

THE WEINREICH LEGACY

by

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Professor of Linguistics

on the Audre and Bernard Rapoport Chair

of Liberal Arts

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The Fifth Annual
Avrom-Nokhem Stencl Lecture in Yiddish Studies
delivered before
The Sixth Annual
Oxford Summer Programme
in Yiddish Language and Literature
on 17 August 1987

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S. S. Praver's impression of Max and Uriel Weinreich

One does not pursue Yiddish very long before encountering the name Weinreich, Uriel (the son) in any case, and Max (the father) not long thereafter. I myself made the acquaintance of the name (though not of its bearers) during a summer almost thirty years ago when I resolved to teach myself Yiddish, and I made the acquaintance in what is still no doubt the most common way: *College Yiddish*,¹ Uriel Weinreich's textbook from which a generation of students have now acquired their Yiddish: *Yidn zaynen haynt a folk fun elf milyon. Yidn voynen af ale kontinentn . . .* Will I ever forget the opening sentences of the *Ershte lektsye*? It isn't likely.

College Yiddish is, as I say, what most people concerned with Yiddish will think of first when they meet the name Weinreich. Originally published in 1949, when Uriel Weinreich was only twenty-two years old, *College Yiddish* was the first really satisfactory grammar in English of the Yiddish language. It has been, I think, of inestimable advantage for the flourishing of modern Yiddish studies that the pioneering grammar of Yiddish was a *technically sound* textbook, not the work of some linguistically naive enthusiast. As the great linguist Roman Jakobson said in the preface to his student's textbook: 'It is encouraging that the first English textbook of Yiddish has been written by a qualified student of linguistics'. A chaste understatement, ominously cautionary for any linguist who, like all of us, has ever thought to write a textbook.

Then there is Uriel Weinreich's *Modern English-Yiddish Yiddish-English Dictionary*: a beautifully crafted thing, unraveler of word mysteries, indispensable, at once awesome and practical, a desk fixture of every devotee of Yiddish. We may safely leave it to the leisure of lexicographers to suggest improvements in the details of Uriel Weinreich's *Dictionary*; he himself urged readers to do so in the preface.² It remains the surest and by far the most

accessible key to contemporary Yiddish both for the neophyte and the advanced student; it is, as the historian Lucy Dawidowicz has written, 'a lasting monument to Yiddish'.³ A monument to be sure, but *practical* — useful, handy.

Max Weinreich is probably best known to the broader public for his monumental four-volume work *Geshikhte fun der yidisher shprakh* (*History of the Yiddish Language*).⁴ Again quoting Lucy Dawidowicz: '[W]einreich's history is no narrow specialist's book. He used linguistics to illuminate the history of Ashkenazic Jewry, to illustrate the rise and flowering of Ashkenazic culture, and to explore the sociocultural relations between Jews and non-Jews. His wide-ranging scholarship and interdisciplinary approach, which had become hallmarks of his craft, found their consummation in this massive monument to Ashkenazic Jewry'.⁵ The title of Max Weinreich's *magnum opus* suggests a linguistic history, which it is; but it is really far more of a sociocultural history of the creation of Eastern European Jewry. No future historian of Ashkenazic Jewry will be able to neglect it.

Who were Max and Uriel Weinreich? Max Weinreich was born April 22, 1894, in Goldingen (now Kuldiga), Latvia. Under the influence of the predominantly Baltic German culture of the Duchy of Courland, his family language was German, not Yiddish. He was early drawn into political activity and Yiddish through the *Kleyner Bund* (*Junior Bund*): 'A brilliant child, fluent in Russian and German, he now began to learn from his young comrades not only revolution and conspiratorial techniques but also Yiddish, the language of the common people'.⁶ By the time he was thirteen he had become a correspondent for the Bundist Yiddish daily in Vilna; by the time he was fifteen Yiddish translations of his had begun to appear; and he was publishing original articles in Yiddish at sixteen. Genes will out: recall that Uriel Weinreich published his grammar at twenty-two.

He attended the University of St. Petersburg, involving himself brilliantly both in linguistics and politics. After the

revolution of 1917 he moved to Vilna, where he edited a Bundist daily. When the war was over he attended the University of Marburg in Germany, earning his doctorate with a dissertation on the history of Yiddish linguistic studies. He then returned to Vilna, where he married Regina Szabad, daughter of a prominent Jewish family. At the same time he began his teaching career at the Yiddish Teachers' Seminary and became an editor of Vilna's Yiddish daily newspaper *Der Tog* and a correspondent for the New York newspaper *Forverts*, the *Jewish Daily Forward* (which he continued to contribute to until his last years, shuddering no doubt every time to see his articles appear in the risibly *un-Yivo* archaic orthography of the *Forverts*).

The Yiddish *Zeitgeist* was ripe for the creation of an academy to promote research in all areas of Eastern European Jewish life. The Yiddish language had always lived (and, lamentably, still does live, among the poorly educated) with inferiority complexes imposed by uninformed fiat: Yiddish isn't a language at all, Yiddish has no grammar, Yiddish is corrupt German, Jews should speak Hebrew, Jews should speak Polish (or Russian, or French, or whatever).⁷ One has heard it all so many times. For a variety of reasons, not least of which was the stimulus of the First Yiddish Language Conference in Czernowitz, Bukovina, 1908,⁸ acceptance of Yiddish as a language, though grudging and piecemeal, had grown during the early decades of the twentieth century. The 1920s were good years for the Yiddish language; they provided fertile ground for a major push forward for Yiddish — for the language itself as well as for its culture. An academy for the care and nurture of Yiddish research seemed a logical next step — a legitimization, an Establishment sort of thing. The idea originated with Nokhem Shtif, but its realization would not have been possible without a moving force behind it as strong-minded and impatient as Max Weinreich.

Shtif's original call for an academy assumed that its natural home should be Berlin, then a haven for Yiddish-speaking scholars, avant-gardists, poets (among them, for a time, Avrom-Nokhem Stencl in whose honour this Annual Lecture was

created), tractists and journalists who had fled from farther east. For obvious reasons, however, Vilna — *Yerusholayim deLite*, the 'Jerusalem of Lithuania' — was the favoured choice. With a population of some 56,000 Jews in 1923, virtually all of them Yiddish-speaking, it had long been a bastion of Jewish secularity and a centre for the Yiddish press, theatre, literature, and school system. Weinreich, on the faculty of the Yiddish Teachers' Seminary and chairman of the Central Jewish Education Committee, pressed his advantages and used his formidable powers of persuasion to win community support and the support of the Jewish intelligentsia of Eastern Europe for the creation of a Yiddish research institute. In 1925 Yivo, the *Yidisher visnschaft-lekher institut* (Jewish Scientific Institute, now the Yivo Institute for Jewish Research) became a reality.

Max Weinreich had *willed* Yivo into existence. One must put it that strongly. 'Yivo's largest single asset was Weinreich's willpower, his strong-mindedness and his capacity to work for what he believed. . . . Determination, he held, could move worlds, could make something out of nothing. He used his willpower to realize a vision of scholarship in the service of the Jewish people. . . . Weinreich's concept of scholarship as a tool to clarify and serve the Jewish community's sociocultural needs inaugurated a new phase in modern Jewish scholarship'.⁹

This is not the place to give myself over to praise of Yivo. What I will say is simply this: that without Yivo probably none of us would be in this room doing what we are doing today. You, teachers and students of Yiddish, would not be gathered here in Oxford in joint pursuit of Yiddish fluency; nor would I be standing before you speaking of two great men and their place in the Yiddish scholarly tradition. Without Yivo that tradition would have been a very different thing altogether, and I for one cannot honestly say that there would have *been* a Yiddish scholarly tradition in anything like the form and shape we know it in now — a tradition strong and academically sound, unapologetic, unashamed.

Max Weinreich, a true child of the Enlightenment, a neo-

maskil, a Vilna intellectual, wanted more than a research academy. He wanted to instill pride in his people — pride of language, pride of heritage. He wanted his people to be proud to be Yiddish-speaking Jews. Scholarship, in his view, was a major tool for raising respect for Yiddish and self-respect in its speakers. Lucy Dawidowicz tells a charming story: ‘On one of his trips abroad, Weinreich noted that in the ship’s first-class accommodations, despite the many Jewish travellers, Yiddish was not seen or heard; in second class, on the other hand, he saw Yiddish signs and heard Yiddish spoken aloud. Weinreich wanted Yiddish to be first class, and he intended to do that by making Yiddish the language of cultivated men, a medium for discourse on the most abstruse, complex, and subtle subjects in all disciplines’.¹⁰

And his successes were many. Yiddish *was* taken seriously — as a language whose structure and history could be studied the way scholars study Latin, Sanskrit, and Hebrew. Graduate students were trained in economics, history, and folklore *in Yiddish*. The orthographic standardization of Yiddish made great strides. Yivo adopted its spelling rules in 1936, and these slightly modified were adopted by the Central Yiddish School Organization in Poland (Tsisho) for school use in 1937. A steady stream of articles, scholarly and polemical, poured forth from his hand and mind, on every topic under the sun: not only on language, linguistics, and literature, but also on folklore, history, and psychology. In his middle years he went to considerable lengths, including stays at the Rockefeller Foundation in New York and with Dr Siegfried Bernfeld in Vienna, to train himself in psychoanalysis.¹¹

He was always concerned about Jewish youth. Yivo gathered, on his initiative, autobiographies written by 300 young Jews; these he used as the basis for his pioneering interdisciplinary and pedagogical work, *Der veg tsu undzer yugnt: yesoydes, metodn, problemen fun yidisher yugnt-forschung* (*The Way to Our Youth: Elements, Methods, and Problems of Jewish Youth Research*, Vilna: Yivo, 1935). Denied entrance to advanced study by

anti-Semitism and the *numerus clausus* in the universities of Eastern Europe, Jewish students lacked opportunities to develop and refine their research and scholarly skills. Weinreich was instrumental in creating the *aspirantur* programme of Yivo in order to provide the research training not otherwise available. One senses that he would have wished to be known, first and last, as a teacher, a pedagogue — not in the dullard sense of the word, but as in the meaning of its Greek etymon *paidagōgos* ‘one who escorts children to school’. ‘Service’ was a Weinreich watchword. One’s lifework is a serious business, it should have practical purpose: the Yiddish word for this is *takbles*.

All this enormous fusion of energy and creativity imploded with the outbreak of the Second World War. The Weinreichs barely got out. Max and his oldest son, Uriel, left Vilna in late summer 1939 to attend an international linguistics conference in Brussels scheduled for September. Germany invaded Poland while they were away. Unable to return to Vilna, they went on to Copenhagen and stayed there (with a group including for a time Roman Jakobson and the young Lucy Dawidowicz, who as an American citizen had been warned by the American authorities to leave Vilna as the promise of war grew certain) until passage to America could be arranged.¹² Early in 1940 Max and Uriel Weinreich arrived in New York to be joined soon thereafter by the rest of the family.

Max Weinreich wasted no time in setting about the continuation of Yivo and its programmes on American soil. It was a courageous act. How hard it must have been, how gloomy and lonely, especially as the first fragmentary intimations of the Holocaust came to the American shores. In 1943, he proclaimed his belief, his credo, his formula for survival: ‘All that is required is willpower. The responsibility of every communal institution is to strengthen the will of its people. We have an obligation to ourselves, an obligation to our overseas brothers and sisters in the grip of the hangman, an obligation for the entire future of the Jewish people’.¹³ One of his first postwar books was *Hitler’s Professors* (New York: Yivo, 1946), a meticulous yet passionately

engagé account of the moral decay of the German professoriate before and during the Third Reich.

He worked to the last day of his life. A professor at CCNY (City College of New York), he taught both Yiddish and German in the German Department. He continued his leadership of Yivo, contriving and overseeing its move from the Lower East Side, next to the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, to upper Fifth Avenue, in a former Vanderbilt mansion; moving, symbolically, from Hester Street to the tony end of East 86th Street, from second-class to first-class accommodations. The preparation to near completion of his *Geshikhte fun der yidisher shprakh* did not interrupt the steady flow of articles in Yiddish and English that appeared in the postwar years in *Yidishe shprakh*, *The Field of Yiddish I, Romance Philology*,¹⁴ and elsewhere. The early death of his son, Uriel Weinreich, in 1967 at the height of his powers, was a blow whose enormity can be imagined though not shared, not even remotely, by those others of us who have not known such depthless pain; what cannot be understood must be endured: 'Viele, viele Zufälle, sämtlich Fügung des Herrn, Dem ich alles zu danken habe'.¹⁵ Max Weinreich died January 28, 1969.

Uriel Weinreich arrived in this country with his father in 1940, aged fourteen. When he died of cancer on March 30, 1967, barely forty years of age, he had become Professor of Yiddish Language, Literature and Culture on the Atran Chair at Columbia University. He was as admired and respected for his work in general linguistics as for his work in Yiddish, and enormously productive in both.¹⁶ His first listed publication was 'Vegn der shprakh fun Ayzik-Meyer Diks a manuskript' ('On the Language of a Manuscript of I.M. Dik'), *Yidishe shprakh*, III (1943), 43–47. He was some sixteen years old at the time. His next publication was 'Der amerikaner himen af yidish' ('The Star-Spangled Banner in Yiddish'), *Yidishe shprakh*, IV (1944), 33–44.¹⁷ He completed his doctorate in linguistics with the 1951 dissertation 'Research Problems in Bilingualism, with Special Reference to Switzerland'. Apart from his own outstanding

theoretical contributions to general linguistics, what was most striking about him was his heterodoxy — a generous openness to the richness of possibilities for explaining linguistic facts, a tolerant scepticism of the linguistic fashion of the hour.

The distinguished Romance linguist, Yakov Malkiel, wrote of him:¹⁸

Being both a warm-hearted humanist and a stringent social scientist; honouring with equal zest his commitments to America, to Europe and — through Israel and India, to Asia; residing in a metropolis famed the world over for the heterogeneous composition of its population, which consists largely of immigrants observable in various stages of adjustment to the national culture; identifying himself with Jewry, at once the most widely dispersed of all ethnic strains and the one most painfully aware of the hazards of that diaspora, Uriel brought the perfect emotional conditioning and the ideal vital experience to the task of mitigating, in uncompromisingly rational terms, the stiffness of much structural analysis.

One cannot avoid superlatives when speaking of Uriel Weinreich. It can be explained with a simple formula, modeled after Martin Joos' laconic encapsulation of the gift of the linguist Y-R. Chao: 'Uriel Weinreich could do nothing badly'.¹⁹ He was brilliant, enormously gifted in languages; and everything linguistic he touched figuratively turned to gold. As I have said of him in a different context:²⁰

Very few academics have accomplished as much as he did, let alone in a professional lifespan cut so short. To the linguistic profession he is known primarily for his work in general linguistics, in particular in the areas of bilingualism and semantics. Most contemporary linguists over the age of fifty would enter him on their list of top ten linguists of the century, though most quite likely would have only the vaguest notion of the *size* of his Yiddish connection. The book *Languages in Contact* (1953) brought his steady hand to a research area — what happens to languages when they are spoken next to each other — that forever struggles to escape the linguistic guild's silent suspicion of inexactitude, inexpertness. 'Empirical Foundations for a Theory of Language Change', written jointly with William Labov and Marvin I. Herzog

... made it impossible for us to continue to think about language change as we had before. ... *The Field of Yiddish* (1954) set a standard for modern Yiddish linguistics that to this day makes it difficult for inferior work to flourish. Yiddish linguistics would be a much different and much poorer thing had it not had the advantages of Uriel Weinreich's attention.

Uriel Weinreich could do nothing badly. His own contribution to *The Field of Yiddish I*, 'Stress and Word Structure', was important for its account of Yiddish stress, but even more important to general linguistics for its commonsense approach to stress and intonation.²¹ His review article 'Mid-Century Linguistics: Attainments and Frustrations'²² was a magisterial yet warmly constructive criticism of neo-Bloomfieldian descriptive linguistics — on target, as usual. The enormously influential article 'Is a Structural Dialectology Possible?'²³ was a characteristic effort to reconcile opposing views of two usually disparate groups of language scholars: structuralists and traditional dialect workers. To the very end of his life he was arguing against reductionist fallacies in linguistic investigation: 'On Arguing with Mr Katz: a Brief Rejoinder', *Foundations of Language*, III (1967), 296–299.

And then there are his Yiddish articles — articles about Yiddish, many of them *in* Yiddish, all of them original and stimulating: 'Sábesdiker losn in Yiddish: a Problem of Linguistic Affinity', *Word*, VIII (1952), 360–377; 'Di klangike struktur fun a podolyer reydenish' ('The Phonemic Structure of a Podolian Yiddish Dialect'), *Yidishe shprakh*, XIII (1953), 121–131; 'Notes on the Yiddish Rise-Fall Intonation Contour', in *For Roman Jakobson* (The Hague: Mouton, 1956), 633–643; 'Yiddish and Colonial German in Eastern Europe: the Differential Impact of Slavic', in *American Contributions to the Fourth International Congress of Slavists* (The Hague: Mouton, 1958), 369–421; 'A Retrograde Sound Shift in the Guise of a Survival: An Aspect of Yiddish Vowel Development', in *Miscelánea Homenaje a André Martinet*, Vol. 2, ed. Diego Catalan [Mendenez-Pidal] (Tenerife: Universidad de la Laguna, 1958), 221–267; 'Nozn, nezer, nez: a

kapitl gramatishe geografye' (The Plural of *noz*: a Chapter in Yiddish Grammatical Geography), *Yidishe shprakh*, XX (1960), 81–90; 'Four Riddles in Bilingual Dialectology', in *American Contributions to the Fifth International Congress of Slavists* (The Hague: Mouton, 1964), 335–359; 'Western Traits in Transcarpathian Yiddish', in *For Max Weinreich on his Seventieth Birthday* (The Hague: Mouton, 1964), 245–264. 'The Seven Genders of Yiddish', never published but delivered orally at the 1961 Christmas meeting of the Linguistic Society of America, was not only amusing (*no* language has seven genders, really) but influential in encouraging other linguists to work on the problem of gender in Yiddish.²⁴

Nothing done badly. There is something so very *whole* about all of his linguistic articles. The questions are plainly formulated, it is clear what is being claimed, the arguments are carefully marshalled, and the exposition is straightforward and stylistically attractive. In reading Uriel Weinreich one is always aware that he has a *plan*;²⁵ nothing is beside the point, there is no overkill, he is always deaf to the siren call of theoretical orthodoxy.

His lifetime project, besides the *Dictionary*, was *The Language and Culture Atlas of Ashkenazic Jewry*, and he lived to see the initial stages of this great undertaking completed. The *Atlas* is now continued under the direction of Marvin I. Herzog, Uriel Weinreich's student, collaborator, and successor on the Atran Chair at Columbia. But, like his father, Uriel Weinreich had a practical bent to him ('*takhles*') that alternated with his theoretical interests. *College Yiddish* and the *Dictionary* are evidence of this of course. In 1948 he began work on a small dictionary for the pupils of Yiddish schools on the elementary and high school levels; this was the seed from which his *Dictionary* grew.²⁶ He was an editor of the youth magazine in Yiddish, *Yugntruf* ('*Call to Youth*'), in its first postwar incarnation. He was an editor of *Word*, the Columbia-based journal of the Linguistic Circle of New York, during its glory years. My favourite piece of 'practical Weinreich', however, is *Say it in Yiddish* (New York: Dover, 1958), written with Beatrice Weinreich, one of the series

of *Say it in Language X* pocket-size Dover books. I have a treasured copy, bought in New York in 1960, and I have now spent over twenty-five years waiting anxiously but without release for the opportunity to use such phrases as:

Vu iz di politsey-stantsye?

(Where is the police station?)

Vu iz dos byuro far gefunene zakhn?

(Where is the lost-and-found desk?)

Vu iz do an apteyk-krom vu men farshteyt english?

(Where is there a drugstore where they understand English?)

And if, worse luck, the occasion arises, I will forever be prepared to cry, as I bleed to death: *Ikh darf epes af a turniket* 'I need something for a tourniquet!'

Then there was the man. This, alas, was a side of him I had but little opportunity to benefit from. I was not privileged to know Max Weinreich at all. I became acquainted with Uriel Weinreich when he came to Texas in 1966 to participate, with his coauthors William Labov and Marvin I. Herzog ('Empirical Foundations for a Theory of Language Change'), in a conference on historical linguistics. Though I knew some Yiddish at the time, my professional work lay much further away in language change, phonological theory, and Germanics. I was a second-year assistant professor. But I had published an article on Old Saxon in *Word* when he was one of the editors, and I was preparing for publication in *Language* the investigation on functional load I had done for my doctoral dissertation. 'Functional load' was a favourite concept of André Martinet's, the distinguished French linguist who had been (like Roman Jakobson) one of Uriel Weinreich's teachers at Columbia after the war. I was somewhat diffident in telling Uriel Weinreich, when I was with him during that conference in 1966, that my work on functional load was not supportive of his teacher's claims for its efficacy (though I had initiated that line of enquiry precisely because I thought Martinet *was* right, and I wanted to prove it).

I need not have been concerned. Uriel Weinreich did not take such things personally. Indeed, he urged me to publish my

results, and encouraged me to involve Yiddish in my theoretical work. I might have found my way to Yiddish linguistics without his encouragement, I don't know; I do know that his gentle invitation to a fledgling colleague *ensured* that I would do so. Somehow, I wouldn't have wanted to disappoint him. He was endowed with great charm and decency and simple human warmth; extraordinary. No one would have wanted to let him down.

Uriel Weinreich worked down to his very last day to complete his unfinished projects, his *Dictionary* most particularly. 'Service', I have said, was a Weinreich watchword; 'responsibility' was another. His last article was a brief communication to Yudel Mark, editor of *Yidishe shprakh*.²⁷ It concerned the interpretation of two rarely used words, *shmukh* 'grin' and *shmukhn* 'to grin'. I append the beginning and ending of the letter here:²⁸

dem 19tn marts 1967

Liber fraynd Mark,

In shaykhes tsu ayer bamerkung num' 4 in Yidishe shprakh b' XXVI, z' 94, vilt zikh zogn ot vos: der substantiv [šmux] un der verb [šmuxn] zaynen modne zelt'n in der literatur, ober. . .

Oyb di informatsye ken aykh tsu nits kumen, megt ir zi opdrukn in kumendikn numer zhurnal.

Mit frayndlekhe grusn

ayer

Uriel Vaynraykh

I find much of what Uriel Weinreich wrote moving. That is not surprising given his writing skill, given the lost world of Yiddish-speaking Eastern Europe that is the emotionally true setting for his work, and given his early death from a cruel disease. There is much here that is moving. But nothing of his that I have read touches me quite so deeply as this brief and, in content, not very important letter — characteristically modest and respectful, straightforward, no wasted words, written eleven days before his death in full knowledge that he had little time to live, but without the slightest pathos. Even the bibliographical apparatus had to be in there. In the cosmic scheme of things, two

small, rarely used words in Yiddish mean nothing at all, yet it mattered to *him* to set the record straight while he could. *It mattered.* He had knowledge; other people should share that knowledge. This, ultimately, is the highest form of academic responsibility.

It is so often in the little things, not in the great ones, that we gain the truest glimpses of personal character. So it is with Uriel Weinreich's courageous letter to Yudel Mark on *shmukh* and *shmukhn*, written eleven days before his death. Service, responsibility, *takhles*. What an extraordinary man.

So, here we are in Oxford, twenty years after Uriel Weinreich's death, some eighteen years after the death of Max Weinreich. What more can I say of these two great men of Yiddish Studies? I can begin by saying Yiddish Studies is a collective enterprise. It is more than the lengthened shadow of a single person's work. Yiddish linguistics alone, leaving aside literature, folklore, and everything else, as we know it today is the accomplishment of many people: Landau, Sainéan, Gerzon, Mises, Borokhov, Zhitlovski, Reyzen, Kalmanovitsh, Harkavy, Prilutski, Veynger, Vilenkin, Solomon Birnbaum, Bin-Nun, Shtif, Yudel Mark, Joffe, Kosover, the Weinreichs. Our obligation is to all these builders of the tradition. Yiddish Studies is a sparsely populated field; we cannot afford to forget any of its contributors; we can afford to neglect none of them.

The Weinreichs represent qualities in the tradition that are especially noble and worthy of our respect and emulation. What are the constituents of the Weinreich legacy? They shared a dedication to labour; they believed in and respected their people; they believed in the discipline of work, service, responsibility. They got things done. There is not a trace of self-pity in anything either of them ever wrote. They were devoted to their scholarship, but they were also teachers. They transmitted their language, Yiddish, to their children.²⁹ Erudite, practical, helpful, encouraging, meticulous — they were all these things. And they worked hard. They succeeded, against the odds.

I am reminded, I don't quite know why, of something Isaac

Bashevis Singer once wrote me: 'I have a feeling', he wrote, 'that the language itself [Yiddish] knows how great God is and how small people are, even the best of them'. When I reflect on the courage and dedication of the Weinreichs, I feel how small we all are, and how great they were. But that is the way one *should* feel in the presence of one's heroes. We all need heroes. Even academic disciplines need heroes. Yiddish Studies has many, and will have many more. Not the least of these will be Max and Uriel Weinreich, may their memory be blessed.

Notes

¹ Ordered directly from 1048 Fifth Avenue, New York 28, New York — an address branded on my memory as permanently as my Social Security number. Yivo was the lifeline to Yiddish in those years of the early 1960s when Yiddish was not widely taught in American universities outside New York.

² Cf. the symposium discussion with contributions by Max Weinreich and David L. Gold, 'Vegn Uriel Vaynraykhs verterbukh' (On Uriel Weinreich's Dictionary), *Yidishe shprakh*, XXX (1971), 2–32. *Yidishe shprakh* (*The Yiddish Language*), Yivo's journal, is the major publication outlet in Yiddish for Yiddish linguistics.

³ Lucy Dawidowicz, 'Max Weinreich: Scholarship of Yiddish', in *The Jewish Presence* (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 162. It will shortly be evident how heavily I have relied on this article for almost all the incidental facts about Max Weinreich that I will be relating in this lecture. I wish to acknowledge my gratitude to Lucy Dawidowicz not only for her article but for several conversations about the Weinreichs. She worked in Vilna on a Yivo *aspirantur* in 1938–1939, where she got to know Max Weinreich and his family. I should also like to thank Mrs Beatrice Silverman Weinreich, folklorist and widow of Uriel Weinreich, for her assistance.

⁴ (New York: Yivo Institute for Jewish Research, 1973). The English translation (*History of the Yiddish Language* [Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980]) lacks the original's voluminous footnotes, which often contain the linguistically most valuable material.

⁵ Dawidowicz, p. 174.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 164–165.

⁷ The totemic reference here is to the well-known characterization of

Yiddish by the German-Jewish historian Heinrich Graetz of the nineteenth century as *eine halb tierische Sprache* ('a semi-animal language'). And more (all citations from his *History of the Jews*, 5 vols. [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1891–1898]): 'The language of the Jews [degenerated into] a ridiculous jargon, a mixture of German, Polish, and Talmudical elements, an unpleasant stammering, rendered still more repulsive by forced attempts at wit' (IV, 641); 'It was one of the consequences of the debasement of language, that the German and Polish Jews had lost all sense of form, taste for artistic beauty, and aesthetic feeling' (V, 300); 'Through this perversity [he is referring to Talmudic exegesis] the language of the German Jews, like that of the Poles, degenerated into a repulsive stammer . . .' (V, 206).

Graetz, possessed of a painfully costive aesthetic sensibility, found repulsiveness and degeneracy almost everywhere he looked in Jewish history. Writing of Jewish life around the eighth century C.E.: '[T]he Jews had lost the sense of beauty and grace of expression; they were negligent in their speech, careless of purity of form, and indifferent to the clothing of their thoughts and emotions in suitable terms. A people possessed of an imperfect delivery, using a medley of Hebrew, Chaldee, and corrupt Greek, was not in a position to create a literature, much less to enchain the wayward muse of poetry' (III, 111). Graetz even refused permission to have his *Geschichte der Juden* translated into Yiddish, cf. Emanuel S. Goldsmith, *Architects of Yiddishism at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century* (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 1976), p. 61.

Heinrich Graetz was a distinguished historian, and his place in the pantheon of Jewish historians is secure. His opinion of Yiddish was formed by post-Mendelssohnian secular Jewish attitudes in nineteenth-century Germany. As contemptible as Graetz's disdain of Yiddish is to us a century later, it was all too sadly typical of 'enlightened' European (especially German) Jewish attitudes towards *mame-loshn* ('Yiddish', i.e. the 'mother tongue') a century ago. My own way of dealing with such things, my psychic defence mechanism, is to remind myself of a quote from Dante's *Inferno* (3, 51):

non ragioniam di lor, ma guarda e passa

'Let's not talk about them, but look and pass on'

⁸ Cf. the extensive treatment in Goldsmith op. cit., not only of the Czernowitz Conference itself but of the rich and fascinating intellectual and historical background of the Conference and its major players.

⁹ Dawidowicz, p. 167. One may consult with profit the marvellously evocative recreation of the Vilna Max Weinreich knew, a richly textured and vibrant community throbbing with Yiddishness, described by Avrom Kahan, 'Der derekh fun Yivo in zayn vilner tkufe' ('Yivo During its Vilna Period'), *Yivo bleter*, XLVI (1980), 9–21.

¹⁰ Dawidowicz, pp. 169–170.

¹¹ His partial bibliography — complete only to 1964 — contains 377 books, articles, tracts and reviews, arranged under thirteen different rubrics. See Leybl Kahn, 'Biblyografye fun Maks Vaynraykhs verk' ('Bibliography of Max Weinreich's Writings'), in *For Max Weinreich on His Seventieth Birthday* (The Hague: Mouton, 1964), 287–304. There were scores of articles between 1964 and his death in 1969, and the *Geshikhte* came out in 1973. There are few scholars whose life's accumulation of writing can equal this.

¹² Lucy Dawidowicz tells an amusing story about her stay in Copenhagen. The group undertook the long climb to the top of Elsinore Castle. At the top she became aware of the great height and 'froze', unable to walk back down. Vertigo. Max Weinreich, drawing no doubt on his Freudian training and his great ability to inspire, got her back down by counting the number of steps, one by one, with her as they carefully descended. It worked; she made it. The phrase one wants to use is: 'He *willed* her back down'.

The conference in Brussels the Weinreichs had planned to attend was the Fifth International Congress of Linguists. Roman Jakobson had prepared for this 1939 Congress the paper 'Les lois phoniques du langage enfantin et leur place dans la phonologie générale' (in Roman Jakobson, *Selected Writings*, Vol. I [The Hague: Mouton, 1971], 315–327), a prolegomenon to the classic *Kindersprache, Aphasie und allgemeine Lautgesetze* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1941), a work that is probably *the* most influential precursor of modern phonological theory. The concentration of linguistic and intellectual mind power in this emigré group in Copenhagen was something quite remarkable.

¹³ Quoted in Dawidowicz, p. 173.

¹⁴ His article, 'The Jewish Languages of Romance Stock and their Relation to Earliest Yiddish', *Romance Philology*, IX (1955–56), 403–428, was one of the longest to have appeared in that journal, whose

founder-editor was the eminent Romance scholar and friend of Uriel Weinreich's, Yakov Malkiel. Cf. Yakov Malkiel, 'Necrology — Uriel Weinreich, Jakob Jud's Last Student', *Romance Philology*, XXII (1968), 128–132.

¹⁵ 'Many, many coincidences, all arranged by God, Whom I owe so much', verses movingly quoted by Jechiel Bin-Nun in the 'second preface' to his *Jiddisch und die deutschen Mundarten* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1973), p. 5.

¹⁶ His bibliography (1943–1967) contains in excess of 100 items in English, Yiddish, and Hebrew, cf. the compilation by Marvin I. Herzog in *Language*, XLIII (1967), 607–610.

¹⁷ In 1943–1944 the journal *Yidishe shprakh* sponsored a sort of competition for the best Yiddish translation of the American National Anthem and Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. Some very well-known names in Yiddish literature and linguistics tried their hand at the thing, with results that are instructive and touching, sometimes unintentionally amusing. I commend the exchange of commentary especially to American students learning Yiddish.

¹⁸ *Op.cit.*, p. 131.

¹⁹ Cf. *Readings in Linguistics*, 2nd ed. (New York: American Council of Learned Societies, 1958), p. 54.

²⁰ 'More About Uriel Weinreich's Four Riddles', forthcoming in *Shofar*. The bibliographical information for the works referenced in the quotation are: *Languages in Contact: Findings and Problems* (New York: Linguistic Circle of New York, 1953), second through fourth printings (The Hague: Mouton, 1963–1966); 'Empirical Foundations for a Theory of Language Change', in *Directions for Historical Linguistics*, ed. Winfred Lehmann and Yakov Malkiel (Austin, Texas and London: The University of Texas Press, 1968), 95–195; *The Field of Yiddish I* (New York: Linguistic Circle of New York, 1954).

²² It went against the regnant orthodoxy in matters prosodic: George L. Trager and Henry Lee Smith, Jr., *An Outline of English Structure*

(Norman, Oklahoma: Battenberg Press, 1951), (= *Studies in Linguistics*, Occasional Papers, No. 3).

²² *Romance Philology*, XIII (1960), 320–341.

²³ *Word*, X (1954), 388–400.

²⁴ See Marvin I. Herzog, *The Yiddish Language in Northern Poland* (The Hague: Mouton, 1965), (= Part III, *International Journal of American Linguistics*, Vol. 31, No. 2), pp. 101–124; and Meyer Wolf, 'The Geography of Yiddish Case and Gender Variation', in *The Field of Yiddish*, Third Collection, ed. Marvin I. Herzog, Wita Ravid, and Uriel Weinreich (The Hague: Mouton, 1969), 102–215.

²⁵ Lucy Dawidowicz again has a nice story to tell in this connection. In 1940, after the Weinreichs had made it safely to New York, she (in her twenties) was asked to take the young Uriel Weinreich (then thirteen) to the New York World's Fair. She took him there, assuming that he would want to run to all the exhibitions, seeing as much as he could as quickly as he could. No, it couldn't be done that way. He insisted that they first sit down and work out a *plan*, the thing had to be seen systematically, no running about without direction: 'We have to figure out how this thing is organized; we have to have a *plan*'. As Dr Dawidowicz says: 'I could have wrung his neck!'

²⁶ Cf. Uriel Weinreich, *Modern English–Yiddish, Yiddish–English Dictionary* (New York: Yivo and McGraw-Hill, 1968), p. viii.

²⁷ Published posthumously as 'Di verter *shmukh* un *shmukhn*' (The Words *shmukh* and *shmukhn*, *Yidishe shprakh*, XXVII (1967), 25–26.

²⁸ In English:

19 March 1967

Dear Mr Mark,

Regarding your comment No. 4 in *Yidishe shprakh*, Vol. XXVI, p. 94, there is something I would like to say: the noun *šmux* and the verb *šmuxn* are curiously rare in the literature, but . . .

If this information should be useful to you, please don't hesitate to publish it in a forthcoming issue of the journal.

With friendly greetings,

Yours

Uriel Weinreich

²⁹ No one who has read the dedication to *College Yiddish* will ever forget it: *a matone di ale, vos ba zeyere kinder in moyl vet yidish lebn* 'a gift for everyone in whose children's mouths the Yiddish language will live'.

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