



Survivors : Postholocaust Yiddish Poems in Non-Jewish Language

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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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Résumé de l'article

Cet article traite de la traduction de la poésie yiddish après l'holocauste en des langues telles que le français, l'anglais et l'allemand et doit pour ce faire tisser une toile de fond linguistique, littéraire et sociale permettant de mieux comprendre les particularités de l'expression juive et de son interprétation. (La conversion en hébreu, discutée dans une étude apparentée, présente des obstacles différents.) Sont également examinés des mouvements littéraires comme l'expressionnisme européen et l'« introspectivisme » yiddish américain ainsi que la parole yiddish et sa prosodie dans les traductions de Cynthia Ozick (anglais), Charles Dobzynski (français) et Gabriele Kohlbauser-Fritz (allemand).

Survivors: Postholocaust Yiddish Poems in Non-Jewish Language

Albert Waldinger

Transcendent Sounds: from Zunser to Sutskever

The story of Yiddish poetry in translation is largely one of clarifying *Bereavement and Breakdown* (the title of a 1919 Hebrew novel by Josef Haim Brenner) for readers from radically various cultures through the creative renderings of a Charles Dobzynski (French) and a Cynthia Ozick (English), not to speak of a Gabriele Kohlbauer-Fritz (German) and a Joseph Leftwich (English). This means finding formulations that can touch the most distant hearts, a difficult process since the Jewish culture propelling the style has been so shell-shocked and so overexposed that its poetry sometimes seems impenetrable. However, Jewish grief, bewilderingly varied and culture-bound though it is, can be understood. All that is needed is a careful examination of its multiform expression throughout modern history, from Neo-Romanticism to Expressionism and many kinds of social and political alignment to individual and folk desperation.

One can start with Eliakum Zunser (1836-1913), nicknamed “Eliakum the Wedding Bard” (*der badkhen*) who floundered in the Russian Pale of Settlement until he ended up as a printer on the Lower East Side of New York City. In 1873, before this “fortunate Fall” and well before the Holocaust, he had sung of a world of widows where “both money and music are dead/And the jester poet must do without bread” (Shekhter, 1964, I, p. 35, p.149)¹. These lines conclude a poem

¹ Unless otherwise cited, all translations from Yiddish are by the author of this article.

contrasting *Kadish*, the prayer for the dead, with wedding high spirits (*badkhones* for the living) and thereby prefiguring a later Jewish reality and its instinctive poetic response. Such prayer is a ritual and religious obligation, performed every Sabbath to commemorate a loved one (Birnbaum, 1977, pp. 147-148), and means a communal reaction to sorrow, one which can even give rise to an idiom turned metaphor — *kadish zogn nokh der velt* (literally, “to pronounce a funeral prayer for the world” and figuratively, “to mourn its course”). Such insight caused Cynthia Ozick to call Yiddish a “direct, spirited, and spiritually alert language” (1989, p. 173) which Jacob Glatshteyn (1896-1971) tried to internalize and liberate through what he called “Introspectivism” (*Inzikhizm*) in poetry², a muted version of European Expressionism. He went so far as to see in such enhancement a restoration of “*Yiddishkeit*” or Jewish ethnic feeling in all of its “national pathos” just when the sense of reverence and celebration was being lost (1972, p. 299).

Zunser’s voice sang out this folk feeling³, either encompassing the entire “Nineteenth Century” or a neo-psalmic “Return to Zion” in Yiddish and Hebrew, recto and verso (Shekhter, 1964, I, p. 344, p. 372), and always expressing superpersonal emotion: “O God, a bone I have to pick with you, / Because the heart begot in me is true / But to my folk, is tied / To the People of Israel, my one and only bride” (Shekhter, 1964, I, p. 456). This seems like mere doggerel, but it constituted the Yiddish “rap” of a dislocating and urbanizing “*shtetl*” (see Hoffman, 1997, p. 87) whose metaphor formed a complete thermometer of pity and identification and a gamut of inspiration according to Cynthia Ozick (1989, p. 269, p. 283). The lines are steeped in folk song and speech, a fact which could square the “additional syllable count” (somewhat smoothed over in my translation). As Hrushovski goes on to phrase it (1954, p. 228), “the isochronal nature of the sung measures can stretch or split the notes,” thereby lending flexibility to lyrics fixed on the page and creating a rhythmic pathos which the adulterated “art poem” can never capture.

In addition, many spoken Yiddish words naturally generate weak syllables, are integrally dactylic (‘ - -) — *a méydele a kléyninke*

² The literary magazine *In Zikh* (“In Self”), edited by Glatshteyn and Aharon Glants Leyeles, preceded the movement itself and printed its manifesto in 1919 (Harshav, 1986, p. 774).

³ The musical notes for all of Zunser’s songs/poems can be found in vol. 2 of *Eliakum Zunser’s verk* (see reference).

(“a girl a tiny one”) is Hrushovski’s example (1954, p. 229) and Uriel Weinreich (1954, p. 4) cites a typical compound — *khásene kléydl* (“little wedding dress”) — to the same prosodic end. Moreover, the choice of an infinitive like *mátern: pátern* (“to torture” — “to loose”) innately produces a “falling meter” as does the grammatical form of words like *zháleve* (“I economize”) (Shekhter, 1964 I, p. 45, p. 248).

The above word exemplifies what Max Weinreich called “fusion,” the tendency of Yiddish to attract the lexical corpus of surrounding languages into its own expressive orbit and then “fuse” with it (Harshav, 1990, pp. 28-29): *zháleve* divides into three syncretic parts — a Slavic (Rus. and Pol.) origin in *zha-* (“begrudge, complain”), the Slavic verbal infix *ev* and the Ger. first person suffix *e*. Likewise fused are Zunser’s neologistic compounds — *snopes-vogen* (Rus. for “sheaves” plus Ger. for “wagon”) — and the titles of some of his most popular songs — *Di soykhe* (from Rus. *sokha* or “wooden plough”) and *Der tsviok* (Ukr. *tsvakh*, “nail”) preceded by Ger. articles (Shekhter, 1964, I, p. 36, p. 280).

The Introspectivist Manifesto of 1919 indeed declared that “all the words of sister languages are also our words.” Yiddish was the equal, even the superior to other tongues and could possess them. What’s more, the traditional elevation of Hebrew was to be leveled down in protest against the “Hebraism of the Haskala Movement” in Zunser’s Russia: Hebrew was a component of Yiddish and nothing more, not to be given greater consideration than Slavic (Harshav, 1986, pp. 780-781), though an exception was made in the case of the poet Aaron Zeitlin, who claimed that the Aramaic-Hebrew vocabulary of his Kabbalistic message could best be rendered by the original Aramaic spellings (Harshav, 1990, p. 83).

In other words, Yiddish was no longer only a planet in the solar system of Hebrew, not merely a “lower function” (Harshav, 1990, pp. 21-22). After all, it had penetrated into the inner sanctum of the synagogue as *Taytsh*, the language of Biblical commentary (see Noble, 1943, p. 87), and this is why Glatshteyn could see “a prosaic and wise smile” in it (1947, I, p. 376). The language, though seemingly ordinary, could create “imaginary gardens” out of the “real toads” of “stubborn blue collar words” (Harshav, 1990, p. 159; Harshav, 1986, p. 803; Glashteyn, 1947, I, pp. 410-411; Williams, 1954, p. 43). Yiddish, like the *Tsenerene* or “Women’s Commentary to the Bible,” shed a “timid

tear” and still “accompan[ied the Bible], step by step, / An oral faithful servant / To the Holy Language” (Harshav, 1986, p. 379, p. 381).

Of course, the translator is not expected to reproduce such intimacy, at least not in detail. There are too many complicated emotions hidden in the thicket, among them a shell-shocked feeling for simple, often Slavic things of the field and for “places” like the “heart and the *kheyder*.” Both Glatshteyn and the Montreal Yiddish poet Yankev Yiskhok Segal rhyme “word” and “place” (*verter*: *erter*, *vort*: *ort*, Harshav, 1986, p. 52; Segal, 1992, p. 137) and the whole relationship is complicated by what Cynthia Ozick (1989, p. 224) calls “the Jewish standard of distinction making,” which saw many of its “landlord-neighbors” as “Hellenistic idol-worshippers” and “barbarians” while imitating many of their ways. What faces the translator is, finally, the tortured and ambiguous personality of an “exile language” with “all the defensive verbal baggage an involuntarily migratory nation is likely to need en route to the next temporary refuge” (Ozick, 1989, p. 183).

But such defense was incomplete as long as Yiddish remained no more than a folk language; so a full-scale literary tradition was invented with Mendeley Mocher Sforim (1835-1917) as the “Grandfather” (*Der zeyde*) and Sholem Aleichem (1859-1916) as his “Grandson” (Ozick, 1989, p. 176). Accordingly, poetry suddenly became regularly stressed and metrical, reaching a point of establishment in the 1880s and 1890s, when “the folk ear became accustomed to the requirements of a syllabic order and introduced it into the old song stock” (Hrushovski, 1954, p. 231, p. 232, p. 234).

Nevertheless, Yiddish remained populist and began to show a belief in a radical future. When the Yiddish poetess Dora Teitelboym (1914-) dedicated “Lunik” or “Sputnik on the Moon” to her friend Charles Dobzynski, poet, novelist, critic and anthologist-translator of Yiddish poetry in French, she was identifying his “lunar explorations” with a new (perhaps Soviet) millenium (see Dobzynski, 1963, p. 119), and the friend saw the attachment as a non-ideological reminder of “the Yiddish folk songs with which my childhood was cradled” (1971, p. 5) — not always soothingly so, according to his troubling fiction of the Vichy years, *Couleur de mémoire* (1974). But he recognized that these memories were unrecoverable in all their exact “color,” especially in a language which had been separated from others by the devastation of “logocide” and the “double solitude” of misunderstanding and

mistranslation (1971, p. 17). People would simply not feel “*chourves*” (“ruins” in Dobzynski’s French orthography-translation) as Teitelboym had; they would not seize the word’s metaphorical scope, though her translator tried to pin it down with fully four synonyms — *Les ruines, le malheur, la cendre et le trépas* (Dobzynski, 1973, pp. 24-25). It persisted in carrying a distinct cultural meaning and memory: the destruction of the Temple (*khurbn habayis*) as renewed in the Holocaust.

In order to reproduce this dimension, my first instinct would be to surround *les ruines* with “*divines*” and “*historiques*” or add a note as Harshav does for his translation of Glatshetyn (1986, p. 321). But this is undoubtedly heavy-handed. What’s more, “divinity” could well go against a translator’s grain. Dobzynski happens to be the only anthologist of Yiddish poetry to include the convinced atheist Aron Verguelis, editor of *Sovetish Heymland*, chief journal of literary Yiddish in the former U.S.S.R. (1971, p. 480). However, the fact remains that *khurves* is a religiously inspired culture word in Yiddish, whether Teitelboym herself related to it as a “pious Jewish girl” or not, and her translator should recognize the fact.

Of course, Dobzynski does include religious issues both in his anthology and in his introductory discussion, as well he must. Peretz’s “Monish” is represented, as is Halpern’s “Kol Nidre” (1971, p. 34, p. 111), but Halpern (“Moyshe-Leyb”) was radically anti-religious, having written what many have called an “anti-Kaddish” in memory of Peretz (Howe, 1987, p. 176), and the anthologist fails to include the mystical side of Leivick, represented by “Kabbalists in Safed” in Harshav’s collection (1986, p. 756). As for “Monish”, the poem contains such “emancipated” openness, was such an “idol-breaker,” that it had to be included.

Still, emancipatory readiness was not enough. What Yiddish poetry needed was the realization that the “synagogue Jew,” one who held traditional values dear, made up a great part of its readership and that religion was thus as much of a staple of Jewish life as potatoes. It was, consequently, essential to lead the “minimalism” of observance to the “maximalism” of Hassidic spirituality. The writer of “Monish” was presented with the challenge of feeling a brotherhood between his own secularized “Sitz in Yiddish Leben” and the Hassidic subjects of his fiction, so that the “holy melody” could penetrate all of Jewish reality. The tales of Rabbi Nakhman of Bratslav which Peretz had recast could

now be read as literary creations “emancipated” from their doctrine and imbued with a near-Surrealistic meandering to be savored for the sake of the symbolism (see Glatshetyn, 1947, I, pp. 498-501). Dobzynski’s *Miroir d’un peuple*, a representative anthology, could never show forth its poems completely without such mildly skewed and undoctinaire emancipation.

Still, Dobzynski is a fine translator-cultural mediator and a “faithful son of his people.” It is worthwhile remembering that while Paul Valéry (1871-1945) was weighing the aesthetic pros and cons of the Parnassians from which his own work stemmed (1957, pp. 17-18), “Sputnik on the Moon” was hiding out in the “ivory tower” of Nazi-occupied Paris. Though quite aware that French was not his “mother tongue” — in the sense that his mother didn’t master it — and forced to omit the tenderness and motherliness of Teitelboym’s verse letter from New York “exile,” he nevertheless reproduced its *élan* through dextrous alexandrines in the tradition of Molière and Racine: *Tu me demandes, Marilka, tu me demandes, ma chérie, / Si je me suis habituée à cette nouvelle patrie* (1963, p. 90).

But the “affect linking” — as Gelernter (1994, p. 94) terms the emotional synapses of images from the past — was still incomplete: “*Chérie*” couldn’t carry the warmth of *mayn tayere* (“my precious”) and Dobzynski was left with the feeling that intimate Yiddish expression would sound “unpoetic” in French (1971, p. 17). So he undertook to produce a very poetic edition of Avrom Sutskever (1913-) eloquently titled *Où gîtent les étoiles* (Paris: Seuil, 1988), which nevertheless included a poem about the unpoetic atrocity of 1944, *Les Juifs gelés* (“Frozen Jews,” *farfroyrene yidn*, see Howe, 1987, pp. 680-681).

The Cracking of the Mold: Chmelnitzki

Glatshetyn (1947, I, p. 57) calls Sutskever “the most notorious of the Young Vilna Group,” a school of poetry which cultivated both meter and cadence (Hrushovski, 1954, p. 265) but rarely allowed itself Expressionist excess. This “melodiousness” created a huge problem: how could one sing about dead bodies without trivializing them? How could one then unify the images to give them a decent poetic burial (since real plots had been denied them in the Vilna Ghetto)? In the first place, Dobzynski lent to Sutskever’s couplets the rhythm, regularity and dignity of rhymed alexandrines whose occasional inversions

seemed perfectly natural, even though these could jar in the original. He normalized the syntax so that the atrocity could step out plainly: *Couché près de sa mère un enfant semble attendre / Ces bras pour le nourrir* [conventional hemistich] *qui ne peuvent se tendre* (“se tendre” and “tendre” are expressive puns in French though not in Yiddish) (1971, p. 454). Glatshetyn (1947, I, p. 67) writes that such images would seem melodramatic and unreal in the life of any other people, but Dobzynski, through Racinian tenderness and measure, made them seem concrete as well as elevated. He realized Harshav’s description of Sutskever as a “Neoclassical Modern” (1986, p. 45) by naturalizing him in the home of aristocratic Neoclassicism, Racine and the pervasive rhetorical tradition of French declamation; he presented him as a poet who could caress the frozen bodies with a pronounced “mute e”: *Car leur âme gelée a des lueurs fugaces, / Poisson doré dans sa vague de glace* (1971, p. 454).

In the second place, he focused on the act of remembering the freeze rather than on the time of remembrance — *Un vent de folie m’a parcouru* (1971, p. 455) — and he faithfully gathered up the images by repeating the refrain of the dying old man’s “incapacity to release his strength from the ice”: *Et du vieillard gelé mon corps prend l’inertie, / Qui ne peut libérer de la glace sa vie* (1971, p. 455). The “qui” links the poet with the sufferer.

In line with Ozick’s belief that a translation doesn’t always have to “mirror” an original exactly (1989, p. 201), she chooses not to repeat this refrain in her version, much to the detriment of the poem’s unity. But she does add starkness — “Baby and mother, side by side / Odd that her nipple’s dried” (Howe, 1987, p. 680) — a “filling out” of the preternaturally plain “she cannot nurse it now” (*zi ken es nit zeygen atsind*, Howe, 1987, p. 681), which stresses the force of the original atrocity. So it was not improper license for Dobzynski to excerpt freely from the vision of Abraham Liessin (1888-1938), “The Fires of Broadway,” which described the street of *Di Arbeter tsaytung* and *Der Forverts*, where this “Bard of Jewish Unionism” had published his early work in the United States (see Liessin, 1938, I, p. 12, p. 309). There, one could recall dead bodies in the snow of Minsk, not far from Sutskever’s Vilna. But their death was not merely physical: as Dobzynski’s highlighting is meant to show, it was the sign of an irredeemable past, especially so after the pogroms of 1919, leaving only a present full of *l’écho du néant* and the “resonance of dust” in a translation more “dignified” than *ophilkhen mit gornisht* (“hallooing

with nothing,” see Dobzynski, 1971, p. 56 and Liessin, 1938, I, pp. 312-313). Of course, he contributed more than mere dignity to Liessin’s conventional quatrains. The combination *étranger / étrangère / étrangeté* is a perfect reproduction of Liessin’s *fremder* and *fremdkeyt*, in which “foreignness” adds to remembered death glaringly lighted by New York.

Glatshiteyn saw this lyrical integration as a mark of transcendence, a kind of “superpersonality” (1947, I, p. 360), though he was well aware that Liessin had invested himself in many sublunar causes — among other things, as long-time editor of the political and cultural review, *Di Tsukunft* (Harshav, 1990, p. 166). Dobzynski caught the relationship — and the paradox — in the “negatively capable” *es vilt zikh veynen* (literally, “there is a desire to cry in me”) of “The Fires of Broadway.” He first translates the phrase as *l’on voudrait pleurer* with the appropriately impersonal *on* or “one” and later as *Je voudrais...*, signaling the dominance of the ego over a poetic artifact (Dobzynski, 1971, p. 56, Liessin, 1938, I, pp. 312-313).

However, when Ernst Waldinger (1961, p. 102) characterized his “homeland” as *Österreich, das Lyrische Land*, he was not thinking of Keatsian transcendence. Nor was he thinking of the Galizia of Yiddish poet Melech Chmelnitzki (1885-1946), though his own father had come from this “crown land” of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy to make his home in Vienna. And he was not thinking of Neoromantic poetic movements in Galizia like Young Poland (see Neigreschel, 1948, p. 118, p. 120), one of whose poets, Kazimierz Tetmajer (1865-1940), Chmelnitzki translated into Yiddish (1948, p. 112). Their poem, *Melodye fun nakhtishn nepeln* or “Song of the Night Mists” (Tetmajer, 1963, pp. 265-266) was redolent of rural Poland and it is understandable that Chmelnitzki should want to romanticize this atmosphere and connect it with home. It is also understandable that he should be forced to see that Jews from the “West” — Vienna, where he had spent twenty-nine years before the Holocaust, and New York, to which he had fled — could not feel it. In recognition of the hard-won sympathy, he translated a sonnet by Waldinger in which the latter declared, ruefully, that he “could never be a guardian of the oven” (*pripetshok*) like a Slavic spirit or *domovoi* (Ivanits, 1989, p. 56, Chmelnitzki, 1948, p. 115).

Still, Waldinger had helped Galizian immigrants to Vienna, especially given the cold reception of “*Ost-Juden*” like Melech

Chmelnitzki and his friend and namesake Melech Rawitsch (1893-1976) (Kohlbauer-Fritz, 1995, p. 10, p. 17). Vienna between the two World Wars had a devastating “emotional valence,” to adapt a term from Eva Hoffman, herself a “refugee” from Krakow in Western Galizia (1989, p. 189). But in spite of the culture shock, magnified seismically when both were uprooted by Hitler to New York, Chmelnitzki came to the realization that both he and Waldinger spoke the same language: though the latter spoke of the “crystalline flame” of his German, the Yiddish poet was convinced that his own language, as the expression of Jewish martyrdom, was the heart of their lives.

But translation into German, the language of the traumatizer, was definitely out of the question for the traumatized. The American Yiddish poet Berish Weynstein denied the validity of German immigrant groups (Harshav, 1986, p. 66) and Jacob Glatshetyn, who wanted to stop such “sadistic” German words as *Schadenfreude* from influencing the Yiddish poetic vocabulary (1947 I, p. 196), gave only faint praise to Nelly Sachs for winning the Nobel Prize with German poems on Holocaust topics (1972, p. 230). However, in 1995, fifty years after “*Befreiung*,” Gabriele Kohlbauer-Fritz brought out a German language and bilingual anthology of Yiddish poetry entitled *In a Shtetl wos shtarbt / -In einer Stadt, die Stirbt* after a 1921 Chmelnitzki poem.

Though the eight lines of the poem are accurately rendered, they lack the “emotional valence” of the original. The Hebrew-Yiddish *Gessisse* is not merely *Todeskampf* but “throes,” a moral as well as physiological process of degeneration, and its verb, *gojssesst* (“[it] struggles on the death bed”) is inadequately linked to the throes by *siecht* because something like *Siechkrämpfe* has not been provided first. Also, the *shrek* felt by the city’s Jews (“fright or alarm”) is much stronger than *Angst* (for the matter, Ger. has *Schreck* and it is not clear why Kohlbauer-Fritz didn’t use it). Most important, the “dream of yesterday,” the *cholem fun amol* chased away by *shrek*, is more seriously nostalgic and rooted in Yiddish folk life than *Traum von dazumal* with its obtuse adverbiality — *einmal* as in “*Es war einmal*” (“Once upon a time”) would have been more resonant (see Kohlbauer-Fritz, 1995, pp. 46-47).

Nevertheless, the translator deserves much praise for adhering so well to the “musical notes” of the original. After all, form was a supreme value for Chmelnitzki and his “First of May” was not, as for

Morris Rosenfeld (1912, pp. 50-53), a benign day for parades, red flags and the overthrow of Mammon. It meant the explosion of uncontained energy and the destruction of form, with the city as its “frozen” victim — *farglivert* and *farfroyren*, as in Sutskever’s “Frozen Jews,” seem more concrete than *erstarrt* (“petrified”); but why, again, doesn’t the translator use *gefroren*? (see Kohlbauer-Fritz, 1995, pp. 54-55). “May Day” meant, in short, Hitler on the way.

Unfortunately, Kohlbauer-Fritz doesn’t contend with the alliterative expression of this energy: *rojscht un rascht* includes a verbalization and syncretization of Hebrew *raash*, which the translator meets with mere “noise”, an unemotive *rauscht und lärmt*. Moreover, *zar un zorn* (“Sorrow and Anger”) is weakly rendered by the conventional, vaguely Romantic *Leid und Schmerz* (“Suffering and Pain”), which in no way approximates the Hebrew “deep sorrow” and the anger felt by Chmelnitzki. He was, after all, unmanned and indignant just as Uri Zvi Greenberg wrote on the eve of World War II: *Tsu tsar (tsadi-ayin-resh) un tsu tsorn* (Arnon, 1980, p. 93, item 1794). At the same time, however, he feels “blessed” (*gebentsht/gebenedeit* from the Romance stock of both Yiddish and German), even purged (Kohlbauer-Fritz, 1995, pp. 54-55).

Kaleidoscopic Voices: European Expressionism and the Introspectivists

Even the Expressionist “carnival barker” Melech Rawitsch could rhyme in the midst of pulsations and “screams,” though Ruth Whitman, perhaps out of respect for the “purity” of the pulsations, doesn’t translate the bonds (1995, pp. 162-163). But the Introspectivist Manifesto specified that a precise verbal echo, while enhancing the expression, was good only when integrated into the poem as a whole (Harshav, 1986, p. 778). Jacob Glatshiteyn rhymed only strategic parts of his creations: at the end of “The Joy of the Yiddish Word,” *shtum* (“silent”) is made to fit *kum* (“come,” see Whitman, 1995, p. 66).

However, his translator does not render this climax, nor does she consistently rhyme even the folk balladeer Itsik Manger (1901-1964), producing a bumpy rendition of “[Leah’s] eyes red and weepy... / You’ve read enough *today*” (1995, p. 129). This is partly out of insufficient feeling for tradition, which saw as significant that the matriarch Leah, according to the *Tsenerene* or “woman’s Bible” in Yiddish, was known for her weak vision (see Waldinger, 1998, p. 15),

and this weakness is modernized in Manger as the semi-comic eye-strain of Yiddish romance fiction. In addition, Whitman doesn't even try a translation of Leyeles, the other leader of Introspectivism, this being "incompatible with my own poetic capabilities" (1995, p. 18) — she had written original and presumably more modern poetry collected in *New and Selected Poems* (1963-1990).

Even the freely stated intimacy of Malka Heifetz Tussman (1896-1987) could bind itself to the interlocked rhyme scheme of a poem reminiscent of Chmelnitzki: "But the aim of Kabbala, Oneness and Glowing, / Is good, and I thank you for Grace without flaw. / Splendor of Splendors is what you foresaw, / O father immersed in mystical Knowing." The "affect linking" is at once formal and personal, impelling her to state that sound can echo transcendence: "Sadness has no purity of sound: / The screech of tears [*trern un greln*] is its sound, / Too deep to be found" (1972, p. 73, p. 62).

Still, the above poets only used rhyme to clinch the poetic statement of a developing persona. Even Sutskever, in the midst of remembered chaos, having cast the Ghetto entries of his poetic diary in traditional forms, nevertheless published in the modernist journal *In Zikh* and later explored the far reaches of his Young Vilna apprenticeship in the cadences of "Under the Earth" in 1956 (Whitman, 1995, p. 187). This poem is an irregular and free meditation in which the first and second stanzas of three contain four and five beat lines with a plethora of unstressed, largely prepositional syllables — "Are thère bírds twítering ùndèr thè éarth... ónce-used wórds thát séem invisíblè bírds?" The rumination is then cut short and the original matches *erter* ("places") with *verter* ("words") just as Glatshiteyn had done in Rabbi Nakhman of Bratslav's dramatic monologue (Harshav, 1986, p. 52). In other words, the stream of thought is unbound but the rhymes are binding, especially the last, in which the "violins" (or *fidlen*, Whitman, 1995, p. 186) respond to the poet's "spades" (*ridlen*) by digging up memories and retrieving the "words hidden in song."

Though Whitman fails to reproduce the integration of thought and expression, she does resuscitate the poem's syntactic parallelism, repetition, and apposition: "*over snow, over hay, over drunken fire, / [My feet] feel words, / The souls of words*" (Whitman, 1995, p. 187). Whatever the poem loses in regular prosody, it regains in strategic sentence regularity, in "parsing," and the translator who respects this also respects the extraordinary discipline behind it. Nevertheless,

Whitman failed to capture the whole esthetic dimension, and this is a great pity since “Under the Earth” is a rare work, an unusual “refusal to mourn,” what Glatshteyn called “a crown on a head covered with ashes” and proof that “one may derive pleasure from a lament” (1947, I, p. 434, p. 428). What’s more, the poem shows a pride in creative vibrancy which Malka Tussman opposed to the “degradation” and “shame” of “wailing” (or “yammering,” closer to *yomern* and more pejorative, see Harshav, 1986, pp. 616-617).

Jacob Glatshteyn had expressed faith in the brave light of the word as early as 1920: “In our time of millions slaughtered, [with] so many souls wandering without redemption..., the poet is left only with his poetry, only with his art as a lantern in the dark corridors...” (quoted in Harshav, 1986, p. 788). The millions were not, clearly, victims of genocide; they were either those fallen in World War I or those victimized in the pogroms of 1919, when Ukrainian nationalism unleashed frustration against the Jews. In addition, Germany had been reduced by the Treaty of Versailles and this “humiliation” was partly behind the Holocaust. The reality of chaos was always there and the Jewish poet did not scream a causeless “bloody murder” (or “*gevald!*”).

So when Uri Zvi Greenberg (1896-1981) saw chaos as the central subject of Yiddish poetry, his long, vehement lines were not over-reactions; most especially “In the Kingdom of the Cross” (*In malkhes fun tselem*, Howe, 1987, pp. 484-485, see Appendix), in which Greenberg saw nothing but “woe-heads” in the “flatlands” of Europe, even prefigured a Zionist flight into the Middle East. His “slashes”, after all, came from intense personal experience: after deserting from the “Great War,” he came home only to find that his community had been victimized by a backlash of hatred by the Poles in 1918, a memory that was to affect his whole life and confirm him in the vocation of a nationalist poet (Harshav, 1990, p. 180, and Arnon, 1980, p. xxxix [lamed-tet])⁴.

But the reactions of American Yiddish poets were more muted. These “found chaos in their psyches” and aimed to uproot it by reflecting — rather than acting on — the “kaleidoscopic whirl” of war, revolution, pogroms, and even private frustration (Harshav, 1990, p. 180). Leyeles internalized the general bewilderment through the

⁴ The Hebrew letters of Arnon’s book require the number-letter notation given above.

dramatic mask of Fabius Lind, whose “diary” (how unlike Sutskever’s!) registered everything from the staccato fleeting of urban time to disgust with the flesh (Harshav, 1986, pp. 137-148). The result was a Jewish version of J. Alfred Prufrock (1910) mixed with Saul Bellow’s Augie March (1953), one spanning two World Wars.

To achieve a new order, the Introspectivist created his own language through expressions like “brain-out” (*oys/moykhn*), an irregular activization of the normally *moyakh* or “brain,” and “brain-flood” (*markh-far/flaytsenish*), in which a completive verbal prefix is added to a noun (Harshav, 1986, p. 136, p. 138). As for *far*, Harshav fails to do it justice as a stylistic particle whose repetition the poet wants us to notice as did Leyeles’ successor, Jacob Glatshetyn, in the postholocaust mood of “Without Jews”: *far/zey* (“completed snowing”), *far/flants* (“completed planting”), and *far/brent* (“completely burned”) (Harshav, 1986, pp. 320-321).

In place of Fabius Lind, whom Glatshetyn nevertheless saw as a “folk persona as integral to Jewish life as Mendele, Sholem Aleichem and Yitskhok Leybush” (Harshav, 1986, p. 802), he restored the person (not as a mere persona but a historical fact) of Rabbi Nakhman of Bratslav (1772-1810), a Hassidic teller of tales and folk bard whose sayings and stories carried the authority of a religious tradition which saw God in all things, in chaos as well as in comfort. According to Hassidim, Godhead was revealed in a pulsation of symbols often flashing forth in the rhythm of speech — “the transcendent being brought into the immanent,” as Martin Buber phrased it (1956, p. 10). But Buber’s German rendering of Rabbi Nakhman was too consciously artistic. Glatshetyn, on the other hand, tried to show the Rabbi (or “Rebbe”) as an authentic *folksmentsh* or “man of the people” who spewed out pantheistic folk wisdom in the pulses of his “talk-verse,” through conversational rhythms unbound by metrical convention (Harshav, 1990, pp. 100-101). Like Leyeles, he “followed the bent of his words” (and prefixes), signaled by serial associationism and inspiration (see Glatshetyn, 1972, p. 44) and Harshav’s description of Yiddish discourse as a “concatenation..., not a systematic essay” (1990, p. 100). In the course of Rabbi Nakhman’s instructions to his scribe, “fairy tales about dwarves,” typically Slavic legends (Sokolov, 1950, pp. 385-387), give rise to “tunes” (*nigunim*) and a Hassidic “mantra” (*Dai, donna, dai*) which then “links up” with a lyrically and suggestively symbolic “small cloud” (*khmarele*, see Leonard Wolf’s excellent translation in Howe, 1987, pp. 440-441), and then, in the

parallel world wrought by musing, produces “One,” a mystical utterance ritualized into Heb. *Echod* which “casually” inspires couplets praising nature in its “drunken beauty.”

The Translation of Estrangement: Glatshiteyn, Tussman and Zeitlin

But the same generously signifying God is “woebegone” in Cynthia Ozick’s translation, one informed by centuries of desolated knights and ladies. Prayers to Him are not merely “silent” after the Holocaust; they are “tongue-tied” (Howe, 1987, pp. 468-469). This God had once been responsible and reliable, making Glatshiteyn long for the lowly security of “*a little stool* before your [prosaic?] smile” and Ozick formulates the longing in the diction of King James — “the *footstool* of Your favor” (Howe, 1987, p. 470) capitalizing the divine address, removing holiness from men even more than before and justifying the “woebegone” refrain (Howe, 1987, pp. 470-471). This is not mere interpretation: it is meeting with the most difficult challenge of a Yiddish translator, that of showing the resonance of the Jewish words in a Christian culture (see Ozick, 1989, p. 203).

Malka Tussman’s “I” gives a tender and understanding response to the gap, one which epitomizes Introspectivism in its staccato “quiddity” (Harshav, 1986, pp. 612-613): “Out of the self/Away/From the self/Where to? (*Fun zikh/ Aroys,/ Fun zikh/ Avek,/ Vuhin?*). This has the dramatic bluntness of an August Schramm without the German’s Expressionistic extremism and with a Jewish innerness and sense of seeking. As Leyeles had written, rhythm was the music of such a sense, not a stress pattern or baldly paraphrasable content (Harshav, 1990, p. 185).

From this base, the poetess could expand her Whitmanian “Personalism” — she had “discovered” *Leaves of Grass* in Milwaukee — into representative Jewish personality, into the realization that “I Am Also You” — to use the title of Marcia Falk’s excellent selection, 1977, p. 7, p. 10 — and the greater presence stands behind the playful “*Ikhoma*,” a poem based on “I” (*ikh*) and “consolation” (*nikhome*). There, the “I” takes on a female identity but without limit (Falk, 1977, pp. 17-18), even attaining the dimensions of a priestess who can urge: “Hurry — / I am fully ripe / and all the fences are down” (Marcia Falk in Howe, 1987, p. 498).

Accordingly, Tussman expands the meaning of “*mame*” or “mother”. In the introductory poem to “Leaves Do Not Fall” (*Bleter faln nit*, 1972, p. 7), she changes a merely “little mother” (*kleyne mama*) to a slavically-infixed *maminke mayne* (“sweet mother mine” from a coalescence of Ukr. *mamin* [“mother’s darling”] and *mamushka* [“mommy”], in which I have added the “sweet” in order to give the feeling of a traditional folk refrain). Likewise, in a late poem, she compares the “small feet” of this mother with the “tinyness” of her person (*a kleyninke*, Harshav, 1986, pp. 624-625) in a semantic gradation which Lehrer (1960, p. 305) views as a sign of the refinement of the maternal in Yiddish poetry.

Of course, the elevation of *mame* brings problems: “My mame-God has cast me down” in more than temporary disfavor, with the result that *mameshkeyt* (translated well in Harshav, 1986, p. 599 as “Mama-world” with an ironic play on Heb.-Yiddish *mamesh* [“real”]) drifts away from me / And I sob on a stranger’s shoulder.” The “shoulder’s strangeness” (Harshav, 1986, pp. 598-599) is then “italicized” (spacing is the Yiddish equivalent of such emphasis), showing that the sob is humiliated *and* sad.

Harshav wrote (Hrushovski, 1954, pp. 255-256) that the crafting of free verse like this outpouring required special discipline and quoted from Tussman to show the poetic value of strict syntactic parallelism and the rhythmic grouping of sentence units. But more than structural emphasis was involved: expressive — and often “untameable” — kernels like “I,” “God,” and salient feelings also get their own line. For example, a Tussman poem segments off the emotionally intensifying *kholile* (“May I never!”), which Harshav (1986, pp. 620-621) doesn’t translate in order to retain the march of the lines, but the omission impoverishes the translation since it fails to fulfill its cultural responsibility to the outbursts — to the full emotional identity.

Of course, a cultural personality like Baudelaire could claim that such folk rhythm was more important than formal details (and this is the belief behind his own translations of Poe). But Baudelaire’s renderings remained more French than Gothic American, rooted as they were in the Neo-classicism of his literary antecedents and education (see Müller, 1995, p. 68; Rose, 1997, p. 31). For this reason, Wilbur’s pairing of “grace and measure” in place of *volupté* in a translation of Baudelaire’s “*L’Invitation au voyage*” perfectly fits Rose’s

characterization of the poet's "respect" for harmony (see Waldinger, 1999, p. 297). However, Harshav was expressly a mediator, not an original creator, and the very fact of his Jewishness made him straddle two cultures with the deliberate intent of "reassessing the junction" (1986, p. xx) and commemorating the dying source (1990, p. 192).

Malka Tussman was all too aware of the futility — and heroism — of such commemoration from the side of creativity. In a poem on the death of Jacob Glatshteyn, she lamented: "Woe, our lovely tree is trembling, / Will soon be bare, / A bare bough in the wind" (*Oy-vey, unzer sheyner boyrn tsitert, / Tsitert bald a hoyler, / A hoyler inem vint*, 1972, p. 68). She knew that the Yiddish poet was cursed with living in a "post revolutionary period of Jewish culture and consciousness" (my emphasis), that though she had once "felt a mission of beginning," she now "stood before the abyss of the end" (Harshav, 1990, p. 138, p. 192). It is crucial that the translator from Yiddish share her awareness.

No poet was more beset by death and ghosts than Aaron Zeitlin (1899-1974), the son of Hillel Zeitlin (1871-1942), the most prominent explicator of Hassidim before Buber, a master of both Hebrew and Yiddish, and a victim of Treblinka. He had lost his father at the end of the War in addition to losing wife and immediate family in a harrowing "accident": in 1939, Maurice Schwartz of the Yiddish Art Theater invited him to New York for the production of his *Esterke* and he left them to the Nazis and extermination while his own life was spared and bereft (see Howe, 1987, p. 537).

Zeitlin stayed in New York, to become a close friend of Jacob Glatshteyn and Isaac Bashevis Singer and express "the invisible presences which steer our way in life" (Anderson *et al.*, 1989, p. 962; Lehrer, 1960, p. 189). His decision was existentially founded, as he wrote in a Yiddish and Hebrew poem: "I am a man in New York / In Warsaw I am a shadow, / An eternal shadow in a house which no longer exists, / No, no, I cannot leave this place, / This home which is no more / In Warsaw which was and is no more" (quoted in Beres, 1991, p. 261, from Hebrew and translated by Jean-Marie Delmaire, p. 260, into beautifully cadenced French [see Appendix]; the Yiddish original is in Zeitlin, 1967, I, p. 48). He put the "fearful symmetry" into a religiously resigned poem:

I know that in this world no one needs me,

me, a word-beggar in the Jewish graveyard.
Who needs a poem, especially in Yiddish ?

Only what is hopeless on this earth has beauty
and only the ephemeral is godly
and humility is the true rebellion (Howe, 1987, p. 538)

According to the translation (by Robert Friend), this could be a modernist poem, but in fact it is very traditional, following a modified terza-rima in which the carry-over echo is supplied at the end of each stanza — *yidish: meridish* —, in which *meride* or “rebellion” is adjectivally seen as synonymous both with “Yiddish” as people and language and with *hakhnoe* or “humility” to result in God-inspired “civil disobedience” (see Howe, 1987, p. 539). Such optimism was undoubtedly prepared for during the loss of a father whom Zeitlin called “the source of prophecy” (1967, I, p. 82). But it would be wrong to say with Alexander (1979, p. 217) that he seemed unshakeable and unshaken; instead, he became sadly aware. One has only to read “The Last Survivor” in Leftwich’s fine version (1961, p. 431, see Appendix) — “Horror and madness won’t leave Aaron, the last, the son of Hillel and Esther” — or Zeitlin’s description of God as an “old musician playing the fiddle with a stone-cold bow and frozen fingers” (1967, I, p. 351) to realize that Glatshteyn / Ozick’s “woebegone God” is not far away. Still, the “blare of Messiah’s horn” in Robert Friend’s translation of “Being a Jew” (Howe, 1987, p. 538) remains the optimistic credo of every Jew, whether doctrinally bound or not, and belief “with no ifs or buts” (*afiles* to rime with *tfiles* or “prayers,” Howe, 1987, p. 539) is only part and parcel of what Zeitlin also calls the “Realism of the Jew” (1967, I, p. 330). A statement of faith like this, for all of its trivial rhyme (*vil es* — “wills it” — to go with *afiles*), is anything but trivial and the translator will see that creed and emotion are inseparably linked in Jewish life; there, the idea of the “right path” governs all “appraisals and reappraisals” of reality (see Lazarus *et al.*, 1984, p. 222). Such co-presence is what Leybush Lehrer meant by “trembling on the tip of burning consciousness” in poetry (1960, p. 189).

In an opposite spirit from Greenberg’s vehement, wounded and nationalistic “In the Kingdom of the Cross,” Zeitlin developed the dramatic persona of a Byronesque Jew, ironic, urbane and perversely

nostalgic at the same time — “The Sin and Death of De Haan”⁵ in Leftwich’s excellent translation (1961, pp. 420-430). It is not that Zeitlin disliked “Uri Zvi,” who had become a kind of institution in the literary life of “Little Tel Aviv.” On the contrary, he valued him highly and even translated Jabotinsky’s poetic eulogy of Herzl into Yiddish from Russian only five years (1937) after inventing his “Yiddish Don Juan” (1967, I, p. 467). However, he was not at home with Greenberg’s “volcanic Messianism” (witness his Hebrew drama, *Beyn haesh vehayesha*, 1957, p. 256, p. 259) and found “Tel Aviv...With its Hebraic jangle” detestable, even though he had “seen it from every angle” (Leftwich, 1961, p. 426 from the derogatory tones of *Tel Avivel...Mit dem ivritish gestamel, / Es vert do der yam aleyn a yamel, / Faynt hob ikh ayer Tel Avivel*,” 1967, I, p. 345).

Leftwich translates the slang beautifully, though he can’t express the brunt of the piquant diminutives while reproducing the irony of the jingle. And it *is* a meaningful jingle, no mere rhyme scheme; “I *hate it*” is no foolishly unmotivated pique and Leftwich gives us a fully motivated “*berated* with the sarcasm” of an “informer who penned an epistle” (someone who *farmasert*, who *getintelt a brivl*) and was ready “to *await it*” — his punishment as a “traitor to the cause” (Leftwich, 1961, p. 426). We are squarely in the world of “paradoxical intention therapy” rather than Zionist enterprise, one in which “the patient is encouraged to do, or wish to happen, the very thing he fears” (see Frankl, 1969, pp. 102-103). However, paradoxically, Zeitlin very much wanted Tel Aviv “to happen” and such a “paradoxical wish” gave rise to a detached and witty poetry which was always interesting and never monotonous, all of whose parts and verse paragraphs were essential. For this reason, Leftwich was unwilling to cut much from “The Sin and Death of De Haan” while leaving whole sections out of his translation of Uri Zvi Greenberg’s moving but humorless “A Jew Stands at the Gates of Tears” (1961, pp. 193-199 from *Bay di toyern fun treern shteyt a yid in gedenkshaft*, Greenberg, 1978, p. 55, p. 63).

But though the poet found Tel Aviv disgusting, he loved Mea Shearim, the Orthodox quarter of Jerusalem with “shadows at each door. / It rains poverty, and a God lives there who is poor” (Leftwich,

⁵ According to Guggenheimer’s *Jewish Family Names*, De Haan is a Dutch corruption of Ger. *Hahn*, itself a version of Bib. Heb. *gever* (“cock” or “man”).

1961, p. 427 from *shotns iber Meya Shorem* , / *Dort regnt dales, dort otemt a Got vos iz orem* , Zeitlin, 1967, I, p. 346). This God is far from “woebegone” and nostalgia for Him gives rise to genuine lyricism. Still, the “De Haan persona” is not really at home despite temporary stilling of his European and “poetic” side, the part that loves “forms and graces” and is nevertheless won over by “these *Job-like* faces” (“Job” is a good general symbol of suffering to replace the difficult *fargolest* or “inured to exile,” Leftwich, 1961, p. 427, and Zeitlin, 1967, I, p. 346). Moreover, Leftwich makes clear that the “I,” in spite of being able to blend into the “abject poverty” described, was never *sotendik* or “satanic,” in no way like Blake’s “dark, *Satanic* mills.” It is only “galled,” bruised badly, a qualification that rhymes with the equally ironic “*prayer-shawled*”(*taleskotndik*), alluding to a pettily ritual detail which bursts the bubble of the poet’s feeling of “ancestral rootedness.” Such reversal objectifies and rejects romantically “folkist” identification and lends the perspective of Pope to a Jewish world: man is now “the glory, jest, and riddle” of De Haan’s universe (see Tillotson, 1968, p. 226).

Consequently, rhyme can create a joke which comments on the poet’s world (see Zeitlin, 1980, p. 106). Such commentary is “object-centered” and “telescopic” rather than merely “kaleidoscopic” in the manner of Introspective poetry, where subjectivity is encouraged to intrude on reality with the danger of making it disappear (see Frankl, 1969, p. 60). So when Zeitlin telescopes “A Dream About an Aged Humorist,” a poem insightfully chosen by Ruth Whitman to represent him (1995, p. 200, see Appendix here), he is stating the empirical (and frightening) fact of a vagrant whose jokes draw a blank but who nevertheless chases skirts with “impetuous daring.” The bumptious and bullying impetuosity is ironically called “*gvure*” or “heroism” in an allusion (shades of *Shimshon hagiber*, “Samson the Hero!”) not even slightly approached by Whitman’s “violently” (1995, p. 201). In other words, the rebirth of the prankster as a dangerous bull in the china shop of reality is the center of this macabre Jewish joke, a transmogrification more than a transformation.

A summary of translation from Yiddish is in another Zeitlin poem, “The Empty Apartment” (Whitman 1995, p. 203), where things dream of people and objects need their corresponding subjectivities, remembering those who “once *personned* there” in the poet’s inimitable coinage (*geparshoynt*, 1995, p. 202). What’s more, the abandonment, the empty rooms, are international, so that there is

nowhere a culturally codifiable “Exile,” only uncommunal “dispersion” — “if only a Polish Exile were still in existence,” laments Zeitlin (1980, p. 169). But he is left in the room, vividly recalling other dreams and betrayals.

The filler of the void left by betrayal is the Jewish translator, a “person” steeped in the history of the Jewish people. Joseph Leftwich is such. He understood the meaning of Exile and Diaspora, having written a book on Theodore Herzl and edited several anthologies of Jewish creativity (among them *The Golden Peacock* [1961] and *Yisroel: the Jewish Omnibus* [1981] in which the Ashkenazic and Yiddish pronunciation of “Israel” is used). Moreover, he was a Yiddish and English poet in his own right (*Lider* and *Years at the Ending* [both 1984]). Above all, he believed in renewed Jewish joy: “I love noise, / Tumultuous joys, / I want a pocketful of toys. / I have *great desires, avidities* — I am full of fantasies” (from Lutzki [1961], pp. 304-305), *Ikh lib tumel, / raash, kurazh, / Mit gelusten a bagazh, / Mit tsatskes in tash, / Fantazyes mish-mash...*, see Lutzki, 1958, p. 126).

In the fiction of the Nazi Occupation, Charles Dobzynski compares the memory of the cave (of threatened oblivion?) to a cocoon destined to be transformed (*chrysalide vouée à la métamorphose*, 1974, p. 45), “myself become a cave too, inheriting night and ruin,” just like a postholocaust Yiddish poet trying to populate a devastated room. This refurnishing could only be a rough polishing of the *Géode* of expression as he did in a recent book of poems and throughout his translations, thereby realizing that such deposits are not “mere natural curiosities” (Bourg, 1999, p. 305), but the cared-for rock gardens of reality and self-realization.

But it was Cynthia Ozick who really understood the “astral” significance of Zeitlin’s “squashed” memories and the vehement voices of recall (see Whitman, 1995, pp. 202-205), in spite of her self-proclaimed rationalism (Frumkes, 1998, p. 19). Her *The Shawl* (1989), which includes the novella “Rosa,” centers on the image of a remnant shawl in which a mother’s dead baby girl is wrapped when murdered by the Nazis, and *The Messiah of Stockholm* (1987) details a search for a remnant text, that of Bruno Schulz, a Polish-Jewish writer whom the Nazis executed.

But Yiddish has not slumped to the ground; Bashevis Singer said in his Nobel acceptance speech that its credible “ghosts” still walk

the earth (Anderson *et al.*, 1989, p. 962). In *The Puttermesser Papers* (1997), a novel full of ironic transmogrification, Ozick's heroine (whose Yiddish name means "butter knife") enacts a ritual of the ancient ceremony of Golem creation, in which the letters of the Holy Name are invoked in order to bring about "the Redemption of the City of New York" (p. 40, p. 67). *Oylem-goylem* says a Yiddish pun / piece of wisdom and identifies the world as a seemingly dumb "pasteboard mask" to be rendered malleable and active by redemptive translation.

Presidio of Monterey, California

Appendix

1. Greenberg/Wolf ("In the Kingdom of the Cross") :

The forest's black and dense; it grows out of the flatlands.
Such depths of grief, such terror out of Europe.
Dark and wild, dark and wild, the trees have heads of sorrow;
From their branches hang the bloody dead — still wounded.

2. Zeitlin/Delmaire :

À New York je suis homme
À Varsovie je suis ombre
Ombre éternelle dans une maison qui n'est plus.
Non, non, je ne puis sortir d'ici,
De cette maison qui n'existe plus,
À Varsovie qui fut et qui ne sera plus.

3. Zeitlin/Leftwich :

No more wife, no more child!
A last survivor.
All he has is a hand that always wrote, so it still writes.
But sometimes he hears voices — They are still in the flames!
One day you will meet them again in far, flaming heights!

4. Zeitlin/Whitman :

Last night I had a dream
Whose paradox followed me

Late into the day: a woman was
Walking with an ox.

The ox — as I know — is an acquaintance of mine,
A Jew, a humorist. He's in trouble
Senile, deaf, and half-blind,
With the face of an old eunuch.
They don't laugh at his jokes. He smells of the grave.

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ABSTRACT: Survivors: Postholocaust Yiddish Poems in Non-Jewish Language — This article, dealing with the translation of Postholocaust Yiddish poetry into non-Jewish languages like French, English and German, must necessarily sketch in a linguistic, literary and social background to prepare the ground for the complete understanding of the special task involved in the rendering of Jewish expression. (Conversion into Hebrew presents a far different challenge, described in a related study). Discussed here are literary movements like European Expressionism and Yiddish “Introspectivism” as practiced in the United States as well as the linguistic basis of these in Yiddish speech and poetic prosody and embodied in the translations of

Cynthia Ozick (English), Charles Dobzynski (French) and Gabriele Kohlbauer-Fritz (German).

RÉSUMÉ : Survivants : poèmes yiddish postholocaustes en langues non-juives — Cet article traite de la traduction de la poésie yiddish après l'holocauste en des langues telles que le français, l'anglais et l'allemand et doit pour ce faire tisser une toile de fond linguistique, littéraire et sociale permettant de mieux comprendre les particularités de l'expression juive et de son interprétation. (La conversion en hébreu, discutée dans une étude apparentée, présente des obstacles différents.) Sont également examinés des mouvements littéraires comme l'expressionnisme européen et l'« introspectivisme » yiddish américain ainsi que la parole yiddish et sa prosodie dans les traductions de Cynthia Ozick (anglais), Charles Dobzynski (français) et Gabriele Kohlbauer-Fritz (allemand).

Key words: culture, expressionism, Holocaust, introspectivism, exile.

Mots-clés : culture, expressionisme, holocauste, introspectivisme, exil.

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