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'DIE JUDEN SCHIESSEN!' TRANSLATIONS BY HERMANN ADLER AND WOLF BIERMANN OF YITZHAK KATZENELSON'S EPIC POEM OF THE WARSAW GHETTO

In 1996, in an article on 'the scandal of Jewish rage', Naomi Seidman compared the well-known French edition of Elie Wiesel's survivor testimony, *La Nuit*, with the Yiddish memoir from which it had emerged, suggesting that Wiesel had downplayed the expression of anger and desire for violent vengeance in the earlier text in favour of a haunted, internalized, death-ridden image of victimhood in the later version.[1] Seidman suggested that this was not simply a case of Wiesel's changing attitude to his own experience, but of deliberate distortion intended to make his text acceptable to a majority culture that felt uncomfortable about Jewish anger and defiance and preferred a Christ-like image of passive suffering that it had the cultural resources to deal with.

Rage is a 'scandal' that disrupts carefully constructed patterns of social harmony and the political interests that rely on them. It is offensive because it attacks the sensibilities of those whose self-image relies on a commitment to reconciliation, and it is unreasonable because it exposes the interests behind reasonableness itself. For all the decades of reconciliation work and the establishment of politically acceptable ways of talking about the Holocaust, there is a residue of violent but unfocused emotion that is excluded from the patterns of polite public memory work. This is of vital interest for exploring how translations of texts arising from the Holocaust mediate the language of rage and vengeance between cultural contexts in which it has a very different status and potential effect.

This article will consider two of the German translations of a Yiddish text from the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, both of which confront the issue of a 'scandalous' rage and desire for violent vengeance that refuse to take their place in the scheme of reconciliation, dignified mourning, and working through of the past. I propose that taking translation seriously as an activity inevitably involving creation as well as communication and mediation can move us beyond the sometimes sterile debate about whether it is possible for victims' experiences to be 'understood' in a new language or cultural context; instead, we can ask questions about the position from which the victim is able to speak in translation, as well as about the function of the text in a new cultural and linguistic context.

Arno Lustiger has called Yitzhak Katzenelson's Yiddish poem *Dos lid*

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[1] Naomi Seidman, 'Elie Wiesel and the Scandal of Jewish Rage', *Jewish Social Studies*, 3 (1996), 1–19.

funm oysgehargetn yidishn folk (*The Song of the Exterminated Jewish People*)
'das wichtigste und ergreifendste poetische Werk des Holocaust'.[2] In Israel,
Katzenelson enjoys the status of a significant poetic spokesman for the Ghetto
fighters, and his work has played a defining role in creating and preserving
the image of the Jewish combatant and resistance fighter.[3] Katzenelson wrote
the text in the internment camp at Vittel between October 1943 and January
1944 after escaping the destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto. As a well-known
writer, he had been charged by his fellow Ghetto fighters with the task of
bringing information out of the Ghetto. He had been provided with a forged
Honduran passport and was interned at Vittel, where foreign citizens were
detained awaiting prisoner exchanges. Katzenelson hid the poem and other
texts before he was finally transported to Drancy and then Auschwitz in April
1944. The poem was first published in Paris in 1945.[4]

Katzenelson's poem is an epic narrative of the German occupation of
Warsaw, the construction of the Ghetto, the 'treachery' (as Katzenelson saw
it) of the Judenrat under Adam Czerniaków, the deportation of the Jews,
and finally the Uprising of April and May 1943 and the destruction of the
Ghetto. The story is narrated in rhyming quatrains, in fifteen parts of fifteen
stanzas each; as the text proceeds to its catastrophic conclusion, the lines
lengthen, giving the impression of a strict compositional principle coming
under extreme tension from the pressure of the events described. Katzenel-
son's language is a virtuoso display, mixing high and low registers, lament,
narrative, and political invective, and rising to moments of rhythmic intensity
when describing both the worst atrocities and the Ghetto fighters' response.

The narrative is many-layered. On one level, it is concerned with the pos-
sibility of making art on behalf of a people about to be exterminated, using a
language that is dying with them. It is also a demonstration of Jewish resis-
tance to National Socialism, made for an audience (God, Jews outside the Nazi
sphere of influence) whose interest cannot be taken for granted, as well as a
defiant statement of Jewish cultural identity at the moment of crisis. The text's

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[2] Arno Lustiger, *Zum Kampf auf Leben und Tod! Das Buch vom Widerstand der Juden, 1933–1945*
(Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1994), p. 88.

[3] On Katzenelson's biography see Tsiporah Katzenelson-Nakhumov, *Yitzhak Katzenelson: sayn
leben un shafn* (Buenos Aires: Tsentral-farband fun Poylishe Yidn in Argentine, 1948).

[4] The publication history of Katzenelson's text is complex, especially given the existence of two
manuscripts, one of which was buried in Vittel and the other smuggled out; both manuscripts
are now held by the Ghetto Fighters' House, Tel Aviv. Quotations in this article are from the
following edition, available online at the National Yiddish Book Center, Amherst, MA (http://www.
yiddishbookcenter.org): Yitzhak Katzenelson, *dos lid funm oysgehargetn yidishn folk* (New York:
Ikuf, 1963). References are given in parentheses as Katzenelson, by stanza (e.g. III. 6=part III,
stanza 6) and page numbers. I have transliterated Katzenelson's text using the YIVO standard
transliteration system; although this is in no sense a neutral system, being a compromise with
the phonetic values of English, it does provide a useful contrast with the German-inflected
transliterations provided by the translators.

linguistic identity is vital: Katzenelson wrote in both Hebrew and Yiddish, but chose Yiddish for this great, final statement, as the everyday language of Eastern European Jewry, and thus as a statement of identity. The attitude of the text towards the languages spoken by Jews is clear: Jewish figures who speak Polish, or who cannot speak Yiddish properly, are the informers, Ghetto policemen, and other traitors, who are not true Jews. Katzenelson calls them 'meshumodim un erev meshumodim' (converts and those on the eve of conversion), whose Star of David on their uniform caps looks to him like a swastika (Katzenelson III. 6, p. 28).

The opening of the poem makes a connection with the roots of Jewish poetry in the psalms, referring to David and his harp (as well as cheekily referencing the characteristic invocation of the Muses at the beginning of classical Greek epics such as Homer's *Odyssey*):

> 'zing! nem dayn harf in hant, hoyl, oysgehoylt un gring,
> oyf zayne shtrunes din warf dayne finger shver,
> vi hertser, vi tseveytikte, dos lid dos letste zing,
> zing fun di letste yidn oyf eyropes erd.'
>
> vi ken ikh zingen? vi ken ikh efenen mayn moyl
> az ikh bin geblibn eyner nor aleyn —
> mayn vayb un mayne eyfelekh di tsvey — a groyl!
> mikh groylt a groyl… me veynt! ikh her vayt a geveyn.
>   (Katzenelson I. 1–2, p. 19)

Katzenelson turns the words of Psalm 149 around: instead of singing the Lord a new song, this is the last song, shouted at the heavens on behalf of his people to see if God is still there, and bringing to a catastrophic end the era of Jewish creativity that began with the psalms. The whole text is rich in interpretative possibilities,[5] but my interest here is in how the German translations respond to it. Where the original is about the possibilities of speech—and specifically art—in a situation where the Yiddish-language culture in which this speech was embedded and that had made it possible is on the point of extinction, the translations are about the meaning of this kind of speech in a context where the Yiddish-speaking world has been destroyed. The emphasis is on the 'how' of 'How can I sing?'.

The first part of the poem ends with the poem's speaker gathering his dead and dying people around him and choosing to represent them through his song in a final, communal act of defiance and self-identification. So any translation—not just one into German—needs to address the question of the meaning of this kind of speech *after* the catastrophe rather than during it, as

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[5] See e.g. Susan Gubar, 'The Long and the Short of Holocaust Verse', *New Literary History*, 35 (2004), 443–68; Alvin H. Rosenfeld, 'The Jewish Writer at the End of Time', in *Identität und Gedächtnis in der deutschen Literatur nach 1945*, ed. by Dieter Lamping (Berlin: Schmidt, 2003), pp. 17–28.

well as the text's refusal to adopt a position of passive victimhood that is available for emotional identification. The translator is also faced with the issue of rendering a voice that speaks so clearly on behalf of a particular linguistic culture and refuses assimilation into what it identifies as non-Jewish languages.

The German translation brings with it additional problems, however. Since the poem's speaker is able to sing only when he overcomes his isolation and individualism and speaks with the voice of his people, a translation faces the problem of producing a text that speaks against the culture in whose very language it now speaks. Can one translate it into the language of the perpetrators without falsifying the subject position of the victim? Or without putting the text to use in supporting either identification with the victims or reconciliation between victims and perpetrators? These are both positions that Katzenelson would have rejected, since both occur at the cost of the victims. How does one deal with the specific similarities and differences between the languages in a text that insists on the implacable otherness of everything German? Is it possible to preserve that sense of otherness, or do the needs of German-language discourse about the Holocaust simply assimilate the subject position of the victim into a self-absorbed ethics of self-criticism? A translation might therefore entail abandoning the expression of rage and pain for its own sake, defusing it by inserting it into a meaningful narrative of mourning and 'working through' the past, where it can do constructive and positive work instead of being unreasonable and embarrassing.

The Translations

Katzenelson's poem has received little attention in English,[6] but in Germany, thanks to the commitment of the Evangelisches Bildungswerk, the historian Arno Lustiger, and the singer-songwriter Wolf Biermann, from the 1990s it achieved popular and political acknowledgement, including a performance by Biermann in the Bundestag on Holocaust Remembrance Day in 2005. Biermann's version of the poem, which is designed for performance, is worth discussing in its own right, but Katzenelson's text has in fact been translated into German on two other occasions, and Biermann's is situated in a network of translations that refer to each other as well as to the original text, and all of which make a case for the significance of the translation of this particular work into German.

The first translation was published by Hermann Adler in 1951, with a new edition in 1992 to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Wannsee conference, following a reading organized by the Evangelisches Bildungswerk in Berlin

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[6] See Yitzhak Katzenelson, *The Song of the Murdered Jewish People*, trans. by Noah Rosenbloom (Israel: Ghetto Fighters' House, 1980).

on 9 November 1990.[7] In response to this republication, Arno Lustiger made a romanized transcription of the Yiddish text, which formed the basis of Biermann's performing version.[8] Following this, and in response to a critical article by Hubert Winkels in *Die Zeit* in 1994,[9] the translator of Katzenelson's Vittel diary, Helmut Homfeld, published privately what he considered to be a more faithful translation.[10] The translators all describe themselves as motivated by factors arising from their biographies—the biographical material helps to justify making this text accessible to a German public—and both versions from the 1990s are presented as responses to earlier translations.

According to Hermann Adler's own account, he was commissioned to translate Katzenelson's work into German in 1949 by the Israeli Minister of Education (and future President) Zalman Shazar.[11] Adler, himself a survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto, was from an assimilated Jewish background in Nuremberg, so his cultural co-ordinates were German, and his concerns were with the possibility of salvaging a form of German Jewish culture after the Holocaust, as well as with questions of Christian–Jewish coexistence, none of which were of any interest for Katzenelson. Having known Katzenelson in Warsaw, and being himself the author of several volumes of German poetry arising from his experiences, it is likely that Adler was judged a useful mediator between victims and perpetrators. Certainly, Adler took this role seriously, positioning himself as mediator between Christians and Jews, Yiddish and German, and different culturally conditioned conceptions of aesthetic quality.

Biermann, whose Jewish Communist father had been murdered in Auschwitz, identifies his version of the text as a personal project to refute the view that Jews went passively to their deaths, 'die ganze Kälber-selber-Schuld-Arie', as he calls it, responding to Katzenelson's sarcastic dismissal of the same attitude: 'Aza a folk! vos hot gelosn zikh vi kelber oysshekhtn, aza a folk!' (Biermann, p. 23; Katzenelson XIV. 5, p. 72). He writes that the idea arose from discussions with Lustiger, who showed him the transliteration that he had made and who saw the publication as part of a long-term project documenting Jewish resistance to National Socialism. The edition presents Biermann as equal author of a text to put alongside Katzenelson's poem; this

    [7] Jizchak Katzenelson, *Dos lid funm ojsgehargetn jidischn folk/Das Lied vom letzten Juden*, ed. by Manfred Richter, trans. by Hermann Adler (Berlin: Hentrich, 1992) (henceforth Adler 1992).

    [8] Itzhak Katzenelson and Wolf Biermann, *Dos lied vunem ojsgehargetn jidischn volk/Großer Gesang vom ausgerotteten jüdischen Volk* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1994) (henceforth Biermann).

    [9] Hubert Winkels, 'Rettung ins Wort', *Die Zeit*, 12 February 1994, pp. 11–12.

    [10] Jizchak Katzenelson, *Das Lied vom ausgemordeten jüdischen Volk*, trans. by Helmut Homfeld (Rendsburg, Vierzonstr. 5: H. Homfeld, 1996); see also Jizchak Katzenelson, *Oh, Mein Volk! Mein Volk . . .: Aufzeichnungen aus dem Internierungslager Vittel*, ed. and trans. by Helmut Homfeld (Berlin: OMNIS, 1999).

    [11] Hermann Adler, 'Zur Entstehung der Katzenelson-Nachdichtung', in *Gesänge aus der Stadt des Todes: Todeslagergedichte aus dem Wilnaer Ghetto 1941/42* (Berlin: Hentrich, 1994), p. 90.

applies whether Katzenelson's text is present in the edition or not. The hard-back edition from 1994 referred to here presents Biermann's text alongside Lustiger's transliteration and a facsimile of one of Katzenelson's manuscripts, while a parallel edition in paperback simply provides Biermann's text, mean-ing that Katzenelson is given as the author of a text that does not appear in the book. Both editions provide Biermann's accompanying essays.

By contrast, Adler is presented as 'Nachdichter' for the poem, in other words in a dependent rather than equal relationship with Katzenelson, des-pite the freedom implied by the term. The first edition, which appeared in Zurich in 1951, did not feature the original text in parallel, but the 1992 edition comprises the original, a romanized transliteration by Claudia Bloß (making the text legible by a German-speaker), and Adler's translation. With three texts set side by side on the page, the poem is not easy to read as a narrative, and attention is thrown onto the relationship between them: the inclusion of the original text in Hebrew letters is a useful reminder of cultural difference and ensures that the German reader is aware that the transliteration is a compromise made for his or her sake.

Homfeld claims to speak on behalf of the author, with authority gained from his translation and editing of Katzenelson's Vittel diary: the aim of his 'wörtliche Übersetzung' is to convey 'wie denn nun Katzenelson wirklich for-muliert und mithin gedacht hat'.[12] His translation is described as non-literary, aiming instead to grasp the essence of Katzenelson's thought, which is seen to be something separate from his style: 'Leider geht bei einer wörtlichen Über-setzung der "Klang" des Jiddischen weitgehend verloren. Auch das Versmaß und der Reim lassen sich kaum übertragen.' Thus the cultural specificity of the text, which is part of its meaning, is sacrificed in the name of a literal ren-dering of its content. One can see this as a useful task as a complement to the two other translations; however, since both texts now come with a romanized transcription of Katzenelson's Yiddish, meaning that the German-speaking reader is able to make comparisons between them, the word-for-word trans-lation may be superfluous.

The translations by Adler and Biermann/Lustiger were both widely read and performed in public, and they have a particular linguistic interest. In their very different ways, these two translations work with aesthetic approaches that seek disruptive interventions in the contexts of their production: they intervene against a tendency to overlay Holocaust remembrance with a sonor-ous rhetoric of reconciliation or elegiac beauty of language, doing this through particular, and very different, linguistic strategies. They are stylized and rhe-torical, working against sentimentality and identification with the victims,

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[12] Homfeld, 'Einleitung' [n.p.]. Homfeld here cites correspondence with the publisher Hentrich; Homfeld eventually published the translation himself, however.

looking for ways of singing an impossible song rather than resorting to a consensual realism.

Adler's text presents a view of the German language as having been subject to destructive forces itself, and refuses any kind of beauty, even where the original offers it; it also insists on the fundamental difference between Yiddish and German, suggesting that reconciliation is possible only through acknowledgement of radical otherness. Biermann's text tries to shake up established ways of talking about violence and victimhood, confronting readers with a victim with whom identification is not possible: it is not polite or reasonable, and makes no offer of reconciliation to the German reader, instead exaggerating the original's violence and cynicism. Their strategies are supported by an implied relationship with the Yiddish original and with a particular understanding of the relationship of the language to German, reflecting the translators' political intentions.

Questions can certainly be raised about whether these strategies respect the cultural integrity of the original or whether it is assimilated to the needs of the new German context, which is a particularly sensitive issue in this case. Editions with a romanized transliteration of the Yiddish in parallel raise questions about the politics of transliteration, since there is no neutral transliteration system: they all have both to negotiate between the various different regional pronunciations of the language and to make particular compromises with the writing system of another language.

Producing a transliteration for a German-speaking readership can give the impression that Yiddish is little more than a dialect of German (or even a substandard 'Judenjargon'), understandable and accessible with little effort: the two translations under scrutiny here approach this political problem in very different ways.

The Relationship of German and Yiddish in the Paratexts

The translators' view of the relationship of Yiddish to German can give us an insight into their strategies, since they are both concerned very concretely with making German work as a medium for speech about the Warsaw Ghetto, as well as showing where it cannot work as a means of conveying the experiences of Yiddish-speaking victims. Hermann Adler's 1951 introduction to the text presents it as a force for reconciliation. A few statements seem to indicate that he, or those who commissioned the translation, is willing to speak on behalf of Katzenelson in the name of contemporary political realities:

Vielleicht wird in dieser deutschsprachigen Übersetzung aber doch das letzte Stammeln eines Sterbenden vernehmbar und sein letztes Warnen so, daß es der tote Dichter noch vermag, auch in der Sprache derer zu mahnen, die er nicht mehr hat vergeben können, und wo aus des Dichters letztem Stammeln Anklagen gellen, sind es nicht Anklagen

eines Hassenden, sondern Anklagen eines Gefolterten, der nur deshalb so heftig hat anklagen können, weil er um Liebe und Barmherzigkeit wußte.

    Als Warnung diene seine Dichtung, und seine Warnung wirke versöhnend.[13]

This reads as an attempt to defuse the anger of the text for a public sphere in which reconciliation and *Wiedergutmachung* are being discussed: it does not want to rock the boat. The phrase 'in der Sprache derer [. . .], die er nicht mehr hat vergeben können' is particularly unfortunate. Adler connects Katzenelson's vision of apocalyptic conflagration with the threat of nuclear war, allowing his German readers to position themselves as potential victims too:

Wüchse nämlich der Haß weiter, heute, da die Menschheit in ihrer Gesamtheit vor der Möglichkeit steht, ausgerottet zu werden, dann könnte geschehen, was der entsetzte Dichter prophetisch ausruft: Aufsteigen wird die Erdenflamme, um den Himmel zu verbrennen, und verbrennen wird des Himmels Flamme unsre Erd. (Adler 1951, p. 7)

Adler had worked for Jewish–Christian reconciliation in the immediate post-war years, and his own poetry was marked by attempts to reconcile images from the two traditions, and to make Jewish experiences of suffering understandable in Christian terms, while at the same time emphasizing the Jewishness of Jesus: this perhaps explains his strategy in the translation of introducing comparisons of the suffering of Jewish children in the Ghetto to the suffering of Christ.

    However, there is more to this translation than Adler's attempt to make it 'salonfähig'. The word 'stammeln' is the key here, giving us an indication of Adler's view of the text, and consequently of his translation strategy. Other critics, such as Alvin Rosenfeld, have also taken this view, stating that the text 'manifests a helplessness of poetic means' and shows 'language in a state of breathless exhaustion'.[14] Discussing the work in terms of 'stammeln' rather than 'singing', which is the claim it makes for itself, downplays the articulacy and linguistic sophistication of the text, but gives us an indication of Adler's translation programme:

Die yiddische und die deutsche Sprache sind verwandt, und dennoch ist es, beispielsweise, für das yiddische Wort schmerzvollen Humors, verzweifelter Ironie, banger Zärtlichkeit, befreienden Spottes, anklagender Verwünschung, gottnaher Gottesleugnung, fordernder oder verzichtender Gläubigkeit nur scheinbar möglich, das entsprechende deutsche Wort zu finden; niemand kann den Ton des yiddischen Wortes in gleicher Weise deutsch erklingen lassen, am allerwenigsten durch wörtliche Übersetzung. In großer Erregung gesprochen, klingt die deutsche Sprache abgehackt, gleichsam staccato, die yiddische hingegen steigert sich zu einem atemlosen Legato. (Adler 1951, p. 7)

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[13] Jizchak Katzenelson, *Das Lied vom letzten Juden*, trans. by Hermann Adler (Zurich: Oprecht, 1951), p. 7 (henceforth Adler 1951).

[14] Rosenfeld, 'The Jewish Writer at the End of Time', p. 20.

What is important here is not whether this assessment of the difference between the languages makes sense, but the way in which Adler constructs that difference in order to stress the distance between them. He clearly does not wish his translation to echo German religious language, or poetry, or political rhetoric, and denies it the resources that Katzenelson drew on in his poem. His comments are also designed to establish the status of Yiddish as a language independent of German, rather than as a substandard or dialect variant, and to justify his own translation practice by stating that a direct translation of words with shared roots or similar grammatical structures will somehow miss the essence of the text, which cannot be accessed through German.

It is not a strategy that tries to reproduce a similar effect in translation, but one that deliberately sets out to produce a different effect, one that is more appropriate to the context. Confronting the reader with harsh, staccato German works against any desire to overlay the experience with false elegiac beauty. It is an intervention against certain stylistic tendencies in the literature of the 1950s and against a tendency to seek reconciliation in aesthetic harmony. It is not a 'smooth' translation that ingratiates itself with the reader. The broken syntax means that it is at times hard to follow the narrative (often frustratingly so): the reader is forced to focus on interpretation rather than story, and is denied easy identification with the victims. Whatever the problems with the translation, there is intrinsic interest in a text that makes an offer of reconciliation while pursuing strategies that make it difficult.

Biermann and Arno Lustiger try hard to disguise their disapproval of Adler's work, but it is clear that an improved translation is part of what motivated them to create their own version. Biermann writes thus about Adler's version, damning with faint praise:

Zur deutschen Übersetzung, die es schon gab, will ich und darf ich kein Wort sagen. In der sogenannten Kunst gibt es wohl Haß und Liebe, es gibt Kunsturteile und Geschmacksurteile, es gibt wechselnde Moden, denen keiner ganz entgeht — aber es gibt keine nettgemeinten Artigkeiten. Es war ohne allen Zweifel ein großer Verdienst von Hermann Adler in Basel, daß er Katzenelsons Poem ins Deutsche brachte. Trotzdem wird Arno Lustiger gewußt haben, warum er mich in dieses Werk von Katzenelson reinzog, und das mag genügen. (Biermann, p. 209)

On his reasons for producing the new version, Lustiger writes:

Ich kannte sehr wohl eine ältere deutsche Übersetzung, sie stammt von Hermann Adler und erschien kurz nach dem Krieg. Weil ich aber das jiddische Original kenne, war ich nicht glücklich mit dieser deutschen Version. Ich wollte also deutsche Verse, die der poetischen Kraft des jiddischen Originals entsprechen. Und so bat ich meinen Freund Wolf Biermann, sich an Katzenelsons Versen zu versuchen. Er tat mir den Gefallen. Aber dann ließ ihn dieses Werk nicht mehr los. So verführte ich — ohne es darauf anzulegen — den Dichter und Sänger, das gesamte Poem von Jitzchak Katzenelson in

ein Deutsch zu bringen, das stark und lebendig genug ist, um junge Menschen in diesem Land zu erreichen und womöglich zu erschüttern.[15]

It is notable here that Lustiger sees no difficulty in finding an appropriate German style for this text: there is no agonizing here about the issue of *Opfer- und Tätersprache*, and no perceived need to stress the separateness of the languages.

Biermann continues in this vein:

Ich habe die herzzerreißenden jiddischen Verse nun in meine kopfzerbrechliche deutsche Sprache gebracht. Der Umstand, daß dieses Gedicht der Opfer in die Sprache der Täter transportiert werden muß, bekümmert mich dabei gar nicht. Mein Deutsch ist das von Hölderlin und Büchner und Heine und Rosa Luxemburg, es ist meine Muttersprache von Emma Biermann, es ist unsere Vatersprache von Bertolt Brecht und kein Schweinefraß, zusammengemanscht aus Abfällen von Bismarck, Hitler, Honecker, Blödel-Otto, Leni Riefenstahl, Mielke und Stolpe. (Biermann, p. 9)

This is a refreshingly practical dismissal of a philosophical tradition that questions the possibility of talking about the Holocaust in German, and that critiques the appropriation of the subject position of the victim in the language of the perpetrators: here, there is a strong, expressive tradition of literary-political German to set against a tradition of linguistic corruption. This is a writer making space for himself to work and locating a set of literary resources for the job in hand: language is not in itself a barrier to understanding.

The translation difficulties that Biermann discusses are less comprehensive than those identified by Adler. Biermann suggests that problems arise from the similarity of the lexical roots, mentioning a few cases of 'false friends' (Biermann, pp. 197–212). Whereas Adler had stressed separateness, an entirely different mode of expression and world-view—perhaps in order to play up the necessity of the task of reconciliation by forcing his German reader to acknowledge the legitimacy of the otherness of the text—Biermann suggests that closeness can lead to problems of understanding, which can be overcome with a little awareness and effort. The politics of the relationship between German and Yiddish have been transformed.

In his initial 1951 publication Adler had not included the Yiddish text, meaning that it is hidden and inaccessible to the German reader. This is of a piece with Adler's emphasis on difference: the translation is not presented as a dialogue with the original text, and the German reader is not encouraged to think that the original is accessible. By contrast, Lustiger has produced a transliteration that represents a compromise between a particular high-status Yiddish pronunciation ('Litvish Yiddish') and the phonetic values of

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[15] Arno Lustiger, 'Anmerkungen zu Katzenelsons Werk und zur phonetischen Transkription', in Biermann, pp. 229–32 (p. 229).

the German writing system. Transliteration is always a political issue, and this reading version makes an offer to the German reader in line with Biermann's comments, namely that understanding is possible with a little sympathetic effort: 'das von mir angewandte Transkriptionssystem [wird] dem deutschen Leser ermöglichen, den jiddischen Text phonetisch korrekt zu lesen und ihn einigermaßen zu verstehen'.[16]

To illustrate how far this departs from Katzenelson's own conception of the linguistic situation, instances can be adduced from the text in which attention is drawn to linguistic difference. The original poem makes a stark distinction between Polish- and Yiddish-speakers that, while certainly a simplification of the multilingual reality of the Ghetto, reflects a rejection of compromise and assimilation. Polish is associated with situations of communication with the occupying authorities, and is the language of the Judenrat and of Jewish traitors. The German language is barely mentioned throughout, preparing for the moment towards the end when the Uprising breaks out, and Katzenelson puts the words 'die Juden schießen' in the mouths of individual Germans before they are killed: the words are transliterated into the text's Hebrew script, but clearly retain their character as German: יודען (yuden) instead of ייִדן (yidn). The German words are repeated throughout the staging of the final battle, finally coming to characterize the shocked and fearful response of the whole nation to the Uprising: 's'iz a ruf gevezn fun a merder-folk, fun akhtsik milion' (Katzenelson XIV. 1, p. 71).

This is the opposite process to the sympathetic opening suggested by Lustiger's German transliteration, suggesting that the assimilation of the desperate words of a dying German into the Hebrew characters is in itself an act of vengeance. For once, the victims are able to make meaning on their own terms. This is the key moment in the text, when the victims become visible on their own terms to the world beyond. It reverses the power imbalance represented by the rendering of Yiddish through the German writing system and displays German words defined and captured in the structures of meaning created by the Jewish resisters. It is also a response to a moment earlier in the text where the speaker recalls being subject to the gaze of a German that defines the relationship between victim and perpetrator. For Katzenelson, it is the gaze of the perpetrator that defines the victim and is the origin of violence:

du host gezen vi der oysvurf hot gekukt [. . .]
Khane, er hat dokh undz, undz alemen derharget dokh in yenem groylikhen moment
i mikh, i dikh, di kinder undzere dos gantse folk dos yidishe in goyishn in land
er hot farmostn mit a blik a shtolenem zikh un hot adurkhgefirt un hot farlendt!

(Katzenelson x. 4–5, p. 56)

The translations have to deal with the issue of the victimizing German gaze

[16] Ibid., p. 232.

while rendering the victim's perspective in the same language. Both address—
or perhaps avoid—this issue by shifting the perspective to the character of
the perpetrator, interpreted in contrasting ways. Adler stresses sadism, hate,
and 'Verrohung', and, by inserting references to Caesar and to Christ's last
words, interprets the gaze in terms of the killing of Christ, shifting away from
Katzenelson's speaker's voice (I discuss Adler's religious programme below):

Wie loderte sein Haß, wie war sein Blick verroht [. . .]
Uns alle hat sein Schuß getroffen. Keiner, Chane, lebt seit jener Nacht.
Tot liegen wir. Tot sind die Kinder. Jeder Jude starb mit uns: im Christenland.
Des Mörders Augen glänzten blau. Er kam, sah, tötete — Vollbracht! Es ist vollbracht!

(Adler 1992, pp. 107–08)

Biermann emphasizes the gaze, strengthens the language of anti-Semitism,
and shifts the perspective to the voice of the perpetrator, ironizing character-
istic post-war defence strategies:

Hast gesehn, wie dieser Abschaum glotzt und stutzt? [. . .]
Ich sage dir: Der hat uns, Chanele, im Grunde alle umgebracht
Ermordet hat er uns und grad in diesem schrecklichen Moment
Mich hat er umgelegt mit diesem Schuß, dich, unsere Kinderchen
Das ganze Volk der Juden hier in diesem Land der Judenhasserei
Er hat uns abgeschätzt mit einem Blick stahlhart, hat funktioniert
Und hat wahrscheinlich nichts als seine Pflicht getan, ganz konsequent

(Biermann, p. 109)

Where Katzenelson's text is about self-assertion against the victimizing gaze,
the translations need to work from within the perpetrator culture and to
divide the gaze against itself.

For Katzenelson, the Ghetto fighters' struggle is a clash of the Jewish with
the non-Jewish world, absolute separateness is emphasized, and the Germans
are simply the worst manifestation of a general hostility to the Jews. The text
concludes with a rejection of any future idea of reconciliation: no Jew will in
future sacrifice anything to improve the world for others. This is the problem
that post-war German translators have to deal with: if the sacrifice enacted in
this text now serves the cause of reconciliation, or if its readers are given the
opportunity to identify with the victims rather than seeing themselves in the
position of the 'merder-folk', then its message has been falsified. In the light
of this discussion, therefore, I will look at two aspects of the translations: the
treatment of the religious language, and the staging of the acts of violence
described in the text.

Religious Language

Both translations adopt particular positions on the text's religious language.
Where Adler introduces Christian imagery and suggests a potential for recon-

ciliation that Katzenelson would have rejected, Biermann seems to confuse Katzenelson's bitterness and 'revolt against God' with an outright rejection of religion. To illustrate this, I will look at a passage in which Katzenelson nostalgically describes the life of Jewish Warsaw before the occupation:

varshe! di alt-yidishe, di fule vi a shul yom-kiper, vi a mark oyf a yarid,
yidn varshever, yidn handlndike oyfn mark, yidn davnendike in di shul
azoy umetik un azoy freylikh — o, parnosse-zukhndiker un gotzukhndiker yid!
varshe di farmoyerte arum, di opgeshlossene — iz geven mit dir ersht ful!
[. . .]
di ershte umtsubrengen sen' gevezn kinder, yessoymimlekh farlosene, es heyst
dos beste oyf der velt, dos sheynste vos di erd, di finstere farmogt!
o, fun die elntste yessoymimlekh in kinderheymen volt gevoksn undz a treyst,
fun di umetikste, shtume penimlekh, di khoyshekhdike, volt getogt undz, volt getogt!

<div align="right">(Katzenelson vi. 2 and vi. 4, pp. 39–40)</div>

Adler has this:

Mein Warschau, Judenstadt, voll warst du wie die Häuser Gottes am Versöhnungsfest,
Voll wie ein Markt. Wo seid ihr, Juden Warschaus, Händler, Betende im Gotteshaus,
Getroffene und dennoch Hoffende? Brotsuchende. Gottsuchende. Der Rest
Vom Rest entschwand. O Stadt, umlauerte, verschlossene — du speist dein Leben aus!
[. . .]
Am Anfang fielen die Verwaisten, längst Verlassenen. Sie lebten freudenlos.
Sie starben sehnsuchtsvoll. Gott weiß: sie waren edle Sprossen einer edlen Saat.
Als Schwacher mit den Schwachen litt, vor Gott, der künftige Erlöser. Seelengroß,
Erniedrigt nur. Wer hofft noch auf Erlösungstaten? Nur die Untat gilt als Tat.

<div align="right">(Adler 1992, p. 67)</div>

Here, the phrases 'Getroffene und dennoch Hoffende' and 'der künftige Erlöser' introduce ideas of suffering and redemption not in the original, which simply describes a mixture of emotions: a description of the religious and political variety of the Jewish population of Warsaw becomes an image of a people seeking redemption. This is taken up in the next stanza cited here, which inserts a reference to Christ suffering alongside the poor and weak.

It is tempting to see in this a falsification of Katzenelson's text for the purpose of making it accessible to a Christian readership, but there is more to it than this. Part of Adler's literary project was to re-emphasize the significance of the Jewishness of Jesus, to persuade the German churches to make this awareness part of their theological apparatus and to use it in a self-critical awareness of their role during the Nazi period.[17] Adler's version offers his Christian readers a route to understanding, while simultaneously making clear the gulf between their world and that of the text and refusing

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[17] See e.g. Friedrich Heer, *Gottes erste Liebe: Die Juden im Spannungsfeld der Geschichte* (Frankfurt a.M.: Ullstein, 1986).

them linguistic resources to deal with the events described in a familiar or comforting way. The final lines of part VI will illustrate this:

> zey zen' geven di ershte, di genumene tsum toyt, di ershte oyf der fur,
> men het gevorfn in di vegener di groyse zey, vi hoyfns mist, vi mist —
> un avekgefirt zey, oysgeharget zey, farnikht zey, s'iz keyn shpur
> fun zey, fun mayne beste nit geblibn mer! okh vey iz mir un vind iz mir, un vist!
>
> (Katzenelson VI. 15, p. 42)

> Am Anfang fielen die Verwaisten. Flammen warteten auf sie. Hoch stieg der Rauch.
> Die Mörder warfen sie auf Wagen. Unrat wird so fortgefahren. Gassenkot.
> Dann rief der Mord: Zum Freudenfeste! Und? Verwaiste waren Opfer. Nicht ein Hauch
> Von ihnen blieb. Mit jedem starb ein Nazarener. Wehe uns, wer herrscht? Der Tod.
>
> (Adler 1992, p. 73)

While one might baulk at the bathos in the personification of Death and the *Totentanz* reference here, Adler's refusal to imitate the very powerful rhythmic lament in Katzenelson's text is telling. The translation refuses the German reader permission to lament the dead with the author, or even to join in the expression of emotion in the same way; the lament is a public, communal expression of emotion from which the perpetrators are excluded. Instead, they are confronted with a reversal of the Christ-killer calumny against the Jews, for here it is the goyim who have killed Christ in these children. The relationship of the translation to the original suggests that it is the perpetrators' business alone to be concerned with this; for Katzenelson and the people his text speaks to, it is irrelevant. Biermann's version, by contrast, joins his voice to Katzenelson's, stressing the closeness of the word roots, which even permit imitation of the alliteration: 'Weh ist mir, wund bin ich und verwüstet bis ins Mark' (Biermann, p. 83).

Biermann takes a very different attitude towards the text's religious language, introducing elements of critique where Katzenelson simply celebrates Jewish cultural diversity:

> Ach Warschau, Stadt der Juden, ein Gewimmel war das einstmals, Jom Kippur
> Ein endloses Versöhnungsfest mit Beten, Streiten, Handeln in der Synagog
> So traurigfroh war alles, einer suchte Geld, ein andrer Jude suchte nur
> Nur Gott und suchte Wahrheit, wenn er sich was in die Tasche log.
> [. . .]
> Zuerst warn Kinder dran mit Sterben. Waisenkinderchen, verlaßne Brut
> Sie warn das Liebste, Schönste, was die finstre Erde je gebar. Aus ihrem Angesicht
> Aus diesen Waisenkinderchen hätte uns erwachsen können Lebensmut
> Aus diesen traurigdüsteren Gesichtchen hätte uns gestrahlt ein Morgenlicht.
>
> (Biermann p. 79)

Note here that Biermann has brought together the worlds of market and synagogue, which are separate in the original, and has introduced a new note of

irony. Biermann's version could be seen as working in the service of a liberal-enlightened polemic against National Socialism, which might entail a critical stance towards religion in general, whereas Katzenelson stresses the unity of a specifically Eastern European Jewish culture that encompasses variety and contradiction, and has little to learn from a liberal critique.

The Staging of Violence

Biermann's text is the version that deals most specifically with the issue of the desire for violent retribution and the inappropriate expression of that desire in the context in which the translation intervenes. Biermann works with a technique of aesthetic excess in rendering the descriptions of violence in the text, showing that the depiction of suffering and retribution has a different kind of significance in the new translation context. Biermann locates in Katzenelson's text the idea of the staging of the revolt for the benefit of external observers, emphasizes it, and puts it to a new use.

The text opens with the poet's demand to himself to sing the last song on behalf of his people in a challenge to God to show himself. On one level, the poem is structured as a drama staged for external observers—specifically God and the Jewish community abroad who may gain access to the smuggled text—and within the text itself, the German occupiers and their helpers. Towards the end, Katzenelson closes the circle, stating that at least their actions have been visible, whether or not anyone was there to see them:

der geto brent, er brent oyf zayne moyern un zayne letste yidn, s'fayer hesht un hesht,
der himl iz geven baloykhtn un oyb s'iz do dort ver, hot tsugekukt zikh un gezen
    di end.

<div align="right">(Katzenelson xiv. 15, p. 74)</div>

Biermann's version of this stanza expands the theatrical metaphor, emphasizing the idea of purposeful staging and expressing the certainty that somebody is watching, which Katzenelson's original does not:

> Die Mauern brennen restlos aus, mit ihnen auch der kleine Judenrest
> Das Feuer wütet und beleuchtet schön die Szenerie. Der höh're Zweck
> Ist klar: Das Ghetto brennt so hell, damit er, der da in der Loge glotzt
> Den letzten Akt von oben sehen kann. Das war das End vom Lied.

<div align="right">(Biermann, p. 155)</div>

This moment is a key to understanding Biermann's strategy: this text is for an existing German audience, and the display of violence and resistance has a present function beyond simple commemoration.

The change in emphasis has to do with the new audience and their expectations: where Katzenelson wrote for a potential Yiddish-speaking audience that was rapidly being exterminated, Biermann is writing for the descend-

ants of the perpetrators. He is not writing in a situation in which knowledge about the Holocaust needs to be gradually established, but is trying to shake up ritualistic forms of remembrance: 'der kleine Judenrest' is a linguistic provocation of a kind uncharacteristic of Katzenelson's style, a brutally impersonal compound that throws a stark light onto the observer's indifference to mass murder. Biermann also confronts German audiences with a victim who refuses to be a victim, who cannot be identified with, and whose text does not conform to the expectations of the Holocaust testimony.

Biermann's language is a performance of violent spectacle. It is not directed against the coherence of German syntax, as Adler's is, but instead takes a scandalous pleasure in its own virtuosity, even when describing the most appalling events. This example is taken from the most upsetting sequence in the text, in which a rabbi and a shammes are hounded by a group of soldiers before the synagogue is burnt down. One of the soldiers theatrically humiliates the pair in various ways, in a grotesque parody of 'teaching them a lesson'. In this stanza, which has a subtext of sexual violence, he has tried to force the shammes to spit into the rabbi's mouth:

'kuk, kuk zikh ayn un lern oys zikh, shmutsiker du yid, kuk vi azoy men shpayt —
un s'hot der daytsh in ofenem in moyl in rov arayngekhraket: 'shling's arop!'
der rov er hot's aropgeshlungen un s'vendt der daytsh tsum shames zikh un tayt,
tayt oyfn rov: 'du zest, er folgt!' der shames hot gekhapt zikh farn kop.

<div align="right">(Katzenelson VIII. 11, p. 49)</div>

'Nun schau, du Saujud, dreckiger, schau zu und lern mal, wie man richtig spuckt!'
Der Deutsche rotzt dem Rabbi in den Rachen und schreit: 'Schluck! Und mogel nicht'
Der Rabbi würgt die Rotze runter, und der Deutsche sagt zum Schammes: 'Guck
Wie prima der gehorchen kann!' Der Schammes aber schlägt die Hände vors Gesicht

<div align="right">(Biermann, p. 95)</div>

Where the shammes refuses to watch, we are forced to—but what are we watching? Ultimately, we are watching a linguistic performance demonstrating the theatricality of violence and pleasure in its performance. Katzenelson's language is also striking here, but he uses the syntactical resources of Yiddish to focus on the victim, the movement of the language mirroring the movement of the act of violence: 'un s'hot der daytsh in ofenem in moyl in rov arayngekhraket.' Biermann's alliteration emphasizes the action rather than the victim, making us take the place of the aggressor, or at least not permitting us to identify with the victim. By contrast, Adler's version plays down this moment: 'Dem Rabbi speit der Söldner in den Mund' (Adler 1992, p. 91).

The text's strategy of excess—drawing attention to the language in a way beyond what would be needed to describe the situation—prepares the way for the outburst of violence at the text's close. Katzenelson describes with

satisfaction the deaths of ambushed Germans, giving the killing meaning in terms of rescuing the honour of his people even during its destruction:

> der lezter yid — koym leygt avek er a rotseyakh ratevet zayn folk!
> man ken a folk an oysgehargetn shoyn rateven.
>
> (Katzenelson XIII. 12, p. 70)

The meaning of the description of these killings in German is different, and the translators are faced with the choice of how to present Katzenelson's contempt and satisfaction to their readership:

zey hobn nit gevust, zikh nit gerikht — '*die Juden schießen!*' ikh hob gehert dem
  oysvurf's ekldike shtim
eyder nokh die umreyne neshome s'iz aroys, s'iz nit geven keyn oysruf, nor beys
  vunder — s'taytsh?!
a shtoynen vist un oysterlish un umgerikht azoy: '*die Juden schießen!*' o, nisht aleyn
  fun im,
s'iz a ruf gevezn fun a merder-folk, fun akhtsik milion: zey oykh! di yidn makhn's
  oykh vi mir, vi yeder daytsh.

> (Katzenelson XIV. 1, p. 71)

Adler tones down the contempt, removing words like 'ekldik' and 'umreyn', weakening the word 'oysvurf', introducing verbs such as 'heulte' and 'büßt' that might evoke pity, and he omits the sardonic pleasure in the dying man's expression of surprise ('s'taytsh?!'):

> Das hat der Deutsche nicht gewußt.
>   Wahrhaft — Juden schießen! Wann im Ghetto heulte so ein Jude, wie
> Der Deutsche heulte, ehe seine Seele wich?
>   Vielleicht kein Auswurf? böses Wunder nur? ein Narr, der büßt?
> Der Schrecken gellte durch die Judenstadt:
>   Die Juden schießen! Und es war kein Einzelner, der sterbend schrie.
> Aufschrie das Mördervolk. Millionen brüllten: Seht —
>   Die Juden! Juden schießen so, wie jeder Deutsche schießt!
>
> (Adler 1992, p. 146)

Where Adler introduces the possibility that the dying man may be repenting, Biermann intensifies Katzenelson's tone. The stronger word 'röcheln' connects the individual with the eighty million murderers in the place of 'ruf'; his soul is 'schwarz' as well as 'unrein'; 'Mörderfressen' intensifies the speaker's grotesque pleasure. Biermann makes an even more direct connection between the bullet and the 'Staunen' that it produces:

> Das hat den Deutschen überrumpelt, schwer verwirrt
> 'Die Juden schießen ja!' — er röchelte dies deutsche Wort
> Als unrein seine schwarze Seele aus dem Körper wich
> Böses Erwachen, reichlich spät im letzten Sterbehauch

Und mit der Kugel hat ein Staunen da den Deutschen kalt erwischt
'Die Juden schießen ja! Verbrecher! Mörder! Mord!'
Achtzig Millionen Mörderfressen röchelten im Schreck:
'Die also auch! Wie wir, so machen es die Juden auch!'
(Biermann, p. 147)

All the acts of violence in the text are staged for someone else's observation, to demonstrate something about power, and all are connected with feelings of enjoyment on the part of one of the parties. By confronting his audience with the spectacle of a victim who revels in the painful death of an individual who could potentially be a family member of anyone in his audience—and this is not the only occasion in the last few pages of the text—and by drawing attention to the aesthetic pleasure of the German linguistic performance, Biermann's text brings to light something forbidden, namely the pleasure involved in inflicting violence and our implication in that pleasure as observers. He makes it very difficult for the German reader to know what position to take up.

Katzenelson does not conform to the image of the reasonable victim, whose pain and anger are expressed only in the expected ritual contexts, whose media presence supports processes of public commemoration, and who provides messages against violence and intolerance. Katzenelson's text, when read in the new context opened up by Biermann's translation, seems to bring to speech hidden desires and fears, which are unconstructive and unreasonable, but unreasonable only because they are in excess of the 'reasonable' consensus of narratives of mourning, remembrance, and reconciliation that give everything a direction and a meaningful narrative function.

Read in terms of theories of mourning, or of theories that contrast the compulsive repetition of traumatic events with a more constructive, enlightened 'working through' of trauma, the performance offered by Katzenelson's text, particularly in Biermann's translation, might feel like a setback, a *Rückfall* into traumatized, compulsive 'acting out' of the experience of violence. But this underestimates the element of aesthetic calculation in the translation strategies adopted to make this text available to an audience for which it was never intended. While Adler's version makes an offer of reconciliation—while showing how much work there is still to do and laying the burden of responsibility clearly onto the German reader of the text—Biermann intervenes against ritualized cultural narratives of remembrance, staging a confrontation with the rage, pain, and violence that have had to be repressed, and reminding us that the price of reconciliation is always paid by the victims.

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