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THE WORLD OF AHARON APPELFELD.

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The Paradox of the Missing Intertext

Arnold J. Band

Two generations have passed since the publication of Appelfeld's early stories but little has been written about his distinctive prose style. One finds references to its restraint, its silence or its impressionism; one encounters unmotivated comparisons with Kafka, Kleist or even Agnon – but little more. Critical attention is usually paid to the themes or the world that he strives to capture in his fiction, to the fate of Jews in Europe before or after the Second World War, but not to the medium of the fiction itself. When one does turn to an analysis of Appelfeld's style, one discovers a strange disjunction between its subject matter, the Jewish experience and its Hebrew style. I call this disjunction the paradox of the the missing intertext. By the missing intertext I refer to the fact often noticed by critics that Appelfeld's prose does not usually allude to intertexts, either to texts taken from the immense library of Hebrew texts to which all Hebrew writing must relate in one way or another or to texts of previous modern Hebrew writers. I call this missing intertext paradoxical because Appelfeld in most of his fiction is deeply concerned with issues of Jewish identity, Jewish destiny, and one would normally expect this concern to generate intertextual discourse in his fiction. I hope I can demonstrate that the paradox is more in the mind of the reader than that of the author. The reader approaches the Appelfeld text with certain expectations which are partly frustrated, but can be explained firstly by reference to historical contexts and secondly by an examination of what Appelfeld's view of Jewish identity really is. To achieve both goals, I begin with an anecdote.

In the autumn of 1962, when I was in Jerusalem furthering my studies of the fiction of Agnon, I would frequently visit on Saturday mornings the home of Dov and Gusta Sadan. Dov Sadan had been my teacher in Hebrew composition at the Hebrew University in 1949–50 (before

he was appointed to a regular academic post) and repeatedly invited me and my wife to his already famous quasi-kiddush gatherings. I say 'quasi-kiddush' since though they were held at the traditional hour of kiddush, it was clear that neither the host nor the guests had attended any shul that morning. The warmth of the hospitality, the varied collection of guests and the fascinating, rambling, ostensibly impromptu lectures of the rebbe, Dov Sadan, were seductive and unforgettable.

Often, he would meet me at the door, a book in hand, and greet me with a discourse on a sentence or phrase from what he was reading. On one occasion he held forth on the virtues of a book of stories he was reading, apparently for the second time, '*Ashan*, the first volume of stories by a certain Appelfeld, a former student of Sadan's and a frequent visitor to his home. What intrigued Sadan that morning was not particularly the narrative skills which he admired, or even the 'phenomen' (his term) that a child survivor could write such effective prose, but rather that he mastered Hebrew which he had barely known before his *aliyah* in 1946, and wrote in a style widely different from that of his contemporaries. 'He doesn't write like Shamir or Meged or Shaham', argued Sadan, 'and I don't find here any allusions to previous Hebrew literature. After all, he learned much of these when he was my student at the university.'

I cite this anecdote not to situate Appelfeld in my reading but rather to evoke the crucial influence of Sadan on Appelfeld, an influence that Appelfeld himself has acknowledged gratefully on numerous occasions – and through a brief discourse on the Sadan connection, to attempt to unravel the paradox in question. The Sadan connection has not been adequately understood by Appelfeld's critics and even the two monographs available, those of Gila Ramraz-Rauch and Yigal Schwartz, do little justice to it. I would even argue that you cannot understand Appelfeld's central notions about Jewish identity without Sadan. To a great extent, what Schwartz has identified as the variegated aspects of the *shevet* (the tribe) in Appelfeld's world, both his fictions and his essays, derives more from Sadan than any other figure who had an impact of him in the early 1950s, the period of his reconstruction of a world view during his years at the university and as he struggled to find his voice as a writer in Hebrew. While Chapter 23 of his autobiographical *Sipur hayim* (1999) refers to Gershon Scholem and Martin Buber along with Sadan as professors at the Hebrew University

who impressed him and critics often seize upon the better known names of Scholem and Buber to the exclusion of Sadan, it is obvious that the last was more influential than the two other mentors.

Sadan's vision of a holistic view of Jewish literature was the manifestation of a passionate engagement with a Jewish essentialism, almost mystical in its adherence to notions of a catholic Yiddishkeit with deep roots and allegiances to the historical experience of the Jewish people, especially as it was expressed in Central and Eastern Europe. Jews might express their Yiddishkeit in a variety of ways – they might be totally non-observant – but denial of this Yiddishkeit was a cardinal sin endemic to interwar Central European Jewry. The Gentile world was seductive to be sure, but hostile. Growing up during the First World War that ravaged Jewish Galicia, he knew the perils of diasporic existence at its worst. The quintessence of this Yiddishkeit was familiarity with Jewish texts, especially those written in Hebrew. This rooted concept of Judaism did not, however, imply a return to Jewish religious practices or beliefs. In this sense Sadan bears a similarity to Buber who was, to be sure, more philosophical, more interested in belief in some sort of God. For Sadan, the logical fulfilment of Judaism in the modern period was Zionism understood broadly as the living of a Jewish life in the ancestral Jewish homeland. In addition to and above all these ideational notions, the Sadan home exuded a natural, embracing familial warmth. Every Jew was a member of this intensely loyal family. (It was in this familial home that I think I first met Aharon Appelfeld.)

If one compares this broad view of Jewish identity with that underlying many of Appelfeld's stories and described in the two monographs cited earlier, with Sadan's intuitive comprehension of Yiddishkeit, one can easily see many connections. It also comports with the convincing psychodynamic pattern presented by Schwartz. The negative aspects of being Jewish, the suffering, the stereotyping, the complex trauma of the child in the steppes of Transnistria, in the monastery in Italy and in the various institutions of Aliyat HaNoar in Israel induced radical erasure of memory. These are also part of the Jewish experience which shapes Jewish identity. Reconstruction of identity in a more positive direction seems to begin in the late 1940s and especially in the early 1950s. The positive core that sustains the ideological stance of the story derives from Appelfeld's reconstructive experiences of the early 1950s and can, I suggest, be identified to a

great extent with Dov Sadan. Even more importantly, what is central to or parallel with the reconstruction of identity is the acquisition of mastery in the Hebrew language which Appelfeld, as it is known, barely knew before 1946. For Appelfeld choices of diction or style are not merely the gestures of a creative artist; they are, in fact, assertions of identity.

Turning to the Appelfeld style that so intrigued Sadan, I shall conduct a brief experiment in stylistics. What Hebrew examples did Appelfeld have available when he began his writing career? By presenting six passages for scrutiny I draw certain tentative, though significant, conclusions as grounds for further study. I have selected four examples, two from the older, more established generation (Agnon and Hazaz) and two from those writers hailed as the new voices in Israeli literature in the early 1950s (Yizhar and Shamir). After these four, I shall present two characteristic passages by Appelfeld himself. The question to be asked in each case is to what extent these authors utilize intertexts taken either from traditional Jewish sources or from significant contemporary Hebrew writers.

The first is the opening passage of S. Y. Agnon's great novel of 1938–9, *Ore'ah natal lalun* ('A Guest for the Night'), which is very close to Appelfeld in theme and spirit. In it the narrator describes his return visit to the town of his childhood that had been devastated in the First World War. This fictive town was, like Appelfeld's Central European towns, formerly part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The Agnon novel was republished as part of the seven-volume set of Agnon's *Collected Works* that appeared in 1952, the year Appelfeld began his studies with Sadan at the Hebrew University. Agnon's characteristically mannered style was highly distinct and was adopted by the late 1950s in the early stories of A. B. Yehoshua, but not by Appelfeld.

The second passage is the opening of Hayyim Hazaz's *Hayoshevet baganim* (*Mori Sa'id* in English translation), first published in 1942. The opening is a fusion of Mendeleian balanced *nosah* with Hazaz's penchant for sweeping statements about Jewish history, and allusion to Biblical or rabbinic locutions. One might think that such an opening with its distinctive Jewish flavour might have attracted Appelfeld to emulate it, but there is no echo of Hazaz in Appelfeld. Hazaz was still esteemed in 1952, the year he published his massive novel *Yaish*.

The third passage is by S. Yizhar, the first paragraph of his popular and influential story *Hashavu'i* ('The Prisoner') of 1948–9. Yizhar's style here and elsewhere was distinctively innovative with its attention to the details of landscape and extremely long periods rendering complex thought patterns. Although Yizhar was one of the most acclaimed writers of the early 1950s, Appelfeld did not find in this style something he could use.

The fourth passage is perhaps the most significant for my argument: it is the opening of Moshe Shamir's *Hu halakh basadot* ('He walked in the Fields') of 1948, perhaps the most representative novel of the first generation of Israeli writers, called *Dor haPalmah* (the Palmah Generation). In reading this passage, one encounters such awkward elevated, Biblical and Mishnaic phrases as 'yehey vihey hasipek beyadkha' (you will have enough time) or 'keshi'ur dalet amot' (about four cubits) or 'velo tehay lahem berera' (they will have no alternative) or 'me'Elat bo'akha Metula' (from elat to Metula). These narrative gestures are contrasted with colloquial interior monologic 'tinofet shel asfalt, lazazel!' (this lousy asphalt, damn it!). Since Shamir was prominent and popular when Appelfeld was learning his craft, I shall compare the Shamir passage with the two Appelfeld passages. One can easily see the difference Sadan was probably referring to. As Shaked and others have noted, the style of what was called Dor HaMedinah is elevated, highly literary, and this meant heavily intertextual. This intertextuality was normal for elevated Hebrew prose since the models for literary elevation in Hebrew implied intense usage of traditional texts, which created, in my opinion, a strange sense of disjunction since these texts derive from the world of traditional Jewish religious life, which writers like Shamir or Megeg or Shaham or Yizhar knew from books, if at all.

As Appelfeld was learning his craft as a writer in the 1950s, the models of newly popular fiction by younger writers were precisely these. It is obvious that he chose not to emulate these writers – though this had become the acceptable norm of writing for the new generation of the newly created state of Israel. Why he did not choose this course is, of course, a matter of speculation – but speculation is no foreigner to literary criticism. The style of Shamir, to take a cardinal example, implied the world of the sabra, with all its nativist, macho ideology. A serious writer who had lived through the traumatic experiences represented by Appelfeld in *Mikhvat ha'or* ('Searing Light', 1980)

could not express himself in this style. Appelfeld's trauma of adjustment to Israeli society which was not particularly sympathetic to Holocaust survivors is well known to those who have read him closely, but relatively unknown to those readers who restrict their interest to the Holocaust experience.

There were, as seen from the examples presented, at least two other models, widely respected in the early 1950s, but of an older generation: Agnon and Hazaz. Hazaz does not emerge as impressive in any of Appelfeld's many interviews or essays, but Agnon looms as the great master he is and, as noted earlier, the second edition of his collected fiction appeared in 1952 to great and widely published critical acclaim. Despite his admiration for Agnon, Appelfeld, unlike the young Yehoshua, did not succumb to the seduction of Agnon's prose. Obviously Agnon's dense intertextuality did not embody the terror or trauma he had experienced and offer him the freedom of composition he sought. If one believes Appelfeld's own statement, the writer who evoked the proper resonance was not a Hebrew writer but Kafka, whom Appelfeld famously calls a *go'el*, a redeemer. In many ways Kafka was the perfect model: his prose style represented the deep personal struggle with his torments; he was a Central European Jew from a province of the old Habsburg Empire – Bohemia, not Bukovina, but still Habsburg; and his supple style presented no problem of intertextuality which might obstruct the nuancing Appelfeld sought.

Returning to Sadan to conclude my argument, I call attention to the specifics of Sadan's holistic approach to modern Jewish literature as it applies to Appelfeld. Sadan expanded the perspectives of investigation from Hebrew literature alone to Jewish literature, dividing the spectrum of Jewish literature into two segments: works in specifically Jewish languages such as Hebrew, Yiddish, Ladino, as opposed to works in other languages such as German, Russian, English, French. In the first segment, the vectors are inner-directed, hence philological and intertextual. In the second, the vectors are outer-directed, hence concerned with contexts in the Gentile world, thus ethnic. To use semiotic terms, the first is more diachronic than synchronic while the second is the opposite, more synchronic than diachronic. Appelfeld in his fiction has merged these two axes in his own unique way. He writes in Hebrew, is deeply concerned with problems of Jewish destiny and identity, but does so as one thinking

in terms of the synchronic axis. And this explains the specificity of his style and his concept of characterization. What seemed at first to be a paradox has thus turned out to be a heuristic device to penetrate the singular nature of his fictional stance.

Memory and Identity in *Sipur hayim* by Aharon Appelfeld

Risa Domb

In this paper I would like to examine Appelfeld's painful search for the childhood roots he lost during the Holocaust, and his struggle to forge for himself an identity in his newly adopted homeland, as represented in *Sipur hayim* ('Story of a Life').¹ This will entail two different, though ultimately connected, directions of examination: the role of memory in the construction of private and collective identity, and the nature of the identity being sought.

1. Aharon Appelfeld, *Sipur hayim* ('Story of a Life') (Jerusalem 1999).

Recent years have seen an unprecedented explosion in the writing of biographies, autobiographies and memoirs both in Israel and elsewhere. One of the reasons for this literary phenomenon is the blur in the postmodern era between factual and fictional narration. The traditional distinctions of biography, autobiography, personal history (diary/confession) and novel are coming to be questioned. Since biography and autobiography serve as a catalyst in the shaping of personal and collective identities, for many contemporary writers – Appelfeld included – autobiography is not merely a device for summing up the accumulated wisdom of a lifetime but a means of defining identity. Writing about lives is an ancient practice. Biographies have been important in the form of genealogical, religious and didactic texts since the start of recorded literature. Autobiography as such, including diaries and personal letters, began to appear in the sixteenth century and became widespread in Europe by the eighteenth century. Autobiographical writing includes both autobiography and memoirs, two distinct modes of writing, although they are often thought interchangeable. Memoirs customarily give some prominence to personalities and actions other than the writer's own; some are accounts of historical events that have been directly witnessed by those recording them. Autobiography, on the other hand, is a connected narrative of the author's life, stressing introspection

2. Alan Mintz, *Banished from their Fathers' Tables: Loss of Faith and Hebrew Autobiography* (Bloomington, Ind. 1989), and Risa Domb, 'Israeli and Modern Hebrew Life Writing' in Margaretta Jolly (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Life Writing* (London and Chicago 2002), 9-477.

and the significance of one's life against a wider background. It is artistically shaped and coherent. However, not all biographical works fall into these classifications. In an attempt to reflect this, the term 'life writing' has gained wide academic acceptance since the 1980s, both because of its openness and inclusiveness across the genre and because it encompasses the writing of one's own or another's life as well as memoirs.

Autobiography and biography were alien to traditional Jewish Hebrew culture because of the secondary status given to the individual in Judaism. There are relatively few autobiographies in classical Hebrew and medieval Jewish writing, and the arrival of autobiographical writing during the Haskalah period can be seen, as Alan Mintz pointed out, as an aberration in the development of Hebrew literature.² The collapse of religious cultural hegemony at the turn of the twentieth century prompted the creation of autobiographies, some of which crossed over into fiction, such as in the works of the writers Mordecai Ze'ev Feierberg (*Whither?*, 1899), and Joseph Hayyim Brenner (*In The Winter*, 1903), who developed the genre of fictional autobiography in Hebrew writing. Although these works are not strictly speaking autobiographies, they reflect the individual's ordeal, considered significant because it was representative of a collective crisis. Similarly, Zionist leaders in particular wrote autobiographies which were deemed acceptable since they seemed to be part of the Zionist national enterprise, in which public events took precedence over the private life of the individual. In the fictional autobiographies which appeared in Hebrew writing after 1948, the names of the narrators may not be those of the authors, but persons and events are authentic and the documentary and historical data accurate. Like the Haskalah writers, those of the 'Generation of the State' portrayed through the individual the life of a generation in crisis. The collective is central rather than the individual, and themes concerning the War of Independence and commitment to the newly established Israel and its ideology were paramount. In the 1960s, writers of the so-called New Wave Generation brought marginalized individuals into the limelight, and consequently many writers of the preceding 'Generation of the State' have recently turned to writing documentary-style autobiographies, in which they themselves are protagonists albeit under assumed names. These narratives contain extracts from journals, letters and memoirs, all of which reinforce the concrete and historical elements and weaken the fictional aspects of

the works. Examples of such writings, which include autobiographical descriptions of the writer's youth in Europe or in Israel, are Matti Megged's *Mem* (1985), Nathan Shaham's *Sefer Hatum* ('Sealed Scrolls' 1988), S. Yizhar's *Mikdamot* (1992), *Tsalhabim* (1993), *Tsdadiyim* ('Asides' 1996) and *Etsel hayam* ('By the Sea' 1996), and Nurit Zarhi's *Mishkei bedidu* ('Childhood Games' 1998). Haim Be'er's *Havalim* ('The Pure Element of Time' 1998) marks a departure, since his autobiography reveals his intimate life and uses his real name. Works such as Yoram Kaniuk's 'Post Mortem' (1992), Natan Zach's 'Death of My Mother' (1997) and Amos Oz's 'A Tale of Love and Darkness' (2002) contribute to this new development. It is in this context that we should view Appelfeld's *Sipur hayim*. However, I wish to suggest that whereas in the works mentioned above the use of unmasked autobiographical details departs dramatically from the authors' previous fictional writings, in Appelfeld this is not quite the case. To my mind, all of Appelfeld's work can be regarded as 'life writing', since his fictional narratives contain autobiographical elements which are not difficult to detect as such and which have become merely more transparent in this work. These elements can be traced more easily here than in other writings, possibly because they all allude specifically to the Holocaust, an event inherent in the shaping of Appelfeld's life as well as in his poetics. Although *Sipur hayim* presents fragmented chapters of Appelfeld's life, and despite the author's insistence that it should be regarded neither as autobiography nor as a chronological narration of life, but as chapters of memory and observation³ or as an 'inner tale' (p. 8), nevertheless *Sipur hayim* can be considered to be 'life writing'.

Memory is one of the most important components of life writing, its preservation being an important component of identity. As mentioned in my introductory words, I propose to examine the process of the formation of Appelfeld's identity, as an immigrant striving to link his past and his present through memory. In the modern world, individual memories acquire significance as the guarantors of social continuity. 'Memory is by nature multiple and yet specific; collective, plural, and yet individual', as the French historian Pierre Nora has put it.⁴ He suggests that 'through "identity", the singularity and permanence of the self (or group) are asserted; in "memory", the repertoire of representations of an individual or collective past is embraced as the distinctive repository and resource of a present consciousness.' Seen in this way, the preservation of memory has an important

3. It seems to me, therefore, that G. Shaked's accusation of omissions and selectivity in Appelfeld's life is not justified; 'Haberaha mehametsiut' (Escape from reality) *Ha'aretz*, 20 April 1999.

4. Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*' *Representations* 25 (Winter 1989) 9.

5. Michal Goldvicht, 'Bifnim bahashekhah rohashim hayenu habilti muvanim' (Inside in the darkness our inexplicable life is whispering) *Ha'aretz*, 20 February 2002.

6. On the indoctrination of Zionist ideology with reference to Appelfeld's work see Yigal Schwartz, *Kinat hayahid ve-netzah hashevet: Aharon Appelfeld: Tmunat 'olam* ('Individual Lament and Tribal Eternity: Aharon Appelfeld: Picture of his World') (Jerusalem 1996) 6-45, and Sidra Ezrahi, 'Revisioning the Past: The Changing Legacy of the Holocaust in Hebrew Literature' *Salmagundi* (Fall/Winter 1985-6) 70-245, and Alan Mintz, *Hurban, Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature* (New York 1984), 39-203. See also Hannan Hever, *Producing the Modern Canon: Nation Building and Minority Discourse* (New York 2000), esp. the Introduction, 1-10.

7. Anne Michaels, *Fugitive Pieces* (London 1996).

function and, as Michal Goldvicht noted, the pains of memory of the Diaspora, of being a refugee and of assimilation secretly nurture the here and now.⁵ In *Sipur hayim* Appelfeld strives to make sense of the chaos of life in general and of his own personal experience in particular. He presents different chapters and episodes in an attempt to reach the roots of his life and to reconnect with them (p. 8). The trauma of his experience of the Holocaust required his memories to be banished into 'the inner cellars of the soul' (p. 7). A great deal has been written about the prevailing Zionist ideology which insisted on the suppression of survivors' memories,⁶ but Appelfeld examines also the personal, self-imposed suppression of memory. It seems that only while serving in the army did his suppressed memories surface and lead him to his past, to the world in which he grew up and to which he felt connected (p. 128). Appelfeld's memories of the war years are of a specific kind: they are memories of a child, not an adult. It is not surprising, then, that he describes them as if they are imprinted in the cells of his body and instinctive sensations rather than as clear images (p. 83) or clear memories, as others perceive them to be. Smell, damp shoes or a sudden noise can take him back into himself. 'I do not invent, I draw from the inner depths of my body sensations and thoughts that I absorbed during my blindness' (p. 169, also p. 49).

Thus Appelfeld claims that it was senses that informed him of his experience, not words, and insists that words are false, that they 'cannot confront big catastrophes' (p. 96). Undoubtedly this is the source of Appelfeld's 'poetics of silence'. A similar view on the role of words and silence in literary texts was expressed by the Holocaust survivor in Anne Michaels's book *Fugitive Pieces*: 'I listened to these dark shapes as if they were black spaces in music, a musician learning the silences of a piece. I felt this was my truth. That my life could not be sorted in any language but only in silence.'⁷ Appelfeld needed to find again the silence of the war years and to revive it so that he could find himself. But with what words and in what way? These are the very same questions that Primo Levi had asked. Not surprisingly, when Appelfeld tried to describe the story of the forest, all words 'evaporated' (p. 164), seeming banal and unable to convey the experience itself. Yet it is paradoxically through words that Appelfeld sought his rehabilitation and searched for the reconstruction of memory and the self.

In the process of reconstruction of the self, 'the acquisition of the new language was the greatest challenge.'⁸ When Appelfeld arrived in Palestine in 1946 at the age of fourteen he found he had no language at all. 'What can I do with no language?' he asked (p. 102). This handicap affected his whole existence. The Hebrew language, exotic though it sounded, was difficult for him to pronounce (p. 100). The loss of his mother tongue represented the loss of his home, his parents and the world to which he belonged. After the lonely war years, the long and formative period of time during which he had hardly used words (p. 111) and had had to work hard on learning to pronounce them (p. 49), he found it difficult to communicate, was short in speech and became capable of narrating with the utmost brevity (p. 113). In order to overcome his stuttering he read German and Hebrew and learnt whole sentences by heart so that he could learn how to speak again. Between 1946 and 1950, while working in the fields of the agricultural college at Nahalal, Appelfeld struggled to learn Hebrew, the Bible and Bialik's poetry (p. 101). The Zionism written and unwritten slogan for new male immigrants at the time was: 'Forget, integrate, speak Hebrew, improve your appearance and nurture your manliness' (p. 126). Whoever spoke in their mother tongue was sternly rebuked, and he hated those who forced him to speak Hebrew (p. 101). Appelfeld's mother tongue died away, and at the age of eighteen he could not write properly in any language. He finally wrote in a language that he had initially resisted. One of the first steps towards integration in a new society is to adopt the native language. However, Appelfeld recalls that it sounded to him like a language of soldiers imposed on him by force. Hebrew was a stepmother to him (p. 103). This reaction resembles that of Kafka, a writer whose style influenced Appelfeld's writing. Kafka, a Czech writing in German, created a language that like Appelfeld's was distinguished by its economy and by the fact that its syntax was different from the dominant German of Prague. Both writers de-territorialized the language, to use Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's terminology.⁹ A recent study reveals that a similar process can be detected in the poetry of Amichai, Zach and Dan Pagis.¹⁰ Perhaps this is the reason why Appelfeld is seen as, in the linguistic sense, in exile. As Sidra Ezrahi pointed out, for Appelfeld 'the Hebrew language seems to provide neither a bridge nor a window onto the past.'¹¹ There is no doubt that the role of the Hebrew language is an all-encompassing issue in the debate on the identity of the Jewish people, their roots, their religion and the way forward in every aspect

8. Gila Ramras-Rauch, *Aharon Appelfeld: The Holocaust and Beyond* (Bloomington, Ind.1994) 14.

9. See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, 'What is a Minor Literature?' *Mikan* (May 2000) 43-134.

10. Nilly Sharf-Gold, "'A Boat Carrying Longings': The Big Journey in the Sea and its Imprints in the Poetry of Amichai' *Mikan* (December 2002) 86-100.

11. Sidra D. Ezrahi, *By Words Alone* (Chicago 1982) 370.

12. Y. Bronowski expressed concern regarding the loss of the homogeneity of the Hebrew language as an important component of Israeli identity with the recent Russian immigration in Israel; 'Marak hatarbut shel 'akeret habayit' (The cultural soup of a housewife) *Ha'aretz* 10 April 1998, p. 13B.

13. For an interesting comparison between Bergner's painting and Appelfeld's prose in the presentation of the destroyed world of their European childhood see Dror Burstein, 'Mikarov' *Yediot Ahronot* 7 (Winter 2001) 86–101.

14. See Schwartz, *Kinat hayahid ve-netzah hashevet* 83–4.

15. Burstein, 'Mikarov' 94, noted that both Bergner and Appelfeld represent the Jewish European world on the eve of its destruction. Both artists paint it as a perfect, self-contained world which resembles a coloured bubble, unaware how thin its skin is.

16. As in S. Yizhar *Mikdamot* (1992) and *Tsalhabim* (1993).

17. As in A. Megged *Ha-hai 'al hamet* (1965).

of their being. For many, their language is inseparable from their identity.¹²

Appelfeld experienced the sense of not belonging and forever asked himself: 'Who am I and what am I in this country?' (p. 125). He felt he belonged neither 'here' nor 'there'. Survivors were forced to dissociate themselves not only from their mother tongue but altogether from the world of their past, to forget it and to integrate into what was for them an artificial world (p. 154). They had to become Jewish farmers and fighters, were accused when they failed to do so, and had to defend themselves from unfair attacks. While Appelfeld envied survivors who were able to forget and to integrate, he could not do so. He could not submerge himself and assimilate into a Palestinian/Israeli existence (p. 138), perhaps because he refused to obliterate his past in order to build a new life on its ruins.¹³ As mentioned earlier, memory was central in his struggle to shape or reshape his own self. He strove to connect his new life to his childhood, which might have contributed to his decision to become a writer, since he was afraid that the story of his childhood and of his parents and grandparents might be lost for ever (p. 165). The world of S. Yizhar and Moshe Shamir, the popular writers of the 1950s in Israel, was not his world, however. Their innocence and idealization was alien to him and stood in stark contrast with his earlier life and experiences (p. 105). Their negation of the Diaspora led them to be disconnected from the long history of Jewish life in Europe. Yigal Schwartz has pointed out that Appelfeld is closer to older Hebrew and Yiddish writers who represented the *shtetl* than to Israeli writers.¹⁴ They were connected to Jewish life in Europe, to the world Appelfeld lost. Dror Burstein draws interesting parallels between Appelfeld and the painter Yossel Bergner and suggests that because both view Israeli reality through the lenses of the ruins of the European world, both are regarded as exilic, alien and non-Israeli artists who do not belong and who represent a world which has died.¹⁵ Against this view I would like to argue strongly that the European world which died is an inherent part of Israel and that both artists do represent Israeli experience. Israeli identity, shaped by the early Zionist founders of Israeli nationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, has passed through repeated processes of change. In the 1920s the model of the 'New Jew' became the 'New Hebrew'. In the late 1930s and in the 1940s, it transmuted into the native 'Sabra'.¹⁶ Since the 1950s the model has been transformed into the 'Israeli',¹⁷ and during the 1960s and 1970s

into Jewish/Israeli.¹⁸ A. B. Yehoshua regards this 'neo-Judaism' as a process of reconciliation between early Zionism and Judaism.¹⁹ The effects of the Shoah on all aspects of Israeli life, the increased ethnic awareness and the new phenomenon of the 'born-again' Jew brought about a Judaization of secular society. Having previously identified themselves as Israelis, many writers have become Israeli Jews, and that is often reflected in the representation of their characters.

Appelfeld became a writer for refugees, rather than for ideological Zionists. This was not an easy path to choose since the reading public in the 1950s and early 1960s, when Appelfeld began to publish, was receptive to survivors' memoirs and authentic testimonies, but not to fiction which represented the Holocaust experience. Appelfeld, as an immigrant, a refugee, a person who carries inside him the child of the war, explains: 'fiction was regarded as provocation' (p. 97, also p. 141). Most of his teachers at the Hebrew University, however, who influenced him when he first started to write, such as Dov Sadan, Martin Buber and Gershom Scholem, were born abroad and like him carried the pain of two homelands; from them he learnt that a homeland is not necessarily a geographical locus but can be transported (p. 138). He came to the conclusion that 'here' and 'there' are not as disconnected as Zionist slogans insisted, and in this respect Appelfeld stood apart from mainstream Israeli writers. He was attracted to Yiddish and Hasidic literature, both of them antithetical to the emerging Israeli culture, but it was precisely through Yiddish literature, even though it was looked down on, that Appelfeld hoped to rediscover his ancestors in the Carpathian Mountains and through it to reconstruct his identity. In the 'New Life' club, established in Jerusalem in 1950 for survivors from Galicia and Bukovina, he found a surrogate home (p. 166). There he heard familiar languages such as Yiddish, Polish, Russian, German and Romanian, and saw faces that reminded him of his lost life. His whole writing enterprise can be seen as a journey back home, in other words to Europe. Perhaps this has contributed to the frequent claim, or even accusation, that 'he is a Jew writing in Hebrew in Israel rather than a typically Israeli writer.'²⁰ I agree that 'typically Israeli writer' he is not, but an Israeli writer he is. Appelfeld was always aware of the distinction between these two identities and, as Gershon Shaked noted, he 'writes for the Jews of Israel, reminding them that, perhaps against their wishes, they are not only new Hebrews but also old Jews.'²¹

18. As in B. Tammuz's trilogy *Elyakum* and in N. Shaham's *Series*.

19. A. B. Yehoshua, *Hakir ve-hahar* (Tel Aviv 1989) 56.

20. Gershon Shaked, *Sifrut 'az kan ve-'akshav* (Literature Then, Here and Now) (Tel Aviv 1993) 143; also many critics mentioned in Schwartz, *Kinat hayahid ve-netzah hashevet* 195.

21. Gershon Shaked, 'Appelfeld and his Times: Transformations of Ahashveros, the Eternal Wandering Jew' *Hebrew Studies* 36 (Madison 1995) 100.

22. See Schwartz, *Kinat hayahid ve-netzah hashevet* 111.

23. Shaked, 'Haberihamehahmetziut', is unfairly critical of this post-assimilatory attitude, claiming that Appelfeld's escape from Israeliness to his European past brings him closer to radical Diaspora assimilated Jews than to those who claim to have an Israeli identity.

24. For further discussion on the subject see Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity* (Cambridge 1991) 1–9.

25. Yehoshua, *Hakir vehahar* 56.

Again and again Appelfeld focuses on one problem: the identity crisis of the modern Jew.²² In *Sipur hayim* he testifies to his search for authentic Judaism, showing sympathy towards traditional Judaism which he terms 'post-assimilatory'.²³ Unlike in his earlier days, Appelfeld no longer stands apart from the concerns of the mainstream. Zionist ideology and Israeli identity are in a state of disorientation not least because this is typical of modernity and results from the openness and pluralization of social life, as well as from an increase of choices.²⁴ Amid a puzzling diversity of options and possibilities, one of the attractive choices for Israelis seems to be the reconciliation between early Zionism and Judaism.²⁵ Secular Israelis today may reopen their old 'Jewish Bookcase' and draw from it new meanings. 'Jewish' and 'Israeli' no longer seem antithetical, and this ongoing reconciliation will no doubt lead to new options. Appelfeld reached that conclusion long ago, for in his life writing the need to preserve memory, and to link the past with the present, guided him in shaping his own identity.

Dislocation, Alienation and Detachment in Appelfeld's Fiction

Edna Amir-Coffin

Displaced Writer of Displaced Fiction

Aharon Appelfeld's life experiences have been transformed into his works of fiction and memoirs. His characters, echoing the life experience of the author, spend their childhood in solitary wanderings through ominous spaces during the war years. They undergo the harrowing experiences of being uprooted from family and home, and are caught in their own nightmare, unaware of the magnitude of historical events in which they are entrapped. Caught in the post-traumatic consequences and haunted by their experience, the survivors attempt to rehabilitate themselves through resurrecting the forgotten past, both individual and tribal.

In this paper I shall look at the depiction of the alienated and displaced adults who had suffered as children from the traumatic events of the war. They emerge from the chaos of war in the postwar years and find it difficult to escape their memories, in spite of their attempts to suppress them. They differ from others in the society in which they seek to rehabilitate themselves in countless ineluctable ways and cannot shed their past or their status and self perception as 'the other', both as victims and as refugees, and seem marked for life. The sense of the displacement and isolation, the inability to form attachments and sustain intimate relationships constitute the main post-traumatic syndromes exhibited by these survivors. They are incapable of enjoying the newly acquired freedom, and feel a need for seclusion and solitude and seek flight from 'normal' life and society into the inner recesses of 'the self'. Their inability to trust others and their perception of the ill intentions harboured against them seem inappropriate in their new circumstances, and

1. Definition of PTSD taken from the internet site of the Centre for PTSD Fact Sheet: 'Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD, is a psychiatric disorder that can occur following the experience or witnessing of life-threatening events such as military combat, natural disasters, terrorist incidents, serious accidents, or violent personal assaults like rape. People who suffer from PTSD often relive the experience through nightmares and flashbacks, have difficulty sleeping, and feel.'

2. Aharon Appelfeld, *Sipur hayim* ('Story of a Life') (Jerusalem 1999) 50.

3. Dan Bar-On, *The 'Others' within Us* (Beer-Sheva 1999) 4.

4. S. Robinson, M. Rapaport-Bar-Sever and J. Rapaport, 'Child Survivors of the Holocaust: their Present Mental State and Coping: A Preliminary Report' *Echoes of the Holocaust* 2 (April 1993) 28.

stem from the trauma of a childhood and adolescence deprived of parental love, from a strong sense of dislocation and from a feeling of abandonment that continues to haunt them. Their compulsion and unrelenting quest for separation and detachment leads to unfulfilled and lonely adulthoods.

In considering Appelfeld's development of the emotional make-up of his protagonists, it is useful to explore certain aspects of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)¹ that provide a framework not only for understanding emotional reactions in infants and children but also for comprehending the consequences in adults. Attachment styles in adults are thought to stem directly from the mental models of the self and others that were developed during infancy and childhood. It provides a key for grasping how the horrendous chain of events depicted in Appelfeld's stories affected *the children who* coped with the loss of a mother, an experience, the author tells us, he himself did not witness, but 'the last cry still resonates in his ears',² followed by forced separation and dislocation. Uprooted from home and from much of early known experience, these children are unprepared by their previous lives for what is to come. Added to this is the painful encounter and attempt to root oneself in a new homeland that never quite manages to be home in the full sense of the word. All of this manifests itself years later, in various disorders. Holocaust survivors, who began a new life in Israel, had to deal with the question of identity. Perceived as the 'other' by the native-born Israelis, they had to adapt to the collective monolithic identity³ or risk isolation and non-acceptance. They attempted to do so but at the same time, plagued by memories, they had to retreat into the inner self, into the world of the past, never quite able to get out of the trauma and the past experience. In many cases they were not fully able to forge a new identity, to forget about the past and to attempt a normal life, as prescribed by the society into which they were integrated. Psychologists who have researched the topic have noted that the suffering of child survivors from post-traumatic symptoms, the traumatic stress of these survivors, becomes even more severe later than was experienced immediately after the war. Most of them still feel that they are *suffering* mentally and physically from the impact of the persecution they underwent during the Holocaust.⁴

This distress, at times latent and at times overt, is clearly evident in the voices of many of the fictional characters that inhabit Appelfeld's

works. The many classic symptoms documented in professional literature of such post-trauma are exhibited through the various characters in the stories: inability to bond, depression, anti-social behaviour, anxiety, avoidance of intimacy for fear of separation, repression of memory but at the same time reliving the trauma in nightmares, the splitting of the self, a blurred sense of identity and a host of physical symptoms. They demonstrate failure to become a part of the collective, in spite of desperate efforts to do so.

The Action Arena

There is a close and direct relationship between Appelfeld's characters and the stage on which they perform. The stage is defined by space and time and by the mental state of the actors. The arenas in which the protagonists are placed can be divided into four centre stages and two transitional juncture points, that lead from one stage to another: Europe – the first centre stage – is associated with home, which is mainly an imagined reconstructed idyllic home or homes in the pre-war period; Europe transformed constitutes the second arena, in which the characters are thrust from the security of home to the vast spaces of the countryside and forests with dangers lurking everywhere, where the individuals and groups continuously wander seeking safety from the predators during the war years. The transitional DP camps provide the juncture with the move to Israel, the third action arena, which instead of providing the promised homeland is depicted in many stories as almost an illusory adoptive stepmother land. And the last and most important one is the fourth arena, a hybrid universe which combines the three previous ones and gives rise to a new one – living in the present in the refuge place, but at the same time suffering from what Yigal Schwartz aptly described as Lot's wife syndrome⁵ – looking back rather than living in the present – being driven by a frantic relentless preoccupation with the world of some indefinable past. The characters try to reverse time, to search obsessively for a past that has been erased from memory by re-inventing many variations of that world. It is not one particular journey to look for lost things, but a multitude of such paths in an unclear blurred roadmap. This new hybrid arena is full of inherent contradictions: it reflects a movement away from the vast open spaces of the forests and away from the constant movement of refugee bands roving aimlessly, and reduces to an enclosed, static and ever shrinking space that provides a shelter from the outside

5. Yigal Schwartz, *Kinat hayahid ve-netzah hashevet: Aharon Appelfeld: Tmunat 'olam* ('Individual Lament and Tribal Eternity: Aharon Appelfeld: Picture of his World') (Jerusalem 1996) 15.

6. In an interview with Michael Gluzman, *Mikan* 1 (2002) 150, Appelfeld describes his sense of being an immigrant: 'I grew up as an orphan, I went through the war, and I grew up among the refugees, and I am still an immigrant. An immigrant is an immigrant is an immigrant.'
7. Aharon Appelfeld, *Badenheim 1939* (Tel Aviv 1975) trans. Dalya Bilu (Godine 1980).
8. Aharon Appelfeld, *1946* (Tel Aviv 1978) 77-105.
9. Aharon Appelfeld, *Laylah ve'od laylah* (Jerusalem 2001).

world. Those who populate it live in a constant existential state of being refugees rather than beginning a new life.⁶ At the same time, however, this seemingly hopeless direction leads to an inner space that, while barren and haunted, also suggests that it can be the one avenue that leads to self-discovery.

Ensemble and Individual Stories

There are two main related formats Appelfeld uses for his survivor stories: the ensemble stories are used effectively in the novella *Badenheim 1939*,⁷ set in pre-war Europe on the eve of the Holocaust, where a group of individuals is transformed into a community through the force of events, or the novella *1946*⁸ where a similar caste of characters appears as refugees right after the war and a reverse process of disintegration of the community takes place, and a recent novel *Laylah ve'od laylah* ('Night after Night'),⁹ which is an ensemble novel set in a pension in Jerusalem, with a caste of characters who lead parallel, isolated lives in a communal setting and seek to find salvation and solution to their existential dilemmas in the revival of Yiddish as the language for literary expression; it attempts to link memory and experience not through language alone but at some deeper level. The second format is that of the story that revolves around individuals; it portrays their solitary insular experience and focuses on the individual who retreats from the community. It often appears in the form of a short story – where anonymous characters are depicted in a sketchier, less fleshed out fashion, as if the author wants to avoid a closer encounter with the subject. Many of Appelfeld's early short stories take this form, but it also serves as the building block for larger works, which often adopt a seemingly ensemble mode but are actually separate individual stories connected by a frame story. In *Night after Night* the efforts to live communally in the pension does not save the participants from their ontological isolation and solitary anguish and nightmares. The entire novel is based on a constantly shifting and undulating dynamics, on the forces and needs that draw the survivors together in search of some solace and collective redemption, and the private terrifying memories that tear them apart. This is reflected in the form as well as the content, as each person is entrapped in his or her own individual trauma:

In any case, each person is by himself. In the early hours of the morning you can sense the thick loneliness rising from the rooms.

Here every resident has a story, and there are those who have two or three stories that they drag with them from place to place, mostly complicated and painful stories, that if any came to light, it would cause an upheaval in the pension for quite a few days.¹⁰

10. Ibid.13.

The spectrum of emotions of these central figures is limited – there is a certain flatness to them, also characteristic of those who suffer from past trauma syndromes. Surprisingly, the rage, the aggression, the thirst for revenge is rarely expressed overtly. Mostly guilt, shame, alienation, humiliation,¹¹ inadequacy and inability to engage with life and with others dominate the scene. And yet rage is there, even when not expressed. As Robert Krell, a psychiatrist and himself a survivor who studied survivor children, observed:

There is an avoidance that is partly an attempt to escape the victim's rage. And there is no greater rage. Collusion in silence with victims of the extreme – of those who experienced humiliation, torture, and torment – is common. Silence feels safer. Better not ask. Yet rage exists. It exists because of, and about, the perpetrators. It must be understood and recognized before healing can take place. Ask any victim of severe abuse. In fact, ask any of us, and do so with compassion and without fear, and you'll hear a story that may be healing, not only for the teller, but also for the listener.¹²

While, on the whole, Appelfeld's characters are passive and not possessed by revenge, it becomes the obsession of one of the residents of the pension in *Night after Night*. The pension owner, Mrs Pracht, a German Jew, who embodies the philosophy of assimilation, including a hostile and dismissive attitude towards Yiddish, becomes an embodiment of German civilization and rejection of Jewish values and traditions in the mind of the East European survivors. A foreshadowing of the act of violence, with drinking and total solitude as its precursors, appears early in the story:

A year ago, one of the residents attacked Mrs. Pracht, threw her on the floor and threatened to strangle her. Had it not been for some residents who rushed to save her, it is doubtful if she would have survived. The attacker, one of the veteran residents of the pension, a quiet and introverted man, used to sit in his room most of the day and drink. His drinking

11. Appelfeld has spoken about the overwhelming sense of humiliation experienced in particular by children: 'Life equipped me only to be a writer – it equipped me with orphanhood, pains, poverty, hunger and, the most difficult of all, with humiliation. During the time of war the ones who were most humiliated were the women and children, and the children more than the women.' Interview with Gluzman, 153.

12. Robert Krell, 'Children who Survived the Holocaust: Reflections of a Child Survivor/Psychiatrist' *Echoes of the Holocaust* (4 June 1995).

13. Appelfeld, *Laylah ve'od laylah* 13.

was solitary and lacked any outward expression. In the pension nobody remembered even one violent move of his. A man without a shadow, as they say, by himself and only by himself.¹³

14. Ibid. 153.

In his delusional state, Mordechai feels that it is his duty to the community to eradicate the German presence and so kills Mrs Pracht, who had to come to represent the threat to him. He sees the act of violence as justified and is ready for the consequences: 'I did my duty, and now I am ready to die' (p. 152). It in some ways expresses the collective fury and rage, the need for a violent response, for an act of revenge. Yet the thought that the victim can assume the identity of his victimizer and turn into a killer shocks them. 'I dream of all kinds of things', says Stiegler, one of the residents, 'but I have never dreamt about a murder in the pension. Reality, it seems, is stronger than nightmare. Nightmare, at times, is but a pale shadow of reality.'¹⁴

This City is but a City and not a Home

15. Aharon Appelfeld 'translit' (This city) Yediot Aharonot www.ynet.co.il/articles/1,7340,L-560910,FF.html.

An extract from a short story that appeared in the literary supplement of an Israeli newspaper provides an excellent illustration of the ongoing psychological damage incurred by individual survivors. The story, 'This City',¹⁵ a very short story of about eight hundred words, manages to have a great impact in spite of its brevity. I found myself constantly referring to it as 'That City' or as 'the Strange or Alien City' since the deictic markers seemed misplaced. Only when I realized that the effect that the story produced was that of the negative of a photograph, where the colors are reversed and reduced, where oppositions work on a different axis of expectations, did I realize that so do the deictic markers in the story.

The title 'This City' need not and perhaps should not be read as a noun phrase but rather as an exclamatory sentence, behind which is a cry full of emotion: The title, which at first is seemingly a neutral one, upon reading the story provokes a different response, when the intention becomes clearer. Behind it is a strong rejection, a disdain, an irony, even a tone of derision and certainly that of disappointment – it actually creates a distance from the here and now. This city is indeed but a city – not a home.

The narrator identifies himself as a refugee – but he is by no means a

newcomer to this city, for he tells us that his circumstances are that of an established member of society:

'I have a spacious apartment, a suitable shower, a device that generates classical music, a library and savings that can support me till the end of my days.'¹⁶ And yet he presents himself as someone who does not belong, as a perpetual refugee – the words are picked carefully – the term survivor is not used. A survivor would be **translit**, that is, one who was saved from the Holocaust – our protagonist is not yet saved and maintains his emotional refugee status, **translit**, which is both a fugitive and a refugee and comes from the root to be ejected from some place. That choice is significant. While a *palit* often points to a temporary state, here it is used for a person in a continuous state of homelessness. The refugee identity of the narrator is fully preserved, and he is unable and unwilling to shed it. It helps him maintain his ambivalence towards his new home.

16. Ibid.

The narrator starts the story in this manner: 'Tel Aviv is a sticky town during July. You cannot touch a railing or lean on a wall. I bought myself a pair of gloves to separate myself from the foul materials that surround me.' These opening sentences are extremely powerful – the discomfort, the lack of belonging and inappropriateness of response to the external environment are transmitted in these two short sentences. The climate is hostile and the refuge taken from it is achieved by putting on gloves in the heat of summer. In this short description Appelfeld manages to create a reading between the lines that implies much more than is stated – the narrator's neurosis is reminiscent of a classic symptom of the patient who washes his hands continuously to separate himself from what he perceives as a threatening and foul environment. It is both a gesture of unhealthy obsession and a rejection of the world outside. With a short and fine stroke of a brush, Appelfeld brings it all to the forefront. This is corroborated as the story moves along:

Everything is sweaty. I spend hours in the shower, but the steamy sweat penetrates, pollutes the air and stifles. I turn on the classical music station and sit in my easy chair. An hour or two of classical music removes me from this boiling pot and plants me back in my beloved landscape.¹⁷

17. Ibid.

The hostile weather colludes with the city – both unbearable – but it becomes somewhat tolerable in the winter – for our narrator is a

18. Ibid.

winter man in what is a summer land. The mismatch can be found in many small details in this and other stories: 'Had it not been for the winter, I am in doubt whether I would have lasted in this place. In the winter I am a different man. I open the door of my apartment and go out with my head up high. My hat and coat lend me privacy and I feel insulated.'¹⁸

19. Appelfeld writes about his relationship with Agnon in *Studies in the Fiction of S. J. Agnon* (Oxford 1994) 12-207.

Someone who feels rejected and answers with rejection expresses a great deal of hostility. He tells us that he feels no need to justify how and what he feels, not to himself and not to others. I do what I do, and I never explain. In this sense also, I am a strange creature in this city. Here accusations, excuses and explanations are widespread. He sets himself apart from the collective, and he actually ends up doing the opposite of what he claims (reminiscent of some of Agnon's heroes in **translit**¹⁹) – while accusing, he is also providing a rationalization, excuses and indictments – the very things he claims to loathe. His strong outburst turns into a confessional act as well as a condemnation. But this type of confessional needs no eye contact or any interaction with the listener. The act of confession is done in isolation and the addressee is absent.

20. **Translit.** this city

Alone, estranged, uncommunicative, he is incapable of any intimacy, of any sense of closeness – the necessary qualities for healing and starting a new life. Being a refugee also provides refuge from any personal commitments. Any change of state of mind seems to him to be a betrayal of true identity and of the past. This is almost a case study for how traumatic events continue to affect the individual throughout her or his entire life. His experience leads him to loss of trust – it tells him that intimacy is a potential source of pain and that the separation he experienced as a child is without a doubt waiting to happen again. He interrupts his diatribe to discuss his relationship or rather entanglements with women: 'It is true that women have disrupted my life, and not without leaving me some lovely memories. I have already learned, that only fleeting and short encounters are for the most part successful, the rest only entangles you. It is best to crave a woman instead of being with her for any length of time.'²⁰

From that generalization about women, he moves to perhaps the high point of the story, the one which most reveals the truth of his situation, which he is clearly aware of but unwilling to acknowledge. It is the failure to form an attachment to a particular woman, Tina, herself a

refugee, for whom the reader senses he has a great attraction, affinity, admiration and even the beginnings of an emotional involvement – all of which are very threatening. This is described subtly, economically and elegantly by the author, in two short paragraphs, full of tenderness mixed with high anxiety.

I fondly remember one woman by the name of Tina, who resided in Jaffa at the end of the 50s, actually more correctly in Jabaliya. I got together with her a number of times, but every moment of it remains imprinted in me: her eyes when I entered, the manner in which she stood and pulled back her hair, took my coat from my hand, the arch of her back when she served me a drink. She never asked me what I do, as is customary, and I never asked her, as if it was agreed between us that the past indeed had significance, but not a decisive one.²¹

21. Ibid.

Tina is one of a host of feminine, nearly ethereal characters in Appelfeld's works, who cannot adjust and belong to a present reality, to a new Jewish homeland disconnected from the European landscape. Among them are Kitty (in the short story by that name), who spends the war years and finds her death in a convent,²² Kristina in *Laylah ve'od laylah* ('Night after Night'), who leaves her husband and young son, to return to life in a convent. Tina provides a representation of all that was, as resurrected and fabricated in his memories – harmony, love, elegance and an ideal state in idyllic circumstances. His description of Tina conflates all these:

22. **Translit** (Kitty) (1963).

Tina was about thirty, perhaps younger, and she had a certain nobility that by now has vanished from the world. All of her movements said: let's be good to each other, so long as it is possible. Who know what tomorrow may bring us? She was, like the rest of us, a refugee, but the sense of being a refugee did not adhere to her. She spoke nice German and French, like all the girls from good families in my hometown of Czernowitz.²³

23. **Translit** This City.

The idealized figure of Tina is a replication of the lost mother, the lost home and the idealized memory built around it. In addition, she represents a strong link to a non-Jewish European identity tied to Christianity, in a form that is isolated from actual reality. It provides

24. Ibid.

conditioned shelter to those under its protection and an escape mechanism from the vicissitudes of life. In real life Tina might turn out to have other real needs that would undermine this idealized reconstruction. He interprets rather than gives Tina a voice of her own – it is her movements that send the message to him – and the reader senses that, if she spoke, her words might carry quite a different message. Tina, kept at a distance by the narrator, her voice muted, finds a different kind of refuge and love: she seeks solitude in a Christian world, in a convent, that sheltered her in other days. She too fails to find a new life in the new land. 'Now I know that I was not good enough for her. One meets a woman like Tina only once in a lifetime. It seems that I did not know how to value what was offered to me.'²⁴

25. Ibid.

The responsibility for this failure, and the inability to consider the needs of another, is entirely his. His rationalization, his inaction and his inability to express by a performative act a promise for commitment he interprets as shared by Tina, whom he perceives likewise flees such a commitment: 'Her words were few and charmingly limited. She seemingly knew what I had learned after a while: words only insult or hurt or leave a continuous conflict in the soul, and it is better to avoid them.'²⁵ The narrator resorts to the mechanism of self-defence, that of avoidance, which protects him from a repetition of painful experience and, consequently, a refusal to engage with life. Instead of accepting Tina as a woman, he transforms her into the embodiment of the past he longs for. The object of his potential love is so purified that she is no longer an object of desire; instead it becomes a relationship with a dead past, which is not an option.

Avoidant adults are somewhat uncomfortable being close to others; they find it difficult to trust others completely and difficult to allow themselves to depend on others. Avoidant adults are nervous when anyone gets close and, often, love partners want them to be more intimate than they feel comfortable being. The role of the women in this story is part of the paradigm that the narrator creates: the city takes on a symbolic meaning and its inhabitants are but a metonymic representation:

Sometimes it seems to me that the women are not to blame, only the city. A city that is given over to the domination of a cruelly beating sun, of humidity and sticky sweat, and can

produce but crude and coarse words. The words, like the blowing fans in the cheap cafés, do not bring any relief, or understanding, only a hum and a buzz.

Everything is buzzing here. It is no wonder that big screaming women pop up in every corner. Fat men sit under the worn awnings and streams of sweat drip from their faces. Who are they? How did I ever end up here? What am I doing in their strange proximity?

Sometimes I think that everyone wants to escape the sweat and the noise. The sticky sweat, of course, does not dissipate. The noise increases daily. From my sealed apartment it sounds at times like an ongoing stream of curses and sometimes as a violent joy.²⁶

26. Ibid.

The narrator's strong reaction to the fat men sitting under the umbrellas and the screaming women seems to suggest more than a dislike for the new environment. It suggests that the strong reaction to the noise, the sweat and the curses bring up other fragments of memory, associated with the trauma of the years of the war. This suggestion is backed by research carried out by a psychologist on those who suffer from PTSD:

A smell, a sound, an image evoke fragments of images or emotions, more compelling than current reality, fragments to which all experience pain, anger, fear, shame and powerlessness have attached themselves. If a coherent account must be given, then it is often painfully apparent that this is impossible. Most often, the person is unable to present an overview of this period.²⁷

The only solution found is avoidance and withdrawal: 'I am thinking of building double doors so that I can separate myself, once and for all times, from the sweat and the din. Clumsy words and sticky sweat are a deadly combination. Dig myself more and more into my apartment, and the thought that I don't belong to all of this, is all embracing.'²⁸

27. L. van Ravesteijn, 'Gelaagdheid van herinneringen' (Layering of memories). *Tijdschrift voor Psychotherapie* V 1 (1976) 195.

28. This City.

The story emphasizes the degree to which its protagonist strives to escape from the noise of the crowds into a world of silence. Silence

29. Interview with Michael March, <http://www.new-presence.cz/97/09/interview.htm>.

30. From *Derrida* (2002), documentary film directed by Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering Kofman.

and isolation protect him from the sweaty collective body of people among whom he is destined to spend his postwar existence. Appelfeld confirms that silence indeed feels safer for his survivors. This sense is heightened through the writing style as well. There are many gaps, many details not told to the reader, and these gaps are filled by long silences. Appelfeld has commented that he found silence to be one of the underlying foundations of character building and that silences make up the discourse in his stories: 'From Beckett I understood that the unspoken is more important than the spoken – that the silence between words is one of the most important things. He was indirectly one of my teachers.'²⁹

A Shifting Locus

What does this short fragment from Appelfeld's extensive work tell its readers? Jacques Derrida provides an excellent justification for reading much into a short work. In a documentary film of 2002,³⁰ when asked questions about his life in an attempt to provide a biographical sketch, Derrida responded that the best way to get to know any philosopher or writer is not through asking such questions or writing biographies, but by reading a sample of the writing carefully, attempting to understand it in some depth; this will lead one to know much more than if one reads an exhaustive biography by someone who claims to know all there is to know about the subject.

This is essentially my method in this paper, by taking a look at the extremely short story 'This City', rather than at the larger picture. This story is embedded in the wonderful tapestry of the totality of Appelfeld's fiction – stories, novels and other writings which constitutes his expanding universe. By being added to this extensive body of literature, this story again shifts the focus as the components of Appelfeld's works rearrange themselves. The author takes the reader on different pathways in his journey for the search of some location – which shifts constantly and never reveals itself clearly. 'This City' is but another attempt that ends in failure to find a path to the existential dilemma.

The questions that are always asked are to what extent Appelfeld's fiction is autobiographical and what is the relationship between his own life and his fictional works. Derrida makes an interesting comment on the relationship between the two components:

Neither readings of philosophical systems nor external empirical readings have ever in themselves questioned the dynamics of that borderline between the work and the life, between the system and the subject of the system. This borderline is neither active nor passive; it is neither outside nor inside. It is most especially not a thin line, an invisible or indivisible trait that lies between the philosophy on the one hand, and the life of an author on the other.³¹

Philip Roth summarizes much of Appelfeld's writing with this observation:

Appelfeld is a displaced writer of displaced fiction, who has made of displacement and disorientation a subject uniquely his own... As unique as the subject is a voice that originates in a wounded consciousness pitched somewhere between amnesia and memory, and that situates the fiction it narrates midway between parable and history.³²

31. Jacques Derrida, *The Ear of the Other* (New York 1985).

32. Philip Roth, 'Walking the Way of the Survivor: A Talk With Aharon Appelfeld', *Sunday* 28 February 1988, Section 7, p. 1.

One Can't Stare at the Sun or at the Heart of Darkness: Disorientation in Two Stories by Aharon Appelfeld

Smadar Shiffman

In Israel, says Appelfeld in an interview with Michael Gluzman in *Mikan*,¹ he is considered a Holocaust Writer, whereas abroad he is considered a modernist. His biography, the fact that he is a Holocaust survivor, is one of the things that make him a modernist, but is not the main characteristic of his work, one which breeds certain expectations of tone, subject matter, and a pre-defined narrative.

Writers whose subject matter happens to be the Holocaust may be divided, albeit a little artificially, into two categories: the first consists of those writers who write autobiographically or semi-autobiographically; the second consists of those who think of themselves as writing within existing literary conventions. Thus when Primo Levi wrote *If This is a Man*, readers automatically assumed that he had written about his own experiences in Auschwitz. Even *If Not Now, When* was mistakenly taken to be based on his personal experiences; it became so 'obvious' that Levi was basically 'bearing witness' that both his biographers deal mainly with disentangling his life from his work.² Primo Levi, Imre Kertész, Elie Wiesel and, of course, K.Tsetnik are too often read as witnesses more than as writers of fiction. In the terms used by Alan Mintz one might claim that theirs is, or at least is read as, 'the exceptionalist model',³ the model perceiving works about the Holocaust as a separate group of works, which should be read and appreciated apart from other literary models and genres.

If I exclude here, for purposes of brevity, the authentic, autobiographical

1. Michael Gluzman, interview with Aharon Appelfeld, *Mikan* 1 (2000) 65-150.

2. See eg Ian Thompson, *Primo Levi* (London 2003).

3. Alan Mintz, *Popular Culture and the Shaping of Holocaust Memory in America* (Washington, D.C. 2001).

memoirs and the fiction of second-generation writers, there still remains a second alternative of writing, if one's subject matter is the Holocaust. Writers who create within the boundaries of what Mintz calls 'the constructivist model' emphasize the cultural prism through which the Holocaust is perceived. They regard the Holocaust as a singular and unprecedented event in human history; however, its cultural and literary representations inevitably follow existing, familiar categories of representation. It seems that this is the model on which Appelfeld bases his own interpretation of his work; he reads his fiction not as bearing witness but as a modernist reading of the world we live in, the world 'after Auschwitz'. As Appelfeld himself says in his *Masot beguf rishon* ('Essays in the First Person') about the experience of reading Kafka: 'The thought that we were *not alone* with our experience not only made it easier, but included us in the *wider circle* of spiritual agony as well.'⁴ In a different essay he is even more explicit about the genre of 'bearing witness':

When one reads the many books of evidence written about the Holocaust one immediately notices that, as a matter of fact, these are repressions, which do nothing but arrange time chronologically. No introspection and nothing like it, but a careful wrapping with a lot of external facts, so that the inside will not be exposed. The survivor was the very first, in his incompetence and his fear of his own experiences, to create that strange plural language of the memoir, which is nothing but an extreme externalization. So that the inside will not be exposed. And those who were not there and tried to understand, easily adopted these chronologies, these generalizations, as indubitable evidence.⁵

There are quite a few ways of dealing with the Holocaust even within 'the constructivist model'. Appelfeld consistently chooses a method that can be called avoiding the direct look at the heart of darkness.

The Holocaust is at the core of many of Appelfeld's short stories and novels. However, the texts hardly ever deal directly with it, but rather with the periods that either preceded or followed it.⁶ The experience of the Holocaust itself is the 'core' the stories avoid, and indirectly illuminate. The actual horrible occurrences are very rarely mentioned, and never directly and realistically described; they are indirectly

4. Aharon Appelfeld, *Masot beguf rishon* ('Essays in the First Person') (Jerusalem 1979) 'Edut' (Testimony) 15. Translations and emphases throughout the paper are mine.

5. Ibid. Hakhelkikim hayekarim (The precious molecules) 6-95.

6. See Gershon Shaked, 'Requiem la'am hayehudi sheneherag' (Requiem for the murdered Jewish people) *Eshel Beer-Sheva VI* (1997) 15-58, and Yigal Schwartz, 'Sheharei sham nashanti larishona et haprikha - Aharon Appelfeld: Sifrut ve-zikaron' (For there I first breathed the blossom - Aharon Appelfeld: literature and memory), *ibid.* 59-82.

illuminated by scattered impressions of the stories' protagonists, and by the human and behavioural consequences of these events.

One could say that Appelfeld's treatment of the fundamental experience of his stories implies that it is indescribable.⁷ One way of describing the indescribable is to cross over to the realm of the fantastic, or the metaphorical or, still better, leaving the reader uncertain whether the story is realistic, fantastic or metaphorical. When one reads Appelfeld's stories, one wonders whether they should be interpreted in realistic terms. Should one assume that they represent dreams, hallucinations, or are they figurative, reflecting an essence that cannot be conveyed literally? Do these stories carry readers over into the nightmarish realm of the fantastic, or are they tightly bound to reality, and the improbable in them is nothing but our own world, meticulously organized and stylized?

In other words, one of Appelfeld's methods of avoiding the direct look at the sun, the one I would like to focus on in this paper, is that of blurring the line dividing the real from the fantastic. When one cannot be sure whether one is reading a realistic, a metaphorical or a fantastic description, one becomes disoriented as to what key should be used in reading the text. Disorientation results in hesitation, and a certain degree of alienation or distance.

I would like to demonstrate my point by looking briefly at two short stories: 'The Hunt' and 'Metamorphosis'.⁸ They appear to be opposed to each other, so far as the degree of their reality is concerned. While 'The Hunt' seems blatantly unrealistic, and only gradually can one begin to interpret it as a stylized rendition of a painful reality, 'Metamorphosis' appears to be describing realistic occurrences using impressionist techniques; it even evokes a certain wonder as to its name, obviously alluding to Kafka's *Metamorphosis*; only gradually does one realize that the metamorphoses in it might be more than figures of speech. That is, a second reading of these stories leads one to the conclusion that both stories approach the same borderline dividing the real from the fantastic, although they do it from opposite directions.

'The Hunt' is a story about a voyage into a territory on the border of familiar territories. A fisherman takes Yanek, through whose consciousness most of the story is transmitted, to the unspecified

7. Yigal Schwartz refers to Appelfeld's lack of memories of that period. I suggest that even those memories that survived are deemed indescribable. See Schwartz, *ibid.* and 'Degem hamakhane hasagur: Derekh hamotsa?' (The closed camp model: the way out?) *Siman Kri'a* 12–13 (1981) 65–150.

8. Aharon Appelfeld, 'Hamatsod' (The Hunt) and 'Hagilgul' (Metamorphosis) *Adnei hanahar* ('The Rudiments of the River') (Jerusalem 1971) 63–73 and 85–92.

lakes. The fisherman is local, obviously a Gentile, who used to hunt Jews when he was younger. Yanek is a stranger to the area, and he remembers his mother mentioning the Jews with longing. On their way they spy a group of Jews referred to as *lahak* (a pack) of Jews, and the fisherman unsuccessfully tries to hunt them down. The terms used in the description of the Jews constantly dehumanize them, referring to them successively as a shoal of fish, a flight of birds and a group of beetles; the fisherman claims they can fly like birds, and describes them as listening by raising their eyes on their feelers. Having failed to hunt them down, he thinks that next time he will not accord them the courtesy of the hunting codes. Yanek, on the other hand, is obviously ambivalent: he feels he belongs to them, and at first he hates them for it, for belonging to them is inseparable from violent and sudden death; but as their eyes, raised on their feelers, make him feel that their gazes (*mabatim*) could survive them, that 'Kol yeshutam bemabatim hazorhim' ('their whole being is in their radiant gazes'), he also feels attracted to them, although he is afraid they would not accept him into their midst.

In trying to reconstruct the main line of the story, it must be realized that Appelfeld is alienating readers from what could easily have been a familiar plot line, calling for empathy for the hunted Jews and hostility towards the fisherman and Yanek. As it is, the story takes place in a non-specified time, at an unfamiliar and non-specific place, to people about whom nothing is known. The presentation of the Jews as a 'pack', the avoidance of presenting even a shred of their feelings, coupled with their description in terms of rather unlikable packs of animals, through the eyes of the fisherman, who does not actually see them as human beings, and through the consciousness of Yanek, who is estranged from them, create distance and alienation. A fisherman in the act of hunting arouses no hostility, just as a pack of distant people, resembling fish, birds and beetles arouses no empathy. The reader's alienation is strengthened by the fact that an analogy is created between the fisherman and the Jews: the hunter, as well as the hunted, is described as an animal; the Jews and the fisherman 'measure the distance' when they deal with each other, and the fisherman's eyes are described in the same words the Jews' skins are depicted. The lack of any specification in terms of a place, time or the psychology of any of the characters estranges the reader from the story.

Even our culturally conditioned empathy towards the hunted is neutralized by their descriptions in dehumanizing terms. Since their spiritual existence is hinted at only late in the story, when their eyes and gazes are described, only rather late in the reading process is the shocking attitude we might have adopted revealed to us, along with the fisherman and Yanek. When our distance and alienation are broken down by this shock, we realize that the story demands more than our accustomed reaction to autobiographical stories about the Holocaust: it requires a critical scrutiny of our own reactions, as a test case of humanity. Along with Yanek's awakening consciousness of belonging to these people, and his realization that there is something special, super-human rather than sub-human about them, we must also critically observe our own ways of perceiving humans.

'Metamorphosis', alluding to its Kafka namesake, as noted earlier, describes an undefined stretch of time in the life of a ritual slaughterer (*shohet*) and his wife. During this period they are cut off from the world, to be only occasionally visited, first by a Gentile who wants to be converted to Judaism and then by two people who are probably Jews. The wife raises fowl. If something dramatic is expected, following the footsteps of Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, it is rather disappointing. Nothing special seems to happen in this story. At first it seems that the protagonist is about to be metamorphosed into a tree: his face is described as turning into shades of green, he and his wife are forgotten by the peasants as if they were vegetation, he is described as changing very slowly and losing his memories and dreams. But this metamorphosis seems to be left behind when the woman protagonist starts changing. At first she is changed into a peasant woman, and only later does she seem to metamorphose into a heavy bird, like the ones she takes care of. She settles in the coop as if she has come to visit them, she turns heavy, as they are, and her husband thinks that in due time she might take off to her new life like a heavy-winged bird. The story ends with the sentence: 'Balaylah kvar hayta yetsiva keotam ofot kvedim hanitakim umitromemim klapei mala ume'ufam meishir beketsev akhid ke'ilu lo yad'u me'olam karka ma'hi' ('At night she was already stable, like those birds who break off and rise up and their flight is steady and direct, as if they have never known what land is.')

9. 'Hagilgul', *ibid.* 92.

The two different metamorphoses have one thing in common: the loss of touch with the past, which ultimately turns into the total loss

of human touch. The slaughterer forgets what he has been; his wife breaks first with her Judaism, when she behaves like a peasant woman, and then with humanity, when she seems to turn into a heavy bird; the Gentile breaks off with his original community, whereas the Jews abandon theirs. The world described in this story reverts to chaos, to a pre-creation state, in other words to a state with no past and no possibility of communication.

The main difference between the metamorphosis the woman goes through and the one her husband is close to seems to lie in their ability to forget. That which enables the woman to take off to her new life, and leave her husband behind, is the ability to obliterate human consciousness. While she forgets and moves forward, he cannot do so. 'Kvar lo hayta hi. U'vo, mishum ma, od hitmida hatmiha lehavhev bil'adav. Veze haya ha-gvul. Khayav tamu ke'ets kasus.' ('She was no longer herself. Yet for some reason wonder kept flickering in him, without him. And this was the borderline. His life came to an end like a gnawed tree.')10 The woman is granted a new life since she can sever herself from her past and from human communication or, perhaps, from humanity. The man's life comes to an end since even in his most forgetful and hazy moments, he keeps wondering, suspecting, pondering. Even beyond the possibility of choice or decision, wonder keeps flickering within him 'without him'.

10. Ibid.

Metamorphosis, then, is here presented as a chance for redemption, for a new life, provided one is capable of severing any human ties, of de-humanizing oneself. The pre-condition for de-humanizing yourself, according to this story, is tearing yourself away from Judaism: prior to being transformed into a bird, the woman is transformed into a peasant woman. Or, in Appelfeld's own words, referring to the Jewish 'secret': 'We knew, the "secret" turns us into a target for every hand and axe, but without it our existence would sink even lower.'11

11. Appelfeld, *Masot beguf rishon* 'Edu' 13.

'Metamorphosis', like 'The Hunt', wavers on the line between the real and the impossible; however, the order of creating this effect is different in the two stories. While 'The Hunt' appears to be a fantastic story, and is only gradually conceived of as real and possible, 'Metamorphosis' prepares the reader for a fantastic event, only finally, hesitantly to hint at a metamorphosis, since most of what I have read here as a fantastic metamorphosis can be interpreted as figures of speech. Still, after the long preparation, coupled with the

allusion to Kafka, the metamorphosis exists in our consciousness, strengthened by a few literal descriptions of the woman. Our reading remains delicately balanced between a figurative one – reading the metamorphosis as a metaphor for an internal psychological process of change – and a literal one, reading the change as a fantastic occurrence.

Both stories hover between the realistic and the fantastic, creating a Kafkaesque world, in which the two merge into each other. The constant wavering between a realistic and a fantastic reading of the stories enhances our disorientation and alienation by presenting nightmarish worlds with blurred dividing lines. Thus, the alienation and disorientation evoked by the absence of specific time and place, the absence of deep penetration into the characters' psychology, and the de-humanization of the characters, whether by describing them as animals, or by alluding to their being metamorphosed into animals, become dominant in the reader's perception of Appelfeld's stories.

Only gradually are the distance and alienation broken, whether by the development in the protagonist's consciousness, or by a second, or more careful, reading. When our involvement is re-aroused, Appelfeld successfully revives and intensifies our reaction to the Holocaust by counteracting our automatic responses: we cannot read the stories as testimonies, and we are forced into asking ourselves what we read them as.

I suggest that this is Appelfeld's way of making us look at the Holocaust not as a singular experience, unprecedented and therefore impossible to comprehend, but as something within modern human experience, that can and should be perceived as a part of our own worldview. Even if it were an extreme experience, where humanity was driven to its lowest depth and maybe its highest peaks of self-sacrifice as well, it was human, and therefore within the scope of human and literary expression. If, to quote Primo Levi, we tend to 'forget that all of us are in the ghetto, that the ghetto is fenced in, that beyond the fence stand the lords of death, and not far away the train is waiting',¹² then Appelfeld constantly reminds us of it. And by reminding us of it he makes us responsible for our reading of the experience. Whether we choose to remain alienated, to be unable to comprehend, to identify, albeit from a distance, or to try and come to

12. Primo Levi, 'Story of a Coin' *Moments of Reprieve* trans. Ruth Feldman (London 1987) 172.

13. Appelfeld, *Masot beguf rishon* 'Hakhelkikim hayekarim' 96.

terms with our own conception of the Holocaust, the responsibility is ours, since Appelfeld does not let us off easily with an ideologically committed reading of it as the justification of Zionism, the great abyss into which Europe fell, the end of Liberal Humanism, or something which could not possibly happen to us. When we read these stories, we get as close as we can to what Appelfeld calls, lamenting its lack in most survivors' chronologies and memoirs, 'the hidden places of the "self", that mystery which people call the soul.'¹³

The Jewish Journey in the Late Fiction of Aharon Appelfeld: Return, Repair or Repitition?

Sidra DeKoven-Ezrahi

In *Booking Passage: Exile and Homecoming in the Modern Jewish Imagination*¹ I charted the Jewish journey as the pursuit of utopian space in its epic and its anti-epic dimensions. From Yehuda Halevi through S.Y. Agnon, the journey to reunite self and soul (*libi bamizrah va-anokhi be-sof ma'arav*), the journey to repair the anomaly of Galut, was hampered, but also shaped and enriched, by what Yehuda Halevi called the 'bounty of Spain' (*kol tuv sepharad*).

Needless to say, the bounty of the homelands that expelled and exterminated the Jews during the Second World War was far more difficult to reclaim or reconstruct than that of twelfth-century Andalusia. Yet even if for the survivors of the Shoah the Jewish journey became that much more urgent and tragic as an exercise in the recovery of a lost continent, the same tension exists in the twentieth – as it did perhaps in the post-traumatic sixteenth century – between *kol tuv sepharad* and 'Zion', between the personal story and the collective telos, the private narrative and the public topos, the idiosyncratic and the paradigmatic.

There is usually not only a tension but a trade-off between the two, a dynamic exchange between the first person singular and plural. After a lifetime of effacing the personal voice in the interstices of a taut and 'public' poetic line, Dan Pagis began in his last years to recover his autobiographical voice in prose. All the more curious, then, that the late prose of his *landsmen*, neighbour and friend, Aharon Appelfeld, seems to be following the two tracks simultaneously: even as he moves towards the confessional in interviews, in conversations,

1. Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, *Booking Passage: Exile and Homecoming in the Modern Jewish Imagination* (Berkeley 2000). Some of the ideas developed here are explored in the chapter on Appelfeld.

2. See Aharon Appelfeld, *Sipur hayim* ('Story of A Life') (Jerusalem 1999); and his *Beyond Despair: Three Lectures and a Conversation with Philip Roth*, trans. Jeffrey M. Green (New York 1994); see also the five-hour interview with the author conducted by Yigal Schwartz in *Words and Images: Jerusalem Literary Project*, dir. Nathan Beyrak and Eleonora Lev (Jerusalem, Dec. 1992).

3. Aharon Appelfeld, *Mikhvat ha'or* ('Searing Light') (Tel Aviv 1980) 30; Appelfeld, *Laylah ve'od laylah* ('Night after Night') (Jerusalem 2001) 54.

essays and in his autobiographical essay, *Sipur hayim* ('Story of a Life')² – even, that is, as he tries to tell his life's story in the first person singular – Appelfeld is on a parallel journey that takes him more and more deeply into the creative sources of the conscience of his race.

The survivor from Central Europe who migrated to Palestine in an Appelfeld narrative found a refuge but not a home there (neither in the territory nor in the text). That is, I submit, the source of both this writer's power and of his unique and shifting place in Israeli fiction – first as outsider, then as representative of Outsiderness as the most common trope of the contemporary Hebrew imagination. Appelfeld, for many years alone with his subject and his language, became a 'mainstream' writer when Jewish fate and pathos began to replace Israeli prowess and triumphalism as the grand narrative.

It is no longer surprising to his readers that there is always a remainder or a gap in an Appelfeld story, a surplus or absence of usable data to remind us of what could not be redressed within the precincts of a postwar Israeli redemptive culture. His characters are never fully repatriated in the ancestral homeland and their gaze turns inevitably towards Europe. Often the journey is an internal one, triggered by a glass of cognac or a game of poker or the word *retenzia* or *purimspiel*.³ There is always another point of reference or centre of gravity.

The cover of the English translation of the novella *Katrina* (Hebrew 1989; English 1992), states that the author was born in Bukovina 'and is currently living in Jerusalem'. Whoever wrote that probably did not realize how revealing such a sentence was of the mobility and tentativeness that prevail in this author's stories. When I visualize Appelfeld's fiction, I see train tracks and coffee houses. The tracks are, however, not only those that lead endlessly and inexorably to extermination, as in Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah*. They are also the tracks that lead the survivor back home, in desperate and repeated efforts to recover language and memory. Finally, they are the tracks on which Sholem Aleichem's characters rode in their endless peregrinations through the Pale of Settlement – the site of a kind of aimless, anti-epic Jewish wandering that coexisted with the messianic and the Zionist epic journeys of return and restoration.

Appelfeld has expressed the nightmare of dislocation and its narrative possibilities more fully than any other contemporary Jewish storyteller. But the reader can recognize, gazing at that long bookshelf, that the act of recovery, doomed as it may be, is as monumental and earnest as the lamentation. Many noticed long ago that even those of his fictions ostensibly set in postwar Israel were contoured by the topography of Central Europe. Jadova, Czernowitz, the Carpathian mountains, Vienna constituted the inevitable point of origin, the site of whatever warm memories of home could be retrieved through the dark glass of a fiction attentive to loss and time. What can now be acknowledged is that that topography is also the only place where one can still re-enact the condition of the Jew as a traveller in space. And it is this evocative figure that will outlive even catastrophic memory.

In this regard, like Isaac Bashevis Singer, Appelfeld has succeeded in 'repatriating' Jewish stories in their native landscapes. What separated the two storytellers, in addition to language, idiom and temperament, was the absence or presence of what Michael André Bernstein calls 'backshadowing', a sense of foreboding that casts Jewish life – whenever or wherever represented – under the sign of the Swastika. 'What was I to do?' asks Appelfeld in a 'conversation' with Philip Roth. 'My most hidden childhood memories were spotted with the soot from the trains.'⁴

In Singer's 'Polish stories', set in the cities and small towns of Poland before – or with no reference to – the war, such foreboding is as absent as it is present in all of Appelfeld's stories. Narratives of childhood before the war, even of life lived in other centuries, are always suffused in an Appelfeld narrative with the pathos of what is to come. Yet something changes in his late narratives to make the comparison with Singer more compelling and the space reserved for his fiction in the museum of Jewish storytelling more secure. While Singer's characters endlessly replay their erotic dramas and passion plays, re-enacting as in a wax museum the imaginative forms and folk strata of Yiddish culture, Appelfeld's characters in perpetual motion replay their fate and the cultural and narrative forms that represented it. At the turn of the millennium, the 'Right of Return' to the European homeland was and is being actualized in the ritualized pilgrimages to ancestral sites and graves – an act that mimics centuries of pilgrimages to Jerusalem as ruined shrine. Appelfeld takes that act one step further.

4. Appelfeld, *Beyond Despair*, p. 70. On this and on Bernstein's thesis, see *Booking Passage* 186ff.

There is, I am suggesting, a shift in both the texture and the telos of the journey from earlier to later narratives. It is not so much that the sense of foreboding is gone, but rather that something archetypal replaces the bewildered quest or angst of the doomed individual, incorporating a kind of knowledge into the very centre of consciousness. Many of Appelfeld's early stories traced random wartime movements of Jews through the vast spaces of the Austro-Hungarian empire; many of the middle ones, culminating in *Tor hapla'ot* (1978; *The Age of Wonders* 1981), charted the homing patterns of those who dared to return to postwar Europe to try to search for lost memories. Bruno, the protagonist of *Age of Wonders*, left Jerusalem to pace the streets of his hometown until he realized that he could not find a foothold for himself between the worn paving stones of the train station – the only sign of the feet of the deported Jews – and the immutable shadows of the church spires. But neither could he ever quite touch down in Jerusalem. Those who cannot repatriate their memories in some innocent landscape of their childhood can hardly be repatriated in postwar Israel – or anywhere, for that matter. 'Return' in an Appelfeld story was a gesture not so much of 'going back' as of 'repeating' – and writing the return remained as obsessive and incomplete as the act itself. The earlier fictions culminating in *Age of Wonders* are less narrations of recovery than deformations of both the idea of the journey and the narrative as its vehicle. The endlessly repeated efforts to write and rewrite an elusive, interrupted story, the characters' endemic homelessness, their failure to be domesticated within their acquired languages and landscapes, are in direct proportion to their inability to rescue a protected pre-war identity. So when in *Sipur hayim* Appelfeld posited such a nature reserve as his own point of departure and source of integrity, the reader sensed that something had shifted. At the same time, and on a parallel track, the publication of the novellas *Mesillat barzel* in 1991 (*The Iron Tracks* 1998) and 'Layish' in 1994 signalled another, diametrically opposed, literary resolution to the struggle to reclaim the past: that of adapting forms of representation belonging to the geo-cultural space in which it had unfolded.

What had begun in the fiction of the 1960s and 70s as a largely aborted return to the sounds and sites of memory becomes in the fiction of the 90s a return to discarded cultural paradigms and languages of representation – above all, to the representation of the Jewish journey. When one is inside an Appelfeld story, there is no

reality beyond or without, no distance from what is not yet or no longer visible. The suspension of time and of outside reference is the prism that collapses chronological and geographical distance and replaces it by an inexorable condition, a process measured in Darwinian mutation rather than historical time.

But if the author, born in Bukovina and 'currently living in Jerusalem', writes stories that are all located in some nomadic space between Bukovina and Jerusalem, in some nomadic time under the sign of catastrophe, it is in 'Layish' that this space fully reacquires its appropriate geographic and narrative contours, even as it too borders on mythic time and place. The journey to recover lost memories gives way to the more paradigmatic journey of the Jew as eternal wanderer.

Before he could relinquish it, however, it seems that the author had to reach the point where he could claim a personal point of view. Its absence was directly attributable not to cognitive patterns of thought of the 'tribe', but to the extreme circumstances that had wiped out individuality. 'There was no place for the individual, for his pain and despair, in the camps', he wrote in the introduction to *Beyond Despair: Three Lectures and a Conversation with Philip Roth* (1994). 'No one there said: I have a headache, a toothache, I'm in a bad mood, I'm homesick. In the camps there was no place for a vocabulary with a domestic tone. The individual or what was left of him, was nullified.'⁵ *Kol tuv sepharad* – a toothbrush, a mother's caress – was wiped away in the very first stroke. The stories that chart the course of Jewish refugees on their way to or in Palestine, and even the early, aborted attempt at the autobiographical essay, *Masot beguf rishon* (1979), are all narrations in the first (or third) person plural.

5. *Ibid.* x.

Appelfeld's characters – anarchic selves who lived outside historical time and personal memory and who undermined society and culture simply by their inability to connect to the present or to remember the past – by the inexorability of their fate as refugees remained exiled even inside the adaptive behaviours and gestures of their own survival, until the language of exile itself resurfaced as authentic mode of representation. Only when the figure of the displaced Jew was reconnected with the language of the Jewish journey and of its ultimate destination as infinitely deferrable could something 'authentic' and canonic be recovered in what had been a series

6. Gila Ramas-Rauch was one of the first to note the ubiquity of the Wandering Jew in the fiction of the 1980s: *Aharon Appelfeld: The Holocaust and Beyond* (Bloomington, Ind. 1994).

7. *Beyond Despair* 70.

of non-resonant fictions. What then emerged as the most allusive element in Appelfeld's stories was not linguistic or cultural memory but the unresolved, recurrent patterns of Jewish destiny. While from the very earliest narratives collected in *'Ashan* ('Smoke' 1962) Israel remains a wanderer among the nations, even in Jerusalem itself,⁶ in *'Layish'* there is finally a confluence between Jewish geography and the Jewish journey.

That is, the search for the 'lost continent' in Appelfeld's later fiction may be characterized less as backshadowing, in Bernstein's terms, than as the practice of return as a form of *déjà vu*. Appelfeld's characters are not free, not because they are judged by the finality of history but because they are trapped in a world of recurrence, in patterns that have been repeated for thousands of years. Although 'fate was already hidden like a mortal illness' within the petite bourgeoisie that constituted the world of his parents,⁷ the real tragedy was that they had lost the code by which they might have deciphered the circumstances of their lives. The process of decoding Jewish fate culminates in the novel *'Layish'*, which enacts the most basic, primordial exilic pattern – the topos of the journey to the Holy Land as a tale of the endlessly deferred end.

Both the journey and the vehicle reach a kind of formal perfection and even affirmation in *'Layish'*. The novel suggests a move from compulsive repetition to repair through a measure of homeopathic application of the symptom as the cure. *'Layish'* may be its author's first true literary homecoming; at once archaic and resonant, it is written in a language that constitutes a rendezvous with Central and Eastern European Jewish culture on its own grounds.

'Layish' is the story of an ostensible journey to Jerusalem by a group of ragtag Jews, mainly social outcasts – petty thieves, thugs and murderers, along with a sprinkling of old folks, musicians, rabbis and visionaries – the usual suspects. Many of these characters disappear and reappear by turns, making their way over what seem to be great geographical distances and many years. The ostensible destination is Jerusalem, but as the identity of the characters and their itinerary become more generic, so Jerusalem eventually reclaims its traditional status as unattainable goal, as destiny rather than destination.

One can read *'Layish'* (many have) as a teleological narrative whose

biblical subtext is the Exodus from Egypt, whose final station is Jerusalem and whose final chapter, at the port of Galati, Romania, on the shores of the Danube just 'before' embarkation, is a sign that the destination is within reach. But my reading suggests that the real work of this slim narrative is not in the epic – messianic or Zionist – thrust but in the re-incorporation of discarded modes of Jewish consciousness into the dominant structure. The aborted conclusion, the *'aliyah* to Jerusalem, that is not enacted in the text is not only a sign of the thwarted teleology of the voyage but actually a realization of a linear structure that has been undermined throughout the journey. The appearance of progress is really a series of digressions: 'The distance from Sadigora to Czernowitz is a one-hour journey, but the heavy rains and the squabbles impeded us and we arrived in Czernowitz two weeks later.'⁸

What appeared to be a major movement in space is now revealed as a sluggish journey within the confines of the Bukovina region, along the shores of the Prut River. Drawing on *Masa'ot Binyamin hashlishi* ('The Adventures of Benjamin the Third') and other picaresque narratives of the late nineteenth century that parody the Jewish epic imagination, this narrative reveals what remains at the end of the twentieth century, the scaffolding of Jewish myth after the dismantling of the edifices of Zionism and Enlightenment, messianic and Marxist faith.

Still, *'Layish'* unfolds in a disenchanted world, without miracle and even without satire. Unlike Mendele's voyage, or Agnon's, the characters are passing through a world of legend that keeps losing its materiality. The journey becomes less and less a journey in space and more and more a journey through texts, though not exactly intertextual – subconsciously accruing biblical and then Talmudic markers into its spiritual geography – until the point where one of the characters jumps into the Prut, which becomes 'as turbulent as the Sambatyon' and drowns him (p. 165). It is at this point that Jerusalem regains its *status quo ante* as the unattainable site of Jewish longing.

The Iron Tracks is structured not by intertextuality but by the journey itself. 'Since the end of the war I have been on this line' begins the first-person narrative of a man whose postwar activity is to ride the rails of Europe. 'Others may possess spacious houses, shops, even warehouses. I have an entire continent. In this repetition lies a strange

8. Aharon Appelfeld, *Layish* (Jerusalem 1994), 51 (my translation).

9. Aharon Appelfeld, *The Iron Tracks*, trans. Jeffrey M. Green (New York 1998) 4-5.
10. *Booking Passage* 198.

hopefulness. As if our end were not extinction but a sort of constant renewal.⁹

‘A strange hopefulness’. I have argued that here, as elsewhere in contemporary Hebrew literature, there is a set of adjustments being made between Czernowitz and Jerusalem as between ‘desire and arrival, narrative and closure, the “real” and the mimetic.’¹⁰ What is an act of recovery or therapeutic repetition for Appelfeld the Jew may also be an act of defiance of utopian impulses for Appelfeld the Israeli. The miserable, lost characters in Appelfeld’s universe constitute, in their circular, reflexive movement, a gentle, sad but powerful indictment of the teleological, monumental structure of Zionist redemptionism.

There is also another element: the ‘official’ pilgrimage to Jerusalem is, it turns out, composed of mini-pilgrimages to the local saints (*tsaddikim*) of Vizhnitsa and Sadigora. Recapitulating the evolving ritual of *geyn af keyver oves* (visiting ancestral graves) in postwar Europe, and in some ways patterned after the journey of Reb Nahman, it is also mimetic of the suspended teleology of *golus*; the mimetic activity of *oyle regl* (pilgrimage) is based on the premise that Vizhnitsa is *bimkoym hamikdosh* (in place of the Temple), a movable simulacrum of the Temple, as its *rebbe* is *bimkoym* the high priest.

It is not by coincidence that I accord these phrases their Yiddish accent. What the journey is in ‘*Layish*’ or *Mesillat barzel*, Yiddish is in *Laylah ve’od laylah*. The characters in that novella, living in a *pension* in Rehavia, return to Yiddish – and to the humour of which it is the guardian – the way ‘*Layish*’ returns to pilgrimage as the deep structure of Jewish consciousness. When the painter Kirtzl paints Yiddish words in an effort to preserve the language, he is creating visual icons of or monuments to the lost culture. The poet Zeidel claims that ‘only in Yiddish will we be truly resurrected.’ The narrator, Manfred, muses that ‘Yiddish not only rings out from the mouths of poets and [the cellist] Paula Tzimmer’s trembling strings but shines in every glass of tea or cognac; ‘I love Hebrew, but “she” can’t fill the place of the mother. Hebrew is not a language you can hug.’¹¹

11. *Laylah ve’od laylah*, 55, 3-42.

Yiddish is, in fact, the grandmother’s hug that lies beneath Appelfeld’s own mother tongue, German, like the pattern of pilgrimage to ancestral graves or to Hasidic saints that lies beneath the journeys of

assimilation or enlightenment, beneath even the modern pilgrimage to Zion. Both *kol tuv sepharad* – its food, its alcohol, its customs and patterns of behaviour and speech – and *kol ra sepharad* – that is, both the bounty of one's native ground and its toxicity – reinforce a sense of fate more profound than the Zionist revolution or anything that modern forms of revolutionary consciousness have produced.

What appeared as two parallel tracks may in fact be two intersecting, and mutually disruptive, tracks. In his biography of Appelfeld, Yigal Schwartz follows the threads of memory that Appelfeld himself sought in the forests and meadows of a revisited childhood as well as the mythological and 'religious' journey (*masa'o hareligiosi*)¹² that reveals with increasing intensity his 'tribal' connections as the deepest layer of his consciousness.

The search is a deep existential one that is inadequately represented by the rather mechanical judgement of many critics, and at times Appelfeld himself, that he somehow migrated from an 'Israeli' into a 'Jewish' place (a move perceived as regressive or progressive, depending on the point of view). But I think it is as much an exegetical and literary as a 'religious' quest – that is, it is a quest to understand and find the language to represent the deepest paradigms of the Jewish imagination—and it is a move which is, in our time, consonant with the direction of other Israeli writers, both 'natives' and 'immigrants'.

Schwartz concludes his literary biography by saying that 'the historiosophical position that emerges in Appelfeld's writings, as in the writings of other major Jewish writers, is that the "entrance into history" of the Jewish people in the last century detached it from its roots and brought upon it the chaos before the Chaos [*pur'anut terem pur'anut*].'¹³ Here again I would only try to mitigate the judgement somewhat, as the 'entrance into history' brought not only Zionism but the world of European Jewish culture that is the writer's bane and his inheritance. Appelfeld cannot really write his own Life Story without in some way validating *kol tuv sepharad*, the nature reserve from which he was expelled, the world of his parents, the petit bourgeois delusion that is being increasingly supplanted in his own consciousness by the stronger, encoded, narrative of Jewish fate. But neither can he stop trying.

12. Y. Schwartz, *Kinat hayahid ve-netzah hashevet: Aharon Appelfeld: Tmunat 'olam* ('Individual Lament and Tribal Eternity: Aharon Appelfeld: Picture of his World') (Jerusalem 1996) 144.

13. Ibid. 194.

The Draft Renounced by History: Appelfeld's *Journey into Winter* and the Radiance of Noah's Ark as a Healing Discourse

Rachel Albeck-Gidron

Aharon Appelfeld's stories are in part repetitions of the same thematic pattern. The indecipherable nature of this fertile pattern, its inability to exhaust its meaning and offer it as a conclusive insight, inevitably result in subsequent variants of the given pattern, and these shape Appelfeld's fiction as he moves from one short story or novel to the next. The author's compulsion to resort to the same pattern again and again is like a compulsive return to the crime scene, or some sort of obsession.

Appelfeld's stories seem like forced labour, the rolling of the same rock over and over up the mountain. This Sisyphean series of stories seeks its own mitigation and dissolution as a kind of redemption. Once the urge to replicate the pattern wanes, the reader knows that Appelfeld has reached a state of resignation and tranquillity. The danger is that relieving the need to reconstruct this pattern may be synonymous with silence. The generative power of the source of pain that demands this obsessive reconstruction is perhaps not replaceable by other narrative patterns.

The moulding pattern underlying Appelfeld's fiction is a narrative that brings together a small community of people, the singular representatives of their kind and species, and binds them in a state of *heterotopia*, or *heterochronia*, to borrow Foucault's terminology. This community conducts itself in a state of a journey, moving forwards

1. Aharon Appelfeld, *Masa el hahoref* (Jerusalem 2000).

This and the other excerpts from Hebrew were translated by Ruth Bar-Ilan.

2. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton 1957) 140.

3. *Ibid.* 5-134.

4. It is no wonder, then, that various ecological activist groups chose Noah's Ark as their logo, as it is traditionally associated with generations of illustrated children's books. In contrast, in intellectual, artistic, sociological and psychological terms, this logo remains inarticulate, failing to serve as an icon of collective anxiety or utopian salvation. This choice attests to the failure of Noah's myth to function as a complex and reverberating force. At the same time, it also attests to the naivety and marginality of these groups, whose idealistic, well-intended efforts are misdirected in the face of the power economy that governs the global treatment of a potential ecological holocaust.

and backwards or simply pacing. The magnetic field in reference to which this constant movement takes place is always an absent but implicit event, which is associated with terrible entropy that swallows up everything in a jumble. This is true of 'Sheloshah' (Three), the story that opens Appelfeld's first collection of stories, entitled 'Ashan' ('Smoke'). This is also true of 'Layish' (Lion), 'Mikhreh hakerah' (The ice mine), 'Hakutonet ve-hapassim' (The cloak and stripes) and 'Ritspat Esh' (Fiery ember), and to a certain extent also of 'Ad she'aloh amud hashahar' (Until dawn rises). The same holds true of *Masa el hahoref* ('A Journey into Winter'), which is the subject of this paper.¹

The pattern emerges when the reader, just like a painter, takes one step backwards, as Northrop Frye suggests in his *Anatomy of Criticism*, in order to get the right perspective and consider the work as a whole.² Frye suggests that 'the structural principles of literature are as closely related to mythology and comparative religion as those of painting are to geometry'³ and that the understanding, the meaning, the *dianoia* of a literary work are established by identifying its underlying mythic structure.

Indeed, if one pays close attention to Appelfeld's works, one cannot miss the primeval mythic structure that is implicit in them and is relevant to them in many respects. I am referring to Noah's Ark floating in the waters of the Flood under the threat of annihilation while carrying the gathered representatives of the animal kingdom.

This thematic pattern originates in a myth that does not appeal to our civilization in spite of – or because of – its enormous relevance to its condition.⁴ This myth has no radiance. It has nothing to do with charisma and magnetism and seems to be lacking 'passion' as well as will – in the sense the latter acquired within the tradition of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. Contrary to Frye's general definition of myth, this particular myth does not deal with the relationship between passion and reality, nor does it produce inner passion as part of its narrative tension. Most of all, the myth of the Deluge has to do with engineering, even though it concerns nothing less than the destruction of the world.

This myth does not share the fate of other, equally extinguished myths, which during the last two centuries have enjoyed a vigorous renaissance in Western culture. Prominent among them are the myth

of Oedipus, which gained popularity thanks to the works of Freud and Levi-Strauss; the myth of the Tower of Babel, which, following Derrida, acquired a highly phatic⁵ standing in the postmodern discourse due to its meta-linguistic theme; and the myth of the Tree of Knowledge, along with its sexual and gender-oriented overtones (as manifested either in the Biblical version or in the Sumerian).

If the myth of the Deluge and Noah's Ark gained any empathy in modern collective memory, such empathy was surprisingly channelled to the comic – an unusual preference as far as myths are concerned. When the most outstanding feature of this myth is recalled, the reader responds to the farfetched, colorful vision it evokes: the various pairs of animals gathered into the Ark. Something of the spotted and the furry, the horny and the reptilian takes control over one's imagination and pushes aside the ominous message of the myth: flood, destruction and all-encompassing death by drowning and strangulation.

It seems that the abundance and diversity of life supersede the uniform entropy of the Deluge, shifting the balance between the inconsequential and the enormously significant. Amid all this one is reminded that it is not possible for an ark that is three hundred cubits long, though obviously the largest vessel in the ancient world, to contain a representative sample of the entire animal kingdom. This 'potential infinity', to borrow Aristotle's absurd term, simply does not lend itself to exhaustive classification and inclusive selection. The same tension between the multiple and varied, on the one hand, and the uniform, of whatever size, on the other hand, veils the relative proportions of the flood and the ark that this myth tries to establish.

The fact that the myth of the Deluge is not charismatic may be closely related to the fact that it has no hero. The passion, or personal centre or subject, of every story is conditional upon the anthropomorphic setting in which the story takes place, and this anthropomorphism requires speech. Hence it is puzzling that the chain of events that binds God and nature in the story of the Deluge takes place without involving man. Unlike any other myth generated by the Bible, the human protagonist in the story of the Deluge, Noah, is speechless. He does not utter a single word throughout the whole affair. Noah is a faceless and voiceless figure, who silently mediates between the divine will and its actual fulfilment, as if it is God's voice that

5. For 'phatic' as suggesting the potential of an idea or myth to produce fertile affinity with contemporary outlooks see Rachel Albeck-Gidron, 'Ideot phatiyot ve-aphatiyyot' (Phatic and non-phatic ideas), *Bikkoret u-Pharshanut (Criticism and Interpretation)*, Ramat-Gan, Israel) XXXVII (winter 2003) 195–206.

embodies Noah's subjectivity. Although Noah is sometimes described as 'knowing', it is never suggested that he is articulating anything. Therefore it seems that he and the members of his family are nothing but four more pairs of animals occupying the microcosmic Ark, and this too only because the purpose of the Ark is to ensure the survival of the potential diversity and multiplicity of the animal species.

Noah's silence is perhaps the leading cause of the loss of appeal of this myth for the much-speaking-consciousness of the last five hundred years. But while Noah is silent, the Ark is speaking. Just like the story of the Tower of Babel, the Ark itself with its chosen tenants is a meta-linguistic model, and perhaps even a meta-lexical one. Yet it embodies not only the governing principle of the language but also that of the arts, as well as suggesting, rather obviously, the technological principle.

The first Biblical stories are concerned with etymological matters. Presumably, side by side with the creation of the world, the divine voice creates language as such. It calls to improvise a name, a word, for each of the newly created elements. (This is a recurrent phenomenon in the story of Genesis and in its midrashic interpretations).

It seems that this onomatopoeic aspect of the Scriptures is engaged in a profound verbal intercourse with the magic of the pagan world and with the way magic attributes the relationship between words and things to an act of power.

The same holds true of the story of Noah. The Ark, along with the pairs and septets brought into it, serves as an enormous lexicon of living creatures, an animal encyclopaedia, in which one single sign is indicative of all the signified individuals. (A pair of lions, a male and a female, is sufficient to signify all individual lions.) In other words, Noah's Ark is the first dictionary. Its existence as an entity depends on a constant correlation with its opposite, the Deluge, which is an unqualified, unclassified and unmarked entropy – the total 'otherness' of what is as yet unnamed and wordless.

Noah's Ark is not only a gigantic dictionary. It also echoes the code of the artistic act, if we consider art as a general name for the neat organization of the macrocosmic and the artificial. As such, it is a symbol of the great project performed by the arts, the encapsulation

of 'a whole world in a grain of sand... infinity in the palm of the hand, and eternity in an hour' (Blake). The ability to grasp infinity in the palm of one's hand is the ability to represent, to make a representative Ark of cosmic multiplicity that is governed by complex rules of selection. This aesthetic aspect of Noah's Ark can be confirmed by its counterpart, which is equally generated by the story of Noah. For the Ark that rescues the living species from destruction is represented at the end of the story by a completely new sign: the rainbow in the cloud, whose gratuitous, fantastic, hologram-like beauty embodies Kant's principle of the aesthetic luxury: Beauty for its own sake.

In this sense, it is the story of the Deluge, rather than the story of building the Tower of Babel, which can be designated as 'the myth of all myths, the metaphor of all metaphors', to use Derrida's nomenclature in the introduction to his 'Tours de Babel'.⁶ Namely, Noah's Ark is speech about speech, a story about narrative ability. (Naturally, according to Derrida's perception, Noah's Ark can never serve as a theory of myth because its governing principle is predatory war against decentralisation, a war declared in the Hebrew Bible by its monotheistic voice.)

6. Jacques Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel' trans. Joseph F. Graham, in Joseph Graham (ed.) *Difference in Translation* (London 1985) 165–207.

Noah's Ark as the very principle of representation is thus the myth of language, of art, of perception, all of which denote compactness, namely a small portion that stands for the totality. In this sense, it corresponds to Platonic metaphysics, which relies on the same power. It marks chaos both as difference and as the tension between the need for representation and the remote possibility of ever achieving it in an effectively compact manner.

Like any lexicon, and any artistic representation, Noah's Ark is marked by absence and sorrow, because of the conspicuously missing presence of the absentee. This remains out of reach and persists as an object of desire (here I follow Lacan's perception of language). Dictionaries reflect a horrible economy, suggestive of what the American Indians were enticed to do: exchanging extensive, fertile lands for glass beads. Instead of possessing the real thing, in all its radiance and enigma, we are left with nothing but a word, a name, a sign. Instead of herds of elephants galloping in spacious planes, Noah's Ark contains just an abstract pair of the given species. Most of all, lexicons signify that which is lost, or doomed to be extinguished – the rainbow in the cloud.

This leads me back to the issue of radiance, to the dim and perhaps extinguished radiation power of the story of the Deluge. It seems that everything that is alive and radiant, everything that is passionate and in possession of a self, of a libido, drowned in the waters of the Flood, namely was defined as the epitome of *hamas*, of 'corruption' and 'violence'. The Scripture does not identify this loss but it can be found as a vital tension – vital to the extent of frenzy – in the version of the story of the Deluge as it appears in the Book of Hanoch. It is no wonder that this version was excluded from the Hebrew Bible and relegated to the Apocrypha. For in the Book of Hanoch one can find the unreleased tension between the ominous darkness and the neatly regulated that annihilates it as an unresolved and non-final aspect, within the narrative *dianoia*. This is a subversive version in which order prevails over darkness.

What then is the establishing power of the Deluge as the thematic pattern in Appelfeld's fiction? In what sense does the uncovering of the mythic structure, as suggested by Frye, provide an insight into the continuous Appelfeldian epos, whose various manifestations are variations of the same myth that keeps unfolding?

As a theme, the analogy between the catastrophic event around which Appelfeld's stories revolve, on the one hand, and the Deluge, on the other hand, seems to be self-evident. The reaction to the Holocaust within the community that is the recipient of Appelfeld's stories can be effectively captured by the metaphor of the Deluge. The Holocaust is total destruction. These people, the citizens of a Noah's Ark of sorts, which is neither clearly defined nor accounted for or justified by the voice of God, were brought alive to the Mountains of Ararat. But more than they identify with Noah as holding the right to be saved in the Ark, they identify with guilty Cain, for whom the sign imprinted on his forehead indicates the absolute absence of rights and innocence. In one of his essays, 'Edut' (Testimony), Appelfeld says: 'I remember one boy, whose movements became flexible and round under the impact of the war years, like those of an attentive beast. He would not touch any object unless he contemplated it at length. This must be how people treaded the ground after the Deluge.'¹⁷

What I am pointing at is not the relevance of the theme, inasmuch as this is part of my interpretive intuition, but rather the relevance of structure as epic repetition. This identification of the mythic pattern,

7. Aharon Appelfeld, *Masot beguf rishon* ('Essays in the First Person') (Jerusalem 1979) 14. In the same collection 'Yedid Nefesh' (Bosom friend) is devoted to Leib Rochman (1918–78), a scholar of Hasidism and the author of three novels about the Holocaust: *Bedamayikh hayyi* ('Un in dayn Blut Zolsten Leben, 1949), *Beze'adim sumim al pnei haAdamah* (Mit Blinde Trit über der Erd, 1969) and *Hamabbul* ('The Deluge') (ibid. 82).

which is possible only when the pattern is repetitive, as is the case with any structural identification, is what establishes Appelfeld's fiction as a work of literature rather than mere testimony. The aesthetic pleasure produced by all literary works, including Appelfeld's and regardless of their dark themes, has to do with the tight mythic structure that they tend to replicate.

In parallel to this – just like any work of literature but unlike unliterary speech – Appelfeld's fiction too is assisted by the principle of Noah's Ark: artificiality, compactness, signifying representation, patterns of order. All these must be outside the basically chaotic reality described in his works, and hence they are imposed on it from the outside.

Here I state what is well known: by undergoing an alchemical process, Appelfeld's autobiographical testimony is transformed into literature. I propose to substantiate this claim by invoking the condition that Frye stipulates for every work of literature, and which Appelfeld meets in his own work; underlying it, one can identify an ancient mythic structure.

I would like to point to some of these things in reference to Appelfeld's recent novel *Masa el hahoref* ('A Journey into Winter'). This is one example of individuals gathered together in an Ark, a small social structure, set against the background of the Flood. The Flood itself is not directly articulated, but every one of Appelfeld's readers bears it in mind.

In the novel an orphan boy who is heavily built and suffers from a speech defect, tells about the fate of a small place in the Carpathian Mountains. Over there, in an inn that is reminiscent of a Thomas Mann setting, Jews who suffer from depression gather together to receive the blessing of a Zaddik or of a local Jewish saint. The boy works in this inn and the guests form a sort of a nation, along with the different types that populate it, among whom one can identify the practical, the artistic, the military, the ideologist, the visionary and so forth. All of them, including the narrator, are given the same medicine, which involves communality and nationalism, namely a medicine associated with an 'ark' and a language. The Zaddik encourages those Jews to revert to their Holy Language and Jewish writings. Once certain decrees are issued against the Jews – decrees that are anonymously analogous to those proclaimed by Nazism

when it was beginning to accumulate power – the Jews organise themselves to escape from their retreat as a united group.

Surprisingly, the story ends with an event that looks like a draft discarded by history: the escape ends in salvation, establishing itself as an Exodus. It ends in an event that takes place in a world made possible by the myth of the Exodus and the Ark, rather than by the myth of the destructive Deluge. Unlike the historical versions of the events, here a group of people that was transformed into a nation succeeds, against the background of an imminent Holocaust, to break through the threat and get out of its range of influence. Stammering Moses and Spartacus, the leader of the slaves' rebellion, who both appear in this novel as parodical allusions, actually prefigure the redemption.

So the Ark sails across the water of the Deluge while beneath it those who are doomed are drowning. In this sense all Appelfeld's stories tell about the Deluge from the safe and sheltered point of view of Noah's Ark. Yet, albeit the evil surrounding these stories is found over there, outside the Ark, some of it undoubtedly penetrates inside.

In parallel to the theme of annihilation and survival among a concentrated group of people that are made to tell their stories, the novel contains another theme, equally recurrent in Appelfeld's fiction and essays, which, as I suggested earlier, is deeply and symbolically connected with the story about Noah's Ark. This is the theme of language.

The stammering narrator is portrayed in the novel in terms of his resemblance to Moses, the great leader who was 'slow of speech and of a slow tongue'. Thus the story identifies the speechless with the chosen. But the stammering of the narrating voice, which is introduced in the exposition of the story, has a certain aspect which is more infrastructural and hidden than the thematic aspect. It is also more infrastructural than the autobiographic aspect, which connects the inarticulateness of Appelfeld's stories with the foreignness of the Hebrew used by the author and his original bilingualism in his country of birth. Appelfeld's fiction emerges as a miracle out of, and by virtue of, this inarticulateness, as many critics have rightly acknowledged.

Let me turn to another aspect of the language in Appelfeld's novel. It concerns the theme of language as an example of the 'horrible economy' of the American Indians' exchange of lands for glass beads, which I mentioned before. This is the reductive exchange embodied in any language that substitutes the reductive signifier for the real and full signified, which is very much present. Mysticism would refer to the former as the 'shell'.

In the recurrent pattern of his stories, Appelfeld has invented a completely new kind of sorrow, which has never been described in fiction or perhaps defined as a sort of loss. It is the sorrow of those who are the last of their kind. Far from being associated merely with orphanhood, widowhood and bereavement, this is a lexical, dictionary-oriented sorrow, the sorrow of the sign, or rather the sorrow of the abstract that has lost its existence as a concrete entity. The last of its kind is transformed, by being the only specimen that has survived, into an abstraction, a mere word. Thus it exists as a kind of depleted concreteness. The sensitivity to the reduction embodied by the linguistic principle can be seen in the following example:

My mother died while she was giving birth to me. Her last pain must have been sealed in my body.

[In my bed there was] a huge teddy bear... made of sheep fur. I was very fond of this teddy bear... One day, it disappeared. For many days I was looking for it... One night I saw the bear in a dream and uttered a cry... Bear, where are you going? With the lump in my throat gone, I managed to call the bear, but the bear did not know that a miracle happened to me and did not respond to my voice... My voice stuck in my throat... This dream came to me again and again. I'm sick with longing. It is choking me... From that time I remember... a puppy... The white bear, which I had forgotten, was brought back to my mind. One day [the puppy] disappeared from the yard and the world darkened for me. [Following the loss of the puppy, the narrator becomes ill and the neighbours are called for help.] The old neighbour ruled: The boy is longing for his mother. But his mother died! ... The boy knows that, said the old woman loud and clear, but he cannot get over his longings. (7-9)

In this sequence of excerpts one can detect a series of reductive

substitutions of the real thing, which is replaced by its signs. The deceased mother is substituted by a teddy bear, into which the boy's feelings of love for the mother are now projected, and the lost teddy bear, in turn, is replaced with a puppy. The latter thus becomes the object onto which the boy projects his feelings, thus functioning as the signifier 'mother' as well as the signified 'bear'. It thus serves both as the locus of absence and as the object of desire. This series is evoked within the context of the disappearance of language, which is represented by the choked throat. Language means the ability to replace mother with a teddy bear and the object with a mere word. As such, it is undoubtedly an economy of a horrible loss, but also of profit. What is gained is the ability to transform the absentee into a minor presence, into a tiny temple. Just as in Noah's Ark a single, abstract and representative lion signifies all lions, so in the fiction of *Masa el hahoref* the teddy bear and the puppy, combined with the substitution of one for the other and the loss of both, stand for the missing and abstract sign of the fullness of 'mother'.

As language becomes the object of contemplation, the story emerges as a reduction of Noah's Ark. The reluctance to speak up, the stammering, indicates a refusal to make do with the sign, a turning away from Noah's Ark.

Continuing in the same Lacanian vein, it is interesting to consider the scene in which the three stammerers are gathered for a session in speech therapy. The teacher ill treats them and demands that they renounce their selves as superfluous extra-linguistic entities. In this respect, this teacher of speech is an effective image of 'the name of the father' in Lacan's terminology, and hence it is no wonder that he is eventually murdered by one of his students. This suggests how strong is the refusal of those who see clearly to give up the real in favour of language and how great the pain involved in this struggle. There are other aspects of substitution in this novel but they are beyond the scope of the present analysis.

The stammering boy, whose inarticulate testimony reveals how the sick and melancholic community of the mountain dwellers was rescued, tells the story reluctantly. Of the two possibilities, that of Noah's Ark and that of the Deluge, he undoubtedly chooses the latter by trying to avoid speech. Here, silence stands for the refusal to accept the reduction of lexical substitution.

Within the framework of culture, repetitions in general, and confessional repetitions in particular, are considered to be reformatory and healing acts. This is how Foucault analyses the phenomenon of religious confession and this too is the role of the psychoanalytic confessional discourse and its understanding of traumatic mechanisms. Perhaps the same is offered by magic, whose simulation of the threatening object is designed to conquer and subdue it.

To what extent does Appelfeld heal his own tormented self, this new lexical sorrow, as well as the wounded self of his community, through these repeated references to Noah's Ark? To what extent does he succeed in either setting a boundary between himself on the one hand and the Deluge and corrupt violence on the other hand, or in signifying the hybrid relations between the latter two? Is it possible to detect a faint shadow of recovery in Appelfeld's series of Noah's Arks?

In *Masa el hahoref*, which for the time being is the last link of this series, salvation seems to be fulfilled at long last. Is a further repetition still possible? Will this pattern re-emerge in one of Appelfeld's next stories – or is it no longer necessary? Time will tell.

Making Choices in a Postwar World: The Portrayal of Holocaust Survivors in the Fiction of Aharon Appelfeld

David C. Jacobson

Towards the end of an interview with Aharon Appelfeld, Philip Roth asked Appelfeld, 'From what you observed as a homeless youngster wandering in Europe after the war, and from what you've learned during four decades in Israel, do you discern distinguishing patterns in the experience of those whose lives were saved?'¹ Appelfeld responded, in part: 'The survivors have undergone experiences that no one else has undergone, and others expect some message from them, some key to understanding the human world – a human example. But they, of course, cannot begin to fulfill the great tasks imposed upon them, so theirs are clandestine lives of flight and hiding.'²

Of all the fictional Holocaust survivors created by Appelfeld, the two most highly developed characters are Bartfuss in *Bartfuss the Immortal* (which had recently been published in English at the time of the interview) and Erwin Siegelbaum in *The Iron Tracks*.³ On one level both fictional characters are the products of Appelfeld's own experiences as a survivor. As Appelfeld has noted, 'One does not need to be a great psychologist to understand that [in my fiction] I deal with the inner parts of my soul... Even when I present other characters, in the final analysis it is I.'⁴ There are, however, a number of biographical discrepancies between Appelfeld and these two characters. They were adolescents during the war, while Appelfeld was a child and spent most of his adolescence in Israel. Siegelbaum's parents were murdered during the war, and although they are not mentioned, we can assume that the same was true of Bartfuss's parents. While Appelfeld's mother was murdered in the Czernowitz

1. The interview originally appeared in *The New York Times Book Review* 28 Feb. 1988; repr. as 'A Conversation with Philip Roth,' in Aharon Appelfeld, *Beyond Despair: Three Lectures and a Conversation with Philip Roth* (New York 1994), 59–80; this ref. 79.

2. *Ibid.* 79–80.

3. Aharon Appelfeld, *Bartfuss ben almavet*, published with *Haqetonet vehapassim* in Aharon Appelfeld, *Haqetonet vehapassim* (Tel Aviv 1983). All quotations are from Aharon Appelfeld, *The Immortal Bartfuss*, trans. Jeffrey M. Green (New York 1988). Aharon Appelfeld, *Mesillat barzel* (Jerusalem 1991). All quotations are

from Aharon Appelfeld, *The Iron Tracks*, trans. Jeffrey M. Green (New York 1998).
 4. Aharon Appelfeld, interview by Shulamit Gingold-Gilboa, *Yediot Aharanot*, 13 January 1984, cited in Yigal Schwartz, 'Hatamah basipporet shel Aharon Appelfeld', *Mehqerei yerushalayim besifrut ivrit* 9 (1986) 201.

5. This approach draws in part on the application of possible worlds theory to literary analysis in Ruth Ronen, *Possible Worlds in Literary Theory* (Cambridge 1994).

ghetto, he was reunited with his father in Israel after the war. Bartfuss and Siegelbaum engage in forms of illegal and legal trade, while Appelfeld's livelihood has been based on teaching and writing. Neither fictional character is part of a loving family unit: Bartfuss has a troubled relationship with his wife and daughters; Siegelbaum has no family. In contrast, Appelfeld's relationships with his wife, adult sons and daughter and his granddaughter are known to all who are friendly with him as loving and fulfilling. These discrepancies lead to the assumption that in part these characters are based not only on his own life, but also on his observation of other Holocaust survivors whose war experiences and life choices after the war differed from his.

At the heart of the fictional world is the *fabula*, the chronological sequence of events, which is largely driven by the choices that characters make out of the possibilities presented to them in the circumstances in which they find themselves.⁵ The notion of the *fabula* as a product of choices made by characters is central to both of these novels. Indeed, throughout Appelfeld repeatedly calls attention to the alternatives available to each survivor and the consequences of the choices he makes among those alternatives. In so doing Appelfeld conveys a central aspect of the Holocaust survivor experience: the necessity of making choices in the postwar world and dealing with the ways those choices shape one's quality of life. As Appelfeld notes in the interview conducted by Roth, at times survivors are driven by a need to act in an unusually exemplary manner and at other times they are driven by a desperate attempt to hide from the necessity to make any choices in life.

The paradigmatic biography of the Holocaust survivor is divided into three stages: first a pre-war life, secondly experiences during the war and thirdly a postwar life. While of the two novels only *Iron Tracks* conveys the pre-war life of the central survivor character, both novels convey the war experiences and postwar lives of the survivors. In the first postwar stage of each novel, in an effort to cope with the traumatic effects of the war each protagonist gradually transforms the experience of a life with a variety of possibilities after the war into a routine pattern of behavior which constitutes a life with limited possibilities. In the second postwar stage of each novel, each character chooses to break out of his routine pattern of behaviour with the purpose of creating a more meaningful life.

The Survivors' War Experiences

The war experiences of Bartfuss and Siegelbaum are presented as memories and reflections about the past experienced by the protagonists during the postwar period. The content of each character's memories and reflections about the Holocaust are characterized by Appelfeld's tendency in his fiction to be sparing of graphic detail. One of the more detailed memories that Bartfuss experiences is his transport in a crowded railway car to a concentration camp: 'Starved, crushed into freight cars, the people had learned to ignore each other, to steal and push like beasts with the little strength remaining to them. One after another, feelings were numbed' (p. 48). In contrast to the animal-like response of their fellow victims, Bartfuss and a woman he meets in the railway car, Theresa, engage in a discussion of Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. For the most part, however, Bartfuss's consciousness of the Holocaust is evoked by the way others characterize him, much to his chagrin, as a legendary figure – 'the immortal Bartfuss' – who cheated death and survived in a truly miraculous manner. 'There are fifty bullets in his body', people would say in awe. 'How can a man live with fifty bullets in his body?' (p. 62). Bartfuss's thoughts about the Holocaust are also dominated by his obsession with what he imagines to have been the way that his wife Rosa survived the war, granting sexual favors to the Gentile peasants who hid her from the Nazis. He condemns the way that he believes she survived. 'Life isn't everything', he declares to her. 'There's a limit to humiliation' (p. 11).

Siegelbaum's Holocaust memories focus on his experiences with his father and mother in the concentration camp run by a Nazi officer named Nachtigel, who eventually murdered both Siegelbaum's parents: 'It was a small, brutal labor camp', he relates, 'where people died from cold and hard work... The Germans and Ukrainians beat people without making distinctions. Nachtigel executed people daily... I worked, loading coal like a trained laborer... One morning Nachtigel shot [father] because he came late to the lineup... One night [mother], too, was shot, near the fence' (p. 144).

Each character's thoughts about the Holocaust are connected to an underlying drive that pushes each of them to break out of the routine life he had devised for himself after the war. Bartfuss's memory of discussing Dostoevsky's great novel of the psychological, moral and

theological dimensions of human existence, the references by other characters to Bartfuss's heroism and his obsession with what he considers to be the compromised way his wife survived, all contribute to his eventual conviction that he must play the role of moral hero in the world. Siegelbaum's focus on the cruelty of Nachtigel and the fact that Nachtigel murdered his parents eventually fuels his drive to avenge their death by assassinating the Nazi officer.

The Postwar Transition that leads to Routine

As was generally true for Holocaust survivors, for both Bartfuss (whose story is told by a third-person narrator) and Siegelbaum (whose story is told in first person), liberation at the end of the war opens up a much wider range of possibilities than they had experienced since the beginning of the war. Of particular significance, however, is the process in which each character makes choices that eventually lead them to a self-imposed, circumscribed, routine life in which his choices are once again limited. Bartfuss's first major choice after the war is to throw himself into an intoxicating life of smuggling in Italy, to which he had traveled at the conclusion of the war. He is particularly drawn to the opportunity he has as a smuggler to be involved in the illegal immigration of Jews to Palestine in defiance of the British Mandate quotas, because it allows him to live the kind of adventurous life he had experienced as he tried to survive during the war: 'He lived for the strong taste of action on others' behalf, like in the forest [during the war]' (p. 20).

It is the relationship he begins with Rosa, whom he meets on the shores of Italy, that leads Bartfuss to the more circumscribed life that he comes to live. At first he has a sexual liaison with Rosa that appears to him to be no different from the casual sexual relations he had begun to have with other women he met after the liberation. As the narrator captures Bartfuss's memories of the early stages of his relationship with Rosa, hints of what attracts him to Rosa emerge as she evokes an unconscious response that causes him to remain loyal to her, even while he generally feels 'that all the things that were happening to him weren't things that he wanted to have happen' (p. 22). The fact that Rosa stays quietly in one place, refraining from making demands of Bartfuss, encourages him to stay attached to her. 'He knew that he would always find her by the sea... Rosa didn't ask "Who are you and what do you do?"... Rosa wasn't a bother' (pp.

16–17). Bartfuss remains loyal to Rosa through the births of their two daughters, despite the fact that fatherhood is one of the last things on his mind following his liberation. Eventually Bartfuss does run away from Rosa. When some of the members of his smuggling ring are arrested, he escapes by ship to Palestine, only to discover that Rosa and the children have followed him on the sea voyage.

Although Bartfuss had been ready to leave Rosa and their daughters behind in Italy, he chooses to remain with them after they all arrive in Israel and settle in Jaffa. This choice is quite puzzling since once they are in Israel, Rosa becomes distrustful of Bartfuss and she keeps their daughters distant from him. The narrator suggests that Bartfuss does not flee his family perhaps because he cannot tolerate the thought that Rosa would tell their daughters that he was guilty of abandoning them, or perhaps because ‘he also harbored a secret hope that the girls might return to him’ (p. 12). As times goes on, Bartfuss becomes increasingly emotionally distant from Rosa and their daughters, and he preserves a treasure which he carefully hides from them. His life in general becomes ‘introverted and friendless’ (p. 30) and he settles into a highly regular daily routine.

Some of Siegelbaum’s postwar experiences resemble those of Bartfuss but a number of the choices he makes are very different. Like Bartfuss, Siegelbaum becomes caught up in the excitement of smuggling. While for Bartfuss smuggling represents a return to the adventures of surviving the war, for Siegelbaum it represents an attempt to forget his past suffering and also to liberate himself from the limitations of the war: ‘We forgot ourselves in all that activity’, he relates. ‘What we didn’t do during the years of the war, we did now: we moved rapidly’ (pp.5-24).

Unlike Bartfuss who stays with Rosa, Siegelbaum eventually leaves his first lover, Bella. After liberation Siegelbaum and Bella settle in the village of Prachtov. When Bella then falls into a prolonged deep sleep, Siegelbaum is tempted to abandon her, but as he informs us, ‘something within me, perhaps fear, wouldn’t let me, and I stayed with her’ (p. 19). When she finally awakens, Siegelbaum tries to learn more about her, but she tells him little. After he runs out of money, he decides, like Bartfuss, to join the smugglers, but Bella refuses to go with him and insists on staying in Prachtov. Over time Siegelbaum becomes increasingly afraid of Bella’s reluctance to speak, as if

‘madness was trapped within her’ (p. 25), and so he leaves her for good. Although Bartfuss and Siegelbaum make opposite choices in relationship to their first lovers after the war, each regrets his decision: Bartfuss because of the limited and alienated life he comes to lead in his marriage with Rosa, and Siegelbaum because he eventually realizes, as he puts it, ‘that no woman has ever known my soul as [Bella] has’ (pp.2-21).

After three years of smuggling, Siegelbaum recounts, he suddenly runs out of energy and decides to join a group of Communists, headed by a man named Rollman. This serves to reconnect Siegelbaum with his dead parents, who had been Communists before the war. His connection with this group is disrupted, however, by the assassination of Rollman by an anti-Communist survivor. It is this murder, from which he flees by train, that leads Siegelbaum to seek refuge in the routine of an annual circular train journey.

Routine Existence

At the beginning of *The Immortal Bartfuss* the reader learns of the routine existence into which Bartfuss has settled in Israel. His day is highly structured: he rises at 4:45 a.m., drinks a cup of coffee, and smokes a cigarette. At 6:00 he smokes his second cigarette. At 7:00 he leaves his house and walks near the ocean, and from about 8:00 to 10:00 he sits in a café and drinks his second cup of coffee. He then wanders along the sea shore and smokes some more until he goes to a restaurant to have lunch, sometimes staying there until 3:00. After lunch he goes to a place where he engages in trading. While his choice of activities through the morning and lunch are apparently designed to help him control his inner anger and anxiety, he becomes tense as he goes to his business dealings, for which he has only contempt. He returns home (sometimes after a bus ride to the north) late at night when the rest of the household is asleep. As the narrator summarizes, ‘That’s how it’s been for years, day after day, at an ever-faster pace, but without any great changes’ (p. 8).

Siegelbaum’s routine consists of a circular train route that he undertakes every year from spring to winter. On this journey he devotes himself to two main activities: buying and selling antique Judaica ritual objects, books and manuscripts, and searching for Nachtigel, the Nazi murderer of his parents. The train journeys serve

additional purposes. For one, they provide him with a welcome alternative to the settled married life that Bartfuss had chosen, in which he fears he would end up as '[a]n insect, a mindless clerk, or, at best, a shopkeeper, a kind of human snail, getting up early, working eight or nine hours, and in the evening, with the remains of his strength, locking up and going home to what? A disgruntled wife, an overgrown, ungrateful son, a stack of bills' (p. 5). Also, having been traumatized by the forward thrust of history, Siegelbaum is comforted by the circular nature of his annual train journey: 'And in this repetition lies a strange hopefulness', he declares. 'As if our end were not extinction but a sort of constant renewal' (p. 5). The steady movement of the trains has a calming effect that relieves him of much anxiety: 'True, a drink and a few cigarettes can banish fear from my heart for a short while,' he states, 'but only the train, it alone, can tranquilize me completely' (p. 31).

Siegelbaum also derives some measure of reassurance and comfort from people he meets in the course of his journeys and from physical pleasures that become available to him, either on the trains or in towns at which he stops. Such experiences neutralize the emotionally debilitating effect of his pain. 'My nightmares...', he relates, 'are neither fleeting nor few... and only certain places and particular foods have the power to quiet them' (p. 47). Siegelbaum tries to influence the train conductor to play classical music over the loudspeaker, and he is drawn to places with a friendly driver who picks him up at the train every year, a bathtub that perfectly fits his body, an innkeeper who tells him about his life or who seems to understand Siegelbaum, a Communist who reconnects him to the political passions of his dead parents, and buffets and inns with food that appeals to him. Yet, the very fact that he typically spends short periods of time at each stop allows him to maintain a safe emotional distance from any prolonged attachment to people or places. His intimate relations with women, sometimes on the train and sometimes in the hotels and inns where he stays, are also kept to a bare minimum of duration. As he puts it, 'Fleeting loves are beneficial and never painful. Love for a station or two is love without pretense and soon forgotten. Any contact beyond that pollutes the emotions and threatens to leave behind recriminations' (p. 9). The train journeys, however, cannot heal the painful memories of all that he experienced in the war. 'My memory is my downfall', he declares. 'Nothing can deplete it. My memory is a powerful machine that stores and constantly discharges

lost years and faces. In the past I believed that travel would blunt my memory; I was wrong' (p. 9).

Siegelbaum always begins his journey on 27 March in Wirblbahn, the date and place of his liberation from the Nazis; in the course of his journey he always heads north and then eventually turns back towards the south. It is as if he is enacting the reality that he has made no progress towards establishing a life after the war and so must retrace his steps over and over again. Many of the people with whom he interacts represent a variety of aspects of Jewish identity which are of central importance to Siegelbaum. Gizi the innkeeper – who had converted to Christianity to please his wife but now that they are separated no longer practises Christianity – amazes Siegelbaum for he has been able to transform his appearance into that of 'an Austrian in every respect' (39). Mrs Groton, a Gentile innkeeper, is even warmer towards him after he tells her he is Jewish, and she reveals to him her hatred of the Austrians. Mrs Braun, whose father had been Jewish, and Mr Drutschik, the Gentile owner of a buffet, both try to help him to track down Nachtigel. Max Rauch, a Jew, delights in purchasing from Siegelbaum Hebrew and Yiddish books he has collected. Stark is the Jewish Communist who reconnects him with the world of his Communist parents. 'I sink into [Stark's company]', he declares, 'as if into a drugged slumber' (p. 41). Siegelbaum shares the rare Jewish books and manuscripts he finds in his travels with Rabbi Zimmel, with whom he also studies Judaism.

Certain places and certain people, however, bring back the pain of the past to him. At one stop, he recalls, he stays one day longer than usual. 'That was a mistake,' he informs the reader, 'though not one I will ever repeat. For hours memory flooded into my head, as if seeking to drown me. My distant childhood, lost sights, appeared before me like a melting sea of ice' (p. 36). Siegelbaum discovers at some locations a degree of postwar residual anti-Semitism which greatly disturbs him. In connection with one village he states, 'I could stay on, but the people here are rude. Since they discovered that I'm a Jew, they treat me with obvious coolness' (p. 47).

Breaking out of the Routine

The event that shakes Bartfuss out of his routine is a sudden illness that causes him to be rushed to hospital. His hospitalization draws Rosa

and the daughters to interact with him more directly than they had in years, although Bartfuss suspects they are doing so only because they are afraid he will die before he reveals to them the location of the hidden treasure. The illness opens up the floodgates of memory that he had successfully maintained: 'He had invested a lot of energy into blocking up the openings through which thoughts could push out. In recent years he had managed to seal them off almost completely. Now he felt he didn't have the power to stop them anymore' (p. 36). Although once he returns home he finds Rosa as suspicious of him as ever, surviving the attack provides Bartfuss with a kind of death and rebirth experience that induces a rush of vitality and an impulse for self-assertion that he had not experienced since his days as a smuggler in Italy: 'The modicum of his egotism, which he had never dared to release,' states the narrator, 'throbbed in him like fanfares of victory' (p. 37).

Throughout this new period in his life, Bartfuss believes he has discovered the most meaningful way possible to live as a Holocaust survivor. To one fellow survivor he declares, 'I should have been more generous. People who went through the Holocaust should be generous' (p. 73). Right after that conversation Bartfuss recovers the drive to perform great deeds which had once gripped him in Italy: 'Now he would devote himself to the general welfare... He would no longer think of himself, his agony, but would work for the general good' (p. 75). To his friend Sylvia's ex-husband he declares: 'I expect greatness of soul from people who underwent the Holocaust' (p. 107).

It is only now that Bartfuss is oriented towards interacting with individuals and sharing his humanity with them. From this point until the end of the novel, Bartfuss experiences a series of encounters with other Holocaust survivors and with his daughter Bridget, in which he tries out his new-found interest in the world and develops the beginning of a sense of purpose. This is clearly a new Bartfuss, and yet in part because of the nature of the people with whom he seeks to interact and in part due to his own personal limitations, each encounter with the world proves to be disappointing, and he never achieves the 'greatness of soul' for which he had come to believe all Holocaust survivors should strive. He tries to breathe new life into the work of a Holocaust memorial, but it eventually closes down. Dorf, with whom he had survived the war, quotes clichés about

Zionist productivity to him with the clear implication that Bartfuss's involvement in business is not making a constructive contribution to Israel. When he comes across Theresa, the woman with whom he had discussed Dostoevsky on the way to the concentration camp, she refuses to acknowledge their past connection. 'You've come to the wrong woman', she informs him. 'Memories don't interest me. I live in the present, the present tense' (p. 57) When an old dealer asks him for a loan, Bartfuss is eager to respond, but in the course of the conversation the dealer withdraws his request because of the emotional implications of taking a loan. In talking with Schmugler, the aptly named fellow smuggler from Bartfuss's days in Italy, Bartfuss 'conjure[s] up some forbidden feelings' (p. 85) and causes Schmugler to become distant and unresponsive, to which Bartfuss reacts by hitting him, although later they do meet and are reconciled. His most positive interaction is with Sylvia, a fellow survivor who, the narrator relates, 'made Bartfuss feel she had words to draw him out of the mire into which he had sunk' (p. 97), but unfortunately she dies. He has two awkward and inconclusive encounters with his retarded daughter Bridget, the second with erotic overtones. His final interaction is with a survivor named Marian, whom he seeks to instruct in how not to be taken advantage of, and when she seems not to understand him, he hits her.

Unlike the sudden illness of Bartfuss which propels him on a renewed interaction with the world, the causes of Siegelbaum's decision to break the routine of the train journeys develop gradually. As he describes the places he visits on his route, it becomes clear that the stability of this routine has begun to break down in recent years, thereby weakening its hold on him and potentially freeing him to make new decisions. 'Until five years ago', he relates, 'I kept up this relentless pace, but since my ulcer was discovered, movement has become difficult for me. After a day of travel I need rest' (p. 24). Furthermore, many changes had occurred on his route the year before or occur during the year of this final journey. The circle round Stark had begun to disintegrate, and Siegelbaum senses during the year of the final journey that it would be the last time he saw this Communist activist. A year before, Mrs Groton, a Christian whose maternal grandmother was a Jewish convert to Christianity, had given him a mezuzah, and he fears that this year she has died; his lover Bertha had announced that she would return to her hometown; and when he had told one of his hosts, Gretchen, that he was Jewish,

he had sensed her aversion and realized she would not want him to return. Perhaps most devastating of all for Siegelbaum is the death of Rabbi Zimmel during the year of the final journey.

The immediate impulse to break the routine of his annual train journey and perform the dramatic deed of assassinating Nachtigel comes to Siegelbaum when Drutschik tells him that he knows exactly where Nachtigel's new house is located in the town of Weinberg and draws him a map of the route from the Weinberg train station to the house. 'When he handed me the paper', relates Siegelbaum, 'my hands trembled. I knew that the delay was coming to an end. The time of testing was approaching' (p. 102). Yet Siegelbaum does not travel directly to Weinberg. Reluctant to depart from the comfort of his routine, he continues on his regular journey, stopping to see a number of acquaintances, including Rabbi Zimmel, whose blessing he seeks. Siegelbaum develops a growing realization that it has been his destiny ever since the end of the war to assassinate Nachtigel. '[I]t seemed to me that I hadn't gotten here under my own power', he declares, 'but that a kind of nightmare had propelled me' (p. 159). He eventually makes his way to Weinberg and waits outside Nachtigel's house for the Nazi officer to return home.

It is not easy for Siegelbaum to assassinate Nachtigel. At first, upon seeing the Nazi officer, Siegelbaum engages him in conversation, pretending to be one of the locals. Siegelbaum offers Nachtigel praise for his war-time exploits, only to discover that Nachtigel is now an old, emotionally broken man: 'He was completely crushed by his misery, and it was clear that no compliment could rouse him from his depression' (p. 177). Siegelbaum cannot bring himself to shoot this pathetic old man until Nachtigel raises his hand to wave good-bye to him. '[T]hat gesture, more than anything he had said,' declares Siegelbaum, 'reminded me of Nachtigel's comradeship with his young subordinates in the camp, and the warm paternal care he used to shower on them. He treated them like a father, and within a short time he made them as cruel as he was' (p. 179). Nachtigel's dedication during the war to the de-humanization of self and of others is, in the final analysis, too much for Siegelbaum to countenance, and so, as Nachtigel turns away, Siegelbaum shoots him twice in the back, a particularly humiliating form of execution.

6. Appelfeld, *Beyond Despair* 80.

Conclusion

The unresolved endings of these novels express Appelfeld's view of the immense difficulty facing the Holocaust survivor as she or he seeks to establish a satisfying relationship with the world. The escape from the heady days of adventurous activity immediately following the war into a self-numbing routine existence is a fully understandable response by people whose world had been turned upside down in the Holocaust. But clearly the routine adopted by each character is only a temporary escape that cannot fully deal with his internal anguish. As Appelfeld put it in his interview with Roth, 'The wound is too deep, and bandages won't help'.⁶ Appelfeld makes clear, however, that survivors have a drive beneath the surface of their regular lives to re-engage with the world through acts that would grant meaning to their existence. The drive that impels Bartfuss is to serve as a moral model who will work to keep the world from descending again into the barbarity of the Holocaust. The drive that impels Siegelbaum is to bring justice to the world by punishing the perpetrators of genocide who escaped accountability after the war. It does appear that Appelfeld considers both of these drives to be highly problematic for two reasons. Firstly, it is beyond the capacity of any one survivor or even a group of survivors fully to restore morality to Western civilization in the aftermath of the Second World War. Neither resolving to be good-hearted nor executing an escaped Nazi will really accomplish this. Secondly, the key to each survivor's happiness is not the morally heroic act but the acquisition of exactly the ability that Bartfuss and Siegelbaum were not able to acquire: to interact with others intimately, openly and spontaneously.

Yiddish Haunts: The Yiddish Underpinnings of Appelfeld's *Laylah ve'od laylah*

Zelda Kahan-Newman

Appelfeld has said of his childhood in his parents' home: 'All around us lived masses of Jews who spoke Yiddish, but in our house Yiddish was absolutely forbidden'.¹ Did the young Aharon Appelfeld absorb any of the Yiddish spoken by the 'masses of Jews' who lived around him? It is impossible to know now. Even the most self-reflective eight-year-olds do not give their language much thought. What is more, there are few who lived then who could attest now to the facts, and so much time has elapsed that memory cannot be relied on.

The picture is yet more muddy because for Appelfeld Yiddish has a strong emotional overlay. Despite the fact that his parents forbade the use of Yiddish in their home, Appelfeld's grandparents still spoke Yiddish.² The young boy undoubtedly heard them and probably understood them. Thus, even before the Holocaust, the positive pull towards Yiddish (grounded in his grandparents' attitude) was counter-balanced by the aversion towards Yiddish (grounded in his parents' attitude). After the Holocaust, Appelfeld reports: 'Hebrew became my mother language and I studied Yiddish to avoid German'.³ Few of us can consciously choose a mother language; the window of opportunity closes in early adolescence.⁴ Appelfeld came to Israel at the last moment. He was able to adopt a new mother tongue, Hebrew, and from his account, he embraced Yiddish. And yet, he remains conflicted about Yiddish. In his words: 'On one side, I have an affinity for it, on the other side, I have a complex about it.'⁵

A careful study of the language of *Laylah ve'od laylah*, I maintain,

1. Aharon Appelfeld quoted in Daniel R. Schwarz, *Imagining the Holocaust* (New York 1999) 249.

2. Joseph Cohen, *Voices of Israel* (New York 1990) 132.

3. *Ibid.*

4. Robert E. Owens, Jr., *Language Development: An Introduction* (Columbus 1988) 380, and David Singleton, *Language Acquisition: The Age Factor* (Clevedon and Philadelphia 1989) 80.

5. Cohen, *Voices of Israel* 132.

reveals that whether or not he intended it, Appelfeld definitely acquired Yiddish. His Hebrew is flavoured with Yiddish influence; the morphological and syntactic structures of Yiddish are there, right underneath the Hebrew surface.

A caveat is in order here. Because Yiddish is a Germanic language, it shares some vocabulary, some morphological patterns and some syntactic patterns with German. If Yiddish influences are found in Appelfeld's work, must one go on to investigate whether these elements are present in German too? I believe not. On this matter Appelfeld should be taken at his word. If he states that he studied Yiddish to avoid German, I shall assume that for him the impacting language is Yiddish, not German. This is the language he heard all around him as a child and the language with which he wants to identify now. Moreover, as I shall show, the one grammatical pattern that is least amenable to conscious acquisition or rejection is unquestionably derived from Yiddish.

In Appelfeld's novel *Laylah ve'od laylah* Holocaust survivors living in Israel bemoan the loss of their native Yiddish. The novel itself is written in Hebrew but its Yiddish skeleton 'sticks out' all over. As I probe its Hebrew outer skin to get at the Yiddish skeleton that lies beneath the surface, I shall show that Appelfeld's Yiddish casts an ironic light on one of the major characters, and the Yiddish morphological and syntactic structures that force themselves on his Hebrew reinforce the novel's theme in unexpected ways.

Some of the character names in the novel are neutral; they add nothing to what is known of the character from the descriptive parts of the novel. 'Manfred', the name of the main character of the story and its narrator, and 'Arthur', that of his son, are two such neutral names.⁶ Other character names clearly reflect and reinforce what is known of the character from the novel. 'Christina' and 'Clara' are two such names. Christina, the young Jewish woman who was brought up in a convent by nuns, is only nominally Jewish. She behaves and feels like a Christian. Her name tells us the most important thing about her. Clara, the retarded daughter of the hero, is a simple young woman, who lives in a protected, shelter-like home. Like Isaac Bashevis Singer's Gimpel, she leads a life free of inner tension and unclouded by complexity. 'Clara' is therefore a name that reflects her personalit.

6. To be sure, for Jews the choosing of names in the Diaspora was never entirely neutral. One can assume that a man named Manfred who names his son Arthur is of somewhat secular persuasion. A thorough analysis of the names in *Laylah ve'od laylah* could be undertaken but that would make for a different paper.

There are two other names, however, that are decidedly ironic. One belongs to the minor character Dr Shutz, the other to the major character Mrs Prakht. Dr Shutz is the psychiatrist who cares for Edward, a former resident of the pension in which the hero lives. What exactly is wrong with Edward is never revealed. By the time the novel starts he has already left the pension and has been admitted to a psychiatric hospital. But one thing is known: his doctor is unable to stave off his emotional decline. Edward is unable to function in society and he becomes a permanent resident of the psychiatric hospital. Now *shutz* in Yiddish means protection but Dr Shutz affords Edward scant protection. In the hospital Edward is, it is true, protected physically but his spirit, sadly, goes unguarded. Dr Shutz, the would-be protector, then, has a name that can only be ironic.

There is yet more irony in the name given to the proprietress of the pension that serves as a home for the hero and his fellow Holocaust survivors. The proprietress's name is Mrs Prakht. The word *prakht* in Yiddish means splendour or magnificence.⁷ When the story opens, it does indeed seem as though Mrs Prakht deserves this name. She is superior to her boarders three times over: financially, socially and culturally. She is the owner of the pension while they are her boarders. She arrived in Jerusalem before the Second World War and has high-placed acquaintances, while they are displaced newcomers with few native connections. She is German-speaking and is proud to belong to a trans-national German cultural group, while they are Yiddish-speaking, aware that their language and its culture are despised throughout Europe and denigrated even in their new homeland. All these advantages conspire to give Mrs Prakht an aura of splendour. But finally, at the end of the story it can be seen that this splendour, like the wizardry of the 'famous' Wizard of Oz, was nothing more than a chimera. Mrs Prakht was not rich at all; in fact, she was nearly bankrupt. Stripped of her wealth, Mrs Prakht's social and cultural advantages dissipate and become inconsequential. The splendour suggested by her name can, therefore, be only ironic. And, one is left thinking, if her splendour was only apparent, perhaps her social and cultural superiority were also only a chimera.

Now for the morphological and syntactic elements of Yiddish that haunt the Hebrew of *Layla ve'od laylah*. As any one who has tried to learn a foreign language knows, one of the most common forms of interference in the learning of a new language is 'loan translation'.

7. In a traditional Jewish source such as the *tsegerene*, the Yiddish bible for women, *prakht* is generally associated with God and/or His retinue. The meaning I have given is that found in Uriel Weinreich (ed.) *English–Yiddish Yiddish–English Dictionary* (New York 1968) 304.

8. Again I must add the caveat of the similarity between German and Yiddish.

However, a *moshl mashal* was clearly derived from the Hebrew-Aramaic component of Yiddish and was returned, somewhat altered, to the corpus of modern Hebrew.

The influence of Agnon on Appelfeld is especially obvious in this case, a guess of mine which a conversation with Appelfeld confirmed.

9. A. Shpiegelblatt, [short story] *Topfpunkt* 6 (winter 2003) 10–11.

10. Aharon Appelfeld, *Laylah ve'od laylah* ('Night after Night', Jerusalem 2001) 9.

11. Used this way *kemo* appears on 17, 55, 61, 74, 83, 133, 144, 145, 148, 150, 161, 180.

This happens when one has acquired the vocabulary of a new language but has not quite mastered all its syntactic and semantic nuances. What happens is that the words of the new language are put into the moulds (syntactic patterns and semantic fields) of the former language. Called 'calque formation' by linguists, this phenomenon usually persists long after the new language has been effectively mastered. Calques might be thought of as the trace elements that a former language leaves in the newly acquired language. There are so many Yiddish calques in the Hebrew of *Laylah ve'od laylah* that a linguist who knows nothing at all about Appelfeld's biography but knows only the grammatical patterns of both Hebrew and Yiddish would suppose that the author's first language was Yiddish.⁸ I shall now examine the most common of these calques.

When there is a need for a comparative clause in Yiddish, the word that heads the clause and conveys the comparative sense is the word *vij*, literally 'like' and often translated into English as 'as though'. Here is an example from a contemporary Yiddish story: 'Er hot es geton dveykesdik... *vij* er volt zikh gegreyt tsu brengen a korbn der almekhtikayt' (He did this with devotion... *as though* he were preparing himself to bring a sacrifice to the Omnipotent One).⁹ Here is the same *vij* in Appelfeld's story, where it surfaces as the Hebrew word *kemo*: 'Ish lo samakh ve-ish lo kina, *kemo* lo medubar haya be-khatuna ela be-hapalat goral' (No one was happy and no one was jealous, *as though* what was at stake was not a wedding, but the fall of the dice).¹⁰ A native Hebrew speaker would use *ke'ilu* here; it is the natural choice for a comparative clause. What Appelfeld has done is translate the Yiddish *vij* into the Hebrew *kemo* and then proceed to use *kemo* to head the comparative clause. Examples of *kemo* used to head a comparative clause are rife in this book. I counted more than a dozen in the story, and I probably missed others.¹¹

Another calque found here is the Hebrew word *akh* used to replace the Yiddish word *nor*. Page 19 of *Laylah ve'od laylah* begins with this sentence: '*Akh* patakhti et ha-sha'ar u-miyad ra'iti et klara' (*As soon as* I opened the door, I immediately saw Clara). Had the sentence been in Yiddish it would have read: 'Kh'hob nor ge-efnt di tir, un kh'hob tekef gezen klarn'. Once again, Appelfeld has translated a term from Yiddish into Hebrew and then used it as he would have used the Yiddish term. This use of *akh* to mean 'as soon as' is so non-native to modern Hebrew that it does not even appear as one of the

many uses of *akh* in the seven-volume Hebrew dictionary edited by Even Shoshan.

If the word *akh* in the meaning of 'as soon as' is indeed non-native to contemporary Hebrew, how did the publishers allow it to appear in a Hebrew novel? The answer, I believe, is that this usage of *akh* is not entirely foreign to Hebrew. It was acceptable in Biblical Hebrew, and anyone who has read the story of Jacob and his brother Esau at their father's bedside has encountered this usage. Genesis 27:30 reads: '*Akh* yatso yatsa Ya-'akov... ve-Esav ba' (As soon as [No sooner had] Jacob left... [than] Esau arrived). At a guess, few speakers of modern Hebrew could dredge up this verse from memory if asked to do so. Nevertheless, all understand how the word *akh* is used in the Biblical verse. No one has trouble understanding what it means. It is this passive knowledge, then, that accounts for the acceptance of Appelfeld's contemporary use of *akh*.

Is it reasonable to suppose that Appelfeld consciously had this Biblical verse in mind when he used *akh* the way he did? That seems unlikely given that this usage of the word occurs only twice in the Bible.¹² It is far more likely that Appelfeld's model was his early exposure to a Germanic language. Nevertheless, when Appelfeld's native language worms its way into his acquired Hebrew, it takes a syntactic pattern of ancient Hebrew and revive it for modern usage.

A third calque found many times in *Laylah ve'od laylah* is the Hebrew word *mashal* linking (and comparing) two independent clauses.¹³ Here Appelfeld's Hebrew word is from the Yiddish phrase *a moshl*, itself a *loshn-koydesh* (Hebrew-Aramaic) word derived from that component of Yiddish. In Biblical Hebrew *mashal* means 'parable', while in the Hebrew of the Sages (*lashon khakhamim*) *mashal* is closer to the English word 'example'. The contemporary use encompasses both the Biblical and the later, but in no case do modern speakers use *mashal* to link two independent clauses. This use clearly derives from the Yiddish phrase *a moshl*.¹⁴ In Appelfeld's use of the word *mashal*, then, once more a word has been derived from the Hebrew, gained a new usage in Yiddish and is then redeposited into the Hebrew repertoire, to be used in a new, expanded way.

It is possible, of course, that Appelfeld was consciously or unconsciously imitating Agnon here. After all, he admits to studying

12. The other occurrence of *akh* used in this way is Judges 7:19.

13. In the usage *X mashal Y* (independent clause *mashal* independent clause), *mashal* serves to equate X and Y.

14. For an overview of the relationship between Hebrew and the *loshn-koydesh* component of Yiddish, see M. Weinreich, *Geshikhte fun der Yidisher Shprakh I* (New York 1973) 311–20. for amore precise definition of 'component' vs 'determinant' see II 3ff. Using Weinreich's terminology, an element can be said to be found in the Hebrew-Aramaic component of Yiddish if it is derived from either Hebrew or Aramaic and has adjusted to the norms of Yiddish phonology and/or morphology.

15. Once again, a non-Yiddish speaker can understand this. However, he or she would not ordinarily resort to this.

16. I am not ruling out a *leshon khakhamim* influence here. However, the most likely (and clearly the strongest) influence for Appelfeld is his native German.

17. I am not suggesting that *ze khashuv etsli* is wrong, only that it has a slightly non-native feel.

Agnon when he was discovering Israeli writers. This is certainly a possibility. However, it is more likely that this is simply a known Yiddish usage making itself felt in Hebrew.

Here is an example of *mashal* in *Laylah ve'od laylah*, used as it would be in Yiddish: 'Le-shema devaray khiyekha, mashal giliti la sod' (At the sound of my words, she smiled, as though I'd divulged a secret to her). Only someone who knows Yiddish would use *mashal* this way.¹⁵

There are some Yiddish calques that put in a single appearance in the novel. Not surprisingly, these are prepositions, the peskiest parts of speech. These small words, which go almost unnoticed, convey nuances that are highly language-specific. When transferred directly to a new language, they are the telltale signs of a foreign influence. One such preposition is the word *etsl(a/o)* in its meaning of 'for her/him'. Literally speaking, *etsla* means 'next to her'. The Hebrew use of *etsel* to indicate possession is derived from the Yiddish. When a Yiddish speaker would say *bay ir* (literally, 'next to her'), Appelfeld translates *bay* into *etsel* and says *etsla*. Hence this sentence in *Laylah ve'od laylah*: 'veha-seder khashuv *etsla* yoter mey-ha-khayim' (And order is more important *for her* than life).¹⁶

Once again, this usage is not as odd as it may seem. Because the revivers of modern Hebrew were native Yiddish speakers, it was natural for them to import their native Yiddish usage into their newly acquired Hebrew. One of the more common of their loan translations was this use of *etsel* as a translation of the Yiddish *bay*. Thus when a Yiddish speaker would say '*bay mir iz alts in ordenung*' (As for me [literally, next to me], all is well), a modern Hebrew speaker would say '*etsli ha-kol be-seder*' and never feel the presence of a loan translation. Indeed, there was a popular Hebrew song with just these words: *etsli ha-kol be-seder* (As for me, all is OK). However, not all replacements of Yiddish *bay* with Hebrew *etsel* feel equally nativized. It is true, for example, that *etsli* is used to mean 'in my place/house' just as *bay mir* is used in Yiddish. However, *etsli* is not naturally used in conjunction with the word *khashuv*. Although a non-native speaker would be (and is) understood if he or she were to say *ze khashuv etsli* for 'it is important to me', the more natural choice would be *ze khashuv li*. In using the *bay > etsel* with the word *khashuv*, Appelfeld discloses his non-native origin.¹⁷

Another calque that slips by because it is nearly native (but not quite) is the use of the Hebrew preposition *al* for the Yiddish *oyf*. *Al* is indeed the proper translation for *oyf* but it cannot necessarily be used wherever *oyf* would be used in Yiddish. On page 43 of *Laylah ve'od laylah* is the sentence: 'Aval la-rov yoshvim ha-dayarim *al* mekomam' (But for the most part the residents sit *in* their seats). The Hebrew preposition *al*, which means 'on', is not the native choice for this usage. A native Hebrew speaker would use the preposition *be* in this case and the sentence would be: 'yoshvim *be*-mekomam'. Appelfeld chose *al* because in Yiddish the sentence would have been: 'zitsen *oyf* zeyer ort'. Once again Appelfeld has taken the preposition that Yiddish would use, translated it into his acquired Hebrew and then used it where it would be appropriate for Yiddish.

It is worth explaining why Appelfeld's use of *al* here is nearly native. There are dozens of examples in the Bible of the word *al* used for sitting in a chair, the best-known (at a guess) being that from the Megilah read on Purim: 'keshevet ha-melekh... *al* kise malkhuto' (when the king... was sitting *on* his throne [literally, the chair of his kingdom]).¹⁸ However, there are no examples of *al* with *makom* (place) as it is used in *Laylah ve'od laylah*. When one considers that sitting in a chair is not semantically far removed from sitting in one's place, and that when one speaks of sitting in a chair in Hebrew one does (or can) use the preposition *al*, one can see why the use of *al* with *makom* would not seem particularly strange to a Hebrew speaker.

I come now to a syntactic device common in Yiddish, known to earlier stages of Hebrew, but present primarily in the modern Hebrew of native Yiddish speakers: fronting. Many languages have the option of moving to the front of the sentence a word, phrase or clause that would ordinarily appear later in the sentence. This move to initial position lends the fronted element an emphasis it would not ordinarily have.¹⁹

An example of such fronting in *Laylah ve'od laylah* is 'mi-yidish hiy kamuvan soledet' (From Yiddish she naturally recoils),²⁰ in which the device of fronting, borrowed from Yiddish, is used by Appelfeld in a sentence which is itself discussing Mrs Prakht's abhorrence of Yiddish. It is as though the author is telling the reader (by the use of a Yiddish syntactic device) that there is no way to avoid the influence of Yiddish

18. One could argue that it is not *kise* but the phrase *kise malkhut(o)*, which is one morpheme. I suggest that *al* and *kise* do co-occur but only with *al kise malkhut(o)*. Of course, *al* does co-occur with *makom* (as in the phrase *shav al mekomo be-shalom*, resumed normalcy, ended as it should have). However, *yashav al mekomo* does not occur.

19. It is a prejudice of Anglo-Saxon linguistics to consider a primary word order (eith subject, verb, object or verb, subject, object) the norm and all else an aberrant result of rules that move elements within the sentence. In this case, moving a prepositional phrase to initial position in a sentence is generally called 'topicalization' (see Stephen Crain and Diane Lillo-Martin, *An Introduction to Linguistic Theory and Language Acquisition*, Malden, Mass. 1999, 113 and 120). Even under a static model of grammar, however, the verbal phrases *soledet mi-x* and *borakhat m-pney x* are each a unit. The detachment of the direct object phrase from its verb occurs under special conditions and calls for an explanation.

20. Appelfeld, *Laylah ve'od laylah* 6.

even (or perhaps especially) if one wants to describe someone who will have no truck with Yiddish. In this case the medium – the use of a Yiddish syntactic device – is itself the message.

As noted more than once, Appelfeld's Hebrew Yiddishisms have a way of feeling almost native to modern Hebrew speakers. With fronting, as with the calques discussed earlier, the feeling of near nativeness derives from the existence in ancient Hebrew of a fronting pattern that is reminiscent of what is found in *Laylah ve'od laylah*.

In Genesis 16:8, when Hagar runs away from her mistress Sarah and is asked by an angel why she has run away, she answers: 'Mipney Saray gevirty anokhi borakhat' (From-before [literally, from the face of] my mistress Sarah I am fleeing). Here a preposition and its noun (which together function as a direct object) are fronted in a fashion closely similar to the fronting used by Appelfeld in the sentence given above. There are dozens of examples of fronting in his novel.²¹ Some of them almost feel like Biblical Hebrew revived; others do not.

Whereas Biblical Hebrew fronts nouns and phrases with ease, it does not front a noun together with its dependent clause. Yiddish, on the other hand, can and does front a noun along with its dependent clause. In the following sentence from *Laylah ve'od laylah*, 'Tefila kemo shel Meshulem Ber lo shom'im od' (Prayer like that of Meshulem Ber one no longer hears).²² The fronting here may have echoes of a Biblical pattern but when examined closely it is clearly derived from Yiddish.

As I pointed out earlier, some of the Yiddish elements in the novel may in fact be German elements. When German and Yiddish share a common feature and that feature is detected in Appelfeld's Hebrew, it is impossible to say with certainty which language is exerting an influence. (Perhaps the two together exert a double-strength influence.²³) However, there is one feature of Appelfeld's Hebrew that is indubitably Yiddish in origin: the use of a rise–fall contour to convey a question or a statement that presupposes a negative. In its simplest form this intonation pattern can be assigned to a sentence consisting of only one word, and a monosyllabic word at that. Thus the monosyllabic *ikh*, 'I', when assigned a rise–fall pattern becomes two units, the first taking a rising pitch and the second taking a falling pitch: *iy/lyikh*. When spoken with this rise–fall contour, the one-

21. Other examples can be found on 15, 23, 40, 58, 60, 66, 67, 70, 72, 77, 78, 79, 81, 86, 94, 99, 111, 118, 131, 144.

22. Appelfeld, *Laylah ve'od laylah* 15.

23. I know no way of measuring a single-force strength against a double-force one but it is worth thinking about.

word sentence becomes a question which means: You don't mean me, do you?

This contour was first discussed by U. Weinreich and elaborated on by me.²⁴ I showed that the rise–fall contour characterizes a *kashe* in the Talmud²⁵ and that it is by way of Talmudic chant that the rise–fall contour made its way into Yiddish speech. I also demonstrated that this chant originated in the land of Israel and was brought to Ashkenaz by the early Jewish settlers.²⁶

When the Jews of Europe acquired a non-Jewish language, they often learnt its phonology and grammar but retained something that gave them away as Jews. This something, I have contended, was the intonation pattern of Yiddish.²⁷ Because intonation has no graphic reification, it is not learned consciously; it is learned subconsciously and transmitted subconsciously. That is why, when the Jews of Europe changed their language, they took with them the intonation patterns that stem from Talmudic chant.

It is this rise–fall intonation pattern that is found in *Laylah ve'od laylah* over and over again.²⁸ Quite often the reader encounters something that looks like a declarative sentence but is not. From the context one knows that the sentence has the meaning of an interrogatory sentence. As was the case with the one-word sentence *ikh*, it is the rise–fall intonation contour that transforms the declarative sentence into an interrogative. In the following passage from the novel, 'Klara, at lo rotsa lavo eylay la-pensyo', if I were to give this a literal translation it would be 'Clara, you don't want to come to my pension' but this is not the reading indicated by the author, for the words that follow this are 'lo paskati lish'ol' (I didn't stop asking).²⁹ The author himself shows that the reader is confronted with a question. If this is to be a question, then, it must be assigned a rise–fall contour to the last two syllables of the word *pensyon*, with a rise on *pen* and a fall on *syon*. Once that is assigned, the declarative sentence is turned into a question that presupposes a negative. The revised translation will now be: 'Clara, don't you want to come to my pension?' This is only one of many examples of Appelfeld's dependence on the rise–fall contour to convey a question (or statement) that has a presupposed negative.

Although the text gives no diacritical marks for intonation reading,

24. U. Weinreich, 'Notes on the Yiddish Rise–Fall Intonation Contour' in M. Halle (ed.) *For Roman Jakobson* (The Hague 1956) 633–43; Z. Kahan Newman, 'The Jewish Sound of Speech: Talmudic Chant, Yiddish Intonation and the Origins of Early Ashkenaz' *Jewish Quarterly Review* XC 3–4 (Jan.–April 2000) 293–337.

25. Kahan Newman, 'Jewish Sound of Speech' 304–11.

26. *Ibid.* 316–30.

27. *Ibid.* 329–30, esp. n. 55.

28. Examples can be found on 17, 21, 37, 43, 45, 52, 58, 60, 66, 85, 108, 136, 160, 179. Occasionally there is more than one occurrence on a page.

29. *Ibid.* 21.

there is no other way the reader can properly interpret this clause as a question and not a statement. Only the assignment of a rise–fall contour will give the sentence not only a question meanin, but also a presupposed negative.

Summary

I have shown that the Hebrew of *Laylah ve'od laylah* is fraught with the telltale signs of Yiddish grammar. Sometimes these Yiddish words or grammatical patterns tell something about the novel's characters. Often they hark back to earlier, more ancient patterns of Hebrew. They are reminiscent of possibilities that used to exist in ancient Hebrew, and they revive these possibilities for modern Hebrew. One could say that Appelfeld has used a Yiddish sieve to recycle (and often to re-work) ancient elements and patterns of Hebrew.

The many examples of a rise–fall contour in *Laylah ve'od laylah* are examples of yet another cycle. Appelfeld may have acquired German as his first language, but he apparently also acquired the ancient intonation pattern brought to Ashkenaz (as a Talmudic chant pattern) by its early settlers. This chant pattern, which originated in the land of Israel and moved with the settlers and chanters to Ashkenaz, took root, it is true, in Yiddish but, because of Appelfeld and others like him, it has returned to the land of Israel, this time as an intonation pattern of modern Hebrew.

One of the themes of the novel is the seeming demise of Yiddish. My analysis has shown, however, that Yiddish is not really dead. Many of its elements have simply divested themselves of their outer Germanic shell and taken refuge in modern Hebrew.

Aharon Appelfeld and the Translingual Imagination

Naomi Sokoloff

In recent years literary critics have paid increasing attention to translingual authors – authors who write in a language other than their native tongue. Such writers themselves have also produced a wave of memoirs and brought new visibility to this topic.¹ The issues at stake are fascinating, because the journey from one linguistic world to another is inherently a fascinating phenomenon. What is more, since theirs is a verbal art, the works of these writers are products of their linguistic journeys. Whether or not novelists explicitly turn multilingualism into a thematic focus of their fiction, their artistry reflects the process of acquiring and grappling with a new language.

Studies reveal that many translingual writers have deeply conflicted feelings about the languages in which they create. Creative writers often find something unnatural or wrong about writing in a language that is not their mother tongue. The reasons for this unease are several. There is, of course, the difficulty of gaining fluency in a new language. Beyond the simple challenges of mastering a new verbal medium, though, authors also face special artistic perplexities. A second language, for example, may not be mimetically adequate for capturing experience lived in a first language. As the critic Steven Kellman remarks, ‘languages are never exactly commensurate – each always processes experience in its own unique way.’² Added to this is an element of sacrifice; inevitably something is repressed or omitted as an individual moves to a new language and new culture. Many obstacles to creativity are therefore not so much technical as emotional. Elizabeth Beaujour, in her study of these matters, quotes a number of writers who see the act of choosing to be bilingual in terms of disease, a curse or even self-mutilation. It is frequently perceived as illegitimate or as a kind of betrayal. Writing in a second language, she asserts, is initially felt not as growth but as loss – worse, as the

1. The term ‘translingual’ comes from Steven G. Kellman, *The Translingual Imagination* (Lincoln, Neb. 2000). In *Shifting Languages: Translingual Writers Reflect on their Craft* (Lincoln, Neb. 2003) Kellman gathers autobiographical reflections of translingual writers. See Elizabeth de Courtivron, ‘Found in Translation’ *The New York Times Book Review* 20 Dec. 1998, p. 31, for a brief survey of recent memoirs by such writers as Eva Hoffman, Ariel Dorfman and Milan Kundera.

2. Kellman, *Translingual Imagination* 12.

3. Elizabeth Kosty Beaujour, *Alien Tongues: Bilingual Russian Writers of the "First" Emigration* (Ithaca and London 1989) 41.

4. Galya Diment, 'English as Sanctuary: Nabokov's and Brodsky's Autobiographical Writings' *The Slavic and East European Journal* XXXVII 3 (Autumn 1993) 352.

5. For more on Appelfeld's biographical background, see eg Gila Ramras-Rauch, *Aharon Appelfeld: The Holocaust and Beyond* (Bloomington, Ind. 1994). Among the interviews in which Appelfeld discusses his childhood is an important one with Philip Roth that appeared originally in the *New York Times Book Review* (28 Feb. 1988) and was reprinted in *Beyond Despair: Three Lectures and a Conversation with Philip Roth*, trans. Jeffrey M. Green (New York 1994). *Sippur hayim* is not yet available in English but brief passages from it are included in 'Buried Homeland' *The New Yorker* 23 Nov. 1998, pp. 48–61.

'dissolution of a sacred tie'. Consequently, it is an act that is 'severely sanctioned by the author's psyche as if it were a primal crime'.³

Still, writing in a non-native language can have undeniable advantages. Galya Diment, referring to the Russian émigré writers Vladimir Nabokov and Joseph Brodsky, notes that at times a detached and artificial style allows writers to assume control over personal and painful memories. Sometimes bilinguals choose to write in a new language (even while complaining about the hardship) because it provides impersonality and distance that can prove therapeutic. In this context the alien tongue is a tongue of alienation.⁴ Such a way of putting things has both good and bad connotations: bad, of course, in that alienation means being cut off; good, in that as art defamiliarizes, it fosters what the Russian Formalists considered the essence of literariness. That is to say, the development of an aesthetic that questions ordinary perceptions of reality can produce innovative vision and break routine modes of thinking. Similarly, a new language can prevent a report of events from becoming banal or trivialized. Furthermore, the adoption of a new language often involves exploring a new identity and sometimes includes the adoption of a new name. This process can feel unsettling and exhausting, or liberating and filled with possibility.

Among translingual writers, Aharon Appelfeld presents particularly riveting accounts of journeying into a new language. In essays and interviews, and most trenchantly in the memoirs *Sipur hayim* ('Story of a Life' 1999) and *'Od hayom gadol* ('It is yet High Day' 2001), he has written about losing his mother tongue and about the challenges he faced while adopting a new identity in Hebrew.⁵ For him, the invention of a new self was initially more by imposition than by choice. Brought to the Yishuv by Youth Aliya after the Second World War, he lived in agricultural schools where learning Hebrew was a crucial first step to adjustment. This meant leaving behind the linguistic world of his early childhood as well as his given name, Erwin. Even in the best of circumstances, abandoning a native tongue involves a painful separation. In this case the pain was intensified by exile from the native land, amplified many times over by the collective destruction of the Jewish people in Europe and made most intensely personal by the death of Appelfeld's mother. She was brutally killed by the Nazis, and for Appelfeld loss of the mother tongue is inextricably associated with loss of his mother. He notes in *Sipur hayim* (p. 102)

that throughout the war he had imagined she would somehow return and speak to him in the German he knew from home. After the war, then, to speak Hebrew meant accepting the finality of her death and relinquishing hopes of seeing her again.

If all language switching is in some measure traumatic, the severe traumas of the Holocaust contribute intensely to this psycholinguistic picture. It should be kept in mind that traumatic memory has a distinctive non-verbal quality. As the psychiatrist Judith Lewis Herman puts it, such memories are 'not encoded like the ordinary memories of adults in a verbal, linear narrative that is assimilated into an ongoing life story'. Instead, they seem frozen and wordless and often consist of vivid images and sensations. Normal memory entails telling a story while traumatic memory 'lacks narrative and context'⁶ and so acquires a kind of timelessness. Traumatized people may relive painful events as though they were continually recurring. It is as if time stops, and often this experience comes intrusively in the form of flashbacks and nightmares. Indeed, the conversion of such images into narrative, so that they are oriented in time, has been seen by many as a central goal of trauma treatment. To transform a traumatic event into a story is held to have healing powers. In this view, to verbalize and to narrate is crucial. However, to do so in a foreign language, which itself spurs resistance, complicates such a move considerably. While entering a new linguistic world has redemptive potential, it is also fraught with dangers.

6. Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York 1992) 37.

Coming from the Hitler's Europe, Appelfeld lived a radical disruption of native language. His schooling lasted only until first grade when it was interrupted by the war. Shaped by years of internment, escape, wandering and hiding, his childhood left him with but smatterings of various languages and bereft of a coherent inner world. He remarks in *Sipur hayim*, 'without a language all is chaos and fear' (p. 99). Furthermore, he notes, being without a mother tongue is to be disabled. Recalling his first years in the Yishuv, he describes child refugees new to Hebrew who stuttered, withdrew into silences or swallowed their words. These remarks make an instructive contrast with other memoirs that speak of changing languages in terms of affliction. Elsa Triolet, who wrote in both Russian and French, stated, 'It's like an illness: I'm sick with bilingualism'; even Nabokov, coming from a background of privilege and a sophisticated education at Cambridge, claimed that switching into English from Russian caused

7. Triolet is cited by Beaujour, *Alien Tongues* 40, and Nabokov by Diment, 'English as Sanctuary' 349.

8. Eva Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* (New York 1989) 107–8.

9. Eg, Sidra Ezrahi, 'Aharon Appelfeld: The Search for a Language' *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* I (1984) 366–80, and *Booking Passage: Exile and Homecoming in the Modern Jewish Imagination* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 2000) 179–99, and Ramras-Rauch, *Aharon Appelfeld* 112–15.

him a kind of 'mental asthma';⁷ and Eva Hoffman, moving to Canada at age thirteen, worries in her memoir *Lost in Translation* that her native Polish and all the thinking and mental life that goes with it, will 'atrophy' when she writes in English.⁸ As he remarks on speech impediments and physical disabilities, Appelfeld also points to language loss and language learning as affliction, but affliction of a different order of magnitude.

In *Sipur hayim* Appelfeld remembers the transition into Hebrew as debilitating. He notes that he found the language hard, uncomfortable and unfamiliar; the words for him lacked all association. In addition Hebrew was integral to a Zionist ideology that, negating the Diaspora, held Holocaust survivors such as himself in contempt. For all these reasons he designates Hebrew a 'stepmother tongue' (p. 103) – in other words, a stranger, or something alien that has become intimate. Other writers, too, have referred to themselves as living with a 'stepmother tongue.' Anton Shammas, for instance, uses this phrase to describe his switch from Arabic, the minority language of Israel, to the majority language, Hebrew. Unlike Shammas, though, Appelfeld eventually comes to feel that Hebrew is genuine family. Even as a stepmother, Hebrew is a parent and provides a home, as well as a framework in which to grow. In addition, Appelfeld ultimately discovers that he and the step-parent have close family connections from previous generations. Reading the work of early modern Hebrew writers, he finds that Hebrew is not so far from Yiddish, thanks to the internal Jewish bilingualism of the old world. Through literature he learns that the world of Europe and the world of Israel are not as distant as he first perceived them to be. Furthermore, Israeli Hebrew has comforting echoes of the past in its proximity to religious language. The Holy Tongue and the contemporary vernacular of the streets have surprising amounts in common. Altogether, Hebrew appeals to Appelfeld precisely because of its pluralism, which is something far other than the monolithic ideology of Labour Zionism that first introduced him to the language.

Critics who have written on Appelfeld and his multilingual background have worked in several directions. Some have made thematic observations, particularly in analysing biographical elements in *Mikhvat ha'or* ('Searing Light' 1980). That novel recounts the story of young Holocaust survivors in an Israeli agricultural school, whose encounters with Hebrew in many ways parallel Appelfeld's own.⁹

Also pursuing linguistic themes, David Suchoff writes about *The Age of Wonders* as a world of bicultural Jewish-German identity in which multilingualism is a source of strength. He sees this novel as a vision of cultural plurality, one that the father of the protagonist misunderstands when he loves German but disdains Yiddish and Hebrew.¹⁰ In this analysis the novel is a protest against monolingualism. It recalls Appelfeld's love of the multifaceted linguistic environment he knew in his earliest childhood, where Jews spoke a *mélange* of German, Yiddish, Ukrainian and Romanian.

Taking a different tack, critics have also examined tensions between speech and silence in Appelfeld's artistic vision and in the way his art deals with trauma. They have concerned themselves with what can and cannot be expressed, in what Sidra Ezrahi terms a struggle between inherited and acquired language aimed at retrieving *un temps perdu*.¹¹ These tensions permeate much of his fiction and take on an added charge in novels set in Europe, for there the author presents in Hebrew a world where Hebrew was not spoken. A number of studies highlight the stylistic idiosyncracies that keep Appelfeld's prose, most notably in his early fiction, at odds with colloquial language. Some interpreters have observed hints of German peeking through Appelfeld's unique Hebrew. Among those who have commented on these stylistics matters is Jeffrey Green, translator of many of Appelfeld's novels. He argues that the German substrate adds an element of defamiliarizing and alienation to this fiction. He then takes the discussion of multiple languages in another direction, remarking on his feeling that Appelfeld, more than most of us, seems to think in pre-verbal ways and only subsequently puts those thoughts into words. According to Green, this accounts for some of the unique quality of Appelfeld's prose.¹² While these observations are speculative, they are pertinent here because they resonate in intriguing ways with Beaujour's reflections on the neurolinguistic bases for creativity in bilingual writers. She claims that writers who write in more than one language often sense a physical distance between thought and expression in any language. She suggests, moreover, that for bilinguals the existence of meaning is somewhere beyond or below the words in which it is formulated in any of their languages.¹³ Admittedly, Beaujour is invoking a hierarchy of thought, voice and writing that seem like a throw-back to an era before Derrida and post-structuralist ideas held sway, and they are impossible to prove or disprove. Her comments are interesting,

10. David Suchoff, 'Kafka and the Postmodern Divide: Hebrew and German in Aharon Appelfeld's *The Age of Wonders* (Tor ha-pelaot)' *The Germanic Review* (Spring 2000).

11. Ezrahi, 'Aharon Appelfeld'.

12. Of special interest are Jeffrey M. Green, 'Omanut haketivah shel Appelfeld mizavit har'ayah shel metargem' (Appelfeld's writing from a translator's point of view), in Iris Parush and Yizhak ben Mordechai (eds) *Beyn kefor le'ashan: mehkarim biyetsirato shel Aharon Appelfeld* (Between frost and smoke: studies in the writing of Aharon Appelfeld) (Beer Sheva 1997) 205–11, and Nili Scharf-Gold, 'Betrayal of the Mother Tongue in the Creation of National Identity' in Emily Miller Budick (ed.) *Ideology and Jewish Identity in Israeli and American Literature* (Albany, N.Y. 2001). For more on Appelfeld's early prose style, see Lily Rattok, *Bayit 'al blimah: omanut hasippur shel A. Appelfeld* (A precarious house: the narrative art of A. Appelfeld) (Tel Aviv 1989), and on changes from his early to his later style, see Bracha Fischler, 'Lehahrish al kolah shel halashon – "ha 'or vehakutonet" ve"timyon" beshtei breirot lashon' (To silence language: 'The Skin

and the Gown' and 'The Conversion' as two linguistic alternatives) in Parush and Mordechai, *Beyn kefor le'ashan* 213–36.

13. Beaujour, *Alien Tongues* 33.

14. Steiner is a critic and writer who has reflected at length on these issues; see eg *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (New York and Oxford 1975). Many current discussions refer back to him and to sociolinguistic-oriented discussion by François Grosjean, *Life With Two Languages* (Cambridge, Mass. 1982).

15. Michal Goldvicht, 'Twisted Tongues' *Ha'aretz* 20 Feb. 2002, www.haaretz.com.

though – if for no other reason – because they call attention to what translingual writers say about their inner experience, and so they challenge us to think about the psychological feel of multilingualism as a lived condition.¹⁴

Appelfeld's novel *Laylah ve'od laylah* ('Night after Night' 2001) merits special attention in connection with all these issues, for it is profoundly concerned with the psychological feel of language loss and of shifting linguistic environments. More than any of Appelfeld's novels since *Mikhvat ha'or*, it emphatically thematizes loss of the mother tongue. The characters, European refugees who are residents of a boarding house in Jerusalem, devote themselves to Yiddish. They resent having been pressured to conform to the mould of Zionist ideals, and they strive to honour the dying *mameloshn* and the Jewish European past by attending poetry readings, holding cultural events and collecting Yiddish books. Tellingly, they associate the language directly with maternal love. 'Like mother's milk,' they say, 'there's no substitute for the mother tongue' (p. 101). As the reviewer Michal Goldvicht noted, this attention to Yiddish does not document the social and linguistic milieu of the period so much as it 'wonders about what the mother tongue stirs in us, to whom and to what it links us, and how it comforts us and becomes a prayer.'¹⁵

Perhaps nowhere are many of the salient concerns of the narrative brought together more richly and concisely than in the following passage:

The morning hours I spend now on long walks. The quiet streets of Rehavia in the morning hours remind me of the lovely streets of my native city. From my native city I've been cut off already for years. Only at times in the dark of night pain slices through me, and I know that the death of the town convulses me. If I were more connected to my mother tongue I would not be so cut off from my town. Because of this sin, because of being cut off, I have forgotten my parents. They do not appear in my dreams at night and they do not tell me what to do. Tzila, I want to cry with all my might, if you knew how many crimes we committed against our language, you would push me to contribute more. Without Yiddish we are cripples, hobbling around on crutches. How long can a man hobble around on crutches? I love Hebrew, but it can't

take the place of a mother. Hebrew is not a language you can embrace. God forgive me, it s cold as ice. What demon provoked us to exchange our mother tongue for a tongue of stone? Who needs eternity? One hour of human warmth is an eternity. Who needs any other eternity? (p. 120)

Not only is loss of mother tongue equated here with loss of mother love and warmth but also the lack of mother tongue is described as crippling, and is equated with physical ailment. (The phrase 'bli yidish anakhnu ba'alei mum, mehalkhim 'al kabayim' [without Yiddish we are cripples, hobbling around on crutches] echoes *Sipur hayim*, where Appelfeld states, 'Belo safat em adam hu ba'al mum' [without a mother tongue a man is a cripple], p. 99.) Moreover, this passage emphasizes a sense of guilt. Switching languages is conceived of as a crime or even as apostasy. These feelings are implicitly connected to disdain for Yiddish. Such disdain was common among assimilated European Jews before the war and is featured as a central theme elsewhere in Appelfeld's fiction, notably in the novel *For Every Sin* (1987). Here the narrator carries a keen sense of having sinned, and he wishes to do penance by contributing money to a fund for preserving Yiddish books. Having survived the Holocaust and then gone on without the language is cast as a kind of despicable disloyalty.

Two remarks about the prose style are in order. First, it is terse, and it relies on narrow vocabulary and frequent repetition. These qualities, plus the musicality of the passage, are two of Appelfeld's signature moves.¹⁶ They keep the text at a remove from everyday spoken Hebrew. But the effect is mild compared to Appelfeld's early fiction, which is marked by subtle syntactical and morphological eccentricities and which thereby conveys a sense of alienation. The language of *Laylah ve'od laylah* has moved much closer to standard contemporary Hebrew. At the same time, the intensity of loss – specifically, the loss of a linguistic world – is expressed very clearly. It seems that the recognition of that loss has crystallized over time, even as the author's Hebrew grows simpler, sharper and more natural. As time passes alienation diminishes in the style but increases in the thematic content. This passage explicitly calls attention to the character's discomfort with Hebrew and to his yearning for the language of the past. Altogether, the experience of alienation from and in language is brought into focus again here, as in earlier narratives, but through a different lens.

16. The musicality, which is integral to the Hebrew, is difficult to convey in English. In my translation here I have tried to preserve the lexical repetitiveness.

Prominent in the passage, too, are references to time, and this adds to the portrayal of language in relation to trauma. For one thing, the paragraph is framed with comments on temporality. It opens with the phrase ‘the morning hours’ and at the end the word *netsah* (eternity) appears three times. In between comes the pain in the darkness, which introduces the timelessness of post-traumatic suffering. Like the nightmares mentioned frequently throughout the novel, this visceral agony wordlessly makes the past intensely, insistently and repeatedly present. It is notable that the narrator wishes explicitly to escape the peculiar temporality of trauma. He hopes to find conventional time, in a framework of human contact (*sha’ah ahat shel hamimut halev* – an hour of human warmth). He has tried to comfort himself by celebrating Yiddish, which is said elsewhere to have an eternal quality (like the soul), but that is insufficient consolation. What he truly seeks is an experience of real love in real time. Since these are not attainable, he seeks connection with the past through his walks, searching for reminders of his hometown. This activity takes place in the ‘morning hours’ – that is, in measurable intervals of time. In effect, he converts his longings for a lost geography and a lost language into sequence and duration, which are the rudiments of narrative.

What he tries to achieve through his daily rounds is to make his homeland come alive. He fails, of course. No one can restore the world of his childhood. Consequently, his motions are repetitive and circular, ever returning to the same unsatisfied yearning. He will continue to suffer at night and attempt to ease the suffering in the daylight. The title of the novel, ‘Night after Night’, suggests that the narrator’s struggle with different kinds of temporality will continue indefinitely, one night at a time.¹⁷ Nonetheless, he at least articulates his desire to revive the past, so this character has made a distinct move away from the wordlessness of traumatic memory and from recurring nightmare, towards a verbal narrative that can be assimilated into an ongoing life story. The passage then evolves into an anguished and passionate, if stifled, cry. Silently addressing his lover (‘Tzila, I want to cry with all my might’), he laments his inability to hold onto his memories. Even though ultimately his is a tale of loss, this character – like the author – makes mighty efforts to seek the healing power of story.

Unavoidably, since it is told in Hebrew, this story at a basic level

17. The text ends with a father trying to comfort his child, whose mother has abandoned them both. The father promises the boy that she will come back *be’od laylah*, the next night. This ending, which expresses hope, is also an expression of hopelessness. Like the narrator with his morning walks, the father makes an ongoing effort to live one day after another, but what he offers as a reassurance also implies endlessly deferred resolution.

is about loss of the native language rather than recovery of it. Yet at the end of the passage cited, the Hebrew has moved closer to the cadences of Yiddish. The sonorous and rather formal assonance and alliteration of the opening ('Rehovot Rehavia harog'im bishe'ot haboker, ma'alim 'al libi et harehovot hayafim shel 'ir moladti') gives way to a *kvetch*: 'who needs an eternity?' ('lemi nahuts netsah aher?'). Then again, perhaps this line is also a solemn philosophical declamation. The hints of a Yiddish conversational tone are not quite compatible with the high register of the Hebrew employed here, so the text becomes the site of an undecided contest between the two languages. Also worth noting in this passage is the absence of attention to German. Appelfeld grew up in an assimilated, German-speaking family. Yiddish was the language of his grandparents and, later, a language he studied as an academic specialty at the Hebrew University. Accordingly, learning Yiddish for him was more a way to re-imagine and reconnect with Jewish identity than a way to re-educate himself in a first language. For many of the characters in *Laylah ve'od laylah*, judging by their names, interests and the little we learn of their pasts, Yiddish is also not a first language.¹⁸ Consequently, it is difficult to say how much this passage expresses nostalgia for a well-loved past and in what measure it constructs an imaginary, idyllic past not based on actual memories.¹⁹ These considerations add another layer of complexity to the novel and its linguistic themes. A story about language is being told here, but not all dimensions of it are told openly.

Translingual writers develop many varieties of artistry, just as they express different perspectives on what it feels like to move from one language to another. Think, for instance, of Eva Hoffman, who in English searches for ever more nuanced, supple vocabulary with which to describe the world. This is a way of compensating for loss of her native Polish that had its own particular powers of denotation and connotation. Other writers delve into code switching and a creative mix of their two languages. Henry Roth, for example, comes to mind among American Jewish writers, as does Yoel Hoffman in the Israeli context. I mention these among many possibilities because they put Appelfeld's achievements into relief by contrast. He does not seek lexical abundance or polyphonic exuberance. The passage cited from *Laylah ve'od laylah* is typical in this regard. It gives an overall impression of concise simplicity but a great deal is going on in this text. Like the novel as a whole, this one brief paragraph is

18. My thanks to Sidra Ezrahi for calling this point to my attention. Thanks also to Assaf Oron for discussing with me the dection of this passage.

19. Yigal Schwartz, *Aharon Appelfeld: From Individual Lament to Tribal Eternity* (Waltham, Mass. 2001) 3–28, explains how central this kind of dynamic is to Appelfeld's art. Appelfeld's recollections of his childhood are fragmentary and spotty; it is useful to see his writing as an extensive imaginative reconstruction of the past rather than a claim to accurate memories of it.

animated by many tensions. While it expresses grief over loss of a native language, the prose testifies to Appelfeld's great creativity in an acquired tongue. Indeed, part of what makes Appelfeld's art so powerful is precisely that he speaks as a voice of alienation from within Hebrew. He is at once profoundly indebted to and grateful to that language, yet he crafts it to remind readers deftly of another world, and of what has been left behind.

My Friend, Aharon Appelfeld

Avraham Holtz

Having observed the way each participant in the conference on Aharon Appelfeld was greeted by him, I was certain that each could compose a story about how their friendship began and how it has developed over the course of the years.

Very early on, Aharon and I met regularly in various cafés in Jerusalem. At our meetings we began with conversations concerning current topics but soon, on a regular basis, devoted part of our get-togethers to the study of the works of the Hasidic master, Reb Nachman of Bratzlav (1772–1810), who is famous for teaching by means of storytelling. In the introduction to the written collection of his tales the editor notes that, upon realizing that all other forms of learning were futile, Reb Nachman is reported to have declared, 'Yetzt vell ich onfangen meises derzahlen' And so now it is time to tell stories.

My friendship with Aharon began some time during the first months of 1969, soon after I arrived in Jerusalem for a year's sabbatical. The late Professor Uri Tal had taught at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York in the early 1960s, at which time we became acquainted. In Jerusalem, I met Uri in the Judaica Reading Room at the Hebrew University National Library at Givat Ram. During a coffee break, we had an opportunity to chat in the basement cafeteria. In the course of the conversation Uri asked me, 'I'm a historian. What does it mean to teach literature?' I am not quite certain that I succeeded in convincing him that indeed there are intrinsic approaches to the study of literature.

However, subsequently, Uri asked me which contemporary Israeli writers I teach. The first name that came to mind was that of Aharon Appelfeld, to which Uri replied, 'Would you like to meet him?' 'Not

necessarily,' I was quick to respond, 'since sometimes familiarity with the author may prejudice the way in which one reads and interprets the author's works, both positively and negatively. I certainly would not call Aharon Appelfeld on the telephone and say "I teach your works, and I would like to meet you." Moreover, in the case of a deceased author, one does not have this opportunity at all. Why do you ask if I want to meet Appelfeld?' Uri replied, 'Both he and I have young children and small living quarters, so we both do our work in the same café, Café Peter. There is an unwritten agreement between us that neither of us disturbs the other while we're writing. However, during coffee breaks we sit together and share small talk, and we have become close friends who admire each other's work.'

At that time, Jules Harlow was also in Jerusalem on sabbatical, and Uri said he would arrange a mutually convenient time for all of us to meet at his home at Rehov Shmuel Klein. I do not remember the subjects of our conversation when we did meet one evening. When we went home Jules Harlow, who had a car, volunteered to drive me back to Neve Schechter, where I lived, near the Israel Museum, and to take Aharon home to Kiryat Moshe. As I got out of the car, Aharon turned to me and said, 'L'hitraot mahar ba'erev', which I took to mean, 'See you sometime in the future.' The following evening, while I was studying in my room at Neve Schechter, I received a telephone call from Aharon, inquiring why I had not yet arrived at his home at Rehov Ben Zion in Kiryat Moshe. Surprised by the call, I said, 'I wasn't invited to your home.' Aharon replied, 'If I recall correctly, I said "L'hitraot mahar ba'erev".' I agreed to come to his home that evening, as fast as I could. This was the first of many visits with Aharon and Yehudit and their children in Kiryat Moshe.

Eventually Aharon invited me to meet him at various times of the day. In the mornings we would meet at Café Tuv Taam. If we met in the late afternoon it was at Café Navah. Occasionally we went for walks in various neighbourhoods in Jerusalem. It became customary for us to introduce each other to our acquaintances whom we met along the way. One incident stands out in my mind. We were walking southwards on Rehov King George and abruptly Aharon left me and ran to greet someone. I stopped and waited. Aharon returned and we continued our walk and our conversation. In due course he commented as to why I had not inquired who the person was to whom he had spoken. I said, 'Had you wanted me to meet him, you

would have introduced us.’ He replied, ‘You’re better off not making his acquaintance.’ To this day, I still do not know who that person was but I am certain that Aharon had good reasons for not introducing us.

Several months later, Aharon invited me to join him and his family for Shabbat dinner on Friday night. Without hesitation I accepted. I came to his house and found the table set for a traditional Shabbat meal. After the meal Yehudit left us to put the children to bed. I heard her singing Yiddish lullabies. I whispered to Aharon that, with his permission, we should not talk so that I might listen to the *zemirot* (songs sung at the Sabbath table) in his house. In response to his surprise at the term that I used, I remarked that Yehudit’s songs were as *zemirot* to my ears. When Yehudit joined us again Aharon mentioned my comments to her and added, ‘I was amazed that, when I invited you to our home for dinner, you accepted immediately, without asking about the *kashrut* [observance of the rules of kosher food] of our home.’ My response was, ‘I assumed that, after these several months of getting to know each other, Aharon Appelfeld would not invite Avraham Holtz to his house to feed him *trayfus* [non-kosher food], especially on Friday night, *lehakhis* [for spite, on purpose].’ Aharon responded, ‘Finally, now, I understand what Conservative Judaism is all about.’ I said, ‘That generalization is far beyond what I intended.’ At all odds, from that point on our friendship was cemented.

About two years later Aharon came to visit the United States for the first time. The Jewish Agency had arranged for him to give a series of lectures in various cities and universities. I understood that, were Aharon to begin his trip with a stay in a hotel, he would not have been able to complete his lecture tour, particularly since at that time the Jewish Agency warned all its lecturers that they must not venture outside the New York hotels alone lest harm befall them. At that time I was unmarried and living with my mother, who had heard about Aharon and his family from me. She was most pleased to welcome him to our home in Queens. They communicated in Yiddish and she related to him as if he were a magical survivor, one of her five nephews who perished in the Holocaust.

While Aharon was in New York we took trips to see the sights. On one of our trips to Manhattan, we were walking on Fifth Avenue during the Christmas shopping season. Aharon was overwhelmed by

the extravagant decorations and holiday displays. When we came to the windows of F. A. O. Schwarz, the famous toy store, Aharon was mesmerized by the electric trains circling the scene in the window display. I tried several times to suggest that we should move on and continue to our next stop but he remained transfixed. Several minutes later he remarked, 'As a child, I had a set of electric trains similar to these at my house in Czernowitz. I'd like to go inside and buy a set for my children.' Before I tell you my answer to Aharon's surprising wish, I want to ask for the forgiveness of the Appelfeld children. If they grew up without electric trains, it was my fault. In retrospect I realize that my response was entirely out of order. I asked Aharon, 'Where would you be able to set up the trains and tracks in your apartment?' Silently and resignedly he left the window, without entering the store.

On another excursion we visited the American Museum of Natural History. Each room and exhibition fascinated and excited Aharon. He commented that this kind of museum is one of the benefits of a large city that can afford the luxury of building and maintaining such magnificent cultural and educational institutions. He expressed interest in visiting the Planetarium adjacent to the museum. As we passed through the exhibition room on our way to the Planetarium Aharon shouted, 'Eileh hen hazipporim!' (These are the birds!) He was certain that I would recognize immediately that he was referring to his stories in which birds of these species figure as potential adversaries, because they lead the enemy soldiers to the people hiding in the forest. I realized then how every event is a potential trigger for memories of his childhood experiences. It took a while for Aharon to compose himself at the bird exhibit before we were able to continue on our way to the Planetarium, where he was overwhelmed by the grandeur of the 'Sky Show'.

During his stay in the United States Aharon accompanied me to Niagara Falls where I spoke before a group of college students. Aharon agreed to say a few words to them. He spoke about the need for 'Jewish hands, Jewish feet, Jewish eyes and ears, in addition to the proverbial Jewish heart.' He and I were both certain that not all the students understood the subtleties of his thoughts, but we felt that they sensed his deep concern for the future of the Jewish people.

In the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War in late 1973 the pervasive

mood in Israel was one of national depression. Aharon sent me a letter that said, 'Ata hayyav lavo' (You must come). I showed this letter to the late Gerson Cohen, who was then the chancellor of JTS. His reaction was, 'If Aharon Appelfeld says that you must be there, then go.' I made travel arrangements and Aharon and Yehudit insisted that I stay with them. Since it was a few weeks before Hanukkah, I thought that the best gift for Aharon's children would be dreidels (four-sided Hanukkah tops engraved with a Hebrew letter on each side, *nun*, *gimmel*, *he*, *shin*). Each letter stands for a word in the Hebrew phrase 'New gadol haya sham', meaning 'a great miracle happened there', that is, in Israel). When I gave them to the children, they seemed puzzled because one letter on these dreidels was different from what is written on all the dreidels they had seen. I had forgotten that dreidels in Israel have the letter *peh* for the word *poh* (here), while the dreidels from abroad have a *shin* for *sham* (there). I tried to explain to the children that *shin* in the U.S. refers to Eretz Yisrael, the Land of Israel, which clearly is right here, *poh*. All attempts to simplify this conundrum were in vain. Finally Aharon, who had been listening to this discussion, said, 'The "there" there really is the "here" here. Dod [Uncle] Avraham is trying to teach you a lesson in Jewish geography, a very complicated subject, which you will eventually come to understand.'

Apropos our correspondence spanning more than three decades, I take this unique opportunity to give Aharon his letters to me, which I have saved all these years. He should feel free to do whatever he wishes with our letters.

While he was living with us in Queens Aharon had met some of my friends and neighbours. He was particularly befriended by a family whom he still refers to as 'hamishpacha hamusicalit' (the musical family) because they all played instruments and were involved in various aspects of the music world. At the beginning of 1975, soon after my marriage, my wife Toby and I came to Israel on sabbatical. The parents of the 'musical family' made their first trip to Israel at the same time. Having befriended Aharon in New York, they wanted to spend time with him in Jerusalem. They invited us to dinner at a restaurant (now defunct), which was a special treat for all of us. During the meal Aharon suddenly left the table. When he did not return Yehudit went to look for him. She told us that he would wait outside while we finished the meal. Yehudit later said that he had

left the restaurant when he noticed that the owner had entered. The owner had been a passenger on the same ship as Aharon on the way from Europe to Eretz Yisrael. During a storm at sea the man had been one of those who wanted to lighten the ship's load by trying to toss some of the orphan children passengers overboard. Aharon had been one of them. Since that terrifying experience he could not abide being in the presence of that man. I realized once again how close to the surface Aharon's wartime and postwar experiences are and how it is impossible for him to forget. Every encounter in everyday life is a potential source of anxiety, deeply rooted in the past.

Although, as I mentioned, I had taught Aharon's fiction before we met, after I returned to the U.S. in 1970 I hesitated to teach his stories lest my knowledge of his past and my familiarity with his present life colour my understanding of his work. In addition, I was privileged to have known Aharon's father, Michael Appelfeld, and to have observed the special relationship between the father and son who had lost each other and then were reunited. One must be very cautious when reading about Aharon's fictional father characters, who are certainly not to be understood as representations of his own father. When I finally decided to give a course on Aharon's works I solved my dilemma, in introductory remarks to the students, by mentioning our friendship and requesting that the students alert me to any personal comments that had no bearing on the literary merit of the works at hand. I have developed the following format, which may prove useful to other teachers. Given the limitations of time during a single semester, there is no possibility for students to read the entire corpus of Aharon's short stories and novellas. I select twelve short stories, one story for each week of the term. The students are required to read the assigned story from beginning to end every day of the week and to record in a log their reactions, questions and comments each time they read the story. This method often leads the students to discoveries and fresh insights in the second and subsequent readings and allows them the time and opportunities for close readings of each story. In addition the students are required to write a term paper, ten to fifteen pages in length, devoted exclusively to one novella, which they are strongly urged to start reading at the beginning of the semester, so that they can read and re-read the novella at least two or three times during the course of the term. The final one or two class sessions are devoted to Aharon's essays, *Masot beguf rishon* (Essays in the First Person Singular; Jerusalem 1979). I do this so that the

students arrive at their own understanding of Aharon's literary works before they encounter his own account of his personal feelings, attitudes and recollections. Incidentally, some of Aharon's splendid personal reflections are available in English in *Beyond Despair: Three Lectures and a Conversation with Philip Roth* (translated by Jeffrey M. Green, New York 1994).

In 1980 Aharon's novella *Badenheim 1939* appeared in English translation, to resounding critical acclaim, including a title-page feature and extensive review essay in the *Sunday New York Times Book Review*. The Monday morning after this review appeared, when I arrived at JTS, the chancellor, my colleague and a recognized historian, greeted me most warmly and exclaimed, 'Holtz, you picked a winner!' I was delighted by his remark but something disturbed me. Later on, that afternoon, I went to his office and told him that I was both elated and uneasy because of his remark. I asked him a rhetorical question. 'Would you need to wait for the acclaim of the *New York Times* for you to determine who is a great historian?' He understood full well the import of my comment. For me, a consequence of the prominent and favourable reviews of this and other books by Aharon was an interest in his work and student requests for a course dealing with his writings. I gave such a course in Hebrew almost every other year since the appearance of that review in the U.S. press. A few years later Aharon received an honorary doctorate from JTS, joining the ranks of other great Jewish writers, scholars and intellectuals who have been recognized in this way.

I take this opportunity to thank Aharon again, publicly, for these many years of friendship that we have shared and enjoyed.