



JEWISH
ROOTS,
CANADIAN
SOIL

*Yiddish Culture in Montreal,
1905–1945*

REBECCA MARGOLIS

**JEWISH ROOTS,
CANADIAN SOIL**

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Yiddish Culture in Montreal, 1905–1945
Rebecca Margolis

**J E W I S H
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S O I L**



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1905–1945*

REBECCA MARGOLIS

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PREFACE

MONTREAL'S JEWISH COMMUNITY CHANGED RADICALLY between 1905 and 1945 and forever altered the face of the city. A visitor to Canada's largest metropolis at the beginning of the twentieth century would have encountered a society sharply divided according to religious and linguistic lines based on the country's two charter groups: an economically and politically dominant English-speaking Protestant community and the urban elite of Quebec's mainly rural French-Catholic majority. Sandwiched between them was a tiny Jewish population of largely anglicized Jews that included a small but growing minority of Yiddish-speaking recent Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe. In the next decades, spurred by the mass exodus of Jews from Eastern Europe, Yiddish would put down roots as a Jewish *lingua franca* in Montreal as it would in Jewish immigrant communities worldwide. The same visitor returning in the mid-1920s would find the city profoundly transformed on many levels. A Jewish population numbering in the tens of thousands had become firmly entrenched in the city, concentrated in an immigrant quarter that stretched along Boulevard St-Laurent (St Lawrence Boulevard) and east of Mount Royal Park. The Jewish vernacular of Yiddish had become the most widely spoken language in the province after French and English. The Jewish community had created a comprehensive and cohesive Yiddish milieu, with an infrastructure that included newspapers, schools, libraries, literary life, and theatre and spanning an ideological spectrum ranging from the secular left wing through the most religiously

observant. A follow-up visit in 1945 would find the Yiddish community reckoning with linguistic attrition in the face of widespread acculturation and external assaults on the language. The destruction of the European Yiddish heartland in the Nazi Holocaust, where Yiddish had been spoken as the primary language of the Jewish Diaspora community for a thousand years, reverberated sharply. However, a visit in 1945 would also yield a dynamic Yiddish cultural life that was being revitalized by the arrival of refugees of the Holocaust, who bolstered the local Yiddish milieu and encouraged not only new creativity but an ongoing celebration of cultural continuity on new soil.

Yiddish culture has changed radically in recent decades. While in 1939 there was a world population of over eleven million speakers – 75 per cent of world Jewry – the language is currently spoken by an estimated 350,000 people,¹ with the remaining pockets increasingly composed of insular communities of Ultra Orthodox (*haredi*) – in particular, Hasidic – Jews. Few people today have access to Yiddish literature, music, theatre, and scholarship in the original language; fewer still speak Yiddish as a vital expression of modern Jewish identity. The decades following the Holocaust were not kind to Yiddish, with the murder of roughly half of the world's Yiddish speakers in Nazi-occupied Europe and the mass displacement of the survivors. The post-1945 losses to Yiddish were compounded by other factors, notably state persecution of Yiddish in the Soviet Union, the supremacy of Modern Hebrew (Ivrit) over other Jewish languages in the newly created state of Israel as well as the Diaspora, and Jews worldwide increasingly adopting English and other languages as vernacular. Moreover, with immigrant Jews having steadily moved up and out of the working class, the left-wing ideological movements that so strongly promoted Yiddish have waned. Today, Yiddish lives on largely as a heritage language in what scholars Jeffrey Shandler and Cecile Kuznitz have termed “postvernacular Yiddish.”² In the post-Holocaust era, Yiddish has increasingly entered into a symbolic realm where the language is valued by people who do not actually speak it.

It has become all too easy to forget that for a period of several decades Yiddish culture thrived as a distinct expression of modern Jewish identity. The rising place of Modern Hebrew as the dominant language of Jewish community life over the last half-century has weakened the collective memory of the pivotal and lasting role of Yiddish in the formative period of Ashkenazi mass immigration. In the first half of the twentieth century, Montreal formed part of a transnational

“Yiddishland” – defined by Jeffrey Shandler as “the virtual locus” of Yiddish use³ – within which most of the city’s Jews lived, read, wrote, recited, acted, viewed, sang, listened, organized, taught, studied, marched, protested, and imagined their collective futures in Yiddish. They did so alongside millions of others across a vast religious and ideological spectrum in Eastern Europe and its immigrant centres. This book tells a story of Yiddish as thriving Jewish roots in Canadian soil.

The years 1905 to 1945 marked a period of flux for Canadian Jewry. Mass immigration from Eastern Europe saw the rapid creation of a comprehensive infrastructure for the community that shared the language of Yiddish. In cities across Canada, an effervescent Yiddish cultural life emerged – libraries, newspapers, book publishing, schools, clubs, theatres – with Montreal emerging as Canada’s Yiddish hub. This was a time when Yiddish culture functioned as a chain between Jewish past and present and a means to forge a revitalized collective future for Jews in the modern world. It did so in tandem, and sometimes in competition, with Modern Hebrew, a language that was expanding as a vernacular and evolving its own modern culture during the same time period. In a time of transition, Yiddish provided a way to engage with the wider world and create and maintain group boundaries; it served to edify and entertain while also opening up new realms of possibility.

Why Montreal and not elsewhere? The nearby city of Toronto, for example, was a growing Canadian metropolis that was home to nearly as many Jews as were in Montreal during the period under discussion. However, its Yiddish milieu did not attain nearly the same level of enduring vibrancy. The same can be said for cities in the United States that absorbed comparable numbers of Yiddish-speaking immigrants. In these cities, the immigrants may have employed Yiddish in public life, but they did not form a locus of lasting institutions to promote Yiddish.⁴ The reasons are difficult to pin down, in particular if one reads backwards through the lens of history. Much of what we know about Yiddish in Montreal is the product of the language’s own activists and cultural figures, and the various possible explanations for Yiddish Montreal are tangled indeed.

The particularity of Montreal’s rich and resilient Yiddish cultural life can best be attributed to a convergence of factors, all of which will be teased apart in this study. Montreal’s particular political and social climate was conducive to high group cohesion and the maintenance of a minority culture. As the first sizable non-Christian minority in

Quebec – a province whose dual Anglo-Protestant and French Catholic linguistic and religious character had been entrenched in Canadian Confederation (1867) – the province’s Jews were a conspicuous “other” whose integration was not encouraged by either dominant group. With limited access to the two discrete existing social, cultural, and educational infrastructures, Yiddish-speaking Jews were left to form their own. As the shared language of a new immigrant community, Yiddish represented an obvious choice for Jewish community building. Moreover, as in other Eastern European Jewish centres, the shared Yiddish vernacular created a sense of solidarity and community.

A major factor behind the vibrancy of Yiddish culture in Montreal was a strong ideological impetus. Initially, Yiddish fulfilled utilitarian functions as a Jewish *lingua franca*: before the First World War, institutions were founded in Yiddish in order to reach the Jewish immigrant masses. At the same time, influenced by global trends, a growing number of intellectuals increasingly turned to Yiddish for its value in its own right. Montreal experienced the convergence of dedicated and energetic activists for whom Yiddish culture formed a core of Jewish identity and continuity in the modern world, often together with Modern Hebrew as well as with other ideological allegiances, such as socialism, Jewish nationalism, or religious observance. Montreal’s cultural activists expressed a particularly strong dedication to left-wing Zionism, where language and national identity were inextricably linked. The Labour Zionist Poale Zion (Workers of Zion) organization, whose Montreal chapter became a dominant force in the city’s Yiddish cultural life, espoused a program of Jewish revitalization that included both Yiddish and Modern Hebrew as national languages. This ideologically motivated emphasis on language coincided with a crystallization of French nationalism in Quebec, a movement centred on the survival of the French language and culture within a dominant English-language society. After the Second World War and Quebec’s transformation into a secular state in what has become known as the “Quiet Revolution,” language would take the place of religion as a key marker of national identity in the province. Thus, with Yiddish serving as the shared vernacular of the Jewish immigrant masses, institutions were initially founded in that language; a strong ideological grounding added additional momentum. Further, the Jews’ relative isolation in Montreal, combined with a heightened role of language and culture within the Quebec consciousness, would continue to bolster Yiddish far beyond the period under discussion.

The zenith of Yiddish in Montreal also marked the period of the language's zenith across Yiddishland. By the end of the nineteenth century, Yiddish served as the shared vernacular of a vast majority of the world's Jewry, both in the Eastern European heartland and in its immigrant colonies in far-flung centres, from Berlin to Buenos Aires. By the first decades of the twentieth century, Yiddish was a transnational cultural force with a consumer base of millions as well as writers, actors, singers, teachers, and activists spanning political, religious, and general ideological lines. For many, Yiddish represented no less than the present and future of the Jewish people. Montreal formed part of a web of Yiddish culture comprised of many strands. While it was a secondary centre compared to the major hubs of Yiddish life in Lodz, Vilne (Vilnius), Warsaw, and New York City, Montrealers actively participated in broader trends in Yiddish cultural life: they produced a variety of publications that refracted literature and thought through a distinctly Canadian lens; they formed local chapters of organizations; they corresponded widely with cultural figures worldwide and both visited other centres and hosted cultural figures from abroad. Montreal maintained close ties with the nearby Yiddish hub of New York City as well other world centres of Yiddish, both large and small. In sum, Yiddish Montreal participated in an ongoing dialogue that bridged geographic distances.

This study examines Montreal Yiddish culture as one expression of a distinct Jewish-Canadian identity that emerged in the twentieth century. It offers an example of a vital community that participated in the creation of modern culture in Yiddishland while at the same time developing along its own particular Canadian trajectory. This study thus complements a corpus of literature on Yiddish culture, much of which focuses on major world centres of Yiddish cultural life: Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union, Poland, and the United States. It posits Yiddish culture as a transnational, multi-centred phenomenon whose various centres engaged in an ongoing exchange with one another as well as in their local contexts. While before 1945 Montreal was a comparatively minor Yiddish cultural centre in comparison with New York City in terms of newspaper, journal, and book publishing, literary life, and theatre, it was at the forefront in the area of Jewish education. In time, Montreal would also evolve its own distinct Yiddish press, literature, and theatre.

The period under discussion is bracketed by two watershed events. At one end is the failed Russian Revolution of 1905, which spurred an

upsurge in the ongoing mass exodus of Eastern European Jewry and further politicized its ranks. Instability caused by the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–05 also served to encourage mass emigration, as did the widely publicized Kishinev Pogrom of 1903. In the Montreal context, 1905 marks a qualitative and quantitative turning point, with the arrival of tens of thousands of Jews who were active producers and consumers of Yiddish culture and the new institutions to support it. By 1907, the city was home to Canada's first enduring Yiddish newspaper, *Der keneder adler* [Canadian Jewish Eagle, hereafter the *Adler*], which would promote Yiddish literature and publish virtually all of the country's Yiddish writers. In the years leading up to the First World War, the local chapter of the Labour Zionist Poale Zion movement served as a driving force behind many of the city's core Yiddish cultural institutions, notably a system of secular Jewish schools – the National Radical/Peretz School and the Jewish People's School – and the Jewish Public Library. These institutions supported the expansion of a rich and variegated milieu that came to include a wide array of activity to promote Yiddish cultural life in all of its expressions. The second event, in 1945, is the end of the Holocaust and the irreparable blow to Yiddish culture brought by the decimation of European Jewry. While the Holocaust marked the end of an era of collective optimism in the Yiddish world, it also spurred the arrival of a sizable group of Holocaust survivors to Montreal that included Yiddish cultural figures of international stature, and transformed Montreal into a major centre of Yiddish culture. The period 1905–45 set the foundations for Montreal as a locus of Yiddish culture into the twenty-first century.

Jewish Roots, Canadian Soil offers a comprehensive historical study of community-based Yiddish culture in Montreal during its formative years, focusing on the community activists, organizations, and publications that fuelled it. The book opens with an introductory chapter that presents the broad context of Yiddish cultural life and includes an overview of Yiddish immigration to Montreal and the underlying ideological bases for Yiddish culture (chapter 1). The following chapters examine four primary areas of Yiddish cultural life in Montreal between 1905 and 1945: the Yiddish press, in particular the *Adler* (chapter 2); Yiddish literary activity, including the development of bookstores, libraries, formal and informal organizations, and publication of journals and books (chapter 3); the network of secular Jewish schools with Yiddish as a core part of the curriculum (chapter 4); and Yiddish theatre (chapter 5). The study concludes with a brief

discussion of the transitional period after the Holocaust and its legacy beyond 1945 (chapter 6).

This study builds on a rich literature on Yiddish culture in Canada. This literature begins with works by Canada's pioneering historians of Jewish Canada of the 1920s, notably *Adler* journalist B.G. Sack's meticulously researched histories of the Jews in Canada.⁵ Canadian Jewish studies, including research on Yiddish culture, expanded alongside the wider field of Canadian ethnic history in the late 1960s.⁶ Montreal archivist, bibliographer, and historian David Rome (1910–1996) produced a series of studies on Jewish immigrant life in Montreal that drew heavily on the Yiddish press.⁷ Comprehensive histories of the Jews in Canada by Irving Abella, Erna Paris, and Gerald Tulchinsky touch on Yiddish within a wider context of immigration and acculturation.⁸ Collections of essays in Canadian Jewish studies include studies of Yiddish culture.⁹ Several recent works examine specific aspects of Yiddish culture.¹⁰ Moreover, two volumes of essays published after 1990 focus specifically on Yiddish culture in Montreal: *An Everyday Miracle: Yiddish Culture in Montreal*, edited by Ira Robinson, Pierre Anctil, and Mervin Butovsky; and the bilingual *Traduire le Montréal yiddish/New Readings of Yiddish Montreal*, edited by Pierre Anctil, Norman Ravvin, and Sherry Simon. A body of works by Montreal Yiddish writers presents a wide array of source material; for example, volumes by the writers, poets, and pedagogues Sholem Shtern and Yankev (Yaacov) Zipper include material on Montreal's Yiddish literary milieu,¹¹ while a contemporaneous historical perspective is offered by the published journals of *Adler* journalist Israel Medres, activist Simon Belkin, and Zipper.¹² Chaim-Leib Fuks's lexicon, *Hundert yor yidishe un hebreyishe literatur in kanade* [One Hundred Years of Yiddish and Hebrew Literature in Canada], includes hundreds of writers. Many of these works have appeared in English or French translation by Pierre Anctil, Mervin Butovsky and Ode Garfinkle, Vivian Felsen, and others. This material is augmented by a wealth of data found in the extensive Canadian Yiddish press as well as in archival sources.

This study examines the nascent phase of Montreal Yiddish culture against a backdrop of Yiddish culture in Europe and the Americas as well as within the broader context of Canadian cultural life. In doing so, it sheds light on the Jewish immigrant experience during the interwar period in a specifically Canadian context. At the same time, the Montreal experience provides particular Canadian as well as Quebec lenses onto a Yiddish cultural revolution that rocked

the Jewish world. This is a study of a group of activists who created a vibrant cultural life from the margins rather than pursuing acculturation into mainstream society. Like Anita Norich's recent work on American Yiddish culture during the Holocaust,¹³ this study rejects the generational model that dictates that each subsequent generation of immigrants moved away from its Eastern European Jewish origins. Instead, it presents a dynamic Jewish cultural life with Yiddish at its core that actively perpetuated itself into the future. Like Eva Morawska's case study of Johnstown, Pennsylvania,¹⁴ this book considers broader developments in Jewish immigrant life while at the same time examining the specificity of a smaller Jewish centre. As Canada's primary Yiddish centre during the period under discussion, Montreal has often been compared with the major Yiddish centre of New York City. However, in many ways, Yiddish Montreal parallels the development of other minor centres, as evidenced by Adina Cimet's study of Mexican Jewry.¹⁵

This study posits that several key factors promoted this lasting minority culture in Montreal. These include a strong ideological basis or other deliberate impetus for continuity; a group of dedicated personalities committed to a shared vision, ideally with a strong activist drive; and mechanisms for implementing a cultural vision in the wider community with popular support. Montreal Yiddish cultural life embodied all of these within a multifaceted periodical press, accessible institutions that promoted literacy, a range of literary activity, a system of secular Jewish schools, and a community-sponsored amateur theatre. Moreover, the relative insularity of Montreal Jewry together with an interplay of ideology and culture laid the foundation for strong institutional structures that allowed Montreal to become a world centre of Yiddish culture after the Holocaust.

This is the story of the development of Yiddish cultural life as a vigorous driving force within the Jewish immigrant community of Montreal. It tells the story of how a minority ethnic group integrated into the Canadian cultural landscape while evolving and maintaining a distinct collective identity through a rich network of institutions. The Yiddish community profoundly altered Montreal's landscape and challenged the linguistic and cultural status quo. As such, its development formed an integral chapter within a period of enormous change in Quebec, as well as in Canada as a whole. What is ultimately under discussion here are the mechanisms that allowed a stream of Jewish cultural continuity to flourish while both removed from and

inextricably linked to the core of Yiddish creativity in the Eastern European heartland. It is a study of Yiddish roots in Canadian soil, of a minority culture transplanted and transformed.

NOTE ON YIDDISH USAGE

For purposes of clarity and consistency, Yiddish terms and titles of publications have been transliterated into Standard Yiddish, according to the system of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. Proper names have been rendered in the form most widely used (e.g., J.I. Segal, Chaim Zhitlowsky). Names of organizations and institutions are initially rendered in transliterated Yiddish and subsequently in their most familiar English forms (e.g., Yidishe folks-biblyotek, Jewish Public Library). In the cases of authors and organizations less known to the English public, names have been rendered according to the YIVO system. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from the Yiddish are my own.



1. Keneder Adler/
Canadian Eagle
4075 St-Laurent
2. Hershman's Jewish Library
and Reading Room
Saint-Laurent, corner
Sainte-Catherine
- 3a. Jewish Public Library
4115 St-Urbain
- 3b. Jewish Public Library
4099 Esplanade Avenue
4. Workmen's Circle/
Arbeter Ring
4848 Saint-Laurent
5. Home of Ida Maza
4479B Esplanade,
apartment 6
6. Jewish People's School
5120 Waverly,
corner Fairmount
- 7a. Peretz School campus 1
5766 Waverly
- 7b. Peretz School campus 2
4231 de Bullion
- 7c. Peretz School
120 Duluth East
8. Monument National
1195 St-Laurent
9. Baron de Hirsch building
2040 Bleury Street

**JEWISH ROOTS,
CANADIAN SOIL**

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INTRODUCTION

IN 1925, NEW IMMIGRANT YANKEV¹ ZIPPER (1900–1983) JOTTED the following impressions of Montreal’s Jewish quarter into his diary: “I go out into the street, and Yiddish is being spoken. But what a mess they make of our Yiddish. Here they say: ‘*we’re busy*,’ meaning ‘they’re occupied.’ Business and more business; will I be able to adjust?” Despite his misgivings, Zipper’s sense of displacement in his adopted home was assuaged by his discovery of the city’s network of Yiddish cultural institutions:

A cultural world does seem to exist here. The school is the centre for the radical nationalist intelligentsia. So it looks as if I may find kindred spirits here after all. I was at the *Folks-biblyotek* [Jewish Public Library] yesterday. Quite impressive. I immersed myself in a Yiddish world. Several young men were sitting around studying. So there does seem to be a life here. There’s also a Folks University. Things seem to be moving. Came across a literary periodical called *Canada* issued in Montreal. It is rather skimpy but my joy is great. So there is a life here. There are people with aspirations. There is somewhere to accomplish things. No need to worry, brother!²

In many ways, Zipper is emblematic of the Yiddish intelligentsia who left Eastern Europe for the New World in the first quarter of the twentieth century: European born with a traditional Jewish

upbringing; largely self-educated in secular subjects; committed to new Jewish left-wing or nationalist movements; and engaged in diverse Yiddish cultural ventures as a writer, teacher, and activist. Born Yankev Shtern into a religiously observant Hasidic family in a small town in Poland, Zipper received a traditional education centred on the study of sacred Jewish texts. As part of a contemporaneous generation of Jewish “home-intellectuals,”³ he studied secular subjects with tutors and independently and placed great emphasis on an ongoing process of self-education. He left the world of his traditional Jewish upbringing to teach in the Polish countryside within the network of newly formed secular Jewish schools. At the same time, like many Jewish intellectuals of the period, he began to publish literature in the nascent Yiddish press. As a young man, Zipper embraced socialist and Zionist ideologies and engaged in underground activism. After changing his name to Zipper (his wife’s maiden name) to evade the authorities, he eventually made his way to Canada. There he further forged a close and lasting connection with Yiddish while remaining committed to modern Hebrew culture. Yiddish was his mother tongue and the tongue of his muse, a language in which he imagined a better Jewish future, and an instrument to both construct and disseminate that vision.

Upon his arrival in Montreal, Zipper settled in the Jewish immigrant quarter, where he joined a largely working-class community. He found employment in the Peretz School, one of Montreal’s recently formed secular Jewish schools. His lifelong commitment to Yiddish culture expressed itself in a half-century of service as the principal and driving force behind the Peretz School. He participated in the rapid expansion of Yiddish print culture by writing and publishing widely in local as well as international Yiddish newspapers and periodicals produced for a growing reading public. Like so many of his community of Eastern European émigrés, Zipper was committed to Yiddish as the language used in the dynamic social, political, and cultural movements in Jewish life. Yiddish was a key to the expression of a vibrant collective Jewish past, present, and future. In this, Zipper participated in a transnational grassroots movement of Yiddish activists who shared a vision of Jewish continuity that encompassed teachers, journalists, writers, poets, scholars, actors, *klal-tuer* (cultural activists), and supporters.

Zipper was one of tens of thousands of Eastern European Yiddish-speaking immigrants who settled in Canada in the early decades of

the twentieth century. Between 1900 and 1920, well over 100,000 Jews of Eastern European origin entered the country. By 1912, Montreal, a city of some 470,000, was home to 28,000 Jews, an increase of 20,000 in a single decade; the population would increase by another 30,000 in the next twenty years. This mass migration coincided with an explosion of new political and social movements in Eastern European Jewish life, and with concomitant cultural transformations that dramatically altered the role and status of Yiddish. Alongside revolutionary left-wing and nationalist movements, there emerged a new emphasis on Yiddish as both a means and an end to defining Jewish identity in the modern world. As in other centres of Eastern European Jewish settlement, Montreal's immigrant community produced consumers of Yiddish culture as well as a core of activists devoted to its dissemination. By the First World War, this fledgling community had developed a comprehensive infrastructure envisioned as the basis of a lasting Yiddish cultural life: social and political organizations; lending libraries; a popular press; educational institutions for all ages; and literary and dramatic associations. The Changing Place of Yiddish

THE CHANGING PLACE OF YIDDISH

Also known as *mame loshn* (mother tongue), Yiddish emerged from medieval origins within Jewish communities in Germanic lands to become the dominant vernacular of Ashkenazi civilization.⁴ Written in Hebrew characters, Yiddish incorporated linguistic components from *loshn-koydesh* (the Holy Tongue, pre-Modern Hebrew and Aramaic) as well as Judeo-Romance languages (known as *Loez*) and, with eastward settlement, Slavic elements.⁵ Migrating with Ashkenazi populations across Europe and eventually to new Jewish immigrant centres, Yiddish functioned as the *lingua franca* of three-quarters of world Jewry on the eve of the Second World War. It evolved within the “multilingual constellations” that have characterized two millennia of Jewish Diaspora experience, where languages with different uses function side by side.⁶ In a framework of internal Jewish bilingualism (diglossia), Yiddish largely served as the spoken language of the everyday, subordinate to *loshn-koydesh*, which functioned as the language of the sacred and legal realms of Jewish life.⁷ Within traditional Ashkenazi culture, a lifelong devotion to the study of sacred *loshn-koydesh* texts, which centred on the “written Torah” in the Bible and the “oral Torah” as recorded in the Talmud, together with ongoing interpretation, as

practised by generations of rabbinic authorities, was incumbent on all males; within this framework, *loshn-koydesh* was mediated through Yiddish. Within a system governed by vertical legitimation, Yiddish occupied a position of co-sanctity, notably in the tradition of oral study. While readers had access to a variety of Yiddish sacred and secular writing, in particular after the advent of the printing press, the most prestigious body of literature, which included liturgy, Biblical, and Talmudic texts and rabbinic commentary, as well as works of Jewish theology, philosophy, and mysticism, was produced and consumed in *loshn-koydesh*. Yiddish writing was derivative and comprised works of entertainment, translation, and ethical and didactic texts officially directed at a readership that lacked literacy in *loshn-koydesh*: illiterate or semi-literate men and women. These early works included the *Bove bukh* [Book of Bove] (printed 1541), an epic poem based on an Italian version of a popular Anglo-Norman tale; a religious epic based on the Biblical figure of King David called the *Shmuel bukh* [Samuel Book] (printed 1544); and the *Tsenerene* [Come and See] (printed 1616), a homiletical rendering of the Bible and its traditional interpretations. Even within the movement of popular mysticism that emerged in the eighteenth century to become known as Hasidism, where Yiddish lore was allotted a more prominent place, the core of Jewish culture remained *loshn-koydesh*. For centuries, *loshn-koydesh* and Yiddish functioned in tandem as a portable, extraterritorial culture, with Yiddish occupying a subsidiary role. In addition, non-Jewish languages were used to varying degrees to communicate with parties outside the community.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment) began to unravel this *loshn-koydesh*/Yiddish symbiosis. The Haskalah's embrace of modernity and the potential for Jewish emancipation splintered the uniformity and unity of the Ashkenazi world by rallying for individual integration into a wider European society governed by horizontal legitimation. Initially, the modernization and revitalization efforts of *maskilim* (proponents of the Haskalah) promoted a rejection of Yiddish.⁸ *Maskilim* advocated the replacement of *zhargon*, as Yiddish was commonly called, with modern European languages such as German or Russia, or with the revival and refashioning of Hebrew as a spoken language. In Western and Central Europe, *maskilim*, beginning with Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786), affected a mass transition away from Yiddish in the eighteenth century in tandem with movements towards Jewish emancipation. In contrast, in the Jewish population centre of Tsarist Russia, *maskilim* “did not succeed

in effecting the radical linguistic transformation of Eastern European Jewry at large that they themselves pursued”: in 1897, with failed efforts at forced Russification, 97 per cent of imperial Russia’s more than 5 million Jews claimed Yiddish as their mother tongue, while only 26 per cent claimed Russian literacy.⁹ Similarly, Congress Poland – then under Russian rule – registered a vast majority of its Jewish population as Yiddish speakers in 1897.¹⁰ This social cohesion and the slow acculturation and assimilation that accompanied it stemmed from many of the same factors that encouraged a mass Jewish exodus of over 2.5 million people between 1880 and 1920: antisemitism and restrictive government policies, notably the Jews’ separate legal status and strictly enforced geographic concentration in the Pale of Settlement.

The roots of modern Yiddish literature lie in a nineteenth-century Haskalah impetus to revitalize Jewish life in Eastern Europe. Mendeley Moykher-sforim (“Mendele the Book Peddler,” nom de plume of Sholem Yankev Abramovitsh, 1835–1917), Sholem Aleichem (“Hello,” nom de plume of Solomon Rabinovitsh, 1859–1916), and I.L. Peretz (Yiskhok Leybush Peretz, 1859–1915), widely called *di klas-sikers* (the classics – that is, the founding writers of modern Yiddish literature), authored belles-lettres that conveyed critiques of traditional Jewish society in Yiddish as well as Hebrew and in the process helped to shape a modern prose style in both languages. They wrote in Yiddish in order to reach the broad Jewish masses, although initially with some reservations. All three writers played an integral role in the expansion of modern Yiddish literary language and genres; for example, Peretz, whose 1888 ballad “Monish” is considered the first modernist Yiddish poem, promoted Yiddish literature and mentored a generation of Yiddish writers. *Maskil* Chaim Nachman Bialik (1873–1934), a pioneer of modern Hebrew verse who became Israel’s national poet, also published a score of groundbreaking modern Yiddish poems in Russian periodicals between 1899 and 1915. By the end of the First World War, a community of Yiddish writers would be producing highly innovative works in all genres in Europe as well as in its immigrant centres.

Despite Yiddish remaining the dominant Jewish *lingua franca* in the Yiddish heartland in Tsarist Russia, the rise of mass modern Yiddish culture there was initially stymied. Extensive state repression included wide-ranging censorship and prohibitions against Yiddish publishing, schools, and theatres. These restraints were toughened in the wake of the anti-Jewish persecution prompted by the 1881 assassination

of Tsar Alexander II and by the radical Narodnaya Volya (People's Will) revolutionary group, which included Jewish members. The subsequent 1882 May Laws forced underground much of the Jewish mass political and cultural activity that had just begun to emerge at this time. Despite the virtually universal use of Yiddish within the empire's vast Jewish community in 1897, imperial Russia did not have a single Yiddish newspaper, periodical, theatre, or modern school. As David Fishman points out, "the requisite socioeconomic and ideological conditions for the flourishing of a modern Yiddish culture were in place perhaps by the 1860s, and certainly by the 1880s, yet no broad cultural renaissance arose until considerably later"; the delay of this enterprise, reflected in the paucity of cultural institutions, can be largely attributed to the restrictive policies of imperial Russia.¹¹ While these restrictions did not have a uniform effect on the rise of modern Yiddish culture, in combination with rampant Jewish poverty and anti-Jewish sentiment across the European world, they encouraged the emigration of leaders in Yiddish cultural life. As a result of Russian state repression, the hub of popular Yiddish theatre shifted from Europe to the United States until the First World War. The first professional theatre was founded in Jassy, Rumania, in the late 1870s by Avrom Goldfaden (1840–1908) and spawned numerous other troupes; however, in the early 1880s state bans on Yiddish theatre drove this activity underground and encouraged many actors and playwrights to leave for America with their audiences. American Yiddish theatre, which faced no such repression, enjoyed mass popularity with a repertoire that varied from formulaic melodramas to realist theatre authored by playwright Jacob Gordin (1853–1909). With prohibitions relaxed after the first revolution of 1905 and abolished in the revolution of 1917 and the breakup of the Russian Empire, popular Jewish culture was able to flourish after decades of repression.

The late 1910s brought a golden age of Yiddish culture to Eastern Europe. In the newly formed Soviet Union, literacy was actively promoted by the state to propagate ideology and to form a new collective identity among its various ethnic groups. These new ventures were initially conducted in the vernacular of each ethnic nationality; for the Jews, this language was Yiddish.¹² The state infrastructure, set in place during the New Economic Policy (1921–28), translated into wide support for Yiddish cultural institutions and promoted literature, publishing, theatre, and education.¹³ This system began to crumble in the mid-1930s, when the Stalinist regime became

increasingly restrictive. Rising state oppression culminated in mass purges and the murders of many of the country's most prominent Jewish leaders and Yiddish cultural figures. During the same period, Independent Poland (1918–39), which united a population of some three million Jews from the former Austro-Hungarian, Russian, and German empires, became what Nathan Cohen calls the “undisputed centre for the press and literary creation” in Yiddish.¹⁴ Until the outbreak of war in 1939, Poland boasted vast networks of Yiddish schools, newspapers, journals, and theatres as well as a host of Jewish organizations that operated in Yiddish. With a mass consumer base, modern Yiddish culture flourished.

The edifice of modern Yiddish culture was supported by a strong ideological scaffold with origins in the nineteenth century. The Jewish program of modernization and Europeanization associated with the Haskalah, combined with ideologies emerging in wider Russian and European society, provided fertile ground for the rapid expansion of secular movements among Russian Jews that came to include modern Yiddish culture. While *maskilim* promoted integration through Europeanization, Jews in nascent left-wing revolutionary movements agitated alongside non-Jews for a new world order. The assassination of the tsar and the pogroms that followed prompted an abrupt paradigm shift in what Benjamin Harshav has termed “a modern Jewish revolution.” This revolution shattered the Haskalah’s liberal ideals of Jewish revitalization through individual integration into European society. The result was the formulation of “an internal cultural alternative” to both prevailing Jewish religious culture and the assimilatory culture of the Haskalah.¹⁵ In a political expression of this cultural alternative, an emerging class of Jewish intellectuals drew on Eastern European ethno-nationalist movements in their advocacy for specifically Jewish forms of nationalism: Zionism (the establishment of a modern Jewish homeland, often associated with Palestine, the historical Land of Israel); Territorialism (the establishment of a Jewish state outside of Palestine); and Diaspora nationalism (the promotion of a national Jewish entity in the Diaspora). In the religious realm, a large number of Eastern European Jews participated in a gamut of expressions of Torah-centred Judaism, notably the Hasidic and anti-Hasidic (*Misnagdic*) movements. The post-Haskalah world view entailed a strong educational component in the dissemination of all of these ideologies. Education lay at the heart of Jewish life in Eastern Europe, where, as Ellen Kellman writes, “a youth culture revolving

around autodidacticism flourished.”¹⁶ Both in Eastern Europe and its offshoots, the Yiddish-speaking masses, most of whom lacked access to formal higher education, sought out educational opportunities in the language most accessible to them.

An array of secular Jewish movements that developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries actively promoted modern Yiddish culture. The most influential political organization in laying a foundation for a mass movement of modern Yiddish culture was Der algemeyner yidisher arbeter bund in lite, poyln un rusland/the General Jewish Labour Union of Lithuania, Poland, and Russia (hereafter the Bund). Founded in Vilne in 1897, the Bund emerged as a left-wing political party to promote revolution and radicalize the Jews of Eastern Europe within the wider socialist movement. In order to spread its revolutionary message, the Bund’s activists turned to Yiddish as the vernacular of the Jewish masses and, in the process, played a seminal role in the emergence of a broad Yiddish reading public. By 1905, after an initial period of resistance, the Bund adopted ideologue Chaim Zhitlowsky’s (1865–1943) theory of Jewish national cultural autonomy and seized upon the growth of secular Yiddish culture to further its agenda. The Bund’s ideology of *doikayt* (hereness) developed in opposition to Zionism as a movement for cultural nationalism in the Diaspora. *Doikayt* translated into a commitment to Yiddish as the living language of the Jewish people, with Yiddish culture functioning as a surrogate homeland. During the years between the Kishinev Pogrom of 1903 and the Russian Revolution of 1917, a group of activists, scholars, writers, and critics promoted modern Yiddish culture as part of *Yidishe visnshaft*, a branch of modern scholarship and critical literature conducted on and in Yiddish with the ultimate goal of Jewish national revival.¹⁷ These ideological movements were linked with the creation of a network of secular cultural organizations to further the use of Yiddish as a national language of the Jewish people, including libraries, academic institutions, and publishing houses. The most far-reaching of these institutions was the Yidisher visnshaftlekher institut (Yiddish Scientific Institute, later renamed the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, hereafter YIVO), founded in 1925 as an academic institution dedicated to the study of Yiddish and Yiddish culture, with its head office in Vilne and, after 1940, New York, and chapters in Europe as well as in immigrant centres.

Much of twentieth-century modern Yiddish cultural activity came under the influence of an ethos of ideological Yiddishism that

identified Yiddish as a national language of the present and future. Rooted in the creation of what Gennady Estraiikh terms “a dissenting subculture of ethnic – rather than religious – Jewishness,” Yiddishism was inspired by the “idea of Jewishness as essentially culture expressed in the national language and defined by its literature and arts.” This new concept of Jewishness manifested itself in two streams, Hebraism and Yiddishism, each with its linguistic focus and “metaphysical homeland.” Hebraism was based on the revival of the Hebrew language to bridge past and future in Zion, and Yiddishism was rooted in the Yiddish language, with its locus in Eastern Europe.¹⁸ A third voice was offered by Jewish assimilationists, who advocated the adoption of majority state languages such as Polish or Russian. Modern Yiddish culture emerged from heated debates about whether Yiddish, Hebrew, or a non-Jewish language should serve as the language of modern Jewish life in cultural as well as political realms. In Eastern Europe as well as in immigrant centres, proponents of Yiddish argued for the centuries-old Jewish vernacular of the masses, adherents of Hebrew advanced a revival of that language, and assimilationists advocated the abandonment of Jewish languages altogether.¹⁹

Ideological Yiddishism came into existence within wider European social and political trends in conjunction with the expansion of mass Yiddish culture. As David Fishman points out, Yiddishism paralleled other ethno-nationalist movements in Europe by placing “great emphasis on the Jews’ spoken language as one of their defining markers as a national group, which bound them together across time and space.” This movement thus championed the modernization of Yiddish as a Jewish vernacular on par with other European languages and its increasing role as “a vehicle for modern national culture” that encompassed literature, the performing arts, education, scholarship, and political discourse.²⁰ In addition to having its roots in ethno-nationalist ideals that promoted Yiddish and Hebrew creativity in the Diaspora, Yiddishism was rooted in Jewish populism. Unlike pre-Modern Hebrew, which had historically been a literary language relegated to an elite, Yiddish was elevated as the language of the *folk* and the embodiment of a collective national consciousness. Within this framework, culture in general – and literature in particular – was viewed as “a surrogate Jewish territory” and formed the core component of modern, secular Yiddish civilization.²¹ Indeed, Yiddish cultural literacy among Ashkenazi Jews was understood as key to Jewish identity and, ultimately, to Jewish life in the modern world.

The First Yiddish Conference, held at Czernovitz, Bucovina, in 1908, legitimized Yiddish by formally declaring it “a national language of the Jewish people,” thus marking the formal genesis of a Yiddish language movement.²²

The two primary architects of the nascent Yiddishism movement, Chaim Zhitlowsky and Yiddish-Hebrew writer I.L. Peretz, promoted intersecting visions of Yiddishism. Zhitlowsky’s cultural-radical version endorsed an extreme secularism in which language, rather than religion, formed the basis of Jewish national identity. The creation of a Jewish nation hinged on the production of a modern cultural life in Yiddish that was comprehensive enough to meet all of the nation’s cultural and intellectual needs. Peretz’s national-romantic Yiddishism emphasized continuity between contemporary Jewish life and the ethical, moral, and aesthetic value inherent in sacred Jewish texts – the Bible and rabbinic literature – as well as modern Yiddish literature. Yiddish formed the newest link in the *goldene keyt* (the golden chain) of Jewish tradition, but could not serve as the national language of the Jews until the Jewish canon, which was overwhelmingly in *loshn-koydesh*, was available in Yiddish via translation.²³ Both outlooks reverberated widely in the Yiddish world and motivated multifaceted cultural activity.

In addition to its ideological role in modern Jewish life, Yiddish evolved as a vehicle for wide-ranging artistic creation. Such activities ranged from politically motivated works to works that pushed the boundaries of Yiddish as a medium. An array of Yiddish literary movements developed in both Europe and America, with centres in the United States, Poland, and the Soviet Union. The beginning of American Yiddish poetry was marked by the late nineteenth-century appearance of New York City’s Sweatshop Poets – Joseph Bovshover (1873–1915), David Edelstadt (1866–1892), Morris Rosenfeld (1862–1923), and Morris Winchesvky (pseudonym of Benzion Novakhovich, 1856–1932), who expressed a commitment to the social and political struggles of the Jewish immigrant worker in highly stylized verse. *Di yunge* (The Young Ones) – a group that emerged with the publication of their first journal, *Yugend* [Youth], in 1907, and comprised poets and prose writers, including Moyshe-Leyb Halpern (1886–1932), H. Leivick (pseudonym of Leivick Halpern, 1888–1962), Zishe Landau (1889–1937), Mani Leib (pseudonym of Mani Leib Brahinsky, 1883–1953), Isaac Raboy (1882–1944), and others – emphasized aesthetic considerations over Jewish politics to promote

an individualistic, art-for-art's-sake approach to Yiddish literature. In 1919, a group of Introspectivist poets, including Yankev Glatshteyn, founded the *In zikh* (In Self) group as a declaration of a new avant-garde that embraced open forms, thematic, and language. Ten years later, the Proletpen group was formed to unite writers of a Communist orientation.²⁴ In pre-First World War Warsaw, a group of writers, including David Pinski (1872–1959) and Sholem Asch (1880–1957), gathered around I.L. Peretz to produce modernist belles-lettres. In 1920s Warsaw, *Di khalyastre* (The Gang) emerged as a group of Yiddish expressionist and futurist poets who promoted extreme individualism in poetry; the group included Peretz Markish (1895–1952), Uri Zvi Greenberg (1896–1981), and Melekh Ravitch (pseudonym of Zekharye-Khone Bergner, 1893–1976). The Soviet Union initially extended wide support to ventures in modern Yiddish literature, as seen in the writing of Dovid Bergelson (1884–1952), Dovid Hofshiteyn (1889–1952), Izi Kharik (1898–1937), Moyshe Kulbak (1896–1940), Leyb Kvitko (1890–1952), and others until state repression increasingly restricted literary production and eventually led to the incarcerations and deaths of many writers.²⁵ In tandem with these major centres and their literary movements, a large number of lesser-known writers were active in smaller Yiddish centres transnationally, both in producing their own writing and in actively supporting the publication of others. In all Yiddish centres, major and minor, the primary site of publication for modern Yiddish literature through 1945 remained periodicals, notably literary journals.

Despite the forward-looking impetus associated with it, modern Yiddish culture largely remained the purview of Jews in the lower socio-economic classes as yet unintegrated into mainstream society. This imbued it with a formidable vitality as well as built-in obstacles. As Michael Steinlauf writes, in all of its centres, the budding Yiddish cultural infrastructure shared “the permanent economic crisis common to all Yiddish cultural institutions”²⁶: that is, lower- or working-class working consumers could not afford to support the product, be it books or plays. Meanwhile, when integration into mainstream society was an option, the middle classes generally assimilated into the dominant linguistic population. Thus, in Poland in 1931, while 80 per cent of Polish Jews declared Yiddish as their mother tongue, the use of Yiddish in areas such as education and reading was on the decline, in particular among the higher economic echelons.²⁷ Although looming antisemitism in Europe stymied integration and encouraged a return

to Yiddish, in the English-speaking world the overarching pattern was linguistic integration away from Yiddish.

In general, during the modern period one can posit an inverse relationship between levels of Jewish integration into wider society and Yiddish maintenance; that is, when Jews were offered the possibility of participating in a non-Jewish civilization, their connection to Yiddish declined and their children were likely to identify a language other than Yiddish as their primary vernacular. In the transitional period between exclusion and integration, modern Yiddish culture flourished. This trend can be discerned in eighteenth-century Germany, where Jewish emancipation and modernization were accompanied by a linguistic shift away from Yiddish to modern German, albeit unevenly. Conversely, in interwar Europe there emerged a vibrant cadre of youth dedicated to Yiddish culture among those with full access to non-Jewish European languages. However, this activity took place against a backdrop of rising antisemitism and the exclusion of Jews from the dominant society. Yiddish thus offered a cultural haven in the face of rising hostility and displacement. The notable exception to this rule is the insular world of ultra-Orthodox Jewry, where Yiddish has maintained – and in some cases expanded – its role as a carrier of Jewish tradition and marker of distinctiveness into the twenty-first century.²⁸

In the face of a rapidly changing world in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Yiddish shifted from being the shared vernacular of the Jewish masses to becoming a means of disseminating new ideologies of Jewish revitalization and, finally, a cultural transmitter. Over a period of half a century, the language came to form the core of a complete cultural system in the modern Jewish world, paralleling other European civilizations. In addition to Yiddish serving as the everyday language of millions of Jews, modern Yiddish culture encompassed a literature that spanned all genres, a popular press and specialty journals, popular and art theatre, and a multidimensional educational infrastructure. While initially a by-product of ideological dissemination, modern Yiddish culture came to be motivated by ideological movements that attributed national as well as cultural value to Yiddish.

Here Yiddish stands in sharp contrast to the Sephardic vernacular of Spanyolit (also known as Judeo-Spanish, Dzhudezmo, and Ladino), where, despite a proliferation of popular newspapers in a collapsing Ottoman Jewry, the language was not championed as a mechanism for cultural transformation.²⁹ Although Spanyolit remained widely spoken

among Ottoman Jewry, the prominence of ideologies of westernization promoted by the Alliance Israelite Universelle (founded 1860) resulted in French emerging as a dominant language of education and intellectual and cultural production.³⁰ Moreover, in the inclusive, multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire, where Spanyolit speakers had formed a religious minority, the empire's dissolution in the First World War rendered Jews a minority in major centres such as Salonika within newly emerging national states where acculturation entailed linguistic assimilation.³¹ Literature and theatre produced in Spanyolit remained largely derivative and a by-product of ideological dissemination and indoctrinization.³² In short, even at the peak of its cultural production, Spanyolit was widely regarded as a temporary linguistic vehicle to disseminate ideas until its speakers adopted a more suitable language; thus, in the case of interwar Salonika, "[w]hile Judeo-Spanish was still regarded as the primary language for transmitting and spreading the new messages of acculturation, the essence of these messages also meant the imminent, and even necessary death of this language."³³ In contrast, during the same period, the Yiddish language and its culture took new roles as a marker of Jewish continuity, in particular within secular contexts.

By the end of the nineteenth century – in the midst of the mass Jewish exodus from Eastern Europe – Yiddish was emerging as a significant vehicle of modern Jewish culture in centres worldwide. This culture expanded simultaneously in major and minor centres in both the Old World, with hubs in Moscow, Warsaw, and Vilna, and the New World, with its mecca in New York City. The development of a Yiddish popular press, literature, theatre, pedagogy, scholarship, and political activism coincided with technological advances that facilitated travel and ongoing contact between Yiddish communities in far-flung locations. Improvements such as more-accessible overseas travel and a more-efficient postal system helped to foster relationships between Yiddish speakers across vast distances. During the years between 1905 and the Second World War, Yiddish produced a multifaceted cultural edifice.

Wherever they settled, Yiddish-speaking immigrants set down roots in new soil. They created mutual aid, religious, educational, political, economic, and cultural institutions to meet their needs, with Yiddish functioning as the common denominator. In some immigrant centres, Yiddish became exhausted within a generation as immigrants adapted to their new situation and took on the local languages of their

adopted homes. Yiddish cultural activists – writers, publishers, educators, activists – became an increasingly marginalized minority in these rapidly acculturating immigrant communities. In other centres, such as Montreal, Yiddish served as an ongoing source of solidarity and was consciously cultivated as a means of expressing and maintaining Jewish identity. Here the impact of a core group of Yiddish cultural activists and the comprehensive and resilient infrastructure they created reverberated in the wider community over successive generations.

JEWISH IMMIGRATION TO CANADA

Unprecedented numbers of Eastern European Jewish immigrants left their homes in the late decades of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth. A combination of legal, socio-economic, and ideological factors spurred the emigration of a third of the total Jewish population. The Pale of Settlement, created by imperial Russia in 1791 to restrict Jewish settlement and economic life, contained the largest body of Jews in the world – some 40 per cent by the end of the nineteenth century – and the vast majority of the world's Yiddish speakers. Imperial Russia addressed its “Jewish problem” – what to do with the Jews in a changing modern world – with policies that alternately ranged from ambivalent to hostile. As Gennady Estraiikh points out, “‘Humanization’ of Jews through general education – the missionary idea that seized influential Russian decision makers – was vigorously, if dysfunctionally, implemented during most of the nineteenth century.”³⁴ Policies to encourage Jewish Russification were set in place, notably the forced military conscription prescribed in the Cantonist laws (1825–55). The same regime, however, facilitated Jewish access to higher education, with the unintended result of creating hotbeds of Jewish student radicalism and a stratum of Jewish intellectual activists. The dissolution of the Jews’ traditional roles as middlemen after the emancipation of the serf population in 1861 led to the economic displacement of Jewry that, combined with anti-Jewish regulations and a rapid natural increase of the Jewish population, resulted in widespread pauperization. Anti-Jewish sentiment increased after the assassination of Tsar Alexander II, leading to further discriminatory laws against the Jews, including legal limitations on residence, on entry into higher education, on trade and professional life, and on publications and performance. A marked increase in anti-Jewish

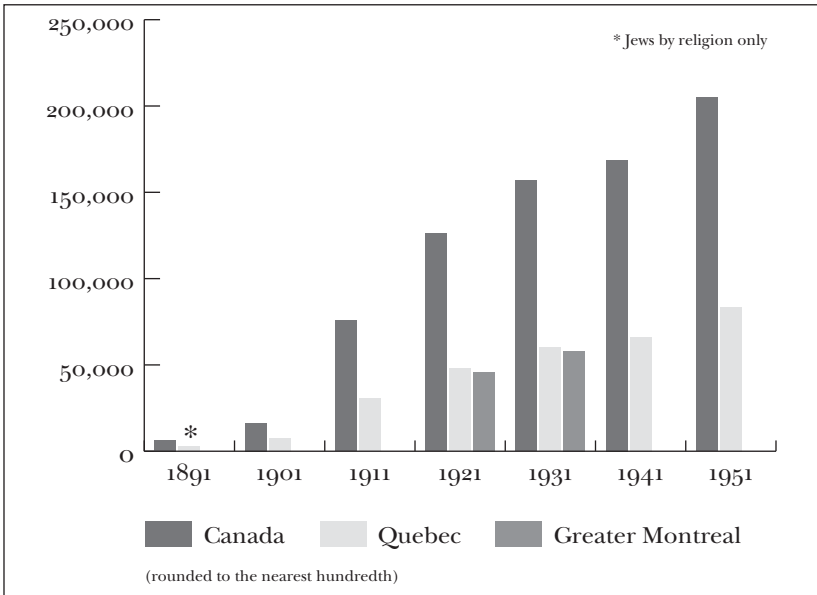


FIGURE 1.1. | The Jewish Population of Canada, Quebec, and the Greater Montreal Area. Credit: Brian Ally, Zijin Digital

violence in repeated waves of pogroms further decimated Jewish life. In this climate of instability and economic hardship, the prospects of a better life lured many Jews away, in particular to the Americas. For immigrant Jews active in nascent revolutionary movements, emigration also presented the chance to implement their left-wing or nationalist ideals in freedom and on new soil.

The mass Jewish exodus from Eastern Europe coincided with a sea change in Canada's demographic and economic development. The federal Liberal government's implementation of the Sifton Plan, named after Minister of Interior Clifford Sifton (1861–1929), aggressively promoted European immigration to populate and develop the Canadian West and generate economic expansion. Its effect was to substantially increase Canada's population and diversify the ethnic landscape. Between 1896 and the outbreak of the First World War, over three million immigrants settled in Canada, increasing the population by 43 per cent, and though Canada remained largely settled by its English and French charter groups, the percentage of foreign-born residents exceeded 20 per cent in 1931.³⁵ Canada's open-door policy facilitated

a mass immigration of Eastern European Jews to Canada. Moreover, individuals such as Alexander Galt (1817–1893), Canada's first high commissioner in London, rallied to bring persecuted Russian Jews to Canada in the wake of the 1882 pogroms.³⁶

Although it occurred on a much smaller scale in Canada than in the United States, the mass immigration of Eastern European Jews exceeded all previous Jewish settlement in Canada many times over. Whereas in 1851 there had been fewer than 500 Jews in Canada, by 1931 over 155,000 Jews were counted on the Canadian census, an increase due overwhelmingly to immigration. The number of Jewish newcomers to Canada in the first five years of the twentieth century exceeded the entire Canadian Jewish population in 1900,³⁷ with immigration peaking just prior to the First World War.

The mass Eastern European Jewish immigration challenged Canadian immigration policies, which were geared towards meeting the needs of the country – population expansion, defence, and economic settlement required for the mining of natural resources, farming, and the creation of infrastructure such as the railway – while maintaining the ethnic, religious, and linguistic makeup of the existing population: Western European, Christian, and English or French.³⁸ In addition to being non-Christian and Yiddish speaking, the Jews transplanted their pre-immigration economic and settlement patterns. They formed the country's most urbanized population at close to 97 per cent in 1931, compared with 34 per cent for the Canadian population as a whole. By 1931, Jewish newcomers to Canada had settled overwhelmingly in the urban metropolises of Montreal (some 58,000), Toronto (some 47,000), and Winnipeg (some 18,000), with seven out of every ten Canadian Jews residing in these cities' densely populated immigrant neighbourhoods.³⁹ Jewish mass immigration coincided with the beginnings of the garment industry in Canada, which drew many Jews into textiles, ready-to-wear clothing, and related trades. In occupational patterns typical of European Jewry, Canadian Jews were overrepresented in the wholesale and retail trades, in sales, and in semi-skilled manufacturing, and were underrepresented in banking, farming, and unskilled labour.⁴⁰ Those Jews who settled outside of major urban areas often opened and operated shops.⁴¹ Only small numbers of immigrants settled in Jewish farming settlements established between 1882 and 1914, with the Jewish farm population peaking in 1921 at 2,568 and then declining rapidly in the Great Depression.⁴² Like larger urban settlements, the Jewish farming

colonies developed networks of Jewish institutions, including synagogues, schools, libraries, and literary clubs, and Yiddish cultural life played a prominent role in combating isolation and creating community.⁴³ Most of the new immigrants arrived without resources, without proficiency in English or French, and disadvantaged by a lack of work skills and discriminatory hiring practices. Contrary to popular stereotypes, Jews were virtually excluded from the leadership of Canada's financial and manufacturing corporations.⁴⁴ As Franklin Bialystok sums up, by the eve of the Second World War, "the Jewish community was urban, proletarian, static in its growth, and outside the mainstream of economic power, social prestige, or political influence."⁴⁵

From the late 1920s through the 1940s, Canada's increasingly exclusionary immigration policies restricted new Jewish settlement. In the post-First World War years – concurrent with the passage of the new U.S. Immigration Act in 1924 – it became more and more difficult for Jews seeking refuge to enter Canada. A 1931 Order-in-Council (PC 695)⁴⁶ closed the door to most immigrants: "until otherwise ordered, the landing in Canada of immigrants of all classes and occupations is hereby prohibited except as hereinafter provided." The exceptions to this regulation were British and American subjects with sufficient financial capital. These regulations were stringently applied to Jews seeking refuge from Europe, and only a very few individual Jews were allowed into the country under special Orders-in-Council, which amounted to individual acts of political patronage. Institutionalized antisemitism rendered it difficult for foreign Jews to enter Canada, even on a temporary basis.⁴⁷ During the years of the Third Reich and its aftermath – when European Jews faced mortal peril and mass murder as well as widespread displacement – the federal government's immigration policy with respect to the Jews was, as summarized by a Canadian immigration official and as subsequently used for the title of Irving Abella and Harold Troper's book on the subject, that "none is too many."⁴⁸ Canada's record for the admission of Jews between 1933 and 1948 was the worst in the Western world, with fewer than 5,000 Jews allowed into the country. The diverse strategies of the organized Jewish community, notably the Canadian Jewish Congress, to bring individuals and groups of Jews from Nazi Europe to Canada were ultimately unsuccessful in moving the government of Prime Minister Mackenzie King to alter the existing policies that were rigorously applied by F.C. Blair, the director of the Immigration Branch of the Department of Mines and Resources. The flow of European Yiddish speakers into

Canada was in effect stymied through the late 1940s, when discriminatory immigration policies were liberalized.

EARLY JEWISH SETTLEMENT IN MONTREAL

The origins of the Montreal Jewish community date to the colonial period, when a handful of English Jews accompanied the British Army following the conquest of New France in 1759–60. Whereas under royal decree non-Catholics had been refused access in the French colony, English rule permitted Jewish settlement. These Jews formed the first non-Christian, non-Anglo-Celtic group to seek integration in what would become Canada. In Montreal, a tiny “old guard” of Jews – largely Sephardim of British origin – joined the society of the English-Protestant elite. By 1768, Canada’s first synagogue, the Shearith Israel Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, had been founded.⁴⁹ Meanwhile, a small but vigorous Jewish community came into being in the nearby city of Trois-Rivières (Three Rivers), with London-born businessman Aaron Hart (c. 1724–1800) becoming Lower Canada’s first permanent Jewish settler in 1759. The Hart family occupied a position of prominence, in both the tiny Jewish and the wider non-Jewish communities. In the second generation, Ezekiel Hart (1770–1843) was elected to the Legislative Assembly in 1807–08, although he was repeatedly denied his seat. In 1832, a Bill of Rights was passed to grant Jews recognition under the law in Lower Canada, making them among the first emancipated Jews in the British Empire.⁵⁰

Immigrant Jews in Quebec encountered a society sharply divided along religious and linguistic lines: a majority Franco-Catholic population – descended from the original settlers – that was largely rural in its settlement patterns and an Anglo-Protestant elite that dominated economic and political life in Montreal.⁵¹ Canadian Confederation and the Constitution Act (British North American Act) of 1867 enshrined the binary character of the province of Quebec with the creation of a confessional public school system divided along Catholic and Protestant lines that promoted the religious, linguistic, and cultural identities of the two charter groups. Each of these “two solitudes” maintained distinct organizational infrastructures, including hospitals, libraries, and educational systems.⁵²

The small nineteenth-century population Quebec Jews acculturated into English society. The founding Jewish community of Quebec, which consisted of fewer than a hundred Jews in 1825, had arrived

largely via England and the British colonies. As Michael Brown suggests in his study *Jew of Juif*, in the nineteenth century, English Montreal was a “frontier garrison town” lacking fixed social boundaries and open to the English-speaking Jewish population.⁵³ By the mid-nineteenth century, the majority of Canada’s Jews residing in Montreal had largely acculturated into the urban English milieu and shared its position of privilege in a Quebec that was largely rural, church-dominated, and French speaking.⁵⁴ By the 1840s, the several hundred Jewish citizens played a prominent role in the elite English sector of Quebec society. Jews founded banks, operated as important merchants, and held public office, and their religious leadership held prestigious positions in the wider community. Reverend Abraham de Sola (1825–1882), for example, invited from England to serve as rabbi of the Shearith Israel Synagogue in 1847, was appointed professor of Hebrew and oriental literature at McGill University. A decade later, a growing community of Ashkenazi Jews founded the Shaar Hashomayim Synagogue.⁵⁵ By 1870, some forty Jewish families living in and around Montreal had formed a well-integrated and prosperous English-speaking aristocracy.⁵⁶ They were educated in the city’s English schools and participated fully in English cultural life. Even as the population gradually increased in the late nineteenth century, the community integrated into Canadian society, adopting the English language and living as “Canadians of the Mosaic faith,” although many of its newer members were increasingly of Eastern European origin.⁵⁷ Recent arrivals joined the established Jewish community and formed new religious and community organizations, including social services and support networks for the resettlement of immigrants. In 1847, Montreal Jews organized the Hebrew Philanthropic Society, a Jewish welfare organization, to aid the several hundred Eastern European Jews who arrived that year. Replaced by the Young Men’s Hebrew Benevolent Society in 1863 (renamed the Baron de Hirsch Institute in 1890), it provided financial, social, and educational support to the new immigrants.

These early organizations – like those that would follow with mass immigration – represented continuity with both Jewish tradition and concurrent trends in Anglo-Canadian society. Traditional Jewish society provided an extensive network of social institutions to meet the physical, spiritual, cultural, and other needs of its community. The wider organizational tendency in Jewish life represents a salient factor in the development of Jewish communal organizations in Quebec.⁵⁸

Likewise, the establishment of ethnic institutions, as Brown posits, was not an anomaly but rather an integral part of life in Anglo-Canadian society that saw the founding of Irish, German, and Swiss societies during the same period:⁵⁹ "In founding their own separate religious and charitable institutions Jews were, in part, then, acculturating to the organizational patterns of Anglo-Canadian society ... The profusion of new Jewish organizations also represented a typical immigrant response – to seek familiar surroundings within an alien environment."⁶⁰ During the opening decades of the twentieth century, Jewish Montreal established lasting patterns of institutional completeness.⁶¹

The mass Eastern European Jewish immigration to Quebec experienced patterns of adaptation very different from those of their predecessors. As discussed below, their integration into the English milieu was far from seamless. Much of this had to do with the sheer size of the immigration, as well as the linguistic and cultural character of the newcomers.

YIDDISH IMMIGRATION TO MONTREAL

Beginning with a trickle of several hundred, Yiddish-speaking settlers soon flooded the anglicized Jewish population of Canada. In 1881, the census showed 2,443 Jews in all of Canada, a twofold increase in a decade.⁶² By 1901, immigration had swelled the total Canadian Jewish population to over 16,000. Then, in 1913–14 alone, over 18,000 Jews arrived in Canada. Immigration resumed after the First World War, although with less intensity.⁶³ By 1931, the Jewish population of 156,726 formed the eighth-largest ethnic group in Canada,⁶⁴ and virtually all of it was Yiddish speaking. The mass immigration that began at the end of the nineteenth century not only rendered the Jews a significant minority, but also brought a marked change in the overall linguistic, socio-economic, and cultural composition of Canada.

The largest proportion of new émigrés settled in the port city of Montreal. In 1901, with a population of 267,730, Montreal was Canada's largest metropolis and its economic hub. The city absorbed roughly a third of the Jewish immigrants who came to Canada in the opening decades of the twentieth century.⁶⁵ By 1912, the Jewish population of Montreal had grown to 28,000, an increase of over 20,000 in just ten years. The Jewish population of Greater Montreal reached 45,802 in 1921 and 57,997 in 1931, representing 6.1 and 5.8 per cent of the overall population respectively and making the Jews the largest

non-French and non-Anglo-Celtic ethnic group in the city. With this new wave of immigration, Yiddish became the most spoken language in the city after French and English. From 1900 through the 1940s, most of the new Jewish immigrants made their home along Boulevard St-Laurent, popularly known as “the Main,” which bisected Montreal geographically and culturally into East and West.⁶⁶ They found themselves sandwiched between the numerically dominant working-class Franco-Catholic majority to the east and the economically dominant Anglo-Protestant elite to the west.⁶⁷ In the 1930s, Jews formed a majority in two wards in this area, St Louis and Laurier, at 50 per cent and 55 per cent of the total populations respectively.⁶⁸

The Jewish newcomers were far more conspicuous than their Canadianized predecessors. They were overwhelmingly Yiddish speaking, with 99 per cent of Quebec Jews over the age of ten declaring Yiddish their mother tongue on the 1931 census (96 per cent in Canada as a whole). They maintained strong ties with their homelands and religious traditions. Moreover, many arrived with previous exposure to radical leftist and nationalist ideals, and they brought their revolutionary ideologies with them.⁶⁹ As in other Jewish working-class centres, Jews became prominent in the emerging labour movement, participating in, as well as organizing, strikes for better wages and working conditions.⁷⁰ As their numbers grew, the Jews came to form what poet Irving Layton has termed a “third solitude.”⁷¹

During the period 1905–45, Montreal’s Yiddish Jews experienced incomplete integration. While tiny numbers of Jews living in rural Quebec spoke French and sent their children to French schools, Montreal Jews continued to acculturate into English society, though far less fully than previously. While, by formal agreement, their children were considered Protestants as far as educational purposes were concerned and educated in English-language Protestant schools, Jews faced increasing exclusion as their numbers grew. In his *Community Besieged: The Anglophone Minority and the Politics of Quebec*, Garth Stevenson goes as far as to state, “The Jews gained fluency in English but not much else from their status as honorary Protestants.” In addition to being denied representation on the Protestant school boards, they were barred from teaching in the schools, excluded from living in certain neighbourhoods, discouraged from working in given companies, and subject to quotas for university education.⁷²

Jewish immigrants to Montreal faced the upheaval of transition to the New World. Although a number did come from industrialized urban

centres, many of the newcomers arrived via *shtetlekh* – market towns with a sizable Jewish population – in the Pale of Settlement in which they had spent at least part of their lives as observant Jews. Their roots were in communities that lived according to the Jewish calendar and observed a comprehensive system of Jewish law (*halakha*) governing most aspects of daily life, from diet to marital relations. This traditional society placed a high value on Jewish learning. As a rule, boys, as well as some girls, attended *kheyder*, and ideally, young men went on to *yeshiva* and a lifelong commitment to ongoing Jewish study in the *beys-medresh*;⁷³ the most capable of these Jewish scholars, the *talmid-khokhem* (Jewish scholar), was held as the male ideal. While many of the immigrants attempted to maintain some degree of Jewish observance in the New Country, their communal lives were no longer governed by Jewish tradition in the ways they had been in the Old Country. Those whose status and income stemmed from Jewish learning – Jewish scholars and religious functionaries, such as the *shoykhet* (ritual slaughterer) – found themselves displaced in a society where their learning no longer represented the ideal.⁷⁴ Moreover, in the 1880s and 1890s, the transmission of religious values was problematic as there were limited opportunities for Jewish education and many children received no Jewish schooling at all.⁷⁵

The newcomers encountered a Jewish community ill equipped to meet their needs. The massive surge of Eastern European immigrants stretched the resources of the existing Jewish community to its limits.⁷⁶ Local and provincial governments provided limited, if any, social services, and what little funds existed were channelled through Christian religious institutions.⁷⁷ Moreover, whereas before 1880 Jews faced few restrictions socially or politically – they could reside anywhere, hold any job, run for political office – mass immigration bred anti-Jewish sentiment that was manifested in a refusal to admit Jews to certain organizations or grant funding to Jewish benevolent societies.⁷⁸ In response, the new immigrants created their own support systems, drawing on models transplanted from the Old Country. Michael Brown posits that the position of ambivalence in which Montreal Jews found themselves as English speakers affiliated with, but ultimately excluded from, English-Protestant society produced a sense of insecurity, leading Jews to turn inward and devote themselves to empowering their own community.⁷⁹ As Ira Robinson and Mervin Butovsky suggest, “In cultural terms, the relative linguistic and religious isolation of the Jews in Montreal ironically proved

to be a positive condition in encouraging the establishment of a well-knit autonomous community life.”⁸⁰ While it resulted in greater vulnerability, the cultural isolation experienced by Montreal Jews contributed to the relative cohesion of the Jewish community. It also played a role in the degree to which the community’s cultural activists created specifically Jewish institutions to meet their needs.⁸¹ In the process, Jewish communal separation also served to insulate the Yiddish language from attrition in the long term.

The rapidly growing Montreal Jewish community established a vast infrastructure of institutions. These included a network of philanthropic, social, and cultural institutions, from mutual aid and burial societies to Jewish educational institutions. By 1915, there were some seventy Jewish organizations in Montreal, including synagogues, sick-benefit and charitable societies, and labour unions. Efforts were made to consolidate the innumerable fraternal organizations, congregations, schools, and cultural organizations of different ideological persuasions that functioned independently of one another. In 1916, the first of three umbrella organizations, the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of Montreal, was founded. Two others would follow in the next decade: the Canadian Jewish Congress (founded 1919, revived in 1934) and the Vaad Ha-Ir (Jewish Community Council, founded 1924).⁸² Many of these organizations functioned primarily in Yiddish, as attested by minute books and other extant documentation.

The decade leading up to the First World War produced Montreal’s core Yiddish cultural institutions. The first Jewish bookstore, with offerings ranging from traditional *loshn-koydesh* texts to Yiddish revolutionary tracts, opened in 1903. It was soon followed by small local lending libraries that stocked Yiddish materials. Canada’s first enduring Yiddish newspaper, the *Adler*, was founded in 1907, a decade after the first Anglo-Jewish paper, the *Jewish Times*. The *Adler* would expand into a daily that would reach a mass readership spanning the local and national community, and serve as a forum – as literary centre and publisher – for diverse Yiddish writers. In 1914, an amateur Yiddish dramatic society was formed to complement an existing commercial theatre. Two systems of secular Jewish schools founded by members of the Labour Zionist Poale Zion movement were in place by 1914: the Natsionale radikale shul/Peretsshul (hereafter National Radical School/Peretz School) and the Yidishe folksshul (hereafter Jewish People’s School). That same year, several existing

Jewish libraries merged in the official founding of the Yidishe folks-biblyotek (hereafter the Jewish Public Library).⁸³ Two years later, the library added its Folks-universitet, or People's University, to provide adult education. At the same time, an emerging local Yiddish intelligentsia coordinated formal and informal cultural gatherings. These building blocks of Yiddish cultural life facilitated a range of activities in the community at large that expanded broadly in the interwar period. Moreover, the same period also brought official recognition to Yiddish within the municipal government when, in December 1914, the Montreal City Council unanimously adopted a resolution to disseminate announcements about municipal business in Yiddish, in addition to English and French.⁸⁴

The years leading up to the First World War period were also marked by a heightening sense of increased political activism and communal identification. Mass rallies were held across Canada to protest the wave of Russian pogroms that followed the 1905 revolution. The *Mendel Beilis* case of 1911–13 in Russia, in which the accused was charged with ritual murder, was openly condemned and publicly protested in Montreal, as in other Jewish centres worldwide.⁸⁵ The *Beilis* case coincided with the Plamondon Affair, a local libel case prompted by the antisemitic speech of prominent Montreal notary and journalist Joseph Edouard Plamondon at a local rally.⁸⁶ These events, which were widely reported in the Yiddish press, served to unite the nascent community.

As the shared spoken language of the Jewish immigrant masses, Yiddish filled a utilitarian role in wider efforts at local community building. As Emanuel Goldsmith's study of the history of Yiddishism suggests, rather than developing a comprehensive ideological framework, early incarnations of what can be termed "Yiddishism" initially relied on the de facto centrality of Yiddish as a vernacular.⁸⁷ The connections between Montreal's Yiddish cultural activity and the Poale Zion are a case in point. Activist and historian Sh. Belkin (1889–1969), in his study *Di poale tsiyen bavegung in kanade, 1904–1920* [The Poale Zion Movement in Canada], discusses Yiddish only in relation to its educational program, notably the establishment of libraries and schools. This reflects a movement whose early commitment was not to Yiddish per se, but rather to conveying leftist Zionist ideology in the majority language of the Jewish masses, whether expressed through syndicalism, political agitation, or cultural activity.

The First World War marked a turning point for Eastern European Jewish émigré communities in Yiddish Montreal, as it did for

immigrant centres elsewhere. New industries geared to the war effort meant employment and prosperity after decades of economic instability. At the same time, Yiddish-speaking activists were prominent within the local labour movement. Community activity and involvement in world events increased; for example, local campaigns to gather funds for Jewish war victims raised tens of thousands of dollars. A real estate boom led to the development of new Montreal neighbourhoods, such as Papineau. The Great War and its aftermath, with the terrible suffering of Eastern European Jewry compounded by rising antisemitic violence, also precipitated a rise in local Jewish group consciousness. Cut off from the Old World, Yiddish immigrant communities outside of Eastern Europe consolidated their efforts and focused on cultural activities in their adopted homes with an underlying ideology of “*doikayt* (hereness)”: we are here to stay and are building for the future.⁸⁸

The interwar period marked the high point of modern Yiddish culture. While Europe negotiated the parameters of new nations in the aftermath of the First World War, its Jews navigated the possibility of achieving recognition as a distinct cultural and religious group within which Yiddish had a place.⁸⁹ At the same time, Yiddish culture increasingly transcended national boundaries, with Yiddish centres worldwide functioning in tandem as both producers and consumers. The Canadian Yiddish milieu, in particular in the urban centres of Montreal, Toronto, and Winnipeg, developed a core intelligentsia committed to expanding the high functions of the language in the areas of education, belles-lettres, and scholarship. During this period, as Pierre Anctil writes, Montreal began to move from its status as “an outpost of Jewish culture” to a Yiddish cultural centre, albeit a minor one.⁹⁰ The same period coincided with the politicization and rapid expansion of a cultural milieu among other European émigré groups, notably Canada’s Hungarian community.⁹¹

At the same time, however, Yiddish was facing attrition in Canada as a Jewish vernacular as the community shifted to English. As long as Canadian borders remained open to new immigration, Yiddish served as the dominant *lingua franca* of the Russian, Lithuanian, Polish, Ukrainian, and Romanian Jews who comprised the Jewish émigré community. Even as the newcomers adopted English, successive waves of new immigrants continued to replenish the population of Yiddish-speaking Jews. Thus, in 1921, 91 per cent of the Jewish population of Canada declared Yiddish their mother tongue,⁹² with the percentage increasing a further 5 per cent ten years later. However, after the First

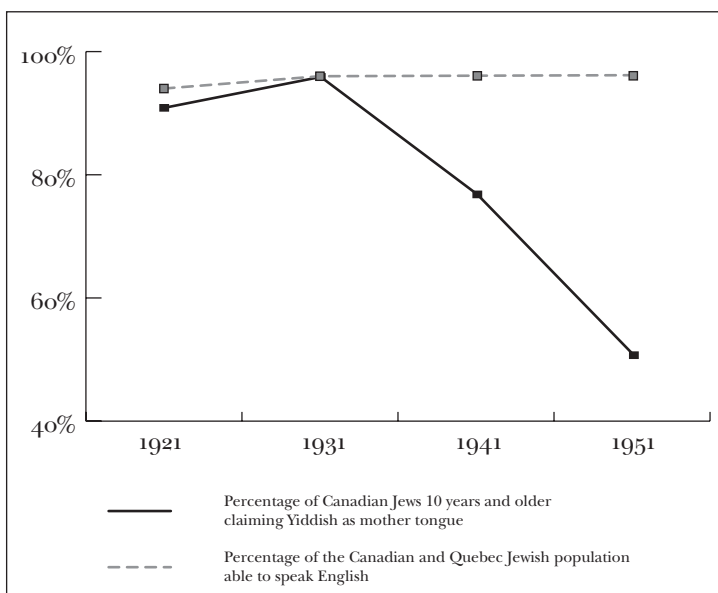


Figure 1.2 | Yiddish and English Usage in Canada. Credit: Brian Ally, Zijn Digital

World War, the tightening of immigration laws in Canada reduced the inflow of new Yiddish-speaking Jews to a trickle, and the next decade also brought the community's heightened integration and anglicization. Thus, while in 1931 almost all Canadian Jews said that Yiddish was their mother tongue, just 3.34 per cent declared themselves unable to speak English.⁹³ Moreover, "mother tongue," defined at that time by the Canadian census as the language first learned in childhood and still understood, does not necessarily indicate fluency or active usage. Even the claim of Yiddish as mother tongue declined steadily, as Canadian Jews raised their own children in English. Thus, the percentage of foreign-born Jews that declared Yiddish as mother tongue declined from 99.4 per cent in 1931 to 83.5 per cent in 1951, while among the native-born population the percentage was reduced from 95.8 per cent in 1931 to 37.8 per cent in 1951.⁹⁴ An influx of Yiddish-speaking survivors of the Holocaust bolstered the community but could not forestall the rapid anglicization of the Canadian-born population.

As the immigrant community acculturated, Yiddish activists invoked new mechanisms for promoting the language and its culture as a central component in the building and safeguarding of Jewish identity

in Canada. They formed part of a dynamic Yiddish cultural venture whose momentum would carry it to 1945 and beyond. The result was an increasing focus on Yiddish that became increasingly deliberate and geared towards preservation of the language as an end in itself.

YIDDISH IDEOLOGIES AND ACTIVISTS

During the last hundred years, Yiddish in Canadian life has undergone a massive transformation as it shifted from being a utilitarian immigrant language to being one of ethnic maintenance. The period under discussion, 1905–45, was a time of institutional genesis in Yiddish Montreal that saw ideology translated into organizational growth and consolidation. With the creation of key institutions in Yiddish culture – a popular daily newspaper in the *Adler*, a community centre in the Jewish Public Library, and a network of secular Jewish schools – a group of activists in Montreal created a forum to carry Yiddish culture into the future. In these years, a forward-looking vision of Jewish life came to fruition in Montreal, with Yiddish culture acting as a primary building block. For its activists, Yiddish came to do more than merely fill the utilitarian role of a shared vernacular; it also functioned as a mechanism for Jewish continuity in a world in flux and as a means for the Montreal community to find common ground and combat assimilation on this foreign soil. The role for Yiddish emerged in tandem with other ideological movements. In Montreal, the most influential force was the intersection between socialism and nationalism, notably in the Labour Zionist movement.

The influx of newcomers committed to left-wing and/or nationalist movements added a strong activist component to Montreal's nascent Yiddish community. The initial home of the local Yiddish socialist community was the local chapter of the Arbeter ring (hereafter Workmen's Circle), established in 1907. Formed in New York City in 1892 as a Jewish socialist fraternal organization, the Workmen's Circle became a centre for progressive Yiddish culture in North America, sponsoring adult education, musical and theatre groups, and publishing. Its Montreal chapter offered a headquarters for Yiddish cultural activists during the early phase of mass immigration.⁹⁵ The rising influence of Communism among the Jewish community after the First World War caused a split within the Workmen's Circle in the 1920s, out of which emerged the Labour League in Toronto and the Canadian Workmen's Circle in Montreal. In 1944, these groups established a

national association under the aegis of the Communist Party called the Faryenikter yidisher folks ordn (United Jewish People's Order, hereafter UJPO). With main chapters in Montreal, Toronto, and Winnipeg, the UJPO sponsored Yiddish cultural and educational activities, such as summer camps, choirs, lectures, concerts, and theatre groups, including the Morris Winchevsky School, a Montreal secular Jewish parochial school that had Yiddish culture at the core of its curriculum.⁹⁶

Offshoots of the Bund – the Poale Zion and the Zionist Socialist Workers' Party – had a wide-ranging influence on the development of Montreal Yiddish culture. The Poale Zion, a Marxist Zionist movement, emerged as a result of a split within the Bund initiated by Jewish workers who identified the solution of the “Jewish problem” as the creation of a nationalist identity in an autonomous Jewish homeland located in the historic Land of Israel. The ideology was based on the synthesis of Zionism and socialism put forth by ideologue Nachman Syrkin (1868–1924), the underlying goal being the betterment of the *folk* and, ultimately, the preservation of the Jewish people. The Poale Zion platform promoted both Hebrew and Yiddish as languages of Jewish national identity, with Yiddish as the language of the working class and the language that expressed Jewish secular identity, particularly in the Diaspora. A split within the Poale Zion led to the creation of the territorialist Zionist Socialist Workers' Party, which broke away to advocate for revolution in Russia and Jewish territorial autonomy outside of the Land of Israel. The year 1905 marked the formation of the first Canadian chapter of the Poale Zion, with headquarters in Montreal.

A catalyst for cultural activity prior to the First World War was the 1910 North American Poale Zion convention, which was held in Montreal because of the city's core cadre of dedicated activists and its proximity to the head office in New York City. The convention stimulated several significant developments with widespread and lasting repercussions in the North American Yiddish cultural milieu. First, Poale Zion activists created the Yidisher natsyonaler arbeter farband (the Jewish National Workers' Alliance, hereafter Farband), a mutual aid society whose chapters across the United States and Canada became hubs of Yiddish cultural activity. Second, a resolution put forth by Chaim Zhitlowsky for the creation of a system of Yiddish-language “National Radical Schools” led to the establishment of

North America's first secular Jewish schools with Yiddish at the core of the curriculum. In addition, the conference energized local activists, who emerged as a driving force behind the promotion of Jewish culture and progressive education in both Yiddish and Modern Hebrew. Members of the Poale Zion were instrumental in the founding of two pioneering organizations key to the long-term dissemination and perpetuation of Yiddish culture in Montreal – the National Radical Schools/Peretz Schools and the Jewish Public Library. There was considerable overlap between these two ventures; as one observer noted, “[I]t is no coincidence that the people who supported the schools were also the first builders of the library.”⁹⁷

For the cadre of Yiddish activists, ideology was translated into active community building and cultural preservation even as Yiddish faced increasing challenges in North American immigrant communities as its speakers adopted English as their *lingua franca*. Despite the acculturation of the local Jewish community, a resilient Yiddish cultural life flourished in Montreal. A core intelligentsia created a future-oriented vision based on Yiddish that reverberated in the community at large. David Roskies characterizes the city's Yiddish cultural life as a “utopian venture” produced by a leadership of “lay revolutionaries” for whom Yiddish was perceived as a unifying force to combat cultural fragmentation and severance from a shared Jewish past. The vision was implemented through community institutions, such as newspapers, libraries, and schools, that served a broad populace, the *folk*. While a mainstream American Yiddish press promoted Americanization, Montreal intellectuals such as pedagogue Shloime Wiseman (1899–1985) advocated an “invented *yidishkayt*” (also *yidishkeit*, Ashkenazi Jewishness) as a new form of *goles* (Diaspora) nationalism.⁹⁸ This *yidishkayt* was practically oriented towards continuity for a cultural community in a double exile: first, as part of the Jewish Diaspora, and second, as removed from the locus of Yiddish culture in Eastern Europe.⁹⁹

In Montreal, Yiddish culture served as a vehicle for expressing the community's ideology in ways that were at once unifying and divisive. The *Adler* functioned as a moderate community newspaper, while its editorial board and regular contributors included Jews from across a Jewish political and religious spectrum. Likewise, the non-partisan Jewish Public Library was formed as an institution in which a gamut of ideologies coexisted, as did Yiddish and Modern Hebrew. However, from

the outset, the formation of several systems of schools for children emerged as a battleground for those holding rival ideological and linguistic loyalties.

In addition to having a strong ideological basis, Yiddish Montreal was piloted and buttressed by a diverse group of dynamic individuals who translated their passion for the language into action as writers, artists, educators, and community activists. Hersh Hershman (1876–1955) responded to the lack of Yiddish literary culture by opening the first Yiddish lending library and bookstore at the turn of the century. Hirsch Wolofsky (1878–1949) almost single-handedly founded the *Adler*, creating a Jewish newspaper empire in Montreal. B.G. Sack (1889–1967) and Israel Rabinovitch (1893–1964) staked out careers as journalists and scholars of Canadian Jewish history and Jewish musicology respectively. Yehuda Kaufman (1886–1976) championed a Jewish public library as a gathering place for the city's Yiddish population. H.M. (Hannaniah Meir) Caiserman (also known as Caiserman-Wital, 1884–1950) encouraged young writers and published works of literary criticism that spotlighted the local literary scene. Poets such as J.I. (Yankev Yitskhok) Segal (1896–1954), A.Sh. (Avrom Shloyme) Shkolnikov (1896–1962), and N.Y. (Noyekh Yitskhok) Gotlib (1903–1967) published literary journals that highlighted the work of local writers. Caiserman, poet Ida Maza (also Massey; born Zhukovsky, 1893–1962) and others opened up their homes to host gatherings of Yiddish writers and other artists. Shloime Wiseman and Yankev Zipper led two branches of a secular Jewish school system that operated largely in Yiddish. Soviet actress Chayele Grober (1894–1978) created a community-based amateur art theatre. Moreover, Montreal was a place of sojourn for towering figures in Jewish cultural life such as Hebraist Reuben Brainin (1862–1939) and folklorists Yehuda Leib Zlotnik (1888–1962) and A. Almi (adopted name of Elyohu-khayim Sheps, 1892–1963). The city also produced world-renowned scholars of Yiddish and Jewish studies, such as the above-mentioned Yehuda Kaufman, later known as Hebrew lexicographer Even-Shmuel; psychologist and Yiddish scholar A.A. (Abraham Aaron) Roback (1880–1965); and Yiddish folklorist Ruth Rubin (born Rivka Rosenblatt, 1906–2002). These individuals and a host of others played major roles in the history of Jewish Montreal as architects and builders of a vigorous Yiddish culture.

The Montreal Yiddish activists exemplify the wide diversity generated by the transformation of traditional Eastern European Jewish society under the forces of industrialization, secularization,

and immigration. Predominantly raised in a religiously observant European society, all underwent a process of having to determine which elements of their Jewish tradition to retain and which to jettison. Three generations of the Shtern family epitomize the spectrum of Jewish identity. Originating in Tishevitz, Poland, the Shterns were an observant Hasidic family that settled in Montreal in the 1920s and 1930s and went on to become a Yiddish cultural institution in Canada. In the first generation, Rabbi Avraham Dovid Shtern (1878–1955) was a highly respected Jewish scholar who published several *sforim* (books with sacred Jewish content). The cohort of siblings in the second generation includes Sholem Shtern (1906–1991), a proletarian poet and principal of the UJPO-affiliated Morris Winchevsky School; Shifre Krishtalka (1909–2003), a teacher at the Labour Zionist Peretz School and author of pedagogical literature; writer and Peretz School principal Yankev Zipper, a staunch Zionist; Yekhiel Shtern (1903–1981), the author of an award-winning history of Jewish education whose ideological affiliations shifted over a lifetime from the left to religious Orthodoxy; and Ish Yair (Dr Israel-Hersh Shtern, 1913–2000), poet and mathematician. In the third generation, Montreal-born Aaron Krishtalka (born 1940), a product of the Morris Winchevsky Schools, was a published poet in his youth. The Montreal milieu offered a place for each member of the diverse and prolific Shtern clan.

The web of institutions, publications, and groups established before 1945 ultimately facilitated the activities of internationally renowned Yiddish cultural figures who settled in Montreal during and after the Holocaust. They include writers and poets Yehuda Elberg (1912–2003), Rokhl Korn (1898–1982), Peretz Miransky (1908–1993), Melekh Ravitch, Chava Rosenfarb (1923–), actress Dora Wasserman (1919–2003), and many others. Further, the Yiddish infrastructure helped to shape a subsequent generation of Anglo-Jewish writers who emerged from the Yiddish milieu, notably poet and novelist A.M. Klein (Abraham Moses Klein, 1909–1972). Although formed by diverse religious and political backgrounds, these newcomers to Montreal, like their pre-war counterparts, expressed a vision of modern Jewish life in which Yiddish played a meaningful role.

YIDDISH MONTREAL ON THE WORLD STAGE

Montreal's institutional framework emerged out of an active interplay between the different facets of transnational Yiddish culture.

As a minor centre of Yiddish culture before the Second World War, Montreal aligned itself with, and was influenced by, major centres such as New York City, Moscow, Warsaw, and Vilna. Montreal Yiddish culture evolved under the ebb and flow of American and Eastern European influences. While the Workmen's Circle – a product of a late nineteenth-century American cosmopolitan socialist ideology – served as the first home of Yiddish culture in Montreal, the ideological core of the city lay at the intersection of twentieth-century Eastern European socialism and Zionism. In the 1920s, an increasingly vocal element of the community aligned itself with Soviet politics and Yiddish culture. In the areas of modern Yiddish popular culture – a commercial press and theatre – New York City, with its vast infrastructure supported by the substantial American immigrant population – exerted a considerable and ongoing influence. While Yiddish newspapers from New York City provided inspiration for local publishing, their availability in Montreal dampened the need for a local press and the major New York dailies as well as other American papers were widely read after the founding of the daily *Adler*. Similarly, into the 1950s, Montreal commercial theatre consisted primarily of readily available imported talent, in particular from New York City, while a permanent amateur Yiddish theatre, with a strong European influence, developed in the city during and after the Second World War under the leadership of Soviet-trained artists.¹⁰⁰

After two decades of Jewish mass immigration, a Canadian tradition of Yiddish writing began to crystallize under intersecting American and European influences. Montreal's Yiddish literary journals from the interwar period reveal a fruitful exchange among major centres of Yiddish letters. As frequent guests in Montreal, international Yiddish cultural figures – writers, artists, activists – energized the local community. However, as late as the 1930s, literary critic H.M. Caiserman commented in his *Yidishe dikhter in kanade* [Jewish Poets in Canada] that most of the Canadian poets publishing during that time were at the very initial phase of their poetic development.¹⁰¹ Owing to its size and proximity, New York City exerted a particularly strong influence on Montreal.

Literary scholars have suggested different models for understanding the relationship between Montreal and New York. Adam Fuerstenberg includes “the overwhelming power of the United States” as one of three basic characteristics of Canadian Yiddish literature.¹⁰² David Fishman holds that Montreal was a self-contained periphery of

New York that, like many smaller cities and towns in Canada and the United States, looked to that city as its centre; Avrom Novershtern characterizes Yiddish literature in minor centres such as Montreal as satellites, or “*optsvaygn* (offshoots),” of the Yiddish literature of New York City, upon which it relied for support. Prior to the Holocaust, like Palestine, Argentina, South Africa, Australia, and other countries outside of Poland, the Soviet Union, and the United States, Canada was not able to attract the greatest writers; nor did it publish their works. Instead, the world’s best-known writers visited the city as part of international tours. Meanwhile, local publishing consisted of small-scale efforts.¹⁰³

On the surface, Yiddish Montreal appeared to be a smaller version of Yiddish New York, separated by a generation gap. Both cities served as their country’s foremost immigrant destinations and Jewish cultural centres, their Jewish neighbourhoods – New York’s Lower East Side and Montreal’s “the Main” – swelling continually as fresh waves of overwhelmingly Yiddish-speaking immigrants arrived. Like New York, Montreal was the site of a number of its country’s innovations in the sphere of Yiddish cultural life, including the first Yiddish newspapers, the publication of the first Yiddish books, and some of the first Yiddish schools. Both cities boasted a well-developed infrastructure of institutions, including *landsmanshaftn* (fraternal organizations for Jews from the same locality in Europe),¹⁰⁴ chapters of political organizations, theatres, literary publications and clubs, and so on. However, despite these superficial similarities, the development of Montreal’s Yiddish cultural life followed a very different trajectory. The Eastern European Jews who arrived in the United States in the mass migration of the 1880s and 1890s joined a large and well-established community of some 250,000 Jews of largely German origin (80,000 in New York City alone) who dominated Jewish life and strove to acculturate the new Yiddish speakers.¹⁰⁵ With the United States’ open immigration policy, Jewish settlers opted for that country: some two million entered the country between 1880 and 1920, most of them via the port of New York. Only small numbers trickled into Canada and Latin America; even the metropolis of Montreal remained a minor port to potential Jewish immigrants prior to the late 1890s. The mass Eastern European Jewish immigration to Canada after 1900 encountered an English-speaking Canadian Jewish community of a few thousand, many of them Lithuanian and Polish Jews who were relatively recent immigrants themselves. Waves of Eastern European immigrants

overwhelmed Montreal's tiny "established" Jewish community; meeting minimal resistance, they developed new institutional networks and dominated the Canadian Jewish landscape by sheer force of numbers.

In addition to timing and numbers, the ideological world view during the nascent period of Yiddish mass immigration represents a major point of divergence between Montreal and New York. The earlier mass immigration of Eastern European Jews to the United States fell under the influence of a radical Russian intelligentsia that espoused a cosmopolitan socialist ideology. For the leadership of this intelligentsia – which created the Eastern European Jewish community's landmark political and cultural organizations, unions, and radical press – Yiddish served a provisional function: to convey a socialist agenda to the working masses.¹⁰⁶ Jewish socialists who published in Yiddish shared the underlying conviction that Jews would eventually cast off the linguistic peculiarity that set them apart from their non-Jewish brethren and embrace an internationalist ideology. The prevalent ideal of integration was shattered by antisemitic violence in Russia at the end of the nineteenth century, when nationalist movements gained prominence among the Jewish masses.¹⁰⁷ By contrast, Montreal's Yiddish immigration took place largely after 1905, by which time Yiddish cosmopolitanism had been supplanted by nationalist ideologies. In tandem with other nationalist movements from Eastern Europe that linked language, nationalism, and statehood, these ideologies advanced Jewish culture and language to forge a sense of shared identity.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, a great many of the city's Yiddish immigrants had been active in nascent revolutionary socialist and Zionist groups in Eastern Europe.

Underlying the particular character of Yiddish Montreal was a fundamental divergence of national ethos that set it apart from New York. Born out of revolution and with a long history of large-scale immigration, the multi-ethnic society of the United States encouraged the assimilation of all immigrant groups into a "melting pot," with distinctions maintained along religious rather than ethnic lines. From the outset, Yiddish-speaking Jews in the United States were actively encouraged to acculturate into a secular English mainstream culture along with numerous other ethnic groups. In comparison, Canada was a younger nation forged out of a compromise between its colonial powers rather than out of revolution against them. Its immigration policies were dictated by the country's changing economic needs and lacked a unified, nationalist impetus. Yiddish-speaking Jews were

channelled into a Canada that was divided along Christian lines. Education provides an example of this divide. In the United States, with the separation of church and state, the system of public schools was geared towards the acculturation of all of the students, regardless of ethnic or social origin, into mainstream American society.¹⁰⁹ In contrast, Jewish newcomers to Montreal encountered the exclusionary character of the denominational Quebec school system, which encouraged the creation of networks of Jewish schools; these included a system of secular Jewish schools that had a nationalist orientation and promoted wider group identification and social cohesion. In this area, Montreal, even as a minor centre of Yiddish culture, far surpassed New York. Eugene Orenstein points to the role of Yiddish in Jewish education in the long-term maintenance of Yiddish culture in Montreal, noting that in the United States “English was the language of work, of education, and – within a generation or so – of daily life. Yiddish creativity thus became largely relegated to literature, the press, and theatre.”¹¹⁰ In the Canadian context, Yiddish remained a language of daily and cultural life in the main Jewish centres, in particular in Montreal and Winnipeg.¹¹¹

Ultimately, New York represents an anomaly among Yiddish centres in the New World. Canada and its Jewish population remained culturally close to the countries of the British Commonwealth, with similar trends in traditionalism and in the high rate of institutionalization. Moreover, the Canadian experience parallels that in other minor centres in Latin America. For example, in Mexico City, which like Montreal was largely dominated by the Roman Catholic Church, the Jewish community shared a similar experience of exclusion that slowed the process of integration into the mainstream.¹¹² Cities such as Buenos Aires, Johannesburg, or Melbourne were “frontier societies” that experienced mass Jewish immigration concurrently with Canada and evolved a dynamic similar to that in Montreal. While local development of mass popular Yiddish culture lagged behind that in New York, ventures in education flourished alongside lasting institutional Yiddish-based infrastructures.¹¹³

CONCLUSION

In many ways, Montreal offered an ideal dynamic for the efflorescence of an enduring modern Yiddish culture. This transplanted culture was inspired by Eastern European ideals but was free of the

political instability, war, and antisemitic violence that curbed cultural expression. It was inspired by the liberties of the United States but was markedly less affected by the powerful pull of assimilation. Yiddish culture was sheltered from the lure of integration by its exclusion from Quebec's two charter groups, and it was encouraged to evolve its own infrastructure. These factors allowed Montreal's Yiddish culture to flourish well beyond the years of the Second World War.

In the interplay between Montreal and other hubs of Yiddish culture, members of the city's intelligentsia ultimately understood themselves to be a distinct part of a larger whole that actively engaged with the other components. Montreal's activists, organizers, and writers were simultaneously players in a transnational Yiddish cultural movement and creators of a uniquely Canadian framework designed to foster it. The explosion of cultural life in Eastern Europe and in its immigrant offshoots invigorated the Yiddish community of Montreal and facilitated ongoing exchange. This dynamic, along with the Yiddish community's institutional structure and ideological drive, served to bolster Yiddish culture in Montreal even as it faced global attrition.

Montreal Yiddish culture is a case study of an immigrant community that refashioned a centuries-old portable tradition of literacy and learning into a comprehensive and robust institutional framework to foster Yiddish culture in the present and future. This vigorous enterprise formed part of a movement that spanned major and minor Yiddish centres, both in the Eastern European heartland and in émigré settlement areas. In Canada, a core group of activists developed a wide-ranging cultural life to serve a new vision of Jewish life, with its centre in Montreal.



THE MONTREAL YIDDISH PRESS

THE PERIODICAL PRESS FORMED A NEXUS OF YIDDISH CULTURAL activity in Montreal. Newspapers and other periodicals were central to the development of a vernacular print culture and broad reading public in the modern Jewish world.¹ As in Yiddish centres worldwide, local periodicals promoted and disseminated information about cultural events, published Yiddish books, and, above all, afforded local Yiddish writers a stable tribune for their writing. Montreal's leading Yiddish daily newspaper, the *Adler*,² provided a stable anchor for the city's emerging Yiddish infrastructure. Alongside popular Yiddish theatre, it was among the few Yiddish institutions that were commercial enterprises; unlike Yiddish print culture generally, the daily turned a profit and could, in turn, subsidize other ventures.

The Yiddish press in Montreal served a dual function – to acclimate the local Eastern European immigrant community to its adopted home in Canada and to maintain and foster a distinctive cultural life. For the tens of thousands of Yiddish-speaking immigrants who settled in Montreal in the opening decades of the twentieth century, the Yiddish press provided access to the unfamiliar outside world while also reinforcing and expanding readers' relationships with the more familiar realms of Jewish life. As in Europe, the Montreal press was key to the development and dissemination of different aspects of Yiddish culture, including political ideology, institutional development, and scholarly and literary ventures. During its heyday, the Montreal Yiddish press – in particular the *Adler* – formed the backbone of the city's Yiddish cultural life.

The periodical press was inextricably linked to all aspects of Yiddish cultural life in Montreal. The *Adler*, as the city's longest-running and largest-circulation Yiddish daily, underpinned Yiddish cultural activity in the local Jewish community, with ripple effects across Canada. Virtually every new local endeavour was announced in its pages, and organizational ventures of all stripes actively promoted. There are two main reasons behind this intimate connection. First, the *Adler's* writers were closely tied to the community and saw themselves as part of a larger cultural edifice that extended far beyond the pages of the newspaper. Second, the *Adler's* publisher and editors, like their counterparts in other Yiddish newspapers during this period, understood the newspaper as integral to the creation and maintenance of Jewish cultural life along its entire ideological spectrum. The role of the newspaper was not simply to report on community life but to actively shape it. The *Adler* was not alone in this function. A host of Yiddish newspapers promoted cultural life in Montreal, in particular in the realm of literature. However, as most of these other publications were short-lived or represented a narrower ideological focus, their influence was not as widely felt. Because they represented a specific audience, they published material outside of the mainstream and espoused more radical ideas, whether high literary modernism or militant communism. Taken together, the *Adler* and other publications provided an insider's view of an ongoing process of Yiddish cultural creativity and organization.

This chapter discusses the function and development of the Yiddish press in Montreal – both newspapers and journals – with a focus on the *Adler*. It introduces the editors, publishers, and many of the writers associated with the city's Yiddish press and highlights major points of innovation and change. It posits the press as an important promoter of Yiddish cultural life, in particular in the literary realm.

THE ORIGINS OF THE YIDDISH PRESS

The Yiddish press developed in tandem with modern Yiddish literature, which emerged in the 1860s as a product of the modernization and Europeanization of the Haskalah. Technological innovations and increased literacy resulted in the widespread development of a Yiddish press in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This expansion corresponded with the emergence of new Jewish ideological movements, such as socialism, Zionism, and religious Orthodoxy. The

first modern Yiddish newspaper, *Kol mevaser* [The Harbinger, 1862–73], was founded as a supplement to Alexander Zederbaum's Hebrew weekly *Ha-melitz* [The Advocate, Odessa/St Petersburg]. *Kol mevaser* published pioneering works of modern Yiddish literature. State censorship in the Yiddish population centre of the Pale of Settlement in Tsarist Russia delayed the further establishment of a popular Yiddish press in Eastern Europe, with the first lasting Yiddish daily, the St Petersburg *Der fraynd* [The Friend], appearing in 1903.³

The period following the First World War brought with it a proliferation of the Yiddish press in Europe as well as abroad. From 1918 to 1920, some 320 periodicals appeared worldwide, including 42 daily newspapers, 75 weeklies, and 39 monthly magazines.⁴ Between 1920 and 1939, some 20 Yiddish dailies were being published in Poland alone. These newspapers attained sizable readerships, especially when one considers that each issue was shared by several readers. The leading Warsaw daily, *Haynt* [Today], founded in 1908, surpassed its close rival, *Der moment* [The Moment], founded two years later, with a circulation of 100,000 during the First World War. Many of these Yiddish newspapers, in particular the dailies, were commercial endeavours that featured a variety of content: local and international news, popularized analysis of scientific developments, sensationalistic serialized popular novels, Yiddish belles lettres, and more. These newspapers were inexpensive, accessible, and widely popular. They met the needs of an emerging reading public who were familiar with Yiddish but generally not with non-Jewish languages and who sought to engage with the modern world.⁵ Like newspapers in other Jewish vernaculars, such as Spanyolit, they served as laboratories for innovation in style and genre and as a forum for heated ideological debates.⁶ In the process, they helped to create and shape a Yiddish reading public as well as a cadre of writers. Moreover, they created a shared sense of what scholar Benedict Anderson has termed “imagined community.”⁷

In North America, where developments were not hindered by state censorship, a popular Yiddish press took root in the rapidly expanding American Yiddish immigrant centre of New York with the founding of Kasriel Sarasohn's *Di yidishe gazeten* [The Jewish Gazette] in 1874. In 1885 Sarasohn launched the first Yiddish daily in the world, *Dos yidishe tageblat* [The Jewish Daily]. The largest New York newspapers, the socialist *Der forverts* [The Forward] (founded in 1897) and the more conservative *Der tog* [The Day] (founded in 1914), published

both local and regional editions. During the peak year of 1915–16, the combined circulation of the Yiddish dailies was 500,000 in New York City alone and 600,000 nationwide, with each copy of the newspaper serving multiple readers.⁸ Newspapers represented a wide ideological and political spectrum, with the different papers published by and for different constituencies. *Dos yidishe tageblat*, for example, spoke to a politically conservative readership, while the *Di fraye arbeter shtime* [Free Workers' Voice] (founded in 1890) represented anarchist interests and *Morgn frayhayt* [Morning Freedom] (founded in 1922) addressed a Communist point of view. Yiddish papers were founded on a smaller scale in many centres of Yiddish settlement, including Boston, Philadelphia, and Chicago.⁹ The American readership largely consisted of recent immigrants who earned their living working long hours in the garment trade or through other semi-skilled labour. While books were luxuries representing time and money that many working immigrants could not afford, the Yiddish press was widely accessible. Circulation peaked just after the First World War and began to decline with the immigration restrictions of the 1920s.

From the outset, the international Yiddish press enjoyed a symbiotic relationship with Jewish culture and politics.¹⁰ As Alan Mintz writes, “[M]uch that was new and important in the creation of [Jewish] culture appeared in journals, newspapers, and miscellanies.”¹¹ Before the Holocaust, the press served as the primary tribune for the publication of Yiddish literature, with “the history of modern Yiddish literature and the history of the Yiddish press ... inextricably interwoven.”¹² Given the high costs associated with published books and their limited potential readership, the Yiddish book industry failed as a commercial venture outside of Eastern Europe. Even in more profitable Eastern European book markets, Yiddish writers tended to publish works of poetry and prose in the press before editing them for publication in book form.¹³ The press enabled emerging Yiddish writers to reach a wide audience. The larger papers also offered contributing writers a source of financial support,¹⁴ and for a select few full-time journalists, they provided an alternative livelihood to harsh and debilitating factory labour and allowed them to devote themselves to more serious literary pursuits. Joshua A. Fishman summarizes the press’s vital function in Yiddish book publishing: “The modern world of Yiddish books is to a large extent a by-product of the Yiddish press, for had the latter not subsidized the former (both in the sense of paying wages/honorariums to the authors and being the first arena in which new books,

in serialized fashion, saw the light of day) the books themselves would frequently not have appeared.”¹⁵

The primary forum for the emergence of modern Yiddish literature was the daily and periodical press. Many of the Yiddish writers to emerge out of the Haskalah made their literary debuts in the pages of the Yiddish press. *Kol mevaser*, for example, published pioneering works of modern Yiddish literature. In its pages, Mendele Moykher-sforim's *Dos kleyne mentshle* [The Little Person], considered by many scholars to mark the beginning of modern Yiddish literature, first appeared in 1864,¹⁶ and the widely popular anti-Hasidic satire, *Dos poylishe yingele* [The Polish Boy] by YY. Linetski, was serialized in 1867. For much of Yiddish literary life, the publication of Yiddish letters took place in the press rather than books. As a general rule, works of Yiddish literature appeared in the press or in periodicals before being published in book form. It was common practice worldwide for Yiddish poetry, prose, and scholarly studies to be published in newspapers or journals and for longer works to be serialized, as the press reached more readers than even the most popular books or pamphlets did. According to Ellen Kellman's study of the New York *Forverts*, longer works that were serialized in the press ranged from low-brow novels to serious literature.¹⁷ Geography did not present a barrier, for Yiddish writers published in newspapers and journals internationally, especially in the extensive New York press. Conversely, most Yiddish writers were somehow affiliated with the Yiddish press, and many relied on it financially as well as for its dissemination of their writing.¹⁸ As books were costly to produce in the absence of an established publishing house, they tended to require either self-publication or the aid of a sponsoring organization.¹⁹ In sum, the book was secondary, superseded by the periodical.

With Yiddish serving as the shared language of much of Eastern European Jewry at home and abroad until the Holocaust, the Yiddish press united millions of readers worldwide and fostered a shared consciousness. It served to rally Jewish communities transnationally and to consolidate them, often along ideological rather than geographic lines. Each newspaper tended to promote a distinct religious and political point of view, the shared goal of its publishers being not only to circulate news but also to disseminate a particular world view, be it Jewish observance and the reinvention of tradition, secularism and radical socialism, cultural nationalism, or a combination thereof. As such, the Yiddish press played a central role in the

rise of Jewish nationalism and the Jewish left wing. Ultimately, the purveyors of the Yiddish press strove to offer a model of the ideal Jew for the modern world, a Jew who was literate and educated about the ways of the world but who, more often than not, was also committed to some vision of Jewish continuity. In addition, the Yiddish press of the immigrant communities in the New World also served as a tool of acclimatization and integration.

As in other Jewish immigrant centres, the goals of the Canadian Yiddish newspaper were manifold: to inform, to educate, to entertain, and to represent the general interests of the immigrant communities. As Irving Abella writes, "The first regular Yiddish dailies that began to be published in Canada were not merely newspapers; for the new-comer they were an introduction to the New World; they were forums of debate, vehicles for self-expression ... They were, for all intents and purposes, the university of the Jewish common man and woman."²⁰

THE EARLY MONTREAL YIDDISH PRESS

Canada lagged some twenty years behind the United States in the development of a Yiddish press. While attempts at creating Yiddish newspapers in Montreal date to the 1890s, the *Adler* marks the first enduring Yiddish newspaper in the city. This can be explained by the correspondingly later mass immigration of Eastern European Jews to Canada and the relatively smaller size of the Canadian consumer base, as well as by the other factors discussed below. Throughout the evolution of the local Yiddish press, newspapers from the United States, most notably from New York, played a vital role in the lives of Canadian Jews. The American Yiddish press provided printing services to Canadian Jewry long before the earliest traces of a Yiddish press in Canada.²¹ Moreover, even after the establishment of a Canadian Yiddish press, many Canadian Jews subscribed to, purchased, or borrowed copies of the largest New York dailies, notably *Der forverts* and *Dos yidishes tageblat*.²²

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, despite Canada's small Yiddish-speaking population and an absence of facilities for the production of Yiddish type, there were several early attempts to found Yiddish publications. All were short-lived.²³ Hebrew printing made its first appearance in Canada in the 1840s, and the earliest Yiddish printing, using the Hebrew alphabet, appeared in miscellanies (such as almanacs) some fifty years later.²⁴ The first item to be printed in

Yiddish in Canada – a leaflet issued during a federal election – was produced in Montreal in 1887. The author was the later-renowned lexicographer Alexander Harkavy (1863–1939), who had been invited to serve as a Hebrew teacher in Montreal’s Shaar Hashomayim Talmud Torah. Because of the absence of a local Hebrew printing press, the Yiddish-language leaflet was issued in Latin letters.²⁵ In that year, Harkavy also published a single issue of a handwritten, lithographed Yiddish newspaper titled *Di tsayt* [The Time].²⁶

Other Montreal efforts followed. The first Hebrew/Yiddish printing press in Canada was established in Montreal by A.L. (Avrom Leyb) Kaplansky (1861–1941).²⁷ Born in Bialystok and trained there as a printer, Kaplansky settled in Montreal in 1893 and opened a shop that offered services such as business cards, letterheads, programs, and invitations, as well as book printing in Hebrew, Yiddish, German, English, and French.²⁸ He imported Hebrew type from New York and produced two calendars for the Jewish years 5655 and 5656 (1894–95 and 1895–96); the calendars were printed from American plates and published in Montreal with locally produced Yiddish-language advertisements.²⁹ In 1897, Kaplansky set type for a Yiddish newspaper titled *Dos likht* [The Light], but the paper, which lacked advertising support, never appeared.³⁰ In an article published in November 1899, Montreal’s recently founded Anglo-Jewish weekly the *Jewish Times* makes reference to the appearance of an unnamed “jargon” (i.e., Yiddish) paper that was printed in New York but designated for Montreal and sent there for distribution.³¹ In 1905, Hersh Hershman (1876–1955) – writer and cultural activist and founder of Montreal’s first Yiddish library and bookstore – published three small issues of a newspaper entitled *Der telegraf* [The Telegraph].³² A year later, a small weekly paper briefly appeared on Fridays.³³ In 1907, Rabbi Joshua Simon Glazer (1876–1938) published the Orthodox *Der yidisher shtern* [The Jewish Star]. The weekly struggled for a year before failing.³⁴

THE ADLER: BEGINNINGS

Canada’s first and most enduring Yiddish newspaper, the *Adler*, was founded in Montreal in 1907 and appeared as a daily from 1908 to the early 1960s. It then appeared less frequently and finally ceased publication in the late 1980s. Despite the existence of an English-language Jewish press, the *Adler* was Canada’s largest Jewish newspaper from the beginnings of the mass Eastern European Jewish immigration

through the 1940s. Within five years of the *Adler's* founding, long-lasting Yiddish newspapers appeared in other major Canadian Jewish population centres: the biweekly *Dos yidishe vort/The Israelite Press* was founded in Winnipeg in 1910 as *Der keneder* [The Canadian Jew], and *Der yidisher zhurnal/The Daily Hebrew Journal* was founded in Toronto in 1912 first as a weekly and subsequently as a daily. Toronto would also house a Communist newspaper called *Der kampf* [The Battle] (later called *Dos vokhnblat* [The Weekly]).

The *Adler's* founder, Polish-born immigrant and community activist Hirsch Wolofsky, played a pivotal role in the development of the newspaper, serving as publisher until his death in 1949. Raised in a Hasidic family, Wolofsky immigrated to Canada via England in 1900 and became a businessman.³⁵ He soon identified the need for a local Yiddish newspaper and rallied to bring the project to fruition. As managing editor of the *Adler*, he shaped the newspaper by hand-picking its editors and promoting the development of a multitude of community institutions in its pages. He regularly contributed a wide array of written material to the newspaper. Wolofsky also published the *Adler's* sister publication, the Anglo-Jewish weekly *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* (founded in 1914). He wrote three Yiddish books on Jewish themes: a travelogue, *Eyrope un erets-yisroel nokh dem veltkrig* [Europe and the Land of Israel after the World War] (1922); a contemporary commentary on the Bible, *Fun eybign kval* [From the Eternal Source] (1930);³⁶ and a book of memoirs, *Mayn lebns rayze* [Journey of My Life] (1946).³⁷ He held various leadership positions in the Montreal Jewish community over his long career, including honorary president of the Canadian Jewish Congress, one of the many causes he championed.³⁸

Wolofsky guided the *Adler* through its birth and early years. In addition to raising the necessary capital and personally hiring editors, writers, and printers, he orchestrated the technical production of the first issues of the newspaper. According to his own account, the project faced what appeared to be virtually insurmountable difficulties in pulling together a team to support the project, securing financing, and addressing the technical challenges involved in publishing a Yiddish newspaper. Within a month of the initial meeting called by Wolofsky, the *Adler* had established functional offices and housed Canada's first Yiddish linotype machine. The first issue appeared almost a month behind schedule on Friday, 30 August 1907, at a cost of two cents.³⁹ Despite the *Adler's* enthusiastic reception, its status was precarious during its early years owing to the economic recession that

struck North America in 1907 and resulted in a chronic shortage of funds. The *Adler* began to appear twice a week after the fourth edition of the paper and then as a daily in October 1908. Its financial status remained shaky until the late teens.

With Wolofsky at the helm, the *Adler* expanded steadily under a series of editors and with an expanding roster of writers in its early years. The newspaper's first editor, Yiddish writer Mikhl Aronson (1879–1963), recruited from New York, returned home in October 1908. The *Adler* was next edited by A.A. Roback, then an undergraduate student of philosophy and psychology at McGill University. Roback left Montreal in 1912 to pursue a doctorate in psychology at Harvard University and went on to become a prominent psychologist. He also became a scholar of Yiddish whose books include *The Story of Yiddish Literature* (1940). Through the years, he remained a regular contributor to the *Adler*, writing columns on health and psychology as well as Yiddish philology and literature.⁴⁰

Roback's successor, Ukrainian-born Wohliner (*nom de plume* of Eliezer Landau, 1877–1942), expanded the *Adler* in size and scope and actively promoted Yiddish literary life in Montreal. He sought to transform the *Adler* from a “provincial” newspaper into an important European-type Yiddish publication, and to that end, he recruited a host of local Yiddish writers.⁴¹ The *Adler*'s regular contributors – B.Y. Goldstein (1879–1953), Y.L. Malamut (1886–1966), Leyzer Meltzer (1889–1971), Solomon Chaim Schneour (1884–1958), Moshe Shmuelson (M. Samuels, 1871–1947), and Isaac Yampolsky (1879–?) – filled the pages of the newspaper with international, local, and community news, essays and opinion pieces, serialized novels, fiction, short plays, and poetry. Goldstein was a particularly prolific writer, producing editorials, sketches, reviews, articles on philosophy, literature and poems, translations from Hebrew and Russian literature, and short stories. He also published several well-received serialized novels about the Jewish immigrant experience, including *Oyf der shif* [On the Ship] (1908) and *Vinkl fun nyu york* [Corner of New York] (1918).

Wohliner's successor, theatre-enthusiast Ezekiel Wortsman (1878–1938), attracted a number of young Yiddish writers to the *Adler* during his tenure as editor from 1910 to 1912. Rumanian-born lawyer and writer L.M. Benjamin (1887–1964) authored poetry, short stories, essays on literature, news articles, and literary translations.⁴² Ukrainian-born Poale Zion activist Simon Belkin wrote news pieces and essays for the *Adler* and would continue to do so for a forty-year

period. He would also go on to publish a study of the early Canadian Labour Zionist movement, titled *Di poyle tsien havegung in kanade: 1904–1920* [The Poale Zion Movement in Canada: 1904–1920] (1956).⁴³ Rumanian-born H.M. Caiserman became a regular contributor – both for the *Adler* and for other Yiddish newspapers and journals in Montreal – of news articles, poems, stories, literary translations from English and French, and reviews of literature, theatre, and visual arts. Active in local communal and cultural affairs soon after settling in Montreal in 1910, Caiserman would play a leading role in the establishment of the Canadian Jewish Congress in 1919.⁴⁴ One of his chief interests was Canadian Yiddish literary life, and in addition to reviewing Yiddish belles lettres in the *Adler*, he also authored pioneering studies of Canadian Yiddish literature.

The period 1912–15 became known as the golden age of the *Adler*. The newspaper was under the editorship of renowned Hebrew stylist Reuben Brainin, who was recruited by Wolofsky. A towering founding figure in modern Hebrew literature, Brainin was a critic, journalist, editor, biographer, translator, and essayist. Born in 1862 in Lyady, Belarus, Brainin received a traditional Jewish education and discovered Haskalah literature as a teenager. Beginning in 1888, he published widely on Hebrew literature in the Hebrew-language press, and by the 1890s he had begun to write articles, feuilletons, biographies, and essays on literature in the Russian-Jewish as well as Yiddish press. In 1909, after having resided in London, Paris, Vienna, and other European cities, Brainin settled in the United States, where he founded the much-anticipated but short-lived Hebrew weekly *Ha-drór* [The Swallow]. He visited Montreal in 1909 while on a lecture tour of North America and returned three years later to become editor-in-chief of the *Adler*. Under his leadership, the newspaper grew both in stature and readership.⁴⁵ Brainin devoted many columns to the development of a comprehensive cultural life within Montreal's Jewish community. As will be discussed in the next chapter, he campaigned for the establishment of a Jewish public library and for its continued support in the pages of the *Adler*. He also employed the pages of the newspaper to highlight issues relating to education, notably the network of secular Jewish schools that were founded locally during the same period. According to Brainin's own accounts, he was deeply affected by Yiddish Montreal. In his published diaries, he states that it was in Montreal that he came across the first edition of Zalmen Reisen's lexicon of Yiddish writers and thereby discovered



Reuben Brainin, together with local authors, on a visit to Montreal, 1930s. *Left to right:* Israel Rabinovitch, Dora Kofsky (married name Rosenfeld, Brainin's secretary), Israel Medres, Brainin, journalist Mordechai Ginsburg, and B.G. Sack. Pr006231, JPL Photograph Collection, Jewish Public Library Archives, Montreal

Yiddish literature,⁴⁶ to which he had up to that point not been exposed.⁴⁷ After a disagreement with Wolofsky that led to his leaving the *Adler* in 1915, Brainin founded a short-lived Yiddish newspaper called *Der veg* [The Road]. He subsequently departed for New York in 1916, where he became editor of the Hebrew journal *Ha-toren* [The Mast]. He maintained lasting ties with the Montreal and was a frequent visitor to the city. This connection to Montreal was maintained even after Brainin's death in New York in 1939. He was buried in Montreal's Shaar Hashomayim Cemetery, his funeral drawing thousands,⁴⁸ and he bequeathed his personal library to the Jewish Public Library.⁴⁹ Brainin was briefly succeeded as editor by long-time *Adler* journalist and historian B.G. Sack, who will be discussed more fully below.

The *Adler's* next two editors helped make the newspaper a hub of local Yiddish literary activity. Moshe Shmuelson, editor from 1914 to 1918, spearheaded Montreal's first Yiddish literary association, the Klub yidishe shrayber, montreol (The Club of Yiddish Writers, Montreal), in 1914. Two years later, he published the city's first literary journal – a short volume dedicated to the memory of writer Sholem

Aleichem – under the auspices of the *Adler*. He also mentored emerging writers, notably J.I. Segal, a recent immigrant to the city who would go on to become Canada's best-known Yiddish poet. A prolific writer, Shmuelson contributed short stories to the *Adler* as well as to the wider Yiddish periodical press in Canada, the United States, and Europe.⁵⁰ In 1918, he published a well-received volume of collected stories in New York under the title *Durkh veltn un tsaytn* [Through Worlds and Times].⁵¹ Shmuelson's successor, H. (Hershl) Hirsch (1880–1931), served as editor from 1918 until he left for New York in 1923. He too was a strong promoter of Yiddish literary life. Born in Ukraine and having studied philosophy and history at the University in Kiev, Hirsch was founder and first editor of Toronto's *Yidisher zhurnal* before he settled in Montreal in 1914. He was a playwright, a writer and editor of the satiric press, and a pioneer in Canadian Yiddish book publishing, both as an author and publisher. He authored three of Canada's earliest Yiddish volumes of belles lettres: two books of Jewish fables, *Hundert tropn tint* [One Hundred Drops of Ink] (Toronto, 1915) and *Fablen* [Fables] (Montreal, 1918), and a work of Biblical translation, *Shir hashirim* [Song of Songs] (Montreal, 1918). Hirsch's contributions to the *Adler* included poetry, opinion pieces, translations of Biblical and other Hebrew texts, and a number of serialized novels. Under his editorship and with the addition of new writers, the *Adler* expanded in scope.

As editor of the *Adler*, Hirsch attracted some of the newspaper's core writers, notably Israel Medres (1894–1964). Born in Belorus and a graduate of the progressive Lida Yeshiva,⁵² Medres settled in Montreal at the age of sixteen and became a full-time writer for the *Adler* beginning in 1922. During his forty-year association with the newspaper, Medres developed a simple, direct, and engaging style, punctuated with humour, that rendered him one of the *Adler*'s most popular journalists. His regular columns, "Di vokh in kanade" [This Week in Canada] and "Bilder in gerikht-zal" [Pictures in a Courtroom], presented readers with accessible discussions of contemporary political and legal matters.⁵³ Medres's roles at the *Adler* included news editor and political affairs columnist (often under the pen name "A Reporter") as well as writer of biweekly feuilletons (under the pen name "Ben Mordkhe"). He went on to author two volumes of vignettes on pre-1945 Jewish life in Montreal based on his columns in the *Adler*: *Montreal fun nekhtn* [Montreal of Yesterday] (1947) and the sequel, *Tsvishn tsvey velt milkhomes* [Between Two World Wars] (1964).⁵⁴

Among the writers who joined the *Adler* under Hirsch were two prominent Warsaw folklorists who briefly resided in Montreal, A. Almi and Yehuda Zlotnik. Almi, a renowned Warsaw-born Yiddish balladeer and poet who was mentored by writer I.L. Peretz, wrote for the *Adler* during his sojourn in Montreal from 1918 to 1922 in addition to participating in the production of several of the city's pioneering literary journals. In 1909, Almi had been "the chronicler of the Warsaw folklore group" headed by noted collector Noyekh Prilutski, gathering songs and stories of Jewish life.⁵⁵ In America, to which he emigrated in 1912, he became a well-known poet and journalist, and his 1921 book, *Di tsveyte ekzistents* [The Second Existence], a philosophical work dealing with spirituality and the immortality of the soul, aroused controversy in Jewish circles.⁵⁶ Zlotnik joined the staff of the *Adler* during his residence in Montreal from 1920 to 1934. Zlotnik had been inspired by Prilutski to become active in Warsaw's Yiddish folklore movement in the second decade of the twentieth century, and he published significant studies on Yiddish folklore and philology under the adopted names Yehuda Elzet and Avida.⁵⁷ He then went on to become one of the founders of the Mizrachi (Orthodox Zionist) Party in Poland after leaving his post as rabbi of the town of Gombin (also Gabin). His regular contributions to the *Adler* included studies on Zionism and the Land of Israel as well as articles on Jewish folklore; in the years he was writing these, he was also working on two books for publication: an ethnographic and philological study entitled *Shtudien in dem amoligen inerlikhen yidishen lebn* [Studies in Past Jewish Domestic Life] (1927) and an overview and analysis of Jewish humour from Jewish textual tradition and popular folklore entitled *Yidisher vits un humor* [Jewish Jokes and Humour] (1937). Zlotnik also published translations of sacred Jewish and world literature into Yiddish: an excerpt of the Zend Avesta in the *Kval* literary journal (1922);⁵⁸ a book entitled *Koheles: Der mentsh un dos bukh* [Ecclesiastes: The Man and the Book] (1929); and selections from the Book of Job in the *Adler* (1932).⁵⁹

The *Adler* found a permanent editor in Israel Rabinovitch, whose term spanned 1924 to 1964. The son of a professional *klezmer* (Jewish instrumental musician), Rabinovitch trained as a violinist before emigrating from his native Grodno in 1911. His interest in the arts – in particular amateur theatre and Jewish music – remained with him throughout his life. He made his literary debut in 1914 in a Montreal humour magazine, *Der hon* [The Hen], with a satirical

item on the local elections titled “*Hendele, kri, kri*” [Squawk, Little Hen]. Rabinovitch turned his attention to more serious writing in 1918, when his lecture on Yiddish writer Mendele Moykher-sforim was printed in the *Adler*. He began to write regularly for the newspaper, his contributions including articles on the Jewish holidays and reports on local musical and theatrical performances. As editor, Rabinovitch’s responsibilities included publishing daily articles and editorials as well as translating advertisements and proofreading.⁶⁰

Rabinovitch used his position at the *Adler* as a platform for cultural ventures within the local Jewish community. One of his interests was to create venues for high Yiddish culture. As Leonard Prager points out, it was in his capacity as head editor of the *Adler* that Rabinovitch “attempted to create a prestigious literary journal,” *Kanade* [Canada].⁶¹ This journal, which appeared in 1925, contained a variety of belles lettres as well as serious essays. Another of his concerns was Jewish education, and in 1926 he published *Di geshikhte fun yidishn shul-problem in kvibek/ The Jewish School Problem in the Province of Quebec: From Its Origin to the Present Day: History and Facts*, a bilingual Yiddish-English book that examined the controversial issue of Montreal Jewish education. Translated by Wolofsky’s son-in-law, writer and lawyer Leon D. Crestohl (1900–1963), the work addressed the pressing issue of Jewish schools within a historical context. It was the first Yiddish work to specifically examine events in the Montreal Jewish community. However, Rabinovitch’s greatest interest was music, a topic he researched as the *Adler*’s theatre and music critic. His scholarly findings appeared in articles on the history of Jewish music,⁶² culminating in the publication of his 1940 book *Muzik bay yidn* [Music among Jews]. This collection of essays explores the history of Jewish music worldwide from ancient to modern times.⁶³ As editor of the *Adler*, Rabinovitch assembled a diverse staff of writers, a staff that included poets and writers whose literary careers began in Montreal in the 1920s. Under Rabinovitch, the newspaper broadened its coverage of the arts, in particular literature, theatre, and music.

THE ETHOS OF THE ADLER

Early on, the *Adler* established the moderate stance that remained its trademark. The maxim of Wolofsky’s *Adler* can be summarized as “something for everyone.” The pages of the *Adler* featured international and local news, opinion pieces, serious essays, modern

literature, critical reviews of books, art, theatre, and music, light reading, humour, and columns geared specifically for women and younger readers. Contributors varied from locally to internationally known writers, and their work appeared both in Yiddish and in Yiddish translation of other languages. The newspaper's classified ads and articles offered its readers concrete assistance in finding an apartment or job. The *Adler* initiated and supported many Jewish community ventures in its pages, from local philanthropic organizations and campaigns in support of European Jewry to the creation of Yiddish libraries and schools.

From its inception, the newspaper acted as a gathering site for the city's emerging Yiddish intelligentsia. Virtually all of the Montreal Yiddish poets and writers published in the *Adler*, and many made their debuts in its pages, as did a great many writers outside of Montreal. According to the tabulations of Pierre Anctil, 284 of the 417 Canadian Yiddish and Hebrew writers who were listed in Chaim-Leib Fuks's lexicon published in the newspaper.⁶⁴ With most of its contributors young immigrants new to the trade, the *Adler* acted as a school for writers to develop and polish their style. Although most of the writing by *Adler's* regular contributors consisted of news items and other material intended for a mass immigrant audience, the newspaper also featured original poetry and scholarship. Most concretely, the *Adler* provided Yiddish writers with an income that allowed them to pursue more serious writing. Poet and essayist Melekh Ravitch credits the *Adler* with enabling poet J.I. Segal and other belletrists the opportunity to attain their literary achievements.⁶⁵ Further, the *Adler* facilitated Yiddish intellectual pursuits that might otherwise have lacked a readership and necessary financial support. Over the years, the *Adler* serialized longer works, including Yiddish translations of Biblical texts, scholarly studies of Jewish historical figures, and works of Jewish musicology, many of which later appeared in book form with the support of the newspaper. While the paper did publish "lowbrow" pieces, such as sensationalistic serialized novels, its writers also made efforts to promote a higher form of the Yiddish language among its readership. For example, in the 1920s, writer A. Almi repeatedly argued for the need to combat the Anglicisms (English words like "shop") and Germanisms (Modern German words like *mond* for "moon") that appeared in the Yiddish press and were used by the intelligentsia.⁶⁶ Still, much of the newspaper's contents remained peppered with English terms as its readership acculturated. This dual nature – the newspaper as

an organ for the masses and the newspaper as a means of edification and elevation – reflects the conflict inherent in a publication whose goals were to reach the widest possible readership while also serving as a tribune for serious Yiddish literature and scholarship.

A spectrum of Jewish ideology was represented in the *Adler*. Many of the individuals involved in the newspaper had Labour Zionist affiliations, including Wolofsky himself, and Zionism was a recurring theme in the newspaper. Zionism appeared both as an ideological movement that promoted the cultural revitalization of Jewish life (cultural Zionism) and as a practical movement that rallied support for the physical resettlement of Jews in Palestine (political or practical Zionism). Other *Adler* writers, such as Hershman, had anarchist connections. Wohliner, who had come to America in 1902 as part of a Labour Zionist group that planned to found a commune, began his literary career with New York's anarchist *Fraye arbeter shtime*. The *Adler* expressed clear socialist inclinations and was sympathetic to the plight of workers in its coverage of strikes. At the same time, the newspaper represented local business interests, in particular in its advertisements. The *Adler* published material on secular Jewish ideology and cultural activity while also featuring writing of a traditional Jewish bent, such as scholarly articles on Jewish texts and Bible translations or special material on the occasion of the Jewish holidays.

The *Adler*'s open stance can be traced back to its publisher, Wolofsky, who in many ways embodied the spirit of the new wave of immigrants. Raised in a traditional Eastern European milieu, Wolofsky was influenced by the ideals of the Haskalah and Zionism and brought a strong sense of Jewish identity and community with him to Canada. Simultaneously a businessman and an active figure in Montreal's Jewish community, Wolofsky created a popular newspaper that addressed the broadest possible consumer base. In contrast to the political and religious fragmentation that permeated so much of the Yiddish press in New York and other larger Yiddish centres, Wolofsky's *Adler* set out to unify rather than divide. The newspaper took an active role in building the community and an infrastructure to support the waves of impoverished Jewish immigrants that comprised its constituency. As Gerald Tulchinsky writes, Wolofsky "had broad liberal and progressive views and saw the primary role of his newspaper as a 'communal institution' whose task was advancement of Jewish cohesion and improvement by means of editorial persuasion and education."⁶⁷ Wolofsky recalls in his memoirs, "I am proud

to say that throughout its existence the *Eagle* has been an influence for good in our communal life.” He points to the many institutions and philanthropic ventures that were initiated and supported by the *Adler*, beginning with a 1908 campaign launched to raise funds for the new building for the Mount Sinai Sanatorium and the establishment of a community kitchen.⁶⁸ This hands-on involvement in all sectors of Jewish immigrant life was ongoing.

The local context further reinforced the *Adler*’s tendencies towards inclusiveness. Even though it was Canada’s largest Yiddish centre, Montreal housed a relatively small Yiddish population and thus had a limited potential audience. It made little business sense to alienate a segment of a readership already divided by ideological differences. Moreover, as a recently arrived and highly visible minority group wedged between the city’s dominant French-Catholic and Anglo-Protestant communities, the local Yiddish community found itself in a precarious position. With overt and covert antisemitism prevalent on both sides, the *Adler* rallied for communal unity rather than divisiveness. In addition, as the first – and for several years, the only – Yiddish daily in Canada, the *Adler* made a deliberate appeal to Jews across the country and sought to serve Canadian Jewry as a whole. In particular, in its early years, when the community seethed with opposing ideological movements, the *Adler* discouraged any form of radicalism that might have led to community factionalism.⁶⁹ In sum, during the political foment that characterized the first decades of Yiddish immigration to Montreal, the *Adler* was far from being extremist. Although many of its readers espoused revolutionary ideals and were involved in local trade unions, the newspaper consistently took a middle road. Even during periods of extreme labour unrest, the *Adler* maintained neutrality. The paper was so moderate that, in one of his political talks in Montreal, Chaim Zhitlowsky asserted that the paper ought to have been called the *ganz* (goose), instead of *adler* (eagle). Likewise, Zlotnik once quipped to David Rome that the *Adler* should have been titled the *katshe* (duck).⁷⁰

The *Adler* functioned as a bridge between the way of life its readers had experienced in Eastern Europe and the new way of life they found in Canada. The newspaper educated its readers about international, national, and local events and issues, and worked to promote strong identification with Canada and political awareness. For much of its readership, for which Yiddish was the vernacular, the *Adler* served as a primary source of information about their Montreal or other

Canadian community as well as about the wider world. For many, it served as a lifeline to events that directly affected their families still in Eastern Europe. Moreover, the newspaper introduced its readership to new ideas and new genres of writing originating from both within and outside of the Jewish world. As most of its readers had not received a formal education in Yiddish culture, the *Adler* offered a first taste of modern poetry or literary criticism. It thus broadened the vernacular role widely associated with Yiddish to include high functions such as belles lettres and serious scholarship. At the same time, the *Adler* played an integral part in the maintenance and adaptation of the Yiddish culture brought to Canada from Eastern Europe. It quickly assumed a leadership role within the Montreal Jewish community and provided a communication network for the community's various Jewish groups.⁷¹ On the eve of the First World War, when innumerable fraternal orders, congregations, schools, and cultural organizations of different ideological leanings were functioning independently of one another, the *Adler's* writers advocated formal communal consolidation. It was within its pages in the first decade of the century that editor Wohliner pioneered the movement that led to the formation of the Canadian Jewish Union in Canada, eventually to become the Canadian Jewish Congress in 1919. The *Adler* likewise played a key role in the promotion of community-wide philanthropic enterprises, such as the relief campaigns for Eastern European Jewry in the 1920s and 1930s. Most basically, the *Adler* presented a forum for Yiddish writing and exchange, and in the process, it created a community of readers and writers.

OTHER MONTREAL YIDDISH NEWSPAPERS

Although the *Adler* proved to be the longest-lasting Yiddish daily paper to appear in Montreal, a number of newspapers and periodicals reflecting a diversity of orientations and interests in the fledgling Yiddish community started up in the 1910s and 1920s. These publications more often than not shared the *Adler's* pool of writers. To maximize their publishing opportunities, members of Montreal's literary community edited and contributed to a variety of publications with diverse ideologies. The city's Yiddish writers functioned as "jacks of all trades" in local periodical production, often serving as editors, publishers, and fundraisers and contributing a variety of material – local and international news, ad copy, editorials, feuilletons, columns

on local events, opinion pieces, scholarly studies, poetry, prose, and drama, serialized potboilers, and so on – to many different publications simultaneously, both locally and abroad.

With the *Adler* dominating the local Yiddish newspaper scene, attempts to establish rival Yiddish newspapers were short-lived. Rabbi Simon Glazer produced an Orthodox newspaper called *Di yidishe velt* [The Jewish World] in 1911–12, while on the other end of the ideological spectrum, labour unrest in 1912 spurred a coalition of local left-wing groups to come together to establish a staunchly socialist alternative to the *Adler*. The coalition, which included anarchists as well as Labour Zionists, perceived the *Adler* as too friendly to the local business establishment. The founders of the weekly *Di folkssaytung* [The People's Newspaper] brought Russian Labour Zionist activist Leon Chasanovitch (née Kasriel Shub, 1880–1925) to Montreal to serve as editor. Chasanovitch, in turn, brought with him New York avant-garde poet Moyshe-Leyb Halpern as his assistant. Self-described as “the first and only Jewish Socialist workers’ paper in Canada ... by workers for workers,” the *Folkssaytung* presented readers with news about the trade unions in Canada and the international labour movement. It also featured contributions by local writers, many of them also associated with the *Adler*, as well as by international writers.⁷² Halpern’s contributions included several poems, most notably “Tsum strayk” [To the Strike], which appeared on the front page during a strike of men’s tailors.⁷³ Owing to financial difficulties, the *Folkssaytung* folded after twenty-four issues. In 1913, *Adler* contributor Y.L. Malamut founded a short-lived newspaper entitled *Der kanader yidisher vokhnblat* [The Canadian Jewish Weekly].⁷⁴ Two short-lived efforts were made to establish newspapers in 1914: *Di arbeter tsaytung* [The Workers’ Newspaper] and an evening edition called *Der abend kurier* [The Evening Courier]. The pool of advertising and other sources of financial support was simply too limited to support a second Yiddish newspaper.

Even projects pioneered by prominent community activists failed for financial reasons. In 1915, when Brainin left the *Adler*, his plan had been to establish a Hebrew newspaper, *Ha-derekh* [The Road]. However, practical considerations of readership – the tiny local audience for Hebrew periodicals – led him to found the Yiddish-language daily *Der veg* instead. *Der veg* featured contributions by some forty Canadian Yiddish writers, many of them, like Isaac Yampolsky, also contributors to the *Adler*.⁷⁵ *Der veg* promoted community causes such as the establishment of a Canadian Jewish congress. Although the

newspaper found support in Yiddish circles, it lacked the financial stability of the established *Adler* and was forced to close after nine months.⁷⁶ Yehuda Kaufman, a key player in the founding and early years of both the Jewish Public Library and secular Jewish schools and a regular contributor to the *Adler*, edited two short-lived Montreal newspapers. The Labour Zionist *Dos vort* [The Word], founded in 1915,⁷⁷ featured Kaufman's editorials and articles as well as his literary offerings. *Dos folk: Keneder yidish literarishe un natsional gezelschafteke vokhschrift* (The People: Canadian Jewish National Social and Literary Weekly) was founded in 1917 with the purpose of garnering support for the new Canadian Jewish congress movement. In addition to its focus on local news and events, in particular items of cultural and educational interest, *Dos folk* promoted the fledgling Yiddish institutions in which Kaufman was active, notably the library and secular Jewish schools. Both newspapers featured regular contributions by some twenty Canadian writers, whose numbers included many of the Montreal Poale Zion activists affiliated with the *Adler*, such as Meltzer, L.M. Benjamin, Simon Belkin, and Israel Medres. The paper also featured poetry by J.I. Segal and Toronto proletarian poet Sh. (Simon) Nepom (1882–1939), articles on historical topics by H.M. Caiserman and Toronto journalist and historian Abraham Rhinewine (1887–1932), as well as writing by international Yiddish authors.⁷⁸ Both newspapers were forced to close because of financial difficulties.

With a growing Yiddish reading public, Montreal editions of foreign publications appeared throughout the 1910s. In 1918, a monthly entitled *Der yid* [The Jew], dedicated to the interests of Orthodox Jewry in the United States and Canada, briefly appeared in New York and subsequently in Montreal. Several of the larger American newspapers published Montreal editions. For example, a local edition *Der yidisher kempfer* [The Jewish Fighter], a Yiddish Labour Zionist newspaper that appeared weekly in 1915 and was distributed by the Poale Zion, featured a section on Montreal news and events. At the same time, the *Adler* briefly published a Toronto edition.

A number of *Adler* writers were involved in specialty publications during the 1910s, in particular humour magazines. Regular contributor Y.L. Malamut, a pioneer in the publication of Canadian humour magazines, published *Der pipernoter* [The Dragon] in 1913.⁷⁹ He also edited five issues of the humour magazine *Der hon*, which had featured the literary debut of Israel Rabinovitch.⁸⁰ In 1916, *Adler* editor H. Hirsch co-edited fifteen issues of a weekly humour supplement titled

Der hamer [The Hammer]. An independent journal published every Friday by the "Hammer Publishing Company," *Der hamer* proclaimed itself as "the Only Illustrated Jewish Journal of Humor and Satire in the Dominion" and became a weekly supplement to the *Adler*.⁸¹ Its co-editor and contributor A.M. Mandelbaum (1885–1952), also a writer for the *Adler*, co-edited a short-lived Winnipeg weekly of humour and satire entitled *Der keneder mazel* [The Canadian Mischief Maker] in 1913.⁸² Like New York's *Der groyser kundes* [The Big Stick] (founded in 1909), and other American and European Yiddish humour periodicals, the Montreal humour magazines satirized local and international events, and featured cartoons as well as belles lettres.

The 1920s and 1930s saw the appearance of a succession of Yiddish literary publications in Montreal. During this time, the city marked the site of a dozen literary journals that spanned the ideological spectrum, from modernist to proletarian. These comprised the first and the majority of the twenty-odd Yiddish journals devoted literature and culture to appear in Canada.

Montreal Yiddish literary journals of the 1920s tended towards a modernist orientation and drew on avant-garde literary trends in the United States as well as Europe. Three volumes of *Nyuansn: A monatshrift far lider, miniatur un essays* [Nuances: A Monthly of Poetry, Miniatures, and Essays] (1921) were edited by J.I. Segal and contained primarily poetry by Canadian Yiddish writers as well as essays on literary themes in Yiddish and non-Yiddish writing in Canada as well as internationally. One volume of *Epokhe: A dray-monatlekh zamlheft far moderner literatur* (Epoch: A Quarterly Review of Modern Literature] (1922), edited by J.I. Segal, A. Almi, and A.Sh. Shkolnikov, featured poetry by Montreal as well as American and European Yiddish writers. *Royerd* [Raw Earth] (1922–23) appeared in two incarnations: three Montreal issues edited by J.I. Segal feature local poets as well as essays on literary modernism in Yiddish and world literatures; two other issues were edited by Sh. Shnayder for Toronto's leftist-oriented Yidishe kultur lige (hereafter Jewish Cultural League) and promoted a worker-oriented secular Yiddish culture. One issue of *Der kvak: A monatshrift far literatur, kritik un kultur-problemen* (The Source: A Monthly for Literature, Criticism, and Cultural Problems) (1922, edited by A. Almi) offered a cosmopolitan approach featuring a cast of entirely Montreal-based writers who contributed poetry, essays on a variety of topics, and translations of world literature. Three issues of *Kanade: Periodish-literarisher zhurnal* [Canada: A Literary Magazine]

(1925), edited by A.Sh. Shkolnikov in conjunction with rotating co-editors, contain poetry and essays on a wide variety of themes, as well as translations of works of world literature and philosophy, all authored and rendered by Montreal talent. Two issues of a revived *Royerd* edited by A.Sh. Shkolnikov (1927) featured local poets exploring a variety of genres and themes. A third incarnation of *Royerd* in 1929 featured much of the Montreal Yiddish literary scene with J.I. Segal at the fore and outlined plans for upcoming issues as well as a local literary anthology; both failed to materialize. While short-lived, these Montreal journals strove to create a specifically Canadian forum for avant-garde Yiddish letters. Taken together, they offered a site for literary experimentation and promoted local ventures in literary life. They published many lesser-known Canadian Yiddish writers and featured the literary debuts of a number of local poets, including A.Sh. Shkolnikov in *Nyuansn* and Ida Maza in *Kanade*. The diversity of material, all authored by local writers, reflects an active engagement with the contemporary wider world of letters that crossed boundaries of geography, nationality, creed, and language.

The Great Depression introduced a series of journals that espoused a proletarian orientation where literature served as a tool for edifying the working class, and many were pro-Soviet. A joint Montreal-Toronto journal entitled *Heftn: Nisht-periodish literarishe shrift* [Notebooks: Non-Periodical Literary Journal] (1929), edited by a collective under Sholem Shtern, aimed to bring together Canada's young Yiddish writers dispersed across Canada, in particular of a leftist orientation. Meanwhile, three other leftist Toronto publications appeared in the early 1930s – *Basheydn* [Modest] (1930), *In gevirbl* [In a Whirl] (1930), and *Bay undz* [Among Us] (1931) – while in Vancouver a single Yiddish-English journal was produced under the title *Di yidishe velt* [The Jewish World] (1928, 1935). Four literary journals appeared in Montreal during the 1930s, all of a left-wing orientation. *Montreol: Literarisher khoydesh-zhurnal* [Montreal: A Literary Monthly Journal] (1932–35), edited by N.Y. Gotlib and others, was the longest running of the Montreal literary journals. Its dozen issues featured local talent and actively promoted activities such as literary evenings. A single issue of *Prolit: Literarisher zhurnal aroysgegebn fun di yidishe proletarishe shrayber krayzn in kanade* [Prolit: Literary Journal Published by Jewish Proletarian Writers in Canada] (1935), edited by a collective, was the most radically leftist of the literary journals, with a manifesto that championed literature as a

tool for proletarianizing of the masses. *Heftn: Shrift far literatur, kunst un kultur-inyonim fun mayrev shtatn un kanade* [Notebooks: Journal of Literature, Art, and Cultural Matters of the Western States and Canada] was a two-city venture co-edited by N.Y. Gotlib in Montreal and Ezra Korman in Detroit that offered a platform for writers in smaller Canadian and American centres (1936–37). The last Montreal journal to appear before 1945, *Kanader zhurnal: Khoydesh-shrift far moderner literatur* [Canadian Journal: A Monthly Magazine for Modern Literature] (1940), edited by A.Sh. Shkolnikov, included contents by local writers that were thematically broad in scope, with extensive discussion of Jewish music as well as content relating to the precarious situation facing European Jewry.

All of the literary journals were published on a small scale, generally by their own editors, and with minimal funds. With the exception of *Montreol*, all were short-lived, lasting between one and five issues. These publications featured belles lettres, essays, and reviews, as well as translations of world literature by a roster of Canadian writers, while occasionally reprinting works by international writers. Geared towards the sophisticated reader of serious Yiddish literature or the politically committed, these journals sought to provide a local forum for new writing and new ideas. In doing so, they fostered a specifically Canadian framework for Yiddish literature.⁸³

There were other short-lived specialty publications in the 1920s and 1930s. A weekly entitled *Der kanader vokhenblat* [The Canadian Weekly], dedicated to serious Yiddish literature, appeared in 1926. Edited by Montreal writers Yankev Zipper and Chaim Tolmatsh (1895–1971), the *Kanader vokhenblat* started out with “purely literary goals.” However, it soon become embroiled in local politics and ceased publication after fifteen issues.⁸⁴ That same year, Zipper also served as literary editor of the weekly *Der kanader yid* [The Canadian Jew]. Meanwhile, growing concerns about the tightening of Canada’s immigration laws prompted the founding of a monthly Yiddish journal called *Nayland* [Newland] in 1926–27 by the Jewish Immigrant Aid Society of Canada (JIAS). Its four issues included articles on Jewish immigration to Canada by local writers active in the area of Jewish immigration, including Hersh Hershman, Abraham Rhinewine, B.G. Sack, H.M. Caiserman, Simon Belkin, and Yankev Zipper. In the Zionist milieu, a newspaper called *Undzer veg/The Jewish Tribune* published a single issue in 1935.

The pooling of local resources across ideological lines indicates a fluidity among writers typical of nascent communities that have not yet established fixed boundaries. Moreover, it demonstrates the broad scope of the Yiddish world, where writers shared resources locally as well as internationally. As a minor Yiddish centre, Montreal was only able to support a single Yiddish periodical in the long term: the *Adler*, a daily newspaper that encompassed the community as a whole. At the same time, the newspaper helped to develop a local Yiddish reading public as well as a pool of resident writers, and its associates produced a variety of specialized publications.

THE PEAK YEARS OF THE ADLER

The years between 1924 and 1939 mark the *Adler's* high point in terms of both writing and readership. The period was one of stability, prosperity, and communal consolidation, and the sizable Yiddish-speaking population was eager for culture. The newspaper simultaneously oriented its contents towards a wide swath of the population, including workers; factory owners and business people; recent immigrants; literature, music, and theatre enthusiasts; Jewish community organizers, activists, and supporters; secular Jews; observant Jews; Zionists; socialists; and so on. The *Adler* was conscious of its changing role as a Canadian Yiddish newspaper and continually adjusted its contents to the needs of its readers. As incoming editor of the *Adler*, Rabinovitch added a number of regular features, including regular columns for women under the title “Di froyen velt” [Women’s World] and one for children, called “Kinderland” [Children’s Land], as well as an illustrated Sunday supplement and a humour supplement. Other special interest columns focused on health, home, and family. The goal, the editors stated in the mid-1920s, was to make the *Adler* comparable to New York newspapers while remaining distinctly Canadian.⁸⁵ By January of 1925, the *Adler* had inaugurated its “English Department of the Jewish Daily Eagle” (also known as “the English page”) to appeal to a younger and anglicizing reading public.⁸⁶ The “English page” featured news, literature, and brief essays. Its contents comprised English items written expressly for the *Adler*, English translations of Yiddish articles published in the *Adler*, and material shared with the English-language *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*.

By the mid-1920s, the *Adler* had assembled a diverse regular staff that produced a wide variety of material. In 1927, the *Adler's* editorial



Editorial staff of the *Keneder adler* and the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*, 1932. Jewish Public Library Archives, Montreal

staff included Israel Rabinovitch as managing editor, Hirsch Wolofsky as publisher, B.G. Sack as assistant editor and staff writer, Yehuda Zlotnik as close associate, and Nekhemye Segal (1878–1945, a poet and the elder brother of J.I. Segal) as a regular contributor.⁸⁷ By 1932, the editorial staff had added as new members poet N.Y. Gotlib, long-time contributor Israel Medres, and Orthodox rabbi and Jewish scholar Chaim Kruger. The diversity of this group, which included scholars of a secular orientation, scholars who were proponents of Jewish Orthodoxy or Zionism, and a working-class poet, indicates the diversity of the Yiddish literary community of Montreal during the interwar period.

The trilingual (Yiddish-English-French) 1932 anniversary edition of the *Adler*, published to mark both the twenty-fifth anniversary of the newspaper and one hundred years of Jewish emancipation in Canada, indicates that the diverse constituents of the country's Yiddish milieu had established deep roots in the city as well as in wider Canadian society.⁸⁸ This special edition includes essays on Jewish life in Canada, Canadian history, medicine, and Yiddish literature; memoirs of Jewish leftist and nationalist activists, pedagogues, writers, and rabbis from Montreal as well as from Toronto and Western Canada; and poetry and prose by a roster of Canadian Yiddish writers. It also offers greetings from Canada's political leaders, including Prime Minister R.B. Bennett, Opposition Leader William Lyon Mackenzie King, Quebec premier Louis Alexandre Taschereau, and the city's wide variety of Jewish organizations. Included in both the English and French sections are essays on Jewish history and antisemitism directed at a wide, and not necessarily Jewish, audience. The broad scope of the project under editor B.G. Sack and the publication's glowing representation of Canadian Jewry and emphasis on the long-standing commitment of the country's Jews to their adopted country served to reach out both to more acculturated Jewish readers and to a non-Jewish audience. The inclusion of French material (the 1927 anniversary volume had been Yiddish-English only) certainly helped to increase the newspaper's readership and the potential for advertising revenue during the Great Depression. However, the use of French can also be understood ideologically as an early form of rapprochement between the country's Jewish and French Canadian communities in a period when there was limited interaction between the Anglo-Protestant, French-Catholic, and Anglo-Jewish/Yiddish "solitudes" in Quebec.⁸⁹ This inclusive approach and openness to French Canada was a salient feature of Sack's journalism and scholarship. It was an attitude shared by *Adler* editor Israel Rabinovitch, notably in his musicological studies that compared Jewish and French Canadian music, and by regular contributor H.M. Caiserman, who wrote extensively on non-Yiddish Canadian belles lettres for the *Adler's* readers. As editor of the edition, Sack reached out to a wide array of individuals locally and internationally as contributors of articles, poetry and prose, and greetings and forwarded copies to prominent figures in Canadian life.⁹⁰ The 1932 anniversary edition indicates ways in which the *Adler* worked to promote both a distinctly Jewish identity in Canada and its active inclusion in wider Canadian life.

THE ADLER AND CANADIAN JEWISH SCHOLARSHIP

The *Adler* served as a springboard for its writers and a percolation site for scholarly projects. The newspaper actively supported writers within the community whose projects involved traditional Jewish scholarship as well as secular studies. Many local scholarly ventures began in the *Adler* and were subsequently published as books. B.G. Sack, the country's first full-time Yiddish journalist and pioneering historian of the Canadian Jewish experience, embodies the role of the *Adler* in promoting Yiddish scholarship.

Sack was born into a family of distinguished Talmudic scholars in a small town in the Kovno (also Kaunas) region of Lithuania. His formal *kheyder* schooling was erratic, owing to his family's poverty and his own impaired mobility on account of muscular dystrophy. Like so many of his cohort of Eastern European Jewish intellectuals, Sack was self-taught in secular studies. According to his own account, he taught himself to read and write Russian, German, and English, and studied mathematics and other subjects on his own from a young age. At age fifteen, Sack was named assistant to the civic rabbi of the town. In 1905, he immigrated to Canada with his mother and siblings to join his father in Montreal, where he immersed himself in Jewish and secular studies, languages, and philology, and taught himself French by reading the local press as well as literary works. His older brother, Mendl-Leyb, a pioneer of the local Labour Zionist movement and a Jewish pedagogue, encouraged him to write creatively, and Sack began to compose poetry in Hebrew and Yiddish.⁹¹

Sack's fifty-year career as Canada's first professional Yiddish journalist began with the founding of the *Adler* in 1907. He became a full-time staff writer in 1910 and served as chief editor in 1915–16 and 1922–23 and as associate editor in 1929–57.⁹² Like most Yiddish journalists of his generation, Sack fell into this role, and his own writing evolved together with the newspaper. Sack wrote prolifically in Yiddish for local, national, and international publications. During his career with the *Adler*, he published some five thousand stories, translations of world literature, editorials, and essays on historical and cultural themes in the newspaper,⁹³ and also contributed English pieces to the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*. By 1910, Sack was writing extensively on various facets of Canadian life, including economics, politics, social and cultural activities, literature, and history. His articles served to

familiarize the immigrant reading public with their adopted homeland, prepare Yiddish-speaking Jews to participate in civic life, and instil a sense of pride in their emerging identity as Canadian Jews. Sack was also involved in pioneering literary ventures under the aegis of the *Adler*, including the Klub yidishe shrayber, montreol (The Club of Yiddish Writers, Montreal).

Sack's research on the history of Jews in Canada was inspired by his close association with the *Adler* and resulted in the first comprehensive study of the subject. The newspaper served as the main forum for Sack's scholarship on Canadian and Jewish history, and it provided him with ongoing financial support to facilitate his research. He embarked on his study of Canadian Jewry in 1911, when Wolofsky suggested that he write a historical survey on the subject. By 1913 the *Adler* had published multi-part studies on Canadian Jewish demography as well as on Jewish emancipation in Canada. His scholarly articles, which appeared throughout the 1910s, 1920s, and beyond, examined the link between Canadian society and the long-standing Jewish community, and gave the Yiddish immigrant community a sense of their deep roots in their adopted country. This journalistic activity sparked Sack's transition to longer historical studies. In the 1920s, his series of articles in the *Adler*, as well as in the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* in English translation, evolved into a meticulously researched account of the Jewish experience in Canada from the sixteenth through the twentieth centuries. After the initial chapters had appeared in the *Adler* and the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*, Sack was commissioned by A.D. Hart, a descendant of the prominent Anglo-Jewish Hart family, to author a comprehensive history of the Jews in Canada as the opening essay in Hart's 1926 compendium, *The Jew in Canada: A Complete Record of Canadian Jewry from the Days of the French Regime to the Present Time*. Sack produced a twenty-chapter study in Yiddish that was translated into English for Hart's publication.⁹⁴

The *Adler* supported Sack's research in tangible ways. As a journalist and as an amateur historian writing a pioneering account of an ethnic community in Canada, Sack had little secondary literature on Canadian Jewish history at his disposal outside of a handful of studies on early Jewish settlement and institutional life in Canada published by Clarence I. de Sola, son of prominent Montreal rabbi Abraham de Sola.⁹⁵ Sack evolved a research methodology whereby he acquired and scoured all available sources on the Jewish presence in Canada – letters, diaries, institutional records, newspapers, government documents,

gazetteers – with much of his progress contingent on personal contact with government officials, archivists, and private collectors of Jewish Canadiana. In his official capacity as staff writer and member of the editorial board of the *Adler*, Sack initiated contact with resource people beginning in the 1910s and corresponded widely with archivists and government agencies, in particular in the area of immigration.⁹⁶ Moreover, to counteract Sack's reduced income owing to the decreased volume of articles he was able to produce while working on his contribution to Hart's book, it was arranged for Sack to publish the complete text of his "History of the Jews in Canada" in the *Adler* as he progressed. Thus, the original Yiddish "Geshikhte fun di yidn in kanade" [History of the Jews in Canada] appeared in instalments in the *Adler*, and the English translation was featured on the newspaper's "English Page" in 1925. Moreover, in 1932, Wolofsky initiated plans for a special committee to publish the Yiddish version as a book.⁹⁷ For reasons that remain unclear, these plans failed to come to fruition, and over a decade would pass before *The History of the Jews in Canada: From the French Regime to the End of the Nineteenth Century* (1945) would be published, with the original Yiddish text appearing in 1948.⁹⁸ Sack was one of many writers at the *Adler* who engaged in scholarship.

From the outset, the *Adler* attracted writers who contributed traditional Jewish scholarship to the newspaper. One of the *Adler*'s earliest writers, Lithuanian-born Shmuel Talpis (1877–1951), was a *yeshiva* graduate, a Hebraist, and a promoter of traditional Jewish study. As a regular contributor to the *Adler* from 1908 until 1951, Talpis published articles on the history of Jewish communities, mysticism, portraits of prominent Jews in history, and other areas of Jewish studies, a selection of which later appeared in book form in 1939 under the title *Geklibene shriftn fun shmuel talpis: A zamlung ophandlungen iber khokhmes-yisroel* [Selected Writings of Shmuel Talpis: A Collection of Discourses on Judaism]. Lithuanian-born rabbi and Jewish scholar Chaim Kruger (1875–1933), who joined the *Adler*'s editorial board in 1921, was also a *yeshiva* graduate and a recognized *ile* (prodigy). He worked as a religious functionary – ritual slaughterer, prayer leader, and *yeshiva* head – and published his first Yiddish-language articles in the *Adler*. He became a regular contributor to the paper, publishing articles, feuilletons, short stories, serialized novels, and studies of leading personalities and events in Jewish history. These formed the basis for his two books on founding Jewish philosophers: *Der saadye gaon* (1930), a study of the ninth-century philosopher, liturgical poet,

and Biblical commentator Saadiah Gaon, and *Der rambam* (1933), an account of the life and ideas of twelfth-century rabbinical authority and codifier Moses ben Maimon (also Maimonides). As traditionally educated advocates of Jewish scholarship, Talpis and Kruger enjoyed prestige as writers and scholars in Montreal. This stands in contrast to the reputation of many of their earlier counterparts in the mass immigration to New York, who were referred to, in a 1902 study by writer Hutchins Hapgood, as “submerged scholars.”⁹⁹ In the Montreal context during the interwar period, Jewish scholars and community functionaries published and lectured in addition to holding positions as religious functionaries within the Jewish community. This group found an important outlet in the *Adler*.¹⁰⁰

YIDDISH LITERATURE IN THE ADLER

Literature broadly defined, from belles lettres to scholarly studies, occupied a position of prominence in the *Adler* from the start. The *Adler*, like many newspapers worldwide, constituted a primary site of publication for the newest offerings of Yiddish poetry, short stories, essays, scholarly studies, and criticism. Throughout its existence, the newspaper served as a “literary forum for Yiddish writers,”¹⁰¹ both as a promoter of Yiddish literature and culture and as a book publisher and distributor. While these roles evolved gradually over the period under discussion, the *Adler* showed a clear commitment to Yiddish letters from its very beginnings. Wolofsky’s desire to create a venue for local writers of all ideological orientations translated into the publication of work from across a broad religious and political spectrum, and the pages of the newspaper presented an ongoing opportunity for both aspiring and experienced Yiddish writers to see their work published. During the first two decades of its existence, the *Adler* attracted a number of poets whose primary tribune remained the Yiddish press: David Drubin (1883–1952), Shloyme Shnayder (1897–1936), Nekhemye Segal, Osher Rosen (1900–?), Shloyme Zalmen Schneirson (1889–1946), and Chane Steinberg (1896–1942). These poets were among the minor Yiddish writers whose work appeared primarily in the Yiddish press and who depended on such publications as the *Adler* and other periodicals for outlet and audience.

By the 1910s, the *Adler* was featuring a wide selection of literary offerings. Like many Yiddish dailies, it included serialized novels, many of which were unattributed and reworked potboilers with titles

such as *Mentsh un tayul* [Man and the Devil], *Der farshtelter* [The Disguised Man], and *Der bootleger* [The Bootlegger]. Some of these popular works were written specially for the *Adler* by its staff. During the *Adler*'s early years, for example, Y.L. Malamut authored several novels that were serialized in the newspaper: *Der veltfarzoger* [The World Provider] (1910), *Der shtoyb fun lebn* [The Dust of Life] (1911), *Tserisene neshomes* [Torn Souls] (1912), and *Inteligentn* [Intelligentsia] (1913). In addition, the *Adler* featured more ambitious genres on a regular basis in the form of poetry by local and international authors. The paper printed excerpts of volumes of Yiddish fiction and non-fiction and highlighted works by local writers. Moreover, the *Adler* covered the local as well as the international Yiddish literary scene. In addition to offering news about local literary events and new publications, it reviewed new Yiddish books by Canadian writers. At the same time, columns such as A. Almi's "Shrayber un bikher" [Writers and Books] discussed new developments in Yiddish literature abroad.¹⁰²

The *Adler* directly promoted discussion of Yiddish literature in the wider Montreal community by organizing events around new trends in Yiddish writing. For example, in January 1925, it hosted a debate on "New Yiddish Poetry," with *Adler* writers as the debate participants: L.M. Benjamin and H.M. Caiserman for the prosecution and Israel Rabinovitch and Yankev Zipper for the defence. The event, which shared some of the theatricality of mock trials held in the Soviet Union during the same period,¹⁰³ allowed the participants and audience to explore new trends in Yiddish literature in a public and interactive manner. Zipper's personal account of the event in his diary suggests that the event was far more than a theoretical debate: he describes how the members of the prosecution "open[ed] fire with their full bombast" in their condemnation of "the new poetry" and of modernist Yiddish writers who were responding to a new age.¹⁰⁴ The participants, as Yiddish writers, verbalized a personal stake in the new Yiddish poetry that was being created by them and around them within a transnational literary milieu.

In the mid-1920s, Yiddish literature assumed a more prominent place in the *Adler*. With Montreal's sizable immigrant population and a wider Yiddish reading public than ever before, the paper expanded its scope. Its associates were a group of writers who were themselves exploring new directions in Yiddish literature in a range of genres, including the essay, poetry, prose, and writing for theatre. J.I. Segal played a vital part in promoting serious Yiddish literature through the

Adler. Having made his literary debut with a love song in its 1915 High Holiday supplement, he soon became a regular contributor to the newspaper, publishing poetry as well as essays. In 1928, after spending five years in New York in the company of the Di yunge group of poets, Segal returned to Montreal, where he played an active role in raising the stature of literature in the *Adler*. In addition to publishing his own poetry for adults and children, he contributed regular columns on Yiddish literature, both local and international, portraits of writers, and discussions of literary trends. As literary editor from 1938 to 1945, Segal oversaw and contributed to a page titled “Di literarishe velt” [The Literary World] that featured literary reviews, original poetry and prose, and news relating to Yiddish literature. In 1941, he established a weekly literary supplement that remained a regular feature of the *Adler*, even after his death in 1954.¹⁰⁵

The *Adler* was also the site of pioneering studies of Canadian Jewish literature, notably in the writing of the newspaper’s chief literary critic, H.M. Caiserman. His pioneering 1927 article, titled “Yidish-literarishe tetikayt in kanade, khronologisher iberblik” [Yiddish Literary Activity in Canada: A Chronological Overview], the first comprehensive study of Canadian Jewish letters, details the history of Jewish literary activity from its English-language beginnings in the 1840s through the 1920s. This material formed the foundation for Caiserman’s 1934 anthology, *Yidishe dikhter in kanade* [Jewish Poets in Canada], a compilation of the work of virtually every Jewish poet to have published in Canada up to that time, over forty in Yiddish and a handful in English. The anthology includes the work of every Jewish Canadian poet, from students whose work appeared in school journals to more seasoned poets such as J.I. Segal. It offers a biographical and critical essay on each poet along with samples of the writer’s work. This material, culled from newspapers, literary journals, and school publications, served to validate and promote the literary activity of the nascent Canadian Yiddish community.

THE ADLER AS PUBLISHER

The *Adler* filled an essential function in the literary community by publishing, distributing, and promoting Yiddish books. During the period under discussion, these were challenging to publish and disseminate, as Montreal, like much of the Yiddish world, lacked both commercial

publishing houses and a core of readers who could afford to purchase books. Newspapers and journals presented a readily affordable mass medium for disseminating literature to the reading masses.

The involvement of the *Adler* in book publishing began as a commercial venture. Soon after its founding in 1907, the *Adler* offered the use of its presses for the printing of Yiddish volumes in exchange for payment. In this capacity, the Druk fun “keneder adler” (Printer of the “Keneder adler”) published Canada’s first Yiddish book in 1910, Moshe Elimelech Levin’s (1865–1933) *Kinder ertsiyung bay yidn* [Children’s Education among Jews]. The *Adler* continued to print as well as support book projects authored by its associates. In 1918, for example, the *Adler* printed and subsidized the publication of two volumes by editor H. Hirsch, *Fablen* and *Shir ha-shirim*, both of which are listed as printed by the Keneder adler/Eagle Publishing Company and published by Hirsch’s Farlag “kenede” [“Canada” Publishing House]. Hirsch’s foreword in *Fablen* expresses gratitude to Wolofsky for making the volume possible, in particular during a time of war and instability in the Jewish book market. Hirsch writes: “[Wolofsky’s] main intent, just like my own, was to achieve something for Yiddish literature, regardless as to whether it would pay off or not.”¹⁰⁶ The *Adler* actively promoted *Fablen* and printed excerpts from the novel in its pages.¹⁰⁷

The *Adler*’s role as local printer of Yiddish books expanded after the First World War. When the war interrupted the printing and distribution of Jewish books in Eastern Europe and brought to a virtual standstill the production of the costly-to-produce folios of the Talmud, Wolofsky undertook the ambitious project of producing a local version under the auspices of the *Adler*, the *Shas talmud bavli* [Babylonian Talmud] or, as it became popularly known, the *Montreoler shas* [Montreal Talmud].¹⁰⁸ In the end, the *Montreoler shas* was a money-losing venture when, unforeseen by Wolofsky, technical difficulties delayed its printing until 1919, by which time the war had come to an end and the publishing houses in Vilna were able to return to business and undersell him. However, with newly expanded printing quarters and a bindery sitting idle, Wolofsky sought to increase the volume of outside printing jobs taken on by the *Adler*.¹⁰⁹ The Yiddish volumes printed commercially by the Keneder adler drukera (print-shop) included *Yidishe geshikhte in fragn un entfers* [Jewish History in Questions and Answers] (1935) by pedagogue and writer Abraham Samuel Sacher (1880–1970); *Di drite sudeh: Lider* [The Third Meal:

Poems] (1937), a volume of poetry by J.I. Segal; and *Yidishe folks-entsiklopedye* [Jewish Popular Encyclopedia] (1942–43) by Polish-born scholar Symcha Petrushka (1893–1950).

The *Adler* also ran a publishing house under the name Farlag keneder adler/Eagle Publishing Company. Unlike the print shop, the *Adler* publishing house was not a commercial venture. Under Wolofsky's direction, it supported the publication of works of Jewish scholarship by absorbing the costs associated with the use of its printing presses and promoting and disseminating the finished product. Farlag keneder adler published Yiddish-language works authored by the *Adler's* contributors, many of them culminations of projects begun in the pages of the *Adler*. These included, among others, Israel Rabinovitch's *Di geshikhte fun yidishn shul-problem in kvibek* (1926) and *Muzik bay yidn* (1940); Zlotnik's *Shtudien in dem amoligen inerlikhen yidishn lebn* (1927) and *Koheles, der mentsh un dos bukh* (1929); Kruger's *Der saadye gaon* (1930) and *Der rambam* (1933); and Talpis's *Geklibene shriftn fun shmuel talpis* (1939). Moreover, the *Adler* published all three of Wolofsky's own books. Like most publishing houses associated with newspapers, the *Adler* published works that met its wider goals. While a press attached to a radical newspaper such as the New York anarchist *Fraye arbeter shtime* published works of a more militant orientation, the *Adler* published works that supported its broader and more moderate outlook in books that furthered Jewish scholarship or works of belles lettres by its own associates. It did not publish books of a radical orientation that might have contributed to factionalism. A comparable role was filled by the Yiddish newspapers in Winnipeg and Toronto, which also published works by their contributors.

ANGLO-JEWISH NEWSPAPERS

The development of *Adler* was bracketed by the rise of an Anglo-Jewish press, with shifts in the relative status of the Yiddish and English press reflecting wider linguistic trends in Canadian Jewish life. The year 1897, the eve of the mass immigration, marked the founding of Canada's first Jewish newspaper, Montreal's English-language weekly *Jewish Times*. Established by two descendants of Canadian Jewish pioneer families, businessman and philanthropist Lyon Cohen and lawyer Sam Jacobs, the *Jewish Times* covered local, national, and international news of Jewish interest for an acculturated, English-speaking readership.¹¹⁰ The Montreal Anglo-Jewish press and the Yiddish press began

to overlap in the 1910s, when, in 1914, *Adler* publisher Hirsch Wolofsky purchased the *Jewish Times* and reconstituted it as the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*.¹¹¹ The *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* would serve as the *Adler*'s sister publication into the 1940s, and the two newspapers shared office space, resources, and writers. The *Adler*'s steadily growing circulation, which increased from 10,000 in 1910 to 19,500 in 1932, was almost double that of the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*.¹¹² For some four decades, the *Adler* served as a primary source of information for its readers, in particular about events pertinent to the Yiddish community locally as well as in other Jewish centres. As with other Yiddish newspapers, this role was particularly vital in the years leading up to and during the Holocaust, when the *Adler* continued to publish the latest news on European Jewry under the Nazis, news that did not appear in the mainstream or Anglo-Jewish press.¹¹³

At the same time, with anglicization and a government policy that limited Jewish immigration, the Yiddish reading public began to decrease, and with it, the circulation and influence of the *Adler*. In response to these trends, Wolofsky created his "English Page" in the *Adler*, which appeared from 1925 to 1936 in order appeal to an anglicizing readership. However, the "English Page" was not sufficient to curb wider trends of linguistic acculturation. In 1941 the *Adler*'s circulation of 18,123 began a steady decline, while the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*'s circulation remained steady at 10,216 in 1914 and 10,472 in 1940. While the *Adler* continued to publish as a daily until 1963, its circulation decreased until it was reconstituted as a community-supported weekly whose publication would become increasingly sporadic until its demise in 1988.

CONCLUSION

The *Adler* strove to be a forum for an acculturating Canadian immigrant community in all its guises. It represented individual factions while striving to create unity among Jews nationwide. It acted as a mediator between the Old World and the New by introducing its readers to Canada while placing a high value on Jewish tradition, learning, and scholarship. It educated its readers about life inside and outside of the Montreal Yiddish community. It promoted the development of lasting local educational, political, and cultural institutions. The Yiddish press played a pivotal role in the development of a rich literary life in Montreal, serving as the primary means for Yiddish

writers to see their writing in print through the 1940s. In the final analysis, the Yiddish press in Canada reached its peak later than in the United States, but it remained a vital force for longer. It was most active between 1907 and 1960, with circulation increasing through the period under discussion.¹¹⁴

Ultimately, the *Adler* declined together with the culture that spawned it. While Montreal was much slower than many other New World centres to abandon the Yiddish language, linguistic acculturation steadily eroded the *Adler*'s audience. Even as an influx of Yiddish-speaking survivors of the Holocaust replenished the body of writers and readers, the Yiddish press continued its decline. The *Adler* was essentially an immigrant newspaper that proved unable to survive the attrition of its Yiddish readership. Of the Yiddish infrastructure in Montreal that is the subject of this book, the *Adler* is the only component that has not survived in some form into the twenty-first century. This is due to the nature of the Yiddish newspaper, which requires a fluency in the language that other institutions, such as libraries, schools, and theatres, do not. Particularly telling was the demise of Montreal's specialty journals, which had been at the forefront of new movements in Yiddish culture, literature, and ideas. After 1940, only three journals appeared: *Tint un feder* [Pen and Ink] (Toronto, 1949), *Montreoler heftn* [Montreal Notebooks] (Montreal, 1955–58), and *Vidershtand* [Uprising] (Montreal, 1957–59). As discussed in chapter 3, in the post-1945 period, the primary forum for Yiddish literature moved from collective ventures such as journals to individual projects in book publication directed towards a steadily declining readership.

YIDDISH LITERARY ACTIVITY IN MONTREAL

MONTREAL'S YIDDISH COMMUNITY WAS ACTIVE, BOTH formally and informally, in the promotion of Yiddish literacy and the production and consumption of Yiddish literature in all its forms, from political tracts to belles lettres. The Jewish immigrant population transplanted and adapted Eastern European literacy patterns to Canada. Literacy movements that had emerged among nineteenth-century modernizers in Tsarist Russia deemed reading central to the education and corresponding transformation of the public, and its Jews actively sought out opportunities for self-education.¹ This educational activity initially took place largely in the Yiddish vernacular, where literacy was high, estimated at 87 per cent for Soviet Jews on the eve of the Russian Revolution. By the mid-1920s, with a state program of Jewish acculturation, 85 per cent of Jews in the Soviet Union had become literate in Russian.² While no comparable statistics exist for Yiddish literacy in Canada, census statistics indicate comparable patterns in Yiddish use: high initial literacy in Yiddish and a shift to literacy in English with linguistic acculturation.

Yiddish literary activity in Montreal can be divided into two distinct periods. Before the First World War, Yiddish literacy fulfilled utilitarian functions: it helped Yiddish readers realize wider values of self-education and assisted in the dissemination of ideologies. Libraries, like newspapers, were created to give working-class Jews access to education and edification in their vernacular. Yiddish literary activity emerged as a by-product of a new openness to the modern

world among the many Jews whose literacy was predominantly in Yiddish. During the interwar period, with the flowering of modern Yiddish culture coinciding with a concomitant decline of Yiddish as Jewish lingua franca, Yiddish literary culture increasingly took on a value in its own right. There were community-based efforts to promote literary activity in the language as Yiddish became closely bound up with Jewish identity in the modern world.

This chapter presents an examination of the Montreal literary milieu and the interplay of various mechanisms that supported and sustained Yiddish literature in Montreal. In this discussion, Yiddish literature is broadly defined to encompass all genres of writing: belles lettres, history, philosophy, criticism and textual interpretation, folklore, travelogue, translation, and so on.³ The Yiddish infrastructure in Montreal comprised a wide variety of communal organizations as well as private ventures: informal networks such as gatherings of writers in private homes, bookstores, libraries, local chapters of international cultural organizations, literary clubs, and publishers of journals and books. Working in tandem, these components promoted a strong and lasting literary life in Montreal within a wider Yiddish cultural milieu.

THE LITERARY MILIEU

Montreal's Yiddish literary life evolved with community at its core. Its writers, most of them affiliates of the *Adler*, were closely connected to the wider Jewish community, many of them holding leadership positions. They were active in communal and cultural affairs, including socialist and Zionist activism, pedagogy, music, and theatre. Among them were architects and promoters of organizations such as the Canadian Jewish Congress, and activists in labour unions and political movements. A great number of the literati were involved with Yiddish education as founders, teachers, and long-time supporters of secular Jewish schools. Ira Robinson, Pierre Anctil, and Mervin Butovsky characterize the connections between individual writers and the wider Jewish community: "What is remarkable about these individual talents is the special relationship they maintained with their society. Individualists all, they nonetheless were fully integrated into the manifold life of their community, in the forefront of public issues and spokespersons for diverse political and social causes."⁴ By the 1910s, this sense of community encompassed a transnational Yiddish cultural milieu. Local literati knew their international counterparts, if

not personally, then by reputation; they corresponded with their colleagues worldwide and maintained close and ongoing contacts with Yiddish writers in the United States, Europe, Australia, Palestine, and elsewhere.⁵ They formed part of an international group of Yiddish writers who read one another's work and kept abreast of projects in the Yiddish press, read and collected one another's published volumes, composed essays about one another, and reviewed one another's writing in the periodical press and in journals. Prominent international writers and poets visiting Montreal lectured on topics related to Yiddish literature or shared their work, providing opportunities for local literati to establish personal contacts with them. Many writers sojourned in Montreal for periods of weeks, months, or even years. In short, borders were fluid for the global Yiddish literary community.

As a minor Yiddish centre, Canada lagged behind the United States and Europe in its development of Yiddish literature, particularly in the field of poetry. Like that of the country's other ethnic minority groups, Canadian Yiddish literature began to develop after the turn of the century.⁶ As late as the 1930s, Montreal Yiddish literary critic H.M. Caiserman asserted that despite the fact that the work of American Yiddish poets, in particular that of New York's *Di yunge* group of writers, was being read in Canada, local writing was at the very initial phase of poetic evolution.⁷ While nearby New York City, with its vast Jewish immigrant population and large pool of Yiddish writers, saw a writer's union in place by the mid-teens,⁸ Montreal literary organization prior to the First World War consisted largely of informal activities: local literati gatherings at the office of the *Adler*, in places such as Horn's Cafeteria on "the Main," during a stroll on Mount Royal, or in private homes.

By the end of the First World War, a host of writers and poets of diverse ideological orientations were active in Montreal's Yiddish literary life, with poet J.I. Segal acting as linchpin. Segal, like most of the writers under discussion, was a recent immigrant who had embarked on his literary career in Montreal. He was born in the *shtetl* of Solobkovits, near Proskurov, Podolia, into a lineage that included scholars and rabbis. His father died when Segal was a child, and he was raised by his mother in the *shtetl* of Koretz. In 1911, at the age of sixteen, Segal settled in Montreal with the help of his older brother, Nekhemye, and his sister, Esther, who had immigrated earlier, and found employment in the clothing shop where they both worked. While he had begun to write poetry in Hebrew as a youth in Koretz,

he made his debut in Montreal's Yiddish press with the encouragement of the *Adler's* literary editor, Moshe Shmuelson, and became a regular contributor of poetry as well as essays to the newspaper. Segal joined the small circle of writers who gathered at Shmuelson's home and, with his support, published a first collection of poetry, *Fun mayn velt* [From My World, 1916]. He took a position as a teacher in the Jewish People's School, of which he remained an ardent supporter. Segal was also active in a wider Yiddish literary milieu, contributing poetry and literary criticism to Yiddish periodicals and publications in Canada, the United States, and Europe. He established personal contacts with the literary community abroad, notably the Di yunge group of poets, and became the foremost proponent of literary modernism in Yiddish Canada.⁹ In 1923, Segal and his family relocated to New York, where he joined Di yunge poet Mani Leib's shoemaker collective. After publishing two collections of poetry, Segal returned to Montreal in 1928 following a family tragedy. A prolific poet, he was recognized within the Yiddish literary world as one of Canada's foremost poets and a promoter of Yiddish as high art.¹⁰ Despite the frequency with which his work appeared in the Yiddish press, Segal was not a popular poet. Because of the introspective, personal nature of his verse, his audience and critics were a select literary elite.¹¹ He remains the best known of the Canadian Yiddish poets, and his work has been widely anthologized as well as translated out of the Yiddish.¹²

A productive poet as well as an activist in Yiddish literary life, J.I. Segal fostered the development of a local literary milieu. He was a pioneer in the creation of Canadian Yiddish literary journals and produced the first of a number of high-quality publications to appear in Montreal. Editorial comments in the 1923 *Royerd* literary journal provide insight into Segal's role in the development of Yiddish cultural life in what journal editor Sh. Shnayder terms "this cold, vast and barely Jewish Canada." Shnayder writes: "If there is at long last the first serious evidence of a Yiddish cultural milieu in this country and a more serious regard by the Jewish population for local Yiddish cultural life, J.I. Segal has had a hand in it."¹³ Although Segal exacted high standards for Yiddish literature and was at times openly disparaging of local literary production,¹⁴ his role in the long-term development of a local literary Montreal was pivotal.

Segal mentored a number of aspiring Yiddish poets in the emerging Montreal Yiddish literary scene of the 1910s and 1920s and published many in his journals, among them A.Sh. Shkolnikov, Esther Segal



Poets A.Sh. Shkolnikov and J.I. Segal, 1920s. Pr005456,
JPL Photograph Collection, Jewish Public Library
Archives, Montreal

(1895–1974), and Ida Maza. These writers, in turn, played active roles in local literary circles. Minsk-born poet A.Sh. Shkolnikov arrived in Montreal at age twenty-three, worked as a baker, and was active in the bakers' union.¹⁵ He made his literary debut in 1921 in Segal's journal *Nyuansn*. He then became a regular contributor of poetry, fables, stories, and essays on literary themes to the *Adler* as well as to periodicals and anthologies in Canada and abroad and also published three collections of poetry. Although his verse was not an object of wide critical acclaim,¹⁶ Shkolnikov was key in the development of local Yiddish literary life, editing and producing six local literary journals between 1920 and 1940 and one in the late 1950s. Esther Segal was

born in Podolia and educated in *kheyder* and by private tutors. Having arrived in Montreal in 1910, she worked in a clothing shop by day and as a teacher in the evenings. She then spent several years in New York, again working in a clothing shop while writing poetry, but she returned to Montreal, where she met her future husband, poet A.Sh. Shkolnikov. Segal made her debut in the *Epokhe* literary journal and went on to publish in virtually all of Montreal's literary journals as well as in the periodical press of New York and Toronto. In 1928, she published a book titled *Lider* [Poems]. She was active in leftist cultural circles, notably the UJPO. Ida Maza, one of Montreal's most highly regarded Yiddish poets, was likewise active in the local literary milieu. Born in Ogli, a village in Tsarist Belorussia, she settled in Montreal with her family at age fourteen. In her thirties, with the encouragement of Segal, Maza devoted herself to Yiddish literature and in 1925 made her literary debut in the *Kanade* literary journal. She went on to publish widely, her writing appearing in most of Montreal's literary journals, in the international Yiddish press, and in anthologies; she also produced several volumes of poetry and an autobiographical novel. As discussed more fully below, Maza was an ardent promoter of Yiddish literature, opening up her home to writers and assisting in the publication of their works.¹⁷ Although he was a staunch literary modernist, Segal also mentored writers who espoused more leftist attitudes towards Yiddish literature.

These poets and many others staked their literary careers in Montreal with the support of a local community of writers. They generally made their literary debuts in local publications and developed their voices in Montreal. While most remained minor poets on the world stage, they built and bolstered a lasting local literary community.

In the 1920s, Montreal became home to two poets who, unlike the majority of Montreal's Yiddish writers active in the interwar period, joined the Yiddish community with pre-existing literary affiliations and reputations: Mirl Erdberg-Shatan (1894–1982) and Yudika (nom de plume of Yudis Tsik, 1898–1979). Born in Kutno, Tsarist Poland, Erdberg-Shatan received training as a pedagogue in Lodz and Warsaw. She was part of the circle that included celebrated Lodz Yiddish poetess Miriam Ulianover (1890–1944), and published poetry, essays, translations, and memoirs in Yiddish publications in Lodz and New York. After settling in Montreal in 1926, she became a regular contributor to the *Adler*, as well as to a number of Montreal journals and literary publications in the United States, Mexico, and Israel.

Erdberg-Shatan published two books of verse and memoirs after 1950,¹⁸ and she hosted gatherings of writers in her home.¹⁹ Yudika was born in Gorzhets, a small town near the German-Lithuanian border, and eventually settled in Kharkov after being interned during the First World War. Yudika began to write poetry in her youth, first in German and, after 1917, in Yiddish. Under the influence of writer Moyshe Taytsh (1882–1935), she became associated with a group of Soviet Yiddish poets in Yekaterinoslav that included Peretz Markish (1895–1952), Khane Levin (1899–1969), and Shmuel Rossin (1890–1941). Her poetry appeared in the Russian Yiddish press in 1918 and in a number of literary publications and journals in Lithuania. Yudika settled in Canada in 1928 and worked in orphanages in Montreal and Toronto. She published poems and essays about literary issues in the *Adler* and in Montreal, Toronto, and New York literary journals and periodicals. She also published several volumes of poetry. The arrival of this seasoned poet was a boon to the local community of writers, according to local literary critic H.M. Caiserman: “Yudika’s having settled in Canada is a great gain for our young Canadian Yiddish poetry.”²⁰

Even within the tiny group of Montreal Yiddish writers there existed a generation gap. By the late-1920s, the earlier arrivals to Montreal – J. I. Segal, Esther Segal, A.Sh. Shkolnikov, and Ida Maza – had established themselves as writers. Segal had emerged as a strong proponent of Canadian Yiddish literary modernism and had laid out its ideology in literary journals that drew on contemporaneous literary journals produced by Di yunge in New York.²¹ In contrast, recently arrived writers such as Sholem Shtern or Shabse Perl (1906–1976) tended towards the political left.²² Born in Tishevitz, Shtern received a traditional education in *kheyder* and from his father and was self-taught in Hebrew and secular studies. He made his debut in Hebrew and Yiddish with prose in the Hebrew-Yiddish weekly, *Ha-kokhav* [The Jewish Star] (Warsaw-Lodz) and in the Yiddish weekly *Undzer shtime* [Our Voice] (Chelm) in 1926. After settling in Montreal in 1927, he worked as a vendor of Yiddish and Hebrew books. He taught for several months at the Peretz School before becoming ill with tuberculosis and spending almost two years at the Mount Sinai Sanatorium in Ste-Agathe, Quebec. His first Canadian poems appeared in the local Yiddish press as well as in a 1928 Toronto anthology, *Baginen: Lider zamlung* [Dawn: Poetry Collection]. Upon his return to Montreal, Shtern gradually began his formal association with leftist organizations such as the

Workmen's Circle. He taught at the UJPO-affiliated Morris Winchevsky School in the early 1930s and served as principal there from 1938 through 1959. He was a prolific journalist whose essays on Yiddish writers, book reviews, and articles on cultural life appeared in leftist periodicals as well as in an array of local and international publications.²³ He published three books of verse before 1945 and in the 1960s produced novels in verse depicting the life of Jewish immigrants in Canada, the best known of which is the acclaimed and widely translated *Dos vaysz hoyz* [The White House]. Although his poetry largely addressed themes related to traditional Jewish life, Shtern was situated in the cultural milieu of the political left.²⁴ Shabse Perl, the most radical of Montreal's leftist Yiddish poets, was born into a traditional Jewish home and educated in a Russian Jewish elementary school until his education was cut short by pogroms. He settled in Montreal in 1927, where he worked in a clothing shop. Perl had written poetry for many years but only began to publish his work when J.I. Segal read his poems and included one in the 1929 *Royerd* journal. Perl came under the influence of proletarian literature and published poetry in the Toronto Communist newspaper *Der kampf*, in the *Adler*, in Montreal literary journals, and in other newspapers and journals. He published one book of verse in 1934.

A number of these newer writers on the Yiddish literary scene can be categorized as proletarian poets: they employed literature as a platform for social change, published in leftist-oriented newspapers and journals, and were often affiliated with Soviet or Communist-oriented organizations. Some were sympathizers of the Soviet Union; others were members or fellow-travellers of the Communist Party. They were most active in the 1920s and 1930s, expressing their leftist values in their verse, with social justice and the betterment of humankind as themes. As a group, the more recently arrived leftist poets experienced a sense of isolation and marginalization. As poet Sholem Shtern complained to Esther Segal in 1929, "We have no literary milieu."²⁵ The Canadian centre of proletarian Yiddish letters was Toronto, which had become home to a group of young politically radical Yiddish poets and prose writers who grouped themselves around locally produced literary publications.²⁶ The Montreal proletarian writers looked to Toronto, with its cadre of leftist writers and periodicals, to inject new life into the Canadian literary scene.

While in theory there was a gap between Yiddish writers who espoused an arts-for-art's sake orientation towards literature and

those who identified with the political left, in practice there was much overlap between their milieus within the small nascent Montreal community. The term “proletarian” was never used to refer to a particular school of Yiddish letters in Canada akin to the American Proletpen group. Thus, an essay on Canadian Jewish writing by Adam Fuerstenberg identifies Sholem Shtern, Shabse Perl, and Yudika as “proletarian” because of their Marxist influences.²⁷ A number of Canadian writers were active in progressive circles and contributed to leftist publications such as the Communist *Der Kampf* without making an ideological commitment to the movement. Moreover, sociologically, most of the Canadian Yiddish writers formed part of a proletarian class: most were working class and employed primarily at trades, sometimes supplementing their income through teaching or journalism. Fuerstenberg argues that their writing reflects both their immigrant background and their “proletarianism,” whether or not they themselves identified with proletarian Yiddish literature.²⁸

While shared backgrounds and socio-economic realities did not necessarily result in shared politics or ideologies of Jewish culture, the ideological schisms in the Canadian literary community were played out largely within the pages of local literary journals. On one extreme lies J.I. Segal, who, in the concluding editorial comments in *Epokhe* (1922), offers a sharply worded polemic that rejects the call of the left-wing “masses” for a more revolutionary Yiddish literature appropriate to the needs of the *folk*. Instead he calls for the independence of the artist and for the recognition of new modern literature as art, and bemoans the lack of support from the wider reading public for innovative ventures in Yiddish letters.²⁹ On the other extreme lies the *Prolit* literary journal, published in the midst of the Great Depression by “Jewish proletarian circles in Canada,” whose opening manifesto, “Af kanader bodn” [On Canadian Soil], presents itself as “the battle-tribune for the Canadian Jewish working class on the literary front.” Its five stated goals include “cleansing the Jewish street of bourgeois literary filth” as well as “proletarianizing” literature by placing it in the hands of the popular masses.³⁰ Despite the vast divergence in their approach to Yiddish literature, both journals feature some of the same contributors – A.Sh. Shkolnikov and Esther Segal – not because these poets became radicalized but rather because the Montreal literary journals shared the same small pool of writers.

Rather than seeking a radical break with the past, Montreal’s Yiddish writers ultimately sought continuity in a new Canadian

context. For example, while Sholem Shtern's ideological affiliations were with the far left, his poetry reveals first and foremost a Yiddish writer shaped by a traditional Jewish upbringing and environment.³¹ Further, on a practical level, Canada's new immigrant population was too small to sustain separate literary infrastructures along ideological lines. Finally, the integral role of literature in the collective endeavour to create a lasting Yiddish culture on Canadian soil imbued it with an underlying sense of unity.

The multiple roles most Yiddish writers adopted during their careers reflect a fundamental interconnectedness between the various components of Yiddish culture, notably literature, education, theatre, and music. The community was comprised largely of relatively minor literary figures who published primarily in collective publications, such as newspapers and journals, and were involved in multiple Yiddish community organizations. Thus, in the introduction to his 1934 anthology of Jewish poets in Canada, which included a few major "stars" and many minor writers, literary critic H.M. Caiserman refers to the poets represented in the work as having together "laid a foundation for Canadian Jewish poetry."³²

Chaim Tolmatsh (1895–1971) and Nosn Rubalsky (1883–1963) offer two examples of lesser-known Yiddish writers who actively created and sustained the city's Yiddish cultural infrastructure. Born in Turov, near Minsk, Chaim Tolmatsh briefly resided in New York City before settling in Montreal in 1911. He published poetry, stories, articles on literary themes, and short plays in the *Adler*, and co-edited and contributed to Montreal's literary journals and the Canadian Yiddish periodical press.³³ Zipper refers to Tolmatsh as one of the builders of the institutions and milieu that "laid the foundation for Montreal to become an *ir-ve'eym beyisroel* [an important Jewish cultural centre]."³⁴ He was active in Yiddish cultural life, in particular in the circles around the Peretz School and its youth groups, the Jewish Public Library, and the Farband, and promoted local Yiddish theatre. On an informal level, Tolmatsh hosted gatherings of writers and artists in his home.³⁵ Nosn Rubalsky was born in Pavelitch in the Kiev region of Ukraine and began to write poetry in his youth. After he settled in Montreal in 1922, he published poetry, short stories, and articles in the *Adler* as well as in other periodicals. His activism in the Yiddish cultural milieu included the founding of a reading circle called the Zhitlovsky leyn krayz (Zhitlovsky Reading Circle) and a close association with the Jewish Public Library.³⁶ While as writers neither Tomatsh nor Rubalsky

established distinguished names for themselves in the Yiddish literary world, they were instrumental in helping to create the building blocks for a local infrastructure to promote and sustain Yiddish culture.

By the 1930s, Montreal was home to a diverse group of writers and a network of literary activity. The community was augmented by Yiddish writers, notably poets N.Y. Gotlib, M.M. (Moyshe Mordkhe) Shaffir (1909–1988), and novelist Sheindl Franzus-Garfinkle (1899–1957). Kovno-born writer N.Y. Gotlib was a graduate of the Soviet teacher's seminary in Minsk, where he became a devoted member of the Poale Zion party. After settling in Montreal in 1930, he became active in local Yiddish literary life, contributing regularly to the *Adler* and publishing poetry, prose, essays, literary criticism, and journalistic articles in the national and international Yiddish press.³⁷ Gotlib was a prolific writer, producing four volumes of belles lettres in Montreal between 1932 and 1945 (and several more after 1945), as well as a book of essays on Soviet Yiddish writers. He contributed to a number of the Montreal literary publications and co-edited several literary journals in the 1930s and 1950s.³⁸ Bukovina-born M.M. Shaffir developed an early interest in Jewish folklore, in particular that of his native region, and made his literary debut in the Warsaw journal *Literarishe bleter* [Literary Pages] in 1928 with a piece about Jewish folk hero Hershl Ostropol. Upon settling in Montreal in 1930, Shaffir published poetry, essays about literature, and articles about Jewish culture, education, and community life in a wide variety of Yiddish publications in Montreal, Toronto, New York, Paris, and elsewhere. He also became a Yiddish teacher in the Peretz and People's Schools. He published his first volume of poetry in Montreal in 1940 and went on to publish fifteen more volumes of verse after 1960. He is best remembered as a wordsmith whose ongoing poetic innovation in his native dialect preserved the Yiddish language and folklore of the Bukovina region. Sheindl Franzus-Garfinkle, the only Montreal Yiddish novelist of the pre-1945 period, was born in Bershad, Podolia. She received a Jewish and secular education, studied medicine at the University of Odessa, worked as a doctor for the Red Cross during the Russian Civil War, and then left for Rumania. She settled in Montreal in 1922 and taught private lessons in Hebrew and Yiddish. Franzus-Garfinkle began to write in Yiddish in the 1930s, making her literary debut with a series of well-received short stories in the *Adler*. She published her first novel, *Rokhl* [Rachel], with the encouragement of J.I. Segal. She was active in Yiddish reading circles and served as secretary of the Zhitlovsky leyn



N.Y. Gotlib, New York City poet Mani Leib, and Yudika, 1930s.
Pr005456, JPL Photograph Collection, Jewish Public Library Archives,
Montreal

krayz, lecturing there regularly, as well as to other organizations.³⁹ She was considered to be among the most talented Yiddish storytellers to emerge in the 1930s and early 1940s.⁴⁰ These writers augmented an already active Yiddish milieu.

The 1930s marked a high point in Montreal Yiddish literary activity. In this period, a stable group of writers explored new genres, organized literary gatherings and groups, and supported a variety of cultural institutions. In his study of Ida Maza and her time, Irving Massey posits that the shared struggle of the Depression years had a democratizing effect on the Montreal Yiddish literary community that resulted in openness to new literary ventures. He suggests that communitarianism was a dominant force in the Yiddish milieu of the 1930s and art was the creation of the community: “[A]s far as literature was concerned, there were no clear standards, and none to impose them if there had been.”⁴¹

On the whole, the belles lettres produced by Montreal’s Yiddish writers during the period 1905–45 reflect continuity rather than radical change. Certainly the landscapes depicted were new, for, as

part of a predominantly urbanized immigrant group, Yiddish writers depicted Canadian cityscapes. Montreal's Yiddish poets in particular incorporated images of the city's streets as well as its other distinctive markers, notably the cross perched atop Mount Royal, and they also wrote about the Laurentian Mountains and other recognizable country settings.⁴² Pierre Ancil has suggested that Montreal's Yiddish immigrants expressed their rootedness in their adopted homes by portraying the city in *belles lettres*, and that they preceded both English and French-language *belles lettres* depicting the city's urban landscape.⁴³ Chantal Ringuet posits that the portrayal of recognizable Montreal landscapes in Yiddish letters, which she suggests served as a metaphor for newfound liberties offered to Jewish newcomers on virgin soil, was integral to a wider process of constructing a distinct Canadian identity.⁴⁴ Certainly J.I. Segal and others conveyed the beginnings of a distinct Canadian sensibility in their rhetoric, notably in the local Montreal Yiddish literary journals of the 1920s. For example, an article by Segal in *Nyuansn* (1922) states: "Our motivation is not to strive for pioneering literary activity here in Canada, which is cold, vast, and of limited Jewishness. We cannot hope for any kind of distinct Yiddish cultural centre here ... Our literary centre is New York, whether we have expectations from it or not, and whether we seek inspiration there or not." However, he concludes, "The fact that we are *here* in Canada makes us a distinct element that is seeking expression and cannot remain silent (*italics in the original*)."⁴⁵ However, Yiddish poetry and prose did not begin to speak to a specific Canadian experience until after the Second World War; rather, Canadian Yiddish writing in the pre-1945 years is characterized by a continuity with the Eastern European world that its authors had left behind. While Montreal's Yiddish writers were influenced by contemporary literary movements, their writing was far less experimental than that of their New York City counterparts, both in style and content. For example, while New York poets such as Moyshe-Leyb Halpern were depicting the gritty urban setting of immigrant Manhattan or Brooklyn, Montreal's foremost modernist poet, J.I. Segal, portrayed local cityscapes that clearly echoed his hometown village of Koretz, Ukraine.⁴⁶

The lack of a discernible Canadian voice within local Yiddish literature was noted in the literary criticism of the interwar period. In his pioneering overview of Canadian Jewish literature that appeared in the *Adler* in 1927, H.M. Caiserman posited that the country had not yet produced a recognizable Yiddish literary tradition.⁴⁷ After discussing

all of the country's Yiddish writers and their ventures – their published work in the *Adler* and other newspapers, in local journals, and in books – he delivered the following verdict: “There is still no Canadian Yiddish literature. There has already, however, been a Canadian contribution to wider Yiddish literature.” The essay was updated for the *Adler*'s 1932 anniversary volume with the same conclusion: “There has been a vigorous start in literary creativity in the Yiddish language. These robust beginnings have still not wrought anything typically Canadian. Despite all of the efforts of certain Yiddish writers to become Canadian, their poems remain ex-territorial.”⁴⁸

For some Montreal Yiddish writers, this orientation towards the Old Country would shift after 1945. For Sholem Shtern, for example, the destruction of the European Yiddish homeland in the Holocaust prompted him to move deliberately towards depicting a specifically Canadian experience in his poetry, notably in his series of novels in verse published in the 1960s: “I felt that I could not write about the great, wonderful past when everything was lying in ruins. I saw the destruction and the horror of the Holocaust and I sensed that I had to reorient myself elsewhere.”⁴⁹ With nothing new to say about a world that no longer existed, Shtern moved away from longing for the past and towards life in Canada.⁵⁰ However, the dominant tendency to engage with the Old Country in Canadian Yiddish letters continued after 1945. Thus, Chava Rosenfarb's novels are set largely in her native Lodz or other European locations; only in her short fiction does Canada play a discernible role, which Goldie Morgentaler posits Rosenfarb has done “by effecting a synthesis between her primary theme of the holocaust and the Canadian milieu in which she now finds herself, so that Canada becomes the land of the postscript, the country in which the survivors of the holocaust play out the tragedy's last act.”⁵¹

Several factors worked together to explain the ongoing connection to the Old Country as well as the inherent conservatism of Montreal Yiddish belles lettres before 1945. One was the tiny size of the local reading public and the limited readership for experimental writing. Another factor had to do with the acculturation patterns of local immigrant Jews. Like the Yiddish community as a whole, most of Montreal's literati were working-class immigrants who experienced uneven integration into a culturally and linguistically divided city. Separated from Eastern Europe, they came to rely more and more on what Eugene Orenstein has termed “acoustic memory” as they sought to replicate in their writing the language of the world they had left behind.⁵² This

same world served as subject for belles lettres written in a language that was being used on Canadian soil, far removed from its roots. The continuity inherent in local Yiddish belles lettres stands in contrast to the ground being broken in the realm of non-fiction, where Montreal Yiddish essayists, critics, and journalists wrote widely on a variety of Canadian themes, notably Canadian literature, art, and general history, in particular for the local periodical press. The overarching goal of this writing, unlike that of poetry and prose, was to facilitate integration and forge a sense of Jewish Canadianness.

By 1945, Montreal Yiddish literature was supported by a comprehensive community infrastructure that would have been unimaginable forty years earlier. In 1905, the city housed one bookstore and a few private reading rooms where Yiddish literature could be found. There was nowhere to publish Yiddish writing and virtually no Yiddish reading public to read it, no local Yiddish writers to write it, and no stable venue where Yiddish literature could be read or discussed. By 1945, in addition to a daily Yiddish newspaper, the city housed the Jewish Public Library and other organizations dedicated to the promotion of Yiddish literature. It was home to a group of writers across the Jewish ideological spectrum who were committed to Yiddish literary culture, broadly defined, and who published, lectured, supported other writers, and were actively involved in local cultural institutions.

MONTREAL'S FIRST YIDDISH BOOKSTORES AND LIBRARIES

The arrival of Bucovina-born anarchist Hersh Hershman from New York City in 1902 marked the beginnings of the establishment of formal Yiddish literary institutions in Montreal. Hershman was active as an organizer of the city's first Jewish bookstores and libraries, having as a goal the promotion of literacy among the working-class Jewish immigrant masses. These ventures began on a small scale and were limited to members of political organizations, notably Labour Zionist groups.

Hershman's memoirs of his early years in Montreal provide insight into the state of Yiddish cultural life at the beginning of the twentieth century; they also describe the founding of the city's first Jewish library.⁵³ Having been lured from New York City by better conditions for shop workers, Hershman was disappointed to discover that the pastime of his "enlightened" countrymen in Montreal was card playing.

According to Hershman, the city lacked a forum for Yiddish culture. There was no club, library, or store where one could obtain a Yiddish newspaper or book. The one exception was the home of the local agent for the New York *Tageblatt*; in addition to selling individual issues of the paper, the agent carried a small selection of Yiddish books but none of the modern Yiddish literature that was then being circulated in New York. There were no meetings or lectures, and Hershman's meagre salary as a shop worker did not allow him to order Yiddish books from abroad or subscribe to New York's largest Yiddish daily, the *Forverts*. Instead, he contented himself with subscriptions to a handful of publications from New York: the monthly literary journal, *Di tsukunft* [The Future], the *Vokhnblat* [Weekly], and the German-language labour *Nyu yorker volkzeitung* [New York People's News]. Hershman's attempts to recruit fellow workers to share subscriptions or to order Yiddish books collectively were met with bafflement. His frustration soon led to him to create a small Jewish library. He befriended several newcomers from New York and formed a group of eight to pool resources and establish an informal library. In fall of 1903, Hershman travelled to New York to purchase the first items for the collection. These comprised a handful of works by some of the best-known Yiddish writers, including short volumes on socialism and social history; works of modern Yiddish literature by I.L. Peretz, Sholem Aleichem, and poet and short story writer Avrom Reisen (1876–1953); and a play by Jacob Gordin. Hershman also procured several issues of a variety of Yiddish periodicals, including the *Forverts*, the *Tsukunft*, and the *Fraye arbeter shtime*. The library was set up on a single table in Hershman's flat in the Jewish district and was open in the evenings. The members would visit the library to read, discuss their reading, or debate current events. In order to raise funds to purchase more books, the library hosted a fundraising ball and collected the substantial sum of \$250. The event did not, however, increase the library's membership. Hershman's next move was to open a store in quarters shared with a shoemaker in the heart of the Jewish immigrant quarter.⁵⁴ Run by Hershman's wife during the day, the store carried imported Yiddish books, brochures, and newspapers. While the shop did attract the attention of passers-by, it had few customers; Hershman recalls that potential clients were puzzled by the store's unfamiliar merchandise and intimidated by the heated political debates about ideology and world events that took place inside. The situation changed drastically with a new wave of Jewish immigration following the unprecedented violence of the 1903

Kishinev Pogrom. These new immigrants were more politicized than their predecessors, and many had been active in revolutionary movements in Russia before immigrating to Canada. Their arrival resulted in an increased demand for Yiddish-language political and cultural activities. When his store became too cramped for its merchandise, Hershman relocated to a larger location that had a meeting room and a library on the second floor.⁵⁵ The new store served as a gathering place for radicalized Jewish immigrants where they could read, converse, drink soda water, and hear lectures on political and social issues.

Jewish libraries such as Hershman's were founded to fill a void in Jewish immigrant centres such as Montreal. New immigrants sought places where they could meet, further their education, and enjoy their leisure time after a long day at the factory – away from their cramped flats. Many of the newcomers had had prior exposure to Jewish libraries in Eastern Europe. With the development of modern Yiddish literature and new ideologies in the Jewish world, libraries featuring works of Yiddish literature were established in Jewish centres across Eastern Europe and subsequently in new immigrant centres. These Jewish libraries, which functioned as reading rooms rather than lending libraries, were founded by local Jewish community bodies – labour unions, clubs, and cultural groups.⁵⁶ The need for Jewish libraries in Montreal was rendered more acute by an absence of local public libraries. The province of Quebec lagged far behind the rest of Canada in the creation of public libraries accessible to the wider population. While by the nineteenth century the public library movement had progressed across Britain and much of North America, libraries in Montreal were owned and operated by special-interest groups such as Christian religious orders and were not accessible to the general public; nor were the existing libraries in Quebec's English-Protestant and the French-Catholic milieus open to Montreal's growing number of Yiddish speakers.⁵⁷

Hershman's reading room was one of several pioneering efforts to establish Jewish libraries in Montreal. In 1888, the local Zionist Chovevei Zion (Lovers of Zion) group, under the leadership of Talmud Torah teacher Alexander Harkavy, established a Hebrew library. By the turn of the century, a Jewish library and reading room with books in Hebrew and some in Yiddish was in operation on "the Main." The Labour Zionist community operated a series of Jewish libraries in Montreal beginning in 1903, when Dorshei Zion (Seekers of Zion) formed a reading circle whose members kept the books

belonging to the group in their homes and bring them to meetings. Two years later, the Poale Zion established a collection of books for the use of its members and organized lectures on a variety of topics.⁵⁸ By 1909, this collection had found its way to the Baron de Hirsch Institute, which housed a small reading room of Jewish books.⁵⁹ In 1912, a convention of Jewish labour associations – the Poale Zion, the Workmen's Circle, and several local unions – was held to establish a Jewish public library “for the advancement of learning and of Yiddish literature in particular.” The library, which relied on paid subscriptions by labour organization members, opened on 3 March 1912. With insufficient funding, the library soon closed. In 1912–13, several unsuccessful attempts were made to amalgamate the Jewish quarter's existing libraries.⁶⁰ In 1913, the Poale Zion convened two further conferences under the leadership of Yehuda Kaufman that resulted in the official launch of the city's Jewish Public Library in May 1914.

THE JEWISH PUBLIC LIBRARY

Montreal's Jewish Public Library consolidated the city's small existing Jewish libraries and provided a gathering place for the Jewish reading public. Unlike its predecessors, it was a non-partisan lending library that its founders envisioned as a *folks-biblyotek*, or “people's library,” accessible to everyone rather than restricted to a select group of individuals with shared ideological convictions. This principle is captured in the first clause of the “Founding Principles” of the Jewish Public Library: “The People's Library is a People's institution, founded by the People, through the People, for the People.”⁶¹ In a study of Yiddish in Montreal, David Roskies posits that the frequent use of the term *folk* in Montreal Yiddish cultural life – the *folks-biblyotek*, the *folks-shul* (people's school), Symcha Petrushka's *folks-entsiklopedye* – reflected one of the central tenets of the “utopian venture” of Yiddish culture in Montreal: “the ideology of serving the broadest interest of the ‘folk.’”⁶² This concept of *folk* encompassed divergences in class and geographic origin as well as a gamut of religious, political, and ideological orientations. Although the 1929 library charter officially changed the English name of the institution from “People's Library” to “Public Library,” the founding ethos remained.⁶³ The Jewish Public Library soon became a centre of cultural activity and a venue for local and visiting Yiddish writers and artists.

The moving force behind the creation of the Jewish Public Library was Yehuda Kaufman. Born in Ukraine, Kaufman attended *yeshiva* and received a Jewish and secular education from his father. Soon after arriving in Montreal with his parents via England at the age of twenty-six, Kaufman entered McGill University as one of its few Jewish undergraduate students. He soon became active in social and political circles and a leader in the local Poale Zion. He was one of the founders of the National Radical School in 1913 but left after several months to establish the rival Jewish People's School, where he served as first its principal. He was also co-founder of the Farband and one of the first proponents of a Canadian Jewish Congress. He was a regular contributor to the Montreal Yiddish press, as well as to the international Yiddish and Hebrew press, and the founder of several local periodicals in the 1910s. After leaving for Philadelphia to pursue graduate work, Kaufman maintained close ties with Montreal and with the institutions he had helped to establish. He remained involved with the Jewish People's School and helped to develop curriculum through the 1920s. Kaufman went on to settle in Jerusalem in 1926, where he became a noted Jewish scholar, writer, educator, and Hebrew lexicographer under the name Even-Shmuel.⁶⁴

It was Kaufman, under the aegis of the Poale Zion, who spearheaded the two conferences that led to the establishment of a Jewish public library, established an organizing committee, and invited Reuben Brainin to act as president of the new institution. In the winter of 1913, Kaufman, Brainin, and a group of supporters rallied the wider community to support the establishment of a public library. Community meetings followed to bolster support for the new library, and membership fees were gathered. As editor of the *Adler*, Brainin employed the newspaper's pages to promote the library and to lobby for community support; this commitment to the library continued through its early years. In the months surrounding the creation of the library in 1914, Brainin penned editorials highlighting the library's function in the education of the *folk*. He maintained that a public library was essential to self-education and self-improvement: "Books are our best, most intimate friends, our teachers, our pathfinders and advisors ... only with a library do we become cultured people ... Through this library, one has the opportunity to control one's own education, the level of one's progress, and one's intellectual development."⁶⁵ Brainin argued that, in a New World centre such as Montreal, which, unlike the traditional Jewish society the immigrants had left behind in Eastern Europe, was

no longer study-based, a library would create an environment that fostered community learning.⁶⁶ Moreover, Brainin repeatedly portrayed the library as a means to unite and consolidate Montreal Jewry.⁶⁷ In his capacity as editor of the *Adler*, he also published columns by Kaufman on the wider benefit of the Jewish Public Library. In one such column, titled “Di moderne folk-biblyotekn” [Modern People’s Libraries], Kaufman characterized the ideal of a *folk* library as stemming from the masses themselves, being open to everyone, and respecting every ideology.⁶⁸ Beginning in April 1914, the *Adler* called for wider financial support in a series of articles that detailed the library’s fundraising and membership campaign. The *Adler* printed the names of all library supporters,⁶⁹ and provided ongoing updates of its ongoing fundraising efforts.⁷⁰ Brainin’s editorials during the first months of the library’s existence expressed frustration at the lack of communal support for the library: “[W]here are the city’s Jewish intelligentsia, its cultural activists?”⁷¹ He bemoaned the opposition of some local people to the idea of an open gathering place for all elements of the immigrant community. At the same time, Brainin also highlighted the library’s successes, for the library was constantly full of readers who demanded more books than it could supply.⁷²

The Jewish Public Library grew steadily. At its opening in May 1914, the library consisted of 499 books, with the Yiddish and Hebrew language books of the defunct Poale Zion and Baron de Hirsch Library reading rooms forming the core of the collection. With virtually no budget, the library embarked on a campaign to gather books from the community. By the end of its first year, the library had amassed just over 1,500 books, almost half of which were in Yiddish. In its founding year, the library held a major fundraising event featuring a renowned international guest: popular New York City labour poet Morris Rosenfeld was the featured guest at a literary and musical evening sponsored by the Library. The next year the library collection had risen to 1,982 books, 45 per cent of which were in Yiddish.⁷³ In its first year, the library circulated some 3,200 books to 264 members.⁷⁴ Steady communal support of the new institution was reflected in the overwhelming success of a fundraising concert held in 1915. The event, which featured beloved Yiddish writer Sholem Aleichem, as well as speeches by Kaufman and others, filled the local 1,200-seat Princess Theatre to capacity.

After a period of disarray following the departure of both Brainin and Kaufman from Montreal in 1916, the Library Committee assumed



Sholem Aleichem's visit to the Jewish Public Library, Montreal, 6 June 1915: Reuben Brainin (*second row, second from right*), Sholem Aleichem (*to the left of Brainin*), and Yehuda Kaufman (*third row, far right*). Pr003855, JPL Photograph Collection, Jewish Public Library Archives, Montreal

management of the institution under the leadership of cultural activist Leyzer Zuker (1886–1965). By 1929, circulation figures reached 15,000. Between 1917 and 1953 the library would move several times into larger rented quarters and eventually purchase its own buildings in the Jewish Quarter. A three-storey building at 4099 Esplanade Avenue would serve as home to the Jewish Public Library from June 1930 to June 1953. The building included reading rooms as well as a children's division.⁷⁵

During the interwar period, the Jewish Public Library served three primary functions in the Montreal literary community. First, it provided a place for local Jews, many of them impoverished new immigrants, to gain access to a wide variety of reading materials. According to its founding principles, the library's purpose was to collect the "treasures of the Jewish People" in their own languages in addition to the classics of other peoples. As a non-partisan institution, the library



(*top*) Front of the Jewish Public Library, 4099 Esplanade Avenue, home to the Jewish Public Library from June 1930 until June 1953. Pr001079, JPL Photograph Collection, Jewish Public Library Archives, Montreal

(*bottom*) Interior of the Jewish Public Library. Pr001051, JPL Photograph Collection, Jewish Public Library Archives, Montreal





Children's division of the Jewish Public Library. Pr001077, JPL Photograph Collection, Jewish Public Library Archives, Montreal

stocked literature of all ideological inclinations, with the exception of *shund* (vulgar literature).⁷⁶ As a lending library, it provided the means for local Jews to borrow books that would have otherwise been unavailable to them. Second, the library offered educational opportunities through courses as well as through lectures and readings by local and visiting writers, critics, and scholars. Third, it served as headquarters for Yiddish literary and cultural activity in the city. These last two points will be discussed more fully below.

The Jewish Public Library coordinated a variety of educational and cultural activities. It regularly hosted a wide array of speakers, including Yiddish writers of all genres, local and international, and of varying ideological orientations. It organized lectures, readings, and literary evenings in honour of milestones achieved in the local and wider literary world, and banquets to mark the launching of books. It sponsored local organizations such as reading, writing, music, and amateur theatre groups. Through these activities, the library supported the development of an intelligentsia in the local Jewish immigrant milieu. Historian of Jewish Canada B.G. Sack characterizes the Jewish Public Library as “the focal point around which intelligent Jews focused their energy, in particular the intelligent Jewish youth.”⁷⁷ Moreover, the library served

as a badge of pride for its founders and activists. According to its long-time librarian David Rome, “[f]rom day one the Jewish Public Library considered itself and was considered by others as one of the great institutions of the world, regardless of how small it was.”⁷⁸

From the outset, education represented a core component of the Jewish Public Library’s mandate, with the Library’s Charter of 1914 stipulating that a *folks-universitet* (people’s university) be formed under the auspices of the library. This people’s university was to be an educational institution for Jewish adults in the Eastern European tradition of popular universities, founded to make secular learning accessible to individuals for whom poverty or restrictive, anti-Jewish policies barred the doors of both public and private universities. Several months after the establishment of the Jewish Public Library, the People’s University was formed as an independent entity associated with the library. From 1914 to 1916, it sponsored occasional lectures by Brainin, Kaufman, and others. In 1916–17, the People’s University augmented its activities and offered some 250 public lectures at the nearby Strathcona Public School for a monthly fee of one dollar. Lectures were held on a variety of subjects: the Hebrew, Yiddish, English, and French languages; history; the social sciences; philosophy; the natural sciences; economics; and so on. Courses in Jewish history and literature proved to be among the most popular offerings. In addition, the People’s University hosted a number of larger events in 1916, including an evening lecture by Soviet-born American Yiddish dramatist and novelist Peretz Hirschbein (1880–1948). In December 1916, the university began to hold regular evening classes at Strathcona Public School. Students were largely Yiddish-speaking Jewish labourers who attended classes after a full day of work.

The People’s University was initially a short-lived venture. Within a year of its founding, its activities were suspended owing to waning public interest and difficulties heightened by local strikes and the departure of both Kaufman and Brainin. Sharon Gubbay’s study of the Jewish Public Library suggests that the founders did not understand their clientele and thus failed to recognize the too-ambitious nature of their undertaking.⁷⁹ Some twenty-five years later, a second incarnation of the People’s University would be spearheaded by Melekh Ravitch – Yiddish poet and essayist and co-founder of the Warsaw expressionist literary group *Di khalyastre* – not long after he had settled in Montreal in 1941 after having been on an international tour. Under the direction of Ravitch together with Jewish Public

Library librarian Rochel Eisenberg (1906–2000, later Eisenberg Ravitch when the two married), the People's University would offer a variety of programs through 1954, including lectures and courses. Classes in the area of Judaica, general and practical, were taught in Yiddish or English at a cost of twenty-five cents per class.⁸⁰

For reasons both practical and ideological, Yiddish played a key role in the Jewish Public Library from the start and would become central to its mission, and the library soon formed a hub of Yiddish literary and cultural activity. Sharon Gubbay identifies several factors behind the centrality of Yiddish for the Jewish Public Library. First, on the practical side, because Yiddish was the common language spoken by the library's patrons and staff, all meetings and events were initially conducted in Yiddish. Second, the language held an ideological value for the core group of activists at the Jewish Public Library; for them, Yiddish came to stand at the centre of their "spiritual/political" program. Third, even non-Yiddishists attached significance to the conservation and preservation of the Yiddish language and culture, recognizing that, with the pull of assimilation, it was important to maintain the Old World linguistic and cultural heritage.⁸¹ Modern Yiddish literature, whose blossoming coincided with the library's nascent years, was essential to its activities. The following assessment, taken from the Jewish Public Library's 1957 commemorative volume, reflects the ongoing role of the institution as "a centre of education," with its "activity extending beyond the circulation of books":

The library always conducted a direct program to disseminate information and ideas by means of lectures, concerts, courses, forums, and other activities along a wide range of subjects. In particular the library sought to establish a close rapport between the author and the public by bringing them together frequently in a milieu that was conducive to a close and fruitful understanding ... Thus there awakened an unusually warm interest in Jewish letters in the very broadest circles of the community ... The passion for Yiddish, the attachment to literary creativity, the love of Jewish science and scholarship, and the social and ethical ideals that were ever concomitant with Jewish literature were thus given the broadest currency ... Deliberately and systematically over the decades the library has taught Montreal Jewry the high significance and the dignity of Jewish letters and has held high the name of Jewish litterateurs.⁸²

The Jewish Public Library's founders, staff, and associates shared a deep commitment to accessible education in Yiddish and to the role Yiddish played in promoting Jewish cultural literacy. This commitment was shaped by Rochel Eisenberg, who served as the institution's sole librarian from 1926 to 1954. In her role as librarian, Eisenberg was responsible for purchasing reading materials on the library's limited budget. She also made reading recommendations to patrons and, in the process, guided the education of many Montreal readers. As Gubbay writes, "Rochel Eisenberg had a clear sense of her mission as educator and as connoisseur of Yiddish letters." Eisenberg's own recollections of her experiences as librarian reflect a devotion to the cause of making Yiddish literature readily available to all of the library's patrons:

During those years ours was a very different institution than most libraries because the readers had come from small towns most of them. They were very eager to read and to know something, to come to lectures. They had never had an opportunity to study so this was not just a library where you take a book, but also a school: we had lectures there, even at that time.

For me this was a very important thing because I could feel how they were hungry for knowledge ... and it was a very personal attachment to the people and to the books. When they came to me and asked me for books, I'd ask them what they would like to read. Even to this day, they say to me you were the first to bring us into the world of literature.⁸³

In 1929, Eisenberg was joined by a second paid staff member at the library, Herz Kalles (1905–1988), who shared her commitment to Yiddish literature and culture. Trained as a typesetter in his native Poland and strongly committed to an educational mandate, Kalles filled the position of library director, his responsibilities including membership, fundraising, organizing lectures, and public relations. Kalles actively promoted Yiddish activity through the library, and he remained especially proud of the high calibre of speakers who lectured there.⁸⁴ He maintained his commitment to furthering Jewish literacy even after he left his post at the library; in 1944, he opened a Jewish bookstore that served as a gathering place for the city's Yiddish and English-speaking intelligentsia.

The library's programming expressed an ongoing commitment to adult education, in particular in Yiddish. After the dissolution of the People's University, the library turned its focus to adult education and lectures featuring local speakers and visitors to the city. As part of its ongoing educational program in the 1920s and 1930s, the Jewish Public Library offered an array of evening courses. For example, from 1926 to 1928, several lecture series were offered in Yiddish, with subjects including Jewish history, Canadian history, political economics, cultural history, the history of modern Yiddish literature, Yiddish style, composition and literature, the English language, and Modern Hebrew.⁸⁵ The library likewise promoted the discussion of new literary works in a variety of genres and fields. For example, during a series of eight "Literary Tuesdays" held in 1933, local lecturers discussed new literary works by Yiddish authors, such as *Elye bokher* by American writer Joseph Opatoshu; *Di geule komedye* [The Redemption Comedy] by American poet H. Leivick; *Geshikhhte fun der yidisher literatur* [History of Yiddish Literature] by Soviet philologist Maks Erik; and *Bam dnyeper* [At the Dnieper] by Soviet modernist writer Dovid Bergelson. The presenters included Yehuda Zlotnik, Shloime Wiseman, and N.Y. Gotlib.⁸⁶ The library regularly hosted lectures by the local literati on a range of subjects related to Yiddish culture. In his diary of 1925–26, Yankev Zipper describes a speaking engagement at the library with an enthusiasm that stands in sharp contrast to his disparaging assessment of the overall state of Yiddish cultural activity. Zipper's comments underline the importance of these lectures to the fledgling literary community:

The hall is crowded. The audience attentive. The library is downstairs. It contains books to which past generations have devoted energy, mind and soul. The atmosphere is earnest. So my sense of responsibility grows along with my seriousness. Down below, the library is a *beis-medresh* [traditional Jewish house of study]. How does one endure till the day when the new study houses are as hallowed as the old ones? In any case, I'm a bit of a "Cohen" [temple high priest] therefore I must earnestly perform the ritual of sacrifice. Somewhat flowery, but how else can it be expressed? I gave my lecture on "Character Types in Yiddish Literature." The audience is enthralled, as if caught up in the experience. Their eyes glisten. So I become enthusiastic. Their mutual rapport is a delight to me.

After the lecture and the serious discussion that follows, I feel that a great deal can be accomplished here. You just have to approach them with a new warm word. It is so cold here. And they fail to understand that only warmth, deep belief, and commitment can raise them up. There is important work to be done here.⁸⁷

For Zipper, as for countless other new immigrants, the Jewish Public Library constituted a home base from which they could build a lasting Yiddish culture.

By the late 1910s, the Jewish Public Library was drawing Montreal's literati into an interlocking transnational network of Yiddish culture. Books by writers from abroad introduced a local readership to international Yiddish literature. Guest speakers from the United States, Europe, and elsewhere visited the city to lecture on topics related to Yiddish literature or to share their work. Visiting poets, writers, playwrights, and ideologues allowed local audiences to engage with a gamut of new trends. These events were attended by diverse segments of the Jewish community, with the more popular speakers attracting audiences of hundreds. Given the fluid borders of the international Yiddish community, these lectures provided opportunities for the local literati to establish personal contacts with visiting writers and poets.

During its high point of literary activity in the 1920s and 1930s, the Jewish Public Library hosted several lectures a month by prominent figures in international Yiddish cultural life. Guests to the library included literary critic Sh. Niger (pseudonym of Shmuel Tsharny, 1883–1955), ideologue Chaim Zhitlowsky, historian Yankev Shatsky, playwright David Pinski, and poets Moyshe-Leyb Halpern, Mani Leib, and Y.Y. Shvarts. The more popular speakers, such as poet H. Leivick, playwright Peretz Hirschbein, Bible translator Yehoash (Yehoash Solomon Bloomgarden), or novelists Joseph Opatoshu and Sholem Asch, visited repeatedly. These events consistently attracted audiences of several hundreds, and a larger room outside of the library building was rented to accommodate them. Weather permitting, cultural events were also held out of doors on library grounds.

Presentations by H. Leivick, Peretz Hirschbein, and Sh. Niger attracted between 200 and 850 people, while less-popular speakers attracted audiences of between 50 and 100.⁸⁸ According to the memoirs of Sholem Shtern, the following routine was followed for



Cultural event held outside the Jewish Public Library, 1940s. Pr001067, JPL Photograph Collection, Jewish Public Library Archives, Montreal

these events: by way of introduction, an essay about the guest lecturer was read; then, after the lecture, the guest was accompanied by the organizers and audience members to a nearby eatery.⁸⁹ Oftentimes a reception was organized in conjunction with the visit, and the speakers were given the opportunity to sell their books. These events were attended by all segments of the Jewish community: young workers, housewives, poets, and so on.

By the time of the Second World War, the Jewish Public Library was hosting a comprehensive array of ongoing activities. An issue of the *Kanader zhurnal* literary journal provides a glimpse into the library's cultural activities for April 1940. It notes that not long after the celebration of the library's twenty-fifth anniversary, plans were in place for two anniversary evenings, one to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the birth of pioneering Yiddish playwright Avrom Goldfaden and the other to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of I.L. Peretz's death; that the library launched A.Sh. Shkolnikov's new book of verse and hosted a guest lecture by New York novelist Baruch Glassman; and



Group portrait at the Jewish Public Library, 1942. *Front row, sitting at table, left to right:* Yehiel Shtern, Maurice Hartt (member of Parliament), writer Sholem Asch, Mathilde Asch, L. Zuker, S. Lapitsky (library supporter), and Melekh Ravitch. Pr006309, JPL Photograph Collection, Jewish Public Library Archives, Montreal

that the library was formally bequeathed Reuben Brainin's private library.⁹⁰ During this period, the library hosted a women's *leyenkrayz* (reading group), a circle that played an active role in the promotion of local literature, even publishing a book of poems by Ida Maza.⁹¹ A course in Yiddish literature was offered, as were Saturday-afternoon readings for children. The library also hosted a composition and music-appreciation group and housed a mandolin orchestra. In addition, dramatic groups functioned under the auspices of the Jewish Public Library, notably Chayele Grober's Yidishe teater grupe (Yiddish Theatre Group, hereafter YTEG).

By 1945, the Jewish Public Library had earned the commitment of the diverse Jewish community as patrons, program participants, and leaders. It formed a nexus of local Yiddish activity and was the primary gathering site for readers, writers, and the wider Yiddish public. It would remain one of the core organizations to promote Yiddish culture in the long term.

WIDER YIDDISH CULTURAL EVENTS

In addition to the Jewish Public Library, a host of other organizations supported a variety of local Yiddish literary ventures. Alongside the activities of the socialist Workmen's Circle and the Labour Zionist Farband, affiliations developed between local activists and such international organizations as the Jewish Cultural League, YIVO, and Di tsentrale yidishe kultur organizatsye (Central Yiddish Culture Organization, hereafter CYCO). Moreover, the city's Yiddish journals piloted local literary activity. All of these activities spearheaded local participation in Yiddish cultural ventures.

Founded as a non-partisan umbrella organization in Kiev in 1918 to promote secular Yiddish culture, including literary, educational, and dramatic ventures, the Jewish Cultural League established multiple branches in Europe and America in the 1920s.⁹² In 1922, plans were in place for a Montreal chapter of the Jewish Cultural League to be attached to the newly created New York office. The local committee comprised Montreal Yiddish writers L.M. Benjamin, A. Almi, J.I. Segal, Israel Rabinovitch, and Shloyme Shnayder.⁹³ That same year, a Toronto chapter of the Jewish Cultural League was established at a conference of worker organizations,⁹⁴ and it came to serve as a hub for that city's Yiddish cultural activity, in particular of a left-wing orientation. In its first six months, the Toronto Jewish Cultural League offered courses for adults, lectures, and literary and musical evenings; published the monthly literary journal *Royerd*; and had begun to unify the various local theatre groups and choirs in the city. Further efforts were undertaken towards founding a local *folks-universitet* (people's university) and an *arbeter heyim* (centre for Jewish workers) that would include a library, reading room, and games room. In Montreal, where these roles were filled by the Jewish Public Library, the Jewish Cultural League did not exert much influence in the local Yiddish milieu, and efforts to promote it met with limited success, as reflected in Yankev Zipper's description of a local Jewish Cultural League lecture in 1925: "In the evening I came for the lecture. A small audience, sleepy as well. An appeal is made for subscriptions to the [Warsaw Jewish Cultural League's] journal *Kultur* [Culture]. The audience disperses. A total failure."⁹⁵

Montrealers played an active role in the YIVO, originally founded in Berlin in 1925 as an academic institution dedicated to scholarship

of Yiddish and its culture. The YIVO's head office in Vilna formed subsidiary branches in Berlin, Warsaw, and New York, with friends of the YIVO active worldwide.⁹⁶ The YIVO relied on both local and international correspondents to collect material, disseminate information about the organization, and otherwise fulfil its mandate. In Montreal as well as in Toronto, Yiddish literati served as local correspondents for the YIVO throughout its American section. Thus, Yankev Zipper gathered material, submitted copies of rare journals, and established local contacts on behalf of the YIVO.⁹⁷ Between 1930 and 1937, a Montreal YIVO committee organized a series of local lectures by scholars from the Vilna office, including philologist Zalman Reisen, linguist Yudel Mark, and literary historian Nachman Mayzel.⁹⁸

In addition to coordinating a variety of Yiddish cultural activity, the local Workmen's Circle and Farband were instrumental in the creation of the Montreal branch of CYCO, founded in New York in 1938 as a national organization to promote Yiddish culture throughout the United States and Canada.⁹⁹ A Montreal chapter of CYCO was formed in May 1938 through a committee of the Workmen's Circle, with the assistance of the Farband. A committee of fourteen was elected, including Yiddish writers Israel Rabinovitch, Shloime Wiseman, and Mirl Erdberg Shatan.¹⁰⁰ Montreal sent delegates to a CYCO planning meeting in New York in 1938; they reported on the proceedings of a public meeting held at the Workmen's Circle¹⁰¹ and spoke on Yiddish schools, Yiddish theatre, and the publication and distribution of Yiddish books.¹⁰² The Workmen's Circle hosted the executive meetings of the Montreal CYCO, as well as lectures and other public events. During this time, a Winnipeg branch of CYCO also held weekly forums on Sunday evenings, offering lectures, debates, symposia, music, and theatre.¹⁰³

Literary activity in Montreal also coalesced around the city's Yiddish literary journals. These publications drew together Yiddish writers from across Canada, creating the sense of a wider Canadian Yiddish literary milieu. Caiserman's review of the 1925 *Kanade* literary journal in the *Adler* points to this role:

A Yiddish cultural milieu (*svive*) has been taking shape for many years. In this milieu (in truth, a diffuse milieu), a serious attitude toward Yiddish literature is crystallizing, if not on the part of the population, then certainly on the part of a significant number of writers and intelligentsia. This serious attitude has

been bolstered by the establishment of a substantial Yiddish and Yiddish-English press (daily and weekly), the existence of a series of modern schools and libraries, and, in particular, the appearance of various journals for literature, poetry, prose, criticism and so on that have appeared in Montreal, Toronto and Winnipeg over the last few years. [These developments] have created the impetus for the formation of a Canadian branch of Yiddish literature.¹⁰⁴

The relationship between the Montreal Yiddish writers and their potential readership in the wider Jewish community evolved slowly and was initially not as close as the local literati might have hoped. In a review of the same *Kanade* journal, B.G. Sack bemoans a lack of reader participation in the literary community: "The better Yiddish reader, to whom the Canadian poet or writer with a serious attitude towards literature appeals and wishes to serve, supports all of the periodicals that have appeared until now. Yes, this is how things should be, according to the enthusiastic publishers. But the readers have barely been infected with the enthusiasm of our literary activists and their idealism has received a very weak response."¹⁰⁵ By the 1930s, with the expansion of literary life, a sense of community had developed around the journals, which held regular gatherings. Notable is *Montreol* (1932–35), the city's longest-running Yiddish journal, and its "Montreol" ovntn ("Montreal" Evenings). At this series of monthly cultural events, organized through a body that called itself *Di shrayber grupe* "montreol" (the "Montreol" Writers' Group), local writers as well as musicians and artists read from their work, listened to musical performances, and sang together over tea. In 1934, for example, five well-attended "Montreol" ovntn took place in the homes of local poets and were presided over by journal editors A.Sh. Shkolnikov and N.Y. Gotlib. Participants included writers such as N.Y. Gotlib, Ida Maza, Esther Segal, and Yudika, as well as local actors, folksingers, and members of the community at large. In addition, public lectures were held to mark the appearance of each issue of *Montreol*. By 1941, Montreal's Yiddish literati had established a writers' organization called *Der fareyn fun yidishe shrayber in monteol* (the Yiddish Writers Association of Montreal).¹⁰⁶ This association would become increasingly active after the Holocaust, supporting projects such as the *Montreoler heftn* [Montreal Notebooks, 1955–58] literary journal, and remained in existence into the early 1960s.

INFORMAL YIDDISH LITERARY ACTIVITY

Much of Montreal's Yiddish literary activity was informal. As such, it remained largely elusive: writers mentoring one another, people gathering in private homes, and short-lived clubs. This activity functioned in tandem with organized Yiddish cultural activity.

Beginning in the 1910s, H.M. Caiserman hosted casual gatherings in his home, and local writers and artists would congregate there to share their work. Born in Roumania and educated in Jassy, Caiserman lived in Paris from 1907 to 1910 before settling in Montreal. He had learned Yiddish as an adult and developed a deep love for its literature and culture. According to Pierre Ancil, "Whenever Yiddish creativity was present, Caiserman approached it with amazing intensity, as if there lay the crux of Jewish survival and identity in the New World. A boundless fascination attracted him to Yiddish belles-lettres."¹⁰⁷ His obituary referred to him "as a friend of Yiddish books. His home was a centre of Yiddish litterateurs. At his home he would organize committees to publish books of poets and writers."¹⁰⁸ J.I. Segal, who was welcomed into Caiserman's home soon after settling in Montreal, characterized him as a lone fighter for Yiddish literature in Montreal at a time when a majority of the Jewish population was indifferent.¹⁰⁹ Caiserman demonstrated an ongoing commitment to Canadian Yiddish literature and to the local literary scene. He organized committees to publish books of poets and writers, and offered financial support to several writers to help them get their books published.¹¹⁰ As the country's first Yiddish literary critic, he published extensively on literature in Canada in the *Adler*, in literary journals, and in other publications. As noted in chapter 2, this work on Canadian Yiddish literature culminated in the publication of his groundbreaking 1934 anthology of Canadian Jewish poets, *Yidishe dikhter in kanade*. Caiserman's plans for a second anthology as well as a monograph on J.I. Segal were cut short by his death.¹¹¹

Caiserman, in turn, credited *Adler* writer Moshe Shmuelson with the creation of an informal local Yiddish literary milieu: "About ten years before the appearance of the [Montreal Yiddish literary] journals [1921–23], a talented group of writers was active in Montreal and a literary life developed around this group. The most active of them was the gifted short story writer, Moshe Shmuelson. Himself a talented writer and a passionate lover of Yiddish literature, he kept an eye out for everyone who published anything of value, sought them out,

brought them to his home, and encouraged them to create. Moshe Shmuelson's house was the literary centre of the city."¹¹² Born and educated in a village near Bratslav, Podolia, Shmuelson immigrated to the United States in 1894, settling first in New York and then, in 1909, in Montreal. Shmuelson began to write poems and stories at age thirteen and turned exclusively to Yiddish at age seventeen. While he earned his living as a labourer, Shmuelson was a devotee of Yiddish literature and contributed his short stories to the *Adler* as well as to other Yiddish periodicals in Canada, the United States, and Europe.¹¹³

Shmuelson opened his home to Yiddish writers and piloted new literary activity in the city, making an early effort to organize Montreal's writers in the city's first Yiddish literary club. In 1914, a notice in the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* announced the formation of a Jewish literary society called the Klub yidishe shrayber, montreol (the Club of Yiddish Writers, Montreal). Addressed "to all readers of Yiddish literature," the notice stated that the society's purpose was to publish Yiddish translations and original Yiddish works in cooperation with an unnamed parent organization in New York City; it also announced that Shmuelson would host the inaugural meeting.¹¹⁴ It is not clear what became of this venture. Two years later, in 1916, Shmuelson was involved in another, similarly named, organization for Yiddish writers. Along with *Adler* associates B.G. Sack and B.Y. Goldstein and *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* editor Hyman Edelstein, Shmuelson co-founded the Klub yidishe shrayber, montreol, alternately called the Montreol yidisher shrayber klub (Montreal Yiddish Writer's Club). The organizing committee comprised Shmuelson, Goldstein, Sack, and Edelstein, with Caiserman as treasurer and Toronto poet Sh. Nepom as secretary.¹¹⁵ *Adler* affiliates dominated the club's roster of writers: H. Hirsch, Shmuel Talpis, Hirsch Hershman, Israel Rabinovitch, and Solomon Schneour.¹¹⁶ This second Klub yidishe shrayber had an auspicious beginning. An announcement in the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* for a literary event in June 1916, to be held at the Baron de Hirsch Institute, states: "The program will be entirely original. Some of the best-known Yiddish writers of this city will read from their works."¹¹⁷ The Klub yidishe shrayber published a single issue of a journal titled *Der kanader yidisher shrayber* [The Canadian Yiddish Writer], in May 1916, dedicated to the memory of beloved writer Sholem Aleichem. Printed by the *Adler*, *Der kanader yidisher shrayber* featured contributions by a number of Canadian Yiddish writers and was the first collection of Yiddish literary work to be published in Canada. It included the following

announcement: "The next gathering of the Klub yidishe shrayber will take place at the Baron de Hirsch Institute on Wednesday, May 24 at 8:15 PM; all colleagues are requested to arrive on time."¹¹⁸ Like its 1914 predecessor, it is not clear what became of the second Klub yidishe shrayber; it is possible that the group members worked together to publish their journal once and then disbanded. The uncertain fate of Shmuelson's two clubs suggests an instability in the early literary milieu that made formal organizations difficult to sustain.

Two decades later, one could point to a chain of Yiddish literary transmission in Montreal. Shmuelson served as a mentor to aspiring writers, reading over their manuscripts and encouraging the gifted among them. J.I. Segal was a member of the small circle of writers who gathered at Shmuelson's home, and it was this contact that helped bring about the publication of his first book. He, in turn, went on to mentor a cadre of aspiring Yiddish poets in Montreal, and a number of these local writers hosted gatherings in their homes. For example, Maza's home became a popular meeting place for local and visiting literati in the 1930s. She was familiar with many of Montreal's Jewish writers, visual artists, and musicians and hosted them in her home on a regular basis, in addition to visiting Jewish cultural figures, in particular from New York. Yiddish writers and poets also gathered regularly at Maza's home to share their work; they included local writers N.Y. Gotlib, A.Sh. Shkolnikov, Shabse Perl, M.M. Shaffir, Mirl Erdberg-Shatan, Esther Segal, J.I. Segal, Yudika; New York poet Kadya Molodovsky (1894–1975), and, in the 1940s and beyond, Melekh Ravitch, Rokhl Korn, and other refugees and survivors of the Nazi Holocaust. Local and visiting artists also gathered in Maza's home, including Alexander Bercovitch (1892–1951), Sam Borenstein (1908–1969), Louis Muhlstock (1904–2001), and pianist and future musicologist Marvin Duchow (1914–1979, Maza's nephew).¹¹⁹

Maza's literary gatherings offer the best-documented example of informal Montreal Yiddish literary activity, for much has been written about her role in what has been termed "Mrs. Maza's Salon" and her unofficial role as *di mame* (the mother).¹²⁰ Irving Massey, Maza's son, situates her in the "Montreal Yiddish Renaissance" of the 1930s and emphasizes the sense of community at its core. He recalls how his family home hosted a constant stream of visitors seeking aid or advice, or simply dropping in. In addition to her extensive contacts with local artists and musicians, Maza was a fount of information on

jobs, visas, and publication possibilities stemming from her wide correspondence with Jews in every part of the world. Moreover, along with Melekh Ravitch and Hersh Hershman, she was active in bringing a group of Yiddish writers to Montreal from Europe after the Holocaust and helped with the publication of a number of their works. This role developed gradually; Massey posits that it began after Maza's first book was published in 1931, and he recalls it becoming full-fledged after the family's move to Esplanade Street in 1934. He describes her various roles in the immigrant community: "My mother herself, along with the equivalent of a full-time job as social worker, placement officer, psychiatric counsellor, and fund raiser, not to mention copy editor and literary agent, also contrived to read more than I did as a full-time student of literature, write literary criticism, lecture, do numerous translations, produce four books of poetry and an autobiography, send off about ten letters a day, and keep abreast of cultural developments in both the Jewish and the international domains."¹²¹ The memoirs of English-language writer and poet Miriam Waddington (1917–2004) provide another first-hand account of Ida Maza's home in the early 1930s, when Waddington's family visited regularly from Ottawa. She describes the third-floor walk-up in the heart of the Jewish area, just up the street from the Jewish Public Library, where most of the activity took place in the dining room and on its expansive "Winnipeg couch." There, visiting writers and painters would sit and listen to poetry readings, discuss new books or ideas for projects, such as publishing a new magazine, and gossip. Maza offered a second home to many aspiring writers who worked in factories and lived in rooming houses. Waddington discusses the important role Maza played in the lives of many of her guests:

To these artists, most of them middle-aged and impecunious, and all of them immigrants, Mrs. Maza was the eternal mother – the foodgiver and nourisher, the listener and solacer, the mediator between them and the world. There she would sit with hands folded in sleeves, her face brooding and meditative, listening intently with her body. As she listened she rocked back and forth, and, as it then seemed to me, she did so in time to the rhythm of the poem being read. She gave herself entirely and attentively to the poem; she fed the spiritual hunger and yearning of these oddly assorted Yiddish writers whenever they needed her.¹²²

Although the style of Maza's gatherings did not appeal to everyone,¹²³ her home functioned as a hub for local literary activity.

ORGANIZATIONAL INVOLVEMENT IN YIDDISH BOOK PUBLISHING

Book publishing formed another nexus of literary activity in the Montreal Yiddish community. While the Yiddish periodical press provided backing to its contributors who sought to publish books, another means of publication was via groups of supporters who stepped in to help. This community involvement became increasingly significant with the expansion of Yiddish print culture between the world wars. Outside of high-circulation newspapers such as the *Adler*, Yiddish printing was a non-profit venture and collective publication projects facilitated the production of numerous works of Yiddish literature.

While the interwar years brought an international flowering of Yiddish literature of all genres – including belles lettres, scholarship, and popular literature – the published book never subsumed the role of the daily and periodical press in the dissemination of Yiddish literature, in particular in Yiddish immigrant settlements.¹²⁴ Montreal, Toronto, and Winnipeg served as Canada's Yiddish publishing centres, with Montreal producing just over half of the some eighty Yiddish titles that appeared across the country between 1910 and 1945.¹²⁵ When one considers the hundreds of active Yiddish writers who published in the local press during the same period, the number of books appears small indeed.¹²⁶

Several factors account for the relatively limited scope of book publication in Yiddish literary life before 1945. One was the prominent role of the periodical press in Yiddish print culture. In the area of popular literature, particularly in the growing immigrant communities of North America, the Yiddish press competed with the publishing industry for market dominance by offering serialized novels in its pages.¹²⁷ Moreover, the symbiotic relationship between modern Yiddish literature and the periodical press rendered Yiddish books difficult to sell; because the works of Yiddish writers tended to appear in periodicals before becoming available in book form, readers were already familiar with the content and not inclined to purchase the volume when it was finally published.¹²⁸ A further factor is less tangible and involves the attitudes of the wider Yiddish reading public. For most of its speakers throughout history, Yiddish has fulfilled a

largely utilitarian function, and the pre-modern works in Yiddish – such as translations and adaptations of Hebrew-Aramaic sacred texts or European literature – were derivative in nature. A broad Yiddish reading public adapted to reading the popular press, while only a far smaller readership ever became consumers of high scholarship or belles lettres. Joshua A. Fishman and David E. Fishman identify the popularly accepted role of Yiddish as antithetical to the appearance of serious books in the language:

Yiddish is most firmly established as a vernacular – an informal, spoken medium – and, as such, its association with radio, theatre, and even the daily press is not hard to fathom. Even the semi-technical tradition of Bible translations and prayer book translations into stylized Yiddish ... follows from the role of Yiddish as the language of everyday life. Finally, humorous books in Yiddish for popular consumption have also had quite a vogue for more than a century. However, books of modern Yiddish poetry, novels, dramas, short stories, essays, literary criticism, as well as Yiddish books in the social sciences or humanities, have rarely reached beyond a very small and select circle of aficionados anywhere in the Yiddish world.¹²⁹

Moreover, the serious Yiddish book was linked to an ideological movement for Yiddish that had relatively limited influence, even at its peak.

Compounding these factors in Montreal was the absence of commercial Yiddish publishing houses. As a whole, the newer Yiddish settlements in the Americas lacked accessible printing facilities supported by a mass customer base. In most minor centres of Yiddish culture such as Canada, it was simply not financially viable to produce Yiddish books.¹³⁰ Yiddish writers in North America thus had the following options if they wished to see their books in print: they could try to locate a publisher abroad; they could self-publish or search for sponsors for the publication of their works; or they could use small, non-commercial publishing houses (*farlag*n). Most Yiddish volumes in Canada were self-published. They were printed in small runs at commercial presses, with the author arranging for the work to be produced and distributed, and absorbing the cost. More often than not, an author received assistance from his or her social and cultural circles, or from friends.¹³¹ This stands in stark contrast to Yiddish newspapers, which often paid their contributors for their literary

submissions. In addition to the *Adler*, the City Printing Company, the Old Rose Printing Company, and the Artistic Print Shop were among the commercial printing presses in Montreal that handled Yiddish type. During the interwar period, many of the volumes of Yiddish belles lettres by Montreal writers were produced in these print shops, with the author listed as publisher. These include Shabse Perl's *Fun khaver tsu khaver* [From Friend to Friend] (1934), J.I. Segal's *Lyrik* [Lyric] (1930) and *Mayn nign* [My Melody] (1934), A.Sh. Shkolnikov's *Lider* [Poems] (1926), N.Y. Gotlib's *Zeglen in zun* [Sails in the Sun] (1932), and Yankev Zipper's *Geven iz a mentsh* [Once There Was a Man] (1940). A very few works were produced in Europe, including Ida Maza's *Lider far kinder* [Poems for Children] (1936), which was published by Warsaw's Farlag H. Bzshoza.

Montreal's commercial print shops also proved to be the primary mechanism for the publication of *sforim* (books with sacred Jewish content) in Yiddish or with Yiddish content. Authored by rabbis and other traditionally educated Jewish scholars, these popular works included treatises promoting Jewish observance, translations of Hebrew-Aramaic works into Yiddish, and collections of Jewish legends. In these works, Yiddish served primarily as a vehicle for disseminating Jewish knowledge and promoting religious observance among an immigrant readership. With a local and international readership, authors of *sforim* self-published their work and then distributed it commercially. Two examples of authors of Yiddish *sforim* are Rabbi Yehudah Yudel Rosenberg (1859–1935) and Symcha Petrushka. Rosenberg was a prolific writer and respected Jewish scholar of Hasidic background who published innovative Yiddish and Hebrew treatments of traditional themes. He authored a number of works while employed as a rabbi in Poland, including a multi-volume translation of the core mystical text, the Zohar, from Aramaic into Hebrew, and a Hebrew-language rendition of the legend of the Golem.¹³² Termed “disguised fiction” by Ira Robinson, this work belonged to a genre that had emerged in Orthodox circles in nineteenth-century Poland and combined traditional content with modern genres.¹³³ During his residence in Montreal from 1918 until his death, Rosenberg authored two Yiddish works, both of which were self-published through the City Printing Company. In *A brivele fun der zise mame shabes malkese tsu ire zin un tekhter fun yidishn folk* [A Letter from the Sweet Mother Sabbath Queen to Her Sons and Daughters of the Jewish People] (1923–24), the author assumes the persona of the Sweet Mother Sabbath Queen

in an appeal to the Jews of Montreal for greater Sabbath observance. Rosenberg's bilingual Hebrew-Yiddish *Sefer nifleos ha-zohar* [The Book of the Marvels of the Zohar] (1927) offers a popular retelling of the life of Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai, the traditionally ascribed author of the Zohar.¹³⁴ Symcha Petrushka was born into a Hasidic family and excelled in Talmudic studies, earning the appellation *der prager ile* (the prodigy of Praga, his Warsaw suburb). In his teens, he immersed himself in secular subjects and established a career as a journalist with one of Warsaw's largest Yiddish dailies, the *Haynt*.¹³⁵ After settling in Montreal in 1939, he published two popular works of Jewish scholarship in Yiddish. His two-volume *Yidishe folks-entsiklopedye* [Jewish People's Encyclopedia], a continuation of a popular Jewish encyclopedia he had begun in Poland, contains entries on all areas of Jewish life penned in an accessible Yiddish style. During the war years, Petrushka produced his magnum opus: the five-volume *Mishnayes mit iberzetsungen un peyrush in yidish* [Mishna with Translation and Interpretation in Yiddish]. The work offered an accessible translation and explanation of a core work of rabbinic literature, the notoriously terse and difficult Mishna, based on Petrushka's own experience of study in Poland. These projects, which were conceived to render Jewish learning readily available to the Yiddish-speaking masses, were self-published with financial support from individuals as well as local organizations such as the Canadian Jewish Congress.¹³⁶

A number of works of belles lettres by Montreal Yiddish writers were published by Jewish publishing companies, or *farlag'n*, that were non-commercial and operated in the short term. In contrast, interbellum Europe boasted a vast infrastructure comprising four categories of Jewish publishing companies: printers turned publishers; patrons of Jewish culture who invested in a publishing venture with capital acquired in unrelated business ventures; cooperative publishing houses, as developed particularly in Poland; and state or party publishing houses, of greatest significance in the Soviet Union.¹³⁷ Between 1900 and 1940, Jewish publishing companies were most prominent in the major European centres of Yiddish culture such as Warsaw, Vilna, Kiev, Minsk, Kharkov, Lemberg (Lvov), and, for a brief time, Berlin.¹³⁸ Poland housed the largest number of Jewish publishing houses, with over a hundred producing Yiddish literature of various genres.¹³⁹ The larger Jewish publishing companies were commercial ventures that required the support of a steady readership and/or a willing sponsor. Meanwhile, in the Soviet Union, state-subsidized Jewish publishing

companies published hundreds of books in the interwar years.¹⁴⁰ The United States had a single commercial publishing house in place: the New York City-based Hebrew Publishing Company (founded in 1901), which published inexpensive Yiddish-language religious and practical books as well as some volumes of belles lettres.¹⁴¹ Despite a lack of commercial outlets, however, the United States, with its vast consumer base and many non-commercial Jewish publishing companies, became a world centre of Yiddish book publishing.¹⁴² In Canada, the scale was far smaller.

A handful of local Jewish publishing companies centred in Montreal and Toronto generally operated long enough to publish a single text or a small number of volumes before ceasing operations. More often than not, ambitious plans for further publications failed to materialize. In addition to the Jewish publishing companies attached to Yiddish newspapers, the individuals behind Canada's independent Jewish publishing companies were often connected to Yiddish newspapers, which facilitated access to printing facilities. Farlag "kenede" (the "Canada" Jewish Publishing Company) was the first and longest-lasting Jewish publishing company in the country. Although there is no conclusive proof as to who headed this venture, evidence points to H. Hirsch, editor of the Toronto *Yidisher zhurnal* and subsequently of the *Adler*, making Hirsch the first publisher of Yiddish literature in Canada. As a newspaper editor, Hirsch would have had access to the necessary printing facilities. An announcement in the back of Hirsch's first book, *Hundert tropn tint*, advertises Farlag "kenede" as "the only Jewish book publishing house in all of Canada," and states that it publishes books and *sforim* in Yiddish and Hebrew. Authors, publishers, and booksellers are invited to be in communication about potential manuscripts and the distribution of existing volumes. Farlag "kenede" published several Yiddish volumes in Toronto and Montreal, beginning with the first volume of belles lettres to appear in Canada, *Hundert tropn tint*¹⁴³ as well as Hirsch's subsequent volume of fables and translation of the Song of Songs. In the 1920s, it also published all three of Toronto journalist Abraham Rhinewine's works on Jewish and Canadian history. Volumes published by Farlag "kenede" noted outside financial support from individual sponsors or from the *Adler*. Other Canadian *farlagn* were constituted for the production of a specific project. For example, Segal's first volume, *Fun mayn velt* [Of My World], was published by Farlag "montreol," while Caiserman's *Yidishe dikhter in kanade* was published by Farlag "nyuansn"

(Nuances). Meanwhile, a number of other Jewish publishing companies in Toronto and Winnipeg published volumes of belles lettres and other literature by local Yiddish writers.¹⁴⁴

Farlagn were founded along ideological lines and sometimes in affiliation with specific literary journals. As editor of the modernist *Royerd* literary journal in the early 1920s, J.I. Segal founded Farlag "royerd" to publish his own and A.Sh. Shkolnikov's work. Segal's plans to publish further books by local and international writers, listed in each of the three issues of the *Royerd* journals he edited, failed to materialize.¹⁴⁵ On the other side of the ideological spectrum, a Toronto-based proletarian publishing company called "Oyfgang" (Sunrise) was founded in 1926 by Communist writer Benjamin Katz (1916–?), who was employed at a local printing press and served as its publisher and secretary.¹⁴⁶ Farlag "oyfgang," which produced Yiddish-language works in the 1920s by Montreal- and Toronto-based writers, greatly facilitated the publication of Yiddish works of belles lettres by Communist or proletarian-oriented writers. For example, Farlag "oyfgang" published an anthology edited by Katz called *Baginen* [Dawn] (1928) that included work by Montreal poet Sholem Shtern. It also published Shtern's first book of verse in 1929 and produced a series of volumes of poetry and prose by Toronto writers called Kleyne biblyotek "oyfgang" [Little "Oyfgang" Library] in 1928. Sometimes *farlagn* were constituted but failed to publish their intended volumes. For example, in the late 1930s, N.Y. Gotlib's plans for the publication of several books through Farlag "heftn" did not come to fruition.¹⁴⁷

The dearth of Canadian commercial publishers combined with increased communal activity led to greater local organizational involvement in the publication of Yiddish books by Montreal authors. Charles Madison's comments on the American context apply equally to Canada: "[T]he paucity of publishers caused the gradual development of associations and organizations interested in publishing books by authors whom their leaders admired."¹⁴⁸ These included *landsmanshaftn*, clubs, and labour unions. Writers affiliated with political or social organizations often found institutional support for the publication of their works. In the United States, Yiddish education was closely linked to the publication of Yiddish books, with a number of publishing houses specializing in literature for youth, notably textbooks for Yiddish schools; one of these publishers, the New York-based Jewish Folk Schools of America, produced Shloime Wiseman's *Dos vort* [The Word] (1931), a Yiddish literary anthology designed for use in the

secular Jewish schools. In Montreal, book publishing encompassed diverse organizations, from schools to unions. Cultural societies and committees, reading circles, writers' groups, and other volunteer organizations dedicated to the publication of specific works banded together to raise funds and see projects come to fruition. Thus, the first Yiddish book to be published in Canada, a history of Jewish education,¹⁴⁹ was printed in 1910 by the *Adler* and sponsored by the local Talmud Torah School, where the author, Reverend Moshe Elimelech Levin, was principal. Esther Segal's 1928 volume *Lider* [Poems] was produced in Toronto by the "Zerubbabel Branch 219" of the Labour Zionist Yidisher natsyonaler arbeter farband (known as the ANAF, The Jewish National Workers' Alliance).¹⁵⁰ Unusually, Segal did not initiate the project; rather the book was produced and distributed by a group of "young people in Toronto."¹⁵¹ After 1930, increasing numbers of Yiddish works were published by local cultural and literary organizations. Ida Maza's first volume was published by Montreal's Yidishe kultur gezelschaft (Yiddish Cultural Society) in 1931.¹⁵² A group affiliated with the *Montreol* literary journal, called the Shrayber grupe "montreol" ("Montreol" Writers' Group), sponsored the publication of Yudika's 1934 volume of poetry, *Vandervegn* [Wandering Ways]. Sholem Shtern's 1941 book of poetry, *Es likhtikt* [It Grows Light], was published with the assistance of the Kultur komitet baym arbeter hilf fareyn (Cultural Committee at the Workers' Aid Association). On a more informal level, it was not unusual for an author's acquaintances to come together to publish his or her work. For example, the earliest poems of Toronto poet Pesakh Matenko (1901–1987) appeared in the 1917 volume titled *Lider*, which his friends published in honour of his sixteenth birthday.¹⁵³ Similarly, Shkolnikov's 1939 volume, *In likht fun tog* [In the Light of Day], is listed as "aroydsgegebn mit der hilf fun fraynt" (published with the help of friends).

A range of examples of institutional as well as personal involvement in the publication of Yiddish books reflects the seminal position that Yiddish literature held in Jewish community life. Yiddish books were more than means of entertainment and edification; they were concrete manifestations of the edifice of Yiddish culture. However, financial considerations often dictated how, when, and even whether a Yiddish book was published. Book publishing ventures were complicated by the financial crisis of the Great Depression. In the absence of an infrastructure for book publication, Canadian authors self-published however they could, in particular in the country's smaller

centres. For example, Mordkhe Miller (1895–1946) handwrote and mimeographed his 1936 book of verse, *Fun shturem* [From the Storm], at the Peretz School in Edmonton, where he was employed as a teacher. The school was listed as publisher.

In the late 1930s, organizations arose in Europe and the United States specifically devoted to the promotion and preservation of Yiddish through the publication of Yiddish books. The mandate of the leftist Yidisher kultur farband (Yiddish Cultural Association, hereafter YKUF), founded at the 1937 World Yiddish Cultural Congress in Paris, was to promote Yiddish books. Based in New York City with poet Zishe Weinper (1892–1957) at the helm, the YKUF was active in Canada, publishing works such as Yudika's 1943 volume, *Shplinters* [Splinters]. Sholem Shtern travelled frequently to New York on behalf of the YKUF.¹⁵⁴ After 1945, the New York-based CYCO and YIVO published numerous works by Montreal Yiddish authors, including Yekhiel Shtern's study of Jewish education, *Kheyder un besmedresh* (1946).

A more formal, but temporary, organization devoted to the publication of Yiddish books was the *bukh komitet* (provisional book committee). Constituted of interested supporters from the community at large, a *bukh komitet* would be created for the purpose of publishing a specific text and was generally disbanded once the project was completed. Its tasks included raising funds, promoting the work, organizing book launches and other literary events, and facilitating distribution. Numerous books by Montreal writers were published with the assistance of a *bukh komitet*, most of them volumes of poetry. A special 1932 anniversary volume to honour J.I. Segal's fifteen years of poetic activity was produced and published by the Sigal yubileom komitet (Segal Anniversary Committee), while the poet's 1937 volume, *Di drite sudeh: Lider* [The Third Feast: Poems], was published with the assistance of another specially organized committee.¹⁵⁵ In 1940–41, N.Y. Gotlib's volume of verse titled *Iberboy* [Rebuilding] was published by the N.Y. gotlib buk komitet (N.Y. Gotlib Book Committee), which was comprised of some twenty individuals, including Israel Rabinovitch, H.M. Caiserman, Vladmir Grossman, J.I. Segal, Ida Maza, Shloime Wiseman, and Yankev Zipper.¹⁵⁶ Gotlib's 1943 book *Naye lider* [New Poems] was likewise published by the N.Y. gotlib buk komitet. The prominence of the *bukh komitet* can be understood as an indication of the limited commercial returns associated with Yiddish book publishing.¹⁵⁷ It also underlines the role of community in the production of works of Yiddish literature.

The *bukh komitet* became increasingly significant in the years following the Second World War, when the massive losses of the Holocaust instilled a sense of urgency in Yiddish book publication, even as readership was declining. Many *bukh komitetn* were formed to lend support to the publication of a wide variety of works of Yiddish literature. Thus, paradoxically, organizational involvement increased at a time when the venture of Yiddish literature was becoming less and less commercially viable. In the post-1945 years, *bukh komitetn* and other forms of subsidized publication continued to support the publication of Yiddish works, even though the culture that spawned them was on the wane.

BOOK DISTRIBUTION

The distribution of Yiddish books in Montreal before 1945 posed another challenge that was largely addressed through communal involvement. The city lacked commercial Yiddish bookstores, but Yiddish books could still be acquired in a variety of ways. One avenue for distribution was promotion through the Yiddish press. The *Adler* and other local Yiddish publications, notably the Yiddish literary journals, carried announcements for new books in addition to publishing book reviews. These included contact information for authors or publishers so that interested readers could acquire the book through them. Yiddish books were also promoted through book launches and readings planned by local organizations such as the Jewish Public Library or by groups of local cultural activists. Finally, Yiddish books could be acquired through the local branches of larger international publishing firms that opened up in Montreal in the years after the First World War to distribute Yiddish books. For example, the Canadian division of the New York-based Farlag “Yidish,” distributor of Montreal’s *Nyuansn* literary journal in 1921, had a local office and advertised the sale of its popular works in the *Adler*.¹⁵⁸ These publishing houses seem not, however, to have published works by local writers.

The lack of an established infrastructure for local book publishing and distribution necessitated significant effort on the part of authors and their supporters to see that the printed volumes reached a reading public. Sometimes it was the authors themselves who literally peddled the book door-to-door in the Yiddish community. In other cases, writers such as Sholem Shtern acted as book vendors of their own works and the works of others.¹⁵⁹ Organizations were also active in distributing books on behalf of a writer. Montreal could fill a hall

with hundreds of individuals to hear a particularly beloved Yiddish lecturer. However, as a commercial enterprise, Yiddish literature was never fully viable, even during the peak of Yiddish literary activity in the 1920s and 1930s.

Beyond 1945, Yiddish book distribution would become increasingly problematic as the reading public for secular Yiddish books faced an ongoing decline. With this decline, the emphasis shifted to individual rather than collective literary projects, and books became the central forum for Yiddish literature. At the same time, linguistic assimilation translated into waning audiences for Yiddish literature, whether in reduced participation at lectures and community events or in fewer consumers of books. Even when Yiddish books were distributed, the numbers of actual readers declined steadily.

CONCLUSION

Montreal's Yiddish literary activity was characterized by community and continuity rather by individuality and radical change. Its writers, supporters, and reading public formed part of a wider venture in modern Jewish culture, one that was community based. Whereas New York produced avant-garde Yiddish literary movements, such as *Di yunge* and *In zikh*, with a strongly individualistic ethos, even the most modernist of Montreal's Yiddish poets, J.I. Segal – who was associated with *Di yunge* and espoused an aesthetically oriented approach to poetry – published hundreds of poems for children in the popular press and was closely associated with the Yiddish schools. In an essay titled “Akshones” [Stubbornness], published in the 1929 *Folksschuln bukh* [Jewish People's School Book], Segal draws attention to the inextricable links between literature and community. He asserts that what allowed the schools to flourish, even in the face of community indifference, was the organic whole that constituted Yiddish culture and intertwined education, literature, and culture: “I do not wish to separate, to classify by profession and vocation. At this point I see us all as one camp: poets, artists, writers, teachers, journalists, cultural activists and cultural builders. I see us all as one edifice, one enterprise. School and literature – how else can we imagine it except as one and the same thing? Even the most individualistic of poets could not deny this.”¹⁶⁰ The Montreal Yiddish writers did not set themselves apart from their communities; they worked with and for a wider collective within a transnational Yiddish cultural venture.

A comparison of Yiddish literary culture with the beginnings of the modernist Canadian English literary milieu in 1940s Montreal, with the convergence of the Montreal Group of poets¹⁶¹ – Patrick Anderson, A.M. Klein, Louis Dudek, Irving Layton, P.K. Page, and John Sutherland – underscores the deep communal roots of the former. Like the modern Yiddish writers, the English-language modernist poets strove to create a high literary culture and a community of writers and readers. They congregated around literary journals such as *Preview* and *First Statement* that lacked a popular reading public. They understood their writing to be an ideologically driven or politicized act, much like the rhetoric expressed in the modernist Yiddish journals. However, despite superficial similarities, several differences stand out between these poets and the Montreal Yiddish writers. Whereas the modernist English writers sought to trigger a literary revolution to break with the present and past, even the most revolutionary of the Yiddish modernist or proletarian writers remained part of a broader Yiddish community. Moreover, the Yiddish literati remained actively engaged in other facets of cultural life, notably education. The modern Yiddish writers ultimately understood themselves to be part of an all-encompassing wheel of Jewish cultural revival of which Yiddish literature represented just one spoke.



MONTREAL'S SECULAR JEWISH SCHOOLS

IN SHARP CONTRAST TO ITS MINOR STATUS WITHIN A TRANSNATIONAL Yiddish milieu in the realms of the press, literature, or theatre, Canada emerged as a major world centre of Yiddish education. Montreal housed some of North America's first and most enduring secular Jewish schools for children that placed Yiddish at the core of the curriculum, both as the language of instruction and as an object of study, and fostered a long-term commitment to Yiddish in the Jewish community. These secular Jewish schools (*Yidishe veltlekhe shuln*) were known as *shuln* or *shules* (*shul* or *shule* in the singular), which embodies both the traditional Yiddish term for synagogue, which is also a place of study, and, like the German term *Schule*, the concept of the modern school. Jewish immigrants across Canada and the United States formulated new models of Jewish education to promote leftist and nationalist ideologies. As Fradle Freidenreich found in researching her recent book *Passionate Pioneers: The Story of Yiddish Secular Education in North America, 1910–1960*, a range of organizations founded a vast web of school systems, with an estimated total of over a thousand Yiddish schools for children in some 160 communities, ranging from major cities to small agrarian colonies, along with dozens of Yiddish summer camps. Yiddish language and literature formed a core value in all of these institutions; the role attributed to religion, the Bible, Hebrew language and literature, and other areas of curriculum depended on the particular ideology of the given school. Within this largely vanished and little-remembered phenomenon, Montreal

stands out not only as a pioneering centre of secular Jewish day-school education, but as a city where a commitment to Yiddish within these schools has been enduring. By 1945, many of North America's secular Jewish schools had amalgamated with non-Yiddish schools or disappeared altogether. As of 2010, almost a hundred years after their founding, Montreal continues to house one of the world's very few networks of Jewish day schools outside of the Ultra-Orthodox world where Yiddish forms a compulsory component of the curriculum at both the elementary and high school levels in the Jewish People's and Peretz Schools (JPPS).

Education has long served to foster Jewish continuity and to impart a system of values to an intergenerational community, and the proponents of modern Yiddish culture, in turn, reached out to individuals of all ages. In addition to establishing mechanisms for adult education, ideologues founded a system of modern schools for children in Yiddish. Beginning in the 1910s, a network of Montreal secular Jewish schools promoted modern Yiddish as a living culture and fostered the development of Yiddish creativity among children born and raised in Canada. For Yiddish activists, young people embodied their hopes for the future, and a system of modern Jewish schools ensured the ongoing transmission of Yiddish as a carrier of progressive Jewish values into the future. As Melekh Ravitch points out in his essay "Yiddish Culture in Canada," "as the press provides the ethnic group with communication in space, so does the school provide communication in time."¹ These schools occupied a primary position in the dissemination of Yiddish culture. They embodied and realized a vision of Jewish continuity with Yiddish at its core. At the same time, the expansion of the secular Jewish schools in the interwar period coincided with the beginning of the steady decline of Yiddish as a communicative language among the younger generation. As such, the schools became central to the promotion and preservation of Yiddish, serving as a bulwark against assimilation.

Some of the first all-day secular Jewish schools in North America were established in Montreal. The National Radical Schools were founded by Poale Zion activists in Montreal and Winnipeg in 1913 and 1914 respectively; both were later renamed Peretz Schools following the death of writer I.L. Peretz. In 1914, an ideological split in Montreal's National Radical School led to the creation of the rival Jewish People's School. At their peak, these schools operated numerous branches, with kindergarten through high school levels.

Meanwhile, Toronto operated a National Radical/Peretz School as well as People's Schools as supplementary schools, while schools in the smaller Jewish centres of Edmonton and Vancouver were founded along similar lines in the 1920s and 1930s. Winnipeg's Peretz School was the first secular Jewish school in Canada to offer full-day parochial education in 1920, with Montreal as well as smaller centres such as Calgary following suit. Despite financial difficulties, Montreal's *shuln* enjoyed tremendous stability; they developed as central communal institutions under long-time leaders as well as with the support of a roster of community activists and other supporters. At the same time, in contrast to the other pillars of Yiddish culture founded before the First World War – the *Adler* and the Jewish Public Library – these schools for Jewish children, which met both utilitarian and ideological needs, were far from non-partisan.

While the Peretz and the Jewish People's Schools were not the only schools to offer Yiddish education for children – the Workmen's Circle, for example, offered classes in local supplementary schools² – this chapter will focus on the evolution and literary activity of the Montreal secular Jewish schools that offered day-school education. After presenting an overview of the establishment of the *shuln*, it will focus on three main areas of discussion: Yiddish and school programming; the activities of school-sponsored clubs and publications; and efforts of the schools to combat attrition in the Yiddish community. It will follow with a discussion of the second generation of writers to emerge from the schools.

THE SECULAR JEWISH SCHOOL MOVEMENT

A secular Jewish school movement developed in Yiddish centres worldwide in the opening decades of the twentieth century. These schools represented a modern alternative to the traditional model of Ashkenazi education – *kheyder* and *yeshiva* – which centred on the Hebrew-Aramaic texts fundamental to Jewish ritual and study: the prayerbook and the Bible, the Talmud and other rabbinic literature, and the commentaries upon them. In contrast, the secular Jewish schools created new curricula that replaced the traditional foci of Jewish study with secular expressions of Ashkenazi civilization, namely Yiddish language, literature, and culture; Jewish history; and folklore and other secular subjects, with a variable role attributed to Modern Hebrew. These schools evolved modern teaching methods

and materials, including an array of new textbooks. They represented a vehicle for implementing a future-oriented alternative to traditional Jewish life in the modern world. As Jeffrey Shandler has suggested, for its proponents, “the classroom became the venue par excellence for enacting a modernist transformation of traditional Ashkenazic culture.”³ These secular Jewish schools were part of a global interwar movement to promote modern Yiddish culture in conjunction with leftist and/or nationalist ideologies. As Kazdan points out, important factors behind the creation of a new system of education were the rise of the labour movement and the need to educate and cultivate the fledgling working class whose shared language was Yiddish.⁴ In time, an ideological reorientation towards Yiddish as a key to Jewish consciousness and continuity would play itself out in the realm of education.⁵

In Europe, state suppression delayed the development of a comprehensive system of secular Jewish education into the interwar period. The first secular Jewish school in late Tsarist Russia operated illegally.⁶ In Poland, a network of secular Yiddish and Hebrew schools flourished in the 1920s, only to decline in the precarious political and economic climate of the 1930s. The Warsaw-based Tsysho (Tsentrale yidishe shul organizatsye/Central Jewish School Organization), a progressive secular Yiddish school system that was active throughout Poland from 1919 to 1941, maintained a network of elementary and high schools as well as teacher’s seminars. With both Jewish and general subjects taught in Yiddish, Tsysho created new curricula for instruction in subjects that had previously not been emphasized in Jewish schools or taught in Yiddish, such as mathematics, the sciences, and the arts. During this same interwar period, the Zionist Tarbut (Culture) organization, which promoted modern Hebrew education and culture, maintained schools in Poland and other areas of Eastern Europe, with curricula that emphasized Hebrew as a communicative language and included Biblical as well as modern Hebrew literature. In the Soviet Union, a vast network of state-run secular Yiddish schools were operational from 1917 through the 1940s.⁷ All of these new educational opportunities – which ranged from nursery school through university level – required the creation of a vast infrastructure and new pedagogical materials for the thousands of students who were educated in Yiddish. Like wider Jewish cultural activity, the Yiddish school movement was cut short by Stalinist repression in the Soviet Union and by Nazi occupation elsewhere in Europe.

Canada's secular Jewish schools, founded on the eve of the First World War, were at the forefront of a system of modern Yiddish education developed in the New World. During the opening decades of the twentieth century, networks of secular Jewish schools were founded in Yiddish immigrant centres in Canada, Latin America (in particular, Argentina, Mexico, Brazil, and Chile), Australia, and South Africa.⁸ As a lasting day-school system that offered instruction in and about Yiddish, Canada's secular Jewish school movement closely resembled that of these other minor Yiddish centres, its institutions serving as enduring focal points for community activity. In contrast, in the United States, in particular in the immigrant centre of New York City, the cosmopolitan ideology of the post-1880 mass immigration fostered English-language socialist education for the Yiddish masses.⁹ Thus, the children's educational program of the Workmen's Circle, the dominant Jewish immigrant organization, consisted of classes in English with socialist content from 1905 until 1918, when Yiddish content was introduced. The American movement for progressive Yiddish education evolved after 1910 with a strong and variegated ideological base and in close alignment with the labour movement.¹⁰ During the interwar period, a network of Yiddish-centred school systems of varying leftist ideologies developed in the New York region as well as in smaller communities across the United States, with the main sponsoring organizations consisting of the Farband, the Communist-aligned International Workers Order (IWO), the non-partisan Sholem Aleichem Folk Institute, and the Workmen's Circle. Even with their rapid expansion, which peaked in the late 1920s, secular Jewish schools in the United States remained a supplementary system to complement the public schools.¹¹

THE JEWS AND THE QUEBEC SCHOOL SYSTEM

The founding of Montreal's secular Jewish schools was motivated by a wider movement to meet the educational needs of a growing immigrant population within the strictly denominational educational system in place in the province of Quebec. Canadian Confederation and the British North America Act of 1867 formalized confessional education in Quebec, establishing two separate denominational school commissions – one Protestant and one Catholic – to administer education with public funds.¹² This system remained in place until 1998, when the city's non-confessional English and French Montreal school boards

began operations. The enshrined duality served to promote and protect the distinct identities of the province's French-Catholic and English-Protestant charter groups, with the schools serving to transmit and promote the religious as well as the cultural values of each group.¹³ With institutional life in Quebec largely church governed until the "Quiet Revolution" stimulated the rise of secularization and modernization in the 1960s, the province of Quebec did not have non-sectarian public education; the province and its schools were identified as Christian and divided into English-language Protestant and French-language Catholic.

As Quebec's first non-Christian minority, the province's Jewish population represented a challenge to the system. Montreal Jews, like all non-Catholics, were barred from the French-language Catholic school system. A Jewish population in the hundreds, comprising a largely anglicized elite, opted to pay its taxes to the Protestant board, and Jewish children were streamed into the English-Protestant educational system. Meanwhile, an attempt in 1874 to establish a separate Jewish school system in Montreal was undermined by rivalry between the city's two synagogues, and Jewish children remained in the Protestant school system. In 1888, a short-lived Jewish parochial school was established by Polish-German Jews through the Shaar Hashomayim Synagogue, with Alexander Harkavy brought to Montreal as one of its teachers. Immigrant Jews founded Talmud Torah schools that followed a traditional curriculum, emphasizing the Bible, Hebrew, and prayer as a modern alternative to the *kheyder* system.¹⁴ The first Montreal Talmud Torah was established in 1896; by 1911, it offered a modern Hebrew education in a newly renovated building in the Jewish quarter. These institutions operated as supplementary Jewish schools that met for several hours a week, in the afternoons, evenings, or on Sundays.

Whereas at the time of Confederation the Jewish population of Canada had been too small to figure in discussions about protecting minority rights in education, the status quo did not change despite the Jewish community's growing visibility as a non-Christian minority in the province of Quebec: Yiddish-speaking Jews were funnelled into the existing denominational school system in continuity with their long-standing "uneasy alliance" with the Protestant community.¹⁵ After much negotiation about the destination of taxes paid by Jewish property owners, an agreement formalized in 1894 incorporated Jews into the Protestant school system. However, rising numbers of

non-tax-paying Eastern European Jewish immigrants in the schools proved problematic: in 1901, for example, Montreal's Jewish community unsuccessfully brought the Protestant commissioners to court for refusing to award a scholarship to a Jewish student.¹⁶ Under the Provincial Education Act of 1903, Jewish children were officially to be regarded as Protestants as far as education was concerned; they paid their school taxes to the Protestant school board and attended English-language Protestant schools. However, despite a rapidly growing Jewish student body, the Protestant commission endeavoured to maintain the Christian character of the schools by implementing a Protestant curriculum and excluding Jews as commissioners or teachers. As MacLeod and Poutanen's study of Quebec's Protestant school boards shows, with the notable exception of the tiny Jewish rural community of Ste Sophie – which in 1914 “virtually co-opt[ed] the school board structure to meet its own needs” by forming a new Protestant school municipality under Jewish trusteeship to meet the educational needs of its children – Jews in the province of Quebec remained in a “curious relationship” with the province's Protestants in the area of education.¹⁷

A growing influx of Jewish immigrants made the arrangement between Montreal's Protestant school board and the Jewish community increasingly problematic for both sides. The flood of Jewish students into the Protestant school system was perceived as undermining the autonomy and integrity of schools that were intended to transmit Christian and British values and culture to an English-Protestant student body. Whereas in 1903 Jews made up 23 per cent of students in Montreal's Protestant schools, the number peaked at 45 per cent in 1917, with the percentage in some schools in the Jewish quarter far higher. Nevertheless, the Protestant commissioners opposed Jewish representation as teachers, administrators, and commissioners, which they perceived as a threat to the institution of Protestant education.¹⁸ Moreover, the taxes contributed by new Jewish immigrants, many of whom arrived with no resources at all, were insufficient to cover education costs for the Jewish students.¹⁹ As reflected in the title of a monograph by Director of Protestant Education Irving Elson Rexford (1850–1936), *Our Educational Problem: The Jewish Population and the Protestant Schools*, the status of the Jews within the Protestant schools remained a matter of ongoing contention into the 1920s. For example, a 1908 bill to secure Jewish representation on the Protestant Board of School Commissioners was defeated and the

board's Christian character maintained. Efforts to secure Jewish representation continued through the 1910s and 1920s, as did discussions about the inadequacy of Jewish taxes paid to the Protestant School Commission and the employment of Jewish teachers in the Christian schools.²⁰ A 1913 strike by Jewish students at Aberdeen School to protest a teacher's anti-Jewish remark and subsequent negotiations with Jewish community leaders prompted the hiring of Jewish teachers, totalling seventy in the next decade.

The problematic relations between the Jewish community and the Protestant school system came to a head in the late-1920s, when the very access of Montreal's Jewish students to English-Protestant schools came into question; in 1928, the courts ruled against the equation of Jews with Protestants for educational purposes, paving the way for a separate Jewish school board.²¹ These various battles for the rights of the Jewish community to receive public education and representation became known as "the Montreal Jewish school question."²² Lobbying by the Protestant committee for a repeal of the 1903 act resulted in a new act that removed the province's Jews from the Protestant board; in 1928, the Privy Council ruled that the 1903 legislation was a violation of the 1867 Constitution Act and that the Jews had no right to education within the existing denominational school systems. After much debate, the resulting 1930 David Bill, under Quebec premier Louis Alexandre Taschereau, proposed that a separate Jewish school board be established in Montreal. His proposal, which would have entailed a Jewish School Commission and Jewish representation on the province's Council for Public Instruction, met strong and vocal opposition from the local Catholic Church. Taschereau's modified 1931 bill, which returned Quebec's Jews to the Protestant school system, made provisions for the hiring of Jewish teachers.²³

The incomplete integration experienced by Montreal's Jewish immigrants, along with their desire to extend Jewish ideology into the future through education, played a significant role in the creation of a lasting network of secular Jewish schools, both supplementary and all-day, that fostered the Yiddish language. In Quebec, the promotion of linguistic and cultural assimilation through the schools did not represent a viable solution to the exclusion that Jews experienced within wider Christian society; their children's education in English-language Protestant schools did not necessarily translate into admittance into mainstream society. Two examples from other Jewish centres, one nearby and one farther away, offer examples of very different

approaches to the role of education in linguistic integration. In the first example, New York City, a country-wide non-denominational public school system drew Jewish immigrants into the United States' dominant English culture. In the second, involving Spanyolit speakers in interwar Salonika, loyalty to the newly established Greek state – which was hostile to its Jewish minority – was expressed through the aggressive Hellenization of the community's schools.²⁴ In contrast, Montreal's Yiddish community safeguarded and championed the use of its vernacular through the education of its children. The impetus derived both from exclusion from the outside and from ideological motivations from within.

IDEOLOGY IN MONTREAL'S SECULAR JEWISH SCHOOLS

Montreal's secular Jewish schools emerged to meet practical needs for Jewish education as well as to play ideological roles within wider community life. The infusion of left-wing and nationalist ideologies that accompanied the Yiddish immigration translated into new developments in Jewish education in Quebec. As a dominant force in the local milieu, the Poale Zion played a decisive role in the development of Yiddish education. It was under the aegis of the Labour Zionist movement that the first secular Jewish schools in North America were established in Montreal and Winnipeg.

Montreal's secular Jewish schools embodied a forward-looking venture in cultural transformation on Canadian soil through modern Yiddish culture. David Roskies's study of Yiddish culture in Montreal distinguishes the city as "one place on the North American continent where Yiddish not only survived but thrived well beyond the period of mass immigration; one experiment in utopian living whose ideological and institutional foundations withstood the great upheavals of the twentieth century."²⁵ He characterizes Yiddish culture in Montreal as a cognitive and ideological construct built upon the assumption that for Eastern European Jews, their settlement in Canada was permanent and that there would be no turning back. For this particular brand of Jewishness, or *yidishkayt*, to survive on local soil, it would have to be reinvented through a network of institutions that included schools. Roskies identifies ideology, and the activism of its proponents, as the root of the phenomenon of an enduring Yiddish cultural life in Montreal, with local ideologues – including pedagogues Yehuda

Kaufman, Simon Belkin, Moshe Dickstein (1890–1956), and Shloime Wiseman – creating a new brand of Diaspora nationalism. The wide-ranging efforts of local pedagogues and school activists, combined with the specific Quebec context, ultimately rendered Montreal a major – if not the major – centre of Yiddish education in North America.

Yiddish cultural figures outside of Montreal early on remarked upon the central role of the city's secular Jewish schools in the promotion of a resilient movement in Jewish life. In an essay published in the *Adler's* 1932 anniversary volume, writer Peretz Hirschbein characterizes Canada as place where “the Jewish milieu is not overcome by the American whirlwind that spins and carries pieces of our lives into far-flung corners.” His article links this Canadian characteristic with the ongoing vitality of Yiddish in Canada: “Consequently a network of Jewish schools is possible in Canada, where Yiddish can be heard spoken by a Canadian-born youth. This is an encouragement to this Yiddish writer.”²⁶ Some twenty years later, in an article in New York's *Tog-morn zhurnal* about the state of the Montreal Yiddish schools, journalist Ben Zion Goldberg (Waife) remarks, “[I]f there was ever the possibility of Jewish/Yiddish (*yidish*)²⁷ autonomy in anglo-North America, it was in Montreal.”²⁸

The catalyst for the new secular Jewish school movement was the 1910 international Poale Zion convention held in Montreal, which passed Chaim Zhitlowsky's resolution for the establishment of a Yiddish-based system of National Radical Schools to transmit the movement's core Zionist and socialist ideals. Zhitlowsky's call for Yiddish schools defeated a rival resolution proposed by Nachman Syrkin for schools based on Hebrew. Shortly after, the first National Radical School was formed in New York. After repeated attempts, a supplementary school was established in Montreal's Jewish immigrant quarter of Mile End.²⁹ Despite cramped quarters, financial difficulties, and opposition from both more acculturated and more traditional segments of the Jewish community, the school expanded to over two hundred students by 1914. Renamed a year later, the Peretz School purchased its first building in 1918, added a kindergarten in 1941, and established a full-day parochial school in 1942. With the motto “Di yidishe yugnt farn yidishn folk” (the Jewish youth for the Jewish people), the secular Jewish curriculum was centred on the Yiddish language and literature, as well as on Jewish history and folklore. While the Poale Zion promoted both Yiddish and Hebrew as expressions of



Group portrait of the students at the National Radical School, Baron de Hirsch building, Montreal, c. 1913. The slogan reads, "Di yidishe kinder farn yidishn folk" (the Jewish children for the Jewish people). Pr005170, JPL Photograph Collection, Jewish Public Library Archives, Montreal

Jewish identity in its schools, Yiddish formed the core of the Peretz School curriculum.

As a secular Jewish school, the Peretz School fostered and buttressed a vision forged by a new generation in which Yiddish played a pivotal role as a carrier of ideology and continuity. The schools formed an integral part of a larger Yiddish cultural edifice that included libraries, schools, publications, political organizations, and other community institutions. For their students, the schools validated and reinforced the Jewish life they experienced at home, and afforded them with a community of young people in which they could actively engage with the ideals promulgated by the schools. The recollections of Esther Zuker (daughter of activist Leyzer Zuker) of her experiences as a student in the Peretz School in its early years capture the pivotal role of the school for secular Jews within Montreal's wider community:

We felt, but did not understand, our difference [from other Jewish children in the neighbourhood] when, after a day's study in English [Protestant] school, we did not study with a Rabbi at



Mitt shule (high school) graduation at the Jewish People's School, May 1944. 85-281-83, JPL Photograph Collection, Jewish Public Library Archives, Montreal

home or in a *kheyder* but rather went to a secular Jewish school [*shule*]. Over time we became so immersed in *shule* activities that our closest friends became other *shule* children, who came from different neighbourhoods in the Jewish "Downtown," from homes similar to our home. Only in our later childhood years did we begin to see that our parents were not non-believers but rather possessed a new belief: the belief in a new, secular *yidishkayt* that attached to everyday life a conscious sense of belonging to the *folk*, a closeness to Jewish culture, studying in a National Radical School, celebrating our holidays in a unique manner with Hasidic melodies and Jewish folksongs.³⁰

From the outset, Canada's secular Jewish school movement reflected the wider language debates between advocates of Yiddish and Modern Hebrew within an ideologically divisive Jewish world. The emphasis on Yiddish over Hebrew in the curriculum of the Peretz School was hotly debated in the *Adler*,³¹ and a group of dissident activists chose to break away and found the Jewish People's School, which would be distinguished by its greater emphasis on Hebrew in the curriculum. Under the leadership of Yehuda Kaufman, the Jewish People's School was established in the summer of 1914. In contrast to the Peretz School program, which did not introduce the study of Hebrew until the third grade, the Jewish People's School put an early emphasis on both Yiddish and Hebrew, with Hebrew conveyed as a modern, living language and taught in the *ivrit-be-ivrit* (Hebrew in Hebrew) method. With steady expansion, the Jewish People's School purchased its first building in 1920, by which time the school had over two hundred students in thirteen classes. In 1922, it added a *mill shule* (high school), and it began to offer full-day parochial education in 1927.³²

Despite the efforts that were made to unite the schools beginning in the 1920s, ideological differences prevented the Peretz and Jewish People's Schools from merging for half a century. When the schools did merge, it was due to financial necessity, and only at the retirement of their two long-term principals in 1971: Yankev Zipper, who led the Peretz School from 1934 to 1971, and Shloime Wiseman, who led the Jewish People's School from 1920 to 1971.³³

Montreal's secular Jewish schools were headed by local intelligentsia and cultural activists who promoted a strong commitment to Yiddish as a basis for national identity. In addition, the students and their parents were overwhelmingly Yiddish speaking, at least initially. As such, the schools offered a curriculum that centred on Yiddish as both a subject and a language of instruction, with Hebrew occupying a variable position depending on the ideology of the given school. In the schools' first decade of operation, Yiddish was the language of the classroom as well as of the hallways, schoolyard, street, and home for both the students and the teachers. By the 1920s, with Yiddish in decline among a generation born or raised in Canada, the schools' leadership put an even greater emphasis on the promotion and preservation of Yiddish. Rather than abandon the language and employ English as the language of instruction, Montreal's Jewish schools deliberately persevered in both teaching Yiddish and teaching in Yiddish.



Students posing in front of new Jewish People's School building at 3885 St Urbain, 1922. 85-281-33, JPL Photograph Collection, Jewish Public Library Archives, Montreal

The basis for these efforts was an ideology that viewed language as a cultural force that embodied the national spirit of the Jewish people, with the schools' students representing the community's hopes for the future. Yiddish was therefore taught as a living language to succeeding generations, regardless of the extent to which students were actively functioning in Yiddish outside of the schools. Many of the schools' educators and supporters were themselves products of new models of secular Jewish education in Eastern Europe and adapted innovative pedagogical methods to convey Yiddish culture to future



J.I. Segal with Jewish People's School class, possibly in front of the newly acquired building at 834 Cadieux Street, dedicated in June 1918. 85-282-04, JPL Photograph Collection, Jewish People's Schools, Jewish Public Library Archives, Montreal

generations. In this venture, the secular Jewish schools represented a community endeavour that involved not only students, parents, and teachers, but a wide group of supporters as well.

Montreal's secular Jewish schools embodied the symbiotic relationship that evolved between education and literature in modern Yiddish culture. As Joshua Fishman has suggested, "the writer has occupied a central position in secular Yiddish culture since its beginnings at the end of the nineteenth century. Together with the Yiddish teacher, he/she served as the leader of the secular Yiddish community."³⁴ With writer and teacher representing highly respected experts on Yiddish language, literature, and culture, there was considerable overlap and exchange between the two roles in modern Yiddish culture. As in secular Yiddish schools across North America, many of the teachers were literati, including accomplished as well as aspiring Yiddish writers who engaged in literary pursuits on the side. Numerous writers became teachers in the schools and maintained close associations with them. J.I. Segal, for example, who taught at Montreal's Jewish People's School until his family relocated to New York City in 1923, remained a

staunch advocate of the schools. His prominent role in the Montreal school is indicated by its closure to mark his death on 7 March 1954.³⁵ The schools counted many other local Yiddish writers among their supporters. The “committee and friends” associated with the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Peretz School in 1938, for example, included local writers Chaim Tolmatsh, Israel Medres, H.M. Caiserman, and Hersh Hershman.³⁶ These writers – like the school’s instructors as a whole – taught in the Yiddish schools to demonstrate their strong commitment to ideological continuity. While teaching posts certainly helped to supplement the incomes of literati and helped them avoid debilitating factory work, teachers’ salaries – which were contingent upon the economic health of the school – were often irregularly disbursed, in particular during the early years. Moreover, the role of the teacher was multifaceted, including teaching responsibilities, fundraising, lecturing, and other tasks. At the same time, the Yiddish writer-teachers published, wrote for the press, maintained contacts with other literati, and were active in literary circles. As public literary figures and purveyors of culture, they instilled in their students a special appreciation for Yiddish language and literature while also serving as living models. This continuity through education ensured that Yiddish literature would be passed on from generation to generation, from teacher to student.

YIDDISH IN THE PERETZ SCHOOL AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE’S SCHOOL

For Montreal’s secular Jewish school activists, Yiddish functioned as a means of fostering and perpetuating progressive Jewish values. In tandem with the evolution of modern Yiddish literature, scholarship, and education, Yiddish in the secular schools increasingly came to be understood not merely as a utilitarian tool for promoting leftist or nationalist ideology, but as a key to the past, present, and future of the Jewish people. Secular Jewish education in Montreal embodied the ideals of the Yiddish cultural community, with the schools fostering a broad, forward-looking approach to education. The overall goal of the schools was to instil a progressive vision of Jewish life in a new generation and perpetuate a set of values based in nationalist and leftist ideals. At issue was not merely successive generations’ appreciation and awareness of Jewish language, literature, and culture – with Yiddish at the core – but also their active engagement with them.



Teachers and students at the Peretz School, July 1928. Yankev Zipper is standing second from left. 85-281-57, JPL Photograph Collection, Jewish People's Schools, Jewish Public Library Archives, Montreal

Both the Peretz School and the Jewish People's School came under the long-term leadership of pedagogues who were committed to Jewish cultural transformation and continuity through Yiddish education. The driving force behind the Peretz School was writer Yankev Zipper, who became a Hebrew and Yiddish teacher soon after settling in Canada in 1925. In 1934, after his return to Montreal following four years serving as director of the Winnipeg Peretz School, he took on the long-term leadership of the Montreal Peretz School.³⁷ The architect of the Jewish People's School, Shloime Wiseman, was another towering figure in Montreal Yiddish cultural life. Born into a family of educators in Ukraine, Wiseman settled in Montreal at age fourteen and began to teach at the Jewish People's School in 1916 while a student at McGill University. He was appointed principal of the Jewish People's School in Mile End in 1920 after he completed his bachelor's degree in English literature and psychology. He went on to earn a master's degree in pedagogy in 1923 and served as the institution's theorist and chief pedagogue. In addition to fulfilling his responsibilities at the Jewish People's School Wiseman was appointed the first director and dean of the Montreal Yidisher lerer seminar (Jewish Teachers Seminary, founded 1946) and taught Hebrew studies at Sir



Teachers and students at the Jewish People's School, spring 1931. Shimshen Dunskey is standing at right. 85-281-53, JPL Photograph Collection, Jewish People's Schools, Jewish Public Library Archives, Montreal

George Williams College (Concordia University).³⁸ He published widely on pedagogy in the *Adler* as well as in other Yiddish, Hebrew, and English periodicals across North America. He also produced Yiddish literary anthologies and a volume of American short stories translated into Hebrew entitled *Mesaprim amerikayim* [American Writers] (1956). Wiseman was joined in the administration of the Jewish People's School by Jewish scholar and pedagogue Shimshen Dunskey. A *yeshiva*-educated Jewish scholar, Dunskey settled in Montreal in 1922 and became assistant director of the Jewish People's School. He was co-founder of the Yidisher lerer seminar, where he taught courses in methodology, history, and grammar.³⁹ As a Bible scholar, he authored multiple Yiddish editions of the collections of Hebrew writings on the Five Scrolls of the Bible.⁴⁰ Together with an array of committed teachers and community supporters, the leadership of the secular Yiddish schools developed the vision as well as the curricula for their schools.

Despite their differences, the leadership of the schools articulated the central position of Yiddish in the Jewish immigrant community, even in the face of steady linguistic acculturation. Twenty years after the founding of the Jewish People's School, Wiseman wrote:

One of the first issues that confronted the schools over the years was the question of Yiddish. The positive relationship of the Jewish People's Schools towards Yiddish is well known. The secular Jewish schools have always regarded Yiddish as one of the most effective elements in the national Jewish education of a Jewish child and the study of Yiddish literature as the most reliable means of acquainting our children with Jewish folkways and with the social objectives of our generation. As a result, Yiddish occupies a primary position in the program of our schools.⁴¹

Fifty years after the founding of the schools, Principal Zipper likewise expressed the early approach of the school: "The language of the masses, Yiddish, was the language of the new school and Yiddish literature was one of its primary tools."⁴²

As the core of the school's curricula, Yiddish was taught as a living language. The Peretz School offered courses in Yiddish language and literature, composition, folklore and singing, and Jewish and general history, with Yiddish stressed over Hebrew, and Jewish culture over religion. Eventually, both Hebrew and the study of Jewish tradition were introduced into the curriculum.⁴³ The Jewish People's School curriculum was developed to educate students about the Jewish past and present, the former through Bible and history study, and the latter through modern Yiddish and Hebrew culture. Emphasis was placed on speaking, reading, and writing both languages, and the works of both Hebrew and Yiddish writers were studied through the advanced level.⁴⁴ With the exception of Hebrew language, literature, or Bible classes, Yiddish served as the primary language in both the Peretz School and the Jewish People's Schools during the interwar period; it was the language spoken between teacher and student, the language in which history was taught and current events discussed. Yiddish literature occupied a central position in the secular Jewish schools from the very beginning. A variety of key works were used in the development of a Jewish national consciousness: Yiddish renditions of traditional Jewish literature from Hebrew or Aramaic, in particular Biblical texts and Jewish legends; Yiddish translations of world literature; and poetry, prose, and drama by both classic and contemporary Yiddish writers. Meanwhile, the high school students discussed older as well as contemporary Yiddish literature at the advanced level. All students were encouraged to engage with Yiddish literary texts in classroom discussions, in recitations at public events,

and through personal contact with Yiddish writers. The curricula also promoted Yiddish composition and encouraged students to develop their skills as writers.

Montreal's secular Jewish school movement evolved as a holistic endeavour that embraced the wider Yiddish community, organizing educational opportunities for all its members and cultivating relationships with other organizations. As in traditional Jewish life, secular Jewish education was understood as spanning from cradle to grave, and the schools offered a variety of learning opportunities for adults, including lectures, courses, and study groups. In 1924, for example, the Jewish People's School sponsored a women's *leyenkrayz* (reading group) that held meetings at which the schools' regular teachers acquainted members with Yiddish literature.⁴⁵ The relationship between the schools and the broader community was reciprocal. Support organizations composed of members of the wider community who were devoted to the ideals of the secular schools helped to ensure their ongoing survival and success. The Jewish People's School, for example, cultivated community support via its board of directors, founded in 1922, which was active in stabilizing the schools' finances, instituting an annual fundraising campaign, and promoting the schools in the wider community. Similarly, the Elter fareyn (Parents' Association) raised funds and popularized the ideals of the schools among the local Jewish population.⁴⁶ In addition, the schools established working relationships with other Jewish organizations in the Montreal community, notably the Canadian Jewish Congress and the Vaad Ha-Ir.⁴⁷ The schools formed an integral part of a commitment to furthering learning and instilling a given set of ideals in children, their parents, and the wider community.

To a certain extent, Montreal secular Yiddish schools fit the "school as *shul*" (*shul* meaning synagogue as well as school) model set up by Alex Pomson and Randal F. Schnoor in their study of twenty-first-century Jewish education in North America. They suggest that with the Jewish school taking on new roles in an increasingly post-denominational Jewish society, Jewish education had come to replace the synagogue as the nexus of Jewish identity for many adult Jews. The Montreal secular Yiddish schools in the early decades of the twentieth century filled comparable functions for pedagogues, parents, students, and community supporters in serving as a focal point for Jewish activity. However, there were significant underlying differences. Pomson and Schnoor find that the Jewish schools in their contemporary

study assumed the greatest significance for those with limited Jewish backgrounds.⁴⁸ In contrast, those members of the Montreal Jewish community involved with the the Peretz and Jewish People's Schools, who largely came from traditional Jewish backgrounds, were forging new expressions of Jewishness in a modern world. Their commitment to the secular Jewish schools stemmed not from a wish to learn more about Judaism but rather from a desire to supplant religious observance and reinvent Jewishness in a secular, revolutionary guise with Yiddish at the core.

Public events organized by the schools were well attended and brought together diverse individuals from the Yiddish cultural community. These programs, which included graduation ceremonies, concerts, and special events, routinely took place at the Monument National Theatre and featured poetry recitations by students, excerpts from Yiddish plays, and music. Peretz School graduate Shulamis Yelin (1913–2002) describes one such event in a short story that she composed many years later:

One wintry Sunday night I found myself with my parents and other members of the family in the Monument National Theatre on St. Lawrence Boulevard, The Main. We were attending the graduation exercises of the Jewish *Peretz shul*, the afternoon Yiddish school then known as the Natsionale Radicale Shul [*sic*]. The auditorium was packed with parents, friends, and well-wishers, and an extravaganza had been mounted for the occasion – a musical rendition of Joseph and his Brethren ... From the thread that started spinning on that magical night at the Monument National Theatre, I began to weave a Coat of Many Colours of my own.⁴⁹

These events were publicized in the *Adler* in announcements as well as in subsequent reviews that discussed them in terms of their wider cultural merit.

The schools embodied an ongoing experiential approach to learning that encompassed writing creatively in Yiddish, performing Yiddish theatre and music, going on outings to local parks, playing sports, and engaging with local as well as international Yiddish cultural activists. The secular Jewish schools deliberately fostered connections between their students and the wider Yiddish cultural world and created opportunities for the students to interact with Yiddish literati

in a meaningful way. Principals and teachers invited international Yiddish figures into the classroom, and the leaders of the schools organized celebrations of milestones in the cultural world. For example, guests of the Peretz School during the 1920s and 1930s included poet Aaron Glants-Leyeles, novelist Sholem Asch, playwrights Peretz Hirschbein and David Pinski, literary critic Sh. Nigér, and ideologue Chaim Zhitlowsky.⁵⁰ Students were imbued with pride in their Jewish heritage, a feeling of connectedness with their history and the contemporary Jewry world, and a sense of identification with oppressed people everywhere. Further, the schools instilled in their students a strong sense of responsibility, rooted in Labour Zionist ideals, to help eliminate injustice and build a better present and future for all of humanity. Looking back on the first twenty-five years of Montreal's Jewish People's School, Shloime Wiseman discusses the motivation behind the desire in the schools for wider community involvement:

We have placed great stress on adult education – of the parents, teachers, school board members, and graduates. We realize that the school is only one of several agencies engaged in the education of the child ... We were also anxious to make the community realize that education is a community-wide duty and responsibility ... We take advantage of every opportunity to bring together parents, children, teachers, and school workers for communal educational experiences. We have succeeded in educating and training a large group of Jewish men and women who are sensitive to the demands of our educational milieu. They are now fully qualified to carry the burden of modern Jewish education and are participating in social, cultural, and civic areas of activity.⁵¹

THE ACTIVITIES OF SCHOOL-SPONSORED CLUBS AND PUBLICATIONS

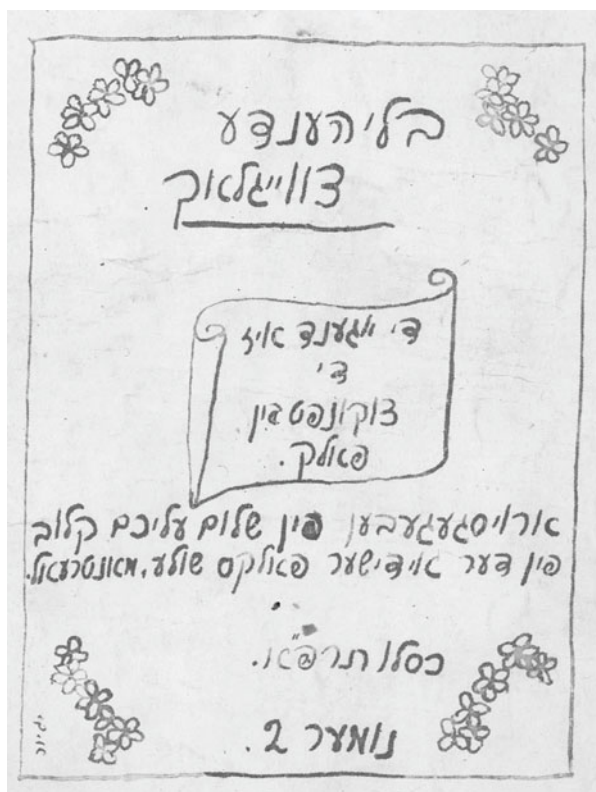
Montreal's secular Jewish schools encouraged their students to engage actively with Yiddish culture beyond the classroom. For example, they sponsored student clubs whose activities centred on Yiddish and included reading and discussion of Yiddish literature, the creation of original writing in Yiddish, and encounters with Yiddish cultural figures. The first Jewish People's School club was formed in 1916 as the Mendele klub (Mendele Club) and was renamed the Sholem



Picnic of the Sholem Aleichem Club, Bout-de-l'Île, Montreal, summer 1925. Shloime Wiseman sits in second row, far left. 85-281-45, JPL Photograph Collection, Jewish People's Schools, Jewish Public Library Archives, Montreal



Sholem Aleichem Club, 1932-33. 85-282-06, JPL Photograph Collection, Jewish People's Schools, Jewish Public Library Archives, Montreal



Cover of *Bliende tsvayglakh*, published by the Sholem Aleichem Club, December 1921. The cover reads: "The youth is the future of the people." Jewish Public Library, Montreal

aleykhem klub (Sholem Aleichem Club) in 1919.⁵² By 1933, the Jewish People's School boasted six children's clubs whose activities included discussions of current events, theatre productions, field trips, and the publication of journals featuring children's writing. The clubs also disseminated international Yiddish children's journals, such as the Vilna *Grininke bey melekh* [Little Green Trees] and the New York *Kinder zhurnal* [Children's Journal].⁵³ In the 1920s, the Peretz School sponsored a club named for popular Yiddish novelist Jacob Dinezon (1856–1919), and in 1930 a club for Peretz School graduates was founded under the name *Undzer klub* (Our Club). With impetus coming from both the school leadership and the student body, the *raison d'être* for the clubs was the active promotion of Yiddish language, literature, and

culture outside of the classroom. The clubs worked in tandem with the schools to promote direct contact between students and the international Yiddish literary world. In 1927, for example, a semi-annual joint gathering of the Sholem aleykhem klub and the Yaakov dinezon klub sponsored a guest appearance by David Pinski, who spoke with students and read from his work. In 1930, Sholem Asch passed an afternoon with students in the Yaakov dinezon klub, while older students spent the evening conversing with Peretz Hirschbein.⁵⁴

A core activity of the clubs was to publish journals to provide a forum for Yiddish student writing. These local publications formed part of a larger body of journals published through the secular Yiddish schools to showcase student writing, as distinguished from a body of Yiddish children's journal published for students.⁵⁵ Beginning in 1920, the Sholem aleykhem klub began to publish a journal called *Bliende tsvayglakh* [Blooming Branches]. In 1923, after five hectographed issues, the journal was typeset and printed on an annual basis through the end of the decade, usually in honour of the Jewish People's School graduation. A majority of the contents were in Yiddish, with the final few pages devoted to Hebrew composition. The journal represented a self-conscious effort on the part of school educators to foster literary activity among the students. The bilingual English-Yiddish curriculum outline in the *Shul Prospectus* of 1926 describes its "School magazine":

A very efficient way of encouraging and helping to develop such that have any particular inclination in the literary field, is the annual School magazine, published for the last six years under the name of "*Bliende Tsvayglakh*."

These contain the choice literary works of the Senior as well as of the Junior pupils, in the form of poetry, short stories, essays, literary criticisms, characteristics, humourous descriptions, narratives, etc.

The magazines have been receiving a great deal of attention from the literateurs and literary critics, especially as several of the pupils contributing to the magazine really show evidence of marked literary activity [*sic*].⁵⁶

Bliende tsvayglakh served as a source of pride and validation for the Jewish People's School. For example, it was included in the 1924 *Folksshuln bukh* [People's School Book], published in honour of the school's tenth anniversary, in which student writing followed essays



Cover of the July 1935 edition of the *Shule klängen* journal, published in honour of the graduation of class 6-B of the Jewish People's School. Jewish Public Library Archives, Montreal

by Jewish People's School educators and theorists.⁵⁷ In subsequent years, *Bliende tsveyglakh* appeared annually in handsome typeset editions.⁵⁸ In 1929, Shloime Wiseman outlined the significance of the journal: "[*Bliende tsveyglakh* was] received with enthusiasm by school supporters and friends as well as the wider circles across the country. These journals reflect the character and the growth of the schools. The journals are also an important means of supporting the study of composition and developing the literary abilities of the school's students."⁵⁹ Other journals issued by the Jewish People's School clubs followed. In 1929 the Sholem aleykhem klub published several issues of *Bay undz: Khoydeshlekher buletin* [Among Us: Monthly Bulletin].⁶⁰ The typewritten, mimeographed journal reflects a decidedly Labour Zionist orientation, expressing, for example, solidarity with workers in the Land of Israel. It includes club news as well as original Yiddish writing and essays on literary topics by the students, notably a series of essays on Soviet Yiddish writer Dovid Bergelson.

Like the Jewish People's School, the Peretz School sponsored the publication of a series of Yiddish student journals. *Yidishe kinder* [Yiddish/Jewish Children], a journal published in honour of the school's graduating classes in the 1920s and 1930s, featured poetry, prose, and essays on literary subjects from students in all grade levels.

The journal reflects the engagement of the Yiddish schools with an international Yiddish literary community. Its issues contain greetings from Sh. Niger, Mani Leib, and David Pinski to mark the school's graduations.⁶¹

Student writing also occupied a place of prominence in other school publications. For example, the second half of the 1934 *Folksshuln bukh*, issued to honour the school's twentieth anniversary, was devoted to student writing. The 1935 *Shule klangen* [School Sounds], a journal issued in conjunction with the Jewish People's School graduation, featured a variety of original writing in Yiddish and Hebrew penned by students in the classroom or in their clubs. Wiseman's introductory remarks express his hopes for the journal: "We believe that the Jewish People's Schools will henceforth make an effort to publish these types of journals more frequently, and in formal, printed form, because it is our conviction that the appearance of these types of journals encourage the children to write and help to develop their talents of expression."⁶²

While school activists repeatedly emphasized the importance of such journals to promote expression and creativity, another factor in their publication – and in Yiddish club activity as a whole – was far more pragmatic. The journals embodied an effort to forestall linguistic attrition of Yiddish among the student body and, in the process, within the wider community. As Yiddish gained in stature as a cultural movement, it was declining as an everyday spoken language. Thus its promotion required increasingly deliberate efforts among pedagogues as well as students. To this end, clubs were founded outside of the secular Jewish schools system. Yankev Zipper describes the goals of one club in a diary entry from 1926:

Last night [school and community activist] Mrs. (Sarah) Zucker [*sic*] called me to her home. A children's club has been organized, children from 10 to 12 years old, a few attend Jewish schools. Interestingly, they have sworn to speak Yiddish amongst themselves. They want to help the Jewish schools in Poland. They asked me to come to their meeting and tell them about the situation there, help them choose a name, and advise them about future activities. So I sat with the children, told them stories which seemed to please them. They sat with their mouths open, evidently quite happy. They said (following my suggestion): We are Jewish children, and therefore our club should be called simply

“Jewish children” (*Yidishe kinder*). Our aim is to speak and read Yiddish.⁶³

The impetus for extracurricular efforts to promote active Yiddish use thus stemmed from adults as well as from younger members of the community. Yiddish offered a viable vehicle for cultural continuity that was intergenerational, even as the fluency of the community’s children showed signs of deterioration.

Although Yiddish was the language used in the home by most of the pupils of the secular Jewish schools, the student body was increasingly raised in Canada, with a majority in the supplementary schools educated in the English-language Protestant schools. Despite the lofty ideals and far-reaching efforts of school activists, English came to serve as the daily language of much of the student body during the interwar period. Moreover, Modern Hebrew assumed an increasingly prominent role within the schools as a communicative Jewish language. However, this did not spell the end of Yiddish within the school curricula; instead, it marked a transformation in the way Yiddish was taught.

EFFORTS OF THE SECULAR YIDDISH SCHOOLS TO COMBAT ATTRITION

Maintaining the core place of Yiddish as a communicative language in Montreal’s secular Jewish schools posed a challenge almost from the beginning. With the anglicization of the Canadian Jewish community, retaining the central position of Yiddish in the schools became increasingly problematic. Pedagogues faced growing hurdles in creating a Yiddish-centred environment for an increasingly English-speaking student population. However, the schools in Montreal did not experience the problems noted in the larger American Jewish centres during the same period: the transient nature of the student body, a lack of parental commitment, and the absence of a coherent educational program.⁶⁴ The primary challenges in the Montreal supplementary schools were rooted in the fact that the students, a growing proportion of whom were Canadian born and/or attended English-language schools during the day, treated English as their vernacular. Even in the all-day schools, Yiddish increasingly became a second/foreign language.

School activists responded to these challenges by introducing new mechanisms to promote Yiddish. As Wiseman recalls in his memoirs,

during the 1920s teachers at the Jewish People's School struggled to teach Yiddish to a group of students who, even during the first decades of the school's existence, had a basic knowledge of the language and could speak with relative ease but were reluctant to speak it with one another. Proactive steps were taken to remedy the preference for English over Yiddish in the student body. A teachers' meeting in 1924 determined that students must be strongly encouraged to speak Yiddish at all times. Wiseman recounts:

I recall going around in the hallways or in the yard at recess and telling the students, "*redt yidish* (speak Yiddish)." This went on for several years until we got sick of it and concluded that it was pointless. This did not, however, cause a deterioration in the instruction of Yiddish in class; rather, the requirement that children speak Yiddish was limited to the classroom during interactions with the teacher, answering questions, or recounting the contents of a paragraph. Much emphasis was placed on writing. Composition class came to occupy an important place.⁶⁵

Despite the development of increasingly sophisticated Yiddish pedagogical approaches, educators were forced to acknowledge the alarming decline in the level of Yiddish among the student body. In a 1934 discussion of the study of Yiddish language and literature in the Jewish People's School, vice-principal Shimshen Dunsky remarks:

True, the study of Yiddish in the schools is becoming increasingly difficult as more and more native-born children are entering the schools. For many of them, Yiddish is almost a *seyfer-hakhosem* [difficult or impossible to decipher ancient Hebrew text], and the Yiddish that comes out of their mouths is far less natural and fluent than fifteen or twenty years earlier when the child was either himself an immigrant or lived in an immigrant environment. For this reason, greater and greater efforts must be made to make the Yiddish word come alive in the mouth of the child.⁶⁶

It increasingly became the purview of the teacher to create a living Yiddish environment in the classroom, to keep Yiddish language and literature meaningful to the students, and to make the study of Yiddish a natural part of the students' lives. As part of these efforts, school pedagogues produced innovative educational materials. For



Cover of *Kinder klangen*, 1946. Jewish Public Library, Montreal

example, in 1931 Shloime Wiseman compiled a three-volume anthology of Yiddish literature titled *Dos vort* [The Word] for use in the Yiddish schools. Similarly, Jewish People's School teacher and writer Abraham Samuel Sacher published a popular work of Jewish history in 1935 titled *Yidishe geshikhte in fragn un entfers* [Jewish History in Questions and Answers], based on the writing of historian Simon Dubnow; a revised edition, published in 1938, was co-authored with Shimshen Dunskey. These texts and many others produced by teachers locally as well as abroad were integrated into the curriculum.

The Second World War marked the realization of vital goals for the activists behind Montreal's network of secular Jewish schools. Both the Peretz School and the Jewish People's School were offering full-day parochial education in addition to their supplementary schools, enrolment was stable, and each school had erected its own buildings.

Further, in 1941, Shloime Wiseman's vision of a lasting school-sponsored Yiddish journal came to fruition. *Kinder klängen* [Children's Sounds], a journal produced by the Jewish People's School high school and Grininke beymelekh clubs, appeared regularly between 1941 and 1946.⁶⁷ This typewritten, mimeographed, and hand-illustrated Yiddish-English-Hebrew journal featured editorials, world news, school news, sports, articles, stories, poems, and greetings. Readers and subscribers included current and former students, school activists, and members of the wider community. *Kinder klängen* fulfilled the hopes of local Yiddish cultural activists. J.I. Segal called it "a true children's journal."⁶⁸

Kinder klängen reflects the ongoing involvement of the secular Jewish schools with an international Yiddish literary community. The 1942 issue reproduces lengthy greetings of a student to poet Avrom Reisen in honour of his visit to the school, as well as student articles on Reisen and his works, all in Yiddish.⁶⁹ A subsequent "David Pinski number" contains several items dedicated to his writing, including an original student play based on Pinski's 1926 play *Der eybiker yid* [The Eternal Jew].⁷⁰ At the same time, *Kinder klängen* also reflects the fact that, by the 1940s, Yiddish was a second language to a vast majority of students. Most visibly, the Yiddish writing is notably weaker and more anglicized than it is in the school publications of the 1920s and 1930s. While, as a fifth grade student remarks, "the journal gives the children an opportunity to write their own stories and poems,"⁷¹ the published pieces are generally short and simple in style and content. Those involved with the journal acknowledged the limitations of the publication: in a letter to the editor, Segal refers to the journal as a necessary tribune for the children, regardless of their level.⁷² Thus, the journal reflects a shift in priorities from fostering Yiddish literary activity to the preservation of Yiddish within the student community. In the end, it was precisely a recognized decline of Yiddish worldwide that made the appearance of *Kinder klängen* so significant. A reprinted letter from an educational labour organization in Palestine enthusiastically praises *Kinder klängen*: "The Yiddish is good, really good! And if there is no hidden hoax, it indicates that the students are coming out of the school with a very good Yiddish!"⁷³ During this period, with the Yiddish heartland in Europe in jeopardy, the appearance of a Yiddish journal authored by children was greeted as nothing less than a miracle.

A SECOND GENERATION OF YIDDISH WRITERS

As part of their far-reaching efforts, the secular Jewish schools produced Canadian-raised Yiddish writers who embodied the community's hopes to perpetuate Yiddish creativity into the future. While comprising a mere handful of published authors, these young people marked a significant accomplishment in the New Country. During the same period, the United States – with its much larger pool of Yiddish immigrants – produced only two published American-raised Yiddish writers: poets Rukhl Fishman (1935–1984) and Hasye Cooperman (1907–1991).

H.M. Caiserman's 1934 *Yidishe dikhter in kanade* includes three young Yiddish poets who were products of the secular Jewish schools: Yitskhak Fogel (1912–1973), Rivka Rosenblatt (Ruth Rubin), and Shulamis Borodensky (Shulamis Yelin). All three were native Yiddish speakers who were raised in Montreal and attended the secular Jewish schools to supplement their daytime studies in the English-Protestant schools. They published extensively in the school journals and were active in the school clubs. All formed part of a group of young, locally raised Yiddish poets who validated the community's goal of establishing a viable Yiddish cultural life in the New World. However, in the final analysis, these poets embodied the seemingly inevitable trend away from Yiddish as a communicative and creative language, despite its institutionalization in the schools.

Born in Pinsk, Podolia, Yitskhak Fogel settled in Montreal with his family at the age of nine. He began to write Yiddish poetry as a student at the Jewish People's School and was among the first contributors to *Bliende tsvayglakh*, where his work appeared beginning in 1923. His verse and prose was subsequently published in the Sholem aleykhem klub journal, *Bay undz*, and the *Folksshul bukh*. Through to the end of the 1920s, Fogel also contributed poetry to Yiddish newspapers such as the *Adler* and the Toronto *Yidisher zhurnal*, as well as to the Anglo-Jewish press in Canada and the United States. Fogel's verse, with its nature and national motifs, bears the stamp of his Jewish People's School education. Caiserman makes an explicit connection between the emphasis on the Land of Israel in school curriculum and the nationalist motifs in Fogel's poetry.⁷⁴ Fogel left Montreal to attend New York's Yidisher lerer seminar and, according to Caiserman, ceased to produce Yiddish poetry after 1929.⁷⁵

Bessarabia-born Rivka Royzenblat settled in Montreal with her family in 1910 and was educated in English-language Protestant schools and in the Peretz School. She began to write Yiddish poems and essays on literary subjects, which appeared in the Montreal Yiddish children's journals *Yidishe kinder*, *Grininke beymelakh*, and the *Kinder tsaytung*.⁷⁶ After graduating and relocating to New York City to study education and, subsequently, music, she was encouraged by David Pinski to continue writing in Yiddish. Her poetry appeared in the *Tsukunft* literary journal as well as in various Canadian Yiddish periodicals. In 1929, Royzenblat published a well-received volume of Yiddish lyrical poetry called *Lider* [Poems]. The introduction to the volume, authored by renowned New York literary critic Sh. Niger, draws a link between Royzenblat's poetry and the modern education she received in the secular Jewish schools. Niger refers to the *Lider* as "the first collection by a Yiddish poetess who grew up and was raised in Canada ... This is the first quiet gift to Yiddish literature from the Yiddish schools in America, a gift that will be accepted with joy."⁷⁷ Royzenblat's book was also celebrated in Montreal; the family of the Yiddish activist Leyzer Zuker organized a gathering in honour of the first book to be published by a Peretz School graduate, filling their home with members of the local community, including many of the school's teachers and graduates.⁷⁸ After 1930, aside from isolated poems in the *Adler*, Rivke Royzenblat ceased to publish Yiddish verse. However, the influence of her education in the secular Jewish schools is evidenced in her career as a celebrated Yiddish folklorist; she devoted herself to the study of Jewish folksongs, which she collected and performed under the name of Ruth Rubin.⁷⁹ While Rubin wrote in English, the primary language of her performances and scholarship was Yiddish. Writing in the 1960s, Melekh Ravitch referred to her as "the first flower ... of Yiddish literature on the American continent."⁸⁰

Shulamis Borodensky's experiences reflect a later and more abrupt shift away from Yiddish. She attended the English-language Protestant schools and was enrolled in the Peretz School (then the National Radical School) afternoon school. As a student she published extensively in the *Yidishe kinder* journal and was active in her class's Yiddish club.⁸¹ In her *Shulamis: Stories from a Montreal Childhood*, a semi-autobiographical collection of short fiction, she describes her enthusiasm at being enrolled at the Peretz School, characterizing her experience there as joyful and deeply meaningful: "A new dimension was added to my life."⁸² More concretely, Yelin suggests

that this experience helped to form her as a poet, with her “literary bent, which had been inculcated at home [being] strengthened in the Peretz School.”⁸³ Later, Yelin’s announcement as a young woman during the Depression-era that she wanted to become a writer elicited the followed reply from her mother: “All those writers you met at Shule! The Shule put such ideas in your head.”⁸⁴ Yelin went on to become a teacher in the English-Protestant school system, and after decades of internal struggle over which language to choose as a writer, she made a conscious decision to write in English. For Yelin, the choice was not an easy one; in the preface to her first book of poetry, *Seeded in Sinai* (1975), she wrote: “The tug of war which had torn me apart in my adolescence, ‘Shall I write in Yiddish or in English?’ had cut off my ability to write at all.” In the 1960s, the conflict was resolved after a near fatal accident: she opted for English.⁸⁵ By this time, writing in English certainly opened up a far wider audience than Yiddish could.

An expression of active engagement with Yiddish in the cadre of Canadian-raised published poets produced by the secular Jewish schools continued into the post-1945 period in the work of Aaron Krishtalka. His experience shares many of the same characteristics as the poets discussed above, despite a gap of almost a generation. Krishtalka was raised in a strongly Yiddishist home where “Yiddish was life itself.” As a student in the leftist UJPO-affiliated Morris Winchevsky parochial school in Montreal, where his uncle, Sholem Shtern, was principal,⁸⁶ Krishtalka was immersed in Yiddish culture, in particular literature. His public career as a Yiddish poet began when he was only nine, with the publication of two lyrical poems in the New York children’s journal *Yungvarg* [Young Ones]. Soon afterwards, his poetry appeared in holiday editions of the *Adler*. On the occasion of Aaron Krishtalka’s bar mitzvah in 1953, his father, Yiddish cultural activist Sholem Krishtalka (1905–1977), undertook the publication of a volume of his verse: *Gut morgn dir, velt!* [Good Morning to You, World]. New York poet Zishe Weinper’s introduction to the book characterizes Krishtalka as a gifted young poet who embodied the hope for the future of Yiddish.⁸⁷ Indeed, Krishtalka was heralded as the harbinger of a new generation of Yiddish poets. Sholem Shtern’s introductory remarks in the book express the literary community’s hopes for Yiddish continuity through education: “The appearance of Aaron Krishtalka’s *Gut morgn dir, velt* is an encouragement for all of us. [It is] an indication that the miracle of new, young talents on local ground is possible. It reveals the value of a real, progressive Jewish education. It is true

that Aaron Krishtalka has experienced an atmosphere conducive to creating in Yiddish in the house of his parents, but it is also true that he is through and through a product of the progressive Yiddish Morris Winchevsky Schools, where he received a thorough, progressive, Jewish education."⁸⁸ Sh. Niger's review of the book in the New York Yiddish press stated that Krishtalka's poems "awaken in us the hope for a new generation of young Canadian Yiddish writers."⁸⁹ Krishtalka's own feelings about his role in the future of Yiddish, however, are marked by ambivalence. He recalls not identifying with the rhetoric about his family's position in the "*kiem* [future existence and survival] of Yiddish."⁹⁰ His perception of the gap between the ideal and reality in the post-1945 period reflects the tenacity of the Yiddishist vision that fuelled Yiddish literary and cultural activity in Montreal. A Yiddish cultural milieu persisted even as Yiddish life in Europe lay in ruins and as North American Jewish youth were jettisoning the language of their parents in favour of English as their natural means of expression and creativity. Krishtalka continued to write in Yiddish into his thirties, contributing poetry, literary essays, and articles on secular Yiddish culture and other themes to the international Yiddish press. By the same token, he went on to study philosophy and history, and became a professor at Montreal's Dawson College, with minimal involvement in the Yiddish world.

The phenomenon of the second-generation Yiddish poets was qualitatively and quantitatively different from that of the first immigrant generation. The second-generation writers generally ceased to publish in Yiddish as young adults. Once they left the nurturing environment of the secular Jewish schools and entered the wider English-speaking world, their careers as Yiddish poets dwindled. While they were hailed as the new generation of Yiddish writers, one can characterize them as exceptions rather than as part of a larger movement of Yiddish literary creativity in the second generation. An even more recent exception is Leybl Botwinik (1959–), a graduate of the Jewish People's and Peretz Schools who authored a Yiddish science fiction novel called *Geheyime shlikhes* [Secret Mission] (1980). He is exceptional as one of the very few writers born after the Holocaust to publish a secular Yiddish book.⁹¹

If the dream of Yiddish culture expressed itself in the production of a second generation of locally raised Yiddish writers, then the secular Jewish schools succeeded. The schools certainly served to prolong the life of Yiddish as a communicative and creative language on Canadian soil. However, as a group, graduates of the Jewish People's School and

Peretz School did not continue to publish in Yiddish in their adult years, and those who did make their literary debuts in Yiddish ultimately turned to English. Without the environment of the schools to foster it, a Yiddish-centred cultural world became increasingly difficult to sustain.

CONCLUSION

Although the wide-ranging efforts of the secular Jewish schools were ultimately not enough to counteract the forces of linguistic acculturation, they did bring sustained vitality to Yiddish language and culture for successive generations. Montreal's secular Jewish schools faced different external and internal forces from those experienced in Jewish centres in the neighbouring United States. There, factors behind a decline of the secular Yiddish schools included a collective exodus from densely populated Jewish neighbourhoods with the suburbanization of the 1950s and 1960s, the increasingly synagogue-centred identification of Judaism, and the increasing prominence of Modern Hebrew and Israeli culture in Jewish education. In contrast, Montreal's Jewish People's and Peretz Schools moved uptown with an acculturating Yiddish community, for whom the *yidishkayt* of their Ashkenazi civilization remained a strong ethnic identity, and continued to teach Yiddish alongside Modern Hebrew. Further, the schools were bolstered in the post-1945 period by the arrival of a large population of Yiddish-speaking Holocaust survivors who revitalized the Peretz and People's Schools as teachers and supporters and who enrolled their own children. Montreal's secular Jewish schools have remained on the forefront of the ongoing promotion of Yiddish as a living, creative force for almost a century. During the period 1905–45, using innovative techniques, a core of ideologues and pedagogues engaged the wider community to perpetuate Yiddish as a living culture among younger generations for whom *mame loshn* represented less and less of a vernacular as the years progressed. Unlike the practice in so many of North America's secular Jewish schools, the commitment to Yiddish remains an integral element of Montreal's Jewish People and Peretz Schools, although how it is expressed today is vastly different and how it will be expressed in the future remains to be seen.⁹²

THE MONTREAL YIDDISH THEATRE

THEATRE MARKS THE ONLY AREA OF YIDDISH CULTURAL activity that came into its own in Montreal after 1945. A tradition of modern, secular Yiddish theatre emerged in Europe and the United States in the second half of the nineteenth century and expanded rapidly in centres worldwide during the first half of the twentieth. As with the popular press and literature, the creation of an indigenous Yiddish tradition of Montreal theatre lagged behind larger Yiddish centres, notably nearby New York City, and was heavily influenced by them. However, unlike these areas, the development of Yiddish theatre was also linked to local trends in French Canadian culture. This chapter examines the Yiddish theatre in Montreal in its development from an overwhelmingly imported enterprise to one that was distinct and locally produced. In particular, it spotlights the establishment of Canada's first permanent home-grown Yiddish theatre studio: the Yidishe teater grupe (Yiddish Theatre Group, YTEG or YTG), an amateur theatre studio that functioned during the Second World War under the leadership of Soviet-trained actress ChayeLe Grober. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of Yiddish theatre after 1945, which saw the establishment of a permanent community-supported troupe in the Dora Wasserman Yiddish Theatre.

OVERVIEW OF THE YIDDISH THEATRE

Modern Yiddish theatre emerged in tandem with other areas of secular culture. Traditional Jewish observance – with its liturgy, ritual, and accompanying melodies; the *khazn* (cantor) and the *magid* (preacher); the wedding ceremony with its *badkhn* (jester) and *klezmerim* (musicians) – is inherently performative. However, rabbinical prohibitions on theatre largely limited its pre-modern development to specific spheres.¹ Carnavalesque plays staged during the festival of Purim, for example, evolved into a tradition of the *purimshpil*, a staged enactment of the Biblical Book of Esther, which dates to the sixteenth century.² Two developments in modern Yiddish theatre emerged in the wake of the secularization and Europeanization of the Haskalah: didactical dramas authored by *maskilim*, such as Shloyme Ettinger (1803–1856), and the performances of itinerant singers and actors, such as the Broder zinger (Broder Singers), who were active in Rumania in the 1860s. Public performances of secular Yiddish plays date to the mid-nineteenth century in major Jewish centres such as Warsaw. Romanian *maskil* Avrom Goldfaden, who had played the lead role in an 1863 student performance of Ettinger's play, *Serkele*, introduced a new chapter in Yiddish theatre by creating a professional theatre troupe in 1876 and authoring the first Yiddish plays geared for a live, ticket-buying audience. His dozens of musical comedies and national historical epics came to form the basis for the modern Yiddish theatre repertoire.³ His Romanian theatre troupe toured across Eastern Europe and spawned other companies that also became wildly popular in America among the burgeoning Yiddish immigrant population. While the violent aftermath of the 1881 assassination of the Russian tsar prompted a mass Jewish exodus, it was the ensuing 1883 imperial ban on Yiddish theatre that induced actors and playwrights – including Goldfaden – to emigrate. From the outset, modern Yiddish theatre was a travelling venture, with its plays, productions, and performers – its “vagabond stars” – in continuous motion across the Yiddish-speaking world.⁴ Like the enterprise of modern Yiddish culture as a whole, theatre was highly mobile, especially during the interwar period.

From the 1880s through the First World War, the epicentre of Yiddish theatre was New York's Second Avenue. With a ready infrastructure of popular entertainment and teeming working-class immigrant masses, the city was a hub of popular Yiddish theatre culture. The repertoire was dominated by light fare, notably melodramas

and fictional accounts of the American immigrant experience, much of it labelled *shund* (vulgar theatre) by theatre critics.⁵ In the 1890s, Russian-born playwright Jacob Gordin, heralded as a reformer of Yiddish theatre, was authoring realist dramas that became classics of the Yiddish stage. After the turn of the twentieth century, New York City served as the primary producer of – and trend-setter for – world Yiddish theatre, as both American actors and American plays provided commercially viable fare for European audiences.⁶

Yiddish theatre emerged concurrently in Eastern Europe. Although the tsarist bans hampered theatre production in Russia, these were unevenly enforced and ultimately failed to halt the development of Yiddish theatre culture.⁷ Outside of Tsarist Russia, itinerant companies staged plays by Goldfaden and others. An upswing in Yiddish theatrical activity after 1905 formed part of a wider expansion of secular Jewish culture. Members of the Jewish intelligentsia such as I.L. Peretz called for high art and Yiddish literary theatre and artistic merit in the place of *shund*. In 1905, Esther Rokhl Kaminska, known as “mother of the Yiddish theatre,” performed Gordin’s *Mirele efros* to wide critical acclaim in Warsaw and subsequently with the newly created Literarishe trupe (Literary Troupe); however, the troupe soon disbanded, as audiences continued to flock to popular American performances. Hazomir (The Nightingale), a literary and musical society founded by Peretz in 1905, piloted amateur theatre based on modern Yiddish literature. By the First World War, Hazomir had become an important cultural organization in Warsaw, with branches across Eastern Europe.

High-calibre Yiddish theatre began to flourish during and after the First World War, first in Europe and subsequently worldwide. An ensemble that became known as the Vilner trupe (Vilna Troupe, 1916–26), which performed literary plays by writers such as Sholem Asch, Peretz Hirschbein, and David Pinski to wide acclaim in Vilna before relocating to Warsaw, set the bar for dramatic Yiddish theatre. Influenced by the Moscow Art Theatre as well as by Russian literature, the group gained notoriety for its avant-garde productions of classics from the Yiddish and European theatre, causing a sensation with its stage premier of Sh. Ansky’s play *Der dybuk* [The Dybbuk] in 1920.⁸ The Moscow State Jewish Theatre (hereafter GOSSET, 1919–48), with roots in the pre-revolution period, offered a repertoire that included works of Sholem Aleichem with sets by Marc Chagall, plays by Goldfaden, adaptations of Shakespeare, and pieces by contemporary

Soviet Yiddish writers. Its principal actor was Shloyme Mikhoeles, who also served as director from 1929 until the theatre was dissolved by the Soviet authorities. The Moscow Art Theatre sponsored Habima [The Stage], which was founded in 1917 as the world's first professional Hebrew-language theatre company and gained an international reputation with productions such as *Der dybuk* and H. Leivick's *Der golem* [The Golem]. After the company split up in 1928, several of its members remained in New York City, while others reconfigured the company in Tel Aviv; the latter branch was named Israel's national theatre in 1958.⁹ Meanwhile in New York, Yiddish actor and director Maurice Schwartz was the driving force behind the Yiddish Art Theatre (1918–49), which staged acclaimed realist literary performances.

A unifying factor in modern Yiddish art theatre was the influence of the “Stanislavski Method,” a Russian school of acting that revolutionized the Western stage. Developed by Constantin Stanislavski, founder and director of the Moscow Art Theatre (established 1898), the “Method” involves multifaceted and rigorous theatre training, ranging from concentration and breathing exercises, to diction, to the study of literature, to the use of études and improvisations to “discover” a character. Actors trained in all aspects of performance in a cooperative setting, with the collective emphasized over the individual actors and the members of the ensemble alternating in leading roles. Studios to teach the system were set up internationally and included New York's radical workers' theatre, the Arbeter teater farband (Workers' Theatre Union, 1926–41, hereafter ARTEF), established under the auspices of the Communist daily *Morgan frayhayt* with the goal of educating the proletariat through theatre.¹⁰

Despite the economic instability associated with Yiddish dramatic theatre and a lack of permanent institutions to support it, performances attracted appreciative audiences in the larger centres, such as Warsaw, and in turn spawned amateur theatres in Jewish immigrant centres. For example, Argentina's Yiddish Society of Actors (founded in 1902) paved the way for similar groups across Latin America, while Young Argentina (founded in 1926) included a drama studio that performed serious works from the Yiddish and European repertoire.¹¹

Canadian Yiddish theatre was for the most part dominated by the United States until a wider decline in the 1930s shifted the focus to local amateur productions. Toronto offers an example of this general trend. The city housed a series of American theatre companies imported by impresarios during the height of Eastern European

immigration to Canada. In 1906, Galician-born immigrant Charles Pasternak (1874–1939) founded the People's Theatre, which featured primarily touring American troupes. Meanwhile, local Zionist groups sponsored successful performances by New York troupes headed by Jacob Adler, Boris Tomashevsky, and David Kessler. Pasternak was also behind the first purpose-built Yiddish theatre in Canada, the Standard, which seated twelve hundred and opened in 1922 to immediate success. However, in the 1930s, the Standard was struggling with the advent of radio, the acculturation of the Jewish immigrant population, and the Great Depression; by 1935, it had been converted into the Strand movie house. The Strand continued to be used for Jewish cultural events, benefits, and political rallies into the 1950s.¹² Touring companies continued to perform sporadically in Toronto until the outbreak of the Second World War, when Yiddish theatre became the purview of amateur troupes associated with local organizations. Montreal's Yiddish theatre history shares key elements with Toronto's. However, prior to 1945, Montreal also housed art theatre that drew an express ideological connection between locally produced theatre and the community, in particular in the YTEG.

HISTORICAL CONTEXTS AND THE RISE OF YIDDISH THEATRE IN MONTREAL

Early Yiddish theatre in Montreal is a story of imported troupes and amateur talent.¹³ Unlike the educational sphere, where Montreal was at the forefront of an international movement of secular Jewish education with Yiddish at its core, the city's permanent, locally produced Yiddish theatre did not begin to come into its own until the start of the Second World War. From the 1890s into the 1930s, Yiddish theatre in Montreal consisted almost entirely of popular productions brought in from New York alongside amateur productions that were small-scale and short-lived. At the end of this period, locally produced Yiddish theatre emerged as an important communal institution involving the local Yiddish intelligentsia, community institutions, and the local press. Home-grown Yiddish theatre ultimately became much more than popular entertainment: it formed part of Montreal's larger matrix of modern Yiddish culture.

Several factors were at play in the late blooming of the native tradition of Yiddish theatre in Montreal. As a minor Yiddish centre and an overwhelmingly immigrant community, Jewish Montreal lacked

resources to support its own professional Yiddish theatre. Meanwhile, trained talent was readily available in nearby New York City, and with less than a day of travel between the two cities, it could easily be imported. It was more efficient to bring troupes to Montreal for a season or rely on visiting performers with big names than to cultivate local theatre. During the nascent period of Yiddish culture in the interwar period, the local market could not sustain both local and imported commercial theatre. Unknown local actors could not compete with well-known stars.

Within Yiddish cultural life, newspapers, journals, and schools met specific local needs dictated by the reality of life in Montreal, while theatre had a very different *raison d'être*. The Yiddish press emerged out of a need for a local tribune for the growing community to express its particular interests. The absence of a system of non-denominational schools and public libraries together with a strong ideological impetus promoted the early development of a local Yiddish educational system as well as an accessible Jewish public library. In contrast, for most new immigrants during the early period, theatre was a cheap diversion after a long day at the factory; it was not a high priority in the cultural or political realm. Unlike Spanyolit theatre, which evolved in the late Ottoman Empire, popular Yiddish theatre was generally not centred on didactic functions.¹⁴ Moreover, as they anglicized, many Yiddish speakers turned to readily available entertainment in English or French. Initially, the local population was unable to sustain its own permanent theatre, especially not one with a literary or artistic focus.

YIDDISH THEATRE / QUÉBÉCOIS THEATRE

Theatre represented a rare point of engagement between Montreal's Yiddish and French Canadian cultures before 1945. The field of education offered no point of contact, as Jewish children were barred from the denominational French-Catholic school system. The realm of literature did not engender exchange between the two milieus owing to linguistic divides: few Jews spoke French well enough to read literature in that language, and even fewer French Catholics could read Yiddish. Whereas Yiddish writers such as B.G. Sack and H.M. Caiserman, who had good reading knowledge of French, perused French newspapers and books, and translated excerpts of what they read into Yiddish, the reverse did not hold true: Yiddish

literature remained the purview of a Jewish readership. This division was thematic as well as linguistic. Although the city's Yiddish writers depicted elements of French Canada in their work, these appear as landscape. It was not until after the Second World War that a Jewish writer would offer portrayals of the French Canadian experience, notably in A.M. Klein's groundbreaking volume of verse *The Rocking Chair and Other Poems* (1948).¹⁵ This book would form part of a wider post-war movement of rapprochement and was translated into French and distributed by the Canadian Jewish Congress to members of the French-Catholic community. Theatre, in contrast, offered a meeting place for several interconnected reasons. First, dramatic productions are inherently accessible; even an audience with no facility in a language can enjoy a performance, and indeed, theatre aficionados from the Yiddish and French communities attended one another's plays. Second, with both traditions simultaneously at their fledgling stage, the realm of theatre was conducive to experimentation and openness. Third, as discussed further below, Yiddish and French theatre were in close physical proximity in a shared venue. This encouraged personal contact between producers and casts, as well as audiences.

Nascent Yiddish and French Canadian theatre traditions evolved during overlapping periods of innovation. These theatres altered the homogeneity of the city's theatre scene, which, at the end of the nineteenth century, remained overwhelmingly English dominated – an estimate of only 12 per cent of all performances took place in French, and all of the city's theatres were English owned. Like the Yiddish theatre, modern French theatre in Montreal was a product of modernization dating to the mid-nineteenth century, when Quebec experienced its own “enlightenment” with the resumption of reciprocal travel between France and Quebec. After centuries of cultural isolation in a church-dominated society, this new channel of communication with France provided an educated Quebec elite with books, theatre, and ideas from one of the world's great hubs of modern European culture. Despite the claim of French Quebec's powerful Roman Catholic Church that theatre threatened the foundations of the French Canadian cultural tradition, the number of touring professional French theatre companies increased steadily.

Exposure to English theatre, tours by world-renowned French performers, and the establishment of amateur French theatre groups and literary societies helped to form a French theatre public. This theatre movement was bolstered by the establishment of the Monument

National, erected by the Société Saint Jean-Baptiste de Montréal in 1891–94 as a centre for French Canadian culture and a bastion against its assimilation into English society.¹⁶ The Monument National sponsored amateur French theatre, hosted professional performances, and was instrumental in training actors, encouraging the production of plays, and creating an audience for local French theatre. By the turn of the century, the Monument National Theatre faced competition from two other professional French-language theatres: the Théâtre des Variétés (founded in 1898) and the Théâtre National Français (founded in 1900), which promoted French works by Canadian playwrights while also presenting vaudeville and other lighter fare.¹⁷

French Canadian and Yiddish theatre faced similar challenges in Quebec. While the intelligentsia endorsed native literary theatre, the masses ultimately preferred imported popular productions. For example, in 1900 a journalist for *Les Débats* commented on the significance of amateur theatre in the Soirées de famille evenings held weekly at the Monument National Theatre: “Our compatriots in the Soirées de famille are not just amateurs playing theatre for fun ... Their hobby is beneficial for the people [*peuple*], who participate in Thursdays at the Monument National and are becoming so accustomed to the French repertoire that they will eventually support a troupe of professionals. In this manner, our amateurs, as pioneers, have attained something patriotic and national; they have participated in the intellectual development of the French Canadian people.”¹⁸ As discussed below, this rhetoric closely resembles the comments of theatre enthusiast and critic Israel Rabinovitch in his response to the creation of the YTEG Yiddish amateur theatre studio in the late 1930s: with community support, Montreal could make its mark as a centre of high-calibre Yiddish theatre and play a role in edifying the Jewish masses. However, despite the lofty goals of the purveyors and supporters of homegrown theatre in both communities, both French and Yiddish Montreal audiences continued to prefer performances brought in from abroad, notably from France and New York respectively. As in other minor Yiddish centres in the New World – and like its French Canadian counterpart – Montreal Yiddish theatre was sharply divided between popular imported performances and theatre that was locally produced by clubs and other amateur groups. In the first decades of the twentieth century, both French Canadian and Yiddish Canadian theatre were largely driven by imported trends, talent, and productions.

French Canadian and Yiddish theatre traditions evolved in the same physical space. Owing to financial necessity, the facilities of the Monument National were rented out not just to French Canadian groups, but also to other linguistic, religious, and ethnic groups, among them the Jewish community. Between 1894 and 1915, the primary occupants of the Monument were French Canadians, followed by Jews and the Irish. Located on Boulevard St-Laurent in the heart of the Jewish quarter, the Monument National would serve as the home of Yiddish theatre into the 1950s. It provided a venue not only for professional performances, but also for local amateur dramatic groups and community events, including Jewish school graduations and High Holiday services. At the same time, the Monument served as the headquarters for a range of Jewish non-profit social, cultural, and philanthropic organizations, including the Baron de Hirsch Institute and the Young Men's and Young Women's Hebrew Associations (formed in 1910, hereafter YM-YWHA). Over time, these facilities would also be shared with a variety of other French Canadian, Irish, Chinese, Italian, Syrian, and Haitian groups. Despite the strong anti-assimilationist and nationalist ethos of the Société Saint Jean-Baptiste, which was expressed in a campaign against the creation of a Jewish school board in the 1920s, its liberal directors were moved by the wider spirit of coexistence that characterized ethnic community life in Montreal.¹⁹ The arrangement between the Yiddish theatre and the Monument National resulted in cultural exchange between Yiddish and French speakers. Despite their linguistic differences, Yiddish and French Canadians attended each other's performances and their artists established lasting relationships. For example, Maurice Schwartz of New York's Yiddish Art Theatre established a friendship with French Canadian actor Gratien Gélinas (1909–1999).²⁰ These intercultural links would continue to strengthen in the 1960s and beyond.

Montreal's Yiddish theatre and French Canadian theatre came into their own after the 1930s, reaching fruition in the 1960s. Gélinas, a founding figure in French Canadian theatre, revolutionized Quebec theatre with his satirical reviews, *Les Fridolinades* (performed in 1938–46). His hugely popular shows caused a sensation by using Québécois – rather than Parisian – French and by offering vibrant portrayals of recognizably Canadian heroes. Under his direction, the Comédie canadienne theatre (founded in 1957) would cultivate the production of works by Canadian authors and lay the foundation for

the ongoing development of an indigenous French-language theatre tradition. During the same period, Chayele Grober's YTEG fostered the emergence of a nascent Canadian Yiddish theatre by training local talent and staging material created by Montreal writers. This tradition would crystallize through the creation of a permanent Yiddish theatre company in the 1960s under Dora Wasserman.

PROFESSIONAL AND AMATEUR YIDDISH THEATRE IN MONTREAL

From the beginnings of Eastern European Jewish settlement in Montreal, the city had Yiddish theatre in a rudimentary, privately organized form. Along with most minor Yiddish centres worldwide, Montreal did not produce original Yiddish theatre; rather, the city's audiences were consumers of imported performances and repertoire, especially popular fare consisting of musicals and melodramas. The first Yiddish stage in Montreal, the Royal Theatre, was located in the Jewish quarter and featured stock companies from New York City, with professional artists from abroad beginning to appear in the 1890s. Such performances, however, were initially sporadic.²¹ In 1896, New York Yiddish playwright Isidore Zolatorevsky (1874–1945) created an amateur troupe to perform Jacob Gordin's *Der yidisher kenig lir* [The Yiddish King Lear] at the Monument National Theatre. Despite the failure of this production, Zolatorevsky decided to form a permanent professional company at the Monument. That year, he brought Leyzer Mitnick (also known as Louis Mitnick, 1866–1915) from Boston to play the lead role in Goldfaden's *Shulamis*, followed by *Bar Kokhba*, filling the Monument National auditorium to capacity. With the support of local Jewish businessmen, Mitnick remained in Montreal to establish a permanent local Yiddish theatre company whose cast included American operetta star Clara Young. He was helped by the fact that, with a saturated market in New York, Yiddish actors toured regularly with ever-changing troupes. In this commercial enterprise, Mitnick managed American companies at several local halls until he eventually made the Monument National his theatre's permanent home.²²

Professional Yiddish theatre performances were sporadic in Montreal until 1905, when the continuous influx of new immigrants created a more stable consumer base. A number of theatre troupes appeared on stages throughout the Jewish quarter, offering a variety of Yiddish entertainment. Mitnick attracted renowned performers to

star in large-scale and widely advertised productions at the Monument National Theatre: Keni Lipzin, David Kessler, Rosa Karp, Boris Tomashevsky, Sigmund Mogulesko, and Esther Rokhl Kaminska. In 1913, Mitnick arranged for a stock company featuring New York's Nathan and Rose Goldberg to perform in Montreal for a full season at the Monument National. Meanwhile, a rival Yiddish theatre specialized in musical comedies at the nearby Atlantic Palace Theatre. Together these companies offered six to eight performances per week over a thirty-five- to forty-week season, with a repertoire mainly of popular musical comedies and melodramas. At the same time, Montreal vaudeville houses – the Gayety, King Edward Place, the Scala Yiddish Vaudeville and Moving Picture Theatre, the Gem Vaudeville, the Globe, the Melody, and the Variety Theatre – offered Yiddish burlesque, which some theatres alternated with the screening of films.²³

By the 1920s, local Yiddish theatre had become more stratified. At the top of the hierarchy was Mitnick's Monument National Theatre, with his son, Ike (Isaac), at the helm. For eight years following his father's death in 1915, Ike Mitnick managed a regular professional company by importing productions and stars from New York City.²⁴ From 1922 to 1934, the Yiddish theatre at the Monument National offered a full forty-week production season from September to mid-June. Mitnick and Louis Shochat, Mitnick's business partner after 1926, acted as local managers for New York productions, but subsequently they produced shows themselves, travelling to New York to select plays and hire a director and cast. Meanwhile, two professional Yiddish theatres at the Rialto and the Novelty Theatre also brought in stock companies from New York.²⁵ The 1924–25 season ushered in a new phase in the development of local Yiddish theatre with the establishment of a permanent professional company called the Yiddish Players. The troupe featured American actors Isidore Hollander, Jehiel Goldsmith, and Sara Skulnick, and two darlings of the Montreal Yiddish stage, Hannah Hollander and Menasha Skulnick. The Yiddish Players offered a season of art theatre in Montreal, and they caused a sensation with their 1924 performance of *Der dybuk*. In an essay on Yiddish theatre in Montreal penned some fifteen years later, Israel Rabinovitch asserts that the dissolution of the Yiddish Players marked the beginning of the decline of Yiddish theatre in the city and the end of permanent professional troupes.²⁶ Still, Montreal continued to host Jewish art theatre performers from abroad in the 1920s and 1930s, including the Vilner trupe; actor Jacob Ben-Ami in Yiddish

productions of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot* and Henrik Ibsen's *The Dollhouse*; Chayele Grober and Mark Schweid, two founding members of Habima; and New York's ARTEF troupe.²⁷

The Great Depression effectively ended the era that saw performances by permanent professional local troupes in Montreal, as ticket prices moved out of reach of local patrons. Audiences were also shrinking because of the acculturation of the Yiddish population, which, due to immigration restrictions, was not being replenished. As the sole producer of Yiddish theatre at the Monument National after 1935, impresario Louis Shochat continued to bring New York troupes and performers to Montreal, but with far less regularity. After the 1930s, local audiences seeking commercial theatre had to rely largely on the intermittent visits of international performers.²⁸ Among the international stars of the Yiddish stage who appeared in Montreal into the 1950s were Molly Picon, Celia Adler, Aaron Lebedev, and Herman Yablokoff. Montreal favourites included Menasha Skulnick, who played a series of sold-out performances in the 1930s, including a run of three consecutive weeks at the Monument National Theatre, and Maurice Schwartz, who appeared in the city fourteen times between 1931 and 1955. As professional commercial theatre began its decline in the Depression, community-based amateur theatre took centre stage.

While far less has been documented about amateur theatre in Montreal, these performances date from the beginning of local Yiddish theatre, with the first of them produced informally by local groups.²⁹ Community-based theatre groups, which were encouraged as an expression of Yiddish culture within the Jewish community, produced plays, musical performances, and presentations of Yiddish literature. Among the first of these groups was Hazomir (The Nightingale), founded in 1914 by members of the local community with an interest in Yiddish theatre and modelled on I.L. Peretz's Warsaw society of the same name. The Montreal group presented plays, literary readings, and music, and attempted, unsuccessfully, to set up an orchestra. Having joined forces with the pre-existing Jewish Dramatic Club, Hazomir also offered lectures and staged discussions for the self-education of its members. The group presented plays by Jacob Gordin as well as European dramas, and collaborated with the Yiddish Players in their 1924–25 season of art theatre.³⁰ A tradition of amateur theatre developed in association with community organizations, with institutions sponsoring amateur dramatic societies

that performed at special community functions. The local YM-YWHA stood out as an active sponsor. While it functioned mainly in English, its Little Theatre Children's Workshop (founded in 1931), led by theatre critic Herbert Whittaker, trained artists who later became involved in the Yiddish theatre. As discussed below, other amateur theatre groups received support from Yiddish institutions such as the secular Jewish schools and the Jewish Public Library.³¹

Amateur Yiddish theatre rose in stature as commercial theatre declined during the Great Depression. Concurrent with the rising influence of the left wing, interest in amateur Yiddish theatre of a political orientation grew. By the end of the 1930s, in addition to productions staged by the local Workmen's Circle, two short-lived dramatic societies were established. The Thealig (Theatre League) was associated with the Zionist Jewish National Workers' Alliance, while the Arbeter teater grupe (Workers' Theatre Group, or ARTEG), a more militant troupe, drew on the principles of New York's ARTEF and, according to critics, presented disturbing but unpolished performances.³² At the same time, the Montreal Jewish Choir, a cultural organization founded in 1925, operated three groups by the 1940s: a large choir, a modern dance group, and a theatre group. These three groups collaborated to present several large-scale productions, including *Benyomin der shlishi* [Benjamin the Third], a choral pantomime based on the novel by Mendele Moykher-sforim that had premiered in the Moscow State Jewish Theatre in 1927. The Montreal Jewish Choir's 1941 performance, with a cast of 125, was directed by prominent New York choreographer Benjamin Zemach.³³

The *Adler* and its associates played a significant role in the support and promotion of local Yiddish theatre. As *Adler* writer Y.L. Malamut would later recall, "The newspaper was the constant advocate of the Yiddish theatre."³⁴ The *Adler* endorsed both amateur and professional theatre in its reviews and encouraged attendance. While the critics of Yiddish theatre preferred theatre with artistic and literary merit, the *Adler* writers faithfully covered all genres of Yiddish stage performances for its readers, as well as, to a lesser degree, theatre in English and French. Newspaper reviews of plays not only offered plot synopses but also critical assessments of the their execution in terms of artistic and literary merit.³⁵

A number of the *Adler's* regular contributors were theatre enthusiasts. It is no coincidence that the founders of Montreal's Hazomir group included two prominent associates of the *Adler*: columnist

and drama critic B.Y. Goldstein as director and “spiritual leader” and musicologist and long-time editor and critic Israel Rabinovitch as a founding member.³⁶ Rabinovitch, in particular, was a staunch promoter of Yiddish theatre in Montreal. The *Adler* promoted local ventures in performance announcements, reviews, and regular columns devoted to theatre. In the late 1910s, Goldstein (under pen-names Reb Borukhl and B.Y. G-n) penned reviews of current performances as well as overviews of the local theatre scene in a column titled “Teater in montreol” [Theatre in Montreal]. Other columns dedicated to theatre included “Teater notitsn” [Theatre Notes], which commented on current and upcoming performances in Montreal, and “In di teatern” [In the Theatres], which included reviews of plays and announced local theatrical events. Moreover, Rabinovitch reported on theatre and music in a column titled “Teater un muzik” [Theatre and Music] and in an illustrated column, “Di teater velt” [The Theatre World]. With the exception of a short-lived weekly journal dedicated to local theatre titled *Teater zhurnal* [Theatre Journal] (1924), the *Adler* was the primary source for information on local Yiddish performance of all varieties.

The *Adler* participated in wider community debates between proponents of theatre as a popular commercial venture and proponents of theatre as a communal enterprise with a higher cultural value. From its very beginnings, the newspaper called for quality Yiddish theatre in Montreal and rejoiced at superior performances. As early as 1908, a year after the *Adler*’s founding, the newspaper engaged in a polemical debate with Louis Mitnick about the “backward” state of current theatre and the lack of literary plays. In 1910, when Goldstein went so far as to suggest staging a quality repertoire, Mitnick offered a sharply worded response: “[It] is clear that you are not yet thoroughly informed about the theatre business: the secret is that a vulgar play or a cheap melodrama is a greater financial success. The key is in the cash, the best witness.”³⁷ As discussed below, under the leadership of editor Israel Rabinovitch the *Adler* would be an ardent supporter of the YTEG.

Most directly, the *Adler* introduced local playwrights to the Yiddish stage. During the First World War, with the encouragement of publisher Hirsch Wolofsky and under the direction of editor Reuben Brainin, writer Y.L. Malamut revised his serialized novel, *Tserisene neshomes* [Torn Souls], as a Hasidic play under the title *Di goldene keyt* [The Golden Chain], later renamed *Baym rebn in hoyf* [In the Rabbi’s Court]. The work was produced first in Montreal and subsequently

in Winnipeg, Chicago, and Minneapolis.³⁸ Similarly, *Adler* editor H. Hirsch authored the play *Der yidisher politishan* [The Jewish Politician], which was performed locally in 1919.³⁹ *Adler* writer and poet Chaim Tolmatsh published a one-act play, *Vayber* [Women/Wives], in the *Royerd* literary journal (1925) that was later produced for the Montreal stage.⁴⁰

PERMANENT LOCAL YIDDISH THEATRE: THE YTEG

The first locally produced theatre to gain the serious attention of Montreal theatre critics, both Yiddish and non-Yiddish, was Chayele Grober's Yiddish Theatre Group. Formed with a wide base of support, this group raised the bar for local Yiddish theatre and paved the way for subsequent ventures in amateur art theatre, notably Dora Wasserman's Yiddish Theatre.⁴¹ A first attempt at lasting, locally produced Yiddish art theatre in Canada, the YTEG trained a core group of local actors and was credited with raising local amateur theatre to a new level. The YTEG reflected the institutionalization of Yiddish culture in Montreal, but also pointed to the limitations of the infrastructure of the pre-1945 period. Despite the support of local institutions such as the Jewish Public Library and the *Adler* as well as of the city's Yiddish intelligentsia and wider community, and despite positive reviews both within and outside of the Yiddish community, the YTEG failed to find the support required to sustain the studio. At the same time, the very fact that a minor centre of Yiddish theatre was home to an art studio under the guidance of a renowned, professionally trained actress indicates that there was a shift in the dynamics of Yiddish cultural life in Montreal. The same forces that brought Grober to Montreal – namely war in Europe – would also bring a handful of prominent figures in the Yiddish cultural world to the city, despite Canada's closed doors to Jewish immigration. However, the story of the YTEG indicates that Montreal did not yet house the necessary infrastructure to support high-level artistic and literary ventures in Yiddish performance.

Chayele Grober arrived in Montreal as a seasoned Yiddish actress. While in Warsaw with her family during the First World War, she befriended Habima director Nahum Zemach, who inspired her to begin her theatrical career. As a leading member of Zemach's Moscow-based troupe, Grober received professional training that included

theatre study with Stanislavski's prodigée Yevgeny Vakhtangov; music study with professors from the Moscow Philharmonia; and Dalcroze eurhythmics. Grober left Habima in 1928 to establish a solo program of dramatic interpretations of Yiddish and Hebrew folk songs, and spent the next four decades touring her shows internationally.⁴² During a visit to Montreal in 1928, she became acquainted with H.M. Caiserman, who helped her to establish permanent residence in Canada. When Grober returned to Montreal in 1930 to perform, Caiserman arranged for journalist Vladimir Grossman, editor of the Paris daily *Parizer haynt* and *Adler* correspondent, to act as her manager.⁴³ During her tours of Romania, Poland, England, and South Africa, she wrote articles for both the *Adler* and the Toronto *Der yidisher zhurnal* that chronicle her travels and discuss the Yiddish and Hebrew theatres. She toured South America from 1937 until the beginning of 1939, when she returned to Montreal with Grossman, now her husband. Grossman became active as a promoter of Yiddish language and culture through the Jewish Public Library as well as the Canadian Jewish Congress.

According to her own account, Grober fell naturally into directing a local Yiddish art theatre. Unable to tour Europe as planned, she decided to remain in Montreal while Grossman undertook the founding and editing of the *Canadian Jewish Year Book* (1939–42).⁴⁴ Her memoirs recount that, after several months, she realized that she needed to have a new project, and “all I knew was the stage.” Although Montreal was, in her estimation, not a theatre city, she undertook the establishment of a local Jewish drama studio. She proposed the idea to the Caisermans, who responded with enthusiasm and joined her in her efforts. The YTEG was established in March 1939, under Grober's direction and the auspices of the Jewish Public Library, as a local experimental theatre atelier.⁴⁵ According to the *Adler*, the YTEG's goal was to establish a professional Yiddish theatre in Montreal by recruiting talented individuals and training them in all aspects of the theatre in a systematic way; when the class was ready, it would occasionally present to the public. “The likelihood of success,” concludes the unsigned article, “is increased by the absence of any Yiddish theatre in Montreal, let alone good theatre.”⁴⁶ The YTEG was formally launched at a general meeting in the home of Montreal-born opera singer Pauline Donalda.⁴⁷ Grober outlined her program for the group, with its studies based on the Stanislavski Method and dramatic techniques akin to those of the Moscow Art Theatre.

מאנומענט נאשיאנאל

מאנטאג דעם 1טן מערץ, 1937
8:45 אונט



חיה'לע גראבער
— איז —
ליר און דראמע


ערשטער אויסטריט אין קאנאדע, נאך אן ערפאגרייכונ
וויבליאריקן טור איבער אייראפע און ארץ ישראל
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פאלקס-לידער
קינדער-ליעבן
ארבייטער-לידער
מוטער-ליבע
שיר השירים
חסידיש
אריענטאלישע הימנ'ער סצענעס

אין אידיש, העברעאיש, אראביש, ענגליש, פראנצויזיש
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CHAYELE GROBER
*For Ten Years Leading Actress
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Song and Drama

After an epochal 500 cities Concert Tour through the
continent of Europe and Palestine and after a seven
years absence from Canada and U.S.A. will appear in

A PROGRAM OF
FOLK SONGS (ENGLISH, FRENCH, RUSSIAN,
ARABIAN, JEWISH, HEBREW)
CHILDREN'S SONGS
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ORIENTAL-YEMENITE SCENES
SHIR HASHIRIM (SONG OF SONGS)
ECSTATIC CHASSIDIC MELODIES

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Yiddish and English texts for a flyer advertising a multilingual local performance by Chaye Grober. Yiddish Theatre Group, Jewish Canadiana Collection, Jewish Public Library Archives, Montreal

Grober adopted a practical approach towards training in her studio. She selected a group of fifteen individuals and began to instruct them in the basement of the Jewish Public Library in the evenings. Only one member of the group had any previous theatre experience. The studio was run like a full-fledged theatre school and conducted according to the Habima system of study: drama was taught by Grober, while plastics, rhythemics, dancing, and diction were taught by local dancer George Erskine-Jones of Montreal's Mary Beetles Studio. The studio was devoted to improvisations and short études that were often

inspired by a poem or short story. The members of the group would work poem or story into a scene involving movement, singing, music, and dance. These numbers, developed under Grober's guidance, formed the core of the YTEG repertoire. Her emphasis was on process and group development, not immediate results, and during the first months of the studio's existence, there were no public performances.⁴⁸

From its inception, the YTEG was a community-based enterprise that relied on a committed public for organizational and financial backing. Supported by a circle of interested individuals under the auspices of the Jewish Public Library, the YTEG's executive committee, headed by Mrs Louis Fitch, wife of the secretary of the Canadian Jewish Congress, oversaw a larger committee of more than twenty members of the Montreal Jewish community, including the Caisermans and Rabinovitches. In order to raise funds, the YTEG organized a system of paid memberships that were sold to the community. The YTEG also reached out to the local artistic community. Grober commissioned the collaboration and participation of local artists such as Erskine-Jones, Russian-born painter Alexander Bercovitch, and Yiddish writers J.I. Segal and Melekh Ravitch. The YTEG enjoyed wide support, with a theatre society of over two hundred members within the first months of its existence. According to Grober's memoirs, "the YTEG became an artistic hub around which the Jewish intellectual population gathered."⁴⁹ By the fall of 1940, while the studio had not yet performed for the public, two open symposia had been held on the subject of Yiddish theatre as well as several other evening events.⁵⁰ Among these events was a Saturday evening program in May at the Jewish Public Library that featured a presentation on the Habima theatre and lectures by Fitch and Caiserman.⁵¹ These festive evenings were attended by members of Parliament and both local and visiting guests.

Logistically, the YTEG moved ahead rapidly. During its first year, the group met on the first floor of the Jewish Public Library, where a stage had been erected. The YTEG began the search for its own studio, and with the help of Caiserman, Grober was given the basement of the Baron de Hirsch building on Bleury Street, which also housed the Canadian Jewish Congress office, rent-free. The building was old and rundown, and Grober and her group set to work clearing out the basement studio. A studio committee was struck to take care of the day-to-day affairs of the group, and with some fundraising, a stage was soon erected.⁵² The new studio was inaugurated, complete with lighting, a stage, and other equipment. Soon it was hosting lectures

on Yiddish literature and theatre. At the beginning of October 1940, the *Adler* reported the completion of the renovations of the YTEG studio and announced a forthcoming public performance.⁵³ The official opening of the YTEG theatre took place on 23 October at the Jewish Public Library and featured speeches by representatives of community organizations, including Hadassah and the Peretz School, and greetings from Member of Parliament Peter Bercovitch.⁵⁴ Three weeks later, on 17 November, after a full year of study, thirteen members of the studio presented their first public performance at the new studio in the Baron de Hirsch Institute. Because of the small size of the space, the size of the audience was limited.

The event's inaugural program indicates that the objective of Grober's studio was not to present commercial entertainment. Like that of the ARTEF in New York City, the program – a series of short pieces and études – was challenging to both performers and viewers. The material consisted largely of movement pieces that drew on Yiddish poetry from America and Europe. A dramatization of H. Leivick's poem "Ershter may in sibir" [May 1 in Siberia] was followed by two moving tableaux: a depiction of Jewish immigrant life based on New York sweatshop poet David Einhorn's "Montmartre-ball" and a group performance involving movement, "Mensh-mashin" [Man-Machine], featuring poetry by Lodz Yiddish poet Moshe Broderson.⁵⁵ The tableaux were set to music by New York pianist Hertz Rubin and choreographed by Erskine-Jones.⁵⁶ Two dramatic sketches comprised group improvisations conceived by the studio's students during their drama courses: "Orchard Street" depicted the Jewish immigrant experience in a dialogue by Peretz Hirschbein. The concluding piece, a group improvisation in three parts called "Evakuatsye" [Evacuation], portrayed the journey from Old World to New, offering a glimpse into the YTEG's overall approach to Yiddish theatre. The piece opens with an "evacuation of the *shtetl*," depicting Jewish peasants forced to flee. The second scene, "on the ship from land to land," creates a mood of fear and uncertainty as figures huddle on the deck of a swaying ship, around them snippets of sad music, the sound of a woman whimpering, snatches of conversation, and, finally, a happy tune. The final scene, "on new earth," is located in a brightly lit New World setting. The singing is strong and confident. Men and women are shown at work – on ladders repairing lights, planing wood, shaping wicker chairs, and an old mother is led towards a set table amid song and joyful movement. The scene ends on a note of hope with the introduction of a

new baby.⁵⁷ These scenes integrated spoken word, music, dance, and movement to tackle key moments in the Jewish experience. Although the spoken text was in Yiddish, the song and movement rendered the performance accessible across linguistic lines.

The performance reached a wide audience that included theatre critics from the local Yiddish and English press, and enjoyed a very positive reception. Israel Rabinovitch offered mixed reviews in the *Adler*, but concluded that the project showed “great potential,” provided it received the necessary support of the larger community.⁵⁸ Reviews in the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*, the *Montreal Star*, and the *Montreal Gazette* applauded the performance and expressed high hopes for the future of the studio. A review by Herbert Whittaker, the *Gazette*’s resident dance and theatre critic, offers a detailed and enthusiastic account of “Evacuation”: “The story is presented in a most impressive fashion with the most impressive simplicity, yet with an underlying thread of artistic selectivity always present. The group is a young one and unity is yet to be achieved in some respects, but its performance last night establishes it as one making a strikingly individual contribution to the drama here [*sic*].” The *Montreal Star* review states, “[T]he YTG shows promise of becoming a force in the cultural life of Montreal’s Jewish community.”⁵⁹ Rabinovitch’s essay in the *Canadian Jewish Year Book* (1940–41) reflects more ambitious community aspirations for Yiddish theatre in Montreal: “Montreal may be destined to make its own valuable contribution to the history of finer Jewish theatre. This is possible through the endeavours of Chayele Grober if she receives the full cooperation of the Jewish intelligentsia and the general public.”⁶⁰ That year H.M. Caiserman recommended Grober for the Canadian Drama Award as director of the YTEG.⁶¹

The YTEG’s second season reflects the crystallization of Grober’s studio. It featured a performance of longer pieces over a run of several weeks, with a “Spring Series of Performances” held every Sunday and Wednesday in May at the studio. The program was included in the *Adler*’s listing of public events, and tickets were distributed by the Jewish Public Library.⁶² As was the tradition among European art theatre studios, special decor and sound were created for the event, with sets commissioned from Alexander Bercovitch and music by Herz Rubin.⁶³ The program opened with greetings from Melekh Ravitch, after which a number of miniatures were presented, including musical dramatizations. One member sang H. Leivick’s “Shtil af di steppes” [Quiet on the Steppes] while a second fished. “Di kukave” [The

Cuckoo Clock] offered a moving tableau set to song. One of the most enthusiastically received numbers was “Ba der nodl un sher” [With Needle and Shears], a dramatization of folk songs originally produced by Benjamin Zemach. The scene depicts tailors in their shop in the Old Country preparing a wedding gown while singing Yiddish songs; one of the older seamstresses strokes the wedding gown wistfully, and the group enacts a mock wedding between her and one of the shop’s young apprentices. The performance concludes with three pieces inspired by the writings of I.L. Peretz, the second of which, “Di levone dertseylt,” [A Moonlight tale],” featured original lyrics by poet J. I. Segal and music by Rubin specially prepared for the YTEG. In contrast to the first YTEG season, which centred on group improvisations, the second season’s program highlighted individual talent. The more challenging nature of the material also points to the studio’s maturation.⁶⁴

The show brought improved visibility for the troupe and prompted renewed efforts to secure wide support. Rabinovitch’s review in the *Adler* expresses enthusiasm about the YTEG’s performance and the future of local Yiddish theatre, positing that the show indicated the studio was making significant progress towards becoming a local art theatre, with good directing and an abundance of talent; despite certain weaknesses in the performance, “the ‘YTEG’ deserves the encouragement of our community because it is well on its way to great achievement ... this venture deserves all of our support.”⁶⁵ An article in the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* likewise states, “It would not be an exaggeration to say that the evening made history, at least as far as Jewish Theatre in Canada is concerned. Jewish theatrical fare has been meagre of late years and it is no small wonder that the audience, both Jewish and non-Jewish, found unbounded satisfaction in the performance.”⁶⁶ Seeking solid financial backing in addition to successful programs, the YTEG committee proceeded with an intensive membership campaign to increase the number of subscribers from one hundred to five hundred, disseminating flyers to inform the public about the theatre troupe.⁶⁷ Meanwhile, Grober continued to offer individual performances in addition to directing the YTEG studio.⁶⁸

By its third season, the YTEG was on its way to becoming an established local theatre. On 24 and 25 January 1942, the studio offered its first performance for Montreal’s general public at a larger rented venue located uptown, Victoria Hall. The trilingual Yiddish-English-French program (synopses are provided in the latter two languages)



Yiddish Theatre Group — אידיש טעאטער גרופע

From right to left

The lower row sitting: Doris Sultan, Rochele Vool.

Second row sitting: Helen Berliner, A. Finkelstein, I. Clement, Minnie Shapiro, M. Sinuk, Sydney Berg.

Standing row: Ina Tenenhouse, Morris Lifshitz, Freda Kunigis, Dudi Rabinovitch, and Feiga Solomon.

Not in the picture: Willie Thomas and Ben Shechter.

פון רעכטס צו לינקס:

אונטערשטע רייע זיצנדיק: דאָריס סולטאן, רחל'ע וואָל.

צטע רייע זיצנדיק: העלען בערלינער, א. פינקעלשטיין, י. קלעמענט, מיני שאפירא, משה סיניוק, סידני בערג.

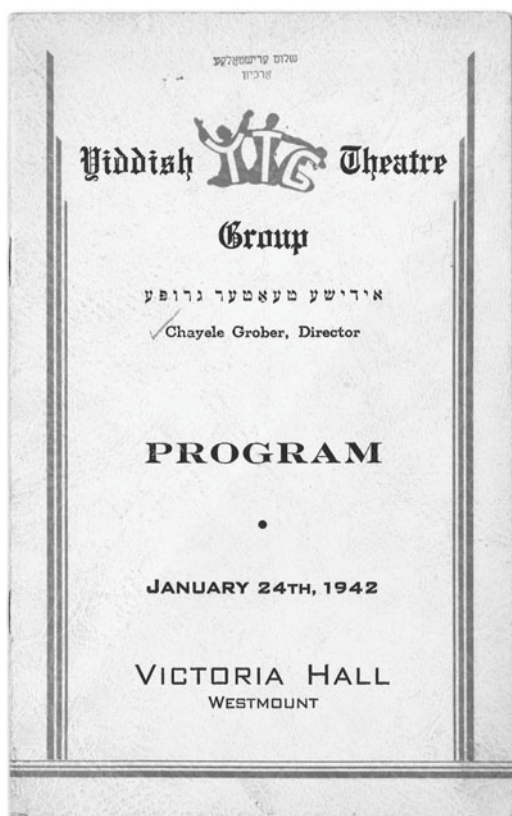
שטייענדיק: אינא טענענהאוז, מאָרריס ליפשיץ, פרידא קוניגיס, דודי ראבינאוויטש און פייגע סאלאמאן.

נ'פֿעלן: ווילי טאָמאס און בען שעכטער.

PATRONIZE OUR ADVERTISERS

Portrait of YTEG cast, 1942 (inside of program for the January 1942 YTEG performance). Yiddish Theatre Group, Jewish Canadiana Collection, Jewish Public Library Archives, Montreal

indicates that Grober anticipated audience members to include non-Yiddish speakers.⁶⁹ An announcement of the event in the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* states: "The YTEG may now be said to have passed the embryonic stage and it is hoped that all who love good theatre will lend their wholehearted support to this most worthy cultural



Cover of program for the January 1942 YTEG performance. Yiddish Theatre Group, Jewish Canadiana Collection, Jewish Public Library Archives, Montreal

enterprise.”⁷⁰ Rabinovitch’s pre-performance article emphasizes the YTEG’s contribution to the art of theatre as well as to community building. He praises the studio for its commitment to producing professional-calibre actors rather than amateurs at a time when Yiddish theatre worldwide is in crisis. Rabinovitch notes that a circle of devoted supporters has grown up around the group and “the studio has become a Jewish institution in Montreal.” With such a positive relationship between the fledgling theatre and the public, “this performance can and must be looked upon as a Jewish celebration in our city.”⁷¹

In addition to reprised scenes from previous shows, the program, prepared by Grober together with J.I. Segal, offered new material,

notably an epic poem composed by Segal for the YTEG titled “Di hey-lige geto” [The Holy Ghetto]. The poem depicts a ghetto filled with wandering half-dead people uttering snatches of tormented dialogue. It concludes:

World, don’t shame us, world, don’t torment us,
 world, give us our place on earth,
 but the world replied: *goles* [exile]
nakhamu, nakhamu, ami [comfort, ye, comfort
 ye, my people (Isaiah 40:1)].⁷²

Segal’s work marked a departure from the previous repertoire of the YTEG in both form and content; produced by a local writer, the poem addressed current events, with a clear allusions to the fate of European Jewry in Nazi-occupied Europe. Until this performance, the YTEG repertoire had called on a romantic and national repertoire; now, it introduced darker themes rooted in the contemporary Jewish experience. Segal’s work conforms to a tradition of Jewish, including modern Yiddish, epic poetry that deals with catastrophe. For example, Chaim Nachman Bialik, Peretz Markish, and Leyb Kvitko wrote epic poems in response to the European pogroms of the early twentieth century.⁷³ Segal’s poem also echoes American modernist poet Yankev Glatshteyn’s renunciation of Western civilization in his 1938 poem *A gute nakht, velt* [Good Night, World]. According to Rabinovitch, Segal had embarked on “a risky undertaking” in turning the “bad dream that has penetrated our reality” into theatre. However, he asserts that, in the hands of Segal and Grober, the work succeeded as poetic symbolization rather than descending into caricature. Further, with performances such as this one, the YTEG was on its way to “true, non-commercial Yiddish theatre.”⁷⁴ In the YTEG, Rabinovitch had found a realization of the vision for quality local theatre advanced in the *Adler* some thirty years earlier.

Ties between the YTEG and the Yiddish community strengthened in the wake of the public performances. A larger YTEG committee was formed, new members joined, and the studio expressed a commitment to community education by offering public lectures and symposia on theatre. With the YTEG as a recognized communal institution, Grober sought wider institutional support for the group, in particular from the Workmen’s Circle. She turned to Nokhem Khanin, educational director at the Workmen’s Circle’s New York head office.

Khanin had been present at the Victoria Hall performance while in Montreal on a North American tour, and in a statement made at the post-performance banquet, he had underlined the significance of the event. With Khanin's assurance of support from the circle's Montreal chapter, Grober delegated a group member to formally raise the question of Workmen's Circle sponsorship of the YTEG at its next local meeting. Meanwhile, preparations were underway for the final performance of the season, on 10 May 1942. This would be a repeat of the January show but would be held at the Montreal Repertory Theatre, home to a local English theatre company.

The recognition of the YTEG as a valuable institution in the local cultural milieu did not mitigate its precarious fiscal status. Three weeks before this final performance of the season, Rabinovitch published an article about the general state of affairs at the YTEG – excellent theatre, no money. He states that the YTEG made great progress in creating serious Yiddish art theatre in Canada, but lacked sponsors and financial support, which translated into difficulties in acquiring new music, sets, or a regular dance instructor and pianist, as well as problems in putting together literature courses for the studio members. Rabinovitch calls for a regular budget for the studio and for a more appropriate venue for the burgeoning Yiddish theatre. Finally, he announces that a public meeting is to be held to discuss the next season of the YTEG and the wider future of Yiddish theatre in Canada.⁷⁵ Similarly, in an article published on the day of the performance, J.I. Segal praises the YTEG as a “new phenomenon in our local cultural life” and reiterates the need for a venue dedicated to the Yiddish theatre.⁷⁶ However, all these high aspirations for the YTEG came to naught; the performance, despite its success, was the group's last. According to Grober's memoirs, the financial difficulties inherent in running the studio, together with the rejection of her bid for Workmen's Circle sponsorship, prompted her to close the studio. The response of the Montreal chapter of the Workmen's Circle – that if an actress is successful, she should not require support – ran counter to the fundamental community character of the studio with its implication that theatre was merely entertainment and should be financially self-supporting. This was enough to cause her to pack her bags.

Grober left Montreal for New York City, made arrangements to tour, and thereafter concentrated her efforts on performing locally and internationally. However, she also participated in a number of small-scale Montreal theatre projects in the 1950s and 1960s. For example,

in 1958, after returning to Montreal following her one-woman show in Australia, she appeared in a well-publicized local performance of song and poetry together with Israel Rabinovitch, Rokhl Korn, and Melekh Ravitch. The next year, under the auspices of the Canadian Jewish Congress, she directed a local ensemble called Habima in a retrospective of the work of Sholom Aleichem. Following this, she directed Arnold Perl's "Tevye and His Daughters," a Yiddish-English sequel to "Tevye the Milkman" performed by the Hillel Players university group in 1960.⁷⁷ Grober subsequently withdrew from theatrical activity and retired to Tel Aviv in 1968.

Janice Bryan's study of the Montreal Yiddish theatre summarizes the end of the YTEG as follows: "The group was very successful but for a very short time."⁷⁸ At the root of the YTEG's short existence lay the lack of infrastructure required to maintain high-calibre non-commercial theatre. With its model in the state-subsidized Soviet system of art theatre, the YTEG needed solid financial backing in order to continue to present experimental art theatre. The YTEG could not compete with popular visiting artists such as Maurice Schwartz or Molly Picon, and the local Yiddish market was unable to sustain both brands of entertainment during the war years. With Jewish theatre audiences consisting increasingly of second-generation immigrants who were raised in an English milieu and could easily attend English-language theatre, it was difficult to find a place for Yiddish art theatre, lacking as it did the light, diversionary song and dance that was so popular among audiences. It is clear from the critical reviews of the theatre that the YTEG filled a gap in the local theatre repertoire and raised the calibre of productions to a high literary and artistic level. The theatre, however, was ultimately a venture that appealed primarily to the Yiddish intelligentsia, a group that was in the minority. Whereas Montreal Yiddish culture needed local schools to promote its values and a local newspaper to disseminate its ideals, the function of theatre in Montreal had always been oriented more towards popular entertainment and diversion than towards the dissemination and perpetuation of core values in Jewish cultural life. Moreover, during the crisis years of the Great Depression and Second World War, the average Montreal Yiddish-speaking viewer sought escape over edification. The serious repertoire of the YTEG that marked it as Canada's first Yiddish art theatre also limited its potential commercial success. In 1942, the Montreal Yiddish community was not yet prepared to support a permanent local theatre.

Despite its short existence, the YTEG left its mark as the forerunner of professional-calibre dramatic Yiddish theatre in Montreal. Grober was the first person to produce experimental Yiddish art theatre using local talent. She was also the first to train local actors in Yiddish art theatre, and some of these actors continuing to perform in local theatre for decades to come.⁷⁹ Moreover, her studio created an interested and discerning public, albeit a small elite in the local Jewish community. The YTEG paved the way for other attempts to produce local art theatre.

YIDDISH THEATRE AFTER 1945

The years that followed the Second World War brought renewed attempts to establish high-calibre, permanent, community-based Yiddish theatre in Montreal. In the wake of the destruction of Yiddish life in Europe and with the growing acculturation of the local community, theatre began to take on new meaning for the city's Yiddish intelligentsia. In the post-Holocaust era, Yiddish theatre became a tool of cultural maintenance in the face of mass attrition.

The years 1945–50 marked a transitional period in the history of Montreal Yiddish theatre. In 1946, Di montreoler yidishe teater gezelschaft (the Society for Jewish Theatrical Art in Montreal) was established by community members committed to founding a permanent, non-partisan Yiddish art theatre in Montreal. The society, whose “Initiative Committee” included poets Yankev Zipper, Sholem Shtern, Melekh Ravitch, and Israel Rabinovitch, solicited members of the community-at-large to participate in the project as both cast and committee members. The group’s twelve-point mission statement employed a rhetoric of cultural continuity and community building, presenting Yiddish art theatre as a means of awakening Jewish national consciousness by bringing the Yiddish language to life for estranged Jews, even for those who did not understand “our folk language [*folk-sprakh*] ... the holy Yiddish *mame-loshn*.” Through live theatre, the organizers hoped to create an artistic milieu that would bring together writers, visual artists, and musicians in a non-partisan, non-commercial enterprise. Like the YTEG, the group would function as a theatre studio focused on training a young local cast. The theatre would perform works from across the repertoire of Yiddish theatre, from Goldfaden to contemporary pieces, on weekends over an eight-month season.⁸⁰

To this end, the society brought Yiddish actor Chaim Brisman from New York to lead the new theatre group under the name the Montreal Yiddish Repertory Theatre (MYRT). It offered two performances in 1947: in March it staged a dramatic musical revue, *Fun unzer lid un leyd* [Of Our Song and Sorrow], at the Monument National Theatre that featured adaptations of Sholem Aleichem, dramatized folk songs, and a montage of songs and scenes by a half-dozen Yiddish writers; and in June, it presented a Yiddish rendition of Hebrew novelist and playwright Harry Sackler's *Yizkor* [In Memoriam].⁸¹ The MYRT then appears to have become defunct. Meanwhile the Yiddish cultural events of the leftist United Jewish People's Order (UJPO) included large-scale musicals that incorporated the UJPO's choir and drama group under directors brought in from New York.⁸²

Two factors determined the course of Yiddish theatre in Montreal after 1945. The first was the attrition of Yiddish as the shared vernacular of the secular Jewish milieu, which spelled the end of an era of popular, commercial Yiddish theatre. The "big stars" of the Yiddish stage no longer attracted the same crowds, while the pool of aging artists was not being replenished. Moreover, the advent of television shifted live theatre from its status as popular entertainment to the realm of the arts. In the 1950s, Yiddish theatre at the Monument National came to a close; Molly Picon gave the final performance in 1957.⁸³ With the Jewish community overwhelmingly adopting English as its *lingua franca*, Yiddish performance had to be made accessible to less fluent and non-speakers of the language, with musical theatre as the dominant genre. Until 1970, Louis Shochat continued to bring big-name artists and shows to other venues, such as His Majesty's, the Comédie canadienne, or the Gésu; some ten revues and musical comedies were staged between 1960 and 1969, ending with *The Megilla of Itzik Manger*, an Israeli Yiddish-English hit musical starring the Burstein Family. The following year marked the final visit by a big-name star with a performance by Ida Kaminska.⁸⁴ Meanwhile, the multilingual Canadian Jewish Theatre, founded by Israeli theatre producer Chaim Avron, staged several Yiddish musical revues in 1968 and 1969. The decline of secular Yiddish theatre was a worldwide phenomenon, with little left of the vitality that had characterized the pre-war era. A second factor that determined the course of Montreal's Yiddish theatre had an entirely different effect: the Holocaust brought new vitality to local amateur Yiddish theatre. An influx of Yiddish-speaking survivors

bolstered community theatre as Yiddish performance entered into a discourse of cultural continuity.

The long-term viability of Yiddish performance in Montreal is evidenced in the Yiddish theatre company created by seasoned Soviet-trained actress Dora Wasserman. Born in Zhitomir, Ukraine, Wasserman enrolled in the GOSET and spent the years of the Second World War performing in theatre troupes in Kiev and Kazakhstan. After her arrival in Montreal in 1950, Wasserman gave small performances at local institutions and was invited by Melekh Ravitch and Rochel Eisenberg Ravitch to teach children's theatre workshops at the Jewish Public Library. Jewish People's School principal Shloime Wiseman invited her to direct student theatre productions and helped her to establish the Jewish People's Schools Graduates' Society as a community amateur group in 1957. As a strong advocate of secular Yiddish culture, Wiseman understood this project as a way of keeping Yiddish alive among his graduates and safeguarding the continuity of Yiddish in Montreal. The society staged ambitious productions of works by I.L. Peretz, productions that involved the school's teachers – Shimshen Dunskey, M.M. Shaffir, and a recent arrival to Montreal, writer Mordkhe Husid (1909–1988) – who shared Wiseman's vision of the project. At Wiseman's suggestion, Wasserman approached Gratien Gélinas, who was known for his appreciation of Yiddish theatre, for technical assistance, and Gélinas offered extensive and ongoing support to the fledgling theatre. In 1960, as the Jewish People's Schools Graduates' Society expanded, Wasserman transformed it into a repertory theatre and incorporated it as the Yiddish Theatre Group in 1967. The company performed at local theatre venues until 1968, when it joined the newly created Saidye Bronfman Centre for the Arts. Over the next three decades, Wasserman staged a broad repertoire of Yiddish theatre, from dramas to musical revues. These included adaptations of works by Sholem Aleichem, I.L. Peretz, Isaac Bashevis Singer, and Chaim Grade, and by local authors such as M.M. Shaffir and Shimshen Dunskey. She produced innovative Yiddish theatre, including specially commissioned translations of plays, notably Montreal playwright Michel Tremblay's classic Québécois work *Les belles-sœurs*.⁸⁵ Now called the Dora Wasserman Yiddish Theatre, the troupe has gained an international reputation and continues to perform in Montreal and abroad under the direction of Dora's Wasserman's daughter, Bryna Wasserman.⁸⁶ It remains one of the world's few permanent

Yiddish theatre companies, albeit one whose audiences are increasingly made up of non-Yiddish speakers.

CONCLUSION

A comparison between the theatres created by Grober and Wasserman spotlights a fundamental shift in Montreal Yiddish culture after 1945. Grober and Wasserman were among many seasoned artists, displaced by the outbreak of the Second World War, who founded Yiddish drama studios in minor centres in the New World. Zigmunt Turkov, founder of the Warsaw Yiddish Art Theatre, for example, directed a drama studio in Brazil in the 1940s before immigrating to Israel. Grober initially understood her sojourn in Montreal as temporary and the studio as a project to occupy her until the end of the war, when she could resume her international touring schedule. In 1942 – the year that Grober’s studio closed – Canadian Jewry was only beginning to become aware of the magnitude of what came to be known as the Holocaust.⁸⁷ In contrast, Wasserman arrived from decimated post-war Jewish Europe as a displaced person seeking permanent roots in Montreal. By the time of her arrival in 1950, the decimation of European Yiddish civilization was no longer a question. While, like Grober’s, Wasserman’s studio grew out of an artist’s dream to create high theatre, it soon gained the status of a beacon in a ravaged Yiddish world. While Wasserman emphasized Yiddish theatre as a living art, her studio served to train generations of actors who were not necessarily Yiddish speakers and to provide an increasingly rare opportunity for audiences to see Yiddish productions. By the end of the 1950s, an increasingly established Jewish community was creating the infrastructure required to support the venture of permanent amateur theatre. Yiddish theatre served as one way to keep the language and culture alive, even as the community increasingly acculturated and anglicized.

Grober’s and Wasserman’s theatres were born out of a quest for community, with a vital point of divergence – the changing position of Yiddish. Both theatres depended on wide support, trained non-professional actors in the art of Yiddish theatre, and presented innovative productions to a wide public, both Yiddish and non-Yiddish speaking. However, unlike the YTEG, the Dora Wasserman Yiddish Theatre evolved in a context where Yiddish was indisputably on the wane, both in terms of audience and as the basis for a future-oriented cultural

venture. With Yiddish theatre becoming increasingly rare after the 1960s, Wasserman's company was recognized not only as a community institution, but as a "symbolic stronghold," and Wasserman herself as "the great defender of Yiddish culture."⁸⁸ The goal of the YTEG had been to produce art in the majority language of the Jewish people, art that equalled the greatest expressions of Western theatre. Like all ventures of wartime Yiddish culture, it existed at a crossroads where a vibrant Yiddish cultural life was still a viable expression of Canadian Jewish identity. After the ramifications of the Holocaust become widely known, the implications of Yiddish performance changed forever.



TRANSITIONS: 1945 AND BEYOND

THIS STUDY HAS EXAMINED A MINOR YIDDISH CENTRE DURING the brief period in history when a transnational modern Yiddish culture flourished. It has explored the infrastructure created to facilitate, promote, and perpetuate Yiddish culture in Montreal during its formative period, 1905–45. Each chapter has discussed the different ways in which a cadre of dedicated ideologues, artists, and activists worked in tandem to create Yiddish-centred organizations and institutions: a Yiddish press; a public library and a cultural milieu to support Yiddish literature; a secular Jewish school system; and community theatre. For Jewish immigrants, who were officially and unofficially excluded from a Quebec society whose English Protestant and French Catholic duality was entrenched at Canadian Confederation, Yiddish flourished as their lingua franca and as the basis for a rich cultural life for close to half a century. Ultimately, Montreal's multi-branched Yiddish cultural milieu was resilient enough to continue to blossom in the face of both mass acculturation away from Yiddish and the decimation of European Yiddish civilization in the Holocaust. Its infrastructure provided a viable, forward-looking expression of Jewish identity with a core Yiddish component for successive generations of immigrants transplanted onto Canadian soil.

Montreal's well-developed and institutionally complete Yiddish cultural network offers an instructive example of the cultural maintenance of a minority group on Canadian soil before the advent of Canada's official policy of multiculturalism in 1971. Early twentieth-century

Montreal Jewry evolved mechanisms to facilitate the creation and maintenance of a resilient minority culture within a dominant society that ranged from indifferent to hostile. For Yiddish Montreal, these mechanisms included a periodical press to represent all segments of the community; organizations accessible to the community-at-large to promote literacy; a dynamic educational system to perpetuate the culture in future generations; and community building through performance.

Multiple interconnected factors explain the ongoing vitality of Montreal's Yiddish culture from 1905 to 1945. Locally, its leading personalities, strong ideological basis, and the city's particular political and social context helped to foster Yiddish. On the global level, Montreal Yiddish culture formed part of a vibrant transnational movement that encompassed a broad swath of the Eastern European Jewish community and its immigrant offshoots. The city formed one strand of an international web of Yiddish cultural activity.

Until 1945, a future-oriented vision of Jewish revitalization with Yiddish at its core was as feasible as any of the other ideologies that comprised the modern Jewish worldview – Zionist and other nationalist movements, left-wing politics, religious Orthodoxy, or secular Judaism – and it often existed in tandem with them. After 1945, in the wake of the decimation of Jewish civilization in Europe and ongoing global acculturation away from Yiddish, the dream of a Jewish future with modern Yiddish culture as a primary component joined a host of failed utopias. The decimation of Yiddish life in Nazi Europe was compounded by the dissolution of Soviet state-sponsored Yiddish culture under Stalin and the intensifying repression of expressions of Jewish identity. Further, Modern Hebrew emerged as the dominant language of the nascent *yishuv* (Jewish settlement in Palestine) and of the State of Israel after its creation in 1947–48, and has assumed the role of dominant Jewish lingua franca for world Jewry.

Montreal's persistence in its promotion of Yiddish culture after 1945 rendered it one of the world's leading centres of Yiddish in the post-Holocaust era. In the shadow of pervasive Yiddish attrition, Montreal emerged as a beacon of Yiddish continuity.

A PERIOD OF TRANSITIONS

The years 1939–45 were marked by a shift in Montreal Yiddish cultural life. With the rise of Nazism in Europe and increased antisemitism in

Canada and abroad,¹ the 1930s had brought consolidation to the local Yiddish scene. Montreal Yiddish writers, pedagogues, and activists turned their attention to long-term efforts to champion their culture. Further, in the face of ever more restrictive Canadian immigration policies, Montreal Jews lobbied to obtain visas for their brethren trapped in Nazi-occupied Europe and sought to help the few refugees allowed into Canada in the 1930s and 1940s to settle and establish roots. In the process, local Yiddish cultural activity was infused with new vibrancy as small numbers of Yiddish-speaking refugees from Europe found their way to Montreal. Actress Chayele Grober pioneered local Yiddish art theatre; journalist Vladimir Grossman produced several volumes of the *Canadian Jewish Year Book*; scholar Symcha Petrushka published a Jewish popular encyclopedia as well as a translation and interpretation of the Mishna in Yiddish; poet and essayist Melekh Ravitch both became a lynchpin of local literary life and revived the Jewish Public Library's People's University. This trickle of newcomers would grow to a deluge in the late 1940s as tens of thousands of Yiddish-speaking displaced persons would make their homes in Montreal.

After 1930, the use of Yiddish in the wider Canadian Jewish community began declining steadily. The dominant pattern in Ashkenazi immigration had been for new immigrants to adopt English, while Yiddish continued to be bolstered by successive waves of new arrivals who spoke that language. The Canadian immigration restrictions set in place in 1931 essentially halted the arrival of new Yiddish-speaking settlers. While Yiddish remained a dynamic vehicle steered by dedicated cultural activists, it steadily moved to the margins of local Jewish life in the face of ongoing anglicization. Further, the marginalization and decline of the Jewish left² – a bastion of secular Yiddish culture – further eroded the place of Yiddish within Canadian Jewish life. This general trend away from Yiddish as the *lingua franca* and as a progressive force in modern Jewish life was heightened by the large-scale immigration of significant numbers of Jews with no historic connection to Yiddish, beginning with Sephardim from North Africa in the 1950s.³

This same period marked the emergence of a new cadre of English writers out of Montreal's Yiddish immigrant community that ultimately brought Canadian Jewish literature into the mainstream. The first of these writers, poet and novelist A.M. Klein, straddled the Yiddish and English cultural milieus. Born in Ukraine, Klein was raised in a Yiddish-speaking home in Montreal and attended the city's English

Protestant schools. As an undergraduate at McGill University, he was active in the local Zionist movement and was also associated with the Montreal Group of English-language poets that sought to forge an English Canadian modernist literary tradition. In addition to practising law, Klein served as editor of the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* from 1938 to 1955, which placed him in a prominent community leadership position.⁴ He was also politically engaged as speechwriter and public relations consultant for Samuel Bronfman, president of the Canadian Jewish Congress, and ran for office for the socialist Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) party. In his poetry and prose, Klein drew on linguistic and thematic elements of the Jewish tradition and crafted verse in his own particular brand of Judeo-English. At the same time, as editor of the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*, he shared offices with the staff of the *Adler* and maintained close contacts with the Yiddish literati, including J.I. Segal, Israel Rabinovitch, and Hirsch Wolofsky. He wrote extensively on Yiddish literature and culture and produced English adaptations of major works by both Rabinovitch and Wolofsky.⁵ Despite his wide involvement with Yiddish culture, Klein – like Shulamis Yelin discussed in chapter 4 – opted for English as his creative language. On an ideological level, he was committed to Jewish revitalization through cultural Zionism and was a promoter of Modern Hebrew, and not Yiddish, as the language of the Jewish people. He was also keenly aware that he lacked the facility to express his art in Yiddish.⁶ In the 1950s and beyond, a cadre of English-language writers from Montreal Yiddish-speaking families produced English-language writing that refracted their experiences of Jewish Canada. These include renowned novelist Mordecai Richler (1931–2001, grandson of Yudel Rosenberg), poet Irving Layton (1912–2006), and poet and novelist Leonard Cohen (1934–), among others.⁷ These writers issued from the Jewish immigrant milieu and may have been inspired by Yiddish, but they did not create in it.

One reading of the increasing dominance of English in Montreal's Jewish cultural milieu is as an inevitable transition away from Yiddish. Novelist and literary scholar Norman Ravvin's introduction to *Not Quite Mainstream: Canadian Jewish Short Stories* presents the following trajectory of Jewish writing in Canada: "For a time, leaders in the Canadian Jewish intellectual community, particularly in Montreal, struggled to maintain a Yiddish literary life, viewing such continuity as the best route to a viable New World Jewish culture. One chronicler [David Roskies] has called these cultural workers 'lay Jewish

revolutionaries' and described their dreams for Yiddish in Canada as a utopian project. Of course, the Jewish literary tradition that took shape in Canada has little to do with this utopian dream."⁸ Other scholars speak of a transition from Yiddish to English among Montreal's Jewish writers.⁹ However, the notion of a unidirectional and inevitable transition away from Yiddish exists only through the lens of historical hindsight; from the perspective of the participants in Montreal's Yiddish cultural milieu, the forsaking of Yiddish for English was far from an inevitability. Further, in post-1945 Montreal, Yiddish was not supplanted to the same extent as it was in other North American centres. Anita Norich's *Discovering Exile: Yiddish and English Culture in America during the Holocaust* details a growing cultural divide between American Yiddish writers and their English-language counterparts. Norich posits that whereas in the United States of the 1930s and 1940s Yiddish had ceded the place of primacy in Jewish life to English, there remained cultural exchange between the two languages; after the Holocaust, however, the dominant Anglo-Jewish culture largely ignored the vibrant Yiddish culture. In Montreal, in contrast, a widening English-Yiddish gap was mitigated by the presence of a strong core of institutions to bolster Yiddish culture, which remained an integral part of mainstream Jewish community life. Moreover, in tandem with Klein, Richler, Layton, and others, a sizable and robust group of Montreal Yiddish writers continued to write and publish in Yiddish far into the post-war period. Writers and poets such as Yehuda Elberg, Mordkhe Husid, Rokhl Korn, Peretz Miransky, and Chava Rosenfarb remained major figures on the local as well as the international Yiddish literary stage, their works widely disseminated, celebrated, and translated into English and other languages. Rosenfarb recalls her integration into Montreal's Yiddish milieu:

Upon my arrival in Montreal in 1950, I found a bustling Yiddish social life. Without ever having to wait until I learned English properly, I could read the *Keneder Adler* every day, and so keep up-to-date with world and Canadian news events. Harry Hershman, my Montreal publisher, who made it possible for me to emigrate to Canada, supplied me with Yiddish literary periodicals, which kept me informed about Yiddish cultural life both here and abroad. He took me to the Folk University at the Jewish Public Library, which was the centre for Yiddish cultural life in the city.

I visited the Peretz schools and the Folk Shule and became a student at the Yiddish teacher's seminary.

I could count more than forty Yiddish writers living in Canada in the years just after my arrival in this country, writers of international reputation, recognized all over the Yiddish-speaking world, as well as more marginal writers, so-called Sunday scribblers – or “graphomanes” – as they were dubbed in Poland. There was an active writers' union in Montreal, which I was invited to join. There were constant public lectures on literary topics.¹⁰

Certainly, despite widespread efforts to achieve long-range cultural continuity through publications, libraries, salons, schools, and theatre and to foster Yiddish as a living culture, locally born and raised generations adopted English as their language of daily life and creative expression. Still, at the same time, Yiddish remained a vital force in Montreal. The full story is thus far more nuanced than a transition away from Yiddish towards English.

YIDDISH CULTURE IN MONTREAL BEYOND 1945

While the post-Holocaust period is beyond the scope of this study, this chapter concludes with a brief discussion of the profound demographic and cultural changes in Yiddish Montreal since 1945. The Nazis' annihilation of half of the world's Yiddish speakers and decimation of the centuries-old Yiddish heartland led to a fundamental reorientation of the map of “Yiddishland.” Historically rooted in Europe, the locus of post-Holocaust Yiddishland shifted to newer immigrant centres, particularly those in America.¹¹ This reconfiguration brought to an end the notion that smaller Yiddish cultural centres such as Montreal were “offshoots” of main centres in Eastern Europe. Of the 250,000 Jews living in displaced persons' camps across Europe at the end of the Second World War, tens of thousands of Yiddish-speaking Holocaust survivors – among them writers, actors, musicians, and pedagogues – settled in areas that had previously been secondary centres of Yiddish culture, including cities in Australia, Canada, Israel, and South Africa. Previously minor centres such as Montreal became major centres on the new map of Yiddishland.

The central feature of Montreal Yiddish life in the immediate post-1945 period was expansion. With community lobbying and changes

in the country's immigration policy, significant numbers of displaced persons began to arrive in Canada. Indeed, the country absorbed the largest population of Holocaust survivors in the world after Israel and the United States. It is estimated that between 1947 and 1956 some thirty-five thousand survivors of the Holocaust settled in Canada; between 1945 and 1960, Canada's Jewish population increased by 35 per cent, at least half of which was the result of the immigration of Holocaust survivors and their children.¹² This population included a significant number of Yiddish speakers. Montreal received more Holocaust survivors than any other Canadian centre; an estimated fifteen thousand settled in a city whose total Jewish population in 1951 numbered eighty-five thousand.¹³ The city's Yiddish infrastructure – the press, the Jewish Public Library and other literary organizations, the schools, theatre – provided a sanctuary and an anchor for the new arrivals. The newcomers became readers of the local Yiddish press and patrons of cultural organizations; they filled the Yiddish schools as teachers and students; and they served as directors, actors, and audiences for an emerging local Yiddish theatre.

Montreal's Yiddish community attracted cultural figures of international renown. Its members banded together to bring Holocaust survivors who had been scattered across Europe to Montreal and to offer them ongoing support. Ida Maza, Hersh Hershman, and Melekh Ravitch were particularly active in bringing Yiddish writers to Montreal, and they subsequently helped in the publication of many of their works.¹⁴ As a result, Montreal became home to many of the last generation of European-raised Yiddish writers. In Elaine Kalman Naves's *Putting Down Roots: Montreal Immigrant Writers*, Eugene Orenstein discusses how Montreal was able to attract writers of high calibre after the war:

Montreal had the only Jewish daily in Canada, the *Keneder Adler*, whose literary editor at one time had been the outstanding poet, J.I. Segal. Montreal had pioneered the Yiddish-Hebrew day school system in North America. It had the Jewish Public Library, which was far more than a place to borrow books, but a major cultural institution to which for a time a so-called "folk university" was attached and where the now famous Yiddish Theatre found its first home. In subsequent years there were as many Montrealers who won the Manger Prize, the most prestigious literary award for Yiddish, as there were New Yorkers: Melech Ravitch, Rachel



Rokhl Korn and Melekh Ravitch on front porch in Montreal, 1950s.
JPL Photograph Collection, Jewish Public Library Archives, Montreal

Korn, S. Dunski, Jacob Zipper, [Chava] Rosenfarb, and [Yehuda] Elberg.¹⁵

Chava Rosenfarb described to Naves the Yiddish literary scene she encountered upon her arrival in 1950: “Not in vain was it called ‘the Jerusalem of North America ... Take the Jewish Public Library! It was the *centre*, the vital nerve of Yiddish life in North America, not just in Canada. And the *great* Yiddish writers from New York used to come to Montreal. I met them all, here in Montreal.”¹⁶

This population of Yiddish newcomers had a significant impact on local Jewish communal life. In her study titled “The Contributions of Holocaust Survivors to Montreal Jewish Communal Life,” Myra Giberovitch discusses the ways in which the new arrivals both revitalized existing organizations and formed new ones. These organizations, which included a variety of Yiddish cultural and educational institutions, facilitated their integration into local life. This institutional

involvement also helped the newcomers address their Holocaust experiences by enabling them to form surrogate families, memorialize those they had lost, and preserve and transmit the cultural heritage of their destroyed communities.¹⁷ Yiddish organizational life expanded in the face of widening divides between the newly arrived Holocaust survivors and the majority anglicized Canadian Jewish population. The gaps were linguistic as well as cultural. As Franklin Bialystok points out, the newcomers spoke Yiddish as well as other European languages, whereas established Canadian Jewry was largely English speaking; they had known a pre-war Europe that had often been far more sophisticated than the one their Canadian counterparts had left behind decades earlier. Moreover, the survivors' horrific Holocaust experiences were often met with indifference or profound incomprehension.¹⁸ To some degree, the isolation faced by the Holocaust survivors ultimately served to strengthen Montreal's Yiddish culture as the newcomers joined the community and expanded the existing infrastructure.

After 1945, the leading figures in Yiddish Montreal increasingly comprised Jews who had escaped or survived Nazi Europe. The arrival of large numbers of Yiddish speakers to Montreal reinvigorated the cultural community just as it was beginning to wane. Their activism in all realms of Yiddish cultural life would signal a new era in Montreal's Yiddish community and sustain Yiddish cultural life for decades to come. In the process, they rendered Montreal a Yiddish world centre. Post-1945 Yiddish Montreal was marked by an efflorescence that brought the city into the international spotlight. The minority Yiddish culture created by Montreal's cadre of Yiddish writers, pedagogues, and cultural activists on Canadian soil in the years 1905–45 sustained itself into the future. In addition to strengthening established organizations, the city's informal Yiddish networks facilitated an ongoing commitment to the Yiddish language among those individuals who chose to speak or write in Yiddish, whether for ideological reasons or because it was the language in which they were most at home. Yiddish speakers organized and attended lectures and other cultural events, coordinated Yiddish education and enrolled their children in secular Jewish schools, contributed to and/or subscribed to Yiddish periodicals, and wrote and/or assisted in the publication of Yiddish books. A group of dedicated Yiddish activists continued to carry the torch, even as their ranks thinned. In the 1960s and beyond, they cultivated organizations such as *Di komitet far yidish* (the Committee for Yiddish)

under the aegis of the Canadian Jewish Congress to promote ongoing cultural activity in the language.

Even in the haven of Montreal, however, Yiddish culture has not been immune to wider trends of attrition. The cadre of Yiddish cultural activists has not replenished itself, and other ideological frameworks, such as religious orthodoxy or Zionism, have assumed dominance in the Jewish community. The city's Yiddish writers, no matter how vibrant their own literary circles, faced a shrinking readership. Even though Yiddish books continued to be published, fewer and fewer people actually read them. Chava Rosenfarb, who chose to write in Yiddish in part to express her commitment to the language and to the memory of a world destroyed in the Holocaust,¹⁹ offered the following comments at a 2006 convocation address at the University of Lethbridge, Alberta:

I wrote my novels in Yiddish out of a sense of loyalty to the vanished world of my youth, out of a sense of obligation to a world that no longer existed. Little did I realize that in a few short years, Yiddish itself would no longer exist – at least not as I knew it, not as a living and breathing language of day-to-day life. To lose one's language is an unspeakably painful thing, especially for a writer. Writing is always a lonely profession, but the Yiddish writer's loneliness has an additional dimension. Her readership has perished. Her language has gone up with the smoke of the crematoria. She creates in a vacuum, almost without a readership, out of fidelity to a vanished language; as if to prove that Nazism did not succeed in extinguishing that language's last breath, and that it is still alive. And so here I am – a Yiddish writer on the prairies. A Yiddish writer who must depend on translation in order to be read.²⁰

In recent years, moreover, Montreal's Yiddish cultural milieu has been hard hit by the passing of its last generation of European-born speakers. In *Words on Fire: The Unfinished Story of Yiddish*, Dovid Katz characterizes the impact of these losses:

For anyone to whom modern Yiddish, and its literature and culture are dear, the most bitterly painful time is the present. The secondary Holocaust blow is hitting hard and is coming to its devastating climax. The last secular Yiddish *masters* – writers, teachers, cultural organizers, scholars, journalists, performers,

artists and so on, who came to intellectual or cultural maturity in pre-Holocaust Eastern Europe, are disappearing daily. In mid-2003, Montreal, for example, was still on the conceptual map of high-end secular Yiddish culture because of the presence of great prose writer Yehuda Elberg (born in Poland in 1912); the untiring, inspirational organizer of Yiddish cultural institutions and events, Sara Rosenfeld (born in Poland in 1920); and the fabled founder of Canada's Yiddish theatre, Dora Wasserman (born in Ukraine in 1919). By mid-2004, they were all gone. It is rather unfair to complain to God (or to doctors) when people in their eighties and nineties who have lived through a lot come to the end of life in peace surrounded by loved ones. By late 2004, Montreal, with no disrespect to its many enduring Yiddish resources (far outstripping many cities with much larger Jewish populations), had fallen off the map as a centre boasting major living masters.²¹

Yiddish culture in Montreal lives on, but less and less in actual Yiddish. Many children of Yiddish activists have become prominent in contemporary Yiddish cultural life and express a commitment to Yiddish. Few function primarily in Yiddish in the day-to-day. As graduates of the secular Jewish schools, patrons and leaders of the Jewish Public Library, actors and audience members in the Yiddish theatre, and Yiddish translators or academics in the field of Yiddish Studies, many Montrealers have maintained strong connections to the language.²² Professor of English literature and Yiddish translator Goldie Morgentaler, daughter of Chava Rosenfarb, has attributed her own retention of Yiddish to her upbringing in Montreal: "Because Montreal managed to preserve its Yiddish heritage for so long, to institutionalize it, and to offer it some organizational and cultural backing, the language held onto its vibrancy in a way that it did not in other places."²³ She points to the impact of the Jewish People's School on her own life: "Among other things, it ensured that I would not forget Yiddish, that I would have a solid grounding in Jewish culture and history and that I would forever after strongly identify as a Jew, albeit a secular one. It is hard to exaggerate the influence that JPS [the Jewish People's School] had on my life."²⁴ Montreal remains the only city in North America whose original secular Jewish schools from the 1910s continue to teach Yiddish as part of the standard curriculum. Further, the city is one of a few world centres to house a public library with an extensive Yiddish collection and Yiddish cultural activity; it is also

home to one of North America's very few permanent Yiddish theatres. However, Yiddish has shifted irrevocably from the vernacular into the post-vernacular.

THE LEGACY OF YIDDISH CULTURE IN MONTREAL

Statistically, the place of Yiddish as mother tongue of Canadian Jewry has eroded steadily. Canadian census statistics show a decline from a high of 96 per cent in 1931 to 77 per cent ten years later. By 1951, about half of Canadian Jews named Yiddish as their mother tongue; a decade later this number would drop to a third. By 1981, only 11 per cent of Canadian Jews declared Yiddish their mother tongue.²⁵ The present and future of Yiddish in Canada remain topics of heated community discussion, in particular in light of the 2006 half-census findings that point to a sharp decline in the overall number of Yiddish speakers and indicate that, for the first time, Modern Hebrew has eclipsed Yiddish as mother tongue among Canadian Jews.²⁶ In tandem with these demographic shifts, the question as to whether Yiddish is dying – or what Shandler refers to as the century-old “trope of Yiddish as moribund” – remains unresolved.²⁷ A 1973 book, *Yiddish in Canada: The Death of a Language*, by Jack Thiessen, emeritus professor of German at the University of Winnipeg, offers a bleak picture of the future of the language:

When eastern Europe was destroyed, Yiddish lost its geographical base, and though enclaves may continue to exist in Mea Shearim, Williamsburg, Montreal and Rio, the end is in sight. Sure, we have Yiddish courses in our universities. These are attended by students whose parents left them culturally rootless, and who are searching for their Zaida (grandfather) and the shtetl (ghetto). For them it is therapy ... For those with a long view, Yiddish is an episode like Alexandria, or Spain, and is destined for the limbo of Aramaic and Ladino.²⁸

This characterization of Yiddish in Canada has not been borne out by time, in particular in Montreal. Yiddish Montreal has shown itself to be far from moribund, despite the passing of the last generation of European-raised Yiddish speakers.

Montreal has retained its primacy as Canada's Yiddish centre and an international Yiddish hub. In 2006, the city was home to a majority

of the country's Yiddish speakers, despite the fact that the total Jewish population of Montreal (71,380) was less than half that of Canada's largest Jewish community of Toronto (141,685). In that year, Montreal had 13,515 self-declared Yiddish speakers of all ages compared to 10,345 in Toronto. An important element in the overall maintenance of Yiddish in Montreal is the infrastructure that was created to promote the Yiddish language and its culture. Yiddish established deep roots in the city, with enduring institutions to ensure its ongoing usage. Montreal continues to engage with Yiddish through the city's secular Jewish schools, its Jewish public library, and its theatre.

For reasons that have to do with the particular makeup of the city's Jewish community, Yiddish Montreal includes a significant younger demographic. In 2006, of Canada's 9,305 Yiddish speakers over the age of seventy-five, 4,390 lived in Toronto and 3,345 in Montreal; however, out of 1,345 Canadian Yiddish speakers under the age of five, 1,180 were residents of Montreal, while 140 lived in Toronto.²⁹ A significant factor behind both the maintenance of spoken Yiddish in Montreal and the relative youth of Montreal's Yiddish speakers is the rapid expansion of insular Hasidic communities in the Montreal area, many of which employ Yiddish as a daily vernacular. Largely refugees from, or survivors of, the Holocaust and their descendants, Hasidim speak Yiddish at home, in the community, and with their children, and teach it in their schools. These Ultra-Orthodox Jews employ Yiddish for intersecting reasons: expressing continuity with a Jewish past; hyperbolizing their distinctiveness and separating themselves from the mainstream; maintaining and reinforcing group solidarity; and facilitating communication among Hasidim worldwide.³⁰ Among Hasidim, Yiddish has shifted from being an immigrant language to being an ethnic tongue that represents a chosen medium for perpetuating tradition. As Leo Davids remarks in a 1993 study of the demographics of Yiddish in Canada, "Yiddish is safe among them!" although, he adds, "today's reality is not guaranteed indefinitely."³¹ Time, however, appears to have borne out Davids's assertion. The Yiddish-speaking Ultra-Orthodox Jews remain the fastest-growing segment of the Canadian Jewish community owing to their high birth rate. According to a community official, in the Hasidic community of Tash located outside of Montreal, couples average one child for every one and a half years of marriage.³² Alex Werzberger, president of the Coalition of Outremont Hasidic Organizations (COHO), has remarked on the rising use of Yiddish within an expanding Hasidic

community: “[W]e call it the revenge of the cradle – that’s our mother tongue.”³³ Today, Montreal’s Hasidic communities continue to evince a high degree of Yiddish maintenance; for example, Ayala Fader, in her study of the Hasidic enclave of Brooklyn, explains one woman’s ease with speaking only Yiddish in her home: “Because she is from Montreal, where most Hasidic Jews speak Yiddish more fluently than in Brooklyn, she did not have too much trouble speaking Hasidic Yiddish at home with him [her husband] and children.”³⁴

It is important to underline, however, that Hasidim hold a very different understanding of the role of Yiddish within their communities from the activists discussed in this study. They do not speak Yiddish to express a revitalization of Jewish life in the modern world. Thus, according to one member of the Montreal Hasidic community, while Yiddish is the first language learned and is widely spoken, “we don’t speak Yiddish to preserve the language, but to have a connection with our forefathers ... The language keeps us between ourselves and minimizes outside influence.”³⁵ While members of Montreal’s Hasidic community do publish material with Yiddish content, such as their community magazines, Yiddish itself – spelling, style, new vocabulary – is not cultivated. According to Werzberger, “Yiddish is not a language. Yiddish really is a jargon, a *joual*.³⁶ It’s a bastardized version of German. Hebrew and Yiddish are not even third cousins.”³⁷ In a population that prioritizes receptive textual knowledge and in which Yiddish print culture retains a traditional derivative role, today’s Hasidic populations officially neither produce nor consume modern Yiddish culture. Whereas in the period 1905–45 members of Montreal’s small founding Hasidic communities, such as Yudel Rosenberg, could be found writing for a mainstream Yiddish newspaper like the *Adler* or otherwise participating in the city’s wider Yiddish cultural milieu,³⁸ the Hasidic refugees from Nazi Europe struggled to transplant their decimated communities, focusing on maintenance and a connection with a lost past rather than on building a new future. Janet Hadda, in her article “Imagining Yiddish: A Future for the Soul of Ashkenaz,” suggests a widening new polarization in post-Holocaust Yiddish culture, with an open secular Yiddish culture on one side and the Ultra-Orthodox world, where Yiddish serves to maintain boundaries between that world and the secular one outside, on the other.

In the secular domain, Yiddish has extended far beyond the boundaries of the Jewish community, in particular in the realm of performance, evolving into what Hadda terms “neo-Ashkenaz” – a

“wildly inclusive,” widely accessible culture based on Yiddish that transcends ethnic boundaries.³⁹ In this vein, Montreal’s Dora Wasserman Yiddish Theatre offers annual performances in addition to operating a youth wing called Young Actors for Young Audiences (YAYA). Although many of the theatre’s cast members do not speak Yiddish and audience members increasingly rely on simultaneous translation into English or French, the theatre deliberately stages an innovative Yiddish repertoire, such as translations from world theatre, in addition to classics of the Yiddish stage.⁴⁰ Most of these performances feature music, which aids in rendering them accessible to non-Yiddish-speaking viewers. Notable productions include educational ventures such as the 2003 YAYA production *No More Raisins, No More Almonds: Children’s Ghetto Songs*, written by Holocaust survivor and Jewish educator Batia Bettman to sensitize youth across Canada to the lessons of the Holocaust. Music with a Yiddish component represents another area of rising popularity worldwide, in particular in the emergence of klezmer music.⁴¹ Although traditionally an instrumental form of music, klezmer music has come to be closely associated with Yiddish song, even when most of its audiences and performers do not relate to the language as a vernacular.⁴² Montreal has spawned a variety of klezmer bands and festivals. Further, since 1996, a retreat centre outside of Montreal has hosted the annual KlezKanada, an intergenerational gathering devoted to music and Jewish culture. These performance-centred events draw on Yiddish culture while requiring no actual knowledge of the language.⁴³ As Jeffrey Shandler points out, in many cases the symbolic meaning attributed to Yiddish in these performance contexts far exceeds the participants’ actual familiarity with the language.⁴⁴ With their participants increasingly comprised of non-Yiddish speakers, performative ventures in Yiddish form an integral part of a postvernacular realm where Yiddish usage is not contingent on linguistic fluency.⁴⁵

During the second half of the twentieth century, the dominant pattern for Yiddish culture in its newer areas of settlement was characterized by a shift away from both an immigrant vernacular and a language of high culture and towards the realm of heritage. However, the transition has been far more complex than rhetoric about inevitable Yiddish decline would suggest. Discussion about the present and future of Yiddish has never been neutral; as Janet Hadda has pointed out, a language only exists as a function of use.⁴⁶ Dovid Katz, himself the son of a Yiddish poet, posits that the “next major chapter in the

unfinished story of Yiddish” lies with the Hasidim.⁴⁷ Hadda and other English-language writers such as Dara Horn posit the transmission of the culture and spirit of Ashkenaz via “Judeo-English” in a new English-language literature.⁴⁸ In Canada, a new generation of Anglo-Jewish writers are imagining and reinventing a literary tradition that incorporates Yiddish.⁴⁹

In Montreal, the core institutions of the infrastructure established between 1905 and 1945 continue to promote Yiddish in changing ways. The Jewish Public Library remains one of a few institutions in the world that continue to collect Yiddish books and offer Yiddish programming.⁵⁰ It has also pioneered key ventures to promote Yiddish creativity. The J.I. Segal Awards, established in 1968 to recognize and celebrate creative works on Jewish themes, includes a prestigious prize for an original work in Yiddish. The library has been actively promoting the creation of original student writing in Yiddish in its annual First Fruits competition, established in 1983 and open to all Quebec high school students, with winning entries published in a literary anthology. At the same time, the library reflects an increasingly linguistically diverse Jewish community, with reading and audiovisual material as well as cultural programming offered in English, French, Hebrew, and Russian.

Montreal’s secular Jewish schools represent some of the world’s very few non-Orthodox Jewish day schools where Yiddish study remains an integral component of the curriculum; both the elementary and high school levels of Montreal’s Jewish People’s and Peretz School (JPPS) system offer Yiddish instruction. However, with none of the students experiencing Yiddish as a day-to-day vernacular, the language has taken on value as what Jeffrey Shandler terms “an object of heritage,” whereby any engagement with the language holds symbolic meaning.⁵¹ In this mode, instruction is focused on forging ties with Ashkenazi culture rather than on building linguistic fluency. As the schools’ website states, “JPPS recognizes the primacy of Hebrew as the language of the entire Jewish people. Nevertheless, in its educational philosophy and orientation, this school has, from its very beginning, integrated the study of Yiddish language and literature into the curriculum of the school. This program of studies is viewed as the vehicle to make the students more knowledgeable and appreciative of this unique and particular part of their Jewish heritage and culture.”⁵² In these schools, emphasis is placed on Modern Hebrew as a communicative language tied to contemporary Jewish life in Israel

and internationally, while Yiddish is characterized as a heritage language. The same tendency can be found in Toronto's Bialik Hebrew Day School, Canada's other secular Jewish all-day school that offers Yiddish as part of its curriculum.

The approach of Yiddish as heritage has faced increasing challenges in JPPS. It is complicated by the increasing diversity of the student body, which includes students from non-Ashkenazi backgrounds. Further, according to Anna Fishman Gonshor and William Shaffir's recent comparative study of secular and Hasidic Jewish schools in the Montreal area, Yiddish teaching in the JPPS elementary and high schools has been undermined by a lack of commitment by the school administration; conversely, Hasidic schools, which operate in communities where children are raised to speak Yiddish, endorse its instruction for utilitarian reasons but do not necessarily place value on the grammatical or lexical quality of the language being taught.⁵³ In her study of students in Jewish high schools in Montreal and Toronto, Grace Feuerverger posits that Modern Hebrew occupies a core position in the definition of Jewish ethnic identity for youth, including students in Montreal's JPPS schools, where Yiddish continues to form part of the curriculum. She also identifies a "psychological conflict" for JPPS students who expressed a desire to maintain Yiddish. As one student said, "I don't want to see Yiddish disappear. I know some of my classmates think it's a waste of time and we should only be learning Hebrew. But I disagree. Yiddish is too beautiful and even if it won't be spoken in an everyday way, it is important that the effort is being made to maintain it through education and literary and music events. It makes me feel less sad."⁵⁴

Concurrent with the rapid decline of Yiddish as a living language outside of Ultra-Orthodox communities has been a rising interest in Yiddish on both scholarly and popular fronts.⁵⁵ Translation marks an expanding site of Yiddish cultural activity in Montreal. In the last two decades, many books on Yiddish in Montreal have been rendered into English and French translation, including Simon Belkin's Yiddish-language history of the Canadian Labour Zionist movement; the memoirs of Israel Medres and Hirsch Wolofsky; the diaries of Yankev Zipper; Chaim-Leib Fuks's lexicon of Yiddish and Hebrew writers in Canada; and Sholem Shtern's essays on Yiddish writers. Numerous French translations have been spearheaded by Pierre Anctil, a Québécois anthropologist and historian, author of pioneering studies on the Jews of Quebec, and activist in rapprochement efforts between

French and Jewish Quebecers.⁵⁶ In addition, the poetry and prose of a handful of Montreal Yiddish writers active in the interwar period have been translated and anthologized, including works by Ida Maza, J.I. Segal, Sholem Shtern, and Yankev Zipper. The corpus of belles lettres in translation by the better-known post-Holocaust Yiddish writers – Yehuda Elberg, Rokhl Korn, Chava Rosenfarb, and others – is extensive. In many cases, the authors themselves have sought out and participated in the translation of their works from Yiddish.⁵⁷ Further, study of Yiddish language, literature, and culture has been offered by community organizations as well as in academic programs in universities.⁵⁸ It has thus become possible for those without facility in Yiddish to gain entry to a rich cultural life.

FINAL REMARKS

The story of Yiddish culture between 1905 and 1945 is one of deep roots in Canadian soil. It is a story of innovation motivated by the ideological conviction that Yiddish could serve as a key to a viable Jewish past, present, and future. Although factors beyond the control of its proponents ultimately doomed that original vision, the example of Montreal provides insight into dynamic mechanisms for formulating identity in the transition from immigration to ethnicity. The Yiddish-based institutions that were established between 1905 and 1945 have demonstrated long-term stability, notably the Jewish Public Library and the secular Jewish schools. Montreal's Yiddish activists created a lasting edifice that has not crumbled; on some level, they represent success despite the fact that they were ultimately on the losing end of history. In the final analysis, it is doubtful whether the Yiddish cultural milieu that has been the subject of this study will ever rise again in Montreal, or anywhere else. Nevertheless, its influence continues to be felt in Canadian Jewish cultural life – and beyond – in ever-changing ways. The legacy lives on.

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NOTES

PREFACE

- 1 This figure, comprising 250,000 in the United States and 100,000 in the rest of the world, represents a rough estimate offered by sociolinguist Joshua A. Fishman. Cited in Shandler, *Adventures in Yiddishland*, 203n1. Because of the increase in Hasidic populations worldwide, one can surmise that this number is increasing rather than decreasing.
- 2 Kuznitz, “Yiddish Studies”; and Shandler, *Adventures in Yiddishland*. See also Glaser, “From Polylingual to Postvernacular.”
- 3 Shandler, *Adventures in Yiddishland*, 33.
- 4 For example, see Peltz, *From Immigrant to Ethnic Culture*; and Tabak, “The Transformation of Jewish Identity.”
- 5 Sack, *History of the Jews in Canada*, and *Canadian Jews*. While less reliable, Toronto Yiddish journalist Abraham Rhinewine’s *Der yid in kanade* includes much raw material on the cultural activities of the immigrant community.
- 6 See Hoerder, “Ethnic Studies in Canada from the 1880s to 1962.”
- 7 See Rome’s series published under the auspices of the Canadian Jewish Congress Archives.
- 8 Abella, *A Coat of Many Colours*; Paris, *Jews*; and Tulchinsky, *Taking Root; Branching Out* and *Canada’s Jews*.
- 9 Weinfeld, Shaffir, and Cotler, *The Canadian Jewish Mosaic*; Brym, Shaffir, and Weinfeld, *The Jews in Canada*; Robinson and Butovsky, *Renewing Our Days*; and Menkis and Ravvin, *The Canadian Jewish Studies Reader*.

- 10 Anctil, *Tur Malka*; Corcos, *Montréal, les Juifs et l'école*; Larrue, *Le théâtre yiddish à Montréal/Yiddish Theatre in Montreal*; Levendel, *A Century of the Canadian Jewish Press*; and Robinson, *Rabbis and Their Community*.
- 11 Shtern, *Shrayber vos ikh hob gekent*; and Zipper, *Araynblikn in yidishn literarishn shafn*.
- 12 Medres, *Montreal fun nekhtn*; *Tsvishn tsvey velt milkhomes*; Belkin, *Di poyle-tsien bavegung in kanade*; and Zipper, *The Journals of Yaacov Zipper*.
- 13 Norich, *Discovering Exile*.
- 14 Morawska, *Insecure Prosperity*.
- 15 Cimet, *Ashkenazi Jews in Mexico*.

CHAPTER ONE

- 1 Zipper's name is alternately rendered Yaacov, Yaakov, and Jacob.
- 2 Zipper, "The Journal of Yaacov Zipper 1925–1926," 53. Translation adapted for clarification.
- 3 Estraikh, *In Harness*, 16.
- 4 Ashkenazim are Jews of Germanic descent whose civilization spread eastwards and came to form the world's largest population of Jews. They are distinguished from Sephardi Jews, who trace their roots to the Iberian Peninsula.
- 5 See Jacobs, *Yiddish*; Kerler, *The Origins of Modern Literary Yiddish*; and Weinreich, *History of the Yiddish Language*.
- 6 Shandler, *Adventures in Yiddishland*, 6.
- 7 See Harshav, *The Meaning of Yiddish*.
- 8 On the history of antagonism towards Yiddish, see Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred*.
- 9 Fishman, *The Rise of Modern Yiddish Culture*, 6.
- 10 Cohen, "The Jews of Independent Poland," 162.
- 11 Fishman, *The Rise of Modern Yiddish Culture*, 18, 21.
- 12 See Shternshis, *Soviet and Kosher*.
- 13 See Peltz and Kiel, "*Di Yiddish-Imperiye*"; and Shneer, *Yiddish and the Creation of Soviet Jewish Culture*.
- 14 Cohen, "The Jews of Independent Poland," 172.
- 15 Harshav, *The Meaning of Yiddish*, 122–4.
- 16 Kellman, "*Dos yidishe bukh alarmirt*," 215.
- 17 See Trachtenberg, *The Revolutionary Roots of Modern Yiddish*.
- 18 Estraikh, *In Harness*, 9.
- 19 For further information on these debates as they played themselves out in interwar Poland, see Fishman, "Interwar Eastern European Jewish Parties and the Language Issue."
- 20 Fishman, *The Rise of Modern Yiddish Culture*, 98.
- 21 Estraikh, *In Harness*, 29.

- 22 For a complete account of the conference, see Goldsmith, *Modern Yiddish Culture*. See also Fishman, "Attracting a Following to High-Culture Functions for a Language of Everyday Life."
- 23 Fishman, *The Rise of Modern Yiddish Culture*, 101; and Goldsmith, "Zhitlovsky and American Jews," 295. On Peretz, see Wisse, *I.L. Peretz and the Making of Modern Jewish Culture*.
- 24 For an overview of American Yiddish poetry, see Harshav, *American Yiddish Poetry*, esp. 27–44.
- 25 See Shmeruk, *A shpigl oyf a shteyn*.
- 26 Steinlauf, "Jewish Theatre in Poland," 84.
- 27 Cohen, "The Jews of Independent Poland," 172. Cohen notes that mother tongue statistics may have been inflated through propaganda by Jewish parties seeking national recognition (163).
- 28 See Isaacs, "Haredi, Haymish and Frim"; and Fader, *Mitzvah Girls*.
- 29 See Stein, *Making Jews Modern*; and Rodrigue, "The Ottoman Diaspora."
- 30 See Rodrigue, *Images of Sephardi and Eastern Jewries in Transition*.
- 31 See Ginio, "Learning the Beautiful Language of Homer."
- 32 Borovaya, "The Serialized Novel as Rewriting" and "New Forms of Ladino Cultural Production in the Late Ottoman Period."
- 33 Ginio, "Learning the Beautiful Language of Homer," 256.
- 34 Estraiikh, *In Harness*, 2.
- 35 On Canada's changing immigration policies, see Kelley and Trebilcock, *The Making of the Mosaic*.
- 36 See Troper, "Jews and Canadian Immigration Policy," 44–5.
- 37 During this time the Jewish population of Canada increased by 100,845, of which 89,169 was due to immigration. Between 1900 and 1905, 17,288 Jewish immigrants came to Canada; the census of 1901 numbers the total population of Jews at 16,401. See Kage, *With Faith and Thanksgiving*; and Sack, *Canadian Jews*.
- 38 See Troper, "New Horizons in a New Land."
- 39 Rosenberg, *Canada's Jews*, 27, 31, 33, 34. They included Toronto's Kensington Market and Winnipeg's North End. See Speisman, *The Jews of Toronto*, 81–95; and Gutkin, *The Worst of Times, the Best of Times*, 5–12.
- 40 Kuznets, "Economic Structure and the Life of the Jews."
- 41 Arnold, "The Contribution of the Jews to the Opening and Development of the West."
- 42 On Jewish farming colonies, see Friedgut, "Jewish Pioneers on Canada's Prairies"; and Katz and Lehr, *The Last Best West*.
- 43 On Yiddish cultural life in one of the most enduring of these colonies, in Edenbridge, Saskatchewan, see Jones, "A Chimney on the Canadian Prairies." For a memoir, see Usiskin, *Oksn un motorn*,

translated as *Uncle Mike's Edenbridge*. See also Friedgut, "Jewish Pioneers on Canada's Prairies."

- 44 Rosenberg, *Canada's Jews*, 162.
- 45 Bialystok, *Delayed Impact*, 18.
- 46 An Order-in-Council is an administrative decision issued by the governor general of Canada that originates with the Cabinet of Canada.
- 47 Zimmerman, "'Narrow-minded people.'"
- 48 Abella and Troper, *None Is Too Many*.
- 49 See Frank, *Two Centuries in the Life of a Synagogue*.
- 50 See Abella, *A Coat of Many Colours*; and Sack, *History of the Jews in Canada*.
- 51 On the history of anglophone domination of the Montreal economy, see Levine, *The Reconquest of Montreal*, esp. 9, 18–19, 35.
- 52 This term originates from the title of Hugh MacLennan's 1945 novel, *Two Solitudes*, and its depiction of the two separate nations that comprise Canada.
- 53 Brown, *Jew or Juif*, 184. See also Feldhay Brenner, "Canadian Jews and Their Story," 284. On other Jewish "frontiers," see Elazar, *Jewish Communities in Frontier Societies*.
- 54 Jewish peddlers maintained ongoing contact with French Canadian communities. Brown, *Jew or Juif*, 184.
- 55 See Schuchat, *The Gate of Heaven*.
- 56 For a discussion of the early Jewish families, see Abella, *A Coat of Many Colours*, 37–54.
- 57 Sack, *Canadian Jews*, 3.
- 58 Weinfeld, "The Ethnic Sub-economy," 181.
- 59 For example, see Burns, *The Shamrock and the Shield*.
- 60 Brown, *Jew or Juif*, 215.
- 61 See Rosenberg and Jedwab, "Institutional Completeness, Ethnic Organizational Style and the Role of the State."
- 62 Rosenberg, *Canada's Jews*, 12.
- 63 Ibid., 19–20; and Kage, *With Faith and Thanksgiving*, 259–61.
- 64 The Jews followed the English, French, Scottish, Irish, German, Scandinavian, and Ukrainian groups. Until 1931, Jews outnumbered Ukrainians by 20,000. Rosenberg, *Canada's Jews*, 12. On Ukrainian immigration, see Gerus and Rea, *The Ukrainians in Canada*.
- 65 In 1851, after almost a century of Jewish settlement in Canada, more than half of the country's 354 Jews lived in Montreal. In 1921, 45,014 of Canada's 126,196 Jews lived in Montreal.
- 66 Initially, Montreal's Old Port at the south end of St-Laurent functioned as the immigrant Jewish area of settlement. The Jewish immigrant neighbourhood moved north until it reached the Mile End area. See Anctil, *Saint-Laurent*.

- 67 For more on the Jewish settlement of Montreal, see Tulchinsky, “The Third Solitude,” 96–112; and Baker, “Montreal of Yesterday,” 39–52.
- 68 Rosenberg, *Canada’s Jews*, 32–3, 321. See also Choinière, “Évolution de la population juive au Québec de 1931–1971.”
- 69 See Olazabal, *Khaverim*; and Szacka, “Antécédents idéologiques de la communauté ashkénaze québécoise.”
- 70 See Tulchinsky, *Canada’s Jews*, 242–82.
- 71 Cited in Greenstein, *Third Solitudes*, 15.
- 72 Stevenson, *Community Besieged*, 45–6.
- 73 The *kheyder* is the first level of a formal traditional Jewish education in Ashkenaz, with a focus on basic Jewish literacy, notably prayer and the Bible. In Jewish Eastern Europe, learning was largely conducted through the repetition of text and oral translation into Yiddish under the supervision of a *melamed*, or teacher. The *yeshiva* represents the next level in traditional Jewish education, with learning done independently or in pairs under the supervision of a rabbi. The object of study is the Talmud and other rabbinic texts. The *beys-medresh* is a house of study.
- 74 On these struggles, see Robinson, *Rabbis and Their Community*.
- 75 For a recent immigrant’s account of Jewish life in Montreal in 1884, see Bernstein, *The Jews in Canada*, 19–22.
- 76 Sack, *Canadian Jews*, 3. The budget designated by the Montreal Jewish community to settle the new immigrants in the last quarter of the nineteenth century was \$1,000, reaching \$2,000 by the end of the nineteenth century; from 1871 to 1901, the Jewish population of Montreal increased fourteen-fold. Langlais and Rome, *Jews and French Quebecers*, 57, 72.
- 77 See Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*.
- 78 Abella, *A Coat of Many Colours*, 103–9.
- 79 Brown, *Jew or Juif*, 247.
- 80 Robinson and Butovsky, *Renewing Our Days*, 18.
- 81 See Sigler, “Montreal.”
- 82 On the establishment of the Vaad Ha-Ir, see Robinson, “The Foundation Documents of the Jewish Community Council of Montreal.”
- 83 In Yiddish, the term *yidish* can mean both “Yiddish” and “Jewish.”
- 84 See Harris, “Yiddish Was Official in Quebec.”
- 85 The trial, which began in October 1911, was highly publicized for its duration; it ended with Beilis’s acquittal on 12 December 1913.
- 86 The case, brought forth by the Jewish community of Montreal and prosecuted by three prominent Montreal Jewish lawyers, was heard in the Superior Court beginning in May 1913. The case was dismissed on a legal technicality when the court ruled that only individuals, not a group, could claim libel. See Abella, *Coat of Many Colours*, 110.

- 87 Goldsmith, "Yiddishism and Judaism," 15–16.
- 88 See Wisse, "Di Yunge."
- 89 Tenenboym, "Di yidishe shprakh af der tog-ordnung fun der sholem konferents in pariz."
- 90 Anctil, "H.M. Caiserman," 87.
- 91 See Patrias, *Patriots and Proletarians*.
- 92 Rosenberg, *Canada's Jews*, 257. For detailed statistical studies, see Rosenberg, "Language and Mother Tongue of Jews in Canada"; and Yam, "Selected Data on the Canadian Jewish Population Whose Mother-Tongue is Yiddish."
- 93 Rosenberg, *Canada's Jews*, 255.
- 94 Rosenberg, "Canada," 2–3.
- 95 Tulchinsky, *Taking Root*, 212. See also Medres, *Montreal of Yesterday*, 45–7.
- 96 See Srebrnik, *Jerusalem on the Amur*.
- 97 Kallis, "Di geshikhhte fun keneder adler."
- 98 Roskies, "Yiddish in Montreal," 31.
- 99 Morgentaler, "Land of the Postscript," 168.
- 100 Ravitch, "Kanadisher tsveyg fun shtam," 77.
- 101 Caiserman, *Yidishe dikhter in kanade*, 69.
- 102 The other two are the vast distances between Jewish communities and the long, harsh winters. Fuerstenberg, "Transplanting Roots," 63.
- 103 Fishman, interview; and Novershtern, interview.
- 104 See Kugelmass and Boyarin, "The Landsmanshaft in Montreal."
- 105 See Diner, *A Time for Gathering*.
- 106 See Rischin, *The Promised City*, 140–70.
- 107 Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts*.
- 108 See Safran, "Nationalism," 77–93.
- 109 See Nasaw, *Schooled to Order*.
- 110 Orenstein, "Yiddish Culture in Canada Yesterday and Today," 294, 297.
- 111 For a fuller discussion of this topic, see Margolis, "Ale brider."
- 112 See Cimet, *Ashkenazi Jews in Mexico*; and Cimet, "A War of Ideas."
- 113 See Elazar, *Jewish Communities in Frontier Societies*; and Avni, "The Jews of Canada and Argentina before World War II."

CHAPTER TWO

- 1 For a discussion of this phenomenon within Spanyolit print culture, see Borovaya, "The Serialized Novel as Rewriting." See also Stein, *Making Jews Modern*.
- 2 The transliterated name of the newspaper is a matter of ongoing contention. The official title on the masthead is *Der keneder adler*, and its readers pronounced it as such. Although the Standard Yiddish word

for “eagle” is *odler*, this study employs the former spelling. Correcting or Yiddishizing the titles of historic Yiddish publications by rendering them in Standard Yiddish would mean changing the name of the Yiddish daily *Forverts* [Forward], to something like *Faroyts* (Standard Yiddish for “forward”); *forverts*, *adler*, and numerous other words used as titles of Yiddish periodicals were borrowed from the German, a prestige language of intellectual life.

- 3 See Stein, *Making Jews Modern*, esp. 23–55.
- 4 Study cited in Levine, “Yiddish Publishing in Berlin and the Crisis in Eastern European Culture.”
- 5 Steinlauf, “The Polish-Jewish Daily Press.”
- 6 Ginio, “Learning the Beautiful Language of Homer,” 241.
- 7 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.
- 8 See Fraenkel et al., “Press.”
- 9 See Chaikin, *Yidishe bleter in amerike*; and Goldberg, “The American Yiddish Press at Its Centennial.”
- 10 See Cohen, “The Yiddish Press as Distributor of Literature.”
- 11 Mintz, “The Many Rather Than the One,” 1.
- 12 Prager and Greenbaum, *Yiddish Literary and Linguistic Periodicals and Miscellanies*, 1.
- 13 Madison, *Jewish Publishing in America*, 207.
- 14 See Fishman, “The Sociology of Yiddish,” 35; and Ravitch, “Kanadisher tsveyg fun shtam,” 234.
- 15 Fishman, “The Sociology of Yiddish,” 33.
- 16 See Miron, *A Traveler Disguised*.
- 17 For a study of the serialized Yiddish novel, see Kellman, “The Newspaper Novel in the Jewish Daily Forward.”
- 18 See Cohen, “The Yiddish Press and Yiddish Literature.”
- 19 Madison, *Jewish Publishing in America*, 207.
- 20 Abella, *A Coat of Many Colours*, 124.
- 21 In 1886, when the Shaar Hashomayim Congregation sought a printer to produce some ritual material, they turned to the printing presses of the New York *Di yidishe gazeten*. Moreover, the technical know-how for the first Yiddish presses in Montreal originated in New York. Rome, *The First Jewish Literary School*, 11.
- 22 Levendel, *A Century of the Canadian Jewish Press*, 13.
- 23 Hill, “Early Hebrew Typography in Canada,” 12. I also thank Mr Harris for sharing his unpublished bibliography, “Hebrew and Yiddish Printing in Canada, 1844–1915.”
- 24 Generally, the Hebrew alphabet has been used for Yiddish texts, but there have been attempts to produce Yiddish in Latin type.
- 25 Israel Rabinovitch’s comments, cited in Rome, *The First Jewish Literary School*, 12. Brad Sabin Hill writes that the leaflet was issued in 1888. Hill, “Early Hebrew Typography in Canada.”

- 26 Ravitch, "Yiddish Culture in Canada," 76. None of these early periodicals are extant.
- 27 Located at 1897 Notre Dame Street, the print shop billed itself as "the only Hebrew Printer in the Dominion of Canada." *Souvenir Programme* of the 8th Annual Convention of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, Montreal, 6–11 July 1897, *Keneder adler*, Canadian Jewish Congress Charities Committee National Archives (hereafter CJCCC; formerly Canadian Jewish Congress National Archives [CJCNA]).
- 28 Rome, *The First Jewish Literary School*, 13.
- 29 According to Harris, the calendars were commissioned by the James A. Ogilvy and Sons store and Rotenberg and Company travel agents, both located in Montreal. For a description of the latter's calendar, see Rome, *The First Jewish Literary School*, 13–14.
- 30 Rome, *The Immigration Story III*, 58.
- 31 *Jewish Times*, 24 November 1899. Cited in Rome, *The Canadian Story of Reuben Brainin*, 87–8.
- 32 Sack, *Canadian Jews*, 46.
- 33 Hirsch Wolofsky, "25 yor 'keneder adler.'"
- 34 Rhinewine, *Der yid in kanade*, 213; Sack, *Canadian Jews*, 46; and Fuks, *Hundert yor*, 66. See Robinson, *Rabbis and Their Community*, chap. 3.
- 35 Medres, *Montreal fun nekhtn*, 65.
- 36 For a discussion of this work, see Robinson, *Rabbis and Their Community*, chap. 8.
- 37 *Journey of My Life* was published in 1945 in an English adaptation by A.M. Klein.
- 38 Fuks, *Hundert yor*, 102; and Niger, *Leksikon fun der nayer yidisher literatur*, 3, 263–4.
- 39 For Wolofsky's full account of this early period, see Wolofsky, *Journey of My Life*, 52–7.
- 40 Fuks, *Hundert yor*, 256. See Rome, *The First Jewish Literary School*, 60–127.
- 41 Fuks, *Hundert yor*, 139.
- 42 Benjamin was among the first writers to translate works of French literature into Yiddish. His translation of *Jean Christophe* by Roman Rolland appeared in New York in book form in 1918–22. Fuks, *Hundert yor*, 33–4.
- 43 The work was published two years after Belkin left for California because of illness. Fuks, *Hundert yor*, 33.
- 44 For a discussion of Caiserman's activism, see Pierre Anctil, "H.M. Caiserman," 69–100.
- 45 See Rome, *The Canadian Story of Reuben Brainin*.
- 46 See Reisen, *Leksikon fun der yidisher literatur un prose*.

- 47 Brainin, *Kol kitveh reuven mordekhai brainin*, vol. 3, 282–3.
- 48 “Levaye fun ruvn braynin ruft aroys dem grestn interes in der yidisher montreol,” *Keneder Adler* (hereafter *KA*), 4 December 1931, 1.
- 49 For a bibliography of Brainin’s archive, see Caruso, *Mafteah lamihtavim byidish ube-ivrit be-izuono shel reuven brainin*.
- 50 Fuks, *Hundert yor*, 316–17.
- 51 Caiserman, *Yidishe dikhter in kanade*, 65–6.
- 52 The Lida Yeshivah was headed by Rabbi Jacob Reines (1839–1915), a Zionist and one of the founders of the Mizrachi movement who introduced secular subjects such as mathematics and Russian into the curriculum.
- 53 Felsen, “Translating Israel Medres.”
- 54 See *ibid*.
- 55 Gottesman, *Defining the Yiddish Nation*, 8–11.
- 56 See Fuks, *Hundert yor*, 18–19.
- 57 Gottesman, *Defining the Yiddish Nation*, 66–9.
- 58 An excerpt appeared in the Montreal Yiddish journal *Der kval* under the name of Yehude Elzet. *Der kval* (1922): 12–15.
- 59 Part of this translation appeared in the twenty-fifth-anniversary volume of the *Adler*. Sack, Rabinovitch, and Wolofsky, *Yoyvl bukh, suvenir oysgabe*, 49–50.
- 60 See Fuks, *Hundert yor*, 260–2; and Gotlib, “Yisroel rabinovitsh.”
- 61 Prager, *Yiddish Literary and Linguistic Periodicals and Miscellanies*, 5.
- 62 Fuks, *Hundert yor*, 260–2.
- 63 An English adaptation by A.M. Klein, *Of Jewish Music*, appeared in 1952.
- 64 Fuks, *Cent ans de littérature yiddish et hébraïque au Canada*, 440.
- 65 Ravitch, “Kanadisher tsveyg fun shtam,” 235.
- 66 For example, “Pleyne yidish,” *KA*, 23 May 1921; and “Tsvishn shrayber un lezer,” *KA*, 20 February 1922.
- 67 Tulchinsky, “The Third Solitude,” 108.
- 68 Wolofsky, *Journey of My Life*, 54–5.
- 69 See Margolis, “A Tempest in Three Teapots.”
- 70 Chaikin, *Yidishe bleter in amerike*, 201; see also Menkis, “Yiddish and Hebrew in Interwar Vancouver.”
- 71 Gordon, *Four Hundred Brothers and Sisters*, 27.
- 72 These included Ber Borokhov, Nathan Birnbaum, Joel Entin, Kalmen Marmor, David Pinski, Avrom Reisen, Nachman Syrkin, Yehoash, Chaim Zhitlowsky, and many others.
- 73 *Folkstsaytung* 1, no. 7 (1912): 8, 11. See Wisse, *A Little Love in Big Manhattan*, 88–90.
- 74 Rhinewine, *Der yid in kanade*, 215. According to Fuks, a weekly titled *Di keneder yidishe pres* [The Canadian Yiddish Press] was edited by

- Malamut in 1913–14. Fuks, *Hundert yor*, 158. It is not listed in Cukier, *Canadian Jewish Periodicals*.
- 75 According to Ancil, 41 of the 417 Canadian Yiddish and Hebrew writers listed in Fuks's lexicon published in *Der veg*. Pierre Ancil, interview with the author, 8 March 2004.
- 76 Rhinewine, *Der yid in kanade*, 215.
- 77 Cukier, *Canadian Jewish Periodicals*, 3.
- 78 Contributors included humorist Moshe Nadir (Isaac Reis), writer Joseph Opatoshu, and poet Chaim Nachman Bialik.
- 79 Cukier, *Canadian Jewish Periodicals*, 7.
- 80 Also known as the *Keneder hon* [The Canadian Hen]. Rhinewine, *Der yid in kanade*, 215; and Cukier, *Canadian Jewish Periodicals*, 3, 8. A fragment of the *Hon* is housed at the CJCCC.
- 81 Fuks, *Hundert yor*, 90.
- 82 May–July 1913. Fuks, *Hundert yor*, 159–60.
- 83 See Margolis, "Negotiating Jewish Canadian Identity," "Jewish Immigrant Encounters with Canada's Native Peoples," and "*Kanader zhurnal*."
- 84 Caiserman, "Yidish-literarishe tetikayt in kanade."
- 85 See editorial in *KA*, 22 July 1924.
- 86 Levendel, *A Century of the Canadian Jewish Press*, 20.
- 87 Reprinted in Sack, Rabinovitch, and Wolofsky, *Yowl bukh, suvenir oysgabe*.
- 88 Ibid.
- 89 See Jedwab, "The Politics of Dialogue."
- 90 Correspondence between Sack regarding the edition is housed at Sack, B.G., CJCCC.
- 91 "Sack, Benjamin Gutman (son of Iseah Lipe, Journalist)," unpublished manuscript, Sack, B.G., CJCCC.
- 92 "Montreal, June 1964. Biographical Notes," Sack, B.G., CJCCC.
- 93 Untitled manuscript listing Sack's articles in the *Adler* from 1910 through 1955. Sack, B.G., CJCCC.
- 94 Sack, "History of the Jews in Canada."
- 95 These articles appeared in Borthwick, *History and Biographical Gazeteer of Montreal*; Singer, *Jewish Encyclopedia*; and de Sola, *History of the Corporation of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews*.
- 96 For example, in response to a request made to the superintendent of immigration in Ottawa, Sack received statistical data on Jewish immigration to Canada in a booklet titled "Immigration Facts and Figures" (1910) and a brochure titled "Immigration Facts and Figures" (1921). Similarly, by request, he received a pamphlet titled "Immigration Facts and Figures" (1920), issued under the authority of the Hon. J.A. Calder, minister of immigration and colonization. Sack, B.G.,

CJCCC; and Sack, Jewish Canadiana Collection, Jewish Public Library Archives (hereafter JPLA).

- 97 Diamondstone, “B.g. zak der historiker fun yidisher kanade,” 66.
- 98 The second volume of *The History of the Jews in Canada*, which covers the period from 1900 to 1920, was in manuscript form in Yiddish at Sack’s death and was published posthumously in English translation. Sack, *Canadian Jews*.
- 99 Hapgood, *The Spirit of the Ghetto*, 44–60.
- 100 See Robinson, *Rabbis and Their Community*.
- 101 Robinson, Ancil, and Butovsky, *An Everyday Miracle*, 18.
- 102 KA, 19 June, 4 July 1920. See editorial of 18 August 1920.
- 103 On the Soviet theatrical trials, see Shternshis, *Soviet and Kosher*, 93–9.
- 104 Zipper, “The Journal of Yaacov Zipper 1925–1926,” 62–3.
- 105 Ravitch, “Yiddish Culture in Canada,” 76.
- 106 Hirsch, *Fablen*, 9.
- 107 Ads for *Fablen* appeared virtually every day between 1919 and 1920.
- 108 The *Montreoler shas* was produced in Montreal and used a type set by the American Rabbinical Council. It was slated to appear in 1918 and to be marketed widely in North America and abroad. Wolofsky, who anticipated significant profits from the venture, moved the *Adler’s* presses to larger quarters.
- 109 Announcements that appeared in the *Adler* in June 1919 advertised the newspaper as a union shop that offered printing services, including books, pamphlets, and ephemera, in Yiddish, English, and Hebrew, as well as photoengraving services.
- 110 A second Anglo-Jewish newspaper appeared in 1908, the *Canadian Jewish Tribune*. After only a few issues, it merged with the *Jewish Times* under the title the *Canadian Jewish Times*. See Levendel, *A Century of the Canadian Jewish Press*, 1–9; and Tulchinsky, *Taking Root*, 149–50.
- 111 Rhinewine, *Der yid in kanade*, 211–13.
- 112 Letterhead, *Keneder adler*, CJCCC.
- 113 See Goutor, “The Canadian Media and the ‘Discovery’ of the Holocaust, 1944–1945”; Leff, *Buried by the Times*; Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief*, “The Holocaust”; and Shapiro, *Why Didn’t the Press Shout?*
- 114 Levendel, *A Century of the Canadian Jewish Press*, 14.

CHAPTER THREE

- 1 Shternshis, *Soviet and Kosher*, 46–7.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 I have adapted this definition from Ravitch, “Kanadisher tsveyg fun shtam,” 233.
- 4 Robinson, Ancil, and Butovsky, *An Everyday Miracle*, 18.

- 5 For an example of such correspondence, see the papers of Sholem Shtern: Correspondence, Sholem Shtern fonds, Library and Archives Canada, www.collectionscanada.ca.
- 6 On early Hungarian, Icelandic, and Ukrainian literature in Canada, see Balan, *Identifications*.
- 7 Caiserman, *Yidishe dikhter in kanade*, 69.
- 8 In 1915 a union of Yiddish journalists was founded under the name I.L. Peretz Yiddish Writers' Union. A member of the United Hebrew Trades, the union had 200 members by 1929, many of them prominent members of the Yiddish literary establishment. Mohrer and Web, *Guide to the YIVO Archives*, 131.
- 9 Howe and Greenberg, *A Treasury of Yiddish Poetry*, 39; and Shtern, *Shrayber vos ikh hob gekent*, 262.
- 10 Anctil, "H.M. Caiserman," 85. For a contemporaneous overview of Segal's poetry, see Caiserman, *Yidishe dikhter in kanade*, 27–49.
- 11 Cooper Friedman, "Between Two Worlds," in *An Everyday Miracle*, 115; and "Between Two Worlds," MA thesis, 2.
- 12 Anthologies featuring Segal's writing in English translation include Howe and Greenberg, *A Treasury of Yiddish Poetry*; and Howe, Wisse, and Shmeruk, *The Penguin Book of Modern Yiddish Verse*. A body of his work has been translated into French by Pierre Anctil (Segal, *Poèmes Yiddish*).
- 13 Sh. Sh. (Sholyme Shnayder), "Notitsn," in *Royerd* 4 (June 1923): 30.
- 14 Mani Leib purportedly penned to Shtern in the 1930s that he hoped one could impress upon Segal not to be "so quarrelsome with all writers. In his esteem, no one in Canada can write. All are scribblers (*grafomanen*).” Shtern, *Shrayber vos ikh hob gekent*, 273.
- 15 On Shkolnikov's involvement with the bakers' union, see Lerner, "Making and Breaking Bread in Jewish Montreal."
- 16 Among the harshest disclaimers of his poetry was J.I. Segal. See Caiserman, *Yidishe dikhter in kanade*, 53–7.
- 17 See Margolis, "Remembering Two of Montreal's Yiddish Women Poets."
- 18 Fuks, *Hundert yor*, 197–8.
- 19 "Montreoler naves," in *Heftn* 1 (January–February 1936): 48–9.
- 20 Caiserman, *Yidishe dikhter in kanade*, 123–4. For Caiserman's overview of Yudika's poetry, see 121–5.
- 21 See Margolis, "Ale brider."
- 22 Shtern, *Shrayber vos ikh hob gekent*, 235.
- 23 A number of these essays are reprinted in Shtern, *Shrayber vos ikh hob gekent*.
- 24 See Margolis, "Sholem Shtern."

- 25 Ibid., 274.
- 26 Fuks, *Hundert yor*, 251; and Cukier, *Canadian Jewish Periodicals*, 19–21. On the Toronto left wing, see Frager, *Sweatshop Strife*.
- 27 Fuerstenberg, “Jewish Writing,” 1110.
- 28 Fuerstenberg, “Faithful to the Dream,” 86–7.
- 29 “Rezonansn,” *Epokhe* 1 (January–April 1922): 87–90.
- 30 *Prolet* 1, no. 1 (September 1935): 1.
- 31 See Shimen Kants’s article on “Sholem shtern” in Spilberg and Zipper, *Kanader yidisher zamlbukh*, 101.
- 32 Caiserman, *Yidishe dikhter in kanade*, 9–10.
- 33 Fuks, *Hundert yor*, 134–5.
- 34 Zipper, *Araynblikn in yidishn literarishn shafn*, 281.
- 35 Fuks, *Hundert yor*, 134–5.
- 36 Ibid., 284.
- 37 In addition to writing a popular daily column for the *Adler* titled “Geshikhte fun mayn lebn (Story of My Life)” under the name Kh. Yudelevitch, he also contributed to *Der yidisher zhurnal* (Toronto) and *Dos yidishe vort* (Winnipeg).
- 38 Fuks, *Hundert yor*, 55–6; and Rozhanski, *Kanadish*, 438.
- 39 Zipper, *Araynblikn in yidishn literarishn shafn*, 171.
- 40 Fuks, *Hundert yor*, 49–50; and Niger, *Leksikon fun der nayer yidisher literature*, 7, 440–1. For a memoir of Franzus-Garfinkle and her writing, see Zipper, *Araynblikn in yidishn literarishn shafn*.
- 41 Massey, *Identity and Community*. 53.
- 42 Margolis, “Les écrivains yiddish de Montréal et leur ville.” See also Fuerstenberg, “Transplanting Roots.”
- 43 See Ancil, “À la découverte de la littérature yiddish montréalaise.”
- 44 See Ringuet, “A nayer landshaft.”
- 45 J.I. Segal, “Rezonansn,” *Nyuansn*, February 1922, 65.
- 46 See Cooper Friedman, “Between Two Worlds.”
- 47 Caiserman, “Yidish-literarische tetikayt in kanade.”
- 48 Sack, “Yidish-literarische tetikayt in kanade,” in Sack, Rabinovitch, and Wolofsky, *Yoyvl buk, suvenir oysgabe*, 58.
- 49 Sholem Shtern, *Shrayber vos ikh hob gekent*, 203.
- 50 Margolis, “Sholem Shtern,” 95.
- 51 Morgentaler, “Land of the Postscript,” 169.
- 52 Conversation with Eugene Orenstein, 7 April 2005.
- 53 Hershman, “Hersh Hershman.”
- 54 The store was located on St-Laurent, near Ontario Street.
- 55 The address of the new store was 68 St-Laurent, near Ste-Catherine Street.
- 56 Jones, “The Vancouver Peretz Institute Yiddish Library,” 9–11.

- 57 See Hanson, *A Jewel in a Park*.
- 58 Evelyn Miller, "The History of the Montreal Jewish Public Library and Archives."
- 59 Figler and Rome, *The H.M. Caiserman Book*, 126–8; and Caruso, *Folk's Lore*, 52.
- 60 Caruso, *Folk's Lore*, 14.
- 61 "Constitution of the People's Library and University."
- 62 Roskies, "Yiddish in Montreal," 24.
- 63 Caruso, *Folk's Lore*, 45.
- 64 Fuks, *Hundert yor*, 240–2.
- 65 KA, 25 March 1914.
- 66 KA, 29 April, 17 May 1914.
- 67 For example, KA, 28 April 1914.
- 68 KA, 9 April 1914.
- 69 Eight columns under the headline "Support the Library and the People's University" appeared from 14 to 26 April. Money for the "Thousand Dollar Fund" was directed to Reuben Brainin at the *Adler*.
- 70 "Monetary Receipts of the People's Library," KA, 24, 28 April, and repeatedly through 31 July 1914.
- 71 KA, 10 June 1914.
- 72 KA, 21 June 1914. See also Sack, Rabinovitch, and Gotlib, *Biblyotek bukh*, 14.
- 73 Sack, Rabinovitch, and Gotlib, *Biblyotek bukh*, 14.
- 74 Caruso, *Folk's Lore*, 53.
- 75 In 1917, the Jewish Public Library moved to larger quarters at 951 St Urbain Street, in the heart of the Jewish Mile End district. In 1921, the library purchased its own building at 1131 St Urbain Street and in 1930 moved into a three-storey house at 4099 Esplanade. In 1953, after a massive fundraising campaign, the Jewish Public Library moved into a newly erected building at 4499 Esplanade. By 1966, the Jewish population centre had shifted further west, and the library moved to rented quarters on Decarie Boulevard. In 1973, it moved to its present location on Cote St Catherine Road.
- 76 *Shund* would be available only to the "serious researcher of literature" for scholarly purposes. "Constitution of the People's Library and University."
- 77 Sack, Rabinovitch, and Gotlib, *Biblyotek bukh*, 4.
- 78 Interview with David Rome, June 1983, 7.
- 79 Gubbay, "The Jewish Public Library of Montreal," 82.
- 80 Caruso, *Folk's Lore*, 58.
- 81 Gubbay, "The Jewish Public Library of Montreal," 67.
- 82 Grossman, *Our Library*, 64–5.
- 83 Gubbay, "The Jewish Public Library of Montreal," 103–4.

- 84 Caruso, *Folk's Lore*, 50-1.
- 85 Flyer of "Ovtn kukrsn fun der folks-biblyotek" and "Sistematish kursn," Canadiana Collection, JPLA.
- 86 Flyer of 1933 "Literarische dinstikn," Canadiana Collection, JPLA.
- 87 Zipper, "The Journal of Yaacov Zipper 1925-1926," 61.
- 88 According to the Jewish Public Library's informal tabulations from 1927 to 1930, these Yiddish lectures on literary, cultural, and political themes took place several times a month. Handwritten list, JPLA.
- 89 Shtern, *Shrayber vos ikh hob gekent*, 18-19, 27.
- 90 *Kanader zhurnal* 1 (April 1940): 47-8.
- 91 On contemporaneous women's *leyenkrayzn* (reading circles) in North America, see Cohen, "The Demands of Integration - The Challenges of Ethnicization."
- 92 On the creation of the Jewish Cultural League, see Mayzel, *Geven a mol a lebn*, 23-33. See also Shneer, "Who Owns the Means of Cultural Production?"
- 93 *Bay undz* [Among Us], *Der kval* (1922): 31.
- 94 A letterhead for Royerd lists it as *khoymes-zhurnal aroysgegebn fun 'Kultur-Lige' in Toronto*, with Sh. Shnayder as editor and P. (Philip) Halpern as secretary. Letterhead. Sh. Shnayder, Correspondence, B.G. Sack, CJCCC.
- 95 Zipper, "The Journal of Yaacov Zipper 1925-1926," 60.
- 96 On the history of the YIVO, see Kuznitz, *The Origins of Yiddish Scholarship and the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research*.
- 97 *Yedies fun yivo* 27 (1 April 1929): 4.
- 98 Reisen lectured on 10 October 1930 and Mark on 12 March 1935, both at the Jewish Public Library. Canadiana Collection, JPLA. On 28 February and 2 March 1937, Mayzel spoke on current events and scholarship at the Workmen's Circle. YIVO, Yiddish Literature, Canadiana Collection, JPLA.
- 99 See Morer and Web, *Guide to the YIVO Archives*, 48.
- 100 "Opteylung fun tsentaler yidisher kultur organizatsye gegrundet in montreal," *KA*, 16 May 1938.
- 101 Copy of resolutions of 10-12 June meeting, CYCO, Yiddish Literature, Canadiana Collection, JPLA.
- 102 "'Tsiko' hot zikh geshtelt groyse oyfgaben, zogn hige delegatn," in *KA*, 19 June 1938. Rabinovitch's own report in the *Adler* was less than enthusiastic about the conference proceedings. "'Der Tsiko tsuzamenfor un zayne bashlusn,'" *KA*, 22 June 1938.
- 103 Undated report, CYCO, Yiddish Literature, Canadiana Collection, JPLA.
- 104 Caiserman-Wital, "'Kanade' nayer periodish-literarisher zhurnal," *KA*, 15 July 1925.

- 105 B.G. Sack, "Kanade," *KA*, 23 October 1925.
- 106 *Fareyn fun yidishe shrayber in montreal*, Yiddish Literature, Jewish Canadiana Collection, JPLA.
- 107 Anctil, "H.M. Caiserman," 82.
- 108 "H.M. Caiserman geshtorbn plutsim," *KA*, 25 December 1950, cited in Anctil, "H.M. Caiserman," 82.
- 109 Segal's preface for Caiserman, *Yidishe dikhter in kanade*, 5–7.
- 110 Anctil, "H.M. Caiserman," 82.
- 111 Ravitch, *Mayn leksikon*, 4: 237.
- 112 Caiserman, *Yidishe dikhter in kanade*, 65–6.
- 113 Fuks, *Hundert yor*, 316–17.
- 114 Figler and Rome, *The H.M. Caiserman Book*, 82.
- 115 Letterhead, B.G. Sack, CJCCC.
- 116 Letterhead of the Montreale yiddisher shrayber klub. B.G. Sack, CJCCC; Fuks, *Hundert yor yidishe un hebreyshe literatur in kanade*, 118–21; and Figler and Rome, *The H.M. Caiserman Book*, 82–4.
- 117 Cited in Figler and Rome, *The H.M. Caiserman Book*, 83.
- 118 *Der keneder yidisher shrayber* 1, no. 1 (21 May 1916).
- 119 See Massey, *Identity and Community* and "Public Lives in Private."
- 120 This appellation for Maza's home was introduced in an essay by Miriam Waddington, who was a regular visitor there. Waddington, "Mrs. Maza's Salon." On the evolution of her role and the responses to it, see Margolis, "Remembering Two of Montreal's Yiddish Women Poets."
- 121 Massey, *Identity and Community*, 62.
- 122 Waddington, "Mrs. Maza's Salon," 4.
- 123 Shtern's assessment is far from glowing: "There was too much close nestling, and Ida Maza held them in the shadows of her wings ... she warmed them with too much pious, sugary, sighing talk." Shtern, *Shrayber vos ikh hob gekent*, 37.
- 124 See Levine, "Yiddish Publishing in Berlin and the Crisis in Eastern European Culture," 86.
- 125 For a bibliography of Jewish printing in Canada, see Rhinewine, *Der yid in kanade*, 325–7.
- 126 For a comparison of works published in Eastern European publishing centres, see Vaisman, "Yiddish Publishing in Eastern Europe."
- 127 See Kellman, *The Newspaper Novel in the Jewish Daily Forward*.
- 128 Madison, *Jewish Publishing in America*, 206. For a survey of Yiddish book publishing in America, see Madison's chapter "Yiddish Book Publishing."
- 129 Fishman and Fishman, "Yiddish in Israel," 11.
- 130 Only works by the most popular Yiddish writers, such as those by New York novelist Sholem Asch, yielded financial returns. See Ravitch, "Kanadisher tsayg fun shtam," 236.

- 131 Ibid.
- 132 See Leviant's introduction to Rosenberg, *The Golem and the Wondrous Deeds of the Maharal of Prague*.
- 133 Robinson, "A Letter from the Sabbath Queen," 104.
- 134 On Rosenberg, see Robinson, *Rabbis and Their Community*.
- 135 On the Warsaw press and Petrushka's role as a journalist, see Cohen, *Sefer, sofer ve-iton*.
- 136 See Margolis, "Translating Jewish Poland into Canadian Yiddish."
- 137 Commission on European Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, "Tentative List of Jewish Publishers of Judaica and Hebraica in Axis-Occupied Countries," 5–6.
- 138 For a case study of a Vilna *farlag*, see Kühn-Ludewig, *Den Buchmarkt um die besten Werke bereichern*.
- 139 A directory of publishing houses prior to 1939, in order of country and city together with the language of publication and genre, can be found in Commission on European Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, *Tentative List of Jewish Publishers of Judaica and Hebraica in Axis-Occupied Countries*, 21–45. The work lists a total of 421 publishers that were active prior to 1939, including 144 specifically devoted to Yiddish literature.
- 140 See Shneer, "Who Owns the Means of Cultural Production?"; and Ratner and Kvitni, "Dos yidishe bukh in F.S.R.R. far di yorn 1917–1921."
- 141 Madison, *Jewish Publishing in America*, 207.
- 142 See Stein, "Illustrating Chicago's Jewish Left."
- 143 Although no date of publication is provided in the volume, Hirsch's *Hundert tropn tint* appears to be the first work of Yiddish belles lettres to be published in Canada. There is some disagreement in the sources regarding date of publication: Rhinewine's *Der yid in Kanade* identifies the date of publication as 1914; Caiserman's *Yidishe dikhter in montreal* puts it at 1917; the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research library card catalogue lists the publication of the volume as 1915, as does a handwritten note housed in the Jewish Public Library Archives; and archivist Eiran Harris agrees with the 1915 date. I am thus opting for 1915 as the date of publication. This makes Hirsch's *Hundert tropn tint* Canada's first volume of belles lettres, followed by Pesakh Matenko's *Lider* (1917) and J.I. Segal's *Fun mayn velt* (1918).
- 144 These included Farlag "visn" (Knowledge), Farlag "yugnt" (Youth), Haymans bukh farlag (Hayman's), Farlag "toronto" (Toronto), and Farlag fraynt (Friends), all in Toronto; and Farlag "winipeg" (Winnipeg) in Winnipeg.
- 145 The *Royerd* lists the following works, none of which were published: three short volumes by J.I. Segal for an "Essays series" on New York City and Yiddish writers H. Leivick, Zishe Landau, and David

- Bergelson; and two volumes of belles lettres, a collection of poetry titled *In dem tatens yorn* [In My Father's Years] by A.Sh. Shkolnikov and a collection of short stories by Sh. Shnayder titled *Tselmim* [Crosses]. An announcement in the *Der kval* literary journal of 1922 lists two additional projects: a volume of Sh. Shnayder's poetry titled *Fun mayn zumer in dorf* [From My Summer in the Village] and a Yiddish translation of Norwegian author Knut Hamsun's Nobel Prize-winning novel, *The Growth of the Soil*, under the title *Di brokhe fun der erd* [The Blessing of the Earth]. *Der kval* (1922): 31.
- 146 Kramer, "Ber Green in Canada," 229; and Shtern, *Shrayber vos ikh hob gekent*, 235.
- 147 See *Heftn 4* (May–June 1937): 43.
- 148 Madison, *Jewish Publishing in America*, 206.
- 149 Levin, *Kinder ertsihung bay yidn*.
- 150 On Segal, see Caiserman, *Yidishe dikhter in Kanade*, 61.
- 151 Krant, *Geflekht fun tsvaygn*, 88.
- 152 Maza, *A mame*.
- 153 For an overview and excerpts, see Caiserman, *Yidishe dikhter in kanade*, 13.
- 154 See Shtern, *Shrayber vos ikh hob gekent*, 57–9.
- 155 Announced in "Notitsn," *Heftn 2* (May–June 1936): 3.
- 156 *Keneder zhurnal 1* (June 1940): 49.
- 157 Fishman, interview with the author.
- 158 For example, an advertisement in the *Adler* announced that Farlag "yidish" was offering I.L. Peretz's twelve-volume collected work, *Ale verk* (edited by David Pinski, 1920). *KA*, 2 May 1920.
- 159 Advertisement on the back page of *In gevirbl* (June 1929).
- 160 Wiseman, *Folksshuln bukh* (1929): 46.
- 161 See Trehearne, *The Montreal Forties*.

CHAPTER FOUR

- 1 Ravitch, "Yiddish Culture in Canada," 76.
- 2 The Workmen's Circle established its first school in 1920 and added a second four years later; its Abraham Reisen Schools, established in 1941, expanded through the 1950s and remained in existence into the early years of the twenty-first century.
- 3 Shandler, *Adventures in Yiddishland*, 71.
- 4 Kazdan, "The Yiddish Secular School Movement between the Two World Wars."
- 5 For an overview of Yiddish in the secular Jewish schools in various centres, see Zuker, "Tsum 100stn yoyvl fun di yidish-veltlekhe shuln."
- 6 Fishman, *The Rise of Modern Yiddish Culture*, 31–2.

- 7 On the Soviet schools and their pedagogy, see Shternshis, *Soviet and Kosher*.
- 8 For an overview of Jewish and Yiddish education in the Commonwealth, including Canada, see Scharfstein, "Jewish Education in the British Commonwealth," esp. 182–8. On Latin America, see Levy, "Jewish Education in Latin America"; Scharfstein, "Jewish Education in Latin America"; and Levy, "Jewish Education in Latin America." On Yiddish schools in Mexico, see Cimet, "A War of Ideas" and *Ashkenazi Jews in Mexico*.
- 9 See Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts*, 179–216.
- 10 On the shifting ideology in the Yiddish schools, see Trunk, "The Cultural Dimension of the American Jewish Labor Movement."
- 11 On secular Yiddish schools in the United States, see Freidenreich, *Passionate Pioneers*; Parker, "An Educational Assessment of the Yiddish Secular School Movements in the United States"; and Praver Kadar, "*Far di kinders vegn*." On Yiddish schools in a smaller American Yiddish centre, see Krug, "The Yiddish Schools in Chicago."
- 12 See Anctil, "Interlude of Hostility," esp. 149–53.
- 13 Anctil, "En quête d'un partenaire fructueux : Les Juifs de Montréal face à la législation linguistique québécoise," in *Tur Malka*, 171–96.
- 14 In Eastern Europe, the Talmud Torahs were established to provide the children of the poor with a Jewish education.
- 15 MacLeod and Poutanen, *A Meeting of the People*, 197.
- 16 Menkis, "Antisemitism in the Evolving Nation," 39.
- 17 MacLeod and Poutanen, *A Meeting of the People*, 196–7.
- 18 Anctil, "Interlude of Hostility," 150; MacLeod and Poutanen, *A Meeting of the People*, 204.
- 19 Sack, *Canadian Jews*, 15–16.
- 20 Rexford, *Our Educational Problem*, 22–41.
- 21 MacLeod and Poutanen, *A Meeting of the People*, 218.
- 22 See Rome, *On the Montreal Jewish School Question*, 1903–31.
- 23 On the "Jewish School Question," see Belkin, "Di bavegung far separate yidishe shuln in Montreal"; and Corcos, *Montréal, les juifs et l'école*, 165–78.
- 24 Ginio, "Learning the Beautiful Language of Homer."
- 25 Roskies, "A Yiddish Utopia in Montreal," 152.
- 26 Peretz Hirshbeyn, "Di 'vayte' un 'kalte' kanade," in Sack, Rabinovitch, and Wolofsky, *Yoyol bukh*, 52.
- 27 In Yiddish, the term *yidish* means both "Jewish" and "Yiddish."
- 28 Goldberg, "In gang fun tog."
- 29 Belkin, *Di poyle-tsien bavegung in kanade*, 197.
- 30 Recollections of Esther Zuker in Zipper, *Leyzer tsuker gedenk bukh*, 23.
- 31 See KA, 16 March, 19 April, and 22 August 1914.

- 32 Wiseman, *Folksshul bukh* (1929), 6.
- 33 See Zipper, *The Journals of Yaacov Zipper*; and Wiseman, “A memuar fun mayn lebn vi a yidisher dertsyer.”
- 34 Fishman, “Yidishe lerers.”
- 35 Anctil, introduction to J.I. Segal, *Poèmes Yiddish*, 17.
- 36 Letter announcing the twenty-fifth anniversary of the *Perets-shuln*, 8 March 1938, Jewish Peretz Schools, CJCCC.
- 37 Fuks, *Hundert yor*, 125–8; Niger, *Leksikon fun der nayer yidisher literature*, 3, 652–4; and Rozhanski, *Kanadish*, 439.
- 38 Rozhanski, *Kanadish*, 439; and Ravitch, *Mayn leksikon* 6:i, 238. For an overview of Wiseman’s career in the *shuln*, see Dunsky, *Shloyme vaysman bukh/Shloime Wiseman Book*.
- 39 Fuks, *Hundert yor*, 77–9; and Rozhanski, *Kanadish*, 438. See also Zipper, *Araynblikn in yidishn literarishn shafn*, 46; and Ravitch, *Mayn leksikon* 6:i, 174.
- 40 Dunsky, *Midrash Rabbah*.
- 41 Wiseman, *Folksshuln bukh* (1934), 6–7.
- 42 J. Zipper, “On the occasion of the 50th Jubilee of the Jewish Peretz Schools,” playbill for the Peretz School production of the Folksbiene Playhouse of New York, in H. Leivick, “The Sage of Rottenberg,” 4 April 1964, Peretz Shuls, CJCCC.
- 43 The curriculum of the school was initially the subject of heated debate in the *Adler*. See *KA*, 16 March; 19, 22 April; and 22 August 1914.
- 44 *The Jewish People’s Schools Montreal Prospectus/Yidishe-folksshuln montreal prospekt program un informatsye bukh* (Montreal, 1926), Jewish People’s Schools (Folk Shule), CJCCC.
- 45 Wiseman, *Folksshul bukh* (1924), 14.
- 46 *Finf un tsvantsik yeriker yubiley fun dem direktorn-rat bay di yidishe folksshuln, montreal*/Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the Founding of the Board of Directors, 1922–1947, at the Jewish People’s Schools, Jewish People’s Schools (Folk Shule), CJCCC.
- 47 *Yidishe folksshuln bulletin*, December 1933.
- 48 Pomson and Schnoor, *Back to School*.
- 49 Yelin, *Shulamis*, 34. See also Bluma Applebaum, “Reminiscences and After,” in Graduates’ Society of the Jewish People’s Schools, *Yoyvl bukh*, 15–16.
- 50 *Annual Campaign of the Peretz Shul* [Montreal, 193?], Jewish Peretz School, CJCCC.
- 51 Graduates’ Society of the Jewish People’s Schools, ed. *Yoyvl bukh* (1947), 4.
- 52 *Programme of Studies in the Jewish People’s School* (Montreal, September 1924), 2, Jewish People’s Schools (Folk Shule), CJCCC. Joseph Kage also highlighted the role of the Sholem Aleichem Clubs in a series

of articles on the history of Montreal Jewish cultural institutions that appeared in the *Adler* in October and November 1964.

- 53 *Yidishe folksshuln bulletin*, December 1933.
- 54 “Notitsn,” *Yidishe kinder* (1930): 36.
- 55 See Prawer Kadar, “*Far di kinders vegn.*”
- 56 Cited from the English text. *The Jewish People’s Schools Montreal Prospectus/Yidishe-folksshuln montreal prospekt program un informatsye bukh*, Montreal, 1926, Jewish People’s Schools (Folk Shule), CJCCC.
- 57 *Folksshul bukh* (1924), 22–50.
- 58 *Bliende tsvayglakh*, May 1925, 1926, and 1927.
- 59 Wiseman, *Folksshul bukh* (1929), 9.
- 60 The March 1929 issue of *Bay undz* is listed as no. 2, the April–May issue as nos 3–4. Presumably the first number appeared in February 1929. Like most of the journals, it is not clear how many issues were produced in total.
- 61 *Yidishe kinder*, April 1926 and April 1933.
- 62 *Shule klängen*, 1.
- 63 Zipper, “The Journal of Yaacov Zipper 1925–1926,” 63–4.
- 64 See Hurvits, “Di yidishe veltlekhe shul in amerike.”
- 65 Wiseman, “A memuar fun mayn lebn vi a yidisher dertsyer,” 391.
- 66 Wiseman, *Folksshuln bukh* (1934), 6–7.
- 67 Between June 1943 and June 1944, a single issue appeared, after which *Kinder klängen* appeared annually through 1946. The journal was available to subscribers at a cost of five (later ten) cents per issue.
- 68 *Kinder klängen* 1, no. 4 (1942): 2.
- 69 The students presented Reisen with a scrapbook and recited his work. *Kinder klängen* 2, no. 1 (1942): 5–6, 20.
- 70 *Kinder klängen* 2, no. 2 (1943).
- 71 Leye Rottermund, *Kinder klängen* 1, no. 3 (1942): 5.
- 72 *Kinder klängen* 2, no. 2 (1943): 2.
- 73 Shalom Hektin, for the Vaad ha-mekhankhim ha-ivrim lemaan eretz yisrael ha-ovedet, in *Kinder klängen* 2, no. 4 (1943): 3–4.
- 74 Caiserman, *Yidishe dikhter in kanade*, 217.
- 75 Fuks, *Hundert yor*, 212; and Caiserman, *Yidishe dikhter in kanade*, 219.
- 76 Fuks, *Hundert yor*, 285; and Caiserman, *Yidishe dikhter in kanade*, 220.
- 77 Cited in Fuks, *Hundert yor*, 285.
- 78 Recollections of Esther Zuker in Zipper, *Leyzer tsuker gedenk bukh*, 24.
- 79 Among her works is the collection of Yiddish folksongs *Voices of a People*.
- 80 Ravitch, КА, 14 February 1965; cited in Fuks, *Hundert yor*, 285–6.
- 81 Borodensky’s poetry was published in the *Yidishe kinder* journal in 1925, 1927, 1929, and 1930. She served as secretary of her class’s Yiddish club in 1927. *Yidishe kinder*, May 1927.
- 82 Yelin, *Shulamis*, 37.

- 83 Ibid., 147.
- 84 Ibid., 149.
- 85 Yelin, *Seeded in Sinai*, preface.
- 86 The Morris Winchevsky School existed as a parochial school from 1945 until 1952, when a raid on the school in one of Quebec premier Duplessis's commissioned police attacks on left-wing establishments drastically reduced enrolment.
- 87 Zishe Weinper, "Aaron Krishtalka," in Krishtalka, *Gut morgn dir, velt*, v–viii.
- 88 Shtern, "Aaron Krishtalka: Der same yingster yidisher poet," in Aaron Krishtalka, *Gut morgn dir, velt!*, xi.
- 89 Sh. Niger, "Gut morgn dir, velt!" *Tog-morgn zhurnal*, 7 March 1954.
- 90 Krishtalka, interview.
- 91 Katz, *Words on Fire*, 372.
- 92 See Margolis, "Culture in Motion."

CHAPTER FIVE

- 1 Steinlauf, "Jewish Theatre in Poland," 72.
- 2 This tradition is ongoing, notably among religiously observant Jewish communities that reject secular Yiddish theatre.
- 3 Berkowitz and Dauber. *Landmark Yiddish Plays*, 35–46.
- 4 For an overview of the history of the Yiddish theatre, see Sandrow, *Vagabond Stars*.
- 5 On *shund*, see Sandrow, "Shund and Popular Theatre," in *ibid.*, 91–131.
- 6 Warnke, "Going East."
- 7 Henry, "Jewish Plays on the Russian State"; and Klier, "Exit, Pursued by a Bear."
- 8 On the Warsaw art theatres, see Steinlauf, "Jewish Theatre in Poland," 82–4.
- 9 See Veidlinger, *The Moscow State Yiddish Theater*; and Kaynar, "National Theatre as Colonized Theatre."
- 10 See Nahshon, *Yiddish Proletarian Theatre*.
- 11 Sandrow, *Vagabond Stars*, 365–76.
- 12 Spiesman, "Yiddish Theatre in Toronto"; and Spiesman, *The Jews of Toronto*, 236–9.
- 13 For an overview of the history of Yiddish theatre in Montreal, see Larrue, *Le théâtre yiddish à Montréal*.
- 14 Borovaya, "New Forms of Ladino Cultural Production in the Late Ottoman Period."
- 15 See Feldhay Brenner, "A.M. Klein's *The Rocking Chair*."

- 16 For a history of the Monument National, see Larrue, *Le monument inattendu*.
- 17 Forsyth, “Three Moments in Quebec Theatre History”; and Carrier, “Les circonstances de la fondation du Théâtre National Français de Montréal.”
- 18 Cited in the original French in Forsyth, “Three Moments in Quebec Theatre History,” 8.
- 19 Larrue, *Le monument inattendu*, 132–6.
- 20 Larrue, *Le théâtre yiddish à Montréal*, 70, 95.
- 21 Bryan, “The History of the Development of the Yiddish Theatre in Montreal.”
- 22 Zylbercweig, *Leksikon fun yidishn teater*, 1292–3; and Larrue, *Le monument inattendu*, 92.
- 23 Bourassa and Larrue, *Les nuits de la “Main,”* 82–3.
- 24 Rabinovitch, “Yiddish Theatre in Montreal,” 168; and Zylbercweig, *Leksikon fun yidishn teater*, 1292.
- 25 Interview with Louis Shochat in Bryan, “The History of the Development of the Yiddish Theatre in Montreal,” 3.
- 26 Rabinovitch, “Yiddish Theatre in Montreal,” 168–9.
- 27 “‘ARTEF’ Artists in Montreal April Second,” *KA*, 26 March 1939.
- 28 Larrue, *Le théâtre yiddish à Montréal*, 79; and Larrue, *Le monument inattendu*, 225–33.
- 29 While material abounds on famous visitors who graced the Yiddish stage, documentation on local theatre made up of volunteer actors and running on low budgets is scarce, as is the glamour that has made the professional theatre such a fruitful area of study. This is common to both Yiddish and French Quebec theatres. Larrue, *Le théâtre yiddish à Montréal*, 100; and Forsyth, “Three Moments in Quebec Theatre History,” 7.
- 30 Rabinovitch, “Yiddish Theatre in Montreal,” 170.
- 31 Larrue, *Le théâtre yiddish à Montréal*, 100.
- 32 *Ibid.*, 101.
- 33 *Montreal Star*, 3 May 1941.
- 34 Cited in Rome, *The Immigration Story III*, 31. See Larrue, *Le théâtre yiddish à Montréal*, 70.
- 35 Compare this with the role of the press in the development of Spanyolit theatre as described in Borovaya, “New Forms of Ladino Cultural Production in the Late Ottoman Period.”
- 36 Rabinovitch, “Yiddish Theatre in Montreal,” 170.
- 37 *KA*, 6 November 1908, 28 May 1910; cited in Larrue, *Le théâtre yiddish à Montréal*, 67.
- 38 Fuks, *Hundert yor*, 158.

- 39 The *Yidisher politishian*, a drama in four acts, played at the Rialto Theatre in January and February 1919. *KA*, 27 January 1919. The play was reviewed by B.Y. Goldstein on 16 February 1919.
- 40 Fuks, *Hundert yor*, 134–5.
- 41 See Larrue, *Le théâtre yiddish à Montréal*, 135–58.
- 42 For biographical information on Grober, see Fuks, *Hundert yor*, 68–9; and Niger et al., *Leksikon fun der nayer yidisher literatur*, vol. 2, 331. See also Grober's two volumes of memoirs: *Mayn veg aleyh* and *Tsu der groyser velt*.
- 43 Segal, "Khayeley grober: A zay gezunt," *KA*, 6 June 1930; and Grober, *Mayn veg aleyh*, 24–31.
- 44 Grober, *Mayn veg aleyh*, 103.
- 45 Rabinovitch, "Yiddish Theatre Group."
- 46 "Khayeley grober geyt grindn teater studio in montreal," *KA*, 26 March 1939.
- 47 On Donalda, see Brotman, *Pauline Donalda*.
- 48 Israel Rabinovitch, "Der ershter efntikher aroystreit fun 'YTEG,'" *KA*, 21 November 1940.
- 49 Grober, *Mayn veg aleyh*, 104.
- 50 "Yidish teater in montreal: Di forshtelung fun der 'TEG' studyo in baron de hirsch institut," *KA*, 8 October 1940.
- 51 "Plan Yiddish Theatre," *Gazette* (Montreal), 29 May 1939.
- 52 Grober, *Mayn veg aleyh*, 104; and "YTEG History in Brief," in 1941 *YTEG Program Book*, Chayeley Grober Collection, JPLA.
- 53 "Yidish teater in Montreal," *KA*, 8 October 1940.
- 54 "Open Yiddish Theatre," *Gazette* (Montreal), 30 October 1940.
- 55 *Program*, Season 1940, Chayeley Grober Collection, JPLA. English translations of the titles are taken from the program.
- 56 Israel Rabinovitch, "Der ershter efntikher aroystreit fun 'YTEG,'" *KA*, 21 November 1940; and "'YTEG' in a Fine Performance," *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*, 29 November 1940.
- 57 Description based on the program for the event and Robert Whittaker, "Yiddish Theatre at New Studio," *Gazette* (Montreal), 2 December 1940.
- 58 Israel Rabinovitch, "Der ershter efntikher aroystreit fun 'YTEG,'" *KA*, 21 November 1940.
- 59 "'YTEG' in a Fine Performance"; "Yiddish Group Opens Season," *Montreal Star*, 17 November 1940; and "Yiddish Theatre at New Studio," *Gazette* (Montreal), 2 December 1940.
- 60 Rabinovitch, "Yiddish Theatre in Montreal," 171.
- 61 Letter from the Community Drama Office, Victoria, BC, to H.M. Caiserman, 15 April 1941, Yiddish Theatre Group, CJCCC.

- 62 “Haynt ershte naye teater forshtelung fun ‘YTEG,’” *KA*, 4 May 1941.
- 63 Grober, *Mayn veg aleyh*, 104.
- 64 *Souvenir Program*, Season 1941, Khaye Grober, CJCCC; and Rabinovitch, “Der nayer spektakl fun ‘YTEG,’” *KA*, 7 May 1941.
- 65 Rabinovitch, “Der nayer spektakl fun ‘YTEG.’”
- 66 “Excellent Performance at ‘YTEG’ Theatre,” *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*, 9 May 1941.
- 67 Rabinovitch, “Yiddish Theatre in Montreal,” 300; and “Yiddish Theatre Group,” June 1941, Yiddish Theatre Group, CJCCC.
- 68 Grober presented a well-publicized dramatic performance of Jewish folksongs at Toronto’s Strand Theatre in May 1941 at a benefit concert to raise funds for the war effort. *Der yidisher zhurnal/ Daily Hebrew Journal*, 17 May 1941; and *Evening Telegram*, 18, 19 May 1941.
- 69 *Program*, 24 January 1942, Yiddish Theatre Group (YTG), JPLA.
- 70 “Premiere of Yiddish Theatre Group,” *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*, 16 January 1942.
- 71 Rabinovitch, “A montreoler yidisher teater,” *KA*, 23 January 1942.
- 72 In her memoirs, Grober calls the poem “Di getlekhe geto” [The Godly Ghetto]. Noting that it does not appear in any of Segal’s published works, she cites the poem in full. Grober, *Mayn veg aleyh*, 104–11.
- 73 See Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse*.
- 74 Rabinovitch, “Di naye forshtelung fun ‘YTEG,’” *KA*, 27 January 1942.
- 75 “Vos hert zikh in ‘YTEG’?” *KA*, 17 April 1942.
- 76 “Tsu der ‘YTEG’-forshtelung haynt ovnt,” *KA*, 10 May 1942.
- 77 Play announcements, Yiddish Theatre Group (YTG), JPLA; Larrue, *Le théâtre yiddish à Montréal*, 103; and Grober, *Tsu der groyser velt*.
- 78 Bryan, “The History of the Development of the Yiddish Theatre in Montreal,” 6.
- 79 *Ibid.*
- 80 Publicity materials of the Society for Jewish Theatrical Art in Montreal, 7 June, 13 September 1946, Society for Jewish Theatrical Art, JPLA.
- 81 Performance programs, Society for Jewish Theatrical Art, JPLA.
- 82 Bryan, “The History of the Development of the Yiddish Theatre in Montreal,” 7.
- 83 Larrue, *Le théâtre yiddish à Montréal*, 92–6.
- 84 *Ibid.*, 120–2.
- 85 See Margolis, “*Les belles-sœurs* and *Di shvegerins*.”
- 86 For a detailed account of Wasserman and her work, see Larrue, *Le théâtre yiddish à Montréal*, 105–62.
- 87 Bialystok, *Delayed Impact*, 24–5.
- 88 See Larrue, *Le théâtre yiddish à Montréal*, 117.

CHAPTER SIX

- 1 See Betcherman, *The Swastika and the Maple Leaf*.
- 2 See Weisbord, *The Strangest Dream*.
- 3 See Elbaz, "D'immigrants à ethniques"; Lasry, "Essor et tradition" and "A Francophone Diaspora in Quebec"; and Lévy and Ouknine, "Les institutions communautaires des juifs marocains à Montréal."
- 4 For a selection of Klein's writing in the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*, see Klein, *Beyond Sambation*.
- 5 Rabinovitch, *Of Jewish Music*; and Wolofsky, *Journey of My Life*.
- 6 For an analysis of Klein's relationship with Yiddish, see Margolis, "Ken men tantst af tseyv khasenes? A.M. Klein and Yiddish." See also Caplan, *Like One That Dreamed*; and Simon, "A.M. Klein as Pimontel."
- 7 See Greenstein, *Third Solitudes*. On Richler, see Kramer, *Mordecai Richler*; Posner, *The Last Honest Man*; and Ramraj, *Mordecai Richler*. On Layton, see Beissel and Bennett, *Raging Like a Fire*.
- 8 Ravin, *Not Quite Mainstream*, 11–12.
- 9 See Zylberberg, "Lost in Translation?"
- 10 Chava Rosenfarb, "Canadian Yiddish Writers," 11.
- 11 Shandler, "Imagining Yiddishland."
- 12 Bialystok, "Greener and Gayle," 33, 43.
- 13 Franklin Bialystok, e-mail message to author, 18 June 2009.
- 14 Zipper, *Araynblikn in yidishn literarishn shafn*, 65, 254.
- 15 Naves, "Keeping the Flame Alight," 53.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 58 (italics in the original).
- 17 Giberovitch, "The Contributions of Holocaust Survivors to Montreal Jewish Communal Life."
- 18 See Bialystok, *Delayed Impact* and "Greener and Gayle."
- 19 See Morgentaler, "Land of the Postscript."
- 20 Rosenfarb, convocation address.
- 21 Katz, *Words on Fire*, 349.
- 22 For example, see Raby, "Memories of Yiddish Montreal."
- 23 Morgentaler, "Yiddish Montreal Lost and Regained," 104.
- 24 Goldie Morgentaler, e-mail message to author, 16 January 2010.
- 25 Davids, "Yiddish in Canada."
- 26 See Heinrich, "Language of Past Sets Hasidim Apart Today"; and Lazarus, "Yiddish Speakers Drop by 10,000 in Five Years."
- 27 Shandler, *Adventures in Yiddishland*, 181.
- 28 Thiessen, *Yiddish in Canada*, 89.
- 29 Statistics Canada, 2006 Census, Data Products, Topic-Based Tabulations, Detailed Mother Tongue.

- 30 See Fader, *Mitzvah Girls*; Isaacs, “Haredi, Haymish and Frim”; Shaffir, “Safeguarding a Distinctive Identity”; and Poll, “The Role of Yiddish in American Ultra-Orthodox and Hasidic Communities.”
- 31 Davids, “Yiddish in Canada,” 159.
- 32 See Shaffir, “The Kiryas Tash Community.”
- 33 Heinrich, “Language of Past Sets Hasidim Apart Today.”
- 34 Fader, *Mitzvah Girls*, 125.
- 35 Heinrich, “Language of Past Sets Hasidim Apart Today.”
- 36 *Joual* is a working-class dialect of Québécois French.
- 37 Abley, *Spoken Here*, 224.
- 38 On the pre-Holocaust Hasidic communities of Canada, see Lapidus, “The Forgotten Hasidim.”
- 39 Hadda, “Imagining Yiddish,” 15.
- 40 See Larrue, *Le théâtre yiddish à Montréal*; and Margolis, “*Les belles-sœurs* and *Di shvegerins*.”
- 41 The term *klezmer* means “musical instrument” in the Biblical Hebrew and came to refer to an instrumental musician in Yiddish (plural: *klezmorim*); today, it is used as the name of a genre of Jewish music. See Slobin, *American Klezmer*.
- 42 See Wood, “The Multiple Voices of American Klezmer.”
- 43 See Margolis, “Culture in Motion.”
- 44 Shandler, *Adventures in Yiddishland*, 139.
- 45 Shandler, “Postvernacular Yiddish.”
- 46 Hadda, “Imagining Yiddish.”
- 47 Katz, *Words on Fire*.
- 48 Horn, “The Future of Yiddish – in English.” See also Glaser, “From Polylingual to Postvernacular.”
- 49 See, for example, Norman Ravin’s novel *Lola by Night*.
- 50 Another example of such an institution is the Maison de la culture yiddish – Bibliothèque Medem in Paris. See Gabel, “Houses of the Book.”
- 51 See Shandler, “Beyond the Mother-Tongue.”
- 52 JPPS Elementary School website.
- 53 Fishman Gonshor and Shaffir, “Commitment to a Language.”
- 54 Feuerverger, “Jewish-Canadian Identity and Hebrew Language Learning,” 123.
- 55 See Abley, *Spoken Here*, 201–28.
- 56 On Anctil, see Simon, “Bifurcations.”
- 57 For a fuller discussion of this topic, see Margolis, “Yiddish Translation in Canada” and “Sholem Shtern.”
- 58 See Prager, “Yiddish in the University.”

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