The Burning Bush Poems from Modern Israel ed. Moshe Dor and Natan Zach, W. H. Allen, London 1977. £2.95
For a Few Hours Only. Selected Poems of Shlomo Vinner ed. Howard Schwartz, Singing Bone, St. Louis, 1976 $3.75
Travels of a Latter-day Benjamin of Tudela by Yehuda Amichai, tr. Ruth Nevo, Webster Review, Cauldron Press, St. Louis, 1977.
The Half of a Circle by David Jaffin, Elizabeth Press, New York, 1977, $8.
Autumn to Autumn and Selected Poems 1953–1976 by A. Alvarez, Macmillan, 1978, £2.95/£3.95
Night Words A Midrash on the Holocaust. Compiled by David Roskies, B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundation, 1971.
Anus Mundi. Black Sonnets, by Ken Smith, Four Zoas, Hardwick, 1976, £1.

Finally, two books on the Holocaust.

Nightwords, by David Roskies, is a compendium, to be recited, sung, and prayed, by thirty-six barefoot participants. Very rarely are there false notes, in this most perilous of all subjects for the survivor. Especially noteworthy are the superb Yiddish poems and lullabies, emanating from the ghettoes and from the Yiddish poets who escaped from them, such as Avraham Sutzkever, which I have only previously seen in inferior translations. Interspersed with these are quotations and episodes from the Bible and Mishnah—the Akedah, the Scapegoat on Yom Kippur, prophecies of Isaiah, the Valley of Dry Bones—from Chassidic *maisehs* and *divrei torah*, such as those of Nachman of Bratslav—and most harrowing of all, an extract from the *Even Metsulah*, the chronicle of the Chmielnitski massacres, set to the *nigun*, the cantillation signs of the Torah. It amounts to an indictment, perhaps, or an innocent question, or a challenge to each of us, to perform this ritual, this ritual of remembrance. One section consists entirely of a rhyming jingle of Yiddish children's names. *Nightwords* is a *Halitsa*, one of its closing ceremonies, a challenge to God by the widowed Shechinah, with the shoes of her offspring; it is also a Kaddish—the last unadorned words—for all the martyrs, in the language of the official reports and shameless statistics, the anecdotes of nurses led to execution, the incoherence of the Shophar announcing the end, and the incoherence of man himself, forever trying to articulate what resists his tongue.

> Moses was the silent one, one who was slow with words; he was of the silence that is higher than speech. . . (Nachman of Bratslav: spoken by The Mute in *Nightwords*)

Anus Mundi by Ken Smith, is likewise very impressive, an interplay of voices from Camp Commandant to ordinary citizen. There is an arbitrary, puzzled, dreadful sympathy, for all, from the torturers to the limbs in the forest and the trees themselves, a sympathy that the torturers share and that drives them to drunkenness, that is unbearable because it cannot forgive, but remains disembodied.

This is the worst sense of the book: an eeriness, a knowledge that the remorse and interminable reflection can resuscitate no one. The Black Sonnets—more of less long prose poems—are disjointed wish-fulfilments, that of Goebbels to be a writer, composer of Black Sonnets, that of Eva Braun to be recognised as *somebody*. The displacement of the written word, the enormous disparity between it and the outrage of the camps, makes of the attempt to explain and justify something dizzyingly forgetful and necessary. Forgetfulness, in the sense that David Roskies' book does the only right and respectful thing: to let the voices speak for themselves, to recognise that at this point we have nothing of our own to say, that only those who were there have a right to speak for us, even in a tongue not our own. Necessary, because nevertheless we must formulate our own response, for if we just carry the burden of the past, it will suffocate our own creativity, and that of God within us. In a sense, David Roskies' collage is too easy. The two books are thus extraordinarily complementary.

Moreover, like *Nightwords, Anus Mundi* encompasses all human suffering in this arena, represented by Durer's "Massacre of the Innocents" and the Bastard of Vauru, and moves between plain statement, sheer facts, like the career of the notorious Irma of Ravensbruck, and poetic evocation, say of the forest or the town:

> There is one strange thing: in recent years all the children born here bear each of them a number printed on one arm. Not printed, it is part of the flesh, a number they bring with them from the womb. Always a different number, sometimes a very high one, but a number that does not wear off, that no scouring will wash away.

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