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**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON**

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

Modern Languages

**The Translingual Imagination in the Work of four Women Poets of  
German-Jewish Origin**

by

**Meike Reintjes**

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

March 2014



UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

## ABSTRACT

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#### **Abstract**

In this thesis, I am developing a theory of the translingual imagination which can be used as a tool to explore literature written in a second language. The term ‘translingual imagination’ was first coined by Steven Kellman in his essay ‘Translingualism and the Literary Imagination’, describing the work of authors writing in a language other than their first. Recent years have seen a growing body of research on these writers, not least because of a risen interest in post-colonial writing and transnational and migration studies. Literary scholars have increasingly questioned ‘the paradigma of monolingualism’, and linguistic research has looked at interrelations between migration, language and identity. However, research projects have often focused on prose writing, predominantly examining the work of canonized male authors (such as Kafka, Conrad or Rushdie), and post-war migrants (such as Turkish-born authors writing in German, or South American-born writers writing in English). Poetry written by women poets of German-Jewish origin has mainly been considered part of Holocaust writing, and over the past decades German scholars have been trying to reclaim these texts as ‘German-Jewish’ poetry. My thesis considers the work of four English poets of German-Jewish origin in the context of translingual writing. While using Kellman’s term, I shall suggest a set of specific criteria to allow for a clearer definition of the ‘translingual imagination’. In applying these criteria to the work of women poets of German-Jewish origin, I will not only show the translingual imagination

at work but also encourage a new reading of literature written by German-Jewish refugees that goes beyond the notion of exile poetry.

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# DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, .....[please print name]

declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

[title of thesis] .....  
.....

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before.

Signed:.....

Date:.....



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## Chapter 1: Introduction

My thesis explores poetry written by women poets of German-Jewish origin through the concept of the ‘translingual imagination’, thereby linking the fields of German-Jewish exile studies and translingual studies.<sup>1</sup>

The term was first coined by Steven Kellman in his 1991 essay ‘Translingualism and the Literary Imagination’, describing the work of authors writing in a language other than their first, or their primary one.<sup>2</sup> Kellman later expanded on his initial thoughts in his book *The Translingual Imagination* (2000), referring to the work of acclaimed authors such as Joseph Conrad, and insisting that translingualism ‘is a genuine and rich tradition’.<sup>3</sup> The interest in and awareness of authors writing in a second (or third) language and the resulting research and publications are often linked to post-colonial studies and the growing literature written by Indian and African authors in the language of the ex-colonial power.<sup>4</sup> While especially earlier publications have focused on authors from former colonies and their attempts to redefine their relationship to the language and culture of their former masters, writers moving between the Americas have also explored the implications of moving from one language into another.<sup>5</sup> More recently, Yasemin Yildiz has discussed questions of mono- versus multilingualism with an emphasis on the German context. Referring to Herder, Humboldt, and Schleiermacher and German Romanticism, Yildiz claims that ‘the German tradition has played an important role in establishing the monolingual paradigm’;<sup>6</sup> and explains that according to this paradigm, ‘individuals [...] are imagined to possess one “true” language only, their “mother tongue”, and through this possession to be organically

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<sup>1</sup>I shall define the term in chapter 3 when developing a theory of the translingual imagination.

<sup>2</sup>Kellman, Steven G. ‘Translingualism and the Literary Imagination’, *Criticism*, Vol. 33 No. 4 (1991), pp. 527-541.

<sup>3</sup>Kellman, Steven G. *The Translingual Imagination* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), p. ix.

<sup>4</sup>For example the novelist Salman Rushdie who has also written essays about colonialism and being an Indian writing in English. See his article ‘The Empire Writes Back with a Vengeance’, published in *The Times* on 3 July 1982, p. 8. Further: Rushdie, Salman. *Imaginary Homelands. Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta Books, 1992).

<sup>5</sup>See for example Dorfman, Ariel. *Heading South, Looking North. A Bilingual Journey* (Gordonsville/ Virginia: Farrar Strauss & Giroux, 1998).

<sup>6</sup>Yildiz, Yasemin. *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), p. 5.

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linked to an exclusive, clearly demarcated ethnicity, culture and nation'.<sup>7</sup> Yildiz' work relates to aspects of German-Jewish history, but with respect to contemporary authors focuses on those from Turkish-German backgrounds. The latter are also discussed in Azade Seyhan's book *Writing Outside the Nation* (2001), where she hints at the parallels between the United States and Germany as in both cases the non-native writers' 'mastery of their literary languages is not the result of colonial experience but of migration, resettlement, and redefinition of identity'.<sup>8</sup> Thus, Seyhan distinguishes between post-colonial writing and literature written by migrants moving to North America or Germany. Considering that the relationship of Turkish-German writers and their new country is not defined by a shared history but by the writers' desire for a future within their new country, their situation can be compared to other migrants who move countries for a better future but who do not settle in the country of a former colonial power, such as the authors discussed in Tijana Miletic's study *European Literary Immigration Into the French Language*.<sup>9</sup> Miletic explores the 'subtle mixture of different cultural influences'<sup>10</sup> in the work of four non-native French writers and discusses 'themes and topoi' revealed in their writing 'which have something in common with their condition as immigrant authors who have chosen French'.<sup>11</sup> It should have become apparent from this brief overview that although recent publications in the field of migrant- and translingual literature have included a variety of authors from various backgrounds, English literature written by German-Jewish refugees has not yet been considered in this context.

### Current state of research

Scholarly interest in German-born writers who were exiled during the fascist era has mainly focused on those who had already had a career in Germany and who often continued to write in German. Early publications seem to have almost exclusively considered the exile experience of male authors, thereby

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<sup>7</sup>Yildiz 2012: 2.

<sup>8</sup>Seyhan, Azade. *Writing Outside the Nation* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 12.

<sup>9</sup>Miletic, Tijana. *European Literary Immigration Into the French Language* (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2008).

<sup>10</sup>Miletic 2008: 7.

<sup>11</sup>Miletic 2008: 9.

portraying the work of a small number of well-known men as typical for and representative of German literary exile.<sup>12</sup> Thanks to the work of feminist researchers, over the past decades these shortcomings have been addressed and the situation of women in exile as well as their cultural contributions have been more widely acknowledged.<sup>13</sup> Recently, previously neglected female writers, such as Anna Gmeyner and Hilde Spiel, have received more scholarly attention.<sup>14</sup>

While these studies have helped to gain a more comprehensive picture of German exilic literature and are a valuable contribution towards a better understanding of the situation of women writers and the hardship they faced, not only because of their refugee status but also because of their gender, the fact remains that most of the research still focuses on previously published authors and those who kept their links with the German language and a German audience.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, Charmian Brinson has pointed out that ‘The phenomenon of language-switching in exile as an aspect of the processes of assimilation and acculturation has not until now received a great deal of scholarly attention’.<sup>16</sup> Among the notable exceptions have been Richard Dove’s essay ‘The Gift of Tongues: German-speaking Novelists writing in English’,<sup>17</sup> and more recently Nicole Brunnhuber’s *The Faces of Janus: English-language Fiction by German-speaking Exiles in Great Britain, 1933-1945*,<sup>18</sup> as well as Susanne Utsch’s book on Klaus Mann’s language switch.<sup>19</sup>

However, the vast majority of research in German exile studies as well as in the wider field of literature written by non-native authors has focused on

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<sup>12</sup>See for example Schütz, Erhard. ‘Literatur im Exil’, *Einführung in die deutsche Literatur des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 1977), pp. 276-289.

<sup>13</sup>See for example Krohn et al. *Sprache – Identität – Kultur: Frauen im Exil. Exilforschung. Ein Internationales Jahrbuch* Vol. 17 (München: edition text & kritik, 1999).

<sup>14</sup>Hammel, Andrea. *Everyday Life as Alternative Space in Exile Writing: The Novels of Anna Gmeyner, Selma Kahn, Hilde Spiel, Martina Wied, and Hermynia Zur Mühlen*. (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008).

<sup>15</sup>Schoppmann, Claudia (ed.). *Im Fluchtgepäck die Sprache. Deutschsprachige Schriftstellerinnen im Exil*. (Frankfurt: Main: Fischer, 1995).

<sup>16</sup>Brinson, Charmian. ‘The Faces of Janus: English-language Fiction by German-speaking Exiles in Great Britain, 1933-1945 (review).’ *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 25.2 (2007), pp. 212-214. *Project MUSE*. Web. 14 Feb. 2014. <<http://muse.jhu.edu/>>.

<sup>17</sup>Dove, Richard. ‘The Gift of Tongues: German-speaking Novelists writing in English’ in: *Between Two Languages: German Speaking Exiles in Great Britain 1933-1945*, edited by W. Abbey et al. (Stuttgart: Akademischer Verlag Stuttgart, 1995), pp. 95-115.

<sup>18</sup>Brunnhuber, Nicole. *The Faces of Janus: English-language Fiction by German-speaking Exiles in Great Britain, 1933-1945* (Oxford, Frankfurt am Main, New York: Peter Lang, 2005).

<sup>19</sup>See for example Utsch, Susanne. *Sprachwechsel im Exile: Die „linguistische Metamorphose“ von Klaus Mann* (Köln, Weimar und Wien: Böhlau), 2007.

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prose writing. Poetry has been largely ignored, which is surprising as it seems to be far more susceptible to linguistic nuance than prose. The French poet Paul Valéry elaborated on the distinctive features of poetry and prose in his essay 'Poetry and Abstract Thought':

Walking, like prose, has a definite aim. It is an act directed at something we wish to reach. Actual circumstances, such as the need for some object, the impulse of my desire, the state of my body, my sight, the terrain, etc., which order the manner of walking, prescribe its direction and its speed, and give it a *definite end*. All the characteristics of walking derive from the instantaneous conditions, which combine *in a novel way* each time. There are no movements in walking that are not special adaptations, but, each time, they are abolished and, as it were, absorbed by the accomplishment of the act, by the attainment of the goal.

The dance is quite another matter. It is, of course, a system of actions; but of actions whose end is in themselves. It goes nowhere. If it pursues an object, it is only an ideal object, a state, an enchantment, the phantom of a flower, an extreme of life, a smile – which forms at last on the face of the one who summoned it from empty space.<sup>20</sup>

If those who walked into their non-native literatures have drawn the critics' attention not only to their direction but also to their gait, those who dare and dance into their new language must be even more eye-catching. Accordingly, poetry must lend itself exceptionally well to the purpose of studying the translingual imagination: while it uses 'the same words, the same syntax, the same forms, and the same sounds or tones' as prose, in poetry all these language elements are 'differently co-ordinated and differently aroused'.<sup>21</sup> Exploring the system of language action and interaction as it abounds in poetry written by non-native writers, it might even be the case that we discover that poems are not necessarily summoned from 'empty space' but a space inhabited by the translingual imagination, as this thesis aims to show.

As we have seen so far, poetry written by non-native authors has not received much scholarly attention. This seems surprising given that following the rise of nationalist ideas in the nineteenth century writing poetry in the national language was regarded as beyond the reach of anybody outside the nation. In his attack on German Jewry in general and Heinrich Heine in particular the

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<sup>20</sup>Valéry, Paul. *The Art Of Poetry*, Volume VII, edited by J. Mathews (London: Routledge and Keagan Paul, 1958), p. 70.

<sup>21</sup>Valéry 1958: 71.

composer Richard Wagner claimed that 'to make poetry in a foreign tongue has hitherto been impossible, even to geniuses of the highest rank'.<sup>22</sup> Considering that Wagner was not the only one by far to comment in such a way, it is safe to say that non-native writers of poetry have been regarded with even more animosity and suspicion than their prose writing colleagues.

Therefore, by concentrating solely on the work of English poets of German-Jewish origin, my thesis sets out to close this gap in current literary research. I shall now explain my choice of poets.

### **Four women poets of German-Jewish origin**

For my research project I have chosen four poets who did not have a career as German poets before they came to Britain. Although Karen Gershon has stated that some of the poems she had written as a teenager had been published by German-Jewish magazines,<sup>23</sup> these publications do not amount to a literary career comparable to those mentioned above in the context of German exilic literature.

The work of Alice Beer has not been widely reviewed and she must be considered the least known of the four poets. Unlike her, Lotte Kramer, Gerda Mayer and Karen Gershon have received some scholarly interest in their role as Kindertransport poets. Peter Lawson's publications on them have certainly helped to introduce their work to a wider audience.<sup>24</sup> However, Lawson's interest lies mainly in the context of Holocaust or Anglo-Jewish writing rather than language switch and translingual aspects. Within the field of German-Jewish exile studies, both Kramer and Gershon have received some attention in Germany, the latter not least because the first volume of her autobiographical work *Das Unterkind* was first published there.<sup>25</sup> In 1999, a selection of Kramer's poetry was translated and published in a bilingual edition by Beate Hörr.<sup>26</sup> The volume with the title *Heimweh. Homesick* also includes a

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<sup>22</sup>As quoted in: Gilman, Sander L. 'Heine: Nietzsche's Other' in *Inscribing the Other* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), p. 105.

<sup>23</sup>Gershon, Karen. 'A Stranger in a Strange Land' *Jewish Quarterly* Vol. 7, No. 1 (26) Winter 1959/60, p. 10.

<sup>24</sup>Lawson, Peter. *Anglo-Jewish Poetry from Isaac Rosenberg to Elaine Feinstein* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2006).

<sup>25</sup>Gershon, Karen. *Das Unterkind: Eine Autobiographie* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1992).

<sup>26</sup>Kramer, Lotte. *Heimweh. Homesick. Gedichte*. Herausgegeben und übersetzt von Beate Hörr (Frankfurt/Main: Brandes und Apsel, 1999).

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conversation between Kramer and Hörr, in which the poet is asked about her self-identity.

*Hörr:* Würden Sie nicht gerne als eine jüdische Autorin bezeichnet werden?

*Kramer:* Oh ja, ich habe nichts dagegen, eine jüdische Autorin genannt zu werden, solange ich gleichzeitig eine englische Autorin bin.

*Hörr:* Auch eine deutsche?

*Kramer:* Nun ja, ich bin keine Deutsche mehr. Von deutscher Herkunft, ja. Das sicherlich. Ja, von deutscher Herkunft. Ich kann ganz ehrlich sagen, dass ich an Lyrik interessiert bin und dass das Schreiben über mein früheres Leben eben in das Gebiet des Deutsch-Jüdischen fällt und von da aus sich entwickelt hat. Aber insgesamt betrachtet, habe ich genauso viel über andere Themen geschrieben [...]. Ich möchte nicht in eine Art Sack der Holocaust oder der Deutsch-Jüdischen Lyrik gesteckt werden.<sup>27</sup>

In this passage, Kramer is very clear about herself as an English poet: while she has no objections to be read as a Jewish poet as well as an English poet, she explicitly rejects the suggestion that she could be considered a German poet. Although she acknowledges her German-Jewish heritage, she positions herself within the literature of her adopted country. The fact that Hörr's book introduces her as a 'German-Jewish poet'<sup>28</sup> seems to be symptomatic for a tendency in parts of German academia that attempts to reclaim those who had been ousted by Nazi Germany – at times without considering the views of those being reclaimed.

One crucial aspect when referring to the work of authors who moved from one country and language to another is how to position them, particularly when their move was forced and not voluntary. Three of the four poets left Nazi Europe on a *Kindertransport*; Alice Beer left her home country (Austria) as a young woman before the *Anschluss* in 1938, but was barred from returning there. Beer, Gershon, Kramer and Mayer all had some experience of and exposure to German literature before they arrived in Britain. Apart from the above mentioned exception of Gershon's teenage poetry, none of the poets had written and published in German. Thus, all four poets began their writing career in English.

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<sup>27</sup>Kramer 1999: 141.

<sup>28</sup>Kramer 1999: blurb and p. 2.

Another important criterion when choosing the women poets was that at the time of their dislocation they all needed to be old enough to experience their language switch consciously. I therefore restricted my choice to women who had had some formal education in German before they came to Britain: having communicated in a language within a formal setting (school) and having written the language as well as spoken implies a familiarity and proficiency that cannot immediately be replaced by another language. All four poets spent their childhood years in a German-speaking environment, and they all refer to the challenges they faced in the process of acquiring their new language – especially with respect to making this language their literary home. In an article for the *Jewish Quarterly* Gershon wrote

I am convinced that the change of language has completely changed my poetry: I would have written German for the love of it but I write English because there are things I wish to say. One cannot respond emotionally to words one did not know as a child, but has acquired consciously, with an effort; they never mean more than themselves, their quality cannot be felt with the senses. This makes my poetry very bare. On the other hand, when I began to write in English I had never read any English poetry and the experience was exhilarating, as if I were the first person ever to turn the language into poetry. Some of this excitement persists: the feeling that the meaning of a poem and the words to express it come from two different sources, the one unconscious and the other external; I am caught between them but in me they meet. It makes even the most personal poem seem more than my own: a discovery.<sup>29</sup>

The poet's reflection on her relation to her new language and on the impact of her language switch suggests that her two languages and her diverse cultural heritage all feed into her writing. What Gershon describes as the unconscious and the external seem to be two of the elements that can help us map the poet's location in culture.

The importance of this positioning process is reflected in my methodological approach which is built and extends on authorial interviews. Issues deriving from these interviews are examined through a variety of different theoretical concepts, such as identity, multilingualism, translation and loss, thereby helping shape my theoretical approach. While this research project also takes

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<sup>29</sup>Gershon, Karen. 'A Stranger in a Strange Land' *Jewish Quarterly* Vol. 7, No. 1 (26) Winter 1959/60, p. 10.

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into account the wider historical and social context as well as the specific circumstances of the four women poets, it is this particular interrelation between methodology and theory that carries it forward.

In the interviews with Lotte Kramer, Gerda Mayer and Alice Beer I have used open, non-leading questions, thereby allowing the poets to choose the emphasis of their narration. The deliberate lack of a standardised structure meant that the women provided valuable information with regard to what was (not) said. During the interview, all poets also engaged in conversations about the process of writing poetry in a second language in general and the formation of specific poems in particular. While I conducted one interview with Lotte Kramer, I had several additional conversations with Gerda Mayer and the late Alice Beer, not all of them electronically recorded. Karen Gershon died before I started my research; therefore I had to rely on her biographical writing as well as research conducted by other scholars.

My reason for choosing narrative, biographical interviews, which are based on an unstructured interviewing style, was to allow for the perspectives of the interviewees to be fully taken into account.<sup>30</sup> Although the four poets all come from a German-Jewish background, there are still considerable differences regarding the kind of Judaism that was prevalent in their respective families. Furthermore, the way in which they experienced non-Jewish citizens of their home countries as well as their British hosts is as diverse as their first contact points with English literature. Given the small number of interviewees and their apparent diversity, the open interviewing style allowed me to follow the poet's narratives and to discover issues relevant to them and their writing.

In preparation for the interviews I had researched primary as well as secondary literature relating to the three poets, helping me to identify areas which could be useful to further investigate, such as the circumstances that lead to the writing and publication of their first poems. The emphasis on the interviews was not on establishing historical facts but on learning about the women's views, and about understanding their narratives relating to their own life. Rebekka Göpfert has made a similar point in the context of her interviews with *Kindertransport* refugees:

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<sup>30</sup>See also Bryman, Alan, *Social Research Methods*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Oxford: University Press, 2004).

Der Historiker muss sich bei der Beschäftigung mit den Interviews vor Augen führen, dass er es nicht mit Tatsachen zu tun hat, sondern mit *Erinnerungen* an Tatsachen, die Rückschlüsse zulassen über die Bedeutung, die diese Erinnerungen für die interviewten Personen heute haben.<sup>31</sup>

All three women poets chose to be interviewed in their own home. Two of them were already widowed at the time of the interviews. Apart from the oldest poet, who lived in sheltered accommodation, the women still lived in their ‘family homes’, i.e. the places where they had moved many years before together with their partners. These homes were situated in suburban areas and of a similar standard: (semi-)detached houses or bungalows with a garden. The fact that all interviews took place at the poets’ private home meant that personal documents, such as photographs, drafts of poems, letters and various books, were accessible during our conversations and added another dimension.<sup>32</sup> Prior to the interviews I had informed the women about my general research interest. However, my initial research ideas were formulated in fairly general terms, thereby allowing much space for the interviewees’ own perspectives. In the interviews, I encouraged what Bryman has described as ‘going off at tangents’ and we often departed significantly from my (however vague) list of initial questions to follow up issues raised by the poets.<sup>33</sup> Our conversation covered large parts of the women’s lives, and their reflections on how external events impacted on their personal lives as well as their writing have added valuable insights to my research project.

Although my interviews with the poets cannot be considered to be ethnographic in a stricter sense of the term,<sup>34</sup> a number of aspects which the ethnographic interviewer has to consider are still true in the context of the kind of biographical, narrative interviews like the ones which I conducted. Radhika Viruru and Gaile S. Cannella have pointed out that ‘[most] researchers have multiple intentions and desires, some of which they are aware of and some of which they are not. The same can be said about the person being

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<sup>31</sup> Göpfert, Rebekka. *Der Jüdische Kindertransport von Deutschland nach England 1938/39* (Frankfurt/New York: Campus, 1999), p. 22.

<sup>32</sup> Bryman 2004: 322.

<sup>33</sup> Bryman 2004: 320.

<sup>34</sup> See for example Spradley, James P. *The Ethnographic Interview* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979).

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interviewed.<sup>35</sup> When I approached the poets, I did so as a German national living in England, as one who had moved to the country by choice. Although I had lived in England for some time and although my research project was based at a British university, my German background was still evident. I was therefore aware that while I wrote to them as a researcher based in England, to some extent I was also a German of the generation of the grandchildren of the perpetrators who had torn the families of these women apart. Both the interviewees and I were conscious of these different components of my identity. Consequently, our conversation was never one-sided as the poets asked not only questions about my personal situation and why I had come to live in England but also enquired about my views on asylum seekers, or even invited me to recite Schiller's ballads with them. When discussing their thoughts on writing literature in a second language, my background as a German-speaking migrant in Britain was a factor as the gender of plants and heavenly bodies along with colours of emotions and distinctive twists of fairy-tales entered the conversation.

The data collected in direct conversation with the poets has allowed me to gain valuable insights and to familiarise myself with the autobiographical narratives of the writers. This knowledge has influenced the angle and the focus of my research. However, it would have been insufficient as a sole basis for establishing a new concept of the translingual imagination. Therefore, my research questions have been shaped not only by my initial reading of the poems and my conversation with the poets, but also by Kellman's essay on the translingual imagination and existing research into literature written by dislocated authors. While the interviews highlighted certain issues, this has been followed up by a close examination of these issues in the light of suitable theoretical approaches, such as concepts of multilingualism when exploring the poets' 'life between languages', or theories of trauma when discussing aspects relating to the poets' loss. With regard to positioning the poets' experience in a wider historical context, the particular German connection between language, nation and identity has helped to shed light onto the complexity of their life as English women poets of German-Jewish origin.

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<sup>35</sup>Viruru, Radhika and Gaile S. Cannella. 'A Postcolonial Critique of the Ethnographic Interview' in *Qualitative Inquiry and the Conservative Challenge*, edited by Norman K. Denzin et al. (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2006), p. 188.

Utilising theories from different disciplines as well as considering the testimonies and biographies of other translingual writers, such as Eva Hoffman or Arthur Koestler, my criteria of the translingual imagination eventually began taking shape. Hence, these criteria derive from a process involving a dialogue with the women poets, a close reading of their work and multidisciplinary academic research. During the interviews and my initial research I found a number of recurring themes and interesting stylistic patterns which consequently deserved a closer examination. Some of these themes, such as departure and arrival, can be directly linked to biographic events and are well-documented in the work of other translingual writers as well. In contrast, the role and relevance of some of the stylistic devices, such as defamiliarization, seems to have a more complex relation with the translingual imagination and require the more detailed explanations and illustrations given towards the end of the theory chapter. Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out that the criteria of the translingual imagination which I develop in this project are non-hierarchical. They refer to literary themes as well as stylistic features and the sequence in which they are discussed does not imply any kind of order of precedence. In the subsequent analysis of the actual work of the four women poets I test the criteria to establish their usefulness for achieving a deeper understanding of poetry written by translingual authors.

When applying the criteria as tools in my exploration of the poetry, I do so in combination with a formal analysis. At times, my analysis of the poetry might seem very formal, particularly when I am examining meter and rhyme patterns. However, form and content cannot be separated in poetry and only the interplay of both produces the dance which Valéry refers to in the essay quoted earlier. Also, it is essential to show certain formal patterns in order to detect defamiliarizing elements.

In my examination of the biographical poems which I have discussed with the authors I refer to the poetic persona and the poet as almost interchangeably. While I am aware that the poetic voice is not necessarily identical with the poet, in those clearly defined circumstances where the poem is directly related to a biographic event I decided to refer to 'the poet' rather than 'lyric I' or 'poetic persona'.

## Chapter 1

Having established the territory as well as the methodological and theoretical approach of my research project, I shall now provide a brief outline of how the content of the chapters of this thesis is arranged.

### **Structure of the thesis**

Following the introductory chapter, the second chapter briefly looks at the long history of writing in a second language before turning to the rise of the vernacular as a scribal language. Focusing on the German context, I explore how questions about the origin of language changed the way in which humans have looked at language, and how these changes eventually impacted on the role of language in German society. I then argue the case that when, towards the end of the eighteenth century, Moses Mendelssohn encouraged his fellow Jews to participate in German cultural life through the German language, this can be seen as linked to the idea of language as a carrier of cultural and national identity.

Following the German-Jewish Enlightenment, German Jews became important contributors to and consumers of German culture. They identified with their country while at the same time they were confronted with growing anti-Semitism. Despite inflammatory pamphlets and increasing discrimination they continued to see themselves first and foremost as Germans, even after the Nazis took power and denied them their citizen rights. The chapter shows how, on their arrival in Britain, German-Jewish refugees were confronted with the conflicting elements of their complex identity, and suggests that issues of language and identity need to be addressed in the process of developing a theory of translingual writing.

In the light of the historical context and the central role of the German language in German national identity, in the third chapter I set out in search for a concept of identity that can accommodate refugees who were forced out of their home and language and who moved into a new language. As essentialist theories of identity cannot account for unstable, multi-faceted identities, I explore alternative models that regard identity as a process rather than a product. Testing concepts of hyphenated as well as hybrid identity I argue that while both are potentially problematic they can be useful for illustrating the complexity of human identity.

Based on my discussion in the previous chapter, where I have referred

to the central role that language played in German identity before the founding of the nation state, I will look at recent research into bilingualism in order to explore the effects the presence of more than one language has on an individual. Concluding that the concept of bi-lingualism is only of limited value in the context of writers who moved from one language into another, I shall then turn to the idea of trans-lingualism. After briefly commenting on Kellman's use of the term I will argue for a more restrictive approach that only applies 'translingual' to those writers who moved languages, and not to all multilingual authors. In order to formulate a clearly defined theory of translingualism that can also be used as a tool to explore the literature written by non-native authors, I investigate characteristic features of translingual lives, and examine their own accounts of their language switch. I will show that 'translation' is a recurring theme when these writers reflect on their lives and will therefore consider a number of aspects raised in the field of translation studies. Having established life changing biographical events resulting in the person 'being translated' as one of the criteria of the translingual, I then turn to aspects of loss and gain involved in this process. With regard to loss I will look into different psychological approaches to grief and examine to what extent they can explain – or even influence – an individual's response to a traumatic event such as having to leave home and losing loved ones. After briefly considering possible gender differences I shall investigate how feelings of dislocation and dis-embeddedness following the language switch can lead to new insights and can therefore be regarded as a potential gain. Examining the concept of defamiliarization and combining it with Benjamin's idea of 'reine Sprache' as well as Bakhtin's dialogic principle, two further criteria of the translingual will become evident: alongside the biographical event and issues of loss and gain, defamiliarizing techniques and intertextual references can be considered the characteristic traits of translingual writing.

Having developed my theory of the translingual, in the following chapters I shall employ the criteria as tools to analyse the poems – thereby showing the translingual imagination at work, and widening our understanding of poetry written by English women poets of German-Jewish origin. Biographical events, loss and gain, and intertexts will be discussed in separate chapters while I shall highlight defamiliarizing elements in all three of them.

Chapter 4, the first of the three analysis chapters will focus on the biographical

## Chapter 1

events, particularly those that led to the language move. Three of the four women poets came to England on the *Kindertransport*, and the experience of being torn away from their families and sent abroad into a safe but uncertain future has impacted on their writing. I shall demonstrate that departure is a recurring motif in their poems; and that even their own arrival in Britain remains overshadowed by their parents' departure to the death camps. Beer, in contrast, who is the only of the four poets who arrived in England as a young adult, puts a stronger emphasis on arrival.

The chapter will also illustrate that despite their shared background as 'English women poets of German-Jewish origin', their responses to their dislocation differ significantly. This is not only apparent in their diverse focal points with regard to the memories they revisit in their poems, but also in their reaction to their adopted country.

As chapter 4 has focused on biographical events that are relevant to the author's path of life, the next chapter focuses on aspects of loss and gain relating to time, place and language. While often linked to biographical events, the poems introduced here put a particular emphasis on the disappearance of the familiar, and in some cases also reflect on the emergence of new meaning, as for example in Kramer's poem about the moon.

My analysis of the poems will also demonstrate how the translingual poets discover new meaning in clichés and how they re-build what Rushdie has called 'imaginary homelands'<sup>36</sup> from fragments of their memory.

While chapter 4 and 5 have already touched on intertextual traces in the poetry of the four translingual poets, chapter 6 will take a more systematic approach and consider intertexts with regard to their cultural ancestry. Looking at Jewish, Judeo-Christian, and Christian intertextual references as well as Greek, Latin, German, and English intertexts, I shall demonstrate the rich and diverse heritage present in the poetry of the four women. Moreover, it will become apparent how the poems also encourage a new understanding of the work which they relate to.

In my concluding chapter I shall return to the research aims of this thesis,

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<sup>36</sup> Rushdie 1992: 10.

reflecting on how the criteria which I developed in chapter 3 can be regarded as useful tools to explore the work of authors who moved from one language into another and who are writing literature in a non-native language.

I will briefly recap what I discovered in my analysis of the poems and make the point that my theory of translingualism and can close the existing gap in current research into literature written by English poets of German-Jewish origin.

Having introduced the scope, methodology and structure of my thesis, I shall now proceed to chapter 2 which will provide the historical context of my research project.



## Chapter 2: Historical Context

Over the past decades, scholars have challenged not only the superiority of those writing in their ‘mother tongue’ but also the idea of any national literature existing independent of other literatures. Publications such as Steven G. Kellman’s *Translingual Imagination* (2000), Azade Seyhan’s *Writing Outside the Nation* (2001), or Yasemin Yildiz’s *Beyond the Mother Tongue* (2012) have all highlighted the achievements of non-native, and often dislocated writers. Post-colonial studies have arguably influenced the new approach to these writers, not least because both post-colonial and non-native writers have been regarded as the Other in Western societies. This chapter looks at how the rise of national languages has influenced our understanding of language in general and how this has impacted on the status of literature written in a second language. Following a short historical outline of writing literature in a second language, I will focus on the German context and the role language and literature have played in forming and a national and cultural identity. Considering the importance of *Bildung* as a way of participating in the German nation, this chapter will then provide the historical background that will allow a better understanding of the cultural heritage Karen Gershon, Lotte Kramer, Gerda Mayer and Alice Beer brought with them to their country of refuge.

### A brief history of writing literature in a second language

Historically, writing literature in a second language was nothing unusual. Before the invention of printing revolutionised the way in which written language could be reproduced, most literature was written in one of the dominant languages of their time – in the European or Western context these were Hebrew, Greek and later also Latin. From the beginning of written languages<sup>37</sup> until the invention of print<sup>38</sup> most writing was in one of the dominant script languages and these were not necessarily identical with the

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<sup>37</sup>‘The earliest examples of a conventional use of writing are on clay tablets discovered in various parts of the Middle East and south-east Europe discovered from around 3500 BC.’ Crystal, David. *The Cambridge Encyclopaedia of Language* (Cambridge; University Press, 1987), p. 196.

<sup>38</sup> I am referring here to the invention of the movable metal type by Johannes Gutenberg (1390s-1468) as earlier devices invented in Asia were not known in Europe and, therefore, had no impact on the European development. (See also Crystal 1997: 192.)

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spoken language of the illiterate majority. Walter Ong points out that at least until the ancient Greek civilisation, culture always meant oral culture and

[i]n an oral culture, knowledge, once acquired, had to be constantly repeated or it would be lost: fixed, formulaic thought patterns were essential for wisdom and effective administration.<sup>39</sup>

As the first fully vocalised alphabet, Greek could be read by a person who did not know the spoken language,<sup>40</sup> making it the first language that did not need any non-textual information to be learned and understood.<sup>41</sup> Consequently, Greek could develop into a script language that could be used for communication across time and distance. However, story-telling<sup>42</sup>, and poetry in particular, was still strongly influenced by the oral tradition and therefore highly formulaic.<sup>43</sup> This did not change significantly over the next centuries and authors writing in Latin, Greek or Hebrew were used to employing set phrases, expressions and clichés – even the great Homer is said to have ‘stitched together prefabricated parts’.<sup>44</sup> The fact that these *clichés* were orally transmitted elements of a culture that valued the reproduction of traditional tales in prefabricated forms is of huge importance with regard to the audience’s expectations confronting a writer.

At least until the Middle Ages languages were considered to be a tool,<sup>45</sup> and it was appropriate for a writer to change his ‘tool’ for the purpose of writing. Hebrew, Latin and Greek were employed by writers of different origins whose works were read by literate men (rarely women) across the Western world. Apuleius and Petrarch, for example, both wrote in Latin yet the fact that their work was written in a second language has never been a reason to question their status or quality.

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<sup>39</sup>Ong, Walter, *Orality and Literacy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1982), p. 24.

<sup>40</sup>Ong 1982: 90.

<sup>41</sup>As opposed to Hebrew and Arabic where the reader is expected to ‘add’ the vowels herself

<sup>42</sup>I am avoiding the term ‘oral literature’ here deliberately because Ong rightfully points out that using the term ‘oral literature’ for the oral tradition is like talking about horses as ‘wheelless automobiles’ (see Ong 1982: 11 ff.).

<sup>43</sup>See also ‘oral formulaic theory’ which was developed in the 1920s and 1930s by Milman Parry and describes formulas as ‘a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea’; M. Parry as quoted in Katie Wales. *Dictionary of Stylistics* (London and New York: Longman, 1989), p. 330.

<sup>44</sup>Ong 1982: 22.

<sup>45</sup>Kremnitz, Georg. *Mehrsprachigkeit in der Literatur. Wie Autoren ihre Sprache wählen* (Wien: Edition Praesens, 2004), p. 42.

Eventually, during the fourteenth century, the dominance of Latin began to fade and the rise of the 'mother tongue' meant that not only did the vernacular gain the status of an official language used at court but it also became the language of art and literature.<sup>46</sup> This happened for various reasons: on the one hand, the new European rulers were keen to establish some independence from Rome and were therefore open to the idea of promoting a national language. On the other hand, the dialects originally deriving from Latin had by then developed significantly and the concept of a national language allowed the speakers to focus on differences in an attempt to distinguish themselves from their neighbours, thereby creating a national identity.<sup>47</sup> As a result, the concord of scholarly thought that had been a characteristic of a unity of mind across the continent disbanded; the influence of Rome shrank, vernaculars were referred to as 'mother tongues' and the rise of national literatures began.

### **Luther's Bible translation and the rise of the vernacular**

When Martin Luther (1483-1546) published his German Bible translation in 1522, the German countries were a 'patchwork of large and small states'<sup>48</sup> with numerous different dialects spoken and no established 'standard' language – apart, of course, from Latin for the educated elites. While there certainly were 'many other individuals' involved in the process of 'forging a "German language"'<sup>49</sup>, it is fair to say that it was Luther's work that laid the foundations for a standardised written German and can be regarded as the most important step in establishing a vernacular as the print language. His translation did not only ensure that the uneducated masses were now able to understand the stories of the Bible but it also helped to create a language that was understood by all Germans independent of their local dialects.

According to the cultural historian Peter Burke, during the European Renaissance '[t]he translation of other texts, whether from Latin and Greek into vernacular languages or from vernacular languages into another, was a process which accelerated in this period and had important consequences for many

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<sup>46</sup>Borst, Arno, *Der Turmbau von Babel*, Band II/2 (München: dtv, 2002), p. 823.

<sup>47</sup>See also Joseph, John E., *Language and Identity. National, Ethnic, Religious* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p.106.

<sup>48</sup> Joseph 2004: 98.

<sup>49</sup>Joseph 2004: 99.

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languages'.<sup>50</sup> As exemplified in Luther's Bible translation, translations from other languages helped to extend and shape the vernacular. Often, new words had to be coined because of the 'impossibility of finding equivalents for some foreign expressions'.<sup>51</sup> During the sixteenth and seventeenth century, some European scholars complained about the 'poverty of the vernacular by comparison with Latin', but there are also several publications referring to 'linguistic abundance'.<sup>52</sup> In 1641, for example, Christian Gueintz, 'a German superintendent of schools' claimed that '[t]he perfection of the German language is so great that virtually nothing can be discovered that cannot be named in this language'.<sup>53</sup> While during the Renaissance the genre of essays in praise of the vernacular was widespread<sup>54</sup>, this quotation can also be read as an attempt to defend the vernacular against further foreign influences. As the vernacular had been stretched and extended through the import of translations from other languages, from the seventeenth century there was an intense discussion in the German speaking community about 'the invasion of German by French words'.<sup>55</sup> French had, indeed, become increasingly important not only as a political but also as an artistic, diplomatic and scientific language across the European continent. In the German countries, however, several scientists rejected international scientific terms, even those derived from Greek, and coined new German terms instead, such as *Wasserstoff* for hydrogen.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, newly founded universities<sup>57</sup> allow for teaching in the vernacular rather than in Latin: 'Christian Wolff's creation of a German vocabulary to discuss mathematics and philosophy encouraged the process of vernacularization in the eighteenth century'.<sup>58</sup>

As the rise of the vernaculars had weakened Latin as a *lingua franca*, French was becoming an increasingly important language for philosophical and

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<sup>50</sup> Burke, Peter. *Languages and Communities in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 79.

<sup>51</sup> Burke 2004: 79.

<sup>52</sup> Burke 2004: 18.

<sup>53</sup> as quoted in Burke 2004: 18.

<sup>54</sup> for example Dante's treatise *De vulgari eloquentia* (between 1301 and 1305)

<sup>55</sup> Burke 2004: 150.

<sup>56</sup> Burke 2004: 150.

<sup>57</sup> for example the University in Halle, where, in the late seventeenth century, Christian Thomasius was allowed to lecture in German after he had previously attempted to do so in Leipzig (Burke 2000: 77.)

<sup>58</sup> Burke 2004: 77.

scientific exchange between European scholar, as well as the language of the elite and as a literary choice.<sup>59</sup>

The Enlightenment regarded language as a neutral tool to express ideas about a reality that existed independently outside of language.<sup>60</sup> While Latin, as the dominant language of scholasticism, had lost much of its influence, basic concepts of language and literature still remained intact and would not change until early Romanticism.

### **Paradigm change**

Nevertheless, during the eighteenth century an argument arose ‘over the role of innate ideas in the development of thoughts and language’.<sup>61</sup> As scholars were moving away from metaphysics, nature was increasingly regarded as the true source of power. Even the divine origin of language was eventually questioned.

In his essay ‘Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprachen’ the German scholar Johann Gottfried Herder rejects ‘the supranatural theory of an origin of language as a divine gift’ as well as ‘a naturalistic derivation of language’<sup>62</sup> and suggests instead that language is a phenomenon derived from human transactions. He promotes the view that a language reflects the character of its nation: as to him ‘language is both means of cognition and means of communication’.<sup>63</sup> Herder’s writing was of great influence in establishing a link between language and national identity. In *Fragmente* he ‘stressed the untranslatability of national cultures, the extent to which they may be contained *in*, and not simply expressed *by*, a given language’.<sup>64</sup> Thus, although Herder argues as a rationalist against a divine origin of human language, he nevertheless promotes an essentialist account of the relation between language and nation. The latter was taken up by German Romanticism and Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835) developed Herder’s idea further when he wrote

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<sup>59</sup> Borst 1995: p.1395.

<sup>60</sup> Kremnitz 2004: 56.

<sup>61</sup> Crystal 1987: 406.

<sup>62</sup> Behler, Ernst, *German Romantic Literary Theory* (Cambridge: University Press, 1993), p. 265.

<sup>63</sup> Esterhammer 2000: 78.

<sup>64</sup> Mengham 1993: 126.

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Man kann [...] als allgemein anerkannt annehmen, dass die verschiedenen Sprachen die Organe der eigenthümlichen Denk- und Empfindungsarten der Nationen ausmachen, dass eine grosse Anzahl von Gegenständen erst durch die sie bezeichnenden Wörter geschaffen werden, und nur in ihnen ihr Daseyn haben [...].<sup>65</sup>

With the rise of Romanticism the emphasis shifted from language as a neutral tool to language as the mother of the nation. The term ‘mother tongue’ became increasingly popular, and during the nineteenth century, an almost inflationary use of the term *Muttersprache*, *mother tongue*, or *materna lingua* can be detected. Around the same time a new theory of literature emerged. The comparatist Ernst Behler suggests that the ‘literary revolution’<sup>66</sup> of this period can be characterised as a ‘basic shift in the appreciation of art and literature as a move away from the model of representation to that of creation, from mimetic imitation to creative production’.<sup>67</sup> Before early Romanticism, the poet was not the creator of something new – even writers such as Martin Opitz (1597-1639) or Andreas Gryphius (1616-1664) were not only allowed but almost expected to use ‘prefabricated elements’.<sup>68</sup> With early Romanticism, literary work was regarded as emerging from ‘a creative principle in the human mind’, from ‘that power of genius capable of producing entire works of its own’.<sup>69</sup> As languages were considered a national entity, literature written in a given language became nationalised, too, and the achievements deriving from the ‘power of genius’ of writers writing in this language were considered a national achievement. Timothy Brennan has pointed out that ‘literary myth [...] has been complicit in the creation of nations’ and claimed that they ‘depend for their existence on an apparatus of cultural fictions in which imaginative literature plays a decisive role’.<sup>70</sup> Looking at the German countries, where the ‘Nibelungenlied’ was rediscovered in the late eighteenth century, there

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<sup>65</sup> Humboldt, Wilhelm von. *Schriften zur Sprachphilosophie*, edited by Andreas Flitner and Klaus Giel (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1963), p. 26.

<sup>66</sup> Behler 1993: 300.

<sup>67</sup> Behler 1993: 301.

<sup>68</sup> Particularly as Martin Opitz published his *Buch von der deutschen Poeterey* (1624) where set out rules about how to write German poetry – a book which received much praise as it marked the beginning of a German poetry as distinct from neo-Latin poetry. Nevertheless, it was later criticised for undermining any sense of poetic creativity. See Walter Hinderer (ed.), *Geschichte der deutschen Lyrik vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2001).

<sup>69</sup> Behler 1993: 302.

<sup>70</sup> Brennan, Timothy. ‘The National Longing for Form’ in *Nation and Narration*, edited by Homi K. Bhabha (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 49

certainly is evidence for a search for national myth and ancient tradition. While the first modern edition published by Johann Jakob Bodmer in 1767 did not receive a very enthusiastic response over the following sixty years it inspired more than thirty publications by a number of German poets and scholars. 'With the advent of romanticism and the national fervour which swept through the country at the time of the Napoleonic Wars, enthusiasm for the German past in general and the Middle Ages in particular increased among poets as well as scholars'.<sup>71</sup> Gottfried Weber, a German Nibelungen scholar, underlines this by pointing out that 'in den Jahren des Deutschen Freiheitskrieges August Zenne [...] eine "Feld- und Zeltausgabe des Nibelungenliedes [...] veröffentlichte, da viele Jünglinge das Nibelungenlied in den Kampf gegen Napoleon mitnehmen wollten.'<sup>72</sup> Eventually, Goethe, who had previously in private criticised the Nibelungenlied's lack of quality,<sup>73</sup> voiced his support for making it a national epos.<sup>74</sup> Soon, it earned its place in the national canon. At a time when the Germans, who saw themselves as a cultural nation, aspired to becoming one also in territorial terms, the national myth served as a story of origin. While Richard Wagner's *Der Ring der Nibelungen* (which was started in 1848 but only finished after the founding of a German state in 1874) is arguably the best known work inspired by the epos, the influence of the Nibelungenlied has left its mark on the work of German artists throughout the nineteenth century. The ethos promoted by the Nibelungenlied, of brave knights who stand loyal to their fellow men and who do not fear death could also be utilised for the purpose of war. As model for a fearless and loyal Germanic soldier – it was omnipresent during the time of the Franco Prussian War, a war that would eventually lead to the unification Germany in 1871.

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<sup>71</sup> McConnell, Winder. *The Nibelungenlied* (Boston: Twayne, 1984), p. 91.

<sup>72</sup> Weber, Gottfried. *Heldendichtung II: Nibelungenlied*, 2., durchgesehene und ergänzte Auflage (Stuttgart: Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1961), p. 3-4.

<sup>73</sup> Goethe's diary from 16 November 1808, 'Und die Nibelungen so furchtbar, weil es eine Dichtung ohne Reflex ist; und die Helden wie eherner Wesen nur durch und für sich existieren' (Grimm, Gunther E., 'Goethe und das Nibelungenlied' published online in *Goethezeitportal*, [www.goethezeitportal.de/fileadmin/PDF/wissen/projekte-pool/rezeption\\_nibelungen/goethe\\_grimm.pdf](http://www.goethezeitportal.de/fileadmin/PDF/wissen/projekte-pool/rezeption_nibelungen/goethe_grimm.pdf), 2006, p.8); retrieved on 10.05.2010.

<sup>74</sup> August 1827: 'Die Kenntniß dieses Gedichts gehört zu einer Bildungsstufe der Nation. Und zwar deswegen, weil es die Einbildungskraft erhöht, das Gefühl anregt, die Neu-gierde erweckt, und um sie zu befriedigen uns zu einem Urtheil auffordert. Jedermann sollte es lesen, damit er nach dem Maaß seines Vermögens die Wirkung davon empfangt.' (Grimm 2006: p. 31)

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Beyond the national epos, German literature was perhaps the single most important element in the establishment of a German nation. It united those who shared in it and excluded all those who did not. This German particularity had a significant impact on the German-Jewish Enlightenment, as we shall see in the following section.

### **Jewish-German history: *Haskalah* and Jewish Emancipation**

Jews in Germany have a long history: there is evidence of a Jewish community in Cologne as early as 321, and by the end of the eleventh century Jewish communities were in existence in many political and economic centres along major rivers like the Rhine, the Danube and the Elbe as well as many other smaller waterways. Unlike experience in most other European countries, Jews were never fully expelled from the German territories until the Holocaust. The historians Mordechai Breuer and Michael Graetz have rightly pointed out 'Juden wohnten in Deutschland länger als in allen anderen Gegenden Europas, mit Ausnahme Italiens'.<sup>75</sup> Taking this long co-existence into account it is not surprising that German and Jewish culture have influenced each other and that, despite many difficulties and challenges, a German-Jewish sense of identity developed.

Throughout the Middle Ages, German Jewish communities tended to be relatively small, 'auch im Hoch- und Spätmittelalter zählte eine Großgemeinde selten mehr als 1000 Personen'.<sup>76</sup> From the eleventh century onwards the situation of German Jews worsened significantly, not least because the Jesus' martyrdom (and a supposed Jewish responsibility) became increasingly a focus of Christian religion.<sup>77</sup> the first crusade (1096-1099) threatened the Jewish communities in France and particularly in the Rhineland area.<sup>78</sup> While the economic and political discrimination against German Jewry remained oppressive and made the lives of Jews in Germany often very difficult,<sup>79</sup> from the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards, a small group of Christian scholars, such as Johannes

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<sup>75</sup> Meyer, Michael A. *Deutsch-jüdische Geschichte der Neuzeit*, Bd. 1(München: Beck 2000), p. 19.

<sup>76</sup> Meyer 2000: 20.

<sup>77</sup> Meyer 2000: 25.

<sup>78</sup> Beinhardt, Haim. *Geschichte der Juden* (Augsburg: Bechtermünz, 1998), p. 39.

<sup>79</sup> See for example Franz Kobler (ed.). *Juden und Judentum in deutschen Briefen aus drei Jahrhunderten* (Königstein: Jüdischer Verlag Athenäum, 1984), p. 15.

Reuchlin (1455-1522) expressed an increasing interest in Judaism.<sup>80</sup> Following the birth of the Protestant church, their ministers were required to have some knowledge of Hebrew and the 'Old Testament'. However, Martin Luther's anti-Semitic hate sermons, after he failed to convert all Jews to Protestantism, had a serious impact on the Protestant attitude towards the Jewish community.<sup>81</sup> From 1538 Luther published numerous anti-Semitic works, culminating in *Von den Juden und iren Lügen* (1543) where he suggests how to put anti-Semitism into practice:

In seiner Schrift *Von den Juden und iren Lügen* (1543) wandte er sich zwar gegen eine physische Vernichtung der Juden, forderte aber dazu auf, ihre Synagogen und Häuser zu verbrennen, ihre Bücher zu konfiszieren, ihren Rabbinern das Lehren zu verbieten, ihre Bewegungsfreiheit auf das schärfste zu beschränken und sie stat des Wuchers zu schwerster und erniedrigendster körperlicher Arbeit zu zwingen.<sup>82</sup>

While further anti-Semitic publications by Christian scholars followed, e.g. *Entdecktes Judentum* (1700) by Johann Andreas Eisenmenger, the seventeenth and eighteenth century saw a wave of activities to proselytise German Jews, often combined with financial incentives for the newly baptised.<sup>83</sup> At the same time, however, personal contacts and correspondence between Christian and Jewish scholars developed<sup>84</sup> and there is also evidence that from the sixteenth century onwards the Jewish communities took an increasing interest in secular, non-Jewish literature, such as Yiddish translations of *Kaiser Oktavian* or *Eulenspiegel*.<sup>85</sup> The historian Heinz Mosche Graupe has even argued that the so-called Jewish Enlightenment at the end of the eighteenth century was not completely unanticipated as it was preceded by at least a century of slow rapprochement.

Unter der Decke der starren traditionellen Lebenshaltung begannen schon im 17. Jahrhundert Auflockerungen in die verschiedensten Kreise der jüdischen Bevölkerung zu dringen, die nicht als zufällige Ausnahmereignisse, sondern als symptomatisch für die sich ändernde geistige Haltung und innere Beziehung der Juden zu ihrer

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<sup>80</sup> Graupe, Heinz Mosche, *Die Entstehung des modernen Judentums. Geistesgeschichte der deutschen Juden 1650-1942*, 2<sup>nd</sup>, revised edition (Hamburg: Helmut Buske Verlag, 1977), p. 71; see also Fischer, Steven, *A History of Language* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), p. 153-154.

<sup>81</sup> Graupe 1977: 72.

<sup>82</sup> Breuer, Mordechai. 'Prolog' in *Deutsch-jüdische Geschichte der Neuzeit*, Band 1: Tradition und Aufklärung; edited by Michael A. Meyer (München: Beck, 2000), p. 72.

<sup>83</sup> Graupe 1977: 74; most notably in Hamburg (Esdras Edzardi, 1629-1708) and Halle (Professor Callemberg 1694-1760).

<sup>84</sup> Graupe 1977: 75.

<sup>85</sup> Meyer 2000: 213.

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Lebensweise und zu ihrer Umwelt angesehen werden müssen. So war die jüdische Aufklärung keine plötzliche revolutionäre Wende; sie war durch einen langsamen Prozeß von mehr als einhundert Jahren vorbereitet.<sup>86</sup>

As European Enlightenment provided the means for bourgeois emancipation, the *Haskalah* (Hebrew for *Enlightenment*) paved the way for Jewish emancipation. Before the founding of the nation state, German language and culture were the sole carriers of German national identity. The Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn understood the obvious implication of this for German Jews: in acquiring the language and by participating in and contributing to the culture, they could demonstrate their belonging to the German nation.<sup>87</sup> Mendelssohn saw Enlightenment as a ‘yet uncompleted process of education in the use of reason, which should be open to all’.<sup>88</sup> ‘All’ clearly included the Jewish community who had been widely excluded from educational institutions. Promoting *Bildung*, Mendelssohn insisted that Jews should not ‘divorce themselves from the cultural connections with the countries where they dwell’<sup>89</sup> but, as Jews, participate in civic life.

As in the gentile world, Enlightenment posed a challenge to the authority of religion and the ‘divine’ language for the Jews. While Hebrew was used only for religious purposes the vernacular was Yiddish. Though closely related to German (but nevertheless regarded as inferior by many Gentiles<sup>90</sup>), Yiddish uses the Hebrew *alephbet*. Consequently, while most German Jews could communicate verbally with their non-Jewish neighbours, few of them were able, or even encouraged, to study German texts as it was not part of their education which was focused on religious contents. It was Moses Mendelssohn who made the case that German Jews should be educated in both: in Hebrew because it was the language of their religious identity and in German, because it was the language of their cultural identity.<sup>91</sup> For Mendelssohn, participating

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<sup>86</sup> Graupe 1977: 10.

<sup>87</sup> Schulte 1993: 20.

<sup>88</sup> Outram 2005: 1.

<sup>89</sup> Cohn-Sherbok, Dan. *Fifty Key Jewish Thinkers* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 94.

<sup>90</sup> see e.g. Goethe on the Judengasse in Frankfurt, as quoted by Amos Elon in *Founder: A Portrait of the First Rothschild and His Time* (New York: Viking, 1996).

<sup>91</sup> Mendelssohn promoted the importance of learning German (as opposed to relying on Yiddish alone) as, according to Amos Elon, he had realised very early that ‘without fluency in Hebrew (German Jews) would cease to be a cultural community; without fluency in German they would remain foreigners forever’ (Elon 2003: 52).

in German culture did not entail a rejection of religious Jewish life. On the contrary, studying German as well as Hebrew would lead the individual to become a full member of the wider society as the German language was the secular language both Jewish and non-Jewish Germans shared. To achieve this educational goal, Mendelssohn translated the Pentateuch into German (1773-1783) 'so that Jews would be able to learn the language of the country in which they lived' and edited a 'commentary on Scripture (*Biur*) which combined Jewish scholarship with secular thought'.<sup>92</sup> By using Hebrew letters for his translation, he eased his fellow Jews' passage from Yiddish to German.<sup>93</sup>

While Mendelssohn saw himself as a philosopher of Enlightenment and counted many non-Jewish intellectuals of his time amongst his friends, most notably the writers Gotthold Ephraim Lessing and Christoph Friedrich Nicolai, he was very clear about the place Judaism occupied in his life and the importance to him of Jewish laws such as *kashrut*.<sup>94</sup> His struggle to claim a place for Jews within the wider society was not in opposition to his understanding of Judaism.<sup>95</sup> A 'strong advocate of religious toleration'<sup>96</sup> Mendelssohn argued in *Jerusalem* also 'for the individuality of all religious traditions'<sup>97</sup> and opposed the idea of a state religion.

Michael A. Meyer points out that one of the consequences of the Jewish Enlightenment was that while it opened up new perspectives for modern Jews, it also caused many of them to question traditional Judaism, and, he claims, even catapulted them into an identity crisis.<sup>98</sup> While in earlier centuries Jewish life had mainly happened behind the walls of the ghetto, it now opened up to and became increasingly affected by the developments outside the boundaries of the Jewish community. Had they previously understood themselves as 'Jews' with a clear and unambiguous social identity, distinct from the gentile world,

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<sup>92</sup> Cohn-Sherbok 1997: 93.

<sup>93</sup> See also Meyer 2000: 357 where it is stated that Mendelssohn's translation of the Pentateuch was a symbolic beginning of Jewish acculturation.

<sup>94</sup> *Kashrut* is the Jewish dietary law regarding the choice, preparation and combination of ingredients. Michael Graetz writes that Mendelssohn did not attend the prestigious *Montagsclub* because the meal served there would not have been kosher. Meyer, Michael A. et al. (eds.), *Deutsch-jüdische Geschichte der Neuzeit*, Band 1: Tradition und Aufklärung (München: Beck, 2000), p.265.

<sup>95</sup> Arendt, Hannah. 'Aufklärung und Judenfrage' in *Die verborgene Tradition* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1976, pp.108-126), p.112. The article was first published in *Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland*, Jg.4, Nr .2/3, Berlin 1932.

<sup>96</sup> Popkin 1995: 482

<sup>97</sup> Cohn-Sherbok 1997: 94.

<sup>98</sup> Meyer, Michael. *Jüdische Identität in der Moderne* (Frankfurt: Jüdischer Verlag, 1992), p. 50.

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they now had to engage with people with different values and cope with the changing emotional significance attached to their Jewish identity.<sup>99</sup>

The shift of emphasis from a purely religious education, which had exclusively focused on Hebrew texts, to a more secular one that encouraged studying scientific and literary texts soon resulted in the emergence of a new Jewish intellectual elite that became increasingly independent from traditional Jewish authorities.<sup>100</sup> These intellectuals engaged with non-Jewish scholars and utilised their skills to address philosophical and scientific questions outside traditional Jewish studies.<sup>101</sup> Within a few years German Jews became leading producers, performers and consumers of German secular culture. Though full emancipation of the German Jewry was not achieved until the founding of a united German state, Mendelssohn's work was ground-breaking in its attempt to lead German Jews from the ghetto into the midst of society.

While the overall political situation changed more slowly, some discriminatory anti-Jewish legislation was partly removed.<sup>102</sup> When, as part of a reform of the Prussian state in 1806, Jewish emancipation was discussed in the Prussian government, it is striking how negative and anti-Semitic the response from some of the ministries was, particularly the reaction from the finance department. A far more progressive response, it has to be said, came from the department for Culture and Education, which at the time was headed by Wilhelm von Humboldt.<sup>103</sup> The more the political emancipation progressed, the more German Jewry was confronted with growing grass-root anti-Jewish resentment. While anti-Jewish prejudice had existed before and economic envy had always been a core feature of it, as long as Jews had been forcefully excluded from German cultural and intellectual life, they did not pose a 'threat'. Now, that they had become more and more part of German cultural and intellectual life, and 'in crucial ways were to become partially constitutive of it' this 'aroused the vehement indignation of their anti-Semitic opponents'.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> See Taylor and Moghaddam 1994: 61.

<sup>100</sup> Meyer 2000: 251.

<sup>101</sup> Meyer 2000: 352.

<sup>102</sup> e.g. abolishment of the 'Leibzoll' in Prussia in 1787.

<sup>103</sup> Jersch-Wenzel, Stefi, 'Rechtslage und Emanzipation' in *Deutsch-jüdische Geschichte der Neuzeit, Band 2*, edited by Michael A. Meyer (München: Beck, 2000, pp.15-56), p.33-35.

<sup>104</sup> Aschheim, Steven E. *Culture and Catastrophe* (London: Macmillan, 1996), p. 1.

### Anti-Semitism and Jewish responses

Some German writers and academics regarded German Jews as intruders that had to be kept out. In 1810/11 the German romantic poets Achim von Arnim and Clemens Brentano founded the ‘Christlich-deutsche Tischgesellschaft’ (to be followed in 1816 by Brentano’s even more explicit ‘Christlich-germanische Tischgesellschaft’) that excluded even non-Christian born converts. It also condemned modernisation and Jewish economic activities and promoted a pre-industrial society with Christianity as state religion.<sup>105</sup> This development can be regarded as a counter reaction against the strong emphasis on rationalism that had dominated during the era of Enlightenment. While the universalism of the Enlightenment had opened the gates for German Jewry to enter cultural and intellectual German life, Romanticism now threatened their right to fully participate in society. As German Jews actively and successfully lobbied for their emancipation, anti-Jewish prejudice developed into an anti-Jewish movement.<sup>106</sup>

The change in the general mood of the gentile population can be seen in the reception of Wagner’s *Das Judenthum in der Musik*. When it first came out in 1869 it still unleashed a wave of anger and protest against it in Germany. According to Pulzer there were ‘no fewer than 170 published protests and attacks’.<sup>107</sup> During the following years, however, anti-Semitism became more and more acceptable in Germany. Wagner’s text was increasingly read as foundational, forcing the Jews, who by no means constituted a homogenous group, to respond.

There was no agreement among the German Jews as to what extent, if at all, Jews should assimilate. In 1810 the first reform synagogue opened in Jeesen and a growing number of German Jews identified with a movement that aimed to modernise religious Judaism while keeping its tradition meaningful and alive for a Jewish community that lived in a rapidly changing world.<sup>108</sup> On the other

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<sup>105</sup> Jersch-Wenzel 2000: 38.

<sup>106</sup> Pulzer 2000: 194.

<sup>107</sup> Pulzer 2000: 195; Following its earlier anonymous publication in 1850 there had already been some criticism of the emphasis on the supposed Christian-Jewish antagonism (Katz 1985: 80).

<sup>108</sup> Tobias, Peter. *Liberal Judaism: A Judaism for the Twenty-First Century* (London: Liberal Judaism, 2007), p. 156, and Meyer, Michael A. ‘Jüdische Gemeinden im Übergang’ in *Deutsch-jüdische Geschichte der Neuzeit*, Band 2 (München: Beck, 2000), p. 125-134.

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hand, there were also those who wanted to abandon their Jewish roots altogether, or, who refused to take part in any modernisation.

In search of a Jewish identity ‘die es wert wäre, gegen die fortdauernde Feindseligkeit von außen bewahrt zu werden’<sup>109</sup> a group of young, highly acculturated Jewish intellectuals founded the ‘Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden’ in 1819. They wanted to explore Judaism as ‘fortwirkende Kraft in der Geschichte’.<sup>110</sup> In examining Jewish literature from a historical perspective and in applying scientific tools rather than following a Talmudic tradition they were looking for the ‘essence’ of Judaism and its place in modern Europe. Amos Elon stresses that ‘there is no doubt that Mendelssohn paved the way for Reform Judaism and the Science of Judaism, which made religion the object of modern cultural study’.<sup>111</sup> Although, as has been pointed out, this was by no means what Mendelssohn had intended, the founders of the ‘Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden’ were aware

dass jüdische Identität den Versuchungen der fortschreitenden Integration und der anhaltenden politischen Zurückweisung nicht würde standhalten können ohne das verinnerlichte Bewußtsein von einer erforschten und strukturierten jüdischen Vergangenheit.<sup>112</sup>

The group faced severe opposition from Neo-Orthodoxy. Its founder Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888) for example claimed ‘Lieber Jude ohne Wissenschaft als Wissenschaft ohne Judentum’.<sup>113</sup> In the orthodox view, the Torah was given by God without any human interference, containing all possible interpretations. The reformist approach to regard the Torah not as a divine but as a historical document, ‘as part of the process of human endeavour to discover truth: a product of that search at a particular point of the journey rather than the final word’<sup>114</sup> was inconsistent with orthodox convictions. From the 1840s onwards the image of the rabbi, too, changed: an increasing number of reform-orientated rabbis began to receive not only a religious but also a formal university education.<sup>115</sup> The process of modernising Judaism in the German countries continued and German Jews made some

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<sup>109</sup> Meyer 2000: 138.

<sup>110</sup> Meyer 2000: 139.

<sup>111</sup> Elon 2003: 54.

<sup>112</sup> Meyer 2000: 145.

<sup>113</sup> as quoted by Meyer 2000: 155.

<sup>114</sup> Tobias 2007: 56.

<sup>115</sup> Meyer 2000: 166.

significant progress towards full emancipation: in 1848 the Frankfurter Nationalversammlung includes also some Jewish delegates and fourteen years later the ‘Gesetz über die bürgerliche Gleichstellung der Juden’ completes the process of legal emancipation in Baden.<sup>116</sup>

However, with the founding of the German state in 1871 and increasing anti-Semitism<sup>117</sup> German Jews were facing new challenges. The nation state postulated citizens with a single language and a single identity. Moses Mendelssohn’s conviction that both, Hebrew and German should form the identity of German Jews became a problem for his descendants. Increasing numbers of Eastern European Jewish refugees added to the dilemma. While they were regarded as ‘brothers’ their lifestyle and the way they presented themselves differed significantly from that of their already assimilated Western part of the family and clearly marked them out as ‘strangers’, to adopt Steven Aschheim’s terminology. For most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Eastern European Jews, threatened by pogroms in Russia, Poland and the Baltic, making their way westwards, were therefore met with a mixture of pity and suspicion. The majority of Western Jews saw themselves as different from the ‘Ostjuden’ whom they charitably supported but did not regard as their equals. Highly assimilated German Jews did not want to be reminded of these relatives at all:

For assimilation was not merely the conscious attempt to *blend* into new social and cultural environments but was also purposeful, even programmatic, *dissociation* from traditional Jewish cultural and national moorings.<sup>118</sup>

In response, assimilated Jews sought even stronger conformity with everything German, often to the degree of denying their Jewish identity altogether.

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<sup>116</sup> Meyer 2000: 388.

<sup>117</sup> The term itself was coined by Wilhelm Marr who was one of the initiators of the *Antisemiten-Liga*, a group that was founded on Yom Kippur 1879 in Berlin. The context in which this term occurred is quite important: the title of the pamphlet published by Marr in 1879 was ‘Der Sieg des Judenthums über das Germanenthum’. The wording of the title implied that the antagonism was not a religious one (otherwise it should have been Jews and Christians) but one between two ethnicities (see also Pulzer 2000: 193). According to Peter Pulzer, this anti-Semitism was a reaction to Jewish emancipation and differed from the centuries-old hate directed against the Jews by the church because they would not accept Jesus as the Messiah. As long as the hate had derived Christian religion, Jews had still the chance to escape this hatred by converting to Christianity. The new hate was not addressed at somebody inferior but at citizens of the same state who were no longer looked down upon but who were feared because of their potential economic and political power.

<sup>118</sup> Aschheim, Steven E. *Brothers and Strangers* (Madison and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), p. 5.

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Others, influenced by the appalling situation of Jewish communities in Eastern Europe<sup>119</sup> and the need to find a new home for the refugees, developed, in line with the spirit of the 19<sup>th</sup> century where nationalism was a dominant feature, Zionism. In short, while some Jews saw a future for the development of a German-Jewish identity, others felt that a dual<sup>120</sup> identity was not possible and that Jews consequently had to decide whether they wanted to be Jews or Germans. While subscribing to a multiple identity with a Jewish element was a constant challenge, the other options meant either to deny one's Jewishness and to assimilate completely, or to deny the German (or European) identity and to define Jewishness as a national identity, as promoted by political Zionism.

### Zionism and questions of Jewish identity

The founder of political Zionism was the Austrian journalist Theodor Herzl (1860-1904). In 1897, together with Max Nordau (1849-1923) and Oskar Marmorek (1863-1909) he organised the '1. Zionistischer Weltkongress' which took place in Basel from 29<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> August. The principal agenda item of the *Weltkongress* was the establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine, formulated in the Basler Programm.<sup>121</sup> Nordau, a Hungarian born doctor and writer, was very close to Theodor Herzl although, according to George Mosse he was 'more sober' and 'no romanticism clouded his vision, no concern with Jewish myths and symbols'.<sup>122</sup> When Nordau argued for the necessity of a Jewish state he had the Eastern European Jews in mind – his idea of a Jewish state was a philanthropic not an ideological project.<sup>123</sup> Herzl, in contrast, in his utopian study *Altneuland* (1902) insisted that Jews had to become one nation again and

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<sup>119</sup> From 1880 increasing numbers of Jews from Russia, Romania and Galicia who had fled pogroms and extreme poverty arrived in Germany.

<sup>120</sup> Marsha Rozenblit points out that 'Jews in Habsburg Austria developed a tripartite identity in which they were Austrian by political loyalty, German (or Czech or Polish) by cultural affiliation, and Jewish in an ethnic sense' (Rozenblit, *Reconstructing a National Identity: The Jews of Habsburg Austria during World War I* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 4).

<sup>121</sup> 'Der Zionismus erstrebt die Schaffung einer öffentlich-rechtlich gesicherten Heimstätte in Palästina für diejenigen Juden, die sich nicht anderswo assimilieren können oder wollen.' (Extract from the *Basler Programm*)

<sup>122</sup> Mosse 1993: 168. However, considering his 'Muskeljudentum', while certainly rejecting traditional Jewish myth and symbolism, Nordau seems to have invented a new Jewish 'myth'.

<sup>123</sup> Lowenstein, Steven, 'Ideologie und Identität' in *Deutsch-jüdische Geschichte der Neuzeit*, Band 3, edited by Michael Meyer (München: Beck, 2000), p. 291.

that the only possible way to avoid anti-Semitism was the founding of a Jewish state for all Jews.<sup>124</sup>

Max Nordau, who had previously applied the term 'degeneration' in the context of the arts now projected 'upon the East European Jews of the Diaspora the physical and mental sickness that characterized the modern in the arts – the stereotype of the degenerate'.<sup>125</sup> Thus, he agreed with anti-Semitic stereotypes insofar as he felt that there was something genuinely wrong with Eastern Jews. However, by introducing his concept of 'Muskeljudentum' he also suggested a solution: Nordau's aim was, in line with the ideals of his time, 'the harmonious formation of the human body, firm control over muscles, the steeling of will, and increasing self-confidence'<sup>126</sup> to create a new Jewry, fit for survival. He saw political Zionism as a way to save Eastern European Jews from pogroms, giving them a new home in Palestine – as farmers and soldiers, leaving the spirit of the ghetto behind and becoming the 'new' Jews.

Cultural Zionism, in contrast to political Zionism, was not interested in founding a Jewish state but regarded Palestine as the desired setting for a new Jewish cultural movement. Similar to the features of romantic nationalism where the emphasis also lay on cultural aspects,<sup>127</sup> cultural Zionists like Martin Buber (1878-1965) or Gershom Scholem (1897-1982) made the link between nature and geographical features of the 'Heimat' and the nature of a people, or at least they felt that the landscape would influence the cultural creation and religious experience of the Jewish people. German Zionists, both political and cultural, were often driven by their opposition to their highly assimilated parent generation whom they accused of denying their Jewish roots. Rather than feeling pity for Eastern European Jews who came to Germany as refugees, they felt admiration for the 'traditional' Judaism they still embodied. Influenced by their German cultural context, German Zionists applied the concept of romantic nationalism, i. e. the importance of a national language and single cultural identity to the Zionist project.

This argument led to some fierce criticism from those German Jews, who saw themselves as Europeans, not as Orientals. In their eyes Zionism was the

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<sup>124</sup> Cohn-Sherbok 1997: 55.

<sup>125</sup> Mosse 1993: 163.

<sup>126</sup> Mosse 1993: 165.

<sup>127</sup> See for example Hartmut Rosa 1998.

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denial of a positive and productive Jewish-European history, ignoring the mutual exchange and stimulation that had existed for more than 1000 years – a point that was for example made by Hannah Arendt. In copying the ideals of other nationalist movements (e.g. Muskeljudentum and the related concepts of body and mind) Zionism was accused of rejecting the significant achievements of Jewish people who were considered part of their ‘host cultures’.

Unter all den Mißverständnissen, welche die zionistische Bewegung mitschleppte, weil sie so stark vom Antisemitismus beeinflußt worden war, hat diese falsche Vorstellung vom nichteuropäischen Charakter der Juden vermutlich die weitestreichenden und schlimmsten Konsequenzen gehabt. [...] Damit würden die Zionisten dem jüdischen Volke seinen gerechten Anteil an der Entstehung und Entwicklung dessen nehmen, was wir im Allgemeinen als westliche Kultur bezeichnen.<sup>128</sup>

The inner-Jewish conflict between assimilation and Zionism continued and even intensified over the next decades, and well into the 1930s. A number of German-Jewish scholars, writers and intellectuals argued passionately that being German and being Jewish were not mutually exclusive components of their identity. The German-Jewish philosopher Hermann Cohen (1842 -1918) had tirelessly argued for the compatibility and complementary character of Judaism and German culture.<sup>129</sup> Likewise, Franz Rosenzweig argued that German and Jewish refer to two entirely different spheres:

Man mag Deutschtum und Britentum, Deutschtum und Osmanentum vergleichen, nicht Deutschtum und Judentum. Versucht man sie zu vergleichen, so wird immer das eine auf die Ebene des anderen, und damit aus seiner Natur heraus, gedrängt. Wer vom Deutschtum (oder von irgend einem anderen Volkstum) ausgeht, wird dem Judentum das Unrecht tun, es als Volk zu wiegen; auf dieser Waage wird es stets zu leicht befunden werden; es ist kein Volk wie andere Völker und ist es, trotz des naiven Vulgärzionismus, auch nie gewesen.<sup>130</sup>

Following the end of the First World War the map of Europe was redrawn based on the idea of the nation state. Conforming to the ideal of ethnic homogeneity new states emerged, increasing the pressure on those who were not

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<sup>128</sup> Arendt 1976: 158.

<sup>129</sup> Mendes-Flohr, Paul, ‘Deutschtum und Judentum’ in *Deutsch-jüdische Geschichte der Neuzeit*, Band 3, edited by Michael Meyer (München: Beck, 2000), p. 352-353.

<sup>130</sup> Rosenzweig 1993: 75.

considered to belong to the nation. Because of their identification with German culture German Jewry felt this particularly acutely. 'Their true home', in the words of Amos Elon, 'was not "Germany" but German culture and language'.<sup>131</sup> German-Jewish intellectuals, such as the journalist and writer Kurt Tucholsky (1890-1935) still insisted on their share in German culture:

Wir pfeifen auf die Fahnen - aber wir lieben dieses Land. Und so wie die nationalen Verbände über die Wege trommeln - mit dem gleichen Recht, mit genau demselben Recht nehmen wir, wir, die wir hier geboren sind, wir, die wir besser Deutsch schreiben und sprechen als die Mehrzahl der nationalen Esel - mit genau demselben Recht nehmen wir Fluß und Wald in Beschlag, Strand und Haus, Lichtung und Wiese: es ist unser Land.<sup>132</sup>

### **The rise of German fascism, the November pogroms, and the *Kindertransport***

When Hitler took power in Germany in 1933 and increasingly after the passing of the Nuremberg Laws in 1935, which stripped Jews of their German citizenship and most of their rights, the situation for German Jews became more and more difficult. Following the November pogrom in 1938<sup>133</sup>, even those who had previously been reluctant to leave their native country were trying to escape persecution. During what became later euphemistically known as *Reichskristallnacht* at least one hundred Jews were murdered in brutal attacks orchestrated by the National Socialist regime, thousands of men were taken away by the Gestapo and many of them later murdered in concentration camps. Only during the 1980s researchers started to question the low official numbers of those killed during the pogroms as well as the number of Jewish homes, businesses and synagogues that were destroyed.<sup>134</sup> Within the scope of this thesis it is not possible to discuss the various different studies relating to the November pogrom. However, it can be assumed that with thousands of private homes and businesses as well as more than one thousand synagogues

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<sup>131</sup> Elon, Amos, *The Pity of It All: A History of Jews in Germany 1743-1933* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 9.

<sup>132</sup> Tucholsky 1929

<sup>133</sup> The night from 9<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> November 1938 although more recent research suggests that the atrocities started up to two days earlier; see Kropat, Wolf-Arno. *'Reichskristallnacht': der Judenpogrom vom 7. bis 10. November 1938 – Urheber, Täter, Hintergründe*, (Wiesbaden: Kommission für die Geschichte der Juden in Hessen, 1997).

<sup>134</sup> See for example Kropat 1997 or Graml, H. *Reichskristallnacht: Antisemitismus und Judenverfolgung im Dritten Reich* (München: dtv, 1988).

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burned to the ground or destroyed otherwise, with up to four hundred Jews murdered or driven into suicide and with no legal protection offered by the German state, German Jews were desperate to leave the country.<sup>135</sup> While international protest in response to the pogrom was prompt with particularly the United States reacting strongly through diplomatic channels, this did not translate into an increase in visa permits for Jewish refugees who applied to immigrate to the United States. Despite more than 140 000 additional applications it still remained at 27 000 per year even after the pogrom.<sup>136</sup> In England, however, reports about the horrific events in Germany eventually shifted public opinion and the government felt under pressure to allow more refugees into the country. On 15 November 1938, less than a week after the pogrom, Neville Chamberlain, the British Prime Minister, received a delegation of prominent British Jews, including the Chief Rabbi Dr J. H. Hertz. They came as representatives of the Council for German Jewry and put forward a proposal that had been drafted by Helen Bentwich and Dennis Cohen, two members of the Council who, within only three days, had come up with 'a plan that became the basis of [the] proposal'.<sup>137</sup> It was a pledge to pay guarantees for unaccompanied German-Jewish children and young teenagers to enable them to enter the UK at least on a temporary basis.<sup>138</sup> Although he expressed 'benevolent interest'<sup>139</sup> Chamberlain still seemed somewhat reluctant. Less than a week after the initial meeting the Jewish representatives met with Foreign Secretary Sir Samuel Hoare, 'a Quaker who was warmly sympathetic to the proposals'.<sup>140</sup> The Quakers had already played a significant role in helping Jewish and non-Jewish refugees leave Nazi Germany: between 1936 and 1938 the Inter-Aid Committee for Children from Germany, which was co-founded by the Society of Friends, rescued 471 children whose parents were persecuted in Nazi Germany.<sup>141</sup> Thus it does not come as a surprise that the Foreign Secretary

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<sup>135</sup> See for example Wolfgang Benz. 'Der Rückfall in die Barbarei: Berichte über den Pogrom' in Pehle, W. H. et al. (eds.) *Der Judenpogrom 1938: Von der ‚Reichskristallnacht‘ zum Völkermord* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1994).

<sup>136</sup> Pätzold/ Runge. *Kristallnacht. Zum Pogrom 1938* (Köln: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1988).

<sup>137</sup> Fast, Vera K. *Children's Exodus. A History of the Kindertransport* (London and New York: Tauris, 2011), p. 18.

<sup>138</sup> Harris, Mark Jonathan and Deborah Oppenheimer. *Into the Arms of Strangers: Stories of the Kindertransport* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000), p. 10.

<sup>139</sup> Fast 2011: 18.

<sup>140</sup> Fast 2011: 19.

<sup>141</sup> Göpfert, Rebekka. *Der Jüdische Kindertransport von Deutschland nach England 1938/39* (Frankfurt/New York: Campus, 1999), 52-53. The Inter-Aid Committee was later to merge with the Movement

was more supportive than Chamberlain and helped putting the matter onto the parliamentary agenda. The public outcry following the news of the November pogrom and the sympathy with the victims of the Nazi atrocities ensured that the initiative was eventually backed by Parliament:

On 23 November the government agreed to the plan the Inter-Aid Committee for Children from Germany proposed, whereby an unspecified number of unaccompanied children from the Greater Reich, under the age of 18, would immediately be granted admission to Britain for educational purposes and for a period of two years, provided they would not become a liability to the British taxpayer.<sup>142</sup>

Within the next ten months almost 10 000 unaccompanied children were rescued from Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia. On 2 December 1938 the first Kindertransport left Berlin. Until the outbreak of the war on 1 September 1939 transports from Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia continued to bring youngsters to safety.<sup>143</sup> Among these children were the future poets Karen Gershon, Lotte Kramer and Gerda Mayer. Gershon was the first to break the silence, and referring to her book *We Came As Children*, which was published in 1966, Andrea Hammel has pointed out that

[F]or former members of the *Kindertransporte*, reading other representations of the *Kindertransporte*, the public interest in such accounts, and the realisation that the *Kindertransporte* were not an individual, but a shared experience, shaped their impetus to write and the form of their narratives.<sup>144</sup>

In our conversations, Lotte Kramer and Gerda Mayer both mentioned Karen Gershon. Kramer in particular pointed out how reading Gershon's work encouraged her to break her own silence.<sup>145</sup> We shall come back to the importance of Gershon's pioneering work in the context of the analysis of the poems. For now, it seems important to note that many of the refugees from Nazi Germany would not have considered themselves particularly Jewish before they were almost reduced to this feature of their identity. Even for those refugees who had some kind of Jewish identity before they were forced into

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for the Care of Children from Germany to form the Refugee Children's Movement (RCM), the organisation responsible for all children who arrived on the Kindertransport.

<sup>142</sup> Fast 2011: 19.

<sup>143</sup> Gilbert, Martin. *Das Jüdische Jahrhundert* (München: Bertelsmann, 2001), p. 185.

<sup>144</sup> Hammel, Andrea. "Between Adult Narrator and Narrated Child", in *Children of the Holocaust*, edited by Andrea Reiter (Edgware and Portland: Vallentine Mitchell, 2006), p. 64.

<sup>145</sup> Interviews with the poets; 30. Juni 2009 (Kramer) and 15. Juli 2008 (Mayer).

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exile, moving from the world of German Jewry into the world of Anglo Jewry was often confusing: Gershon, for example, remembers her own discomfort at visiting a British synagogue in the second part of her autobiography.<sup>146</sup> Lily Pinkus, a refugee from Berlin, recalls, upon her family's arrival in England, they were confronted with a kind of Judaism that was fundamentally different from the one they had known in Germany.<sup>147</sup>

After escaping the fascist terror in their native country thousands of German-Jewish refugees who had been brought up with the German ideal of *Bildung* had to begin new life in a foreign language and culture. Although British Jewry principally supported the refugees, they were also concerned about the response of the non-Jewish population, fearing a growth of anti-Semitism that would potentially affect them as well. The Board of Deputies therefore 'issued apologetic leaflets' to the British public and the refugees themselves 'were given reading materials advising them not to speak German in public, to avoid complaining, never to compare Britain unfavourably to Germany, to dress conservatively, and to display loyalty to their new domicile at every opportunity'.<sup>148</sup> With the British entry into the war and growing concern about a German invasion, some of the refugees were even interned as 'enemy aliens'.<sup>149</sup>

As we have seen, German-Jewish refugees, who had been deprived of their German citizenship and who had been reduced to their Jewish identity, were upon their arrival in Britain considered to be a potential threat because of their German roots. Having found a safe haven from Nazi persecution in a country that had once been the first to expel its Jews,<sup>150</sup> the conflicting aspects of their identity proved to be another challenge.

In the following chapter, I shall investigate different concepts of identity with regard to their capability to accommodate the identities of these refugees.

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<sup>146</sup> Gershon, Karen. *A Tempered Wind. An Autobiography*. Edited by P. Lassner and P. Lawson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2009).

<sup>147</sup> Lily Pinkus writing about her life in *Mein Judentum*, edited by Hans Jürgen Schultz (München: dtv, 1986), pp.129-139.

<sup>148</sup> Laqueur, Walter and Judith Tydor Baumel (eds.). *The Holocaust Encyclopedia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 88.

<sup>149</sup> Dove, Richard (ed.): "*Totally un-English*"?: *Britain's internment of "enemy aliens" in two world wars* (Amsterdam : Rodopi, 2005), p .7.

<sup>150</sup> See Cecil Roth, *A History of the Jews in England*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949), or Patricia Skinner (ed.), *Jews in Medieval Britain* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003).

Considering recent research into bilingualism as well as Leonard Forster's distinction of different types of multilingualism, I shall explain my understanding of translingualism. Drawing from testimonies of writers who had to find their voices in a new language and utilising literary as well as psychoanalytical theories, I shall set out to develop a theory of translingual writing that can provide a number of clearly defined criteria which can also be used as tools to explore translingual literature.

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## Chapter 3: Developing a Theoretical Tool

In the previous chapter we have seen how language and culture have been instrumental in shaping a German national identity, and how the concept of belonging to a nation by partaking in and contributing to its culture has influenced German-Jewish history. With this historical context in mind I shall now turn to questions of identity that arise from this situation. While the essentialist concept of identity promoted by National-Socialism had denied German Jews their dual identity, more recent theorising in the field of social sciences has opened up, allowing for a more inclusive approach to identity. I shall examine to what extent they can accommodate the identities of dislocated German-Jewish refugees before eventually moving on to the role of language in the context of identity. After briefly discussing recent research into bilingualism, I shall turn to the concept of translingualism. Utilising Kellman's term, I shall develop a theoretical tool with which to explore the writing of the four English women poets of German-Jewish origin.

### Concepts of identity

Romantic nationalism promoted an essentialist ideal of a single, stable, national identity and established a national myth to underline the supposedly innate characteristics of the nation. Referring to the emergence of the nation state Benedict Anderson coined the term of 'an imagined community'.<sup>151</sup> He argues that after the breakdown of the ancient axioms of society (i.e. the superior script language, monarchy and a 'conception of temporality in which cosmology and history were indistinguishable'<sup>152</sup>) the concept of the nation was fundamental in fulfilling the need for a 'new way of linking fraternity, power and time meaningfully together'.<sup>153</sup> Thus, although the axioms changed, the idea of a single, stable identity remained: the ideal of an exclusive, unitary German identity emerged, supposedly tracking its roots back to ancient times. Following the *Haskalah*, German Jews considered themselves both, German and Jewish, until the rise of German fascism eventually marked an end point for a hyphenated German-Jewish identity.

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<sup>151</sup>Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities* (London and New York: Verso, 2003), p. 6.

<sup>152</sup>Anderson 2003: 36.

<sup>153</sup>ibid.

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I am aware that the term 'hyphenated identity' was initially used in a derogative manner in Teddy Roosevelt's speech about immigration.<sup>154</sup> He was criticising the self-identity of American the immigrants, who often included a reference to their country of origin when referring to themselves. Despite the politician's demand for a homogeneous identity, the concept of hyphenated identities has been a widely accepted in social and literary sciences to describe groups and individual who belong to more than a single (imagined) community as it allows for different aspects of an individual's identity to be expressed simultaneously.<sup>155</sup> As approaches to identity have significantly changed, social identity theories generally assume that individuals have more than a single group identity<sup>156</sup>. However, although recent theories can accommodate more than one group identity in an individual, there is still a risk of stereotyping: Lawrence Silberstein, who has worked extensively on Jewish identity, has pointed out that 'although acknowledging differences among Jews and Jewish communities, most discussions of Jewish identity tend to assume the existence of a core, authentic, or essential "Jewish self"'.<sup>157</sup> This search for a Jewish 'essence' that is supposedly shared by 'all Jews, as bearers of a shared history'<sup>158</sup> still derives from an essentialist conception of identity. It suggests a stable, fixed group identity and is at risk of attributing certain stereotyped characteristics to all members of a given group. To avoid these shortfalls, it is not sufficient to allow for 'multiple group identities that may shift in salience'<sup>159</sup> but each of the elements contributing to an individual's identity needs to be considered as non-stable and evolving.

The concept of hybridity seems to provide an alternative to the model of hyphenated identities. Homi Bhabha has described hybrid identities as 'cultural identities in a discontinuous intertextual temporality of cultural difference'.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>154</sup>See Nguyen, Stacey. 'The Politics of the Hyphen' *Berkeley Political Review* November 25, 2013 online edition at <http://bpr.berkeley.edu/2013/11/the-politics-of-the-hyphen/>, accessed on 26.01.2014.

<sup>155</sup>For example in post-colonial and migration studies, such as Pandya, Sudha. 'Bharati Mukherjee's Darkness: Exploring the Hyphenated Identity.' *Quill* 2 (1990) 68-73. See also Bhatia, Sunil, and Anjali Ram. 'Rethinking "acculturation" in relation to diasporic cultures and postcolonial identities.' *Human Development* 44.1 (2001) pp. 1-18.

<sup>156</sup>Vignoles, Vivian L. 'Introduction: Toward an Integrative View of Identity' in *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research*, edited by Seth Schwartz, Koen Lyckx and Vivian L. Vignoles (New York, Dordrecht, Heidelberg & London: Springer, 2011), p. 6.

<sup>157</sup>Silberstein, Lawrence J. (ed), *Mapping Jewish Identities* (New York & London: New York University Press, 2000), p. 2.

<sup>158</sup>Silberstein 2000: 2.

<sup>159</sup>Vignoles 2011: 6.

<sup>160</sup>Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 55.

This definition points at the different factors that impact on identity and emphasises its changing nature. Correspondingly, Stuart Hall has pointed out that the concept of hybridity implies that identity 'is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation', rather than 'an already accomplished fact'.<sup>161</sup> The understanding of identity as a process is shared by other theorists as well.<sup>162</sup> However, there remain at least two issues with regard to the source cultures. While the term 'hybrid' suggests a mixed heritage, it provides no information about the actual sources. Considering the increase in migration movements between countries and continents the potential provenance of elements contributing to a hybrid identity are manifold. Limiting the description of complex cultural identities to 'hybrid' does not make it a significant characteristic as the term could be applied to a person moving from Hull to Newcastle as well as to somebody moving from Europe to Asia. The concept of hybridity can help us to understand identity as always 'constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth', and as 'inherently unstable';<sup>163</sup> however, it does not seem to provide a tool to trace different cultural traditions present within a single individual.

The second issue, however, appears to be even more problematic. If we suggest that hybrid identities originate from different cultural sources, we are in danger of assuming the existence of a homogenous source culture. According to Ayse S. Caglar the dilemma is that 'while theorists of hybridity are able to show how cultures can mix, the presumption is that prior to the mixing there were two different cultures à la essentialism.'<sup>164</sup>

Although both hyphenated and hybrid identity concepts allow for a mixed cultural heritage, they nevertheless seem to be prone to falling back into essentialist attitudes with regard to the source cultures. This may not be problematic when we refer to ourselves as having a hyphenated or hybrid identity, as we are probably well aware of the complexity of each of the contributing components. However, as Silberstein's observation regarding the assumption of a 'Jewish essence' should have demonstrated, as soon as hyphenated identities are applied as labels from the outside, there is an

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<sup>161</sup> Hall, Stuart, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora,' in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, edited by J. Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1998, pp. 222-237), p. 222.

<sup>162</sup> Jenkins, Richard. *Social Identity*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (London & New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 5.

<sup>163</sup> Hall 1998: 225.

<sup>164</sup> Modood, Tariq. 'Introduction' in *The Politics of Multiculturalism in the New Europe*, edited by T. Modood and P. Werbner (London & New York: Zed Books, 1997), p. 10.

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increased danger that terms such as 'German' or 'Jewish' are understood as 'an already accomplished fact'<sup>165</sup> rather than a process. The concept of hybridity does not spell out the different sources but has, as Caglar has pointed out, the same difficulty not to fall into the essentialist trap.

For the purpose of this research project I shall apply the hyphenated description of 'German-Jewish' as it gives an indication of the cultural influences that have contributed to the poets' identities. Although I am using the same expression 'of German-Jewish origin' for all four poets, I do not assume a 'Jewish essence' that is identical in all women. Following Jenkins understanding of identity as the 'outcome of agreement and disagreement' I imply also that identity is 'at least in principle always negotiable' and therefore 'not fixed'.<sup>166</sup> This process of negotiation always includes the outside view – in the case of the women poets the views of their non-Jewish contemporaries who denied them their German identity, or the views of their British contemporaries whose definition of 'German' was arguably essentialist. Nevertheless, the process also includes their own understanding of 'Jewish' and 'German' – as well as 'British', since this aspect of their identity was added when they settled in their new country.

Considering that language formed not only an important part of German identity but is also central to the work of a poet, I shall now consider what the consequences of the move from one language into another are – and what happens when we have more than one language.

### **Bilingualism and Multilingualism**

The term *bilingual* occurs much earlier than *multilingualism*. In his book *Bilingualism: Basic Principles* Hugo Baetens Beardsmore concedes that it is very difficult to provide a clear and comprehensive definition of bilingualism, although there is a general agreement that any definition 'must be able to account for the presence of at least two languages within one and the same speaker [...], and that the way the two or more languages are used plays a highly significant role'.<sup>167</sup> In the context of this thesis it might be useful to focus on individual rather than societal bilingualism. While the latter is

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<sup>165</sup> Hall 1998: 222.

<sup>166</sup> Jenkins 2004: 5.

<sup>167</sup> Baetens Beardmore 1986: 3.

concerned with ‘large-scale analyses of multilingual societies’, individual bilingualism focuses on ‘the settings in which bilingual speakers interact’.<sup>168</sup> However, even within the framework of individual bilingualism there is little agreement about the minimum requirements for a person to be considered bilingual. As we are looking at literature, we might expect a bit more than a person being able to ‘complete meaningful utterances in the other language’<sup>169</sup> – as suggested in a definition by E. Hauge. On the other hand, do we expect no traces of one language in the use of the other? And how can we define what a possible ‘language trace’ is?

Herder was one of the first scholars to ‘equate thinking with inner speaking’<sup>170</sup> and today in psycholinguistics it is widely accepted that there is a close link between language and our ability to memorise things.<sup>171</sup> Therefore, the impact of bilingualism on an individual’s memory seems to be of some interest. Aneta Pavlenko has claimed that recent studies suggest that

bilinguals tend to retrieve memories in the same language in which they were encoded or at least to report more vividly and in more detail if reporting in the language of the event. [...] At the same time, it is clear that most memories, like any other inner speech activities, can be translated according to the needs of the context, even though some aspects may be transformed or deleted in translation.<sup>172</sup>

However, according to an essay by Erica B. Michael and Tamar H. Gollan there is also some evidence in ‘recent developments in research on bilingualism that suggests both languages are always active’.<sup>173</sup> This aspect is stressed by Kremnitz who claims that ‘die aktuelle Verwendung einer einzigen Sprache [ruft] virtuell auch alle anderen auf den Plan, und zwar diejenigen die ein Sprecher tatsächlich beherrscht ebenso wie die, von denen er nur eine bescheidene Vorstellung hat’.<sup>174</sup> In the context of writing in a second language this would mean that the full range of bi-lingual

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<sup>168</sup>Crystal 1987: 362.

<sup>169</sup> Baetens Beardmore 1986: 6.

<sup>170</sup> Blackburn, Simon, *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford: University Press 1994), p. 172.

<sup>171</sup>Crystal 1987: 22.

<sup>172</sup> Pavlenko, Aneta. ‘Bilingualism and Thought’ in *Handbook of Bilingualism. Psycholinguistic Approaches*; edited by Judith F. Kroll and Annette M.B. de Groot (Oxford: University Press, 2005) pp. 445-446.

<sup>173</sup> Gollan, Tamar H. and Erica B. Michael. ‘Being and Becoming Bilingual: Individual Differences and Consequences for Language Production’ in *Handbook of Bilingualism. Psycholinguistic Approaches*; edited by Judith F. Kroll and Annette M.B. de Groot (Oxford: University Press, 2005), p. 389.

<sup>174</sup> Kremnitz 2004: 24.

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imagination is always potentially present. The importance of this will be emphasized in the studies of the individual poems.

Although research into bilingualism can provide some useful insights, it is not sufficient for exploring the writing of authors who choose to write in a language that is not their first. Bilingualism seems to be an adequate concept when discussing the life and reality of people living with two languages. However, as my research focuses on poets who grew up in one language before they moved into another, the aspect of *moving* seems to be crucial as well. None of the four women poets grew up bilingually, but they acquired their new language when they moved from their German-speaking home countries to Britain. In other words: their two languages did not grow side by side but one preceded the other, and their language change was the result of their geographical dislocation.

In his book *The Poet's Tongues: Multilingualism in Literature* Leonard Forster distinguishes between different types of multilingualism through several centuries of literary history.<sup>175</sup> Reaching back to the Middle Ages, Forster looks at different 'polyglot' authors and their work. At a time when little systematic research had been conducted in that area, Forster set out to deal 'with polyglot poets and the poetry they write' whilst taking into account their historical and personal context.<sup>176</sup> The type of multilingualism where an author writes in a non-native language seems to correspond to what I am going to call trans-lingual, implying that a writer moved from one language to another. I therefore suggest that translanguaging is a specific form of multilingualism but that the terms should not be used as synonymous: whereas all translanguagers can be considered multilingual in some respect, not all multilinguals are translanguagers.

### Translanguaging

The American scholar Steven G. Kellman coined the term *translanguaging* to describe the work of authors who wrote, or write in a language that is not their native language. In the preface to his 2000 book *The Translanguager*

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<sup>175</sup> Forster, Leonard. *The Poet's Tongues – Multilingualism in Literature* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

<sup>176</sup> Forster 1970: 1.

*Imagination*<sup>177</sup> – a study that examines the work of famous authors who changed their language – he claims that these writers ‘are among the most fascinating of literary figures because their lives took noticeably dramatic twists and because their position between languages enabled them to challenge the limits of their own literary medium’.<sup>178</sup> This is an interesting claim, particularly with regard to the prejudice these writers often face: W.B. Yeats was by no means the only one to voice them when writing in a letter to William Rothenstein that ‘[n]obody can write with music and style in a language not learned in childhood and ever since the language of his thought’.<sup>179</sup> Aiming to dispute this, Kellman’s project is very much about the celebration of successful translingual writers. He draws up a list of major authors who wrote in a language other than their *mother tongue* containing such illustrious names as Vladimir Nabokov, Joseph Conrad, S.Y. Agnon and Samuel Beckett and others.

Kellman’s book received mixed feedback from fellow scholars.<sup>180</sup> Published at a time of increasing interest in authors writing in a second language, Kellman’s project was certainly welcomed as it promised to provide a systematic approach to the subject, or even a theory of translingual writing. However, the book focuses mainly on ‘canonical’ writings (e.g. Nabokov) and on the question of how successful authors established themselves in a new language while ‘lacking an overarching theory of the translingual, or even a convincing definition of the term’.<sup>181</sup> Indeed, the point that was made by several reviewers was that the book ‘does not provide the systematic study of bi- and multilingual writing that is so badly needed’<sup>182</sup> and that ‘[n]o attempt is made to theorize the impact of “translingualism” on the writing process, and on cultural production generally’.<sup>183</sup> Though challenging the view famously voiced by George Santayana, ‘that authentic poetry can be written only in the language of the lullabies the poet’s mother sang’,<sup>184</sup> Kellman remains vague

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<sup>177</sup>Kellman, Steven G. *The Translingual Imagination*. Lincoln and London (University of Nebraska Press, 2000).

<sup>178</sup>Kellman 2000: ix.

<sup>179</sup> Kellman 2000: x.

<sup>180</sup>See for example Orr, Mary, ‘Review’, *The Modern Language Review*, Volume 97 Number 2 (April 2002), pp. 524-525.

<sup>181</sup> Urayoán Noel, ‘Towards a Translanguage Latin/o/american Poetics’ (Albany: SUNY, 2009).

<sup>182</sup>Maria Lauret, ‘Reviews’, *Textual Practice*, 15:1 (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 134-137.

<sup>183</sup> Lauret 2001: 135.

<sup>184</sup>Kellman 2003: ix.

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when it comes to showing the virtues of the ‘translingual imagination’. While Kellman certainly addressed diversity issues in *Switching Languages* (2003)<sup>185</sup>, there is still no ‘overarching theory of the translingual’.

### **Moving languages: Translated lives**

In order to develop a theory of the translingual imagination, I suggest taking a more restrictive view than Kellman and only considering those who *moved* from one language into the other as *translingual* writers. This means that the author’s biography plays a significant role in ‘translingualism’ as I understand it – and that it involves (socio-) historic events that have caused the writer to change his or her language. I am using the term ‘historic events’ here in the broadest sense, and I understand it as including economic as well as political reasons for leaving one language setting and moving into another.

In the context of this study, the ‘historical event’ was the rise of National Socialism in Germany, and the biographical component is the poets’ escape as children or young adults from German-speaking countries to England. Nevertheless, the concept of the translingual imagination developed here claims to be applicable to other contexts as well.<sup>186</sup> My argument is that there are certain identifiable criteria for what I call the translingual imagination and that the biographical aspect is a fundamental one. The obvious reason for this is that, without the ‘(socio-) historic circumstances’, the writers’ biographies would have been different and they might have chosen a different mean of expressing themselves. In a situation in which one is forced to change one’s language, it is plausible to engage with language as a phenomenon, especially for a person who wants to express herself artistically. Language is so closely linked not only to how we see the world but also to our emotional experience that an event which throws us from one language into another necessarily impacts on our life – and might invite some serious engagement with language itself.<sup>187</sup> My claim is that without their historic, the poets I am dealing with would not have been forced to move from one language to another. They would not have been exposed to different linguistic and cultural influences

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<sup>185</sup>Kellman, Steven G. (ed.). *Switching Languages. Translingual Writers Reflect on Their Craft* ( London and Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003).

<sup>186</sup> Possible further examples which cannot be discussed in the frame of this thesis would include German writers of Turkish origin as well as some post-colonial authors.

<sup>187</sup>For examples of the language/ emotion relation see Aneta Pavlenko (ed.). *Bilingual Minds* (Clevedon, Buffalo and Toronto: Multilingual Matters, 2006).

and, therefore, they would have had no need to develop a translingual imagination. I am aware that Kellman does mention the biographical background of writers he describes as ‘translinguals’, he even points out that ‘modernism is largely a literature of exile, a project of psychic if not geographical dislocation’.<sup>188</sup> However, he does not translate this insight into a clear theoretical approach. The reality of exile, more often than not marked by the experience of being confined ‘to a stereotypical “otherness” from which there appears little chance of escape’,<sup>189</sup> needs to feed into a meaningful theory of translingual writing as it impacts on the author’s self-understanding.

Exiled writers usually do not choose to employ a second language for special effects but more often simply for the purpose of survival. In a situation where literature is regarded as a national treasure and at times where the expectations with regard to linguistic skills are mounting higher than ever before, the prospects for exiled writers are quite daunting. Authors who had to leave their home country for political reasons and who chose to adopt a new language, are often met with suspicion. Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany, for example, who tried to establish themselves as English writers during the first half of the twentieth century, were quickly reminded that they would ‘never write good poems because English had not been [their] first language.’<sup>190</sup>

Translingualism is not about arriving in a second language, it is about the journey and the pictures taken on the way. Bi-linguals can live in two different homes, translinguals are a nomadic tribe, and they put up their tents and create a new home in-between.

Describing the process of writing as a journey is not new: in the theory of translation it has long been argued that a good translation needs to go back to the place where a poem originates from and then find a path into the other language – rather than assuming a poem could be mechanically brought into a new language and thereby disregarding the process of its creation. The French writer and translator Paul Valéry, in reflecting on his own translation of Virgil, wrote that

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<sup>188</sup> Kellman 2000: 6.

<sup>189</sup> White, Paul. ‘Geography, Literature and Migration’ in *Writing Across Worlds: Literature and Migration*, edited by R. King (et al.) (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 2.

<sup>190</sup> Hamburger, Michael. *Strings of Beginnings. Intermittent Memories* (London: Skoob, 1991), p. 93.

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[t]he work of translation [...] causes us in some way to try walking in the tracks left by the author; and not to fashion one text upon another, but for the latter to work back to the virtual moment of its formation, to the phase when the mind is in the same state as an orchestra whose instruments begin to waken, calling to each other and seeking harmony before beginning the concert. From that vividly imagined state one must make one's way down toward its resolution in a work in a different tongue.<sup>191</sup>

I would argue that this 'vividly *imagined* state' is very closely related to the 'translingual *imagination*' as it is a sphere where no single language is thought or spoken alone. As I have suggested above, translingual writers dwell in the land that translators need to cross for their work. They differ because they do not use the same tools: while a translator guides a text into the target language, the translingual author uses the space, seeking new meaning.

When writers have to leave their home country and language for political or religious reasons, this invariably affects their relationships to language. While the 'old' language can be burdened with the memory of loss and betrayal, the new language might not feel strong enough to carry a new life:

Despite the fashionable postmodern emphasis on displacement and dislocation; despite the celebration of diversity and "more-than-oneness"; despite the intellectual persuasion that trying to find wholeness is a somewhat obsolete ideal, the anxiety about fragmentation and the search for existential coherence remain primordial human responses. The lifelong struggle to reconcile the different pieces of the identity puzzle (or at least to acknowledge that they cannot be reconciled) continues to be a painful and constantly renegotiated process. All the more so, perhaps, when the fragmentation exists in that most intimate of sites – language.<sup>192</sup>

This struggle can provide an awareness that enables a translingual author to use language in a way that reflects the knowledge of fragmentation and the longing for wholeness – similar to the way in which any text is said to yearn for translation.

Gerda Lerner, one of the contributors to Kellman's anthology *Switching Languages* asks: 'If you are forced to give up your mother tongue, what is lost?' and answers her own question straight away:

In a way, losing one's mother tongue is inconceivable – one assumes one can always return to it. But that is not so. Language is not a dead body of knowledge; language changes year by year, minute by minute; it lives and

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<sup>191</sup>Valéry 1992: 120 f.

<sup>192</sup>De Courtivron, Isabelle (ed.), *Lives in Translation. Bilingual Writers on Identity and Creativity* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 2.

grows. In order to remain adequate it must be spoken and it must be read. When you lose your language, you lose the sound, the rhythm, the forms of your unconscious.<sup>193</sup>

Exiled she feels that there is no breathing space left for her old language – that she cannot cultivate and nourish it in the way it demands. And she also echoes aspects of what Benjamin Lee Whorf stated in his essay ‘Science and Linguistics’:

the background linguistic system (in other words, the grammar) is not merely a reproducing instrument for voicing ideas but rather is itself the shaper of ideas, the program and guide for the individual’s mental activity [...].<sup>194</sup>

In other words: language influences the way we look at the world, even the way we feel. However, this is not to promote a Whorfian view of language, or to suggest that his approach could be entirely helpful in explaining the challenges of the translingual imagination. Far from aiming to adapt a rather simplistic though appealing relativist account of language, the purpose of this illustration is to explore the different facets of translingual lives.

Though language is not the only ‘shaper of ideas’, switching your language means losing *common-sense* concepts. It seems that for a translingual poet the choice of the first word is more complex than for any other writer as she is painfully aware of the multi-layered meanings that exist below the surface. This is true particularly as in poetry more attention is paid to individual words than in a prose text. Paul Valéry describes the process of choosing the ‘right’ words and forms in his essay ‘Variations on the *Eclogues*’:

A man writing verse, poised between his ideal of beauty and his nothingness, is in a state of active and questioning expectation that renders him uniquely and supremely sensitive to the forms and words which the shape of his desire, endlessly resumed and retraced, demands from the unknown that is from the latent resources of his constitution as a speaker. Meanwhile, an indefinable singing force exacts from him what the bare thought can obtain only through a host of successively tested combinations. The poet chooses among these, not the one which would express his “thought” most exactly (that is the business of prose) and which would therefore repeat what he knows already, but the one which a thought by itself cannot produce, and which appears to him both strange

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<sup>193</sup> Kellman 2003: 275 f.

<sup>194</sup> First published in 1940 (Whorf 1966: 212).

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and a stranger, a precious and unique solution to a problem that is formulated only when it is solved.<sup>195</sup>

Given that she is a stranger herself, the translingual poet is even more sensitive to the most delicate tunes of this singing force, aware how little she already knows of the myriads of possible meanings, welcoming each precious word.

As we have established so far, the translingual writer moves from one place, one language to another. Both aspects, leaving and arriving, are key to the understanding of translingual writing. The German-born English poet and translator Michael Hamburger, who, aged nine had fled his native Berlin together with his parents, thus moving from German into English, once stated that he had been ‘translated’ as a child.<sup>196</sup> Indian-born Salman Rushdie, uses the same image when he explains:

The word “translation” comes etymologically from the Latin for “bearing across”. Having been borne across the world, we are translated men. It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation; I cling, obstinately, to the notion that something can also be gained.<sup>197</sup>

Rushdie here is referring to Robert Frost’s famous claim that poetry is what gets lost in translation.<sup>198</sup> When we take the Anglo-Indian author’s plea seriously, the concept of the translingual imagination implies, while acknowledging the challenges of a ‘translated life’, the emergence of something new – something that is gained in the process.

In the following I shall look at aspects of loss and gain in more detail, particularly in the context of the relation between place and time, and the impact of this relation on language and creativity.

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<sup>195</sup>Valéry 1992: 117.

<sup>196</sup>Hamburger, Michael. *String of Beginnings: Intermittent Memoirs 1924-1954* (London: Skoop, 1991).

<sup>197</sup>Rushdie, Salman. *Imaginary Homelands. Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta Books, 1992), p. 17.

<sup>198</sup>Robert Frost as quoted in: Untermeyer, Louis. *Robert Frost: A Backward Look* (Washington: The Library of Congress, 1964), p. 18.

### Loss – but gain?

The most obvious starting point is probably Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation: Life in a New Language* (first published in 1989), a book that is often regarded as the 'modern classic' of translingual writing.<sup>199</sup> In this work, the Polish-born author writes about being uprooted from her childhood world in Krakow when, in 1959, her family moved to Canada. Hoffman looks back at her years in Poland and describes how she dealt with the trauma of migration. She relates how what she had known as her 'reality' crumbled, how she felt that her Polish was out of place in America and that her childhood language had to be abandoned to make space for the English to grow.<sup>200</sup> Reading her account, it is almost as if the Canadian Eva is a different person from the Polish Ewa Wydra – a difference signalled in the different spelling of her first name. This observation seems to be backed by Robert Jay Lifton's research. The American psychiatrist, who worked with people who survived major traumatic experiences, such as the Holocaust or Hiroshima, said in an interview that 'extreme trauma creates a second self', claiming that the traumatized self has to be reintegrated before a full recovery from the trauma can be achieved.<sup>201</sup> Hoffman herself, influenced by Freudian thought,<sup>202</sup> states that while she regards herself as 'the sum of [her] languages', it is with the English language that she travels back into her childhood to reconcile her two voices.<sup>203</sup> Anne Malena picks up on this when stating that Hoffman 'negotiate[s] this notion of doubleness in [her] writing in terms of trauma and eventual recovery or the possibility of a successful translation'. She argues that 'Hoffman becomes conscious of the need to create a second self in a Vancouver classroom when she realizes that her classmates will never be convinced that "Poland is the center of the universe rather than a gray patch of land inhabited by ghosts. It is I who will have to learn how to live with a double vision".'<sup>204</sup> Malena understands this double vision as a result of migration – and consequently as

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<sup>199</sup>See for example the reviews in *The Guardian* or in *The Literary Review* as quoted on the blurb of *Lost in Translation* (1998).

<sup>200</sup>Hoffman, Eva. 'P.S.' in *Lives in Translation*, edited by Isabelle de Courtivron (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 50.

<sup>201</sup>Lifton, Robert Jay. 'Interview' in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, edited by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1995), p. 137.

<sup>202</sup>She describes her therapy as 'partly translation therapy, the talking cure a second language cure'. Hoffman, Eva. *Lost in Translation* (London: Vintage, 1999), p. 271.

<sup>203</sup>Hoffman 1999: 272f.

<sup>204</sup>Malena, Anne. 'Found in Translation or Edwige Danticat's Voyage of Recovery' in *TTR : traduction, terminologie, rédaction*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2003, p. 203.

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something that needs healing and reconciliation. Romanian-born Marianne Hirsch, while granting that migration effects the perception of the self, has challenged the implications made by Hoffman and, influenced by recent feminist research, drawn a different conclusion.

Marianne Hirsch was born in 1945 to Lotte and Carl Hirsch, Jewish emigrants from Czernowitz. She went to the US in 1961. Together with her husband, the historian Leo Spitzer she published *Ghosts of Home: The Afterlife of Czernowitz in Jewish Memory*<sup>205</sup> in which they explore the lost 'Vienna of the East', as the capital of the Bukowina used to be referred to. The book deals with the loss of Czernowitz as a home – a loss that its authors never experienced first-hand. Leon Botstein writes in his review for the Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz that

it is an effort to reconstruct the world before the destruction, more through the prism of survivor recollection than through historical research. [...]Written by authors born during the war years who have no direct memories of that period, "Ghosts of Home" seeks to paint a picture by negotiating memory as distorted by nostalgia, denial, shame and fear. The authors' goal was to gain an image for themselves of a lost, almost mythic home and heritage.<sup>206</sup>

Hirsch's journey 'back' to Czernowitz is substantially different from Hoffman's attempt to reconcile her Polish childhood, her 'Paradise' (as the title of the first part of *Lost in Translation* suggests) with her American adult life. Czernowitz is the lost world of Hirsch's parents, a place that had ceased to exist<sup>207</sup> before she was even born. Her life began outside 'Eden'. Hoffman, despite Polish anti-Semitism and her parents' experience during the war, remembers 'her' Poland fondly and defines the moment when she left Krakow as the traumatic moment. Hirsch, in contrast, never experienced such 'Paradise' – instead, she is enthralled by the 'almost mythic home and heritage' typified by the 'inherited' memory of Czernowitz. Simultaneously, she is no less aware that her identity reaches back to her early years in Romania and that she did not leave 'Eden' behind when her family moved, via Vienna, to the US. In 'Pictures

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<sup>205</sup>Hirsch, Marianne and Leo Spitzer. *Ghosts of Home: The Afterlife of Czernowitz in Jewish Memory* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2010).

<sup>206</sup>Botstein, Leon. 'Holocaust studies / Inevitable fragments of nostalgia' in: *Ha'aretz* from 01.07.2010, online version <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/books/holocaust-studies-inevitable-fragments-of-nostalgia-1.299504>, retrieved on 23.02.2011.

<sup>207</sup>From 1775 to 1918 the city was part of the Austrian Hungarian Empire, after WW I it became part of Romania but German remained to be the language of culture for most of the large Jewish population. For an introduction to the history of Czernowitz see chapter 1 of Hirsch and Spitzer (2010).

of a Displaced Girlhood' she describes how reading *Lost in Translation* reminded her of her own story but that the effects of 'displacement' were 'different' for her 'as were the strategies of relocation' which she developed.<sup>208</sup> She emphasizes that, although she can understand the feelings of 'doubleness and relativity', she 'cannot identify with Hoffman's nostalgic attempt to overcome [them] by returning to her Polish childhood'.<sup>209</sup> To illustrate what I consider to be the fundamental difference between Hirsch and Hoffman, I would like to examine Hirsch's terms. 'Nostalgia' is a compound noun deriving from the Greek *nostos* (to return home) and *algia* (a painful condition). At least for the past fifty years the term 'nostalgia' – although originally coined in a military-medical context – has entered everyday language, as Fred Davis has shown. The American sociologist has also pointed out that, 'despite its private, sometimes intensely felt personal character, [nostalgia] is a deeply social emotion as well'.<sup>210</sup> In this sense, nostalgia derives from our personal circumstances while simultaneously influencing the way in which we look at the world and how we act. As nostalgia entails a yearning for something in the past, our dealing with this feeling gives some indication how we relate our past to our present – and possibly our future. In doing so, it has serious implications for our sense of identity. Davis uses the metaphor of nostalgia as a 'readily accessible psychological lens which

we employ in the never ending work of constructing, maintaining, and reconstructing our identities. To carry the optical metaphor a step further, it can be thought of as a kind of telephoto lens on life which, while it magnifies and prettifies some segments of our past, simultaneously blurs and grays other segments, typically those closer to us in time.<sup>211</sup>

In Hoffman's case, the nostalgic look seems to 'prettify' the Polish past. This is not unusual: there is a tendency in human nature to idealise aspects of our past. Particularly at times of transition, when we are confronted with the necessity to change and to adapt, nostalgic reactions can be strong. Davis' research suggests that 'nostalgia thrives on transition, on the subjective

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<sup>208</sup>Hirsch, Marianne. 'Pictures of a Displaced Girlhood' in: *Displacements. Cultural Identities in Question*, edited by Angelika Bammer (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 75.

<sup>209</sup>Hirsch 1994: 76.

<sup>210</sup>Davis, Fred. *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (New York: Free Press, 1979), p. vii.

<sup>211</sup>Davis 1979: 31.

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discontinuities that engender our yearning for continuity',<sup>212</sup> and what he lists as 'transitional phases' includes an individual's life events as well as events of a bigger social-political context. Herb Caen once wrote in his San Francisco Chronicle column that 'nostalgia is memory with the pain removed'<sup>213</sup> – and the longing to remember a past free from all the challenges and difficulties of the present is certainly understandable in a young immigrant who is confronted not only with a new language but a whole new way of life. So why does the nostalgic feature so prominently in Hoffman's writing and not in Hirsch's? Both, Hirsch and Hoffman, were teenagers when they arrived in North America. Reflecting on Hoffman's memories of her first years in Canada and recalling her own struggle moving from childhood (Romania) to puberty (Vienna) and then to adolescence (small town America), Hirsch certainly shared Hoffman's feelings of awkwardness and insecurity. However, from her adult perspective she asks whether

any girls *come by crinolines, lipstick, cars, and self-confidence naturally?* Was my discomfort and Hoffman's the result of our cultural displacement or was it due to a chronological transition that teenage culture and the demands of adult femininity have made inherently and deeply *unnatural* for even the most comfortable indigenous American girl?<sup>214</sup>

Here, Hirsch refers to another 'transitional phase', one that she shared, though she had not been aware of this at the time, with other girls growing up. She backs up her suspicion by referring to Carol Gilligan's research into female adolescence. Girls, according to Gilligan's findings, 'use images of violent rupture, death, and drowning when they describe the transition between childhood and adolescence, a transition they locate between the ages of twelve and thirteen'. According to Gilligan this has to do with the fact that around this age, 'girls lose their place: without their voice and their certainty, they become "divided from their own knowledge, regularly prefacing their observations by saying "I don't know" '. Hirsch concludes this is 'implying that every transition into female adulthood is a process of acculturation to an alien realm or, could one say, an experience of emigration?'<sup>215</sup> Coming across Gilligan's research changed the way in which Hirsch looked at her own life: previously, she had 'like Hoffman, attributed [her] awkwardness and alienation to [her] status as a

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<sup>212</sup>Davis 1979: 49.

<sup>213</sup>Herb Caen in *SFC*, 15 April 1975.

<sup>214</sup>Hirsch 1994: 74.

<sup>215</sup>Hirsch 1994: 74.

“newcomer” and was therefore unable to perceive the similar discomfort and alienation of [her] female peers’. Talking to her former classmates at a school reunion, she is told that, while they can still remember their own insecurities, their recollection of Hirsch is that of somebody ‘completely “together” even as early as tenth grade – only a year after [she] came’. Hirsch acknowledges that her female peers ‘also had to exercise a form of mimicry in their performances of feminine behaviour’ but she points out that her

own and Hoffman’s process of unlearning and learning, of resistance and assimilation was a double one which must have been doubly difficult to negotiate. It must have left us doubly displaced and dispossessed, doubly at risk perhaps doubly resistant to assimilation. If most girls leave their “home” as they move into adolescence, Hoffman and I left two homes – our girlhood and our Europe.<sup>216</sup>

The parallel drawn by Hirsch suggests that both, adolescent girls and exiles have to leave an environment where they felt not only relatively safe and comfortable, but – I would argue – also as equals amongst equals: they share their childhood with all children, boys and girls, they share their homeland with all different citizens before they lose their equal status and become the ‘other’. This view should not be confused with a universalising approach such as the one expressed in Isabelle de Courtivron’s introduction to her book *Lives in Translation* (2003) where she invited bilingual authors to write on identity and creativity. De Courtivron claims that

In the end we are all exiles. Exile is, after all, only a metaphor for the human condition. We have all lost our childhood paradises, even if this did not happen because we left behind our mother tongue. We all struggle to understand the self as well as to reach out and communicate with others.<sup>217</sup>

Discussing ‘exile’ or ‘displacement’ in terms of a general experience can pose the danger of trivialising the painful experience of those who had to leave behind more than their childhood. Nevertheless, the feminist approach suggested by Marianne Hirsch can shed some light onto the different ways in which men and women cope with exile if we accept her point that women become ‘exiles’ in the process of growing up in our modern societies. Considering the double displacement of female exiles might offer some

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<sup>216</sup>Hirsch 1994: 75.

<sup>217</sup>De Courtivron, Isabelle (ed.). *Lives in Translation. Bilingual Writers on Identity and Creativity* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 7-8.

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explanation as to why women are often said to cope successfully with everyday matters of exile, while at the same time they are less visible – be it as artists, or as scholars.<sup>218</sup> We will return to this issue later when looking at the translingual writer Arthur Koestler. For now, I will focus on another aspect of Hirsch's approach to issues of loss and displacement. In my view, Hirsch seems to embrace the experience of exile as part of herself, part of her life. She writes that she identifies

neither with Hoffman's nostalgically Edenic representation of Poland, nor with her utter sense of dispossession later, nor do I share her desperate desire to displace the relativity, the fracturing, the double-consciousness of immigrant experience. For me displacement and bilingualism preceded emigration, they are the conditions into which I was born. Even as a child, in the midst of those first affections so eloquently celebrated in *Lost in Translation*, I was already divided.<sup>219</sup>

She refuses to grant these 'conditions' of her childhood the power to let recovering the past and reconciling contradictory elements of her biography become the sole purpose of her life. Although Hirsch is a migrant herself, she is well aware that the experience of 'not quite belonging' is not the sole privilege of those who move countries and that we cannot assume that the identities of those who live in the country of their birth are necessarily 'undivided' and 'homogeneous'. As a Jewish speaker of German in Romania, Hirsch was 'different' from the very start. Moving to a German speaking country did not make her an 'insider' either as her German was not the same German as the one spoken in Vienna. Perhaps it was due to the fact that '[t]hroughout her thirteen Polish years, Hoffman live[d] in the same house, [slept] in the same bed, [spoke] one language',<sup>220</sup> that to her the sense of loss was so severe. Hirsch, by contrast, had been living in a multilingual environment since her early childhood; hence her own experience was different and might have influenced the kind of coping strategies she developed.

### **Different approaches to loss**

I would argue that the ways in which Hoffman and Hirsch discuss their biographies represent two significantly different approaches to loss and

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<sup>218</sup>see for example Brinson, Charmian. 'A Woman's Place...?': German-speaking Women in Exile in Britain, 1933-1945' in *German Life and Letters* 51:2, April 1998, 202-224.

<sup>219</sup>Hirsch 1994: 4.

<sup>220</sup>Ibid.

consequently different expectations with regard to human life events (such as exile) and identity. Hoffman seems to be searching for a lost past, hoping to find a geographical place that resembles her imaginary Poland: a place where she could feel whole again, thereby overcoming her fragmentation. Hirsch, in contrast, seems to try to incorporate her loss into her identity. The American psychologists Eric D. Miller and Julie Omarzu have pointed out that Freud's 'Trauerarbeit', Lindemann's 'grief research' (1944)<sup>221</sup> and Bowlby's 'attachment theory'<sup>222</sup> all 'focus on the individual emotional response to loss'.<sup>223</sup> Freud's essay 'Trauer und Melancholie' (1915)<sup>224</sup> examines the characteristics of mourning and melancholy and aims to provide some guidance how to distinguish between them. Lindemann's research focuses on acute grief and the above mentioned study provides the model for how the 'stages of grief' are characterised in contemporary psychology.<sup>225</sup> The principles of 'attachment theory' were first formulated by John Bowlby and later developed by Mary Ainsworth. The theory is about the link between a child's earliest bonds with his or her mother (or, more neutrally: caregiver) and the later ability to form relationships with other people. It is mainly concerned with the quality of the 'attachment', and while there are certainly differences between Freud and Bowlby,<sup>226</sup> the 'ideas developed within attachment theory have parallels in those of psychoanalytic object relation theories, both with regard to the conceptualisation of motivation and the understanding of the origins of psychological disturbances',<sup>227</sup> as Gullestad has pointed out. These 'psychological disturbances' are investigated with regard to the links between interpersonal relations and their possible traumatic origins. According to Miller

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<sup>221</sup>Lindemann, Erich. 'Symptomatology and Management of Acute Grief', *The American Journal of Psychiatry*. 1944; 101: 141-148.

<sup>222</sup> For an introduction to attachment theory see for example Bretherton, Inge. 'The Origins of Attachment Theory: John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth' in *Attachment Theory: Social, developmental and Clinical Perspectives*, edited by Susan Goldberg (et al.) (Hillsdale: The Analytic Press, 2000), pp. 45-84; its implications on approaches to loss and grievance are discussed in Stroebe, M. S. 'Paving the Way: from Early Attachment Theory to Contemporary Bereavement Research', *Mortality* Volume 7, Number 2, 1 July 2002, pp. 127-138.

<sup>223</sup> Miller, Eric D. and Julie Omarzu. 'New Directions in Loss Research' in *Perspectives on Loss. A Sourcebook*, edited by John H. Harvey (Philadelphia: University of Iowa Press, 1998), p. 8.

<sup>224</sup> in: Freud, Sigmund. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, transl. by James Strachey, in collaboration with Anna Freud (London: Vintage, 2001).

<sup>225</sup> See for example Archer, John. *The Nature of Grief. The Evolution and Psychology of Reactions to Loss* (London: Routledge, 1999).

<sup>226</sup> See for example Fonagy, Peter. *Attachment Theory and Psychoanalysis* (New York: Other Press, 2001).

<sup>227</sup> Gullestad, Siri Erika. 'Attachment Theory and Psychoanalysis: Controversial Issues', *Scandinavian Psychoanalytic Review* (2001) 24, pp. 3-16.

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and Omarzu ‘these models assume that intense or prolonged grief is pathological in nature’ and that they treat ‘loss as a transient state that demands recovery in order to be “normal” or healthy’.<sup>228</sup> Hoffman’s autobiographical writing suggests that she shares this understanding of loss when she describes how she needs to ‘recover’ and to ‘reconcile her two voices’. Miller and Omarzu promote an alternative approach to loss and which, I would argue, is also based on Freud’s work: defining loss as ‘an event that forever alters the shape and outlook of one’s life’ their version ‘accepts that individuals who suffer a loss may never completely return to their pre-loss state and concedes that this may not even be an optimal goal’.<sup>229</sup> It seems to reflect Hirsch’s attitude as it does not regard loss and the trauma caused by it as something that needs to be or even should be ‘fixed’. It parts from the idea of an ideal world where everything is safe and sound and has its dedicated place. Not only does it suggest that loss is inevitably a part of human life but it also encourages a ‘com[ing] to terms with the changes, and integrating oneself into a new social context or identity’.<sup>230</sup> Thus, mourning is reinstated as an active process as opposed to the passive state of melancholia. Loss, paradoxically, by incorporating it into one’s identity, can be a gain: to say ‘I am the person who has lost’ adds to the identity.

### **Les Belles Infidèles?**

Questions of loss and gain are not the only issues that are relevant to translingualism as well as to translation studies. Malena’s wording, when she writes about ‘recovery’ and a ‘successful translation’ of Eva Hoffman, echoes concerns that have long occupied translators and theorists of translation. Over the centuries, what has been regarded as a ‘successful’ translation has changed significantly. From ‘les belles infidèles’ to ‘foreignisation’ – what has been considered ‘good’ or ‘successful’ over the centuries is as manifold as the translated texts themselves. So what does Malena mean when she talks about the successful translation of a person? Can we choose, to borrow from Schleiermacher, whether to move the ‘original’ person closer to the target

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<sup>228</sup> Miller and Omarzu 1998: 9.

<sup>229</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>230</sup> Miller and Omarzu 1998: 9.

culture, or to try getting the ‘target culture’ closer to the person?<sup>231</sup> And, most crucially: is a ‘successful translation’ one which does not betray the fact that it is a translation?<sup>232</sup> Does the ideal immigrant not have any ‘accent’? Or, on the other hand, should a translation be ‘faithful to the original’ and what would be the implication of that?<sup>233</sup> Do we still live in a society where translation is all about loss, where we can be *either or* but not *as well as*? In other words: can a writer be either Polish or Canadian, either be ‘Ewa’ or ‘Eva’? Should nobody be able to notice the presence of ‘Ewa’ in Canada? Can ‘Eva’ be left behind in North America when ‘Ewa’ travels east to visit the places of her childhood? Perhaps the concept of ‘foreignisation’ where a translated text is not only allowed but meant to be ‘strange’ or ‘different’ could be a model for the ‘successful translation’ of a person. Rather than ‘domesticating’ the migrant, to borrow a term coined by Lawrence Venuti,<sup>234</sup> a successful translation would allow her to express her ‘foreignness’ and her hyphenated identity in a society that is not as homogeneous as it has been portrayed – or should we say ‘imagined’, to borrow Benedict Anderson’s term? Furthermore, can a person be reduced to one single translation? And who has the authority to choose the right translation? In my opinion, however appealing this metaphor might be at the first sight, there are some serious issues. For a start, once a translation is done, it is fixed. However, a person changes and develops all the time and she or he can be very different in different contexts. Where and what is the ‘original’ when we translate a person?

### Moving beyond translation

Theories of translation can be useful in developing a new approach to translingual writing, as they point us at some of the challenges faced by those who want to move a text from one language to another – and it should have become apparent by now that moving a person is even more complex. Even if

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<sup>231</sup> ‘Entweder der Übersetzer läßt den Schriftsteller möglichst in Ruhe, und bewegt den Leser ihm entgegen; oder er läßt den Leser möglichst in Ruhe und bewegt den Schriftsteller ihm entgegen.’ Schleiermacher, as quoted in Snell-Hornby, Mary. *The turns of translation studies: new paradigms or shifting viewpoints?* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2006), p. 8.

<sup>232</sup> Of course, the answer to this question differs depending on the culture.

<sup>233</sup> Mary Besemeres for example claims that ‘the metaphor of fidelity to an original is an especially suggestive one in the context of an immigrant’s life’ and asks: ‘are the cultural assumptions with which he or she arrives susceptible to extension and revision, and to what extent can a ‘self’ be identified with them?’ ‘Language and Self in Cross-Cultural Autobiography: Eva Hoffman’s *Lost in Translation*’, *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 40 (3-4) (September-December 1998), p. 327.

<sup>234</sup> Venuti, Lawrence. *The Translator’s Invisibility* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).

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we question the extent to which ‘moving languages’ has to be a traumatic experience, changing from one language to another certainly implies moving from one way of looking at the world to another. Even without being a ‘Whorfian’, it is hard to imagine that we can understand the reality around us as utterly independent from the language we use to describe it: many concepts that help us make sense of our environment are language based and different languages engage with and influence this reality in different ways. The writer Arthur Koestler, who changed languages twice (first he switched from Hungarian to German and then from German to English) suggested that ‘(l)anguage serves not only to express thought, but to mold it’,<sup>235</sup> pointing out that ‘the adoption of a new language, particularly by a writer, means a gradual and unconscious transformation of his patterns of thinking, his style and his tastes, his attitudes and reactions.’<sup>236</sup> While Eva Hoffman would probably agree with the first part of Koestler’s statement, her description of the process of adopting a new language is certainly not that of a ‘gradual and unconscious transformation’. Different to Hoffman’s account of her ‘life in a new language’ Koestler’s expression suggests the absence of pain. Hoffman’s new Canadian life happens in a language that is appropriate for this new reality but fails to express the reality of her Polish past – and equally, this Canadian life cannot fully be captured in her old language. Hoffman even claims that her Polish ‘in a short time, has atrophied, shrivelled from sheer uselessness’<sup>237</sup> and, as her English had ‘not penetrated to those layers of [her] psyche from which a private conversation could proceed’,<sup>238</sup> there was a time when she had no interior language at all. She writes how ‘without it, interior images – those images through which we assimilate the external world, through which we take it in, love it, make it our own – become blurred too’.<sup>239</sup> This experience seems to be rather extreme and in stark contrast to what Vladimir Nabokov said about his ‘thinking language’. Asked in a BBC interview in 1962 about the language he thought in, he famously replied ‘I don’t think in any language. I think in images. I don’t believe that people think in languages’.<sup>240</sup> I would argue

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<sup>235</sup> Koestler, Arthur. ‘Becoming Anglicised’ in *Bricks to Babel: A Selection from 50 Years of his Writings, chosen and with New Commentary by the Author* (New York: Random House, 1981), p. 218.

<sup>236</sup> Koestler 1981: 218.

<sup>237</sup> Hoffman, Eva. *Lost in Translation* (London: Vintage, 1999), p. 107.

<sup>238</sup> Hoffman 1999: 107.

<sup>239</sup> Hoffman 1999: 108.

<sup>240</sup> Nabokov’s interview as quoted on [http://lib.ru/NABOKOW/Inter02.txt\\_with-big-pictures.html](http://lib.ru/NABOKOW/Inter02.txt_with-big-pictures.html)

that, while language certainly impacts on the way we look at the world, the lack of a suitable vocabulary to describe the unfamiliar does not necessarily prevent us from thinking and creating our own images about it. The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein once claimed ‘The limits of my language mean the limits of my world’.<sup>241</sup> These limits might not be as narrow as we think: our language can be stretched to accommodate new experiences and impressions. Learning to live in a new language might also make us more aware of the limits of any language – and of its flexibility. In the preface to *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* Wittgenstein writes, ‘what can be said at all can be said clearly; and whereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent’.<sup>242</sup> Perhaps this is not true for the person moving from one language into another: perhaps the double vision does not give us the clear-cut version we would like to have and there is a point in arguing that the alternative cannot be to fall silent.<sup>243</sup> Exploring the new language and stretching the limits not only of one’s language but also of one’s imagination – in other words embracing the ‘translingual imagination’ – is a process that can lead from blurry images to new insights. Magda Stroińska, referring to Hoffman’s experience, talks about an exiled writer’s need to ‘rediscover the lost connection between the external world and her internal representation of it through language’.<sup>244</sup> The crucial point for understanding what is happening in the translingual imagination is to realise that life in a new language does not mean starting from zero; there is no ‘tabula rasa’. The new language is overlaid on the old one. And while the connection has to be built between the new language and the world, this is done on the basis of the old language. Thus, the world becomes bigger and more complex as the translingual imagination gains space.

To illustrate how words in different languages “intend” the same object’ but differ in their ‘modes of intention’,<sup>245</sup> it seems useful to turn to Walter Benjamin’s concept of *reine Sprache* (pure language). Benjamin hints at ‘the

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<sup>241</sup> Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, translated by C. K. Ogden (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co, 1922). Project Gutenberg E-book edition, p. 74 (§ 5.6).

<sup>242</sup> Wittgenstein 1922: p. 23.

<sup>243</sup> as Hans Magnus Enzensberger writes in his poem ‘Das Falsche’ in *Der Fliegende Robert. Gedichte, Szenen, Essays* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1977).

<sup>244</sup> Stroińska, Magda. ‘The Role of Language in the Re-construction of Identity in Exile’, in *Exile, Language and Identity* by V. Cecchetto and M. Stroińska (eds.) (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2003), p. 99.

<sup>245</sup> Benjamin, Walter. ‘The Task of the Translator’, transl. by Harry Zohn, in *The Translation Studies Reader*, edited by Lawrence Venuti (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 18.

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kinship of languages' which in his view 'does not necessarily involve likeness'.<sup>246</sup> He claims

Vielmehr beruht alle überhistorische Verwandtschaft der Sprachen darin, daß in ihrer jeder als ganzer jeweils eines und zwar dasselbe gemeint ist, das dennoch keiner einzelnen von ihnen, sondern nur der Allheit ihrer einander ergänzenden Intentionen erreichbar ist: die reine Sprache. Während nämlich alle einzelnen Elemente, die Wörter, Sätze, Zusammenhänge von fremden Sprachen sich ausschließen, ergänzen diese Sprachen sich in ihren Intentionen selbst. Dieses Gesetz, eines der grundlegenden der Sprachphilosophie, genau zu fassen, ist in der Intention vom Gemeinten die Art des Meinens zu unterscheiden. In „Brot“ und „pain“ ist das Gemeinte zwar dasselbe, die Art, es zu meinen, dagegen nicht. [...] Während dergestalt die Art des Meinens in diesen beiden Wörtern einander widerstrebt, ergänzt sie sich in den beiden Sprachen, denen sie entstammen. Und zwar ergänzt sich in ihnen die Art des Meinens zum Gemeinten. Bei den einzelnen, den unergänzten Sprachen nämlich ist ihr Gemeintes niemals in relativer Selbständigkeit anzutreffen, wie bei den einzelnen Wörtern oder Sätzen, sondern vielmehr in stetem Wandel begriffen, bis es aus der Harmonie all jener Arten des Meinens als die reine Sprache herauszutreten vermag.<sup>247</sup>

Moving from one language to another, the translingual writers experiences different 'modes of intention', and is faced by the fact that words are not interchangeable. For Eva Hoffman, the new language challenged her understanding of 'friendship' when her old, Polish image of the word did not fit her American reality: talking about her Canadian classmate Penny, Hoffman says, 'we like each other quite well, though I'm not sure that what is between us is "friendship" – a word which in Polish has connotations of strong loyalty and attachment bordering on love'.<sup>248</sup> Eventually, Hoffman gives up on preserving the distinction between acquaintance and friend – in contrast to her parents who, 'with an admirable resistance to linguistic looseness, continue to call most people they know "my acquaintance"'.<sup>249</sup> I would argue that their 'resistance to linguistic looseness' is more of an adherence to what they consider to be their own values. In Canada, Eva Hoffman's patterns of thinking, her style and her tastes, her attitudes and reactions begin to depart from those prevalent in her parents' culture. The Canadian meaning of 'friend' is now part

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<sup>246</sup> Benjamin, Walter. 'The Task of the Translator', transl. by Harry Zohn, in *The Translation Studies Reader*, edited by Lawrence Venuti (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 18.

<sup>247</sup> Benjamin 1969: 61.

<sup>248</sup> Hoffman 1999: 148.

<sup>249</sup> Hoffman 1999: 148.

not only of her vocabulary but also of her world – but it is built on her Polish understanding of what friendship can mean as well.

### Gender Differences

In contrast to what Koestler seems to suggest, for Hoffman rediscovering the lost connection between language and the world does not happen unconsciously, or without any suffering and pain. Koestler's claim seems to be rather presumptuous anyway as he himself needed the tireless though unacknowledged support of his girlfriend Daphne Hardy to eventually master writing in English, as his biographer David Cesarani has pointed out.<sup>250</sup> Hardy did not only translate the German manuscript, but Koestler also 'owed the title of *Darkness at Noon* and much of its literary success to her'.<sup>251</sup> It was this success that allowed Koestler to get a contract for his next book, *Scum of the Earth* (1941) and, although this time he wrote in English, 'it benefited from Daphne Hardy's attention to grammar and vocabulary. Indeed, without her ministrations it is hard to see how it could have been such a *success d'estime*'.<sup>252</sup> Far from moving 'gradually' and painlessly from German to English, Koestler (ab)used his girlfriend's talent to establish himself as an English writer:

Hardy read, commented upon and improved his English, making sure it was elegant as well as intelligible. However, while Koestler mentioned this assistance to friends such as Paul Willert, apart from her translation of *Darkness at Noon* she never received public credit. It was little consolation that he referred to her sometimes as 'my fiancée' or 'my wife': he took her for granted and that rankled.<sup>253</sup>

The process of Koestler's language acquisition seems to have been as violent as Elias Canetti's memories of how German became his 'mother tongue'.<sup>254</sup> However, whereas in Canetti's narrative it is his childhood self who suffers through the 'tour de force' of learning a new language to be able to satisfy his mother's linguistic needs, Koestler's girlfriend is forced into 'feeding' him with the language skills he desires: Koestler is almost like the nightmarish 'fifth

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<sup>250</sup> Cesarani, David. *Arthur Koestler. The Homeless Mind* (London: Heineman, 1998).

<sup>251</sup> Cesarani 1998: 182.

<sup>252</sup> Cesarani 1998: 177.

<sup>253</sup> Cesarani 1998: 182.

<sup>254</sup> Canetti, Elias. *Die gerettete Zunge* (Hamburg: Hanser, 1977).

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child'<sup>255</sup> who devours the woman that is nurturing him. It would be interesting to find out whether Koestler's 'method' can be regarded as typical of (male) translinguals who 'effortlessly' move from language to language where other (female) writers, like Hoffman, struggle for years: in the end, it might all come down to whose efforts are mentioned and whose efforts are taken for granted. Research by Charmian Brinson has shown that in many cases it was immigrant women who earned a living in the new country as men struggled to adapt.<sup>256</sup> There are several examples of female fellow refugees of Koestler's who established themselves, albeit on a fairly modest level, as English writers, for example Hilde Spiel, Livia Laurent or Hermynia zur Mühlen.<sup>257</sup> However, as far as I am aware, none of them has ever boasted that moving from one language to another had been easy or painless, nor did they keep quiet about the support they received from friends. In the context of Koestler's language move, it seems that it was not painless either but that the pain was borne by Daphne Hardy rather than him.

As we have seen, moving from one language into another does not only entail the loss of the feeling of security that comes with monolingualism but also the gain of a new language and a new perspective at the world. In the following section, we shall explore the latter in more detail.

### **Gain at last: Looking at the world from a new angle**

In her 'Afterword' to Alvin Rosenfeld's *The Writer Uprooted: Contemporary Jewish Exile Literature*, Hoffman relates the experience of dis-connection and dis-location to the notion of defamiliarization. Being what she calls 'dis-embedded' is not only the challenge the translingual writer faces but also a potential gain which can become her advantage:

Dislocation from the familiar gives you new ways of observing and seeing, and brings you up against certain questions that otherwise remain unmasked and quiescent. It places you at an oblique angle to your world

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<sup>255</sup> See the novel of the same name by Doris Lessing (1988)

<sup>256</sup> Brinson, Charmian. 'A Woman's Place...?': German-speaking Women in Exile in Britain, 1933-1945' in *German Life and Letters* 51:2, April 1998, pp. 202-224.

Brinson, Charmian. 'Autobiography in exile: The reflections of women refugees from Nazism in British exile, 1933-1945' in *German-speaking Exiles in Great Britain*. Edited by J. M. Ritchie (Amsterdam/ New York: Rodopi, 2001).

<sup>257</sup> Hammel, Andrea. *Everyday Life as Alternative Space in Exile Writing: The Novels of Anna Gmeyner, Selma Kahn, Hilde Spiel, Martina Wied and Hermynia Zur Mühlen* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008).

and gives you a certain detachment and a vantage point. The perspective of distance can be a great stimulus to thought and creativity [...].<sup>258</sup>

In this light, the challenges a migrant faces when her world is no longer as it used to be, can be the basis for new growth; looking at the world from ‘an oblique angle’, or as Salman Rushdie calls it with ‘stereoscopic vision’,<sup>259</sup> can open up new perspectives that would have been hidden otherwise.

The underlying concept of defamiliarization is more immediately obvious in visual arts than in literature and therefore it might be useful to choose the example of Cubism to illustrate some key aspects. Cubist painters have illustrated how new perspectives might confuse the beholder who is expecting a coherent picture, if not a familiar one, from a single perspective. Cubism abandons ‘the idea of a single fixed viewpoint’.<sup>260</sup> Nicolas Pioch claims that cubist painters ‘provided what we could almost call a God’s-eye view of reality: every aspect of the whole subject, seen simultaneously in a single dimension’.<sup>261</sup> Its key concept is, in short, that the essence of an object becomes visible only when this object is simultaneously presented from different perspectives. By fragmenting and rearranging the form of the object, a painting becomes less ‘a kind of window through which an image of the world is seen, and more a physical object on which a subjective response to the world is created’.<sup>262</sup> Like a cubist painting, translingual writing offers more than just one perspective but looks at reality from different angles. The French poet Apollinaire described cubism as ‘the art of painting new configurations with elements borrowed not from visual but from conceptual reality’.<sup>263</sup> As ‘reality can never be discovered once and for all’,<sup>264</sup> translingual writing offers the opportunity for discovering new aspects that might have been otherwise hidden. Paul Klee once said about art that it does not reproduce the visible but that it makes visible,<sup>265</sup> and it could be argued that translingual writing

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<sup>258</sup> Hoffman, Eva. ‘Afterword’ in Rosenfeld, Alvin (ed.). *The Writer Uprooted: Contemporary Jewish Exile Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

<sup>259</sup> Rushdie 1991: 19.

<sup>260</sup> Chilvers, Ian. *The Oxford Dictionary of Art* (Oxford: University Press, 2004), 184.

<sup>261</sup> Pioch, Nicolas. ‘Picasso and Cubism’. <http://www.sai.msu.su/wm/paint/tl/20th/cubism.html>, accessed on 30 June 2011.

<sup>262</sup> Chilvers 2004: 184.

<sup>263</sup> Apollinaire as quoted in L. C. Breunig. *Apollinaire on Art: Essays and Reviews 1912-1918* (New York: Viking Press, 1972), 256.

<sup>264</sup> Apollinaire, Guillaume. *The Cubist Painters*, edited by Peter Read (Forest Row, Sussex: Artists Bookworks, 2002), 12.

<sup>265</sup> ‘Kunst gibt nicht das Sichtbare wieder, Kunst macht sichtbar’ (Klee 1976: 118).

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exemplifies this capacity.<sup>266</sup> The potential link between Cubism and literature becomes even more compelling when considering Steven M. Rosen's observations that in 'Cubist works, no longer does that [alter-]perspective hover in the background as we view the given perspective; rather, all perspectives are brought into the *foreground*, viewed simultaneously on the canvas.'<sup>267</sup> In the context of translingual writing this can be understood as exploring words in all their different facets, liberating them from the narrowness of their most obvious meaning, even allowing for ambiguities.

According to the American scholars David S. Miall and Don Kuiken, the actual term 'foregrounding' goes back to the Czech theorist Jan Mukarovsky, referring 'to the range of stylistic effects that occur in literature, whether at the phonetic level (e.g. alliteration, rhyme), the grammatical level (e.g. inversion, ellipsis), or the semantic level (e.g. metaphor, irony)'.<sup>268</sup> It can be seen as a literary strategy to present a complexity of meanings that cannot be achieved otherwise. The underlying concept from which Mukařovský's definition of 'foregrounding' derives, however, goes back to by Russian Formalism where 'foregrounding' has been identified as a method to achieve 'defamiliarization'.<sup>269</sup>

The defamiliarizing elements are almost like tripping stones: against the natural flow of automatized language they demand attention. According to Russian Formalists, the presence of these stylistic devices is what distinguishes literary from everyday language. It is important to point out that because of their disruptive function, stylistic devices cannot be stable or they become automatized – as is the case with metaphors that found their way into everyday language and therefore fail to strike us as 'strange' in a literary text. Thus, devices differ depending on the period in literary history and/ or the individual writer. Russian Formalism was not so much interested in looking at one particular stylistic device but how certain techniques are employed to achieve a

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<sup>266</sup> Of course, non-translingual writers can also experiment with language and discover 'hidden perspectives'. The point I am arguing here is that translingual writers do this 'by definition', looking at the world from different angles is a decisive characteristic of translingualism.

<sup>267</sup> Rosen, Steven M. *Dimensions of Apeiron: A Topological Phenomenology of Space, Time, and Individuation* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2004), p. 48.

<sup>268</sup> Miall, David S. and Don Kuiken. 'Foregrounding, Defamiliarization, and Affect Response to Literary Stories' in *Poetics*, 22, 1994, 389-407.

<sup>269</sup> Miall and Kuiken repeat what had been pointed out by Victor Erlich earlier, i.e. that some related ideas had been proposed already by Coleridge and Shelley (see for example Coleridge in his 'Occasion of the Lyrical Ballads').

specific effect. Victor Shklovsky for example pointed out that ‘poetic imagery is but one of the devices of poetic language’.<sup>270</sup> And, as even poetic imagery can become ‘automatized’, it might then be an altogether different device that interrupts the natural flow. According to Russian Formalism, defamiliarization is central not only to the very concept of poetic language but to art in general.

### **Defamiliarization and dialogism in translingual writing**

How does the concept of defamiliarization relate to translingual writing and to the notion of loss and gain? As we have seen, Eva Hoffman writes about her sense of being ‘dis-embedded’ and it is plausible that a person who moves into a new language cannot use it in an ‘automatized’ manner comparable to that of a ‘native’.<sup>271</sup> While apparently lacking the ability to communicate fully idiomatically – which can be considered a loss – translinguals enter a new world of linguistic possibilities. One example of exploring the potential of the new language given by Arthur Koestler is the ‘rediscovery of the cliché’. He makes the point that ‘every cliché, even the broken heart and the eternal ocean, was once an original find; and when you begin writing and thinking in a *new* language, you are apt to invent all by yourself images and metaphors which you think are highly original without thinking that they are hoary clichés.’<sup>272</sup> ‘A hoary cliché’ is certainly something a serious poet should try to avoid by all means – or they might end up like the inventor in Peter Bichsel’s short story: an inventor, who lives far away from the town, invents a machine that can show pictures from far away. When he arrives in the town to show the engineering design, the other people just laugh at him as the television had already been invented. The inventor leaves, spending his life away from other humans, re-inventing the fridge, the car, the telephone... all for himself – and ripping up each of the papers afterwards as these things had already been invented. ‘Doch er blieb sein Leben lang ein richtiger Erfinder, denn auch Sachen, die es gibt, zu erfinden, ist schwer, und nur Erfinder können es’.<sup>273</sup> This story tells many different lessons; however, the crucial point for us here is

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<sup>270</sup> Shklovsky, Victor. ‘Art as Technique’ in *Russian Formalist Criticism. Four Essays*, edited and translated by Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), p. 9.

<sup>271</sup> See for example Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill, ‘Linguistic Ecology’ in *Lives in Translation*, edited by Isabelle de Courtivron (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 80.

<sup>272</sup> Koestler 1981: 218-219.

<sup>273</sup> Bichsel, Peter. *Kindergeschichten* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2004).

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that even for an inventor it is not ideal not to be in dialogue with his fellow humans. To be sure that an invention is new, we have to know about previous inventions, about the work of our ancestors as well as our contemporaries. In poetry, this dialogue is necessary to understand which metaphors are 'hoary clichés' and which are not. Although Russian Formalism does not mention it explicitly, the literary scholar Alexei Bogdanov has hinted at the 'dialogic nature' of the concept of defamiliarization as it is 'implied in the assumption that the reader's perception of existing forms is "automatized," while the new forms foster deautomatization.'<sup>274</sup> In his work *On Poetic Language*<sup>275</sup> the Czech literary theorist Jan Mukařovský (1891-1975) engages with this idea and describes the 'aesthetic self-orientation' of poetic language and discusses 'the position of poetic language within the entire linguistic system'.<sup>276</sup> According to his argument, poetic language, and language in general, is not purely 'material' but carries meaning in itself – and it develops through application in various contexts. Furthermore, as the German scholar Wolfgang Iser has pointed out, Mukařovský maintains 'that a literary work can generate meaning only by referring to linguistic codes and aesthetic norms that are collectively shared',<sup>277</sup> thus emphasizing the dialogic nature of the process. Accordingly, language is more than a pure tool and translingual writers beginning their life in a new language do not enter an empty space but a language that is already full of history, potential meaning and generations of conversation. As new arrivals, translingual writers may mourn the loss of familiarity but they can join the dialogue in the new language. The theorist who coined the term *dialogism*, is the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975). Bakhtin maintains that words do not have a fixed meaning but develop in an eternal process that entails myriads of voices.

The word is not a material thing but rather the eternally mobile, eternally fickle medium of dialogic interaction. It never gravitates toward a single consciousness or a single voice. The life of the word is contained in its transfer from one mouth to another, from one context to another context, from one social collective to another, from one generation to another generation. In this process the word does not forget its own path

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<sup>274</sup> Bogdanov, Alexei. 'Ostranenie, Kenosis, and Dialogue: The Metaphysics of Formalism According to Shklovsky' in *The Slavic and East European Journal*, Vol. 49, No. 1 (Spring, 2005), p. 52.

<sup>275</sup> Mukařovský, Jan. *On Poetic Language* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976). First published in Czech in 1940.

<sup>276</sup> Mukařovský 1976: 13.

<sup>277</sup> Iser, Wolfgang. 'Foreword' in *Memory and Literature* by Renate Lachmann, transl. by Roy Sellars and Anthony Wall (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. viii.

and cannot completely free itself from the power of those concrete contexts into which it has entered.

When a member of a speaking collective comes upon a word, it is not as a neutral word of language, not as a word free from the aspirations and evaluations of others, uninhabited by others' voices. No, he receives the word from another's voice and filled with that other voice. The word enters his context from another context, permeated with the interpretations of others. His own thought finds the word already inhabited.<sup>278</sup>

In a sense, all words, all utterances are in dialogue with their past, present – and future. For a person arriving in a new language this implies that she cannot ignore the history of the new words, she cannot pretend they are just tools to express ideas that can remain independent from and untouched by these words. Equally, the 'aspirations and evaluations' even of those new to the language enter the realm of the words and add yet another context. Words, in this understanding, can accommodate myriads of voices and language can be a harbourage.

Bakhtin's view is in sharp contrast with positivists' approaches to language as he insists 'that language cannot be reduced to abstract, logical or mathematical expressions alone'.<sup>279</sup> Deriving from this understanding of language, members of the Bakhtin Circle rejected the idea that words can carry any objective, fixed meaning independent from the dialogic process. In *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1929) Valentin Voloshinov claims for example that 'meaning belongs to a word in its position between speakers' and is 'the effect of interaction between the speaker and listener'.<sup>280</sup> This understanding of language and meaning has some highly explosive implications as it refuses the right of a single, strong voice to dominate meaning. Particularly with regard to poetic language it is true that nobody owns language in an absolute sense; every voice is part of an endless dialogue. Nevertheless, even in everyday language new layers of meaning are added and discovered all the time. Eva Hoffman, arriving in Canada, adds new meaning to the English word 'friend' and her utterance joins a conversation that has been going on for centuries and will continue longer than any single human voice.

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<sup>278</sup> Bakhtin, M. M. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Translated and edited by C. Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p.201.

<sup>279</sup> Beasley-Murray, Tim. *Mikhail Bakhtin and Walter Benjamin. Experience and Form* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p.88.

<sup>280</sup> Voloshinov, V. N. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, ed. and trans. Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 103.

## Dialogism and 'reine Sprache'

The dialogic principle that Bakhtin proclaims has been described by Iris M. Zavala as

breaking ground for an unsettling process of meaning and subject, and heightening what is open, mobile, relational against what is finished, conclusive, static. Words are meant, to him [Bakhtin], to bring forth significations which have hitherto been unuttered and unutterable. Dialogic relations not only address the loud, recognizable boisterous dominant reigning voices, but the weak, not yet emerged, just beginning to ripen, embryos of future world views as well.<sup>281</sup>

It seems that Benjamin's idea of 'reine Sprache' which we have encountered in earlier in this chapter, shares some common ground with Bakhtin's dialogic principle.

'Reine Sprache' as seen by Benjamin, belongs to a messianic concept of language that proposes the view that pure language will eventually emerge from the harmony of all different 'Arten des Meinens'. Benjamin argues that, only in the 'Allheit ihrer einander ergänzenden Intentionen'<sup>282</sup> true language is possible. In this way, Benjamin promotes a universalistic view in a post-language-relativism world: while he grants that languages differ and that it is not possible to translate mechanically from one language to another he insists that there is a common source and a common goal. While Benjamin's approach derives from Jewish mysticism it is compatible with modern theories of language origin.<sup>283</sup>

Benjamin's 'reine Sprache' can therefore be understood as language that entails everything as opposed to 'reine Sprache' in a romantic sense that wants to exclude everything that is regarded as foreign and impure.<sup>284</sup>

Bakhtin and Benjamin both seem to share a connection with the tradition of the German philosopher Wilhelm von Humboldt as they maintain the idea that language 'ist kein Werk (*Ergon*), sondern eine Tätigkeit (*Energeia*)'.<sup>285</sup> In the

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<sup>281</sup> Zavala, Iris M. 'Bakhtin and Otherness: Social Heterogeneity', in *Mikhail Bakhtin and the Epistemology of Discourse*, edited by Clive Thomson (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1990), p. 87.

<sup>282</sup> Benjamin 1969: 61.

<sup>283</sup> See for example Ruhlen, Merritt, *The Origin of Language: Tracing the Evolution of the Mother Tongue* (New York: Wiley and Sons, 1994).

<sup>284</sup> Of course, Benjamin's concept of language comprises far more than just 'reine Sprache'. For a more comprehensive essay by Benjamin about his approach to language see for example 'Über Sprache überhaupt und über Sprache des Menschen' (1916)

<sup>285</sup> Humboldt, Wilhelm von. *Über die Verschiedenheit des Menschlichen Sprachbaues und Ihren Einfluss*

curriculum vitae written shortly before his death, Benjamin states explicitly that 'it was lectures on Humboldt's "Über den Sprachbau der Völker" that awoke his interest in the philosophy of language'.<sup>286</sup> As for Bakhtin, the concept of dialogism can be directly derived from the idea of language as *energeia*. Tim Beasley-Murray has highlighted how both Benjamin and Bakhtin distanced themselves from efforts to find an abstract formula for the nature of language:

Bakhtin's point [...] is that language cannot be reduced to abstract, logical or mathematical expression alone. The utterance always bears some of the traces of its genesis in a particular, historically and socially located context. The corollary of this is that the attempts at stating only the logical purity of the given, utterances such as mathematical equations, are unutterable in language. In 'On the Programme of the Coming Philosophy', Benjamin similarly argues that Kant's inability to account for the fullness of possible experience is the result of his tendency to seek the model of knowledge not in language but in mathematical formulae. For both thinkers, language contains a fuller form of experience than the minimal experience that is grasped by abstract thinking.<sup>287</sup>

This 'fuller form of experience' is visible in Bakhtin's dialogism as well as in Benjamin's 'reine Sprache'. When Benjamin, in his essay 'Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers', elaborates on how the process of the translation of a text should be accomplished, and what the real purpose of any translation is, the idea that any translation is a form of answer to the original and that any text yearns for translation, implies a dialogue between the text and the words of the text. In *Mikhail Bakhtin and Walter Benjamin* Beasley-Murray describes translation as a 'form of indirect or double-voiced discourse'<sup>288</sup> and argues that, despite (contextual) differences Bakhtin's and Benjamin's understanding of what language is and should be, is very similar. And indeed, the way in which Bakhtin writes about how 'languages throw light on each other'<sup>289</sup> resembles Benjamin's idea of translation. As different languages are illuminating each other, as each word, each utterance is a multi-voiced dialogue, language is always changing and can only be understood in its specific context. Each word

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*auf die Geistige Entwicklung des Menschengeschlechts* (Berlin: Königliche Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1836), p. 41.

<sup>286</sup> Brewster, Philip and Carl Howard Buchner. 'Language and Critique: Jürgen Habermas on Walter Benjamin', *New German Critique*, No. 17, Special Walter Benjamin Issue (Spring, 1979), p. 21.

<sup>287</sup> Beasley-Murray, Tim. *Mikhail Bakhtin and Walter Benjamin. Experience and Form* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p.88.

<sup>288</sup> Beasley-Murray 2007: 102.

<sup>289</sup> Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), p. 12.

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entails the potential of generations – a glimpse of ‘reine Sprache’ – and each utterance carries forward the communication.

### **Dialogism and intertextuality**

So where does this Benjaminian-Bakhtinian theory of language lead us with regard to translingual writers? In the creative process of writing translingual poetry the languages present in the poet certainly illuminate each other and the words carry voices from different times and places.<sup>290</sup>

Moving from the idea of ‘reine Sprache’ and the dialogic nature of language to the discussion of the implications of intertextuality seems a natural step as intertextuality can be thought of as a dialogue between texts. Mary Orr defines intertextuality as ‘a text’s relation to other texts in the larger “mosaic” of cultural practices and their expression. An “intertext” is therefore a focalizing point within this network or system, while a text’s “intertextual” potential is derived from its relation with other texts past, present, and future.’<sup>291</sup> Long before Bulgarian-born French philosopher Julia Kristeva coined the term, Mikhail Bakhtin noted that

The text lives only by coming into context with another text (with context). Only at this point of contact between texts does a light flash, illuminating both the posterior and anterior, joining a given text to a dialogue. We emphasize that this contact is a dialogue between texts [...]. Behind this contact is a contact of personalities and not of things.<sup>292</sup>

In translingual poetry, the intertexts are not only from different times but also from different national literatures – they are in dialogue with the ‘already-said and the to-be-said’<sup>293</sup> in different voices, different languages. Of course, to some extent this applies to all literature. However, I would argue that in translingual poetry the different voices are even more interwoven and can often include those that do not belong to the canon of world literature.

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<sup>290</sup> The argument that Bakhtin explicitly excluded poetic language from his concept of dialogism can be dismissed as he repeatedly discusses language in general terms as ‘dialogic’. For an extensive discussion of the issue see also Renate Lachmann’s *Memory and Literature*, transl. by Roy Sellars and Anthony Wall (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

<sup>291</sup> Orr, Mary. ‘Intertextuality’ in *The Encyclopedia of Literary and Cultural Theory* Vol. 2, edited by Robert Eaglestone (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2011), p. 641.

<sup>292</sup> *Bakhtin, M. M. Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Trans. by Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), p.162.

<sup>293</sup> Bauman, Richard. *A World of Other’s Words. Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Intertextuality* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p. 5.

Bakhtin's emphasis on the contact between personalities rather than between things and his insistence on the importance of the context is also in stark contrast to those branches of literary theory that proclaimed the 'death of the author'.<sup>294</sup> Far from being dead, Bakhtin maintained that 'the author is profoundly active but this action takes on a specific dialogic character'.<sup>295</sup> The dialogic nature of (translingual) writing also reassures voices like Edward Said who stressed that

texts are worldly, to some degree they are events, and, even when they appear to deny it, they are nevertheless a part of the social world, human life, and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted.<sup>296</sup>

Said accused contemporary criticism of having 'given up the world entirely for the aporias and unthinkable paradoxes of a text'.<sup>297</sup> In the context of translingual writers it seems essential to take Said's point on board: to 'take realities into account', to read the translingual poetry by women of German-Jewish origin in the context of both their biographies and the historical events, to be aware of the different intertexts and the dialogues of different voices. The concept of 'translingual imagination' in my understanding can only be a useful tool when all these aspects are taken into consideration. Only by including biographical information as well as textual ones can we shed light on how these four women poets who are in the centre of this research 'inhabit' the English language. By contextualising their work, notions of defamiliarization become meaningful beyond their role as a poetic device. In dialogue with German, English and ancient classical intertexts we may unravel layers of meaning in the translingual text that might otherwise remain unnoticed. Writing in-between different national literatures, hybridization is characteristic for translingual authors. Bakhtin explains that

What we are calling a hybrid construction is an utterance that belongs, by its grammatical (syntactic) and compositional markers, to a single speaker, but that actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two 'languages', two semantic and axiological belief systems.<sup>298</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> See Barthes, Roland. 'Death of the Author' in *Image Music Text*, transl. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977)

<sup>295</sup> Todorov, Tzvetan. *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogic Principle*, transl. by Vlad Godzich (Manchester: University Press, 1984), p. 106.

<sup>296</sup> Said, Edward. *The World, the Text and the Critic* (London: Vintage, 1991), p.4.

<sup>297</sup> Said 1991: 5.

<sup>298</sup> Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, transl. Caryl

## Chapter 3

The translingual writer Salman Rushdie has pointed out that as an Indian he ‘can’t simply use the language in the way the British did’,<sup>299</sup> insisting that the language ‘needs remaking for our own purposes’.<sup>300</sup> This ‘remaking’ happens as a dialogue between two cultures. Bakhtin maintains that even past meaning is not stable and the ‘boundless masses of forgotten contextual meanings’ might be discovered in the process of the translingual imagination. ‘Nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will have its homecoming festival’.<sup>301</sup>

In a world dominated by the loud and boisterous voices, where literature is still considered more of a national than a human treasure, translingual writers are not always in a comfortable position. As Salman Rushdie writes:

Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools. But however ambiguous and shifting this ground may be, it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy. If literature is in part the business of finding new angles at which to enter reality, then once again our distance, our long geographical perspective, may provide us with such angles.<sup>302</sup>

In the following chapters I shall explore the poetry of Karen Gershon, Lotte Kramer, Gerda Mayer and Alice Beer with regard to the ‘ambiguous and shifting ground’ they occupy.

I will apply the criteria of translingual writing developed in this chapter as tools for my analysis of the poems. One general focus will be on defamiliarizing elements, either related to form, language or content. I shall demonstrate how the translingual poets disrupt automatized patterns and thereby foreground significant aspects of their stories in their poems. The three analytical chapters are structured so that each of them concentrates on one criterion: biographical events, loss and gain, and intertextual references. While they occur often interlinked in the poetry of the four women, their emphasis tends to shift. The first of the three analytical chapters will deal with biographical traces in the poets’ work, and although the selection of poems displays a strong emphasis on crucial biographical moments, they may still

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Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 304.

<sup>299</sup> Rushdie, Salman. *Imaginary Homelands*. Essays and Criticism 1981-1991 (London: Granta Books, 1992), p. 17.

<sup>300</sup> Rushdie 1992: 17.

<sup>301</sup> Bakhtin, Mikhail. ‘Methodology for the Human Sciences’ in *Speech, Genres and Other Late Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), p. 170.

<sup>302</sup> Rushdie, Salman. *Imaginary Homelands*. Essays and Criticism 1981-1991 (London: Granta Books, 1992), p. 15.

refer to loss and gain, or to various intertexts. With regard to the biographical traces, I shall particularly focus on aspects of departure and arrival. The next chapter will then examine questions of loss and gain as they occur in the poems. While the (im)balance between loss and gain will be an interesting point to consider, I shall demonstrate how these issues are addressed in a variety of different contexts, such as time, place and language. Finally, the chapter on 'Intertexts' will explore the rich and versatile intertextual references that manifest themselves in the poems. By making audible some of the voices that are part of the ongoing dialogue within these poems, I hope to show how the new angles from which the poets look at their world can make us, as readers, see our world in a different way – and stretch our language and imagination.



## Chapter 4: Departure and Arrival – Biographical Traces

As we have seen in chapter 2, experiencing the early Nazi years and the traumatic separation from parents, siblings and other members of the family had a huge impact on the lives of the *Kindertransport* refugees. In this chapter I shall demonstrate, how the biographies of the four women poets have played an important part in how, when and why they took up writing. Biography has also influenced their choices of style and motifs. While Karen Gershon had already published poetry in German,<sup>303</sup> and Gerda Mayer had wanted to become an actress or writer from early childhood on,<sup>304</sup> the other poets began to write poetry later in life. Again and again, they re-visit actual or imagined events of their own as well as their family's past in their writing. Therefore, I will look at the connection between biographical experience and becoming a poet and at ways in which the biographies of these four poets have provided themes and motifs for their writing. One of the recurring motifs in their work is that of departure and arrival. It is probably no coincidence that for the women who left home to join a *Kindertransport*, the emphasis is mostly on *departure* while *arrival* often seems to be temporary and tainted by imperfection. This is particularly true for Gershon's poems as she had never anticipated any meaningful arrival in England, assuming that she was just on her transit to Palestine. Whilst Gershon, Mayer and Kramer differ with regard to the extent to which they write about their own departure from home, their parents' departure features repeatedly in their poems. Alice Beer, however, who left Vienna as a young woman and whose childhood did not come to an abrupt and early end because of the Nazi terror, nor did her parents die in the Holocaust, writes little about her departure from Vienna and more about her arrival in Britain. Examining her poems will be useful for illustrating the different ways in which the translingual imagination can manifest itself. While focussing on biographical events, I will also examine how the poets employ form and stylistic features to explore the painful as well as the joyful experiences they write about. At times there will be overlaps with the other criteria as even

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<sup>303</sup>Gershon, Karen. *A Lesser Child* (London: Peter Owen, 1994), p. 133.

<sup>304</sup> interview with the author

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though the poems in this section are chosen for their biographical interest they still contain elements related to 'loss and gain' as well as to intertextual references.

### Karen Gershon

The poet was born Käthe Löwenthal in Bielefeld (Germany) in 1923. The family was middle-class and particularly her father, Paul Gershon-Löwenthal, strongly identified as German. Karen Gershon's maternal family, however, felt allegiance not only to the German state but also to the Jewish community which is illustrated by the fact that the grandfather, Adolf Schönfeld, was head of the Jewish community of Bielefeld.<sup>305</sup> Following the rise of National Socialism, the parents decided that Käthe and her two older sisters should learn Hebrew, to equip them to make *Aliyah*.<sup>306</sup> Around that time Karen also began to write her first poems in German. In 1936 she recited one of them at a children's Chanukah party, 'pretending (to save her embarrassment) that it was from a book'.<sup>307</sup>

Gershon and her next older sister Lise managed to get a place on the second Kindertransport to England and arrived in Harwich on 15 December 1938.<sup>308</sup> Their oldest sister, Anne, followed in spring 1939 on her own, as she was too old for the scheme.<sup>309</sup> In December 1941 Gershon's parents were deported to Riga where her father died as a forced labourer. Her mother reportedly survived until the autumn of 1944, there is no information though about what happened to her afterwards.<sup>310</sup> She might have been amongst those who were deported to the concentration camp Stutthof but her name was not on any of the lists of camp survivors published by the Red Cross in April

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<sup>305</sup>See Huppert, Shmuel. 'Karen Gershon' *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*. 1 March 2009. Jewish Women's Archive. November 8, 2011 <<http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/gershon-karen>>.

<sup>306</sup>*Aliyah* is the Hebrew for 'ascent' and in this context means the immigration to then Palestine; Karen Gershon was a member of *Youth Aliyah*, an organisation that helped youngsters escape from Nazi Germany and also prepared for life in Palestine, including learning Modern Hebrew.

<sup>307</sup>Brown, Susan, Patricia Clements and Isobel Grundy (eds.). 'Karen Gershon' in *Orlando: Women's Writing in the British Isles from the Beginnings to the Present* (Cambridge: University Press Online, 2006), [orlando.cambridge.org](http://orlando.cambridge.org), 01 February 2012.

<sup>308</sup>Gershon, Karen. *A Tempered Wind. An Autobiography*. Edited by P. Lassner and P. Lawson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2009), p. 37.

<sup>309</sup>Gershon 2009: 9.

<sup>310</sup>Gershon 2009: xi.

1946.<sup>311</sup> In 'A Jew's Calendar' Gershon recalls how she searched the lists for her parents' names.

Spring 1945

X

I climbed some stairs to a bare room  
 in which the Red Cross lists were spread  
 naming the German Jews not dead  
 I could not find my parents' names  
 so glad was I they could not claim  
 compensation from me for  
 the martyrdom they had to bear  
 that I did not grieve for them<sup>312</sup>

There is no punctuation in 'A Jew's Calendar' apart from a full stop at the end of the final stanza. The lack of punctuation marks can be understood as a defamiliarizing element in Gershon's poem. We, as readers, become insecure how to read the poem, as we do not know where to pause. It seems that the regular pattern of the stanza has taken on the role of organising the content and keeping everything together. Like many of Gershon's poems, 'A Jew's Calendar' is written in eight-line stanzas. In a preface to a later edition of her *Selected Poems* the poet herself commented on her choice of form:

A style I discovered for myself: an eight-line stanza with movable rhymes or half-rhymes; finding that it suited me, I came to rely on it; I was not interested in technical experimentation.<sup>313</sup>

In our example, the stanza is written mainly in iambic tetrameters, although there are several pauses and inversions that interrupt the flow. The first two lines are metrically unobtrusive whereas the third line begins with an inversion ('naming') before returning to the iambic meter. The sixth and the eighth lines are one syllable shorter than the other ones, having only seven syllables each instead of eight. However, if one added a silent foot, i.e. a pause at the beginning of each of the two lines, they too fit into the iambic pattern. Rhythm is not the only element of repetition employed in the poem. Different types of rhyme can be found throughout the poem; most obvious are the end rhymes

<sup>311</sup>Gershon 2009: xi.

<sup>312</sup>Gershon, Karen. *Selected Poems* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1966), p. 32.

<sup>313</sup>Gershon, Karen. Foreword' in *Selected Poems* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan Publishers, 1990), p. 2.

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(‘spread’/ ‘dead’) but there is also alliteration (‘some stairs’; ‘could’, ‘claim’, ‘compensation’) as well as assonance (‘stairs’/ ‘bare’; ‘names’/ ‘claim’). It seems that the poet chose a traditional form of stanza, employing traditional characteristics of poetry. The first two lines of the poem describe the poetic persona climbing the stairs to the room in which the Red Cross had put up the lists and the regular English meter conjures up a safety that is shattered in the third line: ‘naming’ the surviving German Jews is the first irregular beat.

This moment of shock, of recognition that her parents’ names are not on the lists of the survivors, is audible in this disruption of the metric pattern. Yet, the poet’s reaction to this lack of their names must come as a surprise to the reader as she appears to be relieved. The ‘relief’ could be related to her ‘survivors’ guilt’ as she feels that she was spared all the suffering her parents went through, that she did not pay the price they had to pay. Thinking of her parents’ suffering she feels unable to respond in any appropriate way and her claim that she ‘did not grieve for them’ underlines this inability. Both lines, the sixth where she writes about the possible compensation that could have been demanded from her and the final one where she states that she did not grieve for her parents, are a syllable short. I would argue that this is no coincidence but a way of showing that something is missing. Particularly the last line, where by mentioning that she did not grieve she shows her awareness that grief is what would normally be expected to follow the violent death of the parents, the missing syllable symbolizes the gap that was left. Furthermore, there is this most crucial gap on the Red Cross lists. Two lines are a syllable short – and the Red Cross lists were two names short. Not only did they not survive but their deaths were not documented in a way that their daughter could at least have some certainty about their fate. Therefore, her loss is worsened by a sense of uncertainty that makes mourning her parents even more difficult.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, there are different psychoanalytical and other accounts attempting to explain loss and grief. Nevertheless, while the approaches might differ in what they see as ‘successful mourning’ both the traditional (Freudian) approach as well as more recent alternatives assume that loss is followed by grief. Gershon, however, clearly claims that she did not grieve. It seems that this apparent lack of an appropriate emotional response is related to the horrific circumstances of her

parents' death as well as the circumstances of her separation from her parents. Daughter and parents parted at a moment when adolescence meant that the relationship was under a certain strain, the aggravating circumstances make it difficult to embark on a normal grieving process.<sup>314</sup> The poem was written by the adult poet, at that time when she had become a mother herself. Looking back she cannot change the awkward feelings or undo the behaviour of her adolescent self. She, as a daughter, and her parents never had a chance to solve the conflicts that are part of growing up because their relationship ended with their violent death.<sup>315</sup>

The denial of the loss, at times in the form of an inability to grieve is not unusual for *Kindertransport* refugees whose parents were murdered. Being reminded of how the loved ones died can be too painful to face, especially when the expectations of the environment are that one should be able to cope.<sup>316</sup> It seems that the translingual poet has made herself a dwelling place where she can rely on the safety net of traditional forms and rhyme. The comfort of this safe place enables her, at least at times, to let the traumatic events of her life surface and to continue her 'interrupted grief'.<sup>317</sup>

The stanza belongs to one of Gershon's longer poems and most of the aspects mentioned above are visible throughout the poem. 'A Jew's Calendar' can be read almost like a diary of traumatic events.<sup>318</sup> The 14 stanzas are grouped under different subtitles: '10<sup>th</sup> November 1938' for the first three stanzas, '1933' for stanzas four and five, '1935' (the year when the Nuremberg Laws were introduced) for stanza six, '13<sup>th</sup> December 1938' (marking the day Gershon and her sister left Germany on the *Kindertransport*) for stanzas seven to nine, 'Spring 1945' for stanza ten, '13<sup>th</sup> December 1941' (the day Gershon's parents were deported) for stanzas eleven to thirteen, and finally 'June 1963' (most probably the month in which the poem was written) for the last stanza.

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<sup>314</sup>Dieter E. Zimmer. *Die Vernunft der Gefühle – Ursprung, Natur und Sinn der menschlichen Emotion* (München: Piper, 1981) p. 155-168.

<sup>315</sup>For the difficulties in their relationship see for example Gershon's autobiography *A Lesser Child* (1994), or Lassner, Phyllis. *Anglo-Jewish Women Writing The Holocaust: Displaced Witnesses* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

<sup>316</sup>See for example Göpfert, Rebecca. 'Kindertransport: History and Memory' in *Shofar* Vol. 23, 2004.

<sup>317</sup>Kellermann 2001: 8.

<sup>318</sup>The poem is, albeit briefly, mentioned in *A History of Twentieth Century British Women's Poetry* by Jane Dawson and Alice Entwistle (Cambridge: University Press, 2005). In this volume, Gershon is wrongly described as 'the Polish émigré' (p. 87).

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Although the poem mostly adheres to a chronological order of events, it is structured according to the moment in time an event became known or relevant to the poet. Even if Jewish parents had tried to protect their children from the hostile policies and threatening changes, after the November pogrom it was no longer possible to pretend that they would be safe. With the pogrom, a new 'Jewish calendar' of persecution starts: it is the pre-stage of the *Endlösung* and, as Frithjof Trapp has pointed out, all efforts to leave Germany were now driven by the desire to survive, almost independent of an opportunity to have any kind of new career abroad.<sup>319</sup> Accordingly, the second and third section of the poem can be almost read like flashbacks: here, the poetic persona revisits two moments that had set the stage for the tragedy that was to unfold. The next section ('13<sup>th</sup> December 1938') describes how Gershon left her hometown and with it the perspective of becoming a German poet. The town is portrayed as an individual, i.e. personified: the poet writes that the town 'looked at us and cast us out'. Rather than the people, it was the town who exiled the children and who did not allow Gershon 'to belong'. The poet's claim that 'exiled I cannot sing about/ what was an ordinary town' sets the scene for the next stanza where Gershon describes how she was separated from her German.

### VIII

All that was German in us was  
exorcised the day we left  
the persecution's single gift  
granted a second birth to us  
Jewish voices are among  
the greatest in the German tongue  
had I lived in another time  
one of them might have been mine

Meter and rhyme in this stanza are similar to what we found in the one discussed above. Again, the shorter lines differ in their rhythm and appear to be carrying the most distressing messages. Looking at the second line, the poet could have easily moved the word 'was' from the previous line down thus adding an unstressed syllable and the iambic

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<sup>319</sup>Trapp, Frithjof. Rezension: 'Die Vorstufe zur "Lösung der Judenfrage": Texte zur Judenverfolgung im Institut für Zeitgeschichte' in *Exil. Forschung – Erkenntnisse – Ergebnisse*, 29 Jg. (2009).

meter would have remained undisturbed. For example, had she written 'All German heritage and truss/ was exorcised the day we left', or even 'All that was German in us thus/ was exorcised the day we left', the attention would not have immediately been drawn to the first word of the second line. The poet's choice to start the line with an inverted foot, thus putting an additional emphasis on 'exorcised', results in a strong gesture<sup>320</sup>: the first line informs about the subject ('All that was German in us') and builds up the anticipation with an enjambment – followed by 'exorcised' which unravels what happened. The term 'exorcised' stems from the religious context, mainly from a Christian setting. While ridding people of evil spirits plays a central role in Jesus' miracles and subsequently in Christian tradition, there are comparatively few examples of exorcism in the Hebrew Bible. However, in his article 'Dybbuk, demons and exorcism in Judaism' Rabbi David Wolpe has pointed out that 'Dybbuks and demons, possession and magic are woven throughout Jewish history'.<sup>321</sup> He is not the only scholar to regard the case of King Saul as the first significant biblical story where a person was possessed by an 'evil spirit'.<sup>322</sup> As Gershon's poem is neither a Chassidic folk tale nor referring to an 'evil spirit' that has taken possession of an individual, it seems to be talking about a 'German' spirit that had entered the whole of German Jewry. As discussed in chapter two, following the *Haskalah* the vast majority of German Jews, no matter whether they belonged to the Reform or the Orthodox movement, strongly identified as Germans. In response to the rejection by their homeland, Gershon and her sisters – like many others – had joined Zionist groups.<sup>323</sup> At the moment of leaving the country of her

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<sup>320</sup>See Brecht, Bertolt. *Schriften zum Theater 3* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1963), p. 281.

<sup>321</sup>Wolpe, David. 'Dybbuks, demons and exorcism in Judaism' *The Jewish Journal*, 26<sup>th</sup> June 2012, available online at [http://www.jewishjournal.com/cover\\_story/article/dybbuks\\_demons\\_and\\_exorcism\\_in\\_judaism\\_20120627/](http://www.jewishjournal.com/cover_story/article/dybbuks_demons_and_exorcism_in_judaism_20120627/) accessed on 17<sup>th</sup> July 2012

<sup>322</sup>see First Samuel 16: 14-23.; for a discussion of differences and similarities between the exorcists David and Jesus see for example Klutz, Todd. *The Exorcism Stories in Luke-Acts: A Sociostylistic Reading* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 61 f.

<sup>323</sup>Gershon, Karen. *A Lesser Child* (London: Peter Owen, 1994), p. 81f. About the growing importance of Zionist youth groups in Nazi Germany see for example Mendes-Flohr, Paul. 'Jüdische Jugendverbände' in

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birth, young Käthe Löwenthal imagines that she would become a Zionist Jewish poet writing in the language of her 'second birth' – Hebrew. Thus, the poet's voice would not be among those of her fellow German Jews who were some of 'the greatest in the German tongue'. This is not spelled out explicitly in her English poem here but the 'second birth' seems to hint at it. Supporting evidence can be found in the fact that, initially, Käthe and her sisters belonged to a group of Zionist youngsters who entered Britain on transit to Palestine. As there was some delay with visas, the girls found themselves waiting in a camp in Dovercourt for their immigration papers to arrive. In her autobiography, Gershon recalls the day when Teddy Kolek, later mayor of Jerusalem, and two other youth leaders from the London office of the Jewish Agency arrived to meet the children.

These permits to enter the land of Israel which we were waiting for, he began, speaking German with a Viennese accent, which would enable us to leave the reception camp, thus making space for more children to be brought over from Germany – surely it made more sense to allocate these permits to children who were still in Germany, who were worse off than we were, in more urgent need of them.<sup>324</sup>

British immigration policy in 1938 was based on the understanding that Britain was predominantly 'a country of transit for refugees'<sup>325</sup> and even though the government had agreed to allow unaccompanied children into the country they were not to stay indefinitely. Thus, the prospect of further travels, which was linked to these permits to immigrate to Palestine, would allow helping more children out of Germany. As Jewish immigration to Palestine had been capped due to Arab objections,<sup>326</sup> the scarce permits became even more valuable. Being reassured that they would receive their new permits before they turned seventeen (in

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*Deutsch-jüdische Geschichte der Neuzeit*, Band 4, edited by Paul Mendes-Flohr et al. (München: Beck, 2000), p. 287.

<sup>324</sup> Gershon 2009: 46.

<sup>325</sup> London, Louise. *Whitehall and the Jews 1933-1948: British Immigration Policy and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: University Press, 2000), p. 9.

<sup>326</sup> See for example Haim, Yehoyada. 'Zionist Attitudes Toward Partition, 1937-1938' *Jewish Social Studies*, 40:3/4 (1978:Summer/Fall) p. 304.

keeping with the conditions of their British visa), Käthe and Lise together with the other children signed off their entitlement to the existing permits for Palestine. When Lise finally received her papers in June 1939, shortly before her 17<sup>th</sup> birthday, it meant that the sisters would become separated as there still was no entry permit for Käthe.<sup>327</sup> Her older sister, Anne, was equally out of reach: she had arrived in Britain in spring 1939 and spent some time in London before leaving for a Zionist training farm in Kent.<sup>328</sup>

Thus, Gershon found herself all on her own in a foreign country. At first, she did not intend to write in English and after leaving Germany she had continued to write in German for some time. It was not until the summer of 1941 that she began to write in English.<sup>329</sup> In other words, although the exorcism of 1938 was to erase ‘all that was German’ in her, it seems not to have succeeded in taking the German language away from her. Her new poetic language, however, was also not the one that she had prepared for when she attended Hebrew classes in Germany. In the end, the poet’s ‘Jewish voice’ did neither become one of the great voices in the German nor the Hebrew tongue. ‘13<sup>th</sup> December 1938’, these lines written in English, illustrate the characteristics of translingual writing: the loss, as spelled out in the words of the poem and emphasised by the missing syllables; the unexpected gain that is not only ‘the second birth’ but also the English meter. Gershon increasingly rejected her German background and thought of herself as ‘a Jew who happened to have been born in Germany’ and even ‘ceased to value the poems [she] wrote in German’.<sup>330</sup> However, the latter might also have to do with the fact that these were poems composed by a youngster and she may not be the only poet to disown her early work.

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<sup>327</sup> Gershon 2009: 65.

<sup>328</sup> Gershon 2009: 9f.

<sup>329</sup> Gershon 2009: 103.

<sup>330</sup> Gershon 2009: 116.

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The next stanza of 'A Jew's Calendar' recalls the situation and the emotions when the adolescent girl had to part from her mother:

IX  
At the station barrier  
my mother would not let me go  
I thought that I had outgrown her  
I did no longer want her love  
I was relieved to leave her there  
it was her life that paid my fare  
to recollect my childhood now  
is the only scourge I have

The first and the last line i.e. the two shorter lines, embrace the rest of the stanza while the second and second last line form an embraced rhyme that holds the remaining four lines of the stanza. Looking at these so carefully wrapped four lines, the first three appear to present the state of mind of the teenage daughter who is about to become independent from her mother. 'I thought that I had outgrown her/ I did no longer want her love/ I was relieved to leave her there' are all characteristic of a teenager's urge to move away from her parent. The fourth line, however, is the grown-up's acknowledgement of her mother's love. This love was the one thing that could not be taken from the girl. However, the half-rhyme of 'Love' and 'have' seems to hint at the lack of total harmony in their relationship. While the poem talks about the tension between mother and daughter, there is a clear acknowledgement of the mother's love for her child – as well as the grown up daughter's awareness of the strength and importance of this love. The word 'her' appears four times in the stanza, the repetition sounding through the poem like a reassurance that the daughter had not been abandoned. At the same time, the first three lines where the word 'her' occurs towards the end of the line, begin with the word 'I'. The effect of this repeated pattern is that the struggle between mother and daughter becomes almost tangible. Thus, the recurring of 'her' can also be read as a signal that the daughter wants to break free from the dominance of her mother – and, under different circumstances, leaving her mother behind would have been exactly what she had wanted. Here, the dilemma of the teenage refugee becomes visible: at a time, when she needs to establish herself as an independent person distinct from her mother, the daughter is violently separated from her mother. While the daughter is safe, the mother is

not. Therefore, the daughter has a moral obligation to try and rescue her mother, or at least to be grateful for her sacrifice. These two contradicting emotions are raging against each other, leaving the daughter feeling guilty and angry. The task of ‘recollecting’ her childhood after this traumatic event is a scourge because of the missing link: for one, there was never the opportunity to reconcile the teenage girl and her mother; and the shadow of what marked the end of her childhood makes it very painful to look back.

In this stanza, a number of the different criteria of translingual writing are apparent: the biographical element, a place symbolising the moment of loss and departure (the station barrier) as well as the revisiting of the (imagined) past as an adult to acknowledge the loss, to grieve and to re-collect. The poem relates to at least two different traditions – the English and the Jewish. English, because the poem is written in this language and the poet explores homophones when she employs and links words like ‘relieved’ and ‘leave’. The Jewish tradition is visible in the term ‘scourge’. At first sight though, ‘scourge’ seems to be a rather odd choice of word as it is fairly old-fashioned while the rest of the stanza uses a more modern, everyday idiom. ‘Pain’ would have been a more obvious choice and the poet’s decision to use ‘scourge’ can be interpreted as a link to the Jewish Bible, notably the Passover scourges.<sup>331</sup> These scourges are recounted at every Passover Seder, a central event in the Jewish calendar that Gershon would have attended throughout her German childhood. In a well-known non-biblical English context, John Milton used the expression ‘scourge’ when he wrote *Paradise Lost*. In his Bible translation, Luther uses the term ‘Plage’ where the King James Bible uses ‘scourge’. It is difficult to tell which biblical stories Gershon was introduced to in a Christian context during the short period of time she attended Christian meetings in her childhood.<sup>332</sup> However, there is a short poem by Kant, the opening line of which echoes a phrase from Matthew in the Christian Bible where it says ‘Es ist genug, daß ein jeglicher Tag seine eigene Plage habe’.<sup>333</sup> Kant’s poem begins ‘Ein jeder Tag hat seine Plage.’ and while it is impossible to tell whether Gershon was aware of Kant’s poem or not, the underlying idea that ‘Plagen’ are part of daily human life and that we need to deal with them

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<sup>331</sup> For further examples see Exodus and Kings.

<sup>332</sup> Gershon, Karen. *A Lesser Child* (London: Peter Owen, 1994).

<sup>333</sup> Matthäus 6: 34b, Luther Bibel.

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accordingly, can be regarded as a (Protestant) German ethos. In her poem, Gershon treats her 'scourge' with the acceptance that it is a part of her life – and one way of reading the final line is that she might even be lucky to have only one. In contrast to that reading, one could argue that having just one never-changing scourge is like a curse: while the Christian tradition suggests that every day has its own scourge, Gershon's scourge remains the same: recollecting her childhood. Re-collection is closely linked to remembering, and the latter is an essential element of Judaism. It is the responsibility of children to remember their parents – and in this sense, Gershon's scourge is in more than one way linked to her Jewishness: while Nazi Germany robbed her of her childhood because of her Jewish background, re-collecting the traces and remembering this childhood is part of *zakhor*.<sup>334</sup>

In her poem, Gershon takes on this responsibility to remember. The translingual writer seems to transform culture and tradition, as her use of the term 'scourge' illustrates. There are traces of her Jewish heritage as well as echoes from her Christian-German environment though the actual term she uses is in English and therefore comes with all its English cultural connotations. These fractured and merging images can be read as indicators of the translingual mind and how it pushes the boundaries of meaning and challenges what can be said in one language and how. By using an unfamiliar sounding phrase like 'is the only scourge I have', the poet foregrounds the expression that showcases this rich and ambiguous space that is the translingual imagination.

The date that precedes the following three stanzas is 13<sup>th</sup> December 1941 – a Saturday. It happened to be the Shabbat before Chanukah, usually a happy time for Jewish families. However, rather than celebrating the festival of the spiritual survival of Judaism after occupation,<sup>335</sup> in 1941 it is the date that for Bielefeld Jewry marks the beginning of physical annihilation in the occupied Eastern territories.

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<sup>334</sup> *Zakhor* is the Hebrew word for 'remember', a concept of central importance in Judaism. For a detailed account of *Zakhor* see Yerushalmi, Yosef Hayim. *Zakhor. Jewish History and Jewish Memory*. Paperback edition with a new preface (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1999).

<sup>335</sup> Chanukah commemorates the victory of Judah Maccabeh over the Syrians and the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem. It is a festival against assimilation at the expense of a Jewish identity. See for example Knobel, Peter S. (ed.). *Gates of the Seasons. A Guide to the Jewish Year* (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis: 1983), pp. 89-93.

13<sup>th</sup> December 1941

xi

In the third winter of the war  
all remaining German Jews  
were exiled to the Russian front  
for what was called resettlement  
my father and my mother went  
of that alone I can be sure  
to make up the six million whose  
murder was anonymous

xii

One told me that my father died  
in Riga of a stroke in bed  
I cannot know if someone lied  
I only know that he is dead  
for four years in the first world war  
he was a front-line soldier  
he thought himself a German Jew  
and was nobody's enemy

xiii

Some said my mother was  
sent to Auschwitz where she died  
it may be true but I believe  
the transport meant did not arrive  
but paced the Polish countryside  
until the wagon-loads were dead  
they killed Jews in so many ways  
I know she cannot be alive<sup>336</sup>

The meter of the first line seems to indicate that the poem needs to find its foot before entering difficult ground: the first foot of the first line is anapaestic, followed by trochees. It could be argued that the shorter syllables are like small steps at the beginning of a run up where one has to find the right pace and rhythm to take a jump into more challenging territory. After these first searching steps, the regular iambic pattern sets in. In these three stanzas, Gershon employs alliteration (winter, war; Russian, resettlement; million, murder) and assonance ('what was called') as well as end-rhymes (the stanza rhymes abcccabb). It seems that these stylistic features are smoothing the rocky territories of the traumatic events: the soothing sounds of the

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<sup>336</sup> Gershon, Karen. *Selected Poems* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1966), p. 32-33.

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language become a lubricant for transmitting the terrible truth about the murderous transports to the East. The use of the phrase 'to the Russian front' is striking insofar as 'the Russian front' is where German soldiers were sent at the same time. Thus, it can be read as a bitter irony that, whilst being robbed of their German citizenship, German Jews – some of them, including the poet's father, having been German soldiers themselves less than twenty-five years previously – are sent to the same destination as the new generation of German soldiers, as if it was a military operation rather than genocide. Simultaneously, it is a bitter echo of a phrase used by many of Gershon's non-Jewish German contemporaries who would speak about Wehrmacht soldiers as being 'sent to the Russian front'. Employing the very same phrase to describe the fate of those sent to the death camps in the East foregrounds some of the most abysmal aspects of the atrocities: for example the logistical effort to transport people to a foreign place to murder them more efficiently and the brutal reality that one part of the population went East to murder and another part to be murdered. Furthermore, 'the Russian front' is an expression that instantly conjures up images of suffering and despair; it has become a synonym for merciless battles and deaths. The actual military frontline was several hundred miles long, reaching from the Baltic to the Black Sea and covering very different landscapes. Both, the war against the Soviet Union and the setting up of extermination camps in the East started in the summer of 1941 – and Gershon's poem makes it clear that rather than a 'resettlement' it was the transport to the factories of death. I would argue that by using the term 'Russian front' Gershon reclaims her German-Jewish ancestry and rejects the narrative that people like her parents were not German but Jewish. 'Russian front' is the expression from inside Germany and it stresses the point that German citizens who happened to be Jewish were carted to their horrific death. This interpretation is also supported by the fact that the poet reminds the reader that her father had been a front-line soldier in World War One who 'thought himself a German Jew'.

Apart from German Jews and the Russian front mentioned in the first of the three stanzas, the poem refers also to 'the Polish countryside' in stanza xiii. What is the significance of the nationality of a specific countryside? At the time, when Gershon's parents were deported, the idea that even the countryside characterises the national identity was fairly common and there

were strong German efforts to ‘Germanize’ the occupied Polish territories.<sup>337</sup> In other words, the German occupiers were aiming to destroy some of the features of the existing landscape. In the following chapter we shall examine a number of examples where poems recreate the landscapes that represent a lost home. In this stanza, however, the translingual poet imagines the place where her mother was murdered. Historically, the Polish majority culture has often been hostile towards Jews and in modern Israeli discourse, Poland is regarded as deeply anti-Semitic.<sup>338</sup> It seems that the potentially hostile ‘Polish countryside’ in Gershon’s poem does not refer to an actually known place but, like Rushdie’s ‘imaginary homelands’, to a ‘Poland of the mind’. The difference, however, is that the poet herself has never seen the actual Polish countryside where the ‘wagon-loads’ paced along: she can only imagine where it happened and what the landscape was like. A landscape, that her mother would not have been able to see either, crowded into a cattle cart.

Apart from the biographical events mentioned in the poem there is another link to Gershon’s German childhood. From 1928 to 1936, the Jüdischer Verlag Berlin, in cooperation with the Commission on Literary Works for Youth of the Grand Lodge for Germany of the Independent Order of B’nai B’rith, published a Jewish Children’s/ Youth’s Calendar. It was edited by the rabbi and writer Emil Bernhard Cohn who also contributed some of the poems and stories. The calendar starts with the first month of the Jewish year, Tishri, which usually coincides with the month of September in the Christian calendar. Texts and illustrations engage with various topics from Jewish and German-Jewish history, from biblical times to the German Haskalah to Zionism. Among the contributors are German youngsters as well as Jewish educators. The calendar also introduces its readers to some modern Jewish celebrities, such as Theodor Herzl, or the poet Chaim Nachman Bialik. Annegret Völpel has pointed out that the calendar’s intention was to ‘inculcate its young readers with a self-consciousness that is equally balanced between German and Jewish cultures. Because of the overwhelming influence of the German culture, the Calendar strove to communicate to young Jews of all backgrounds a feeling of belonging

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<sup>337</sup> See for example Harvey, Elizabeth. *Women and the Nazi East: Agents and Witnesses of Germanization* (Yale University Press, 2003), pp. 137-146.

<sup>338</sup> See for example Feldmann, Jackie. ‘Marking the Boundaries of the Enclave: Defining the Israeli Collective Through the Poland “Experience”’, in *Israel Studies*, Volume 7, Number 2, Summer 2002, pp. 84-114.

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to a common Jewish culture'.<sup>339</sup> The calendar encouraged pride in German-Jewish achievements whilst, at a time of rising anti-Semitism, provided young German Jews with a sense of identity and consistency through their Jewish heritage. At the same time, it did not trivialise the threat posed by fascism and by 1936 there were 'implicit calls to emigration'.<sup>340</sup> Given how widely the calendar was read, it is very likely that Karen Gershon was familiar with it and may have even owned one herself. Her poem 'A Jew's Calendar' can therefore be read as a sequel to the calendar of her childhood. Far from the evocation of a German-Jewish identity of Cohn's calendar, Gershon's poem is thoroughly disillusioned. While it acknowledges the historical achievements of German Jews that had been celebrated in the *Kinderkalender*, such as the work of Heinrich Heine, Gershon's poem comes to a different conclusion about the future. Perhaps comparable to Sebastian Haffner's *Germany: Jekyll and Hyde*<sup>341</sup> there is the realisation that the land of culture and *Bildung* did also produce the greatest horror and suffering. The final stanza of the poem underlines this notion.

June 1963

XIV

Three years after I left home  
my parents were sent from the town  
a quarter of a century  
has weathered my emotions till  
there is no rage or grief in me  
only compassion that men use  
the holy solitude they feel  
to cultivate catastrophes.

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<sup>339</sup> Völpel, Annegret. 'The First Issue of the Jewish Children's Calendar' in *Yale Companion to Jewish Writing and Thought in German Culture, 1096-1996*, edited by Sander L. Gilman and Jack Zipes (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 486.

<sup>340</sup> Völpel 1997: 486.

<sup>341</sup> Sebastian Haffner is the pseudonym of the German journalist and writer Raimund Pretzel. In 1938 he left Germany for London where he worked as a journalist. His book *Germany: Jekyll and Hyde* was published in 1940. On the occasion of the republishing of the book in 2005 Rafael Behr wrote in the *Observer*: 'Haffner's clear-sighted analysis, applied mainly to the dissection of his fellow Germans, also annihilates any claim by his contemporaries not to have known about Nazi crimes. The nature of Hitler's regime, he says, was well understood; all that is open to debate is the eagerness with which it was supported. Anti-Semitism, reports Haffner, was not just a feature of Nazism, it was a defining pillar of the creed, an initiation test by which recruits proved themselves able to shed their humanity.'  
<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2005/mar/20/historybooks.features>, accessed on 23.10.2013.

The previous stanzas have commemorated some of the key dates and events of the persecution of the poet's family and that of their fellow Jews. The first lines of the final stanza refer to the dimension of time: 'three years after I left home' and 'a quarter of a century' place the events on a time-line. The relatively short 'three years' put the forced relocation and subsequent murder of the parents in close proximity to the poet's departure from her home. In contrast, the 'quarter of a century' is a much longer period of time that now separates these events from the poet's present. Thus, it could be considered a safety zone that puts a distance between the present person and the terrible past. The expression that time has 'weathered' the emotions implies not a calmer state: rage and grief have not disappeared because of a healing process but because of exhaustion; in other words, the poet is too worn out for these very powerful emotions. They are replaced by 'compassion'. Whereas rage or grief would mean that the poet is immediately and deeply affected by the situation, 'compassion' moves her onto a different level. Compassion is about feeling for (or literally 'with') the unhappiness or suffering of other people, rather than suffering from one's own fate. Therefore, compassion entails some sense of community which suggests that the poet's focus has shifted.

This last stanza of the poem seems to hint at a kind of detachment from personal suffering in an attempt to come to some general insights. The conclusion drawn by the poet seems to be an almost fatalistic one: 'men use/ the holy solitude they feel/ to cultivate catastrophes'. The poem speaks about 'men' in general rather than Germans or Jews, Parents or children, those murdered or survivors. 'Men', claim the last lines of 'A Jew's Calendar', 'cultivate catastrophes'. What is striking about this expression is that there is a connection established between 'cultivate' and 'catastrophes' through alliteration, whereas on a semantic level the two words are rather contradictory. 'Catastrophes' are usually associated with powers beyond human control and they tend to threaten the livelihood and things that humans 'cultivate', such as agriculture but also cultural achievements and what we call 'civilization'. 'To cultivate catastrophes' implies that they are not only in human control but actively produced by them. Furthermore, these humans seem to do so not viciously but by using the 'holy solitude' they feel. 'Holy solitude' is an expression that is usually only found in the description of the lives of saints. The 'holy' lends the phrase a religious and innocent tone and

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indeed, 'Holy solitude' is also the title of a poem by a French mystic, Madam Guyon.<sup>342</sup> According to Guyon's poem, '(k)ind solitude' is '(t)he cure of all ills' – a quiet, blessed state that brings the individual close to God and 'There no disquietude// Troubles the peace of this place'. In stark contrast to the mystic's belief that the 'holy solitude' spells the end of all troubles, Gershon argues a different case. Based on her experience, she has come to the conclusion that aiming for 'holy solitude' does not guarantee peace – and, as the poet seems to say, culture and Bildung do not prevent catastrophes. In a way, she anticipates Amos Elon's account of the history of Jews in Germany which he published under the title *The Pity of It All*.<sup>343</sup> Elon's book 'summons up a splendid world and a dream of integration and tolerance'<sup>344</sup> – a world that seemed so close but was shattered by the greatest catastrophe in German and Jewish history.

### Lotte Kramer

Lotte Kramer was already in her forties when she first started writing poetry. In previous years Kramer, who had come to England on a *Kindertransport*, had tried to shut away the trauma of leaving home and losing her parents in the Holocaust. But when she and her husband had to relocate from London to Peterborough because of his work, the uprooting brought back the suppressed memories. In Cambridgeshire, Kramer was a stranger again and during this 'period of "unbelonging"'<sup>345</sup> she could not contain her memories:

Es kam wie ein Wasserfall aus mir raus. [...] ich war ziemlich viel allein auf dem Land in England und hab mich noch mehr entwurzelt gefühlt – trotz der Jahre, die ich in England gelebt habe. Und da kam eben die Vergangenheit wieder raus. Ich habe gelitten, ich habe geweint, aber ich habe nie in der Öffentlichkeit drüber gesprochen. Das war mir zu nah. Aber dann, nachdem ich darüber geschrieben habe, konnte ich anfangen, darüber zu sprechen.<sup>346</sup>

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<sup>342</sup>James, Nancy C. (ed.). *The Complete Madam Guyon* (Brewster MA: Paraclete Press, 2011), p. 212.

<sup>343</sup>Elon, Amos. *The Pity of It All: A History of Jews in Germany 1743-1933* (London: Penguin, 2003).

<sup>344</sup>Elon 2003: blurb.

<sup>345</sup>Oldfield 2007: vi.

<sup>346</sup>O-Ton 66, *Heimweh im Exil. Erinnerungen der Lyrikerin Lotte Kramer an den Kindertransport 1939*, manuscript by Sabine Mahr, SWR Rheinland-Pfalz, 2003.

Kramer's first collection of poems, *Ice-break*, was published in 1980. It is also the title of the first poem in this volume, describing the beginnings of her writing with a powerful metaphor.

ICE-BREAK

Snow and ice have lain  
Rich and fat on the grass  
For days,  
On river and lake the silver  
Is sitting as stubborn  
As oil,  
Each blade and twig has a  
Metal skin of its own.

The light cuts right through the years  
And I find myself small  
By the side  
Of my father, quite close to his hand,  
Our feet step in careful tread on the ice,  
The Rhine  
Now a new white street without end,  
The reliable river vanished or dead.

Yet alive  
With a fun-fair crowd  
On its broad, hard chest,  
As men  
Use the solid water instead of earth  
And dancing deny its escape  
And birth,  
But the poem insists on its flow  
With the ice-break of words.<sup>347</sup>

The three stanzas of the poem, though not resembling any recognisable form, are of similar length and shape. The alternation of short and long lines is very prominent and gives the poem a distinctive shape. Kramer, who studied Art and History of Art at Richmond College, has not only written several poems about works of art<sup>348</sup> but has also always been concerned with the visual shape of her poems, as this one demonstrates. The poem describes a frozen landscape and although it is easy enough to visualize the snow and the ice on river and lake, some of the phrases seem odd: 'rich and fat' is more likely to be

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<sup>347</sup> Kramer, Lotte. *New and Collected Poems* (Ware: Rockingham Press, 2011), p. 25. First published by Annakin, 1980.

<sup>348</sup> See for example 'Jewish Bride', 'Woman at the Window', 'Black Over Red' and 'Matisse, Chapel of the Rosary'; all published in Kramer, Lotte. *Black Over Red* (Ware: Rockingham Press, 2005), pp. 27-29.

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used for describing the grass than the ice that has covered it and 'stubborn as oil' is certainly not the most common of similes either. As stylistic devices, they disrupt the language of the poem, resulting in defamiliarization. Thus, the images deriving from the translingual imagination carry the poem beyond what has already been written or said about frozen landscapes. In the second stanza, the first two lines have a cinematic flair – as if the camera was time-travelling and zooming in on the next scene: the poetic self 'small/ By the side' of her father. 'By the side' can also be read as the title of the next two lines as it is followed by a description of how the child gingerly steps onto the ice with her father. 'The Rhine' would be the next title with the following lines conjuring up the picture of the frozen river: first likened to a street but then, rather disturbingly, mourned as 'The reliable river vanished or lost'. Again, as in the first stanza where a common metaphor ('silver') is confronted with an unfamiliar image ('stubborn as oil'), in the second stanza the image of the river as a street occurs next to the rather disturbing and strange image of the 'vanished or dead' river. The tension between the easily recognisable metaphor and the unexpected desperation highlights the space where the translingual imagination is at work: that, which the poet is writing about cannot be expressed in a metaphor that has become almost one of the 'hoary clichés' Koestler spoke about.<sup>349</sup> Rather, the potential experience of the river as 'a new white street without end' is confronted with the image of 'the reliable river vanished or dead' to foreground the painful complexity of the issue the poem is dealing with. The writer Shirley Toulson has pointed out that Kramer

[...] sees her surroundings not so much in contrast with, as highlighted by, the scenes and history of her childhood homeland and all it entailed. Sometimes the associations between the two places that have moulded her life are almost too terrible for the reader to contemplate. Giving them form in verse must have called on all the poet's courage [...].<sup>350</sup>

In 'Ice-Break', there is not only the association between snow and ice in Peterborough and a long-ago winter in her native Mainz but also the ambiguous description of the river. The two interpretations of the frozen river, as a 'new white street', allowing endless travel into the future, and the river that 'vanished' under the ice both reflect the poet's experience. The Rhine is a

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<sup>349</sup>Koestler 1981: 218-219.

<sup>350</sup>Shirley Toulson. 'Bookreview', *European Judaism*, Volume 36, No. 1 (Spring 2003), p. 153.

recurring motif in Kramer's poetry and Anthony Grenville has suggested that it symbolises 'history in flow' as well as 'the permanence of nature, of the natural order and, by extension, of the humane values innate in human beings'.<sup>351</sup> In 'Ice-Break', it seems, the frozen river symbolises the icebound humane values that ended with the death of millions of human beings – and particularly the death of the one whose hand the poet held that one winter long ago.

The tension, though not resolved, is then eased in the opening line of the final stanza. 'Yet alive' – does not only reassure the reader of the survival of the river but subsequently also of the continuing life of the girl who stepped onto the ice. The images, however, are still contradictory and confusing: the river is 'alive' with the human crowd dancing on his 'broad chest' while this very dancing is also depicted as denying the river the right to flow, and even more dramatically, its birth. In the end, it is the poem that breaks the ice with words when it 'insists on its flow'. The ambiguity of this line lies in the word 'its' as the pronoun can refer to both the river and the poem itself. The contradictory or strange images of the poem are closely linked to the two different ice-breaks – the river's and the poet's. The role of the ice itself is ambiguous: while it prevents the river's flow its 'metal skin' protects each little twig from the harshness of winter. Thus, the poem evolves from the tension between the paralysing and the protective, suggestive of Kramer herself. For decades Kramer's frozen memory had preserved the image of a happy childhood in Mainz but it was a frozen image out of fear how Kramer would cope with the ice-break. When 'the light cuts right through the years' and the memory returns, the sadness of the loss of the 'reliable river vanished or dead' gives way to the mourning of friends and family who 'vanished' and are now dead. The poet, however, is still there, like the river. Ice-break is to be understood as her birth as a poet.

Besides this strong biographical link and the presence of defamiliarizing elements, the poem also features a further criterion of the translingual imagination referring to time and place, revisiting a place of the poet's childhood.

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<sup>351</sup>Grenville, Anthony. 'Lotte Kramer's *Collected Poems*' in *AJR Journal* Volume 12, No. 5 (May 2012)

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Kramer had never aspired to becoming a poet while she was still living in Germany. She was born Lotte Wertheimer in Mainz in October 1923 into a liberal Jewish middle-class family. Her father, who had written some plays before World War I, worked as an accountant in his wife's family business, a wine and liqueur factory.<sup>352</sup> Sofie and Ernst Wertheimer identified first and foremost as German, though they had Jewish as well as non-Jewish friends. Kramer recalls that, when in June 1930 the last remaining French troops left the German part of the Rhineland, which had been occupied since the end of the Great War, Sofie and Ernst Wertheimer – like many other Germans – took their six year old daughter Lotte to the celebrations near the Landtag. After all these years, Kramer can still remember sitting on her father's shoulders, watching German flags being waved around her and feeling the joyful atmosphere. Like many others, her parents did not take the emerging nationalist and anti-Semitic tendencies seriously, although they were already noticeable.<sup>353</sup> They just could not imagine that the country they had been devoted to and felt part of would turn against them.

With the Nazis' rise to power, the changes soon began to affect the lives of Lotte and her parents, although the latter tried to protect their child. The first event that threatened to destroy the safety of Kramer's family life took place on the 1st April 1933 – the day, the Nazis proposed as a day of boycotting Jewish businesses. It was also the day Lotte's grandfather died.

The death of her grandfather, which Kramer recalls in an interview with a German radio programme seventy years later,<sup>354</sup> was among the first deaths to be recorded in an account published by the World Committee for the Victims of German Fascism in 1933. The president of this committee was Albert Einstein. Titled *The Brown Book of the Hitler Terror and the Burning of the Reichstag* it provides detailed information not only about the Nazi's 'Path to Power' but also about 'The Campaign Against Culture', 'The Persecution of Jews' and 'The

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<sup>352</sup> Oldfield, Sybil. 'Introduction' in *Kindertransport, Before and After: Elegy and Celebration. Sixty Poems by Lotte Kramer*, edited and with an introduction by Sybil Oldfield (Brighton: Centre for German Jewish Studies, University of Sussex, 2007), p. i.

<sup>353</sup> Interview with the author. For more information about the different political views held by Jews in the Weimar Republic and shortly after the Nazis came to power see also chapter 2 or for example Niewyk, Donald L. *The Jews in Weimar* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2001).

<sup>354</sup> *Heimweh im Exil. Erinnerungen der Lyrikerin Lotte Kramer an den Kindertransport 1939*, manuscript by Sabine Mahr, SWR Rheinland-Pfalz, 2003.

Concentration Camps'. In the Appendix 'List of Murders' it gives the following information:

April 2<sup>nd</sup>. H. Wertheimer, Kehl, alleged stroke before arrest. (*WTB*.)<sup>355</sup>

Forty-eight years later, Kramer commemorates her grandfather in a poem published in her second volume, *Family Arrivals*.<sup>356</sup>

GRANDFATHER

For me  
He was the unassailable giant.  
The creator of bicycles and dolls,  
The law of God behind his butcher's apron

He smelt  
Of sausages and fresh air,  
And he grew out of his small town  
As naturally as a Black Forest pine tree.

Not quite  
In tune he would sing to me,  
With tears in his voice and eyes,  
His well-worn folk-songs and ballads.

His word  
Was gospel to his family,  
And his wife's large domesticity  
Was ornament and shape for his great size.

No one  
Dared to correct him.  
For him it was right to stub his roll,  
To saturate his moustache and napkin,

So when  
One April Fool's Day  
They barricaded his shop and house,  
He, like an angry god, turned away from the living.<sup>357</sup>

The poem is exemplary of Kramer's poetical resurrection of her family.<sup>358</sup>

Written in free verse, the six stanzas of the poem are all triangular shaped, that

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<sup>355</sup> *The Brown Book of the Hitler Terror and the Burning of the Reichstag* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1933), p. 345. 'WTB' is short for *Wolff Telegraph Bureau*. The authors of the book point out that their 'sources of information are official German announcements' (p. 341).

<sup>356</sup> Kramer, Lotte. *Family Arrivals* (Middlesex: Poet and Printer, 1981).

<sup>357</sup> Kramer, Lotte. *Family Arrivals* (Middlesex: Poet and Printer, 1981).

<sup>358</sup> Kramer has also written poems about other family members, for example 'Grandmother' (in *A Lifelong*

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look like steps leading up to the grandfather's doorstep. There he stands, portrayed as an almost god-like character: he is 'the creator', 'the law of God' and before he went 'like an angry god', 'his word/ was gospel'. Additionally, he is given some fairy-tale attributes, such as being an 'unassailable giant' while also belonging to nature as he had grown like 'a Black Forest pine tree' and smelt of 'fresh air'. Combining the down-to earth butcher's apron and the smell of sausages with these superior powers effectively introduces the reader to the wonders of this girl's world whose grandfather was such an impressive figure. The frequent repetition of the pronouns 'he' (five times), 'his' (ten times) and 'him' (twice), underline the central importance of the grandfather. In particular, the possessive pronoun 'his' underlines the role the grandfather plays as the patriarch of the family. 'Grandfather', while he is certainly feared, is also deeply loved and respected by the other family members. Despite all his attributes of power, Kramer remembers him also as an emotional person who sang to her with 'tears in his voice and eyes'. The personal relationship between grandfather and grandchild is visible in the short phrases 'for me' at the start of the poem, and 'to me' in the third stanza: the creator-role of the grandfather has a direct and positive outcome for the grandchild, who is also the chosen audience of his emotional vocal performance. The poetic resurrection of the grandfather is supported by a variety of different senses: smell, sound and vision. In contrast, the description of the cause of his death remains vague. The date – 'one April fool's day' – almost seems to suggest that it must have been a bad joke when 'they' caused him to 'turn away from the living'. The poem does not specify who 'they' are. It seems that the reader is kept in a position similar to that of the grandchild, who did not really learn what happened and why as the adults tried to shield her from the terrifying events. In the poem at least, there is no element of fear or terror – the grandfather is never afraid or weak, even his death does not involve surrender. Quite the opposite: he turns away in anger.

Despite the death of the grandfather and the rapidly deteriorating living conditions for Jews in Germany, Lotte's family, not unlike many others, were

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*House*, 1983), 'Uncle Julius', 'Aunt Elise' (both published in *The Shoemaker's Wife*, 1987); she remembers her mother in 'Waving' (*Family Arrivals*, 1981).

still hoping that the Nazis would not last.<sup>359</sup> Only very reluctantly the father made some enquiries for the family to leave the country. When he finally submitted an application to emigrate to the United States, there were so many people ahead of them on the waiting list that their chances for a visa were almost non-existent.

Among Kramer's earlier poems about her father are 'An Invocation Of My Father' (1981) and 'A Dramatist Who Was My Father' (1983), which recall moments of his life, imagine his pains and acknowledge the daughter's heritage. In her later poem 'The Non-Emigrant' she remembers her father as a man who, like so many others, felt strong loyalties to the country of his birth. Like so many others, he could not anticipate the horrors that were to come for the completely assimilated Jewish community. Being already in his fifties, he shrank from making the decision to leave. The translingual poet travels back in time and space to recreate the scene of her father sitting in his room, waiting for the horror to pass. It is his non-departure to the United States that will haunt his daughter.

THE NON-EMIGRANT (*my father in Nazi Germany*)

He left the application forms  
Hidden inside his desk and missed  
His quota for the U.S.A.

He thought he'd stay and wait and stare  
The madness out. It could not last.  
He would not emigrate, not lose

His home, his language, his ground.  
Beside his armchair sat a pile  
Of books; the smoke from his cigar

Fenced comfort with a yellow screen.  
His daily walk was all he'd need,  
He thought. Abroad was where he'd been.<sup>360</sup>

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<sup>359</sup> See for example Barkai, Avraham. 'Etappen der Ausgrenzung und Verfolgung bis 1939: Die illusorische "Schonzeit"' in *Deutsch-jüdische Geschichte der Neuzeit*, Band 4, edited by M. A. Meyer et al. (München: Beck, 2000), pp. 200-205.

<sup>360</sup> Kramer, Lotte. *The Desecration of Trees* (Frome/ Somerset: Hippopotamus Press, 1994), p. 15.

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The title of the poem is striking as it defines the person described in the poem by pointing out what he is not – and thereby possibly suggesting what he should have been. The text in brackets seems to have been added for the reader to make the context of this poem clear beyond ambiguity: it is not about any non-emigrant but about the poet's father in Nazi Germany. The poem tells us that, although he had an application form for a visa for the United States, he kept it in his desk and thus missed his quota. Apparently, he did not want to leave, neither his immediate home (his armchair, his books, his house), nor the country, culture and language he lived in. He had decided to stay because he was sure that the 'madness' would pass, and that he himself would be content to go for a walk rather than abroad. However, when taking a closer look at how this seemingly straight-forward story is told, there are a number of words that carry some ill-omened connotations. Although the poem speaks about the 'smoke' from a cigar, it is the smoke from the chimneys of Auschwitz that lies ahead for the non-emigrant. For now, there is 'fenced comfort with a yellow screen' when soon there will be no comfort but fenced camps and yellow stars. The final line of the poem is particularly chilling: 'He thought. Abroad was where he'd been'. The poet knows that her father would travel abroad again; this time, in a cattle train, eastwards.

The shape of the poem has a symmetrical appearance: four stanzas of three lines each, all about the same length. While the first three stanzas are non-rhyming, the meter is undisrupted throughout as the whole poem is written in iambic tetrameters. The last stanza, which implicitly acknowledges the father's death, is the only one that rhymes. It is no coincidence that this stanza is more formal than the rest of the poem: the form can be seen as a corset that holds together the words that can hardly be uttered. Together with the formality of the rhyme, the structure of the form is relied upon to enable the poet to face her trauma. In this understanding the enclosed rhyme has to bear something that would otherwise be unbearable.

The first stanza is syntactically separated from the rest of the poem as it is the only stanza that ends with a full stop. It can be regarded as an introduction as it sets the pretext for what is described afterwards. In other words, it is the one thing that stands on its own: the father's decision not to apply for a visa (at least not early enough to be successful). Everything that follows is interlinked, a chain of events that is unstoppable, sentences just

move on into the next stanza until the end. The beginning of the first and the last line of the second part are identical: 'He thought'. The emphasis this repetition puts onto the phrase suggests an importance that goes beyond that particular thought which the poem recalls. 'He thought' implies a capacity that would have existed even after his daughter had left Germany on the *Kindertransport*. Even though his thoughts about his future were wrong, he nevertheless was capable of thinking, of keeping possibilities vivid and alive, if only in his mind. And decades later, long after the father had perished in the Holocaust, the poet daughter can remember the father and his thoughts – and in remembering them she keeps his memory alive.

While Kramer often employs traditional poetic forms in her poems, she also breathes life into the images of a lost childhood by her choice of words and sounds. Imperturbably and perhaps even fatalistically, the father insists that Germany is his home and that he will not leave. He was to 'stay and wait and stare', each of the verbs are monosyllabic with a long vowel, and the assonance stresses that he would remain where he was, with no inclination to move. In the same stanza, Kramer also uses repetition to emphasise how her father would not let go of his homeland. 'It could not last' and 'he would not lose' almost sound like an incantation.

Throughout the poem, the different vowels and their respective sounds seem to be connected with different spheres of reality: while the fuller sounds like 'ground', 'armchair', 'comfort' and 'walk' describe the safety of 'home', the shriller 'ee' (that ends each line of the last stanza) is a bearer of the loss of everything loved and valued.

Apart from dealing with the poet's childhood memories this poem is exemplary also in the way in which it *does not* spell out the terrible truth: that, which is not said in this poem, is present nevertheless. By refraining from putting it into words but wrapping it into a painful silence, the poet creates a piece of art that gives an idea of the terrifying and suffocating helplessness of the child who lost her parents in the Holocaust.

While the situation in Germany was worsening, the Wertheimer's were fortunate to have loyal non-Jewish friends who continued to support them. The Trempers lived in the apartment house where Lotte's family had lived before they were forced to move. They were very close friends and Frau Tremper

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guarded Lotte's 'Aussteuer' during the war – Lotte's mother had given the parcel to her the day before she and her husband were deported.<sup>361</sup> Kramer dedicated a sonnet to these close friends.

### FRIENDS

To call you faithful would not be enough.  
You came at night because the laws were wild  
With hate. It could have meant a broken, rough  
Diminished life for you and for your child;

It could have been your end. But when they burnt  
The temples, when they rent the doors apart  
That held our confined world, when they interned  
And claimed the silent men and many hearts

Translated fear to death, you found the way  
To us. Even before the cattle-trucks  
Ordained a new stage of the cross, that day,  
Your comfort marked a constancy. It brushed

All bitterness away I might have clutched  
As a distorting mask. With love you judged.<sup>362</sup>

While many of Kramer's poems are in free verse, she has published more than thirty sonnets and it clearly appears to be one of her favourite forms. This is perhaps not surprising for a translingual poet who was dislocated as a child – exiled poets who had to leave their native country have often been found to take to the sonnet.<sup>363</sup> To simply argue that this preference is related to the reassuring rigidity of the form would be to ignore how deeply rooted the sonnet is in European culture. Nevertheless, the sonnet has never been a means of easy comfort:

(...) the sonnet does not set out to settle, progressively and increasingly, the reader's mind, but is, rather, a fourteen-line postponement of settlement, a form in which formal limits are apprehended, but experienced not as reassurance but as disquiet, nervous uncertainty, involving us intensely in the formal resolution.<sup>364</sup>

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<sup>361</sup> Oldfield 2007: 8 and *Heimweh im Exil. Erinnerungen der Lyrikerin Lotte Kramer an den Kindertransport 1939*, manuscript by Sabine Mahr, SWR Rheinland-Pfalz, 2003.

<sup>362</sup> Kramer, Lotte. *A Lifelong House* (Sutton, Surrey: Hippopotamus Press, 1983), p. 43.

<sup>363</sup> See for example Ziolkowski, Theodore. 'Form als Protest. Das Sonett in der Literatur des Exils und der Inneren Emigration' in R. Grimm and J. Hermand (eds.), *Exil und innere Emigration* (Frankfurt/M.: 1972), pp. 153-172.

<sup>364</sup> Scott, Clive. 'The Limits of the Sonnet: Towards a Proper Contemporary Approach' in: *Revue de Littérature Comparée*, 1976, 50:3, p. 244.

It seems that it is this element of tension which makes the sonnet not only a challenge for the poet but can also accommodate the often conflicting experiences of the translingual writer and offers enough space for the translingual imagination. The sonnet's 'resourcefulness, its adaptability have made it a great communicator between different European cultures'<sup>365</sup> and Kramer's 'Friends' can be read as an example of this.

The rhyme scheme and the meter, though not the layout, clearly identify 'Friends' as a Shakespearean sonnet. It is one of Kramer's earlier sonnets and recalls the times when 'the laws were wild/ with hate' and the dangerous circumstances under which the friends of the Wertheimer family remained loyal to them. While depicting the horrific violence against the Jewish population and the importance of the friendship that counteracted the cruelty, the sonnet explicitly links the experience of this friendship to the present, stating that it 'brushed all bitterness away' which the poet might have otherwise clutched. Here, the poet reflects on her experience with non-Jewish Germans which is markedly different from that of other *Kindertransport* refugees. Gershon, for example, did not have any loyal non-Jewish friends who supported her and felt an 'unassuageable bitterness towards all Germans'.<sup>366</sup> Kramer, in contrast, has pointed out that, because of her own experience, she wants 'to promote tolerance and appreciation ... both here [in the UK] and also in Germany'.<sup>367</sup>

The November pogrom, 'when they burnt/ the temples', 'when they interned/ and chained the silent men' and forced Jews into suicide is contrasted with the brave action of the friends who 'came at night'. The poem points out the risk they were taking, how 'it could have meant a broken, rough/ diminished life' to their whole family but it also highlights the enormous importance of their decision to come despite all dangers to themselves: while everything seems to be tumbling down, the friends' 'comfort marked a constancy' and enabled the poet not to lose trust in humanity.

As a poetic form, the sonnet provides an ideal framework to develop contrasting ideas or aspects towards 'a formal resolution'. In Kramer's sonnet

<sup>365</sup> Scott 1976: 244.

<sup>366</sup> Oldfield 2007: vii.

<sup>367</sup> Kramer, Lotte. 'Reflections' in *The Jewish Yearbook 2000*, as quoted in Oldfield 2007: xii.

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the two different aspects are constantly interwoven – the first quartet, introducing the friendship that went beyond faithfulness, contains references to the horror of the time as well as the comfort of the friendship. The second quartet expands on the description of the threat faced not only by the poet's family but, because of their support for them, also by their friends. The third quartet, while anticipating the suffering that was still to come – 'the cattle trucks' – nevertheless manages to move towards a positive resolution. Though far from resolving the dark memories of the pogrom the final couplet offers a view that focuses on the beneficial effect the friends' loyalty had on the poet's further life: rather than holding on to a bitterness aimed at 'a distorting mask' the comfort of individuals who 'found the way' to the poet's home enabled her to let go of an all-consuming bitterness. Connected to the third quartet through an enjambment, the final couplet is closely tied to the rest of the poem – equally, the solution is closely connected to the very specific circumstances of the poet's biography. The final sentence: 'With love you judged', implies that the conflict of interest – the own safety on the one hand and the well-being of friends on the other – was decided in favour of the latter because of the ethical values of the Tremper family. Their decision to come 'at night' – both in a literal as well as a metaphorical sense – was, as we have seen above, not the safe or easy option. The fact that the Trempers were Catholic Christians suggests that the 'love' they judged with is based on the 'love' as a principle which is a core value of Christian belief. However, long before it became that, it was already one of the core values of Judaism. Thus, when Jesus said 'Love your neighbour as yourself' (Mark 12:31), he was simply quoting from Leviticus 19:18. Considering the position of the phrase 'with love you judged' in the poem it seems that this central value, shared across religious borders, which manifested itself in the friends' faithfulness, has helped the poet not only through the immediate threats of the pogroms. Above all, the friends' brave behaviour has helped her, even after her parents were murdered by other Germans, to continue to see every human being as an individual rather than a representative of their religion or nationality.

The reassuring appearance at a time of fear and danger marks an important biographic event in the poet's life. The carefully crafted sonnet that bears witness to her friends as 'righteous gentiles' is arguably one of Kramer's most accomplished early poems. Stylistically, the sonnet employs rhyme (end

rhyme as well as assonance and alliteration) and uses a lyrical register. However, the terminology when describing the Nazi terror is explicit and there is no euphemism in expressions like ‘coffined world’ or ‘cattle trucks’. Enjambments and caesuras often reinforce meaning, for example in ‘And chained the silent men and many hearts/ Translated fear to death’.

Although the focus of this chapter is on biographical aspects rather than intertexts, I shall still highlight some of the intertextual references in Kramer’s sonnet as through them the poet relates to her own biography. The metaphor, ‘burnt/ The temples’, for example, links the November pogroms to the destruction of the Second Temple. The latter was followed by the dispersion of the Jewish people all over the world – and the pogroms led to the *Kindertransport* rescuing children from Nazi Germany. Furthermore, in the third stanza, with the lines ‘Even before the cattle trucks/ Ordained a new stage of the cross’, the poem links Auschwitz and the Christian narrative of Golgatha. This link between Christian and Jewish narrative is recurring in the Wertheimer-Trapp relationship and fits with the idea of the sonnet as employing different ideas and eventually reaching a resolution.

Another important intertextual reference of Kramer’s ‘Friends’ is Shakespeare’s sonnet XXX. When Kramer first arrived in England, she stayed with Margaret Fyleman, an Irish woman who lived in Fendley House in Hertfordshire. There, she was first introduced to English literature – and Shakespeare’s work in particular.

The daughter of the house where we lived, [...] was a young actress and she taught us Shakespeare’s sonnets. And I loved them. And we each learned one by heart.<sup>368</sup>

Considering that it was sonnet XXIX which she learned by heart,<sup>369</sup> it is likely she also read sonnet XXX. It seems that with ‘Friends’ the translingual poet has explored the poetic space that Shakespeare created with the sonnet that he wrote for his close friend to make it a dwelling place for her twentieth century friendship. In Shakespeare’s sonnet the comforting thought of the friend means that ‘All losses are restor’d and sorrows end’<sup>370</sup> – and Kramer’s relief

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<sup>368</sup>Interview with the author, 30 June 2009.

<sup>369</sup>Interview with the author, 30 June 2009.

<sup>370</sup>Shakespeare, William. ‘Sonnet XXX’ in *Shakespeare’s Sonnets and A Lover’s Complaint*, edited by Stanley Wells (Oxford: University Press, 1985), p. 44.

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from 'all bitterness' is probably as close as it can get to comfort in the context of a Holocaust survivor's sorrows.

Thanks to the efforts of one of her teachers, Fräulein Cahn, Lotte and four other girls (among them her cousin Lore) had the chance to leave Germany to find refuge in Britain. Cahn had made contact with the Quakers in Germany and Britain as they had been involved in rescuing children from Nazi Europe. She then found Mrs Fyleman who was prepared to take both the teacher and the girls into her home, and the Quakers helped with the 'necessary financial sponsorship and places on the Kindertransport train'.<sup>371</sup>

Apart from having found a safe place, through the efforts of both their host and Fräulein Cahn, for some time the girls continued their education. Though no longer taught in a formal setting, they were exposed to English and German music and literature.<sup>372</sup>

With the outbreak of the war the situation for German refugees in England became more difficult. As 'enemy aliens' they were treated with suspicion and many refugees were detained in internment camps, often together with Nazi supporters. The vast majority of refugees showed a remarkable understanding for the worries of their host country and referred to themselves as 'His Majesty's most loyal enemy aliens'.<sup>373</sup> Even those who were not interned were restricted in their movements and 'had to live within a five mile radius from a police station to which they reported'.<sup>374</sup> Thanks to Mrs Fyleman, neither Lotte nor any of her fellow refugees was interned but they all had to do 'war work' instead.<sup>375</sup> Lotte worked in a laundry together with young English women. They got on well – until the fiancé of one of her fellow workers was killed at Dunkirk. All of the sudden, hostility rose towards the German girl. Again, Mrs Fyleman came to the rescue. As her sister Lady Helen Seymour-Lloyd who lived in Oxford was looking for a new lady's companion, she arranged for Lotte to take up that position.<sup>376</sup> The time in Oxford is another biographical event that is revisited in one of Kramer's poems. Although yet another dislocation, it marks a relatively happy spell in her life as a refugee. The poem suggests that at least

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<sup>371</sup>Oldfield 2007: ii.

<sup>372</sup>Oldfield 2007: iii.

<sup>373</sup>For an oral history account see Ronald Stent, 'The Internment of His Majesty's Loyal Enemy Aliens', *Oral History Vol. 9, No. 1* (Spring 1981), pp. 35-40.

<sup>374</sup>Oldfield 2007: iv.

<sup>375</sup>Oldfield 2007: iv.

<sup>376</sup>Oldfield 2007: iv.

retrospectively it is a time when her hopes were raised that eventually she could feel at home in her adopted country. Interestingly, the key criterion that she regards as relevant for such a belonging is the one which had been considered the entry requirement to fully participate in German culture and society a century earlier: Bildung.

OXFORD 1940s

Then I was "Mother's Help – Lady Companion",  
A teenage girl in love with fantasies  
Walking the wartime Oxford streets and lanes.

The colleges were locked facades to me  
Quite out of bounds with military use  
But still regarded with romantic awe

As territories one day to be explored  
By one who'd shed the enemy alien skin.  
Meanwhile there were the books – some treasured

Second-hand, picked up at Blackwell's for a song.  
An early Schnitzler with the spine in shreds  
And hinted sex in dashes worming through

To savour secretly. Before permissiveness.  
Long, lonely afternoons up Shotover,  
The hill that took me past an empty church

I sometimes entered, praying in my search  
For something new and weatherproof  
But never found. Years looking for a clue.

A cleric gave a lecture, gaunt, severe,  
On faith, a Puritan of sorts, a Scot  
Who sent me down a draughty corridor

A mile or two. Not very far. 'Macbeth'  
Came to the theatre and filled my head,  
My bones and bloodstream ever since, the breath

Of witches stoking up my words. A flame  
As permanent as air. And British  
Restaurants would earn their wholesome name

With calories that lined my ribs. U.S.  
Canteens were troves that sometimes  
Spilled their gems. And war was somewhere else.<sup>377</sup>

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<sup>377</sup> Kramer, Lotte. *New and Collected Poems* (Ware: Rockingham Press, 2011), p. 127f. First published in *The Desecration of Trees* (1994) by Hippopotamus Press.

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The dominant meter is iambic pentameter (although there are some disruptions to this pattern), the meter most commonly used in English poetry.<sup>378</sup> Only the first, sixth and last stanza end with a full stop, and the first stanza is the only one that is confined in itself. It can be read as an introduction to the poem, in a way setting the scene as we get some information about the place (wartime Oxford) as well as a description of the main character (A teenage girl in love with fantasies) and her role in life ("Mother's Help – Lady's Companion"). With the second stanza, the poem turns towards the institutions of education and learning – the colleges, 'regarded with romantic awe' by the refugee girl. Here, the translingual imagination provides a glimpse at the poet's German-Jewish upbringing and its ideal of *Bildung*. Like the role *Bildung* had played in Jewish emancipation in Germany, as 'Mittel zu sozialem Aufstieg und zur gesellschaftlichen Integration',<sup>379</sup> the poet appears to aspire to English education as a means of belonging, enabling her to 'shed her enemy alien skin'. Already, there are indications of the teenage girl trying to immerse herself in English culture, allowing Shakespeare's work to fill her head, her bones and bloodstream. Strikingly, two of the three rhymes of the poem can be found in the stanzas referring to the witches in 'Macbeth': Shakespeare wrote most of the play in unrhymed iambic pentameters – with the notable exception of the lines spoken by the witches, which are rhymed couplets. Thus, while the poet's German cultural experience in Oxford – the book by Schnitzler – remains a private one,<sup>380</sup> the English cultural experience not only is gained in public (in a theatre) but also shows in the poetic devices used in the poem.

It seems that both the poem and the biographical events that feature in the poem, depict the poet's approach towards the English culture and a possible movement away from her German roots. 'Oxford 1940' appears to be somehow removed from the poet's previous life, even 'war was somewhere else'. Instead of food shortage there were 'British/ Restaurants' and 'U.S./

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<sup>378</sup>Spurr, Barry. *Studying Poetry*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 206), p. 376.

<sup>379</sup>Richarz, Monika. 'Frauen in Familie und Öffentlichkeit' in *Deutsch-jüdische Geschichte der Neuzeit*, Band 3, edited by M. A. Meyer et al. (München: Beck, 2000), p. 74.

<sup>380</sup>And it is not clear if that is because of the German or the sexual connotation – the poem is not explicit about it: although 'permissiveness' indicates a link to 'hinted sex', German language was also not publicly encouraged during the war. The British Central Office for Refugees for example published a flyer where it urged refugees 'Don't talk German in the streets, in public places or any places where others may hear you'. Quoted from Wimmer, Adi (ed.). *Strangers at Home and Abroad: Recollections of Austrian Jews Who Escaped Hitler* (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 2000), p. 12.

Canteens'. However, while the poet longs to 'shed the enemy alien skin' she is not going to renounce her Jewish heritage yet: although looking for 'something new and weatherproof', she eventually decides against following the Christian route. Her reluctance is already visible in the lines 'The hill that took me past an empty church/ I sometimes entered'. Here, the enjambment seems to suggest 'a slight moment of indecision'.<sup>381</sup> In the end, the poetic persona enters the church but despite a strong desire to connect – aptly illustrated by the presence of the only other end rhyme apart from the lines referring to Shakespeare – Christianity cannot offer her what she is looking for.

In 'Oxford 1940' the translingual imagination reveals itself not only in the links between biographic events and the poetic devices employed to express them but also in the way in which it relates a desire to find a place to belong. As the familiar German-Jewish culture seems to be out of reach the poem exemplifies an attempt to find a home in a new culture by exploring its possibilities. Embracing elements of the new culture but rejecting others and clinging on to treasured bits of the old culture, if only to 'savour secretly', helps to discover unknown territories of the translingual imagination.

As we have seen, Kramer remembers her Oxford spell as a time of relative peace when she could even dare to hope to belong one day. However, as she was now separated from the other girls from her transport '[t]his second transplantation only intensified Lotte's homesickness and her worry about all those she loved in Mainz'.<sup>382</sup> As the war in Europe continued, it was more and more difficult for Lotte to stay in contact with her parents. She did not learn about the deportation of her parents in 1942 until six months later, when she received their final telegram through the Red Cross.

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<sup>381</sup>Bradford, Richard. *Poetry* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 16.

<sup>382</sup>Oldfield 2007: iv.

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### The Red Cross Telegram

The red-cross telegram  
Read when it came  
Those five and twenty words;  
The terror, fear,  
Was there; I did not dare  
To grasp the cruelty  
That now I know  
It did contain:  
'We have to move,  
Our residence will not  
Remain in this town,  
Farewell, beloved child.'  
How can I ever sing  
A requiem  
In silent, dark despair,  
Transfiguring  
Your calvary of nails  
And gas and graves.<sup>383</sup>

The poem is written in free verse. The fairly short lines contain between one and six words each and are organised in a single stanza, although there are three parts of the poem that are separated through punctuation and content: the first eight lines recalling the actual moment when the poet received the telegram, followed by a four-line quotation from the telegram and the final six lines that are dealing with the poet's response to the telegram. Although the poem contains more than twenty-five words, the way in which it expresses a multitude of distressing emotions in very few words links it to the form of the telegram.

With regard to the poet's choice of words, line three of the poem is particularly striking: 'those five and twenty words'. The literal translation of the German 'fünfundzwanzig' can be read as a defamiliarizing strategy as it draws the attention not only to the actual number of words but also to the language they were written in. Another defamiliarizing effect is achieved at the end of the poem with the 'calvary of nails/ and gas and graves'.<sup>384</sup> Drawing from Christian, Jewish and English intertexts, Kramer highlights the historical dimension of Jewish suffering. Like the reference in her sonnet 'Friends', where the 'cross' provided the link to Jesus as a Jewish victim, here his 'calvary of

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<sup>383</sup>Kramer, Lotte. *Family Arrivals* (London: Poet and Printer, 1981).

<sup>384</sup>'Calvary' is a translation of 'Golgotha' used in Luke 23:33 in the King James Bible.

nails' is recalled as one element of the 'calvary of nails/ and gas and graves' suffered by Jews. Whilst the word 'gas' is unambiguous as a symbol for the mass murder of European Jewry, 'graves' can have a number of different connotations. According to the gospel, Jesus' grave was empty following his ascension to heaven. Thus, although there was a grave, the corpse was missing and the mourners distressed. However, Christian belief resolves the situation because Jesus is resurrected and does not need to be mourned. In contrast, Kramer's parents as victims of the Holocaust have no graves other than what Celan called those 'in den Lüften'<sup>385</sup> and their mourners' distress cannot be easily resolved. The lack of a physical grave – and the lack of knowledge of what happened to her parents and how and when exactly they died – might be one of the reasons that make it so difficult for the poet to 'sing/ a requiem' that would transfigure their suffering.

However, it seems as if 'The Red Cross Telegram' could be this requiem. According to the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, apart from being a 'special mass for the repose of the souls of the dead' a requiem can be 'any dirge or solemn chant for the repose of the dead'.<sup>386</sup> 'The Red Cross Telegram' is a solemn chant by a surviving child for the repose of her dead parents. Different forms of artistic expression, colours as well as sounds, are called upon by the poet to 'sing/ a requiem/ in silent, dark despair'. Even the very personal element of the poem – her parents' last telegram – has been integrated into this piece of art without exposing the most private words of this last farewell. Kramer only used the first part of the telegram and expanded on it whilst keeping the final part to herself. The original telegram reads:

Unser Wohnsitz ändert sich  
 Alles Gute, bleibe gesund geliebtes Kind  
 Gottes Segen wird mit Dir sein. Küssen  
 Dich. In Liebe gedenken Dir immer  
 Deine Eltern<sup>387</sup>

The introducing 'we have to move' in Kramer's poem carries a notion of departure that can be regarded as a characteristic feature of translingual

<sup>385</sup> Celan's 'Todesfuge', was first published in 1947 in a Romanian translation and in the German original the following year. John Felstiner has suggested that it might have been written as early as 1944. See Felstiner, John. *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001) pp. 27.

<sup>386</sup> *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, Volume II* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 1711.

<sup>387</sup> Kramer 2007: 40.

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writing. Like the eleventh stanza of Gershon's 'A Jew's Calendar', 'The Red Cross Telegram' returns to the moment the parents have to depart to their death while the poet was allowed to depart to a safe new life. 'We have to move', the additional line, which has no equivalent in the parents' telegram, emphasises the significance of this departure. In contrast, the second part of the telegram is not deemed relevant to the poem: it is the final blessing the parents send to their child, born out of their deep love and full of hope for her future. As the poem is a requiem to the parents it can be understood as a grateful response to the love they had for their child. With this poem, the translingual poet has drawn from her different cultural heritages to create a form that can accommodate her loss. Interweaving German, English and Jewish elements this form can provide a secure space in which to mourn her parents.

At the time, Kramer did not know what happened to her parents after they sent this last telegram. A few months after receiving the telegram, and almost a year after the deportation of her parents, in February 1943, Lotte married her fellow refugee Fritz Kramer and moved with him into his parents' home in Richmond.<sup>388</sup>

Lotte and Fritz knew each other from Mainz. Following the introduction of a 'numerus clausus' that limited the maximum number of Jewish children in German grammar schools to 1.5%, both of them had attended the newly established Jewish school that was accommodated in the synagogue. In response to the new education laws, the 'Reichsvertretung der deutschen Juden'<sup>389</sup> opened a number of Jewish school across the country, staffed by Jewish teachers who had been suspended from their positions in state schools following the anti-Semitic laws regarding civil servants in 1933. When Fritz and Lotte met there, they became close friends and decades later Lotte Kramer still recalls their secret letters and their little romance. Their 'engagement kiss' in the school gym (i.e. the cellar of the synagogue) was followed by a warning where the rabbi pointed out to them that they would be excluded from the

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<sup>388</sup> *Heimweh im Exil. Erinnerungen der Lyrikerin Lotte Kramer an den Kindertransport 1939*, manuscript by Sabine Mahr, SWR Rheinland-Pfalz, 2003.

<sup>389</sup> The Reichsvertretung was founded by prominent German Jews in September 1933. The aim was to have one single body to speak for and act on behalf of German Jewry at a time of crisis. For a more detailed account see Max Gruenewald 'The Beginning of the Reichsvertretung', *Leo Baeck, Oxford Journals*.

school in case they were to repeat anything similar.<sup>390</sup> Soon after that event, the political circumstances forced them apart: Fritz, who could not study for his Abitur because of the discriminating German laws, went to Czechoslovakia to do an apprenticeship arranged by his aunt. When he arrived in London, he tried to find Lotte again.

The little school romance in Nazi Germany can be seen as a link that allows Lotte Kramer continuity from her childhood to her old age, from Mainz via London to Peterborough. Without the Holocaust it might have been just any school days' anecdote but with the murder of her closest relatives this 'engagement' means there is still an immediate connection to her life in Mainz, to the time when she lived with her parents.

Thus, in 1943, after spending more than four years in an English environment trying her best to blend in, she suddenly lived in a German speaking household. What must have been some comfort at a time of growing despair and worry about her family in Germany has retrospectively become the time that also made her a foreigner for the rest of her life: in our conversation (as well as in an interview with a German radio station<sup>391</sup>) Kramer insists that before she moved from Oxford to Richmond she had shed her German accent but that she regained it afterwards. I am not a native speaker of English myself and therefore not the best judge with regard to German accents but I found it hard to spot any foreign accent in Kramer's spoken language. Having spoken to other German-born refugees of her generation, I am aware that some of them have fairly strong accents even seventy years after their arrival in England<sup>392</sup> but I would not have counted Kramer among them. However, being not fully at home in either of her two languages has been a recurring topic in Kramer's work. Therefore, while it is difficult to establish whether or not the German accent has been noticeable to her British contemporaries, the relevant fact is that it has been an issue for the poet herself. Language, to Kramer, is an essential part of her identity. Reflecting on the two languages that have shaped her, and the lack of a single, dominant tongue she maintains: 'I don't think of

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<sup>390</sup> *Heimweh im Exil. Erinnerungen der Lyrikerin Lotte Kramer an den Kindertransport 1939*, manuscript by Sabine Mahr, SWR Rheinland-Pfalz, 2003.

<sup>391</sup> O-Ton 56, *Heimweh im Exil. Erinnerungen der Lyrikerin Lotte Kramer an den Kindertransport 1939*, manuscript by Sabine Mahr, SWR Rheinland-Pfalz, 2003.

<sup>392</sup> See Pauker, Arnold. 'Speaking English with an Accent' in *England – aber wo liegt es?* Edited by Brinson et al. (London: Institute for Germanic Studies, 1996), pp. 21-32.

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it as either handicap or advantage but as something I have to live with but I suppose it gives another dimension to my work.<sup>393</sup> Her decision to write in English was not a rejection of her German roots but an acceptance of where life had brought her. Talking about her two languages, she explained to me that by the time she started writing, she had been in England for so long that she was thinking in English.<sup>394</sup> Therefore, her adopted language became the language of her poems – though the language of her childhood remained with her as well. While touching on issues of loss and gain, the following poem nevertheless belongs into the biographical chapter as it deals with the shaping of the poet's identity and the way she looks at her own life.

### Identity

A river, wandering  
Through a bed of rocks  
Never quite  
Homing in one place,  
Tasting the difference  
Of earth's  
Textures, lushness  
And dryness for my  
Long journey,  
A constant movement,  
Exploring this gift  
But also  
A losing on foreign shores  
Where languages jar  
On my waters'  
Fluidity, preventing  
Arrival at the sea's throat.  
A stagnant  
Sojourn of black  
Solitude, a stage of scorn  
At liquid living  
Of inevitable yearning  
And slow acceptance,  
A song  
Of searching voices  
For the many and the one.

The shape of the poem already hints at the theme – one long, slender stanza of twenty-six lines, it is one long stream of words, a visualisation of life as a long

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<sup>393</sup> Interview with the author, 30 June 2009.

<sup>394</sup> Interview with the author, 30 June 2009.

river. 'Identity' is one of Kramer's later poems and it is exemplary of the translingual imagination: embedded in a biographical context, the poem engages with issues of departure and arrival, loss and gain involved, and picks its references from various points in time and space. Given that the idea of life as a river can already be found in Heraclitus, the metaphor the poet has chosen is very old. However, as the poet explores it thoroughly in her own biographical context, it gains a new relevance and new meaning. While even in popular media people seem to be talking about their personal 'journey' all the time and the term has become a cliché a serious poet would want to avoid, Kramer's poem about her 'long journey' engages with all the nuances of the journey of the 'wandering' river. 'Wandering' itself is one of the multi-layered words the poet employs in this poem. Considering her Jewish background, it is not far-fetched to think of the image of the 'Wandering Jew' who is roaming the earth without a permanent homeland. According to the Christian legend, the Wandering Jew is damned to wander the earth until Doomsday because he taunted Jesus on his way to Golgatha. Although there is evidence that the character initially was not of any specific background or religious denomination, at least since the publication of Creutzer's *Kurtze Beschreibung und Erzählung* (1602) the Jewish link and thus the legend of the 'ewige Jude' (eternal Jew) was established.<sup>395</sup> Called 'Ahasver',<sup>396</sup> he soon becomes a symbol of all Jews and recurs in numerous, often anti-Semitic, publications (most notoriously the Nazi film *Der Ewige Jude*, 1940). However, not all the works on the Wandering Jew are necessarily anti-Semitic and at least since Nathan Birnbaum in 1910 published his cycle of poems based on the myth,<sup>397</sup> Jewish artists have been looking into the subject. Referring to Jewish persecution during the Nazi era, both Gertrud Kolmar ('Der Ewige Jude') and Nelly Sachs ('Chor der Wandernden') explored the role of the shoes of the 'Wandering Jew'.<sup>398</sup> Though different from the image of dusty shoes that endlessly drag their owners along, Kramer's river identity has a far more positive notion. The poet, who was dislocated but not driven along dusty roads, chooses an image

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<sup>395</sup> Körte, Monika. *Die Uneinholbarkeit des Verfolgten: Der Ewige Jude in der literarischen Phantastik* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2000), pp. 27-44.

<sup>396</sup> Initially, Ahasver(erus) was the name of the 'all-powerful and totally inept' non-Jewish Persian king in the biblical story of Esther (see Berlin and Brettler 1999: p. 1626.).

<sup>397</sup> Zer-Zion, Shelley. 'The Wanderer's Shoes' in *Jews and Shoes*, edited by Edna Nashon (Oxford: Berg, 2008), p. 142.

<sup>398</sup> Körte 2000: 63.

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that contains both the life-affirming as well as the restless notion of flowing water. Considering that Kramer's river-identity is 'never quite/ homing in one place' the exact wording is crucial as it seems that the poet is not saying the river is never quite homing but that it is never quite homing in one place. As it is constantly moving, it encounters new territories with changing conditions. At the same time, however, it carries sediments from places it has previously encountered, moving them along. 'Tasting the difference' of these textures is a 'gift' that the poet cherishes although she also feels 'a losing on foreign shores' as some of the new territories she encounters are not easily inhabitable.

Kramer describes how 'languages jar' on her 'waters'/ fluidity'. This is an interesting image insofar as languages are likened to something solid that stands in the way of a fluid entity. In other words, languages can be language-barriers; they are sluices that need to be opened to allow the water to move on. The poet, although long 'fluent' in the new language is well aware of the challenges involved in properly operating the sluices. At this point in the poem, not only do 'languages jar' on the 'waters'/ Fluidity' and prevent an arrival, but also the flow of words stops with a jar as the first sentence ends. Like a sluice, the full stop appears to block the stream of words. However, as it is possible to continue the same story by starting a new sentence; the same water can continue to flow once it has passed the sluices and has been moved to a different level. Because ultimately, that is what sluices do: while they seem to stop the flow of the water and though being trapped between sluice-gates might feel like a 'stagnant/ Sojourn of black/ Solitude', it is a stage to reach a new level where the journey can then continue. The first part of the poem was characterised by the a sense of adventure and energy, the second part is 'a stage of scorn/ At liquid living', expressing the frustration and pain involved in being at somebody else's mercy, being trapped between the jarring sluice-gates. However, this unpleasant experience is followed by a 'slow acceptance': probably on the other side of the gates, the river has reached a new level. It has slowed down inevitably and changed its appearance. The poem emerges changed from the language barrier but still a river. Clearly, the sluices had an impact but they have not destroyed the waters.

The tension of loss and gain is not resolved anywhere in the poem as it is a necessary feature of the 'river-identity'. The fact that Kramer does not deny her

loss enables her to integrate this aspect of her experience into her self-identity and in that sense allows her to move the river on. Still yearning and searching, she continues her journey.

### **Gerda Mayer**

The poet Gerda Mayer was born Gerda Stein in June 1927 into an assimilated Jewish family in Karlsberg in Sudetenland, what was then part of newly founded Czechoslovakia. It was her mother's second marriage and Mayer had one older sister, Hanna, from her mother's first marriage to a non-Jewish man. In late September 1938, shortly before the Sudeten are annexed by Nazi Germany, the family leaves for Prague where they stay with relatives before finding some rented rooms for themselves. At that stage, they are still hoping to emigrate together.<sup>399</sup> However, because of visa restrictions this turns out to be impossible. On 18 February 1939 Gerda's father, Arnold Stein, writes into *Babys Tagebuch* (baby's diary) he and his wife kept for their daughter:

Von unseren ständigen Hetzen von Amt zu Amt, jede Woche neue Verordnungen, mit erforderlichen Dokumenten etc. ein Chaos in welchem sich niemand auskennt.<sup>400</sup>

In one of her poems, Gerda Mayer remembers the desperate struggle for a visa that would allow the family to leave Prague.

#### THE EMIGRATION GAME – WINTER 1938/39

Mother and I walk through the streets of Prague.  
Her hands are balled against the falling snow.  
(Can't she afford gloves? Are they bare from choice?)  
There's snow above and endless steps below.

We have a bag of chocolate-creams; we play  
The Emigration Game: England, if brown;  
Or, if the centre's white, we must stay here;  
If yellow, it's Australia. Snow falls down.

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<sup>399</sup>Mayer, Gerda. *Prague Winter*, manuscript at Leon Baeck Archive in New York, 1998, p. 2-5.

<sup>400</sup>Leo Baeck Archive New York, Arnold und Erna Stein Collection (AR 5085) p. 24.

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I pick a brown and mother has the white.  
She walks with a straight back: let's try again.  
Her legs are varicosed; her heels are raised.  
She's bearing up and stout of heart. In vain

From consulate to consulate her steps  
Inscribe petitions. Soon the sweets are gone.  
Then March comes and invaders bar all routes:  
Yet leave no trace of her when they move on;

Their footsteps beating time and bearing down.<sup>401</sup>

The four stanzas of the poem are written in iambic pentameters although the first line of the first stanza begins with an inversion thus stressing the word 'mother'. What follows gives evidence to the suggestion that the poem is at least as much about the poet's mother as it is about an Emigration Game or the winter of 1938/39: it is about the tireless but unsuccessful efforts of the poet's mother to obtain emigration papers for the family. This is not Mayer's only poem about memories of loved ones she lost in the Holocaust to take its title from a game as we shall see when discussing 'Hide and Seek' in the next chapter. It seems that the poet is trying to hide the full dimension of the traumatic memories behind an innocent title. The poet Peter Porter once aptly remarked that 'like Stevie Smith she writes children's rhymes for grown-ups'.<sup>402</sup> Looking at the formal shape of 'The Emigration Game' with its regular rhyme scheme, it clearly gives the appearance of a playful little poem. However, the enjambments betray the painful knowledge of reality: 'we play' (end of the first line of the second stanza) 'in vain' (end of the last line of the third stanza), read the two unfinished sentences at the end of a line in the two stanzas describing the Emigration Game. Based on magical thinking, the Emigration Game allots the life-saving emigration papers by chance and the fact that Mayer remembers this episode hints at her desire to find an explanation for her rescue, or perhaps even an apology. It is difficult to tell if the poet and her mother really played this game together, or if it was just something young Gerda came up with as she followed her mother around, trying to cheer her up, or perhaps something she only played in her own mind. Retrospectively, she

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<sup>401</sup>Mayer 1999: 96.

<sup>402</sup>Quoted from *The Observer*, 15.03.1981. It might be worth pointing out, however, that Stevie Smith very seldom uses regular forms.

might even feel responsible for the bad outcome of the game.<sup>403</sup> When I met the poet in her home in London and we were seeing off some of her other visitors, she insisted that we shut the door straight away and did not wave or gaze after them as they drove off because that would result in bad luck and not ever seeing them again. Considering this incident, it seems likely that a game of magical thinking that went wrong has left its mark on Mayer after all these years. In a way, the Emigration Game can be regarded as a link to the poet's childhood and her fondness for fairy-tales, a child's belief in miracles and fate. Nevertheless, 'The Emigration Game' also bears references to English literature, notably in the description of the mother, who is 'bearing up and stout of heart'. 'Stout of heart' is an expression taken from William Wordsworth's poem 'Michael' where the poet describes an old shepherd. In a letter to Thomas Poole Wordsworth wrote in 1801:

I have attempted to give a picture of a man of strong mind and lively sensibility, agitated by two of the most powerful affections of the human heart; the parental affection and the love of property, including the feelings of inheritance, home and personal and family independence.<sup>404</sup>

Choosing the expression 'stout of heart' to describe the mother who tried everything to save her daughter's life and the future of her family can be understood as a commemoration of Mayer's mother. Like Michael, the shepherd in Wordsworth poem, who sends away his son, hoping that he will secure the family's fortune, the poet's mother sent away her daughter. Both, Mayer's mother and Michael the shepherd, do so with a heavy heart. Before his son's departure the old man says: 'Heaven forgive me, Luke,/ If I judge ill for thee, but it seems good/ That thou should'st go'. Like Luke, the shepherd's son, who 'wrote loving letters, full of wondrous news', Mayer regularly sent letters from England to Prague as her mother was keenly awaiting any kind of news from her daughter.<sup>405</sup> In Wordsworth's the son eventually 'gave himself/ To evil courses' and cannot return – leaving his parents to die alone. In a document submitted to the Leo Baeck Archive in New York in 1982 Mayer remembers how hard she tried not to disappoint her parents and when she

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<sup>403</sup> Incidentally, in 1946 the American board game publisher Vida Fox Clawson published a game called 'The Game of Emigration' – perhaps that is where Mayer, who had relatives living in the United States, heard the name and realised that she herself had also played an Emigration Game.

<sup>404</sup> Wordsworth, Jonathan. 'Introduction to William Wordsworth: *The Ruined Cottage*' in *William Wordsworth*, edited and with an introduction by Harold Bloom (Broomall/ PA: Chelsea House Publishers, 2003), p. 141.

<sup>405</sup> Leo Baeck Archive New York, Erna & Arnold Stein Collection AR5085 2.

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stayed with her guarantor's family in England to be at her best behaviour at all times.<sup>406</sup> Different to Luke, the shepherd's son, she never gave herself 'to evil courses' – but she did not see her parents again either. When Mayer re-reads her mother's letters almost forty years after the mother's death, she is 'appalled and saddened at how inadequate [her] own response must then have been'.<sup>407</sup> The poet, deeply moved by her mother's memory, writes

It is in her little verse both in the diary and in the letters, that her originally sanguine nature and her humour are best expressed. She passes on to me some of her humour and her love of literature, especially poetry. But her courage is all her own and I feel it to be significant that her last message like some family motto was HABE MUT.<sup>408</sup>

Thus, the mother who recited Schiller and Heine to her and taught her to love the great poets of the German language is remembered by her daughter in the words of one of the great poets of the English language. This poetic memorial demonstrates the translingual imagination at work: the 'stout of heart' Czechoslovakian mother, who had so many plans for the future,<sup>409</sup> walks with her 'varicosed' legs into English literature. And although the fascist invaders of Prague 'leave no trace of her when they move on', her daughter has put traces of her memory into a translingual poem.

We have already touched on the fact that eventually Mayer's parents succeeded in finding a way for their daughter to leave Prague. As a result, they even felt more positive about their own prospective, as the father's entry into *Babys Tagebuch* shows:

Nun besteht die Aussicht, dass ein engl. Professor dich aufnimmt. [...] Wir müssen auswandern, wohin ist unentschieden, da sämtliche Staaten sich hermetisch gegen Einwanderung verschliessen. Mit dir wäre uns die Einführung im neuen Lande beinahe unmöglich und so ist Deine Aufnahme für uns ein ebensolches Glück als für dich selbst [...].<sup>410</sup>

However, they never managed to escape. Mayer's father, Arnold Stein, was betrayed and handed over to the Gestapo when he tried to flee via Poland. He ended up in a camp in Lemberg; his daughter never learnt what exactly

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<sup>406</sup> Leo Baeck Archive New York, Arnold und Erna Stein Collection (AR 5085) Folder 7.

<sup>407</sup> Leo Baeck Archive New York, Arnold und Erna Stein Collection (AR 5085) S4105, p. 6.

<sup>408</sup> Leo Baeck Archive New York, Arnold und Erna Stein Collection (AR 5085) S4105, p. 8.

<sup>409</sup> Letter from Anny Krapkova to Gerda Mayer, Leo Baeck Archive New York, Arnold und Erna Stein Collection (AR 5085) Folder 7.

<sup>410</sup> Leo Baeck Archive New York, Arnold und Erna Stein Collection (AR 5085) p. 24.

happened to him but he probably died there in 1940.<sup>411</sup> Mayer's mother was murdered in Auschwitz and her half-sister Hanna, being classified by the Nazis as 'half-Jewish', survived physically unharmed but, probably caused by her traumatic experiences, later suffered from schizophrenia. For many years she lived in a mental hospital in East Germany.<sup>412</sup> In the end, it was only Mayer herself whose departure was one to a safe haven. Her poem 'They Went' tells about her family's fate.

#### THEY WENT

My father went hiking without pass-  
port or visa and was  
intercepted  
My sister went mad my mother  
went into that Chamber trusting  
in God  
God picked the bones clean they lie  
without imprint or name dear  
mother<sup>413</sup>

Written in the 1960s this is one of Mayer's earlier poems on the Holocaust. The title 'They Went' suggests a departure but it does not give any more information about where to and how. The first three lines are dedicated to the father: in the first line, the father is introduced doing something which suggests a certain purpose: he goes hiking, hoping to find the mountain pass that can lead him into safety. The unfinished second line first builds up the tension and then, like a blow, follows the annihilating third line with its single word that seems to have dropped down from the line above. We learn that he was 'intercepted', something that is emphasised by the fact that the line is also 'intercepted'. Thus, the layout of the first three lines of the poem reinforces what the words are saying.

In the fourth line, we are told that the 'sister went mad'; the poet playing with a different meaning of the word 'went' though without giving any further explanation. The rest of the line introduces the mother. The sister's brief but haunting mention is followed by a longer section referring to the mother, which begins in line four and continues to line six. We are told *where* she

<sup>411</sup> Leo Baeck Archive New York, Arnold und Erna Stein Collection (AR5085) Folder 1.

<sup>412</sup> Interview with the author, October 2009

<sup>413</sup> Mayer, Gerda. *Bernini's Cat. New and Selected Poems* (North Shields: Iron Press, 1999), p. 20.

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'went' – 'into that Chamber', and *how* – 'trusting/ in God'. Mayer has mused about the religious feelings of her mother in the months before her death. In a document held by the Leo Baeck Archive in New York the poet writes (in 1982):

I have also wondered sometimes whether the frequent references to God might not too be in response to my own rather glibly-voiced faith. [...] However, my mother was in fact quite a devout person - though our Judaism was a very watered-down affair - and certainly her 'bete täglich für Dich' of her last letter was wholly sincere.<sup>414</sup>

Mayer's thoughts here seem to suggest that she hopes for her mother to have had some trust left when she faced the brutal reality of the gas chamber – and at this time, when nobody had been able or willing to rescue her, this trust could not have been into any of her fellow humans. With the following line, the poem also turns its attention to God: since 'they' all went and cannot be reached any longer by the surviving child, the poem focuses on God's response. Accordingly, the last three lines are about God who 'picked the bones clean'. This process entails making them anonymous as they are now 'without imprint or name'. However, the poem does not end here: the final words 'dear mother' are split between lines eight and nine. They almost sound like a personal address, perhaps the beginning of a letter. However, it is the end of the poem, not the beginning of a letter and the reader is painfully aware, that whatever letter might be written to the 'dear mother' addressed in this poem, will never be read, let alone answered by her. Here, the pain felt by the survivor is tangible. This is a mourning poem of a child that has been left behind when everybody else 'went'.

It is startling, that it is God who is 'picking the bones clean' – that is something we would usually expect that birds or ants do. Why would God interfere? Considering the Jewish background of the poet the most compelling answer would be a reference to Ezekiel 36:37 and 37:1-14 which is the haftarah text for Passover whenever Shabbat falls during its intermediate days.<sup>415</sup> It is the story about the valley of dry bones where God promises that he will 'respond to the House of Israel and act for their sake'.<sup>416</sup> According to

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<sup>414</sup> Leo Baeck Archive New York, Arnold und Erna Stein Collection (AR5085) Folder 1.

<sup>415</sup> Commentary on Ezekiel 37:1-14 in *The Jewish Study Bible*, edited by Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 1113.

<sup>416</sup> Ezekiel 36:37

Ezekiel's vision, God instructs him to 'prophesy over these dry bones', and God speaks to the bones himself: 'I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live again'.<sup>417</sup> Thus, it is a vision about the resurrection of the dead with God saying to Ezekiel:

O mortal, these bones are the whole House of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, our hope is gone; we are doomed.' Prophesy, therefore, and say to them: Thus said the Lord God: 'I am going to open your graves and lift you out of the graves, O My people, and bring you to the land of Israel.'<sup>418</sup>

Thus, the poet's words 'God picked the dry bones' seems to have a more comforting tone than previously assumed. Rather than visualising animals picking the last bits of flesh from bones, this image is about a caring God who responds to the desperate cry of his people and promises to bring back the murdered ones. In Mayer's translingual imagination, the bones of the victims of the Holocaust lie clean whilst awaiting their resurrection – and the poet awaits her reunion with her 'dear/ mother'.

### Alice Beer

Alice Beer only started writing poetry in her seventies. Asked whether she had written anything in German while she was still living in Vienna, she recites the lines of a poem that she wrote when she was looking after a little girl. It was the year she had finished school:

I was taking a little girl on holiday with her mother. Actually, her mother left me in charge, just after the matura it was. It was about – I can say it, if you want:

Es ist so heiss, die Sonne sticht,  
die Mutter sagt: ‚So geht das nicht!‘  
So sind die Koffer schnell zur Hand,  
wir fahren ins Tiroler Land.

[...]  
Wie ist es so lustig im Tanz sich zu dreh'n,  
allein immer spielen ist lang nicht so schön.

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<sup>417</sup>Ezekiel 37:4-5

<sup>418</sup>Ezekiel 37:11-12

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That's all that I wrote in my 24 years in Austria.<sup>419</sup>

The poem is exactly what one would expect from a bright young girl who is making up some rhymes to entertain or comfort a little child. Rhythm and word melody work well and it is not difficult to imagine the scene where the mother gets out the suitcases to travel to Tirol to escape the summer heat in Vienna. The second stanza is like a little waltz, underlining the dancing theme. In short: a nice poem dedicated to a little girl.

More than half a century later, Beer wrote her first poem in English. During a holiday in France, she felt the urge to put her own faith into words.

### Faith

I went into a church.  
It was old and beautiful  
and the light filtered through the stained glass windows.  
I sat down to be quiet and said to the Lord:  
“Do you like it here? Are you here with me?”  
And the Lord answered: “Yes, my child,  
I am here with you.”

I came to a wood. It was beautiful.  
The birds sang and the golden sunlight  
filtered through the leaves  
and it was so peaceful.  
I sat on a tree trunk to be quiet  
and I said to the Lord:  
“Do you like it here? Are you here with me?”  
And the Lord answered: “Yes, my child,  
I am here with you.”

I found myself in a busy street.  
It was crowded and the people  
were pushing this way and that.  
It was getting dark and I was far from home.  
I said to the Lord, a little anxiously:  
“Are you here with me?”  
And the Lord answered, with infinite patience:  
“Don't you know yet, my child,  
that I am with you, wherever you are.”

While the poem sets out from a Christian image – a beautiful old church – the poet herself comes from an Orthodox Jewish family. Born Alice Freyberger in

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<sup>419</sup> Interview with the author, 15 September 2008

Vienna in September 1912, the youngest of four children, from an early age she felt not at home in Orthodox Judaism.

I didn't feel Jewish as a child. I didn't feel much sympathy for the religion. Once, sort of when I started thinking for myself, I felt that it was unneeded separation with the laws what you can eat and so.<sup>420</sup>

Later, as a grown-up woman in England, she would eventually join the Quakers not least because she felt comfortable with their inclusive approach and social engagement. The image of the church building in the first stanza of 'Faith' seems predominantly refer to a quiet space for spiritual experience rather than the stage for an institutionalised religious event such as a Christian service of any specific denomination. The relationship with the 'Lord' is direct and personal. Similarly, the wood is a prototype of nature, an almost romantic picture of a perfect and peaceful creation. Again, this spiritually wholesome setting invites a direct conversation between 'Lord' and the poet persona. The final stanza moves to a different environment with other humans entering the stage as an anonymous crowd. The potentially threatening atmosphere is emphasised by the change of light: while earlier 'light filtered through the stained glass windows' and 'golden sunlight filtered through the leaves', now it is 'getting dark'. The poem ends with the final reassurance of the Lord – and thereby seems to hint that a personal relationship with God is possible outside organised religious settings and that God's presence is not limited to dedicated spiritual environments.

The calmness and confidence that are expressed in this poem, as well as the positive image of God, seem to be in stark contrast to the writings of the other three poets. It does not come as a surprise then that Beer does not share the traumatic experience of being forced to leave her family behind to join a *Kindertransport* to safety. Though her faith into God and humanity have also been challenged, she was already a young adult when she left Vienna and she never had to search the Red Cross lists for her parents' names. However, looking at Beer's life, at some key decisions and events in her biography, it becomes apparent that faith (in the wider sense) had always played a central role. Therefore, although it is certainly not her most accomplished poem, it

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<sup>420</sup>Interview with the author, 15 September 2008

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shows traces of her biography and demonstrates how the translingual imagination can express itself in different ways. First, there was the Orthodox Jewish faith she was born into and which felt remote from everyday life, as it separated her from non-Jewish friends and people around her. In response, she developed a strong socialist belief in justice which put her into danger in 1930s Vienna, where the right-wing government clamped down with increasing brutality on social-democratic or socialist activities.<sup>421</sup> Despite all the difficulties and dangers she faced throughout her life, she did not lose her faith in other human beings, and, as well shall see in this section, she was fortunate to meet people who justified this faith.

When Alice was little, her family was reasonably wealthy, the parents together with an uncle owning a children's clothes factory.

We were quite well to do. When I was a little child we had a cook and a chambermaid who would also look after the children and a French 'bonne', who would teach us French by being there and talking French.<sup>422</sup>

However, with the end of World War I and the defeat of Austria Hungary the Empire fell apart. New states were founded and what had been unrestricted retail activities within one Empire suddenly became international exports, impeding previous business relations held by Alice's family. Vienna was the capital of the German speaking provinces that had become 'German Austria' with the declaration of the First Austrian Republic in November 1918. The new Austrian state faced serious economic challenges and hyper-inflation soon destroyed a substantial part of the financial assets of the middle class. With the economic crisis, the political situation became tenser as well.<sup>423</sup> As Alice's parents' factory was producing high quality clothes, they were hit hard as people were trying to cut their spending to make ends meet. The family business was struggling.

Vienna went through a period when people were economising and there were a lot of people out of work, depression. And of course we felt that.

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<sup>421</sup> For more detailed information see for example Konrad, Helmut. 'Der Februar 1934 im historischen Gedächtnis' in *Themen der Zeitgeschichte und der Gegenwart. Arbeiterbewegung – NS-Herrschaft – Rechtsextremismus. Ein Resümee aus Anlass des 60. Geburtstags von Wolfgang Neugebauer*, edited by DÖW (Wien: Lit Verlag, 2004).

<sup>422</sup> Interview with the author, 15 September 2008.

<sup>423</sup> For a more detailed account of the events see for example 'Part II: The Republic of Austria' in Jelavich, Barbara. *Modern Austria. Empire & Republic 1815-1986* (Cambridge: University Press, 1987).

With my mother having Parkinson she couldn't, like other people would, take over the household. [...] But we still stayed in the same flat.<sup>424</sup>

Alice remembers not only the economic impact of the crisis on their family. Although she was still quite young, the wider social and political events were too blatant to be ignored. The emerging socialist and pacifist movements had a lasting impact on her as she felt drawn to the ideals of peace and social justice. Inevitably, this caused some friction within her traditional Orthodox family.

After finishing the 'Frauenoberschule', a type of Sixth Form College specialising in domestic economy and childcare and spending a year in France working as an au-pair, Alice went to university to study psychology and English, planning to specialise in child psychology. By that time she was deeply involved in political activities and, as her daughter Elizabeth pointed out in the obituary published in *The Guardian*, the 1930s in Vienna were not a safe place for a young Jewish socialist.<sup>425</sup> Therefore, in April 1937, partly to improve her English, partly to go to a safer place, Alice went to England.

The economic crisis in Britain did not make it easy for anybody to find a job and the trade unions guarded against cheap foreign labour threatening the British work force. However, domestic servants were not organized and therefore in early 1937 – not long before the situation for German and Austrian Jews was to become intolerable – it was still possible to obtain a visa and find employment in England.<sup>426</sup> Together with another young Austrian woman, Alice travelled via Dover and London to her future employers' house in the Midlands.

### Journey and Arrival

After the train and the boat,  
another train from Dover.  
Ambling through the Kent fields,  
past farms and oasthouses,  
the vast string of houses,  
pocket handkerchief gardens.  
We thought: This is England.

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<sup>424</sup> Interview with the author, 15 September 2008

<sup>425</sup> Elizabeth Brandow in *The Guardian*, 07 April 2011.

<sup>426</sup> For more information about Jewish refugees in domestic service see Tony Kushner, 'An Alien Occupation—Jewish Refugees and Domestic Service in Britain, 1933–1948', in Werner E. Mosse (ed.), *Second Chance: Two Generations of German-Speaking Jews in the United Kingdom* (Tubingen: JCB Mohr, 1991), 553–78.

## Chapter 4

In a taxi, shepherded by a woman from the YWCA  
from Victoria to St. Pancras.  
After seemingly endless London  
small towns along the route,  
sheep in the countryside,  
hedges in bloom.  
We thought: This is England.

Collected from the station by our employers,  
a car ride past fruit trees covered in bloom –  
in Austria blossom time was over.  
We felt: This is England.

Shown to our rooms, two iron bedsteads,  
one chest of drawers, a shabby wardrobe,  
no heating,  
told to be down in the kitchen  
at quarter to seven next morning.  
Anna and I exchanged glances,  
thought: So, this is England.

What is striking is that, in contrast to the three other poets, Beer does not even mention her departure from Austria. Although the departure is implied, the poet focuses on ‘journey and arrival’, as the title already suggests. Unlike the departure of her fellow poets, Beer did not leave Vienna as a refugee; she was not forced away from her parents as a youngster. As she left before the *Anschluss* and was planning to return the following year, it was not a departure into an uncertain future. Nevertheless, the first line of the first stanza brings the Kindertransport to mind as the mode of transport is so similar: ‘after the train and the boat’ could have also described Gershon’s or Kramer’s journey to England. Beer’s description of the Kent countryside seems to be that of a tourist enjoying the picturesque fields, farms and houses, who is then sharing her discoveries with her fellow traveller (‘This is England’). The language employed in this stanza is that of an insider considering informal idiomatic English expressions such as ‘pocket handkerchief gardens’. Furthermore, the word ‘amble’ suggests an unhurried pace, emphasising the unhurried feeling of the first stanza. London, in the following stanza, is not only the place of transit from one station to another but also from tourist to worker: the ‘woman from the YWCA’ is not a tourist guide but there to make sure the young Austrian women do not get lost in the vast city. There is an anticipation of a promising future, with ‘hedges in bloom’ – a new life full of opportunities. The

optimism is palpable in the third stanza when the two women *feel* that ‘This is England’. That ‘blossom time was over’ in their home country seems not only to refer to a seasonal phenomenon but equally to the political situation. Arriving from Austria, liberal England certainly must have felt like springtime in many ways. However, the final stanza completes the picture, not only for the new arrivals but also for the reader: the reality of a domestic worker in 1930s England is not all bloom and blossom but a very sober affair with ‘iron bedsteads’ and ‘no heating’.

As in Beer’s previously discussed poem ‘Faith’ the setting of ‘Journey and Arrival’ appears to be fairly clichéd. However, the two different stereotyped scenes – the picturesque countryside on the one hand and the shabby domestic servant quarter on the other hand – are both set into direct relation with the poet’s personal adventure. Furthermore, Beer’s way of combining different clichés helps foregrounding the elements that do not fit immediately, such as the reference to Austria. In other words, the cliché becomes an experienced reality as the poem populates the stereotyped settings with individuals who experience the events as unique.<sup>427</sup> The defamiliarizing effect indicates the translingual imagination at work as the poet explores and transcends fixed images of the English language and culture. The refrain ‘This is England’ accompanies the poet’s journey, from a first cognition of the landscape with its traditional houses and gardens, to the cognition of the class society with its live-in domestic staff.

However, Beer’s sobering realisation of what England was going to be like for her did not result in bitterness or disappointment. Well aware that as a migrant she had found this employment because it was not the most attractive to the native work force, she was nevertheless grateful to be able to support her family in Vienna:

I felt also that I had that job in England because no English girl would do it. [...] But it didn’t make me feel sorry for myself. In a way I felt that I was well off, I had very little money but it came in regularly and I could sent to my family. I had nearly four pounds a months and of that money I sent two pounds for my parents and that paid for a servant at home.<sup>428</sup>

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<sup>427</sup> See also Brecht, Bertolt. ‘Dialektik und Verfremdung’ in *Schriften zum Theater 3* (1933-1947) (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1963), pp. 180-182.

<sup>428</sup> Interview with the author 15 September 2008.

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Alice worked as a cook and supported her family financially as their economic situation had become increasingly difficult, not the least because Alice's mother suffered from Parkinson's disease and needed help with running the household. In early 1938 the mother died.

With the *Anschluss* in March 1938, only weeks before Alice was due to return to Vienna, the situation changed dramatically. She stayed in her position until her boyfriend came over from Austria and the couple got married in October 1938.<sup>429</sup> Together they tried to find a way to get her father out of Austria. In one of our conversations Alice recalled the unlikely story of the stranger on the train who agreed to become a guarantor for her father: a headmistress overheard Franz and Alice talking about the difficulty of finding somebody to guarantee for Alice's father. Without knowing him she agreed to sign the necessary forms and saved his life. 'Stranger on a train' was only published in 2011, after Beer's death.

### Stranger on a train<sup>430</sup>

It was a stranger on a train  
who saved my Father's life.  
She heard the desperation in our voices.  
We'd tried so hard to get him  
out of Austria, to be safe with us.

Nobody we knew could or would sign  
the guarantee we needed, although  
we promised never to ask for money; kept  
the promise, managed on the very low wages  
my husband earned in the first years.

Father arrived here just before war began.  
Though only sixty-two he looked an old man,  
thin, worn out, shrunk. In time he revived,  
improved his English; adaptable, he found  
a job, made new friends in this country.

It took some time before he told us  
he'd been arrested by the Gestapo, kicked,  
beaten, spat on; let go days later  
on condition he would leave Austria  
within three months or be sent to a camp.

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<sup>429</sup>Interview with the author, 15 September 2008.

<sup>430</sup>Alice Beer. 'Stranger on a train' in *Soundswrite Anthology of Contemporary Poetry* (Leicester: Soundswrite Press, 2011), p. 20.

The title of the poem almost resembles that of one of Hitchcock's famous films, *Strangers on a train* (1951), based on Patricia Highsmith's novel of the same name.<sup>431</sup> However, very different from the thriller in which a total stranger helps out with killing a relative, Beer's stranger plays a key role in the rescue of her father. It seems as if the translingual poet has deliberately chosen a title that would trigger this association – only to disappoint the audience's expectation.

The poet uses different forms repetition to accentuate the difficulties the daughter faced ('could or would') and the sacrifices she and her husband were willing to make ('promised') to rescue the father. Another strategy employed by Beer to highlight important events is to have a line coinciding with a prose sounding, grammatical sentence. 'She heard the desperation in our voices' and 'Father arrived here just before war began' are the two key moments of the rescue: the former is the precondition of the rescue attempt and the latter means the successful completion. While these two moments seem to form the irrevocable core of the rescue mission, the poem also presents other details. For example, Beer's use of enjambments has a defamiliarizing effect as she seems to play with a further literary and cinematic association. The last two lines of the first stanza, where she writes 'We tried so hard to get him' and the following line continues with 'out of', there is a fairly possible automatism to read 'Africa' instead of 'Austria'.<sup>432</sup> Positioning 'out of Austria' in such a way and thereby encouraging a mis-reading, allows for a different understanding of the huge challenge facing the daughter who wants to get her Jewish father out of Nazi Vienna. Austria in 1939 might as well have been a different continent and to escape from there just as dangerous and urgent.

While the first two stanzas focus on the time up to the father's rescue, the last two stanzas talk about the time following his departure from Austria. It is no coincidence that the father first needs to readjust his life, so adapt to his new home, in other words to feel safe, before he can face what happened to him in Vienna. Beer's poem shows how fortunate she was to help her father to survive. Unlike the parents' departure described in Gershon's, Kramer's or

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<sup>431</sup> Highsmith, Patricia. *Strangers On A Train* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950).

<sup>432</sup> Automatism as a concept has been discussed in the theory chapter in the context of defamiliarization.

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Mayer's poetry, she can write about her father's arrival. Furthermore, she knows what her father suffered and the phrase 'sent to a camp' is the cruel alternative which he escaped. In 'Stranger on a train' the translingual imagination is visible in Beer's allusions to English and American culture which, through defamiliarization, serve as both stumbling blocks and gateways: the potential of the stranger on a train is moved beyond its previous dimension. Neither the anonymous and inconsequential stranger we all might encounter (and ignore) on a train journey, nor the ruthless murderer to be is portrayed in Beer's poem. Quite the opposite: Beer's stranger on a train challenges the prevailing concept of a stranger as she is able and willing to do what friends and acquaintances 'could or would' not do – namely to save a life.<sup>433</sup> The defamiliarizing effect allows for a new and deeper understanding not only of the refugees experience but also of semantic concepts.

Living as an Austrian refugee in early 1940s England implied being regarded as a stranger by the authorities. In 'A Long Time Ago', Beer remembers the time after England entered the war and her husband, because of his Austrian nationality, was suddenly regarded as an 'enemy alien'.<sup>434</sup>

### A Long Time Ago

I wasn't unduly disturbed,  
nor worried for our seven week old girl,  
when they interned you after the fall of France.  
This was England, after all,  
not Nazi Germany.

I wasn't unduly perturbed  
when you sent word you were going to Canada,  
hoping we'd follow soon;  
when week after week no news came from you –  
so many ships were sunk in those days –  
nor was I unduly relieved  
when more than two months later I was told  
you were safe in a camp in Australia.  
No, not unduly.<sup>435</sup>

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<sup>433</sup>Of course, stranger does not always and necessarily have a negative connotation in English; see for example *OED* online: <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/191250?rkey=SnGuF7&result=229447#>. However, in the context of 'stranger on a train' the image of the stranger is negative because of the reference to the thriller.

<sup>434</sup>For more information about the situation and treatment of German and Austrian refugees see for example Stent, Ronald. 'The Internment of His Majesty's Loyal Enemy Aliens' in *Oral History* Vol. 9, No. 1 (Spring 1981), pp. 35-40.

<sup>435</sup>Beer, Alice. *Facing Forward Looking Back* (Nottingham, Poetry Monthly Press, 1999), p. 29.

Our daughter was not unduly bewildered  
at eighteen months, when you returned,  
a stranger, with quite unpredictable moods;  
enchanted by her, but  
demanding all my attention.

I was not unduly surprised when,  
a few weeks after your return  
you took a new job in London,  
the family to follow.  
A fresh start in war-torn London in 1941.  
No, not at all surprised.

The four stanzas of the poem cover the period from spring 1940 until late 1941. Beginning in June 1940 with the fall of France, the poem mentions the personal implications the event had on the poet and her young family.<sup>436</sup> 'This was England, after all/ not Nazi Germany' points at the disquieting overtone an internment based on nationality had for the refugees, despite the reassuring hint at the significant differences between the two countries. The following stanzas recall the husband allegedly being sent to Canada but (fortunately) ending up in Australia, and eventually returning to England, marked by his experience. Finally, there is 'A fresh start in war-torn London in 1941'. The poem is written in free verse and the story told in a rather prosaic tone, intercepted only by the poet's repeated assertion that she did not respond excessively emotional to the events. Already in the first line the poet points out that she was not 'unduly disturbed' by her husband's internment. The term 'unduly' occurs six times in the poem, together with the verbs 'disturbed', 'perturbed', 'relieved', 'bewildered' and 'surprised', all of them referring to an emotional state. Given the poet's potentially traumatic experiences between June 1940 and the end of 1941 a strong emotional reaction would not seem disproportionate. The repetition of phrases including the term 'unduly' as a kind of chorus accompanying the main story directs the attention. By reiterating that none of the emotional responses were 'unduly' the term itself foregrounded. Beer seems to point at the British ideal of keeping a stiff upper

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<sup>436</sup>For a chronology of Germany's war against France see for example Jackson, Julian. *The Fall of France: The Nazi Invasion of 1940* (Oxford: University Press, 2003), p. xvi. For more information about the internment of enemy aliens in Britain see Cesarani, David and Tony Kushner. 'Alien Internment in Britain during the Twentieth Century: An Introduction' in *Immigrants and Minorities* Vol. 11, Issue 3 (1992).

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lip, not showing any emotions no matter what. British culture is renowned for being suspicious of overtly displayed emotions and Lord Tennyson's famous lines 'Theirs not to make reply,/ Theirs not to reason why,/ Theirs but to do and die' could almost be regarded as a creed of the British Empire.<sup>437</sup> By drawing the attention to 'unduly' the poet not only challenges the concept of keeping a stiff upper lip but also points at the distress suffered by refugees from Nazi Europe. As Cesarani and Kushner have shown, there is still very little awareness within British society of the sometimes poor treatment internees faced and the anxiety the internment caused within the refugee community.<sup>438</sup> With the translingual imagination at work, Beer's poem addresses these complex issues gently. Her poem is not an open accusation but, considering the story, it seems that Beer is still pointing a finger at this inglorious chapter of British history.

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<sup>437</sup>Tennyson, Alfred. 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' (1854) in *The Works Of Alfred Lord Tennyson* (Ware: Wordsworth Library, 2008), p. 408.

<sup>438</sup>Cesarani and Kushner: 1992.

## Chapter 5: Loss and Gain

As I have shown when developing the criteria of the translingual imagination, ‘loss and gain’ are recurring motifs in the writing of translingual authors. They are part of the writers’ experience of dislocation and can manifest themselves in various ways.

The struggle to ‘rediscover the lost connection between the external world and (an) internal representation of it through language’<sup>439</sup> is visible in the writing of all four poets. Writing in English, they still incorporate insights derived from their first language – and approach their adopted language with an open curiosity that provides space for the translingual imagination. While mourning the loss of the mother tongue, the poets have gained a new language, which words they find already inhabited by other voices, to borrow Bakhtin’s image. These words enter the translingual poet’s context ‘from another context, permeated with interpretations’<sup>440</sup> to which the poet then adds her own voice, thereby enriching her adopted language.

‘Loss and gain’ also play their part in the poet’s dealing with time and place. As their dislocation places them ‘at an oblique angle’<sup>441</sup> to their world, they gain insights that would not have been possible otherwise. In that sense, their poetry provides access to a new understanding of their adopted homelands. On the other hand, the poems can also give some indication about the role in which the dislocated poets see themselves within their adopted country. Gershon, for example, evokes the idea of *galut* in one of the poems we shall discuss. *Galut* is the Hebrew word for ‘exile’, initially referring to the Jewish exile from Israel following the destruction of the Second Temple.<sup>442</sup> Since then it has been generally adopted when describing the condition of Jewish communities outside the land of Israel, emphasising their homelessness

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<sup>439</sup>Stroińska, Magda. ‘The Role of Language in the Re-construction of Identity in Exile’, in *Exile, Language and Identity* by V. Cecchetto and M. Stroińska (eds.) (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2003), p. 99.

<sup>440</sup>Bakhtin 1984: 21.

<sup>441</sup>Hoffman, Eva. ‘Afterword’ in Rosenfeld, Alvin (ed.). *The Writer Uprooted: Contemporary Jewish Exile Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008). Thank you to Ellman Crasnow for pointing out to me that E. M. Forster used a similar expression when he described the poet C. P. Cavafy as ‘a Greek gentleman in a straw hat, standing absolutely motionless at a slight angle to the universe’. Quoted by Rae Salven in *The Complete Poems of Cavafy* (London: Hogarth Press, 1961), p. 216.

<sup>442</sup>Eisenberg, Joyce and Ellen Scolnic. *The JPS Dictionary of Jewish Words* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2001), p. 44.

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and their hope for a 'Jewish homecoming'.<sup>443</sup> Gershon, however, as we shall see, applies the concept of *galut* to the forced exile from her native country, Germany.

The work of all four women poets illustrates how their recall of places they left behind is influenced by their 'oblique angle'. As the poems conjure up images of past places, one of the aspects to examine will be whether and to what extent nostalgia plays a part in this re-creation.

In the following poem, Karen Gershon revisits a German forest and confronts her memories with the knowledge of the present. The poem begins with describing the effect this encounter has on the grown-up refugee girl.

### IN THE WOOD

I kept forgetting that I was a woman of forty  
children too young for history may have thought me mad  
when I came out of the wood with my hands and shoes dirty  
and with tears in my eyes walked up and down the road

Yet not for a moment did I walk again in my childhood  
the wood did not echo a word all its magic had gone  
every path was for me a secret turning to Auschwitz  
there were traces of murder under every stone

Nothing German remains that has not been desecrated  
beechwood will now mean for ever a violent place  
nature is neutral my own culpable thoughts created  
a setting for tragedy where I might have seen peace<sup>444</sup>

The poem suggests that it is an actual German wood the poet revisits. More than twenty years after the end of the Nazi era and the murder of her parents, Gershon returns. We are not told why she decided to enter the wood, if it is in search of her childhood memories then this outing is a bitter disappointment: 'not for a moment' did she feel she was walking again in her childhood. None of the enchantment of her sylvan childhood experience was there, the magic wood of her memory replaced by a hostile reality. With references to Auschwitz and mass-murder, a topography of terror arises from the German wood – a

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<sup>443</sup> Eisen, Arnold M. *Galut. Modern Jewish reflection on Homelessness and Homecoming* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. vii.

<sup>444</sup> Gershon, Karen. *Selected Poems* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1966), p. 40.

place that was once a romantic topos in German literature.<sup>445</sup> From the early nineteenth century onwards, numerous poems, fairy-tales and sagas about the German wood were invented.

Wer wissen will, wie der Wald zum Mythos der Deutschen wurde, muss sich weit in die Geschichte zurück denken. Am Anfang steht der altrömische Historiker und Ethnograf Tacitus; vor allem aber dessen Interpretation durch die Mythenforschung des 19. Jahrhunderts. Seine *Germania*, um das Jahr 100 unserer Zeitrechnung verfasst, war im 15. Jahrhundert wieder aufgefunden worden. Als Jacob Grimm und andere Romantiker aus Mythen und Sagen eine verborgene Geschichte der Deutschen rekonstruieren wollten, erhoben sie dieses Werk zum ältesten deutschen Geschichtsbuch.<sup>446</sup>

Gershon grew up with these Romantic fairy-tales and there are references in her poem that hint at a familiarity with the mythical image of the wood, for example by alluding to 'its magic' and using the phrase 'under every stone' – the latter reminiscent of the sagas about spirits ensouling stones or mythical creatures hiding in the forest behind stones and stumps.<sup>447</sup>

Although initially the Romantic myths about what could be described as a Germanic forest identity were not necessarily of a political nature, they soon were exploited by nationalistic and fascist propaganda.<sup>448</sup> Considering the extent to which Nazi ideology used the 'myth' of the German wood, it becomes even more obvious that the poet reasons 'Nothing German remains that has not been desecrated'. 'Beechwood', in the following line is a literal translation of 'Buchenwald'. Buchenwald was established in 1937 on the Ettersberg near Weimar and by the end of the Second World War it was the biggest concentration camp within German borders.<sup>449</sup> The first prisoners had to cut down the trees to make place for the camp – with one notable exception: Goethe's oak. Here, we come full circle: the Nazis who put a strong emphasis

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<sup>445</sup>See for example Jung-Kaiser, Ute (ed.). *Der Wald als romantischer Topos. 5. Interdisziplinäres Symposium der Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst Frankfurt am Main 2007* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008).

<sup>446</sup>Lehmann, Albrecht. 'Mythos Deutscher Wald' in *Der Deutsche Wald* (Stuttgart: Landeszentrale für Politische Bildung, 2001), p. 4.

<sup>447</sup>Lehmann 2001: 4.

<sup>448</sup>Lehmann 2001: 4.

<sup>449</sup>When it was first established, it was called 'Konzentrationslager Ettersberg', relating to its site. However, less than a fortnight later, following protests from the 'Weimarer NS-Kulturgemeinde' the name is changed to 'Konzentrationslager Buchenwald' – the 'Ettersberg' is mentioned in Goethe's work and apparently Nazi aesthetes felt it was inappropriate to name a concentration camp after it. Website of the 'Gedenkstätte Buchenwald' <http://www.buchenwald.de/455/>, accessed on 07.10.2013.

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on the national myth of the forest (and trees in general) would not destroy the one tree where the national poet reportedly met with Frau von Stein. Joseph Roth, in his last ironic comment, written shortly before his death remarked:

zwischen Wäscherei u. Küche steht die Naturschutzzeiche der Fr. v. Stein u. Goethes. An dieser Eiche umgehen jeden Tag die Insassen de Kz.tr-Lagers vorbei; d. heißt: sie werden dort vorbeigegangen. Fürwahr! man verbreitet falsche Nachrichten über das K-Lager Buchenwald; man möchte sagen: Greuelmärchen. Es ist, scheint mir an der Zeit diese auf das rechte Maß zu reduzieren: an der Eiche, unter der Goethe mit Fr. v. Stein gesessen ist und die dank dem Naturschutzgesetz noch wächst, ist bis jetzt, meines Wissens, noch kein einziger der Insassen des K-Lagers „angebunden“ worden; vielmehr an den anderen Eichen, an denen es in diesem Wald nicht mangelt.<sup>450</sup>

The incident of Goethe's oak cruelly confirms Gershon's claim that 'Nothing German remains that has not been desecrated': the wood of her German childhood has lost its magic and all the wonderful folk-myths could not prevent the torture and murder of millions by a people who felt protective towards a tree where one of their greatest poets used to sit more than one hundred years ago. Traces of magic have been replaced by 'traces of murder' and simple words like beechwood have lost their innocence.

The shock about the loss of the romantic wood of her childhood is tangible in the first stanza. Bewildered, she comes 'out of the wood', the dirt on her hands and shoes and the tears in her eyes vouching for her desperate search for the familiar wood of the past. What she found in the wood does not resemble what she remembers from her childhood.

The notion that nothing is what it seems is also expressed in one of the stylistic features employed by the poet: at first sight, the poem seems to be written in alternating rhymes. However, none of the lines actually rhyme – they are merely eye-rhymes. Thus, the rhyme scheme creates a moment of disappointed expectation as the reader realises that the poem is not as harmonious as anticipated – echoing the much bigger disappointment about the German wood felt by the poet.

The last two lines of the poem seem to take a step back. The poet blames herself for having created the scene with her 'own culpable thoughts' as

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<sup>450</sup>Leo Baeck Archive New York, Estate of Joseph Roth, AR 1837/ II 9.

'nature is neutral'. On the surface, this self-blame seems to be reminiscent of survivor's guilt. However, the actual wording 'nature is neutral' hints at a different connection. It is a quote from a speech (1952) by the American politician Adlai Stevenson who also added: 'Man has wrested from nature the power to make the world a desert or to make the deserts bloom. There is no evil in the atom; only in men's soul'.<sup>451</sup> On 10 August 1945, the American journalist Dorothy Thompson had already used the phrase 'nature is neutral' in a similar context in her article about the launch of the atomic bomb.<sup>452</sup> The argument that an atom, or any part of nature itself cannot be good or evil, has been prevalent from early on in the discussion about scientists' moral obligations. German scientists who worked for the Nazis were among those demanding that researchers should not be held responsible for what is done with their findings and ideas.<sup>453</sup> Wernher von Braun, one of the leading German scientists who developed the V2 rocket (the 'Wunderwaffe' with which the Nazis hoped to win the war) and who was directly responsible for the death of thousands of forced labourers,<sup>454</sup> when asked about his role remarked that 'science does not have a moral dimension'.<sup>455</sup> At the time the poem was written, the man who had once selected his workforce from the inmates of Buchenwald had long since continued his career as a scientist for NASA. Buchenwald, the scene of torture and death, had not soiled the memory of Goethe's Ettersberg<sup>456</sup> and the grown-up child refugee 'might have seen peace' – were it not for her knowledge of what happened in the midst of an unconcerned nature.<sup>457</sup> Hence, it is not survivor's guilt that creates the setting but it is the ignorance of her contemporaries: not just the ignorance of those 'children too young for history' but of those non-Jewish Germans who insisted

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<sup>451</sup> As quoted in Kaplan, Rob (ed.). *Science Says...* (New York: Stonesong Press, 2001), p. 109.

<sup>452</sup> Published in *Pittsburgh Post Gazette* (10 August 1945), p. 8.

<sup>453</sup> Werner Heisenberg is quoted to have said 'Die Ideen sind nicht verantwortlich für das, was Menschen aus ihnen machen'. *Wissenschaft im Zitat* ((Leipzig: Verlag VEB Bibliographisches Institut, 1987), p. 67.

<sup>454</sup> See *Peenemünder Erklärung* (2012),: 'Von Braun war NSDAP- und SS-Mitglied, seine Arbeit diente der Entwicklung von Terrorwaffen für Hitlers Krieg; nicht zuletzt war er mitverantwortlich für den Tod von Tausenden von Häftlingen bei der Entwicklung und Produktion dieser Waffen.' (available online at <http://www.peenemuender-erklaerung.eu/>, accessed 08.10.2013.

<sup>455</sup> Wernher von Braun as quoted in Daempfle, Peter. *Good Science, Bad Science, Pseudoscience, and just Plain Bunk: How to Tell the Difference* (Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield, 2013), p. 166.

<sup>456</sup> One notable exception is, of course, Anthony Hecht's poem 'Light! More Light' (1967) where Goethe's famous last words are related to the deaths of two Jewish prisoners 'outside a German wood'; they are to be buried alive and no light 'from the shrine at Weimar beyond the hill' appears. Hecht, Anthony. *Collected Earlier Poems* (Oxford: University Press, 1990), pp. 64-65.

<sup>457</sup> The concept of a nature that is indifferent to human suffering recurs in other poems as we shall see in the chapter on 'Intertexts'.

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on protecting a tree where they should have protected humans and who now insist on seeing 'peace' where a tragedy happened.

Gershon cannot cling to a nostalgic view of the German wood which once was something she shared with her fellow Germans. With the German wood turning into a murderous scene, the poet is on her own – nobody shares the new meaning of beechwood with her: not her old fellow citizens in Germany because they made sure to protect their nostalgia from culpable thoughts, and not her new ones in England as the word does not mean anything to them. The translingual poem can be understood as an attempt to express this dilemma by acknowledging the loss. Simultaneously, the poem creates a space for an enhanced understanding of the complex meaning of words and their meaning. Thus, it encourages its English readers to become aware of the *dialogic interaction*<sup>458</sup> that inhabits words and that moves forward meaning. Nature itself may be neutral but 'wood' will not remain a neutral word after the translingual poet has added her voice to the dialogue.

At least in her thoughts Gershon repeatedly returns to her country of origin. In 'Songs in Exile' the poet revisits her 'native town', Bielefeld. However, it soon becomes clear that it is not the post-war city in Westphalia she returns to.

### SONGS IN EXILE

I  
In my thoughts I still return  
to the town where I was born  
and walk along streets that I know  
were ruins sixteen years ago  
which rebuilt can never be  
welcoming and home to me

I who have no other home  
love my native town with shame  
driven by my memories  
riven between loyalties  
I love the town my exile built  
a replica without the guilt<sup>459</sup>

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<sup>458</sup>Bakhtin, M. M. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Translated and edited by C. Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 201.

<sup>459</sup>Gershon, Karen. *Selected Poems* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1966), p. 13.

In this first of seven 'Songs in Exile' the poet enters the home town of her memory. She makes it clear from the beginning that this is the town she left behind as a child, a place not yet destroyed by war – not the 1960s city in the Bundesrepublik Deutschland. While her country of refuge did not become a new home to her, post-war Bielefeld has ceased to be 'welcoming and home', and all the poet is left with is the memory of her 'native town'. Gershon evokes the image of *galut*: referring to the ruins of the place where she belonged and insisting that she has no other home, she emphasises the uprootedness of her own existence. It seems that even her inner conflict, the reason why she is 'riven between loyalties', is related to the concept of *galut* as she keeps questioning herself about the causes of her exile. The poet obviously is struggling to come to terms with the fact that the place that she had loved did not love her back but disowned her and failed to protect her parents. Suffering the rejection and embarrassed by her own feelings, Gershon – daughter of an architect – lets her exile build 'a replica' of her native town. The reproduction of her Bielefeld has all the familiar features the refugee remembers and it provides her with a focal point for her need for a place to call home. Some years later, an Indian-born English writer would call such a place an 'imaginary homeland': Salman Rushdie, in his essay 'Imaginary Homelands' (1983) states that exiles, leaving behind their native place, are often 'haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim'.<sup>460</sup> However, because of what he calls the 'physical alienation; exiles cannot reclaim 'precisely the thing that was lost' but will 'create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind'.<sup>461</sup> It seems that in the first of her 'Songs of Exile', Gershon has created a 'Bielefeld of the mind'. As it is built on her personal memories it is fragmented and cannot claim to be an accurate image of an actual place, not even of an actual place in the past. Its value is not being an accurate copy of the complete town with all its details but the fragments of it the poet remembers and cherishes because they are relics from an irrecoverable place. Rushdie has likened these fragments to 'broken pots of

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<sup>460</sup>Rushdie, Salman. 'Imaginary Homelands' in *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta Books, 1992), p. 10.

<sup>461</sup>Rushdie 1992: 10.

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antiquity, from which the past can sometimes, but always provisionally, be reconstructed [...], even if they are pieces of the most quotidian objects'.<sup>462</sup>

Looking back at the town of her childhood, the poet approaches the place from what Hoffman has called an 'oblique angle'. It allows the translingual writer to gain new insights that would not have been possible had she not left the place. Combined with her move from one language to another, the dislocation makes space for the translingual imagination. The poet's 'oblique angle' becomes apparent in the fourth of the 'Songs of Exile' where she describes the geographical location of the town as well as local monuments to draw a connection with a 'false/ faith in the gloriousness of war'.

### IV

My town lies in a hand of hills  
all words have lost their innocence  
the valleys which the townships fills  
possess a natural defence

Fortresses and memorials  
heroic shrines of local lore  
raise generations to a false  
faith in the gloriousness of war<sup>463</sup>

Bielefeld is situated in hilly country at the northern edge of the *Teutoburger Wald*, a place of considerable importance in German history: in the ninth century, it was the scene of the legendary 'Battle of the Teutoburg Forest' where the Roman army led by Varius was defeated by Germanic tribes under the leadership of Arminius the Etruscan. The events, which, over the centuries, have been revisited again and again in German art and literature,<sup>464</sup> have been considered a key event in German history and the 19<sup>th</sup> century historian Theodor Mommsen even called them 'a turning point in world history'.<sup>465</sup>

Around 18000 Roman soldiers were killed and the defeat arguably halted further Roman expansion north- and eastwards, resulting in a cultural and language border along the Rhine.<sup>466</sup> While 'Hermann der Etrusker' had been

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<sup>462</sup>Rushdie 1992: 12.

<sup>463</sup>Gershon 1966: 14.

<sup>464</sup>Wolters, Reinhard. *Die Schlacht im Teutoburger Wald. Arminius, Varus und das römische Germanien* (München: Beck, 2009), p. 7.

<sup>465</sup>Wolters 2009: 9.

<sup>466</sup>Wolters 2009: 9-10.

glorified in Germany particularly from the nineteenth century onwards and hailed ‘the first national hero’ by conservative historians,<sup>467</sup> there have been critical and ironic voices from early on, for example Heine who recorded in *Deutschland. Ein Wintermärchen*:

Wenn Hermann nicht die Schlacht gewann,  
Mit seinen blonden Horden,  
So gäbe es deutsche Freiheit nicht mehr,  
Wir wären römisch geworden!<sup>468</sup>

In 1844, when Heine wrote his poem, the building works had begun for the gigantic ‘Hermannsdenkmal’, a huge monument in honour of Arminius and the battle which many at that time considered the genesis of German history.<sup>469</sup> Thus, when Gershon mentions ‘Fortresses and memorials/ heroic shrines of local lore’ she clearly refers to the Hermannsdenkmal on top of the Grotenburg. The inscriptions on the base of the monument illustrate what Gershon seems to hint at when she claims that the memorials ‘raise generations to a false/ faith in the gloriousness of war’: while the main monument commemorates the ‘Battle of the Teutonic Forest’, the boards at the base extend the glorification of armed battle by linking the Roman-Germanic war to the more recent French-German hostilities. Thus, the defeat of the French in the Franco-German War of 1870/71 and the subsequent founding of the German Reich are portrayed as a sequel to the ‘Battle of the Teutonic Forest’. Moreover, although meant to unite the German nation, the Hermannsdenkmal soon became a popular venue for right-wing activists and warmongers.<sup>470</sup> Gershon’s claim that ‘all words have lost their innocence’ seems to be directed at the hypocrisy of the nation-building myths commemorated in the monument: whilst proclaiming liberation and unity the spirit of those who have made a cult out of Arminius is to divide Germans into Jews and Aryans, to enslave an entire continent and to glorify violence. The lost innocence in this poem is linked to the ‘desecration’ of all German in ‘In the

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<sup>467</sup>Wolters 2009: 10.

<sup>468</sup>Heine, Heinrich. ‘Deutschland. Ein Wintermärchen’ in *Heinrich Heine. Werke und Briefe. Band 1* (Berlin und Weimar: Aufbau Verlag), p. 461.

<sup>469</sup>Recent research even questions the term ‘battle’ as there is some evidence for a Germanic attack on a Roman military camp – or at least an ambush. See Wolters 2009: 13 f.

<sup>470</sup>See for example Frantzen, Michael. ‘Wir kämpfen unter Hermanns Zeichen’ in *Länderreport* (Deutschlandradio Kultur, 22.02.2013). Available online at <http://www.dradio.de/dkultur/sendungen/laenderreport/2018709/>; accessed on 10.10.2013

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Wood' insofar as we encounter the German wood yet again. The densely forested hill on which the Hermannsdenkmal was built was chosen on purpose as here the two myths of the origin of the German nation come together: Arminius, the military hero, and the wood as the place of origin of the Germanic people. Gershon was born into the very centre of German national myth – and yet expelled. A dislocated poet, she enters reality from a different angle.<sup>471</sup> Looking at the 'local lore' from the outside, the translingual poet can blow its cover and reveal the ugly face of nationalism.

As we have seen in the chapter 'Departure and Arrival: Biographical Traces' the four poets differ significantly in the way in which they deal with their experiences. Likewise, when it comes to aspects of 'Loss and Gain' the way in which the translingual imagination becomes visible in their work is just as diverse. Lotte Kramer, in her poem 'Androgynous' does not look back at her native town nor at her adopted country but gazes at the firmament and shares her thoughts about the moon.

### ANDROGYNOUS

Long ago  
There was the man in the moon.  
The cold-eyed guard  
Over my childhood.  
He watched my nights chillingly.

Now he's turned female.  
Benevolence in liquid white.  
A veiled eye of knowledge  
In a veteran sky,  
Elusive in a cloud of history.<sup>472</sup>

The first stanza relates to the image of the moon as the poet experienced it during her German childhood. Not only is the German moon male by its grammatical gender, it is also inhabited by a male character: the man in the moon. This lunar resident is not a pleasant character at all – in Bechstein's fairy-tale 'Das Märchen vom Mann im Mond' (1841) he is a former woodcutter

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<sup>471</sup>Rushdie 1991: 15.

<sup>472</sup>Kramer, Lotte. 'Androgynous' in *New and Collected Poems* (Ware: Rockingham Press, 2011), p. 219. First published in 1997 in *Selected and New Poems 1980-1997* by Rockingham Press.

who was punished by God for working on a Sunday. Hence, he has to stand on the moon, carrying his faggot until eternity. In *Peterchens Mondfahrt* (1915) this story is slightly adjusted – the woodcutter is now a wood thief and he is sent to the moon by the Fairy of the Night. Unfortunately, together with the thief's faggot the sixth leg of a May beetle travels to the moon and the poor insect is desperate to get it back. It turns out that the man in the moon is really evil as he not only refuses to return the poor May beetle's sixth leg but also attempts to eat the children who travelled all the way to the moon to find the leg.<sup>473</sup> On this background, it does not come as a surprise that Kramer refers to the 'cold-eyed guard' who shows no sign of love or kindness but watched her nights 'chillingly'. The second stanza begins with the moon's transformation into the English female moon. The attributes of this moon are very different – more positive though far less clear cut: 'Benevolence in liquid white' does not have a fixed shape and the word 'elusive' reinforces this notion. Though still looking at the earth, the English moon does so with 'A veiled eye of knowledge' rather than with 'cold-eyed' like her male German version. The moon of the second stanza has traces of Wordsworth's 'Queen of the stars! – So gentle, so benign',<sup>474</sup> she probably still remembers the love-sick *Astrophel*,<sup>475</sup> and her veil has been alluded to before by Shelley and Wilde.<sup>476</sup> Residing 'in a veteran sky', the moon seems distant and difficult to grasp as 'a cloud of history' hinders a better view. Considering Kramer's arrival in a new language and a new culture with a long history of looking at the moon in different ways, it looks as if the poem was mirroring the poet's own experience with her two cultures: the stanza about the German moon, though it reaches back to a time 'Long ago', refers to a clearly marked period of time ('my childhood'), gives a unambiguous characteristic and ends with a definite statement. On the other hand, the stanza about the English moon begins with a statement: 'Now he's turned female'. This is the only clear definition the stanza offers, everything else remains 'elusive' although with a comforting note. Grenville, in a review of 'Bilingual', another poem in which Kramer explores her two languages, has pointed out how the poem 'conveys the well-

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<sup>473</sup>Bassewitz, Gerd von. *Peterchens Mondfahrt*, illustrated by Hans Baluschek (München: Südwest-Verlag, 2004). First published in Berlin by H. Klemm (1915).

<sup>474</sup>'To the Moon' (1835), by William Wordsworth

<sup>475</sup>*Astrophel and Stella* 'XXXI' (1580), sonnet sequence by Sir Philip Sidney

<sup>476</sup>'The Moon' by Percy Bysshe Shelley. Wilde, Oscar. 'La Fuite de la Lune' in *The Collected Poems of Oscar Wilde* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1994), p. 70.

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defined intellectual order of German' while the 'English, by contrast, remains fluid and elusive'.<sup>477</sup> It seems that in 'Androgynous' the poet has used a similar strategy to express the insights which she gained from her 'oblique angle'. Her androgynous moon stretches beyond language and cultural barriers: it is a creation of the translingual imagination.

While 'Androgynous' explores an extra-terrestrial entity, 'Roots' is about the loss of the native soil. It is one of Kramer's early poems and was first published in *The Jewish Quarterly* in 1978.

### ROOTS

I was a vineyard;  
A sun-ripe grapevine  
Was my home, river  
And ruined castles  
Were my loam of love.

I had a father  
And a mother once,  
They were safe, their  
Lost lives tear my tale,  
On their graves no stone.

I want the sound earth  
Now, the rooted tree  
Secure in brown clay  
Wedded to corn lanes:  
And my day is new.<sup>478</sup>

The opening line of the poem is reminiscent of Psalm 80: 9-10 where it says that God 'plucked up a vine from Egypt;/ [...] and planted it./' Then God 'cleared a place for it;/ it took deep root and filled the land'.<sup>479</sup> Unlike the Christian context, where Jesus calls himself the vine, in the understanding of the Jewish bible the whole Jewish people are the vine that God planted.<sup>480</sup> Thus, the line 'I was a vineyard' relates to the poet's belonging to this people. The poem then zooms in and looks at the poet's place within this people – and

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<sup>477</sup>Grenville, Anthony. 'Lotte Kramer's Collected Poems' *AJR Journal* Volume 12, No. 5 (May 2012).

<sup>478</sup>Kramer, Lotte. 'Roots' in *The Jewish Quarterly* Vol 26, Issue 2, 1978.

<sup>479</sup>Berlin & Brettler 2004: 1373.

<sup>480</sup>For Jesus quote see John 15.

what follows is a description of Kramer's native Rhineland: utilizing the overlap between the biblical metaphor and the actual landscape of her home, she creates the image of a Jewish homeland in Germany. The idyllic depiction of her home, emphasised by the use of romantic images ('river/ and ruined castles') and patterned language ('loam of love') conjures up a 'Rhineland of the mind', to borrow Rushdie's expression. The second stanza laments the loss of the parents. Their 'lost lives' destroy the fabric of the poet's tale and uproot her. Thus, the idyllic scene of the first stanza is annihilated and all that is left are nameless graves ('On their graves no stone').

The third stanza turns towards the present. Here, the poet demands a safe place, where the earth is 'sound', maintaining the roots of a tree securely. The description of this place is different to that of her native land: a 'tree' instead of a 'grapevine' and 'brown clay/ Wedded to corn lanes' instead of 'river/ And ruined castles'. Psalm 80, the biblical text that shines through in the opening line of the poem, continues to narrate the destruction of the vine which was planted by God, as 'it is burned by fire and cut down,/ perishing [...]'.<sup>481</sup> The psalmist then beseeches God to preserve the lives of his people and to restore them. Kramer, in contrast, does not beseech God – she demands. Knowing what she has lost, she wants her adopted country with its 'brown clay' and 'corn lanes' to become her home – and she wants it now. The poet does not ask for a restoration; although she paints a nostalgic picture of the past she knows that this is a place lost beyond retrieval. The dislocated poet wants to grow roots in her new place, she wants to belong. In Isaiah 60 Israel is promised a new dawn.<sup>482</sup> Kramer does not want to wait for this prophesy to become reality – with the last line of the poem she makes it clear that her 'new day' would be to be at home in England.

Drawing from Jewish intertexts and romantic German imagery, the translingual poet not only laments her inconceivable loss but also voices her human want for a safe place that she can call home.

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<sup>481</sup>Berlin & Brettler 2004: 1373.

<sup>482</sup>Berlin & Brettler 2004: 903.

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Like Gershon and Kramer, Gerda Mayer also revisits her native home in her poetry. Written in the 1970s, 'My Own My Native Land' provides a snapshot of how the place presents itself to the poet on her return.

### MY OWN MY NATIVE LAND...

That's it –  
the house at the back –  
home of my childhood.  
The bloomers hung out to dry  
in what once was the daisyfield  
have been added since.  
Unabashed they flaunt themselves  
well to the fore.  
A flag hoisted by the usurpers, they say:  
Seeker of the past – this is new land.<sup>483</sup>

The title is a quote from the opening lines of 'Canto VI' of Sir Walter Scott's *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805):

Breathes there the man, with soul so dead,  
Who never to himself hath said,  
This is my own, my native land!  
Whose heart hath ne'er within him burned,  
As home his footsteps he hath turned,  
From wandering on a foreign strand!<sup>484</sup>

The stanza concludes that such a 'wretch [...] shall go down/ To the vile dust [...], Unwept, unhonoured, and unsung'. Thus, the words of the Scottish poet are setting the scene for Mayer's first steps on Czechoslovakian soil decades after she left as a refugee.

However, there is no romantic homecoming as the Scottish bard might have expected – Mayer's opening lines are rather prosaic: 'That's it – / the house at the back – ' as if giving instructions to a taxi driver. The place, likewise, is markedly unromantic, with 'bloomers hung out to dry'. The poet's wry remark that they 'have been added since' intensifies what Peter Porter has

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<sup>483</sup>Mayer, Gerda. *Bernini's Cat. New and Selected Poems* (North Shields: Iron Press, 1999), p. 71.

<sup>484</sup>Scott, Sir Walter. *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (Baltimore: Joseph Cushing, 1812), p. 111.

described as the ‘everyday disenchantment’ of Mayer’s poetry.<sup>485</sup> There is no place for nostalgia and the loss of the childhood home irrevocable when the poem concludes with bloomers’ claim: ‘Seeker of the past – this is new land’.

Choosing the ‘bloomers’, the old-fashioned female underwear, as the symbol of the ‘usurpers’ of her lost home has a comical effect. At a closer reading, however, the underlying tragedy of Mayer’s loss becomes visible. At the time the poem was written, especially in smaller towns it was still considered indecent to dry one’s underwear openly visible to outsiders. Instead, large sheets would be placed on the outside with knickers hidden in the inside. The ‘bloomers’, as they ‘flaunt themselves/ well to the fore’ speak of a certain impertinence. Considering that ‘bloomers’ usually refer to ‘a woman’s knee-length undergarment’<sup>486</sup> (in other words something fairly old-fashioned and by the 1970s more likely to be worn by older women) it seems that they symbolize the obscene behaviour of the post-war generation of non-Jewish citizens of Karlsbad: neighbours who had taken advantage of the distress of their Jewish neighbours for their own financial benefit.<sup>487</sup> In a letter from 12<sup>th</sup> November 1961 Anny Krupkova, who was the family’s cook until Gerda was about ten years old, writes about how a Czech professor had refused to return some jewellery Erna Stein had asked him to keep safe for her. The man even threatened Mayer’s mother to hand her over to the police.<sup>488</sup> It was also Anny who informed Mayer about what had happened to the family’s property in Karlsbad:

In Euren Geschäft ist jetzt ein Büchergeschäft, Eure Strickerei existiert nicht mehr, bei Grossmamas Haus Kyffhäuser gingen wir vorbei, ist aber in guten Zustand unten ist eine Samenhandlung drin, da waren doch früher Büros, oben wo die Grosseltern wohnten waren im ganzen Stock die Maler, neue Fenster überall.<sup>489</sup>

In other words, it appears that the ‘usurpers’ have indeed unabashedly taken over.

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<sup>485</sup>Quoted from *The Observer*, 15.03.1981.

<sup>486</sup>*OED* online: <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/20462?rskey=qL65Iy&result=2#eid>, accessed on 13.10.2013.

<sup>487</sup>See for example *Deutschland-Berichte der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands 1934-1940*. 5. Jahrgang 1938, Nr. 11, pp. A27ff.

<sup>488</sup>Letter by Anny Krupkova in Arnold und Erna Stein Collection (AR 5085).

<sup>489</sup>Undated letter by Anny Krupkova in Arnold und Erna Stein Collection (AR 5085).

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One thing which disappeared together with the past and which the poem explicitly mentions is the daisyfield. Daisies are widespread across Europe and can grow under various conditions from early spring until the beginning of the winter. They are often a part of childhood memories, probably because of fairy-tales and customs such as making daisy-chains.<sup>490</sup> Moreover, according to central European tradition, the 'Gänseblümchen' symbolises purity and innocence.<sup>491</sup> The disappearance of the daisyfield and its replacement with bloomers can be read as a metaphor for land that was once the poet's home but has now lost its innocence – and the new occupiers are not even ashamed. Mayer's use of a famous line of Scottish poetry illustrates how the translingual poet meets her audience on what seems to be familiar terrain, only to introduce a puzzling old-fashioned female garment. Interrupting the automatized nostalgic view of the 'native land' of one's childhood, she makes space for the translingual imagination where bloomers proclaim the victory of the usurpers. Thereby, the poem exposes nostalgic concepts of a homeland as naive given the background of recent European history. As it communicates the heart-breaking loss suffered by Mayer wrapped into a superficially amusing story, it conveys a glimpse of a tragedy that cannot be fully grasped by its facts alone: it is not only the loss of the parental home itself which the poet mourns but the circumstances that left her orphaned and expelled from her native place. Returning to her native soil the poet painfully experiences that 'the past is gone' and that '[u]nlike geographically remote places we could visit if we made the effort, the past is beyond reach'.<sup>492</sup>

As we have seen before, Mayer often chooses superficially funny or child-like images. In 'Hide and Seek' she uses the well-known children's game to revisit her childhood and to hear the lost voices of her family.

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<sup>490</sup>See for example Andersen, Hans Christian. *Das Gänseblümchen*, available online at <http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/1227/68>, accessed on 13.10.2013.

<sup>491</sup>Archive of the Botanical Garden in Wuppertal/ Germany; <http://botanischer-garten-wuppertal.de/pflanzedesmonats/archiv-pflanze-des-monats-2011/april/index.php>; accessed on 13.10.2013.

<sup>492</sup>Lowenthal, David. *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: University Press, 1985), p. 187.

## HIDE AND SEEK

Once I used to hide  
 in the open recess  
 under the first  
 floor balcony,  
*(and always,*  
 my father remarked,  
*in the same place).*

*Where can she be?*  
*Where can she be?*  
 Here comes my aunt  
 searching and thin  
 and walks past me the first time;  
 this being part of the ritual.

Forty years later  
 and the recess  
 has shrunk to  
 under my chin;  
 and is full of  
 old lumber now and  
 a better place to hide in.  
 I look into the shadows  
 and ask and ask  
*where are they?*<sup>493</sup>

Already the first word of the poem creates a fairy-tale sentiment: 'Once'. We are about to revisit the poet's childhood and this place now seems to be as far removed and fabulous as a fairy-tale. The first stanza gives some information about the place where young Gerda liked to play hide and seek. Although it is the poet's recollection of what she loved doing as a child, it could well be based on her father's memory of her early childhood which, by sharing it with his daughter, became her memory. Thus, it is not only recalling the scene where little Gerda hides 'in the open recess/ under the first/ floor balcony' but also the moment her father remarked '*and always/ [...]/ in the same place*'.

The second stanza describes 'the ritual', the reassuring repetition being part of the fun. The roles of the different family members are clearly defined and the child feels secure in the knowledge that the adults want to find her and will do so.<sup>494</sup> When the poet returns to the 'open recess' forty years later, the

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<sup>493</sup> Mayer, Gerda. *Bernini's Cat* (North Shields: Iron Press, 1999), p. 56.

<sup>494</sup> For a psycho-dynamic approach to the game see for example: Fascher, Ralf. 'Überlegungen zur

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place 'has shrunk' because she has grown up. The 'old lumber' that has been dumped there seems to fill up part of the space. Whilst the last stanza so far appears to refer to the actual place under the first floor balcony, the final sentence beginning with the phrase 'I look into the shadows' is ambiguous: obviously, it can be understood in a literal sense as there probably is not that much light in the open access. However, the poem seems to hint at the shadows of the past, as the next two lines confirm: 'and ask and ask/ *where are they?*' Forty years after the death of her parents Mayer still cannot accept the finality of it. Although they disappeared into the shadows many years ago, a part of Mayer is still hoping for their return – as she writes in another poem: '... write to me, father.'<sup>495</sup>

The memory of playing hide and seek is a fragment of Mayer's childhood and, similar to a fragment of an ancient pot, from it the past can provisionally be reconstructed. Rushdie has suggested that, while 'the past is a country from which we have all emigrated, [...] the writer who is out-of-country and even out-of-language' experiences the loss of her past 'in an intensified form'.<sup>496</sup> Being physically removed from the places of the past may, according to Rushdie, enable the dislocated writer to 'speak properly and concretely on a subject of universal significance and appeal'. Mayer's poem, it seems, illustrates Rushdie's claim in an exemplary way as it sets off from a memory that is shared by many people – the memory of playing with their parents and relatives – and that constitutes a nostalgic moment which has irrevocably passed. However, only very few readers of the poem will have shared the traumatic experience that is expressed in the last line of the poem – '*where are they?*' The pain that speaks from the final stanza, and particularly this last line, is outside the scope of normal comprehension. Yet the translingual poet has extended this space. By taking the name of the child's game literally and pondering over it, she foregrounds the 'seeking' element of the name. In her native German, it would have been 'Versteckspiel', completely neglecting the aspect of 'seeking'. Exploring the full meaning of the English name of the childhood game, the translingual imagination extends the playful memory into

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psychodynamischen Bedeutung des Versteckspielens in der Kinderpsychotherapie' *Praxis der Kinderpsychologie und Kinderpsychiatrie* 46 (1997) 9, pp. 660-671.

<sup>495</sup>Mayer 1999: 84.

<sup>496</sup>Rushdie 1991: 12.

a heart-broken present: no longer the little child who hides to be found, the poet is now an adult searching for her lost family. Knowing that they are not deliberately hiding she continues to search. By the end of the poem hide and seek, the innocent children's game, has become a seeking of the hiding dead.

Alice Beer did not suffer the loss of her parents to the Nazi murderers. Nevertheless, she also considers aspects of loss and gain in her writing. In 'Questions and Answers' she contemplates the survival of love before and after the life of a beloved person.

#### Questions and Answers

No one has found an answer to my question:  
Where was my love before I met you?  
It briefly showed its face  
with Andrew and Sebastian  
but only stayed with you and me.

And when you died, my love,  
where did it go?  
People will say: It is still here,  
you love him still.

I do, but it is just a memory  
of mountain peaks, of glaciers  
and dark pine forests  
in the lake below.<sup>497</sup>

The question Beer raises in this poem is not a haunting one like the questions asked in Mayer's 'Hide and Seek'. The lack of a definite answer to Beer's query is not the result of a catastrophic historical event. The poet still marvels at the love between her and her late husband. Enquiring about her own love's past, she travels back in time and remembers moments when her love had briefly surfaced – fragments of a past that is long gone and that she does not miss: a question out of curiosity rather than longing.

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<sup>497</sup>Beer 2005: 14.

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The second stanza raises the second question: where did the poet's love go after her late husband's death? The suggestion that her love is still there because she stills loves her late husband is not thoroughly convincing in her eyes. The reason for her doubts is given in the final stanza where she points out that it is the memory of her husband she loves, now that the real person is gone. In other words: does the love remain unchanged when a person dies? Beer's second question seems to have the potential to be more pressing than the first one: while the death of a spouse after a long and happy partnership should probably not be considered as traumatising as the early loss of both parents to the Holocaust, it still tears a gap into the life of the surviving partner.<sup>498</sup> The final lines of Beer's poem seem to touch on this issue. Although the poet set out asking where her love went, the final stanza shifts the focus from the initial query to another matter – Beer's memory of her husband. The images with which she describes this memory betray the translingual poet: she likens it to the 'memory of mountain peaks, of glaciers/ and dark pine forests/ in the lake below'. Trying to explain the breath-taking beauty of life with her late husband and the wonderful yet comparably faint and removed memories of it, she turns to images from her native Austria. Beer uses the views of the Austrian countryside as a metaphor for the beauty of the love she lived with her husband. Uniting them in one image, she can mourn the two lost loves of her life. The idyllic mountain scene is a remain of Beer's Austria and despite it being a cliché the poet fills it with new meaning by diverting from the expected: when the third stanza sets off to paint a picture of the mountain idyll, rather than raising her reader's eyes to the peaks, Beer turns the focus to 'the lake below'. Moreover, it is not even the actual mirror image she has in mind but the memory of it. The poet encourages her reader to look beyond the cliché and to discover what can be gained through the translingual imagination.

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<sup>498</sup>There are dozens of guidebooks available for people who lost their spouse and a growing number of academic articles examining coping mechanisms of difficulties of the surviving partner, see for example Van Baarsen, Berna. 'Theories on Coping With Loss: The Impact of Social Support and Self-Esteem on Adjustment to Emotional and Social Loneliness Following a Partner's Death in Later Life' *Journal of Gerontology: Social Science* (2002) 57 (1), pp. 33-42.





## Chapter 6: Intertexts

In this chapter I shall examine how different texts and traditions have influenced the writings of the four translingual poets. The term *Intertextuality* has been first used by Julia Kristeva in her essay 'Word, Dialogue and Novel' which was published in her volume *Recherches pour une sémanalyse* in 1969.<sup>499</sup> As I have discussed in my theoretical framework of this thesis, my understanding of *intertextuality* is very much founded on Bakhtin's much earlier notion that a 'text lives only by coming into context with another text (with context)' and that it is only because of this contact between texts that, as Bakhtin puts it, 'a light flash[s], illuminating both the posterior and anterior, joining a given text to a dialogue'.<sup>500</sup> In this chapter, I shall illustrate how this dialogue that stretches across centuries is joined by the texts written by the four translingual poets. Furthermore, I shall argue that in the work of these poets the intertexts are not only from different times but also from different national literatures. Their poems are in dialogue with the 'already-said and the to-be-said'<sup>501</sup> in different voices and different languages. Communicating with Jewish and Christian, Greek, German and English texts, the translingual poems create a 'flash' that can not only illuminate the 'posterior and anterior' but also the 'here' and 'there' as their dialogue stretches across time and space.

The Jewish intertexts are particularly interesting insofar as they include references to a variety of different contexts. Some of them are what could be described as exclusively Jewish intertexts, such as the Kaddish. Then, there are Judeo-Christian intertexts, such as biblical references. Here, the poets might explore different interpretations of the texts, for example when Kramer translates Rilke's poem 'Esther'.

As we have already seen in previous examples, some of the poems also refer to Christian intertexts such as the Easter legend. However, rather than

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<sup>499</sup>as quoted in Martínez Alfaro, María Jesús. 'Intertextuality: Origins and developments of the concept' *Atlantis* Vol. 18, No. 1/2 (Junio - Diciembre 1996), pp. 268. Published by: AEDEAN: Asociación española de estudios anglo-americanos Article Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41054827>

<sup>500</sup>Bakhtin, M. M. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Trans. by Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), p. 162.

<sup>501</sup>Bauman, Richard. *A World of Other's Words. Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Intertextuality* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p. 5.

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following a Christian reading the translingual poems explore Jesus' teaching and fate as that of a fellow Jew.

Apart from the biblical intertext of the exodus, the Kaddish is the most prominent reference point in the writing of the four poets. As it is, with the exception of the Shema<sup>502</sup>, probably the best known Jewish prayer this does not come as a surprise. The Kaddish has frequently been a theme in the arts, particularly since the mid-twentieth century. In literature, some of the most famous examples are Alan Ginsberg's poem 'Kaddish'<sup>503</sup> which he dedicated to his mother, or the novel *Kaddish for an Unborn Child* (1990) by Imre Kertesz. *Kaddish* is also the title of Leonard Bernstein's Symphony No.3 and the prayer has been recited in a number of Hollywood movies as diverse as *Rocky III* (1982) and *Schindler's List* (1993). The main reference point in all these examples is the mourner's Kaddish. Originally, Kaddish was a prayer of praise and its initial function was to conclude a study session.<sup>504</sup> It was said not in Hebrew but in the vernacular of the time, in Aramaic. The precise circumstances of its first occurrence remain unclear and although the prayer contains clear references to biblical texts, the wording is slightly different.<sup>505</sup> For centuries the Kaddish was generally understood to be a justification of God's ways rather than a duty to the deceased. However, by the thirteenth century the prayer acquired a new function that was said to go back to Rabbi Akiva. According to the legend, the rabbi taught a boy to say Kaddish for his father who was burning in Gehenna<sup>506</sup> because of his ill treatment of the poor. When the son, who had not been taught the prayer by his father, finally recited it in public and the congregation responded with their part of the blessing, the father was redeemed. Schonfield has suggested that the association 'derives from Talmudic texts which refer to the fact that children can help their deceased parents by good deeds, and later ones that describe how this can be achieved through prayer'.<sup>507</sup> As the torture in Gehenna was understood to last a maximum of twelve months, initially Kaddish was said for twelve months. However, eventually it was deemed inappropriate to assume one's parents'

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<sup>502</sup> In English 'Hear'

<sup>503</sup> published in: Ginsberg, Allen. *Kaddish and Other Poems* (San Francisco: City Lights Bookstore, 1961).

<sup>504</sup> See Schonfield, Jeremy. *Undercurrents Of Jewish Prayer* (Oxford and Portland, Oregon: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2008), p. 230f.

<sup>505</sup> See Wieseltier, Leon. *Kaddish* (London: Picador, 1999), p. 30ff.

<sup>506</sup> In Jewish tradition, Gehenna is an expression for 'hell'.

<sup>507</sup> Schonfield 2008: 245. Note that Kaddish is also said for children, spouses and siblings.

soul in Gehenna, and therefore the period was shortened to eleven months. Thus, it has become custom to say Kaddish for one's parents every day for eleven months following their death and thereafter on their *yahrzeit*, the anniversary of their death.<sup>508</sup> There is no indication in early sources that daughters were not allowed to say the prayer; rather, as with other public worship duties, the understanding was that women were exempt from them because of their time-consuming responsibilities in the house. Over time, this exemption has become an exclusion but for cultural rather than religious reasons. Thus, the bias against women fully participating in religious study and public worship does not derive from the Torah nor from the early rabbinic period but became Jewish custom over the centuries. Nevertheless, from the seventeenth century, there is at least one well-documented case that a daughter said Kaddish for her father and Rochelle Millen argues that this might not have been unusual.<sup>509</sup> Since the Jewish enlightenment, the customs that have excluded women from full participation in all aspects of Jewish life have been increasingly challenged. In 1916, responding to a (male) friend's offer to say Kaddish after her mother on her behalf, the American Zionist Henrietta Szold wrote:

The *Kaddish* means to me that the survivor publicly and markedly manifests his wish and intention to assume the relation to the Jewish community which his parent had, and that so the chain of tradition remains unbroken from generation to generation, each adding its own link. [...]

I believe that the elimination of women from such duties was never intended by our law and custom – women were free from positive duties when they could not perform them, but not when they could. It was never intended that, if they could perform them, their performance should not be considered as valuable and valid as when one of the male sex performed them. And of the *Kaddish* I feel sure this is particularly true.<sup>510</sup>

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<sup>508</sup> The eleven months period applies only following the death of a parent, otherwise it is thirty days.

<sup>509</sup> See the 'Amsterdam Case' as discussed in Millen, Rochelle. 'Women and Kaddish: Reflections on Responsa' in *Modern Judaism* (1990), pp. 191-203.

<sup>510</sup> Henrietta Szold as quoted in Millen, Rochelle L. 'Women and Kaddish: Reflections on Responsa' in *Modern Judaism* 10 (1990), p. 191.

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Jonathan Magonet, a prominent British Reform rabbi, who also quotes from Szold's letter, has pointed out that since the Holocaust Jewish women around the world have increasingly started to say Kaddish.<sup>511</sup>

However, other Jewish women have felt trapped in the widespread male-dominated understanding of Jewish tradition. Feeling deprived of an opportunity to say Kaddish for their parents, they have looked for alternative ways of honouring and remembering their deceased relatives. The writer and Auschwitz-survivor Ruth Klüger for example has described her poems as her way of saying Kaddish for her father. Coming from an Orthodox background, Klüger recalls a family anecdote according to which her own maternal grandfather, who did not have a son, told the (male) dog of the family: 'Du bist der einzige hier, der Kaddish für mich sagen kann'.<sup>512</sup> While Klüger has felt the urge to remember her murdered father in her 'homespun Kaddish' she also questions if they can be an adequate response to the horrors of the ghettos and extermination camps as they seem to blank out any rage and anger.<sup>513</sup>

The connection between the poetry about the Holocaust and the Kaddish has been made by other writers as well. The Hungarian-born poet George Szirtes has described Kramer's work as 'a silent watercolour *Kaddish*'<sup>514</sup> and some of the poems written by Gershon, Mayer and Beer can certainly also be read as *Kaddish* in a wider sense. They commemorate the lives of loved parents, friends and relatives, or even the lives of all six million Jews who perished in the Holocaust. Both Gershon and Kramer wrote a poem titled 'Kaddish' and we shall now take a closer look at them.

### Kaddish

Thirty years on:  
The wall unbricks itself  
And look by look a childhood's  
Rawness stands and turns:  
"Confront me Now!"

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<sup>511</sup>Magonet, Jonathan. *The Explorer's Guide to Judaism* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1998), p. 92f.

<sup>512</sup>Klüger, Ruth. *Weiter leben. Eine Jugend* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuchverlag, 1994), p. 25.

<sup>513</sup>Klüger 1994: 38.

<sup>514</sup>Szirtes, George. 'Book Reviews' *European Judaism* 31, no. 1 (spring 1998), pp. 150-151.

Forty years on:  
 The named, nameless queue  
 And walk their histories,  
 Demand a chronicle:  
 "Remember us!"

Fifty years on:  
 Not late, not loud, the trumpet  
 Weeps this jubilee,  
 The skeletons return:  
 sad hieroglyphs.<sup>515</sup>

Kramer's 'Kaddish' commences with the moment the poet could not hold back the memories any longer – thirty years after the death of her parents the wall that had kept them away for so long finally 'unbricks itself'. 'Unbrick' is a dated term and to say something 'unbricks itself' is unusual.<sup>516</sup> By using the term, the poet foregrounds the action it describes, that is the wall unbricking itself. As the bricks are removing themselves, gradually 'a childhood's/Rawness' comes to the fore, demanding the poet's attention. It does not allow any further delay – the 'Now!' with its capital letter and its exclamation mark leave no doubt about that. Thus, Kramer has to return to her 'childhood's/Rawness' with all it entails.

Another ten years later, after the poet has confronted her own past, 'The named, the nameless queue' and demand to be remembered as well. Kaddish, in Kramer's poem, seems to be an ongoing process, slowly growing as a commemoration not only of the parents but of all men and women who shared their fate. As a survivor, the poet is held responsible to record their stories and remember their lives. The dead demand a 'chronicle' and the term seems to hint at the Book of Chronicles which begins with the genealogical tables (1 Chronicles 1-9) and ends with a note referring to the redemption of the people of Israel:

Thus said King Cyrus of Persia: 'The LORD of Heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and has charged me with building Him a House in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Any one of you of all His people, the LORD his God be with him and let him go up.'<sup>517</sup>

<sup>515</sup>Kramer, Lotte. 'Kaddish' in *The Desecration of Trees* (Frome: Hippopotamus Press, 1994), p. 11.

<sup>516</sup>The OED defines 'to unbrick' as: 'To remove bricks from; to open up, set free, by the removal of bricks', with the first reference from 1598 and the last from 1900 (Accessed online on 02/02/2014 at <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/209986?redirectedFrom=unbrick#eid>).

<sup>517</sup>2 Chronicles 36:23, quoted from Berlin & Brettler 2004: 1825.

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The promised redemption in Chronicles follows the destruction of Jerusalem, the death of many Jews and the long Babylonian exile. The second stanza of Kramer's 'Kaddish' seems to echo the structure of the Book of Chronicles: beginning with the 'named and nameless' it retraces 'their histories'. The prospect of redemption at the end of the Chronicles is mirrored in the hope of redemption in the closing lines of the *Mourner's Kaddish*:

May great peace descend from heaven, and abundant life be granted, to us and all Israel; and let us say: Amen.  
May the Most High, Source of perfect peace, grant peace to us, [...], and let us say: Amen.<sup>518</sup>

The *Mourner's Kaddish* is recited by the whole community during the Memorial Service on Yom Kippur and the main purpose is to remember the dead – not only as an unnamed group but as individuals, as human beings with their own voices, thoughts and faces.<sup>519</sup> 'Remember us!' in the final line of the second stanza highlights exactly that aspect of the Kaddish. Thus, the poet explores the *Mourner's Kaddish* and links it not only with biblical stories but also to with her own time, past and present. Fathoming the meaning of redemption the poem makes use of the translingual imagination.

'Fifty years on', the first line of the third stanza, continues the pattern of the previous two stanzas. However, rather than simply referring to the time that has passed since the poet's parents were murdered, it carries an additional meaning in Jewish tradition. According to Leviticus 25.9-10 God announced that

Then you shall sound the horn loud; in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month – the Day of Atonement – you shall have the horn sounded throughout your land and you shall hallow the fiftieth year. You shall proclaim release throughout the land for all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: each of you shall return to his holding and each of you shall return to his family.<sup>520</sup>

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<sup>518</sup> *Machzor Ruach Chadashah*, edited by Eric L. Friedland and John D. Rayner, reprinted with corrections (London: Liberal Judaism, 2008), p. 401.

<sup>519</sup> See for example the meditation by Rabbi Simcha Paul Raphael in *Machzor Ruach Chadashah*, edited by Eric L. Friedland and John D. Rayner, reprinted with corrections (London: Liberal Judaism, 2008), p. 385.

<sup>520</sup> Berlin & Brettler 2004: 270.

In Kramer's poem, 'the trumpet/ Weeps this jubilee' because it is only 'skeletons' that return to their families. The mentioning of 'Sad hieroglyphs' seems to hint at the Exodus from Egypt where the slaves were redeemed and left the place of forced labour and suffering for a future in their own land. In Kramer's time, however, the Jewish slaves who had been sent to concentration camps cannot be released because they were murdered. So when the Jubilee Year is proclaimed with the final blow of the horn on Yom Kippur, after the Memorial Service and the commemoration of the dead, it is not the joyful redemption that follows.

Kramer's 'Kaddish' delves deep into Jewish tradition and its thoughts on remembering and redemption. The poet plays on the 'artificial connection' that ancient translators drew 'between Hebrew "yovel" and the similar sounding Latin "jubilate," "shout for joy"; thus the English "jubilee" suggests the idea of jubilation not present in the Hebrew'.<sup>521</sup> The expectation of a joyful event is disappointed: the fiftieth year does not mean the return of the victims of the Holocaust to their families. While the Jewish Jubilee year does refer to release and return and implies an element of liberation, it does not suggest any resurrection of the dead like the sounding of the trumpet in 1 Corinthians 15:52 in the Christian bible where it says 'for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible'. Thus, Kramer's 'Kaddish' is aware of the trumpet (or *shofar*) as it sounds on Yom Kippur and hears the weeping: there can be no physical release of those whose bodies were burnt in Auschwitz but by remembering them in *Yizkor* prayers their memories are kept alive. As Kramer quoted in one of her earlier books from a Hassidic saying:

'To forget is to prolong exile,  
To remember is the beginning of redemption.'<sup>522</sup>

Karen Gershon published her 'Kaddish' almost twenty years before Kramer's poem first appeared. In nine numbered stanzas Gershon contemplates not only the importance of remembering but also considers the significance of how the victims of the Holocaust shall be remembered.

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<sup>521</sup> Berlin & Brettler 2004: 270.

<sup>522</sup> Kramer, Lotte. *A Lifelong House* (Sutton: Hippopotamus Press, 1983), p. 39.

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### KADDISH

I  
Simple must be the words I use  
to commemorate all these  
Jews and those who died like Jews  
consider when you label them  
sick of sad Jewish memories  
making emotional demands  
natural victims of strong hands  
that those who killed them did the same<sup>523</sup>

Gershon's solution that 'Simple must be the words I use' seems to reflect on the controversy between Theodor W. Adorno and Paul Celan, following the former's dictum 'nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben, ist barbarisch'.<sup>524</sup> Celan's response to this was

Kein Gedicht nach Auschwitz (Adorno): Was wird hier als Vorstellung von 'Gedicht' unterstellt? Der Dünkel dessen, der sich untersteht, hypothetisch-spekulativerweise Auschwitz aus der Nachtigallen- oder Singdrossel-Perspektive zu betrachten oder zu berichten.<sup>525</sup>

The use of 'simple' words can be read as Gershon's attempt to avoid any kind of 'Nachtigallen- oder Singdrossel-Perspektive' but to use prosaic language in a respectful manner. Moreover, as we have seen above, the language of the traditional Kaddish is mainly Aramaic, in other words it was a prayer recited in the vernacular. Hence, it also could be considered to be a prayer using 'simple' words rather than the elaborate poetry such as can be found in the psalms.

Gershon's concerns regarding appropriate commemoration of 'all these/ Jews and those who died like Jews' seem to be mainly language-related as the poet requests from her audience that they should consider the implications of their own terminology when referring to victims of the Holocaust. The emotional challenge of genuinely confronting what happened to European Jewry and all the others who 'died like Jews' is acknowledged by the poet when

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<sup>523</sup> Gershon, Karen. *Selected Poems* (London: Gollancz, 1966), p. 19.

<sup>524</sup> Adorno, Theodor W. 'Erziehung nach Auschwitz' (1955) in *Theodor W. Adorno: Gesammelte Schriften*, edited by Rolf Tiedemann, Band 10.2. Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft II (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1998), p. 674.

<sup>525</sup> Celan, Paul. 'Ansprache anlässlich der Entgegennahme des Literaturpreises der freien Hansestadt Bremen' (1958) in *Paul Celan: Der Meridian und andere Prosa* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1983), p. 38.

she refers to people being 'sick of sad Jewish memories/ making emotional demands'. There is already a notable inclusion in this third line: 'Jews' we would expect, therefore the short delay caused by the enjambment does point at the obvious; the completion of the line brings the surprise: 'and those who died like Jews'. Traditionally, the *Mourner's Kaddish* concludes with the words 'Oseh shalom bimromav, hu ya-aseh shalomaleyenu ve-al kol yisrael, veimru ameyn', asking God 'to grant peace to us and to all Israel'.<sup>526</sup> Judaism does not expect non-Jews to abide by all its laws or to follow its traditions and Gershon's desire to remember also those non-Jews 'who died like Jews' in a Kaddish is quite significant. With her inclusion of all those who shared the same fate, the poet seems to take up a stance against the fascist racial ideology and for to advocate one humanity shared by all. In the following lines, Gershon urges her audience not to label the murdered 'natural victims of strong hands'. This phrase seems to refer to terminology used by the National Socialist in their account of social-Darwinism and the related ideological concepts of *Lebensraum* and *Volksgemeinschaft*.<sup>527</sup> As the Nazis considered non-Jewish Germans to be Aryans and members of a master race who were crowded into a country that was far too small for them, they regarded it as their duty to expand their *Lebensraum* eastwards and eliminate the indigenous population.<sup>528</sup> Furthermore, to ensure the purity of the master race, inferior races, such as the Jews, had to be destroyed as they might otherwise threaten the Aryan *Volksgemeinschaft*.<sup>529</sup> Therefore, in the eyes of the Nazis Jews were inevitably destined to be 'natural victims' as they had to make way for the superior race who brushed them aside with 'strong hands'. In the second stanza of her 'Kaddish' Gershon defends the victims of the Holocaust even more fervently against accusations that they were 'weak', rejecting the widespread view that the victims had readily surrendered themselves to their butchers.<sup>530</sup> In his essay 'The Return of the Images' the historian Habbo Knoch has pointed out that the photographs of Nazi crimes shown in West Germany

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<sup>526</sup> In Britain, it is only in the Liberal tradition that the phrase 've-al kol beney adam' ('and to all humanity') is added; see *Machzor Ruach Chadashah*, edited by Eric L. Friedland and John D. Rayner, reprinted with corrections (London: Liberal Judaism, 2008), p. 401.

<sup>527</sup> See for example Vogt, Markus. 'Sozialdarwinismus als Element des nationalsozialistischen Programms von Hitler' in *Sozialdarwinismus* (Freiburg: Herder, 1997), pp. 277-306.

<sup>528</sup> Rubenstein, Richard. *After Auschwitz*, second edition (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 114.

<sup>529</sup> Rubenstein 1992: 114-115.

<sup>530</sup> Gershon, Karen. *Selected Poems* (London: Gollancz, 1966), p. 19.

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from the late fifties onwards rarely showed individual victims. He notes that 'the visualization of the Holocaust generally did not present the victims as either individuals or as [...] figures to be admired'.<sup>531</sup> According to Knoch, even in images about the Warsaw uprising Jews were presented 'as cowering families or groups guarded by victorious German soldiers', thereby 'visual stereotypes that had long been used by anti-Semites to stigmatize Jews were reproduced'.<sup>532</sup> Against this background, Gershon's 'Kaddish' aims to restore the victims as individuals with a human dignity. As Kaddish is said to remember and honour the dead, the translingual poet goes back to the Aramaic sources of the prayer to create an English poem that prepares the survivor for reciting of the Mourner's Kaddish. The final stanza of Gershon's 'Kaddish' is distinguished by its positive imagery and seems to have almost returned to the unshakeable confidence of its Aramaic ancestor. The intertexts of the poem illustrate how far the translingual imagination stretches: from the comforting Jewish prayer to the brutal and inhuman terminology of the Nazis and to the painful insights of Celan, the survivor who wrote poems after Auschwitz, saying 'Sie, die Sprache, blieb unverloren, ja, trotz allem'.<sup>533</sup> It seems that at last, the translingual imagination has enabled the poet to find her own language in which to commemorate not only her parents but 'all these/ Jews and those who died like Jews'.

The Exodus is another important Jewish intertext. In his book *Biblical Text and Texture* Michael Fishbane has highlighted the fact that

The narrative of the exodus from Egypt in Exodus 1-15, [...] depicted this historical event as the consummate expression of divine power and national redemption. The interweaving of a broad diversity of recollections of this event into a coherent and expanded saga of cumulative force resulted in a *mythos* of the origins of the Israelite religious consciousness and nationhood. Accordingly, the exodus tradition was used, from the first, as a paradigmatic teaching for present and future generations.<sup>534</sup>

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<sup>531</sup> Knoch, Habbo. 'The Return of the Images' in *Coping with the Nazi Past*, edited by Philipp Gassert and Alan E. Steinweis (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2007), p. 42.

<sup>532</sup> Knoch 2007: 43.

<sup>533</sup> Celan 1983: 38.

<sup>534</sup> Fishbane, Michael. *Biblical Text and Texture* (Oxford: One World, 1998), p. 121.

Fishbane gives several examples of uses of the Exodus motif in the Tanakh<sup>535</sup> to prove his point. Looking at the sheer number of adaptations of the Exodus story in more contemporary Jewish literature it is not difficult to support this view.<sup>536</sup>

Gershon's poem 'The Children's Exodus' highlights the aspect of the biblical Exodus as a communal event. Unlike the ancient Hebrews who left Egypt as a community, and who were to be addressed as a people at Mount Sinai, the Kindertransport children were on their own.

#### THE CHILDREN'S EXODUS

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When we went out of Germany  
 carrying six million lives  
 that was Jewish history  
 but each child was one refugee  
 we unlike Egyptian slaves  
 were exiled individually  
 and each in desolation has  
 created his own wilderness<sup>537</sup>

The stanza is written in iambic tetrameters, except for lines two, three and five which, each a syllable shorter, have a stress on the first syllable. This inversion of the iambic rhythm to a trochee not only interrupts the flow of the poem but also emphasizes the first word of the respective line: *carrying*, *that* and *we*. The stress on *carrying* might suggest the heavy burden of being a survivor, taking on the responsibility for all those who perished in the Holocaust. It is even more significant considering that those who were 'carrying' this load were mere children. *That*, the first word of the third line, points a finger at what was a central event in Jewish history: the exodus. However, Gershon immediately adds that this new exodus differs from the biblical one: *we* were not like Egyptian slaves. The exodus from Egypt is a central element of Jewish religion and identity and recounted in the daily prayers. As Egyptian slaves, they were oppressed as forced labourers, and not allowed a protected family life. With

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<sup>535</sup>Name of the Jewish Bible, which comprises (though in a slightly different order) what Christians call the Old Testament.

<sup>536</sup>The most famous of which probably is Leon Uris novel *Exodus* (1958)

<sup>537</sup>Gershon 1966: 26.

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the first Passover lamb on the eve of the exodus from Egypt this situation changes:

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: '[...] Speak to the whole community of Israel and say that on the tenth of the month each of them shall take a lamb to a family, a lamb to a household. But if the household is too small for a lamb, let him share one with a neighbour who dwells nearby, in proportion to the number of persons: you shall contribute for the lamb according to what each household will eat.'<sup>538</sup>

Here, the Hebrews are seen as persons within a social context – families, households, neighbours. During their journey through the desert, they encounter God at Mount Sinai where the covenant is established. This covenant is between God and the whole of the Jewish people, present and future.<sup>539</sup>

Thus, the community at Mount Sinai following the biblical exodus is a symbol of the greatest possible community of Jews. In sharp contrast to the biblical story, the *Kindertransport* children in Gershon's poem are removed from their communities and become individual refugees – their exodus leads into, not through, the wilderness. The stress on We, the first word in line five, underlines the importance of that difference. Considering that in English the tendency is that nouns and verbs carry a heavier stress than articles or personal pronouns, this is a noticeable deviation from the norm. As the iambic rhythm is abandoned, the personal pronoun is foregrounded, drawing the reader's attention to the fact that this story is not about an ancient founding myth but about a group of people of which the poet is one. The defamiliarization enables the poet to highlight the painful experience of the children's exodus. Underneath the carefully crafted corset of rhyme the horrendous reality and raw pain of being a child refugee become visible.

Lotte Kramer has also chosen the motif of the Exodus for one of her poems about her rescue from Nazi Germany. However, unlike Gershon's poem the tone of Kramer's 'Exodus' is far more positive. The parallels that Kramer draws to her own experience can be understood as an illustration of how 'each

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<sup>538</sup> Exodus 12:1-4 as translated in *The Jewish Study Bible*, edited by Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 125.

<sup>539</sup> See for example 'Exodus and the Jewish Tradition' in *The Jewish Study Bible*, edited by Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 106.

generation looked for the first exodus as the archetypal expression of its own future hope'.<sup>540</sup> Furthermore, it enables an understanding of Jewish history as an on-going process.

## EXODUS

For all mothers in anguish  
Pushing out their babies  
In a small basket

To let the river cradle them  
And kind hands find  
And nurture them

Providing safety  
In a hostile world:  
Our constant gratitude.

As in this last century  
The crowded trains  
Taking us away from home

Became our baby baskets  
Rattling to foreign parts  
Our exodus from death.<sup>541</sup>

The title of the poem reminds us of the exodus of the Hebrew people from Egypt, through the desert, to the Promised Land. However, the story itself is not re-told in the poem. The opening lines of the poem only recall the moment when Moses' mother pushes the basket that carries her baby onto the river. What is striking is that, rather than mentioning this very specific occasion directly, the poem addresses 'all mothers in anguish' who put their babies into 'a small basket', hoping they might be saved. Furthermore, the phrasing 'pushing out their babies' allows for an even broader reading as there is the connotation, too, of giving birth. Thus, the very process of being born into the world implies being dependent on the kindness of other people around. However, the next line of the poem specifies that the babies are being pushed out 'in a small basket', which then is cradled by the river until it is found by 'kind hands'. This act of letting go of a tiny, helpless little person in order to

<sup>540</sup>Fishbane 1998: 121.

<sup>541</sup>Kramer, Lotte. *Black Over Red* (Ware, Herts: Rockingham Press, 2005), p. 11.

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ensure their survival is met with 'our constant gratitude'. It is striking that the gratitude is directed at the mothers who let go of their children rather than the owners of the 'kind hands'. Also, for the first time in the poem, the narrator gets directly involved. Using the word 'our' signals to the reader that there is somebody speaking from inside history, not just any storyteller but a person who belongs to the story. The last line of the first part therefore signals that there is more to this poem than just a re-telling of an ancient story.

Consequently, after what could be called a spectator's view offered in first part of the poem, the second part zooms in and explores the motif of exodus from the inside – through the eyes of the person in the baby basket. Now the focus is on one particular occasion 'in this last century' and likens the 'crowded trains' of the Kindertransport to the ancient baby basket that took Moses 'away from home', in an 'exodus from death'.

The first part of the poem, a single sentence, comprises the first three stanzas. Within this long sentence, the last line of the third stanza stands out because it is separated from the rest of the sentence by a colon. Putting 'Our constant gratitude' into such an exposed position emphasises the particular importance of this phrase. As I have argued above, it signals the move from the general (i.e. the biblical motif) to the specific (i.e. the personal experience of the Kindertransport). Furthermore, it can be read as a way of dedicating the poem not only to one but to all mothers in anguish.

Part two, comprising the remaining two stanzas, forms another single sentence. While the first word of the last line is a repetition of the first word of the last line of part one, the former is not separated from the rest of the sentence. Here, the repetition again emphasises the importance of the line. Kramer employs different types of repetition in a number of stylistic devices, such as alliteration ('baby baskets'; 'cradles'/ 'crowded') or auto-rhyme (them). The comforting nature of the river cradling the baby basket is mirrored in the only proper rhyme of the whole poem 'and kind hands find'. In contrast, the 'crowded trains' are 'rattling to foreign parts'.

Another striking aspect of the poem is how it works with contrasts and dichotomies. For instance, while the baby basket in the first part of the poem is found by 'kind hands', the children on the 'crowded trains' are travelling to 'foreign parts'. Although the poem is about the children's exodus to safety, the

picture of ‘crowded trains’ travelling to ‘foreign parts’ disturbingly echoes the very journey the children were spared: their parents’ deportation to the death camps in the East.

Kramer’s poem is deeply embedded in a Jewish intertext that goes far beyond the mentioning of the Exodus. By linking the biblical story to her own, Kramer *remembers* the Exodus of the Jewish people in a new way, making it relevant to her own life. As we have seen earlier, remembering her past arguably was the beginning of the poet’s redemption as she no longer had to hold back her memories. A similar effect in concentration camp survivors who wrote about ‘what they had lived through’ has been described by Andrea Reiter in her book *Narrating the Holocaust*.<sup>542</sup> In a wider context, *remembering* is, as we have seen, a crucial element of Jewish tradition. The historian Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi even claims that only in the Jewish tradition ‘and nowhere else is the injunction to remember felt as a religious imperative to an entire people’.<sup>543</sup> According to Yerushalmi, the God of Israel is known to his people because he ‘reveals himself “historically”’ in biblical stories. *Remembering* these events is paramount in Jewish tradition and the Jewish festivals are linked to the memory of specific events. This is particularly the case in the context of the Exodus, an event that is commemorated annually at Passover. The *Haggadah*, a collection of texts from Jewish tradition, is read to recall the liberation from enslavement in Egypt and the end of exile. These texts range from biblical extracts to Rabbinic wisdom to medieval poetry and, in the case of *Haggadot* from the Progressive movement, also contain contemporary texts. Kramer’s translingual poem can be understood as another addition to a contemporary *Haggadah*, it commemorates not only God’s guidance and mercy but also the selfless love of the parents who let go of their children so they could join ‘the exodus from death’ and survive.

While Kaddish and Exodus can be considered to be the most dominant Jewish intertexts, there are other visible biblical references in the writings of the four poets. In her poem ‘I Was Not There’ Gershon seems to engage with

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<sup>542</sup>Reiter, Andrea. *Narrating the Holocaust* (London & New York: Continuum, 2005), p. 137.

<sup>543</sup>Yerushalmi, Yosef Hayim. *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*. Paperback edition with a new preface (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1999), p. 9.

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another important Jewish text, the highly poetic book of Lamentations. Daniel Grossberg has pointed out that Lamentations is

the Bible's primary literature on destruction and became the paradigm for later Jewish literature of destruction. Lamentations is a form of mourning for a destruction that was to become a linchpin in Jewish history and Jewish religious thought. More than that, Lamentations eternalizes the destruction, thereby helping to make it a central event in the Jewish memory.<sup>544</sup>

The speaker of Gershon's poem, having listened to the ancient words of mourning carries some of their images across time and space to allow the translingual imagination to create something new.

### I WAS NOT THERE

The morning they set out from home  
I was not there to comfort them  
the dawn was innocent with snow  
in mockery – it is not true  
the dawn was neutral was immune  
their shadows threaded it too soon  
they were relieved that it had come  
I was not there to comfort them

One told me that my father spent  
a day in prison long ago  
he did not tell me that he went  
what difference does it make now  
when he set out when he came home  
I was not there to comfort him  
and now I have no means to know  
of what I was kept ignorant

Both my parents died in camps  
I was not there to comfort them  
I was not there they were alone  
my mind refuses to conceive  
the life the death they must have known  
I must atone because I live  
I could not have saved them from death  
the ground is neutral underneath

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<sup>544</sup> Grossberg, David. 'Lamentations' in *The Jewish Study Bible*, edited by Adele Berlin and Marc Zwi Brettler (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 1587.

Every child must leave its home  
 time gathers life impartially  
 I could have spared them nothing since  
 I was too young – it is not true  
 they might have lived to succour me  
 and none shall say in my defence  
 had I been there to comfort them  
 it would have made no difference<sup>545</sup>

The title 'I was not there' which also forms some kind of refrain in the poem recalls the lamentation of the destruction of Jerusalem: in the first chapter of Lamentations the phrase 'There is none to comfort her' occurs five times in similar form.<sup>546</sup> Gershon's choice of phrase seems to confirm Shaye J. D. Cohen's claim that Lamentations is 'the eternal lament for all Jewish catastrophes, past, present, and future'<sup>547</sup> as the Holocaust clearly is one of these catastrophes. The first chapter describes Jerusalem's suffering as she is abandoned by friends and allies alike, stating that 'Judah has gone into exile' (Lamentations 1:3) thus recalling the enslavement in Egypt. Gershon's poem is written from the perspective of one of Jerusalem's children who has not 'gone into captivity' (Lamentations 1:5) but went into a different kind of exile. Nevertheless, the child who was brought into safety is aware that her Jerusalem was left behind 'with none to comfort her' (Lamentations 1:9) in all her suffering. The fact that the poem spells out the horror of the last months and weeks in the life of the parents while simultaneously mentioning the daughter's absence arguably is an expression of survivor's guilt. However, recalling the suffering of the murdered parents also constitutes a form of remembrance that is crucial in Judaism as it is the responsibility of the living to remember their ancestors.

Like in 'A Jew's Calendar', or 'In The Woods' the question of the neutrality of nature is raised. It seems as if the poet expected her native place to take sides and protect those German Jews who had valued and protected their

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<sup>545</sup>Gershon, Karen. *Selected Poems* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1966), p. 11.

<sup>546</sup>Lamentations 1:2 'There is none to comfort her'; L. 1:9 'With none to comfort her'; L. 1:16 'Far from me is any comforter'; L. 1:17 'She has no one to comfort her' and L. 1:22 'There was none to comfort me'

<sup>547</sup>As quoted in Grossberg, Daniel. 'Lamentations' in *The Jewish Study Bible*, edited by Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 1587.

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German *Heimat*. As 'the ground is neutral underneath' it has ceased to be a home but has become matter, belonging to those who hold the power.

When Gershon writes about her parents' deportation, or her father's imprisonment, she does so without any knowledge of what really happened: her parents could not share their memory with her. Efraim Sicher has pointed out that

Unlike the camp inmates, whose lives are a memorial to what happened, whose writings, as Elie Wiesel testifies, are a remembering, the refugees do not even have the memory with which to commemorate.<sup>548</sup>

Gershon seems to fill this lack of personal memory by recalling the banishment from Eden, and the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, both part of shared Jewish memory. Drawing from the poet's Jewish heritage, the translingual imagination provides the imaginary scenes that allow Gershon to commemorate her parents.

Her absence from her parents' side haunts the poet. As Sicher has put it: her 'guilt at being alive [...] makes [...] writing a *kapara* (penance) without remission.'<sup>549</sup> The poem, which seems to confirm Sicher's notion ('I must atone because I live') lists various reasons and possible excuses why the poetic persona should not be blamed for her absence from her parents' side – but ultimately they are all rejected. What remains is the poet's longing for a comfort that is beyond her reach: had her parents survived, 'they might have lived to succour' her. The dated term 'succour' betrays the poet's conviction that she is responsible for her own abandonment. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term has connotations of sheltering, protecting and helping and expresses the kind of comfort that is often related to God.<sup>550</sup> Thus, it seems that despite conjuring ancient Jewish memories, Gershon is still left without the comfort that she has been longing for.

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<sup>548</sup>Sicher, Efraim. *Beyond Marginality: Anglo-Jewish Literature After the Holocaust* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1985), p. 157.

<sup>549</sup>ibid.

<sup>550</sup> OED online, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/193369?isAdvanced=false&result=2&rskey=UKQaf2&>, accessed on 19.10.2013.

The way in which Gerda Mayer's poems relate to Jewish intertexts differs from the previous examples insofar as they frequently refer to Judeo-Christian classics, i.e. stories that are mostly well known even in secular Christian circles and are often detached from specifically Jewish interpretation. Representatives of such classics would be the creation myth and stories relating to King David (for example his encounter with Goliath), with the latter receiving a markedly different interpretation in Christian commentary because of David's relevance for the story of Jesus. Another example of a Judeo-Christian classic would be six the 'court legends' about the prophet Daniel. Lawrence M. Wills has explained why the Daniel has played a different role in Judaism and Christianity:

Daniel was evidently considered a prophet at Qumran and elsewhere in early Judaism (Josephus, *Antiquities* 10.266-68), but because prefigurations of Christ and Christian resurrection were seen in Daniel by the early church, the rabbinic tradition hesitated to embrace the visions of Daniel. [...] Jewish tradition was also sometimes critical of what appeared to be a positive relationship between Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar. The different status of Daniel in Judaism and Christianity is thus reflected in the position of the book in the two canons.<sup>551</sup>

In Mayer's 'Bible Stories', we can find references to two of the above mentioned classics: to the creation myth and to the prophet Daniel.

#### BIBLE STORIES

In childhood I took it for granted  
that Adam and Eve were Jews:  
though implied rather than stated,  
it was Good News.

Now Goethe was a German,  
and Masaryk was a Czech,  
and Adolf Hitler across the road  
was a wicked pain in the neck.

But Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,  
and the rest of the biblical crew,  
and my grandfather 'the solicitor',  
was every one a Jew.

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<sup>551</sup> Wills, Lawrence M. 'Daniel' in *The Jewish Study Bible*, edited by Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 1642.

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The swastikas of my childhood,  
chalked upon the wall,  
the rain and the years have washed them away,  
and the bible survives them all.

Reading the poem aloud the light-hearted mood of 'Bible Stories' is striking. As in a ballad, rhythm and rhyme move the poem forward. The steady flow is not interrupted by any caesura or enjambment, perhaps apart from the two lines about Adolf Hitler that could be regarded as an enjambment.

Although the poem is called 'Bible Stories' it is not only biblical figures that play a part in the story that is told. Starting off from the narrator's childhood and her (naive) assumption that Adam and Eve were Jewish, Goethe as well as two politicians of Mayer's childhood are mentioned. After that, the Jewish Patriarchs as well as Mayer's family patriarch, her grandfather, are introduced before the final stanza remarks on the impermanence of the symbol of National-Socialism as opposed to the survival of the bible. What is fascinating about 'Bible Stories' is its choice of characters along with the points of reference it gives to describe the threats that were faced and eventually overcome. The playful mood of the poem, which is also evident in the phrasing, lends a slightly mythical touch even to those events that are part of recent European history rather than biblical legends. Mayer is drawing from different realms of life and literature and feeds them into her translingual imagination. Thus, the translingual poem shows traces of the memories of a Jewish child growing up in a secular German-Jewish family in a Christian-dominated Czechoslovakian environment – and the grown-up refugee's imagination that creates a fairy-tale ending to comfort the child.

The opening lines of the poem seem to hint at the rather sketchy Jewish knowledge to poet had as a child: Adam and Eve were not Jewish – Judaism as a religion begins with the giving of Torah at Mount Sinai. As the daughter of assimilated German-Jewish parents, young Gerda knew she was Jewish but it was not something that would bother the family in any way: they did not send their daughter to a religious school or engaged in depth with Jewish studies at home. Though aware of the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – because they are considered the ancestors of every Jewish child alongside parents and grandparents – Gerda's biblical knowledge is closely linked to that of her

Christian environment and calling Adam and Eve's supposed Jewishness 'Good News' can be read as an indicator of that: spelled with two capitals 'Good News' clearly suggests a connection with the name of the Christian gospels. For the child of an assimilated family, these details are not relevant; being Jewish is mainly an aspect of family ancestry. Being German, on the other hand, is arguably relating to the cultural identity, highlighted by the mentioning of the German poet Goethe who symbolises German cultural achievements and who was, as previously discussed, of major importance in the context of *Bildung*.<sup>552</sup> The Czech identity is the youngest of the three and predominantly a political one. Here, the poem sums up how many of the German-speaking Jews in the newly founded Czechoslovakia felt: Jewish by family tradition, German by culture but still loyal to their Czech nationality.<sup>553</sup> It might seem surprising that Hitler is not linked to a nationality. A possible explanation would be that he does not fit into the cultural image of Goethe's Germany and therefore cannot be part of a desirable German identity. Furthermore, he is threateningly close ('across the road') – an aspect which can be read as reference not only to the proximity of Nazi Germany but also to the threat posed by Nazi collaborators of all nationalities. The expression 'a pain in the neck' seems to play down the danger of the Nazi leader and the devastating effect he had on European Jewry. It seems that choosing this phrase is a strategy to keep the catastrophe at bay: instead of spelling out the horror and allowing it to overwhelm the child of two of the murdered six million, 'a pain in the neck' is a phrase that can mean anything. Being a common phrase, it usually refers to a minor nuisance that everybody has to deal with in their life. Hence, the poet employs it as a bridge to reach the next part of the story: the final stanza that proclaims Jewish survival. Unlike the writing on the wall in Daniel 5, where Belshazzar is told that God has numbered the days of his kingdom and brought it to an end, the Fascist symbols have no divine origin and are merely 'chalked upon the wall'. The Nazis might have proclaimed the end of Jewish life but fleeting as they are, they cannot threaten Jewish survival as such. As I have pointed out in the

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<sup>552</sup>For a brief discussion of Goethe and his importance for Jewish-German cultural identity see for example Mendes-Flohr, Paul. 'Die jüdische Bindung an Deutschland und die deutsche Kultur' in *Deutsch-jüdische Geschichte der Neuzeit*, Band 4, 1918-1945, edited by M. A Meyer et al. (München: Beck, 2000), pp. 154-157.

<sup>553</sup>See for example Čapková, Kateřina. 'German Jews' in *Czechs, Germans, Jews? National Identity and the Jews of Bohemia* (New York: Berghahn, 2012), pp. 56-91.

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introduction to this poem, the court legends in the book of Daniel, of which the story about king Belshazzar and the Menetekel is one, can be considered part of the Judeo-Christian classics. Heine wrote a ballad about 'Belsazar' which was first published in 1822 and set to music by Robert Schumann soon after.<sup>554</sup> When Mayer was a child, she used to recite ballads with her mother and still regards them with great respect as she feels they are 'sort of in the highest level of language and linguistically wonderful and yet not so complicated a child wouldn't understand'.<sup>555</sup> Hence, it is very likely that Mayer, daughter of assimilated German Jews would come across king Belshazzar in Heine's ballad rather than the book of Daniel. Heine's poem depicts the king as autocrat who is thoroughly frightened by God's writing which he cannot read – and who is eventually killed by his own servants. The 'Buchstaben von Feuer' in Heine's ballad are mere chalk in Mayer's poem and neither of the two poets mentions Daniel who was the only one who could decipher the meaning of the writing on the wall. However, it seems that Mayer's poem arrives at its comforting conclusion also because of a child-like trust in the awe-inspiring power of 'Jehovah' as depicted in Heine's ballad. As we have learned from the first stanza of the poem, in the eyes of the child Jewish life originates in the stories of the bible. Thus, Jews having been there from the very beginning, the poem's upbeat conclusion seems to be that Judaism might well carry on forever – at least in the bible. And while on the surface it looks all positive, this final line carries the ambiguity that distinguishes the reality of the grown-up refugee from the memories of her childhood: the bible may survive 'them all' – but many Jews who were not part 'of the biblical crew' did not. Thus, Mayer's translingual poem provides a glimpse at the rich and at times ambiguous or even contradictory space of the translingual imagination, where different intertexts feed into what appears to be a cheerful little poem in English.

Esther, another biblical character, is at the centre of the next poem. It is Kramer's version of Rilke's 'Esther' (1908) and therefore another example of how a Jewish biblical character is approached through German literature rather than immediately through the biblical source. Rilke's poem was first published

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<sup>554</sup>Heine, Heinrich. 'Belsazar' (1822) in *Heinrich Heine: Werke und Briefe*, Band 1 (Berlin und Weimar: Aufbau Verlag, 1980), pp. 52-53. Robert Schumann: 'Belsazar' op. 57 (1840)

<sup>555</sup> Interview with the author.

in *Der Neuen Gedichte Anderer Teil*.<sup>556</sup>

ESTHER

Die Dienerinnen kämmten sieben Tage  
die Asche ihres Grams und ihrer Plage  
Neige und Niederschlag aus ihrem Haar,  
und trugen es und sonnten es im Freien  
und speisten es mit reinen Spezereien  
noch diesen Tag und den: dann aber war

die Zeit gekommen, da sie, ungeboten,  
zu keiner Frist, wie eine von den Toten  
den drohend offenen Palast betrat,  
um gleich, gelegt auf ihre Kammerfrauen,  
am Ende ihres Weges *Den* zu schauen,  
an dem man stirbt, wenn man ihm naht.

Er glänzte so, dass sie die Kronrubine  
aufflammen fühlte, die sie an sich trug;  
sie füllte sich ganz rasch mit seiner Miene  
wie ein Gefäß und war schon voll genug

und floss schon über von des Königs Macht,  
bevor sie noch den dritten Saal durchschritt,  
der sie mit seiner Wände Malachit  
grün überlief. Sie hatte nicht gedacht,

so langen Gang zu tun mit allen Steinen,  
die schwerer wurden von des Königs Scheinen  
und kalt von ihrer Angst. Sie ging und ging -

Und als sie endlich, fast von nahe, ihn,  
aufruhend auf dem Thron von Turmalin,  
sich türmen sah, so wirklich wie ein Ding:

empfang die rechte von den Dienerinnen  
die Schwindende und hielt sie zu dem Sitze.  
Er rührte sie mit seines Szepters Spitze:  
...und sie begriff es ohne Sinne, innen.

Kramer was first introduced to Rilke's work through her teacher Sophie  
Cahn:

She was a great influence on my education.[...] I inherited her edition of  
Rilke which is complete, you know, which she got when it came out. A  
lovely edition. Every now and then I look at it. And she used to make

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<sup>556</sup>Rilke, Rainer Maria. 'Esther' in *Rainer Maria Rilke: Gedichte 1895 bis 1910*, edited bei Manfred Engel and Ullrich Fülleborn (Frankfurt a. Main & Leipzig: Insel, 1996), p. 524.

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notes of the poems she liked. So it's a guide for me.<sup>557</sup>

At first sight, Kramer's version of Rilke's 'Esther' stays quite close to the original, although there are some minor formal deviations (such as Kramer's six stanzas as opposed to Rilke's seven and the abandonment of Rilke's rhyme scheme).<sup>558</sup>

ESTHER  
(Rainer Maria Rilke)

For seven days the servant girls were combing  
her sorrow's and low spirit's ashes  
from her hair and took it out into  
the sunshine in the open air and fed it  
spices still today and several days: but then

the time had come when leaning on her servants,  
without an invitation or appointment,  
like someone dead, she went into the threatening  
unlocked palace and saw him facing her  
whose presence can cause death when coming near.

He shone so much, she felt the ruby flaming  
out inside the coronet she wore;  
she quickly filled herself with his whole air  
just like a vessel that was full enough

and overflowed with power of the king,  
before she'd walked across the third great hall  
flooded by greenness of the malachite.  
She had not thought to walk so long with all these stones  
becoming heavier with the king's bright light  
and cold with her own fear. She walked and walked.

And as she saw him near at last, resting  
and towering on the throne of tourmaline,  
so real and powerful, so like a thing:

she fainted in the servant woman's arms  
who led her to the seat. He touched her  
with his sceptre's point and she was without  
senses, comprehending it, inside.<sup>559</sup>

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<sup>557</sup> Interview with the author, 30 June 2009.

<sup>558</sup> In our interview Kramer pointed out that in the context of her Rilke poems she prefers the term 'version' rather than 'translation' (Interview 30 June 2009).

<sup>559</sup> Kramer 2011: 385.

Like Rilke's poem, Kramer's 'Esther' singles out one particular moment in the Purim story without giving any context. 'Esther' describes the queen's preparation to go and see the king without prior invitation. The poem follows Esther across the 'great hall' while giving a very detailed account of the queen's sensations ('she felt the ruby flaming') and depicts the moment when, already fainting but still vaguely aware of what is happening, Esther is saved. The corresponding section in the biblical book is only a mere three sentences and far less dramatic:

On the third day, Esther put on royal apparel and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, while the king was sitting on his royal throne in the throne room facing the entrance of the palace. As soon as the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, she won his favor. The king extended to Esther the golden scepter which he had in his hand, and Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter.<sup>560</sup>

The differences between the biblical source text and the poem are striking and the effects on the main character, Esther, significant: while in the biblical text the queen prepares conscientiously for her meeting with the king, she is far from weak or appearing close to death. Kramer's (and Rilke's) 'Esther' appears to be a careful and sensitive close-up of a woman in crisis who has to cope with something that seems to be almost beyond her capability, whereas the biblical source text shows no apparent interest in psychological details. In Jewish tradition, the Book of Esther is read at the festival of Purim. The name *Purim* means 'lots' because Haman, the villain of the story, cast lots to decide on a suitable day to kill the Jews. Adele Berlin has pointed out that 'Esther is best read as a comedy', claiming that Rabbinic commentary has added and extended 'in the most unsubtle ways the farce or burlesque inherent in the book'.<sup>561</sup> According to the scholar, 'the story's plot is structured on improbabilities, exaggerations, misunderstandings, and reversals'.<sup>562</sup> In the biblical story, Esther, a Jewish woman, is chosen to be the new queen after Queen Vashti refuses to obey her husband, the Persian King Ahasuerus.<sup>563</sup> The evil Grand Vizier, Haman, plans to kill all Jews throughout the kingdom but, thanks to Esther's brave visit to the king (and her uncle Mordechai's wise counsel), the tables are turned. In the end, Haman is hanged and 'Mordechai

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<sup>560</sup>Berlin & Brettler 2004: 1632.

<sup>561</sup>Berlin & Brettler 2004: 1623.

<sup>562</sup>Berlin & Brettler 2004: 1623-4.

<sup>563</sup>We have already met Ahasuerus in chapter two: the 'Wandering Jew' was named after him.

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and Esther live happily ever after – after instituting Purim as an annual holiday'.<sup>564</sup> Thus, it is a story of Jewish survival.

Considering that already by the end of the nineteenth century some assimilated German Jews had developed a sense of religiousness that derived more from Goethe's lyric than Jewish texts,<sup>565</sup> Kramer's choice to approach Esther through Rilke's poem could be regarded as typical for a daughter of an assimilated Jewish family. However, the Purim story would have been familiar even to the most assimilated German-Jewish child. Rather than being her first contact with the biblical story, it seems that Rilke's 'Esther' intrigued Kramer because of its close focus on the heroine at a moment between hope and fear. Similar to Rilke's work, Kramer's version uses assonances to underline the grave mood of the poem ('Asche ihres Grams und ihrer Plage' vs. 'sorrows and low spirit's ashes'), at times even more ('She had not thought to walk so long with all these stones'). While the shorter, non-rhyming stanzas of Kramer's 'Esther' do not alter the tone of the poem and do not interfere with its story, there are two notable instances where her version differs significantly from Rilke's poem. First, there is an obvious change in the depiction of the king from Rilke's 'am Ende ihres Weges *Den* zu schauen,/ an dem man stirbt, wenn man ihm naht' to Kramer's '[...] and saw him facing her/ whose presence can cause death when coming near'. Rilke's lines suggest a God-like being on the throne, expressed in the italicised pronoun with a capital letter '*Den*'. In Kramer's version, we are reminded of the biblical source: 'As soon as the king saw Queen Esther'. In both Kramer's and the biblical text Esther and the king see each other – they are both human and despite an imbalance of power, there can even be a potential for them to see eye to eye. Similarly, whereas in Rilke's poem Esther sees the king 'fast von nahe' (and even then the phrase is wrapped into a complex sentence structure), Kramer's Esther sees him 'near at last', thus bridging the gap between king and the approaching woman.

These seemingly small adjustments hint at the poet's translingual imagination: the original Purim story has little relevance to the *Kindertransport*

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<sup>564</sup> Strassfeld, Michael. *The Jewish Holidays. A Guide and Commentary* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), p. 188.

<sup>565</sup> Lowenstein, Steven M. 'Die religiöse Landschaft des Judentums in Deutschland' in *Deutsch-jüdische Geschichte der Neuzeit*, Band 3, 1871-1918, edited by M. A. Meyer et al. (München: Beck, 2000), pp. 106.

survivor who lost her family to a ‘Haman’ that almost succeeded to ‘destroy, massacre, and exterminate all the Jews, young and old’.<sup>566</sup> Cherishing German culture, the poet approaches the Jewish heroine of the Purim story through Rilke’s poem as the moment depicted in the poem is full of potential: Esther may be able to stem the tide. While Rilke’s Esther still shows some traces of the weak, sensual Jewess, who is forced into danger by male masterminds (such as Mordecai),<sup>567</sup> the translingual poet moves her heroine beyond these stereotypes. Kramer’s Esther, it seems, has made up her own mind; she knows what is at stake and she decides to face the danger with open eyes. She is no longer a ‘Schwindende’, but carries the translingual poet’s subtle hope for survival.

Kramer’s version of Rilke’s ‘Esther’ does find itself right in ‘the center of the language forest’; but while it remains ‘on the outside facing the wooded ridge’,<sup>568</sup> to use Benjamin’s words, it listens to more than just the echo of Rilke’s poem. The translingual poem does not only echo Rilke’s ‘Esther’ but also a whisper of the idea of Queen Esther in Kramer’s mind, enriching the sound.

While the poems discussed so far all relate to some Jewish or otherwise religious intertexts, Gerda Mayer’s ‘Lorelei’ refers to a Romantic German legend that was first invented by Clemens Brentano in 1801.<sup>569</sup> ‘Loreley’ initially was just the name of the rock near St Goarshausen – an impressive 132 m high cliff rising from the Rhine. It is the narrowest section of the river between Switzerland and the Northern Sea and particularly the bend close to the rock is notoriously dangerous for ships. Because of the narrow gorge and the high cliff there is also an extraordinary echo, a possible reason for the name ‘Loreley’ as ‘lorren’ is a Middle High German term for ‘to sough’. Another explanation for the name derives from the word ‘lure’ which means ‘to lurk’ and has a more

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<sup>566</sup>Esther 3:13

<sup>567</sup>See for example Grillparzer’s drama *Esther* where the queen is bullied into action by her uncle Mordecai.

<sup>568</sup>Benjamin, Walter. ‘The Task of the Translator’, transl. by Harry Zohn, in *The Translation Studies Reader*, edited by Lawrence Venuti (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 20.

<sup>569</sup>Brentano, Clemens. ‘Godwi. Zweiter Teil’ in *Clemens Brentano: Werke*, Band 2, edited by Friedhelm Kemp (München: Hanser Verlag, 1963), pp. 426-429.

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sinister connotation.<sup>570</sup> The spooky atmosphere around the rock had encouraged legends for a long time but it was not until Clemens Brentano's 'Lore Lay' that these elements had led to a personification. Within a few years after the publication of his ballad several different versions by other poets followed. The best known one is by Heinrich Heine and was published in his collection 'Heimkehr', in *Buch der Lieder* in 1824. It is arguably one of the most famous poems that have ever been written in German. It was set to music by Friedrich Silcher and soon became a well-known tune in Germany. Even during the Nazi era it remained so popular that Heine's poem was eventually published as 'Volksweise' because the German authorities felt that they could not erase it from German cultural heritage.<sup>571</sup> It certainly had not been erased from Mayer's memory when she wrote her poem:

Lorelei

Lorelei, the story has it  
You are sitting on some rocks,  
And alluring and in-luring  
Combing out your golden locks.

But the story misses out on  
What you're really doing there;  
You're assessing your reflection,  
As you rearrange your hair.

And those suicides by water,  
Though of course they gratify,  
Whilst you wait for Captain Right, are  
Mere fringe benefits, Lorelei.

The fact that there are some aspects of the Lorelei motif in Mayer's poem that cannot be found in Heine's version but in Brentano's – such as 'Captain Right' – together with Mayer's love for ballads, suggests that the poet was aware of Brentano's work as well. Similar to Heine, who did not re-tell Brentano's ballad but developed his own story based on Brentano's legend, Mayer does not re-tell the story of either of the two ballads but picks her own aspects. Thus, her poem seems to be a wry modern evaluation of the myth.

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<sup>570</sup>Halfer, Manfred. 'Loreley. Ein Beitrag zur Namendeutung' in *Hansen-Blatt 50/1997* (St. Goar am Rhein: Internationaler Hanseorden e.V.).

<sup>571</sup>Slochower, Harry. 'Attitudes Towards Heine in German Literary Criticism' *Jewish Social Studies* Vol. 3 (1941), 369.

Heine's 'Lorelei', although celebrated as a German folk song, already distances itself from Brentano's Romantic legend, referring to it rather ironically as 'ein Märchen aus uralten Zeiten' when Heine must have been well aware that it was barely twenty years old. The irony seems to have been lost on his fellow countrymen and 'Lorelei' became one of the best-loved ballads with some scholars even claiming that it achieved the status of a national anthem.<sup>572</sup>

Mayer's poem can be read as a translingual response to both the myth in general and Heine's ballad in particular. Employing a rhyme and line pattern that is reminiscent of a ballad, Mayer plays with the appearance of this form without actually writing a ballad. The mighty cliff is downgraded to 'some rocks', leaving no doubt that the poet is not going to look at Lorelei in admiration and awe. The dislocated translingual woman poet looks at the legendary blonde bombshell from an angle very different to that of Heine, let alone Brentano. Mayer is writing from an oblique angle for a number of reasons: first of all, she is a woman and therefore not the prime target of Lorelei's appeal and part of her wry remarks could be accounted for by that. The second reason, however, seems even more relevant as it is linked to Mayer's place 'outside the (German) nation', to borrow Azade Seyhan's term.<sup>573</sup> As a dislocated poet, she looks back at one of the most famous German legends – a legend that is inevitably linked to the river Rhine and its all but mythical role in German identity.<sup>574</sup> Shrugging off the nationalist excrescences and military megalomania that came after the first sighting of the blonde siren in German literature, Mayer returns to Lorelei as play of words: her hint at Lorelei's 'alluring and in-luring' behaviour foregrounds a connection that has been forgotten in the German. Lorelei, after all, is a legend that grew from a

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<sup>572</sup>According to Pinkert, Klein (1957) claimed that Heine's 'Lorelei' had this status. However, Pinkert rejects this claim. 'Es wurde behauptet, Heines Loreley sei „einige Jahrzehnte lang so etwas wie eine zweite deutsche Nationalhymne“ gewesen (Klein 1957: 495); dem muß man widersprechen, auch wenn das Lied besonders nach 1870 zu mancherlei „nationalem“ Humbug mißbraucht wurde (s.u.). Wenn es damals „so etwas wie eine zweite Nationalhymne“ gegeben hat, dann war dies Max Schneckenburgers Die Wacht am Rhein'. Quoted from: Pinkert, Ernst-Ullrich. 'Differenz und Identität, Krieger und Sänger. Zur Rheinsymbolik bei Heine und in der deutschen Lyrik des 19. Jahrhunderts', available online at publikationen.ub.uni-frankfurt.de, accessed on 22.10.2013.

<sup>573</sup>Seyhan, Azade. *Writing Outside The Nation* (Princeton: University Press, 2001).

<sup>574</sup>Following the Romantic period, more nationalistic Rhine myths developed and the sensual 'Lorelei' was joined further up the river by 'Germania', the female warrior at the Niederwalddenkmal near Rüdesheim. See for example Blotevogel, Hans Heinrich. "'Rheinische Landschaft' – zur geographischen Konstruktion des Rheinlands 1790-1945", Institut für Geographie an der Universität Duisburg; available online at duepublico.uni-duisburg-essen.de/.../blotevogel1.pdf, accessed 22.10.2013.

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playful approach to language, from the search for a hidden meaning in words. Thus, Mayer's translingual poem shines a new light at Lorelei: a beguiling woman sitting on a rock, born from a play of words, she is probably not worth dying for.

Gershon's poem 'Wild Anne in Spring' refers to a myth that is much older than the Lorelei – the Greek goddess Persephone, daughter of Demeter, dates back to Homer's *Iliad*. According to Greek mythology, Persephone was gathering flowers when she was abducted by Hades. Her mother desperately tried to find her. Eventually, Zeus intervened. However, it was too late for Persephone to return permanently to her mother as she had already eaten the seed of a pomegranate while she was in the underworld. Thus, she was to remain there with her husband Hades for at least part of the year. Her annual reappearance from the underworld as the Goddess of Spring marks the beginning of new vegetation.<sup>575</sup>

The early death of her oldest sister Anne in 1943 left Gershon in shock.<sup>576</sup> She had always adored Anne whom she regarded as somewhat separate and slightly removed from the rest of her family if not humankind. In one of her early poems Gershon evokes the image of her sister as a goddess of spring.

### Wild Anne in Spring

You look at me with snowdrop eyes  
and yearn from every budding tree  
now you are earth and one with me  
and wear my life for your disguise.

I have long passed your numbered age;  
you are not now beyond me wise.  
Time lingers where your body lies  
and my life has its anchorage.

I am borne high beyond your grave  
but live by taking thought from you  
and even what you never knew  
attempts the guidance that you gave.

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<sup>575</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Vol. 17 (Chicago, London & Toronto: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1951), p. 544-545.

<sup>576</sup> Gershon, Karen. *A Tempered Wind*. Edited by Phyllis Lassner and Peter Lawson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2009), p. 24.

A legend grows out of your dust  
and finds this muted song in me  
now you are earth as I shall be  
and have relinquished all I must.

The winds have blown the winterfolds  
from all things that are deemed to live  
that spring may gather them and give  
each one a sprig of life to hold.

Your breath is woven into air:  
it is the touch that makes lambs leap.  
Life's lungs are manifold and cheap  
as ghostly winds are rich and rare.

You look at me with snowdrop eyes  
and yearn from every budding tree  
now you are earth and one with me  
and wear my life for your disguise.<sup>577</sup>

The Persephone motif is visible in the imagery throughout Gershon's poem: Anne 'yearn(s) from every budding tree' and her breath 'is the touch that makes lambs leap'. When the poem was first published to a wider audience the poet Edwin Muir, who edited the volume, explained why he had chosen Gershon's work. Aware of its lack 'of a contemporary idiom' he pointed at a criterion he felt much more important: 'the power of poetry to move or illumine or delight'.<sup>578</sup> Some expression such as 'winterfolds' even seem to be Gershon's own invention. The poet appears to explore her adopted tongue, and while searching for a solemn language for commemorating her sister, the translingual imagination illumines the potential of re-discovered English words. While Gershon chose a classical reference as the motif, the form of her poem shows no resemblance with (translations of) Homer's text or Ovid's *Metamorphosis*. Considering that 'Wild Anne in Spring' is written from the perspective of the bereaved, Schiller's 'Klage der Ceres' (1796) springs to mind.<sup>579</sup> As we have seen before, the German classics played a central role in

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<sup>577</sup>Gershon, Karen. 'Wild Anne in Spring' in *New Poets 1959*, edited by Edwin Muir (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1959), p. 53.

<sup>578</sup>Muir, Edwin (ed.). *New Poets 1959*. Ian Crichton Smith, Karen Gershon, Christopher Levenson (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1959), p. 5.

<sup>579</sup>'Ceres' is Demeter's equivalent in the Roman tradition. As most of the European literature on the legend refers to Ovid's *Metamorphosis* rather than Homer's *Iliad*, the Latin names are usually used.

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German-Jewish cultural identity.<sup>580</sup> Hence, Gershon would have been familiar with the poem where an oread tells the mourning mother 'Deine Blumen kehren wieder,/ Deine Tochter kehret nicht'.<sup>581</sup> Removed from her native culture, Gershon writes a monologue addressed to her sister. The poet is not Ceres: she is not mourning her daughter but her older sister; she is not immortal but will eventually be reunited with Anne in death. Considering that Gershon writes that she lives 'by taking thought from' her sister, and that her 'life has its anchorage' in Anne, the poet seems to merge the motif of Persephone with the Jewish tradition of remembrance in which the deceased live on in the memory of the living. Thus, 'Wild Anne in Spring' is a colourful example of poem that emanates from the translingual imagination. While acknowledging that although 'Time lingers' where Anne's body lies, life goes on in Gershon's world, the poet preserves the memory of her sister as she knew her. By likening Anne to the Goddess of Spring, the poet surrounds herself with visible and returning signs of her sister's presence. Although taken away from her and brought to the underworld, Anne returns with spring and continues to give life. Thus, departure and arrival are part of a never ending circle - making departure more bearable as it is not finite.

Death is also the topic of the poem by Beer which we shall examine now. In her 'Villanelle (After Dylan Thomas)', the poet engages with one of the best known poems by the Welsh poet. Thomas wrote 'Do not go gentle into that good night' in March 1951 addressed to his father who was gravely ill, losing his eye-sight and approaching death.<sup>582</sup> Employing the challenging form of the villanelle, Thomas's emotional poem evokes the father's strong-mindedness and urges him to 'rage against the dying of the light':<sup>583</sup>

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<sup>580</sup>The work of Schiller and Goethe continued to played an important part on the curriculum of Jewish schools after Jewish-German children were expelled from 'Aryan' schools: 'Es war eine ironische Gerechtigkeit, dass in dieser Zeit der Barbarei die hervorragendsten Äußerungen deutscher Kultur in den jüdischen Schulen bewahrt wurden'. Mendes-Flohr, Paul. 'Jüdische Schulen' in *Deutsch-jüdische Geschichte der Neuzeit*, Band 4, edited by M. A. Meyer et al. (München: Beck, 2000), p. 291.

<sup>581</sup>Schiller, Friedrich von. 'Ceres Klage' in *Schillers Gedichte*, edited by Klaus L. Berghahn (Königstein: Athenäum, 1980), pp. 167.

<sup>582</sup>Davies, Walford (ed.). *Dylan Thomas. Everyman's Poetry* (London: J. M. Dent, 1997), p. 111.

<sup>583</sup>Thomas, Dylan. 'Do not go gentle into that good night' in *Dylan Thomas. Everyman's Poetry*, edited by Walford Davies (London: J. M. Dent, 1997), p. 94.

Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night

Do not go gentle into that good night,  
 Old age should burn and rave at close of day;  
 Rage, rage against the dying of the light.  
 [...] <sup>584</sup>

In her 'Villanelle (After Dylan Thomas)' Beer takes up Thomas's famous line but rejects his demand. Breaking the regular metre of Thomas' poem in her opening-line, the octogenarian emphasises her disagreement and insists that she 'will not rage against the dying of the light'.

Villanelle (After Dylan Thomas)

I will not rage against the dying of the light;  
 Death follows life as night must follow day,  
 but Lord, I have a problem with your might.

For quite a long time God was good and right  
 and in my bed at nightfall I could say:  
 I will not rage against the dying of the light.

I heard of babies in their cots at night,  
 of good young people dying every day.  
 You understand I had a problem with your might.

I thought, dear Lord, that you had perfect sight  
 and love and wisdom, not let fortune play.  
 I would not rage against the dying of the light.

In war I had to watch the soldiers' plight,  
 how they were slaughtered, spattered corpses grey.  
 Dear Lord, I had a problem with your might.

I do not feel the world is governed right,  
 death meted out by powers as they may.  
 I will not rage against the dying of the light  
 But Lord, I have great problems with your might. <sup>585</sup>

Beer's response to Thomas's famous poem demonstrates how the different angle from which she approaches death and dying leads to new insights. The woman poet's view can only partly be explained by her age and gender, and it

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<sup>584</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>585</sup> Beer, Alice. *Facing Forward, Looking Back* (Nottingham: Poetry Monthly Press, 1999), p. 15.

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seems far more decisive that, although born around the same time as the Welsh poet,<sup>586</sup> she experienced the same historic events from a very different perspective.

It seems that Beer can accept death but not necessarily the circumstances that cause it and she refuses to split the two issues. Looking at the reasons why Beer 'had a problem' with the reality of death and dying it becomes obvious that the poet feels strongly about the (often unnecessary) death of young people and the slaughter of soldiers in wars. Following the carnage of World War I Beer was a convinced pacifist. A refugee from Nazi Europe and a Jewish Quaker, she has long lost the child's belief in a God who governs everything and is aware that it is often human powers that mete out death 'as they may'. From the perspective of the dislocated poet who has witnessed hunger in the streets of Vienna, who has feared for her interned husband's life and seen death and devastation in the streets of London during the Blitz 'rage against the dying of the light' is not a plausible option. To her, the death of an old man because of illness and old age, no matter how close one has been to this person, is nothing she would rage against.

Referring to the poem in his introduction to Beer's collection *Facing Forward Looking Back* (1999) Huw Watkins, admires the poet's 'boldness' in using one of Thomas's most famous lines and attests that her villanelle 'is both humorous and serious and very telling'.<sup>587</sup> It seems that the translingual poet is telling her adopted country in her adopted language that there are things less acceptable than the death of an old man. Taking up Thomas's line she moves the familiar quote into unfamiliar territories. Without contesting the sincerity of the Welsh poet's words, Beer elucidates why she will not join in. By contemplating the literal meaning of a line of such a famous poem the translingual poet provides the reader with a deeper understanding, thus stretching the boundaries of English language and literature.

Kramer's poem '1939' is another example of how the translingual poet explores language and literary heritage of her adopted country. The first encounter with English poetry came right at the beginning of Kramer's stay in

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<sup>586</sup> Beer was born in autumn 1912 and Thomas in autumn 1914

<sup>587</sup> Watkins, Huw. 'Introduction' in Beer, Alice. *Facing Forward, Looking Back* (Nottingham: Poetry Monthly Press, 1999), p. 1.

Hertfordshire. '1939' recalls the moment when the poet's 15 year old self recited a Shakespearian sonnet to the cleaning lady.

### 1939

Then, to improve my English,  
I learnt some poetry by heart.  
I loved the Shakespeare sonnets:  
"When in disgrace with fortune  
And men's eyes I all alone beweeep..."  
I quoted it to the cleaning lady  
Who looked at me in bafflement,  
Had no idea what I meant.  
In time I realized that language  
Is in flux, has changed its music.  
My love stayed undiminished.<sup>588</sup>

It is Shakespeare's sonnet XXIX the young refugee girl declaims in front of the unsuspecting cleaner and it continues:

[...] my outcast state,  
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,  
And look upon myself and curse my fate,  
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,  
[...]<sup>589</sup>

Kramer must have recognised herself in Shakespeare's words: an outcast from Nazi Germany with little hope to get her parents out of an increasingly desperate situation, she could hardly be blamed for cursing her fate. How amazed must the teenager have been to find her own sorrows expressed in Shakespeare's sonnet. It seems that the old-fashioned language did not distract her from discovering a truth in these lines, and the sixteenth century poetry appears to have been as accessible to her as any other utterance in her adopted language. The 'baffled' cleaning lady seems to have been a first indicator of the fact that 'language/ Is in flux' and that the same meaning cannot necessarily be reproduced by employing the same phrases that somebody else used. Moreover, the poet seems to agree with Rushdie's notion that she 'can't simply use the language in the way the British did' but that 'it

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<sup>588</sup> Kramer, Lotte. *Turning the Key* (Ware, Herts: Rockingham Press, 2009), p. 18.

<sup>589</sup> Shakespeare, William. 'Sonnet XXIX' in *Shakespeare's Sonnets and A Lover's Complaint*, edited by Stanley Wells (Oxford: University Press, 1985), p. 43.

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needs remaking' for her own purposes.<sup>590</sup> With '1939' Kramer applies the lesson she learned: it is written in her own English. While quoting from Shakespeare's sonnet, she does not attempt to reproduce his meaning but uses it as a peg on which to hang a new story, told from her own angle and illuminated by the translingual imagination. First of all, we meet the teenager who learns poetry to improve her linguistic competence in the new language – thereby introducing the German-Jewish girl who grew up with the ideal of *Bildung* as a means to participating fully in society. Then, adding new relevance to Shakespeare's famous lines, '1939' illustrates how an outsider can access meaning which a native speaker appears to be barred from. Of course, the cleaning lady may not have been the most educated person and could be forgiven for not picking up the significance Shakespeare's sonnet had for young Lotte. Nevertheless, part of the lady's 'bafflement' might also be owed to the fact that a vast majority of English people were unaware of the feelings of a Jewish refugee girl. Thus, it seems plausible that many of them 'Had no idea what (she) meant'. With '1939' the poet seems to point at the importance of finding one's own authentic language, not least to establish a sense of identity and belonging. Her translingual poem also highlights the fact that, far from being just an English national treasure, Shakespeare's poetry can speak to an outsider in a way which adds relevance and meaning, and extends the scope of understanding – with compliments from the translingual imagination.

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<sup>590</sup> Rushdie 1991: 17.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

The aim of my thesis has been to provide a theory of the translingual imagination that can be used as a tool to enhance our understanding of the English poetry written women of German-Jewish origin. Taking into consideration the historical context and exploring different concepts of identity as well as drawing from theoretical approaches from areas as diverse as bilingualism and translation, psychology and literary studies, the core criteria of translingual writing have emerged: biographical events that triggered the language switch, motifs of loss and gain, and defamiliarization and intertextual references as visible elements of textual action and interaction. As we have seen, these criteria do not only enable us identify translingual writing, but can also be understood as tools to explore translingual writing. Having applied these tools in the analysis of poems by Karen Gershon, Lotte Kramer, Gerda Mayer and Alice Beer it seems that identifying and fathoming the traces of the translingual imagination has helped to uncover different layers of meaning that otherwise may have remained hidden.

In this concluding chapter, I shall revisit the criteria of the translingual imagination and reflect on how their utilisation has contributed to a better understanding of the work of the four poets.

### **Biographical events**

In chapter 3 I have explicated the significance of the biography of a translingual author. Following the analysis of the poems it seems that although all four poets revisit biographical events in their writing, there are considerable differences between them. Gershon's work, for instance, seems to focus on remembering and recording certain days and events that had an impact on German Jewry in general. In the early stages of her career the poet herself had stated that she writes 'in justification of [her] survival', concluding

## Conclusion

I must commemorate my parents and all Jews and all refugees because I believe that life has conditioned me for this purpose.<sup>591</sup>

This attitude is also reflected in her book *We Came as Children*, 'a collective autobiography of refugees', as the subtitle puts it. It was the first documentary about child refugees from Nazi Germany, using more than two-hundred testimonies to form a single account.<sup>592</sup> Thus, it seems that the experience of being up-rooted and the threat of what she felt was the individualization of exile impacted on Gershon's writing and influenced her choices.

Kramer's poetry appears to focus more on the commemoration of individuals, and her poems about family members could be compared to miniatures like those that you find in amulets: affectionate portraits of loved and respected ones that show complex personalities that cannot easily be reduced to faceless victims. Furthermore, the poet also reflects on her own development from the young refugee to the grown-up woman. Thus, her poems are not only retrospection but include a prospect.

Mayer's biographical poems are often written as a retrospective first person narrative, for example in 'The Emigration Game' where the poetic persona recalls events in the past but includes questions that only occurred to her later, or adding comments made by other people. However, the child's perspective is kept alive in Mayer's poems. When we hear about the mother in 'The Emigration Game', we look at her from the child's angle: little details like her hands without gloves have been noticed by the child that was hurrying alongside her. Like Kramer, Mayer evokes images of her loved ones. These images are often fragmented, precious memories of shared moments, preserved and brought to new life in a poem.

Beer's departure from Austria was far less traumatic than that of her fellow poets. As she was not forced away from her loved ones violently, her first arrival in England is not marred by painful separation. Unlike the other poets whose work I discussed in this thesis, she was travelling as an adult. Her memories of the English landscape, of feelings of anticipation and excitement

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<sup>591</sup> Gershon, Karen. 'A Stranger in a Strange Land', *Jewish Quarterly* Vol. 7, No. 1 (26) Winter 1959/60, p. 11.

<sup>592</sup> See for example J. M. Richie. *German-speaking Exiles in Great Britain* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), p.4.

on her journey north distinguish her from her fellow writers. It is striking that most of Beer's poems relate to her life in England. When she recalls moments of kindness ('Stranger on a train'), excitement ('Journey and Arrival'), or strain ('A long time ago'), all these events are linked to her adopted country. The emotions roused in Beer's poems are multifaceted and the picture she draws of England is not always only complimentary.

Considering the central role that motifs of departure and arrival play in translingual writing, it is significant that, while Gershon, Kramer and Mayer all mourn the departure of their parents, it is only Beer who can commemorate the arrival of her father.

### **Loss and Gain**

The poets' responses to loss and gain range from anger, despair and sadness on one side to appreciation and gratefulness on the other. Again, Beer's situation differs from that of the *Kindertransport* poets as she did not lose her parents to the fascist genocide. Whereas Kramer, Mayer and Gershon all write about their struggle following the loss of their home and family, Beer relates to 'loss' mainly in the context of the death of her husband ('Questions and Answers').

Gershon, Kramer and Mayer all revisit their native homes in their poetry. Although the title of Mayer's poem suggests she is mourning the loss of a country, she focuses explicitly on the very place where she grew up. 'My Own My Native Land' draws a picture of what became of the house and garden where she lived with her family before the Sudetenland was occupied – and notes that the place as she knew it does no longer exist. 'Hide and Seek' takes an even closer look at the house: inspecting the 'open recess/ under the first/ floor balcony' Mayer searches for her lost family, knowing that there are only shadows left.

Gershon, in contrast, seems to mourn the loss not only of the immediate family home but also of her German *Heimat*. While she must be regarded as the one who most resolutely tried to cut off all ties with her native country, her return to the German forest highlights the pain the loss caused her. As we have seen, the German forest is part of the national myth and Gershon's sense of being expelled from the nation combined with her knowledge about the horror

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of the Holocaust are visible in her poem 'In the Wood'. The degree to which Gershon had previously identified herself as German becomes even more apparent in her 'Songs in Exile' where the loss of her native country is likened to the loss of Eretz Israel.

Kramer also writes about the loss of her native country. In 'Roots' the poet acknowledges her German origin and refers to her German(-Jewish) ancestry. However, even though the imagery of up-rootedness hints at the violent and painful experience of being robbed of the native soil, the poet's demand for 'sound earth' in her new country shifts the focus from loss to, albeit rather pragmatic, gain. Kramer refuses to be homeless and insists on a place where she can belong. Without denying her loss, the poet insists on discovering what she gained, as illustrated in her poem about the moon ('Androgynous').

## Defamiliarization

By examining the poems it has become apparent that defamiliarizing and de-automatizing elements are present at a number of different levels. In my analysis I have demonstrated how the disruption of the iambic meter, the lack of punctuation, enjambments and intercepted lines all disrupt the reading of the poems, thereby foregrounding aspects that might have otherwise passed unnoticed.

On a semantic level, the poets employ cliché while looking at it from a new angle. At times, they use metaphors and imagery that are not easily accessible and that may even sound strange to an English reader, such as 'rich and fat' when referring to ice.

Another example of de-automatizing strategies applied by the poets is what could be called a misleading use of well-known phrases, be it 'Stranger on a train', 'Out of A...', or lines taken from famous English poetry. As the poets tempt us into what an English reader might think of a familiar territory, defamiliarization strikes and for a moment we look at the world from a different angle.

### Intertexts

As we have seen, the intertextual references in the poetry written by the four women originate from a variety of different sources. The age of the refugees seem to have had a lasting impact not only on their ability to cope with the loss of their home and family but also on their poetic choices. For example, Mayer who was the youngest of the four poets at the time of her departure from Prague often returns to those German texts that were accessible to her during her childhood, such as the ballads she recited with her mother. Kramer, in contrast, enjoyed almost four more years of formal education in Germany and also had the advantage of being accompanied by her teacher when she left her native town. As a result, she had access to German literature even after she left the country and was therefore in a position to appreciate the work of poets such as Rilke alongside English writers.

Jewish intertexts are particularly strong in the poems written by Kramer and Gershon. The latter had ‘venerated Rilke’ as a child, and had written her early German poems ‘in the German romantic tradition’.<sup>593</sup> However, after her native country rejected her, Gershon began to place even more emphasis on her Jewish heritage.

Considering the differences between the four poets in relation to Jewish intertextual references it appears that the two women who were born in Germany had developed a stronger Jewish identity by the time they left than the refugees from Prague and Vienna. This can be explained by the fact that, unlike Mayer and Beer, Gershon and Kramer had already spent five years of their lives under the discriminating legislation of the Nazi regime. Being excluded from German public life they were officially reduced to their Jewish identity. Thus, forced out of their German identity and regarded as exclusively Jewish they inevitably had to develop an understanding of their place within this community. Following the Holocaust, they felt an even stronger responsibility towards their Jewish heritage. Their Kaddish poems can be read in that sense: they are evidence that the poets accept their belonging to the Jewish tradition and are willing to fulfil the *mitzvah* of remembering.

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<sup>593</sup> Gershon, Karen. ‘A Stranger in a Strange Land’ *Jewish Quarterly* Vol. 7, No. 1 (26) Winter 1959/60, p. 10.

## Conclusion

References to Christian intertexts can be found mainly in the poems by Kramer, Mayer und Beer.<sup>594</sup> They occur in the form of Christian terminology (for example in Mayer's 'Bible Stories') as well as in the context of shared Jewish-Christian values (such as the 'love' described in Kramer's 'Friends'). However, they never dominate a Jewish intertext but seem to be added to extend the intertextual dialogue.

Among the secular intertexts visible in the translingual poems discussed in this thesis are, apart from the German references mentioned earlier, English and Greek/Latin texts. Gershon refers to the latter when she likens her sister Anne to Persephone. It seems that the poet is returning not only to her Jewish roots but also to the shared roots of Western culture: among many others German and English poets found their inspiration in the works of Greek and Latin literature. By reviving the ancient myth the poet appeals to the unifying power of more than three thousand years of shared cultural heritage. In view of this long period of time, the expulsion from German culture and literature might shrink in importance.

While Gershon appears to find reassurance in ancient literature, Beer, Mayer and Kramer make frequent intertextual references to English literature. Kramer, for instance, discovers Shakespeare's sonnets from the perspective of a continental refugee; Mayer finds that a shepherd from the early nineteenth century Lake District shares a quality with her own mother and Beer ensconces herself in English literature by starting an argument with one of its great poets.

Thus, it seems that the four translingual poets have entered the dialogue with the language and culture of their adopted country. They never hide their cultural roots but they are happy to grow them in new soil.

## The Translingual Imagination

Valéry has likened poetry to dance and this research project should have demonstrated how the translingual imagination enhances the English dances

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<sup>594</sup> The reference to 'Plage' in the ninth stanza of Gershon's 'A Jew's Calendar' is ambivalent at best; references to Jesus in other poems by Gershon which are not discussed in this thesis mainly refer to Jesus as a Jew and not as the founder of the Christian religion.

performed by women of German-Jewish origin. As we have seen, reading the work of Karen Gershon, Lotte Kramer, Gerda Mayer and Alice Beer as translingual poetry allows us to access facets of their writing that may have remained hidden otherwise. Furthermore, using the criteria of the translingual as tools to explore the poems does not brush aside the differences between the poets, and their diverse responses to their experience of dislocation. Quite the opposite: it allows us to acknowledge their distinctive, individual steps that form their translingual dances, thereby avoiding any essentialist simplification while discussing them as 'English women poets of German-Jewish origin.

As the work of *Kindertransport* poets and German-Jewish exiles in general has often been labelled as Holocaust poetry, little attention has been paid to aspects of intertextual dialogue and cultural gain. Emphasising issues of loss and dislocation reduces the poets to victims of historic events, whereas the concept of translingualism opens up new space for a more comprehensive understanding of literature written by authors who had been translated as a child, to borrow Michael Hamburger's expression.

When Edwin Muir introduced Karen Gershon in his volume *New Poets*<sup>595</sup> he did not mention her refugee background or that her parents perished in the Holocaust. To him, it seems to have been irrelevant – he felt it far more important to promote the work of a young poet that exemplified 'the power of poetry to move or illumine or delight'.<sup>596</sup> The case studies of the four translingual women poets have hopefully confirmed the potential that Muir has sensed in Gershon's work. Moreover, I hope to have demonstrated that their power 'to move or illumine or delight' derives from the translingual imagination which challenges and deepens our understanding of meaning, adding fascinating views from an oblique angle.

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<sup>595</sup>Muir, Edwin (ed.). *New Poets 1959*. Ian Crichton Smith, Karen Gershon, Christopher Levenson (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1959).

<sup>596</sup>Muir 1959: 5.

## Conclusion

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