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Joshua, King David, and the Flying Nun: Doodles and Reader Annotations in Post–Holocaust Yiddish Primers for Children[1]

Abstract

Students in Yiddish supplementary schools used texts produced by educators steeped in a diaspora nationalist pedagogy that reflected the ideological coupling of Yiddish and Yiddishkeit: the Yiddish language informed one's sense of Jewishness. By the 1960s, doodles students left in their schoolbooks challenged this coupling of language and identity. Though it is generally supposed that Yiddish primers ultimately tell us more about the aspirations of adults than they do about the experiences of children, reading these texts together reveals that children evolved their own relationship between Yiddish and Jewishness that was far more subtle than what they encountered in their textbooks. Postwar primers emphasize maintaining the Yiddish language on American soil, to the exclusion of the external culture; children's doodles argue that more important than preserving the language was locating Yiddishkeit in the culture around them.

Résumé

Les élèves des écoles supplémentaires yiddish utilisaient des textes produits par des éducateurs imprégnés d'une pédagogie diasporique nationaliste qui reflétait le couplage idéologique entre yiddish et yiddishkeit : la langue yiddish informait le sentiment de judéité de chacun. Dans les années 1960, les gribouillages laissés par les élèves dans leurs manuels scolaires remettaient en question ce couplage entre langue et identité. Bien qu'il soit généralement admis que les manuels yiddish nous en disent plus sur les aspirations des adultes que sur les expériences des enfants, la lecture conjointe de ces textes révèle que les enfants ont développé une relation au yiddish et à la judéité, bien plus subtile que celle enseignée dans les manuels. Les manuels d'après-guerre mettent l'accent sur le maintien de la langue yiddish sur le sol nord-américain, tout en excluant la culture extérieure; les gribouillis des enfants affirment au contraire l'importance de situer le yiddishkeit dans la culture qui les entoure.

On page 45 of Y. Noskovitz's 1962 Jewish history primer *Mayn folk: geshikhte far der elementar-shul, ershter teyl* (My People: History for Elementary School, Part One), an illustration captioned "Dovid un Goliat" (David and Goliath) portrays a pivotal moment in Jewish legendary history: a diminutive David stands in the background, slingshot hanging loosely by his side, gazing at the giant Goliath lifeless at his feet. A speech bubble scrawled in pencil hangs near David's head and spills out of frame onto the page, intruding on the momentous biblical scene and inserting dialogue into the mouth of the anointed ruler of Israel, conqueror of Jerusalem and the Holy Land, and rightful ancestor of the future Messiah: "I told you I had to fart."[2]

This book, and dozens like it published in the 1940s and 1950s and used into the 1970s, comprise a library of texts produced for students of Yiddish schools at another pivotal moment in Jewish history: the decades following the Holocaust that saw the widespread decline of Yiddish, once the language and culture of the largest Jewish population in history. Yiddish supplementary schools, known as *shule*s, are an important element of that history, representing one facet of the efforts to sustain Yiddish in those years. *Shule*s provide a multifaceted and intergenerational perspective capturing a universal human exchange: the transfer of fundamental values and traditions from one generation to the next. In the case of post–Holocaust Yiddish, the exchange extended beyond value and traditions to also include language, and the students were not only the next generation, but children of those who had survived or escaped the horrors of the Holocaust; in many cases, the Yiddish language was all they had left. For these parents, enrolling a child in a supplementary Yiddish school was an affirmation of that child's role as a carrier of the language into the future. Children, in general, saw things differently. For them, the *shule* was a tortuous extension of the school day to learn a heritage language that had little relevance to their own lives. During the unending hours in the after-school Yiddish classroom, *shule* students doodled away their boredom, entertaining themselves and their peers with reader annotations and marginalia, like the caption added to the David and Goliath scene, that constitute a reader reception history that scholars have never considered.

The study of marginalia has ballooned over the past two decades among book historians, and literary scholars. The field tends to privilege medieval manuscripts and early modern texts, where doodles, drawings, comments, and readers' marks offer glimpses into reader biographies and psychology, trade networks, and literacy among various constituencies.[3] Scholars have examined the marginalia in papers and manuscripts of major twentieth-century writers, and some have also examined their anonymous readers.[4] Recent studies of schoolbook doodles have been analyzed as evidence of anxiety in the foreign-language classroom and as acts of reclamation. As Andrew Kear writes, "doodling is a way in which students, consciously or not, stake a claim of personal agency and challenge some [of] the values inherent in the education system."[5]

Research on postwar Yiddish is relatively slim; research on postwar Yiddish reading material for children, even slimmer. Miriam Udel's English 2020 anthology of Yiddish literature for children, some of which appears in postwar Yiddish schoolbooks, makes this material newly accessible to readers, and scholarly assessments are sure to come.[6] The most comprehensive look at Yiddish school materials, Naomi Prawer Kadar's analysis of periodicals in the Yiddish school system offers a perspective on the authorship and contents of these texts, but does not extend to the postwar period. Moreover, readers' marks and annotations are beyond the scope of Prawer Kadar's study, as are textbooks.[7] Jeffrey Shandler outlines a history of postwar Yid-

dish primers in the context of postvernacular language and culture, and this article builds upon his observations, but a comprehensive study of the history of these books has yet to be written.[8] Though reader annotations and doodles are ubiquitous in Yiddish textbooks, no one has yet analyzed them as evidence of what became of the considerable post–Holocaust efforts to sustain the Yiddish language in the wake of unimaginable loss.

This article does just that. Reading Yiddish primers and reader annotations together reveals that they represent a progression of thought about the importance of Yiddish to Yiddishkeit, of language to Jewishness. Primers and basal readers compiled in the late 1940s and 1950s reveal how pedagogues viewed their audience and what they anticipated the role of Yiddish to be for the next generation. These authors espoused a diaspora nationalist pedagogy founded on the conviction that Jews shared a national identity based on language and culture that reflected the ideological coupling of Yiddish and Yiddishkeit: the Yiddish language informed one's sense of Jewishness and Jewishness informed the language; neither could survive without the other. Reader annotations and doodles left by Yiddish students as late as the 1970s in turn convey children's responses to this ideology which, by the time it reached *shule* students, was outdated. Postwar basal readers prioritize maintaining the Yiddish language on American soil, to the exclusion of the external culture. Children's doodles argue that more important than preserving the language was locating Yiddishkeit in the culture around them. Over time, students evolved their own sense of the relationship between Yiddish and Jewishness that was far more subtle than what they encountered in their textbooks.

I provide an overview of major themes that characterize the Yiddish primer's attitude toward the link between language and Jewishness and explore that link in the scribbles and captions added by students at the former Toronto Workmen's Circle I.L. Peretz school. I analyze the reader annotations of one student in particular, whose doodles I treat as a case study in the changing relationship between Yiddish language and Yiddishkeit. These books are palimpsests in the truest sense: texts whose original writing has been erased or effaced in order to make room for alterations or later additions, but whose earlier form remains visible. My literary reading reveals how young people roughly ten to thirteen years old absorbed the messages of their forebears around language and Jewishness and reshaped them, offering their own interpretation of the meaning of Yiddishkeit and where it could be found. For adults, the essence of Yiddishkeit lay in peoplehood, tradition, and language; for children, it was reflected in ethnic urban culture, regardless of language.

My focus here is on materials in circulation in Toronto, a postwar Yiddish centre that has scarcely, if at all, been considered as such by scholars. While Rebecca Margolis, Pierre Anctil, and others have shown Montreal to be a distinctive Canadian Yiddish city, Toronto provides a different perspective on the development of Yiddish culture

within an Anglo milieu that stands apart from other English-speaking centres in the United States because of its close cultural relationship to the United Kingdom.[9] Toronto serves as an example of the way Yiddish instruction was received by children in a place that was slowly emerging with an idiosyncratic urban Canadian culture of its own, gradually abandoning the Protestant British influence that had shaped much of the political, social, and mass cultural character of the city since the nineteenth century.

My study of postwar Yiddish primers in use in the 1950s–1970s is not exhaustive; rather, it looks closely at the materials in use at one school in a specific urban and historical context. It begins with a close look at mid-century Yiddish primers and the particular way these texts conceived of the relationship between Yiddish and Yiddishkeit. Then, an analysis of student annotations, particularly those made by a student named Stephen Goren, combined with interviews with former students at the Toronto Workmen's Circle I.L. Peretz school illuminates how children perceived and responded to their parents' and teachers' linguistic and cultural visions of language and Jewishness.

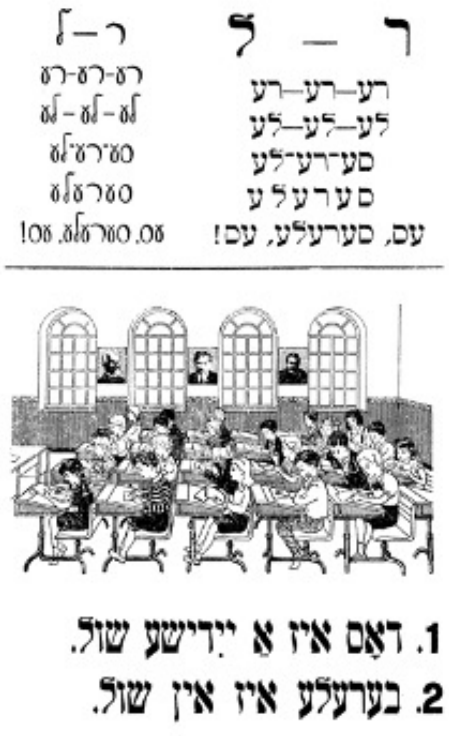
Yiddish and Yiddishkeit, at Home, at School, and in America

Primers for young Yiddish readers emerged from Yiddish publishing houses in the Russian Empire at the turn of the twentieth century and continued to appear sporadically throughout the 1920s and Thirties in Poland and the Soviet Union under ever evolving political, cultural, and social conditions. Meanwhile, American Yiddish primers developed their own pedagogical programs reflecting the unique challenges to heritage languages posed by American society. By the mid-twentieth century American Yiddish primers had evolved from simple lessons in Yiddish literacy to narratively structured self-contained excursions into an imaginary Yiddishland.

Primers are discrete assemblages of narrative scenes that operate as didactic texts that teach language through verbal and behavioural modelling. Yiddish primers, like other mid-century primers, model patterns of proper social relationships within the family and between adults and children, but these books also operate as metanarratives that present the Yiddish language as a conduit for one's identification with Jewishness. While the choreography of the lexical, pictorial, and narrative elements of these books merits a longer study, for the purposes of this discussion I am most interested in the way Yiddish and Yiddishkeit undergird one another in these texts, prescribing a particular valuation of the Yiddish language that intertwined it with access to a discrete sense of ethnic Jewish awareness and identity. One way they achieved this is through a framework informed by place: home, school, and America.

Jeffrey Shandler surveys Yiddish school texts in view of the changing affective relationship to Yiddish since the Second World War, finding that while Eastern European primers offer a variety of first words (flower, house, rooster, hammer), American texts show a preference for words like *mame* (mother) and *shul* (school), words that "suggest a shared awareness of the primers' symbolic value as they address the challenge of teaching Yiddish to children who do not necessarily know the language, even nominally, from home."[10] However, the symbolism of "*mame*" and "*shul*" extends beyond the challenge of instructing young children in Yiddish literacy. Setting the narratives at home and at school, the primer establishes a relationship between the domestic setting where Yiddish functions as the *mameloshn* (lit. "mother language," an affectionate way to refer to Yiddish), and the tuitional environment where Yiddish is a subject to be learned and shared among peers. As a result, the primers establish not only what the language is, but how it functions to bind Jews to one another and create an intimate community where song, speech, and play reinforce one's sense of Jewish belonging.

School and home are ostensibly two distinct spaces, but David Bridger's 1947 *Der onheyber* (The Beginner) shortens the distance between them.[11] It opens with two characters, the siblings Serele and Berele, on their way to school; later we meet their mother, father, and grandparents, but school occupies the primary position. School is where the beginner begins, displacing home as the environment from which Yiddish emerges and gesturing toward the real-world sociological circumstances Shandler references, where Yiddish is not in fact spoken at home. The title of Y. Kaminski's 1951 *In der heym un in shul: a lernbikhl for onheyber* (At Home and In School: A Primer for Beginners) makes the link between domestic and tuitional settings even clearer, though it reverses the order of *Der onheyber* and begins at home, re-establishing Yiddish among the family. The reader is introduced to the characters' domestic and family life (morning routines, meals, play, grandparents) long before the word *shul* appears, twenty-eight pages in.[12]

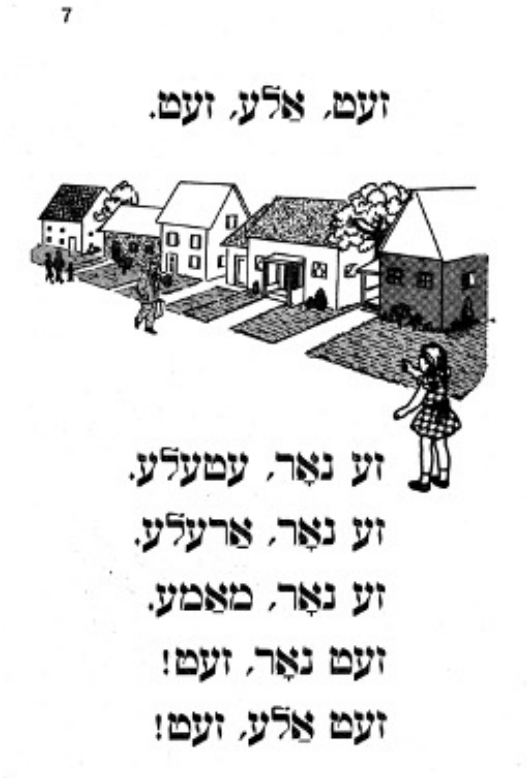


David Bridger, *Der onheyber* (New York: Matones, 1947), 7.

Traditionally, home is the place whence the *mameloshn* most naturally emanates and belongs; school is where extra-familial community is built around the language. Both settings function as sites for developing social relationships between family members and friends and for being initiated into Jewish life. Because of the adamantly secular nature of Yiddish education, synagogues, rabbis, and ritual markers of religious Jewish life such as prayer shawls, yarmulkes, prayer books, Torah scrolls, and mezuzahs are absent from these texts. Rather, children encounter Jewishness—here, defined through family, food, songs, and holidays—in communal experiences that are replicated at home and in school. For instance, *In der heym un in shul* has students learn the story of Hanukkah at school and light the menorah (indeed, the only ritual object featured in these introductory texts) with their class and teacher; they later repeat the ritual at home with their family, spin dreidels, and eat latkes. Here *shabes* (the Sabbath) is not a sanctified day of prayer and rest; but it is an exceptional day. The children do not attend school on *shabes*. Instead they play, sing Yiddish songs, and visit with their grandparents (with whom they speak Yiddish). Home and school are counterparts to one another that create meaning by mirroring experiences of everyday Jewish life to the Yiddish language. At school children encounter Jewish knowledge; at home they replicate this knowledge through per-

formance and repetition. Home and school blur into one another, and Yiddish is the language of both.

"Home" in these books also gestures toward the idea of national belonging. The vignettes in both *Der onheyber* and *In der heym un in shul* offer lessons in correct and socially appropriate behaviour that reinforce the conventional expectations of mid-century America. David Bridger, author of *Der onheyber*, based the format and characters on comparable American English language material of the era.[13] In so doing, he also implicitly staked a place for Yiddish within the American context. Yiddish is not a foreign language in these texts: the local baker speaks Yiddish; even the family dog speaks Yiddish. Other distinctly American elements—a row of tidy suburban houses, the New York skyline—locate Yiddish within an identifiably American landscape.



Y. Kaminski, *In der heym un in shul* (New York: Workmen's Circle, 1951), 7.

Earlier Yiddish primers had also included explicit references to America and the place of Jews within it. Hyman Bez and Zalmen Yefroykin's 1942 *Mayn shprakhbukh* (My Language-Book), a reader for students in grade 2 and 3, places Yiddish in the mouths of American presidents George Washington and Abraham Lincoln.[14] A short story titled "A yidishe meydl un Vashington" (A Jewish Girl and Washington), adapt-

ed from Elma Ehrlich Levinger's 1929 American collection *The Story of the Jew for Young People*, tells of Rivke, a motherless young girl who together with her father escapes the capture of British forces during the Revolutionary war and proves her loyalty to Washington. Another story, "Linkoln un a yidisher soldat" (Lincoln and a Jewish Soldier) features the tragic story of Dovid Leyvi, a Union soldier who falls in battle wrapped in an American flag, his blood mingling with the colour of the stripes. In both stories, Jews emerge as exemplary patriots on the winning side of decisive moments in American history.

In the years after the Holocaust the notion of a home both Jewish and Yiddish changed profoundly, and Bez and Yefroykin placed an even finer point on their adopted homeland. *Mayn shprakhbukh* was reissued in 1954 with a new title: *Dos lebedike vort* (The Living Word).[15] The new edition mostly reproduced the material from 1942 but reorganized it. Comparing the schematic structures of *Mayn shprakhbukh* and *Dos lebedike vort* shows an evolution in the compilers' perspective on the place of Yiddish and Yiddishkeit in America.

Mayn shprakhbukh, divided into eighteen subsections, opens with two sections on children and childhood and one on nature, followed by the Jewish High Holidays, folktales, and the Sabbath. "Our School" and "At Home" take the seventh and eighth spots; eleventh, after "Work," "Folktales," and "Hanukkah," is a section on the then-ongoing destruction of Eastern European Jewry, called "*In shvere teg*" (Amid Hard Days).[16] Fifteenth is the section on Eastern Europe, "Dos yidishe kind in der alter heym" (The Jewish Child in the Old Country), and last is "Amerike" (America).

Dos lebedike vort, released a dozen years later, makes some important adjustments. In the twenty-one sections of *Dos lebedike vort*, the one on songs, poems, and short stories on the Holocaust—"Shvere teg" (Difficult Days)—is similarly ordered, coming twelfth. An addition is a section on Israel, in tenth position, and America is moved up to fourth, after opening sections on children, the High Holidays, and folktales. The section on Eastern Europe is last. In between all of these, as in *Mayn shprakhbukh*, are sections on Jewish holidays that fix the content within a broader framework that marks Jewish time.

Tables of contents are taxonomical structures that impose order on information. The major difference between these books from 1942 and 1954 is their taxonomy, most noticeably their placement of Eastern Europe and America. Both books are structured loosely according to the Jewish calendar, spanning the annual holidays, and both books place the sections on Eastern Europe and America last, after *Shevues* (Shavuot), the final holiday before the end of the Jewish year; both Eastern Europe and America are therefore external to the flow of Jewish time. However, if in 1942 "Amerike" comes last, it is because the idea of America serves as an open door to opportunity, possibility, and salvation, extending beyond the terrible present moment.

By 1954, the section on Eastern Europe comes last because its destruction has irrevocably ruptured the Jewish temporal flow. In 1942, America is where the compilers of this book want Yiddish to be; by 1954, Eastern Europe is whence they wish it could return.

The title alone conveys this desire. Retitling the book *Dos lebedike vort* was an allusion to a well-known Polish Yiddish primer by the same name compiled by the late Sh. Bastomski and Z. Reyzen, who as Bass and Yefroikin explain in their "To the Teacher" notes, "perished together with their reading primer in the tragic days of the greatest atrocity committed against our people. May this present book be named after a book that perished."[17] The book's title is a necronym serving a memorial function, explicitly invoking the Jewish practice of naming children after deceased relatives to honour the dead. Like its authors, the original *Dos lebedike vort* did not survive the horrors of the Holocaust. In the eyes of Bez and Yefroykin, their book and the children who would use it would transform the ruins of the Jewish past into raw building material for the Jewish future.

Within the pages of postwar Yiddish primers, then, the relationship between Yiddish, Yiddishkeit, home, and school is foregrounded upon locating all of these in post-Holocaust America. One's sense of self, bound up with language and ethnic distinctiveness, was now also bound up with the challenge of exchanging the old country for the new. In this new environment, Jewishness was located in the nation. These books place a Yiddish filter on American life, suggesting that both Yiddish and Yiddishkeit could become naturalized, along with one's citizenship, in *di goldene medine* (the Golden Land).

Yidishe kinder: The Jewish Child and/in Yiddish

As the 1950s gave way to the 1960s, Yiddish representations of Jewish belonging in America grew moss while opportunities for inclusion in society increasingly expanded. At the same time, spoken Yiddish among secular Jews retracted. The need for negotiating one's Jewishness and sense of national belonging in Yiddish lost its potency. To an ever-greater degree, Yiddish and Yiddishkeit were located at home and school—and in fact, practically nowhere else. A new evaluation of those spaces was needed, and in 1959 the basal reader *Yidishe kinder* (Jewish Children; also, Yiddish Children) provided one.

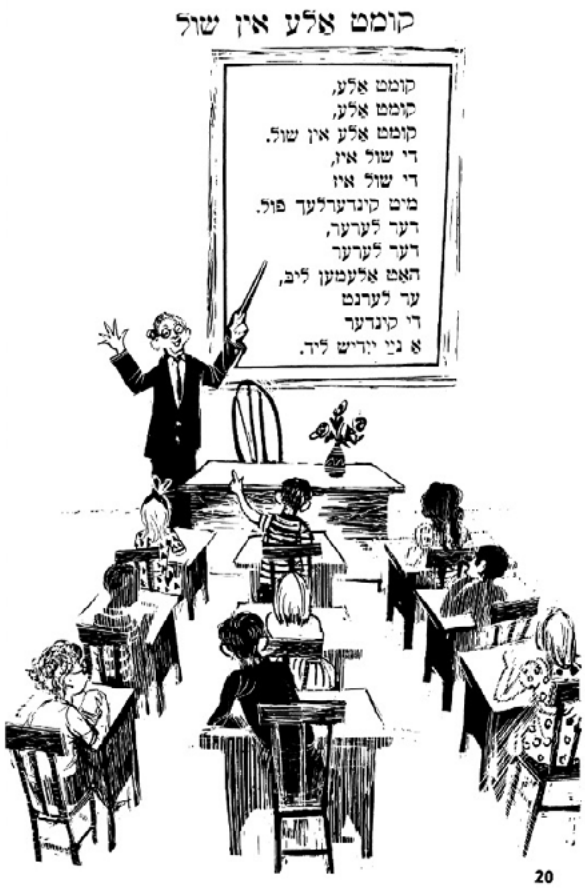
Yidishe kinder was conceived as a renewed approach to the Yiddish primer. The longtime Workmen's Circle educator Yosl Mlotek explains in "A Word from the Author" that *Yidishe kinder* was produced with the child in mind, with new illustrations and musical notation to enliven the classroom. Prominent teachers were among the book's supporters, contributors, and manuscript reviewers. The composer Mikhl Gelbart contributed musical notation to accompany song lyrics and enliven the

classroom experience. "I hope this book," Mlotek concludes, "…will help the Yiddish school across the globe and the Yiddish teacher in his mission to bring the Jewish child closer to the Yiddish word (*vort*) and Jewish values (*vertn*)."[18]

Immediately, *Yidishe kinder* delivers on Mlotek's hope. Like *Der onheyber* (1947) and *In der heym un in shul* (1951), *Yidishe kinder*'s main characters, siblings Motele and Gitele, move between home and school. However, from the opening scene of this book, home and school are cleverly constructed as the sites of another, more nuanced dynamic: the way Yiddish generates Yiddishkeit. Home and school remain sites of engagement with language and identity, but here the language does not only express Jewishness—it actually produces it. The book opens with the children arriving at school and the teacher leading them in Yiddish song. Then Motele produces his own. "Ikh ken a yidish lid, lerer" (I know a Yiddish song, Teacher), he says, and sings: "Ikh bin a yidish kind, ikh zing a yidish lid" (I am a Jewish child, I sing a Yiddish song). The word *yidish* (Jewish) produces two meanings, at once referring both to the language and to Motele's membership within the Jewish people. This song is a forceful affirmation of Motele's understanding of his own identity, and of the role of Yiddish in forming that identity. Yiddish language and Yiddishkeit are not merely two halves of a whole; rather, Yiddish language is a fundamental element to realizing the Jewish self. Yiddish language and Jewish identification are intertwined with one another.

Compared to earlier primers, the vignettes in *Yidishe kinder* do not vary significantly in form. Scenarios cohere to patterns of social interaction and hierarchy that convey typical roles and expectations within the postwar American nuclear family, also observable in other basal readers of the day—male characters (boys and their fathers) play specified roles, usually as initiators of a sequence; female characters (girls and their mothers) respond and observe in appropriate ways; and small children experiment but are ultimately ushered toward prescribed conventional behaviour.[19]

More interesting here than the idealized social roles of these characters is the way Yiddish features in this narrative and indeed, in every scenario in this book. Demonstrating one's Yiddish knowledge, as well as one's Jewish knowledge *in Yiddish*, is superimposed over the models of social interaction that comprise the primer. Where Yiddish language in *In der heym un shul* is a means to an end—to model desired social relationships and behaviour—in *Yidishe kinder* Yiddish is both the means and the end. The emphasis shifts from situations of moral didacticism to scenarios where children develop a sense of Jewishness by demonstrating their knowledge and mastery of the Yiddish language.



Yosl Mlotek, *Yidishe kinder: alef* (New York: Workmen's Circle, 1959), 20.

For instance, at school one day Gitele produces a rhyme about visitor from abroad, a cousin of one of her schoolmates. "I can make a song of rhymes! From the land Argentina / Comes a girl, Dina / She is Perele's *kuzine* (cousin)." Dina replies: "I can also make Yiddish rhymes. I can sing many songs," and she does, adding, "...We [also] have Yiddish schools." Leybele, a boy in class, responds with incredulity: "I did not know there were Jews in Argentina at all."[20] Dina's Yiddish points to her embeddedness in a Jewish community where Yiddish education is proudly valued. Dina's display is evidence that she can keep up in a Yiddish environment, despite being far from her own. The language is the key to community engagement, no matter where. Elsewhere too, Yiddish is offered as an opportunity to join in: children bring songs home from school and parents and grandparents respond with their own clever Yiddish ditties. Repeatedly, Yiddish is how one proves oneself to others and participates in community. As the author Mlotek intended, the Yiddish *vort* translates to Yiddish *vert* (worth).

The value of Yiddish is amplified in its most engaging form in the figure of the children's uncle, the jovial and playful Melekh. His visit to the family's home for Motele's eighth birthday is a high point in the primer and the longest sequence of related content, spanning six pages. A new character first introduced in this 1959 primer, Melekh is a magician and a raconteur with a performer's spirit. "[The children] know that when Uncle Melekh comes, it will be joyful in the house. Uncle Melekh can perform nice tricks. He can sing happy songs. He can tell nice stories. He can speak in rhyme."[21] In addition to entertaining the children with a disappearing penny and shadow puppets, Melekh plays word games with them, rhyming and riddling to the children's delight. At the root of Melekh's jollity is his aptitude as a Yiddish wordsmith. His linguistic virtuosity and his playful approach to language set him apart from other adults, whose interaction with the children is more limited. For young people engaging with Yiddish from within an English-speaking milieu, Melekh's fluency serves as a model of how to engage meaningfully, and playfully, with the language.

In these ways, *Yidishe kinder* insists that one way to define the Jewish self is through language: here, the language is a conduit for Jewishness. Yiddish *is Yiddishkeit*. The title suggests as much: this is a book where characters are both Jewish children and Yiddish ones, where language is constitutive of one's identity. The production of Yiddish is therefore existentially consequential, as Motele stated clearly in his song: "I am a Jewish/Yiddish child; I sing a Yiddish song." By emphasizing the language as a container for one's Jewishness, attention shifts away from the concrete places of home, school, or indeed America. The text is pervaded instead by a sense of geographical dislocation. The characters inhabit a world with no visual or spoken cues as to time or location. Other than the occasional appearance of Jewish holidays, the universe of *Yidishe kinder* is devoid of markers indicating a Jewish past or future; there is no Holocaust here. This dislocation is further conveyed by the illustrations, which feature floating images of children walking to school, sitting in a classroom, or eating dinner at home. Neither home nor the classroom has a floor or ceiling; the blackboard and the dining table alike float in the air, unmoored. The images hover on the page alongside narratives disconnected from one another, lending a dreamlike quality to the vignettes in the book and suffusing them with a sense of boundlessness.

Children who encountered Yiddish language materials in the Toronto Yiddish *shule* from the late 1950s to the early 1970s inhabited a complex linguistic landscape that challenged that sense of Yiddish limitlessness. Inside the universe of the basal reader Yiddish was an official language of existential concern, and its lack of rooted specificity set it free to be conjured spontaneously wherever Yiddish speakers found themselves. Outside the pages of the textbooks, other languages in Canada had become a matter of national politics and policy. In 1969 the first federal Official Languages Act was adopted, declaring English and French to be the two official languages of Canada; mandatory instruction in elementary schools soon followed. Yiddish occupied

more humble quarters, like the supplementary afternoon schools where the generation born and acculturated in Canada was developing its own way of relating to the language and its meaning. Those children inscribed their relationship to Yiddish in doodles, drawings, reader annotations, and captions in their schoolbooks; it is to that context and that marginalia we now turn.

Yiddish and Yiddishkeit in Toronto

Yiddish primers from the 1940s and 1950s, read together with doodles left by students in the 1960s and 1970s, document how the meaning of Yiddishkeit changed over time as these books changed hands between generations. Postwar Yiddish educational materials couple language and identity, locating the heart of Jewishness in the Yiddish language. Children who used these materials implicitly questioned the inseparability of language to the Jewish self. They found that Yiddishkeit was accessible in more ways than through the Yiddish language, and offered a no less profound valuation of Yiddishkeit that locates its power beyond the bounds of language. Studying Yiddish in a declining tuitional setting into the 1970s, these students perceived that Yiddishkeit was far more vibrant and transferrable than their primers imagined it could be.

In books passed from student to student, such as the 1954 edition of *Dos lebedike vort* in use in Toronto in the late 1950s, a cacophony of overlapping dialogues fights for space on overcrowded end pages. Frederick Thomas Attenborough analyzes student marginalia like this in university library textbooks, which because of their nature as shared texts become sites of student interaction where private doodles become public, where "any current user of a textbook has the ability to interact with the 'traces' of previous users."[22] In the privacy of reading (as distinct from the public forum of class discussion), Attenborough finds, these inscriptions amount to a performative negotiation of personal identity in which students may adopt on a role ranging from that of a critical expert to that of a disgruntled underminer. On the inside cover and opposing end page of *Dos lebedike vort*, a similar dynamic is at play. Doodlers take on personas that engage in dialogue with one another. The page transforms into a schoolyard where students prod one another, experiment with different tones, and pass imaginary judgment upon peers. "Do you know Rachel?" "No," another replies, "and I don't care to." "Too bad, she's nice," replies another. Centimetres away, Michael Blackburg's name is written in English below Shmuel Shvartzberg in Yiddish, penned by the same hand in an act of self-translation that indicates a consciousness about the different forms that names, and perhaps the people bearing those names, can take in varying linguistic contexts. Dovid Vantman/David Wallman, following suit, appears nearby.

In another copy of *Dos lebedike vort*, someone has drawn Canadian coins; on the inside front cover, opposite, someone has scrawled "Toronto" ad infinitum, filling the entirety of the page. Studies have shown that doodling is more than daydreaming. It is "one way of expressing cognitive, psychomotor, and affective experiences beyond ordinary words," writes Geraldine Siagto-Wakat in her analysis of doodles as evidence of anxiety in the language classroom.[23] As readers of this material, the choice of the word to practice—not the scrawler's own name, or someone else's, but "Toronto," which exaggeratedly fills the inside cover—we are drawn to reflect upon the urban environment where these children attended their Yiddish *shule*.

By the late 1950s, Yiddish had receded from mainstream Jewish life in Toronto. Sandy F., who was born in 1948 to parents who had survived the Holocaust, came to Toronto at the age of one. Her parents were active members of the Workmen's Circle after their arrival in Canada and raised Sandy and her brother in Yiddish at home. They both attended the *shule*, which, Sandy emphasizes, took up an extraordinary amount of time: Monday to Thursday from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m., and Sunday mornings. On principle, the family did not attend synagogue for any reason. They did not fast on Yom Kippur. *Shule* kids, Sandy explained in an interview, were conscious that their experience as Jews was unique. "We were anomalous in the community, A, because we were secular and this was our thing—but also, I was a kid of Holocaust survivors. We were *grine* (green, or "recent immigrants"), not *hige* (local, or "Canadian"). Those things made a big difference in terms of the community at large. I never felt mainstream Jewish—and I didn't care. I just knew that wasn't *my* thing."[24] Rather, the *shule* provided a sense of Jewishness and belonging.

The Holocaust did too, and its commemoration was central to the students' education and sense of community. "It was in my DNA," Sandy said, and she and her fellow students routinely performed elaborate programs of poetry and song to memorialize the lost world of their parents. Once, on the stage of Toronto's Victory Theatre, they sang "*Kh'heys Yisrolik*," (My Name is Yisrolik) a song about a child orphaned in the ghetto. Sandy recalled that during the song, her best friend would poke her toes through the top of her Mary-Jane shoes, sending Sandy into a fit of giggles: "We got into *so much* trouble." The Holocaust weighed upon their shoulders and humour served as a way to cope with the displaced trauma of the adults around them. Teachers, many of whom were themselves adults traumatized by the war, had no patience for the irreverence of the students. "Our teacher would lift a kid by the ear, he would grab them by the hair...."[25] But this did little to deter the children, and only amused them further.

Ida B.'s parents immigrated from Denmark, also in 1948. Like Sandy, she attended after-school Yiddish school consistently from grades 1 through 7. Her father was a committed Yiddishist and the son of a prominent Yiddish educator in Copenhagen, and though he tried to impart his love for Yiddish on his children, Ida resented

the considerable time she spent at *shule* and attended only to please her father. She describes the environment as distinct from public school: at public school, students did exactly as they were told, feared their teachers, and dared not disrupt. At Yiddish school, students disrespected both the teachers and the building. "Some people didn't take it seriously," Ida recalled, remembering the floor covered in sunflower seed shells. "You would never do that in public school."[26]

Thinking back, Ida states that her sense of Yiddishkeit was tied to the *shule*. "There was no Hebrew in my house, there was no kosher in my house … My father was very much against anything that had to do with *religion*…. There was no religion in my house whatsoever. Yiddish filled the gap…. A sense of Jewishness came, I think, only from the Yiddish. It didn't come from anything religious, because at the time the way I was raised, you saw it as us and them—them being the Orthodox, or those that kept kosher…. My brother didn't even have a bar mitzvah…. My sense of Jewishness came from Yiddish school, and nothing else."[27]

However, that sense of Jewishness mattered very little to Ida as a tween. As she recalled graduating from the *shule* at thirteen, she laughed: "I was *free*! Redemption!" Enrolment had fallen steadily during her time at the *shule*. When she began in grade 1, there were full classes of about fifteen students. By the time she graduated, class sizes had shrunk to five or six. Of her years there, Ida said: "It was done for my parents. It wasn't done so much for me. And—I haven't done anything with Yiddish since."[28]

Sandy and Ida's memories validate an oft-repeated truism about the Yiddish *shule*: kids hated it. They cared very little, if at all, about the intertwined ethnic and linguistic program reflected in their schoolbooks. In hindsight they acknowledge that in the fiercely secularist environment of Diaspora Yiddishism, the *shule* was in fact their primary source of Yiddishkeit. They also acknowledge that though the language played a marginal role in their lives beyond those years at the school, the *shule* deeply influenced them as Jews. Both owe their deep and ongoing interest in Jewish culture to the *shule*. The relationship between Yiddish language and Yiddishkeit—a sense of ethnic Jewishness beyond that conveyed by the religious trappings of ritual or theology—was different for this post-Holocaust generation born and raised in Canada. The schoolbooks depicted a Yiddishland whose national language was Yiddish. There, Yiddish was a way to move through the world and to understand one's own identity. By the 1970s at the Toronto Workmen's Circle school, that was not the world children inhabited.

Yiddishkeit without Yiddish: A Case Study of One Student's Reader Annotations

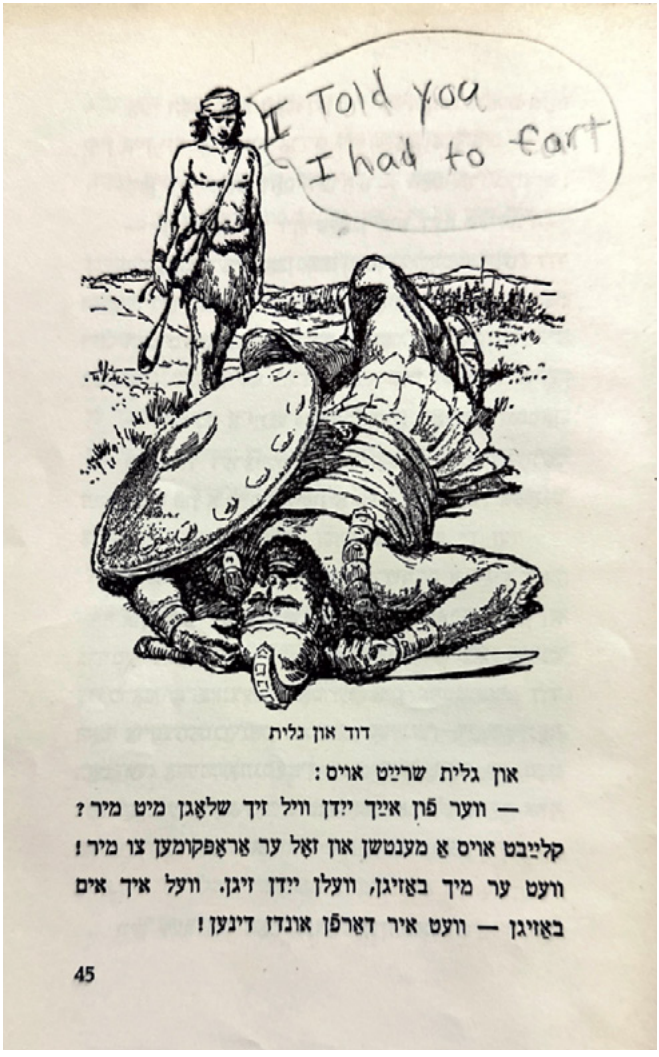
Most of the marginal inscriptions and doodles are external to the texts they appear next to, such that the relationship of the scribble to the content at hand is not immediately clear. The power differential between author, whose voice remains authoritative throughout the book, and commentator, whose voice is limited to the inside cover and end pages, is stable. Students, in general, dare not enter the text itself. The reader asserts themselves with restraint. An exception is a 1955 inscription by a student who boldly inserts himself onto a page from Dvoyre Tarant's *Mayn yidish bukh* (My Yiddish Book), published first in the US in 1944 by the secular left-wing Jewish People's Fraternal Order.[29] Under a lesson in gender-modified adjectives on page 46 that reads, "*Der tate iz a foter. Der tate iz a guter. Er git mir a bal. Er shpilt mit mir. Er git mir a peni*," (Dad is a father. Dad is good. He gives me a ball. He plays with me. He gives me a penny"), with the equivalent feminine modifications for *mame* there is a cursive note: "Marvan read this page on Tuesday, Dec. 6, 1955 in Jewish school." Heather Jackson calls this an "act of self-assertive appropriation," which goes a step further than simply writing one's name in book to indicate ownership.[30] Marvan insists here on his own readerly presence and his own specificity, which contrasts so sharply with the bland universalism of the unnamed "*mame*," "*tate*," (described, even more blandly, as "good") that it feels like a vociferous (and cheeky) protest against the meek anonymity, vagueness, nobody-ness, and nowhere-ness of the page.

However, the copy of Y. Noskovitch's 1962 *Mayn folk: geshikhte far der elementar-shul, ershter teyl* (My People: History for Elementary School, Part One) mentioned at the top of this study, presents an altogether different kind of doodle. Here the commentator both usurps the principal author's control of the text and boldly undermines key biblical legends in a display of extraordinary comic genius and, well, chutzpah. Of the roughly twenty-five illustrations of biblical figures and scenes from the Books of Judges and Prophets that appear here, reproduced from synagogue publications, Stephen Goren (whose name is inscribed in English cursive on the inside cover) treated his textbook like the blank panels of a comic book and added speech bubbles and dialogue to almost all. Consistently, they are absurdist interjections into foundational moments in the biblical narrative that add cheeky panache to the famously terse text, which in this book is summarized in simplified Yiddish. Paragons of piety, divinely anointed enthroned royalty, or fearsome warriors—as portrayed by the secular Yiddish schools—these individuals are divested of their sanctity and portrayed as no more than historical figures of the ancient Jewish past. Goren humanizes them to an even greater degree, filling their mouths with expressions of frustration, incredulity, and disbelief at issues of personal hygiene. With subtlety and nuance, these reader annotations convey where one student located *Yiddishkeit*: far beyond the *shule* or the Yiddish language.

Mayn folk presents in simple vernacular Yiddish, the tales and legends of the Books of Prophets, Judges, Kings, and Chronicles. It follows the Jewish people on their destined, glorious, and ultimately tragic path into the Promised Land. The first annotation appears on page 11, overlapping the drawn sword of an austere-looking, black-bearded Joshua, the prophet, warrior, and successor to Moses. "Hi Hitler," it says.[31] As attested to by Sandy F. and Ida B., teachers at the Peretz *shule* were by the 1950s largely Holocaust survivors, the students almost entirely children of survivors. Very few students had grandparents. This created a particular environment around the Yiddish language, which was overlaid with generational trauma and the heavy absence of those who did not survive. Holocaust commemoration events at the school were annual opportunities for survivor parents and teachers to put students centre stage as representatives of the endurance of the Jewish people. Sandy recalls another ghetto commemoration ceremony where she was asked to recite a poem. At the word "*veynen*" (to cry), she burst out in a fit of uncontrollable giggles and was pulled off stage.[32] Hers was not a unique experience, where Yiddish school was suffused with trauma that was too great to be comprehensible for kids whose only recourse to cut through the tension was laughter and comedy. "Hi Hitler" explicitly frames this post-Holocaust atmosphere. The juxtaposition of the biblical Joshua with Hitler (perhaps united in this student's imagination by the severity of their gaze and their austere facial hair) conveys the discomfort of the environmental conditions of these children's Yiddish education, where traumatized parents left children to navigate a terrain in which they were symbols of the Jewish future. The pages of a schoolbook are an adult-free zone, a no-man's-land for the oversight of parents. It is a space of absolute freedom of thought and expression, a space ruled by children and their imaginations, where "Hi Hitler," reduces the menacing, forbidden "Heil" into a simple, playful, and unthreatening "Hi."

Like other schoolbooks, but differently inflected, the Yiddish primer is a place to explore the taboo, the things that are uncomfortable, rude, or forbidden to discuss around grownups. Whether Hitler or bodily functions, both serve a similar function in the context of a doodle. Proposing a theory of the "intimate graffiti of doodles," folklorist David Allen Ensminger argues that "within the margins of the page, a brief suspension of boundaries and borders, authority and power, occurs. The reader hides in anonymity, free to reroute the meaning of the book."[33] Near an illustration labeled "Gideon klaybt oys zayn armey" (Gideon selects his army), in which the military leader and prophet Gideon looks over his shoulder, surveying soldiers gathered behind him, Goren added the warning, "If anyone farts…."[34] At the fall of Samaria to the Assyrian Empire, a frieze depicts two soldiers marching in line, one in front of the other. The fearsome foe responsible for the destruction and captivity of the Kingdom of Israel apparently has other things on its mind, when the soldier at the rear asks the other: "Did you fart?"[35] And of course, there is the warning about flatulence that went unheeded that animates the illustration of David and Goliath. There, the

punchline contains insight. "I told you I had to fart," says David.[36] Goren's caption amplifies Goliath's fatal flaw: underestimating his opponent. The reader has read, and grasped, a pivotal dramatic moment of Jewish legendary literature and translated it into a sketch, rendering the Bible a situational comedy with precise timing and succinct punchlines. In doing so, as Ensminger might suggest, Goren has suspended the authority of the text.



Y. Noskovitz, *Mayn folk* (New York: Workmen's Circle, 1962), 45.

ירמיה מוראגט דעם יאך פון בבל

איר מיינט אז דאס וועט אייך העלפן.
ניין, נאר וועט צעשטערן דעם בית־המקדש,
די שטאט ירושלים וועט צעשטערט ווערן!
די מענטשן וואס האבן דאס געהערט זיינען געוואָרן
זייער אין כעס. מע האט ירמיהן געוואלט טייטן. מע
האט אבער מורא געהאט צו טייטן א נביא. מע האט
אים געלאזט פריי.
ירמיה האט מורא געהאט אז בבל וועט באפאלן
דאס יידישע לאנד. ער האט געזאגט:
— שיקט מתנות קיין בבל.
ירמיהס תלמיד ברוך האט געלייענט פאָרן פאָלק די

127

Y. Noskovitz, *Mayn folk* (New York: Workmen's Circle, 1962), 127.

Personal hygiene indiscretions recur in a number of annotations that render biblical scenes into advertising for consumer products. In a scene labeled "Shimshen tserayst dem leyb" (Samson tears apart the lion), the mighty Samson is transformed into a dentist issuing diagnoses. "You got junmgle [sic] mouth," it says in a speech bubble emitting from Samson's mouth, as he stands over the lion, grasping it firmly by the jaws.[37] In an illustration where the prophet Samuel anoints Saul as King of Israel, Saul, head bowed in humility beneath a jug of oil, punctures the inflated moment of national grandeur with a complaint: "I washed my hair and I can't do a thing with it!"[38] A section titled "Tsores fun kinder" (Aggravation from Children) recounts the woeful, worrisome, and troubled life of David's beloved son Absalom. At its conclusion, Absalom kneels before his father the king. David holds his son's head to his chest, nestling his chin in Absalom's cascading hair. It is a heartrending scene of a famously complex relationship between father and son. "You've got dandruff!" interjects a guard standing nearby. "Have you tried Head and Shoulders?" asks a speech bubble

hanging over David's head.[39] A sailor loading one of the many ships of King Solomon exclaims, "Old Spice has come a long way!"[40] Several pages later a scene depicting the dramatic Judgment of Solomon, often rendered by classical painters, is populated by speech bubbles that make Solomon as well as many of the onlookers in his court exclaim, "B.O! B.O!"[41] An image of a yoked and shackled Jeremiah the Prophet warning the people against falling subject to Nebuchadnezzar says, ironically, through a flowing white beard, "I use Shick [sic]. Dont [sic] believe me? Tell me to my face."[42]

Taboo language also appears in the reader annotations in *Mayn folk*. The section on King David ends with the battlefield death of Absalom, his beautiful long hair his undoing. An illustration shows him contorted, caught in the boughs of an oak tree, back arched backward as he is unseated from his galloping horse, yelling in a speech bubble added by Goren, "You dummy, my cock is showing!" while the distressed horse, eyes popping, replies, "Tuf luck hansome [sic]."[43] Where king Ahab is warned by Elijah the Prophet to abolish idolatry in the land, lest no rain fall, Goren inserts into Elijah's mouth a pointed observation that foretells the fateful story of greed that has yet to unfold: "You fucked already," says the prophet, pointing a finger at a beleaguered-looking Ahab.[44] These expletives are more than filler. Much like Goren's personal hygiene jokes, these capture a more profound meaning that the biblical illustrations fail to communicate. Absalom is indeed known for being vainglorious, and Elijah's warning to Ahab was indeed more of a sentencing. To understand that, one must take a view of the biblical narrative in full. This student is therefore not doodling in aimless distraction. His commentary actually enhances the text before him, revealing the sophisticated way this reader assimilated a deep understanding of the Jewish text with his own means of self-expression.

Two clues help us date these annotations. Page 23 pictures the prophetess Deborah clad in heavy robes and pointing skyward. "Flying Nun," Goren offers in the margin, cheekily aligning Deborah with another robed religious figure, the titular character of the fantasy sitcom that starred Sally Field as Sister Bertrille, a nun who becomes airborne when the wind gets caught in her cornette, and which aired on television from 1967 to 1970.[45] Page 134 features an adaptation of nineteenth-century German Jewish painter Eduard Bendemann's *Jeremiah Among The Ruins of Jerusalem*. The prophet is slumped and forlorn, surrounded by others crying out in hopeless distress, hand hovering at his mouth as he weeps. "Lavoris makes you pucker," Goren adds, turning Jeremiah's anguish into disgust at Lavoris, a notoriously astringent cinnamon-flavoured mouthwash whose jingle in a 1971 television commercial went, "Use Lavoris and you're pucker power clean!"[46]

Dating the doodles and reader-added dialogue in *Mayn folk* is critical to grasping their significance on the page of a Yiddish schoolbook. Goren's dialogic annotations bear all the hallmarks of the quick-witted, intelligent situational comedy that filled television airwaves of the era, especially that of David Steinberg. Steinberg was a

prominent Jewish comedian originally from Winnipeg who attained mass appeal and exposure, appearing on *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson* one hundred and thirty times from the late 1960s into the early 1970s and frequently serving as guest host. In particular, the punchy one-liners Goren inserts into the biblical scenes of *Mayn folk* recall an iconic Steinberg bit—performed in his first appearance on *The Tonight Show* in 1968—in which he, assuming the role of pulpit rabbi, would produce spontaneous sermons on Old Testament figures, punctuating the biblical narrative with absurdist observation and dialogue along the way.[47] Identifying Steinberg as an influence on this particular Yiddish *shule* student helps to locate these reader annotations temporally in the early 1970s and culturally within an popular culture environment that saw Jewish-inflected humour translated for an English-speaking, largely non-Jewish audience. These captions, therefore, cohere to a lineage of Jewish comedians from Yiddish-speaking environments adapting their irreverent, transgressive Jewish humour for mainstream Canadian and American audiences, thus blurring the boundary between Jewish and not.

Sandy F. recalled that her family gathered together to watch Jewish comedians on television. They took tremendous pride in these Jewish performers who had crossed over into mainstream entertainment and taken their Yiddishkeit with them.[48] To be sure, the irreverence that was finding its way into American comedy came from Yiddish stock. The translator and poet Benjamin Harshav theorizes Yiddish folklore as "a unique combination of attitudes from a socioeconomic lower class with those of an intellectual elite." Harshav explains: "The Jews were poor but, at the same time, they were, in their own eyes, a fallen aristocracy of the mind, conscious of their history, of their mission, and of ideological attitudes in general."[49] This view understands Yiddish as the culture of a Chosen People whose material lives and social positions reflected something less than nobility, but who clung to the possibilities of scaling the heights of wit and wisdom; in other words, this was a people who survived by relying on their abilities to outsmart their surroundings. Absorbing the tenor of comedians through television, but also through Yiddish poetry, folklore, and history at *shule*, Goren attempted to outwit the dry biblical narratives in his textbook, which had become their own kind of oppressive ideology. For students like him, legendary tales of the Jewish nation were less impactful than the grand adventure they were currently experiencing: shaping a Canadian Jewish identity that was at home in North American Anglo culture, not apart from it.

The comedian Lenny Bruce, an influence on Steinberg and dozens of other Jewish comedians, famously liked to divide the world into two categories, Jewish and "goyish." "It doesn't matter even if you're Catholic," Bruce said, "if you live in New York, you're Jewish." Historian David Biale describes Bruce's idiosyncratic definition of "Jewish" as "a kind of urban, ethnic, secular irreverence"—the very same that reverberates in the doodles of this copy of *Mayn Folk*.[50] If Yiddish *shule* primers offered one vision of Jewish life in America, Bruce and those like him offered another. In this

version, a Jewish kid from Canada could infuse the stories like those in *Mayn Folk* into the wider (and non-Jewish) American bloodstream through comedy and social commentary. Those who had been until recently excluded from mainstream national culture could now shape it using precisely the raw material that both kept them a people apart *and* ensured the sustenance of their peoplehood. Stephen Goren's doodles and annotations indicate that as Anglo North American culture was becoming more socially, politically, and sexually permissive, kids like Goren began to see that Jews did not have to camouflage quietly into America or Canada, hiding their Jewishness or maintaining it separately—instead, they could absorb their surroundings in precisely the way the primers fantasize, drawing upon the familiar *mameloshn* and the irreverence offered by Yiddish culture and Yiddishkeit to navigate the foreign terrain of *Amerike*. The task of teaching Yiddish to American-born children, Shandler writes, "was implicated with immigrants' need to forge new understandings of Yiddish as an object of cultural heritage, articulating connections between the immigrants' Old World past and their visions for the future of Jewish life in America."[51] As it emerged, however, Yiddish was for these children a language several times removed, a link to a world they would never know and a bygone feature of Jewish life whose relevance was waning. The doodles and commentary they left bear out a development that was both inevitable and unforeseeable: Yiddish culture was not disappearing; it was transforming, becoming (like the people who maintained it) part of America in ways the mid-century translators of "A yidishe meydl un Vashington" and "Linkoln un a yidisher soldat" could only dream.

Though I have argued that the authors of these texts were out of touch with the students who would continue to use their materials for decades, there is something ironic about the Yiddish translation of America that appears in these books. In the original 1920s versions of the "Vashington" and "Linkoln" stories, Revolutionary and Civil War-era Jews speak English, indicating that they are already a natural part of the American landscape. In the Yiddish translations, Washington and Lincoln are translated along with the Jews. If language is critical to one's identity, then effectively—to borrow Lenny Bruce's taxonomy of things—these translators make goyish America and all her citizens Jewish.

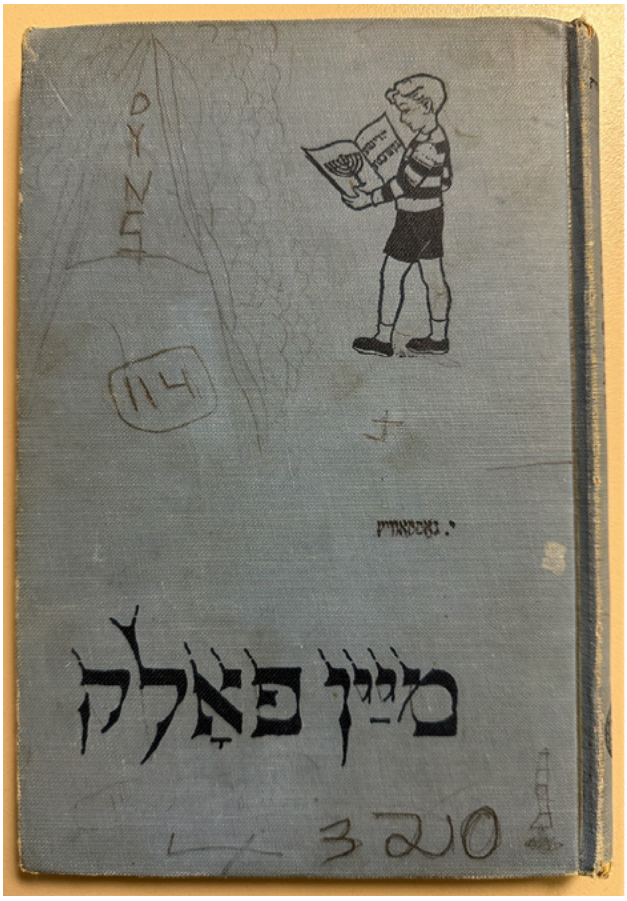
Stephen Goren's reader annotations, too, as they insert 1970s American advertising and entertainment into stories that form the bedrock of Jewish national culture, propose that in his era, the division between the "goyish" and the "Jewish" is far more diaphanous, and perhaps less threatening, than it once seemed. Oddly then, students in Yiddish *shule* in the 1970s and the Jewish immigrants who authored their textbooks twenty years earlier actually agreed on the complex, bewildering, defiant nature of being Jewish in the New World: it was a landscape that would require adaptation, and Yiddishkeit would be crucial building material. Where they disagreed was on the role of Yiddish itself. It is crucial to note that none of this student's reader-added dialogue is in Yiddish; rather, it evinces a grasp of Yiddishkeit that locates a

sense of Jewishness beyond the Yiddish language. Goren's doodles decouple Yiddish from Yiddishkeit, offering a view of Jewishness that was not defined by the Yiddish language, but was informed by the collective sensibility and worldview Yiddish language and culture had produced.

Writing in 1952, the preeminent folklorist Ruth Rubin (herself a graduate of a Canadian *shule*) contended that children's song—a different kind of social and cultural text—was the most interesting category of folksong: "In song are mirrored two worlds: on the one hand, the feelings of the child itself, its temperament, imagination, playfulness, wisdom, humour, and often satire; and on the other hand, the views and sentiments of its elders and certain current events."[52] Rubin was attuned to the affective qualities of children's texts and the nuanced way children expressed themselves within them. While Jeffrey Shandler concludes that "Yiddish primers ultimately tell us more about the aspirations of the adult community than they do about their children's actual experience," books used by cohorts of *shule* children who left their marks, doodles, and scribbles in distinctive ways demand our attention if we are to determine what became of those adult aspirations.[53] If, as Rubin observes, two worlds were reflected in children's song, doodles and other marginalia filled the chasm between them.

Schoolbook doodles and cartoons function as indicators of how Jewish children in Toronto Yiddish schools assimilated a complicated web of information about language, society, and belonging in the decades following the Holocaust. The Yiddishism of their textbooks intersected with messaging about what it meant to be a member of the society in which they lived, resulting in a set of social and linguistic contradictions for children regarding the role and relevance of Yiddish in everyday life. By the late 1960s and early 1970s secular Jewish identity was, for the youngest generation, undergoing a profound change: the Yiddish language as a vehicle for communication grew increasingly irrelevant, while for some, Yiddishkeit itself became encoded into Anglo North American popular culture through the work of Jewish Canadian and American comedians, whose televised jokes and subversiveness reverberate in the doodles of *shule* students.

There are no television sets depicted in the Yiddish primers of the postwar era. But in the bottom-right corner of the cover of 1962's *Mayn folk*, someone has drawn a small rocket ship, blasters alight in takeoff, a symbol of the Space Age this book had stumbled into. Try as they might to inoculate children from the ravages of modernity while placing into their hands and upon their shoulders the language and cultural identity of Ashkenazi civilization, the adults who shaped Yiddish education were unable to venture beyond the margins of the material they produced. They were focused on ensuring a Jewish future that deeply reflected the past. But in the margins is precisely where children offered their responses, projecting a vision that reflected the Jewish present—and boldly embraced the uncertainties of its future.



Y. Noskovitz, *Mayn folk* (New York: Workmen's Circle, 1962).

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2
Y. Noskovitz, *Mayn folk: geshikhte far der elementar-shul, ershter teyl* [My People: History for Elementary School, Part One] (New York: Workmen's Circle Educational Department, 1962), 45. The scene depicts the verse from 1 Samuel 17:49, "David put his hand into the bag; he took out a stone and slung it. It struck the Philistine in the forehead; the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground."

3
Leading studies on marginalia include H.J. Jackson, *Marginalia: Readers Writing in Books* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002) and William H. Sherman, *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); also Heidi Brayman Hackel, *Reading Material in Early Modern England: Print, Gender, and Literacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) and Katherine Acheson, ed., *Early Modern Marginalia* (New York: Routledge, 2018). For studies of schoolbook marginalia, see Stephen Orgel, *The Reader in the Book: A Study of Spaces and Traces* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Nicole Perry, "How to Read: Interpreting Responses to Reformation Change Through Material Interventions Including Marginalia in a 1537 Printed Primer" (master's thesis, Canterbury Christ Church University, 2020).

4
See Dirk Van Hulle and Wim Van Mierlo, eds., *Reading Notes* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), which includes chapters on Franz Kafka, Walter Benjamin, Paul Celan, James Joyce, and Samuel Beckett. Also, Peter Buckridge, "The Ethics of Annotation: Reading, Studying, and Defacing Books in Australia," in *Marginal Notes: Social Reading and the Literal Margins*, eds. Patrick Spedding and Paul Tankard (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

5
Andrew Kear, "Drawing in the Margins: Doodling in Class as an Act of Reclamation" (conference paper, Seventh Annual Dean's Graduate Student Research Conference, University of Toronto, March 2007), 89. See also, for instance, Geraldine Siagto-Wakat, "Doodling the Nerves: Surfacing Language Anxiety Experiences in an English Language Classroom," *RELC Journal* 48, no. 2 (2017): 226-240.

6
Miriam Udel, *Honey on the Page: A Treasury of Yiddish Children's Literature* (New York: NYU Press, 2020).

7
Naomi Prawer Kadar, *Raising Secular Jews: Yiddish Schools and Their Periodicals for American Children, 1917–1950* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2016).

8
Jeffrey Shandler, *Adventures in Yiddishland: Postvernacular Language and Culture* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), especially chapter 2, "Beyond the Mother Tongue."

9
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Shandler, *Adventures in Yiddishland*, 77-78.

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David Bridger, *Der onheyber* [The Beginner] (New York: Matones, 1947).

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Y. Kaminski, *In der heym un in shul: a lernbikhl for onheyber* [At Home and In School: A Primer for Beginners] (New York: Workmen's Circle Educational Department, 1951).

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Hyman Bez and Zalmen Yefroykin, *Mayn shprakhbukh* [My Language-Book] (New York: Workmen's Circle Educational Department, 1942).

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Hyman Bez and Zalmen Yefroykin, *Dos lebedike vort* [The Living Word] (New York: Workmen's Circle Educational Department, 1942).

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It is important to note, as Naomi Prawer Kadar does, that Yiddish schools were some of the earliest sources of current information about the war in Europe and the fate of European Jewry. "The Yiddish schools in America—in contrast to all other American Jewish schools, which did not incorporate into their curricula any information about the Holocaust until the 1960s—included the events of the European tragedy almost as soon as they transpired. The Yiddish schools were the first to report the events of Kristallnacht, November 9, 1938." *Raising Secular Jews*, 156. Also see Diane K. Roskies, *Teaching the Holocaust to Children: A Review and Bibliography* (New York: Ktav, 1975).

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Bez and Yefroykin, *Dos lebedike vort*, 252.

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Yosl Mlotek, *Yidishe kinder: alef* [Jewish Children: Aleph] (New York: Workmen's Circle Educational Department, 1959), 104.

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Frederick Thomas Attenborough, "'I Don't F***ing Care!' Marginalia and the (Textual) Negotiation of an Academic Identity by University Students," *Discourse & Communication* 5, no. 2 (2011): 100.

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Fainer, discussion, March 11, 2024.

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John Cohen, ed., *The Essential Lenny Bruce* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1967), 32-33; David Biale, *Eros and the Jews: From Biblical Israel to Contemporary America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997; 2019), 217.

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Shandler, *Adventures in Yiddishland*, 75.

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