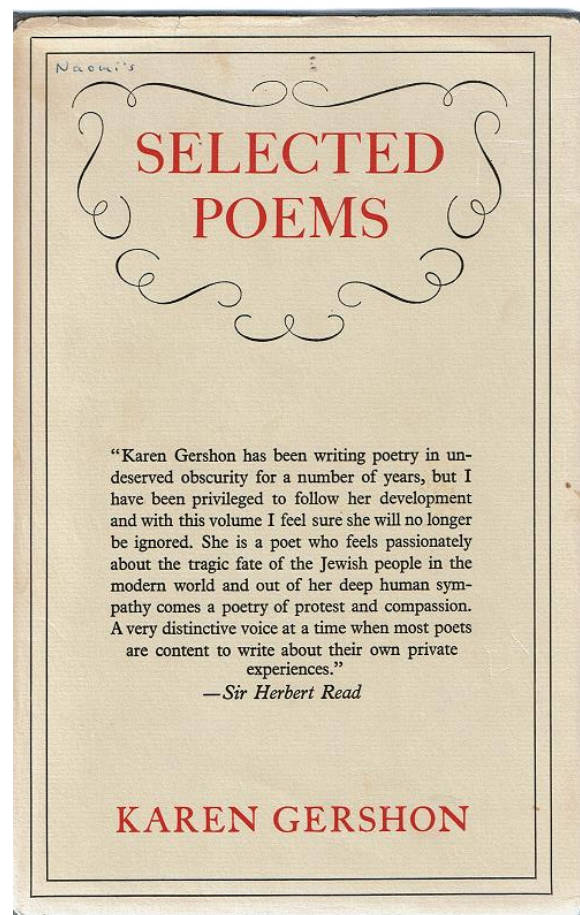
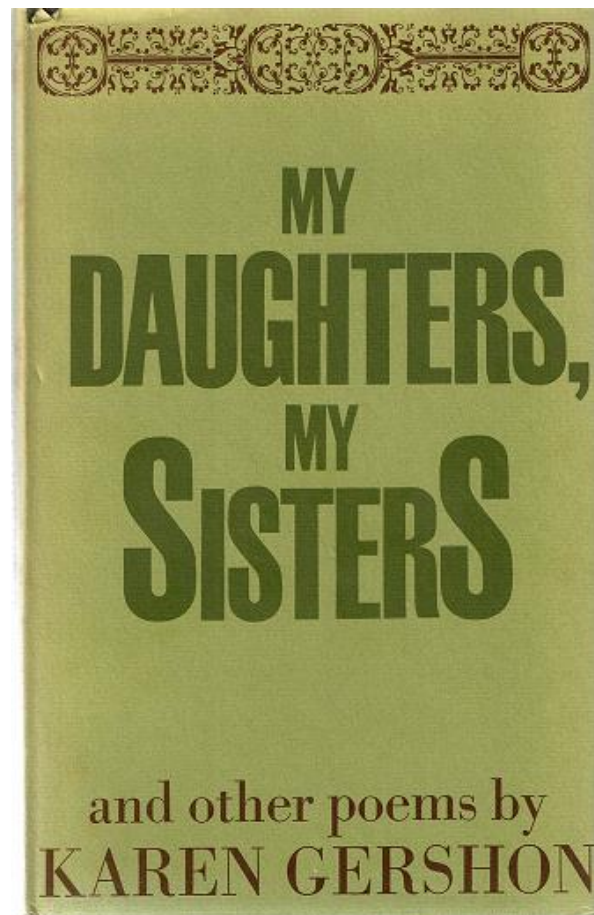
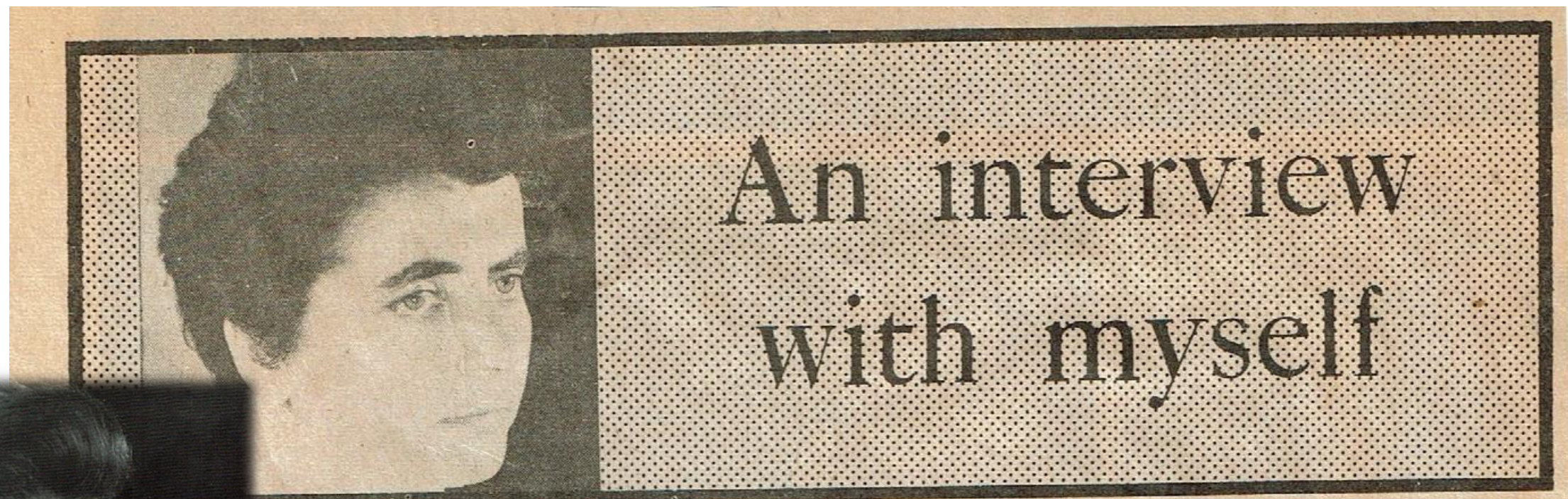


1967 British newspaper
With daughter Naomi



Possibly Jerusalem Post
1970?



By KAREN GERSHON

I CAUGHT this view of myself the other evening and thought that it would be worth while making the effort to examine my situation honestly: because it has come about through circumstances which also affect the lives of other people. What I was doing at that moment was looking for the flat of a recent immigrant from Britain; I have been interviewing such people and, when their story has been suitable, writing it up for publication in the English press; the intention is to counteract the news items of war in the Middle East with stories on the daily lives of ordinary people — which will not persuade anyone to come on *aliya*, but might quieten doubts. That evening, I had already called at several addresses where the people had not been at home; it was the thought of failure and waste in this context which startled me into an awareness of what my preoccupation amounted to.

Our economic situation is not desperate: I drove to Talpott in our family car, and still wearing the clothes I bought for my official visit three years ago; it will be some time before I shall begin to look shabby. I cannot plead that I am prostituting what talent I have as a writer out of necessity.

On the other hand, we are not managing well. Like all other immigrants from the affluent countries to whom I have spoken, we are adjusting to a lower standard of living. In England, my husband was a school teacher and we raised four children; only during the last few years did I earn an appreciable amount of money by my writing. The thought of, for instance, being able in Israel to afford meat only once a month instead of once a week did not worry me; I did not expect that we would not remain solvent. We believed that the rights which we had as new immigrants would help us to settle; we did not under-

A SMALL, middle-aged woman stands in the dark at the foot of a large apartment block, anxiously scanning the names on the letter-boxes: it is a few minutes to 9 o'clock and if she fails again the evening will have been wasted.

The setting is a hill in Talpott; tall pine trees planted half a century ago by men to whom the Jewish State was a dream worth their total dedication frame a view of modern Jerusalem, inscribed in lights. The anxious woman pays no attention to the view: it belongs to another existence — in which she might have celebrated it with words matching its beauty.

This is no fantasy: the woman is a recognized poet who, three years ago, visited Israel at the invitation of its President, and decided to settle there with her family. Then, official receptions were held in her honour; she gave poetry readings before the intellectual elite. Now she has become an immigrant, she writes articles for the Jewish Agency.

stand that they amounted to no more than an absence of disadvantages which would have made settling impossible.

But I am not now primarily concerned with the financial aspect of our new life, though it cannot be excluded from the total picture which is coloured by it. I don't believe that any informed person voluntarily settling in Israel can accord the financial aspect of his life such importance that this is the direction from which comes the slow erosion of enthusiasm.

Opposite of propaganda

When I first began to interview new immigrants, I was so disturbed by the experiences they told me of, that I resolved to write, instead of propaganda, whatever the opposite of it may be called. But I found myself emotionally incapable of this: if I had rejected the idea of settling in Israel, and wanted to make out a case why I had done so, I could have found words for what I had vaguely in mind. But I could not foster in myself an explicit negative attitude to what I was and am still trying to do.

Now I am wondering if it is possible to clarify honestly what is worrying me, and balance this with an affirmation of our decision to settle. The other day, someone whose

judgement I respect who has been here for 10, 12 years, told me unequivocally what he has seen: *People satisfied with their new life in Israel are people satisfied with the work they are doing.*

Amongst the women I have interviewed have been graduates in science or art who are now working as typists. Individually, they hesitate to put their frustration into words. It seems selfish to be preoccupied with one's personal career; if their typing is what the country needs, they should be prepared to spend the rest of their lives typing for the sake of Israel, as professional women in the generations preceding us here were prepared to keep chickens or plant trees. The attempt to adjust to this has a dual effect on people. It makes them feel humble because the abilities which are their pride have to be relegated, and being here becomes more valuable, as valuable as the price which they are paying for it.

I am not asking for sympathy; it seems to me that old settlers are too quick with their "when we came..." sort of reaction, as if what happens to any Jew in Israel were not something concerning the whole community. I know a dentist from Finland and a pediatrician from Czechoslovakia who are working at *Kupat Holim* clinics and both say that conditions there make it impossible for them to maintain their former professional standards — ought they to be satisfied, merely because they are now practising in Israel, is it all right for the *Israelis* that they are receiving inferior treatment for their teeth and their children?

WIZO REVIEW
July - August 1968



The English poet, Karen Gershon, was in Israel for several months recently with two of her four children as guests of President and Mrs. Shazar. The visit was much more than just a "holiday". They were exploring the possibility of settling down in the country, while Miss Gershon utilised the opportunity to learn more about herself and her Jewish origins.

She was a child refugee who fled from Germany with a Youth Aliyah transport in 1938. World War II broke out before she could get to Israel and so she remained at a Zionist pioneer training farm in Scotland, was attracted to Orthodox Judaism, and waited. A violent reaction to her experiences soon developed. She rejected both Zionism and Orthodoxy, and in a bid for independence she went to work in an office and then as a domestic. She forfeited a university scholarship, worked as a house mother in several private schools and finally married an English school teacher, settling down in Somerset in 1950 where her two sons and two daughters were born.

Miss Gershon also began to write poetry, first on general themes, then on the Holocaust. She wrote, "They Came as Children," an account of what had happened to a number of German child refugees in later years. Her first visit to Israel was in 1966 to attend a conference of Israeli and Anglo-Jewish writers. The impact of her initial stay and her latest one have been of such a dimension that she is determined to come on aliyah.

KAREN GERSHON - A Poet in Search of her Identity

ISRAEL NOTEBOOK

Influenced by their own German childhood memories
they told me not to burden my children with being
Jews —

forgetting the wrecked lorries on the road to Jerusalem
commemorating the courage of those who died in them.
My half-Jewish children will grow up to make their choice.
In the *Yad Vashem* I heard an English child
asking: "And he was going to be killed?"
intoning the statement like a ritual imposed
every photograph of the holocaust.
"And they were going to be killed?" still asks the voice.

Anyone coming upon this grave without warning,
might think some warrior king lies buried there
and that the names are of the battles he fought.
Six million dead need space only in thought.
If they could become birds they would fly clear
of this rock roof which will not admit the morning.

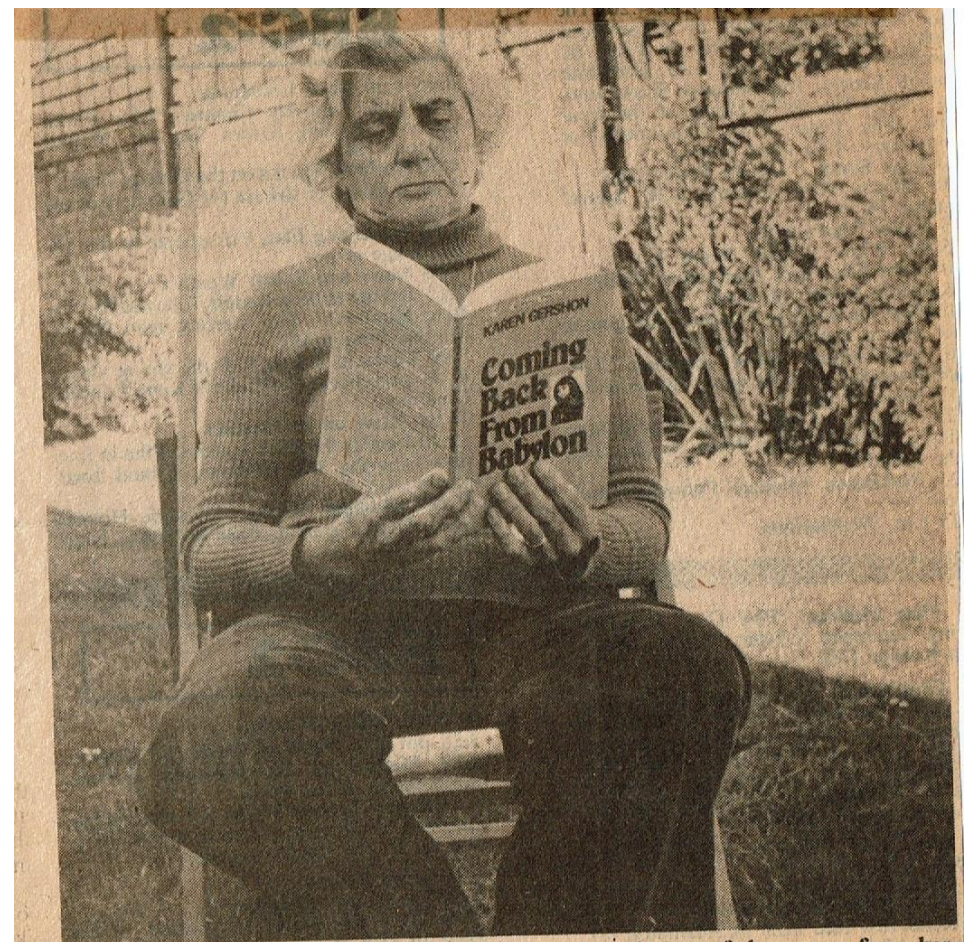
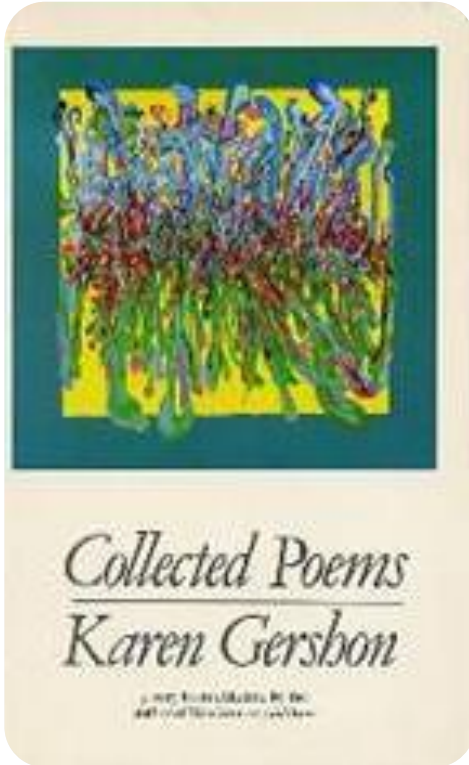
The salmon sun on camel ground
hatches ghetto beards of scrub
this is a concept more than land
to raise who were defeated up.

God's dereliction where he pottered Man,
green orchestration of messianic dreams,
are the south and north of both exile and home,
where every year of the expectation of life
is represented by a different nation —
all people whom the Germans would have killed.

Ancient Jerusalem is ruin-grey —
the ash of history raked to a crown;
oriental Jewish children play
within the range of rifles pointed down.
From desert stone, in legendary places,
an ancestry of pride is being built
by survivors with contaminated faces —
all people whom the Germans would have killed.

That we come from the desert explains the Jew:
where nothing obstructs the shadow of Man,
or intervenes between eye and horizon,
what can be imagined may be true.
A tyranny of concepts grew
in this petrified sea of pink and gold
where the world is what a life can hold.
The desert we come from explains the Jew:
Stunted, conditioned victims who,
yielding essence like a fruit,
danced in the presses of pursuit —
that we come from the desert explains the Jew.

This is the country of the resurrection:
its people carry dead relatives in their eyes,
tend them for harvest in ghettos of remembrance,
hoard them against hunger where children are evergreen.
Behind the victims pilloried to pity
are granaries of healthy generations;
the whole dispersion irrigates this triumph
where history grows fresh interpretations.



Karen Gershon sits in her garden in Kenton and reads one of the poems from her forthcoming book.

Life provides poetic themes

KAREN GERSHON left Germany in December 1938 with 10,000 other Jewish children, and thought she was going to what was then known as Palestine.

has been — with her immaculate English — it seems out of character that such a restless person should have stayed living in Kenton for five years.

She is a poet and prose writer, and her latest collection of poems, "Coming Back From Babylon"

have looked through their eyes, because I wanted to know what the world felt like to them.

"Two thousand years is not a long time in the development of mankind and though our thoughts have changed, our feelings

never made that trip until 25 years later.

By then, she had gathered much experience, having worked in England and Scotland during the war as a domestic servant, a chorus girl with a third rate pantomime, a mill hand and as a housemother in a progressive school.

Her father died in Riga Labour Camp during the war and she doesn't know to this day if her mother survived the Nazi persecution of the war. Karen married unsuccessfully and worked her way independently into Edinburgh University, but gave up after a term.

When Karen Gershon speaks about the places she

18.
Now 56, she is married to Val Tripp, head of the Art Department at Park High School and they have four children.

She says her two main themes of writing are about being a mother and being Jewish. What is perhaps unique about her biblical poems, which appear in "Coming Back From Babylon" is her attempt to go behind the well known stories.

"These poems are based on the Bible, but they are not religious in the conventional sense," she said.

"I believe that the forces which govern the universe are not at all like the God whom my forefathers imagined. But in these poems I

There are 24 poems in "Coming Back From Babylon", and they took her a year and a half to write. Mrs Gershon works in the mornings, and they rarely produce more than six lines of poetry.

"You have to be self disciplined about it. It's the most important thing in my life. It's only recently that I've developed the knack to actually write fairly regularly," she said.

Her poetry has won her several prizes, including the Jewish Chronicle Books Prize, Arts Council awards, and the Pioneer Women's Prize for her Selected Poems about the Holocaust.

Her first novel, "Burn Helen", will be published next year.



KAREN GERSHON was 15 years old when she left her native Bielefeld in Germany to travel with one of the Children's Transports to England. That was 51 years ago. She has spent most of those 51 years in Britain, where she has achieved fame as a poet and novelist. Yet, in all that time, she has not shed her German accent.

The accent, she explains as we sit in a Jerusalem coffee shop, is part of her identity. "People who wanted to integrate into English society made an effort, consciously or unconsciously, to lose their accents. But I was a refugee and I am a refugee."

While England has not made her feel unwelcome, she considers herself to be a guest there. "I'm an accepted guest — but I'm still a guest."

So why does she live in England and not in Israel?

That's part of a long and complicated story, the bottom line of which is that her non-Jewish husband Valentine Tripp does not feel at home here.

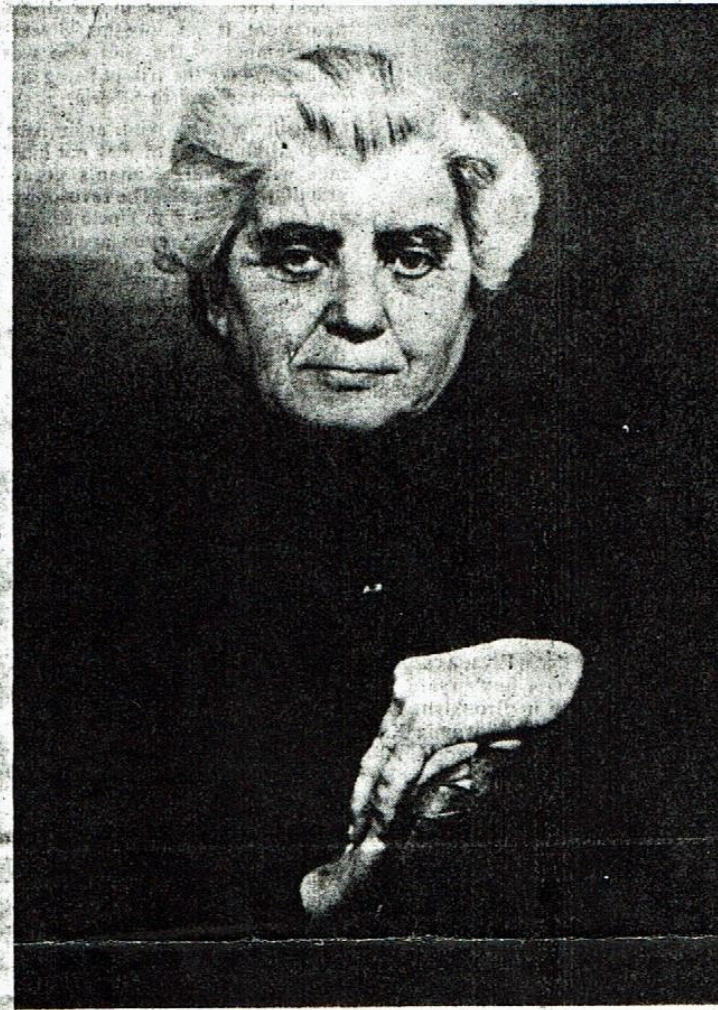
Karen Gershon first came to Israel in 1966 as a participant in an Anglo-Israel writers' symposium organized by Mercaz Letefutot. Until the 1960s, she had done everything possible to submerge her Jewishness. It was something which she had no desire to foist on her children. The family lived in Somerset where there were very few Jews. Her four offspring, Christopher, Anthony, Stella and Naomi, may have been vaguely aware of the fact that she was Jewish, but she never discussed her past — and there was nothing Jewish in the home environment.

While her children were growing up, Karen Gershon saw her Jewishness as something negative. It was the cause of her separation from her parents. It was the cause of persecution. It was a burden which she did not want to carry...

In 1963, she revisited her home town for the first time. On her return to England, she wrote her first Holocaust poems and then felt compelled to write her non-fiction book *We Came as Children*, which is a collective biography of German-speaking youngsters who on the eve of the Second World War found a

EVER A REFUGEE

Writer Karen Gershon's search for identity has brought her back to her own Jewishness



INTERVIEW / Greer Fay Cashman

Next, she worked as a shop assistant but didn't earn very much; she discovered that she could do better for herself as a chorus girl. Since she had a nice figure and good legs, she applied for the chorus line for the pantomime season — and was promptly hired. Some of the other girls in the show came from Bradford and when the season was over, she accompanied them and went to work in a spinning mill there.

Her cousin Walter had stayed in touch with her, and when he proposed marriage, she was delighted. Because she was under age, British law required her parents' permission for the union. Their blessing arrived in December 1941. It was her final communication from them.

Walter was a good man, but he and Karen were unsuited. They wanted different things, and neither was capable of sufficient compromise to accommodate the other. They parted amicably at the end of the war, by which time Karen had met Val Tripp. The divorce was so friendly that Walter made Val sign an undertaking to look after her.

BEFORE THE WAR, Karen's attitude to her Jewishness had been sanguine. While still in Germany she had written a poem for the community's Hanukkah celebration in which she had exhorted her co-religionists to be aware of their Jewishness not because the Nazis had reminded them of it but for positive reasons. In similar vein, she had told them through her poem, "we should go to Eretz Yisrael not because the Nazis want to get rid of us, but because that is where we belong."

After the war, there was a radical change in her attitude. She perceived her Jewishness as something shameful. "I tried to get rid of my Jewishness by marrying out. After the Holocaust, I saw my Jewishness as something that would ruin your life...as something that could kill you."

She thought then that by the time she reached the age of 31, she would be more British than refugee because she would have lived for a longer time in England than in Germany. It was a false premise.

She might have regained her Jewish perspective at an earlier age had

she been contacted by all sorts of people — some who had known her grandparents, some who had known her parents and some with whom she had gone to school. They all seemed so glad that she had survived, that she left Germany with an unexpected sense of warmth. It was then that she began to re-identify with her Jewishness.

BY 1966, SHE had come to terms with her historic past and was ready to tackle Israel. The writers' symposium was an ideal milieu. When someone at the symposium asked who among the participants considered themselves to be a Jewish writer, her spontaneous response was "I do." She surprised even herself with the readiness of this admission and realized that she was beginning "to fit into my Jewish skin."

Buoyed with a new enthusiasm, she persuaded her family to settle in Israel. Both Chris and Tony were instantly at home here. Neither had been circumcised, and both underwent circumcision in order to get married here. She had deliberately refrained from having them circumcised when they were born so that they would not be identified as Jews. A nonconformist like her mother, Stella Tripp was the first member of the family to go back to England, ostensibly to study art.

That was in the spring of 1973. Her father followed soon afterwards. He was then 54, and Karen hoped that he would come back to Jerusalem saying that he had been unable to find a job or a house. But he was offered a job as a teacher, and because she did not want to separate her daughters as she and Lise had been separated, she joined him. She empathized with his inability to adjust to Israel. "He was in the position that I had been in in England as a Jew among gentiles. Maybe it's more tolerable to us because we're used to it."

Naomi was then 11; when she grew up, she chose to make her life in Israel. She married an Ethiopian immigrant. Like their mother and aunt, the two Tripp sisters have children who are prevented by language barriers from talking to each other. Chris and Tony remained here. "My children are doing on my behalf

In 1963, she revisited her home town for the first time. On her return to England, she wrote her first Holocaust poems and then felt compelled to write her non-fiction book *We Came as Children*, which is a collective biography of German-speaking youngsters who on the eve of the Second World War found a haven in Britain. Published in 1966 by Gollancz, it was this year republished in paperback by Macmillan. It has also been translated into German, and is the basis for a film which is being made by England's TV Channel 4.

THE BOOK, when it was first released, created something of a sensation. Gershon was interviewed on television and by the print media. It was through these interviews that her children learned of their own Jewish roots.

Karen was the youngest of the three Lowenthal sisters: Anne was the eldest and Lise was in the middle. Their father, whose family had lived in Germany since the Middle Ages, was an architect. Until Hitler came to power, the family was quite well off. They lived in a fine house surrounded by a garden. There were servants and handsome gifts for birthdays and at Hanukka. Their maternal grandfather, who was Orthodox, was the president of the Jewish community. Their father was an agnostic.

From the day that Hitler took control of Germany, the Lowenthal fortunes began to dwindle. No one wanted to employ a Jewish architect; and over the next five years the family became destitute. The children used to have their main meals in other people's houses because their father could not afford to pay for food. Any clothes they received

came from charity bundles.

It was poverty which enabled Lise and Karen to join the second Children's Transport. Anne was too old, but she managed to get to England on some other rescue programme. It wasn't so much a question of saving their lives, Karen recalls: their inclusion was a means of allowing them to grow up without persecution. It was a chance to learn a trade and to be like everyone else. "But we were not like everyone else. We were refugees."

When they arrived at Dovercourt reception centre and were asked what they wanted to be, Lise replied that she wanted to be a doctor. "We can't put that down," she was told by the receiving officer. "You're a refugee." The echo of that insensitive sentence has remained embedded in Karen Gershon's consciousness; it is one of the reasons that she still considers herself to be a refugee.

Lise turned 17 in 1939 and was shipped out to Palestine, settling initially at Degania. Anne, who was also in England on an agricultural training scheme, was interned together with all the members of her group. From the internment camp she joined the ATS. At the age of 22, she contracted a form of leukaemia, and died.

Karen was left all alone. SHE DIDN'T KNOW if and when she would ever go to Palestine, and she no longer cared for the idea. She

had become disenchanted just before Lise went on aliya; the sisters had been talking to an instructor who scathingly told Karen that Eretz Yisrael did not need writers, but people to plant potatoes. At that time, Karen did not know that one could live without joining a kibbutz.

In 1941, at her own initiative, she left the training farm. She didn't know exactly where she was going or how to get there. Her English was mediocre at the time, and since she had no idea of the cost of a ticket, she simply put all her money on the counter and asked where it would take her. The ticket-seller, on recognizing her accent, immediately called the police. As an alien, she needed special permission to travel through England, but the police were soon convinced that she was harmless, and gave her the necessary papers.

She arrived in Leeds with only a few shillings in her pocket and a teacher at the ORT school gave her breakfast and the address of the Jewish Refugee Committee, which in turn gave her the address of someone who had come from Berlin and had rented a house for the purpose of taking in refugees. So she had a roof over head. The next challenge was to find a means of livelihood. She went into domestic service with an English Jewish family, but the job didn't last long. "They treated me as a servant and not as a Jew," she says tersely.

INTERVIEW / Greer Fay Cashman

Postscript



*A Collective Account of
the Lives of Jews in
West Germany since
the Second World War*

by

KAREN GERSHON

KAREN GERSHON

by

*the Second World War
1941-1945*

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One might have imagined that her Jewish perspective at an earlier age had her sister remained in Israel. But Lise had met an Italian Jew, with whom she had fallen in love and after the war had settled with him in Italy. The two sisters were reunited in 1947 when Karen and Val cycled on a tandem from England to Italy. While Lise and Karen can talk to each other in German, their children cannot converse with each other because they have no common language.

In 1963, Karen had a yearning to return to Bielefeld in search of her childhood. She fantasized that if she went back to the last known address of her parents, she would find them. Once she got there, she was cruelly confronted with the difference between imagination and reality. It was an emotionally painful experience. She was very much afraid in Germany; it was as if the war had not yet happened. One of the houses which her father had designed had not been damaged during the bombing. When it was completed, a plaque was attached naming both the man who had financed the fine building and the architect who had designed it; the architect's name had been scratched out. Karen could understand why this was done in wartime. But she was astounded that no one had thought to restore his name after the war.

She was so outraged that she voiced her anger to the newspapers. In the aftermath of the publicity, she

Chris and Tony remained here. "My children are doing on my behalf what I should have done myself," says Karen.

In 1967, she was again in Bielefeld, this time with Lise, who could not face going there alone. When the German translation of *We Came as Children* was published, she once more went to Germany to launch it. Then, last month, she went with her children and the Channel Four camera crew for on-location shooting of the film on her life.

A 13-year-old Bielefeld boy asked her what they were doing, and when she told him, she was shocked by his question "Aren't you afraid that the Nazis will find out what you're doing and will come to attack you?" Bielefeld, which was once a centre of liberalism, has become a centre of neo-Nazism. A memorial stone listing the names of Jewish soldiers who gave their lives in the First World War for the Fatherland has disappeared. The only monument to Jewish life which once existed in Bielefeld stands in the Jewish cemetery - but it has been desecrated.

Karen Gershon is in some respects a walking memorial. She has taken her professional surname from her father's Hebrew name. His name may have been scratched from the plaque in Bielefeld, but it graces all his daughter's writings. **E**

(Karen Gershon will read a selection from her own writings at Beit Ha-sofer in Kaplan St., Tel Aviv on Tuesday August 29, at 7.30 p.m.)

BRITISH POETRY SINCE 1945
(PENGUIN 1970)

KAREN GERSHON

(born 1923)

[Of all the poets writing in English who have tried to deal with the theme of the German concentration camps, Karen Gershon is the most moving. She is one of the German Jewish children who were saved at the last moment from the Nazis, but whose parents were left behind to die. Of all the poets from abroad who have lived in England, she remains in a sense the most exiled. At one moment she even thinks of herself as 'exiled' in language: as someone who might write more naturally in German. Recently, in search of 'native ground', she moved to Israel. Technically limited, and emotionally monotonous, her work still deserves a great deal more notice than it has so far received. Again, as in the case of Louis MacNeice, I find it strange that her poems have not been brought into the debate about 'confessionalism'.

Selected Poems, Gollancz, 1966. Her work was included in *New Poets* 1959, ed. Edwin Muir, Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1959.

I Was Not There

The morning they set out from home
I was not there to comfort them
the dawn was innocent with snow
in mockery – it is not true
the dawn was neutral was immune
their shadows threaded it too soon
they were relieved that it had come
I was not there to comfort them .

One told me that my father spent
a day in prison long ago
he did not tell me that he went
what difference does it make now
when he set out when he came home
I was not there to comfort him

KAREN GERSHON

and now I have no means to know
of what I was kept ignorant

Both my parents died in camps
I was not there to comfort them
I was not there they were alone
my mind refuses to conceive
the life the death they must have known
I must atone because I live
I could not have saved them from death
the ground is neutral underneath

Every child must leave its home
time gathers life impartially
I could have spared them nothing since
I was too young – it is not true
they might have lived to succour me
and none shall say in my defence
had I been there to comfort them
it would have made no difference

In the Jewish Cemetery

The dead Jews lie
divided by
the fate of their families
those with survivors have
flowers on their graves
the others have grass

One who is named
on her family's tomb
died in a camp
when she was twenty years old
I envied her as a child
and am ashamed



In Jerusalem
August 18th 1989

IN JERUSALEM AUGUST 18, 1989



Author Karen Gershon (inset) will speak at Beit Shmuel this week about the thousands of Jewish children who fled Germany 50 years ago aboard the 'Kindertransports.'

Recalling the voices of 'Kindertransport'

City Lights/Pamela Kidron

Karen Gershon was born in Bielefeld, Germany, in 1923. In 1938 she and her sister were sent to England by their parents on a *Kindertransport*. At the end of the war she learned that all her family in Germany had been killed in the Holocaust.

She remained in England, working at various jobs, among them domestic servant, chorus girl and mill hand. She began writing poetry at the age of 13 and has been writing ever since.

For her first book, *We Came as Children* (1966), she compiled and edited a collection of autobiographies by people who came with the *Kindertransport*.

This year, to mark the 50th anniversary of those transports, *We Came as Children* has been republished in paperback, and England's Channel Four is making a film about Gershon's life and work.

The author, in Israel for filming, will present a reading of her works at 8 Tuesday at Beit Shmuel. Admission is free. On August 28 at 8, she will give a free reading (in English) at Con-

In 1989 Karen visited Israel
And gave a number of
poetry readings in Jerusalem
And Tel Aviv



World Union For Progressive Judaism

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02-203447 - 203452 טל

Beit Shmuel
Educational and Cultural Center

August 28, 1989

Ms. Naomi Samuel
Kiryat Yovel

Dear Naomi,

Shalom!

Please accept my thanks, again, for the initiative you took in organizing the encounter with Karen Gershon. It was an inspiring and emotional evening for myself and the 150-odd participants.

I would like to ask you to please thank your mother for her wonderful participation in the successful and moving event.

I am looking forward to working together with you on future projects.

Sincerely yours,

Judy Gladstone
Director of Educational
and Cultural Programs
Beit Shmuel

JG/lb



Hebrew Union College –
Jewish Institute of Religion

האיגוד העולמי ליהדות מתקדמת
WORLD UNION FOR PROGRESSIVE JUDAISM

בית שמואל
Beit Shmuel



KAREN GERSHON

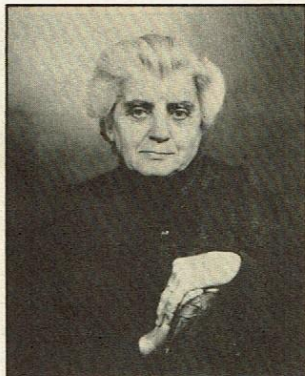
Author of:

“We Came as Children”

“Postscript”

“The Bread of Exile”

“The Fifth Generation”



Presently in Israel for the filming of a British Television documentary about her life and works, Karen Gershon will read excerpts from her writing and talk about being a survivor 50 years after the Holocaust.

Sarah Manodla, head of the English radio department at Kol Yisrael, will be the moderator.

Tuesday, Aug. 22 at 8 p.m.

Beit Shmuel, 6 Shama St.

Admission Free

Karen Gershon's life history:

- ★ Born in Bielefeld 10 years before Hitler came to power.
- ★ Sent to England in 1938 on a Childrens Transport at the age of 15 and never saw her parents again.
- ★ Lived in Israel with her family from 1968—1974. Today 3 of her 4 children and 6 of her 9 grandchildren live in Israel.

Karen's four volumes of poetry will be republished by McMillan this winter.

6 Shamah St., Jerusalem טלפון 02-203456-9 ירושלים

אוטובוסים: 5, 6, 15, 18, 21, 30



קהילה כל הנשמה

רח' הרכבת 57, בקעה, ירושלים 93502

KEHILAT KOL HANESHAMA

Autobiographical Writing Workshop

with

KAREN GERSHON

British Author, Poet and Subject of a BBC Film

Monday, August 28, 1989

8:00 P.M.

Kehilat Kol Hanesama
57 Harakevet Street (Corner Pierre Koenig St.)

Please Bring Writing Materials

Admission Free

SATURDAY 29 JANUARY 1994

BOOK DIGEST

Torment of the innocents

Karen Gershon was a young Jewish girl during Hitler's rise to power. Her memoirs are a poignant evocation of childhood in Nazi Germany. By SHAUN USHER



describing the experiences of one intelligent and impressionable schoolgirl, *A Lesser Child** has more impact than many a melodramatic picture of Germany marching towards genocide in the Thirties.

Writing with a child's shattering honesty and clarity, Gershon lets small events speak for themselves. As in all great tragedies, one wants to cry out a warning as her father, Paul, a gifted architect, his wife Selma and their three daughters struggle to understand the threat that eventually engulfs them.

The danger signs that had begun with the water throwing incident gradually became everyday occurrences.

Kate's father — a freethinking philanderer — shared Hitler's proud record of having fought for the Fatherland during World War I, and had won the Iron Cross for valour. He considered himself a German citizen of the

summoned, weeping, to the police station, and Kate remembers trying to hold on to his hand. 'They needed to prise her fingers away from it, because she did not want him to leave while he was crying.' His arrest was a warning to the Jewish community: even its president was unsafe. Jail broke Opa, and he died soon afterwards.

All his possessions were confiscated, though the authorities allowed Selma to take a workbox and a vase which she explained belonged to her. Kate marvelled at such restraint — since Jews were such criminals, she reasoned, why had her mother not claimed more than her due? Hearing so much about the wickedness of the Jews, the young girl was starting to believe some of it must be true.



protected by his World War I service and not sent to the camps until 1943. But soon after Kate's departure, another married couple

Jewish faith, who did not believe in God and therefore was 'not much of a Jew'. Paul mocked his wife out of keeping a kosher household — with the result that his father-in-law, president of Bielefeld's Jewish community, could not eat there.

Yet all this could not save him. Like so many, Paul and Selma would vanish into the death camps, Iron Cross or no. Still standing in Bielefeld is one of many local buildings he designed, a bank; his last achievement as an architect. His plans won a municipal competition, but new laws forbade Jews to be architects. Instead, the runner-up's name was inscribed on the foundation stone.

The tightening of the screws was gradual, recalls Kate. Her beloved grandfather, Opa, was imprisoned for defaulting on debts which the Nazis gave him no chance to settle. He was

When she was 14, and top of the class at school, Kate's sister Anne was called in by the headmaster. The father of a classmate, a senior Nazi official, objected to his daughter getting lower marks than a Jew and Anne had to leave. Soon afterwards, it was arranged for Kate and Lise to go to England. It was 1938.

Paul and Selma fooled Kate that her officially sanctioned flight to England was a kind of holiday, refusing to admit that the parting was final. The end was to come sooner than they might have expected. Her parents should have been

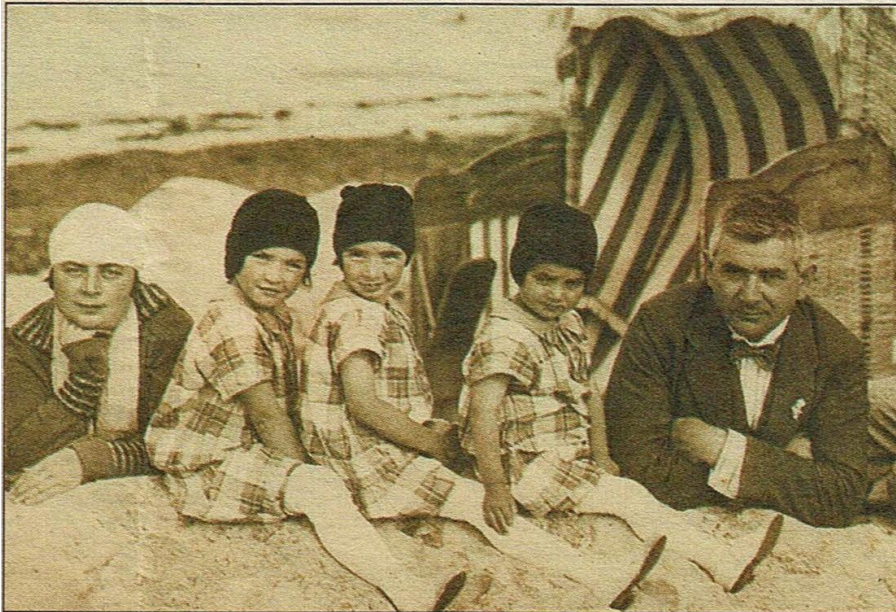
attempted suicide and, in a quirk beyond the blackness of *Catch 22* satire, were deemed unfit to be transported to an extermination camp. So Paul and Selma took their place and were herded off to Auschwitz and their deaths.

Meanwhile, still believing that her father's medal made them safe, Kate set off with Lise and their parents to take a tram to the station where they would catch their train to England. A stranger stepped out of the queue. 'Allow me to carry your suitcases,' he pleaded. The girls were frightened. Then the man said loudly, intending the rest of the queue to hear: 'I want you to know that not every German agrees with what is being done to you in our name.' It was a rare gesture of humanity from a country that had destroyed so much of her life.

Kate's final glimpse of her father (able through a vestige of his old influence to see them on to the train) speaks poignantly of the Jews' desperate plight. Kate and Lise found themselves having to share him with all the other children who were cruelly denied a proper farewell. 'He was the only Jewish father on the platform and all the departing children were competing for his attention.' It was like her father, thought Kate, not to realise how much his daughters needed him at that moment, and not to make their last moments together special.

Then the train drew out of the station, passing, with a dreadful irony, the Jewish cemetery. The landmarks of their childhood — the Sparrenburg castle, the custard factory with its old, familiar smell, the forest and heath — were left behind forever.

**A Lesser Child by Karen Gershon is published by Peter Owen, £17.50*



Above: sisters Lise, Anne and Karen ('Kate'); above right: Germans rally to Hitler in 1934; left: (l-r) mother Selma, Anne, Lise, Karen and father Paul in happier days

Obituary

Karen Gershon

Karen Gershon, who has died in London aged 69, was a child refugee who became a pioneer English writer on the German-Jewish experience — when the Holocaust was still a taboo subject to many.

Born Kathe Loewenthal in Bielefeld, in western Germany, she began writing verse as a child, and several early poems were published in the *Jüdische Rundschau*.

Raised in a Liberal community, she belonged to a Zionist youth club, where she trained for kibbutz life in Palestine. But being under 17, she was too young to qualify for a permit for Palestine and came to England on a Kindertransport in 1938. Her parents died in a Nazi camp in Riga.

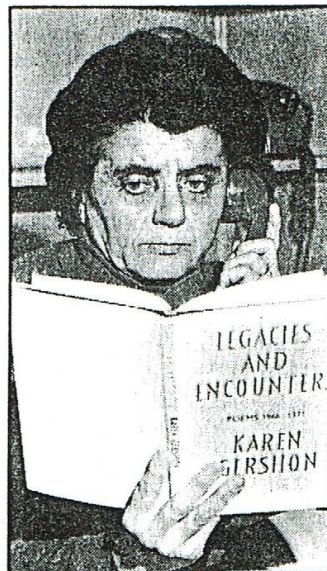
As one of the first in England to write about the Holocaust generation, she explored from her own experience the feelings of loss and exile, and the struggle to re-establish an identity. To the end, she felt she owed her parents an unrepayable debt for having sent her to safety.

After living in a Jewish refugee youth hostel in Scotland — where she became briefly interested in Orthodoxy — she rejected religion and Zionism as she sought work and personal independence.

She won a scholarship to Edinburgh University but gave it up to work in progressive boarding schools as housemother and matron. In 1948, she married an art teacher, Val Tripp — a non-Jewish pacifist with strong humanist convictions. They settled in Ilminster, Somerset.

From 1950, she began writing in English: only after having entered and won a verse competition, she later explained, did she feel confidence in her new language.

However, her abiding sense of alienation — whether as German, Englishwoman or Jew — was reflected in her choice of pen-name:



Gershon, with its meaning of "stranger in a strange land."

Her first book, "Selected Poems," published in 1966, was praised for exploring with "honesty and penetration the most traumatic events of our century."

In that same year, she won widespread acclaim for her "collective autobiography" of kindertransport experiences, "We Came As Children." The book was the result of feedback from an article she had written for *The Observer* to mark the rescue operation's 25th anniversary.

She conducted her own commemoration by revisiting her native city, where she found herself bemused by the lack of any sign of former Jewish habitation, even though she received a courteous welcome from old friends and neighbours.

Her work, which included poetry readings and TV programmes about refugees, was recognised with an Arts Council bursary, as well as by the Jewish Chronicle book award, a Pioneer Women of America award and a study grant for Israel.

Her visit to Israel marked an emotional highlight — the sudden experience of simply being a Jew within a society built by Jews. "I felt as if I had been healed of a sickness," she wrote.

But the time was not yet ripe for Jews or non-Jews in Britain to face up to the horrors of the Holocaust. At a Hillel House conference in 1967 on the Holocaust and its literature, she found the student audience ignorant, bewildered and uneasy.

It was not until the 1970s that other books on the Holocaust started to appear.

A regular contributor to the *JC*, she was a frequent reviewer of books on survivors' experiences from Germany, Czechoslovakia, France and Italy. Her own work — poetry, fiction or non-fiction, totalling some 15 volumes — continued to explore the themes of pain in bereavement, exile and separation.

A description of her childhood, "The Lesser Child," published in Germany, will appear in England later this year. In her last two years, she returned to poetry, with an unpublished collection, "Diary of a Heart Patient."

From 1969, she spent six years in Israel, which she found spiritually exhilarating, although she and her husband ultimately decided to return to England.

Three of their children settled in Israel: one daughter, Naomi, married an Ethiopian Jew, among the first such weddings celebrated in Israel.

She is survived by her husband, four children and grandchildren.

Obituary in The Daily Telegraph
April 3rd 1993

Karen Gershon

KAREN GERSHON, the writer and poet who has died aged 69, was best known for her book, *We Came as Children: A Collective Autobiography* (1966), which told of the traumatic experiences of refugee children in Britain during the Second World War.

Her credentials for writing such a book were impeccable, for Gershon had herself been sent to England under a special rescue scheme in



Gershon: unsettled

1938. Her parents remained behind, and were butchered by the Nazis.

Karen Gershon also wrote a series of largely autobiographical poems, brought together in *Selected Poems* (1966), in which the tone was elegiac and often sad, but never lachrymose. The same can be said of her later collection, *Diary of a Heart Patient*. She wrote 15 works in all, including several sad little novels.

She was a small, intense woman who always looked as though she was slightly lost. This was, indeed, how she felt for much of the time, and her work is full of a sense of not belonging. Gershon, the *nom de plume* which she used throughout her writing career, is a Hebrew word meaning stranger in a strangeland.

She was born Kathe Lowenthal at Bielefeld, Germany, in 1924.

She was a sensitive and precocious child, and started writing, in German, in her teens. After moving to England she took some time to master the language, but, once she did, wrote with great delicacy.

She won a scholarship to Edinburgh University but, restless and unsettled, failed to complete the course and went on to do various jobs before she met and married an art teacher and made her home in Ilminster, Somerset.

But although she loved the English countryside Gershon never felt entirely at ease in her adopted country and in 1969 she moved with her husband and children to Israel.

Gershon was briefly euphoric, believing her wanderings had finally come to an end. But she and her husband became uncomfortable with the religious fervour which had gripped Israel after the Yom Kippur war.

They returned to England in 1975 and settled in Cornwall. Three of their four children remained in Israel.

KAREN GERSHON

Karen Gershon, poet, died in London on March 24 aged 69. She was born in Bielefeld, Germany, on August 29, 1923.

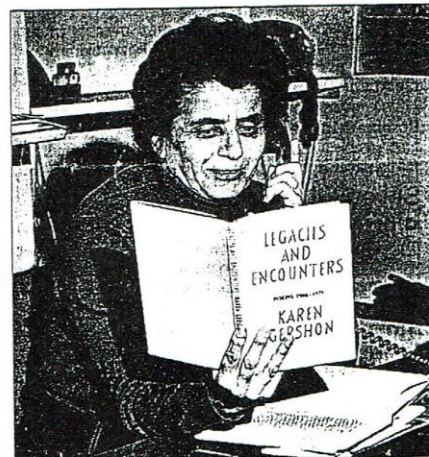
KAREN Gershon was a lone voice in Holocaust poetry and literature in this country during the 1960s, when the general public, Gentile and Jewish, was not yet ready for the unburdening of the trauma of the second world war.

Herself a "children's transport" arrival in England in 1938 at the age of 15, she threw off all connections with her past as soon as possible. She left the Scottish refugee hostel, where she had been placed, and took domestic and office jobs in Leeds. She won a scholarship to Edinburgh University but gave it up to work in matron and house-mother posts in progressive boarding schools around the country. She married an English non-Jewish art teacher, Val Tripp, in 1948 and settled with him in Ilminster, Somerset, to raise a family on humanist principles.

As a child in Bielefeld, Westphalia, she had belonged to the German-Jewish Liberal tradition and attended a Zionist youth group, where she prepared for a future life in Palestine — not that she looked forward to collective life on an agricultural kibbutz, having more literary ambitions. Her older sister received a certificate to go to Palestine but as Karen was under 17, her parents sent her to England for safety instead. Like many of her background, she felt culturally rather than religiously Jewish and wished to be more German. Her name then was Kate Loewenthal.

After moving to Ilminster, she started writing in English but did not feel sure enough to publish until she had won an English verse competition. Her first book of *Selected Poems*, published by Victor Gollancz in 1966, was full of the pain of the sudden and final separation from her parents, who perished in a concentration camp in Riga, Latvia. Her repeated line "I was not there to comfort them" showed the now familiar guilt of the survivor.

Her collective autobiogra-



phy, fusing the accounts of nearly 250 child refugees into one story, *We Came as Children*, marked the 25th anniversary of the Kindertransport operation and led to a wider audience on television programmes and to poetry readings. In the early 1970s, she was chosen as one of the dial-a-poem telephone poets.

Her surname comes from the name given by Moses to a son born in Midian because he was "a stranger in a strange land". The sense of alienation never left her. After a visit to her home town in Germany in 1963, where all trace of the Jewish community had been wiped out including her father's name on architectural plaques, she wrote: "I have always denied that I am German... yet am only marginally Jewish... I live in England from choice." But as her children grew up, she felt a growing need to give them a background of Jewish religious symbols, festival and ceremonies.

Her courageously penetrating verse on a deeply wounding subject earned her awards and recognition in 1967 from the Arts Council, from an American organisation, and from Israel, where she was invited to spend a study tour.

Israel was an emotional highpoint for her, where she

found that being a Jew and a refugee could be a normal condition and nothing to hide or be ashamed of. At Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem, she felt she came the nearest she possibly could to her parents' grave. She went to live in Israel in 1969 but practical problems brought the family back to England six years later, where they lived first in London and then Cornwall. However, Israel's pull was strong enough for three of her four children to make their home there.

She continued writing, widening her field to include motherhood and biblical themes. But the pain of bereavement, flight and exile was always present, whether in her poetry volumes such as *My Daughters*, *My Sisters* and *Coming Back From Babylon* or her novels, such as *Bread of Exile*, which explored autobiographical strands. She wrote for all her generation when she said: "I write about my parents because to think about them is all that is left to me of them; I write about my childhood because there is no one to tell me what it was really like, and I use my poetry as a means of discovering an unremembered truth."

She leaves her husband, two sons and two daughters.

Obituary in The Times April 15th 1993

Karen Gershon

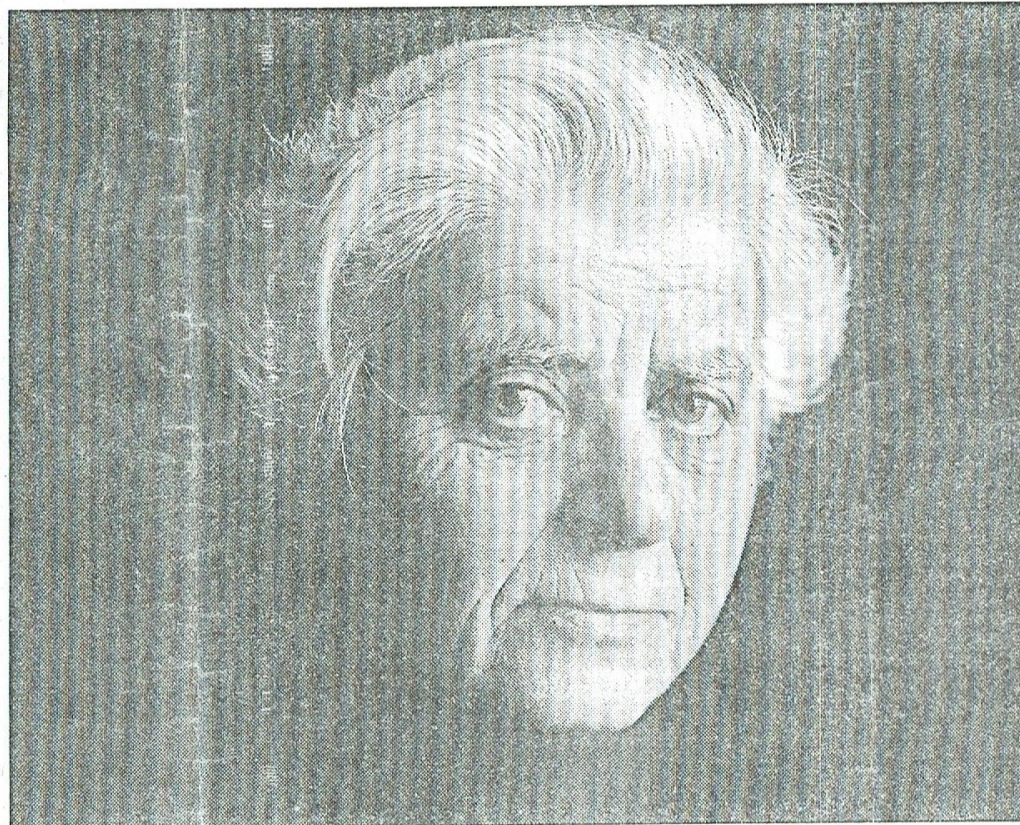
AS A CHILD in Germany, the writer Karen Gershon, who has died aged 69, was so good at writing verses — so as not to be left out of the family singing — that her mother mistook them for Heine. A few years later, alone in England, the Jewish teenager had already begun to formulate, in English, her experiences of the Holocaust.

She was born Kathe Loewenthal in Bielefeld, and was one of the 10,000 children on the *Kindertransport* which began bringing children to Britain in December 1938 after the Nazi pogrom called *Kristallnacht*. She was excited to be going, with her sister Lise (her elder sister Anna had already left for England). But shortly after, Lise went to Palestine in one of the last Jewish groups to get there before war broke out and Anna unexpectedly died. The parents died in the Holocaust, in Riga. She was now completely alone.

On her arrival in England at 15 she was too old to be adopted into a family. She went from Dovercourt reception camp to Whittingehame, in Scotland, and took menial jobs before she married an Englishman, with whom she was to have four children. They made their home in the West Country. In 1963 she returned to Bielefeld for the first time. The experience released a flood of poems as she walked in the streets and parks where she had been so loved as a child. Her first book of Selected Poems was published in 1966. In the same year *We Came As Children*, a "collective biography" of survivors of the *Kindertransport*, also appeared. Karen had collated their recollections. Hugh Montefiore wrote: "The restraint of the contributor's tears at your guts."

In 1969 Karen and her husband emigrated to Israel. It didn't work out for them although three out of their four children settled there and they returned in 1973. Out of that visit came more poems, many on a Biblical theme.

A documentary, *Stranger In A Strange Land*, was shown on Channel 4 in 1989 and in the same year her *Collected Poems* were published. Her



Karen Gershon . . . a flood of poems from a survivor of the Holocaust generation

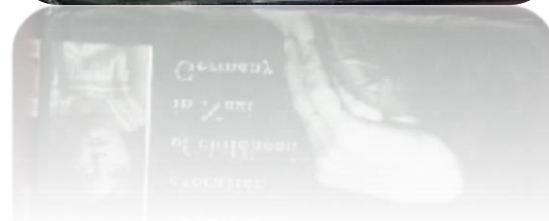
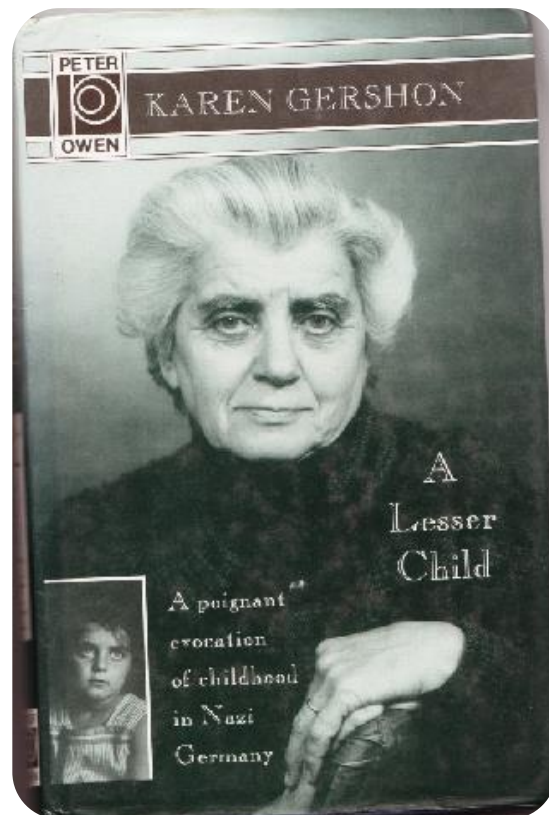
PHOTOGRAPH: JANE BOWN

autobiography, published in Germany last year, will be out this autumn. Shortly before her death she was writing a new collection of poems, *Notes Of A Heart Patient*. Although she said she should have enjoyed being alive more than she did, and although much of her life was spent coping with grief, she still had the courage, determination and humour shown by that little girl making up her own songs in Germany.

Vicky Pett

Karen Gershon, born August 29, 1923; died March 24, 1993.

THE GUARDIAN
Thursday April 22 1993



A LESSER CHILD

The Jerusalem Post Magazine
1994?

Karen Gershon
struggles with
rejection and
low self-esteem in
her posthumously
published book.

Chapter 16 is
presented here



A LESSER CHILD

There were now more children registered with Youth Aliya than the British were willing to admit into Palestine. The Zionist organizations ran farms, where groups of candidates stayed for four weeks, working half the day and spending the other half on learning Hebrew and other cultural activities, under the supervision of youth leaders who, at the end of each course, allocated the available number of immigration certificates to those who in their opinion were most suitable for kibbutz life. The rest were offered places on long-term training farms.

Anne had earlier that year gone to such a farm, because by the time she became a Zionist she was too close to her 17th birthday – the upper age-limit – to be considered for Youth Aliya. She had little chance of getting an adult certificate: they went to the boys and men, partly because only they were believed to be at risk in Germany and partly because they would one day be needed by the Land of Israel as its soldiers.

Even for places in the selection camps

there were waiting lists. It was mid-September before Lise and Kate went to Rüdnitz, which was not far from Berlin.

Not all her homesickness had cured Kate of believing that for her, life would be more enjoyable elsewhere than she found it at home. She often thought of Lise as standing between her and the sun; she did not think much of herself but she thought less of her. Against all the evidence she believed that she but not Lise would be able to take Rüdnitz in her stride.

"I'm much more used to being away from home," she told Lise on the way. "I shall look after you." She was relying on her experience of being in Herrlingen, relying on having learned something from it, relying on that being something which would now stand her in good stead. As if she had not known that Rüdnitz was bound to be an altogether different place, that being there was bound to be an altogether different experience.

As they had so far to travel, they were among the last to arrive. Those coming from Berlin – about half of the almost 40

youngsters – were already known to each other; the rest had already had time to become acquainted. Kate instantly felt that she was an outsider, had made a mistake in coming, regretted being there.

A small, fat ebullient girl – who turned out to be no one special – took charge of them and, showing them to where they could leave their suitcases, on the way explained the layout of the farm, their timetable there and, in passing, introduced them to people. It would have taken Kate days to know as much, and to behave like that was totally beyond her.

"We must put our best foot forward," the girl said "to be among the ones who make it." Until that moment, that she might not manage to be among those had not occurred to Kate, and she rejected the possibility. With an arrogance that she did not know was part of her character she thought, as good as *that* girl I most certainly am.

The dormitories, two for the boys and two for the girls, had bunk-beds, and sacks stuffed with straw for mattresses; all the lower bunks were already taken. "As sisters

you aren't allowed to sleep in the same room," somebody said as Lise and Kate looked round and then looked at each other. Rescue me, Kate's look said.

If it occurred to Lise that it mattered what impression they made, that here and now it mattered more than elsewhere at other times, it did not make her give up her habit of shielding Kate. There was no lower bunk left in the other dormitory either. "She suffers from dizziness," Lise lied (it was a sense of insecurity Kate suffered from), "will one of you please, please give up your place to her." It did not even surprise Kate that someone did. She was grateful to Lise but also cross with her: Kate expected to have allowances made for her while refusing to admit even to herself that this was so.

Perhaps some of the other girls were more like her than she knew; they wanted Lise to be a big sister to them, too. "Och, we want you to stay in here with us," they told her, instant affection for Lise making them cock a snook at the course leaders, whose opinion of them would determine their futures. Whoever

Karen Gershon
yearned to make
Israel her home
and to write
in Hebrew.
Her daughter
ended up living



more or less at once would be allocated places on training-farms.

Kate had stopped listening before he had finished speaking, when she realized – as she had not done before – that there was a real possibility that she would be failed. She looked round the circle to count the certainties; she did it heart thudding and fingertips freezing, as frantically as if she were practicing magic. The names were read out alphabetically. At each pass she flinched at this diminishing of her chances, wishing now that she had not been so rash as to submit herself to this ordeal. She thought it unfair that throughout the four weeks they had been left to behave as they pleased without guidance. Now, only now, did she realize that the fact that not Heinz, not Hans, had ever criticized her did not mean that they had found no fault. Through her mind flashed a hundred and one occasions when she could, when she now knew she ought to have behaved differently.

She thought that probably they would not grant two certificates within one family. Her assumption that she stood a greater chance than Lise was based on the fact that not Lise but she had been given a place in Herrlingen, and also on wishful thinking. Lise, she believed, would be better able to cope with being rejected. Lise – that one had always encouraged her to believe – was able to accommodate herself to anything.

K coming before L, she heard that she had been passed, and instead of relief then

Aliya would be so damaging to Kate that it would scar her for life. Hesitating only to find the right words, she lied – she would not have lied to him on her own behalf – “I don’t know what’s been the matter with her, she isn’t usually like this, she hasn’t been doing herself justice.”

And so on, until Hans said, “You know her better than we do, if you think...”

Decades were to pass before she judged Kate mature enough to be told the truth.

Before returning to Bielefeld they spent three days in Berlin with Paul’s sister and her family. The time was too brief to

bull-calf had been taken to be sacrificed in the Temple; he recruited a gang of children who set about rescuing him. If the story was a parable she was not aware of it.

The rejected manuscript was waiting for her at home. Selma had not mentioned it in her letters so as not to upset her while she was away. Under the impression that the publishers had not yet reached a decision about it, Kate’s hopes grew like Jack’s beanstalk.

She needed her Berlin relations’ help to find the address. She must telephone first, they told her and make an appointment. She did not want to do that, did not want to establish this most important contact in the

write them.

A young woman had come down to take her up. Kate, belonging to a generation which still took for granted that all the important positions were filled by men, mistook her for a secretary; she was one of the firm’s readers.

She was concerned to be faced with an enquiry about a manuscript which had already been returned. Kate interpreted her concern more personally, believed that it was for her because of what she had written, believed that it was for her book because of what it was. The woman told her that because it had been a handwritten manuscript, they had feared that it might be the only copy, and returned it by registered post.

This evidence that it had been treated as something of value softened the effect on Kate of the rejection; instantly she felt that she had known all along that the book would not be published, was in fact not publishable, felt that she had never expected to achieve with it more than to be standing in this office with this woman in friendly conversation as between equals. She abandoned her creation, sought refuge with strangers, joined the rejectors to escape feeling that it was herself who had been rejected. Needing to explain how it came about that she did not know that the manuscript had been returned helped her to cope with the moment. What also helped was the conditioning she had been receiving since Hitler had come to power that all she most



(Right to Left) Karen Gershon with her sisters Anne and Lise.

experienced a moment of utter panic. Her luck could not hold – and what was the good of anything if it deprived her of Lise?

Hans had asked Lise's opinion of the girls about whom he had been undecided. Late one evening in the office, with the feeling that they were the only ones left awake, he had told her, 'I have my doubts about Kate.'

The love she felt for him had been foremost in her mind. It ceased to matter the moment she was needed by her little sister. "What doubts?" she asked, no longer his friend.

"She's a good and willing worker. But she doesn't know how to relate to people, she's a born outsider, it would make problems to have her on a kibbutz."

Lise pretended not to take his words seriously. She did not want to be separated from Kate but that was not what motivated

become acquainted; they had another reason for wanting to stay. Those of their Rüdnitz group who lived there were going to meet at somebody's house towards the end of the week and Kate especially could not bear the thought of them doing this without her, who also belonged.

There was something else she wanted to do, even more important to her. Before going to Rüdnitz, that summer with so much time on her hands – Anne away from home and Lise working – she had written a novel. She did it sitting in Anne's part of their room, on Anne's chair and at Anne's table, writing every day for three hours first thing in the morning for five weeks, and spending much of the rest of the time thinking about it.

It was the title of a book she had not read, *The Little Prophet*, which had captured her imagination. Her little prophet was a peas-

whole of her life so far by such impersonal means. Besides, she did not know whom to ask for or what to say. They might have told her not to come, and she wanted the experience of visiting a publisher. It was Schocken, as far as she knew the only Jewish publishing house left in Germany.

The entrance was shabby, in inside dark, or perhaps so only by contrast with her bright expectations. At reception, she gave her name across the counter and said, "As I happen to be passing through Berlin...", a grand phrase rehearsed in thought all that morning. She was told to sit down while waiting, but preferred to remain standing, poised.

The stairs were narrow and winding. Perhaps they only seemed like that to her because to her the place was an enchanted castle. Books everywhere. Paper for books in the making. People whose purpose in life

wanted was beyond her reach.

She had achieved more than seemed to her then. The registered parcel awaiting her at home included a letter from Dr. Georg Gross, then one of the directors of Schocken. What plans did she have for her future? he asked. If she needed help, she should let him know; he might be able to arrange her emigration.

It was the sort of letter for which her father had been waiting for years. "What has he ever done to make anybody want to help him?" her mother asked whenever one of his emigration schemes came to naught. Well, she had done something to make somebody want to help her. It so happened that her emigration was already arranged. But for the rest of her life, the memory of that letter helped her, a little, to cope with the guilt she felt over having survived. ■

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By Carl Schrag

Happier days: Karen Gershon sits in between sisters Lise and Anne with their mother Selma, on the beach

A PLACE TO BELONG

Karen Gershon died nearly a year ago of complications that arose from a heart bypass operation. Hailed as “the voice of the Kindertransport generation,” she was a poet and a writer who published more than a dozen books during her lengthy career.

Her last published volume, *A Lesser Child*, appeared in German shortly before her death. She did not live to see the English version in print.

Born in Germany in 1923, Gershon was

the youngest of three daughters of a respected architect and his wife. The rise of Hitler signaled the beginning of a serious downslide in the family’s quality of life.

Soon they were unable to maintain their very comfortable standard of life; eventually they had to move to a small apartment in a poor section of Bielefeld. Later, the parents were forced to accept charity slots in camps for the girls, and to arrange invitations from better-off relations in order to give the girls something that resembled a holiday.

Ultimately, Gershon reached safety in

England, as part of a children’s transport in December 1938. Her two older sisters, Anne and Lise, also made it to England, although Anne got sick and died; the girls’ parents died in Latvia.

After the war, Gershon married a non-Jewish Englishman and vowed that her children would grow up with a sense of belonging that she had never known. Between 1948 and 1962, they had four children. The eldest didn’t even know he was Jewish until he neared his 18th birthday.

In 1966, she published her first nonfiction

book. *We Came as Children* was a collective autobiography of the generation of European Jewish youngsters who found safe haven in Britain during World War II. The media fanfare and critical acclaim which greeted the book earned Gershon acclaim as “voice of the Kindertransport generation,” and it also hoisted her Jewishness into the lime-light in such a way that she could no longer “shield” her children from their heritage.

Before leaving Germany, Gershon – who in the book calls herself by her childhood name, Kate – had been deeply involved in



Zionist activities. All three girls found a certain solace in a movement based on the belief that there was a place where Jews really did belong and could be full members of society without discrimination.

A Lesser Child, published by Peter Owen Ltd., is an intensely personal volume. While it tells a story that parallels that of thousands of Jewish children in the 1930s, it is first and foremost Gershon's own memoir. Reading it, her children surely learned a lot about their mother and the life which vanished in the Holocaust.

Her youngest daughter, Naomi Shmuel, 31, who lives in Jerusalem, recounts the story of Gershon's chance meeting with Teddy Kollek, who was posted in England in 1938 on behalf of the Jewish Agency.

"When my mother and her sister arrived in England with migration passes to Palestine, Teddy Kollek met their boat at the pier," Shmuel says. "He asked all of the children in the group to give up their passes to Palestine, so they could be used to help get other children out of Germany."

Kate and Lise were the first to come forward and hand Kollek their paperwork. He held them up as an example to the other youngsters, and promised the sisters, "I will see to it that you get to Eretz Yisrael."

Shortly after the publication of *We Came as Children*, Shmuel continues, Kollek – who had already become Jerusalem's mayor – visited Britain and Gershon made a point of meeting him. After she reminded him of his vow, Kollek arranged for Gershon to be invited as part of a delegation of British writers who visited Israel.

Middle East, it would probably have been in Saudi Arabia," returned to England, telling Gershon, essentially, to choose between her country or her husband.

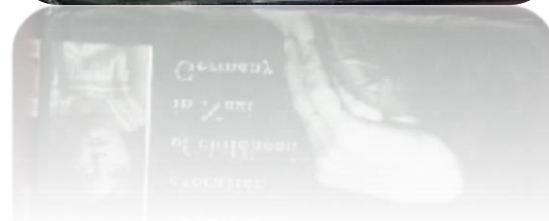
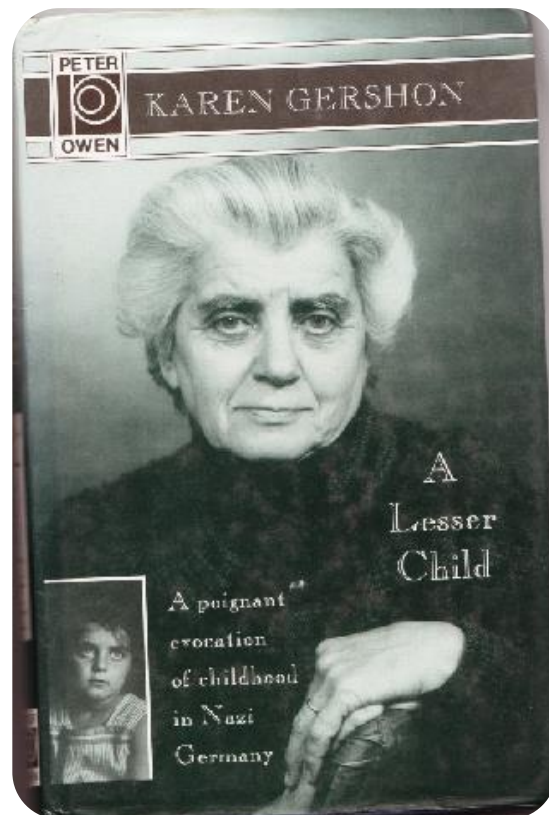
Ultimately, Gershon decided to return to Britain. Shmuel says her mother was driven by a desire to see her two daughters living near each other, and a fear that they would raise families in distant countries, speaking different languages. "She did not want to see me and my sister separated, as she and her sisters had been separated."

As happens so often with fate, the efforts to keep the family together had little impact. Shmuel's two brothers were married in a joint ceremony in Jerusalem in 1972, and remained in Israel. Just after the Yom Kippur War, Shmuel and her mother followed father and sister back to Britain.

"It was a very difficult period for the entire family," Shmuel says today. "We had left everything behind when we moved to Israel, and starting over [in England] was not easy. We had left a beautiful Arab house in Jerusalem, and we lived in a council flat."

Gershon didn't have the energy to make their small apartment a home. Nor did she have energy to write. Although life had not been easy in Israel ("Our economic situation is not desperate," she wrote in *The Jerusalem Post* in 1971, attempting to put a positive spin on a difficult existence), she had been happy, having finally felt that she had found something approaching a place to call her own.

They lived for a number of years as if their sojourn in Britain was a temporary one, but eventually it became clear they



*Gershon vowed that
her children would
grow up with a sense
of belonging that
she had never known.*

So enthralled was Gershon with what she found here that she made a point of returning. Zalman Shazar, then president, urged her to settle here, and she brought her husband and her three younger children in 1968. Their oldest son had just been married, and he stayed behind. (When he eventually divorced his first wife, he joined the family in Jerusalem.)

They lived in a beautiful old Arab house in Jerusalem's German Colony. Naomi, for her part, was thrilled with her new life. For a child, Israel in the late 1960s was a wonderful place to be.

Her older sister Stella was far less happy. On the advice of absorption "experts," the parents sent her to study in the Hadassim boarding school. If the objective was to immerse her in Israeli life, the opposite happened. She hated everything about her new life here, and finally refused to study in Hebrew.

Their father arranged for her to be admitted to the Anglican School in Jerusalem, and the situation improved. But the Anglican School only had classes through O levels, and Stella wanted to complete her A levels, so in 1971 she returned to England alone.

What follows could be seen as a continuation of the lifelong circumstances which kept Karen Gershon from ever being too close to what she wanted. Gershon's husband, whom Shmuel describes as "very English; if he could have fit in anywhere in the

would not be returning to Israel.

"It was what my father wanted," Shmuel says, "and my mother did not want the responsibility of bringing him back here and having him be unhappy again."

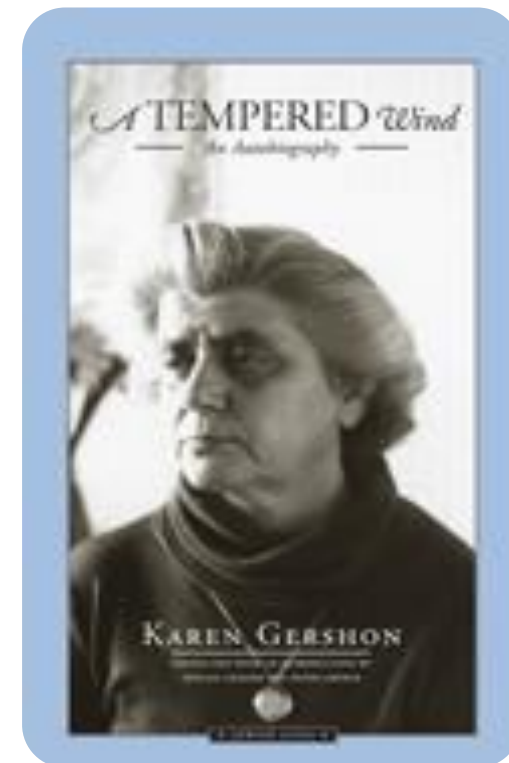
"In reading *The Lesser Child*, I realized she had learned to do without things she had wanted all her life," she adds.

A DECADE later, after completing a degree in anthropology, Shmuel returned to Israel. Her two brothers had never left. Ironically, she lives five minutes away from one of them, but they barely speak. The two sisters are on good terms, but they are separated by 3,000 km.

Naomi, whose marriage to Ethiopian immigrant Emmanuel Shmuel drew headlines in 1986, has written two children's books, the second of which was released this month. "I think it made my mother proud that I write," she says with a smile. "And especially that I write in Hebrew."

Since her marriage, Gershon had written in English, but she had long dreamed of writing in Hebrew.

On her last visit here, in 1991, Gershon gave two poetry recitals which drew overflow crowds and wide acclaim. After her death last year, her family and friends felt her writing was the best memorial possible. Shmuel's sister has been trying to find a publisher for an unpublished volume of poetry, *Diary of a Heart Patient*.

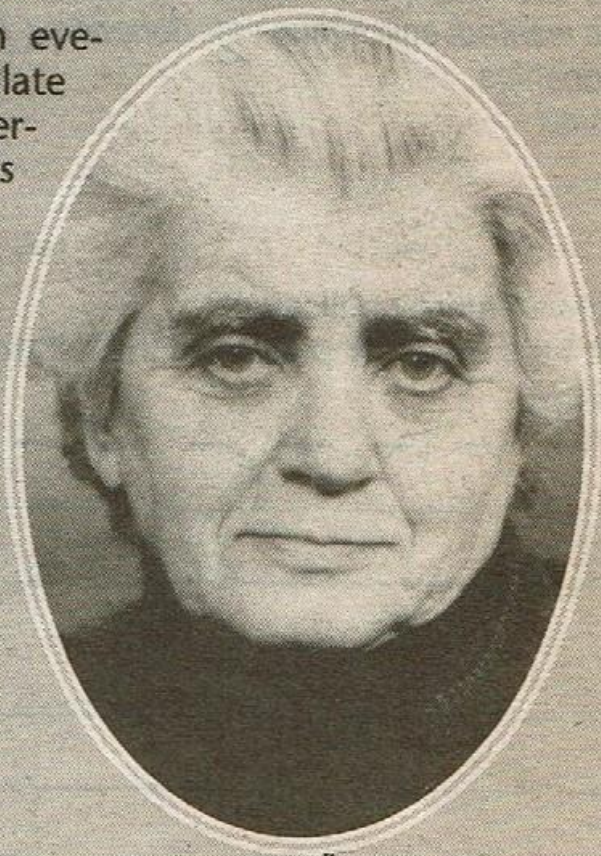


Jerusalem Post
21.3.2003

Stranger in a Strange Land

Beit Shmuel is hosting an evening in memory of the late writer and poet, Karen Gershon (1923-1993). Authors Aharon Applefeld and Shmuel Huppert will make opening remarks, followed by a screening of *Stranger in a Strange Land*, a British documentary, and readings from Gershon's poems by her daughter Naomi Samuel and Sara Manobla.

March 24, Beit Shmuel,
Shama 6, 620-3455/6,
NIS 25.



Haretz
21.3.2003

Down memory train

The late poet and writer **Karen Gershon** will be remembered at a special event at Beit Shmuel in Jerusalem on Monday evening. Those paying tribute to Gershon, who published a book in 1966 about her experiences on the Kindertransport, include **Aharon Appelfeld** and **Shmuel Huppert**, both writers on Holocaust themes. Gershon's daughter, Jerusalem resident **Naomi Shmuel** will also speak at the memorial evening for Gershon, who lived in the capital between 1966 and 1974. Former radio broadcaster **Sara Manobla** will read a selection of Gershon's poems and the television documentary about her life, "Stranger in a Strange Land," will be screened. The evening begins at 19:30.

Ha'aretz

21/3/03

FRIENDS and admirers of the late poet Karen Gershon will be able to exchange reminiscences at a memorial evening at Beit Shmuel Jerusalem, on Monday, March 24. Organized by her daughter, author **Naomi Shmuel**, the program will include author **Aharon Appelfeld** who will talk about Gershon and her work. **Naomi Shmuel** will speak on behalf of the family, and **Sara Manobla**, whose voice was for many years familiar to listeners who tuned in to English broadcasts on Israel Radio, will read a selection of Gershon's poems. The evening will conclude with the screening of a British documentary about Gershon: *Stranger in a Strange Land*, which traces her reactions when she revisited Germany, the land of her birth. Gershon, who died in 1993, was born in Bielefeld, Germany in 1923 and was sent to England on a Kindertransport in 1939. Soon after, she began writing poetry in English, and subsequently turned to prose. Her 1966 book *We came as Children - A Collective Autobiography of Refugees* was widely acclaimed and brought her international recognition. Two years later she returned to live in Jerusalem with her husband and four children. Many of her poems and reviews were published in *The Jerusalem Post*. She returned to England in 1974 and continued writing until her death 19 years later. Three of her children and their families remain in Israel.

Jerusalem Post
21.3.2003

J. Post

21/3/03

KAREN'S WAY

by
VANESSA ROSENTHAL

KAREN
GERSHON



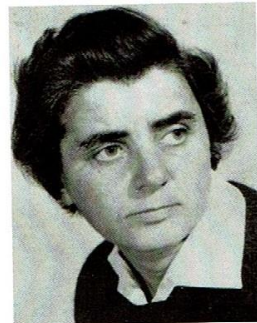
DAUGHTER
& POET

KAREN
GERSHON



POET &
MOTHER

YELLOW LEAF THEATRE



Karen Gershon (1923 - 1993)

Karen Gershon, the poet, was born Kaethe Löwenthal, the youngest of three daughters of middle-class parents (her father was an architect) in Bielefeld, Germany, in 1923. After the burning of synagogues on 9th and 10th November 1938, 'Kristallnacht', and the wider attacks on Jews, Karen and her sister, Lise, were sent to England with the second of the *kindertransports*, in December 1938. This separation from her parents, who were deported to Riga on 13th December 1941, as well as privations, loneliness, and difficulties integrating into British society affected and strengthened her. (The experiences of the refugee children of these times, she later documented in her best-known book of prose, *We Came As Children* [1966], which further extended her literary reputation in Britain.)

Karen's wartime life criss-crossed Britain, from reception in an Essex holiday camp and her first base at the Balfour family's home, turned pre-Palestine farm school, in East Lothian, through Edinburgh to Leeds, Bristol and beyond - in a life of constantly changing jobs, insecurities and the tragic loss of her remaining family. In the war's wake, came other brief encounters - a short marriage to a fellow Bielefeld refugee and, in 1945, after excelling in the University Scholarship, a spell at Edinburgh studying for a degree in French - but in English, the tongue in which she was resolved to realise her undimmed sense of herself as a writer.

It took several years for her to master the language to her satisfaction, so that she could begin writing her poems in English. These addressed her, and others', experiences in attempting to rebuild their lives and immediately won the attention of the critics. Her first collection of poems, *The Relentless Year*, was published in 1960 and others swiftly followed from major publishers, such as Gollancz and Macmillan.

Marked by German linguistic influences, her poems reflect Gershon's severance from her birthplace and mother tongue and her adoption of the language of the English of Britain, the country that had saved her life. However, the fact that she chose to write under her father's given name, Gershon, a variant on the Hebrew for "a stranger there" hinted at a continued sense of alienation. In 1948 she married Val Tripp, an English art teacher and, after a time in Lincolnshire, they settled in the West Country. Four children, two sons and two daughters, were born to them, from whom she drew encouragement and consolation, describing them in one of her poems as a welcome reincarnation of her deceased family.

The Israeli chapter of Karen Gershon's life, long dreamed of in her girlhood in Germany and in exile in Scotland, came to reality in 1967. During the Six Day War, she feared for the destruction of Israel and decided that in this crisis she had "to be there". The family emigrated to Israel in 1968 but, although her years in the country were very important to her, she felt too little recognised, her husband could not settle and they returned to the West Country.

In the poem, *Self-Portrait*, in the collection, *My Daughters, My Sisters*, she refers to "the girl within", an ironic response to those who see her only as a heavy-set, elderly woman and cannot imagine that, in her, a young girl can still be found. Tired of pretence, the poem displays an awareness of time's passage and of the sources of her inspiration - her childhood home in Bielefeld, its family hearth and warm sisterly relations - all taken from her when she escaped on the *kindertransport* to England. Karen's severance and loss were muses that inspired her to write, for as she said of herself, even in 1944, "poetry crouches at the core of her life".

The television film, *Stranger In A Strange Land* (TSW for Channel 4, 1990), presented the story of Karen Gershon's life and of her return visit to Bielefeld, the city of her birth in Germany. In one of the most emotional parts of the programme, Val, her quintessentially English husband, wonders why Karen cannot free herself of guilt feelings and nightmares. "What's past is past," he urges. Surely, one has to regain composure, to go forward and not to look back. But Karen is determined that she must hang on to memories and give them a voice; she feels that she must not forget her dear ones who were slaughtered. Otherwise, who will ever remember that they lived?

In all, Karen Gershon published six collections of poems, two documentary works, two volumes of autobiography and three novels and was awarded a number of literary prizes, such as the Hayyim Greenberg Memorial Award in 1968. In 1990 her *Collected Poems* appeared, published by Macmillan and a posthumous collection of some of her previously unpublished poems, *Grace Notes*, was brought out in 2002, with illustrations by her daughter and literary executor, the artist, Stella Tripp.

Karen Gershon lived her final years in Cornwall and died in London in March 1993, following a heart by-pass operation.

Karen Gershon

YELLOW LEAF THEATRE

PRESENTS

KAREN'S WAY

a *kindertransport* life

by

VANESSA ROSENTHAL

The action takes place in a park in Bielefeld
Germany, 1990

Older Karen Gershon

Younger Karen Gershon

Piano

Violin

*Francesca
Larkin*

Vanessa Rosenthal

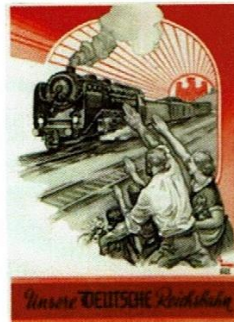
~~Lindsey Mace~~

Marion Raper

David Riley

Director

Chris Wilkinson





The deportation of Jews from Bielefeld to Riga,
Bielefeld, Germany, 13th December, 1941

From
SELECTED POEMS

I WAS NOT THERE

The morning they set out from home
I was not there to comfort them
the dawn was innocent with snow
in mockery - it is not true
the dawn was neutral was immune
their shadows threaded it too soon
they were relieved that it had come
I was not there to comfort them

One told me that my father spent
a day in prison long ago
he did not tell me that he went
what difference does it make now
when he set out when he came home
I was not there to comfort him
and now I have no means to know
of what I was kept ignorant

Both my parents died in camps
I was not there to comfort them
I was not there they were alone
my mind refuses to conceive
the life the death they must have known
I must atone because I live
I could not have saved them from death
the ground is neutral underneath

Every child must leave its home
time gathers life impartially
I could have spared them nothing since
I was too young - it is not true
they might have lived to succour me
and none shall say in my defence
had I been there to comfort them
it would have made no difference

Extract from
KADDISH

I
Simple must be the words I use
to commemorate all these
Jews and those who died like Jews
consider when you label them
sick of sad Jewish memories
making emotional demands
'natural victims of strong hands'
that those who killed them did the same

II
It is not just to think them weak
because they stood in line to die
these people were defeated by
a refusal of the mind
to contemplate what men can do
Christ persecuted was a Jew
and when confronted he was meek
and he had left all hope behind

From
GRACE NOTES

MINE IS THE BAT'S SCREAM

I'm not as silent as you think:
mine is the bat's scream you can't hear,
from the messages it bears
from regions where you haven't been:
I am more potent than I seem,
a witness to make you aware:
the memories from which you shrink
identify the world we share.



The Mother from the Memorial at
Salaspils concentration camp, Riga

KAREN GERSHON'S WORKS

THE POETRY

THE RELENTLESS YEAR, New Poets 1959, Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1960
SELECTED POEMS, Gollancz, 1966
LEGACIES AND ENCOUNTERS, Gollancz, 1972
MY DAUGHTERS, MY SISTERS, Gollancz, 1975
COMING BACK FROM BABYLON, Gollancz, 1979
COLLECTED POEMS, Macmillan, Papermac, 1990
GRACE NOTES (with drawings by Stella Tripp), Happy Dragons Press, 2002

NON-FICTION

WE CAME AS CHILDREN, Gollancz, 1966 & Macmillan, Papermac, 1989
POSTSCRIPT: A COLLECTIVE ACCOUNT OF THE LIVES OF JEWS
IN WEST GERMANY SINCE THE SECOND WORLD WAR, Gollancz, 1969

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

A LESSER CHILD (AUTOBIOGRAPHY, Vol.1), Peter Owen, 1993
A TEMPERED WIND: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY, North Western University Press, 2009

FICTION

BURN HELEN, Harvester Press, 1980
THE BREAD OF EXILE, Gollancz, 1985
THE FIFTH GENERATION, Gollancz, 1987

From
MY DAUGHTERS, MY SISTERS

BY NOW MY FATHER...

By now my father would be an old man.
I look at old men to see myself in their eyes.
I hold your hand in which the years are humming
notes of the tune with which my life began
to feel the death in which my father lies.

From LOVE POEM III

Matching my love to my beloved,
who was my mother on a beach
when others were beyond my reach
and only she surrounded me,
I lay like one of her own limbs
in the bay of her lap lapped by her breath -
in the net of the sun skin against skin
till her flesh reopened to let me in -
when she woke to a summons beyond my range,
broke me off and stopped being mine.



FAMILY SUM

I turn now to one of my children, now to another,
who wanting their mother must all turn to me:
if each of the four should need me one quarter as much
as I need them, a sort of balance is struck,
which satisfies me till I question whether
I give out four times as much as I get back.

THEATER

Karen's Way to Jerusalem

A drama about poet Karen Gershon's journey from the Kindertransport to England, Israel and back will feature at Beit Avi Chai's Stage One Theater Festival

• By BARRY DAVIS

Like 10,000 other Jewish children and youths from Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland, Karen Gershon left her parents to take the only possible route to survival. Gershon was on the second Kindertransport out of Nazi Germany in December 1938, just five weeks after Kristallnacht, when she was 15 years old. Like most of her travelmates, she would never see her parents again.

Gershon eventually became a writer and a poet, with all her works feeding off the trauma of her relocation to Britain and the subsequent experiences that stayed with her throughout her life. She died 20 years ago at the age of 70, and the story of her life and work will be portrayed in *Karen's Way: A Kindertransport Life* at Beit Avi Chai this Wednesday and Thursday as part of this year's Stage One English-language



The play stars Vanessa Rosenthal as the adult Gershon and Francesca Larkin as the young Gershon. (Courtesy Beit Avi Chai)

town and was, in fact, the one to broach the subject to Beit Avi Chai. "I'm sure it would mean a lot to my mother [to have the play performed here]," says Shmuel. "I have seen a DVD of the play – I missed the Edinburgh Festival because I broke my leg. I was very impressed and look forward to seeing the real thing on stage."

Shmuel is fully supportive of Rosenthal's decision to opt for a dual-role portrayal of her mother's life, adding that there is essentially no dividing line between the younger and older Gershon. "The dialogue between the younger, recently orphaned Karen and the older, wiser version with hindsight, depicts the story of her life. She never really let go of the 15-year-old girl she was when she left home."

That also informed Shmuel's own early life. "Every separation carried with it her final separation from her parents. As a child I was intuitively aware of this: it made even short-term

theater festival.

Karen's Way was written by British playwright Vanessa Rosenthal, based on some of Gershon's works. The play was one of the highlights of last year's Edinburgh Festival and stars Rosenthal as the adult Gershon and Francesca Larkin as the young Gershon, with musical accompaniment by violinist David Riley and pianist Marion Raper.

Rosenthal is a respected member of the thespian fraternity in Britain. Her theater acting credits include roles in Alan Bennett's *The Lady In The Van*, and in Oscar Wilde's *The Importance Of Being Earnest*, and she has appeared on TV and radio in a wide range of works. She is also an acclaimed playwright and author, with four novels under her belt. Her plays, which often feed off her Jewish roots, include *Jerusalem North West*, about an elderly widow who converted to Judaism to marry her man and is now dying in a Jewish retirement home, and *Exchanges in Bialystok*, which was produced on BBC Radio 4 in 2003 and is based on a trip made by a 76-year-old professor to the Polish town where his family perished during World War II.

The Holocaust features strongly in Rosenthal's oeuvre, even though she says she has no direct connection with the Kindertransport. "My grandparents came to Britain in the late 19th century," she notes, "so I have no direct family connection with the Holocaust.

Mind you, there was a young student who died in the Bialystok uprising called Herschel Rosenthal, and my father always said that he was a relative. But I can't verify that."

Not having any personal Holocaust baggage was something of a double-edged sword for Rosenthal in the context of *Karen's Way*. "I suppose, in a way, it made it a bit easier to address Holocaust-related material. Actually, for a long time I couldn't do that."

In fact, however, she had already touched on the subject matter, in *Exchanges in Bialystok*, and it was the Jewish producer of that play who gave her a nudge in the requisite direction. "I told him I didn't feel I had the right to write, in any way, about the Holocaust. He was the one who said I must, and that was the first time I really contemplated writing something about the Holocaust."

The seed for *Karen's Way* was planted long before *Exchanges in Bialystok*. Rosenthal came across Gershon's work some time ago. "Way back in the 1980s, a non-Jewish writer I know asked me if I knew Karen Gershon's poetry and I said I didn't, and he gave me a book of her poems. I was very struck by them," recalls Rosenthal.

She finally got down to putting her impressions of Gershon's poetry, and Gershon's life, into tangible form around 12 months ago, although the

original format soon changed. "I decided I would write a one-woman show about Karen Gershon," she says, "but while I was writing it, I thought we needed to hear Karen as a younger person as well. So we have Karen as an older person and a youngster in the play, and the story is told through her writing and through music."

While *Karen's Way: A Kindertransport Life* is a dramatization, with live music, of Gershon's life based largely on her own words and poems, Rosenthal says she had her work cut out for her to achieve the final product we will see at Beit Avi Chai next week. "I have had to be very very careful about devising the whole thing and putting it together, to make her tell a complete story within a time frame of an hour and a half," she says.

Rosenthal was very sensitive to how Gershon's story would come across and says she ran her work by a source very close to the heroine of the play. "I was in touch with Karen's older daughter, Stella, and I was sending her the drafts and making sure the family was happy with what I was doing. Obviously, I had Stella's full permission to go ahead with the play."

GERSHON'S OTHER daughter, Naomi Shmuel, is also a writer and lives in Jerusalem. She is, naturally, delighted about the prospect of her mother's story being told in her adopted home-

aware of this; it made even short-term partings hard."

Rosenthal believes that *Karen's Way* addresses a far wider issue than just Gershon's life and work. "The play is largely about the consequences of the Holocaust. It is about the effect, about little children being uprooted from family, culture, country, everything. And it's not just about the Holocaust, it is also about Karen's emergence as a poet."

The latter, says Rosenthal, was not a direct result of Gershon's traumatic relocation and subsequent events. "She would have been a poet with or without the Holocaust. She wrote poetry when she was seven or eight, but she wrote about the Holocaust because of her experiences."

Toward the end of her life, Gershon got the opportunity to revisit her childhood vistas when a British TV Channel 4 documentary team went back with her to Bielefeld, Germany. Sadly, a year later, Gershon went into hospital for heart surgery and died as a result of post-operative complications.

According to Shmuel, her mother will be well represented at next week's performances. "The way things worked out, most of Karen's grandchildren grew up and live in Israel today. I'm glad they will have this opportunity to see the play," she says. •

For more information about *Stage One* and *Karen's Way: A Kindertransport Life*: 621-5300 or www.bac.org.il.

Wiedersehn nach 25 Jahren mit Heimatstadt Bielefeld

Als junges Mädchen aus Deutschland vertrieben / Eltern ermordet

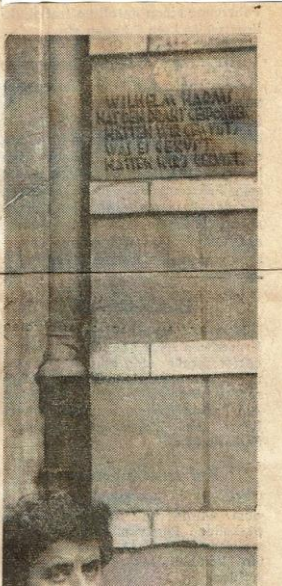
Nach 25 Jahren ist Frau Karen Tripp, geborene Loewenthal, erstmalig wieder in ihrer Heimatstadt Bielefeld. Als 13jährige mußte sie zusammen mit ihren beiden Schwestern vor den braunen Machthabern flüchten, da sie Jüdin ist. Ihr Vater, Architekt Paul Loewenthal, konnte seine Frau Selma nicht allein lassen, weil sie schwer krank war. Er fiel am 10. Dezember 1941 zusammen mit seiner Frau den Schergen der Nationalsozialisten in die Hände. Seine drei Kinder haben seit diesem Tage nichts mehr von ihren Eltern gehört. Sie sollen angeblich nach Riga deportiert worden sein. Den Kindern haben Mitgefangene später erzählt, daß Paul Loewenthal im Konzentrationslager in Riga ermordet worden ist. Seine Frau Selma soll im KZ Auschwitz umgebracht worden sein.

Karen Tripp, die schon seit 1947 mit einem Engländer verheiratet ist, kam allein nach Bielefeld, um sich die Heimatstadt, in der sie eine so traurige und harte Kindheit verleben mußte, anzusehen. Die kleine, sympathische Frau erzählte uns, daß sie große Angst gehabt habe, nach Deutschland zu fahren, da sie immer noch die Schreckensbilder von früher vor Augen habe.

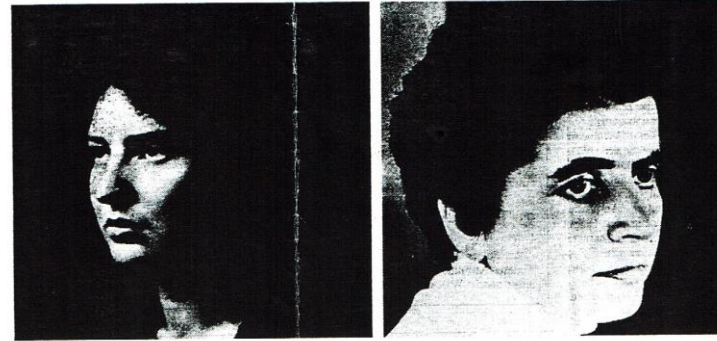
Karen Tripp wandert ziellos durch die Straßen der Stadt. Sie sucht Erinnerungen an ihren Vater. Häuser, die er gebaut hat. Erinnert sich die junge Frau: „Mein Vater baute das Haus an der Goldstraße, in dem das Lebensmittelgeschäft Harms eingerichtet ist. Es muß sogar noch ein Spruch an dem Haus sein, auf dem der Name meines Vaters erwähnt

Frau Karen Tripp erinnert sich, daß ihr Vater einmal davon gesprochen habe, daß er die erste Rolltreppe Bielefelds in einem Kaufhaus entworfen habe. Wer von den alten Bielefelder Bürgern erinnert sich daran oder weiß etwas von sonstigen Arbeiten des Architekten Loewenthal, der einige Zeit in der Rolandstraße 10 gewohnt hat und später, etwa 1930 bis 1933, in Brackwede wohnte?

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„Langsame Heimkehr“
Renate Walls „Lexikon deutschsprachiger Schriftstellerinnen im Exil“ macht sich um zu Unrecht vergessene Autorinnen verdient ■ Von Wilfried Weinke



Lu Märten (links) und Karen Gershon, zwei Autorinnen, die durch den Traditionsbruch des NS dem Vergessen anheimfielen Fotos: Kore-Wei

Canetti – eine Frau? Wer kennt schon die 1963 verstorbene Veza Canetti, die im November 1938 gemeinsam mit ihrem Mann Elias erst nach Paris, dann nach England emigrierte. Ihre ersten Kurzgeschichten konnte die gebürtige Wienerin noch in der

haben ihre Bücher Eingang in den literarischen Kanon gefunden. Unter den Entwurzelten im Exil, die sich in einer fremden Sprach- und Kulturwelt durchschlagen mußten, waren es zumeist die Frauen, die sich als die Lebensechtigsten erwiesen. Sie waren sich nicht zu schade, Arbeiten „un-

Chodziesner emigrierte nicht. Im Rahmen der sogenannten „Fabrikaktion“ wurde sie mit anderen jüdischen Zwangsarbeiterinnen verhaftet und im Februar 1943 nach Auschwitz deportiert.

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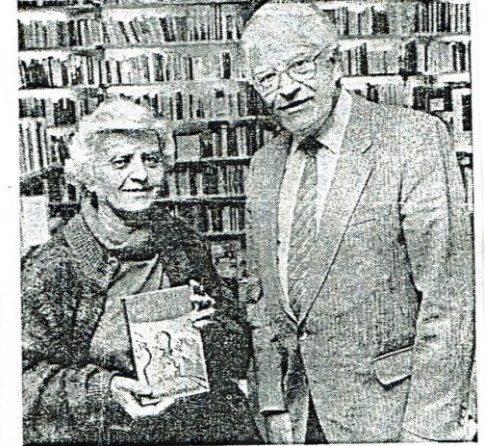
In dem übersichtlich gestalteten Lexikon mit leider viel zu kleinen Fotos versehenen Lexikon stellt Renate Walls die unterschiedlichsten Persönlichkeiten vor, es die Wiener Schriftstellerin E. Feldmann und ihre sozialistischen Reportagen und Bücher, es Helen Hessel, deren Dreieck

BIELEFELDER ZEITUNG

Nach 50 Jahren Wiedersehen mit der Stadt ihrer Kindheit:

Die Jüdin Karen Gershon stellte neuen Roman in Bielefeld vor

Die Jüdin Karen Gershon erinnert sich noch gut an ihre Kindheit in Bielefeld. Jetzt kam sie nach 50 Jahren zum zweiten Mal zurück in ihre Geburtsstadt: Im Café der Buchhandlung Gemini stellte die in England weitbekannte Autorin ihr Buch „Die 5. Generation“ vor. Zwar ist der Roman keine Autobiographie, doch spiegelt er ihr persönliches Schicksal. Die Jüdin, deren Vater in Bielefeld ein Architekturbüro führte, wurde kurz vor Kriegsbeginn mit einem Kindertransport nach England gerettet. Dort lebt sie auch heute noch. Ihr Buch schildert die Suche eines solchen Flüchtlings nach seiner Identität im wiederaufgebauten Deutschland. „Es war die natürliche Wahl, den Roman zunächst in Bielefeld zu präsentieren“, meint ihr Verleger Abraham Teuter, „denn ich gewann beim Lesen den Eindruck, das das Geschehen in dieser Region spielt.“ Karen



Gershon beteuerte im Gespräch mit Bürgermeister Friedhelm Schürmann, sie komme trotz ihrer schrecklichen Erlebnisse im Nationalsozialismus gern nach Bielefeld zurück. stw/Foto: Brüggemann



Karen Gershon in the German press

Bielefelder
1963
Karen's first visit
back



Wiedersehn nach 25 Jahren mit Heimatstadt Bielefeld

Als junges Mädchen aus Deutschland vertrieben / Eltern ermordet

Nach 25 Jahren ist Frau Karen Tripp, geborene Loewenthal, erstmalig wieder in ihrer Heimatstadt Bielefeld. Als 15jährige mußte sie zusammen mit ihren beiden Schwestern vor den braunen Machthabern flüchten, da sie Jüdin ist. Ihr Vater, Architekt Paul Loewenthal, konnte seine Frau Selma nicht allein lassen, weil sie schwer krank war. Er fiel am 10. Dezember 1941 zusammen mit seiner Frau den Schergen der Nationalsozialisten in die Hände. Seine drei Kinder haben seit diesem Tage nichts mehr von ihren Eltern gehört. Sie sollen angeblich nach Riga deportiert worden sein. Den Kindern haben Mitgefangene später erzählt, daß Paul Loewenthal im Konzentrationslager in Riga ermordet worden ist. Seine Frau Selma soll im KZ Auschwitz umgebracht worden sein.

Karen Tripp, die schon seit 1947 mit einem Engländer verheiratet ist, kam allein nach Bielefeld, um sich die Heimatstadt, in der sie eine so traurige und harte Kindheit erleben mußte, anzusehen. Die kleine, sympathische Frau erzählte uns, daß sie große Angst gehabt habe, nach Deutschland zu fahren, da sie immer noch die Schreckensbilder von früher vor Augen habe.

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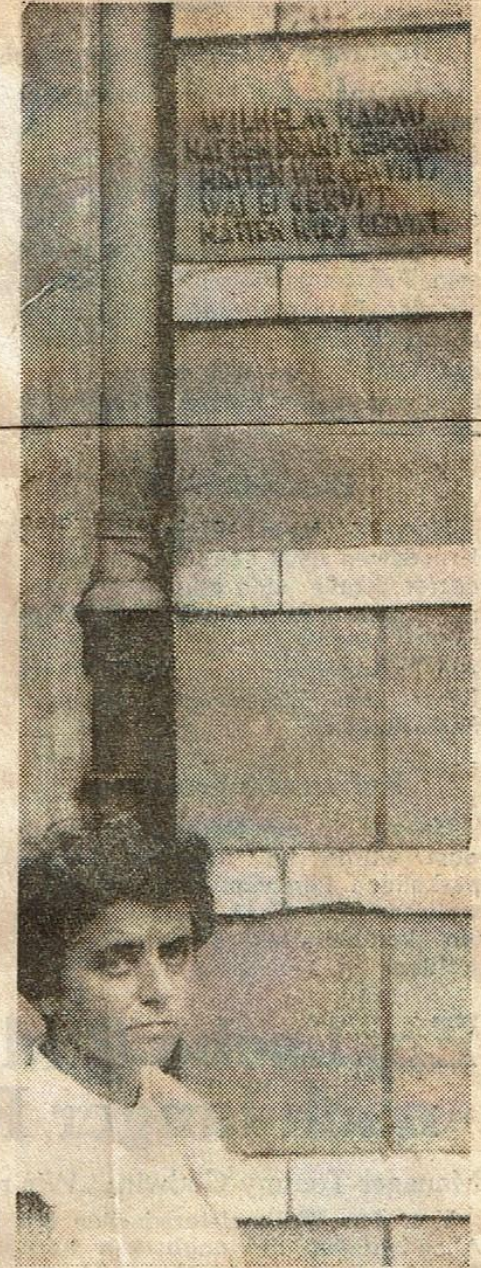
Wir fuhren mit Karen Tripp zur Goldstraße. Der Spruch ist noch vorhanden. Aber nur teilweise. Er heißt jetzt: „Wilhelm Harms hat den Draht gesponnen. Hätten wir gewußt, was es gekostet, hätten wirs gelust.“

An den dicken Steinquadern des Hauses erkennt man deutlich, daß ein Teil des Spruches ausgehöhelt worden ist. Die erste Zeile hieß:

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Karen wird nur noch bis Dienstag in Bielefeld bleiben. Sie arbeitet in England in Ilminster in Westengland als Schriftstellerin und verfaßt kleine Gedichte über den Leidensweg des jüdischen Volkes. Sie wird nach ihrer Rückkehr ein Interview für eine englische Rundfunkgesellschaft geben. Auf unsere Frage, ob sie



worden ist. Die erste Zeile hieß: „Paul Loewenthal hat das Haus erschaffen!“ Der Name des Architekten mußte jedoch aus dem Mauerwerk verschwinden, da Paul Loewenthal ein Jude war.

Erschüttert steht die Tochter des Mannes, der dieses Haus geschaffen hat, vor der Inschrift. Als Frau Karen Tripp den Besitzer des Hauses, H. Harms fragte, ob er etwas dagegen hätte, wenn der Name des Architekten wieder in den Spruch eingefügt würde, erklärte Harms sich sofort damit einverstanden. Wird sich ein Steinmetz in Bielefeld finden, der der Tochter des im Konzentrationslager umgebrachten Architekten diesen einen Wunsch erfüllt?

ben. Auf unsere Frage, wie es ihr jetzt nach den langen Jahren in Bielefeld gefalle, sagte sie: „Ich hatte erst große Angst, doch muß ich feststellen, daß die Menschen hier sehr nett sind, und ich fühle mich schon nach den beiden Tagen, die ich jetzt in meiner Heimatstadt bin, wie eine richtige Bielefelderin.“

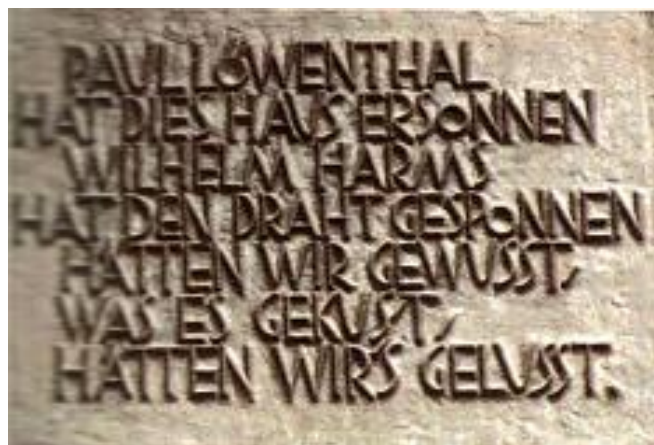
GERHARD ENGEL

An dem Haus an der Goldstraße entdeckte Karen Tripp den Spruch, von dem ihr Vater vor 25 Jahren gesprochen hatte. Doch sie mußte feststellen, daß der Name ihres Vaters ausgemeißelt wurde, da er ein Jude war und die braunen Machthaber deshalb Namen entfernen ließen.

Foto: FP (Engel)



Keiner kannte die Tochter Paul Loewenthals mehr, die gestern zur Rolandstraße 10
fuhr. In diesem Haus wurde sie geboren. Frau Weisend, die jetzt mit ihrem Mann

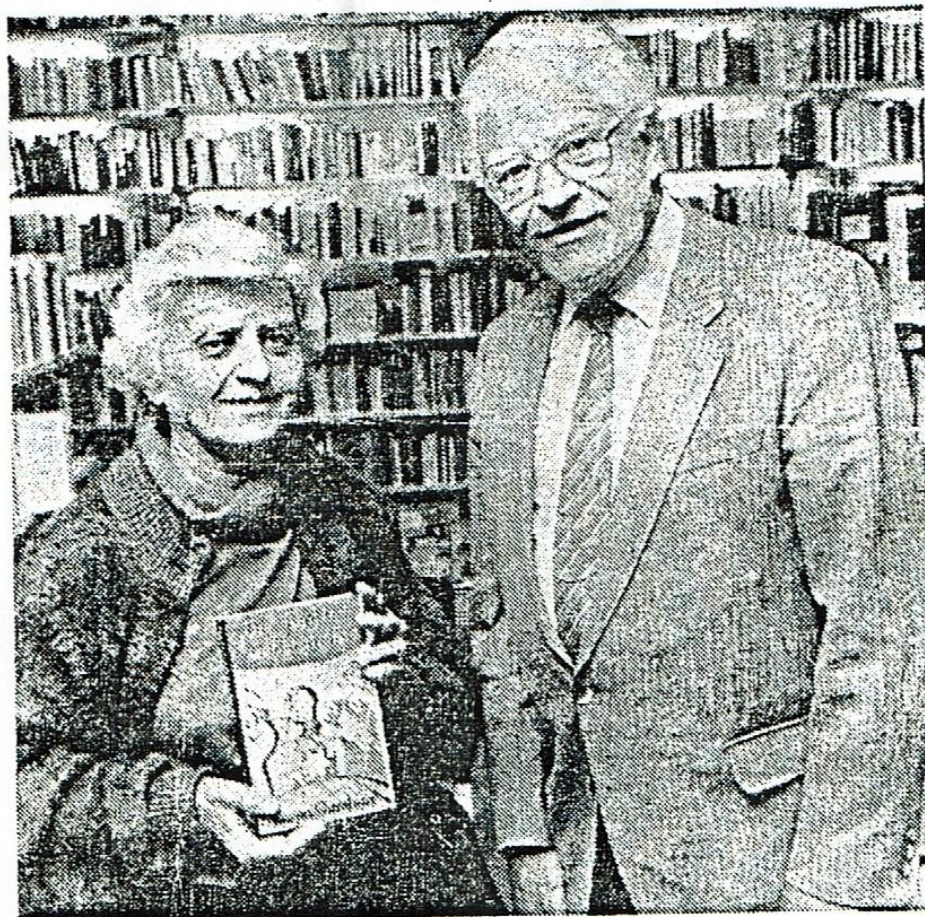


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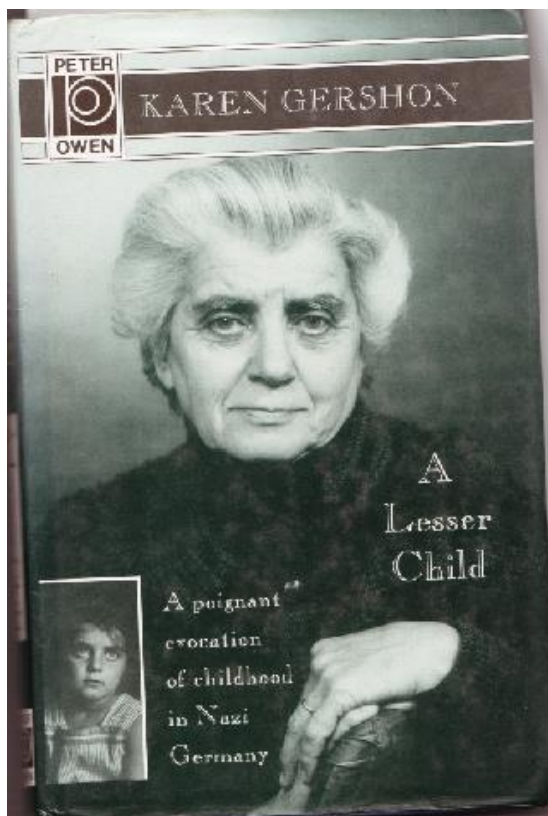
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Gershon beteuerte im Gespräch mit Bürgermeister Friedhelm Schürmann, sie komme trotz ihrer

schrecklichen Erlebnisse im Nationalsozialismus gern nach Bielefeld zurück. stü/Foto: Brüggemann



Bielefelder
16.9.1988

Bielefelder



Karin Gershon stellte im Café der Buchhandlung Gemini ihren Roman „Die fünfte Generation“ vor (Bild). Im Gespräch mit Bürgermeister Friedhelm Schürmann.
Foto: Frucht

Jüdische Schriftstellerin stellte Roman vor

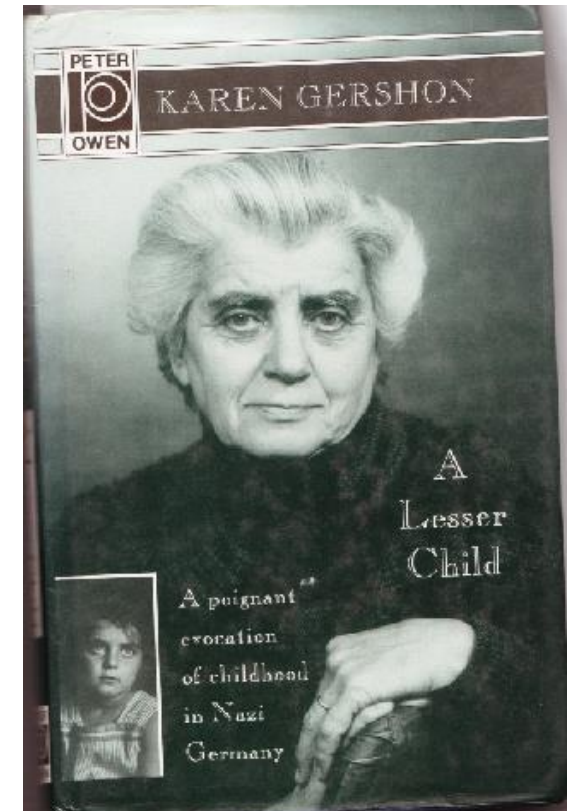
„Stets Schuld gefühlt, überlebt zu haben“

Bielefeld (nes). „Mein Deutsch ist um 50 Jahre zurück. Wenn ich an Kindheitserinnerungen zurückdenke, denke ich auf deutsch und dann fällt es mir schwer, wie eine Erwachsene zu denken.“ Karen Gershon, 1923 in Bielefeld geboren, kam 1938 mit einem Kindertransport nach England – als Jüdin auf der Flucht vor den Nationalsozialisten. Ihre Eltern starben im Konzentrationslager. 50 Jahre später kehrt die in England lebende Schriftstellerin in ihre Geburtsstadt zurück – mit ihrem Roman „Die fünfte Generation“.

Im Café der Buchhandlung Gemini, Bürgermeister Friedhelm Schürmann zur Rechten und Abraham Teuter vom Alibaba Verlag zur Linken liest sie dar-

lerin vom Sohne Hitlers: „Ich sehe darin eine Überprüfung von Peters Charakter. Indem man ihm als Juden dieses Schlimmste zumutet, wird gezeigt: Wie kann er damit leben? Aber im deutschen Verständnis darf das Überleben Hitlers nicht gedacht werden“, und sei es nur in der Existenz seines Sohnes.

Warum dies so ist, läßt sich leicht denken. Einerseits ist da die Angst vor der Vorstellung eines neuen kleinen Hitler, andererseits kann diese imaginäre Figur ein Fortleben eines Teils der deutschen Geschichte darstellen, der von vielen nur zu gerne vergessen werden würde.



aus vor.

Mit vier Jahren soll Peter von den Nazis zu einem Lampenschirm verarbeitet werden. Mit sechzehn, zwölf Jahre nach dem Krieg, lebt er mit einer jüdischen Pflegemutter in einem Dorf in England, als ihm mitgeteilt wird, er sei Hitlers Sohn. Die Suche nach seiner wahren Identität führt ihn nach Deutschland, wo die Vergangenheit lebendig wird und er lernt, mit sich selber zu leben.

„Es gibt in Deutschland ein genaues Bild vom Leiden der Juden“, hebt Abraham Teuter, selbst Jude und Übersetzer von „Die fünfte Generation“, einen Punkt hervor, der bei der Rezeption des Buches in der deutschen Öffentlichkeit zu Problemen geführt habe: „Dies Bild ist leidend, duldend, melancholisch und still. In „Die fünfte Generation“ ist das nicht der Fall.“ Ein anderer kritischer Punkt sei, ganz im Gegensatz zu dessen Aufnahme in

„... Denn ich, der Herr, dein Gott, bin ein eifriger Gott, der da heimsucht die Schuld der Väter unter den Kindern der dritten und vierten Generation.“ Kann die fünfte Generation ganz von vorne anfangen, kann sie die Last der Geschichte abwerfen? „Nein“, antwortet Karen Gershon, vor dem Hintergrund der deutschen Geschichte beschwört dieser von einem Vers des zweiten Buch Moses inspirierte Titel also eine gefährliche Illusion, eine Unmöglichkeit.

„Ich habe es niemals leicht gefunden, Jüdin zu sein“, sagt sie. Sie, die damals ihre Eltern in Deutschland zurücklassen mußte, trug sich, wie auch Peter in ihrem Buch, lange Jahre mit Schuldgefühlen, überlebt zu haben. Trotzdem sagt sie: „Ich gehöre nicht zu den Leuten, die Hitler für alles verantwortlich machen. Hitler hat mich nicht zum Schriftsteller gemacht. Aber die Judenverfolgung hat mich zu einem

VORANKÜNDIGUNG HERBST 1988



Karen Gershon stammt aus Bielefeld. 1938 kam sie mit einem Kindertransport nach England. Sie verdiente sich ihren Lebensunterhalt unter anderem als Hausmädchen, Chorsängerin, Mühlenarbeiterin und als Hausmutter in einem progressiven Internat. Sie begann mit 13 zu schreiben. Sie heiratete einen Lehrer, und nach einigen Jahren in Jerusalem lebt sie jetzt mit ihrem Mann in Cornwall. Von ihren vier Kindern leben drei in Israel. Karen Gershon wird 1988 65 Jahre alt.

Ein literarisches Ereignis im Herbst 1988: Karen Gershon in Deutschland

»Die 5. Generation« gewinnt seine Qualität aus der Kühnheit und dem Mut, das Aberwitzigste zu benutzen, um Qualen und Kämpfe von Überlebenden und Opfern darzustellen, aus der Genauigkeit der Beschreibung und aus der Mitmenschlichkeit der Autorin. 50 Jahre nach ihrer Emigration als Jugendliche wird Karen Gershon zum ersten Mal in Deutschland verlegt. Gemeinsam mit »Die 5. Generation« wird »Wir kamen als Kinder« erscheinen, eine von Karen Gershon zusammengestellte und herausgegebene kollektive Autobiografie der Kinder, die bis Kriegsausbruch nach Großbritannien gerettet werden konnten. Karen Gershon wird im Herbst zu einer ausgedehnten Lesereise in die Bundesrepublik kommen. Bereits jetzt bieten wir den Buchhandlungen an, mit uns bei der Planung zusammenzuarbeiten. Sprechen Sie mit unseren VertreterInnen. Sie werden Ihnen erste Informationen geben. Danach setzen wir uns wegen Termin-, Raum- und Werbeplanung mit Ihnen in Verbindung.

Die 5. Generation Ein Roman

Eine junge Frau, Jüdin, gerettet durch einen der Kindertransporte, die kurz vor Kriegsbeginn tausende jüdischer Kinder nach Großbritannien brachten, arbeitet nach dem Krieg in einem Lager für Kinder, die die Grauen der Nazi-Herrschaft überlebt haben. Sie kümmert sich dort um eine Gruppe von Jungen, deren Schicksal es gewesen wäre, zu sterben, damit ihre Haut zu Lampenschirmen hätte verarbeitet werden können. Einen dieser auch seelisch schwer verletzten Jungen nimmt sie, nachdem sie geheiratet hat, bei sich auf. Einige Jahre später erhält der Junge einen Brief eines deutschen Rechtsanwalts, der ihn nach London einladet. Dort wird er von einer Gruppe Neonazis als der Sohn Adolf Hitlers begrüßt. Wie reagiert ein Sechzehnjähriger mit einer solchen Biografie auf eine derartige Nachricht? Was bedeutet es für ihn, nicht mehr zum Volk der Opfer gehören zu müssen? Was bedeutet es für sein Verhältnis zu seiner jüdischen Pflegemutter? Was bedeutet es für sie, möglicherweise Hitlers Sohn großgezogen zu haben? Was ist überhaupt wahr an dieser Geschichte?

Der Junge muß die Antworten auf diese Fragen, muß die Gewißheit über seine Biografie in Deutschland finden. Er reist nach Walfeld, dem Dorf in Westfalen, aus dem er nach England gebracht worden ist. Dort erfährt er mehr über sich, seine Herkunft und seine Familie. Die Reise durch das wiederaufgebaute, prosperierende, vergessende Deutschland wird für ihn zu einer Prüfung ungeahnten Ausmaßes. Sie steht stellvertretend für die Identitätssuche einer Generation der Überlebenden des Massenvernichtungswerks der Nazis.

Leseprobe: Prolog

Die auserwähltesten Lampenschirme konnte man aus der Haut von Kindern herstellen. In Walfeld — was auf Altdeutsch Schlachtfeld bedeutete —, einem Dorf in Westfalen, wurde ein Verfahren perfektioniert, die Muster in die lebende Haut einzudrucken — es war nicht schmerzhafter als gewöhnliche Tätowierungen; die Haut wurde am besten von den noch warmen Körpern geschält. Diese Pergamente hatten dann eine seltene Lichtdurchlässigkeit. Die Produktion war aber noch nicht wirklich in Gang gekommen, als Deutschland besiegt war.

Die Kinder wurden dann als VERSICHERUNGSJUDEN genutzt — Juden, deren Anwesenheit die Bewohner eines Hauses dagegen absicherten, bei den Eroberern als Nazis zu gelten. Je jünger die Kinder waren, um so besser, auch für diesen Zweck: am begehrtesten waren die, die mit ihren körperlichen Bedürfnissen zu recht kamen, aber noch zu jung waren, um Zeugnis abzulegen. Die Geschichte von dem deutschen Dorf, in dem jede Familie ein jüdisches Kind gerettet hatte, machte Schlagzeilen auf der ganzen Welt.

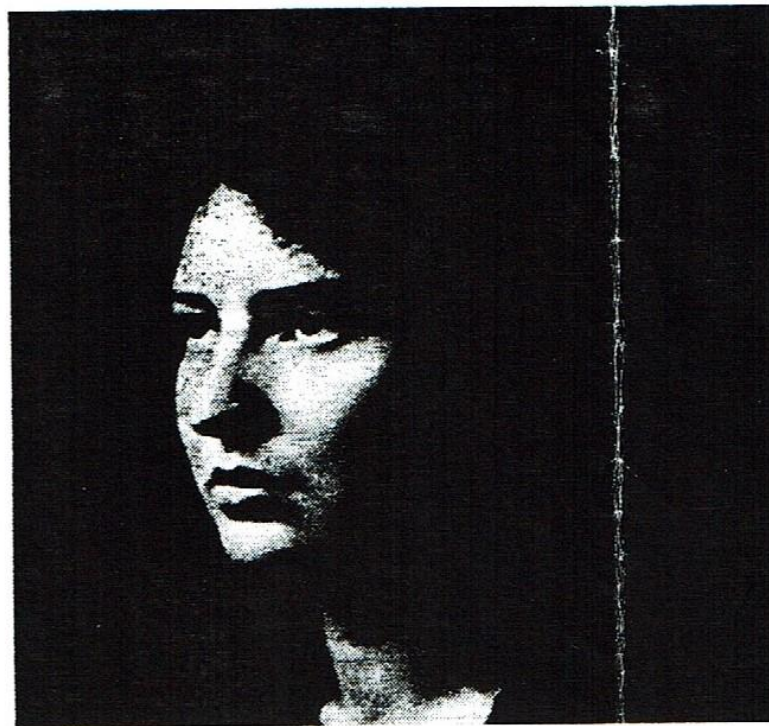
Die Hilfsdienste im Gefolge der siegreichen Alliierten sammelten dreiundzwanzig Kinder im Alter zwischen drei und fünf Jahren ein, darunter einen Jungen von Sangers Bauernhof, der dort in einem Schrank gefunden wurde. Frau Sanger behauptete, er wäre ihr Enkel, aber es war nur zu offensichtlich, daß es da eine Wahrheit gab, von der sie nicht wollte, daß sie bekannt würde, weshalb die Hilfsdienstleute darauf bestanden, ihn mitzunehmen, und wirklich, bevor sie den Hof noch verlassen hatten, schrie ihnen die Frau im Ton einer Verwünschung hinterher: »Nehmen Sie ihn! Nehmen Sie ihn mit! Nehmen Sie ihn mit den anderen!« Als der Großvater zurückkehrte, zusammen mit einer Gruppe Zivilisten, die Britische Soldaten zusammengetrommelt hatten, um Gräber auszuheben, fing die Großmutter Streit mit ihm an. »Wenn ich ihnen gesagt hätte, daß er Hitlers Sohn ist, was glaubst du, hätten sie mit ihm getan?« Und innerhalb weniger Tage, als die Deutschen begannen, die Folgen ihrer Niederlage zu erleiden, versicherten sich die Großeltern gegenseitig, daß der Junge besser aufgehoben wäre bei den Judenkindern: versorgt und untergebracht, behütet und vor allem in Sicherheit, denn wer konnte schon sagen, auf wen man sich jetzt im Zusammenbruch des Dritten Reichs verlassen konnte, wo doch die Anstrengungen so groß waren, nachzuweisen, man wäre niemals Nazi gewesen.

Die geretteten Kinder wurden wieder in die Lampenschirmfabrik gebracht; die, die sie woandershin bringen wollten, denen fehlte es dazu an Autorität, denen mit der Autorität fehlte es an Einfühlungsvermögen. Hier gab es Liegen und Bettzeug, frei von Ungeziefer, was eine der Frauen vom Hilfsdienst, die nicht in der

Lage war, sich vorzustellen, daß die kleinen Juden wertvoller Rohstoff gewesen waren, veranlaßte, in einem Brief nach Hause festzustellen, daß es Kindern in zerbombten englischen Städten schlechter ginge. (Die von Entbehrungen geplagten Engländer konnten sich nur schwer damit abfinden, daß die Deutschen noch kurz vor der Niederlage in der Lage waren, Luxusgüter herzustellen. Aber Deutschland hatte die meiste Zeit des Krieges auf Kosten der besetzten Länder gelebt.) Wahrscheinlich waren nicht alle geretteten Kinder Waisen — aber wie sollte man anfangen, die Verwandten von Überlebenden aufzuspüren, die nicht alt genug waren, um mehr über sich zu wissen, als die ihnen gegebenen Namen? Mit diesem Problem im Kopfsuchten die für sie Verantwortlichen die Aufmerksamkeit der Öffentlichkeit, aber weiter im Osten gab es bereits sensationellere Geschichten und Bilder. Jedoch waren noch einige Fotos von ihnen in der englischen Presse erschienen, die eine Rettungsaktion in Gang setzten, woraufhin ein Dutzend dieser Kinder nach England gebracht wurde. Sie wurden zuerst in einem Hotel in Richmond untergebracht, was zur Folge hatte, daß sie danach mit typisch britischer Nachlässigkeit als die »Richmond-Kinder« bekannt wurden. Einer von ihnen hatte die Buchstaben PS auf der linken Gesäßhälfte tätowiert.



"Langsame Heimkehr"
Renate Walls „Lexikon deutschsprachiger Schriftstellerinnen im Exil“ macht
sich um zu Unrecht vergessene Autorinnen verdient ■ Von Wilfried Weinke



Lu Märten (links) und Karen Gershon, zwei Autorinnen, die durch den Traditionsbruch des NS dem Vergessen anheimfielen

Fotos: Kore-Ver

Canetti – eine Frau?
Wer kennt schon die 1963 verstorbene Veza Canetti, die im November 1938 gemeinsam mit ihrem Mann Elias erst nach Paris, dann nach England emigrierte. Ihre ersten Kurzgeschichten konnte die gebürtige Wienerin noch in der dortigen *Arbeiter-Zeitung* veröffentlichen. Die politischen Ereignisse

haben ihre Bücher Eingang in den literarischen Kanon gefunden.

Unter den Entwurzelten im Exil, die sich in einer fremden Sprach- und Kulturwelt durchschlagen mußten, waren es zumeist die Frauen, die sich als die Lebensechtigsten erwiesen. Sie waren sich nicht zu schade, Arbeiten „unter ihrem Stand“ anzunehmen, als Abwäscherin, Kinderpflegerin, als

Chodziesner emigrierte nicht. Im Rahmen der sogenannten „Fabrikaktion“ wurde sie mit anderen jüdischen Zwangsarbeiterinnen verhaftet und im Februar 1943 nach Auschwitz deportiert.

Dirk Krüger skizziert das kurze Leben der 1906 ebenfalls in Berlin geborenen Kinder- und Jugendbuchautorin Ruth Rewald. Vor 1933 erschienen die Bücher „Rudi

In dem übersichtlich gestalteten Lexikon mit leider viel zu wenigen Fotos versehen stellt Renate Wall die unterschiedlichsten Persönlichkeiten vor. Es ist die Wiener Schriftstellerin Elisabeth Feldmann und ihre sozialkritischen Reportagen und Bücher, es ist Helen Hessel, deren Dreiecksbeziehung Truffauts „Jules et Jim“ zur Grundlage diente.

ten. Die polnischen Ereignisse der Jahre 1933/1934 verhielten jede weitere Publikationsmöglichkeit für die Jüdin und überzeugte Sozialistin. Ihre Werke, wie der Roman „Die Gelbe Straße“ (1989), das Schauspiel „Der Oger“ (1990), die Erzählungen „Geduld bringt Rosen“ (1991), erschienen allesamt posthum. Die frühen Romane sind verschollen oder blieben unveröffentlicht.

Wie Veza Canetti erging es vielen Autorinnen nach der Machtübertragung an die Nationalsozialisten. Die Osnabrücker Lehrerin und Publizistin Renate Wall ist in mehrjähriger Recherche ihren – notgedrungen – verschlungenen Pfaden nachgegangen. Das Ergebnis, ein zweibändiges „Lexikon deutschsprachiger Schriftstellerinnen im Exil 1933 bis 1945“, liegt nun vor. Die Herausgeberin präsentiert 203 Schriftstellerinnen, deren Werke verboten wurden, die in Konzentrationslagern ihr Leben ließen, ins Exil gingen, dort erst zu schreiben begannen oder verstummten, die zurückkehrten oder im Exilland blieben.

Sicher, die Namen von Vicki Baum, Hilde Domin, Marieluise Fleisser, Irmgard Keun, Else Lasker-Schüler, Erika Mann, Anna Seghers klingen vertraut. Aber was ist mit Else Feldmann, Karen Gershon, Anna Maria Jokl, Lu Märten, Lenka Reinerová, Ruth Rewald, Lessie Sachs und Christa Winsloe? In den seltensten Fällen

Küchenhilfe oder Verkäuferin. Darauf bezieht sich das geflügelte Wort der Exilforschung: „Im Exil lebte man von der Hand in den Mund: von ihrer Hand in seinen Mund!“ Es waren die Frauen, die ihre literarischen Karrieren unterbrachen oder aufgaben, um Ehemänner und Familien durchzubringen. Doch damit nicht genug: Nach Publikationsverbot, Verbrennung der Bücher und Ausbürgerung setzte sich der bewußte Verdrängungsprozeß nach 1945 fort. Die politische Frontstellung im Kalten Krieg und die kollektive Amnesie haben aus vielen jüdischen und vielen politisch-engagierten Schriftstellerinnen, zumindest in einem Teil Deutschlands, literarische Nobodys gemacht.

Renate Wall und die fünfzehn weiteren Autoren, die Einzelbeiträge verfaßten, liefern mit der Rekonstruktion der Schicksale zahlreiche traurige Beispiele. So erinnert Renate Wall an Gertrud Käthe Chodziesner, die unter dem Pseudonym Gertrud Kolmar veröffentlichte. Die gebürtige Berlinerin, aus großbürgerlich-jüdischem Milieu stammend, publizierte 1917 mit 23 Jahren ihre ersten Gedichte. Noch 1938 erschien ihre Gedichtanthologie „Die Frau und die Tiere“. Gertrud Käthe

und sein Radio“ sowie „Müllerstraße – Jungens von heute“. Das für Weihnachten 1933 geplante Buch „Achtung, Renate“ blieb unveröffentlicht. Im französischen Exil schrieb sie das Jugendbuch „Janko. Der Junge aus Mexiko“. Ein weiteres Buch mit dem Titel „Tsao und Jing-Ling – Kinderleben in China“ fand keinen Verle-

Im Exil opferten die Frauen ihre Karrieren, um das Überleben zu sichern.

ger, wurde aber 1937 als Fortsetzungsgeschichte in einer Schweizer Gewerkschaftszeitung gedruckt.

Als ihr Mann, der Rechtsanwalt Hans Schaul, sich den Internationalen Brigaden anschloß, verarbeitete sie Erfahrungen und Erlebnisse ihres Aufenthalts in Spanien in dem Manuskript „Vier spanische Jungen“. Der Einmarsch deutscher Truppen in Frankreich verhinderte dessen Drucklegung. Im Juli 1942 fiel Ruth Rewald in die Hände der Gestapo. Sie wurde nach Auschwitz deportiert, zwei Jahre später auch die erst sechs Jahre alte Tochter. Der Initiative Dirk Krügers ist es zu verdanken, daß „Vier spanische Jungen“ 50 Jahre nach seiner Entstehung erstmals als Buch erscheinen konnte.

Ganz und gar verschollene Autorinnen werden hier dem Vergessen entrissen. Etwa Lisa Tetzni, Verfasserin der neunbändig Kinderodyssee „Die Kinder a Nr. 67“, oder Alex Weddir, Pseudonym für Grete Weiskopf, die 1931 mit ihrem Jugendbuch „Ede und Unku“ auf sich aufmerksam machte.

Auch an Karen Gershon ist gedacht worden, die per Kindertransport aus Deutschland entkam. Ihr repräsentative Autobiographie der ehemaligen Kinderflüchtling, schon 1966 in England veröffentlicht, erschien unter dem Titel „Wir kamen als Kinder“ in Deutschland erst 1989!

Dieses Lexikon zeichnet sich dadurch aus, daß es nie langweilig wird, in ihm zu blättern und zu suchen. Sämtlichen Porträts merkt man bei aller Sympathie die Sorgfalt an. Und so sind echte Entdeckungen zu machen: Wer keinschon das schmale Werk der Rita Tassoni, die nach der Teilnahme am Spanischen Bürgerkrieg, ins Exil in Frankreich und den USA Italien lebte und im November 1994 in Bergamo starb? Ihre Erzählungen, mittlerweile allesamt im Zürcher Pendo-Verlag erschienen, sind überaus lesenswert.

Renate Wall: „Lexikon deutschsprachiger Schriftstellerinnen im Exil 1933 bis 1945“. Zwei Bände. Kore-Verlag, 540 Seiten. 58 DM



גרשון לא מוצאת מקום

חרות של גרשון באנגליה וזה
לעבור קומה. שותף ושותף זה
היה, כי כחל תחשבת תחשבת
מאורעות החרושה "כאן פה"
תחשבת וזה חלק וחלק זה השנים
שחשון עבר, אני מכיר עד כמה זה
לחשבת עכשיו, ותחשבת תחשבת זה
אשרי תחשבת שנה זה ערין
זה, וכל שנה חושבת על זה
מכנה זה העבר. חלש זה חושבת
מפני שחשבת על החרושה של לב
רמיה, אני לעולם לא אוכל לחוש
באנגליה. מה חושבת, ששנתו יקרה
כמה זה לוי חרומה
וזה חושבת וזה חושבת על אנשים, זה
רוח חושבת וזה חושבת על שנים.
חושבת חושבת ששנים של חושבת
החושבת חושבת, וזה חושבת על חושבת
זה חושבת חושבת על חושבת על חושבת
עם". חושבת חושבת על חושבת חושבת

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קרבן גרשון בעיתונות הישראלית

מעריב
16.8.1989

מעריב
יום ד' 16.8.89
ט"ו באב תשמ"ט

בן

מישלוח הילדים הציל את חייה

מאת אילנה באום

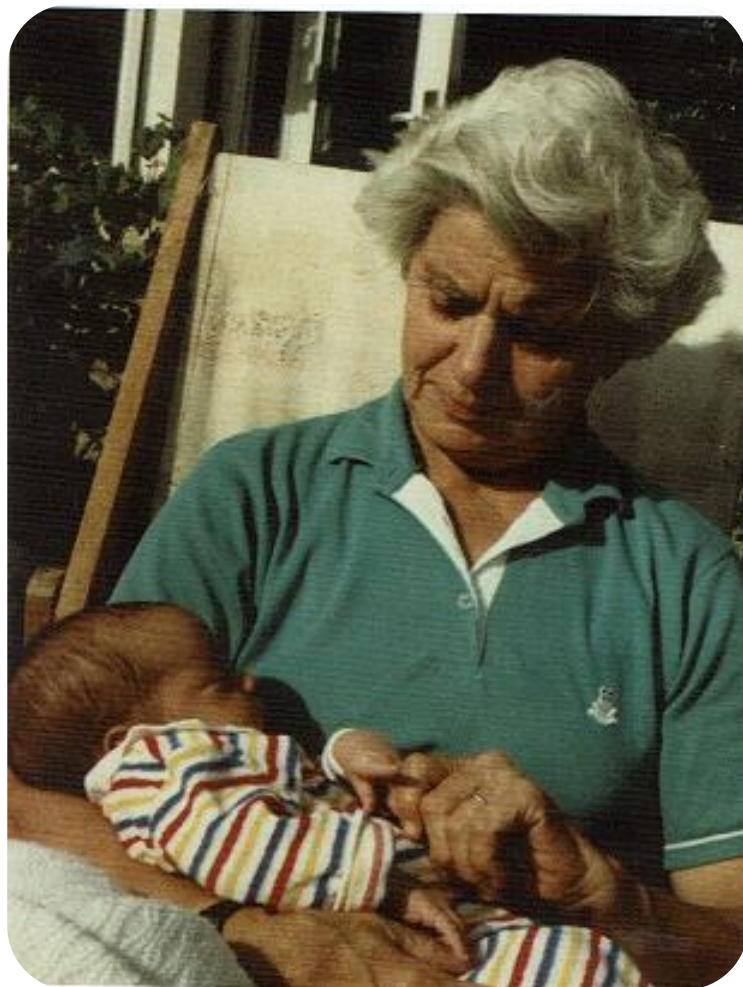
צוות צילום של "ערוץ 4" של הטלוויזיה הבריטית נמצא בימים אלה בארץ, כדי לצלם סרט על קארן גרשון, שהיתה בזמן מלחמת העולם השנייה ב"מישלוח הילדים" מגרמניה לאנגליה, ואשר הציל את חייה. קארן גרשון נולדה בעיירה ביילפלד בגרמניה, 1923. עם פרוץ מלחמת העולם השנייה החליטו הוריה לשלוח אותה ואת אחותה לאנגליה, במסגרת מה שכונה אז "מישלוחי הילדים", שנועדו להציל את הילדים ולהעלותם לפלשתינה. קארן הייתה צעירה מדי – ונשארה באנגליה. לאחר השואה התברר לה שכל בני משפחתה אשר נשארו בגרמניה – הושמדו בשואה. היא נישאה לגוי ונולדו להם ארבעה ילדים.

בגיל 13 החלה בכתיבת שירים ומאו לא חדלה לכתוב. בשנת 1966 פורסם ספרה, "באנו כילדים", סיפורם של הפליטים הקטנים שהגיעו יחד עמה לאנגליה "במשלוח הילדים". בעקבות הספר הוזמנה על ידי הנושא זלמן שזר לבקר בישראל וזמן קצר לאחר מכן החליטה לעלות. חבלי הקליטה היו קשים ובשנת 1974 חזרה לאנגליה – אבל שלושה מילדיהם נשארו בארץ.

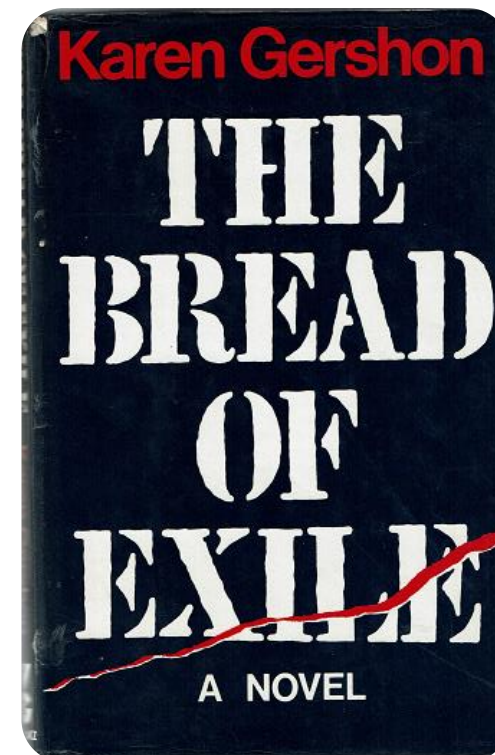
כעת, משמלאו 50 שנה למשלוח, החליט "ערוץ 4" של רשת הטלוויזיה הבריטית לעשות סרט על קארן גרשון. הצוות צילם כבר בביילפלד והשבוע מתקיימים הצילומים בישראל. נקווה כי הטלוויזיה הישראלית תרכוש את הסרט. בימים אלה שוהה קארן בירושלים אצל בתה נעמי ועו-

קארן גרשון ונכדיה. "ערוץ 4" הבריטי מכין עליה סרט (צילם: יצחק אלהרר, סקופ 80)

שה "בייביסיטינג" לנכדים. ב-22 באוגוסט אל" בירושלים וב-29 בחודש בבית הסופר תקיים ערב קריאה מספריה ב"בית שמרי בתל אביב."



כל העיר
1.9.1989



חמישים שנה לאחר שהגיעה
לבריטניה עם קבוצת נערים
פליטים מגרמניה, משחזרת קרן
גרשון עבור הבי.בי.סי. את
עקבות הטלטלה ההיא ואלו
שבאו אחריה



תחושת הפליטות גוברת ככל שחולפות השנים, גרשון (צילום: יוספה מאיר)

גרשון לא מוצאת מקום

הזרות של גרשון באנגליה והפך לעובדה קיומית. ככל שהתחדדה זהותה הודית, כך פחתה תחושת השייכות למולדתה החדשה: "באופן מוזר, בהשתפר זה הלך והחמיר עם השנים. שהזמן עובר אני מבינה עד כמה הג להיטמע נכשל, ותחושת הפליטות גוברת אפילו אחרי חמישים שנה זה עדיין כן, וככל שאני חושבת על כך, אני מבינה שזה בגלל העבר. אני חושבת שד מפני שההורים שלי הרגישו כל-כך טוב רמניה, אני לעולם לא אוכל לחוש באנגליה. תמיד אחשוש, שמשוה יקרה במה זה בא לידי ביטוי?"

זו חשרנות גוברת כלפי אנשים, הם רות, חוסר יכולת ליצור קשרים. היה לי מקרה אחד של שכנים שלנו, שקלטו המיבטא הגרמני שלי, ואז אמרו לי בחביב "נו, חבל שהיטלר לא חיסל את כל ה דים". כדי שזה לא יקרה שוב. הרגשתי

"באותה תקופה פשוט לא יכולתי להתחנן עם יהודי. אני גדלתי בגרמניה בתקופה שיר הורים היו בני אנוש נחותים, ומאוחר יותר הבנתי שהפנמתי את זה, יהודים פשוט נתפסו בעיני כשווים פחות. אחרי שלמדתי מה קרה להורי, פשוט החלטתי למחוק את הקטע הזה בחיים שלי."

גרשון ובעלה האנגלי חיו בקורנוול, דרום-מערב אנגליה, וגולדו להם ארבעה ילדים, שלא ידעו דבר על יהדותם. רק בשנת '63, במלאת 25 שנה להגיעה לאנגליה, החלה גרשון להרהר בקורותיהם של חברה למסע ההוא. היא פירסמה מודעות בעיתונים וביקשה מידע. את זרם המכתבים שהציף אותה ערכה בסופו של דבר לספר, שבו תיארו הפליטים הצעירים את הקורות אותם, מאז נאלצו לעזוב את בתי הוריהם בסוף שנות השלושים. הספר זכה להצלחה, גרשון זכתה בפרסים, והחשיפה שבאה בעקבותיהם אילצה אותה להתמודד עם זהותה המודחקת.

השבוע שעבר היה מרגש במיוחד עבור קרן גרשון, ירושלמית לשעבר שהגיעה שוב לעיר אחרי מספר שנות היעדרות. צוות ההפקה של הטלוויזיה האנגלית, שהגיע לארץ במיוחד כדי לצלם כאן פרקים לסרט על תולדות חייה, ליווה אותה במשך יומיים בסירוריה בעיר: הם הצטרפו אליה לביקור אצל בנה במושב ליד יריחו; צילמו אותה בביתו של בנה האחר בירושלים; והנציחו את ביקורה בירושלם ובעוד מקומות מוכרים. שלושה ילדים השאירה גרשון בירושלים, כאשר שבה לאנגליה לפני כחמש-עשרה שנה, בתום תקופת ניסיון של חיים בארץ. הישירותם כאן, כך נרמה, מעוררת בה תגובות דרמטיות: "זה מפתיע אותי, כי מעולם לא גידלתי אותם כיהודים, ואפילו להפך, ניסיתי לגונן עליהם מהעובדה הזו כל ילדותם. אבל נראה שהם מרגישים פה בבית, ובעצם אני כן יכולה להבין זאת. והו גם המ קום היחיד בו אני מרגישה בבית."



סרט על חייה, ראינות לעיתונות – עדיין חדשה לה. עבור גרשון הכל עדיין משמעותי מאוד, נוגע, מרגש כל פעם מחדש. חשוב לה להבהיר ולהסביר את שעבר עליה: "אולי יש בי להט מיסיונרי כזה. בארץ זה פחות חשוב, אבל כשאני בחו"ל, אני כל הזמן חשה צורך להסביר לאנשים מה המשמעות של הדבר הזה עבורי, להיות יהודייה". את המשמעות המיוחדת הזו חשה גרשון לראשונה בשנות השלושים, ככת למשפחה יהודית בורגנית בעיר בילפלד, גרמניה. היא היתה בת עשר כשעלו הנאצים לשלטון, אביה איבד את משרתו והיא נזרקה מבית-הספר. חמש שנים לאחר מכן ולאחר אינסוף נסיונות הגירה שנכשלו בשל חוסר היכולת להשיג ויזה למקום כלשהו, הגיעו הוריה למסקנה, כי יש להציל לפחות את הילדים, ושלחו אותה ואת שתי אחיותיה בטרנספורט ילדים לאנגליה. הבי.בי.סי. החליט להפיק סרט לציון יובל החמישים להגעתם של הפליטים הצעירים לחופי האי הבריטי, ובחר בגרשון, שכתבה ספר על הנושא ופירסמה קובצי שירים העוסקים בחוויה, לעמוד במרכזו. היא מודעת לעובדה, שייתכן כי האנגלים לא יאהבו את מה שתאמר להם: "חמישים שנה אחרי שהגעתי לאנגליה אני עדיין מרגישה שם פליטה, זרה. אף פעם לא באמת התאקלמתי שם. אני עדיין ממשיכה להרגיש כיהודייה נרדפת".

בשנים הראשונות רווקא נראה היה, שגרשון כן מצליחה להשתחרר מן הטראומות. שנה לאחר שהגיעה, עזבה את קבוצת ההכשרה הדתית שאלה היתה שייכת. הקבוצה התעדרה לעלות לארץ כדי להתיישב בקיבוץ, וגרשון החליטה שאין זו דרך חיים המתאימה לה. היא עזבה את הקהילה, עברה לגור בלידס ועבדה שם בעבודות שונות. בשנת 1974, כבר לאחר שנודע לה כי הוריה לא נותרו בין החיים, נישאה לבחור אנגלי, לא יהודי, אותו פגשה באוניברסיטה. מעבר לממדים האישיים של הקשר, נראה לה היום כי הבחירה בן המקום לא היתה מקרית:

סרט על חייה, ראינות לעיתונות – עדיין חדשה לה. עבור גרשון הכל עדיין משמעותי מאוד, נוגע, מרגש כל פעם מחדש. חשוב לה להבהיר ולהסביר את שעבר עליה: "אולי יש בי להט מיסיונרי כזה. בארץ זה פחות חשוב, אבל כשאני בחו"ל, אני כל הזמן חשה צורך להסביר לאנשים מה המשמעות של הדבר הזה עבורי, להיות יהודייה". את המשמעות המיוחדת הזו חשה גרשון לראשונה בשנות השלושים, ככת למשפחה יהודית בורגנית בעיר בילפלד, גרמניה. היא היתה בת עשר כשעלו הנאצים לשלטון, אביה איבד את משרתו והיא נזרקה מבית-הספר. חמש שנים לאחר מכן ולאחר אינסוף נסיונות הגירה שנכשלו בשל חוסר היכולת להשיג ויזה למקום כלשהו, הגיעו הוריה למסקנה, כי יש להציל לפחות את הילדים, ושלחו אותה ואת שתי אחיותיה בטרנספורט ילדים לאנגליה. הבי.בי.סי. החליט להפיק סרט לציון יובל החמישים להגעתם של הפליטים הצעירים לחופי האי הבריטי, ובחר בגרשון, שכתבה ספר על הנושא ופירסמה קובצי שירים העוסקים בחוויה, לעמוד במרכזו. היא מודעת לעובדה, שייתכן כי האנגלים לא יאהבו את מה שתאמר להם: "חמישים שנה אחרי שהגעתי לאנגליה אני עדיין מרגישה שם פליטה, זרה. אף פעם לא באמת התאקלמתי שם. אני עדיין ממשיכה להרגיש כיהודייה נרדפת".

בשנים הראשונות רווקא נראה היה, שגרשון כן מצליחה להשתחרר מן הטראומות. שנה לאחר שהגיעה, עזבה את קבוצת ההכשרה הדתית שאלה היתה שייכת. הקבוצה התעדרה לעלות לארץ כדי להתיישב בקיבוץ, וגרשון החליטה שאין זו דרך חיים המתאימה לה. היא עזבה את הקהילה, עברה לגור בלידס ועבדה שם בעבודות שונות. בשנת 1974, כבר לאחר שנודע לה כי הוריה לא נותרו בין החיים, נישאה לבחור אנגלי, לא יהודי, אותו פגשה באוניברסיטה. מעבר לממדים האישיים של הקשר, נראה לה היום כי הבחירה בן המקום לא היתה מקרית:

הגילוי הזה, היא אומרת היום, גרם לה לשינוי כיוון: ב'66' הגיעה לראשונה לביקור בארץ, ובמפתיע, לראשונה בחייה, חשה בבית. ב'69', לאחר שהיתה פה לחצי שנת ניסיון, הסכים גם בזיווגה להצטרף להרפתקה המשונה, והמשפחה עלתה לארץ. הם חיו אז במושבה הגרמנית, בעלה של גרשון עסק בהוראת אמנות לנוער מטעם העירייה, והיא עצמה המשיכה בכתיבה, בעיקר של שירים. ארבע שנות הניסיון לא עלו יפה. המורה האנגלי התקשה להתרגל לדפוסי החיים בלבאנט, ובשנת '73 ארזו בני-הזוג את המזוודות ושבו לקורנול. שני הכנים המבוגרים, שכלל לא היו להם כוונות כאלו בתחילה, נשארו בארץ. "הם באו לבקר קור, אבל ישר הרגישו פה בבית", אומרת אמם המופתעת. בת הזקונים, נעמי, שבה עם הוריה לחו"ל, אך מאוחר יותר שבה גם היא לישראל ונישאה לעמנואל שמואל, עולה מאתיופיה ("חששנו מהרקע השונה, אבל אנחנו שמחים לגלות שהם מסתדרים"). רק בת אחת, סטלה, חיה היום באנגליה. פיזור המשפחה רק הגביר את תחושת

ליצור קשרים והתנתקות יותר ויותר. במהלך ההתנתקות הזו החלה גרשון להקדיש יותר ויותר זמן לכתיבה, ומספר קובצי שירים שלה, כמו גם ספר אוטוביוגרפי העוסק בחוויות ילדותה, התפרסמו בשנים האחרונות באנגליה. היא זכתה בפרס ה"ג'ואיש כרוניקל", וה"סאנדיי טיימס", ה"גארדיאן", ה"דיילי טלגרף" וה"מוסף הספרותי של ה"טיימס" פירסמו ביקורות אוהדות למדי. למרות כל אלה לא מרגישה גרשון (המפרסמת בכוונה תחת שמו העברי של אביה ולא בשם נישואיה) שהצליחה: "זה לא נושא אנגלי, השואה לא מעניינת אותם, הם לא רוצים לדעת על זה".

בארץ את כן מרגישה, שיש עדיין עניין בנושא? אני לא יודעת, אבל בארץ לפחות יודעים כמה מדובר. לא צריך להסביר כל דבר מהתחלה. זה המקום היחיד אליו אני מרגישה שייכת, אבל אני לא יכולה לחיות כאן, מפני שאני רוצה לחיות עם בעלי. לפעמים אני חושבת שזה פשוט הגורל היהודי, שאי אפשר להימלט ממנו. רולירוזן

