

## Witnessing the death of Yiddish language and culture: Holes in the Doorposts

By Arnold Richards

This was the end. This was the sum total of hundreds of generations of living and building. of Torah and piety, of free thinking, of Zionism of Bundism of struggles and battles, of the hopes of an entire people - this empty desert.

I looked around me at what had been the Jews of Warsaw. I felt one hope and, I feel it now., May this sea of emptiness bubble and boil, may it cry out eternal condemnation of murderers and pillagers, may it forever be the shame of the civilized world which saw and heard and chose to remain silent. (Goldstein, B., 2005)

To bear witness to the Holocaust is to look both ways. We must acknowledge heartbreaking destruction and loss, but we must also celebrate the enduring power of life. Not every individual witness is privy to both perspectives, however. Some witness only destruction; some are themselves destroyed. Some witnesses come so close to destruction that they can endure their experience only by separating as much as possible from what they have seen, keeping it to themselves and passing it on (if at all) as a tale told at a remove. Some manage to continue to grow even with traumatized roots; they put out new shoots and look to the future. Destruction and creation -- witnessing includes both. So when Nancy and Marilyn asked me to contribute to this volume a personal view of what the Holocaust meant to Yiddish culture, I found myself contemplating that tension between absence and presence, death and life, destruction

and creation. I grew up in a family that did not hide what was happening, which allowed me to be openly interested. At the same time, I saw the intensity of pain the events of the thirties and forties caused in my family and my community, and I learned to appreciate why some people felt the need to separate themselves from it, and why others were disconnected from it by fiat, because their parents couldn't bear to engage with their experience intimately enough to pass it on.

I think that my choice of profession had a lot to do with my own issues about coming to terms with the past. I'm a psychoanalyst, committed to helping people find ways to discover and tolerate their own histories (whatever they may be) so as to be free to build their futures. I grew up bi-lingual in Yiddish and English in Brooklyn, New York and have been involved since 1978 with YIVO, [footnote] an organization dedicated to the preservation of Yiddish language documents and cultural history I served as Chairman of the Board of Directors between 1987 and 1990. I have gained an expansive, intricate, and very privileged view, not only of the catastrophe of the Holocaust, but of the extraordinarily creative ways that the Jewish people had found and continue to find to develop.

In this essay I act as a witness to honor the history of Yiddish culture and memorialize some the writers and poets who were killed. There is absence where a vast wealth of literature and a tradition formerly flourished.

Traveling to Krakow: holes where mezuzahs used to be

In the early 1980s I traveled to Krakow with a YIVO group for a special showing at the Jagiellonian University there. That exhibit gave rise to the collection published as

*Image Before My Eyes: A Photographic History of Jewish Life in Poland, 1864-1939.* (Dobroszczycki & Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, eds. 1977) and also to Josh Waletzky's 1981 documentary of the same name. There was an official opening ceremony for our contingent, followed by a tour of the displays documenting Jewish life in the Polish territories before the Holocaust. The Polish visitors to the exhibit, of all ages, responded to the photographs as if they were archeological documents, records of an ancient civilization. They didn't seem to feel any close connection between these pictures and their history -- in some cases, their lives. But to those of us from YIVO it was a moving and gripping evocation of the vibrancy of Jewish life in Poland not so very long ago -- certainly within our parents' memories, and for many of us, our own.

I thought about this as we drove from Krakow to Warsaw, stopping off to visit the formerly Jewish villages – the shtetlach -- we passed through along the way. On the doorposts of houses formerly occupied by Jews there were nail holes you could see and touch, ghosts of mezuzahs that were no longer there. But it wasn't all that long ago that they had been there, and I felt the connection acutely, looking at those photographs in Krakow, and walking through those once Jewish, now Polish, villages. My mother came from a village like these. She spoke the language that the people who lived here; she read the books that the people who lived here read. I read them too. We had them at home while I was growing up in Brooklyn. My father's story is different, but that's part of the point of my assignment for this volume, which is to bear witness to the fate of the Yiddish literary culture in Eastern Europe from a personal point of view, in the context of my own history.

A brief bio

I grew up in Brooklyn in the thirties and forties, hearing and reading about the Holocaust in English, Yiddish, and Russian. My parents' marriage was a microcosm of the sociological stew that was Eastern European Jewry. They came from towns that are very close together on the map, and their Yiddish was very similar. But my father spoke Russian and my mother spoke Polish. My father's family had been more or less integrated with the Russian world for generations -- his great-grandfather, who was killed in the Crimean war, was the only Jewish noncommissioned officer in the Russian army, and his grandfather was manager of the Russian estate of an absentee Polish landowner. My father graduated from a Gymnasium where he had been excused from religion classes because he was Jewish. My mother came from an Orthodox shtetl family; her family kept Kosher, and the schools there were traditional kheyders (footnote—definition). My mother left Galicia with her family in the 20s. She was eleven years old. She worked as a milliner and learned English in night school, My father came here by himself in 1924. He was a Bolshevik atheist, who joined the Russian revolution and became a librarian in the Red Army. It was the job of the librarian of each unit of Trotsky's army to drive the horse and the cart full of books for the soldiers to read. That was my father's job. Guns weren't enough, Trotsky thought. You had to know Marx too.

My earliest lexical memory dates from 1939. I was five, reading the *Yiddish Forward* (FOOTNOTE), and there was a picture of a bearded man and a caption: **“Barimpta yiddisher professor geshtorben.”** Freud had died. Yiddish culture was an integral part of my growing up, as I know it was not for many Jewish children at the time. But it wasn't until I was an adult that I became really aware of the magnitude of what

had been lost.

## Yiddish: A Lost Language

So let me start with the language in question, Yiddish. The origins of Yiddish aren't absolutely clear, but it's thought to have arisen in the 10th or 11th century, in the Rhineland, the fruit of generations of migration back and forth between Palestine and Europe after Rome destroyed Judea in the first century AD. It was an inclusive language, open to elements of the various other Jewish linguistic traditions that intersected with it, and so it grew in time into a communicative thread that connected a lot of Jews of very different backgrounds.

But its universality--as a language, and as the marker of a traditional and separate Jewish culture -- was on the wane long before the Holocaust. There were various reasons for this, but they mostly had to do with pressures for assimilation. Convenience was one of these pressures. Yiddish was still the main, and often the only, language of the provincial Jews living in shtetls in the Pale of Settlement. Many of these people for religious reasons kept themselves apart from the "secular" world, and perpetuated their isolation with the traditional religious kheyder education that followed a curriculum centuries old. But an increasing number of Polish Jews spoke Polish as well; it was a necessary tool for doing business with the Poles. My mother's father by traditional lights was a rather worldly person, and he spoke German as well as Polish and Yiddish

Some Jews just wanted to feel like part of the world that surrounded them; this was true all over Eastern Europe and elsewhere. The great Sholem Aleichem wrote in

Yiddish because his audience spoke and understood it. But he wanted his children to be part of Russian civilization and Russian society, and to them he spoke Russian. Fear was another reason for assimilation and the thinning out the population of Yiddish speakers in Eastern Europe leaving it less concentrated than it had once been. In the wake of the financial crisis that followed the Panic of 1873, pogroms became more frequent within the Pale of settlement. Times were hard after the booming mid-eighteen-hundreds and in some quarters the Jews were blamed for it. This was the same period in which the term anti-Semitism came to prominence with the publication of a propaganda pamphlet by Wilhelm Marr in 1879, *Der Weg zum Siege des Germanentums über das Judentum (The Way to Victory of Germanic over Judaism)*. Many Jews felt the need to distance themselves from the distinguishing cultural, religious, and linguistic markers that made Jews so easily recognized -- and so easily demonized. Another reason was pride. Yiddish was kept very carefully under wraps by many of the Jewish urbanites who settled in Europe's great cities, or who grew up there as the children of immigrants, and wished to assimilate themselves as perfectly as they could to their cosmopolitan surroundings.

Sigmund Freud was an example of this. Like many Austrian Jews, he aspired to membership in what he saw as a great cultural tradition, and certainly this possibility was becoming ever less remote as the Enlightenment progressed. But every movement that Freud and Jews like him made toward establishment culture meant a movement away from the culture of their parents. They were ashamed of their parents -- with their odd dress and odd appearance and odd language -- and guilty for being ashamed. I think that Freud's much-vaunted "godlessness" had as much to do with embarrassment

as with religion. His wife's grandfather was the chief rabbi in Hamburg, and he didn't want his status as an enlightened Jew in sophisticated Viennese society to be undermined by identification with those scruffy and primitive Jews from the shtetl. He unabashedly acknowledged his prejudice against them, saying once of a play about Yochanan the Prophet that "I'd rather be the Jew in the tuxedo than the Jew in the caftan." (REFERENCE FOR QUOTE HAARETZ 1939)

Freud later said that it was anti-Semitism that made him a Jew: "My language is German. My culture, my attainments are German. I considered myself German intellectually, until I noticed the growth of anti-Semitic prejudice in Germany and German Austria. Since that time, I prefer to call myself a Jew." [ Gay, Freud, 988, p. 448]. But some prosperous German and Austrian Jews actually came to blame the shtetl Jews for the Holocaust, believing that it was their foreignness that attracted such dangerous attention. I heard this said by German Jews in the United States and by some of the Viennese psychoanalysts who I knew in New York City They didn't recognize this as anti-Semitism themselves, nor did they recognize that the very success that they thought would insulate them had made them envied, and that when hard times returned again in the thirties envy contributed a great deal to conventional anti-Semitism and support for Hitler's Final Solution.

Sociological factors like these shaped the Yiddish literary and intellectual world, in which the traditional, the assimilationist, the religious, the worldly, the political, the highbrow, the trashy, and the avant-garde were all represented. Assimilationist pressures and temptations being what they were, the halcyon days of the 1930s would likely have been the peak of Yiddish literary culture even if there had never been a

Holocaust. But while they lasted, they were glorious. If not for the destruction this literary tradition would have influenced development of the arts for generations to come.

Eastern Europe before the war was rich with gifted poets, novelists, playwrights, journalists, historians, artists, musicians, and philosophers. In 1931, Poland had the highest percentage of Jews anywhere, more than three million of the 17 million Jews worldwide, about 18%. I'll be using Poland here as a focus, partly because it was home to the greatest number of Jews in Europe, and partly because its cities were centers of the Yiddish literary life that I'll be discussing. Poland's Yiddish literary culture was the largest and most active in the world; it was the only country in which successful Yiddish authors could support themselves by writing. Isaac Bashevis Singer has talked about the intellectual life of Warsaw, its newspapers, the coffee houses where patrons could sit and talk about the great Yiddish and Western writers for hours at a time. Many of those great writers died before World War II -- the likes of Y.L. Peretz, Sholom Aleichem, and Mendele Mocher Sforim, who has been called the grandfather of Yiddish literature. These men were read everywhere within the Pale of Settlement, and I read their work myself as a child here, in my Yiddish school. At home we had a bound set of the collected works of Sholom Aleichem, and a volume of Peretz as well.

By 1906 there were five Yiddish dailies in Warsaw with a circulation of 100,000; and double that circulation by the end of the decade. They serialized the work of Yiddish writers, and published theater reviews and schedules. There were Jewish literary magazines. There was an Association of Jewish Writers and Journalists in Warsaw, and a PEN club in Vilna. So Yiddish speakers in Eastern Europe between the wars had

plenty to choose from. Readers could find everything from serious novels to avant-garde poetry to escapist junk. Theater repertoires included not only musical comedies and tear-jerkers, but also drama, and performances in Yiddish translation of Shakespeare and such modern playwrights as O'Neill and Dreiser. (/Forgresert und farbessert/--"bigger and better" "enlarged and improved meant as a boast. There were Yiddish movies, cabarets, and marionette theaters. A Yiddish version of the Pushkin/Tchaikovsky opera Eugene Onegin was produced in Vilna in 1920. Clearly not all of these offerings were by Yiddish authors or composers, but a vast number of them were, and the fact of the others attests to the appetite, and the cosmopolitan temperament of Polish urban Jewry.

### Destruction

But, by the middle of the 1940s Yiddish civilization was almost completely destroyed by the Germans with the collaboration of Ukrainians and Poles. And the question to which I will address the rest of this paper is: What happened to the Yiddish writers? We can divide the Yiddish literati into groups according to the date of their deaths. The first group includes the early greats, who were dead by the time the war began. A second group survived the Holocaust and developed a Yiddish readership (significant, if dwindling) in the United States and Israel. Among these were the likes of Itzik Manger, Chaim Grade, and Abraham Sutzkever. There also had been a very creative and vibrant group of Yiddish poets called the Yunga, the young ones, who were developing an avant-garde Yiddish poetic sensibility. Some of these survived the war in the Soviet Union, but were subsequently killed by Stalin. In Joseph Leftwich's anthology (ref?) *Great Yiddish Writers of the 20th Century*, both of these groups are generously

represented. Leftwich includes many of the early giants who died before 1940, including Y.L. Peretz, Sholom Aleichem, and Isidor (Yisroel) Eliashev. Among the postwar greats who survived the Holocaust, Leftwich includes, for example, Grade, Sutzkever, and Sholem Asch.

The group I want to speak of and memorialize here is barely represented among Leftwich's 81 authors, or in any other anthology or classification that I know of. These are the Yiddish writers who were murdered in Eastern Europe between 1940 and 1945, particularly those who were not granted the time to fully develop their craft, or to establish enduring reputations. They were acclaimed and reckoned significant among the Jewish Eastern European literati of their time. But their work had not yet been disseminated widely, and it was lost, for the most part, when the audience of readers and play-goers who knew it best disappeared. It is these writers who call up so poignantly the bittersweet awareness of what might have been.

Of the group who were murdered during the war years Leftwich included only three, and two of them were old men who had fully developed their skill and renown. Simon Dubnov, who wrote a many-volumed history of the Jews was killed by Germans in Riga in 1941 at the age of 81 and Hillel Zeitlin, the scholar, writer, and journalist, died in 1942 in the Warsaw Ghetto at the age of 72. Leftwich's third choice is the poet and critic Yisroel Shtern, who perished in Treblinka 1942 at the age of 46.

These three, however, are only a few of the dozens, perhaps hundreds, of Yiddish poets, novelists, playwrights, historians, philosophers, and journalists who were lost between 1940 and 1945, dying of starvation in the ghettos of Poland and the Pale,

shot in the fields and forests of Russia and Lithuania, or otherwise murdered in concentration camps. They are only a few of the people whose names we don't recognize, whose productions we've never heard of, whose books aren't fondly remembered by our parents. They hadn't written enough, or written long enough, before the war to be known outside of their immediate community, and they didn't survive the war to promote their work afterwards to the world's tragically destroyed audience of Yiddish speakers, readers, and theater-goers.

Leftwich's list is sobering, and it's very hard to add to it. I hope I've made clear that this isn't because there wasn't much going on in the arts in Yiddish-speaking Europe. It's because the documentation of the period was decimated along with the people themselves. What little we know comes from material saved from the conquering Nazi armies by courage, guile, and luck, and then in some cases saved again from the tightening grip of Stalin. These efforts at preservation are yet another aspect of witness, and I'll mention two of them here: YIVO and Ringelblum.

YIVO was founded in Vilna in 1925 by Max Weinreich and other European Jewish intellectuals (Edward Sapir, Albert Einstein, and Sigmund Freud among the trustees) who wanted make available for study the history, language, and culture of the Jews of Eastern Europe before they were swamped by change and assimilation. YIVO sent emissaries throughout the Pale of Settlement, to collect the stuff of the culture. Its initial mission was collection and scholarship, not preservation. But given what happened so soon afterward, their foresight turned out to be a great blessing.

When the German army took Vilna in March 1942, the Einsatzstas Rosenberg task force, started by Nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenberg for looting the Jewish world of its

cultural treasures, established a sorting center in the YIVO building. It was supposed to identify the most valuable materials there and ship the plunder to Rosenberg's Institute for the Study of the Jewish Question in Frankfurt. Rosenberg's functionaries could not distinguish between the gold and the dross, however. They impressed Jews who knew the material into this bitter task, but their unwilling accessories soon set their minds to saving YIVO's most valuable holdings. Dubbed di papir-brigade, the Paper Brigade, they disguised, removed, and hid as many important documents as they could. They were led by the poet Abraham Sutzkever and the writer and cultural historian Shmerke Kacerginski, and they risked their lives to cache materials in the ghetto, in YIVO's attics, and with non-Jewish contacts for safekeeping.

In 1987, despite the ravages of war and Communism, a huge collection of YIVO materials that had been spirited into the hands of gentiles were discovered in a book depository the Lithuanian National Book Center. This accounts for [[X]] % of YIVO's archive today. David E. Fishman has told this story in his book *Embers Plucked from the Fire: The Rescue of Jewish Cultural Treasures in Vilna* (YIVO, 2009). Perhaps most miraculously, or at least most ironically, the materials dispatched from YIVO to the Nazis in Frankfurt were discovered in 1946 by a US Army officer in a freight car at a railway siding outside of Frankfurt. These were sent to New York, and reconstituted as the American YIVO collection.

Emanuel Ringelblum the organizer of relief in the Warsaw Ghetto and of Oneg, the Warsaw Ghetto archive, tried to accumulate materials that would portray all facets of Jewish life from many different perspectives. He also wanted to document the destruction of Polish Jewry, to which he was an eyewitness. He and his colleagues

collected questionnaires, memoirs, and interviews administered by amateur field workers, as well as input from professional historians and sociologists. . David Roskies (*The Jewish Search for a Usable Past*, Indiana University Press, 1999, p. 24) includes him among the eyewitness chroniclers of modern Jewish catastrophe. His work is an example of what Roskies calls "the Literature of Destruction," another name for the tradition of witnessing that is the subject of this volume.

By some estimates, about half of what was written by Jews during this time was saved through the efforts of committed individuals like Ringelblum, who had opportunities to escape but who chose to remain the Warsaw ghetto to continue his work.<sup>1</sup>: Ringelblum finally left the ghetto on the eve of the uprising, but he was discovered by the Gestapo and killed, along with his family and the Gentiles who had hidden them. The archive was maintained until February 1943. Two of the three Oyneg Shabes Caches were found after the war; the last is still missing. : My mother was still alive at the time of the discovery of our YIVO materials in Vilna; when I told her about this discovery and the amazing accomplishments of the Papir-Brigade, she said in Yiddish, "Better they had saved fewer papers and more people." That wasn't within their power. But mindful of my mother's comment, my intent in the rest of this piece is to speak of the Yiddish poets, playwrights, and novelists of Poland who were murdered between 1941 and 1945. In some cases at least, thanks to those who documented their lives and to those who courageously managed to preserve the documents, their names will live on.

Yet there are others whose names do not live on --whose names, even, have been lost, along with their lives and their work. Witnessing works both ways -- we

witness what is present, "before our eyes," as the Krakow exhibition had it, and we witness also the fact of absence and the fact of the loss of the future. Some of these names are lost to us because it was not only the people who vanished, but those who knew them, as well. They too might have grown into greatness had their world not been destroyed. But like the mezuzahs that once graced the doorposts of village homes, they are gone; we can know that they were there only by the holes they left behind.

### A Community Eradicated: Creative Voices Lost

Some of the holes in the doorposts are large and deep; some are small and barely discernible. But they all attest to a community destroyed, to an irreversible loss of life and of creative force. What follows here are two lists. The first is a list of Yiddish writers murdered between 1940 and 1945 about whom a significant amount is known. I offer it to establish a more detailed picture of these people and the lost riches that can never be recovered. I will then follow with a Yizkor list, a list of remembrance, of those whose names we know but whose work we do not. All this material is excerpted from the wonderful YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe website ([www.yivoencyclopedia.org](http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org)). Anyone interested in this vanished world will find a visit there very rewarding. Yet the list still is not complete, and it never will be. Part of the tragedy we are witnessing here is the fact that we do not even have names for so many of these people, and yet surely many of them contributed in measure as full as those who are remembered. The names we do have, the ones I am memorializing here, are listed with the little information available about them on the YIVO site, at [http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Yiddish\\_Literature/Yiddish\\_Literature\\_after\\_1800#id0qbg](http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Yiddish_Literature/Yiddish_Literature_after_1800#id0qbg) My hope is that anyone with historical connections to this vanished

civilization will look at that list, and offer to YIVO any further information they may possess, either of names that should be added, or of knowledge about the people who are already included there.

Mordkhe Gebirtig, poet and songwriter. Born 1877, Krakow. Died 1942, by random German fire while being marched to the Krakow train station for transportation to the Belzec death camp. Gebirtig is best known for his song "S'brent" (It is burning), which was written in 1938 in response to a pogrom, and became a favorite of the Jewish Resistance movement. The first collection of Gebirtig's songs, *Folkshtimlech (In the Folk Style)*, was published in 1920, and a second, *Mayne Lider (My Songs)*, in 1938. In 1940 or 1941 he wrote *Atos fun nekome (A Day for Revenge)*, a song about hope for the downfall of the perpetrators of the Holocaust.

Shimen Horontshik, novelist. Born 1889, Wieluń. Died 1939, Kałuszyn, a suicide, to forestall being murdered by German troops engaged in a pogrom. Horontshik lived in Lodz during World War I and in France and Belgium during the early thirties. He wrote eleven novels, five of which were primarily autobiographical. Two -- *In geroysh fun mashinen (Amid the noise of the machines, 1928)*, and *1905 (1929)* -- are set in the lace-making district of Kalisz, where industrialism and capitalism are making inroads upon shtetl life. *Bayn shvel (At the threshold, 1935/36)* looks at the conflicts between Jews and Poles and among Jews themselves, as seen through his young eyes. In other novels he considered the damage to the Jewish way of life wrought by greed and the loss of moral structure.

Alter-Sholem Kacyzne, novelist, playwright, and photographer. Born 1855, Vilna.

Died 1941, Tarnopol; killed with thousands of other Jews who were fleeing the German advance. Kacyzne's great two-volume *novel Shtarke un Shvakhe (The Strong and the Weak)* was published in 1929/1930; it dealt with the 1905 Polish uprising and the conflict between Bohemian Jews and the rising generation of Poles. He also wrote three plays, *Dem Yidns Opera (The Jew's Opera)*, *Ester (Esther)*, and *Shvartsbard* (about Sholem Schwartzbard, who assassinated the Ukrainian nationalist Symon Petliura in 1926).<sup>2</sup>

Kacyzne was probably one of the most prolific of the pre-war Yiddish writers in Poland, and considered by many the literary heir to Y.L. Peretz. Despite these accomplishments, he is better remembered as a photographer than as either novelist or playwright. In 1921 he was commissioned by the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society to photograph Jewish life in Poland, and his work was published regularly in the New York *Forverts*. (translate) Kacyzne's photographic archive in Warsaw was destroyed in the Holocaust, but the 700 photographs he had sent to New York are at YIVO.<sup>3</sup>

Yitzhak Katzenelson, poet, educator, writer. Born 1885, near Minsk. Died 1944, Auschwitz. Katzenelson was a major Hebrew and Yiddish poet, (called by some the Poet of Destruction.) His first anthology of Yiddish poetry, *Die zun fargeyt in flamen (The sun sets in flames)* was published in 1909. He was a man of many accomplishments. He established a network of private Hebrew schools that continued until 1939, and for it wrote children's literature and Hebrew textbooks. He started a Hebrew theater company, and wrote plays on contemporary and biblical themes. He translated the poetry of Heinrich Heine into Hebrew. He published his collected Hebrew poems in three volumes in 1938. These were much darker in tone than his early work.

But at the time of publication the political situation made for poor distribution, and few copies survived the war. Later, however, they revealed Katzenelson to be what the YIVO Encyclopedia calls "the great eulogist in verse of the murdered Jewish people."([http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Katzenelson\\_Yitshak](http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Katzenelson_Yitshak); In December 1939 Katzenelson escaped from Lodz, and became a central figure in the pedagogic and cultural life of the Warsaw Ghetto. He continued to teach, direct plays, and write, and he contributed to the underground press. Forty of his own works were composed in the Ghetto, including two long poems (Dos lid vegn Shloyme Zhelikhovsky [The poem about Solomon Zhelikhovsky] and Dos lid vegn Radziner [The Poem about the Radzhin Rebbe]). Both of these were about heroism in the face of death. He was now writing in Yiddish, seeking to reach the largest audience he could in his current circumstances. But August 1942 his wife and two younger sons were deported to Treblinka, and his poetry turned very dark again. He took part in the first Warsaw Ghetto uprising and escaped briefly, but was caught and sent to a German detention camp in Vittel, France, and then to Auschwitz, where he and his son were murdered. In Vittel, Katzenelson wrote two of the Holocaust's most important works: *Pinkas Vitel* (*The Vittel diary*) in Hebrew, and *Dos lid fun oysgehargetn yidishn folk* (The Poem about the Murdered Jewish People). These capture the terror, pathos, and rage of his people, and lament his own impending death.

Miryem Ulinover\_(nee Manya Hirshbeyn ), poet and journalist. Born 1890, Lodz. Died 1944, Auschwitz. Ulinover was a prolific poet and active in Yiddish literary circles during the 1920s. Her first poems were published in Polish when she was 15. She also wrote in Russian and German. Her Yiddish work began to appear ten years later. Her

best-known collection of poems is *Der bobes optser* (*My Grandmother's Treasure*, 1922). There is disagreement among literary critics about whether Ulinover is a modernist or a naïve folk poet, and about whether her poetry is secular or religious. Kathryn Hellerstein writes in the YIVO encyclopedia that "Mirym Ulinover wrote poems designed by a modern sensibility that sought to preserve the folk diction, sayings, and customs of pre-modern Jewish life in Poland." [[cite. ]]

Oyzer Varshavski, novelist. Born 1898, Sochazcew. Died 1944, Auschwitz. Varshavski's first novel, *Shmuglars* (*Smugglers*), published in 1920, is considered the finest example of Yiddish naturalism. It is a raw tale of Jews in a Polish town trying to make a living during World War I by distilling illegal whiskey and smuggling it into German-held Warsaw. Varshavski portrayed the implosion of shtetl life as it came into increasing contact with the outside world. In his study *In the Mirror of Literature: The Economic Life of the Jews in Poland as Reflected in Yiddish Literature (1914-1939)*, William Glicksman (1966) describes Varshavski's vision as the vortex of a world at the brink of an abyss [[Icitation.]] His second novel, *Shnit-tsayt* (*Harvest Time*, 1926), was about shtetl life in the years between the outbreak of World War I and the beginning of the German Occupation. There is a tragic irony to Varshavski's last book, *Rezidentsn* (*Residences*) [[ date]], which describes the efforts of various Jewish characters to escape the Nazis in occupied France. Varshavski settled in Paris in 1924, but after the occupation fled first to Vichy France and then to Italy, where he and his wife were seized and sent to Auschwitz.

Dvora Vogel, philosopher and art critic. Born 1900, Burshtyn, Galicia. Died 1942, together with her husband, mother, and small son, in the Lvov ghetto during the Great

Action of 1942. Vogel was educated in Vienna, in Lvov, and then at Jagiellonia University in Krakow, where she completed a dissertation on Hegel's aesthetics. She was an accomplished academic as well as a writer; she taught psychology at Hebrew Teacher's Seminary in Lvov, and was a central figure in the Polish literary and artistic avant-garde. She corresponded widely with other writers in a circle of mutual influence. Her first volume of poems, published in 1930, (*Tog-figurn Lider, Figures of the Day*) are free verse poems on concrete and abstract themes. *Manekin Lider (Mannequin Poems, 1934)*, were openly constructivist in principle. Her work was little regarded in her time; if she and her audience had lived long enough to become familiar with the new literary forms, her literary fate would likely have been very different.

### Grieving the Death of Writers Lost

Finding this list has changed what was intellectual insight to a profoundly emotional feeling. The sadness and sense of loss to all of us must be overwhelming. to me. The number and the details of who they were and what they had written follows.

**(The information is from where information from—and is it verbatim from encyclopedia so that pages should be listed. [The following list identifies and briefly describes Yiddish writers who are not the subject of an independent biographical entry.]**

Apshan, Herts I(1886–1944), prose writer and journalist. HertsI Apshan was born near Sighet, Hungary; as an adult he was a businessman and insurance agent in that city. After 1918, he lived in Romania. Apshan's depictions of Hasidic life in Transylvania were praised for their artist cobservations and soft irony. He was murdered in Auschwitz.

Aronski (Zak) Moyshe(1898–1944), prose writer and educator. Born in Ovruch, Ukraine, Moyshe Aronski (originally Zak) graduated from Kiev University in 1930 and subsequently taught literature and history in Yiddish schools in Ukraine. From 1926, his prose appeared in periodicals in Kharkov ,Kiev, and Moscow. Aronski enlisted in the Soviet Army and was killed in action. He published more than 15 novels and collections of stories about Jewish life in the Soviet Union..Beylin,

Moyshe-Zisl (1857–1942), scholar and folklorist. Born in Novogrodek, Belorussia, Moyshe-Zisl Beylin served as a crown rabbi in Rogachev (Belorussia) and Irkutsk (Siberia), and from 1920 lived in Moscow. Throughout his life he collected and studied Yiddish proverbs, songs, and children's rhymes and riddles; his studies appeared in Russian, German, and Yiddish scholarly and literary periodicals. Beylin's last collection of Yiddish folk jokes and anecdotes was ready to be published in 1941 but was not released because of the war. Some of his unpublished materials are preserved in the YIVO archives. He died in Siberia.

Dreyfus, Leybush (Leon; 1894–1941), prose writer, journalist, and actor. Born in Lwów, Leybush Dreyfus began to publish poetry in the *Po'ale Tsiyon* press in 1911. After World War I he went to Czechoslovakia, where he founded a traveling Yiddish theater company. He returned to Lwów and contributed short stories, essays, and poems to the Yiddish press under various pseudonyms. Living in Riga and Warsaw, Dreyfus edited Yiddish and Polish periodicals, published a novel about actors (*Kulisn [Behind the Stage]*; 1927), worked in theater and on the radio, and in 1939 returned to Lwów. He died in the Janów concentration camp.

Dua, Yankev-Kopl (1898–1942), writer and journalist. Yankev-Kopl Dua was born in Warsaw and attended a Russian school. He became involved in socialist politics and contributed numerous articles on art, theater, literature, and music to the left-wing Yiddish press. His novels about Polish Jewish history were reprinted in installments by Yiddish newspapers in the United States, Argentina, and South Africa. He was the main editor and author of *Groshn-bibliotek (Penny Library)*, which published popular brochures and produced numerous translations from world literature. Dua continued his literary work in the Warsaw ghetto; a German officer shot him on the street.

Dubilet, Moyshe (1897–1941), literary critic and educator. Born in Ekaterinoslav province, Ukraine, Moyshe Dubilet served in the Red Army during the Russian Civil War and later graduated from the Yiddish department of the Odessa Pedagogical Institute. He taught Yiddish language and literature in Yiddish schools and in 1933 began graduate studies at the Kiev Institute of Jewish Proletarian Culture, researching nineteenth-century Yiddish literature (Yisroel Aksenfeld, Shloyme Ettinger, Sholem Yankev Abramovitsh, Sholem Aleichem). Dubilet's collection *Kritishe artiklen (Critical Essays)* was published in 1939; in 1941, he enlisted in the Soviet Army and was killed in action.

Eliashev, Ester (1878–1941), literary critic, journalist, and teacher. Ester Eliashev was born in Kaunas, and studied philosophy at the universities of Leipzig, Heidelberg, Bern (receiving a doctorate in 1906), and taught at the Higher Women's Courses in Saint Petersburg. She returned to Kaunas in 1921, where she worked as a teacher and was a prolific literary critic and journalist. Eliashev died on the eve of the German invasion. She

was the sister of Isidor Eliashev (Bal-Makhshoves).

F Gilbert, Shloyme (1885–1942), prose writer and poet. Born in Radzymin, near Warsaw, Shloyme Gilbert began to publish neoromantic poetry and novellas in 1907. His first collection of stories appeared in Warsaw in 1922, followed by two additional books of poetry and drama inspired by religious and mystical motifs. He was deported from the Warsaw ghetto to Treblinka.

Glik, Hirsh (1922–1944), poet. Born in Vilna, Hirsh Glik began to write under the influence of his older friends from Yung-Vilne; he issued his first publications in 1940. Glik is famous for his ghetto poetry, especially the “Partisaner lid” (The Partisan Hymn; 1943), which became a symbol of Jewish resistance.

Goldshteyn, Moyshe (1900–1943), prose writer. Moyshe Goldshteyn was born near Siedlec, Poland, and lived in Warsaw. In 1923, he immigrated to Argentina and published short stories in the Yiddish press. In 1932 he arrived in Birobidzhan, worked in an agricultural colony, and published reports about Birobidzhan and Argentina in the Yiddish press. Two collections of his short prose works were published in Moscow. He served as an officer in the Soviet Army and was killed during World War II. A number of his war stories were published posthumously.

Gotlib, Yankev (1911–1945), poet. Yankev Gotlib was born in Kaunas, and received a traditional education. His first poem was published in 1925; subsequently he published four collections of poetry and a book about H. Leyvik; he also edited literary publications in Kaunas. He died under evacuation in Central Asia.

Grin, Yerakhmiel (1910–1944), prose writer. Yerakhmiel Grin was born in a village near Kolomyia, Ukraine; he lived in Warsaw. He wrote stories and novels about Jewish life in the Carpathian Mountains, and died in the Janów concentration camp together with his wife Hinde Naiman-Grin (1916–1944), a Polish and Yiddish writer and journalist.

Grodzenski, Arn-Yitskhok (1891–1941), poet and journalist. Arn-Yitskhok Grodzenski grew up in Vilna and published his first poem in 1906. From 1910 to 1913, he lived in Antwerp, and then returned to Vilna, publishing his first collection of poetry in 1914. In 1916, Grodzenski fled to Ekaterinoslav, where he lost his legs in an accident. He contributed to various Yiddish publications in Ukraine as well as translated Russian and German poetry. In 1921, he again settled in Vilna, where he worked as an editor and translator. His most popular work was the novel *Lebn* (Life; 1923). Tchaikovsky's opera *Eugène Onegin* was performed in his Yiddish translation in Vilna in 1923. Grodzenski was murdered in Ponar.

Hartsman, Motl (1908–1943), poet. Born in Berdichev, Motl Hartsman attended the Yiddish school headed by Nina Brodovskaya, who encouraged his first literary and

theatrical attempts; he received his higher education in Odessa and Moscow, and completed graduate study in Kiev with Maks Erik. Hartsman's first poems were printed in Berdichev's Yiddish newspapers and quickly became popular; a few collections of his poems were published in the 1930s. His last long poem, *Der toyt-urteyl* (The Death Sentence), was written during the war while he served in the Red Army. He was killed in action.

Hershele (1882–1941), poet, prose writer, and journalist. Hershele (pseudonym of Hersh Danilevich) was born in Lipno, Poland. As a textile worker in Warsaw, he joined the socialist Zionist movement, was arrested, moved to Switzerland, and then came back to Poland, where he eventually settled in a town near Warsaw. His first publications, in 1904, were greeted warmly by Y. L. Peretz. Beginning in 1910, Hershele contributed poetry, short stories, children's literature, and translations to various Yiddish periodicals; he collected and published Yiddish folklore; and some of his poems became folk songs. His earliest book of poetry came out in 1907; he also published and edited several other collections. His poetry from the Warsaw ghetto appeared in illegal publications. also published a collection of plays and dramatic poems, titled *Bayopgruntn* (By Abyss; 1930). He participated in Yung-Vilne and served as chair of the Yiddish PEN club. In 1938 he moved to Palestine.

Heysherik, Kalmen-Khayim (1900–1941), prose writer. Kalmen-Khayim Heysherik was born near Łódź, Poland. As a prisoner of war in Germany during World War I, he kept a diary that later served as the basis of his memoirs and fiction, which became popular during the 1920s. He published stories and essays in major Polish Yiddish newspapers. After the occupation of Warsaw in 1939, he fled to Vilna. He was murdered in Ponar.

Kava, Shloyme-Leyb (1889–?), critic and journalist. Born in Warsaw, Shloyme-Leyb Kava (main pseudonym of Moyshe-Yosef Dikshteyn) served as Y. L. Peretz's secretary and later became vice president of the Association of Jewish Writers and Journalists in Warsaw. From 1905, he published numerous articles and essays in the Yiddish press, some of them sharply satirical and critical. In 1923, he published a collection of Yiddish folklore and was involved with various Yiddish publications in Poland. He died in the Warsaw ghetto.

Kirman, Yosef (1896–1943), poet. Yosef Kirman grew up in Warsaw in a poor family and was a worker; his first poetic publication appeared in the collection *Ringen* (Rings; 1919), he later contributed to various periodicals and published one collection of poems. He was arrested for his political activity by the Polish police. In the Warsaw ghetto he continued to write poetry and prose, which was partly preserved in the Ringelblum Archive. He was murdered in the Poniatów concentration camp.

Kreppel, Yoyne (1874–1939), journalist and writer. Born in Drohobycz, Galicia, Yoyne

(Jonas) Kreppel was active in the Zionist movement and later became a leader of Agudas Yisroel. He also participated in the Czernowitz Conference. Beginning in 1914 in Vienna, he served for many years as an adviser for the Austrian Foreign Ministry. He contributed to Deryud and other Yiddish publications in Galicia and from 1919 was a Vienna correspondent for New York's Yidishes togblat. A prolific Yiddish-language author of crime and historical fiction in Poland and America, he published more than 100 small books of stories and novels that were popular among a mass readership. He composed a comprehensive overview of contemporary Jewish life in German with *Juden und Judentum von Heute* (Jews and Judaism Today; 1925). Kreppel died in the concentration camp at Mauthausen.

Olevski, Buzi (1908–1941), poet and prose writer. Born in Chernigov, Ukraine, Buzi Olevski's primary focus was on the economic and social transformation of shtetl youth; he also wrote for children. He wrote his dissertation on the poetry of Dovid Hofshiteyn in Kiev, and later lived in Moscow and Birobidzhan. As an officer in the Soviet Army, Olevski fought in World War II and was killed in action. His autobiographical novel *Osherl un zayne fraynd* (Osherl and His Friends) was published posthumously in 1947.

Pitshenik, Moyshe-Leyb (1895–1941), writer and journalist. Moyshe-Leyb Pitshenik was born in Złoczew, Galicia, spent 1920–1922 in Katowice, and was the director of the Jewish school in Łowicz from 1923 on. He published poetry, stories, and articles in the Polish Yiddish press as well as historical novels about the Haskalah and Hasidism. He was murdered by the Nazis near Chełmno.

Rashkin, Leyb (1903?–1939), prose writer. Born in Kazimierz (Kuzmir), Poland, Leyb Rashkin (Shaul Fridman) began writing stories in the 1930s. His major work, *Di mentshn fun Godl-Bozhits* (The People of Godl-Bozhits; 1936), a realistic panoramic portrait of the Polish shtetl, was one of the most important Polish Yiddish debut novels in the 1930s and was awarded a literary prize. Rashkin was murdered while attempting to escape from German occupation to the Soviet Union.

Shaevich, Simkhe-Bunem (1907–1944), poet and writer. Born in Tęczyce, Poland, Simkhe-Bunem Shaevich grew up in Łódź. From 1933 he published poetry and short stories, mostly in left-wing papers in Łódź and Warsaw; his first collection of stories was ready for publication in 1939 but was not issued due to the start of the war. In the Łódź ghetto, Shaevich composed profound Holocaust poems that explored traditional concepts such as exile and martyrdom. These works were preserved by survivors and published, posthumously, in 1946.

Shalit, Moyshe (1885–1941), journalist and communal activist. Born in Vilna to a well-off family, Moyshe Shalit was actively engaged in a wide range of public and philanthropic activities in Russia, Poland, and abroad, among them the PEN club and the Association

of Jewish Writers and Journalists. In 1906, he published a historical study of the BILU movement in Russian (translated into Yiddish in 1917) as well as articles and reviews in the Yiddish and Russian press, and he edited a number of books and periodicals on politics, culture, and education. He was arrested and murdered immediately after the German occupation of Vilna in July 1941..

Sito, Fayv (1909–1945), prose writer. Fayvl Sito was born Rovno, Volhynia, lost his family during the civil war, and grew up in an orphanage. He studied in Odessa and at the Kharkov Conservatory. His stories about the lives of Jewish orphans in postrevolutionary Russia were based on personal experience, written with warmth and humor, and made him popular with a Yiddish readership. Also popular were his parodies of various Soviet Yiddish writers that were collected in two books (1934, 1938); he additionally wrote plays and translated from Russian and Ukrainian into Yiddish. In 1939–1941, Sito edited a Yiddish magazine for teenagers in Kiev. During the war, he edited an army newspaper and worked for the Moscow Yiddish newspaper Eynikayt.

Tumru, Dovid (1910–1941), prose writer. Born in Alitus, Lithuania, Dovid Umru lived in Kaunas. He began to publish short stories in the Yiddish press in the 1930s; two collections of his short stories appeared in Kaunas in 1937 and 1938. In 1940–1941 he edited the newspaper *Vilner emes* and served as the director of the Vilna State Yiddish Theater. He was murdered by the Gestapo in July 1941.

Varshavski, Yakir (1885–1942), writer and journalist. Born in Mława, Poland, Yaki rVarshavski contributed to the Hebrew press (from 1908) and to Yiddish periodicals (from 1909); he also taught Hebrew in Warsaw's schools. Varshavski published his travelogue to Palestine and Egypt (1919), as well as a number of other books in Hebrew in Poland, including short stories for children. His two Yiddish collections were ready for publication in 1939 but did not appear due to the outbreak of World War II. He continued writing in the Warsaw ghetto until the Nazis murdered him in the summer of 1942.

Vaynig, Naftole (1897–1943), literary critic and folklorist. Born in Tarnów, western Galicia, Naftole Vaynig studied philology at Kraków University and art in Vienna. He also taught in Polish and Jewish schools. From 1917, his critical essays appeared in the press of Vienna and Warsaw, and he contributed studies of Jewish folklore to academic Yiddish publications in Poland. From 1941, he was in the Vilna ghetto, where he continued to teach, write, and collect folklore. His study of Leyb Naydus's poetry won a literary prize of the Judenrat.

Vulman, Shmuel (1896–1941), prose writer. Shmuel Vulman was born in Kaluszyn, Poland. From 1917, he lived in Warsaw and contributed poetry, articles, reviews, and translations to numerous Yiddish periodicals in Warsaw, Lwów, and Czernowitz. He published collections of poetry, memoirs of the German occupation during World War I,

an autobiographical novel, and a number of popular books on history, literature, geography, and other subjects. He was murdered by the Nazis in Kremeniec, Volhynia, where he had fled from Warsaw.

Zhitnitski, Hersh-Leyb (1891–1942), writer and journalist. Hersh-Leyb Zhitnitski was born in Szeradz, Poland, and lived in Łódź. From 1920, he lived in Warsaw, and fled to Lwów in 1939. He fell into the hands of the Nazis in 1941, and was deported to a death camp a year later. His first short story appeared in 1913 in *Lodzer morgnblat*. Zhitnitski worked as an editor of the *Warsaw Haynt*, contributed to the Yiddish press of Poland, the United States, Argentina, and Palestine, and published two collections of novellas and a novel about World War I in installments. His last book was ready for publication in 1939 but was never published due to the outbreak of the war.

Zilburg, Moyshe (1884–1941?), literary critic and translator. Born in Molodechno, Belorussia, Moyshe Zilburg took part in revolutionary activity, was arrested, left Russia, and moved to Galicia. He lived in Kraków, Lwów, and Vienna, where he edited the Yiddish literary magazine *Kritik* (1920–1921). In 1923, he returned to Vilna and worked on various Yiddish literary publications. He began to publish literary criticism around 1908 and later produced several translations from Hebrew, German, and Russian. After the German occupation of Vilna, he was killed in Ponar.

The contribution of this paper is to bring to our awareness the Yiddish writers listed in an Encyclopedia but otherwise not widely recognized and their loss not mourned This is my Kaddish for them

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