Yiddish and the Field of Translation

Agents, Concepts and Discourses across Time and Space

Edited by
Olaf Terpitz

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Olaf Terpitz

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In cooperation with Marianne Windsperger

BÖHLAU VERLAG WIEN KÖLN WEIMAR

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Olaf Terpitz (University of Graz)

Introduction: Entanglements, Enactments, Receptions

In February 2017, the University of Vienna hosted the EAJS Laboratory on "Yiddish Language and Culture. A Relay Station of Modernity and Lieu de Mémoire of Postmodernity," with the support of the Doctoral Program "Austrian Galicia and its Multicultural Heritage," the Department of German Studies and the Institute for Jewish Studies.[1] The aim of this international workshop was threefold: First, it sought to connect scholars of Yiddish across disciplinary and geographical boundaries, bringing together participants from Europe, the US, Israel and Canada in a city that was once a hub for various forms of Yiddish cultural production. Second, it invited participants to discuss theories of translation and the history of Yiddish translations alongside practitioners, musicians, translators, authors, and educators – all of them being stakeholders in the field of Yiddish studies and working on and with various forms, strategies, and concepts of translation. Third, eventually, it asked – given the central role of Yiddish language, literature and culture to Jewish studies in general – to outline the impact of translational practices in this realm, and thus to highlight the relation between Yiddish studies and conceptualizations of World Literature.

In recent years, research on translation has emerged as a highly relevant field in cultural studies:[2] the translational turn in context with other cultural turns has broadened and sharpened our view on translation, its epistemological, methodological, and critical potential. It has further extended the concept of translation beyond the creative and philological, and developed a broader approach – putting translation in relation to aesthetic, cultural, and political dimensions, and putting forth (and challenging it at the same time) the notion of cultural transfer. Doris Bachmann-Medick, for one, has outlined those complexities in the general debate on translation: "With this wider perspective, the concept of translation risks being diluted into a mere metaphor. It is, therefore, important to delineate the concept more precisely,

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1 See https://yiddish-laboratory.univie.ac.at/ (last access 27.02.2020); for a report on the workshop see https://www.eurojewishstudies.org/colloquia/eajs-programme-in-jewish-studies/eajs-laboratory-report-yiddish-language-and-culture-a-relay-station-of-modernity-and-lieu-de-memoire-of-postmodernity-university-of-vienna-february-2017/ (last access 27.02.2020).

2 See amongst others Pratt, Snell-Hornby, Venuti, Wolf.

by almost microscopically dissecting it into its components (transfer, mediation, transmission, the linguistic dimension, transformation) [...] – including concrete translational activities performed by agents." (Bachmann-Medick 188)

This is exactly where Mikhail Krutikov's contribution "vu lebt di yidishe literatur?" (Where does Yiddish Literature Live?) to the *Forverts* starts when discussing the problem of translation for Yiddish. After stating "hayntiker tsayt leyent men yidishe literatur koydem-kol in iberzetsungen" (today people read Yiddish literature first of all in translation) Krutikov points out succinctly the conditions and contexts of contemporary translations: e.g. what should be translated, in what way, who takes care of printing, disseminating and even sponsoring? (Krutikov) Whereas he focuses mainly on the agents involved, Anita Norich takes up another lead. The Yiddish verb "fartaytshn" does not only mean "to translate," but also "to give meaning." In her book *Writing in Tongues* Norich offers close readings of translations and their Yiddish originals, extrapolating the time-bound cultural meaning that was embedded in the translated texts by the translator.[3] Emily Apter follows a third path: with the concept of "untranslatability" she argues in *The Translation Zone* against trends in theories of World Literature and the literary market to universalize or "homogenize" literatures and cultures, and thus to level their differences.[4]

However, accessibility of the original language material, funding for translation, public interest, and therefore readers are of fundamental importance for the transmission of any literature. Reflections on translation and language, moreover, can not only be found in texts by translators themselves, but also by authors reading translations (of their own texts or by others), and in fictional literature itself. In contemporary novels (in English, French, Spanish, Hebrew and German) acts of reading, writing and translating Yiddish texts are staged. These texts (e.g. Nicole Krauss, Dara Horn) work with images of Yiddish literature that have been broadly shaped by popular culture; some of these texts play with nostalgic images associated with Yiddish language and culture, some invent Yiddish texts mainly as narrative devices,

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3 For further discussions of the role of translation in Jewish literatures generally, see for instance Ernst / Hahn / Hoffmann / Salzer, and Arnold.

4 For a discussion of the dynamic field of the "untranslated," its cultural dimensions and epistemological potential, offering differentiated approaches to translational practices in politics, culture, and literature, see forthcoming Grbić / Korbel / Laister / Schögler / Terpitz / Wolf.

and others try to complicate popular images of the Yiddish language by staging the very act of translation in the novel and by curating Yiddish texts.[5]

This connects directly to the understanding of World Literature as proposed by Lital Levy and Allison Schachter who argue that "the rich, multilingual body of modern Jewish writing exemplifies the dynamic interaction of diverse literary cultures along circuits of exchange in the so-called global peripheries. When Jewish literary studies internalizes a truly comparative and transnational ethos, it can serve as a model for a more expansive conception of world literature – one that voices a clear alternative to the dominant center-periphery paradigm." (105)

Yiddish literature and culture take a central position in Jewish literatures and cultures. Being shaped to a high degree, not least through migration, by encounter, transfer, and transformation, translation in all its cultural varieties and potentials, sustained by writers, translators, journalists amongst others, plays a crucial role in their formation and creation. Besides texts this also encompasses discourses, concepts and medialities.

The present volume "Yiddish and the Field of Translation. Agents, Concepts and Discourses across Time and Space" is dedicated to trace these complex interactions in their time and space-bound constellations, to offer close readings of translations beyond the philological, i.e. in regard to their discursive, aesthetical and societal impact, and to reflect on their theoretical implications for World Literature.

The volume is based on revised contributions of the Vienna workshop as well as it includes contributions by invited authors. It is structured along four thematic sections: the translator, strategies of translation, concepts of translation,[6] and translation and discourse.

The first section engages with the agent central to all translation, the translator. The scope of texts and the way s/he translates depends, though, on a multitude of factors, such as knowledge, own commitments, embeddedness in literary circles, or cultural and societal agendas s/he pursues. The contributions ask how and to what extent the mediating instance of the translator is informed and guided by individual interests that can be as diverse as self-presentation, creating a canon or raising an awareness for particular texts.

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5 See for detailed reflections Windsperger; see also Lavieri (95) and Jeffrey Shandler's notion of Yiddish as "postvernacular" (Shandler).

6 This complex was published earlier as special issue in the online journal *In geveb. A Journal of Yiddish Studies*: Olaf Terpitz, Marianne Windsperger (eds.). Translation: Poetics, Negotiation, Tradaptation. *In geveb* 2019. https://ingeveb.org/issues/translation-poetics-negotiation-tradaptation (last access 27.02.2020).

In the second section "Strategies of Translation" the contributions ask in which ways an assumed readership influences, even shapes translational approaches and practices. They seek to highlight how texts in translation are adjusted, some might even say are "manipulated," according to the time and context informed abilities and expertise of the readership.

The contributions of the third section "Concepts of Translation" showcase the performative dimension of translation: Musicians and poets draw attention to the interactions between languages, phonetic experiences, rhythm, rhyme, and the productive use of misunderstandings. Critical reflections on their own translations, and the role performed by agents such as editors, engender the question of what it means to be a writer or reader in multilingual settings. They emphasize, moreover, the moment of "experience" – the moment when originals, translations, translators, and other actors meet in public and in private, while negotiating between different forms of expectations.

The last section gathers contributions that address the embeddedness of translations in public discourses. This concerns in general processes of reception that mirror political contexts, societal needs and constrictions, but also transgressive forms of emancipation and self-empowerment. They mark, thus, the fault zones of translation by asking in which ways translations are used to project ideas of societal engagement or, *mutatis mutandis*, become a project screen for political instrumentalization.

The contributions to this volume seek, in short, to negotiate the dynamic field between Yiddish studies, translation and world literature in different spatial and temporal contexts. Focusing on phenomena of translation in Yiddish literature and culture it hopes to deliver insights into the *glocal* Yiddish cultural production as well as incentives to current transdisciplinary cultural theories.

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The Translator

Beruriah Wiegand (University of Oxford)

The Yiddish Bashevis and His American Construct I.B. Singer

Questions of Language, Translation and Betrayal

I.

While writers, in general, tend to reveal themselves through their use of language, the case of the Yiddish writer Yitskhok Bashevis is more complicated, because, as Joseph Sherman has shown, "the discourse of his Yiddish texts differs markedly from that of the best-selling translations of them" made under the supervision of his American construct I.B. Singer. (Sherman, "Bashevis / Singer". Wolitz 14) Scholars of Isaac Bashevis Singer's works who read both Yiddish and English have long been struggling with the question about the exact relationship between his Yiddish originals and the popular English versions of his texts. In English, there are thirteen novels and twelve collections of short stories in book form, plus the three volumes of Singer's *Collected Stories* published by the Library of America in 2004, which include all the earlier collections as well as some previously uncollected stories. There are also five volumes of memoirs, fourteen collections of children's stories and various anthologies. But in Yiddish book form, there are only five novels, three collections of short stories and two volumes of memoirs. All of Bashevis's other works in the Yiddish original (both those that have been translated into English and those that have not been translated as yet) are only extant in back copies of the Yiddish פֿאָרווערטס (Forward) and other Yiddish periodicals and literary journals. Thus we have two very different "corpora" of Bashevis's writings, a smaller Yiddish corpus and a much larger English one, in which we encounter texts that are not merely "translations", but "works recast by the author and Englished by a whole team of collaborators". (Sherman, "Translating". Denman 50) Once the Yiddish writer Bashevis had been able to establish a name for himself in English translation under the name of I.B. Singer, it was his standard practice to sit with his Yiddish manuscripts with various so-called translators, many of whom had little or no knowledge of Yiddish. He would dictate his own rough translations to his collaborators, whose main task was to check his grammar and to put his prose into more idiomatic English. But in this process, Bashevis clearly overestimated his ability to judge stylistic niceties in English. Although Bashevis himself spoke of the English translations as

"co-originals" and was often able to edit his Yiddish texts during the process of translation and tighten up his narratives, the English texts were often "deprived of subtlety of register" and "of much of the accurately observed cultural detail that characterise his Yiddish prose fiction", as Hugh Denman has pointed out in his introduction to the volume *Isaac Bashevis Singer: His Work and His World*. (Denman 2) In his own native Yiddish, Bashevis possessed a special feel for register and a stylistic mastery, which he completely lacked in English.

II.

Apart from employing various styles of Yiddish narrative prose, Bashevis could also imitate the style of rabbinic writing, as well as the style of seventeenth century *mayse-bikhlekh* (chapbooks), as he has done so masterfully in his first novel, *דער שׂטן אין גאָריי* (*Satan in Goray*), first serialised in the literary journal *גלאָבוס* (The Globe) in 1933, and then published in book form by the prestigious PEN club in Warsaw in 1935.[1] Most of the novel is narrated by an anonymous narrator, who starts his account by summarising the gruesome events during the Chmielnicki massacres of 1648/49 in a dry and factual style. With this style of aloof detachment Bashevis consciously dissociated himself from the sentimentality with which Sholem Asch had presented the same events in his popular novel *קידוש השם* (Martyrdom) in 1919.[2] These are the opening lines of Bashevis's novel:

> שנת ת"ח, אין דער צײַט װען דער רשע כמיעלניצקי און זײַנע מחנות האָבן
> באַלאַגערט די שטאָט זאַמאָשטש און זי נישט געקאָנט אײַננעמען צוליב דער שטאַרקער
> פֿעסטונג, װאָס האָט זי אַרומגערינגלט, האָבן די הײדאַמאַקן געמאַכט גרױסע שחיטות
> אין טאָמעשאָװו, בילגאָרײַ, קראַשניק, טורבין, פֿראַמפּאָל און אױך אין גאָרײַ, דער העק
> װאָס ליגט צװישן בערג. מע האָט געשטאָכן, געשונדן די הױט לעבעדיקערהײט,
> גערצאָכטנט קלײנע קינדער, געצװאװנגען װײַבער צו זנות און דערנאָך אױפֿגעטרענט
> זײערע בײַכער און פֿאַרנײט אין זײ קעץ.
>   (Bashevis, *דער שׂטן אין גאָריי* 15)

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1 Bashevis, Yitskhok. *דער שׂטן אין גאָריי* – originally serialized in *גלאָבוס* in Warsaw, January – September 1933, published in book form by the Warsaw Yiddish PEN Club in 1935, republished as *דער שׂטן אין גאָריי און אַנדערע דערצײ"לונגען* in New York: Matones, 1943, and in Tel Aviv: Y.L. Perets, 1955; translated as *Satan in Goray* by Jacob Sloan, first published in New York by Farrar & Straus in 1958 (thereafter: London: Penguin, 1981).

2 See: Roskies, David. *A Bridge of Longing: The Lost Art of Yiddish Storytelling*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995, 292.

In the year 1648, the wicked Ukrainian hetman, Bogdan Chmelnicki, and his followers besieged the city of Zamoć but could not take it, because it was strongly fortified; the rebelling *haidamak* peasants moved on to spread havoc in Tomaszów, Bilgoraj, Krásnik, Turbin, Frampol – and in Goray, too, the town that lay in the midst of the hills at the end of the world. They slaughtered on every hand, flayed men alive, murdered small children, violated women and afterward ripped open their bellies and sewed in cats.
(Bashevis Singer, *Satan in Goray* 13)

But two sections of דער שטן אין גארײ stand out prominently against the language and style of Bashevis's anonymous narrator: the letter from Lublin in Chapter 11 in the first part of the book, and Chapters 13–14 in the second part. The letter from Lublin to Rabbi Beynesh Ashkenazi in Goraj, warning him of the evil of the Shabbatean heresy, is introduced by the anonymous narrator in the following way:

דער בריװ איז געשריבן געװען אין לשון-קודש. [...] ער האָט זיך געלייענט בזה הלשון:
(Bashevis, דער שטן אין גארײ 75)

Written in the holy tongue [...] it read thus:
(Bashevis Singer, *Satan in Goray* 64)

But then Bashevis gives the letter entirely in Yiddish, creating the illusion that we are actually reading a Hebrew text by transposing the stylistic features of rabbinical Hebrew into Yiddish, using the traditional style of *taytsh* (the style used for translations of sacred Hebrew texts into Yiddish). The letter begins with the following words:

צום כבוד פון האר פון דער תורה, דער צדיק די גרונטפעסטיקייט פון דער וועלט, יכין און בועז, די זיילן אויף וועלכע דאָס הויז איז אָנגעלייזנט, די טירן פון גאָטפאָרכטיקייט און קלוגשאפט זענען פאר אים קיינמאָל נישט געשלאָסן
(Bashevis, דער שטן אין גארײ 75)

In Jacob Sloan's English translation from 1958 it reads like this:

To the master of the holy teachings, the righteous one, the foundation of the universe, like unto Joachin and Boaz, he that is the pillar of our house, for whom the doors of the fear of the Lord and wisdom are never shut
(Bashevis Singer, *Satan in Goray* 64)

Bashevis's Yiddish letter is a perfect translation of a fictitious Hebrew original in the style of *taytsh-loshn* (i.e. a rather archaic-sounding Yiddish writing style like the one that was used for translating Hebrew Scriptures), which could easily be translated "back" into Hebrew (so to speak): לכבוד בעל התורה, הצדיק, יסוד עולם וכו׳ (in honour of the Master of the

Torah, the Righteous One, the Everlasting Foundation, etc.). Bashevis consciously uses words from the language of *taytsh* like „גרונטפפעסטיקייט" and „גאָטפּאָרכטקייט" for the Hebrew words יסוד and יראת-השם or יראת-שמים, which could perfectly well have been employed in a Yiddish text, thereby creating the illusion of translating from an original letter written in a flowery rabbinical Hebrew. But although Jacob Sloan's translation is one of the better English versions of Bashevis's works by far, it does not always do justice to the author's special use of language and register in the original Yiddish.

Bashevis's „גרונטפפעסטיקייט פון דער וועלט" which translates the Hebrew phrase „יסוד עולם" is the title given to a religious dignitary, and it would have been better to translate it as "Everlasting Foundation" rather than "foundation of the universe". Bashevis's phrase „יכין און בועז, די זיילן אויף וועלכע דאָס הויז איז אָנגעלייענט" refers to Yakhin and Boaz, which are the names of the two pillars in the Temple – and figuratively the pillars of an institution. Thus Rabbi Beynesh is praised here for being the pillar of his community of Goraj, keeping it upright like the two pillars of the Temple. Therefore it would have been better to translate this phrase as "he is like Yakhin and Boaz, the pillars, on which our house is leaning" rather than "like unto Joachin and Boaz, he that is the pillar of our house". These are only some of the problems with the translation of this novel that occur even in the work of such a competent translator, who knew Yiddish well, which cannot be said of many of Bashevis's later translators.

The other section of the novel that is written in a completely distinctive style are the two final chapters of the book, which summarise the events in the community of Goraj from a point of view, which is very different from that of the anonymous narrator of the main part. This last part starts with the following words:

> אַ מעשׂה נורא מיט אַ יונגפרוי וואָס עס האָט אין איר זיך באַהאָפטן אַ דיבוק ר״ל:
> אַרויסגענומען פון דעם שיינעם ספר מפעלות-הארץ און מעתיק געווען אויף עברי
> טייטש דערום אויך די וויבער און די מוידן און די לייט פון המון זאָלן וואָיל
> פאָרשטיין גאָר דאָס וואונדער און טון זייער האַרץ זיך אומצוקערן צו גאָט
> (75 *דער שׂטן אין גאָריי,* Bashevis)

A marvellous tale treating of a woman that was possessed of a *dybbuk* (God preserve us): Taken from the worthy book The Works of the Earth and rendered into Yiddish to the end that women and girls and common folk may perfectly comprehend the wonder of it all and that they might set their hearts on returning to God's ways
(Bashevis Singer, *Satan in Goray* 147)

Thus the final section of this novel is supposed to have been translated into ״עברי טייטש״ (another word for the traditional Yiddish employed for translations from sacred Hebrew texts) from a fictitious Hebrew work entitled ״מפעלות-הארץ״. Its style is not only distinctive from the style of Bashevis's anonymous narrator, but also from that of the letter from Lublin, purportedly translated from rabbinical Hebrew. In this section, Bashevis masterfully imitates the style of a 17th century *mayse-bikhl*. But both of these distinctive sections – the letter from Lublin and the *mayse-bikhl* – have a strongly documentary character and add different viewpoints to that of the anonymous narrator of the main part of the book. As Chone Shmeruk has pointed out in his introduction to דער שפיגל און אַנדערע דערצײלונגען (*The Mirror and Other Stories*), the "credibility of these pseudo-documentary sections has been achieved by the skilful manipulation of stylistic features, which makes each of them faithfully reflect the character of its imaginary source". (Shmeruk IX) But in the English translation by Jacob Sloan – and even in the Hebrew translation by Mordecai Lipson – the differences in Yiddish between the style of the anonymous narrator and that of the two different "Hebrew" sections are eliminated to a considerable extent. To quote Chone Shmeruk again: "The strong contrastive effects, based in the original on pronounced stylistic differentiation, are in danger of being entirely lost in any translation". (Shmeruk X)

III.

There is another instance when Bashevis quotes from a fictitious Hebrew original, but gives the actual text in Yiddish. This is a letter of recommendation, written by a *Maskil*, a proponent of the Jewish Enlightenment,from Zamość for Oyzer-Heshl Banet, the main character of Bashevis's second major novel די פֿאַמיליע מושקאַט (*The Family Moskat*), published both in Yiddish book form and in English translation in New York in 1950.[3] The letter begins thus:

> צו מיין גרויסן לערער און וועגנוויײזער, דער וועלט-באַרימטער חכם אין תורה און
> השכלה, ר׳ שמריהו יאַקאָבי, זיין ליכט זאָל לייכטן.
> (Bashevis, *די פֿאַמיליע מושקאַט* 34)

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3 Bashevis, Yitskhok. די פֿאַמיליע מושקאַט – originally serialized in פֿאָרווערטס in New York, November 1945 – May 1948, published in book form in New York in 1950, thereafter in Tel Aviv: Y.L. Perets, 1977; translated as *The Family Moskat* by A.H. Gross (completed by Maurice Samuels, Lyon Mearson and Nancy Gross), first published in New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1950 (thereafter: London: Penguin, 1980).

> To my illustrious teacher and guide, world-renowned sage in the Law and En-
> lightenment, Reb Shmaryahu Jacobi, long may his light shine forth!
> (Bashevis Singer, *The Family Moskat* 38)

The so-called Yiddish "translation" is very different from the two "Hebrew"
sections in דער שׂטן אין גאָריי which employ the traditional style of *taytsh*.
The letter of recommendation in די פֿאַמיליע מושקאַט, by contrast, imitates
the rhetorical style of Hebrew Maskilic writing. Bashevis clearly demon-
strates his mastery in his original Yiddish by choosing exactly the right style
of translation from various fictitious Hebrew texts in each context. But these
careful stylistic differences in Bashevis's Yiddish "translations" from the
Hebrew cannot be reproduced in the English translation.

The Family Moskat was, in fact, Bashevis's first novel that was published
in English translation, under the imprint of his older brother Y.Y. Zinger's
(I.J. Singer's) English publisher Alfred Knopf. Bashevis himself started to
make cuts and changes to the English translation by A.H. Gross, Nancy
Gross and Maurice Samuel, as it proceeded. In addition to this, Knopf's edi-
tors asked for the removal of numerous sentences and passages they thought
to be repetitious. Bashevis eventually agreed to a cut of 90 full pages of
the text – and many more pages as a result of cuts within pages. He also
omitted the entire last chapter of the novel, which describes the return to
traditional Judaism of the novel's main character Oyzer-Heshl in Warsaw
during the High Holidays of the year 1939. The English version, by contrast,
ends with a modern Jewish intellectual's resigned response to the impending
catastrophe, seeing messianic redemption only in death. There are different
opinions among scholars as to the question whether it was Knopf's editors
who demanded this significant change to the ending of the novel or whether
it was Bashevis's own decision to give the novel a less religious and more
nihilistic ending in the English. Janet Hadda speaks about Bashevis not for-
giving the "artistic insult" he suffered on account of Knopf insisting "on
certain changes in the novel for purposes of translation".[4] Joseph Sherman,
by contrast, remarks that "Knopf's editors are nowhere cited as demanding
a radical change to the whole ending of the novel". Bashevis's anger with
Knopf seems to have been fuelled by the publisher's failure to promote
Bashevis's novel over its rival – John Hersey's *The Wall* – rather than by

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4 Hadda, Janet. *Isaac Bashevis Singer: A Life*. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press,
   1997, 129. As a source for this, Hadda cites Hailblum, Isidore. "The 'Hidden Isaac Ba-
   shevis Singer." *Congress Bi-Weekly* 25 Dec. 1970: 33–34.

any disputes about significant cuts in the text.[5] Whatever the case may be, the feeling of being slighted by Knopf led Bashevis to change publishers as soon as possible. He affiliated himself with Noonday Press and its editor Cecil Hemley, who was knowledgeable in Yiddish matters. In 1960, Noonday merged with Farrar Strauss (later Farrar, Strauss & Giroux), with whom he would remain for the rest of his life. (Hadda 130)

IV.

While the English version of *The Family Moskat* was much less successful among the general public than Bashivis had hoped for, what really introduced him to American readers was the publication of Saul Bellow's translation of "גימפּל תּם", "Gimpel the Fool", in the prestigious *Partisan Review* in 1952. The story was a huge success, "a happy combination of the best talents of two Yiddish-speaking Jewish writers", one writing in Yiddish, the other in English, "who both later won the Nobel Prize". (Sherman, "Translating". Denman 56) But when Bellow asked Bashevis many years later why he had never been invited to translate more of his stories, Bashevis replied very tellingly that if these stories were going to enjoy any success, "they'll say it's you, not me . . ." (quoted by Hadda 130–31)

However, even with Bellow's excellent translation there is a significant problem. Bashevis's original begins with the following line:

<div dir="rtl">

איך בין גימפּל תּם. איך האַלט מיך נישט פֿאַר קיין נאַר. פֿאַרקערט.
(Bashevis-Zinger, *דער שפּיגל* 33)

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Bellow's translation reads: "I am Gimpel the fool. I don't think myself a fool. On the contrary." (Bashevis Singer, *Collected Stories* I, 5) The problem is that the English translation does not distinguish between "נאַר", which means "fool", and "תּם", which means a simple, innocent person and invokes the whole-hearted, innocent person in the Bible, the simple son of the Haggadah and the story by R. Nakhmen of Bratslav about the "חכם" and the "תּם". In the English translation this distinction, which is an important *leitmotiv* in the story, is entirely lost. As Anita Norich points out: "Erasing

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5 Sherman, Joseph. "Translating 'Shotns baym Hodson' [*Shadows on the Hudson*]: Directly Encountering Isaac Bashevis Singer's Authorial Dualism." *Isaac Bashevis Singer: His Work and His World*, 53. Ed. Hugh Denman. As a source for this, Sherman cites: Saposnik, Irving. "Translating *The Family Moskat*: The Metamorphosis of a Novel." *Yiddish* 1 (1973), 235–237, and Hindus, Milton. "A Monument with a Difference." Rev. of *The Family Moskat*. *New York Times Book Review*, 70: 11. 14 Mar. 1965: 4, 44–45.

the crucial distinction between *tam* and *nar*, Bellow elides the folkloric and religious resonances of *tam* as well as the numerous linguistic derivations of *nar*." But, of course, this choice was completely deliberate, avoiding the "in-felicitous choice" of "Gimpel the Simple" and instead hinting at the "holy fool" of Shakespearean drama and of Christian tradition. (Norich 49) This is not the only change in the story that points to different audiences of the Yiddish and the English version. In his English translation, Bellow omits all anti-Christian references present in the Yiddish original, including the mocking remark when Gimpl's wife gives birth to a son that is most certainly not fathered by Gimpl:

אָט זאָגט מען דאָך, אַז ס'ייִוזל האָט אין גאָנצן קיין טאַטן נישט געהאָט.
(Bashevis-Zinger, *דער שפּיגל* 38)

  After all people say that little Jesus didn't have a father at all.[6]

But this line is omitted from Saul Bellow's translation. This might have been Bellow's choice or Eliezer Greenberg's, the Yiddish poet who commissioned Bellow to translate this story and assisted him in the process. But the end result in the English version is "a universal, sympathetic message of the faith that ennobles folly", which is far removed from Bashevis's context and from the intimacy of his Yiddish text with all its specific Jewish references. (Norich 51)

V.

Many of Bashevis's short stories, like "גימפּל תּם", for example, employ the "monologue technique", where either the whole story or the greater part of it is written in the first person. Chone Shmeruk distinguishes between those monologues told by non-human, supernatural narrators and those told by human narrators. The latter include "old wives' tales", told in front of a group of women, and Hasidic tales, told at a gathering of men in the context of the Hasidic *shtibl*. (Shmeruk XVI–XXIX)

  Bashevis's "דער קטלן" ("The Wife Killer") is his first story written as the monologue of an old woman. First published in 1945 and much later included in the collection *דער שפּיגל און אַנדערע דערציילונגען*, it bears the subtitle "אַ באָבע-מעשׂה", which in this context certainly has the connota-

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  6 This translation is mine, as are all other translations that are not otherwise attributed.

tion of an old wives' tale. In this and many other monologues of old women, like "ריקל און צייטל" ("Zeitl and Rickel") and "נאָדל די" ("The Needle"), Bashevis is clearly very able to delineate his women narrators through their speech patterns by employing the register that would be exactly fitting to their characters and their station. For example, the old woman narrator of "קטלן דער" begins her story like this:

קעגן דעם וואָס איר זאָגט אַ קטלנית? באַהיט און באַשירעמט זאָל מען ווערן, נישט
דאָ געדאַכט, נישט קעגן נאַכט געדאַכט, נישט פֿאַר קיין ייִדישער טאָכטער געדאַכט,
ס׳זאָל אויסגיין צו שׂונאימס קעפּ און צו זייער לייַב און לעבן.
(Bashevis-Zinger, *דער שפּיגל* 57)

> As for what you're saying – a husband killer? May we be preserved and protected
> from it, not to be imagined here, not to be imagined at night, not to be imagined
> for any Jewish daughter, may it be poured out on our enemies' heads and their
> bodies and lives.

Only an old woman in a *shtetl* would curse like this – and Bashevis captured this small-town old woman's speech pattern perfectly well. But this whole introduction, which delineates this old woman's register so well, is omitted in the English translation by Shlomo Katz, which starts with "I am from Turbin, and there we had a wife killer. Pelte was his name, Pelte the Wife Killer". (Bashevis Singer, *Collected Stories* 1, 37)

VI.

The speech pattern and register employed for the narrators of Bashevis's old wives' tales differ markedly from that of his Hasidic narrators, in particular in his series of three stories: "מעשׂיות דרייַ" ("Three Stories"), "פֿון מעשׂיות הינטערן אויוון" ("Stories from behind the Stove") and "גרייַזן" ("Errors"). In each of these stories we have three monologues, narrated by the same three speakers, who all differ in their status in society, their language and their style. In the original Yiddish, Bashevis was able to delineate all of his different narrators through their speech patterns.

Zalmen Glezer is a poor craftsman, a glazier. His stories are the simplest of the three, and Bashevis employs the lowest register, full of slang and devoid of any complicated *loshn-koydesh* expressions (i.e. expressions derived from Hebrew or Aramaic), to characterise his speech pattern. For example in "מעשׂיות דרייַ", speaking about a non-Jewish magician he had met, he says:

געלט האָט ער געהאַט גאַנצע פֿעסער. ס׳ווייַב איז אים געפּגערט און ר׳האָט זיך
באַהעפֿט מיט דער סיטרא-אחרא.
(Bashevis-Zinger, *דער שפּיגל* 140)

In the English translation by Ruth Whitman and Cecil Hemley this reads:
"He had more money than he knew what to do with. It was his wife's death
that drove him to magic."(Bashevis Singer, *Collected Stories* 1, 467) But the
English translation does not at all capture the register of Zalmen Glezer's
speech, when he says the magician had barrels full of money, and his wife
"איז אים געפּגערט", i.e. she had croaked. Apart from this, the magician had
not just been driven "to magic", but he had joined the *sitre-akhre* (the Other
Side), i.e. the realm of the demons.

The second narrator, Levi-Yitskhok, is much more respected in Jewish
society on account of his cane, which had once belonged to the Hasidic *re-
be* R. Khatskele Kuzmirer. He is more learned than Zalmen Glezer, and his
language is of a higher register and includes more *loshn-koydesh*.

But the most learned of the three narrators is certainly Meyer Tumtum.
Despite the fact that he is an outsider in Jewish society due to his lack of
masculinity and his craziness, which comes over him for two weeks every
month, he knows the whole Talmud by heart and is well-versed in Kabbalis-
tic literature. His speech is full of complicated *loshn-koydesh* expressions
and references to the Talmud and various Kabbalistic works, and he ex-
presses many unusual, original ideas based on the teachings of Lurianic
Kabbalah. For example, he ends his story in "דרייַ מעשׂיות" with the fol-
lowing words:

אַלץ איז תּיקון. אַ מאָל האָט אַ ספֿר-תּורה אַ סך גרייַזן און אַ מאָל – בלויז איין גרייַז.
פֿאַרריכטן קאָן מען בלויז דאָ, אויפֿן עולם התּחתּון. דער עולם הקליפֿות איז דער עולם
התּיקון – דאָס איז דער ענטפֿער אויף אַלע קשיות . . .
(Bashevis-Zinger, *דער שפּיגל* 150)

In the English translation this reads: "Every soul descends to earth to correct
some error. It's the same with souls as with manuscripts; there may be few or
many errors. Everything that's wrong on this earth has to be corrected. The
world of evil is the world of correction. This is the answer to all questions."
(Bashevis Singer, *Collected Stories* 1, 476)

This is a very free translation of the Yiddish original, which omits the
reference to the "ספֿר-תּורה", turning it into a mere "manuscript" and wa-
ters down all the Kabbalistic references in Meyer Tumtum's statement. The
"עולם הקליפֿות" is much more than the "world of evil". It is the world of
the *Klipot*, the dark forces of the *sitre-akhre*, formed from the shards of the
broken "vessels" of the lower seven *Sfirot* during the cosmic catastrophe
referred to as "שבֿירת-הכלים" (the "breaking of the vessels") in Lurianic

Kabbalah, and ”תיקון“ is the restoration of the universe to its state of cosmic harmony, which it has not enjoyed since the catastrophe of the "breaking of the vessels" at the beginning of Creation. All of these important Kabbalistic references are lost in translation, as is Bashevis's subtle use of different registers to characterise his narrators' speech patterns.

VII.

Bashevis's monologues narrated by supernatural speakers include a series of stories told by Satan, who would speak of himself as the ”יצר-הרע“ (Evil Inclination).[7] They also include monologues of minor demons, such as in ”דער שפּיגל“ ("The Mirror") and ”מעשׂה טישעוויץ“ (translated as "The Last Demon"), where Bashevis demonstrates his fine stylistic talent in combining the language of religious scholarship (his demons are all "Jewish" demons, who know their Talmud well) and the style of a *badkhn* (wedding jester) in the rhymed sections of the stories. The story ”מעשׂה טישעוויץ“ ends with rhymed comments by the last surviving Jewish demon after the Holocaust on the first ten letters of the Hebrew alphabet, followed by the demon's conclusion:

> אַלף אַן אָדלער, אַן אָדלער פּליט; בית אַ בוים, אַ בוים בליט; גימל אַ גלח, אַ גלח
> קניט; דלד אַ דאָרן, דער דאָרן ברענט; הא אַ הענקער, אַ הענקער הענקט; וואָו אַ
> וועכטער, דער וועכטער שענקט; זין אַ זעלנער, אַ זעלנער שיסט; חית אַ חזיר, אַ חזיר
> ניסט; טית אַ טויטער, אַ טויטער מתט; יוד אַ ייִד, אַ ייִד פֿאַרגעסט . . .
> יאָ, ווי לאַנג ס'איז דאָ אַ ייִדיש וואָרט, האָב איך אַן אָנהאַלטעניש. ווי לאַנג די מילבן
> האָבן נישט אויפֿגענעגעסן ס'לעצטע בלעטל, איז נאָך דאָ מיט וואָס זיך צו שפּילן. וואָס
> וועט זיין שפּעטער, וועל איך פֿאָרן מויל נישט ברענגען.
> אָן אַ ייִדיש אות –
> איז אַ שד אַ ייִד – אויס . . .
> (Bashevis-Zinger, *דער שפּיגל* 22)

In Martha Glicklich and Cecil Hemley's translation this reads as follows:

> *Aleph*, the abyss, what else waited?
> *Bet*, the blow, long since fated.
> *Geemel*, God, pretending he knew,
> *Dalet*, death, its shadow grew.

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7 The monologues of the ”יצר-הרע“ are ”דער חורבן פֿון קרעשעוו“, ”זיידלוס דער ערשטער“
and ”אַ מעשׂה *דער שטן אין גאָריי און אַנדערע דערצײלונגען* in ”צוויי מתים גייען טאַנצן“ and
”דער רואה ואינו נראה“ in *גימפּל תם און אַנדערע דערצײלונגען*, New York: CYCO, 1963.