Smuggled Words: Textual Migration and Subversive Assimilation in the Translations of Isaac Bashevis Singer

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> The Yiddish mentality is not haughty. It does not take victory for granted. It does not demand and command but it muddles through, sneaks by, smuggles itself amidst the powers of destruction, knowing somewhere that God's plan for Creation is still at the very beginning.
> — Isaac Bashevis Singer, Stockholm, 1978

1. Introduction

A well-known rumor, never confirmed nor dispelled, surrounds the translation of Shakespeare into Yiddish. There is said to have existed a Yiddish translation of *King Lear* that proclaimed on its title page "far-taytsht un farbesert" ("translated and improved"). Regardless of the rumor's dubious grounding in fact, it stands as both a testament to the stubborn pride with which Yiddish readers and writers viewed their literature (insofar as it could easily not only accommodate but *improve* upon the great Western classics) and a jibe at the stereotypical insular, unworldly Jew who might believe such a claim (indeed, the assertion that one could "improve" Shakespeare would have been dismissed as a quixotic delusion in most literary traditions).

Nevertheless, starting in the late nineteenth century the Yiddish publishing industry began appropriating large quantities of foreign literature. Major publishing houses were established in Warsaw, Vilna, and New York, and by 1917 there were eleven Yiddish-language dailies in the United States alone, which introduced their readers to serialized works of Zola and Maupassant alongside those of Sholem Aleichem, Sholem Asch, and Avrom Reisen (Michels 2000, 51). But given the

amount of literature being produced in Yiddish within the United States and the propensity of the Yiddish press for translating classic works *into* Yiddish, it is striking that, as of 2004, less than 1 percent of Yiddish literature had been translated into other languages (Lansky 2004, 298).

Of these translated writers, no one has gained more international attention than Isaac Bashevis Singer, the Polish immigrant to Manhattan's Upper West Side whose short stories and novels, once translated into English, earned him enormous popularity and, in 1978, a Nobel Prize in Literature. Alongside fellow Nobelist and bilingual writer Samuel Beckett, Singer enjoys a somewhat unprecedented double role in world literature: his works occupy a place in both the Yiddish and American canons;[1] his writing has arguably been more influential to English-language Jewish-American writers than to Yiddish writers. In fact, he was generally viewed by the latter as inferior to his older brother, Israel Joseph Singer, whose 1936 epic novel *Di brider ashkenazi* (*The Brothers Ashkenazi*) established him as a promising master of Yiddish prose, even drawing comparisons to Tolstoy (Newberger Goldstein 2010, vii–xi). But the elder Singer died in 1944, and within a year his brother published the work that would make of him an international celebrity: the short story "Gimpl tam."

This article will explore Isaac Bashevis Singer's/Yitskhok Bashevis's subversive use of translation as a means of navigating, on the one hand, his hybrid identity (the Polish-Jewish intellectual and son of a Hasidic rabbi who became a Nobel Prize–winning American writer) and, on the other, the complexities of translating out of a hybrid language. Using Singer as a case study, I will highlight the need for a broader reevaluation of the relationship between Yiddish and translation: one that moves toward a perception of translation rooted in decentering, empowerment, and enlargement (what Antoine Berman has called "eccentric" translation) rather than grim fatalism (1992, 180). The mechanisms behind Yiddish hybridity—in particular its so-called "*lehavdl loshn*," or "differentiating language"—mirror the process of translation and therefore should be regarded not as a hindrance but as a useful means

1. For proof that the American canon has claimed Singer, see the anthology *Collected Stories: Gimpel the Fool to the Letter Writer* (Singer 2004). Its publisher, The Library of America, boasts on its website (www.loa.org) of "publishing, and keeping in print, authoritative editions of America's best and most significant writing." The *New York Times Book Review* has dubbed it "the 'quasi-official national canon' of American literature."

of conceptualizing the translation of Yiddish as a generative, dialogical process as opposed to a destructive, dialectical process.

In order to (1) evaluate the ethics of Singer's translation methodology (and, indeed, Saul Bellow's, whose translation of "Gimpl tam" propelled Singer into mainstream American recognition) and (2) delineate a more ethical, decentering approach to translating out of Yiddish in general, I suggest that we look beyond critiques of Singer's supposed assimilationism and recognize Singer as the hybrid writer he was—one whose texts were inevitably inflected as much by his experience of immigration and exile in America as by his formative years in Poland.

2. Situating Singer

The literary prestige associated with the Singer family name, combined with the attention of key Jewish-American intellectuals, propelled Singer further toward transcanonical success than those fellow immigrant Yiddish writers (modernist poets Mani Leib and Yankev Glatshteyn, for example) whose works, although highly influential within Yiddish literary circles, were perhaps perceived as too esoteric or avant-garde for translation and mainstream publication in English. Conversely, one must wonder if popular Yiddish writers such as Moyshe Nadir,[2] whose writings, unlike Singer's early works, liberated Yiddish from an Eastern European context to articulate instead the immigrant experience in America, posed a threat to a nebulous—indeed, mythical—"all-American" target readership precisely because the very alterity of such narratives brought about an unsettling defamiliarization of domestic territory. (Singer himself, as I will later discuss, worried along similar lines that writing about America in Yiddish constituted an impossible deterritorialization of the language. Perhaps this viewpoint explains the writerly aphasia Singer experienced during his first five years in the United States [Epstein 1991].)

Regardless of the reasons for his peers' inability to attain his level of success in translation, American-Yiddish writers viewed Singer with skepticism,[3] an undeniable degree of jealousy (vividly captured

2. Moyshe Nadir (1885–1943) went largely untranslated until 2006, according to the Index Translationum (http://www.unesco.org/xtrans/bsform.aspx).

3. Glatshteyn criticizes the "Jewish façade" and "distasteful blend of superstition and shoddy mysticism" that define Singer's work, which, he claims, "reads better in English than in the original Yiddish" (1986, 145). Invoking an essentialistic "humaneness" common to Yiddish literary works, Glatshteyn denounces the lust

in Cynthia Ozick's short story "Envy; or, Yiddish in America" [1983]), and perhaps even, like Ozick's poet protagonist, the underlying fear that Singer would "save" himself through translation while consigning the rest of the Yiddish language and its literature to oblivion. For Singer, translation was indeed a quest for survival: his own as a writer as well as that of his work. Whether or not concerns over the uncertain future of the Yiddish language also played into Singer's decision to selectively self-translate, the fear that within a generation Yiddish might only survive through translation undeniably loomed over both his work and the criticism he received from fellow Yiddish writers.

Over a period spanning five decades, Singer's novels, short stories, reviews, articles, and literary criticism were published in the New York–based Yiddish-language newspaper *Forverts* under various names: Bashevis (the possessive of his mother's name and the name by which he was known to his Yiddish fiction readers), I. B. Singer (the name that appeared on his translations and English-language publications), Varshavski, and D. Segal (two pseudonyms he claimed to use only when writing for a deadline and that he abandoned once he had "cleaned ... up" the piece in question; Saltzman 2002, xi–xii; Singer in Miller 1985, 41). Singer's arsenal of pseudonyms allowed him to cultivate multiple identities according to the language in which he was writing and, perhaps more importantly, the quality of his work. This latter distinction is inextricably connected to his linguistic identity, since for Singer "cleaning up" was often carried out not by editing but by translating, a form of "collaborative" self-translation. Translation offered him an opportunity to improve his Yiddish texts, which were often written in haste for a *Forverts* deadline. So for Singer, *fartaytsht* and *farbesert* were one and the same.

Eventually this process of editing through translation led to the apparent displacement, indeed *replacement*, of the original by the translation. The difficulty of even proving the existence of Singer's original texts is startling. Even though the translated works of I. B. Singer have appeared in multiple hefty English and French anthologies, to this day only four small volumes (all long out of print) containing original works by Yitskhok Bashevis have been published in book form; the rest are stored on unindexed microfilm in the New York Public Library, making them almost impossible to retrieve (Saltzman 2002, xi). According to

and violence in Singer's writing, which "places his so-called heroes on the same level with the heroes in non-Jewish literature" (1986, 145).

Singer bibliographer Roberta Saltzman, between 1960 and 1991 Singer, the most famous name in contemporary Yiddish literature, produced "fifty-five short stories, eleven novellas, and eleven novels that have yet to be translated into English" and that exist only on microfilm and as manuscripts (2002, xi).

Yet at least one of Singer's works that appeared in English has left the existence of its Yiddish original shrouded in mystery. "Moon and Madness," a short story that appeared in the *New Yorker* in 1980 and was subsequently published in an anthology of Singer's stories without a translation credit, raises questions about the extent to which Singer's practice of self-translation into English eventually became one of *writing* in English.

Anita Norich has invoked the dialectical tension inherent to translating out of Yiddish: it promises at once survival and obliteration, since, in the case of what Jeffrey Shandler has referred to as a "postvernacular" language, the translational afterlife threatens to supplant both the text that it extends and the language itself (Norich 1995, forthcoming; Shandler 2006). In short, translation has been perceived as something of a pharmakon to the Yiddish language; it is a selective lifeline that determines, for better or worse, the shape of Yiddish postvernacularity, dictates how Ashkenazi Jewish culture will be remembered—two decidedly pessimistic implications that posit Yiddish as a moribund or at the very least decidedly rare language—even as it also, and most crucially, promises a potential renewal of the language. Norich, embracing the latter possibility, proposes that the relationship between Yiddish and translation need not be antagonistic; the obliteration/generation paradox, which she frames in terms of *collaboration* (translation as obliteration) and *resistance* (translation as survival, furthering), suggests that the very translation of Yiddish texts is in effect "an act of resistance to history" insofar as any kind of engagement with Yiddish after the Holocaust necessarily represents "a defiant gesture aimed at preserving the traces of a culture that has undergone startling and dreadful transformations in the past century" (forthcoming, 209).[4]

While Singer's critics slammed his translations—and increasingly his work in general—as overly assimilative (and thus obliterative), Singer's translations in fact subversively complicated the relationship between original and translation and in that respect resisted the very

4. I am grateful to Anita Norich for sharing with me a chapter from her forthcoming book, *Writing in Tongues: Yiddish Translation in the Twentieth Century*.

notion of translation as salvation. It is too simplistic to think of Singer's translation process as one of improvement: often the texts have been extensively reworked, resulting in an entirely distinct plot that in some way contradicts, indeed negates, the original, for example, by rendering irony earnest and *heymish* (Yiddish for cozy and familiar)—or at least cloaking irony in the folksy tropes of the Jewish shtetl tale so that an American audience, nostalgic for a mythical past, cannot recognize it. Many of the omissions and alterations in translations of Singer's work arise from the sheer complexity of the Yiddish language—elements that make translation particularly challenging, including its rootedness in pre–World War II Eastern European Jewish culture, its unique differentiative tendencies (most often distinguishing between what is Jewish and what is not), and its dizzying semantic range (a result of the Ashkenazi Jews' contact with several languages and cultures over the past thousand years). Therein lies the rub: fatalist Yiddish writers and critics (Singer himself, ironically, among them) brand Yiddish an inherently untranslatable language, failing to see that the elements of its complexity are precisely what make it ripe for translation (Singer 1989, 7).

3. The Stakes of Translation

> Yiddish, I call on you to choose! Yiddish! Choose death or death. Which is to say, death through forgetting or death through translation. Who will redeem you? What act of salvation will restore you? All you can hope for, you tattered, you withered, is translation in America!
>
> — the fictional untranslated Yiddish poet Hershel Edelshtein, in Cynthia Ozick's "Envy; or, Yiddish in America" (1983, 74)

The wariness with which contemporary Yiddish writers have regarded translation is the product of several factors. The Holocaust, to speak euphemistically, suddenly and drastically reduced the world's Yiddish-speaking population; indeed, since Yiddish was the first or second language of a majority of the six million Jews killed in the Holocaust, it was indelibly bound to memories of atrocities against Jews. The establishment of the State of Israel just a few years later definitively squelched what remained of Yiddish in Erets Yisroel: the institution of Hebrew as the official language of Israel only served to underscore the perception of Yiddish as a stateless, diasporic language, one considered at best the "vulgar" Jewish tongue and at worst a corruption of German (Norich 1995, 209). Persecution at the hands of hostile pre-State Hebraists was later channeled into government policies that for over four

decades essentially refused to recognize the presence of Yiddish within its borders (Shandler 2006, 9–10). In the Soviet Union, which, under Stalin, had initially supported measures to foster Yiddish publishing, Yiddish was subject to increasing hostility as the Second World War approached, culminating in the murder of fifteen Yiddish-speaking Soviet-Jewish intellectuals on August 12, 1952. Finally, the use of Yiddish was in decline in America well before the war, largely as a result of the desire among Eastern European Jewish immigrants to assimilate. Sons and daughters of immigrants were encouraged to speak only in English—even to parents who themselves barely spoke it—or else were made to view Yiddish as a shameful language only to be spoken in the privacy of the home.

In an environment where Yiddish was the object of both violent and passive suppression, translation became vital to the survival of its literature. Singer was keenly aware of this urgency, and it likely played into his decision to "self-translate"—more specifically, the fear that if *he* did not do it, there would soon be no one left to translate for him. Yet paradoxically, for Singer translation was not an attempt to meticulously reproduce his work for posterity in another language; it was, rather, the creation of a new but complementary work. It kept the secrets of the original encoded in the Yiddish but offered a narrative that (generally, but not always) owed its existence to the Yiddish. Here I quote Norich at length on the relationship between Singer's translations and originals:

> Neither a view of Singer's English stories as secondary and derivative versions of Bashevis's Yiddish, nor a view of them as edited improvements on novels that are often exceedingly repetitive and meandering seems apt. Rather, the Yiddish and English texts comment on one another, the latter reworking and sometimes completing the ideational and imaginative work of the former. The English clarifies the Yiddish but for a growing audience it also replaces the Yiddish as the definitive text. This is typical of the history of Yiddish literature in America, but Singer is remarkable among Yiddish writers in the extent to which he contributes to and validates this usurpation of Yiddish by English even as he suggests a different model. (1995, 214)

Singer's goal in translation was not transparency; indeed, even though his translations arguably made his work more accessible to the English-speaking American reader (and the often-censorious methods by which he facilitated this accessibility will be discussed later on), they simultaneously shielded the content of the original from view. Singer harbored a lifelong fascination with Kabbalah and in a way treated his original

Yiddish stories as kabbalistic, sacred texts. In altering them in translation, it might be argued that he was in fact "respecting the intimate secrets" of Yiddish culture they carried (Noiville 2006, 101). Indeed, if the Yiddish was, as Irving Saposnik suggests, the Torah, the English was "almost a Talmud to the primary text" (2001, 6).

Still, Singer's translations may have produced a very different effect. Norich's quote raises some questions. First of all, are non-Yiddish-speaking readers aware of Singer's subversive use of translation as a means of simultaneously opening up and closing off Yiddishkeit to external scrutiny? Was Singer successful in preserving Yiddish if his English-language readers believed they were reading "the definitive text"? Moreover, was Singer conscious of the "usurpation of Yiddish by English" that his translations allegedly brought about? While we cannot speculate about Singer's intentions (which he kept as tightly concealed as his original texts), one important effect of his translations must be considered: somewhere between writing and translating Singer upset the traditional binary roles of original and derivative, yielding instead a fluid relation based on interdependency. The usual linear temporal relation between original (first) and translation (second) is brought into question when Singer's original becomes, in a way, a product of its translation (and most apparently when the original *is* the translation). How can we hear, to quote Benjamin, "the echo of the original" in a text that precedes the original, alters it beyond recognition, or threatens to conceal its very existence (1969, 76)?

Here a consideration of Singer's fellow self-translator and linguistic exile Samuel Beckett might prove enlightening. In delineating the complex relationship between Beckett's original texts and their often vastly divergent self-translations, Brian T. Fitch suggests that, in the case of a self-translator/rewriter, each text merges with its translation to form a single *work*, informed by the cross-fertilization of the "two different fictive worlds" merged within it, thanks to additions, subtractions, and alterations in translation. The gaps produced by asymmetries between the complementary texts constitute what Fitch refers to as a "recalcitrant remainder": the residue formed by the totality of divergences, gains, and losses in translation (1987, 32). Far from being debris left in the wake of a violently distortive translation, however, this remainder should be viewed as a crucial translational *gain*: it enables the refiguration of both translation and original as contingent, incomplete texts until the moment they are placed in dialogical contact. If translation does indeed intend "language as a whole" (that is, look beyond the context of a single literary work in order to encompass the totality of a language), the inter-

text of original and translation (Yiddish and English, respectively) places Yiddish in a position of power vis-à-vis English: the act of translation is one of mutual influence and growth, but particularly as it enables Yiddish to enrich English—an idea that, in Benjamin's words, evokes the procreative potential of translation ("birth pangs") realized in the target language, thus figuring the source language as a virile source of interlinguistic regeneration (Benjamin 1969, 76 and 73).

Seidman draws an insightful comparison between Singer's deceptively opaque translations and the English translations of yet another Nobelist, Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore, which yields the conclusion that viewing Yiddish literature and translation through the lens of postcolonial theory might be instructive (2006, 253). Beyond the distinctions that Seidman draws between the two writers (the most crucial being that Tagore's Bengali readership was not, like Singer's Yiddish readership, in imminent danger of extinction), the comparison yields fascinating parallels. Tagore's translations were not entirely reflective of his body of work: he selectively adapted his most mystical poetry to fit into an Edwardian style. Whether he found such stylistic assimilation appealingly Western or whether, as Kishore has suggested, he viewed Edwardian stylistic mimicry as necessary to achieving success in the literature of the colonizer, Tagore constructed an image of himself as a visionary Eastern mystic who speaks in the familiar words of Keats.

Much like Tagore's, Singer's initial translations were of those texts we might consider his most "Orientalizing": narratives that exoticized and often eroticized shtetl life, even as characters were generally endearing. His English-language American readers were charmed by such friendly defamiliarization, and Singer happily *gave the illusion of* indulging their curiosities, when in fact the inherent mysticism of his texts was toned down significantly in translation: obscure talmudic references were suppressed as more universal Jewish clichés were played up.

Singer's brand of Orientalism was in large part a result of his belief upon arriving in the United States that "Yiddish literature is a product of the ghetto ... and it can never leave the ghetto" (Singer 1989, 10). In other words, since Yiddish as a language had such strong cultural and geographic ties to Eastern Europe (in spite of its status as the language of the Jewish diaspora), it did not have the capacity to express Western modernity.[5] On top of that, Singer implied that even his Yiddish-

5. This is a rather perplexing statement, and Singer would later moderate his opinion. Norich has rightly suggested that Yiddish has long been an international cosmopolitan language (1995, 209). Indeed, enclaves of Yiddish-speaking Ashkenazi

language readers approached his texts with the expectation that they would be transported "back" to the shtetl: "The reader of Yiddish, insofar as he still exists, turns to Yiddish books mainly for their Jewish content, not for their ill-conceived and pathetically rendered 'worldliness'" (Singer 1989, 11). With those words Singer peremptorily, if temporarily, relegated his writing to a historical Eastern European context.

Where Singer suppressed, Tagore expanded; his use of Edwardian verse reconfigured language as a vehicle for transmitting the heterogeneity of his own culture and thus enabled him to expand in English his already hybrid subject position to include the colonial dimension. Although Tagore's translations have, like Singer's, been harshly criticized for their assimilative tactics (Sengupta 1990), their syncretic fusion of elements of Hinduism, (Sufi) Islam, and British colonialism carries an important affirmation of hybridity (Kishore 2013). (Although, again, when it came to choosing which texts to translate, Tagore, like Singer, privileged his most mystical texts to the neglect of his "rational, humourous, patriotic [or] satirical" texts, which neither conformed to the visionary mysticism the British reader expected of an Eastern poet nor did much to endear him to the colonizer [Sen 2013].) For Singer, however, it was not so much a question of stylistic adaptation as it was ideological change: as I will discuss, the domestication carried out by Singer entails a simplification of Ashkenazic cultural hybridity (perpetual contact between Jews and Christians, Yiddish and Polish, sacred and profane—all of which inflect Singer's Yiddish texts). Accordingly, if Tagore used an altered and distinctly British register as a means of maintaining—even further complicating—cultural complexity, Singer omitted and simplified alterities in translation.

Whereas Tagore's poetry soon fell prey to stylistic archaism, Singer was keenly aware of his aging readership and adapted accordingly. As much as Singer was moved to translate by the plight of his language and the possibility of "improvement" that translation afforded him, he was also an astute businessman, and his overarching motivation, some have contended, was opportunism (Saposnik 2001, 4). Saposnik cynically attributes Singer's sudden success among intellectuals to his calculating entrepreneurial mind: "Much like his most famous character Gimpel, he was shrewder than he pretended to be, far more the wily peasant than the impish old man.... Bashevis often read his American audience better

Jews have thrived in cities as diverse as Berlin, Mexico City, Buenos Aires, Melbourne, and Johannesburg.

than they read him, and proceeded to give them what they wanted, all the time concealing both his literary and literal Yiddish originals" (2001, 4). However, Saposnik overlooks the fact that Singer's strategy of concealment and the eventual relocation of his stories from the shtetl to modern America were symptoms of a larger dilemma: what Singer has termed the "inherently untranslatable" nature of Yiddish (Singer 1989, 7). On the one hand, modern English lacked the extensive and layered semantic range necessary to adequately convey Eastern European Jewish culture, which initially caused Singer to criticize *Yiddish* as a language stuck in time and place. Ironically, though, Singer eventually remedied the problem by forcing Yiddish into the very context he claimed did not support it: starting around 1960, he began writing stories set in New York in Yiddish (Roskies 1995, 304). Perhaps that way he was assured that what was expressed in Yiddish could easily be replicated in English; indeed, in the case of many of his later works, accusations of blatant rewriting and suppression no longer hold.[6] This makes one question the extent to which Singer had taken to writing the original with the English translation already in mind. While complicating the ontological status of original and translation, was Singer's practice of "preemptive" translation a form of self-censorship?

Regardless of his motivations, the fact remains that Singer shifted his writing toward a new target audience: the New York intelligentsia who were first introduced to him through the appearance of Saul Bellow's translation of "Gimpl tam" ("Gimpel the Fool"),[7] which appeared in the prestigious *Partisan Review* in 1952. Singer's newer plotlines tore Yiddish away from its roots in Eastern Europe and replanted it in the streets of New York: the adventures of the shtetl schlemiel were replaced by the semi-autobiographical adventures of the successful Yiddish writer living in the big city, and the publications in which they appeared followed suit; many of them migrated from *Forverts* to *The New Yorker, Esquire,* and *Playboy* in translation.

If Singer's later stories were indeed written with a view to English translation, their content (or more precisely their *lack*) offers fascinat-

6. David Roskies suggests rather dramatically that these texts "lose little in translation because there is nothing much to lose": neither on a stylistic level nor, more importantly, on an ideological level insofar as the complexities of Yiddish as a hybrid, stateless, and Jewish language—all of which are so integral to the Eastern European context of Singer's earlier work—are conspicuously absent (1995, 304).

7. Bellow's translation remains the only published English translation of the story.

ing insight into what Singer viewed as untranslatable. The absence of the once-ubiquitous talmudic and anti-Christian references that were such an integral part of shtetl banter in his older works points to the fact that Singer had begun suppressing the distinctly Jewish component of Yiddish in favor of a more secular, even ecumenical, language. These changes could be attributed in part to Singer's failure to find an equivalent in English for the complex system of differentiation that is so integral to Yiddish.

4. Separation and Differentiation: *Lehavdl loshn*

In her discussion of Singer's early story "Zeydlus der ershter," the tale of a Jew who converts to Christianity after being told by the devil (*der yeytser-hore*) that he could one day become pope, Seidman speaks of Singer's "comedy of hybridity, an allegory for the mutual implication of language and identity" (2006, 271). The very irony of the story is that Yiddish is so inextricably linked to Judaism that any Christian who spoke it would be effectively expressing his or her Christianity in Jewish terms—so the conversion remains incomplete until Yiddish is relinquished. Singer's implicit conflation of language and religion—and, by association, identity—is a powerful comment on the role of Yiddish in the lives of its native speakers. It was long labeled "the Jewish vernacular" (affectionately, *mame-loshn,* or mother tongue)—the language that expressed the things of everyday life in a way the holy tongue, Hebrew, could not and *should* not. Such a view is reductive, however, since Yiddish is by its very name a Jewish language.[8]

Since the Ashkenazim were a diasporic people, their language is a product of contact with a number of cultures and languages across Europe. Yiddish combines elements of Middle High German (whence its syntax and a majority of its vocabulary), Hebrew and Aramaic (the *loshn koydesh,* or "holy tongue," component, although *loshn koydesh* borrowings are not limited to religious terminology), Slavic languages (a result of the Jews' movement from the Rhineland into Eastern Europe starting in the thirteenth century), and, finally, a small number of words derived from French, Italian, and Latin (a reflection of the Ashkenazi Jewish community's origins in France and Italy).[9] As a result of the intermix-

8. Native speakers of Yiddish will often produce the English sentence "I speak Jewish," carrying over into English Yiddish's lack of differentiation between language and religion.

9. For a more detailed explanation of the makeup of Yiddish, see Harshav 1990.

ing of languages and, more importantly, of the language of the secular and the divine, Yiddish has developed what the linguist Max Weinreich refers to as an internal *lehavdl loshn*, a "differentiating language."[10] It is not a question of register per se, because even an uneducated Jew could be well-versed in the Torah,[11] and again, the *loshn koydesh* component of Yiddish includes many words expressing everyday secular concepts; if anything, the *lehavdl loshn* creates a possibility for nuance that is not possible in English. For example, for the English word "question," Yiddish has *frage* (a straightforward question), *shayle* (a question demanding interpretation, often reserved for talmudic dilemmas), and *kashe* (a question provoking discussion), the first term coming from German, the second from Hebrew, the third from Aramaic. The bifurcation of the sacred and the profane, and the domestication of Christian terms (perhaps most transgressively, the use of the diminutive *yoyzl*—a term I will revisit shortly—to refer to Jesus) function as a means of identity affirmation that can be traced back to Eastern Europe, where for centuries Jews lived in close proximity to non-Jews. Roskies suggests that *lehavdl loshn*, "[m]ore than a motley of ethnic slurs [terms such as '*goy*' and '*shikse*,' which convey varying shades of contempt or mockery when used in English], of the kind that Philip Roth and other American satirists came to exploit ... is a linguistic structure that serves to insulate the Jews even as they live and work among the Christians" (1995, 286).

Lehavdl loshn played a central role in Singer's early writing, and perhaps that is why translating Singer's earliest works required so much alteration. "Zeydlus der ershter" provides a prime example of how the nature of a language can function as an important plot device. The problem is, what happens when that plot device is translated out of the text? This was the dilemma Saul Bellow faced when he agreed to translate "Gimpl tam."

10. Since the word *lehavdl* is notoriously difficult to define in English, I cite Seidman's thorough explanation: "[*Lehavdl loshn* is] the 'differentiating language' that distinguishes between what is Jewish and what is not. This semantic field is untranslatable in part because English lacks the capacity to mark these distinctions—the interjection '*lehavdl*,' a verbal marker used to distinguish between a Jewish and non-Jewish phenomenon mentioned in uncomfortably or misleadingly close proximity, should serve as a sufficient example" (2006, 253–54).

11. Sholem Aleichem's Tevye stands as one example of a shtetl Jew in Tsarist Russia who is well-versed in the Jewish scriptures, even as he constantly misquotes them for comic effect.

In 1952 Bellow, at the time an up-and-coming novelist, was approached by Eliezer Greenberg and Irving Howe to translate Singer's short story "Gimpl tam," the tale of a seemingly gullible baker who repeatedly allows himself be taken in by his fellow townspeople, for the forthcoming anthology *A Treasury of Yiddish Stories*. Bellow agreed on the condition that Greenberg dictate the text to him, which would enable him to translate simultaneously. Appearing first in the *Partisan Review* that same year, "Gimpel the Fool" was an immediate success: suddenly the name Isaac Bashevis Singer was on the lips of critics, publishers, and non-Yiddish-speaking readers. This was not, incidentally, the first time Singer had been translated into English. Two years prior, A. H. Gross's English translation of the novel *Di familye mushkat* was published to little fanfare. But the publication of Bellow's "Gimpel" in Greenberg's anthology coincided with the publication of Bellow's defining work, *The Adventures of Augie March*, and gained him as much (if not more) attention as Singer.

In his translation Bellow carefully retains the idiomatic character of the original "Gimpl," reproducing common Yiddish turns of phrase that ring exotic but charming to the American reader (Singer's "Az ikh hob derlangt a patsh hot men gezen kroke" [1] reads in Bellow's translation: "If I slapped someone he'd see all the way to Cracow" [3]; "Nu-nu, hot men mir gemakht a katsn-muzik mit a pekl" [2] yields the disconcerting "Well, what a cat music went up!" [1953, 4]). The effect of such idiomatic calquing is humorous (and in some cases not where Singer would have intended) but also distancing; the reader constantly hears vestiges of the Yiddish in the translation. However, if Bellow aimed for a foreignizing translation, he failed in one crucial way: he suppressed all of what are ostensibly anti-Christian references in the text—and there are a few.[12]

Much of the supposed anti-Christian rhetoric in the text is in fact an example of the *lehavdl loshn*, quite literally in the sense that it is used to assert Jewish identity by contrasting it with Christianity. It is not meant to be malicious but is, rather, a reflection of the way Eastern European Jews actually spoke—especially given that shtetls were, contrary to the

12. But the responsibility must not be pinned on Bellow alone; Bellow claimed that Greenberg had omitted one particularly inflammatory line from his recitation, though subsequently "neither Singer nor Bellow had it reinstated in subsequent printings of the English text" (Wirth-Nesher 2008, 105).

myth propagated by literature and more recently film,[13] often home to intermingling Jewish and Christian communities. If Jews were known both among themselves and among Christians as skeptics—defined by what they *did not* believe in—then it makes sense that this kind of vaguely mocking rhetoric would figure prominently in their conversations. But for Greenberg and Bellow, to have included such talk would have undermined the kind of *heymish* Orientalism they felt would please readers. That said, the omissions were likely motivated by more than a simple appeal to reader satisfaction. One cannot overlook the fact that in 1952 the Holocaust was still fresh in Jews' minds: the omissions may have been motivated, more than anything else, by the underlying fear that depicting Jews as "Gentile-haters" would fuel anti-Semitism.

Paradoxically, by opening up Singer's text to a non-Jewish readership, Bellow was simultaneously barring access. The primary problem with Bellow's translation is that some of his most blatant omissions actually mislead the reader. For example, when in the Yiddish text Gimpl first lays eyes on his future wife, Elke, he remarks that "zi hot gehat tsvey tsepelekh, vi, lehavdl, a shikse, fardreyt in beyde zaytn in krentslekh," a common hairstyle for Eastern European Christians of the time (1953, 3); Bellow gives: "She had her hair put up in braids and pinned across her head" (5). The purpose of the passage is to establish that Elke is abnormal, revolting, and possibly not to be trusted—all of which is succinctly conveyed in the original by the words "vi lehavdl, a shikse" ["like, forgive the comparison, a non-Jewish girl"]. Since Bellow omits the comparison, he adds that Gimpel, upon seeing Elka, is stifled by "the reek of it all" (5) to establish that what Gimpel is seeing displeases him, but the translation provides no explanation as to why. Similar references to *goyim* or skepticism about Jesus' resurrection[14] are either omitted entirely or altered to lose their anti-Christian overtones.

13. See, for example, how the 1971 film *Fiddler on the Roof* reconfigures the shtetl of Sholem Aleichem's stories to segregate Christians and Jews, thus heightening bilateral antagonism. The film also stands as a paradigm of what I will refer to as the *heymish* Orientalism of Yiddish texts in translation.

14. The phrase "nisht-geshtoygn, nisht-gefloygn" appears twice in the original. Literally it means something akin to "didn't rise, didn't fly," expressing skepticism about the resurrection. At the beginning of the story the townspeople try to fool Gimpel into believing that his parents have risen from the grave, to which he responds: "[K]hob gants gut gevust, az s'iz nisht-geshtoygn, nisht-gefloygn" (2). Bellow gives: "I knew very well that nothing of the sort had happened" (1953, 4). Here he accurately conveys the idea that Gimpel is not fooled, but the weight of Jewish skepticism toward Christianity is lost.

One final and crucial omission in Bellow's translation bears noting. When Elke tries to convince Gimpl that the child she gave birth to seventeen weeks after their wedding is indeed his, Gimpl, after initial skepticism, says, "Un tsurikgeshmuest, ver veyst? Ot zogt men dokh az s'yoyzl hot in gantsn keyn tatn nisht gehat" (1953, 6). Bellow translates the first sentence "But then, who really knows how such things are?" (7) but omits the second (literally: "People say that little Jesus didn't have a father"), which is perhaps one of the most important—and most inflammatory—sentences in the story, for in it Gimpl essentially produces a line of Christian doctrine in Yiddish. What is more surprising is that he does not refute it; rather, he seems passively to accept it. The sentence is the last of the paragraph—his last pronouncement on the question of his paternity—and as such it brings his vacillation between skepticism and acceptance of his wife's story to an abrupt, unexpected conclusion. Since Gimpl comes to trust his deceitful wife only once he has seen in his situation an analogy of the Immaculate Conception, his gullibility is explicitly equated with Christian belief. In fact, scholars have long fought over the significance of Gimpl's "Christian" innocence: Is Singer using Gimpl as a vehicle to mock Christianity, or is he in fact mocking the stereotype of the skeptical Jew by allowing a marginalized Jew with vaguely Christian beliefs to triumph in the end through his realization that, although the world is made of lies, even lies hold a degree of truth?[15]

Regardless of how one chooses to interpret the sentence, one of its bilateral transgressions lies not in the Christian doctrine to which it alludes but rather in Singer's use of the word *yoyzl*, a diminutive form of *yeshu* (Jesus). Use of the diminutive form is common in Yiddish and can convey affection or disdain. Norich suggests that the traditional use of the diminutive in Yiddish when referring to Jesus, preceded by the definite article "dos" (which functions deictically to establish distance: "*that* little Jesus"), provides "a way of containing the danger posed by the figure of Jesus" (2013). In Singer's text it functions to highlight the subversion of both Yiddish and Christianity inherent in the term: he has used a Jewish language to appropriate a Christian term—indeed, the divine symbol of Christianity—and refashioned that term within the constraints of the language to *become* Jewish (even specifically Yiddish). Bellow's translation, however, will later erase Singer's domestication of the Christian referent by suppressing it, reframing the story for a non-

15. Seidman explores these and various other interpretations of the story in her chapter on Bellow's translation (2006, 255–63).

Jewish target reader. But the translation does more than just omit possibly offensive terms; it goes so far as to neutralize and in some cases actively "Christianize" *Jewish* references, resulting in a text that sounds more generically ecumenical than Jewish. The *shames* (the assistant to the rabbi) thus becomes first the "sexton" (1953, 6) and later the "beadle" (8), and the *tare shtibl* (the ablution chamber) loses its religious connotation as the almost humorous "little corpse-washing hut" (5).

But for scholars of Yiddish, the most controversial part of Bellow's translation has nothing to do with his censorship of perceived anti-Christian rhetoric; it is the very title of the story itself, "Gimpel the Fool." As many before me have pointed out, *fool* is an inaccurate translation of the Hebrew-derived *tam*. The term has roots both in the Passover Haggadah and in Jewish folklore (two sources with which Singer's Yiddish readers would undoubtedly be familiar): the third son in the Passover story is referred to as *tam*, simple but laudably pious.[16] The term later appears in Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav's eighteenth-century parable "The Wiseman and the Simpleton" about two men who are summoned by the king. The simpleton goes unquestioningly and is rewarded, while the wise man stops to ponder why the king would call upon a common man such as himself. This leads him to deny the very existence of the king, so he never collects his reward. *Tam* here has a positive connotation: it is associated with unyielding piety and innocence (ironically the same quality that links Gimpl to Christianity), even perfection. Whether we understand Singer's use of the term as his earnest praise of simplicity or as an ironic jab at bygone unenlightened shtetl Jews, both are impossible readings in Bellow's translation: the nuances and rich historico-religious resonances of the term are lost in the word *fool*.[17]

16. The term also appears in the Bible: Job declares to God that he is *tam* (innocent, blameless) and undeserving of punishment (Habel 1985, 193).

17. The most obvious indication that Singer did not equate *tam* with "fool" comes in the opening lines of the original Yiddish: "Ikh bin gimpl tam. Ikh halt mikh nisht far keyn nar" (1). Gimpl introduces himself as "Gimpl tam" (essentially "Simple Gimpel") but adds that he does not consider himself to be a "fool" (the German-derived *nar*). In using the two different terms, Gimpl is acknowledging that he *is* simple (pious, perfect, blameless)—he willingly lets himself be taken in by others—but *not* that he is foolish, for a fool would not *willingly, knowingly* be deceived. Bellow gives: "I am Gimpel the Fool. I don't think myself a fool" (1953, 3). Without the distinction between *tam* and *nar*, Bellow's Gimpel becomes at best a decidedly less-complex character, a hackneyed sketch of what Paul Kresh calls the "quintessential Jew" and at worst a character whose self-perception is at odds with his actions (quoted in Seidman 2006, 260).

Bellow's failure to distinguish between two concepts that are in Singer's original designated by two vastly different terms (one derived from *loshn koydesh* and the other from German, it bears noting) reveals the obstacles to translation posed by Yiddish's *lehavdl loshn*. A term with positive—and uniquely Jewish—religious associations harkening back to the Bible and Jewish folklore is expressed in English by a word that, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, refers to "[o]ne deficient in judgement or sense, one who acts or behaves stupidly, a silly person, a simpleton." So far a term that conveys nothing of the innocent piety of *tam*. Most telling, however, is the parenthesis following the definition: "(In Biblical use applied to vicious or impious persons.)." The term *fool*, carrying its own set of biblical associations, is thus the *exact opposite* of the term it is used to translate. Here the *lehavdl loshn* does more than reveal linguistic asymmetries; it underscores the unique conceptual plane on which Yiddish operates and the consequent limits to translation that it entails. Was Bellow, who spoke fluent Yiddish and was raised in a devout Jewish household, aware of the multiple positive connotations of the word *tam*? Most likely. Was his choice of "fool" then a purely aesthetic one—a means of avoiding, as Norich suggests, the tempting but facile rhyme of "Simple Gimpel"—or was it the result of a decision that, since *tam* cannot be conveyed in all its complexity in English, it must not be conveyed at all (1995, 213)?

In many ways Bellow's translation of "Gimpl tam" reveals that the practice of protectively burying the Yiddish text under its translation had begun even before Singer forcibly intervened as "collaborator" in all of his translations. If Bellow's distortive translation made of the translator an author by imbuing him with the power to censor or alter problematic passages, Singer was determined to regain control over his texts through similarly distortive means. As co-translator of his works, he would assure that no one could challenge his claim to authorship—by rewriting his own texts in translation. The result was an apparent bifurcation in Singer's identity: his simultaneous presence, thanks to his translations, in both the American and the Yiddish canons.

As I have discussed, Singer was certainly not the first writer to use translation as a means of straddling literary traditions: Beckett's dual-canonical status (a product of his decision to write and self-translate between French and English), like Singer's, presented a challenge to library classification systems, which generally "base their divisions on the principle of linguistic nationalism" (Chamberlain 1987, 17). The Library of Congress divides Beckett's works among the English and French sections—a classification that dissociates him completely from

his Irish national identity (1987, 17). The inevitably awkward attempts to circumvent ontological problems posed by the multilingual author result in the fragmentation of both the works and the writer: divvied up between national literatures, contingent texts sit in exile from one another on the shelves, enlarging the gap between original and translation that Fitch argues should be bridged in order to allow for the dialogical unity of both texts. This separation, an echo of the Yiddish utterance *lehavdl*, had particularly significant implications for Singer, whose position as a writer of Yiddish—a diasporic and postvernacular language—meant that, while his translations opened the way for his acceptance as a Jewish-American writer (and those translations were categorized accordingly on the shelves), there was no place for his Yiddish originals. His texts seemed destined for exile and eventual oblivion.

6. Singer as Self-Translator

After the publication of the translation "Gimpel the Fool," Singer abruptly cut off all contact with Bellow. He even went so far as explicitly to prohibit Bellow from translating any of his other works. When the two met years later, Bellow asked Singer why he had reacted so violently to his translation. Singer's cryptic response was, "They'll say it's you, not me" (Noiville 2006, 93). Singer harbored fears that Bellow's fame and talent would overshadow his own, that the translator would displace the author in much the same way that Yiddish texts—including his own, ironically at his behest—once devoid of a readership, could potentially be replaced by "definitive" English translations.

Before Bellow came along Singer had worked directly with A. H. Gross on the English translation of *Di familye mushkat* and made significant changes in English, removing entire chapters while adding a chapter to the end of the novel.[18] For Singer it was not enough to awkwardly reproduce the idiomatic character of his stories in English, as Bellow had done to great success. To do so was to perpetuate the per-

18. In response to the suggestion that 50 percent of the original text is lost in translation (an arbitrary number to be sure), Singer told an interviewer, "That's why I try to write one hundred and fifty percent" (quoted in Landis 1989, 2). This is not far from the truth. During the translation process, according to Henri Levi, Singer "pared his texts to the bone, keeping only the indispensable elements of the setting and the details essential to the story line. The rest—the Hebrew, the Aramaic, the inbred allusions, the anti-Christian quips—all these were written off as losses" (Noiville 2006, 95).

ception of Yiddish literature as "folksy," to relegate it to the shtetl (something Singer himself had championed during the early part of his career and something he realized was becoming less and less relevant—not to mention increasingly difficult the further removed both geographically and temporally he found himself from life in Poland). By the time Bellow's "Gimpel" appeared, Singer had been in America for close to twenty years and was more at home at the Garden Cafeteria conversing with members of the Jewish intelligentsia than reminiscing with aging immigrants about his adolescence in the Polish shtetl of Biłgoraj. Having come to terms with the fact that he was an American writing for Americans (Yiddish speakers and otherwise) *in* America, he developed the following outlook: "It happens often with me, working on the translation and working on the book itself go together, because when it's being translated I see some of the defects and I work on them—so in a way the English translation is sometimes almost a second original" (quoted in Saposnik 2001, 11). Source and target texts then stand in a symbiotic relationship: the original is altered through the very process that engenders the translation, so that consequently original and translation are mutually derivative.

By the time he set out to translate several of his works following Bellow's "Gimpel," Singer was already a seasoned translator, having translated works by Thomas Mann, including *Der Zauberberg,* into Yiddish and collaborated on the translation of *Di familye mushkat* (Garrin 1986, 50). His post-Bellow translation process consisted in hiring a group of mostly women, often recruited from the ranks of his admirers, to serve essentially as his transcribers insofar as Singer himself would dictate to them in English (Noiville 2006, 105). In fact, many of his credited "translators" did not even speak Yiddish; they were merely polishers, editing his dictation to flow more naturally in English (Noiville 2006, 106). In this way Singer exerted complete control over the translation process, and the attribution of his later translations reflect this: fifteen of forty-two credited translations appearing in the 1982 Singer anthology bear the note, "Translated by the author and _____."[19] One effect of this approach to translation, whether intended or not, was Singer's complete freedom to alter the original text by suppressing or modifying perceived anti-Christian or obscure Jewish references without protest from

19 Not including Bellow's "Gimpel the Fool," of the remaining translations, seventeen are attributed to various collaborators; eight are attributed to Singer's nephew, Joseph Singer; one to Singer's wife, Alma Singer, and a collaborator; and five lack attribution entirely.

his translators. In many ways, Singer had assumed the role of Greenberg to his transcribers' Bellow—a role that led him to suppress just as many, if not more, potentially problematic passages than his predecessor.

Around this time Singer mandated that all future non-English translations of his work be done from the English text (Noiville 2006, 99). English really did then displace the Yiddish to become the "definitive text"; indeed, English was the source text for his French, Italian, German, Spanish, even Korean and Japanese readers.[20] This resulted in the existence of two supposedly "identical" but actually ideologically opposed texts. Henri Levi attributes this split to the disconnect produced by the Christianization of Singer's translations—this time by Singer himself:

> David Roskies has shown that *a shnur patsherkes*, meaning literally (and not without mockery) "Pater cord," becomes "rosary"; the word *galekh*, a rude term for a Christian priest ("the closely cropped one"), is changed to "sacristan"; "house of impurity" expresses an external, hostile point of view; "rosary" and "sacristan" are Christian words that Polish Jewish readers may not have understood. (quoted in Noiville 2006, 95)

As unhappy as he was with Bellow's translation of "Gimpl tam," Singer practiced the same censorship and ecumenicalization as Bellow. But ironically, by neutralizing, if not outright Christianizing, Jewish or anti-Christian references Singer had shifted his work onto an entirely different semantic plane, one that was incompatible with the original Yiddish, resulting in translations that were in some ways impenetrable to his original readers, not necessarily linguistically (most Yiddish speakers in America at the time were proficient in English) but ideologically. The decision to circumvent instead of confronting the challenge of translating *lehavdl loshn* is fraught with implications. By Christianizing their English translations Bellow (and Greenberg) and Singer appear to implicitly accept the terms of Singer's "Zeydlus": Yiddish is so inextricably linked to Judaism that the relinquishment (translation) of Yiddish necessarily constitutes a conversion—yet one that can never be complete so long as traces of Yiddish cultural sensibility remain.

20. As a result, we have "Gimpel l'idiota" in Italian, "Gimpel, el tonto" in Spanish, "Gimpel der Narr" in German, "Gimpel l'imbécile" in French (updated to the more appropriate "Gimpel le naïf" in a 1993 retranslation). In fact, nearly all translations of Singer's works are listed in UNESCO's Index Translationum as being translated from English with a note indicating that the original was in Yiddish.

Further complicating the status of Yiddish in translation is Singer's designation of his English translations as the source texts for translations into other languages, perhaps because the English translations, which he himself oversaw, served as a safely ecumenicalized mediation of the Yiddish, thereby promising that no translations into any other language would have to grapple with the complications of *lehavdl loshn*.[21] More than the vehicular language through which Singer's works entered the world stage, English was the intermediary that simultaneously hid the Yiddish and enabled it to be more easily transmitted into languages lacking its system of differentiation.

Perhaps it was by rendering the two texts partially opaque outside of their intended readership that he was able to keep his two authorial identities (Yitskhok Bashevis and I. B. Singer) separate. Both the dual identity that Singer had constructed for himself and the complex relationship between his originals and translations provide, then, an instantiation of the process of differentiation inherent in the word *lehavdl*. The question is, does this form of identity differentiation contribute to the obliteration of source text/language/culture? Singer's incorporation of the differentiating tendencies of Yiddish in his translation methodology enacts a compelling conflation of self and text: that the insular, oppositionally defining elements of Eastern European Jewish discourse are manifested in Singer's approach to translation as a means of maintaining those very aspects of his identity amidst the intercultural fluxes of immigration (against, of course, the broader backdrop of the Jewish diaspora) and generational change indicates a poignant resistance to the very assimilation of which Singer has been accused. Singer's influence on American writers (Jewish and non-Jewish) signals a fluidity between texts and between self and text that points to contiguity, not separation: Singer's creative approach to translation, though ostensibly assimilative, enriched twentieth-century American literature with innovative magical realism and fantasy, which would soon be appropriated by English-language Jewish-American writers such as Cynthia Ozick and Bernard Malamud. Unlike Singer, however, the next generation of Jewish-American writers chose to embrace, instead of suppress, the Jewishness of

21. Here I do not place Hebrew alongside Yiddish because, although several of Singer's works were translated into Hebrew from the original Yiddish, the majority were translated from English. Perhaps this offers evidence that even Hebrew, the sacred Jewish tongue from which a substantial amount of Yiddish is derived, does not possess Yiddish's *lehavdl loshn* capabilities and thus is more easily translated from English.

their texts in all its complexity, entering into dialogue with Singer's work by writing the contemporary Jewish-American experience in English: echoing the pioneering Jewish-American writer Henry Roth, phrases in the works of Ozick, Malamud, and Roth are dotted with Yiddish words (including the same mildly derisive terms referring to non-Jews that Singer, and Bellow and Greenberg before him, carefully omitted in translation) and Jewish references left untranslated and unexplained; English is altered to reflect Yiddish syntax and idiom, while the content reflects the struggles of American-born Jews navigating life amidst the fresh collective memory of the Holocaust with a familiar mixture of pathos and humor common to Singer's works.

If Singer's translational practices coupled with the disappearance of a Yiddish readership threatened the destruction of a literature, those writers who followed him promised its redemption—even as they redefined it, allowing for American readers to discover Singer anew through the clarifying mediation of a newly solidified, self-reflexive corpus of Jewish-American literature. The barrier between original and translation, deceptively reified in the term *lehavdl*, has thus proven porous, artificial. Not only has the unique fictive world of Singer's translations laid the groundwork for Ozick's and Malamud's magical realism (even as it has also stood as a stylistic paradigm in opposition to which Jewish writers initially preoccupied with existential realism—Philip Roth and, ironically, Bellow among them—have defined themselves); the intertext that exists between Singer's Yiddish writings and the innovative works of subsequent Jewish-American writers offers a fruitful dialogue—as well as the possibility of reconsidering Singer's work within the canon to which it has been definitively, if problematically, assigned.

7. Conclusion

The aim of this article has been to explore (1) the implications of Isaac Bashevis Singer's construction of a dual authorial identity through translation (a process initiated by Saul Bellow in his translation of "Gimpl tam" and later reclaimed by Singer himself), and (2) to provide a framework for reconceptualizing Yiddish translation more broadly. The split between (the works of) Yitskhok Bashevis and (the works of) I. B. Singer poses the question: How does one translate oneself out of Yiddish and into a language lacking its complex system of differentiation? For Singer, the answer was to assimilate subversively. Indeed, as Singer's career progressed he appeared to write increasingly with a view to translation, but that is only half the story. As Saltzman has pointed

out, Singer continued to write prolifically in Yiddish from 1960 on, though only a small portion of that writing has been translated into English (2002, xi). The rest, confined to manuscripts and an uncatalogued mass of microfilm, stands as a reminder that, even though Singer had cultivated a somewhat domesticated image of himself for his English-language American readers, he never abandoned his Yiddish readership nor his identity as a Yiddish writer. As strongly as he believed that Yiddish would soon die out, he continued to write in Yiddish stories he never intended to translate. It is the task of future translators first to locate these texts and then to translate them in a way that neither censors the cultural and religious beliefs that inform them nor leaves them intact and unexplained so that they remain impenetrable to the non-Yiddish reader—in short, to break through the unique barriers to translation posed by a hybridized source language (one that is, moreover, charged with the spatio-temporally distant reference points of pre–World War II Eastern European Jewish life).

Berman calls on translators to confront the *épreuve* (trial, experience) of translation with a commitment to decentering, to a shunning of opaque ethnocentric translational practices: "[W]e must struggle relentlessly against our fundamental reductionism, but also remain open to that which, in all translation, remains mysterious and unmasterable, properly speaking in-visible" (1992, 180). It is precisely the "mysterious and unmasterable" content, the kabbalistic "secrets" permeating Singer's Yiddish writing and Yiddish literature more broadly, that must be *embraced*, not suppressed, in translation. With these complexities in mind, I would suggest that any attempt to articulate a comprehensive and ethical theory of Yiddish translation might do well to consider the centrality of the term *lehavdl* within Yiddish discourse as an analogy for translation out of Yiddish: as a linguistic device, the term unites and separates at once, establishes both proximity and difference, translates between the sacred and the profane; in its contradictory function, *lehavdl* differentiation reifies the process of translation, which similarly creates difference-based contingency between two texts.

Finally, it is time to work toward an understanding of the relationship between Singer's Yiddish texts and their translations as *dialogical*—not dialectical. Indeed, perhaps resituating Singer's Yiddish works amidst the works of his many as-yet-untranslated peers will allow us to better appreciate his unique hybrid status as a writer, his role in the formation and bridging of two canons. Acknowledging those Yiddish writers whose works shape and respond to Singer's own (including those peers who, like Glatshteyn, problematically branded him as unrepresentative

of Yiddish literature) can lead us toward a methodology of translation that enables a more complete representation of Yiddish literature, while respecting its internal diversity and cultural particularities. Engagement with Yiddish writers on (and *in*) their own terms is becoming increasingly possible thanks to the growing presence of Yiddish at universities worldwide[22] and the outreach of youth-oriented Yiddish organizations such as Yugntruf (Shandler 2006, 2). As the twenty-first century witnesses a resurgence of interest in Yiddish language and culture that extends well beyond the bounds of the kitschy, commercialized postvernacularity to which Yiddish long seemed destined, it is quite possible that we will yet encounter Yitskhok Bashevis and his peers in the language of Shakespeare.

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22. Jeffrey Shandler estimates that, as of 2006, some two hundred doctoral dissertations and master's theses involving Yiddish were written in North American universities alone—about half of them since 1990 (and only two prior to World War II) (2006, 2).

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