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I

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Aharon Appelfeld: The Search for a Language

*for Aharon
and David -
with love,
fisher*

Aharon Appelfeld, *Tor hapelaot* (Hakibbutz Hameuḥad, 1978).

———, *The Age of Wonders*, trans. Dalya Bilu. New York: Washington Square Press, 1981. \$12.95

Aharon Appelfeld, *Mikhvat Haor* [*Searing Light*] (Hakibbutz Hameuḥad, 1980). (Untranslated)

The appearance in English translation of the work of a Hebrew writer hitherto relatively unknown outside Israel signals a significant change in the public status of that writer. Some of the recent fiction of Aharon Appelfeld, who is the 1983 recipient of the Israel Prize for literature, has crossed the boundaries of an intimate community of Hebrew readers and is now available to a much wider public through the English translations of Dalya Bilu.*

Translating Appelfeld is a complex enterprise, though not for the usual reasons; the insularity of the classical allusions which laminate the prose of S.Y. Agnon, for example, does not apply here. Quite the contrary. There is the quality of a primal struggle in Appelfeld's prose, a chiseling and shaping of language by a writer who encounters Hebrew unencumbered by layers of classical association; this struggle with the linguistic medium, which resists transposition into another idiom, is the focus of the present discussion. Some of the chisel-marks which show through the Hebrew text, like Michelangelo's "Captive" sculptures just barely emerging from yet still imprisoned in the unhewn rock, have been polished over in the English version, which is otherwise faithful to the original.

The signs of an acquired language are literary evidence of Appelfeld's personal odyssey. He was born in the German-speaking Jewish

*Translations of individual stories have appeared in various journals and anthologies. The first of Appelfeld's full-length books to appear in English translation was *Badenheim, 1939* (trans. Dalya Bilu [New York: Washington Square Press, 1980]). And in 1983, the novella *Tzili* appeared (trans. Dalya Bilu [New York: Dutton]). Most of his fiction, however, remains untranslated.

community of Czernowitz in the Bukovina region of Romania; when he was eight years old the Germans entered his town and he was separated from his family and sent to a work camp in Transnistria. He managed to escape and then spent the war years as a fugitive in the forests of Europe. In 1944 he was picked up by the Red Army and brought to the Ukraine; the end of the war found him in Italy, from whose shores he was transported to Palestine in 1946.

In examining the fiction of Appelfeld and of certain other writers within the confines of what has come to be known as "Holocaust literature," one may tend to overlook dimensions of the experience of upheaval and displacement which these writers share with other writers of the twentieth century and with a long line of exiled artists who can trace their lineage in one direction to Ovid on the shores of the Black Sea and in another to the psalmist by the waters of Babylon. From Ovid banished from Rome through Dante banished from Florence, from the voluntary exile of Nabokov and Beckett through the forced exile of Solzhenitsyn, from the wanderings of Judah Halevi to those of S.Y. Agnon, "the history of civilization itself could be reckoned," as Harry Levin claims, "by an endless sequence of migrations." The personal malaise that such wanderings often induced was diagnosed as early as 1688 as an affliction called "Heimweh" (nostalgia or homesickness).¹

Our century seems to abound with examples of prominent literary exiles. In some cases they continued writing in their native tongue which, as with Ovid nearly two thousand years ago, compounded their sense of exile and often brought about a loss of linguistic facility ("Lo! I am ashamed to confess it; now from long disuse Latin words with difficulty occur even to me! And I doubt not there are even in this book not a few barbarisms, not the fault of the man but of the place"). Other displaced writers labored to acquire the languages of their adopted countries. George Steiner refers to twentieth-century writers "driven from language to language by social upheaval and war . . . as apt symbols for the age of the refugee."² Those who most tragically exemplify this status are the expatriates from Nazi Germany. German writers such as Thomas Mann, Berthold Brecht, Stefan Zweig, Franz Werfel and Erich Maria Remarque, who managed to emigrate to North or South America before the full forces of destruction had been unleashed, have been the subject of a growing critical study of *Exil Literatur*.⁴ In an impassioned speech delivered at the memorial service held for Stefan Zweig in Los Angeles after his suicide in 1942, Franz Werfel said that

like all the rest of us he was banished from his native country not only geographically but spiritually. Later generations will one day plumb the

tragedy of poets and writers separated from their mother tongue, beggars doomed to wander eternally on the borders of a foreign idiom and a foreign mode of thought, with neither the youthful energy nor the desire nor the humility to go across.⁵

Yet their state of exile is still fertile ground when compared to the barren landscape of the transplanted Jewish writers who managed to survive the Holocaust in Europe and who found themselves, at the end of their long ordeal, far from their homeland and deprived of their native tongue. Piotr Rawicz, Anna Langfus and Elie Wiesel writing in French, Jurek Becker in German, Ilona Karmel and Jerzy Kosinski in English—the linguistic displacement is perhaps the most telling characteristic of the total upheaval of those years.⁶

Albert Memmi has argued that language for the Jew has always been a provisional possession which the mandates of history periodically force him to exchange.⁷ The condition of exile which was inherent in the Jewish condition and perception for two millennia had found its literary expression in nearly every generation.⁸ Yet the upheavals were local; it would take World War II to empty Europe of its Jewish voices. Though it may still be too early to assess the impact of such massive displacement on the cultures from which Jews were expelled or on the survivors' adopted languages, there are a few writers, such as Nelly Sachs or Paul Celan, whose continuing post-war presence in the German language, even while in physical exile in Sweden or France, has already had a profound effect on contemporary German letters. Choosing not to exchange his native tongue together with his citizenship, Celan nevertheless had to reinvent the language in order to find a home in it. John Felstiner has written that Celan's poems "do not enjoy the emotional closure and vocal integrity that lyric verse traditionally embodies. Each line struggles not just with, but against the language itself, against the 'thousand darkneses of death-bringing speech' which Celan says his native German had to pass through during the Holocaust."⁹ In a speech in 1958 acknowledging the literary prize awarded him by the city of Bremen, Celan identified his own poetry and that of others of his generation as the "'efforts of someone . . . shelterless in a sense undreamt-of till now and thus most uncannily out in the open, who goes with his very being to language, stricken by and seeking reality.'" ¹⁰

When Celan came to Jerusalem in 1969, some of his sense of exile seems to have lifted. His posthumously-published Jerusalem poems are entitled "Zeitgehöft" (Homestead of Time).¹¹ And for several years before this visit he had made frequent, incantatory use of untranslated Hebrew words and phrases. The poem "Du sei wie du," ends with the

Hebrew imperative "kumi/ori" which, as Felstiner elucidates, refers to Isaiah 60:1, promising a renewal of the covenant and a return of the exiles: "I see [Celan] breaking free in [the poem's final words], renewing his bond with them in messianic speech."¹² Hebrew here carries the promise of light beside the "darkneses of death-bringing speech," of a haven for the "shelterless" and an access to ancient, pristine layers of speech and of being.

Celan himself was a sojourner in the land of Israel on his way, it now appears, to an inexorable rendezvous with death which was administered by his own hand in 1970. But the intimations of connectedness in his last poems suffuse the writing of many of the adopted sons of Israel. In the early post-war period, the linguistic exchange undertaken by every European refugee who arrived in Palestine seemed to entail more gains than losses. Palestine had been a land of immigrants and pilgrims since the Babylonian dispersion, and in most recent times had seen an influx of writers who wrote in Hebrew but still dreamed in Russian, Yiddish, German, whose portraits of the Judean desert still invoked the steppes of Russia. Yet by the time the survivors of the Nazi Holocaust began to arrive, there was already a generation of native speakers. And for the writer attuned to its sounds, there were echoes of ancient voices keening the dead of two millennia, providing literary models.

In acquiring the language, the writer moving into Hebrew acquired an apparatus of discourse on Jewish suffering, a set of paradigms of protest and consolation, of piety and even irony. To the extent that, like the poet and ghetto fighter, Abba Kovner, his childhood memories resonated with the language of sacred texts, Hebrew became the avenue of retrieval of the writer's personal as well as the collective past. Kovner illuminates this process in describing his own agonized search for a bridge to the dead; he states that as he was completing the fortieth chapter of his long poem, "Ahoti Ktanah," (My Little Sister), a chasm suddenly opened up before him and, without a rope to pull him across, he could not proceed:

The end of the rope was not in my hand. And my hands were over my eyes:

The shorn head of my sister
Breaks out of a wall.

She stands on the other side and does not hear me, does not understand my language. My God! There must be a language which will make a bridge between us. A language of the living which the dead will also hear and understand.

And then I hear the voice of the syllables like drops of rain which fall on a hot tin roof: ridudi . . . midadi . . . gdudi . . . kitvi . . . metfi . . . dodi . . . litsvi . . . li . . . bemar li . . .

I didn't know how they came to me. And I didn't ask at this time or this hour about their origins. Like a woman beaten by a dry season who comes hesitantly toward the first rain, I collected the drops in a small bowl.

Still I remember the magic sound of the words while they fell. Like the weeping of many violins.¹³

The language of ancient piyyut, erupting like grace from the depths of the collective unconscious, is a bridge to the poet's private as well as public memory; it evokes the sounds of a childhood in Vilna—or elsewhere in Jewish Europe. In another image of access, Kovner claims that the medieval piyyutim came into his poems “like windows . . . cut in a prison wall. Through them comes a small light and through them is reflected, near, yet unattainable, another world, real and imagined.”¹⁴

Hebrew then, is not a neutral instrument, indifferent to Jewish experience, like French or English, in which survivor writers grope for a vocabulary to accommodate biographies that cannot fit the common mold. The Hebrew writer inherits a language infused with forms of Jewish historical memory that both liberate and constrain the poetic imagination.¹⁵ Even when the writer is subverting the tradition from within, through irony or “*Widerruf*,” he is affirming its boundaries as the demarcations of the collective consciousness. A dialectical process of appropriation runs through the lamentation literature from the binding of Isaac on Mt. Moriah through the massacre of Jews in Bialik's Kishinev, to the devastation of Kovner's Vilna.¹⁶

In this context, Aharon Appelfeld stands out as one survivor writer for whom the Hebrew language seems to provide neither a bridge nor a window onto the past. In the land which was envisioned by prophets, poets and philosophers as a haven for the dislocated soul of Israel, Appelfeld remains, in a fundamental, linguistic sense, an exile. Like his fictional characters, he grew up in an assimilated family (“assimilation was passed on as our inheritance”¹⁷) which had totally embraced German culture as their own. Their credo was an advanced form of liberal humanism, accompanied by a disdain for the *Ostjuden* for their parochial practices and appearance and anachronistic beliefs. The major theme in his later fiction is not the atrocities of the Nazi years, but the retrieval of childhood: imagination as the only possible vehicle of return to a world that now exists solely in the memory of the survivor and language as the only possible mortar of reconstruction. Yet in Appelfeld's case the inaccessibility of classical layers of symbol and meaning

integral to the fabric of childhood render Hebrew a partial or even intractable medium of return.

In two of Appelfeld's recent novels, the return journey takes on variant, even alternative, forms. *The Age of Wonders*, published in Hebrew in 1978, consists of a long novella and a short independent story which also serves as its sequel. Book One is a first-person narrative of the twilight hours of bourgeois German-Jewish culture in Europe on the eve of World War II, related from the perspective of the child but informed by the hindsight of the adult. The story concludes as the Jews of the little Austrian town find themselves crowded into “the cattle train hurtling south.”¹⁸ A blank page follows, separating the two stories and signifying what Harold Fisch calls the great “silence”—the unarticulated event that disrupted the normal continuity of biography and subverted the normal literary course of the *bildungsroman*;¹⁹ where the youth should, like Pip or Stephen Dedalus or Wilhelm Meister, have gone out into the world to shape his destiny, he fell instead into the abyss.

The second part, narrated in the third person, takes place over twenty years later, when the protagonist, Bruno, revisits his hometown of Knospfen and tries to put together the pieces of the puzzle of his past. Both sections focus essentially on the same period of time but the first part of the novel is an *artistic* reconstruction of the pre-Holocaust world in which the writer exercises his creative prerogative to construct fictions out of the gaps of memory. The story has inner and symbolic logic, a chronology—a beginning, a middle, and an end (in this case an ominous “end” which informs the entire narrative, though it is clearly not perceivable to the actors during the events themselves). The second part, on the other hand, is a *psychological* reconstruction of the past from the limited vantage point of the present. Here, where there is no artistic privilege, memory erupts as fragmentary; psychological barriers to coherent memory, which were overcome through the fiction-making of the writer in the first part, shape the work of retrieval which is necessarily involuntary and incomplete. The same logic prevails in Appelfeld's later novel, *Mikhvat Haor* (Searing Light), which traces a group of liberated refugees in their wanderings along the shores of Italy and in their journey to and arrival in Palestine.

All of Appelfeld's attempts to retrieve “un temps perdu” focus on the struggle between inherited and acquired languages. The first and most fundamental property of which the hapless German-speaking Jews who populate his fiction were dispossessed was their language, their mode of intercourse with the world at large. Appelfeld dramatizes repeatedly how, in the earliest stages of exile, in the crush of deportation to ghettos and train stations, “the words got lost.”²⁰ The language

of home was not simply forgotten, having fallen into disuse—it was *denied*. None of the lessons that had been learned were useful in the present struggle. Not algebra or Latin, nor the pride of belonging to the glorious Weimar Republic. German was now the language of National Socialism, of a territory in which the Jew had been disenfranchised. In the first part of *The Age of Wonders*, the father of the protagonist is remembered as having protested in anguish to his detractors in the twilight weeks preceding deportation:

I am an Austrian writer. German is my native tongue. I have no other language. In German I have composed six novels, six collections of short stories, two books of essays. Haven't I brought honor to Austria? For a moment there was silence. Very nice. So why don't you go to the Jews and write for them? They must need writers. We'll manage with what we've got!²¹

There emerges, throughout these two novels, a scarcely-veiled disdain on the part of the adult narrator for the culture of his childhood which had bred such trusting and deluded cosmopolitan Jews; the contempt is focused primarily on the father—a figure that carries over from one novel to another and whose solipsism penetrates every inch of the narrative. Still, although the German Jewish culture prepared the child neither for survival in a hostile world nor for participation in the post-war enterprise of national rebirth in the Jewish homeland, its substance, its beliefs, its prejudices, its language are the child's only inheritance.

The Austrian Jewish writer, Jean Améry, in his book, *At the Mind's Limits*, subtitled "Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and its Realities," writes that "home is the land of one's childhood and youth. Whoever has lost it remains lost himself. . . ." For those who were exiled from the Third Reich, the loss of home also meant the loss of a "mother tongue."²² The younger one was at the time of deportation the more far-reaching the ultimate effects of this process seem to have been. The child of eight—Appelfeld himself or nearly any of the characters in his recent fiction—who had barely mastered the rudiments of language, could retain no articulate formulas of experience to protect the integrity of his past. Memories, associations, one's own native tongue, remain trapped forever in that pre-articulate stage of young childhood.

As in *The Age of Wonders*, the war years are obscured in most of Appelfeld's stories by a thick veil of silence, punctuated in the early fiction by oblique tales of persecution and flight that are largely non-referential.²³ This silence regarding the events themselves is not only a form of amnesia as response to trauma,²⁴ but the muteness of those who have, quite simply, *lost their tongue*.

In the fiction that traces the wanderings of groups of refugees following liberation, the survivors begin to appropriate fragments of speech from one another. And each acquisition, it seems, consigns to oblivion another article from one's own past. "How many years has it been since I saw father's study," muses the narrator of *Mikhvat Haor*; "Even my mother tongue, German, comes out of my mouth corrupted irreparably. I lost it somewhere along those endless roads. Now I speak Yiddish in all the jumbled accents of the refugees."²⁵ Elsewhere, in an essay, Appelfeld remarks that the "bit of warmth that resided in the few words we had brought from home, evaporated."²⁶ On the shores of Italy and after the refugees' arrival in Palestine, a few words of Hebrew were learned—as a cover and a camouflage over the negated past.

The new culture facilitated the escape from and denial of one's former identity. Whatever remained of the languages of *Galut* to which the "smell of death"²⁷ still clung, was baggage to be cast off in order to qualify for the Procrustean bed provided by the Jewish Agency. The image of the helpless, ignominious Jew was exchanged along with one's name and mannerisms, for the proud, swarthy appearance of the self-reliant Israeli. It was fairly easy to pour language into a mind which had been emptied. Rather than providing a vocabulary to rescue private as well as public memory, the language of the Sabra spoken in Appelfeld's house of fiction constitutes an effective shield against any claims the past might still assert. Cliché is the language of enforced consensus that intrudes upon and usurps the remnants of memory which still manage to infiltrate the private domain. Soon after his arrival in Eretz Yisrael, the narrator of *Mikhvat Haor* dozes in the company of a group of refugees who spend their time playing cards and declaring their political and religious allegiances:

And I close my eyes for a moment and see clearly the small village where my mother and I spent our last vacation. It was a sparse village bisected by a stream. And when it was time to leave, mother packed the suitcases and wept. I, fool that I was, tried to comfort her. But she refused to be comforted and continued to cry. As if her whole world had been destroyed. I can now see her teary face clearly, as if under a magnifying glass.

"Now we are all in one boat." This sentence penetrated my day-dream and awakened me. One of the cardplayers, who was losing, had said it.

"You are asleep. Who will build the country? We need *halutzim* here and not dreamers."

"What do you want from the boy?"

"I want him to be a *halutz*. A fighter."

There is no meaning to the words. They issue forth by themselves

and do not harm anybody, but they roused me from my sweet day-dream. How long has it been since I last saw my mother. Now that she has appeared to me, they have snatched her from me.²⁸

It is only later that the narrator learns the pragmatic value of the Hebrew idioms and clichés which he masters slowly. "We spoke a broken babel of tongues, and now to this mix were added a few Hebrew words. He [Dormant (sic), the refugee who has made the quickest adjustment] absorbed the clichés first and made effective use of them. At that time we did not yet realize that they were his fins and that it was with their help that he navigated."²⁹ In what emerges as a Darwinian process of acculturation, acquired words are like new appendages enabling this transplanted species to adapt to a new environment.

There is, then, a clear dialectical antagonism here between the languages of past and present, between the diminishing store of warm words salvaged from home—like the marks of speech organs from an earlier biological phase—and the foreign clichés grafted on but never fully assimilated, between the privacy of biography and the tyranny of collective existence.³⁰

In most of Appelfeld's stories set after the war, the past, the world of childhood, is a fragmented estate which cannot be voluntarily recalled. In S. Y. Agnon's *A Guest for the Night*, which is the great interbellum Hebrew novel of return on which the second part of *The Age of Wonders* is largely patterned, the associational mechanism is primarily sensory: the aroma of "millet boiled in honey"³¹ accompanies the narrator in his arrival to and departure from his hometown, and frames the entire narrative. It recalls Proust's "petite madeleine," that cake dipped in tea in the first part of *A la recherche du temps perdu*, which invokes the dormant memories of childhood that the intellect had failed to summon:

And so it is with our own past. It is a labour in vain to recapture it: all the efforts of our intellect must prove futile. The past is hidden somewhere outside the realm, beyond the reach of intellect, in some material object (in the sensation which that material object will give us) which we do not suspect. And as for that object, it depends on chance whether we come upon it or not before we ourselves must die. . . .

But when from a long-distant past nothing subsists, after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered, still, alone, more fragile, but with more vitality, more unsubstantial, more persistent, more faithful, the smell and taste of things remain poised for a long time, like souls, ready to remind us, waiting and hoping for their moment, amid the ruins of all the rest; and bear unfalteringly, in the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence, the vast structure of recollection.³²

For Proust and for Agnon, smell and taste are the essences of the organic material world of the child that can be reaffirmed even at a distance and beyond the normal ravages of time. Yet for Appelfeld to retrieve a past which was lost not in the natural course of time and aging, but wrested brutally from the eight-year-old child, more radical means of recall seem to be needed. The words, as intermediate between body and spirit, remain the primary associative mechanism that can survive the ultimate ruin of the physical world and serve to reconstruct it; it is words that evoke the past, and memory is triggered primarily through verbal rather than non-verbal sensory association.³³ The narrator of *Mikhvat Haor* is confronted by the man who claims to have been his father's literary adversary:

'I wrote about 12 long articles and not a few critical essays [rezenziot] against your father, mostly in German, but some in French' [he tells the boy]. The word 'rezenziyah' evokes in me, like magic, the smells of home. Books, galleys, my father sitting bent over his table, writing. He is engulfed in a screen of cigarette smoke and the aroma of coffee: 'What does the 'rezenziyah' say?' I hear mother's voice.³⁴

Sometimes memory is embodied in a name, a name which is no longer legitimate in a world of Yoram and Rinahs. "'Zossi,' Dormant says (addressing our group), 'wouldn't you like to go to Zossi's and celebrate her birthday?' Strange, this sweet name evoked, like magic, the sweet smells of parquet, of a stove emitting comfortable heat and a window decked with flowers, the enchanted remains of our homes."³⁵

The old words, then, are independent entities, they are of the essence of time past; they *are* the past, as palpable as any artifact salvaged from one's childhood—a picture or a scarf—could be. They erupt, unbidden, autonomous, into the business of constructing one's present life out of stone and cliché. Retrieval of childhood will, inevitably, remain partial, incomplete, since the process of remembering is involuntary³⁶ and since when one succeeds in retrieving one detail, one loses the others. At one point the narrator forgets everything—father, mother, all of the properties and personalities of his childhood home except for Louise (the chambermaid) and her room.

But there *is* another form of narrative in Appelfeld's fiction in which the past becomes more palpably accessible: the stories of actual return—stories such as "Reparations" from Appelfeld's first volume of stories, *Ashan* [Smoke] and "Many Years Later, When Everything Was Over," the second part of *The Age of Wonders*. In these stories, the narrator actually takes the journey back to his hometown and confronts the physical environment and even some of the people with whom he grew up.

Marcel's act of eating the "petite madeleine" in a rather obvious denial of the Proustian model of childhood retrieved through sensory association and infused with meaning through art; ordering a cake and dipping it into his coffee, he realizes that "not a memory remained with him. It was as if they had been devoured and left not a trace behind."⁴

Yet, although the mechanisms of retrieval are different, and art does not seem to constitute a redemptive mode, the parameters of memory in Appelfeld's fiction are ultimately closer to Proust's in being grounded in the private self, rather than in the intertextual codification of collective experience retrieved by the individual that characterizes the language of Agnon or Kovner. The process remains private, personal, a struggle against the currents of the Hebrew language. The writer and his characters remain expatriates, never fully "in-gathered" in the land, never fully at home anywhere again. Bruno will return from Knospes to a Jerusalem without shadows, to a Hebrew without echoes.

SIDRA DEKOVEN EZRAHI
Hebrew University

Notes

1. "Literature and Exile," in Herbert Dieckmann, Harry Levin, Helmut Mutekat, *Essays in Comparative Literature* (St. Louis, 1961) pp. 6, 8.
2. *Tristia*, V. vii, 11.56–60, trans. Arthur Leslie Wheeler (Cambridge, Mass., 1975) p. 239.
3. *Extraterritorial: Papers on Literature and the Language Revolution* (New York, 1971), p. 11.
4. One of the most up-to-date bibliographies of studies of *Exil Literatur* can be found in Egbert Krispyn, *Anti-Nazi Writers in Exile* (Athens, Ga., 1978).
5. "Stefen Zweig's Death," *Stefen Zweig: A Tribute To His Life and Work*, ed. Hanns Arens (London, n.d.), p. 140.
6. It is, still, rather astonishing that after only a few years, most uprooted Jewish writers found their tongue in the language of their adopted home; by contrast, it appears that those Armenians who managed to survive the massacres of 1915 did not for the most part succeed in mastering the languages of the countries in which they settled or in creating a "survivor literature" in languages other than Armenian. See: Leo Hamalian, "The Armenian Genocide and the Literary Imagination," and Vahe Oshagan, "The Impact of the 1915 Turkish Genocide on West-Armenian Letters," papers delivered at the International Conference on the Holocaust and Genocide, Tel Aviv, Summer, 1982.
7. *The Liberation of the Jew*, trans. Judy Hyun (New York, 1966), p. 185.
8. "My heart is in The East and I am at the/edge of the West," wrote Judah Halevi in the 12th century ("Libi bamizrah," *The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse*, trans. & ed. T. Carmi [Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981], p. 347); "I do

not know the speech/Of this cool land/I cannot keep its pace," wrote Elsa Lasker-Schüler in the early part of this century, long before her own expatriation from Germany. ("Heimweh," Elsa Lasker-Schüler, *Hebrew Ballads and Other Poems*, ed. Audri Durchslag and Jeannette Litman-Demeestere [Philadelphia, 1980], p. 17.)

9. "Translating Celan's Last Poem," *The American Poetry Review (A Special Supplement)*, July/August 1982, p. 22.
10. Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 23.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
12. "Translating Paul Celan's Du sei wei du," *Prooftexts* III, no. 1 (January 1983) p. 104.
13. *A Canopy in the Desert: Selected Poems by Abba Kovner*, ed. Shirley Kaufman (Pittsburgh, 1973), pp. 214–15.
- See also Abraham Sutzkever's poem, "Under the Earth," for a similar affirmation of the power of words over the Yiddish poet (*An Anthology of Modern Poetry*, selected and translated by Ruth Whitman [New York, 1966], p. 127).
14. Kovner, pp. 213–24.
15. When S. Y. Agnon, a native of Galicia who emigrated to Palestine long before the outbreak of World War II, comes, in a short story, "Hasiman" (The Sign—set at the end of the war), to summon the dead of his hometown of Buczacz, he turns in a vision to the master of the medieval *paytanim*, Solomon Ibn Gabirol. The language provides an unmediated discourse between the twentieth-century writer and the eleventh-century poet (in *Ha-esh v'eha'ezim* [The Fire and the Wood] Jerusalem, 1971). For a discussion of this story, see my "Agnon Before and After," *Prooftexts*, II, no. 1 (January, 1982), pp. 78–94.
16. For a more detailed discussion of the processes of literary adoption and subversion in martyrological literature, see my chapter on "The Legacy of Lamentations," in *By Words Alone: The Holocaust in Literature* (Chicago, 1980); and David G. Roskies, "The Pogrom Poem and the Literature of Destruction," *Notre Dame English Journal*, XI, no. 2 (April, 1979), pp. 89–113.
17. *Masot b'guf rishon* [Essays in the First Person] (Jerusalem, 1979), p. 10. All translations from this book are mine.
18. *The Age of Wonders*, p. 132.
19. "Et lahashot v'et ledabber: al *Tor hapelaot* l'Aharon Appelfeld" [A time to be silent and a time to speak: On Aharon Appelfeld's *The Age of Wonders*], (Hebrew), *Zehut* I (April/May 1981) p. 151.
20. *Masot be'guf rishon*, p. 12.
21. *The Age of Wonders*, p. 8.
22. *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and its Realities* (trans. Sidney Rosenfeld and Stella P. Rosenfeld [Bloomington, Ind., 1980]), pp. 48, 54.
23. These stories appear in such collections as *B'gai haporeh* (Jerusalem, Schocken Books, 1964), and *Adnai hanahar* (Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1971). Appelfeld's recent, longer, fiction tends to be more realistic and socially engaged than the earlier stories. The latter, as Dan Miron has written, were often shrouded in an impressionistic, metaphoric mist that obscured psychological process and engagement with reality. (See: "Facing the Father: Renewal and Power in the Work of Aharon Appelfeld," [Hebrew], *Yediote Ahronot*, June 2, 1978, Literary Supplement, p. 1.)
24. See, for example, the story "Bertha," in *Hebrew Short Stories*, Vol. II, ed. S. Y. Penueli and A. Ukhmani (Tel Aviv, 1965).

25. *Mikhvat haor*, p. 31. All translations from this novel are mine.
26. *Masot beguf rishon*, p. 36.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
28. *Mikhvat haor*, p. 33.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
30. This was the period of the Yishuv and the young state which, as Gershon Shaked writes, was epitomized in a "code of behavior . . . and a set of values above life and death. This generation [of writers] . . . has no significant affinity . . . to the Jewish past and the Diaspora experience, all these were exchanged for myth . . . The collective novel is a fitting expression for a society whose gaze is directed at the collective and not the individual." ("First Person Plural—Literature of the 1948 Generation," *Jerusalem Quarterly* no. 22 [Winter 1982] pp. 111, 112).
31. *A Guest for the Night*, trans. Misha Louvish (New York, 1968), p. 463. Again, however, it should be stressed that for Agnon, as for Kovner, the realm of memory is not enclosed within the bounds of the self but often extends to encompass collective experience.
32. *Remembrance of Things Past*, trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff (New York, 1934), Vol. I, pp. 34, 36.
33. There is, of course, a sensory-auditory quality to the verbal mechanism, to memory which is almost invariably triggered by the *spoken* word; nevertheless, the process of recovery and the mode of retrieval focus on the associative content of language as the *primary* medium. The father in both novels is a writer whose identity is embodied in his language, and it is through language that the struggle of the son manifests itself.
34. *Mikhvat haor*, p. 30.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
36. "I am exercising all the powers of memory but I cannot summon up a thing," (*Ibid.*, p. 117).
37. For a discussion of the theme of return in Holocaust literature, see my *By Words Alone*, pp. 89–95.
38. See, for example, the end of Anna Langfus' novel, *The Whole Land Brimstone*, trans. Peter Wiles (New York, 1962).
39. *The Age of Wonders*, p. 166.
40. Frederick Hoffman, *The Mortal No: Death and the Modern Imagination* (Princeton, 1964), pp. 463–64.
41. *The Age of Wonders*, p. 138.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 138. I have altered the English translation somewhat to conform with the original.
43. *Ibid.*, pp. 146, 152.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 204.

The Holocaust in Lithuania and Latvia

Yitzhak Alperovitz (ed.), *Sefer Gorzd* (The Book of Gorzd). Tel Aviv: Society in Israel, 1980. 417 pp.

Fruma Gurvitch, *Zikhronot shel rofah: im yehudei lita biyemei shoal* (The Survivor's Memories: With the Jews of Lithuania in the Holocaust). Aviv: Beit Lohamei Hagettaot and Kibbutz Hameuhad, 1981.

Gertrude Schneider, *Journey into Terror: The Story of the Riga Ghetto*. New York: Ark House, 1979. 229 pp. \$12.95

One characteristic of survivors of the East European Holocaust is the drive to perpetuate in book form the memory of those dear who were exterminated and of their own communities that were destroyed. This characteristic, very human in itself, is also of great historiographical importance. These commemorative books are often practically the sole source of information on what happened to some of the communities both during, and prior to, the Holocaust.

Books of this type, dealing with individuals (mainly memoirs) and with communities (usually called *yizkor*, memorial books), first appeared during World War II itself and have been appearing ever since. There is a constant stream in different languages and different forms. There are thousands of them, and there is as yet no end in sight. Many were published in Israel, many in America and Europe, and some in Africa and Australia. The peak from the numerical point of view seems to have been reached in the 1950's and sixties, but still many books of this kind are to be expected up to the end of the twentieth century and beyond, as long as there are still Holocaust survivors and their children alive.

Here we shall review three publications that appeared in the 1980's which differ in language and form, but all relate to the Baltic Jewish communities, to Lithuania and Latvia.

The first of these publications is a bulky volume on the typical memorial book, devoted to the small Lithuanian town of Gorzd—"its life and its ending." Gorzd—Gargzdai in Lithuanian