

Kafka and the Postmodern Divide: Hebrew and German in Aharon Appelfeld's *The Age of Wonders* (*Tor Ha-pela'ot*)

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Much recent cultural criticism has argued that postmodern culture can be diagnosed as an unworked-through period of mourning, unable to come to terms with the Holocaust and the definitive break with modernist categories that it represents.¹ Aharon Appelfeld's Hebrew novella *The Age of Wonders* (1978) portrays the story of an assimilated Jewish writer and his family in Austria before the Holocaust, and the story of his son Bruno, who returns to Austria from Jerusalem after the war in search of his past. The text's very structure seems to affirm the traditional categories of the modern/postmodern divide. Bruno's father seems to represent the formalism of modernist fiction and its paradigmatic ethnic self-denial. As the Holocaust draws near in the first half of the novella, Jewish history is truly the nightmare from which the writer, as the "father" of Bruno's apparently rootless, postmodern fate, unsuccessfully tries to awaken. "Father" (his only consistent name in the novella) constantly seeks to become an "Austrian writer," with German as his "only language" and "mother tongue," while critics constantly racialize him as a Jew and compare his writing to Kafka's "parasitism" and unhealthy Jewish style.² "Father" seems to represent classical modernism, struggling to break with the mass and enter elite culture, only to confront the question of Jewish culture in its own terms, and those of its enemies, everywhere he turns.

The novella's second half can easily be read as the postmodern Jewish fate of the Jewish writer's son. Like the protagonist of Cynthia Ozick's *The Messiah of Stockholm* (1987), Bruno in *The Age of Wonders* is an orphan who seeks to prove his filial tie to a prewar literary progenitor, and thus to ground his identity in the past. Appelfeld's protagonist returns from Jerusalem to his native Austria, wearing his national Jewish identity on his sleeve. Yet despite Bruno's secure grounding in a national homeland, he is seemingly unable to overcome his melancholy,

or separate himself from an imaginary, bifurcated construction of the Jewishness that seems to be all that is left of the European Jewish world. The Israeli discovers only “mongrel” (234) Jews who have repressed their Jewish lineage, Asian students, and Asian “midgets” (235), guest workers who are forced to perform a parody of their national cultures on stage for the German-speaking audience. The difference between the “actual” Jews, or Asians, and imaginary or hybrid forms of ethnic identity, moreover, seems to be undecidable, and nationhood and Hebrew in the novella’s second half do not seem to be enough to end Bruno’s melancholic anger toward his father’s world. The Hebrew-speaking son from Jerusalem, who cannot distinguish fictional from actual Jews on his return to his native “Knospfen,” is just as melancholic about his failed marriage in Israel and seems without any secure connection at all to the German Jewish and Yiddish-speaking past.

But *The Age of Wonders* unsettles this very distinction between “Father’s” German modernism and the postmodern predicament of the Hebrew novelist. The alternatives of a formalist German modernism, confronting but fleeing a grounded Jewish culture, and the postmodern proliferation of ethnic and national identities, where Judaism seems to become an impure, mixed performance, are instead taken into the texture of Appelfeld’s Hebrew and exploded as false alternatives. The intertext Appelfeld uses to explode this distinction between grounded and postmodern Jewish identity is the figure of Kafka, the writer whom Appelfeld himself, and most readers, see just below the surface of almost all of the crucial scenes of *The Age of Wonders*. In fact, the most “postmodern” sections of the novella’s second half uncannily resemble the bicultural allusions of Appelfeld’s Hebrew to the Kafkan themes of the first, “modernist” half, and the similarity is no accident. Both sections are rooted firmly in what Benjamin Harshav has described as the “tri or multilingual” Jewish cultural and linguistic system that flourished in creative ferment before the war.³ When the postmodern, post-Holocaust figure of Bruno returns to “Knospfen” in search of his paternity, he encounters only half-Jews, bar denizens like Suzi who are proud of their difference but afraid to announce it, with nothing but an “imaginary” connection to their tradition (234). The Hebrew of those scenes finds its source in the German modernism of Kafka’s *Castle*: the bar scenes where K. encounters Frieda, or Pepi, or other ethnically marked but indeterminate figures. Bruno’s Hebrew “patrimony,” in other words, and the source of his postmodern dilemma, is that his “predecessor” tongue is German. The figure for the postwar Hebrew speaker who goes to the diaspora in search of his origins discovers Kafka, Appelfeld’s dominant subtext, but also a figure for the hidden openness of tradition whence he comes. The novella is thus more accurately read not as Bruno’s but Appelfeld’s own belated reunion with Kafka as a figure for the multilingual Jewish literary tradition in which he writes.⁴ Appelfeld’s reunion in this novella is thus not with a “father,” but with the Kafka who represented his German writing, with its Hebrew sources, as a “new Kabbalah,” a form of Jewish writing as well.⁵

The creative brilliance of Appelfeld's *The Age of Wonders* is to show that the German writing of Kafka was already double, open to Jewish and non-Jewish languages alike, part of a Jewish literature that might have been written in German but transmits deeply Jewish linguistic as well as national concerns. The exploration of Kafka in Appelfeld's novella makes him a figure not for monolingual culture as the father's law, but for the openness of the Central European Jewish tradition, a writing that was alive to Hebrew, German, Yiddish, and other languages as well. Bruno, of course, often feels just the opposite, especially in the novella's second, postwar half. As a postmodern, post-Holocaust son, Bruno's melancholia is given the precise figure of being the son of a tradition without a father. At the end of the first half, as Bruno is about to be Bar Mitzvah, literally a son of the commandment, and a reader of the Hebrew language, the Jewish "father" abandons the son, about to speak Hebrew, for the gentile baroness in Vienna. But if the predecessor figure for Appelfeld as a "strong" postmodern writer is Kafka, the desire to mourn, or displace the scandal of a mixed modern origin—both Hebrew, and German—may be narratively compelling, but beside the novella's deeper point. Bruno's postmodern melancholia cannot mask the fact that both "Father" and son are born into one nation, yet speak the language of another. Both are transnational in crucial ways, part of a tradition—whether voiced in German, or the modern Hebrew that Bruno speaks—that was open to outside influence from the start.

The Age of Wonders' conclusion, where Bruno lifts his hand against Brum, the closet Jew who mouths anti-Semitic venom and remained in Austria after surviving the Holocaust, can of course be understood in simpler Zionist terms. As the representative of an Israeli generation looking back at the diaspora, Bruno seems to vent the rage of Israeli sons against their weak modernist fathers who hailed from German-speaking lands but deserted their Hebrew sons. But Appelfeld's critical prose defines Kafka's writing as a different kind of paternal legacy, not a figure swamped in anxiety or self-denial but the author of a German prose that was underwritten, as in a palimpsest, by its Hebrew concerns. Appelfeld explained his attraction to Kafka to Philip Roth by pointing out the dual linguistic depth Kafka's discovered in the apparently thin Jewish culture he received:

The marvelous thing is that the barrenness brought [Kafka] not to self-denial or self-hatred but rather to a kind of tense curiosity about every Jewish phenomenon, especially the Jews of Eastern Europe, the Yiddish language, the Yiddish theatre, Hasidism, Zionism, and even the idea of moving to Mandate Palestine. This is the Kafka of his journals, which are no less gripping than his works. I found a palpable embodiment of Kafka's Jewish involvement in his Hebrew handwriting, for he had studied Hebrew and knew it. His handwriting is clear and amazingly beautiful, showing his effort and concentration as in his German handwriting, but his Hebrew handwriting has an additional aura of love for the isolated letter.⁶

In this description that refers to literature as much as life, Kafka's texts are tellingly imagined as a kind of handwriting, penned by an author who could write German and Hebrew with equal care. Both, Appelfeld suggests, display the con-

centration that marks an authentic identity, but the “amazingly beautiful” writing for Appelfeld, the Hebrew subtext, may be invisible to the reader who can see only “self-hatred” in the Jewish writer composing left to right in German words. Yet like many bilingual or bicultural individuals, Appelfeld points out, Kafka’s real love is *beneath*, but also contained within, the actual language he most often used and spoke. That German itself, he insists, must be understood as open to the Hebrew. And the Hebrew in Kafka’s own period—when both he and S. Y. Agnon lived in Berlin—was likewise open to the concerns of German, Yiddish, and the national questions the choice of Hebrew, or German, or Yiddish, inevitably had to raise.⁷ With its postmodern “father” figure as Kafka, in other words, Appelfeld’s *The Age of Wonders* is firmly grounded in a modernist writing that is neither simply alienated, anxious, assimilated, or a self-hating convert to the German tongue. Instead, the Bruno who returns to Austria, spurred by a “a revival of interest in his father’s work” (208), can be shown to have discovered in the novella’s modern, pre-Holocaust section the same continuum of “postmodern” concerns with language, national culture, and transnational identification that dog him after the war.

The reading of *The Age of Wonders* that follows will treat Appelfeld’s text with the same attention to the “isolated letter” that he brings to our attention in Kafka’s writing, a focus that both Kafka’s love of Hebrew and Appelfeld’s love for the German-Jewish tradition deserve. Many of the overt themes of Appelfeld’s novella are drawn from Kafka’s *Das Schloss*, referring to scenes in Kafka’s work that were openly legible in Kafka’s own period to his Jewish readers as treatments of an interlingual, bicultural Jewish identity, as I have argued elsewhere.⁸ K.’s concern with the boundaries of the culture of “small peoples,” Pepi as an open figure for intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews, and the political anxieties that cultural mixture provoke, all find their counterparts in Appelfeld’s text. These not-so-hidden motifs in *The Age of Wonders* speak more broadly to the roots that the postwar Hebrew novel has increasingly struck in its non-Hebrew modern predecessors.⁹ Modern Jewish writing, in other words, whether in Kafka’s German or Appelfeld’s Hebrew, shares binational and interlinguistic concerns that span the Holocaust and break the seemingly insuperable modern/postmodern divide that serves as the armature of Appelfeld’s text. Melancholy blockage, a crisis of memory, or an impossibly shattered identity are indeed part of the heritage of Holocaust writing as a genre of postmodern fiction. But the multilingual, German and Yiddish roots of Appelfeld’s Hebrew fiction also show us an interlingual Jewish tradition that existed before the Holocaust and continues as part of Israeli prose. Kafka’s presence in *The Age of Wonders* certainly invokes a model of the modern/postmodern divide, symbolized by the work’s bifurcated halves, and the divide between the modern writer “Father” and his son. But the true wonder of Appelfeld’s most Kafka-centered text to date is how similar Appelfeld’s sense of the multilingual heritage of the postmodern writer-figure truly is to the very Jewish tradition that Kafka’s German prose explores.

Amalia's Secret: The Hidden Openness of Tradition

As Yigael Schwartz aptly notes, the crises of Bruno as autonomous individual in *The Age of Wonders* are also crises of tradition. "Father's" abandonment of the Jewish family on the eve of Bruno's Bar Mitzvah and the Holocaust are both an act of betrayal of his tribe and the Hebrew his son is about to pronounce.¹⁰ Bruno's postmodern return to Knospfen, after the textual ellipsis that marks the Holocaust here, as in most of Appelfeld's texts, seems determined by this betrayal of Hebrew, even overdetermined by it in a compulsive, Oedipal sense. The action culminates at a crossroads, where Bruno seizes the elderly Brum by the coat and bloodies his face by shoving him to the ground. A Jew who converted and managed to survive, Brum denies any knowledge of responsibility for what happened to the Jews of his town. He is in this sense also a paternal stand-in for Bruno, now of Jerusalem, who vents his anger at his father for abandoning him on the eve of his Bar Mitzvah in Knospfen, and thus for abandoning the Hebrew that he now fluently speaks. Appelfeld gives this "sickness of tradition," as Walter Benjamin called it in his essay on Kafka, a different name in the first half of the novella, a name taken from Kafka's work itself.¹¹ Father's ill "stepmother" bears the name of Kafka's heroine in *Das Schloss*. Amalia, in Kafka's novel, is the nationalistic figure who, unlike "Father," refuses to abandon her family, and in Appelfeld's telling emphasis, this Amalia refuses to abandon her roots—her children who are intermarried—in both gentile and Jewish national traditions. Unlike Bruno's Uncle Salo in the *Age of Wonders*, Kafka's Amalia refuses the bed-hopping that in Kafka's novel symbolizes intermarriage. In Max Brod's contemporary work, the kind of bed-hopping Kafka portrayed was publicly debated in Prague as a symbol for scandalous bi-nationality, a disloyalty to one's own tribe and a submission to, and loss of identity in, another.¹²

Amalia, then, becomes a figure not of tradition's abandonment, but its cultural nexus. Though she rails against her children's intermarriage in *The Age of Wonders*, the Hebrew recollection of her as a figure from Kafka's German-language text serves as a reminder that German was already a source of Jewish cultural identity, not a source of Jewish pollution, but of Hebrew's staying power. Appelfeld's Hebrew, in other words, uses the figure of Amalia to remind his readers not of Jewish weakness in the German-speaking diaspora, but to recall the philological and historical fact that Kafka's writing, like his two forms of penmanship Appelfeld reads, could never be separated from Hebrew identification and strength. Early on in Kafka interpretation, the significance of Amalia's name in Hebrew ("labor") was pointed out by Heinz Politzer, who developed his Kafka interpretation after the war in Jerusalem, working on Kafka's manuscripts with Max Brod.¹³ Even earlier, Franz Rosenzweig would write to a friend that the German style of Kafka's *Schloss* reminded him, before all else, of the Hebrew Bible he was translating with Martin Buber, a figure who is a friend of "Father's" in Appelfeld's text.¹⁴ Initially, Amalia's voice is described in Appelfeld's text as "asur," or imprisoned, but a word that also carries the meaning

of “taboo” in modern Hebrew. Hers is the Jewish voice that speaks despite the imprisoning “taboo” that it not intermarry with things German, and speaks all the more powerfully for that. The fact that bicultural identity is a source of Jewish strength is beautifully represented in the figure of Amalia’s voice, even if “Father,” who worships Kafka’s “pure” Austrian style, and “Mother,” who prepares Bruno for his Bar Mitzvah, cannot name it as the hidden power of the tradition Bruno joins.¹⁵ For “although they never mentioned Amalia’s name, it seemed that her imprisoned [*asur*] voice was beating between the double windows, and that the reflection of her face would not disappear in winter,” even in the disaster to come.¹⁶

The “double-windows” of Hebrew and Kafka’s German provide Appelfeld with a prism that refracts and transforms the idea of tradition in *The Age of Wonders*. The voice that “would not disappear” represented in Amalia is neither wholly theological, nor literary-historical: her appearance refers us back to “Father’s” shtetl origins (90), whose Jewish habits she preserves, but also to Appelfeld’s introjection of Kafka as his German literary predecessor-figure, German being Appelfeld’s native tongue. The marginal stepmother, in other words, represents the central doubleness of the tradition of modern Jewish writing and culture that Appelfeld inherits and defends. Kafka was, Appelfeld has said, the writer who spoke to him in the language of his parents’ assimilated world.¹⁷ The omnipresence of Kafka in *The Age of Wonders* thus indicates a certain wrestling with origins, very much after Harold Bloom’s pattern of the “strong” literary predecessor introjected by the successor text.¹⁸ The figure of Amalia does not defy as much as open up this narrative, exposing the productive difference that lies at the heart of Appelfeld’s text. “Father” himself, and the vision of Kafka as the “pure” Austrian/German tradition that he represents, may be disfigured as self-hating, blind, and weak. But this disfigured origin is also the preserver of Amalia, a woman who represents a productive, bicultural identity, and who sustains a powerful vision of cultural plurality that hails from Kafka, the “father” text itself.

This is why Amalia’s bicultural Jewish significance seems marginal in *The Age of Wonders* as soon as “Father’s” disfigured reading of Kafka begins to take hold.¹⁹ For this is also the period when his monolingual obsession champions a modernism disavowing any connection with Jewish culture. He also despises the Eastern Jews who start appearing at the train station—hardly a Kafkan posture—and when critics attack his work in a gradually escalating series of assaults as the epitome of the Jewish “decadence,” he begins to denounce the Jews himself (108).²⁰ Father’s love for Kafka as a pure writer of German, in other words, tries to shut out very bicultural identity that his critics perceive and decry, a self-denial that can only appear as a disaster to Bruno, his Israeli, Hebrew-speaking son. Thus when Bruno is melancholic and anxious in the novella’s second half, his actions are implicitly claiming that this Hebrew, rejected by the father on the eve of the Holocaust, is the stronger, superior, more “original” Jewish language—the stronger tradition—than his father’s Kafkan prose. The problem of the anxiety of influence is thus posed for Bruno in German/Hebrew terms. The choice between

German—native, but anti-Jewish—and Hebrew, the original language of the Jews, promising a new beginning, but paradoxically secondary to “Father’s” tradition—seems to be a zero-sum game.

Classic Zionist formulations of the meaning of Hebrew from the “State Generation,” or the “Dor Ha-Medinah,” often covered up such anxiousness in the heroic narrative of a new beginning. Yudka’s famous rejection of the diaspora fathers, in Haim Hazzaz’s “The Sermon,” declared that he was “opposed to Jewish history.”²¹ The anxiety implicit in this model of the transmission of Jewish tradition has produced anxiousness in interpreters of Appelfeld as well, worried about this hostility to the fathers, a view voiced especially powerfully in reaction to Appelfeld’s earlier novel about German-speaking Jews, *Badenheim, 'Ir Nofesh* (Badenheim 1939). One critic recently placed that novel at the center of a book-length attack on ideologically controlled, Zionist fiction, decrying its supposedly “triumphalist, unidirectional view of history,” and allegedly ideologically Hebrew attack on the German-speaking Jewish fathers of the diaspora.²²

No such Hebrew-German divide, however, informs Appelfeld’s deeper vision of his tradition, and especially not in *The Age of Wonders*. Appelfeld’s Kafkan intertext gives his Hebrew precisely the opposite effect and rests on a different concept of literary tradition than this all-or-nothing game between German-speaking, diaspora fathers and their Hebrew-speaking sons. Kafka’s own staking out of his tradition, of course—given his deep investment in Hebrew, not to mention Yiddish—militates against that view. So does the Hebrew literature that followed the “State Generation” in Israel, writers who returned to the non-Hebrew traditions that lay beneath the Zionist self.²³ *The Age of Wonders* subtly rewrites the all-or-nothing model of cultural identity, though “Father’s” view of tradition often seems to control the text. Amalia therefore appears through his eyes as a kind of Jewish harridan, a blind but authoritarian enforcer of a tradition with no place in the modern world, carried about in an ancient vessel that seems both venerated and obsolete. Amalia’s sick-bed, we are told, is moved about as if it were “reminiscent of some ancient ritual object” (43). Amalia’s Jewish tradition is thus perceived by “Father” as vacuous, “vengeful” and “harsh”: She rails against her intermarried daughters, and because blind, refuses to eat anything but greens, clearly, lest she mix meat and milk, and thus touch the impure.

Yet if Amalia appears to condemn intermarriage, the fact that “her daughters had married gentiles” (42), such cultural mixture is also the novella’s figure for her staying power, the very force that keeps her alive. “God would have no mercy on apostates,” Amalia declared, repeating her daughters’ names as a litany: “God would not forgive them. How could he possibly forgive them? And now she could not die because of them” (48). Amalia’s perseverance, moreover, depends not on her symbolic rejection of things German, or on the linguistic impurity symbolized by her daughters, but on the hidden openness and modernity of tradition symbolized in the very “sickbed” on which she lies. Though carried by “Father” as something “ancient,” Amalia’s bed is a surprisingly modern construction, put together from pieces, rather than some pure, authentic whole. For

the “old-fashioned chest with four carved table legs stuck to its corners” was, like all tradition, a construction put together from disparate elements, “and the work was so slipshod you could see the joints at a glance” (43). Never pure from the start, the venerated “ritual object” of Jewish tradition that Appelfeld presents us with in *Amalia* is, like her family itself, composed of elements it appears to reject. And like tradition itself, or any good piece of construction, *Amalia*’s “original” tradition keeps its strength not in spite of, but because of the sutures and joints that link its different parts, though no one ever wishes to expose them to view. It is thus no accident in Appelfeld’s novella that “Stark,” the half-Jewish sculptor of *The Age of Wonders*, who returns to a pure Judaism just before the Holocaust and undergoes a belated circumcision, becomes a weak and marginal figure, while the “sick” figure of *Amalia*, by contrast, refusing to abandon her apostate children, remains a strong presence whenever she appears in the text.

Amalia’s bed signals Appelfeld’s careful introjection, and transformation, of the *Amalia* of Kafka’s *Schloss*, the woman who refused to sleep with the family’s enemy. In sexually symbolic terms, if Kafka’s *Amalia* does stand for a powerful and justifiable assertion of national or linguistic independence, Appelfeld’s strong re-reading of her significance, and deeper reading of Kafka as a whole, is that tradition itself is already highly plural. The bed as symbolic medium is a reminder of the many languages that “old-fashioned” Jews acquired, like the middle-high German they learned to speak, transformed, printed in Hebrew letters, infused with their own vision and language(s), and which became the European Jewish mother-tongue (*mamaloshn*). *Amalia* may lament this symbolic promiscuity, and “Father,” as another element of Appelfeld’s linguistic heritage, may respond to *Amalia*’s “harsh judgment” by returning her to the sanitarium and trying to “cover up our disgrace” (49). Appelfeld’s Hebrew, however, has claimed Kafka’s diaspora, non-Hebrew inheritance—“Father’s” writing, as it were—as the source of a Hebrew tradition speaking across the abyss separating the novella’s pre-Holocaust, diaspora section, from its second post-Holocaust return, seen largely from Bruno’s Israeli perspective, “Many Years Later when Everything Was Over.”

That Hebrew-German abyss seems less uncrossable, moreover, once the close bond between Appelfeld’s model of literary tradition as interlingual, and Kafka’s own concept of Jewish tradition and writing, are taken seriously. In returning so often to Kafka, *The Age of Wonders* also looks below “Father’s” either/or interpretation of Kafka and the German-Jewish tradition that seems to dominate his work. The text’s anguish over Bruno’s German or Hebrew legacy, and *Amalia*’s alternative model of a dual tradition, would be unthinkable without referring to Kafka’s reflection on the anguish of cultural paternity, “Die Sorge des Hausvaters,” or “The Cares of a House-Father,” literally construed. Kafka published his own reflection on the problem of Jewish cultural paternity in the Prague Zionist journal *Selbstwehr*, in its Chanukah issue of 19 December 1919. In Kafka’s text as in *The Age of Wonders*, the concern is with family as a metaphor for the transmission of Jewish tradition, and by symbolic extension, language and nationhood.

The predecessor figure for Amalia's bed, that vessel of "ancient veneration," but which has also given rise to apostasy, is Kafka's "Odradek," another hybrid vision of tradition. Like the bed of Appelfeld's text, "Odradek" becomes the object of a father's concern, especially a father who hopes to continue his "house," or in the national sense of the Hebrew Bible, his nation (Beit Yisrael).

Tradition, Kafka suggests through the figure of Odradek, despite the "Hausvater's" anxieties, is strong precisely because it is composed of different strands. Some say the name itself "stamme aus dem Slawischen"; others insist "es stamme aus dem Deutschen, vom Slawischen sei es nur beeinflusst."²⁴ Like Central European Jewry, influenced by both the Slavic (*Ostjuden*) and the German (assimilated German Jews), Odradek, despite being "zerbrochen," sustains his national character through all his travails. For though he is a "Spule" or spool for these various cultural strands "von verschiedenster Art und Farbe" that he has collected along his way, his center takes the shape of a "Stern." And "einer der Ausstrahlungen" of that Star is quite visible, especially to the readers of a Zionist journal. This assemblage of cultural strands is "in seiner Art abgeschlossen," but at the same time open to new additions, at once perfectly closed and finished, yet open to new strands and views.²⁵ Such a tradition is by definition evanescent and sometimes seems to have vanished: Odradek is at times not to be seen for months, and even appears to have moved, or assimilated himself into other houses ("Manchmal ist er monatenlang nicht zu sehen; da ist er wohl in andere Häuser übersiedelt"). But he always returns with the utmost loyalty to the people he remembers: "doch kehrt er dann unweigerlich wieder in unser Haus zurück." Though the cultural fathers constantly worry about his disappearance—"Can he possibly die?" ("Kann er denn Sterben?")—he is right there at the feet of future generations, of the House's children and its children's children ("vor den Füßen meiner Kinder und Kindeskinde"), trailing his different threads behind. The fact that Kafka published this piece in *Selbstwehr* reminds us how compatible Kafka's sense of critique was to Hebrew and Zionist commitments, and how a multilingual concept of tradition and Zionism could coincide. Not the least important quest of *The Age of Wonders*, in its examination of Bruno's House, is its quest, shared by other Israeli novelists, for a Hebrew culture that found one of its sources in speakers of the German tongue.

Intersections: Appelfeld's Hebrew and its Traditions

Appelfeld defined his literary lineage in Hebrew as founded in the Jerusalem he lived in as a refugee from Czernowitz, describing his walks with the Hebrew novelist S. Y. Agnon. "I first met Agnon after arriving in Palestine . . . in 1946," Appelfeld recalls, describing their meeting as if it were an ordinary encounter with the Hebrew language, and symbolically, with language per se.²⁶ Elsewhere, in another English publication, an interview with Philip Roth, Appelfeld reinforces that sense of finding his language, and eventually his literary language and tradition, for the first time. Though "my mother tongue was Ger-

man," he recalls, and "my grandparents spoke Yiddish," the two years Appelfeld "spent wandering all over Europe" as a child after escaping from the camp at Transnistria, from 1944 to 1946, seemed to leave him bereft of any native tongue at all. Appelfeld recalls that when he arrived in Israel as a Holocaust survivor, his "head was full of tongues," but fundamentally, in this version of his literary origins, "the truth of the matter [was] that I had no language."²⁷

When Appelfeld encounters Agnon again in 1951, this rebirth into Hebrew takes on a somewhat different hue. Agnon, to be sure, as one of the founders of modern Hebrew literature, encourages Appelfeld in a love of Hebrew literature that will help him recover his repressed Jewish origins and rebuild his sense of self. "Every walk" with the great author, Appelfeld movingly recalls, "became an enchanted chapter for me, chapters of Jewish history, Jewish literature, Jewish memory."²⁸ But Appelfeld, and Agnon himself, disenchant the notion that Hebrew alone, without diaspora languages such as German, would be the only "golden key," as a novel of Agnon's puts it, to the Jewish tradition that both are committed to restore. In a Hebrew interview with Shmuel Schneider published in 1982, Appelfeld defines his originary encounter with his tradition not in his meeting with Agnon, but in his wanderings and borrowings from the library of the Hebrew University library on Mt. Scopus, in Jerusalem, where other tongues play a crucial role. There, Appelfeld reports, his "intellectual personality" that would blossom into the prose of a major Hebrew writer was built, but not quite from a speechless state. For he knew "how to read a little bit of German, and Yiddish," and it was Yiddish that "overpowered" him.²⁹ And the same Agnon, in a different account of Appelfeld's literary origins, although impressing on him his "great obligation" to become a "Hebrew writer," insisted that Appelfeld write about "your town," Czernowitz, one of the most multilingual cities of Jewish Europe.³⁰

The modern Hebrew language that Appelfeld learned in Israel, then, served a precisely double function for him, as he says explicitly to Philip Roth. On the one hand, Hebrew meant escape from the diaspora, from its languages, its suffering, and in part, despite its national revival of Jewish history and tradition, escape from aspects of the Jewish past, including the varied linguistic traditions in which that tradition was built. "Like most kids who came to this [Israel] country as Holocaust survivors," Appelfeld recalls, "I wanted to run away from my memories. What didn't we do to change, to be tall, blond, and strong, to be *goyim*, with all the outer trappings. The Hebrew language sounded like a gentile language to us, which is perhaps why we fell in love with it so easily." But the Hebrew that promised escape from a suffering diaspora, and its "sickness," weakness, and blindness, was also a means of secretly returning to what had to be repressed in the founding of the Hebrew nation, and self: the presence of "other" languages from the past. The language that promised the survivors "self-forgetfulness" in the national narrative of "heroism," Appelfeld reports, "tricked me," and "brought me, against my will, to the most secret storehouses of Judaism." But that Judaism is anything but fixed in a self-enclosed Hebrew tradition, for Appelfeld describes his acquisition of the language as a dialectic of exclusion and

inclusion. For the Holocaust survivor, Appelfeld explains, Hebrew represented a kind of merger with the non-Jewish world, with the “*goyim*”—the normalization promised by classic Zionist thought, that promised to leave the diaspora and its languages behind—while it simultaneously accomplished the “trick” of including a diaspora world.³¹

Despite his obsessive quest to become a pure Austrian writer, the figure of “Father” in *The Age of Wonders* embodies this same dialectic of tradition that Appelfeld cites. In one sense a monolithic and repressively monolingual figure hostile to his people’s Jewish languages, “Father” is also the signpost directing us elsewhere, toward the fruitfully divided “buds,” or “Knospen,” of the Hebrew literary inheritance itself. His contradictory actions serve to remind the Hebrew reader of how deep the reception and transformation of the German-Jewish tradition has been in modern Hebrew narrative from Agon on.³² Thus when “Father” goes off to meet Martin Buber in *The Age of Wonders*, he seems to be looking for a “way out” from his monolingual German obsession and Jewish self-denial, to borrow the phrase from the piece Kafka published in Buber’s journal *Der Jude* in 1917.³³ As Bruno, the narrator, puts it: “They were always talking about Jews at home, but always with a kind of grimace. And sometimes in an outburst, ‘You can’t deny it, we too are Jews. Ever since Father had discovered Martin Buber, this little disgrace had found a certain if incomplete remedy. Father had even gone off to Frankfurt to meet Buber’” (62). Father, to be sure, betrayed this bilingual and bicultural hope, eventually treating Buber’s efforts as a mark of shame instead of pride. But Appelfeld takes care in his interview with Shmuel Schneider to let his contemporary Hebrew readers know where he stands, reminding them of the courses he took with Buber at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.³⁴ The Hebrew writer, this intersection suggests, pursues not “pure” Hebrew, but a bilingual, mixed tradition, one that his forebears sometimes denied. “Father’s” disgrace, though not understood by Bruno, becomes the tradition taken up by Appelfeld, the tradition’s figurative son.

Buber, moreover, is a symbol of the diaspora origins of modern Hebrew culture in other Israeli literature as well. The same Buber who would assume a professorship at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, while continuing to translate the Bible into German, figures prominently as a symbol of Hebrew’s mixed lineage in another crucial Israeli work, Amos Oz’s *The Hill of Evil Counsel* (*Har Haetza Hara’a*, 1974). “Father” in Oz’s novella—as he is most often called—is Hans Kipnis, a figure for Hebrew’s literary paternity as well. As a native speaker of German who learns Hebrew and settles in Palestine, Oz’s “Father” represents the Hebrew road not taken by the “Father” of Appelfeld’s later text. For unlike Bruno’s “Father” who runs away with the Baroness on the eve of the Holocaust, Oz’s Hans Kipnis pursues the Zionist dream of agriculture, and Hebrew, like a pure Hebrew type—in “biblical sandals,” and “khaki shorts” (39)—in the nascent state.

Yet both fathers are linked in the way the vision of Hebrew tradition conveyed in each novella undermines their monolingual quests. Bruno’s father seeks to be-

come a pure Austrian writer, only to be constantly reminded of how Kafkan and how Jewish his writing actually is. Oz's father figure seeks a new and pure, modern Jewish and Hebrew self in the land of Israel, only to confront his wife's symbolic lust for things gentile, and the forgetfulness and self-repression that is the price of his Hebrew ideal. Both Appelfeld and Oz are thus Hebrew novelists who mock their literary "fathers," but from different ends of the German-Hebrew divide, and with a son's critical love, not simply for loving German too much, as Bruno's "Father" does, or for loving Zionism too fully, the fault that blinds Oz's Zionist "father" to his Jewish wife's longings for Poland, its poetry, and the rest of the gentile world. Literary "fathers" are mocked in these Israeli novellas not for occupying a "Zionist" or a "diaspora" extreme, but for imagining that gentile and Jewish cultural traditions could ever cancel the process of mutual influence constitutive of tradition, and of *Hillel*, the novella's figure for the continuation of tradition itself.

Oz's text, like *The Age of Wonders* that will allude to it four years later, makes the point through Buber and Agnon, whom "Father" meets in "Zichel's," a Jerusalem café. Both Buber, the eminent representative of the German Jewish tradition, and Agnon, the greatest living Hebrew writer, are in "disagreement" when "Father" and Ruth approach. And both make "gallant" advances to Ruth, the mother of Hillel, the novella's Hebrew native speaker born in the land of Israel, and Jerusalem at that: For what is symbolically at issue in the scene is which course their progeny, the native speaker of the Hebrew language, will pursue. Ruth, however, as the plot unfolds, is attracted to both sides of the tradition that splits the novella in half: to what is symbolically German and diaspora-centered, and what is Hebrew, and the representatives she meets in the Jerusalem café. Her attraction to both of those possibilities is sexualized and often derided in the novella, when she runs off with the British officer and leaves her child in the end. But the fact that the symbolic "mother" of the new Hebrew language is attracted both to "gentile" languages, and to the Hebrew "father"—and the fact that that dual legacy is handed down to her son—represents the most profound and redemptive level of Oz's text.³⁵

The Age of Wonders' most powerful image of that dual legacy remains Kafka's Amalia, transported to Appelfeld's postmodern Hebrew text. For "Father's" blind stepmother is constantly prescient in her grasp of tradition. She knows, for instance, when Jews are present, even when the Jews' own denial blinds them to their own tribal membership, and their share in its imminent fate (44). But her sense of tradition also listens for different sounds, and from the margins of the text, unsettles "Father's" all-or-nothing game of German or Jew. Amalia has a keen ear for the intersection of cultural voices and thus appreciates the sounds of a flock of birds, sure that those creatures "making a sound inside of her head at night. . . were not local, but from far away." Everyone is sure she suffers from "the hallucinations of blindness," for "Father" tells her with certainty that they are simply local creatures making their way, or migrating at best. His answer, of course, is a projection of his own conviction: His "Austrian" status, he is sure,

will protect him, for the Jews are not a different people, from far away, but local, as far as "Father" is concerned.

All the family is therefore stunned the next day when "a large flock of birds appeared in the sky, and none of us," including the local villager, "was able to identify them" (47). The uncertainty represented beautifully by Appelfeld here is whether the creatures are native or not, belonging here or elsewhere. In a larger sense, this is the question that has dogged Appelfeld's interpreters in their attempts to categorize his ideology as a Hebrew novelist, and hence his attitude toward diaspora Jews. Is he a doctrinaire, ideological Zionist, imposing his "foregone conclusions" after the fact, as Michael André Bernstein and others have argued, implying that Amalia's family should have known it was time to go elsewhere, and can only be blamed for having failed to act? Or is he, as Alan Mintz describes him, instead to be seen as one of first Israeli novelists who, by writing about the Holocaust, was able open up nationalistic Hebrew fiction to diaspora protagonists and their concerns?³⁶

My point throughout this essay has been to show that Appelfeld's vision of his own tradition as a Hebrew novelist simply does not mesh with such bifurcated alternatives. Amalia's "birds" can, of course, stand for the *Anschluss*, and the blindness of an assimilated family to the destruction to come. But the deeper reading of these non-native birds asks us to think of them as symbols of tradition, in a more general and open sense. The sounds Amalia hears are "not local," but they are nonetheless quite familiar to her, challenging the distinction between sounds that are native and those that hail from far away: "[S]he spoke confidently, as if she had firsthand knowledge." By suggesting that the distant and foreign is also native and familiar to her, Amalia announces a radically open truth about tradition from a seemingly conservative position in Appelfeld's text. In fact, those elements of tradition that are often considered "local," or strictly "native" knowledge, have indeed often been derived from elsewhere, or borrowed from "different" cultures that appear radically opposed. Recognizing this truth pleases Amalia immensely, and hearing her insight validated brings her back to life: "[E]ven the landlady, a native of the village, did not know [the birds], and when Father told Amalia, the two slits of her eyes opened momentarily, as if smiling, and closed again" (47). In the sounds of the birds, Amalia recognizes a language that is strange, distant, foreign, yet at the same time recognizable to her as her own. And in the very same image, without diminishing the dignity of Amalia's Jewish tradition, the dark omen of the birds is a reminder—as Appelfeld's allusion to the anti-Jewish hatred of the villagers—that this vision has not always been shared. For it is only when this difference within tradition, *within* the "native" self, needs to be denied that a nation or culture tries to eradicate the "foreign" within its midst.

Appelfeld's Hebrew, with its heavy debt to Kafka's German, reminds us that a native language always comes from elsewhere, not from a fiction of pure origins, or a nationalistic narrative of roots, and that tradition sacrifices none of its integrity for that. Indeed, the ability to recognize difference within a national tra-

dition makes it possible for differences between national literatures to become a source of fruitful exchange. Language is always on the move like tradition itself, claiming to define itself against “other” cultures that it actually shares, never simply the burden of “fathers” who try to set, or to escape its bounds.³⁷ His tradition, then, could be said to be precisely that of his native Czernowitz, where Jewish national identity strengthened itself, as Nathan Birnbaum put it, through its contact with different tongues.³⁸ Threatening to some, recognizable to others, Appelfeld’s beautiful narrative voice in Hebrew, owing so much of its vitality to Kafka’s German, sounds precisely like Amalia’s birds: like a voice that is both deeply at home and from far away.

Bruno’s postmodern melancholia at the end of *The Age of Wonders* could be understood as a displacement of his anger at the murder of this model of tradition. The novella never blames Bruno for his depression, nor his misplaced anger at times, having returned, as he has, to the German-speaking ground where any hope was exterminated that traditions that were different, but open to one another, might thrive. Bruno’s “suppressed hostility” (209) towards “the Jew” that he meets on the train upon his postwar return is thus of a piece with his anger toward his father: “the disgrace he had not dared to touch, seething silently all this years like pus inside a wound” (209). Both of these paternal figures provoke Bruno to recall failed attempts to span the Jewish/German divide. The man in “the black skullcap” tells Bruno that he betrayed Israel in both a biblical and Zionist sense, having sold his Jewish birthright for a mess of “pottage” by choosing “business” in German-speaking Austria instead of Hebrew and Palestine in 1948: “[M]y friends were better men than I. They chose labor.’ He said the last sentence clearly, choosing his words, and perhaps trying to force Bruno into a reaction” (180). “Father” too seems to represent the failure of a dual tradition: “[T]hey said he had died half-mad in Theresienstadt, and that before he died he had tried to convert to Christianity” (209). But another “rumor” places father symbolically closer to Hebrew, Yiddish, and its traditions, “somewhere near Minsk, where he had been seen a number of times in the slaughterhouse.” The difference between these rumored deaths of “Father,” whose “writing” (209) spurs Bruno’s journey home in the first place, leaves this split cultural identification unresolved. But Bruno’s antipathy toward both the “skullcap” and his German-speaking father only points out the depth of his cathexis with this dual tradition, expressed in his anger at “father” figures who were not strong enough to keep it alive.

Bruno’s “wound” (209) toward the end of *The Age of Wonders* is thus the scar of unresolved hostility toward a writer who was unwilling or unable to side with Jewish culture against the increasingly violent German culture he admires. In familial terms, “father” is either unable or finally unwilling to save his own Jewish family, and Schwartz is right to point out the parallelism with Bruno that is involved.³⁹ But in a deeper sense, Bruno is able to move beyond his Israeli “shame” that his father apparently chose the “literary salon” of the Baroness (169) over his Jewish flesh and blood in the end. For “this wretched shame,” as the novella

begins to draw to a close, “was no longer hatred, but a kind of distance, and even wonder” (209).⁴⁰ This reference to the novella’s title thus strongly suggests that Bruno’s melancholia and anger are neither *The Age of Wonders*’ first, nor its final word. “Father,” to be sure, abandoned his family, for the “Baroness von Drück,” or the gentile *pressure* to leave his Jewishness behind. But the deeper, bicultural hope contained in the “broken echo” (209) of “father’s” literary endeavors remains, both for Bruno and a much more accepting Aharon Appelfeld, a wonder to behold.⁴¹

“Father’s” failure in *The Age of Wonders* paradoxically reminds us of a living legacy that emerged from towns like “Knospfen” in Central Europe: the aspiration to live in the language of “others,” without losing, but in fact strengthening, one’s own. This was also the vision held by another native of Czernowitz, Paul Celan, a vision of tradition as a migratory creature, much like Amalia’s birds: the notion that a national culture can contain other languages, without losing its integrity or national force.⁴² In this vision of Jewish as well as other national traditions, internal difference becomes a source of nation’s vitality and health. Such cultural strength, Celan suggests in one of his poems, “Es ist alles anders,” could only be captured by letting the idea of a monolingual national tradition go. That is, by accepting the fact that language, like any national tradition, is always different from the geographic, linguistic, or historical centeredness and continuity it claims. Such cultural strength, Celan’s “Es ist alles anders” (“Everything’s Different”) reminds us, can be captured only by shattering its German Wintermärchen—as his nod to Heine puts it—and by accepting the idea of national tradition that is strengthened, not weakened, by the internal differences it allows to speak. “Wie heisst es, dein Land,” Celan asks, “hinterm Berg, hinterm Jahr?/ Ich weiss, wie es heisst./ Wie das Wintermärchen . . . /es wandert überall hin, wie die Sprache,/ wirf sie weg, wirf sie weg,/dann hast du sie wieder . . .”⁴³

Bruno’s blow against Brum similarly takes place on the ground of hidden cultural crossings and does not represent a “crossroads” (200) in any nationalistic sense. For Bruno meets Brum earlier not at “Graben Lane,” the site of the symbolically “dead” diaspora culture that he seems to despise, but at an ignored site of cultural crossing that Bruno prizes above all. This is “the abandoned hill, as they called it,” where “Father” had sat and talked with the living representatives of German-Jewish literary tradition itself: “[T]o this place his father had brought Stefan Zweig, Jakob Wassermann, and Max Brod” (256). Brum himself despises all hint of these figures of cultural difference—Wasserman was author of *Mein Weg als Deutscher und Jude* (1921)—and vents his spite on the women of the town (255), excoriating precisely the “mongrels” to whom the Israeli son is drawn. And Bruno discovers something valuable, even something irreplaceable at this site where Jews spoke the German tongue: “[F]or a moment [Bruno] stood there feeling dizzy, as if he were about to bend down and pick up precious objects scattered all over the ground” (256). The anger in this scene can neither cover up Bruno’s love for this “wonderful and unique” place, hide its rich linguistic and literary plurality, nor obscure the fact that “precious” treasures are

waiting to be collected by this Hebrew speaker in the diaspora world. For like birds Amalia listens for, the multiplicity and migration of languages they stand for, and the rustling of their treasures and “wonders” on the ground, these are the sounds, when it “was very quiet” (256), that Appelfeld’s text most acutely hears.

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NOTES

1. Alain Finkielkraut’s foundational text, published after *The Age of Wonders* (1978), made this equation between a postmodern, image-centered culture and the post-Holocaust loss of solid grounding for authentic Jewish culture, quite clear. See Alain Finkielkraut, *Le Juif Imaginaire* (Paris: Seuil, 1980), [*The Imaginary Jew*, Trans. Kevin O’Neill and David Suchoff, Introduction by David Suchoff (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1994)]. Elizabeth J. Bellamy effectively analyzes much of the debate on the modern/postmodern divide in contemporary cultural criticism as a melancholic displacement of, or attempt to work through, mourning for the destruction of a European Jewish civilization in her *Affective Genealogies: Psychoanalysis, Postmodernism, and the ‘Jewish Question’ after Auschwitz* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).

2. Aharon Appelfeld, *The Age of Wonders*, Trans. Dalya Bilu (Boston: David R. Godine, 1990), 138, 72. All English references to this edition will be given parenthetically in the text. The Hebrew text used is Aharon Appelfeld, *Tor Ha-Pe-la’ot* (Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1978), and will be cited by footnote below.

3. The Israeli Hebrew in which Appelfeld writes, Harshav points out, began in its transformation from a religious to a secular, literary language in a European Jewish world that was intensely multilingual. See Benjamin Harshav, “The Secular Polysystem,” in his *Language in Time of Revolution* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1993), 38.

4. That tradition received a powerful statement in “One Literature in Two Languages” by Bal-Makhshoves [Isador Eliashev] after the Czernowitz conference of 1908 declared Yiddish to be a national language of the Jewish people: “And does the writer live and breathe between the two languages only? [Yiddish and Hebrew]. Don’t our better critics carry within them the spirit of the German language? And in our younger writers. . . can’t we discern the spirit of the Russian? And don’t we hear echoes of the French among our colleagues, the Palestinian writers (Ben-Ami, Hermoni)?” Such bi- and multi-lingualism, he argues, is part of Hebrew’s, and the Jewish tradition’s strength. See Bal-Makhshoves, “One Literature in Two Languages,” in Hana Wirth-Nesher, Ed., *What is Jewish Literature?* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1994), 73; in the Yiddish original, Bal-Makhshoves, *Geklibene shriften* (Vilna, 1910), II, 63.

5. Franz Kafka, Diary Entry of 16 January 1922, *Franz Kafka: Schriften Tagebücher Briefe, Kritische Ausgabe*, hrsg. Hans-Gerd Koch, Michael Müller, and Malcolm Pasley (Frankfurt, 1990), 878.

6. Aharon Appelfeld, “A Conversation with Philip Roth,” *Beyond Despair: Three Lectures and A Conversation with Philip Roth*, Trans. Jeffrey M. Green (New York: Fromm International, 1994), 63–64.

7. Agnon’s time in Berlin and his support for German-Jewish culture is outlined in Michael Brenner, *The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1996): “Agnon abstained from both stigmatizing German Jews as assimilated, ‘non-Jewish Jews’ and idealizing ‘authentic’ East European Jews,” respecting their “multifaceted achievement,” (208). Agnon was in this regard a crucial source for Appelfeld, whose encounters with the Hebrew modernist, friendly to German-Jewish culture, were formative. Appelfeld’s account of their encounter in Jerusalem follows below.

8. See “Amalia’s Secret: Silence and Ethnicity,” in David Suchoff, *Critical Theory and the Novel: Mass Society and Cultural Criticism in Dickens, Melville and Kafka* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 162–175.

9. Kafka, as Gershon Shaked notes, was crucial to a whole generation of Israeli novelists, who wished to expand the range of “realistic” Hebrew narratives. Like Agnon, Kafka provided a “foundation,” Shaked points out, for “the depiction of the human condition in general, and the Jewish condition in particular,” and thus to expand a more limited Zionist narrative of nationhood. The reading of *The Age of Wonders* offered here argues that this use of Kafka is not “mythical,” but part of Israeli literature’s recovery of its own interlingual, bicultural traditions. See Gershon Shaked, “Israeli Liter-

ature and the Subject of Fiction: From Nationhood to the Self," in Emily Budick, ed., *Narratives of Jewish Self-Definition: Ideology and Identity in Israeli and American Literature*, forthcoming, SUNY Press. In addition to Appelfeld's comments on Kafka quoted in this essay see also Aharon Appelfeld, "Edut," [Testimony] in his *Masot b'guf harishon*, [Essays in the First Person]. (Jerusalem: Zionist Library P, 1979), 15 [Hebrew], and Yigael Schwartz, *Kinat hayakhid vnetsakh hashevet: Aharon Appelfeld, Tmunot olam* [Individual Lament and Tribal Eternity: Aharon Appelfeld, Pictures of a World]. (Jerusalem, Keter, 1996), 46 [Hebrew].

10. Schwartz, *Kinat hayakhid*, 39.

11. Walter Benjamin, "Brief an Gershom Scholem, 12-6-1938," in *Benjamin über Kafka: Texte, Briefe, Briefzeugnisse, Aufzeichnungen*, Ed. Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt, 1981), 87: "Kafkas Werk stellt eine Erkrankung der Tradition dar."

12. See Suchoff, *Critical Theory*, 164–166, and Hillel Kieval, *The Making of Czech Jewry: National Conflict and Jewish Society in Bohemia, 1870–1918* (New York: Oxford UP, 1988), 138–9.

13. Heinz Politzer, *Franz Kafka: Parable and Paradox* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962), 272.

14. Franz Rosenzweig, Letter to Gertrude Oppenheim, 25 May 1927: "Die Leute, die die Bibel geschrieben haben, haben ja ähnlich gedacht wie Kafka. Ich habe noch nie ein Buch gelesen, das mich so stark an die Bibel erinnert hat wie sein Roman *Das Schloss*." Franz Rosenzweig, *Briefe*, unter Mitwirkung von Ernst Simon, ausgewählt und herausgegeben von Edith Rosenzweig (Berlin: Schocken Verlag, 1935), 596

15. In this sense, Amalia is very much Appelfeld's image of a bicultural Judaism as the strongest life-force in his novel, a figure of both German and Hebrew identification. "Indeed," as Emily Budick recently puts it, "it is possible to understand the Final Solution as an effort to pierce the impenetrable German-Jewish mutuality, to distinguish the indistinguishable other from the self." See Budick, "Literature, Ideology, and the Measure of Moral Freedom: The Case of Aharon Appelfeld's 'Badenheim, 'Ir Nofesh,'" *Modern Language Quarterly*, June 1999, 60:2, 234.

16. Appelfeld, *Tor Ha-Pe-la'ot*, 39: "v'af shelo healu et shma shel Amalia domeh hayah ki kola heasur mitkhabet beyn hakhalonot hakfulim hubavuat panehah lo te'alem gam bakhoref."

17. Appelfeld, "A Conversation with Philip Roth," 63: "I discovered Kafka here in Israel during the 1950s, and as writer he was close to me from my first contact. He spoke to me in my mother tongue, German, not the German of the Germans, but the German of the Hapsburg Empire, of Vienna, Prague, and Czernowitz, with its special tone, which, by the way, the Jews worked hard to create."

18. This introjection, according to Bloom, comes only at the price of misreading, of disfiguring the origin, a way of dealing with anxiety over displacing, and appropriating, the power of the "classic" or paternal text. Post-Holocaust appropriations of German-Jewish writers—although borrowing from their strong inheritance—often disfigure them as weak texts of a failed tradition in precisely this fashion. See Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford UP, 1973), and *Agon: Towards a Theory of Revisionism* (New York: Oxford UP, 1982.)

19. As the narrator of *The Age of Wonders* puts it: "Kafka's few published works had converted him completely. He knew them all by heart" (44).

20. Appelfeld has thus introjected a self-hatred reading of Kafka in connection with "Father's" text, and it is adequately represented in the novel by Danzig, Bruno's violin teacher, who has internalized Wagner's doctrine, by Dr. Mirzel, who has taken on the worst of Wagner's notion of Jewish art (80) and Otto Weinger's vision of the Jews (79).

21. Haim Hazzaz, "The Sermon," in Robert Alter, Ed., *Modern Hebrew Literature* (Orange: Behrman House, 1975), 253–87.

22. See Michael André Bernstein, *Foregone Conclusions: Against Apocalyptic History* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1994), 3. Bernstein fleshes out this charge in his reading of Appelfeld's *Badenheim* on 59–72, 150–157 ff. That Bernstein's anxieties over Appelfeld's Zionist attack on the diaspora are overstated is well-shown by Budick, "Literature, Ideology, and the Measure of Moral Freedom: The Case of Aharon Appelfeld's 'Badenheim, 'Ir Nofesh,'" op. cit., pp. 234 ff.

23. See for instance, Nili Gold's "Betrayal of the Mother Tongue in the Creation of National Identity," and her reading of the hidden German-Hebrew dialogue in Dan Pagis, and other Israeli writers. These figures, as Gold put it, forge "an identity that is not founded on a dichotomy between Hebrew and other foreign sounds, but on their verbal intercourse." In Budick, ed., *Narratives of Jewish Self-Definition*, forthcoming.

24. Franz Kafka, "Die Sorge des Hausvaters," *Gesammelte Werke IV: Erzählungen*, Ed. Max Brod (Frankfurt, 1976), 129–130.

25. Kafka, as Willi Goetschel points out, is one source of this notion of the internal difference constitutive of any modern tradition, one noted by Walter Benjamin in Kafka and elaborated in Benjamin's philosophy of history. See Willi Goetschel, "The Differential Character of Traditions," *Telos* 95, Spring 1993, 163, 168.

26. Aharon Appelfeld, "Personal Statement." David Patterson and Glenda Abramson, Eds., *Tradition and Trauma: Studies in the Fiction of S. J. Agnon* (Boulder: Westview P, 1994), 207–212.

27. Appelfeld, "A Conversation with Philip Roth," 71.

28. Appelfeld, "Personal Statement," 211.

29. Shmuel Schneider, "Aharon Appelfeld al khayav vyetsirato (Sikha im ham' saper) [Aharon Appelfeld on his Life and Work] [Hebrew], *Bizaron* IV:13–14, April 1982, 10.

30. Appelfeld, "Personal Statement," 211.

31. Appelfeld, "A Conversation with Philip Roth," 72.

32. See Dan Miron, "German Jews in Agnon's Work," *Leo Baeck Society Year Book*, 23 (1978), 265–280.

33. See Franz Kafka, "Zwei Tiergeschichten," *Der Jude: Eine Monatschrift*, zweiter Jahrgang, 1917–1918, 488, 565. The "ape" figure of "Bericht für eine Akademie" seeks an "Ausweg," of course, but is also finding his way into Ahad Ha-Am's well-known Hebrew essay of 1893 on the topic, "Imitation and Assimilation" [Hikkui ve-hitbolelut], which values Jewish contact with languages other than Hebrew in a positive fashion.

34. Shmuel Schneider, "Aharon Appelfeld," 11.

35. The passage ends with "Father's" inability to keep these symbolic representatives of the German (Buber) and Hebrew (Agnon) from simultaneously appealing to his wife, despite his attempt at intellectual mediation: "At a nearby table sat the philosopher Martin Buber and the writer S. Y. Agnon. In the course of a disagreement, Agnon jokingly suggested that they consult the younger generation. Father made some remark; it must have been perceptive and acute, because Buber and Agnon both smiled; they also addressed his companion gallantly. At that moment Father's blue eyes may perhaps have lit up behind his round spectacles, and his sadness may have shown around his mouth." See Amoz Oz, *The Hill of Evil Counsel: Three Stories*, Trans. Nicholas De Lange (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1991), 21.

36. Bernstein, *Foregone Conclusions*, cited above. Ruth Wisse thus takes Appelfeld to task for his seeming to attack diaspora Jews more than the Nazis who destroyed them, in "Aharon Appelfeld: Survivor," *Commentary* 76:2, August 1983), 74–76. Alan Mintz by contrast, sees Appelfeld in precisely opposite terms, as an "outsider" to the "great tradition of response to catastrophe in Hebrew literature," but as opening up Hebrew literature to the Holocaust, and hence to the importance of the diaspora per se. See "The Appelfeld World," in Mintz, *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature* (New York: Columbia U P, 1984), 238. Such antithetical readings of Appelfeld are possible precisely because a novel like *The Age of Wonders*, at its deepest levels, refuses to conceive of the modern, or postmodern Hebrew novel in either pro-Zionist or pro-diaspora terms, especially where the Holocaust is concerned. For a learned statement of this position, see Gershon Shaked, "Appelfeld and His Times," *Hebrew Studies* 36, (1995), 100.

37. Though Appelfeld roots his writing, to be sure, in the long history of the Hebrew literary tradition. See "A Conversation with Philip Roth," 71–72.

38. Birnbaum described Czernowitz, site of the conference on the Yiddish language he organized in 1908, as a city, to a certain extent (einigermaßen) divided by "nationale Mannigfaltigkeit;" but where the breath of tradition remains strong, spurred on, rather than thwarted, by difference. See Nathan Birnbaum, "Gäste in Czernowitz," in Andrea Corbea-Hoisie, Ed., *Jüdisches Städtebild Czernowitz* (Frankfurt, 1998), 139. The entire passage is as follows: "Es ist kein Zweifel, auch Städte haben Individualität, haben ein ausgeprägtes seelisches Eigenbild. Auch wenn sie sich aus den verschiedenartigsten Elementen zusammensetzen, schwebt ein einigender Hauch über ihnen. Nationale Mannigfaltigkeit spaltet zwar einigermaßen das Bild, aber nur, wo die einzelnen nationalen Gruppen sich stärker sondern und Gelegenheit haben, ihre Sonderart in Sonderkultur zu betätigen."

39. Schwartz, *Kinat Yakhid*, 39. Bruno returns to Knospen after having divorced his wife Mina, the daughter of Holocaust survivors, at the same age that "father" left his Jewish family in Knospen.

40. In a literal translation of the Hebrew, Bruno was "no longer experiencing animosity, but viewing it all with a distanced eye, one of wonder:" "lo od eybah ele m' ayin r' khok sh' yesh bo hafalah," 138.

41. As Yigael Schwartz accurately points out, Bruno is not a figure for Appelfeld the novelist in any strictly biographical or autobiographic sense. Schwartz, *Kinat Hayakhid*, 35. Appelfeld's inter-

view with Philip Roth makes this point clearly. Despite the fact that "assimilated Jews" were "certain they were no longer Jews," it was in these Jewish figures, Appelfeld felt, in which "the Jewish character, and also, perhaps, the Jewish fate, was concentrated with the greatest force." This is why, he declares, "I have always loved assimilated Jews." See "A Conversation with Philip Roth," 70. Appelfeld's love for a bicultural, if sometimes "half-blind" Jewish tradition, makes him more like "Hill," the part-Jewish figure Bruno meets late in the novel. "All part Jews are sad," she declares, "but I like them" (197).

42. "The denial of the languages that lie beneath the national language," Dan Laor writes, "is not characteristic of only one culture." See Dan Laor, "Schizolingua: Or, How Many Years Can Modern Hebrew Remain Modern? On the Ideological Dictates of the Hebrew Language," in Budick, ed., *Narratives of Jewish Self-Definition*, forthcoming.

43. Paul Celan, "'Es ist alles anders.'" *Gesammelte Werke*, hrsg. Beda Allemann und Stefan Reichert (Frankfurt, 1983) I, 285, and "Everything's Different," *Poems of Paul Celan*, Trans. Michael Hamburger (New York: Persea, 1995), 223: "what is it called, your country/behind the mountain, behind the year?/I know what it's called./Like the winter's tale . . . /it wanders off everywhere, like language./throw it away, throw it away,/then you'll have it again . . ."