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David Fram: Lithuanian Yiddish Poet of the South African Diaspora and Illuminating Love

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David Fram: Lithuanian Yiddish Poet of the South African Diaspora

and

Illuminating Love

Hazel Frankel

A thesis and a novel submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of
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Abstract

This thesis investigates the Yiddish poems of the South African Lithuanian immigrant David Fram. It locates Fram's poetry and aesthetics in the context of Yiddish poetry in general and Lithuanian-South African Yiddish literature in particular. In doing this it identifies and investigates Fram's main poetic themes, Diaspora, the memory of home and the condition of exile; landscape and people, nature and creator; his response to the Holocaust suggesting poetry is a legitimate means of expressing trauma. The thesis also deliberates on the potential relevance of taking Fram's biography and personal experiences into consideration when interpreting his poetry. It reflects on the approach to and process of writing both this thesis and the novel *Illuminating Love*, considering how thesis and novel relate to each other and to Fram's poetry, as well as to the notion of postmemory. Indicating the antecedents of *Illuminating Love*, the thesis discusses aspects of realism and postmodernism, genre and mixed genre, as well as development of voice, point of view and character in my novel. In conclusion, suggestions are made for future projects that might be undertaken to revitalise the vibrant language of Yiddish and memorialise its community. The appendix contains translations (following transliteration) of Fram's poems.

The creative component of the thesis is the novel *Illuminating Love*. Its narrative entwines the journeys of two Jewish women, Judith, forced to leave her home in Lithuania, Eastern Europe before World War II, and Cally her granddaughter living in contemporary South Africa. Transcribing Judith's poems in calligraphy, Cally uncovers her family's history and roots. The content of the love sampler she inscribes for her husband Jake, and the illuminating of a *ketuba* (the Jewish marriage contract) serve to counterpoint her personal circumstances. Behind the gilding lies the reality of domestic violence, Judith's escape from the genocide and Jake's experiences in the bush during the South African Border War.

Key topics: David Fram; Yiddish poetry; Lithuania; Holocaust; South African Yiddish; South African Yiddish Poetry; Jewish Diaspora; South African Jewish Diaspora; memory; trauma; biography; postmemory; genre; mixed genre, realism, *Illuminating Love*; calligraphy; illumination; *ketuba*; domestic violence; genocide; World War II; Border War; Bush War.

Dedication

To my late esteemed grandparents, Leah and Morris Slayen and Sarah and Benjamin Hillel Eidelman, and my late beloved parents, Sylvia and Benny Eidelman, without whom there would be no story; and to the future generations, Ilan and Helen, Daniella and Warren, Gabriel and Jodi, Jonathan, Joshua, Ruby, Morgan and Nathan who carry my hopes and dreams.

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David Fram: Chronology

1903 b. Poneveyz, Lithuania

1916 Relocated to Samara, White Russia

1921 Matriculated in Krakinove, Lithuania.

1922 Studied at the Military Academy, Wilkomir, Lithuania

1926 Spent three months in Toulouse, France

1927 Emigrated to Johannesburg, South Africa

1931 Publication of *Lider un poemes*, Warsaw, Poland

1934-6 Resided in London, United Kingdom

1940-1949 Married and emigrated to United Kingdom; daughter born

1945 Publication of *Efsher*, London, United Kingdom

1947 Publication of *Dos letste kapitl*, London, United Kingdom

1951-2 Remarried and returned to South Africa

1983 Publication of *A shvalb oyfn dakh*, Johannesburg, South Africa

1988 d. Johannesburg, South Africa

Introduction

This thesis focuses on the Yiddish poems of Lithuanian¹ immigrant David Fram. Placed in the public domain, I argue that his poems offer significant insights into Lithuanian-South African Yiddish literature in general. I also believe that they make a significant contribution to the understanding of a particular Jewish immigrant's diasporic experience. In order to support these notions, I have transliterated² the poems, many for the first time, and then translated them into English to make them accessible to a wider readership. These versions of the poems are included in the Addendum.³

Joseph Sherman, well-known critic and Yiddishist, affirmed Fram's importance. He recognised Fram as "the eminent South African Yiddish poet" (*From a Land Far Off* 14), one whose "knowledge of and sensitivity to the Yiddish language are everywhere apparent, from his distinguished verse to his illuminating conversation" (14). Solomon Liptzin too commented that Fram was "South Africa's finest Yiddish poet ... who began in 1923 with idyllic poems of Jewish life in Lithuania. His *Lider un poemes* (Songs and Poems⁴) (1931) was the first lyric collection by a recognised poet based in part on South African experiences" (*Maturing of Yiddish* 251). This collection was Fram's first step towards fulfilling his aim to "make South Africa a Yiddish literary centre" (Liptzin 251). David Wolpe, Yiddish poet and critic, singled Fram out for his fine lyrical poems ("Yiddish Language" 296), and Melekh Ravitsh, another Yiddish poet and critic, in his introduction to *Lider un poemes*,⁵ describes Fram as "a Yiddish lyricist in the fullest sense of the word" (403). Although Wolpe was the most prolifically published South African Yiddish poet and won the Israeli Manger Award for Yiddish Poetry in 1983, Fram is the only South African included in Joseph Leftwich's collection of Yiddish poetry, *The Golden Peacock* (1961). This gives credence to Mona Berman's assertion

¹ In his poetry, when Fram refers to Lite, he is referring specifically to his homeland,

² Yiddish that is transcribed in Latin characters. The Yivo system has been used for Yiddish. Hebrew words have also been transliterated using this Yiddish system.

³ Poems were transliterated and translated before undertaking critical commentary. I have used capitalisation at the beginning of each line of poetry and also for words usually capitalised in English in order to facilitate the reading of the work. Chapter Six includes a section that describes my approach.

⁴ This is the official title given to the collection. The literal translation would be 'Short and Long Poems.'

⁵ It also appeared as an article in *Literarische bleter* (1932).

that Fram was the “poet laureate of Africa” (E-mail 10 July 2010); Fram may thus be considered as the archetypal diasporic poet. *Lider un poemes* was followed by a second collection, *A shvalb oyfn dakh* (A Swallow on the Roof) in 1983.

Although a vigorous body of South African Yiddish literary work has been “listed in three progressively enlarged bibliographies, very little research has been undertaken to evaluate it” (Sherman “Ideology and Indifference” 28-29). To date, only three South African Yiddish books have appeared in translation, although some short stories appeared in the publication *Jewish Affairs*. As recently as 1987, Sherman edited the story collection *From a Land Far Off*, commenting that such a publication was “long overdue” (14). Little has been achieved by way of publication of South African Yiddish poetry.

The timeliness of this study may be associated with the recent upsurge of memoirs and histories of the few remaining Holocaust survivors and Jewish immigrants who came to South Africa before 1939. It is also propelled by the awareness that the few remaining guardians of Yiddish (first and second generation speakers and writers of the language throughout the world) are disappearing. In addition, this study may be connected to contemporary social and political developments in South Africa. These include the collapse of Apartheid in 1994 and the emergence of a multicultural nation, which affirmed the presence, history and literature of the various minorities, including that of South African Jewry. What was once “taboo has now been recovered, valorised and often proudly publicised ... such is the nature of collective memory, serving as it does changing needs and circumstances” (Cesarini 48). Within this context, the translation and transliteration of Fram’s poems provide a “cultural doorway to understanding some of the underexposed aspects” (4). An exploration of the literary depth of the Jewish culture and experience, as discussed in this thesis may rescue and preserve the richness and significance of South African Yiddish poetry.

In Chapter One, I foreground the Yiddish language, Fram’s mother tongue, and discuss its roots, culture and history in Eastern Europe and South Africa. I then locate his poetry and aesthetics within that of earlier Yiddish poetry and of the English and Russian Romantics. I also describe the ethos, aesthetics and aims of various Yiddish Modernist groups, arguing Fram’s commitment to traditionalism. In this regard, I refer to the insights and opinions offered in their emails by Yiddish specialists Justin Cammy (2011), Gennady Estraiikh (2010, 2011), Cedric Ginsberg

(2010-2012) and Kenneth Moss (2011), as well as to the writings of Frieda Aaron (1990), Barbara Harshav (1986), Kathryn Hellerstein (1995) and Maera Shreiber (1998).

The chapters that follow highlight various themes that can be identified in Fram's oeuvre. Thus, in Chapter Two, I discuss his Diaspora poems and how these reflect his continuing connection to Lithuania, because, as Ravitsh stated, "like a stubborn dream the Lithuanian themes continued to dominate Fram" (403). In order to argue the poems' relevance with regard to Fram's longing for home, I draw attention to the nature of Diaspora and relate this to various aspects of his background and subject matter, his memories of home and his condition of exile. I also reflect on Fram as wandering Jew and perennial outsider. My argument is influenced by the insights of critics Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi (2000), Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer (2010), David Cesarini (2009), Paolo Bartoloni (2008), Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Jonathan Karp (2008) *inter alia*.

Chapter Three argues for Fram's neo-Romanticism in poems encompassing the landscape and its peoples, with reference to English and Russian Romantic poetry. The chapter looks at how Fram's subject matter and style were influenced by his commitment to traditionalism. I then discuss the development of a personal lexicon of imagery, as well as the relationship between nature and the Creator in his landscape poems, also referring to poems about the indigenous peoples of South Africa.

In Chapter Four, I consider Fram's Holocaust poetry in comparison with other ways of recording trauma, such as historical archives and documentation. I also focus on the importance of poetry for preserving memory, suggesting that it may serve as testimony and bear witness, and may offer a means of catharsis and even prayer. In doing so, I argue against Theodor Adorno's stricture that there should be "no poetry after Auschwitz" ("Negative Aesthetics" 392).

In Chapter Five, I enter the debate as to whether, when interpreting poetry, information about the writer's background is useful. Reference is made to the theories of T. S. Eliot (1888-1965), Roland Barthes (1915-1980) and others who argue for the irrelevance of biography and the need for the reader to assess the literary text alone. On the other hand, John Keats (1795-1821) and Seamus Heaney (b. 1939), *inter alia*, suggest that there may be a place for biographical discussion under certain circumstances. I suggest that because there are certain significant congruencies

between Fram's life and his craft, it may be useful to take his biography into account. To support my stance, I select and analyse specific poems.

In Chapter Six, I reflect on the process of writing this thesis and the novel, *Illuminating Love*. While Fram's poems were one source of influence for the Judith poems, I also draw attention to the work of two other poets, Avrom Sutskever⁶ (1913-2010) and Irena Klepfisz (b. 1941). I discuss some of the issues that arose when writing about Fram that affect my own writing practice. Thereafter, I also discuss the revival and survival of Yiddish as a vibrant and rich language, through university courses, community gatherings, summer programmes, Aaron Lansky's Yiddish library initiative, as well as the current status of Yiddish poetry.

Chapter Seven reflects on the process of writing the novel *Illuminating Love*, drawing attention to influential texts. Focusing on the voices of the two women protagonists, one of whom expresses herself in prose, the other in poetry, I address issues of choice of genre, viewpoint and dialogue. I also look at aspects of characterisation and the significance of the act of writing as this pertains to calligraphy as well as poetry in the narrative.

While the golden years of Yiddish are long gone, my hope is that my research and translations will in some measure redress previous neglect of South African Yiddish literature in general and Fram's poems in particular. I hope that this thesis may give the poems new life for "later generations [who] seek to regain the language and culture of parents and grandparents" (Cesarini 5). I further hope that, by preventing their consignment to oblivion, my transliteration and translations of Fram's poems will provide a measure of critical awareness, recollection and reminder.

⁶ This is the Yiddish translation. His name is written as Abraham Sutzkever in the English translations of his books.

Chapter One: Fram's Yiddish Poetry: Language, Tradition and Form

'No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone' (T. S. Eliot).

In this chapter, I discuss the development of the Yiddish language and its poetry in Europe and South Africa. I focus on how Fram perpetuated his heritage by continuing to use Yiddish, the language of the historical and personal past, as the vehicle for writing. To the extent to which a nation's culture is "embedded in words" (Omer-Sherman 111), the Jewish culture is vested in Yiddish, the *mame-loshn*.⁷ There can therefore never be "a rounded picture of the South Africa Jewish community without a thorough knowledge of what was written about it in Yiddish" (48). Hence, the corpus of Yiddish writing published in South Africa "provides a unique insight into the historical, political and socio-cultural forces that shaped our life here" (Sherman "Between Ideology and Indifference" 48). Fram's particular diasporic, Jewish secular identity was invested in the continuity of Yiddish in South Africa. There, his poems, like stones, are the "archeology of a culture" (Harshav and Harshav 9) whose eternal suffering is enmeshed with the disappearance of its language. He continued to write in Yiddish, aside from a few early poems, despite the pressures of acculturation and assimilation, the antagonism from within the community itself and from the outside world.

This chapter also argues for Fram's traditionalism and neo-Romanticism, despite the rising tide of Modernism in the twentieth century. I offer my translations as a means of serving the remnant of Yiddish language and culture, and as a record both of a world the poet left behind and of the Diaspora.

The Development of Yiddish and its Poetry in Europe

Yiddish emerged in the Rhine area around C. E. 1000 (Weinreich qtd. in Harshav and Harshav 10). It exemplifies a "hybrid etymology" (Hellerstein 66), a language "born when the intimate mother [Yiddish] was embraced by the articulate tongue of patriarchy [Hebrew]⁸" (Hellerstein 66), so that a "central range of [Yiddish]

⁷ Mother tongue

⁸ Hebrew is the *loshn-koydesh*, the language of the *Torah*, the Bible. In mediaeval Europe it was the accepted language of education in religious schools. "The Jews were the only society that had an obligatory education, at least for men ... [and] the texts of that education – the holy books, the books of law and their commentaries, as well as the texts of prayers ... were in Hebrew" (Harshav 10).

discourse depends on Hebrew words and phrases” (Sherman “Between Ideology and Indifference” 42).⁹ In addition, as it spread throughout Europe, it incorporated words and ideas from the languages of its host countries and surrounding cultures, blending Germanic dialects, Old French, Old Italian, Slavic, Polish, Russian and Lithuanian into “one synthetic whole and grammatical system” (Harshav and Harshav 10). Yiddish is thus characterised by multilingualism, an inclusive language that continually makes and remakes connections between words and meaning, selves and others. It therefore became known as *zhargon*,¹⁰ a language spoken and used by everyone regardless of religious belief or political persuasion, by people “of different ideologies, education and commitment, as much the language of gangsters and shopkeepers as that of poets and intellectuals, never the exclusive property of *di groyse gelernte*”¹¹ (Shreiber “End of Exile” 280), but also the “the coarse folk tongue of the uneducated masses” (Sherman “Ideology and Indifference” 32).

Although Yiddish literature developed out of an “old and rich culture” (Howe and Greenberg 57) and heritage, it formed no part of “any authorised curriculum in Lithuania” (Estraiikh e-mail 11 Nov. 2010). Students who “went to *yeshivas*”¹² would have studied in Hebrew, while those who attended the *gymnasias*¹³ would have learned Russian, German and English and been influenced by those literatures” (Estraiikh 11 Nov. e-mail 2010). Yiddish poets were thus in the unusual situation of not having studied their language formally. Nevertheless, for all of them, their first language was Yiddish and they “would have read many texts in Yiddish” (Ginsberg e-mail 29 July 2011). All the great early Yiddish writers, Ayzik Meyer Dik, Mendele Moykher-Sforim, Yitskhok Leybush Perets and Sholem-Aleykhem, having begun by writing in Hebrew, switched to Yiddish as they believed they would have a larger potential audience. For the same reason, “much of the writing of the Lubavitcher *Rebbe* and of a faction of the Zionist movement wrote in Yiddish” (Ginsberg e-mail 29 July 2011), and Bundists¹⁴ and Yiddishist secularists also promoted the

⁹ As Sherman commented, “Yiddish and Hebrew are the two eyes of Jewish life; take one away and we are blind” (“Ideology and Indifference” 34).

¹⁰ Jargon.

¹¹ Intellectuals.

¹² Religious boys’ schools for *Torah* learning.

¹³ Secular high schools.

¹⁴ Secular Jewish socialist party in the Russian Empire.

propagation of Yiddish. Thus, the fact that an individual wrote in Yiddish did not necessarily mean that he espoused a particular outlook.

There is little definite information about Fram's literary education. He was not a student in the Yiddish secular school system in Lithuania, and he finished his schooling in the Soviet system (Cammy e-mail 29 June 2010) when he returned from Samara in 1921. However, according to Moss, by the 1920s a Yiddish reader in Lithuania would have been able to find "some Romanticism (German, Russian, English) and also avant-garde writing (Expressionism), original, translated and in Yiddish if he/she looked for it, but Modernist works produced in Kiev or New York would not have been accessible" (Cammy e-mail 29 June 2010). It is therefore likely that "a person of Fram's education would have been well-read in these areas" (Estraikh e-mail 11 Sept. 2010).

Yiddish and its Literature in South Africa

Initially, Yiddish was not accepted as a fully-fledged European language in South Africa, and prospective immigrants were turned away if it was the only language they knew.¹⁵ However, after the publication of a pamphlet *Yiddish – Is it a European Language?* by journalist David Goldblatt (1903), and the representation made to the South African Immigration Department by Morris Alexander, President of the Cape Jewish Board of Deputies, immigration by Eastern European Jewry was permitted. Native speakers continued to "speak, read and write in their mother tongue" (Sherman, *In a Land Far Off* 6), and, despite the initial lack of linotype machines, trained compositors and loose type, Yiddish newspapers such as *Der Afrikaner* (The African) appeared as a regular weekly in November 1911. The *Afrikaner yidishe tsaytung* (The African Jewish Times), first published in the early 1930s, amalgamated with *Der Afrikaner* in December 1933, maintaining the title *Di Afrikaner yidishe tsaytung*. Together with the publication of journals such as the *Dorem Afrike* (South Africa), these endeavours attest to the importance of the continuation of the Yiddish language and Lithuanian culture. By the 1930s, Yiddish was the third largest European language in the Transvaal after English and Afrikaans and there were 30-40

¹⁵ As it was not written from left to right, it was not considered legitimate.

*landsmanshaftn*¹⁶ in Johannesburg alone. South Africa therefore came to be regarded as a “colony of Lithuania” (Sokolov qtd. in Belling 171).

Subsequently, however, “the rejection of Yiddish amongst Jewish immigrants particularly in the English speaking world was a function of acculturation” (Ginsberg e-mail 29 July 2011). Many immigrants longed to become part of the dominant culture, and jettisoning the language of the old country was one way of achieving this. Yiddish also struggled against “external pressure” (Ginsberg e-mail 29 July 2011), the prejudice of the gentile community, where the “animosity of an alien world towards the image of the Jew was projected upon a language seen as an embodiment of the ‘medieval’ primitive, unassimilable Jewish substance” (Omer-Sherman 5). As a result of these “disabling views that [their language] Yiddish was a lesser and deficient form, preventing the acceptance of it as a beautiful borderlands language in its own right” (Peterson 182), masses of young Jews streamed into the surrounding “richer more rewarding general culture wherever possible – in pre-Hitler Germany, in post-revolutionary Russia and in relatively liberal America, and no high-level effort was made to present the art of Yiddish in other languages” (Harshav and Harshav 7). Once “Stalin [had] killed Yiddish writers [and] Hitler killed Yiddish writers and readers alike” (20), one third of the Jewish people perished and destruction of Yiddish culture was almost total. Thereafter, with the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, Hebrew became the language of choice in creating a strong Jewish nation-state, Yiddish being considered the language of victimhood.

In the South African Jewish Diaspora, despite the homogenous nature of and the strong sense of group identity, “most contemporary Jewish organisations were hostile to Yiddish and Yiddish culture and tended to ignore it” (Cesarini 10), desiring to acculturate and improve their circumstances. Politically, whereas the Bund had promoted Yiddish in Eastern Europe, it had very little influence in South Africa. In addition, non-religious Zionists and the religious orthodox community had no interest in Yiddish. Highly-cultured German Jews kept themselves apart from the less well-educated Lithuanians, and second generation immigrants separated themselves from the first generation. Thus, marginalisation occurred within the minority group itself.¹⁷

¹⁶ Community groups, compatriot groups and self-help associations formed by people from the same town or surrounding areas in the old country on their arrival in the new.

¹⁷ German Jews in South Africa followed the patterns of British Jews. The Lithuanians found their customs “fancy and pretentious” (Ginsberg e-mail 29 July 2011).

Although early Lithuanian Jewish immigrants spoke Yiddish, there was a lack of interest in cultural expression and most of them knew little of its literature. The fact that there is little archived material of either poetry or drama indicates how these were regarded as being on both the “general and Jewish periphery” (Belling 170). There was a shortage of writers and only a very small intelligentsia. Few poets saw their poetry in print because of a lack of readership. When work did appear, it was given little space, unlike in the journals of Eastern Europe and America that actively promoted Yiddish literature, including that of South Africa, such as *Literarische bleter* (Literary Pages) and *Forverts* (Forwards). By the 1940s, there was no group for whom Yiddish would have been the language of choice and education, and who would have sought it out, unlike in Argentina for example. As a result, where Yiddish originally served as a bridge between the old world and the new, it became almost entirely erased from the collective memory of South African Jewry.

On the other hand, after World War II, there were those who saw the presence of Yiddish as essential to the preservation of a world that had been destroyed, and who were determined to revive the language and its literature. Many were writers who felt it to be “the most sacred and crushing of obligations” (Aaron 6) to save the culture, and these years brought a “renewal of Yiddish in South Africa” (Wolpe “Yiddish Literature” 21). *Dorem Afrike* reappeared in 1948 and there was a resurgence of “contemporaneous writing in Yiddish – albeit by a group of writers of an older generation, Hyman Polsky, Morris Hoffman, J. M. Sherman, Rakhmiel Feldman, Leibl Feldman, Ben Moshe, Hyman Ehrlich, Mendl Tabatznik, Nehemia Levinsky and David Wolpe – to name the best known ones” (Ginsberg e-mail 29 July 2011).

Those immigrants who continued to use Yiddish as a living and vibrant language amalgamated their experiences of past and present, so Eastern European Jewish secular literary culture became part of the literary culture in the far-flung Diaspora of South Africa. They made their own mark on the re-constituted communities as they transposed their history and background onto new soil. In his article, ‘Yiddish literature in South Africa’ (*Dorem Afrike* 1956 21), Wolpe noted that the revolutionary and ideological ideas that were very much part of Eastern European Yiddish poetry were superseded in South Africa by descriptions of personal experiences by numerous Lithuanian-South African Yiddish writers like Fram. N. D. Hoffmann’s *Seyfer hazikhroynes* (Book of Memoirs) (1916) was the first book-length

Yiddish volume to be published in South Africa. Describing the author's experiences in the home country in contrast with those in the South African countryside, it set the tone of much future, local writing, portraying the hardships and moral dilemmas in a nation predicated on institutionalised racial discrimination. Rachmiel Feldman published a volume of short stories, *Shvarts un vays* (Black and White) (1934), which provided commentary on local policies against the black population. Morris Hoffmann, a scholar who became a shopkeeper in De Aar in the Karoo, published an anthology of Yiddish poetry, *Voglungs-klangen* (Sounds of Wandering) (Warsaw 1935), and his short stories appeared posthumously in *Unter afrikaner zun* (Under the African Sun) (1951), later translated into Hebrew by his widow in Israel. He expressed a "realistic, unsentimental view of immigrant Jewish life in South Africa" (Sherman "South African Literature" 5), comparing the difficulties of the Jew with those of the Afrikaner in rural areas during the Depression, and also evoking the destructive effects of Nazi ideology and anti-Semitism. Hyman Polsky's short story collection *In Afrike* (In Africa) (1939, 1952) consists of monologues of struggling immigrants who felt perpetually alien, filled as they were with the sense of loss of and longing for the birthplace from which they had escaped with their lives.

J. M. Sherman wrote the first South African full-length novel, *In land fun gold un zunshayn* (In the Land of Gold and Sunshine) (1956), which focused on the isolation felt by Jewish immigrants who "never really adjusted to life in the harsh environment of Africa [and] looked back with nostalgia to the world they left behind in Eastern Europe" (Sherman "South African Literature" 7). In his memoir, *Dankere* (1956), Hyman Ehrlich reflects on his *shtetl*¹⁸ childhood in Russia. Nehemiah Levinsky's collection of short stories, *Der regn hot farshpetikt* (The Rain Came Late) (1959) describes the interplay between the immigrant Jews and indigenous Afrikaners. Sarah Eisen included memories of the old country as well as depictions of life in South Africa, the golden land, in her poetry collection *Geklibene lider un poemes* (Selected Lyrics and Poems) (1965). *Kalman Bulan* (1968-1971), a trilogy by Mendel Tabatznik, describes the disruption caused by migration, and the resulting acculturation and assimilation.

The survival of Yiddish was therefore fuelled by memories *fun der alte heym* and Yiddish may therefore be regarded as both relic and reliquary of a culture. As a

¹⁸ An Eastern European market town with a sizable Jewish population.

record of courage and determination, this literature is a “noteworthy addition to the body of general South African culture that has been neglected for too long, to the great injury of our fullest self-awareness as an ethnic minority” (Sherman “Between Ideology and Indifference” 49). Language communicates best when it can rely on a broad background of understanding in society and on readers’ familiarity with a wide range of texts, written and oral, fiction and folklore, essays, ideology and philosophy, and today, little of this can be “assumed in the reader of Yiddish” (Harshav and Harshav 9). The diasporic tradition continued into the next generation of Jewish writers, Nadine Gordimer, Dan Jacobson and Sarah Gertrude Millin and poets Ruth Miller, Bernard Levinson, Karen Press, Helen Segal, Lewis Sowden and Olga Kirsch – but in English, not Yiddish.

Locating Fram: Publication

An overview of the Eastern European journals in which his poems appeared tells us little about Fram’s aesthetic ideals, as those publications represent the full gamut of literary and political stances of the times. Fram’s Yiddish publishing debut occurred in 1923 when poems appeared in the *Kveytn* (Blossoms) (Ponevezh), *Yidishe shtime* (Yiddish Voice) and *Folksblat* (People’s Paper) (Kovne¹⁹). Later poems written between 1924 and 1931 were published in *Di velt*²⁰ (The World) (Lite), *Literarishe bleter* and *Haynt* (Today) (Warsaw), *Nayes* (News), *Mir aleyh* (Me Alone), *Folksblat* and *Kovner tog* (Kovne Day), *Der shtral* (The Ray) (Libau, Latvia), *Di vokh*²¹ (The Week) (Riga, Latvia), as well as *Zuntog* (Sunday) and *Oyfkum* (Arrival) (New York). According to Moss (E-mail 6 June 2010), these journals display no particular party line: “*Literarishe bleter* was the leading Yiddish literary journal in the interwar period and published work of various aesthetic sorts but saw itself as a bastion of literary quality. Its editor, Nahman Mayzl, was a careful reader and a fan of Modernism broadly speaking” (Moss e-mail 6 June 2010). On the other hand, the Kovne *Nayes* was a “Yiddishist-Folkist paper that identified with non-socialist, Diaspora-nationalist Yiddishism and was opposed to the pro-Communist, pro-Soviet ideology of the Lithuanian Kultur-Lige” (Moss 6 June e-mail 2010). This was also true of the Kovne

¹⁹ Yiddish name for the Lithuanian Kaunas.

²⁰ Given in *Lider un poemes* as *Der velt*. Its source is given as Lite.

²¹ Given in *Lider un poemes* as *Der vokh*.

Folksblat, a continuation of *Nayes*. Kovne's *Yidishe shtime* and Warsaw's *Haynt* were Zionist papers while *Folksblat* and *Mir aleyn* were "local and provincial publications, unlikely to be too avant-garde" (Moss e-mail 6 June 2010).

In South Africa, Fram's poems were published in *Dorem Afrike*, *Yidishe tribune*, *Foroys* (Forward), *Ekspres* (Express) (Johannesburg) and the *Fri-steyter baginen* (Free State Dawn) (Bloemfontein). These publications represented varying literary and political leanings. However, had Fram elected to publish only in "literary journals that were congruent with his political stance, he would probably not have been able to publish much" (Ginsberg e-mail 29 July 2011). That his first collection, *Lider un poemes*, was published in Vilna,²² does suggest that Fram had kept some ties with the literary establishment there. Moss therefore deduces that Fram's commitment to "Yiddishism was not as a subsidiary of a political ideology but an end in itself" (E-mail 6 June 2010), an approach that he terms "culturalism," (E-mail 6 June 2010), where individuals' proclivities are determined by their culture rather than by political or religious ideologies.

Locating Fram: Neo-Romanticism and Traditionalism

Traditional Yiddish poetry reverberates with themes and images of earlier Hebrew-Aramaic religious, mythological and cultural tradition, figures of Jewish history and Slavic folklore and literature (Harshav and Harshav 10). It also draws on the tradition of "homely verse of nineteenth century troubadours travelling from *shtetl* to *shtetl* and the Romantic poetry of Heine and Pushkin, Byron and Lermontov" (Howe and Greenberg 8). Influenced by folk song and ballad with their unembellished vocabulary and direct narrative, Yiddish poetry frequently includes "metaphoric language, repetition of significant words and a repeating questioning pattern" (Aaron 57). In addition, since Yiddish is amenable to the absorption of expressions from other spoken languages, its poetry thrives on colloquial expressions, proverbs, anecdotes, quotations and stories from other sources.

The critic Brinman aligns Fram's traditional, romantic and classical forms and his choice of subject matter with the poetry of Dovid Eynhorn, a Lithuanian poet who opposed Modernist Yiddish poetry. Brinman categorises Eynhorn as, "a dikhter fun litvishn landshaft un natur, fun litvishn umet un troyer" / "a poet of Lithuanian landscape and nature, of Lithuanian sadness and sorrow" (1938). Ravitsh too

²² The Yiddish name for Vilna/Vilnius is Vilne.

describes Fram’s poems as representing “the epitome of the Dovid Eynhorn method” (403), and Niger in his review of *Lider un poemes* (1934), comments on how Fram’s romantic longing and his descriptions of town and country show Eynhorn’s influence. Thus, for example, the romantic phraseology in the title and first line of Fram’s poem “Es hot a bleykhe hant getsundn di ikone” / “A pale hand has lit up the icon” (*Lider* 28) (1926)²³ and the line “blasn bleykhshayn” / “pale, pale glow” (4), link him directly to Eynhorn.

Brinman also connects Fram’s Romanticism and realism, language and descriptions of landscape and towns, summers and winters, with the traditional landscape poems of Moyshe Kulbak, for example the poems ‘Shkie’ (‘Sunset’) (*Lider* 29) (1924) and ‘Briv’ (‘Letter’) (*Lider* 277). Brinman comments on how Fram’s lyricism in the sonnet ‘Fareltert’ (‘Grown Old’) (*Lider* 85) (1929) shows the influence of Bialik’s ‘Mayn gorten’ (‘My Garden’) with its regular musical rhythm and traditional form (qtd. in Niger 615). These are apparent in lines such as “Es iz farfaln shoyne – ikh ken zikh nisht tsebaytn; / Ikh veys nisht, ver fun unz es zaynen di gerekhte; / Ikh veys nor, az ikh benk amol nokh alte tsaytn, / Un oftmol leb ikh nokh tsufridn mitn nekhtn.” / “All is lost now – I cannot change it; / I do not know who of us is correct; / I only know that sometimes I long for old times, / And sometimes I am satisfied with yesterday” (1-4).

In addition, Fram’s poetry owes much to and was enriched by his traditional background, as can be seen in the inclusion of references to Jewish customs and the Hebrew Bible. His poem ‘Unzere kedoyshim’ (‘Our Martyrs’) (*Dorem Afrike* Mar-Apr. 1969 17) makes reference to the biblical destruction of the Jewish people, lending resonance to the similar fate of contemporary martyrs, as in the line “Fun sine²⁴ un fun has, un khayishe retsikhes” / “In malice and hatred, and savage murder” (10), which encapsulates both. In the poem ‘Iz vos?’ (‘So What’) (*Lider* 16-17) (1929) the poet refers to his own wanderings, “nokh dem megulgl gevorn aleyne tsu di breges fun Lite” / “after that transformed I landed up alone on the shores of Lite” (2). These journeys may be metaphorically linked to those of the biblical Hebrews.

Neo-Romanticism in Galicia was at its height between 1904 and 1909 and this

²³ Where the poem appeared elsewhere before it was published as part of Fram’s collections, the original publication date follows the collection date.

²⁴ The words “sine,” “khayishe,” “retsikhes” and “megulgl” are Yiddish words derived from the *loshn-koydesh* (Hebrew-Aramaic) component of Yiddish.

enriched Yiddish literature with “lyric and the love of cultural heritage” (Liptzin *Maturing* 150). Poets with these leanings wrote “simple, melodious quatrains and traditional stanzaic forms about uncomplicated emotions, timid longings, the pain of unfulfilled love, attachment to Palestine’s holy soil, romantic nature far removed from urban abodes ... [and] flirted with death and the grave” (Liptzin *Maturing* 132). Their poems were “idyllic, referring to an innocent past and an idealised future” (134), and so for example, Melekh Ravitsh’s early poems in *Oyf der shvel* (At the Threshold) (1912), show the influence of Heine, in that they are full of “sweet melancholy and overflow[ing] with sentimental love for all mankind. Ravitsh sings of dawning dreams, tender friendships, regret at the loss of childhood innocence” (Liptzin *Maturing* 143). However, although Fram’s verse does show some similar tendencies, it is impossible to prove that Fram had read Ravitsh’s poetry. It does seem likely however, given that Ravitsh wrote the introduction for Fram’s *Lider un poemes* that was later used for an article in *Literarische bleter*. Ravitsh later moved away from neo-Romanticism when he became one of the poets of *Di khalyastre* in Warsaw. With the appearance of *Nakete lider* (Naked Poems) (1921), Ravitsh “forsook rhyme, regular metric lines and stanzas, and followed the Expressionist tide in subject matter” (Liptzin *Maturing* 144), but Fram never did.

Thus, most of Fram’s poems use the standard iambic foot of Yiddish verse, a rhythm that fuses the lyrical and dramatic, evoking a “solemn, epic quality” (Harshav and Harshav 45). They use traditional rhyme, for example abab, in early lyrics such as ‘Mayn opfor’ (‘My Departure’) (*Lider* 14) (1928)²⁵, as well as the long landscape poem ‘Oyf Transvaler erd’ (‘On Transvaal Earth’) (*Lider* 263) (1930), indicating consistency. His conservative mode favours stanzas of the same length, often using quatrains both in the short poems ‘Mayn mame hot mir tsugesht a kishn’ (‘My Mother Sent Me off a Cushion’) (*Lider* 18) (1928) and ‘Baym keyver’ (‘By the Grave’) (*Lider* 35) (1927), as well as in the book-length epics *Dos letste kapitl* (The Last Chapter) (1945) and *Efsher*²⁶ (Perhaps) (1947). Although the narrative epic, ‘Matatulu’ (1953), consists of three long sections and a short coda, whereas ‘Matumba’ (*Shvalb* 84-88) uses regular quatrains, both poems continue to make use of rhyme in every second line.

²⁵ Dates of original journal publication of poems are included where known.

²⁶ The poems *Efsher* and *Dos letste kapitl* appeared both as separate booklets and in extracts. When referring to the book-length versions, the titles are italicised.

Fram's poem 'Ikh benk' ('I Yearn') (*Lider* 89) (1929) also uses a regular rhyme scheme and four four-line verses, similar to the folk ballad as well as traditional anaphora at the start of each verse, "Ikh benk azoy mid nokh a shtikele shvartse, tsekvolene erd" / "I long so tiredly for a piece of black, swollen earth" (1), "Ikh benk nokh di yidn fun velder" / "I long for the Jews of the forests" (5) and "Ikh benk nokh di teg" / "I long for the days" (9). Thus, these poems all remain traditional rather than Modernist in approach and style.

The poem 'Ikh bin a yid' ('I am a Jew') (*Dorem Afrike* July-Aug. 1971 23), also affirms Fram's commitment to his traditions and culture. Through references to the holy books, it connects him both to the biblical forefathers, Joseph and Moses, as well as to his grandfather,

Ikh bin a yid, a yid fun khumesh un tanekh,
Es rint in mir dos alte blut fun Yoysefn un Moyshen.

Es rint in mir an eydelkeyt fun mayn farshemter sprakh,
Un nokh a melekh yidishn mayn zeyde hot geheysn.

I am a Jew, a Jew of *khumesh* and *tanekh*,²⁷
And in me flows the old blood of Joseph and Moses.

There flows in me the nobility of my shamed language,
And my grandfather was named after another Jewish king. (1-4)²⁸

The references to the *khumesh* and *tanekh* (1),²⁹ indicate Fram's knowledge of these traditional religious tracts, but not necessarily that he was religiously observant – he uses Hebrew words with religious connotations, but their meaning derives from their context and the poem is purely secular.

²⁷ Punctuation in the English translations follows that of the original Yiddish text.

²⁸ Yiddish quotations from the poems are followed by my own translations into English, unless otherwise stated. The full texts are presented side by side in the Addendum.

²⁹ Hebrew words used within the Yiddish poems are spelt in the Yiddish way when transliterated, but use the spelling most familiar to English-speaking readers in the translations.

Fram's ballad 'In an Afrikaner baginen' ('In an African dawn') (*Lider* 74) (1927) with its visually evocative descriptions of landscape and people, uses the traditional abab rhyme scheme in the manner of a romantic song of praise:

S'iz zunik un s'iz loyter der frimorgn.
Ekh, vos hele, shtralndike zun!
Un azoy bafrayt fun dayges un fun zorgn –
Kvoktshet ergets-vu a leygedike hun.
(1-4)

It's a sunny and clear early morning.
Oh, what a bright, radiant sun!
And so, free of worries and cares –
A laying hen clucks somewhere.

This also occurs in the rhymes "toybn" / "veyen" / "troybn" / "dergeyen" (5-8). The iambic rhythm further enhances the natural cadence of Yiddish through its alternating emphases, as in lines with alternating rhymes, for example,

A **fokh**, a **patsheray**, un **fligl shotndike veyen**,
Un **s'gist zikh on der vayn in grine troybn** (6-7)

And

S'iz **groys di shtume freyd** bay shrotsim **un** bay **mentshn**,
Un **shrayen vilt zikh, shrayen** fun hispayles!
Frum mispalel **zayn** un **davenen** un **bentshn** (35-37).

Similarly, the long poem 'Dimantn' ('Diamonds') (*Shvalb* 64-68) has a traditional, regular rhyme scheme, aabb, as in "oto-do" / "sho" (1-2) and "umbavuste" / "puste" (3-4), with occasional irregularities where the rhyme occurs on alternate lines, ababcdcd, such as in

Brilyantn – far dir kh'hob, mayn kind, zey gezukht,
Far dir kh'hob a lebn zey zhedne geklibn ...
Es hot zikh mir lignerish tomid gedukht,

Az du vest vi ale zey tsiterik libn.
Derfar hob ikh shtendik far dir zey gehit,
Ikh hob nor in dimantn finster gegloybt,
Far zey hob ikh shtil vi a betler geknit,
Un oftmol afile dem tayvl gelaybt.... (31-38)

The poem ‘An entfēr der velt’ (‘An Answer to the World’) (*Dorem Afrike* Jul. –Aug. 1971 50) ³⁰ is also part of the traditional poetic lineage. An elegy or ode in both its subject matter and its construction, the long lines, slow rhythm and lack of verse breaks enhance its mournful tone,

Ikh fil, ikh trog oyf zikh tsurik di gele late.
Fun vaytn knoylt zikh nokh fun kalkh-oyvn der roykh,
Vu s’hot zayn letstn Shma Yisroel oysgelebt mayn tate,
Vu s’hot mayn mame oysgehoykht ir letstn hoykh.
(1-4)

I feel I wear the yellow star once again.
In the distance there still billows the smoke from the lime-kiln
Where my father lived out his last *Shma Yisroel*,
Where my mother breathed her last breath of air.

The title of the poem ‘Fun tate-mames yidishe’ ³¹ (*Lider* 77) (1939) has been translated simply as ‘From Jewish Parents,’ but also infers the broader culture of forbears in general. It takes as its subject matter the importance of the continuing survival and use of Yiddish to maintain its traditions and culture for future generations. This is affirmed in its inscription to, “Di kinderlekh fun der ershter yidisher folksshul in Yohanesburg, geheylikt,” that is “Dedicated to the children of

³⁰ Fragment of a longer work.

³¹ The words *yidishe* and *yidishkeyt* need to be understood in terms of the use of the Yiddish language as the ‘national’ language of the Jewish people, of Jewish culture and socialism. *Yidishkeyt* in the religious sense means “Jewish learning, observance, *mitsves*, *kashres*, *shul*, but in the worldly sense it means secular Jewish nationalism” (Ginsberg e-mail 23 Sept. 2011). Thus, for Fram, as for many immigrants, “*Yidishkeyt* was a Yiddish-based, non-observant Jewishness – the treasure of European Jewish life . . . [and] a product of the Diaspora” (Klepfisz qtd. in Shreiber “End of Exile” 277).

the first Yiddish Folk School in Johannesburg,” where the children still sang in Yiddish and did traditional dances. The poet’s own continued use of Yiddish indicates how he fully embraces the language and culture even though people around him have discarded it.

Written thirteen years after Fram left his birthplace, the poem reflects on the importance of heritage for the community and expresses regret at its dissipation. Fram observes the conflicts, and seems to be levelling criticism at a Jewish society that denigrates the significance of the past. Thus, the first quatrain of the poem describes the parents as being ashamed or embarrassed by Yiddish and their alienation from *yidishkeyt*. Notwithstanding their negative attitude, a “fayer heyliker” / “holy flame” (4) continues to burn for the next generation. The poem’s traditional form, regular metre and rhythm follow those of the conventional folk ballad, with four verses of four lines and a scheme of full and half rhyme:

Ir hot in yidish poshetn tsezungen ayer freyd,
Zikh gloybike, tsefridene in karahod gedreyt,
Un s’hot geklungen kishefdik der kindisher gezang,
Nokh vos ikh hob an elnter gebenkt vi ir fun lang....

(5-8)

You sang out your joy in simple Yiddish,
And faithfully in contentment twirled the circle dance,
And the childlike singing rang out enchantingly,
For which I like you had forlornly longed for ages....

The traditional rhythm and language emphasise the theme of the poem, the importance of traditional Jewish values:

Ikh hob gebenkt an elnter, un dokh hob ikh gevust,
Az s’tsaplt zikh a heylikeyt bay yedern in Brust:
– Dos yidish, vos es zaftikt zikh oyf lipelekh bakheynt –
Fun vos me hot aykh, kinderlekh, fun kindvayz on antveynt.

(9-12)

I have longed forlornly, and yet have I known,
 That a holiness quivers in each and every breast:
 – That Yiddish, so juicy on charming little lips –
 From which they weaned you away, children, from infancy.

Fram thus maintained an opposite stance to those Jewish immigrants who had become estranged from the old ways, “Fun tate-mames yidishe, vos hobn zikh geshemt / Mit yidish un fun yidishkeyt geven azoy farfremdt” / “From Jewish parents who were embarrassed / By Yiddish and were so estranged from *yidishkeyt*” (1-2). Instead, he delights in seeing the children continue the old traditions: “Ir hot in yidish poshetn tsezungen ayer freyd, / Zikh gloybike, tsufridene in karahod gedreyt” / “You sang out your joy in simple Yiddish, / And faithfully in contentment twirled the circle dance” (5-6). This kindles a flame of continuity, “Un s’hot a fayer heyliker in hartsn zikh tsebrent” / “And a holy flame has flared up in [my] heart” (4), a feeling which is emphasised in “Az s’tsaplt zikh a heylikeyt bay yedern in brust” / “That a holiness quivers in each and every breast” (10). The children’s innocent enjoyment echoes the poet’s own longing for *yidishkeyt*, “Nokh vos ikh hob an elnter gebenkt vi ir fun lang” / “For which I like you have forlornly longed for ages” (8), as it emerges “oyf lipelekh bakheynt” / “on charming little lips” (11). Because “Pionern hobn oysgeleygt far aykh a heln veg” / “Pioneers have set out a bright path for you” (13), *yidishkeyt* still nurtures them, even though they had been deprived of it by their parents. The poet shares the children’s pleasure in the traditions as they enjoy the days of festivity, “Dan hot mayn simkhe oyfgebroyzt mit ayerer tsu glaykh” / “Then my joy welled up together with yours” (15) and so “Az voyl iz mir, o kinderlekh, tsu freyen zikh mit aykh!” / “How happy I am, oh children, to rejoice along with you!” (16). Fram had a religious education, and so uses language from that context in this secular poem. Terms such as “fayer heyliker,” “gloybike,” “heylikeyt” and “yon-tevdiker” add depth of reference, but, rather than referring to holiness, sanctity, religious belief or dogma, they here suggest an alternative value system, one no less significant. In this poem, Fram puts forward his belief in the importance and value of the continued use of Yiddish – as the children joyfully sing songs, they give hope to the adults who want to keep the language alive.

Locating Fram: Modernism

The literary history of Yiddish poetry in the twentieth century is that of a series of groups, almost all “striving towards one or another version of Modernism ... with innovation and experiment ... [but] the inner history is one of tacit continuity [and] even as they seek and receive the impress of surrounding cultures, they cannot break past the visible and invisible boundaries of Yiddish” (Liptzin *Maturing* 61).

While the course of development in poetries of other languages took centuries, in the case of Yiddish it is packed into a few decades. As it goes through a series of “abrupt changes and inner revolutions; it draws both on the cultural resources of the Jewish past and the surrounding modern literatures of Europe and America; and it [also] bears the imprint of the Yiddish immigrant experience” (Howe and Greenberg 1). The emergence of a classical phase, the drama of a romantic reaction, the leap into Modernist scepticism, the compulsive progress into undefined possibilities of subject and method – all these, part of the inner development of western poetries, occur in Yiddish “across a single century, which in effect means, almost simultaneously” (56); these movements were “a jumble of contemporaneous happenings. As a result, everything is compressed and nothing fulfilled ... forced into mixed and overlapping forms” (57).

The emergence of Modernism affected the use of regular rhyme and metre and equal-length stanzas. These changes in the norms can be observed in the poetry of the groups *Di yunge* (The Young Ones), *In zikh* (The Introspectivists) and *Di khalyastre* (The Gang) who confronted

the demands of modernist art on the one hand and the repeated search for new forms of mimesis and expression on the other ... magnified by the traumas of Jewish history, from which the poets tried to escape through the forms and myth of modern poetry, and into which they were pulled back by the intimate ropes of their Jewish language. (Harshav and Harshav 22-23)

Di yunge, which emerged in Poland, Russia, and the United States in the 1910s (Aaron 3), rejected the rigidity of “traditionalism, political propaganda, didacticism and chauvinism” (3). Its poetry combined “Yiddish literary conventions,

traditional values of *yidishkeyt* and Romanticism with Expressionism and Symbolism” (3). Instead of having a political agenda, these poets promoted art for art’s sake in an impressionist poetry of mood and atmosphere, fascinated by “Freud, the Russian Revolution, Nietzsche, Baudelaire, Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav, markers of American intertextuality³² and internationalisms” (Harshav and Harshav 30). Their poetry emphasised “individuality, subjectivity and unhampered – sometimes audacious – methods of expression” (Aaron 3), centring on personal experience of life, death and eternity. However, although Fram’s personal poems ‘Mayn opfor’ and ‘Mayn mame hot mir tsugeshikt a kishn’ have no political agenda, and could therefore be linked to those of *Di yunge* poets, their style, form and imagery are still traditional. As they display no Modernist or Expressionist tendencies in these aspects, we must assume that Fram was in all probability not influenced by *Di yunge* poetry.

Another group of Modernist poets, *Di khalyastre*, published poetry in Warsaw and Vilna in the 1920s they aimed to popularise Yiddish and widen its audience by making the transition to Modernism. Like *De yunge* poets, they emphasised the “primacy of individuality and experimental forms and showed unmistakable expressionistic tendencies, proclaiming a form of anarchy that denounced the *Haskalah*,³³ religion and politics” (Aaron 4). Melekh Ravitsh, Perets Markish and Uri- Tsvi Grinberg who were members of *Di khalyastre* “divined from historical events not only the crisis of the individual in the western world but of the entire world” (21). They consciously strove for art in language, drawing on cultural density, Jewish lineage, Hasidic³⁴ tales, and historical disasters. These Yiddish Expressionists set out to fragment the language of Perets and Mendele and render it new, as Mayakovsky was attempting to do in Russian. They responded with “emotional and intellectual intensity ... to the human condition, to nature, the modern city, alienation and love, the ‘Golden Land’ and the ‘Old Home’ overseas in existential or melodic

³² References in literary texts to other literary texts that results in layering of meanings.

³³ Jewish Enlightenment. This ideological and social movement developed in Eastern Europe in the early 19th century.

³⁴ Hasidism: The word derives from the Hebrew *chesed*, kindness, and from the appellation *chasid*, meaning pious. It was a movement of religious revival with a distinctive social profile and appealed to the masses as well as to the elite. Originating in the second half of the eighteenth century in Eastern Europe, its ideological and historical origins are associated with the teachings of Yisrael ben Eliezer (1698/1700-1760), known as the Ba’al Shem Tov (Master of the Good Name and abbreviated as Besht). His followers called themselves Hasidim after his death.

lyrical poems or long, descriptive verse narratives” (4), favouring expressionist themes and violent clashing imagery. Grinberg called for “free, naked human expression, for the chaotic cry of the blood” (Liptzin *Maturing* 145). Ravitsh no longer wished to fixate on momentary impressions as in his earlier poems, but wanted to ascend from personal moods to universal moods (Liptzin *Maturing* 146). He referred to the new poetry as naked poetry pulsating between the two poles of love and death and appealing to the instincts rather than to the mind, “an elemental outcry in which are commingled water and fire, earth and gold, word and blood” (Liptzin *Maturing* 147). One example is Ravitsh’s ‘Shpinoza’ (1918), a “cycle and lyric tribute to the lonely philosopher, the embodiment of absolute truth and goodness. In the poem, Ravitsh versifies ideological questions, concretises thoughts, emotions and intuitions in vivid images” (Liptzin *Maturing* 144). Together in Warsaw in the 1920s, Ravitsh, Markish and Grinberg came under “vastly different influences and therefore one can only really talk of their work as similar during their early periods of writing” (Ginsberg e-mail 29 July 2011).

Although some of Fram’s poems, for example ‘Ikh bin a yid,’ ‘Iz vos?’ and ‘Mayn opfor’ are similar to those of *Di khalyastre* in asserting the primacy of the self, it is unlikely that Fram was influenced by the group. His base prior to his departure from Lithuania was the Kovne area (Moss e-mail 2010), whereas *Di khalyastre* was based in Warsaw, part of Poland at the time. The cultural links between the two centres were not strong, and Fram’s poems do not indicate signs of having made a similar transition. Nevertheless, Ravitsh’s introduction to *Lider un poemes* offers Fram praise and support.

The American Modernist group *In zikh* consisted of older poets such as Yankev Glatshetyn (Jacob Glatstein) who helped to launch it in New York in the 1920s. Like *Di yunge* poets, the poets of *In zikh* championed *yidishkeyt* and affirmed the importance of the presence of the Yiddish poet in the modern world. They embraced Yiddish as their creative language of choice stating, “Yiddish poetry is the art of the Yiddish language” (Harshav and Harshav 4). Their subject matter encompassed politics, personal relationships, Jewish and universal issues, while their experimental and free verse forms favoured modern principles and stream of consciousness techniques. In these ways, they hoped to capture the multidimensional nature of modern life and the simultaneity of experience. They were the first Yiddish poets to make free verse a cardinal issue, “promoting a chaotic composition, avoiding

any continuity of line and space, showing defiance to coherence and closure, and constructing a random collage of discordant elements in one text” (Harshav and Harshav 40); it was a genuine revolution: “for a poet raised on metrical verse to free himself from ... automatised scansion” (43).

However, Fram’s poems do not exhibit the characteristics of *In zikh* poetry. Thus, for example, although ‘In an Afrikaner baginen’ is written with varying line lengths like *In zikh* poems, it also retains the use of Fram’s characteristic regular rhythm and rhyme. Also, while Fram did make contact with Glatstein on a visit to New York in 1947 (Letter 17 Aug. 1947³⁵), and – in common with *In zikh* poems – his poems ‘Fun shop tsu shop’ (‘From shop to shop’) (*Dorem Afrike* July-Sept 1984 29) and ‘Tsu di shvartse’³⁶ (‘To the black man’) (*Lider* 19), offer insights into his personal responses to political and social circumstances, there is no proven link between them.

Another group, *Yung Vilne* (Young Vilna), came together in the 1930s in the city known as the *Yerusholayim de Lite*, ‘Jerusalem of Lithuania,’ which was the centre of Jewish cultural life and learning (Kugelmass and Boyarin 7). Apart from this, Vilna figured with special prominence during these years, mainly because here there was still a Yiddish-speaking and reading youth, a rising generation that spontaneously and ‘naturally’ used Yiddish as its first language (Howe and Greenberg 50). *Yung Vilne* poets were “highly politicised by poverty and anti-Semitism, Zionism, territorialism and socialism” (Aaron 4), although they did not “provide unified poetic principles” (Aaron 4). They were devoted to metrical regularities and proprieties; they experimented not so much with form as with language, playing upon the infinitely flexible Yiddish vocabulary in a way that no earlier poets had dreamed of doing (Howe and Greenberg 28). The first person singular features heavily (Howe and Greenberg 27) as *Yung Vilne* poets transformed the generic and impersonal ‘I’ to a distinct and personal one. Again it is unlikely that Fram would have been influenced by their poetry as he left Lithuania in 1927 and it was not readily available in published form.

³⁵ Fram Archives, p. 126.

³⁶ The term *shvartse*, black, needs to be understood in context: offensive today, it was acceptable at the time. In this poem, whose tone is that of an ode, it is a descriptor recognising difference.

In 1971, Fram wrote an article describing the Yiddish renaissance in Lithuania after World War I, when “in the gardens of the gymnasia, [s]tudents read Avrom Reyzen’s and Moyshe Kulbak’s poems on the grass of green parks in the shadows of cherry trees” (“Yerushe un hashpoes”) (Legacy and Influence) (315). They were “enthralled by Yoysef Opatoshu’s ‘In poylishe velder’ (In Polish Forests), H. Leyvik’s ‘Goylem’ and *Siberian poems*, and works by Mani Leyb, Melekh Ravitsh and Uri-Tsvi Grinberg” (“Yerushe un hashpoes” 315). During this time *Di yunge* and *Yung Vilne* thrived together with Yiddish journals, *Literarische bleter*, *Folksshrift far literatur* (The People’s Journal of Literature) and the Warsaw *Khalyastre*, whose standards could be compared with publications in America and Europe. Sections of Fram’s ‘Baym zeydn’ appeared in *Literarische bleter* in 1926, attesting to the poem’s quality. However, although this submission and his article do make it clear that Fram knew about and read contemporary poetry, his own poetry is distinct from the work of the groups mentioned above because it “does not exhibit Modernist tendencies [such as] unusual patterns of versification and grammatical structures [or] punctuation” (Aaron 9). Thus, while Fram may have known of the above-mentioned groups at the time, there is no way of proving that his poems were directly influenced by any of them.

Whereas Wolpe, the other significant South African-Lithuanian poet, did use experimental forms in his collection, *A volkn un a veg* (A Cloud and a Way) (1978), and also for poems about his personal experiences in Dachau, the poems in Fram’s collections, *Lider un poemes* and *A shvalb oyfn dakh* (A Swallow on the Roof) (1983), and his Holocaust poems ‘Lesterung’ (‘Blasphemy’) (*Shvalb* 127-129) (1965) and *Dos letste kapitl*, show instead the influence of the folk ballad, using conventional forms of the lyric and narrative epic. Although he would have known Wolpe’s work, given that it appeared in the same journals as his, for example, *Dorem Afrike*, Fram’s poems remain distinct from Modernism.

By leaving Lithuania when he did, Fram disconnected himself from the upsurge in Yiddish literary creativity there and from the thrust of *Yung Vilne* and *Di khalyastre*. Instead, he became a member of the local group *Unicorn*, which included writers such as Uys Krige and Vincent Swart whose outlook was different from Fram’s in that they were South African born. However, by writing in Yiddish Fram explored and expanded the possibilities of South African poetry in general, breaking new ground by incorporating South African themes and subject matter into his poems.

Thus, while the form of 'Fun shop tsu shop,' 'In an Afrikaner baginen,' 'Tsu di shvartse,' 'Burn,' 'Matumba' and 'Matatulu' remains conventional, the inclusion of Afrikaans and Zulu customs, vernacular, cultural layering and multilingual usage was innovative, and may thus be considered as displaying some "Modernist tendencies" (Aaron 9). Since none of the articles written about Fram describe him as being part of any literary movement with a specific agenda, either international or South African, I approach Fram's poems as being those of an individualist. As Moss comments (E-mail 6 June 2010), Fram may be regarded as a group of one.

Chapter Two: Fram's Diaspora Poetry

'Home is where we're going; always home.' (Novalis)

Resonating with the atmosphere of traditional Jewish life, many of Fram's poems draw on a "rich store of memories of place ... evok[ing] in some small measure the familiar environment of the old country" (Langfield qtd. in Cesarini 2). Melekh Ravitsh draws attention to the way in which Fram describes "the old home in beautiful pictures because the young sentimental Fram found it difficult to part with his home, with his Lite" (403). Thus Jewish Lithuania persisted as Fram's muse in this way long after he had left his *shtetl*, both as a physical reality and as a "projection – an idea physically disconnected from its geographical location and dependent on the vicissitudes of personal, familial and cultural memory" (Hirsch and Spitzer xv). This chapter looks at issues relating to homeland and exile, affirming that with reference to Fram's Diaspora poems, "place matters in understanding the immigrant experience" (Foner qtd. in Cesarini 8).

Homeland and Diaspora

The terms 'home' and 'homeland' may refer either to the place of birth or to the place of residence. For Russian Jews in czarist times, their home was the Pale of Settlement³⁷ (Simon 114), with Vilna and Warsaw as the two most important Yiddish cultural centres.³⁸ After the assassination of Czar Alexander II in 1882, and again after the Russian Revolution and First World War, two of the "great traumatic events in Jewish history" (9), thousands of Jews left this homeland. As well as an escape from persecution, an additional incentive was "the existence of pre-established Jewish communities elsewhere" (Langfield 30), where emigrants followed family and friends in the hope of better economic opportunities. Fram was part of this "chain of immigration" (Simon 114), the "flood of Yiddish immigrants from Lithuania to the shores of the Cape of Good Hope" (Fram "Yerushe un hashpoes" 313). South Africa, part of the Jewish Diaspora, then became known as the golden country, *di goldene medine*, yet the immigrants continued to refer to Eastern Europe as home.

³⁷ The frontier area between the German and Russian Empires designated by the czar for the Jews of Russia, where they suffered forced removals, pogroms and prejudice, anti-Semitism and genocide.

³⁸ Other centres were Lodz, Lublin, Minsk, Kiev and Odessa.

The term ‘Diaspora’ may denote either the circumstance of living away from the land of one’s birth, or, as in the case of the religious Jew or the modern Zionist, that of living away from the Holy Land, known variously as Zion, Canaan, Palestine, Israel and *Erets Yisroel*. J. Boyarin states, “Diaspora has been the primary cultural feature of Jewish existence for more than 2000 years” (qtd. in Omer-Sherman 7), and may be considered as their “paradigmatic experience” (Ezrahi 240). In the Diaspora, identity is affected by attitudes to both home and away, place and displacement, and is invested with “social and cultural meanings that reflect cultural histories and backgrounds, including a worldview shaped by the experience of ethnicity [and] race” (Cesarini 32). Living in this in-between state, transitional and transnational, tradition and adaptation, communities may preserve their original culture and/or adopt that of the new society.

Such a physical “translation of [Jewish] identity ... always entails gains as well as losses” (Omer-Sherman 268), and when living in the Diaspora is considered less than ideal, it may be regarded as existing in a state of exile. The ultimate goal would then be return, either to the original homeland or to the Promised Land. Moses’ passage through the Red Sea to Sinai, Joshua’s crossing of the Jordan River into Canaan and the Israelites’ journey from Babylon to Zion are paradigmatic Jewish narratives of homecoming. Hence, many religious or Zionist Jews request burial in Israel if they do not achieve the goal of return in their lifetime, an aspiration endorsed at the conclusion of the Pesach Seder³⁹ every year, when the final declarative words are ‘Next year in Jerusalem.’

As may be observed in his poems and letters, Fram was neither religious nor Zionist in inclination; when he writes of home, he is referring to his birthplace, Lithuania.

The Memory of Home

Reznikoff comments that, “survival in the Diaspora was as much a cultural issue as it was physical” (qtd. in S. Rubin 213). Thus, as much as home may be a concrete presence, “places do not simply exist as physical manifestations, [for] some of these elements [of home] are not portable because they are conceptual and intangible” (Cesarini 30). There may always be the sense that “something essential to being and

³⁹ Passover meal commemorating the Exodus from Egypt.

identity is missing, [and] that what completes the individual is still present but only as memory” (Bartoloni 103). Such memory may embrace physical as well as intellectual, emotional and metaphysical dimensions that bear no relationship to reality as it was lived, and “nostalgia [may be] the only mode in which [the idea of home] could be explored” (Cesarini 11). Viewed from a distance, home may become idealised through memories of “activities, or a satisfaction in simple living, or an absence of negative emotions, or the joy of being in or cultivating a garden, of children growing up, of particular trees and shrubs, [and] associations with particular people or special sites” (Cesarini 30). It may even become like a “Jerusalem-of-the-mind where dreamscapes as opposed to real landscapes provide the symbolic and material dimension for the poet” (Ezrahi 238).

Fram’s Lithuania shaped his literary identity. His poem ‘Mayn opfor,’ affirms his recollections of home and family, intimacy and belonging, comfort, security and identity, all of which he lost when he left. In the poem, both his close relationship with his family and his separation from it are embodied in the image of “Dos hemd” / “The shirt” (1), that his devoted sister sewed for him. The stitching serves as a metaphor for their strong connection to each other, “Derken ikh ire kleyne shtekh, di forzikhtike net. / Zi hot mit shtiler hartsikeyt un benkshaft es baveyt / In lange, lange ovntn farzesn zikh biz shpet” / “I know her tiny stitches, the careful seams. / She breathed her quiet sincerity and longing into it / While sitting alone for long, long evenings until late” (2-4). The stitches and shirt also provide a metaphorical contrast with the rending of the fabric of his family on his departure.

In the second verse, the poet describes how his mother organised delicacies for him to take on his journey, “Un nokh dem hot mayn mame shtil a pekele gemakht, / Dort pomerantsn ongeleygt un tsukerlekh farpakt” / “And after that my mother quietly made a parcel / Packed with oranges and sweets” (5-6). These details highlight his appreciation of her care, asserting the strength of their bond with the image of how she held his hand when he left, “Gedenk ikh, aza kleyninke in harbstikn farnakht / Fardayget mikh aroysbagleyt tsum breyt-tseleygtn trakt” / “I remember, such a tiny woman in the autumn evening, / As she worriedly escorted me to the stretched-out, broad road” (7-8). In contrast, at the moment of parting, his father remains silent in anguish as “A shkie hot a blutike in hartsn zikh tsebrent” / “A bloody sunset burned in [our] hearts” (11). The conflation of the images of blood and sunset suggests both beauty and destruction. Stanza three emphasises only the latter, through the

descriptors “tseshnitn” (14), cut, “sharfer” (14), sharp, and “farshtikt’ (16), muffled, together with the accompanying loneliness, “Un kh’hob in nakht in harbstiker farlozn zey aley, / Tseshnitn hot mayn shtume harts a trukn-sharfer vey” / “And in the autumn night I left them alone, / A dry, sharp pain cut through my silent heart” (13-14). This reaction continues in the description in stanza four, “in vayter Afrike, iz veytogdik un shver, / Durkh benkenish gelayterter farvoglt in der fremd” / “in far off Africa, it is painful and hard / Wandering in a strange land filled with pure longing” (21-22).

The poem concludes with a painful memory, “Mayn shvester hot mikh oysgeputst mit shmekedikn hemd, / Un mame hot aroysbagleyt in veg mikh mit ir trer” / “My sister dressed me up in a nice-smelling shirt, / And mother’s tear accompanied me along the way” (19-20). The sense of loneliness is again emphasised here through repetition: “Farshtikt in triber elntkeyt an elntn geshrey” / “Muffled by dismal loneliness we cry out desolately” (16). Though still holding onto the memory of his mother, the link between them is broken. The shirt remains the one tangible remnant of a time before “s’hot a nakht a finstere unz alemen tsesheydt” / “a dark night separated us all” (12). The poem refers to specific incidents to evoke feelings of pain and longing and the shaping of his identity as it is “associated with place [and] ... with people, families, communities and the intangible values they share... to create meaning for themselves and future generations” (Cesarini 40). As Appelfeld states, their descendants may carry memories of home like “a wonderful gift and a relentless curse” (qtd. in Hirsch and Spitzer xiii).

The section of *Lider un poemes* that includes ‘Mayn mame hot mir tsugeshikt a kishn’ is titled ‘Mit eygene leydn’ (‘With my own suffering’), which sets its tone and mood. Here, the poet describes the particular circumstances in which he found himself after he left, and the tenderness with which his mother sends him the gift. This both reminds him of his home, “A grus a heymisher fun benkendiker Lite!” / “A home-made greeting from yearning Lithuania!” (2), and highlights its opposite, the harshness of his current circumstances, “Do in Afrike, in enger kaferite.”⁴⁰ / Oy, ven zi

⁴⁰ South African eating-place for black workers. Numerous fictional accounts describe the lives of white, Yiddish-speaking immigrants employed in these ‘kaffir eating houses’ established by concession on mine property during the gold industry’s boom period. This was very often the only kind of employment they could get. It was badly paid and the conditions poor as they were frequently badly treated by the owners. They had to learn English, Afrikaans and *fanagalo*, “a simplified, artificial mixture of words from various Bantu

volt epes fun dem visn!” / “Here in Africa, in the crowded concession store. / Oy, if she only had an inkling about it!” (3-4). The expression “oy” (4), encapsulates his mother’s imagined response of regret and disbelief that her dreams for him have not materialised, so that instead, “hakhnoedik, tsufridn un farlitn, / Kafers muz ikh shmutsike badinen” / “servile, content and patient, / I must serve dirty black customers” (7-8). This description develops the theme of ‘Mayn opfor,’ illustrating the change in his fortunes.

Although Fram expresses deep regret at what he forfeited, in ‘Mayn mame hot mir tsugesht a kishn,’ he also indicates some acceptance of his new circumstances, acknowledging the pleasantness of Africa’s “lange teg un zunike baginens” / “long days and sunny dawns” (5). The immigrant may thus evolve by overcoming “spatial and temporal barriers” (Bartoloni 101) between himself and the majority resident community, and by making contact with different cultures. Through these interactions, even the state of exile may offer the possibilities for growth and positive change. Despite long hours of work, he begins to feel a degree of closeness to the customers as he realises that he has much in common with them. They are in fact, “Glaykh vi oreime un leyndike brider” / “Just like poor and suffering brothers” (10), and so like them, “farshvigenener un mider” / “more silent and tired” (11), he is counting the length of time of his suffering, “Tseyl ikh ovntn tsuzamen shoyn in yorn” / “I have already counted my nights in years” (12). The despair in the act of counting the nights is emphasised through repetition, “Tseyl ikh glaykhgiltik a shtumer yedn ovnt” / “Indifferent I count in silence each night” (13), indicating the tedium and the slow passage of time for both himself and the labourers.

In the final verse, the poet uses the image of petals as a contrast to that of the feathers in verse one; whereas the feathers were tenderly “gekhovet” / “gathered” (16) by his mother to fill the cushion, the autumn flowers are “fun gertener gerisn” / “torn from the gardens” (14). This also implies that when he left he too felt torn away. The purity of the white feathers is a reminder of the beauty of his home, as opposed to his current dirty working circumstances. Like the feathers, the Jewish people maintains its own identity, even though torn from their roots and scattered like petals, what has been described as a “scattered and diverse phenomenon” (Omer-Sherman

languages” (Rosenthal 167) while they worked. They slept either on or underneath the counter and had no social life.

270). The poem ends with a reinforcement of the memory of his mother's generosity and the beauty of his homeland, "Mayn mame hot mir tsugeshikt a kishn / Durkh vayse vintern di federn gekhovet" / "My mother sent me off a cushion / The feathers gathered during white winters" (15-16).

As in 'Mayn opfor,' the poem uses the image of a concrete object to symbolise the loss of the old home and advance the narrative. The poem itself becomes a container like the cushion – of memories of home, of his mother's feelings for him and his for her, of his loss. Far from the hub of Yiddishism, Fram yearned for Lithuania and his adaptation to his new circumstances is thus embedded in his choice of imagery, highlighting the immigrant conflict between moving forward and looking back, between possibility and loss, between the acquiring of new languages and adapting to different cultural mores, and the diasporic longing to preserve the old customs, between the sense of belonging and feeling outcast. Thus Fram represents Singer's "Yiddish-speaking Jew, [with] his fear of physical and spiritual effacement, and his desperate effort to sustain the values and languages of his history" (qtd. in Omer-Sherman 1).

The Trope of Exile

For many, "exile is the beginning of narrative ... and Diaspora is the place where people talk" (Ezrahi 228). Fram's writing may be located within what may therefore be termed a diasporic-exilic dialogue.

The poem 'Ikh benk' ('I Yearn') (*Lider* 89) (1929) was written soon after Fram's arrival in South Africa when the pain of parting was still very much in the forefront of his memory. He describes the fields, forest and village he left behind, the people going about their labours, the gathering of the crops and the drudgery experienced by the animals. The repetition of the title of the poem as the first line of each verse focuses attention on different aspects of the poet's homeland, emphasising feelings of loss, "Ikh benk azoy mid nokh a shtikele shvartse, tsekvolene erd / Nokh harbstike regns oyf felder un blotes oyf endlozn trakt" / "I long so tiredly for a piece of black, swollen earth / For autumn rains on the fields and for mud on the endless road" (1-2), and "Ikh benk nokh di yidn fun velder, vi kuperne yodles farpekht, / Vos shmekn in friike reykhesh fun shvomen un varemen mokh" / "I long for the Jews of the forests, pitch-dark like copper firs, / Smelling of the early scents of mushrooms and warm moss" (5-6). The poem also describes the dark Lithuanian soil and the autumn

gloom as the horses trudge through dense mud towards the *shtetl*, where “zun kumt tsu geyn oyf a vayl vi a zeltener khoshever gast” / “the sun visits awhile, like a rare, honoured guest” (12). This also recalls the associated emotions, the heaviness of “dorfishn umet” / “village sadness” (4), and the exhaustion after the weekday toil so that they would “shlepn aheym zikh oyf shabes” / “drag themselves home for Sabbath” (7). Verse three focuses on the abundance of the fruitful earth as the poet looks back, aware of the beauty, as “gibn di seder avek zeyer gob” / “orchards give up their bounty” (9) and “kelers farfult mit a vayniker gilderner last” / “cellars are filled with their wine-like golden store” (10).

The *shtetlekh* were always under *blote*, mud, and the repetition of the image encapsulates the suffering of the people; yet the final verse overlooks the ugliness he remembers because of his feelings of longing for the familiar way of life, “In teg fun farlozn di seder ikh benk azoy elntik-shtum, / Nokh yidn fun pekhike velder oyf soflozn, blotikn trakt” / “Now, when I have lost those orchards, I long, alone and silent, / For Jews of the pitch of the forest and the endless, muddy ways” (19-20). The poem is filled with nostalgia, though the poet is close enough to his recent past to remember the difficulties experienced, for example in the lines “mide, tseveykte, farshpetikte, elnte ferd” / “tired, soaked, late and forlorn horses” (3) and “poyersher pratse” / “peasant toil” (4), during the “shverer farmaterter vokh” / “heavy, exhausting week” (8), in the “groyer, farshvigener velt” / “grey, silent world” (16). This poem gives a realistic view of what home was like for Fram and his fellows.

However, many of Fram’s later poems focus only the beauty, disregarding the trials of living in Russia and minimising the many reasons for Jewish emigration. Thus, the “difficulties of the early years ... are forgotten ... [or] replaced by images that glorify the past” (Foner qtd. in Cesarini 138). One example is the poem ‘Oyf mayn dakh hot amol gesvitshert a shvalb’ (‘Once a Swallow Still Twittered on my Roof’) (*Shvalb* 67). While the original publication date is unknown, the poem appeared in Fram’s collection of the same name, and so must have been written later than the poems about his home discussed above. Thus, although the time of separation is in the distant past, the poet’s longing for home remains and his memories of it are still idyllic. The central image of the “shvalb,” the “swallow,” evokes a sense of possibility and hope, as opposed to the reality of the misery and drudgery of daily toil. It recalls only the good and the beautiful aspects of the Lithuanian home and environment, the kitchen filled with the aroma of “tsufridenem broyt” / “satisfying

bread” (2), the “farshikerter bez” / “intoxicated lilac” (9), the “tishn gegreyt mit ladishes un kez” / “tables bedecked with jugs and cheese” (11), the abundance of “Fule donitses milkh” / “Full milk pails” (14) and also how “es tunkt zikh in gold dos farakerte feld” / “the ploughed fields were dipped in gold” (15). Remembering the pasture filled with “tsheredes shof” / “flocks of sheep” (17), the poet feels satisfied as he is seized by “gliklekher shlof” / “contented sleep” (19). Thus, the swallow is still on the roof, and the poet remains connected to his home. This is ironic in that, by the time this poem was written, Lithuania no longer existed as Fram knew it, its population wiped out and its *shtetlekh* decimated.

In this context, Aciman’s assessment may usefully be applied to Fram:

I needed only to ... unload all my memories onto paper, to ...
 [redeem] ... the past, ... the way some of us would like to return
 to the old country ... because memory is the ultimate metaphor
 for displacement.... In fact the word exile is inappropriate: you
 cannot be an exile from a place that does not exist (qtd. in J.
 Langer 29-30).

The Trope of Wandering: Fram as Wandering Jew

Fram could be said to epitomise the wandering Jew,⁴¹ a “central image of Jewish historical consciousness” (Omer-Sherman 268). He moved from Lithuania to Samara, to Lithuania, to France and then to South Africa. Thereafter, he twice lived in London and later in Rhodesia before returning to Johannesburg.

The term ‘Hebrew’ itself denotes a crossing-over and Jewish nomadism began with the biblical command given to Abraham, “Lech Lecha”⁴² (“Get you gone from your country and your birthplace and from your father’s house”), followed by Isaac and Jacob (renamed Israel) and his twelve sons who became the twelve tribes of Israel. The desert wanderings of the people of Israel forms part of the “collective cultural memory of wandering and dislocation” (J. Langer 9). Given that the wandering Jew is the leitmotif of diasporic cultural expression, a ubiquitous image in

⁴¹ The original term is “*Der Ewige Jude*, literally the eternal Jew, but understood as the wandering Jew” (Hasan-Rokem and Dundes 10).

⁴² Genesis 12:1-17:27.

literature, and that physical and existential rootlessness and “nomadism [is] a source for Jewish text” (Omer-Sherman 111), it is useful to explore Fram’s poems in this light.

The poem ‘Iz vos?’ highlights the condition of eternal nomadism, with the poet himself as wanderer,

Iz vos, oyb gelebt kh’hob amol in der vayter un shtiler Samare⁴³
Un nokhdem megulgl gevorn aleyn tsu di breges fun Lite,
Un itst – shoy n in Afrike fremder, vu s’shmekt mitn zamd fun Sahare,
Mit trukene zunen farbroynte un shteynerne felzn tseglite? (1-4)

So what, if I once lived in distant and silent Samara
And after that transformed I landed up alone on the shores of Lite,
And now – in strange Africa, which smells of the sand of Sahara,
Of dry, stony, glowing rocks browned by the sun?

In his insecure state, unable to settle in one place, nothing seems to make a difference to the poet. The contrast between the landscapes, the waters of the Volga as opposed to the Sahara desert in stanza two, serves to highlight his struggle. Thereafter, he extends the difficulties of his physical journey into a metaphysical quest for the meaning of life, “Az s’hot mikh mayn goyrl farbundn mit troyer fun blutike reges, / Vos zaynen gerunen in khoyshekh, vi ayter fun ofene makes” / “And that my fate was linked with sadness of bloody moments, / Which became curdled in darkness, like the pus of open abscesses” (7-8). His distress is emphasised by the mournful tone, which continues into the final couplet, “Un ikh vel nokh voglen a mider oyf shtoybike vegn on keynem, / Un efsher nokh Afrikes elnt oyf topltn elnt tsebaytn” / “And I will still roam on wearily alone on dusty roads, / And still perhaps exchange Africa’s desolation for twice the loneliness” (23-24).

The poem ‘Nokh vos zol ikh forn?’ (‘For What Shall I Go?’) (*Lider* 24) (1930), similarly evokes feelings of “chronic homelessness” (Shreiber “End of Exile” 274), as in the lines “Un efsher vet merer un shtarker nokh vey ton / In fremde

⁴³ Fram was relocated with his family to Samara, White Russia by the czar’s decree. This was his first experience of exile.

merkhokim un leydike breytn?” / “But perhaps it will hurt more and ever more strongly / In distant places and empty spaces?” (7-8). And as he wanders on “tunkele vegn” / “dark roads” (13), there is “nishto vos tsu gloybn” / “nothing to believe in” (11), there is “Nishto vu tsu geyn un bay vemen tsu fregn” / “Nowhere to go and no one to ask” (14). These descriptions emphasise “rootlessness, nomadism and dispersal” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Karp 7), where moving away from home may mean exchanging one kind of loneliness for another, becoming unbearable. This may be so even with the possibility that “s’vet nokh a shprits ton mit freyd a baginen” / “a dawn will still spray joy” (6). Relocation is thus as much a psychological as a physical and geographical adjustment, “a map that is drawn in the production of memories in the present, and of lives that weave their present stories declined in the past” (Bartoloni 103). Fram’s home becomes an allegorical site whose meaning is constructed through memories.

Fram’s Diaspora Poetry as Expression of the Outsider/Other

Transitions from one world to another are always a culture shock: beyond the place where one belongs “lies what may be perceived as a hostile world in relation to the geographies of ethnicity” (Bartoloni 100). As a minority group, Jewish immigrants reflect separateness and cultural differences, never fully accepted in a gentile arena and under constant threat of assimilation and surrender of their own cultural legacy. Living as strangers in a strange land, they may always feel themselves to be other, where “to live according to Jewish law is to live knowingly out of step with the outside world” (Mirvis qtd. in D. Rubin 308).

More specifically, “Jews who had left homes and countries where they had put down roots over generations in Jewish environments governed by Jewish concepts and characters, came to South Africa where they found an alien country, an alien language, an alien culture” (Polsky qtd. in Sherman *From a Land Far Off* 12). Many of them were socially disadvantaged and so were often disparaged by an already-assimilated, better-educated, Anglo-German Jewish community, as well as by the local English and Afrikaans white inhabitants. Whereas previously they themselves had been victims of discrimination, they now found themselves in privileged roles as whites.

However, many did acculturate, and where “needs were not met by their own system, immigrants borrow[ed] models, structures and options from the established,

highly visible adjacent cultural and/or language systems” (Omer-Sherman 268). They acquired Afrikaans and/or English in order to function in their new country, and many also changed their surnames to ones that sounded less Jewish and were more easily pronounceable in English. So as to blend in, Ezrakowitz became Ezra and Shwartz became Black.⁴⁴ They also changed their first names so that Khayim became Charlie, Moyshe Morris, Binyomin Benjamin, Sore Sally and Brayne Brenda. Nevertheless, their accents and habits remained, making it difficult for them to fit in (Frankel *Memoirs* 5 and 36).

“Even when the Jew becomes integrated, communal apprehension and historical consciousness would naturally and aptly remain as latent residual forces ... and would preserve the Jewish collective” (Omer-Sherman 269). This may be the case even when there are no restrictions imposed on freedom, no exclusion from trade guilds, no restriction to geographical locations in ghettos or the Pale or exclusion from the benefits of a general education. Still the immigrant may yet feel at home “everywhere or nowhere,” never being “chez nous ... here or there” (Aciman qtd. in J. Langer 39), or as Anne Landsman commented, “I belong where I am not” (ix). Like many other Jewish writers, Fram experienced confusions and complexities of hybridity of language and culture, where “negotiating the space of Diaspora, yield[ed] a conflicted literary identity” (Omer-Sherman “Diaspora” 5). His poems are those of the literary Jew who “regarded himself as the outsider” (Cesarini 126). As Hitler and then Stalin destroyed the Eastern European Jewish Diaspora and its Yiddish base, Fram, known as both Dovid and David, continued to write in Yiddish, thereby keeping the culture alive. Ultimately, his poems always asserted, “Jewish history, Jewish idealism, recollections and recordings of deep, consequential collective feelings ... rearticulating the Jewish past ... the poems [containing] the memory of the past” (Bleich qtd. in Barron and Selinger 181).

Fram’s poem *Efsher* (1947)⁴⁵ epitomises his feelings of being other, and how the “place that expelled him” (Aciman qtd. in J. Langer 30) remained the space for writing long afterwards, articulated in the line, “Shver iz di rege fun tsesheydung” / “Heavy is the moment of parting” (1). The poet therefore asks, “Vet di benkschaft

⁴⁴ Such surname changes were also common in Lithuania in order to avoid conscription. Thus, my maternal grandfather changed his name from Lak to Slayen.

⁴⁵ The poem was published as a pamphlet in 1947. Later, excerpts appeared in *Dorem Afrike*. The extract translated and used here appeared in August 1949 (*Dorem Afrike* 21).

shtendik rinen? – / Veln oyf fremdn breg / Oyfgeyn freylekhere teg?” / “Will the longing always ooze? – / Will there on foreign shores / Arise happier days?” (5-7). Once away, “Do hob ikh ober tsebaytn / Naye heym oyf fremde vaytn / Vider fun dos nay gedarft” / “Here I had to exchange / My new home for foreign distances / Yet again had to start anew” (9-11). The pain of separation the poet describes also highlights the importance to him of familiar places and a traditional way of life, “Dayn balibtn barg un tol” / “Your beloved mountain and valley” (55), as well as “Dayn boym, dayn groz, dayn vald un feld” / “Your tree, your grass, your forest and field” (62), and “Dayn altn shokhn lebn dir” / “Your old neighbour next to you” (60). By leaving these, the wanderer would become “heymloz vi a hunt” / “homeless like a dog” (53), and with the last traces of heritage wiped out, will remain “nisht dernert” / “unsustained” (71), far from the welcoming front door and unable to share in the community rituals, “simkhes groyse un in shive” / “great celebrations and in mourning” (87). This is how the poet himself feels, having withered on strange soil. Fram did not want to negate his ethnicity and the richness of his original culture and so tried to rebuild and maintain its cohesion in a new environment, therefore remaining an outsider.

The everyday objects to which the poet refers, his suitcase, the cushions and the straps that bound his bundles together, come to symbolise his journey and its finality, “Veyst: – nishto shoyt keyn tsurik” / “You know: – there is no going back” (18). There can be no possibility of return, as he acknowledges how “Hinter zikh farbrent di brikn” / “I burned the bridges behind me” (19); nevertheless he is still preoccupied with the old ways. The poem also wrestles with the existential question of the meaning of life and mankind’s ultimate exile, encompassing not only his own personal travail, but the total destruction of Jewish life *in der alte heym*, its community, language and culture, as emphasised in the final rhyming couplet, “Tsu bentshn, vi gebentshtn broyt / Biz shtiln onkum funem toyt” / “To bless, like blessed bread / Until the quiet coming of death” (98).

Fram and the Experience of Doubleness

The immigrant Fram inhabited what may be described as “a culture of diversity and simultaneity, diasporically Jewish and national citizen at once” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Karp 177). Acculturation may involve the relinquishing or retention of language, dress, religious and cultural expressions in favour of the dominant cultural

modes. Consequently, the immigrant could “look for ways to knit the worlds ... [of] the contradictory inheritance together” (Rosen qtd. in D. Rubin 265) in diasporic “multicultural states, where culture is always negotiated, coextensive and intertwined with mainstream forms and institutions” (Zemel qtd. in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 177). Thus, having been “educated in the schools of your subculture, its way of thought and language, ... you then come upon the literature of the umbrella civilization ... This core-to-core confrontation often gives rise to explosions of creativity” (Chaim Potok qtd. in D. Rubin 30). Torn between his own heritage, traditions and aspirations within the foreign culture, his religion, race, ethnicity, history and nationality all played a role in his literary identity, enriching surrounding cultures and equally enriching them. Thus “Diaspora is an important site of a modern Jewish aesthetic” (Ezrahi qtd. in Zemel 176).

Fram’s poem ‘In tsveyen,’ (‘Two Fold’) (1931), encapsulates this conflict as stated in the first verse, “Fun rusisher rakhves tsu Afrikes umet ... O, filt men zikh elnt in tsveyen!” / “From Russian expansiveness to Africa’s sadness ... Oh, one feels the loneliness doubly” (1; 4). There follow further descriptions of differences, snow and sunshine, short days and long, where the regular rhyme emphasises the mournfulness of loss, his journey compared with those of “elnt-farblonzhete shifn” / “lonely and lost ships” (12). Thus, Steiner comments, “As a state of perpetual deferral, exile is wonderfully sustaining” (qtd. in Shreiber “End of Exile” 275), and according to Ezrahi, this is “the best way is to preserve *both plots*” (237), a situation that maintains an ongoing interaction between the original and then the second home. From these twin sources, Fram produced poems that highlighted the soft, flat landscape, pale blue and grey skies and whiteness of snow in Lithuania, and also those that focus on the South African plains lit by the heat of the sun. As he contended with the states of belonging and not belonging, with the tensions between the need for continuation of tradition and modernity, between identification with the community of origin and assimilation, between preservation of original culture and adapting to the new, his poems affirmed a Jewish minority literature within that of a dominant culture. His Lithuanian Jewish identity played a major role in his work in a foreign environment as memories of home stirred his imagination, much like the abrasion caused by the nacre inside the oyster shell creating the pearl.

With the destabilisation of boundaries between Jews and others, Jews have become “so indistinct ... that the task of describing [Jewish culture] may become

insurmountable” (Omer-Sherman 272). Wasserstein points out, “We are witnessing the disappearance of the European Diaspora as a population group, as a cultural entity and as a significant force in European society and the Jewish world. Slowly but surely they are fading away. Soon nothing will be left but a disembodied memory” (289-90). As a result, a Jew might now give his nationality first and foremost as ‘American,’ ‘Russian’ or ‘South African,’ rather than affirming Jewishness. However, Jews are not the only culture to have moved away from their traditions. In many places where different communities live in close proximity - for example in Soviet Russia after the Revolution and in Poland, France, England, Argentina, and the United States - absolute national identities have also begun to decay; so ambivalence becomes “a universal condition applicable to other Others ... people [who] increasingly identify their liminal status between home and homeland as one of Diaspora” (Omer-Sherman 111). Thus today most of us inhabit one form of Diaspora or another, and the next generation must prepare to inherit a hybrid world.

Rooted in his culture and rituals, Fram occupied a literary space, where as a Jewish writer he could tell Jewish stories that would also resonate for other communities. His poetry may therefore throw some light on the general diasporic experience. Ultimately, Fram’s poems incorporate “two worlds ... the world he brought with him and the new, wild and beautiful African world around him” (Ravitsh 403), embracing the paradoxes of old and new, Lithuania and South Africa, often idealising both. In so doing, they highlight the issues of “displacement and foreignness ... a tale of immigration, intercultural relationships, and searching for home ... with journeying, with travel ... with upheaval and uncertainty ... and ambivalence, and the ways in which they assert the multiple subjectivities that are the hallmark of Diaspora’s ‘double consciousness’” (Zemel qtd. in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 177).

As Fram began to “notice Africa, Africa began to dominate his poems, and he was inspired and determined to go along that path” (Ravitsh 403). He then became what Ravitsh called the “progenitor of the Yiddish lyric in a new centre, South Africa” (403), his poems filled “like an African pineapple with juicy Lithuanian Yiddish speech; his Yiddish language became as rich as a pomegranate” (403). Because there is a kinship between the “feat of self-creation, the literary imagination ... [and] the writer’s situatedness” (Omer-Sherman 269), this chapter argues that place plays an important role in Fram’s poetic subject matter. Emigration saved

Fram's life and he never returned to Lithuania, but its memory plays itself out in the poems written long after he had left.

Chapter Three: Fram's Poetry of Landscape and People

And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills,
Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;
And here were forests ancient as the hills,
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery. (S. T. Coleridge)

Landscape and its inhabitants provide the background and subject matter of many of Fram's poems, reflecting his concern with the flat muddy Russian farmlands and folk, and later the terrain, flora, fauna and inhabitants of South Africa. In that most of these poems are the descriptive, lyrical "outpourings of a man coming to terms with universal suffering" (Goodman 1949 28), display a characteristic, heightened pleasure in nature and epitomise "freedom of individual self-expression: sincerity and spontaneity" (Birch *n. pag.*), this chapter argues that they may be considered neo-Romantic.

In addition, as a foreigner, Fram was culturally alienated in a society divided by colour, and where whites were compartmentalised as either English or Afrikaans speaking. Although safely white, the Jewish poet empathised with the victims of the system. Thus, reflecting his personal experiences, the narrative poems have a personal, political agenda and are steeped in the language and customs of the local inhabitants. Within the poems, images of flowers and fruit, bright sun, stark African sky, mine dumps and ochre *veld* recur and develop into a personal iconography. In these ways, his poems succeeded in fulfilling his aim to enrich Yiddish "with an entire continent" (qtd. in Sherman "Singing in the Silence" 41).

The Influence of the Romantics

Hermeren describes influence as "contact between X and Y that in some way changed Y's artistic creations" (239). According to Estraiikh, given Fram's cultural and literary education there is a strong probability that he encountered the work of the Romantic poets (E-mail 11 Sept. 2010), especially since some had been translated into Yiddish and appeared in the same journals as Fram's, for example *Yidishe periodik*. Through this "contractual relationship" (Weisstein 266), he may have been influenced by their approach, style and content. In that the Romantic poet wrote as "a man speaking to men, [through] the sincerity of his personal vision and experience" (Drabble *n. pag.*), exhibiting an "emotional intensity often taken to extremes of ... nostalgia for childhood or the past, melancholy" (Birch *n. pag.*), as well as "joy" (Drabble *n. pag.*),

Fram's poetry may be seen to resemble theirs. This is reflected in Wordsworth's affirmation of poetry as the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" ("Preface"), endorsed in the opening line of 'The Daffodils,' "I wandered lonely as a cloud" (*Albatross* 306) and Fram's lyrical descriptions of trees and plants. The latter may also be read within the tradition of the nature poems of the Russian Romantics Alexander Pushkin and Mikhail Lermontov, as well as those of Avrom Sutskever, the Yiddish poet whose 'Shtern in shney' (Stars in Snow) also exhibits Romantic characteristics.

According to Sherman, Fram's first-published poem, 'Zima' (Winter) was written when he was a youth, relocated with his family from Lithuania to Samara, White Russia ("What Balm" 7). The piece describes that icy environment, exhibiting Fram's "abiding emotional concern" (Sherman "What Balm" 7), the nostalgic longing for his birthplace. The poem was written in Russian and appeared in a Russian journal, but thereafter Fram always wrote in Yiddish. In similar vein, 'Baym zeydn' (At my Grandfather's) (1925-26) is a traditional verse-monologue about Fram's boyhood visits to the family farm, and was praised by the poet Bialik (qtd. in Gershater 1). In its description of the poet's grandfather, it reflects the Romantics "tendency to hero-worship" (Birch *n. pag.*), here the protagonist whom the poet admires, a true peasant, "Es hobn geshmekt zayne kleyder in reykhes fun tsaytike felder" / "Whose clothes reeked of the smell of ripe fields" (18). Rooted in home soil and in touch with the land and its rhythms, he was also "a gvar, a farbroynter fun zun un pukhike velder" / "a strong man browned by the sun and downy woods" (17). The prototype also appears as Reb Itshe in Fram's 'In a zunikn tog' (On a Sunny Day) (*Lider* 123-132) (1930), as well as in 'Reb Yoshe un zayn gortn' (Reb Yoshe and his Garden) (*Lider* 91-100) (1927). The publication of the latter poem in the New York journal *Oyfkum* (1927) brought Fram into the international arena of Yiddish poetry (Sherman "What Balm" 7). It too describes with a Romantic nostalgia, a forest Jew who knew every berry and mushroom by name, planted and tended his radishes, cucumbers, beetroots, 'aportn' (a Lithuanian apple) and crushed juice from berries,

Dan yedn shtiln herbst klaybt Yoshe zikh tsuzamen
 Di yagdes in a flash un tsukert ayn mit bronfn.
 A zeltener getrank, vos shmekt in toyznt tamen. (41-43)

Every quiet autumn Yoshe collects
The berries in a bottle with sugar and liquor
A special drink that tastes of a thousand flavours.

In that the Romantics regarded “nature as ... a responsive mirror of the soul” (Birch *n. pag.*), the natural world that Fram describes in his poems reflects his state of being. He longs for human beings whom he links with nature, “*di yidn fun velder, vi kuperne yodles farpekht / Vos shmekn in friike reykhesh fun shvomen un varemen mokh*” / “the Jews of the forests, pitch-dark like copper firs, / Smelling of the early scents of mushrooms and warm moss” (‘Ikh benk’ 5-6), thus emphasising the richness and reliability of both the people and the land, as in the earlier ‘Baym zeydn’ and ‘Reb Yoshe un zayn gortn.’ Later South African poems, ‘In an Afrikaner baginen’ and ‘Oyf Transvaler erd,’ with their “emotional intensity ... taken to extremes of rapture” (Birch *n. pag.*), are also reminiscent in some respects of Shelley’s ‘Ode to the West Wind,’ Wordsworth’s ‘Evening on the Beach’ and Keats’ ‘Ode to a Nightingale.’ Here, Fram’s lyrical poems about life lived close to the land celebrate nature’s bounty, evoking Africa’s “pulsating vibrancy” (Sherman “David Fram Centenary Tribute” 41), its “stony soil and scorching skies” (7). Through them, Fram expresses his pleasure at nature’s abundance using the repeated appearance of particular images that then become personal symbols.

‘In an Afrikaner baginen’ opens on a joyful note and establishes the sun as its central image, “*S’iz zunik un s’iz loyter der frimorgn*” / “It’s a sunny and clear early morning” (1), heightened with a further description, “*Ekh, vos hele, shtralndike zun!*” / “Oh, what a bright, radiant sun!” (2). The brightness of the image is repeated for emphasis in “*zunik*” (19), “*zunen*” (27), in “*A shmir, a shot, a glants fun toyznt zunen!*” / “A smudge, an outpouring, a radiance of a thousand suns!” (27), and “*Tsegist zikh klorer shayn oyf felder gantse emers*” / “Buckets full glow and pour out on the meadows” (28). Nature’s richness also manifests in tactile images, “*Fun tsarte flaterlekh, fun babelekh, fun flign*” / “From soft butterflies, from beetles, from flies” (11), as well as the aromatic, “*stoygn shmekedikn hey*” / “fragrant haystacks” (13). In the lines “*Oy, s’iz gut! S’iz zunik-hel. S’shmekt in vayse epel*” / “Oh, it’s good! It’s sunnily bright. It tastes of white apples” (19), together with “*bloyn himl-shayn*” / “blue heaven-splendour” (45), the sun’s power is shown to bring forth the natural abundance that fills the earth. The bright sunshine, the cluck of the hen, the white

doves, the wind blowing and the songs spreading widely amidst the smell of the sweet hay, the green grass, and the yawning fields all hold nature's promise, so that "s'kvelt a hele freyd in tsapldike Brustn" / "bright joy and delight well up in quivering breasts" (31). Fram's use of personification emphasises man's intense connection with nature, as in "lonkes plikhevate" / "bald meadows" (13) that "genetsn" / "yawn" and "pyetshenen zikh zate" / "indulge themselves until satiated" (14). The final image of the sun brings the imagery of the poem full circle, back to "di zunike, di loytere fartogn" / "the sunny, the clear dawns" (50).

Through the repeated references to fruit and vegetables, the poem also affirms the land's fertility, for example in "s'gist zikh on der vayn in grine troybn" / "wine pours from green grapes" (7), as the "royte kavones in feld dergeyen" / "red watermelons ripen across the field" (8), and this is also emphasised in "korn baykhikn" / "ripe rye" (15), and "kupes hey, oyf shmekedike felder" / "heaps of hay, over sweet smelling fields" (48). At the same time that "shiker iz di luft fun tsaytikdike peyres" / "the air is drunk with ripening fruits" (9), there is also, amidst "beymer knokhike balodene mit peyres" / "gnarled trees with laden with fruit" (34), a "shtume freyd" / "silent joy" (35).

Soil is also a recurrent image, as for example in "a fal ton tsu der mame-erd anider" / "falls down to mother-earth beneath" (41). The term "mame-erd" suggests a bond between man and soil, as does the description of "zikh durkhmishn mit erd, mit leym, mit royte gruntn" / "wallowing in the earth, with clay, with red soil" (43), so that it "breklt zikh fun oybn" / "crumbles from above" (45). As a result, everything becomes "A tsetumltter, farshikert begilufn" / "Confused, intoxicated with joy" (42). On the other hand, in 'Oyf Transvaler erd,' the soil is hard and dry and the spanned oxen have to drag their ploughs, "trot bay trot" / "step by step" (3) where there is no easy fodder. The field is referred to as "steppes" (84), relating the poem back to the Russian grasslands as a reminder of Fram's past, but the Yiddish word "mokhn" (moss) (8) is juxtaposed with the Afrikaans "burijan" (steppe grass) (8), bringing the poem closer to the South African veld, thus making it site specific.

Aural descriptions also enhance the Romantic lyricism of Fram's poems, for example in 'In an Afrikaner baginen,' where the sun's intense rays "klingt zikh op in gold mit kishefdikn zemer" / "ring out in gold, in enchanted melody" (30). Here, the vision of the sun's beams become part of nature's song, and is matched with sound and rhythm in "shtiklekh shtraln brekln zikh un zipn zikh un zipn" / "bits of sun-rays

shred and screen and sift” (18), as well as in “A klung, a shprung, a tants oyf feste gruntn” / “A ring, a jump, a dance on firm ground” (23). This use of short and springing rhythm endorses the high spirits, as in the lines, “aroysshrayen mit ale dayne glider” / “shout out with all your limbs” (39) and “zikh aleyn mit eygenem geshrey fartoybn!” / “deafens with one’s own cry!” (46). There are also other sounds, for example “Kvoktshet ergets-vu a leygedike hun” / “A laying hen clucks somewhere” (4) and “A fokh, a patsheray, un fligl shotndike veyen” / “A flap, a beating, shadowy wings fanning the air” (6). Sound is emphasised by the use of alliteration in “Trikenen zikh shtil oyf grine lonke-lipn” / “Dry up quietly on green meadow-lips” (17), sensual effects that bring forth “a freyd an erdishe” / “an earthy joy” (25) in nature’s bounty where “s’ shpreyt zikh oyset vayt a nign” / “melody spreads far and wide” (12), contrasting with the “shvaygenish fun velder” / “silence of the forests” (49).

In addition, by introducing South African words, images, language and local customs into the Yiddish poetry, the poet adapts the mother tongue to the diasporic environment. By doing so, he also underscores his affinity with the Romantics, “valuing ... local vernacular traditions” (Drabble *n. pag.*) as they did. Thus, in ‘Oyf Transvaler erd,’ Fram transcribes local plant names into English⁴⁶, for example, “watermelon” (36), “cactus” (64), “peaches” (76), “dahlias,” “hibiscus” (88), “eucalyptus” (93), “Christmas flowers” and “poinsettias” (140). This draws attention to and intensifies their impact in the landscape and on the poet’s consciousness; it is as if he, like the land, is drunk with delight at this bounty. Like other Yiddish-speaking immigrants, he knew no English or Afrikaans, had never seen a black man before and had no knowledge of the different tribes, Xhosa, Zulu, Sotho and Shangaan. ‘Oyf Transvaler erd’ includes transliterated African words “sakebona” (hullo), (108), “Zulus” (114), “kral”⁴⁷ (mud huts) (91), and “matchekes” (blankets used as clothing) (104), and introduces local words, “burishe” (like farmers) (5), “kaferl” (black child) (54), “kaferkral” (tribal hut) (55) and “pikanin” (black child) (56).⁴⁸ This makes the poem specifically African, and also heightens its atmosphere

⁴⁶ To distinguish the use of these English names, the poet places them in scare quotes.

⁴⁷ Foreign words in Fram’s poems such as *kraal* and *assegai* are spelt according to Yiddish rules in the transliterations, but in their vernacular spelling using italics in the English translations.

⁴⁸ These pejorative epithets were regarded as acceptable at the time, examples also occurring in the stories of H. Ehrlich and R. Feldman. The terms are not used derogatorily:

and a fusion evolves between South Africa and the Yiddish poet as part of a process of adaptation.

Connections between Nature and Prayer

In that Fram's poems connect natural phenomena with the presence of a greater being, they may be interpreted as neo-Romantic – one of the characteristics of the Romantics was that they saw nature as “a means of divine revelation” (odessa.edu *n. pag*). Thus, the protagonist acknowledges the Creator for his bounty ‘In an Afrikaner baginen,’ in the lines “A lid, a brumeray, a shire farn boyre!” / “A poem, a hum, a song of praise for the Creator!” (10), in “Fun regn un fun toy batrifte tfiles” / “From rain and from dew spattered prayers” (16), as well as in “A shire, a geveyn, a loybgezang dem boyre” / “A song of praise, a lament, a hymn for the Creator” (32). Nature itself seems to sing a hymn: “Frum mispalel zayn un davenen un bentshn / In di zunike, di oysgehelte vayles!” / “Pray piously and worship and bless / In the sunny, the brightened moments!” (37-38).

In Fram's poem ‘Ikh benk,’ the extent of nature's bounty also induces reverence in the poet, so that “Dan gloyb ikh ... dan gloyb ikh mit hertser, vos gloybn emunedik-frum, / Vos zaynen mit heylike tfiles vi harbstike kelers gepakt” / “Then I believe ... then I believe together with hearts that believe faithfully and piously, / Packed like autumn cellars with holy prayers” (17-18). The poet also makes specific reference to the Sabbath eve in the lines “Vos shlepn aheym zikh oyf shabes durkh osyendik-vintike nekht, / Un gorn nokh ruiker shalve fun shverer, farmaterter vokh” / “Who drag themselves home for Sabbath through windy autumn nights, / Craving tranquillity from the heavy, exhausting week” (7-8). Here, instead of using the term *boyre* for the Creator, the poem focuses on how, “Tsevakst dan in vareme hertser a groyser, derbarmiker Got, / Un shpreyt aza mekhtikn gloybn oyf groyer, farshvigenere velt” / “And growing then in warm hearts a great, merciful God, / Spreads a mighty belief on a grey, silent world” (15-16). In this way, man's spirit is restored by the abundance of the natural world, the addressee similar to the one used in the Holocaust poems, the God of Jewish prayer.

many of these immigrant writers showed sympathy to the underdog, congruent with their personal experience of racial persecution as Jews under czarist rule.

The Countryside and its People

Fram's poems 'Tsu di shvartse,' 'Fun shop tsu shop,' 'Matumba' and 'Matatulu' all focus on rural black men's experiences in a hostile, urban environment. They emphasise Fram's "liberal inclinations" (Davis 46) and his "strong belief in human equality and brotherhood" (46), showing how his approach to politics is "essentially a Romantic one" (45). The poems are similar in approach to the earlier 'Baym zeydn,' 'Reb Yoshe un zayn gortn' and 'In a zunikn tog,' which also idealise the ordinary man living close to the land, that "grant a special value to outcast figures" (Drabble *n. pag.*), as do the poems of the Romantics. Some of these poems give prominence to the individual by making use of the first person singular. This may be either an expression of a poetic persona or of a personal or biographical 'I,' for example in "Ikh benk nokh di yidn fun velder" / "I long for the Jews of the forests" ('Ikh benk' 5), and in the line "Dan gloyb ikh...dan gloyb ikh" / "Then I believe ... then I believe" (17). These descriptions indicate how Romantic poets "turned to the emotional directness of personal experience and to the boundlessness of individual imagination and aspiration ... [when] expressing their own imaginative truths" (Birch *n. pag.*).

The use of the first person singular in 'Tsu di shvartse' seems to be a reference to the poet himself, for example in lines such as "Hot keyn moyre un antloyft nisht fun mir, shvartse" / "Do not be afraid and do not run away from me, black man" (1) and "S'klemt a vey oykh vi bay aykh bay mir in hartsn" / "There is a choking pain in my heart as there is in yours" (3). Written soon after Fram arrived in Africa, Fram's protagonist here appears to be "similar to outcast figures ... in Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron and Shelley" (Drabble *n. pag.*). The poem describes the futility of the black man's wanderings, his hunger and loneliness, as well as his exotic physical difference and sculpted strength, "Ayer Brust azoy geshmidt, vi fun tshugon?" / "Your breast was smelted, so like cast iron?" (12). The poet hopes to befriend him, but recognises the other's hesitation, "Nisht dershrekt zikh far dem bleykh fun mayn gezikht." / "Do not be afraid of the paleness of my face" (2). Nevertheless, despite their physical differences, they are also alike as they both bleed when stabbed or cut: "Un ven emetser zol ayer layb tsheshnaydn – / Oykh fun shvartser hoyt a rizl ton vet blut!" / "And if someone were to cut your body – / Also from black skin blood would trickle!" (19-20). In addition, they have a similar moral outlook: "Un oykh ir farshteyt, vos shlekht iz un vos gut" / "And you too understand, what bad is and what good" (18), and so the poet recognises the kinship between them, "Ikh farshteyt aykh,

un ikh trog mit aykh tsuzamen / Ayer freyd un ayer shvayndike payn” / “I understand you, and I carry with me like you / Your happiness and your silent pain” (5-6), a theme that is intensified between the first and final stanzas. Where the first verse states “Un ikh vart azoy vi ir oyf ayer likht” / “And I wait for your light just like you” (4), the line appears in the last verse with one alteration, “unzer likht” / “our light” (36), that is, “your light” becomes “our light.” Thus, the two are united as they both wait, hoping that their difficult circumstances will change and relief will come. Fram’s affinity for the suffering hero, in this case the black underdog, echoes an abiding theme of the Romantic poets. The term “shvartse” is here used purely descriptively, perhaps affectionately. Even when Fram uses the terms “kafers” in ‘Oyf Transvaler erd’ it is not used in the racist manner of the farmers in ‘Burn,’ “Di kafers vet men oysshish vi hint” / “They could shoot the *kaffirs* like dogs” (43).

Fram’s humanism and empathy for the victim is also clear in ‘Fun shop tsu shop.’ Set in the Transvaal,⁴⁹ the poem describes the struggle of the black protagonist to find work. This effort mirrors the poet’s own difficulties as a *smous*⁵⁰ when he first arrived in Africa, Fram “identifying with the blacks as an oppressed people” (Davis 46). His protagonist represents “humanity persevering through overwhelming hardships” (46),

Azoy a gantsn tog – fun shop tsu shop –
 Iz er arumgegangen betlendik a dzhob⁵¹ –
 A shtikl arbet zol men im vu gebn.
 Er iz geven yung un kreftik vi an ayzn
 Un dafke hot zikh im gevolt nokh lebn. (1-5)

A whole day like this, from shop to shop –
 He went round begging for a job –
 Hoping someone should give him a bit of work somewhere.
 He was young and strong as iron
 And yes, he still wanted to live.

⁴⁹ This was a separate province in South Africa now known as Gauteng.

⁵⁰ Itinerant peddler; travelling salesman.

⁵¹ English words have been transliterated in Yiddish.

As the black man trudges on, no one takes pity on him, his arduous efforts prove fruitless in the face of the white shop-owners' indifference, "Derlangt men mernit shtil a shokl mitn kop: / 'Neyn, nito keyn arbet do, farshteyst? – Neyn!' ... / Un vider veys er vayter shoyn nit vu tsu geyn." / "Giving him nothing more than a quiet shake of the head: – / 'No, there is no work here, understand? – No!' ... / And once again he does not know where to turn" (17-19). The poem sets up the socio-political background and the hierarchy of race, "Er hot azoy fil gute, vayse mentshn shoyn gezen / Un keyner hot zikh iber im a hungerikn nit derbarmt / Mashmoes, keyner darf nit hobn do zayn pratse un zayn shveys." / "He has already seen many good, white people / And no one yet has taken pity on him in his hunger, / Presumably, no one here needs his labour and his sweat" (21-23).

The man's hunger is palpable; as the memory of his last meal plagues him, "s'triknt im di shpayekh'ts azh fun hunger in zayn moyl?" / "the saliva dries in his mouth from hunger?" (30). He recalls the taste and heat of the food and, "benkt farkhalesht nokh a bisl proste 'mili-pap'" / "starving longs for a bit of simple *mielie pap*" (33). As he imagines how he would "shepn shporevdik mit alemen fun heysn blekh / Dos aynkaykln in zayne shvartse hent s'zol vern shvarts vi pekh / Un nokh dem leygn dos mit groys hano in zayn moyl" / "scoop up carefully from a hot tin with everyone / Rolling it in his black hands so it becomes as black as pitch / And then putting it in his mouth with great pleasure" (37-39), the reader's mouth also waters for the bit of hot 'pap.'

The poems 'Matumba' and 'Matatulu,'⁵² tales of black men told by a Yiddish-speaking white immigrant, are unique for their time. Both first appeared in *Dorem Afrike* in 1953 when the Nationalist government was in power and reflect the political disjuncture of the times when blacks had curtailed rights, circumstances similar to those of the Jews of Lithuania when Fram left. The two poems were later collected in *A shvalb oyfn dakh*, and are in line with the Romantics' "strong ... interest in ballads" (Birch *n. pag.*). Both narratives evoke and idealise country life and illustrate the ills of society resulting from urbanisation, showing empathy towards ordinary peasant folk similar to Fram's grandfather and Reb Yoshe, and elevating

⁵² The version of 'Matatulu' in *Dorem Afrike* (Dec. 1953 17-19) is 225 lines in length. When it appeared in Fram's second collection *A shvalb oyfn dakh* (1983) (89-93), 88 lines were cut. I have transliterated and translated the longer version as it includes references to the impact of the pass laws, which are pertinent to my discussion.

them to heroic status. Matumba and Matatulu, forced to leave their *kraals* in search of work in the city for white employers, lose their homes, family and traditional way of life. The eponymous heroes' rural naiveté and sense of alienation in the city of the white man, the cultural clash between traditional customs of *lobola*⁵³ and polygamy and the white man's pass laws⁵⁴ and monogamy, ultimately contribute to misunderstanding and tragedy.

The first stanza of 'Matumba' sets the scene in the *bushveld* where Matumba lives peacefully with his wives and livestock, "Matumba iz gekumen fun vaytn kral, / ... / Ergets-vu in a vinkl fun Transval / Iz gebliben zayn royte, leymene khate." / "Matumba came from a distant *kraal* / ... / Somewhere in a corner of Transvaal, / His red, clay hut remained" (1-2, 4). There, he had "dray vayber / Tsu pashen in kral zayne ki" / "three wives / To look after his cattle in the *kraal*" (5-6). The descriptions of the large breasts of the women, their shining backs, their white teeth, the rattle of their bracelets as their feet stamp the dry ground, the heat of their bodies as the dancing quickens highlight their customs and sense of community through shared rituals. As the patriarch, Matumba was short of nothing and was content: "Er iz gevezn tsufridn mit dem vos er hot shoyng gehat, / Er hot gevust az er hot zayne vayber shtark holt / Un shlofn hot er gekont mit zey tsu zat." / "He was happy with what he already had, / He knew that he loved his wives greatly / And he could sleep with them to his fill" (22-24). The traditional life that they share is idyllic, "Ekh, flegt im reytsn ir nakete, shvartse Brust – / Ir boykh azoy rund, azoy shtayf, nokh gor vi a bsule" / "Ah, how her naked, black breast would tease him – / Her round belly, so firm, still as a maiden's" (27-28). Matumba paid *lobola* of twelve oxen for his favourite wife Sesula who is "Vi a zeltener ferd in stadole" / "Like a rare horse in the stable" (32). In this blissful existence, similar to that idealised in Romantic poetry, the noble savage, possessed of gentleness and physical beauty and strength, remains uncorrupted by civilization. This is also parallel to the connection between man and nature emphasised by the Romantics: where nature is peaceful, man is at peace.

At the outset of 'Matatulu,' the protagonist is described as a "mentsh" (1), literally 'a man,' but also an epithet that connotes decency. Repeated reference is made to his physical beauty: "Zayn kerper naketer iz glantsik, fet un shvarts, /

⁵³ Customary bride price amongst Zulu, Xhosa and Ndebele tribes.

⁵⁴ 'Pass' (*dompas*). The document every black person was required by law to carry at all times.

Bashmirt mit reynem oyl fun shmekedike flantsn” / “His naked body is shiny, fat and black / Smearred with pure oil from aromatic plants” (10-11), and his sense of well-being is highlighted, “Ho, gezunter, yunger, shtarker Matatulu!” / “Ho, healthy, young and strong Matatulu!” (109). Matatulu’s life, like Matumba’s, would have remained undisturbed, were it not for the impact of “di minhogim fun vaysn” / “the customs of the whites” (‘Matumba’ 34) which then “tseraysn” / “tore” (36) everything apart.

Matumba is obliged to go into the city to earn enough to pay the white man’s tax, which “ober dray yor gehat nisht getsolt” / “for three years he had not paid” (39). So he has to leave “Ale dray vayber ... bay zikh aheym. / Oy, hot er zikh biter mit zey dan gezegnt.” / “All three wives ... at his home / Oy, how bitterly he bade them farewell” (45-46). Ahead of him lies the dry and empty road and followed by endless days serving “zayne vayse balebatim” / “his white employers” (50) without respite. The contrast between what he was when he was part of his tribe, and what becomes of him when he is ripped away from it, and the course of his downfall thereafter is emphasised as he changes. Once in peak physical condition, Matumba becomes weakened by city life and instead “Itst ligt er azoy vi a kretsiker hunt / Un klaybt breklekh fun tish bay dem vaysn” / “Now he lies like a mangy dog / And collects scraps from the table of the whites” (67-68). Sapped of his physical strength, “Iz Matumba gevorn farshrumpn fun tsar, / Er hot zikh ingantsn gebitn” / “Matumba became shrunken with grief, / He became completely changed” (81-82). He longs not only for “zayn khate” / “his home” (52), but also, “Zayn ‘asegay’⁵⁵ hot er shoyn lang nisht gesharft” / “He had not sharpened his *assegai* in so long” (55). This reference acknowledges his identity as a warrior amongst his own people and protector of his clan, and because of this, “in hartsn gebrent hot a fayer” / “in [his] heart there burned a fire” (56). He becomes anxious that some ill might befall Sesula because he is not there to protect her and he asks the “royfe” / “doctor” (64)⁵⁶ for a remedy.

⁵⁵ Traditional Zulu hunting weapon.

⁵⁶ This would have been the *feldsher* in the *shtetl*, although there were doctors as well. In South Africa, the *sangoma* is the traditional medicine man or witch doctor amongst the Zulu, Xhosa, Ndebele and Swazi tribes. Matumba would have sought a *sangoma*’s potion rather than western medicine.

As a lowly servant living in close proximity to his employer, his ‘missis,’ Matumba cannot understand why she does not care about him, given his own loyalty: “Gedint hot er erlekh zayn vaysn har, / Gedint im getray un farlitn.” / “He has honestly served his white master / Served him faithfully and patiently” (83-84). As he does the chores, dusting the house, polishing the floors on his hands and knees, he can see and watch his mistress at her intimate ablutions, “zi – ire hor flegt zi kemen, / Halb-naket un reytsnd azoy vi a leyb – / Zi flegt zikh far im gornisht shemen” / “she – she would comb her hair, / Half-naked and alluring as a lion, / She was not embarrassed before him” (90-92). This vignette serves as a foil to the earlier one where as chieftain Matumba danced freely with his half-unclothed wives, accentuating the difference in cultural mores relating to the acceptance of the nakedness of women.

While Matumba straightens the still-warm bed, he watches his employer put on her clothes, “Un tsaytvayz flegt zi in shtayfn korset / Farshnureven hart ire Brustn, / Dan flegt er arayngeyn farbetn dos bet / Nokh varem fun tayve un glustn” / “And at times she would in a taut corset / Tightly lace up her breasts, / Then he would go in and straighten the bed clothes / Still warm with passion and lust” (93-96). Confused, Matumba sees Sesula, his true love, in front of him instead, and “Un eynmol in friling hot er bay ir tir / Gevart vi a khaye farborgn” / “And once in spring by her door / He waited like an animal concealed” (101-102). Unable to control himself because of his longing for his wife, he rapes his mistress, “Er hot zikh meshuge gevorfn oyf ir / Un hot zi shir-shir nisht dervorgn” / “He madly threw himself at her / And he almost choked her” (103-104) until they become nothing but “Tsvey kerpers tsemisht” / “Two bodies entwined” (109), one black and one white. The poem thus also serves as a metaphor for and an indictment of the white-black hierarchy. There is no question of his guilt, so there can be no doubt of his sentence. Found guilty of murder, Matumba goes to the gallows alone, crying out the name of his beloved, “Fartsitert, gefaln, Matumba iz toyt, / Eh, eh, Sesula, Sesula!” / “Trembling, fallen, Matumba is dead, / Oh, oh, Sesula, Sesula!” (119-120). Out of his familiar territory and in the midst of an alien culture, ensnared by his employer’s seductive behaviour, this warrior and patriarch amongst his own people, nothing more than a servant in hers, loses his sense of worth and dignity, and ultimately his life. Through the narrative of the poem, Fram, like the Romantics, indicates his reaction to oppression and injustice, using description and/or narrative to illuminate such situations.

Similarly, the hero of the poem ‘Matatulu’ is hardworking and has “dem koyekh funem oks, di flinkeyt fun zhiraf” / “the strength of an ox, the agility of a giraffe” (17), and may also be likened to “der leyb, der odler, di pantere” / “the lion, the eagle, the panther” (45). These comparisons emphasise his animality, animal innocence and life of freedom in the wild. Matatulu relishes his circumstances because, “vi gut, vi varem s’iz di groyse zun” / “how good, how warm is the great sun” (9), and so “Zayn ponem iz bagosn mit a breytn shmeykhl” / “His face is filled with a broad smile” (20) and so, “Er bedarf do gornisht inem bush; keyn shukh, keyn kleyd, / Zayn beged iz di fel fun a shakal. / Zayn hoyz – on dort der erdisher rondavel” / “He needs nothing more in the bush, no shoe, no garment; / His garb is the skin of a jackal. / His house – is a mud *rondavel*” (23-25). In addition, he is also an assured hunter, manly in the tradition of his own culture: “Ven er yogt nokh mit ‘asegay’ un blankn shpiz / A tsiterdikn hirsh, vos falt farblutikt in di derner” / “When he pursues with his *assegaai* and shiny spear / A quivering deer, that falls bloody into the thorn bushes” (52-53). And then “Ho, s’iz groys di freyd – a shprung, a tsi, a ris, / Er heybt di khaye oyf bagaystert far di herner / Un shlept zi inem kral arayn dan, vi a gvar” / “How great is the joy – a jump, a pulling, a tearing, / He grabs the animal by its horns with excitement / And drags it to his *kraal*, like a strong man” (54-56). The use of the word “gvar” connects him with Fram’s grandfather in the poem, ‘Baym zeydn’ (7). Like him, Matatulu is connected to, and an extension of, the land itself, “Er hot zikh oysgerut in ‘bush-feld’ vi der beym” / “He rested in the *bushveld* like the tree” (71). And it is there that he has a complete sense of himself, “Ho, er ken zikh gut, der shtarker Matatulu” / “Oh, he knows himself well, the powerful Matatulu” (57). However, the scene of the hunt presages what is to come, when Matatulu, once the hunter himself becomes the hunted, the white man’s prey.

Like Matumba, all is well for Matatulu until he longs for a wife: “Ayede khayeale in dzhungl, veys er hot zayn por. / Es hot di shlang afile zikh gefunen do a vayb” / “Every animal in the jungle, he knows has his pair. / Even the snake has found his wife here” (79-80). To fulfil this need, Matatulu, like Matumba, must pay *lobola*, in this case, fourteen oxen, to his future father-in-law. To do so, “Er loyft bagaysterter tsu yener groyser shtot / Fun vos er hot azoy fil vunder shoyn gehert” / “He runs excitedly to that big city / About which he had heard so many wondrous things” (100-101). He then decides “nisht lebn merer punkt vi der volf fun royb” / “to live no more like the wolf from prey” (106), and so he abandons jackal skins and bare feet, and

instead, “trogt shoyn hoyzn ... mit a hemd, mit zokn, / Un vestlekh hot er azoy fil, / Un shvere unbakveme shikh” / “wore trousers ... with a shirt, with socks, / And he also had many vests, / And heavy uncomfortable shoes” (117-119). The changes in his attire intimate the changes that occur within himself, and what he loses as a result, “In shtot hot Matatulu, mit der tsayt, gebitn zikh ingantsn. / Der bush, di vayte stepes oysgeleygte zunike un fraye, / Dort vet er shoyn far di levones merer zayne tents nisht tantsn” / “In the city, over time, Matatulu changed altogether, / The bush, the wide plains, spread out sunny and free, – / There he will never again dance his dances before the moons” (110-112).

Whereas when he lived in the wild Matatulu was the epitome of nobility, like the eagle and panther, ox and giraffe, now his white boss treats him like a mere “khaye,” a lowly “animal” (1, 12, 114, 216), a beast, a “hunt,” a “dog” (116) and so “Zayn modne arbet vaybershe gefalt im azoy shver” / “He finds his strange, womanly work so hard” (121). Matatulu’s employers “veysn zey den nisht, az s’iz zayn yikhes groys” / “Do not know of his great pedigree” (133) and the esteem in which he is held amongst his own people. In addition, amongst the white people, “Er kon zey zikher keynem nisht farshteyn” / “He can surely understand none of them” (137). So he, like Matumba, loses his identity and sense of himself: “Er ken aleyn zikh poshet nit derkenen ver er iz” / “He himself does not recognise who he is” (122), and instead “dremelt ayn farbenkter nokh zayn kral” / “dreams with longing of his *kraal*” (155), and “tulyet zikh atsind tsu zikh aleyn fun shrek vi a faryogte khaye” / “curls into himself now alone in fear like a pursued animal” (113). The poem makes use of animal imagery, first to show his power and self-sufficiency when he is in his own, known environment, respected by his community, and in touch with his natural surroundings, then to indicate his fall from grace as an outsider in an alien environment.

The description “Dervayl hot shoyn di zun zikh ayngetunkt in blut” / “In the meanwhile the sun itself has become dipped in blood” (187) is a portent of what is to come, echoing the bloody death of the deer earlier in the poem. While “Matatulu shtelt zikh op nokh oyf a vayle in ‘lokeyshn” / “Matatulu stopped for a while in the ‘location”⁵⁷ (193), the police patrol for offenders. Matatulu hears a voice in the dark, “Vu flistu, tayvl eyner? ... shtey, dayn ‘speshl” / “Where are you rushing, you devil?

⁵⁷ Official, separate black informal settlements, in this case probably either Alexandra township or Soweto.

... stop, your ‘special’”⁵⁸ (209). He makes a run for it because “Men nemt im vi a vilde khaye iber ale yogn” / “They chase him as if he were a wild animal through the streets” (216). Whereas he used to hunt deer for his beloved near his *kraal*, now instead, he is the quarry, “In finsternish a fayerdiker shos... / S’iz Matatulu oyf der erd glyakh vi a leyb gefaln. / Un bislekhvayz es gist zikh oys fun im zayn blutiker fardros...” / “In the darkness a fiery shot rings out. / Matatulu’s body falls to the ground just like a lion. / And slowly his bloody trouble pours out ...” (218-220). Once healthy, strong and youthful, all that remains of Matatulu is “Der letster tsapl mit zayn toyter fus” / “The last shudder of his dead foot” (224).

The poet’s empathy for and choice to place black men at the centre of these narratives is innovative. However, by focusing on their physical attributes, the poems adhere to the stereotypical, and ‘Matumba’ also reinforces the fear of the assault of a white woman by a black man. Nevertheless, the reader is intended to feel no empathy for the seductive ‘missis,’ but rather to feel pity for Matumba, whose heroic qualities and personal difficulties are highlighted in the various vignettes. By using descriptors from Zulu, “lobola” “asegay,” Afrikaans, “mili-pap,” “kraal,” and English “missis,” “location,” and “pass” in the Yiddish narrative, the poet emphasises cultural and racial differences.

The desperate circumstances of Matumba, Matatulu and the shorter, philosophic poem, ‘Tsu di shvartse,’ may be contrasted with the lifestyle of the white Afrikaner farmers in their smoke-filled parlours in the *platteland*,⁵⁹ as described in ‘Burn’ (‘Farmers’) (*Dorem Afrike* 1971 13),⁶⁰

Mit halbn tog – gekumen iz a fule shtub mit gest;
 Di burn in garniters oysgeputst,
 Mit breyte hit un hengendike grobe hent. (1-3)

⁵⁸ His special paper, that is, his ‘pass.’

⁵⁹ Outlying countryside.

⁶⁰ The poem was published in full in *Lider* (210-249). The extract that appears in *Dorem Afrike* has been translated for the purposes of this thesis. The title refers both to farmers and also to the fact that they are Afrikaners, *Boers*, members of the Dutch/Afrikaans minority.

At midday – there was a full room of guests;
The farmers dressed up in their best outfits,
With broad hats and hanging, huge arms.

In this manner, the farmers enjoy a day of leisure, listening to music, talking and relaxing,

Gezupt di kave fun der flakher shal,
Zikh tsugehert geshmak tsum gramafon
Un emese hanoë do gehat. (47-49)

Sipped coffee from the shallow saucer,
Listened with pleasure to the gramophone
And enjoyed it very much.

The landowner is self-satisfied as he enjoys the fruits of his labourers, and he
“Derlangt a lek dem shpits mit naser tsung / Un take zikh bagavert bay derbay” /
“Licked the tip (of the cigar) with a wet tongue / And he was really slobbering in the
process” (56-57).

Unlike their black servants, ‘Matumba’ and ‘Matalulu,’ or the black protagonists in ‘Tsu di shvartse’ and ‘Fun shop tsu shop,’ the white farmers live off the fat of the land. Their bodies reflect this as they enjoy neighbourly get-togethers, sitting separately, lethargic in their Sunday best,

Di vayber zaynen do gezesn mat
Mit kerpers ongegose mit shmalts,
Mit fete geyders un mit fule brist,
Azoy, az shver gevezn iz tsu geben zikh a rir. (4-7)

The wives sat there listlessly
With bodies covered in fat,
With fat chins and full breasts,
So that it was difficult to move.

The pleasure the farmers experience when they are together is further emphasised in lines such as “Azoy hot men in eynem zikh farbrakht / Gemitlekh in der yon-tevdiker ru” / “That is how they all passed the time together / Companionably in the celebratory rest” (66-67).

In this chapter, I show how Fram’s landscape poems enrich Yiddish with the sights and sounds of Africa and also enrich South African poetry by adding to its frame of reference as seen through a Yiddish lens. I also point out how some of the poems bear similarity to those of the Romantic poets. Like them, Fram uses the first person singular, in the landscape poems presented in this chapter, in his reflective poems of the Diaspora discussed in Chapter Two, and also in the Holocaust poems to be discussed in the Chapter Four. However, he does not use it for the longer narrative poems such as ‘Matumba’ and ‘Matatulu.’ Thus, he moves in and out of this mode depending on the poem; had he been a Modernist, he would have been at pains to avoid personal connotations altogether, because the “biography of the poet himself has no bearing at all” (Wimsatt and Beardsley 5). The question of the relevance of biography in literary works will be further discussed in Chapter Five.

Chapter Four: Fram's Holocaust Poetry

First they came for the Communists, and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a Communist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak out for me.

(Martin Niemöller 1892-1984: Quotation displayed in Yad Vashem)

In this chapter, I locate Fram's Holocaust poetry within the debate about the legitimacy of literature in times of trauma. On the one hand, Howe and Greenberg comment on how, after the Holocaust, "every Yiddish writer finds himself under the most crushing and sacred of obligations. The memory of catastrophe is decisive ... Yiddish poetry now returns ... to its original concern with the collective destiny of the Jewish people" (52). They also note that, "To an overwhelming extent Yiddish poetry became a *Khurbn*⁶¹ of holocaust poetry" (52). In that "language [may] remember what has been lost in memory" (Bartoloni 154), language also confirms that history and poetry may "breathe life into factual information as well as illuminating it through its use of imagery" (Kearney 60). Fram's Holocaust poems provide a valuable aesthetic space for recording history, for bearing witness and giving testimony, for catharsis and for prayer.

Against poetry

Adorno states that, "After Auschwitz to write poetry is barbaric" ("Negative Aesthetics" 362). He argues that to "try and paraphrase atrocities is to diminish the experience" (Adorno "Negative Aesthetics" 362), as it "violates the inner incoherence of the event, casting it into a mold too pleasing or too formal" (Langer 555). He regarded poetry's lyrical beauty as "an obscene contradiction" (382) in relation to circumstances as dire as the Holocaust, because any attempt to orient testimony through the use of poetic norms, or to condense incomprehensible suffering into a few melodious lines "make[s] an unthinkable fate appear to have some meaning; it is transfigured, something of its horror is removed" (Adorno "Commitment" 313). In so doing, it does "an injustice to the victims" (313).

⁶¹ Yiddish: Destruction; ruin; an alternative term for the Holocaust (Hebrew: *Churban*).

Claude Lanzmann and Berel Lang agree that creative works trivialise or undermine tragedy, in that “rhetoric ... imperil[s] the humanity of its subjects” (Gubar 7). They too question the morality surrounding the creation of any art that seeks to talk about atrocities, asserting the inability of language to “express the inexpressible” (Gubar 7). Consequently, as Schiff comments, for some victims, “Speechlessness alone could reflect integrity, [because] to seek to portray reality with inadequate words would betray that reality and the voiceless dead at its core” (xxi). This opinion is endorsed by Simon Srebnik, a survivor of Chelmo, where people were burned and which no one ever left alive except him: “No one can describe it. No one can recreate what happened here” (qtd. in Lanzmann 5).

Historical Recording and Fram's Holocaust Poems

On the other hand, while documents and archives are the accepted modes of recording history, Nietzsche “questions [their] usefulness” (Hartman 3), for they may prove inadequate in the face of trauma. As what “really happened” (Peterson 7) is not made up of one linear version or one set of circumstances, straightforward facts alone may be unable to access real history, let alone fully acknowledge its physical and emotional horror, and “history as a discipline is inadequate for understanding” (Felman and Laub qtd. in Peterson 7). In addition, even as documents assert their faithfulness to the facts, they may be “pervaded by error, partiality, myth” (Nietzsche qtd. in Hartman 3), and may prove inaccurate and unreliable in telling “what [was] experienced and witnessed” (Lang 182). This would not be through a deliberate act, but through the instinctive need to create a personal narrative and make sense of tragic occurrence.

Instead, the experience of victims calls for alternative language forms to “witness ... the crisis within history which precisely cannot be articulated” (Peterson 7), where “imaginative speculation” (Peterson 9) may offer an avenue in which to contend with the horror. While making no claim to being historically factual, “literary texts are essential, if not to restore the record through speculation, then to mark the spaces, gaps and aporias that cannot be filled” (9). Rather than deploying the factual depositions of historical documents, poetry’s use of metaphor and multi-layering reflect the “chaotic nature of life and experience” (ix). As Bennett states, “Poetry ... inhabits an uncertain space somewhere between the specificity of history and the generality of philosophy” (125).

Fram's poem 'Unzere kedoyshim' is one example that uses poetic imagery to record both the history of persecution of the Jews *en masse* throughout the ages and during the Holocaust. The poem's central image is the Jewish custom of rending a garment as a sign of mourning when a loved one dies. By metaphorically tearing his own garment, the poet connects himself directly to the victims, thereby indicating that a community tragedy is also a personal one, "Nokh aykh, ir brider mayne, hob ikh haynt gerisn krie" / "For you, my brothers, I have rent my garment today" (1). He visualises that it would have been "Azoy vi s'volt farbay a frume, shtralndike eyde / Fun yidn gloybike tsu Gots gebentshtn heykhl." / "As if a pious, radiant congregation of faithful Jews / Were passing by [on their way] towards God's holy temple" (6-8). But the image that follows describes how there will come a time when, "Farovlt vet di velt far aykh faln koyrim / Un betlen farn toyt vet zi bay aykh mekhile" / "Bereaved the world will still prostrate itself before you / And beg forgiveness of you for this death" (23-24). This act of prostration echoes that of the solemn ritual performed on *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement, where observant congregations kneel before God, asking for mercy for all the sins they may have committed.

Similarly, the poem 'Lesterung,'⁶² records history, extending the impact of the actual events in a way that bald facts could not, as the image of the temple is transformed into that of the gas oven. In this poem, the poet addresses himself to God, "hostu di gaz-oyvns farfult mit mayne brider, / On hostu dem gzar aroysgelozt – dayn stade tsu farbrenen?" / "you loaded the gas ovens with my brothers, / And pronounced your decree – to burn your flock?" (77-78). Again, by using the epithet, "mayne brider" / "my brothers," the poet associates himself directly with the victims.

In 'An entfere der velt,' the poet also employs various devices in order to bring historical facts to the reader's attention. Thus, the poem refers to the infamous star that the Jews had to wear under Nazi rule, and to the abhorrent method by which they were exterminated: "Ikh fil, ikh trog oyf zikh tsurik di gele late. / Fun vaytn knoylt zikh nokh fun kalkh-oyvne der roykh" / "I feel, I wear the yellow star once again. / In the distance there still billows the smoke from the lime-kiln" (1-2). By associating himself with the victims, the poet drives home to us the horror of the situation to himself personally, intensifying this with a further reference to the ovens of death, "Ven laykhtste shtrof gevezn iz: – 'farbren im,' / Dos iz der psak – dem henkers

⁶² Fragment of a longer poem, 'Ma toyvu ohalekho Yankev' ('How goodly are thy tents, o Jacob?') (*n. d.*).

shvartser kol” / “When the lightest penalty was: ‘burn him,’ / That is the judgment – the hangman’s black voice” (11-12). The use of a visual adjective “shvartser” / “black” to describe a sound, draws attention to the cruelty of the final outcome. While historical documents note dates of offensives and tally the dead, the poem serves as a memorial as well, an emotional container of history that includes images of the yellow star, the kiln and the hangman. In addition, by providing a cultural site for remembering, poetry may also be “our only evidence that an event has occurred . . . [and where there may be no other] independent account” (Forche qtd. in Peterson 14).

Simone Weil draws attention to the fact that “[d]ocuments originate among the powerful ones, the conquerors” (qtd. in Peterson 24) and Peterson comments, “History is nothing but a compilation of the depositions made by assassins with respect to their victims and themselves” (24). Such official histories, inscribed by ruling classes or race, include other or minority races only where intersections occur, and so these are inevitably biased. Therefore for “minorities, for the less powerful and most of all for the excluded, collective memory and myth are often more salient” (Samuel and Thompson qtd. in Cesarini 10). Poetry offers one such platform for collective as well as individual memory and myth. One such example in Fram’s work is the poem *Dos letste kapitl*,⁶³ which encompasses the poet’s personal experiences and responses as well as those of his silenced people. In the following excerpt (1984), he views the ruler-murderers from the standpoint of the Jewish minority, expressing emotions that would have no place in official historical documents,

Di hent dayne zaynen mit blut haynt bagosn,
 Dos blut vest shoyn keynmol fun zey nit farvashn,
 Es hot zikh in dir dayn bizoyen farloshn
 Un s’zaynen farfoylt itst mit mord dayne gasn. (58-62)
 Your hands today are drenched with blood,

⁶³ The original version is 68 pages and appeared in pamphlet form. Fram made repeated alterations to the poem, and these handwritten and typed drafts and versions can be seen in his archives at the University of Texas, Austin. Leftwich translated the poem in rhyming couplets in the style of the original but Fram only permitted him to print a short extract in *The Golden Peacock* (631-632), where it appeared under the title of ‘The Slaughter in Lithuania.’ Fram’s personal copy of the unpublished translation is noted as being in the library of the University of the Witwatersrand, but could not be located. A second translation of part of the poem by Barry Davis, appears in Sherman’s article “Singing in the Silence” (48). My own translation is of the Yiddish excerpt that appeared in *Dorem Afrike* (Jan.-Mar.1984 12).

That blood you will never be able to wash away,
Your shame became extinguished within you
And your streets are rotten now with murder.

Although we feel “aghast at the ghoulish facts... [d]istanced from the Holocaust as readers we need to engage emotionally, intellectually and imaginatively, as this is the only means to recover the experience” (S. Horowitz qtd. in Hartman 57). It is in these ways that poetry may have a “more profound impact than historical writing” (Schiff xiv), though making no claim to being factually correct. Fram’s poems, by expressing personal wounds, also record the “traces of an existence” (Wierkorva qtd. in Hartman 25), of a lost place and people in a shattered world. In so doing, they epitomise what “the great realist novelists from Stendhal to Proust knew, that individual lives are shaped by historical forces, where the individual becomes “the events of the world” (Chagall 1986), and those forces “show up in the texture of the intimately personal” (Eagleton “TLS Books of the Year 2010”). Hence, by evoking the impact of the Shoah on himself and his family, Fram’s poems throw some light on “‘the history of a culture’ within ‘the troubled experience of the individual’” (Everett qtd. in Bennett 111).

Fram’s Holocaust Poems and Memory

Walter Benjamin stated: “Every image of the past that is not recognised by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably” (qtd. in Peterson 160), and Jews have “preserve[d] for nearly two millennia a community of rememberers” (Ezrahi 234). In the following section, I suggest that, by memorialising the beauty and destruction of his birthplace Lithuania in poems such as *Dos letste kapitl*, ‘Lesterung’ and ‘An entfer der velt,’ Fram prevents its complete obliteration. In so doing, the poems become more than the products of aesthetics.

Fram addresses Lithuania affectionately and possessively in ‘*Dos letste kapitl*’ as ‘*Mayn Lite, mayn heymland*’ (‘My Lithuania, my homeland’) (51). In ‘*Lesterung*,’ addressing her as ‘*mayn land*’ (‘my land’) (1), he lovingly describes how his Jewish countrymen went about their age-old activities, making their own wine and shepherding their livestock in a peaceful farming community and seemingly timeless *shtetl* environment,

Di yidn dayne vaynmakher, un poyerim, un shmidn,
Di yidn dayne pastekher – Yisroelim un Menashes,
Vos flegn fitern di stades tsign heymish oyf der pashe
Un hamern un gisn kiers un klezayen. (10-13)

The Jews your winemakers, and peasants, and blacksmiths,
The Jews your shepherds – Israels and Menashes,
Who would graze the herds of goats gently in the pasture
And hammer and cast ritual washstands and weapons.

The sense of peace is magnified by linking the local farmers to biblical ones, the “Yisroelim un Menashes” / “Israels and Menashes” (11), as the poet expresses his longing for his compatriots,

Tsu yene felker frayntlekhe, vos hobn mir a shtikl dakh
Gegebn vu nit iz avektsuleygn, oyf dervayl, mayn kop dem midn.
(6-7)

To those friendly people who gave me a little shelter
Gave somewhere to lay down my tired head for a while.

Similarly, in ‘Dos letste kapitl,’ Fram recalls a time when the land was “bagosn mit flamen / Fun gilderner hits un fun gilderner shefe / Un breyt hot di erd ire orems tseefnt” / “flooded with flames / Of golden heat and gilded abundance / And then the earth spread her arms wide” (4-6). Through the use of personification, the country’s abundance is intensified as she embraces her Jewish children, “Azoy vi a mame” / “like a mother” (7), which may be linked to the joy and bounty of “mame-erd” / “mother earth” as described in ‘In an Afrikaner baginen.’

However, as the same pastures become killing fields, the mother becomes murderess and the love-song becomes a dirge,

Mayn Lite, mayn heymland, vi ken ikh dos gloybn,
Az du host di yidn bay zikh dort geshokhtn,

Du host zey dervorgn,
Mit dayne farblutikte negl atsinder,
Du host zey dershtikt – dayne eygene kinder!
(51-55)

My Lithuania, my homeland, how can I believe it,
That you slaughtered the Jews there in your midst,
You strangled them,
Now with your bloody fingers,
You choked them – your own children!

As the acts of brutality continue, all that is left are the “meysim, harugim un kupes mit beyner” / “murdered, the dead and piles of bones” (49), and “A yomer fun kreyen vos pikn di beyner” / “A lamentation of crows that pick the bones” (47), where use of the unusual collective noun intensifies the sorrow. As a result, the poet wants to take action against the enemy himself, wants to take “Nekome far alte farpaynikte zeydes, / Far gantse fartilikte yidishe eydes” / “Revenge for old tortured grandfathers, / For entire annihilated Jewish communities” (85-86). The contemporary tragedy is magnified by linking it to a biblical episode in “Vos zaynen avek tsu di shvartse akeydes” / “That are gone to the black bindings of Isaac” (87). However, whereas Isaac was spared, there is no redemption for the Jewish people; whereas Abraham downed his knife at God’s bidding, the poet himself considers taking up his weapon,

Ikh veys nit tsetumlt, vos ikh volt gedarft ton,
Nor ven kh’volt itst kenen a meser a sharf ton,
A sharf ton a meser azoy vi a britve,

Volt ikh dayne merder, mayn yidishe Litve,
Di gorgls tsheshnitn mit heyser nekome. (77-81)

I did not know, confused, what I needed to do,
But if I could now sharpen a knife,
Sharpen a knife like a razor,

I would cut the throats of your murderers,
My Jewish Lithuania, in burning revenge.

In this way he would express his anger and anguish, delivering the biblical punishment, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, to avenge his brothers, his sister, his parents and his community.

These Holocaust poems evoke Fram's personal responses to the fate of a silenced people, focusing their narrative so that "individual anecdotes, images and objects serve as 'points of memory' opening small windows on the past" (Hirsch and Spitzer xix). While the poems may be seen to defy Adorno's stricture in that they "distil...the complex anguish of the event into a few perfectly finished lines or pages" (Gubar 558), yet, by connecting writer and reader to a lost past, they go some way to resisting the historical amnesia of the Lithuanian Holocaust. Hence Fram may be categorised as "a poet who clothes adversity in poetic form [and so] immortalises it in an everlasting monument" (Kaplan qtd. in Aaron 9).

Bearing Witness and Offering Testimony

It may be argued that poetry provides a significant means of recording testimony. According to Burke, "All that is needed for evil to succeed is for decent human beings to do nothing" (qtd. in Schiff xxi). However, before the Eichmann Trial in Jerusalem, from April 1961 onwards, many victims could not bring themselves to talk or write about the Holocaust: "The problem [lay] not only in the survivor's inability to speak the unspeakable; it [lay] also in our inability – as non-participants – to imagine the unimaginable" (Horowitz qtd. in Hartman 45). Non-victims could not comprehend what had happened, nor could they listen to the survivors. The trial served as the catalyst to assist those who had not done so before to come forward, evoking their sense of moral obligation to give testimony, in that "to remain silent would surely only compound the evil" (Schiff xxii). As Sutskever stated, "affirmation of life ... is not only an act of personal survival but one of cultural continuity as well, an imperative that derives from the fear that only a dying ember might be left of the Jewish community in Europe" (qtd. in Aaron 32). It also gives the dead what Ruth Wisse calls a "poetic grave" (qtd. in Sutskever 10). Thus survival, the need to tell the story of that survival and bearing witness may become deeply intertwined "reciprocal acts" (Des Pres 31). In 'Dos letste kapitl,' for example, the survivor-poet Fram,

wanting to take revenge for the death of “gantse fartilikte yidishe eydes” / “entire annihilated Jewish communities” (88), tries to do so, not with the sword, but with memorialising words.

Further, where “the plaintiff himself is divested of the means to state his own case” (Lyotard 8), a witness or commentator, in this case the poet, has the responsibility to do so for him, “to bear witness to differends” (8). Hence, Primo Levi describes how it was the experience itself and the need to bear witness that “turned me into a writer” (qtd. in Langer 106), in that “the reason for writing itself is to conserve and save life from death and forgetting” (Kearney 48). In addition, R. B. Kitaj states, “Jews should not hand Hitler a posthumous victory by forgetting their heritage” (qtd. in Sinclair 6), while Elie Wiesel, another writer-survivor, asserts that the telling of their stories gives those who did not survive “the voice that was denied them” (qtd. in Kearney 48).

Thus, in ‘Dos letste kapitl,’ Fram bears witness for the annihilated men and women, grandmothers and grandfathers, brides, grooms and children unable to testify for themselves:

Oy vey iz mir, Lite – ot zaynen, ot lign –
Azoy fil harugim: – mayn khaver, mayn bester,
Mayn shokhn, mayn korev, mayn eynstike shvester. (74-76)

Oh woe is me, Lithuania – here they are, here lie –
So many slaughtered: – my friend, my best friend,
My neighbour, my relative, my only sister.

Numerous Yiddish books of remembrance similarly honour family members and friends by name, describing *shtetl* types such as the *treger* (carrier), candle maker, soda-water maker and bagel seller, in this way also recording that lost way of life. Two such volumes were published in South Africa, the *Yisker-bukh fun Rakishok un umgegnd* (Memorial Book of Rakishok and Surroundings) (1952), and the *Yisker-bukh fun Khelm* (Memorial Book of Chelm) (1954).⁶⁴ Personal immigrant narratives are also recorded against an “historical backdrop” (Hartman 6) in *Memoirs: Our*

⁶⁴ The tradition was begun after World War II. Both of these volumes were edited by Melekh Bakalzuk-Felin.

Stories; Our Lives (Frankel 2010). However, such narrative coherence and direct representation have their limitations in expressing depth of personal responses. Hence, “a search may be necessary to find new rules to express this feeling” (Lang 13), and Fram’s ‘An entfer der velt’ offers testament to the suffering of the Jewish people in general and, more particularly, to the suffering of his parents during the Holocaust. It provides a reminder of the past that Walter Benjamin feared would otherwise be lost, as previously mentioned. To this end, the poem deploys images such as the yellow star, columns of people on the death march, gas ovens, ritual objects, the lime-kiln and the black smoke as reminders. It also makes reference to the *Shma Yisroel*,⁶⁵ in “Vu s’hot zayn letstn Shma Yisroel oysgelebt mayn tate, / Vu s’hot mayn mame oysgehoykht ir letstn hoykh” / “Where my father lived out his last *Shma Yisroel*, / Where my mother breathed her last breath of air” (3-4). In those direst of circumstances, as death approached, his father was able to say the final prayer before death, his mother was prevented from doing so, and “Vu brider zaynen tsu dem toyt farlitene gegangen, / Vu oyfhelekh geshtelt hobn in vakl zeyer shtiln trot” / “Where brothers went to their deaths with resignation, / Where infants trod their quiet shaky steps” (5-6). The adjective “letstn” (“last”), appears twice, the use of the adjectives “farlitene” (“with resignation”) and “shtiln” (“quiet”), and the lines “Hot men keseyder unz geharget un gevorgn? – / Vos greser s’iz der mord – alts freylekher iz zey.” / “They constantly killed and choked us? – / The greater the killing – the happier they are” (13-14), emphasise the poet’s despair.

In addition, the poem lists the names of the cities that were destroyed, in this way engaging with the historicity of the destruction,

Azoy zaynen gegangn yidn tsu dem shayter –
 Fun Varshe un Pariz, fun Kovne un fun Bon.
 Milyonen hobn zikh getsoygn vayter, vayter
 Tsum shvartsn eshafot ... oy, gantse zeks milyon! (17-20).
 Thus did the Jews go to the pyre –
 From Warsaw and Paris, from Kovne and from Bonn.
 Millions were drawn further, further
 To black execution scaffolds ... oh, a whole six million!

⁶⁵ Prayer central to the liturgy, said twice a day, at critical moments in a person’s life and at the point of death (Deut. 6, 4-9.)

By using the use of the pronouns “Ikh,” “unz” and “unzere,” (“I,” “us” and “our”) (13, 25, 27, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52), Fram again implies his own presence in the killing fields. His bonds with his family and community are so strong and his empathy so deep that he feels he has suffered the same fate, even though he was not physically present. By so doing, he also inserts himself as a witness to what happened, affirming the belief that failure to speak or write about what happened creates circumstances to commit the “perfect crime [which] does not consist [only] in killing the victim or the witnesses ... but rather in obtaining the silence of the witnesses” (Lyotard 8).

Thus, as can be seen from this discussion, Fram’s poetic texts confront the threat of historical amnesia, giving voice to those who have been silenced, bearing the double responsibility of functioning as testimony as well as literature. As Sutskever⁶⁶ stated,

I who saw the destruction of my people felt that
we, the small group of Yiddish writers who
survived, could with the power of our pen put in
no claim for the blood of Ponar and of
Auschwitz, but we could and must put in our
claim for the burning of our language on the
bonfires, by giving it rebirth. (qtd. in Leftwich
Sutskever 23)

Sutskever believed that his poems were proof that he was still alive and they remain as “important interpretations of the destruction of European Jewry in Yiddish” (Cammy e-mail 15 Jan. 2011). Fram’s poems about that destruction may be viewed in a similar light. However, “it [would be] an injustice ... if one seeks to reduce [the Holocaust] to the act of witnessing ... [or] for ‘overcoming’ what no power can overcome” (Hamburger iv). Although poetry may be seen to be significant to the act of bearing witness and giving testimony, the “act of remembering is its own justification” (Ignatieff qtd. in Hartman 7), and the poem remains an artwork in and of itself.

⁶⁶ During the Nazi occupation, Sutskever helped the partisan underground in the Vilna ghetto to rescue hundreds of the city’s most valuable literary treasures.

Fram's Poetry and Catharsis

Sylvia Plath regarded the Shoah as a test case in which “poetry could serve as a vehicle to convey what it means for the incomprehensible to occur” (Heven qtd. in Lang 123). Through the use of metaphor, contradiction, encapsulation and fragmentation, poetry is able to express otherwise unsayable matters, those that “cannot be fully articulated or made visible” (Peterson 160). It was in that “most catastrophic of circumstances, the Holocaust, [that] the quickest reaction came in poetry” (Aaron 1), indicating how, as Chaim Kaplan commented in the Warsaw Ghetto, “More than bread we need poetry at a time when we don’t seem to need it at all” (Aaron 9). So, for example, Sutskever was driven to write poetry at the very time that he was experiencing torment, and the spirit that drove his writing helped him to survive, as if its regenerative “mystic power could save the singer from death” (Wisse qtd. in Sutskever 11). Thus, by relieving the poet of his emotions and offering “a vessel to hold within its form, at least for a little while, whirling thought and feelings” (Kearney 60), poetry may have some “measure of success in transcending the wretchedness of the present moment” (Aaron 71), and may “provide catharsis” (Lyotard qtd. in Aaron 14).

Fram’s ‘Dos letste kapitl’ opens on an optimistic note, with the line, “A yid iz gekumen fun veg a farshvitster” / “A Jew came along the road all sweaty” (2). This is an historical reference to the arrival of the first Jews in Lithuania, whose communal expression of Jewish life sustained their continued existence. There they celebrated and perpetuated religious observances, “Shabosim, yon-toyvim, havdoles un kidesh! / Barmitsves un khasenes” / “Sabbaths, festivals, Havdalah ceremonies and Kidush! / Bar Mitzvahs and weddings” (21-22). With recourse to “multidimensional, metaphorical defamiliarisation” (Peterson 7) and the employment of images, the intensity of Fram’s poem “compels the reader to listen to these painful histories and remember them” (Peterson 13). The poem provides a reminder of a world that is no more, a space in which the poet may struggle to reconcile horror and hope, attempting to express the unspeakable “in ways that surpass most other contextualising methods” (Aaron 14), providing a place for his own catharsis,

Un hoykh volt ikh veln atsind a geshrey ton,
Di velt zol derzen, di velt zol derhern,

Un demolt vet efsher azoy dokh nit vey ton,
Un s'veln nit shtikn azoy mikh di tren,
Un efsher, efsher mayn veytok vet laykhter dan vern.... (91-95)

And loudly now I would want to scream out,
That the world should recognise, the world should take heed,
And then maybe it would not hurt so much,
And maybe my tears would not choke me,
And perhaps, perhaps my pain would then become lighter....

Here, the poet offers his responses directly and overtly to try and represent what may otherwise be unrepresentable, to express the inexpressible and speak the unspeakable, and so give the reader some access to the unthinkable.

Fram's Holocaust poems transform what he had witnessed and endured into art. Although trauma can have no clear line of articulation, poetry may offer this in some way, because "[i]t had to be said or sung somehow" (Syrkin qtd. in Omer-Sherman 83). The poems are a response to the bloodbath that erased Fram's Jewish Lithuanian homeland, a singing in the silence to the memory of his fellow Lithuanian Jews, articulating powerful human emotions and recording abhorrent memories of historical events. As "inappropriate as art might [seem] to human suffering, no other vehicle of expression articulates it more convincingly or enduringly" (Aaron 9), perhaps offering some form of relief and release and supporting the suggestion that poetry is an important cathartic outlet. Ultimately, Adorno himself acknowledged its validity because "[p]erennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream" ("Negative Aesthetics" 362).

Fram's Holocaust Poems and Prayer

According to Howe and Greenberg, "in the desolation of memory, Yiddish poets find themselves turning back to the old Jewish God, not so much the God of orthodoxy or even the God their fathers had worshipped, but a God inseparable from the Jewish fate, a God with whom one pleads and quarrels" (53-54). In this section, I indicate how Fram's poems offer a space in which the poet speak to his God, at times railing against Him and at others praying for the eternal rest of the victims.

Thus the poem ‘Lesterung’ decries the way his Jewish compatriots were doomed despite their belief in God. As a result of this, the poet suffers his own crisis of belief, abandoning his observance of religious rituals. He stops beating his breast during the litany of *al-kheytt*⁶⁷ on *Yom Kippur* and also ceases saying *ma toyvu ohalekho*,⁶⁸

Ikh hob mayn altn Got in hartsn merer nisht getrogn,
Un kh’hob zikh keyn al-kheytt fartsitert nisht geshlogn,
...
Hob ikh shoyn merer nisht gezogt ma toyvu ohalekho.... (35-36, 39)

I no longer carried my old God in my heart,
I no longer in trepidation said *al-kheytt*
...
I no longer said *ma toyvu ohalekho*....

He also gives up donning *tfilin*⁶⁹ in the mornings and binding the leather thongs of the *shel-rosh* around his head. His *talis*⁷⁰ bag lies forgotten as he also no longer puts on his *talis*, no longer attending prayer services at the synagogue:

In *tfilim*⁷¹ -zekl hobn lang gefoylt shoyn mayne *tfilin*!
Es hot zikh der *shel-rosh* badekt dort mit a grinem shiml,
Un s’iz mayn *talis* heyliker farshemt geblibn lign. (42-44)

My *tfilin* have long been rotting in my *tfilin* bag!
And the *shel-rosh* has become covered with a green mildew,
And my holy *talis* lay shamefully unused.

⁶⁷ For the sin: Prayer uttered on the Day of Atonement, asking for forgiveness.

⁶⁸ Part of the opening lines of the morning prayer when praying in the synagogue, not at home (Numbers 24: 5).

⁶⁹ Phylacteries. This includes the *shel rosh* that is mentioned in the verse, which is bound around the head, as opposed to the *shel yad* that is bound around the hand.

⁷⁰ Prayer shawl.

⁷¹ Appears as *tfilim* in Fram’s text, but *tfilin* is the correct form.

The poem allows the poet intellectual room to do battle with these conflicts and confront the shame he feels at having abandoned these rituals of his own accord, whereas the victims were prevented from observing them, then murdered for their beliefs. Despite his negative feelings, the poet feels able to address God directly,⁷² perhaps indicating his continuing belief in His existence in spite of everything, “Farvos hostu geshvign, Got, ven ikh hob zikh gematert” / “Why did you keep silent, God, while I suffered” (51) a line omitted in the version in *A shvalb oyfn dakh*. The poem expresses anger, disillusionment and bitterness at God because of His silence and lack of compassion towards His people,

Un vi a Got fun rakhmim, fun tsoren a farbrenter
 Nisht ongetsundn mit a treyst bay zey di shvartse shoybn?
 Zey zaynen dokh geven getray tsu dir durkh ale doynes,
 Zey zaynen dokh gegangen frum in ale dayne drokhim. (57-60)

And as a God of mercy, of zealous wrath
 Did you not light up their black panes with some comfort?
 After all they were faithful to you through all generations,
 After all they went piously in all your ways.

In his anger and despair, the poet interrogates His actions, aligning God with the enemy in “Hostu aleyn zey gor gefirt tsu shekhtn in Treblinke” / “You yourself took them to be slaughtered in Treblinka” (70), and accusing him outright in, “Derfar hostu di gaz-oyvns farfult mit mayne brider, / Un hostu dem gzar aroysgelozt – dayn stade tsu farbrenen?” / “Therefore you loaded the gas ovens with my brothers, / And pronounced your decree – to burn your flock?” (77-78). The reference to the Jewish people as His “flock” is both in keeping with the pastoral background of the poet’s Lithuanian community referred to earlier, and also echoes the psalms of the Shepherd and his shepherd, David; juxtaposing this with the reference to the extermination camp makes it all the more horrifying.

⁷² The designation here is different from that of the landscape poems, as for example in ‘In an Afrikaner baginen,’ where the creation of nature is attributed to the *boyre*, a more general term for the Creator, as opposed to the religious one.

The poem ends with the powerful image of the *Shma Yisroel* sighing upward from the chimneys of the crematorium,

Oy, Got, ot hostu shoyn gezen, vi iz avek tsuzamen
Tsum shayter-hoyfn nokhamol dayn gantser groyser kool,
Un zikh gelozn far dayn shem fartsukn fun di flamen –
Fun vanent s’hot aroysgeshpart der letster Shma Yisroel ... (79-82)

Alas, God, now you have seen, how together they have gone
To the pyre-mounds once again your whole great community,
And they let themselves be gobbled up by the flames for the sake of your name –
From where was sighed the final *Shma Yisroel* ...

Through the reference to many Jewish religious rituals and images, the poem succeeds in “generat[ing] the most exact correlation for feelings and states of consciousness in response to the unfolding catastrophe ... connected with the mystery of religious rites and myths of suffering and endurance, immortality and mortality, continuity and finality” (Aaron 1). This could not be achieved with the use of historical facts alone.

In the following lines from ‘An entfere der velt,’ the poet imagines what happened to the victims because there was no intervention, commenting on what was the only-too-real response from the world,

Oyf dem – di gantse velt gekukt hot un geshvign,
Geshtanen glaykhgiltik mit aropgelozte hent,
Un meysim kupesvayz hot men gelozn lign,
Un nokhanand gebrent, geshokhtn un gebrent ... (21-25).

On this – the whole world looked on and kept silent,
Stood by indifferent with hands hanging at their sides,
And they left the dead lying in piles,
And burnt them continuously, slaughtered and burnt...

Nevertheless, as the poem goes on to intimate, redemption came when a hand reached out to help. With the concomitant sense of relief, the poem offers words reminiscent of a prayer,

Biz vanen s'hot a nes unz oysgeleyzt, bafrayte,
Es hot bavizn zikh an oysgeshtrekte hant.
Mit hofn un mit treyst, mit zeungen banayte
Zi hot unz drayst gefirt tsurik tsu unzer land. (25-28)

Until a miracle redeemed us, freed us,
An outstretched hand appeared.
With hope and with comfort, with renewed visions
It took us boldly back to our land.

After the miracle, the following lines look forward to the replenishment offered by the day of rest established by God at the time of creation,

Un himlen iber unz gekukt hobn derfreyte
Mit shabesdiker ru oyf pratse fun der vokh ... (55-56)

And heavens above us looked down delighted
With Sabbath-like rest after the toil of the week ...

Once the apocalypse has passed, the earth regenerates, as “S'iz erd gevorn faykht, bafrukhpert fun di toyen, / Vos ayngeszapt hot zat do yeder boym un kveyt” / “Earth became moist, made fruitful by the dew, / Which each tree and blossom absorbed” (35-36), and the poem ends on a hopeful note for the poet's community, so that “Di reshtlekh fun a folk, der iberblayb fun pleyte / Vet opvaksn tsurik un lindern dem brokh” / “The remnant of a people, the remaining survivors / Will grow back and soothe the catastrophe” (53-54).

In addition to the references to God, some of Fram's poems also make use of the aesthetic of ritual prayer.⁷³ Thus, in 'Dos letste kapitl' for example, lists of artifacts both memorialise individuals and intensify the effects of destruction,

A shleyer ikh ze fun a yidishe kale,
Ot ze ikh a shtrayml, a yidishe hitl,
Un ot iz a vayser, a heyliker kitl.
Ot valgert zikh elnt a zilberner bekher
Fun velkhn mayn tate gemakht hot nokh kidesh ...
(69-73)

A veil I see of a Jewish bride,
Here I see a fur hat, a Jewish hat,
And here is a white, a holy *kitl*.⁷⁴
Here lies in desolation a silver goblet
With which my father still made Kidush...

By enumerating each item of clothing and jewellery, these become symbols of the destruction of their owners. They also serve as reminders of a way of life and the people who engaged in it, the poet's parents, grandparents and friends in particular, before all was desecrated and destroyed,

Ot trogstu di hemder fun unzere zeydes,
Vos oysgeton hostu fun zeyere layber.
Ot trogn mit khutspe atsind dayne vayber,
Di tsirungen fun mayn gehargeter bobn,
Vos unter mayn shvel du host tsinish bagrobn.
(61-66)

⁷³ One example is the *al khey*t devotion of *Yom Kippur*.

⁷⁴ White garment in which a deceased Jew is buried; also worn by many religious Jews on *Yom Kippur*.

Here you wear the shirts of our grandfathers,
Which you stripped from their bodies.
Here your wives wear now with impertinence,
The jewellery of my murdered grandmother,
That you cynically buried at my lintel.

The poem thus also offers a vehicle for a conversation with God. In so doing, it may be likened to the *kadish*, the mourner's prayer, intoned at the graveside and thereafter on the *yortsayt*, the anniversary of the day of death, providing a fitting memorial for the dead, as a tombstone would do. This is particularly poignant, since for those buried in mass graves or incinerated, there was no such honour or ritual of remembrance. In these ways, Fram's poetry provides a spiritual space of hope and connection with God.

In this chapter, I suggest that Fram's poems offer lines of continuity to the ruins, recording a personal response to historical circumstances. They enable the imaginative reconstruction of past events, reassembling the fragments of a lost culture, the once-vibrant Jewish community in Eastern Europe, the shards of the Shoah. By providing solace, however temporarily, they serve as a vehicle of moral and cultural sustenance. As an affirmation of traditional values, they serve as testimony to a spiritual defiance to keep the souls of the condemned from dying. In so doing, they "enable us to reflect ... on how memory and transmission work both to reveal and to conceal certain traumatic recollections, and how fragmentary, tenuous, and deceptive our access to the past can be" (Hirsch and Spitzer xix). They therefore acknowledge what Aaron calls the "rupture and separation, the condition of his people" (9), providing a "defence against forgetfulness" (9). In connecting writer and reader to a lost past, the poems go some way to withstand the historical amnesia of the Lithuanian Holocaust.

Thus I suggest that the writing of poetry is an artistic "inner quest" (Horowitz qtd. in Hartman 45), different in intent from documentation and testimony, and one that offers the possibility of psychic recovery. Such emergent poems cannot be simply dismissed as decoration and ornamentation. They also provide a place for the poet to invoke his God and to address religious and spiritual concerns about matters of life and death. Through the aesthetic expression of tragic content, they highlight the enormity of calamity, where through "a combination of beauty and horror" (de

Beauvoir qtd. in Lanzmann iv), “a terrible beauty is born” (Yeats ‘Easter 1916’). In that the metaphors of poetry evoke the wounds and the metaphors survive, “art is what we go back to when everything is over” (Albahari qtd. in Langer 13).

Chapter Five: Fram's Biography and his Poetry

'A poet's best biography is his poetry' (Tennyson qtd. in Aldridge 414).

In the previous chapters, I approach Fram's poetry within academic orthodoxy, focusing on aesthetic and thematic analysis, literariness and literary quality. In this chapter, I offer an alternative approach, suggesting that the poems also have a variable relationship with biography and that knowledge of Fram's biography may in some way enrich the reading of his poems.

Against Biography

Numerous critics offer arguments against biography: Derrida contends that there is "nothing beyond the text" (Peterson 8), and Barthes asserts the text's supremacy stating that "we do not read circumstances; we read books" (qtd. in Koelb 13). Barthes also comments on how "the image of literature ... is tyrannically centred on the author, his person, his life, his tastes, his passions" (in Bennett 110). Wimsatt and Beardsley argue that it is the use of objective and aesthetic criticism that "enables us to distinguish a skillful poem" (6), because "structure and content are determined by literary convention" (79). Therefore it is "the text itself [that] remains to be dealt with, the analysable vehicle" (13), as this consisting of aesthetic and poetic devices, simile, metaphor, rhythm, rhyme and form. These critics also draw attention to the "danger of confusing personal and poetic studies" (10), because preoccupation with biography may distort the critic's view, pointing out how "false judgment is likely to involve the intentional fallacy" (15). The latter refers to the "confusion [that may occur] between the poem and its origins ... when trying to derive the standard of criticism from the psychological causes of the poem ... [from] biography" (21).

T. S. Eliot regards poetry as "a purely impersonal instrument aimed at finding objective and universal truths" (Aldridge 413). Asserting the autonomy of art, his theory for its interpretation stresses "depersonalisation and rationality" (413), while opposing the inclusion of individual experience and biography as source material or for critical analysis. Eliot also asserts that "poetry should be an escape from, a diminution of, rather than an expression of, personality" (qtd. in Aldridge 418), and states,

The only way of expressing emotions in the form of art is by finding an ‘objective correlative’, in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion ... [in] accord with the modern reaction against vagueness and the direct statement of feelings in poetry – an oft-cited example is Shelley’s ‘Indian Serenade’: I die, I faint, I fail – in favour of definitiveness, impersonality and descriptive concreteness. (qtd. in Abrams 115-116).

According to Eliot, a work of art is neither a vehicle for self-expression, an embodiment of experience nor “a document for biography” (Wellek and Warren 79). In that literature creates its own world, which may or may not be connected with the defining moments in the life of the writer, biographical knowledge may therefore obscure the critical assessment of the literary value and aesthetic merits of the work. D. H. Lawrence also warned that even when there appears to be a close relationship between the work of art and the life of an author, “this can never be construed as meaning that the work of art is a copy of life” (qtd. in Aldridge 418). Because poetic licence and the poet’s use of rhetoric may alter, simplify, emphasise or conceal aspects to create the aesthetic object, may be “private or idiosyncratic; not part of the work as a linguistic fact, consisting of revelations (in journals, for example, or letters or reported conversations) about how or why the poet wrote the poem” (Wimsatt and Beardsley 10), critic and reader should be aware of the pitfalls associated with such external evidence.

Criticism that does not take this into account affects truths about “inspiration, authenticity, biography, literary history and scholarship, ... especially its allusiveness” (3), because “[d]escriptive words such as ‘sincerity,’ ‘fidelity,’ ‘spontaneity,’ ‘authenticity,’ ‘genuineness,’ ‘originality’ cannot be equated with terms such as ‘integrity,’ ‘relevance,’ ‘unity,’ ‘function,’ ‘maturity,’ ‘subtlety,’ ‘adequacy,’ which are more precise terms of evaluation, that is ‘expression,’ do not always mean aesthetic achievement ” (5). Thus, if “the poet’s aim ... is to be judged at the moment of the creative act, that is to say, by the art of the poem itself” (4), what is important is whether the words on the page are the best ones in the best order.

The foregoing discussion highlights the negative aspects of including biographical information in the assessment of literature. However, I nevertheless suggest that, given that my project concerns the process of recovery, biographical details about Fram cannot simply be ignored, especially where some of his poems seem to invite such a reading. This approach is supported by John Keats's comments that distinguish two types of poet, one who obliterates personality and one who displays it in order to "draw a self-portrait, to confess, to express himself" (Wellek and Warren 77). Thus, for example, Seamus Heaney "doesn't flinch from defining poetry as personal expression" (Bennett 117), and sourcing information on the life and times of the poet as a "whole man" (Aldridge 415) may in fact "help us understand ... [his] aesthetic expression" (415). It may therefore be useful to avoid rigid separation between Fram's life and the content of his poems, in order that their underlying meaning may be better understood. While the poems do not provide documentary evidence of his life, interpreting them in a biographical light may enrich our reading of them.

Fram's Life and his Poems

Fram was born in Ponevezh, a *shtetl* in Lithuania in 1903. Together with many other Jewish families who lived in the Pale of Settlement, "his family was expelled to Samara, White Russia at the start of World War I by the Czar Nicholas II for security reasons" (Sherman "David Fram Centenary Tribute" 2). Fram received a traditional Jewish *cheder*⁷⁵ education. In addition, he studied with private tutors, unusual for a boy of his background. He matriculated at a Russian Soviet workers' school in Krakinove in 1921 and then attended the military academy in Ukmerge,⁷⁶ Lithuania in order to avoid conscription. There, he boarded with Yudl Mark, a linguist and educator who became his tutor and mentor. In 1926, Fram spent three months in Toulouse at an agricultural college, before returning home, then left Lithuania in 1927 to join an uncle in South Africa. His education and devotion to learning gave him the wherewithal to become a writer despite the vicissitudes of migration.

As discussed in Chapter Two, his journeys between Lithuania, Russia, France, South Africa, England and Rhodesia epitomise those of the wandering Jew, and his responses to the resulting loss of his traditional way of life and his family influenced

⁷⁵ Hebrew school.

⁷⁶ Wilkomir.

the content of his poems. The poem ‘Mayn opfor’ describes his departure from his *shtetl*, providing a vehicle for soul-searching in the mode of the Romantic poet. It is subjective, self-reflective, introspective and emotional, where the ‘I’ of the poem may be inferred to be the poet himself, given the detailed references to his sister sewing the shirt for him, his mother packing sweetmeats and his father waving goodbye. In reality, Fram did not return to Lithuania and never again enjoyed such times of family togetherness. Being in possession of this information about his “personal emotions and experiences” (Wellek and Warren 77) extends and deepens our interpretation of the poem, making it the more moving, whereas “the dramatic intensity of the situation and psychological significance of the poem may be lost if we don’t know the background” (Aldridge 415). Similarly, as indicated in Chapter Two, the poem, ‘Mayn mame hot mir tsugeshikt a kishn’ can also be read as an evocation of the poet’s personal experience of immigration, where the cushion serves as an image that refers to a specific time in his life, the poem a container for his personal feelings and a reminder of his journey.

Several other poems containing descriptions of longing for the original homeland may be understood as personal, for example, “Ikh benk azoy mid nokh a shtikele shvartse, tsekvolene erd / Nokh harbstike regns oyf felder un blotes oyf endlozn trakt” / “I long so tiredly for a piece of black, swollen earth / For autumn rains on the fields and for mud on the endless road” (‘Ikh benk’ 1-2), and “Nokh vos ikh hob an elnter gebenkt vi ir fun lang” / “For which I like you have forlornly longed for ages” (‘Fun tate-mames yidishe’ 8). Similarly, the poet’s admiration for his grandfather, the man of the land, is recorded in his poem ‘Baym zeydn.’ Fram emulated his life style by going farming in Hekpoort, South Africa and in Rhodesia, as described in ‘In an Afrikaner baginen’ and ‘Oyf Transvaler erd.’ In ‘Burn,’ the descriptions of the land and its inhabitants, the Boers,⁷⁷ the English farmers and the black farm hands provide insights into Fram’s background, belief system and worldview once he was in Africa.

In 1934, Fram worked at the Imperial War Museum, London researching the anti-Semitic film *Jew Süß*, emphasising the importance Jewish history had for him. Later, his own family became victims of that history. In 1942, his mother, Shifre Mine, father Yoysef Ber and sister Ester who had remained in Lithuania were

⁷⁷ Afrikaans farmers.

murdered in the Ponevezh death camp,⁷⁸ as were many members of his extended family and community.⁷⁹ These facts offer the reader additional insights into Fram's Holocaust poems and so argue for the relevance of a biographical reading of 'Dos letste kapitl':

Mayn Lite, mayn heymland, vi ken ikh dos gloybn,
Az du host di yidn bay zikh dort geshokhtn,
Du host zey dervorgn,
Mit dayne farblutikte negl atsinder,
Du host zey dershtikt – dayne eygene kinder!
Di hent dayne zaynen mit blut haynt bagosn,
Dos blut vest shoyn keynmol fun zey nit farvashn,
Es hot zikh in dir dayn bizoyen farloshn
Un s'zaynen farfoylt itst mit mord dayne gasn. (51-58)

My Lithuania, my homeland, how can I believe it,
That you slaughtered the Jews there in your midst,
You strangled them,
Now with your bloody fingers,
You choked them – your own children!
Your hands today are drenched with blood,
That blood you will never be able to wash away,
Your shame became extinguished within you
And your streets are rotten now with murder.

Here again, knowledge of Fram's background deepens the reader's understanding and provides useful insights into his choice of subject matter and frame of mind, while confining interpretation to the poem's aesthetics to "the realm of intellect ... as abstraction... an aesthetic artifact ... [may] dehumanise or depersonalise artistic creation" (Aldridge 413).

⁷⁸ Testimonies submitted by Itamar Borovitz, Fram's nephew to Yad Vashem (Ref: 6332599, 6332600, 6332601).

⁷⁹ Fram's only daughter, Shifra Mina, was named after his deceased mother, as is the custom amongst traditional Jews; the choice also affirms Fram's connection to his mother.

In the 1940s, Fram married Simone Watter in Johannesburg (ancestry.com). Originally from Bialystok, Poland, her forebears later established themselves in Antwerp, Belgium (ancestry.com), where they became leading diamond merchants (Sherman “What Balm” 10). Fram and his wife migrated to Britain in 1949, where he too tried to make good as a diamond dealer. This personal involvement in the trade gave him a unique vantage point and inside information that is reflected in the poem ‘Dimantn,’ written contemporaneously.⁸⁰ A narrative ballad in the tradition of earlier Yiddish poetry written in Europe, the poem is similar in its yearning tone, personal references to his family and the use of the first personal singular to the shorter lyrics, ‘Mayn mame hot mir tsugesht a kishn’ and ‘Mayn opfor.’ The Frams divorced sometime in 1952-3 (Fram letter to his sister Rivele, 2 Jan. 1954), and their daughter remained with her mother in London (Fram letter to his sister Rivele, 2 Jan. 1954). Telephone book and ship records of these years (ancestry.com) substantiate the time period of his residence there and the date of his return to South Africa with his second wife (Sherman “What Balm” 9). Fram died in Johannesburg in 1988 and there is no evidence that he ever saw his daughter again.

‘Dimantn’⁸¹ is a dramatic monologue in which the protagonist speaks to his daughter. The speaker is referred to as “dayn tate” / “your dad” (187), and the listener designated “my child” / “mayn kind” (1), terms of address that may legitimise a biographical reading. The poem offers what may be read as personal experience of the diamond industry, reflecting on universal issues of corruption and envy and referring to the impact of the trade on his relationship with his daughter and on himself. The narrator describes the diamonds as “brilyantn” / “brilliant,” as he shows them to her, “Du zest zey, mayn kind oto-do” / “You see them, my child, here” (1). He tries to convince her of the solace diamonds can bring “Far mide neshomes, – neshomes vi mayne” / “to tired souls, – souls such as mine” (25), and to “Neshomes fartrakhte, un yunge vi dayne” / “Souls thoughtful and young like yours” (26). He goes on to suggest how they may offer a fulfilling life to those, “Vos zukhn un benken, un filn, un lekhtsn / Neshomes farfulte mit veytok un krekhtsn, / Vos veynen in velt vi der elnter vint. / Neshomes fun mentshn, vos lebn vi hint” / “Who seek and long, and feel

⁸⁰ The original was whittled down from 200 to 135 lines. Numerous versions and translations may be located in the Fram Archives, University of Austin, Texas, pp 407-411. The poem also forms part of the collection *A shvalb oyfn dakh*.

⁸¹ Fram’s own English version appears in the Addendum. As this is not a literal translation, I have used my own translations of lines pertinent to my argument in the thesis.

and yearn, / Souls filled with pain and moaning, / Who cry out in a world like the lonely wind. / Souls of people who live like dogs” (27-30). Yet, in spite of their bright beauty and the attraction the diamonds hold for him, he admits that they “firn / In eygenem fayer” / “freeze / In their own fire” (20-21). This description also seems to imply his own bitterness and disillusionment in what he comes to realise is a soulless enterprise, supported by the fact that it made him “wealthy for a while only” (Sherman “Singing” 43).

The poet goes on to tell her that, “Brilyantn – far dir kh’hob, mayn kind, zey gezukht” / “Diamonds – for you, my child, I sought them” (31), so that “du vest vi ale zey tsiterik libn” / “you will love them with trembling like everyone else does” (34). The tone is coaxing as he tells her of the lengths to which he went in order to gather them for her, “Ikh hob nor in dimantn finster gegloybt, / Far zey hob ikh shtil vi a betler geknit / Un oftmol afile dem tayvl gelyobt” / “Gloomily, I only believed in diamonds, / Before them I kneeled quietly like a beggar / And often even praised the devil” (36-38). Now, holding them “gevaremt in buzem bay mir” / “warm to my breast” (47), “gevisht un sortirt / In tsimer bay shverer, farshlosener tir, / Mit finger fartsitert” / “polished and sorted / In a room behind heavy closed doors / With shaking fingers” (48-50), he sorts and cleans them to the point of obsession, “Mayn lebn fun zey hob ikh bloyz nor getrakht, / Ikh hob fun di shteyner gekholemt baynakht” / “In my life, I only thought about them, / I dreamt about them at night” (52-54). The expression of these passionate emotions evokes the poet’s personal response to and involvement with the stones, in contrast with the lack of any meaningful relationship with his daughter.

Fram’s letters (26 Aug. 1949; 29 Dec. 1949) affirm the difficulties he encountered in dealing in diamonds and his struggle to make a living. The anger and resentment expressed correlates with the bitter description in the poem, where he acknowledges how his nature has been changed by the diamonds and how he has become so much like them, so that “Flegt shtendik mayn harts vern harter un harter” / “My heart would harden more and more” (63), until “ikh hob derfild durkh tsendliger yorn, / Az ikh bin gevorn ingantsn farshteynert” / “I felt with the passing of the years / That I have become completely like stone” (68-69); and “Di dimantn hob ikh nor kalte geklibn / Un durkh zeyer fayer farfrom gevorn” / “I only gathered cold diamonds / And I have become frozen in their fire” (91-92). Thus, despite the attraction to the “oytsres” / “treasure” (72) that appear “heylik” / “holy” (73),

ultimately, “elnt in velt kh’bin farblibn aleyn nor” / “wretched in the world I remained alone” (70).

In various letters to his sisters, Fram also refers directly to his involvement with the trade, describing his difficulties in the acquisition and sale of ‘parcels’ of stones (Fram letter, 26 Aug. 1949). How he has been degraded by the trade is shown by his description of the corrupted nature of the people he has encountered in the trade, “vayber fun tunkele, zate haremen” / “women from satiated harems” (156), “dames fun raykhe salonen” / “women from rich salons” (158), as well as “hurn in nakht oysgelasan” / “lewd whores of the night” (159). It was they who had “gekoyft un farkoyft di brilyantn, / Gehandelt, geshvindlt, geyogt” / “bought and sold the diamonds / Trading, swindling, chasing” (132-133). And impure as they are, he recognises that they demean him too, because “Gekukt zey farshkluft vi a hunt in di oygn” / “I looked them in the eyes enslaved like a dog” (166). They cannot see past the shimmer of the stones, “Far zey hot er hel vi a shtern geblitst, / Un azh fun der zun hot er heyser gebrent / In zeyere karge, farfroyrene hent” / “It flared up for them bright as a star, / Burning even hotter than the sun / In their miserly, frozen hands” (102-104), so that “Bay alemen flegn di oygn tseflamen” / “Everyone’s eyes flamed” (112), and they “Flegt blaybn farshteynert, farklemt un fargliver” / “stood like stone, speechless and numb” (115). Devious and underhand, in a world where people cheat each other to get the best deal, he becomes their accomplice because, “In zeyere simkhes hob ikh zikh bateylikht, / Geven a farmitler fun ganeyve un mordn” / “I attended their festivities, / Was a participant in their thefts and murders” (167-168). He also recognises how the natural world mirrors his feelings: “Der vint oyf farlozene, elnte pleynen / Far mir flegt keseyder dan veynen un veynen” / “The wind on deserted, lonely plains / Would keep on crying and crying for me” (79-80). And it is these sentiments and responses that he tries to communicate to his daughter as he proffers his gift, “Ikh hob vi a mentsh nisht gekont merer lakhn, / Ikh hob nisht gekont merer gloybn un libn / Di ale gefiln kh’hob lang shoybn farlorn” / “I could no longer laugh like a human being, / I could no longer believe or love. / I have lost all these feelings for long” (88-90).

But her response is unequivocal as she casts away his gift of the stones, “Un haynt, ven far dir kh’hob gebrakht mayn farmegn, – / Hostu im tseshmishn in harbstikn regn” / “Today, when I brought you my riches, – / You threw them into the autumn rain” (171-172). Thus he realises from her response how “Du vest mit di dimantn mayne zikh shemen / Zikh shemen far mentshn, vos leydn un gloybn / In libe un

sheynkeyt” / “You are ashamed to have my diamonds / Ashamed for people who suffer, and believe / In love and beauty” (184-186). He becomes aware of the fact that, unlike himself, she has retained her purity and belief in moral values, and so “inem harbst bin ikh umetik eyner / Geblibn aley n mit di tayere shteyner” / “in autumn I am sad and alone / Remaining alone with the valuable stones” (179-180).

The description of the stones’ physical brightness contrasts with the blackness from which they are gathered and also intimates their potential for corruption, “Zey zaynen far mir in a finsterer sho / Bashafn gevorn durkh hent umbavuste / Durkh leydike teg un durkh ovntn puste” / “They were collected for me in a dark hour / Mined by unknown hands / Through empty days and hollow evenings” (2-4). The description of the miners’ travail also resonates in the poet’s social conscience, “Un hobn keynmol nisht bamerkt vi gelitn / Arum hobn mentshn fun hunger geshvoln” / “And they never noticed how people were suffering / Around them, swollen from hunger” (145-146), an empathy arising from his own suffering in Lithuania.

The image of darkness foreshadows what besets those whom the diamonds hold in their thrall. While the poem emphasises the beauty of the stones in descriptions such as “Un ist zeyer glants, zeyer kalter” / “And now their cold gleam” (8), and “Der glants fun brilyantn, – di fayerlekh grine, / Di fayerlekh royte, di gele, di bloye” / “The gleam of diamonds, – the fiery green, / The fiery red, the yellow, the blue” (14-15), there is also the contrast with their coldness in “Mit kaltkeyt fun toyter, fargliverter kelt” / “With coldness of dead, glazed cold” (11), and “Dan zestu di dimantn kalt, vi zey frim / In eygenem fayer” / “You see, the cold diamonds how they freeze / In their own fire” (20-21), building up to the contradiction that the diamonds are both “farsholtene” and “reyne,” accursed and clear, the impact of his own greed for possession of their beauty destroying his humanity, but not his daughter’s,

Bist raykher, avade, mayn kind, fun dayn tatn,
Fun yene farsholtene, reyne karatn.... (197-198)

You are, nevertheless, richer my child, than your father,
From those accursed, clear stones.

This reading of the poem combines aesthetic analysis of imagery, language and choice of subject matter with contextualisation by weaving Fram's personal history into the narrative, the poet's life reflected in his art.

While a number of Fram's poems such as 'In an Afrikaner baginen' and 'Oyf Transvaler erd,' lyrically celebrate South Africa, letters to his family, siblings and friends instead indicate discontentment and disillusionment with particular aspects of his life there. Disparaging *di finstere Afrike*⁸² (Letter from London to his sisters, 6 Aug. 1949), he states his preference for London and Rhodesia (Letter to his brother Motke, 25 Aug. 1949). In addition, while the poems 'Matumba' and 'Matatulu' support the black underdog and abhor the way he is treated, some of Fram's letters show feelings of distaste for him (Letter to his brother Motke, 25 Aug. 1949). There is no way of knowing the reasons for this discrepancy – the letters in question were written twenty years after his arrival, in some cases years after the poems, and there are no surviving earlier ones. Similarly, poems such as 'Fun tate-mames yidishe' and *Efsher* affirm Fram's commitment to Jewishness and a Jewish value system, but this seems to be contradicted by his actions: his first wife's parents were Catholic converts who altered their Jewish surname (ancestry.com), and his second wife was a non-Jew (Letter to his sister Rivele, 2 Jan. 1954).

Since Fram saw himself as a poet of substance, it is possible that in order to maintain his reputation amongst the literary fraternity, he concealed "the seamy side of [his] life... though [would] be happy to expose those he viewed with pride" (Aldridge 414), and so kept his family letters secret. That Fram sought fame and acknowledgement through his poetry can be seen in a letter to fellow poet and friend Fayvl Zygelbaum (23 Aug. 1949), where he also expresses the hope that his Johannesburg home would become a museum recognising his contribution to Yiddish literature. As Wellek and Warren point out, many "professedly autobiographical elements may differ completely from the poet's actual life" (78). It is not possible to know where the exact personal truth lies, in the letters or the poems – or perhaps in neither. While a writer may disclose some aspects of his life in his work deliberately or inadvertently, "the design or intention of the author [may] neither [be] available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art" (Wimsatt and Beardsley 3).

⁸² Darkest Africa.

As has been suggested in this chapter, certain aspects of poems such as ‘Mayn opfor,’ ‘Mayn mame hot mir tsugesht a kishn,’ *Efsher, Dos letste kapitl* and ‘Dimantn’ may have arisen out of Fram’s personal diasporic experience. This may be observed in some instances of congruency, where biographical influence may have affected his choice of subject matter and stance. Thus, while a poet’s personal life has no bearing on the aesthetic interpretation or value of the works, is not a useful source for objective analysis, and is not relevant when assessing their value as artifacts, biography may nevertheless contribute deeper insights and understanding of their content. I therefore include aspects of Fram’s biography in my assessment of his work, always recognising the difference between this approach and one that focuses purely on aesthetics.

Chapter Six: Reflections on the Relationship between Academic and Creative Components

‘Until I started to read Judith’s poems, I knew so little of the personal history of my family’ (Frankel *Illuminating Love*).

In this chapter, I discuss those issues relating to the writing of my thesis on David Fram that connect to the novel *Illuminating Love*. The submission may be read as a series of combinations: of different modes of writing (prose, poetry and calligraphy), of aspects of place, home and Diaspora, of English and Yiddish, the latter itself a language of fusion. Both thesis and novel also encompass acts of translation and transfer: the translation of Fram’s poems from Yiddish to English, Fram’s physical translation from homeland to Diaspora as reflected in Judith’s journey in the novel and the transfer of Judith’s poems into calligraphy. I also reflect on Hirsch and Spitzer’s notion of postmemory (2010), that is, the relationship with a place to which one is attached but where one has never been. The whole serves as a memorial and testimony to a particular way of life

The Academic Component: Process

Most of Fram’s poems have not been translated before and very little critical work about them has been previously carried out. My research therefore relies heavily on numerous articles that were written by the late Joseph Sherman who was a recognised expert on his poetry and knew Fram personally. Despite assurances by a number of Yiddish academics that Sherman was writing a larger work on Fram at the time of his death in 2010, a project to which he had made reference himself, this could not be located. Instead, Sherman’s articles pointed me to Yiddish articles of the 1930s in newspapers such as *Literarische bleter* and *Der Kanada odler*, as well as to English journal pieces on Fram’s poetry, most of which proved to be descriptive rather than critical in approach. In addition, other specialists shared their knowledge of Yiddish culture, literature and poetry in general, and directed me to material that might shed light on Fram’s work in particular.

When I first read Fram’s most readily available poems, for example, ‘Fun tatemames yidishe,’ ‘In an Afrikaner baginen,’ and ‘Nokh vos zol ikh forn?’ in *Dorem Afrike* and in Rollansky’s collection, *Antologye Dorem Afrikanish*, I assumed that, like these, the rest of his oeuvre was also an expression of his longing for home and

yidishkeyt. However, his collections *Lider un poemes* and *A shvalb oyfn dakh* revealed poems on other diverse subjects, as well as many love poems. Given that the focus of my argument is on how living in the Diaspora affected Fram and influenced his choice of subject matter, I have not included any of the latter in my final submission. They therefore remain to be translated and researched at a future date.

While my thesis is predicated on Fram's continuing commitment to Yiddish, this was called into question by the discovery of a series of English poems in his archive in the University of Texas at Austin.⁸³ In some ways these are similar to 'Tsu a froy' (To a Woman) (1929) in *Lider un poemes* and the cycle 'Lider tsu a froy aza vi du' (Poems to a woman such as you) in *A shvalb oyfn dakh* (1983), but there are also significant differences. They are undated, unlike all Fram's Yiddish poems, published and unpublished, are written in a chivalrous mode not used anywhere else, and are perfectly typed out – there are no multiple drafts. Sherman, who was responsible for rescuing Fram's archive from the University of the Witwatersrand, makes no mention of them in his list of contents, nor in any of his articles about Fram's literary output, and none of these poems has ever been published. It is even possible that someone else wrote them to Fram, rather than the reverse. As their language is English and their provenance in doubt, I omit them from my discussion.

Presentation of the poems together with their transliteration was problematic. The decision to create an addendum and use columns, placing the original and its translation side by side, was taken after trying various alternatives, for example placing the relevant poems after the chapter in which they are discussed with English following Yiddish or vice versa. I would also have liked to include the original Yiddish poems, but this is a mammoth task in itself, and remains to be undertaken at a future date.

Translating and Transliterating Fram's Poetry

Charles Simic comments, "translation is the closest reading of a poem" (2005), while Lenhardt states in his introduction to the translation of Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* that "Every translation must fit one world inside another" (iv). Thus, one language cannot simply be translated into another because each word in a translation is not simply the exchange of a word, but an interpretation of the culture, experience and worldview

⁸³ When the Department of Jewish Studies was closed down, the Jewish Board of Deputies declined to find a place for its material, hence its resting place in America.

embedded in it. Other challenges arise because Yiddish contains many Hebrew words, a transfer that affects pronunciation and spelling. One Yiddish word might require a phrase or sentence in English, and vice versa, and two words that are subtly different in the original may be translated in the dictionary as having the same meaning. The many Slavic and Russian derivatives are not found in Yiddish-English dictionaries. For me, the main challenges were to translate and analyse poems and articles not in my mother tongue, and to grasp the cultural implications of Yiddish expressions from a bygone era about a foreign community.

To get a sense of Fram's overall vision, I began by translating as many poems as I could, word for word and line by line. I followed this with translations that sought sense and poetic truth, but found no perfect equivalence for the originals' metaphoric language. Another obstacle was trying to be true to Fram's Yiddish rhythm and rhyme, because "[i]t wasn't a question of getting the words right; it was a question of getting the sound, the pace and the cadences right" (Weaver 2002). I found that to do so would have required a convolution of natural English word order, and I therefore sacrificed the mellifluous patterns of the Yiddish in the interest of English sense. Fram also uses repetition extensively, a stylistic mannerism that enhances the poems' melody and spirit in Yiddish, but one that sounds heavy and cumbersome when emulated in English. Still, in some instances, for example the short poem 'Fun tate-mames yidishe,' the reproduction of such repetition is effective in English and helps to set up the mood; these I preserve. Although I created a number of versions of each poem, and wanted to submit these in order to illuminate the process, this proved unwieldy. I therefore present only one version for each poem. My final versions therefore keep Fram's line and verse breaks, lexicon and punctuation as far as possible, but so as not to interfere with either the sense of poem or the ease of its reading.

While the ideal way to translate the poems would have been to compare alternative versions of the same pieces with my own version, this was seldom possible as there are few extant translations; I referred to them where they do exist. Leftwich's translation of 'Iz vos' (1961 633), although true to overall meaning, takes liberties with the text, avoiding Fram's more violent images and references, for example to the "pus of open abscesses," instead introducing an image of willow trees that is not in the original. For these reasons, I did not make use of it. Leftwich also alters the order

of the lines from one verse to another to maintain rhyme. My translation does not rhyme, but concentrates instead on word choice and sound to enhance tone.

Fram rewrote his poems many times,⁸⁴ and the poems *Efsher* and *Dos letste kapitl* that appeared as full pamphlets appeared later in *Dorem Afrike* in shortened form. In the latter, lines have been abbreviated or left out altogether. Whether this was an editorial decision or was carried out by Fram himself is impossible to know. Fram also rejected Leftwich's translation of sections of 'Dos letste kapitl' (Sherman "Centenary Tribute" x). These alternative versions of the same poems presented difficulties, and I chose to translate the shorter ones.

Fram and Biography

In Chapter Five, I discuss Fram's biography in relation to the reading of certain of his poems. As Peter Carey comments, "everyone wants you to be writing about yourself" (qtd. in Dalley 3). Everett too states, "what readers find interesting and attractive in poetry is often subordinated to this interest in biography, in the author's life" (qtd. in Bennett 110). My own response when reading Fram's poems was not dissimilar – I found myself delving into his letters, writing emails to and interviewing people who might have known him or known about him, and checking genealogy sites and shipping records to find out about the man behind the poems. This process is also relevant to my own writing in that readers often ask whether what occurs in the narrative 'really happened' as described. Thus, instead of adopting a critical approach to the work as literature, or recognising that it has been designated as fiction, the focus is on the issue of whether or not the work is true to life. In the instance of the novel, as in the case of Fram's poetry, while biographical information may enlighten the reading and deepen interpretation of the narrative, it may also distort and should therefore be used with great care.

Testimony and the Memoirs Project

As discussed in Chapter Four, Fram's poems serve testimony, offering a bulwark against silence. The act of writing the Judith poems and their subsequent inscription in calligraphy were similarly motivated. In order to gain a deeper insight into the diasporic experience, I interviewed numerous immigrants who came to South Africa

⁸⁴ Drafts are preserved in the Texas archive.

from Eastern Europe before World War II, as Fram – and my grandparents – had done. These informal histories are documented in *Memoirs: Our Stories; Our Lives* (Frankel 2010). Like my grandmothers, most of the women interviewees had only a rudimentary Yiddish school (*tarbes*) or Hebrew (*cheder*) education, seldom of more than three or four years. Though some were educated in secular Russian schools, others were kept at home to help their mothers with running the home and with younger siblings, or to contribute to the family income. Although most boys had more education, they were allowed “only *Torah* learning” (Parush 5); some also went on to study at the *yeshiva*. Their experiences shed some light on Fram’s poetry and influenced the content of the Judith poems.

Through these interviews, I became aware of the levels and conflicts that co-exist in memory without ever being reconciled. Displaced from their homes and homelands, refugees, exiles and survivors carry recollections of past trauma, discrimination and oppression as well as memories of good times and happy moments. The interviewees spoke of the difficulties of adapting to South African society, of discarding personal and ethnic history, and of changing their names and their language and their ways of earning a living. While some of the immigrants attended convents and learnt how to fit in and to speak with the correct accent, most continued to feel like outsiders (37). One woman described how, when as a young child she tried to tell the teacher how to pronounce her name, she was reprimanded: “If you want to be a South African then speak like one, otherwise go back to where you belong” (Frankel *Memoirs* 36). She later changed her name, Blume, meaning ‘flower’ in Yiddish, but that sounds like bloomers in English, to the equivalent Flora, to avoid playground teasing (36).

The oral testimonies were often filled with silence when the protagonists were unable to “speak of the unspeakable” (Horowitz qtd. in Hartman 45), as discussed in Chapter Four, on Fram’s Holocaust poems. These indicate events left out because the speakers were simply unable to go on with their description, through forgetfulness because of age or the gap between the time of actual events and the recording, or because of the perception that others would not be prepared to listen. In other instances, they could only offer minimal information; this was the only way that they could speak about what had happened to them. One woman, 101 years old at the time, kept promising me she would tell me what had happened to her, but only did so after I returned for a seventh visit. Even then she gave me only the barest outline of her

traumatic journey from Europe to South Africa in 1938. Thus, listeners and readers may have to fill in the gaps for themselves.

Like Fram and my grandparents, the contributors survived because they left Europe before the Holocaust began. Their previously undocumented and unspoken narratives highlight aspects of a destroyed culture and bring these to public attention, bearing witness to what happened to them. Their individual histories offer some insights into a way of life that was obliterated and illuminate a little-recorded aspect of pre-Holocaust history. Together with Fram's poems, they provide the grist for the diasporic content of Judith's lyrics and litanies. Threaded through the prose, the poems make up a double, contrasting narrative, casting the contemporary present into historic relief.

The Relationship of the Judith Poems to Fram's Poetry

The writing of the Judith poems may be interpreted as an act of imaginative retrieval on my part on behalf of my immigrant forebears. Although they accepted and became *ayngevoyn't*, used to, their new way of life, they always remained connected to their past, their history and their culture, as did Fram. Fram's poems focus on various aspects that were influenced by living in the Diaspora, and in order to simplify discussion, the chapters are divided into themes accordingly: Diaspora, landscape and Holocaust. Judith's poems are written as a linked sequence between the prose sections, covering various episodes of her life and her response to these. Her poems support my thesis about Fram in that they highlight the condition of diasporic longing.

Fram's poems of his real home and journey therefore provide the basis for my critical research, as well as the background and stimulus for the poems about Judith's imaginary journey. Hence there are similarities between their evocation of the Lithuanian and South African landscapes, customs, peoples and traditional folk song, and the use of sensory and visual detail. The following extract from Judith's poems may be related to Fram's 'Ikh benk,'

Green forest canopy:
darkness of pines
fragrant as needles,
heavy as mud.

Children sticky with strawberries,
leaped into stars.

Here, I cannot find
the path along my tongue. (Frankel *Illuminating Love* 90)

There are also differences. As has been shown, Fram used rhyming couplets, his Yiddish style is convoluted and repetitive in places, and his lines are frequently very long. Judith's style is spare, the poems employing short lines and a free verse form,

The salt of the sea
was the herring brine left behind.

The ice of the old country
became the warmth of the new. (Frankel *Illuminating Love* 67)

However, like Fram whose poems develop his individual iconography, Judith's style is image-based, as in the above example with its images of tears and salt, brine and sea. In addition, like Fram, many of her poems use the first person singular, though the inclusion of vignettes of other characters such as Eva, Chana, Dora and Lily also allows for variation.

Like some of Fram's poems, Judith's echo the litany in their use of repetition and enumeration, and their tone, as they characterise a traditional and observant woman forced to undertake an arduous journey:

What we lost
was not straw –
we always had it;
was not the wagon –
that was the landlord's;
was not jewels –
we had none,

mud was everywhere;
it was not land –
we never owned it;
was not the river –
it followed its course. (Frankel *Illuminating Love* 112)

Judith's experiences and responses reflect the circumstances of the diasporic Jew in general, not only of women, or of immigrants to South Africa. Suggestive and evocative, they resist the overt explanation: "All artists are continually aspiring to conditions of music. You never say, what does it mean? about a piece. It means what it is" (Pater qtd. in Tripp 37).

The Poetry of Avrom Sutskever and Irena Klepfisz and the Judith Poems

Reading about Fram and Yiddish poetry led me to the poets Avrom Sutskever and Irena Klepfisz, whose Diaspora writings also influenced the content and style of the Judith poems. Some background details may therefore be useful to contextualise these two poets.

When the Germans occupied Vilna in 1941, 75,000 Jews were forced into the ghetto and Sutskever was captured. However, "he was reprieved ... when the Lithuanians deliberately fired over his head and returned him to the ghetto" (L. Langer 561). After the Nazis poisoned his baby boy, Sutskever joined a Jewish resistance group and worked on an underground press. He and his wife were subsequently airlifted to Moscow, immigrating to Palestine in 1947 where he founded the Yiddish literary quarterly *Di goldene keyt* (The Golden Chain). Thereafter he wrote:

I who saw the destruction of my people felt that
we, the small group of Yiddish writers who
survived, could with the power of our pen put in
no claim for the blood of Ponar and of Auschwitz,
but that we could and must put in our claim for the
burning of our language on the bonfires, by giving
it rebirth in the land of our ascent (qtd. in Leftwich
Sutskever 23).

His poems use delicate versification, linguistic manipulations and inventive rhyme schemes, but even his most lyrical and romantic poems are rooted in the actual, “the situation and vocabulary rivet the art to its ‘concrete origin in fact’” (Wisse qtd. in Aaron 106). Sutskever includes specific images, for example those of his ghetto poem ‘Di blayene platn fun Roms drukeray’ (‘The Leaden Plates of Romm’s Printing Works’) (1943) (41), and in ‘Sibir’ (‘Siberia’) (1953), with its final image of escape into warmth and sunlight:

In our dovecote the newborn bird
Picks its way out of its broken shell
(10).

As is the case with Fram’s, although they are similarly descriptive, the connections between Sutskever’s poems and Judith’s are indirect, for example,

The pond in summer
a place for dreaming;

cart wheel runnels
tracks of hooves;

double trees
in deep waters. (Frankel *Illuminating Love* 17)

Irena Klepfisz was born during the Second World War in the Warsaw ghetto where her father perished defending his Jewish identity; she and her mother survived by passing themselves off as Poles. Thereafter, Klepfisz learned Yiddish as an essential component of her identity, undertaking a linguistic and metaphorical journey back to the country of her birth to do so: “I was taught . . . that Yiddish is *mame-loshn*, mother tongue, the language of the Jews, the medium through which Jewish culture and politics are to be transmitted” (qtd. in Shreiber “End of Exile” 283). Klepfisz asserted that language rather than geography or religion is the site of Jewish identity, that “language may not be everything, but . . . it is a great deal” (qtd. in Shreiber “End

of Exile” 277); she therefore expressed her poetic vision in Yiddish. Her poems and the manner in which they are related to her life story influenced the evolution of Judith’s poems, their structure and imagery.

Klepfisz’s metaphoric return home through choice of language was not simply a nostalgic return. It was “a highly constructed, personal effort where diasporism is particular to [her] achievement, not simply an extension of exile or of perpetual scatteredness where identity depends on the idea of the recovery of a sacred homeland” (qtd. in Shreiber “End of Exile” 277). Her vision of Diaspora was enabling rather than restrictive, a chosen condition in a dynamic space with negotiable borders between self and host nation, yet at the same time one that maintained a degree of separateness.

Because she had no first-hand knowledge of the land of her birth, Klepfisz was free to fantasise about the past and make it new. Creating her own version of what she had lost and placing it beside the culture that she gained, she made a place for herself as a Holocaust survivor and secular Jew living in the Diaspora. This view is one of home as a transitory condition where writing “interrogates notions of community” (qtd. in Shreiber “End of Exile” 277). Its open-ended possibilities allowed her “to do some border crossing of her own to discover how to make Yiddish more like ‘home’” (Shreiber “End of Exile” 280), experimenting with bilingual verse, and exploiting the migratory aspects of its linguistic tradition in keeping with Yiddish’s own semiotic history. By placing the fluid inclusivity of Yiddish at the centre of her vision, Klepfisz presents an identity where Diaspora is a linguistic and cultural construct and her poetry questions the nature of Jewish identity.

Thus, for example, in the closing stanzas of Klepfisz’s ‘A Few Words in the Mother Tongue’, she “make[s] space for a diasporic poetics” (Shreiber “End of Exile” 284), that is a linguistic Diaspora where the creative use of the *mame-loshn* can even evoke “dreams in Yiddish” (284):

Zi kholmt

di hor

di lange shvartse hor

Zi kholmt

zi kholmt

zi kholmt.

(Klepfisz *A Few Words* 227 21-26)

Here, emulating the unruly borders of Yiddish itself, Klepfisz's poems question categorical claims about the pure lineage of cultural discourse and its terms. The Yiddish is therefore italicised in order to differentiate the two languages and the struggle between them.

*Yidishkayt*⁸⁵ a way of being

Jewish always arguable.

(Klepfisz *A Few Words* 225 22-23)

In a similar way, through the juxtaposition of languages, the bilingual Judith poems conjure up alternative modes of being. There, changes and exchanges take place in which host and diasporic language and culture together perpetuate the sense of belonging and not-belonging, of Diaspora and non-Diaspora, for example:

In every *shtetl*

Jews in the centre circle.

In every wooden house

a kitchen,

a *pripetshik*.

On every bed a *perene*

stuffed with feathers,

plucked and de-stemmed

by a row of children

with curls

bound in kerchiefs. (Frankel *Illuminating Love* 4)

⁸⁵ Spelt here as it appears in the original text.

By using the two languages in tandem, the meanings and inferences of each are destabilised, the opposition between home and exile jostling traditional boundaries so that expected meanings are altered. The visual impact of the words on the page endorses this process of hybridity and biculturalism, allowing expansion and contraction and indicating a “discontinuous sense of self and community after her displacements” (Rich qtd. in Shreiber “End of Exile” 278). Thus, Judith’s poems in *Illuminating Love* express aspects of her identity and history, her past and her present existence, her homeland and her adopted country and her difficulty in settling down there:

I breathed a world
that knew mushrooms,
field, forest.

Mosaic sky of blue
called winter,
blue called emptiness,
blue called forgetting. (Frankel *Illuminating Love* 89)

The poems were also influenced by Klepfisz’s structure and approach:

a froy kholmt a woman
dreams *ir ort oyf der velt*
her place in this world
un zi hot moyre and she is afraid
so afraid of the words.
(Klepfisz *A Few Words* 226 21-25)

And as may also be observed in this extract,

In der fremd
among strangers
iz ir heym
is her home.
(Klepfisz *A Few Words* 224 1-16)

Judith's poems were also influenced by Klepfisz's layout of the words on the page, where meaning emerges through the gaps and silences.

Particularly relevant to the conflicts illuminated in the Judith poems is Klepfisz's poem 'Fradel Shtok' (1990). This narrative describes the downfall of the eponymous protagonist (1890-1930), a poet who was deprived of both her home and mother tongue:

Think of it: *heym* and *home* the meaning
the same of course exactly
but the shift in vowel was the ocean
in which I drowned.
(*A Few Words* 228 8-12)

The poem acknowledges what may be described as the "discontinuities between who one was and who one is. The dream does suggest a kind of return, as well as the creation of something new that comes into being between the two, in the interstices created therein" (Hirsch and Keller qtd. in Shreiber "End of Exile" 283), fragments separated by spaces but which nevertheless form a continuous thread.

The fragmented structure of the nine-part 'Di rayze aheym,' 'The Journey Home' (*A Few Words* 216-24), Klepfisz's most sustained effort to reside in a language where home is not a fixed entity, also impacted on that of the Judith poems. It is "[a]wkwardly fashioned out of phrases and words" (Klepfisz qtd. in Shreiber "End of Exile" 281), its ruptured surfaces reflecting a struggle between "making Yiddish accessible and preserving its foreignness" (Shreiber "End of Exile" 281):

Ire zikhroynes
her memories
will become monuments

ire zikhroynes

will cast shadows.

(Klepfisz *A Few Words* 224 21-25)

By traversing boundaries between the familiar English and the unfamiliar Yiddish, through repetition and paraphrase, Klepfisz creates a “deeper more absorbing reality” (Bernstein qtd. in Shreiber “End of Exile” 281). Similarly, Judith’s text, located between Yiddish and English lyric and narrative, serves a mimetic function, representing the world it seeks to call into being and one already in existence, the collective past as well as her own personal one. In this way, the reality of a diasporic community is physically crafted out of the condition of brokenness:

It is there

di gantse geshikhte

fun folk

the entire history

of the people.

(Klepfisz *A Few Words* 217 3-16)

As can be observed, the subject of Klepfisz’s poetry is chronic loss, exile and estrangement, expressing the rupture between herself, her forbears and her past. It also offers a place where “home is constructed and lived in language [with] a productive and evocative potential for the homeless and for those seeking to represent Diaspora as something other than lack” (Shreiber “End of Exile” 280).

Mit vemen

ken ikh redn?

Whom can I speak to?

(Klepfisz *A Few Words* 221 19-21)

Klepfisz and Fram both make use of amalgamation in their poetry. He transposes elements of the South African vernacular into Yiddish; she uses bilingualism, placing

Yiddish beside its English translation. Both of these are natural adaptive tactics analogous to the way my grandparents, when they did not know an English word for something, inserted the Yiddish word or expression. The listener would then interpret its meaning according to context. Klepfisz's poems, with their mix of Yiddish and English, their lyricism, short lines, and depiction of the effects of dislocation, influenced Judith's poems. These, as the creative expression of the otherwise voiceless woman, imply a patriarchal system legitimised by the culture. They also reflect on and invert the circumstances of the second woman character in the novel, Cally. While the sanctity of the home rests on the pillars of Jewish laws symbolised by the four poles of the marriage canopy and the vows of the *ketuba*, in Cally's relationship with Jake, home and marriage become spaces of danger.

Postmemory: Fram and the Judith Poems

Fram's Yiddish poems evoke the experiences of Lithuanian Jews who had no personal freedom and came to South Africa in the hope of bettering themselves. Fram wrote nostalgic poems about the place he had left behind, as well as poems of despair about its subsequent destruction. Similarly, Judith's poems represent my grandmother's connection to her birthplace and the transmission of this memory to me, confirming that place matters to the immigrant as suggested in Chapter Two.

Growing up, I heard Yiddish spoken daily by my parents to my immigrant grandparents. At that time, I was unaware that Yiddish was anything but a spoken language and had no idea of its origins. While all four of my grandparents were Lithuanian-born, each from a different *shtetl*, Yanishok, Kupishok, Rakishok and Kurshan,⁸⁶ my parents were both born in South Africa. Although they remained traditional Jews who observed the festivals and celebrated *Shabes*, they were also absorbed into and very much part of the prevailing Anglo-Saxon culture around them. No one ever discussed why my grandparents had left the old country. There was only one cue, my maternal grandfather's oft-repeated and heavily-accented comment, "We had no choice. All we had to eat there was herring in brine, and sometimes just brine." Nor did they ever speak in my hearing of what happened *in der alter heym*, of the Holocaust and its destruction of European Yiddish speakers or the members of our

⁸⁶ These are the Yiddish names for the Russian towns Joniskis, Kupiskis, Rokiskis and Kurshenai.

own family who had been left behind there. Since I attended English-medium government schools rather than the Jewish day school, did not belong to a Jewish youth movement, and learned Hebrew at *cheder* but not Jewish history or Yiddish, I was not party to this information until I reached university and our history studies extended to World War II. Only then did I begin to discover my communal history. Only recently, in search of my *mame-loshn*, did I find that Yiddish also has a highly developed literature with deep cultural roots. This fuelled the impetus for the recovery of that lost world and so I found the Fram poems and began researching the life of this particular Jewish immigrant.

According to Hirsch and Spitzer, the Jewish culture of Eastern Europe now exists “only as a projection – as an idea physically disconnected from its geographical location and tenuously dependent on the vicissitudes of personal, familial and cultural memory” (xv). They coin the term “postmemory” (9) for what they describe as a process of “re-remembering” (9). This refers to their own “secondary ... relationship with times and places ... never experienced or seen” (9), so much so that it feels as if they have actually been remembered. Such a relationship evolved through hearing the stories and visualising images of the place and people where Hirsch’s mother grew up and the recognition that an idea of a place shaped identity. The “coexistence of nostalgic and negative associations” (253) derives from layers, “both positive and negative – that have been passed down ... unintegrated, conflicting, fragmented, dispersed” (9). As Ruth Glasberg Gold asks in her memoir, “Is it wrong to love my birthplace, my native land, even though I was cruelly deported from it?” (292), Hirsch also questions her own memories, “My fantasy of ‘return’ to Czernowitz was not exactly a nostalgic longing for a lost or abandoned Heimat⁸⁷ (as my father termed it): how could a place I had never touched, and which my parents left under extreme duress, really be ‘home’? Nor was it a yearning to recall some better past time in that city, for I had experienced no actual time there at all” (11). Nevertheless, she holds “strong, positive, nostalgic memories of a city and culture that had long disappeared in reality, if not in the realm of remembrance, image and recreation” (Hirsch and Spitzer xvii). This is characterised by a longing “for a home that no longer exists or

⁸⁷ Term that denotes the relationship of a human being to a particular personal or social space (German).

has never existed” (Boym qtd. in Hirsch and Spitzer xv), though such memories never add up to a complete picture or linear tale.

By writing poems that my grandmother might have written about her upbringing, loss of home and family, and adjustment in an alien land, I question my own fantasy of return, as does Hirsch. The Judith poems thus arose through a process of connecting memory to place and bringing inherited memories back to that place, one which I adopted as my own, and then transmitted using Judith as a conduit. Having internalised this family and community history, I too talk about ‘going back’ to Lithuania even though ‘my’ Lithuania is a country that does not exist in any physical way. In that the imagery used in the poems reflects the dual consciousness of the immigrant of home and away, they become a metaphor for memory, simultaneously expressing my own condition of postmemory, that is, they ‘remember’ a world I never knew, as I write about a place where I have never been and where I will in all probability never go.

The poems may therefore be described as a “set of fabricated meanings mapped onto an actual landscape” (Cesarini 3). Whereas my earlier poetry was written from the personal viewpoint of a woman like myself, English speaking and South African, in Judith’s case I adopted the persona of my grandmother, thinking myself into her skin, writing as if her history were mine, using the first person singular as part of the reclamation process. By combining Yiddish with English, the poems offer a physical manifestation of the conflict my forbears might have felt with regard to choice of language. Through this act of ventriloquism, my vision of my grandmother’s life journey is voiced through Judith’s poems, in the hope of recovering a fragment of communal and personal Judaic history. My writing of the poems was therefore “motivated by needs and desires that, ... rely on no more than speculative investment, identification and invention” (Hirsch and Spitzer xix). The poems ‘tell’ of ‘events’ as I see them from another far-distant country, over the distance of generations and through the telescope of time, where “the voices of ancestors continue to clamour, to make healing possible. Sometimes good things emerge from terrible moments” (Peterson 179). It would appear then that the “shadow of Holocaust memory on the children and grandchildren of survivors” (Hirsch and Spitzer xvi) is similar to the shadow under which I carried out my research and wrote the Judith poems. However, it is also noteworthy that I only became aware of the notion of postmemory after writing the poems.

The “ethical act is to never forget and so the burden of memory is passed on” (Peterson 179), and people are united and strengthened by a shared history. However, there is also the ethical question around adopting the trauma of others for one’s own creative purposes. My drive to write about Judith’s journey was an instinctive rather than a rational one, but one that will hopefully evoke the reader’s own understanding and insight. By writing Judith’s bilingual poems I ignore Adorno’s caveat against writing poetry after Auschwitz, conceiving of them rather as an optimistic contribution to the recovery of a culture. This highlights the issue debated in Chapter Four.

My research of Fram’s poetry and the recording of the interviews for *Memoirs: Our Stories; Our Lives* undertaken as research for *Illuminating Love*, enriched my understanding of what my grandparents’ lives might have been like. The novel, together with the Judith poems, thus becomes a form of *yisker-bukh* or *kadish*, honouring and memorialising them.

The Survival of Yiddish in the Jewish Diaspora

There is a Hasidic parable concerning the Baal Shem Tov:⁸⁸ When he had a problem, he went to the forest, lit a fire and prayed for wisdom. The next generation forgot the prayer but still went to the forest and lit the fire. The following generation forgot the prayer and could not make a fire, but continued to go to the forest. The generation after that was unable to find the forest, light the fire or remember the prayer – yet they still remembered the story.

Once Yiddish was a fully lived language with a sense of community, history and family, and “Yiddish writers made a lively and significant contribution to a language and a literature which is ... the idiom of frightened and hopeful humanity” (Singer qtd. in Sherman *From a Land Far Off* 13). However, many immigrants, after leaving home, found themselves overwhelmed when “transfer occurred when the foreign repertoire was [found to be desirable] via contact between the cultures” (Even-Zohar “Cultural Repertoire” 378). They erased their past, giving up rituals and cultural capital, acculturating to survive. Although they speak or understand their common language, may use colloquialisms which have been absorbed into common

⁸⁸ Rabbi Yisrael (Israel) ben Eliezer, 18th century Jewish mystic and founder of Hasidism.

usage, such as *beygl*, *laks*, *shlep*, *khutspe*, *mentsh*, *ganev*, *kvetch*, *meshuge* and *mazl-tov* and may enjoy a good Yiddish *vits* (joke), they are content to leave it at that.

Nevertheless, there are still two or three million Yiddish speakers in the world today, both within ultra-orthodox Hasidic communities and outside it, who speak Yiddish as their first language or use it for prayer and speech, and who will pass it on to their children and grandchildren. This continuity goes hand in hand with the study and teaching of Yiddish, and literature and language classes are prevalent in American and all the major Israeli universities. There are also still ongoing Yiddish weeklies such as the *Forverts* and the monthly *Vayter*. In addition, there are Yiddishists worldwide who are working towards maintaining Yiddish as a viable ground for a revitalised community. They hold cultural gatherings in different places around the world, in New York, London, Paris and Tel Aviv. *Yungtrunf* (Youth for Yiddish) holds an annual get-together, *Yidishvokh* (Yiddish week), in a retreat centre near Baltimore, U. S. A. where 100-200 speakers of all ages, including children, gather for a total immersion in Yiddish. There is also an organic Yiddish farm in Goshen, New York where Yiddishists work the land, and which offers Yiddish programmes in the summer. Also on the positive side, Aaron Lansky has been instrumental in saving millions of Yiddish books and documents from a fate similar to that of their previous owners and readers, an outcome which would extend Hitler's legacy.⁸⁹ These books now make up the holdings of the National Yiddish Book Centre in Amherst, Massachusetts. Many of the books have also been digitised, thanks to Steven Spielberg and other benefactors, so that readers may access the original writings or versions in English and other tongues. The centre also offers grants to translators in order to promote the cause of Yiddish.

The Internet has encouraged a surge of interest in the Yiddish culture and language by enabling the search for roots amongst second and third generation diasporists through genealogy and *shtetl* sites. Where interest groups have been formed, people discover not only that their families share *shetl* origins, but also the common language of their grandparents, Yiddish. Thus there has been a revival of interest in the language amongst many younger people who regard it as a means of connecting with their roots, a process that plays a significant role in the continued

⁸⁹ This initiative has similar goals to those in Eastern European ghettos when manuscripts were hidden or removed to places of safety.

dissemination of the *mame-loshn*. However, though Yiddish remains at the core of Jewish and diasporic identity, as well as in nostalgic memory, there can be no illusions about the difficulties of maintaining it as a living language in places where “there are no elders to tell it or no younger generation to hear it and pass it on to those who will come after” (Peterson 35). In such instances, its history may be irrecoverable – the great-grandchildren of immigrants are now so far removed from tradition that they know neither the story nor of the existence of the Baal Shem Tov, and an inheritance of any sort, whether material or cultural wealth needs to be husbanded.

For Yiddish to find a new readership, “new texts based on a new repertoire [similar to those that] emerged in Akkadian through the interference of Sumerian” (Even-Zohar “Laws of Interference” 6) would need to be produced. In addition, other transliteration and translation projects such as this one would need to be undertaken by people with the necessary skills or with the willingness to acquire them. Although no Yiddish poetry is currently being written in South Africa (Belling email Apr. 2012), there is new literary work being written elsewhere. This includes poetry by Beyle Schaechter Gottesman, Alexander Spiegelblatt, Michoel Felsenbaum, Boris Karloff, Velvl Chernin, Rivke Basman ben Khayim, Lev Berinksi, Zackary Sholem Berger, Jack Janek Lewin and Khayke Beruriah Wiegand. Their poems can be found in the cultural and literary publications like *Afn Shvel*, *Toplpunkt*, *Gilgulim* and *Yerusholayimer Alamanakh*. There are also new books of contemporary Yiddish poetry and prose coming out, such as the recently published poetry collection, *Step by Step: Contemporary Yiddish Poetry*, edited by E. Bemporad and M. Pascucci. In addition, *Yungtrunf* is reviving its *Zhurnal* and calling for entries for a competition for poets under 35.

Thus, as Singer stated in his Nobel acceptance speech,

The high honor bestowed upon me ... is also a recognition of the Yiddish language – a language of exile, without a land, without frontiers, not supported by any government, a language which possesses no words for weapons, ammunition, military exercises, war tactics; a language that was despised by both gentiles and emancipated Jews. The ghetto was not only a place of refuge for a persecuted minority but a great

experiment in peace, in self-discipline and in humanism.
As such it still exists and refuses to give up in spite of
all the brutality that surrounds it. I was brought up
among those people (1978).

Chapter Seven: Reflections on *Illuminating Love*.

We do not speak
of the train at the station,
you leaving, me waving you on.
(Frankel *Illuminating Love*)

In this chapter, I consider the process of writing *Illuminating Love*. Looking at literary influences outside of Yiddish, I comment on aspects of genre, voice, viewpoint, dialogue and characterisation, as well as the function of the act of writing itself, with reference to Cally's calligraphy and Judith's poetry. Critical texts that affected my choice of approach include Andre Brink's *The Novel: Language and Narrative Form from Cervantes to Calvino* (1998), Rain's 'Literary Genres' (2007), B Tilghman's 'Crossing Boundaries' (2006) and T. Todorov's 'The Origin of Genres' (1997).

Aspects of Genre

Steven Earnshaw comments on how "the work of art remains a law unto itself, each piece unique and with its own set of rules" ("Handbook" 67). Further, A. S. Byatt states, "The nice thing about the novel is that everything can go into it ... you can change genre, you can change focus" (qtd. in Burgass 24). Such an open-ended approach to form invites new possibilities that may include unexpected stylistic, generic and technical elements. Developing "from or with the realist tradition, deliberately bending, stretching and corrupting it" (Burgass 23), this "pick-and-mix approach to genre ... is a hallmark of postmodern fiction" (Burgass 27). In so doing, it offers "a matrix of possibilities, a vast interconnected web" (Rain 61). In *Possession: A Romance* (1990), Byatt herself "disrupts hierarchies of genre by incorporating elements or alluding to other ... genres" (24), weaving together two plots, creating resonances between the two, the inclusion of poetry extending the subject matter of the prose narrative. Her novel significantly influenced *Illuminating Love*, a mixed genre novel that combines poetry and prose fiction.

Additional influences on *Illuminating Love* were Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992), in which poetry also occurs within the prose narrative, as well as Anne Michael's *Fugitive Pieces* (1997), where the prose itself becomes poetry. Other examples of novels that contain poetry are Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), *Palimpsest* (1921) by Hilda Doolittle (H. D.), E. L. Doctorow's *City of God* (2000), which includes passages of song, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987),

Divisidero by Michael Ondaatje (2007), where each scene is an individual poem bound together each other suggestively to create a fictional narrative, and Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate* (1986), a novel whose narrative consists entirely of poetry. In that the prose-poetry combination of *Illuminating Love* may be read as a book-within-a-book or a story-within-a-story, analogous examples would be *Possession: A Romance*, Chimamando Ngozi Adichie's *One Half of a Yellow Sun* (2007), Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin* (2001), Graham Swift's *Waterland* (1983) with its combination of history with fiction, and *Fugitive Pieces*, in which two separate stories, one historical, reflect and balance each other.

Illuminating Love evokes the poetry of Judith, a Yiddish-speaking immigrant to South Africa, who expresses herself in poetry (as did David Fram), and the prose narrative of Cally, her South African granddaughter. While the piece may be viewed as a novel with poetry, it may also be regarded as a long poem broken up into fragments, where Judith's extended poetry cycle looks to the tradition of the long (narrative) poems of the Bible and Ovid as well as to modern examples such as *The Autobiography of Red* by Anne Carson (1999), *The Distance between Us* by Fiona Sampson (2006) and Osherow's *Conversations with Survivors*, each of which consists of either a single sequence or combines disparate fragments, lyrical or narrative.

Both prose and poetry components explore the experience of being Jewish before and after the Holocaust, setting up dialogues between Judith and Cally, between national and private anguish and entrapment, between destruction by external as opposed to internal forces, and between authority and victimhood. Novels that affected my understanding of these, as well as the main themes of emigration, Diaspora and home, were Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated* (2002), Nicole Krauss's *A History of Love* (2006) and Dara Horn's *The World to Come* (2007). The primary concern of the poetry component of *Illuminating Love* is the Lithuanian historical past of the Jewish Holocaust. In this, Jacqueline Osherow's *Conversations with Survivors* (1994) and Myra Sklarew's, *Lithuania* (1995), *The Witness Trees* (2000) and *Over the Rooftops of Time* (2003) enriched my material.

Reflecting differing aspects of identity, Cally's experiences contrast with Judith's; as Cally inscribes and responds to Judith's poems, she uncovers her own roots. The two voices cut into each other, at times running parallel, at times at angles and tangents without favouring either genre. Incidents and emotions of the poet spark off thoughts and actions of the prose narrator, creating multi-levels of meaning. The

poems are placed so that they echo the prose narrative in some way, elaborating on it, picking up on an image or suggesting a connection. The poems also create obstacles to the progression of the narrative, deflecting and halting it in both counterpoint and contrapuntal fashion, simultaneously diverging in purpose and content while retaining an essential relationship. This creates a variation in pace and intensifies the emotional undercurrent. At the intersection of the lyrical and prose interior voices, the speaker of the poetry is contrasted with the narrator of the novel and the reader experiences a temporary disorientation moving from one mode to the next. This multimodal approach serves defamiliarisation at the same time as it illuminates Judith's influence on Cally in a concrete way, balancing the metaphorical and explicit.

Representing two voices speaking in differing cadences and with different purposes, the layout of *Illuminating Love* emphasises formal, visible differences, the short lines of Judith's poems being justified left with white space to the right, Cally's narrative following a traditional prose layout. My intention was that the two genres should carry equal weight; although there is far more prose than poetry in the final submission the emotional weighting is similar because of the heightened intensity of poetry. In my initial drafts, the genres were too separate, the echoes too obvious and over-determined, or too obscure. I worked on eliding the alternating styles and tones of the narratives in order to create a descant that switched smoothly between the two. In order to do so, I also added a third and fourth level, introducing Cally's comments on Judith's poetry as well as Judith's personal notes that Cally finds and reads. In addition, there is the suggestion of a fifth layer, where Cally starts to find her own voice as she begins writing her own poems. However, each of these additions created challenges in the presentation of the whole, for example, how Judith's notes could be distinguished from her poems, how Cally's poems could be differentiated from Judith's, and whether any or all of the poems should be italicised or not.⁹⁰

The seeds for the Judith poems were sown when I set out to discover as much as I could about my family, particularly my maternal grandmother. Although she was illiterate, as were many immigrant Jewish women of her generation, the poems are

⁹⁰ The issue of the use of italics concerns the entire novel. For the purpose of clarity, italics are used for foreign words that occur in the English text, though I would have preferred not to do so in the interest of an uninterrupted read. They are glossed at the end, while in the academic thesis, foreign words are explained within the text or in a footnote. The Yiddish poetry itself is not italicised.

those she might have written had she been able to. The Judith poems reflect how my grandmother might have coped with her experience of resettlement, the loss of her parents and siblings, and the impact of the Lithuanian Holocaust; Judith's emotional responses create her narrative. The creative outcome of diasporic longings, suggestive and indirect, functioning through the use of metaphor and image, the poems offer an historical reminder of a people, a culture and a language, Yiddish. By providing a vehicle for the preservation of history in an intimate, sensory and metaphorical way, the poems capture lost personal moments and encapsulate the loss of family, roots and cultural traditions. Operating analeptically, moving back in time through memory, they heighten the reader's imaginative entry into the world of the past and of a foreign culture, connecting a bygone era with the present.

Contextualising and Developing the Character of Cally

The prose element of *Illuminating Love* is emotionally driven by Cally's relationships with Jake, her children, her grandmother, her mother and her sister Bella, and by her passion for calligraphy. Cally's character emerges through the choices she makes in the kitchen and studio, the food she serves and the inks she employs. As she suffers the insidious small cruelties and growing sense of alienation over a protracted period, she is rendered increasingly helpless. Dealing as it does with the quotidian minutiae of daily life, the development and texture of family relationships, and the small decisions in which emotional trauma is registered and expressed, *Illuminating Love* may be seen to operate within conventions of domestic realism. In that it offers "the appearance of truth or reality" (Earnshaw "Beginning Realism" 3), the semblance of "verisimilitude" (Earnshaw 3), it may be likened to Dorothy Allison's *Bastard out of Carolina* (1993), Anna Quindlen's *Black and Blue* (1998) and Swift's *Waterland*. These are also written within a realistic tradition and deal with similar themes.

Cally's reactions to Jake's behaviour range from distress as Jake throws his keys onto her desk, to lying awake after being belittled or going to her sister when Jake's actions become more aggressive, until she is forced into making a drastic decision. However, the change in her is slow in coming. She feels bound to Jake because of strong Jewish cultural mores that maintain the male as the patriarch and proscribe divorce, and where the dynamics of power force women into various modes of submission, avoidance, circumlocution and quiet-subversion. The victim of abuse in the home, the supposed place of safety, Cally becomes increasingly immobilised

and fearful, transfixed and intimidated, unable to protect herself or to flee the source of her pain. Such emotional outcomes are explored in various theoretical texts that recognise the issues of spousal abuse, addressing various aspects of domestic violence in society in general and the Jewish community in particular, and also suggesting ways of self-empowerment for the victim within the system. These include *The Shame Borne in Silence: Spouse Abuse in the Jewish Community* by A. Twerski (1996), S. Weitzman's *Not to People like Us: Hidden Abuse in Upscale Marriages* (2003), N. Graitz's *Silence is Deadly: Judaism Confronts Wife Beating* (1998), C. G. Goodman's *Sins of Omission: The Jewish Community's Reaction to Domestic Violence* (2003), and M. S. Miller's *No Visible Wounds: Identifying Nonphysical Abuse of Women by their Men* (1995).

Cally could instead have been depicted as a more proactive character, one who acts on her own behalf. In this case, she might have answered Jake back, walked out of the room, threatened him with separation or divorce, realising the damage the hostility in the home was inflicting on her children even while ignoring the effects on herself. Such an awareness of collateral damage might also have served to heighten the representation of her inner conflict. However, my intention instead was to depict a woman worn down by ongoing and intensifying episodes of domestic violence, the emotional outcome of which is her loss of self-belief and confidence to act successfully on her own behalf. Thus, for example, the scene where she does finally react to Jake's taunting, tipping the table onto him and scalding him with hot coffee, only comes very late in the novel.

Development of the Character of Jake

Jake is drawn simply as a man with an abusive personality, his occasional demonstration of affection towards his wife and children another of his tactics. The implication is that his aggression may have exacerbated by his experiences during the Bush War. Nick Andrew's memoir *Buried in the Sky* (2001), as well as news articles by W. Claiborne, 'Namibia's Forgotten Bush War; 21 Costly Year Nears With No End in Sight' (1987) and G. Baines, 'South Africa's Forgotten War' (2009), all of which describe the soldiers and their contribution to the war effort, provided the background material.

In order to make Jake's character more complex, his involvement in the war could have been described in more detail, and existing episodes extended to include

scenes of the combat and their aftermath. In addition, Jake's friendship with Brad in the desert and the camaraderie between them and other comrades-in-arms could have been employed to cast him in a more sympathetic light. The impact of this history on Jake, and therefore also on Cally, might also have been employed to reflect the impact of history on personal life, one of the concerns of Judith's poems. Jake's character might also have been developed further in relationship with Cally as well as with the other woman by showing a more loving side of Jake. This approach might then have further served to highlight Cally's emotional difficulties.

However, Jake's function in the novel is that of a subsidiary character and my intention was to focus on the women, Cally and Judith, interweaving their narratives and emphasizing their capabilities, versatility and lyricism in the face of their differing obstacles. Focusing more attention on Jake would have emphasised his viewpoint instead, his wars and the male viewpoint, thereby detracting from the development of the women and theirs.

Aspects of Voice and Viewpoint

The use of the first person evokes a deeper intimacy than is typical of the omniscient narrator or third-person point of view, and *Bastard out of Carolina* and *Waterland* influenced the choice of point of view for *Illuminating Love*. In my first novel, *Counting Sleeping Beauties*, the narrative emerges as a sequence of events told by four women, each using the first person point of view. *Illuminating Love* extends this approach into poetry. In that the use of the first person point of view also offers the reader a sense of immediacy, it gives direct access to Cally and Judith's thoughts and feelings, encouraging reader empathy

However, the use of the first person singular prevents the narrator from describing any given situation that does not directly involve him or her. This possible disadvantage is overcome: through Cally's interactions with her mother and her sister Bella, the reader is given an alternative viewpoint and different choices with the possibility of different outcomes. Although writing from the single point of view could lead to lack of variety, Judith's poetry provides an alternative to Cally's. The differing textures of consciousness offered through the imperative of the two first-person narratives express subtle subjective shifts in their alternate versions of belonging, home and violence, linking domestic/subjective and national/cultural aspects.

Use of Dialogue

Dialogue in fiction is multi-functional, propelling the narrative, establishing levels of realism, proffering information and developing character. Choice of language and tone must be appropriate to, or a reflection of, characters' state of being and frame of mind, since the reader forms opinion about the characters from what they say.

In *Illuminating Love*, dialogue is used to set the scene in various family interactions, during Jewish festivals, barbecues in the garden and outings to the park. Conversations between Cally and Aaron, Cally and her mother and Cally and Bella reveal their characters and also provide the reader with information about Judith, her background and her poetry. The conversations between Cally and Aaron develop their relationship, at the same time highlighting their mutual passion for calligraphy. On the other hand, the dialogue between Jake and Cally is sparse, indicative of the chasm between them. Their informal, day-to-day conversation fluctuates between the romantic and the hostile; as he controls her, she submits, in the cage, forest and sea. Finally, however, it is his criticism of her as manifested in dialogue that provokes Cally into action when she tips the table and its contents onto him.

The Function of Calligraphy in the Narrative

The two strands of *Illuminating Love* are linked through the trope of writing as “a transformative art” (Hartman 18). As Cally seeks a way to inscribe her journey in fitting aesthetic form, Judith searches for suitable words to record her memories through poetry. In order to better understand the art and craft of calligraphy, I referred to *The Story of Writing* by Donald Jackson (1981) and *More than Fine Writing: The Life and Calligraphy of Irene Wellington* by Heather Child et al (1998).

While inscribing her grandmother's words, Aaron and Shira's *ketuba* and her gift for Jake, Cally is able to detach herself from her fraught circumstances and avoid direct confrontation. In expressing her longing through the words of others, she invests them with an almost magical power; in so doing, she maintains her hopes that all will be well. Her inner dialogue reveals her conflicts, anxieties and fantasies; as she remains passive, the narrative develops through the words she is writing rather than through her actions. As she obsessively carries out her tasks, each project reveals different aspects of the craft as well as of her relationship with Jake. The art of calligraphy serves as writing, expression, self-expression and voice as the page offers

a safe space for meditation, and the rendering of form and detail bring their own consolation. It is for this reason that the art is described in cumulative detail.

The process itself comes to reflect the nature of Cally's daily life, her fears, hopes and dreams, just as the act of writing poetry serves Judith. Thus the quiet, inner lyricism of calligraphy and poetry provide both protagonists with a place of refuge and solace. By making use of historical and biographical material some of which was garnered in conversation with survivors, Judith's poems permeate the borders between poetry and testimony. Since both Cally and Judith express their losses and longings through inscriptions that aspire to permanence, they fulfill the stricture to never forget. Thus their collected writings become a *yisker* book, a book of mourning and memory, of individual and communal preservation and healing.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have presented and analysed numerous poems by the Lithuanian-South African Yiddish poet David Fram. As a result, this literature enters the public domain. Most of the poems have not been translated before and my intensive study of Fram's poetry required some knowledge of Yiddish. By transliterating them into English for the first time, the poems are now accessible to a wider readership. This also places the roots, history and culture of Yiddish in the forefront of literary consciousness by providing both an overview of the concerns of Fram's oeuvre and an in-depth assessment of the content and style of the poems. Through the intensive process required by the PhD, this study makes a contribution to the further understanding of a particular poet of a particular culture and time. It also gives the interested reader greater understanding of a particular Jewish immigrant's diasporic experience.

Through the study of this particular writer, I also highlighted notions of home and exile as important sources and spaces for creativity. For David Fram, his continuing connection with his mother tongue and homeland provided cultural stability in the Diaspora. His poems perpetuate links between Lithuania and the South African Diaspora after the breaks caused by the mass emigration from Eastern Europe before World War II and after the Holocaust. Together with a small group of survivors and their heirs, he continued to write in Yiddish, his poems mingling his feelings of attachment to what he left behind in his homeland with his responses to Africa. Thus, they offer significant insights into the mutual enrichment of Lithuanian-South African Yiddish literature and affirm the continued survival of Yiddish literature, specifically poetry.

I also proposed that the project is a timely one in that the last few Holocaust voices are dying out. Ours is the last generation that will be able to speak to or see survivors of the Shoah in the flesh. Fram's poetry offers an important vehicle for preserving their memory, as well as a means of bearing witness and offering testimony, arguing against Theodor Adorno's stricture that there should be "no poetry after Auschwitz" ("Negative Aesthetics" 392).

Given the importance of dealing with the reality of multiculturalism and multilingualism in contemporary South Africa, this also seems an appropriate time for a project of reclamation such as this. Although Yiddish is not one of the eleven official languages and Jews make up only a tiny percentage of the population, the poems contribute to a deeper understanding of South African culture. As a result of

the research and my findings, Fram's work may find a new and sympathetic audience there.

I also suggested that because there are certain noteworthy congruencies between Fram's life and specific poems, it is useful to take this into account when interpreting his works. In addition, I reflected on the process of writing this thesis, relating it to particular aspects of my creative submission. As indicated in Chapter Six, Fram's poems influenced the subject matter of the Judith poems in *Illuminating Love*, the novel written for this project. Chapter Seven highlighted the material other than Yiddish that influenced the development of the novel and the decision to structure it through the voices of two women, one expressed in prose, the other in poetry. I also reflected on aspects of genre, voice, viewpoint, dialogue, character development and the function of calligraphy in the narrative. Given the subject matter of my thesis, novel and poetry, these too become part of the body of Jewish Diaspora literature, providing their own form of testimony.

Future Projects and Possibilities

Simon Dubnow asserted, "Jewish history ... possesses universal significance ... the effective educational worth of the biblical part of Jewish history is disputed by none. ... Only a very few, however, recognise the profound moral content of the second part of Jewish history, the history of the Diaspora" (qtd. in Omer-Sherman 110). By researching Fram's poetry and offering my translations and transliterations in this study, I affirm the relevance of Jewish diasporist writing both to its own and to a wider community. In the future, I hope to present Fram's poems in their original Yiddish and in translation in journals such as *Jewish Affairs* (South Africa), and on sites such as *Mendele*,⁹¹ or Lansky's website,⁹² an initiative striving to mobilise the modern generation with the digitisation of the Yiddish books in its collection.

Literary texts may go some way to resist historical amnesia and Fram's poems form part of a lost world waiting to be recovered. Their symbolic process and expression help in the adaptation to and transcendence of the "wretchedness of the present moment" (Aaron ix) of the counter-history of a Jewish minority group. Translated and discussed, they offer insights into the rich cultural and personal

⁹¹ Yiddish Internet site of the University of Yale.

⁹² National Book Centre.

experience of homeland and Diaspora. Seeking “balm for the heart” (Sherman “Fram Centenary Tribute” 7), Fram’s ‘Fun tate-mames yidishe,’ and ‘Ikh bin a yid’ maintain the importance of both his language and his culture, even in Africa. Yiddish remained a linguistic homeland for Fram in which he could recover and reconstruct the world of the *shtetl*, an emblem of resistance to its destruction. Rather than remaining silent, he voiced his responses to rupture through poetry rather than prose, attaching metaphor to his memories to commemorate a lost community.

Yiddish survives through continued study, teaching and learning programmes, retrieval projects such as Lansky’s Yiddish library, and translation into the language of dominant cultures as in this study. Wolpe, expressing his conviction that Yiddish would be “analysed by a researcher in the future” (“Yidish loshn” 313), wrote, “Yiddish literature in South Africa is not a closed chapter yet” (313). Yiddish remains a vibrant language with a rich heritage and it is my hope that my study in some way redresses previous neglect of South African Yiddish literature in general and of Fram’s poems in particular, in this small but optimistic project of reminder and reclamation.

Word count: 42538

Illuminating Love

Hazel Frankel

About a *shtetl*
about friendship
about arranged love
about a father and mother
about writing a poem
about hiding the writing
about secrets
about a woman and *Torah*
about a whole coat
then frayed
one button left
about the button
about what is lost
about paper bridges
about not forgetting.

I turn the tattered pages of Judith's notebook. English and Yiddish are faded and blotched, barely legible in places, her minute copperplate script covering both sides of every page, some pages a palimpsest, some words pressed so close together that the looping 'ls' and 'ks' are entangled. Although I read slowly, I can't take it all in, what she went through.

I want to write out her text in a calligraphic script different from any I've used before. What would be right for her words, her experiences? How best can I capture the essence of my grandmother's life, her journey to South Africa?

Her poems. My roots.

In every *shtetl*
Jews in the centre circle.

In every wooden house
a kitchen,
a *pripetshik*.

On every iron hob,
water in a bowl,
a brass samovar,
ash in the flue.

On every plot
cow, chicks, ducks;
no sow.

On every bed a *perene*
stuffed with feathers,
plucked and de-stemmed

by a row of children
with curls
bound in kerchiefs.

In every bed
children
cold noses,
cold feet touching.

For every child,
boots stuffed with paper,
too small, too big.
For every child
a hand-me-down shirt
from the child-just-older.

We all held hands,
we held out our hands:

None left out.
None left.

In my studio, my writing desk is next to the window for natural light. On it are ink stones and sticks, gum sandarac, gum ammoniac and distilled water, bottles of Indian and Chinese ink and boxes with tubes of gouache and watercolour. There are ceramic jars containing penholders with metal nibs, sable and squirrel-hair brushes and quills from the flight feathers of swans. Oak shelves line the walls, filled with books arranged according to subject matter: poetry, art, calligraphy, and facsimiles of illuminated manuscripts. Swatches of handmade, machine-made, hot-press, cold-press, rice and reed papers as well as parchment are stored in architects' drawers, cool, dry and dust-free, protecting them from light damage and keeping them flat.

I begin with a variety of steel nibs, writing familiar letters in a steady slope and regular rhythm. I practise various styles, trying to find one that would be appropriate, a heavy Italic for the English combined with a lightweight and feathery Yiddish script, rounded letters, linked then separated. Dissatisfied, I throw away page after page.

My window overlooks the swimming pool, so I can keep an eye on Danny and Michelle while I work. Behind them, the garden is a mass of bright colours, but the lawn needs mowing and the old birdcage is an eyesore. I hear Michelle, who is ten, challenge Danny, twelve, to a butterfly race.

‘On your marks, get set ...’

‘Okay, now backstroke!’

When the two of them sun themselves on the lawn I open the window.

‘Danny. Mishy. Have you used your sun block? Come and put some on.’

‘It’s fine, Ma, we’ll do it. Don’t worry.’

Besides writing out Judith’s poems, I am planning to inscribe an anniversary gift for Jake. I try various layouts, a rectangular scroll, and an accordion book that folds up like an ancient codex, each page with a decorated border. I choose quotes from King Solomon, Shakespeare and Khalil Gibran, words that encapsulate tenderness and passion, gentleness and promise, memory and possibility. I write page after page until the children bounce into the room, splattering water drops from their still-soaking costumes and hair.

‘Ma, can we have the chocolates in the cupboard, please?’

‘Sure. Only one each though! It’s nearly supper time.’

They wrangle over Kit Kats and Mars Bars as the grainy page caresses the heel of my hand and I keep to the ruled path. Thin up, thick down. Thin up, thick down. The ink is a glossy meniscus on each letter, wet and shiny as the words form, emerge, then sink into the pile of the paper, black streamers against the crisp white, drying into permanence.

My mother divided
one chicken into ten,
kneaded the *Shabes khale*
at midnight,
churned butter in the pail
mended our shoes,
dresses, trousers,
passed on with tears and holes,
made new mattresses
with straw every season
while we all slept
under the sign of the *mezuzah*;

but even she, my mother,
could not douse the *czar*,
set us free,
part the waters,
stay the execution;

still she carried our Ark,
believed in the Rainbow,
made a covenant,
kept faith with the Promised Land.

‘Ma, please can we eat?’

I’ve completely lost track of the time. Jake hasn’t arrived home and hasn’t called, though it’s almost seven. Maybe he’s stuck somewhere? Has he been hijacked?

On the patio, I braai our chops and think about how it takes one sheep to make one parchment volume. The aroma from the open fire makes my mouth water. I crack open an egg and the oil hisses as it hits the frying pan. The yolk forms a perfect golden ‘o’ when I slip it onto the rectangle of white toast and pass it to Danny under a night sky bright with stars, the Milky Way like burnished gilding on a mediaeval manuscript.

‘Where’s Dad, Ma? This is his favourite supper. Mine too. Can I have his chops?’

‘Wait a bit, okay?’

As we finish eating, lightning flashes break the darkness and we run for cover. As always the electric storm does not last, but the rain cools the air after the heat of the day. At eight, I tell Danny that he can have Jake’s dinner but he doesn’t want it any more. I cover the plate and store it in the fridge.

I brush out the knots in Michelle’s long hair despite her protests and kiss their dark heads once they are in bed. Then I go back to work on Jake’s gift. I watch my hand as it grips the pen, dips the nib. I tap off the surplus ink and move the nib along the writing line, concentrating on each movement, each twist, aware of my arm stroking back and forth as the patterns emerge. There are so many possibilities. I write the familiar letters in a steady slope with regular spacing, neat and accurate, my spacing even and controlled. Hours spent practising the classical hands have set them in my muscle memory and I know the steps, the fine upstrokes and thick downs in each script, Italics and Gothic, Roman and Compressed. Calligraphy is a learned art and an exact and exacting science. Unlike handwriting, there can be no spontaneity, no short cuts.

Come live with me and be my love ... As I copy out the words of the poem, Jake finally arrives home.

‘Hi, Doll,’ I quickly cover my page, ‘How’s your day?’

He walks mud into the studio as he comes towards me, shoes squelching on the pinewood floor. ‘Have to go to Namibia tomorrow. An urgent contract to draw up in Windhoek for that guy with the scrap-metal yard. You know, Muller, Brad’s buddy? And he’s some big shot in the diamond industry there so I’m sure there’ll be other work. It’s a real

feather in my cap that he's using me, you know.' Then, 'I have to pack now. Where'd you put the small suitcase? The handle on my black one's broken.'

'Hall closet, I think.'

'You'll have to take my car for a service. She's fetching me first thing tomorrow.

Miranda.'

I want to ask him how he feels about going back there but Jake won't talk about it, so I don't. It was Mike, Bella's doctor husband, who had always told us what was going on, about operations in Namibia and the battles between SWAPO and UNITA. Never Jake.

I practise some of the difficult letters: the twist of 's', the balance of 'g', the carefully weighted crossbars of 't' and 'f', and the invisible joins of 'o'. I want the best script for each quotation and plan to call Ewan, my favourite tutor, to discuss possibilities of paper, nib and ink combinations, size and weight, and perhaps for some brush-up lessons too. I hear footsteps on the stairs. As Jake bursts back into my studio, I hunch over the desk, not looking up, protecting my secret.

His car keys land on my desk, and my eyes flicker, then return to my letters. He bends down, brushes my cheek with his lips and leaves. He doesn't ask about or try to see what I'm doing. I'm pleased – my gift will be a surprise. Then he's back.

'My suit's not clean. What do you want me to wear, hey?' The jacket is shoved in front of me.

'What about wearing the dark blue? It's smart. Or your light grey is nice?'

'You've got a cheek, you know, sitting at your desk, day in, day out, not getting things done. I'll be back Tuesday for supper.'

I put down my pen and close my eyes, imagining Jake playing his guitar to me, the sun-and-shade of willow trees along the brown Vaal. Then I return to Judith's poems, taking the writing slowly, resting my eyes between bursts.

Jake's study door slams and my hand jerks, splattering the ink.

In the kitchen
kerosene for light,
fire for warmth;

shmalts renders
after the carcass;
onions in *gribenes*
congeals on our bread;

outside,

piners keep watch.

No bones, only potato peels
for today's meal;

I boil them with salt,
add one wild beet,
bring sunrise into the pot.

‘Do you do cartography? Graphology? Gallography?’

‘It’s calligraphy.’

‘Is that where you write something with pen and ink?’

‘Yes, what are you wanting?’

‘Certificates. Black and white. There’re about 500. How much will it be?’

‘Depends on the script. I charge more for Gothic.’ Although writing on white envelopes or certificates is dull work, it’s my bread and butter. ‘And I’ll need a correct list.’

‘How long do you need?’

‘Depends when you give it to me.’

Now I practise and experiment with lettering variations, Rustic, Foundational and Lombardic scripts, for certificates I’m designing for the College of Art and Design, referring to photographs of the historical versions in Stan Knight’s book, then to Jackie Svaren’s modern adaptations. I page through my copy of the Lindisfarne Gospels, pages designed in the eighth century by a lone scribe. On the remote Holy Island in Northumbria he dedicated his life to inscribing a single Latin text on parchment, carrying out all the tasks himself: he ruled up, mixed the colours from the flora and the soil he’d found in the area and wrote. Tombstones, indigenous flowers and birds and ancient jewellery and coins of early Anglo-Saxon culture and patterns of the labyrinth inspired his decorations for the manuscript.

I adapt the designs and try to emulate his vibrant colours. In the hours that Danny and Mishy are at school, I complete a few possibilities to show the director of the college. Jake arrives back and we all sit down to supper. He devours a huge helping of cottage pie.

‘I want to start advertising, Jake. I want to get more work and at the moment word of mouth is my only source of commissions.’

‘Work? You can’t take on more work! I want to come home to a cooked meal and a tidy house and my shirts ironed.’

‘Yes, but calligraphy ...’

‘Such a fancy word for your copying! How long do you think the craze will last? Maybe you’ve been busy these last couple of months but it’s totally uncertain.’

‘Well, I thought of listing myself in the phone book and the local press. Maybe even have a website ...?’

‘Oh, so now you’re also a computer boff.’

‘There is so much potential for it, Jake. I’m going to be starting a few classes at the recreation centre and some of my friends have asked me to teach them at home. It would be a good source of income.’ I want to ask him whether he’s heard of Steve Jobs’ passion for calligraphy, but I don’t.

‘I don’t want to hear any more about it. You’re the wife of a successful man. Are you telling me I don’t earn enough to support you?’ He bangs his fork and knife down on his plate. ‘How can any work you do even cover the cost of the dog food? It’s pointless.’

Danny and Mishy are wide-eyed, and I’m relieved that Louisa, our domestic, has left already. Jake shoves his chair back and leaves the table and neither of the children finishes their food. Why did I discuss it in front of them? Why did I bring it up at all? Jake stalks back into the dining room.

‘In any case, don’t most people prefer computer print? At least then there are no mistakes. I can’t see the point of the hours you spend lettering.’ He walks out again without waiting for my response. The children help clear the table and I wash up while they do their homework.

That night I surf the Internet for ‘calligraphy’, then ‘parchment’, then ‘illuminated manuscript’.

‘At a scriptorium in Wales, a team of calligraphers are inscribing a modern English Bible under mediaeval conditions, using only turkey quills and mediaeval methods. On 8 March 2000, the Queen’s Scribe penned the first words of Genesis on the first separate folio.’

I pick up my pen, dip and write ‘In the beginning was the Word’. I doodle a few lines under them to suggest sea, then make a circle above for the sun, the edged pen giving the drawn lines a thick and thin, sinuous quality.

‘A modern script has been specially created for this Bible. It will eventually consist of seven volumes of 1150 parchment pages, two foot tall. The cost will be in excess of four million dollars for a work that may outlast mankind, an historic achievement, contemporary, ecumenical, cultural and prophetic. It will be decorated with butterflies, dragonflies, grasses, acorns, squirrels, cranes, cicadas and mosquitoes, images culled from the surrounding Welsh locale.’

I copy some of the details from the high-definition photographs around the edges of my page, then take another and cover it with butterfly wings.

‘The layouts and borders will be computer-generated and will include images of evolution, black holes and man’s conquest of outer space as well as traditional religious imagery. These will then be transferred and hand painted in gouache, watercolour and black ink on the parchment to create a work of art for people of all faiths worldwide.’

Page one is already completed and up on the Internet for viewing, a menorah with a DNA strand twisting through written in Hebrew, English and Aramaic.

I shut down my laptop. Long after midnight, when Michelle calls for a glass of water, I’m still writing.

As we sip, plush feet planted,
I take apart the brass samovar,
bit by bit and tell it:
black coal-stove,
pipe fuelled with pine cones,
saffron-smelling sugar lumps,
in the icy wood house, where tea swirled through the spigot,
spilt from the tap
where red was just another colour,
where ash faces multiplied,
white faces breaking on stones,
where the sun could not warm them,
rain could not wash them away,
in the forest where they fled,
where the road ended and their journey began,
burnt aloe sinking into pits,
staring eyes,
not stars,
and their spilled saffron voices
flow through me,
kum, vart, blayb
come, wait, stay
as we sip.

Louisa arrives late for work the next day.

‘It’s the taxi strikes. I waited and waited.’

She changes out of her navy skirt and jacket into her pink apron, ties a scarf around her hair and vacuums the bedroom section, then sweeps my studio. I pass her down some of my books to dust and we rearrange the chairs around the table to make it more comfortable when clients come, then she starts on the bathrooms.

In the afternoon, she leaves earlier than usual to take two buses back to Alexandra.

I fetch the children from their activities and help them with their homework, then begin preparing supper. I have bought fresh rolls and I open tins of baked beans and boil some sausages.

Jake comes in to the kitchen.

‘Where’d you put my cell phone, Cally?’

Mishy and I hunt in his study, moving everything, the dusty magazines, the papers and the pictures stored behind the bookcase in case it has fallen there. ‘How many times have I told you to leave my stuff alone? And why are you reading my messages, hey?’

He is silent and cold at the table, and the children’s jokes fall flat.

‘Not eating this.’

‘Maybe have it with the Dijon mustard, Jake, or tomato sauce?’

‘It’s inedible. I’m going to get takeaways!’

‘Us too, Daddy, us too.’

‘Sure. What would you like then?’

‘Burgers please. And French fries.’

He doesn’t offer me anything, takes out the cell phone that has reappeared without comment, and gives his order. He drives off and the house goes quiet, the children watching TV while they wait. I eat my hot dogs, clear away what is left on the other three plates, wash up and put away the pot, imagining Judith’s mother dividing one chicken into ten, kneading the *khale* at midnight, and after their father blessed them, giving each child a crust of the warm bread. She churned butter in the pail, mended their shoes, dresses, trousers, made new mattresses with straw every season beyond-the-Pale, while they all slept under the sign of the *mezuzah*, as we still do. And even though they could not get rid of the *czar*, they believed in the Promised Land.

Upstairs, I take Jake's sampler from its hidden shelf and set up. I stare out of the window. When he comes back, he remains in the TV room with the children as they eat their dinner.

*

Almonds with orange peel,
cinnamon with sugar,
ginger with spice,
 yolks without white;

flour rains through muslin sifter,
thoughts rubbed with butter,
eyes big as raisins,
mouths breathe longing;

my father laps us with his eyes –
warm sweetmeats.

Judith's word-tattoo is on my mind. As I develop an alphabet that suits her imagery, I feel very close to her as her voice comes to me through her poems. I have so many questions about her journey, questions that can now never be answered.

I gather goose and swan feathers, plunge their tips into sand heated in a metal pot on the hob. I think of Zeus coming to Leda as the tendons and gristle harden with the heat and the smell of burning flesh catches my throat. I slice away the feathery bits, slit the tips with my penknife to create a nib, deepen these for flexibility, then fan the quills out on the drawing table. Waiting for them to cool, I phone my mother.

'About Judith, Mom. Her poems ...'

'So sad, aren't they? As was so much of her life.'

'I wish I'd known her better. I understood so little before I read them. Can you tell me more?'

'I don't know very much. We tried to ask her many times, your aunt Rachel and I, about what happened to her and her family before she came here. She never wanted to speak about it, always changed the subject. Or pretended not to hear.'

'Why wouldn't she tell you?'

'I guess she just wanted to forget – her losses were terribly painful. But we only realised that long afterwards.'

While she speaks, I pick up an uncut quill. Scraping its tip on the empty sheet of paper in front of me, I picture Judith as I remember her, dark hair plaited into a bun round the back of her head, a cameo brooch pinned to her paisley cotton dress.

'She survived when most of the members of her family whom she left behind didn't. It was like that for many of the immigrants. Plus, they didn't want to burden us, the next generation, wanted us to fit in to our new country, have a happy life. One that was denied them. We were their hope for the future.'

'It must have been so difficult for her, Mom. And for you – such a heavy silence around something so important.'

I hear my mom's breathing on the other side of the line.

'Mom, are you okay?'

'It's all such a long time ago, still it weighs on my mind.'

Loading my sable brush with ink made of gouache, lamp black and alizarin crimson mixed to creamy consistency, I fill the well of the metal nib. I test it out on deckle-edged, A3

paper, keeping a cover sheet under my writing hand and a sheet to my right to flick off excess ink. My hands moving in harmony as I dip, tap, touch, reach, over and over again, the ink performing its magic, clotting on the surface, veining the page and funnelling thought. I draw the thick and thin strokes, ascenders and descenders in different heights and with varying slope.

I rinse my brushes and pens, leave them in a jar to dry with their tips up, then grind down my Chinese ink stick. It makes an abrasive sound as I push the resulting carbon powder into the deep well of the jet-black grinding stone. The shellac smells of damp, earthy caves and makes my eyes water. When I have enough powder, I add distilled water, a few droplets at a time. I choose a quill but it feels scratchy, its chitin on the fibre of the paper making a grating sound. I replace it with one that is more flexible and yielding. I start to write out a practice sheet, using the style I have chosen:

The pond in summer
was a place for dreaming,

cartwheel runnels
tracks of hooves,

double trees
in deep waters.

Jake comes up behind me and covers my eyes. Even though I'm in the middle of writing a word, I laugh, put down my pen and put my hands over his. He turns my face towards him and bends down to kiss first my eyelids, then my cheeks and then my lips. His hands are cool and comforting and I swivel my chair round and stand up. He holds me close.

'Home so early?' It's afternoon and the children still at school.

'I've got a surprise,' is what I think he says, his lips still on mine, and his tongue in my mouth. He keeps his arms around me, moving his hands gently up and down my body, first just down my sides, over my hips and thighs, then towards and over my breasts so that the heat rises between us. He is already unbuttoning my top by the time we make it to the bedroom, and then we are undressed completely and in each other's arms, without thought, both of us breathless and searching.

Our tempo slower, we delight in each other's touch and taste. Every time we are together it feels new, slight changes and the smallest twists making for the variety and satisfying our needs. It's the changing colour of his eyes, his lashes against my earlobes and

the fluttering, so that afterwards, alone, I catch my lobe between my finger and thumb to resuscitate the feelings.

Lying still, we rest, his arms around me, as I snuggle into the crook of his arm.

‘I’ve booked us a holiday, Cally. Marilyn was in the office today and while we were drawing up the contract for her new resort, she showed me some brochures.’

‘A Cape holiday – just for the two of us. What’s to stop us? We’ve been talking about it for long enough.’ He makes as if to get up to fetch whatever it is that he wants to show me, but I catch his arm and pull him back.

‘No rush. The children won’t be back for an hour at least ...’

That evening, we go through the folder of brochures together. Two weeks in Cape Town, our accommodation organised. For the rest, we will decide together once we’re there, and will go wherever takes our fancy.

I know what the essentials are for me, Robben Island, Kirstenbosch, Holocaust Museum, National Gallery, South African Museum, the Castle, Groot Constantia, and long drives through winding hills and alongside the vineyards. However, staring at Jake’s tan, I know we will spend more than half the time on the beach. While I’ll protect my skin and sit under an umbrella, he’ll be baking outside it, and will swim whether the sea is warm enough or not.

I take another look at the dates. Enough time to complete my current commissions.

‘Mishy. Danny. Major. Prince.’

Because of the Cape Town trip we’ve planned in the new year, we are spending the December school holidays at home, enjoying the neighbourhood. Early Sunday morning we leash the dogs, call the kids and walk down the road to the bird sanctuary. We won’t be able to sit in the hides because of the children and the dogs. Instead, Danny is soon up the jacaranda tree, sitting with his legs dangling down, egging Mishy on to join him. Jake gives me the leashes and he holds her hand while she clambers up. When Major and Prince pull away, I hand the dogs back to Jake and stay with the children. He runs with them all the way up the hill, round and back, then helps the kids down, tickling Mishy’s legs as she passes him, and grabbing her round her waist.

‘Danny, Mishy, come see the owls’ nesting boxes.’ The boxes are camouflaged behind a clump of willow trees. On the ledges the birds devour their meal of mice. For the moment we are the only ones there.

Suddenly a group of big boys erupts into the hideout. The owls scatter, shrieking, some on the attack, defending their home. Mishy hides her face in my arm, as Jake arrives back.

‘Get away, you idiots. Look what you’ve done ... spoilt it for everyone,’ Danny yells. Then Jake raises his voice.

‘Take your mates and go or I’ll get the supervisor.’ The boys take off straight away. We wait to see if the birds will come back but they don’t, so we go for a run before the sun disappears altogether.

At home Jake takes down his *Roberts Birds of Southern Africa*.

‘Here’s what we saw, Barn Owls. Since the park put up the boxes, they are managing to breed there.’

Danny pages through, ‘Look Dad, Martial and Fish Eagles. These are top of my wish list.’

Then we hear fireworks going off at the party next door, big bangs, then rockets. The children run outside, but it is impossible for them to see through the hedges between the houses. They delay going to bed, talking about the incident with the gang of boys at the park.

‘Come, Dan. Let’s feed the dogs and then you can go to bed, okay?’ They disappear into the yard while Mishy and I go back inside to tidy the kitchen. I hear Jake, then Danny calling, ‘Major, Major.’

‘Ma, he’s gone. We’ve looked and called and looked and called.’

‘Well, he can’t have gone very far. When last did you see him?’

‘Don’t remember. Dad’s gone to get the torch.’

‘Tell him it’s in the tool drawer upstairs.’

‘Got it.’ Danny follows him back outside and the search goes on as they open the gate and walk up the road. Then Jake is back. ‘I’m taking the car.’

‘Can I come, Dad?’

‘Me too, Dad.’

The three of them leave and I wait. They come back more than half an hour later but without the dog.

Jake sits down in the kitchen and takes Michelle on his lap. ‘We’ll have another look in the day, sweetie. He’ll turn up.’ Then he turns to face me. ‘He got out through that hole in the fence. Let’s get some sleep. I’m bushed. Must have been the fireworks frightening him.’

‘Where can he be, Mommy?’ We try to comfort the children and then all turn in.

In the morning, we hear a familiar duet and presume Major came back the same way he left. Jake spends the day at home, repairing the break, Michelle holding the tool kit, Danny passing.

My father took down
 the guarded *Khanuke-lomp*,
 tarnished black,
 crown and lion,
 eagle and dove,
 bolted to their palace,
 eight wells empty,
 twisted string wicks stiff
 with last year's oil,
 ninth well for the *shames*,
 the overseer, the lighter,
 the oil jug upright and empty.

He laid paper
 on the kitchen table,
 dismantled the lamp,
 placed screws with bolts,
 each in order,
 hummed as he worked,
 whispering an age-old philosophy,
 passed me the rag,
 bade me polish,
 piece by piece.

Outside,
 wildflowers were gone,
 grass was grey,
 sky was empty of blue;
 our breath came in clouds
 as we rubbed our hands together
 against the chill.

Beside the fire
 I worked silently
 under the eye of the eagle,
 whose call sang to me
 as we polished each memory
 until it shone,
 put the whole back together,
 so that it stood as it always had,
 in its right order,
 in its right place,
 lion with crown,
 eagle with dove,
 lid with well,
 oil with wick,
 each according to its purpose.

That night we lit the first candle,
sang *maoz tsur*,
Judah's old triumphant song,
our own miracle:

my father's spirit,
my father's torch.

The first night of *Khanuke* falls on the third Sunday in December. We have the whole family over for lunch first and will light the first candle at nightfall. Until the last minute before the guests arrive, I work on my commissions. There never seems to be enough time. I check off on my fingers what still needs to be done, then take out chicken pieces and chops from the freezer, wash potatoes, put eggs on to boil and cut up the pickled cucumbers for the potato salad. When Danny comes downstairs, barefoot and still in his pyjamas, I set him to washing the lettuce and slicing the tomato, peppers, radishes and green cucumber. I grate the cabbage and carrots and add mayonnaise and raisins, slice avocado pear and combine it with pawpaw and nuts.

My parents arrive at the same time as Joyce, Jake's mother. She hooks her arm through his. Outside on the recliners, they are soon engaged in exclusive conversation, and Jake shares the *Sunday Times* with her. When Bella and Mike and their children come, they settle down nearer the pool under the umbrella.

Jake opens a cooldrink can for Joyce. As the air spurts out, Hamlet, our parrot, goes 'sshheeww' and bends his knees, head cocked to one side. His cage swings gently under the canopy protected from the mynahs. My nephew, Gary, puts his fingers through the metal bars.

'Careful,' Danny says, 'you know he's a parrot with attitude.' Hamlet hops down from his perch and picks at his smorgasbord, first choosing some pawpaw then tossing the skin away. He rejects the banana and eats the orange quarters instead.

'Just look at this headline,' I hear Jake's voice across the lawn.

'Bush War memorial for anti-apartheid fighters.'

'After all you and your friends gave up for this country.'

'And now the ANC is honouring the Cubans!'

'Please will you start the fire, Jake?' He doesn't answer me. There is the rustling of cheap paper as he straightens out the folds, and hands the newspaper to his mother. 'And can you find the braai tongs?'

I set the table outside, avoiding bumping Jake's legs, which are resting across an extra chair. I wipe off the knives and forks and notice how tarnished they are, the plastic handles chipped in places. We need to replace some of them.

'Jake, I forgot to get rolls. Please can you get? And I don't think there's enough charcoal.'

He tosses the newspaper aside and stands up, knocking into the table so that the cutlery jumps. By the time he comes back, I'm organised and my mom and dad, suntanned and relaxed, are watching the Grey Louries nibbling the red berries in the hedge.

'They're called Grey Go-Away Birds now,' Dad says as he helps himself to the savoury corn-and-nut mix.

'It's ridiculous. As bad as the Dikkop being called Thick Knees.'

'At least they're easily identified, unlike all those LBJs, little brown jobs.'

Jake offers my father a Johnny Walker and pours himself a heavy tot. The men stand watching the fire and chatting as Jake puts the meat on to braai. The children splash around, bombing each other in the pool. Bella helps me to carry the food outside.

Around us hadedas squawk and weavers twitter in their hanging nests.

'Your pergola is beautiful, Cal. Those climbing roses!'

'They're a hybrid. Jake ordered them for me. I love the colour. I want to plant all the beds in shades of blue, mauve and purple, violets, pansies, irises. Oh, Mom suggested we do this Friday night together.'

'I'll ask Mike.'

'Oh, okay, did you hear the Burchell's Coucal calling there? Must be going to rain.'

When Jake's cell phone bleeps, he excuses himself and goes inside. I think I catch a glance between Bella and my mother but I go on serving hors d'oeuvres and offering crisps with dips. Jake returns, pours himself another tot, sits down and joins in the conversation with my father and Mike, then interrupts them to talk about a new take-over bid he's involved in. Jiggling his leg, then swinging it up and down, he grazes Bella's every time, until she says, 'Jake, please.' He stops but does not move away and soon starts swinging his leg again. 'Take it easy, Jake.' He picks up the newspaper and is reading the front-page article again as my mom and I carry the salads outside and I serve the meat. Sitting on their towels, the children devour their food, Danny and Gary chomping the meat off the bones. The boys are a year apart and they get on well. Danny looks up to Gary and they include each other in activities with their different groups of friends.

'Please save the bones for Prince and Major.'

‘Sure, Ma.’ Danny turns, ‘Gran, Grandpa, want to see my new dives?’ He’s been practising hard, hoping to make the Maccabi team and to compete in Israel, and when he does his routine, everyone is suitably impressed. Gary tries to emulate him but gives up, and the two of them join Mishy and Joanne who are chatting together. Mishy fetches the Monopoly set and they are soon engrossed in buying property and building houses. I catch Jake staring at me, but I ignore him, offer second helpings and drinks, and then start clearing away the plates and cutlery to make way for dessert.

‘Please can you slice the watermelon, Jake, and bring it out?’

I stack the dishwasher as Jake slices the fruit. He takes the sliced melon outside and I follow with dessert plates.

My father hands out *yarmies*, opens the *sider* and makes the *brokhe*. Then he lights the first candlewick of Judith’s *menorah*, adjusting the string to make sure that its end is dipped in the oil so the flames don’t go out. We sing *maoz tsur*, the children’s sunburnt cheeks radiant in the candlelight, and enjoy mom’s *latkes*, with cinnamon and sugar or just plain.

Afterwards I sit next to my dad who passes me his folded-over newspaper and points to one of the clues.

‘Any idea, Cal? It’s in your field – writing.’

I read aloud, ‘Used by monks to give teeth to parchment.’

I count the empty squares of the crossword.

‘Sandarac.’

‘Never heard of it.’

‘Makes the surface abrasive so that the ink doesn’t slide off.’

‘Thanks. Danny, this is an interesting one. Desert Rat?’

‘No idea, Grandpa. What is it? Gerbil?’

‘Montgomery. He led the British in Egypt in World War Two.’

‘Were you there, Grandpa?’

My father puts down the newspaper and takes off his glasses.

‘No, I was much too young. Your uncle Harry, my oldest brother, was exempted on medical grounds. Next time you see him, have a look at his left eye. There’s a white streak across the pupil.’

‘What happened to him, Grandpa?’

‘When he was a boy, about eight I think, he was chopping wood. A splinter flew into it.’ I see Danny cringe. ‘The doctors thought he’d lose his sight but he still has ten per cent vision there. Enough to read with.’

We see all the adults out. My mother kisses Jake goodbye as usual, on both cheeks.

Jake comes back in and closes the door.

‘It’s too much, having your whole family here. Especially your mother. And that story about your uncle. Someone else who never fought in a war. Just like Mike.’

I sit down, and put my legs up. ‘And you shouldn’t eat so much. Don’t want you looking fat on the beach.’

The cousins sleep over, and fall asleep quickly after their day in the sun. I kiss them all, softly so as not to wake them, and switch off the lights.

They get up early and Jake sets up the yellow plastic water slide, attaching it to the hose pipe. They spend the day squirting each other, drying out and then starting again, drinking juice and eating apples, crisps and chocolates, and cold meats and salads for lunch.

Afterwards, every *Khanuke*,
my husband
laid out the paper on the table,
took the pieces apart,
separated lid from holder,
bird and crown,
cleaned the lamp.

unbolted crown, lion, *shames*,
covered each with polish,
left it to dry,
rubbed each with cloth
until it shone.

Signs of my husband:
newly trimmed wicks,
polished silver wells filled with oil,
songs as the festival rode in
on the back of sunset.

We drop Danny and Michelle at my parents the night before we fly, with last-minute instructions, farewell hugs and promises of gifts on our return. Tucked into my handbag is Judith's journal, wrapped in layers of protective tissue paper, but I have taken out the small envelope packed with her ink-written notes that I found stuck between the back endpapers and the cover, and left those safely at home.

Our bed-and-breakfast accommodation overlooks the Camps Bay promenade, Atlantic in front of us, Table Mountain behind. We spend the first morning taking a leisurely walk in town, past Parliament through The Company Gardens with its lily ponds and huge cages filled with birds. All the avenues are lined with oak trees, some dating back hundreds of years, and there are squirrels feasting on the acorns that lie scattered in the gutters. We wander down Long Street and through St George's Mall, stopping to browse the antique shops and read the signboards about the history of the streets. Later, in Greenmarket Square, Jake catches my elbow, my shoulder, and then puts his arms around my waist so that I change my sling bag to my left side to prevent it bumping him. At a stall selling jewellery I find a lovely silver butterfly brooch.

'It's kitsch.'

'Still, I like it.'

Jake buys it for me, then tries on and buys a pair of trainers and a couple of patterned shirts for himself.

'Try this cap, Jake.'

'Not khaki. Too much like army issue.' We both choose plain white caps and then some gifts, a wooden model of the Dromedaris for Danny and a brightly coloured banjo, like the ones the Cape minstrels play at the New Year carnival, for Michelle. We also buy a pack of koeksusters and eat as we walk, trying not to drip syrup onto our clothes. I have raw blisters on my heels from my new sandals and I sit on a bench and take some emergency plasters out of my bag. Jake helps me to cover the sores.

'You need Mercurochrome, Babe. We'll stop at a pharmacy on the way back. Can you hold out till then?' I nod, though the pain is excruciating.

Our expedition takes longer than we expect, because of the heat and my painful feet, so it is late by the time we take a bus to Clifton Beach. There we are lucky to find a shady spot on the crowded beach beside an outcrop of rocks. Jake strips to his swimming costume, spreads his towel on the sand and lies down. Within moments he is asleep. I put my head on

my handbag and doze off too. I awake disorientated, to see Jake walking towards me, licking around the edges of two sorbet cones to prevent them from melting away.

‘Here, Doll, eat up.’ We make short work of the delicious combination of strawberry and lemon. Then he pulls me up and I paddle in the glassy water watching my toes and the sway of the seaweed. My open blisters sting. Jake doesn’t mind the icy current and goes in deep.

‘Time for cocktails?’

Walking back up the steep incline, Jake carries my bag as well as his. He hails a taxi on the main road.

‘It costs ...’ but he opens the door and I slide in ahead of him, relieved.

‘It’s fine, Cal. You’ll never manage with those wounds on your feet.’

Back at the hotel, the blue shutters rattle open and closed in the southeaster, the Cape Doctor, as Jake struggles to unpin the brooch from my blouse. He mumbles as he pricks himself but soon I am in his arms and the sweat pours between us.

‘Love you,’ he says.

‘Mmm, me too. Perhaps we could visit one of the museums tomorrow?’

‘What about taking the train to Muizenberg where the water is warmer?’

‘There’s an Irma Stern exhibition. Why don’t we start there?’

‘Beach.’

‘Exhibition.’

‘Beach.’

We do neither. We wake late and go for a walk. We sit on the patio of the hotel, order salad for lunch and then sleep, me shaded by the blue striped umbrella. Jake lying unprotected so he can tan his back.

At the end of the day, though I have been careful, my skin is burning and Jake puts lashings of Freeze across my back and down my arms. There are white marks on my feet where the sun could not reach because of the sandal straps. After a cool shower, we sleep, awakening in the middle of the night ravenous. I find a squashed health bar in my overnight bag and Jake two packets of nuts and a melted bar of chocolate in his. We make do with water to drink and fall asleep again, the moon filtering brightly through the floral curtains.

The next day, we drive past Groote Schuur Hospital where Chris Barnard did the first heart transplant, past the Old Windmill and Rhodes Memorial to Kirstenbosch Gardens. Meandering along the paths, smelling the plants, we identify some of them by sight, some by reading the labels, savouring their variety and fragrance. It is impossible to see everything:

the place contains every variety of South Africa flora: the proteas, restios and ericas that make up the fynbos; exquisite flowering bulbs; the aloes, vygies and other succulents; a section on medicinal plants; hidden streams with cycads and tree ferns. Sunbirds and Cape White-Eyes everywhere. Jake takes some pamphlets and reads as we drink tea and eat scones with jam and cream at the wooden tables at the restaurant, nestled against the mountain.

‘There’s an exhibition of sculptures by Zimbabwean artists. Let’s look.’

The show has been set up between the plants and trees and we buy two soapstone birds, an African Hoopoe and a Helmeted Guinea Fowl, and also a painted wooden Red Hornbill.

‘They’ll be ideal for the pool area, next to the rockery. What do you think, Cal?’

Jake also buys a book on indigenous plants.

‘For when we landscape the garden.’

Later, we stand in a long queue to go up Table Mountain, then ride up in the packed cable car and, once at the top, wander around with all the tourists as the sun sets, sipping our water and catching glimpses of dassies. Coming down, my stomach sinks and I can’t look, though the night vista is magnificent with Lion’s Head and Devil’s Peak on either side of us. I grip Jake’s hand and he holds me in his arms until we reach the ground.

On the edge of the pond,
skating
alone;
in a world of silence
on one wooden skate,
on fine ice;

they pulled me out,
brought blankets
carried me home;

lay me
on top of the oven
to thaw.

*

I ran home,
dangling over my shoulders,
rough wooden skates
made by my father,
filled with his light.

I ran home,
brother in front,

sister behind,
throats panting with ice
the rhythm of skating lost
with the beat of our feet.

We ran home,
three of us in a chorus,
tears cutting our cheeks:
Zeyde lay on the wooden floor,
life lights around his head,
coins on his cold, closed eyes.

We make an early start the following day to visit the Holocaust Museum next to the Gardens Synagogue, the first *shul* in South Africa. Jake parks in the museum parking area, making eye contact with the guard to ensure that he watches our car. We pay at the turnstile and help ourselves to the guidebooks. As we walk up the stone walkway and along the ramp into the centre, I read the first display board, ‘More than two thirds of European Jewry died, 1500 children. For many families there were no survivors, no witnesses, no records, no memories.’ Inside, the next exhibit is headed ‘Genocide’. The word did not exist before 1944. Since then, occurrences have multiplied all over the world, despite the obligation never to forget what happened so that it never happens again.

The museum covers the events throughout Europe, from the ascent of Hitler, to Kristallnacht, the deportations and the death camps, the names projected onto the walls, Bergen-Belsen, Treblinka, Sobibor, Auschwitz.

We view a display showing hundreds of photographs of nameless victims from a single *shtetl*, arranged in the shape of a *Magen David*. Next to it is a glassed exhibition of photographs, but this has names next to each person.

‘Jake, how would they have been identified?’

‘Names on the back, maybe?’

‘I wonder where the Museum got the photographs.’

I point to a black-and-white image of some women holding out their arms to show their camp numbers.

Candles burn along the floor all the way round the room, eternal flames. My eyes fill with tears and I can barely read the information boards.

Walking along the passages in dimmed light, peering into the glass cases, we go on reading: Jews know precisely to which sect they belong, but Hitler did not differentiate between Ashkenaz and Sephardi, unenlightened and *maskilim*, between converts who’d married out or those who married in, those with one Jewish parent, grandparent, great-grandparent, step-parent, those who were one thirty-sixth, one twenty-fourth, one sixteenth, one eighth, a half, a quarter Jewish.

‘Who could have imagined such hate, the gas, the burning? Waiting for letters. News.’

Enlarged photographs in black and white show pairs of scissors being thrown out of windows, the cutting off of the beards of religious men, Jews dancing the *kazatska* naked in

the street, waving the unfurling *Torah* scrolls as crowds stand by and clap their hands and stamp their feet, bodies in flames falling from the windows of synagogues.

Most of Europe's Jews were in Poland so all the train lines went there.

'Oh, that's why most of the camps were there. Convenience. Did the Allies know what was happening? Why didn't anyone do anything? Samuel Zygielbaum committed suicide to try to convince them. Made no difference.'

We find ourselves in a simulated ghetto behind barbed wire as the gate closes behind us. We hear the shots being fired, and sounds of people screaming and crying and shouting out the names of loved ones and as we walk along the passage there is a voice-over of a man who lived through it. Jake holds his hands over his ears.

'We were totally occupied and preoccupied with survival. Survival was a form of resistance. As the Germans stepped up the pressure, we became more determined. Hunger and cold were our enemies as much as the Germans.'

'Let's get out of here, Cally.'

He grips my arm and steers me along the corridor. At the end is an alcove with seats. A video of interviews with six survivors who came to South Africa after the war is playing.

'I wonder how I find out more about where Judith came from, Jake. All I know is that she came from Lithuania, not exactly where or how she got here.'

'Why dwell on the past? It's dead and gone.'

Because of the German obsession with order, there are carefully kept records of numbers, places and dates, which are displayed in vast glass cases. There are also diaries, personal histories of those who were determined to document Jewish fate, saved by collective initiatives in Warsaw and the Vilne ghettos, removed and hidden outside the fences.

'If Judith had remained in Europe, she might have been like any one of them. She managed to get out before the borders closed. Was it foresight? Luck? Desperation? Because she had someone to go to?'

'I said let's go.'

I find tissues in my bag and blow my nose, and then look around the museum shop. There is a selection of history books on the world wars and the Holocaust, also various memoirs and artists' renditions of the conditions in the ghettos and camps.

'I'll just get this for the children. I'd like to read it to them.' I pay for a leatherbound copy of Anne Frank: *The Diary of a Young Girl*, and we leave.

Our eyes adjust to the light as we come outside and we take a drive out of the city, along the coast past the Twelve Apostles, down Suikerbossie towards Hout Bay, free to go,

into the sun, into the present. We have lunch outside the fish-and-chips shop, watching the sea gulls pecking in the gravel and the fishermen on the rocks. Jake has grilled sardines that are bony but delicious and I have hake fried in beer batter. We feed the balance of our slap chips with vinegar and salt to the gulls, then walk along the wharf, looking at the boats at anchor, reading their names, Good Hope, Emerald Isle, Halcyon Days.

That night we drive up Signal Hill, where, with the lights below and the stars above, we see the sea and sky to the end of the world.

Every *Shabes*,
beneath the crown of the *Torah* scroll,
beneath the eye of the silver lion,
my father murmured ancient blessings,
as the choir croaked like crows,
except for my father, kissing the fringes
in our tent of his *talis*,
raising his rough chin,
where a tiny cotton ball caught his blood;
except for my father whose heart
beat my answers, whose song
flew from the *sider* like doves.

Every *Shabes*, twisting his strings,
I whispered my wishes through the webbing,
my fingers coiled in his fingers,
my fingers touching him through the fringes,
leaning into the warmth of linen and wool,
where the silken ladder swayed with his shoulders,
where his kite lifted me up from the dark pew,
a small girl who didn't understand the patterns,
a small girl enclosed in a coven of men.

Every *Shabes*,
blind to the holes,
I knotted a cradle with the strands,
until his voice unravelled into emptiness,
until my silence echoed in his silence:
his *talis* still tents his body,
his ladder still reaches to me.

Jake disappears before I wake up, mumbling something about a walk on the beach front and do I want to go, but I decline and go back to sleep. When he returns, he kisses my shoulder gently.

‘Look what I’ve brought. Wake up!’ He has two packets in his hands, one of which he parks gently on my tummy. He opens the other and wolfs down the contents.

He takes a pastry out of my packet.

‘Taste. Almond filling and sweet powder icing.’ Some of the icing falls in sprinkles onto my skin as I eat. He leans forward and licks the sweet powder from the corners of my mouth. There is a small kettle in the room and he makes coffee for us both.

‘Come on,’ he tousles my hair, ‘time to move. What’s the plan for the day?’

Though I would like to turn over and go back to sleep, I rouse myself.

‘I thought we could go the Castle or take a trip to Robben Island.’

‘If we can have lunch on the beach when we come back.’

We pull on our clothes, brush our teeth, take our money and sunscreen and go.

I still have the taste of almonds in my mouth as we settle down on the boat, pleasure craft and seals bobbing around us. We ask another couple to take a photo of us with Table Mountain behind us, and then snap each other, Jake taking a bow as we pass one of the yachts in the bay, me pulling my hat over my eyes.

‘Don’t be silly. Let’s see your pretty face.’

The day is a scorcher but we are interested in the history the place holds. The sun glares off the quarry stones Mandela and the other inmates were forced to dig and move, ruining their backs, their hands, and their sight. Inside Mandela’s cell, excerpts from his memoirs have been projected onto the wall describing his early experiences as a clerk and his burning of the compulsory pass book. On the boat ride back Jake starts chatting to some of our fellow passengers in a mixture of Afrikaans and English and we arrange to meet up with one couple, Bertus and Martie, the next day at the beach.

That evening, back in our room after sharing a salad and pizza, we lie side by side. Jake tickles me, I fall on the floor and we are soon making love and laughing, the moon offering her silver light.

The weather holds and we meet up with Bertus and Martie on Clifton and spread out our towels near the water’s edge. While Jake describes a new cell phone venture he’s involved in through one of his clients, Martie and I talk about our children. Together we visit

the vineyards at Groot Constantia. One of the oldest examples of Cape Dutch architecture, the Manor House is filled with artefacts dating back to the arrival of the Dutch settlers in 1652, including the original blue-and-white ceramic serving bowls and tureens, as well as silver cutlery, all marked with the Dutch East India Company insignia. Its wines were world renowned in the eighteenth century, and after a tour round the house and the cellars, we taste the wines. We have lunch outside under the oak trees, and watch children running around barefoot in the heat, chasing the hens and cockerels whose feathers glint in the sun.

‘Why don’t we go up the West Coast tomorrow? Saldanha, St Helena Bay? I’ve heard they’re worth a visit?’ suggests Bertus. ‘We could go as far as Langebaan or Walvis Bay, maybe sleep over and drive into Namibia.’

‘I’d rather swim.’

The next day we take the train to Muizenberg without them. ‘Can’t stand him,’ Jake says as we watch the gulls circling overhead. ‘Thinks he knows everything.’

At the beach, Jake stakes the striped umbrella deep into the sand and bakes in the sun behind the wooden painted huts. He lies belly down in the blazing sun and is soon fast asleep. I find my hat, lather myself with sunscreen and stroll along in front looking for shells, watching the waves crashing and breaking into foam on the sand, bubbles popping behind the receding waves. I disturb a couple of plovers as I drag my toes along the sand. I bend and stretch and bend and stretch, finding only debris, picking up cracked fluted cone shells, so I dip my feet in the water to cool off and return to the umbrella. Then I spread out my towel, lie down, close my eyes, forgetting everything.

‘Feel like a swim?’

‘You go.’

I reach into the cooler bag for an orange juice between Jake’s Castle Lagers.

Too hot, I remove my sunglasses and hat and ask a young woman close by to watch our stuff. Wandering back down to the water’s edge, I step into small waves that curl over my calves, then through the bigger ones, enjoying the still stretches of water between. Crouching down I immerse myself, gasping until the cold wears off a little. I sway with the waves, moving outwards, moving back. There is no rough backwash so I stand with my back to them and jump over and float over the greeny-blue swells, seaweed threading between my legs. Lost in thought, I keep the shore in sight. There are a few other swimmers nearby, some a little deeper in than I am, and surfers to the side of me, a group of learners and instructors in the shallow waves and experts daring the big waves at the back.

Suddenly I'm under the water. The hands pushing me down are strong and I can't fend them off. I hold my breath as I grasp for something to hold onto. Then the pressure is removed and I come up for air, spluttering and coughing, water like glass shards across my face, nose and eyes stinging. Jake is treading water nearby.

'Gotcha! Oh, you should see yourself, Cal!' My hair is tangled and stuck to my face and I push the strands aside and sneeze over and over, coughing up salt water, treading water, and trying not to go under again.

'Come, let me hold you.' My arms are limp and weak as he takes me in his arms. I shiver and sand scratches my skin under my swimming costume.

Behind us, a crowd of youngsters are splashing crazily, kicking the water, cupping and tossing it, teasing and ducking each other. Jake urges them on.

'That's it, give it to him. Do it!'

'Jake, I must go out. I'm freezing.' I can't stop coughing water and my nose is blocked.

'Get out then! It'll be more fun with those guys anyway.'

When I reach the edge, I pull my costume back into place, squeeze water out of my hair and dry my face. I turn back and see that he has joined the boys' group.

As the wind rises and the sand stings our legs, we pack up and walk back to the station.

For the rest of the holiday we do nothing other than lie on the beach, sleep and read. I dip my toes and Jake swims, waving at me from far away. We never do get to the Irma Stern Museum, the National Art Gallery or the South African Museum with its dinosaur display and whales, but we make plans to bring the children at some point in the future.

At the end of the ten days, we return to Johannesburg, brown and relaxed.

He tosses up the baby chicks;
they flap their tiny wings;
Mame, Mame, look how they fly.

They drop to the gravel,
flashes of yellow in dark mud.

She picks one up,
so softly, so softly,
strokes it, kisses it,
cushions her cheek
to its heartbeat,
its heat.

Afterwards the red;
afterwards the tears.

Soon after our return, we have Friday-night dinner at my parents'. We light the candles and make the *brokhe* and hug and wish each other a *gutn Shabes*. My mom also lights a *yortsayt* candle that will burn for the next twenty-four hours.

'It's for Judith. It's twelve years years since she passed away.'

Then Jake makes *kidesh* and we sit down to a special meal, barley and lentil soup and *perogen*, roast beef and chicken, roast potatoes and vegetables, chocolate mousse and fruit salad. After the meal and the *bentshing*, we take the empty plates and platters to the kitchen.

'Cal, how's your Judith project coming along? I'd love to see it.'

'Sure, Mom, as soon as I've written out a few more poems. It's slow going though – it's already three months since I started. I'm really glad you gave me the notebook, Mom.'

'I would have given it to you before if I'd realised you'd be so interested.'

'I would have loved to show her what I'm doing.'

'She believed none of us would understand how it all affected her. Which is why she hid the book.'

'I would so much have liked to ask her what really happened.'

'I know. We did too. But then none of us wanted to upset her by bringing it up. Rachel did once dare to ask her why we had no grandparents. She wouldn't say a word. Nor would our father, for that matter. All I know for certain is how we came by boat to join him here – I was born in Lithuania after he'd left – so the first time he saw me was on Johannesburg station. I was already eight months old!'

'How did she manage that journey, travelling alone with three small children? I don't manage Danny and Mishy in my own home.'

'The immigrants all helped each other where and when they could. There was a youngster, a *landsmen* from the *shtetl*, who travelled with us. We went by train to Kovne, then took another train to Libau. Before anyone was allowed onto the ship, we were all tested for trachoma. Traumatic. Rachel remembers having her eyelids turned up and back and the torch light being shone into her eyes. Many were turned back and were then trapped in Europe. From there we made our way to England where we stayed in the Poor Jews' Temporary Shelter for two weeks – everyone had to – while our papers were sorted out.'

'What made them leave Lithuania – so many didn't?'

'My father hoped to make a better life for us here. There was always too little to eat back home. And think of the timing. His uncle was here already and he'd made good. So it

was a chain immigration. They brought with them everything they could manage to carry, tied up in bundles.’

‘My samovar and Bella’s candlesticks?’

‘Yes, and Judith also brought your grandfather’s books, wrapped in their *perene* – with the marmalade. When they arrived, the pages – and the feathers – were stuck together.’

I try to imagine it, the babies crying, the children clinging, kerchiefs and blankets knotted or coming undone, the desperation to leave Europe and find safe haven elsewhere. Before it was too late.

‘You and your sister are named after Judith’s lost sisters, Chana and Bella. They both died *in der heym*. I’m glad you’re writing them up, Cal, and breaking the silence. We need to remember.’

The next morning, I go to *shul* with Danny and Mishy where we read the portion from the *Torah*. Before the final prayer and songs, the rabbi makes announcements from the pulpit about the arrival of new babies, offers good wishes for those who are ill and condolences to those who have lost a close relative and are sitting *shiva*. While I attend the main *shul* service, Danny and Mishy go to the youth service. Jake plays golf.

By half past eleven we’re hungry, not having eaten beforehand as is the custom. The rabbi completes the *brokhes* and we tuck in to the traditional delicacies, herring and *kikhl*, *teyglekh*, cheese cake, and the specialities of our ladies-guild, cinnamon-and-chocolate *sabras*, muffins, lemon meringue and apple pies, chocolate cake with Bar One icing and Peppermint Crisp dessert, a combination of condensed milk, chocolate and tennis biscuits. Standing around, we catch up on news.

We return home and spend a quiet afternoon napping and then have tea on the patio. *Shabes* ends when Jake returns from his game and lights the twisted candle of *Havdole*. We breathe in the aroma of the spices as we move back to everyday life.

That night I search the web for Rakishok, the Lithuanian *shtetl* Judith came from. I find its name on a map and on the Jewishgen site. Although I don’t know specific family names, I find community death dates because the Germans kept numerical lists in quadruplicate for the Jewish years 5701/5702, 1941 to 1942. The liquidations were carried out as part of a mass action by *Einsatzgruppen*, task forces of locals under German command, part of Eichmann’s plan. I even find the name of the commander of the operations, Karl Jager. His is the only name on the lists; the rest, the Jews who were killed, are enumerated as part of a cumulative total that mounts up as the pages of the report are turned. Today Rakishok is only a name on a list.

Until I started to read Judith's poems, I knew so little of the personal history of my family.

*

The woman who loves maps
runs her fingers
over the folds,
disturbing the dust,
reads lines,
knows the way.

*

Swirling in water,
engraved in stone,

weighted words,
written in air,

walking heavy,
walking away,

distant road,
never home,

world of *dybbuks*,
broken open,

in this night,
in a place apart:

fingers touched,
singeing silence,

fingers withdrew,
charring the map.

I take time out to spend an afternoon with the children. We tease and test each other to see how long we can go on singing without repeating ourselves – even when we love a particular song and want to sing it again. I play the piano honky-tonk style and they sit next to me, one on either side. We begin with our old favourites, ‘The Old Grey Mare’, ‘Shenandoah’, ‘Blue Tail Fly’ and ‘Waltzing Matilda’, ‘There is a Tavern in the Town’ ending with a chorus of ‘I’ll hang my harp on a weeping willow tree, and may the world go well with thee, with thee’, then we move on to songs with colours and there is no stopping us. The children shout to outdo each other and me.

‘Me, Ma!’

‘No! Me next!’

Danny fetches his tennis racket and they pass it like a guitar from one to the other, strumming the strings in front of an imaginary audience and helping each other with forgotten words and lines.

‘We – will – we – will – rock – you – rock – you,’ we hear Hamlet outside as I abandon my playing so we can all dance, turning, spinning, depending on what the song calls for, making it up as we go along. Michelle has a clear soprano and she does a few.

‘Bar – ce – lo – na,’ comes from the parrot cage as my writing implements lie forgotten on my table.

We don’t hear Jake arrive until he shoves the door open.

‘I could hear you down the driveway. What a racket!’

He walks out and goes upstairs. The children get up off the floor and disappear. I hold on to the arm of the couch and get up too, follow them out, and go back into the kitchen to start cooking supper. I am singing ‘Daisy, Daisy’, Hamlet goes ‘Day-zee’ just when Jake comes into the kitchen looking for a snack.

‘How many times have I told you, I can’t stand the way you sing?’

‘Sorry. Jake, don’t you want to wait for supper – it’s nearly ready?’

He ignores me, opens the fridge door with a lurch so that it hits the side wall, then he pulls out a few jars and opens them on the counter. A lid rolls off. He slices himself some fresh rye bread, piles his plate high with slices of cold meat, drops the knife on the counter, leaves the table top covered in crumbs, tomato sauce and piccalilli, and goes into the lounge. I hear the couch creak and picture him putting the leaky sandwich on the glass-topped coffee table as the television goes on and he channel-hops between the news and *Top Gear*.

I heat the oil in the frying pan and peel and slice potatoes for chips.

‘Doll, bring me a beer!’

‘Coming.’ I’m pleased the tension seems to be over, and spend a few minutes watching the news with him. I go back in the kitchen to face a disaster.

‘Jake! The pot’s on fire!’

The fire grows higher and higher, flames licking up the walls. Jake rushes in, grabs one of the big pots off the stand to the side of the door and fills it with water.

‘Not water, Jake. Blankets.’

‘You know nothing ...’ He tosses the contents of the bucket at the wall behind the stove and the flames surge to the ceiling. The room fills with smoke as the water cascades down onto the floor. Jake refills the bucket a few times, tossing the water at the wall rather than directly at the fire and the flames subside.

‘How could you? You are so stupid!’

‘I’m sorry. Careless of me.’

The walls behind the stove are black and the varnish has peeled off the cupboard doors on each side. There are water and oil stains everywhere and sliced potatoes mashed into the sodden linoleum floor. I crouch down and start picking up the bits. We mop up the mess as best we can, drying the walls and wiping away most of the singe and soot, Danny and Mishy helping. My skin is hot and hair hangs over my face, drenched with sweat.

We get takeaways for supper, and I sort out the children.

‘Ma, where’s my stationery bag?’

‘No idea, Dan. Where did you last have it?’

‘At Paul’s, I think.’

‘Give him a call please.’ Sure enough Danny has left his school kit there, and he asks Paul to bring it to school for him.

‘Sleep well, Dan. Put Mishy’s light out on your way past her room, please.’

I make a list of what we’ll need to fix the place: turps, sandpaper, brushes, varnish.

‘Jake, how much paint do you think we’ll need?’

‘How long is a piece of string? How would I know? Hell, Cally.’ He gets another beer, stalks back out to the lounge.

Climbing into bed I put the light out and stare through the curtains at the blue-black sky. There is no moon, only the streetlights shining through the branches of the willow outside my window. I wake at about three when Jake comes to bed. Then I hear Mishy moaning. I roll over and put my feet on the floor, steadying myself and feeling for my warm

gown. I move as quietly as I can, leaning against the wall for support until I am in the passage and can switch on the dimmer light. Mishy is holding her stomach, doubled over on her side. I sit on the edge of the bed, put my hand on her shoulder and rub her back.

‘I’ll bring you a tablet.’

‘Don’t go, Ma. It’s so sore. I was calling and calling you.’

‘Let me get you a Panado. Won’t be a minute, Mish.’

I tiptoe back down the passage and into our bathroom, feeling for the door of the medicine cupboard that clicks as I open it. Jake groans and turns over. I find the tablets and make my way back to Mishy, but bump into the bedroom door in the dark.

Jake swears at me. ‘Can’t you be quiet, Cally – some people have to work, you know.’

‘Sorry, Jake.’

I creep along the passage, rubbing my forehead. Mishy hasn’t moved from her doubled-up position since I’d left her. I give her the tablet, hold her head up and help her sip from her water.

‘Let me get you a hot-water bottle.’

As I wait for the kettle to boil, I resist the urge to start scraping the varnish off then and there, and have some orange juice, leaning my head against the cool fridge door. By the time I get back to Mishy, she has fallen asleep, her arms around her pillow. I carefully put the water bottle inside the duvet, look in on Danny, close his door and go back to bed.

Jake swears again.

‘Sorry.’

He goes back to sleep, but wakes me thrashing his arms and crying out, stops for awhile and then begins again.

‘What is it, Jakey? What is it?’

‘All gone.... Conrad’s brother.... Brad’s cousin Rod’

I try to cradle his head but he shoves me away, gets out of bed and goes back downstairs. It’s his same old nightmares. I had hoped they had gone for good.

The love poem
I cannot write
sees the moon
through the muslin
of my mother’s sifter,
sees the silver of the river
as we reach for each other,

links arms and desire,
hands and hope.

In the love poem
I cannot write,
you left me alone
in the winter wind,
a snowdrop
unable to cut through.

*

Me under my *perene* here,
you beneath your blanket there,
water between us;

me beneath sheets of ice,
you beneath the rays of heat,
letters like boats;

kisses in a foreign tongue,
kisses in our *mame-loshn*,
bridges of stars.

*

Your voice,
kum, sheyn meydele;
shared treats,
khale lokshn kugl.

You went alone.
Now I am alone.

In the forest, in dark places,
in the house,
in warmth and light,
in my heart

longing for you.

I think back: Jake and me living in cheap furnished apartments, newly wed, no children yet. I planned supper, roast chicken pieces, legs for Jake, breast for me, a new recipe for a barbecue marinade both sweet and spicy, to try out with roast potatoes and gem squash. I covered the kitchen surfaces with newsprint and sipped my tea at intervals while I cleaned the chicken parts, removing the remains of the feathers and slicing the potatoes into chunks. I placed the chicken in a pan with the potatoes around it. Waiting for the oven to heat, I set two places with tablemats and added a wooden stand for the hot pan. Soon the aroma from the oven filled the flat. I hoped this would be a celebration – that after the second interview with the head of the law firm, he would be asked to join it.

I half-filled a stainless-steel pot with water for two gem squashes. Once it was bubbling, I put in the vegetables with a serving spoon, careful not to burn myself, careful not to splatter, checked the food in the oven and went on reading Stan Knight's *Historic Calligraphy*. I made notes and jotted down some questions that I had about style and character of the exemplars, hoping to use some of these in future commissions.

Only when I could barely see did I get up, switch on the lamp above my head and check the food. The sound of Jake's key in the lock made me jump. I got up to kiss him hullo. He held me tight, kissing my neck, caressing my back. He smelt of aftershave and cigarettes. Although supper was nearly ready, I went along with him. Soon we were lying on the bed half undressed, my arms around his neck and his face buried in my breast.

'I'd better just turn down the chicken so we don't have to throw out charred remains and starve.'

'Always the exaggerator,' he turned over, watching me slip away from him, grinning at me. Soon I was back beside him.

There was an enormous bang.

'What the ...?' Jake jumped out of bed and grabbed his dressing gown. I pulled the sheet around me as he tiptoed to the door and went out. 'Cally, come here!' I got up, pulled on my gown and rushed down the passage. In the kitchen the squashes had shattered, their insides splattered across the ceiling and walls, pale greenish-yellow tendrils garish in the fluorescent light.

'So much for my kitchen skills!' I laughed and tucked the hem of the gown into the belt, then took down a towel to clean up.

‘What an idiot! That’s the stupidest thing I’ve ever seen. Cally, you could have killed us.’

I stared at him. I had never seen him like that before. The harangue went on and on, his voice getting louder and louder until I ran to the front door, flung it open, went out and pulled it shut behind me and raced down thirteen flights of stairs to ground level.

Breathless on the pavement, heart pounding, I held my dressing gown down to keep my legs covered, looking right and left into the blackness, not knowing what I should do. I sat down on the cold paving stones at the back of our building, leaning my head against the brick wall as I sobbed.

When Jake came looking for me he put his arms around me.

‘I’m so sorry, Doll. I shouldn’t have gone off at you like that. I love you.’ He took my hand, ‘Let’s go back upstairs.’

I served him his supper and cleared up the debris from the squash, bits of skin and pulp on the walls and floor, using a stool to reach and wipe off the light fitting. He started eating.

‘Can’t wait. Long day.’

When I sat down to eat, he was long finished. The meal was delicious, even without the squash. He called me to watch television and we sat together on the couch, his arm around me. I fell asleep there and he carried me to bed.

I woke in the middle of the night to his low groaning and his arms thrashing next to me.

‘No, no! No, no!’ I didn’t know whether to wake him or not.

Next morning the sheets on his side of the bed were tangled and damp but when I asked him about his nightmare that evening, he just laughed.

Through *Mame’s* fingers
I saw the horses, the soldiers,
the blades
curved and shiny;

they shouted *Zhid, Zhid*,
bayoneted the rabbi
trying to save his daughter,
sheared off *Tate’s* beard;

I ran with Bella,
dropped her, she broke;
Bella-brown-eyes,

Bella-brown-curls;

once, full of sleep,
our warm breath mingled in the dark,
but then her light went out;
we soothed her softness in silence;

Mame held me to her swollen belly,
heaving breasts; cheeks salted with tears;
the sky ran wet,
the cobbles bled;

in empty spaces in my dreams
I hear her calling.

*

Chana kept her papers
in the lining of her coat;
the coat was stolen;

Leah kept photographs
in her shoes;
they were lost;

Chana fell
where they shot her;
Leah saw it all.

On *Purim*, I sit in *shul* with my mom and Mishy, waiting for the reading of the *megilah*, the story of Esther. Danny is downstairs with his friends. What would the parade have been like for Judith in the *shtetl*, before she came to Johannesburg? I try to picture the clowns, the main attraction, the mimics, tightrope walkers, fools, acrobats and jokers with kitchen utensils dangling from their caps, some leading others by a string from their noses, kissing the ladies in the crowds, smacking their lips, nibbling pastries, offering bites. There would also have been kings and queens, Moses with the Ten Commandments, Aaron in his priest-ropes, Miriam and her tambourine, Joshua with his bugle and *klezmer* musicians whose fiddles, clappers and songs fed the excitement, the one day they could all step out of the mud of poverty and dress up to fit their fantasies. Would boys and girls have winked at each other behind their masks, even though they were not allowed to look at each other?

Today we still dress up and read the Persian story, how Esther saved her people from Haman. We drown out his name with the noise from our *homen-dreyers* and stamp our feet at the names of his ten wicked sons. Afterwards we make merry and give sweet gifts, *shlakh-mones*, *lekakh*, three-cornered buns filled with poppy seed, *homen-tashn*, raisins, fruit and wine. I wave to Chloe and she comes up to us. Our children don't know each other well. Mishy, dressed up in her Queen Esther robe and crown, wanders over to a group of her friends. They help themselves to some of the sweetmeats on the table.

'We haven't seen you in so long, Cal? How're things? Ryan and I miss the bridge nights.'

'Yes, me too! Have you been playing?'

'Yes, we played in a competition last week but I didn't play well. We came bottom of the group. All my fault, but Ryan didn't mind. Do you want to play on Sunday night? We could have snacks first and catch up?'

'Thanks, Chloe. I'll let you know?'

'That would be great. Say hello to Jake.'

'Can't stand them,' Jake says when I suggest an arrangement. 'She's a grovelling idiot. Have some coffee, Jake? How's work, Jake? We've missed you, Jake. And he's worse. Self-satisfied and boring. Pathetic.'

No light in the kitchen,
no one could see us
behind the curtains;

under *Mamushka*'s petticoats,
small sister,
smaller sister,
smallest sister.

*

Russians
drank vodka,
beat their women
and ours.

Polacks
drank wine,
raped their women
and ours.

Sober, Lithuanians
plundered and killed
their women
and ours.

Fingers on lips
we hid the glasses,
secreted the jars,
covered the barrels.

Now a *tikh* covers her scar.
her *shande*,
her shame.

I am looking forward to Ewan's calligraphy workshop at the Rotary Club.

I pack a minimal kit, having learned my lesson when I took every item of equipment I owned to a conference and left my box on the pavement, so excited was I to be there. Now I'd rather do without than risk losing my burnisher, gold leaf cushion or even my cheap but favourite cork penholder. I drive along Harrow Road, then through Observatory and around the curve, the water tower set high on the hill in front of me. Once at the venue, I join Anya who has kept me a place and I put out my equipment. For Ewan's set project we try brushing printing ink onto various rice papers some of which have leaves, fine stalks and coloured petals embedded in them. We watch as Ewan demonstrates decorative and elaborate modern scripts with a brass ruling pen and then shows us how to cut up a metal cooldrink can and make a similar pen using a dowel stick.

We have all also brought along projects in progress to complete, and I work on the layouts for some of Judith's poems.

Eva's parents sold a cow
for her dowry.

She went to Kovne
to meet her *bashertn*.

She returned
with a fur coat,
a different warmth.

Is Eva still alive? Still in the country? I have no idea. As I write on, I wonder whether my mother or my aunt Rachel know anything more about her.

On our side of the *mekhitse*,
Zlata grapples
the angel of death,
adds Chaya to her name:
it means life.

Next year
will she still stand beside me,
gentle and dignified,
the most beautiful woman
I have ever known?

Did Zlata survive? Have children and grandchildren? The thought crosses my mind that Judith may have had a personal telephone book. If she did, maybe my mother still has it.

In the shade of the jacaranda trees eating our lunch on a blanket, the lawn covered with purple flowers, Anya and I laugh at some of the strange commission requests we get, for messages written on rice grains or names in gold felt-tip pen on plastic pencil cases, a thousand by tomorrow, please. We plan to create a source book of helpful hints for calligraphy together, and she starts drawing up a list of possible topics and how we could market it.

‘Which *shtetl* did your grandparents come from, Anya?’

‘No idea. Why’re you asking me now?’

‘You know I’m inscribing Judith, my gran’s poems? Well, it has made me curious about her background, about my forebears.’

‘I suppose you’ve asked your mom.’

‘Yes, but Judith never spoke about it to her.’

‘It was never discussed in my home either. We were all too focussed on fitting in to worry about the past.’

Back inside, Ewan critiques each student’s work, but I can’t stop thinking about Judith.

‘Anya, are these yours? I like the combinations of lettering and cartoons. You could look at Ben Shahn’s work for inspiration. Or David Jones.’

Then he looks at my roughs.

‘Try different layouts here, Cally. Perhaps some of the poems could be placed next to each other, in double columns? The ones with the short lines and similar themes?’ Other students offer their ideas too.

‘Maybe all the lines needn’t be justified left. Try alternating.’

‘What about turning the book in a landscape direction?’

‘What about working in different colours? Not all black?’

Ewan draws some fine capitals on some of my trial sheets.

‘You could also work down the right side of the page.’

To me, my lines look like the train tracks into Poland.

I make notes of Ewan’s comments and sketch some new ideas for future reference.

The next day, Ewan takes us to the home of a fine book collector to see his handwritten folio of Dylan Thomas’s ‘Under Milk Wood’. His accent reminds me of Judith’s.

On the final day of Ewan's workshop, we continue our individual projects. I buy some unusual paste papers and a grainy drawing book for future work, and also a set of new Mitchell nibs with detachable gold wells. As the course ends, we set a date to meet again so we can show each other what we have accomplished.

Stimulated by the inspiring work I have seen there, I think of alternative ways to inscribe Judith's story.

We do not speak of parting,
but it sits between us.

We do not speak of love, only
of the deer as it hesitates, one foot in the air,

waiting for the sun's touch on the crisp snow.
We do not speak

of the train at the station,
you leaving, me waving you on.

*

The day before you left,
spinning and still,
we skated on the river,
side by side.

One wooden skate
for each child,
a gift you hewed,
shaped, smoothed,

no splinters;
each child smiled,
balanced, fell,

while the road stretched
empty ahead of you,
empty behind,

where we waited,
balancing, falling,
splintering

until you were no longer visible.

*

On the platform
of the *shtetl* station,

at the carriage door.

I can feel your heart;
I can feel your hands;
you climb the stairs.

My eyes follow you.
You wave.
The train moves on.

Aaron and Shira, new customers, want me to inscribe their marriage document, their *ketuba*. As a Jewish woman, a *soferet*, I am permitted to inscribe this civil contract with religious implications, but only a religious man may inscribe the *Torah*, *tefilin*, *mezuzas* and the *get*, and then only after immersing himself in the *mikveh*.

The *ketuba* contains the promises the bride and groom make to each other as they begin their journey of life together. Filled with their future hopes, it uses ancient Aramaic wording written in Hebrew, and may also include a translation in the language of the land. It is customary to decorate it, combining the delicately wrought lettering with floral borders and entwining symbolic images, pairs of turtle doves, candlesticks, and ripe fruit or scenes of the Wailing Wall and the Holy Land. It's the commission I like best, and the one I'm known for. Writing love.

Aaron arrives on his own wearing an open-necked shirt and chinos, tanned and well groomed. Where Jake is slim and wears a brush cut, Aaron is burly and tall, his face clean-shaven and his hair parted and slicked down. His voice is deep and resonant as he shakes my hand and pats our Prince and Major, as they follow us inside.

'Hu-llo,' the parrot calls from the patio as we pass the window.

Aaron laughs.

'Sounds totally human ... I must say, I'm looking forward to this. I tried to do calligraphy myself once, but I'm left-handed.'

'That would make it a bit more difficult.'

'I couldn't keep the correct angle of the nib and my sleeve always smeared the ink so I gave up. Instead, I studied the manuscripts, English, Latin, and Hebrew. The early scribes worked in the same way as the *sofrim*, preparing the parchment, pricking the holes, and indenting the writing lines. Amazing contrast to our contemporary fixes.'

'I suppose you know that each task was usually done by a different craftsman?'

'Yes. The rubricator drew in the red capitals, the gilder added the gold, and the scribe did the writing by natural light. Music wasn't allowed. Nor the tender relief of women.'

'The *sofer* also worked alone, grinding his ink, mixing the powder to creamy liquid. Writing was a permissible outlet for creativity.'

'And at least he was allowed to marry.'

Aaron admires the calligraphy on the walls and I talk about size, contrast and legibility in the Roman, Gothic and Uncial examples, some large with letters close together,

some smaller versions, my own as well as the exquisite scripts of Ann Hechle, Sam Somerville and Donald Jackson.

He is completely absorbed by the feast of words and hand lettering.

‘Computers generate “calligraphy”, but there is no substitute for the beauty of writing done by hand.’

It’s as if we have always known each other as I show him my photograph albums recording previous jobs, ‘Desiderata’, ‘If’ and The Hippocratic Oath.

‘Let me show you our *ketuba*. It’s in the dining room.’

The piece hangs over the sideboard, set in an antique-looking frame of dull gold so as not to detract from the artwork itself. Designed with two interlocking circles as a copy of an antique manuscript, the gleam of gold leaf catches the light, illuminating the text and the linked initials, Jake’s and mine. We had chosen the crimson and ultramarine colour scheme as well as the peacocks and periwinkle in the design together. Aaron leans forward to look more closely at the Blessing of the Priests, incorporated in the gilded border.

‘Cally, it’s beautiful.’

‘Thank you. I think so too. The scribe, Joshua Nathan, has done us proud. Do you like the way the Hebrew script combines with that small Italic?’

‘Yes. Perhaps you can you show me how it’s done?’

His soft grey eyes catch mine in the mirror in the passage. Back in my studio, I take out my wooden pens, each holding a different size metal nib, uncap my ink bottle, put a piece of paper in front of me with a smaller cover sheet over it to protect it from the oils on my hand and place a scratch sheet to my right.

I write ‘Cally’ in plain Italics and then with elaborate flourishes.

‘Please write “Aaron”.’

I do it in Gothic, Roman and Compressed. He points to my unembellished Italic example.

‘I prefer this whiplash line. Could you add a flourish or two?’

When I demonstrate various Hebrew scripts, he tells me he likes the Yerushalmi best, the one they used for the Dead Sea Scrolls.

I’m surprised that he is aware of it.

‘Me too, though the most difficult to do is the *Torah* script with its crowns.’

‘I’d love you to show me how you do it.’

‘Do you have time now?’

‘Yes, sure.’

At first I struggle. There is not enough ink and the nib scratches when I drag it upwards against the grain of the paper to make the three separate points of the crown. Aaron holds his breath until I get it right, then swings the chair round to scrutinise the wet lettering in better light.

‘You’re good, Cally. I know our *ketuba* will be great.’

I cap the bottle.

‘Shall I do some rough drafts for you?’

‘Price?’

‘Depends on design and the script. I’ll work out a quote for you once you decide.’

It was not a love match
to begin:

the *shadkhn* came
pointed at sepia;

my father questioned,
chose;

I stood behind the door,
afraid;

I met my *khosn* for the first time
under the *khupe*;

we sipped from the same cup;
I peeped from under my veil;

he broke the glass,
with one stamp;

shards to commemorate
the destruction of the Temple;

had we been alone
he would have bent to kiss;

we all danced, men with men,
women with women;

they lifted us separately,
I caught his white kerchief;

after, when he touched me
it was how I expected,
unexpected;

as fire burnt in the stove,
it was a love match
after.

When Aaron arrives to see my first drafts, I offer him coffee as we sit down at my long pine table. Before the *ketuba* can be inscribed, the bride and groom have to know who they are and where they come from. The Beth Din provides the information if the bride and groom don't know the details of their Hebrew names in full, and if there is no surviving family member who remembers them. This connects them to their roots because 'son of' and his father's first name always follow the groom's first name. For the boy, the only two other occasions where the correct name must be used are the *Brit Milah* or *Bar Mitzvah*; a girl may never have had previous need of it.

'Your names and lineage must be inscribed according to ancient formula in Hebrew.'

'I'm *Aharon ben Yaakov*, and it's *Shira bat Yitzchak*.'

'Which tribe? Cohen or Levi?'

'I'm Israel.' Like most Jews today he is descended from those who wandered in the desert for forty years, carrying the second set of tablets of stone with them in the Holy Ark.

The groom makes commitments and the bride's status is noted, widow or *agunah*, divorcee or virgin. A woman of worth, whose price is above rubies, she accepts his promises but makes no promises of her own. No mother's name is recorded for either bride or groom, even though a Jew takes his or her religion from the maternal line. Surnames are not inscribed because they were only introduced in the Jewish community in Eastern Europe in mid-nineteenth century by order of the *czar*, for census and tax purposes. Only once all these details have been ascertained, can the *ketuba* be inscribed.

I show him different formats.

'What about a long, narrow rectangle like an official document?' I have already ruled the lines, working leaning over the paper so I can see the edge of the ruler and avoid the error of parallax. I have put in a margin left and right to keep the writing contained, just as the relationship must remain within accepted confines. I write some examples of scripts as he watches, fine and broader scripts, sloping to the right, straight up, cursive where some letters are linked and some stand alone.

'What a pity that calligraphy is a dying craft.'

Taking out a fountain pen and a notebook, bound in blue kid, embossed with gold foil letters from his briefcase, he lists and numbers each of my styles in deep red ink, 1 Copperplate, 2 Italic, 3 Foundational, and notes whether it is slanted or straight up, its size and weight. I don't say anything, not wanting to disturb his concentration, pleased that he

takes what I do so seriously. His own handwriting is well spaced and sloped on an imaginary straight line, and the nib glides gracefully across the page. He rolls the nib over his 'rs' and swirls his 's-es' and I am mesmerised by the glistening ink. He waits for it to dry before turning over so as not to smudge the page. Even though he is not a calligrapher, Aaron loves writing for its own sake and has an eye for its beauty and detail. When he finishes, he recaps his pen, not a cheap Sheaffer, but the Parker pen I've been hankering for. Sleek black, its tip moulded from rounded metal, it rests comfortably between his forefinger and thumb, the perfect weight. My own handwriting bears no relation to my calligraphy – written at speed, it is neither neat nor clear.

'Want to try it?'

'Don't you mind?'

'Here, have a go.'

'But it's like sharing a toothbrush. What if I damage the nib?'

'It's okay. Go ahead.'

Then he brings out an array of refills, bronze, emerald, royal blue, mauve and lilac from his briefcase and fans them out on the table.

'I have a pen for every different colour so I don't have to remove and wash the nibs every time I want to change. Not all Parkers though.'

'I do the same with my dipping pens.'

I hold the pen up and check the nib for a treacherous blob on the tip waiting to spill itself onto the paper. The pen is every bit as lovely to use as I imagined it would be and my handwriting is the better for it – though not nearly as consistent as Aaron's. I feel his eyes on the back of my neck but don't look up. I let my page dry. Then he asks, 'Can you do copperplate?'

'Yes, but it's a different technique entirely, pressure rather than nib angle to make the thick down strokes.' I put down his pen and take out a dipping pen in which I have inserted an elbow nib, open my ink and write a few words at a forty-degree slant. 'Take the samples with you to show Shira.'

'Thanks so much, Cally. I'll get back to you in a few days. Oh, can you let me have your cell phone number please?' He enters it in his directory.

We continue playing with different pens, experimenting with different combinations until it's time for him to leave and for me to fetch the children.

The veil separates us,
hair, collarbones,
elbows, knees, ankles
concealed;

in secret,
my unanointed lips
sing flames to you.

*

Plaited,
a woman's hair is her chastity,
she is untouched;

lying loose on her shoulders,
it is her nakedness;

unfurled
it is a flag;

my hair, fragile,
lies tamped in my kerchief,

longing for your caress,
my skin for your embrace.

*

To free me,
begin with the beads,
slippery in the light;

kiss sepals of eyelids,
buds of ears,
nectar of lips;

unhook my corset,
uncase my bones,
caress my secrets;

I step away
from silken bindings
into your arms.

‘There’s a new pottery studio in the Magaliesberg. I heard it’s great because you can watch the guys at their wheels.’

‘Sounds good, Jake. Let’s pack a picnic and spend the day out.’

‘Sure. Make sandwiches and we’ll stop for drinks on the way.’

The rain has finally stopped. Cooped up all week, the kids can’t wait to get out.

The road follows the path of the Jukskei River lined with willow trees and even now, in the early autumn, the fields are a mass of pale pink and white cosmos. The pottery studio is set high above the water with picture windows and bright skylights. Three craftsmen operate wheels while two others are at a wooden table making pinch pots, jars of water nearby to dampen the clay. They all wear white plastic aprons and head coverings, plain or paisley tied in a knot at the back. The floor is dusty and littered with discarded bits of clay.

‘Wow, Dad,’ Mishy puts her hand in Jake’s.

‘Amazing how they turn lumps of nothing into something useful.’

Around us, displayed on pine shelves are all sorts of containers of various shapes and sizes.

‘And beautiful,’ I say while the wheels spin as the workers pump the floor pedals, cutting off the excess clay, some of which they offer the children. Jake takes Mishy over to one of the tables and they make themselves comfortable. An assistant offers them aprons and they roll out the strands of clay to make small coil pots. Danny and I join in.

‘Not as easy as it looks,’ I say, rewetting the clay, which then becomes too slimy to work with. I roll out another piece, make it into a ring and dampen the edges, then stick these together.

‘Let’s make one together, Ma,’ Danny says. ‘Look, I’ve already got lots.’ He points to the completed bowls, jugs, plates and platters displayed in sets according to glazing colour and patterns. ‘I like those.’ We’re pleased with our handiwork when we are finished, and wash our hands at the sink. We take off our aprons and I try to get the debris out from under my nails. I rub the bump on my right middle finger caused by years of pen pressure.

‘Nice to be doing something other than writing, Cal? Should we buy something?’ Jake chooses a tall elegant vase, and I point out a squat bowl with a lid with similar decoration. The assistant takes them down for us.

‘What about this coffee set, Jake?’

‘Yes, good idea. It’s magnificent.’ The twelve mugs, milk jug and sugar bowl are the colours of a bright sea with wave lines drawn into the clay.

‘I think we’ll get a lot of use out of them. And the price is really good.’

‘Because they’re selling directly to the public. No middle man,’ Jake agrees.

‘Can I get something for Bella, please?’

‘Sure.’

‘Maybe one of these?’ I pick out a milk jug, blue with yellow flowers, then a matching sugar bowl. ‘And this?’

He pays for our purchases with his gold card and also for the pots we made ourselves.

‘Remember to leave those to dry out completely. Then you can paint them,’ the salesman advises us.

‘Can we use them?’

‘Only for decoration. Otherwise they would need to be fired.’

He helps Jake carry the heavy parcels to the car and they stow them in the boot. Down by the river, we set up our picnic on a blanket, chomp cold meat and tomato sandwiches, and then swig down our cooldrinks. Jake lies back, puts his arms behind his head and drifts off to sleep. Danny and Mishy wander away, pulling up wild grass and pale and deep-pink cosmos. Mishy does a few dance steps and leaps around Danny, twirling her flowers.

‘Too near the water, you two. Careful.’

‘Can we paddle, Ma?’

‘No, it’s not safe. There’s bilharzia in the water. You can swim at home.’

I watch the clouds changing shapes until the children present me with their flowers. Driving home beside the Jukskei River, we cross the railway line a few times. Once the boom comes down and we have to wait. The rhythm of the wheels on the metal tracks is steady. The carriages are all carrying goods, and are labelled, ‘Hulett’s Refinery. Sugar.’ Unlike Judith’s passenger train, or *ban* as she would have called it. Unlike those cattle trucks. Unlabelled.

‘Happy day, Jake,’ I say as we unwrap our acquisitions at home. ‘Thanks.’

‘Yes, great. Just one thing. That top you’re wearing. Makes you look fat.’

‘We should all go. And take the parents.’

‘When’s the next public holiday? Or maybe another Sunday?’ He takes the items from me one by one and displays them on the kitchen shelves. ‘We could also take everyone to Pretoria to see the Union Buildings and the Zoo.’ I fill vases with the pink and white cosmos, then use the new jug to fill them with water. The spout pours perfectly.

On that river bank
you warmed the stone
on your skin;

now I touch it
in my pocket
through the coarse linen;

I see the willows, cornflowers,
fields laden with berries,
then with snow,
then your face.

I grind down the stick on my granite stone to make a new batch of ink, the regular rhythm inducing calm, good preparation for the work ahead. When there's enough powder, I push it into the sloped well and add a few drops of distilled water. In the silence I am absorbed in my lettering, the ink channelling the words. You were born together and together you shall be for evermore.

Jake is in Melville watching the soccer quarter-final knock-out, Man U and Arsenal, he and Brad and some of their infantry buddies. He calls and I hear a chorus of down, down, down as they swallow their lagers by the tankard.

'The match will be over by three. We can hook up afterwards.'

'Sure,' I say. 'I'm having lunch with Bella and Anya. I'll meet you when we're finished. And the children are sleeping over at Bella's tonight – we're going out with Electra and Des.'

'Where to?'

'New club in Sandton. That band you like, Watershed, is doing a gig. There's also a Robbie Williams' look-alike.'

'Crooners. That's great!'

I wear my turquoise top with its flattering neckline and my new Sissy Boy denims that hug my hips. At lunch we enjoy the fusion food, small portions of perfectly served cuisine followed by chocolate martinis. When Anya leaves, Bella and I window-shop the boutiques along the main street. Knowing that the match is over, I call Jake after we've finished our skinny lattes and biscotti, looking forward to my date with my husband.

'What do you want to do now?' he asks. In the background the raucous laughter of the guys goes on.

'I'm ready to go. You?'

'I'll be home in half an hour or so. See you then, Doll.'

I go straight home, dress, stroke on my eye make-up and my favourite lipstick, check that my make-up base has concealed any blemishes, turning my head to be able to see myself in the three-way mirror. I lie down on the couch and switch on the television. It is a glorious Johannesburg evening that reminds me of when Jake and I would wake up after making love and one of us would put on the kettle, padding around barefoot, getting back under the covers, teasing the other with cold toes.

I flip through the current Oprah magazine, dipping into Suze Orman and Dr Phil's advice columns, always interesting and the advice sound – on paper at least. But I don't take much in. I try not to, but I keep checking my watch. 8.00, 8.15, 8.45. I call Jake again. His cell phone is off.

I think back to our first year of dating, Jake's and mine, the conversations, the music and place.

'Cal, we're going to the Yellow Tambourine Saturday night. Disco. Great music. I hope that's okay with you?'

'Sounds good. Who else is going?'

'Brad and them.'

'Thea?'

'No, he broke up with her. He's met someone else. Monica, I think.'

'Pity.'

I liked Thea's down-to-earth sensibility and lighthearted sense of humour. Since Jake and Brad double dated a lot, it was more enjoyable for me if I got on well with Brad's girl.

'Never mind, Cal. He's always like that. It's no use getting too attached to his chicks.'

'So, what time Saturday?'

'I'll pick you up at seven and we can go for a bite first. There's a little Italian place nearby where we can have a good pizza or pasta. I think you'll like it.'

'Thanks, Jake. See you then.'

On the Thursday afternoon, I took off from lectures and dragged Bella off to the local shopping mall. We ransacked the boutiques and eventually I decided on a lilac mini skirt and suede Roman sandals which toned in, their long thongs winding up my calves and over my knees. Bella bought new jeans and a spaghetti-strap top. Our colouring is similar, dark hair, blue eyes, light skin, and although our taste is not always the same, we still buy different outfits so we can share our clothes.

'I've met someone, Cal. He's nice. Unusual. Great combination of looks and brain.'

'Where? When? How come you haven't said anything before, Belle?'

'Didn't want to jinx it. He's a medic but he comes to the Humanities library sometimes. He's into politics.'

'Are you reading up on it too?' I looked at her and we giggled.

'We do have other things to do, you know.'

Before our date, I spent the afternoon blow-drying my hair then putting it in a whorl, clipping it all the way round my head and covering it with the top of a stocking, so that when

I unravelled it, it was straight and sleek. Bella plucked my eyebrows and helped with my make-up, and I did the same for her. Mike arrived to fetch her and I liked him immediately, saw that he would be just right for her, the same height as our father, with a rugged face, strong chin and Roman nose. His hazel eyes followed Bella as she collected her stole and bag and kissed our parents goodbye. Jake arrived as they were leaving and I introduced him and Mike. They shook hands, weighing each other up.

‘Great outfit, Cal. Ready?’ Jake held my hand as we walked to the car, then opened the passenger door of his Beetle for me. I noted his TJ number plate, 143 342, but I didn’t say the code aloud, I love you; you love me. Too soon. As we drove, he lit up a Camel and offered me a drag. I declined. He opened the window but when he saw that the wind was messing my hair he wound it up again, leaving just a crack for the smoke to dissipate. I told him my worries about the book report I was working on, that I thought it was off track. He reassured me, offering to read over it. For supper we shared a pizza and a salad. He talked about his law studies, his problems with one of his lecturers and his hopes for his own law practice one day.

‘I want you to meet my parents soon. And Jesse and Diane.’ His brother and sister, both younger than him, still lived at home. ‘But my mom won’t like the idea of my getting serious.’ He put his hand on my knee and gazed into my face. I tried to read his expression, responding to his words and the pressure of his fingers on my skin.

‘She still wants to hold onto me. She hated it when I was in the army.’ He looked away.

‘Where were you stationed? What was it like?’ He turns his face away.

‘South West. Then Angola. But no need to spoil our evening talking about guns and tents and bloody Swapo.’ He looked into my eyes again, caressing the inside of my wrist then turning my hand palm up.

‘Future looks good. See your life line – no breaks!’ and he asked for the bill. He offered me the peppermints and gave the waiter a generous tip, helped me on with my jacket, then draped his arm over my shoulders. We crossed the road to the disco where he stayed by my side throughout the evening, waving away any other male who seemed to want to pay me attention. When Brad asked to dance with me, Jake gave him a playful shove and held me closer. The place was unlit but a strobe hit a huge silver ball in the centre of the room, flashing mosaics of light through the dark. We moved to the beat of the music, only partly able to see each other, separating and moving our arms up and down, round and round, silhouetted against the light. We danced without stopping through Abba, Michael Jackson,

Smashing Pumpkins and shared water between every medley. We couldn't talk above the noise and so we mimed our pleasure to each other and to Brad and the rest of the crew and their girlfriends, winding together, spinning away. He kissed me as we danced and I tasted the cigarette on his breath, slightly acrid but not unpleasant.

He drove home slowly, though there were few cars on the road. Once home, I offered him coffee but it was too late. Upstairs Bella was already fast asleep so I went to bed too, looking forward to our usual postmortem the following day.

Over a late breakfast she told me about the movie they had seen, finishing her yoghurt and licking her lips.

'Definitely a long-term possibility.'

'Mmmm. Jake too.'

Now I start suddenly in the silence. Still no Jake. I check my cell phone but there is no missed message. I press automatic dial. Eventually he picks up.

'Why're you phoning again? Anyway, I've changed my mind. Why go out with those losers? Waste of my time.'

'I thought you liked them. That you'd enjoy the dancing, Jake.'

'Then don't think so hard, stupid.'

I wander around the empty house, touching some of our ornaments, picking them up, putting them down, wedding gifts like the pewter fruit bowl and the crystal-handled spoons and forks, masks we had bought together at the flea market, choosing the least ghoulish ones so as not to frighten the babies we'd planned.

I call Electra, undress and hang up my clothes, clean off my make-up, check my neck and cheeks for remaining smears and crawl under the duvet. I try to sleep but my eyes pop open at every creak of the floorboards and window frames.

When Jake arrives home, he switches on the light.

'Hi.'

'Switch off the light. Where were you?'

'Conrad wouldn't leave. Had a fight. Broke his nose. Had to take him to hospital.'

'Something wrong with your phone?'

'Battery died.'

'And Conrad's? The hospital's?'

I lie rigid and sleepless until the dawn breaks and I get up and go downstairs. His clothes have been dumped on the bathroom floor and there are bloodstains on Jake's shirt. He

follows me a few minutes later and starts to explain again, but I walk out of the kitchen and have my coffee on the patio.

My birthday orange came to me
from the night of her pocket.

The salt of the sea
was the herring brine left behind.

The ice of the old country
became the warmth of the new.

I broke the fruit open
and cast its golden skin upon the water.

The past peeled away:
before we docked I sucked each segment,
sipping sweetness out of the dark.

That night, Jake brings me roses, a dozen yellow, wrapped in floral tissue paper. He hands them to me where I am sitting at my worktable and water leaks from the stems onto my page. He leans down and turns my face to kiss my lips but I'm slow and his lips brush my cheek instead.

'Peace offering.'

I put my pen down as he swivels my chair towards him. He leans his arms on the arms of the chair and starts kissing me and as he moves closer, my body relaxes towards him. At that moment Danny comes in.

'Ma. Dad. Look. They gave it to me in assembly this morning. Cool, hey?' He holds up his medal, blue eyes shining. 'The gold!'

Jake turns away from me, lifts Danny up and spins him around. As Jake flexes his arms, Danny holds on until his foot catches my small side table and it topples over, sending a pile of papers flying.

'Oops.'

'Sorry, Ma.'

We pick everything up and Jake straightens the table. Reaching down for the medal, he brushes his hand against my calf, and then pinches.

'Did Mr Clark say anything special, Dan?'

'Oh, yeah. That I mustn't neglect my school work.'

'He has a point.'

Jake puts his arm around the boy and they go out. The splotches of water from the roses dry on some of my trials in uneven rings with indigo ink edges. I pick up my pen again and use the blots as centre patterns, writing letters round and round them in navy and black until the page is filled with repeated ripples, endless stars. I want to go on evolving the images but force myself to cap my ink and stop for the day.

I cradled our samovar
in a blanket
in my arms;
heavy, empty,
ash long cold,
water long gone.

Now I hold it,
polish it,
shine my family,

you,
songs in the spout,
voices in the flue –

still it warms us.

At supper, Jake holds his glass up like a microphone, ‘And now for sport. Today, Danny Dynamite, future hope of South African swimming, received the gold. Winner in the 100 metres and 200 metres individual crawl at the Ellis Park Gala, he beat champion Ryk Neethling into second place, shaving two seconds off previous records. Danny is here with us in the studio, so let us have a few words. So, Danny, tell me, how did it feel when everyone was cheering and you knew it was for you?’

‘Oh, come off it, Dad!’

We drink to Danny’s success with orange juice, Jake with a whisky and I reheat the food in the microwave, plate by plate.

The next day, Jake leaves to discuss the first stage of work for Brad’s friend Muller over the border in Namibia. I write out a few pages of the sampler before dawn, feeling an urgency to complete it, resting my eyes and hand between bursts of writing. As I find my rhythm, my body and mind are in tune, my fingers with my eyes, my pen and ink flowing. By the time I lose concentration and take a break for breakfast, happy at how the project is taking shape, Danny and Michelle are awake.

‘Ma, can I go to Greg’s today from school? We want to practise our goal kicking. Soccer season’s starting soon, Ma. Where’s the ball?’

‘Can you take me to Joanne’s to complete our project after school, please Ma?’

The lift scheme arrives to fetch them. Back in my studio and free, I inscribe a few quotes in a minute script, changing nibs and also my gouache colours. It’s time to fetch the children before I know it and I rush out without cleaning my pens or brushes.

I scramble some eggs with sweet corn for supper, then there’s a flurry as the children do homework. I help Michelle with her history project heading, doing it for her on a rough sheet. She copies my lettering, shades it in with pencil, then adds linear detail, and I fetch a mapping pen and ink and show her how to do the fine outlines and cross hatching. She adds her own personal touches, looking up for my approval. Danny asks my advice now and then.

‘Please sign off that I’ve done it all, Ma.’

‘Have you?’

‘Yes.’

My ink is caked and lumpy on my unwashed nibs when I get back to my own work the next morning. I use a toothbrush and water with a drop of dishwashing liquid to remove the dried ink and the shellac from the prongs, then dab off the nibs on some tissue. Delicate even though they're made of steel, the nibs are useless if they are bent out of shape or if the sections separate.

It's Passover, time to read about the Exodus, the original escape narrative. The children get new outfits for the *Yon-tev*, and I buy Jake a black-and-white striped Polo shirt on my Stuttafords' account. We no longer make our own wine in barrels that creak in the cellar, wood expanding as the grapes ferment, but we do still drink four cups plus one for Elijah the prophet, and eat our *matse* leaning to the left, each row part of the labyrinth, dots mapping the path towards the pillar of fire, the parting waters of the Red Sea leading the slaves from bondage to redemption. Oasis or mirage, we wander in the wilderness. I write Judith's words,

Everything all at once:
the loaded dray,
the road ahead,
the open sky;

homemade biscuits,
hard and dry;
rope round our bundles,
tightly tied;

hands waving goodbye.

Aaron sends me a text message.

Hi C, Can't choose between Italic and Lombardic. What do you think? A.

I think about his handwriting, his pleasure in making letters, even when simply jotting in a notebook, his delight in using the fountain pen and in the patterns formed by the letters on the page.

Peysekh.
Warmer weather.
Sugar, eggs, meal,
ginger, syrup.

She rolled out the mixture,
length by length,
cut it up and made rings,
the dough sticking to everything,
farklept di gantse velt,
left to rise under a dish cloth,
in a warm place,
plunged them into bubbling syrup
with zest of one orange, grated.

Room redolent, gingery sweet

she opened the pot;
steam enveloped her,
froth bubbled;
fork by fork she lifted the rings,
left them to cool:

Golden *teyglekh*,
once-a-year temptation
from Rose's golden hands.

I fetch the children from swimming in their teacher's covered and heated pool. On the way back home my cell phone beeps but I don't take my eyes off the road. It's probably Jake reminding me to call the plumber about the leaking bathroom tap. His car is in the driveway when we get home.

'How come you're home so early?'

'I had enough. Bergman has cut us out of the deal.'

'Why? What's happened?' It's not something he has told me about before.

'He'd brought us with him into a big money-spinning consortium. Mind out of my way.'

He fetches his briefcase from the car, puts it down on the kitchen counter and takes out some documentation.

'Look at this. Completely unjust. No reason. They're definitely in breach.'

I make his favourite supper, fish and chips with onion rings, followed by custard and canned pears. The children enjoy it too. I like it because it needs minimal preparation.

'And I've left my cell phone somewhere. Maybe at work. Maybe at that pig's office. Where's yours? I need my own lawyer – even a lawyer needs one sometimes. Marcus'll sort him out.'

'Why don't you use the landline?' but he's already riffling through my bag.

'Hey, what's this?' He pulls out Judith's book and unfolds the protective wrapping.

'What's so secret?' He opens the book and stares at the script.

'It's my grandmother's writing.'

'Oh, living in the past again. All that Holocaust stuff.'

He drops the book back into my handbag and scrabbles around again until he finds my phone.

'You've got an unread message.' He presses the button and reads it out.

C, see you tomorrow at 12. A.

'Who is this?'

‘Aaron. He’s a new client.’

‘Don’t lie to me.’

I stare out of the window at the few remaining purple irises in the flowerbeds. Season after season, their colour brightens the greyest of days. Behind them the pine trees stand guard. Next door, the hose system is on full blast, and the shooting water beats against the fence. As I step outside and walk along the gravel pathway I can hear Grace and her sisters playing hopscotch in their drive, counting the blocks. Surrounded by plants, embedded in the rockery, the cement cage stands empty. The birds are long gone, golden pheasants, green parakeets and songbirds, or so the previous owners had said. More likely to have been common pigeons I’d thought at the time, or perhaps homing ones; man can cage any bird he chooses.

The door dangles on its hinges, the wire netting broken and rusty, ready to hook the unsuspecting. Inside, the cage is dark. There are brown and white splashes on the ledges, droppings, stains, gravel, twigs and dried leaves, fragile mosaics scattered in the dust. I have to bend to get through the door and there is no room to stand up. Instead, I lie down across the cold cement floor. In the branches and trunk of a dead tree, split and dry, are black nesting holes. I stretch and put my hand inside, only to be pricked by dry pine needles. White downy feathers cling to the skin on my bare arms. Outside in the twilight sparrows chatter and doves coo in the eaves.

Behind is a lone eucalyptus, its bark hanging in strips, flailed skin with the gold leached out of it, so that there is no contrast between the white and brown pieces in the failing light. I hear an unfamiliar birdcall and my footsteps crunch on the stony path.

I need the work from Aaron and any future referrals that may come from it. For a while I don’t answer his message, but then I confirm the appointment. I throw away some of the poorer attempts for Jake’s sampler. Not good enough. Nothing seems good enough. I try again. In squares that emulate a hand-sewn quilt, I place quotes in a modern alphabet to suit the love-words, hoping they will perform their own alchemy, that everything will come right between us, that it will be how it was in the beginning.

A pillar of smoke,
not a mushroom cloud,
lead Moses out of Egypt.

Then he dropped those stones,
and their words
made our world stronger;

but letters and bodies
curl and burn;
day by day
they went up the chimney,
a different kind of slowly.

*

After forty years
wandering in the wilderness,
calf, manna, commandments;

distance beckoning,
parting waters,
pillar of smoke;

you and me
fire water
promised land.

I look for suitable parchment for Judith's poetry. The piece I choose has been shaved, sanded and smoothed to palest ecru. I measure up and slice sheets to size with a steely blade against the side of a metal ruler, my strokes true so as not to spoil the edges. However, there is no need for me to use a tiny script as Judith did, no need to conserve materials the way she had to – though expensive, there's more available if I need to redo the job. I can change my mind, scrape and rewrite as there is always another chance. I work on the individual pages and will bind them together only once they all are completed.

I test my nib on the off-cuts to make sure it won't snag the grain of the skin and streams of letters emerge where heavy down strokes contrast with more delicate upstrokes, accumulating to create a lacing of black on cream.

Milk beaten
in wooden churns
leaving the whey;

knotted cloths filled with curds
hanging on the line
between shirts and sheets;

creamy cheese seeping
between sugary folds,
blintses kept hot until he came,
melting in our mouths
until we were sated.

My hand is tired from writing when I flip through the book and discover Judith's personal notes on the back of a page of poems: Write about digging the pit, falling into it and lying in it, still alive, naked under a blanket of bodies. Write about escaping, crossing the border, surviving on rations, weevils, nothing, sleeping with rats. The dark and cold European winter. Write about after, swimming in the warm Indian Ocean. About no yellow stars. No taste of ash. About here.

'Tickets for Othello tonight, Cal. With Laurence Fishburne and Kenneth Branagh. The movie has had good reviews and Brad recommended it too. Why don't we eat out first? We can leave Danny and Mishy with your folks.'

We drop them off. As we kiss them goodbye, Jake ruffles Danny's hair and runs his hand across Mishy's back. Jake opens the passenger door for me and puts on the radio. As the Eagles sing 'Hotel California', my foot taps the rubber mat and a Queen medley follows

while Jake parks in the basement of the mall. He puts his arm around my shoulders and we walk to the restaurant. We share a salad, then he has a steak, medium rare, and I order pasta with spinach and ricotta. By chance, Anya and Gerald stop at our table, and Jake invites them to join us for coffee. He offers Gerald an introduction to one of his clients who is in the same line of work. They are disappointed when we have to leave, and we make a dinner date for the next weekend. Chatting to them makes us late for the main movie.

‘Never mind, Doll,’ Jake says, ‘we’ll soon figure it out.’

The drama of entanglement unravels in amazing cinematography.

‘Irene Jacob was brilliant, didn’t you think?’

‘Great directing. But Shakespeare can never be bad.’

‘Desdemona’s costumes!’

Jake puts his arm around me at interval.

‘I think we need to buy you some new clothes. I’ll give you money, or better yet, perhaps I can go shopping with you one evening.’

Once home, he puts the sweets we brought for the children on their pedestals for the next day, fixes us each a Kahlua coffee and sets the alarm. We savour the warm drinks on the bed in the half-dark. I kick off my shoes and curl my legs under me and Jake stretches out facing me. Then he puts down his empty glass and switches on his sound system, finding Sting. He takes my drink from my hand and pulls me up into his arms, swaying me gently.

As he puts his hand on my head and strokes my hair, I think about Judith, her family in the snow during their forced removal from their *shtetl*, where they could only take with them what they could carry. I shiver.

Sunrays slice through icicles
hanging on my fringe;
Tate in uniform
hangs in the cupboard;
hangs on the washing line
in his shirt.

The mill no longer grinds,
the stones are silent;

the dying town huddles
against winter;

the spaces haunt me
where my home once was;

in the forest,
graves lift the grass;

sweet snowdrops, lavender;
bitter ash.

*

White and worn,
stiff and solid,

catching the wind
the frost, the snow,

his pegged shirt billowed
on the washing line;

I hold him to my breast,
empty ice:

he remains hanging there,
his remains hanging there.

On holiday in Ballito Bay in the April school break, we stay in an apartment on loan from one of Jake's clients, half patio and half penthouse. Every day I cook and Jake washes up, or he braais and I do the dishes. When one or both of the children fall asleep in the lounge, Jake half-carries, half-walks them to bed and tucks them in, then it's just him and me. The children ride their bikes on the roof and Jake plays with them. They cheer him on as he does stunts, first balancing only on the back wheel, then only on the front. He teaches Danny how to do wheelies and shows both children how to whistle by pursing their lips.

We can see the sea all the way to the horizon, with ships coming and going and the smaller, private boats close by. Even in this season, the beach is packed with holidaymakers who have come here for the balmy weather, sunny in the morning, cooling late in the afternoon. We sit under our umbrella on hired deck chairs, near to the water's edge where the breeze is refreshing, but not so near that the rising tide can wash away our towels and paraphernalia. The children make beach friends and Danny meets up with some boys from school. They play volleyball and action cricket, hitting the ball then having to chase it into the water or across the hot sand. Jake takes Danny swimming, going very deep so that they can body surf all the way into land, Danny imitating Jake and taking the waves as they crash. Mishy and I remain near the shore, holding hands and jumping over the waves, enjoying the gentle swells before they rise, break and unroll. Then Jake and I leave the children in the shallows and swim together.

When we come out, the three of them dig an enormous hole and Danny jumps in. Mishy and Jake cover him, and then build a racing car with a sand steering wheel and tyres around him. They collect stones and shape them into the Jaguar insignia. When Danny is tired of sitting cooped up, he breaks the car and they all fill in the hole. Covered in a layer of sand, he hauls Michelle back into the water and gets her to help him rinse himself off. We relax, suck ice-lollies bought from the vendor and drift in and out of sleep under the umbrella.

Half asleep, I feel my neck and find that the blue-green moonstone pendant that Jake had bought for me for our first anniversary is gone.

'Where did you walk, Cal?'

'I've only been in this area – and in the water.' Without much hope, we hunt in the sand around the chairs, sifting it through our fingers.

'When did you last feel it round your neck?'

‘Not sure. I can’t remember whether I had it before we came to the beach. It is so much part of me.’ Jake is crouched over, running through the sand with his fingers until he moves his feet, crows and picks up the chain with the jewel still attached. He opens my hand, places it in my palm and closes my fingers.

‘We’ll get you a new chain, one with a better clasp,’ he says. ‘There’s that jewellery shop in the Rosebank Mall.’

On our way back to the apartment, we pick up some frangipani blooms that have fallen from the trees lining the beach. I tuck one behind Mishy’s ear and one behind mine.

Horseradish numbed our buds;
the taste of the past
disappeared.

In place of fur balaclava,
panama hat
for the African sun.

I point to orange *mer*,
glassy *tsibele*, crimson *burekes*,
carrots, onions, beetroot.

We still eat
gribenis, *perogen*, *fligele*,
dream of home.

Now I am Judith,
but also still Yudis;
the Pale on my tongue,
Yiddish on my breath.

‘I think you’ll look great in them, Doll. Put them on for me.’ Jake has bought me a new blouse and a cerise button-through jersey.

‘I knew it. Perfect.’

I look at myself in the mirror.

‘Thanks so much, Jake.’ I wish I could tell him that the fit is not right. And that cerise doesn’t suit me. But I don’t. I can’t.

‘How about a game of tennis, Dan? We can use Rod’s court. Leave in half an hour and back by lunch?’ Danny has just come inside and doesn’t answer Jake straight away.

‘Don’t tell me you’re too lazy. Consider yourself lucky that you don’t have to spend your weekends at veldskool like I had to. That’s where we first learned to march, had to be cadets in khaki shorts and shirts and sing ‘Die Stem’ while we saluted the flag.’

I know Danny has an arrangement to meet up with Andrew. He catches my eye and I nod.

‘Okay, Dad. Can I just shower? And Ma’s just making me some pancakes.’

‘Right. Call me when you’re ready.’ Jake disappears upstairs, then, ‘Don’t eat too many, butterball, or you won’t have a chance.’

I pour batter into the heated pan. When the first batch is done, I give Michelle some, then have a couple myself.

Danny comes back, his cheeks glowing from the hot shower.

‘Ma, I haven’t played in weeks. I’ll be hopeless. Maybe I should tell Dad I’ve changed my mind?’

‘Don’t worry. He wants to spend time with you so it should be fun.’

‘Except you know he wants to thrash me.’

‘Dan, you know you have a great backhand and serve. And it’s good experience for you. You can still meet up with Andrew this afternoon.’

‘Yeah, thanks, Ma.’ I slip his pancakes onto his plate and pass him the maple syrup. ‘Awesome.’ He makes a big production of smacking his lips, smears the pancakes with syrup and then puts the knife in his mouth and licks it clean.

‘Dan ...’ He laughs.

‘Just teasing you, Ma.’ Finished, he leaves the kitchen, athletic legs brown against the white of his shorts, shirt hanging out. Finding no more pancakes, Mishy puts her pinkie into the sugar bowl, and then licks off the granules.

‘You kids. Have an apple, Mish.’

‘Boring.’

But she takes a Starking from the fridge and washes it.

‘Want a bite?’

‘No, thanks.’

‘Did you get Laura a present, Ma?’ I give her the gift and some wrapping paper, and a card so she can write a note. I hear her humming and then practising her lines for her role as Dorothy. The school play is still many months away, but they take it seriously and she’s enjoying the rehearsals.

‘Help, please Ma.’ She’s made a mess of the parcel.

At last the three of them leave, Jake dropping Michelle off before his match with Danny. I settle down in the studio, inscribing concert programmes with donors’ names inside the front covers. The covers don’t stay open and I have to wait for each one to dry before moving on. I give myself a break and try out combinations of Rustic and Italic, sloping the down strokes of ‘ns’ and ‘ms’ at different angles rather than parallel and using irregular connections.

I take a break and call my mom to ask if there are any more of Judith’s notebooks. If there were any, she doesn’t have them. Nor does she have a book of Judith’s friends’ phone numbers. Disappointed, I return to my work, trying some heavy cream paper I’d discovered tucked away at the back of one of my drawers and like the effect. The morning flies past and I jump when I hear Jake’s key in the door.

‘Hey, Cal, what’s to eat?’

Danny’s expression says it all.

We share the leftovers from the previous night’s meal and I drop Danny and Andrew at the mall to see the new Batman movie. Then I go round to Bella’s where we curl up on the sofa-swing in her garden, sipping tea from china cups. ‘How’s it going, Cal?’

‘Oh, fine, thanks. We’ve had a lovely weekend.’

I left Rakishok,
left my parents
took our children.

We were lucky:
Benjamin sent money
for passports, for tickets:
Libau, Ostend,
Southampton, Cape Town.

We were lucky
the journey took us three months;
my cousin's burning eyelids
kept her quarantined;
my uncle landed in the Antipodes;
my friend married the stranger
who paid for her ticket.

We were lucky:
in thick fog
another ship sailed past us
with inches to spare.
Afterwards
my children played with other children,
their coloured balls flying off deck,
my hat floating away.

Then London:
teeming streets;
waiting for papers;
sleeping at the shelter;

Cape Town: sea and summer
instead of mud and snow;
jumping rocks, holding hands;
fishermen catching
sardines and *snoek*;

and Johannesburg:
Benjamin waiting for us;
A *nes*, a miracle:
Dorem Afrike, South Africa,
di goldene medine.

My necklace is agate,
 amber dotted with silver,
 water laughing past portholes,
 turquoise pools threaded through dreams,
 birds swimming in a blue-black sky;

we stood over our shadows,
 beckoned by sun-stars,
 forging the future,
 holding the memories,
 travelling free.

‘I want you to meet Shira soon, Cally. You’ll like each other. She’s ...’ Aaron has arrived for our next appointment.

‘Come and see some new samples I’ve done for you.’

The correct words in the correct order, perfect spacing, an expression of commitment: inscribing a *ketuba* I must leave no gaps between the lines, the words, the Hebrew text and the English, the end of the text and the place for signatures. No one should be able to add any word that does not belong, and so there must be no place left for any alien element, an inherent warning to mind the gap.

‘We met in Israel. Saw each other in the library. All I wanted to do was talk to her.’

I reflect on how the letters and words have their place, belonging together but individual, never allowed to touch. Each as important on its own as it is part of the whole, each in its right place. Hyphenating at the end of lines is not allowed because it breaks the unity. If a correction has to be made it must be invisible – I have to use a blade to lift it, but even the slightest scratch leaves a scar. Human creation can never attain perfection.

‘We were both doing research.’ He strokes the ancient volume of scripts he has brought with him.

‘I watched her as she read one sacred text after another, jotting in her notebook, calm and absorbed. Self-contained. Didn’t think she even noticed me. She was always alone, always focused, and I never caught her looking at me, though perhaps she was looking at me through the curtain of her hair.’ He smiles, remembering.

‘What’s your research?’

‘Archaeological sites – I’m on sabbatical now.’

‘Qumran?’ I imagine the Dead Sea Scrolls crumbling in their urns in their darkness.

‘And others. Every morning when I arrived, she was already there. I had to work up the courage to look her in the eye and I beckoned her to meet me in the garden though we should not even have looked at each other. There was never tension between us. It was as if we had always known each other. Her English is faultless, though slightly accented. We talked about our work, religion, our families.’

‘She introduced me to a side of Israel that I didn’t know, the places where the locals met and ate. Walking towards the *shuk* one evening, she quoted some Hebrew poetry and I echoed it in English. It was the *khamzin* season – damp and hot. Our bodies were jostled together in the crowd.

‘I pulled her into a doorway, though we should not have been touching – did I say she’s from an Orthodox family?’

‘But we were magnetic, knew it was right and good and unstoppable. We laughed with surprise and relief: we needed to pretend no longer. She believes I am her *basherter*.’

He blushes at the intimacy.

‘Simple. A man. A woman. Same needs. Same longing for fulfilment. But she couldn’t bring herself to tell her parents. In their eyes I was the infidel. They would have done anything to break us up. We didn’t know what to do – please her family and endure our own heartbreak, or live our love but cut ourselves off from them. We told no one.’

He opens the book, turns the marbled endpapers and slides out a sheet of folded onionskin paper. I can see the indented black type.

‘The first poem I wrote for her.’ He doesn’t offer it to me to read.

‘Now we have her parents’ blessing. We must get the *ketuba* just right.’

‘I know. Its rules are as serious as those for marriage.’

As they fill in the gaps, On the ... day of the week, the ... day of the month ... in the year ... the couple take their first decisions about timing, showing up and being together forever.

I did not have to ford the river
in the dead of night dodging bullets,
bundles above our heads;

did not have to hide in the toilet,
heart pounding, mouth shut tight,
with no tickets, wrong papers;

did not have to leave without –
I had five zlotys from my father,

five from the *mishpokhe*;

did not have to eat ants,
beetles, mushrooms, berries,
poisonous, not kosher.

I had our children with me,
in the third class carriage,
in steerage,
on deck,

we had a home,
two rooms in Jepestown
for the five of us;

it was a good move.

‘Hey, Cal. What made you decide to fix it finally?’ Jake is home early. I’m inside the birdcage putting up wooden nesting boxes that Neil the handyman, whose hobby is keeping birds, has painted in reds and greens and they brighten up the overall greyness of the rocky structure. I’m careful not to tear my nails or my skin or to trip over any of the boxes or tools lying on the cold floor. ‘Need help?’

Jake takes off his jacket and steps inside.

I pass him the hammer. He bangs the nails into the tree stumps with sure strokes, then hooks on the strings of the little houses and flicks them so they swing. Soon they are all done and we step outside to admire our handiwork.

‘What about some feeders and water holders? I saw an article in *Birds and Birding* that you can use pine cones to hold seeds – and that you should mix them with peanut butter. Great for birds but not for children!’

Back inside he finds the article, which also has a photograph of a stone birdbath.

‘I saw some at that nursery outside Pretoria on my way home from Mpumalanga last week.’

‘Pricey?’

‘Reasonable. They also sell those mauve bougainvillea. That would brighten up the outside of the cage area in summer, don’t you think?’ It’s not really a question. ‘I’ll get some when I go back next week.’

‘Could you get some primulas too while you’re there, that rainbow mix that they specialise in. If we plant now, they’ll bloom in spring. And maybe some sweetpea seeds to throw in next to the pool fence?’

‘Don’t push your luck.’ I’m not sure if he’s joking or not. The warmth of the sun rays caresses my back through the window.

When Danny and Mishy come home from Bella’s we call them out into the garden, the twilight sky is a blend of azure and cobalt, the trees blotted silhouettes. We anticipate the influx of birds, the children sitting cross-legged on the grass, Jake and I perched on the birdcage ledge, leaning against the wooden uprights.

On the weekend we all work in the garden, taking turns with the spade and rake, clearing the beds around the cage area and replanting flowers from their plastic containers.

‘I want to pull up those irises. Hate the colour.’

‘Jake, they’re beautiful!’

He fetches the hosepipe and connects it to the closest tap. When water drips from the hose connection, he sends Danny to fetch a bucket.

‘It needs a new washer,’ he says, as he pulls the snaking pipe along the length of the lawn, turns on the taps, and without warning turns the water on the children. Danny grabs the hose and turns it on Jake and he whisks out of the way. Sopping, they run inside to shower off and warm up.

When our pigeons arrive, Neil sets them free inside the wire enclosure. Unsure at first, they sit on the cement ledges, then hop onto the branches as the children coo at them through the netting and I start suggesting names, Spice, Feathers, Star.

‘How will we know which is which?’ asks Mishy.

‘Each one probably has a differentiating mark,’ Neil says. ‘Associate a name with it and then remember it.’ He gives us instructions for their care and promises to visit the following Sunday to see how they’re doing.

Jake brings home a water dispenser for inside the cage and a bird table for out. He and Danny set it in place, creating a rockery around its base. We collect pine cones and smear some of them with peanut butter and bird seed.

I fill the unused fire grate in the lounge with the rest of the cones. Then we have a steady stream of the children’s friends to inspect our acquisitions, a few of whom decry the fact that the birds have to spend their lives behind the wire. Everyone has their own ideas, and we settle on a suite of names, Nib, Quill, Pen, Feather and Ink.

When Bella and Mike arrive for tea, I see that Mishy is talking to the neighbours through the fence.

‘Can Lerato come over to see the birds, Mommy?’

I get up and join Michelle at the fence.

‘Hi, Lerato. Ask your mom and dad if they’d like to join us for tea.’

Naledi and Peter join us and regale everyone with jokes about their move to Johannesburg from Mangaung. I took them a cake when they moved in and bought a gift for the baby, Dineo, but have only previously spoken to Naledi through the hedge.

No one has done any homework. That night, we polish off a batch of cheese omelettes and the children are asleep as their heads hit the pillow. We are too.

I knew
hearth, love, fire;

I thought

stones
do not grow.

*

What we were:
a confusion of pieces,
a fractured flock.

What I am:
a sparrow in flight
above a shed.

*

Cries of the body,
cries of the spirit,

different time,
different place,

moon in transit,
sun standing still,

night outside,
light within;

somewhere between the two:
best of both.

Writing and decorating the *ketuba*, the scribe adorns the marriage ceremony and fulfils a *mitsve*. Like the *Torah*, the document can be rolled up so the bride can take it with her until she and her husband have settled in a permanent home. There, it can adorn their walls; if it is not displayed, it is the wife who must always know where it is. My *ketuba* bag is similar to the one Judith would have had, two handstitched velvet rectangles, two different reds trimmed with silk, and is tucked away in the drawer with Jake's *talis* bag and a collection of *yarmies*.

Aaron arrives, face tanned and a white ring on his wrist under his leather bangle. He had been away checking out honeymoon possibilities to choose a place perfect enough for Shira. He bubbles with stories about Prague and Budapest, the sights and the people.

'Where else are you considering?'

'Rome, Milan, Florence, maybe.'

We finalise the specifics of the *ketuba* and I give him my quote.

'I'll let you know when I'm finished.'

'I want to follow your progress.'

As much as I dislike being scrutinised, I agree. As we walk out he says, 'Oh, I nearly forgot these.' He takes two boxes of ink refills out of his jacket pocket, one of bronze, one red.

'Thanks so much. I can't wait to try them out.'

'Except maybe you should be starting my *ketuba* right now!' We share a laugh at his expense – and mine.

Like Aaron, I have more than one fountain pen so I don't need to keep changing nibs. I put in the colours and swirl and dance with my pen.

I breathed a world
that knew mushrooms,
field, forest;

mosaic sky of blue
called winter,
blue called emptiness,
blue called forgetting;

forest fragrant as needles,
green carrying darkness,
green carrying tomorrow;

children sticky with blackberries,
leapt into stars;

here, I cannot find
the path along my tongue.

‘Too many clothes, Cal.’

‘I know. I can’t decide. Can we believe the weather predictions of a heat wave?’

Better be safe, I always think, so I still cover all possibilities and hear Jake muttering as he packs the boot.

I stroke his back and he sighs.

‘I said only one suitcase, okay.’

‘O-kay,’ says Hamlet.

It’s the Youth Day long weekend and we’re on our way to a birders’ retreat, leaving the children with Bella. As we leave, I call Bella on my cell.

‘Mom says she’s available to help, Belle. Oh, and please don’t give Danny any drinks with colorants. They make him hyperactive.’

‘Don’t worry, Cal. I’ll call you if there’s a problem.’

I am grateful for a break away from the paper work, but the motes behind my eyelids become letter shapes, a kaleidoscope searching for a design. Jake puts a disc into his player, turns it up full blast, and we’re off. He opens the window, rests his elbow on the ledge, and puts his foot hard down on the accelerator once we hit the freeway, his mood elevated. I slowly start to relax, looking forward to seeing Phyl and Amy again and catching up on their family news. We haven’t seen each other since the last trip away more than a year ago.

‘Jake, could I get an increase in my housekeeping allowance please? You know everything has gone up, especially now with the rise in petrol prices.’

‘Not now, Cally. We’re on holiday.’

Jake taps with his fingers on the steering wheel in time to the Rod Stewart oldies. He checks his rear-view mirror and then overtakes trucks as we leave the city behind and the road opens ahead of us. He exceeds the speed limit but I bite my tongue, watching the veld speed by, trying to ignore his irritation at the slower vehicles and more careful drivers. He clenches his jaw and mutters expletives now and then, turning his head round and glaring at the pantechinon drivers in the right-hand lane who prevent him from speeding past.

‘What’s that, Jake?’ I try to identify a single raptor settled on the telephone pylon.

‘Tawny Eagle.’

That?

‘Same.’

The sun is already half-way up the horizon when we stop for a bathroom break and tea. We stretch our legs.

‘Want to take the wheel for a bit? I need a break.’

I stall as I start up and have to switch on again.

‘Okay. Ready to go? Change gears immediately.’

Once back on the open road, it’s easier.

‘You can overtake now.’

The road is busy as we near the bigger towns, with trucks carrying logs and holidaymakers. I concentrate on the road, pushing thoughts of the children and work out of my mind. I’m happy to spend time with Jake. It’s what I’ve been looking forward to.

‘Cal, it’s going to pour any minute.’ He points towards the left side of the highway where dark clouds have massed. I have been unaware of them, concentrating on the road ahead and the other vehicles. ‘Want me to drive?’

‘No, I’m fine, if that’s okay with you.’

‘Sure.’

He does take over before Van Reenen’s Pass and drives through the Drakensberg, exceeding the speed limit as he takes the hairpin bends, overtaking trucks carrying logs, livestock, apples and oranges to the coast. There are signs to the battlefields, Colenso, Rorke’s Drift, sites of destruction from the South African War, as well as to Blood River where Piet Retief’s Boers and Zulu impi encountered each other during the Great Trek. Once through, he lets me take over so he can rest.

‘Jake, perhaps we could visit one of those places? I know they have good tour guides and it should be interesting.’

‘No battlefields.’

We drive along and he turns the music up. I suggest that we stop in at the place where they do the weaving, where we went last time.

‘I’d get my mom a shawl there, and I need some other gifts.’

‘No problem. I’ll watch for the signs. It’s quite near here if I’m not mistaken.’

I already have one finely woven pullover that we bought two years ago that my mom has always admired. The colours of their cotton knits are exquisite, the garments well made and long lasting. I want to buy a gift for Bella and also a couple of short-sleeved tops for myself.

There is a crash of thunder and the heavens open. I can barely see the road ahead of me as the rain turns to hail.

‘Pull over, Doll.’

I check in my rear-view mirror for a break in the traffic, and have to take a chance and stop in the emergency lane with my lights flicking. We sit for a long while until the flash flood subsides and we set off again.

‘I think we should leave the weavers for when we come back,’ Jake says. ‘Pity we don’t have a 4-by-4, hey?’

‘Would have been perfect for this.’

The weavers are located in huts situated up a steep incline on an untarred lane. There is no way we can make it in Jake’s sedan. He does the last stint of the drive, emerald hills on either side of us and we arrive in Balgowan in time for hot buttered scones and farmhouse raisin bread. We stay at a bed-and-breakfast belonging to one of Jake’s clients, the perfect spot for endemic pipits, larks and longclaws. Tea is served from Mrs McKay’s floral china teapot, the leaves caught in a strainer before the liquid reaches her Doulton cups, brought by her grandmother as part of her dowry from Scotland.

There is a log fire in the grate of the stone lounge and we sit around and exchange news with the other guests. Phyl and Amy are both pregnant again and so we chat about due dates and the benefits of having elective Caesarean sections, until we go to our bungalows to get ready for dinner. I look forward to the farm specialities of cornbread and tomato soup, Trout Almandine served with baby potatoes, and ice cream with hot chocolate sauce. Jake and his buddies talk about the ‘lifers’, once-in-a-lifetime birds they hope to see on this trip, Narina Trogon and Purple Crested Lourie, both furtive, to be found in a dense forest area nearby, though it is late in the season.

‘Want to shower first?’ asks Jake.

‘No, you go.’

He comes round to my side of the double bed and kisses my cheek, then puts his arms round me and gives me a squeeze before disappearing into the bathroom. I can hear him singing the Rod Stewart medley we’d listened to in the car, ‘Rhythm of my heart’, then ‘Have I told you lately’, humming where he’s forgotten the words. I browse through some magazines until the opening of the bathroom door wakes me with a jolt. I check the time. We still have an hour until dinner. He has his towel wrapped around his waist, and his hair is slicked back, his face and neck tanned and smelling of Old Spice. Again he comes to my side of the bed and puts his arms around me.

In the dining room, starters have been served by the time we get there. Amy has kept me a seat beside her, and Jake sits next to her husband Ken. Everyone is chatting, drinks are

flowing and laughter drowns out the *maître d'* when he tries to tell us the specials. Jake catches my eye from across the table, and then slides himself down on his chair so that his foot caresses mine under the table. I smile, looking down at my meal, remembering how good it felt earlier as he'd held me as if I were the most precious person in the world to him and we'd made love as if re-plighting our troth. Suddenly I have a series of new images for his sampler to add to the illumination. I reach for my bag and take out my notebook and make a quick memo and sketch.

'Doll, don't do that here. It's rude.'

'Finished.' I put the book away and continue eating, lifting my head now and then to watch him through my fringe. Amy turns to me.

'How's Aaron's *ketuba*?'

'Going according to plan – so far. Thanks for recommending me, Amy. How do you know him?'

'He was at school with my sister. She was mad about him but he was never interested then. Now he's completely in love with Shira. I saw them at the Market Theatre last week, both radiant.'

'Usually bride and groom choose the *ketuba* design and colours together, but he's taken charge, comes on his own. She doesn't seem to mind though.'

'Apparently she has no artistic flair and he fancies himself the connoisseur. She said it to me in front of him, but she says she trusts his judgment.'

'Taste he has, but it would be fairer to talk to both of them. She also has to live with it. He's a real taskmaster.'

'Maybe, but he's pleased with your work.'

I look up and see the expression on Jake's face.

'Doll, enough shop talk already. Get some dessert.'

Amy and I stand and go towards the sideboard. Ken catches my arm as we walk past.

'Hey, Cal. No hello kiss?' He brushes his cheek against mine. We choose our dessert, slice some cheese and take plates and crackers to the table for everyone. Everyone is mellow and Phyl suggests we play Trivial Pursuit afterwards.

'Come on, Phyl! We've all got better things to do?' Her husband rumples her hair.

'Early start tomorrow,' Grant, the tour leader, breaks in, 'Meet back here at 5.30 for rusks and coffee. Don't forget sun block, caps, binoculars, water.'

Back in our chalet, Jake has some new moves. He plays me like a harp and from my responses he knows that it is what I want, that he is doing it right. He turns me this way and

that, my body in shadow, then in light, as the moon passes the crack in the curtain and our breath comes together deeper and harder. Then he moves the arena towards the bed, where we lie down until the duet reaches its crescendo and then stills. We fall asleep, fitting together like love-spoons. Perfect.

The group we are with are seasoned birders, impatient about what we might miss round the next corner, camouflaged in the dense grassland. I practise using the GISS formula, general impression, shape and size, learning to recognise the different species. I stick my notebook in the pocket of my cargo pants and tuck the bottoms into my socks to protect my legs against ticks and mosquitoes.

In the morning the group splits up, half going with Grant into the vast field looking for the pipits and larks, LBJs – little brown jobs – so difficult to identify. The rest of us follow his partner, Deirdré, along the high rim of the hills. Looking down we can see them all bunched together, slowly making their way through the grasses. Suddenly, there is a great whoosh right where I am standing, and two Spotted Eagle Owls that we have disturbed glide out of the brush and soar across the field.

Early the next morning, we all climb into the back of Grant's Land Rover and travel through rough terrain to see the resident Palm-nut Vultures. Jake and I bump together and hold hands. Then he holds me tight as the condition of the roads worsens. In an oil palm, high above the ground, is a huge nest of sticks and we are lucky enough to see the female tearing at and eating the palm husks, though it's the wrong time of year to see the chicks. Training my binoculars carefully, I can see another vulture circling overhead, easily mistaken for an eagle. Grant takes us right into the forest to see a pair of Crowned Eagles; their nest has been there for years – they just keep building on. After a picnic lunch in the shade we take a long walk through the forest. Birds are particularly difficult to spot in this habitat, but we do catch a glimpse of the back of a Narina Trogon after Dierdré points it out to us. When we get back to our chalet, the first thing Jake does is tick off our sightings on his bird list, adding to his grand total.

We leave the Midlands with regret after breakfast on Tuesday. The day is bright and Jake tells me to take the wheel and I remind him about visiting the weavers.

'Doll, we're not taking that road!'

'Jake, please ...'

'Bad idea. Your mother can do without the shawl for another season.' He closes his eyes and falls asleep.

But I've now set my heart on a pashmina like the one Amy was wearing and, when I see the sign, I turn off the main road. I drive carefully along the track; although the day is sunny, there are still puddles from the flash flood. Some francolins dash across and I swerve to avoid them. The car skids in a muddy patch and slides into the embankment. And as I accelerate to get out the wheels sink deeper.

Jake opens his eyes, opens the door and steps straight out into the mud. I hold my breath. There are no other cars around. He comes round to the driver's side and bangs on the roof.

'I'll have to lift the left wheel. You must accelerate when I tell you. We have to time it perfectly or we'll never get out of here.'

'Don't you want me to call Amy? Ken could help. Maybe Grant too. They're all still in the area.'

'Do you want everyone to know what a fool you are? And the towrope is at the bottom of the boot under the luggage. Now start.'

I switch on the ignition and put my foot on the accelerator, waiting for his signal. He counts down, 'Four – three – two – one – lift!'

I feel the car lifting slightly, but Jake can't hold it and it drops back down with a bump. His face is red and sweaty.

'Again.' I see his mouth move and it looks like he says bitch. What if we can't get out and have to wait to be pulled out by the AA? He bangs on the roof of the car.

'Come on.' He counts down again and I try not to panic. Once more I put my foot down hard on the accelerator and this time the car lurches forward out of the quagmire. Jake's face and clothes are splattered with brown clay. He wipes his face with his sleeve and then comes to the driver's door.

'Sorry, Jake.'

'Move over.'

I lift myself over the gear lever and settle down in the passenger seat, putting his equipment on the floor.

'Careful with those!'

I put his Zeiss binoculars back in their cover. My armpits are drenched and my palms sticky. I take some wet wipes from the cubbyhole and pass them to him. He mops his face and drops the wet cloths in my lap.

I see by the flashing light that there is a missed message from Aaron on my cell phone. I don't dare check it.

For us, home was one bad *czar* after another,
hatred and extreme weather
congenial bedfellows; counting Nicholases and
Alexanders,
we had no way of measuring who was worst:
Alexander II was assassinated,
Alexander III sent in his Cossacks.

We lost everything more than once;
changing borders kept us moving,
forced removals confined us in the Pale,
six provinces, Suwalki, Kovne, Vilne,
Grodne, Vitebsk, Minsk;
tiny villages, Rakishok, Kupershik, Krok, Telze;
changing names,
chopping off a brother's limb,
adopting a neighbour's son,
we saved boys from conscription;
sixty roubles could buy a ticket
away from the coal stove to another world.
For us it was one long winter after the other:
cabbage and rotten potatoes,
no herring, only brine,
nights of sabres, nights of steel,
nights of running, nights with nowhere to run,
nights of weeping
as the vodka drinkers hurled
glasses at the wall
curses at the wall
babies at the wall.

For weeks I have been preparing projects for the Society of Illuminators' mentor group. I pack all my materials the night before, wake early on the day, make sure I have my reading glasses and enough food and prepare a flask of coffee.

I lift the garage door and load up my car, putting my kit in the hatchback and lodging the drawing books against the side so they don't slide around. As I switch on the engine, Danny taps on the car with the portable telephone. It's Anya asking me to bring with my copy of Donald Jackson's Story of Writing for her. I go inside to fetch it. Back in the car, I reverse and there's a sudden loud bang. The garage door has swung down, hitting the roof of my car. I switch off the engine again and get out. I find a small dent above the back windscreen. I check that the garage door is open properly this time and get back into the car, look in my rear-view mirror and drive. In the background, Major is barking as usual.

Halfway down the driveway I feel a bump. I stop, roll the car forward, and then look behind me and see Prince, lying still. I jump out of the car and run to him. We've had him since the children were born, since he was a fluffy puppy. Now grizzled and old, he walks with a limp and is almost deaf.

'Prince? Princey?' He lifts his head and stares at me with soft brown eyes. His mouth is turned down and his tail lies still. Major nudges me, then puts his muzzle against his playmate as if to spur him on, but Prince doesn't budge, just lies there, barely breathing. I crouch, my hand on his head, my tears flowing down my arm as I brush my hair away from my face.

'Danny! Louisa!'

'Ma, what's happened? Are you okay?' They rush out to help me. Mishy is still sleeping. I fetch an old blanket and together we push it under the dog's inert body, then, holding the blanket corners, we lift him into my car, wrap him in the blanket, tucking it under him, me crooning nonsense and Danny patting him.

I give Danny the telephone number of the workshop organisers to let them know what has happened just as the children leave with their lift scheme. Then I rush off to the vet who checks Prince over straight away and decides to keep him there overnight for observation.

I am late for the workshop but the organisers have helped by doing my photocopying and distributing handouts for me. I give rushed instructions and everyone works well, though the group is muted as I move between the students. I send Jake a text message.

Ran over prince. Vet says will know in 24. So sorry.

The afternoon drags. I know the children are safe at Bella's where they are going after school, but I can't concentrate. I make mistakes and drop paw-print black blots on the students' pages. I take a wrong turning on the way home and pass the squatter camp. There are washing lines between the makeshift houses roofed with zinc offcuts and plastic.

When I arrive back, I call Bella and she comes over, bringing the children, hers and mine, with her.

We sit on my bed, me huddling under my duvet, she leafing through the latest Oprah magazine and sharing snippets of advice. The children crawl in on either side of me. I stare out of the window, tears welling up. I keep seeing the after-image of Prince in the driveway, unable to stand, his hips dislocated and with who knows what internal injuries. There was no blood and I think this must be a good sign. I knew he was losing his hearing; that was why he had not gotten up when I reversed nor heeded Major's barking. Small consolation. It was my own fault.

All the while I wait for my cell phone to bleep with reassurance from Jake, for him to ask how I am, to ask about the dog. Bella phones the vet and passes me the phone. He reassures me that Prince is resting, that he has done what he can, given him an injection cocktail of muscle relaxants, painkillers and anti-inflammatories and that we will now have to let nature take its course. His voice is gentle as he tells me that he'll be open at 6 a.m. and gives me his cell phone number. I wonder how I'll tell the children if it's bad news.

Bella and I have tea together. She reads me more from the magazine, showing me photographs of the rich and famous coupled with the handsome and blasé. We smile at the unreality of it all. Then she leaves for an appointment. I keep listening for the sound of Jake's car in the driveway, checking my cell screen in case I haven't heard a message arrive. The bile rises in my throat every time I think of Prince, then every time I think about how it will be when Jake comes home. Supper time comes and goes. I can't swallow anything. Instead, I run my bath water and the children go up to their own beds.

Leaving Jake's *boerewors* in the oven, I undress and sink into the uterine waters. I lie there until eight o'clock when I hear his key in the door. Drying myself and putting on warm pyjamas I stare at my face in the steamed-up mirror. There are indigo half-moons under my eyes. Even my eyes, usually blue, seem to be dark grey, and my mouth feels pinched in at the corners. I tie my dressing gown belt and walk to Jake's study to find him. He glances up as I come in and then drops his eyes back to his computer screen.

'Did you get my message about Prince?'

'Yes.'

‘I was waiting for you to reply.’

‘What did you want me to say? How could you? I love those dogs.’

‘I know you do. So do I.’ He looks up at me with ice in his eyes, swings his chair around so that his back is to me and picks up his book, something about quad-biking.

‘How can you be so cruel?’ He climbs into bed. My book holds no interest for me. I switch out the light and stare out through the slit in the curtains at the sliver of moonlight. I waken to find the bed empty next to me. I switch on the light to check the time. I think back to all the incidents I’ve pretended didn’t happen, all the times I’ve taken the blame myself and said I was sorry.

The next day, the vet is optimistic. Prince had a good night, is wagging his tail and has eaten a good breakfast. I take him home after they give him a warm bath and another dose of medication.

I try to call Jake but his cell phone is switched off. When he comes home he eats straight away then goes upstairs. I follow him to tell him the good news. I knock on the spare room door. Getting no answer I turn the handle. The door is locked.

Up light. Dark down. Down dark. Light up.

The pages of Judith’s book are watermarked with tears.

My world:
a shadow,
a smudge,
a thought;
against the dusk
a small sparrow.

Now,
lit-up voices;
children flit like peacocks.

In the forest,
pears and mushrooms flourish,
leaves have no trees,
bones have no bodies,
language has no voice,
snowflakes in the old world,
butterflies in the new.

*

My tin packed
with cold Russian soil
is wrapped in my kerchief,
tucked under a blanket

in my cupboard.

Inside,
embedded still
in home soil,
splintered mosaic,
fragments of rainbows:

I am long gone.

*

Kept safe
in *sider*, *makhzer*,
Tsene-rene;

words defy
burners, showers,
ovens, gas;

pages, routes,
memories past hatred,
beauty past destruction:

we still have our song.

Aaron had chosen a design similar to our *ketuba*, Jake's and mine, double rings to symbolise wholeness, perfect union, the double covenant between the couple and between them and the eternal one. I do the mock-up in pen and ink on a cheap sheet of paper, the difficulties of placement and spacing playing havoc with my layout. Calligraphied words take up more space than those written in pencil. The length of each line of writing is different and I keep running over the edges or find myself with just too much white space at the ends of the lines.

'Can I come round?'

I agree with reluctance, not wanting Aaron to see my struggles. He peers at what I have done.

'I like it very much so far.' He points, 'and I think this colour scheme works best.'

After he leaves, I am distracted. Anxious about making spelling mistakes or blots, I can't continue. Instead, I boil up the unblemished gallnuts that have been soaking for the past week to make the required kosher ink, cool and strain the muddy potion, reheat it, then mix it with gum Arabic and ferrous sulphate, *kankatum*. This liquid will flow through the nib, marking the *ketuba* with happiness, joy, communion and companionship, tying the bride and groom to their cultural roots and to each other.

I twine the past
through my fingers, count

kleyne yidele, miese fidele, holtshaker,
as your voice twists through my heart;

the blue of that sky,
the yellow
of those rays;

you beckon me back,
a trail of salt.

Mishy is singing upstairs, waiting for Bella to drop Joanne off. I load the washing machine. Jake comes into the kitchen to fetch a beer from the fridge.

‘Jake, Louisa asked me for a raise. I’d like to give it to her. She has to pay school fees.’

‘Can’t afford it.’ He disappears onto the patio and I can see him reading the TV schedule as I pass the window.

I switch on the machine, 3 for permanent colours, fetch the children’s clothes and Jake’s, then slip upstairs and make a start on the next lot of wedding envelopes, this time in copperplate. I manage to do about fifty and then go downstairs to empty the washing machine, load the tumble dryer, mix myself a passion fruit and soda and go outside to offer Jake some, but he has dozed off.

I do some more addresses until my concentration flags. Back in the kitchen, I empty the tumble dryer while the washing is still warm. If I fold it straight away, Louisa won’t have to iron everything. I sort, Danny’s, Mishy’s, Jake’s, mine. Most can go straight back into their cupboards, but Jake’s shirts and his and Danny’s jeans will need pressing.

I hold up Jake’s shirt, white, pink and turquoise stripes, bought at Greenmarket Square. It has shrunk to half its original size. I wish I could just get rid of it. I pick it up and go to the TV room where he is now watching the rugby test match between South Africa and England. He is lying with his feet on the sofa.

‘Jake ...’

‘What?’

‘I’m sorry, but your shirt ...’

He stands up, grabs it, holds it up and then tosses it onto the floor.

‘Why don’t you let Louisa do the washing? She does a better job than you, that’s for sure.’ He marches upstairs.

‘And that’s what she’s paid for.’ I hear a crash in our room. When I go up, I find my dresser drawers tipped out and my pyjamas, nighties, underwear and pantihose are strewn across the floor. The drawer he hurled into the bath is cracked though the bath is intact.

When Louisa arrives the next morning, she finds his shirt in the dustbin and brings it to show me. Then she holds the drawer while I glue the pieces back in place, jabbing myself on the splinters. When it’s dry, I try to push it back into the dresser but it jams.

‘I’m not going.’

‘Jake ... Bella will be so disappointed ...’

‘Rubbish. She won’t even notice I’m not there. Biggest waste of my time. Those people are all fools. In any case, I need to finish the presentation for Monday.’

How will I explain? I’ll look a fool without him at Bella’s dress-up birthday dinner. I was looking forward to it until this moment, the vibe at the classy Italian restaurant in Norwood, the good food, as well as seeing all our mutual friends. I’ve already taken the children to be with Gary and Joanne, where Belle and I have organised a sitter. We bought them ice cream and new graphic comics, knowing they’ll want to stay up late as it’s Saturday night.

‘I’d like you with me.’

‘So stay home then.’

‘What can I tell them?’

‘Whatever you like. What’s the difference? Tell them I didn’t want to come. Yeah, tell Mike, the one who managed to inveigle deferment when everyone else was called up. All those fancy doctors. And we, the plebs, having to defend them.’

I put on my eye make-up, debate staying home. I pull my little black dress over my head, careful not to muss my hair, straighten the top, and clasp my amber beads around my neck. I struggle to find the hook. I check my appearance in the long mirror, tissue the excess lip gloss from the corners of my mouth, touch up my mascara and remove a fleck of black from my eyelid, spray perfume on the pulse points of my wrists and on each side of my neck below my ears. By now I’ve decided. I sing aloud, ‘Come away with me’, and the music lifts my spirits. I spin round on my heels and tap my toes.

‘Do you have to? You know I hate that song even when Norah Jones sings it. But when you do ...’

‘I thought you liked it.’

I organise my black evening bag, collect my lipstick and fill my Belgian lace tissue holder. Then I find the keys, drape my cashmere pashmina around my shoulders and tie it in front, careful not to spoil the neckline of my dress or cover the pretty clasp.

‘See you later.’

Jake doesn’t raise his head from the paper. My heart beats hard. I’ve never done this before, gone without him. I reverse out of the garage, making sure that the dogs are not lying

on the warm bricks of the driveway. At least the restaurant is close by – I do not enjoy driving alone at night. I keep checking my rear-view mirror to make sure that I am not being followed. There are three robots and four stop streets en route. I watch for oncoming traffic and pull away from each traffic light as quickly as I can, even from the ones that are against me; waiting for green may lead to my bag being snatched. I feel my heart hammering all the way. At the venue I parallel park, get out, lock my doors and switch on the immobiliser and alarm.

The party is already getting going as I make my way to my sister's table. Mike comes up to me and wraps me in a bear hug.

'Cally, so good to see you. I think you know just about everyone? Drink?'

He orders me a vodka, lime and lemonade and doesn't comment on the fact that I've come alone. Bella is deep in conversation with Anya, relaxed and smiling. Anya's husband Gerald stands beside her, arm draped across her shoulders.

My cell phone rings.

'Where's the condensed milk?'

'In the pantry. Next to the biscuit tin. If it's not there then look in the fridge.'

'Why there?'

'Perhaps there isn't any. I didn't know you still liked it.'

'Your usual inefficiency.'

The waiter comes up to take my meal order but I haven't made up my mind. I shut my cell phone, hang my bag behind my chair and check the menu once more. I decide on the grilled sole with Cajun spice and a green salad as Bella turns to me,

'Where's Jake? I thought he was in town this weekend?'

'He's ...'

'Never mind, Cal. Sorry I asked. You don't have to cover for him with me. I'm just happy to have you here. Enjoy yourself.' She grabs and kisses me and I hug her back. I can feel my eyes fill, but I bite my lip and the tears disappear. I am not going to let anything spoil the party for me now. I lift my drink to her and we touch glasses.

'Cheers, Belle, many more.'

The lights are still on bright, the music is gentle in the background, soft enough to be able to chat and catch up with our friends' news. Everyone is walking round, sipping their drinks, toasting Bella and generally getting into the swing of it. I try not to dwell on the repercussions of coming without Jake. The food arrives. Anya is next to me on one side, discussing the on-going bitterness against the Zimbabwean refugees amongst locals who feel

their jobs and homes are threatened. She asks about Danny and Michelle and gives me news about her own children. Then we compare projects and she asks me to design a long service award for members of her organisation. Although she does calligraphy herself, this is not her area of expertise. We talk shop, avoiding the minefield of Jake. Facing me, Nick, an old friend of Mike's, also there on his own, greets me with a nod and a smile.

Gerald, on the other side of Anya, asks for black pepper for his pasta dish, then leans forward and asks me whether I need anything. I shake my head, no thank you, and start my fish, and between eating and chatting the time passes quickly. The waiter comes round to clear away the plates and takes orders for dessert and coffee and Mike stands up and proposes a toast to my sister.

'Come, Belle. Dance with me.' He takes her hand and they glide onto the floor. I dread the moment when everyone else takes their cue and joins in and I'll be alone at the table.

But my sister hauls me up for a threesome with Mike and I am taken up with the music and the beat, dancing on the spot, then weaving my way across the floor to George Benson, Phil Collins and Genesis, Bruce Springsteen, Guns 'n' Roses until we form a big circle and push Bella into the middle. She does a few spins on her own, then pulls me in, hooking opposite arms and dancing round and round, each of us then choosing another partner until everyone is in pairs again, though not necessarily with their spouses. I have pulled Anya in, but when we separate, Nick is by my side.

As we get hot and sweaty he orders a double whisky for himself and a lime and soda for me. Clasp my right hand in his left, he puts his right hand on my waist and whirls me around, a master of the dance. Though the floor is full we don't bump into anyone as we wind through the throng round Bella. As the tempo slows for a medley of World War Two love songs, 'Lili Marlene' and 'We'll meet again', I relax and let him lead until the next course is served and my crème brûlée is on the table, caramel topping crisp, custard centre melting in my mouth. Nick commandeers Anya's seat next to me. No longer concentrating on intricate dance steps, we talk in spite of the pulsing music. He mentions an exhibition he's seen in New York of art works confiscated during the Holocaust, now restored to their rightful owners.

'I'd love you to see the catalogue, Cally. The colour plates are high definition and the imagery is amazing. There are also some thought-provoking essays. With your background and interests, you'll get a lot out of it.' A successful businessman who is well travelled and well read, he has never spoken to me at such length before.

‘I’ve seen some of the works on the Internet.’

‘That’s how I knew about the exhibition. There is one article that describes the process and difficulties of the search. It’s still going on. What’s your cell number? I’ll bring you the book.’

He then regales me with stories of his own painting attempts, how he finally gave up because of his dislike of failure, and how although he enjoys his career in the world of big business and high finance, it isn’t his passion. Then it’s the big topics, man and the planet, creationism and the meaning of life, until we realise that everyone else is dancing again. He invites me back onto the dance floor, and as the music slows, he holds me closer and closer. I check the time.

‘Nick, I must go.’

‘What? Have I turned into a pumpkin already?’

‘Jake will be waiting up and wondering why I’m so late. Sorry. Don’t mean to be rude – I’ve had a lovely time.’

‘Do you need a lift?’

‘No, thank you. I have my car here.’

‘I’ll follow you.’

‘No, it’s fine.’

‘I said I’d follow you. It’s not safe.’

I think he is about to ask about Jake, but he doesn’t. We say goodbye to Bella and Mike, then to everyone else who is still there. I find my pashmina and my bag and check my cell phone. There are three missed calls from Jake, but it’s too late to call him back. Nick opens my car door for me, ‘Jake doesn’t know what he’s got.’

I wave and we drive away. The lights are off down Fifth Street and an accident blocks the intersection at Acacia Road, so I’m glad to have the escort. When we reach the nearest stop street to my home, I feel in the ashtray for my automatic gate button, but when I press, nothing happens. The electricity is off there too and I have no key to unlock the gate. Nick draws up behind me. I take out my cell phone and dial Jake, but there is no answer. I try the house telephone but get my own voice telling me to leave a message. I know I shouldn’t have gone out, should have stayed at home with him.

I try a few more times, and then call Bella. Nick follows me back to the restaurant where Bella and Mike are just leaving. Nick kisses me on both cheeks, promising again to let me have the art book. He disappears into the night as Mike settles the bill and puts his arms around my sister.

‘Great party, Belle. Worth it. One for the rocking chair.’

He caresses her hair and leans his forehead on hers.

‘We’ll follow you to our place, Cal. Let’s go.’

He tips the guard, follows me out and watches me into my car. I don’t jump any of the red lights this time, though I am tempted. In the spare room, I settle down wearing Bella’s pyjamas and say the Shema, thinking about two rabbis who visited a monastery in Europe in 1945. They had heard that Jewish children had been sent there when their parents were taken away. Searching through the list of names, the rabbis recognised many as Jewish and they asked the priest to release the children into their care. The priest refused, wanting proof of their identity, an impossible request to fulfil in the post-war chaos. The rabbis returned that evening as the children were going to sleep and as they called out, ‘Shema Yisrael ...’ the children burst into tears and cried out ‘Mommy, Mommy’, in the language of their birth. Though raised in another religion, they had not forgotten words once chanted with their mothers at bedtime.

Bella and I breakfast together on her patio.

‘I need to hurry, Belle. Jake will be waiting for me.’

‘Cal, why don’t you speak to someone? Get some support?’

‘About what?’

She hesitates. ‘There’s no shame in it. Sorry isn’t enough, you know. Or bringing flowers.’

‘Jake loves me. And I love him. Everyone knows that.’

She puts her hand out, places it on my arm.

‘I’m always here for you, Cal, when you need me. No one deserves to be treated like this.’

Things that happened
that did not happen to me:

I did not fight
for the last peel of potato
mouthful of soup;

hide my tin spoon,
their photographs;

wear a dead man’s clogs
skin rubbed raw,
snow abrasive, splinters adhering;

line up five abreast
to answer to a number at *Appell*
as if it were my name;

sleep on straw, snow dripping,
breath turning to water
coagulating through cracks;

let my brown-eyed baby go
at point of bayonet;

I was not stripped,
shaved, raped.

Coming here saved me
from Lithuanian whip,
jack boot, Alsatian's rip.

Coming here
I evaded the ghetto,
survived Ponar.

I tore my blouse for my mother
put on black for my father
sat *shiva* for my brothers, sisters,
cried for them all.

They perished
like blossoms.

At our wedding dinner, Jake quoted from Gibran's 'The Prophet', from the section on love and marriage. I write it out, hoping it will remind him of how we used to be.

On the night we met, it seemed that threads of possibility immediately wove us together. Tall and slim, he caught my eye from across the room and made his move. I turned to Bella to point him out to her, but then he came up to us.

'Jake Melman. Good to meet you.' He is blonde with green eyes, and his name seemed a good omen, like honey. His handshake was firm and dry, his smile showing straight white teeth as he invited Bella and me to sit at his table. There he pulled out chairs for us and introduced us to his friends, Brad, Gerald and their girlfriends, Thea and Anya, also Conrad and some others whose names I didn't catch. He sat down next to me and offered us both a drink.

One of the first things he'd told me about himself was that he'd played the trumpet in the school band so he did not have to march up and down the rugby field doing compulsory cadets, playing at soldiers.

Soon after we met, he invited me on a picnic at the Vaal Dam. Once there, although we met up with a group of his friends, Jake laid out a blanket a little way away from the others. He had brought the food, egg mayonnaise and cheese and tomato sandwiches, apples and white wine. We lay staring through the willow branches as the boats with skiers raced past, the petrol smell stark and the noise from the motors piercing the peace.

But when he started reading from Gibran I forgot all that. I hadn't known the poems before, and was absorbed both by the words and his voice, then the meaning, closing my eyes to concentrate better. He broke off every now and then to look at me, wooing me.

Then he put the flap of the cover between the pages to keep his place, put the book back in the basket, lay down beside me and pulled me towards him. Wrapping his arms around me he began to kiss me, first my cheeks and forehead, then my ears and neck, then my mouth. We were both breathing heavily as he put his tongue between my teeth, then lifted me towards him so that we were half-lying, half-sitting. He broke the kiss.

'Come, let me hold you. I can't get you close enough.'

I did as he asked and we twined our arms together and began kissing again, his ribs pressing hard against my breasts. My wet lips were bruised.

'Hey, you two! Enough already.' We broke apart and wiped our mouths, looking up to see Brad and Thea hand in hand at the gap between the trees. 'Jake, man, you said you'd

give us a riff.’ Brad pulled Thea to him so that she tripped over the hem of her cheesecloth skirt and fell against him. He kissed her hard on the mouth, which Jake took as permission to return to what we were doing before, but Brad interrupted.

‘Come on, Jakey. The guys are all waiting for you.’ We stood, folded up our blanket and Jake fetched his guitar from the car.

He sat on a low tree branch, strummed a while, then alternated between folk and blues and jazz, Dylan’s ‘Times they are a’changing’ and ‘Masters of war’, then Simon and Garfunkel’s ‘Sounds of silence’ and ‘Strangest dream’. His repertoire seemed endless as he played all his friends’ favourites, then turned to me, brown eyes soft. ‘What’s your request, Cal?’

‘Summer time?’

He tightened the guitar strings, retuning them, and began, his fingers dancing, his voice perfectly in key. When he stopped for a breather everyone applauded, and there were mocking wolf whistles.

‘So now you can get back to your chick, Jakey, why don’t you? Looks like you finally met your perfect match, hey?’

He turned to me and grinned. We stayed there for the rest of the afternoon, planning to hire a boat next time and learn to water ski. On the way back he played CDs of his favourite classical composers and I put my head back and fell asleep, only waking at my parents’ when he stopped the car.

‘Come, Cal. We’re home. Let me help you with your stuff.’ He kissed me goodbye as we stood in the driveway.

‘I’ll call you about Saturday night, okay.’

‘Sure. Thanks so much, Jake.’

He rang the door bell and my father opened.

‘Hope you had a good time.’

‘Yes, we did thanks.’

He didn’t come inside and I was happy to go straight to bed, too tired for the buttered toast and marmalade my mom offered me, but enjoying the afterglow of the day.

Now on crisp, white paper with a deckle edge, I rule up, anticipating the flow of words, then remove a rough spot on my nib with fine sandpaper, reminding myself to be contained by what I am doing, to concentrate on each movement no matter how slight, on each tic of the pen, each flicker of the eyelid, on my body’s place in space and on the feel of the grain of the paper as my hand moves over its surface. I write ‘Let there be spaces in your

togetherness,' choosing a lightweight Uncial, then practise flourishes and plan the decorated borders and the heavily illuminated capital for the start of the quotation. The ink transforms the blank white space into positive shapes and the lattice of strokes builds up on the page. All the while, I think about Judith's struggle, of how writing was her refuge as mine is now for me.

What we lost
was not straw –
we always had it;
was not the wagon –
that was the landlord's;
was not jewels –
we had none,
mud was everywhere;
it was not land –
we never owned it;
was not the river –
it followed its course;
was not the snow –
it remains in our hearts
even in summer;
was not our enemies –
they remained;
was not the past –
we carried it;
was not the future –
we took it with us;
was not freedom –
we never had it;
was not our way of life –
we keep it
alive with birdsong.

Aaron and Shira have an appointment to see what I have done so far. I set the *ketuba* out and scrutinise each line. He arrives alone.

‘Where’s Shira?’

‘Buying holiday gear.’

‘Have you decided where you’re going?’

‘She wants Mauritius. I’d prefer Florence.’

‘Who’ll decide?’

‘She. Bride’s prerogative.’

Aaron looks at my handiwork, remarking on some of the finer details. He sits and he makes himself comfortable at my table. He surprises me by uncapping his pen.

‘I want to show you something.’

He removes his bangle from his writing arm. In sky-navy ink, the colour of night when the moon is only a sliver, its light a slim long streak across the water, he writes, ‘Go placidly amid the noise and haste and remember what peace there may be ...’

Head bent, his eyes concealed, his breathing deep, he concentrates on his handwriting. I don’t watch the nib but his hand, the firm grip well positioned, the forefinger straight, pen resting lightly on his thumb, as if it is an extension of his hand, caressing the paper as it glides across. His nails are trim, the suntan mark from the bangle faded, the hairs on his forearm dark, the veins on his hand prominent and blue beneath the skin. He writes, ‘You are a child of the universe ...’ his script strong and the slope perfect. It is obvious that this is not something he is going to crumple up and toss in the wastepaper basket. ‘... with all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world.’ When he makes the final full stop he looks up, acknowledges my presence and smiles.

‘What do you think?’

‘Beautiful words, and your writing ... well ... it is too.’

‘It’s for you.’

‘Why?’

‘Just want you to have it. Cally, I want to learn calligraphy. I’ve always wanted to do what you do. Maybe you can teach me to overcome my southpaw?’

‘But Aaron ... You don’t need ...’

‘I’ve already got the project in mind. Come on, Cally?’

Or maybe you think I can’t do it?’

‘It’s not that.’

‘And of course I’ll pay you for the lessons.’

‘Okay. But we have to have set times. You have to arrive and leave when I tell you.’

All I can think of is what Jake will do.

‘So, let’s start now.’

Mishy and Danny are coming home late, so I take down some ready-ruled paper, find a penholder with a cork top, fit the right nib in, and make sure it doesn’t wobble. The first requirement is to correct Aaron’s grip of the pen with the angled nib to accommodate his southpaw.

‘You need to slope the paper more.’

He turns the page to the left until it is almost horizontal and rests his hand on it.

‘Put this rough sheet under your hand to protect the paper from the natural oils on your skin.’

‘This’ll take some getting used to.’

I start him doing zigzag lines across the page but he can’t maintain the correct angle or the thick and thin strokes. I stand behind him and remind him to sit straight and in front of his work.

‘Look, the angle of the nib must stay constant, like this.’

He tries but after a few strokes he has lost the angle again.

I lean over him and, placing my hand over his, turn the nib back to the correct position and guide his hand across first one line then the next. As he becomes more confident, I relax my grip. At last, when he has it right, we move on to the next set of exercises, straight lines down, evenly spaced, and then on to bracket shapes.

‘You must practise ten minutes every day. It’s better than one long session and then nothing for days. You have to ingrain the actions in your muscle memory and hardwire the images into your visual one.’

I suggest we break for tea but he doesn’t want to stop, and we start on the alphabet, the Foundational hand. I break up each of the letters into their separate components, talking and explaining as I write, commenting on the direction and width as I do it, showing him how to join the strokes invisibly.

‘Easy to understand because it’s based on the circle but also difficult to perfect,’ he says as he tries to follow my examples.

‘Slow down.’

He eventually manages to write ‘the quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog’.
Although there are rules, calligraphy is still individual and his version is strong even though irregular. He puts down his pen.

‘Whew. Lots of practice required.’

‘Lots of homework.’

Lunchtime comes and goes. We use up screeds of paper, throw away some, file some.

‘Date the pages so you’ll be able to chart your progress. Otherwise in a couple of months, you’ll tell me you’ve learned nothing.’

He grins, looks at his watch.

‘See you next week. Same time?’

While the children are still out and I’m warmed up from the practice, I return to Jake’s sampler, imagining it working its magic, drawing him back to me. I start another section. In between bouts of writing, I re-read my grandmother’s poems. I feel her sense of loss more and more. Also my own.

Here, mounds of potatoes,
electric stove,
oil spatters,
blue flame surges.

I arrange the cakes in the pan,
flip them over,
golden as the days,
sprinkle cinnamon, sugar, syrup,
eat, push away, sleep.

How many shall I make?
How many do we need?
How many can we eat?

In my hands,
the plenty.

Life in the *shtetl*:
zuntik bulbes
montik bulbes
dinstik un mitvokh bulbes
donershtik un fraytik bulbes
Shabes in a novene
a bulbes-kugele
un zuntik vayter bulbes.
Monday potatoes
Tuesday potatoes

Wednesday potatoes
Thursday and Friday potatoes
Saturday evening a potato pie
Sunday again potatoes.

In this city, *bagel* with lox,
kikhl with chopped herring,
fried fish with *khreyn*,
shmalts and *kneydl*,
perogen and chicken soup,
helzl, *pupik*, *fisele*, *petscha*,
warm *tsimes* of carrot and pumpkin,
salt *lokshn* with mince meat,
sweet *lokshn* with cream cheese,
hot latkes with sugar and cinnamon,
delicacies.

In the *shtetl*
Sunday quiet
Monday work
Tuesday hunger
Wednesday fear
Thursday conscription
Friday pogrom
Saturday prayer.

In the *shtetl*
one potato
two potato
three potato four

five potato six potato
seven potato.

No more.

The next time I see Aaron the honeymoon is booked, Venice and Florence then the Greek Islands, Corfu and Rhodes.

‘And look at my letters.’ It’s obvious he has practised and as we go on there is a swing in his arm, instead of the previous crabbing that spoilt the shapes. He tests the nib with confidence, dips and taps as I have shown him.

‘Here is a new set of exemplars.’

‘Different pitfalls, no doubt.’

He begins and I set out my array of cheap fountain pens.

‘All loaded with different colours?’

‘Yes, I want to try the bronze. Never used it before.’

It dribbles. The harder I try, the worse I get until I dump down my pen and blot up the mess. I take a clean sheet and write boustrophedon, the way oxen pull the plough, from left to right then right to left, finding an even rhythm, wanting to dance not trudge.

‘Lunchtime.’ We break and sit in the lounge where the sun is streaming in between the blinds. Aaron pushes away his empty plate and checks out Jake’s CDs, reads out the titles: Eagles, Simon and Garfunkel, Chopin, Beethoven, Mahler.

‘Can I put something on?’

‘I guess.’ But we never touch his collection. Only he ever removes a disc from its cover, balancing it between pinkie and thumb, before loading it in his player. But Aaron goes ahead and as we listen to Vivaldi’s Four Seasons, he sits down in the armchair humming while reading the historical background on the insert. I relax and close my eyes.

‘This is great, Cally. You should have it on when you work.’

‘The monks ...’

‘... may have worked in silence, but who says they knew everything?’

‘But Jake ...’

‘Get your own system. I’ll install it in your studio – I’m not just someone who likes beautiful things, you know. I can also do stuff.’

‘Jake ...’

‘Won’t he be happy if your work conditions improve? We’ll make a list of what you need and I’ll spend a morning putting it all in.’

‘How much ...?’

‘Exchange for the lessons.’

My script is the better for the interlude and while Aaron focuses on his Italics, alternating between a heavy version and a fine and elegant one, I refer to Thomas Ingmire's manual. We copy quotations and experiment with our own variations, comparing angle, slope, and shape of letters with the exemplars.

'It's amazing how, no matter how much we copy, our writing still remains unique to each of us!'

'Let's try something else. Let me write a line, then you.'

'Dada with a difference.'

I choose bronze for 'Today is the first day of the rest of our lives', blow on the letters until they're dry and pass the piece to Aaron so he can write the next quotation in his maroon. Now I'm hooked on the fountain pen. Not having to dip into the well or bottle every time I start writing is a quick fix. The colour combination isn't one I would have chosen, or even thought would work, but the alternating scripts are eye-catching. I pin the piece to my display board.

I do not hope to return:
because what I dream about is the forest
because what I remember is the mud
because the straw mattress was made by my mother
because I was not taken from it in the night
because I did not know the ghetto
because I did not climb those walls
because I never stood beneath the tower
transfixed in the light
because I never looked up the bayonet

because I did not stand five abreast
because I did not dig the lime pit
because I did not strip before strangers
because I was not stripped by strangers
because I did not dig the lime pit
because I did not stare naked into the pit
because I did not lie alive in the pit
I cannot hope
I cannot return
I cannot hope to return

because I believed that cattle cars are only for cattle
because I wore my own shoes
because the frost did not give me gangrene
because I did not walk five abreast in a death march
I believe that winter will pass.

Army helicopters plough back and forth, their propellers hacking and choking above the rooftops. Xenophobic attacks have spread in Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban and Pretoria and also to the smaller cities.

Since the trouble started, he has nightmares every night as the choppers fly overhead.

‘Jake, perhaps you should speak to someone? Maybe a therapist could help you?’

‘Load of rubbish.’

When he falls asleep, I tiptoe out of the bedroom and feel my way along the dark passage, pressing my body against the wall so as not to fall. In my studio, my array of pens and paper awaits me, everything in place. I find one of Judith’s memos written around the edge of a page: Write about Lithuania. 1941, Vilne, Kovne, Rakishok, Kupershik, Yaneshok, Kurshan. Write about the forced gatherings in the *Umschlagplatz*, the town square. About marches into the forests and mass graves. About the orchestra playing at Auschwitz and shoes and suitcases.

The choppers go round and round all night, though the earlier screaming has stopped. The moon is behind the clouds and the lights from the street cut through the dark. I think about having coffee but I read on. My river is lost, my village, autumn, parents, brothers, sisters, friends, my name. Alien here. So hot. No snow. Market Street, Johannesburg, nothing like the *Rakishoker mark*. Freedom in Africa. I read,

Roots mired in blood;
seeds black teeth;
stems soft swords, petals crushed;
sunflower, you were facing the wrong way.

To try to take my mind off what is happening around me, I work on two hundred ready-ruled certificates for Danny’s school, dipping my pen into the flat-bottomed bottle of Chinese ink, permanent and archival. The smell of the Chinese ink catches the back of my throat as I stroke the metal Speedball nib across a scrap piece of paper, testing the ink’s consistency. The shellac stunts the flow. I add distilled water and stir until it is creamy but not too runny. I adjust the height of my chair, stretching my neck this way and that.

The sirens whine their way towards the trouble spots that seem close by and I hear the parrot making his alarm sounds and realise I’ve forgotten to cover his cage. When I come back from the patio, I place my cover sheet beneath my hand. The names of the recipients flow but I remain alert for errors. I’ll check the spelling later.

I go back to bed where Jake moans in his sleep, covering his ears. He shouts out a few times, no, no. No, no. In the morning, I want to ask him if he is okay. But when I go to look for him, he has already left for work. I make myself a mug of coffee and sit on the patio.

Louisa arrives late again, out of breath and dishevelled, her coat half-buttoned and her stockings laddered.

‘It’s my brother. He is in the hospital. We had to run with his children. They’re burning the township. Alexandra. Also Soweto.’

I make her some tea with sugar.

‘It’s Zimbabweans. They take our jobs. They work for nothing. What can we do?’

I switch on my radio to the breaking news about the violence in the night. The stock exchange report and weather follow. The JSE has taken a downturn and today will be frosty and cold.

‘Can I use the phone please? I need to speak to his wife.’

I go to my studio but I can hear Louisa making the call. She talks for some time, starts crying, goes on talking. She puts the phone down and comes to find me.

‘My brother, maybe he will die. And then who will look after his children? I must go early today.’

I get my purse and pay her for the day, give her taxi money, then a lift to the stop where there is already a long line ahead. On the way back, I notice that the dustbins have not been emptied. Although there is no official strike, there are now other obstacles preventing the carrying out of utility services. According to the news report, the rampage against foreigners continues, mobs of people burning shacks, Zimbabwean, Congolese and Somali residents fleeing with their children and babies, leaving behind their meagre possessions. Helicopters and ambulances ferry the injured to Chris Hani and Helen Joseph hospitals where doctors battle to cope with the influx of injuries. With the exception of the most critical all scheduled cases are postponed.

We knew no English, Afrikaans, French,
wrote our names,
Yiddish with Hebrew characters;
they heard our accents,
ignored us,
looked away;
we lost our *mame-loshn*,
became strangers to ourselves
in safe white skin.

‘Doll, I’ve booked Treetop Tours for the July holiday!’

I look up from my writing. Jake is standing at the door, grinning.

‘What do you mean? What is it?’

My mind is full of swashes and flourishes, though on the page I try to use them sparingly rather than in excess, to emphasise rather than detract from the lettering itself: the preference is for only one flourish, well placed. Aaron instructs me where the embellishments should go. The irony is that I have to practise them over and over so that the final ones look spontaneous; if my hand slips the effect will be spoilt.

Now I put down my pen. With difficulty I muffle my resentment at the interruption, aware of my burning eyes. I rub them, and then brush the hair off my forehead.

‘For when we’re in Knysna next week. Did you even remember that we’re going, Cally?’

‘Jake ...’

‘Don’t do me any favours.’

He turns on his heel and walks out. I shut my ink bottle and wipe off my nib, then follow him down the stairs. Jake is in his study but the music hasn’t been turned on yet.

‘What’s Treetop Tours?’

‘Oh, so you do care.’

‘Jake, come on. I organised the holiday remember? Don’t start this please.’

‘Start what? Start what, hey?’

He takes a CD from its cover and presses the remote to open the disc player.

‘I’ve booked for Danny, you and me. We have to be at the site at ten. It costs a fortune, so it’s a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Danny can’t wait. Nor can I. Ask him what it is.’

‘What’ll Michelle do while we’re doing this? And why can’t she go if it’s a tour? She loves being outdoors just as much as he does.’

‘No kids under twelve. Or shorter than five foot.’

‘Do I need special clothes?’

The music goes on.

‘Dan, what’s this about Treetop Tours?’

‘It’s not a tour like a bus tour or in a museum, Ma. It’s like when you slide from tree to tree. It’s in the Knysna forest forty metres above the ground. The slides are eighty metres

long. You have to wear this amazing kit. I think there're about twelve slides. It'll be great. And Mishy can't go, she's too young. Imagine, Ma.'

With that he too puts on his music. The thud-thud goes through my head and I leave him to it. My heart is thudding too. I'm terrified of heights. Even watching the kids on the high slide at the park or on the swings makes my blood run cold. Has he forgotten?

I practise flourishes and lose myself in the inky curls and twists, but my hands are sweating. To do them on the final piece takes skill and nerve and I delay until teatime, and then it's time to fetch Mishy from Chloe's. Then it's too late so I wash my nibs and brushes and put everything away.

By the time we leave for the Garden Route, I have erased the lines and added the finishing touches to the wording. I take it to the Beth Din and leave it with the rabbi to have it checked before I do the illumination. This is all weighing on my mind as we drive and when my cell phone rings, I am not surprised.

'Hi, Aaron. Yes, sure. Please hold on a minute, I can't hear you.' I gesture Jake to turn down the volume. He grimaces but flicks the switch.

'Of course,' I reassure Aaron that there will be enough time when I return from holiday to complete the decoration.

'Hell, Cally, you should tell these people to leave you alone. Especially him. Keep your cell phone off now.'

'Jake, he's good client. I can't just fob him off.'

'Why not. It's not as if he, or they, pay the bills. You never listen. You need to take notice of me. I'm the breadwinner. The winner of your bread, remember?'

'I know. Thanks.'

I can't stop myself worrying about the work but make a conscious effort to put it out of my thoughts. I listen to the music, though Jake doesn't ask me at any stage what I want to listen to. I can't hum to myself against the beat of Nirvana, so I close my eyes, but sleep is impossible. He is going too fast.

'Careful!' Jake slams on brakes as we are almost squeezed off the road between a truck and the embankment. He lets the vehicle go first, swearing about the incompetence of some drivers, his voice getting louder and louder, the expletives more crude each time there is another incident on the road, a taxi overtaking us or another Mercedes that leaves us far behind.

The children have fallen asleep in spite of this and I tuck my neck cushion between the window and the headrest, only to be jolted awake by the squealing of brakes. I brace

myself for a crash that doesn't come and open my eyes to find that a truck has jack-knifed across the road and is lying with its front smashed to smithereens, its contents scattered. There is only one lane for cars going in either direction to pass it. We hear sirens as the cops arrive, and soon after, a fire engine and tow trucks. Traffic crawls. The children are hungry. I feed them segments of oranges, then they share a few sticks of Jake's biltong, rejecting my peanut butter sandwiches.

In Knysna, our timeshare accommodation is comfortable and on the day of the adventure, Mishy stays with some friends she has made. We drive deep into the forest where we meet the rest of the group. Rod, the tour leader, gives instructions to a group of fifteen adults plus Danny. I look up at the magnificent yellowwood and stinkwood trees, imagining their age, moved by their beauty. I kit up like everyone else, shivering as the metal rings and long ropes and pulleys are attached to my waist. There is an incessant drizzle. At any moment, I'll have to mount the first tree to the platform thirty feet above us using the wooden steps hammered into the trunk. There we will all have to stand and wait our turn. My stomach heaves.

Everyone else is in a state of excitement. Some have done it before, either here or elsewhere in Africa. Others have bungee-jumped off the Victoria Falls Bridge or into the Limpopo and they tap their feet as they wait their turn for the expected adrenalin rush here. Once on the wooden platform, I look down and then up again and swivel my eyes round and round, trying to quieten my breathing. No escape.

Jake and Danny laugh and point, estimating the distance between trees.

'Sixty metres short,' Rod tells us. Attached to metal hooks on the trunk, we all stand in a circle, like druids at the beginning of time – who were earth bound and still knew they had to pray. My fellow-jumpers are bubbling with anticipation – no one else seems to feel as I do. I'm mute.

'Who's first?'

One by one the others all have their turn, whooping and shrieking, waiting for their harness to be attached to the cable, then letting go of the platform and whizzing down the gentle parabola of the slide and then on and up to reach the far platform where the tour leader grips their hand, pulls them up and unhooks them. Simple. Now it is my turn. I pray for the earth to swallow me up but there is no getting away from it.

Cold air blows around my ears and my hands are icy despite my protective gloves. It is grey and dark as rain threatens once more and there is no break in the thick cloud cover visible through the canopy of leaves. Rod directs me. Having watched all the others, I should

be au fait with the procedure by now, but my mind and body have frozen with my breath. I hang down off the platform, grasping the metal cable, as Rod instructs me to do. At this stage I am supposed to stop gripping and curl my fingers lightly around the wire so that I can whiz down and then up the other side of the slide. But my hands won't let go; instead they tighten. Rod says in a gentle voice, 'Let it go, go on, go on now, take a deep breath. Go. Now.' On the far platform, the rest of the group is waiting, stamping to keep warm, the clink of their chains echoing through the trees. I grip the wire for dear life. Then, leaving Rod behind on the platform, I inch my way down fist over fist, not daring to look down; although I know that I can't fall, I can't rid myself of my fear. When I do reach the centre valley of the wire slide, but having given my body no impetus, I'm stuck like a beetle on its back.

'Coming. Hold tight.' Rod dives onto the wire and speeds towards me, stopping right beside my face. He then crawls over my stiff body, careful not to tread on my hands, until he is ahead of me on the wire. He puts his arms around my waist and using his legs pulls me up the other side, as if rescuing me from a tidal wave. I keep my eyes shut and we reach the platform. The group gives a few wolf whistles, and one of the women claps my back.

'Well done.'

That was slide 1, the lowest and the shortest. There are eleven to come. At each there are the same manoeuvres, the eager group members taking their turn, cackling and whooping with delight, landing on the far platforms boots first, then me last, waiting in the dipping centre for Rod to return and lug me to the top. Through it all, Jake chats to the others about other adventures, white-water rafting, canoeing between crocodiles in the Okavango, shark diving. He says nothing to me and doesn't make eye contact. By far the most athletic of the group, he takes Rod's praise about his skill as his due.

One of the women tries to engage me in conversation. It is all I can do to answer in monosyllables or nod or shake my head. She of course is the daredevil type, has flown the Atlantic alone, a contemporary Amelia Earhart who grabs at all such opportunities. She tells me of her stunts, embellished enough for all the men to prick up their ears. They let her go first and watch her every move as she settles onto the wire and adjusts her torso beneath her gear. She is exhilarated by the cold, which adds to the brightness of her eyes and her ruby smile. Between each turn Jake waits by her side, cracking his own jokes and delivering his smart one-liners at her, waiting for her response, a musical laugh that adds to her allure.

When it is Jake's turn, she is already on the other side and she calls, 'Go, Jake, go,' as he leaves the platform, bounces down and speeds towards her waiting hand. She lifts him onto the platform. Their stage and theatre, I think as I watch their heads moving, their hands

gesturing, unable to hear their conversation. When I do make it to the other side, my eyes smarting with shed and unshed tears, she keeps her back to me.

Danny can't hide his embarrassment on my behalf and even more on his own. The best he can do is make occasional eye contact with me and grin, but he cannot bring himself to say anything. I am consumed with fear, sweat dripping under my arms and between my breasts.

There is a single highlight. Standing and waiting my turn forty metres up a yellowwood tree, I spot a Knysna Lourie, a 'lifer' for me. He stares straight back at me, white eyeliner clear and bright against the acid green of his face. He remains silent for a while, motionless, and then flies off with a single squawk, his wings flapping, steering himself through the foliage and away as my eyes follow his escape.

Jake and Danny chat in the car all the way back, doing postmortems of each slide, both still on a high.

‘Was Dad in the army, Ma?’

‘Why do you ask?’

‘Well, Steve’s dad was, somewhere in South West Africa and Angola, I think Steve said. He showed me his dad’s kit today, Ma, his helmet and his uniform with the webbing and with stars on the arms. Two for lieutenant. And camouflage gear.’

‘Your dad’s *trommel* is locked in the outside storeroom.’

‘He got a medal called Pro Patria, but long afterwards. By then he didn’t care. He said it meant nothing to him. Because they all got one. Did Dad?’

‘I’ve no idea, Dan.’

‘Steve says his dad sometimes talks about it to them, about the base at Grootfontein and the bush war. And that then he cries. Ma, it sounds so horrible. There’s a photograph of his dad with his platoon in uniform at the army base there, and you can see the military tents and the razor-wire fences. What were they fighting for? I can’t understand it. I mean, Steve’s dad says his friends died for nothing because South West Africa got independence anyway. It’s Namibia now, you know.’

‘You could ask your Uncle Mike, Dan.’

‘But Uncle Mike didn’t go. I asked Gary on the way to school.’

‘It’s true his call-up was deferred because he was still studying to be a doctor. But he knows a lot about the history and the politics, and all his friends were called up. He’ll be happy to talk about it to you.’

‘But Dad doesn’t like him.’

‘Speaking about me behind my back, hey?’ Neither Danny nor I has heard Jake come in. ‘Cally, I’ve warned you not to talk about that stuff in this house ...’

‘I know, Jake. I was just explaining that when you walked in. How was your day?’

‘Don’t try and fob me off,’ he turns to Danny, ‘But your mother is right about one thing. Your Uncle Mike knows all about it – in theory.’ Danny puts his hand on my arm as Jake leaves the room.

‘Sorry I brought it up, Ma. I’ll ask Uncle Mike when I see him. I have to know. Maybe tomorrow when I’m there. He sometimes comes home early and plays cricket with us. Oh, and please can you get us a new ball? The seam’s burst on the one we’ve got.’

‘Sure, Dan.’ I pull him close.

Next door, we hear sounds of a party setting up that become louder as the afternoon wears on. Our neighbours are testing the music system, moving tables onto the patio and onto the lawn.

‘Where’s the standing lamp?’

‘Can’t find the braai forks ... ’

‘Did you get beer?’

It’s Saturday night. Jake and I have no arrangements that evening and Danny and Mishy are both sleeping out. It is an ideal opportunity to work and I have been looking forward to it all week. I have stocked the fridge and taken out a frozen lasagne to heat for dinner. The xenophobia seems to have died down while we were on holiday, and there are no longer helicopters disturbing our sleep at night.

Guests arrive, children and adults. The party sounds get louder. Children kick a soccer ball around on the grass until it flies into our garden. The doorbell rings and I answer and open the gate.

‘Sorry, can we get our ball, please?’ a child’s voice. I put down my pen and make my way outside. I toss the ball to the bigger of the two boys who smiles as he thanks me.

‘Doll, where’s the stepladder?’

‘In the garage.’ I pour myself some ginger and lemon tea and take a melt-in-the-mouth cinnamon biscuit.

‘Can’t see it.’

The ladder is obscured behind boxes of clothes for the charity shop. I lift it out of the corner and a tarpaulin topples off the top shelf, landing on me, dusty and full of spider webs, rat droppings and dead beetles. I cough and shake out my hair. The ladder falls over, catching my car bumper, then my foot. Jake takes it outside.

Even in the bath with the water over my ears as I wash my hair, I can hear the beat of the music pounding and hammering. I can’t settle to work, so I gather all my notes and sketches that I have worked on for the *ketuba*, sit cross-legged on the rug, lean across to switch on my radio, find 5FM, don’t like what they are playing, change to Jacaranda, and then I switch off. I separate my papers into piles for future reference, Hebrew, English, sketches of leaves and plants, birds and architecture.

The wooden floor creaks as Jake steps into my studio, crunching some of the exemplars on the floor.

‘I need the wire cutters.’

‘With the pruning shears in the kitchen cupboard.’ I hear him muttering down the stairs.

Now as I watch from my window, a group of smartly dressed guests arrives. Naledi greets them, wearing a traditional outfit, red zigzags and swirls, her hair wrapped in a matching headdress. She sways every time a guest compliments her and wishes her and Peter happy anniversary.

The lawn is packed with people sipping their drinks, chatting and catching up with their news. Smoke drifts towards my window and I shut it. I hear calls for Peter to change the music.

‘Just Jinger!’

‘No, Hugh Masekela.’

‘Can’t dance to it!’

‘Let’s have it for the white Zulu, Johnny Clegg.’

‘No way. “Graceland.”’

‘Margaret Singana.’

In the kitchen, Jake hunts for the ball of string that I keep in the cupboard next to the sink, pulling out the broom, black rubbish bags, shoe polish and cleaning materials. I fetch a new ball from the pantry and yawn as I hand it to Jake and he begins cutting lengths.

Suddenly there is a shriek, followed by loud clapping of hands and laughter as the music gets louder.

‘I wish they’d shut up. Can’t stand their music.’

He marches to the front door, opens it and goes out, shouting to attract Peter’s attention. When he gets no response he comes back inside.

‘Where’s the phone number for the Noise Unit, hey? Phone them.’

Instead, I look up Peter’s phone number in the telephone directory, find the number and make the call. I let the phone ring for more than five minutes but get no answer.

‘Don’t know why you’re bothering. They can’t hear you.’

Jake grabs the phone and dials the Noise Unit’s number where a woman does eventually answer, promising to send out a crew as soon as possible. He goes into the bathroom, closing the door behind him with a click. I hear the shower water spurting and the squeak of the sliding door as I fetch my cold tea and go upstairs to dry my hair. I look for Prestik to use as earplugs. Even if the cops arrive, the partygoers are unlikely to take much notice.

Jake puts his clothes back on.

‘I’m going over there.’

‘Must you? It’ll only ...’ but he doesn’t wait. Not long afterwards the doorbell rings again and I hear voices through the intercom.

‘Tell your husband to go to hell.’ Peter’s voice is slurred.

Jake is back. ‘I’m going to cut their electric fence – and alarm system. Teach them a bloody lesson and put them in their place!’ The wire cutters are sticking out of his pocket. I picture his body pinned to the wire, with rays of lightning surrounding him.

‘Jake, please ... you’ll be electrocuted’ He holds up my gardening gloves. A little later I hear the door bang shut.

The drumming continues through the night. In the daylight, I see the result of Jake’s handiwork. The cops arrive with a warrant for his arrest for malicious damage to property. He calls his personal attorney. He wants me to go with him to the appointment but I refuse. When he returns, he looks for extra linen, slamming cupboard doors, and takes his blankets to the spare room. The next night he tells the children what happened.

‘I cut through the wires. Easy. Don’t know who they think they are.’

The case against Jake is withdrawn for lack of eyewitnesses or proof of identity.

But I’m afraid. Afraid for him. Afraid of him. I know I should leave, but feel immobilised. I can’t find the courage. What will my parents say? Our children? And how will I manage on my own?

Ella’s piano teacher
played at the Winter Palace, St Petersburg
for Nicholas and Alexandra
who presented him
with an engraved fob watch.
Here, he gave lessons
for *parnose*. Then,
Ella borrowed the watch
for an exhibition at the City Hall
to raise money
for Jews in Europe:
the watch vanished.

*

Mira came when she was seventeen,
paid for by a widower with five children,
one of whom was seventeen.

She sailed alone,
her happy union
her parents’ hope.

Unhappy union,
he did not indulge her:
he had paid to save her.

She wrote home
to her parents:
no reply.

*

Varda was a *tsionistke*,
escaped to *Erets Yisrael*;
lived on *kibbutz*,
studied agriculture;
looked after babies,
climbed ladders, picked fruit;
mixed cement, built walls,
learned to use an automatic,
dismantle a *dum dum*,
drive an ambulance;
met Hungarian Hannah Szenes,
poet in the British army;
saved her *bashertn*
in the War of Independence;
survived.

I do a mock-up version of the Hebrew words of the *ketuba*, number each line and then cut them up separately.

Placing my fine Arches archival paper on my sloped drawing board, I fix it with magic tape and measure downwards from the top centre, ruling the writing lines in pencil. Then I put the cut-out line above the ruled line and copy the Hebrew cipher for cipher. By the end, it fits in perfectly and my eyes burn with the strain.

Then I write the English directly, trying to remain vigilant so as not to leave out a word or a line, duplicate a word or line, or make any errors I cannot lift off with my blade. I try to breathe evenly as the hours pass, the glisten of wet ink on white paper drying with the growing shape of the text as darkness gives way to dove-grey dawn. I rest my pen on the little blue ceramic holder usually used in Chinese restaurants for chopsticks, stretch my arms, suddenly aware of the chorus of the sparrows and pigeons on the lawn and in the eaves. The sun is climbing away from the horizon when I release my slanted drawing board and rest it down flat, find a large sheet of white cartridge paper and, after checking that the ink is bone dry, I cover the finished piece of writing.

Aaron arrives with my new sound system, a Sony middle-of-the-range combination, chosen on his recommendation, compact yet with good quality sound. This is nothing like buying calligraphy books and materials where I am self-assured and know exactly what I need. He installs the units, finding suitable nooks for the speakers and disc player; there is enough of Jake's music to keep me going. We don't have time for our lesson, and reschedule for the next day. I stop him as he is about to leave.

'I want to show you something.' I take out Judith's book of poems, then my rough drafts, and some of the poems already inscribed on parchment. I lay them all out on the table. No one else has seen what I've done yet, not Bella, not even my mom. He picks up Judith's book and, sitting down, opens it at the beginning. After admiring the endpapers he turns the pages one by one, deliberating over some more than others. The writing isn't always clear and some of the pages are crammed full. He reaches the end and then turns back the pages until he finds what he is looking for.

'I know it is far-fetched, but I think this may be my grandmother. She was also called Lily, and I seem to remember something about her lost and found and lost again love.'

He reads Judith's words aloud:

A date near the station,
she beautiful, he late,
she could not wait.

How would it have been
had he not been too far off
to call her name?

Years afterwards he saw her,
called out 'Lily,'
caught and embraced her,
felt her belly beneath her coat,
searched her eyes
for her promise,
his future.

She looked away;
everywhere absence.

'Then she could have known Judith! It's more than possible – many of the Lithuanian immigrants knew each other. Then she might be able to tell me more about her.'

'I'm sorry to say she passed away a few years ago. But my mom might know more.'

I call Bella.

'Hard to believe, Cal.'

'I know. We'll have to wait to hear more.'

'Did you ask her if Judith had a personal phonebook?'

"Yes, but no such luck."

"What a pity. By the way, Gary has to have his tonsils out on Monday.'

'Oh, did you decide finally?

'Yes, he's been having sore throats, even with antibiotics. The doctor said there's no option.'

'Good luck for it. Hope all will be well, Belle. And Danny has made the Maccabi swimming team for Israel for the trip next July.'

'Mazel tov. Let's have this *Shabes* together. I'll bring a roast, shall I?'

'Thanks. You know I'm better at mixing ink than sauce.' Hopefully Jake will enjoy Bella's gourmet cooking and won't object to spending the evening with my family. Soon the children are home chattering and I down my tools. Surprised at the music in my studio, Danny clamours to put on something more to his liking, but I shoo them out and close the door behind us. With the melodies still ringing in my ears, I make fried eggs on toast for supper.

‘Who touched my discs?’

‘Me, Jake. I’m so sorry.’

‘How many times do I have to tell you to leave my things alone? That includes not using my stuff on your system. Got it?’

A crash in the lounge is followed by clattering as he sweeps his CD collection onto the floor and the sound of his footsteps disappearing into his study. I leave the mess where it is, help the children finish their homework and then read to them from the next chapter of Anne Frank’s diary. Mishy is asleep long before I stop, but Danny goes on reading on his own, inspired by the young girl’s experiences.

In the quiet of the night, I write ribbons of letters across the width of my paper, then turn and write across the length, a palimpsest like those Aaron and I did together. Like Judith’s.

The past follows me,
looks back at me;

soft girls, tough boys,
tough girls, soft boys,
cloaked by the *Khurbn*,
gone;

the same look
as in the eyes
of beggar children here,
holding out their hands;

it is their dark brimming eyes
that haunt me.

Jake grabs me. Just after he tells me about his trip to Botswana. Just after he tells me that there's no god.

It was peaceful while he was away, even though the outside shed was broken into and the lawn mower and canvas chairs stolen. I worked so as to block out my fears and the sounds of the night. The minute he arrives back, his stories about the trip are never-ending, a woodpecker going rata-tat-tat, rata-tat-tat.

'Doll, calling the AA was the least of my problems. Even getting my car fixed in the bundu was simple. No, the worst was getting bogged down in sand on a high road to nowhere, until a group of black women and their piccanins arrived on the scene and stood around giggling stupidly, waiting to be told what to do. Then a drunken hotelkeeper drove up and tried to free me but his towrope broke. Eventually the women pulled me out while I steered.'

'How was the ...?'

'... And I had to throw my steaks out. Because of the heat of the car for the two days.'

How many times when we had been away together had I carted the perishable food into the hotel and stored it in their ice chest, through the favour of the kitchen staff? Now as his voice rages, then quiets, I know that he isn't talking to me. I am his captive audience.

'How were the birds?'

He winds down as we go to bed. I lift my book. He brushes his teeth and walks to and fro unpacking his gear. I steel myself against the stomping and the dropping of stuff on the floor and try to go on reading. He climbs into bed and takes up his book.

'Look at this.' He points to the cover of Dawkins' *The God Delusion*. 'See, I told you so.'

'What?'

'There is no big-daddy-in-the-sky, that's what. You and your indoctrinated beliefs. Where does bowing and scraping to something invisible get you?' He sweeps his hands around to indicate the contents of our bedroom. 'It's all such garbage, all your prayers giving thanks to a non-existent god!' I remain silent, breathing deeply, staying calm. 'It's not god that gave you all this. It's me.' He stabs my chest with his index finger, then points at the text, subsides like an air balloon coming down to earth, he goes back to his reading.

I put my book down on my pedestal, fold up my glasses, adjust my pillows and switch off my lamp. I have taken to keeping the main light turned off since Eskom has restricted our

electricity. The glow of the single-bar heater reflects in the mirror and I get up and switch that off too, leaving my heating pad on low.

Jake riffles his pages, clearing his throat so that I turn away and cover my head with my pillow. I say Psalm Twenty-Three as a mantra to help me fall asleep, imagining pastures green, far from the spluttering going on next to me. He makes no attempt to muffle the sounds.

I am woken by an arm being slung over my back and a prodding from the body behind me. I weigh up the possibility of lying still or moving away but there is no choice as Jake rolls me over, pushing my mouth open with his tongue. I am grateful for the darkness. I keep my eyes clenched. My horse to his rider, I long for it to be over, visualise my next design, massed letters hanging in the air, then in flight lighting up the sky, soaring above me, on fire and free, above water and earth, clear orange and red against the foil of the blue-green background, escaping confinement, floating off in an umbra as the Milky Way beams into the room, sprinkles the darkness, glitters through.

As the invasion goes on, I hold the *Magen David* on the chain round my neck and speed up my breathing, opening my mouth and gripping him towards me. His goal achieved, he rolls away and I sigh, as if content, then turn my back to him and curl up. Satisfied, unaware of my despair, how he's hurting me, he passes out, mouth open, grinding snores alternating with coughs. My head aches. I lie still for a long while, hoping it will disappear. When it doesn't, I swing myself out into the cold air, pull my dressing gown around me and find a couple of aspirin, then go downstairs to warm some milk for Milo.

Only when the fingers of the sun reach for the blue of the sky and the sparrows start chirruping, do I fall asleep. I waken to a cold bed.

*

Were I to ask directions
in Yiddish to my Rakishok today,
no one would reply;

were I to ask directions
in Lithuanian to Roskiskis,
they would know;

on the road
to my *shtetl* today,
same landscape:

forests,
rivers,

grass;

on the road
to my *shtetl* today,
broken stones,
unmarked graves.

*

The lost:
a list of numbers, dates, places,
no names;
clumps of not-people;
clumps of not-flowers;
clumps of ash.

Kovne is now only Kauen,
Yaneshok now only Joniskis,
Rakishok is Rokiskis,
Kupershik Kopishok,
Kurshan Kurshenai.
None left to pronounce
the Yiddish names.

None left to pronounce
their names;
only we,
the fragments.

Jake and I, newly married, had just set up home.

‘I bought two sets of pots today,’ I told him as we made our way out to play bridge with friends. ‘I can’t wait to show them to you and invite people over.’ Together we had already bought a round pine table and six bentwood chairs, as well as a cupboard for the kitchen and another longer one to be used a sideboard. Both of these had drawers as well as shelf space so I could store our plates and cutlery and display our wedding gifts.

I had spent the day browsing through the recipe books my mother had given me as well as those that I’d been given at my kitchen tea. I had marked the recipes that had been recommended to me as tried, tested and foolproof. I looked forward to trying them out, if not on guests, then on Jake.

Jake, in his new leather jacket, was walking slightly ahead of me.

‘What?’ He suddenly turned to face me. ‘What do you mean two sets?’

‘One for meat. One for milk.’

‘Why?’ The word spat and splattered.

‘For our kosher home.’

His body puffed up like bellows.

‘Who said anything about kosher, or two sets of anything when we’re just starting out?’ I stood still and felt my tears come as he got into his stride. People walked round us and stared and his voice got louder. I reached for tissues and mopped my nose.

I wanted to walk away from him, but we were miles from home. I felt only bewilderment as his accusations flowed. How I hadn’t discussed it with him. How I took decisions on my own. How I was a spendthrift. How it was his money. How he should have been there to choose. I waited for him to run out of steam.

‘But, Jake, I thought you wanted it too.’

‘How dare you do it without asking me?’ He had barely stopped to take a breath.

‘Can we discuss it, please?’

I shivered and looked at my watch.

‘Don’t check the time. Chloe and Ryan can wait.’

‘I’m sorry, Jake.’

‘Okay then.’ He puts his arm around me. ‘Let’s go then. We’re already late.’

Now I find our wedding album. In the photographs, Jake and I stand close, alone in some, sometimes with our parents and extended families. I stare at the smiling faces of my

friends, arms around each other's waists, shoulders, laughing. Where are they all now? Are they married with children? Still in the country?

I can still hear his comments about my friends, 'All losers. Why would you want to be friends with any of them? Let's spend the night together, just the two of us.' I stare at the photographs, my lacy wedding gown and my bouquet of country flowers, at Jake in his dress suit. When I hear him come in, I close the album and put it away.

We look at things differently now:

we warmed ourselves
by fire in the forest,
danced to the balalaika
like flowers in flame;

holiday trains,
jewelled stars,
green forests;

but trains filled with stars
until they fell like petals.

Deadlines loom, more than I can cope with, wedding envelopes to be addressed, a long service award to design, a *Birkat Habayit* for Anya for her birthday, and names on the books for the girls' high school matric dance, themed 'Jane Austen's England'.

My calligraphy equipment is spread out on my desk where I'd left it. I wash the steel nibs, pushing a fine piece of paper under the well of each nib to remove the encrusted shellac, then dry them and place them upright in their correct jars, fine nibs together, medium and broad in separate containers. I put my coffee where I won't knock it over and begin Judith's next poem.

In a world I no longer know,
log houses fill with damp,
windows cannot see
over ice, mud, snow;

in a world I no longer know,
I slept beneath feathers,
wore no lace at my neck,
or on my sleeve;

here,
lilac agapanthus,
orange birds of paradise;

fire on both sides.

Once finished, I check the dance list to find my place, pick up my pen, dip and begin. It goes well despite my frame of mind. I write twenty names, then stop and stretch my hand and fingers, bend my neck this way and that and rub my taut shoulders and manage another few before Danny comes in in his pyjamas.

'Morning, Dan.' He sits and watches me, not making a sound. I enjoy the fact that he is so interested in what I'm doing and continue working for a while. When I reach the end of a page of the bride's list, I stop and get up. Going round my desk, I rub his head and bend to kiss him. He turns his cheek up to me, still warm from sleep.

'Breakfast time.' In the kitchen I serve up Special K in two bowls and make him a hot drink. Leaving him for the moment, I go to wake Mishy.

She has a tap class as well as singing practice for her role as Dorothy in the school production of the Wizard of Oz and Danny has a swimming lesson. I hope Jake will take

them because it is Sunday but I see his golf bag is gone. So no more work today until after Ryan and Chloe's daughter's birthday lunch.

I would like to know Jake's plans but there is no message. I text him to meet us at Chloe's, as all the husbands will be there. In the car I know better than to engage the children in conversation so early. Danny will say something like, 'Ah, come on, Ma, can't you leave Twenty Questions for later?'

We stop to buy a card for Gila at the CNA. I also buy them new ballpoints, black and red, hoping that their shape might help improve their handwriting – they're at a good age to enjoy learning Italic as an alternative to their school cursive.

Chloe asks me to help serve the lunch and I chat to the other moms, watching the front door for Jake. The afternoon passes without incident and we are all tired when we get home. None of us is hungry and so the children park themselves in front of the television to watch Toy Story 2. I doze off, waking to the moonlight streaming through the unmasked windows. I tiptoe into the children's rooms; they are both fast asleep. There is still no sign of Jake. I have no idea where he is. I close the curtains and set the security alarm.

Words and rhythms
fire field sky
you I

what's lost
river bridge cold
warm rooms peaceful sleep
sea
from there to here
snow tombstones sun

no knowing
as I write this
when it will end

how where

44

3 a.m.

I wash my hands, and then come back for another look at my handiwork before going to sleep.

A droplet of water, caught behind my wedding band, drops and puddles in the centre of Jake's sampler. I run for tissues to stop the flow as it seeps through the 'and' then spreads over the gold.

I'm too tired to even contemplate how I will try to fix it, so go to bed but I can't sleep. I remind myself about the Persian carpet makers who make an error in their weaving on purpose, acknowledging that nothing man-made can ever be perfect. I think about Titivillus, patron saint of calligraphers whom we blame for our slip-ups, believing he collects all our errors, puts them in a sack and gives them to the Devil to count on Judgment Day. He is probably gloating right now. I go back to my studio to survey the damage. The stain has dried. With a sharp, round-tipped scalpel, I begin to scrape. It's the only way to win him back.

Hours later, I finish lifting the saucer-sized blot. I treat the paper with gum sandarac so that the letters I rewrite won't bleed. My nib struggles over the grittiness until it is done.

I make tea in a glass
with a Russian silver holder;
swirl the leaves
in an already warmed pot;
use a strainer to prevent strays;
slice pungent lemon
to lighten cinnamon water
to palest saffron;
add delectable honey
with a long-handled spoon,
lump sugar in my cheek,
suction sweet liquid through my lips
and sigh,
Ay a maykhl! Delicious!
Another world
from the herring brine
of home.

For supper, I stir-fry mixed vegetables with chicken strips, simmer, then add sweet-and-sour sauce.

‘Danny–Mishy–Jake. Suppertime.’

‘Cally, I need your signature on this.’ Jake sits down at the kitchen table and pushes my plate away and places a sheaf of papers in front of me.

‘Here’s a pen.’

‘What is it?’

‘I need you to sign surety – and I have to remortgage the house or we’re going down. Brad completely overextended us.’

‘I haven’t got my reading glasses.’

‘You don’t need them. I told him the venture in Namibia was too risky, but he never listens.’

I make out the bold capitals at the top of the first sheet and the name of the Jake’s attorneys, followed by ‘We, the undersigned,’ then my name and his, but I can’t read the small print.

‘I can’t just sign.’

‘What, don’t you trust me? You get secret text messages from other men and you don’t trust me?’

He tries to open my fingers and push the pen into my hand while the children watch our every move. I don’t know how to defuse the situation: get up and leave the table; sit tight and refuse to sign; try to discuss it with him?

‘I need my glasses.’

Jake bangs his hands down onto the table and peas and rice scatter. Jake’s arm is in mid-air as the children scuttle out of the dining room and up the stairs.

‘All you have to do is sign.’

I remain upstairs, sleeping on and off. In the morning I call Anya and ask her for the number of the lawyer whom her sister used, but he is away. I don’t want to tell anyone else.

Instead, I read some of Judith’s poems. Next to one is an asterisk. I turn over and on the back of the page is a note in her tiny script. ‘Write about Janusz Korczak, teacher, author, doctor, who went hand in hand with orphans to Treblinka. About Friedl Dicker Brandeis, teacher, friend, who bought paper, paint, ink and pencils for children in Terezin.’

Then I write my own words, 'Flowers in the garbage; flowers seeking sun; petals fall to ash; exile in the promised land.'

I try to work but I can't. Instead, I get in my car, drive to the park, don't get out, go to the supermarket and tramp up and down the aisles tossing tins and packets into my trolley. I don't bother to check for the best prices. Baked beans, broad beans, lentils, carrots, fish, fish sticks, lettuce, tomato, cheese, eggs, bread, milk. I reach the end of my list, remember that I need a new broom and walk to the other end of the store. I put it in with the handle thrusting backwards so as not to poke anyone else. Good. Now I'm done for the week.

I toss the list in the bin on the way to the till, see the length of the check-out queues, look at my watch and at the pile of purchases, let go of the trolley handles and keep on walking.

Braiding the *khale*:

I gather ingredients,
prove the yeast,
test the water,
add warm milk and melted butter,
a hint of salt, a smidgeon of sweetness,
flour by instinct,
fold sticky dough,
knead towards me
with the heel of my hand,
punch it away,
turn and repeat,
my whole body working together,
legs, belly, heart,
poking the satiny dough,
so it sighs, rises, combusts,
with my touch,
a living thing;
divide into four,
roll into strands,
place on a greased baking tray,
pinch tops together,
lift right strand,
thread over, under, over, under,
right to left,
pinch the ends together,
cover and leave in a warm place
to rise to double its size,
brush with yolk,
sprinkle with seeds,
bake at 350 degrees
for half an hour
until golden, hollow;

anticipate the feast.

Breaking the *khale*
satisfies a hunger
not satisfied by our daily bread;
braiding the Word together
satisfies a hunger
unsatisfied by everyday speech;
satisfying pattern,
mouthpiece for memory.

I break off pieces to burn
for my grandmother, my mother,
my children, my grandchildren,
He who binds up our wounds.
We are bound –
unless we break off.

Michelle practises for the school musical in the bathroom and her bedroom in front of the mirror, becoming more and more confident. She has watched the video of the original production over and over again and tries to imitate Judy Garland's walk and her style as she sings 'Somewhere over the rainbow' and 'Follow the yellow brick road'. She has shot up in the last few months, and her costumes have had to be lengthened. Their bright colours enhance her fair skin and green eyes, the same colour as Jake's. Now at last it's the first night and she calls me to her room.

'Listen, Ma. Last rehearsal. What do you think?' Standing by the window, she sings her solos one after the other, her voice strong and convincing. Once we're there, Jake looks around the school hall waiting for the show to begin.

'Not an empty seat in the house. This is a big deal! Is she prepared, do you think?'

'Wait, Dad. You're in for such a surprise.' Danny is generous in his praise of his sister though he considers the primary school production beneath him. Next to us sit Bella and Mike with Gary and Joanne. As the curtain goes up, Jake leans his body into mine.

'Sorry about last night, Cal. It'll never happen again, I promise.' He kisses my neck. The audience claps for the amazing set and again as Michelle as Dorothy appears with Toto.

As the Wicked Witch of the West melts and disappears and Dorothy uses her jewelled red shoes to get back to Kansas, I watch Jake from the corner of my eye; he is bewitched. When the finale is over and Michelle has done her encore, there is a satisfied buzz in the hall. We make our way out, accepting congratulations on her behalf. She joins us in her own clothes, still wearing make-up. When we all go out for milkshake and waffles, Joanne can't take her eyes off her cousin.

'I hope that they've done a digital recording.'

'They're going to do that at the last performance, Dad, after we've had a few practices in front of a live audience.'

'I want to send a copy to your Uncle Jesse in Australia. Let those cousins of yours see what they miss, those rats that left the ship.'

Instead
of crossing the border
at night
at fourteen,
alone,
homeless,
stateless,

into an unknown land
with an unknown language;

instead
of eating
butter and ham,
in a convent,
of French nuns,
who changed my name;

instead of
sleeping
on the forest bed,
soil of the dead;
watching a child jumping
out of a synagogue
on fire;

instead of feeding my baby
liquid poppy
to save the rest,
I mantle my *Shabes* table,
dream of reflections
birds on water
that never remembers,

as another formation
wings its way;
shadows hover, disappear
as if they had never been.

I check and recheck my work and when Aaron comes he too scrutinises it line by line. I sit still so as not to distract him and only relax as he lifts his head. When the bell rings again, I open the door and meet Shira for the first time.

‘Is Aaron still here? I’ve just come back from Tel-Aviv. I couldn’t wait to see him.’

Her face glows as I take her through to my workroom. Aaron stands up, puts his arm around her and formally introduces us. Oblivious of me, they kiss in the heat of their reunion, making no apology. Their embrace stirs me, rouses memories of feelings I haven’t had for a long time. Their hands remain entwined as they separate. I offer a hot drink.

‘Oh, yes, thank you. Have you got herbal tea? Any flavour’s fine.’ Shira takes a tissue from her coat pocket and blots her forehead, then her lips. She laughs, looking at Aaron as they lean towards each other, the sides of their bodies touching, their joy in the moment and the hope for the future palpable. I am the intruder in my own home. When I bring in the tea, apricot for her, coffee for Aaron and me, they are still smiling into each other’s faces. I serve them both, offer them muffins and we sit chatting. Then we make a time for them to return the next week and they sway out and down the driveway together, oblivious of anyone else. I cover their document with another sheet of paper and put my drawing board away. The ink and paint must dry over a few days before I can erase the pencil lines.

Sensation of skin; branches
scrape the glass; orange flowers
against heavenly blue;
rhythms we knew separate
then from now;
when the song vanished,
birds flew.

Resting against his chest
I thought breathing could not end;
now all my songs
die on my breath.

I invented myself
as I wanted to be:
when you read my poems,
will you recognise me?

*

To know the spring
look out of your window
and see budding blossoms,

hear cracking eggs, baby birds.

To understand summer
be open to its rays;

autumn will soon follow,
gorgeous leaves underfoot;

in winter, wind blasts, icicles, igloos;
to endure, place a fur coat round your heart;

the snowball shattered;
I'm still looking for it.

The lights dim, go off, flicker, then go off and stay off. I feel my way to the emergency lantern on the bedroom floor, bashing my knee. What if they never come back on again? What if paraffin lamps become the norm? But what if there's no paraffin? There is no solution to the situation of the electrical shortage in sight. What if winter were without heating, Johannesburg like Siberia? I think of Judith's heavy coat that she never wore again once she got here, never needing it in a place where winter did not freeze her eyelashes.

We're due at Brad's birthday bash and some of their old SADF regiment mates will be there; also Bella and Mike, Anya and Gerald, so it should be a great party. The electricity comes back on an hour later and I take Danny and Mishy to sleep over at my parents' and am dressed and ready when Jake calls up the stairs.

I check my stockings, straighten my pencil skirt, whip my fingers through my hair, straight and shiny and swinging at my neck, and on the skin of my back. I splash some Issey Miyake onto my neck and the pulse points on my wrists, drop Bach's rescue remedy under my tongue, have a last look in the mirror in the entrance hall and touch up my lipstick. I am in the mood for dancing – I'll go barefoot if my shoes hurt.

'Another new lipstick. Waste of money.' Jake opens the front door, lets me pass and switches on the alarm. I feel for the square-cut pendant that he gave me for our tenth anniversary and which goes perfectly with my outfit. The crystal draws compliments as it draws light, its antique chain, not too shiny, resting on my neck.

I gaze at the full moon in the indigo sky and wait in the driveway as he pulls his car out of the garage and see, not his white car, but a black, top-of-the-range, brand-new-out-of-the-box, seats fawn-leather-smart 4-by-4. He stops in front of me.

I try to catch his eye to say, Wow, but he's fiddling with the audio dials. Once I'm inside, he engages the gears and the vehicle bucks forward, then he reverses out. A passing car just misses us and hoots. We speed off.

The restaurant is noisy and there is no possibility of conversation. I turn to Bella and take her hand, relieved that she and Mike are there too. We give our meal orders to the waiters over the beat of the music and when we eat it becomes so loud I feel alone in the crowd, though I know most of them well. Under other circumstances, I would have sung along with the songs.

Jake and Brad and their crew are already drinking heavily.

‘Don’t you love this song?’ I mouth to Bella, and point as the DJ plays Celine Dion’s ‘Think twice’.

I beckon the waitress and order us each a vodka, lime and lemonade. We touch glasses, say *lekhayim*, and drink to each other and I take her hand and we sway to the heartbreak. I sense Jake’s eyes boring into my back but don’t turn. Instead, I concentrate on my timing and on my spins, sometimes holding Bella’s arm up and making an arch for her to go through, doing it myself until my body is glowing and I’ve forgotten the world.

As Bella and I are dancing together, I imagine Jake taking the lead as he used to, one hand at my waist and the other hand covering mine, guiding me across the floor, steering me between the bodies as we whirl until we’re giddy.

While we eat, the DJ plays a Beatles remix. We all join in, matching the words to the changing rhythm and drumming on the table. Singing along with ‘All my loving’, I know how I want to celebrate our anniversary. I dab my damp forehead and cheeks with the damask serviette. Jake beckons that it is time to go home and at the end of ‘Can’t buy me love’, he comes over, interrupts Bella and, putting his hand under my elbow, steers me towards our host.

My wrap is in the ladies’ room. I take my time, checking my mascara and refreshing my lipstick. As I come out, I see Jake leaning his chin on the shoulder of a young woman who turns her face towards him so I can see who it is. I go straight back into the bathroom, into the cubicle, close and lock the door and I sit on the lid of the closed toilet. Then I hear two women come in, both tipsy.

‘Brad’s wife knows, you know.’

‘All these older guys with young chicks.’

‘Yeah, and you know Jake?’

‘Yes.’

‘Well, he’s with Brad’s secretary. Carolyn.’

‘No way.’

‘Watch them when we go out. He’s all over her.’

‘Unbelievable. I mean, his wife’s right here.’

The door swings closed behind them.

No wonder there’s a new car, new gold chain, and Mont Blanc sunglasses. I flush the toilet unnecessarily, check my make-up and my stockings again, swing my wrap around my shoulders and go back.

It's as the woman said, Jake's face is in Carolyn's neck, kissing her skin, breathing her scent. Carolyn, fifteen years younger than he is, raven hair down to her slim waist. He squeezes her arm, and then lets her go. I know he has seen me. In the car, I lean my face against the cool window and close my eyes until we reach home.

I bolt the door of our room shut. He bangs.

'Open up Cally. I need clothes for tomorrow.'

Eventually I hear him stalk away. I swallow more rescue drops.

In my studio I stare at the sampler, dip my pen, overfill it but don't tap it off. I cover Judith's words to shield them, then scribble and scratch all the way down the sides of the page, over and over, until the whole border is filled in with raw, jagged lines.

If a Jew came near the wire
the ghetto guards fired;
the Jew ducked and ran.

No one cared for the dead;
like bullets,
cheap as beans.

‘Can I look at the gold powder and leaf you use?’

Aaron has brought his copy of Gluck’s *Orpheus and Eurydice* and we listen as I take out my gilding materials to demonstrate for him. The gold that decorates a piece is both mirror and magnet for light and spirit. Where mediaeval scribes were circumspect, placing it for optimum effect, today we are more lavish, relieving large areas of gilding with texture, scoring into its surface – the gold can withstand the onslaught – offering variation to otherwise uniform smoothness so that it enhances the music of the words across the surface.

‘I can’t wait to see the end result. The gold is the perfect finishing touch.’

‘But you know how temperamental gilding is?’

‘Yes. Still ...’

‘Well, at least you’re not asking me to do the tiny lettering itself in gold!’

My gold supplies are hidden in a drawer away from light and rough hands. I explain to him how the traditional calligrapher uses gold powder, shell gold, gold leaf on a flat gum base and gold leaf on a raised gesso base. The powder comes in packets, measured by weight; gold in this most concentrated form is the most expensive and is seldom used over large areas, but applied with a pen nib or brush it is wonderful for detail as well as easy to control. It can even be painted over already laid colour, and though it dries flat and dull, can also be burnished to brilliance. I use it in dots, lines and patterns, and as accents.

I also use shell gold, particles bound together in a tablet with gum, once supplied in a mussel shell, and then add two or three droplets of distilled water. Too much water and the gold flows but will be patchy and transparent; too little means no flow, a lumpy effect and gold that brushes off when it dries. Gold leaf comes as sheets backed with paper and separated between fine tissue paper. All these golds are unalloyed, pure metal. The painted decoration creates a rich tapestry, my contribution to beatifying the nuptials.

Clients know little about the art of the scribe and leave me to complete the task according to their initial brief. Now there is the pleasure of sharing the finer aspects of my craft with someone who has an insider’s knowledge.

‘Gold leaf can’t be applied straight to the surface, you know? You need to use mordants. Gum or gesso. Each has its pros and cons.’

‘They once added snail slime and garlic juice.’

‘I didn’t know that!’

‘Let’s see your gum ammoniac?’

I look for my little brown glass bottle of gum, the milky secretions from the ferula plant.

‘I mix this with water so it’s like cream, and then apply it to the paper. It dries clear, raised and glossy. Then I apply the gold leaf over it. In fact gesso works better than gum ammoniac. With patience.’

‘I know that it contains plaster, fish glue, lead – poisonous of course – sugar – either rock candy or brown coffee, a dash of Armenian bole and distilled water.’

‘Or you could use glair instead of distilled water. Better consistency. I’ve watched Donald Jackson do it, layer by fine layer until he had the perfect thickness to use with brush and even in a nib.’

‘Now they use titanium dioxide instead of the lead – its effects are cumulative, which is why it’s been removed from paints for children’s toys.’

‘You know your stuff, Aaron.’

He takes my book of gold leaf and holds it spine uppermost, between finger and thumb so as not to crumple or tear the sheets.

‘Luckily your studio is cool so you don’t have to worry that the gum will dry too fast and crack.’

We are careful not to breathe on the finely beaten sheets – the slightest breeze could blow them away, and then, impossible to pick up, they break or may be ruined by the particles of dust that adhere to them from the floor. Aaron watches me prepare the gum ammoniac and lay it on a suitable piece of practice paper. I lift a fine sheet of gold with the tip of the blade, rest the leaf on the cushion, and flatten the corners. From the corner of my eye, I see him lift my gilding knife to check its heft and run his thumb over the blade.

‘Don’t worry. I don’t want blood dripping all over your work either. I shouldn’t do it though – don’t want to blunt it or to get the grease from my fingers all over it.’

He wipes the blade on the cream suede of my gilding cushion and, turning it so that the point is towards him the handle to me, he puts it my hand. I slice the sheet into quarters, then eighths and then sixteenths.

Aaron caresses the raised padding of gum Arabic to make sure it has dried as I make a tube from a small rectangle of paper. I blow through it onto the gum to moisten it and lift a tiny mosaic of gold with the point of the knife blade, then place it over the mound. I put the gilding knife down and the glint of its steel catches the light. I pass him my burnisher.

‘It’s a cheap one. Plastic. I lost my haematite.’

‘Oh yes, bloodstone. Could also use a dogs’ tooth.’

‘Bit mediaeval.’

I cover the gold with crystal parchment, glassine paper, to protect its delicate surface. Aaron’s fingers brush my hand as he passes the plastic burnisher back to me and I begin shining and polishing over the crystal parchment.

‘Please move the blade. There’s a reflection. Don’t want my hand to slip.’

‘Sure. Terrible to rip the gold.’

He lifts the knife and plays it like a seesaw across his hand.

‘Careful.’

I focus on the delicacy of the gold, no synthetic imitation so I don’t want to waste. Aaron doesn’t talk and I direct my breath away from the gold leaf on the cushion. I think to move it aside but don’t want to disturb my rhythm.

‘It’s brilliant.’

‘Recently, calligraphers have also tried to use polymers and acrylics, but the traditional techniques still get the best results.’

‘Can I have a try?’

I pass him the burnisher and then shift the paper with the gold leaf so that it’s in front of him. When I think it’s enough, I stop him polishing and lift the crystal parchment. The leaf has reached a fine sheen.

‘I hope it’ll be like this on the final piece, Cally,’ then, ‘How do you feel about letting me do the polishing? Then you needn’t spend so much time on it and I’d have added my personal touch to the contract.’

‘Unusual arrangement, don’t you think?’

‘Why not, though? It’ll be like mediaeval scribes, separate tasks, division of labour.’

I’m possessive and like to work on my own, perhaps even only trust myself, but he is the client and I can see he’ll do a meticulous job. He holds the burnished letter up to the light. It gleams. So does he.

‘Coffee and cake to celebrate?’

‘Coming up. I’ll put on the kettle. And I have a lemon chiffon that my mom made.’

I bring the tray into the studio and set it down away from all the papers.

‘Have you seen the original Lindisfarne Gospels?’

‘No, but I have a replica. I’ve used it to inspire my own designs – there aren’t any South African historical or religious treasures like it – there’s no tradition of calligraphy here. That’s why we have to look to the Judaic and British traditions of penmanship and illumination. Why?’

‘It’s worth a trip to London just to go to the British Library and see it. They turn the pages every now and then, so you may be lucky enough to see one of the carpet pages. There’s one at the beginning of each of the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, a full page of patterned gold. Unbelievable.’

The door opens and Jake walks in. Aaron stands up and puts out his hand.

‘Hey, Jake, Aaron. How’re you doing?’ He stands away from the table, brushes chiffon crumbs and specks of gold leaf from his trousers into his hand, then bends and picks bits up off the floor. Particles of gold leaf have also adhered to the tabletop, the cushion and the knife.

‘Cally, you should put all these away. Some can still be used.’

Jake steps forward and looks at what we’ve been doing.

‘What a waste of time.’

His sudden movement disturbs the loose leaf, which flutters off the table. Jake picks up my gilding knife, holding it by its point between his thumb and forefinger.

‘Nice knife.’ He turns it so that he is holding it by the wooden handle, taps the blade against the back of his hand, feints a stab at Aaron, then drops it back onto the table.

‘Cally, come. We’re due for cocktails with Brad at Marinetti’s.’

*

When he had a problem

the *Baal Shem Tov*, the *Besht*,
went to the forest, lit a fire,
and prayed.

The next generation
still went to the forest,
and lit the fire,
but forgot the prayer.

The next generation
went to the forest,
didn’t make the fire,
couldn’t pray.

The next generation
couldn’t find the forest,
light the fire or remember the prayer,
but they remember the story.

We leave our forest,
but still scatter ash:
al tishkach – never forget.

Jake suggests we play bridge with Chloe and Ryan again. We eat together first, a snack supper, then play, plying ourselves with caffeine to keep us going as morning looms.

Ryan is mellow and chats away during play about our mutual friends and acquaintances, their achievements and difficulties. Charming and gentle, he is our news anchorman, but Jake, sharp and smart, gives him a dirty look.

‘Come off it, Ryan. I need to concentrate here.’

‘Sorry.’ But a little while later Ryan is at it again. Chloe gets up to brew more coffee while Ryan shuffles and deals. I pick up my cards, one by one, with a sense of anticipation and tension. I have a great hand. As we bid, I know by his responses that it dovetails with Jake’s, unless he is double-crossing the opposition to do them out of what should be their contract.

Chloe puts my coffee next to my elbow and offers me another snack, proffers nuts and crisps. She leaves the dishes at my elbow, next to her ashtray, which by now is filled with cigarette butts, spent matches and Quality Street sweet wrappers. Opposite, Jake lights up another Lucky Strike, offering Ryan one too, but Ryan prefers his Marlboro.

Jake and I reach six no trumps, which Chloe doubles when she realises that I have to play to Jake’s dummy. Jake redoubles and sits smoking, self-satisfied at having led me to the correct contract, laying out his cards and watching my hand as I draw from his dummy, then waiting for first Chloe’s play, then Ryan’s. I take my time. My heart is pounding. I should make it, but it’s not stone cold. I control the wobble of my hand as I play, though I try to keep a poker face. Jake is thrilled when I take the last trick, making the contract and the points.

We take a break as Jake writes down the scores and Ryan tells us that his company is listing on the stock exchange. Jake looks at his watch.

‘Last rubber.’ It’s not a question. It’s clear he wants to beat them by a bigger margin than the one we already have. I shuffle, aware that the atmosphere has intensified. I deal. We call. Now it’s Chloe’s turn to play out. I can sense Ryan wanting to tell her what to do, but he restrains himself. Jake is staring at me and I hesitate before I decide which card to play first. He makes a sarcastic comment about my choice but goes on playing to my lead. Each time I put down a card, he sighs.

‘Don’t you have anything better?’

I can feel my stomach starting to tighten but I force myself to go on playing.

‘Cally, that’s stupid,’ then, ‘Haven’t you ...?’

‘Come on, Jake, you can’t prompt her like that. Let her be.’

‘It’s got nothing to do with you.’

‘But we’re all playing.’

‘Well, soon we won’t be! Cally, you can’t play that card!’

I haven’t any idea what he means. I check my hand and then the card I’ve put down. I cannot see what’s wrong with my choice but can feel Jake’s leg jiggling under the table and see him grimace. The old scar on his cheek reddens. I leave the card where it is. I win the trick but don’t look up at him. Still I feel his eyes boring into the top of my head and I start sweating. I want to ask Chloe to open the window because their smoke is burning my eyes. Each time I choose a card to play, Jake mutters and curses under his breath.

‘Jake, just leave her.’ Then, ‘You’re spoiling the game for all of us, Jake.’ But Jake’s knee keeps jogging the table so that the tea cups clatter and saucers clatter. Ryan puts his hand out to stop his loaded ashtray from tipping off the table onto their white shaggy rug. I am now so on edge that I put down the Jack of Hearts and realise straight away that I should have played the Jack of Diamonds. There is a sharp intake of breath opposite me followed by an expletive. I am conscious of the tiniest crow of delight from Chloe. Two more tricks and I’d have made it, but that one slip-up has given them the upper hand. Ryan slides the last trick onto their pile and Jake starts up again.

‘Hell, you play like an idiot. Can’t you count?’ I grip the tabletop. Acid starts broiling at the bottom of my gut with each hammer blow of insult, about my useless play out, my pathetic bidding, about what a useless pupil I am and how he will never play with me again. I cannot look at Chloe and Ryan.

‘As for that king ...’ I shift the table, testing its weight. ‘How could you make such an elementary mistake? Don’t you know ...?’

I lift the bridge table, look straight at Jake and tip the table. Everything, including his hot coffee, lands in his lap.

*

Teflin,
black box and leather straps
bound round
his arm, his head,
connecting him to what was
and what is to come,
forbidden to me,
being woman;

my hair wound
under my kerchief,
light twisting candles
with blue and yellow flames;
no prophylaxis
against cloud,
no blessing for shroud.

Jake doesn't answer when I say goodbye and leave for the annual calligraphy exhibition and workshops. I have to hurry. I still need to fetch Anya's exemplars as she isn't coming. I lock the front door behind me as Major and Prince bark. I pat them both, stroke each of them and fill their water bowls.

I reverse out, checking, as I always do now, that neither of them is in my path. It takes ten minutes to get to Anya's where she comes out in her dressing gown, her hair tousled, thanks me and gives me her subscription money and folder of papers. As I put it down on the back seat, I stare. Where's my own equipment? I get out and open the hatchback. No box. I speed home. Now I'll be late for the meeting on the other side of town. I leave the car engine running and my door open as I dash inside. Jake is in his study wrapped in a towel from the waist down, his torso bare. He glares at me as I go on past the open bathroom door, the steam still coming from the shower.

I can't remember where I've put my container so I check next to my bed, behind the door and in my studio. Nothing. I go to the toilet, brush my hair again, stare at myself in the mirror but look right through my face.

On my way back, Jake is in his dressing room, standing in front of the mirror putting on his chain with the gold pendant, slicking back his brush cut.

I walk back into my studio, find what I'm looking for in the opposite corner and leave.

When I get back, the door won't open. I knock, then bang and he comes to unlock it.

'Why'd you bother to come back?'

'Where did you go?'

'What's the difference?'

'It looked as if you were....'

'I haven't done anything.'

'... meeting someone.'

'You paranoid or something?'

*

Why did they die
while I live?

Did they suffer more
from hunger or cold?
If I do not tell my children,
how can they tell theirs?

‘Jake, please ...’

‘You ...’

‘I ...’

‘You ...’

‘I’m sorry, Jake.’

‘Too late.’

He slams the kitchen door.

‘Bitch.’

I open the door and follow him to his study.

‘Jake, please let’s speak about this.’

He doesn’t answer but thumps that door closed too and turns the key in the lock.

When I go down to make tea later, I see that his supper is still in the warming oven. I call Chloe.

‘Sorry about the other night.’

‘Oh, don’t worry about it, Cal. Are you ok?’

‘Please send me the bill for cleaning the rug.’

‘I managed to get the marks out straight after you left, so don’t worry about it. Do you want to meet for coffee on the weekend?’

‘I’ll call you. Thanks.’

Later the front door clicks closed behind him. Half past nine on Saturday night. I have no idea where he is going.

I wake after midnight when I hear Jake return. I switch out the light and watch the moon sliding across the blue-grey sky. I close my eyes and see the wire stretching ahead of me, going on and on into the dead-hush of night, me trying to hold on as I veer from one side to the other, then tumbling down out of control. Icy and clammy, my hands are sore as they try to find a grip and my body is rigid. I don’t recognise my clothes. They are all black. There is no air to breathe and no sound. Ahead is a tiny round pinprick of light. As I slide towards it, it gets further and further away. There is a bright and broken halo around it, like Van Gogh’s starry night. Did he paint it just before he walked into the sunflowers where black crows wheeled?

I send an email. 'Dear Jake, I'm sorry. Love Cally.' He continues to stomp, storm and disappear without telling me where he is going. I put a letter under his study door, 'Dear Jake, I'm sorry. Love Cally.'

Then in the passage one night he grips my arm.

'I know you're having an affair.'

His words come out like spit.

'What? I don't ... please ...'

'Don't think you can make a fool of me.'

For him, believing something is true is proof enough that it is. Like Othello. He has gone into his study. I knock and open the door.

'Get out,' he says. 'I said, get out.' He picks up his book, puts it in front of him and starts reading, eyes down.

'Jake, speak to me. Maybe we should speak to someone together, a therapist?'

But I know that to get him to talk to me could take days.

'Get out. I've got nothing to say to you.'

He turns the pages, and then turns it back as if to check one of the facts that he's just read.

'Can I bring you some tea?'

'Are you deaf or just stupid?' And then again, 'Bitch.'

'What are you talking about?'

'Now you're a bitch and a liar.' The beams from his eyes cut me to shreds.

I lean against the doorframe feeling as if the ground is shifting under me. I look at him, at his tall, lanky frame and clean-cut features, his blond hair spiky above his forehead.

'It's the guy you're doing that *ketuba* for. What does he have to come here every day for, hey? Bloody Aaron. I know all about the two of you. Or maybe it's Nick, Mike's friend. Or Neil, the birdman. No wonder you wouldn't sign surety. Now just get out.'

'It's not like that, Jake.'

'I'm sick of your behaviour and your lies. You need a lawyer. I'm going to ...'

'Jake, there's nothing between Aaron and me. He's getting married.' I move towards him.

'Don't touch me.'

'Can't we just talk about it?'

He throws the book down.

'Nothing to talk about. What do you not understand about that?'

I walk out of the room and shut the door.

Inside Mishy's bedroom, I crawl into her spare bed. Woken by the slamming doors, Danny joins us. From memory, I tell them the story of Bilbo Baggins' ring, his disappearance.

We hear Jake passing the door but he doesn't try to come in.

'Let's try and get some sleep, shall we?'

By the time I hear him come out of his study, it's after midnight. I lie awake in the dark.

In the morning, I creep out early to find my cell phone. My messages and directory have been erased. On a piece of paper I draw a circle. In it I put everything that's happened. Then I erase it, just like that. I lean my pen on the ceramic penholder, but it bounces off the table and falls nib first into the wooden floor.

I write of uprooting,
lost family, home, land;

I remember
my struggles, my journey, my hopes;

I write love poems,
dream you.

*

Your voice remains in me,
songs and prayers
coming down through the tears.

The silence of you in me,
listening in hope,
waiting in the dark,
through my fears.

The belief of you in me,
the wonder of sound,
the laugh, the grin
where your teeth splayed apart;

the beat of your heart.

Jake's music blares from his study. He is stopping songs mid-note, switching between bands and CDs, on and off with no predictable progression. Despite the cacophony, I keep ruling my lines for the long service citation for the chairman of the board of directors of the pharmaceutical association, doing some rough work, testing the new Mitchell nibs that I bought and deciding whether I prefer them to my old Speedball favourites. Outside, the weather is perfect, tempting me away.

'Doll.' I don't reply, immersed in the patterns on my page, wondering about closeness and distance.

'Doll!'

'Yes.' I put down my pencil and ruler and go to the door.

'Come listen.'

I close the ink bottle and put down my pen.

I knock on his study door.

'Come in. Why do you knock?'

He takes his headphones off and smiles.

'Sit.'

I balance myself on a small stool as he places the headphones over my ears, trapping my hair.

'Listen.' He adjusts his speakers, fiddles with the sound buttons of his player and tracks back the album. 'Just listen.'

When I make out the song, I pull the headphones off and stand up. He moves towards me, preventing me from leaving and puts his arms around me, stroking my back. I hold my breath. It is so long since he's touched me I don't know how to respond. He lifts my chin and turns my face to him. The song is still playing through the headphones on his desk as he kisses me, moving his lips across my forehead, then down the side of my face. When his tongue presses itself into my mouth, he pulls me closer and we sway to the slow beat. When the song ends, he switches off the machine, breaking the kiss and takes my hand. I make no demur. There is no one else at home.

'Come,' he says.

In the bedroom, he opens the bedcovers and closes the curtains, indicating that I should lie on the bed. Then he unclothes me, starting with my shirt, undoing the buttons from the top, putting his hand inside and caressing my skin, touching my breasts as if I were the

only girl in the world and he were the only boy, as it was in the beginning. As if I matter. As if I matter to him. It goes on and on, the caressing, first with tenderness, then with more intensity as he begins to slide his tongue down my neck onto my chest. He lifts my blouse, careful not to catch my hair, then takes off my bra and drops it to the floor. Kissing my breasts, he holds me and I can feel his gaze fixed on me as if he will never take his eyes off me, ever.

I shiver a little as his mouth moves on my skin in delicate butterfly kisses. When he reaches the nipples he sucks gently, teasing so each grows in his mouth. I am lost. I lie still. Far away, I hear the Piet-my-vrou's distinctive call. A warning? A call-to-arms? Whichever the case, I dare not resist.

Holding me tight, Jake lifts me so he can remove my jeans, taking care not to jolt me. He lies down next to me and runs his hands up and down my thighs, my calves, my belly, all the while placing tiny kisses on my breasts, my face, and then returning to my mouth. Languid, I feel the heat creep up through me, outside, then in, as he undresses himself and drops his clothes. I open my eyes to watch. He parts my legs then and bends down so that he can kiss and lick the inside of my thighs. Saliva droplets leave trails on my skin that cool in the air, as he purses his mouth to draw the skin towards him in little bunches.

'Put this on.'

My eyes snap open.

'What ...? Why ...?'

'I've no idea where you've been. Or maybe I do!'

'Jake ... I don't know what you mean. Come on, Jake.'

'Bullshit. Bullshit.'

'But why ...? I have never been with anyone else.'

'You're the only one. You know that.'

'Put it on.'

He hands me a condom. I lift myself up and take it from him. As I roll it on my hands shake and the rubber takes on his shape. He keeps his eyes on me all the while, watching that I do it right.

I try to think my way back to an hour before, when he called me and played me that song, the way I had felt while he was touching me.

Love hurts.

Danny and Mishy are away on a school tour for the weekend. I put the *khale* on the table and cover it, get the *sider*, say that *brokhe*, and an additional one for the wellbeing of my children. I make my own *kidesh* and drink the wine, knocking the *kos* so it splashes on the white cloth, wash my hands, bless the bread, break, salt and eat it. Then I have my soup and my main course. I hold my book open, careful not to spill soup on it, change my mind, close it and put it aside. I take my empty plates to the kitchen, let my bath water in and stare at my reflection in the glass. Had Jake only ignored me, accused me, locked me out it would have been enough. The bread lies twisted on the table, the wine spilt on the cloth. Crumbs. Stains.

At the back of her book, I find another of Judith's notes, this time a list. Diaspora – Judea and Israel, Eden and Canaan, Goshen and Zion, Jericho and Jerusalem. Then Birobidzhan and Uganda, Beaubassin and Mauritius, Argentina, Brazil and South Africa. The wilderness. I think about women in the wilderness. Underneath in pen and ink is a drawing of a pomegranate split open. 613 seeds, 613 *mitzves*.

Her poems, her thoughts, her experiences. Voiceless other than through her writing, she seems to be calling to me.

I eat chocolates, dropping gold and silver wrappers into the dustbin.

Falling stars.

I always leave the decoration of the *ketuba* for last. Usually I use traditional images, peacocks for beauty, doves for peace, contentment and unity, candelabra and *menorahs* to symbolise light and love. I also include decorative letters and an illuminated border to beautify the document, but never image of man or woman or deity – no graven images are allowed. The colour itself will serve as embellishment, imbuing the ceremony with brightness and allowing artists to express their creativity yet not break the commandment.

Aaron and Shira choose a heavily decorated border of flowers, birds and fruit from the countries of their birth, Israel and South Africa. Flowers in the wrong place or smudges of paint can be glossed over or added to, but letters cannot easily be altered or corrected. I set out pencils, ruler, tracing paper, gouache paints, blue, red and yellow, and two brushes, a fine and a medium. My china palette is gritty with old paint and I run it under warm water then rub it clean, first with my fingers, then a cloth so that it returns to pure white and won't affect the way I see the squeezed-out colours.

I measure twice, and then lightly rule in a frame around the block of writing. There's nothing worse than a heavily ruled line – impossible to erase altogether. I begin with periwinkle and strelitzia, creeper and upright plant, whose blue and bright orange flowers complement each other, my indigenous response to the traditional ivy and acanthus of British manuscripts. I then use different tones and shades of mixed green for the leaves. Between the flowers, Aaron wants scenes from Masada, the Dome of the Rock and the Wailing Wall linked to Table Mountain, silhouettes of mine dumps, and rickshaws with their bright paint and feathers. I sketch and trace until my pencils are blunt, then sharpen them with my penknife.

Midmorning, I take a break and go into the children's rooms to tidy up, first Mishy's, then Danny's. Putting his pencil crayons in their box, I open the lid of his desk. Inside is a mass of papers. Just like mine, I think and smile until I cut my hand on a knife. I dash to the bathroom for cotton wool and Dettol, Mercurochrome and plasters. The blood drips onto the carpet and I make a mess with the Mercurochrome. The cut is deep, on the ball of my right hand where the plasters won't stick. I wind a crêpe bandage over it, pick up Jake's army knife and wipe and dry the blade. I sheath it and put it in my apron pocket until I can return it to his *trommel*. Feeling faint, I make my way back to my bedroom and swallow two Paracetamol with some orange juice. Later, the doctor gives me an antitetanus injection and, instead of the

old-fashioned stitches I am expecting, he tapes plasters over the cut. He warns me to watch out for infection from my paints that are probably still lead-based.

I return to my colours and enhance the *ketuba* with the traditional blessings, words serving as decorative containers that refer to the *simchah* of the marriage ceremony and its future. I inscribe in Hebrew, *Kol sason vekol simchah kol chatan vekol kalah*, followed by the translation, The voice of joy and the voice of celebration, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride. Then, in a circlet around the edge as an additional border, I write out the Blessing of the Priests in Hebrew, ‘*Yevarechecha ...*’ and then in English, ‘May the Lord bless you and keep you; may He cause the light to shine on you and be gracious unto you; may He turn His face to shine on you and give you peace.’ At the top in the centre, I place the tablets of the Ten Commandments, and beneath the whole, a line from the Song of Songs, ‘*Ani ledodi vedodi li, I am my beloved and my beloved is mine.*’

I finish. Then when the *ketuba* is dry, I pack it in a black board folder and take it to the Beth Din for the *dayanim* to check.

In the shed the lock of the *trommel* has been broken off and inside his khaki kit has been disturbed. I neaten it and find a folder of papers. I take out the photographs – Jake and Brad in South West Africa. Though they are grey and white and grainy, the location and situation is clear. It is cold in the shed and I feel guilty for looking without permission and anxious that I’ll be discovered, but I can’t put them down. Jake, shirtless, holding his rifle pointing to the ground, smoking, the top of a pack of Texan sticking out of his shirt pocket. Their platoon in the desert, wearing helmets, the men crouched down, water bottles in hand. An aeroplane painted in camouflage with men climbing on or getting off, difficult to differentiate. A column of men, their backs to the camera, Bushmen trackers in front. A lookout post with a soldier gazing out using binoculars. And one of Jake and Brad, shirts off, metal dog tags round their necks, looking straight at the viewer, tents, sandbags and barbed-wire fences behind. The photos are each labelled on the back, Oshakati, Ovamboland, Grootfontein, Windhoek.

I put them back under Jake’s kit together with the knife, and my fingers touch the cold metal of a small pistol. I don’t know what to do so leave everything as I find it, planning to replace the broken lock.

Is he with her at this very moment? Do they fall into each other’s arms? Does he tell her she’s his one and only? He’ll kiss her and she’ll take it for passion. And when he hurts her, she’ll take it for love.

I run my silver brush
through my hair
dream another life:

leaves laden with white ice
like stars from the sky
against the grey of that day.

I run my fingers across the glass,
breathe Africa's heat,
patterns light as air.

The *Beth Din* does find a few minor errors in the text, a *yud* instead of a *vav*, a *vav* instead of a final *nun*. I correct the strokes and at last the piece is accurate as well as beautiful. When Aaron collects it, he is delighted with the writing, the orange birds of paradise and the winding blue creeper. I wrap up it in protective tissue paper and put it back in its folder, handing it over with relief, assured that they will treasure it. He settles my account and I develop photographs of the job and mount them in my record book.

Aaron and Shira's *khupe* ceremony is held in the garden at dusk. Just before, at the *kabalat panim*, the groom makes sure that he is marrying the right girl, so as not to make the same mistake as Jacob and get the heavily veiled Leah instead of Rachel, so he then had to work another seven years for his father-in-law to earn his beloved. So Aaron comes to her with a group of his friends before she puts on her veil, radiant in her Juliet cap and A-line satin dress fitted at the waist, then flaring around her long, slim legs. Once satisfied, he covers her face.

He walks down the aisle between his parents towards the *khupe*, symbol of their home. The pole holders, four male friends, support the flimsy canopy even when one of the poles snaps in the wind. It drizzles but then the rain stops and Shira joins Aaron under the canopy. She walks around him seven times, weaving a circle to contain the two of them, excluding all others. The stars appear to bless them, as she stands next to him as the rabbi reads the *ketuba* aloud for the only time, first in Aramaic, then in the English equivalent. Even though the *Beth Din* has approved the document, I am still anxious. There might be an error previously unnoticed, so that I'll be mortified in front of the gathering and will have to rewrite the document. Instead, the rabbi praises it, a work of art that contains a spirit beyond the physical, and offers words of wisdom and blessings for the future joy and good health of the bride and groom.

Star signs:

Magen David

Mogen Dovid

contains the number seven:

six points plus a space;

in *Kabbalah*,

six directions

plus the centre;

in the *Shema*,
six words
written around the star;

from Creation,
seven days and seven angels,
Uriel, Sariel, Ramiel,
Zadkiel, Michael, Raphael, Gabriel.

from David's name,
two triangles, two *daleds*,
one straight up, one flipped;

David's shield,
leather thongs across a metal frame,
together with a catty and a stone;

David's Star, yellow and torn,
red and bloody,
blue and triumphant.

At dinner, all of us are around the table.

‘The business will close at the end of the month.’

‘Oh, Jake.’

‘You could have prevented it.’

‘I ...’

‘What’s with the bandages?’

‘I...’

‘What’s the big secret?’

Danny flinches, and I know that he knows the knife is gone.

‘Know something about it, do you, boy? ... Daniel, I’m talking to you.’ He goes round to the other side of the table. ‘What do you say, hey?’ He yanks Danny’s hair.

‘What has your mother said about me? Answer me!’ He twists Danny’s ear.

‘Jake!’

I rush round and grab at Jake’s arm. He shoves me away and then lets Danny go.

‘Daddy!’ Mishy’s face goes white.

Danny is dry-eyed as Jake turns on me and twists my arm behind my back, swearing as I try to pull away, shoving me against the wall and knocking my head against it until I collapse onto the carpet, holding my head in my hands. Mishy and Danny run from the room.

‘And don’t you dare tell anyone. Anyway, no one will believe you.’

Counting the memories:

collecting wood is one,
 setting the fire two,
 lighting the stove three,
 frying *latkes* four,
 dividing them between us five,
 devouring them six,
 washing in ice water seven,
 washing clothes in the *taykh* eight,
 passing them down nine,
 mending the tears ten,
 lying head to foot, six in a bed, eleven,
 sleeping when you could twelve.

Counting endings:

bands of Cossacks (one)
 pogroms (two)
 hunger (three)
 futility (four)

despair (five)
loneliness (six)
hopelessness (seven)
grey sky (eight)
the Pale (nine)
the trains (ten)
the camps (eleven)
the gas (twelve).

What we still have:

Hashem one

Amidah two

Commandments three

Tehilim four

Eyshes khayil five

Pirkey-oves six

Liturgy seven

Remembrance eight

Eulogy nine

Kadish ten

Yisker eleven

Shma twelve:

Gan Eydn,

Eternal Paradise.

I wake as I hear tiptoeing footsteps on the stairs. As they become louder, I hold my breath and peek through closed eyes as my door opens. I had forgotten to turn the key. My head still aches from where Jake bashed me and I have bruises on my arms. In the almost-dark I make out the shadow of my husband. He is holding his army knife. I push aside my duvet and move towards him, trying not to make any sudden gesture that might startle him.

‘Stay away from me’.

‘Give it to me, Jake. Please.’ I feel the wound on my hand tearing open. He lunges at me and drops the knife. It clatters to the floor and I keep an eye on him as I bend to pick it up, expecting him to make a grab for it – or for me – but as if the air sinks out of him, he turns and walks away.

‘If it’s not you, it’ll be me.’

The house is silent after that.

Back at the GP’s to check my stitches and rebandage my hand, I tell him what happened.

‘He needs help, Cally. So do you and the children.’ He gives me the numbers of some psychologists. ‘Jake was always going to have problems after South West. Call me if you need anything. And be careful.’

Our rabbi says, ‘You must try to create *shalom bayit*, Cally, peace in the home and in the marriage.’

‘What about the husband’s responsibility?’

‘It’s up to you as the homemaker to try harder for the children’s sake. As a divorcee you will lose your standing in the community.’ He pulls out his diary to make an appointment. ‘Let me help you, speak to the two of you together.’ How would it be possible to talk openly if Jake is sitting there? I say I’ll call him. I should have known better than to approach him – he has never indicated in any sermon that he is aware of marital abuse. Instead I manage to set up an appointment with the lawyer who represented Anya’s sister when she got divorced. Brian opens a file for me and makes notes.

‘You have to make your own decision here, Cally. This is bad stuff with many ramifications. What about the bond on the house? Your children’s education? And how will you support yourself? If you decide to go ahead I’ll need R60 000 upfront to start proceedings, draft the first letters and serve him with papers. If he contests the case, it could run into thousands – he’s a lawyer himself and knows all the tricks of our trade. And you

know he's a good guy at heart.' As he speaks I hear Jake's voice, I'm respected in the community. No one will believe you.

I serve them supper. Michelle cries and Danny is stony-faced. I walk round and put my arms around each of them and draw them to me. There is no commandment to honour wives and children; it is taken for granted. There is no freedom for those who are shackled to their secrets.

I write my own poem, 'Woman alone in the dark, stone in her gut, holding her breath; a wordless goodbye; mulberry footsteps on a cream carpet walking away.'

Rosh Hashanah. Time for the *shofar*. The rabbi speaks about how we are all, like the ram in the story of Abraham and Isaac, caught in the thicket. No sooner are we freed from one bush of thorns, when there is another. But the simple and unadorned ram's horn, its simple sounds blown now at this beginning of a new year, remind us of new possibilities. It is a wake-up call. *Yom Kippur.* Time to make amends, reflect on the past year. In *shul* I sit upstairs with Mishy, Danny downstairs with Gary and Mike. He looks up to see where we are, attentive. No Jake.

Tashlich:

I empty my pockets,
cast my lint upon the water,
watch my dregs drift away
towards the river's mouth,
towards hope.

They make confession,
know the ropes,
count their beads,
lighten their load,
feel absolved,
look you in the eye,
pray not to repeat
their sins.

We do *vidui*,
beat our breasts
do *teshuvah*,
give *tsedakah*,
pray not to repeat
our sins.

Nick brings me the catalogue as promised. I read about Gustav Klimt's golden portrait of Adele Block-Bauer, commissioned by her husband, the background filled with gilt patterns like eyes that follow the viewer. The painting took three years and two hundred sittings to complete. I wonder who put the necklace on Adele, Ferdinand her husband, or Klimt? In 1938 in Vienna, the Gestapo make an inventory of the Block-Bauer treasures to comply with the Anschluss. They leave with the diamonds. Later the earrings hang from Mrs Goering's lobes. Klimt's golden painting is removed to the Belvedere Palace with hundreds of others, becoming the property of Hitler as they all were one way and another. Restored to the family fifty years later, it sells in Los Angeles for \$137 million, the world's most valuable painting, a triumph of Judith over Holofernes.

I pull out the list of psychologists' names and call the first one. Maybe someone will believe me. I make an appointment.

With this support I put a restraining order on Jake, then serve him with the divorce papers and he moves out. He wants joint custody, but I am afraid to leave the children alone with him, so the lawyer stipulates that he must be assessed and have counselling first.

I have a room of my own now. My projects are spread out around me. The birds chatter above the fan's whir and my hair whisks across my face. The ICC commentator's voice penetrates my consciousness as India play South Africa out to a draw.

Around me are Rorschach stains of water, ink and blood. The acacia thorn trees that he planted are dead. In front of my window, the moonflowers and azaleas bloom.

At the end
of the long fast day,
the final horn,
the long-drawn *tekiyah*.

Floating home
wrapped in my white shawl,
the lamplight a circlet
holds darkness at bay;
a new beginning.

My father and Mike put up our *suke*. Danny and Gary help to lug the metal poles from the storeroom, holding them steady as Mike hammers the corner joints together.

‘Watch out!’ and I hear banging, then laughter and also muttering as knees and hands are scraped and bumped. They bind lengths of waterproof material around the poles to serve as walls, no more than twenty cubits long and no less than ten cubits high. Mike brings palm fronds in his trailer and they use them to cover the top, crisscrossing them neatly, then adding willow branches for shade. For the eight days of *Sukes* we eat outside under the leaves, under the clear October sky, moon and stars shining through, feeling closely connected to the universe.

My mom, Bella and I do the shopping and then cook. We make *kikh* and chopped herring, mustard herring and herring in cream, mock crayfish and *snoek* pâté, spending time in the kitchen together. Bella is in her element as we try new recipes: passion fruit crème brûlée, strawberry coulis with vanilla ice cream as well the old favourites, chocolate mousse, halva shortcake and strawberry *pavlova*. We use Judith’s vegetable soup recipe. We fry the soles, and share the basting and turning of the roast beef and turkey. Michelle and Joanne help to set the table with the African-patterned placemats and matching crockery and Judith’s silver candlesticks. These, and her samovar, are the only precious objects that she brought with her when she came to South Africa, heirlooms that brightened the otherwise unredeemed poverty of the *shtetl*.

The fine weather holds for the first night. As they arrive, my mother puts a small parcel into my hand, closing my fingers over what feels like a box.

“Open it later, Cal, when you’re on your own.”

My father makes *kidesh* and the *brokhe* for eating in the *suke*. We drink wine and break bread together, the round *khale* with raisins dipped in honey for a good sweet year.

‘Imagine those Israelites. Forty years in *sukes*.’

‘Yes, but they got to eat manna every day.’

‘In the desert. In the *khamsin*.’

‘So many other stories of redemption,’ Mike says, ‘Noah, Jonah, David.’

‘And don’t forget arks and whales.’

‘I’m full. Thanks for supper, Ma.’

‘Thanks, Aunty Bella.’

The children get up and kiss their grandparents.

‘Who’s coming to *shul* tomorrow morning to shake the *lulav*?’

‘We all need a shake-up now and then.’

‘Doing the *mitsve* of *lulav*, *hadas*, *aravah* and *esrog* to clear the way for new thoughts and actions.’

‘I love the smell. Like lime.’

The children take their plates inside and my dad and Mike continue their conversation.

‘And then of course afterwards we’ll have a *brokhe* in the *shul suke* and guess what we’ll do afterwards ...?’ My father taps his belly.

‘Well, who can resist? I must get the recipe for the Peppermint crisp cake from Dorothy. We could make it for Sunday, Belle.’

‘Why, oh why, does everything delicious have to be so full of calories? How can anyone stay slim?’

‘Anyone fancy a run round the block?’

Eating outside is a lot of extra work, taking each course outside, then bringing the empties inside, but even on the nights it rains, we laugh as we run, everyone carrying something inside, dragging the chairs under the patio covering and stubbing our toes or tripping over each other in our rush to prevent the food getting drenched and spoilt. Bella and I laugh at our frizzy hair – luckily for us, there are always ponytails. No one mentions Jake.

Upstairs when everyone has left, I open my mother’s gift to me. Inside the box is Judith’s cameo brooch.

*

When it finally comes
and my arms relax their guard,

my hair lies loose
and I float free,

place coins on my lids,
pearls in my hand,
stars on my forehead,

light candles
to mark my way,

let birds come as zephyrs
and lift me away;

when it finally comes,
wear me as wings.

*

A *vekhterin* will wait with my body,
watching so my spirit will not escape,
wander homelessly;

mirrors will be covered,
so that my soul cannot see itself,
stop to look, forget its path;

at the cemetery
instead of rending the flesh,
the mourner's shirt will be cut and torn;

after the funeral,
they will eat eggs and bagel
for continuity,
sit on low benches
for humility,

won't wear leather,
there can be no comfort;
will keep a candle burning
for *shiva*, seven days and nights;
speak of how it used to be.

*

Strangers' hands
will wash my body,

touch my face,
swaddle me

in muslin *takhrikhim*,
hand-stitched, white,

shirt, cap, belt,
same for everyone;

no pockets, zips, buttons,
will touch my skin;

in my pine cradle
they will cover me;

nothing to bind me,
nothing to take with me,

leaving behind
all whom I love.

As the telephone rings, my nib slips.

‘I’ve got the gun, Cally. I’m going to do it.’

‘Jake, do me a favour, cut it out.’

I try to work on the photograph labels for Aaron and Shira’s wedding album, but I can’t focus. Fetching my bag, I check that I have my cell phone, get my car keys and go. At a stop street, a beggar holds out her hand, her baby crying, wrapped tightly in a blanket, snot pouring from its nose, its eyelids sticking together. On the thin strip of pavement next to her, a toddler sits, running his bare feet through the gravel. They remind me of stories from Judith’s poems but I have no time to stop. I accelerate past.

Down Louis Botha Avenue, taxis hoot and swerve, overtaking across the solid white line, cutting in front of each other, slamming on brakes to pick up passengers or drop them off. Every traffic light is against me. I should have gone the alternate route through less busy suburban streets.

I press Joyce’s gate buzzer once, then again and the automatic gate opens. I drive in. Half-way up, Jake’s car is blocking the driveway so I stop and switch off the engine as Joyce comes running out.

‘Cally!’

She raps on my car window, her dogs yapping behind her.

‘What is it, Joyce? What’s happened?’

‘Why didn’t you come straight away? You could have stopped him!’

On the lawn, the dogs jump up and I push them away. I try to put my arms around Joyce, but she shoves me aside. Inside, in the entrance hall, I hear a groan where Jake lies slumped on the carpet. The front door and window are splattered with blood.

‘Joyce! What happened? Have you called anyone? The ambulance?’ Joyce shakes her head, tears streaming down her face.

I pull out my cell phone and dial Netcare 911, give Joyce sugar water to drink and put on the kettle to boil. I’m too afraid to touch Jake. The paramedics arrive in minutes. As they turn Jake over I vomit.

The gate buzzer sounds again. Joyce opens for Brad and he runs in.

‘What’s happened here? Jake? Jakey? Talk to me. Please.’

There is no response. Brad turns to me.

‘This is all your fault, Cally, you know. You’re a stupid woman. Always thought so. So wrapped up in your own stuff, you never saw what was right in front of you.’

‘Brad, come on. He would never speak to me about anything. It was the big secret. His. Yours.’

‘It was state security. We swore an oath.’

‘No. You just wouldn’t talk about it to anyone who hadn’t been there. It was your club. Exclusive.’

‘Well, how could anyone else understand what we’d been through, hey? Bloody SWAPO. Bloody bush operations with sweet names that pretend, like Daisy. Names that are just covering something up, like Protea, and Phoenix. Never knowing what was lying in wait for us, who was going to pounce in the dark, where the mines were. Explosions. Do you know how dead bodies stink when they’ve been lying around in the sun, hey? Jake found Martin Green. Conrad’s brother. But you don’t care about that. All you women were miles away in your safe houses.’

‘Brad’

The young paramedic tries to talk to him but Jake doesn’t respond. ‘And then the nightmares.’

‘I tried’

‘And Mike and his fancy cronies, oh so clever, because they know the history. But they got out of it. Found ways to stay at home too ... and being ignored when we came back as if nothing had happened, nothing had changed. As if we were still the same.’

It looks as if the side of Jake’s face has been blown away, but perhaps it’s only a flesh wound. The ear bleeds a lot.

‘And then, a new government who put up a monument to the Cuban dead! My bloody ex-wife never got it. And nor do you!’

They struggle to put on the oxygen mask while wiping away the blood that is still flowing down his face and neck, put him on a stretcher, and then carry him to the ambulance parked on the lawn.

‘Who called us?’

‘Me.’

‘Sign here please. We must hurry.’ The boy clenches his jaw.

I wipe up the vomit, then go and find my mother-in-law. She is lying on her bed sobbing.

‘Get out, Cally! Get out of here!’

I make tea for her and put the cup on the small side table with the sugar basin. I find a box of shortbread biscuits and place it on a plate next to her. Then, trembling, I drive myself home. I have trouble walking to the house and fitting the key in the door. I manage to call Bella. She's at home and comes round straight away, helps me to undress, and brings me a hot-water bottle and hot sweet tea.

'You need more than rescue remedy. I'm calling Dr Jacobson.' I cling to her when she leaves me to go and buy the medication from the chemist. I close my eyes but can't stop seeing Jake on the carpet with blood all over him. She brings back the pills and makes me take them with water, then lies on the bed beside me and cradles my head, crooning.

I wake in the dark.

'Cally? Cal? How're you feeling?' The tears keep falling.

'Where are the children, Belle?'

'Mike's looking after them. He'll bring them back when you ask him to.'

'Belle, is he ...?'

'I tried to call the hospital earlier but they wouldn't give me any information.'

She dials again, and passes the telephone to me.

'He's in theatre.'

I call my parents, then go into the bathroom and look at my face in the mirror. I don't know who I am looking at, a grey-faced stranger, brown eyes not chocolate, cheeks without gloss. When Mishy and Danny arrive, they run to me, kissing me as they get onto the bed.

'What's happening, Mommy?'

'Mommy, why're you crying?'

*

Poems like photographs:

At left,
a pile of stones;

at right
a pear tree blooms

an arm cut off
at the hand;

a sigh in sepia.

*

Two people in black
beside an open pine box;

a gravestone with grapes,
wheat, *yad*, lion;

name unread, no address,
ancient text roughly carved;

hands in front of them,
they would not know us;

we made our way forward
on an unmapped path;

between the shutter
opening and closing,
sepia life, lace memories.

Jake has plastic surgery on his face. He also goes for psychological counselling and trauma debriefing so he can see the children without a social worker being present.

Once our divorce is finalised according to civil law, Bella fetches me to go to the Beth Din and I lean on her, holding on to her arm as we go into court. Even now when we finalise our *get*, I am still afraid of Jake, afraid even now that he will make trouble, refuse to come. Then I'm afraid he will refuse to give me my freedom, and instead leave me an *agunah*, forever chained to him. Were he a Cohen, rather than a simple Israelite, he himself would not be allowed to remarry.

We wait in a corner until a triumvirate of rabbis strides in with Jake. From behind a long narrow table, the patriarchs of a patriarchal society make their ruling to grant us a Jewish divorce, according to age-old laws separate from the civil decree of the country. Jake sits alone on the opposite side, his jaw bandaged after plastic surgery, his eyes avoiding me, a shrunken shadow of his former self, bluster and anger gone.

Inscribed by the *sofer* that morning, the *get* is barely dry when the *dayan* reads it out. Written in historical Aramaic it makes no sense to the layperson other than in its practical application, the end of a marriage. The end of our marriage. The rabbi beckons Jake who walks across the room towards me. He hands him the document and Jake holds it above my head and drops it into my hands. It is so different from the moment when the rabbi read out our *ketuba* under the *khupe*, emphasising *gilah* and *rinah*, joy and singing, affection and support, then passing the document to both of us. I have handed it in to the office.

Our *ketuba* blessings were powerless to prevent the unravelling of its promises and the double rings entwined in gold remain with the Beth Din for their records, our names inscribed for future generations, the names that will be incised on our tombstones.

Home at last, I lumber upstairs and take Jake's paper sampler from its hiding place. I unroll it and look at it one last time.

I tear.

Then I lean over the banisters and watch the fragments, once part of a gilded whole, float to the carpet below like white doves' feathers. They sink, lift and lie still.

When they stand side by side
at my grave,
love going forward not back,
their eyes red with tears,
my voice stopped,

will they know
words were my bread and milk,
they the honey?

Blossomless night,
blood to ash,
in my words
my blood still pumps,
my children sing.
I live.

Back from honeymoon, Aaron is relaxed and tanned, still wearing his wrist thongs but now also sporting a silver wedding band. We're sitting on the patio.

'It's as I thought.' 'Lily, the woman in Judith's poem, was my grandmother. She was pregnant with Ruth, my mother, when she bumped into her first love on the platform as they were all leaving Rakishok.'

'That's amazing, Aaron. Every tiny piece of information about Judith is a jewel for me.'

'Judith and Lily met again in Johannesburg at the *Rakishoker landsmanschaft* meetings during the war. Which is also when Lily told Judith about her lost love. There were others – Dora, Varda and Eva – who were also part of their friendship circle – they all knew each other back home. Hence Judith's poems.'

We fall silent.

'And yes, my mother did meet Judith. She asked if you would inscribe a copy of the Lily poem for her. She would love to meet you and tell you what she knows about Judith. And she sent you this.'

Aaron reaches for his package and takes out an envelope. Inside is a black-and-white photograph.

'Lily and Judith, with your mom and mine.' The two little girls are sitting on a blanket on the grass in the shade of a jacaranda tree, wearing bonnets tied under the chin and smocked white dresses. Judith and Lily are on either side of them, clasping hands. Their names are written on the back in blue-black fountain pen with the date, February 1944.

'I also brought this to show you.'

On the first page of their wedding album, he has inscribed his and Shira's names and the date of the occasion in maroon and bronze Italic.

The day we struggled with the cart, black ice
bitter on the road, the grass, the rooftops,
I could not speak; then the journey
to the tiny village, the station, the muddle
over my ticket. Why is it
that it is not upright trees that we reflect on
but the bareness of their branches, the fading moon
rather than
the night, the sun disappearing in the cold mist,
instead of its delicate beams through the cherry tree?

Winter itself, pressing its cold fingers to my cheek;
quiet days to enjoy
as much as those I conjure up
which elude me still. On our way
to the station, knowing it was the last of those moments,
you turn to me: a bead of light.

I align the edges of each page of Judith's poetry and stitch the parchment folios together. After binding them in a leather cover, I emboss the title, followed by my grandmother's name, into the skin:

After Long Silence

Judith Shreiber

b. 29 June 1910, Rakishok, Lithuania;

d. 7 May 1983, Johannesburg, South Africa.

I would like to write it in Yiddish as well, but I don't know how to do it. Now is too late for that, too late for all my questions. All Judith ever told Bella and me when we were little girls was how she came to South Africa because there was nothing to eat back home except herring in brine. Until her poems I did not understand what she meant by 'came', nor what she meant by 'brine'. But the rivers still dance through Lite to the sea, the spreading ripples pointing to freedom. Judith's book of names and pressed sprigs of lavender still carry memories of a people who are no longer dancing and of a place where no one is left to tend the graves. Had Judith continued to eat salty herring in brackish water *in der heym*, she too would not have survived – and I would not have been born.

Judith's poems are now in a *Yisker* book, a resistance against forgetting, a covenant with life and love.

I draw a final delicate flourish beneath her poems. As I close the leather covers, rays of sunlight glint through the glass.

Always

we try to imitate heaven:
 these firefingers, our stars,
 thrown into the dark,
 sink or come towards us in colours
 that try to outdo the silver we already know.
 It is the same dream
 as Icarus had:
 that if only he could find a way,
 he would reach
 the Sun's heat
 yet still resist its sear.

These elements, light and fire,
 are what I aspire to
 in my insignificant darkness:
 nothing I do is original.

Looking out,
the stars we make
glow and disappear,
their impermanence
an imitation of my own,
while in the firmament,
the planets never disintegrate,
vanishing in the great light
only to return again
night after night
long after we have gone.

Word count: 56810

GLOSSARY

agunah: a married woman whose husband won't agree to give her a divorce, or one who has disappeared. Under Jewish Law, she may not remarry until she obtains a divorce or he is certified dead; a chained woman

Amidah: central prayer, recited silently during the daily services while standing facing Jerusalem

Appell: roll call (German)

aravah: willow

Baal Shem Tov (Besht): Rabbi Yisrael (Israel) ben Eliezer, an 18th century Jewish mystic

bagel: roll with hole in the centre

balalaika: stringed musical instrument (Russian)

ban: train

Bar Mitzvah: Jewish boy's coming-of-age ceremony

bashert: destined; fated

bat: daughter

ben: son

bentshing: grace after meals

Birkat Habayit: blessing of the home

blintses: filled crêpes

bobe: grandmother

Brit Milah: circumcision

brokhe: blessing; festive meal

boerewors: sausage (Afrikaans)

bulbes: potatoes

burekes: beetroot

daled: letter 'd'

dayan/im: rabbinical judge/s

di heym: the home, Lithuania

dinstik: Tuesday

Die Stem: Afrikaans South African national anthem

donershtik: Thursday

dybbuk: malicious or benign spirit that possesses a person's body

Erets Yisrael: land of Israel

etrog: citron

farklept di gantse velt: lit. makes the world sticky

fisele: little foot

fligele: little wing

fraytik: Friday

Gan Eydn: Garden of Eden

gesele: small street

get: divorce document

gilah: joy

Goyim: Gentiles

gribenis: rendered fat

hadas: myrtle

Hashem: Creator

Havdole: ritual ceremony at the end of the Sabbath

helzl: neck

homen-dreyers: noise makers used during the reading of the Scroll of Esther when Haman's name is mentioned
homen-tashn: three-cornered buns filled with poppy seed eaten at *Purim*
in der fri: in the morning
Kabbalah: Cabbalah
kabalat panim: lit. greeting of faces; pre-wedding reception
kadish: mourner's prayer
kalah: bride
kazatska: Russian dance
ketuba: marriage document
khamsin: hot wind
khale: plaited bread for the Sabbath
Khanuke: Festival of Lights
Khanuke-lomp: Candelabra used on festival of lights
khosn: bridegroom
khreyn: horse radish
khupe: wedding canopy
Khurbn: Holocaust; Shoah
kibbutz: communal farm in Israel
kikhl: flat sweet biscuit
kidesh: sanctification of wine before the Friday-night meal
kleyne yidele, miese fidele, holtshaker: counting finger rhyme
klezmer: Jewish folk music
kos: *kidesh* cup
kugl: oven dish with potatoes or lokshen
kum vart blayb: come wait stay
lekhayim: toast to life
landsman: someone from the same village or area in Lithuania
latkes: potato pancakes
lekakh: honey cake
al tishkach: never forget
lokshn: noodles
lomp: lamp
lulav: date palm frond
makhzer: prayer book for *Yon-tev*
Magen David (Heb.); *Mogen Dovid* (Yid.): Star of David
mame: mother
mame-loshn: mother tongue, ie. Yiddish
mamushka: mother (Russian)
maoz tsur: O mighty Rock (start of *Khanuke* song)
mark: market place
maskilim: enlightened Jews
matse: unleavened bread
nes: miracle
mekhitse: curtain
megile: scroll of Ester, read on the festival of *Purim*
menorahs: candelabra
mer: carrot
meydele: girl
mezuzah: amulet affixed to the doorpost

mikveh: ritual bath
mishpokhe: family
mitvokh: Wednesday
mitsve, mitsves: commandment(s); good deed(s)
montik: Monday
parnose: livelihood
perene: duvet
perogen: meat pies
petsha: aspic
Peysekh: Passover
Pirkey-oves: Ethics of the Fathers
pripetshik: metal cooking stove
pupik: belly button
Purim: a minor festival
rinah: song; jubilation
Rosh Hashanah: Jewish New Year
sabras: small cinnamon and chocolate cakes also called *rugelech*
shmalts: fat
Shabes: Sabbath
shadkhn: matchmaker
shalom bayit: peace in the home
shames: main flame on *Khanuke-lomp* from which all others are lit
shande: scandal; shame
sheyn: beautiful
shiva: seven days of mourning following the death of a close relative
shlakh-mones: *Purim* gifts
Shma: central prayer proclaiming the belief in one Creator
shofar: ram's horn
shtetl: Eastern European market town with a sizable Jewish population
shuk: market
shul: synagogue
sider: prayerbook
simchah: celebration
snoek: South African fish (Afrikaans)
sofer (m), *soferet* (f): scribe
sofrim: plural of *sofer*
suke: booth
Sukes: festival of booths
takhrikhim: shrouds
talis, taleysim: fringed prayer shawl(s)
tashlikh: casting away one's sins upon the water (ritual performed on first day of *Rosh Hashanah*)
tate: father
taykh: river
tefilin: phylacteries
Tehilim: Psalms
tekiyah: blast of the ram's horn
teshuvah: repentance
teygl, teyglekh: cakes boiled in syrup
tikhl, tikhlekh: head scarf; scarves

Torah: Scrolls of the Five Books of Moses
tsedakah: charity
Tsene-rene: Yiddish Bible paraphrase, which uses much Midrashic material (1622).
tsibele: onion
tsimes: dish consisting of potatoes, carrots, pumpkin
tsionistke: Zionist (feminine)
Umschlagplatz: gathering point (German)
vekhlerin: female guard who watches over corpse before burial
veldskool: bush school
vider: again
vidui: confession of sins
yad: hand
yarmies, yarmelkes: skull-caps
Yisker: prayer for the dead
Yivarechecha: May He (start of priestly blessing)
Yon-tev: Holy Day
yortsayt: anniversary of death day
zeyde: grandfather
Zhid: (Russian) Jew
zuntik: Sunday

Previous publications by Hazel Frankel
Calligraphy for Africa (Penguin) (1996)
Drawing from Memory (Poetry Collection; Cinnamon Press, U.K.) (2007)
Counting Sleeping Beauties (Jacana Media) (2009)
Memoirs: Our Stories; Our Lives (Chevrah Kadisha) (2010)
Shlomo's Journey: From Bedzin to Johannesburg (Private Press) (2010)

ADDENDUM ¹

Chapter One: Fram's Yiddish Poetry: Language, Tradition and Form

“Dedicated to the children of the first Yiddish Folk School in Johannesburg.”

‘Of Jewish Parents’

1 Of Jewish parents who were embarrassed
By Yiddish and were so estranged from *yidishkeyt* –
I have noticed you, dear children, for the first time,
And a holy flame has flared up in [my] heart ...

5 You sang out your joy in simple Yiddish,
And faithfully in contentment twirled the circle dance,
And the childlike singing rang out enchantingly,
For which I like you have forlornly longed for ages...

9 I have longed forlornly, and yet have I known,
That a holiness quivers in each and every breast:
– That Yiddish, so juicy on charming little lips –
From which they weaned you away, children, from infancy.

13 Pioneers have set out a bright path for you –
To lead you with spirits raised to festive days;
Then my joy welled up together with yours.
How happy I am, oh children, to rejoice along with you!

“Di kinderlekh fun der ershter yidisher folksshul in Yohanesburg-geheylt.”

‘Fun tate-mames yidishe’ (*Lider* 77)

1 Fun tate-mames yidishe, vos hobn zikh geshemt
Mit yidish un fun yidishkeyt geven azoy farfremdt –
Ikh hob aykh, libe kinderlekh, tsum ershtn mol derzen,
Un s’hot a fayer heyliker in hartsn zikh tsebrent...

5 Ir hot in yidish poshetn tsezungen ayer freyd,
Zikh gloybike, tsufridene in karahod gedreyt,
Un s’hot geklungen kishefdik der kindisher gezang,
Nokh vos ikh hob an elnter gebenkt vi ir fun lang...

9 Ikh hob gebenkt an elnter, un dokh hob ikh gevust,
Az s’tsaplt zikh a heylikeyt bay yedern in Brust:
– Dos yidish, vos es zaftikt zikh oyf lipelekh bakheynt –
Fun vos me hot aykh, kinderlekh, fun kindvayz on antveynt.

13 Pionern hobn oysgeleygt far aykh a heln veg –
Tzu firn aykh dermunterte tsu yon-tevdike teg:
Dan hot mayn simkhe oyfgebroyzt mit ayerer tsu glaykh.
Az voyl iz mir, o kinderlekh, tzu freyen zikh mit aykh!

¹ The Yivo system had been used for Yiddish. Hebrew words have also been transliterated using the Yiddish system. Punctuation of English text follows that of the Yiddish original.

Chapter Two: Fram's Diaspora Poetry

'I Yearn' ...

1 I long so tiredly for a piece of black, swollen earth
For autumn rains on the fields and for mud on the endless
road,
Where tired, soaked, late and forlorn horses trudge along,
Heavy with village sadness and packed with peasant toil.

5 I long for the Jews of the forests, pitch-dark like copper firs,
Smelling of the early scents of mushrooms and warm moss,
Who drag themselves home for Sabbath through windy
autumn nights,
Craving tranquillity from the heavy, exhausting week.

9 I long for the days when the orchards give up their bounty,
And the cellars are filled with their wine-like golden store,
And skies draw closer, stooping down towards the earth,
And the sun visits awhile, like a rare, honoured guest.

13 And then the moments become quieter, even more still
than empty orchards,
Even quieter than village desolation in the autumn-abandoned
field.

'Ikh benk' ... (*Lider* 89)

1 Ikh benk azoy mid nokh a shtikele shvartse, tsekvolene erd
Nokh harbstike regns oyf felder un blotes oyf endlozn trakt,
Vu shlepn zikh mide, tseveykte, farshpetikte, elnte ferd,
Mit dorfishn umet balodn un poyersher pratse gepakt.

5 Ikh benk nokh di yidn fun velder, vi kuperne yodles
farpekht,
Vos shmekn in friike reykhes fun shvomen un varemen mokh,
Vos shlepn aheym zikh oyf shabes durkh osyendik-vintike
nekht,
Un garn nokh ruiker shalve fun shverer, farmaterter vokh.

9 Ikh benk nokh di teg, ven es gibn di seder avek zeyer gob,
Un s'vern di kelers farfult mit a vayniker gilderner last,
Un himlen, zey vern alts nenter un lozn tsu dr'erd zikh arop,
Un zun kumt tsu geyn oyf a vayl vi a zeltener khoshever gast.

13 Un dan vern shtiler di reges, nokh shtile fun leydikn sod,
Nokh shtiler fun dorfishn elnt oyf harbstik-farlozenem feld.

And growing then in warm hearts a great, merciful God,
Spreads a mighty belief on a grey, silent world.

17 Then I believe ... then I believe together with hearts that
believe faithfully and piously,
Packed like autumn cellars with holy prayers,
Now, when I have lost those orchards, I long, alone and
silent,
For Jews of the pitch of the forest and the endless, muddy
ways.

Tsevakst dan in vareme hertser a groyser, derbarmiker Got,
Un shpreyt aza mekhtikn gloybn oyf groyer, farshvigener velt.

17 Dan gloyb ikh ... dan gloyb ikh mit hertser, vos gloybn
emunedik-frum,
Vos zaynen mit heylike tfiles vi harbstike kelers gepakt,
In teg fun farlozn di seder ikh benk azoy elntik-shtum,
Nokh yidn fun pekhike velder oyf soflozn, blotikn trakt.

‘My Departure’

1 The shirt – I still remember – my sister sewed it.
I know her tiny stitches, the careful seams.
She breathed her quiet sincerity and longing into it
While sitting alone for long, long evenings until late.

5 And after that my mother quietly made a parcel
Packed with oranges and sweets.
I remember, such a tiny woman in the autumn evening,
As she worriedly escorted me to the stretched-out, broad road.

9 My father stood tiredly with thin, long arms,
His white head bowed, without word and silent.
A bloody sunset burned in [our] hearts,
As a dark night separated us all.

13 And in that autumn night I left them alone,
A dry, sharp pain cut through my silent heart,
And many desperate tears we moan
Muffled by dismal loneliness we cry out desolately.

17 And here, in far off Africa, it is painful and hard
Wandering in a strange land filled with pure longing ...
My sister dressed me up in a nice-smelling shirt,
And mother’s tear accompanied me along the way.

Mayn opfor’ (*Lider* 14).

1 Dos hemd – atsind gedenk ikh nokh – mayn shvester hot
geneyt.
Derken ikh ire kleyne shtekh, di forzikhtike net.
Zi hot mit shtiler hartsikeyt un benkshaft es baveyt
In lange, lange ovntn farzesn zikh biz shpet.

5 Un nokhdem hot mayn mame shtil a pekele gemakht,
Dort pomerantsn ongeleygt un tsukerlekh farpakt.
Gedenk ikh, aza kleyninke in harbstikn farnakht
Fardayget mikh aroysbagleyt tsum breyt-tseleygtn trakt.

9 Mayn tate iz geshtanen mid mit dine, lange hent,
Dem vaysn kop aropgelozt, on verter un on reydt.
A shkie hot a blutike in hartsn zikh tsebrent,
Un s’hot a nakht a finstere unz alemen tsesheydt.

13 Un kh’hob in nakht in harbstiker farlozn zey aleyn,
Tseshnitn hot mayn shtume harts a trukn-sharfer vey,
Un s’hot a vildn shpar geton mit tremn a geveyn
Farshtikt in triber elntkeyt an elntn geshrey.

17 Un do, in vayter Afrike, iz veytogdik un shver,
Durkh benkenish gelayterter farvoglt in der fremd ...
Mayn shvester hot mikh oysgeputst mit shmekedikn hemd,
Un mame hot aroysbagleyt in veg mikh mit ir trer.

‘My Mother Sent Me off a Cushion’

1 My mother sent me off a cushion
A home-made greeting from yearning Lithuania!
Here in Africa, in the crowded concession store.
Oy, if she only had an inkling about it! ...

5 Through long days and sunny dawns,
I have cruelly curtailed and suppressed them,
And servile, content and patient,
I must serve dirty black customers.

9 I have now become so close to them,
Just like poor and suffering brothers,
Also just like them – more silent and tired,
I have already counted my nights in years.

13 Indifferent I count in silence each night
Like autumn flowers torn from the gardens;
My mother sent me off a cushion
The feathers gathered during white winters.

‘Mayn mame hot mir tsugeshikt a kishn’ (*Lider* 18-19)

1 Mayn mame hot mir tsugeshikt a kishn
A grus a heymisher fun benkendiker Lite!
Do in Afrike, in enger kaferite.
Oy, ven zi volt epes fun dem visn! ...

5 Mayne lange teg un zunike baginens,
Kh’hob akhzaryesdik farkirtst zey un farshnitn,
Un hakhnoedik, tsufridn un farlitn,
Kafers muz ikh shmutsike badinen.

9 Zaynen zey atsind mir nont azoy gevorn,
Glaykh vi oreme un laynddike brider,
Oykh azoy vi zey – farshvigener un mider
Tseyl ikh ovntn tsuzamen shoyn in yorn.

13 Tseyl ikh glaykhgiltik a shtumer yedn ovnt
Vi blumen harbstike fun gertener gerisn;
Mayn mame hot mir tsugeshikt a kishn
Durkh vayse vintern di federn gekhovet.

‘So What?’

1 So what, if I once lived in distant and silent Samara
And after that transformed I landed up alone on the shores of
Lite,
And now – in strange Africa, which smells of the sand of
Sahara,
Of dry, stony, glowing rocks, browned by the sun?

5 So what, if I were raised when the Volga overflowed its
banks,
And the songs that lulled me to sleep were those of bearded,
worn-out farm labourers?
And that my fate was linked with sadness of bloody moments,
Which became curdled in darkness, like the pus of open
abscesses...

9 So what, if I sinned in life the holy clarity of snow,
The copper autumn by the rivers, a drunkard heating the
winter?
And now on rusted soil, devoured by burning pain, –
The treasure of golden autumn exchanged for silver winters?

13 So what, if in the strangeness of Africa my suffering has
doubled in two,
The sadness in my heart is increased, the loneliness is
silenced ...
I know: as in times past, the days come and go and pass on,
And the silent days and nights collect and bind the years
together ...

‘Iz vos?’ (*Lider* 16-17)

1 Iz vos, oyb gelebt kh’hob amol in der vayter un shtiler
Samare
Un nokhdem megulgl gevorn aleytn tsu di breges fun Lite,
Un itst – shoynt in Afrike fremder, vu s’shmekt mitn zamd fun
Sahare,
Mit trukene zunen farbroynte un shteynerne felzn tseglyte?

5 Iz vos, oyb es hobn gehodevet mikh ven der Volges
tsegosene breges,
Un s’hobn farvigt mikh di lider fun berdike, mide ‘batrikes’?
Az s’hot mikh mayn goyrl farbundn mit troyer fun blutike
reges,
Vos zaynen gerunen in khoyshekh, vi ayter fun ofene
makes...

9 Iz vos-zhe, oyb ikh hob farzindikt baym lebn di heylike
klorkeyt fun shneyen,
Dem kupernem harbst bay di taykhn, dem shikern vinter
tseglytn?
Un itst oyf farzhaverte gruntn, fartserte fun brenike veyen, –
Di oytres fun gilderne harbstn un zilberne vinters tsebitn?

13 Iz vos-zhe, oyb s’hot zikh in Afrike fremder fartoplt mayn
leydn in tsveyen,
Fargresert di atsves in hartsn, der elnt farshvign gevorn ...
Ikh veys dokh: di teg vi fartsaytn, zey kumen un geyen,
fargeyen,
Un s’klaybn zikh shtile mes-lesn un bindn tsunoyf zikh in
yorn ...

17 So who cares any, for instance, if someone weeps,
brokenly,
If someone is filled with longing in the dark for the songs of
the Volga farm labourers?
And who cares any how severe a place it is, for example, if
clear dry words,
And painful moments ooze, like pus from open abscesses? ...

21 It's nothing ... it's nothing ... I know this; – the truth is
frightening for all.
The days as they have gone by, will again pass by into the
distance.
And I will still roam on wearily alone on dusty roads,
And still perhaps exchange Africa's desolation for twice the
loneliness.

17 Iz vemenen art es, a shtayger, az emetser veynt, a
fartserter,
Az emetser benkt in der finster nokh lider fun Volger
'batrakes'?
Iz vemenen art es, a shtayger, az hele fartrikenen verter,
Un s'rinen tseveytoge reges, vi ayter fun ofene makes? ...

21 S'iz gornisht ... s'iz gornisht ... ikh veys es; – der emes iz
shreklekh far eynem.
Di teg, vi zey zaynen gegangen, fargeyn veln vider in vaytn.
Un ikh vel nokh voglen a mider oyf shtoybike vegn on
keynem,
Un efsher nokh Afrikes elnt oyf topltn elent tsebaytn.

‘Perhaps’

(A fragment of a longer poem.)

1 “Heavy is the moment of parting,
That day becomes somewhat empty,
That time becomes hollow,
Those minutes sting and horrify ...
5 Will the longing always ooze? –
Will there on foreign shores
Arise happier days? –
Will one accomplish anything? ...
So will the same old question
Be put to me anew
In the emptiness of the world ...

9 Here I had to exchange
My new home for foreign distances
Yet again had to start anew.
The pain has become sharper
13 That heavy, blunt pain –
The last farewell of the last snow-day,
Suitcases, cushions, straps –
All signs of long journeys –
Entangled in parcels and string.
You know: – there is no going back...

19 I burned the bridges behind me.
Now one travels to new fortunes,
New fortunes looked for somewhere,
Perhaps work, bread and rest.
23 Maybe, maybe, who can tell ...
Endlessly everywhere lamenting
Great sorrows in every land? –

‘Efsher’ (*Dorem Afrike* Aug. 1949 21)

(A fragment fun a greserer poeme.)

1 “Shver iz di rege fun tsesheydung,
Yener tog vert epes leydik,
Yene sho vert oysgehoylt,
Yene reges shmartst un groylt ...
5 Vet di benkshaft shtendik rinen? –
Veln oyf fremdn breg
Oyfgeyn freylekhere teg? –
Vet men epes vos dergreykhn? ...
Ot der alter frage-tseykhn
Vert fun mir oyf s’nay geshtelt
In der pustkayt fun der velt ...

9 Do hob ikh ober tsebaytn
Naye heym oyf fremde vaytn
Vider fun dos nay gedarft.
S’hot der veytog zikh farsharft
13 Yener shverer, temper veytog –
Letster grus fun letstn shneytog,
Tshemodanes, kishns, rimens –
Alts fun lange rayzes simens –
Plonterst zikh in pek un shtrik.
Veyst: – nishto shoyn keyn tsurik...

19 Hinter zikh farbrent di brikn.
Itster fort men naye glikn,
Naye glikn zukhn vu,
Efsher arbet, broyt un ru.
23 Efsher, efsher, ver ken zogn ...
Halt den umetum in klogn
Groyser tsar fun yedn land? –

I am an old immigrant –
27 One must try, one must search,
And the hundred thousand shudders
With full and heavy fear
On my new, long way
Are not worth the effort ...
32 The world is exactly like your room:
Each day the owner
Can tell you to go – so what?” ...

35 “Once, sixty years ago
They came seeking happiness
On today’s famous reef.
They crawled in the dark depths,
Searching with big, greedy eyes
40 The gold that lured them,
Drew them like a magnet
From *kraals*, villages and from cities
The charlatan and careerist
The Jew, *kaffir* and Christian,
The great, wild riff-raff
Who had here stubbornly and bold
From the first lonely tent
So built a whole world,
And life delivered a blow
In light of great, bright day.

50 I personally believe,
That always under your feet
You must have solid ground:
Not be homeless like a dog,
Not to change every time
55 Your beloved mountain and valley,

Kh’bin an alter emigrant –
27 Darf men pruvn, darf men zukhn,
Un di hundert toyznt skrukhn
Mitn gantsn shvern shrek
Oyf mayn nayem, vaytn veg
Zaynen shoyrn nit vert keyn kimer ...
32 S’iz di velt punkt vi dayn tsimer:
Yedn tog der balebos
Ken dikh heysn geyn – iz vos?” ...

35 “Amol, mit zekhtsik yor tsurik
Iz men gekumen zukhn glik
Oyf hayntikn bavustn rif.
Men iz gekrokhn in der tif,
Gezucht mit groyse, zhedne oygn
40 Dos gold, vos s’hot tsu zikh getsoygn,
Getsoygn vi mit a magnet
Fun kraln, derfer un fun shtet
Dem sharlatan un karyerist
Dem yidn, kafer un dem krist,
Dem groysn, vildn eyrev rav,
Vos hot do ayngeshpart un brav
Fun ershtn elntn getselt
Azh oysgeboyt a gantse velt,
Un s’lebn hot derlangt a shlog
In likht fun groysn, heln tog.

50 Ikh perzenlekh halt gevis,
Az tomid unter dayne fis
Muztu hobn festn grunt:
Nisht zayn heymloz vi a hunt,
Nisht tsebaytn itlekh mol
55 Dayn balibtn barg un tol,

Your piece of earth, which is dear to you,
Should be your little horizon,
Your home, your surroundings and your roof,
Your own embarrassing language,
60 Your old neighbour next to you, –
His good or his bad door, –
Your tree, your grass, your forest and field –
For any treasures of the world ...
I insist, exactly like the tree
65 You must stay at your home, –
May it be small or big, –
Even if one pulls out the roots
To plant them in new places,
Then you can blossom fully,
Because, certainly, in strange places
You will remain unsustained.

72 And there, where you were born,
Live out your years,
There grow old and die.
As each flower has its colour,
Each person has his mannerisms.
77 Let's say – even if [you] suffered,
[You've] been alone amongst foes
Spent your yesterdays and your todays,
But don't wipe away the tracks
From there, where your swaddling was
In which your mother wrapped you.
83 Where familiar is the old bridge
Standing ready to welcome you
And homeliness and warm joy,
In hearty and in close surroundings,
In great celebrations and in mourning, –

Dayn shtikl erd, vos dir iz nont,
Zol zayn, dayn kleynem horizont,
Dayn heym, dayn svive, un dayn dakh,
Dayn eygene farshemte sprakh,
60 Dayn altn shokhn lebn dir, –
Zayn gute tsi zayn shlekhte tir,
Dayn boym, dayn groz, dayn vald un feld –
Oyf keyne oytsres fun der velt ...
Ikh halt gevis, punkt vi der beym
65 Muztu farblaybn in dayn heym, –
Meg es zayn kleyn, meg es zayn groys, –
Nor koym men rayst dem vortsl oys
Oyf naym bodn tsu farflantsn,
Dan kenstu opvelkn ingantsn,
Vayl, gevis, oyf fremder erd
Vestu blaybn nisht dernert.

72 Un dortn, vu du bist geborn,
Dortn leb oys dayne yorn,
Dort elter zikh un shtarb.
A yede blum hot dokh ir farb,
A yeder mentsh hot zayne zitn.
77 Zol zayn afile – host gelitn,
Host aleyn tsvishn faynt
Farbrakht dayn nekhtn un dayn haynt,
Ober vish nit op dem shpur
Fun dortn, vu dem vikl-shnur
Dayn mame hot far dir geviklt.
83 Vu heymish iz der alter brikl
Geshtanen oyfnemen dikh greyt
Un heymishkeyt un vareme freyd,
Un hartsikeyt fun nonter svive,
In simkhes groyse un in shive, –

In sorrow of silent mourners
In holiness of observant prayers
90 Prayed by older generations
By anniversary candles and bright candelabra –
Where grey, poor shacks
[They] enjoyed and celebrated weddings,
With satisfying, noisy circumcisions,
And where sweet Sabbaths were filled
With holy confidence –
96 Awaited through grey weekdays
To bless, like blessed bread
Until the quiet coming of death ...”

In tsar fun shive-zitser shtile,
In heylikeyt fun frumer tfile
90 Tsedavente fun alte doyles
Bay yortsayt-likht un hele menoyres –
Vu groye, oreme khalupes
Hobn zikh gefreyt mit khupes,
Mit zate tumldike brisn,
Un vu men hot shabosim zise
Farfult mit heylikn bitokhn –
96 Dervart durkh groye indervokhns
Tsu bentshn, vi gebentshtn broyt
Biz shtiln onkum funem toyt ...”

‘Once a Swallow Still Twittered on my Roof’

1 Once a swallow still twittered on my roof,
And from the house came the aroma of satisfying bread,
And in the stall the spring bore a calf,
And in the shop still rotted last year’s cabbage ...

5 All around, every step, each and every stride
Enjoyed the sun and breathed in happiness.
At dusk a mist fell on the river,
And with warm earth a whisper from the fields ...

9 And in the orchard the intoxicated lilac was filled with
longing,
And in the forest the moss was already dried out.
All the tables were bedecked with jugs and cheese,
And with warm bread for a happy week ...

13 And here in the cottage the abundance flourished:
Full milk pails, full gallipots of sour cream.
And the ploughed field were dipped in gold,
Which peasant hands blessed with sowing,

17 And the meadows were shaded with flocks of sheep,
And I half close my eyes against the bright light,
And I am seized by such contented sleep, –
Once a swallow still twittered on my roof ...

‘Oyf mayn dakh hot amol nokh gesvitshert a shvalb’ (*Shvalb*
67)

1 Oyf mayn dakh hot amol nokh gesvitshert a shvalb,
Un in shtub hot geshmekt mit tsufridenem broyt,
Un in shtal hot der friling geborn a kalb,
Un in kleyt hot gefoylt nokh faryoriker kroyt ...

5 Umetum, yeder trot, yeder eyntsiker shpan
Hot gekvoln mit zun un geotemt mit freyd.
Oyfn taykh iz gefaln farnakht a tuman,
Un mit varemer erd hot fun felder geveyt ...

9 Un in sod hot gebenkt der farshikerter bez,
Un in vald iz shoyn trukn gevorn der mokh.
Ale tishn gegreyt mit ladishes un kez,
Un mit varemen broyt oyf a gliklekher vokh ...

13 Ot azoy hot in khate di shefe gekvelt:
Fule donitses milkh, fule sloes mit shmant.
Un es tunkt zikh in gold dos farakerte feld,
Vos gebentsht hot mit zriye di poyershe hant,

17 Un di lonkes bashotn mit tsheredes shof,
Un di oygn fun likht ikh farzhmure oyf halb,
Un es khapt mikh arum aza gliklekher shlof, –
Oyf mayn dakh hot amol nokh gesvitshert a shvalb ...

‘For What Shall I Go?’

1 Why should I leave and where shall I go,
When my options have been shortened,
And when the places have been limited,
I don’t know what I’ll get in place of my loneliness.

5 Perhaps I shall still find rest some place,
And a dawn will still spray with joy;
But perhaps it will hurt more and ever more strongly
In distant places and empty spaces?

9 I know, there is nothing I’ll be able to prevent,
And everywhere there awaits the same suffering.
I know this for sure, there is nothing to believe in
But to carry on wandering with dry dust;

13 And carry on wandering on dark roads ...
Nowhere to go and no one to ask;
Nowhere to look in empty distances.
I don’t know what I’ll get in place of my loneliness ...

‘Nokh vos zol ikh forn?’ (*Lider* 24)

1 Nokh vos zol ikh forn, un vu zol ikh forn,
Az s’zaynen farkirtst mayne vegn gevorn,
Az s’zaynen gevorn farshnitn di vaytn,
Un kh’veys nisht oyf vos kh’veel mayn elnt tsebaytn.

5 Kh’veel efsher a mol nokh a ru vu gefinen,
Un s’vet nokh a shprints ton mit freyd a baginen;
Un efsher vet merer un shtarker nokh vey ton
In fremde merkhokim un leydike breytn?

9 Ikh veys, ikh vel keyn zakh nisht kenen farmaydn,
Un umetum vartn di zelibike leydn.
Ikh veys es, avade, nishto vos tsu gloybn
Un vandern vider mit trukene shtoybn;

13 Un vandern vider mit tunkele vegn ...
Nishto vu tsu geyn un bay vemen tsu fregn;
Nishto vos tsu zukhn in leydike vaytn.
Ikh veys nisht, oyf vos kh’veel mayn elnt tsebaytn ...

‘Two Fold’

1 From Russian expansiveness to Africa’s sadness,
From white deserts and gleaming snow –
To sunny distances of everlasting summer,
Oh, one feels the loneliness doubly!

5 And white longing spilt out on roads,
On bloody ground rusty and dissolved,
And short evenings extinguished like wicks,
Dried out by glowing suns ...

9 And dying sunsets – without the ringing of bells
With eternal silence ragged and wearisome –
With delicate yearning and bleak longing,
Like lonely and lost ships ...

13 And hearty songs of Volga priests
Records playing brightly here in lonely houses.
With constant longing for Russian ² paths –
Then the banks flow over.

Oh, Africa’s sadness with Russia’s made poorer,
17 The loneliness of keeping quiet in bloody pain –
In drunken nights of the intoxicated south
Here one feel the loneliness twice over ...

‘In tsveyen’ (*Lider 7*)

1 Fun rusisher rakhves tsu Afrikes umet,
Fun vayse midboryes un glimike shneyen –
Tsu zunike vayten fun eybikn zumer,
O, filt men zikh elnt in tsveyen!

5 Un benkenish vayse oyf vegn tsegosn,
Oyf blutike gruntn farzhavert tserunen,
Un ovntn kurtse vi knoytn farloshn,
Fartriknt fun gliike zunen ...

9 Un goysese shkies – on glokn-geklangen
Mit eybiker shtilkeyt un langvayl tsetrifn –
Mit benkenish tsarter un tribe farlangen,
Vi elnt-farblonzhete shifn ...

13 Un hartsike lider fun Volger galakhn
Tsezign do rekords in eynzame shtiber.
Mit eybikn benken fun rusishn shlyakhn –
Dan shvimen di breges ariber.

O, Afrikes umet mit Ruslands georemt,
17 Der umet fun shvaygn in blutike veyen –
In shikere nekht fun farshikertn dorem
Do filt men zikh elnt in tsveyen ...

² The Yiddish should be ‘rusishe,’ but appears as ‘rusishn’ in Fram’s original.

Chapter Three: Fram's Poetry of Landscape and People

'In an African Dawn'

1 It's a sunny and clear early morning.
Oh, what a bright, radiant sun!
And so, free of worries and cares –
A laying hen clucks somewhere,
5 And white doves fly up in flocks –
A flap, a beating, shadowy wings fanning the air,
And wine pours from green grapes,
And red watermelons ripen across the field,
And the air is drunk with ripening fruits.
10 A poem, a hum, a song of praise for the Creator
From soft butterflies, from beetles, from flies ...
And melody spreads far and wide –
Far across the fragrant haystacks, over bald meadows
And fields yawn and indulge themselves until satiated
15 With ripe rye, with golden wheat, with heavy *mielies*.
From rain and from dew spattered prayers
Dry up quietly on green meadow-lips,
And bits of sun-rays shred and screen and sift ...
Oh, it's good! It's sunnily bright. It tastes of white apples,
20 In drops of sun in the fresh, cool haze,
In blooming grasses, moist with dew ...
And in the distance scythes ring out loud:
– A ring, a jump, a dance on firm ground,
Warmed on sweaty herbs,
25 And there sprays out an earthy joy from underneath.
And deep skies have compassion for the earth: –
A smudge, an outpouring, a radiance of a thousand suns!

'In an Afrikaner baginen' (*Lider* 74-76)

1 S'iz zunik un s'iz loyter der frimorgn.
Ekh, vos hele, shtralndike zun!
Un azoy bafrayt fun dayges un fun zorgn –
Kvoktshet ergets-vu a leygedike hun,
5 Un stayes-vayz in luft tsefliyen vayse toybn –
A fokh, a patsheray, un fligl shotndike veyen,
Un s'gist zikh on der vayn in grine troybn,
Un royte kavones in feld dergeyen.
Un shiker iz di luft fun tsaytikdike peyres.
10 A lid, a brumeray, a shire farn boyre
Fun tsarte flaterlekh, fun babelekh, fun flign ...
Un s'shpreyt zikh oyset vayt a nign –
Het-vayt, oyf stoygn shmekedikn hey, oyf lonkes plikhevate
Un felder genetsn un pyetshenen zikh zate
15 Mit korn baykhikn, mit gilderdikn veyts, mit shvere miles.
Fun regn un fun toy batrifte tfiles
Trikenen zikh shtil oyf grine lonke-lipn,
Un shtiklekh shtraln breklen zikh un zipn zikh un zipn ...
Oy, s'iz gut! S'iz zunik-hel. S'shmeckt in vayse epel,
20 In tropns zun, in frishn, kiln nepl,
In grozn bliike, in faykhte roses ...
Un vayt tseklingen zikh betsiber koses:
– A klung, a shprung, a tants oyf feste gruntn,
Oyf kraytekher tsepreyet un tsevaremt,
25 Un s'shpriptst-aroys a freyd an erdishe fun untnt.
Un tife himlen hobn zikh oyf erd derbaremt: –
A shmir, a shot, a glants fun toyznt zunen!

Buckets full glow and pour out on the meadows
 And vanish in little stripes, in rivulets, in threads
 30 And ring out in gold, in enchanted melody.
 And bright joy and delight well up in quivering breasts:
 – A song of praise, a lament, a hymn for the Creator!
 Early, in the void, the bushes pray
 And gnarled trees laden with fruit.
 35 Great is the silent joy in insects and with people,
 And one wants to shout and scream in rapture!
 Pray piously and worship and bless
 In the sunny, the brightened moments!
 Bluntly shout out with all your limbs
 40 The unbridled ³ joy, that gurgles up inside,
 And falls down to mother-earth beneath
 Confused, intoxicated with joy,
 And wallowing in the earth, with clay, with red soil,
 With earthy abundance, that pushes up from beneath,
 45 As blue heaven-splendour, which crumbles from above,
 And deafens one with one's own cry!
 And so that the cry carries far
 Far, over the heaps of hay, over sweet smelling fields.
 And resounds in the silence of the forests
 50 In the sunny, the clear dawns.

Tsegist zikh klorer shayn oyf felder gantse emers
 Un vert in shtrayfelekh, in ritshkelekh, in shnirelekh tserunen
 30 Un klingt zikh op in gold mit kishefdikn zemer.
 Un s'kvelt a hele freyd in tsapldike Brustn:
 – A shire, a geveyn, a loybgezang dem boyre!
 In kholel friikn mispalel zaynen kustn
 Un beymer knokhike balodene mit peyres.
 35 S'iz groys di shtume freyd bay shrotsim un bay mentshn,
 Un shrayen vilt zikh, shrayen fun hispayles!
 Frum mispalel zayn un davenen un bentshn
 In di zunike, di oysgehelte vayles!
 Temp aroysshrayen mit ale dayne glider
 40 Di freyd tsekhlinete, vos rizelt zikh in gufn,
 Un a fal ton tsu der mame-erd anider
 A tsetumltter, farshikert begilufn,
 Un zikh durkhmishn mit erd, mit leym, mit royte gruntn,
 Mit shefe erdisher, vos shpart aroys fun untn,
 45 Mit bloyen himl-shayn, vos breklt zikh fun oybn,
 Un zikh aleyn mit eygenem geshrey fartoybn!
 Un zol zikh vayt der oysgeshrey tsetrogn
 Het-vayt, oyf kupes hey, oyf shmekedike felder.
 Un ophilkhn in shvaygenish fun velder
 50 In di zunike, di loytere fartogn.

³ This word is not translated in my dictionaries.

'From Shop to Shop'
(A fragment of a longer poem)

1 A whole day like this, from shop to shop –
He went round begging for a job –
Hoping someone should give him a bit of work somewhere.
He was young and strong as iron
5 And yes, he still wanted to live,
There would always be a time to die –
And for what reason, for instance, should he die now,
And be forgotten by everyone in the world?
And simply for this reason, that he doesn't want to eat
anymore?
10 Eh-eh, a foolishness, he is not yet a dried-out skull,
That would have seemed plum crazy to him,
He will still earn his piece of bread anywhere he can ...
And yet he hurries around like this the whole day from street
to street
And his huge eyes cry out terrified with fearful need:
15 'Work, I want to work, my boss, I want a job' ...
But no one responds to his begging –
Giving him nothing more than a quiet shake of the head:–
'No there is no work here, understand? –No! ...
And once again he does not know where to turn,
20 He has already been to almost everyone,
He has seen already many good white people
And no one yet has taken pity on him in his hunger.
Presumably no one here needs his labour and his sweat.
Meanwhile the African noon was warming up,
25 The great sun has poured out on the earth. It's hot,

'Fun shop tsu shop' (*Dorem Afrike* July-Sept. 1984 29)
(A fragment fun a greserer poeme)

1 Azoy a gantsn tog – fun shop tsu shop –
Iz er arumgegangen betlendik a dzhob –
A shtikl arbet zol men im vu gebn.
Er iz geven yung un kreftik vi an ayzn
5 Un dafke hot zikh im gevolt nokh leb, n,
Tsu shtarbn vet er tomid dokh bavayzn –
Un tzulib vos, lemoshl, zol er dos shoyn shtarbn,
Un vern oyf der velt bay alemen fargesn?
Ot poshet tsulib dem, vayl er vil mer nit esn?
10 Eh-eh, a narishkayt, er iz nokh nit keyn oysgedilter sharbn,
Dos volt bay im geheysn glat a meshugas,
Er vet fardinen nokh avu nit iz zayn shtikl broyt ...
Un ot, er loyft arum a gantsn tog azoy fun gas tsu gas
Un s'shrayen zayne groyse oygn shrekevdik aroys mit noyt:
15 'Vork, ay vont tu vork, may bas, ay vont a dzhob' ...
Nor keyner ruft zikh oyf zayn betenish nit op –
Derlangt men mernit shtil a shokl mitn kop:
– 'Neyn, nito keyn arbet do, farshteyst?– Neyn! ...
Un vider veys er vayter shoyn nit vu tsu geyn,
20 Er iz shoyn do kimat bay alemen geven
Er hot azoy fil gute, vayse mentshn shoyn gezen
Un keyner hot zikh iber im a hungerikn nit derbarmt.
Mashmoes, keyner darf nit hobn do zayn pratse un zayn
shveys.
Dervayl hot zikh der Afrikaner halber tog tsevaremt,
25 Di groyse zun hot zikh tsegosn oyf der erd. S'iz heys,
S'iz likhtik oyf der velt fun ot der groyser zun,

The world is made bright by this great sun,
There could be so much that is good and appealing ...
Only of what benefit is this to him, for instance, from this,
When still the horror looks out from his eyes,
30 While the saliva dries in his mouth from hunger?
And he wanders around the city the whole day,
Like a black ball
And starving longs for a bit of simple *mielie pap* –
He does not remember the last time when he happily had it –
35 Ekh, how he would like to eat his fill of it now
Or where he could come by a little bit of it, oh, here's a taste,
To scoop up carefully from a hot tin with everyone
Rolling it in his black hands so it becomes as black as pitch,
And then putting it in his mouth with great pleasure ...

Es ken dokh zayn azoy min gut un ongenem un voyl ...
Nor vos kumt im aroys, a shteyger, fun derfun,
Az s'kukt fun zayne oygn alts aroys nokh der groyl,
30 Un s'triknt im di shpayekhts azh fun hunger in zayn moyl?
Iz kayklt er zikh iber shtot a gantsn tog,
Punkt vi a shvarster knoyl
Un benkt farkhalesht nokh a bisl proste 'mili-pap' –
Di tsayt gedenkt er shoyn nit ven er hot dos gliklikher gehat –
35 Ekh, volt er zikh veln onesn atsind mit dem tsu zat
Khotsh vu nit iz a bisele fun dem bakumen, ot azoy, a kap,
Dos shepn shporevdik mit alemen fun heysn blekh
Dos aynkaykln in zayne shvartse hent s'zol vern shvarts vi
pekh,
Un nokhdem leygn dos mit groys hanoie in zayn moyl ...

‘To the Black Man’

1 Do not be afraid and do not run away from me, black man,
Do not be afraid of the paleness of my face.
There is a choking pain in my heart as there is in yours,
And I wait for your light just like you ...

5 I understand you, and I carry with me like you
Your happiness and your silent pain.
And your mother was not guilty,
That the day gave you too much beauty.

9 And the years too were not guilty,
That dripped like drops of clear sun.
Who is guilty then that it happened
Your breast was smelted, so like cast iron?

13 Who is guilty, and why should this bother us,
That your skin is mirror-like and black?
– If within the suffering and slender body
And in you there also beats a blood-red heart!

17 And you carry within you like me the same suffering,
And you too understand, what bad is and what good ...
And if someone were to cut your body –
Also from black skin blood would trickle!

21 And when someone would touch your pain,
You would quiver with a dull cry;
And, surely, like me, you would feel
Deep in your heart such burning pain!

‘Tsu di shvartse’ (*Lider* 19-21)

1 Hot keyn moyre un antloyft nisht fun mir, shvartse,
Nisht dershrekt zikh far dem bleykh fun mayn gezikht.
S’klemt a vey oykh vi bay aykh bay mir in hartsn,
Un ikh vart azoy vi ir oyf ayer likht ...

5 Ikh farshtey aykh, un ikh trog mit aykh tsuzamen
Ayer freyd un ayer shvaygndike payn.
Un nisht shuldik iz gevezn ayer mame,
Vos der tog hot aykh geshonken tsufil sheyn.

9 Un nisht shuldik zaynen oykh geven di yorn,
Vos tsetrift hobn mit tropns heler zun.
Ver iz shuldik den in dem, az s’iz gevorn
Ayer Brust azoy geshmidt, vi fun tshugon?

13 Ver iz shuldik, un tsu vos zol dos unz arn,
Az di hoyt bay aykh iz shpigldik un shvarts?
– Az in gufim in farlitene un dare
Tsaplt oykh bay aykh a blutik-royte harts!

17 Un ir trogt in zikh vi mir di zelbe leydn,
Un oykh ir farshteyt, vos shlekht iz un vos gut ...
Un ven emetser zol ayer layb tsheshnaydn –
Oykh fun shvartser hoyt a rizl ton vet blut!

21 Un ven emetser zol ayer payn barim,
Vet ir oyftsaplen mit shtumpikn geshrey;
Un, avade, oykh vi mir vet ir dershpirn
Tif in hartsn aza brenendikn vey!

25 And, surely, also like us it would bother you,
That they punish you so painfully and hard,
And silent, and suffering, and grim
That in your eye too there burns a tear ...

29 Are they guilty, are they guilty, the days and nights,
That have scorched skin to black?
– That I cannot and do not want to forget you –
Your heavy, your oppressive need! ...

33 Do not run and do not run away from me, black man,
Don't be afraid of my pale face.
My heart too is clammed up with pain like yours,
And I am waiting like you for our light.

25 Un, avade, oykh vi unzh vet aykh fardrisn,
Vos me shtroft aykh azoy veytogdik un shver,
Un farshvign, un farlitn, un farbisn
Oykh in ayer oyg tsebrent zikh dan a trer ...

29 Zaynen shuldik, zaynen shuldik, di mes-lesn,
Vos farsmalyet hobn shvartser ayer hoyt?
– Az ikh ken nisht un ikh vil aykh nisht fargesn –
Ayer shvere, ayer shtikndike noyt! ...

33 To antloyft nisht un antloyft nisht fun mir, shvartse,
Nisht dershrekt zikh farn bleykh fun mayn gezikht.
S'klemt a vey oykh vi bay aykh bay mir in hartsn,
Un ikh vart azoy vi ir oyf unzer likht.

‘Matumba’

1 Matumba came from a distant *kraal*
He came to serve his white bosses.
Somewhere in a corner of Transvaal
His red, clay hut remained.

5 Matumba left three wives
To look after his cattle in the *kraal*,
All three had black bodies
And big breasts – almost right down to their knees ...

9 And their backs would shine
Like the hindquarters of precious horses,
When his wives began dancing
The earth shook beneath the soles of their feet.

13 Their bracelets, the foot bands, the wire
Twisted high around their ankles,
Would reverberate with each step
With the sound of metal shards and tin ...

17 And laughter mixed with crying,
In the intoxicated dancing of his wives,
Oy, then their white teeth shone,
And their naked bodies burned.

21 And actually Matumba needed nothing more,
He was happy with what he already had,
He knew that he loved his wives greatly
And he could sleep with them to his fill.

‘Matumba’ (*Shvalb* 85-88)

1 Matumba iz gekumen fun vaytn kral,
Er iz gekumen dinen zayne vayse balebatim.
Ergets-vu in a vinkl fun Transval
Iz gebliben zayn royte, leymene khate.

5 Matumba hot gelozn dray vayber
Tsu pashen in kral zayne ki,
Zey hobn ale dray gehat shvartse layber
Un groyse Brustn – azh bald biz di kni ...

9 Un di rukns bay zey flegn glantsn
Vi di hintns bay tayere ferd,
Ven Matumbas vayber flegn zikh aveklozn tantsn
Flegt mamesh tsitern unter zeyere pyates di erd.

13 Di brasletn, di fis-bend, di drot
Farviklte heykh biz di knekhlekh,
Flegn avektrogn itlekhn trot
Mit geklang fun di sherblekh un blekhlekh ...

17 Un gelekhter tsemisht mit geveyn,
Oystantsn flegn farshikert di vayber,
Ay, flegn damolst blanken zeyere vayse tseyn,
Un gebrit hobn heys zeyere nakete layber.

21 Hot take Matumba merer keyn zakh nisht gedarft,
Er iz gevezn tsufridn mit dem vos er hot shoyng gehat,
Er hot gevust az er hot zayne vayber shtark holt
Un shlofn hot er gekont mit zey tsu zat.

25 But Matumba also knew full well,
That his favourite wife was Sesula.
Ah, how her naked, black breast would tease him –
Her round belly, so firm, still as a maiden's.

29 For her a whole twelve oxen
He gave her father *lobola*.
And now she flourished with him
Like a rare horse in the stable ...

33 Everything would have been just fine,
If not for the customs of the whites –
But here came just like a bullet
A misfortune to tear him apart ...

37 Matumba did not know the value of gold,
Gold was to him worth exactly the same as *mielie pap*,
So that for three years he had not paid
His accursed tax to his white master.

41 So for Matumba only one thing remained,
Only one remedy he could he find:
To leave his old, homely roof
And go away to town to work there.

45 All three wives Matumba left at his home,
Oy, how bitterly he bade them farewell,
The clay seemed so heavy and abandoned to him
On the dry, distant, rust-coloured roads.

25 Nor dokh hot Matumba oykh gut gevust,
Az zayn libste vayb iz bay im Sesula,
Ekh, flegt im reytsn ir nakete, shvartse Brust –
Ir boykh azoy rund, azoy shtayf, nokh gor vi a bsule.

29 Far ir hot er gantse tsvelf oksn
Gegebn ir taten 'lobola,'
Un itst iz bay im zi gevoksn
Vi a zeltener ferd in stadole ...

33 Volt dokh altsding geven azoy voyl,
Ven nisht di minhogim fun vaysn –
Hot do ober punkt vi a koyl
Gedarft im an umglik tseraysn ...

37 Matumba hot nisht gevust dem vert fun gold,
Gold iz bay im geven punkt vi 'mili-pap' tayer,
Hot er shoyt ober dray yor gehat nisht getsolt
Dem vaysn bos zayn farsholtenem shtayer.

41 Iz far Matumban gebliben nor eyn zakh,
Eyn eytse hot er bloyz gekont gefinen:
Farlozn zayn altn, heymishn dakh
Un avekgeyn in shtot ergets-vu dinen.

45 Ale dray vayber hot Matumba gelozn bay zikh aheym,
Oy, hot er zikh biter mit zey dan gezegnt,
Es hot im oysgekukt shver un faryosemt der leym
Oyf di trukene, vayte, farzhaverte vegn.

49 And so three years soon went by
As he served his white bosses in town.
Tediously he counted his days there
And without respite he longed for his hut.

53 In town he needed nothing for himself
Only to pay off his tax the more quickly.
He had not sharpened his *assegaai* in so long,
And in [his] heart there burned a fire ...

57 And in the distance behind the empty bush,
There lay his desolate hut,
He would now have left on foot
On the empty clay roads.

61 Of his three devoted wives who knew,
What Sesula was doing there now,
May no evil happen to her, heaven forbid: –
He would ask the doctor for a remedy ...

65 And once he was bold and healthy –
He could then have ripped a lion apart,
Now he lies like a mangy dog
And collects scraps from the table of the whites ...

69 Oh, Matumba, Matumba, – it's really not good,
Your heart has become small and tightened,
And the blood in his veins seethed –
And his eyes burned with tears ...

49 Un ot zaynen shoyn bald dray yor avek
Vi er hot gedint in shtot zayne vayse balebatim.
Langvaylik hot er dortn getseylt zayne teg
Un on oyfher gebenkt nokh zayn khate.

53 In shtot hot er far zikh keyn zakh nisht gedarft, –
Bloyz optsoln vos gikher dem shtayer,
Zayn 'asegay' hot er shoyn lang nisht gesharft,
Un in hartsn gebrent hot a fayer ...

57 Dort vayt, ahinter dem leydikn bush,
Dort ligt vu zayn khate farlozn,
Er volt zikh atsinder ahintsu tsufus
Mit di leymike vegn gelozn.

61 Zayne heyse dray vayber avade, ver veys,
Vos es tut dortn itster Sesula,
Ir zol gor nisht trefn, kholile, keyn beyz: –
Er't betn dem royfe a sgule ...

65 Un amol iz gevezn er brav un gezunt –
A leyb hot er dan azh gekont dokh tseraysn,
Itst ligt er azoy vi a kretsiker hunt
Un klaybt breklekh fun tish bay dem vaysn ...

69 Ekh Matumba, Matumba, – s'iz avade nisht gut
Dayn harts iz gevorn kleyn un fartsoygn,
Un s'hot in di odern zayne gezotn zayn blut –
Un mit trenn gebrent zayne oygn ...

73 Then although he could have burst with heavy lament, –
He could on his own have slit his throat.
But no, he would run – run away home
As soon as the new moon would rise ...

77 Meanwhile he must still his bitter gall, –
He would ask the [witch] doctor for a remedy.
Who knows how many miles it is to his *kraal*, –
Oy, Sesula, Sesula ...

81 Matumba became shrunken with grief,
He became completely changed,
He has honestly served his white master,
Served him faithfully and patiently.

85 He simply could not understand,
Why his *missis* bothered him constantly,
Often he saw her alone at the mirror
Saw her in her room without clothes on.

89 Then he would be dusting in the forehouse,
And she – she would comb her hair,
Half-naked and alluring as a lion –
She was not embarrassed before him ...

93 And at times she would in a taut corset
Tightly lace up her breasts,
Then he would go in and straighten the bed clothes
Still warm with passion and lust ...

97 And then Matumba knew nothing at all, –
In front of him stood Sesula,

73 To zol er khotsh platsn fun shvern geveyn, –
Er volt zikh aleyn itst derkoylet.
Nor neyn, er vet loyfn – antloyfn aheym
Vi nor es vet oyfgeyn der moyled ...

77 Dervayl muz er shtiln zayn bitern gal, –
Er't betn baym royfe a sgule.
Ver veys vifl mayl s'iz der veg tsu zayn kral, –
Oy, Sesula, Sesula ...

81 Iz Matumba gevorn farshrumpn fun tsar,
Er hot zikh ingantsn gebitn,
Gedint hot er erlekh zayn vaysn har,
Gedint im getray un farlitn.

85 Nor poshet er hot nisht gekont farshteyn,
Farvos zayn 'misis' hot im gekimert keseyder,
Oftmol er hot zi baym shpigl aleyn
Gezen in ir tsimer on kleyder.

89 Dan flegt er in foderhoyz vishn dem shtoyb,
Un zi – ire hor flegt zi kemen,
Halb-naket un reytsnd azoy vi a leyb –
Zi flegt zikh far im gornisht shemen ...

93 Un tsaytvayz flegt zi in shtayfn korset
Farshnureven hart ire Brustn,
Dan flegt er arayngeyn farbetn dos bet
Nokh varem fun tayve un glustn ...

97 Hot dan shoyn Matumba fun gornisht gevust, –
Geshtanen far im iz Sesula,

It was only her breasts that seemed whiter, –
Breasts so firm and full ...

101 And once in spring by her door
He waited like an animal concealed,
He madly threw himself at her,
And he almost choked her ...

105 And so, when it became too late
To ask, to scream, to call,
There squirmed together then in bed,
Two naked bodies in a faint.

109 Two bodies entwined white, and black –
He forgot about his ‘misis,’
And after a while his bloodied heart
Sprang, twitched as in a death throe.

113 Not for long did Matumba have to wait
In the spring, while it was still blooming,
He could no longer sharpen his spears, –
He went quietly to the gallows.

117 And no one accompanied him to his death,
He could only cling to the wind,
Trembling, fallen, Matumba is dead,
Oh, oh, Sesula, Sesula!

Es iz mernisht vayser gevesn ir Brust, –
A Brust aza shtayfe un fule ...

101 Un eyn mol in friling hot er bay ir tir
Gevart vi a khaye farborgn,
Er hot zikh meshuge gevorf'n oyf ir
Un hot zi shir-shir nisht dervorgn ...

105 Azoy, az es iz shoyn gevorn tsu shpet
Tsu betn, tsu shrayen, tsu rufn,
Es hobn getsaplt zikh damolst in bet,
Farkhalesht tsvey nakete gufim.

109 Tsvey kerpers tsemisht hobn vays zikh un shvarts –
Fargesn hot er fun zayn ‘misis,’
Un s’hot nokh a tsayt zayn farblutikte harts
Geshprungn, getsukt vi in gsises.

113 Nisht lang hot Matumba itst vartn gedarft
In friling, vos halt nokh in blien,
Er hot zayne shpizn shoyn mer nisht gesharft, –
Avek iz er shtil tsu der tlie.

117 Un keyner hot im tsu zayn mise bagleyt,
Tsum vint nor er hot zikh getulyet,
Fartsitert, gefaln, Matumba is toyt,
Eh, eh, Sesula, Sesula!

‘Matatulu’

A man.

A man nestled like an animal into the earth.
He lay stretched out in the hot bush,
He considered his limbs with curiosity:
“Ho, a rounded knee, a swift, muscular foot,
A sturdy hand – well and strong.”
From behind he touches his firm neck,
Poured from one piece like iron,
And his beating heart drinks with sheer pleasure:
Ho, how good, how warm is the great sun.
10 His naked body is shiny, fat and black,
Smearred with pure oil from aromatic plants.
A man. Just like a free animal he can now dance around.
He can jump around with gay abandon,
He can compete with the ostrich.
He feels his greatness. He feels like a child and young.
He has the strength of an ox, the agility of a giraffe,
And the monkey’s innocent intelligence.
Therefore here he owns the whole world.
20 He lies. His face is filled with a broad smile,
His chest – it heaves, it breathes and it swells.
It fills with warm, quivering joy,
He needs nothing more in the bush, no shoe, no garment;
His garb⁴ is the skin of a jackal.
His house – is a mud *rondavel*.
There lies his homely longed-for *kraal*
There the cluster of golden threads of the sun grows,
There the sand burns the big, dancing feet,
There it stinks of dung, of smoke, of sharp sweat,
30 That emanates from lowly huts.

‘Matatulu’ (*Dorem Afrike* Dec. 1953 17-19)

A mentsh.

A mentsh hot zikh getulyet vi a khaye tsu der erd.
Er iz gelegen oysgetsoygn inem heysn bush,
Er hot di glider zayne ale naygerik baklert:
“Ho, a runde kni, a flinke, shpirevdike fus,
A hant a kreftike – gezunt un shtark.”
Fun hintn tapt er on zayn festn kark,
Gegosn fun eyn shtik azoy vi tshugun,
Un s’trinkt zikh azh in freyd zayn tsapldike harts:
“Ho, vi gut, vi varem s’iz di groyse zun.
10 Zayn kerper naketer iz glantsik, fet un shvarts,
Bashmirt mit reynem oyl fun shmekedike flantsn.
A mentsh. Ot vi a khaye fray er ken zikh itst tsetantsn,
Er ken tshspringen zikh mit hefkerdikn shprung,
Er ken zikh mitn shtroys farmestn in gelaf.
Er filt zikh groys. Er filt zikh kinderish un yung.
Er hot dem koyekh funem oks, di flinkeyt fun zhiraf,
Un fun der malpe hot er ir naivn seykh.
Derfar farmogt er do arum di gantse velt.
20 Er ligt. Zayn ponem iz bagosn mit a breytsh meykhl,
Zayn Brust – zi vakst, zi otemt un zi kvelt.
Zi gist zikh on mit heyser, tsapldiker freyd,
Er bedarf do gornisht inem bush; keyn shukh, keyn kleyd;
Zayn beged iz di fel fun a shakal.
Zayn hoyz – on dort der erdisher rondavel.
Dort ligt zayn heymisher, zeyn benkendiker kral
Dort viklt oys di zun a knoyl mit gilderdikn bavl,
Dort Brent der zamd di grobe, tantsndike pyates,
Dort shtinkt in mist, in roykh, in sharfn shveys,
30 Vos shpart aroys fun yene niderike khates.

⁴ Instead of *beged*, the word *levush* is used in the version of the poem in *Shvalb*.

The great day is lethargic and unbearably hot,
 So hot that it almost sings the black flesh,
 The dryness burns until the coolness of the night.
 And he? He lies alone in the bush and thinks.
 He thinks about his beloved lass,
 Of her voluptuous, great breasts,
 That hang down heavily like cow's udders ...
 Ho, he thinks a lot in that sluggish heat,
 He thinks and dreams and dreams again ...
 40 His mind is still not sharp and nimble enough.
 He finds clear thinking difficult.
 And yet he is resourceful and clever,
 He scratches his low brow over and over,
 But relies the more on his sharpened intuition,
 Exactly like the lion, the eagle and the panther.
 Oh, the wild silent African bush!
 At night he finds his way by the blossoming stars,
 By day he senses his way across the wide open miles,
 He always recognises his *kraal* through the hot dust ...
 50 And as, once shot, his sharp arrows fly,
 When he keenly tracks his prey,
 When he pursues with his *assegaai* and shiny spear
 A quivering deer, that falls bloody into the thorn bushes.
 How great is the joy – a jump, a pulling, a tearing,
 He grabs the animal by its horns with excitement
 And drags it to his *kraal*, like a strong man.
 Oh, he knows himself well, the powerful Matatulu.
 He knows how to heed danger,
 And proud as he is, as proud as a Zulu,
 60 As proud as the lion – his Afrikaner neighbour
 That lies in the high grass and stalks the buck ...
 His bubbling triumph bursts out of him,
 Oh, the great, light, African day!

Der groyser tog iz foyl un umdertreglekh heys,
 Azoy min heys az smalyet poshet op di shvartse hoyt.
 Es brent di trikenish biz kiln oyfdernakht.
 Un er? Er ligt in bush aley n un trakht.
 Er trakht atsind fun zayn farlibter moyd,
 Fun ire tayvedike, groyse tsitsn,
 Vos hengen shver arop, vi bay a ku der ayter ...
 Ho, er klert a sakh in yene foyle hitsn,
 Er klert un dremlt ayn un kholemt azoy vayter ...
 40 Zayn markh iz nokh nisht sharf un rirevdik genug,
 Es kumt im on nokh shver dos seykhldike klern.
 Un dokh iz er far zikh hamtsoedik un klug,
 Er kortshet nokhanand zayn niderikn shtern,
 Nor mer farlozt er zikh oyf zayn farshpitstn khush –
 Punkt vi es tut der leyb, der odler, di pantere.
 Ho, der Afrikaner vilder, shvaygndiker bush!
 Baynakht gefint er do zayn veg nokh di tseblite shtern,
 Baytog dershmeckt er zayne trit oyf vayte oysgeleygte mayln,
 Zayn kral derkent er tomid nokh dem heysn shtoyb ...
 50 Un vi geshikt es flien zayne sharfe fayln,
 Ven er lozt girik zikh avek do nokhshpirn zayn royb,
 Ven er yogt nokh mit 'asegay' un blankn shpiz
 A tsiterdikn hirsh, vos falt farblutikt in di derner.
 Ho, s'iz groys di freyd – a shprung, a tsi, a ris,
 Er heybt di khaye oyf bagaystert far di herner
 Un shlept zi inem kral arayn dan, vi a gvar.
 Ho, er ken zikh gut, der shtarker Matatulu.
 Er veys zikh vi azoy tsu hitn fun gefar,
 Un shtolts iz er bay zikh, vi shtolts es iz a Zulu,
 60 Vi shtolts es iz der leyb – zayn Afrikaner shokhn
 Vos ligt in hoykh n groz un loyert nokhn bok ...
 Es shrayt fun im aroys zayn broyziker nitsokhn,
 Ho, der groyser, likhtiker, der Afrikaner tog!

II

Not far from that place is his *rondavel*.
 The sun still moves behind clusters of silvery cotton,
 It moves constantly, consistently, without end,
 Matatulu wakes up satisfied from his sleep,
 As the small monkey stirs in the branches,
 And hurries home, late.
 70 He is now laden with a heavy silence,
 He has rested in the *bushveld* like the tree.
 But now he feels how his stomach rumbles –
 The hunger growls in him like an angry dog.
 And becomes suddenly unsettled, weighed down,
 Still on the whole, he feels good, satisfied and well.
 The same, the great Matululu –
 Yet now he feels that something is happening within him,
 He pines deeply for his naked, exasperated maiden.
 Every animal in the jungle, he knows has his pair.
 80 Even the snake has found his wife here.
 Only him? A heavy curse lurks over him,
 There wells up an eager longing in his body,
 And the thought bothers him constantly, *lobola*.
 Her father demands for her from her groom fourteen oxen,
 From where can he get such riches?
 Since always he has grown wild like a lion,
 And suddenly he becomes saddened in the bush,
 So lonely, that it is as if his throat constricts ...
 He licks his broad lips with his fat tongue,
 90 Girds his broad hips with a thin skin,
 And alert and agile, he gives a gentle jump
 And bears himself like a deer, far away, into the wilderness.
 Meanwhile the nights in the bush follow new days,

II

Nisht vayt fun ot dem plats gefint zikh zayn rondavel.
 Di zun, zi viklt alts nokh knoyln zilberdikn bavl,
 Zi viklt nokhanand, keseyder, on a sof,
 Matatulu khapt zikh itster oyf tsufridn fun zayn shlof,
 Vi s'khapt zikh oyf di kleyne malpe in di tsvaygn,
 Un loyft oyf gikh farshpetikter aheym.
 70 Er iz itst ongelodn mit a shvern shvaygn,
 Er hot zikh oysgerut in 'bush-feld' vi der beym,
 Nor epes filt er vi es kitslt im in mogn –
 Der hunger hot in im tsereytst zikh vi a beyzer hunt.
 Un er vert epes mitamol azoy min umruik, tsetrogn.
 Hagam in algemeyn, er filt zikh gut, tsufridn un gezunt,
 Der zelibiker, der groyser Matatulu –
 Dokh shpirt er itster vi es kumt do epes mit im for:
 Er benkt gefערליkh nokh zayn naketer, tsereytster bsule.
 Ayede khayele in dzhungl, veys er hot zayn por.
 80 Es hot di shlang afile zikh gefunen do a vayb.
 Nor er? Es loyert iber im fun lang shoy'n aza shvere klole
 Es kvelt a glustenish a zhedne in zayn layb,
 Un s'matert im keseyder der gedank: 'lobola.'
 Ir tate fodert dokh far ir fun khosn gantse fertsn oksn,
 Fun vanet zol er nemen dos aza rekhush?
 Az shtendik iz er do a vilder vi der leyb gevoksn,
 Un mitamol es vert im epes umetik in bush,
 Azoy min umetik, az s'nemt im shtikn azh in kel ...
 Balekt er zayne grobe lipn mit zayn feter tsung,
 90 Fargartlt zayne breyte hiftn mit a dine fel,
 Un ongeshpitst un flink, er tut a veykhn shprung
 Un trogt zikh vi der hirsh, het vayt, in vildernish avek.
 Dervayle geyen oyf in bush di nekht mit naye teg,

And once again nights come with cool, thirsty moons,
Matatulu runs fast like an arrow from a bow,
He always greets the passersby with a *sakebona*,⁵
He swallows landscapes with fiery eyes,
And carries himself agily with light, dancing steps,
So that the soles of his feet barely touch the ground.
100 He runs excitedly to that big city
About which he had heard so many wondrous things.
He knows about everything, Matatulu, oh, he knows,
He will confidently find the distant city now,
And the sweat pours from him in hot pleasure.
Ho, he will now the oxen there,
He will work there, live no more like the wolf from prey,
There he will gather the *lobola* for his maiden,
And behind him gathers the thick hot dust,
Ho, healthy, young, strong Matatulu!

III

110 In the city, over time, Matatulu changed altogether.
The bush, the wide plains, spread out sunny and free, –
There he will never again dance his dances before the moons,
He curls into himself now alone in fear like a pursued animal:
–
He the great Matatulu, who competed with lions,
For whose strength everyone at the *kraal* was once afraid, –
Treated by his white employers like a common dog.

Oh, he soon wore trousers, it seemed, with a shirt, with socks,
And he also had many vests,

Un vider kumen nekht mit kile, durshtike levones,¹¹
Matatulu loyft geshvint, vi fayl fun boygn,
Di durkhgeyer bagrist er ale ‘sakebona’
Un shlingt shtokhim gantse mit tseglite oygn,
Un trogt zikh flink mit laykhtn, tanstndikn trot,
Az zayne pyates rirn koym vos on di erd.
100 Er loyft bagaysterter tsu yener groyser shtot
Fun vos er hot azoy fil vunder shoyn gehert.
Er veys fun altsding, Matatulu, ho, er veys,
Er vet di vayte shtot atsind a zikherer gefinen,
Un s’rint in heysn tayneg zaynem iber im der shveys.
Ho, er vet shoyn itster dort oyf oksn zikh fardinin,
Er vet dort arbetn, nisht lebn merer punkt vi der volf fun royb,
Er vet dort onklaybn ‘lobola’ far zayn bsule,
Un s’heybt zikh hinter im gedikht der heyser shtoyb,
Ho, gezunter, yunger, shtarker Matatulu!

III

110 In shtot hot Matatulu, mit der tsayt, gebitn zikh ingantsn.
Der bush, di vayte stepes oysgeleygte zunike un fraye, –
Dort vet er shoyn far di levones merer zayne tents nisht tantsn,
Er tulyet zikh atsind tsu zikh aleyn fun shrek vi a faryogte
khaye: –
Im dem groysn Matatulu, vos hot mit leybn zikh farmostn,
Far vemens gvure s’hot der kral amol der gantser zikh
geshrokn, –
Bahandlen zayne vayse balebatim vi a hunt a prostrn.

Ho, er trogt shoyn hoyzn, dakht zikh, mit a hemd, mit zokn,
Un vestlekh hot er azoy fil,

⁵ ‘Hello’ in Zulu.

And heavy uncomfortable shoes ...
 120 And yet, for long months he toiled in the kitchen,
 He finds his strange, womanly work so hard,
 He himself does not recognise who he is: –
 There he crouches – on the ground, a big man, a giant,
 And scrubs the playful floor repeatedly.
 He polishes well, he shines diligently so that it glows.
 So what? Will he accomplish anything with this when it is not
 his goal? –
 Here they give him food as if he were an invalid,
 So what? Is he weak and does he not feel well,
 Did he complain to anyone?
 130 Why do they treat him like a common dog:
 They shout, they curse him, they drive around, they chase,
 For any small thing – they reproach and they punish ...
 They do not know of his great pedigree,
 That once he could run agilely – even faster than an ostrich,
 And now? He feels uneasy even when he sleeps.
 Ho, they are bizarre these white people in the city,
 He can surely understand none of them ...
 He curled up into himself, like a mole in the field,
 And he remained quiet, silent and alone.
 140 He does his work well, carefully and patiently,
 He scrubs pots, he keeps the rooms neat, clean,
 He owes his masters, nothing, it seems,
 On the contrary – he always smiles with his white teeth
 And displays to everyone his slave-like servility,
 He is always ready to serve everyone,
 He had always gained from these a childlike pleasure
 That there rose in him such naïve joy –
 A slave. Long-suffering, silent, afraid, like a servant,
 His life seeps away so quietly, monotonously ...
 150 And in the deep, black African nights,

Un shvere umbakveme shikh ...
 120 Un dokh, khadoshim lange horevet er oyf der kikh,
 Zayn modne arbet vaybershe gefalt im azoy shver,
 Er ken aley n zikh poshet nit derkenen ver er iz: –
 Ot ligt er – oyf der erd, a groyser mentsh, a riz,
 Un shayert nokhanand dem shpilevdikn dil.
 Er shayert gut, er shayert mit hasmode es zol blankn.
 Iz vos? Vet er mit dem dergreykh n ven nit iz
 zayn tsil? –
 Ot git men es n im do kloymersht vi a krankn,
 Vosi? Er iz den shvakh, er filt zikh nit gezunt,
 Er hot zikh den far emets n baklogt?
 130 Farvos bahandlt men im vi a prost n hunt:
 Men shrayt, men zidlt im, men traybt arum, men yogt,
 Far yeder kleynikayt – men musert un men shtroft ...
 Tsi veys n zey den nisht, az s'iz zayn yikhes groys,
 Az loyfn flink hot er amol gekont – nokh flinker farn shtroys,
 Un itst? Er filt zikh umruik afile ven er shloft.
 Ho, zey zaynen vild di vayse mentsh n do in shtot,
 Er kon zey zikher keynem nisht farshteyn ...
 Hot er zikh ayngenuret in zikh, vi in feld der krot,
 Un iz gebli n shtil, farshvign un aley n.
 140 Er tut zayn arbet gut, farlit n geduldik,
 Er shayert tep, er halt di tsimern do tsugeklib n, reyn,
 Er blaybt di balebatim zayne, dakht zikh, gornisht shuldik,
 Farkert – keseyder shmeykhelt er mit zayne vayse tsey n
 Un vayzt far alemen zayn knekhtishe hakhnoe,
 Ayedern badinen iz er tomid greyt,
 Er hot dokh alemol fun dem aza min kindishe hanoe
 Es kvelt dokh dan in im aza naïve freyd –
 A knekht. Farlit n shvaygevdik, dershrokn, vi a knekht,
 Es rint dos lebn zayns azoy min shtil, ayntonik ...
 150 Un in di tife, shvartse, Afrikaner nekht,

Lonely, he starts to play on his harmonica,
He plays, for hours on end, an incessant melody,
Like the distant howl of a jackal,
Until sad and alone he became quiet in the night,
And dreams with longing of his *kraal* ...

IV

Therefore on Sunday Matatulu felt happy,
He rose early. The dew quivered still like tears on the leaves.
The sun had just begun to shimmer in glowing fragments
And pours out with full abundance on the earth.
160 That day he was free until the night.
He felt good. He wanted to cry out with pleasure,
He wanted to go forward far away
To that ridge, that unfurled over there so clearly,
Then he carefully took his bicycle out,
That shon, brand-new, nickel-plated, in the sun,
Adorned with all sorts of glassy lights, with great shiny
buttons,
Surrounding the decorated saddle,
And left in one breath for the plains.
He went like the wind, madly, demented,
170 In one minute and he cut through the long street,
Where he burnt plains spread ahead of him again.
Except that in his haste he always forgot his pass at home,
Even until today he could never get used to it ...
What is it? Why does he need that stupid paper?
That he needs to carry around the pass, the (bug) bear,
As if the elephant cannot move without it,
The lion, the crocodile, the buffalo-ox? – And he? ...
Why should it be worse for him than them?
Why should they always have control over him?
180 And like an animal he roars out his dark cry: –

Nemt Matatulu shpiln umetik oyf zayn harmonik,
Er tsit keseyder, shoen-lang a langvaylikn nigen,
Azoy vi voyen volt fun vaytn a shakal,
Biz vanent umetik er vert in nakht aley n farshvign,
Un dremelt ayn farbenkter nokh zayn kral ...

IV

Derfar a zuntog filt zikh Matatulu gliklekh.
Er shteyt oyf fri. Der toy oyf bleter tsapelt nokh un tret.
Di zun heybt nor vos on tsu krishlen zikh in gliderdike
shtiklekh
Un s'shit zikh oys mit fuler shefe oyf der erd.
160 Dem tog er hot far zikh biz oyf der nakht a frayen.
Es iz im gut. Fun tayneg vil zikh Matatulu azh tshshrayen,
Er vil zikh itst avektrogn het vayt foroys
Tsu yenem rand, vos hot zikh dortn hel azoy tsevikt.
Dan firt er forzikhtik zayn 'baysikl' aroys,
Vos glanst in zun vi shpogl-nay, baniklt,
Batsirt mit glezlekh kolerley, mit groyse, blankendike knep
Arumgezetst dem oysgeputstn zotl,
Un lozt zikh in eyn otem flink avek tsum step.
Er trogt zikh vi a vint, meshuge, oyver-botl,
170 In eyn minut un durkhgeshnitn hot er shoyn di lange gas,
Es shpreytn zikh far im shoyn vider opgebrente pleynen.
Nor in geayl fargest er alemol aheym zayn pas,
Er kon zikh nokh biz haynt tsum pas nisht tsugeveynen ...
Vosi? Vos darf er den mit zikh dos shtikl narishe papir?
Darf den mit zikh arumtrogn a pas der ber,
Tsi efsher ken der helfant zikh on dem nisht ton keyn rir,
Der leyb, der krokodil, der bufl-oks? – Un er? ...
Farvos zol er dos erger zayn far zey?
Lemay zol men im shtendik darfn hitn?
180 Un vi a khaye brumt er demolst oys zayn finstern

Ho, he can be good, he can be friendly and patient,
But when necessary, he can stand up against them strongly,
He could defend himself like the wild snake ...
That is how Matatulu stayed again in the bush,
Remained lonely, lay very long,
And again deep in himself secretly thought.
In the meanwhile the sun itself has become dipped in blood –
The first sign of a hot evening,
And for miles around the dryness rested.

V

190 Then he quickly became unsettled and hurried home.
He had spent the whole dusty, hot day ...
The wayfair burned with red, rusted clay.
But Matatulu stopped for a while in the ‘location’
There he has friends. He wants to chat a little –
With close friends it is another matter entirely ...
And once more he cannot part from them for a long time:
In town with his white bosses? – Ho, he suffers much,
He drags through his days tempered as from thick tar,
He scrubs pots, he cooks, he washes. Ho, a madness ...
200 And for his lass – he still does not have any *lobola* ...
Now suddenly Matatulu remembers his pass.
It is already late. The darkness becomes thick.
He sees in the darkness ahead a bad sign ...
He runs fast. The hot sweat pours from his face,
He wants the faster now to reach his night’s bed,
In the distance he sees the lights of the city spread out like a
net.
And here – he is already near. Only one more street ...
And suddenly, an order in the name of the law:
Where are you rushing, you devil? ... stop, your ‘special.’

geshrey: –

Ho, er ken zayn gut, er ken zayn frayndlekh un farlitrn,
Nor ven men darf, dan ken er groyzam shteln zikh antkegn,
Er ken farteydikn zikh vi di vilde shlang ...
Azoy iz Matatulu vider do in bush gelegn,
Gelegn umetik, gelegn zeyer lang,
Un vider tif in zikh fartayeter getrakht.
Dervayl hot shoyn di zun zikh ayngotunkt in blut –
Der ershter simen fun a heysn oyfdernakht,
Un s’hot oyf mayln vayt di trikenish gerut...

V

190 Dan vert er plutsim umruik un aylt zikh shoyn aheym.
Er hot a gantsn tog farbrakht a shtoybikn, a heysn ...
Es brent mamesh der veg fun roytn, zhaverdikn leym.
Nor Matatulu shtelt zikh op nokh oyf a vayle in ‘lokeyshn’
Dort hot er fraynd. Es vilt zikh im atsind abisl reydn –
Mit eygene iz dokh gor an ander zakh ...
Un vider ken er zikh mit zey a lange tsayt nisht sheydn:
In shtot bay zayne vayse balebatim? – Ho, er leydt a sakh,
Er tsit di teg zayne farhorevet vi fun gedikhter smole,
Er shayert tep, er kokht, er vasht. Ho, a meshugas ...
200 Un far zayn moyd – er hot nokh alts nisht keyn ‘lobola’ ...
Nor do dermont zikh plutsim Matatulu on zayn pas.
Es iz shoyn shpet. Der khoyshekh vert gedikht.
Er zet in finsternish far zikh a shvern tseykhn ...
Er flit oyf gikh. Es rint der heyser shveys fun zayn gezikht,
Er vil vos gikher itst zayn nakhtleger dergreykhn,
Fun vaytn zet er shoyn di likht fun shtot tsheshpreyte vi
a nets.
Un ot – er iz shoyn nont. Sakhakl nokh eyn gesl ...
Un plutsim, a bafel in nomen fun gezets:
Vu flitstu, tayvel eyner? ... shtey, dayn ‘speshl.’

210 And confused Matatulu falls to the ground,
He feels a strong, oppressive hand on him.
Hot blood rushes to his head:
He, trapped like a skunk here in his own land?
Oh, no. He cannot endure the shame.
And like a provoked lion he tears himself away.
They chase him as if he were a wild animal through the
streets.
In vain – his strong feet are still fleet ...
But suddenly – a bang. In the darkness a fiery shot rings out.
Matatulu's body falls to the ground just like a lion.
220 And slowly his bloody trouble pours out ...

V

So once did he chase after jackals
Near his quiet *kraal* in the silent bush
And carrying them, brought [them] for his maiden.
The last shudder of his dead foot
Oh the healthy, proud, young Matatulu.

210 Un Matatulu falt tsetumltter oyf dr'erd arop,
Er filt oyf zikh a drikndike, shtarke hant.
Dos heyse blut derlangt a shpar tsu im in kop:
Er, gefangen vi a tkhoir ot do oyf eygn land?
O, neyn. Er vet di bushe nisht fartrogn.
Un vi a leyb tsereytster git er zikh a ris.
Men nemt im vi a vilde khaye iber ale gasn yogn.
Umzist – es zaynen flink nokh zayne shtarke fis ...
Nor mitamol – a knal. In finsternish a fayerdiker shos ...
S'iz Matatulu oyf der erd glaykh vi a leyb gefaln.
220 Un bislekhvayz es gist zikh oys fun im zayn blutiker
fardros ...

V

Azoy flegt er amol zikh yogn nokh shakaln
Arum zayn shtiln kral in shvaygndikn bush
Un brengen zey tsutrogn far zayn bsule.
Der letster tsapl mit zayn toyter fus.
Ho, gezunter, sholtser, yunger Matatulu.

‘Farmers’

(A fragment of a longer poem published on the 10th anniversary of the Republic of South Africa).

At midday – there was a full room of guests;
The farmers dressed up in their best outfits,
With broad hats and hanging, huge arms.
The wives sat there listlessly
With bodies covered in fat,
With fat chins and full breasts,
So that it was difficult to move;
And the old gramophone played
Anew, perhaps for the tenth time
10 The same, the well-known waltz.
The women enjoyed so much
The pleasurable, authentic music
And tapped their feet,
And kept time with their heavy heads,
And they longed to go and dance!

The men looked on at this
And also enjoyed themselves good-naturedly.
They spoke in simple Afrikaans.
Told the news of the land,
20 And quietly spoke of politics,
And mentioned Paul Kruger once again:
– Now that was a brave man –
Today there is no one like him! ...
Those years are passed, yes, ...
What a pity, the English, they don’t leave us alone,
We will soon drive them from the country.
But no, Africa is steeped in their blood ...

‘Burn’ (*Dorem Afrike* May-June 1971 13)

(A fragment fun a greserer poeme aroysgegebn oyfn tsentn yortog fun der Dorem Afrikaner Republik).

Mit halbn tog – gekumen iz a fule shtub mit gest;
Di burn in garniters oysgeputst,
Mit breyte hit un hengendike grobe hent.
Di vayber zaynen do gezesn mat
Mit kerpers ongegose mit schmalts,
Mit fete geyders un mit fule brist,
Azoy, az shver gevezn iz tsu geben zikh a rir;
Un s’hot geshpilt der alter gramafon
Fun s’nay, shoyn efsher fun tsentn mol
10 Dem zelibikn, dem gut-bakantn vals.
Di vayber hobn ongekvoln azh
Fun der mekhayediker, emeser muzik
Un tsugetupet mit di fis,
Un tsugesheklt mit di shvere kep,
Un s’hot zikh zey gekhalesht geyn a tans!

Di mener hobn tsugekukt tsu dem
Un oykh zikh gutmutik farbrakht.
Men hot geredt in prostn Afrikaans.
Di naves zikh dertseylt fun oyfn land,
20 Un shtilerheyt geshmuest politik,
Un nokhamol Pol Krugern dermont:
Ot dos gevezn iz a braver man –
Nishto haynt nokh eyner tsu im! ...
Fargangen zaynen yene yorn, yo ...
A shod ... di Englender, zey lozn nit tsuru,
Me vet zey bald shoyn gor aroystraybn fun land.
Nor neyn, s’iz Afrike batrift mit zeyer blut ...

And now there are many of them here.
 They all remember that time,
 30 When there was a wilderness around.
 And if sometimes a farmer would bring a guest
 To his farm –
 It really lasted many days ...
 One went on, one continued, and the dirt road never ended.
 “Where is the place?”
 Someone asked curiously.
 “Up there” – Someone pointed with his hand:
 “It is near, just there. Can you see?”
 But had not yet seen anything,
 40 And many nights would pass ...
 But today it’s a different era.
 They could still do a lot.
 They could shoot the *kaffirs* like dogs ...
 And they would struggle still for their folk and language ...
 Surely they would still do something ... yes ... That is how
 the boers comforted themselves
 Sipped coffee from the shallow saucer,
 Listened with pleasure to the gramophone
 And enjoyed it very much.

50 The boss smoked a Dutch cigar,
 Offers them to his guests with satisfaction.
 They took his gift carefully
 With two huge fingers of the hand,
 With politeness and with appreciation, like something
 For which they had the utmost respect.
 And after that they examined it so well
 Licked the tip (of the cigar) with a wet tongue
 And he was really slobbering in the process,

Un itster zaynen zey faranen do a sakh.
 Gedenken zey nokh ale yene tsayt,
 30 Ven s’iz geven a vildernish arum.
 Un tomer hot a bur gefirt amol a gast
 Tsu zikh arop in farm –
 Hot dos gedoyert mamesh gantse teg ...
 Me fort, me fort, un s’nemt keyn sof afile nit tsum shlyakh.
 “Var iz di plats?”
 Flegt yener naygerik shoyn ton a freg.
 “Da – bu – u –u” – Flegt men im dan a vayz ton mit der hand:
 “Es iz shoyn nont, on dortn. Kan yey sin?”
 Nor s’hot zikh alts nokh keyn zakh nit gezen,
 40 Un oftmol flegt men opgeyn gantse nekht ...
 Nor haynt iz shoyn an ander tsayt.
 Zey konen shoyn a sakh epes vos ton.
 Di kafers vet men oysshishn vi hint ...
 Un me vet kemfn nokh far zeyer folk un shprakh ...
 Gevis vet men nokh oyfton epes ... yo ...
 Azoy hobn di burn zikh getreyst,
 Gezupt di kave fun der flakher shal,
 Zikh tsugehert geshmak tsum gramafon
 Un emese hanoé do gehat.

50 Der balebos farroykhert hot a Holender tsigar,
 Traktirt mit dem tsufridn zayne gest.
 Men hot genumen azoy forzikhtik zayn gob
 Mit tsvey fargrebte finger in der hant,
 Mit derekh erets un mit opshay, vi a zakh,
 Far vos me hot a gevaldikn respekt.
 Un nokh dem hot men dos azoy min gut bakukt,
 Derlangt a lek dem shpits mit naser tsung
 Un take zikh bagavert bay derbay,

And wiped the saliva from their lips.
60 Quite simply with the sleeve of the coat,
They drooled with enthusiasm in the aromatic smoke.

The pipes were exchanged at the same time
With the reckoning of expensive antiques;
And it became smoke-filled soon
With such a bitter, thick fumes
The whole enviable house.

That is how they all passed the time together
Companionably in the celebratory rest,
And nobody even noticed,
70 How the summer day passed,
Played out with such a tiring heat
Outside until the coming of the cool evening.

Un vishndik di sline fun der lip
60 Gants aynfakh mitn arbl pidzhak,
Hot men farkhlinet zikh mit shmekedikn roykh.

Di paypn hot men oysgebitn glaykh
Oyf ot dem khoshevn un tayern antik;
Un s'iz gevorn ongeroykhert bald
Mit aza bitern, gedikhtn tshad
Di gantse benkendike shtub.

Azoy hot men in eynem zikh farbrakht,
Gemitlekh in der yon-tevdiker ru,
Un keyner hot afile nit bamerkt,
70 Vi s'hot getsoygn zikh der zumerdiker tog,
Getsoygn zikh mit aza foyler hits
In droysn biz dem kiln oyfdernakht.

Chapter Four: Fram's Holocaust Poetry

'Our Martyrs'

1 For you, my brothers, I have rent my garment today –
The sharpness of the burning knife cut through to the body in
pain
Those black gallows still remain before my eyes
On which your death was changed into eternal martyrdom.

5 I see you still, you heroic martyrs, you walk towards the
sacrifice
With steadfast step, elevated in terror, illuminated with a
smile
As if a pious, radiant congregation of faithful Jews
Were passing by [on their way] towards God's holy temple.

9 I see you still, Jewish heroes, strung up because of lies,
In malice and hatred, and savage murder
In bloody peals of screaming bells
When the hangman fulfills his murderous task...

13 I see you still before me, you courageous redeemers,
Drowsy as if in sleep after a mother's suckling,
So quiet and clean, without wrath, without anger,
As if God would have kissed you with a divine kiss.

17 As if God would have sent you to live again forever.
Clearly I see you as through a transparent curtain.
Praying my people for you, observant and believing
And our greatest pride – now is your gallows.

'Unzere kedoyshim' (*Dorem Afrike* Mar.-Apr. 1969 17)

1 Nokh aykh, ir brider mayne, hob ikh haynt gerisn krie –
Dem sharf fun heysn meser bizn layb mit veytik ayngeshnitn
Es shteyt nokh far di oygn mayne yene shvartse tliye
Oyf velkher ir hot ayer toyt oyf kedeshe eybiker tsebitn.

5 Ikh ze aykh nokh, ir kedoyshim heldishe, ir geyt tsu der
akeyde
Mit festn trot, derhoybene fun shrek, baloykhtn mit a
shmeykhl
Azoy vi s'volt farbay a frume, shtralndike eyde
Fun yidn gloybike tsu Gots gebentshtn heykhl.

9 Ikh ze aykh nokh, giboyrim yidishe, gehangene fun sheker,
Fun sine un fun has, un khayishe retsikhes
In blutikn geklang fun shrayendike gleker
Ven s'filt der talyen oys zayn merderishe shlikhes...

13 Ikh ze aykh nokh far zikh ir mutike derleyzer,
Farshlefert vi in shlof durkh mamisher yenike,
Azoy min shtil un reyn, on tsorn, on gebeyzer,
Vi Got volt aykh gekusht mit getlekher neshike.

17 Vi Got volt aykh geshikt tsu lebn vayter eybik.
Gelaytert ze ikh aykh, vi durkh a loyterer yerie.
Mispalel zayn mayn folk far aykh vet frum un gleybik
Un unzer grester shtolts – iz itster ayer tlie.

21 So rest in your sleep, you Jewish heroes,
Sanctity envelops you as if it were *Ne'ila*.
Bereaved the world will still prostrate itself before you
And beg forgiveness of you for this death.

25 And you will remain holy among our people!
Oh, woe, that I am not one of that congregation!
With whom I would have wanted to share your destiny
And proudly walk together with you to the sacrifice.

21 To rut in ayer shlof, ir yidishe giboyrim,
Di kedushe hilt aykh ayn azoy vi tsu neile.
Farovlt vet di velt far aykh nokh faln koyrim
Un betlen farn toyt vet zi bay aykh mekhile.

25 Un ir bay unzer folk farblaybn vet ir heylik!
Oy vey, lemay bin ikh nisht eyner fun der eyde!
Mit velkher kh'volt gevolt zikh teyln ayer kheylek
In shtolts tsuzamen geyn mit aykh tsu der akeyde.

‘An Answer to the World’
(Introduction to a larger work)

1 I feel, I wear the yellow star once again.
In the distance there still billows the smoke from the lime-
kiln,
Where my father lived out his last *Shma Yisroel*,
Where my mother breathed her last breath of air,

5 Where brothers went to their death with resignation,
Where infants trod their quiet shaky steps
Enwrapped in moving, in motherly songs,
They would not cry out before dying – oh my God!...

9 And I still see today and still feel the hell
From the recent past of not long ago
When the lightest penalty was: ‘burn him’ –
That is the judgment – the hangman’s black voice –

13 They constantly killed and choked us, –
The greater the killing – the happier they are.
They did not care about the clear gleam of morning
The most appalling scream did not disquiet them...

17 Thus did the Jews go to the pyre –
From Warsaw and Paris, from Kovne and from Bonn.
Millions were drawn further, further
To black execution scaffolds ... oh, a whole six million!...

21 On this – the whole world looked on and kept silent,
Stood by indifferent with hands hanging at their sides,
And they left the dead lying in piles
And burnt them continuously, slaughtered and burnt...

‘An entfder der velt’ (*Dorem Afrike* July-Aug. 1971 50)
(Araynfir fun a greserer arbet)

1 Ikh fil, ikh trog oyf zikh tsurik di gele late.
Fun vaytn knoylt zikh nokh fun kalkh-oyvn
der roykh,
Vu s’hot zayn letstn Shma Yisroel oysgelebt mayn tate,
Vu s’hot mayn mame oysgehoykht ir letstn hoykh,

5 Vu brider zaynen tsu dem toyt farlitene gegangen,
Vu oyfhelekh geshtelt hobn in vakt zeyer shtiln trot,
Farviklte in hartsike, in mameshe gezangn,
Zey zoln farn shtarbn khotsh nit veynen – o mayn Got!...

9 Un kh’ze nokh haynt un fil nokh dem gehenem
Fun gornisht-lang fargangenem amol,
Ven laykhtste shtrof gevezn iz: – ‘farbren im’,
Dos iz der psak – dem henkers shvartser kol –

13 Hot men keseyder unz geharget un gevorgn, –
Vos greser s’iz der mord – alts freylikher iz zey.
Es hot zey nit geshtert di hele shayn fun morgn,
Es hot zey nit geshtilt der groylikster geshrey...

17 Azoy zaynen gegangn yidn tsu dem shayter –
Fun Varshe un Pariz, fun Kovne un fun Bon.
Milyonen hobn zikh getsoygn vayter, vayter
Tsum shvartsn eshafot... oy, gantse zeks milyon!...

21 Oyf dem – di gantse velt gekukt hot un geshvign,
Geshtanen glaykhgiltik mit aropgelozte hent,
Un meysim kupesvayz hot men gelozn lign
Un nokhanand gebrent, geshokhtn un gebrent ...

25 Until a miracle redeemed us, freed us,
An outstretched hand appeared.
With hope and with comfort, with renewed visions
It took us boldly back to our land.

29 Those concealed in towns and villages,
Who were protected from the murderous sword –
Proudly went with prayers pious and divine
Saved from death – settled our land.

33 And here it happened – they began to build,
Each one wanting to live their life in joy...
Earth became moist, made fruitful by the dew,
Which each tree and blossom absorbed.

37 And there rose to life a people, ploughmen and sowers,
They tended sheep, they cut bread
And Jews from afar, like through the desert wanderers –
Stopped fearing death.

41 This is now their home; they will defend it,
Like heroes they are ready – with their sweat and blood
And should it thunder and blaze and flash –
No one will be able to contain their courage...

45 The peaceful fields began to blossom,
In great brightness the day has arrived,
The brightness of being, the radiance of Zion
Healed is our wound, silenced is our lament ...

25 Biz vanen s'hot a nes unz oysgeleyzt, bafrayte,
Es hot bavizn zikh an oysgeshtrekte hant.
Mit hofn un mit treyst, mit zeungen banayte
Zi hot unz drayst gefirt tsurik tsu unzer land.

29 Di oysbahaltene in derfer un in shtetlekh,
Vos oysgehit zey hobn zikh fun merderisher shverd –
Gegangen zaynen shtolts mit tfiles frum un getlekh
Geratevet fun toyt – bazetsn unzer erd.

33 Un do iz dos geshen – men hot genumen boyen,
S'hot yederer gevolt zikh oyslebn in freyd...
S'iz erd gevorn faykht, bafrukhpert fun di toyen,
Vos aynghezapt hot zat do yeder boym un kveyt.

37 S'hot oyfgelebt a folk fun akerer un zeyer,
Men hot gepashet shof, men hot geshnitn broyt
Un yidn fun der vayt, vi durkhn midber-geyer –
Zikh oyfgehert tsu shrekn hobn farn toyt.

41 Dos iz dokh zeyer heym, zey veln zikh bashitsn,
Vi heldn zaynen greyt – mit zeyer shveys un blut
Un zol es dunern un flakern un blitsn –
S'vet keyner ayntsoymen nit kenen zeyer mut...

45 Di felder fridlekhe genumen hobn blien,
Mit groyser likhtikeyt gekumen iz der tog,
Di likhtikeyt fun zayn, di oysshtralong fun Tsien,
Geheylt hot unzer vund, geshtilt hot unzer klog...

49 This is how we felt, this how we understood it:
The fig tree will grow restfully at your door.
Here we will remain, we will not depart from here,
From this place now we will never move.

53 The remnant of a people, the remaining survivors
Will grow back and soothe the catastrophe...
And heavens above us looked down delighted
With Sabbath-like rest after the toil of the week ...

49 Azoy hot men gefilt, azoy hot men farshtanen:
Der faygnboym in ru vet vaksn bay dayn tir.
Men vet shoyn blaybn do, men vet nit geyn fun danen,
Men vet zikh funem ort atsind nit ton keyn rir.

53 Di reshtlekh fun a folk, der iberblayb fun pleyte
Vet opvaksn tsurik un lindern dem brokh...
Un himlen iber unz gekukt hobn derfreyte
Mit shabesdiker ru oyf pratse fun der vokh...

‘The Last Chapter’

(Fragment of the poem, as read by Reuven Zygelbaum at the Fram evening convened by the Jewish Trust in honour of Dovid Fram’s 80th birthday)

1 It happened a long time ago, once, not now:
A Jew came along the road all sweaty
On one sunny *Tamuz* day.
The earth was flooded with flames
Of golden heat and gilded abundance
And then the earth spread her arms wide,
Like a mother, for the Jew,
Delighted with the guest, though exhausted.

A Jew arrived then quietly and wearily,
10 And such great joy fluttered in his heart:
The earth was fond of him and the heavens blue,
Here he could live in harmony with the Gentiles,
They would all acknowledge him, the ancient one,
He would not hide anything from them,
He would greet them from near and from far...
And horizons winked at him politely
With homely calm, respectable and worthy –
To him, to the Jew on Lithuanian soil.

On Lithuanian soil, how great the surprise!
20 The Jew implanted there a life in Yiddish:
Sabbaths, festivals, Havdolah ceremonies and Kidush!
Bar Mitzvahs and weddings, silver candelabra
And chalices and goblets for *simkhes* and *brises* –
For the birth of new, Jewish generations, –

‘Dos letste kapitl’ (1945)

(*Dorem Afrike* Jan.-Mar. 1954 12)

(Fragment fun der poeme, geleyent fun Ruvn Ziglboym oyfn Fram-ovnt, vos der “Jewish Trust” hot ayngedont lekoved Dovid Fram tsu zayn 80^{tn} geboyrntog.)

1 Geshen iz dos lang shoyn, fartsaytn, nit itster:
A yid iz gekumen fun veg a farshvitster
In eynem a tog fun a zunikn tamez.
Di erd iz gelegn bagosn mit flamen
Fun gilderner hits un fun gilderner shefe
Un breyt hot di erd ire orems tseefnt,
Azoy vi a mame, hot dan farn yidn,
Zi hot zikh derfreyt mitn gast mitn midn.

A yid iz gekumen dan shtil un farmatert,
10 Un s’hot aza freyd in zayn hartsn geflatert:
Di erd iz im lib un der himl iz bloy im,
Do lebn besholem vet er mit di goyim,
Zey veln im ale derkenen, dem altn,
Er vet zikh mit keyn zakh fun zey nit bahaltn,
Er vet zey bagrisn fun vaytn un noentn...
Un s’vinken derhoybn tsu im horizontn
Mit heymisher ru, balebatish mit verde –
Tsu im, tsu dem yidn oyf litvishe erdn.

Oyf litvishe erdn, vi groys s’iz der khidesh!
20 Der yid hot farflantst dort a lebn in yidish:
Shabosim, yon-toyvim, havdoles un kidesh!
Barmitsves un khasenes, zilberne menyres
Un bekhers, un koyses far simkhes un brisn –
Geburtn fun naye, fun yidishe doyres, –

And Sabbath songs sung at warm tables
With clean cloths spread out for Sabbath,
And candles in the candlesticks and *khales* ready prepared.
With white tablecloths, as if covered with snow.
And on Friday nights, the candles on the table,
30 They would burn with holy shimmer.
And Friday nights in Jewish homes,
They light up with belief in loving warmth,
Belief strengthened them and gave them courage.
And even when there were Jews who were bleeding,
When need cut into them like a slaughter knife –
Like a slaughter knife, a bloody razor,
They strengthened themselves and they suffered,
Suffered, on the soil of homely Lithuania.

Once a Jew arrived in Lithuania,
40 That Jew was my grandfather, my father,
Blossoming meadows stretched out
And fields of bread – overflowing, satiated –
All these wonders, all these figures,
Which lived a happy life there,
Now they are there no longer.
There spills out an empty lament,
A lamentation of crows that pick the bones
And now there all, all are missing – there is no one left
Except the murdered, the dead and piles of bones,
50 Without even *kadish*, without comfort, without mourners
My Lithuania, my homeland, how can I believe it,
That you slaughtered the Jews there in your midst,
You strangled them,
Now with your bloody fingers,
You choked them – your own children!
Your hands today are drenched with blood,

Un zmires tsezungn bay vareme tishn
Mit tishtekher klore oyf shabes farshpreyte,
Mit likht in di laykhter un khales gegreyte.
Mit tishtekher vays, vi mit shneyen bashneyte.
Un fraytig-tsunakhtn, di likht oyf di tishn,
30 Zey flegn tsebrenen mit heylikn tsiter.
In fraytig-tsunakhtn in yidishe shtiber,
Zey loykhtn mit gloybn un varemkeyt liber.
Es hot zey dos gloybn geshtarkt un gemutikt.
Un ven s'hobn yidn afile geblutikt,
Ven s'hot zey di noyt vi a khalef geshnitn –
Azoy vi a khalef, a blutike britve,
Zey hobn geshtarkt zikh un hobn gelitn,
Gelitn, oyf erdn fun heymisher Litve.

A yid iz gekumen amol in der Lite,
40 Der yid iz gevezn mayn zeyde, mayn tate,
Es hobn getsoygn zikh lonkes tseblite
Un felder mit broytn – tsekvolene, zate –
Di ale khidushim, di ale geshtaltn,
Vos hobn gelebt dort a gliklekhn lebn,
Zey zaynen shoyn dortn atsind nishto mer.
Dort trogt zikh arum itst a leydiker yomer,
A yomer fun kreyen vos pikn di beyner
Un s'feln dort ale, ale – nishto iz shoyn keyner
Bloyz meysim, harugim un kupes mit beyner,
50 Afile on kadish, on treyst, un baveyner
Mayn Lite, mayn heymland, vi ken ikh dos gloybn,
Az du host di yidn bay zikh dort geshokhtn,
Du host zey dervorgn,
Mit dayne farblutikte negl atsinder,
Du host zey dershtikt – dayne eygene kinder!
Di hent dayne zaynen mit blut haynt bagosn,

That blood you will never be able to wash away,
Your shame became extinguished within you
And your streets are rotten now with murder.

60 Here lies a bloodied woman's jacket,
Here you wear the shirts of our grandfathers,
Which you stripped from their bodies.
Here your wives wear now with impertinence
The jewellery of my murdered grandmother,
That you cynically buried at my lintel...
Here come the witnesses, here they all are:
A veil I see of a Jewish bride,
Here I see a fur hat, a Jewish hat,
And here is a white, a holy *kitl*.⁶

70 Here lies in desolation a silver goblet
With which my father still made Kidush...
Oh woe is me, Lithuania – here they are, here lie –
So many slaughtered: – my friend, my best friend,
My neighbour, my relative, my only sister...

I did not know, confused, what I needed to do,
But if I could now sharpen a knife,
Sharpen a knife like a razor,
I would cut the throats of your murderers,
My Jewish Lithuania, in burning revenge.
80 Revenge for the innocent Jewish women,
Revenge for children and mothers and fathers,
For desolate, empty Jewish shacks.
Revenge for old tortured grandfathers,
For entire annihilated Jewish communities,
That are gone to the black bindings of Isaac

Dos blut vest shoyrn keynmol fun zey nit farvashn,
Es hot zikh in dir dayn bizoyen farloshn
Un s'zaynen farfoylt itst mit mord dayne gasn.

60 Ot ligt a farblutikter vaybersher yakl,
Ot trogstu di hemder fun unzere zeydes,
Vos oysgeton hostu fun zeyere layber.
Ot trogn mit khutspe atsind dayne vayber,
Di tsirungen fun mayn gehargeter bobn,
Vos unter mayn shvel du host tsinish bagrobn ...
Ot kumen di eydes, ot zaynen zey ale
A shleyer ikh ze fun a yidishe kale,
Ot ze ikh a shtrayml, a yidishe hitl,
Un ot iz a vayser, a heyliker kitl.
70 Ot valgert zikh elnt a zilberner bekher
Fun velkhn mayn tate gemakht hot nokh kidesh...
Oy vey iz mir, Lite – ot zaynen, ot lign –
Azoy fil harugim: – mayn khaver, mayn bester,
Mayn shokhn, mayn korev, mayn eyntsike shvester ...

Ikh veys nit tsetumlt, vos ikh volt gedarft ton,
Nor ven kh'volt itst kenen a meser a sharf ton,
A sharf ton a meser azoy vi a britve,
Volt ikh dayne merder, mayn yidishe Litve,
Di gorgls tsheshnitn mit heyser nekome.
80 Nekome far koshere yidishe froyen,
Nekome far kinder un mames un tates,
Far elnte, leydike yidishe khates.
Nekome far alte farpaynikte zeydes,
Far gantse fartilikte yidishe eydes,
Vos zaynen avek tsu di shvartse akeydes

⁶ White garment in which a Jew is buried; also worn by many on *Yom Kippur*.

With holy prayers left half unsaid,
When their eyes filled with tears,
With autumn-like sunsets forever sealed.
And loudly now I would want to scream out,
90 That the world should recognise, the world should take
heed,
And then maybe it would not hurt so much,
And maybe my tears would not choke me,
And perhaps, perhaps my pain would then become lighter ...

Mit heylike tfiles oyf helft nit derzogte,
Ven s'hobn zikh zeyere oygn farklogte,
Mit harbstike shkies oyf eybik farshlosn.
Un hoykh volt ikh veln atsind a geshrey ton,
90 Di velt zol derzen, di velt zol
derhern,
Un demolt vet efsher azoy dokh nit vey ton,
Un s'veln nit shtikn azoy mikh di trenn,
Un efsher, efsher mayn veytok vet laykhter dan vern ...

‘Blasphemy’⁷

(Fragment of the poem ‘How goodly are thy tents, o Jacob’)

I My land, you have lain for centuries, as a presence
From my beloved, cared-for, longed for [religious] book.
When I would feel lonely, dried out and old,
And when I looked out at the world as if through a crack,
And my heart would fill with envy and with jealousy
To those friendly people, who gave me a little shelter
Gave somewhere to lay down my tired head for a while –
Then I would think of you, my holy *Tanakh*
Of you, and of my land and there – of those Jews, –
10 The Jews your winemakers, and peasants, and
blacksmiths,
The Jews your shepherds – Israels and Menashes,
Who would graze the herds of goats gently in the pasture
And hammer and cast ritual washstands and weapons.

My people, I thought then of an eye for an eye.
I kept your *Torah* for generations protected and learned.
I saw your ancient heavens with stars stretched out,
Your Galilee, and your Carmel, and the flowing Jordan.
Yet I was far away from you – many miles, millions,
And your hot earth was for me both cold and alien:
20 Your flax did not grow there ready for my shirt,
Your bread never nourished me, the hungry one,
Your wine I surely did not drink from your flask –
But always I wandered around alone and upset

‘Lesterung’ (*Shvalb* 127-129)

(Fragment fun der poeme ‘Ma toyvu ohalekho Yankev’)

I Mayn land, du bist far mir yorhunderter gelegn in geshtalt
Fun mayn farlibtn, oysgehitn, benkendikn seyfer.
Ven ikh fleg zikh derfiln elnt, oysgeshept un alt,
Un ven kh’hob oyf der velt gekukt vi durkh a shpalt,
Un s’flegt mayn harts zikh onfiln mit kine un mit eyfer
Tsu yene felker frayntlekhe, vos hobn mir a shtikl dakh
Gegebn vu nit iz avektsuleygn, oyf dervayl, mayn kop dem
midn –
Fleg ikh on dir dermonen zikh, mayn heyliker tanakh,
On dir, un on mayn land un dort – on yene yidn, –
10 Di yidn dayne vaynmakher, un poyerim, un shmidn,
Di yidn dayne pastekher – Yisroelim un Menashes,
Vos flegn fitern di stades tsign heymish oyf der pashe
Un hamern un gisn kiers un klezayen.

Mayn folk, kh’hob dan getrakht fun ayin takhes ayin.
Ikh hob dayn toyre doyles-lang bahalt un gelernt.
Ikh hob gezen di alte himlen dayne oysgeshternt,
Dayn Galil, un dayn Karmel, un dem fuln Yardn.
Nor vayt bin ikh fun dir geven – oyf mayln, oyf milyardn,
Un s’iz dayn heyse erd geven far mir i kalt, i fremd:
20 Dayn flaks iz nisht gevaksn dort gerotn far mayn hemd,
Dayn broyt hot mikh a hungerikn keynmol nisht dernert.
Dayn vayn hob ikh avade nisht getrunkn fun dayn logl –
Nor tomid bin ikh umgegangn elnt un farklemt,

⁷ The version translated here is of that published in *Shvalb*. Line 51, which is from the earlier version in *Dorem Afrike* (May-June 1965), is also included as it is relevant to the discussion of the poem.

And hundreds of years consumed my longing,
And I stopped looking for you in my wandering.

My land. With pain I clung to what once was.
I have absorbed your past into my hardened veins.
But I have become tired on my way of waiting for you –
My blood in my head the temples, no longer beat
30 My dream was no longer of Jerusalem,
In the morning I no longer turn my glance towards you,
My sword no longer girded my loins with courage,
Since I planted myself in new terrain.

Alas, I was perhaps brimful of sin and rebellion.
I no longer carried my old God in my heart,
I no longer in trepidation said *al khey*t,
I forgot I once also had a kingdom,
a king,
And in the lonely hours of calm dawns
I no longer said *ma toyvu ohalekho* ...
40 And you, my God you observed my sinful offence
And you never reminded me of your commandment and will,
For my *tfilin*⁸ have long been rotting in my *tfilin* bag!
And the *shel rosh* has become covered with a green mildew,
And my holy *talis* lay shamefully unused –
And you observed it all from heaven.
You watched and saw it all, and stubbornly kept silent.
And as if indifferent, none of it bothered you,
You neither sent your curse to me nor your *brokhe*.

Un s'hobn yorn hunderter mayn benkenish fartsert,
Un dikh hob ikh shoyn oyfgehert tsu zukhn in mayn vogl.

Mayn land. On dayn amol hob ikh zikh veytikdik geklamert.
Dayn over hob ikh aynggezapt in mayne odern di harte.
Nor mid bin ikh gevorn in mayn veg oyf dir tsu vartn –
Mayn blut hot shoyn in kop bay mir di shleyfn nit gehamert,
30 Mayn kholem iz shoyn nisht geven mer bas-Yerusholayim,
Tsu shakhris hob ikh oyfgehert mayn blik tsu dir tsu vendn,
Mayn shverd hot nisht arumgegurt mit gvure mayne lendn,
Vayl ikh hob oyf a bodn zikh arayngeflantst a nayem.

Oy vey, ikh bin efsher geven farfult mit zind un vidershpenig.
Ikh hob mayn altn Got in hartsn merer nisht getrogn,
Un kh'hob zikh keyn al-khey't fartsitert nisht geshlogn,
Ikh hob fargesn, az kh'hob oykh gehat amol a kenigraykh, a
kenig,
Un in di shoyn eynzame fun ruike fartogn
Hob ikh shoyn merer nisht gezogt ma toyvu ohalekho...
40 Un du, mayn Got, host tsugezen mayn zindikn farbrekhn
Un host mir keynmol nisht dermont on dayn gebot un viln,
In tfilim-zekl hobn lang gefoylt shoyn mayne tfilin!
Es hot zikh der shel-rosh badekt dort mit a grinem shiml,
Un s'iz mayn talis heyliker farshemt geblibn lign –
Un du host zikh dos tsugekukt tsu alts bay dir in himl.
Zikh tsugekukt un tsugezen, un ayngeshpart geshvign.
Un vi es volt dir glaykhgiltik shoyn keyn zakh nit gekimert,
Hostu dayn klole nisht geshikt tsu mir un nisht dayn brokhe.

⁸ Appears as *tfilim* in the text, but *tfilin* is the correct form.

Your grace no longer protected me,
the lonely one,
50 But you filled my life with grey weekdays.

Why did you keep silent, God, while I suffered,⁹
Why did you remove your hate and love from me,
Why did your divine presence not hover in my poor house? –
Or was my great sin alone the reason for this?
Why did you not approach them in misfortune,
Who honoured you with prayers and with praises,
And as a God of mercy, of zealous wrath
Did you not light up their black panes with some comfort?
After all, they were faithful to you through all generations,
60 They went piously in all your ways,
They in their despair lit *menoyres* to you,
And at the holy candles sang praises for you.
They washed for your name's sake many times,
Fasted for you God, like unhappy sinners.
So why did you savagely destroy those offspring,
Of your children who should have developed into a people.
You have them, your flock, not tended like a shepherd God.
You afflicted them with thirst and not given [them] drink.
You punished them believers and through your great awe,
70 You yourself took them to be slaughtered in Treblinka.
And this is the second time you have exterminated them,
In the desert you ordered that they all die out,
And now you have again ruthlessly enabled
That they should pile up the pyres with burning coals ...
Is this your attempt to prove once again
That your slaves still acknowledge you as of old?
Therefore you loaded the gas ovens with my brothers,

Dayn khesed hot mikh eynzamen shoyn merer nisht
bashiremt,
50 Nor host mayn lebn ongefilt mit groyen indervokhn.

Farvos hostu geshvign, Got, ven ikh hob zikh gematert,
Farvos hostu avekgeton fun mir dayn has un libe,
Farvos hot in mayn orem hoyz dayn shkhine nisht geflatert? –
Tsi iz mayn groyse zind aleyn geven far dem di sibe?
To vos hostu tsu yene zikh in umglik nisht darentert,
Vos hobn tomid dikh farert mit tfiles un mit loybn,
Un vi a Got fun rakhmim, fun tsoren a farbreuter
Nisht ongetsundn mit a treyst bay zey di shvartse shoybn?
Zey zaynen dokh geven getray tsu dir durkh ale doyres,
60 Zey zaynen dokh gegangen frum in ale dayne drokhnim,
Zey hobn dokh in zeyer brokh getsundn far dir menoyres,
Un bay di likht di heylike gezungen far dir shvokhim.
Zey hobn dokh zikh itlekh mol gevashn far dayn nomen,
Gefast taneysim far dir Got, vi umgliklekhe zinder.
To vos hostu akhzyesdik fartilikt yene zomen,
Vos hobn oyfgeyn in a folk gezolt fun dayne kinder.
Du host zey, vi a pastekh, Got, dayn stade nisht gefitert.
Du host gematert zey mit dursht un nisht gegeben trinken.
Du host geshtroft zey gloybike un durkh dayn groysn tsiter,
70 Hostu aleyn zey gor gefirt tsu shekhtn in Treblinke.
Un dos iz shoyn dos tsveyte mol, vi du host zey fartilikt,
In midber hostu oysstarn zey alemen bafoyln,
Un itster hostu nokhamol akhzyesdik bavilikt
Men zol di shayters onshitn mit brenendike koyln...
Iz dos a pruv geven fun dir, kedey tsu pruvn vider
Tsi s'veln dayne shklafn dikh nokh vi amol derkenen?
Derfar hostu di gaz-oyvns farfult mit mayne brider,

⁹ This line does not appear in the version of the poem that appears in *Shvalb*. It is included here as it is pertinent to the discussion in the thesis.

And pronounced your decree – to burn your flock?
Alas, God, now you have seen, how together they have gone
80 To the pyre-mounds once again your whole great
community,
And let themselves be gobbled up by the flames for the sake
of your name –
From where sighed the final *Shma Yisroel*.

Un hostu dem gzar aroysgelozt – dayn stade tsu farbrenen?
Oy, Got, ot hostu shoyne gezen, vi s'iz avek tsuzamen
80 Tsum shayter-hoyfn nokhamol dayn gantser groyser
kool,
Un zikh gelozn far dayn shem fartsukn
fun di flamen –
Fun vanent s'hot aroysgeshpert der letster Shma Yisroel.

Chapter Five: Fram's Biography and his Poetry

'Diamonds' ¹⁰

1 These brilliants, you see them, my child, do you see –
For me they were made and created for me,
By unwilling hands in the darkness of night,
While digging with greed and with a grasping eye,
Through evenings empty and unending days,
Exploring and sifting deep-down underground,
For me and for you they were sought and were found.
And now they are glittering, icy and cold,
With fear and with horror that are hidden and deep,
And holding you tight in their deadening grip.
10 The coldness of death is their glittering shine,
The frightening cold of unnamed horror,
Their fires that glimmer in many a colour
With green and with red, and with yellow and blue,
And sparkle on mornings with light like the dew,
On meadows in spring, or on blossoming trees,
The diamonds' fires are cold, and it seems
As if they were freezing in their own gleams,
But trembling with zeal I have guarded with care,
My treasures of stones, of the rough and the rare.
20 And trusting forever their power concealed,
I kept them for you as a gift and reward,
For them like a beggar my knees I have bent,
And even the devil I've praised as a saint,
Because they are powerful, precious and dear,

'Dimantn' (*Shvalb* 64-68)

1 Brilyantn – du zest zey, mayn kind oto-do? –
Zey zaynen far mir in a finsterer sho
Bashafn gevorn durkh hent umbavuste ...
Durkh leydike teg un durkh ovntn puste,
5 Mit girikayt sharf, vi di sharf fun a shverd,
Men hot zey gegrobn fun finsterer erd, –
Far mir un far dir zey gezukht, vi du zest.
Un itst zeyer glants, zeyer kalter, er prest
Keseyder mit tifer, farborgener moyre,
10 Er prest dikh un drikt mit aza more-shkhoyre,
Mit kaltkeyt fun toyter, fargliverter kelt ...
Er prest azoy shver in der fremd fun der velt: –
Nisht varem, nisht heymlekh, mit durshtiker kine...
Der glants fun brilyantn, – di fayerlekh grine,
Di fayerlekh royte, di gele, di bloye,
Vos tsindn zikh, dakht zikh, vos tsindn zikh toyen
Oyf lonkes, ven s'heybn on seder tsu blien
Un shvalbn, ven s'kumen di ershte tsu flien
Mit likhtike grusn fun freyd un yetsire, –
20 Dan zestu di dimantn kalt, vi zey frirn
In eygenem fayer, – in grinem un bloyen
Vos brent, dakht zikh, varem azoy vi di toyen
In likhtikn friling oyf likhtike grozn ...
Nor neyn, zeyer fayer du kenst nisht tseblozn
Far mide neshomes, – neshomes vi mayne,

¹⁰ Fram's own translation is used here (Fram Archives, Folder 11, 409-411). It is much shorter than the original Yiddish poem and forgoes line-by-line translation.

For whom all the world is bowing with fear.
Accounting for every and each of the gems,
I counted them quietly and many a time,
Counting with cunning and counting again,
And tenderly wiping off traces of dust,
30 And putting them back in their places with care,
I fed them with looks that were hungry with lust.
The stones were my thoughts, and my dreams through the
night,
And stricken with terror I held in my hands
The diamonds, burning, bewitched in their light.
Locked in by doors that were bolted and barred,
My fingers touched softly the diamonds all,
And stroking them, counting, alone in the hall,
While safe amidst safes of cold iron and steel –
Myself I got stronger and hardened and hard.

40 From weighing and sorting the wealth of my jewels,
The sight of my eyes becomes sharpened and cruel
Until after years that are passing, I feel
That hard like a stone I am growing myself,
And that in the world I am one and alone.
And lonely alone like a Shylock reborn,
I treasure my secrets with terror unceasing –
And everything evil seems sacred and pleasing,
Since burned is my brain with the treacherous jewels,
So great was my shame that I no longer felt shame.

50 Wherever I looked, it was always the same:
The mirrors and walls they shadowed and haunted,
Myself I saw only and nothing but me,
The winds that were blowing through evenings late,
They sounded as if they were weeping aloud,

Neshomes fartrakhte, un yunge vi dayne,
Vos zukhn un benken, un filn, un lekhtsn –
Neshomes farfulte mit veytok un krekhtsn,
Vos veynen in velt vi der elnter vint, –
30 Neshomes fun mentshn, vos lebn vi hint...

Brilyantn – far dir kh'hob, mayn kind, zey gezukht,
Far dir kh'hob a lebn zey zhedne geklibn...
Es hot zikh mir lignerish tomid gedukht,
Az du vest vi ale zey tsiterik libn.
35 Derfar hob ikh shtendik far dir zey gehit,
Ikh hob nor in dimantn finster gegloybt,
Far zey hob ikh shtil vi a betler geknit
Un oftmol afile dem tayvl gelaybt...
Vayl zey zaynen tayer un mekhtik, un shtark,
40 Far zey boygt di velt ir farmatertn kark,
Zey kenen bafrayen un kenen farshklafn,
Zey kenen tseshtern un kenen bashafn,
Zey kenen derhoybn un vider tsebrekhn...
Derfar hob ikh keseyder geklert un gerekhnt,
45 Barekhnt di shteyner tsum vifltn mol,
Getseylt zey, gekheshbnt farshtikt oyfn kol,
Farzorgt zey gevaremt in buzem bay mir,
Zay zhedne gekhovet, gevisht un sortirt
In tsimer bay shverer, farshlosener tir,
50 Mit finger fartsitert zey heylik barirt
Un gliklekh gevezn fun itlekhn rir...
Mayn lebn fun zey hob ikh bloyz nor getrakht,
Ikh hob fun di shteyner gekholemt baynakht,
Dershrokn gehit zey durkh loytere teg,
55 Durkh shoen, ven zun hot mit gold mikh geblendt,
Un tomid gevaksn iz greser di shrek,

So lonesome across the deserted dark lanes,
Yet neither in springtime the blossoming trees,
Nor heat of the summer, so golden and bright,
Nor autumn leaves' red, nor winter's snow-white
That sacredly covered the planes and the fields –

60 They long ceased to gladden my sorrow and grief.
And laughter I lost, and love and belief.
Collecting the diamonds cold and unceasing,
Myself in their fires I was steadily freezing.
For ages and centuries, deep with despair,
Have humans been digging for treasures unknown.
And clearing from darkness and cutting them bare,
They polished and washed them and made them glare.
And measuring, weighing, assessing their worth,
They heaped in the millions the money they brought,

70 By fooling themselves and deceiving their friends.
More brilliant than starlight and brighter than sun
The stones seemed to burn in their cold frozen hands.
Whoever they were who have touched them one time:
The dealer or agent, the miner or cutter,
The thief just released, and the man from the gutter,
The cheats and adventurers, hunting for chances –
They were all inflamed with the glimmering glances
That flowed from the cold and adored ornament.
Since then and forever they cursed their own fate,

80 And felt in their misery abandoned and lost.
In the winds that were blowing, in sunsets unfolding,
Sailed merchants from countries all over the world.
From far away cities of far continents,
From London, New York, from Antwerp and Rome,

Ven dimantn hobn bay mir in di hent
Mit fayerlekh kalte farkisheft gebrent...

Un ven kh'fleg ahinter farriglte tirn
60 Di dimantn harte mit veykhkeyt barirn,
Un gletn, un tseyln zey lang a farshparter
In tsimer tsvishn di ayzerne shranken, –
Flegt shtendik mayn harts vern harter un harter,
Un punkt vi a khalef flegt nemen dan blankn
65 Mayn blik der tsekokhter bay mir in der oygn.
Ikh hob di brilyantn getseylt un gevoygn,
Un kelter, un beyzer mayn harts iz gevorn,
Biz ikh hob derfilt durkh tsendliger yorn,
Az ikh bin gevorn ingantsn farshteynert, –
70 Un elnt in velt kh'bin farblibn aleyn nor,
Aleyn in der velt a farshtikter vi Shaylok
Hob ikh mayne oystsres dershrokn gehit,
Un alts vos s'iz zindik gevorn iz heylik,
Ven s'hobn di shteyner mayn moyekh gebrit ...

75 Ikh hob a farshemter zikh oyfgehert shemen,
Gezen hob ikh zikh umetum nor aleyn,
Nor groylik flegt vern, ven ikh fleg farnemen
In ovntn shpete fun vint dem gevoygn.
Der vint oyf farlozene, elnte pleynen
80 Far mir flegt keseyder dan veynen un veynen.
Tsi s'iz geven friling, tsi s'hobn geblit shoyn
Di karshn in seder bay poyershe ploytn,
Tsi s'iz geven zumer mit gilderne hitsn,
Tsi harbst hot di beymer geforbn in roytn,
85 Tsi vinter afile geyogt hot mit shneyen
Un vays un geheylikt farhilt ale shlyakhn, –
Dos hot shoyn fun lang-on mikh oyfgehert freyen,

From India and Egypt and China they came,
To buy and to sell and to bid and to game.
They traded and cheated and changed and exchanged ...
Allured and enticed by the glittering gems,
Their hearts were hardened and frosty still more,

90 With fires unreal and sparks that were lying.
But still they were changing and selling and buying
And stealing the carats from innocent scales –
And never they noticed those others who bore
With pain and with patience their suffering lot,
And swollen from hunger and touched with disease
Were unknown and wretched and forgotten and lost –
But they, they saw only the diamonds they knew,
With tears in their eyes that were glistening like dew,
In evenings late and in autumn belated.

100 For whom, my dear child, has your father with care,
For whom has he saved all that colourful ware,
And hoarded with warmth all the treasures, for whom?
For sinister women in harems of gloom,
For prostitutes lingering in the streets of the city,
For ladies in noble salons,
And for the pretty and young lusting harlots of old growing
men;
For hideous traders, for kings and for courts,
For bankers and barons, for courts and for lords?
With them he was trading and dealing – your dad,
110 For them he has always been bowing his head,
To them he has looked with the eye of a slave.
And cashing the dollars and pounds,
He has been the servant of murder, of theft and of sin.
But then at the end I was handing as gift

Ikh hob vi a mentsh nisht gekont merer lakhn,
Ikh hob nisht gekont merer gloybn un libn –
90 Di ale gefiln kh'hob lang shoy'n farlorn,
Di dimantn hob ikh nor kalte geklibn
Un durkh zeyer fayer farfrom gevorn ...

Durkh doynes, durkh gantse yorhunderter hobn
Fartsveyflte mentshn di shteyner gegrobn,
95 Fun finstere griber, fun erdishe tifn, –
Zey zoyber gevashn, geputst un geshlifn,
Gemostn, gevoygn, geshatst zeyer vert, –
Milyonen tsu zikh in di hoyfns farshart,
Vi yenem tsu narn keseyder geklert
100 Un zikh un dem tsveytn gebloft un genart ...
Der diment hot heys zeyer tayve gehitst,
Far zey hot er hel vi a shtern geblitst,
Un azh fun der zun hot er heyser gebrent
In zeyere karge, farfroyrene hent.

105 Un ver s'zol nisht zayn dos: – a soykher a shtayfer,
A mekler, a 'kliver,' fun Holand a shlayfer,
A dimentn-greber fun Afrike vayter,
A ganev, nor okorsht fun tfise bafrayter,
A shvindler a fremder mit khutspishe blikn,
110 Vos hot zikh gelozn nokh finstere glikn,
A hur fun Pariz, tsi fun London a dame: –
Bay alemen flegn di oygn tseflamen
In shayn fun di kalte, brilyantene tsirung.
Un ver s'flegt nor kumen mit dem in barirung
Flegt blaybn farshteynert, farklemt un farglivert: –
Di dame, der soykher, der tremp un der 'kliver,' –
Zey flegn shoy'n blaybn oyf eybik farlorn
In tsar fun farsholtene leydike yorn ...

To you, my dear child, all my wealth and my gains,
You did not accept them, but took them to pieces
And threw them away in the winds and the rains.
In vain have the miners been digging so hard
In darkness of night and in dangerous ditches.

120 In vain have the cutters been proving their skill;
In vain was I sharing in swindle and theft.
Alone in the autumn, alone I was left,
Alone with my stones so precious and dear –
And still I shall guard them with worry and will.
No longer for you I shall need them and hoard them,
And yet as before I shall weigh them and count them,
Not sharing the shame and the fear that you feel,
For people who suffer with love and with faith,
Believing in beauty and glory and grace –

130 It was so before and so will remain.
But you who rejected my gifts and my gains
And threw them away to the winds and the rains –
Relieved from the curse of the glittering stone,
The greatest of treasures in life you have won.

Zey hot shoyn in lebn keyn zakh nisht gekimert,
120 A khuts der brilyantener, bloylekher shimer,
A khuts vi in shteyn di bahaltene flekn:
Der ‘glets,’ der ‘pikey’ oyfn zoybern tovl, –
Far dem nor zey flegn zikh hitn un shrekn,
Azoy vi es shrekt zikh in shive der ovl,
Azoy vi es shrekn zikh tsaytike grozn
In harbst farn sharf fun di poyershe serpn.

Un vintn zey hobn in shkie geblozn
Un hendler fun Indye, fun Roym un Antverpn,
Fun Vin un Pariz, fun Nyu York, Argentine,
130 Fun London, Brazil, fun Egiptn un Khine,
Fun ale fir ekn, fun ale fir kantn, –
Zey hobn gekoyft un farkoyft di brilyantn,
Gehandlt, geshvindlt, geyogt un gelyaremt,
Un s’hot zey der diment gereytsht un gevaremt,
135 Gereytsht un gevarmt, un shtarker gefrom
Mit prostikn fayer di hertser di harte,
Vos zaynen alts kelter, farglivert gevorn
Durkh fayern falshe un funken genarte.
Un vintn, zey hobn in shkie geblozn,
140 Un s’hobn getsitert di tsaytike grozn
In blank fun di koses un poyershe serpn.
Un London, Pariz, un Nyu York un Antverpn
Gekoyft hobn shteyner, getoysht un farbitn,
Geganvet karatn fun erlekhe sholn,
Un hobn keynmol nisht bamerkt vi gelitn
Arum hobn mentshn fun hunger geshvoln,
Fun krankeyt tsegrizhet, fun veytog tsefresn,
In eygenem elnt farshtupt un fargesn –
Di mentshn, zey hobn durkh teg nisht dernerte

150 Gezen bloyz dimantn in oygn fartrerte,
In trern, vi toyen, vos vern farloshn
Fun shpetikn vint in a shpetikn osyen...

Un itster, far vemen, mayn kind, hot dayn tate
Gekhovet di vayse un bloye karatn,
Far vemen hot er zey gevaremt, far vemen? –
Far vayber fun tunkele, zate haremen,
Far zoynes fun shtetishe likhtike gasn,
Far eydele dames fun raykhe salonen
Azoy vi di hurm in nakht oysgelasn,
160 Far miese sokhrim, far melokhim un tronen,
Far kepsvayber yunge fun alte magnatn,
Far lordn, bankirn, un grafn, baronen,
Mit zey hot, mayn kind, dos gehandelt dayn tate,
Far zey hob ikh tomid mayn kop dos geboygn,
165 Geshlept zikh tsu zeyere shleser di zate,
Gekukt zey farshkluft vi a hunt in di oygn,
In zeyere simkhes hob ikh zikh bateylikt,
Geven a farmitler fun ganeyve un mordn,
Un kh'hob zeyer zind, zeyer tume geheylikt
170 Far funtn un dolers fun sokhrim un lordn ...

Un haynt, ven far dir kh'hob gebrakht mayn farmegn, –
Hostu im tshemishn in harbstikn regn,
Du host nisht genumen, du darfst im nisht hobn:
Umzist hobn greber di shteyner gegrobn,
Fun finstere griber, fun erdishe tifn,
Umzist hobn shlayfers zey gute geshlifn,
Umzist hob ikh zikh in ganeyve bateylikt
Un heslekhe tume in lebn farheylikt,
Atsind inem harbst bin ikh umetik eyner
180 Geblibn aleyn mit di tayere shteyner,

Ikh vel zey nokh hitn mit klem un mit veytik,
Nor du host avade, mayn kind, zey nisht neytik,
Du darfst zey nisht hobn, du vilst zey nit nemen
Du vest mit di dimantn mayne zikh shemen
Zikh shemen far mentshn, vos leydn un gloybn
In libe un sheynkeyt. Tsu zey zikh derhoybn
Hostu zikh gevis – nisht azoy vi dayn tate,
Vos hot nor gevoygn di shvere karatn,
Getseylt zey, gekheshbnt, gegloybt in zey heylik
190 Un durkh zey gelitn, geveytogt vi Shaylok,
Nor ikh vel nokh vayter di dimantn klaybn, –
Azoy iz geven un azoy vet shoyn blaybn,
Nor du host dem diment dem grestn bakumen –
Ikh hob dir gegeben, nor du st'nit genumen,
Ikh hob dir gegeben mayn gantsn farmegn,
Hostu im tshemish in harbstikn regn,
Bist raykher, avade, mayn kind, fun dayn tatn,
Fun yene farsholtene, reyne karatn ...

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