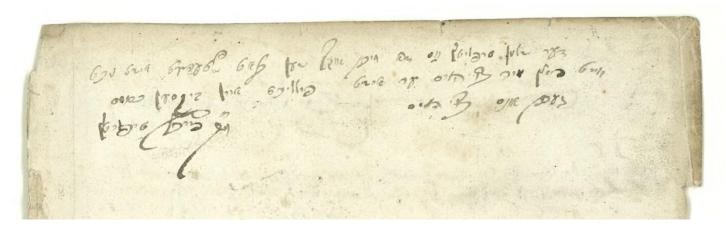
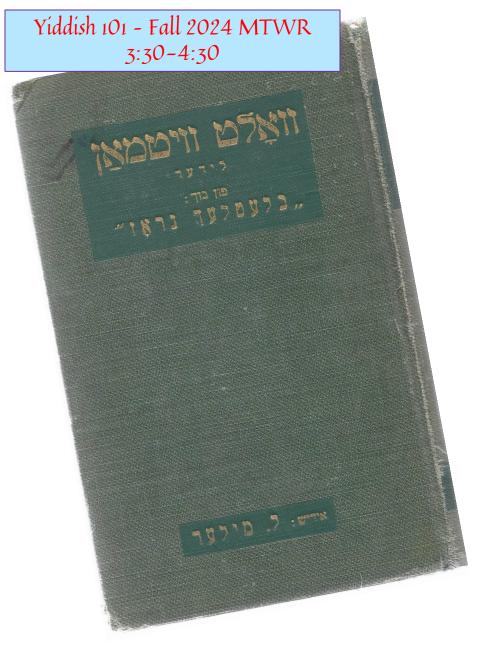
What is Yiddish?

Yiddish has no clear boundaries of either space or time. Some speak of the beginning of Yiddish at the end of the 19th Century, with the novels of Mendele Mokher Sforim. Some go back a further century to the stories of Rabbi Nakhman of Braslev. And some go back to the 13th and 15th centuries. Some people say that it's a dead language, and some people would be quite upset by such an assertion. Some contradictory images of Yiddish are that it is the language of poor ignorant people, but also that Yiddish has reached impressive cultural feats in literature and criticism, poetry, the theater and even in the cinema. Some people think that Yiddish is a sad language, and others think that it is actually funny.



Worms Mahzor, 1272. The oldest know text written (partially) in Yiddish.



Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grasss [bletele graz*]. English translation by L. Miller. New York: Kooperativer Folks Farlang. 1940. In Yiddish.

Today's Lecture:

- ~ A Short Story
- ~ A Brief Historical Introduction
- ~ Yiddish as a National Language
- ~ A video: Yidl mitn Fidl
- ~ Secular Language



Yitskhok Leybush Peretz. *Dertseylungen. London: Menorah.* 1925.

Yitskhok Leybush Peretz. "The Baal Shem Tov Makes a Shidekh."

Shmuel and Treyne are merchants. The have no Children. Sometime they invite a man who walks by to stay at their house. The neighbors tell them that this is the Baal Shem Toy, and that they can make a wish. Shmuel doesn't want to bother his guest, but finally asks for a son. The Baal Shem Tov tells them that they would have to give up their financial success to have a son and they agree. Shmuel's wooden logs wash down the stream and he losses all his money. When their son, David, reaches marrying age, he becomes mute. The Baal Shem Tov tells Shmuel to go to a place where no one had heard of him.



Yitskhok Leybush Peretz. "The Baal Shem Tov Makes a Shidekh."

Shmuel reaches a rich Jewish German family with a sick daughter who needed to marry. They return to the Baal Shem Tov and the son and daughter become engaged. The German Jew, who became rich when he found a large quantity of wooden logs that washed down the river, gives all his money as a dowry for his daughter, and the two families live happily ever after.

Yitskhok Leybush Peretz. *Dertseylungen. London: Menorah.* 1925.



Mendele Mokher Sforim stamp. Released by the Israeli Post Office in 1996.

A Brief Historical background

The Middle ages

1272 the Worms Mahzor

1382 Cambridge Manuscript

1541 Bovo d'Antona: Bovo Bokh

1645-1724 Glikl fun Hemlin

18th Century/19th Century –

Enlightenment/Bourgeois

Rabbi Nahman of Braslev

Ayzek Meir Dik

Shlomo Etinger: Serkele.

Modernism

1864 Dos Kleyne Mentshelekh

1908 Czernowitz Conference (Esther

Frumkin)

Grandfather, Son and Grandsom

1836-1917 Sholom Abromovits

1851-1915 Y.L. Peretz

1859 1916 Sholom Rabinovits

<u>Yiddish as a National Language</u>

In 1832 Max Weinreich wrote about Yiddish diction: "Now is the time to draw clear lines, with every possible emblem of a national border; and most importantly: with strict border security.

Already in 1908 a scandal breaks out during the Czernowitz Conference, when Esther Frumkin, the representative of the Jewish Labor Bund, advocates Yiddish as a notional language. She claims that Yiddish is the language of most Jews, while Yiddish serves an intellectual and economic elite. Finally both languages are declares "national languages" of the Jewish people.



Yosef Grin and Yan-Novina-Perzivilsky (Dirs.). *Yiddl Mitn Fidl*. Starring Moli Pikn. Green Films. 1936.





1904. Bertha Kalish as Hamlet (Inspired by Sarah Bernhardt)

Secular Language

~ Today Yiddish is associated with religious culture (mainly Hasidic), as many Yiddish speakers are part of ultra-orthodox communities in New York and Jerusalem.



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- ~ Today Yiddish is associated with religious culture (mainly Hasidic), as many Yiddish speakers are part of ultra-orthodox communities in New York and Jerusalem.
- ~ At the beginning of the century, however, Yiddish was an innovative language used by secular scholars who wrote poetry, literature, drama, journalism and cinema. Such texts bore the mark of contemporary themes, styles and cultural innovations in different languages.
- ~ Even today, a Yiddish radio station (WEVD), and a Yiddish newspaper (The Yiddish Forverts) are secular sources that provide information about cultural events, literary texts and world news.



1904. Bertha Kalish as Hamlet (Inspired by Sarah Bernhardt)



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