

legislacyjnych. Teksty źródłowe zostały opracowane w bardzo staranny i przemyślany sposób, dzięki czemu publikacja może służyć za wydanie wzorcowe i punkt odniesienia dla kolejnych przedsięwzięć tego typu.

Anna Michałowska-Mycielska
Uniwersytet Warszawski

Jan Schwarz, *Survivors and Exiles: Yiddish Culture after the Holocaust*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit 2015, 356 pp.

Those who think that Yiddish culture ended abruptly with the physical annihilation of the Yiddish-speaking community in Eastern Europe will be proved wrong by the book *Survivors and Exiles: Yiddish Culture after the Holocaust* written by Jan Schwarz, professor of Yiddish language and literature at Lund University in Sweden. The author argues convincingly that although the great majority of Yiddish speakers perished, the scattered groups of survivors not only continued to write in Yiddish, but they made Yiddish literature blossom for about twenty-five years after the end of the Second World War. Central to the book's methodology is the division of the postwar period into the following overlapping historical phases: "the angry 1940s"; before and after the 1961 Eichmann trial; "the silver age" of Yiddish book publishing; and the rise of post-vernacularity. Schwarz shows that the status, reception, and performance of Yiddish Holocaust literature changed in distinctive ways from the 1940s through the 1970s, often in response to cultural changes in the majority cultures.

The Yiddish writers and cultural leaders after the war were gathered around a few cultural centers in New York, Montreal, Buenos Aires, Tel Aviv, Moscow, and until 1968 in Warsaw, and they worked frenetically to reach Yiddish readers and make Yiddish culture visible by extensive publishing, theaters, or clubs for poetry reading. They were driven by at least two strong motives. Firstly, they wanted to bear witness to the violent end of the Ashkenazi civilization in Europe and to find both individual and collective responses to the Holocaust. Secondly, they were motivated by a strong sense of being the last generation and thus responsible for completing the cultural projects interrupted by the war, as well as building the infrastructure that might sustain Yiddish culture after they would be gone. In his book, Schwarz provides a fascinating chronicle of Yiddish

activities of the past six decades with the focus on the years 1945–1971 and on a selected number of writers that he finds representative for the different milieus in prewar Yiddish culture, as well as for the different new directions in the development of Yiddish culture after the war. Among the authors are: Avram Sutzkever, Chava Rosenfarb, Leib Rochman, Aaron Zeitlin, Yankev Glatshteyn, Chaim Grade, and Yitskhok Bashevis (I. B. Singer).

However, it is essential to point out that Schwarz's book should not be seen merely as an inventory of Yiddish letters after the war. In my view, an important achievement of the author is that he shows that studies of Yiddish literature and culture can constitute an essential and innovative contribution to scholarly discussions and the bulk of knowledge both in the field of literature and cultural history, and in such fields as sociolinguistics, memory studies and Holocaust studies.

Let me point at just a few important problems within these disciplinary fields that Jan Schwarz deals with or touches upon while he weaves his chronicle of Yiddish postwar literature. First and foremost, he demonstrates how Yiddish writers coped with the crucial question of the representation of the Holocaust. What esthetic means could be used to give expression to unspeakable suffering? This question is still discussed today and creates divisions between two camps. The first camp argues that any traditional representations and genres (such as mimetic realism or melodramatic mode) should be rejected to the advantage of modernist ways that can come close to the "stuttering"—as the appropriate way of expressing the unrepresentable. The other camp accepts traditional mimetic representations as a way to reach a broad public and awake a so-called "prosthetic memory," defined by Alison Landsberg in her book *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* of 2004 as the mediated, not first-hand experienced, memories. Schwarz shows clearly that Holocaust survivors themselves, while writing in Yiddish, chose varied strategies of representation, but many of them, and certainly those who were most acclaimed among Yiddish readers (such as Chava Rosenfarb or Leib Rochman), were prone to use life-writing and realistic prose to describe their experiences. This may point to the conclusion that there are no *a priori* better or worse representations of borderline experience, but all depends on the totality of the communication situation (the author and his intentions, targeted audience and context).

This brings us to another query, which is as fundamental for literature and art as the problem of the means of representation, ethics and esthetics, namely the question of the possible transformative power of art and literature. In our present era that puts in doubt the very notion that we can participate in forming our tomorrow, the idea that art and literature can contribute to the change and creation of a better future seems outdated and belonging to the ideas of Romanticism. However, reading *Survivors and Exiles* we encounter again and again examples of writers who like Sutzkever or Rochman bear witness to how the act of writing helped them survive in the most extreme conditions. We also find evidence of how writing literature helped them to deal with trauma, gave a sense of mission and pointed to the future. One of the best-known writers, mentioned in the book, who illustrates the potential power of literature, is Elie Wiesel. By his writing, he managed to use the past to redefine himself in order to engage with reality through ethical and political action, and to imagine who he could become in future, instead of being paralyzed and destroyed by the past. The examples of Yiddish writers, described in Schwarz's book, can be used to confirm the American scholar Amir Eshel's ideas about the capacity of literature and art to expand human imagination and thus open a horizon of hope, even in the darkest times. Eshel calls it "futurity" in his book *Futurity: Contemporary Literature and the Quest for the Past* published in 2012. By this term he refers to the capacity of literature and art to engage imaginatively and productively with the past and to expand the idiom we employ to make a sense of calamities and look to the future.

Survivors and Exiles is also a goldmine of fascinating cases that could be used to study both the transnational and transcultural reception of literary works, but also more broadly of transmission and reception of memories across national and cultural borders. Schwarz's findings clearly point to the immense significance of historical and cultural context for the reception of a literary work. Several of the wartime writers that he analyzes experienced that their works (for example, poems recited during private gatherings in the ghettos) were received very differently by their audience during the war than by their postwar audience. Moreover, the reception would totally change when the work written in Yiddish was translated into another language. For example, Leib Rochman's *The Pit and the Trap: A Chronicle of Survival*, which focuses on the Polish Jewish community of Mińsk Mazowiecki, was acclaimed within the Yiddish-speaking

community, but became a failure in the Hebrew translation from the 1960s and passed almost unnoticed when it was translated into English as late as 1984. This case raises the important issue of problems involved in cultural transmission across languages and cultures. Yiddish literature seems to be an exceptionally rich material for studies of what is lost and what is won in translation. It raises the question about the compromises writers must make if they want to reach audiences outside their own linguistic communities. Schwarz's account points to some very interesting cases in Yiddish literature that might be studied from that viewpoint, Wiesel and Bashevis Singer being the best known ones.

Wiesel's narration of his experience in Auschwitz was originally written in Yiddish and thus could not reach many readers, but it received an immense attention when it was published in French, and then in English under the title *The Night*. However, Schwarz stresses the fact that the book was not a simple translation. It was very much adjusted to the non-Jewish reader. Additionally, according to Schwarz, the introduction written by François Mauriac played an important role for the book's reception. This very thought-provoking observation about the significance of an introduction for a book's reception is unfortunately not developed further in *Survivors and Exiles*.

On the other hand, Schwarz dedicates more attention to the case of Bashevis Singer and his unprecedented success among the world readership. He shows that Singer's position among Yiddish writers was not uncontroversial. He was not always treated as the most artistically accomplished author. His popular success was accounted by his ability to reach out to the American audience. This was due to his effort to translate his own works into English (he referred to the latter as "second originals"), as well as his way of writing that was in tune with the American letters of his time. Moreover, Singer, in contrast to the majority of Yiddish writers, did not write about the Holocaust, but about the Ashkenazi world before the Shoah, that he presented as an almost mythical world that was gone forever, destroyed beyond any hope of reconstruction. The sketchy analysis of the reception of Singer in *Survivors and Exiles* is very promising, but leaves the reader craving for more. Hopefully, it may be developed in Schwarz's future work.

Yet another aspect that I somewhat miss in the book is a proper presentation of Yiddishism as a kind of ideology: when exactly it started to develop, which stages it went through and what its future is.

The book ends not just with a summary of its main conclusions, but with interesting reflections about the future of Yiddish. It is emphasized that Yiddish today has a post-vernacular character as a result of a major decline in Yiddish-language proficiency among second- and third-generation Israeli, American, and Russian Jews. However, the book points to the fact that the rich treasures of Yiddish writing can today be stored digitally and are made accessible to those that might be prepared to learn to read the language. The author writes about the rise of virtual Yiddish culture. However, the question remains if that may create a chance for the revival of Yiddish and an increase in Yiddish language competence. What is the future of Yiddish in the contemporary world?

Barbara Törnquist-Plewa
Lund University