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Yiddish on the Australian Page and Stage: New Linguistic Representations of Melbourne in the Aftermath of the Holocaust[1]

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Abstract

2023 marked the release of two Australian works of heterolingual English-language fiction works that integrated significant Yiddish: Leah Kaminsky's novel, Doll's Eye *and Elise Esther Hearst's stage play,* A Very Jewish Christmas Carol*. Created and set in Melbourne, these cultural productions suggest ways in which the integration of Yiddish into new literary work index identities in relation to the Holocaust and its aftermath. These works provide examples of second- and third-generation Holocaust representation that draw on diverse strategies of intratextual translation to portray the Yiddish language and its resonances.*

Keywords

Yiddish, heterolingualism, multilingualism, intratextual translation, audiovisual studies, vehicular matching, selective reproduction, verbal transposition, fiction writing, dramaturgy, Elise Hearst, Leah Kaminsky, Melbourne, Australia, Holocaust, second generation literature, third generation literature, Melekh Ravitch, migrants

Introduction

Anyone with an eye on Yiddish in Australia since 2020 will have observed a marked upturn in creativity in that language – musical albums and stage performances, original plays with Yiddish dialogue, and fiction writing that meshes that language into its narratives – accompanied by a clutch of media articles dedicated to the topic.[2]

1. I'd like to thank the reviewers for their helpful comments. I'd also like to note that while Yiddish is predominantly written in Hebrew letters, I represent it throughout this article in Latin script in line with how it appears in both of the literary works I analyse. This transliteration draws on the system devised by the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. See Isaac L. Bleaman, "Guidelines for Yiddish in Bibliographies: A Supplement to YIVO Transliteration," In *geveb* (July 2019). https://ingeveb.org/pedagogy/guidelines-for-yiddish-in-bibliographies.

2. Natasha Frost, "A Yiddish Haven Thrives in Australia," *New York Times*, July 18, 2023, https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/18/world/australia/yiddish-melbourne-australia.html; Mia Gardiner, "Young Yearn for Yiddish." *Australian Jewish News* February 2, 2023, https://www.australianjewishnews.com/young-yearn-for-yiddish/; Nomi Kaltmann, "Yiddish Thrives Down Under," *Tablet*, December 28, 2020, https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/community/articles/yiddish-thrives-in-melbourne; Tali Lavi, "The Dybbuk in the Room: Melbourne's Yiddish Art Scene," *Jewish Quarterly* 251 (2023), https://jewishquarterly.com/jq/community/214; Dashiel Lawrence, "Yiddish in Sydney," *The Jewish Independent* October 15, 2020, https://thejewishindependent.com.au/podcast-sydneys-yiddish-speakers-keep-beloved-language-alive.

A thousand-year-old linguistic carrier of a transnational Ashkenazi Jewish civilisation, Yiddish was the most widely spoken Jewish language until the mid-twentieth century. The number of Yiddish speakers has declined dramatically due to language shift in the wake of modernisation and migration, as well as persecution and repression culminating in the murder of most of its European speakers during the Nazi Holocaust. Even as the numbers of daily speakers continues to dwindle in the mainstream and the last generation of prewar European-born speakers is passing away, Yiddish is gaining traction within cultural production aimed at general audiences. Australia features prominently within this new transnational Yiddish creativity.

Yiddish in the global mainstream increasingly resides outside the purview of its daily or native-born speakers and their descendants. As a recent study by Jessica Kirzane finds, newcomers to the language bring learning goals that are motivated by interests other than everyday fluency, including academic research or the alignment of the language with leftist, queer or other identity politics.[3] Amelia Glaser posits that Yiddish in the mainstream has increasingly become a cultural symbol in a shift from a signifier (a mode of communication) to a signified (a subject unto itself), not only in North America but globally.[4] This echoes Jeffrey Shandler's influential study, *Adventures in Yiddishland*, which lays out the theory of postvernacular Yiddish as a mode where the language operates in symbolic or performative functions: simply put, the fact of using Yiddish is more important than what you say in it.[5] Netta Avineri's concept of "metalinguistic communities" frames Yiddish usage as a symbol or identity embedded within another dominant language such as English.[6] My recent study, *Yiddish Lives On: Strategies of*

3. Jessica Kirzane, "Defining Graduate Academic Yiddish Proficiency: Results of an Evidence-Based Study," *L2 Journal: An Open Access Refereed Journal for World Language Educators* 16, no. 1 (2024). https://escholarship.org/uc/item/43z6x4cb/.
4. Amelia Glaser, "The Idea of Yiddish; Re-globalising North American Jewish Culture," in R*outledge Handbook of Contemporary Jewish Studies*, ed. Laurence Roth and Nadia Valman (New York: Routledge, 2017), 259–71.
5. Jeffrey Shandler, *Adventures in Yiddishland: Postvernacular Language and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). See also Jeffrey Shandler, *Yiddish: Biography of a Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).
6. Netta Avineri and Jesse Harasta, "Introduction: Exploring Agency, Ideology, And Semiotics of Language Across Communities," in *Metalinguistic Communities*, ed. Netta Avineri and Jesse Harasta (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2021), 1–22.

Language Transmission, investigates what I term "created language spaces" where Yiddish is spoken, read, performed, sung, or mediated by digital technologies in meaningful and embodied ways, with or without daily usage or literacy in the language.[7] These Yiddish spaces stand outside the hundreds of thousands of Hasidic speakers who operate in the language daily within interconnected Jewish separatist communities as a means of maintaining boundaries.[8]

What interests me as an academic and a newcomer to Australia (I arrived from Canada in 2020) is how Yiddish today is bound up with heritage and building upon the legacies of the language's speakers, especially in my adopted home of Melbourne. After more than two centuries of continued Jewish settlement, the 2021 census reported an Australian Jewish population of 117,000 (out of a total of 25.4 million),[9] largely spread across the cities of Sydney and Melbourne. Almost all Australian Jews speak English, with over three-quarters speaking that language exclusively, and some 1,500 also speaking Yiddish (compared to 10,000 speaking Hebrew).[10] Melbourne remains home to most of the country's Yiddish speakers and over a century of artistic and organisational life in the language, including literary and stage production, education, and political activism. Yiddish is spoken among multiple generations by a small but active minority of descendants of European-born speakers, most of whom settled in Australia as survivors of the Holocaust. Yiddish is also a creative outlet for a growing pool of artists with non-Yiddish backgrounds who have studied the language or otherwise made it a focus of their creative work.

The scholarly and popular literature about Yiddish in the aftermath of the Holocaust is vast, including studies of its

7. Rebecca Margolis, *Yiddish Lives On: Strategies for Language Transmission* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2023).

8. See Dovid Katz, "The Yiddish Conundrum: A Cautionary Tale for Language Revivalism," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Minority Languages and Communities*, ed. Gabrielle Hogan-Brun and Bernadette O'Rourke (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 553–87; Chaya R. Nove, "The Erasure of Hasidic Yiddish from Twentieth Century Yiddish Linguistics," *Journal of Jewish Languages* 6, no. 1 (2018): 109–41.

9. David Graham, *The Jewish Population of Australia: Key Findings from the 2021 Census* (Sydney: JCA, 2024), https://jca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/The-Jewish-Population-of-Australia-Report_2021-Census-1.pdf, 6.

10. Graham, *The Jewish Population of Australia*, 35.

cultural legacies, digital afterlives, and linguistic transmission. Within a body of scholarly writing about the present and future of Yiddish in Australia, authored by observers and participants in the local Yiddish scene, the language is characterised as a conduit to a pre-Holocaust Jewish past, as well as an anchor for shared leftist or familial legacies and new creativity within those spaces.[11] Literary scholar Anita Norich, writing a generation ago, called Yiddish a metonymy for the victims of the Holocaust, ever heightened as the language has become less commonly spoken.[12] While this observation holds true in some instances in Melbourne, notably with the integration of Yiddish content in annual Holocaust commemoration events, the language is also associated with projects that deliberately showcase innovation and, in many cases, draw on the leftist legacies of the city's Yiddish speakers. A trio of organisations forms a hub for this activity: the Kadimah Cultural Centre and Library encompasses an operational library and archives as well as classes, cultural events and festivals, and a professionalised Yiddish theatre; the Jewish Labour Bund and its youth arm, SKIF (Sotsyalistisher kinder farband/Socialist Children's Union), coordinate events as well as weekly gatherings and camps for youth; Sholem Aleichem College offers Yiddish education to primary school children as well as classes for graduates and the community at large. The city is home to singers as well as bands that perform regularly in Yiddish, notably the Bashevis Singers, Chutney, and YID!. In addition, Melbourne's Yiddish literary history encompasses a cadre of local migrant writers as well as contemporary writers who draw on the language.

In this study, I consider two Australian fiction works published in 2023 that showcase Yiddish on the page and

11. Rebecca Margolis, "Shabbes in Ek Velt: Yiddish Rap Music in Melbourne," *Australian Journal of Jewish Studies* 36 (2023): 31-56. http://www.aajs.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Margolis_AJJS_XXXVI_2023_31-56.pdf; Ena Burstin, "Yiddish in Oystralia," in *New Under the Sun: Jewish Australians on Religion, Politics & Culture*, ed. Michael Fagenblatt, Melanie Landau and Nathan Wolski (Melbourne: Black Inc, 2006), 76–86; Bronia Kornhauser, "Music and the Continuity of Yiddish Language and Culture in Melbourne," *Australian Journal of Jewish Studies* 27 (2013): 85–118, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A373371539/LitRC?u=googlescholar&sid=sitemap&xid=e82adcef; Margaret Taft and Andrew Markus, *A Second Chance: The Making of Yiddish Melbourne* (Clayton, Vic: Monash University Publishing, 2018).
12. Anita Norich, "Yiddish Literary Studies," *Modern Judaism* 10, no. 3 (1990): 298, https://doi.org/10.1093/mj/10.3.297.

stage: Leah Kaminsky's novel, Doll's Eye, and Elise Hearst's stage play, *A Very Jewish Christmas Carol*.[13] These works embed Yiddish into English-language texts to represent two facets of the Australian Jewish experience: pre-Holocaust life in Europe, and encounters between Jewish and non-Jewish Australians by survivors and their descendants. Rather than address questions of linguistic continuity, I investigate the ways in which Yiddish is meshed into recent works of English-language Australian fiction writing to address broader questions relating to Jewish identity, memory, and belonging in relation to the Holocaust.

My analysis of Kaminsky's *Doll's Eye*, and Hearst's *A Very Jewish Christmas Carol* considers how second- and third-generation writers, born and raised in Melbourne, deploy Yiddish within fiction writing. Drawing on these two works, I investigate how Yiddish functions as a mimetic device to represent both the fictive world and memory of a vanished one. I consider how the meshing of Yiddish into English texts reconstructs and reimagines characters within narratives set in Australia during and in the aftermath of the Holocaust. I am interested in the production and functions of intratextual translation – mechanisms to decipher foreign language terms, phrases or other elements that are embedded within a text in a dominant language – as a representational strategy within literary projects that integrate Yiddish. I discuss how and why that language is intentionally blended into a predominantly English text, accompanied by translation for readers or audiences who are assumed not to speak the language. In addition to discussing Yiddish as a mimetic device within the works, I examine their authors' connections to Yiddish and their strategies for managing that language in English-language texts alongside other foreign languages such as textual Hebrew, German, Russian, or Polish. I posit the ways in

13. Leah Kaminsky, *Doll's Eye* (Milsons Point, NSW: Vintage Books, 2023); Elise Esther Hearst with Philip Kavanagh, *A Very Jewish Christmas Carol*, dir. Sarah Giles, feat. Natalie Gamsu, Miriam Glaser, Emma Jevons, Evelyn Krape, Jude Perl, Louise Siversen, and Michael Whalley, Melbourne Theatre Company, Southbank Theatre, The Sumner, Melbourne, November 14 – December 16, 2023 (Melbourne: Currency Press), https://www.currency.com.au/books/adaptations/a-very-jewish-christmas-carol/.

which Kaminsky and Hearst foreground the Yiddish language in their works to theorise about the current place of Yiddish in Australian cultural production. Within this dynamic, I operate as both scholar and practitioner; I am a researcher of Yiddish and a contributor in Yiddish-based projects in Melbourne, including serving as Yiddish translator for *A Very Jewish Christmas Carol*. I was fortunate to be able to interview both authors for this study.

Yiddish in Multilingual Texts

As a Germanic language that originated among Jewish speakers, Yiddish from the outset integrated textual Hebrew and Aramaic, and subsequently evolved in Slavic lands in close contact with Polish, Ukrainian, and other languages. Yiddish speakers have historically been plurilingual speakers moving between, and drawing on, multiple languages, Jewish and non-Jewish. Scholars have pointed to the longstanding movement between Yiddish and other languages in creative work, as well as the profoundly translational character of the Yiddish language.[14] Within this multilingual dynamic, Jews have developed their own distinctive speech varieties to signal or express belonging or identity. These integrate borrowings of terms or phrases from Jewish languages, notably Yiddish or modern Hebrew and textual Hebrew/Aramaic, as well as grammatical structures, intonation and accent. Within the extensive sociolinguistic research on the practice of speakers moving between languages – alternately termed an ethnolect, codeswitching, translanguaging or code-meshing – Sarah Bunin Benor has proposed the concept of "linguistic repertoire" to characterise the range of Jewish language within a dominant tongue like English to serve as a means of indexing identity. For example, Yiddish words (Yiddishisms) such as "shlep" or "mentsh" within American English, in

14. Naomi Brenner, *Lingering Bilingualism: Modern Hebrew & Yiddish Literatures in Contact* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2016); Saul Noam Zaritt, *A Taytsh Manifesto: Yiddish, Translation, and the Making of Modern Jewish Culture* (New York: Fordham UP, 2024).

what has been popularly termed "Yinglish",[15] can signify a connection to Ashkenazic Jewishness or other markers of group belonging.[16]

In contrast to an extensive body of research on the linguistic repertoires of Jews in the United States, notably their expression within American popular culture,[17] the linguistic repertoires of Australian Jewry have received far less attention. Twenty-five years ago, the work of Michael Clyne, Edina Eisikovits and Laura Tollfree compared ethnic varieties of Australian English (ethnolects). They found that the descendants of Greek and Jewish migrants in the second-generation and beyond respectively integrated Greek or Hebrew/Yiddish borrowings as well as other distinctive linguistic features in their English. They did so in marked situations to express or symbolise their dual ethnic identities, group solidarity, or recall the past.[18] What Clyne, Eisikovits and Tollfree term "Yiddish-based Australian English" encompasses pronunciation (phonology), grammatical structures (syntax), and vocabular (lexic). They observed, "for many Jewish Melbournians, Yiddish has become a symbol of their culture and history, a link with the religious and cultural traditions of their forebears".[19] Further, they predicted that Australian Jewish English would decline with language shift and would be "unlikely to exert influence on mainstream Australian English.[20] Some two decades later, Emma Breslow and Caroline Hardy returned to this topic in a sociolinguistic study of ethnoreligious identities that compared American and Australian familiarity with a list of Jewish lexical items. They found that knowledge of Jewish English is influenced by

15. Leo Rosten, *The Joys of Yiddish: A Relaxed Lexicon of Yiddish, Hebrew and Yinglish Words Often Encountered in English ... from the Days of the Bible to Those of the Beatnik* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968).
16. Sarah Bunin Benor, "Mensch, Bentsh, and Balagan: Variation in the American Jewish Repertoire," *Language & Communication* 3, no 1–2 (2011): 141–54.
17. Sarah Bunin Benor, "Pastrami, Verklempt, and Tshootspa: Non-Jews' Use of Jewish Language in the United States," *American Jewish Year Book 2020*, ed. Arnold Dashefsky and Ira M. Sheskin (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2022), 3–69.
18. Michael Clyne, Edina Eisikovits and Laura Tollfree, "Ethnic Varieties of Australian English," in *English in Australia*, ed. David Blair and Peter Collins (Philadelphia and Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2000), 223–38; Michael Clyne, Edina Eisikovits and Laura Tollfree, "Ethnolects as In-group Varieties," in *Us and Others: Social Identities across Languages, Discourses and Cultures*, ed. Anna Duszak (Philadelphia and Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2002), 133–157.
19. Clyne, Eisikovits and Tollfree, "Ethnic Varieties of Australian English," 224.
20. Clyne, Eisikovits and Tollfree, "Ethnolects as In-group Varieties," 147.

both national and religious identity, and reported a repertoire of terms like "shemozzle" (to mean a confused state or mess) particular to Australia, used by both Jewish and non-Jewish speakers. Further, they observed that the practice of shortening words that is widespread in Australian English (hypocoristics, e.g. "brekkie" for breakfast or "arvo" for afternoon) has evolved in-group terms relating to Jewish religious practice, notably "yarmi" for "yalmulka" and "barmi" or "batmi" for "bar mitzvah" or "bat mitzvah" respectively.[21] My own informal study suggests a distinctive lexicon of Australian Jewish terms, especially stemming from Yiddish used among Jewish speakers, to include "shpats" (short for "shpatsir," a stroll) or "broygez" for holding a grudge; the term "motza" (from Matzah) to mean a large sum of money, appears within wider Australian popular culture.

My analysis draws on scholarship that builds upon Meir Sternberg's foundational study, "Polylingualism as Reality and Translation as Mimesis," which outlines strategies for mimetic representation and translation of foreign languages in literary works.[22] Sternberg suggests that whilst literature's fictive worlds offer opportunity for juxtaposing different kinds of speech, how to represent them within a medium of communication that is typically unilingual poses a challenge.[23] He proposes the term "heterolingualism" to refer to the use of foreign languages or dialects in a dominant language where its primary function is mimetic versus communicative. For Yiddish, this means that the language operates, in Glaser's terms, as *signified* rather than *signifier*. The effects of heterolingualism include creating realism, emphasising linguistic difference, or reflecting cultural plurality.

In Sternberg's schema of multilingual coexistence within a fiction text, the methods for managing literary

21. Emma Breslow and Caroline Hardy, "The Macher Wears a Yarmi: A Comparative Study of Australian and American Familiarity With Jewish English Lexical Items" (poster, Linguistic Society of America Summer Institute, 2023); Emma Breslow and Caroline Hardy, "From Shpiel to Shemozzle: A Study of Familiarity with Jewish Lexical Items in Australia and the United States" (paper, 25th Sociolinguistics Symposium, Curtin University, Perth, Australia, June 24–27, 2024).
22. Meir Sternberg, "Polylingualism as Reality and Translation as Mimesis," *Poetics Today* 2, no. 4 (1981): 221–39. https://doi.org/10.2307/1772500.
23. Sternberg, "Polylingualism as Reality and Translation as Mimesis," 222.

heterolingualism as a discursive strategy exists within two extremes: unilingual representation within a text ("homogenizing convention"); and the portrayal of linguistic difference by verbatim reproduction of a foreign language ("vehicular matching"). Between these poles lie other methods of explicitly portraying as well as rendering intelligible a polylingual fictive world to audiences. These include: "selective reproduction" of foreign speech in occasional quotations, for example, the use of interjections such as the Yiddish "*oy vey*"; "verbal transposition," which underlines interlingual difference by marking a character through idiosyncratic usage in the dominant language, for example an accent or distinctive grammar, such as the Yiddish-inflected "I want you should go"; or "explicit attribution," where a text states that another language is being uttered.[24] Sternberg's model has been adapted by generations of scholars considering heterolingualism and intratextual translation in the representation of ethnic identities in fiction writing and film.[25] Nina Fang's study, "Shaping a New Voice: Blending Australian English and Heritage Languages in Second-Generation Migrant Writing," marks the beginnings of scholarly study of Australian heterolingualism through the lens of code-meshing as a creative practice where different languages combine in a text.[26]

Heterolingualism in fiction writing brings challenges as well as advantages. Sternberg discussed potential pitfalls with the extensive inclusion of foreign language in a text in relation to intelligibility: "so inconsistent with the norm conditions of communication, [vehicular matching] may in some periods and genres be thought to divert attention from more important matters and to require too much

24. Sternberg, "Polylingualism as Reality and Translation as Mimesis," 225–31.
25. See for example Rebecca Margolis, "Melekh Ravitch as Yiddish Catalyst: Montreal, 1941–1954," *EEJA (East European Jewish Affairs)* 46, no. 2 (2016): 192-209, https://doi.org/10.1080/13501674.2016.1201640; Rebecca Margolis, *The Yiddish Supernatural on Screen: Dybbuks, Demons and Haunted Jewish Pasts* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2024); Rainier Grutman, "Refraction and Recognition: Literary Multilingualism in Translation," *Target: International Journal of Translation Studies* 18, no. 1 (2006): 17–47, https://doi.org/10.1075/target.18.1.03gru; Carol O'Sullivan, *Translating Popular Film* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Julie Primon, "'Italianness' in English-Language Novels: Intratextual Translation as a Representational Tool," *New Writing* 18, no. 1 (2020): 35–46, doi:10.1080/14790726.2020.1746351.
26. Nina Fang, "Shaping a New Voice: Blending Australian English and Heritage Languages in Second-Generation Migrant Writing," *Asian Englishes* 23, no. 2 (2021): 137–51, https://doi.org/10.1080/13488678.2020.1725728.

polyglot expertise on the part of the author and his [sic] reading-public".[27] This concern is addressed by Reed Dasenbrock in "Intelligibility and Meaningfulness in Multicultural Literature in English", which responds to a rise of Anglo-literature by authors from diverse linguistic backgrounds.[28] Rejecting intelligibility as the lone criterion, he suggests that writers can insert foreign languages as an artistic strategy and thereby "choose to make moments of their work more difficult to understand, less immediately intelligible, because they know that the reader will work for their meaning".[29] Further, the very same challenges to intelligibility can mirror the experiences of a text's characters and thereby embody them for audiences. As Juliette Taylor-Batty suggests, "The interlingual encounter – and its representation – always brings distortion, problems of interlingual and intercultural communication, and a foregrounding of difference".[30] Interlingual discourse can suggest stereotypes, interrogate the dominant culture, or signal ambivalence about one's own or another's identity. Building on this analysis, I posit that the work on the part of the audience in encountering Yiddish – whether via selective reproduction, verbal transposition, or vehicular matching – represents an essential function of the text in that language in both Kaminsky's and Hearst's works, even if translation is always provided. The engagement of the audience through the integration of strategically translated Yiddish embodies the ways in which the texts' fictional characters index their identities as Jewish Australians, especially in relation to the Holocaust and its aftermath.

I situate this study within a cycle of literary work by Australian second- and third-generation writers – the children and grandchildren of European-born Yiddish speaking survivors – that explores the Holocaust and its aftermath, much of which integrates Yiddish within the

27. Sternberg, "Polylingualism as Reality and Translation as Mimesis," 225.
28. Reed Way Dasenbrock, "Intelligibility and Meaningfulness in Multicultural Literature in English," *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 102, no. 1 (1987): 10–19, https://doi.org/10.2307/462488.
29. Dasenbrock, "Intelligibility and Meaningfulness in Multicultural Literature in English," 14.
30. Juliette Taylor-Batty, *Multilingualism in Modernist Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 40.

contexts of their narratives.[31] These works sit within an international and multilingual corpus of cultural production that represents the Holocaust removed from the events, both in space and time. Marianne Hirsch's concept of "postmemory," introduced in the 1990s, characterises how a second-generation – the "generation after" – have inherited and internalised their parents' memories, and how these manifest in cultural production about the Holocaust: "Postmemory's connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation".[32] Alison Landsberg introduced the term "prosthetic memory" to interrogate how technologies of American mass culture such as film or television have facilitated collective experiences of memory for people who did not experience them.[33] Gerd Bayer's study of third-generation Holocaust cinema, or "after post-memory," finds an orientation towards addressing forward-looking ethical questions within the telling of Holocaust stories.[34] Victoria Aarons and Alan L. Berger further propose that one of the characteristics of third-generation narratives is the "imaginative return," which can "take the form of both literal and metaphorical journeys to reenact and reclaim the past".[35] Olga Gershenson terms the third-generation Holocaust memory on screen "meta-memory," where artists create works that represent memories of memories.[36]

As the vernacular of a majority of the victims of the Holocaust, Yiddish is prevalent in second- and third-generation Holocaust fiction as a mimetic device, as it is in portrayals of the migrant experience of Yiddish speakers more broadly. These works fall into under a sub-genre of Jewish literature in English that interweaves Yiddish into

31. Rebecca Margolis and David Slucki, "Second- and Third-Generation Holocaust Writing in Australia: Towards a Cultural History," *Journal of Jewish Identities* 16, no.1–2 (2023): 217–39. https://doi.org/10.1353/jji.2023.a898147.
32. Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 15.
33. Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).
34. Gerd Bayer, "After Postmemory: Holocaust Cinema and the Third Generation," *Shofar* 28, no. 4 (2010): 116–32, https://doi.org/10.1353/sho.2010.0053.
35. Victoria Aarons and Alan L. Berger, *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation: Trauma, History and Memory* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2017), 64.
36. Olga Gershenson, "Meta-Memory: About the Holocaust in New Israeli Video Art," *Jewish Film & New Media: An International Journal* 6, no. 1 (2018): 86.

polylingual narratives.[37] A cycle of twenty-first century fiction works foreground Yiddish as a mimetic device within English-language narratives that creatively reimagine Jewish pasts. Perhaps the most renowned of these is Michael Chabon's 2007 bestselling American detective novel, *The Yiddish Policemen's Unit*, set in a fictive post-Holocaust Jewish homeland in Sitka, Alaska, where Yiddish is lingua franca.[38] Another example is Gary Barwin's historical drama, *Yiddish for Pirates*, which tells a story set during the Spanish Inquisition narrated by a 500-year-old Yiddish-speaking parrot named Aaron.[39] A more recent example, Moriel Rothman-Zecher's 2022 novel, *Before All the World*, intertwines Yiddish and English words and phrases in a narrative about an interracial friendship set in 1930s Philadelphia.[40] Each of these works intentionally embed Yiddish or Yiddishisms – both translated and untranslated – into their works to generate humour, interrogate intersections between Jewish and other identities, and enrich the narrative by immersing the reader in a reimagined Jewish cultural milieu.[41]

Australian fiction has evinced its own meshing of Yiddish within English cultural production to portray Australian Jewish worlds within narratives of migration. Arnold Zable, a Yiddish-speaking child of Holocaust survivors, embeds extensive translated Yiddish terms and short passages into his semi-autobiographical portrayals of Holocaust survivors in Melbourne.[42] The language occasionally appears spoken on Australian television to portray Jewish migrants: the family drama, *Palace of Dreams* set in Sydney,[43] and an episode of the crime fiction series set in Melbourne, *Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries*, titled, "Raisins and Almonds",[44]

37. Hana Wirth-Nesher, *Call It English: The Languages of Jewish American Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).
38. Michael Chabon, *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* (London: Harper Perennial, 2007).
39. Gary Barwin, *Yiddish for Pirates* (Toronto: Random House Canada, 2016).
40. Moriel Rothman-Zecher, *Before All the World* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2022).
41. Margolis, *Yiddish Lives On*, 160-62.
42. Arnold Zable, *Café Scheherazade* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2001); Arnold Zable, *Scraps of Heaven* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2004).
43. *Palace of Dreams*, directed by Stephen Wallace (Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 1985).
44. *Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries*, season 1, episode 6, "Raisins and Almonds," directed by Tony Tilse, aired March 9, 2012, on ABC, produced by Every Cloud Productions.

as well as the novel of the same name upon which it was based.[45] Whilst these works await fuller analysis (as part of a larger project I am currently working on), their use of Yiddish offers a mimetic device to represent the speechways of Jewish migrant characters from the past. In contrast with all of these works, Kaminsky and Hearst not only employ Yiddish to evoke migrant pasts but – in a feature of third-generation texts – explicitly align that language with contemporary issues such as language loss and the effects of intergenerational trauma. Both evince a meta-memory orientation that draws on wide-ranging Holocaust representation in the arts and in public memory, while also responding to discourse associated with the Yiddish language. This combined with the scope of Yiddish across Kaminsky and Hearst's works, and their multifaceted translation strategies, suggests a new stage in heterolingual Yiddish writing in Melbourne.

Leah Kaminsky's *Doll's Eye*

Leah Kaminsky is a Melbourne-based physician and award-winning author who was born in Melbourne to Polish Jewish survivors of the Holocaust. Her third novel, *Doll's Eye*, tells the story of Anna Winter, a German woman who flees to Australia with her doll collection after becoming inadvertently involved in a Nazi spy network, and finds herself managing a hotel in the remote outback town of Birdum. Winter encounters Yiddish poet Alter Mayseh, who has fled his native Poland to Australia in 1938 in search of a haven for persecuted European Jewry, only to find himself stranded in Birdum during his cross-country travels. The two fall in love until they are torn apart when the truth about Anna's past comes to light. Through interconnected narratives and flashbacks, the novel recounts the tales of these two refugees. Anna's dolls form a recurring motif throughout the book as carriers of her past. The "doll's eye" in the title further evokes a medical test for a reflex by that name (oculocephalica) used to assess brain function; in

45. Kerry Greenwood, *Raisins and Almonds: A Phryne Fisher Mystery* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1997).

the book, the term refers to the ways in which the characters evade or face consciousness of the events that have shaped their lives, or those around them.

The Yiddish in the novel hinges on the character of Alter Mayseh, who is introduced as a Warsaw Yiddish poet within that city's lively literary scene. The polyglot Alter Mayseh finds himself a lone Yiddish poet displaced in the Australian Outback. Only later in the novel is he welcomed as a celebrity in the Melbourne Yiddish milieu after he and Anna relocate to the city. Alter Mayse is loosely based on Yiddish avant-garde poet and essayist Melekh Ravitch (pen name of Zechariah Choneh Bergner), a seminal figure in twentieth-century Yiddish literary life, first in Warsaw and subsequently in Melbourne and Montreal. Ravitch arrived in Australia in 1933 to investigate the possibility of establishing a Yiddish school in Melbourne, and traversed the Northwestern Australian outback in search of a potential site for large-scale migration of displaced European Jewry. An influential figure in Melbourne's Yiddish cultural life until his departure in 1937, Ravitch has recently emerged as an object of interest within creative representation of the Australian Jewish experience. For example, a recent lavishly illustrated book on Ravitch details his Australian voyage in an English translation of his travel memoirs, accompanied by photographs and paintings by Ravitch's son,[46] with plans for a stage adaptation in development.

Kaminsky had intended to write a book about Ravitch while a creative fellow of the State Library Victoria in 2010. Her project, titled The Fish Council, was slated as "a creative non-fiction narrative about Yiddish–Polish poet Melekh Ravitch who was sent to Melbourne in 1933 by the Jewish Agency to fundraise for Yiddish schools and went on to undertake an arduous trip across the Kimberley with an Italian postal truck driver and a young Aboriginal guide in an attempt to find a homeland for German Jewish

46. Anna Epstein, Melekh Ravitsh: *The Eccentric Outback Quest of an Urbane Yiddish Poet from Poland* (Melbourne: Real Film and Publishing, 2019).

refugees".[47] Kaminsky's entry point into the project was Ravitch's son, painter Yosl Bergner, who settled in Melbourne in 1937 and joined the rebellious avant-garde group of writers and artists informally known as "the Angry Penguins." Kaminsky's father, who arrived from Poland in 1938, befriended Bergner when the two served together in the Australian Army. Kaminsky met Bergner on a trip to Israel at the age of fifteen at his Tel Aviv studio and he became a longtime friend and mentor with whom she conversed in Yiddish. Bergner repeatedly requested that Kaminsky write his father's story, detailed in Ravitch's memoir, *Iber Oystralye* (Across Australia).[48] Bergner provided her with access to Ravitch's diaries and a photographic account of Ravitch's journey to Melbourne and the Northern Territory in 1933. Kaminsky retraced Ravitch's journey to Birdum – now a ghost town – in 2020, accompanied by one of the last speakers of Yangman, the indigenous language of the region. Ultimately, Kaminsky made the decision to fictionalise Ravitch instead, which liberated her to create the character of Alter Mayseh.[49]

Figure 1: Leah Kaminsky (left) with Yosl Bergner (centre) in his studio on Bilu St., Tel Aviv, 2013
Image by Audrey Bergner.

47. Victoria State Library, "Previous Creative Fellows: Dr. Leah Kaminsky," accessed October 30, 2024, https://www.slv.vic.gov.au/about-us/fellowships/creative-fellowships/previous-creative-fellows/2010/dr-leah-kaminsky#:~:text=Dr%20Leah%20Kaminsky's%20book%20manuscript,Italian%20postal%20truck%20driver%20and.
48. Melekh Ravitch, *Iber Oystralye* (Warsaw: Kinder Fraynd, 1937).
49. Leah Kaminsky, zoom interview with Rebecca Margolis, August 14, 2024.

Figure 2: Leah Kaminsky in Birdum, 2020
Image by Prof. Ghil'ad Zukermann.

Yosl Bergner formed one inspiration for the book; the second was visiting a French doll museum with a friend.[50]

Kaminsky's relationship to Ravitch's story evinces characteristics of second- and third-generation Holocaust writing. Her narrative and the novel's integration of Yiddish, bridges Hirsch's concepts of postmemory as well as Bayer's "after post-memory." Kaminsky drew on inherited Holocaust memory from her father's generation, mediated by her friendship with Bergner and the travel memoirs left by Ravitch. She undertook a journey of return to Birdum. However, rather than recounting Ravitch's story set during and after the Holocaust, she wrote a character based loosely on him with the additional intent of interrogating contemporary issues around the loss of language and culture in Australia. Given how profoundly Ravitch was enmeshed in forging Yiddish culture before, during and after the Holocaust, it is hardly surprising that a novel's fictionalised portrayal of him be steeped in Yiddish and that the language be enmeshed with broader themes of difference and belonging. However, the novel additionally draws on Kaminsky's own relationship with the language, with the Yiddish refracted through her own experiences. Born to Yiddish-speaking parents, Kaminsky

50. Jessica Abelsohn, "What's Behind the Doll's Eyes?" *Australian Jewish News*, September 4, 2023, https://www.australianjewishnews.com/whats-behind-the-dolls-eyes/amp/.

spoke the language at home, attended a Yiddish school as a child and performed in the Yiddish theatre; as a teenager, she distanced herself from the language, only to return to it later in life.[51] The Yiddish in the novel thus marks its own journey of return.

Yiddish appears in three guises in *Doll's Eye*. In each case, the Yiddish appears transliterated into English letters followed by explanatory glosses in English, either on the page or intradiegetically (within the narrative). The Yiddish is thus explained within the text, as opposed to via an extradiegetic apparatus such as footnotes or a glossary, or left untranslated. In Sternberg's model of heterolingualism, Kaminsky does not employ vehicular matching by inserting long passages of Yiddish text into the narrative. Rather, the Yiddish punctuates the novel and is fluidly meshed into the English text. It is integrated using the strategies of selective reproduction, where isolated terms or phrases from the language appear in the English, as well as verbal transposition, where a character speaks in English with idiosyncratic usage that suggests that the character is actually speaking or thinking in Yiddish.

In the first category of Yiddish usage, proverbs in the language punctuate the book's sections: "*Di velt iz groys un s'iz nito vu ahintsuton*. The world is huge and there's nowhere to turn";[52] *Eyn oyg hot mer gloybn vi tsvey oyern*. Trust one eye more than two ears";[53] "*A tropn libe brengt a mol a yam trern*. A drop of love can bring an ocean of tears".[54] Having grown up hearing Yiddish proverbs from family members, curating these short texts marked a kind of reclamation. For Kaminsky, proverbs represent a form of folklore embedded in the language that recall a familial Yiddish milieu that has since vanished: "I find it tragic that I haven't got anyone to talk to like I did with my uncles and aunts, and my parents, with that beautiful *neshuma* [soul], and the songs, and the jokes, and the proverbs and the

51. Kaminsky, interview.
52. Kaminsky, *Doll's Eye*, part 1, 7.
53. Kaminsky, *Doll's Eye*, part 2, 150.
54. Kaminksy, *Doll's Eye*, part 3, 184.

laughter that I really miss".[55] The Yiddish proverbs appear separate from the text in a static and symbolic function, not spoken or interacting with the narrative but as a graphic iteration on the page that only allude to the content of each section.

The second usage of Yiddish occurs embedded throughout the narrative, in the experiences, literary creativity and activism of Alter Mayseh. Whilst this name literally means "Old Story" in Yiddish, Alter Mayse is portrayed as anything but; he is a lively and driven artist engaged with the latest trends of modernity. The Yiddish underpins his trajectory from belonging in a multifaceted European Yiddish world, which is lived in and through Yiddish; to estrangement in the Australian Outback; to a return to continuity and innovation within Melbourne's émigré Yiddish circles.

Yiddish appears as lingua franca of the vibrant Yiddish-speaking world that Alter Mayseh inhabits in pre-War Warsaw, which Kaminsky conjures at the start of the novel. A scene set at the revered 13 Tlumatzka Street (Tlomackie 13) – site of the Yiddish Writers Union where Alter Mayseh served as secretary (like Melekh Ravitch) – portrays the gathering of artists who eat, drink, argue and engage in furtive sexual acts. In a strategy of selective reproduction that suggests speech fully in that language, Yiddish words and short phrases pepper the scene, with descriptors such as "*tsedreyte* crazy white cat" embedded in the English.[56] Speech is reimagined in animated Yiddish, glossed in English for the non-Yiddish speaker: "*Ribono shel oylem*! God in heaven! What are you doing here?",[57] or "'Enough, Alter! There is no *gelt* left to throw away on any more of your *luftgesheft*. All your outlandish schemes are founded on air".[58] The Yiddish is meshed within a discourse comprised of witticisms and banter that are characteristic of Ashkenazic speechways. The scene feels like it took place in Yiddish and the reader is accessing it via translation.

55. Kaminsky, interview.
56. Kaminsky, *Doll's Eye*, 19.
57. Kaminsky, *Doll's Eye*, 20.
58. Kaminsky, *Doll's Eye*, 21.

The use of Yiddish demarcates Jewish identity as difference when Alter Mayseh departs his Polish Yiddish world for Australia. In Birdum, where he finds himself the sole Jewish inhabitant in a hostile environment, Alter Mayseh's spoken English is peppered with Yiddish terms and phrases that explicitly underscore his Jewishness: "We say in Yiddish: *Khasene hobn zol er mit di malekh hamoves tokhter*. He should marry the daughter of the Angel of Death".[59] Within his internal monologue, the language underlines moments of profound turmoil as a newly arrived traveller in Australia, for example, in a key scene when a wounded albatross lands in front of him on a ship: "*Vos zol ikh ton*? What was he to do?".[60] Yiddish functions as an expression of deep-rooted ambivalence as he grapples with his intensifying relationship with the non-Jewish Anna, for example in a scene where he imagines the ghosts of his departed grandparents claiming that the union would kill them: "Akh, dead shmead. *Altsding lozt zikh oys mit a gevayn*." The Yiddish "shm-reduplication" – a linguistic strategy to mock or convey scepticism – in "dead shmead" is followed by a proverb, which is then translated intradiegetically in the next line: "No! Not everything has to end in tears, Frumaleh".[61] Alter Mayseh deploys Yiddish to connect with Anna by aligning his worldview, expressed in Yiddish, with hers. For example, after a spat, he remarks:

> "*Der ershter broygez is der bester broygez*."
> "Which means?"
> "The first quarrel is the best."[62]

Alter Mayseh draws on his Ashkenazic linguistic repertoire to explain Jewish practice to Anna, for example, the practice of *Tashlikh* (symbolic casting of crumbs for the Jewish New Year).[63] Anna reveals her entry into Alter Mayseh's cultural world by adopting and weaponising his Yiddish, for example, using a deprecating term for a

59. Kaminsky, *Doll's Eye*, 48.
60. Kaminsky, *Doll's Eye*, 50.
61. Kaminsky, *Doll's Eye*, 67.
62. Kaminsky, *Doll's Eye*, 121.
63. Kaminsky, *Doll's Eye*, 177.

non-Jewish woman, she refers to herself as a "little *shikseh*" when she accuses him of treating her as a mere romantic dalliance.[64]

In a kind of return to Alter Mayseh's Warsaw, Kaminsky paints a vivid picture of his reception as newly arrived luminary within Melbourne's Yiddish milieu, comprised of migrants dedicated to the language and its continuity. His rousing inaugural lecture encapsulates the project of secular Yiddish: "I want to help recreate our vanished world – not to blend in, but to transplant an entire culture through theatre, education, literary works and a flourishing press. Let's make Yiddish the language of our everyday lives, alongside the King's English; a secular identity, divorced from rituals of prayer and devotion".[65] Within these scenes, the reader encounters local lynchpins of the Yiddish cultural world such as actor Yankev Waislitz and writer Pinchas Goldhar.

Whereas Yiddish is foregrounded within the novel's heterolingual landscape, German or Russian occasionally punctuate the text. When the text states that Anna and Alter Mayseh converse in their shared language of German, their dialogue is represented in English, with occasional German terms. Within the novel, German is largely associated with negative settings and signalling dislocation. More than simply appearing as the vernacular associated with Nazi Germany and the Holocaust, the German language is associated with profound unease. For example: German appears in the harsh commands that Birdum's most odious character, Max Schmidt, gives his dog[66] or his cursing of Alter Mayseh as "'Filthy Swine, *Jude*!'";[67] frightening tales told in Anna's childhood;[68] or the loss of love and home when Anna bakes *Frischer Apfelkuchen* (fresh applecake) for the first time in Melbourne, just before Alter Mayseh terminates their relationship.[69]

64. Kaminsky, *Doll's Eye*, 179.
65. Kaminsky, *Doll's Eye*, 190.
66. Kaminsky, *Doll's Eye*, 39.
67. Kaminsky, *Doll's Eye*, 61.
68. Kaminsky, *Doll's Eye*, 77–78.
69. Kaminsky, *Doll's Eye*, 195–97.

Russian appears in one scene featuring a sympathetic Soviet refugee.[70] In contrast, Yiddish underpins the novel on multiples levels extending into esoteric: Alter Mayseh points out that the secret name that Anna's mother gave her doll, Lalka – meaning "doll" in both Polish and Yiddish – suggests hidden Jewish ancestry.[71] A single word holds the key to the possible Jewishness of Anna's mother, and thus Anna herself. As Alter Mayseh's nephew, Yosl – modelled on Yosl Bergner – concludes during a visit to Anna's doll repair business at the end of the novel, "*Yede hartz hot soydes*. Every heart has its secrets".[72]

Kaminsky's Yiddish repertoire stems from her knowledge as a native speaker, rather than generated via translation or refracted via Yinglish in American popular culture. Kim Kelly's book review comments on the "earthy physicality to Kaminsky's broader cast of characters: … men finger their lovers under the table at Yiddish literary soirees. Her fictional people are fully alive. … We meet the boisterous and the boring among the Yiddish Writers Union … We hear the philosophy of Spinoza, and a great deal of Yiddish, far beyond the expected 'schleppings' and 'schmucks'".[73] Much of the liveliness of the characters and their fictional world is achieved via the book's portrayal of a multilingual world, with the heterolingual foregrounding of embedded terms or phrases in Yiddish, and to a lesser degree German, or Russian. Kaminsky manages the polylingualism of her storyworld so that the reader is a linguistic insider, privy to all of its languages.

A third function of the Yiddish in *Doll's Eye* is metalinguistic: discourse about Yiddish that speaks to the meanings attributed to the language. Yiddish is linked to Jewish resistance and resilience in the face of a long history of anti-Jewish hostility. For example, upon Alter Mayseh's arrival at the Birdum Hotel, he is approached by a resident who asks, "You're a four-by-two, right?"

70. Kaminsky, *Doll's Eye*, 164.
71. Kaminsky, *Doll's Eye*, 144–45.
72. Kaminsky, *Doll's Eye*, 229.
73. Kim Kelly, "Leah Kaminsky Doll's Eye," *Newtown Review of Books*, September 12, 2023, https://newtownreviewofbooks.com.au/leah-kaminsky-dolls-eye-reviewed-by-kim-kelly/.

The text continues,

> Alter had heard the term before. Four-by-two. Rhyming slang for Jew. He'd been called worse. Kike. *Zhyd*. Sheeny. Smouch. Shyster. Shylock. Christ-killer. He was an instant curiosity wherever he went, a freak in some sideshow even though he had no belief in God. What still made him a Jew, aside from his *bris*, a ritual he had no say in as an eight-day-old baby? For Alter, it was language. Yiddish shaped his every thought, awake or asleep, wrapped in its silken veil around his heart, coursing through his blood. Even if he wanted to, how to exorcise an angel that lived in every nerve and muscle of your being? A language filled with sadness, love, humour and wisdom, like none other he knew; and he could speak more languages than most. But it was a language without a home.[74]

The passage prefigures the ways in which Melekh Ravitch and other surviving Yiddish writers – the last European-born generation to have experienced the full breadth of modern Yiddish culture – would frame the language as a linguistic carrier of Jewishness in the aftermath of the Holocaust.[75]

Like Chabon's *The Yiddish Policemen's Unit*, *Doll's Eye* sits within a subgenre of heterolingual fiction writing that portrays alternate Jewish historical trajectories. However, whereas Chabon portrays a Yiddish-speaking alternate future in a fictional post-Holocaust Jewish homeland in Alaska on the brink of collapse, Kaminsky's adaptation of Melekh Ravitch's sojourn in Australia transforms him into a prophetic harbinger of language loss within Australia. Yiddish is seminal to the book's interrogation of difficult pasts and language loss, specifically the annihilation of European Jewish civilisation in the Nazi Holocaust set against the destruction of Indigenous cultures and languages in Australia. Kaminsky superimposes these parallels into the thoughts of Alter Mayseh as he roams the

74. Kaminsky, *Doll's Eye*, 45.
75. Margolis, "Melekh Ravitch as Yiddish Catalyst."

countryside with Anna:

> This country, he had been told, held so many languages. As he listened to the distant voices he feared these too, were doomed to disappear. Many beautiful languages around the world were being gradually cannibalised. An ancient tongue spoken for over five thousand years would have died, if it were not for those who clung to what they saw as the word of God. Since then, a pastiche passed through the lips of Jews wherever they roamed, a babel of dialects and utterances tacked together like barnacles. Worldly words, used for laughter, tears, arguments and making love. Ghost words scattered by stray winds, sinking into the quicksand of time. Lullabies sung by generations of mothers to their trembling infants – *Bey meyn kindeleh's vigele, shteyt a klor veys tsigele* – a child's wagon guarded by a small white goat.[76]

A media article cites Kaminsky: "I'm writing very much about the refugee experience and the loss of language. There's a lot of Yiddish peppered throughout the book. It's about the cannibalisation of smaller languages by an increasingly homogenised world, and how with the loss of those languages, is the death of culture and identity as well". [77] In interviews, as well as within the novel, Kaminsky aligns the cultural losses of Yiddish with those of the Indigenous Yangman language, which today has only a few remaining speakers.[78] In the musings of Alter Mayseh, she characterises Yiddish as "a *tsebrokhene* phoenix, hobbling on one leg",[79] a portable Jewish homeland. Yiddish offers an example of the essential place of language within cultural continuity, and how, as Kaminsky writes, "A culture lived and breathed and survived through its language".[80]

76. Kaminsky, *Doll's Eye*, 101.
77. Abelsohn, "What's Behind the Doll's Eyes?"
78. "Author Leah Kaminsky on 'Doll's Eye'," *Good Reading Magazine*, September 2023, https://goodreadingmagazine.com.au/article/author-leah-kaminsky-on-dolls-eye; Kaminsky, *Doll's Eye*; Kaminsky, interview.
79. Kaminsky, *Doll's Eye*, 102.
80. Kaminsky, *Doll's Eye*, 102.

In *Doll's Eye*, Yiddish appears as both *signifier* and *signified*, with Kaminsky writing both in and about Yiddish. As a media article suggests, the novel is, "a love story about a man and a woman, but it's also about a love of language, in particular Yiddish, and culture".[81] For Kaminsky, Yiddish emerged organically within the writing process as "the heart and soul of the book".[82] As a second-generation native Yiddish speaker who has returned to the language in later life, Kaminsky meshes Yiddish fluidly throughout the novel in both intra- and extra-diegetic ways: outside of the narrative in proverbs that demarcate the book's sections, and within the narrative in dialogue and inner monologues around the figure of Alter Mayseh. Kaminsky draws on the inherited Holocaust memories and the language transmitted by her parents' generation to index the Jewish identities of her characters, and to connect them with broader contemporary issues relating to language loss.

A Very Jewish Christmas Carol

Elise Esther Hearst is a playwright and novelist based in Melbourne. Born in the city, she was raised in a Jewish but not Yiddish-speaking family. She recently authored two plays that integrate Yiddish dialogue, both premiered in Melbourne: *Yentl* (with Gary Abrahams and Galit Klas), based on Isaac Bashevis Singer's short story by that name, set in a shtetl in the 1870s for the Kadimah Yiddish Theatre in 2022, and *A Very Jewish Christmas Carol*, which is set in contemporary Melbourne. Created as part of the Melbourne Theatre Company's NEXT STAGE writer's program by its resident writers Hearst and Philip Kavanagh, *A Very Jewish Christmas Carol* was commissioned in 2019 and performed at the end of 2023. During that period, the play underwent several iterations as a Jewish adaptation of Charles Dickens's oft-adapted tale, *A Christmas Carol*, with Hearst emerging as the main writer. Applying a distinctively Jewish mode of storytelling, the play drew on Hearst's family history as the granddaughter of a Holocaust survivor who escaped Nazi Europe with her family, although her own

grandmother did not speak Yiddish. The play also originated in Hearst's experiences of hosting her partner's non-Jewish family for Christmas for the first time, shortly before his brother passed away, and the grieving that followed.[83] Keenly aware of the play's iconic status within a Christian-dominant anglosphere that includes Australia, Hearst's adaptation ultimately developed Dickens's tale about the redemption of a miser into a narrative addressing Jewish intergenerational trauma in the aftermath of the Holocaust.[84] Dickens's own ambivalent attitude towards Jews lends a subversiveness to the foregrounding of Jewish voices and narratives in a Yiddishised adaptation of *A Christmas Carol*.[85]

The play offers a contemporary Jewish retelling of *A Christmas Carol* that centres on a Jewish Melbourne family as they grapple with loss and buried family legacies. The play's miserly Ebenezer Scrooge character, Elysheva (Ely) Scroogavitz (Miriam Glaser), struggles to salvage the now failing Ada's Bakery, which she inherited from her Jewish Holocaust-survivor grandmother, Bubi, three years earlier. She intends to stay up all Christmas eve night in hopes of uncovering the secret of her Bubi's famous gingerbread. Estranged from her family – well-intentioned mother, Fran (Natalie Gamsu); sister, Sarah (Emma Jevons); their Rabbi Rivka (Jude Perl); and devoutly Christian mother-in-law, Carol (Louise Siversen) – and heavily pregnant with her first child, she mourns the untimely accidental death of her fiancé, Ben (Michael Whalley) with whom she navigated an interfaith relationship by celebrating a blended Hannukah and Christmas they called "Chrismakkah." After rebuffing a family intervention, Ely is visited by the ghost of her deceased Bubi (Evelyn Krape) as well as three spectral apparitions of past, present, and future, each of them a blend of Christmas fare and Jewish mysticism: the Rein-dybbuk (a possessing Jewish spirit in the body of a reindeer, Louise Siversen), the Gingerbread Golem (an ani-

83. Elise Esther Hearst, zoom interview with Rebecca Margolis, September 5, 2024.
84. Hearst, interview.
85. See Deborah Epstein Nord,"Dickens's 'Jewish Question': Pariah Capitalism and The Way Out," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 39, no. 1 (2011): 27–45.

Figure 3: Happy Christmukkah
A Very Jewish Christmas Carol. Melbourne Theatre Company 2023. Image by Pia Johnson.

mated giant cookie, Evelyn Krape) and Lilith Claus (the demonic mythical first wife of Adam, Natalie Gamsu). As in Dickens's original morality tale, Ely's discoveries – which lead her to witness a scene of her grandmother's youth in pre-war Poland – compel her to confront her grief and her inherited Holocaust trauma, and begin to reconcile with her family. The play manages its serious subject matter with witty dialogue and physical comedy that is accessible to broad audiences; as one review remarks, "the predominantly non-Jewish audiences at *A Very Jewish Christmas Carol* opening night had no trouble appreciating the humour".[86]

Figure 4: In Ada's Bakery.
From left to right:
Rabbi Rivka (Jude Perl); Sarah (Emma Jevons); Fran (Natalie Gamsu); Ely Scroogavitz (Miriam Glaser); Carol (Louise Siversen).
A Very Jewish Christmas Carol. Melbourne Theatre Company 2023. Image by Pia Johnson.

86. Danny Gocs, "A Merry Time at A Very Jewish Christmas Carol," *Australian Jewish News*, November 20, 2023, https://www.australianjewishnews.com/a-merry-time-at-a-very-jewish-christmas-carol/.

The fast-paced play is augmented by musical renditions of Christmas and Hannukah songs performed by the cast, each of whom play multiple roles in the production.

Hearst's *A Very Jewish Christmas Carol* operates in a wartime and post-war Jewish linguistic landscape that is similar to Kaminsky's *Doll's Eye*, blending Jewish and European languages into a predominantly English script. One review aligns the heterolingual script with the play's mode of representation: "Attention to detail was key in bringing authenticity to the production, with actors often expertly jumping between English, Hebrew, Yiddish and Polish".[87] Another review observes, "And *A Very Jewish Christmas Carol* wouldn't be the same without a sprinkling of Yiddish and a smattering of Polish for good measure".[88] The play deploys Yiddish in two main guises: first, to mark the Ashkenazic Jewishness of characters navigating their identities within non-Jewish Anglo-Australia; and second, to portray a multilingual pre-war Polish Jewish past that encompasses both Yiddish and Polish. In the first guise, Hearst inserts terms or phrases from the Yiddish as well as idiosyncratic Yiddish-inflected English in the heterolingual strategies of selective reproduction and verbal transposition. In the second guise, long passages of dialogue in the script are translated into Yiddish as well as Polish in a strategy of vehicular matching to demarcate the encounters between Jewish and non-Jewish characters and spaces.

The first category of Yiddish usage underscores Jewish difference as well as establishing humour in the play. It draws upon a repertoire of Yiddish borrowings, sentence constructions and accent commonly associated with that language to function as a signifier of Ashkenazic Jewishness. These Yiddishisms have been widely disseminated by American television, film, fiction, and popular culture, including their usage by non-Jewish

87. Carissa Shale, "A Very Jewish Christmas Carol," *Theatre Matters*, November 21, 2023, https://theatrematters.com.au/Reviews/a-very-jewish-christmas-carol/.
88. Alex First, "A Very Jewish Christmas Carol (MTC) – Theatre Review." *Blurb: Australian Arts and Entertainment Reviews*, November 2023, https://theblurb.com.au/wp/a-very-jewish-christmas-carol-mtc-theatre-review/.

characters to portray or subvert Jewish stereotypes.[89] Within a strategy of verbal transposition, Ely's use of Yiddishism signals her identity in relation to both her Jewish family and her interfaith relationship with Ben. Her first utterance in the play, the hybridised interlingual exclamation, "Oy humbug" (Hearst 2023 1), is later explained: in a flashback, Ely and Ben announce the invention of Christmakkah; when they find out that the term had earlier appeared in the television dramedy, the OC, they spontaneously spawn a new coinage:

> Ely: Oy!
> Ben: Humbug!
> Ely/Ben: Oy humbug![90]

Whilst "oi" is a common Australian exclamation, here it additionally evokes the iconic Yiddish interjection "oy," which expresses a range of emotions including surprise, exasperation, dismay or anguish. With her family, Ely lapses into Yiddish-inflected English: "Mum! Bubi! Enough with the fighting".[91]

Throughout the play, the performance of untranslated Yiddish borrowings form part of a wider Jewish linguistic repertoire that also encompasses textual and modern Hebrew. As the sole non-Jewish character who is playfully censured for her love of Christmas and unenlightened ideas about Jews, Carol is the humorous foil for the characters' Jewishly inflected utterances. In the opening scene, an exasperated Fran says to her daughter, "God forbid I touch the sign. Hashem will punish us all!".[92] A nervous Rabbi Rivka extends greetings in both Hebrew and Yiddish when she enters the bakery for the family intervention:

89. Rebecca Margolis, "'Oy with the Poodles Already!': Yiddishisms and Non-Jewish Characters on American Sitcoms," *Journal of Jewish Languages* 11, no. 2 (2023): 1–36. https://doi.org/10.1163/22134638-bja10037.
90. Elise Esther Hearst, with Philip Kavanagh. *A Very Jewish Christmas Carol*, dir. Sarah Giles, feat. Natalie Gamsu, Miriam Glaser, Emma Jevons, Evelyn Krape, Jude Perl, Louise Siversen, and Michael Whalley. Melbourne Theatre Company, Southbank Theatre, The Sumner, Melbourne, November 14 – December 16, 2023. Melbourne: Currency Press, 2023, https://www.currency.com.au/books/adaptations/a-very-jewish-christmas-carol/.
91. Hearst, *A Very Jewish Christmas Carol*, 27.
92. Hearst, *A Very Jewish Christmas Carol*, 3.

Rivka: *Chag sameach*.
Fran and Sarah: *Chag sameach*, Rivka
Rivka: *Gut yontif*.
Fran/Sarah: *Gut yontif*.[93]

Fran appears as the superstitious grandmother-to-be, spitting as part of traditional Jewish apotropaic practices to ward off the evil-eye.[94] The Rein-dybbuk speaks in a stylised jocular, Jewish-accented English, sounding like an anachronistic composite of Yiddish-inflected characters from American television and film: "Oh geez. Okay. Here we go. You are (*consults a rolodex*) Elysheva Scroogavitz. And I am the Rein-dybbuk of Chrismakkah past, yada-yada-yada come on toots let's get this show on the road".[95] These examples of selective reproduction in linguistic tags serve to index the characters' identities in relation to Jewish practice or Jewish representation within popular culture.

Yiddish is most strongly aligned with the character of Bubi, an energetic ninety-nine-year-old European-born speaker who appears as Ely's spectral guide. Her first utterance, when spotted by a shocked Ely in the bakery, is the Yiddish, "Nu?".[96] Bubi's speech is peppered with Yiddish interjections such as "Oy" or "Oy vey".[97] Her use of untranslated Yiddishisms underscores her feisty character. For example, upon discovering that Ely is pregnant, this exchange ensues:

Ely: I thought you'd be happy to see me.
Bubi: Sure, sure darling. You tell yourself what you need to. But let's just say I was on a Mahjong winning streak and I need to kick Minnie Finklestein's *tuchus*, oy she thinks she's all that ...
Ely: Bubi!
Bubi: I knew that boy was no good for you. He knocks you up and this whole place turns to crap! Where is that *no-goodnik*?[98]

95. Hearst, *A Very Jewish Christmas Carol*, 24.
96. Hearst, *A Very Jewish Christmas Carol*, 19.
97. Hearst, *A Very Jewish Christmas Carol*, 20, 21.
98. Hearst, *A Very Jewish Christmas Carol*, 21.

Bubi weaponises Yiddish in her encounters with other characters in the play. Her English is replete with Yiddish proverbs, which are glossed intradiegetically by characters in the scene, or appear translated in textprojections (surtitles) for the audience to read. Bubi critiques Ely's slovenly appearance:

> Bubi: *Az di moyd iz mies zogt zi, der shpigl iz shuldik*.
> Ely: What?
> Bubi: If a girl is ugly, she blames it on the mirror. Would it kill you to make an effort? At least for your daughter's sake.[99]

Bubi aggressively deploys Yiddish proverbs against her daughter, Fran:

> Bubi: *Az got hot geteylt dem seykhl bistu geshlofn*. (When God was doling out brains, you were asleep).
> Fran: You know I can't speak Yiddish.
> Bubi: Pity.[100]

> Bubi: *Ale tseyn zoln dir aroysfaln, nor eyner zol dir blaybn af tsonveytik*.
> Rein-dybbuk: May all your teeth fall out, except one to give you a toothache. Savage.[101]

> Bubi: *A tropn libe brengt a mol a yam trern*.
> Fran: What, Mum?
> Rein-dybbuk: A drop of love can bring an ocean of tears. Brutal.[102]

Bubi's Yiddish mockery and insulting her daughter, to whom she never taught Yiddish or Polish, underscores the schism between them. According to Hearst, those incompletely transmitted languages form a hidden aspect of Bubi, and express her deepest pain (Hearst 2024). They mark an origin point for the intergenerational trauma that the characters carry into the present. At its most extreme,

99. Hearst, *A Very Jewish Christmas Carol*, 23.
100. Hearst, *A Very Jewish Christmas Carol*, 26.
101. Hearst, *A Very Jewish Christmas Carol*, 29.
102. Hearst, *A Very Jewish Christmas Carol*, 38.

Bubi deploys Yiddish slurs and proverbs in a verbal sparring with her nemesis, Lilith, about who will guide Ely:

> Bubi: Okay, you old witch, I'll take it from here.
> Lilith: Go back to your little games. This is no place for an *alte kaker* like you.
> Bubi: Who are you calling an *alte kaker*?! You're as old as time!
> Lilith: *Fargelt un fargrint zolstu vern!* (May you turn yellow and green!)
> Bubi: *Eyn imglik iz far im veynik.* (One misfortune is too few for him.)
> Lilith: *Vern zol fun dir a blintshik, un di kats zol dikh khapn.* (May you turn into a blintz and be snatched by a cat.)
> Bubi: *Dayn neshome zol arayngeyn in a kats un a hunt zol es a bis ton.* (May your soul enter a cat and may a dog bite it).[103]

The play's Jewish characters lapse into vulgar Yiddish-inflected English to manage uncomfortable moments of intimacy, which are revealed to Ely during her travels with the three ghosts. In a flashback to a tense scene between Bubi and Fran, Bubi announces that she is leaving, "*To pish*!"[104]. When Sarah and Rivka talk privately about whether to reveal their romantic relationship, Sarah scoffs, "Meanwhile I'm off having the time of my life, *shtupping* the rabbi." Rivka responds, "I thought this was more than *shtupping*."[105] The play extends a running gag about Bubi in the midst of a heated otherworldly game of Mahjong as a defeated Ely prepares to leave the bakery and her family:

> Bubi: (offstage) *Oy vey iz mir* that noodle-head. She treating you okay?
> Ely: Yeah fine.
> Bubi: (*offstage*) Don't you dare, Minnie! It's my turn! Oy. Sorry. Finklestein's up my *tuchus* again. What were you saying, Elysheva?

103. Hearst, *A Very Jewish Christmas Carol*, 58.
104. Hearst, *A Very Jewish Christmas Carol*, 30.
105. Hearst, *A Very Jewish Christmas Carol*, 47.

Ely: Lilith is showing me my future so I can get back and pack up my things.

Bubi: (*offstage*) Pack up? What's to pack up? Calm down, Finklestein, can't you see I'm talking to my granddaughter?

Ely: I'm no good to anyone, Bubi. I see it so clearly now. I don't want to be a burden any longer. And the only way to make things better is for me to get the hell out of here. Then everyone else can get on with their lives.

Bubi: (*offstage*) You're leaving? Oy. You haven't figured it out you *shmendrick*. Finklestein, play my hand, and I'll know if you cheated. Elysheva Scroogavitz, don't move a muscle. Bubi is coming![106]

In contrast to Kaminsky, a child of Holocaust survivors who grew up speaking Yiddish within a rich cultural environment, Hearst was exposed to Yiddish colloquialisms within her family but does not speak the language.[107] Hearst constructed the play's Yiddish dialogue in three ways. First, she drew on her own Jewish linguistic repertoire of Yiddishisms to embed in the play, which appear largely untranslated. Second, like Kaminsky, she searched up Yiddish proverbs to integrate into the script (using the Yiddishwit.com website), which appear translated. Third, for the longer sections of Yiddish dialogue that employ a strategy of vehicular matching, I was brought in as a consultant and translator, having previously worked in the same capacity on Hearst's earlier co-authored play, *Yentl*. The production also hired a dialect coach to work with the actors, Melbourne-based Yiddish singer and teacher, Freydi Mrocki. In my role, I was presented with the sections of the play in English to render into spoken Yiddish, which I also audio-recorded for the actors.

In my studies of new films and television with subtitled Yiddish dialogue, I termed this bidirectional mode of rendering Yiddish dialogue for performance on the stage or screen "transvernacular." In this mode, "Yiddish appears as

106. Hearst, *A Very Jewish Christmas Carol*, 57.
107. Hearst, interview.

a fluently spoken language produced by, and for, non-fluent Yiddish speakers" who encompass creators, directors, actors and audiences.[108] Here an original script in the source language is rendered into the target language of Yiddish, and then glossed back into the original language for viewers in subtitles or surtitles. In Hearst's play, I translated sections of the original script in English into Yiddish, which the actors memorised, and the original English appeared as surtitles for the audience. In this mode, the Yiddish amounts to what scholars have termed "pseudo-subtitling"[109] or "back translation".[110] With no Yiddish source text and no target audience of Yiddish speakers, the Yiddish dialogue exists in a "closed loop" of translation. The Yiddish operates within a dramatic function of translation where the language is essential as a narrative strategy.[111]

The performance of *A Very Jewish Christmas Carol* draws on heterolingualism as a dramaturgical resource. In contrast to a novel, the multimodality of staged theatre – which, like cinema, draws on multiple senses at the same time – radically changes the audience experience of the Yiddish. Rather than an unfamiliar text that is encountered on a page, the extra-linguistic aspects of performance mediate the Yiddish that audiences encounter when viewing the play. Language exists as one among a suite of signifying resources: facial expression, gesture, costume, and the placement of characters on stage. The corporeal, embodied, plastic nature of performance offers a range of resources and affordances, which extend well beyond the linguistic. Through these, the play's heterolingualism and its foregrounding of Yiddish become embodied on stage. Further, the experience of viewing the play in a collective transforms its performed heterolingualism into a linguistic

108. Margolis, "Melekh Ravitch as Yiddish Catalyst"; see also Margolis *Yiddish Lives On* and Margolis, *The Yiddish Supernatural on Screen*.
109. O'Sullivan, *Translating Popular Film*, 4.
110. Dror Abend-David, "The 'Non-Translation': Editor's Introductory Note," "Yiddish, Media and the Dramatic Function of Translation—or What Does It Take to Read Joel and Ethan Coen's film, A Serious Man?" In *Representing Translation: The Representation of Translation and Translators in Contemporary Media*, ed. Dror Abend-David (New York and London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 202.
111. O'Sullivan, *Translating Popular Film*, 120; Abend-David "The Non-Translation," 202.

strategy to forge human connection. Jill Dolan's foundational study, "Performance, Utopia, and the 'Utopian Performative'," posits that in addition to an aesthetic act, theatre performance can foster moments of community and shared experience that gesture toward the possibility of a better world, and thereby allow audiences to momentarily glimpse an imagined utopian future.[112] Drawing on Dolan, Yana Meerzon considers how a Canadian multilingual theatre performance navigates linguistic diversity and translation in a stage performance about the reassembling of shattered identities after migration, whereby the act of storytelling engenders a utopian community.[113] Likewise, the heretolingualism of *A Very Jewish Christmas Carol* is instrumental to its creation of a utopian performative meeting place of cultures. The audience experience of shared spectatorship and participatory Yiddish listening underpins the play's multilingual narrative. As a spectator at a performance of the play that had numerous Yiddish speakers in attendance, I experienced audience responses to the Yiddish dialogue in collective laughter or gasps that were sometimes out of sync, depending on whether a person knew Yiddish or not, and to what extent they relied on the mediation of surtitles to grasp the meaning of the spoken dialogue. In and through Yiddish, the audience collectively witnesses Bubi's submerged memory of the tragic loss of her family in the Holocaust and her subsequent dislocation, and the healing of intergenerational trauma prompted by its telling.

As the play's English to Yiddish translator, I considered the cadence of how extended passages of Yiddish would sounds in the mouths of the actors as well as how they might be heard by audiences. Of the group, only Evelyn Krape, who played Bubi/the Gingerbread Golem, had extensive experience acting in the Yiddish language (she had recently co-starred in the play, *Yentl*). Without the scaffolding of the English script, none of the actors

112. Jill Dolan, "Performance, Utopia, and the 'Utopian Performative'," *Theatre Journal* 53, no. 3 (2001): 455–79, https://doi.org/10.1353/tj.2001.0045.
113. Yana Meerzon, "Between Je and Moi: Staging the Heteroglossia of Immigrant Autobiography," *Theatre Research in Canada* 36, no. 2 (2015): 1–22, https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/tric/article/view/24309/28125.

understood the Yiddish words that they were memorising and delivering on stage. The phonetics of Yiddish can pose challenges to non-speakers; for example, the voiceless velar fricative, represented by the symbol [x] in the International Phonetic Alphabet and transliterated as "kh," is a widespread phoneme in Yiddish. As I translated, I read each line aloud to ensure that the lines flowed and that their delivery would not be rendered unduly difficult. Freydi Mrocki and I worked together to rewrite some of the lines to make them as idiomatic as possible. Although Yiddish emerged from Middle-High German and is thus related to Modern German, I resisted using an overly Germanised Yiddish or turning to internationalisms that would be easily accessible to audiences. I was inspired by the scholarly studies of heterolingualism suggesting that the encounter with foreign languages as an artistic strategy can embody a character's experiences for audiences.

I offer here an early example of vehicular matching in the play to suggest how Hearst's script not only manages the intelligibility of longer passages of Yiddish, but facilitates an immersive audience experience through that language. This excerpt plays with the dynamics around intelligibility to generate humour as well as to wryly comment on dramaturgy as a mediator between languages. In the second scene, the text reads: "Bubbe's body is suddenly possessed by an ancient ancestor. The ancestor speaks the following in Yiddish in a deep and gravelly voice":

> Bubi: Enough, Elysheva! You do not know what you cannot know! Do not presume to have all the answers. Instead, learn to ask the questions. Tonight, this Chrismakkah Eve, you'll be visited by three spirits, each one presenting you with a vision of your past, your present, and the future yet to come. Expect the first when the oven bell dings one. The second will come when the oven bell dings two, the third when the oven bell dings three. Remember this, and remember me, and please, sort yourself out so I never have to return to this godforsaken place.

The audience is presented with the above script to read as English surtitles while hearing the Yiddish:

> *Genug, Elysheva! Du veyst nisht vos du kenst nisht visn! Meyn nisht as du host ale entfers. Onshtot dem, lern zikh oys tsu fregn frages. Haynt, dem Erev Krismaka, veln dray rukhes dikh bazukhn. Yeder vet dir forshteln a vizye fun dayn over, funem haynt un fun der tsukunft. Rikht zikh oyf der ershter ven der oyvn zeyger klingt eyns. Der tsveyter vet kumen ven der oyvn zeyger klingt tsvey, der driter ven der oyvn zeyger klingt dray. Gedenk dos un gedenk mikh, un, zay azoy gut, plonter zikh oys az ikh zol keyn mol nisht muzn tsurik in dem hek.*

Bubi comes back into her own voice and body.

> Bubi: (*To Elysheva*) Did you understand any of that?
> Ely: Strangely, I did.[114]

The humour in this passage hinges on the suspension of disbelief that underpins the play's vehicular matching: Ely is able to understand the Yiddish without speaking that language. This early encounter with Yiddish establishes a dynamic that carries through the play: Yiddish is spoken as a language that neither the audience nor Elisheva understand, but which is translated for both parties: via magical means for Elisheva, and surtitles for the audience. As a result, both Elisheva and the audience are privy to mediated secret information associated with the mystical or haunted realm inhabited by Bubi and the three ghosts who visit her. As I posit in *The Yiddish Supernatural on Screen: Dybbuks, Demons and Haunted Jewish Pasts*, the association of Yiddish with esoteric knowledge and resonances of memory forms a trope of an international corpus of twenty-first century multilingual film and television that foregrounds spoken Yiddish as a mimetic device.[115]

The play's third act – its climactic revelation – employs an extended dramatic function of translation using vehicular

114. Hearst, *A Very Jewish Christmas Carol*, 23.
115. Margolis, *The Yiddish Supernatural on Screen*.

matching. The characters' speech reconstructs the multilingualism of a Polish Jewish family on the eve of the Second World War. In an interview Hearst recalls the impact of having recently completed the script for *Yentl*, which blends English and Yiddish dialogue: "I felt like the power of hearing language was a way of transporting the audience in time and place is really essential and amps up the unexpected nature of what is about to happen. It signifies to the audience that we are no longer in that familiar place".[116] The combined Polish and Yiddish dialogue additionally functions to underscore the multilingual and intercultural speechways destroyed during the Holocaust.

Set in a snowy forest in Poland, Christmas/Hannuka 1938, scene twelve portrays Bubi as a young woman named Misha (Emma Jevons) in a clandestine sylvan holiday gift exchange with her non-Jewish friend, Ada (Jude Perl). The scene opens in Polish (translated and coached by Krystyna Duszniak). It soon seamlessly switches to English when Ely, who is witnessing the scene together with Bubi's ghost, complains: "A little help Bubi? I can't speak Polish!" Bubi responds, "Oy. Here." The play's directions state, "Bubi magically makes them speak in English".[117] Hearst's fictional translation device was motivated in part because of the difficulties the actors encountered memorising the lines of Polish dialogue in addition to the Yiddish.[118] This translation strategy – an example of Sternberg's explicit attribution, where the audience is informed that a language is being spoken without hearing it – delimited the time-consuming and challenging process of memorizing large swathes of Polish-language dialogue for the stage, where, unlike in cinema, no retakes are possible. In the scene, Ada hands Misha an envelope containing the recipe for what would become Bubi's famous gingerbread. As Misha reads the Polish recipe, Ely attempts to glimpse it but is unable to read the

116. Hearst, interview.
117. Hearst, *A Very Jewish Christmas Carol*, 59.
118. Hearst, interview.

Polish; Ada commands Misha to memorise the recipe before she tears it up. The two are shown coining the term Chrismakkah – much to Ely's chagrin – as they exchange holiday greetings and sing together. When Ely moans in protest and demands to know why Bubi never shared the recipe with her, Bubi responds that she promised never to reveal it. The scene underscrores the ruptured linguistic and cultural transmission in the wake of the Holocaust: because she does not speak Polish – one of the daily languages fluently spoken by her grandmother – Ely is unable to retrieve the coveted gingerbread recipe.

The next two scenes – the most emotionally charged in the play – appear predominantly in Yiddish. Scene thirteen portrays Ada visiting Misha's family in an interfaith encounter as they light the Hannukah candles. Misha, her mother, Renia (Natalie Gamsu), and her grandmother, Halina (Louise Siversen), recite the Hebrew blessing and banter comparing gingerbread with jam *ponchkes* (doughnuts). In the scene, spoken English stands in for the dominant language of Polish in a strategy of homogenizing convention. The family speaks in Yiddish when they don't want Ada to understand, with the translation projected in English surtitles behind the actors. Yiddish serves as a Jewish cipher within a multilingual household in a reversal of the common post-Holocaust memory of children of Yiddish-speaking parents recalling the language being used to conceal secrets from them.

> Misha: It's Chrismakkah, Bubbe!
> Ada: The best parts of Christmas and Chanukah combined!
> Halina: What is she talking about? *Az meh tut on sheyn a bezem, iz er oykh sheyn.* (Dress up a broom and it will look nice too.)
> Renia: Mum, be nice!
> *Mameh, zay a mentsh!*
> The girl is harmless!
> *Dos meydl volt nisht getshepet keyn flig oyf der vant.*

119. Calvin Trillin, "Of Yiddish, Litvaks, and the Evil Eye: A Smattering of Yiddish Happens to be all the Yiddish I have," *The New Yorker*, November 29, 2024, https://www.newyorker.com/culture/personal-history/of-yiddish-litvaks-and-the-evil-eye?

Halina: Suit yourself, but I'll be sleeping with one eye open.[120]
Tu vi du vilst, ober ikh shlof say vi mit an ofenem oyg.

Figure 5: The surtitles during scene 13
A Very Jewish Christmas Carol. Melbourne Theatre Company 2023. Image by Pia Johnson.

In scene fourteen, Misha says a tearful farewell to her family as she prepares to depart Poland in search of refuge. Her mother and grandmother hand her a rucksack with food, and Renia, says:

Gedenk dem plan. Du gey, lern zikh, un oyb es vert alts erger, gey vayter un vayter un vayter, un oyb du kumst on in ek velt, iz dos beseyder. Du geyst poshet vayter. Un demolt shikstu nokh undz.
Remember the plan. You go, study, and if things get worse, you keep going, and going, and going, and if you reach the end of the earth that's okay. You just keep going. And then you send for us.[121]

Bubi reveals to Ely in the next scene that she was the sole survivor in her family. She entreats Ely to connect with her own family rather than be consumed by grief after losing Ben. In the final two scenes, Ely is able to reconcile with Ben by encountering his ghost. She calls her mother on her mobile phone to invite her, along with her sister, Rivka, and Carol, to join her at the hospital for the birth.

Yiddish as a mimetic device is integral to the play's third-generation character. According to Hearst, the play

121. Hearst, *A Very Jewish Christmas Carol*, 65.

explores, "the pressures placed upon the third generation as they attempt to emerge from their own parents' inability to connect with their parents because they are too close so that it falls upon the grandchildren to solve the mysteries and work through the trauma so that their own children don't have to bear the burden of that pain".[122] Within Hearst's dramaturgical redemptive journey of return to pre-War Poland, Polish and Yiddish in tandem offer a key to a vanished past, as represented by the elusive gingerbread recipe. Through multiple strategies of heterolingualism, the play reveals a family history that allows for the healing of intergenerational trauma to begin. The play suggests the ways that memory constitutes transformative stories that shape the present; as Bubi says at the end of their journey: "History repeats, and yet does not have to repeat itself. We need to see our ghosts. Speak their names. I know that now".[123] Hearst recalls how the global context impacted the use of Yiddish in the play, which entered production shortly after the events of October 7 and during the sharp upturn in antisemitism that followed.[124] Being able to rehearse in Yiddish and sing Hannuka songs offered a refuge and reclamation for the Jewish members of the cast and crew. Along with representing tradition and ritual, speaking Yiddish offered a way to honour the defiance of survival.[125] In connecting real and imagined speakers across generations, the Yiddish in the play helps to heal painful pasts that continue to affect the present. The Yiddish borrowings index Jewish identities in relation to the non-Jewish characters of Ben and Carol, and a dominant Australian culture more broadly. The Yiddish dialogue functions to bridge the worlds of the dead and the living as well as pre-Holocaust Jewish life in Poland and the contemporary Jewish experience in Australia.

122. Hearst, interview.
123. Hearst, *A Very Jewish Christmas Carol*, 67.
124. Ruby Kraner-Tucci, "662 Antisemitic Incidents Recorded in Australia in the Wake of Gaza War," *The Jewish Independent*, December 20, 2023, https://thejewishindependent.com.au/662-antisemitic-incidents-in-australia-since-october-7.
125. Hearst, interview.

Conclusion

Kaminsky's *Doll's Eye* and Heart's *A Very Jewish Christmas Carol* suggest innovative uses of Yiddish as a mimetic device within heterolingual Jewish Australian fiction writing in 2023. Representing a native speaker and second-generation writer, and a non-speaker and third-generation writer respectively, Kaminsky and Hearst employ narrative and discursive strategies to integrate Yiddish into English-dominant texts. Within a heterolingual framework that foregrounds it, the Yiddish is managed with multiple intratextual strategies. Within a far larger corpus of heterolingual fiction writing that integrates Yiddish, these works point to diverse functions and strategies for foregrounding the language for writers and audiences for whom Yiddish does not function as daily language but remains essential to indexing Jewish identities in the aftermath of the Holocaust as well as addressing broader themes relating to memory and belonging. Their spotlighting of language offers rich possibilities for interlingual encounter and communication in relation to Holocaust memory and education. These texts also suggest productive mechanisms for non-fluent or non-Yiddish speakers to integrate that language into new creative work for the page or stage.

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