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Job in Auckland: Karl Wolfskehl's Poetry in the Light of the Jewish Job, the Topos of the *Galut*, and the Lurianic Theme of God's Exile from Himself

Introduction

After a lifetime of reading, writing, and working with the writers of Germany, especially the so-called George Circle, Karl Wolfskehl (1869-1948),² as an old man, virtually blind, came to the realization, like so many intellectual and well-assimilated Jews in Germany during the 1930s, that the Nazi programme of Antisemitism was aimed as much against them as at the more "peculiar" Jews from Poland and elsewhere in Eastern Europe. Although he maintained his romantic faith in the mystical revival of Germanic glory - and even boasted that the true spirit of Germany dreamt of by Stefan George and his followers left for exile with him - Wolfskehl also started to accept that many of his close associates over the years were rabid Antisemites³ who would not protect him from the barbarism that began to unroll in the early 1930s, several years before the full extent of what would be called "The Final Solution" (Endlösung) was manifest.

This seems to be what he is saying in the poem of his poetic sequence *Die Stimme spricht* written in 1933/4 when he calls out: "Herr! Ich will zurück zu Deinem Wort."⁴ As has happened

¹ This paper was prepared in great haste and under pressure, and before I really started to understand the context of Wolfskehl's life. I should like to thank Friedrich Voit and Norman Franke for their help in supplying texts of the poetry, articles and books about Wolfskehl's work, and moral support. During the Symposium itself I started to appreciate the Jewishness of Wolfskehl more than first appeared, and I will try to make some modifications in the text, but also add some notes to clarify my position further. Nevertheless, I think it historically significant to leave the essay fairly close to the state it was in when presented in Auckland.

² For biographical background and the social-intellectual matrix of Wolfskehl, see Grunfeld, Frederic V., *Prophets Without Honour: A Background to Freud, Kafka, Einstein and Their World*, New York 1979, especially Chap. III, "Turn Towards the Light for a Moment" (pp. 67-95), which deals with Karl Wolfskehl, Theodor Lessing and Carl Sternheim, all three being related.

³ For example, Ludwig Klages; cp. Grunfeld, *Prophets Without Honour*, p. 72.

⁴ All citations are from the dual language edition entitled Karl Wolfskehl,

many times in the past to Jewish writers, scientists, artists, and other intellectuals who had not considered their Judaism to be a major component in their personal identities, the forces of European history began to strip away all other than the biological component and began, moreover, to institutionalize a definition of that identity as not only outside the German national character but even sub-human. He cries out in this same poem:

Allein in leerer, atemleerer Luft.
Allein in Herzen, vor mir selber scheu.
Alle meine bunten Bälle sind verpufft.
Alle meine Weisheit ward Dunst und Spreu.
Ich bin arm, Gott! Neu

Faced with that apparent loss of wisdom and safety, even though he could not have guessed that the Shoah was about to eclipse all previous pogroms and mass persecutions, Wolfskehl began a life of exile, moving first to Switzerland, then to Italy, and finally to New Zealand where he eventually became a citizen and died in 1948. The one and only history of the Jews in New Zealand, grants Wolfskehl two short sentences, speaking of him more as an educator than as a poet, indicating that he made a minimal impact⁵ on the local Jewish population.⁶ For him, as Paul Hoffmann puts it, "Neuseeland war ganz Exil."⁷

In this period, however, there are some indications that the poet came to realize that he could not find security anywhere but in his Jewish heritage, something hinted at in the poem "Mensch und

1933: *A Poem Sequence*, translated by Carol North Valhope and Ernst Morwitz. New York 1947.

⁵ This is probably a more complex point than I originally assumed. Though some of the local Jewish community was put off by the presence of this giant of German culture, and he himself did not suffer fools lightly, on the whole it seems that he did interact both with the local English literary people and with some of the German intellectuals who had escaped from Germany around the same time as he did. But as a very old, nearly blind man, with a halting command of English, it would be difficult to imagine his influence on the insular society of New Zealand, including the established Jewish community of Auckland. In 1940 the population of all of New Zealand was only about one million.

⁶ Goldman, Lazarus Morris, *The History of the Jews in New Zealand*, Wellington 1957, p. 197: "Nor did Dr Karl Wolfskehl's writings [attract great attention]. He came from Germany and wrote poetry and essays, especially on Jewish subjects, in German."

⁷ Hoffmann, Paul Theodor, *Das religiöse Spätwerk Karl Wolfskehls*. (Doctoral Dissertation: University of Vienna, 1957) p. 28.

Er" from *Die Stimme spricht*: "Standhielt ich, wenn auch ich wankte," apparently finding comfort in a God who would find out his hiding place and resolve the current crisis:

Jeder Abweg war der nächste
Ganz gewisse Pfad nach Haus,
Deines Lauts voll noch der schwächste
Vogelruf im Wetterbraus.

But when in this same poem he calls himself the ward of God, "Deine Zucht", does this poet qualify as a writer of Jewish Holocaust literature as well? In other words, while Wolfskehl was a Jew who was forced into exile and to separate himself from the land of his romantic and poetic dreams, can he be said to manifest those peculiar traits that distinguish the survivors and witnesses to the Shoah? From a Jewish perspective and in Jewish ears, all too often the language Wolfskehl uses sounds Christian and offensively part of the same idealistic Germanic tradition which led to the Shoah itself. Even the poems of *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement, have more of a christological ring to them than echoes of liturgical chants that follow from *Kol Nidre*. Therefore, whatever his ranking among German writers in exile, there are deep feelings of doubt, resentment, and even distaste for a man who continued to the last to proclaim his faith in the glories of Germanic civilization.⁸

During these years of exile, Wolfskehl wrote what is today understood by Germanists as key texts - letters and poems - in the literature of exile. But while it is up to others to determine the exact place and value of this literature within both German literature and the larger genre of exile literature, I wish to look at three related problems from a specifically Jewish perspective, each one of these problems arising from themes and images in Wolfskehl's poetry written after he left his native land. When this perspective has been put in place, I will attempt a preliminary and tentative evaluation of Wolfskehl as a survivor and witness to the Holocaust.

⁸ Though I am now convinced that Wolfskehl was aware of his Jewish background and had been writing about the feelings from earlier in the century - and here a fuller, more fair account would have to take into account not only his poems and essays on Jewish topics written before his exile, as well as during his time in New Zealand, but also his letters - there remains the opinion expressed by some of the relatives of Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria who did find Wolfskehl and what they knew of his writing distasteful.

Job the Jew

How is the figure of Job as understood within Jewish tradition? Since this is the character the poet chose to focus on when trying to imagine his own predicament, this perspective is important. Unlike the Christian version of Job who suffers patiently and through his suffering achieves a new sanctification, the Jewish Job is a man who rages at God for His injustices, demands adherence to the laws of morality, and finally dismisses God ironically and cynically in order to live a new sort of life.⁹ Even when it seems that God has told off the comforters for their superficial view of morality and spirituality and restored to Job the wealth and reputation he had lost, nothing can ever be as it was once. "His wonderful sun-bright world, his whole concept of life and of the world has been shattered," writes Chaim Jitlovsky; "- the whole bright sunny world-and-life concept of Judaism in his time, that lived in the heart of his friends, and in which he believed till he had realized the common significance of his personal fate."¹⁰ This is not a Christian perspective, and it is not the idealized *mythos* of German Romanticism. This is a bitter, cynical and for that very reason personally liberating view of the world, the nonsense of myth and nationalism wiped away. For, as Jitlovsky expresses it, Job "had shattered the sweet, happy religious tradition with hammer blows, and his spirit wanders in the land of darkness and of the shadow of death, and he storms against God."¹¹

The Christian version of the Job story puts violence, death, and anger in another place. As Carl A. Mounteer puts it, in regard to Gregory the Great's *Magna Moralia*, a classic Christian commentary, not only is "God [...] a harsh, punishing, and unpredictable father," but the questions of theodicy are turned into personal afflictions:¹²

9 While I have benefited greatly from conversations and letters with Israel David (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev) and Mark Glouberman (University of British Columbia), see, in addition to the books in the following notes, Tsevat, Matitiah, "The Meaning of the Book of Job", in: *HUCA* 37 (1967), pp. 73-106 and Brenner, Athalya, "God's Answer to Job", in: *Vetus Testamentum* 31:2 (1981), pp. 129-137.

10 Jitlovsky, Chaim, "Job - A Poem of Jewish Free Thought" in: J. Leftwich, selected and translated, *Great Yiddish Writers of the Twentieth Century*. Northvale, NJ and London 1987 [1969], p. 80.

11 Jitlovsky, "Job - A Poem of Jewish Free Thought", p. 83.

The story of Job has become the classic expression of the unanswerable question of how one can believe in a just God when good people endure such terrible suffering. Job, singled out as being God's most faithful servant, is inflicted with the worst adversities. When Job demands of God why he has punished him so, God turns on him angrily and batters him with a series of rhetorical questions designed to illustrate the incomprehensibility of his will. This figure of a harsh, punishing God who unpredictably and inexplicably inflicts punishment on good people is entirely consistent with Gregory's view of man's relationship with God.

It is not a Jewish view, and certainly does not fit with the readings of the Book of Job that are generated by both modern kabbalistic thought and wrestlings with the utter absurdity of the Holocaust.

Yet Wolfskehl's Job-Figure, though carefully distanced from the idea of a Christian messianic type of suffering servant, is also distinct from any kind of traditional Jewish version of the biblical character. Hoffmann envisions for Wolfskehl a Job as "Symbol zeitlosen jüdischen Fatums" in which the figure of the poet's Hiob becomes "das eigne 'Ich' oder das eigene 'Du' der mit sich selbst redenden und rechtenden Seele".¹³ But this kind of poetic prism, in which the prophetic voice tries to see itself refracted through different manifestations of the Job/Hiob figure is more embedded in Germanic idealism and romanticism than it is in Jewish suffering and ethical reflectiveness, which is not to say, of course, that Jewish thinkers in Germany during the nineteenth and early twentieth century were not attracted, like everyone else, by this kind of trance-inducing mythology.¹⁴

But the more central version of Job in Jewish tradition is of the man who, in Marc-Alain Ouaknin's words, who not only curses life and apologizes for death, but above all who denounces the absurdity of the human condition;¹⁵ and proves, as the Talmud confirms, that

12 Mounteer, Carl A., "God the Father and Gregory the Great: The Discovery of a Late Roman Childhood", in: *The Journal of Psychohistory* 26:1 (1998), pp. 440-441.

13 Hoffmann, *Das religiöse Spätwerk Karl Wolfskehls*, p. 117.

14 Some of the participants during the Symposium tried to convince to me that the Hiob figure is close to what I was explaining as a typical Jewish reading of the non-Jewish biblical character. This may be true, but at this stage I cannot evaluate the situation beyond what I have said in the body of the essay.

15 Ouaknin, Marc-Alain, *Lire aux éclats: Eloge de la caresse*, 3rd ed. Paris 1992 [1989], p. 74. Cp. Cox, Dermot, *The Triumph of Impotence: Job and the Tradition of the Absurd*, Rome 1978, p.27: "Not only does [Job] rail at the absurdity of existence, but imputes deliberate injustice to God, in language that caused

God sometimes makes mistakes - colossal errors.¹⁶ The rabbis also satirize the injustices in the Book of Job, pointing out that God's bargain with Satan is similar to a man asking another to smash a bottle but at the same time take care not to spill the wine it contains.¹⁷ In brief, what Wolfskehl seems to miss are the Jewish feelings and pains, and the painful effects of those rabbinical jokes which destabilize¹⁸ - if they don't outright smash - the kind of idealism and abstracted morality inherent in the myths and dreams of the George Circle.

In Exile from Exile

Related to this Jewish figure of the raging Job is the *topos* of exile, known in both Hebrew and Yiddish, as the *Galut*. It is no surprise then that Wolfskehl writes in "Wir Ziehn": "Blieb ich doch Gast, / Im Land der Andern Gast." From a Jewish perspective, as Wolfskehl seems aware, this is not a temporary status inflicted or taken on under duress, but a much more existential and defining quality that all Jews share - or at least until the foundation of the State of Israel in 1948. Such a *topos* entails positioning of the individual and group identity within a matrix of social, political, theological and psychological forces. In other words, for Jews the sense of exile is a compounding and cumulative experience that can be registered throughout biblical and rabbinical texts, beginning, as it were, with the expulsions of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, Abraham's wanderings after his departure from Ur of the Chaldees, the long sojourn in Egypt and the subsequent wandering for forty years in Sinai, then the exile to Babylonia and the major dispersions that follow the destruction of Jerusalem, and the Second Temple. In more modern terms, Jewish *Galut* includes all the expulsions from England, Spain, Portugal, Italy and Germany during the late Middle Ages, and the sufferings of rejection, restriction to ghetto and *shtetl*, confinement in a Pale of Settlement, and similar uprootings and forced departures. As Fackenheim puts it:

the authors of the Septuagint to massively bowdlerize the text".

16 Ouaknin, *Lire aux éclats*, p. 71.

17 Cited by Kaplan, Mordecai M., *Judaism as a Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American Jewish Life*, New York 1934, p. 161.

18 Friedrich Voit's paper on Wolfskehl's Satyrspiel given on the last day of the Symposium seemed to me much closer to Jewish wit and painful humour, and I will be happy to revise my own feelings when I have had a chance to study that poem - and any others like it - more carefully.

A people cannot last in a disastrous exile unless it can view that exile as meaningful and unless it has an abiding hope. In short, existence in *Galut* required *Galut* Judaism, defined by the belief that exile, while it lasts, must be patiently endured and that its end is a secret in the keeping of God.¹⁹

Thus, though every individual and every family suffers each *Galut* alone, all Jews suffer the continuing anticipations and actual ordeals in a collective and shared memory - and a shared hope that next year we shall be in Jerusalem.

Thus it is disturbing²⁰ to read Wolfskehl's poem on the Exodus from Egypt, "Erneuerung" in which the speaker cries out of what is supposed to be the confusion of the Children of Israel as they gather to depart from the Land of Egypt and centuries of slavery:

Zerren sie uns am Halfter vor Deinen Stuhl,
Gott, zu Dir, da wir entrinnen wollten,
Jeder für sich lief, hier und da und dort,
Einer den Nächsten kaum verspürt,
Keiner den Nächsten des Wegs geführt -
Hand blieb der Hand fern, Blick glitt vom Blick.

This image of individual selfish and anarchic behaviour leads towards a sense of personal salvation, not the collective experience of the Jewish people, especially as conceived in the Passover narrative of the *Haggadah*.²¹ For all his citations from Jewish texts then - and they are mostly passages and phrases in the Old Testament, not rabbinical commentary or discussion - the cry of despair is personal and discordant with traditional Jewish concepts. At one point, though, Wolfskehl does seem to break out of his assimilated mould and feel in a more Jewish way "the torment of exile":

Nun das ewige Schicksal mich, mich anspringt,
Dass ich versteh und spür, was die Väter waren,
Väter litten, Väter vollführten—Väter
All Ihr meine Väter erwacht in mir...

19 Fackenheim, Emil L., *To Mend the World: Foundations of Future Jewish Thought*, New York 1982, p. 17.

20 In retrospect and in the light of the Symposium, this may not be as disturbing as I first thought. The nature of the Shoah was such as to disturb any and all normative views on how human beings behave.

21 The Haggadah teaches that everyone must think of him and herself as having been both individually and collectively involved with the departure from Egypt.

Yet finally it is a personal salvation that is called for, not a collective sanctification of the Name or of the world through *tikkun ha-olam*.

In particular, the Jewish idea of the *Galut* received a kabbalistic twist in the mystical thinking of Isaac Luria and his East European Hasidic followers after the sixteenth century, and because of Wolfskehl's interest in the mystical image of the *Shekhinah*, it is significant to place some of his poems into the context of this configuration of themes and images; namely, that from the moment of Creation, God went into exile from Himself, leaving his Face or Female Essence to wander through the *Galut* with the Children of Israel, only to be reunited with her in the days of *tikkun olam*, the repair, recuperation, and sanctification of the world.

At the very moment of Creation, the energies that were released caused two major and highly significant ruptures in the fabric of divine reality. On the one hand, in order for there to be space and time in which the created world could explode out of God's endless, eternal simplicity - the aspect of the divine known as the *Eyn-Sof* - there occurred a *tzimtzum* or contraction of sacred essence into itself. On the other hand, the super-condensation of primary spirit meant that what shot out into the world not only broke the very vessels of the brilliant energies, including the myriad of sparks which then spread throughout the new space-time continuum evacuated by the *tzimtzum*, but that God—who lies even more mysteriously behind the *Eyn-Sof* - became separated from his own female presence and shadowed self, the *Shekhinah*.²²

In Lurianic kabbalah, then, the *Shekhinah* which remains in exile with the Jewish people in their ceaseless wanderings and longings for a return to the sacred Land of Israel and the Holy City of Jerusalem, is both a perpetual token of God's love for the Children of Israel and a guarantee of their participation in the aching pains of love that the *Shekhinah* feels for her beloved. Each Friday evening, *Shekhinah* manifests herself as the Sabbath Bride and is confirmed in the erotic binding of a Jewish man and his wife, turning the Shabbat itself into a weekly glimpse and momentary experience of what the messianic future promises when God and his

22 See for instance, Jacobs, Louis, "The Doctrine of the 'Divine Spark' in Man in Jewish Sources" in: R. Loewe, ed., *Studies in Rationalism, Judaism & Universalism: in Memory of Leon Roth*, New York and London 1966, pp. 87-114, especially pp. 110-11, note 42.

Bride are reunited and the broken vessels repaired, the sparks all gathered up, and the *Eyn-Sof* again envelopes and reabsorbs the created universe. By clinging to the *Shekhinah* and sharing with her the longings for God, the Jewish people in exile transcend the pains of their ordeal and participate in the correction of the fundamental flaw by which the creation was accomplished. In brief, the *Galut* has meaning, not just a significant sense, but a purpose and a transformative effect on the world and on God.

The Jew in exile, therefore, is in a similar situation to the *Shekhinah* and to God: the exile does not, as Christian theologians asserted, mark the Jew's lapse into disfavour from God and stigmatize him as the stiff-necked sinner unwilling to recognize the coming of Christ into the world. Exile, with all its fears and pains, sanctifies the Jew, as the Jew himself sanctifies the world by his love for the *Shekhinah* and God and his efforts to bring them together through *tikkun ha-olam*.

A Jewish Job Rages Against God

If we are to understand Karl Wolfskehl's treatment of the Job story as a central myth of his and the Jewish people's sufferings during the 1930s and 1940s, then we have to set out what kind of an interpretation would be available to a Jew who by definition would reject a Christological perspective and a retelling that stressed the salutary and sacrificial nature of the circumstances. From a Jewish perspective there is no patience in Job and his suffering does not prove salutary - if anything it exposes the essential gap between man's desire for justice and order in the world and God's misunderstanding of human pain and the meaning of human life. When he begins to realize the full extent of the injustices inflicted upon him, Job moves from a stunned silence and weak rationalization of his pains, illness, and deprivation to a monstrous rage, first against, the three comforters who come to argue the case of a moral economy which must confirm the basic rule that in a God-created and ruled world the good reap rewards for their virtues and the wicked are necessarily punished for their sins and crimes; and then, thanks to the distorted logic of the young man who also visits Job, Elihu, the old man turns his fury against the injustices of God Himself. This finally pushes God to the edge, and He appears in the whirlwind to confront the man he has allowed Satan to test - in a pathetic understanding of what constitutes human virtue, justice, and experience - and offers only fatuous arguments in his own

defence. At first God asks Job, "Where were you when I created the world?" As though chronological priority were any more a rationalization for cruelty and abuse than other implied rationalization, that by creating the world God has the right to do with it what whatever he wishes.

In all events, there are three consequences to this apparently unequal confrontation between the Creator and the protesting creature: first, hearing Job out, God then turns to his comforters and tells them that they are wrong and Job is right, that it was self-willed blindness and gloating at the sight of a suffering man wronged by powers beyond his control that made them argue that there just had to be some moral reason why God had inflicted such terrible pains on Job and his family; instead, God now concedes, Job was correct to protest, and to do more than protest - to rage against injustice, and to appeal to God to come into the world of testing to act as Job's advocate on the basis of the ethical covenant entered into by God with all humanity.

The comforters are moreover commanded to make up to Job his losses, so far as they can, the rest being provided by God, though compensation is inadequate, since while flocks and herds may be restored and houses rebuilt, and even a reputation re-constituted, there is no way a new generation of children can make up for the sons and daughters lost. Having put the three old men and the younger Elihu in their place and then conceded his error in tormenting Job, God does two other things which are vital to a Jewish comprehension of the biblical drama. On the one hand, God glides over the issue of his original bargain with Satan that set the action going - and which thus receives no closure in the text; such manifest gaps in the Bible are always key points of entry for rabbinical commentary and discussion, since they seem always to be located at the junctures in a narrative, dialogue or event where a modern sensibility would expect a discussion of morality, theology or at least logical balance and closure.

Second, this inconclusive ending to the drama, which began with such elaborate scene-setting and rhetorical fanfare, does not merely fizzle out with the inappropriate and inadequate return of wealth, power, and prestige to Job, but with a set of ironic questions and statements from Job, which like the growling and grumbling of Jonah, put God's melodramatic bellowing into perspective and undercut the grandeur of the theophany itself. It has been said that after this humiliation, God in effect disappears from the Bible, and

the last books to be redacted for inclusion, such as the Song of Songs and the Book of Esther, make no mention of the deity at all. From then on, in other words, not that mankind is on its own, but that it is in human history that the ethical, moral, and spiritual action has to occur to carry out the divine imperatives concerning justice and mercy in the world. One of the terrible intellectual paradoxes of the Holocaust is that, while God is shown to have failed to save mankind from its own evil, it is in the human resistance to that evil, futile as it mostly was, a remedy is found, and a new wisdom generated. As Job rages against God and spits at the friends who keep calling for him to recognize a sinfulness in himself which justifies the horrors of his afflictions, there grows in him, as Jitlovovsky suggests, "an unconscious desire for a new ideal of God, Love and boundless forgiveness," yet not a Christian washing away of sin and guilt, but a new sort of morality generated "by man's own wisdom."²³

To choose Job, then, as a mythic centre for a set of poems about the suffering of the Jews in the Nazi Holocaust is to place the disaster in the heart of the essential Jewish question of theodicy which is not, as Milton said for his *Paradise Lost*, "to justify the ways of God to man" but to demand that God answer to the charges of abrogating his side of the bargain, of calling divine justice to account. From the midst of the nightmare of the death camps, Mark Dworzevsky cries out:

In me cries a prayer: "Don't let the generation of the saved vanish without the legacy of their testimony! The legacy of testimony that is our curse and our blessing - and our sacred mission - help us to bring into the treasurehouse of Israel the grief of the Destruction and the cry for vengeance. Help us to tell the story!"²⁴

This is why rabbis could gather in the concentration camps, arraign God, and find him guilty of forgetting his chosen people. But it can also be a way of seeking out a secret and mystical aspect of the Shoah; not to trivialize it as having spiritual meaning, when the cries of millions rise up in anger and despair, but to see in the suffering a revelation of the structural faults in the very heart of civilization. It would be the grossest of desecrations of the memory of those who perished to say that the Holocaust was a judgment on Israel's sins,

²³ Jitlovsky, "Job - A Poem of Jewish Free Thought" p. 85.

²⁴ Dworzevsky, Mark, "What I Saw," in: Leftwich, ed, *Great Yiddish Writers of the Twentieth Century*, p. 420.

just as it is sickening to think that the death of six million was a necessary sacrifice to create the State of Israel in 1948. Since no Jew went to the gas chambers for his or her beliefs, the harsh reality that is first revealed is that neither commitment to God nor atheistic defiance can save the Jewish people, neither closure into a spiritual community of Chassidim nor assimilation to modern secularism. What Job teaches is something quite different.

Suffering in the Galut

Loift! Untloift! Farbalt zich! "Run! Flee! Hide yourselves!"²⁵ This is the age-old cry, warning members of the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe that a pogrom was about to begin. Throughout the Middle Ages and afterwards, whenever a pogrom began, with whatever church-led fanfare or government inspired drunkenness and thirst for blood, Jews attempted to avoid destruction: they fought back when they could, appealed for help from their neighbours or the princely authorities, tried to hide, and only when there was no hope for release did they undertake some kinds of action that would at least humiliate the enemy, or at least rob them of as much satisfaction as possible. But nothing in their experience could really prepare the Jews of the late 1930s for the systematic, total operation of modern industrial and state-apparatus geared towards their total annihilation. Especially for the Jews in Germany itself, where they assumed that the traditions and ideals of the *Aufklärung* and the mechanisms of the Weimar Republic would protect them in ways that could not be expected for their eastern neighbours in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Russia, Hungary and Romania. Even the mounting evidence of cruelty and unremitting violence seemed to many an aberration, something which individuals could escape from, not a massive, inexorable onslaught of evil.

Yet to a small group of Jews who were more than privy to the day-to-day crystallization of a totalitarian system more ruthless than any previously experienced, even in Spain or Italy, the idea that there would be a place to defend oneself or to hide rapidly disappeared, and the only hope lay in escape. This would not be so much an act of cowardice, of rats deserting a sinking ship, or the strong leaving the weak behind to be killed mercilessly; but something more and other, again characteristically Jewish in its essence. On the one hand, there was need to preserve a certain remnant of the culture,

²⁵ Zwabe, Arnold, *Jewels and Ashes*. Newnham, Vic. 1995 [1991] p. 111.

despite the appeals for calm and to a rational expectation that German justice and enlightenment would not allow the worst to happen. On the other hand, there was a sense of establishing an opposition outside of Europe from which to fight back, to expose the truth, and to shame the enemy. Certainly, many individuals did not conceive of long term plans and escaped because that was an instinctive act, with many hundreds of thousands willing to do the same if they had been able to obtain the necessary papers, means of transport, or physical strength.

In addition, as happened with many of the Jews expelled from Spain in 1492, the reality of the Inquisition and the state-turned-persecutor did not dampen their sense of identity with Iberian civilization, there were many Jewish intellectuals who left Germany, not to escape German identity or culture, but to escape from the Nazi barbarism and preserve, if they could, what they believed was the true essence of German civilization. It would take further revelations of the real extent of the Final Solution to purge them of their illusions or delusions.

Intellectuals have gone into self-imposed exile or been expelled for various reasons in the twentieth century, some as individuals and some as part of large-scale diasporic movements. But the Jews have been in the Galut for nearly two thousand years, and the exile is a theme expounded in both mystical and practical theology. Wolfskehl's experiences are therefore not unique as individual suffering nor as intellectual ruptures but continuous with Jewish history and thought. Nevertheless, his articulation becomes split between attempts to carry on within himself the pure essence of a strangely romantic German Aufklärung and to find consolation - and to face up to the guilt of having failed to protest against manifest Evil - in Jewish tradition.

For that reason, as I said, it is hard to feel sympathy for his poetic stance, even for his apparent identification with Job and the pain he tries to refract through four mirrors. Perhaps this is because, whatever Wolfskehl may have come to know about the Shoah while in New Zealand, the poem *Hiob, oder die Vier Spiegel*²⁶ never seems to grasp the enormity and the thought-destroying evil of the events occurring in Europe.²⁷ There is some hint, of course, in the

26 All citations are from the translation by Peter Dronke and German original published in the *New Zealand Poetry, Yearbook* 1986.

27 I think now I would have to backtrack somewhat on this point. It seems that the shock of the Holocaust did start to hit home and, along with his sense of dislocation in exile, Wolfskehl began to seek some kind of new spiritual

designation "Hiob der Starre ward Hiob der Rasche,/ Irrwendige."
But there is also something reductive in the supposedly anguished cry of the second refraction of Job into Samson:

Hab drum in Wind und Wettergüssen
Ausharren müssen.
Bin drum von Gottes Faust
Zerstrobelt und gezaust.

Nevertheless, in the last sections of the poem, something starts to happen to the language itself. It starts to break apart, first, with more and more Hebrew words, then with a fragmenting of the syntax, and lastly perhaps with an increasing hint at the Yiddish rhythms of wordless Chassidic melodies or *niggunim*. Thus Wolfskehl speaks of the spirit that travels "Von Moscheh bis Maschiach"²⁸ and then falters into "Geists Morgenhorn / War ich. War ichs? Eh? Nie? Ach!" Again, at the start of the "Der Vierte Spiegel: Hiob Maschiach", the hints at Hassidic melodies and perspectives become stronger:

Du, der Ruf, horch! Dir gilt er, dich trifft er:
Bis du nicht Siegel, bist du nicht Stifter?

The fourth section on Job as Messiah, there is a three line motto:

Wer wenn nicht du
Wann wenn nicht heit
Wo wenn nicht hier

These lines echo the famous saying of Hillel cited in the *Chapters of the Fathers*: "He used to say: If I am nothing to myself, who will be for me? And if I am for myself only, what am I? And if not now, when?"²⁹ Commentators see in these cryptic words of Hillel a condemnation of the kind of scholars who puff themselves up at the expense of perfecting their own souls.³⁰ Wolfskehl's writing

understanding of his Judaism in these last years of his life in New Zealand.

28 Interestingly, Dronke flattens out this outbreak of Hebrew by rendering the line "From Moses to Messiah."

29 *Chapters of the Fathers*, translation and commentary by Samson Raphael Hirsch, Jerusalem-New York 5732/1972, p. 16.

30 Chill, Abraham (comp. and trans.), *Abrabanel on Pirke Avot: A Digest of Rabbi Isaac Abrabanel's "Nahalat Avot" with Selections from Other Classical Commentaries on Pirkei Avot* (New York 5751/1991), pp. 62-68.

and his life do manifest an increasing concern and devotion to the Torah or to the Jewish people, even if the articulation is not always orthodox or conventional.

Then after a roll call of key biblical names - Abram, Moscheh, and David - Wolfskehl calls up later rabbinical and Hassidic names - the Gaon and the Baal Schem - finally completing that first stanza with a virtually non-verbal percussive rhythm:

Dann bist du's
Brenn's ganz in dich ein.
Dann bist du's.
Der Ihn dann dein Du.
Der Ihn dann Du, dein Du'stes Du.
Wer wenn nicht Du?

There are also highly suggestive puns, some in German, some crossing over into Yiddish and Hebrew, such as "Schaut nur genau auf des Rebben Tür" and "Mitten am Werktag kein Krach in der Gass?" The allusions here are to the Passover Haggadah and the legends associated with *Eliyahu ha Novi*, Elijah the Prophet, who circles the world and will sip a cup of wine when the Messiah's time has come. The Baal Shem Tov, or Besht, founder of the modern Hassidic movement, proclaimed an ecstatic Judaism, based on song, dance, and spontaneous prayer and storytelling. His key opponent was the great scholarly defender of traditional authority, the *Gaon* of Vilna, who though a great kabbalist in his own right, challenged the anti-rabbinical tendencies within the new movement. The *shofer*, or ram's horn, usually sounded at Rosh ha-Shanah, the New year, will also be heard at the time when the *Moshiach* comes. A *golem* is a creature which has the appearance of human being but which lacks speech and therefore a human soul. In other words, without going through all the dense allusions to Scripture, rabbinical texts, and folklore, this part of the text becomes densely Jewish, painfully responsive to the *churban*, the great disaster afflicting the Jewish people at the time the poem is being written.

Conclusion

Loift! Untloift! Farbalt zich! This is the essential pattern of Jewish resistance: to run, if possible; to escape, if you can; and to hide, when the opportunity offers. But also to fight back, when the situation warrants; and to try to make accommodation with the

enemy, if the circumstances are propitious enough. Yet when there is no other hope, to assume a new posture of suffering, not always in silence--except where that allows a chance to draw new strength, to seek an understanding of the dangers, and to plot another escape. And when that too fails, to make another gesture of defiance, one that at once sanctifies the name - sometimes to the point of martyrdom - but also one that dignifies the name of Judaism and shames the memory of the perpetrators of evil. Thus Gusta Davidson Draenger, writing of the epic struggle put up by the people in the Krakow district, says:

They had to shake the self-confidence of those in charge, to demonstrate that the masses were not without spirit and would not accept the government's bestiality, and that the down-trodden were finally rousing themselves from their torpor. The people's spring was about to begin.³¹

What happened during and immediately after the Holocaust was that the enormity of the disaster - no mere pogrom writ large, no single act of madness and blood-letting - but a cold-blooded, concerted, sustained, state-sanctioned genocide overwhelmed ordinary people, knocked them back into stunned silence and often despair. Again to cite Fackenheim, "The Holocaust [...] is a whole of horror. A transcending comprehension of it is impossible, for it would rest on the prior dissolution of a horror that is indissoluble."³² Yet, as the Jewish philosopher points out, there were certain acts, both by Jews and Gentiles, which began, in the midst of this total horror, to repair the world. A few young and fit Jews resisted against all odds, fighting in the ghettos, with the resistance, and in the woods on their own. Fackenheim instances the movement known as the "White Rose" and the stand taken by a young philosophy professor, Kurt Huber. Each act confirms Kant's third imperative law, that humanity cannot be forgotten; and by extension Fackenheim's 614th commandment, that no Jew is allowed to give Hitler a posthumous victory. Each of these acts at once is a tikkun olam and a mark of a Jewish humanity, whether the person was a Jew or not.³³

³¹ Draenger, Gusta Davidson, *Justyna's Narrative*, ed. with introduction by Eli Pfefferkorn and David J. Hirsch, tran. Roslyn Hirsch and David H. Hirsch, Amherst, MA 1996 [1946], p. 112.

³² Fackenheim, *To Mend the World*, pp. 27-28.

³³ Fackenheim, *To Mend the World*, pp. 267ff.

Huber's action was a Tikkun [...] In obeying the unwritten law he restored the law - it must be written somewhere - by writing it into his own heart. In acting in behalf of Kant's Idea of Humanity, he mended that idea - it was broken before he recreated the matrix or Boden of it in actual humanity, even if only in his own person.³⁴

Another way to put this, turning the philosophical perspective to the more personal and emotional, and thus allowing us to place Wolfskehl in context, is given by Aaron Zeitlin:

In our generation every Jew, even if he hasn't himself been in any of the ghettos and extermination camps, should consider himself not as one who lives, just like that, but as one who has remained alive, which is more and different. One who has remained alive after a shipwreck still feels the tragedy of the shipwreck. That is how every Jew should feel the disaster of the six million.

The poets, novelists, and intellectuals, German or Jewish, like Wolfskehl, tried to make some sense out of the senseless and to give shape to the sense of shame and guilt that dogs the survivors - those who know that they survived, not because they were better, cleverer, stronger, or more sacred than those who perished, but were simply luckier. The survivors, no matter how assimilated, irreligious, or partisan to political causes beforehand tended to realize, unconsciously as often as consciously, that they now had to become both the rebels against traditional Judaism and the remnants of Israel, and like Job, they must rage against God - and the rabbinical authorities who enforced the practice of Jewish Law - who proved unable or unwilling to prevent the Holocaust and to cry out for justice according to the principles of that very Law. This is why, I think, we see in Wolfskehl's depiction of Job in the four mirrors of traditional suffering an increasing shift away from literary German towards Hebrew expressions and the rhythms of Yiddish anguish. Wolfskehl's writings are not simply a Germanic poetry and prose of exile: but are they the witness of survival, guilt, and Jewish rage against injustice? Does Karl Wolfskehl fit into the description offered by the famous Yiddish writer Itzik Manger?

We are still too near the destruction of our Yiddish-European style to be able to give a clear account of the terrible catastrophe. But deep in the hearts of each of us who was by chance saved or

³⁴ Fackenheim, *To Mend the World*, p. 277.

escaped to the corners of the earth, vibrate the echoes of this Jewish style of life. Let us acquaint our children with it, let us teach them the lesson "Continuation," for indeed this style was terribly lovely, authentically Jewish, and if the word classic still has any sense and meaning, it was in our day "classic Jewish."

While Wolfskehl was in Auckland bemoaning his fate as an exiled intellectual and trying to make sense of what he thought he knew was happening to the Jews in Europe, in 1942 a man named Shapiro arrived in Wellington with the personal witness of what up to then, for the Jews of New Zealand, had only been a rumour. Here is how Arnold Zable records the memories of his parents who had left Bialystok in Poland less than ten years earlier:

Some time in 1942, father cannot recall exactly when, there arrived in Wellington the first eye-witness, a refugee by the name of Shapiro. He had been in Warsaw during the Nazi invasion and had lived through the early weeks of occupation. A frequent guest of my parents, he would stay late into the night, recounting fantastic tales of his escape, while glancing from time to time at photos of the wife and daughters he had left behind. He had fled east, across the length of the Red Empire, and beyond, through Siberia into Japanese controlled Manchuria. Wherever he went he was pursued by war. The world had gone mad, or so it seemed, until he made his way by via Shangai to New Zealand, to the quiet haven he had come to believe no longer existed upon the earth.³⁵

But neither Shapiro nor Zable's parents could rest easy in New Zealand. Though they were not intellectuals and well-assimilated German Jews like Wolfskehl, they continued to suffer in the peaceful Pacific islands of New Zealand.

This sense of unease was to increase, and become deeply embedded, as the full impact of the Annihilation was gradually revealed, and in time it would become clear that, despite their voyage to the ends of the earth, they had not broken free.³⁶

Set against these experiences of Polish refugees who suffered directly under Nazi barbarism, Wolfskehl looks somewhat less convincing as a survivor or witness in his writings, though his plight and his confusions nevertheless mark him as one more victim of Nazi barbarism. For he was a victim, for all his idealistic talk, and his dreams gleaned from the anti-rationalists - Wagner, Bachofen, Nietzsche, and George - all the late Romantic talk of the German mythos, the spiritual mission of the poet, and the soul-renewal of

³⁵ Zable, *Jewels and Ashes*, p. 125.

³⁶ Zable, *Jewels and Ashes*, p. 125.

suffering.³⁷ In other words, he was a victim, not just because he was forced into exile - though that is bad enough; but because, for all his concern for Judaism, he could not overcome his hypostizing of "des archaischen und antiken Kosmos."³⁸

Without claiming too much for the wisdom of hindsight, it is nonetheless clear that none of us can look back - or forward - to anything without being aware of that event which, as Emil Fackenheim writes, "called into question all things - God, man, the ancient revelation and the modern secular self-confidence, philosophical thought and indeed any kind of thought."³⁹ That Wolfskehl persisted in his dreams of Germanic glory,⁴⁰ and his hopes to forge a German literature that would be worthy of the ideals set by Stefan George and his companions - pathetic as it sounds in the chambers of history where the cries and prayers of the victims and their children's children still echo - also paradoxically signal a Jewish idealism, a hope to be a teacher of the nations, and a constant longing to correct, improve, and repair the world itself. Others fought back, contrived ways to escape with their families by devious means, endured great hardship, took up the challenges of restoring Jewish life in the Diaspora or creating the Zionist dream in Israel. A few tried to hide their Judaism and the memories of their great humiliations during the Shoah. There is no blame for the weak, the powerless, the confused, the disillusioned, the cynical and the frightened. As the rabbis said of those who were forced to convert during pogroms in Spain or Poland, a sinning Jew is always a Jew. In that sense, for all his Germanic dreams and romantic delusions, Karl Wolfskehl is also a Jewish writer, a Jewish thinker, a Jew. It is not for us to judge the heart of a man who suffered and sought to maintain his dignity as a man.

³⁷ See Arnaldo Momigliano's comments on the followers of Stefan George in his review of "Gershom Scholem's Autobiography", chapter 18 in *Essays on Ancient and Modern Judaism*, ed. Silvia Berti, trans. by Maura Masella-Gayley. Chicago and London 1987, pp. 194-195. Cp. Grunfeld, *Prophets Without Honour*, p 267.

³⁸ Hoffmann, *Das religiöse Spätwerk Karl Wolfskehls*, p. 5.

³⁹ Fackenheim, *To Mend the World*, p. 9.

⁴⁰ While I am unwilling now to change this phrase, still I must concede the point is more problematical than it seemed when I first wrote those words.