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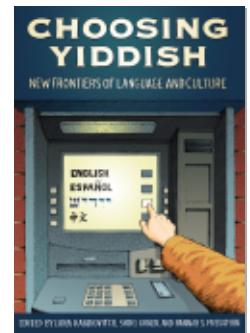
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WRITING ON THE VERGE OF CATASTROPHE

David Vogel's Last Work of Prose

SHIRI GOREN

The last work of prose by the Hebrew poet and author David Vogel (1891-1944), posthumously titled *They All Went out to Battle*, depicts a fascinating testimonial narrative of a year of imprisonment in French prisoner of war camps during the Second World War. The manuscript was found after the war buried in a yard in the small town of Hauteville in southeastern France. Vogel buried it himself, together with the rest of his literary remains, shortly before the Lyon gestapo captured and transported him to Auschwitz, where he perished in March 1944.

Throughout his literary career, Vogel, a native Yiddish speaker, took it upon himself to write and publish only in Hebrew. Wandering through Europe's modernist centers and making a failed attempt to immigrate to Israel, Vogel managed to achieve this goal. Between the end of the First World War and the beginning of the Second, he published poems, a book of poetry, a novel, and two novellas—all, except for one, in Hebrew.¹ That exception appeared in the form of an unpublished manuscript of 127 large (8.3 by 11.7 inch) handwritten pages consisting of about 150,000 words composed entirely in Yiddish.

In the beginning of February 1944, the Lyon gestapo conducted an operation in the province of Ain in order to arrest several members of the French resistance as well as the few Jews who lived in the area, Vogel among them.² Shortly before that, he buried the manuscript of the novel along with two poems and the first pages of a comprehensive Hebrew novel he was rewriting.³ He buried the texts in a yard of the house where he rented a room since his release from detainee camps in August of 1940. After the war, one of Vogel's friends, the painter Avraham Goldberg, dug in the ground of that house and discovered the literary remains.⁴ Goldberg transferred the text to the Hebrew American author Shimon Halkin, then living in the United States, who delivered it to the

author Asher Barash in Israel.⁵ In 1950, with the establishment of the Gnazim Institute for the Research of History of the Hebrew Literature in the New Era, Barash gave Vogel's Yiddish manuscript to the institute, where it remains in Tel Aviv to this day.⁶

The manuscript, as the image on page 30 shows, comprises a draft full of alternative words, erasures, and parentheses. Vogel's tiny handwriting makes some of the words difficult to decipher. Although the narrative is lucidly structured and has a beginning, middle, and end, Vogel never got a chance to finish it in terms of editing and preparing it for publication. This likely explains why, unlike the author's Hebrew works, this Yiddish text was never published in the original language, and it has received little scholarly attention. Only in 1990 did a heavily edited version become accessible to the Israeli public through a Hebrew translation by literary editor and scholar Menachem Perry.⁷ For a title, Perry selected *They All Went out to Battle*—in Hebrew, *Kulam yatzu lakrav*—a line he took from one of two Hebrew poems by Vogel that survived the Second World War.⁸

Drawing on both Yiddish and Hebrew versions of the text and contextualizing Vogel's narrative within his biography, my analysis takes Vogel's work as a testimonial narrative created on the verge of catastrophe. By applying Maurice Blanchot's conceptualization of the writing of the disaster and Hans-Georg Gadamer's concept of the "fusion of horizons," this investigation offers a tentative explanation for Vogel's poetic decision to write this unique text in Yiddish.

The Geography of Vogel's Biography

Vogel's personal and literary histories seem related in several ways. Born in 1891 in Satanov, Podolia (now Ukraine), Vogel, as a teenager, decided to dedicate his life to becoming a Hebrew writer, even though his native tongue was Yiddish. Literary scholar Chana Kronfeld argues that "For Vogel, a famished, uprooted, perpetual wanderer through Europe's modernist centers, the very decision to become a Hebrew writer was an act of self-marginalization, and self-modernization."⁹ In 1912 he migrated west, crossing the border to Austria and arriving in Vienna, where he stayed for thirteen years. By moving to Vienna not only did he change geographical locations within the continent, but Vogel also switched positions in the Jewish world: he attempted to abandon his *Ostjude* roots and reinvent himself as a west European man. In 1914, two weeks after the beginning of the world war, local police arrested him together with several other Russian citizens suspected of cooperating with the czar's troops. Vogel was imprisoned for two years, during which time he intermittently wrote a journal in Hebrew.¹⁰ Although at first he viewed the incarceration as a convenient solution for his financial hardship, later on he suffered despair and

loneliness. After his release in 1916 he went back to Vienna but could not find a place for himself there financially or existentially. Nevertheless he became an Austrian citizen, married his first wife, Ilka, in 1919,¹¹ and began publishing poems in various Hebrew journals toward the end of the First World War.¹² Undeniably, throughout his life, the more entrenched Vogel became in his individualism, the more world events chased him. The more he aimed at being particular, the more he unwillingly became a symbol for collective Jewish existence in interwar Europe.

Vogel's wandering among geographical locations is mirrored in his shifting of literary genres and styles. In fact, his poetics at that time, and throughout the rest of his life, reflected his biography in that he was a minor author whose writing evades any attempt at literary, political, or ideological categorization. Indeed, Dan Miron emphasizes that Vogel stubbornly adhered to a non-redemptive writing style: "bleak universal existentialism and introspective individualism which sees nothing but the absurd fate of the lonely individual progressing toward his end."¹³

Though writing in Hebrew, Vogel claimed no Zionist leanings, and he alienated himself from the linguistic and national Hebrew revival. In 1929 he immigrated to Palestine with his second wife, Adah. Their only daughter, Tamar,¹⁴ was born there, but they returned to Europe after a year and settled in France. In 1939 when the Second World War broke out, Vogel lived in Paris with Tamar, then ten years old. At that time, his wife was hospitalized in a tuberculosis sanatorium in Hauteville, in the countryside of southeastern France. Vogel's train ride with his daughter from Paris to the countryside, a mere few hours before France declared war on Germany, forms the opening scene of the manuscript: "Dem tsveytn september [1939] hob ikh nokh uspeyet tsu khapn dem letstn tsug: paris-burg-shamberi" (On September 2nd I managed to catch the last train: Paris-Burg-Chambéry).¹⁵

A month after Vogel's arrival with his daughter in Hauteville, local police arrested him, together with other people whose origin was, as the manuscript stresses, "funem itstikn groysn daytshn raykh" (from the current large German Reich).¹⁶ Ironically, twenty-five years after his arrest by the Habsburgian authorities as a Russian citizen, Vogel faced similar accusations by the French, this time as the carrier of an Austrian passport. He spent ten months (October 4, 1939–August 8, 1940) imprisoned in several French camps for citizens of enemy countries.¹⁷

Following his release, a few weeks after France surrendered to Germany and established the Vichy regime, Vogel decided to return to Hauteville to be near his wife's sanatorium.¹⁸ He spent the next three years there, relatively safe, renting a room in the house of an elderly woman, and focused mainly on writing. As far as we know, during those years Vogel authored several poems in Hebrew,¹⁹ revised a modernist Hebrew novel, and probably dedicated most of his creative time to writing the autobiographical novel in Yiddish.²⁰

Vogel composed this highly uncharacteristic manuscript while on the verge of catastrophe in the midst of dramatic world events. Whether or not he suspected how the war would end for him toward the end of his time in Hauteville, the circumstances under which he wrote the manuscript were incredibly dramatic and fraught.²¹ The care he took in ensuring the preservation of this manuscript requires us to read the narrative with particular attention to the circumstances under which he wrote and saved it. Vogel created in proximity to universal, national, and personal disasters. The phrase “verge of catastrophe,” then, conveys here both the traumatic experience of Vogel’s own imprisonment in 1939–1940 and the sense of temporality and indeterminacy that writing in the middle of a world war embodies.

Vogel’s Last Work of Prose

Written in a first-person voice, Vogel’s literary account is reminiscent of a journal or a diary. The main protagonist, however, is a fictional character named Rudolf—or in some cases, Ernest—Weichert, a Jewish painter with biographical and family circumstances very similar to Vogel’s own. The different name and occupation of the main character seem to camouflage, in different degrees of displacement, the author’s reworking of the trauma of his incarceration.

The narrative follows Weichert, together with a group of German and Austrian citizens, both Jewish and non-Jewish, through eight months of imprisonment. The prisoners are transferred from one camp to another, aiming to maintain their daily routine in the highly irregular and sometimes violent situations they encounter and continuously fighting French bureaucracy in failed attempts at release from the camps. This haunting Yiddish manuscript depicts the crisis of a sudden break from the outside world, the loss of freedom, and the ever increasing sense of vulnerability and helplessness that the prisoners experience.

The first paragraph of Vogel’s manuscript, right before the scene at the train station, describes the French mandatory call, from September 3, 1939, for all foreign citizens of hostile countries to immediately report to the local police:

Everyone whose origin is from the German Reich (with the handwritten addition: “from the current large German Reich”) from the ages of seventeen to fifty years old (the day after, new posters announced: also from fifty to sixty-five years old) must report in the next twenty-four hours, at their own expense, to a concentration camp for foreigners. If not, they will be arrested by the police. One must bring food for two days, two small blankets (or one big one), underwear, clothes, shoes etc.²²

The impersonal narration, which changes to first person in the second paragraph, provides the reader with the background and context for the entire

narrative. By applying this impersonal voice and quoting the language in the posters announcing the call, Weichert distances himself from any personal ramifications the order must have entailed for him. The character of Weichert employs this technique of hiding behind formal language on other occasions throughout the novel, for example, when Captain Ledoux interrogates him in Camp Arandon²³ and when the authorities encourage the prisoners to volunteer for the French Foreign Legion.²⁴

Weichert's detailed, matter-of-fact prose rarely contains expressed emotions. In fact, the narrator seldom reveals anything about his own feelings toward various situations he encounters, nor does he dwell on his life at any point. For example, although he introduces some of the other inmates by their professions (carpenter, judge, physician, lawyer, manufacturer of goods), he does not relate such information about himself. The reader vaguely learns about Weichert's occupation before the incarceration during two interviews with French captains in which he declares himself a painter in the first interview and a writer in the second.²⁵ The lack of details on Weichert's life before his arrest, the scarcity of his own emotional output in writing, and his overall passivity suggest a common representation of the incarceration experience, in which the individual is reduced to a mere number. Weichert and the group of prisoners, whom he meets in the first camp, Bourg, allude to this feeling in labeling their crowd with the number zero.²⁶ Here the group is composed of law-abiding citizens who become prisoners for an unspecified time for reasons beyond their control. This traumatic experience forms a sudden and complete break from their regular course of life. The prisoners' inability to do anything to amend the situation only strengthens their frustration, cynicism, and despair.

Vogel's narrative is a minor one, in that the events described in the text did not lead to the murder of the prisoners, who in the end were released from the camps. Rather, the occurrences appear as more links in the chain of dehumanization and deprivation of human rights. Moreover, Vogel does not structure the dichotomy of good and bad around the axis of Germans and Jews: whereas most of the inmates were Jewish, the oppressive personnel belonged, without exception, to the French nation. Weichert despises Hitler and the French administration equally for imprisoning him. He wishes a defeat for Hitler but at the same time hopes that the French, too, will learn their lesson. Writing in the middle of the war, Vogel seems painfully aware of the price it entails for all the parties involved yet nevertheless presents a humanistic worldview. The protagonist's fundamental resistance to the war derives not from pacifism or altruistic motives but from practical, perhaps even selfish, reasons—he does not want to die:

I have only one life, limited in time, one and only, and it is dear to me. It is dearer to me than all the nations in the world and their stupid conflicts. It was given to me alone, to live in full, selfishly. I do not want to give my life to anyone

and nobody has the right to take it away from me. Had I been at fault, I would be willing to pay. But I haven't done a thing. It is not my fault that France wants to go to war. I would possibly be ready to sacrifice my life, but not to France alone. Never. But against Hitler, for the Jews. Yet I must make this decision for myself. Such a decision must be born in me, freely, without any outside coercion.²⁷

Through the voice of his main character, Vogel therefore offers a subversive, universal critique of nationalism and its inevitable outcome, war.

Vogel's critique, however, is not limited to the big picture of the war but spans to the smallest details of the incarceration as well. The absurdities and inconsistencies that characterize the oppressive French regime in Vogel's narration are evocative of Kafka's depictions of the unidentified authority in his 1925 novel *The Trial*. Vogel, an avid reader and speaker of German who translated but failed to publish his own magnificent novel *Married Life* into this language, was surely familiar with Kafka's oeuvre. Although Weichert is not Joseph K., the bureaucratic process supposedly leading to the release of the prisoners is so obscure and unproductive that the reader is reminded of a Kafkaesque world. Ultimately, Vogel's narrative constitutes a literary meditation on the condition of the individual in the modern world, and in that respect, it certainly gestures toward Kafka's fable.

In more than one case, the author suggests a bitter irony toward the inherent impotency of the main character in various situations without Weichert's knowing. For example, depicting his visits to the local police station before the initial arrest, Weichert says,

I immediately went to the city hall and then to the police. I did not believe that the announcements were directed to me as well. Me, a "former Austrian," a Jew who has been living in France for many years, who is certainly not a friend of Hitler (*may his name be forgotten!*) not at all, to the contrary: a friend of France that now will finally wipe him off the ground. I asked once and then many times over, as in such times, one has to know for sure. This is a war! They answered me, at the city hall and at the police, once and many times, that I do not have to go. Me, no. I am a former Austrian, I am a Jew, and Austrians are not Germans. We will free Austria, return its sovereignty. We'll free all the small countries. We fight for freedom and equality for all.²⁸

The situation is ironic and even slightly amusing, particularly due to the reader's knowledge of Weichert's lengthy imprisonment shortly afterward. Weichert and the policemen's deep conviction that the French authorities did not target him becomes irrelevant a few paragraphs later when the same people come to arrest him. Moreover, the French policemen, speaking in first-person plural, quote empty slogans on freedom and equality. Similarly Weichert, in many ways like Vogel himself, has only limited interest in world politics. There-

fore, his intentions to appear enthusiastic about the war and France's prospects of winning only stress his passivity throughout the actual incarceration. The narrator's wording ridicules—in a second reading—both the character and the agents of the state. By using literary devices of irony and comic relief, Vogel therefore creates the opposite effect and brings the reader to understand the ultimate gravity of the situation.

The text travels between a few literary genres: autobiography, testimony, personal journal, memoir, and fiction. Consequently, it does not fully follow the literary conventions of any of these genres. This hybrid form seems to be highly productive for the author and what he wishes to impart to his reader. Nevertheless, I read the manuscript as autobiographical fiction or, more precisely, a novel with autobiographical elements.²⁹ Such an interpretation views Vogel's manuscript as a literary creation with aesthetic values rather than a journal or a testimony, as scholars have referred to it thus far, and allows the application of tools from the field of literary theory in order to gain a better understanding of the text.³⁰

Unlike a personal diary, Vogel's text does not contain separate daily or weekly entries, and although the manuscript occasionally mentions dates, the narrative progresses geographically. It starts with the train ride from Paris to Hauteville and continues with Weichert's arrest and transfer to the "concentration camp for foreigners" (*zaml-lager far oyslender*)³¹ in Bourgen-Bresse. From there the prisoners move to another camp in Arandon, and then to another one in Loriol.

The final scene, akin to the opening paragraphs, occurs on a train that takes the prisoners to an unknown destination. In both cases the setting symbolizes temporality, transition, and uncertainty, echoing the prisoners' emotional condition throughout their imprisonment. In the beginning of the novel, Weichert is a free man in a foreign crowd on the verge of becoming a prisoner. Although Vogel does not explain or intellectualize the final scene, by the story's end Weichert's release remains unknown and he stands in a familiar crowd of foreigners. In both images the train leaves at night and the travelers are unsure about the destination and whether or not the train will even reach it. Moreover, both situations present overcrowded train cars and mayhem—of people, limbs, and belongings. Despite the gloomy setting, in both instances Weichert, who in the first episode is accompanied by a child and in the second suffers from ill health, not only manages to get on each train but even locates places to sit each time.

The preparations for the train rides and then riding the trains quintessentially constitute, thus, Vogel's actual experience (disguised as Weichert) throughout the incarceration. The similarity between the two scenes represents a circular, repetitive motion that typifies the novel as a whole. Perry argues, for example, that the camps themselves serve as meticulous variations of one another, at times even parodied as such. There are several repetitive elements upon the arrival and settling down in each of the camps, from hammering nails

into the walls to sorely missing the old camp to domesticating the new place.³² The time spent in the camps is lost time, which Perry rightly labels “existence in parenthesis.”³³ The recurrent temporality and the sense that the main character is stuck, both physically and emotionally, show the futility of the entire incarceration experience. The nine months that pass between the first and the last scenes—a period of time that according to literary conventions symbolizes a new beginning—only stress the feeling of stagnation and despair. The use of the pregnancy time period constitutes a cruel inversion of the typically blessed gestation time into a symbol of death and destruction. Vogel, it seems, made an informed decision to conclude the narrative with an open ending after nine months and chose to finalize Weichert’s story fifty-nine days before the end of his own narrative. Here the author’s poetic preferences overcome the authentic depiction of the events—an instance of the aesthetic prerogative overriding historical authenticity in Vogel’s autobiographical fiction. The destination of the train he describes in the last scene is Le Camp d’étrangers des Milles, near Aix-en-Provence. Vogel spent almost two months there before his release in August 1940, but, again, this period of time remains absent from the manuscript.³⁴ Moreover, the decision not to provide the reader with closure to the narrative but rather to leave the fate of the prisoners unknown constitutes a powerful aesthetic choice, perhaps echoing the author’s state of mind while writing the narrative in the middle of the Second World War.

The unjustified incarceration experience burned a permanent mark on Vogel, a scar that manifests itself in the way his text ends. Transformed and displaced, unhealthy, and deprived of basic rights, Weichert seems indifferent, even apathetic, to what may happen next. When some of the prisoners stand up to better view the direction of the train, Weichert only cares for his own comfort, stretching his legs and thinking, “Ven a teyl shteyen, ken ikh mikh beser oysstrekkn, di fis gants grand.”³⁵ Weichert remains apathetic, reflecting the trauma of his incarceration, with a diminished will to live, sensing that there is no place for him in the world. No place, perhaps, except for where he is located right now, in the text’s present tense, on the train that carries him onward. This could explain why sitting comfortably means more to him at that moment than knowing, for example, the destination of the train. The narrative, thus, appropriately ends in transition, on a threshold, in between geographical spaces.

The transient metaphor and the train as a nonplace echo not only the emotional and physical experience of the imprisonment but also the type of world Vogel faced upon returning to Hauteville in 1940 in the middle of the war. The world he grew up in and left behind no longer existed, with circumstances that prevented him from returning to the Western metropolises, Paris and Vienna, where he previously resided. Vogel, then, lived in Hauteville and spent his time creating materials for his own time capsule. His Hebrew poem “Gallop of Troops around the World” (“She’atat tzeva’ot bimlo tevel”), written in December 1941, describes this period and the atmosphere of war lurking near him:

*ru'ah ketel ba'olam titholel—
va'ani od rega nisharti po*

wind of slaughter spreeds around the world—
and I remained here [alone] for another moment

This image combines personal and international history. The speaker wants no part of the glory of death on the military battlefield and strives to maintain his individuality on the verge of an imminent disaster. Indeed, a present-day reading of the manuscript, with the knowledge of the catastrophe of the war in Europe and the Holocaust in particular occurring at the time of Vogel's writing, creates dramatic irony in the most classical sense of the term and greatly affects the experience of reading the novel.³⁶

Yiddish on the Verge of Catastrophe

In his book *The Writing of the Disaster (L'Écriture du désastre)*, novelist and critic Maurice Blanchot discusses the possibility of writing about catastrophe and the ability of a text to register disaster. The Holocaust, he writes, “is the *absolute* event of history.”³⁷ Blanchot conceptualizes disaster as unexperienced: “It is what escapes the very possibility of experience—it is the limit of writing. This must be repeated: the disaster de-scribes. Which does not mean that the disaster, as the force of writing, is excluded from it, is beyond the pale of writing or extratextual.”³⁸

The totality of the Holocaust catastrophe hovers above the reading experience of Vogel's last work of prose. The retrospective, extratextual knowledge about the tragic fate of the author in Auschwitz no doubt contributes to the shaping of this experience. Like the reader of other Holocaust diaries whose authors perished at the hands of the Nazis, Anne Frank being the most famous example, the reader of Vogel's work cannot help but be influenced by the historical knowledge of the author's untimely death.

The translator of Blanchot's work, Ann Smock, further explains,

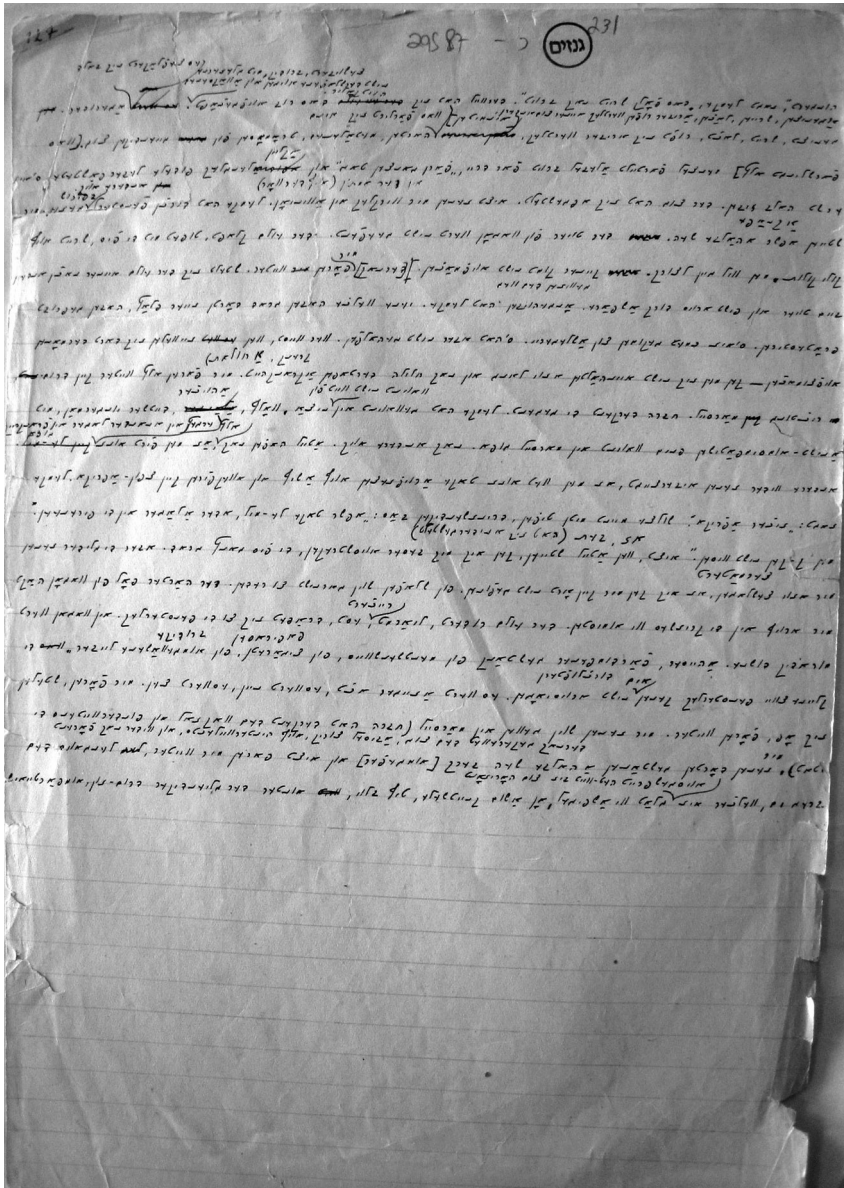
“The writing of the disaster” means not simply the process whereby something called the disaster is written—communicated, attested to, or prophesied. It also means the writing done by the disaster—by the disaster that ruins books and wrecks language. “The writing of the disaster” means the writing that the disaster—which liquidates writing—is, just as “knowledge of the disaster” means knowledge *as* disaster, and “the flight of thought” the loss of thought, which thinking is.³⁹

The catastrophe in Vogel's narrative occurs only *after* the manuscript ends and is located outside the reality of the plot. At the same time, however, it forms

an undeniable presence that already exists in the reader's collective past. In order to bridge these two levels of knowledge and experience—the text that describes traumatic events but does not contain “disaster” and the reader's retrospective contextualization of Vogel's death—I use Hans-Georg Gadamer's concept of the “fusion of horizons.” Gadamer views understanding as a matter of negotiation between oneself and one's partner in a hermeneutical dialogue such that the process of understanding may be seen as a matter of coming to an “agreement” about a matter at issue. Coming to such an agreement means establishing a common framework or “horizon,” which Gadamer takes to be a process involving the “fusion of horizons” (*Horizontverschmelzung*).⁴⁰ In his words, “A virtual horizon of interpretation and understanding must be opened in writing the text itself, one which the reader must fill out.”⁴¹ Although Vogel's narrative does not include the actual lingual encoding of the catastrophe that happens only after it has ended, the material surfacing of the text, after the war, already contains the knowledge of his personal catastrophe as well as the disaster of European Jewry. The very act of intimating the hiding place of his literary works to others proves that Vogel certainly considered the possibility that he would never return to Hauteville, perhaps even suspecting his own impending death. This historical intertext and the dramatic account of the preservation of the manuscript together create the fusion of horizons here.

This fusion of horizons between the reader and the text contributes to the effectiveness of the final scene of the novel. Delivered in the present tense, the scene depicts a train that carries the inmates to an unknown destination: “The clock passed eight, nine, and then ten o'clock. We started, we stopped, we rode further. We passed Marseille (some recognized the train station and the city from afar). We stayed there for about half an hour, then the train turned and drove a little bit backward. Then again forward. And now we travel farther, along the coast. The sea, smooth as a mirror without any wrinkle, spread to the horizon, deep-blue under the glowing southern sun, impartial.”⁴²

The narrative ends with a minor, anticlimatic tone similar to other prose works by Vogel.⁴³ The train could lead the prisoners to freedom or to another camp and a few more months of imprisonment. Historical knowledge attests that the inmates survived this ride and eventually returned to their homes and families.⁴⁴ As mentioned, the French authorities released Vogel in August 1940 and he joined his wife and daughter in Hauteville for the next three and a half years. However, knowledge of the Holocaust and Vogel's personal fate in Auschwitz force the reader today to interpret the open-ended plot as concluding in tragedy. The autobiographical component of the narrative, the similarities between Weichert and Vogel, thrust on the reader an understanding that even if after the train ride Weichert is released from the French detention camp, he will not be saved. The reader knows that this constitutes merely the first episode in the protagonist's war plight, and thus the possibly hopeful impact created by the open-ended narration is only temporal. In the mind of the reader



Last page of Vogel's Yiddish manuscript. Photo by the author, courtesy of the Gzanim archive.

today, a forced train ride to an unknown destination is a ubiquitous metaphor associated with the Holocaust, a prescient literary device of Vogel's. Therefore, the catastrophe that has already happened in the Jewish reader's collective past is bound to occur in the novel's future, beyond the pale of the text.

Still the questions remain: What does it mean to write such a narrative in Yiddish? Why choose Yiddish over Hebrew or German? In what ways does the personal biography relate to poetic decisions made by the author? Because Vo-

gel did not have a chance to respond to these questions, scholars are left to provide their own explanations.

Vogel's choice to write in Yiddish contributes significantly to the shaping of the experience that the narrative portrays. For a native speaker who had never before applied the language creatively, such a decision entails a number of symbolic investments. First and foremost it derives from an attempt to make sense—in the form of a retelling—of a traumatic, disorienting experience. Vogel may have preferred Yiddish to Hebrew for describing daily life in the camps. A major part of the vocabulary needed for such a depiction in Hebrew did not yet exist at the time of his writing, and even if the colloquial Hebrew flourishing in Mandatory Palestine had already invented or renewed some of these terms, Vogel could not have had access to such information during wartime. In addition, according to the narrative, German was the most commonly spoken language in the French camps. It might have been easier to transfer dialogues and reenact situations in a language that semantically resembled the original tongue in which such conversations and experiences occurred. By switching the language in which the events took place from German to Yiddish, Vogel gained control over the depicted situation, perhaps even reducing the emotional risks involved in remembering and retelling. Crucially for a writer whose existence was synonymous with in-betweenness, Yiddish also metaphorically functioned here as a mediator between German and Hebrew, serving as a medium that allowed Vogel enough distance for distinct artistic creation.

Beyond the linguistic preferences, Vogel must have had other reasons for selecting Yiddish as the most suitable medium for the task of creating the narrative of his incarceration experience. Scholarly research also provides some clues beyond Vogel's own self-conscious motivation. Perry offers a stylistic explanation for Vogel's creative choice. According to him, the novel is written in Yiddish not as a result of a sense of Jewish companionship but rather as an attempt to echo grotesque forms of writing offered by Mendele and Gogol.⁴⁵ Laor connects the nature of Yiddish with Vogel's thematic intents and argues that "Yiddish was a reliable medium for representing the kind of world Vogel was interested in."⁴⁶ Viewing the novel as a testimonial narrative created on the verge of catastrophe may also assist in explaining the movement toward Yiddish.

Attempting to create an account of traumatic events involves a reconstruction and perhaps a reliving of the stressful experience. As Holocaust scholar James Young emphasizes, a parallel and contradictory impulse exists on the part of the writer to preserve in narrative form the very discontinuity that lends events their violent character. This same discontinuity is also effectively neutralized by its narrative rendering.⁴⁷ Vogel, negotiating between these two opposing processes, sought a way of constructing a narrative that would serve simultaneously as a testimony of events and a work of fiction. The experience he wanted to include in the narrative amounted to such unordinary circumstances that he may have wanted to move beyond his "regular" creative lan-

guage, Hebrew, to relay those events. Although he could have picked German or even French, he consciously chose a language that by then was already in great decline, on the verge of its own vernacular death in western Europe particularly. Perhaps as an act of defiance, he decided against the Nationalist impulse he could now detect in both German and French.

Moreover, as a native speaker of Yiddish who mastered the language long before studying Hebrew, German, and other foreign languages, it might have been easier for Vogel to portray the experience of such displacement in his *mameloshn*, the language for which he possessed the most intimate knowledge. Vogel may have thus chosen Yiddish as the most adequate means to narrate his incarceration. Paradoxically, only through the application of his *mameloshn*, that most intimate and nurturing of languages, did Vogel find strength within himself to recount the disturbing events. Yiddish became for him a divider or a buffer zone between the traumatic experience and its poetic recreation. It also, paradoxically, formed a protective, intimate site from which he could create. In that way, Vogel's poetic decision to write in Yiddish and the proximity of the act of writing are directly and powerfully related to the author's own past trauma as well as the ongoing war around him.

Vogel's narrative depicts reality in dark, barely cloaked colors. His life experience led him to pessimism and despair. He no longer believed in the goodness of humankind. In one instance he writes, "And there will be no heaven. In a place where human beings are found, heaven cannot exist."⁴⁸ Writing on the verge of events that redefined the horizon for many, Vogel appeared to believe in nothing but artistic creation. He chose Yiddish, the language closest to him, despite or perhaps because of having avoided artistic creation in that language until that liminal point in his life. Like Vogel's earlier decision to become a Hebrew writer, his choice of Yiddish, a language that itself was on the verge of catastrophe both before and during the war, amounted to an act of defiance and self-marginalization. For him, the most rebellious act against the brutality he faced was to place it in a narrative structure using a familiar, intimate language suitable for what he had to say and tying, in the process, the survival of his account of events to the fate of his mother tongue.

Notes

I would like to thank Yael Feldman, Marion Kaplan, Hizky Shoham, Ziv Eisenberg, Lara Rabinovitch, and Hannah Pressman for their insightful comments and valuable suggestions. Unless otherwise noted, all English translations from the Yiddish are mine.

1. The collection of poetry *Lifney hash'a'ar ha'afel* (*Before the Dark Gate*) appeared in 1923. The novella *Beveyt hamarpe* (*In the Sanatorium*) came out in 1928. In the following year, Vogel published the modernist novel *Hayey nisu'im* (*Married Life*). The novella *Facing the Sea* (*Nokhah hayam*) appeared in 1932.
2. Literary historian Dan Laor traces this event to the night between February 5 and 6 in 1944. Laor located documents confirming the arrest of eighteen people in Hauteville-

- Lompnes during these two days. According to him, Vogel was among them. See Dan Laor, "Le'an huvlu ha'atzurim: al haperek heḥaser bekhronikat hamillhama shel David Fogel" [Where Were the Detainees Taken To: On the Missing Chapter of David Vogel's War Chronicle], in *Mimerkazim lemerkaz: sefer Nurit Govrin* [From Centers to Center: Festschrift in Honor of Nurit Govrin], ed. Avner Holzman, Michal Oron, and Ziva Shamir (Tel Aviv: Machon Katz, 2005), 385-411, 386.
3. A newly discovered Hebrew novel by Vogel was published in February 2012 by Am Oved. Literary scholar Lilach Netanel found the manuscript among drafts of the novella, "Facing the Sea," and gave it the title, *Roman Vina'i* [Viennese Romance]. Netanel and other scholars argue that Vogel wrote the majority of the manuscript circa 1937-1938. See Noa Limone, "The Vogel's Code," *Haaretz*, January 19, 2012, accessed January 27, 2012, <http://www.haaretz.co.il/magazine/1.1620416>. In all likelihood, the Hebrew pages in Vogel's buried literary remains are part of this novel.
 4. Aharon Komem, "Introduction," in *Le'ever hadmama: shirim* [Towards Stillness: Poems], by David Vogel (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1983), 9-77, 11-12, 62.
 5. Menachem Perry, "Eibed Fogel et Fogel—aharit davar" [Vogel Has Lost Vogel: An Afterword], in *Taḥanot kavot* [Extinguished Stations], by David Vogel, ed. Menachem Perry (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad/Siman Kriah, 1990), 327-50, 328-29.
 6. David Vogel archive, folder no. 231.29587 (handwritten manuscript) and 231.29587a (printed manuscript). My thanks to Hedva Rokhel, former director of the Gnazim Institute, and Dvora Stavi, director of the Gnazim archive, for their invaluable assistance in accessing and copying the original manuscript.
 7. David Vogel, "Kulam yatzu lakrav" [They All Went out to Battle], *Extinguished Stations*, 65-197.
 8. These poems are "Arey ne'uray" ["Cities of My Youth"] from September 1941 and "She'atat tzeva'ot bimlo tevel" ["Gallop of Troops around the World"] from December 1941. See Perry's afterword for Vogel's collection of prose *Extinguished Stations*, 328.
 9. Chana Kronfeld, *On the Margins of Modernism: Decentering Literary Dynamics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 160.
 10. The diary (*yoman*), which spans from 1912 to 1922, contains no indication that Vogel meant to publish it. The full text appears in *Extinguished Stations*, 269-326, and is titled "Ketzot hayamim" ["Ends of Days"]. For an extensive discussion of this personal journal, see Robert Alter, "Fogel and the Forging of a Hebrew Self," *Prooftexts* 13 (1993): 3-13.
 11. David Vogel, "Ends of Days," *Extinguished Stations*, 324-25. In this Hebrew entry in his journal from December 14, 1919, Vogel mentions briefly that he got married six months before and already buried a "six-month-old baby girl," whom he loved. "It was necessary to save the mother and we had to put the daughter to death," he writes. Despite this language it appears that Vogel meant that his wife Ilka, who was six months pregnant and suffered from tuberculosis, terminated the pregnancy in order to save her life. Such a practice was common in Europe in the first decades of the twentieth century.
 12. Robert Alter, *The Invention of Hebrew Prose: Modern Fiction and the Language of Realism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988), 75-77; Aharon Komem, *Ha'ofel vehapele: iyunim beyetzirato shel David Fogel* [Darkness and Wonder: Studies in David Vogel's Work] (Jerusalem: Zemora Bitan, 2001), 205-12.
 13. Dan Miron, "When Will We Cease to 'Discover' Vogel?" in *The Blind Library: Assorted Prose Pieces: 1980-2005* (Tel Aviv: Yediot Ahronot, Sifrey Hemed, 2005), 102-24, 105.
 14. In a postcard Vogel sent to his wife from Camp des Milles dated June 18, 1940, he refers to his daughter as Tamara, which perhaps was her nickname. This is the only time he mentions her by name. See the full letter in Laor, "Where Were the Detainees," 391-92.
 15. Vogel, 1 [unpublished manuscript]. The Yiddish quotations from Vogel's manuscript in this essay are based on both the original handwritten text and on a typed transcription made by Avram Nowersztern. Nowersztern's document, comprising 419 pages, formed

the basis of Perry's edited translation into Hebrew. Quotations from Nowersztern's document will henceforth be marked with "(N)." Notes or quotations that are based on the Hebrew translation will henceforth be marked with "(H)." My thanks to Zohar Weiman-Kelman of the University of California, Berkeley for sharing with me parts of Nowersztern's document as well as her ongoing work on Vogel's manuscript.

16. Vogel, 1 [unpublished manuscript].
17. French historiography of recent years refers to these camps as *les camps de la honte* (the camps of shame). See, for example, Anne Grynberg, *Les Camps de la honte: les internés juifs des camps français, 1939-1944* (Paris: La Découverte, 1991) or Patrick Coupechoux, *Mémoires de déportés: histoires singulières de la déportation* (Paris: La Découverte, 2003). See also Laor, "Where Were the Detainees," 386.
18. Komem, *Towards Stillness*, 12, 15; Laor, "Where Were the Detainees," 386-87.
19. Komem, *Towards Stillness*, 12-13.
20. Perry, "Vogel Has Lost Vogel," 328.
21. Although the sources we have are not sufficient to prove beyond doubt that Vogel knew about the fate of European Jewry, we know that confirmed information about the systematic mass murder of Jews arrived in Palestine and the United States (which were much farther away than Hauteville, France) as early as November 1942. In addition, Vogel must have felt at least some personal danger, for he decided to hide his literary production before the Lyon gestapo captured him in February 1944.
22. Vogel, 1 [unpublished manuscript].
23. Vogel (H), 122.
24. Vogel (H), 127-28.
25. The character appears to be lying to the interviewer on the second meeting. See Vogel (H), 165, 187. Reading Weichert as a painter is also in line with Vogel's attempt to distance himself—at least on the surface—from the main character of the novel. With that, literary scholars have used the trope of "painting" to describe Vogel's Hebrew writing style. For example, analyzing the novella *Facing the Sea*, which many consider Vogel's best prose writing, Robert Alter explains that the narrator has "painterly precision," which may easily depict Weichert as well. See Alter, *Invention of Hebrew Prose*, 79.
26. Vogel (H), 107.
27. Vogel (N), 262.
28. Vogel, 2 [unpublished manuscript].
29. For a good formulation of autobiographical fiction and its evolution in Hebrew literature, see Hannah Naveh, *Siperet haviduy: beḥinato shel janer* [Confessional Prose: Examination of the Genre] (Tel Aviv: Papyrus, 1988). For "masked autobiography," see Yael Feldman, *No Room of Their Own: Israeli Women's Fiction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 22-28.
30. The one exception is the reading Perry has offered. However, although he views the manuscript as a novel, he does not apply theoretical tools other than close reading to analyze the text.
31. Vogel (N), 6.
32. Perry, "Vogel Has Lost Vogel," 341.
33. Perry, "Vogel Has Lost Vogel," 337-39.
34. For detailed information on Camp des Milles and the time Vogel spent there, see Laor, "Where Were the Detainees," 387-90.
35. Vogel (N), 419.
36. Dramatic irony arises when the words and actions of the characters of a work of literature have a different meaning for the reader than they do for the characters. This is the result of the reader having a greater knowledge than the characters themselves. See, for example, The Literary Encyclopedia, "Dramatic Irony," accessed October 2, 2009, <http://www.litencyc.com/php/stopics.php?rec=true&UID=574>.

37. Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 47.
38. *Ibid.*, 7.
39. *Ibid.*, ix.
40. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "Hans-Georg Gadamer," <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/gadamer>.
41. Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Text and Interpretation," in *Hermeneutics and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Brice R. Wachterhauser (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 377-400, 393.
42. Vogel, 127 [unpublished manuscript].
43. See, for example, the ending scene of the novella *Facing the Sea* from 1932, depicting the farewell of Barthes and Gina. David Vogel, *Nokhah hayam* (Tel Aviv: Hasifria haketana, 2005), 93-96.
44. Laor, "Where Were the Detainees," 387-88.
45. Perry, "Vogel Has Lost Vogel," 331.
46. Laor, "Where Were the Detainees," 408.
47. James E. Young, "Interpreting Literary Testimonies: A Preface to Rereading Holocaust Diaries and Memoirs," in *New Literary History* 18, no. 2 (1987): 404-7.
48. Vogel (H), 171.

