Danny Luzon

Shakespeare "Translated and Improved": The Translational Politics of the American Yiddish Theater and Its Afterlife

Abstract This article explores the American Yiddish theater's creative reworkings of William Shakespeare, a practice epitomized by the presumed parodic dictum "translated and improved" (*fartaytsht un farbessert*). It argues that this theater's translational politics of chutzpah strives to breach fixed literary and familial lineages by treating the high-canonical Anglo text as a porous space, open to endless cultural attachments. Through revisionary acts of intercultural exchange, the Yiddish theater and its followers envision literary inheritance as something that is not bounded by familial descent and dissent but rather is open to alternative modes of kinship. Specifically, this late nineteenth-century strategy is carried forward by authors such as Anzia Yezierska and Grace Paley, who turn to the Yiddish theater's proclaimed improvement of Shakespeare in their multilingual English works in order to envision a radical fluidity of the American self. Writing on the periphery of US literary production, the authors studied in this article Judaize, Yiddishize, and queer Shakespearean characters, insisting on both the semantic and semiotic ways in which translations can democratize the linguistic economy of Anglo-American literature.
Keywords translation, migration, Jewish American literature, Yiddish, Shakespeare

> Most Yiddish audiences would have agreed with the theater manager who reportedly claimed, "Gordin is greater than Shakespeare, for besides having the same dramaturgical talents, he also has Jewish charm, Jewish humor and Jewish pathos—qualities that Shakespeare does not possess!"
> —Joel Berkowitz, *Shakespeare on the American Yiddish Stage* (2002)

For Eastern European Jewish authors of the mass migration period, whether they chose English or Yiddish as their predominant language of expression, writing in the United States entailed a challenge of legibility in the shadow of the Anglo literary tradition. In

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her discussion of cultural hegemony in the broader context of a literary world-system, Pascale Casanova (2004: 17–18) stresses the crucial role that both language and literary tradition play in maintaining this system, contending that "indeed, literature is so closely linked to language that there is a tendency to identify the 'language of literature'—the 'language of Racine' or the 'language of Shakespeare'—with literature itself." In the essay-story "An Immigrant Among the Editors," Anzia Yezierska (1923: 57) critically ponders this predicament: "But how was I to reach these American-born higher-ups when they were so much above me?. . . . I wasn't interested in grammar and arithmetic and dry history and still drier and deader literature about Chaucer and Marlowe." Going through a series of failed attempts to publish her early English stories in US magazines, she wonders: "What's my place in America?" (63).

The overpowering allure of the Anglo canon also troubled the other end of the linguistic debate. Immigrant authors who wrote in Yiddish rather than English expressed a fear that assimilation of Anglo literary trends—even if not the language—would threaten the very intactness of Yiddish culture. The Yiddish poet Yankev Glatshteyn (quoted in Howe 1976: 452) sardonically claims that being "a poet of an abandoned culture" means "that I have to be aware of Auden but Auden need never have heard of me." Glatshteyn, the Yiddish paragon of Anglo modernist experimentation, underwent a radical shift in the mid-1930s. In his caustic essay "*Der marsh tsu di goyim*" (The march to the gentiles, 1935), Glatshteyn attacks authors who write in a manner that makes it easier to translate their works into English, insisting instead on an aesthetic commitment to Yiddish untranslatability. Thus, although Yiddish poets often flaunted a manifold (Jewish, American, and transnational) identity, their assertion of a hybrid literary self was often accompanied by profound tensions of sustainability (see Rubinstein 2008).

The two ends of the English-Yiddish conundrum faced similar dilemmas; that is, does seeking aesthetic intelligibility by and through highbrow Anglo-American culture necessarily efface Jewish particularity, or does it, conversely, allow immigrant authors to establish a distinctive, dialogical literary tradition and to invert cultural hierarchies?[1] For example, the authoritative editor of the American Yiddish daily *Forverts*, Abraham Cahan (1929), scorns Boris Glagolin for his 1929 production of *Othello* at the Yiddish Art Theater. He finds fault in particular with Glagolin's attempt "to renew the long-standing Shakespearean tragedy with '*altereyshens*,' to make in it '*impruvments*'" (6).

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Cahan uses English words in his Yiddish review to ridicule what he takes to be Glagolin's endorsement of an Anglo-modernist gaze. He determines that despite the attempt to elevate William Shakespeare in Yiddish, the resulting adaptation is "really a *shund* [sensational-pulp] story" (4).[2] What bothers Cahan in particular is Glagolin's effort to derive both source material and aesthetic credibility from Shakespeare. In a rather striking claim, he makes Glagolin—an avant-garde modernist—into a lowbrow *shund* author, and he lauds Harry Kalmanowitz in contrast—one of the most popular playwrights of the time, who mainly wrote crowd-pleasing melodramas—for his capacity to produce original, engaging "Yiddish works about Jewish life."

The Yiddish *shund* (pulp) theatrical tradition, as well as Kalmanowitz's own engagement with Shakespeare as a means for critiquing the idea of a literary language, is explored in depth later in this article. But it is worth lingering on this brief example to see how Shakespeare serves as a tool for negotiating the dilemma of Anglo-conforming aesthetic legibility versus cultural and linguistic independence.[3] The Cahan-Glagolin dispute shows, as Joel Berkowitz (2002: 136) points out, that Yiddish writers and critics "demanded something more of Shakespeare in Yiddish than mere faithfulness to the text." This *something*, this article argues, reveals a different conception of literary tradition, one which strives to unsettle the idea of a national and cultural lineage. By considering the aesthetic and political work of translation, my focus will be less on linguistic translation, and more on cultural translation between high Anglo culture and immigrant Jewish expression. I suggest that through revisionary acts of translation and adaptation, the Yiddish theater came to imagine literary inheritance as a process that is not bounded by familial descent and dissent but rather is open to alternative modes of kinship. This subversive translational strategy was then in turn carried forward by immigrant and postimmigrant authors such as Anzia Yezierska and Grace Paley, who turned to the Yiddish theater's improvement of Shakespeare to envision a radical fluidity of the Jewish American (female) self.

While immigrant Yiddish adaptations of Shakespeare span lowbrow-parodic and high-modernist productions, these varied reworkings share an aspirational commitment to the dialogic possibilities of literary kinship. This article thus asks us to take seriously a playful mode of cultural porousness that came into being by way of the Yiddish theater and its afterlife in Jewish American literature of the 1920s through the 1950s. The unique, carnivalesque translational politics of this theater strives to breach fixed lineages by treating the Shakespearean play as a space

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open to endless cultural reworkings and attachments via the faculties of translation and variation. The authors discussed in this article, who wrote in Yiddish and/or English, creatively adapted this Yiddish theatrical signature to envision the Anglo high-canonical text as a site that could be incessantly rewritten long after it had been published as a finished work. The dialogical features in the works of Harry Kalmanowitz, Anzia Yezierska, and Grace Paley utilize this theater's nonhierarchical politics in order to allow individuals to participate in a collective ongoing retelling, and, in so doing, to reimagine a national American collective.

Staging One's Place in Language

The era of mass migration brought about pressures of assimilation and a compulsion to efface multilingualism. As Delia Caparoso Konzett (1997: 602) notes, new immigrants

> were strongly encouraged, if not forced, to learn English, since foreign languages were now viewed as a national threat. In a wartime speech, Theodore Roosevelt warned Americans of "our most dangerous foe . . . the foreign-language press . . . which holds the alien to his former associations and through them to his former allegiance."

The Yiddish theater staged these sociolinguistic tensions and provided "healing opportunities for spectators to laugh and cry side by side in their own ethnic haven" (Sandrow 2015: 226). One strategy to accomplish this was the profusion of Yiddishized English words. In plays such as Isadore Zolatarevsky's 1911 *Daymends* (Diamonds), words like *eksyuzet mi* (excuse me), *bukh kiper* (bookkeeper), *biznesman* (businessman), and *gut efternun* (good afternoon) indicate a community that lives in-between languages and for whom some concepts exist only in such *dialect*-ical, bilingual interplay.

The most intricate translational strategy for subverting assimilationist pressures, however, was not through linguistic translation but through intercultural exchange, by means of the radical reworkings of literary works of the West. The Yiddish theater is particularly famous for adapting Shakespeare's plays, presumably guided by the humorous dictum "*fartaytsht un farbessert*" (translated and improved, see Quint 2017). As Anita Norich (2015: 488) points out, "Those who cite this familiar sign of Yiddish chutzpah do not, indeed cannot, marshal proof that it existed. . . . Nonetheless, the strength of the claim and the smile it evokes continue." While Norich describes the phrase "translated and improved" as an anecdote whose historiographical

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accuracy cannot be ascertained, her claim draws attention to a historically distinctive Yiddish sense of humor. That is, this witty translational signature thrived in practice even if the purported motto related to it has never been phrased or recorded. Yiddish theaters often Judaized Shakespeare's plots, making characters and locales Jewish, as in Isadore Zolatarevsky's *Der yeshive-bokher, oder, Der yidisher Hamlet* (The yeshiva-boy, or, the Jewish Hamlet, 1899), and Jacob Gordin's *Der yidisher Kenig Lir* (The Jewish King Lear, 1892) and *Mirele Efros; Di yidishe Kenigin Lir* (Mirele Efros, or the Jewish Queen Lear, 1898).

In fact, the Yiddish theater considered Shakespeare's works to be essentially unfinished—outside the determinism of cultural and historical boundaries—to the extent that, in a caustic sketch, the satirist Moyshe Nadir (1916) describes how he goes to Shakespeare's grave and tries to coax him out of his tomb to give the Elizabethan playwright some literary advice (see Berkowitz 2002: 222–27). Through its heterodoxy in striving to improve Shakespeare—and in its humorous, nonconflictual way of doing so—the Yiddish theater envisioned a non–Harold Bloomian notion of literary tradition. By carving out a fluid mode of kinship with literatures of the West, it freed itself from linguistic hierarchies and cultural lineages, as well as from the compulsion to passively inherit a finalized, Anglo-Christian aesthetic tradition. It is the humor in this assertion that allowed members of the Yiddish theater to radically disarm the conflictual, hierarchical notion of literary and national inheritance, which processes of assimilation and class mobility enforced.

In *The Jewish King Lear* (1892) and *Mirele Efros, or the Jewish Queen Lear* (1898), Gordin transforms the plot of Shakespeare's plays to make a point about intergenerational discords in modern Eastern Europe. These tensions result from processes of Jewish modernization that threaten traditional patriarchal power. Similar to Lear, Gordin's patriarch and matriarch figures assert their power by desperately relinquishing it. Instead of a king, however, the main protagonist of *The Jewish King Lear* is a wealthy Lithuanian merchant named Dovid Moysheles, a choice that reveals the limits of Eastern European Jews' class aspirations. Moysheles decides to entrust his capital to his sons-in-law so that he can retire and move to Palestine. This decision generates tensions between himself and his three daughters (modeled on Lear's daughters), and Moysheles's daughter's tutor (and later, her husband) warns Moysheles that his fate will be like in the story of King Lear. Similarly, Mirele Efros is a respected businesswoman and the widow of a wealthy

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businessman from Poland. She considers marrying off her son Yosele to Sheyndele, a simple village girl, but is horrified by the vulgarity of her family. To Mirele's chagrin, Yosele falls in love with Sheyndele, and the generational clash between the norm of arranged marriage and the son's wish to pursue his love devastates the family. As several scholars have noted, both plays proclaim complex formal analogies to *King Lear*, for example in terms of the temporal semiotics of repetition and the thematic of vision impediment (see Henry 2011: 36–41; Yachnin 2003: 10–12). Furthermore, Shakespeare's play is mentioned several times in *The Jewish King Lear*, by characters who make Moysheles analogous to Lear. These formal and intertextual gestures seem to install a sense of fated history, stressing how the past is devoured by the present in a process that always repeats itself. However, a significant difference in Gordin's two plays is that they both end on surprising happy notes. In order to envision a sustainable place for the generation of the past *within* the present, Gordin's dramas end with a reconciliation of the patriarch/matriarch and their children.

Gordin's desperate optimism can be read within the context of a broader anxiety about the viability of the Yiddish theater as a cultural institution. The Yiddish theater emerged in New York in 1881, six years after its debut in Romania, and it flourished until the late 1930s. During the 1920s, about a dozen Yiddish theaters operated in New York City alone, located among Second Avenue, The East Village, and the Lower East Side (see Nahshon 2004: xiii–xviii). Translations of Shakespeare's plays, which entered the Yiddish repertoire in the early 1890s, were performed in 2,500-seat venues such as the People's Theatre and were extremely popular. Nevertheless, this massive success was accompanied by the apprehension that this was an ephemeral phenomenon.[4]

The precarity of the Yiddish theater was linked to an additional fear by its practitioners, who worried that Yiddish popular theatrical culture was inherently unrefined, geared toward sweatshop workers rather than a cultural aristocracy. The fascination with Shakespeare can be understood as one of this theater's translational means to legitimize itself as art. In the early years, operettas and melodramas prevailed on the Yiddish stage, genres which were considered crude, as they "appealed to an unsophisticated immigrant population, many of whom had never before seen a play in any language" (Sandrow 2015: 225). Jacob Gordin scorned the Yiddish theater of his time as folksy and vulgar and instead set out to elevate this lowbrow institution by slipping into his plays "bits of information about European and classical literature" (228).

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Gordin's adaptation of Shakespeare in plays such as *The Jewish King Lear* and *Mirele Efros, or the Jewish Queen Lear* was an attempt to transcend the problem of vulgarity, as well as the lack of high-art tradition. Nonetheless, despite Gordin's high-cultural aspiration, the carnivalesqueness involved in Judaizing and cross-gendering Lear on the stage reveals his ambivalence toward the sanctified status of literatures of the West. To be sure, Shakespeare captivated Jewish immigrant writers because of his esteemed status in early twentieth-century US culture. During this time, Shakespeare in the United States "had become part of 'polite' culture—an essential ingredient in a complex we call, significantly, 'legitimate' theater" (Levine 1990: 31). Yet these versatile dialogues with Shakespeare were also parodic and never fully serious. Yiddish playwrights, already in Gordin's generation, refused to abide by a unilateral model of literary inheritance, by an imperative of self-deprecation in the shadow of authoritative literary tradition. It is not surprising that they turned to Shakespeare in particular, when one considers the role of the Elizabethan playwright in the American search for literary independence.

One can argue that the desire to both relate to Shakespeare and surpass him is already quintessentially American. In "Hawthorne and His Mosses," Herman Melville (1850) famously likens Hawthorne's literary genius to Shakespeare's.[5] He uses Shakespeare as a foil for legitimizing the independence of US literature: "Believe me, my friends, that men, not very much inferior to Shakespeare, are this day being born on the banks of the Ohio. And the day will come, when you shall say, Who reads a book by an Englishman that is a modern?" (126). During the around the same time that Gordin staged his dramas on the Jewish King and Queen Lear, Mark Twain serialized *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884–85), which includes a farcical soliloquy in which the King melds parts from *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* (Twain 1994: 136–37). In this memorable scene, Twain proclaims his own literary genius by both mocking and venerating Shakespeare's. Although certainly distinct in both its translational practice and sociohistorical tensions of acculturation, the Yiddish theater engaged with Shakespeare in a similar manner. It grappled with a sense of English literary supremacy while also finding in Shakespeare a means for subverting fixed cultural hierarchies and for asserting artistic particularity. By refusing to either unquestioningly inherit or fully rebel against authoritative Anglo texts, the Yiddish theater shaped a dialogical notion of Jewish immigrant literary tradition in the United States.

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Shakespeare's status within the broader American reflection on literary tradition helps us see why he continues to play such a central role in original Jewish American works that no longer need him as "proof" of quality. Authors of the following generations, such as Harry Kalmanowitz, Anzia Yezierska, and Grace Paley, engaged with the Yiddish theater's dialogue with Shakespeare, but not in order to legitimize their own works. Instead, they embraced the unfinalized status of the literary work, which the Yiddish theater celebrates and which is in fact characteristic of Shakespeare's own time—the differences between quarto and folio, the countless versions of an Elizabethan drama on the stage (see Orgel 1988: 1–25). Jewish authors of the 1920s through the 1950s who witnessed the rise and fall of the Yiddish theater turned to its engagement with Elizabethan literariness in order to envision a transnational model of tradition, one that would allow them to generate an attachment to English language and literature in their own cultural terms. Gordin, as Berkowitz (2002: 72) reminds us, "was not the first Yiddish playwright to derive source material from other cultures, but he was the first to make the very act of appropriation part of his goal: to help Yiddish theater break out of its often stifling parochialism and connect it to the broader Western dramatic tradition." He did so, I would add, by forcing the major culture to undergo no less of a radical change. The politics of chutzpah in translation, adaptation, and appropriation that I discuss in the following sections are much indebted to Gordin's Shakespearean revolution.

Becoming Shakespeare the Second

Adaptations of Shakespeare's dramas dominated the Yiddish stage from the 1890s to the early 1910s. After World War I, however, these were replaced by various high-art plays, as companies such as the Yiddish Art Theater now featured original works by Abraham Goldfaden, Sholem Asch, H. Leyvik, and Arn Zeitlin. Yet, despite this new body of serious plays, lowbrow operettas, melodramas, and musical comedies continued to prevail on the Yiddish stage. Shakespeare now came to serve not as a source material but as a trope for elucidating the contrast between crowd-pleasing, sensational shund and high modernist theater, at a tumultuous time when artistic Yiddish theater was "felt to represent the culture's highest aspirations, which trashy *shund* betrayed" (Sandrow 2015: 229).

The anxiety about the Yiddish theater's incapability to transcend its shund condition is shrewdly explored in Harry (Hershl) Kalmanowitz's *Shekspir der tzveyter* (Shakespeare the Second, 1920). This tragi-

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comedy, which has not been researched before, survived in only two manuscript forms; I was able to find the full manuscript at The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives.[6] Although he is almost forgotten today, Kalmanowitz (1886–1966), who immigrated to the United States from Polish Lithuania in 1900, was a prolific playwright who had hundreds of popular plays performed all over America and Europe. He wrote Yiddish comedies and melodramas at a time when sensationalism was considered a ticket to commercial success.[7] Yet *Shakespeare the Second* emerges as an attempt to reclaim the potentiality of trashy shund aesthetics. Not only does Kalmanowitz flaunt his knowledge of Shakespeare's dramas in complex intertextual ways, he also uses his dialogue with the Bard to reflect more broadly on what makes a literary language.

The four acts of *Shakespeare the Second* tell the story of Abie Zlatkin, a failed playwright, and his wife Fannie, who supports his dream of producing Yiddish works of great merit. Floundering in an existential present-time stasis, Abie fails to get his plays on the Yiddish stage, and he has his father-in-law, Malkiel, pay the bills for his family. In a moment of rage at Abie's failure to provide for his daughter, Malkiel tears up Abie's manuscripts, leaving him in a yet more profound state of stagnation. Kalmanowitz designs Abie's temporal paralysis as a comment on the American Yiddish theater's inability to rid itself of its shund status, to legitimize itself in the shadow of the Anglo tradition. Both of Abie's ambitions are nonviable: writing for public success is contrasted to artfulness; and aiming for artfulness, for becoming a second Shakespeare, is unfeasible, since even the Yiddish world belittles Abie's talent. Abie's community mocks his aspirations, calling him "Shakespeare the Second." The play's title thus serves to interpellate Abie as a *non*-Shakespeare, stressing the perceived impossibility of a Yiddish playwright producing a work of art that is acknowledged as such by a substantial audience.

Kalmanowitz makes manifest the inability of Yiddish to break through sociolinguistic hierarchical constraints. Fannie, Abie's wife, lauds his plays' language: "why are you upset by people laughing at you? . . . Your language, the language that you arrange in your plays is truly a Shakespeare language" (Kalmanowitz 1920: 16).[8] The ambition of producing a "Shakespeare language" in Yiddish is quickly debunked, however, when Abie's friend Tashntikhl enters the room. As suggested by his caricature name (handkerchief in Yiddish), Tashntikhl is the emblem of shund culture. From the moment he enters the stage he comically blurs various social discourses and classes: he greets Abie

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with the Yiddishized English word "*helow*" and then shifts to speak in Lithuanian Yiddish, the most prestigious dialect in terms of class and language politics alike. This shameless pastiche peaks as Tashntikhl proclaims that he has also written a play and asks Abie for advice. Abie determines that "it's absolutely worthless!" ("Es iz gor nisht mit gor nisht [literally: nothing with nothing]" (17). Yet Tashntikhl insists: "Surely you did not read it well. . . . My brother-in-law read my drama and said that it is *foist klass*, do you see? . . . My brother-in-law is not a greenhorn" (17–18).[9] To Abie's remark that the problem is "the language, the language," Tashntikhl replies: "My brother-in-law licked his fingers over my language. It is, says he, brilliant" (19).[10] The Yiddish idiom "you can lick your fingers," often used to describe the experience of American Yiddish audiences, stands for something that is sensually rather than intellectually pleasurable, thus capturing the shund predicament: sensationalism (as well as pleasure *in* dialect) versus the alleged artfulness of a "Shakespeare language."

Shakespeare the Second includes numerous similar metafictional gestures. It proclaims itself to be a play about how one writes a play, about what makes a work worthy of literary appreciation. All the while, it also ridicules the authoritarian approach of the Yiddish Art Theater, by comically placing its linguistic ambitions under the overpowering shadow of English theatrical culture. For example, Abie instructs Tashntikhl:

> Your language, your language. Tell me only Tashntikhl, have you ever read any literature? . . . (goes aside and pulls out his own drama). Here, now you will hear a [Shakespearean] language. (searches). Hear now, this is my drama *Yashtsherke* [lizard or chameleon in Yiddish], which will any day now be produced on the stage. I will read aloud for you how a beloved should speak to her lover.[11] (20)

The play Abie reads aloud for Tashntikhl—whose title, as can be seen in this quote, evokes the act of masquerading and boundary crossing—is itself a metadramatic text. It explores the theme of forbidden love and infidelity, as the overarching force that shapes Yiddish creativity in the United States. The protagonist in Abie's play is married with two children but he falls in love with another woman. Later on, the essential plot of his play is replicated in Abie's own life. In the third act of *Shakespeare the Second*, Abie suddenly becomes successful. The star actor, Madam Rosencrantz, tries to seduce Abie, disregarding his marital status. In a celebration of sensationalism and bad taste typical of the

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shund genres, Rosencrantz tells Abie: "the two of us will drink from one glass. . . . I want your lips to touch the same glass that my lips have touched. . . . You created such a great acting role and I would like to buy it with my love" (64). Abie, in a reply that replicates his own play's plot, tells Rosencrantz: "I have a wife and children!"[12]

The name Rosencrantz is, of course, not accidental. Kalmanowitz alludes to and feminizes the notable minor male character in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Taken together with Kalmanowitz's play's title, the allusion to *Hamlet* thematizes the Yiddish theater's forbidden love affair with Shakespeare, an affair followed by a sense of guilt and betrayal. In *Shakespeare the Second*, Abie ultimately commits adultery, and when his wife Fannie finds out about the affair with Rosencrantz, she commits suicide, which marks the death of the adherence to Yiddish tradition in the United States. But Kalmanowitz also insists on the aesthetic potentiality of the shund tradition's refusal to accept boundaries between high and low culture, between American English and the immigrant vernacular, between English Renaissance dramas and Yiddish shund. He follows Gordin's Jewish Queen Lear when he feminizes and Judaizes Rosencrantz in order to parody the sanctified chasm between the Shakespearean and shund traditions.[13]

Kalmanowitz's play underlines the failure of the Yiddish theater to become socially esteemed in the US present due to language and class politics, since in the final act the audience learns that these events have been a mere dream. In reality, Abie fell asleep on his typewriter, yet another indication of his creative paralysis. He had not become successful nor did he engage in a love affair with Madam Rosencrantz, who is revealed to be a dream figure. Yet Kalmanowitz's alleged pessimism is expressed through a complex allusive poetics, which once again shamelessly rewrites the sanctified Anglo work. The metafictional function of the dream scene gestures to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which is also a metadramatical play about a failed theatrical endeavor. In both plays, characters insist on true love even as the plot undermines this idea.

As in Kalmanowitz's play, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* produces a temporal thickening of narrative-within-narrative. It accomplishes this narrative embedment in two major ways: first, through its citational relationship with Ovid's story of *Pyramus and Thisbe* (replicated in Kalmanowitz's relationship with *Hamlet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*), which treats historical problems as cyclical; second, through the metadramatic effect of its interior simultaneity, that is the anachronistic

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parallelism between its various subplots, realities, and times. Such nondiachronic temporality is crucial for Kalmanowitz. The dream in *Shakespeare the Second* parallels Abie's real life. Abie's falling asleep on his typewriter marks him as an ineffectual *luftmentsh* who lives in mere dreams. Additionally, the fact that the play survived solely in manuscript form provides us a glimpse of Kalmanowitz's thematic deliberations. Various pages of the full manuscript include deletions that indicate a hesitation as to whether Abie should have two children or not. Kalmanowitz initially gives Abie two children, like the protagonist in Abie's play, which strengthens the sensationalism of his extramarital affair, as well as the cyclicality of the various times and texts in the play. But this detail is consistently crossed out and is left *sous rature*. It is either Kalmanowitz or the unknown producer who ultimately insists on making Abie childless. Because of its material status as a manuscript, both incompatible details exist simultaneously. By giving Abie two children, the play achieves a cyclical, nondiachronic temporality, thus envisioning an open-ended, nonhierarchical citational way to inherit an authoritative literary tradition. By preventing Abie from having children, however, *Shakespeare the Second* stresses Abie's existential barrenness, as an author who cannot produce in terms of literary and biographical lineage alike.

Kalmanowitz expresses the apprehension that language politics in the United States would prevent Yiddish from producing a sustainable tradition: Abie aspires to write a Shakespearean language but succeeds only in his dream. Nonetheless, Kalmanowitz also insists on the aesthetic potentiality of the shund's Bakhtinian effacement of boundaries between low and high languages and art forms. Similar to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Kalmanowitz designs a play within a play, a play within a life within a dream. The dialogue with Shakespeare allows him to conceptualize a nonlinear mode of literary inheritance, not through lineage but through aesthetic thickening (intertextual, temporal) and active choice. The subversion of cultural hierarchies that the shund theater makes possible would soon find expression in works of serious literature as well. Jewish authors of the time revitalized the Yiddish theater's carnivalesque politics of in-betweenness. They made this theater, which had already started to decline, into a crucial agent of the conceptualization of open-ended American texts and selves. Whereas Kalmanowitz thematizes the *im*possibility of entering Anglo culture, Anzia Yezierska draws on the hybrid qualities of this theater in her English writing to design productive modes for inclusion.

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Anzia Yezierska's Jewish King Lear

During Anzia Yezierska's (c1880–1970) lifetime, her work was generally considered to be a truthful, albeit stylistically deficient, depiction of immigrant life. Newspaper titles in the 1920s dubbed her a "Sweatshop Cinderella" and lauded her miraculous ability to move "From Hester Street to Hollywood" (Yezierska 1987: 40; see also Konzett 1997: 595). Yezierska took pains to manipulate and reclaim these myths. In an interview for *The American Hebrew*, she takes pride in knowing "nothing about technique," contending: "I care nothing for the ready-made mental garments of the writer who has been fitted by colleges and short story classes" (Yezierska 1922: 342). She claims that ready-made techniques impose a fixed notion of self-expression, which prevents immigrants from being accepted into US culture on their own diverse terms. In order to free the self from reifying social conventions, she envisions the literary text as something that continues to evolve long after it has been published and canonized. Yezierska generates this temporal hybridity by applying the Yiddish theater's translational signature to the Anglo literary tradition. Her creative engagement with Shakespeare's *King Lear* in her best-known novel *Bread Givers* (1925) is an astute example of her design of text and self that are always in the process of becoming; of her idea of a literary work that continues to evolve long after it has been published, performed, and finished.

Bread Givers follows Sara Smolinsky, the rebellious young daughter of an immigrant Jewish family in the Lower East Side. At a young age, Sara watches her ultra-Orthodox father dominate the lives of his wife and daughters. Her rebellion against his values shapes her very sense of self. Sara eventually makes it into the lower-middle class and becomes an English teacher. However, she ultimately feels guilt for betraying her "roots" and decides to let her tyrannical father live in her house, even though this means she will have to live according to his views of women's domestic responsibilities. Although the novel ends on an unexpectedly somber note, as Sara ostensibly submits to both the patriarchy and the essentialism against which she has rebelled throughout the plot, Yezierska's refusal of a narrative that neatly resolves its basic tension thematizes an unfinalized notion of the American self. This stubbornly unfinished feature is established not only via an ending that refuses to close, but also through a distinct mode of citational kinship.

Among the various intricate allusions in *Bread Givers*, the most striking one is to Shakespeare. When, at the end of the novel, Sara

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runs into her old, forgotten father, Reb Smolinsky, he surprisingly depicts himself in comparison to Shakespeare's *King Lear*:

> "Well—well," he jerked out, his teeth clacking together with the cold. "Let the world see the shame—the shame that my daughters heaped on me. What's an old father to heartless American children? Have they any religion? Any fear of God? . . . With all I have done for my daughters—the morals I soaked into them, the religion I preached into them from the day they were born—yet they leave me in my old age, as they left King Lear—broken—forgotten." (Yezierska 2003: 284)

Smolinsky's allusion is striking because it is made by a character so culturally reclusive—his ultra-Orthodox religious lifestyle strictly forbids consuming secular culture—that he is recurringly described "like an ancient prophet that had just stepped out of the Bible" (125).[14]

Werner Sollors (2015) points out the strangeness of this intertext, but he dismisses too quickly Yezierska's citational and translational politics. He identifies her critical engagement with *King Lear*, as well as with Sholem Aleichem's popular Yiddish dramatic novel *Tevye the Dairyman*, but he does not consider the full thematic implications of these creative allusions. According to Sollors,

> One does not have to match the four Smolinsky daughters to Tzeitl, Hodl, Chava, and Beilke, to read *Bread Givers* as a rewriting of Sholem Aleichem's *Tevye the Dairyman*. . . . When Reb Smolinsky is finally reduced to peddling wares on a pushcart he laments that his daughters leave him in his old age, "as they left King Lear—broken—forgotten." The reference to Lear may seem far-fetched, but Sara does resemble Cordelia, the daughter who cares most for her father. (93)

Although he admits that the principal tension in *King Lear* is both apparent in and essentially different from *Bread Givers*, Sollors (2002: 409) considers this reference a mark of Yezierska's "premodernist prose," by which she "expressed the themes of modernity yet refrained from employing modernist forms." Thus, Sollors (2015: 93) interprets the novel's conclusion as Sara's submission to her patriarchal father, contending that "her father will not have to end with Lear's howl." But this intertext seems to function more like what Chana Kronfeld (1996: 130) has called a modernist "radical allusion," one which generates a "mutual reinterpretation of the two texts activated in the allusive process."[15] What happens, then, if we take Yezierska's translational

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intertextuality more seriously? What happens if we extend our understanding of a multilingual work (and in fact, tradition) to moments in which a language attaches itself to another not only in semantic but also in semiotic ways, by bringing to life, or afterlife, a cultural hallmark—"translated and improved," translated *as* improved—and, in doing so, we recognize the contribution of the Yiddish theater to Yezierska's pragmatist philosophy of the unfinalized American self? These are the questions that I would now like to consider.

Yezierska was well familiar with the Yiddish theater and its repertoire. In a letter to her close friend Rose Pastor Stokes from April 1, 1914, she writes that Stokes's play "The Saving of Martin Greer" would "have a great run in Vaudeville. Have you thought of translating it in Yiddish?" (Yezierska Collection, box 4). While working with the Samuel Goldwyn studio on *Hungry Hearts* (1922), the film adaptation of her first short story collection, she suggested and auditioned various actors in the Yiddish theater, including Rosa Rosanova, Sara Adler, and Bessie Thomashefsky (see the Samuel Goldwyn studio telegrams from 1921–22, Yezierska Collection, box 5). In her 1950 auto-fictional memoir *Red Ribbon on a White Horse* (1950), she recounts her romance with John Dewey: "Sometimes we went to the Yiddish theater" (Yezierska 1987: 109). Yezierska's dialogue with both *King Lear* and *Tevye the Dairyman* allows her to participate in an open-ended reimagining of authoritative texts. The figurative compound between Smolinsky and Lear brings to mind the citational hybridity mentioned earlier in Gordin's *The Jewish King Lear* and *Mirele Efros, or the Jewish Queen Lear*. By producing a nonhierarchical hospitality between Yiddish and English cultures, Yezierska continues the translational politics of chutzpah undertaken by the American Yiddish theater from its very inception.

By having Sara's father compare himself to Lear, Yezierska manages the internal anachronism of the Lear plot, the depiction of an old patriarch who insists on demonstrating power he no longer holds. The fact that Sara meets her father wandering in the streets, "his teeth clacking together" (Yezierska 2003: 284), evokes the storm episode in *King Lear*. Smolinsky, like Lear, wanders out into a place over which he no longer has dominion. Like Lear, he has been excluded from the lives of his daughters and has been deprived of all property and position. Furthermore, Yezierska consciously produces a comical affinity between a king and a poor immigrant peddler in order to reclaim both anachronistic male figures as vitalizing agents in the present. She does not aim merely to critique patriarchy in the immigrant world

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but to criticize a broader temporality of assimilationist America and the way it marginalizes immigrant women.

Much in line with the Yiddish theater's translational politics, Yezierska improves upon the Lear plot by making us see Shakespeare's play as the tragedy of Cordelia, while also insisting on the cruel chasm between the daughter of a king and a poor immigrant young woman. In the worlds of both *King Lear* and *Bread Givers*, female characters such as Cordelia and Sara are trapped in a transition from old to new systems of patriarchal control, an exchange from one male-centrist system of social organization to another. In *Suffocating Mothers* (1992), Janet Adelman discusses the psychoanalytic tensions of male-centrist monarchic power in *King Lear* in terms of a wide variety of collapses of boundaries. She shows that Lear is

> simultaneously the father who abdicates and the son who must suffer the consequences of this abdication. . . . The collapse of father and son into one figure is only the first of many such collapses. . . . All the traditional guarantees of identity itself dissolve in a terrifying female moisture in which mother and daughter, male and female, inner and outer, self and other, lose their boundaries. (Adelman 1992: 103)

Bread Givers is characterized by a similar collapse that threatens to destroy the symbolic order altogether. Reb Smolinsky's recurring command "Woman! Stay in your place!" (Yezierska 2003: 13) elucidates, to use Adelman's vocabulary, the uncanny of a world created by fathers alone. Sara's escape from the rule of her Father is thus a prerequisite for her individuation. Yet she also quickly learns that the New World offers women only the freedom to "pick out for themselves the men they want for husbands" (76). By paralleling the patriarchy of the Old and New worlds, *Bread Givers* stresses the limited social possibilities immigrant women have, as they are ensnared in the intersection of multiple male-dominated worlds. This predicament results in the splitting of Sara's character into two—a submissive versus an annihilating female subject—which peaks as the boundary between the Old and New worlds ultimately collapses.

Yezierska invites us to focus on Sara's failure to meet her father's needs, her inability to give him her "all." By the same token, Cordelia ultimately "splits in two, as the benign and nurturant mother with whom Lear would merge generates her opposite, the annihilating mothers who seek his death" (Adelman 1992: 117). Sara's guilt for being an annihilating daughter necessitates a sacrifice of self. When

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she accepts her father into her house, Sara laments: "I almost hated him again as I felt his tyranny—the tyranny with which he tried to crush me as a child" (Yezierska 2003: 295–96). The collapse of the boundary between two worlds that ought to have been kept separate produces a subject that is spliced between the demands of both. Similarly, Adelman (1992: 124) contends that in *King Lear*, "The sacrifice of Cordelia's otherness is not an incidental requirement of the plot; it is the meaning of her return. She can only come over the bourn by losing herself." Refusing to treat Shakespeare's play as a sanctified, finished product, Yezierska retells—and prefigures feminist scholarly tellings of—*King Lear* as the tragedy of Cordelia, in order to articulate the psychic tensions and limitations of immigrant women in their pursuit of vocation, love, and acceptance. By bringing into afterlife the Yiddish theater's translational politics of chutzpah, by producing a Jewish King Lear and a Jewish Cordelia, Yezierska designs a translational notion of literary tradition. She makes the authoritative Anglo text into an open-ended yet historically oriented device, one whose meaning enduringly changes with the emergence of socially marginalized retellers.

Yezierska wrote from a ruptured position, and she turned to Yiddish, a landless language, and made its cultural homelessness into a pragmatist philosophical means to conceptualize Americanness. Grace Paley, who wrote in the following generation, responded to a different challenge, at a time when the decay of secular Yiddish life in the United States, as well as processes of cultural and class mobility, had almost been completed. Paley searched for an afterlife to that which was already gone. Yet her translational politics brought to its highest complexity the agency of the (by then decayed) Yiddish theater to undo notions of diachronic absolutism in the present.

Grace Paley's Female Jewish Falstaff

By the time Paley published her debut story "Goodbye and Good Luck" (1956), the Yiddish theater, an emblem of a larger, rich immigrant Jewish cultural life, had fully decayed. A new generation of Jewish American authors, such as Saul Bellow and Bernard Malamud, entered the mainstream. They did so not as children of immigrants but as American authors in their own right. Paley's choice to tell her inaugural story through the voice of an old, forgotten generation, that of the Yiddish theater, was thus not accidental. Like Yezierska, Paley turned to the transgressive qualities of the Yiddish theater to intersect

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a critique of gender and genre. Yet whereas Yezierska centered on revealing the parallelism between patriarchy in the Old and New worlds, Paley's feminism traced the vitalizing potentiality of the past to unsettle gender constraints in the present.

From its beginning, "Goodbye and Good Luck" asserts itself as a feminist metafictional story, by linking the threat to women's authority to tell stories with the threat to their control over their own bodies. Rose, the fifty-year-old, childless protagonist, who refuses to get married until she has become "fat and fifty" (Paley 1959: 19), grapples with her sister's disapproval of both her storytelling and her life choices. Rose is about to get married to Volodya Vlashkin, a retired old Yiddish actor with whom she had a thirty-year, on-and-off affair while he was married. She asks her niece Lillie to tell Lillie's mother about the belated marriage, because "your mama. . . . don't listen to a word from me. She only screams, 'I'll faint, I'll faint'" (21). The hyperbolic representation of her sister's aghast response stresses how the social order constructs Rose's nonreproductive choices as sexual abominations. In fact, Rose's very act of telling is viewed by her sister as a disgrace.

Shaina Hammerman and Naomi Seidman (2012: 176) compellingly show that the story's "particular set of family relations—that which connects a childless aunt with her niece"—serves as a rejection of a Harold Bloomian concept of literary inheritance anchored in a father-son Oedipal struggle. The most complex problematization of the Bloomian model, I would argue, is achieved through Paley's playful rewriting of Shakespeare, a strategy which she develops through her intimate dialogue with the Yiddish theater. Furthermore, Paley materializes the Yiddish theater's nonconflictual accumulation of Anglo literary works, locating one's agency within the process of *embodied* accumulation. The idea of one's capacity to establish an alternative connection with time through a temporal accumulation in the flesh permits Paley to undermine the lachrymose discourse of inextricable loss that surrounded the historiographical discussions of the Yiddish theater in light of assimilation processes. It allows her to re-embrace the Yiddish theater's fierce refusal of a fixed, linear cultural continuity of history, tradition, and descent.

Rose's choice to marry Vlashkin only when she is too old for reproduction thematizes Paley's critique of a bourgeois femininity based on efficiency and linear telos. In the beginning of their thirty-year, intermittent affair, Vlashkin, himself a married man, warns Rose: "Rosie, I worry about you. . . . You are losing your time. Do you understand it?

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A woman should not lose her time" (Paley 1959: 17). But Rose refuses to abide by a gender economy based on efficiency of time and matter. Paley shrewdly mobilizes the Yiddish phrase *hobn di tsayt* (to have the time), which means to menstruate, into her English.[16] She has Rose turn instead to her own bodily superfluousness—Rose proudly dubs herself "stationary in the flesh" (9)—as a means to radically reimagine the symbolic order, insofar as one's accumulated flesh becomes for her a site in which various layers of time simultaneously coalesce.

Paley's idea of accumulated time in the flesh, contrary to the ephemerality of one's body under the linear time of lineage, opens up new ways to envision literary inheritance. She makes the inheriting author into an active agent free to transcend linguistic descent and free to accumulate in her text any literary tradition she desires. This can be seen in Paley's act of Judaizing and cross-gendering Shakespeare's Falstaff, a character that enters the story as an anecdotal aside. When Rose criticizes Vlashkin's narcissism in his Yiddish memoir *The Jewish Actor Abroad*, Vlashkin defends his book: "there is a line in Shakespeare in one of the plays from the great history of England. It says, 'Self-loving is not so vile a sin, my liege, as self-neglecting'" (17). Although Vlashkin feigns to efface his referent, his loquaciousness provides enough information to trace it. Once Paley has Vlashkin summon Act II, Scene IV of *Henry V* into her story, a scene subsequent to the famous eulogy for Falstaff, she works to broaden the kinship between the two texts, by making Rose into a female Falstaff. In the play from which Vlashkin quotes, the viewers learn about Falstaff's death. Falstaff is not seen on the stage in *Henry V*, but he is nonetheless present in characters' dialogues. Paley's gesture to this mode of character representation summons into her story the question of how something may continue to exist even after it is gone. The citational and translational dynamic that the Yiddish theater makes possible is Paley's answer.

By making Rose into a Jewish female Falstaff, Paley adopts the role of the niece who converses with a neglected relative: the playful tradition of "translated and improved."[17] "Goodbye and Good Luck" is haunted by many instances of loss of use at old age, and it revitalizes them by envisioning a different way to relate to the past in the present. The idea of temporal thickening in the flesh allows for the inclusion of a vitalizing residue of a decayed past *in* the present.

Like Falstaff, the great comical character who is mentioned in four of Shakespeare's plays, Rose is characterized by her society in terms of her age and body. Falstaff is depicted by prince Hal, the future

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Henry V, as "an old fat man" and a barrel of flesh (*Henry IV, Part 1*, 2.4.407). Yet Falstaff takes pride in his age and body, determining: "If to be old and merry be a sin, then many an old host that I know is damned. If to be fat be to be hated, then Pharaoh's lean kine are to be loved" (2.4.429–32). Similarly, Rose prides herself on being "a lady what they call fat and fifty" (Paley 1959: 19). Like Rose, Falstaff lives both within and outside the institutional order of marriage, reproduction, and class. Although he is a knight, Falstaff ridicules the social order, and the way it constructs time as forward-looking, through his comical use of language and embodiment. After the Shrewsbury battle, in which prince Hal kills Hotspur, Falstaff carries Hotspur's corpse, using it as a prop to gain honor on the battlefield. Whereas prince Hal needs to steal Hotspur's values in order to become king Henry V, proving himself worthy of the royal family lineage, Falstaff gains glory by stealing Hotspur's body. Paley in turn steals and reclaims Falstaff's body to parody the convention of a happy-ending-achieved-through-marriage. She uses Falstaff's body as a prop in order to unsettle the patriarchal family lines through which literary inheritance and female subjectivity have both often been structured.

By stubbornly accumulating a decayed cultural tradition, by improving Falstaff as a Jewish working-class woman, Paley invites us to see the social grammars that make individuals legible within a hegemonic cultural and gender economy. In producing a comedy of mistimed, deeroticized heteronormative marriage, through a belated romance plot between a Jewish female working-class Falstaff character and an impotent, retired old Yiddish actor, Paley adheres to a past theatrical tradition created by and for the working classes, a tradition that nonetheless took the liberty of audaciously improving the most privileged canonical texts of the Western literary tradition.

W. H. Auden (1962: 183), whose close literary relationship with Paley deserves future research, famously argues that Falstaff does "not belong to the temporal world of change." Living outside sociohistorical time, "Falstaff could stab a corpse because, there, all battles are mock battles, all corpses straw dummies; but we, the audience, are too conscious that this battle has been a real battle" (185). What Auden begins to say but stops short of—and this is where, I think, he differs from Paley—is that Falstaff's position outside historical time reveals the cyclical operation of power *within* history, the social grammars that construct the real. For Auden, since Falstaff "lives in an eternal present and the historical world does not exist for him," his anachronism entails narrative and historical messiness: "If the actor were to

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appear in one scene in Elizabethan custom and in the next in top hat and morning coat, no one would be bewildered" (186). Paley, who seeks to revitalize Falstaff via the Yiddish theater's historically oriented translational politics of chutzpah, consciously draws on this mode of anachronism, to suggest a different way to relate to the past in the present.

Paley (1997: 74) once said that she writes "with an accent. I did have three languages spoken around me when I was a kid: English and Russian and Yiddish. Those were my languages. That's what's in my ear." If, as Hana Wirth-Nesher (2006: 56) tells us, "accent is the body remembering," a material remainder that subverts assimilationist pressures of effacement, Paley's accent, I suggest, locates this excess not only in the semantics of language but also in the semiotics of culture. Paley (1997: 106), who claimed that when she started working with Auden on her early poems she was writing "with an English accent," *accents* her debut story with the excess added to Shakespeare by the improving Yiddish reworkings of his plays. It is here that Paley's politics of language, gender, and time intersect. Zohar Weiman-Kelman (2018: xxvi) identify how modern Jewish women writers turn to Yiddish as an act of *looking back* in order to "resist a deterministic retrospective reading by which Yiddish was fated to vanish into English or Hebrew." Paley's story invites us to align it with what Weiman-Kelman term a (queer) historiography of "backward continuity" (xii), by envisioning new kinds of genealogies and kinships.[18]

"Goodbye and Good Luck" takes place over several decades during which the Yiddish theater is gradually shut down. Whereas in the beginning of the century, it had been "full of coming and going" and Vlashkin performed every single night in front of "hundreds of pale faces" (Paley 1959: 12–13), by the mid-1950s, members of the theater either die, retire, or move to Broadway: "The theater ended. Esther Leopold died from being very aged. Krimberg had a heart attack. Marya went to Broadway. Also Raisele changed her name to Roslyn and was a big comical hit in the movies" (18–19). This depiction captures real historical processes of the time, with actors like Bertha Kalish and Jacob P. Adler moving to perform on Broadway. Yet Paley refuses to see these changes in terms of utter loss. Resisting what Walter Benjamin (1968: 256) famously calls "the triumphal procession" of the historical victor, Paley utilizes Vlashkin's words to envision a nondiachronic historical time. The line Vlashkin quotes from *Henry V*, he tells Rose, "also appears in modern times in the moralistic followers of Freud" (Paley 1959: 17). By linking his Yiddish memoir

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with two other sociohistorical literary instances (Shakespeare and Sigmund Freud) and by endorsing an accumulated sense of historicity that allows for a stubborn looking back, Vlashkin opens up a way for a neglected past to be included in the present as a vitalizing agent. Similarly, Rose exchanges the time of diachronic change with the temporality of bodily change. Although "change is a fact of God," she tells Lillie, "a person like your mama stands on one foot, she don't notice how big her behind is getting" (9). Once again Rose's distinct idiomatic language (in other words, Paley's accent) stresses that the body is her means to reimagine the symbolic order and her place in it, insofar as accumulation in the flesh allows a neglected past to make a change *in* the present. The Yiddish theater might have died, but it can find an afterlife within a particular intertextual and translational politics of time and tradition.

I began my discussion with *Shakespeare the Second*, contending that by naming his jester character Tashntikhl (handkerchief), Kalmanowitz parodies the gap between the Yiddish theater's self-image as a member of high-art culture and the shund context that gained it its popularity. A similar use of fabric appears in Paley's story. When Vlashkin first meets Rose, he invites her to his regular restaurant, where, in the back room, there is "a table of honor for him. On the tablecloth embroidered by the lady of the house was 'Here Vlashkin Eats'" (11). As Hammerman and Seidman (2012: 191) note, the embroidery melds Yiddishized syntax with highly formal English reserved for "gravestones—'Here Lies X,'" thus bringing together "the grand eloquence of eulogy and the comically overblown self-image of the Yiddish theater." This volatile movement between grand aesthetic ambitions and historically facing melancholia is what makes the dialogue with Shakespeare by Kalmanowitz, Yezierska, and Paley so productive. By turning to Shakespeare in a translational manner that strives to both efface cultural hierarchies and celebrate the carnivalesqueness of such effort, by introducing the Yiddish theater's politics of chutzpah into US literary historicity, all three authors succeed in transcending linguistic and familial heteronormative constraints. They envision an afterlife to the Yiddish theater's distinct translational signature as an active agent in their presents.

Danny Luzon is a lecturer (assistant professor) of English at the University of Haifa, where he researches and teaches American literature in conversation with translation studies, novel theory, comparative literature, gender and sexuality studies, and Jewish studies. He is currently working on a book project dedicated to modernism, translation, and the fate of Jewish languages in the United States.

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Notes

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1 This problem confronts many immigrant cultures in the United States and is also a crucial issue for postcolonial theory. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1985: 253) famously argues that "no perspective *critical* of imperialism can turn the Other into a self, because the project of imperialism has always already refracted what might have been the absolutely Other into a domesticated Other that consolidates the imperialist self." Conversely, Tejaswini Niranjana (1992: 6) argues that reinscribing translation as a strategy of resistance is "a task of great urgency for a post-colonial theory attempting to make sense of 'subjects' already living 'in translation,' imaged and re-imaged by colonial ways of seeing."

2 "Di alte Shekspir tragedye tsu banayen mit 'altereyshons'; tsu makhen in ir 'impruvments'"; "Es blaybt kimat nit mer un nit veyniker vi a shund suzhet." All translations from Yiddish are mine unless otherwise stated.

3 These choices were, of course, neither binary nor easy. For a comprehensive discussion of sociohistorical challenges of intelligibility in early twentieth-century Jewish American writing, see Zaritt 2020.

4 As Sandrow (2015: 235) notes, by the 1930s, "it was clear that ticket buyers were slipping away. . . . Younger audiences spoke only English; they preferred American shows and movies."

5 Melville (1850: 145) determines that "the difference between the two men is by no means immeasurable. Not a very great deal more, and Nathaniel were verily William."

6 A forty-five-page manuscript of the first two acts is housed at The Library of Congress's Marwick Collection of Copyrighted Yiddish Plays (D 55188). I was able to trace the full manuscript, which is housed at the Yiddish Theater Collection at The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives.

7 As Zachary M. Baker (2004: viii) notes, although "mass-produced comedies, melodramas, and operettas" were widely "denigrated by critics as *shund*, or trash, these form the overwhelming majority of Yiddish plays that were actually performed."

8 "Vos kerstu vos me lakht fun dir. . . . Dayn shprakh vos du leygst avek bay dayne pleyz iz take Shekspir shprakh."

9 "Mistame hostu nisht gut geleynt. . . . Mayn shvoger hot geleynt mayn drame un er hot gezogt az es iz Foys Klas . . . zestu dos. . . . Mayn shvoger iz nisht keyn griner."

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10 "Di shprakh. Di shprakh"; "Mayn shvoger hot gelekt di finger fun der shprakh. S'iz zogt er briliant."
11 "Di shprakh, di shprakh. Zogt nor Tashntikhl, ir lent epes literatur? . . . (geht un nemt zayn eygene drame). Ot vet ir bald hern a shprakh. (zukht). Ot dos iz mayn drame Yashtsherke, velkhe me' vet gor in gikhen shpilen. Ikh vel aykh forlezen vos heyst a gelibte redt tsu ir gelibten."
12 "Mir velen beyde fun eyn gloz trinken. . . . Ikh vil ir zolt mit ayere lipn bariren dos zelbe gloz vos mayne lipn hobn barirt. . . . Du host fargeshafn aza groyse role un ikh vil mit libe dir dem batsolen"; "Ikh hob a froy mit kinder!"
13 Part of the irony is, of course, that Shakespeare comes to stand for polite culture even though his dramas are famous for combining high and low speech, as well as highbrow and lowbrow genres.
14 See also Yezierska 2003: 16, 203. Tony Kushner (2013: 25) offers a similar hybridizing intertext in the beginning of part one of *Angels in America*, where Rabbi Chemelwitz tells Louis an aphorism in Yiddish, "Sharfer vi di tson fun a shlang iz an umdankbar kind!," taken from "Shakespeare. *Kenig Lear*." The quote, as we learn from the rabbi's own translation, is both about the *tongue* of postimmigrant children and about their *abandonment* of inherited tradition: "Sharper than the serpent's tooth is the ingratitude of children."
15 Expanding on Judith Butler's view of one's agency to resist interpellation through speech, Kronfeld (2016: 162) argues that "repetition-through-change of an authoritarian or authoritative text" permits the speaker a "counter-appropriation" of the language of authority, as well as an effacement of hierarchies between literary traditions.
16 I am thankful to Chana Kronfeld for pointing this out to me.
17 By the same token, Hammerman and Seidman (2012: 189) contend that the story's distinct idiom should be read "as a stylized mobilization, by a literary 'niece' with her own literary agenda." By adopting the intergenerational role of a niece, Paley breaks away from mere documentation of the Jewish immigrant vernacular. Instead, she makes the dialect of this past generation into the grounds for her feminist language politics *in* the present.
18 Weiman-Kelman (2018: xxv) argue that modern Yiddish offers a radical challenge to heteronormative time because it is generally no longer transmitted as mother tongue outside the ultra-Orthodox world: "In order to have a future, it must be actively (and queerly) chosen rather than (heteronormatively) produced and inherited."

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