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THE SHORT STORIES OF AHARON APPELFELD

A Critical Analysis

by

Margaret Jane Meyer

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Ordination.

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

March 3, 1986

Referee, Professor Ezra Spicehandler

DIGEST

Until 1980 Aharon Appelfeld was virtually unknown to the American reading public. Some of his short stories had been translated, but few outside a limited group knew of his works. Since Badenheim, 1939, appeared in English, however, several other novels as well as some literary criticism have appeared in English. This thesis attempts to study and analyze Appelfeld's development as a writer through his earliest Hebrew works, his short stories.

Aharon Appelfeld was born in 1932 in eastern Europe. Deported by the Nazis in 1940, he spent the war years hiding in forests and among local populations. He arrived in Israel in 1946, studied literature at the Hebrew University, and began writing in the 1950's. His early works are highly autobiographical, concerned with the Holocaust and the fate of the Jews who lived through it.

Appelfeld's themes, in the early stories and still today, include the inevitability and irrationality of fate. Confronting one's past, coping with guilt, and accepting one's loss are the thematic motifs of many of the short stories. In addition, the theme of the wandering Jew occurs frequently.

The short stories show little evidence of character development, but Appelfeld creates certain "types" that are still found in his present works. He is concerned with very ordinary people trying to rebuild their lives after the

Holocaust, with children, and with women who often have an inner strength lacking in the men.

Appelfeld's literary style shows interesting development. He experimented with various narrative techniques, and tried several kinds of imagery, including some highly symbolic stories, before finding his present style, one that is seemingly realistic, but has strong overtones of the surreal, causing him to be compared to Kafka.

Some of the early works are obviously those of an untrained beginner. But within each of the first books are a few memorable stories. By understanding Appelfeld's background and early writings one can better appreciate his more recent, highly acclaimed novels.

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PREFACE

Until the 1980 publication of the English translation of Badenheim, 1939, the works of Aharon Appelfeld were virtually unknown to the American reading public. Although some of his short stories had been translated and published in other collections and periodicals, unless one was a serious student of modern Hebrew literature, one would have been hard put to locate Appelfeld's works or even recognize his name.

This all changed following Irving Howe's front page review of Badenheim, 1939 in the New York Times Book Review on November 23, 1980, in which Howe called the book a "small masterpiece" and referred to Appelfeld as "one of the most gifted writers alive today." The novel enjoyed a wide readership in the United States and within a year other Appelfeld novels began to appear in English translation, and thus were made available to the non-Hebrew reading public for the first time. The author was interviewed widely in the American press and his novels were reviewed in important American Jewish and literary periodicals. The vast majority of the reviewers, like Howe, had not only not read the novels in the original, but they had no knowledge of the author's literary background, his education and influences, or his earlier works and their effects on the newly

translated novels. As a result, many interviewers focused on Appelfeld's childhood years before World War II, and on what they wrongly perceived to be themes of self-hate by the author.

I had first been introduced to Aharon Appelfeld's works in the early 1970's in Israel, and was confused and concerned by American literary criticism of his "writings," which were actually based only on the translated works. As more of Appelfeld's works became available in English, and American interest in the author intensified, I became convinced that the non-Hebrew reading American public, especially the interested American Jewish public, should have some acquaintance with Appelfeld's early works. Thus was born the impulse for this thesis which is an attempt to study and analyze the early short stories of Aharon Appelfeld. At the end of this thesis, I have also appended a list of all those works by Appelfeld that have appeared in English translation, including some earlier stories found in periodicals.

My interest in Appelfeld's earliest short stories took on several aspects. I wanted to see how they relate to his later, more acclaimed works, and to understand the time frame in which he chooses to write -- why he chose a particular setting and when in his career he wrote about that time. His characters in the novels fascinated me; I wanted to study his creation of characters and themes in the

early works in order to see development and continuity and/or change as his career evolved. He has been acclaimed for his powerful, yet oblique manner of depicting unspeakable tragedy. I wanted to study the early works to trace stylistic developments and changes and to see if the early works influence the style of the later ones.

To have done justice to Aharon Appelfeld, the man and his works, I should have carefully read his entire corpus in the original Hebrew. Due to my own language limitations and the constrictions of time within which I worked, this was not possible. I therefore concentrated on Appelfeld's first three collections: Ashan, BaGai HaPoreh, and Kfor Al HaAretz, which together established the author as a writer of repute in Israel in the 1960's. I also read selected stories from Appelfeld's other two collections, B'Komat HaKarka and Adnai HaNahar, as well as all the works that have appeared in English translation.

Until very recently there had been almost no literary criticism in English on Appelfeld's earlier works. This lack has been rectified by the appearance in 1984 of Hurban by Alan Mintz, in which Mintz included a chapter on Appelfeld in his excellent analysis of Jewish literature of catastrophe. Mintz perceptively discusses several of Appelfeld's short stories, and his chapter is a major contribution to an appreciation of Appelfeld as a writer of the Holocaust.

In order to understand how Israeli writers accepted Appelfeld, both as a literary and national phenomenon, I read many contemporary reviews of his works in the Israeli press. The literary criticism of Gershon Shaked and Hillel Barzel were extremely helpful as well.

Working in the literature of another language creates myriads of problems when the writer is not completely at home in that language. I have tried to be faithful to the original Hebrew when translating and quoting from the stories, but am fully aware of the impossibility of capturing the nuances of a language in translation. All translations are my own; transliterations are also mine, following the guidelines listed in the Encyclopedia Judaica for Hebrew-English transliteration.

I would like to thank Professor Ezra Spicehandler, my teacher, advisor and friend, for his help and encouragement with this thesis. It was Dr. Spicehandler who first introduced me to the works of Aharon Appelfeld more than a decade ago through his publication of a dual-language edition of the short story, "Kitty." It was he who encouraged me to continue to study and work in the field of Hebrew literature, even when the language barrier seemed insurmountable. I have learned much from his classes, and profited greatly from his friendship. Professor Spicehandler also arranged an introduction to Aharon Appelfeld, and I

would like to take this opportunity to publicly thank the author for his gracious interview given in Jerusalem in August, 1985. I have enjoyed the memory of our conversation while reading and studying his stories these past months.

My own interest in literature goes back to my formative years and to the books and conversation always in abundance in the home of my aunt and uncle, Jane and Eli Kahn. I am grateful to them for awakening in me the appreciation for literary imagination and its diverse expression in many cultures.

This thesis, as well as my entire effort as a rabbinical student, has been a "family enterprise." Each member of my family has given me unique and indispensible support in my rather late and unusual quest to become a rabbi. My son, Daniel, whose individualism and decision to make Aliyah spurred me to consider doing the unconventional myself, has been an example to his mother by his own ideals and commitment. My son Jonathan and I paralleled each other in college, he as an undergraduate, I in rabbinic school. His support during the writing of this thesis was especially meaningful, for it came at the same time he was writing his own senior thesis. My daughter, Rebecca, not only helped and encouraged her mother during her last two years at home, she also helped edit parts of this manuscript, providing sound advice beyond that usually found in a college sophomore.

There are simply no adequate words to properly thank my husband Michael for his encouragement, support and love during these past four years. He did not marry a rabbi, and my decision to study for the rabbinate created incredible complexities in our lives that we, even in our careful planning and deliberations, had never imagined. Mike not only endured them, but his patience, good humor and gentle persistence throughout has strengthened our relationship, whether because of, or in spite of, his wife's career decision. Although no one in my family has worked on or even seen the entire manuscript, none of this would have been possible without their willingness to wait for dinner, endure lonely Shabbatot, help with the housework, and adopt the family motto, "As soon as the thesis is done...."

In the final analysis, the words on these pages, and the ideas they represent, are mine alone, and I take full responsibility for errors in judgment or fact. If this thesis has added to the understanding and appreciation of the literature of Aharon Appelfeld in even some small way, I will have succeeded in my task. For his works are worthy of a wide audience.

Chapter One

WINTER'S CHILD

A Short Biography

It is impossible to attempt an appreciation of Aharon Appelfeld's works without a close look at his life, for the two are bound up into one. Unlike most modern Israeli writers, Appelfeld writes not of the present Israeli scene, or of an idealized past that cannot be recaptured, but of events, scenes and people Appelfeld himself can remember.[1] Although his work is definitely fiction, not autobiography, it is a fiction based on fact. To understand Appelfeld's works, one must understand his past -- "My life fashioned me," he has often stated.

Aharon Appelfeld was born in 1932 in Czernovitz, Bukovina, which was then part of Romania, but is now a part of Russia. His was a secularized, intellectual Jewish family; the languages spoken at home were German and Yiddish. Of his early childhood Appelfeld remembers little, although he speaks fondly of a Hasidic grandfather, and of a loving mother he admits he probably does not really remember. His conscious memory begins in 1940 when, at the age of eight, he and his family were rounded up by the Nazis, along with the rest of the town's Jews. He witnessed the brutal killing of his mother and was separated from his

sister, whom he would never again see. Transported to a concentration camp in Transnistria, Ukraine, Appelfeld became separated from his father. With several other children, he escaped to the forests around the camps. As he has recalled, it was winter, and the children knew they would never survive in the camps. Whoever had the strength, escaped.[2] They found themselves in open fields and forests, alone, without parents. "We belonged now to no one, only to the winter."

According to Appelfeld's own accounts, he spent two years wandering and hiding in the forests, occasionally being sheltered by local Ukrainian farmers for whom he would work as a shepherd and field hand. He spoke little during those years, trusting no one, and fearing that at any time he might be unmasked as a Jew. He was of fair complexion and blended into the surroundings relatively easily, trying also to learn local jargons. The description of the young farmer's helper, Tzili, in the book of the same name, is drawn from that era, a time so painful that only recently, more than twenty years after he began to write, has Appelfeld been able to describe it.

Towards the end of the war, Appelfeld joined up with the Russian forces, serving as a junior cook and errand boy. At the war's conclusion he once again wandered from place to place, this time with other refugees. "I wandered, searching for relatives, for someone who knew me, but I

didn't find a soul."[3] He went from DP camp to DP camp, from one hiding place to another, eventually winding up in southern Italy. Many of Appelfeld's short stories concern rootlessness, wanderings, the sense of being pursued even after the pursuit has ended. Several of these stories are set on the shores of Italy, in the camps or near by, and it is evident that, with the war behind them, this was where "real" life began for Aharon Appelfeld and the other survivors. "The war was over and we were free," he explained once in an interview. "But there was no sense of exhilaration, no shouting. I was still a child, and I didn't know what would happen to me. I found others like me. We walked, long marches together as in a caravan -- not knowing where we were going. I was afraid of freedom, the way I had been afraid of the Nazis."[4] Worries, fears, illnesses, jealousies --the day to day problems confronting these pathetic human beings -- they all found expression in Appelfeld's early fiction.

It was in Italy also, after the war, that Appelfeld spent several months in a monastery, along with five other Jewish youths.[5] He is reluctant to talk about this experience, how or why he came to be there, or even what went on or how and when he left. But the event was traumatic, and became central to several of his short stories.

Along with many of the homeless refugees, Appelfeld dreamed of going to the "Goldene Medina"; he and others would sit around at night in the D.P. camps and read letters from American relatives, each hoping to be on the next boat westward. But the boat Aharon Appelfeld finally sailed on was the Haganah, one of the many illegal immigration ships plying the Mediterranean between Europe and Palestine after World War II.[6] He arrived in Israel in 1946 as part of a Youth Aliyah transport, and spent time in that movement's institutions and kibbutzim. He has recalled those days unhappily: "I was 13 when I came to Israel. I didn't know any language. I had forgotten my mother tongue and spoke only a little Yiddish, a bit of Russian, Italian and German. I had had no formal education."[7] He could not even write his name. As late as 1962, after he had been published and acclaimed as a promising new Israeli writer, he told an interviewer that, although he had come to Israel, "in reality I remain somewhere else -- in another place."[8] He felt himself an outsider, and for several years refused to discuss his experiences during the Holocaust. "There was an ideological chasm between the newcomers and the real Israelis. The Israeli was the new Jew; the Holocaust was a bad word. It was the victims who were silently accused, and we felt a deep sense of embarrassment."[9]

After serving in the Israeli army, Appelfeld entered Hebrew University, studying Hebrew and Yiddish literature.

He had begun to keep a journal, reminding himself of incidents he could not reveal to others, probing the horrors of his childhood. "Only when I began to study Hebrew did I begin to ask, 'Who am I? How did I get here? Who were my parents, what was my homeland?' These were some of the questions that pushed me towards writing."[10] Writing was thus at first an opening, an acceptable way for Appelfeld to deal with the myriad questions burning within him.

It was during the university years that Appelfeld first learned something about Judiasm, mainly through studying with Martin Buber and Gershom Scholem. The war years had impressed upon him the significance of his Jewishness, and he had been indoctrinated in Zionism through the Youth Aliyah program. Now, in a university setting, he began learning Jewish tradition and religion. He frequented Mea Shearim to learn "authenticity" and, although he did not become a follower of the Orthodox, to this day he has respect and sympathy for their way of life. In his own practice he considers himself a traditionalist; in America he would be called a Conservative Jew.[11]

His studies at the university also introduced him to modern Hebrew writers, some of whose influence he still feels strongly as he writes today. He had first heard the names Agnon and Bialik from Zionists in the camps in Europe; in Israel their works came alive for him. His early writings reflect the impact of Agnon, especially what

Appelfeld has called the "shadings of Agnon's characters, the 'gray' people."[12] He came to Brenner late, yet it is Brenner's works with which his own are often compared by such critics as Gershon Shaked and others, and he feels he learned much about using the Hebrew language as a vehicle for expression from both Brenner and Agnon.[13]

When he began writing, aside from his journals, his first endeavors were poems, some of which were published in 1955. But he soon abandoned that genre because of the necessity for precise language use in poetry. He was still struggling to master the Hebrew language and found the strictures of poetry too demanding. In 1961 Appelfeld's first short story was published. That year, and again in 1962, he received the Anna Frank Prize, awarded to a young writer of promise. Several of the stories, later collected in Ashan (Smoke) were cited in the award, in particular "Pitzuyim" (Reparations) which concerns a survivor returning to Germany.

Aharon Appelfeld's first book of short stories, Ashan, appeared in 1962. It received critical praise for its sensitive portrayal of victims of the Holocaust, but it was not a book Israelis flocked to read. Appelfeld was not writing about Israaeli heroes, kibbutz life or Arab-Israeli tensions. His world was that of victims, not heroes, and those victims were ordinary, not always nice, people. His

Israelis were not necessarily Zionists, but rather the unfortunate souls who came to Israel as to a last refuge, often because no other country would have them. Israelis did not want to read about this "other" Israel. True, the Eichmann trial had helped change the Israeli climate of opinion towards the Holocaust and its victims. But was the Holocaust a fit subject for aesthetics, for literature? The question arose in critiques of Appelfeld's work, as well as in interviews with the author himself. In a 1962 interview in the Israeli newspaper Ma'ariv,[14] Appelfeld explained that, "The Holocaust, like all catastrophes, does not lend itself to a specific artistic expression. Any utterance is a breaking of the silence; the artist must find a way along the 'golden path' between complete explanation and revealing without speaking at all." Years later, in 1971, he was still answering the same question: "I can't change. I must write about the Holocaust no matter what the critics say. How can a man cut himself off from his arms and legs?"[15]

After his first book and its positive reception, Aharon Appelfeld published so frequently that a writer noted in 1971, after his fifth and sixth books had appeared, "Only nine years ago Appelfeld had not published a single book and was unknown as a writer in Israel; now he is known as a vatik" (old timer).[16]

While writing, he supported himself as an ulpan teacher of foreign students at the Hebrew University. Subsequently

he received a position teaching Hebrew literature there. His fame as a writer was growing. In 1966 he won the Youth Aliyah Prize awarded to gifted graduates of the Youth Aliyah program; in 1967 he was given the Ussishkin Prize for his third volume of short stories, Kfor Al HaAretz (Frost on the Earth).

In 1971 Appelfeld published two works, Adnai HaNahar (Foundations of the River) and HaOr v'HaKatonet (The Skin and the Garment). The former was his fifth and last book of short stories; the latter, his first published longer work, a novella. This marked a watershed in his writing career, for since then Appelfeld has written only longer works. He claims he enjoys the artistic challenge of developing characters more fully and exploring human motives through the genre of the novel.[17]

In 1975 Aharon Appelfeld received the Y. H. Brenner Prize for Literature for his book Shanim v'Shaot, (Years and Hours) which contained two long stories, "1946," and "Badenheim, Ir Nofesh." He later re-worked "Badenheim" into a full length novel, his first novel to appear in English translation. It's appearance established him as a writer with an international audience. Tor HaPlaot (The Age of Wonders) appeared in English the following year. It had been published in Hebrew in 1979 and earned the author the coveted Bialik Prize for Literature.

Since 1979 Aharon Appelfeld has taught literature at the Ben Gurion University of the Negev, where he occupies the Chair in Holocaust Studies. He continues to write and publish; in recent years he has spent time both in England and the United States lecturing on literature of the Holocaust.

I met with Aharon Appelfeld on an August day in a Jerusalem cafe. It was his suggestion, but I was hardly surprised, since nearly every interview he has ever given has been over coffee or tea in a Jerusalem cafe. The short, bald man greeted me warmly, and at first was eager to talk. Our conversation was conducted mainly in English, since his mastery of the language, which he claims is not good, is nevertheless superior to my Hebrew. Occasionally he would grasp for phrases and we would slip into Hebrew for a while.

Appelfeld was more than willing to discuss his childhood, his immigration and his student days in Israel. We also compared notes on our own children; he has three, one of whom had just completed the army, and two still in high school. Since my own children are of nearly the same age, we discussed the youth and their lifestyles in Israel today. But when we began to discuss his works, the brow furrowed, the eyes, behind thick glasses, clouded. An author does not want to engage in self-analysis of his own works. He was a bit disappointed that I planned to study

his early stories. He has not considered Ashan seriously for many years, and today views it as "my earliest work; you must understand that I wrote it so many years ago. I was still learning the language." But, when pressed, he agreed that many of the themes in Ashan and his other short story collections are to be found in his later, "more complete" works.

Appelfeld wanted to talk about his recent novels, and urged me to re-read them. He had been attacked by some reviewers for being filled with self-hate, and for condemnation of the victims. He felt impelled to explain to any who would listen that his people are ordinary people, and that today, from the perspective of many years, he writes about people in an attempt to understand the human condition: "people and their motives."[18] When I asked if he were not a bit more judgmental towards his characters in more recent works than in the earlier sketches, he denied that this was so. His characters, he claimed, are complex human beings, each having positive and negative characteristics. He pointed to the assimilationist father in The Age of Wonders of whom he stated, "He's complex, I love him; and don't forget the mother has many faults, too."

On his newly acquired fame in America, he mused, "Americans see me as a Jewish writer, writing about Jewish themes." In contrast, he readily admits, Israelis view him as an Israeli writer who does not concern himself with

current Israeli problems, but lives in the past. He is none the less comfortable with his own role. He sees himself as an author who with each book attempts to broaden his range, refining his style, experimenting with plot and character. As we parted, he told me of an invitation to lecture at Boston University. He smiled as he said that this invitation is particularly meaningful to him because it did not come from the Department of Religion, nor from the Department of Holocaust Studies, but from the Department of English Literature. The invitation represents acknowledgement of his status as an author of international standing.

Aharon Appelfeld lives in a Jerusalem suburb with his wife, a former student, and three children. He is at work on a new novel.

NOTES

[1]Moshe Zanger, "Writing from Within" [Hebrew], HaDoar, December 7, 1971.

[2]Hillel Barzel, Siporet Ivrit Metarealistit (Ramat Gan: Masada, 1974), p. 128.

[3]Yaron Golan, "Interview with Aharon Appelfeld" [Hebrew], HaAton, May 5, 1971.

[4]"Talk by Aharon Appelfeld on Receiving the Ussishkin Prize" [Hebrew], Am V'Sefer, January, 1967.

[5]Personal interview with Aharon Appelfeld by author, August 8, 1985.

[6] Golan, "Interview with Aharon Appelfeld."

[7]Yitzhak Bezalel, "Interview with a Question Mark" [Hebrew], LaMerhav, July 9, 1965.

[8][Anon.] "Conversation with Aharon Appelfeld" [Hebrew], HaAton, November 21, 1962.

[9]Haim Chertok, "Conversation with Aharon Appelfeld," Jewish Frontier, March, 1984, p. 15.

[10]Bezalel, "Interview with a Question Mark."

[11]Personal Interview.

[12][Anon.], "Conversation with Aharon Appelfeld."

[13]Gershon Shaked, Gal Ḥadash BaSiporet HaIvrit (Merḥavia: HaKibbutz HaArtzi, 1974), p. 150.

[14]Raḥel Ḥalafi, "Ashan -- Dark and Tragic -- A Discussion with Aharon Appelfeld" [Hebrew], Maariv, November 23, 1962.

[15]Golan, "Interview with Aharon Appelfeld."

[16]Ibid.

[17]Personal Interview.

[18]See Ruth Wisse, "Aharon Appelfeld, A Survivor," Commentary, August, 1983, p. 73.

Chapter Two

"THERE ARE TIMES A MAN REMEMBERS"

Thematic Motifs

Although one is tempted to treat each volume of short stories separately, from the perspective of many years distance it seems more appropriate to note the recurring themes throughout Aharon Appelfeld's work and the varying methods he employs to develop these themes as his own technique matures.

The overwhelming theme found in almost all of Appelfeld's works, even in his recent novels, is, as he himself has stated, that no one can escape his fate. He might try to forget his past, or to deny it, but until and unless he has come to terms with it, he is incomplete. One's past is a part of one's present. In Appelfeld's first collection of short stories, Ashan (Smoke), set in Israel shortly after the War of Independence and published in the early 1950's, this theme is pervasive. It is especially powerful in two short stories, the title story and "Pitzuyim," (Compensation). The protagonists are refugees from the Holocaust, shattered lonely human beings attempting to rebuild their lives, overwhelmed by a sense of futility and a fear of the future. Many of the characters in Ashan are so burdened with the past that they are immobilized in

the present. Some try to change, but cannot and are led to suicide;[1] others cannot even attempt to change.[2] In a few stories the protagonists do confront the past, traumatic as it is. These are Appelfeld's most successful stories.

The title story, "Ashan," is replete with symbolism. Smoke evokes in the reader's consciousness the sights and smells of burning, of the Holocaust. Max, a butcher, is trying to forget the past by adjusting to life in Israel. He is a lonely, pathetic figure, delivering meat, cleaning the shop, warding off blackmailing thugs. He talks to himself, for he has no one with whom to communicate. Reb Aryeh, his co-worker, is always ill; because of Reb Aryeh, Max has to work longer and harder. But Max, too, is not well. He cannot sleep at night; he has aches and pains, fears and anxieties. He smokes incessantly. He would like to rid himself of Reb Aryeh, but the two had shared the war years together. Reb Aryeh had often rescued Max, had even carried him on his own shoulders. Now it is Max who is burdened by Reb Aryeh.

At home, his only companion is "Mitzi," his dog. He feeds Mitzi, cares for her, talks to her. Mitzi is all he has in the world. Except for the rucksacks. Two old, partially burned rucksacks have been sitting in a corner, unopened, ever since Max arrived from Europe. He managed to pluck them from a burning synagogue, and carried them with him throughout the war, wherever he went. Now they stare at

him day after day. Max has not been able to open them, nor has he been able to rid himself of them. The smell of smoke they exude still permeates his room. He has thought of moving to escape the smell, but he cannot bring himself to leave the place. Meanwhile, more and more, he is plagued by anxieties, aches and sleeplessness.

Finally one night, unable to sleep, frightened and alone, Max decides to open one of the rucksacks. It is filled with his family's clothes; memories rush forward, enveloping him with the smoky smell of each piece of clothing. Gently cradling a jacket that once belonged to his little sister, Jenny, Max talks softly to his dog, telling Mitzi of the night the Nazis burned the synagogue and took his family. Suddenly, confronted with his past, Max is overwhelmed. In a panic, searching for a cigarette, he heads for the home of Reb Aryeh, the man who shared the hell of the Holocaust with him and but a few hours he earlier had wished to be rid of. He gains a new comprehension of the bonds tying them together. He reaches Reb Aryeh's house, remembers that the old man is ill and decides not to awaken him. Having unlocked the past, he can finally live with the present. For the first time in many nights, Max is able to sleep -- on the doorstep of Reb Aryeh's house.

A far more violent confrontation with the past is depicted in Appelfeld's story, "Pitzuyim." Whereas Max, the butcher, who was haunted by a past he refused to remember,

experienced a powerful catharsis by opening the rucksacks and was freed of the past, the heroine of "Pitzuyim" attempts to return to that past. The result is a total emotional breakdown.

Erna Traum is a refugee widow whose life in Jerusalem is circumscribed by routine. She lives day by day, cleans her house, almost obsessively, and tries not to rehearse her tragic past. But the past intrudes in spite of her attempts to bury it. Mrs. Traum, whose name suggests the traumatic,[3] receives compensation from the German government and has learned that she might be entitled to more. She is cautious and somewhat paranoid, convinced at times that people are against her. Like Max the butcher, Erna Traum's anxieties manifest themselves in an inability to sleep, a desire to shut herself off from the world by closing the heavy, European style curtains, and by keeping windows locked. She does not really want to return to Germany for the compensation, yet feels she must. To help her decide, she ascends to the attic where she keeps pictures and memorabilia of her husband, Adolf, who disappeared while they were fleeing the Nazis, and of their infant son Rudi who had died in Trieste while they were awaiting transportation to Israel. Unlike Max in "Ashan," when Erna Traum caresses these items, they unsettle her, and jar her into confusion. Perhaps she should not return and confront her past.

But she does return. Her journey to Hochburg, her hometown, is a descent into the Inferno. The agitation she felt at the mere prospect of returning becomes all pervasive once she arrives. Everything seems the same in the town: the buildings, the gardens, the streets. Only the Jews are missing. As she wanders through the town, Erna Traum becomes more and more unsettled. She walks through the cemetery, which has become a macabre tourist attraction, and is driven nearly insane by the thoughts which rush through her hysterical mind. She visits a monastery-hospice where there is a special section for Jews, and recognizes familiar faces among the incoherent inmates. "These are the Jews of Hochburg," she is told sarcastically by one of the survivors. The town cemetery and hospital are steps in her unravelling as she sinks further and further into her past.*

One of the reasons she has returned is to search for some trace of her husband. The question of his fate is finally resolved by one of the men at the hospital; he had been with Adolf Traum in Auschwitz. Now she knows, but her knowledge does not bring her the serenity it brought Max in "Ashan." Erna Traum's unlocking of the past has driven her beyond the pale of sanity. Appelfeld ends his story with the widow still in the monastery, half-crazed.

"Ashan" and "Pitzuyim" represent two extreme reactions of refugees confronting their past, but the protagonists in nearly all the stories in Ashan are wrestling with their

past. Some commit suicide; others lead lives doomed to destruction.

If in Ashan Aharon Appelfeld describes particular individuals in specific post-Holocaust situations, in his next collection, published two years later, he treats the same theme in a more oblique way. BaGai HaPoreh (In the Fertile Valley) contains themes similar to those in Ashan, but the style and plot situations are very different. As in all Appelfeld's works, the focus is not on the horrors of the war itself, but on the effects they have on human beings and their attempts to live their lives beyond the tragedy.

"Matzod" (Manhunt) is about memories: memories suppressed and memories released. Set in an ambiguous wilderness, the author tries to convey a sense of timelessness in order to universalize the problem of confronting one's own past. The protagonist in "Matzod" recalls ancient Jewish history: the selling of Joseph, and the slavery in Egypt, but cannot recall his own personal history. He spins tales of the past, relating stories to other Jews. Hiding from the Gentiles on a mountain, he feels both comfort and fear in the knowledge that while he is temporarily safe, he will soon be exposed to his enemies. Towards the end, surrounded on all sides, as he is about to be captured, his full memory is restored to him. "That same day he remembered who he was and where he was from. He carried all his dreams with him. He couldn't tell anyone,

not even himself, but he waited to tell the children. But they were already surrounded."[5] There are times, Appelfeld is saying, when memory returns too late, when it has been locked away so long it cannot be freed, not even in time to save the next generation.

Memory slowly returning, slowly peeling away the protective layers of amnesia, is also the theme of "BaShemesh HaDromit" (In the Southern Sun). Like many of the stories in the second volume, Appelfeld sets this one some time after World War II but, as with "Matzod," he tries to give his story a timeless aura, through vagueness regarding time and events. Everyone has forgotten the past, the narrator complains at the opening; they have settled into a routine of daily life as refugees but have forgotten their common past which had brought them here. It is a life where there is no continuity, except for the sun, rising and setting each day. But the summer sun represents anguish also, as the land becomes more parched day after day, recalling the desert in which the ancient Israelites once wandered.

The wanderers attempt to carry on some semblance of ordinary life. Itinerant merchants set up tents and sell their wares; Gentiles join them; young people enliven their surroundings. But although it is known that they are Jews, they themselves do not tell anyone, as if bound by an unspoken oath among them to guard the secret. Except for

Shabbat. They remember Shabbat and slowly, because this one frail memory is alive, other memories return. A man of about thirty recalls that he once had parents; he remembers a home near a river. He cannot recall details, only that everyone was taken and he alone escaped. Perhaps, he muses as memories suddenly flood him, perhaps his parents survived and are alive somewhere, across some safe border. "There are moments," Appelfeld writes, "that a man does remember something."[6] He aches with these memories. But the years in the wilderness have not compeletely erased the memory. Slowly, painfully, the group is able to recall who they are and where they come from, and this makes it possible for them to continue their journey.

Sometimes, Appelfeld suggests, one remembers too little, too late. In"BaShemesh HaDromit" memory enables the wanderers to continue their struggle. But the scene Appelfeld depicts in a later story, "HaHishtanut" (The Change), from B'komat HaKarka (On the Ground Floor), published in 1968, is brutally different. Here two refugees, fleeing their pursuers, learn to survive by hiding in caves, climbing trees, and trying to fade into the surrounding Gentile atmosphere. Sometimes, the author tells us repeatedly, they would remember. But mostly they tried to forget. The woman would attend church on Sundays, and return to find her partner drunk. The man would become like a wild animal; he would attack her and she would reproach

him with a reminder, from somewhere within, that he was a Jew, not a "goy." As they remember less and less, they become more animal-like and more Gentile-like in behavior. With the first snow, she leaves him, probably to sell herself to the peasants. He is stuck, frozen, unable to move. He thinks, half-crazed, that she will return and find him in the spring when the snow melts. But like the earth around them, their memories are frozen. They are both doomed. In later works similar in theme to this story, Appelfeld is much harsher on those who refuse to remember than in these earlier stories.

The protagonist in "HaShayarah" (The Convoy) at first resists memory. Left behind when the group he had been travelling with sailed for Palestine and the United States, he decides to make a life for himself on the shores of Italy. He will merely fade into the surrounding community; he will play with the children, conduct business with the Christians, and find women among the townspeople. He tries to convince himself that there is no difference between him and the non-Jews. At first this seems to work, but soon he begins to forget who he is, where he came from and even how he got there.[7] In the end, prodded by memory, he becomes resigned to the fate of belonging to the Jewish people. The story closes with him waiting and hoping for another convoy of Jews to wander by, so that he may join with them, and become part of them. In this second collection Appelfeld

writes of characters who force themselves to remember, to confront their past, while still refugees. Perhaps their future will not be as dismal as that of the sad survivors living in Israel depicted in Ashan.

Although most of the stories in Appelfeld's third volume, Kfor Al HaAretz (1965) are set in Europe, the two stories which most strikingly and successfully express Appelfeld's recurrent theme of coming to terms with one's past take place in Israel. Although stylistically they are similar to the stories in BaGai HaPoreh and Kfor Al HaAretz, being almost Kafkaesque in their descriptions and their interior monologues, in setting they resemble more closely the stories in Ashan, although their characters and plots are often more developed.

The story, "P'gishah" (The Meeting) describes the anxiety, pain, and quiet joy of memories recovered. Told in the first person, by a man who had settled in Jerusalem after World War II, it describes the narrator's meeting with another survivor. The second man pursues the narrator throughout town, following him, asking occasionally if they could meet and talk. Several times the narrator resists such an encounter, until the stranger mentions the name of their common hometown, Listik. Memories become unfrozen. "First I thought Jerusalem was my home, now I know the name of my city... only now I know the mixture of joy and sadness within me! Memory brings you back even when you

thought you'd forgotten." The narrator, almost against his will, visits his "landsman's" home. "I looked at the man and realized that only he could return me to my home."[8]

The man talks of the war years, of their successes, and failures, smuggling across borders. The atmosphere becomes heavy. "I knew then," the narrator reports, "I knew for certain that my city no longer existed; it is erased from the world." Like the butcher in "Ashan" opening his rucksack, the narrator, by facing the truth of his past, transcends the agony and finds tranquility. The other man recalls visiting the narrator's grandfather, and of smuggling out the Torah. Connections are made. "Now I remember the man seated before me; now he remembers me." How do they remember one another? -- by the smell of corn flour. Everyone in Listik worked together in the granary; the corn flour became part of them. Once, he recalls, he had met a man at the port in Naples; they recognized each other; they were both from Listik. It was the corn flour. And now they are here in Jerusalem. They had tried living among the Gentiles, but the language of the Jews of Listik had remained in their hearts. Now these two witnesses faced each other with the language of Listik. They had never before met, but they were like brothers. Memory brought them together; memory restored them to their past and helped them understand their present. Listik may have been destroyed but it remained alive in their conversation and in

their hearts. They would meet again; now they could get on with their lives.

The story "BaMekomot HaNimukhim" (In Low Places) is similar to "P'gishah" in subject matter. It takes place at a Dead Sea resort where a group of Holocaust survivors, all from the same town in Europe, are vacationing. Simply being together conjures up thoughts of the past. In the opening lines, the narrator compares the dry winds of the desert climate to those of the Carpathian mountains. The Dead Sea is barren; yet it causes these friends to recall the sights and smells of city streets. They are here together to "turn inward, to search for your own scenes of childhood, your own language." Each vacationer has different needs and different memories; together they conjure up the past of their lost town. Dr. Shpilmeister had been a free-thinker; Mrs. Fledermaus(!), once considered an elegant lady, had been abandoned by her Gentile husband. Now she is a pathetic old woman, afraid of the past which "lurking, always threatens."

They sit around a fire, on the beach, knowing that what was lost will not return, but here in the open air and sky they can find comfort in their memories. In Jerusalem they are unable to function; their minds too often wander between the past and present. Here, in the desert, they can abandon themselves to their memories. As a group they are trees without roots. "For years you lived among the Gentiles, but

a flame burned within you and refused to die. All your life you searched for this group and now you found them, here on this desolate shore."[9] These refugees, though not related, form a bond, a family of abandoned lonely souls who have found each other and through their memories have helped each other become a bit more complete.

Even when Aharon Appelfeld's survivors reclaim their memory, they are burdened by their loss. Loss -- of family, stability, of a normal way of life -- is part of the overall motif pervading his works.[10] In "Aviv Kar" (Cold Spring), in Ashan, Appelfeld depicts the loss, isolation and fear in the lives of five refugee survivors immediately after the war. The five: Reb Isaac, Berl, Hirschl, the narrator, and Tzeitl, the lone woman, have hidden in a bunker throughout most of the war. Each is the sole survivor of his family; here in the bunker they have formed a surrogate family. Now, with the end of the war, and the end of their danger, their group unity begins to break down. As with other Appelfeld stories, (for example "Pitzuyim") the real trauma comes after the tragedy. The moment they leave the temporary security of their bunker and attempt to relate to the world around them, each is overcome by memory and the reality of their loss.[11] Some have the urgent desire to separate and go their own way. Reb Isaac dashes into the forests, crying out, "Sonia, Sonia"; he is not seen again. The group now

has further reason to mourn. Their own group, as well as their families before the war, are totally lost. They are completely alone in the world. Appelfeld strengthens the sense of isolation and aloneness by noting that nothing on the outside seems to have changed. The Gentile world in Appelfeld's fiction runs its normal course; it is the Jewish world that is forever changed by the Holocaust.

The four remaining refugees wander on, and are refused shelter by the Gentile world, symbolized in this instance by a monastery. They are taken in by a local peasant woman who, however, sexually attacks the wounded Berl, who is nowhere to be found the next morning. Continuing their journey, frightened by occasional memories, the three remaining survivors encounter a hermit-witch in the forest who reveals to them much information about their own families. Tzeitl, for the first time comprehending the enormity of the Holocaust and its tragic effects on her people, screams out, "The children, the children are all orphaned."

At the story's end Tzeitl is once more mourning for Reb Isaac and wishing that the five of them could be together again. Tzeitl and the others have lost everything. They are completely alone; they do not even have the security of the bunker and each other as they did during the war. Tzeitl's memories will haunt her; she will continue to be pulled by the past as she is adrift, alone, in the present.

Appelfeld treats the themes of memories unlocked, of loss and search, in a very different manner in the story "B'makom Aḥer" (In Another Place). The title itself suggests rootlessness, and Appelfeld has commented that places are important in his works only insofar as they affect people's lives. "B'Makom Aḥer" suggests that more than one place is important to the protagonist, an archeologist who originally came from Europe, had lived in Jerusalem, and now finds himself in Italy directing a dig. The story touches on memory and loss on several levels. The archeologist, in Italy on a professional job, is actually in the midst of a profound personal quest. He is torn between his desire to uncover the past and an equally strong wish to leave the past hidden. This is compounded by his mixed emotions regarding himself -- his need to remember his own past versus his futile desire to escape it. The Italian town reminds him of Arab villages in Israel, while the townspeople remind him of people he once knew in Europe. Everything connects him to his past. Even this location, an ancient site, was first discovered in the distant past by a young man who died unheralded and unknown. But his journal had been found and published in an obscure periodical and when Dr. Seltzer, the archeologist, found it, he was seized by the desire to once again uncover the site, to recapture the glories of the past.

When the archeologists do uncover ancient relics, (a house with an entry way and even household utensils), Dr. Seltzer is overcome. He senses that the site resists being exposed to the twentieth century scientists, that the tel wants to keep its own secrets hidden beneath the dust. He remembers another house, the one he had left in Jerusalem. The ancient ruins remind him of his own most recent home. Day after day, room after room is discovered. The archeologists find a small scroll with Hebrew lettering. It tells of a Jewish youth who had been kidnapped and taken to a monastery; another scroll in another "room" indicates that the youth eventually went insane. One day the site reveals, Seltzer muses, the next day it seems to conceal. The archeological site has become a metaphor for memory.

Winter arrives; most of the tourists and many workers leave. Seltzer is unable to decide whether to return to Jerusalem or remain. It does not seem to matter to him. "For one who has lost his home, every place is his home."[12] He has no place that is his own; every place is merely a "makom aḥer," another place. He is incomplete and alone, still searching, still putting together the broken sherds of his own past.

Throughout Appelfeld's works runs the motif of the eternal wandering Jew, rootless and searching. In the first volume, Ashan, this theme is for the most part implied

through the characters' inability to acclimate themselves to Israeli society, and by their European attitudes and mannerisms which they keep even as they struggle to learn a new culture and language. In subsequent works Appelfeld refined and developed this theme, so that it has become apparent to some degree in nearly all of his works including his later, recent novels.

Sometimes the reader meets the wanderer during his journey, at other times at the end of the road. Most of the stories in BaGai HaPoreh and Kfor Al HaAretz are about wandering Jews, some attempting to reclaim their past, others trying to escape it. In BaGai HaPoreh two such stories seem almost a mirror image of each other. "HaMaḥaseh HaAḥaron" (The Last Refuge) is a highly symbolic story of a Jew who has sought refuge in a monastery, abandoning his faith in order to assure himself total acceptance by the Christians. He becomes a gardener, tending plants, shutting himself off not only from the war raging outside the monastery, but also from all contact with Jews and Judaism. Eventually he is poisoned by a plant he works with, one usually effective as a medicine. As Gershon Shaked has written, "the poison of the Gentile world accompanies him even to his `last refuge,' poisoning his body as well as soul."[13] The wanderer cannot find surcease by denial of his past; "the last refuge" is no refuge at all.

"Masotav shel Andriko" (Travels of Andriko) begins after a young man, Andriko, leaves a monastery and wanders through Italy, supposedly on a pilgrimage to the monument of a Crusader saint, but in reality on a search for his own origins. All he knows of himself is that he was a foundling left at the monastery. The reader is never explicitly told that Andriko is Jewish, but what he knows of his past parallels what Kitty, in the story by the same name, had been told about her own past. Since we learn that Kitty is Jewish, we have no reason to believe that Andriko is not. But Andriko does not know who he is; like so many of Appelfeld's characters he is a "tree without roots."[14] He encounters some shepherds and takes on their garb, recalling for the reader the Biblical legends of Israelites wandering in the wilderness. Eventually he comes upon a caravan of Jewish refugees; he stays with them for a while and works for them. Until now his only knowledge of Jews has come from what the monks had taught him: biblical Jews were good; contemporary Jews are sinful. But Andriko and these Jews begin to trust each other. He tells them what little he knows of his background; they tell him their story -- how many of them were deported, and how few returned. He is searching for the mother he never knew; they are searching for their lost families. He feels comfortable with them, although he does not quite feel as though he belongs. In the end, Andriko continues his wandering, but this time it

is together with the Jews, these modern nomads. He has found his people and "come home," though he and they may still be homeless refugees.

Wandering and loneliness can also be found as explicit themes in later works, especially in Kfor Al HaAretz. In the story, "B'iye St. George" (On the Isles of St George), Chohovski is the by now familiar Appelfeld refugee who had wandered throughout Europe after the war, eventually made his way to Israel and now, fleeing authorities, is back in Europe seeking a different kind of refuge, a solitude beyond the reach of the law. He is a petty black-market entrepreneur, like those portrayed in Ashan. Unlike them, however, Chohovski has left Israel behind him. In his wanderings, he is thus not unlike the archeologist in "B'makom Aḥer." Tired of his travels, Chohovski feels that only by being alone might he absorb the pain of the years. But Chohovski cannot be totally alone. The isles of St. George to which he flees are home to a solitary monk, guarding an abandoned monastery. The two settle into a relationship, the monk waiting for new orders that will take him to the Holy Land, the Jew content to be far from Eretz Yisrael. After a brutally cold winter, Chohovski has become hermit-like; his life spark has left him. He is alone, as he once wished to be, but finds himself even more anxious than when he had been on the run, pursued by others. He has found no peace. He will probably leave the islands,

continue his travels, re-enter petty trade and smuggling and continue to wander. His is a purgatory of belonging nowhere, always moving. The isles of St. George cannot be a refuge, for they are devoid of Jews and he now knows he must be with Jews in order to exist.

Appelfeld attempts to convey the timelessness of the Jewish people's wandering and rootlessness through several stories that are not precisely located in either time or place. "BaTaḥanah" (At the Station) takes place at a rail station somewhere in eastern Europe during a bitter winter. A Jew is traveling, trying to reach the border, escaping something or someone. Not much "happens" in this story; rather Appelfeld depicts a scene, and evokes a mood of people on the move, fleeing, escaping, wandering. Some have ultimate destinations such as America; others are merely trying to reach the safety of another state. Some are army deserters, some are criminals, some are Jews. The Jews have the more difficult journey, for they live with "Jewish terror."[15] Harsh weather has caused a delay. All are gathered at the station, waiting for the train. It is a scene that has occurred frequently in Jewish history -- the Jew, traveling, wandering from place to place.

The counterpoint to the Jew wandering as a result of fleeing is the timeless scene of Jews banished. Appelfeld depicts this in "HaGerush" (The Expulsion), which Alan Mintz has called one of Appelfeld's most accomplished stories.[16]

Once again, as in so many of Appelfeld's stories, the time is not specified; this could be occurring at any time in Jewish history. The story probably takes place in modern times, although, except for a few particulars, it could even be set in medieval times. Jews have been expelled and forced to roam since the beginning of recorded Jewish time. By placing his story in an ambiguous setting Appelfeld is emphasizing the Jews' fate; it is also his way of understanding the Holocaust as a culmination of the way Gentiles have always treated Jews -- persecuting them, expelling them.

In "HaGerush" the reader is not told the reasons for the expulsion; reasons are unnecessary. A group of Hasidic Jews, after living in one area for many years, has been expelled, and has just begun its journey towards a provincial capital. After so many years of trying to live in harmony with the Gentiles, there is a certain freedom that comes with the expulsion. The Jews are now free to please only themselves. As they travel, they enjoy the beauty of nature around them; they pray and observe their rituals without constraint. But they never mention the reason for their journey. The word "expulsion" never reaches their lips; it is a secret, bound up with the fear and terror that is part of their Jewish heritage. As they travel, fear creeps back into their lives. The women are afraid of the formless wilderness; they are used to more

circumscribed lives. They want to end this journey, to arrive and settle in their new town.

The power of memory, or the lack of it, is also present in this story. The Hasidim reach back into the depths of their collective memory for stories of their rebbe, of other celebrations at other times. The women remember the warmth of their homes. Only the children see things clearly, without the veil of memory. At times the story is presented through the eyes of an orphaned child who is unable to remember his own parents. He has been adopted into the group and become its "pet." His eyes take in everything, every sight, every anguish and fear. For him, as for the Jewish people, Appelfeld recalls the rabbinic dictum, "There is no before and no after."[17] Only the present is clear. The past and future are mixed; Jewish history never changes.

The story is complicated by other wanderers who appear on the scene. A troupe of comedians and mummers, these Jews have deliberately chosen to drift aimlessly from place to place, and have also deliberately renounced their Judaism. They taunt the Jews with a sneer, "You have been expelled." But what is the ultimate difference between the Hasidim's forced journey and the mummers' chosen one? Each is cut adrift from the rest of society. Mintz contrasts the two groups, claiming that the mummers cheapen reality while the Hasidim exaggerate it. He believes Appelfeld favors the mummers since they have chosen their lot willingly and are

recognized for their talents and achievements. On this point I think Mintz has misunderstood Appelfeld. The Hasidim have their tradition, their heritage which they can pass on to the children who, it is intimated, will be the only ones to survive and eventually end their wanderings. The mummers will continue to drift and slowly die out. Their kind of Wandering Jew is not unlike the apostates in monasteries, people doomed by rejecting their fate. But neither is Appelfeld judging the mummers. They seem to represent the grotesque extremes in the irrationality of the Jewish situation. Appelfeld creates similar characters on the fringes of society in his D.P. camp stories. Later such grotesque performing Jews take on more importance in Badenheim, Ir Nofesh.

The fear and anxiety accompanying each homeless wandering Jew is especially heightened in the stories in BaGai HaPoreh. In this book Appelfeld describes the terror of the Jew pursued, and the fear of the pursuer. The relationship between the pursuer, the pursued and the pursuit itself, which is an undercurrent in many of Appelfeld's earlier stories, becomes a major theme in BaGai HaPoreh and thereafter remains one of Appelfeld's major concerns. Three stories in particular, each very different from the other, depict this theme. Deliberately, the author does not connect any directly to the Holocaust, since he has

repeatedly stated that he is writing about a universal Jewish condition of which the Holocaust was only an extreme expression.

"Masa" (Travels) is a highly symbolic, not totally successful, attempt to portray a Jew among Gentiles. In this case the specific Jewish boy is not fleeing Nazis in central Europe, but is in an unnamed wilderness among alien wanderers. The setting evokes the biblical Joseph among the nomads; it probably occurs in Israel, although the reader is not told this specifically. From the safety of his own room, a young man recalls his kidnapping. He remembers the fears that he would never be found and rescued. He also recalls that after being with his captors awhile he adjusted to their way of life and feared a different pursuer -- the Jews who might be searching for him. He had wandered with the Gentiles, had been attacked by them, lived with their women, and even betrayed another Jew in order to save himself. His "travels" are as much psychological as they are physical. His fear of the pursuer and of being pursued change with regard to their point of reference -- at times he is afraid of the Jews, at times of the Arabs. But always he remembers his home. When memory is clear, he realizes that "Everyone must return to his own home."[18] To Aharon Appelfeld, "home" is one's own people. The young man has been returned; the story is told in the past tense by the returnee himself.

But he is a shattered, emotionally destroyed individual. He had wandered too far, and feared too much, to be redeemed.

Another story in the same volume, "HaR'difah," (The Pursuit) portrays the angst and terror of pursuit from a very different point of view. The pursuer is a Jewish father somewhere, sometime during the last century. He is desperately searching for his daughter, kidnapped by Gentile soldiers on a drunken rampage through his shtetl. In his frantic pursuit from town to town, he comes to understand his total dependence on the whims of the Gentile authorities. They claim they will help him find his daughter; they take his money; they make a mockery of him. He finally realizes that he will never find his daughter, that she has become their whore and he has lost his child. The entire outside world is conspiring against him. He will continue his futile search, pursuing the Gentiles and being pursued by them, knowing his daughter will never be found.

"Shohet," which translates as "butcher" but also carries the connotation of "slaughterer," is a very short, powerful story about a shohet hiding in the woods. He has just escaped a mass killing of his fellow Jews by the Gentiles. We are not told if they are Nazis or ordinary European Gentiles. That is not important because the fear and terror they cause the Jews are the same. The shohet, hiding alone, is consumed by plans for revenge. The hunted will become the hunter, he thinks to himself as he carefully

sharpens his slaughtering knife. He makes his plans meticulously. He will await them, then attack. But eventually he, who plans on becoming the vengeful pursuer, is so paralyzed by the trauma of being alone, and of being hunted down like an animal, that he is reduced to emotional paralysis as he helplessly awaits the enemy's attack and his own inevitable death. The fear of the pursuer itself has helped destroy him.

Woven throughout all Appelfeld's works, from his earliest short stories to his latest novels, is the problem of guilt and responsibility. The author claims he does not want his characters judged, and indeed he is always suggesting that they are destined to their fate, but nevertheless he shows people abandoning others to save their own skin. He also depicts the dire consequences of their actions.

"Al Yad HaHof" (By the Seashore) first appeared in Ashan, and was also included in BaGai HaPoreh. Set in the displaced persons camps of southern Italy, the story introduces the prevailing mood of despair and tragedy in its opening paragraphs: "Immediately after the war, tremendous possibilities opened up."[19] Some refugees managed to take early boats for America or Palestine, others set up temporary businesses as peddlers, barterers and black market profiteers. Some searched for lost family. Then, as the

frenzy of the first days abated, reality sets in. The great opportunities were ephemeral and short lived. Each individual had to look after himself. They were still in camp, albeit a different kind of camp; typhus raged; they were quarantined.

Berl, Fishl and Gittl are among the pathetic survivors in the camp. Berl had found the child Gittl while hiding out during the war; he had carried her with him and had cared for her in hiding. Once he actually abandoned her, but she had found him and he had promised never to leave her again. But now she had once more become a burden. If not for Gittl, Berl would think, Gittl with her penetrating glances causing him an uneasy sense of responsibility, if not for her, he would be able to leave the camp, and would be free, perhaps already in America.

Fishl, the practical survivor, suggests a means of escape, a way to reach the south coast where they will board a ship to freedom. But what about Gittl? Berl is plagued by doubts, and cannot make a decision. Fishl, the pragmatic one, plans to leave her in a monastery where, he promises her, the nuns will teach her French. The men intend for Gittl's stay to be temporary; eventually she would be rescued by other Jews. But Berl is unable to leave Gittl, and it is Fishl who leads her to the monastery gates. There they are greeted disdainfully by a nun who agrees to shelter the child only if Fishl relinquishes her permanently, to be

raised as a Catholic, to become a nun. Fishl, driven by his need to escape to freedom, and eager to be released of this child-burden, willngly relinquishes Gittl, but does not tell Berl that their freedom has been bought in return for that of the child. Appelfeld is not condemning the men; he has shown in other stories that at times caring for an extra person can lead to danger, madness or death. He instead develops the situation in such a way that the reader can understand Fishl's motives and his desire for escape, without agreeing with his actions. We can ache for Berl, who is torn by guilt and a need to get on with his life. And we cry out in pain for poor Gittl, abandoned in order that others may succeed in their quest for freedom. "The great possibilities" that opened up immediately after the war were in reality confining and choking.

Memory, which in many cases becomes the only salvation, also brings with it guilt and shame, as Appelfeld depicts in "BaGovah HaKar" (On the Cold Heights) in BaGai HaPoreh. The Holocaust refugees in this story are gathered in an abandoned fortress-monastery perched on a high cliff overlooking the coast of Italy. The building has been turned into a hospice where the mentally and physically wounded may rest and begin the healing process. Many have become as emotionally frozen as the cold heights above the sea. Some resist remembering their past; it is as if they

do not want to awaken from their stupor, for with awareness comes pain and guilt.

A woman, Dora, acts as a nurse. Filled with fear and guilt for past actions, the particulars of which are not revealed to us, she begins to think of a future in medicine. "Only in her work could she atone for her life....she could never be forgiven; but perhaps she could work."[20] A man, Shpilman, and his niece, Liuba, remain apart from the group. Their secret for survival had been to hide their Jewishness and join a circus troupe, traveling from town to town with the Gentile riffraff. Now, alive but empty, they live in distrust of everyone, including each other. Suddenly, one evening, Shpilman drags Liuba by the hair and throws her over the cliff. This act jars the refugees from their torpor. They try to calm Shpilman, to care for the wounded Liuba. She claims he is too possessive; he accuses her of whoring with the Gentiles. Eventually Liuba is well enough to leave. She speaks of joining a circus, but does not. In their forgetting, their denial of their Jewishness and their guilt, they have destroyed themselves and each other.

The poignant story which closes BaGai HaPoreh, combines all the major themes of his early works. "Mukar" (Familiar), set in Israel, depicts a distraught father about to place his emotionally disabled son in an institution. The father has wandered all over Europe, first while evading the Nazis during the war, then while searching for relatives

after the war's end. He and his son, called Ernst in Germany and Arye in Israel, finally arrived in Israel, but their wanderings were not to be at an end. The father has searched from place to place, trying to find out why his child can't communicate, and desperately seeking a cure.

Now he has arrived at an institution that should be able to help him. As he stands in the corridor, awaiting an interview, the place seems "familiar" and long suppressed memories begin to return. When he explains his son's condition to the supervisor, the reader is aware that the father is holding back some information. Was the child really well all during the war, becoming ill only after arriving in Israel? The father is torn; he resists giving his child to Mrs. Frostbaum, the head of the institution, for she tells him that Arye-Ernst must stay there permanently. But he knows he has no choice. He wanders through the strangely familiar halls and gardens, knowing that he has never set foot in the place before. He talks with a gardener who tells him of Mrs. Frostbaum's past. She had been betrayed to the Nazis by her Gentile husband when he discovered she was Jewish. Somehow she survived, no one knew how. The implication is that everyone who survived has some secret, some guilt in his or her past. Suddenly the father remembers -- this place reminds him of the monastery, the place where he left his son. His guilt was so overwhelming that he had totally suppressed the memory of

the event. The father who had abandoned his son in order to save himself during the war must now separate himself once again from him, this time in order to save the son. The only one who might possibly help the child is one who has also been scarred by the trauma of the Holocaust. In Appelfeld's eyes, a child who endured years in a monastery is as damaged as one who had been in Buchenwald.[21] Appelfeld understands that the father had to abandon the child; he views the plight of the father sympathetically; the reader comes to care for both father and son in this tragic situation.

The themes of wrestling with one's past, of confronting memory, guilt and loss, of fear of pursuit and alienation, are the overwhelming motifs in nearly all of Appelfeld's early works. Because the stories are short, the author's thematic emphasis often seems too heavy and unrelieved. But it comes from the soul; these were stories Appelfeld had to tell, ideas he had to reveal. In his later works he develops plot and character more fully, enabling him to be more subtle in thematic development. But many of the early motifs remain; one cannot escape one's destiny.

NOTES

[1]"Sipur Ahavah," in Ashan, (Jerusalem: Ahshav, 1962), pp 181-187.

[2]"Nisayon Ritzini," in Ashan, pp. 89-124.

[3]Hillel Barzel, Siporet Ivrit Metarealistit, (Ramat Gan: Masada, 1974), p. 130.

[4]Zev Bargad, "The Lost Past Requires Remembering" [Hebrew], HaDoar, November 2, 1972.

[5]"Matzod" in BaGai HaPoreh, (Jerusalem: Shocken, 1964), p. 80.

[6]BaGai HaPoreh, p. 183.

[7]BaGai HaPoreh, p. 158.

[8]"P'gishah," in Kfor Al HaAretz (Jerusalem: Masada, 1965), p. 124.

[9]Kfor Al HaAretz, p. 136.

[10]Alan Mintz, Hurban (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 212.

[11]This theme is also prevalent in "Shloshah" (Three), a shorter, less developed work which opens the first volume.

[12]"B'Makom Aḥer" in Kfor Al HaAretz, p. 149.

[13]Gershon Shaked, Gal Ḥadash BaSiporet HaIvrit (Merḥavia: Kibbutz Artzi, 1974), p. 165.

[14]Interview with Appelfeld by M. Meyer, August 8, 1985.

[15]Kfor Al HaAretz, p. 59.

[16]See Alan Mintz's excellent treatment of this story in Ḥurban, pp. 216-220.

[17]Kfor Al HaAretz, p. 59.

[18]BaGai HaPoreh, p. 26.

[19]Ashan, p. 163.

[20]BaGai HaPoreh, p. 141.

[21]BaGai HaPoreh, p. 197.

Chapter Three

"ORDINARY, UPROOTED, UNHEROIC PEOPLE"

Character Development

When Aharon Appelfeld's works are reviewed, they are usually praised for thematic development, for setting, ambience and style. But rarely is Appelfeld singled out for the characters he creates, either for their development or typology. In his more recent, longer stories he has taken pains to show growth and change within many of his protagonists. But in the early short stories, the characters are often too similar to one another; at times they seem almost interchangeable from story to story. Yet, even within these stories, certain types appear with enough regularity to be eventually identifiable as "typical" of Appelfeld. In some cases these "types" change from volume to volume; others recur at different stages in the author's writing career.

Nearly all the characters in Ashan, Appelfeld's earliest volume, are shattered human beings, living in Israel, but inextricably tied to their past. The protagonists often share situations and characteristics. They are incapable of genuine relationships. They cannot become "real" Israelis, but remain refugee European Jews; they blend almost inconspicuously into their environment.[1] Max the butcher in "Ashan" is typical: a petty merchant who

lives on the fringe of society. Zimmer, a truck driver, in "Nisayon Ritzini," (which can be translated as "A Serious Experience" or "A Serious Attempt" -- a double entendre in which both meanings are probably intended by the author) is even more developed. The author unfolds the story through Zimmer's eyes, thoughts and fears. The reader never knows what the other characters are thinking; they are reflected only through the experiences of Zimmer himself. Zimmer is lonely, with no surviving relatives in Israel. Dissatisfied with his job, he quits but is unable to adapt himself to anything else, so he soon returns to it. When he requests a shorter hauling route, he is turned down. Zimmer, like Max in "Ashan," Erna Traum in "Pitzuyim," and nearly all of the early Appelfeld characters, has difficulty sleeping at night. His life is filled with aches, pain and angst. Like so many survivors, he is overly cautious, and often subservient to the point of obsequience.

In developing the character of Zimmer, Appelfeld conveys to the reader the fears and insecurities of a pathetic soul. Zimmer worries constantly; he is more cautious than other drivers and has trouble relating to Rozine, the girl he thinks he loves. When Zimmer is accused of stealing goods from the trucking company, the reader is able to experience his heightened sense of terror, although he -- and we -- know he is innocent. Zimmer's nervousness, dizziness and sweaty palms not only describe his anxieties,

they have become a part of his being. He is still a victim preyed upon by others. His thoughts are constantly of death; he dreams of death, and he talks of death, even when making love. His only friend, another truck driver, is killed in a road accident, a situation portending his own demise. When he is finally offered the shorter driving route, he declines it. He cannot act, only be acted upon. He is terrified of change. When, on the last trip of his life the motor sticks, hurtling him downhill at ever increasing speeds, the reader is made to understand that he is rushing towards his fate, his death, with the same fear that accompanied him in life. Appelfeld, by concentrating on Zimmer's thoughts and feelings, enables the reader to understand the despair that consumes his life. The author slowly and carefully reveals the truck driver's personality and problems. Zimmer's death is an inevitability, not a surprise.

A predictable death at the end of a life filled with anguish can be found in several of the stories in Ashan. It is Appelfeld's deft character portrayal that sets each one of these stories apart from the others. In "Sipur Ahavah" (Love Story) Kuba, a Holocaust survivor, marries Rosa. From the very first day of their marriage he is troubled, and the narrator soon reveals that his anguish and despair are due to guilt. There had been a wife and child "before," in Europe; their fate remained unknown. Now, with a new wife,

Kuba is "lavish with gifts and money, miserly with love."[2] He is trying to live a new life, and attempting to change his ways, but it is futile. He becomes sickly, has disturbing dreams and difficulty making decisions; eventually he stops going to work. Appelfeld doesn't reveal all Kuba's thoughts, only his dreams and his actions. The author also describes Rosa's reactions and fears as her husband slips from her. By developing the personalities of both protagonists in a sympathetic manner, Appelfeld avoids judgment. We sympathize with both Rosa and Kuba; first more with the one, then with the other. Whereas we were with Zimmer in the truck as he headed toward his death, we learn of Kuba's suicide at the very moment his wife does: "From far, far away Rosa heard the cry. But by the time she arrived it was already too late."[3]

Other stories in Ashan revolve around similar characters: workers, rental agents, merchants, smugglers, all trying to begin anew and all failing. In "Yamim Noraim" (another double entendre title, meaning both "Days of Awe" and "Awful Days") Manfred Stein slowly becomes incapacitated. His wife watches helplessly as he sinks towards his death. The intervention of well-meaning relatives only serves to further alienate Manfred and his wife from each other. Manfred is another lonely soul, lacking emotional strength for survival.

Other stories in the first volume concern similar character types. In "Shutafut" (Partnership), "B'Komat HaKarka" (On the Ground Floor) and "L'at" (Slowly) Appelfeld fails to develop enough singular characteristics for his individual protagonists. The result is often a blur. Dansky in "Shutafut" is a stock character who could just as easily have been placed into the nearly identical setting of "B'Komat HaKarka." Sharfstein in "L'at" is given some individuality because Appelfeld lets him "speak" his thoughts directly to the reader. But even he is basically the same personality "type" as the others.

In later works, Appelfeld creates many more post-Holocaust refugees leading ordinary, futile lives in Israel. But he never again is quite as despairing of the future, so completely without hope as with the characters who people Ashan, nearly all of whom are doomed to an untimely death.

In his early writings, Appelfeld seems to be working backward into his own experiences. His first book concentrates mainly on the broken lives of the survivors who have reached Israel, although he has a few stories that are set immediately after the war. In the succeeding collections, especially in BaGai HaPoreh, but also in later works, he concentrates on refugees from the Holocaust, either those running from the Nazis during the war, or those

wandering, homeless souls -- of which Appelfeld himself was one -- who languished in Italy as a way-station to the future. One can begin to see the writer's development by comparing two stories from Ashan, "Shloshah" (Three) and "Aviv Kar" (Cold Spring). "Shloshah" is basically a sketch, a vignette about three people left alone, alive and free, after the war. They had hidden themselves in an abandoned bunker and had come to depend upon each other for their very existence. Now that the danger has passed, their friendship falters. Each eventually goes his own way, although they know that their ability to survive depends upon their being together. Appelfeld makes little differentiation among the three, other than to state that one was older, one young, one middle-aged. The young one is a bit more optimistic and exhuberant than his comrades; otherwise the three are virtually indistinguishable from each other.

In "Aviv Kar"[4] Appelfeld creates almost precisely the same scene, but his characters exist as distinct beings with unique personalities. Tzeitl is the "earth mother" who cares for the group and despairs after they are separated. Reb Isaac dashes into the woods with a passionate cry for his lost Sonia. It is these characters and their responses to the situations they face that enable the reader to understand the terrible reality of the situation. "Shloshah" is opaque, ambiguous. The tears and pain of Berl

and Tzeitl, and the fears of the narrator-participant Hirshl, serve to concretize the experience in "Aviv Kar."

Quite a few of Appelfeld's early short stories, and one later novella, concern the refugees in or near the displaced persons camps in Italy. In these stories Appelfeld attempts to convey the difficulties faced by survivors as each struggles to pull the pieces of his life together and continue beyond tragedy. The problem is most clearly delineated through the excellent story "Al Yad HaḤof" (By the Seashore) which appeared in both Ashan and BaGai HaPoreh. Each of the three main characters is sufficiently developed to enable the reader to understand and sympathize with their conditions. The responsibility Berl feels towards little Gittl is conveyed through their conversations, recollections, and even by the way they look at and touch each other. In these short stories, Appelfeld is at his best with characterization when he concentrates on a few individuals, portraying them with their individual problems, not as examples but as simple ordinary human beings caught in a trap from which there is no escape.

In "BaGovah HaKar," the refugees are once again in an Italian D.P. camp, but only a few are differentiated one from the other. Dora, the nurse who is consumed by a secret guilt, Shpilman and his niece Liuba, stand out because of Appelfeld's careful and sympathetic writing. The reader observes Dora caring for the sick, and worries along with

her about the lack of medicine. But though she nurses the refugees, she remains a bit apart from them. Shpilman and Liuba, too, are separated, this time physically, from the masses. They live away from the others, detached from all society, even from this make-shift one situated on "cold heights" above the sea. As with so many of his short stories, Appelfeld here presents people as they are; there are no changes, no real development in their personalities. If there is any movement, it is almost invariably temporary, with an immediate lapse back into the character's stupor-like existence. In "BaGovah HaKar," with its theme of memory slowly reawakening,[5] Dora is momentarily jarred into planning for the future. Shpilman, caught between past and future, and frustrated with the present, physically abuses his niece. But even he, after his outburst, apparently returns to his previous ways; he remains in the camp.

The problem with the refugee characters in these early volumes is that they seem almost interchangeable from story to story. Even the more memorable characters are similar to others. Dora in "BaGovah HaKar" becomes organizer and nurse-caretaker for the camp in much the same way Tzeitl concerns herself with her four fellow survivors in "Aviv Kar."

The survivor in "HaShayarah" (The Convoy) is also a stock type, another refugee in Italy who has been in the

displaced persons camps. The significant difference in this story is that Appelfeld concentrates solely on this one slightly crippled, bitter individual who, having been left behind when most of the refugees departed, believes he has no need of other Jews. The author unfolds his character as he talks to local children, passes time in bars with women and drink, and sets himself up as a peddler. Slowly, as the seasons change, he himself begins to change. He sheds his illusions of melting anonymously into the surrounding non-Jewish scene, or of finding an Italian wife. When he stands on the deserted beach, gazing into the vast emptiness of sea before him, he is totally alone. The change is in his resigned acceptance of his destiny to be among Jews. The story may be viewed symbolically, with this one survivor representing all Jews. The author's message is that Jews cannot exist without other Jews. But what makes the message succeed is that the Jew is one person, alone, who has been realistically portrayed by the author. There is no idealization here as the character gradually changes his self-perception. Readers identify with his loneliness and concern themselves about his future.

A variation on the "refugee in Europe" character is the protagonist who had once been in the Italian D.P. camps, made his way to Israel and, after some time, has wandered back to southern Europe. The archeologist in "B'Makom Aḥer"

fits into this category. Caught between two worlds, he fits into neither.[6] As Gershon Shaked has pointed out, this kind of Appelfeld protagonist has his heart in the west, even when his body is in the east.[7] The clearest example of this in Appelfeld's works is Chohovski, a petty black-market dealer in "B'iye San George." Chohovski has been on the run from authorities ever since the end of the war, first in Vienna, next among the refugees in southern Italy, later in Israel, finally once again in Italy. Weary of constant flight, he chooses the nearly deserted isles of St. George, off the coast of southern Italy, as a last refuge. He plans to be totally alone. He believes no one will find him there and that he will be able to remain undisturbed.

Appelfeld develops Chohovski by unraveling his thoughts, fears, and plans. The reader understands what happens to Chohovski on the island as though viewing a film run backwards. After bidding farewell to the boatman who ferried him there, reminiscent of the mythical Charon ferrying dead souls across the river Styx, Chohovski wanders through the island in search of himself. Days blend into nights; time becomes meaningless in such isolation. As his memory returns, he slowly reveals his past. Appelfeld uses Chohovski's recurring dreams of his childhood, along with his current daydreams, to unfold the history and personality of his character. The reader knows that Chohovski is not his real name; he had exchanged it, during one escapade

running from the authorities, for the name of a dead Jew whose identity papers he had obtained. This fact begins to trouble him as he accustoms himself to his isolation. Soon he longs for the sight of a human face and realizes his need to return to society. At the same time, he begins to come to terms with himself, noting that "a man must examine his own deeds."[8] He is tormented by dreams in which his father and others in his home town deride him by calling him Chohovski instead of Leibl, his given name. In his dream conversations he pleads with his father to understand why he had shed his name, and to accept him as Leibl.

Chohovski comes to see the world as dichotomous: the islands and the rest of the world. He finds Vinter, another Jew in hiding, who works as a guard at an abandoned mine. Vinter has a quasi-relationship with the outside world; every week his employers send him supplies from the mainland. Chohovski rejects such an existence. Either he will be part of society or he will be part of the island. Strangely, he is soon drawn back to civilization by the presence of another place of retreat, a monastery. The pealing of the bells forces him to remember times he had sought refuge in monasteries. He wanders over to the monastery and becomes friendly with the caretaker-monk. In conversation with the monk he is totally honest about himself, perhaps for the first time in many years. Chohovski and the monk are the same age, but the contrasts

are striking. The monk is content with his lot and is looking forward to his upcoming journey to the "Holy Land." His dreams are of Jerusalem, the holy city. Chohovski is agitated, still filled with anxiety. His dreams are of his checkered past. He tries to convince the monk that the Jerusalem he knows is not holy at all. He attempts to find some small measure of contentment by working in the monastery garden. In a superb use of irony, Appelfeld has Chohovski teach the monk Hebrew, the "holy language." Slowly Chohovski awakens to the reality that he is the summation of his past experiences. Even on an almost deserted island he is unable to escape from himself. The monk leaves for Eretz Yisrael; no replacement arrives; the monastery is closed. Chohovski is left totally alone, but with a greater sense of self. He now knows it is impossible to begin again through forgetting.

Appelfeld continued writing about the refugee in Italy as he further developed his literary craft. This stock character became the vehicle for one of his earliest novellas, 1946, which appeared in 1975 in the volume, Shanim v'Shaot (Years and Hours).[9] Actually, the work is more an integrated group of short stories than a novella. It is peopled by Holocaust survivors in a displaced persons camp, any of whom might have been the subject of an entire short story in the author's earlier works. By combining these character sketches into a unified piece, however, Appelfeld

is able to describe in more detail the specifics of their daily life. His characters include smugglers not unlike Chohovski, a mute child (reminiscent of the child in "Mukar," and of other children in his early stories), a Yiddish teacher, and others. One vignette actually was conceived first as an independent story. "B'Hanukah 1946" (On Hanukkah, 1946), first appeared in Adnai HaNahar in 1971. It concerns a refugee couple, Freidl and his wife, who have just given birth to a son. The traumas they have undergone and their continuing fears are expressed in the tension of their loveless relationship. She demands a proper circumcision for her newborn; he is incapable of facing the future, symbolized by that son. In the middle of the night he leaves the camp, abandoning her with her son and her dried up breasts. When a mohel is finally obtained, he refuses to circumcise the child, claiming the boy will soon die anyway.

The tone of despair present in "B'Hanukah 1946," when it is read alone, is somewhat ameliorated when the story is woven into the fabric of the longer work, 1946. In the novella, other refugees look forward to aliyah, or to a life in Italy. Although none of Appelfeld's survivors in the camps are ever actually happy or hopeful, most, like the smugglers, manage to survive and to cope with life day by day.

Occasionally Appelfeld focuses an entire story on a solitary character. "Shoḥet" is a typical example, although "Shoḥet" is more of a character sketch than a complete story. The shoḥet is in hiding. He is remembering, planning, fearing. Chohovski in "B'iye San George" and the refugee in "HaShayarah" also fit into this category of a man all alone. A very different kind of solitary figure is the shaliaḥ in "HaBsorah" (The Good Tidings) from Kfor Al HaAretz.[10] The author employs the first person narrator in order to focus on a single individual, alone and alienated from others. He is an itinerant lecturer, who travels from town to town in Eastern Europe, bringing "good tidings" from Jerusalem. But his real "tidings" are anything but good. Weary and forlorn, he arrives at one town where he is met by the head of the Jewish culture club. The shaliaḥ is by now used to the reception given him, which is the same everywhere. No one really wants to hear him; no one comes to his lecture. The local people do not even fill the collection plate. He will continue his travels, as he has for more than twenty years, alone and not quite despairing. The "good tidings" are bleak.

"HaBsorah" is a different angle for Appelfeld. Whereas most of his early stories focus on a solitary character trying to escape his Jewishness, and ultimately being forced to accept it, in "HaBsorah" the wandering shaliaḥ is the only one who really cares about the Jewish people and their

fate; the majority are indifferent. Although there is no major development in the shaliaḥ character, Appelfeld reveals insights into his feelings and attitudes, presenting an individual who is taking a realistic look at himself and his life.

Throughout Aharon Appelfeld's various stages of literary development he has depicted children as major characters in his stories. His children are not youngsters absorbed in a child's world, for he himself did not have that luxury. He was but a child during the Holocaust, and the children he depicts in his fiction are, like him, victims of a world gone mad. The child often remains the only symbol of innocence among adults who must compromise in order to survive. Gittl, in "Al Yad HaḤof," deposited in a monastery by Berl and Fishl so that they might begin their lives anew, is typical of such a child. Although Gittl was one of the author's earliest fictional creations, Appelfeld is still, today, writing about children. Two of his most recent works, Tzili and Tor HaPlaot (The Age of Wonders) have children as their main protagonists. "Mukar," in the second volume, is in a sense a continuation of "Al Yad HaḤof." Gittl had been left in the monastery. The child in "Mukar" had been reclaimed by his father from a monastery after the war ended. When he returned for his son, he found a badly disturbed child who might never recover. Although

the father's guilt is the main focus of the story, it is the description of the son's large, questioning eyes, silently accusing his father, that remains with the reader.[11]

Several of the stories in Kfor Al HaAretz have children as their protagonists. In "HaGerush"[12] the children are only part of the larger group fleeing their pursuers, but the children are free of the fears and memories of their elders and can therefore see things the most clearly. Parts of "HaGerush" are revealed through the eyes of one child, an orphan who has no memory of his own parents. It is he who understands, with a child's instinct, the vastness of the wilderness before him. He gazes upon all the sights and events, engraving them on his heart, into his memory. "He didn't know then," the author writes, "that only he would be left as a believable witness."[13] The children will eventually remember and thus force the world to remember the atrocities committed.

"B'even" (In Stone) is a highly symbolic story of a child in a monastery, revealed by the child himself.[14] He is the ultimate victim because he is unable to unlock his own memory. He has vague recollections of a village, and of parents, but these are mixed with dreams and visions he experiences while living in hiding in the basement of the monastery, among the stonecutters. Like the chld in "Mukar" he does not communicate with others. But in his case he is only pretending to be mute, lest others find out too much

about him. It is a successful strategy for survival, even though it means the child must accept taunts and physical abuse without answering back.

It is unclear exactly how much time the boy spends in the monastery, or whether he is an adult or still a child by the end of the story. Appelfeld's vagueness is deliberate: seasons and years blend into each other because ordinary time exists only outside the monastery walls. But the effect is uneven. Is this a child who sculpts a family from the blocks of stone? Or is this a man whose life has been destroyed in the monastery? Does the "family" represent the Christ child with Mary and Joseph, or is this a Jewish child's emotional breakthrough, remembering his own parents? In any case, the child has been victimized by society. The only unanswered question that matters is whether he has been totally destroyed or will one day be able to build a life of his own.

Children are innocent victims, totally dependent upon the whims of others, in "HaBhirah" (The Choosing),[15] a very short story told in flashbacks by a child waiting to be adopted from an orphanage . The children had been brought to this general orphan home years earlier, although they themselves did not remember when, and had been cared for during the war by the nuns. Now the war had ended, and they waited to be claimed by others, hoping to be adopted. Appelfeld describes the anxiety, uncertainty and hope that

grip the children as they gaze at the faces of prospective parents or employers. Some children were chosen because they were strong and could help at home. Others were chosen because they were small and childlike, and could perhaps fill the void in a home that had lost its own. Occasionally a child was returned to the orphanage. He would appear to be defeated, and would cause renewed anxiety among the remaining few. Eventually orders arrived to close the home. The nun in charge pleaded for someone to take the children, but in vain. On a winter's evening the last, unwanted children walked through the gate and out into the darkness of the street, rejected, unloved, with only empty hopelessness before them.

Throughout Appelfeld's works, from his earliest stories to his most recent novels, he has depicted women in strong, often unusual roles. In "Aviv Kar," Tzeitl is the conscience of the group of five who survived together in the bunker. It is she who tries to keep the group together after the war, who calls after Reb Isaac and searches for the lost Berl. She despairs because now that the group has separated, she senses that they are lost. It is Tzeitl who is jarred into remembering the horrors of the past by the revelations of a hermit-witch in the woods. When she realizes the enormity of the tragedy that has befallen her and her people, she lets loose with a piercing cry for the

lost future: "The children -- the children are all orphaned!"[16] The men are concerned only for their physical safety; Tzeitl mourns for her people. Her memories will continue to haunt her. If we were to project a future for her, it would be that of the Appelfeld refugee characters who later wound up in Israel, torn by memories, unable to adjust to a new life. She would be similar to Erna Traum, in "Pitzuyim," pulled by the past, eventually destroyed and driven mad when she tried to return to the scenes of her early life. These refugee women are all shattered; they are in some serious manner abnormal: either ill, deranged, or at times retarded. Although he creates them as slightly grotesque creatures, Appelfeld always treats these women gently, while at the same time showing the reader that society is to blame for causing the abnormalities.

"Berta," one of the best stories in Ashan, exemplifies this kind of Appelfeld woman.[17] Brought to Eretz Yisrael after the war by Max, another Holocaust survivor, Berta is a retarded dwarf who on one level understands little, yet at times seems to comprehend everything. Berta symbolizes the past, the Holocaust with all its complexities. She is a burden that Max must bear with him at all times. He tries to rid himself of her, leaving her for months at a time. But always, when he returns, he finds her still there, waiting for him, unchanged and unchanging, always knitting and unravelling the same yarn, living in the present,

frustrating his future. Try as he might, Max cannot desert Berta. He commits her to an asylum; she returns, refusing to be confined. Max has meanwhile fallen in love with another, but cannot build a new life for himself or even concentrate on his own work because of Berta. He finally determines to rid himself of his grotesque burden. Once more Max returns to her. Berta awaits him, aware that this is the end. They walk together briskly, silently, through the cold streets of Jerusalem. Berta becomes ill; Max takes her to the hospital, but is unable to bring himself to leave. He remains there in a stupor. When she dies, a part of him dies with her. His release from her is the end, not the start, of a major part of his life. Berta, retarded and deformed, symbolizes every Jew, changed forever by the Holocaust. Berta cannot be rejected; she is memory itself. She has become a part of Max.

Writing more than a decade later, Appelfeld was still concerned with similar themes in stories of women-survivors representing memory. "Regina" first appeared in Hamishah Sipurim in 1969, and later was included in the collection, Adnai HaNahar, published in 1971.[18] Like Tzeitl, in the earlier "Aviv Kar," Regina had lived with a group as a surrogate family throughout the war. Now they are still together in Israel. Like Berta, she is "different" and has become a burden to others. Berta died early but Regina has lived on in Israel for several years. At first she seemed

almost normal, although a bit wild. In recent years she had become ill and withdrawn. She stopped going out, even onto the porch, saying that she could not stand the daylight. Now she has become difficult and unreasonable in her demands. Her life has become a foreshadowing of her death. As she approaches death, her memory becomes clearer; she calls out names and places from long ago. The others around her, particularly Zeitchik, for whom she has become a burden, have little memory of the past. Regina, too, had once tried to bury the past. But now she remembers it all. When she dies, Zeitchik considers her death as if it were his; a part of him dies, too. Although Regina on her deathbed was able to reconcile herself with her past, including some unspoken horrors, nevertheless with her death the Holocaust has claimed yet another victim.

Gittl in "Al Yad HaHof" is typical of many of Appelfeld's character types in his early stories. She is one of the refugees in the Italian displaced persons camps; she is an innocent child. Because of her age and size, she is a burden to her surrogate family, Berl and Fishl. Gittl has managed to survive the war with the others and is beginning to look towards the future, when Berl and Fishl leave her at the monastery in order to further their own chances. The nuns accept her reluctantly, insisting she

remain with them permanently. Victimized first by the Nazis who destroyed her family and childhood, Gittl is victimized again by the uneasy partnership of Jews and Christians, each using her for their own needs. At nine she is too young to totally comprehend what is happening, but she has lived long enough and through enough difficulties to know that things are not what they appear to be. Gittl knows instinctively that the stay at the monastery will not be short; she understands that her life will change far more drastically than merely learning French from the nuns.

Kitty, in the short story of the same name, has no recollection of her past. "Kitty," which appeared in BaGai HaPoreh in 1963, is typical of the stories in the second volume in that it is more symbolic than Appelfeld's very first stories.[19] At the opening of the story, Kitty, an eleven year old child-woman, is almost ethereal. Appelfeld's depiction of her is of a pure, innocent victim who had been brought to the convent when very young, perhaps even before the start of the war, and now has no memory of life before. She is not merely innocent, but, like Bertha, different. She is slightly dense; the nuns believe her to be retarded. She never complains, never questions, and only vaguely comprehends why she is there and what is happening in the world around her. Under the tutelage of a kind nun, Maria, Kitty begins to blossom and to enjoy life. Gradually she becomes somewhat aware of the world outside the convent

walls, of the Germans encamped around them, and of the anxiety within the convent. As she begins to mature physically, Kitty begins to lose her innocence as well, for she becomes more earthy and less "pious," and enjoys communication with Peppi, the raucous, base German maid. Peppi is a typical German, with antisemitism totally ingrained in her. When Kitty refuses to steal from the convent for Peppi, the maid's instinctive response is, "You dirty Jew, you won't get away, you won't get away." These were not mere words, the narrator relates, "they were sounds escaping from a vicious being, like barks."[20]

Kitty's knowledge and understanding of Jews and Judaism is limited to what she has been taught in the convent; such a negative self-image is troubling to the reader, but comes from a void, not self-hate. Kitty slowly comprehends that she is Jewish, and eventually realizes that she is to be punished for it. Although she has no understanding of Judaism or the Jewish world she must have once inhabited, by the end of the war her memory has been stirred enough that she belongs neither to her old Jewish world nor to the Catholic world to which she had been brought. Her eventual rape and death at the hands of the Nazi soldiers is viewed by her -- and by the author -- as a release from the pain and anxiety of the lonely alienation to which she was subjected. Her death is the closest Appelfeld comes to

depicting a martyrdom. It is almost Christian in description; Kitty's death seems almost a transfiguration.

Alan Mintz writes that Aharon Appelfeld's women bear a different relationship to memory than his men, that they do not resist facing the past and are willing to include in their memories a wider range of experience than men are.[21] He bases this theory mainly on Regina and the other women appearing in the volume Adnai HaNahar. While this may be true for some of Appelfeld's women, it is neither true of all the women he creates, nor limited to the women characters alone. Many of the men, Chohovski in "B'iye San George" and the refugees in "P'gishah," for example, confront their memories with the same painful honesty as the women. Rather, the one trait that these women share, often lacking in the men, is an inner strength. Sometimes this leads to acceptance of a cruel fate; at other times such fortitude enables the women to survive against all odds. Kitty and Gittl are examples of the first kind, stoically accepting what fate has handed them, but accepting with a grace and dignity. Tzeitl, who may have gone mad or may yet regain her strength and survive her trials -- the author is purposely ambiguous -- fits the second category.

In his later works, Appelfeld is increasingly interested in the women survivors. The outstanding example of a woman, actually a child-woman, with an inner strength that enables

her to survive unspeakable horrors, occurs in Appelfeld's novel of the 70's, Tzili, The Story of a Life. Although this thesis is mainly concerned with Appelfeld's early stories, Tzili must be included because, both thematically and in development of character, Tzili is in many ways a culmination of all the child-woman characters Appelfeld created in his earlier works.

Tzili is a dull, slightly retarded child in an achievement-oriented, assimilated Jewish family. She cannot learn, and she is ridiculed by her family for being as dumb as a Gentile, and by her Gentile classmates for simply being stupid. She never complains, and grows up somewhat neglected by her family.

When the war breaks out Tzili's family flees, leaving her to fend for herself and mind the house. "They thought nobody would harm a feeble-minded little girl."[22] When the town is overrun by Nazis, Tzili escapes to the forest. Here she learns to survive, working for peasants who beat her mercilessly, but provide her with food and shelter, learning to eat berries and fruits and drink from river streams, and calling herself "Maria's girl," after the town prostitute who had many illegitimate daughters. As a bastard she is tolerated; as a Jew she would have been tortured and killed. Stoically she endures what is necessary in order to exist. Her ignorance matters little in her struggle for survival. When her life is threatened, she moves on.

In the forest she meets a concentration camp escapee who has lost his entire family. Tzili never completely comprehends what is ocurring around her; she only knows that her family and the other Jews have left. She and her new friend Mark make a shelter for themselves in a cave and remain there throughout several seasons, living off the provisions Tzili is able to bargain for with the peasants in nearby towns, using clothing from Mark's lost family as items for exchange.

When Mark insists on entering town to purchase goods himself, against Tzili's better judgement, he fails to return. Soon Tzili realizes she is pregnant with Mark's child and, though she waits for him and hears him in her dreams and in her despair, he never returns. All alone, Tzili once more trudges through the forest, growing larger with child as the seasons change. Eventually she joins a band of former concentration camp inmates. The war has ended and they are wandering through Europe, lost, abandoned. In southern Europe, in a refugee camp, Tzili is delivered of her dead child; soon afterward she boards a ship bound for Palestine.

Appelfeld's creation of this dullwitted girl brings to mind the many women who inhabit his early tales, but Tzili represents a new level of his fiction, as well as of his characterization of women. Unlike the passive Kitty, or the deformed Berta, Tzili survives. She survives by her simple,

dogged persistence on the most basic levels of existence. The reader has no reason to believe she will become either a Regina or an Erna Traum. She is independent and stoic; she is capable of acting instead of being acted upon. The victim has finally outlasted the vanquisher.

Tzili is a finely constructed novel with a beautiful characterization of the main protagonist. It represents an achievement in character development that Appelfeld has only recently been able to reach. The early stories, the short stories, and even to some extent the early longer ones such as 1946, show little actual development in the lives of the protagonists. Some are merely scenes in a life, some are character sketches which lack depth. There are certain types which Appelfeld concentrates on, however, and within those types one begins to see the author's concerns and his development as a writer. It is therefore instructive to study the author's refugees, his lonely, alienated characters, his women, and his children in groups and separately. The contrasts from early to later stories, from slightly developed people to characters the reader can identify with, from themes barely suggested to those developed through the personalities of his characters, provide significant evidence of the talent and literary growth of Aharon Appelfeld.

NOTES

[1]Gershon Shaked, Gal Ḥadash BaSiporet HaIvrit (Merḥavia: Kibbutz Artzi, 1974), p. 152. See also Raḥel Ḥalafi, "Ashan -- Dark and Tragic -- A Discussion with Aharon Appelfeld" [Hebrew], Maariv, November 23, 1962.

[2]"Sipur Ahavah," in Ashan (Jerusalem: Akhshav, 1962), p. 181.

[3]Ashan, p.186.

[4]The plot and theme of "Aviv Kar" are discussed at length in the previous chapter.

[5]See previous chapter for a full discussion of "BaGovah HaKar."

[6]"B'Makom Aḥer" in Kfor Al HaAretz (Jerusalem: Masada, 1965), pp. 138-149.

[7]Shaked, p. 164.

[8]Hillel Barzel, Siporet Ivrit Metarealistit (Ramat Gan: Masada, 1974), p. 130.

[9]Shanim V'Shaot (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1975). This story also appeared in English translation in The Jerusalem Quarterly, number 7, Spring, 1978, pp.104-144.

[10]"HaBsorah," in Kfor Al HaAretz, pp. 95-101.

[11]"Mukar," in BaGai HaPoreh (Jerusalem: Shocken, 1964), p. 198.

[12]Kfor Al HaAretz, pp. 56-66.

[13]Kfor Al HaAretz, p. 61.

[14]"B'even," in Kfor Al HaAretz, pp. 72-80.

[15]"HaBḥirah," in Kfor Al HaAretz, pp. 81-85.

[16]Ashan, p. 58.

[17]Ashan, pp. 61-78.

[18]See Alan Mintz's discussion of "Regina" in Hurban, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 235 ff.

[19]BaGai HaPoreh, p. 43.

[20]BaGai HaPoreh, p. 56.

[21]Mintz, Hurban, pp. 234-237.

[22]Aharon Appelfeld, Tzili, The Story of a Life (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1983).

[23]Tzili, p. 7.

Chapter Four

EVOKING A MOOD

Literary Style

Nearly all critics of Aharon Appelfeld's early works remark on his masterful ability to set a scene and evoke a mood. He creates an atmosphere in his stories in which character and theme become unified with the setting. The result is often powerful.

SETTING

Appelfeld's literary technique has developed and changed over the course of his writing career. He has experimented with various points of view, used many stylistic devices and tried different modes of communication, from highly symbolic to starkly realistic. But the most obvious and striking constant in Appelfeld's early works is the significance of seasons. Whether writing of situations in Europe or of refugees in Israel, the elements of nature are always of primary importance. Appelfeld's people live according to a seasonal calendar. Months and dates are rarely mentioned. Winter's harsh cruelty, summer's heat, spring and autumn's temperate calming effect, all these take on a significance beyond that of ordinary weather or time. In attempting to understand this emphasis, one once again must recall Appelfeld's own

personal history. He spent much of the war years outdoors, exposed to the elements, interacting with nature. The artificial divisions of weeks and months would have been meaningless to him. The strength of the sun's heat, the changes in winds, the gathering storm clouds -- these were what mattered to him in his struggle for survival.

LANDSCAPE

A careful reader immediately notices repeated descriptions of clouds, their many shapes and shades, which appear over and over in Appelfeld's first stories, the ones in Ashan. "That year the winter clouds arrived early," Appelfeld begins "Pitzuyim."[1] The clouds' arrival signifies upheaval, a change not necessarily for the better. The coming of winter is further described as Erna Traum closes her house tightly against its harshness. The clouds feature again prominently later in the story, in Europe. Dark clouds hover over the cemetery, setting the bleak scene that is about to unfold in Erna Traum's life.[2]

In "L'at" the clouds and their changes also signify approaching disaster, this time by their time frame. The clouds of autumn give way to clouds of winter. The end is near for Sharfstein and for his interminable waiting. Shortly thereafter, when winter has arrived, there is no answer to a knock on Sharfstein's door. The clouds not only

set the scene, but also the mood. Their presence predicts the outcome of the story.

Appelfeld uses extensive description of seasonal change, highlighted by different kinds of clouds and their various movements, in other stories in the first volume as well, particularly "Nisayon Ritzini" and "B'Komat HaKarka." In the first, the seasonal changes help depict parallel changes in Zimmer's own attitudes. In the second the bleakness of winter intensifies the mood of helplessness in the old man's life.

While Appelfeld uses clouds and winter to intensify a mood, when he writes of the sun it is as often in an ironic mode as not. This becomes apparent in "Al Yad HaḤof" where the Mediterranean sun beats down mercilessly upon the ragged band of refugees. Instead of offering warmth and comfort, the natural opposite of winter's elements, the sun is as cruel as winter's winds, causing dryness, heatstroke, and even madness from its constant, shadeless glare.

None of nature's elements offer comfort in Appelfeld's first stories. Nor are they pleasant in the second collection, BaGai HaPoreh. In this volume, Appelfeld seems to be consciously evoking moods and setting scenes in differing kinds of environments. The titles alone of several stories in the collection suggest the importance of landscape setting: "Sibir" (Siberia), "BaMidbar" (In the Desert), "BaGai HaPoreh" (In the Fertile Valley), "BaGovah

HaKar" (On Cold Heights), and "BaShemesh HaDromit" (In the Southern Sun). In some of these stories, "BaShemesh HaDromit," for example, the sun serves a similar purpose as in "Al Yad HaḤof." Appelfeld intensifies this sun symbol to become a powerful force; the desert wanderers are frightened of its power and despise its heat and light. During the long summer months they live out their days wishing for the darkness of night. Only with the coming of autumn do they receive any relief from the southern sun.[3] This strong ironic use of nature and its elements could perhaps be traced to the influence of other Hebrew writers, especially Bialik in such poems as "B'Ir HaḤaregah" and "Al HaSḥitah."

The rugged outdoors, combined with the changing seasons, form a powerful setting for the story "Matzod."[4] The contrasts between day and night also heighten the mood. An old man has been abandoned by the side of a lake. It is night and he feels safe; at daylight he might be revealed by the light and his hiding place discovered. It is the end of winter, everything is melting, but still cold. He climbs a mountain for safety; here on the heights he is in control. He can see the land below, and know if he is being pursued. Winter melts into spring. Along with a roving band of shepherds he spends his days sleeping on the mountain; nights, he forages below to find food. It is a stange kind of freedom. "Here," the author comments, "one learned to live according to nature."[5] The man muses on the relative

merits of both mountain and valley for safety and comfort. On the mountain he is both trapped and safe. In the valley he is freer to roam the open spaces, but more likely to be caught. Summer means a propitious change. Summer, in Appelfeld's works, is always dangerous. In this case, the farmers below will move towards the mountains and begin to close in on him. Finally, in the heat of summer, he and the others are surrounded and doomed. The changes in nature are natural. They flow evenly, predictably. Appelfeld juxtaposes these uncaring forces of nature against the terror and fear of his protagonists who must learn to submit to their laws.

In "Sibir," there is no change of season. This story, which is more a sketch than a well developed tale, is set in a transport station, somewhere in Siberia. Two prisoners argue; each vehemently defends his version of communism. A priest tries to convince them to "go the way of Jesus."[6] Meanwhile war rages all around them, and the frozen ground, the snow and the bitter cold, make the futility of their arguments and their hopes abundantly clear to the prisoners. No one will escape in this weather. The guards need not worry; the freezing cold rules. In this part of the world, the seasons control one's destiny. "Sibir" is not one of Appelfeld's better stories, but in its stark depiction of the frozen wasteland, the author has created a chilling scene of despair.

In Kfor Al HaAretz (Frost on the Earth), most of the stories, including the title story, occur during the winter. One such story is similar to "Sibir" in its setting: a snow covered train station during the depths of winter. At first reading, "BaTahanah" seems to be about a Jew traveling to another town to confront the Gentile authorities who have confiscated his vendor's licence, forcing him out of a job.[7] But the story is really about man's struggle against the elements. For some passengers on the train the freezing cold is a good omen. During the bad winter months, borders go unchecked. One can escape from the pursuing authorities. One might reach freedom on the way to America. For other passengers, the bitter cold and frost means costly delays in business; it might mean the difference between success and failure, even between life and death. The snow both causes the train's delay and protects the passengers by blanketing the station and helping it stay warm. Again, Appelfeld is employing an ironic use of weather; here it is to emphasize the irrationality of fate.

Winter's weather affects the travelers in other ways. The frozen river means travelers are able to cross on foot, making passage to the border easier than in warmer weather. But the strong wind forces some people back. All are dependent upon the whims of winter. Often they are tortured by its deceptions, for the snow and the wind may seem gentle and banal, when they are in fact lethal. Some travelers give

themselves over to the harsh weather, realizing they are all merely "winter's playthings."[8]

Soon spring will come. It too is a season of brutality, perhaps the harshest of all. The rains will flood the ground. The authorities, comfortable with warmer weather, will patrol the woods and borders more closely. Rivers will swell, mud will make travel on foot difficult. The author's message is clear: whether one resists or not, one is at the complete mercy of nature.

In "Sibir" and "BaTaḥanah" Appelfeld writes of people struggling against nature. In other stories he does not necessarily use setting in contrast to his characters and their ambitions, but as symbols of oneness, an almost complete identification between protagonist and landscape. Chohovski on the isles of St. George is an example of this technique. He is searching for solitude. The barren island, gray and lifeless, is a perfect setting for Chohovski's confrontation with his own emptiness.

In "Tzel Harim" (Mountain Shadows), from Kfor Al HaAretz, Appelfeld has written an impressionistic story in which the setting and the protagonist blend into one. The small Jewish group exists in concert with nature, living on top of a mountain in a fortress-type temporary refuge. They know their limitations in trying to eke out an existence. One must come into conflict with neither the Gentiles nor nature. The story focuses on Moshe, a young man who dares

to leave the protected enclave for the larger world with its hostile environment. Moshe is forever changed, his personality destroyed, by his futile challenge against his destiny.

In "Tzel Harim," Appelfeld attempts to place his characters into a timeless setting. He emphasizes not only the mountain heights and its valleys below, but the changing seasons with their various winds. He also makes considerable and often forced use of wind, fire and water -- earth's elements and their effects on man. Setting the story into a timeless frame is a device he employs in several stories in the early volumes, but drops in his later work. The almost mystical quality of man and nature working together or against one another is not enough to overcome the dull vagueness that is also conveyed by the mood created. The landscape the author creates sets a mood, but the mood is not enough to carry the rambling, often disconnected story line. "Tzel Harim" is a rare case where Appelfeld's careful descriptions of landscape and setting cannot overcome a confused plot.

LOCATIONS

In addition to describing the seasons and landscape, in his early works Appelfeld tends to dwell on specific locations for his settings. The Israel scenes are almost all in Jerusalem. It is not the Jerusalem of the Halutzim, the

pioneers, but an almost Europeanized Jerusalem, as seen through the eyes of the traumatized European refugees who have been transplanted there. Even when he creates a story set elsewhere in Israel, Appelfeld is influenced by European memories. In "BaMikomot HaNimukhim," for instance, the setting is the parched land around the Dead Sea in Israel's desert, but the protagonists' memories are of the mountains in central Europe.

In Europe, in these early stories, most of the settings are outdoors, on mountain tops or in fields and valleys. When Appelfeld refers to specific locations he most often writes of the d. p. camps in southern Europe, especially those in Italy. But one particular place keeps recurring, even in his recent works: the monastery. Appelfeld himself spent time in a monastery in Italy after World War II. He declines to discuss it, but the experience obviously had a profound and lasting effect on him. In a few stories, "B'iye San George" and "Pitzuyim" for example, the monastery is a fairly neutral symbol. Most of the time he writes of it, however, he uses it as a means of condemnation. Sometimes, as in "Al Yad HaHof," he is condemning both the Jews who leave the child Gittl in the monastery and the Christians who accept her only on the condition that she remain with them to become one of them, lost forever to the Jewish people. In stories such as "Kitty" and "Mukar," Appelfeld's object of condemnation is less clear. He merely describes

the destruction of the children, Kitty's death, and the emotional illness of the child in "Mukar." The blame is left for the reader to decide. Are the nuns more guilty than the Nazis for Kitty's murder? Is the father in "Mukar" to be condemned for leaving his child at a monastery in order to try to save both their lives? In typical Appelfeld style, the monastery stories all leave the reader with the sense that although there is guilt to be borne, exactly whose guilt is not clear.

Other Appelfeld stories with a monastery setting are highly symbolic. "B'even" (In Stone) and "HaMahaseh HaAharon" (The Last Refuge) both concern protagonists living in a monastery. In the first story, a Jewish child has been taught to act mute; eventually he becomes as mute as the stones he carves. In the other story, the Jew flees to a monastery for safety, trying to leave his Jewishness behind him. He is poisoned in body and mind. Appelfeld's anger against the monasteries and the Christianity they represent abates somewhat in his later works. But the forbidding, cold, walled monastery, remains for the reader one of the most striking <u>places</u> in all his writings.

IMAGERY

In <u>Ashan</u>, Appelfeld's use of imagery is spare and clear. Most of the stories in this first collection are realistic, and when Appelfeld does employ a symbol, it is

often memorable, fitting easily and naturally into the context of the story. The rucksacks in "Ashan" and the dwarf-woman Berta are both symbols of the past which cannot be repressed. Opening the smoky-smelling rucksacks provides a catharsis for the butcher. Caring for Berta, whom he is unable to discard, constantly reminds Max that the Holocaust years are to be carried with him; they are his burden as surely as Berta is. In "Berta," Appelfeld draws upon images from Greek mythology with Berta constantly winding and unravelling the same yarn, bringing to mind Penelope trying to stave off a doomed future with unwanted suitors as she waits for Odysseus. But unlike Penelope, Berta does not succeed.

In "L'at," also in the first volume, Appelfeld attempts a more poetic and sustained metaphor. "The trees sprout slowly," Sharfstein keeps repeating to himself," trying to justify the slowness of changes in his life. He is almost too patient, refusing to force change. Rather, he waits for the slow changes to occur to him. The author also uses a tree image in referring to Sharfstein's background before the war. In Europe he had planted and tended trees; they grew slowly but, except for unusual circumstances, one could be sure they would grow. Now, in Jerusalem, he is a rental agent. His livelihood is sporadic at best, and he longs for the certainty of the blossoming trees.

"The trees sprout slowly." Sharfstein finally despairs; his tenants do not pay, and he cannot bring himself to evict them. Anxious for a sudden change, he again recalls the forest of his youth. He remembers the occasional forest fires which both destroyed everything, and forced new growth and freedom among the remains. Slowly, "l'at," Sharfstein understands that his life is nearing its end. He cannot change. Even the imperceptible changes the trees experience from season to season are beyond him.

Appelfeld's use of the tree image is creative, but he is trapped by it, and at times the attempt to sustain the metaphor is forced, weakening the story line. "L'at" may have stonger imagery, but it is simply not as memorable a story as "Ashan" or "Berta."

BaGai HaPoreh contains many stories which are meant to be read on a symbolic level. In this book, the author leaves realism behind to experiment with diverse images and symbols. Still haunted by the terrors of the Holocaust, but wanting to universalize the experience, Appelfeld creates many varied allusions to the age-old "Wandering Jew." Some of his stories directly compare the homeless Jewish wanderers in Europe with the Israelites in the wilderness. In "BaMidbar" (In the Wilderness)[10] the title itself recalls the Biblical scenes. The wilderness here is a barren area somewhere in eastern Europe. No time is given, for the author intends that it be understood as occurring any time,

anywhere, to any Jew. These wandering Jews are leaderless, their group solidarity is cracking and they each blame the other for their collective failures. Eventually they blame the dying horse who, they wail, led them astray. Alone in the wilderness, without a leader to unite them or a common purpose by which to proceed, they will surely perish.

In "BaShemesh HaDromit"[11] Appelfeld once again places his wanderers into an unnamed wilderness. Perhaps because this is a longer, more intricate tale than "BaMidbar," the author's images sometimes lead to reader confusion. The opening paragraph suggests the biblical wilderness, but then characters are introduced which suggest a late nineteenth or even mid-twentieth century time-frame. Christian priests who accuse Jews of praying to false gods, Jewish peddlers who speak Yiddish and Slavic -- all these clash with the biblical mood created both by the opening wilderness scene and occasional biblical phrases. Women and children in the wilderness caravan, for instance, are referred to in the archaic and stylized phrase, "HaTaf V'HaNashim," a Hebrew that is found mainly in the Torah regarding the women and children who were part of the Exodus and wilderness civilization.

Yet, regardless of the author's problem with time, the wilderness is the central symbol in "BaShemesh HaDromit." These Jews had almost forgotten who they were. Here in the wilderness, memory slowly returns to them. "Only here in

the wilderness," the narrator explains," can one really rest, and observe the Sabbath."[12] Because they begin to reclaim their heritage through memory and observance, the wanderers begin to unite. The wilderness has helped to save them. They will continue to wander, but their chances for survival are good.

Other biblical allusions abound in these short stories. "Kitty," "Mukar," "Nisayon Ritzini," and "Matzod" all recall the Akedah. In "Matzod"[13] the protagonist compares the alienated condition of the wanderers to that of the Israelites enslaved in Egypt. The narrator, a storyteller, recalls the tale of Joseph sold into slavery, and concludes that the world has never changed in its attitude towards the Jews. Trying to teach the children the ancient lessons, he tells them about God searching for a people to accept his commandments. "Na'aseh V'Nishma" -- we will do and we will obey -- is the message he tries to pass on to the next generation. But it is too late. His memory finally returns to him, but repeating the old Bible tales was not enough to save the children.

Appelfeld continues to depict wandering Jews in a biblical wilderness in other stories, such as "HaShayarah" and "HaGerush." The motif is suggested in later works as well, but, as his career develops, the author mutes such images rather than emphasizing them. Parts of Tzili, with the heroine wandering aimlessly in her quest for survival,

recall for the reader the wilderness image of the earlier stories. But in Tzili and other more recent works Appelfeld is able to control his symbols more carefully. In the early stories they too often control him.

Appelfeld's writing has frequently been compared to Kafka, with its emphasis on anxiety and loneliness, on frustration and the sense of futility. He, himself, acknowledges his debt to Kafka, whose works he greatly admires. Nearly all the highly symbolic short stories are Kafkaesque, especially the strange, dreamlike, existential "Masa" (Voyage), with which BaGai HaPoreh opens. The setting is psychological as well as physical, with the narrator recalling his lengthy "voyage" from the confines of his own room in his parents' home. He had wandered, in a manner reminiscent of the Joseph story, among Gentile strangers in a wilderness. All during his wanderings he had wanted to return home, but never even made an attempt of his own. Always filled with fears, the fears of confinement, as well as the fears of being hunted down, he commits unspeakable atrocities against fellow Jews in order to save his own life when under duress. Eventually he is rescued and returned to his own people. The reader is left with many unanswered questions. Why is he so filled with paranoia? Did he even really travel the "journey" or was it all a figment of his imagination? Is this voyage an allegory in which the protagonist is every Jew who went through the Holocaust and

had to compromise himself in order to survive? Why is there such a sense of guilt and anxiety permeating the story? The ambiguity of the setting and the ramblings of the narrator leave a powerful, unsettling effect on the reader, even though the story line itself is at times confusing.

In a later volume of short stories, B'Komat HaKarka, Appelfeld writes another Kafkaesque allegory, "HaHishtanut,"[14] which translates into "The Change," or "The Transformation." Alan Mintz notes that the story might also be translated as "The Metamorphoses," so closely does this story resemble Kafka's own style.[15] Unlike the highly symbolic technique he used in "Masa," in "HaHishtanut" Appelfeld writes his allegory in an almost matter-of-fact style. Two Jews have fled to the forests and try to pass themselves off as Gentile peasants in the surrounding population. Slowly, as they become less Jewish, they become less civilized, less human. Their hair and skin become coarse; they can swim and climb, fish and hunt. But they can no longer get along with each other. They become more like the earthy peasants. The woman goes to church in town; the man remains behind in the cave. Eventually she leaves him; his is severely ill and will soon die. As in the themes of other stories, the couple's demise is caused by their denial of their Jewishness and the breakdown of their relationship. "HaHishtanut" is remarkable not only for its indebtedness to Kafka, but for its subtlety and clarity. In

previous works Appelfeld attempted allegory; here he has succeeded.

NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

The first three collections of Appelfeld's stories, upon which this study is mainly based, must be viewed today as apprentice works. Each story is both an artistic expression and a learning experience. The author himself regards these stories as beginner's attempts,[16] beyond which he has long since moved. One understands this corpus as a method of learning and experimenting, particularly when isolating certain stylistic techniques, such as those of narrator and point of view.

In Ashan, most of the stories are told in the third person, simply and straightforwardly. In "Shloshah," an outside narrator describes the scene and action, beginning with the simple declarative sentence which reveals so much: "Three remained."[17] Although not a participant, the narrator injects himself into the story by engaging the reader in a rhetorical question in the very next sentence, "Is it possible to say (they remained) by accident?" The reader knows the narrator's thoughts, but not the protagonists'. This changes in other Ashan stories. In "Ashan" and "Nisayon Ritzini," among others, the author lets the reader enter into the thoughts and emotions of Max, Zimmer, and other main characters, using a partly omniscient third

person narrator. This is especially effective when he creates lonely, solitary characters who communicate with others little, and so poorly. By using this narrative technique, Appelfeld is able to develop his characters more fully, enabling the reader to identify with them.

At times the author goes beyond describing the characters' thoughts and into their dreams. Dreams take on particular significance in "Sipur Ahavah," a story which the author tells from the viewpoints of both Kuba and his wife, Rosa. Kuba dreams of his mother and of his life in Europe shortly before he ceases going to work. Later on he dreams that he should return to work. His dreams help explain his confused state of guilt. Rosa has dreams, too, but their content remains hidden from the reader, who only knows her own reaction to them, a fear that others will laugh at her.

In "Shoḥet," the author employs an almost omniscient narrator. The shoḥet is the only character; the reader not only watches his actions, but sees, indeed almost hears, him talking to himself and thinking out his plans for revenge against the murderous Gentiles. It is the narrative technique, together with the description of the parched, dead, landscape around him, that creates the mood of the trauma that the shoḥet must endure, his fear and ultimately his paralysis.

But the realism of "Shoḥet" is the exception in BaGai HaPoreh. Most of the stories are highly symbolic and

existential, and bear the mark of an author attempting, almost too hard, for an effect. One technique Appelfeld employs to a great extent in this book, and then hardly at all in later works, is that of the second person narrator, the "You," a form of direct address. Such a narration is extremely difficult to sustain, and the author often lapses into a normative third person narrative for parts of the stories. When he does succeed with the second person narrator, the technique results in the narrator-participant being able to reveal his thoughts as he experiences them and creates a relationship of sorts between reader and narrator. In "Mukar" the father is the narrator. His pain is keenly felt by the reader, in part because he addresses the reader while addressing himself. When the narrator muses, partly to himself, "Mrs. Frostbaum approaches you; slowly she extends her hand," the reader is forced to see himself in the father's place, about to meet with the head of the institution.[18]

The same second person narration works, for the most part, in "HaR'difah," where the father is in pursuit of his kidnapped daughter. His hopes, fears, and finally his despair are heightened by his speaking directly to the reader. In "BaShemesh HaDromit" and "BaMidbar," discussed at length earlier in this chapter, the use of the second person narrator is less successful, partly because Appelfeld cannot sustain it, and partly because in these stories the

narrator participant is only one of a large group of characters. The third person, which the author occasionally slips into, or a first person plural, which would have had the narrator including himself in the group in a more natural way, might have served to strengthen these two stories' overall effect.

In his first volume Appelfeld was writing about events so close to his own experience in time that he needed the device of a detached narrator in order to keep artistic distance from his subject. By the second volume he was more comfortable with the short story form and began to experiment, especially with the use of the second person, "You," narrator. Not until the stories of the third volume, published in 1965, does he feel comfortable with an "I" narrator, a character who is part of the story, telling the tale as a personal experience.[19] In both "HaBsorah" and "P'gishah," the narrator is the main character. In "HaBsorah" all events are reflected through the shaliah's eyes; the reader notices the empty auditorium and the apologetic tone of the president of the Jewish culture club by hearing it from the shaliah himself. But by seeing the events through the shaliah's interpretation, the reader also comes to understand the shaliah's own pathetic personality, his doubts about his job, and his sense of impending defeat. "P'gishah" takes place in Jerusalem, and the author's use of first person narrator could lay him open to the charge of

barely fictionalized autobiography. But his descriptions regarding the two men, their meeting and subsequent re-awakening of memories for their home village of Listik, which no longer exists, transcends personal reminiscences. The village itself, the narrator's grandfather, the remembered smells of corn flour, the smuggling trade at the border -- memories of all these unite the two men as they talk quietly into the night. The reader becomes a guest, observing as the two men reminisce. The scene drawn is poignant and beautiful, and with it the author achieves a universality far beyond personal memories. Appelfeld continues to use the first person narrator in several other stories in Kfor Al HaAretz, with varying degrees of success.[20]

A variation on the first person narrator is the first person plural, the use of the "We" to tell the story. In "HaBhirah" the narrator is a child waiting to be chosen for adoption from a group of refugee children. But Appelfeld is not writing the story of the boy alone. In order to universalize, he has his boy speak of the entire group, of their hopes and fears, as each day brings them closer to the orphanage's closing. It is an interesting technique, but one of Appelfeld's strengths is usually his ability to create children the reader can identify with and care about. One can not identify with a group of children as well as with one individual child.

The "I-We" narration technique used in "HaGerush" serves a different purpose. Here the narrator is not the main character, but merely one of the group, an orphan child who views the situation from a different perspective than the adults, yet identifies with them. In "HaGerush" the "We," not the "I" is important. But a general "we" would not have had the same effect; the child's observations are crucial, for he sees through others' false optimisms as well as fears. He is totally innocent, with little memory of the past, knowing only what others tell him and what he with his clear eyes can see for himself. "HaGerush" is one instance where the "I-We" narrative combination works.

In later stories, Appelfeld returns to variations of the more common third person narrator, especially when he writes realistic stories, as he has in recent years. In one of his newer works, Tor HaPlaot, (Age of Wonders), published in 1981, Appelfeld constructed his novel in two distinct parts. The longer first section, about a child growing up in Europe during the years immediately preceding the Holocaust, is narrated by the child, Bruno, himself. This enables the reader to sense Bruno's anxieties and other intense reactions as he watches his parents' marriage crumble, and witnesses his father abandon the family, all the while slowly comprehending more about the maelstrom swirling about them. In Part Two of Tor HaPlaot, Bruno has survived the war and settled in Jerusalem, from which he returns to his

home town seeking answers. Appelfeld unfolds this section using a third person narrative which helps set the mood of distance Bruno feels towards the town and its inhabitants. Bruno no longer belongs to the scenes he views; the town is only one part of his memory. The first person narration is effective to help the reader understand Bruno's views of life at home in pre-war Europe. The third person works precisely because the author intends a sense of distance. Tor HaPlaot represents a successful culmination of Appelfeld's various attempts at narrative.

LANGUAGE

Appelfeld's use of language as a means of conveying his fiction has undergone many changes since he first began writing. Hebrew is not his native tongue; he was not introduced to it until he arrived in Palestine at age 14. Within a few years he was writing poetry, and slightly more than a decade after his arrival he published his first short stories. It was an amazing mastery of language. But Hebrew is both ancient and modern, with layers of Jewish civilization built into the language itself, and Appelfeld could not begin to absorb all the subtle nuances of the language so early in his writing career. When critics attacked his word choices and occasional syntax problems, he agreed with them, reminding them he was new to the language, and adding, "Sometimes I am recalling sentences from long

ago, in another language."[21] His early sentences are relatively simply constructed. The language is straightforward. Conversation, whether internal or between two characters, is always plausible. Although the stories lack rich allusions, Appelfeld is in enough control of vocabulary to carefully describe changes in landscape and seasons as well as characters' emotions.

As he began to feel more comfortable with the written Hebrew word, he at the same time was studying and deepening his own Jewish knowledge. BaGai HaPoreh, published in 1963, contains stories with biblical and other allusions, and uses various narrative points of view. Also, in this book, the author experiments with an almost Joycean stream-of-consciousness in the protagonists' ramblings in "Masa." But the language, that is to say the syntax and vocabulary, do not evidence much change from the first book.

It is with the publication of Kfor Al HaAretz in 1965 that critics began paying attention to Appelfeld's use of language. Hillel Barzel lauds the poetic language, the rich images and metaphors that Appelfeld creates in Kfor Al HaAretz which he claims enrich the stories and keep them from becoming didactic.[22] But others writing about the same works, such as Gershon Shaked, claim that the language is "too rich," and the characterization "too obviously archetypal."[23] Barzel, most of whose Appelfeld criticism concerns language use, speaks of the style not as "too

rich," but "heightened and elegant." In discussing "Gonev HaMarot" (Stealer of Visions), Barzel notes the use of words that remind one of holiness, such as "Hehal" for synagogue instead of the more ordinary "Bet Knesset," and repeated variations of the word "Mar'eh," "vision." He sees this as part of Appelfeld's technique when writing of man's attempts to reach a state of completion. His close, linguistic criticism is interesting but off the mark, for it forces him to read into Appelfeld's works far more symbolism than the author could possibly have intended. Simply counting the times a word is used in a story cannot reveal everything about the story or the author's motives.

After Kfor Al HaAretz, Appelfeld leaves the difficult, "elegant" language behind and opts for a naturally flowing, progressively more sophisticated and developed, modern Hebrew. He is still not as comfortable with biblical or rabbinic Hebrew as with modern Hebrew, but his command of the language is complete, his control over it smooth and polished. He begins to write longer, more complex works, and his style is sustained and consistent.

NOTES

[1]"Pitzuyim," in Ashan (Jerusalem: Akhshav, 1962), p. 17.

[2]"Pitzuyim," p. 42

[3]"BaShemesh HaDromit," in BaGai HaPoreh (Jerusalem: Shocken, 1964), p. 178.

[4]"Matzod," in BaGai HaPoreh, pp. 72-82. See previous chapter of this thesis for thematic discussion of "Matzod."

[5]"Matzod," p. 75.

[6]"Sibir," in BaGai HaPoreh, p. 97.

[7]"BaTahanah," in Kfor Al HaAretz, (Jerusalem: Masada, 1965), pp. 49-55.

[8]"BaTahanah," p. 54.

[9]"L'at," in Ashan, p. 59.

[10]"BaMidbar," in BaGai HaPoreh, pp. 101-107.

[11]See Chapter two of this thesis for detailed discussion of "BaShemesh HaDromit."

[12]"BaShemesh HaDromit," p. 184.

[13]See discussion above on "Matzod."

[14]"HaHishtanut," in B'Komat HaKarka (Tel Aviv: Dagah, 1968), pp. 55-62.

[15]Alan Mintz, Hurban, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984) pp. 221-222.

[16]Interview with Aharon Appelfeld, Jerusalem, 1965.

[17]"Shloshah," in Ashan, p. 7.

[18]"Mukar," in BaGai HaPoreh, p. 168.

[19]Appelfeld does attempt the first person narrator in "Masa," in the second volume, but far less successfully than in the stories in Kfor Al HaAretz.

[20]See "Kfor Al HaAretz," "Gonev Marot," "B'even," "MiMrom HaDumiah."

[21]Rahel Halafi, Maariv, November 23, 1962.

[22]Hillel Barzel, Siporet Ivrit Metarealistit (Ramat Gan: Masada, 1974), p. 129.

[23]Gershon Shaked, Gal Hadash BaSiporet HaIvrit. (Merhavia: HaKibbutz HaArtzi, 1974), p. 163.

CONCLUSION

The early works of Aharon Appelfeld are not, for the most part, masterpieces. Ashan was written by an author not yet fully at ease in his adopted Hebrew language. BaGai HaPoreh and Kfor Al HaAretz often suffer from a language that is too stylized and too obviously symbolic, probably as a result of Appelfeld's experiments with his craft and his "trying too hard." But within each of these first collections, Appelfeld has written a few remarkable stories which, more than two decades after their publication, still remain memorable, poignant vignettes of people in untenable situations trying to cope with their fate.

A study of the early short stories is helpful not merely as an introduction to the complete body of Appelfeld literature. For the English language reader, only the novels have been widely available, with the result that Appelfeld has become known in the United States as a writer obsessed with the pre-Holocaust years, concerned mainly with themes of alienation, antisemitism and self-hate. By acquainting oneself with Appelfeld's early writings, a reader can now have more appreciation for his background, his earlier themes and motivations, as well as his growth as a writer. Appelfeld wrote his earliest stories about people who had survived the war, as he himself had, and were now

attempting to rebuild their lives in Israel. As the years passed, and the emotional scars healed, he was able to turn in his creative imagination to the days "immediately after the war" and to the war years themselves. Only after he had written about those turbulent times, could he reach back even further to the years before the war, the years depicted in the stories Americans have become familiar with in Badenheim, 1939, The Age of Wonders, and The Retreat. Because Appelfeld's own biography is so closely connected with the subject of his writings, knowledge of his short stories and when they were written helps fill in large pieces in his life's picture that were heretofore missing.

Many of the themes first introduced in the short stories are refined and reexpressed in the later, longer works. Appelfeld's concerns in these novellas and novels include coming to terms with one's Jewishness, as well as one's guilt of survival, memory suppressed and memory reclaimed, and alienation. But these are not recent themes; all are found in many variations in the early works. As he has developed as a writer, he he has been able to depict these same themes in differing ways.

One of Appelfeld's talents as a writer is his ability to describe minute details of a very ordinary moment and make it extraordinary. The descriptions of the characters gathered at the Badenheim resort, for example, is masterful, filled with foreboding of events to come. Each character

stands apart, unique in his own ordinariness. But Appelfeld did not always have the ability to create his characters so clearly. In the early stories his protagonists were often indistinguishable from each other, often even from story to story. In refining his skill, the author has also become particularly adept at creating sympathetic children and women, characters often endowed with inner resources not found in his male characters. Tzili is the prime example of this. She can also be viewed as a literary culmination of such characters as Gittl, Tzeitl, Kitty, and the various monastery children depicted in the early short stories.

From almost the beginning of his writing career, Appelfeld has been able to create scenes and evoke moods with his depictions of landscapes and seasons, his ability to conjure up fear through the description of a cloud or a footprint on the cold snow. He continues to prefer outdoor settings and the mood he is able to create with them to the common types of indoor scenes. His writing style has become more realistic than in his earlier phases, but he still evokes the surreal in a manner that has caused critics, from the time of his very first published stories until now, to compare him to Kafka.

Appelfeld refers to himself as a Jewish writer living in Israel rather than as an Israeli writer. "Holocaust writer" is a term he detests. His own definition is apt, for although his background is weak in Jewish sources, his

works are more universally Jewish than the native born Israeli writers of his generation, such as Amos Oz or A. B. Yehoshua, who concern themselves with the inner struggles of the new breed of Israeli. Yet Appelfeld shares with these Israeli writers an existentialist bent, influenced not only by the European Kafka, but also by the European born Israeli author S.Y. Agnon. He is also different from the other major Israeli writer of Holocaust literature, Uri Zvi Greenberg, whose own point of view is that of an earlier generation, and whose mastery of the Hebrew language, tradition and literature Appelfeld cannot approach. Yet Appelfeld has developed his own spare, oblique style in his new language, and when he does create a traditional Jewish allusion, it is all the more powerful for its rarity.

Aharon Appelfeld's unique talent lies in his ability to depict ordinary human beings responding to one another during extraordinary times. He continues to write in order to "try to comprehend the human condition," and to understand the human response to catastrophe.

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