Yiddish literature may be said to have been born twice. The earliest evidence of Yiddish literary activity dates from the 13th century and is found in southern Germany, where the language itself had originated as a specifically Jewish variant of Middle High German approximately a quarter of a millennium earlier. The Haskalah, the Jewish equivalent of the Enlightenment, effectively doomed the Yiddish language and its literary culture in Germany and in western Europe during the course of the 18th century. At the beginning of the 19th century, however, the Haskalah paradoxically promoted a renaissance of Yiddish literature in those parts of eastern Europe to which the Yiddish language had been carried from the 13th century onward. The Haskalah therefore represents a watershed separating two essentially distinct cultural phenomena. Whereas in eastern Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries Yiddish literature eventually became an autonomous modern mode of literary expression fully comparable with parallel European literatures, the Yiddish literature of medieval Germany and the adjacent territories to which it spread remained in the shadow of the infinitely more prestigious Hebrew literature and, in theory at least, was addressed only to women (who were not taught Hebrew but learned to read and write Yiddish in the community schools) and to untutored men.

The low regard in which the Yiddish language and its culture were held conspired with the ravages of time and the turbulent vicissitudes of Jewish history in the German-speaking lands in such a way that all but a small proportion of medieval Yiddish texts have been lost, though important texts are still coming to light. From what survives, however, it is clear that the literature aimed predominantly at the edification of its readership and was either didactic in character or sought to entertain while serving as an antidote to the supposed moral dangers of Gentile literature. As a result of their traditional respect for learning, the efficacy of their community schools, and their predominantly urban way of life, literacy was much higher among the Jews of northern Europe during this time than among non-Jews living in the same area. Many works achieved such popularity that they were frequently reprinted over a period of centuries and enjoyed an astonishingly wide dissemination, with the result that their language developed into an increasingly ossified koine that was readily understood over a territory extending from Amsterdam to Odessa and from Venice to Hamburg. During the 18th century the picture changed rapidly in western Europe, where increasing cultural assimilation led to the abandonment of Yiddish in favour of the languages of the ambient societies. In eastern Europe, on the other hand, the Haskalah, as a result of the recognition that its mission to enlighten the Jewish masses could only be accomplished through the medium of Yiddish, unintentionally wrought a renewal of the language it disapproved. The resurgence of Yiddish literature in eastern Europe went hand in hand with the emergence of a new standard literary language based on the eastern dialects, which had been invigorated by contact with the languages of its Slavic environment.

This article provides a historical survey of the development of Yiddish literature. For a discussion of literature in Hebrew, see the article Hebrew literature. For coverage of related topics in the Macropedia and Micropedia, see the Propedia, section 621. The article is divided into the following sections:

- The Middle Ages to the 18th century in western Europe
- Biblical and religious literature
- Secular literature
- Modern literature in eastern Europe and in emigration
- The 19th century
- The 20th century
- To World War I
- After World War I
- Bibliography

The Middle Ages to the 18th century in western Europe

Biblical and religious literature

The earliest recorded sentence written in Yiddish is a blessing inscribed in a mahazor (prayer book for the Jewish holidays) written in Worms in 1272–73. Other rudimentary signs of Yiddish literary activity from the 13th century, or perhaps earlier, are interlinear and marginal glosses found in manuscripts of books of the Bible and of biblical commentaries. Glossaries were made from the end of the 14th century onward. The earliest known printed Yiddish book is a Hebrew–Yiddish glossary and concordance of the Hebrew Bible published in Kraków in 1534 and known as the Sephard shel Reb Ansheh ("Book of Rabbi Ansheh"). The oldest known printed Yiddish text is a version of the Passover hymn Addir Hu ("Mighty is He"), which appears as Almekigtiger-Go in a Haggadah (a book of Jewish lore) published in Prague in 1526. Actual translations of portions of the Bible appear from the end of the 15th century onward. The earliest example to which a definite date may be assigned is a 1490 Yiddish manuscript version of the Psalms. Printed Yiddish Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament) were first published in Constance and Augsburg in 1544, while a Tavtish khamesheh—a Pentateuch accompanied by the appended portions of The Prophets (Hebrew: Nevi'im) and the five Scrolls (Megillah; Hebrew: Megillot), together with extracts from the celebrated 11th-century commentator Rashi—appeared in Crémone in 1560.

Considerable popularity was also attained by rhymed adaptations of parts or the whole of the Bible, many of which were embroidered with material from midrashim (anthologies of rabbinic sayings, parables, and tales arranged as expositions of books of the Bible, chapter by chapter). The earliest extant example is a manuscript dated 1382 that was found in Cairo at the end of the 19th century. It is housed in the Cambridge University Library and is known as the Cambridge Yiddish Codex. It includes the stories of Aaron, the Garden of Eden, the young Abraham, and of Joseph and Potiphar.

Greater originality was evinced by the biblical epics that survive from the 16th century, some of which may have been written earlier. Jewish audiences had long been familiar with more or less lightly expurgated German sagas and romances. The Cambridge Yiddish Codex includes a Hebrew-alphabet version of a section of the Gudrun cycle that is approximately 130 years older than the earliest recorded Middle High German version. There are also Hebrew-alphabet manuscript versions of the chivalric romance Wigmol, and evidence suggests that there were once Jewish versions of a number of other Middle High German epics.

Though perhaps these Hebrew-alphabet versions of German material should not strictly speaking be accounted a part of Yiddish literature, they certainly served as models for more authentically Jewish biblical epics. By far the most notable of these is the Shmuel-bukh ("Samuel Book"), published in Augsburg in 1544. Its anonymous author rendered the story of the prophet Samuel, of King
Saul, and above all of King David into the rhymed stanzas of the 
Nibelungenlied. Using material from what at that time was still a single Book of Samuel copiously 
embellished with legends drawn from the Talmud and from midrashic sources, the author fashioned a dramatic 
panorama filled with realistically depicted battle scenes and 
heroic deeds narrated with an element of suspense 
together with much broad humour and erotic incident, all 
centred on the somewhat idealized image of King David. 
A similar but slightly less successful treatment of the Books 
of Kings was the Melochim-bukh, published in 1543. 

Of all the various forms of Yiddish biblical literature 
the most popular was the Tseneve, a paraphrase of the 
Pentateuch with other appointed portions of Scripture 
enriched with midrashic material. It was written at the 
end of the 16th century by Jacob ben Isaac Ashkenazi 
of Janow Lubelski. The work appears to have been published 
in Lublin some time between 1530 and 1600; it has 
goty (a type of woodcut) running commentary and has 
been constantly in print. The Se岳er ha-maged was almost as 
popular and took the form of a sequel to the Tseneve, 
comprising the Prophets and the Hagiographa in the 
original Hebrew text together with a paraphrase and 
Rashi's commentary in Yiddish. 

The 16th century had seen numerous rhymed 
and more or less freely adapted versions of parts of the 
Bible, it was not until 1676–79 that Yekuesy ben Yitsche 
Blits produced a translation of the Hebrew Scriptures in 
Amsterdam. By then there had been a reaction against 
the type of embroidered homiletic version used in the 
Tseneve, and in emulation of Martin Luther, an attempt 
was made to produce a translation close to the original 
that, nonetheless, eschewed word-for-word glossing. 
This approach was even more pronounced in the case of the 
second complete Yiddish Bible, which was translated by 
Yosef Vitanhoyn in published in Amsterdam in 1679. 

Freely adapted biblical material eventually found its way 
into drama around the end of the 17th century. Jewish 
tradition did not originally permit theatrical performances, 
and only at the time of the feast of Purim was this prohibition 
relaxed sufficiently to allow extempore enactment of the 
Megile of Esther, associated with the feast, and 
subsequently of other biblical stories. The earliest extant 
manuscript of such a Purim play (Purim-shpiul) is the 
Akhasveresh-shpile, named after the Persian king, 
Ahaseurus, in the Book of Esther. Other subjects of the early 
Purim plays that have survived are the story of the sale 
of Joseph into captivity and the story of David and Goliat. 

Collections of prayers either with a Yiddish translation 
of the tables of the Hebrew text, whether for daily use or specially for the holidays, are found from the 
16th century onward. The first printed Yiddish prayer 
book dates from 1544. More interesting, however, are the 
khines, which are collections of prayers for the use of 
women. Whereas the prayers for general use invoke the 
deity in a group name of 200 attributes and hasp a familiar 
the liturgical canon, the khines articulate the personal 
supplications of individual women and communicate far 
more about the joys and particularly the sorrows of every- 
day Jewish life in 16th-century Germany. This is also the 
case with the minhagim, or custom books, which recorded 
practical and liturgical usages as the particular 
communities. The minhagim, together with the 
masur books, which prescribes norms of moral conduct, reflect prevailing 
ideas concerning everyday life. The earliest 
masur books in Yiddish were translations from Hebrew, but at the beginning of the 17th century a number were composed 
in Yiddish. Among these the Seyer braunshpigel (1602; 
"The Burning Mirror") by Moshe Khanukh Alshit was 
preeminent. 

SECUAL LITERATURE 

A genre that occupies an intermediate position between 
religious and secular writings is represented by collections 
of stories and fables, in which free adaptations of midrashic 
and talmudic material are found side by side with tales 
garnished by a variety of Gentile sources. The most 
notable example is Eyn sheyn mayse-bukh ("A Beautiful 
Story Book"), usually referred to simply as the Mayse- 
bukh, published in Basel in 1602 by Yankev ben Avrom 
of Mipdzyrcez. Many of the stories are designed to 
illustrate an edifying moral or to provide models of behaviour. 
By far the most accomplished Yiddish writer of this 
period was Eyle ben Asher ha-Levi, known as Eliaj Levita 
or Eyle Bokher. Though he was born near Nuremberg, he 
lived and worked primarily at Padua, Venice, and 
Rome. He was a noted Hebrew grammarian, and his Yiddish 
translation of the Psalms, published in Venice in 1545, 
was the first to be printed and achieved great popularity. 
He also wrote the verse lampoons Shreyf fun Venesyje 
("The Fire of Venice") and ha-Mardil ("Benediction"), 
but he made his reputation chiefly as the author of the 
Yiddish romances, the Bove-bukh and Pariz un Viene. 

The Bove-bukh, or Bove d'Antana as it was entitled in its 
first edition (1541), was composed in 1507–08 and takes 
the form of an abridged and skillful adaptation of one of 
the many Italian versions of the Buve de Hantone, an 
Anglo-Norman chanson d'auete. The moldling of the story 
(and) the versatile performance at the Yiddish taste and the virtuoso performance in adapting the 
Italian ottava rima stanza to the Yiddish language 
at much the same time and place as Giuseppe Sarfati was 
troducing this form into Hebrew poetry) are both evidence 
of exceptional literary talent. His Pariz un Viene, based 
on the original French Romance, was an even greater tour de force but does not seem to 
have achieved the same popularity and survives in only 
two incomplete copies printed in Verona in 1594. 

The troubled social conditions in which the Jews 
of Germany lived during the 17th and 18th centuries are 
reflected in a class of verse that has become known as 
damphetamine poetry, concerning the social, cultural, 
and economic circumstances of the German Jews of 
her time. She tells of wars and plagues, of wedding feasts 
and bankruptcies, and of the impact on Germany of the 
hysteria aroused by Shabse Tsvi. 

Yiddish literature in Germany and the West came to a 
virtual end with the handiwork of those who sought 
organizational centers and the rewriting of the 
haskalah, who in principle were proponents of the 
popular. 

Typical of this tendency was Aron Yoffizn-Hale's 
Laykhnitz un freimeyel (1759; "Frivolity and Bigotry"). It is subtitled 
Familien-gemidele, or "Family Portrait," and bears 
comparison with the bourgeois drama that had become 
more and more fashionable on the contemporary German stage. The intention 
was to provide a modern secular alternative to the 

31. Secular literature 

Western Yiddish survived into the 19th century, 
and in certain areas immediately outside of the 
frontiers of Germany the language was still alive after World War II. 
No further literature of any significance was produced, however, in western Europe.
Modern literature in eastern Europe and in emigration

THE 19TH CENTURY

A resurgence of Yiddish literature in eastern Europe overlapped chronologically with the decline in the West. To a large extent it was shaped by the struggle between Haskalah and Hasidism. The Hasidic religious revival, which originated in Podolia in the 18th century, sought communion with nature and spontaneity of worship in song and dance. The emphasis placed on individual fervour naturally favoured the free expression of feeling in Yiddish in contrast to formulaic liturgy in Hebrew. The main literary reflections of this ethos were the eulogies of the movement's founder, Israel ben Eliezer (known as the Ba'al Shem Tov); and above all the mystical tales of his great-grandson, Reb Nakhmen (Rabbi Nahman) of Bratslav.

The maskilim, adherents of the Haskalah, considered such Hasidic literature inimical to the enlightenment of the Jewish people and set about combating its influence by means of parody and satire. In particular it was the aim of the Haskalah to expose the supposed hypocrisy of the Hasidic rabbis and to ridicule the obscurantism of their tales. The Yiddish author most widely read during this period was Ayezakh Meyzer. His Hasidic tone was less pronounced than that of his contemporaries, Yisroel Aksenfeld and Shlomoyn Ettinger. Dikd produced more than 400 sentimental and historical novels, many of which have disappeared because the cheap unbound editions in which they were produced were quite literally read to shreds.

The more committed maskilic writers were confined to parody by the very fact of their ideological alienation from their mass audience and from the world they described. This had the somewhat paradoxical effect of concentrating their attention on the use of colloquial language in dramatic dialogue, a fact that played a significant role in the gradual molding of the new Eastern European standard literary Yiddish. At the same time, however, this restriction of scope severely limited the dimensions of their narrative perspective. A crucial step in overcoming this limitation and in the development of Yiddish literature in general was taken in 1864 when Sholem Yankev Abramovitch (also spelled Shaliam Jacob Abramovitch) published Dos klyme menshtshe (“The Little Man”). It appeared anonymously in 12 installments in Kol mevezer (“The Herald”), the first successful Yiddish weekly journal. At the beginning of Dos klyme menshtshe Abramovitch introduced the reader to his narrator, Mendele Mokhiker Sfarrow (“Mendele the Itinerant Bookseller”). Mendele, also spelled Mendele Mokher Sfarim, came to be regarded as the author’s pseudonym, but Mendele is more accurately thought of as a brilliantly conceived narrative voice that permits his creator subtle ironic shifts of perspective. In 1865 there followed the first version of Dos vintshefingerl (“The Magic Ring”), which after complex revisions was eventually to become his major novel. A play, Di takse (1869; “The Tax”), treated economic and class antagonisms within Jewish society for the first time.

Abramovitch’s satirical allegory, Di klyye (1873; The Nag), represents the fate of the Jewish nation in the form of a prince transformed into a broken, malnourished horse. Yosef Yosef Linetski benefited greatly from advanced narrative technique made by Abramovitch. In Dos poiyshle yingl (1869; The Polish Boy), which became immensely popular, Linetski adopted the device of the faux-naf narrator. When Shlomoyn Ettinger’s tragicomedy Serkele was performed by students at the Zhitomir rabbinical academy in 1867, it was the first time that a modern era Yiddish play actually had been enacted. In 1876, however, Avrom Goldfaden (Abraham Goldfaden) traveled to Romania, where he joined forces with a group of singers to mount open-air performances. At first these were limited to a scenario-framework for his songs. Music played an important role in Goldfaden’s work and many of his compositions acquired almost the status of folk songs. In 1877 the company performed his first play, Shmendrik. The play itself was a sentimental comedy attacking the custom of enforcing arranged matches particularly in Hasidic families.

Its real significance lay, however, in the fact that it constituted the beginning of a professional Yiddish theatre, which was destined to play to packed houses in London, Buenos Aires, and New York City by the turn of the century, and which before it disappeared made a significant contribution to the Broadway and Hollywood industries. In response to the anti-Semitism of the 1880s, Goldfaden’s plays became more serious, more critical of superficial Haskalah rationalism, and increasingly nationalistic in tone. Though set in 14th-century Palermo, “Doktor Almosado,” which had its premiere performance in St. Petersburg in 1882, reflected the recent pogroms in Russia. Plays set in Palestine, such as Bar Kokhba (1883) or his final work, Ben-Ami (1907; “Son of My People”), were strongly Zionist in sympathy.

In the 1880s Yiddish literature as a whole saw a movement away from the militant educational campaign of the Haskalah and a corresponding tendency to espouse national values and to adopt a less confrontational approach toward Yiddish. This shift of emphasis was particularly evident in the works of Sholem Rabinovitch, or Sholem Aleichem (Sholem Aleichem), as he was called, his authorial persona from an early stage. With his arrival on the literary scene Yiddish literature made further strides toward self-consciousness and maturity. Having already shown promise in a number of novels, stories, and feuilletons, he made a savage attack in Shomers mishpet (1888; “The Trial of Shomer”) on sentimental pulp fiction that in his view demeaned the status of Yiddish letters. Then in the two volumes of Di yidshe folks-bibylet (1888–89; “The Yiddish? Popular Anthology”) he provided a draw from authors such as Abramovitch and Linetski, of writing he thought would stand comparison with works in other literatures.

In 1892 Rabinovitch adopted the epistolary mode, in which he showed great virtuosity in his ironic handling of the constantly reborn but never gratified dream of the average Eastern European Jew. A series of monologues began two years later featured the best known of all of Rabinovitch’s characters, Teyve der milkhikher (“Teyve the Milkman”), who narrates to Sholem Aleichem the vicissitudes of his life. Teyve’s tales epitomize the social strains and calamities suffered with faithful resignation by Jewish rural communities.

Rabinovitch also published tales for the Jewish festivals and children’s stories such as the well-known Dos meseł (1886; “The Penknife” in Some Laughter, Some Tears) and the Moor Pesye dem khasz cycz (1907–16; Adventures of Motel, the Cantor’s Son). Returning to the novel in later life, Rabinovitch dealt with the theme of the Jewish artist in Blondzhende stern (1909–11; Wandering Star), giving a picturesque panorama of Yiddish theatre life stretching from eastern Europe to London’s Whitechapel and Manhattan’s Lower East Side. His comparatively few writings for the theatre include the posthumously published Di goldebre (1908; “The Gold Diggers”) and Dos groye gevins (1916; “The Grand Prize”). In addition he adapted a number of his stories for the stage, including Teyve der milkhikher. (Teyve was made into a successful motion picture in 1939 and later was adapted as a musical comedy and motion picture under the title Fiddler on the Roof).

THE 20TH CENTURY

To World War I. Together with Abramovitch and Rabinovitch, Yitzhuk Leyb Perets is regarded as one of the three major classical writers in Yiddish literature. He was Perets who effectively united Yiddish literature into the modern era by importing it to contemporary trends in western European art and literature. He was influenced by Polish neo-Romantic and Symbolist writers, and under their impact he lent new expressive force to the Yiddish language in numerous stories collected as Khasidish (1908; “Hasidic Tales”) and Folkstimerlekh geshikhken (1908; “Folktales”). In these stories Hasidic material is treated with a new profundity from the standpoint of a secular literary intellect and becomes the vehicle for an elegiac contemplation of traditional Jewish values.

Perets played an important moderating role as deputy
chairman at the Yiddish Conference that assembled at Czerwonowitz in 1908 to promote the status of the language and its culture. He is also remembered for the encouragement that he gave to a whole generation of younger writers who flocked to his home in Warsaw.

Perets and several other writers participated in the extraordinary burgeoning of literary activity that manifested itself all in the foundation of literary periodicals with aesthetic programs. Particularly influential were the Literarishe monatsblattn ("Monthly Literary Review"), four issues of which appeared in Wilno (Vilnius) in the spring of 1908, carrying contributions by Perets, Der Nister (pseudonym of Pinkhes Kahanevich), Perets Hirschbein, and Jonas Ain (also spelled Shlomo rAsh). World War I and its aftermath transformed Yiddish cultural geography. The war itself severely hampered contacts between the Jewish heartland in eastern Europe and nascent Yiddish intellectual life in the New World, while the Bolshevik Revolution, the Russian Civil War, and the ensuing Russo-Polish War severed the Soviet centres from literary activities in the resurgent Polish Republic. Furthermore, an ideological exchange took place, with Jewish intellectuals both fleeing from and migrating to the Soviet Union. Consequently, in dealing with Yiddish literature after World War I, it is appropriate to give separate attention to developments in the three major cultural centres. At home, a renewed freedom for Yiddish authors to write about Jewish aspirations and causes. Soon after the war, however, the Zhdanovite repression bared down with particular severity on Yiddish cultural life, and by 1948 virtually all of the leading figures of the Yiddish intelligentsia had been arrested. Some died in prison. Almost all those still alive on Aug. 12, 1952, were shot on Stalin’s orders. In 1955 and 1956 many of Stalin’s victims were posthumously "rehabilitated," and since then Yiddish books and periodicals have appeared on a limited scale.

Poland. During the interwar years the Republic of Poland, independent once again after an interval of more than 120 years, together with the so-called "Polish Yiddish literature," constituted the most fertile of the Yiddish cultural areas. An exponential increase in the number of talented writers at work produced a wealth of literary developments existing side by side. Naturalism was exemplified by Ozter Yashkevitch’s novel Shamgaris (1920; "Smugglers"), which depicts underworld life during the German occupation. Shloyme Zyayvl Rappoport, who wrote under the name of S. A瘾s, was much influenced by the neo-Romanticism of Perets. His play Der dibek (1919; translated as "The Dybbuk" in the Dybbuk and Other Great Yiddish Plays, 1966) was performed by the celebrated Vilna Troupe in Warsaw with great acclaim. It is a play on to attract international attention with performances in translation in Kraków, Berlin, Vienna, and New York City, all in 1925. (Mikhl Vayshtik’s screen version of Der dibek [1937] is perhaps the most successful of all the many Yiddish films made in Poland between the wars.)

The most self-conscious bunch of the war was made by the Expressionists. In 1919, writing in his short-lived but influential journal Jung-yidish, Mowshe Broderzon described the group of exuberant iconoclasts to which he belonged as a "frejlevke... khlyastre" or "merry gang," and this appellation became the title for the almanac Khlyastre, published in Warsaw and Paris in 1922, in which the expressionists crow. The main protagonists in addition to Broderzon were Uri-Tsvi grinber, Melekh Ravivitz, and Perets Markish, who had gone to Warsaw from Kiev in 1921. Influenced both by the Futurism of the Russian revolutionary poet Mayakovsky and the Expressionism of the German Jewish writers Werfel and Else Lasker-Schüler, they sought to participate in the general European modernist movement and to respond to the anguish and chaos of the postwar world with universal images of apocalyptic pessimism. It was in Warsaw also that Markish first published his collection of poems entitled Di kuper (1921; "The Heap"), which is a Kaddish, a lament for the victims of a pogrom whose mutilated corpses lie heaped in a Ukrainian market square. Di kuper represented an important station in the history of Jewish artistic responses to anti-Semitism that
had included the 17th-century leader Hayyim Nahman Bialik's famous Hebrew poem on the Kishinov pogrom of 1903. Grinberg, who in 1918 had himself narrowly escaped death in a pogrom in Lvov, voiced a more explicit reaction in his "U-Tsiyan tsered yoselem" ("U-Tsiyon Before the Cross"), which he published in the second issue of his journal Altayaros (1923). Grinberg eventually turned his back on both European and Yiddish literature in order to become a Hebrew poet living in Palestine. Markish's Socialist idealists took him back to the Soviet Union, while Raviditch left Poland and traveled widely before settling in Canada.

An associate of the group, while it lasted, was Yisroel-Yeshua Zinger (known in English as Israel Joshua Singer). He was the joint editor of the first issue of Khovavsit, and he contributed to it an impressionistic story, "In der finster" ("In the Dark"), written in Kiev during the Russian Civil War. Zinger, however, soon moved away from his neo-romantic beginnings toward Realism. A semi-autobiographical novel, Sholom ayenyon (1927; Blood Harvest, U.S. title Steel and Iron), reflects his wartime experiences. In Yoshe Kelb (1932) Zinger returned to his roots and wrote a novel of represed sexual passion set amid the corruption and hypocrisy of a Hasidic court. After the triumphant success of a stage version produced in New York City by Maurice Schwartz, Zinger emigrated to the United States. It was there that he wrote his masterpiece, Di brider Yeshayahu (1935; The Brothers Ashkenazi), which traces the antagonisms of two brothers against the background of the development of the textile industry in Lodz from the end of the Napoleonic era to the rebirth of the Polish republic.

Itzik Manger was born in Austrian Bukovina and began writing in Romania, but he moved in 1928 to Warsaw, where a year later he published his first book of collected verse. His major achievements were Khumesh leder (1935; "Pentateuch Songs") and Megile lide (1936; "Songs of the Book of Esther"), in which he feigned the naiveté of an illiterate minstrel and draws on the Purim sotse to give an anachronistic and vivid account of biblical stories.

The rich and varied Yiddish literary culture of Poland was brought to an abrupt and tragic end by the Nazi invasion in 1939. Nevertheless, poems, plays, and songs continued to be written in the ghettos and camps, and a small proportion survives.

The United States. With the 19th-century migrations to the United States, and especially to the Lower East Side of New York City, Yiddish literature made its appearance in the New World. A volume of exhortatory Haskalah verse appeared as early as 1877. This early beginning was followed by a generation of "swatshop poets." Moris Vintshefski represented a transition from the Yiddish to the Yiddish. He arrived in the United States in 1898 having already made a reputation for himself in London as a writer of propagandistic verse. Moris Roznfeld, like many of his readers, also came to New York City via the East End of London. He worked for many years in the tailoring shops of both cities. One of his famous poems, "Mayn yungele" (1887; "My Little Boy"), expresses a worker's estrangement from his family, resulting from endless hours spent in a sweatshop.

Avrom Lyesn and Avrom Reyzn made a more ironic and Romantic contribution to the development of Yiddish verse. While in Yeshayahu, they wrote under the name Yehoase, capturing the sights and sounds of the metropolis and introduced the world of nature to the Yiddish lyric in the New World. His supreme achievement was a masticulous and scholarly translation of the Old Testament into modern Yiddish. A significant change of direction occurred with the emergence of Di Yunge, a group of young poets associated with the journal Di yunge ("Youth") that was published in New York City in 1907-08. They had been influenced by the Jewish Labour Bund and the revolutionary ferment in Russia, but when they went to the United States after the disappointments of the failed revolution of 1905 they no longer had any patience with the tendentious rhyming of their predecessors. The paradox of their position was that while their daily experience remained that of immigrant working-class life, they viewed it very largely from the perspective of European aestheticism. They were linguistic purists and also adept translators of the French, German, and Russian Symbolists who were their inspiration. The main protagonists of this movement were Mani Leyb, Zishe Landoy, and Moyshe Leyb Halpern. Another who was embraced by the movement was H. Leivick, pseudonym of Leyvik Halpern, who was best known for his verse Derv Gory ("The Gory"). For most part Di Yunge were unacquainted with English literature, but Yisroel-Yankel Shvarts (I.J. Schwartz) translated Walt Whitman's poetry and adopted something of his manner in the epic poem Kentoki (1925; "Kentucky"), in which the exoticism and the wide open horizons of the American landscape were the focus for the first time.

After World War I a more radical rebellion challenged the innovations of Di Yunge. In the anthology In zikh (1920; "Inspection") Arn Glants-Leyeles, Yankev Glatshteyn, and Nokhem Minkov asserted that the world exists only as "insofar" as it is reflected in subjective impressions, each of which demands its own unique formal expression, ideally in free verse. Unlike Di Yunge, the Inzikhisten, as they came to be called, had attended universities in London and New York City and were influenced by contemporary English and American literature, in particular by Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, and the Imagists. Glatshteyn was a poet and a writer of the "moderne" school. One of his later collections, Shtralnike yidn (1946; "Radiant Jews"), expresses sadness and despair following the Holocaust. Y.L. Teller, a younger poet, also confront the political events of the time, in, for example, Lider fun der tsayt (1940; "Poems of the Age").

Sholem Ash became the first Yiddish author to have a truly international following. He visited the United States for the first time in 1910 and spent most of the rest of his life there. He moved from genial portrayal of life in early Christianity, so much so that of his trilogy published in English as The Nazarene (1939), The Apostle (1943), and Mary (1949) only the first volume appeared in the original Yiddish, as Der man fun Neteres (1943). Critics remained hostile to his subsequent work, including his most successful novel, Ist river (1946; East River), which looks with a sanguine idealism at interaction between Ash and Jewish immigrants of the Lower East Side at the turn of the century.

Jared Shapiro (pen name of Levi Yisroel Shapiro) and Yosef Opatoshu (pen name of Yosef Meyer Opatovski) were prose writers of the same generation as Ash who migrated to the United States in their 20s. Shapiro achieved notoriety with a brilliant series of stories constituting a psychopathology of the pogrom, in which the action is seen through the eyes of the perpetrators of the violence. Opatoshu wrote realistic stories set in New York City and historical novels.

Chaim Grade, who lived in Vilnius until World War II, became a leading figure in the Yung-Viln movement of the late 1930s. Grade published several highly esteemed volumes of poetry, such as Doyre (1945; Generations). After his arrival in the United States in 1945 and his remembrance of his pogrom years—many of which have been translated into English—and the philosophical post-Holocaust story Mayn krimt mit Hersh Rasseyn ("My Quarell with Hersh Rasseyn").

Since World War II, the only Yiddish author to achieve world renown has been Shalom Aleichem, known to his English readers as Isaac Bashevis Singer, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1978. Born in Poland in 1904, he moved to New York City in 1935. His best novel is perhaps the early, experimental Der som in Goray (1935; Satan in Goray), which begins as a historical novel. As it recreates the aura following the massacres instigated by Bob Dan Khmelnytsky in 1648, it is a far from Shabbetai Tzevi. (Bokdan Khmelnitskiy was a Cossack leader who led an uprising against Polish landowners; his forces also destroyed hundreds of Ukrainian Jewish com-
Yiddish literature in the United States: Yiddish theatre arrived in the United States by way of London, where it had enjoyed a brief heyday in the 1880s. The first professional production in the United States took place in 1882 (despite much outraged protest on the part of New York City's German Jews) when the young Boris Tomashevsky made his debut in Goldfaden's Kolomanye ("The Witch"). On the whole, artistic standards were not high, but the efforts of Yankev (Jacob) Gordin brought a considerable improvement. His Sibyl, which opened on November 1891, and Der pogrom in Rusland, produced two months later, brought a purer Yiddish as well as more serious and realistic content to the Yiddish stage, though his work was often marred by melodramatic moralizing. In his prolific output he frequently contented himself with free adaptations from classical English, German, and Russian drama. His most successful works were Der yidisher kenig Lir (1892), based on Shakespeare's King Lear, and what is perhaps the most popular play in the entire Yiddish repertoire, Mirele Efros (1898), which reworks the same theme with a female protagonist.

The accomplishments of Yiddish theatre took place in the years following World War I. Dramatists such as Sholem Ash, Dovkie Pinsker, and Perets Hirshbein arrived from Europe and began working with theatre groups subsidized by Yiddish cultural organizations. A major impact was also made by European touring companies such as the Vilna Troupe. Hirshbein wrote rural idylls such as A farvofn vi nikht (1912; "A Secluded Corner") and Grine felder (1916; "Green Fields"), which reflected his experience of Jewish farming life both in his native Byelorussia and in the Catskill Mountains. Both plays were successfully staged in New York City by Yankev Ben-Ami, who had worked in Hirshbein's own company in Odessa before the war. While studying in Berlin, Pinski had been influenced by the Naturalist drama of the prolific German writer Gerhart Hauptmann. Pinski arrived in the United States in 1899 and continued his studies of German literature at Columbia University. His Der oyter (1906; The Treasure) is an ironic comedy satirizing avarice in a Russian shlektor. It was given its premiere performance in German translation by the German-Jewish theatrical director Max Reinhardt in Berlin and became an international success.

In Dovid hameylekh un yazne vayber (1914; "King David and His Wives") Pinski depicts the growing cynicism and hedonism of modernity, a theme which, nonetheless, in his day achieves an almost Faustian insight into the elevation that comes from striving after an ideal. In 1949 Pinski, who had for decades been active in the Poalei Zion movement, moved to Haifa, where he became the focus of the Yung-Yisroel ("Young Israel") group.

Israel: Arguably the most important Yiddish writer in Israel during the 20th century was the poet Avrom Sutskever (or Abraham Sutzkever). Like Chaim Grade, he was involved with the Yung-Vilno group. Sutskever lived for several years in Warsaw, where he published his first book of poetry in 1937. He escaped from the Vilna ghetto in 1943 and wrote poems about his experiences. Some of his poetry that responds to the Nazi genocide is contained in Di festung (1945; "The Fortress"), or "Prison") and in Lider fun geto (1946; "Poems from the Ghetto"). After Sutskever moved to Palestine in 1947, he continued Yiddish literary culture in Israel and around the world by editing the journal Di goldeine keyt (1949–96; "The Golden Chain"). Other Yiddish writers in Sutskever's group Yung-Yisroel were Shlomo Vorsoger, Tsvi Eisenman, Rivka Basman, and Rokhl Fishman.

Rukhad Potash was born in Poland and moved to Palestine in 1934. She published poetry in Poland and in Israel, including the volume Moyer oibn Timna (1959; "New Moon over Timna"). Both her sense of fantasy and her knowledge of art history enrich this collection of poems. Leyb Rokhsman settled in Jerusalem in 1950, where he tried to carry on both the Hasidic tradition and the Yiddish culture of prewar Poland. His second book, Mit blinde trit iber der erd (1956; "With Blind Steps over the Earth"), expresses the psychological complexities of life as a Holocaust survivor. Yosi Birshetyen, born in Poland and going to Israel in 1950 by way of Australia, published poems, novels, and stories in Yiddish and Hebrew, including the novel Der zamler (1955; "The Collector"). Tsvi Kana survived three years in a concentration camp before moving to Palestine in 1946. In 1980 he began writing fiction in Yiddish; among his books are Ikh un lemlekh (1994; "Lemlekh and I") and Opgegebl broyf (1996; "Returned Bread" or "Returning to the Clay"). Lev Berinsky was a Russian poet who switched to Yiddish. Among his Yiddish works are the collections Der zuniker velbloy (1988; "The Sunny World-Structure") and Fishfang in Venesietse (1996; "Fishing in Venice").

Women writers. In the 20th century women began to contribute greatly to Yiddish literature. Among the more important writers are their novels Anna Margolin (Eida [1929; Poems]), Celia Dropkin, Kadzin Mostowoy, and Malka Heifetz-Tussman. Selections of Tussman's poetry appear in English translation in Weeds of Earth (1992).

Yiddish and Hebrew have switched positions in the secular life of Ashkenazic Jewish communities. In Israel, Yiddish was the dominant vernacular of the Jews in Europe, while Hebrew was the largely unspoken, "high" literary language of Scripture and prayer. However, Hebrew was revived as the vernacular in Israel, and Yiddish began to lose its voice. Few of the secular Yiddish authors and scholars of the 21st century will have learned Yiddish as their mother tongue.

