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In a path-breaking article ‘Hebrew-Yiddish-Polish: A Trilingual Jewish Culture’ published in 1989 in *The Jews of Poland Between Two World Wars* Chone Shmeruk argued that

[i]n addition to the traditional religious culture that was still predominant in Poland between the two world wars, three modern post-Enlightenment cultural systems existed among Polish Jewry. They were generally distinguished by linguistic and ideological characteristics. The cultural systems in the Jewish languages – Hebrew and Yiddish – were usually identified with defined Jewish nationalist ideologies. Hebrew culture relied on Zionist ideology, whereas modern Yiddish secular culture was built primarily by Bundists and their adherents, and to a lesser extent by Zionist socialists, Folkists, and those Jewish communists who did not advocate the assimilation of Jews.

Alongside these two cultural systems, there also existed a ‘Polish cultural system in which the ‘striving for Jewish self-preservation [was] less apparent’. Shmeruk distinguished between ‘the thin stratum of Polish intelligentsia of Jewish descent, including renowned Polish writers, who were totally assimilated into Polish culture and identified themselves as Poles – even despite certain sporadic expressions of Jewish self-identification to which they were pushed by hostile forces over which they had no control’ and those Jews ‘whose exclusive or partial cultural language was Polish’ but who were either ‘Zionist in ideology or nonaffiliated and politically apathetic’ and who ‘certainly never denied their Jewish identity’.

He concluded:

The true and great power of this culture lay not in isolation of these linguistic areas but in their interaction, an interaction that included the traditional religious cultural system as well. The full picture of the culture of Polish Jews can only be perceived by approaching it

as a polysystem in which the power of its components comes from the force of their mutual, dynamic interaction, and not in their isolation¹.

Certainly, as Shmeruk suggests, since the Enlightenment, the cultural creativity of Polish Jews has found expression not only in Hebrew and Yiddish, but increasingly in Polish. There has been mutual and dynamic interaction between the cultural systems, but until the end of communism the trilingual Jewish culture of Poland was little studied. In this volume, scholars from Poland, the United States, Israel, Italy, and Argentina investigate writers from across this spectrum and consider how they saw their Jewish (and sometimes Polish) identity, and what they thought of the authors in the other linguistic or cultural camps. Together their work constitutes a first examination of Jewish literatures in Poland from the point of view of both linguistic and geographic diversity. The interwar years serve as the reference point, but material on the period before the First World War and since 1945 is also included.

The volume comprises six sections: new research on Jewish literature in Polish, including discussions of less known works by Janusz Korczak and Julian Strykowski; Polish - Yiddish-Hebrew literary contacts, with important pieces on Y.L. Peretz's early work, the translation of Haim Hahman Bialik's poetry into Polish, the influence of Polish writers on Sholem Asch's early plays and the reception of Joseph Opatoshu's novels in interwar Poland; mutual perceptions represented by the images of Poles and Poland in the work of Jewish writers and of Jews in the work of Polish authors in, for instance, the work of the Hebrew Nobel laureate, S.Y. Agnon and the Polish writer Stanisław Vincenz; avant-garde art and modern ideologies with discussions of Bruno Schulz's graphic works and why communism appealed to some Jewish writers; questions of identity with a special focus on Julian Tuwim, one of the greatest Polish poets, an assimilated Jew attacked both by Polish nationalists and Yiddish intellectuals; and different 'exiles', understood both literally and metaphorically and encompassing works created in Poland, Israel and Argentina.

In spite of this wide range of themes, the coverage of the topic is not exhaustive: there are still very few studies of Polish-Hebrew literary contacts, and although more has been written about Yiddish writers in Poland there are still areas requiring comparative perspective. It is hoped that the themes and motifs discussed in this volume will inspire further research in this complex field. This is a major study of topics which have rarely been discussed in English, especially Jewish literature written in Polish. The articles should appeal to all students of literature and particularly to those interested in Polish, Yiddish and Hebrew creativity understood as a rich cultural polysystem.

¹ Ch. SHMERUK, Hebrew-Yiddish-polish: A Trilingual Jewish Culture, in: Y. GUTMAN [et al] (eds.), *The Jews of Poland Between Two World Wars*, N. H.: University Press of New England, s. 285-311.