

If there is to be any security in the defense, every gun and machine-gun must have an alternative position to which it can move in a hurry if it is located by the enemy. Sometimes more than one can be provided. The more such emplacements there are, the more difficult it will be for the enemy intelligence service to decide where the weapons of the defenders really are. It is hard to distinguish between active and unoccupied positions. In addition to real alternative positions, dummies are constructed, and, of course, these must not be too obvious if they are to be of any use. There is unlimited scope for cunning in these ruses, and if they cannot always absolutely succeed, they add to the uncertainty of the attacking general and his artillery commanders. It should be made impossible for them to say with complete assurance: "Here is a field gun; there a machine-gun nest."

But trenches cannot be hidden, so the

infantry who occupy them are made safe by digging more trenches than are actually garrisoned. The alternative position principle again. Those lengths which are not primarily intended for fire positions in battle are useful for communication, and sometimes for positions for flanking fire, in case of the capture of a portion of the defensive zone, and the consequent necessity of changing front.

These are a few of the principles on which the engineers of the defense work in order to preserve its effectiveness when it is tested by a serious attack. The object, in brief, is to surprise the enemy when he attacks, and to prepare this surprise by the most sedulous concealment beforehand. The success of the defense will depend chiefly on whether suitable ground has been chosen in the first place, and after that on the ingenuity and attention to detail of those responsible for the location and camouflaging of the works.

## Language

### YIDDISH IN AMERICAN FICTION

BY ALTER BRODY

THERE arises, in the popular American fiction of the day, a new dialect, which, by analogy with Pidgin English, may be called Yidgin English. Its basis is theoretically Yiddish; in form it is ostensibly a translation of Yiddish into English. Actually, it is a purely imaginary language, logically related to neither of its parents.

"God from the world!" wails Anzia Yezierska continually, throughout her stories. Why? Because the preposition *foon* in Yiddish, like the German *von*, and like many English prepositions that have several uses, happens to mean both from and of, depending upon the context. In this phrase, in the Yiddish, it happens to mean of—which converts the picturesque "God from the world" into the drab and strictly grammatical "God of the world." If one wanted to go a step from literalism, a smoother and truer inter-

tation would be simply "God Almighty."

"Will you have a bite of eating?" is a casual query, spoken evidently in Yiddish, since the young lady addressed has just "got off from the ship." *Essen* (eating), however, also happens to mean food in Yiddish, as it does in German. So the phrase flattens into "Will you have a bite of food?" This, being redundant in English, can be reduced to "Will you have a bite?" "Mine own brother," exclaims Anzia elsewhere, "with the old shine from his eyes!" This, as it happens, is even more incorrect as Yiddish than as English. *Schein* (shine) is never used in that sense in Yiddish; but *licht* or *lichtigkeit* (light); which converts the sentence into: "My own brother, with the old light in his eyes."

The ancient Jews, whether they spoke the pure Hebrew of David, or the Aramaic Yiddish of Christ, probably managed to express themselves in tolerably grammatical form. But the Bible, according to St. Anzia and her school, ought to read some-

what like this: "*Oi web!*" moaned David. "Mine son Absalom, Absalom mine son! God from the world! Better from far already I should have died, only if not he!" And Christ, in the Garden of Gethsemane, should exclaim: "*Oi web!* So tired I am from the heart, till I could die! Mine Father from Heaven, everything it could be by You! So make it maybe I shouldn't have this bitter cup to drink!"

It remained, however, for a gentile, the late Myra Kelly, to outdo even Anzia Yezierska. Myra was a school teacher on the East Side, and recorded her experiences in a volume of stories called "Little Citizens." Her protagonists are chiefly school children, and are supposed to be talking in the typical class-room English of the Ghetto. But anyone who has ever observed a group of little East Side school-girls playing school, and aping their teacher's accent and deportment with uncanny perfection, will wonder when and where such gibberish as this was ever spoken:

Isidore, yiss ma'am, he makes me dis here shiner. Sadie she goes und tells him she kisses him a kiss, so he makes me a shiner. He's love mit her, und she got kind feelings by him. Come Isidore, und he hit me a hack on my leg, so I couldn't to hold it even. So I fall und I make dis here shiner. Soon mine mama she puts medsin at a rag, and bangages up mine eye, und now I aint healthy.

The firm of Kelly & Yezierska is the horrible example. But there are others. I have before me one of Edward J. O'Brien's anthologies of "Best Short Stories," containing an East Side story by David Freedman. Freedman steers clear of the Scylla of italicized Yiddish,—but only to fall, all too frequently, into the contortions of Yidgin. Here, at the opening of his story, he is at his best:

"What is a landlord? A bore! He asks you one question all the time—Rent! What is rent? A fine you pay for being poor. What is poverty? Dirt—on the surface. What is riches? More dirt—under the surface. Everybody wants money. Money! What is money? A disease we like to catch but not to spread. Just wait, Zelde! The time will come! I'll be a landlord on Riverside drive! We'll have our own home——"

"In the cemetery!" Zelde said bitterly.

"Not so fast," Mendel replied, sipping his tea.

"Cheer up, Zelde! What is pessimism? A match. It burns the fingers. What is hope? A candle. It lights the way. You never can tell yet! What is life? A see-saw. Today you're poor and tomorrow——"

"You starve!" Zelde muttered.

This is excellent—and it makes all the more inexcusable such lapses, later on, as: "Zelde, a glass tea," and "Zelde, it's a draught. Shut up the window." These phrases may sound quaint to Anglo-Saxon ears, but so would any English colloquialism literally translated. Imagine what metaphysical profundity a Brahmin might read into our casual: "How do you do?"

Bruno Lessing, like Freedman, belongs to the class of those who know better. One of his most successful adventures in Ghetto psychology is a story entitled "The Story of Sara." A rabbi goes a-marketing, and the tale turns on the transaction between him and a sentimental fishwife. We have a firm, fleshy narrative in untroubled English, as real and convincing as the fish the rabbi is fingering:

"Are they fresh?"

"They were swimming in the sea this very day, Herr Rabbi. They could not be fresher if they were alive. And the price is—Oh, you will laugh at me when I tell you—only twelve cents a pound."

"Come, come, my good mother, tell me without joking what they cost. This big one, and that little one over there."

"But Herr Rabbi, you surely cannot mean that that is too much. Well, well—an old friend—eleven cents, we'll say."

And so on. After thus showing us that he can get along without Yidgin, it is surely unkind of Mr. Lessing to offer such stuff as the following, in "A Swallow-Tailor for Two":

Isidore, bah . . . never do I want that *name* to hear. Isidore, a loafer he iss, sure. Ve vas friends vunce, un don't I know vot a loafer he iss? Ven a man iss a loafer, nobody knows it better as his best friend. Don't you remember by the night uff der two Purim balls? Vot, no? Yes. Der vas two Purim balls by der night.

Comparing these two stories, it may be noted that Ghetto psychology is well-handled in inverse proportion to the amount of Yidgin a story contains. When a writer uses such crude means of laying

on local color he can afford to stop at the surface, but if he deprives himself of their aid he has to prove his points.

When one comes to the author of "Potash and Perlmutter," the question becomes somewhat involved. Obviously, Mr. Glass doesn't wish it to be inferred that his characters are using Yiddish, but rather their own particular brand of English. Nevertheless, one who is acquainted with both Yiddish and the cloak-and-suit brand of English will find it rather hard to classify his dialogue. It's too smooth for the English it is supposed to be, and its crudities are out of place if it is translated idiomatic Yiddish. Beside, the assumption that English rather than Yiddish is the language of the firm is in itself unsound. Unless it was part of their articles of partnership that all conversation be carried on in English, Mr. Potash and Mr. Perlmutter, whatever their degree of Americanization, would hardly have used it constantly as an intimate medium. The average Potash and Perlmutter, when they are sure that their daughters are away at college, and that there are no young Western buyers around, always relax gratefully from the strain of English into the comfortable easy-chairs of their Yiddish.

The really characteristic idiom of the elder generation of Americanized Jews is a Yiddish sprinkled with English. The corruption of Yiddish by this English invasion has for years divided the Yiddish press into two warring camps. In this battle, which overrides all party lines, the *Freiheit* (Communist) finds itself on the side of the purists, with the *Tag* (democratic); and the *Vorwärts* (Socialist) leading the Americanizationists.

Most Yidgin writers qualify their Yiddishisms with parenthetical English explanations. But not Fannie Hurst. She disdains such proximity, and it is well for her that she does. In one of her latest stories, her heroine speaks of going downtown to Hester street for some *blintzes* to rejewvenate her nostalgic old father. Since Hester street is a pushcart and dry-goods

center, one infers that *blintzes* are some sort of banana, or perhaps some kosher dry-goods. For the benefit of the *goyim*, it must be whispered that they are really fried cheese fritters, served at Jewish restaurants from Bensonhurst unto the Bronx.

No one, not even the Yiddish writers, understands the Jew better than Israel Zangwill. But sprinkled through his dialogue, like obscene allusions, are the leering italics. They have no place in the stories, because by their side in parentheses there are always perfect English paraphrases. All they contribute is a sense of indulgent recognition to the Jewish reader, who feels "in on it," and a vague sense of outlandishness to the Gentile. Neither of these reactions is æsthetically pertinent, but it is on them that Yidgin feeds. The average purveyor of it, brought up from his school days to look down on Yiddish as the language of his unschooled parents, gets the same satisfaction in using it in his English that a small boy gets in repeating half-understood indecencies. And the American public finds anything that is not American either irresistibly comic or profoundly pathetic. We do not think it comical that a Frenchman should speak French, but we have yet to learn that there is nothing comic in Jews because they happen to be expressing themselves in Yiddish.

Yiddish is too rich a language to be exploited superficially. In an age of standardized speech, it is emotionally fluid—a dramatic mine unequalled since Synge discovered Irish. But it is not an English dialect like Synge's Irish. It is an autonomous language. It is a Middle German dialect, which the German Jews adopted in the Middle Ages, and which their tongues moulded to their own peculiar rhythms. It has its own peculiar imagery, differentiating it from German more than its accent or grammar, and it is this that one must capture if one is to transplant it into English. There is no reason why it should be foreign to the genius of English, any more than the Hebrew of the Old Testament.

# GUAM

BY M. S. LEA

**T**WELVE days lazy sailing to the East, and a little to the South, of Honolulu brings you to that island of the Ladrone group known as Guam. It might be called a little cousin of that other voluptuous paradise of missionaries and tourists, but it is a very ragged little cousin. Its face looks as if it would long, if it were a right minded urchin, for Saturday night to come. Its *camisa* hangs outside (there is nowhere else for it to hang) and it wipes its nose on its "white hat," bought or stolen from the American navy, because it has been told that it must be wiped on something and the hat carries itself—on the head. The arrangement is effortless and simple.

Guam, technically, is a coaling station for the Pacific Fleet. A high official in a military bureau in Washington once remarked of a junior who asked to be assigned to duty on the island, "If he's fool enough to want it, send him there immediately!" Everyone knew at that time, shortly before the outbreak of the World War, that only one steamer stopped there each month, and that one an army transport. This meant only one mail a month. It meant no theatres, no shops, no companionship outside the personnel of the naval station and a few civilians in charge of the cable. But there are always persons who like the compact life of colonial communities. Guam is still sought after by the new lieutenant and his bride, who are reluctant to relinquish each other for the dark distances of a regulation cruise. (It may be had, upon request, in place of two years sea-going.) And it is not disdained by the captain of ships for whom a fresh sensation lives in being made a governor.

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It is a splinter of coral reef and cocoanut grove thirty miles long by nine across, at a casual approximation, delightfully without landscape gardening of any description. Its beaches are littered with robber-crabs and storm-torn branches; it faces typhoons with a chattering, gamin's smile. It is not big enough to be considered in the topographical scheme of things save as a pin point and a name, and it knows it. Its very sense of inferiority makes it intriguing.

"Here I am," it seems to say. "You will find Hawaii sensuous and Manila a little depraved. I am that derelict thing, a South Sea island in the raw."

"Oh, my God!" the passing tourist responds. "And people live here! Let's get back aboard, for Gossake!"

But such comments are not ruffling to the ladies in organdy dresses and a variety of fans, whose husbands are stationed ashore. They live quite nicely in old Spanish houses, made new with built-on verandahs and fresh whitewash. They belong to bridge clubs, and on clear afternoons they play tennis on courts laid out on the plaza, and on moonlight nights go on picnics and swim lazily in the convenient lagoons. Everyone knows what they have to say.

"Have you read 'The Red Petticoat'?"

"Oh, my dear! Isn't it the most—"

"But that woman! Do you suppose that such a creature could be—"

"I know what you mean. Like that dirty man in 'Norden.'"

"I can hardly wait to find out—"

"Oh, they don't, my dear! She kills herself!"