Translating Jewish Poland into Canadian Yiddish: Symcha Petrushka's *Mishnayes*
Traduire la Pologne juive en yiddish canadien: les *Mishnayes* de Symcha Petrushka

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Article abstract

In 1945, with European Jewry in ruins, Polish-born Symcha Petrushka published the first of six volumes of his Yiddish translation and interpretation of the Mishna. Produced in Petrushka's adopted home in Montreal, the *Mishnayes* was conceived as a work of popularization to render one of the core texts of the Jewish tradition accessible to the Jewish masses in their common vernacular, and on the eve of World War II Yiddish was the *lingua franca* of millions of Jews in Europe as well as worldwide. However, in the aftermath of the Holocaust and the destruction of the locus of Yiddish civilization and millions of speakers combined with acculturation away from Yiddish in Jewish population centres in North America, Petrushka's *Mishnayes* remains a tribute to the vanished world of Polish Jewry.

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Introduction

In 1945—as European Jewry lay in ashes—Polish-born Montreal scholar Symcha Petrushka published the first volume of his *Mishnayes mit iberzetsungen un peyrush in yidish* (*The Mishna with Translation and Commentary in Yiddish*), a groundbreaking popular rendition of a core text of the Jewish textual tradition, from its original Hebrew into the modern Yiddish vernacular. Using translation into Yiddish—the language of the Jewish masses of Eastern Europe and its émigré centres worldwide—Petrushka set out to render Jewish knowledge accessible to a wide readership. A brilliant scholar and a prolific journalist in Warsaw, Petrushka produced his most significant works after his arrival in Canada as a refugee on the eve of World War II. By the time his magnum opus appeared in print, the European Yiddish heartland was in ruins in the wake of the Nazi Holocaust and the language was facing global attrition. This study examines Petrushka's *Mishnayes* as an unintended cultural artefact: what began as a work of popularization ended as a tribute to the vanished world of Polish Jewry.

With the considerable decline of the language as vernacular in recent decades, much emphasis has been placed on translation out of Yiddish into other vernaculars. This represents a new phenomenon. Originating in medieval German lands as a

Jewish Diaspora language, Yiddish served as the *lingua franca* of much of Ashkenazi Jewry (Jews with roots in Germanic lands) in its thousand-year geographic spread eastwards and its eventual expansion into the world's largest Jewish community. Yiddish existed in a symbiotic relationship with *loshn-koydesh* (the Holy Tongue, pre-modern Hebrew and Aramaic), which functioned as the sacred language of study and prayer. Yiddish texts consisted largely of popular literature and translations of texts officially designated for those who could not access *loshn-koydesh* texts; women and men illiterate in Hebrew-Aramaic (see Harshav, 1990; Weinreich, 2008). By the end of the nineteenth century, with the advent of movements of Jewish revitalization in what Benjamin Harshav has termed "a modern Jewish revolution," Yiddish had expanded from a primarily spoken language into a complete modern culture with belles-lettres, theatre, educational institutions and popular press (see Harshav, 1993). While much of its consumer base, which would comprise some eleven million Yiddish speakers by 1939, remained concentrated in Eastern Europe, persecution and pauperization spawned immigrant communities worldwide by the end of the nineteenth century. New York City emerged as a major centre of Yiddish life, with a vast network of popular theatres and newspapers, and smaller centres such as Montreal followed. From the 1880s through the eve of the Second World War, works of all genres—political tracts, world literature, and traditional Jewish texts—were translated *en masse* into Yiddish to reach a mass, transnational Jewish readership hungry for access to a variety of knowledge that included world literature. After a period of rapid expansion of Yiddish cultural life in centres worldwide in the 1920s and 1930s, this Yiddish civilization was struck numerous blows by the middle of the twentieth century: the annihilation of the locus of Yiddish civilization in Europe along with most of its speakers in the Holocaust; the primacy of modern Hebrew with the creation of the State of Israel; the decimation of Soviet Yiddish culture under Stalin; and widespread language loss due to acculturation. In the post-Holocaust world, the language has taken on increasingly symbolic roles within the Jewish world in a shift from Jewish *lingua franca* to what scholars have termed "post-vernacular" Yiddish (see Kuznitz, 2002; Shandler, 2006). In the Canadian context, where Yiddish language maintenance

has been relatively higher than in other Yiddish centres, Yiddish mother tongue statistics have plummeted from a high of 149,500 in a community of some 156,000 Jews in 1931 (96%) to some 17,500 of 373,000 Jews in 2006 (about 4.5%) (see Margolis, 2009; Rosenberg, 1939). In the last twenty years, the speakers of Yiddish in Canada as well as worldwide have increasingly come to comprise members of insular Ultra-Orthodox communities for whom the language provides a means of expressing distinctiveness and maintaining boundaries from the secular world (see Fader, 2009; Isaacs, 1999; Shaffir, 1995). With these changes, the market for texts translated into Yiddish has all but vanished; when they do appear, they tend to act as novelty items (for example, a Yiddish translation of *Winnie the Pooh*) rather than fill utilitarian functions. In Canada, with Yiddish ceding its place as the *lingua franca* the Jewish community, the shared venture to translate texts into Yiddish in order to reach the Jewish masses has shifted to increasing efforts to translate texts out of Yiddish in order to render them accessible to non-Yiddish readers (see Margolis, 2006). Petrushka's *Mishnayes* were produced on the cusp of this momentous transformation in the dynamics of Yiddish translation.

Petrushka's World

Symcha Bunem Petrushka, who straddled the traditional and secular Jewish worlds, in many ways encapsulates the Yiddish experience in modern times. He was born in 1893 in Prage, a suburb of Warsaw, Poland, the city home to Europe's largest Jewish population. His family had deep roots in the populist, mystical Hasidic movement that had swept Jewish Eastern Europe in the nineteenth century. He inherited a centuries-old Ashkenazi textual tradition centred on lifelong study of the Talmud: the Hebrew-language compendium of Jewish "oral law" known as the Mishna (redacted in the second century) in combination with the Gemara, subsequent rabbinical discussions of the Mishna mainly in Aramaic (redacted some three centuries later), and subsequent commentaries. Within this tradition, these texts—together with the Torah (the "written law," the Pentateuch)—represent divine revelation transmitted and are continually interpreted through generations of Jewish sages. For

the traditionally observant Ashkenazi Jew, they form the core of a lifelong dedication to ongoing study. Petrushka excelled as a scholar of these texts, and by the age of ten he had earned the nickname of *Prager ile*, the Prage Prodigy. Until he was sixteen years old, Petrushka studied in *yeshivas* (institutions of Talmudic study) and under rabbinic scholars that included some of the greatest Jewish luminaries of his time (see Zygielbaum, 1969). Nobel laureate Isaac Bashevis Singer, whose father was a rabbi in Prage, described the mystique surrounding the brilliant young Petrushka in his book, *In My Father's Court*:

> The only writer whom I personally knew when I was a child was the celebrated Simcha Pietrushka [*sic*], who translated the Mishnah into Yiddish. When father was the head of the Radzymin Yeshiva, Pietrushka was his pupil. I often heard my father speak of Pietrushka's genius; there was one story he repeated many times. Pietrushka, it seems, made a wager that he could commit to memory in the space of a single summer's night the two treatises of the Talmud called Tbachim and Minachot. These treatises, which are notoriously difficult to understand, concern themselves with the temple, its rites, and the vessels used for sacrifice. Many Talmudic scholars do not even bother to study them. Their texts are too long and difficult even to be recited in several days. But Simcha Pietrushka mumbled and flipped pages from sundown to sunrise. In the morning, Father found to his amazement, when he tested his pupil, that Pietrushka knew not only the body of the text but every footnote and gloss. A sceptic might argue that Pietrushka had already memorized the work, but this in itself would have been a remarkable feat for a boy his age. Pietrushka had almost total recall. (Singer, 1966, pp. 169-70)

Under the wider influence of the Haskalah, the nineteenth century movement of Jewish enlightenment that promoted Jewish modernization, Petrushka embarked on a program of secular study. Like so many members of his generation, he took part in "a youth culture revolving around autodidacticism" (Kellman, 2003, p. 215). Under the aegis of the Tlomatzky Synagogue in Warsaw, which espoused a modern and scientific approach to Jewish study, he immersed himself in a program of guided independent study in the natural and social sciences, ancient and modern history, and non-Jewish languages and their literatures (see Kipnis, 1938).

Warsaw offered vast opportunities for Petrushka as a Jewish scholar. With an interwar population of over 350,000 Jews—about 30% of the total population of the city—Warsaw housed the largest Jewish community in Poland, second only to New York City in the world. This vibrant Jewish centre was home to an extensive network of social, cultural, religious, and educational institutions that spanned the religious and political spectrum as well as to a lively literary milieu (see Cohen, 2003). Jewish Poland as a whole formed a dynamic "polysystem" of cultural systems that comprised Yiddish, Hebrew, and Polish (see Shmeruk, 1989). However, even with the active use of other languages, a vast majority of the population remained Yiddish speaking, with 91% of Jews declaring Yiddish as mother tongue on the 1931 Polish census (see Cohen, 2002). The proliferation of the Yiddish-language periodical press in interwar Poland provided high visibility and steady employment to a diverse group of writers: prominent dailies such as the Warsaw Zionist daily, *Haynt* (founded 1908), and its rival *Moment* (founded 1910) boasted circulations in the tens of thousands. With a largely working-class readership, the press formed a primary site for the emergence of written Yiddish as a literary as well as popular language (see Cohen, 2007). During the period between the two world wars, Yiddish writers in Poland as well as other centres published a wide array of articles in newspapers, journals as well as books on popular subjects—Jewish Studies as well as the natural sciences and other areas of knowledge—to reach the Jewish masses. These works included translations of a vast spectrum of world literature into Yiddish.

It was in the realm of popular writing that Petrushka found his niche until the outbreak of World War II. He became associated with *Haynt*, and served as a contributor, editor, and correspondent for the newspaper and its various affiliate publications for three decades. He enjoyed wide popularity and influence as a journalist; a fellow writer recalled in his memoirs of the Yiddish press in Warsaw that Petrushka "had a sixth sense for what interested the masses and had a rare talent for writing in an accessible style. He wrote the way people spoke" (Finkelshteyn, 1956, pp. 144-145). In addition to authoring hundreds of newspaper columns on a wide variety of subjects,

Petrushka undertook projects to educate the Jewish public. One such venture was a Yiddish-language *Yudishe entsiklopediye far yudishe geshikhte, kultur, religiye, filolozofiye, literatur, biographiye, bibliographiye un andere yudishe inyonim* [*Jewish Encyclopaedia For Jewish History, Culture, Religion, Philosophy, Literature, Biography, Bibliography and Other Jewish Issues*], which was originally conceived as a multi-volume work with thousands of entries (see Petrushka, 1932-1935). In his introduction to the first volume published in 1932, Petrushka outlines his objectives: to create a work that would encompass all aspects of Jewish life—from ancient times through the present—including religion, culture, history, literature, descriptions of important personalities and Jewish centres, and render the vast repository of Jewish knowledge available to the masses. Due to the financial crisis of the times, only a small part of the planned encyclopaedia appeared (Ravitch, 1947, p. 58); Petrushka would return to this project a decade later in Montreal. By the mid-1930s, Petrushka was predicting disaster for European Jewry, and actively promoting mass emigration in his newspaper columns. After unsuccessfully attempting to obtain visas for Palestine and the United States, two brothers living in Montreal lobbied to bring Petrushka and his family to Canada. The family left on the Batori, one of the last boats to leave Poland before Hitler marched into Poland in September of 1939.

Petrushka found himself in Canada's largest Jewish centre, and a dynamic hub of Yiddish culture. The recent mass immigration of Eastern European Jews to Canada had increased the Jewish population from some 6,500 to over 75,000 between 1891 and 1911; it would double again over the next twenty years. These immigrants, a majority of whom settled in Montreal, created a network of institutions: religious, social, political, philanthropic and cultural organizations, newspapers, libraries, schools, and literary societies. With 99% of the city's Jewish population of some 60,000 claiming Yiddish as mother tongue in 1931 and the language serving as Montreal's third most spoken language after English and French, much of this activity was in Yiddish. While a minor Jewish centre in comparison with Warsaw, Montreal nonetheless boasted a lively Yiddish cultural life and has been characterized a "utopian venture" (see Roskies, 1990). The city housed a Yiddish daily, *Der keneder adler* [*The*

Canadian Jewish Eagle], founded 1907, educational institutions including a Jewish Public Library and a network of Yiddish schools, and an active literary milieu. By the time of Petrushka's arrival, Montreal was home to a diverse community of Jewish writers, poets, intellectuals, and activists spanning the spectrum from secular to ultra Orthodox that functioned largely in Yiddish (see Margolis, 2005).

As a new immigrant, Petrushka faced separation from his homeland as well as the terrible awareness of the imminent destruction facing Polish Jewry under the Nazis. When Poland surrendered to Germany, over three million Jews found themselves trapped under a regime that imposed increasingly brutal measures against them; the Nazi plan of systematic annihilation would deplete some ninety percent of their ranks. Meanwhile, despite extensive lobbying by local Jewry in response to the increasingly dangerous situation facing European Jewry, Canada's wartime immigration policy under Prime Minister Mackenzie King was, as Abella and Troper titled their book on the subject, "none is too many," with Canada admitting fewer than 5,000 Jews into the country between 1933 and 1948 (see Abella and Troper, 1983).

As Polish Jewry stood on the brink of extinction, Petrushka turned away from journalism to the production of works of popular scholarship in Yiddish. In 1942, he dedicated himself to the project of his Jewish encyclopaedia in two compact volumes of entries that offered hundreds of entries on all aspects of Jewish civilization into easily accessible Yiddish. In 1943, the *Yidishe folks-entsiklopedye far yidishe religye, geshikhte, filozofye, literatur, biografye, lender-kibutsim and andere inyonim* [*Jewish Popular Encyclopaedia for Jewish Religion, History, Philosophy, Literature, Biography, Settlement and Other Issues*] had appeared in full with support from the Federation of Polish Jewry, and was widely lauded in the Yiddish press. The work remains the only complete Jewish encyclopaedia in the Yiddish language (Brisman, 1987, p. 61). Despite the all-consuming nature of this project, contemporary events in Europe were never far from Petrushka's mind. In the introduction to the first volume, Petrushka writes:

> As I am writing this introduction at the end of November 1942, the most gruesome news is arriving through various channels. Hitler has sent extermination commandos into Nazi-occupied lands in order to slaughter all of the Jews in the ghettos. Jewish children, elderly, women, and the sick are being led out and butchered, after which the rest of the adult population is slaughtered. Until now, these murderers have apparently slaughtered over two million Jews, and the murder and killing continues. (Petrushka, 1942, pp. vi-vii)[1]

The introductory remarks to the second volume report that millions of Jews have been killed, and entire Jewish communities in such centres as Warsaw, Lodz, Vilna, and Lemberg have been erased: "The elimination of a vast number of Jewish people; the deaths of the major Jewish intellectual forces; the destruction of the greatest centres of Jewish life, learning, culture, and society: all of this amounts to the greatest destruction in the entire story of the Jewish people." (Petrushka, 1943, p. ix). A second edition of the *Yidishe folks-entsiklopedye*, which appeared in 1949, was updated to reflect the historical reality of the Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel. Petrushka's popular translation of the *Mishnayes* would be shaped by world events to an even greater degree.

Petrushka's *Mishnayes*

With his encyclopaedia behind him, Petrushka turned to his great passion: the Mishna. The first work of Rabbinic Judaism and a core text of the Jewish canon, the six orders of the Mishna are written in a terse and often elliptical Hebrew that is filled with obscure references to geography, ritual and other technical areas. Petrushka was heir to a centuries-old tradition of Mishna study built upon on layers and layers of commentary. As a Polish Jew, this tradition combined the Hebrew and Aramaic texts of the Mishna and its written commentaries with oral discussion in Yiddish. The Mishna of Petrushka's childhood first learned in the *beys-medresh* (the traditional house of study) was a Hebrew-Aramaic-Yiddish singsong, with the text and its interpretative

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1 Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from the Yiddish are my own. My additions, in square brackets, are for clarification.

components functioning seamlessly together. He engaged with the text as an adult in an ongoing fashion and developed a great love for this core Jewish text.

In his *Mishnayes*, Petrushka aimed to produce a comprehensive and readable translation and interpretation of the Mishna and render its tradition of study accessible to the Ashkenazi masses in their common language: Yiddish. His introduction to the first volume of the *Mishnayes* opens:

> It is unnecessary to write at length about the importance of *Mishnayes* with a translation and interpretation in Yiddish. The Mishna is, after the Tanach [Jewish Bible], the basis for all of Jewish life: religion, ethics, lifestyle, and ancient history. The Mishna is the foundation upon which the Gemara, the texts of *gaonic* [early Jewish scholars] times, the *poskim* [commentators] and rabbis of later generations were built. The need for every Jew to be able to read the Mishna together with a translation and interpretation in Yiddish is a given. (Petrushka, 1945, p. i)

Petrushka devised a user-friendly format for his *Mishnayes*. Each tractate (section) of the Mishna begins with a brief introduction in Yiddish to its core themes and concepts. This is followed by the text with the Hebrew Mishna on the top of the page and the translation and Petrushka's running commentary appearing underneath. Petrushka's text integrates the teachings of centuries of commentators on the Mishna. The following excerpt of the opening tractate, taken from his own later English translation, highlights the main characteristics of Petrushka's approach in the *Mishnayes*: a concise translation that renders the most obscure content accessible to a general readership. The translation of the Hebrew Mishna text appears in bold print, with words in round brackets added by Petrushka for clarity, and the lighter type indicating Petrushka's commentary:

> [...] The Shema is read twice daily, in the morning and in the evening. [...]
> **From what time may the Shema be read in the evening? At what time does the evening begin? From the time the priests enter ('Nichnassin') to eat their Terumah (offering).** [...]
> The Mishna here states that the proper time to read the evening Shema is when the priests consider it evening and that

it is permissible to eat Terumah. The Gemara says that this is when the first stars appear in the sky. The Mishna uses the word 'Nichnassin,' they enter. The Tiferet Israel[2] explains that at the time of the Mishna the ritual baths were outside the city; after the priests had bathed they again entered into the city. (cited in Rome, 1950, p. 12)

As this sample text shows, Petrushka's text interweaves the core text and various traditional commentaries into a single narrative. Moreover, he provides background material so that even a reader with minimal Jewish knowledge can grasp the issues at hand. In the process, he rendered a dense and complex text accessible. Petrushka's Yiddish voice in the *Mishnayes* is one of an expert writer who is so at ease with his material that he is able to penetrate barriers posed by unfamiliar terms and context. The text appears without any extraneous argot; when technical terms are employed, they are immediately explained in their simplest terms. This characteristic is vital to popularizing a text known for its difficult concepts and terminology dating to ancient times. Here is his introductory paragraph to the above-cited tractate, with the original Yiddish transliterated into English letters:[3]

> *es iz faran, keyedua, di mitsve, az yedn in der fri un yedn ovnt zol men leyenen kris shme, dos heyst, men zogt di parshes fun khumesh "shma yisroel" (in khumesh devorim vov). […] di dozike mitsve iz faran in der toyre in khumesh devorim vov. […] du zolst zey zogn "ven du leygst zikh un ven du shteyst oyf", dos heyst in ovnt un in der fri. der ershter peyrek in der mishna bahandlt di frage, ven heyst "in ovnt," un ven heyst "in der fri."* (Petrushka, 1945, p. *alef*)[4]

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2   A commentary by the nineteenth-century scholar Rabbi Israel Lifschutz printed in standard editions of the Mishna.

3   Yiddish is written in Hebrew letters.

4   The transliteration is according to the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research's rules of Standard Yiddish. It does not reflect the pronunciation of Petrushka's own Polish dialect, where vowels are generally lowered and lengthened. The pages of the *Mishnayes* are numbered according to the Hebrew alphabet: "*alef*," the first letter of the alphabet, is equivalent to the number one. The translation below is mine.

In English translation:

> There is as is well known, the commandment that one should read the Shema prayer, that is to say, that one recites the verses of the Bible "Hear O Israel" (in the Bible, Deuteronomy 6). [Petrushka cites all of the verses and their locations in the Bible]. This commandment is found in the Torah in Deuteronomy chapter 6. [Petrushka cites the relevant verse and then translates it as follows:] You should say them "when you lie down and when you get up," that is to say, in the evening and in the morning. The first chapter of the Mishna deals with the question as to when "in the evening" and "in the morning" are understood to be.

In this passage—as throughout his text—Petrushka's Yiddish is simple and clear, with a conversational feel to it. He does not assume prior knowledge, even when discussing the "Shema," one of the central prayers in Judaism. Rather, he explains everything in a concise and straightforward language. While he employs a Yiddish that is fairly free of dialectical particularities, he does use Yiddish terminology that would be familiar to his assumed readership wherever possible. For example, he employs the traditional, centuries-old appellation for the readings of the "Shema," *"leyenen kris shme,"* literally "reading the reading of the Shema."

Petrushka's choice of Yiddish was utilitarian: he sought to speak to the average Jewish reader in the common language of the traditional Ashkenazi scholar. The *Mishnayes* are not a literary translation whose intent is to test the boundaries of what the Yiddish language could do or to create new Yiddish literary forms, as was often the case in translations of world literature into Yiddish. More than anything else, Petrushka's Yiddish represents a distillation of his own ongoing engagement with the Mishna in the voice of a seasoned Yiddish writer reaching out to the widest possible readership. Polish-born Yiddish poet and essayist Yankev Glatshteyn (1896-1971) surmised that Petrushka's main considerations were clarity and posterity rather than aesthetics. He asserted that unlike recent Yiddish literary renditions of the Bible by poet Yehoash (Yehoash Solomon Bloomgarden, 1870-1927), Petrushka was not motivated by a desire to enrich Yiddish

literature. Moreover, if Petrushka had known that Yiddish would decline as the dominant Jewish *lingua franca*, he would never have undertaken his project in Yiddish at all (Glatshteyn, 1956, pp. 228-229). This assertion is supported by Petrushka's next major project: as discussed below, Petrushka began an English translation and interpretation of the Mishna soon after he completed his Yiddish *Mishnayes*.

Petrushka produced his *Mishnayes* virtually single-handed, under trying circumstances, and at a rapid-fire pace. He was personally involved in all aspects of the project: he authored the translation and commentary, largely drawing on his photographic memory; he also arranged fundraising, printing, proofreading, typesetting, and sale and distribution of the *Mishnayes*, all the while suffering from serious health problems (see Pearl, 1997). Moreover, concurrently with the publication of the first volume in 1945, Petrushka completed a doctorate in Hebrew Literature from the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York for his thesis on the scientific approach to the Mishna (*Jewish Theological Seminary of America Register 1948-1949,* 1948, p. 45). The recent events of the Holocaust added a sense of urgency to Petrushka's task, and undoubtedly played a role in the fantastic speed at which he was able to complete the project: a later newspaper article on Petrushka characterized his scholarly efforts as a battle against the disappearance of European Jewry (see Lang, 1969). In addition to the *Mishnayes* being widely reviewed in the Yiddish press, Petrushka was awarded the prestigious Louis Lamed Prize for Jewish literature.

As in the *Yidishe Folks-Entsiklopedye*, Petrushka's distress and anguish over the fate of European Jewry are palpable in the introductory comments to each volume. In the first two volumes, Petrushka discusses Jewish destruction at the hands of the Nazis and wondered about the status of his relatives who had gone missing. The third volume makes explicit mention of his family lost in the Warsaw Ghetto: "my close relatives, the uncles, aunts, and their children and grandchildren, who were killed at the hands of the depraved murderers in Warsaw and about whom we had not received news until now" (p. 3). In the fourth volume, Petrushka cites Psalms and the charge to remember the destruction of

Jerusalem even during the happiest celebration, and writes that he recently received letters from a few surviving acquaintances who experienced atrocities that cannot be described in words. The introduction to the fifth volume, composed on the night after the United Nations voted to grant the Jews a homeland in Israel in November of 1947, states that at this time of joy it is "our duty" to recall the six million who did not live to see the beginning of the redemption. In the final volume, Petrushka pays homage to the destroyed *shtetl* (town) of Brock where his mother was born, writing: "Let these words serve as a small memorial to this *shtetl*" (p. 5).

If at their outset Petrushka's *Mishnayes* aimed to render one of the greatest Jewish cultural treasures accessible to the broad masses, by the time of their completion they served as a two-tiered monument to Polish Jewry: first, to the physical destruction of the Jews; and second to the intellectual milieu that had developed over centuries of Jewish life. Petrushka's was the last generation to experience Poland's age-old tradition of Mishna study before it was torn out by the roots with the destruction of Polish Jewry in the Holocaust. Moreover, even during his youth, the deeply entrenched method of studying the Mishna accompanied by a traditional Yiddish commentary was being supplanted by the advent of secular study and new approaches to the study of Jewish text. In recording the language of Mishna study that he had known as a youth, Petrushka's *Mishnayes* served to preserve this legacy. A review of a subsequent 1966 edition of the *Mishnayes* asserted that the text was especially welcome among the Polish Jews who had survived the Holocaust because the contents hearkened back to the days of traditional Jewish study in Poland (see Lang, 1969). Glatshteyn went further, characterizing the *Mishnayes* as: "no more and no less than a restoration […] It ultimately entails re-establishing that which has been destroyed" (Glatshteyn, 1956, p. 220).

Conclusion

Despite Petrushka's initial goals, much of his intended audience—the Jewish masses—were increasingly moving away from Yiddish, and he moved along with it. He had initially planned to translate

the entire Talmud into Yiddish; instead he embarked on a project to produce a popular English edition of the Mishna akin to the *Mishnayes*. Petrushka recognized the growing role of English in the future of Jewish scholarship, in particular for American Jewry, which formed the world's largest Jewish community after the Second World War. After completing more than half of the project in less than a year, Petrushka's plans were cut short by his sudden death from cancer in April of 1950. Although a campaign was organized to publish Petrushka's English Mishna, the posthumous publication never materialized (see Lang, 1969). Today, much of the manuscript remains in the archives of Montreal's Canadian Jewish Congress Charities Committee. This work would have predated the popular Israeli translation and commentary of the Mishna by Pinhas Kehati that began to appear in modern Hebrew in the mid-1950s, which is valued across the Jewish world as an indispensable tool for study. One project did come to fruition: a revised second edition of Petrushka's *Mishnayes* in 1950 was followed by a third edition was published in 1955 and again in 1966, this time complete with Hebrew vocalization.[5] With the ongoing decline of the use of Yiddish as a vernacular among Jews in the secular world, the audience for Petrushka's work is primarily located in insular Yiddish-speaking Ultra-Orthodox circles, where Yiddish remains widely spoken. Contrary to his initial aims, Petrushka's works has become the purview of an insular Jewish community rather than the broad Jewish masses.

During much of his adult life, Symcha Petrushka was in an ideal position to open the world of knowledge—both secular and sacred—to the Jewish masses. He embodied the height of the Polish Jewish experience in the decades prior to the Holocaust: he was among the elite recipients of its textual tradition as well as its new innovators in the advent of modern Jewish scholarship. He spanned the Hasidic and the secular Jewish worlds in Poland and Canada. He crafted an accessible Yiddish style for the popular press that allowed him to disseminate

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5   Although Hebrew uses a system of vocalization to aid in accuracy of pronunciation, texts are often published without. For technical reasons, Petrushka's earlier editions of the *Mishnayes* did not include vocalization.

complex ideas for the average reader. However, his lasting role as a translator of ideas was cut short by the rapid decline of the Yiddish language. Petrushka's *Mishnayes* are emblematic of the centuries-old civilization where Yiddish served as a Jewish *lingua franca*, which came to an abrupt end after the Holocaust. Due to rapidly changing historical circumstances, this work of popular translation remains an artefact of a lost civilization.

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ABSTRACT: Translating Jewish Poland into Canadian Yiddish: Symcha Petrushka's *Mishnayes* — In 1945, with European Jewry in ruins, Polish-born Symcha Petrushka published the first of six volumes of his Yiddish translation and interpretation of the Mishna. Produced in Petrushka's adopted home in Montreal, the *Mishnayes* was conceived as a work of popularization to render one of the core texts of the Jewish tradition accessible to the Jewish masses in their common vernacular, and on the eve of World War II Yiddish was the *lingua franca* of millions of Jews in Europe as well as worldwide. However, in the aftermath of the Holocaust and the destruction of the locus of Yiddish civilization and millions of speakers combined with acculturation away from Yiddish in Jewish population centres in North America, Petrushka's *Mishnayes* remains a tribute to the vanished world of Polish Jewry.

RÉSUMÉ : Traduire la Pologne juive en yiddish canadien: les *Mishnayes* **de Symcha Petrushka** — En 1945, alors que le monde juif européen était en ruines, le Polonais Symcha Petrushka publia en langue yiddish le premier des six volumes de sa traduction et interprétation de la Mishnah. Écrites à Montréal, ville adoptive de Petrushka, les *Mishnayes* étaient une œuvre de vulgarisation, ayant pour objectif de rendre l'un des textes centraux de la tradition juive accessible au peuple juif dans sa langue vernaculaire. À la veille de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale, le yiddish était en effet la *lingua franca* de millions de juifs en Europe et dans le monde. Au lendemain de l'holocauste, de la destruction du cœur de la civilisation yiddish en Europe, ainsi que de l'acculturation linguistique qui a eu lieu dans les grands centres juifs d'Amérique du Nord, les *Mishnayes* de Petrushka demeurent un hommage au monde juif polonais disparu.

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