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Landscape Movements in Avrom Sutzkever's Poetry

Abstract

The paper concerns the question of the status and role of the landscape in relation to the experience of migration and displacement in the post-war poetry of Avrom Sutzkever. The author investigates what is characteristic about the relationship between different landscapes and migrant subject. In the poetry of Sutzkever, the landscape is intertwined with the process of reconceptualisation of the identity of the Holocaust survivor and immigrant to the land of Israel, as well as with the cultural-literary project of the integration of East European heritage and new Israeli reality.

Keywords: landscape, memory, Yiddish, Avrom Sutzkever, Israel.

Avrom Sutzkever's biography is linked to three places: Siberia, Vilnius, and Tel Aviv. After the outbreak of World War I, his family fled from Smorgonie (nowadays Smarhoń in Belarus) to Omsk, western Siberia, where Sutzkever spent his early childhood. The experience of Siberia, and especially its landscape, influenced the poet's characteristic imagery, which reveals his sensitivity to the sensuality of nature or, as Daniel Kac puts it, "analytical pantheism", which consists in an impressionistic approach to the world expressed in single and point images of natural phenomena.¹ In his youth, Sutzkever was connected with Vilnius, where he worked as part of the Jewish artistic group

¹ See: D. Kac, *Wilno Jerozolimą było. Rzecz o Abrahamie Sutzkeverze*, Sejny 2003, pp. 27-28.

Jung Wilne.² During World War II he stayed in the Vilnius ghetto and was involved in Jewish guerilla groups. In 1947, after several years of wandering, Sutzkever arrived in Palestine and lived in Tel Aviv until the end of his life. He founded and edited the Yiddish magazine *Di Goldene Keyt*, which was to serve as a weapon in the struggle for the survival of the Yiddish language and culture in Israel.³

Sutzkever's changes of domicile are reflected in his poetic work, which focuses on the relationship between man and landscape. Scholars analysing his poetry emphasise that Sutzkever makes nature the main source of his literary inspirations and explorations, and treats individual elements of the landscape as auto-thematic symbols.⁴ In my paper, I would like to propose an interpretation of Sutzkever's poetry written in the years directly following the war. Its starting point is not so much the question about the significance of nature as about the form and role of the landscape in relation to the experience of migration and dislocation. Therefore, on the one hand, the subjective experience is determined by the formula of being-in-motion, that is the poet is not physically present in the area that was hitherto his, and on the other hand, the landscape is deprived of its material reference, or simply it has hardly anything to do with what is actually in front of his eyes. In other words, I am interested in such a landscape that moves together with a wandering man and exists as such in the imagination or memory of the subject. In the analysis proposed here, I also aim to answer the question of what the status of the landscape set in motion is, and what characterises the relationship between different landscapes that are part of the poet's wanderings. In Sutzkever's poetry, landscape is not only a static meta-poetic metaphor, but it also becomes an active participant in the experience of the subject. As Barbara Bender rightly points out, "[...] dislocation is always also relocation. People are always in some relationship to the landscape they move through – they are never nowhere [...]"⁵ The poetic landscapes created by Sutzkever are situated on the border of what is natural

² More on the subject: J. Lisek, *Jung Wilne – żydowska grupa artystyczna*, Wrocław 2005, pp. 126-128.

³ For more information on the journal, see: A. Shpigl'blat, "*Di Goldene Keyt*" un ir redaktor, *Avrom Sutzkever*, "Keshet" 1989, no. 6, pp. 120-124; J. Sprinzak, "*Di Goldene Keyt*", "*Di Goldene Keyt*" 1949, no. 1, pp. 5-6.

⁴ This metapoetic way of interpretation is mostly applied to Sutzkever's pre-war and post-war works, starting with his debut volume in Yiddish, *Lider [Poems]* from 1937. See H. Valencia, "*Bashtendikayt*" and "*Banayung*": *Theme and Imagery in the Earlier Poetry of Abraham Sutzkever*, Stirling 1991, pp. 35-36; J. Lisek, *Rozwój indywidualności twórczych w gronie Jung Wilne. Debiuty książkowe. Nowe formy działalności*, in: eadem, *Jung Wilne...*, op.cit., pp. 126-134; A. Nowersztern, *Der nartsis un der regn*, in: *Yikhes fun lid. Lekoved Avrom Sutzkever*, ed. D. Sadan, Tel Aviv 1983.

⁵ B. Bender, *Landscapes on-the-Move*, "Journal of Social Archaeology" 2001, vol. 1, issue 1, p. 78.

and what is cultural. They refer to real places, but at the same time they constitute an aesthetic depiction of sensual and material aspects of real places. Therefore, in my analysis, the concept of landscape will be more useful, cognitively speaking, than that of nature entangled in the binary relation to culture. As Tim Ingold explains, "[...] neither is the landscape identical to nature, nor is it on the side of humanity *against* nature. As the familiar domain of our dwelling, it is *with* us, not *against* us, but it is no less real for that. And through living in it, the landscape becomes a part of us, just as we are a part of it".⁶

The landscape in this sense is a relational and integrated whole that is based on the unity of people and place, interconnected by different interdependencies; it is a space for human action, sensations and experience.⁷ Such a perspective allows us to see that in Sutzkever's poetry the landscape—and especially its dislocation—is included both in the process of reconceptualising the author's identity as a Holocaust survivor and immigrant to the land of Israel, as well as in the cultural and literary project that Sutzkever proposes in his post-war works.

Dislocated landscapes—a research proposal

The category of "dislocated landscapes" will be used to describe the problem of landscape relations and the experience of a migrating subject. A dislocation of landscape can describe two cases: 1) a shift within a given landscape that happens in relation to the frame of reference and linkages between the components of the landscape, and 2) the moving of the landscape itself, i.e. its separation from a specific, "natural" geographical and material area and, at the same time, its confrontation with a new and different location. In the first case, the displacement determines a constant change of perspectives and forms of experiencing a landscape, none of which excludes others. The individual elements that make up the landscape are not subordinated to the laws of panoramic view, which presupposes a reflective way of perceiving, distanced from the object and prior to experience. Merleau-Ponty explains it this way:

I do not have one perspective, then another, and between them a link brought about by the understanding, but each perspective *merges* into the other and, in

⁶ T. Ingold, *The Temporality of the Landscape*, "World Archaeology" 1993, vol. 25, no. 2, p. 154. Emphasis—T.I.

⁷ It is worth noting that similar observations concerning landscape as a complex and relational whole were formulated by Arnold Berleant, one of the main representatives and thinkers of environmental aesthetics. However, Berleant used the term "environment" to describe the integrity of the landscape. See: *idem*, *The Aesthetics of Environment*, Philadelphia 1992, pp. 14-24.

so far as it is still possible to speak of a synthesis, we are concerned with a ‘transition-synthesis’ [...]. When I see the horizon, it does not *make* me think of that other landscape which I should see if I were standing on it, nor does that other landscape make me think of a third one and so on; I do not *visualise* anything; all these landscapes are already there in the harmonious sequence and infinite unfolding of their perspectives.⁸

The second dimension of experience implied by the “landscape dislocation” determines the landscape’s unclear ontological status, since it deprives it of its connection with a particular place. In such an approach, displacement—as a change of location and topographical reference—would focus on the different dimensions of mediation between the alienation and unintelligibility of the new landscape that encompasses a different topography, environmental shape and different socio-cultural, literary and linguistic arrangement, and the sense of rootedness in the domesticated landscape. However, mediation between landscapes does not lead to an agreement on a common version, but reveals their untranslatability and incommensurability. As Barbara Bender writes, “the new world is undernourished” because it lacks memory and experience that build a man’s sense of connection and belonging to the landscape and place. She does not exclude the possibility of domesticating the landscape, making it one’s own and establishing new relations (usually this is the case), but she stresses that the process of gradual experiencing of a new landscape and adapting to it (through mediation) depends on the sense of the previous place.⁹

Let us try to ponder the specificity of the relationship between the subject, who is active in creating a landscape, and the landscape in its cultural aspect, which retains its autonomous agency. First of all, this relationship takes the form of interaction and mutual influence.¹⁰ Ryszard Nycz describes the mutual influence of man and landscape on each other as a “mediatory causal relationship”, by means of which “the subject and the environment form and ‘objectify’ their dispositions and characters. [...] mediation ‘develops what is mediated’, modelling and correlating elements in a way that forms their mutual connection, as well as their separate form and identity”.¹¹ The attitude of the subject who situates his or her migration experience within a landscape is based on hybridity resulting from dual existence: being both “here and there”

⁸ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, transl. C. Smith, London 1976, pp. 329-330. Emphasis—M.M.-P.

⁹ See B. Bender, *op.cit.*, p. 82.

¹⁰ See A. Berleant, *op.cit.*, pp. 14-24.

¹¹ R. Nycz, *Krajobraz kulturowy albo o kulturze jako czasowniku. Wprowadzenie do dyskusji panelowej*, in: *Więcej niż obraz*, eds. E. Wilk *et al.*, Gdańsk 2015, p. 49. If not stated otherwise, all the quotations were translated by Kaja Szymańska.

and the simultaneity of different landscapes.¹² In *Scapeland*, a text devoted to landscape, Jean-François Lyotard notes that the experience of landscape appears in a situation of alienation when the stability of the subjective position is disturbed by the “material presence” of the landscape. Referring to these observations, Piotr Schollenberger emphasises that “in a landscape, we are not ‘alone with ourselves’, but rather ‘beyond ourselves’. *Landscape*, as Lyotard suggests, is in fact what we are constantly eludes our attention in direct experience—i.e. *escape*, and what can only be retroactively put in the rigid framework of representation”.¹³ A migrant subject experiencing the “displacement of the landscape” functions in a kind of suspension, between his own deficient identity, eradicated from its natural landscape and place, and the possibility of re-creating oneself through experiencing the landscape.

Na ve-nod yorn—years of wandering

The years between the end of the war (liberation of Vilnius by the Red Army in June 1944) and reaching the shores of Palestine marked a kind of liminal transition in Sutzkever's life—the aim of his wandering around Europe is to search for himself and settle accounts with the past. His poetry at the time, as Heather Valencia says, is a record of loss of identity, sense of deracination and homelessness, as well as a struggle with traumatic experience and his own status as a survivor of the Holocaust. Poetry, which registers a sense of non-rootedness, is also an attempt to revise the metapoetic and cultural concepts that Sutzkever expressed in his pre-war work. A significant example of such a poetic reckoning is the poem *Tsu Poyln (To Poland)*, written under the influence of the author's stay in Warsaw and in reaction to the Kielce pogrom in 1946, in which the idea of a cultural Polish-Jewish community is revised.¹⁴

¹² P. Czaplinski, *Kontury mobilności*, in: *Poetyka migracji. Doświadczenie granic w literaturze polskiej przelomu XX i XXI wieku*, eds. P. Czaplinski, R. Makarska, M. Tomczok, Katowice 2013, p. 42.

¹³ I recall the concept of Lyotard as described in: P. Schollenberger, *Odosobnienie. Próby dekonstrukcji krajobrazu*, “Widok. Teorie i Praktyki Kultury Wizualnej” 2014, no. 8, p. 18, <http://pismowidok.org/index.php/one/article/view/246/441#sdfootnote23sym> (access: 5.06.2019).

¹⁴ A. Suckewer, *Do Polski*, transl. M. Tuszewicki, “Cwiszn” 2010, no. 1-2, pp. 24-32. Chone Shmeruk pointed out the importance of this poem in a lecture given on 18 May 1993 at the Hebrew University. He emphasized that in this poem Sutzkever captured the experiences and emotions shared by the survivors, who returned to their homeland and faced the emptiness of these places. See Ch. Shmeruk, *A simbolizse farbindung*, “Di Goldene Keyt” 1993, no. 136, p. 11. In another critical text, Shmeruk interpreted the work not only as a “farewell and a multidimensional painful Jewish settlement of accounts with Poland”,

Physical displacement simultaneously moves the landscape in which the poet grew up, created, and experienced his feelings. The thread connecting him with his homeland, the landscape that actually shaped his poetic sensitivity and worldview, has not been broken, or even—could not have been broken. The ethical dimension of poetry, which becomes clear in both his war and post-war works, is connected with the preservation and recording of the old, extinct landscape by means of words. In Sutzkever's post-war poetry, the moving of the landscape indicates the transfer of the eastern European, familial and familiar landscape within the framework of the Israeli environment. This transfer generally takes two forms. First, the blending of landscapes is incorporated into the process of adapting to the Israeli landscape and negotiating one's place in it by the newcomer. Secondly, it determines the imperative, felt by the survivors, of making the heritage of Eastern European Jews a complementary part of the collective identity of Israel.

Domesticating the new reality, different topography and culture reveals a certain paradox. The Israeli landscape is as foreign and different from the familiar Eastern European landscape as it is close to and preserved in Jewish tradition and history in the form of a mythologised image of the lost homeland. To express the sense of not feeling at home in the new landscape Sutzkever uses the metaphor of "nakedness". The subject arrives in the new country naked because his individual identity has no specific reference in the Israeli landscape. In the work *In fayer-vogn* (*In a fiery chariot*) written in 1947, which opens the poetic volume, the subject directs the following words to himself:

You come naked
All in fire.

Your clothes—
Sewn with your mother's fingers
playing the music of velvet and silk
fell burnt in the shadows.

but also as a revision of the phantasm of the Polish-Jewish brotherhood. See *idem*, *Avrom Suckewer i polska poezja. Juliusz Słowacki w poemacie „Cu Pojln”*, transl. M. Adamczyk-Garbowska, in: *Polskie tematy i konteksty literatury żydowskiej*, eds. E. Prokop-Janiec, M. Tuszewicki, Kraków 2014, pp. 279-290 (Ch. Shmeruk, *Avrom Sutzkever un poylishe poezye: Juliusz Słowacki un der poemat „Tsu Poyln”*, in: *Yikhes fun lid. Lekoved Avrom Sutzkever, op.cit.*, pp. 280-291). Daniel Kac also observed that "the poem *To Poland* became [...] a poetic testimony to the breaking of the thread connecting the two nations over the centuries. Sutzkever did not believe that the Jewish community, culture, and art would be reborn in Poland". See D. Kac, *op.cit.*, p. 230. More on Polish-Jewish relations presented in the poem see M. Ruta, *Bez Żydów? Literatura jidysz w PRL o Zagładzie, Polsce i komunizmie*, Kraków, Budapest 2012, pp. 140-143.

Needles, just needles—
It is all you have saved.¹⁵

In Sutzkever's poetic code, clothing symbolises not only protection against the external (it plays the role of an additional skin), but—recalling the figure of a mother—it also serves as a link with the old world. In the destructive fire of Palestine to which the poet arrives, he loses his old clothes, which makes it necessary to define a new identity. Sutzkever shows the process of its creation as sewing. The material he uses is new, connected with the current living conditions, and the tool that welds and shapes the new attire is needles from the old, familiar world.

However, the problem of (non)rootedness in the Israeli landscape is perceived differently from the collective perspective. As a member of a community for which Israel was a lost homeland, the poet perceives the landscape as part of the Jewish cultural heritage. Therefore, he describes his arrival to the new country as “being born together with the country”:

If I hadn't been with you
If I hadn't been breathing the happiness and pain of this place
If I hadn't burnt with the soil
The volcanic soil during childbirth
If, suddenly, after my akedah,
I hadn't been born with the country,
Where every pebble is my grandfather—
My hunger wouldn't have been satisfied with bread
Water wouldn't have soothed my palate
Till I had gone away transformed into a goy
And only my longing would have come.¹⁶

According to Justin Cammy, the coincidence of the poet's arrival and the establishment of the State of Israel, as expressed in the above passage of the

¹⁵ “Bist gekumen a naketer, / in gantsn in fayer. // Dayne bgodim – / Fun mamishe finger genodlt, / Vi shpilndik piano af samet un zaydns – / Farsmaliete zenen gefaln in shotn. / Di nodlen, di nodlen – / Zey hostu farhit”. See: A. Sutzkever, [titleless poem], in: *idem, In fayer-vogn*, Tel Aviv 1952, p. 10. If it is not stated otherwise, fragments of Sutzkever's poems quoted in the text are translated by Kaja Szymańska from the philological translation into Polish did by Karolina Koprowska.

¹⁶ “Ven kh'volt nit zayn mit dir baynand, / Nit otemen dos glik un vej do, – / Ven kh'volt nit brenen mitn land, / Vulkanish land in khevle-leyde; / Ven kh'volt atsind, nokh mayn akeyde, / Nit mitgeboyrn mitn land, / Vu yeder shtejndl iz mayn zeyde – / Gezetikt volt mikh nit dos broyt, / Dos vaser nit geshtilt mayn gumen. / biz oysgegangen kh'volt fargoy't / un bloyz mayn benkshaft volt gekumen...”. See: A. Sutzkever, [titleless poem], in: *idem, In fayer-vogn, op.cit.*, p. 9.

poem, serves to highlight the unity of individual and communal experience and the organic relationship between the fate of the Jews and their country.¹⁷ However, if we try to complete Cammy's analysis and reflect on the concept of "double birth", we find that in order for the new identity of the subject to take on an integral and affirmative form it needs a place of birth. The birth certificate legitimises the relationship between man and place, and in the context of Holocaust rescue marks a new beginning of the poet's life. What is more, Sutzkever sees his re-birth, parallel to the creation of the country, as a destination. With the help of negative rhetoric and the conditional mood, which is maintained throughout the poem, he emphasises that his presence in Israel is the basic condition for his survival and finding a new identity after the Holocaust (this is suggested by bread and water, which are essential for survival).

It is no coincidence, however, that Israel becomes a new birthplace—this is also the paradox of the new landscape to which the poet migrates. In Sutzkever's poem, the boundaries of the place of birth are extended and identified with those of the new country where "every pebble is my grandfather", as the subject admits. He is, therefore, connected with the Israeli landscape primarily through culture and tradition, through links with previous generations who have lived in it and shaped it. A certificate that testifies to his being born in the landscape is, therefore, a prerequisite for the "naturalisation" and embodiment of this relationship, as the cultural bond turns out to be insufficient. The experience of landscape translocation shown by Sutzkever becomes constructive and affirmative—it can be treated as the moment from which the process of creating one's own identity starts again. Its core is an attempt to integrate Eastern-Europeanism and Israelism, the Yiddish and Hebrew languages, taking the position of a guardian of memory and a cultural mediator.

Landscape as a palimpsest—a cultural project

The translocations of the Eastern European and Israeli landscapes become not only a part of the identity search of the migrating subject, but also a part of the cultural and literary project. The main idea postulated by Sutzkever is to preserve the hybridity and multilingualism of Jewish culture and identity, to creatively combine the heritage of the diaspora with the ideology of the new state within the framework of the landscape palimpsest. The establishment of landscape translocations leading to the formation of such a palimpsest, the basis of this cultural fusion project, is clearly illustrated by the poem *Der shney afn Hermon* (*Snow on Mount Hermon*) published in the collection *In*

¹⁷ Cf. J.D. Cammy, *Vision and Redemption: Abraham Sutzkever's poems of Zion(ism)*, in: *Yiddish after the Holocaust*, ed. J. Sherman, Oxford 2004, p. 248.

fayer-vogn. This work shows landscape as a medium of memory and a carrier of cultural heritage:

May ko mashme lon snow on Mount Hermon?
It is showing me snow-covered, evening huts,
when my father comes back with an axe wrapped around him
and the sun, wandering between the branches on the glass,
shines in his frosted beard.

It reminds me of the Jews who, like transparent snowflakes,
Have been falling quietly all winter
And lie behind my pupils—in the back,
They miss a spring that will bring back the memory
But is there such a blooming spring?¹⁸

Snow on Mount Hermon reveals its two functions in the poem. On the one hand, it becomes a pretext for remembering and recalling the past, on the other hand, it is an element of Sutzkever's cultural project. Snow functions as a link between Eastern European and Israeli landscapes; it is the cement that maintains the integration of different worlds and cultures. In the poem, the snow refers to snowy Siberia as a half mythological land with which the poet connects happy childhood memories, an image of his first home as a place of security and tranquillity, as well as his first aesthetic experience and discovery of beauty in the landscape (which is shown by the image of the sunshine gleaming on the frozen glass). The second stanza shows another location of snow—the forest in Ponary (Lith. Paneriai), the place of mass murder of Vilnius Jews, including the poet's mother. Snow evokes the memory of specific persons. The first stanza is dedicated to the father and the second to the entire Jewish community of Vilnius.

The mechanism of evoking subsequent memories is not in line with the associative movement of involuntary memory, but reveals to some extent the intentionality of the subject. This is suggested by the question in the first verse, which begins with the phrase from Gemara: *may ko mashme lon*, which translates as: “what does it wish to tell us here”, “why does it tell us this”. Therefore, this formulation does not clearly indicate the visual aspect of landscape

¹⁸ “*May ko mashme lon* der shney, vos afn hermon oybn? / Er antplekt mir a bashneyte, ovntike khate, / Ven bagartlt mit a zeg es kumt arayn mayn tate / Un di zun, vos blondshet inem veldl af di shoybn, / Finklt in zayn bord zayn ongeayzikte, in khate. // Er dermont mir on di yidn, vos vi shneyen klore, / Zenen zey gefaln shtumerheyte a gantsn vinter / Un zey lign hinter mayne shvartsaplen, – ahinter, / Benken az a friling zol zey makhn a hazkore. / Nor iz den faran aza min friling a cegrinter?”. See A. Sutzkever, *Der shney afn Hermon*, in: *idem, In fayer-vogn, op.cit.*, p. 31.

perception and evoking memorable images—the hearing of snow requires greater involvement of the sensory apparatus. On the other hand, the reference to Gemara in the context of the description of the landscape points to an analogy between experiencing the landscape and reading the text—regarding snow as a sign which carries a specific meaning and which can be read in a specific way, convinces us of its cultural dimension. In addition, the use of this phrase may have an intertextual nature and is a reference to the poem by Avrom Reyzen, which begins with the following questions: “*May ko mashme lon der regn? Voshe lozt er mikh tsu hern?*” (*May ko mashme lon* rain? What is it letting me hear?). From this paradoxical experiencing of a landscape that combines different dimensions and senses emerges a figure who simultaneously observes (contemplates) and listens. As Tim Ingold emphasises, the presumed landscape implies the presence of someone who observes and listens: the presumed landscape must be filled with people who observe themselves and who “act in reverse” as they live.¹⁹ Therefore, the landscape of the snow-capped mountain Hermon poses a particular challenge to the subject—since the quote comes from the Hebrew language and refers to the spiritual sphere and advanced religious studies, reading the meaning of snow requires both specialised knowledge and previous experience.

Snow, which contains various cultural and memory connotations, becomes a tool of the cultural integration project, in which particular elements are equally important. The shape and conditions of this integration are presented by Sutzkever in the last stanza of the poem *Der shney afn Hermon*:

O bird from Mount Hermon! The one I have been acquainted with,
with your heartfelt song *To the Bird*.
Bring children’s snow on your thin wings
from my home, *der ir veeym*²⁰
—dear will this landscape become.

Without snow, it will be cold in the fiery country.²¹

The cultural project, based on the idea of a landscape palimpsest, has a dynamic character. It requires constant maintenance of the interrelation between

¹⁹ T. Ingold, *op.cit.*

²⁰ This is a term used to designate a city that has played a significant role in the history and culture of the Jewish community, the centre of Jewish heritage. It can be assumed that the author refers here to Vilnius, which used to be called “Jerusalem of the North”.

²¹ “Foygl funem Hermon! Vos ikh hob geshlosn kantshaft / Nokh in el hatsiper mit dayn hartsiker negine, – / breng a shney a kindishn af dayne fligl dine / fun mayn heym, der ir veeym, / – vet liber zayn di landshaft. // Onem shney vet kalt zayn in der flamiker medine”. See A. Sutzkever, *Der shney afn Hermon, op.cit.*, p. 31.

cultures (diaspora and Israel) and languages (Yiddish and Hebrew), between the past and the present, the living and the dead. The landscape is not only an image that allows identification of landscape parallelisms and convergences, but is shaped by a creative and interactive interplay of different cultural values. The main postulate of this project is the chance to enrich the culture of the new country with the heritage of Eastern European Jews. The new beginning would not mean breaking ties with the past and cutting off what the Jews who migrated to Israel had left behind in Europe—on the contrary, it would mean a continuation of the cultural models already developed. A similar vision of idyllic and harmonious coexistence of landscapes is also presented in the poem *Tverie* (Tiberias):

On the one side, a rainbow rises like a giant palm tree.
 Opposite, at exactly the same height—Hermon,
 And as if
 a lost piece of Siberia wandered here.
 And between them—the steel
 Sea of Galilee, in the middle of which
 a fisherman on a golden boat rocks.²²

The communication between the old and the new order is maintained and legitimised by what functions on the border between the two worlds, is both physically and materially present here as well as there, and migration determines experiencing and practising it. Apart from the snow as a carrier, this task is performed by the “bird from Mount Hermon”, to which the subject of the earlier mentioned piece directs his statement. The Yiddish bird (*foygl*), which itself embodies the idea of movement from one place to another, is compared to the Hebrew bird (*el ha-tsipor*) from Hayim Nahman Bialik's poem,²³ thus becoming a transfer of cultural content. This is expressed by a request-call to the bird to bring on its wings the “childhood snow” from the subject's home. In another poem, *Mayn khaver der butszan* (*My Friend Stork*), a stork plays such a role. In the times of the diaspora, it maintained the poet's longing for Israel, and now he has become a mediator of the memory of the former landscape.

²² “Fun eyn zayt, vi a rizn-palme, heybt a regn-boygn zikh. / Antkegn, punkt di zelbe heykh, – der hermon, / Vi do volt / A shtik sibir farblondshet. / Un tsevishn beydn – shtolt / Der yam kineres, vu in mitn halt in beygn, neygn zikh / A fisher af a lodkele fun gold”. See A. Sutzkever, *Tverie*, in: *idem, In fayer-vogn, op.cit.*, p. 30.

²³ This refers to the poem *El ha-Tsipor* (Hebr. *To the bird*), which was Bialik's debut in 1892.

Landscapes of memory

In Sutzkever's poetry, the landscape ensures the survival of individual identities, cultures, and memories, both collective and individual. In the landscape palimpsest, subsequent contents do not remove or invalidate the previous ones. Instead, they can coexist on equal terms. Robert Traba states that we treat

the cultural landscape as a palimpsest in which the various overlapping layers of the past are recorded. We do not choose from them what suits us at the moment, but we assume that they are continuity and only as an entirety do they tell us the true story of the place. Tabooing one of the layers, covering it with an embarrassing conspiracy of silence, we close the way to understanding the past.²⁴

The practices and activities of generations whose effects shape the landscape (both physically and symbolically) can thus be reproduced and constantly updated. The idea of landscape as a palimpsest, i.e.—in the original meaning—a text written on a previously used writing material, from which the previous text has been removed, also provokes a metaphorical search. The language of poetic expression plays an important role in the moving of the landscape and in the process of adapting the new place of residence. Karen Underhill indirectly points to its importance as a medium of culture and landscape in her analysis of the poem *Tsu Poyln (To Poland)*, stressing that:

Sutzkever's epic poem turns on a paradox: couched as a poem of leave-taking, a bitter and accusatory letter of farewell [...] it becomes at the same time a textual record of the inextricable ties between Jewish and Polish history that preserves that heritage in Yiddish letters, making Polishness a part of the permanent, portable Jewish homeland.²⁵

In Sutzkever's poetry, the Yiddish language, which carries the time of the diaspora and the European landscape, hybridises with Hebrew as the language of the new reality and the new homeland. The meeting of languages takes place through substitutions—substitution of a Hebrew word with its Yiddish equivalent, e.g. “feldzn fun *adem*” (“rocks of earth” from the *Ras-el-nakiv* poem from *In fayer-vogn*, p. 76), “*avu in zayn igl iz fintster, iz layle*” (“there, in your midst dark, night” from *Der boym in Eyn-Khosev, In fayer-vogn*, p. 69), “*day shigoen*” (“your clock” from *Ode tsum heysherik*, from the collec-

²⁴ R. Traba, *Pamięć zapisana w kamieniu, czyli krajobraz kulturowy jako palimpsest*, in: *Dziedzictwo Kresów – nasze wspólne dziedzictwo?*, ed. J. Purchla, Kraków 2009, p. 275.

²⁵ K. Underhill, *Toward a Diasporic Poland/Polin: Zeitlin, Sutzkever, and the Ghost Dance with Jewish Poland*, in: *Eastern European Culture, Politics and Societies*, eds. I. Grudzińska-Gross, A. Tymowski, vol. 10: *Poland and Polin. New Interpretations in Polish-Jewish Studies*, eds. I. Grudzińska-Gross, I. Nawrocki, Frankfurt 2016, p. 190.

tion *In midber sinay*, p. 24). These linguistic confrontations do not invalidate any of the elements. They rather have an autonomous character, since each of them is assigned a specific and distinct vocabulary and terms related to a particular landscape.

A direct and additional impulse to preserve the Yiddish culture of Eastern European Jews was most probably the policy of the new State of Israel, which favoured the Hebrew language as a national language and discriminated against everything connected with the diaspora.²⁶ The poet records the dilemmas associated with the fate of the Yiddish language in Israel in an ironic poem *Yiddish*, built from a series of questions based on the ambiguity of the verb *untergeyn*, that is, on the one hand, lowering, disappearing, and falling, and on the other hand, approaching and moving near to something: "Could he please show me / Where the language will go down? / Maybe at the Wailing Wall?"²⁷ Justin Cammy formulates a convincing thesis that in Israeli poetry Sutzkever reveals himself as a Zionist, as his experience of the Israeli landscape is thoroughly Zionist, but speaking in Yiddish, which, as the researcher emphasises, is an exception in Jewish literature.²⁸

Sutzkever demonstrates that the condition for including the diaspora's heritage in the culture of the newly emerging Israeli state is to recognise and preserve the memory of the Holocaust. The moving of the landscape is therefore determined not only by the imperative of remembering the murdered, but it is also a form of communication with the dead and an opportunity to evoke their shadows. This is expressed in the following fragment of the poem *Di karsh fun dermonung* (*The cherry of a Remembrance*):

[...] and it happened like this:
 In a minute of unremembering,
 When I took a cherry in my mouth—
 The cherry
 Turned into hot coal and lit the words.
 And when the words caught fire in me like tar—
 Two shapes jumped out of my mouth

²⁶ For more information on the fate of the Yiddish culture and language, see G.D. Bar-Am, "May the Makom Comfort You": Place, Holocaust Remembrance, and the Creation of National Identity in the Israeli Yiddish Press, 1948–1961, "Yad Vashem Studies" 2014, no. 2, pp. 155–195. In the ideological introduction to the first issue of "Di Goldene Keyt", Josef Shprinzak stresses that the policy of promoting Hebrew as a national language was by no means a fight against Yiddish but against the "unrealistic and unproductive power" of weakening the effort to create a new state around one culture, one language, and the same values; the need to strengthen the nation and its own identity, to unite it around a common symbolic imaginary. See J. Shprinzak, *op.cit.*, p. 5.

²⁷ A. Sutzkever, *Yiddish*, in: *idem, Selected Poetry and Prose*, transl. B. and B. Hershaw, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 1991, p. 215.

²⁸ See J. Cammy, *op.cit.*, pp. 242–245.

With fire crowns on their heads.
 Both of them
 Danced in my eyes
 They persuaded me to
 dance with them
 live
 die again
 with them.
 But you never die enough...
 And only a star that rises at the same time as they do,
 Watched my body, my spirit pour into both of them
 And a vision flashes on silvery paper.²⁹

The evocation of memories takes place not only through specific memory media, but also in a specific affective moment, i.e. one that precedes thinking, awareness, and the ability to express oneself. The past returns suddenly and unexpectedly, “in the minute of unremembering”. Perhaps this is not only a moment of weakening of the disciplining power of consciousness, but also a short moment of respite from the painful past. This phrase thus highlights the violence and involuntary action of the traumatic memory, which cannot be fully tamed and controlled. Memories impose themselves on the poet on their own, the past has power over him—the media of memory turn out to be channels through which trauma passes.

In Sutzkever’s poetry, the traumatic past materialises, although it is a matter with a weak and fragile base, since it takes on ghostly forms. In the poem *Bagegenish (Meeting)*, it is suggested by a sudden change of voice into a familiar character, although difficult to identify.³⁰ The ghostly status of the evoked characters from the past is implied by terms used by the poet to describe them: sculptures, shapes-figures (*geshtaltn*), smoke, shadows, sounds, facial reflections (*opshaynen*), moonlight glows, or reflections of old characters. They point to the non-self-reliant existence of the spectre of the dead, dependent on their previous form and, at the same time, on someone who hears their voice,

²⁹ “[...] un s’iz geshen azoy: / In a minut fun nit-gedenken, / Ven kh’hob a karsh genu-men tsu di lipn – / Hot di karzh / Farvandlt zikh in heyser koyl un ongetsundn verter. / Un az di verter hobn zikh tseflamt in mir vi smole – / Aroysgeshprungen zenen fun di lipn tsvey geshtaltn / Mit fayerdike kroynen af di kep. / Zey hobn beyde / Arayngetatst in mayne oygn, / Hobn mikh getsvungen / Mittsutantsn, / Mittsulebn, / Mittsushtarbn vider / Mit zey tsuzamen, / Vayle keyn mol shtarbt men nit genug... / Un bloyz a shtern, ufgegangen glaykhtsaytik mit zey, / Hot tsugezen vi s’fleytst arayn mayn guf, mayn gayst in beydn / Un oysgeblitst di zeung afn zilber fun papir [...]”. See A. Sutzkever, *Di karsh fun dermonung*, in: *idem, In fayer-vogn, op.cit.*, p. 145.

³⁰ “Un mit a mol / hot zikh farvandlt s’kol / in lebedikn vezn”. See *idem, Bagegenish*, in: *idem, In fayer-vogn, op.cit.*, p. 138.

or sees the traces of their presence. The return of memories is conceptualized as an encroachment into the sphere of the poet's corporeality and thus an infringement of his subjective integrity. In his poem *Di karsh fun dermonung*, this is evident in the consequences of the appearance of two characters who jump out of the poet's mouth and dance in his eyes. The phantoms do not have a fixed and defined form, they use intrusion, disturbing the reality.³¹ They violate the boundaries of the autonomous self of the subject of the poem, forcing it to participate in their spectral ritual of co-dancing, co-living, and repeated co-dying. The characters called up are not, however, dybbuks. Instead, the work shows a fundamental reversal of the roles of the subject and the shadows. It is the body and spirit of the poet that "pour" into the spectral shapes. Therefore, the disintegration of one's own subjectivity seems to be the prerequisite for establishing communication with the past world and, what is more, for hearing and giving voice to what is gone.

The imperative of remembering, understood as directing oneself towards those who remain hardly hearable, is connected in Sutzkever's poetry with yet another dimension of evoking memories and, at the same time, with the role of the subject-poet himself. In his poem *Shvartse toybn (Black pigeons)* which is in a sense the quintessence of Sutzkever's spectral aspect of poetry, he compares the dead to sculptures and clay skeletons:

Behold the sculptures
The soil has already
Enjoyed this exhibition to the fullest and is satisfied with it
Now the red fire will devour it.³²

The symbol of fire in the poem combines two ambivalent meanings. On the one hand, it refers to the decimation of the Jewish nation during the Holocaust, and on the other hand it reveals its creative power. The sparks of fire appearing in the work are supposed to stimulate and revitalise the sculptures of the dead—transform their deadness into a spectral presence. It seems that the aim is to revive the dead through poetry, keeping them on the verge of presence and absence, life and death. This practice can, therefore, be described as Derridian "ontologisation", or "production of the illusion of presence", the creation of strong ontological foundations of reality consisting of ephemeral

³¹ J. Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, transl. P. Kamuf, New York, London 1994, p. 5-7. Cf. A. Marzec, *Widmontologia. Teoria filozoficzna i praktyka artystyczna ponowoczesności*, Warszawa 2015, pp. 206-207.

³² "Ot o zenen di skulpturn, / S'hot zikh shoybn di erd / Ongezetikht un gehat hanoef fun der oysshtelung. / Itster vet zikh zetikh mit dem dos royte fayer". See: A. Sutzkever, *Shvartse toybn*, in: *idem, In fayer-vogn, op.cit.*, p. 148.

traces and spectra.³³ The poet's task would combine both the Promethean gesture of bringing human figures to life through fire stolen from the gods and the Kabbalistic and mystical act of reviving the golem by the Maharal. In fact, Kabbalistic references in Sutzkever's poetry are very clear. Describing himself and his role in relation to the dead, the poet confesses in a conversation with a ghost: "I am suddenly a not-myself: / vision has shrunk me into a distant star".³⁴ He describes his status as "tsimtsum", shrinkage and withdrawal, and thus with the term used in the Kabbalah to describe the act preceding the creation of the world, during which God withdrew from himself in order to make room for the world. The poet thus sacrifices himself—like the Creator—for his creation, which is the poetic restitution of the past, making poetry a meeting place for both the phantoms of the victims of the Holocaust and the world of the living.

Sutzkever's poetry of memory landscape not only perpetuates the past, but also creates space of dialogue with tradition or confrontation with the official policy of memory. Its objective is not only to commemorate, to build a poetic monument to the exterminated. It is above all to constantly evoke and revive the past, to reconstitute the phantoms and their subversive potential, to constantly stimulate both active remembrance of the victims of the Holocaust and the transmission of cultural values developed in the diaspora, which seems to be threatened by collective Israeli amnesia (for example, the poem *A tfile in milkhome-tsayt* (*Prayer in the war-time*) has such an interventional character).

Conclusions

The cultural and literary project that Avrom Sutzkever proposed and developed in his work, based on the moving of the landscape, aimed at a palimpsest-like understanding of culture founded on diversity and multiplicity. Even in the bitter and revisionary poem *Tsu Poyln*, in which Sutzkever conceptualises relations between Polish and Jewish cultures, he does not completely reject his concept of hybrid poetry, but merely modifies it. On the formal and ideological level, the poem becomes an area of interference between the two cultures, a platform for meeting and confrontation between representatives of both literatures, that is Polish writers, such as Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki, and Yiddish-language men of letters, e.g. Sholem Asch or Isaac Leib Peretz. The allusion at the end of the poem to Peretz's work in the quote from his

³³ See A. Marzec, *op.cit.*, pp. 192-193.

³⁴ "[...] ikh bin atsind nit ikh: / di zeung hot mikh ayngetsimtsemt in a vaytn shtern". See A. Sutzkever, *Di karsh fun dermonung*, *op.cit.*, p. 147.

drama *Di Goldene Keyt* seems to be particularly significant: "So here we go / Our souls—they are burning!". Considered the father of Yiddish modernism, Peretz was an ardent advocate of integrating trends and currents present in world literature and the characteristics typical of *Yiddishkeit*, in order to open up Yiddish literature to the process of universalisation and ensure its place in general literary circulation.³⁵ As the cultural heir to Peretz's thoughts, in his post-war poetry, Sutzkever, undertakes the relationship between Polish and Jewish, Yiddish and Hebrew, Eastern European and Israeli cultures, considering them as a space of interference rather than convergence.

The dislocation of landscape is primarily a kind of mediation between the past, the present, and the future, negotiating a new form of identity based on simultaneity of European memories and the Israeli reality. The translocated landscape is not only a medium of memory, but also a bridge between the culture of the diaspora (Polish and Jewish literature, the Yiddish language, Eastern European landscape) and the emerging Israeli state (along with the primacy of the Hebrew language and the landscape perceived by the poet directly, but also through biblical images inscribed in the Jewish collective identity). In a hybrid braid, the individual landscapes retain their autonomous form, but at the same time they constantly confront each other and enter into a dialogue. Sutzkever shows them in a creative tension. On the one hand, he points to their analogy and cooperation, and on the other to the differences between them and the impossibility of translation.

Translated by Kaja Szymańska

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³⁵ See I.L. Peretz, *Vos felt undzer literatur?*, in: *Di verk fun Yitskhok Leybush Peretz*, ed. D. Piński, vol. X: *Literatur un lebn*, New York 1920, pp. 270-279. Cf. I.L. Peretz, *Czego brakuje naszej literaturze? (1910)*, transl. K. Szymaniak, "Midrasz" 2010, no. 5, p. 37.

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