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The Continuing Story of the Yiddish Language: The Yiddish Book Center in Amherst, Massachusetts

ABSTRACT

The focus of my article is a unique place, the Yiddish Book Center in Amherst, Massachusetts, which connects Yiddish culture with the American one, the experience of the Holocaust with the descendants of the survivors, and a modern idea of Jewishness with the context of American postmodernity. Created in the 1980s, in the mind of a young and enthusiastic student Aaron Lansky, the Yiddish Book Center throughout the years has become a unique place on the American cultural map. Traversing the continents and crossing borders, Lansky and his co-workers for over thirty years have been saving Yiddish language books from extinction. The Center, however, has long stopped to be merely a storage house for the collection, but instead has grown into a vibrant hub of Yiddishkeit in the United States. Its employees do not only collect, distribute, digitalize and post online the forgotten volumes, but also engage in diverse activities, scholarly and cultural, that promote the survival of the tradition connected with Yiddish culture. They educate, offering internships and fellowships to students interested in learning Yiddish from across the world, translate, publish, and exhibit Yiddish language materials, in this way finding new users for the language whose speakers were virtually annihilated by the Holocaust. To honour their legacy, a separate project is aimed at conducting video interviews that record life testimonies of the speakers of Yiddish. Aaron Lansky's 2004 memoir, *Outwitting History*, provides an interesting insight into the complexities of his arduous life mission. Today, the Center lives its own unique life, serving the world of academia and Yiddishkeit enthusiasts alike.

Founded in 1980, the Yiddish Book Center in Amherst, Massachusetts is a unique place, which houses the world's largest collection of Yiddish books. The history of the place is closely connected with its founder, Aaron Lansky, whose youthful vitality and unrelenting belief in his cause made his vision come true. Accompanied by like-minded enthusiasts, Lansky, a student of Yiddish literature, began to journey in the early 1980s across the United States to collect Yiddish language books, first from the homes of aging, Yiddish-speaking Jews, then from the homes of their children and grandchildren who did not know the language any more. Lansky's story is not only one of a group of young people who embarked on a mission to save Yiddish books from destruction, but it is also a story of their owners. From basement storerooms, attics, garages, and book cabinets, and with the assistance of many helpers, the volunteers located and collected the forgotten volumes. The initial estimates mentioned the possibility of recovering about 70,000 volumes, a number which ultimately grew to over a million in the next years. Lansky's quest for Yiddish language books took him to Eastern Europe and South America where he not only collected but also distributed the sought-after volumes. With the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the rebirth of Jewish synagogues and educational centres, the Yiddish Book Center answered the demands of the re-emerging Jewish reading public by shipping volumes to Latvia, Estonia, Poland and Lithuania. Aaron Lansky published his story in 2004 in a memoir entitled *Outwitting History*, in which he describes an arduous task of saving thousands of volumes from extinction.

Language is a repository of cultural capital. Whenever one of its constituting elements loses its significance, another is endangered. Children who reject their parents' inheritance leave an open space that is difficult to bridge with other aspects of culture. With the linguistic generation gap, the thousand-year legacy of Jewish life in Eastern Europe was doomed to oblivion. As assimilated American Jews forgot how to speak Yiddish, they did not feel the need to preserve its literature. Consequently, Yiddish books were not reprinted for lack of a readership. For example, the complete works of Sholem Aleichem were last published in the United States in 1928, and I. L. Peretz's in 1948. Most of the literature written in Yiddish perished during World War II. However, some volumes that survived the Holocaust, the Stalinist purges, displacement and assimilation, were still there to be recovered. As Lansky recollects in his memoir, the Yiddish books always came with the stories of their owners: sometimes those who acquired them personally and could tell the stories about their whereabouts, other times those who inherited them and knew nothing about their origin. The aged owners did not only hand over the books, but their own lives attached to them. The process of collection, as Lansky recalls it, became a kind of ritual: first, the volunteers had to listen to people's stories, then help themselves to ample amounts of homemade food, and only then could they mention what they really came for—the Yiddish books.

Lansky understood the significance of Yiddish and the need to preserve access to the records of this important part of the Jewish diaspora's history. Language and literature provide a link to the past that is otherwise gone. This connection results in the continuation of an intellectual legacy. Uprooted and landless people perpetuate stories, whether in oral or written form, to confirm and sustain their shared identity. For diasporic nations, books become a "portable homeland" (Lansky 48). Passing on the language is an act of cultural transmission and preservation that ensures historical continuity. When Aaron Lansky decided to look for Yiddish books, he initially met with indifference and scepticism, largely expressed by the American Jewish establishment. "Who needs Yiddish in America now?" they asked. The opinion that the Yiddish language is dead and that they should embrace American culture, not linger in the past, was common. For assimilated and acculturated American Jews, Yiddish was "an unwelcome reminder of the immigrant culture they had worked so hard to forget" (Lansky 359). Moreover, it was Hebrew—the official language of the State of Israel—not Yiddish, which was regarded as the future for Jews. According to Lansky, "[t]he priorities of the Jewish establishment had been set in stone years before: Israel, anti-Semitism, social services" (63–64).

Individual people, however, were pleased that somebody had finally shown interest in their lives. Yiddish was a vital part of their youth, their mother tongue in which they first got to know the world. In America, the demands of immigrant life forced them to give it up for the sake of English. If still remembered, Yiddish was used at home, among the older generation, while becoming foreign to their own children and grandchildren. For the Yiddish-speaking generation, a young man such as Lansky represented the future of American Judaism, and his interest in the past meant that their Eastern European legacy might not be completely forgotten after all.

There has been a long debate about the importance of Yiddish for the Jews. Yiddish was originally the language of Ashkenazi Jews. At the height of its usage, Yiddish was spoken by 11 million Jews in Eastern Europe and all over the world, according to the approximates provided by the Jewish Virtual Library. The *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* estimates the number of speakers of Yiddish on the eve of World War II at approximately 13 million (Katz). Yiddish had been spoken for hundreds of years by strict traditionalists when, in the latter part of the nineteenth century, it was taken up by intellectuals who broke from the constraints of the Talmudic law and wanted to reinterpret Jewish tradition in a modern way. Their texts were modern, often too modern for traditional Jews, who regarded them as forbidden (unkosher). Pious Jews were to concentrate on religious texts in Hebrew and Aramaic, whereas novels and stories written in Yiddish represented a departure from the traditional world of Judaism, and were claimed to corrupt the Jewish mind with inappropriate knowledge. Therefore, the Jewish vernacular, referred to as zhargon, was long denigrated by mainstream Jewish scholarship. Jeffrey Shandler comments on its character:

> Yiddish is imagined as autochthonic, indigenous, a part of the Jewish soul—and, like the Jewish soul, part of the Jewish body. Associations of Yiddish with the corporeal and the vulgar (in its multiple meanings) are vital for much of the discourse on the language going back to the Enlightenment, both in disparaging Yiddish, and in expressing its appeal. (141–42)

The debate about the "national" language for the Jews, such as the one held during the first international conference on Yiddish language and its role in Jewish life in 1908 in Czernowitz, "was characteristic of the age of linguistic nationalism, where language was thought to express the quintessence of a people and to determine the character of the nation" (Davis 5). The organizer of the conference, Nathan Birnbaum, proclaimed Yiddish to be the national language of the Jewish people. Looking back, Pinsker points to a complicated relationship between Hebrew and Yiddish, claiming that, first of all, as "the young State of Israel neglected and sometimes forcefully rejected Yiddish, this topic elicits strong emotional, psychological, and ideological reactions. Second, scholars have, until recently, almost totally neglected the place of Yiddish within Israeli literature and culture" (278), despite a large number of Yiddish-speaking refugees and settlers relocating to the new state. A different situation was observable on the European continent, where the end of the First World War granted special rights to ethnic minorities of Eastern Europe and prompted a Yiddish-language revival. According to Dovid Katz, "[i]n the early Soviet Union, Yiddish became a government-supported language and literature, and the state financed school systems, advanced research institutes, and literature (and in some areas, Yiddish enabled courts, post offices and other public institutions)." Intellectual life flourished, marking a time of cultural renaissance in Jewish communities throughout Eastern Europe. The Yiddish language, preferred to Russian and Hebrew, became a political tool for the Bund (a leading Russian-Jewish socialist party). The prosperity of Yiddish ended in the 1930s in the USSR with Stalin's orders to close most of the Yiddish-language institutions. According to Katz, "[i]n the purges of 1937, leading Yiddish writers and cultural leaders were arrested and executed; later, in a postwar purge, the most famous surviving authors were murdered in 1950s."

The Holocaust brought the annihilation of this vibrant culture in Europe. Zionist ideology, with its rejection of the Jewish Diaspora, saw no future for Yiddish, which was then seen as the embodiment of "Jewish marginality" (Lansky 102). Yiddish was stigmatized for a lack of sophistication and the use of lowbrow humour. The Jews who escaped Europe had to learn the local vernacular, making Yiddish their secondary language, if they did not forget it altogether. Attitudes towards Yiddish began to change in the 1960s and were attributed to many factors:

> [T]he gradual death of the last masters (and of Yiddish-speaking parents and relatives) that evoked nostalgia for the "old country"; growing consciousness (and knowledge) of the Holocaust; a recognition that Israeli Hebrew was now secure and that its proponents need not "fear" Yiddish; the changing evaluation in the United States of black and other ethnic cultures; and, an emerging cultural and scholarly consensus that saw a great world literature in Yiddish prose, poetry, and drama in 150 years that can schematically be dated from 1850 to 2000. (Katz)

Isaac Bashevis Singer's 1978 Nobel Prize for Literature confirmed and endorsed the changing attitude towards Yiddish.

In regard to the history of Jewish immigration to America, Yiddish publications played an important role in helping newly arrived East European immigrants to settle into a new life. Between 1881 and 1924 their numbers reached 2.5 million. *The Tageblat*, which was established in the 1880s, "preached two fundamental themes—the necessity of clinging to Orthodoxy in faith and practice and the obligation of the immigrant to appreciate the blessings of his adopted country" (Martin 185). Socialists, anarchists and Zionists established various Yiddish-language organs for propagating their views. Beginning in 1897, *The Jewish Daily Forward*, edited by Abraham Cahan, educated the greenhorns in all aspects of life. Reading *A Bintl Brief* (A Bundle of Letters), immigrants learned the intricacies of American etiquette, prepared for citizenship exams, and chose American names for their children. Cookbooks and cooking tips helped them to standardize traditional recipes by adapting them to American ingredients. According to Lansky,

> When Jewish immigrants first arrived in America they assumed that coffee beans, like other beans, were not kosher for Passover—until an enterprising Maxwell House advertising agent came along. First he found a rabbi who publicly declared that coffee beans are really berries and therefore acceptable for Passover fare. Then, to reinforce the point, he began distributing free Haggadahs (books used at the Passover Seder) emblazoned with the Maxwell House logo. To this day, "Maxwell House Haggadahs" can be found on Seder tables across the country. (95–96)

Popular science books taught the newcomers the basics of science: physics, chemistry, and geology. Bilingual editions of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, phrasebooks in English, Yiddish and Ladino, and letter writing guides helped immigrants to find their way in a new linguistic and cultural environment. The Yiddish press paved the way for Yiddish literature, since novels, short stories, and poems were first published in the press and, if they were successful enough, they would appear in book form. Yiddish writers chronicled the lives of the immigrant Jews; for instance, Morris Rosenfeld presented the difficulties of immigrant life from a socialist perspective. Joseph Opatoshu wrote the first fully developed historical novel in Yiddish entitled *In Polish Woods*, 1938 (the original version was from 1921). Isaac Raboy explored the myth of the Wild West in *The Jewish Cowboy*, 1942, and Halper Leivick conveyed spiritual anguish after the Holocaust in his poem *I Was Not in Treblinka*, 1945. Translations of world literature into Yiddish opened the East European Jewish world to writers such as Emily Dickinson, Robert Frost, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Jack London, Mark Twain, Leo Tolstoy, Oscar Wilde, and Guy de Maupassant. One Yiddish translation of William Shakespeare's works was accompanied by a note: "Translated and Improved" (Lansky 97). Yiddish readers were acquainted with Chinese legends and Finnish folktales. Women writers were represented by Kadya Molodovsky, Rachel Luria, Celia Dropkin, Anna Margolin, Rajzel Zychlinsky, Miriam Raskin, and Rokhl Korn (who first published in Polish). Finally, the New World became home to famous Yiddish writers such as Sholem Aleichem, Sholem Ash, I. B. Singer and I. J. Singer, who came to America for various reasons, such as poverty, anti-Semitism, or as war refugees. Sholem Aleichem, nicknamed the Jewish Mark Twain, was the central figure in Yiddish literature, and the author of the popular stories about *Tevye the Dairyman* on the basis of which the musical *Fiddler on the Roof* was produced. The Yiddish theatre became a vibrant scene for the Yiddish-speaking cast and audience, when "the first

Yiddish play professionally performed in New York was staged on August 18, 1882" (Martin 189).

Aaron Lansky's quest began a campaign to bring the Yiddish language back into focus. As far as the situation of Jewish immigrants was similar to the situation of other ethnic groups, the specificity of Yiddish rested in its unique position as an endangered language. Other ethnicities could still rely on their homelands, whereas the Yiddish civilization perished during the Holocaust. According to Lansky, "[t]here were 11 million Yiddish speakers in the world when the Nazis invaded Poland in 1939; by 1945 one in two had been murdered, and the great Jewish cultural centers of Eastern Europe lay in ruins" ("The Yiddish Book Center" 22). Yiddish is a language without a country, surviving solely in the presence of people who speak it. Nowadays, Yiddish is spoken mainly by Hasidic ultra-Orthodox groups for which "the language functions to shield them from the corrupting influence of the outside world, reinforcing the sense of identity totally focused on religious observance" (Davis 7–8). The revival of Yiddish in the 1970s and 1980s can be best observed in academic circles, where the Yiddish language became of interest to younger Jews, especially those fascinated by East European Jewish social history and cultural studies. Max Weinreich taught the first Yiddish college course at City College in New York in 1947. Another college-level Yiddish program was launched in the 1950s at Columbia University by Frank Atran, who was later succeeded by Uriel Weinreich, Max's son, the author of the first modern textbook in English, *College Yiddish* (1949). Max Weinreich's scholarly work helped to establish the notion that "Yiddish is a unique language from which modern linguistics can glean vital insights" (Katz). The inclusion of Yiddish in places like Harvard, where Ruth Wisse began a Yiddish studies program, finally legitimized its validity in the field of Jewish studies. In 1991, UNESCO passed a resolution which declared Yiddish an endangered language. Today, Yiddish has recovered its validity, granting direct access to a thousand-year-long cultural tradition. It may be heard not only in ultra-Orthodox communities in America and Israel, but at about twenty colleges and universities throughout North America; its resurgence as a foreign language is a fact. Baruch College at the City University of New York is the only place in the United States which has a resident Yiddish theatre company—The Folksbiene Theater. This is how I. B. Singer talked about the uniqueness of Yiddish in his Nobel lecture:

> The high honor bestowed upon me by the Swedish Academy is also a recognition of the Yiddish language, a language of exile, without a land, without frontiers, not supported by any government, a language which

> possesses no words for weapons, ammunition, military exercises, war tactics: a language that was despised by both gentiles and emancipated Jews. (Lansky 219)

Although the influence of Yiddish on host languages was limited, as the groups lived next to each other rather than together, there is a large number of Yiddish words that have found their way into modern English: bagel (a hard ring-shaped bread roll), blintz (a thin pancake), chutzpah (shameless audacity), dybbuk (the wandering soul of a dead person), kosher (food that conforms to dietary laws), lox (smoked salmon), meshuga (crazy), shlep (to carry something with great effort), and schmuck (a contemptible person), to mention a few. Benor specifies two phrases of Yiddish origin that have successfully become part of the American English language: "enough already" and "money shmoney" (322), whereas words such as shmatta, Shabbas, shiksa, kasha, bachor, cymes, kelner and kapcan sound familiar to the speakers of Polish, even if their meanings are often no longer congruent with the original versions. For example, the word "bachor" in Yiddish means a young man, and in Polish, an unruly child.

Even though Yiddish literature is finite, it can be a source of inspiration for modern writers. Henry Roth, Saul Bellow and Bernard Malamud spiced their English with Yiddish syntax. Cynthia Ozick and Irving Howe translated from Yiddish into English. A post-vernacular work by Michael Chabon, *The Yiddish Policeman's Union* (2007), describes a culture invented on the basis of Yiddish. The world of the shtetl comes to life in Allen Hoffman's *Small Worlds* (1996), as well as in Nathan Englander's *For the Relief of Unbearable Urges* (1999), Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything Is Illuminated* (2002), and Steve Stern's *The Angel of Forgetfulness* (2005) and *Frozen Rabbi* (2010). Chava Rosenfarb's *Bociany* (2000) was originally written in Yiddish, and later translated by her daughter into English. Popular imagination associates Yiddish with the expression of folk culture; however, Anita Norich observes its complex position in Jewish history:

> [I]t is a language of the majority of Holocaust victims and has increasingly become a metonymy for them, as if it constituted the very shrouds they were denied. As a language of mourning and commemoration, it is a sign of absence, carrying the authority of the dead with whom one cannot argue and who therefore always have the last word. ("Yiddish" 298)

Founded in 1980 by Aaron Lansky, the Yiddish Book Center is a nonprofit organization, which is sponsored by member contributions (there are around 20,000 registered members), gifts, and grants. The Center's primary aim is the preservation of Yiddish literature and culture. Books acquired by the Center come not only from the United States, but from those parts of the world that hosted Yiddish-speaking immigrant communities, such as, for example, Zimbabwe, the former British colony of Rhodesia, where Jewish World War II refugees found shelter. Yiddish books have come from Israel, Costa Rica, Uruguay, Chile, Brazil, Mexico, Canada, Cuba, and South Africa. For example, many copies of books in the series *Dos Poylishe Yidntum* (Polish Jewry), a 175-volume series published in Buenos Aires between 1946 and 1966, are available at the Center. Because old books were printed on cheap, wood-pulp, brittle paper, they turned yellow in time and crumbled. Reprinting was too expensive, so the books were scanned and digitalized. A big project of digitalization of the whole collection started in 1997, making the whole depository accessible to world-wide readers. The Steven Spielberg Digital Yiddish Library enabled the Yiddish Book Center to place thousands of texts online, which then can be downloaded free of charge.

A newly constructed building designed by Allen Moore became in 1997 the Center's permanent quarters. The wooden structure brings to mind the synagogues of Eastern Europe. Over the years, the Yiddish Book Center has grown to become the largest Jewish cultural organization in the United States. Its aim is not only to save and preserve Yiddish books, but to find new readers for the forgotten volumes. That is why the Center does not only store books, but distributes them to libraries, educational institutions and private parties, at the same time offering duplicate copies for sale. All books are digitalized and posted online, except those for which the author's estate or the publisher has refused permission. In practice, the priority is given to books in better condition, simply because they are easier to handle. There remain about two thousand rare and fragile books to be digitalized, and ephemeral materials are not digitalized. The requests for original copies of the books from readers who have found the PDFs online and the reports of the Center's international students and fellows confirm that people around the world are using the digital library. At the last count (2014), there have been 400,000 downloads. The Center collaborates with educational institutions and libraries wherever in the world Jewish studies are taught. In 2013, for example, nearly 3,000 volumes were shipped to universities and cultural institutions in Poland. Over the years, the Center has become a vibrant cultural hub that educates, translates, publishes and exhibits Yiddish language materials. The best Yiddish books are translated into English under the program "The New Yiddish Library." The Wexler Oral History Project collects video interviews that record life testimonies of speakers of Yiddish. The Center's English language magazine *Pakn Treger* (The Book Peddler) publishes news about the world of

Yiddish. For example, recent issues discuss the work of Yiddish cultural activists, explore Yiddish food vocabulary, and reproduce examples of Yiddish primers. Since 1989 the Center has been offering internships and fellowships to students from across the world interested in learning Yiddish. The courses are accredited and many of their alumni join the field of Jewish or Yiddish studies, becoming educators and community leaders. The Book Center's programs include education, Yiddish books and translation, events and exhibitions, oral history, production and publication, with a variety of on-site and online courses at different levels, for teenagers and adults alike. The Book Center is developing a new textbook that would incorporate contemporary pedagogical methods in learning Yiddish. An interactive website allows translators from all over the world to post their works in progress and get feedback from more fluent speakers of Yiddish. The Center hosts exhibitions on modern Yiddish culture, as well as conferences, concerts, performances, readings, and lectures. There is a theatre, a bookstore, and offices. The Center's activities which move beyond its premises include lectures at synagogues and colleges.

The significance of such places as the Center for the preservation of Yiddish cannot be overlooked, especially that the language's appeal has been shifting depending on the agenda:

> For atheists it was Jewishness without religion; for feminists, Judaism free from patriarchy; for those uncomfortable with Israeli politics, nationalism without Zionism; for socialists, the voice of proletarian struggle; for more contemporary radicals, a *shtokh* [a jab] to the establishment. (Lansky 286–87)

Bearing in mind its extensive use by ultra-Orthodox Hasidic communities, it seems that the future of Yiddish is not imperilled. As the spokesperson for the library claims, there is great interest, if somewhat clandestine, in the digital library among Orthodox Yiddish speakers, many of whom live in communities that consider secular Yiddish literature *treyf* (forbidden). The post-vernacular use of Yiddish and the younger generation's interest in Yiddish culture allow one to hope that Yiddish will continue to thrive. However, as a medium through which one may examine the Jewish past, Yiddish cultural representations evoke a question of authenticity. Since Yiddish has become a proxy for all those speakers whose voices have been muted by the Holocaust, the politicization of Yiddish studies has been unavoidable. One example may be the presentation of the shtetl in the musical *Fiddler on the Roof* as poor and oppressive, but familiar and comforting. This image, as Anita Norich argues,

> has long held precedence over the evidence of literary and historical sources pointing to a much more complex picture. Dan Miron's *The Image of the Shtetl*, Tel Aviv, 1981 examined the shtetl from a fuller perspective that challenges nostalgic re-creations of history. ("Yiddish" 298)

Another example might be an all-inclusive culture of neo-Ashkenaz Yiddish enthusiasts, such as

> the sole Japanese klezmer musician, Kazutoki Umezu, . . . [and] the participants in mock shtetl weddings. . . . The epitome of neo-Ashkenaz is Ariel, a so-called Jewish restaurant in Kasimierz, which was the pre-Shoah center of the Cracow Jewish community. The food features such Eastern European delicacies as *heldzlekh*, but Mediterranean specialties are also available. The music is a bizarre and unsettling mix of secular and religious melodies. And among the musicians and restaurant employees, there is not a single Jew. (Hadda 15)

As long as those contemporary trends illustrate the accommodative qualities of Yiddish, none of them, as Janet Hadda argues, "can claim to be direct continuations of the rich, conflict-ridden, and sometimes contradictory realm that existed in Eastern Europe before World War II" (17).

Hebrew has been an unquestionable element in American Jewish religious upbringing. Its presence is highlighted especially during religious ceremonies. Learning Yiddish, however, does not have to be religiously mandated, and can be seen as a step toward the exploration of an interesting aspect of Jewishness. To secular Jews and non-Jews, studying Yiddish culture offers a connection to Judaism that is not religious. Whether out of nostalgia for the lost world of their ancestors, or a curiosity about its exotic nature, Yiddish has enjoyed a revival in modern times. Yiddish offers an interesting medium for the study of the idea of multiculturalism and transnationalism, as it embraces

> a wide range of cultural forms and influences, including but not limited to traditional Jewish education; American, eastern, and western European literatures in their originals and in (abundant) translations; the cadences of Tanakh (the Jewish Bible); and *di yidishe gas* (the Jewish street). (Norich, "Writing" 11–12)

Knowledge of Yiddish helps students in scholarly research, during which they can read primary texts. New learners who begin their adventure with

Yiddish often become the ambassadors of this endangered culture. "In the twenty-first century," Benor claims, "young American Jews are using Yiddish-influenced English to indicate facets of their ethnic and religious selves, even when their parents and grandparents do not" (319). What is more, there will probably be more haredi Jews, raised in Yiddish, who will leave their communities and bring their Yiddish fluency to a wider Jewish community. An example of this trend may be such novelists as Pearl Abraham, the author of *The Romance Reader* (1996), Tova Mirvis's *The Outside World* (2004), Nathan Englander's *For the Relief of Unbearable Urges* (2000), Allegra Goodman's *Kaaterskill Falls* (1999), and Tova Reich's *Master of the Return* (1999). Yiddish will probably never be part of the mainstream of American Jewish life, nor will it be replaced by English as the Jewish language, as Cynthia Ozick speculated in her essay "America: Toward Yawneh" (1970), but as long as there is still an important minority who can speak Yiddish, its role in American Jewish culture will not be forgotten, and institutions such as The Yiddish Book Center will play a vital role in its preservation.

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