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Tannenbaum, Michal

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# ‘The Heartache of Two Homelands...’: Ideological and Emotional Perspectives on Hebrew Translingual Writing

MICHAL TANNENBAUM

*Tel Aviv University*

*E-mail: mtannen@post.tau.ac.il*

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The work of immigrant writers, whose professional identity is built around language, can deepen understandings of sociolinguistic and psychological issues, including aspects of the immigration experience; the position of language in the ideological and emotional value systems, and the significance of language for individual development. This paper deals with a number of translingual writers who immigrated to Israel prior to its establishment as an independent state and who chose Hebrew as their language. The paper focuses on three figures—Alexander Penn, Leah Goldberg, and Aharon Appelfeld—who came from different countries and different language backgrounds but have in common that Hebrew was not their first language.

Two issues are discussed in depth in this article. One is the unique position of Hebrew, a language that retains high symbolic significance given its association with holy texts and the ideological role its revival played in the Zionist enterprise. Its association with identity issues or childhood memories may thus be somewhat different from that of other second languages. The other issue is the psychological motivations that affected these writers’ language shift. Despite the broad consensus on this shift as having been inspired by ideological/Zionist motives, my claim is that their motives may have been broader. Ideologies may at times serve as camouflage—used either by wider society’s collective interest in promoting its ethos, or by the individuals themselves, who prefer to be viewed as part of the collective and lean on its ideology to serve their own psychological needs.

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## ZIONISM, THE REVIVAL OF HEBREW, AND TRANSLINGUAL WRITING

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, waves of Jewish immigrants came to Palestine, driven by the perception of the Land of Israel as the Jewish homeland and by an evolving Zionist ideology that also involved a revolutionary linguistic dimension: the revival of Hebrew as a spoken language.<sup>1</sup> Until the destruction of the First Temple (587 BC), Jews living in the Land of Israel had spoken mainly Hebrew. The impact of Aramaic increased during the Babylonian exile and, following the Jewish exile after the Roman destruction of the Second Temple (70 AD), Hebrew basically lost its function as a vernacular and was reserved mainly for literary and religious use. For most Jewish communities around the world, then, Hebrew remained a holy tongue (Ben-Rafael, 1994; Ravid, 1995; Safran, 2005a).

During the first decades of Zionism – starting in the late nineteenth century – most Zionist leaders viewed the revival of spoken Hebrew as a cornerstone of the Zionist enterprise in the Land of Israel and as a precondition for Jewish nation-building. This language revival was accompanied by a determined campaign to lead immigrants from different places to stop using other languages and to promote the exclusive use of Hebrew on a day-to-day basis, in parallel with attempts to denigrate other features of the diaspora (*shlilat bagalut*). The choice of *Hebrew* as the new language was logical in several

respects: it was a language native to the land; it enjoyed cultural prestige; it was the language not only of the Bible but of a significant corpus of literature; it was transethnic, bridging the cultures of Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews, and it was already embedded in the Diaspora languages that had developed within both these communities. It thus became a significant tool in creating a new society and a decisive factor in the efforts to weld together Jews arriving from many lands. It represented the creation of a new identity—the Hebrew-speaking person working the Hebrew land, independent, proud, and free (Hever, 1994; Nahir, 1998; Safran, 2005a, 2005b; Spolsky & Shohamy, 1999).

The Hebrew literary center that developed in pre-state Israel was central to the creation of the new society's identity, especially due to the prominent status of literature in the national revival. The Land of Israel was perceived as the most appropriate place for the creation of a new Jewish-Hebrew culture, and prose and poetry were perceived as an integral component of this process and as a necessary expression of it. Indeed, some claim that they were among the elements that enabled the nation-building project (Hever, 1994; Mann, 2001; Shavit, 1980, 1998, 2002).

This combination of Zionist ideology, immigration, Hebrew revival and the centrality of literature led to a relatively large number of writers and poets choosing to write in Hebrew, a phenomenon that was warmly embraced by Zionist ideology at the time and was later developed in the Zionist narrative as (yet another) testimony to the success of the Zionist project. Ben-Or (as cited in Hever, 1994) writes about the close ties between the new Hebrew literature and the Zionist soul:

Our new literature was the breeding ground *for the Zionist movement's soul, in its broad sense*. Zionist ideals were forged on its anvil, and it was this literature that took away the burden of exile from the exiles' souls and prepared them for pioneering endeavors, for renewal in the homeland... Zionism created the desirable conditions for the revival and development of an artistic, non-tendentious Hebrew literature, by proclaiming the great intrinsic value of reviving Hebrew talent, creating an original national art, and awakening the need for a Hebrew literature that fulfills our spiritual longings, whether Hebrew or human... (italics in original) (p. 61)

Hebrew writers and poets, many of them translingual, were acclaimed in the Zionist ethos (by ideological leaders, readers, and scholars), as an integral part of the movement. And indeed, some writers and poets did shift to Hebrew because it was a significant symbolic marker of the new identity that they willingly adopted. That said, the main argument of this paper is that the fact that these writers wrote in Hebrew does not necessarily reflect only the ideological impact of this linguistic revolution. Rather, their language shift or their translingualism may at times have derived from more private, emotional, perhaps even unconscious motives; its occurrence parallel to this ideological revolution, however, made it natural for them and for their society to attribute ideological motivation to this artistic translingual choice.

The present article analyzes the life and work of three translingual writers and poets: Alexander Penn, Leah Goldberg, and Aharon Appelfeld. All three immigrated to pre-State Israel and chose to write in Hebrew even though it was not their mother tongue, and eventually became canonic literary figures. They have been chosen for analysis in this article, both because of their centrality in the Hebrew literary canon and because of their extensive writing on issues explicitly related to the themes analyzed and addressed in this paper.<sup>2</sup> Each of them had his or her own unique life story but, in many senses, they tell the story of a generation, an era, an ethos.

## IMMIGRATION: LANGUAGE, IDENTITY AND EMOTIONAL JOURNEYS

Literature on this subject is rich and varied. One particularly thought-provoking model that focuses on the internal psychological process immigrants often go through was developed by Akhtar (1995). He suggested viewing the immigration process as analogous to the natural, universal maturation process of separation-individuation (Mahler, Pine, & Bergman, 1975). This is the process through which the infant—then the toddler and later the child—gradually separates from the mother (or another parental figure) and acquires an individual identity. In this process of maturation, which is considered to involve mourning over the loss of unity with the mother, the child is gradually able to perceive the mother and the self as distinct individuals with different needs and separate existences. Akhtar (1995) proposes that, like the toddler and later the (regressed) adolescent, "the immigrant is vulnerable to [a] splitting of the self-and-object representations [...] along libidinal regressive lines" (p. 1058). The psychological process experienced by the immigrant is described as complex and encompassing four dimensions: drive and affects, space, time, and social affiliation. Akhtar refers to these dimensions as *journeys*, a term capturing the process of gradually moving from one end to another along each one of them until eventually finding an optimal position. These interlinked journeys involve a mental, emotional course from love or hate to ambivalence; from near or far to optimal distance; from yesterday or tomorrow to today and, finally, from mine or yours to ours. All these journeys lead to "psychic rebirth [and] the emergence of a new and hybrid identity" (p. 1076), and may eventually afford autonomy and differentiation from the original homeland (see also Ainslie, Tummala-Narra, Harlem, Barbanel, & Ruth, 2013; Mirsky, 1991).

The language aspect adds a unique dimension to this analysis, given the close association between language and identity in general, as well as the close association between the mother tongue and one's homeland, heritage, and early significant memories in particular (e.g., Mirsky, 1991; Tannenbaum, 2005). Studies of bi/multilinguals (including personal memoirs, subjective ratings, and electrodermal response lab studies) repeatedly report that greater emotionality is embedded in the first language compared with later-acquired and -learned languages, in adolescence or after (Dewaele & Nakano, 2013; Harris, 2004; Pavlenko, 2004, 2006; Schrauf, 2000). These findings touch on emotional expression, sensitivity to perceiving emotional messages, richness of memories, and spontaneity in language use. Studies have also pointed out that bi/multilinguals tend to present themselves differently in their different languages, both in terms of narratives in these languages (Koven, 2007) and in terms of personality profiles (e.g. Chen & Bond, 2010).

When immigration involves a language shift, as it often does, it may have profound implications for one's sense of well-being and self-definition. It can also generate a whole range of reactions, from cultivating a sense of loss to embracing the new language as an opportunity for a new mode of expression, perhaps even a new identity. Bohórquez (2009) referred to the process of shifting to a new language as involving the loss of the *monolingual self*, the self as one knew it. In terms of Freud's conceptualization (1957), this loss entails a mourning process. On the other hand, Bohórquez mentions instances of what may be seen as a painless language transfer, especially in the context of an assimilatory stance in both the immigrant and the absorbing society. The well-known (English) memoir of Mary Antin, *The Promised Land* (1912), is one example of a seemingly 'happy' and mourning-free process.

Moreover, language choice, language shift, and even language loss, may often serve as a defense mechanism in various contexts. Thus, immigrant families who have gone through personal traumata may cling to the new language and find in it a neutral space for raising children. Parents may choose to speak to their children in a language free from their past, from their memories, from the language encoding difficult and at times traumatic experiences (e.g., Greenson, 1950; Pavlenko, 2004; Tannenbaum, 2005, 2012). Research on psychotherapy supports this idea, demonstrating through the analysis of various case studies how patients, and at times therapists, shift to their second language to distance themselves from traumatic memories. Marcos and Urcuyo (1979) suggest that bilinguals may operate with a dual sense of self, with each language linked to different object relations, ego defenses, and distinct ego ideals. Furthermore, "living in a second language can function as a defensive armature against early developmental conflicts, isolating or splitting off old psychic structures from newer ones" (Foster, 1992, p. 70). Shifting to one's first language then "seems to create the mood, set the stage, trigger the specialised associations, and more efficiently move patient and analyst into original self and object reenactments in the relational world in which they were lived" (p. 71). The "second language, learned at a later developmental period through interpersonal dialectics with very different objects, provides a ready-made resistance to the reenactment of primary self and object configurations in the transference" (p. 73; also see Amati-Mehler, Argentieri, & Canestri, 1993).

## **(TRANSLINGUAL) LITERARY TEXTS AS A PRISM FOR NEW INSIGHTS**

Some of the processes described above will be explored in this paper. Various samples of the writings of the three translingual writers who are the objects of this analysis – Alexander Penn, Leah Goldberg and Aharon Appelfeld – have been chosen to illustrate aspects of their personal journeys and internal worlds. In particular, we chose examples of writings that relate to issues relevant to the present article, those that touch on such questions as identity, homeland, belonging, language, and memory. The exploration of literary texts as they intersect with authors' personal biographies features in a large number of studies (e.g., Amati-Mehler, et al., 1993; Casement, 1983; Empson, 1984; Lieblich, 2003), especially where issues are explored from an interdisciplinary perspective, as in this article. In line with Lieblich (1997), their writings are viewed as potential sources that can shed light on the authors' lives, pointing to some kind of "truth" and allowing a deeper understanding of their internal world (see also Miron, 2001). Just as "biographical knowledge can be useful in the pursuit of literature as an object of cognition" (Shusterman, 2008), p. 3), and "extra-textual information can help resolve interpretive difficulties" (p. 4), literary texts, poems and diary excerpts can provide a deeper understanding of personal biographies and the context in which these were written.

Note that the aim of this paper is to use literary texts, along with biographical information, in order to illuminate ideological and psychological motives associated with the writings and personal journeys of the chosen authors. Thus, it focuses on matters of content and relates to texts as potential sources for personal information. It does not aim at literary analysis and thus does not explore formal characteristics such as style, prosody, rhyming, etc.

### **Alexander Penn**

Our knowledge of Alexander Penn's biography is sketchy, with many details incongruent or missing, a mystification that Penn himself fostered (Halperin, 1989, 2007). Throughout his life, Penn scattered various and often contradictory details about his background, childhood, and adolescence (including about his original name), creating various biographical accounts.<sup>3</sup> We know that Penn was born in 1906; his mother died when he was very young.<sup>4</sup> His father was a Jew who had left the fold, and Penn did not meet him until he was a teenager. He was partially reared in Siberia by his maternal grandfather, a bear hunter and fisherman, and he spent his early years in remote, Christian surroundings. He was ten years old when his grandfather was killed, apparently in a hunting accident, and young Alexander then wandered across Russia searching for his father before reaching him in Moscow. According to a legend that he himself encouraged, Penn walked across vast distances over several years, at times alone and at times with gangs of abandoned children. In Moscow, he became acquainted with famous Russian writers and poets such as Yesenin, Mayakovski, and Pasternak. At this time, Penn also became a boxing coach and joined *Maccabi*, a Zionist sports organization then active in Europe. In 1926, he was arrested for supposed Zionist activities and exiled to a remote village. After a successful escape, he reached Palestine, apparently the only possibility open to him as a Jewish ex-prisoner in the USSR. He hardly knew any Hebrew then and initially wrote poetry in Russian, but by 1929 he was already writing in Hebrew. He published only one book of Hebrew poetry during his lifetime; much of his poetry, including a number of books, were only published after his death in 1972 (Halperin, 1989, 2007).

Penn is known for being a poet whose life was closely associated with his poetry (Karpel, 2007), and many of his poems touch upon issues of belongingness, orphanhood, homeland, and language. The following poem<sup>5</sup> is entitled *Adayin Lo* [*Not yet!*]:<sup>6</sup>

The sun a burnt hellfire  
The earth of my bread—cactus and sand.  
I tell you in all honesty:  
I cannot!

I cannot the owl's groan,  
The angry desert wind,  
The life on thistle and briar  
I cannot call that motherland-homeland.  
[...]  
An old madness stamps me with the fire of its voice,  
But I cannot... not yet.  
(Penn, 2005, p. 9)

This poem deals with belongingness and the notion of homeland. Penn relates to the physical, external environment – the scenery, the climate, the sounds. He feels alienated, but at the same time, he addresses the timing factor—it is still *too early* to call this place home. He brings together traces from the past—“an old madness”—and its resonance in a new place joined by a shared language and a common history.

The next poem, *Ubekhol Zot...* [*Nevertheless...*], is similar but illustrates another theme that was central for Penn: his relationship with the homeland as a love object, using erotic and strongly charged emotional language.

Worn and wanton, like this sun,  
[...]

I packed in snow your ardent temper,  
Placed a glacier on your fires,  
And you did not draw back from sin,  
I melt in the clasp of your arms.

[...]

And then the voice unwittingly thunders within me:  
‘Worn and wanton, and nevertheless—the homeland!...’  
(Penn, 2005, p. 93)

The poem *Moledet Hadashab* [*New Homeland*] takes this emotional stance even further:

For this new homeland, which I did not know,  
And for a wind perfumed with orchards’ gold—  
I placed my soul—and with joyous laughter sent her  
To be burnt in the blaze of a *hamsin*.

What is for me life without dissipation and thunder?

[...]

And without the wide snowy spaces, the heart dims, ages!

I love her, this homeland!

[...]

You kill my soul’s thrust in a moment  
You, called the new homeland.

[...]

The flame of your deep secret—is hidden from me,  
Only once, then... only there did my lips touch.  
To you I have brought for safekeeping the essence of my life  
And the gist of my thoughts.

[...]

And then a wild poetry, different and separate,  
To your heart I will throw, because it is my life’s fate.  
Not in vain did I bolt the door  
Between the two homelands: Russia and *Eretz Israel*.  
(Penn, 2005, pp. 81-82)

Penn juxtaposes the heat of the new homeland to the snowy wilderness of the old one, relating to the contrast in passionate terms—positive and negative, love and hate, attraction and disgust—and choosing a dramatic ending where he addresses both places as homelands, in a way an oxymoron. He refers to “this homeland, which I did not know” (p. 81), a loaded use of the ambiguous Hebrew root *y-d-‘a* [know] that, besides the usual meaning of knowledge or familiarity, denotes sexual intercourse in biblical Hebrew. At the same time, he also expresses aversion, anger, and alienation toward this place – in terms of both its physical features as well as what it represents symbolically.

In *Canaan*, or *Eretz Zavot* [*The land flowing*], two versions of the same poem, the comparison between the two “homelands” emerges once again, as well as his use of an imagery reminiscent of courtship:

[...]

Proud and wrecked carob land,

Wherein my mother tongue  
 Fails to master your secret idiom.  
 Will you accept a dry roar  
 In the tongue of lindens, frost, and snow?!  
 [...]
   
 Here I am, a new son, come from firry distances.  
 [...]
   
 My homeland, one and only!...  
 If only we would bear peace in our basket,  
 If only the two chords—you and I—could  
 Play together the song of our rebirth.  
 (Penn, 2005, p. 128)

Penn relates here to the complex encounter between his languages, raising thoughts about which one is the “right” one for expressing emotions. Moreover, the notion of home and homeland is presented again, this time stating that there is only one.

In the long poem *Mikhtav El Ishah* [*Letter to a woman*], Penn writes to a woman in great detail about their affair and its end and includes a long section describing his relationship with the *language*:

And see more.  
 See the depth of this wonder:  
 My poems, which only yesterday played out in a foreign tongue,  
 Today, my hand deals with them  
 Along a line from right to left!

A tongue from right to left  
 Is a tongue of chastity and sin!  
 Tenderness and stinging in all its moves.  
 You must come to it  
 And subdue her swiftly  
 Like a beautiful and rebellious woman.  
 (Penn, 2005, pp. 77-78)

In this poem, Penn addresses his new language as if it were a woman. His erotic imagery—becoming acquainted with it, developing their relationship—culminates in his use of a surrender metaphor that presents him as a sort of winner, master, owner.

In general, Penn’s poems seem to reflect both an ongoing battle between extreme contrasts and a hyphenated, ambivalent stance. He resorts to fiery expressions of love-hate, attraction-aversion, and hostility-sympathy toward the new country, using extreme words to describe his intense feelings of simultaneous belonging and alienation. He questions the meaning of “homeland” – a new homeland? Two homelands? Motherland-homeland?—all of them found in the poems cited above. Despite his ceaseless efforts, he does not (yet) feel attached to the new place, the new landscapes, the weather. His attitude towards Hebrew is also ambivalent; he succeeds in creating rich and beautiful writing from it and yet feels somewhat alienated, especially as compared to his “real” mother tongue.

Growing up without a stable, parent-supported family may have contributed to Penn’s extreme stances and to his ambivalence with regard to his new (home)land as an adult. In particular, his difficulties in finding the optimal distance, in Akhtar's (1995) terms, between here and there, between his private world and the collective one, between



past and future, could be related to the split in his childhood. Growing up with different caretakers, in different contexts, and probably with different religions (although facts on this issue are unclear) probably contributed to his unconventional life path. He showed a strong tendency to dissociate himself from the majority and to present himself as different, emphasizing his Jewish background when in Russia while presenting himself as a Gentile with strong ties to Russian culture after his arrival in Palestine (Halperin, 1989, 2007). He was certainly a man of contradictions. He was a Communist, but also a Zionist; he was a romantic, sensitive poet who was also a boxer; he was a married man and a father who was notorious for his many love affairs; he was a dominant man but continuously sought spiritual guides to show him the way. Halperin (2007) suggests that many parts of his autobiography(ies) are in fact fragments from the lives of venerated role models, including the poets Yesenin, Lermontov, and Shlonsky, as well as Alexander Zaid.<sup>7</sup>

Penn never entirely stopped writing and publishing poetry in Russian, which could be interpreted as a device for distancing himself from the new society and also as a way of maintaining his original identity and the ties with his original homeland. His combative personality may suggest that, for him, Hebrew served as a platform for creating a specific new persona (see also Tannenbaum & Haim, 2007), and not necessarily a path to the evolving society that had become his new homeland. His eventual adoption by the local literary establishment and his ultimate inclusion in the Hebrew literary canon do not, in and by themselves, attest to Penn's ideological motivation, if any, for his language shift. Hebrew may have functioned as one more tool that happened to be there at the right time and the right place, a new language serving mental and emotional needs.

## Leah Goldberg

Leah Goldberg was born in 1911 in Koenigsberg, East Prussia (now Kaliningrad, Russia). She spent her early childhood in Russia; after the Revolution, she moved with her family to their home in Kaunas, Lithuania. Lithuanian soldiers of the White Army arrested her father and accused him of Communism. For ten successive days, the soldiers staged his fake execution, an experience that may have given rise to his lifelong mental imbalance.

As a child, Goldberg studied at a Hebrew school in Kaunas. She received her Ph.D. in philosophy and Semitic languages from Bonn University. Upon returning to Lithuania at the end of the war, she taught Hebrew literature until her immigration to pre-State Israel in 1935. Goldberg wrote poems, children's books, and plays, and translated extensively into Hebrew, using her excellent knowledge of seven languages. She never married or had children and, in many of her poems, speaks of loneliness and the breakdown of relationships. In many other poems, she relates to memories of Europe and conveys a yearning for the nature that no longer exists in her new reality. She died in 1970 (Aharoni & Aharoni, 2005; Lieblich, 2003).

Her poems express an aesthetic dimension of her life and, as such, have to be acknowledged in understanding her biography (Lieblich, 1997, 2003). As she herself writes in one of her poems titled *Al Atsmi* [*About Myself*]<sup>8</sup>:

[...]

My seasons are etched in my verse  
As a tree's are in its rings  
As my years are in furrowed skin.

I have no hard words—  
 To hamper my visions.  
 My images  
 Are as clear as a church’s window.  
 Through them  
 One can see  
 The changes in the light outside  
 ...  
 (Goldberg, 1986, vol. 3, p. 85)

Goldberg's life is intertwined with her writing. Her poems reveal her emotions and her experiences are “etched in her verse.” Her images, as she explicitly writes, are clear and straightforward. Nevertheless, as Watzman (2010) emphasizes, she chose the image of *church* windows, often made of stained glass and not exactly transparent. Her poems, then, are a window affording readers a glimpse into her life that might be somewhat distorted. This declaration of Goldberg offers a significant insight into her perception of the links between her experiences and her poems, life and art.

One poem of Goldberg that is highly relevant to the issues discussed in this article is entitled *Ilanot*<sup>9</sup> (‘Pine’):

Here I cannot hear the voice of the cuckoo.  
 Here the tree will never wear a cape of snow.  
 But it is here in the shade of these pines  
 my entire childhood comes alive.

The chime of the needles: Once upon a time—  
 I called the snow-space homeland,  
 and the green ice that enchains the stream,  
 and the poem's tongue in a foreign land.

Perhaps only migrating birds know—  
 suspended as they are between earth and sky—  
 this heartache of two homelands.

With you I was transplanted twice,  
 with you, pine trees, I grew,  
 my roots in two different lands.  
 (Goldberg, 1986, vol. 2, p. 143)

This poem is a mixture of attachment, confusion, and nostalgia. Goldberg contrasts her current environment with her memories of the snow, the cuckoo, and the forests, and as mentioned by Back (Goldberg, 2005), “while there are some wild pine woodlands in Israel, the vast majority of the pine forests are cultivated ones, transplanted from other regions” (p. 214). The phrase “two homelands” (p. 143), her explicit addressing of the language issue, as well as her final statement about being transplanted once again, create a complex, sensitive declaration of an ongoing journey towards a clearer sense of identity.

The migrating birds mentioned in *Pine* serve as the title of another poem - *Tsiporey Mas’a* [*Migrating birds*]:

That same spring morning  
 the sky sprouted wings.

And in its wandering westward  
 the breathing sky spoke  
 the Traveler’s Prayer:  
 ‘O God,  
 bring us safely  
 across the ocean  
 across the deep waters,  
 and in autumn return us  
 to this little country  
 which has heard our songs.’  
 (Goldberg, 2005, vol. 2, p. 222)

Goldberg speaks of a kind of wayfarers’ prayer recited by the birds, creating an analogy between the birds and herself. The reference to “this little country” is rather touching: an affectionate term, but also one denoting a place where she is heard, understood, and acknowledged as a poet (see also Lieblich, 2003).

Her first and only published novel, *Vehu Ha-Or* [*And this is the light*] (2011), which was originally published in 1946 and is partly autobiographical, affords further interesting insights. Any reader acquainted with Goldberg’s life can identify undisguised details, beginning with Nora (the protagonist)’s age, the geography of the novel, the many difficult childhood memories, the family’s wanderings during the war, and her father’s mental illness. The book describes the cruel trauma of loss of support and Nora’s fears concerning internal and external instability, while also conveying a strong need for independence. Throughout the book, she expresses a wish to be free from the chains that tie her to her family, her past, and her feeling of national belonging. In the opening chapter, she is in a train going home for a vacation after her first year at university. She is sitting next to a Swedish Gentile man and in front of an elderly Jewish man, feeling bound by this triangle.

And at that moment, she was seared by that deep and burning shame, a strong shame for all three of them. And it was as if she stood on display naked before the two of them: the Jew and the gentile. Damn them, why can’t I just be me, me without being affiliated with one of those two strangers? (p. 4).

Goldberg alludes to Nora’s wishes to be herself and to the ties (traditional, local, and moral) that she perceives as restricting her freedom — ties represented by the two men, by the landscape, by the train. Towards the end of the story, however, Nora expresses a different stance towards the past: you can ignore it and begin anew as an adult.

I don’t want them. That’s the end of it. I’m going beyond them. You can live without a childhood. You can pass over it [...] we, all the young people robbed of childhood, robbed of trust and calm, we’re a mighty army, millions, millions of young people all over the world, we’ll learn to start our lives from adulthood. (p. 197).

In the very last pages of the novel, she writes about her dreams and her wishes for her future, focusing on her sanity, on her new and fresh beginning, *on light*:

I want to live. I want to live all the many days before me, down to the last one, to the end! [...] I won’t go out of my mind in spite of you. In spite of you, I’ll be sane, I’ll be strong, I’ll be very happy [...] I will live and love this life. Love it with its ugliness, its disease, its dread – and I won’t go out of my mind. I want to live... To live the life

of a person who can breathe, live in the light, in the light of the days to come. And this is the light. And this is the light that will go on shining. And this is the light. (pp. 196-198)

“The light” of the title, the source of optimism, may point to the path chosen by the heroine—a new language, a return to her Jewish sources:

Who taught you to dream the dream of your future, with a tremble, to pronounce the name of a little land on the shores of the Mediterranean, if not this town and its Jews? And for whom, and because of whom did you want to live, if not for them, for the people of this town? (p. 171)

Nevertheless, and contrary to the claim of various scholars suggesting that the light represents mainly Zionist ideology (e.g., Liebllich, 2003), I would argue that Goldberg views the new language as a tool, not an end: a tool that allows both Nora and herself a quiet and internal freedom, a way to start from scratch as an adult. Thus, Nora's statement at the opening, “I settled my account with the past. I'm free” (p. 7), emerges as naïve. As the novel comes to an end, the past emerges as a permanent concern rather than a sealed chapter. Moreover, in the novel, there is a constant swing between options: memory vs. forgetfulness, attachment vs. detachment, where to live, and in what language. These themes are also prominent in several of Goldberg's poems as well as in her diaries (Aharoni & Aharoni, 2005; Goldberg, 1986; Liebllich, 2003); they seem to represent deeper issues that Goldberg dealt with throughout her life, both personal and professional. Her language shift, in life and in writing, is another meaningful vehicle for moving between these possibilities, between different ways of expression, and probably between different parts of her life, personality, and memories. Each language holds different connotations and offers a different path (for better or for worse) to specific memories and experiences. In choosing a new way of life and a new language, then, Goldberg may not be making a deliberate ideological decision. Possibly, she may be mustering all that may help to liberate her, at least for a while, at least to some degree, at least in some contexts, from her burdensome past.

### **Aharon Appelfeld**

The next example of the thesis discussed in this article about the need for a broader perspective on the shift to Hebrew among translingual writers is Aharon Appelfeld. Until a few decades ago, Holocaust survivors constituted a substantial proportion of immigrants to Israel, and Appelfeld is one of the most distinguished literary representatives of this group. He was born in 1932 in a village near Czernowitz, Romania (now Ukraine). When the war reached him, his mother was murdered, and he and his father were deported to a concentration camp. Soon after, they were separated. Appelfeld escaped and survived hiding alone for three years in villages and forests before joining the Soviet Army as a (very young) cook. After the war, he spent several months in a displaced persons' camp in Italy before immigrating to Palestine in 1946 as part of a youth group. He learned Hebrew while studying in an agricultural high school, served in the army, and later studied Hebrew literature and Yiddish at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Several years after arriving in Palestine, he was reunited with his father. Appelfeld has published more than forty novels, and most of his work touches on the Holocaust (Schwartz, 1996, 2009).

Encompassing the whole spectrum of his writing is obviously beyond the scope of this paper. My focus will be mainly on his most explicitly autobiographical work, entitled

*Sipur Haim* [*The Story of a Life*] (2004), and on several passages from other books. The following quotation illuminates his thoughts and feelings concerning language(s):

My mother's native tongue had been German. She loved the language and cultivated it, and when she spoke it, the words had the sound of a crystal bell. My grandmother spoke Yiddish, and her language had a different ring, or, rather taste, to it, for it always brought to my mind plum compote. The maid spoke Ukrainian, with some of our words and some of Grandmother's thrown in, too. [...] all she wanted was to make me happy. I loved her and her language [...] Another language, which we didn't use at home but which was the most common on the streets, was Romanian [...] These four languages merged into one, rich in nuance, contrasts, humor, and satire. This language had lots of room for emotion, for delicate shadings of feeling, imagination, and memory. Today these languages no longer live within me, but I feel their roots... (2004, p. 108-109)

Languages, then, are central to his sense of identity, and the various languages hold different memories and associations. Relating to his experiences during the war, he writes that he was left without a coherent internal world:

It is 1946, the year I came to Israel, and the diary is a mosaic of words in German, Yiddish, Hebrew, and even Ruthenian. I say "words" and not "sentences" because in 1946 I was not able to connect words into sentences, and the words were the suppressed cries of a fourteen-year-old youth who'd lost all the languages he had spoken and was now left without language. (p. 107)

Again, Appelfeld is explicit about languages as integral to his internal sense of self, and about the dramatic implications of being left without a fluent, articulate language. After arriving in Palestine, he started to learn Hebrew. The words, he writes,

[...] sounded exotic but were hard to pronounce. They lacked warmth, their sound aroused no associations, as if they had been born from the sand that surrounded us on all sides [...] Memories of home and the sounds of its language faded away, but the new language would not take root easily [...] The effort to preserve my mother tongue amid surroundings that imposed another language upon me proved futile. From week to week it dwindled; by the end of that first year all that remained were embers [...] My mother and her language were one and the same. Now, as that language faded within me, it was as if my mother were dying a second time. (p. 109-110)

He equates his mother tongue with his mother. First, when he relates to his early memories, the sound of the language, and the smells it evokes, and later, upon shifting to Hebrew, when he equates this language shift with another form of his mother dying. The crisis of language shift, which was interwoven with his immigration process, was further amplified by the tie assumed in Zionist ideology between Hebrew and the negation of the Diaspora. Part of the Zionist ethos, as noted, was the creation of a new identity, a new Hebrew-speaking Jewish prototype. Young Appelfeld, who experienced the horrors of the Holocaust and the difficulties of immigration, now faces the need for a new language that he does not necessarily feel attached to, which is significant given his sensitivity to languages noted in the previous quotes. Against this background, it is clear why he calls Hebrew his "stepmother tongue" (p. 103): foreign, but still a family member; alienated, but still part of some kind of collective identity.

He further elaborates on life without a language, or with a language that is not an inherent, constitutive part of the self.

What will become of me without a language? [...] Without a language I'm like a stone [...] without a language I would also wither away in an ugly and lengthy desiccation, like the garden behind our dormitory during winter [...] Without language a man doesn't talk. (p. 110-111)

My mother tongue, which I had greatly loved, died within me after two years in Israel [...] There was, of course, an inescapable dilemma: that language had been German – the language of those who murdered my mother. How does one go back to speaking in a language drenched in the blood of the Jews? (p. 111-112)

Thus, apart from stressing the difficulty of losing his mother tongue, he also relates to the complex dilemma of people who spoke *German* and loved it, those for whom German is the language of childhood and cherished memories, but also the language of the murderers.

In the next diary entries, Appelfeld relates to his past, echoing Goldberg's statement about erasing traumatic childhood memories:

During the morning break, the instructor, M., asked me casually where I'd been during the war. The question so surprised me that I stood there open-mouthed. "Many places," I recovered sufficiently to say... (p. 119)

Every night I tell myself: Forget more and more. The more I forget, the easier it will be to blend in with the earth and with the language. (p. 120)

The quotes are examples of forgetfulness as a coping mechanism— cutting himself off from the path he had walked, erasing memories with the aim of starting on a new journey from scratch. A new language, Hebrew in this case, may be a very helpful tool in this endeavor. Commenting on this interplay between remembering and forgetting, attachment and alienation, Schwartz (1996) writes:

The emotional and cognitive world that emerges from [...] Appelfeld's stories (including those that take place before the Holocaust) is traversed by two opposing vectors: the involuntary necessity and the desire to erase every bit of memory, and the effort to preserve those few scraps of memory. These two vectors wax and wane, in a kind of pendulum movement. Sometimes the need or desire to forget prevails, and sometimes the need or desire to remember. One way or another, the battle between these 'imperialistic' forces takes place on a very small stretch of remembered landscape (p. 7).

Many of Appelfeld's other writings suggest that wartime childhood memories are not forgotten but rather "sealed off or fragmented" (Shlensky, 2006, p. 413). In one of his more recent books – *Ha-ish She-lo Pasak Lishon* [*The Man who Never Stopped Sleeping*] (2009), the story turns on themes of remembering and forgetting. Irwin (Appelfeld's given name before he changed it soon after his arrival in Israel), the protagonist, is a recently arrived adolescent, a Holocaust survivor. His counselor preaches the message that the aim is to forget the past, to create a new, better identity:

"You will change. In three months, you will be different. They won't recognize you; you will be tall, strong, and tanned. The language will come together with the body and they will become one." I didn't understand everything he said but I sensed that if we did everything we were supposed to, we would change and we would become different. In this process, a part of me would be taken away, and I would grow differently. (p. 15)

"Within a few months I will change, the war years will be erased and I will be a new creature." As I repeated the words, I felt their inane, lapped by anguish laced with sorrow. (p. 25)

In these excerpts, Appelfeld expands on the notion of changing – while forgetting. The new persona—with a new body, a new name, a new routine, and also a new language—offers an appealing alternative. This was a central aspect of the Zionist ethos, not to say propaganda. While choosing this alternative, however, Appelfeld also reminds the reader of the price of these processes:

My first name is Irwin. Mother chose this name out of all the names then in fashion, she liked it. Father also liked my name... The thought that my name would be erased and I would bear another name instead suddenly appeared to me as a betrayal. In my heart, I knew that changing the name was tied to changing the language, and I repeated to myself the arguments that Ephraim had laid out before us and tried to justify them, but in the dream at night, I was at home when Father heard the arguments and his reaction was unequivocal. One doesn't change one's name just as one doesn't change one's mother tongue. The name is the soul. A person who changes his name is ridiculous... I like names in which you hear the parents' love. (p. 51-52)

The name, Appelfeld accentuates, is the soul, and is also related to one's first language, one's mother tongue. Both the name and the first language are tied to the close emotional bond with one's parents. These associations again remind us that the journeys "from far... to optimal distance" (Akhtar, 1995, p. 1058), or "from yesterday... to today" (p. 1064) are complicated. The Zionist ethos, however, rarely acknowledges their intricacy and views them as a dream come true, or as the fulfillment of an ideal.

Appelfeld addresses these issues sparingly. He is well known for his unique writing style, often described as "minimalistic" and "thin" (e.g., Budick, 1999; Fischler, 1997; Shlensky, 2006). As phrased by Schwartz (2009), his style has its unique music, reminiscent of the soothing movement of waves both revealing and concealing powerful underwater storms. Shlensky (2006) analyzes Appelfeld's style as a reflection of the difficulties that Holocaust survivors in general, Appelfeld included, often encountered when trying to remember. Breaking with the collectivist ethos dominant in Israel during its first decades, Appelfeld sought ways of conveying the experiences of survivors, in both plot and language, to an audience that found them essentially beyond comprehension. His minimalism in general, as well as his characters' silences and hesitations in particular, denote unbearable memories. He articulates the otherness of those who never felt an integral part of the collective Zionist ethos because their experiences were not understood or even listened to. Shlensky's (2006) arguments are in line with what we know from empirical findings about bi/multilinguals' access to memory (e.g., Schrauf, 2000). Particularly relevant in this context is the subject of post-traumatic bi/multilinguals (Foster, 1992; Greenson, 1950; Tannenbaum, 2005). As Appelfeld remarks about himself, individuals may not always have conscious access to

memories of overwhelming past experiences, and his work is another example of choosing a new language to approach memories in emotionally safer ways.

In light of the analysis so far, my understanding is that Hebrew did not play for Appelfeld the ideological role often attributed (by society, by the educational system, by Zionist propaganda) to many translingual writers (including to him, until he explicitly articulated a contrary stance). Adopting Hebrew, though often involving severe difficulties of a technical or (mainly) of an emotional nature, was a necessity. The fact that Appelfeld eventually became a leading Hebrew writer is impressive, but seeing this purely as a triumph of Zionist ideology, is unwarranted.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The Zionist movement, wherein the revival of Hebrew played a central role, warmly embraced Hebrew literature as a tool that reflected and promoted its ideology and as evidence of its success. For many decades, modern Hebrew literature was mostly the work of translingual writers who adopted Hebrew as their expressive, artistic language. Thus, even though Hebrew was not their first language nor part of these writers’ early lives, they chose to shift to a language that constituted an ideological pillar of the evolving society. Though some of them, like Leah Goldberg, had encountered Hebrew during their early school years, it had still served mostly as a school language, if at all, while a different language had been dominant at home. By and large, then, the different languages served different (emotional) functions in terms of emotional loading and access to early childhood memories (Dewaele & Nakano, 2013; Pavlenko, 2006; Schrauf, 2000).

Besides being part of the national revival, my central argument in this article is that Hebrew may also have played other roles, and writings of Penn, Goldberg and Appelfeld were cited to illustrate what Akhtar (1995) termed *journeys*. Penn's ambivalent relationship with his new homeland and his waiting for the time when he will feel part of it are reflected in his poems, and different aspects of his personal biography strongly suggest he may have been in the midst of such a journey. He emerges as being torn between love and hate and as questioning issues of affiliation. He wonders about adapting to the new place and the new identity as opposed to feeling part of the past, of the “far” and the “yesterday” ends of these journeys (Akhtar, 1995, p. 1064). Goldberg's heroine finds in “the light”—the title of her novel—a potential escape from the feeling of being tied down and hopeless. Some of her poems reflect her journey in time and evoke her internal dialogue on being transplanted yet again to a new place, with the “migrating birds” (Goldberg, 1986, vol. 2, p. 143) in the role of an optional alter self. Like her, the birds are in a constant journey between the “near” and the “far,” between “mine,” “yours,” and “ours” (Akhtar, 1995, p. 1057). Appelfeld's memories of his own sweet and horrific “yesterdays” (Ibid, p. 1064) are further examples of the complexities involved in personal migration stories. Hebrew functioned in these journeys as a central mechanism for creating and nurturing a new identity, helping to define the borders between in-group and out-group not just in terms of space but, more significantly for the subject at hand, also in terms of time: one (in fact many) language(s) for the past, a different one for the present and the future.

The writers discussed in this paper convey the experiences generally confronting migrants. Without in any way equating in a simplistic, reductionist manner a writer’s biography with his or her work, I suggest relating to these writings as prisms through which one can view personal and often difficult experiences. The language choice of these writers is extremely meaningful, deserves special attention, and cannot be explained



solely on ideological grounds. The linguistic revolution of Hebrew revival was unfolding concurrently with their development as writers, and the new language may have helped them to redefine themselves as individuals. The choice to write in Hebrew may reflect a conscious or unconscious emotion or idea that shifting to the new language could help them in their journey. The shift may be viewed as helping in the transition from an old to a new state of mind, from the old world (not only the physical one) to a new beginning. The writers presented here had harsh and traumatic childhood experiences, unstable families, they lived through wars or survived the Holocaust. In Zionist ideology and in the (evolving) State of Israel, they found an opportunity to reinvent themselves, to create a new sense of self. To do so through language, which for them was not only a tool of communication but the essence of their professional identity and closely related to emotional layers of the self, was a powerful opportunity.

Language shift may thus have served as a kind of defense mechanism, reinforcing the fence between their painful past and their present. This language choice may have strengthened their “third individuation” (Akhtar’s, 1995, p. 1053), as part of the complicated personal process they would have undergone as immigrants. They thereby acquired a space where a simpler and quieter sense of self became possible (see Amati-Mehler, et al., 1993; Tannenbaum, 2003, 2012). A second language may thus have a (conscious or unconscious) defensive function in the context of immigrant families or in the context of therapy, and may also serve a similar function for writers who choose to express their inner world and develop their professional identity as translingual authors.

Kellman (2000) refers to Zionist writers’ choice of *Hebrew* as an “assertion of communal identity,” and claims that most “chose this medium precisely in order to create a new tradition, in a language that would affirm their identity within a vital and tenacious culture” (p. 88). They were offered the artistic opportunity of shifting to a language that was deeply connected to the collective past and of great symbolic significance, but emotionally less laden than their mother tongue (i.e. more nationally/ethnically but less personally charged). Using Bohórquez’s (2009) conceptualization, the account of the Zionist narrative regarding language shift is one of a mourning-free, perhaps even happy transition. The interaction of the intrapersonal and wider social dynamics in this context may indeed be different from those of translingual writers in other immigrant societies. Opting for it, being embraced by the surrounding society for doing so, and even gaining acceptance into a new canon, only encouraged the process.

And yet, what appears as a simple and painless transfer may be more multilayered (e.g., Bohórquez, 2009; Tannenbaum, 2005, 2012). I suspect that the view portraying the transfer to Hebrew as a smooth transition of Zionist writers to a new life context misses the examination of their inner selves and inner worlds in terms of their pain, their personal reasons for language shift, and the mourning process they experienced in shifting to the new language. Even for those who shifted early in life (like Goldberg, at least in her writings), even for those who maintained their first language parallel to using Hebrew (like Penn and Goldberg), a significant shift took place. Penn may use Hebrew to cut off from the past, Goldberg generates new personal possibilities, Appelfeld uses it to fill a void, finding himself bereft of a language altogether. In all these instances, there is a discontinuity between the language of their childhood experiences and that of their adult professional lives, creating a split between their different selves. Confining the analysis of translingualism to the socio-political context ignores the significant individual dimensions at play. Hebrew was indeed intimately bound up with the land and the history of Israel, and became a powerful symbol in the new evolving society. Writers in this language were embraced as standard-bearers of this society. However, the fact that they wrote in Hebrew, in Israel, and at that time, does not automatically imply that they

did so purely out of an ideological stance. Their principal motivations may have come from other sources and have been of a personal or psychological nature, which happened to fit well with ideological positions. Ideologies may at times serve as camouflage, both for a society with a collective interest in promoting its ethos, and for the individuals themselves, who may choose to be regarded as part of the collective and support its ideology because of their own personal needs.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The first international Zionist activities of organised immigration to Palestine began in the late nineteenth century, though its roots can be traced back to the *Haskalah* [Enlightenment] movement that had begun a century earlier. The seeds of secular thinking, including the use of Hebrew for non-religious purposes in journalism, literature, and poetry, and the perception of Hebrew as a cultural rather than necessarily nationalist element, were planted at that time (e.g., Safran, 2005a).

<sup>2</sup> Due to the limited scope of this paper, only these three examples will be considered, but translingual Hebrew writing is a large phenomenon involving an impressive group of authors who, together, became a cultural cornerstone in the building of the new nation.

<sup>3</sup> It is hard to avoid being reminded here of Romain Gary, another translingual writer who created various autobiographies peppered with exotic details (e.g., Diver, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> There are several versions of his mother's background; some mention that she was Jewish, others that she was a Subtonic, while others mention she was a non-Jewish nanny who worked for his father (e.g., Halperin, 1989, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> All of Penn's poems cited below appear in the complete anthology of his poems (Penn, 2005). Reservations about literary translation are well known, but given that the focus of this paper is on themes and contents, the use of translations was deemed suitable.

<sup>6</sup> Penn's poems were translated from Hebrew by B. Stein.

<sup>7</sup> Alexander Zeid was a prominent figure of the Second *Aliyah* (immigration wave to Palestine, between the years 1904-1914) and one of the founders of several Jewish defense organizations (e.g., *Bar-Giora*, *Hashomer*) during the period of Ottoman rule in Palestine.

<sup>8</sup> All poems presented here appear in the complete anthology of Goldberg's poems (Goldberg, 1986). This poem was translated by H. Watzman (2010).

<sup>9</sup> Translated by R. Back (Goldberg, 2005).