

YIDDISH AFTER THE HOLOCAUST

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VISION AND REDEMPTION: ABRAHAM SUTZKEVER'S POEMS OF ZION(ISM)

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A matter of weeks before his departure in September 1947 aboard the ship, appropriately named *Patria*, that would bring him and his family as illegal immigrants to the Land of Israel, Abraham Sutzkever completed a bitter farewell ode, 'Tsu poyln' (To Poland)' in which he repudiated the myth of a Polish-Jewish cultural symbiosis that he had helped to nurture in his formative years as a member of *Yung-Vilne*.

Only a decade earlier, he had anchored his maiden volume of poetry, *Lider* (1937) with an eight-part ballad about the Polish romantic poet Cyprian Norwid in which he offered up his vision of a community of faith based on art that would transcend the hostility that had poisoned relations between Jews and Poles:

*s'darf zayn a likht, vos ale mentshn zoln filn, zen –
a libshaft, vos iz sheynkayt, un a sheynkayt, vos iz libe.
bloyz demolt vet a brudershaft, vos keyn mol nit geven,
farflekhtn ale elnte in likhtiker mesibe.*

There must be a light that all of humanity can feel, see
A love that is beauty and a beauty that is love.
Then a brotherhood never before realized
will weave all solitary beings into bright celebration.²

Sutzkever then was still naïve enough to offer up a denationalized vision of human kinship based on literature and art in which *der himl oysgeshternter iz ist dayn manuskript*, 'the star-filled heavens are now your manuscript'. His determination to make his poetry rise above the demands of the 'Jewish street' was resented by some of his *Yung-Vilne* colleagues who were put off by his refined aesthetic posture.³ However, when he returned home to Vilna in July 1944 to dig up the literary treasures from the YIVO collection he had helped to protect from the Nazis as part of the

'Paper Brigade',⁴ Sutzkever's encounter with death in the Vilna Ghetto, where his son was murdered moments after his birth and the poet himself barely escaped his own execution in the death pits at Ponar, and his time as partisan fighter in the Narotsh forest, where Jewish fighters found themselves hunted not only by the Nazis but by Polish partisan units, left scant opportunity for trans-national star-gazing. His experiences under one totalitarian regime prompted him to recognize that it was only a matter of time before the Soviet Union, the new occupying power, would impose its own version of repression on the remaining splinters of local Jewish life.

Inspired by the details of his own biography, the first-person speaker of 'Tsu poyln' pays one final visit to Warsaw to bid farewell to the unofficial capital of Polish Jewry. As he roams its deserted Jewish streets, he is besieged by questions:

*vi lozt men iber
dem eymek-habokhe, di shtiber, di griber?
vi shtelt men der pustkayt a denkmol, a tsaykhn,
es zol tsu mayn eynikls eynikl graykhn?
vos tut men, der nekhtn zol vern nisgale
dem morgn?*

How can I go and leave behind
All that there was in this valley of sorrow?
How shall I raise a monument to this emptiness here?
What can I do so that a sign should appear
that will show my grandchild's grandchild
all our yesterdays tomorrow?

In the struggle to find the most appropriate way to memorialize Polish Jewry, the speaker is drawn to Peretz's tomb in the Jewish cemetery on Okopowa Street, one of the few Jewish communal sites to emerge relatively unscathed from the war. Rather than allowing Polish soil the honour of hosting a future pilgrimage site to the memory of Eastern European Jewry, the poet imagines himself hoisting Peretz's tomb on his shoulders so that it is not left behind as a lonely marker of former spiritual grandeur. The poem's act of creative disinterment concludes with an appropriation of Peretz's words from his play *Di goldene keyt* (1906-1910): *der oyhel [...] vet mir a veg in di morgns farkern: / ot azoy geyen mir/ di neshomes – flakern*, 'The tomb will open the path to future: So we go on, as we came, / proud Jews with souls aflame.'⁵ Embedded within this inter-text from *Di*

goldene keyt are echoes of the rousing lines that conclude the drama's first act, in which Peretz imagines *groyse shtoltse yidn*, 'great proud Jews', and *shabes-yontevdike yidn*, 'Sabbath-Festival Jews' – individuals who force the hand of fate to restore the national spirit in a disorienting age.⁶

In imaginatively transporting the entirety of the Polish-Jewish cultural inheritance with him to the Jewish homeland, Sutzkever assumes a posture of national dignity designed to steel the backs of his fellow survivors. A full generation before Holocaust memorialization emerged as the secular religion of post-war Jewish life, Sutzkever warned that a culture of memory alone, devoid of faith and a sense of future mission, was ultimately a recipe for self-pity. It should have come as little surprise, then, when just a year after the establishment of the State of Israel, Sutzkever again borrowed from Peretz's lexicon to name the Yiddish quarterly journal he founded *Di goldene keyt*. By aspiring to the highest standards of Yiddish writing and scholarship, this journal was designed to provide Yiddish culture in Israel with a legitimate home, and to forge links between Yiddish writers and readers in the Diaspora and those in Israel.⁷ In naming the journal *The Golden Chain*, Sutzkever returned to the vision he had conjured up at the end of 'Tsu poyln' when his speaker pledged to carry with him the legacy of Polish Jewry. He did not write a foreword or introduction to the journal's inaugural issue because he wanted it to be seen as an actualization of its title – not as a new beginning, but as an organic link in modern Yiddish culture. His success in convincing the *Histadrut* to underwrite the cost of the journal's production was secured, in part, by his recognition that the journal could be a forum for bridging the gap between Yiddish and Hebrew culture. To this end, the journal's early issues featured translations into Yiddish of works from Hebrew literature, and discussions about contemporary Jewish culture.⁸ *Di goldene keyt* carved out a place for Yiddish in the Labour-Zionist family soon after the founding of the State of Israel, leaving only the most intransigent Hebrew ideologues to continue to fight Yiddish as a symbol of *Galut* heritage, or fear it as a threat to the further development of Hebrew culture in Israel.⁹ Sutzkever justified the need for a quick resumption of Yiddish literary activities in Israel in national terms: 'I, one who saw the destruction of my people, felt that we, the small remnant of Yiddish writers, could with the power of our pen put in no claim for the blood of Ponar. But we could and we must put in our claim for the burning of our language on the bonfires by giving it

rebirth in the land of our ascent.'¹⁰ From this perspective, Yiddish could play an integrative role in holding the diverse chapters of his own biography and Jewish culture together. Sutzkever was only the latest of modern Jewish cultural figures to embrace Baal Makhshoves's notion of 'two languages, one literature,' as in his assertion: 'Yiddish and Hebrew are the two eyes of Jewish life. Take either out and we are blind.'¹¹

Soon after arriving in the Land of Israel, Sutzkever embarked upon a new thematic chapter in his writing, one that undertook to claim as its subject the land and peopledscape of his new, yet familiar home. In the Israeli volumes *In fayer-vogn* (Chariot of Fire, 1952), *In midber sinay* (Sinai Desert, 1957), and the epic poem *Gaystike erd* (Spiritual Soil, 1961), he crafted the most refined Zionist moment ever to appear in Yiddish literature.¹² I use the word 'Zionist' deliberately, to suggest the degree to which the contents of these volumes yoke Yiddish poetry to the revival of the Jews in their homeland that was one of the cornerstones of cultural Zionism.¹³ Sutzkever's poetic re-discovery of Biblical landscapes, his exotic lyrics about Jews from the East, and his celebration of Jewish heroism in the defence of the homeland serve as markers of roots reclaimed, community reconstituted, and pride restored. At the same time, the frequent poetic flashbacks to the life and fate of European Jewry that he features throughout these volumes suggest that he was attempting to shape the way Israelis conceived of the relationship between the European *khurbm* and the birth of the Jewish state. His writing underscores just how much the new Jewish state owed to the generations of those who longed for its reconstitution, but were not present to participate in its physical upbuilding.

Despite the importance the poet accorded to this new period in his creativity, critics have not mined sufficiently the degree to which Sutzkever's Zionist writings are a critical artistic moment in which the poet struggled to reconcile his personal past and the collective catastrophe of Jewish Eastern Europe with the poetic imperative to rekindle the awe and wonderment that defined his voice in the 1930s.¹⁴ For instance, several collections of critical essays on Sutzkever – *Yoyvl bukh* and *Yikhes fun lid*¹⁵ – underplay the place of these Zionist volumes in his overall *oeuvre* by according comparatively little space to discussion of their contents. Benjamin and Barbara Harshav's volume of English translations from Sutzkever seems to restrict its selections from this period to poems that contain a universal thrust more easily digested by English (and non-Jewish) readers. Does the relative lack

of critical attention to Sutzkever's Zionist poetry reflect a *political* distaste for a Yiddish-Zionist poetry, or an *aesthetic* judgment¹⁶ that when he yokes himself to the cause of cultural Zionism he jeopardizes artistic standards? My own sense is that Sutzkever's reputation as the lyric voice of nature and metaphysical groping forged in the late 1930s, and his new status as the most refined poetic witness to the destruction of European Jewry, were so fixed in the minds of critics and readers that the notion of Sutzkever as 'Zionist' writer seemed almost coarse. Of course, Sutzkever's own *oeuvre* offered a correction to this dominant view. He understood the challenge clearly: 'We must not assimilate into Israel, we must assimilate Israel into ourselves.'¹⁷ Sutzkever summarized this philosophy to Yankev Pat by explaining: 'If the destruction was sung about in Yiddish, so too must the revival.'¹⁸ Greater critical attention to his Zionist poetry will show that it is not an aberrant stage in his writing, but is rather an integrating force that provides him with fresh sources for the retrieval of his original poetic of mystical wonderment.

Only a year after arriving in Israel, Sutzkever published the first of only two book-length poems of epic national scope that he would undertake in his career. *Geheymshot* (Secret City) tells of the efforts of ten Jews – a representative *minyem* of survivors – to live out the Nazi terror by hiding in the sewers beneath Vilna. The poem concludes when one of its surviving characters is charged with an awesome collective mission:

*fil on zikh a zekele shtoyb, zay mekayem,
di benkshaft fun gor dem farshnitnem zoymen
un tu es tshpreytn in yerusholayim
kedey es zol dortn tseblen zikh. omeyn.*¹⁹

Fill a sack of dust, fulfill your duty
to the longing of the murdered seed
and spread it in Jerusalem
so that it blooms there. Amen.

In filling a bag of earthen ashes from the former 'Jerusalem of Lithuania' (as Vilna was colloquially referred to) and transporting it to the eternal-living Jerusalem, the poet imaginatively donates grains of the diasporic past to fertilize the soil of contemporary Jewish life, hoping that they will play a creative role in the way Jews understand the journey from national catastrophe to rebirth.

This thematic thread is replayed several years later in 'Fun bovl' (From Babylon), a poem that invites readers to participate in the realization of the age-old prayer of *kibbutz-galuyot* (ingathering of the exiles) by placing them alongside the speaker at Lod airport as he greets the arrival of a planeload of new immigrants from Baghdad. As the title's anachronistic reference to Babylonian Jewry suggests, in these new arrivals the speaker sees the return home of a community representing one of the golden periods of national creativity. In presenting the exoticism of these new arrivals, he brings into Yiddish the excitement of being present at the re-uniting of eastern and western Jewries. The strength of the Jewish bond to the Land of Israel reaches its climax when the heart of an old man wrapped in a prayer shawl bursts with joy the moment he kisses its soil *vi a yerie*, '[as one kisses] the parchment of a Torah scroll'. The imagery suggests that the Land of Israel can be experienced as a holy text in its own right, something to be read and interpreted for inspiration. Before the old man takes his final breath, he manages one final request to his granddaughter:

*atsind az im iz shoybn bashert tsu lign vu yeshaye,
ven zayn gebeyn vet zogn shire, oysgeleyzt fun ovl,
zol shtilerhayt, leman hashem, zahave zayn getraye,
araynleygn in keyver im dray shteyndekeh fun Bovl.*

Now that I am destined to lie near Isaiah
where my bones will sing praises, redeemed from mourning,
Zahava, be true, for the sake of God,
and quietly place on my grave three stones from Babylon.

Peretz's tomb in 'Tsu poyln,' the sack of earth from Vilna's death pits in *Geheymshot*, and these stones *fun bovl* all function as memory markers of the diversity, vitality and catastrophes of Jewish life in the Diaspora. All three poems argue that only by embarking on the journey from exile to homeland, and synthesizing these diasporic memory markers into the new culture that is being created there, can they be assured of a continued place in the Jewish national consciousness.

Sutzkever's earliest poems written in the Land of Israel were an attempt to negotiate between past and present, between European memories and Israeli realities. For instance, in the cycle 'Erets-yisroel erd' (Soil of the Land of Israel), published in Tel-Aviv in 1949 in the Yiddish journal *Undzers*, Sutzkever forges his own harrowing sea-journey and initial im-

pressions of Palestine into a collective myth of rebirth. In one of its poems, 'Shturem af di vaser bay krete' ('Storm Waters Off Crete', pre-dated at publication with the notation '*Patria* Ship, September 1947'), the boat carrying illegal immigrants from Europe to Palestine is almost capsized by stormy waves and torn apart by threatening rocks. Its speaker conjures his imaginative powers to intervene against this destructive force of nature by reminding the 'storm-king' that its power is nothing compared to the emotional attachment between diasporic Jews and their national homeland:

*afn zelbn yam
hot haleyvi zikh gelozn fun zayn heym der shpanisher,
un zayn tsion-benkshaf, vos ikh otem-ayn ir flam,
vet dayn kinigraykh bahershn, hersher du vulkanisher!*

On the same sea
Halevi abandoned his Spanish home
and his Zion-longing, whose flame I inhale
will also master your kingdom, you volcanic ruler!

In setting himself up as a direct descendent of the medieval proto-Zionist poet Judah Halevi ('My heart is in the east, and I am at the edge of the west[...]'), Sutzkever envisions himself continuing and fulfilling the mission that was denied to so many that preceded him. The contrast between the stormy sea all around him (symbolic of the political context of the struggle for the establishment of the Jewish state), and the speaker's internal confidence in the ultimate success of his journey, led him to conclude the first volume of his collected works, *Poetische verk* (1963), with this poem, whose concluding image involved incorporating the destruction of European Jewry into the way he perceived the new Jewish homeland:

*un di khvalies nemen zunik-shtil
di tsehakte templen vider boyen.
biz antkegn shvebt mir der galil
zunen zeks milyon in zayne toyen.*

And the waves become sunny-quiet
the shattered temples are rebuilt.
The Galilee soars opposite me
six million suns reflected in its dew.²⁰

Both *In fayer-vogn*, Sutzkever's first volume of collected poems writ-

ten in Israel between 1947-1949, and the second volume of *Poetische verk* open with a different lyric that appeared in the cycle 'Erets-yisroel erd.' It picks up thematically and chronologically where the previous poem leaves off, as a confirmation of arrival. This untitled poem inaugurated the first section of *In fayer-vogn* – appropriately titled 'Shehekhiyonu' ('You give us life') – to accentuate the poet's dominant mood of thanksgiving.

*ven kh'volt nit zayn mit dir baynand,
nit otemen dos glik un vey do,
ven kh'volt nit brenen mitn land,
vulkanish land in khevley-leyde;
ven kh'volt atsind, nokh mayn akeyde,
nit mitgeboyrn mitn land,
vu yeder shteyndl iz mayn zeyde-
gezetikt volt mikh nit dos broyt,
dos vaser nit geshtilt mayn gumen.
biz oysgegangen kh'volt fargoyt
un bloyz mayn benkshaf volt gekumen.²¹*

Were I not at one with you
Not breathing the joy and pain here,
Were I not burning with the land
Volcanic land in its birth-pangs;
After my sacrifice there
Were I not reborn with the land
Where every pebble is my grandfather –
Bread would not still my hunger
Water would not soothe my gums.
I would turn gentile and I expired
And only my longing would have come.

In a masterpiece of liturgical and poetic inventiveness, Sutzkever marks his landing in the Land of Israel with a *shehekhiyonu* for the Zionist age.²² It is almost as though the traditional *shehekhiyonu* prayer was too narrow and poetically flat to express his range of emotions effectively. Through a virtuoso rhyme scheme yoking elements from the Germanic, Hebrew-Aramaic and Slavic spheres (*vey-do*, *havley leyde*, *akeyde*, *zeyde*) Yiddish – not Hebrew – is shown to contain within itself such a diversity of experience that it testifies to the interdependence of Diaspora and Zion in the Jewish culture. From the very first line, Sutzkever imparts a sense of mystery into his writing by working in the conditional tense, and directing his

lines to an unspecified listener – *ven ikh volt nit zayn mit dir baynand?* The informal and intimate *dir* suggests that its intended addressee is not God, the traditional recipient of the *shehekhionu* prayer. The speaker could be addressing the Land of Israel itself, as the end rhymes *baynand* (at one with) and *land* propose. This reading is complicated somewhat by the fact that the Land of Israel is subsequently referred to in line three in the third person. I want to suggest that in this very first line of his maiden Zionist volume, the speaker's addressee is deliberately ambiguous, allowing the poet simultaneously to address himself both to the Land of Israel and to those murdered back in Europe. Though 'at one' physically with the land, he also feels himself emotionally, even metaphysically, bound to his personal dead. In the speaker's self-image of being 'reborn with the land' he fuses individual and national experience to suggest that the fate of the Jewish people and its land are an organic unit. He does not portray himself as an immigrant, but as a returnee to a place 'where every pebble is my grandfather.' The negative conditionality of Sutzkever's rhetoric – the entire poem is built on a series of 'ifs' and 'nots' – further accentuates the poet's miraculous interpretation of his own survival. Even the reference to bread and water – the minimum requirements for survival – suggest that his presence in the Land of Israel is now the basic condition for his creative and national survival. The poem's conditionality acknowledges his anomalous position as one of the few among many millions who is blessed enough to witness to Jewish independence. But who, we might ask, confers this blessing upon him? The poem directs its thanks to the historic longing of the Jewish people for this sliver of land that allows him to claim it as his birth-right. The penultimate line's sharp word play in transforming the verb *fargeyen* (to expire or to set) into *fargoyt*²³ (a sharp neologism for 'becoming a Gentile') secures the poem's Zionist reading of history, in which the only viable option for the European Jew who has survived his own sacrifice and does not want to risk being consumed by a Gentile world is *aliyah*. The poem concludes with an even more stunning confirmation of the visceral bond between the people and their homeland by asserting that even had he shared in the fate of so many of his brethren and died a martyr (or even, if we allow ourselves to read biographically, had the poet had remained behind in Soviet Eastern Europe and disappeared behind its totalitarian curtain), his longing for Zion would have completed the journey on its own. By suggesting that the Zionist idea transcends temporal, physical,

even conscious boundaries, Sutzkever's poem argues that the national dreams of all Jews, if not all Jews themselves, have made it home.²⁴

As *In fayer-vogn* unfolds, Sutzkever's colourful and musical impressions of the diverse landscape of Zion are offered as part of his process of poetic naturalization. From the section about the empty expanses of the Negev desert where *do hot zayne kunstbilder oysgeshtelt breyshis*, 'Genesis still exhibits its art' – reminiscent of his earliest poetry of artistic self-discovery in the barren landscape of Siberia – to Jerusalem's paranormally labelled *feldzene shpiglen*, 'mirrors of stone', that allow one to encounter *eybikeyt ponim el ponim un efsher nit shtarbn*, 'eternity face to face and maybe not die',²⁵ Sutzkever's travels allow him to reconnect with, and actualize, history. His reading of the Israeli landscape offers opportunities to introduce national passion and metaphysical awe into the way readers understand the creation of the Jewish state. For instance, in his 'Jerusalem' section, he offers a modern adaptation of Psalm 137 to commemorate the doomed attempt to defend the Old City during the War of Independence:

[...] *un az di letste kriger hobn mer shoyn
di altshtot nit bavizn tsu bahershn –
hot der same yingster fun a vant
a tsigl oysgebrokhn, un anshtot im
farmoyert zikh aleyn di rekhte hant:
ikh vel do blaybn biz mayn letstn otem.*

[...] And as the remaining fighters
could no longer control the ancient city
the youngest among them broke off a brick from a wall,
and instead walled in his right hand:
— Here I will remain until my last breath.²⁶

Elsewhere, as in his 'Lider fun negev' (Poems of the Negev), the silences of the desert allow him the opportunity for meta-poetic musings about his function as a modern Jewish writer:

*do bistu baym varshtat fun gor der yetsire.
fardingen zikh konstu im vi a gezeln, —
di eybikayt vet dir batsoln mit ire
matbeyes – oyb s'vet nor dayn arbet gefeln.*

Here you are at the workshop of all creation
Hire yourself out, an apprentice,

Eternity will pay you
with its currency if your work is good.²⁷

Sutzkever sharpens his sense of wonderment on the pain of his lamentation. *Bist gekumen a naketer*, he reminds himself, *in gantsn in fayer*, 'You arrived naked – engulfed in flame'.²⁸ An untitled dirge that begins with the words, *fargangen is a yidnvelt mit masmid un fun monish [...]*, 'Gone is a Jewish world of the Talmud student and of Monish [...]'²⁹ recalls poetic heroes from the library of Bialik and Peretz³⁰ who best represent both the religious steadfastness and the temptations of secular culture that were the defining poles of Jewish life in interwar Eastern Europe. In places, Sutzkever is more confrontational than mournful, as when he sounds the following cautionary note to his fellow writers:

*un vestu farmoln dos bild fun der yidisher gas,
mit pendzl getunkt in dayn zunika, nayem paleter,—
zay visn: di farbn di itstiker veln zikh sheyln.
dos gevezene bild mit a hak vet bafaln dikh shpeter,
farvundn azoy, az dos naye vet keyn mol nit heyln.*

And if you paint over the image of the Jewish street
with a brush dipped in your new sunny palette
know this: the fresh colours will peel
and someday the old image will attack you with an axe
and wound you so the new will never heal.³¹

The poem argues that memory of the past and vision of the future must co-exist to ensure that the golden chain of culture is not irreparably ruptured. Sutzkever offered up his writing as a way to bridge physical and historical distances in contemporary Jewish life: 'It is a great privilege for the poet from the Jerusalem of Lithuania that the Jerusalem of eternity has taken up his song [...] Now in Jerusalem I dream of Vilna as when I was in Vilna I dreamt of Jerusalem.'³²

One way the bonds between Diaspora and Zion can be maintained, he implicitly suggests, is if poets and readers keep faith with Yiddish as a legitimate medium for Jewish art. Though Sutzkever does not begrudge the dominance of Hebrew in Israel, he pushes back against those who are not as forgiving of the presence of a Yiddish writer on Israeli soil, asking sarcastically, in a self-comparison with his patriarchal namesake:

*zol ikh onheybn fun onheyb?
zol ikh vi avrom
oys brudershaft tsehakn ale getsn?
[...] zol ikh aynflantsn mayn tsung
un vartn biz farvandlen
vet zi zikh in avosdike
rozhinkes mit mandlen?*

Should I start anew?
should I, like Abraham,
out of brotherhood smash all the idols?
Should I plant my tongue
and wait until it transforms
into the raisins and almonds
of our forefathers?

He suggests that, for the Yiddish poet, the accusation that his language is no longer viable defies reality since it remains the essential tool of his creative vitality. He turns the tables on those who would prefer that Yiddish quietly disappear by challenging them to do something just as impossible as it is for a poet to abandon his language; he demands that they identify the precise spot *vuhin di shprakh geyt unter*, 'where the language will go down', so that *vel ikh dort kumen, kumen / efenen dos moyl / un vi a leyb / ongeton in fayerdikn tsunter, / aynshlingen dem loshn vos geyt unter. aynshlingen, un ale doynes vekn mit mayn brumen*, 'I can come / open my mouth / and like a lion / garbed in fiery scarlet / swallow the language as it sets / and wake all generations with my roar'.³³

In casting the Yiddish writer as a lion – a powerful creature that demands respect – Sutzkever defies the most hardened Zionist stereotypes of Yiddish as a language emblematic of diasporic passivity. Later in the volume – in the section 'Akordn fun shtoltsn' (Chords from the Proud Forest) – he dedicates an entire series of poems to the theme of the Jewish partisan units during World War 2, in part to show that the fighting Jew is not the exclusive invention of Zionists: *vi konen di mentshn fun danen dir gleybn, / az du host in varshe / farteydikt dem kastel? / az du host in toytn-medine gefuremt / di lebedik-hey mishe / yunge medine?* 'How will the people here believe / that there in Warsaw / you defended the castle? / How will they understand that in the death state you forged / your living young state?'³⁴

Several years later, Sutzkever returned to the motif of the Jewish fighter with 'In midber sinay',³⁵ a tightly constructed poem of ten twelve-line

stanzas that constituted the first section of his 1957 volume of the same title. The inspiration for the work came from his experience as a war correspondent tracking a fighting unit of the IDF during the Sinai Campaign. On one level, the poem interprets Israel's victories on the battlefield as acts that redeem national self-confidence. On a deeper level, the encounter with Sinai is experienced as a moment in which contemporary events meet up again with Jewish history through the return to the very landscape that first moulded the nation's religious, ethical, and creative consciousness. Sutzkever was not alone in seeing the return to Sinai as a replaying of the mythic exodus from slavery to freedom, from humiliation to dignity. On a private level, in the desert wilderness he experienced a spiritual-artistic revelation similar to the one that he had undergone in the empty expanses of Siberia as a young boy, *di tsayt far ale tsaytn*, 'a moment transparent into all time.'³⁶ 'In midber sinay' endows contemporary events with echoes of eternity by borrowing heavily from Biblical motifs and imagery, as when it describes the troops guided by a *volknzayl*, 'pillar of cloud' with its echoes of the Exodus, and the tired soldiers as revived when *du blozst in beyner trukene dayn otem*, 'you breathe your breath into dry bones', from Ezekiel 37. Sutzkever gropes towards a rhetoric that can serve both his private metaphysical musings and the historic moment. Sometimes, this is expressed through synesthetic confusion, as in the line: *der barg! der barg! di shtilkayt blit mit bsumim / fun ale doyyes*, 'The mount! The mount! The silence blooms with fragrance / of all the generations'.³⁷ Elsewhere, he imports Hebrew words into his rhyme scheme to accentuate the commonalities between war and revelation as experiences prompting fear and national brotherhood:

*un host antplekt dem tsveytn barg dayn simen:
tsetrotene vi shpiltsayg unter zoyln –
tsetretn itst in sinay toyt un pokhed .
un oyf di lipn glien dayne koyln,
un mit di kinder bistu zikh mityokhed.*

And You revealed Your sign on the second mountain:
Trampled like toys under foot –
crushed now in Sinai, death and fear.
And Your coals glow on the lips
and You are one with the children.

The most stirring turn of phrase occurs in the poem's penultimate stanza with its play on the traditional concept Sinai as the site of *matan toyre*, 'the giving of the Law':

*tu oys di shikh un shtel zikh in a shure,
tu oys di shikh un zol dos zamd dikh shvenken.
atsind iz do di tsayt fun matan-gvure.
di shtilkayt iz a t'hom. a t'hom fun benken.*

Take off your shoes and stand in a line,
take off your shoes and let the sand purify you.
Now is the moment of the giving of heroism.
Silence is the primal abyss. An abyss of longing.³⁸

For the Jewish writer-survivor, the revelatory experience produced by the return to Sinai is that of self-reliance restored after ultimate disempowerment. The command to remove one's shoes recalls both the indignities of war (as when enemy prisoners are required to disrobe and line up for processing), and God's initial command to Moses at the burning bush to acknowledge his presence before holiness. It is not accidental that the central figure of the final stanza is a soldier drawn from the ranks of *golus kind[er]* who completes his mission by scaling the peak of the mountain:

*un afn barg, durkh blitsndiker eyne,
a yingl mit a fon. er git zi iber
a hant, vos nemt zi oybn a geheyme,
un zalbt mit eybikayt, un bentsht der giber.*

And on the mountain, through flashing terror
a boy with a flag. He offers it up
to a hand that receives it mysteriously
and anoints with eternity, and blesses the hero.³⁹

The hand that accepts his flag on the mountain peak is the mystical force of a renewed faith in one's people that will redeem the mountains of Jewish bodies left behind in Europe by storming and reclaiming the place of the original national covenant. Out of the chaos and suffering of war comes a new prayer for peace, directed as much toward a transcendent God as toward humanity:

*a tfile kletert fun di same tifn,
vi s'volt in harts, baym klang fun di trumeyters,
a diment on a diment zikh geshlifn:
zol run un sholem kumen shoy'n geshvinder.
fun barg in sinay – bloz avek di sine.
farshnayd oyf s'nay a bund mit dayne kinder,
un zoln royte zamdn vern grine!*

A prayer ascends from the bottomless depths,
As if in my heart at the sound of the trumpets,
A diamond has polished itself without the help of another diamond:
So may tranquillity and peace come quickly.
From the mountain in Sinai – trumpet away hatred,
Seal anew a covenant with your children,
And let the red sands become green.⁴⁰

Just as he managed earlier in his career to overturn his readers' preconceived ideas about Siberia as a desolate and frigid landscape by crafting it into a universe of colour, light, and wonderment, so here too does he conjure a desert setting that is very the opposite of poetically barren. If Sinai's wilderness is the stuff of challenges to the soldiers whom Sutzkever accompanies, to the poet it is a site of metaphysical substantiveness. In its silences he hears the call of generations, and in the presence of its peaks he feels himself in touch with a new genesis of creative inspiration. Elsewhere in 'In midber sinay' Sutzkever answers his own poetic calling to serve the nation with vocabulary reminiscent of an earlier calling received by his patriarchal namesake:

*in der shtilkayt derher ikh a shtim:
— avrom!
un bald kumt di shtim daytlekher un zingevdik tsetsoygener:
— avrom!
dos blut – far an opgrunt. di kni beygn zikh:
— hineni.*

In the silence I hear a voice:
— Abraham!
and suddenly the voice distinctness and song draws out:
— Abraham!
My blood – before an abyss. My knees bend on their own:
— Here I am.⁴¹

Though Ben Gurion is reported to have lamented, 'Pity they are not in

Hebrew'⁴² upon receiving a copy of *In midber sinay*, his words were not so much a dismissal of Yiddish as a lament over the paucity of writers like Sutzkever in contemporary Hebrew literature. The first prime minister's comments convey a profound respect for a poet who interpreted the rebirth and building of the Jewish state as an epic story, and whose new life in Israel allowed him once again to experience Jewish existence poetically. This was certainly the intention of the title poem of *Ode tsu der toyb* (Ode to the dove, 1954) in which the speaker recalls how he rescued a dove when he was a boy. When the bird promises him a gift in return for having saved its life, all the future poet requests is a pledge of allegiance: *mayn libinke, bin ikh dir tayer, / kam, az a mol kh'vel dikh rufn in regn in shney un in fayer*; 'So long as I inspire you / come whenever I call you, in rain and in snow and in fire'. Nothing could better prove the extent to which Sutzkever inhabited a world of his own symbols than the ode's concluding stanza, in which the speaker turned to his old muse for permission to write with the same sunny exuberance that characterized his genesis-poetry as a young adult in Vilna:

*taybele, bistu di zelbe, di fligl nit gro, iz dos meglekh?
zol ikh do boyen mayn templ, vi ikh hob geboyt im tog-teglekh?
zol ikh mayn tsoyberdik lempl tsegrinen oyf s'nay un tsebloyen?
— boyen un boyen dem templ, mit zunikn seykhil im boyen!*

Dear dove, are you the same, your wings not gray, could it be?
Shall I build my temple here, as I built it day after day?
Shall I take my magic lantern, make it grow green, bloom blue?
— Build and build the temple, with sunny thought, build it anew.⁴³

The symbolism of equating his new writing about the Land of Israel with the rebuilding of the Temple underlines the degree to which Sutzkever saw his creativity as a holy mission to create a transcendent temple of art. Israel spoke to and through Sutzkever on the highest spiritual and artistic levels, as he suggests in 'In vadi-firan' a poem from the collection *Oazis* (Oasis, 1957-59): *do lebt nokh a loshn, vos darf nit keyn lipn*, 'Here lives a language that does not need lips.⁴⁴ His drive to compose a new *megile* for his generation was the cornerstone of a post-war poetic that endowed poetry with the importance of sacred script, as a testament to the catastrophes and wonders of recent Jewish history. After the loss of some of Judaism's holiest sites during the War of Independence, he expanded on his sense of duty: 'I saw how the Jews of Jerusalem erected ladders on the rooftops so

that they could see the Western Wall. We writers must construct such ladders out of our poetry, so that [our readers] can see the entirety of the Jewish world.⁴⁵

This acceptance of his responsibility as a national poet to provide vision and orientation to the nation prompted him to return to the epic form he had first experimented with in *Geheymshot*. Structurally, thematically, and chronologically, *Gaystike erd* (Spiritual Soil, 1961)⁴⁶ picks up where *Geheymshot* concludes, with the survivor's imperative to carry the Eastern European Jewish inheritance to the Land of Israel. A book-length poem in amphibrach tetrameter, the volume attempted to impose some order on the story of Israel's rebirth between 1947 and 1949.⁴⁷ The title of the first section, 'Afn yam, baym geburt fun legendes' (On the sea, at the birth of legends), contains within it a hint of the myth he sought to construct out of his illegal sea journey to the Land of Israel. Since Sutzkever's writing closely mirrored his own biography, the poet-speaker emerges as the organizing hero of his poetic saga. Much like the ten representative Jews hiding in Vilna's sewers in *Geheymshot*, the speaker in this poem is accompanied on his journey by a group of prototypical survivors. Each is meant to represent a different aspect of the tragedy of Eastern European Jewry. Gershoni, a botanist by training, finds his love of nature and beauty perverted by his being made a crematorium attendant in Bergen-Belsen. During one of his round-ups of frozen Jewish bodies, he notices that a flower once celebrated by the Polish national poet Mickiewicz is lying in the snow. When he reaches for it, he finds that it is actually wrapped around the neck of his fiancée, part of a medallion he made as a gift for her before the war. Luka, a former Communist whose faith is destroyed when the Soviet state imprisons him in a Siberian concentration camp, is traveling with Lena, his Eskimo wife who rescued him from his incarceration. The unborn child she is carrying represents the exotic future of modern Jewish life in Israel, and the possibility of a common humanity redeemed. Yet another character is a former actress with the Vilna Troupe. During a ghetto performance of Hirshbein's pastoral play *Griner felder* (Green Fields), she sees guns instead of faces in the crowd, only then to witness the gruesome enactment of the audience's murder in the synagogue courtyard. Galitsky wears a Polish military cap emblazoned with an eagle that seems to stare down at him mockingly. In his pocket he brings empty shell casings, symbols of his patriotic participation in a doomed resistance. Matle, a grandmother, carries with

her the doll she managed to rescue in place of her granddaughter. All of these 'gifts' that the characters bring with them to the Land of Israel are symbols of national sacrifice, akin to those that appeared in Peretz's story 'Dray matones' (Three Gifts). Sutzkever's first-person speaker brings with him the memory of Vilna itself. Whenever he looks overboard at the sea, he witnesses his hometown swimming alongside the ship like a Jewish Atlantis, warning him not to leave it behind. When the sea itself (long a poetic symbol of the unconscious) threatens to sink the vessel in a storm, nature mirrors his internal devastation in a stroke of pathetic fallacy:

*der zunfargang – mayn shtot! ikh ze zi bult.
kh'ob zi gekusht in fayer, itst – in vaser
un beyde mol iz zi in mir gekoylet.*

Sunset – my city! I see it clearly.
I kissed it in fire, now – in water,
and both times ruins within me.⁴⁸

The speaker underlines the epic nature of his adventure by casting himself as a modern-day, tragic Odysseus, as in the following wordplay: *ikh hob nit ayngenumen troye / nor troyer iz der indzl fun mayn vander*, 'I did not capture Troy, but sadder [troyer] is the island of my wanderings'.⁴⁹

Sections two and three, 'Di sabres blien' (The Sabras Glow) and 'A kholem fun a goldshmid' (Dream of a Goldsmith) open up windows on to particular historical moments – the last days of the British Mandate over Palestine, the Jewish underground fight for the creation of the State, the United Nations decision to divide the land between Arab and Jew, and the early days of Israel's battle for independence. Utopian dreams constantly bang against political realities, as when an Arab bombing prompts the poetic voice to inquire:

*iz dos di kleyne groyse erd on mestung?
iz dos di erd, vos geyt arayn in sider
[...] iz dos di erd fun zeungen un transn
vu oykh der toyt iz nit real?*

Is this the tiny great land beyond measurement?
Is this the land of the prayer book?
[...] Is this the soil of prophecy
where even death is not real?⁵⁰

The poem captures that sense of frustration in the face of a seemingly uncaring world that characterized the mood of the *yishuv* in the period preceding statehood:

*nor az du nemst in hand arayn a tsaytung,
bashitn dir di oygn shvartse remlekh.
un ergets zitsn kalte diplomatn
un shpiln shokh mit dir un mitn kholem
fun elter-zeydn daynem, funem tatn.*

Take a newspaper in hand
your eye meets black headlines.
And somewhere cold diplomats sit
playing chess with you and with the dream
of your forefathers and fathers.⁵¹

Ultimately, the poem refuses to succumb to such prosaic intrusions. Instead, the speaker strikes a bargain with the national muse: *oyb du vest mikh bashitsn fun di khayes, / batsoln vel ikh dir mit groyse lider*, 'If you protect me from the animals / I will pay you with great poems'.⁵² The bulk of the volume is a poetic travelogue in which the speaker charts his sense of wonderment with the new languages, landscapes, and people he encounters:

*farshtoybt lipn! veln zikh otkhayen
mit yidnvayn – fun oysgebenktn hopn.
dertseylt hot mir mayn tekhterl, mayn rine:
– in kinder-gortn blit a naye blum, vos heyst: medine.*

Dusty lips! They will be revived
with the Jewish wine – of willed dreams.
My daughter Rina told me:
In kindergarten a new flower is blooming. We call it *medina*
[the Hebrew word for 'state'].⁵³

Through his daughter, Sutzkever experiences amazement at the new language of pride being born all around him that also reflects his own sense of poetic renewal: *mayn tokhters nomen – fun reyne iz gevorn rine*, 'My daughter's name – Reyne [purity] has become Rina [song of joy]'.⁵⁴ In the cool mountain air of Tsfat at sundown, the poet is freed from the anxiety of European influence with the realization that beauty is a Jewish possession as well:

*fun vanen hot geshept azoy fil gingold
rembrant? un titsian, rafael, velaskes –
vi kumt tsu zey aza rubingold, gringold,
azoyne froyen, keniglekhe maskes?
ikh vel dir vayzn zeyere modeln:
dos zaynen tsfater volkn. mitn zunoyfgang zey kveln!*

From where did Rembrandt invent all his golds?
and Titian, Raphael, Velasquez
how did they come to such rubies and greens, such women, such majesty?
I will show you their models: The clouds of Tsfat gushing at sunset.⁵⁵

If Sutzkever draws on Tsfat's mystical past to reflect one aspect of what he was attempting to accomplish creatively, then contact with Jerusalem allows him to cast himself in another mould, closer to the survivor-speaker of Lamentations 3:1: *ani hagever*, 'I am the man who has known affliction', he echoes in one poem when he enters the Old City for the first time, reminded that he too is a witness to the contemporary destruction of the Jerusalem of Lithuania. Sutzkever suggests that Eastern European Yiddish poets are not only the direct inheritors of, but also the living remnants of 'In shkhite-shtot' (City of Slaughter), Bialik's Yiddish version of his famous Hebrew poem about the 1903 pogrom in Kishiniev:

*ikh kum fun shkhite-shtot, tsu dir, meshoyrer
fun shkhite-shtot. mayn zun iz dort farloshn.
fartilikn hot nit gekont der tsoyrer
dos eyntsike vos lebt on leyb – mayn loshn.*

I come from the City of Slaughter to you, poet
of the City of Slaughter. My sun was extinguished there.
The enemy could not annihilate
the only thing that lives without a body – my language.

Sutzkever was sustained by the notion that even though the Nazis succeeded in degrading and ultimately murdering vast numbers of Yiddish speakers, the well-crafted Yiddish poem about the new Jewish homeland could secure their language, and ultimately their dignity, in eternity.

The epilogue of *Gaystike erd* is set on the ruins of Masada, one of the most popular of rediscovered Zionist pilgrimage sites. In the climate of heightened nationalism that characterized the generation of Israel's founders, Masada provided Zionists with a means creatively to betray and reinvent

the Jewish past for contemporary ideological purposes. As the location of one of the last acts of collective Jewish resistance – both spiritual and militaristic – against Roman occupation of the Second Jewish Commonwealth, Israeli culture gravitated to the battle-cry ‘Masada shall not fall again’ to inspire future acts of self-sacrifice on behalf of the nation. The poem’s speaker finds himself at the desert fortress on 19 April 1949, the sixth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. The generation of Jewish resistance in the ghettos and the generation of zealot defenders of the homeland are collapsed together to produce the impression of a chain of Jewish heroism leading directly from Masada to Eastern Europe and back again. When the voice of a former ghetto fighter punctuates the contemplative moment and inspiring scenery with the opening words of Hirsh Glik’s partisan hymn, *zog nisht keyn mol*, poetry again allows Sutzkever to revive his personal dead⁵⁶ by transcending the vicissitudes of time and space.

The ultimate Zionist approval of Sutzkever’s work as a Yiddish poet in Israel is conjured up when Yitshak Sadeh, the legendary general of the Palmah, comes to pay his respects to the ghetto fighters. When Sadeh salutes the poem’s speaker on the rocks of Masada, it is a moment of brotherhood and mutual respect, not only between the military and cultural defenders of the Jewish spirit, but between representative figures of the pre-war Zionist and Diasporic experiences. Sadeh’s acknowledgment allows Sutzkever to conclude his epic poem where he began it, looking outward toward the ocean with a visionary scene of the Jewish future in its people’s homeland that is ever mindful of the sacrifice that brought him to this day:

*antkegn beydn toyter yam. a zegl
dernenert zikh tsum bortn fun yehudo.
a regn, vays-un-bloy, iz oyle-regl
un shpreyt a shpray, a heyldike ru do.
un hant af aksl beyde shvaygn loyter
gehorkhik tsu dem andersn makhsheyves:
der toyter yam vet mer nit zayn keyn toyter,
nor blaybn vet in harts a yam-hamoves—
yehudo-berg un ploynen shtoynen, shtoynen:
a friling-regn vays-un-bloy. Mir bentshn zayne
kroynen.⁵⁷*

Opposite both of us, the Dead Sea. A sail
Approaches the shores of Judah.
A rain, white and blue, is a pilgrim

Gushing spray, a blessed peace here.
And hand on shoulder, both of us in pure silence,
Attentive to one another’s thoughts:
The Dead Sea shall no longer be dead,
But a sea of death will remain in the heart—
The hills of Judah and the plains are astonished,
astonished:
A spring rain, white and blue. We bless its crowns!

The stanza’s use of colour conjures the promise of the Zionist banner just as its sound combinations (*zegl / oyle regl; yehudo / ru do*) kindle a sense of inner calm and at-homeness. However, even the most promising future can never truly be free of the past in Sutzkever’s imagination, as he indicates by transforming the Hebrew name for *yam hamelah* – the sea on the edge of the Judean desert whose high salt content tears and burns open wounds – into the Yiddish construct *yam hamoves*, his symbol for the lamentation within the heart of the nation resulting from the vast sea of death that was once Eastern European Jewry.⁵⁸ By balancing his responsibilities both to Jewish history and to the Jewish future, to his Diaspora origins and his Israeli home, Sutzkever succeeds in his effort to create a new Zionist genre of Yiddish writing, what Chana Kronfeld calls ‘a harmonious hybridity of the most Israeli in milieu and experience with the most uniquely Yiddish in idiom and expression.’⁵⁹

Where Avrom Sutzkever differed from Chaim Grade and Isaac Bashevis Singer, arguably the other two most accomplished Yiddish writers of the post-war period, was in his ability to use his post-war poetry as a means to take hold of and celebrate the contemporary rhythms and future directions of Jewish life. Despite Grade’s arrival in America at roughly the same time that Sutzkever landed in Israel, Grade’s fiction never endeavoured to make America its central concern or subject. Rather, Grade’s literary gaze remained focused on the past, allowing him to produce an impressive body of fiction centred on the lost world of traditional Eastern European Jewry. Similarly, though Bashevis Singer eventually emerged as an American literary icon in consequence of the translation of his work into English, his fame had little to do with his creative investment in America as a literary subject. From the moment of his arrival, he remained suspicious of the viability of America as a home and setting for Yiddish literature.⁶⁰ America allowed him the historical distance from the *shtetl* creatively to betray and re-invent it for a new generation of readers. Sutzkever alone drew upon his

new Israeli universe as the raw material for a post-war Yiddish-Zionist poetry that bordered on the liturgical, one that captured equally the lamentations of historic loss, the excitement of national rebirth, and the confidence in a creative future.

NOTES

¹ 'Tsu poyln,' *Poetische verk*, Vol. 1 (Tel-Aviv, Yovl-komitet, 1963), pp.567-577.

² 'Cyprian Norwid,' *Lider* (Warsaw: Yidishe pen-klub, 1937), pp.45-52.

³ His initial application for membership in *Yung-Vilne*, a local Yiddish literary group founded in 1929, was rejected. Later, the group's editor, Shmerke Kaczerginski, angrily berated him: 'We're living in a time of steel, not of crystal' (in Yiddish, *fun shtol un nit krishtol*).

⁴ For more on this episode, see David Fishman, *Embers Plucked from the Fire: The Rescue of Jewish Cultural Treasures in Vilna* (New York: YIVO, 1996).

⁵ Peretz worked on *Di goldene keyt* from 1903-1910. For an English version of the play, see Marvin Zuckerman and Marion Herbst, *I.L. Peretz: Selected Works* (Malibu: Pangloss Press, 1996).

⁶ Peretz wrote *Di goldene keyt* as a response to the rapid assimilation of Eastern European Jewish youth into European culture. Peretz's text sought to galvanize young Jews to stay within the fold of Jewish culture during this transitional historical moment of modernization, secularization, migration, and urbanization.

⁷ The publication of *Di goldene keyt* was a crucial event in the transformation of Israel into a centre of post-war Yiddish high culture. Other important events include the establishment of a chair in Yiddish literature at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 1951-52, and the creation of a Yiddish publishing house in Tel-Aviv, Farlag Y.L. Peretz.

⁸ *Hulyot*, a contemporary Hebrew language journal dedicated to 'Studies in Yiddish Literature and Its Affinities to Hebrew Literature' is the intellectual outgrowth of such efforts undertaken by *Di goldene keyt*.

⁹ For more on the attitude of the Hebrew establishment toward Yiddish in the first decade of the State, see the work of Rachel Rojanski. For pre-State attitudes toward Yiddish see Yael Chaver, 'Outcasts Within: Zionist Yiddish Literature in Pre-State Palestine,' *Jewish Social Studies* 7:2 (2001): 39-66. Chaver's article provides insights into the 'Yiddish affair' of 1927 in which Hebrew writers debated the place of Yiddish within the *yishuv*, and into the Yiddish language publishing culture in Mandate Palestine.

¹⁰ Joseph Leftwich, *Abraham Sutzkever: Partisan Poet* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1971), p.23.

¹¹ Leftwich, pp.142-43.

¹² I cite these collections in particular because of their overarching concern with the theme of the Jews return to their ancestral home. His other volumes of this period – *Ode tsu der toyb* (Ode to the Dove, 1955) and *Oazis* (Oasis, 1960) – also include works in which Israeli motifs are featured prominently, but whose Zionist flavour is more diluted. It is worth noting that the most comprehensive anthology of Yiddish poetry about the Land of Israel ever produced, Mordekhay Yafe's *Erets-yisroel in der yidisher poezye* (Tel-Aviv, Farlag Y.L. Peretz, 1961), never raises the question about the existence of a Yiddish poetic Zionism. In the anthology's introduction, Yafe seems more concerned with explaining its title: 'Why an 'Erets-yisroel' anthology and not an 'Israeli' anthology? There is a simple answer: The Land of Israel is something more than Israel. It includes both the people and the land. The Land of Israel is the entirety of history, inheritance, and tradition that ties together all generations of Jewish life – past, present, and future.' *Erets-yisroel*, p.7.

¹³ Of course, this was not exactly what Ahad Ha'am, cultural Zionism's foremost theoretician, had in mind when he argued the need for the development of a Hebrew-speaking cultural centre in the Land of Israel.

¹⁴ The notable exception to this is Gershon Weiner, 'Eretz Yisrael beshirato shel Avraham Sutzkever,' *Bitzaron* (1987): 61-66.

¹⁵ *Yovl bukh: tsum fuftsikstn geboyrn-tog fun avrom sutzkever* (Tel-Aviv, 1963); *Yikhes fun lid: likhvod avrom sutzkever* (Tel-Aviv, 1983).

¹⁶ This view is reflected most clearly in two cantankerous reviews of *In fayer-vogn* by Yankev Glatshiteyn, who asserts that 'the poet must rid himself of his grotesque poetic mask that he puts on at sunrise and does not remove until he goes to sleep.' Underlying the critic's dismissal of Sutzkever's new collection of poems about the Jewish state is the implication that the poet's passion for his material clouds his ability to discern the difference between poetic inventiveness and forced artistry. Yankev Glatshiteyn, 'A. Sutzkever's lider fun yisroel,' *Idisher kempfer* (4 April 1952): 10-11, 14; and 'A forvorf un an oyfklering,' *Idisher kempfer* (16 May 1952): 13-14.

¹⁷ Yankev Pat, *Shmuesn mit shrayber in yisroel* (New York: Der kval, 1960), p.172.

¹⁸ Pat, p.172.

¹⁹ *Geheymshetot* (Tel-Aviv: Ahdut, 1948), pp.156-57.

²⁰ 'Shturem af di vasern bay krete,' *Poetische verk*, Vol. 1, pp.605-06.

²¹ *In fayer-vogn* (Tel-Aviv: Goldene keyt, 1952), p.9.

²² For a nuanced reading this poem, see Ruth R. Wisse, 'A Prayer of Homecoming by Abraham Sutzkever,' *History and Literature: New Readings of Jewish Texts in Honor of Arnold Band*, ed. William Cutter and David Jacobson (Providence: Brown Judaic Studies, 2002), pp.339-49.

²³ For more on the poetic meaning of the verb *fargeyen* in the context of Sutzkever's

writing, see Dov Sadan, 'A kleyne lektsiye,' *Yoyvl-bukh*, pp.165-168.

²⁴ Hebrew editors soon picked up on the existence of a Yiddish poet inspired by a Zionist's love for the Land of Israel. The poem was among the earliest of Sutzkever's works on the *Erets-yisroel* motif to be translated into Hebrew. See 'Yahad itkhem', trans. E. Zusman, *Davar* (13 August 1948): 2. See also the translation of his cycle 'Land of Israel Soil' in *Etim* (1948). Though many of his individual poems appeared in Hebrew over the next decade, it was not until much later that an entire volume of Sutzkever's Zionist poetry appeared in Hebrew. See Benjamin Harshav (Hrushovsky) *Be-rekhev esh* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1963-64).

²⁵ See 'Mayle akravim' (Ascent of Scorpions), *In fayer-vogn*, p.68, and 'Feldzene shpiglen' (Mirrors of Stone), *In fayer-vogn*, p.89. The English quotations are from Benjamin and Barbara Harshav's translations in *A. Sutzkever: Selected Poetry and Prose* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp.209, 221.

²⁶ 'Khronik vegn altshtot' (Chronicle about the Old City), *In fayer-vogn*, p. 92.

²⁷ 'Mayle akravim', p.68; Harshav, *A. Sutzkever*, p.221

²⁸ *In fayer-vogn*, pp.10-11.

²⁹ *In fayer-vogn*, p. 12.

³⁰ See H.N. Bialik, 'Ha-masmid' (The Yeshiva Student, 1894-1895), *Shirot Bialik*, ed. Steven L. Jacobs (Columbus: Alpha Publishing Company, 1987), pp.24-81; I.L. Peretz, 'Monish' (1888-1908), *The I.L. Peretz Reader*, ed. Ruth R. Wisse, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), pp.3-15

³¹ 'Komentarn tsu a ponim in shpigl' (Commentary on a Face in a Mirror), *In fayer-vogn*, p.110. Translation in Harshav, p.234.

³² Leftwich, pp.20-21.

³³ 'Yidish,' *In fayer-vogn*, pp.34-35. Translation in Harshav, p.214.

³⁴ *In fayer-vogn*, pp.10-11.

³⁵ *In midber sinay* (Tel-Aviv: Farlag Y.L. Peretz, 1957). All English citations from the poem are translations from David and Roslyn Hirsch, *In the Sinai Desert* (Providence, R.I.: Ziggurat Press, 1987).

³⁶ 'In midber sinay' *In midber sinay*, p. 10.

³⁷ *In midber sinay*, p. 14.

³⁸ *In midber sinay*, p. 15.

³⁹ *In midber sinay*, p. 16.

⁴⁰ *In midber sinay*, p. 15.

⁴¹ 'Der kval fun nevue' (The Spring of Prophecy), *In midber sinay*, p. 22.

⁴² Leftwich, p.141.

⁴³ Translation by Harshav, *A. Sutzkever*, pp.273-280.

⁴⁴ 'In Wadi Firan,' *Oazis* (Tel-Aviv: Farlag Y.L. Peretz, 1960), pp.67-71.

⁴⁵ Pat, p.172.

⁴⁶ *Gaystike erd* (New York: Der kval, 1961).

⁴⁷ The most comprehensive analysis of this work is that by B.Y. Mikhali, 'Me-ir setarim le-adama ruhanit,' *Yikhes fun lid*, pp.167-184.

⁴⁸ *Gaystike erd*, p.19.

⁴⁹ *Gaystike erd*, p.11.

⁵⁰ *Gaystike erd*, p.43.

⁵¹ *Gaystike erd*, p. 58.

⁵² *Gaystike erd*, p. 42.

⁵³ *Gaystike erd*, p. 96.

⁵⁴ *Gaystike erd*, p. 59.

⁵⁵ *Gaystike erd*, p. 119.

⁵⁶ Sutzkever's friendship with Hirsh Glik preceded their time together as Vilna Ghetto partisans. He, along with other *Yung-Vilne* colleagues, mentored younger Yiddish writers like Glik through their participation in the literary broadsheet *Yung-vald* (Vilna, 1939).

⁵⁷ *Gaystike erd*, p. 132.

⁵⁸ Sutzkever returned to this concept for the title of his canonized collection of wartime writings published in 1968, *Lider fun yam hamoves*.

⁵⁹ Chana Kronfeld, *On the Margins of Modernism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p.220.

⁶⁰ Contrast Sutzkever's statements about the imperative for the Yiddish writer to redeem his language in the land of Jewish rebirth (cited above) with Bashevis's perspective soon after arriving in New York: 'In spite of everything, it's sad, and it's sad because here in New York I see even more clearly than in Poland that there is no Yiddish literature, that there is no one to work for [...] It doesn't need Yiddish literature. We built on paper bridges.' From a 1935 letter to Yiddish poet Meylekh Ravitsh, cited in Janet Hadda, *Isaac Bashevis Singer: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p.84.