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In Search of Lost Times and Places

Simon Rawidowicz Reflects on his Formative Years in Grajewo and Białystok

BENJAMIN RAVID

ALL THOSE who knew my father, Simon Rawidowicz, personally or heard him lecture appreciated his magnetic personality, wide range of knowledge, and sense of humour that under the influence of events could often become gallows humour.¹ He could engage in meaningful conversation with scholars and intellectuals in their own fields, spanning the range of European—including Russian—philosophy, literature, and history, as well as the other humanities and social sciences. This was evident to me as a teenager (I was only 20 years old when he suddenly passed away), as I heard him interact with his Brandeis University colleagues and their spouses who enjoyed coming to our home for social gatherings, at which he would regale

Some words of thanks. An invitation from Professor Mitchel Duneier of Princeton University to be a guest lecturer in the summer of 2011 in his sociology seminar on the early modern ghettos of Rome and Venice and that of Kraków during the Second World War brought me to Poland for the first time and enabled me to visit the proverbial ‘towns of my fathers’ with four members of my family. That visit induced me to prepare the first draft of the translation of the following selections from my father’s letters. I thank Dr Tomasz Wiśniewski, author of *Jewish Białystok and Surroundings in Eastern Europe: A Guide for Yesterday and Today* (trans. L. Aleksandrowicz-Pedich, ed. D. Elliott, E. Elliott, and J. Simonsen (Ipswich, Mass., 1998)) and other similar works, who guided us around Białystok and Grajewo and graciously gave us books and other literature, and Dr Tomasz Dudziński, director of the Grajewo Historical Archives (Grajewska Izba Historyczna), who also escorted us around Grajewo and kindly sent us digital images of old postcards of Grajewo. I wish to thank two dear friends, Professor Howard Tzvi Adelman and Dr David M. Gordis, for their extremely helpful translation suggestions, and also express my great debt to my dear wife Jane, for her very valuable insights. Finally, I am most grateful indeed to my close friend and colleague Professor Antony Polonsky for his keen interest in this material, and especially for his assistance with Polish words, terms, and orthography, and to Natalia Aleksium for her help in the transliteration of Polish words from Hebrew to Latin characters.

¹ For an English introduction to the life and thought of Simon Rawidowicz, see B. Ravid, ‘Introduction’, to S. Rawidowicz, *Israel: The Ever-Dying People and Other Essays*, ed. B. Ravid (Rutherford, NJ, 1986), 13–50; reissued in paperback with an additional essay as *State of Israel, Diaspora and Jewish Continuity*, ed. B. Ravid (Hanover, NH, 1998). For a more detailed Hebrew version and bibliography of Rawidowicz’s major writings, see id., ‘Introduction’, to S. Rawidowicz, *Iyunim bemaḥshevet yisra’el*, ed. B. Ravid, 2 vols. (Jerusalem, 1969–71), i. 17–92 (Heb. pagination).

them with stories and epigrams from rabbinic and hasidic literature and the world of Polin.

These qualities emerged to a limited extent in his published writings but even more so in his letters and especially those written to members of his family, almost all of whom settled in Mandatory Palestine in the early 1920s. These family letters, written almost entirely in Hebrew, from the time of his arrival in Berlin in 1919 until his death in Waltham, Massachusetts, in 1957, constitute a diary, or what today might be called a blog. In them, he related what he was doing and thinking, his plans, hopes, and concerns, his activities, the people he was meeting, events in the Jewish—especially Hebraic and Zionist—world and in the world in general, especially as they related to Zionism, antisemitism, and the Holocaust.

Increasingly, after the death of his father, Chaim Yitzhak Rawidowicz, Rawidowicz would reminisce about the days of his childhood and youth in Grajewo and Białystok, which he left at the age of 22. He was very close to his father, who had instilled in him a deep love of Erets Yisra'el, initiated him into the Hebrew language by speaking it at home on the sabbath and holidays, and introduced him to Maimonides' *Mishneh torah*, which was to concern him for the rest of his life.² Certainly the fate of that world during the Holocaust further stimulated his recollecting, as did life-cycle events in the family, including the births of children, birthdays, weddings, and above all the anniversaries of the death of his mother, Chana Batya, 6 Elul (20 August) 1920, and of his father, 20 Elul (7 September) 1936. His siblings treasured these letters and preserved them,³ and after his death his brother Abraham in Tel Aviv, with whom he was especially close, transcribed some sections of them—since Rawidowicz's handwriting is often not easy to decipher, especially for those unfamiliar with the subject matter and literary style—

² On Chaim Yitzhak Rawidowicz, see Ravid, 'Introduction', to Rawidowicz, *State of Israel, Diaspora and Jewish Continuity*, 20, 30; id., 'Introduction', to Rawidowicz, *Iyunim bemaḥashevet yisra'el*, i. 29–30 (Heb. pagination); S. Rawidowicz, 'Grave: di strebendike un di traumendike. a kapitul zikhroynes', in *Grave yisker-bukh*, ed. G. Goren (New York, 1950), 35–47; repr. in id., *Shrifn*, ed. E. Golomb (Buenos Aires, 1962), 45–54; Eng. trans.: 'Grave: Aspiring and Dreaming', in *Grajewo Poland: Memorial (Yizkor) Book*, trans. T. Lunson (New York, 2014), 29–39; available at <<http://www.Jewishgen.org/yizkor/grajewo/grajewo.html>> (accessed 13 Nov. 2015); n. 99 below; his obituary by Elimlech Pomerantz (*Haaretz*, 11 Oct. 1936); on Pomerantz, see n. 119 below. After leaving Poland, the family dropped the '-owicz' and reverted to the original Hebrew Ravid—an acronym for *rosh av beit din* (head of the rabbinical court), a position held by Rabbi Shabtai in Augustów—except for Simon, because he had published under the name Rawidowicz, although he did give me, his only child, the surname Ravid shortly after my birth. Notwithstanding his deep love for his father and appreciation of his good qualities, Rawidowicz was aware of his shortcomings.

³ The children of Chaim Yitzhak Rawidowicz (1863–1936) and Chana Batya Rembelinker (1864–1920) were: Razel (b. 1885; d. 1885), Hetl (1886–9), Abraham Yenor (?–?), Rivka (1889–1971; m. Fishel Oldak (1892–1968) in 1920/1), Shifra (1892–1967; m. Yeruham Levin (1897–1959) in 1923), Jacob [Jack] (1895–1967; m. Rose Weinstein (1908–2007) in 1932), Simon (1896–1957; m. Esther Eugenie Klee (1900–80) in 1926), Shabtai (1899–1980; m. Rachel Guttman (1902–84) in 1924), Meir (1901–78; m. Malka Simhon (1906–77) in 1931), Abraham Shalom (1904–73; m. Drora Jacobson (1914–2014) in 1937), and Eliyahu Zalman (b. 1908; d. 1908).

and arranged for the typing of over 200 pages of excerpts. Abraham continued to receive more letters from his brothers and sisters in the State of Israel until his own death in 1973, and they are now in my possession. Subsequently, as my cousins settled the estates of their parents, they sent me all the additional letters they found, and I even received two more in the summer of 2014 as I was completing this chapter.

To borrow a phrase often used by Rawidowicz, unfortunately all too often in vain given his premature passing, *im ezkeh lekhakh*—difficult to translate but perhaps best rendered slightly freely as: ‘if I am fortunate enough . . .’—it is my hope, *im ezkeh lekhakh*, to prepare on the basis of these letters an extensive annotated narrative that will result in the closest possible approximation to the projected autobiographical memoir that Rawidowicz was never ‘fortunate enough’ to write. In the interim, to stress the importance of the following recollections, it seems appropriate to paraphrase the opening lines of one of the most famous poems of Rawidowicz’s close associate of his earlier Berlin days, Hayim Nahman Bialik: ‘if you wish to know the source from which Rawidowicz drew his strength and inspiration, go to Grajewo and Białystok of old’.⁴

A word on translation: Rawidowicz’s Hebrew is peppered with expressions from biblical and rabbinic literature and paraphrases of those sources. I have striven to provide an accurate translation, on occasion sufficiently literal to enable those well versed in the traditional Hebrew sources to sense the original, but at the same time one that reads smoothly in English. Generally, no attempt has been made to provide references to the biblical verses or rabbinic phrases woven into the letters, although attention has been drawn to certain plays on words and ambiguities.

FOREWORD

20 November 1941: Leeds, to Abraham, Tel Aviv

If I am fortunate enough to be able to [*im ezkeh lekhakh*], I will account for my London period in two summaries: one private/family and the other literary/communal, an enlightening account in many respects. But as important, and in some respects more so, is the account of the other metropolis in which I lived for fourteen years.⁵ And more important than that is the account of the Białystok period that preceded it. And more important than that is the account of our house in Grajewo. Several chapters—there is no strength and no time and no, etc. If only I were to finish properly [*lu zakhiti*] at least one chapter of our first account—that of Abba.⁶

⁴ S. Rawidowicz, *Siḥotai im bialik*, ed. B. Ravid and Y. Friedlander (Jerusalem, 1983), see Ravid, ‘Introduction’, to Rawidowicz, *State of Israel, Diaspora and Jewish Continuity*, 19–20.

⁵ See B. Ravid, ‘The Berlin Period of Simon Rawidowicz: The University and Ludwig Feuerbach in Context’, in U. Reitemeyer, T. Shibata, and F. Tomasoni (eds.), *Feuerbach und der Judentum* (Münster, 2009), 135–57.

⁶ Chaim Yitzhak.

19 March 1950: *Chicago, to Abraham, Tel Aviv*

Of course you and the members of our family, may they live, who have read my letters about Abba, etc., during the past thirty years, of necessity will not be satisfied with my abbreviated article in *Grayeve yisker-bukh*.⁷ You are 'spoiled' and rightly so. I understand your feelings. You hoped for the continuation of those letters or something better than them, but there was not. . . . An intimate letter that is written without limits and restraints cannot be compared to a technical-objective account of one detail such as the 'war' of Zionism in Grajewo. I am happy that you did not hide your disappointment. Always reveal the truth that is in your heart. From this, when you do praise one of my articles, I will know that my words please you. Actually, I wrote those notes during my journey to America on the ship the *Nieuw Amsterdam* (**May the navy of the State of Israel have such a ship!**)⁸ without much effort. I agonized over the choice of a topic. I thought of writing about my days in the new *beit midrash* [study house]—but I feared that it would be too autobiographical. In the end, I decided to choose the topic of Hovevei Tsiyon [a movement advocating return to Erets Yisra'el], in order to rekindle the memory of Abba. I hope that the reader who has not received letters from me during the past thirty years about Abba, Grajewo and the like will find some interest in it. . . . If He who apportions life to all living⁹ grants me sufficient time, I will write my book on Abba and Grajewo, etc., and of course in Hebrew. The language does much. I do not write Yiddish with enthusiasm. Hebrew stimulates me as I write—which is not so with Yiddish. I am not used to it. And maybe a collection of selections from my letters of the last thirty years would be better than that book that I desire to write and maybe will not be granted time to write.

REMINISCENCES OF GRAJEWO AND BIALYSTOK

16 March 1931: *Berlin, to Meir, Moshav Merhaviva*

And so, you are about to enter the *hupah* [wedding canopy], and I have to sit and wrinkle my forehead, which has already become wrinkled with the passing of time, and to study the laws of blessing bridegrooms, the blessing of brothers and bride-

⁷ See Rawidowicz, 'Grayeve'. Many of the names in these letters are mentioned in *Grajewo Poland*, but unfortunately since 'the English spelling of many of the family names contained herein have been approximated by the translators and may be different depending on the translator' (*Grajewo Poland*, p. xiv) and first names have often not been given, I have not been able to identify all of the individuals mentioned in the letters. Chaim Yitzhak Rawidowicz is mentioned on pp. 24, 61, 63, 65–6, 68, 69, 70, 73, 74–5, 143–4, 254, 267; however, he was a delegate to the seventh Zionist Congress (32, 37), not the first (24, 254) or the sixth (73). Simon Rawidowicz is mentioned on pp. 68, 69, 75 (actually he was at the College of Jewish Studies, not the University of Chicago), 267–70 (he spent only one year at Lida yeshiva, and, after preparing for the Abiturient examination, he entered the University of Berlin in 1921, finished his programme in 1926, and was awarded his doctorate in 1927), 303.

⁸ This typeface indicates that the original text is in Yiddish rather than Hebrew.

⁹ Rawidowicz often referred to God by invoking relevant divine attributes.

grooms. For the blessing of brothers, silence is praise. The heart does not reveal to the mouth. The blessing of brothers is not given to be written down on paper. The hearts will communicate silently, the blessing is a blessing. Formerly among Jews, the groom and bride were enveloped in secrecy and mystery; they were in forty-nine measures of secrecy.¹⁰ Formerly the fish was ‘trembling’ in water, when a Jew created a shelter for himself. He went out from the world of his mother and his father and entered the world of wife and children. He himself became the head of an independent household. It was an uprooting and a settling down. He acquired new obligations and also one important exemption. Just consider: traditional Jewry exempted him from the recitation of the Shema [Yisra’el (Hear, O Israel)] prayer and from putting on tefillin, and because of him the entire community was exempted from Taḥanun.¹¹ Meanwhile, the ways of life changed. People walk on the earth, the many mysteries have been hidden. The nine traditional ‘measures’ of modesty have passed (and who knows whether there were not also other reasons for this modesty). Clarity came to the world. I like clarity. Let us not engage much in consulting secretly. I remember how great was the trembling of my childhood heart when I would look at the young new husbands who would come to pray in the *beit midrash* during the seven days of their feast—the atmosphere in the *beit midrash* was fraught with tension. And our hearts, the hearts of young children, were as full of Torah as pomegranates, the boys were sitting and trilling in their throats at the long table that was next to the stove. The young man also had companions, his father-in-law or his brothers-in-law (that is, the best men), who did not move from his side during all seven days of the feast, and there were the members of the group of the marriage brokers, both the marriage brokers who arranged this marriage and those who received a reward for not interfering. Everyone became a familiar of the groom during the seven days of his feast, everyone would come up to him after the ‘Aleinu’ prayer and offer him his tobacco box and he would smell it himself and spit, once to the north and once to the south. The beadles who would pass by him with their alms-boxes would sound in his ‘honour’ an additional ring with the twelve coins that were in their boxes, a ring that was heard in all directions and the groom was always overflowing with oil, entirely olive oil, a little ‘a vessel full of shame’ and a little ‘all saying honour’, his stomach was not yet between his teeth,¹² yet on the second day of the seven days of the feast he already had the sign of a belly, and maybe it was not created other than to emphasize the watch and the golden chain hanging on his breast that were sparkling and shining in our eyes. And we the children were standing and looking with jealous eyes at this seven-days-of-the-feastnik, the man who was lucky and everybody praised him, all looked at him, all said to him generously *shalom aleikhem* and

¹⁰ The number 49 was used in midrashic literature to indicate a large number.

¹¹ A prayer recited in traditional services on most weekdays following the ‘Eighteen Benedictions’ at the morning service of *shaharit* and the afternoon service of *minḥa*.

¹² A rabbinic expression that usually refers to a pregnant woman: here it is used to refer to the effects of the cooking of the new bride.

blessed him *mazal tov* twice and thrice. For the hands of a man of Israel formerly were ownerless hands available to all, the hands of a man were not his, a man and the hands of the congregation were one hand. The hand of a man from Israel would pass from hand to hand: *shalom aleikhem, aleikhem shalom*, and repeat *mazal tov*—every hand would approach the other, hand to hand. The Romans say: one hand ‘washes’ the other.¹³ It was not so among the Jews: one hand cleaved to the other. The hand of the woman was as the hand of her husband. The hand of a slave was as the hand of his master, the hand of a man was as the hand of his master. The hand of a Jew was as the hand of his friend. In those days all Israel—at least in the *beit midrash*, in their ‘national’ or religious house—was one hand.

Consider how great was this hand of Israel that was pushed aside. This hand of Israel was upon me. It was upon me also in the days of my youth, I saw it after I grew up, and I felt that it had descended upon me much before then. This hand of Israel descended upon me when [our sister] Rivka was in the hands of grooms. It made all the strings of our heart tremble, the hearts of children. And in the hand of the bridegroom was the new *talit*. How much it attracted us: all of the other *talesim* that we would see in the *beit midrash* were not clean but grey from much use and folding. The *talit* was the garb of the Jew, he was accustomed to wear it every day. Among them were torn and tattered *talesim*, also torn pieces on top of each other. Their fringes were full of tobacco and stains of fat and also some different elements that could not be given a proper chemical analysis. And behold, God prepared for us a white *talit*, sparkling, shining, on which were preserved all the smells of the holidays and the sabbaths of the years, the *talit* of the seven days of the banquet—and how could our hearts not tremble with joy? This *talit* was a *talit*. And the bag for the *talit*! A new bag, and on it the name of the bridegroom in flowers, in a border that was entirely art, and the embroidery was that of a fair and modest bride, who sat trembling, as did we children, waiting for the bridegroom, and she was sitting and embroidering on the bag of the *talit* and the tefillin the dreams of her childhood, the desires of her heart, and the hopes of happiness for the future to come, an embroidery that was entirely secret (and sometimes also without taste . . .) that because of the lack of experience and the lack of life was recognizable as the embroidery of a bride for her bridegroom, hand to hand, again hand will cleave to hand, so that the hand of Israel will be exalted.

And after all the hands of Israel were upon the bridegroom, there was not a hand in the *beit midrash* that had not cleaved to him, the bridegroom would take out his gilded cigarette case, the present for his *derashah* [talk], and remove a cigarette, a gift from his father-in-law, tear a piece of paper from one of the torn holy books¹⁴ that were on the tables and the mantles, approach the burning *yortsayt* light with his remaining strength, and light the cigarette that was in his hands. He had in his

¹³ I wish to thank Antony Polonsky for advising me that the quotation—in the Latin original *manus manum lavet*—is from Seneca (*Apocolocyntosis Claudii*, 10). It means ‘you scratch my back, and I’ll scratch yours’.

¹⁴ Presumably a blank page next to the binding.

hand the old light, the eternal light, his face was radiant and he was again full of joy and prepared to walk to the table arranged by his wife, to the table of the seven days of the feast.

In this manner, ‘formerly among the Jews’ the bridegroom would enter life and the world of the deed. When hearts became diminished, things changed even in the laws of bridegrooms. There are no more seven days of the feast and there is no old *beit midrash*, there is no exemption from reading the Shema and from Taḥanun. The trembling has gone from the camp. There is no fear in Jacob, everyone knows the end of the boy and of the girl is for the bridal canopy. In a thousand ways they will flee from it, but to it they will return. The bridal canopy is not the end of a period of life, we do not measure our lives according to our bridal canopy. The seven days of the feast have become profane. Every wedding feast in which I have participated has become for me a sort of banquet, a matter of a meal of friends, profane, and how pleasant is the profane. How agreeable is the profane. The profane is for man! The profane is holy. The profane is the way of our life. We live the profane and we sanctify it—and even our holiness is profane.

And even I have been a bridegroom.¹⁵ Wearing a proper top hat and a frock, I looked like a diplomat, a representative of one of the great powers, neatly pressed, from the sole of my foot to my head, and my heart cries out: ‘Why?’ If I had entered the *hupah* in Grajewo, the pranksters of the town would have thrown eggs that had not been laid on a festival at me, and now an automobile waits by my room. I enter it embarrassed, because a few people had gathered to see the spectacle, I travel in it to the house of Esther, again a group of people (every street in Berlin is a little town of itself!). Esther stands with a veil and other assorted items that ‘belong’ to it, everything according to the custom of the land, one woman whose business it is stands and takes care of her dress. I say to her: ‘Master of the World, how awesome¹⁶ is your veil!’ She smiles, and that woman looks at me with fear. I profaned her holiness. I saw a bride with her veil and I was not ‘awed’. Afterwards she said to Esther: ‘I share in your sorrow over the words of your bridegroom, that certainly caused you much pain. . . .’ The two of us entered the automobile and in the street was a crowd of passers-by and curious people. We travel to the synagogue. Tens of automobiles are in front of it. The entire synagogue is full from one end to the other, and we pass between the rows. The rabbi preaches for around a whole hour, a few times I was forced to suppress my laugh. And afterwards the bridegroom and the bride sit on a bench, and all Israel comes to bless them, but the hands are not those of the Jews of the *beit midrash* in Grajewo but rather of

¹⁵ Rawidowicz married Esther on 10 October 1926 at the Muenchener Strasse synagogue. On Esther Klee-Rawidowicz, see Ravid, ‘The Berlin Period of Simon Rawidowicz’, esp. 147–8, 150–1, 154; id., ‘Alfred Klee and Hans Goslar: From Amsterdam to Westerbork to Bergen Belsen’, in Y. Kaplan (ed.), *The Dutch Intersection: The Jews and the Netherlands in Modern History* (Leiden, 2008), 347–68.

¹⁶ Hebrew *nora’ah*. Presumably the original language of the conversation was German.

the Jews of the synagogue¹⁷ on Münchener Strasse in Berlin, the hands are not the hands of our Jacob.

Happy are you, Meir, that on the day of your wedding your hand will cleave to the hands of Abba, your brothers, and your sisters; hand will speak to hand, hand will tell hand what has been and what will be.

How greatly my soul longs to participate in your wedding, but the ‘heavens’ prevent it. The hand of time is pressing upon Israel. The hand of time has prevailed over the hand of brothers. From far away, I send you my hands.

And you too, Malka, the wife of a brother is as a brother, you have acquired Meir, and may you live long together into old age. If a certain feeling did not prevent me, I would bless you that this realm of ‘between him and her’ that you are now entering be as pleasant, straight, and simple as that in which Esther and I are in. But it is impossible to bless in this way. And now that I have not blessed you—I have blessed you.

Accept the hand of your brother that is stretched out to you for an unending blessing, and may you see good all your days and do not forget to empty a glass at your wedding feast in my name and at my request.

To Meir and Malka, together with the hand of your brother, accept also the hand of your sister who blesses you heartily.¹⁸

Said the editor [Rawidowicz]: The wording is really that of Esther. Meir, photograph all those assembled at your wedding with my ‘*derashah*-present’ and send me the picture.

2 September 1938 (6 Elul), to Rivkah, Merhavia¹⁹

And as I think these thoughts, I again think of Abba. After all, how difficult was his life despite all the illustriousness that was given to him? Three of his children died, his partner was taken from him in his lifetime, most of his days in Grajewo were difficult, for a few years he earned a little from mushrooms, but most of the years he would borrow and borrow, pay off the debt to Kopciowski with a loan from

¹⁷ A Hebrew transliteration of the German word *Synagoge*. When Rawidowicz referred to aspects of Western Judaism, as opposed to east European Judaism, he transliterated vernacular terms into Hebrew characters rather than using the traditional Hebrew words. This was especially true when dealing with Reform Judaism (see also pp. 396, 398 below). This raises the question of Rawidowicz’s relation to Judaism, which is too complex to deal with here. His attitude to non-traditional Judaism was not based primarily on religious considerations, since he did not accept ‘Orthodox’ Judaism, but on his belief that *yidishkeyt* and above all knowledge of Hebrew and its classical works was generally lower among non-traditional Jews. He was also critical of traditional Jews who did not meet his standards in such matters. Despite his knowledge and deep spiritual and intellectual concerns, Rawidowicz was not a theologian and did not think in theological categories. Possibly some deep issues of ‘authenticity’, ‘continuity’, and ‘community’ with psychological overtones were involved.

¹⁸ This line written by Esther.

¹⁹ The anniversary of Chana Batya’s death. Generally, Rawidowicz dated his letters according to the secular calendar. However, on the anniversaries of his parents’ deaths and on the days before Jewish holidays, he usually gave only the Hebrew dates.

Nowiński, and so it repeated, as was the way of Jews in our towns. *Oj*, how difficult was his suffering! Really, the war saved him from complete bankruptcy. He dreamed of becoming an exporter, and a foolish and light-headed boy came from Augustów and convinced him and Uncle Shraga Moshe²⁰ to send mushrooms to America. Abba grasped at this straw. They began looking for big boxes, really huge, double wrapped, lined with paper, and began filling them with beautiful fresh mushrooms. They sent box after box, until that foolish boy disappeared for a while. The expenses of storage and customs in New York began increasing, so Abba sent the 'expert', Uncle Mordechai, of blessed memory,²¹ to New York and he apparently did 'better' than that boy from Augustów and spent around 10,000 roubles in a few weeks—and this sum belonged neither to Abba nor to Shraga Moshe (the latter possessed 7,000 roubles, and after each mushroom season he would lend that money to Abba at 7 per cent or 8 per cent and sometimes also at 10 per cent and sometimes borrowed 'freely' from Abba. . . . When he felt that Abba's condition was not good, especially in the last years before the war, he would not give Abba credit and Abba had to get Reuven Vilenski to find lenders for him, who would of course be nicely rewarded.²²)

25 October 1939: London, to Shifra and Yeruham, Afula

Woe unto Jewish children in 1940! When I think of the suffering of Jewish children in Poland and elsewhere, there is no limit to the darkness that overcomes me. And behold, by chance we too were 'saved' for the time being from the valley of destruction: Grajewo, Białystok, etc. (in Siedlce, for example, stands a memorial plaque: 'here stood the town of Siedlce'). Sometimes it seems to me as if the fire that is sent against them burns my flesh, really burns it. Some months ago I dreamt that I was sitting in a certain room and arguing with Hitler, Goering, and others, and suddenly some members of the SA²³ fell upon me and hit me. I explained to those who were hitting me that it was folly to hit people and that was not the way, etc., but they continued. When I woke up, I felt it all over my body. Of course, the 'rationalist' will say: because you did not lie down properly, you felt it in your body,

²⁰ Chaim Yitzhak's brother.

²¹ Chana Batya's brother.

²² Rawidowicz was keenly aware of his father's economic vicissitudes. In a letter to Abraham of 4 July 1941, he related that 'the expenses increased annually, the cost of living in Russia began rising sharply after the Russo-Japanese war [1904–5]. He would borrow from Kopciowski and pay Nowiński and the process repeated itself constantly. He lent and borrowed; he lent what was not his; he borrowed at 7 per cent or 8 per cent and lent to the horse-sellers, Miller, and others at 10 per cent, basing his hopes on the small income difference in the changing exchange rate between the rouble and the mark. And the more he borrowed, the less he could lend. Of necessity, he had increasingly to find lenders. . . . (I very much want to describe to you some day the basis of the 'economy' of Abba—and his brother Shraga Moshe—which would also provide an opening to understanding the personality of Abba and his troubles in other spheres. . . .)' Lack of space precludes a discussion of Rawidowicz's own economic views and a major investment that did not work out as he had hoped.

²³ *Sturmabteilung*, the para-military wing of the Nazi party, which was replaced by the SS but continued to be active in the persecution of the Jews.

and since you felt it in your body, you dreamt about the blows with which you are beaten, and if you were beaten, who would beat you if not the SA? Therefore, fortunate is he who is beaten only in a dream at night, and fortunate is he who is able to console his soul with the vision of 'redemption', etc.

Do I remember, Yeruham, the conquest of Białystok twenty-five years ago? Of course. That Thursday remains before my eyes. I 'volunteered' and enlisted in the police, and you, a man of the people etc., did not participate in this 'project'. I still see you sitting in your 'storehouse' in Gumienna Street, at the long table that was not arranged,²⁴ drinking tea, and eating white bread, a delight to the eyes, gathering crumb to crumb, white bread—at the time when we on Białostoczańska Street lived on potatoes and rice, rice and potatoes. Do not suspect me of violating 'thou shalt not covet'. . . . In those days we did not think about food and everything associated with it. We were 'idealists' (like one of Chekhov's heroes, who says: 'I am "above love", I do not love. . . .'²⁵) Certainly it was not your 'fault' if the members of your family left you as an 'inheritance' a sack of flour or a partnership in a sack of flour with someone . . . and so you were fortunate and a certain woman would bake for you white bread, may it never be lacking for you and the members of your household in Afula and in Białystok and in future times.

Do you know that Professor Schorr, whom I met a few months ago in London and spent half a day and a night in friendly conversation with, invited me to deliver guest lectures at his institute in Warsaw,²⁶ and Tarbut²⁷ also invited me. And had the war not broken out, I would have gone for a month and a half to Poland, in order to lecture in ten or fifteen towns in Poland, Białystok, and Grajewo among them? It is unfortunate. But what are 'losses' like this in comparison with what is happening and what will happen in that hell.

2 January 1940: Moretonhampstead, Devon, to Abraham, Tel Aviv

When I sit in this bungalow (a house of one storey) and look at the pleasant hills across from it, at the fields, etc., often I suddenly see Abba going up the hill and coming closer to us. How happy I am to see him in my mind as he would sink in the snow with his small son—the writer of this letter—in the streets of Grajewo, a few hours before sunrise in the days of winter, on the way that goes up to the new *beit*

²⁴ A play on the Hebrew words for 'long', *arokh*, which begins with an *alef*, and 'arranged', *arukh*, which begins with an *ayin*, as well as on the title of the classic sixteenth-century code of Jewish law, the *Shulhan arukh* ('The Arranged Table').

²⁵ See Trofimov's monologue towards the end of the second act of Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*: 'Varya's afraid we may fall in love with each other and won't get away from us for days on end. Her narrow mind won't allow her to understand that we are above love.'

²⁶ On Rawidowicz and Mojżesz Schorr, see B. Ravid, 'The Human Dimension of Wissenschaft des Judentums: Letters from the Rawidowicz Archive', in J. Decter and M. Rand (eds.), *Studies in Arabic and Hebrew Letters in Honour of Raymond P. Scheindlin* (Piscataway, NJ, 2007), 97–102.

²⁷ An extensive network of secular Hebrew-language schools from kindergarten to teachers' seminaries and other educational programmes in Poland, Romania, and Lithuania, established in 1922.

midrash, when he would stand and knock on the window of the old Shimshon (who just then was successful in bringing into his house his wife—the divorcee—to the anger of some of his opponents) and ask him for the key to the *beit midrash*. There he would sit by the long table that was full of books and prayer books, etc., and the steam would rise from the big stove that was a sort of eternal stove, and he and his son were ‘making their voice heard with song’, as they learned a page of the Gemara that was in front of them—could he ever have imagined that after thirty years his son would sit in this distant English village, a Jew who was captured—willingly—among the ‘nations’, whose language he had never heard, sitting and hiding ‘until the storm will pass’, the second storm in twenty-five years? Could he imagine what would be the fate of all of his sons and daughters? Who knows whether we know what will be the fate of our children—and we are so fearful for their welfare and their future. For months, the voices of the Jewish children in Poland are stealing the remnant of my peace. What is the consolation in the little that we have attained in Erets Yisra’el in comparison with our terrible suffering in the entire world? Will we have the good fortune to see this year the end of the kingdom of wickedness in Germany and, I add, also in Russia? The time has really arrived, and the time has also arrived for me to end.

1 April 1940: London, to Rivka and Fishel, Moshav Merhavia

Do not be concerned about memories that descend also upon you. It is the nature of man. The concern with the past does not result only from a lack of grounding in the present and the absence of prospects for the future. This accepted idea is based on an error. There is here much of the love of the ‘finished’, the ‘complete’, the arranged from A to Z. If I do not see it in myself, behold the ‘flesh’ of our child makes me realize it. How little is his past, as it were, and how great is his interest in it. There is not a morning on which he does not begin with his request: ‘Tell me what happened when Chaki²⁸ was a “small” boy?’ . . . And I am forced to tell him, to repeat all the broken words that are to be found in his mouth, to describe his walks to Hyde Park, etc.—and how much he enjoys this contemplation of his ‘past’. . . . We return to the past not only out of an inner poverty and absence of strength—but also from an abundance of faith, an abundance of work, etc. If it is permitted to compare life to a stream of water or to a fountain—it is natural to return to the early fountain, to the first trough from which we drank our first drops of life. Happy is he who finds this trough whole and as pleasant as it was in its ‘beginning’

And if the nature of man in general is like this, how much more so is it of people who have been transplanted from that ‘first trough’, whether against their will or willingly, whether out of sorrow or out of the joy of freedom.

And in the end, that ‘trough’ is decisive. A certain famous English storyteller, James Barrie, describes his many literary failures until he was successful and

²⁸ My nickname as a child, derived from how I pronounced my Hebrew name, Chaim Yitzhak.

rediscovered his small town in Scotland.²⁹ When he dealt with it, when he stuck with it, his wings sprouted, his star rose in the English literary heavens. But his old and simple mother would mock him and be astounded: ‘What did you see that you dealt with us, the inhabitants of this “province” and its area? Why do you describe our dress, our way of life, our speech? The gentlemen in London will not wish even to glance at those “trifling matters”.’ This simple woman did not know what the ‘past’ is. Happy and unfortunate is she. Happy is she that the past is a burden, and unfortunate is she in that turning to the ‘first trough’ is a sign of life and culture. The more our hearts and our intellect are developed, the more we return and drink from that first fountain. Its taste is the elixir of life. And if sometimes its bitterness is great and it removes scabs that have congealed on wounds—it restores the soul of a man.

And when I think of that town in which our first trough stood—my heart trembles inside me. How terrible is the suffering of those who are under the rule of Hitler and Stalin. There are those who flee from the furnace of the Germans to the hell of the Russians, and the other way. Terrible, terrible.

It is a sad matter for me. This year I was going to go to Poland and Lithuania (I was invited to a ‘circuit’ of lectures in ten to twelve centres in Poland, etc.). With a trembling heart, I anticipated also ‘reunions’ with *batei midrash* [study houses] and cemeteries, old streets, and alleys in Grajewo and Białystok—and now I know that I will never find in them that which I anticipated, even if the end will come to those two ‘destroyers’, may their names be erased together, not a memory will remain of all that we had in those places. And it will be that when we come there—not even the graves of our past will be found. Not a grave will be seen or found.³⁰

There is no wonder that this great degree of silence has descended upon us, silence, the absence of speech. Apparently, we speak, we write, we convene conferences, we form committees—and out of all this great noise, a unique silence reaches our ears. We speak much, so that they will not feel—and so that we ourselves will not feel—that the power of speech has been taken from us.

Do you remember Savta,³¹ the mother of Abba, at the time of a fire? When a fire would break out in our town, she would hurry and run to our house as long as her strength held out, to see whether her first-born son was still there, and when she came home she would sink into the chair silent, without the strength to speak, fainting. The image of Savta stands before my mind’s eye for many years. We all are going in her footsteps. Her silence is our silence.

²⁹ James M. Barrie (1860–1937), Scottish-born novelist and playwright, best known as the creator of Peter Pan. The reference is to his ‘Thrums’ novels, based on his native town of Kirriemuir in eastern Scotland (J. M. Barrie, *Auld Licht Idylls* (London, 1888); id., *A Window in Thrums* (London, 1890); id., *The Little Minister* (London, 1891)); see also his biography of his mother (id., *Margaret Ogilvy* (London, 1896)).

³⁰ Chana Batya’s grave in Białystok is preserved in a photograph from the early 1920s but could not be located after the Second World War. ³¹ Sheina bat Eliyahu Zeev Soria, Chaim Yitzhak’s mother.

Sometimes I remember also that cantor and teacher Joel, with a good voice and melody when he had been young, and when he came to Grajewo he could not succeed in anything other than teaching, and even so the *batei midrash* would want him to lead the *musaf* service. And he had golden spectacles that were placed on his long nose, a Litvak who did not differentiate between the letters *shin* and *sin* (and I still hear his ‘Sha’agat aryeh’ prayer: instead of *vetigar besatan leval yastineni* [rebuke Satan, so that he not accuse me] . . . it is forbidden to finish this verse³²), and one Passover evening a fire broke out in Tik [?] Street, and its flames consumed his house, and he escaped from it while still alive and stood outside and looked at the flames of the fire, surrounded by a crowd of crying men, women, and children, and shouted: ‘*Gevalt, yidn, why does it burn, why does it burn? . . . Tell me, have mercy. . .*’ The entire Jewish people—and the world—is grasped by fire. We—sometimes we are silent as our grandmother, sometimes ‘we do not know’ why it burns. By the way I have never ‘exploited’ memories and experiences of our family and its life either in writing or in lectures. But a year ago I participated in a mass meeting in Whitechapel in London, and I told the audience that story of a woman among the women of our city—but not in the name of our grandmother—a trembling passed through the audience when they heard this description, and many asked me afterwards to memorialize that woman. So this grandmother of ours had much ‘individuality’ of her own.

You are reflecting on the Łomża and Marijampolė periods of your life and that of Shifra. It is a good period to recollect. If I had a little more time and were in a different ‘state of mind’, I would participate in your recalling those days from the abyss of forgetfulness, and I would perhaps help the two of you a little in this ‘reconstruction’ of the ‘Golden Age’, the days of dreams and trials, and they are the best days of our lives. In the end, was it not I who violently opposed the cross on the cover of your book and because of my ‘pressure’ a ‘change’ came about and it was removed? It was I who forced Abba (who ignored this matter) to fulfil the commandment of ‘and you shall extirpate the evil from your midst’, and it is forbidden to have a cross in a Jewish house—I and no one else. . . . The days of your externship are living in my memory in all their details, your teachers (from Duniak the revolutionary to the son of the pharmacist Schwartz, etc.), your examinations, the carriages (Yudka to Łomża and the second was What was its name? At this moment, I forget, to Suwałki)—and my running away and disappearing at the time of departure, etc., even they have not disappeared from me yet.

(Other than the Olschwangers, Jezierski, Feinsilber, who was the first Jewish woman to enter the gymnasium from the circle of our ‘householders’? The Markus family, Sara or Leah Kurejowski, the daughter of the ‘expert’ tailor? Tutelman came after them, that I know

³² Joel would pronounce the Hebrew word *yastineni* as *yashtineni*, which could be interpreted as ‘urinate on me’, although the verb is intransitive and the objective personal pronoun cannot be attached to it.

This investigation is significant not only for personal family ‘reconstructions’, but also for the investigation of the process of modernization of Jewish life in Russia and Poland before the war. A very important chapter.)

Certainly our education was not structured. With all his great devotion and concern for our fate and our future, Abba could not direct us in the way we should go. As for me, I see the sixteen years of my life until the [First World] War as wasted years. . . . I did not learn that which I should have learned, I was not prepared for any profession, trade or skill (the rabbinate, etc., I did not want, since I was 13). We spoke a language in which one did not differentiate between past and future, a language that was not ordered and grammatical, we did not know what a rule was, we did not understand the world around us, we did not know what was going on outside, the inside we saw from a very limited perspective, real learning for the future we did not receive.

And even so, how dear to us is that ‘first trough’.

Education is not ‘straight’ in its nature. Education nurtures indirectly, mysteriously; stolen waters are sweet to it: that which is given is not decisive in education . . . but just the secret, the invisible, the hidden. The educator thinks that the material that he is giving shapes the image of his student, but he is wrong. The decisive thing is not what our sons and daughters receive from us directly, openly—that which is received secretly, unconsciously, it alone is decisive. That absorption of the unspoken that the heart does not reveal to the mouth, that a father and his son do not speak about, and do not reveal even to the most modest—it is the higher education.

And in this respect, I think that Abba was a great and most capable educator. What he gave us directly and consciously, we did not accept. We rejected most of his ideas and beliefs. We are so far from his traditional world-view, etc., but we received from him much more than all those—we received him as he was. And he did not know how much of him we absorbed into us, and how much he lives in us. And he hid and restrained himself, he did not impose himself upon us—and we absorbed him, we all absorbed him, each in his own way.

And this was unconscious education, ‘indirect’ education, education that was based upon the personality of the educator and not upon the material that was given and learned.

If we can be for our sons and daughters even something of what Abba was to us—it would be sufficient. But who knows? Have not the times and the conditions of life changed? Abba inherited the tradition and he bequeathed it to us—we rejected its shell and we ate the fruit inside. What is the ‘fruit’ that we will bequeath to our children?

Again, the ‘inside’ alone is not decisive. It is to give and the way of giving that are decisive. And it will still be seen. The impact of education is not obvious and expressed at the time of giving. Sometimes it comes out from hiding to be revealed only after many many years.

22 September 1940 (20 Elul): London, to Shabtai, Be'er Tuvia³³

Actually, this is not our first cellar. We were young boys, and the sword of Hitler (at that time his name was Kaiser Wilhelm, but he is Hitler, he is Wilhelm, he is Mussolini, etc., he is the devil, he is the angel of death, etc.) began pursuing us. He did not catch us in the nest of our birthplace, and he pursued us to Białystok, and he caught up with us in Białostoczańska Street, in the house of Pekar (the merchant), a respected man among his people, who ran a *beit midrash* in our neighborhood.³⁴ Every night the zeppelin of Kaiser Wilhelm terrified us in our lying place, and our house was still in its fullness, before the eclipse of the lights.³⁵ And not only that, also Uncle Shmuel L.³⁶ (when did he die?), who was detained too long by a haemorrhoid operation in Warsaw, and meanwhile the Germans conquered his Suwałki. He joined us (his room, in which he slept, was dark; he went around silently most of the day), he began his day with a cup of tea with milk in the fashion of Grajewo. And so also do the English, in their language: an early cup of tea, but their 'cup of tea' is not like 'tea with milk' in our area. The moderation of Uncle Shmuel was almost 'English'. When he finished his drinking, with many sighs—and I always shared in his sorrow—he began looking half-heartedly for his *talit* and tefillin, placed them under his arm, and began 'crawling' slowly to the *beit midrash*, in which they waited to receive the face of depressed Jews such as him, also people without a home, whom fate brought to the town of Białystok. He returned from the *beit midrash* at the same pace (something of the fearful and frightening was in him), and 'spent' the rest of the day in the house of his brother-in-law, eating his morning bread around midday, listening to the claims of Ima³⁷ and her complaints, claims stronger than flint on a deprived life and on the hopes that did not come to pass, and he thought of his 'woman of valour' in Suwałki, of his daughter and of his son, in whom he gloried. How great was his depression and how great was ours when we looked at him and we thought about what had come upon him and what was in store for him? It is no wonder that he became depressed as he began whispering and going in Białostoczańska Street. Certainly he found an overturned house when he returned to his home. Sometimes time causes a break in the course of events, in the relationship between a man and his fellow man,

³³ 20 Elul is the anniversary of the death of Chaim Yitzhak.

³⁴ The tombstone of Rabbi Nathan Pekar, son of Rabbi Benjamin Beinish Pekar, who died in 1925 appears in 'Zmarl Harvey Pekar "Białystoker"' [video], narr. T. Wiśniewski, *You Tube*, <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uKvAvyCNXuA>> (accessed 14 Nov. 2015). Pekar is described as 'an old and important man, God-fearing and *mem-vav-heh*', the first two letters of which—the letter *vav* representing 'o'—are presumably the abbreviation for *more* (teacher) while the third is the definite article, which could refer to 'of the generation'. For other videos by Wiśniewski, under the name of his organization Bagnowka, see <<http://www.youtube.com/user/bagnowka7/videos>> (accessed 14 Nov. 2015). Saul and Dora Pekar, possibly the son and daughter-in-law of Rabbi Nathan, who emigrated from Białystok to Cleveland in the 1920s, were the parents of Harvey Pekar (1939–2010), especially known for his comic book, *American Splendor*.

³⁵ The death of Chana Batya.

³⁶ Brother of Chana Batya and husband of Sarah (see p. 376 below).

³⁷ Chana Batya.

between him and her, or even between him and himself, and there is no fleeing or way of escaping from this break that separates and divides, and it is not in the power of a man to overcome that last break.

And even for me at this time Uncle Shmuel was a kind of break but in a different manner, this break was a continuation. Uncle Shmuel would always awaken you, Shabtai, to imitate the sound of the zeppelin, or more exactly—the exploding of the bombs: ‘Boom, boom, boom!’ And Rivka would break out into *shema yisra’el*—such a kosher daughter of Israel. About her, you, *shema yisra’el*, Uncle Shmuel, Białostoczańska Street, and that ‘ideal’ of one zeppelin travelling in the heavens of the city of Białystok—I think of that so often when I sit in the cellar of the Englishman (that is, the tenant in the cellar of the house in which we live), watching over Chaki that he should not awaken, that he should sleep and sleep and sleep, and not hear the sound of the *teruah* [air-raid siren]. The sound of the *teruah*? The storm of the *teruah*, lightning and thunder, etc. On the right side sits Esther who is thinking about our fate, and about the fate of the members of her family far away (in the Netherlands, the newspapers reported that her father was imprisoned.³⁸) When I hear the noise that is capable of deafening the ear of all flesh, and when I look at the people around me, nobody cries out *shema yisra’el*, and no boy says ‘Boom, boom, boom!’ . . . Hundreds and hundreds of weapons of destruction are over our heads, over the heads of millions of men and women and children, and no one knows whether his name is written on any given bomb. If it is for him—it will certainly find him wherever he will go and wherever he will turn. If it is a decree from above—there is no escape. And if the Merciful One will consider him favourably—his cellar will protect him. This happened to us: ten days ago, an incendiary bomb fell on the roof of our house (we were in the cellar), it hit the roof, the tenants and the fire extinguishers hurried, and they were successful. They brought the bomb down from the roof, which was slightly burnt, and we were saved. If they had been later, who knows whether I would have been able to write these words to you. There are those who worry and worry for their safety and are not successful. (A terrible thing happened to a family of our acquaintances. Had they remained sleeping in their beds—as usual—they would not have been brought this morning to a Jewish grave.) And there are those who worry less and from the heavens they have mercy. Everything is in the hands of heaven, everything—including this modern world with this modern war, it and its bombs.

You are fortunate that you are in Be’er Tuvia and not in Tel Aviv. My heart goes out to the inhabitants of Tel Aviv and its area, the defenceless city. If Mussolini loses his senses—may God guard us, I will not open my mouth to the devil. . . . And we still grope in darkness: who will stand in the midst of the attack this coming winter—we who live here, or you who live in the land of the fathers: England or Egypt and Erets Yisra’el? Unlike those who deceive their souls, I always predicted

³⁸ On Esther’s father, Dr Alfred Klee, see ‘Klee, Alfred’, in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd edn, 22 vols. (Detroit, 2007), xii. 218; Ravid, ‘The Berlin Period’, 147–8; id., ‘Alfred Klee and Hans Goslar’.

the participation of Italy. It was clear that it wanted to share in the spoils of Hitler. And now I greatly fear that Spain will follow in its footsteps. And if so, our position in the Mediterranean will not be 'so good', but with all this we must hope that the end of Hitler will come and maybe soon. The English people, who refuse to be slaves to Hitler, are a holy nation! The last people in Europe who rose to destroy the rule of Hitler. May the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob be with them, may they succeed in freeing the world from the kingdom of evil. On the victory of England depend our lives, the lives of the people and the lives of every individual. And what hope is there for Erets Yisra'el, if—perish the thought—the strength of Hitler, etc. will become stronger in the world? (And even from this is a hint to my idea of 'partnership', as I already pointed out in other letters: If there will be a place, there will be a possibility of existence for the multitude of Jews in the diasporas of Europe, and there will be a future for the people of Israel living as a free people in Erets Yisra'el. And if not . . . I will not open my mouth to the devil. One is dependent on the other. How stupid and idiotic were the official ideologists of Zionism, who for forty years were repeating the word, repeating the refrain: 'The diaspora will be completely destroyed and Erets Isra'el will rise . . .'.)

12 December 1940: London, to Shifra and Yeruham, Afula

Since the routes have become disrupted and there is no regularity to the mail, the reason for writing letters has been taken away. One writes and does not know whether the letter will reach the person for whom it was intended, and if it will reach them, when that will be. And if it does indeed arrive safely—who knows whether the writer will ever receive an answer. So the reason for writing is taken away, because of the multitude of our sins. Let us hope for better days than these, in which the writing of letters will return to its former situation. And at this time we recite [the thanksgiving psalms of] a Greek Hallel, a complete Hallel, and not a half Hallel (do you not know that scholars differentiate between several types of Hallel in the book of Psalms: a Babylonian Hallel, a Egyptian Hallel, etc.). Blessed be the Greeks. Around 2,300 years ago we fought them, and now they are fighting our fight, saving Erets Yisra'el in our days from the Italian devil that is lying in wait. Blessed be the Greeks! Our 'Al hanisim'³⁹ and theirs is one. The many at the hands of the few, the impure at the hands of the pure. So pure and holy. Every people that fights Mussolini and Hitler is a holy people. Ten degrees of holiness descended to the world in 1940, and Great Britain took nine and nine-tenths of them. If you saw what that wicked one did to its metropolis, and some other cities in that country—if you saw . . . and if you saw the bravery of the people, how they conquered their impulses, there is no speech, there are no words, neither is their voice heard. They are not afraid of the fear of night, of the arrow that flies in the

³⁹ A prayer of thanks 'for the miracles', added to the sixteenth benediction of the Shemoneh Esreh prayer and the second benediction of Grace after Meals on the holidays of Hanukah and Purim.

day, of the aeroplane that flies in the dark. Thousands and tens of thousands will fall, and they are in the category of 'it will not come near you'. They stand in their place. This nation alone has the strength to destroy the wicked kingdom of Hitler—and may this spirit endure to the end, until the defeat of Germany and it shall bow down and fall as it did in 1918. Do you remember, Yeruham, it was the sabbath in the afternoon, we sat at the meeting of the Central Committee for Lithuania South (*Oy*, this revisionism, it should be South Lithuania) in the Zionist Centre across from the town clock.⁴⁰ Doctor Guttman was presiding and, behold, someone entered and announced the revolution in Germany. We jumped from our places and did not yet imagine what was awaiting for the world. Guttman announced Kaiser Wilhelm was our most dangerous enemy and with his downfall, salvation will come to Zion and to the Jews. When I returned home, late in the evening, I saw a German soldier as drunk as Lot and Noah combined swaying in Nikolevski Street. (Is the Beit Midrash Hagadol, where Abba used to pray, next to the bridge still standing?⁴¹ And I did not pray there. I spent my first winter in Bialystok in the *beit midrash* Mishmar. It was the last winter that I sat at a bench in a *beit midrash*. Would that I would be given a *beit midrash* open day and night and I will begin again returning from time to time to the learning of my youth), waving his sword to the four corners of the earth, suddenly it broke in half and he sang like a madman: 'Deutschland, Deutschland, über Alles . . .'. From the day that this Germany existed, never was its snare spread out over all of Europe—to the British Islands, may the Guardian of Israel guard them—as in this hour. And nevertheless a second 1918 will come, something like it will indeed come. For if not so, what are we and what is our life, etc. . . . Our life here is hanging by less than a hair, miracle of miracles, a miracle of twenty-four hours a day and of sixty minutes an hour—and all the danger and fear, etc. will find their peace on the day of the downfall of Germany. And afterwards? We will see. I do not believe, unfortunately, that a second Balfour Declaration will come or that the first will be returned to its former state by our own strength. But we must thank and bless, etc. the Guardian of Israel who guards [the Jews of] the Yishuv [in Palestine] from the destruction that awaits them from Mussolini and Hitler and Stalin, these three archetypes of evil.

The accounts on Reines are interesting but incorrect.⁴² Did not I, 'your ser-

⁴⁰ Rawidowicz's business card from this period, in Hebrew, identified him as a 'Member of the Central Committee of Tse'irei Tsiyon in Lithuania and the Regional Committee of the Zionists of South Lithuania' and in slightly larger bold type as 'Director of the Hebrew Pedagogic Courses'. After the First World War, in December 1918, he served as one of the five elected representatives of Tse'irei Tsiyon on the first Jewish community council of Bialystok. On Rawidowicz's activities in Bialystok, which seem to have gone unnoticed in the secondary literature and require further investigation, see Ravid, 'Introduction', to Rawidowicz, *Iyunim bemaḥashevet yisra'el*, i. 22–4 (Heb. pagination); id., *State of Israel, Diaspora and Jewish Continuity*, 14–17.

⁴¹ It was no longer standing in 2011.

⁴² Yitshak Ya'akov Reines (1839–1915), rabbi, halakhic authority, and author. From 1885 until his death, he resided in Lida, where in 1905 he established a modern yeshiva at which students also received a secular education. He was a member of Hovevei Tsiyon from its inception and organized the

vant', use to get up at sunrise and pray at the morning services for regulars in the house of Rabbi Reines, for I resided on Kamienna Street, and I have much to tell about him. The meeting between him and the Hafets Haim⁴³ is invented from thin air. He behaved towards the Hafets Haim with much exaggerated contempt. The Hafets Haim was a really righteous man (I met him in the bathhouse in Lida. He prevented me from helping him with the 'pail of water'. He asked me for my comb—Master of the World, when will Jews like that arise in our midst?) I remember, Rabbi Reines once scolded us, the students of the yeshiva, because one sabbath, we went to hear the *derashah* of the Hafets Haim and stayed away from his: **Where are you going? The Hofetz Haim should come and listen to me. What is he speaking about: ritual baths, family purity!** Who knows if in my 'memoirs' I will get to Reines of blessed memory, to Lida—for I have not yet started, and maybe I will not start at all, the chapter on Grajewo. It is now the time of *shofarot*⁴⁴—(and at the time of my writing, in the cellar, the planes of Hitler are making noise over our heads) and just with the end of my letter, the noise of the planes, may their names be erased, is becoming stronger. . . . Let us hope that this night also will end well and I will be able to send this letter tomorrow and so forth, amen, and I will be able to add to it, may it be His will.

*13 August 1941 (9 Av): London, to Abraham, Tel Aviv*⁴⁵

I do recollect my sin; with my sin I will commence: I began my letter as an answer to your telegram—and as I began, I remembered that the day of the destruction of our two temples is the day of your birthday! It is too bad. Unfortunately, I am sorry that it was not the 'first cause' for taking up my pen at this moment. Maybe because Tishah Be'av and a birthday are so far from each other, two that contradict each other (and not according to the tradition that at the time that the Temple was destroyed, the messiah was born). So, how many years have passed since that day on which you emerged into the air of the world in the house of Haimek on Rajgród Street?⁴⁶ (Is it not so?) . . . Is it really thirty-seven years? How can you not be

convention at which the Mizrahi movement was founded in 1902. Here Rawidowicz is commenting on newspaper articles that Abraham had sent him.

⁴³ Rabbi Israel Meir Kagan (Hakohen) (1838–1933), better known by the title of his first book *Hafets hayim*, halakhic authority and talmudist. He was a very influential ethical writer, teacher, leader, and author of many halakhic works, including the still popular *Mishnah berurah* (a commentary on the first section of the *Shulhan arukh*). He was also one of the founders and spiritual leaders of Agudat Yisra'el.

⁴⁵ 9 Av was Tishah Be'av, anniversary of the destruction of the First and Second Temples. The day is held to be inauspicious.

⁴⁶ Today, Kopernika Street, part of route E61, the main road through Grajewo from Warsaw to Lithuania. Unfortunately, the street number of the Rawidowicz house is not known, but near the beginning of the street in the centre of town stands a row of old house in one of which the family may have dwelt.

ashamed . . . ? *Kurchakl*⁴⁷ is approaching forty-minus-one! As people say: 'Because of our many sins, the generation has become weaker, and now every urchin and every boy is 50 years old, 60 years old, etc.'

Grajewo, thirty-seven years and thirty-eight ago . . . The house of Abba. The store is full of the smell of leather, soles, etc. I am on the threshold of the store . . . and Ima is standing around—certainly until the decisive hour of the arrival of the mail packages—and gives orders to Tanhum the shoemaker and others and some Poles who have not yet been taken by our two competitors: Shlomo Zalman the Hasid and Michael (?) (I forget the family name of that 'leather worker', his two sons were in our *heder*) whose advantage was increasing, to the extent that Abba often went to Prostken⁴⁸ and extended much credit to his customers in the store in Grajewo. No, I am not exaggerating in the least when I say that in America two or three dozen planes and submarines, etc. 'are born' in the length of time that Ima needed in order to convince the customer to take a certain piece of sole. Every one of the Jewish shoemakers wanted, of course, the very best—but the manufacturer in Warsaw did not send the best in his warehouse to the distant town of Grajewo. And the customer would place his 'look at this and cut'—that is, a piece of worn paper, the shape of the desired sole, for there were not yet enough newspapers in Grajewo to serve as 'examples'—on the sheet of leather that was in front of him in a way that would give him a little extra bit. And Ima would try to adjust the measuring and cutting to her benefit. And so, after they reached a compromise regarding the price, negotiations began over the correct measuring. The voices of Ima and of the customers, who stood and confronted each other with accusations—and sometimes also oaths and excommunications—over a miserable piece of leather, still reverberate in my ears. Master of the Universe, how distant are those days from us—and how much 'have we progressed' . . . really? We are no longer being killed over less than a cent's worth. Prices have been fixed in the world. The relationship between sellers and customers has improved. In our day there is not that narrow-minded provincialism, even in villages! The horizon of every storekeeper and every shoemaker has been broadened, the new style of life has stamped its spirit on everything, even on negotiations over the sole of a shoe and things like it. And even so . . . how much of their energy and of their spirit and of their time did our fathers waste on such trivia and on every trifling thing, and how much does our generation violate 'thou shalt not waste' everywhere. Who knows how much our children and our grandchildren will be amazed at us and our deeds and our way of life.

⁴⁷ An affectionate term frequently used by Rawidowicz to address Abraham, to whom he was especially close, since, after leaving Bialystok in 1921 to prepare to go to Erets Yisra'el, Abraham studied at the engineering institute in Zwickau, Germany, and they frequently exchanged letters and were together on holidays. The sense is evidently something like 'little chicken', since Abraham was the youngest of the five brothers.

⁴⁸ Prostken was in East Prussia until 1945, when it became a part of Poland and was renamed Prostki.

And the day came and it fell right on Tishah Be'av (that fell on Thursday, was it not so?) and you burst with a cry of surprise and fear into this world (so is our entry into the vale of tears: trembling—'shock' in the vernacular—the exit from a hidden place to a new revealed hidden, a change of air and smell, etc., and we are so fearful and surprised—and as is our entry so is our departure). We received your face with great joy (to which he who came after you did not attain because he left before he was able to peek at the world⁴⁹) and especially Abba. I described to you once, I believe, the light in the face of Abba that Tishah Be'av when he stood at his 'place' in the *beit midrash*, his head sunk in lamentations, shedding tears, as was his way, the way of one of the best 'lamenters' in our town—and a smile of pleasure was hidden between his lips: an heir came to his Abba, the name of his Abba whom he so loved would be continued.⁵⁰ He lamented the lamentations of Zion in his manner from year to year—he would not give up his monopoly, no one dared to take from the mandate of the committee in Odessa, his 'propriety right' to recite the lamentations of Rabbi Judah Halevi and others—and even so, one lamentation is not like the other. Indeed [the lamentation chant] 'AleI tsiyon ve'areiha' is like a woman in her travails. The travails of the woman, thank God, passed. Next to her was placed a small baby, and may he continue [to suckle]. . . . One does not wish *mazal tov* on Tishah Be'av, but even so most of the men in the new *beit midrash* passed in front of Abba one after another: 'Reb Chaim Yitzhak: a boy?' Embarrassed, the boy's father answered: 'Yes'. *Nu*, those who congratulated said, and they moved to his other side. One does not engage much in blessings on the day on which the Temple was destroyed. And on the evening of the sabbath, old Shimshon announced from the pulpit: 'Reb Chaim Yitzhak, the son of Abraham Sholem, invites the congregation to a Shalom Zakhar.' . . . Where has this communal solidarity, this atmosphere of family been preserved in Erets Yisra'el—outside of the kibbutzim and collective villages? And the community came and received its reward. One left and another arrived. Groups of children all afternoon: God the faithful King. They too received small parcels of delicacies. And the day of the *brit* [circumcision] was almost in the category of 'it took place in the blink of an eye' . . . The cantor began with 'God full of mercy' (and this cantor is now among Jack's patients in New York. **How he davened, that is to say, he did not know, *nebbish*, how to daven**) for Saba, and Shimshon the *shamash* [beadle] sharpened his knife. His nails that were full of dirt and tobacco were prepared for the uncovering of the foreskin and his lips—not nice teeth—for the sucking. . . . That old man circumcised, uncovered the foreskin, and sucked generations of Jews in that small town—maybe around three generations—with those nails, etc., and I do not remember even one death because of circumcision. A weighty subject, the wisdom of hygiene! . . . From the midwife to Shimshon the *shamash*—how great was the danger, but He has mercy on all his creations, blessed be He. Blessed be He who speeds his help and shows his strength

⁴⁹ Apparently a boy was stillborn between Abraham and Eliyahu Zalman.

⁵⁰ Chaim Yitzhak's father, Abraham Shalom Rawidowicz, who died in 1902.

in 'primitive' Russia, blessed be He who strengthens the hands of simple Slavs—and to his help the French did not attain, they who fed on dainties, the delicate and the pampered, who were raised on purple, and the worm of destruction consumed their flesh before they fired the first shot! I am very angry at them, for they opted for slavery and subjection and committed treason and acted treacherously, they will not rise—whatever may come later.

In general—maybe I am thinking too much about the troubles of the time and the suffering of our Jewish brethren wherever they are. It is good that a man should bear a yoke in his youth—after his youth, he has to worry about his end. And yet I cannot turn my heart away from what is going on in the world.

3 February 1942: Leeds, to Abraham, Tel Aviv

Sometimes I say to myself: if you, that is, not myself, but you, Abraham Shalom, *kurchakl*, were near me, I would sit and relate to you some 'thoughts' and memories, and you would write them down! During the course of one winter, we would certainly write slowly a book or two and mainly: the scroll of Grajewo, the chapter about Abba, *Siḥotai im bialik*, and my book *Bavel viyerushalayim* that is occupying my thoughts day and night.⁵¹ As for scholarship, some of it is in manuscript, but it requires working and investigation—I cannot deal with it at all, for the time being: the order to rest, the absence of a Judaica and philosophy library in Leeds. You would enjoy it, I would be happy, and maybe someone else besides us would 'come to his reward'. . . . It is very unfortunate. The Prime Mover did not move us properly (last year, I consoled myself with the prospect of brothers sitting together in New York, and now, apparently, there is no reality even in that prospect). If the day comes and we succeed in uniting the scattered and the bound in one place, maybe we will not have the strength for that undertaking, who knows. And again: when I remember that terrible man and that war, etc., I say: 'How should a man complain, etc.' Fortunate are you that you are still living in the Land, and the Land has still not tasted the taste of Hitler—and we pray that it will never taste it—and we are still wandering around in the British Isles, and these isles are saying a big 'No'⁵² to Hitler, may his name rot. It is not possible. . . . And as long as this 'No' is being said, lives, and exists, Hitler cannot win. And if the Russians will add a second 'No,' and if the Americans will add a third 'No,' and the world will be full of 'Nos'—in the end the fall of the wicked one will come, even if it will tarry.

⁵¹ This is apparently the first reference to Rawidowicz's 909-page *Bavel viyerushalayim* (2 vols. (Waltham, Mass., 1957)), which he completed writing shortly before his death.

⁵² An untranslatable play on words. The Hebrew word for 'isles' (*ee*) is similar to the Hebrew word used for 'no' in construct expressions. Rawidowicz continues the word play in the next sentence: *i-efshar*, 'it is not possible'.

7 February 1942: Leeds, to Abraham, Tel Aviv

Do you know when I first saw butter? In the home of Savta, the mother of Ima, that is—in the attic in the house of Mordechai Abramski, the baker. On the left wall of the only room in that attic (I believe that the attic of that house consisted of a room and a kitchen, and maybe also a sort of dark corridor), but it had a very small window and its glass panes were double, both in summer and in winter. In cold weather, Savta would place on the sill of that window a glass or a small glass box, and in it was butter that was intended only for Mordechai, and no one dared to touch it. I did not know hunger in the days of my childhood, and I am doubtful whether I looked with jealous eyes at that piece of frozen and solid butter, but there is no doubt that in that attic I encountered for the first time the existence of butter in the world

Oy, gevult, may Shifra, may she live—who has been completely silent, and it is unfortunate—come and shout at me. . . . But the income of Abba was certainly not sufficient for a daily bath for seven to nine children and also for butter for each child. . . . In any case, that first sight of butter occurred in the fourth or fifth or maybe the sixth year of my life. This sight is fresh in my memory, as is that taste of the dried apples that Savta and Aunt Liba⁵³—how we have forgotten her, and in her was much of the burden and of the strength, and her influence, unconsciously, was great on all of us, without any doubt—brought us on sabbath afternoons, in winter, in a sabbath handkerchief, and because of them we would of course free up our places next to the hot stove, from which neither Savta or Aunt Liba would move until after the end of sabbath. The taste of Wiener schnitzel, etc. that I used to taste in Berlin will be forgotten, but that taste will never be forgotten. Better is the strength of the first taste, the taste of youth, than the taste of a grown person, who grasps and tastes, who tastes without wonder in the heart, who enjoys the taste but the taste does not remain with him. . . . Taste requires concentration, needs time; it has to be associated with Savta, the relationship to the aunt, the connection to the people who gave us our first taste that is not given to forgetfulness.

Whether Mordechai of blessed memory gave me to taste from his portion, I do not remember. After all, the income of Savta was so limited. And I was the 'go-between', so to speak. On every fifth day of the week, I would go to Elimelech Pomerantz's old father, who was in charge of supporting the religious functionaries and their widows, and I would ask for the allotment of Savta: if I am not wrong, a rouble and something per week. And sometimes he would dismiss me with 'go and come back'. Everything was dependent on the butchers—who were the partners of Amalek—who would sometimes be late in their payments, and the ritual slaughterers and others would not receive their payment on time. And Aunt Liba lived on the interest that she received from Abba and from her storehouse. The 'storehouse' of Aunt Liba, who saw it and will not remember it? You, Reb Avraham, *kurchakl*, certainly will not remember it. In whom among your brothers

⁵³ Chana Batya's sister.

and sisters in the land of the fathers will the spirit arise to describe that storehouse? . . . Consider this: almost all the women in our house were small-scale merchants: Ima, Freidka,⁵⁴ [Aunt] Liba, Chainke,⁵⁵ [Aunt] Sheine Tova,⁵⁶ Sarah the wife of Uncle Shmuel.⁵⁷ They were all businesswomen, but not all of them were on the same level. Aunt Liba was the ‘diplomat’ among them. Her Yiddish was very cultured. Much German was in it. She would rhyme rhymes. And I think I mentioned to you that maybe she was the first of the women in Grajewo (of her type) to look at the Warsaw newspapers that began circulating ‘in the land’. . . . Yes, also cloth for shrouds was in her ‘storehouse’. Did they not call them in Yiddish ‘clothes’, just ‘clothes’? ‘One has to have clothes.’ When a woman would come, she would say: ‘For whom? How many *arshn*?’⁵⁸ Apparently, a strange and senseless question. Most of the people of Grajewo were of the same size. And in those four cubits of the good earth, what difference did it make?

‘Happy’ was the generation of our fathers in Grajewo. They came to the ancestral graves in ‘clothes’. Every person had his grave and his rhymed tombstone and so forth. And now—from Grajewo the town to Moscow the metropolis etc.! . . . Master of the World, to silence and destruction are myriads of your sons and daughters, and there is no end to the slaughter, and there is no voice calling out: ‘Cease!’ Several days ago Loker⁵⁹ sent me from London a pamphlet by Prager, *The New Abyss of Despair: The Scroll of Poland*.⁶⁰ There is not strength in the heart of a man to read it to the end. And the Jews of Poland did not dwell in peace even until the new year 5700.⁶¹ (Yesterday I participated, as a lecturer at the University [of Leeds],⁶² in the official reception for De Gaulle and some representatives of the Allied armies. De Gaulle deserves praise, encouragement, etc., but the hands refuse to clap when the representative of Poland ascends to the platform)

⁵⁴ Shraga Moshe’s wife.

⁵⁵ Chaim Yitzhak’s sister. She married Moshe Zelig Rothman in 1889 and divorced him in 1896 because of financial malfeasance. Her second husband, Shraga Feivel, died in a Berlin hospital where he had gone for medical treatment in 1930, an event described by Rawidowicz in a letter of 3–5 August 1930. Chainke died in Safed in the 1960s.

⁵⁶ Chana Batya’s sister. She married Shmuel Meir Cohen.

⁵⁷ Presumably the youngest brother of Chana Batya.

⁵⁸ From the Russian *arshin*, a measure corresponding to the cubit and standardized by Peter the Great at 28 inches.

⁵⁹ Berl Loker (1887–1972), Labour Zionist leader, publicist, activist, and member of the Zionist and Jewish Agency Executives in London.

⁶⁰ M. Prager, *Yeven metsulah hehadash: yahadut polanyah betsipornei hanatsim* (Tel Aviv, 1941). The title refers to Natan Hannover’s account of Polish Jewry during the Khmelnytsky massacres of 1648 to 1649 (*Abyss of Despair: The Famous 17th Century Chronicle Depicting Jewish Life in Russia and Poland during the Chmielnicki Massacre of 1648–1649*, trans. A. J. Mesch (New Brunswick, 1983)).

⁶¹ Germany invaded Poland on 1 September 1939, fourteen days before the start of 5700.

⁶² See Ravid, ‘The Human Dimension of Wissenschaft des Judentums’, 106–11.

20 April 1942: Leeds, to Rivka and Fishel, Moshav Merhavia

A week ago, [Chaki] began going to school. At 9:30 he will go and at 12:00 he will return. At his age, I would really sit all day in the chicken coop of Carmin 'a hundred times'⁶³ (is he still living?)—actually, not only around thirty children sat in that small room but also a few birds, of course kosher, they would walk around it for their pleasure and also for ours. On the first day he came back in and related: 'Ima, the teacher does not know how to say "table" [in Hebrew].' 'How do you know?' 'I told her that I am learning Hebrew. She asked me: "What is table?" I said to her: *shulhan*, and she was not able to repeat the word.' . . . Maybe he will teach the children in his school Hebrew, and they will not learn English, etc., as with that Jewish boy who was sent to a German village to perfect his German and to forget the way of speech of the Jews, and when his father came to visit him, he saw that all the inhabitants of the village were speaking a kind of Yiddish. . . . In general he does tell us almost nothing about the school, as if it is a secret. I suspect that the matter in general is not especially dear to him. A day before the opening of the 'time' he asked: 'If a child begins to go to school, he never stops?' He trembled to hear our answer. . . . I remembered how I fled from the *heder* of Jacob Shiye ('Joshua', so they called him), in one of the first days of reading the alphabet—because he slapped me on the face, and said: 'You are a Maciek [a common Polish name]; you will be a goy.' . . . Did I tell you about this 'event'?

Certainly, going to the *heder* of Carmin was easier than Chaki's going to his school. We have to be sure that he will be a little late and come after the [Christian] prayers. Some Jewish children, or their parents, are not concerned, and they join the 'minyan' and absorb some things that are not ours. If only our Jews and Zionists in England would smarten up a little and open schools for their children! But no, such a thing will not be done in Jewry, [which asserts that it is] a waste of work, a waste of money, and there is no right of existence for the *golah*, etc., for in another year or two, the *golah* will disappear from the world, and why does one need Jewish or Hebrew schools? . . .

And of course, assimilation is easier, more convenient, and less expensive. The Orthodox Jew finds 'permission' for his assimilation in the religion of Israel. And the Zionist Jews—in Erets Yisra'el, in Zionism. The first takes the name of his God in vain and profanes it. The second profanes the name of Erets Yisra'el: he envelops himself in its prayer-shawl and also drowns in the forty-nine gates of assimilation. And the next generation in the diaspora, what will happen to it? May God have mercy on it and on us.

25 August 1944: London, to Rivka and Fishel, Moshav Merhavia

One more year and it will be twenty-five years since Ima passed away. A quarter of a century. Twenty-four years after her death the Russians returned and took

⁶³ Jacob Joshua Carmin established a modern *heder* (*heder metukan*) in Grajewo (see *Grajewo Poland*, 34 (Rawidowicz, 'Grayev'), 49, 71, 254).

Białystok and its surrounding towns—and she was a victim of the capture of Białystok in 1920.⁶⁴ History returns and is repeated in front of our eyes—indirectly, in a roundabout manner, with different circumstances and people, but it returns. At this hour, the armies of Chernyakhovsky the Jew,⁶⁵ who avenges, whether aware or not, the Jewish blood that was spilled as water in Poland and elsewhere (and it is not a mere figure of speech to say that the value of water in the Europe of Hitler, may his name be erased, was greater than the value of the blood of our people) are between Goniadz and our Grajewo,⁶⁶ apparently, on the other side of the walls of Osowiec the fortified, a fortress, it will also be called a fortress in our days. . . . In the Russia of Nicholas II, it apparently had some reality. The importance of the swamps beyond Prostken was apparently greater than that of the fortress Osowiec. Abba realized this secret in 1914 and said: ‘The armies of Russia and Germany will not be able to cross these swamps.’ . . . In August 1914 I went with Abba to see our storehouse in Prostken for the last time—under the rule of the Russians. The storehouse was empty, nothing was left in it except for worn sacks, packing paper, etc., and on the ground rolled certificates of the Keren Kayemet [Jewish National Fund] (that would be received from the main office in Cologne, and Abba would smuggle them into Grajewo) and among them were shares of the ‘Jewish Colonial Trust’ that he laboured to distribute. He had some shares of his own, and afterwards it was his luck that Moshe Borkowski—for whom Abba paid, as a guarantor, 1,000 roubles to Kopciowski—gave him some shares as compensation and now they are scattered among ‘my documents’, and they are not worth a penny, because the administrators of the bank committed fraud with the money of the community. Among them were Neiditz and others: they did business with that money and lost it. Druyanov and others wrote some articles about this—but the Zionist executive, with all of its different parties from the right to the left, decided to deal with this matter in private, and so the whole matter was entirely forgotten. Abba worked in vain for a number of years to get some of these shares from Borkowski; in vain Ima wept for years over

⁶⁴ I wish to thank Chaim Isaac Porat, grandson of Rivka and Fishel, for the following reminiscence: ‘I remember that Savta told me that Ima was sick (I believe) from typhus and died from it. There were difficulties with the burial because it was forbidden to move sick people around town for reasons of public health, so aunt Chava dressed up in the uniform of a nurse and together with Savta Rivka they carried the body in the dark of night in a horse-drawn carriage in which they transported sick people and in this manner it was possible to move in the city and reach the cemetery.’

⁶⁵ General Ivan Danilovich Chernyakhovsky (1906–45), a general in the Soviet Army (the youngest ever to hold that rank) liberated Białystok on 18 July 1944 together with General Zakharov. He was twice made a Hero of the Soviet Union and, at the time of his death in action on 18 February 1945, was the Soviet Supreme Commander of East Prussia. He was initially buried in Vilnius, near a square named after him, but, after Lithuania declared its independence from the Soviet Union in 1990, his remains were reburied in Moscow. Although it is sometimes stated that he was born of Jewish parents, apparently that was not so (see T. Segev, ‘My Kin: A Jewish General who Led the Red Army’, *Haaretz*, 15 Feb. 2013; available at <<http://www.haaretz.com/weekend/the-makings-of-history/my-kin-a-jewish-general-who-led-the-red-army-1.503713>> (accessed 14 Nov. 2015)).

⁶⁶ A distance of 19 miles.

this episode of Borkowski—that was one of her main accusations and complaints on the *batlanut* or, as they say in Erets Yisra'el, the impracticality [*i-meshkiyut*]—of Abba.

What did Abba think at that time when, from all of his toil, nothing was left for him except for those shares in Prostken and the little remnant in Grajewo in the cellar of the house of Schreider, in which were hidden most of the pillows and covers, the vessels, boots, etc.? (How much did we use to 'hide' in those years? When in Białystok in 1915 the Germans commandeered all vessels of copper, kettles, bathtubs, door locks, and the like—we dug a pit in the courtyard of our flat, in the house of Pekar in Białostoczańska Street. Ima gave me most of her copper vessels to hide in it. Who acquired those copper treasures that were in the *genizah*?) Father was confused, very depressed. His incomplete words in a halting Russian-Polish to the Russian commandant in Prostken, who was lying half drunk in an easy chair, his lament on his plundered storehouse, his request that they should help him to find the traces of the merchandise that had been plundered, etc. will not depart from my memory until my last day on earth. It was one of the saddest and most depressing scenes in which I saw Abba. Also Hayim Murzi who brought us to Prostken was depressed, silent. Silently, we returned on the road from Prostken to Grajewo, the orphaned and the forsaken,⁶⁷ that until 1 August 1914 had been pulsating with much traffic and 'life'. And also the face of the forest changed. The forest, most of whose paths we knew, and sometimes when childishness and a little unruliness descended on Abba (this spirit was in him, and one should look deeper into this detail, and it moved him to depart from the way of the community of Grajewo in some respects), he would take his Gemara and tell me to take mine, and we would go to the forest to learn in the bosom of nature. A unique combination of the old and the new. The voice of Abba sounded throughout the forest, and I was a little ashamed . . .

And it was not so with our Jack, may he live. He did not go with his Gemara to the forest. Zeidel Carmin and he 'joined forces' to look for little animals (as the author of Hebrew dictionaries in the past, I call everything that crawls and swarms in the forests 'little animals'). As an investigator of nature, as a botanist, he went to the forest between Grajewo and Prostken—and filled our house with little animals that would be placed in bottles, etc. How much I mocked this 'waste of time' in my heart—and I did not know that 'foolishness' like this sometimes serves as the first indication of great natural scientists.⁶⁸ Jack examined the crawling and swarming in the forests of Grajewo and Prostken, and I used to look at the crawling and

⁶⁷ Compare this with the subtitle of Rawidowicz, 'Graveye: Aspiring and Dreaming'.

⁶⁸ Jack left Grajewo in 1909 to study at the Gymnasium Herzliya in Tel Aviv (see *Grajewo Poland*, 70, 74). Forced to leave Ottoman Palestine at the outbreak of the First World War because he was a Russian citizen, he joined the Zion Mule Corps and fought at Gallipoli and then joined the Jewish Legion. After the war, he went to the United States and received his doctorate of medicine from Johns Hopkins University. At the time of his death he was chief pathologist and director of laboratories at St Claire's Hospital in New York. A Joseph Carmin (later Carmi?), son of Jacob Carmin, also left Grajewo

swarming and struggling among the men and women of Grajewo.⁶⁹ Most of the days of our childhood we spent together, we slept in one bed almost until the day when Jack travelled to Suwalki to prepare for the exam for the gymnasium—and the eyes and hearts of the two of us are pointed in such different directions (maybe only apparently). I was afraid—to tell the truth—of every crawling and swarming thing in the forest. When years later I would walk with Esther in the woods of Oranienburg⁷⁰ and elsewhere—and Abraham joined us a little on our ways—I used to take care that she would not pluck and eat from all that was growing in the fields and in the woods. . . . However, over time Esther taught me some of the secrets of the woods. Like our Jack, her heart was also much given to every crawling thing that crawled on the face of the earth. Meanwhile the world has changed and also the crawlers in the forests have changed. In the forests of Poland then tens of thousands of our brothers and sisters crawled and swarmed in the underground, from Grajewo to the border of the Soviet Union. In the forests of Poland they did not crawl and they did not swarm—in the forests of Poland they forged swords and prepared war against the enemy of the People of Israel, that is the enemy of the world, the enemy of every man and every woman and every child, the most impure insect since the day God created insects in the world: Adolf Hitler and the millions of his soldiers. In the forests of Poland between 1940 and 1945, fathers did not study Gemara peacefully on pleasant summer days, and sons did not gather animals and plants. In the forests of Poland, men of the underground were hungry for bread—and they preserved the image of God. Now they are coming out of the forests of Poland to its towns and villages—the remnants, the saved, those whom all the evils of the forest could not overcome, who withstood every trial. Are also our brothers and sisters numerous among them? How many of the three million Jews of Poland were saved in the forests of Poland? What percent? There is not yet an answer.

Each person has their own forest. The forest of our childhood was that between Grajewo and Prostken—through which Abba would pass every day to find food for his household, through which mother would pass on the days before holidays to dress her sons and daughters in Lyck,⁷¹ in the storehouses of Charlak . . . Jacobi (what was his first name?), etc. At the opening of this forest stands Chernyakhovsky the Jew and prepares himself to conquer East Prussia and everything beyond it, and the miracle of Tannenberg⁷² will completely pass, and an end will come to the wicked kingdom of Hitler. There is no Abba, there is no Ima, the forests of Grajewo and Prostken are not ours: it is very far from us and not only in space, also the

to study at the Gymnasium Herzliya. He became a teacher and author of various textbooks on zoology, botany, and biology and the founder of Independent Biology Laboratories (see *ibid.* 70, 254).

⁶⁹ For one such observation, see n. 80 below.

⁷⁰ On the Havel River, north of Berlin.

⁷¹ Lyck was in East Prussia until 1945, when it became a part of Poland and was renamed Elk.

⁷² Where the Russian army attempting to invade East Prussia at the beginning of the First World War was destroyed.

tombstone of Ima and Saba and Savta and others have not been left in their places. When we will go to the ancestral graves in Grajewo and Białystok, there will not be a marker for our graves.⁷³ We were as if silent, does silence have a tombstone? We are silent, even most of those who remain alive are hidden in that silence. Things are hard to say, they are hard to grasp adequately, the heart will not reveal to the mouth. And nevertheless: the end of Hitler is approaching. Blessed be God, blessed be He! And I must stop here—in order not to burden the plane. . . .

10 January 1947: Leeds, to Rivka and Fishel, Moshav Merhaviva

This is not a time for memories, even though the engagement of the first granddaughter of Abba and Ima⁷⁴ has in it to raise several chapters of life from the abyss of forgetfulness, so that they not be completely forgotten. If I am free to turn to it one day, maybe I will sit down and raise something from that abyss. All of the letters of Abba (the bridegroom) to Ima in the days of their engagement are preserved in my memory. The writing desk that Ima brought from Białystok—do you remember, Rivka, the journey of Ima to Białystok, in order to purchase new furniture?—had one special quality: its cover was not ‘stuck’ to the table. Some weeks after it entered our house, I discovered this secret (and then I was around 11 or 12), and so I would go and raise this cover when Abba was in Prostken and left me to study Torah in the narrow bedroom of Abba and Ima, in which it was impossible to move at all, but it was possible to nod over a page of Gemara . . . and to look at what was hidden in it. Beside Abba’s diary that stopped in the middle⁷⁵ was a package of letters from Abba to Ima, and a thick blue string held it together. The writing was the nice writing of Abba, the paper was yellowish and ‘becoming old’ and its contents were full of love as stated . . . not much love, but guidance and education. The tendency of Abba to educate was prominent in him, apparently, also in the days that he went after Ima in the desert of Grajewo, in a land that was not known for romance and other evil spirits. The language—German, of course in Hebrew letters—the German was certainly not especially elegant (a few years ago I discovered among the papers of Sokolow, which have no end, in his house in London, his first diary, and it too was written in German in Hebrew letters.⁷⁶ . . . He sought to train his fingers to German and to enlightenment). Its basis was in the approach of Chanina Grohn (the grandfather of our Rose of Jacob! God sits in the heavens and matches pairs, is it not so? And that Chanina Grohn used to come to us on Purim and sing ‘Shoshanat ya’akov’ [The Rose of Jacob], and afterwards Jacob [Jack] came to New York and sang the ‘Rose of Jacob’ in his own way. . . .⁷⁷),

⁷³ This fear of Rawidowicz’s was indeed justified (see n. 30 above).

⁷⁴ Chana Oldak (1922–2012), daughter of Rivka and Fishel Oldak, married Shmuel Porat (1922–2010) in 1947.

⁷⁵ The manuscript, written in Hebrew, is still extant.

⁷⁶ After Nahum Sokolow died in London in 1936, the World Zionist Organization asked Rawidowicz to go through his Nachlass, and in 1943 he published *Sefer sokolov*, which he had edited.

⁷⁷ Jack married Rose Weinstein, daughter of the New York Zionist and philanthropist Solomon

who taught Abba and Ima. In one of his letters, Abba described to Ima the story of Purim: Haman and Mordechai, Esther and Ahasuerus. There was in his description a little of the wonderful Targum sheni,⁷⁸ as I realized later. These were not love letters in their usual sense. They were, as hinted, letters of guidance, and they were appropriate for the reading of a 12-year-old boy like me, who violated boundaries and looked at what was not written for him. . . . Where are these letters? Have they been lost in Grajewo together with the bundle of my childhood writings: my first story, that Druyanov⁷⁹ declared unprintable (may his memory be blessed)?⁸⁰

30 July 1947: Ilfracombe, Devon, on summer holiday, to Abraham, Tel Aviv

You are right, my handwriting is 'declining': tiredness, much writing. (I wrote and copied [drafts of] my book of about 150 pages in *Metsudah* around five times during the last year! And additionally . . . Master of the World, 'old age' also does a little.) And my confidence in you does much. I am confident that you will try to read that which I write to you, and therefore I permit myself a little leniency. This permission is not nice, forgive me. A little my pen also does. I am not satisfied with my fountain pen. For years I have been searching for a nice fountain pen and in vain. 'Ararat'⁸¹ in Berlin—an interesting slip of the pen. And this is additional proof that usually I do not go back and reread my letters to you. Most of my letters I go back and proofread. Should I therefore ask for your forgiveness? No, on the contrary.

*20 December 1947: on board the Cunard SS Queen Mary from Southampton to New York, to Abraham, Tel Aviv*⁸²

The *Queen Mary* sails on the water, and I am on it. It is really a king's palace. Whoever has not seen this ship (of 81,000 tons) has not seen almost anything, it is a real

J. Weinstein (1880–1974) and his wife Fanny, née Grohn (1882–1969), and granddaughter of Chanina Grohn (c. 1835–?). On Chanina Grohn, see *Grajevo Poland*, 13.

⁷⁸ An Aramaic translation and midrashic elaboration of the book of Esther.

⁷⁹ Alter Druyanov (1870–1938), Hebrew writer, Zionist activist, and editor of *Ha'olam* from 1909 to 1914, best remembered for his comprehensive anthology of Jewish humour (*Sefer habediḥah vechaḥidud*, 3 vols. (Tel Aviv, 1935–8)).

⁸⁰ This story, entitled 'Shenei aḥim' ('Two Brothers') which Rawidowicz had submitted to *Ha'olam*, dealt with the relationship between Rawidowicz's father and one of his uncles, presumably Shraga Moshe, a theme that Rawidowicz treats in several letters.

⁸¹ Ararat Publishing Company was established in London in 1942 by Rawidowicz and the two London Mizrahi leaders, Alexander Margulies and Ben Zion Margulies. Ararat's main publications included the Hebrew miscellany *Metsudah* and *Sefer dubnom*, both edited by Rawidowicz, and Rawidowicz's *Bavel viyerushalayim* (see B. Ravid, 'The World of Ararat and its Fortress: From the Letters of Simon Rawidowicz to Alexander Margulies', in Rawidowicz, *State of Israel, Diaspora and Jewish Continuity*, 248–74; A. A. Greenbaum, *A History of the Ararat Publishing Company* (Jerusalem, 1998)).

⁸² Rawidowicz's first trip to the US, to serve as visiting professor at the College of Jewish Studies in Chicago during the spring semester of 1948.

city of a king. Over two thousand travellers. A 'raiser and lowerer' ('lift' in the vernacular) is in it, and not one but a 'street' of stores in which you find everything that cannot be purchased in England, and the table is prepared. Only those who succeed in obtaining provisions from the blackest of the black markets in England have such foods, the best of the best. Yesterday, on the eve of the sabbath, the 'queen' departed and what I have seen and tasted in those twenty-four hours, I have not seen and have not tasted since the war broke out. Really, how right were the words of Sholem Aleichem: a man shall always sell his possessions as long as he remains a 'rich man'. This world was created only for people like them, for those who travel among the first-class travellers, with an array of luxuries that would not be believed were it to be told. And even so, I renounce all luxuries. Would that I were able at this moment to open the door of my small house in Leeds and to look at Esther and Chaki and to eat with them the meal of Rabbi Hidka,⁸³ a piece of bread and 'herring'. You know how much I liked those 'herrings'.⁸⁴ . . . And the *Queen Mary* sails—no, flies. It ploughs a path in the great sea, the Atlantic, and who will tell it what it should do. It hits the waves with strength: it is not a ship, it is a complete city, a city mainly of iron, the iron 'flies' in the sea and in it over a thousand people are enjoying and luxuriating—and among them are also angry, sad, and depressed faces, refugees from Europe (also in first class!) who are fleeing from the danger of the atom, etc. And the undersigned, to where is his face set? Why is he sheltering in the shadow of this 'queen'? Has it been decreed upon him to try and to sink roots (the last?) in America, which he feared all his life? If he had wanted to, he would have entered it half a jubilee ago. Every wandering Jew speaks in the language of the father of every wanderer, the third of our patriarchs, the forefather of all immigrants: I did not come to reside, nor to settle here. Woe unto me from my impulses and woe unto me from my creator. . . . I do not want to be buried alive in the holy community of Leeds, I do not want to sink roots in America and it will be hard for me to accept the offer (when it will be officially suggested) regarding succeeding Klausner.⁸⁵

And so I travel to the kingdom across the seas. Who would ever have imagined this journey, and under these conditions!

Who in our family was the first to wander afar to America? Among the closest: Uncle Mordechai. It was not yet his time to go to the army and even so they decided (there was not a parliament in our family and decisions were accepted . . .) that he should go to America. Savta agreed and Aunt Liba supported this decision; Ima hesitated a little, to a slight extent she wanted this. Why? There was apparently a hopeful whisper that maybe Mordechai would be attracted to Rivka, then

⁸³ A fourth-generation *tana* (mishnaic sage) and pupil of Rabbi Akiba. According to Rabbi Hidka, who believed that one should eat four meals on the sabbath, a simple light fourth meal was sufficient to satisfy the requirement (see *Shab.* 117b–118a).

⁸⁴ Rawidowicz frequently subsisted on bread and herrings during his student days in Berlin.

⁸⁵ As professor of modern Hebrew literature at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

called Alta. Certainly you did not know about this. They were almost the same age, approximately. Savta gave birth to him after the birth of the first daughter to Abba and Ima (she who died and her sister who came after her⁸⁶). Ima and Abba were apparently thinking it over—and mainly Mordechai began becoming a little close to the socialists and the anarchists, so to speak, in Grajewo. He would read their brochures and distribute them. . . . This apparently influenced Uncle Mordechai. The inhabitants of the house began fearing police, searches: a supporter of revolutionaries (actually there were no revolutionaries in our family)! Domesticity and moderation ruled in it. Religiosity, nationalism, yes, but not revolution: the depth was missing. The simplicity of Abba was pleasant, but it was not sufficient: it did not have in it to arouse the depths of the heart. In his simplicity he solved contradictions and did not adequately reconcile them; he joined the torn and did not penetrate to their depth; he was missing depth that descended to the bottom of things, not on the plain meaning alone will man live, every just middle is not sufficient, and on this more another time. And so they decided that Mordechai would go to America. There lived the brother of Saba or Savta on the side of Ima. . . . And in those days, whoever went to America was as one brought to burial, a living person was transformed in America into a ‘picture’—living young people went, wandered, fled there. At first, they would send a little money and pictures in which one saw wonderful and strange surprises that an eye had never seen in Grajewo, and after a while the pictures disappeared and sometimes the money ceased and was no longer seen, they descended to confusion and the eyes of mothers and grandmothers were tearful over children who were exiled and no one gathered them and redeemed them

And we then lived in the house of Sheinke—you will not remember it, that house that father bought ‘on condition’ for five years⁸⁷—a terrifying house, in which the last (the youngest) of our brothers, Eliyahu Zalman, was born and died [1908], the store in its entry was all desolate, and Palti the *melamed* [elementary Hebrew teacher] was on the second floor, he was the pioneer for the enactment of the laws for the defence of the tenants . . . (not only did he object to any increase in the rent, but he did not pay it at all, and when Abba would draw his attention to it, he would respond: ‘I have nothing against you, but what have you, Reb Chaim, against me, what can I do?’ As a reward for his not paying rent, we gave our house for the reception when his son married . . .) And one winter morning, certainly it was a cloudy morning, Mordechai came—he was 17 or 18—to say goodbye (Alta [Rivka] at that time was preparing for the entrance exam to the gymnasium in Łomża) to the members of our family—and the house was full of wailing. Ima began, and Rivka responded aloud. Rivka stood in the kitchen and was boiling the pot of milk

⁸⁶ Razel and Hetl.

⁸⁷ In a letter of 1 April 1946 from Leeds to Shabtai in Be’er Tuvia, Rawidowicz recollected: ‘Our house—a real house, the house of Sheinke “on condition”, for five years: if Sheinke does not return from America, the house will be ours forever, and if she does return, the house will return to her possession.’

(that big pot of copper that we buried with all the other copper vessels in Białostoczańska Street, to rescue it from the army of Wilhelm II. Have they been taken out from their burying place?) and her eyes were dripping tears, they almost dropped into the pot, tears do not make the milk unkosher. Abba coughed (in the language of his grandson in Leeds: 'I clear my throat') and as was his way in confusion, he raised his voice: 'Go in health, be a *mentsch*.' . . . And Mordechai answered, ashamed and evasive. . . . And I, the little one, I was around 10 then—my heart was pounding, without pause. A living person, Uncle Mordechai, who was so dear to me, was being brought to burial: he was going to distant America. He would go to Bremen, where he would remain for three weeks (apparently for reasons of quarantine, they would keep every immigrant from Europe in Bremen or Hamburg or another sea port) and afterward he would send a 'picture' and afterwards and afterwards. . . . That day of departure will never leave my memory—I also thought of him two days ago, when I closed the door of my house in Leeds (I am in Leeds, and Leeds? Master of the Universe. . . . who is playing jokes with me: Is this joke really true?)

23 September 1949: Chicago, to Abraham, Tel Aviv

Have you looked at *Grayeve yisker-bukh*? How numerous are the exaggerations in the article of Wojslawski⁸⁸ on the dress, etc. of the inhabitants of Grajewo, on the 'bridegrooms' [from other places]. Was there a community without such bridegrooms? Who is that Gorczycki?⁸⁹ He does not write with great wisdom, there is much *batlanut* in his words. Some inaccurate details (even on Abba, that he was a delegate to the first or second [Zionist] congress⁹⁰).

3 December 1949: Chicago, to Abraham, Tel Aviv

A week ago, we sat in a certain hotel in Chicago—the three of us and another eighty people including Jack and Rose—and celebrated the barmitzvah of Chaki, with much 'glory and splendour': a proper meal, chicken kosher for even the strictest, wine (one of my 'admirers', a half-Yiddishist, supplied our wine needs very inexpensively), a nice hall, prepared tables, speeches (five altogether), communal singing in Hebrew—and those present enjoyed themselves very much. All week the telephone did not stop ringing: everyone thanked and praised, etc. They had never seen such a *simhah* in this city etc. Chaki recited his *haftarah* [portion from the Prophets] in the morning in the synagogue, he delivered his *derashah* once in Hebrew and once in translation (on the birthright, the State of Israel, Jacob and Esau) and also on Saturday night, on Malachi, from his *haftarah*, against those who desecrated the Temple, etc., those wicked ones who do not sacrifice peace offerings

⁸⁸ Tzvi Wojslawski (1889–1957), Grajewo-born Hebrew writer, translator, and activist, who lived in Berlin from 1921 and emigrated to Erets Yisra'el in 1934 (see *Grajewo Poland*, 70, 260, 304, *et passim*).

⁸⁹ On Yitzhak Gorczycki, see *ibid.* 89 n. 17.

⁹⁰ See n. 7 above.

—*Oy, gevalt*—and now we need not only a pure offering but also a pure heart etc. His Hebrew *derashot* made a great impression.

At my barmitzvah, no one from our family was present except for Uncle Shraga Moshe and Uncle Shraga [Feivel]⁹¹—and I spoke about the passage in tractate *Menahot* [37a], dealing with whether a person who did not have a left-hand and was unable to put tefillin on his arm was required to put them on his head. I took my *derashah* from the *Sha'agat aryeh*⁹² on my own, Abba did not help me, and as I was speaking, Moshe Avraham the *melamed* interrupted me several times in order to make me fail, to examine me, to make it more difficult for the boy who was standing and engaging in *pilpul* on whether that unfortunate creature was required to put on the tefillin of the head. In those days they did not pamper young Jewish schoolchildren, they made them taste the yoke of the Torah in all its severity, and if a 13-year-old took upon himself to give a *derashah* from the *Sha'agat aryeh*, every learned person had to put stumbling blocks in his way, they knew that the young preacher would not fail—and if I mentioned the name of *Sha'agat aryeh* last Saturday night, maybe three or four out of the eighty-three people present would have known what I was talking about. . . . So we roar in our day—there are no lions and no roars—and there are celebrations and singing and praising Torah without end. . . . I think that I was the only one in our family who gave a barmitzvah *derashah*. Jack did not speak, and those who came after me did not speak. Those lucky ones! The bottles of brandy that I 'picked up'⁹³ in Grajewo . . . for the barmitzvah of Meir, did one not also enjoy them at your barmitzvah in Nikolevsky Street? After me, Abba was tired and he did not place again upon you that yoke that he placed upon me. He came to terms with his fate: children who would not occupy themselves only with Torah or would not occupy themselves at all with Torah, and I was the sacrificial lamb—the scapegoat for Torah and for the *derashah*, etc.

And tonight, after the sabbath, if Abba were here in our narrow apartment, he would have been a little satisfied. Chaki decided to visit tomorrow the 'barmitzvah club', in which barmitzvah boys put on tefillin every Sunday morning and afterwards have breakfast together. I do not know how long he will continue in his faithfulness to the club and to tefillin—at any rate he asked me tonight to show him how to put on tefillin. . . . I taught him this secret—and it was amazing: for tens of years I had not put on tefillin—may the Master of the World in his great goodness

⁹¹ See n. 55 above.

⁹² *Sha'agat aryeh (Roar of the Lion)* by Aryeh Leib ben Asher Gintsburg (or Gunzberg) (1695/6–1785), also known by his French name, Lion Asser. Born in Minsk, he was teaching in the yeshiva there by 1733 but had to give up his position in 1742 and subsequently travelled in Lithuania and the German lands. Eventually he served as rabbi in Metz until his death. He rejected the *pilpul* method of interpretation and insisted on a direct approach to the Talmud. Republished over forty times, *Sha'agat aryeh* is still considered an essential rabbinic text. See S. Schwarzfuchs, 'Gintsburg, Aryeh Leib ben Asher', in G. D. Hundert (ed.), *The Yivo Encyclopedia of Jewry in Eastern Europe*, <http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Gintsburg_Aryeh_Leib_ben_Asher> (accessed 6 Feb. 2016).

⁹³ A rather free translation of Rawidowicz's adaptation of the first line of Hayim Nahman Bialik's poem *Lo zakhiti ba'or min hahefker* as *shezakhiti min hahefker*.

forgive me—but this wisdom is still preserved in my memory, maybe the fingers of a man remember, remember better than his mind. . . . With what enthusiasm and holy trembling did I begin to put on tefillin in the new *beit midrash* in Grajewo a month before I reached 13 years—and in my memory is preserved one cloudy morning in Białystok on which I returned from a boring night at my courses⁹⁴ and suddenly the desire for tefillin was taken away from me. I took them off and I returned them in order not to make Abba sad, and from that day on my heart never moved me to return to the tefillin bag, and now, after around thirty-three years, I am sitting and teaching my only son the knowledge [*torah*] of putting on tefillin.

29 January 1951: Chicago, to Shabtai, Be'er Tuvia

[Chaki] did not grow up with that fear of the Poles, etc. that we did—even though he experienced much antisemitism in his school in Leeds—nor with that lack of economic security with which we grew up. He did not see his father exchanging notes and groan greatly over the notes and the interest—when I was 10, I would run with the notes to Nowiński to get 1,000 roubles, bring them to Kopciowski, and receive in exchange for them another note, and after a month it would repeat. I used to do this for free, without any money—and Rabbi Reuven Vilenski afterwards moved in on me and became the middleman between Abba the borrower who needed that middleman who was entirely tobacco, and in our childhood he used also to fill our nostrils with tobacco, he enjoyed seeing us crying. . . . Chaki never saw his father get up at 3 or 4 in the morning and never heard him pleasantly chant a page of Gemara after he had sat for many hours bent over his ledgers to see whether the accounts were in order, whether the debtors had paid their debts, and his heart was heavy because the expenses were greater than the income: gymnasia in Marijampolė and Tel Aviv,⁹⁵ etc. and the Antmans⁹⁶ took considerable advantage of his honesty and the mushrooms had not turned out well for some years, and Feivel Moshe came every month to demand his interest on the sums that he lent him and on sums that he had invested in his business as a partner. Chaki did not hear his father raise and lower his voice and pour out ‘when the morning stars sang together’—and it is unfortunate. . . . I have neither voice nor a hint of a voice In short, different, so different are the conditions in which we grew up and in which our children—and your grandchildren—are growing up from Be'er Tuvia to Chicago.

23 August 1951: on the way from Chicago to Waltham, to Rivka and Fishel, Moshav Merhavia

Rivka, in your last letter you raised the question of Abba's books. I have thought much about it. Some can be given to the library in Merhavia—but most should be

⁹⁴ See n. 40 above.

⁹⁵ Jack studied in Tel Aviv; Rivka and Shifra attended the gymnasium in Marijampolė.

⁹⁶ A family of horse-sellers (see below).

kept in our family. For example, the Vilna Shas [edition of the Babylonian Talmud] and *Yad haḥazakah* of the Rambam [Maimonides' *Mishneh torah*]⁹⁷—those books with which Abba learned with me for many years in Grajewo—it is appropriate that if there are no other suitable owners for them, then I should look into them in the years of my old age. . . . They were the books of my youth. How many tears did I spill on them—when my soul did not desire that page of Gemara, and I studied it with Abba so as not to sadden him? If I could have made myself 'merciless' to him, as Jack did, I would certainly have stopped learning Gemara immediately after I returned from Lida—but I could not, I saw how much he desired that at least one of his sons should learn a page of Gemara, I was the sacrificial lamb. . . . I carried some of the volumes of the Talmud to the forest—in Bogusza Street⁹⁷—when the spirit descended on Abba and he decided to study a page of Gemara in the forest, and taking off his coat, not as all people who go to the woods to sing, to rest, to make love, etc.—no, Abba would go with us to study a page of Gemara. . . . In some of the tractates of the Vilna Shas, I also wrote some notes in my handwriting. . . . In some of them hairs of Abba certainly are preserved—for it was 'forbidden' to throw even one hair on the ground . . . and this is also so with the *Mishneh torah* of the Rambam, it too was a book of my youth. And actually I am dealing with it much, sometimes day and night, during the last fifteen years as I prepare [for publication] *Sefer hamada* that is dedicated to the memory of Abba,⁹⁸ and how nice it would be if I could use it now, after an interval of around forty years . . .

I would suggest, practically, that someone should draw up a list of the books that are in Merhavia. If the members of the family in Merhavia are not interested in those books, one should try to put them in the hands of people who would find them useful. So, first of all let us make a list of the books, and we will see, and afterwards we will decide on their fate. Now that I have moved to Waltham, I have the possibility—that is, the space—for books of a larger format such as the Vilna Shas and *Mishneh torah*. By the way, in Merhavia there was—I saw it in 1925—the *Sefer ha'agadah* that my students in the courses gave me as a present in 1915 or 1916—is it still there? I think a lot about printing the remaining portions of *Merhavei yitshaki*, it is our duty to publish them—Mosad Harav Kook promised me that they would print them, but one cannot rely on it.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Today, Elcka Street, route E65, the road north to Bogusze, Prostki, and Elk. The forest still exists, but the urban area has encroached upon it.

⁹⁸ Rawidowicz planned to publish a critical edition of *Sefer hamada* with a lengthy commentary. He sent the text of the critical edition to his old friend Rubin Mass in Jerusalem but was unable to continue to work on the commentary during the war because the manuscripts and books that he needed were removed for safe keeping. After the war Mass was unable to keep the text that had been set in type any longer, and printed it with the title *Rabi mosheh ben maimon: sefer hamada (mishneh torah—sefer rishon)* (Jerusalem, 1946; repr. 1974) (see also Rawidowicz's introduction and dedication to his father). For his other publication plans for Maimonides, see Ravid, 'Introduction', to Rawidowicz, *Iyunim bemaḥshevet yisra'el*, i, esp. 8–10 (Heb. pagination).

⁹⁹ In Moshav Merhavia in the Jezreel Valley, Chaim Yitzhak divided his time between physical work

16 August 1952: New York, to Rivka and Fishel, Moshav Merhavia

Rivka, Abraham wrote to me about your illness. I hope that it has passed without returning and that you have returned to your former self. In the days of my youth, I used to think that life was given only to the healthy. I was never sick in my life: that is, in the days of my youth. When Ima of blessed memory went with me to Dr Hendel (around two years before the [First World] War), he said to her: ‘Your son is strong and healthy. His exemption from the army will cost you much money. . . . He will cost you 100 roubles.’ . . . Hendel—I am not sure whether he was a slaughterer or a shoe-maker, but I am sure that he was an uncouth person—his hand was in everything. He did not hesitate to perform every operation that came to his hands—and interestingly, he did not kill many. . . . Shimshon the *shamash* who brought the boys of Grajewo into the covenant of Abraham our father with dirty fingers, whose long nails were full of *makhorka*¹⁰⁰ of the very best, etc., and with his lips that were not cleaner than his nails, he would suck the blood of the circumcision of those babes who had not sinned—he too never poisoned a child of the children of Grajewo. . . . When I think of Dr Hendel and Shmulkinka on the one hand and Shimshon the *shamash* on the other—I tend to say: over-rated is hygiene; excessive is the great care that we take

And yesterday in my dream Moshe Yossel the *shamash* appeared to me, I spoke with him about his life, etc. Why Moshe Yossel? I lectured that day to an American Jewish audience, and in it sat a Jew with a moustache and a little beard whose face was similar to the faces of many Jews in Grajewo, the town of our birth, and that Jew asked me a certain question. I answered him—and during the day and the night he was transformed and appeared in my dream in the image of old Moshe Yossel. . . . We are, so to speak, masters of our deeds and our thoughts when we are awake—but when night comes with its dreams we are completely powerless, abandoned to the hands of . . . to the hands of whom? Our own hands or the hands of a playful angel who mocks us with all kinds of ridicule—and sometimes also

in the fields and writing a lengthy talmudic commentary supporting Rashi against the criticisms of the Tosafists, entitled *Merḥavei yitshaki*, a word play on Merhavia where he lived and the Hebrew word *merhav* in the sense of ‘broadening’ or ‘opening up’ the commentary of (Shlomo ben) Yitshak (Rashi). A 544-page volume containing his analysis of tractates *Berakhot* and *Shabat* was published in Warsaw in 1929, with a *haskamah* (approbation) by the Ashkenazi chief rabbi of Mandatory Palestine, Abraham Isaac (Hakohen) Kook. A second volume of 348 pages dealing with tractates *Pesaḥim* and *Eruvin* was published by his sons Shabtai and Meir in the State of Israel in 1973. The remainder of the manuscript remains unpublished, except for two and a half pages from tractate *Sukah*, published together with Rabbi Kook’s *haskamah*, a brief biographical introduction by Rawidowicz, and a foreword by Simon Federbush in *Rashi: His Teachings and Personality. Essays on the Occasion of the 850th Anniversary of his Death*, ed. S. Federbush (New York, 1950), 225–32. The approbation of Rabbi Kook, the foreword by Federbush, and the brief biography by Rawidowicz were reprinted in the second volume of *Merḥavei yitshaki*, together with a brief biography of Chaim Yitshak and a photograph of him working at his desk in Moshav Merhavia.

¹⁰⁰ A cheap low-quality cigarette tobacco.

pains our hearts and makes us greatly fear. . . . And so I began with my dream about Moshe Yossel—and I ended with that fearful dream that has recurred an uncountable number of times during the last thirty years: I am in a coach of the train that returns from Prostken to Grajewo and Grajewo is Polish,¹⁰¹ and suddenly a great fear grips my heart: *Oj*, the Poles will discover my origin and will see that I am a deserter, I fled from them and from their army . . . and I am looking for my new certificate, the latest, in every pocket and I do not find it: is it that ‘stamp’ that was lost, that ‘stamp’ that we used to receive in the office of the official at the end of Bogusza Street—or my German certificate or the English? God knows, and I dream frightened and agitated: What shall I say to the Polish official? What will he do to me? How will I escape from him? And I ask myself: Why did you come here? Did you not know that you are a deserter and it is forbidden for you to cross the Polish border, etc.?—and when my great fear overflows its banks, I wake up and my heart is beating fast. After a dream like this, there is no sleep for my eyes and no slumber for my eyelids all the night, and I wake up tired and broken—because I was in the trap, in the hands of the Polish border official. . . . See, thirty-three years ago I fled from Polish Białystok, and I am residing ‘safely’ in the land of Columbus, after I resided ‘safely’ in two countries in ‘great safety’: Germany and England—and that Monday evening, when Abraham came to the meeting of the council of the [Jewish] community in Białystok and passed me a note that the police were asking for me and that I had to be mobilized, still lives in my heart, apparently, and it is a source for all those dreams, dreams of confusion. . . . And even so—it is good for a man that he should dream a little. Not every dream is fearful and frightening; there are also pleasant dreams that gladden the heart of man. But . . . I very much miss the prayer book of Jacob Emden.¹⁰² . . . That prayer book that had been owned by Abba contained dream-interpretations of all kinds, interpretations for every dream. Sometimes I wanted to look into it—even though I knew that not everything is according to that prayer book. There are dreams whose interpretation also Rabbi Jacob Emden, may his merit protect us, did not know.

I will return to the beginning of my letter: in the days of my youth I thought in my haste that there is no remedy for a sick man, and when in the last years I began ‘to feel’ a little here and there—I freed myself from that ‘prejudice’. I discovered that it is possible to live and to work also with pains, and one should not think much about illnesses and similar matters. Who is a healthy man? Everyone who is able to work a little, to do something. Also something nice: there is no complete health in this world. These words of *epikorsut* [heresy] I am writing in the house of our brother, the doctor [Jack], in New York! . . . Such nerve, to sit in the house of a

¹⁰¹ Prostken remained part of Germany until 1945, while Poland regained its independence after the First World War.

¹⁰² Jacob Emden (1697–1776), a rabbi who spent most of his life in Altona and strongly opposed Shabateanism.

doctor and to deny everything. The main thing, Rivka, do not pay attention to illness or pains. We all, thank God, have pains, and it is of no significance, may they have mercy from the heavens.

10 September 1952 (20 Elul): Waltham, to Shifra and Yeruham, Afula

I enjoyed very much, Yeruham, your letter about Shifra and her spiritual and physical activities. All her days she carried a yoke, it is good for a man to carry a yoke in his youth—and it is good for a woman that she should cast off the yoke from time to time. In the days of her youth, she was appointed or helped with cooking and taking care of babies. I described to Jack and Rose how Shifra would rock the cradle of ‘our babies’ and her song—I entertained them, not at the expense of Shifra, heaven forbid, nor at the expense of the Grajewo of Haimek and Sheinke, etc., but I re-created for them the picture of days past—and the distant past can give pleasure. Jack really does not remember anything from the days of our youth. It seems to me that only you, Shifra, and our sister Rivka remember our way of life—but you, with all due respect, put on ‘rose-coloured glasses’ a little too much, and so arrive at amazing stories about weekly (or daily? . . .) baths in our house in Grajewo. You have forgotten that big barrel whose rings were very rusty, that would collect rainwater on rainy days because that water was good—in the opinion of the inhabitants of Grajewo and its neighbouring towns—for washing and for laundry, and that barrel was not filled with water every week and not even every month. If He who gives life to all living things will enable me to come some day to the Holy Land, I will explain to you exactly, according to my memory and from the hidden recesses of my old age, the daily orders and procedures in our house—from Haimek to Schreider (before Haimek I do not remember anything; when we left the house of Haimek, I was around 7), I will begin with sunrise, when we would get up early and carry pails of water from the well beyond the house of Sheinke, not far from the blacksmith (his wife was the crazy Gittele . . .). . . . I will return to your melody—the odyssey of a melody and not exactly in the version of Peretz; a day after I sang the cradle-melody of our Grajewo, the mother of Rose, Mrs Weinstein, came and began putting her granddaughter Joyce Hanna to sleep with that very melody, A . . . A . . . A . . .—from Grajewo to Dobbs Ferry in New York¹⁰³—a simple melody does not disappear from the world completely as long as a heart that absorbed it at its time still remains.

*18 July 1954 (17 Tamuz): Waltham, to Abraham, Tel Aviv*¹⁰⁴

Last week, Esther read my article in *Grayeve yisker-bukh*¹⁰⁵ (she is teaching herself to read Yiddish) and burst into laughter when she reached the description of Abba and his ‘monopoly’ on the lamentations for Zion on Tishah Be’av. Really, in the

¹⁰³ Dobbs Ferry, on the Hudson River, 25 miles north of New York City, where Jack and Rose rented an apartment for a while after the birth of Joyce Hanna in 1951.

¹⁰⁴ On 17 Tamuz 70 CE the Romans breached the walls of Jerusalem, leading to the destruction of the Temple three weeks later.

¹⁰⁵ Rawidowicz, ‘Grayeve’.

new *beit midrash* no one dared to touch this proprietary right of Abba: the lamentations for Zion of the Zionist Reb Chaim Yitzhak . . . and the year 5664 [1904] was not as all the other years. That year, he recited the lamentations as he had never done before nor would afterwards. A son was born to him, and his name would be as the name of his father—this very thing so enriched his heart. To this moment, at which I am sitting at sunset in the ‘sukkah’¹⁰⁶ that is next to my house in Waltham, that Abba never saw even in his dreams, and in that sukkah I spend the whole day, every day, from the middle of June, the beginning of the summer, and write and write and write, *Oy*, may they have mercy from the heavens—the face of Abba that morning of Tishah Be’av in the *beit midrash* is still before me. It was a very sunny morning. On Tishah Be’av, Abba used to wear a very old coat, very yellow, a kind of cloak that he never wore on the other days of the year, special for that day of mourning—and around half an hour before the beginning of the lamentations he stood ‘at his place’ and read Job properly as was the practice, and some of the householders—Reuven Vilenski, Tutelman, and many others—came up to him and congratulated him quietly, for on Tishah Be’av one does not say *mazal tov*, and he stood and hid his smile, he was not able to suppress it. Fortunate is he who has a beard and moustache, they are a nice ‘hiding place’ for a smile, etc.: that is, he struggled with his smile, and it overcame him. A special light was in his eyes. This light, the light of his face remains in my memory more than the other things. I do not remember the appearance of the face of Ima on that day, certainly they allowed us to enter on that day to recite the Shema, and the face of Abba is before me. I do not remember the other days, but the day of the *brit* is as if it were yesterday. The taste of the beans at the *brit* is still with me, and I still see someone polishing my shoes in honour of the day, the shoes of Jack and Shabtai and Meir, and the long tables that were borrowed for that purpose from the Welcoming of Guests [confraternity], if I am not mistaken, and many bottles of beer and fried goose. . . .

19 December 1954: Waltham, to Meir, Pardes Chana

We have lit the [Hanukah] candles, and we are not permitted to use them—I will not write my few lines to you in their light, which is visible to me. The light brings back the light of the Hanukah candles of Grajewo, etc.—these little candles—and I will not open my mouth to the devil of memories.

4 March 1955: Waltham, to Abraham, Tel Aviv

On 15 January I lectured at the opening ceremony of YIVO in New York—on Maimonides in Yiddish, it will be published in the *Tsukunft*, I will send it to you¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ A small gazebo under a large chestnut tree in the garden.

¹⁰⁷ S. Rawidowicz, ‘Rabbi Moses ben Maimon: tsu zayn 750-sten yortsayt, 20 tevet 1955’, *Tsukunft*, 60 (1955), 203–10, 266–73; repr. id., *Shrifin*, 73–102.

—before an audience of over 2,000 people . . . the Palace Theatre¹⁰⁸ [in Białystok] times two or three—it was a very pleasant evening. Afterwards several people from Białystok and nearby towns came up to me, some of my former students, I recognized almost all of them—after thirty-six years. . . . When travelling, my sleep always wanders—and that night it wandered seven-fold. . . . I wandered to Białystok—and my eyes did not know sleep. In Montreal, they all shouted: we never yet heard lectures such as these, never . . . and this is also so in the big New York. In Montreal, some inhabitants of Grajewo and Białystok—and friends from Lida yeshiva. . . . In another week it will be thirty years since my first visit to the Land in Merhavia!

24 August 1955 (6 Elul): Chicago, to Rivka and Fishel, Moshav Merhavia

In your letter you mentioned the Palace Theatre. On 15 January I lectured—in Yiddish on Maimonides at Hunter College at a YIVO meeting in front of 2,000 (or over 2,000) people. That evening I felt as if I were in the Palace—the large crowd in the hall reminded me of the Herzl evening in the Palace. And at the end of the event, some people from Białystok and the surrounding towns came up to me: the ‘young’ (forty years ago) Rosenthal and his wife, she had been my student in the courses, Chaya Halter (I have not seen her for forty years, she became widowed a while ago) and several more Białystokers.

In Montreal, Canada, where I lectured last December—I will write about it to Yeruham—for Montreal is a continuation of Białystok and Suchowola. . . . If I would come more frequently to New York, I would certainly meet with them, but I go very seldom and briefly from my four cubits because I have no time, and no strength, etc., etc.

7 September 1955 (20 Elul): Waltham, to Shifra and Yeruham, Afula

I wrote to Rivka on 6 Elul and I mentioned to her the visit to Montreal. In New York last winter Białystok returned and arose, and in Montreal the memory of Białystok and Grajewo and Suchowola and Goniądz was reawakened, Magid on the one hand—and Mishkin (now Mendelsson) on the other. I lived in the same room in Lida with Mishkin (principal of the Hebrew school), bed next to bed, and the third bed belonged to a third person—and now he fills an important position in Montreal. After all ‘only’ forty-three years have passed since that winter in Lida, during which we shared a room. . . . He and Magid apparently occupy the central positions in the field of education in Montreal.¹⁰⁹ Apparently ‘I did not dis-

¹⁰⁸ Located behind the Ritz Hotel, the Palace Theatre was built in 1912 by a Jew and owned by a Jewish company. It was ‘certainly the most elegant and comfortable hotel in the provincial towns of the formerly Russian-governed areas of Poland’ (Wiśniewski, *Jewish Białystok*, 52–3). It could seat 900 people and hosted Jewish speakers and popular theatre companies. Both it and the hotel were destroyed by the Nazis.

¹⁰⁹ Melech Magid (1894–1977) was born in Knyszyn, north-west of Białystok and was one of the founders of a school in Białystok named after Uri Nisan Gnessin. He arrived in Canada in 1921,

appoint' my friends from Lida and Bialystok. . . . Magid did not change much. If I met him by chance—I would recognize him. A man is recognizable by his nose. . . . A broad nose (like mine, because of my many sins) 'changes' during the course of forty years—which is not the case with a long and pointed one such as that of Magid. . . . We spent one evening in his house, in the company of some people of learning, etc. and 'I spoke'. . . . I spent four days in Montreal—and never stopped talking. . . . I returned tired and exhausted. The other cities of Canada invite me and invite me—and there is no strength and no time, etc. When there is no time and there is no strength—there is no need for it, etc.

7 November 1955: *Waltham, to Abraham, Tel Aviv*

Life is strange: Just on the day on which the news about Fink shocked me—his death in itself, the danger of the publishing or not publishing of my book that is associated with it¹¹⁰—the offer of Jacob Pat¹¹¹ (from Bialystok, do you remember him, the head of the Yiddishists. I met him several times in New York, he wrote a review of *Metsudah* in the *Tsukunft*) to be the head of the editorial board of the Jewish encyclopedia in Yiddish that will be published in New York together with the old Jewish socialist Rafael Abramovitch,¹¹² reached me. . . . In Hebrew and Zionist America—it is impossible for me to publish even one article. . . . *Bitsaron* is publishing one chapter from my book [*Bavel veyerushalayim*] for almost a year—with endless intervals.¹¹³ . . . The people of the Histadrut Ha'ivrit are sunk in

received a bachelor's degree from McGill University in 1929, was appointed head teacher when the new Central Talmud Torah school was opened, and in 1935 became principal and then director of the United Talmud Torahs. Later he organized and served as first president of Iggud, the first organization of Hebrew schools in Canada. Mordechai I. Mendelssohn (1895–1974) attended Lida yeshivah from 1907 to 1912. He was the founder and vice director of the Hebrew junior college in Vilkaviškis, Lithuania from 1919 to 1930. He arrived in Montreal in 1930 and was on the faculty of the Temple Emanuel school in Montreal until 1938. He founded and was the first director of the Adath Israel Hebrew Academy which grew from eleven pupils to over 600 under his leadership with classes from kindergarten to full-day Hebrew high school. See 'Magid, Meilach', in *Who's Who in Canadian Jewry*, ed. E. Gottesman (Montreal, 1965), 127; 'Mendelssohn, Mordechai I.', in *Who's Who in Canadian Jewry*, 128. I would like to thank Eddie Stone of the Technical Services Department of the Jewish Public Library for providing me with the dates of the deaths of Magid and Mendelssohn and Magid's obituary (*Montreal Gazette*, 22 Feb. 1977).

¹¹⁰ Rawidowicz would send his handwritten chapters of *Bavel veyerushalayim* by registered air-mail to the writer and communal leader Jacob Fink in Paris, who would then arrange for them to be typed and delivered to the printer, Éditions Polyglottes, which had been chosen because, all things considered, it was the most desirable option. The pages were then sent for binding in England or New York, depending on their final destination.

¹¹¹ Jacob Pat (1890–1966), Bialystok-born Jewish socialist, Bundist leader, author, editor, journalist, and ardent orator.

¹¹² Rafael Abramovitch (1880–1963), Bundist, Menshevik activist and leader, leader of the Socialist International, and Yiddish writer. He migrated to New York in 1940.

¹¹³ Presumably a reference to chapter 8, 'Hashpa'ah', which appeared in *Bitsaron*, 31 (1955), 223–33; 32 (1955), 163–73; 33 (1956), 91–101.

forty-nine degrees of bluff, and, behold, the Yiddishists come and offer me an opportunity: the editing of the encyclopedia. . . . According to him, I do not have to stay in New York (of course, I will not under any circumstances give up my professorship at Brandeis), but can direct the work from here and visit New York sometimes. . . . I am so exhausted today—and I do not have the strength to decide. My heart does not go for this suggestion: the issue of time, of physical strength, and of the abundance of my manuscripts that are crying out to be finished—and on the other hand, maybe the income from the encyclopedia will serve me as a source for printing my books, and I will not be dependent on a Maecenas in London or in New York. Woe unto me from my impulses: I am caught between a rock and a hard place. Today is entirely confusion and depression. You ask about the fragments that you found in my briefcase thirty or thirty-five years ago—most of them are sins of youth, I fear that I will not deal with them. Every fruit-bearing tree also has things that fall off . . . like a foetus that will not see the sun. On the other hand, it will be unfortunate if I do not succeed in publishing the book of my conversations with Bialik.¹¹⁴ Erez (Ayanot—they stole my name¹¹⁵) is interested in it. My book *Sefer hamada* (around 800 pages) is in manuscript—it would be a shame if it does not appear, and this is true of the rest of my manuscripts.¹¹⁶ Who would have thought that the day would come when my desk would be full of ‘material’—and I would not have a publisher. . . . To be sure, publishers want particularly Mendelssohn (Mosad Bialik), for example, while I give greater urgency to my other books.

12 January 1956: Chicago, to Abraham, Tel Aviv

I did not accept Pelli's offer because I must devote my few remaining days to finishing my books, and it is forbidden for me to devote my time and energy to any editing, *Metsudah*, etc. were a great sacrifice for me—and who wants my sacrifice? I also do not want to accept Pat's proposal, but the difference is clear: if I accept Pat's offer, I would be able to continue my work at Brandeis and go to New York for a day or two once a month, while Pelli's proposal means uprooting from here in order to settle completely in Pelli's offices. Troubles pile up. The Yiddish National Arbeter Farband (Po'el Hatsa'ir Histadrut of America) elected me a while ago as an ‘honorary member’—they are urging me to give a hand to the Hayim Greenberg Institute that they are going to establish in New York. . . . In their eyes H. G. was a great of the generation—and in my eyes, between us, an excellent speaker, a minor thinker, and a ‘Russian’ maskil, not a scholar and not an ‘innovator’. Nevertheless, maybe I will promise them a few lectures. On 11 March I will lecture at the annual meeting of their teachers' seminary in New York: a dinner and a lecture after

¹¹⁴ Rawidowicz, *Sihotai im bialik*.

¹¹⁵ On the Ayanot Publishing Company, see Ravid, ‘The Berlin Period’, 141–2.

¹¹⁶ See Ravid, ‘Introduction’, to Rawidowicz, *Iyunim bemaḥashevet yisra'el*, i. 7–15; id., ‘Introduction’, to Rawidowicz, *Iyunim bemaḥashevet yisra'el*, ii. 9–16.

it. A great waste of time, especially since I lectured at Brooklyn College in the beginning of December—as a result, Esther got out of this village for a day and a half, and we met with Jack and Rose and little Joyce Hanna. We spent two evenings together.

Rivka got older, according to you. And what wonder is there in this? They relate that the classical humourist Shemarya Levin¹¹⁷ used to say: ‘From year 1, one also becomes old.’ . . . Is Rivka not around 67? Or am I wrong? You did well that you decided not to waste [*word missing*] on the barmitzvah. At Jack’s barmitzvah there were not more than five or six guests and so also at my barmitzvah. I spoke from *Sha’agat aryeh* (from the tractate *Menahot*, on whether someone without a left hand was obligated to put on the tefillin of the head). . . . This ‘roaring lion’ was a rabbi in Minsk. I believe that he received four or five gold pieces a week. They said that he requested a rise and they did not give it to him, afterwards they apparently threw him out of the town. . . . A few weeks ago I met with a liberal rabbi¹¹⁸ in Boston who receives \$25,000 a year (rabbi—there is no better source of income than that among the sources of income of the People of Israel in this diaspora that is not *galut*—and these rabbis . . .), and certainly he never ever heard the name of *Sha’agat aryeh*

19 May 1956: Waltham, to Abraham, Tel Aviv

And the main thing I did not forget: fortunate is Elimelech Pomerantz of blessed memory¹¹⁹ that he reached the age of 80, that some of the greats of the spirit in the world did not reach (Bialik died at the age of 61, Krochmal, 55, etc. . . .) He was a faithful friend to Abba, a faithful Zionist and Hebraist—but to write about him? Impossible. . . . The pen does not move. . . . I did not learn anything from him. When I think of Pinhas Schoffman, for example, my heart is full of thanks to him, but it is not so with E. Pomerantz of blessed memory . . . and moreover: he was a lame teacher in all respects. He reminds me of the defects in my education (or in our educations), of the broken vessels in which they raised us, teachers who did not arouse in us our latent abilities, who did not develop in us a taste for beauty and logic, etc. They fed us with petrified objects, not even grammar did this teacher of ours of blessed memory teach us properly. He lived a long life—fine and good: it is sufficient.

I am greatly burdened with burdens to bear, people I knew who were not worth knowing, memories of books that I read upon which it was not worthwhile wasting

¹¹⁷ Shemarya (Shemaryahu) Levin (1867–1935), Zionist leader and publicist and Hebrew and Yiddish author and editor known for his outstanding oratory.

¹¹⁸ The English word ‘rabbi’ is transliterated in Hebrew characters.

¹¹⁹ Elimelech Pomerantz, Zionist and Hebrew activist, who established a modern *heder* in Grajewo and eventually settled in Erets Yisra’el. See *Grajewo Poland*, 25, 34 (‘there was also Elimelech Pomerantz, a dear and devoted Hebrew teacher (I also studied with him one semester’) (Rawidowicz, ‘Grayeve’)), 49–50, 61, 66, 68, 69, 72, 73, 76, 79, 256.

the light of the eyes. . . . If I live to write my book on Grajewo, I will devote a few lines to the deceased—but I have no desire to write specially about him. In the newspapers of the Land there is no ‘proportion’ in articles of praise about those who celebrate jubilees and words of lamentation on the deceased—a little proportion is lacking: a giant, giant!

21 December 1956: Waltham, to Shifra and Yeruham, Afula

If you would have come to our house a week ago, you would have seen Jacob Pat sitting for hours urging the undersigned to take upon himself the editorship of the Yiddish encyclopedia in New York. Hundreds of Yiddish writers are in New York—the wise men of YIVO and others and others—and just on me they set their sights: if I will not accept, they have no editor . . . (on the other hand, Hebrew literature in America has editors, a few rabbis, this ‘memorial to the destruction’ was given to two or three rabbis and functionaries, and my heart hurts). Several of my manuscripts cry out for their conclusion and preparation for print—and this man comes with an encyclopedia. . . . Next week I will be in New York—I will go to their office, I will look at the material, maybe I will advise them a little, even though it is forbidden for me to waste even one hour on such things. . . . And it is a nice ‘historical joke’. If it would have been prophesied to Pat and me in Białystok in the years 1915 to 1919 that the day would come and he would travel to Waltham to bind me to the chariot of his encyclopedia. . . . (I asked Pat whether he remembered the Sholem Aleichem celebration in the Palace Theatre, the evening of the language war in the OPE [The Society for the Promotion of Culture among the Jews of Russia] at which I delivered my first public lecture, and I was very hungry, the days were the beginning of the invasion—apparently he forgot much, sometimes I envy those who can forget)

1 March 1957: Waltham, to Abraham, Tel Aviv

Meanwhile, in another week I have to travel to New York to lecture at the *Tsukunfi* symposium, and my time will not suffice even to visit Jack’s house. I invited Jack and Rose and the Weinstein family to the symposium.¹²⁰ Towards evening on Sunday I will come to New York, I will stay in a certain hotel, and on the next day, Monday, I have to spend some hours in the office of the Yiddish encyclopedia (finally after two years of enticing and urging, they enticed me and I was enticed.¹²¹ I will be editor-in-chief of this encyclopedia). I hope that this editing will not take much time away from me: in any case, they will come to me in Waltham, the secretary of the encyclopedia will present his questions to me, and I will decide and

¹²⁰ See S. Rawidowicz, ‘Yidisher kiyum: sof un einsof’, *Tsukunfi*, 62 (1957), 204–10, 256–67; Eng. trans.: ‘Jewish Existence: The End and the Endless’, in id., *State of Israel, Diaspora and Jewish Community*, 64–95.

¹²¹ *Petitani adonai va’epat* (Jer. 20: 7): possibly a word play involving Pat, the ‘enticer’, although the Hebrew word for ‘entice’, *lefatot*, is spelled with a *tav* and Pat with a *tet*.

advise. It is strange: America is full of Yiddish writers, wise and sagacious, and in no way could they find anyone else. See how great is my hatred of Haman, that is, how great is my pain at the dominance of the English vernacular among American Jewry: out of this hatred of Haman, I went out to help to compile that encyclopedia. Furthermore, Jewish life in the last centuries can be given a description that is authentic only in Hebrew and Yiddish, and not in the vernacular, the vernacular vernacularizes, tears and uproots. The encyclopedia will also serve as a portrayal of that Jewish reality in Europe that passed. I felt a moral obligation to erect a memorial to that which has passed and is no more. Jacob Pat and his friends claimed and claimed—and rightly—that if this is not done now, in another five or ten years there will not be even a small handful of people who will be able to do it. I said: Let me try with one volume of the encyclopedia: it will have ten volumes. I will see if it is not beyond my strength; if it will not steal too much of my time, I will continue, and if not Actually it is an interesting and tragic ‘joke’—the remuneration that the encyclopedia will provide for me will serve as the decisive source for publishing *Kirvei rabi nahman krokhmal* and my Hebrew books that will come afterwards Who would have thought that (1) I would be the only person in America who would be worthy and qualified, etc. to serve as the head of an editorial board of an encyclopedia in Yiddish and (2) that I would live in a country flowing with dollars and not find for myself a source of money for publishing my Hebrew books other than through my work in the field of Yiddish literature. . . . It is a joke—also from a joke, the heart hurts. . . . I will finish this preoccupying issue: at the end of March, I have to return to lecture in New York—maybe I will receive a few dollars from my lectures, and I will be able to send them to Ararat in London, because I have to participate in the publishing of *Bavel viyerushalayim* with my very own money. . . . Ararat lost much on the *Metsudah* and Dubnow—and maybe this book will be our last joint effort. . . . My books that will appear from now on will appear at my expense—and so I am looking for a name for my ‘publishing company’ (an additional joke): Badad [Alone]? Sarid [Remnant]? . . . or rather ‘optimistic’: Selah [Rock]? My name Ayanot was stolen by the Mapai party . . . and nothing can be done after the deeds of robbers.

2 April 1957: Waltham, to Abraham, Tel Aviv

And as for the encyclopedia—if my brothers in the Land had heard that I took upon myself to edit an English encyclopedia, would they also be so surprised or regretful? Ask Shabtai and Meir and let me know. When we will meet, I will explain this matter fully—and as a hint: our enemy (the enemy of Hebrew) is English and not Yiddish. The situation has become critical, in the diasporas of Israel one has to rescue the actual twenty-two letters of the alphabet. . . . Zionism and the synagogue,¹²² etc. are sinking in the forty-nine measures of English. And if it is decreed that I should not edit a Hebrew encyclopedia in America, and I have to choose

¹²² The English word ‘synagogue’ is transliterated in Hebrew characters.

between English and Yiddish that is written in our alphabet—I will decide in favour of our alphabet. . . . I ‘hate’ the numerous translations into the vernacular. And a last hint: Jewish life in the last centuries in Europe, etc. can be described, formulated, and expressed in Hebrew and Yiddish (and to different degrees in those two languages), and it cannot be done in English. . . . For two years, I hesitated and hesitated—and in the end I accepted this yoke upon myself in order to establish a memorial for eastern European Jewry in its language, at least in its alphabet. . . . And the matter is long, and certainly does not make one happy. For the fact that I have some hours in the week free for editing this encyclopedia proves that the gates of Hebrew in America are sealed. They are sealed, and there is no one who opens them: that minimal amount of Hebrew here is only for the Zionist regurgitators and people of lowly propaganda, etc.—and about this I am very very sorry. If I were 30 years old and lived in New York, I would be very active on behalf of Hebrew. And now—my heart is heavy. You ask about *Bitsaron*—several times I have asked them to remove my name from the board of editors: this monthly is not at all according to my spirit, it exploits my name, it is low grade. I said several times that they should send it to you—they did not send it. It is not worth your losing time over it.

30 June 1957: *Waltham, to Shifra and Yeruham, Afula*

Jacob Pat—who is going to spend some months in the Land—invited me to participate in a *Sefer bialystok* that he and his friends are planning to publish with an article on ‘my Bialystok years’. I do not know if I will respond to him¹²³—and begin the Bialystok phase of a refugee from Grajewo who entered one Friday on a wagon loaded with many kinds of merchandise to that great ‘metropolis’, in which he spent around five difficult and unpleasant years, years of experience and personality formation [*itsuv panim*], that is: sadness [*etsev*].¹²⁴ . . . And whenever I think of this community—and the hundreds of similar communities that passed from the world before their time, the spirit does not move me to take account of my soul, the account of an individual Jew. What is the value of such accounts compared with those of thousands of thousands of Jews who were exterminated with great madness, may God avenge their blood. I will not deal further with this because one should not deal with it further.

AFTERWORD

7 September 1955 (20 Elul): *Waltham, to Shifra and Yeruham, Afula*

The sages of every generation were divided as to whether it is worthwhile for a man to return to the green pastures in which he grazed and fed in the days of his childhood. Some thought it better to leave the days of childhood and youth in that

¹²³ Presumably, Ravidowicz did not have time to respond, since he died twenty days later.

¹²⁴ A play on the Hebrew words for ‘formation’ (*itsuv*) and ‘sadness’ (*etsev*).

fog of imagination with which the years covered them. Clarity does not become them. One should not shine the light of noon and the twilight of evening (even in this twilight, there is much light, the light of sunset) on the fog of childhood And even so, every hour that I go out of my four cubits and people from Grajewo and Białystok (also people from Berlin and London . . .) press upon me, my heart cries out inside me: oh, if I could turn for one brief moment to Grajewo, to see whether the houses of Schreider are still standing, and what was the end of the house of Haimek, and what happened to the house and store of Sheinke the store-keeper, and whether the new *beit midrash* is still standing or whether it became one of their community centres or a stable for horses.¹²⁵ . . . And the broad market—how does it look now, is there still in its middle that pump on the hill: that is, that stands on a small mound¹²⁶—that in the days of winter would serve as a ‘sports field’ when we would return from the *heder*, and especially in moonlit nights of Shevat and Adar, we would skate on its ice, sometimes Shemoneh Esreh, sometimes only Kedushah¹²⁷—until a few non-Jews and their dogs came (one non-Jew and one dog were enough for us) and we fled for our lives. . . . Yes, those ‘rails’ of Grajewo, the iron tracks, how many dreams did we dream on our walks on those ‘rails’, we almost forgot them. Our walks were not in couples but in groups, great was the noise on both sides of the tracks (there are similar ones also in Waltham in the middle of the town—this small town in which I now ‘live’, in a nice house that maybe there was none like it in the town of our birth, and here it is ‘dust and ashes’¹²⁸) and before a walk on the tracks, on weekdays of course, we would stand for an hour at the mail office. . . . The train from Białystok would arrive in the evening, around 7:00, was it not? 7:30? And the mail officials would distribute all the ‘material’—and those who had a box would receive theirs that evening, and we had number 35 (was it not so?), and a person would step on the feet of his neighbour as we hurried to take out the letters from our box. The official himself was a pleasant man, apparently; his assistant, who had blue glasses, was a hard man, apparently, a Pole, an antisemite. And the official of the telegraph mail (first it was only in the train, and afterwards it was moved to the mail office) was hard-hearted, we feared him, how much did we fear him. As soon as a telegram arrived, from Miller or from the Antmans—the horse-sellers and other crooks—Jack and I would take off our shoes so that we would not have to go to the telegraph office. . . . We would deceive Abba—and in the end one of us would have mercy upon him, put on his shoes, and bring the answer to the telegraph office

¹²⁵ It is no longer standing.

¹²⁶ The site of the marketplace, next to the intersection of routes E61 and E65 in the middle of Grajewo (see nn. 46, 97 above) has been attractively landscaped, but one structure remains at the side, which may be the pump referred to here.

¹²⁷ Presumably they skated for the time it would take to say the prayers. (The Kedushah is the third benediction of the Shemoneh Esreh prayer.)

¹²⁸ Actually, it was one of the larger houses in the Cedarwood neighbourhood of Waltham, with a grassy lot with trees and a small gazebo which Rawidowicz called the sukkah.

Sometimes my soul longs to return and to walk on those ways on which we used to walk with Abba to the *beit midrash*—especially that walk before morning, almost in the middle of the night, especially on 18 (or 19) Tevet, the day of the death of Saba—or at least to go back and walk on the ‘road’ from Grajewo to Prostki (and not Prostken¹²⁹), to recall the memory of Hayim Murzi. . . . What was the name of that small wagon-owner who was very faithful to Abba, who was once caught with contraband (silk in a winter wagon . . .) and lost his travel licence to Prostki for ever? Itshe? . . . *Nu*, what was his name, Itshe? Itsha Moses? No.

Sometimes I stop in my work—and begin writing names, names. At first I wonder, afterwards I smile to myself: they are names of Jews from Grajewo and from Białystok. . . . Every name has its own world. Sometimes I want to stop my writing and to sit and to write the memoirs of Grajewo and Białystok, etc.—and sometimes my heart says to me: things that are in the heart, one is not permitted to write down.¹³⁰ . . . Maybe I will not get around to writing them. The darkness of childhood and youth will remain in its darkness—those who come after us will not understand it, and from us it is going and becoming more distant and more distant—and in a little while, we will have been without Abba for twenty years.

¹²⁹ Because in 1945 Prostken became part of Poland and was called Prostki.

¹³⁰ An adaptation of the rabbinic dictum: ‘things that are oral, one is not permitted to write down’.