

Yiddish

Flegt klingen a mol mame-loshn kimat umetum.
Fun geto aroys, hot es tsenters fun kroyn-shtet derlangt.
Nokh eyder s'iz nelem gevorn in Rusland der Tkhum,
af finf kontinentn geshalt hot zayn zaftiker klang.
Af Shanz-Elize, Pikadili, Arbat un Brodvey
flegt yidish in yener tsayt onfiln hilkhik di luft
mit zayn kheyn un khies, zayn zaftikayt, khokhme un vey,
mit shtarkn geshmak fun zayn terpke un zislekhn duft.
Af pletser, bulvarn flegt hilkhik di yidishe shprakh.
Men hot in teaters, kafeen gehert ir heys kol.
Af groyse asifes geklungen hot yidish a sakh.
Afile in hoykhshuln eynike flegt men a mol
zikh lernen af im. Un atsinder s'iz do a mekhak:
tsurik in di getos fun London, Antwerpen, Nyu-York
un Yerusholaim, vi oykh in dem kleynem Bney-Brak,
hot umgekert zikh mame-loshn... An emeser zorg
far yidish-libhobers. Af kleyne asifes atsind
zey zamlen zikh, lernen zikh, staren zikh ton, vos me kon,
kedey s'zol farkerevet vern der itstiker vint,
oyb shteyt shoyn beemes der goyrl fun yidish in kon.
Yo, vider zol klingen di yidishe shprakh iberall!
Azoy vil ikh oykhet, se glust mayn neshome azoy.
In Kenedi-Tsenter af yidish ikh hob shoyn geshalt,
un opgeshatst hobm es hoykh i a yid, i a goy.
Kh'vel ton es in kumendik yor oykh in Karnegi Hol...
Nor neyn, nit bloyz dos darf men ton, nit genug iz dos alts.
Kh'bin greyt tomid reydn af yidish mit hilkhikn kol
un shrayen kh'bin greyt, biz s'vet heyzerik vern mayn haldz,
nor s'fregt zikh: tsu vemen?.. Mir dukht zikh, mistame ikh ver
a bisl meshuge... nor s'helft dokh a mol meshugas!
S'iz nokh halber nakht, un mayn dimyen tsehitst zikh alts mer...

Yiddish

Mame-loshn used to ring out almost everywhere.
From out of the ghetto, it reached the centers of the capital cities.
Even before the Pale of Settlement in Russia was abolished,
the juicy sounds of Yiddish resounded on five continents:
on the Champs-Élysées, Piccadilly, Arbat, and Broadway.
In those days, Yiddish used to fill the air resoundingly
with its charm and its liveliness, its juiciness, wisdom, and pain,
with the strong taste of its tart and sweet aroma.
The Yiddish language used to echo on squares and boulevards--
its voice was heard in theaters and cafes.
Yiddish was heard a lot at big meetings—
even some high-school classes were sometimes taught in it.
And now there's a shortage of it.
Mame-loshn has returned to the ghettos
of London, Antwerp, New York, and Jerusalem,
as well as little B'nei Brak—
a real concern for Yiddish lovers.
They gather now at small meetings,
study, settle for doing what they can
so the current wind might change in direction,
since the fate of Yiddish really is at stake.
Yes, the Yiddish language should ring out again everywhere!
That's what I want too, my soul longs for that.
I've spoken in Yiddish at Kennedy Center already,
and it was rated highly by both a Jew and a Gentile.
I'll do the same next year in Carnegie Hall.
But no! Not only that needs to be done—all of that is not enough.
I'm always ready to speak aloud in Yiddish
and to cry out that I'm ready till I get hoarse,
but one asks oneself: To whom? It seems to me that I'm probably getting
a little crazy... but sometimes craziness helps, after all.

Mir vilt zikh aroysgeyn itst shtilinkerheyt af der gas,
dergeyn tsu der Arke, zikh shteln dort, glaykh unter ir -
un onheybm shrayen af yidish fun dort vos-nit-iz,
un shrayen azoy bekol-roym on a sof, on a shir,
zol shaln ba nakht mame-loshn af gantser Pariz!
Nu, s'regnt shoyn hintern fentster, m'darf shlofn atsind...
Ba tog ober oykh vert mayn dimyen a mol gants tsehitst.
Tsi vekt zikh shoyn uf in mir efsher a bisl a kind?
S'kon zayn, az afile azoy... nor kh'bin dokh an artist!
M'darf aynladn Anyen un Yitskhokn af a shpatsir:
af Shanz-Elize, af Monmartr un lem Notr-Dam
hoikh reydn af yidish mir veln mit lust on a shir -
un shtralndik pleyesken zikh vet in der luft dort zayn tam!
Vos nokh? Keyn Reykyavik af etlekhe teg fli ikh bald -
tsi hot men geredt dort af yidish bikhlal ven-nit-iz?
Kh'gedeynk ober, ven kh'bin geven finf-un-tsvantsik yor alt,
beshas mayn bazukhn Island, ot aza min surpriz
iz demolt geshen: m'hot geton ba mir plutsem a freg,
tsi yidish ikh ken! Yo, geven iz aza voyle froy
oykh dort, afn tsofn, in yenem dervaytertn ek,
vu umetik-niderik zaynen di volkns un groy...
Iz itstiks mol onklingen Boryen vel ikh fun Island:
fun droysn, fun a restoran oder glaykh funem zal,
vu uftretn kh'vel, - oykh in yenem bavolkntn kant
baloykhtn di luft zol fun yidish der farbiker shtral!
Kol-zman ikh bin lebedik, klingen es vet yor nokh yor
di yidishe shprakh fun mayn mol! - nor vos vayter vet zayn?..
Mayn libe, geboyr zhe mir kinderlekh zise a por -
un zol zeyer lebm baloykhtn fun yidish di shayn,
un zoln zey kenen un lib hobm yidish a sakh,
un zoln zey nern zikh tomid fun zayn frishn kval:
mit yidishe viglider vern anshlofn ba nakht
un mit "A gut morgn!" bagrisn dem hel-royntn shtral,

It's past midnight, and my imagination grows all the more heated.
I want to go out quietly into the street,
reach the Arch, and stand there, right under it,
and start to cry out in Yiddish from there,
to cry out loudly, endlessly, without limit
so mame-loshn will ring out at night all over Paris!
Well, it's raining outside now, one has to go to sleep.
But even in the daytime, my imagination gets quite excited.
Is a bit of a child awakening in me perhaps?
That might even be true, but I'm an artist, after all!
I have to invite Anya and Itzhok* for a walk:
on the Champs-Élysées, in Montmartre, and near Notre-Dame
we will speak out loud in Yiddish, lustily and endlessly,
and its taste will sparkle and echo there.
What else? I'm soon flying to Reykjavik for a few days—
has anyone ever spoken Yiddish there at all?
I recall, however, when I was twenty-five years old,
during my first visit to Iceland, that a sort of surprise occurred:
I was suddenly asked, if I knew Yiddish!
Yes, there was such a nice lady there,
in the North, in a far-flung corner of the land,
where the clouds are sad and low and gray.
This time I'll call Boris** from Iceland:
from outdoors, from a restaurant,
or right from the hall where I will perform -
even in that cloudy neighborhood
let the colorful sparkle of Yiddish illuminate the air!
As long as I live, the Yiddish language will ring out from my mouth,
year after year. But what will happen after that?
My love, have a couple of children for me -
and may their lives be illuminated by Yiddish.
May they know and love Yiddish a lot,
and may they draw nourishment forever from its fresh spring:

un shpiln, un shtifn af yidish... Un efsher, ver veys? -
oykh andere kinderlekh veln zikh lernen fun zey
a bisele yidish - un vider es vet klingen heys
af Shanz-Elize, Pikadili, Arbat un Brodvey!
Dan shtarbm kh'vel ruik, vayl visn af zikher ikh vel,
az mayn bobeloshn vet lebem nokh mir zeyer lang.
Un zol af mayn keyver zayn varem, gemitlekh un hel,
un hilkh zol dortn fun yidish der heymisher klang.

go to sleep at night with Yiddish cradle-songs,
greet the bright pink rays of morning with "A gut morgn!",
play and make mischief in Yiddish... And perhaps, who knows? -
other little children will learn a bit of Yiddish from them -
and again it will ring out hotly
on the Champs-Elysees, Piccadilly, Arbat and Broadway!
Then I can die peacefully, for I will know for sure
that my bobeloshn will live a long time after me.
And may my grave be warm, welcoming, and bright,
and may the intimate sound of Yiddish echo there.

* Anna Ershler and Yitzhok Niborsky, Yiddish scholars.

** Boris Sandler, Yiddish author.