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RUTH R. WISSE

Not the "Pintele Yid" but the Full-Fledged Jew

"VER IZ DER YID? . . . Yidn, veys ikh, zenen borukh hashem do fil, yidn fun farshidene minim. Ober 'der yid' mit a 'hey hayediye' vos fun zaynetvegn zent ir aykh azoy matriakh un tsu im vilt ir dos redn 'oyf zayn loshn,' der yid vos ayere shrayber rufn im stam 'dos folk'—ver iz er?"

(Who is the Jew? . . . I know that Jews exist, thank God, Jews in abundance and in many varieties. But "the Jew" with a definite article, on whose behalf you are expending so much energy and to whom you want to speak "in his language," the Jew your writers call simply "the folk"—who is he?)¹

With characteristic acerbity, Aḥad Ha'am (Asher Ginsberg) made his first foray into Yiddish polemics in the seventh issue of *Der yid*, April 1899. By then, Aḥad Ha'am was at the height of his influence as visionary architect of a new Jewish spiritual center in Erets Israel. Alarmed by Herzl's political emphasis on the immediate establishment of a Jewish homeland, and by what he considered the premature colonization of Palestine on the part of pioneers unprepared for the task, he had been calling instead for the gradual transformation of the Jewish people as a precondition of their resettlement. He believed that Leo Pinsker's ideal of Jewish auto-emancipation could only be achieved if Jews were to develop a disciplined modern Hebrew culture while still in exile, under an elite national leadership that would replace the waning authority of the rabbinate.² In a letter to the editor, the only form he would use in a language other than Hebrew, Aḥad Ha'am said that he was responding to

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the statement of purpose that the editor Yehoshua Hana Rawnitzki had published in the first issue of this new periodical, offering Jewish writers a place where they might speak in their own language, not only of the people but with the people—*shmuesn nit nor ibern folk nor mitn folk*.

By the turn of the century, this was hardly a novel idea. Rawnitzki was following the lead of Sholem Aleichem's *Yidishe folksbibliotek*, Mordecai Spector's *Hoyzfrant*, and I. L. Peretz's *Yidishe bibliotek* and *Yontev bletlakh*, each of which had set out to communicate responsibly and intimately with Jews in the language the vast majority of them knew best. Sholem Aleichem had tried to craft the first high-level collection of Yiddish belles-lettres with a new blend of prose, poetry, and criticism. Spector cast himself as a helpful friend of the family, come to amuse and instruct the household through long winter days and summer nights. Peretz reached for the impatient younger reader, recently arrived in the big city, eager to improve himself and the world. Even before this, in the early days of the Lovers of Zion, 1887, Rawnitzki himself had put out an issue of *Der yidisher veker* to reawaken in ordinary Jews the love of homeland that is so common among other peoples. But for all their appeal to a broad modern audience, these erratic miscellanies proved no substitute for a regular newspaper or magazine, and the tsarist government had turned down all requests for a license to publish a Yiddish newspaper after the closing of the single Yiddish weekly, the St. Petersburg *Yidishes folksblat*, in 1889.³ Consequently, no Jewish periodical in Russia had succeeded in consolidating a national readership until Rawnitzki, a member of Aḥad Ha'am's own inner circle, founded a Yiddish newspaper, nominally based outside the tsarist empire in Cracow, that was to address and represent the interests of the entire Jewish people.

Like his predecessors, Rawnitzki explained his venture into Yiddish journalism primarily as a response to the plight of fellow Jews: "What could be worse than the emaciated, desiccated, tortured Jewish body and the bruised, impotent, strangled Jewish soul?" But whereas Sholem Aleichem, Spector, and Peretz had groped, each on his own, toward a remedial program of education and inspiration, Rawnitzki now had behind him the agenda of the Zionist movement that had been founded in Basel in 1897. He understood Jewish nationalism in its broadest terms, as encompassing the cultural and political, long-range and short-term aims represented by Aḥad Ha'am on one side, Herzl on the other: Jews were to take their fate into their own hands and try to live according to their own true national ideals; their children, like children of other nations, were to be raised to respect the cultural treasures of their own people; the Jewish land was to be rejuvenated and resettled, with Hebrew as its resuscitated living language; Jews should not go to die there but to live there. Anticipating the objection that Zionism implies disloyalty to lands of

origin, Rawnitzki insisted that the fierce loyalty of Jews to their native lands was by no means diminished by their attachment to the land of their fathers. The threat lay rather in the opposite direction of assimilation and demoralization, which is why the new periodical would attempt to coax "dos pintele yid"—the spark that still smoldered in every Jewish heart—back into a bright warm fire.⁴

It should be noted that without Aḥad Ha'am's approval, the paper could not have been launched. As one of the founders of the Hebrew publishing house called Aḥi'asaf and editor of its flagship journal *Hashiloah*, Aḥad Ha'am had agreed to the sponsorship of a Yiddish newspaper that would help to spread the Zionist idea. He was in a position to appreciate the potential audience for Yiddish, since of Aḥi'asaf's two recently published pamphlets on the Jews' need for a land, Dr. Herzl's in Hebrew had sold a mere three thousand copies, while Sholem Aleichem's in Yiddish sold 27,000.⁵ Thus, when the Zionist Executive Council (which had already set up its own German paper, *Die Welt*, in Vienna in 1897) appealed to him the following summer to launch a Yiddish publication that would "really bring use to our people and be a genuinely Jewish periodical," he swallowed his many objections and imposed but a single condition, that the editor be someone of his choosing, his close associate Rawnitzki, who shared his basic views on issues of greatest importance and could be trusted to maintain the paper's independence from the Zionist Council.⁶

But once *Der yid* appeared, it disturbed Aḥad Ha'am in ways he had not anticipated. For one thing, the original intention had been to call the paper *Bas-kol*, an ambiguous term that can mean simply "echo," or "celestial voice," a kind of oracular prophecy. Aḥad Ha'am saw in the Yiddish "Jew" an accommodation to the linguistic status quo that ran counter to his reformist priorities. Then, too, when he realized that Rawnitzki intended to attract the finest writers of the day, he feared that the Yiddish paper would compete favorably with his own Hebrew *Hashiloah* for subscribers and influence. In private correspondence with Rawnitzki, Aḥad Ha'am admitted that he could not appreciate the beauty of the Jewish vernacular.⁷ Having imagined that the paper would confirm his low opinion of the language he still called "jargon," he was frightened by the evidence in the first few issues that Yiddish was fast becoming the very thing he said it could not be:

Everything precious and holy that makes a man value his life is bound up with his mother tongue, with the language in which his thoughts first evolved and in which his feelings expressed themselves from childhood on. Thus, it is no wonder that everyone feels great love for his mother tongue and every people is prepared to make heavy sacrifices in order to maintain, enrich, and enhance it. We alone, we *zhargon*-Jews, may be the only people in

the world accursed not to know the sweet taste of a dear mother tongue. The language in which we were raised, through which we received our first impressions and expressed our earliest childish feelings—this language we ourselves don't value or consider to be *ours*; we don't feel any tenderness toward it, its life and flowering don't interest us in the least. Because we know very well that it is altogether alien to us, a kind of mark of exile that bitter fate imposed on us against our will, like the yellow badge of shame that our tormentors forced our parents to wear on their breast. This relation to *zhargon* [Yiddish] is quite natural, and we couldn't change it if we tried. We would first have to forget that we are a people with an ancient culture; that the most beautiful memories of our national life derive from times when this mishmash was not yet our language; that the greatest treasures of our national literature, in which we feel such pride, were not created in this language and have nothing to do with it. Were we to be able to forget all of this and become a *goy-meyesmoyl*, a nation "newly hatched" along with the *zhargon*, then it might be possible for us to love our language and eagerly set about cultivating it and establishing it as our true national language. But just as a mature human being, with the best will in the world, cannot erase his former life from memory to become a child again, with a fresh spirit that has to be resown from scratch—so, too, an entire people cannot wash its spirit clean of the historical memories it inherits from the past. These memories, that live inside him for many, many centuries, are stronger than he is.⁸

Without indicating that he had had any hand in the founding of the paper, Aḥad Ha'am concedes that since people could only be appealed to in a familiar tongue, it was necessary to go on applying to Yiddish the utilitarian standard that had justified its use from the beginnings of the Russian Enlightenment. *Der yid* was wrong, however, in trying to create an educated audience and a national culture in Yiddish, because the ideal of a healthful Yiddish national culture was impossible by definition.

The argument between Aḥad Ha'am and those who championed *Der yid* demonstrates the moral and intellectual complexity of debate over the Jewish question even among Zionists of the same tiny circle. Although both sides claim equally to be speaking for the Jewish people, Aḥad Ha'am has in mind the transformed ideal of the Jews, Rawnitzki, the political actuality. Their contrasting images of Jewish peoplehood reflect contrasting attitudes to the Jewish people—critical impatience with Jews as they are, on one hand, and tender appreciation of them on the other. Aḥad Ha'am had long since been accused of loving the abstract idea of the Jewish people at the expense of the rabble that surrounded him.⁹ His open letter incorporates some of the patrician features of earlier Haskalah criticism, including the attempt to fit Jews into the procrustean bed of German philosophic definitions and contempt for the adaptive vitality of Yiddish culture. Yet its negative bias is part of a coherent thesis of considerable persuasiveness: since Hebrew alone unites Jews in time and

space, it alone can claim to be the language of the entire nation. If Zionism intends to rouse the Jewish historical consciousness by reaching across gentile boundaries back to the ancient homeland, how can it accept an adumbrated representation of "The Jew"? And if it wishes to nurture Jewish national pride, how can it encourage the use of Yiddish, symbol of sociopolitical dependency?

The philosophic premise of these questions was never addressed in the paper. Instead, Rawnitzki turned Aḥad Ha'am's rhetorical question "Who is *der yid*?" around to read: "Who isn't *der yid*?" and pointed out that the paper was becoming the national vehicle of the very audience Aḥad Ha'am said did not exist.¹⁰ Mordecai Spector responded to Aḥad Ha'am with the anecdote of a heder teacher, who, when asked by one of his students to explain the meaning of *Moyshe*, replies, "Moyshe iz di taytsh moyshe" (the meaning of Moses is Moses). Just so, "Der yid iz di taytsh der yid."¹¹ As Samuel Johnson kicked the tree to ridicule Bishop Berkeley's questions about the nature of reality, those who were writing in Yiddish relied on apparent realities to refute Aḥad Ha'am's theoretical objections. The proof of the existence of Yiddish culture, of proud Yiddish-speakers, of Yiddish as a national language was the presence of all three in the pages of the very paper that Aḥad Ha'am came to criticize. One angry artisan wrote to the paper to complain that all the time Yiddish readers like himself had been fed on cheap fiction, the pap of "American romances," none of their guardians had ever bothered to defend their needs. But the minute a decent paper began treating them as adult, intelligent beings, up rose "a Jewish Bismarck" to try to keep them down.¹²

Aḥad Ha'am's rejection of Yiddish was by no means unique in the pages of this Yiddish periodical: as part of the same debate, Reuben Brainin weighed in with a passionate appeal for Hebrew, "the loveliest, finest, most powerful and most glorious language in the world," which must be reclaimed precisely because we are such a battered people.¹³ In a private letter to Rawnitzki, Brainin admitted hating *zhargon* with a vengeance (*sonoy anokhi et hazhargon sinat mavet*).¹⁴ Nonetheless, under the urging of Rawnitzki, he joined the large cohort of Hebrew writers who wrote for the paper—Moshe Leib Lilienblum, Alter Druyanow, Elhanan (Yontev) Levinsky, Ben-Ami (Mordecai Rabinowicz), Sh. Rosenfeld, Barzillai (Yehoshua Eisenstadt), Sh. Ben-Zion, A. Sh. Friedberg, Mordecai Ben Hillel Hacohen, Ḥayyim Naḥman Bialik, David Frischmann, Judah Steinberg, Joseph Klausner—most of them members of Aḥad Ha'am's Odessa circle.

The antagonists in this discussion over language and nationality that dominated the first months of *Der yid* were not always speaking the same language to begin with. As the editors did not always standardize the

orthography or edit the grammar of their contributors, we find a wide range of Yiddish literacy in the paper, and Aḥad Ha'am's essay (which would have been left intact) is an example of the problem he speaks of. I cite from the section quoted above, now in the original:

Di shprakhe iz der mentsh. Ales tayerste un heyligste, vos makht dem menshn zayn lebn lib, iz bay yedem inerlikh ferbundu mit zayn mutershpakhe, mit der shprakhe in velkher zayne gedanken hobn zikh tsuersht entwikkelt un zayne gefile zikh ferkerpert fun kindvays on. es iz darum keyn vunder nit vos yeder mentsh hot azoy hertslikh lib zayne mutershpakhe un yedes folk iz berayt ale shvere korbones tsu brengen, kdey zayne tayere shprakhe tsu erhalten, tsu beraykhern un tsu fershenern.

The German form of such words as *hertslikh*, *berayt*, *erhalten*, and the reach elsewhere for Hebrew formations show that the author was paying no attention to consistency in his Yiddish usage. If language is the man, his Yiddish literary style would have proven Aḥad Ha'am to be an inauthentic Jew, from which he concluded that it could not be an authentic national tongue. But by this same standard of authenticity, every issue revealed that others were claiming their artistic birthright in their mother tongue. Peretz, for example, protested against editorial changes that had been made to his manuscript on the grounds that in a newspaper called *Der yid*, Odessa had no right to impose its regional usage on Warsaw!¹⁵

In fact, it was Zionism's call for national sovereignty that proved decisive in encouraging Jewish writers to feel themselves at home in Yiddish. Rawnitzki believed that among all the nations of the world, life is intertwined with literature; the two are interdependent and exert reciprocal influence. Jewish life emphatically included its European vernacular. This editorial axiom helps to explain why *Der yid* marked the turning point in the consolidation of a modern Yiddish literature while stimulating broad popular support for Zionism. Encouraging Jewish "life and literature" in Europe to take themselves for granted, Rawnitzki set few limits on the ways in which modern Jews might choose to define themselves: "*Kol yisroel*, all Jews have an equal share in the designation Jew, and there is no difference in this respect between various classes, various political parties."¹⁶ Anyone was welcome to write who did not implicitly exclude anyone else from writing. The ability to live with ambiguity allowed Rawnitzki to set about building a Hebrew future for the Jews in Erets Israel by galvanizing a new Jewish national consciousness in hospitable Yiddish.

The first task of the paper had been to evade the tsarist ban on the Yiddish press. Zionists had thought that since their national program did

not threaten tsarist authority, they might stand a chance of getting permission for a Russian Yiddish daily, but when the request of Eliezer Kaplan, one of the founders of *Ahī'asaf*, was rejected, as those of previous petitioners had been, he decided to publish a weekly outside Russia, in Galician Cracow, which could be shipped back to Warsaw for distribution. In this way, it would have to pass censorship after, rather than before, publication, thus under somewhat less stringent standards. The stratagem proved successful, if imperfect. Rawnitzki reluctantly moved from Odessa to Warsaw to edit the paper from the *Ahī'asaf* offices there, but it then had to be shipped to Cracow for publication, and back to Warsaw for distribution. The resultant relay left *Der yid* unable to compete with the quicker news coverage of the Russian and Polish press. It therefore began tentatively as a bimonthly, with emphasis on editorial opinion, literature, and news analysis that did not depend quite so much on immediacy. Postponing the censor's scrutiny until after the paper was published caused another set of problems, since any infelicity could now result in confiscation of an entire issue. Despite the difficulties, however, the paper flourished from the moment of its founding:

One could say that *Der yid* created an era; it not only attracted as contributors almost all the major writers of the older generation, Hebrew as well as Yiddish, it also made room for all the younger talents. . . . Its rich literary content and serious treatment of social issues made it instantly popular and beloved among both the broad public and in circles of the Jewish intelligentsia.¹⁷

A tabloid of sixteen pages (expanded for special holiday issues and reports on Zionist congresses), *Der yid* devoted most of its attention to the Pale of Settlement, as any paper tends to favor local readership, with featured summaries of world news, news of the Jewish world, correspondence from Argentina, America, England, and Palestine, and a "Cities and Towns" column incorporating reports from around the country. The national ambitions of the paper were reflected in the price list: annual subscriptions were invited in German marks, shillings for Britain and the United States, francs for Erets Israel and other countries; for Russia and Austro-Hungary the price in kopecks and kreutzers was also given for single issues and advertising lines, indicating its more practical intended function in those regions.

The special coverage accorded to Zionist congresses and gatherings makes the paper a good source for the early history of the movement. An eclectic, self-critical outlook governed the editorial pages; occasional challenges to the paper were published within its pages, with adjoining editorial responses. Because the editor considered belles-lettres the keenest spur of a national culture, he invited poems, stories, feuilletons,

serialized novels, dramas, sketches, and essays on literary matters. As in the early days of British journalism, it is hard to draw the line between belles-lettres and editorial comment, since the good political essayists write anecdotally, and the good writers are innately political.

By November 1899, *Der yid's* success warranted that it become a weekly, at which point Rawnitzki, who wanted to return to Odessa, handed over the editorship to one of his assistants in Warsaw, Joseph Luria. Twelve years Rawnitzki's junior, Luria had completed a degree in philosophy at the University of Berlin a year prior to attending the first Zionist Congress, and he was henceforth one of a small cadre of educated Jews to look eastward rather than westward for his future. He devoted himself to education, first as director of a modern heder in Warsaw and later, after moving to Palestine in 1907, as a teacher in the Herzliah high school in Tel Aviv. During the years between, when he edited *Der yid* (1899–1902), he opened the pages generously to his contemporaries, though he may have thwarted the Yiddish career of at least one of them—Joseph Hayyim Brenner—by rebuffing his overly pessimistic submissions.¹⁸ Like his predecessor Rawnitzki, he tried to anticipate the censor's requirements, and he was helped in this by the fact that A. Sh. Friedberg, the Warsaw censor for most of this period, was himself a frequent contributor.¹⁹

Under Luria's stewardship, the paper also managed to avoid the kind of infighting that later became a speciality of the Yiddish press. In 1901, when the editor of *Hamelits*, who was publishing a competing Yiddish supplement, tried to smear *Der yid* for its putatively heretical and insurrectionist character, Luria quickly countered the attack and squelched it.²⁰ The popularity of the paper followed from ideological intent, since the editors' idea of a broad-based national revival meant that they would try not to antagonize one group at the expense of another. In the words of an admirer, the idealistic editors tried to heed all honest criticism, and to satisfy readers "the way a mother does when she is anxiously feeding her child."²¹

Right from the start, the editors attracted the best writers of the older generation and unsolicited manuscripts from a host of novices just starting out. The prestige of Hebrew played no small part in this, since whatever one's attitude to the language question, sponsorship by a Hebrew publishing house and Hebraist editors brought with it the status of the older language, and implicitly conferred on Yiddish the legitimacy of an equal. (This was the point of Aḥad Ha'am's protest, which can be read as proof of how "threateningly" legitimate Yiddish had suddenly become.) Although the editors did not explicitly endorse Yiddish except

as a tool in the larger national struggle, their attentiveness to poetry strongly suggests that they did have an independent interest in cultivating and refining Yiddish literature, for otherwise it is hard to explain why they included poetry in every issue or worked so hard to seek out new poets of quality. The Yiddish poet and short-story writer Abraham Reisen would later complain of the paper's lack of explicit commitment to the language of the people, yet in censuring its ideological indifference, he admitted that along with the other major Yiddish writers of Warsaw, he had been overwhelmed by the musicality of the poets in its pages.²²

The two most natural writers for *Der yid*, natural in the sense of embodying the paper's attitude to language and literature, were Sholem Aleichem and Shimon Shmuel Frug. Frug had won renown with three volumes of poetry in Russian before coming to Yiddish, and in both languages he represented the condition of Jews who had absorbed the Russian language to the point of making it their own. His Russian poetry was so good, and his Yiddish poetry had in it so much of Russian melody and atmosphere that he could be regarded as either proof or disproof of Jewish cultural integration. There were those who deplored the transformation of a first-rate Russian lyric poet into a second-rate Yiddish folk bard. Others held that by bringing Russian melody into Yiddish, Frug did for poetry what Mendele Mokher Seforim had done for prose.²³ In Zionist myth, Frug looms as Russia's spurned suitor: tsarist laws against conversion to Judaism had prevented him from marrying the Russian woman he loved, and tsarist laws against the residence of Jews in St. Petersburg required that he be registered there as someone else's footman; his turn from Russian poetry to Yiddish poems of exile and of Zion was thought to parallel the national evolution of the Jews from a rejected to a renewed people.

The first poem that Frug published in *Der yid* develops a running metaphor of poetry as worship.

ikh bin a khazn on an omed
kmat shoy'n finf un tsvantsik yor.
dokh klingen mayne tfiles tomid
un kh'hob dertsu a sheynem khor.

(I've been a cantor without a congregation / for almost twenty-five
years. / Yet my prayers continue to resound / and I also have a lovely
choir.)²⁴

The bereaved prayer-leader of the poem discovers his chorus in nature. The storm helps him blow the shofar . . . the sun chants the restorative blessing as the wind shakes the hosanna branches by the river. The Russian landscape serves him as sufficient accompaniment for every spiritual-ritual occasion, yet since the deepest part of Jewish experience is

pain and sorrow, his music ultimately cries out *de profundis*, from the depths.

mit vos ikh heyb nit on tsu zingen—
mit “min hameytsar” endik ikh . . .

As against Aḥad Ha'am's assumption that Yiddish was cut off from its ancient sources, Frug bled past into present, experience of exile with yearning for Erets Israel, and personal feeling with national consciousness. Consequently, his poetry sounded familiar the first time it was heard. When the teen-aged Rokhl Brokhes made her debut in *Der yid* with a psychological portrait of Yankele, a heder boy, she chose an epigram from Frug to introduce her story (*vi a vorem in der finster / shvakh un shtum un blind, / lebstu op di kinderyorn / yidish kind!* Like a worm in the darkness / weak and mute and blind / you pass your childhood / Jewish child!)²⁵ Avraham Abba (Alter) Druyanow, one of the Hebrew writers who became a regular contributor to *Der yid*, advised impoverished Jewish shopkeepers to read the poetry of Frug because it comforts us “the way that a page of traditional learning consoles my *beys medresh* neighbor.”²⁶ Though some of his critics followed Frug's lead in judging him a tragically suspended figure (David Frischmann wrote that he “dreams in one language and writes in the other”),²⁷ others felt at home with him precisely on account of his problematic identity. “Frug was *our* poet,” said Ber Borochoy, who as a schoolboy first sang him in Russian before rediscovering him as an adolescent in Yiddish.²⁸

Alongside Frug, poets as different as Mark Warshawski and Ḥayyim Nahman Bialik made their Yiddish debuts in *Der yid*. Warshawski, a Russified Kiev lawyer, published in *Der yid* what may be the most popular of all Yiddish songs, “Oyfn pripetshik brent a fayerl,” about the teacher inside the cosy heder who, even as he instructs children in the Jewish alphabet, reassures them that these Jewish letters will provide them with spiritual sustenance in hard times ahead.²⁹ The frank sentimentality of this song was characteristic of moderns who soften their attitudes to tradition the further they withdraw from it. Around Warshawski's claim to folk status, bolstered by his published “folk song” collection of 1901, there developed a lively controversy between the musicologist Joel Engel, who published in the Russian-Jewish weekly *Voskhod* a review that tried to uphold the distinction between genuine folklore and modern imitators, and Sholem Aleichem, Warshawski's champion, who insisted on Warshawski's standing as a folk poet. Listing the living authors of items that Engel had termed genuine (anonymous) folklore, including one of his own lullabies, Sholem Aleichem tried to erase the distinction between formal and folk culture, as if the measure of artistic achievement were the degree to which an individual work of art

could merge into the national consciousness.³⁰ In his review of Warshawski's folk song collection of 1901, the critic Bal-Makhshoves, himself a doctor of philosophy, went even further to spell out the national utility of this folk aesthetic: he suggested that Warshawski's book caught so much of the Jewish spirit that it should be sold at reduced rates to Zionist choruses.³¹

Tension between collective consciousness and the individual talent came to very different expression in the Yiddish poetry of Hayyim Nahman Bialik. Bialik was the orphaned yeshiva boy who had captivated Hebrew readers with his very first published poem, a lyrical appeal "to the bird" to become the bearer of his yearning for a distant land. Rawnitzki, the editor responsible for publishing that maiden poem in the Hebrew *Pardes* (1892), now urged him to try his hand at Yiddish poetry. Bialik accepted the invitation, commending Ah'asaf for putting out a popular organ in a language to which he felt on the whole well-disposed, because in the present climate of "ignorance and indifference," there could be nothing more important than awakening the national spirit.³² Although Bialik seems to have taken up the challenge of writing in Yiddish out of a sense of duty, he was able to experiment in the relatively relaxed atmosphere of *Der yid* with folk motifs and nostalgic lyrics as well as lofty national verse. His poem "On the Conclusion of Yet Another Century" is an elegiac wail on the hopelessness of the Jewish exile.³³ In "The Last Word," subtitled "Neviyish" (In the Prophetic Mode), Bialik assumed for the first time the literary mantle of the modern prophet, and while he does not yet meet the standard of the "Poems of Wrath" that he began in 1903—his Yiddish is not up to the task of carrying the prophetic anger—he already sets up the triangular relation between God, poet, and people as it will figure in the later work. God, no longer able to witness the suffering of the Jews, charges his poet-prophet to tear from the heart of his people an "oy," a moan of agony sufficiently powerful to shake the foundations of the earth. (Frug's *de profundis*—which may have served Bialik as a goad—must issue forth as shattering groan, not gentle sigh.) But Bialik's prophet finds the Jews so indifferent to their agony that he is roused to anger instead of pity. He predicts that when the messianic age dawns for all other nations of the world, the Jews alone will remain unredeemed.

un shver vet aykh dos lebn vern—
 a lange nakht un nit eyn shtern . . .
 un ayer krekhts fartrogt der vint
 un ayer kol vil got nit hern . . .
 un shrekleh groys vet zayn di noyt,
 vi groys un shrekleh iz di zind;
 un ir vet khaleshn dem toyt

un benken vet ir nokh dem lebn . . .
nor got vet aykh nit beyde gebn. . . .

ir vet zikh pruvn heybn, heybn—
an otem ton—un vet nit kenen.
dos iz a keyver, nor bagrobn
zayt ir dort lebedikerheyt . . .
dos iz a fayerdiker gehenem,
vos vet keyn ende keynmol hobn—
nor s'iz a gehenem on a toyt . . .³⁴

(Life will grow heavy— / a long night without a single star . . . / The
wind carries off your sigh / and God does not wish to hear your
voice . . . / Your need will be terribly great, / as great and terrible as your
sin; / you will be desperate to die / and you will long for life . . . / but
God will grant you neither. . . .

You will try to rise, to rise— / to breathe—but in vain. / This is a grave,
but you are buried / in it alive . . . / This is a fiery hell, / which can
never have an end— / It is hell without dying . . .)

The poem concludes with God's final injunction: let the prophet take a clay pot, raise it above his head, and casting it down with all his might, announce to the people that thus shall they remain shattered beyond messianic repair.

No modern Jewish poet before Bialik had struck out with such uninhibited passion against national apathy, and if Bialik's higher purpose was "to desacralize history in God's own name,"³⁵ he had found the way of insinuating the modern poet into the process. This poem was a dry run for "Be'ir hahareiga" (In the City of Slaughter), written by Bialik in response to the Kishinev pogrom of 1903, and destined to remain the most electrifying Jewish poem of the century. Our contemporary Dan Miron says that Yiddish gave Bialik artistic release, opening the blocked passages of personal feeling. Bialik's contemporary Bal-Makhshoves said that Bialik allowed Yiddish the freedom it needed to express the powerful feelings of a people seeking *its* release.³⁶ The major effort of Yiddish poetry at this time was to find suitable diction and versification in a language better known for its instrumentality than instrumentation. Morris Rosenfeld, Yehoash, and Abraham Liessin were among the Americans recruited by *Der yid* out of what appears to have been a recognition on the part of the editors that the poetry coming out of America was riper than its European counterpart.

In breaking the logjam of Russian censorship, Rawnitzki and Luria provided the first steady and open forum for good literature in Yiddish.

Established Yiddish writers began writing for the paper at an ecstatic pace. Sholem Aleichem provided an item a week, Peretz wrote on several literary levels in tandem, S. J. Abramovitsh returned to Yiddish after a long sojourn in Hebrew. What comes to mind in trying to describe this ferment is the saying of Nahman of Bratslav, "there is nothing as whole as a broken heart," later amplified by the folk to read "there is nothing as whole as a broken Jewish heart." This saying captures not so much the mood of the paper, which was on the whole optimistic, but its essential paradoxicality, the way it projected consensus through contradiction, confidence through admission of weakness, unity through admission of diversity, and a revolutionary program of national self-transformation through respect for the status quo. "Can one become a Zionist the way one becomes, let us say, a vegetarian?" asked the Zionist spokesman Dr. Max Mandelshtam in the last issue of the nineteenth century. The reply is given in the negative. "If one is a Jew, one is already a Zionist." This tautological inclusiveness made a revolutionary of every Jew while giving him leave to feel satisfaction in what he was.

The brief partnership in Sholem Aleichem's story "A boydem" between the *yishuvnik* Tevye the Dairyman and his distant relative Menahem-Mendl in the first issue of *Der yid* captures the essence of this contrariety. Five years earlier, Sholem Aleichem had created Tevye, the traditional Jew with a liberal soul, and had rewarded his character's trusting nature with a windfall that set him up in the dairy business and gave him for the first time real economic independence. In that original adventure, Tevye was hauling logs from the forest with the aid of his starving horse, when a chance encounter in the woods allowed him to shepherd home a pair of wealthy Jewish women who had strayed from their local summer colony. Because the vacationing big-city Jews were still separated from the local Jew *only* by money, one generous act on the part of the grateful hosts was enough to set up the impoverished villager as a dairy farmer, and to set in place for future adventures the most enduring of Jewish literary characters.

Menahem-Mendl was also an earlier creation of Sholem Aleichem's, dating from 1892.³⁷ A less rounded character than Tevye, Menahem-Mendl had left his wife, Sheyne-Sheyndl, and family behind in their native Mazepevke within the Pale of Settlement, to take up illegal residence in the big city and try to make his fortune as a speculator. In the epistolary exchange between them, Menahem-Mendl and Sheyne-Sheyndl represent two psychological extremes: the man's specialty is faith unleashed, the capacity never to learn from experience, a compulsive optimism that is uniquely appropriate and uniquely vulnerable to the opportunities of an opening market economy; Sheyne-Sheyndl is the beleaguered realist, hardened and increasingly embittered by having to

bear the consequences of her husband's impracticality. The reader is amused to see how the two monologues in their exchange of letters never approach dialogue, how incompatible are the two sides of this "family" arrangement.

By bringing his two main characters, Tevye and Menahem-Mendl, together in the maiden issue of *Der yid*, Sholem Aleichem provided a complicated gloss on the interdependency of Jews within their modern predicament. At the basic level of narrative, each Tevye episode is structured as a unilateral conversation between Sholem Aleichem and Tevye, who is amusing the author while unburdening himself. Turning Aḥad Ha'amism on its head, Sholem Aleichem's narrative structure demonstrates that the best of the modern national spirit is to be found not in the intellectuals but in sturdier Jews, who provide the model of dynamic adaptiveness and set the moral tone for the nation. One of the reasons Sholem Aleichem's talent was able to blossom and achieve its ultimate expression in *Der yid* was their common appreciation of the links between individual creativity and the creative community.³⁸

But the failed partnership between Tevye and Menahem-Mendl also reveals a more troubling side of Jewish interdependency. Tevye's decision to hand over to the penniless speculator his entire savings of one hundred rubles hints at what might happen to the Jews should they be swept away by speculative dreams. Marxist critics could read the story as an exposé of the false lures of capitalism, and nationalists could read it equally as a plea for national autonomy, but Tevye's diction shows him struggling over the messianic legacy that threatened to doom him.

And that, Pani Sholem Aleichem, is how I blew all my money. But if you think I've been eating my heart out over it, you have another guess coming. You know the Bible's opinion: *li hakesef veli hazohov*—money is a lot of baloney. What matters is the man who has it—I mean, what matters is for a man to be a man. Do you know what I still can't get over, though? Losing my dream! If only you knew how badly, oh Lord, how really badly I wanted to be a rich Jew, if only for just a few days! But go be smarter than life. Doesn't it say *be'al korkhekho atoh khai*—nobody asks if you want to be born or if you want your last pair of boots to be torn. "Instead of dreaming, Tevye," God was trying to tell me, "you should have stuck to your cheese and butter." Does that mean I've lost faith and stopped hoping for better times? Don't you believe it! The more troubles, the more faith, the bigger the beggar, the greater his hopes. How can that be, you ask? But I've already gone on enough for one day, and I'd better be off and about my business. How does the verse go? *Kol ha'odom koyzev*—there isn't a man who hasn't taken a beating sometime. Don't forget to take care and be well!³⁹

When Tevye says he has forfeited his dreams, his warning against radical investment on the stock market may be interpreted as a warning against

the spirit of radicalism in other areas of life, including politics and literature.⁴⁰ Similarly, in the subsequent Tevye episode, "Modern Children," when Sholem Aleichem begins to write the story of generational conflict from the point of view of the parent, the narrative seems as concerned for what stands to be lost by European Jews as it is hopeful of improvement.⁴¹ Many years earlier, when Rawnitzki had invited Sholem Aleichem to contribute to the first proto-Zionist Yiddish publication, *Der yidisher veker*, Sholem Aleichem replied that although all his sympathies were with the movement, he could not write ideologically persuasive work.⁴² And notwithstanding the very popular pamphlets he did produce for Zionism, his many contributions to *Der yid*, encompassing some of his best work, including most of *Menahem-Mendl*, are either tangential to the aims of relocation, or so bound to the local culture of Jews in Eastern Europe as to seem resistant to the activism that the Zionist movement was promoting. Sholem Aleichem's human comedy at the bottom of the page often undercut the earnestness of the editorial programs at the top. Some complained that Sholem Aleichem's conservatism suited an essentially conservative paper. More to the point, his embrace of Jewish actuality in its many contradictory aspects suited the paper's emphasis on "the whole people of Israel" as the irreducible idea of Zionism. It was a blow to the paper when Sholem Aleichem accepted Ben Avigdor's invitation to become a permanent contributor to the rival St. Petersburg *Folkstsaytung* in 1902, on an exclusive contract aimed at precluding his participation in *Der yid*.⁴³

A much more problematic contributor, given his known reservations about the Zionist project, was I. L. Peretz, who happened to serve a brief prison sentence for antitsarist agitation in 1899, just after *Der yid* began publication. These two unrelated events—the prison term and the appearance in Warsaw of a permanent Yiddish weekly—opened a new vein in Peretz's art. Peretz published in *Der yid* the neohasidic stories that are among his best-loved works—"If Not Higher" (*Oyb nisht nokh hekher*), about the skeptical Litvak who becomes a disciple of the hasidic rabbi of Nemirov; "The Conversation" (*A shmues*), a Passover dialogue between a Hasid of Belz and a Hasid of Kotsk; "Between Two Mountains" (*Tsvishn tsvey berg*), a Simhath Torah story about the rabbi of Brisk, who effects a partial reconciliation with the rebbe of Biale; "Transmigration of a Melody" (*A gilgl fun a nign*), about the hidden powers of cultural transmission; *Mishnas khasidim*, about the Vonvolitzer rebbe whose daughter marries a rationalist talmudic scholar, and so on.⁴⁴ That the writer and editor of some of the most radical political pamphlets of the 1890s, the emblematic modern Jew whose home in Warsaw had become the place of refuge for lapsed yeshiva boys, should have begun to write appreciatively about the Hasidim whose authority he had done so much to undermine,

was considered by detractors and admirers alike to be a turning point in the author's biography and in the national culture.⁴⁵ The neohasidic stories yoke Jewish contrarities within a common sphere of fiction. The quality of interaction among the characters takes artistic precedence over the nature of their disagreement. For all that Peretz usually reveals his modern liberal outlook in a homiletic conclusion, the triumphant element in these stories seems to be Jewishness itself, not least for being able to tolerate and to nourish such contradictory elements within the same people (within the same story).

In addition to these neoromantic stories that seemed ideally suited to the "neoromanticism" of the Jewish national revival, Peretz also wrote for *Der yid* in many other voices. Under his own name, he published social satires of the kind associated with his so-called radical period of the 1890s, as well as difficult modernist stories, one of which the overly indulgent editor allowed to be serialized for months on end.⁴⁶ In one experimental story, Peretz explored the suicidal attraction of the town well, a theme that would later dominate his masterful drama, *A Night in the Old Marketplace*.⁴⁷ He signed himself "Melancholy Israel" (Israel Shvermut) in one column and "Dr. Shtitser" (Doctor Booster) in another. Under the former pseudonym, Peretz wrote a sardonic letter from Warsaw, "the largest Jewish community in the world, whose pulse has grown so weak . . . that it sometimes seems to be no longer alive!" He described "the American duel," namely, the opportunity for suicide that modern governments offer their citizens when they pretend to open certain paths of advancement, then shut them down on youngsters who have come halfway along the road.⁴⁸ Peretz had always been aware of the assimilation of two opposing groups of Jews, the well-to-do who wanted to rise in Polish society, and the socialist intellectuals who wanted to become part of a classless international society. He made common cause with the Zionism of *Der yid* in appealing to Jewish cultural pride and in opposing Jews who found other cultures preferable to their own.

But Peretz did not condone the editorial emphasis on national unity: his objection to those who overthrew Jewishness did not translate into solidarity with all those who remained Jews. Invited to take over Mordecai Spector's regular column "Cities and Towns" when the latter left to join a rival paper at the beginning of May 1902, Peretz completely altered its tone. Spector had gathered material from correspondents around the country to produce a gentle and sympathetic composite picture of Jewish foibles; Peretz gave warning of harsher intentions by signing himself "The Bee."⁴⁹ In his first column, he assailed communal graft and cruelty: "Fayvl Bakulin of Lodz wants to know why thirty Jewish public schoolboys were forced to trail after the hearse of a rich donor in the frost almost barefoot and without winter clothing."⁵⁰ He attacked the bastions of

conservatism that maim and kill in the name of religious observance. He mocked the superstitions and ignorance of Jews that compounded their suffering at the hands of others. He made a special target of unfeeling doctors, who felt sufficiently stung to answer back.⁵¹ To justify the harshness of these columns, he tells his readers that when he invited "one of his critics" to prepare the column in his stead, the young man grew so flustered by the stack of reports about thefts of communal funds, homeless fire victims, failed attempts to reform education, a woman who commits suicide because her husband will not grant her a divorce, and so forth, that he sneaks away with a strange look in his eye, leaving the Bee to resume his impossible task.⁵² Peretz says, "When you read the Jewish papers, you think the [Jewish-Russian and Jewish-Russian-Polish] world has come to an end. So it's a good thing that I am a Jew, because I'm used to looking at the grim side."⁵³

At no time in any of these writings does Peretz consider a political alternative to the grim reality that he describes. If Zionism figures at all favorably in these columns, it is only as he tells us explicitly because its supporters are still weak, and he feels duty bound to protect them from harm as he would all other persecuted Jews.⁵⁴ Otherwise, he was an outspoken opponent of both Herzl's quixotic political crusade and Aḥad Ha'am's projected "spiritual center" in Erets Israel, having found it impossible to conceive of an artificial center far away from the living body of a people, "with the torch in one place and the flame, that is, the education of the people, in another."⁵⁵ In this respect, one could claim a certain similarity between Sholem Aleichem and Peretz in their accommodation to the Jewish-Russian-Polish reality: Sholem Aleichem's irony fuses contrasting views of the Jewish condition within a single piece of writing; Peretz splits the image in two, seeking alternately the idealized potential Bialer rebbe who can be brought to life in fiction, and the current, reactionary, intolerant rebbe of Biale who must be exposed. At the heart of Peretz's intensifying "nationalism," as of Sholem Aleichem's love of the Jews, was the hard-won and reluctantly assimilated conviction that the Jews stood alone, and their self-respect depended on their ability to make the most of it.

In this, they also concurred with Aḥad Ha'am. For their part, the editors of *Der yid* continued to take from each vying sector of the Jewish literary community whatever reinforced the idea of the dynamic nation.

This commitment to comprehensiveness was both a boon and a goad to the young writers who were just starting out. As said, Zionism's call for national sovereignty proved decisive in encouraging Jewish writers to feel themselves at home in their own culture, but there were multiple

ironies in this situation. The national movement could not control the energy that it released, so that the very confidence it promoted was eventually used in revolt against it. It bred individualism on one hand, factionalism on the other. Zionism soon re-created within its fold all the major divisions that existed within the Jewish people and most of the ideological divisions that were forming around it, because the opportunity of formalized internal political debate was greater than ever within a self-constituted modern nation.

The following prose writers who made their Yiddish debut in *Der yid* indicate some of the variety of contemporary talent:

Rokhl Brokhes (1880–1945) stands out as one of the few Jewish women prose writers of the time. Having written her first story at age sixteen, she sent it to Rawnitzki three years later, because prior to the appearance of *Der yid* there was no chance of having it published. Her early work dramatizes the inner world of young boys and women who cannot stand up to life's abuse. The psychological isolation of her characters, reminiscent of the men in Hamsun and the women in Ibsen, is so acute that it destroys them. However, in one story about two sisters who are factory workers, the eldest is stimulated against her will by her grandfather's insistence that she study the Book of Exodus with him despite her fatigue. As the wonderful biblical images possess the girl's imagination, she somehow feels herself "refreshed with new-found strength for the new day . . . for the heavy work ahead of her."⁵⁶ Literary solace is the only one the author allows in her stories. Brokhes was one of many struggling writers who never made it to the big city, and suffered from the lack of a nurturing literary environment.

Isadore Eliashev (1873–1924), who studied medicine in Berlin and Heidelberg, was invited by his close friend Joseph Luria to join him in Warsaw as a permanent contributor to the newspaper. Eliashev first took the pen name Ger-Tsedek ("proselyte by conviction") to indicate his status as a "Gentile" returning to the Jewish fold, then the permanent pen name Bal-Makhshoves ("thinker"), under which he wrote essays and the first professional literary criticism in Yiddish. Coming to Warsaw from Germany, he was critical of Peretz for holding too high an opinion of the value of pure European education, and for placing too much hope in progress. He believed that "only the development of a strong national movement created a tribune for the Yiddish poet, artist, communal worker," which explained why Peretz only began to hit his stride as a writer after the advent of Zionism.⁵⁷ A passionate supporter of Herzl, he expected ordinary Jews to take the initiative in building their land. On the other hand, no more than Aḥad Ha'am's or Peretz's did his nationalism imply support for populist art. The word "aristocratic" is frequently used to characterize his erudition and the unassuming way he carried it, his

artistic taste and the way he tried to cultivate it in his audience. There is a good deal of himself in this characterization of his friend Joseph Luria:

Luria, who hides behind the initials J. L., reminds me of the bell ringer of children's literature who lives all alone in the tower, never mingling with the people for whom he rings the bells. But he is secretly pleased at the thought of the rapture that will greet every pull at the bells as he sends them pealing with such rich sound.⁵⁸

Just so, Eliashev took pleasure in alerting the "folk" to the best of its writers.

When Sholem Asch (1880–1954) first came to Warsaw with his maiden efforts in Hebrew and Yiddish, in 1899, he was advised by Peretz to concentrate on Yiddish, and was extended a warm welcome by the young writers Hersch David Nomberg and Abraham Reisen. It wasn't until he returned from Kutno a year later that he placed his first story, "Moyshеле," in *Der yid*,⁵⁹ but from that moment on, the excitement over his work never stopped. Remarkably, this very slight story, barely a sketch, introduces what was to remain one of Asch's major themes in an exceptionally prolific career. Moyshеле the heder child reflects on the nature of God in the light of what the rebbe has told him about the punishment of evildoers in the afterlife. If God is good, why does he create evildoers? Dissatisfied with explanations of free will and with the rebbe's insistence on the eradicability of evil, Moyshеле substitutes his own version of the world:

"Oh, if I were God," Moyshеле thinks to himself, growing embarrassed, "if I were God, for no more than a minute I would see to it that everyone be good and pious. I would take the goodness of heaven and divide it among the people.

"Ha! What a life that would be! Everyone would have to be good. No one would get angry—not the teacher, not father, not even the beadle of the *beys medresh*.

"If the goodness of heaven were not enough, I would add the little that is in my heart."⁶⁰

In many of his mature works, particularly in the evangelical trilogy and some of the historical novels, Sholem Asch expanded on this same longing for a liberal universe, with the author presuming to add his goodness to heaven's. Asch's was the purest romantic voice in the annals of *Der yid*: his large-breathed prose monologues, his pantheistic immersion in the natural world, and his attraction to heroic figures and heroic subjects contrasted with the prevailing rationalist constraint of the rest of the paper.

The young guard of the paper, Asch, Nomberg, and Reisen—championed by Peretz and Jacob Dineson and paid fairly handsome

honoraria for their contributions—did not think of Yiddish literature as a fragile venture but as the preserve of an older, established generation. Abraham Reisen found out about *Der yid* during a visit to Minsk, from a socialist subscriber who said he opposed its nationalist ideology, and from Rokhl Brokhes, who urged him to send Rawnitzki his work.⁶¹ For the next four years, Reisen placed most of his prose and much of his poetry in *Der yid*, chaffing all the while at the Zionist, Hebraist orientation of the paper, “the always festive tone of most of its articles, poems, and essays, which went not only against my revolutionary, protesting spirit, but even against my aesthetic taste.”⁶² Because the paper’s gradualist approach to national self-emancipation did not threaten the tsarist censors, it gave the appearance of toadying to them, so that the very fact of its smooth publication was considered a mark against it. This contrasted sharply with the fortunes of the clandestine socialist press, then centered in Vilna, always throbbing with calls for class struggle and individual self-sacrifice, dodging police as it tried to arouse antitsarist protest. One of the ways that Reisen squared his socialist conscience with continuing to write for a “bourgeois” paper was by putting out more radical anthologies of his own, and by submitting his strongest political poems to socialist papers in America.

Notwithstanding his antagonism to *Der yid*, Reisen became one of the defining voices of its fiction, even more so than the giant Peretz. Reisen specialized in small, spare studies of common people at breaking moments of their lives: a heder teacher tries to work up the courage to approach the town’s rich man in the small synagogue where both men pray, in order to suggest that he send him his grandson as a pupil for the coming school term; taking a pinch of snuff to stiffen his resolve, the *melamed* sneezes all over the rich man’s coat. The young heroine of another story resents the poverty imposed on her by her father’s inability to find a job, but though she works up her anger through a long frustrating morning, she feels so sorry for her father by the time he finally appears in the door that she swallows her rage yet again. The mixed blessings of progress is the subject of a third story about a shoemaker’s relation to the annual mud, and the fatal consequences to him of paved streets. The protagonist of one of Reisen’s most popular stories of the time is a young man who returns home to his shtetl after three years in Warsaw. Lying to friends and family to conceal his poverty, he finally determines to tell at least one person the truth about how miserably he has failed in the big city. But when his father asks him, “Well, have you decided to stay?” he blurts out that he’s leaving immediately for Warsaw, to get back to his fictitious job.⁶³ The suppressed quality of Jewish experience in these stories is more poignant than the poverty. Stripped to the bare essentials of characterization, description, and plot, Reisen’s

fiction invests a small experience with the concentrated attention that hints at its larger human significance, reminding many readers of Chekhov. The stories echo a certain ascetic strain in the religious tradition, and at the same time, they stir interest in the national plight by arousing sympathy for fellow Jews. Despite their mildness, the stories also managed to satisfy socialists by drawing attention to the suffering of the poor in a way that elicits social awareness and protest in the reader.⁶⁴ Whereas Peretz often seemed to be ill at ease in the confines of a newspaper, Reisen's fiction, as austere as the material circumstances of the characters he portrayed, was much better suited to the sixteen-page tabloid format.

Hirsh David Nomberg (1876–1927), the third member of the young triumvirate around *Der yid*, was as different from Asch and Reisen as they were from each other. A sickly and sensitive bachelor, he resembled those Hebrew and Russian *fin-de-siècle* writers who seem forever poised on the point of expiry, hence attentive to detail in the way of people who are in no hurry to get anywhere. His prose is moody, turned in on itself, as resistant to ideology as Sholem Aleichem's humor, but at the other end of the emotional scale.

Mark Arnstein (1878–1942?) and Yitshak Gruenbaum (1879–1970) also made their Yiddish debuts in *Der yid*, the first with a short play, the second with notes on contemporary theater. Arnstein, who wrote and directed in Yiddish and Polish, became one of the leading figures in Polish-Jewish theater in both languages. Gruenbaum, who wrote in Yiddish, Hebrew, and Polish, was one of the few young contributors to remain formally associated with the Zionist movement in Poland. When he assumed the leadership of the Polish Zionist Federation after World War I, he tried to maintain a centrist position in the spirit of *Der yid*, which included respect for both Yiddish and Hebrew as well as a comprehensive definition of Jewish peoplehood. But by then, the politics and culture of Jews in Poland and Russia (the Soviet Union) had been transformed beyond recognition.

Already in Abraham Reisen's attack on the paper, one could see how ideological Hebraism and Yiddishism, closing in on Jewish nationalism from either side, began to squeeze out "The Jew with a definite article" in favor of qualified versions of the noun. Just as Aḥad Ha'am had opposed the paper for accepting a false image of the Yiddish-speaking Jew, so, now, socialists within the Yiddish camp demanded an explicit ideological commitment to Yiddish as the language of the proletariat in Europe and America. The editors were powerless to prevent language itself from becoming one of the most acrimonious points at issue:

It is interesting that writers at the time did not know that by propagating *Der yid* they were creating a force that would fight against them; they were

creating Yiddish as a thing “in itself” (*an zikh*), on whose behalf a war would be waged in years to come. They did not foresee that the Yiddish language, which represents the special quality of the Jewish people, would become a weapon in the struggle for Jewish national rights.⁶⁵

To be more precise, the socialist prism through which writers like Abraham Reisen judged Jewish language and literature led them to seek “the special quality” of the Jews in what was compatible with a Marxist understanding of the proletariat, rather than in the religious and national categories that had hitherto defined them as a people. By its third year of publication, possibly under the influence of Peretz, Luria himself began to allow a mildly Marxist vocabulary to seep into the pages, and on June 19, 1902, the editors use a distinctly apologetic tone in announcing an alternative “cheap edition” of the paper, at two rubles a year, for those who could not afford the regular five-ruble subscription rate. Trying to navigate between respect for the “good reader” on one hand and, on the other, the simple public that is by no means simple (*dem prostn oylem, dem hamoyn, velkher iz, vi yeder muz moyde zayn, bay undz dokh nisht azoy prost*), the editors deny the accusations from certain quarters that they have erred in aiming too high with their material, but concede that their price may have been too steep.

For the poor Jewish artisan, the teamster, and so forth, paying four or five rubles a year for a newspaper is the end of the world. Talk to him when he has no bread, in whatever language you like, and he will still be unable to spend the few necessary rubles for spiritual sustenance. Not his simplicity but his poverty stands in his way!

Der yid, which had always been attentive to problems of poverty and suffering, now promises to give “all the classes of our people a good and healthful diet.” No doubt Luria added this cheaper edition of the paper, just as he had earlier introduced a monthly supplement called “The Jewish Family,” to capitalize on the paper’s popularity, but his language indicates a new ideological concern and a concern for the ideological reader.

He was certainly moving in the right direction in trying to gain a mass circulation, but he could not move quickly enough. By the end of the year, after turning down innumerable petitions, the government finally granted permission to Shabtai Rapoport and Shaul Ginzburg to publish in St. Petersburg the first Yiddish daily of the Russian empire. In order not to have to sustain competition, the new paper, *Der fraynd*, bought out the high popular Yiddish weekly, and employed Joseph Luria as one of its editors. Reluctant as he was to give up his beloved *Yid*, Luria was reassured by the knowledge that the new daily had the same broad Zionist sympathy for “a folk of five million, most of whom don’t

understand any other language except plain Yiddish." In a parting letter, he thanks his readers for love and gratitude greater than he had expected and deserved, and in the tradition of one who is taking leave of a corpse, begs the readers' pardon if the paper did not always provide what they needed. Having fulfilled its purpose, *Der yid* thus constituted the historical bridge between the miscellanies of the 1890s and the emergence of the daily Yiddish press in Russia. Its successor, *Der fraynd*, continued to promote a democratic political approach to *klal Yisra'el* and to aim for high intellectual and literary standards until its demise in 1913.

Upon first analysis, *Der yid* seems a web of paradox. The most significant catalyst in the renaissance of modern Yiddish literature turns out to be a periodical that incidentally favored Hebrew as the language of a reinvigorated Jewish nation. Rawnitzki's and Luria's grasp of Zionism as a process of political and cultural ingathering, without prejudice to the qualities of the Jews being gathered in, released a flood of creative energy that was obviously pumping long before the formal beginnings of the Zionist movement, but that required a certain kind of vehicle to channel it effectively, one that at once was editorially rigorous and rigorously democratic, powerfully national yet open to any sort of Jew. I know of no other Jewish publication before World War II where contributors of different ages, from different regions and social levels, and holding different political priorities, felt so much at ease in one another's company. It was the indifference to the question of language rather than insistence on language that allowed Yiddish to emerge unapologetically as a common Jewish instrument.

The paradox goes deeper. No sooner did Zionism grant writers and readers in the Jewish Pale of Settlement confidence in their national legitimacy and a place to express it than they began to realize the depths of their European roots. The badge of shame attached to the Jews by hostile rulers had implicitly branded the Jewish language. By erasing the stigma of inauthenticity from the Jews, Zionism uncovered Yiddish as the European Jewish vernacular, different from Ukrainian, French, or German, to be sure, but only in the ways that Jews differed from Ukrainians, Frenchmen, and Germans. Because the Jewish people crossed all European national boundaries, *Der yid* showed the Jews moored in Europe *in der leng un in der breyt un in der tif*—vertically as well as horizontally, through the centuries and on the soil as well as across the miles. There was a powerful sense of placement rather than displacement, as I would like to try to demonstrate through one final small example.

In an early issue of *Der yid*, there appeared a series of feuilletons by Jacob Dineson, under the unpromising title *Narishkaytn* (Foolishness).

Although Dineson was the author of some of the most popular Yiddish novels of the nineteenth century—*Der shvartser yungermantshik*, *Yosele, Hershele*, and others—he had subordinated his literary career to that of I. L. Peretz, so that his name became a byword for artistic humility. The feuilleton in question, characterized by Dineson's extreme modesty, is an extended rumination about the Dreyfus case, for as Dineson explains, he cannot stop worrying about the fate of Captain Dreyfus and his family. Dineson interprets his concern for the stranger in Paris as proof that "all the limbs of the Jewish body politic remain vitally interconnected, flowing with blood and energy in spite of all the abuse the body had endured."

Thinking about Dreyfus, Dineson is reminded of his childhood in heder when he was studying the portion *Vayishlah* (Gen. 32:4–36), in which cautious Jacob tries to appease his brother, Esau, with a gift of hundreds of goats, ewes, and other animals. In the course of this lesson about goats, the heder teacher explains to the boys that the billy goat in the backyard is a *bekhor*, the firstborn of its mother, and that on account of its status as an unblemished firstborn male goat, it has been consecrated as the community goat, *der koolsher bok*, connecting the Jews of the town with the ancient temple service of the priests in Jerusalem. According to custom, if the town can manage to keep the goat free of any physical blemish until the day of its natural death, the Jews will be entitled to give it ritual burial in the Jewish cemetery. But, as Dineson explains, the animal takes advantage of its privilege. It upsets stalls in the marketplace, chews up gardens and rooftops, and molests smaller creatures. Finally, one day, the town is rescued from its self-destructive piety. The *bekhor* makes the mistake of goring the chief of police—and is fatally maimed by him, that is to say, unritually put to death.

The *nimshal*, or moral point of this insignificant memory, is *der koved fun der armey!* France treats its army the way the town treated its goat, letting it trample the rights of the people in the name of its untouchable status. France can only be saved as their shtetl was once saved by an authority prepared to destroy the myth. Good liberal that he is, Dineson concludes with the observation that all people are alike, that Jews are in most respects no different from Frenchmen, but *kleyne kinder kleyne narn, groyse kinder groyse narn*; whereas the foolishness of little Jews does a little damage to their economy and their yards, the foolishness of great nations does irreparable harm to the world.

In towns all over Poland, Jews expressed their ties to the laws of sacrifice by sanctifying unblemished goats and giving them ritual burial in their European cemeteries. And though Dineson builds into his story the modern rationalist's embarrassment at bizarre superstition, he prefers the Jewish foolishness over the contemporary reality of France. Moreover, whereas modern Jews have by now shed their dated practices on the way

to genuine enlightenment, France has moved backward into this world of superstition. Without denying the relative smallness of the Jewish sphere, indeed, by drawing attention to its backwardness, Dineson suggests that Jews whose nationalism keeps them responsible for one another worldwide are true pan-Europeans as opposed to the parochial xenophobic French.

Here, then, is another side of the same complicating evidence that *Der yid* brought to light: the Jews had actually created an indigenous pan-European culture that confirmed their links with ancient Jewish civilization. When called upon to recognize themselves as a nation, they found they compared quite favorably with other Europeans. The minute they were released from censorship and invited to express themselves, they wrote not only in the style of *sagi-nahor*, of euphemism, irony, self-parody, and not necessarily decked out in borrowed grandeur (the way Herzl wanted delegates to the Zionist Congress to dress in formal attire for a moment of high dignity), but in widely varying individual styles, and testifying to the relative decency of their civilization.

The problem was exactly opposite of the one Aḥad Ha'am had defined. Once Zionism began to champion an autonomous modern Jewish people and an unapologetic culture, it discovered how profound a civilization the Jews had actually developed in Yiddish, their European language. *Der yid* revealed the layered depths of Jewish life and culture in Europe, and the degree to which Yiddish had become the sufficient repository of Jewish national consciousness—provided only that Jews wanted to go on living as Jews. The political assault against the Jews might dictate a policy of evacuation, and the rise of modern nation-states might require that Jews reclaim their original territory and original language: ever conscious of these external threats, the editors of *Der yid* pointed Jews toward Erets Israel and extolled the virtues of Hebrew, the language they associated with Erets Israel. In the meantime, however, they did everything possible to further develop a full-fledged national European Jewish culture.

On further analysis, these apparently paradoxical qualities of *Der yid* are no more than expressions of Jewishness, which sustains a great many internal contradictions, and appears to be contradictory only when judged by worldviews outside itself. Any cultural organ representing the entire Jewish people on its own terms would have incorporated similar contradictions: (a) The idea of national language, which is an outgrowth of modern theories of nationalism, bears no intrinsic relation to the role of languages among the Jews, who remain bound to a sacred text in Hebrew yet resistant to the sanctification of the language of that text (the Talmud could be argued and codified in a language other than Hebrew; the sanctification of God, which is the prayer for the dead, could be in

Aramaic; the vernacular language of the Jews of Europe could be Yiddish, their own creation, while the vernacular of the Jews of America could be English, the local tongue); (b) As with language, so with territory. The idea of land is so central to Jewish consciousness that Jews have been able to remain dispersed throughout millennia, knowing that in life or death, in finite or infinite time, they will eventually return to their land. If Jews at the end of the nineteenth century were prodded by the nature of modern illiberal nationalisms to make their way to Zion to protect Jewish life, this could not retroactively cancel out the amply demonstrated possibility of creative Jewish life in countries outside the Jewish land; (c) Ideologically, the tribal quality of Jewish religion shapes a different ideal of universal salvation from the one promoted by Christianity—one that does not *require* universality but only reaches for it ultimately. The same Jewish nexus of religion and nationhood shapes a concept of brotherhood theoretically narrower but in practice much less anxious than the one brokered by emancipation; (d) The culture of secular Jews, while struggling to become independent of authority, remains historically subservient to a text that no secular author dreams he can improve on. Dineson's sense of participation in a late stage of civilization and an essentially exegetical culture typifies most Yiddish and Hebrew writers of his generation, and the most autonomously modern "Jewish" writers in any language.

It was still possible between 1899 and 1902 for Polish-Russian Jewish writers to produce a composite modern culture that sustained these internal contradictions. That possibility did not long outlive *Der yid*.

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NOTES

1. *Der yid*, Vienna-Cracow (March 1899). Described as *Tsaytshrift far ale yidishe interesn*. Published by Khevera Ahi'asaf, Warsaw, between January 1899 and December 30, 1902.

For general background, see Zalman Reizen, ed., *Leksikon fun der yidisher literatur un prese* (Warsaw, 1914), pp. 689–90; Shmuel Rozhanski, "Der yid," in *Pinkes far der forschung fun der yidisher literatur un prese*, vol. 3, ed. Chaim Bass (New York, 1975), pp. 319–33; David Druk, *Geshikhte fun der yidisher prese (in rusland un poyln)* (Warsaw, 1927), pp. 10–20. For an overview of the Yiddish press in Russia, see Y[akov] Shatski, "Geshikhte fun der yidisher prese," *Algemeyne entsiklopedye* [General Encyclopedia in Yiddish] (New York, 1942), pp. 199–284.

2. Zalmen Zylbercweig, *Akhd ha'am un zayn batsiung tsu yidish* [Ahad Ha'am and His Attitude Toward Yiddish] (Los Angeles, 1956), offers a useful summary of the debate, including appendices of some of the relevant texts.

Steven J. Zipperstein, *Elusive Prophet: Aḥad Ha'am and the Origins of Zionism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1993), does not deal directly with this article, but offers an excellent analysis of Aḥad Ha'am's approach to Jewish nationalism as well as a good background for the period.

3. For achievement and shortcomings, see Sh. L. Tsitron, *Di geshikhte fun der yidisher presse fun 1863 biz 1889* [History of the Yiddish Press] (Vilna, 1923), pp. 117–72. Overview of the problems of the Yiddish press in Russia in David E. Fishman, "The Politics of Yiddish in Tsarist Russia," in *From Ancient Israel to Modern Judaism; Essays in Honor of Marvin Fox*, vol. 4, ed. Jacob Neusner, Ernie Frerichs, and Nahum Sarna (Atlanta, 1989), pp. 155–71.

4. Editorial, *Der yid* (January 1899). "One could say that in every Jewish heart there is a spark of Jewishness, of faithful love of the Jews. That spark is often buried in ashes, but it can be fanned back into bright warm fire."

5. Letter to A. Shulman in Kiev (July 27, 1898), *Igrot Aḥad Ha'am* (Tel Aviv, 1924), vol. 1, pp. 254. The correspondence of 1898–89 contains information about the founding of *Der yid*, its relation with the Hebrew *Hashiloah*, and Aḥad Ha'am's concerns over the status of Yiddish. I am grateful to Shulamit Laskov of the Aḥad Ha'am Archive at Tel Aviv University for her help with related unpublished material.

6. Letter to A. Shulman in Kiev (January 29, 1899), *Igrot*, vol. 2, pp. 21–22.

7. Letter to Y. H. Rawnitzki in Kiev, February 16, 1899, *Igrot*, vol. 2, pp. 24–25. In a letter of January 29, 1899 (vol. 2, pp. 36–37), he excuses Rawnitzki for having selected the paper's name without prior consultation, but this does not prevent him from publicizing his objection in an open letter to the editor.

8. *Der yid* (April 1899). The letter was signed A-D-M.

9. Zipperstein, *Elusive Prophet*, describes discomfort of many members of Aḥad Ha'am's circle with his perceived remoteness from quotidian affairs. Many of Aḥad Ha'am's objections to Yiddish are included in his essay "The Language Dispute" (1910) and discussed in that connection, pp. 222–24.

10. R[awnitzki], "Who Is a Jew?" [Yiddish], in *Der yid* 1:9 (May 1899).

11. Mordecai Spector, "The Jew Is a Jew" [Yiddish], *Der yid* 1:12 (June 1899).

12. M. Meirzamen, "Letter from an Artisan" [Yiddish], *Der yid* 1:11 (June 1899).

13. Reuben Brainin, "Our Holy Tongue" [Yiddish], *Der yid* 1:8 (April 1899).

14. Ibid., letter to Rawnitzki, dated November 26, 1898, Berlin. In Rawnitzki Archive, The National Library 4*1185.

15. I. L. Peretz, undated letter to Rawnitzki, "Ten Unpublished Letters" [Yiddish], ed. Nahman Meisel, in *Yidishe kultur* (April 1950), pp. 25–26. In the same letter, he provides an interesting commentary on the difference between "Yaades" (Judaism) and "Yidishkayt" (Jewishness), reproaching Rawnitzki for having taken the liberty of replacing the first by the second in his manuscript.

16. R[awnitzki], "Who Is a Jew?"

17. Zalman Reisin, *Lexikon*, pp. 689–90.

18. Abraham Reisen, *Epizodn fun mayn lebn* [Episodes of My Life] (Vilna, 1929), vol. 2, pp. 49–50.

19. David Druk, p. 17.

20. David Druk, pp. 15–16. See open letter to *Hamelits* signed by Eliezer Kaplan and other members of Aḥi'asaf board, protesting the assault on Aḥi'asaf publications in general and on *Der yid* in particular. 3:39 (September 26, 1901).

21. David Druk, p. 17.

22. Abraham Reisen, vol. 2, pp. 12–13.

23. N. B. Minkoff, *Yidishe klasiker poetn* [Yiddish Classic Poets] (New York, 1937), p. 14.

24. Shimon Frug, "Mayn lid," *Der yid* 1:2 (January 1899).

25. Rokhl Brokhes, "Yankele," *Der yid* 1:7 (March 1899).

26. Abcd Hadrai [Avraham Abba Druyanow] "Pages from a Shopkeeper's Diary" [Yiddish], *Der yid* 1:16 (August 1899).
27. David Frischmann, "Shimon Shmuel Frug," *Kol kitvey Dovid Frischman* [Complete Works] (Mexico, 1951), vol. 2, p. 264.
28. Ber Borokhov, "At Frug's Graveside" [Yiddish] (dated October 16, 1916), *Shprakh-forshung un literatur-geshikhte* [Works] (Tel Aviv, 1966), p. 281.
29. Mark Warshawski, *Der yid* 1:3 (February 1899).
30. Sholem Aleichem, "A Letter to Mr. Engel of the *Voskhod*" [Yiddish], *Der yid* 3:24 (June 13, 1901) and Engel's reply, 3:40 (October 10, 1901).
31. Bal-Makhshoves [Isadore Eliashev], review of Warshawski's folk songs, *Der yid* 3:16 (April 17, 1901).
32. Letter to Y. H. Rawnitzki (dated Sosonowitz, November 12, 1898), *Igrot Hayyim Nahman Bialik* (Tel Aviv, 1937), vol. 1, no. 51.
33. Hayyim Nahman Bialik, "Nokh eyn yor-hundert," *Der yid* 1:16 (August 1899). This was actually the first poem Bialik had submitted, although the second, "Oyf dem hoykhn barg . . ." [High on the Mountain] was published earlier, in the previous issue.
34. *Der yid*, *ibid*.
35. David G. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984), p. 89.
36. Dan Miron, *Hapreidah min ha'ani he'ani* [Taking Leave of the Impoverished Self: H. N. Bialik's Early Poetry] (Tel Aviv, 1986), especially pp. 318–20. Bal-Makhshoves [Eliashev], Introduction to *Shirim: lider un poemen* [Poems] (Berlin, 1922), p. 13.
37. Abraham Novershtern provides a developmental study of the character in "From 'Menahem-Mendl' to Sholem Aleichem: From Textual History to Artistic Construction" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 44 (1975), 105–46.
38. Sh. L. Tsitron, *Dray literarishe doyyres* [Three Literary Generations] (Vilna, 1920), vol. 1, pp. 164–65.
39. Sholem Aleichem, "A boydem: a naye-mayse fun tevey dem milkhikn, iberdertseylt vort bay vort fun sholem aleykhem," *Der yid* 1:1, 3 (January–February, 1899). Trans. by Hillel Halkin as "Tevey Blows a Small Fortune" in *Tevey the Dairyman and the Railroad Stories* (New York, 1987), pp. 34–35.
40. Describing the association with Rawnitzki and *Der yid*, I. D. Berkowitz says Sholem Aleichem "brushed off the mitzvah of becoming a modernist." He was especially affronted by literary modernism among the young Jewish writers around him, which was not the decadence of a sated literature but a leap from the purple prose of the Haskalah to another form of exaggeration. *Dos sholem-aleykhem-bukh*, I. D. Berkowitz, ed. (New York, 1926), pp. 187–88.
41. Sholem Aleichem, "Hayntike kinder," *Der yid* 1:10–12 (May–June, 1899).
42. Y. H. Rawnitzki, *Dor vesofrav* [A Generation and Its Writers] (Tel Aviv, 1926), pp. 112–15. Rawnitzki's memoir about Sholem Aleichem gives valuable information about their attitudes toward Jewish writing in the "folk language." See also Y. H. Rawnitzki, "The First Years of My Acquaintance with Sholem Aleichem," *Tsum ondenk fun sholem aleykhem*, ed. I. Tsinerberg and Sh. Niger (1917). Nonetheless, it is worth noting that Rawnitzki tells us very little about his role in the founding of *Der yid*.
43. *Dos sholem-aleykhem-bukh*, ed. I. D. Berkowitz (New York, 1926), p. 196. Berkowitz describes Sholem Aleichem's situation in footnote to relevant letter from Sholem Aleichem to Mordecai Spector, dated Kiev, November 12, 1902.
44. I. L. Peretz, "Oyb nisht nokh hekher (a khasidishe dertseylung)," 2:1 (January 11, 1900); "A Shmues," 2:15–16 (Passover issue; April 12, 1900); "Tsvishn tsvey berg," 2:40–41 (Simhath Torah issue, October 4, 1900); "A gilgl fun a nign," 1:46 (November 15, 1900); "Mishnas khasidim," 4:19 (May 8, 1902).

45. Nohum Oyslender, "Peretses 'shtet un shtetlakh'" [Yiddish], in *Tsaytshrift far yidisher geshikhte, demografye un ekonomik, literatur-forshung, shprakhvisnshaft un etnografye*, 1 (Minsk, 1925), argues that Peretz's column represented a necessary interval of realism between the neohasidic stories of 1900 and the neofolk tales of 1903 and following. Though Oyslender's thesis is overstated (Peretz wrote concurrently in several styles), he provides the most complete essay we have on Peretz's involvement with *Der yid*. For a discussion of Peretz's hasidic stories and reactions to their publication, see Sh. Niger, *Yitskhok leybush perets* (Buenos Aires, 1952), pp. 265–97.

46. I. L. Peretz, "Dray khupes" [Three Canopies], begins 3:17 (April 25, 1901). A partial list of Peretz's contributions to *Der yid* in Nachman Meisel, *Y. L. Perets, zayn lebn un shafn* [Peretz's Life and Works] (New York, 1945), p. 362.

47. I. L. Peretz, "Der farsholtene brune" [The Cursed Well], *Der yid* 1:9, 11 (May–June, 1899). In issue 14 of the same year, Mordecai Spector reported the case of a girl who had fallen into the well and was not rescued for hours because everyone was afraid of the demons who had lured her in.

48. Israel Shvertmut [I. L. Peretz], "Briv fun varshe," 2:1 (January 11, 1900). The column ran irregularly thereafter.

49. The change occurred between the issues of May 1 and May 8, 1902. In a boxed announcement in the issue of May 22, 1902, the editors write: "We have decided to expand and improve the "Cities and Towns" section of *Der yid* so that it may genuinely mirror the whole range of Jewish life in the provinces"; they invite readers to submit exact and especially "statistical" data whenever possible.

50. Di bin [I. L. Peretz], "Ma nishtanoh?" *Der yid* 4:19 (May 8, 1902).

51. D. Z. Bikhovski, "An Open Letter to the Bee" [Yiddish], *Der yid* 4:44 (October 29, 1902). Bikhovski says the sting will prove less harmful than intended because Jewish doctors don't read the paper.

52. Di bin, "Shtet un shtetlakh," *Der yid* 4:27 (July 3, 1902).

53. Di bin, "Shtet un shtetlakh," *Der yid* 4:33 (August 14, 1902).

54. Di bin, "Shtet un shtetlakh," *Der yid* 4:21 (May 22, 1902).

55. I. L. Peretz, *Haḥets* [The Arrow] (Warsaw, 1894), p. 47. See also chapter on relations between I. L. Peretz and Aḥad Ha'am in Nachman Meisel, *Yitskhok Leybush Perets un zayn dor shrayber* [Peretz and His Generation of Writers] (New York, 1951), pp. 322–37.

56. Rokhl Brokhes, "Nokh der arbet," *Der yid* 1:19 (October 1899).

57. Bal-Makhshoves [Eliashév], "I. L. Peretz" [Yiddish] (1915) in *Geklibene verk* (New York, 1953), p. 197.

58. Bal-Makhshoves [Eliashév], "Dr. Joseph Luria" [Yiddish], in *Geklibene shriften*, 4 (Warsaw, 1929): 121.

59. Sholem Asch, "My First Acquaintance with Peretz" [Yiddish], in *Tsukunft* (May 1915): 458–63; Abraham Reisen, *Epizodn fun mayn lebn*, 2, see especially chap. 29.

60. Sholem Asch, "Moyshel," *Der yid*, November 29, 1900.

61. Reisen, *Epizodn*, 1:83–84.

62. Reisen, *Epizodn* 1:195–96.

63. The four stories referred to are: "Der shmek tabak" [The Pinch of Snuff], 1:16 (August 1899); "Di shpayzerin" [The breadwinner], 3:23 (June 5, 1901); "Oys blote!" [No more mud!], 1:21 (November 15, 1899); and "Tsurik oyf der shtele" [Back on the Job], 3:17 (April 25, 1901).

64. Reisen, *Epizodn*, 1:222.

65. David Druk, p. 12.