LEAVING THE *SHTETL* BEHIND. CHILDREN'S LITERATURE ON JEWISH MIGRATION FROM EASTERN EUROPE

Jana Pohl

> Whoever has eyes that see and ears that hear
> absorbs enough stories to last a lifetime
> and to tell his children and grandchildren
> (Singer 1991: 172).

This well-known quotation from Isaac Bashevis Singer's children's story "Naftali the Storyteller & His Horse, Sus" exhibits how universal and pervasive stories are and what a pivotal role they can play in passing on memories from generation to generation. According to Singer, stories for children are not just important as entertainment. It is their content and their function of keeping the past with us that makes stories an essential part not only of children's but also adults' lives. Singer, who emigrated from Poland to the USA, dedicated much of his work to the memory of his country of origin and of *shtetl* life; his Nobel-Prize-winning work is highly imbued with the culture of the Eastern European Jewry. Alida Allison observes that "[...] his writing has uniquely contributed to keeping the memory of Eastern European Yiddish culture alive" (Allison 1996: 20). Children's literature as a means of remembering the *shtetl*, a particular form of predominantly Jewish settlement in past Eastern Europe, will be the subject of the second part of the article in which I will look at native U.S.-American authors and their children's literature[1] of the past 20 years and its depiction of the *shtetl*. My argument is that the depiction of the *shtetl* has been connected to the issue of migration[2] – a fact that can be explained with historical and cultural circumstances which differ from Singer's times. This analysis necessitates some general remarks on children's literature and migration to which the first part of my paper is dedicated.

1 "Children's literature" refers to literature for children as well as for young adults throughout this paper.

2 In children's literature the distinction between migrants, refugees and fugitives is not always easy to make. Therefore the term migration is used in a general sense.

Children's literature and migration

In answering questions about how children perceive migration and cultural differences, literature which is primarily addressed to children and is therefore adapted to their age, can serve as a key tool. Authors of children's literature tell migration stories for children and modify their topic and way of writing to the implicit child readers. Stories are often narrated through the "eyes of a child character," either from third or first person. These narrative strategies appear to give insights into the characters' minds and their perception of migration processes, as well as to the target audience of migration stories, the child readers. Certain genres, such as autobiography, diary or epistolary novel seem more inclined to take readers into a character's mind than others. Nevertheless, the reader has to keep in mind that it is in most cases the adult author who puts words into a character's head and mouth. The imagined child reader is one feature of children's literature which in narrating migration stories follows certain conventions. Two common traditions of children's literature are happy ending and the orphan child as a protagonist. Migration stories are set in either the country of origin or the target country – or both – or simply focus on the journey. In any case the happy ending is predicated on successful migration[3] which is indicated in the children's books by advancing assimilation to the target country, economic success, education, or by being joined by other family members. The orphan child as a protagonist[4] entails the message that children are capable of mastering the journey from one country to the other on their own.[5] These conventions have an important effect on the commercial success of a children's book.

Migration has been a prospering topic of children's literature. In accommodating the migration issue, children's literature interlinks with aspects of multiculturalism, discrimination, tolerance, and cultural plurality for informational, educational[6] and/or aesthetic purposes. Migration stories, depicting the movement from one place to another, immanently revolve around people, countries, and cultures that differ from the reader's background.

Migration has also been referred to as object, i.e. topic, and subject at the same time because it serves as the autobiographical background for the au-

3 Return migration is rarely a topic in children's literature, except for the depiction of flight during war and returning home.

4 Many famous hero(in)es of children's literature are orphans, for example Johanna Spyri's Heidi, Lucy M. Montgomery's Anne of Green Gables, Peter Barrie's Peter Pan, and Joanne K. Rowling's Harry Potter.

5 See for example Amy Hest's picture book When Jessie came across the sea (1997) which tells the story of the orphan Jessie and her emigration from Russia to America or Lillian Hammer Ross's story Sarah, also known as Hannah (1994) about 12-year-old fatherless Sarah who masters the journey to America on her own.

6 See Ruth McKoy Lowery's (2001) sociological analysis of migration stories in children's literature.

thors, thus implying a strong notion of subjectivity. Authors, who migrated as children, tell of their own experiences and memories or fictionalize their ancestors' life stories in children's literature. Due to their personal connection to the topic, they attribute a strong sense of authenticity to their writing.

No matter if object or subject, the depiction of migration usually takes place in the (former) target country. It is often the country of immigration and not the country of emigration where migration stories for children are generated and within which they are situated. This perspective entails the questions of "who writes the story?" and "who writes whose story?" Writers with a migration background are themselves successful immigrants or their descendants. Descendants of former migrants write the story of their own people, in contrast to authors who fictionalize the stories of ethnic groups other than their own. This question of perspective has important consequences for the stories and their claim for authenticity which shall be discussed later in the paper.

When looking at migration stories and their reflection of the children's perception of the migration process, one automatically touches upon matters of representation. Representation is closely connected to narrative patterns. One particularly interesting narrative form of "looking into a character's mind" is the first person narration which many migration stories use. First person narration is a typical feature of autobiography. The following chart visualizes the migration story's entanglement with all three genres of life story writing: autobiography, biography and fiction. In a post-modern blurring of genre boundaries children's literature on migration (except non-fictional history books) may incorporate elements of all three genres (shown in the overlapping of the three grey circles in the illustration below); autobiographical inclusion is not obligatory, for not every author includes autobiographical references in the book's story or paratext[7] (therefore the grey line is dotted). Many authors of children's books on migration, as we shall see later on, choose to draw attention to their autobiographical tie to the subject for reasons of authenticity. Autobiography as one genre of life story writing recounts the author's life or parts of it in hovering between objectivity and subjectivity, including a retrospective account of a life's important events among which migration certainly counts. Autobiographical accounts necessitate a narrator who is close in time and space and right in the middle of the story, which entails an impression of psychological depth and physical closeness. The narrator therefore takes on an androgenic role between describing, observing, and engaging in the story. Nevertheless, all three genres capture a sense of historical and socio-cultural context of the past or present migration process for which the black inner lines stand.

7 Paratext, a term coined by Gérard Genette, embraces all the signals which accompany the text, such as title, preface, notes, and all signals mediated by the book, such as font, illustrations, jacket etc.

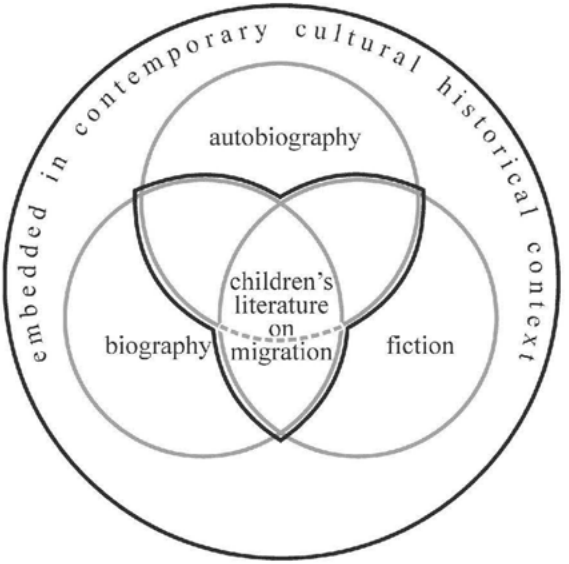

Illustration 1: Genres of life story writing

Contrasting with autobiography, a biography is a narrative account of someone else's life, describing the individual in the context of his/her life. Both biography and historical fiction recreate the past, mostly through chronologically narrating past events. In writing historical fiction authors assume the dual role of a storyteller and a historian at the same time. Migration stories therefore always contain elements of biography, because migration as an important life event is part of the plot. Proceeding from the premise that the line between true and fictional events in an autobiography or a biography can be blurred, we can conclude that text and protagonists of migration stories infiltrate the area of fiction in which the story is a product of the author's imagination. Many migration stories can be completely classified as fiction. Regardless of the genre, all migration stories are embedded in socio-cultural context and the literary system's traditions and conventions at their time of publication and reception (the latter can but need not coincide).

By describing migration from children's perspectives, children's literature not only represents certain migration waves. It documents the perception of cultural varieties and the assimilation to a new home. It informs about the historical period, in which migration took place, and the formation of an immigrant nation, such as the U.S.-American. At the same time children's literature recollects the life of a past culture and can thereby keep the heritage of an ethnic group alive, pass it on, and mediate it, from adult generations (grandparents or parents) to children. Migration stories, which I will focus on in the second part of the paper, stand for a generation of contemporary North American writers of children's literature on migration who narrate past migra-

tion stories for today's children. In blending life story genres, they all depict the migration of Jews from Eastern Europe to North America and remember the *shtetl* which stands for the country of origin of their protagonists'.

Remembering the *shtetl* in contemporary U.S.-American children's literature

Adult literature as well as children's literature has a long tradition of describing the *shtetl*s[8] (*shtetlekch*), "small market towns in Eastern Europe ranging in size from 1,000 to 20,000 people. Most *shtetlekch* had between 1,000 and 5,000 people, with the majority of the population being Jewish" (Eliach 1998: 782). Since the reign of Catherine II until the revolution in 1917, Jews in Russia were required to live in a special zone in the West of the empire which made up about four per cent of Russia and was called the *Pale of Settlement*.[9] Even within the *Pale*, Jews suffered discrimination. They had to pay double taxes, could not buy or lease land and were excluded from higher education.

*Shtetl*s existed both in the *Pale* and in Poland. Life in a *shtetl* often meant a life in poverty in a traditional Jewish community. Anti-Semitism, devastating pogroms, especially after the assassination of Czar Alexander II in 1881, restricted educational and economic opportunities as well as the threatening army service for Jewish boys pushed more than two million Jews out of the *shtetl*s to America. America, in particular the USA, radiated an image of the Golden Land, where the streets were paved with gold, and an image of the Promised Land, where Jews were free to exercise their religion. These images of America can be pointed out as major pull-factors. Eastern European Jews made up the vast majority of the Jewish immigrants in America in this migration wave around the turn of the last century. The Eastern European Jewry and this specific migration wave have been a reoccurring topic in adult literature and in children's literature. Despite the existing historical knowledge concerning life in the *shtetl*, it has often been described as an image, partly romanticized in literature, paintings[10] and in the children's literature of the 1970s and 1980s[11] as well.

In 1984, Barbara Mirel described the depiction of the *shtetl* in North American children's literature in her paper "Lost worlds of tradition: *Shtetl* stories for suburban children." According to her, *shtetl* life and its cultural setting are lost for modern young readers and *shtetl* stories by "classic" authors like Sholem Aleichem or Singer lack an audience. She draws attention to a group of books which give an introduction to Eastern European Jewish life

8 *Shtetl* (*shtetlekch* as one plural form) is a Yiddish word, derived from the Middle High German "*stetel*" which is a diminutive form of the German "*Stadt*" (town).

9 The Pale of Settlement included the territory of present-day Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine and Belorussia.

10 Schoeps 2000: 160, see also Roskies 2000.

11 Mirel 1984.

because she considers these books important for the recreation of a past civilization and identity as well as for educational purposes. Mirel rightly points out that famous Jewish literature about the 19th century has a strong tradition of portraying the *shtetl* with its manifold cultural and religious facets. In terms of Yiddish children's literature Aleichem's *Motl Peysi dem Khazns* (first published in 1916) and Singer's *Stories for Children* (first published in 1984) are well-known examples. This illustrates that the *shtetl* as it represents history and cultural heritage of a long period of the Eastern European Jewry's past has a long tradition in literature in general as well as in children's literature. Literary narratives about the *shtetl* often focus on the time under Czar Nicholas II of Russia and particularly around the turn of the last century. When looking at the so-called classics of Eastern European Jewish literature (for example Yitskhok Leyb Peretz or Sholem Asch) and their depiction of the *shtetl*, specific essential features re-occur: stories display community life which existed in isolation from the Russian empire. They tell the reader about traditions and customs existing in the *shtetl*, including descriptions of various representations of Jewish religious culture such as synagogues, rabbis, and cheders[12]. In analyzing classic Eastern European Jewish literature such as Aleichem and Asch, Dan Miron delineates the fire metaphor, the unexpected visitor, and multiple scenes of departure as elements of the *shtetl* image, the latter of which is particularly important for contemporary North American children's literature (Miron 2000: 16–32).

However, contemporary and therefore retrospective children's literature about the *shtetl* especially in the time of the Russian empire differs in the depiction of past reality. Mirel outlined two major themes of American born authors in their treatment of the *shtetl* in children's fiction as "the response to anti-Semitism and the tensions arising from the infiltration of modern ideas into traditional patterns of Jewish life" (Mirel 1984: 7). She refers to U.S.-American authors and their works published in the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. Her examples – Chaya M. Burstein's two novels *Rifka bangs the Teakettle* (1970) and *Rifka grows up* (1976), Leonard Everett Fisher's *A Russian Farewell* (1980), Anita Heyman's *Exit from Home* (1977), and Marge Blaine's *Dvora's Journey* (1979) – are all completely set in Eastern Europe incorporating the atmosphere of the *shtetl* with its inherent reactions to anti-Semitism and its blend of modern ideas and traditional Jewish life. Scenes of departure are introduced only late in the plots. Hence, these examples from the 1970s focus on the *shtetl* and not on the experience of departure.

In the following part I will look at the development of the *shtetl* topic in U.S.-American children's literature during the past 20 years, i.e. since the publication of Mirel's article. Is the distinct culture of the *shtetl* still remembered in contemporary U.S.-American children's and young adult literature and if so, has its depiction changed over time? These questions can be answered with a clear yes. The high number of publications of children's fiction

12 Jewish school where children were instructed in Hebrew and read the Bible.

on Eastern European Jewry proves that Eastern Europe – although its depiction has changed – still is an important topic in U.S.-American Jewish children's literature. I will examine whether Barbara Mirel's assumptions regarding U.S.-American authors and their treatment of the *shtetl* are still applicable to the U.S.-American children's literature on the *shtetl* nowadays and will show how the depiction of the *shtetl* has been connected to the migration from it. Contemporary U.S.-American authors portray the *shtetl* differently due to deviant geographical, cultural, social, and historical circumstances.

The focus of today's U.S.-American children's literature differs from the classic Eastern European Jewish literature and from the U.S.-American children's literature 20 years ago. In remembering the *shtetl* in children's literature, the emphasis has been put more and more on the migration process. The "multiple scenes of departure," outlined by Dan Miron for the classic Eastern European Jewish adult literature about the *shtetl*, feature strongly in the U.S.-American children's literature of the past 20 years. Stories usually include descriptions of the *shtetl* and the living conditions in Eastern Europe as the country of departure, often from the perspective of a child narrator. But *shtetl* depiction and migration have been strongly linked. This corresponds to the historical reality in the *shtetl*s in which mass emigration to North America had been part of everyday life since the pogroms after the assassination of Czar Alexander II. The focus on migration is especially evident in picture books which shall be discussed first. The emphasis on the journey aspect becomes apparent not only in the stories as such but in their titles as well: *Escaping to America. A True Story* (Schanzer 2000), *Journey to Ellis Island. How my Father Came to America* (Bierman 1998), *When Jessie Came across the Sea* (Hest 1997), *Journey to the Golden Land* (Rosenblum 1992), *Leaving for America* (Bresnick-Perry 1992), and *Annushka's Voyage* (Tarbescu 1998).

The journey aspect underlines the autobiographical background of many children's books on the Eastern European Jewry and the *shtetl*. Many of the authors articulate such a background in their book's paratext. Edith Tarbescu, for example, dedicates her book "To the memory of my parents, Esther and Benjamin Roseman, whose names are inscribed on a wall at Ellis Island." She writes the book "For my mother, who has lived in many countries" and includes a picture showing her mother and aunt after their arrival in America. In her author's note she explains: "Ever since I was a child I heard the story of how my mother made that journey at the age of 13. This is her story." Rosalyn Schanzer bases her book on her father's and his family's story and dedicates it "To the memory of my family and to everyone who has travelled from another country to begin a new life on these shores." Roslyn Bresnick-Perry explains in the author's note that she was born in the *shtetl* Wysokie-Litewskie and later emigrated to America. Her picture book's opening lines are "We were leaving for America. My mother and I were leaving our *shtetl*, our little town of Wysokie, to join my father" (Bresnick-Perry 1992: 4). Carol Bierman's picture book is a biographical account of her father's migration to America, showing pictures of him in the book. She sets the story in a little village in

Russia called Pinsk; the setting is underpinned with material signifiers like a photograph showing Cyrillic letters and a samovar. Yiddish words, e.g. *"mentsch"* or *"tsuris"*[13] (1998: 14), and Jewish names such as Yehuda, the main character, indicate a Jewish context in *Journey to Ellis Island*. There is, however, no mentioning of a *shtetl* or Jewish religious life. As the title indicates the story is mainly about the journey to one's destination in exile. The turmoil of World War I in Russia is mentioned as a reason for emigration (16) as well as the family encountering a pogrom while fleeing – however, the focus is completely on the journey as such when the process of migration is described. First big brother Abe, whom the main character Yehuda didn't even get to know, migrates to America. He is followed by his father, then by Yehuda himself, his sister, and mother. The book charts various stages of their journey: the long march out of Russia, to Poland, to Rotterdam where they boarded the ship, the journey on board to America, the inspections on Ellis Island, and finally the arrival in New York. Thus, the journey and migration focus is so pronounced that the *shtetl* background is shunned by it.

The autobiographical background reveals that many writers are the descendants of successful immigrants, a fact that encourages a positive attitude towards the target country. An autobiographical connection appears to enhance authenticity. A paratext's revelation of an author's autobiographical tie to the subject seems to underscore the story's genuineness. An author who announces that a story is based on events in his/her own life presents him/herself as a reliable source and is therefore assumed to produce a reliable text, based on first-hand experience.

Books by descendants of immigrants tackle the question: why are we as the descendants of Eastern European Jewish immigrants here in America and how did we get here? This explains why migration from the *shtetl* is of central importance to the younger generation of U.S.-American writers and why they focus on migration from the *shtetl*. Many contemporary U.S.-American authors are the descendants of successful immigrants who came to America about a century ago. They often tell the stories of their families. Therefore their emphasis is on the push-factors that drove Jews out of the *shtetl* and across the ocean. Therefore anti-Semitism and pogroms often figure more prominently in their stories than Jewish religious life and *shtetl* culture. Therefore they focus on the "new country," which is at the same time the country of their implicit readers.

Barbara Cohen's picture book *Gooseberries to Oranges* (Cohen 1982), illustrated by Beverly Brodsky, for instance, is "a true story of a little girl who was born in Eastern Europe and came to live in America" according to the front flap. The illustrator dedicates the book "To my mother and the memory of my father whose stories of the old country inspired the creation of this

13 *Mentsch* and *tsuris* are explained by the author in the glossary in the end of the book. *Mentsch* is explained as "The Yiddish word for 'man.' *Mentsch* also means a decent, honorable person" and *tsuris* as "The Yiddish word for 'troubles'" (Bierman 1998: 48).

book" (imprint).[14] This is the story of the illustrator's mother. In an email Beverly Brodsky informed me that "This is certainly a story about my own mother" whom Barbara Cohen "interviewed to get information for her text." The first third of the book embraces scenes of the *shtetl*. Already on the second doublespread war and Russian soldiers terrorizing the Jews are introduced (see illustration 2). The text says:

But winter came, and war. We put feather pillows around the walls of the rooms so if bullets hit our house they wouldn't hurt us. Soldiers in steel helmets searched every corner, looking for boys to take away to the army. They tore the mezzuzah[15] off the door jamb because they thought gold was hidden inside. There was no gold inside the mezzuzah, only a little scroll inscribed with words from the Bible (Cohen 1982: n.p.[16]).

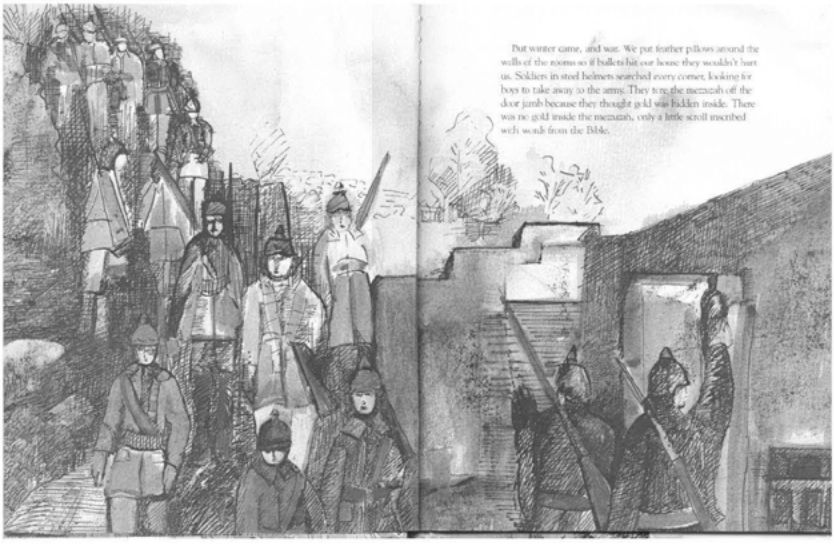

Illustration 2: from Barbara Cohen's Gooseberries to Oranges (1982, illustration by Beverly Brodsky)[17]

Cohen's little Eastern European village is characterized by anti-Semitism, poverty, and hunger. The book's focus is on the journey out of the *shtetl* and the new life in America, the latter making up about two thirds of the book. Cohen, as well as the authors of the above-mentioned picture books, all intro-

14 I am indebted to Beverly Brodsky for sharing this information on the creation of Gooseberries to Oranges.

15 A *mezzuzah* is a scroll of parchment with important words from the Torah, kept in a small container made from wood, plastic or metal and nailed to the doorpost of a Jewish home.

16 N.p. stands for no pagination.

17 The picture is reprinted with Beverly Brodsky's permission.

duce migration very early in the plot. That does not leave much room for lengthy *shtetl* descriptions. In the majority of the books the "village" is not even called a *shtetl*[18]. But the books do include various shibboleths for Jewish culture (e.g. *mezzuzah*s, Sabbath candles or Jewish names such as Avrom-Leyb or Feygl) and a setting in past Eastern Europe.

The autobiographical aspect can only serve as one possible explanation of the shift of focus. The growing remoteness of the *shtetl* experience is another. The time gap between the *shtetl* culture in the Russian empire as the (historical) background of the migration of the Eastern European Jews and the narrative accounts of it is constantly getting larger.

Classic Eastern European Jewish writers such as Aleichem, Peretz, and later on Singer still knew the *shtetl* life personally and had the chance to write from that personal experience. For modern U.S.-American authors – with or without autobiographical ties to the subject – the *shtetl* is a historical and fictional subject which is treated as such: sometimes authors treat the sujet with a lot of care, involving meticulous research; sometimes books are simply set in that time (at the turn of the last century) and place (a Jewish village, Jewish town or *shtetl*) without further explication of the *shtetl* as historical reality.

Elvira Woodruff's picture book *The Memory Coat* (1999) is one example of a fictitious account of the *shtetl* and migration to North America. It starts with the following introduction to the setting: "Long ago, a young girl named Rachel and her cousin, Grisha, lived with their family in a small town, far away in Russia. Such a town was called a *shtetl*. It was where many of the Jewish people lived. There they worked as cobblers, blacksmiths, tailors, and shopkeepers. Their little wooden houses and shops ran all along the cobblestone streets" (n.p.). The *shtetl* description includes many *shtetl* elements: Woodruff describes the community life in a *shtetl* and people's occupations; a synagogue is mentioned and so are prayers. The Yiddish language is displayed, and there is a pogrom which triggers the family's departure for America. Woodruff gives an impression of *shtetl* life and culture, and at the same time explains the need to leave, taking on the adventure story of migrating to a new country. The illustrations are not particularly *shtetl*-specific. The Russian setting cannot be deducted, but they show people in traditional clothing and men with long beards – as a sign of traditional Jewishness. *The Memory Coat* depicts *shtetl* life to some amount and adheres to parts of the common *shtetl* depiction. Woodruff's picture book, however, exceeds in its *shtetl* description many of the other picture books mentioned.

Mirel's statement (1984, see above) is still applicable insofar as "the response to anti-Semitism" features in the books. Anti-Semitism is mainly depicted in form of pogroms which have become an important component in the *shtetl* description. Along with the response to anti-Semitism comes the escape

18 The omission of the word "*shtetl*" can also be explained with the implicit readers of the picture books and the image of children; "*shtetl*" is after all of Yiddish origin and needs to be "translated" or explained to an American child reader.

from it. Emigration from the country in which pogroms take place is a logical conclusion. Young adult fiction, as we shall see, accommodates this component and at the same time exhibits in many cases the above-mentioned biographical factor of the literary *shtetl* depiction.

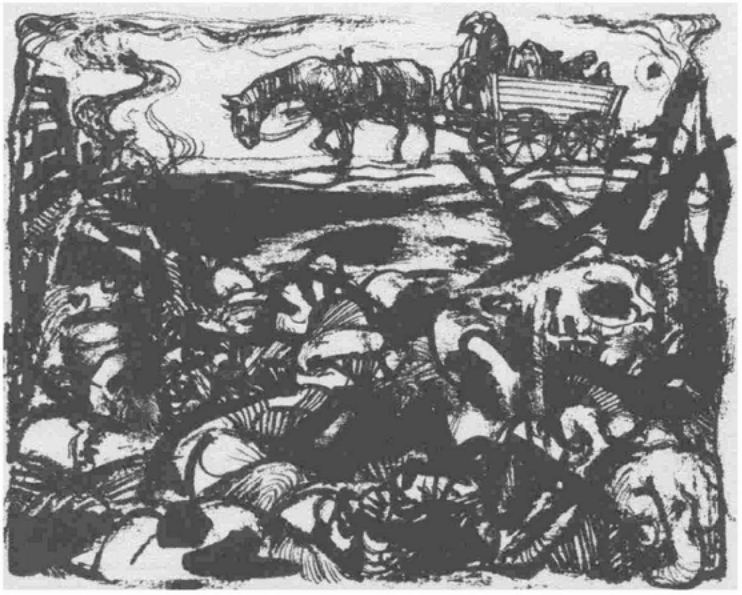

Illustration 3: by Trina Schart Hyman, in Kathryn Lasky's "The Night Journey" (1981)[19]

Young adult books often exhibit an (auto)biographical link regarding the *shtetl* and the migration process. Kathryn Lasky's books are just one example. Her first (!) young adult novel, *The Night Journey* (1981), is based on her aunt's story of coming to America. Lasky herself notes: "My grandparents had all died by the time I was three, but that did not prevent me from asking my parents about their journeys to America. And still I had aunts and uncles who remembered" (as quoted in the paratext in Lasky 1998: 181).[20] Not surprisingly, her book is written for her aunt, "For Ann Lasky Smith, who remembers." The character great-grandmother Sashie, who is based on Lasky's aunt, describes her flight from the Russian empire to North America – an experience which is central to the novel. She passes on the story to her great-granddaughter Rachel before her own death. Lasky depicts her family's story about coming to the United States, and the way the *shtetl* is remembered bespeaks the "response to anti-Semitism:" the *shtetl* with its major elements is

19 Reprinted with the permission of Penguin Group: New York.

20 For the autobiographical background see also Brown (1998: 58f.) and Lasky Knight (1985: 28ff.).

subsumed under the flight process. It is associated with pogroms, violence, death, and the Russians as the originators of pogroms. During the flight Sashie's family passes through a *shtetl* where a pogrom had just taken place. The setting is described as such:

> Sashie and Ghisa peeked between the slats of the wagon. And through the cracks and holes of the boards, the fragments of total destruction appeared like scraps from the apocalypse – a charred cart with a blackened hand reaching stiffly out; a cow bloated in death, its pointy hooves faintly absurd as they stuck straight up into the sky; burned-out cottages, their windows like blind eye sockets; a large star of David, once fastened to a prayerhouse door, lay scorched in a pile of rubble. The only sound was the soft hiss of the still-smoldering fires (Lasky 1981: 136).

Trina Schart Hyman's illustration (above) captures this gloomy image of the *shtetl*.

In *The Night Journey* Jewish religious life such as holidays, prayers, food, and a sense of Jewish community life are present in connection with the flight. The story's narration epitomizes hybrid remembering processes: the story is narrated in a blend of present and past in which passages shift between Rachel as a third person narrator in the present and Sashie as a young girl experiencing migration in the past. At the same time the author, Kathryn Lasky, remembers her aunt's migration story in writing an autobiographical young adult novel about it, herself standing for the generation remembering its cultural heritage.[21]

Margery Evernden's young adult book *The Dream Keeper* (1985) does not specifically express an autobiographical connection of author and subject but her book's dedication shows a personal biographical link: "In Memory of Mary Carbolofsky, Christian Gulbrandsen, and the uncounted brave children of many races and creeds who have followed their dreams across the seas to America." As Lasky's *The Night Journey* this book is also part of the so-called "grandmothers-fiction,"[22] meaning that the plot revolves around a grandmother, Bobe, and the granddaughter, Becka. Both assume central plot functions: the grandmother's life story, as the main part of the novel, is passed on to her granddaughter who is to keep the memory of her grandmother alive after her death. This narrative construction accommodates the migration process as an important historical event in the past. Bobe emigrated with part of her family to North America from a Polish *shtetl*. This story is embedded in a

21 See also Broken Song (2005), the sequel to The Night Journey.

22 The term "grandmothers-fiction" is taken from the Cataloging-in-Publication (CIP) Data from the Library of Congress which appears in brackets in the imprint of children's books. The library's staff compiles descriptions of the books and analyses the subjects. They determine subject headings of which grandmothers-fiction is one. It simply means that "a significant aspect of the book is about grandmothers, and it is a book of fiction." The quotation as well as the information about compiling CIP-Data are taken from an email from the Library of Congress (18.03.2004). I am indebted to the Library of Congress for answering my questions on grandmothers-fiction.

frame set in the present in which Becka gets to know about her grandmother's life in the Polish *shtetl* and life after her migration. The story's part which is set in the *shtetl* takes up most of the novel. Evernden gives a thorough account of life in the *shtetl* and of *shtetl* culture including its sense of isolation from the Polish and Russian surroundings: "Here in their higgledy-piggledy *shtetl*, like an island in the great sweep of Polish farmlands and forests, they had their own tiny home with its three, crowded rooms [...]" (Evernden 1985: 44). She weaves the historical frame of reference into the *shtetl* description: "That good life had been cruelly swept away by the Tsar's soldiers and by a *pogrom*, one of those terrible raids during which Jewish people were destroyed and their property seized. Jews had no right to own land and fine houses, the marauders had said. Mama could never bring herself to speak of the *pogrom*, only of the shimmering days of her youth" (Evernden 1985: 45f.). Evernden's *shtetl* exhibits a comprehensive spectrum of *shtetl* features: it includes the historical education system with its *cheder* and *yeshiva*[23] and its inherent differences for Jewish boys and girls, the community life, and a *shtetl*'s social hierarchies when it comes to marriage and marriage brokers (Evernden 1985: 57). But most importantly, it comprises various aspects of traditional Jewish religious life such as prayers, sitting *shiva*, keeping the Sabbath, going to *shul*[24], studying the Bible, and holidays such as Passover[25].

The past decade was reticent about *shtetl* fiction in young adult literature. Its young adult books with the Eastern European Jewry as a subject are mainly set in the new country, i.e. the USA and Canada. The migration tie is pursued to such an extent that the immigrants' fate is predominantly explored after the immigration to the new country. Eastern Europe and to some degree the *shtetl* serve as a backdrop for the characterization of protagonists and are therefore not of central importance to the narrative. Kathryn Lasky's young adult book *Dreams in the Golden Country: the Diary of Zipporah Feldman, a Jewish Immigrant Girl. New York City, 1903* (1998) is a diary of the immigrant girl Zippy set in New York City. This book is completely set in New York City in the first decade of the 20th century, right after the family's arrival on Ellis Island. The *shtetl* is depicted retrospectively in the book and only in minor passages, for example when the place of origin is given as background information: "we are from Zarichka, a little village in Minsk Gubernia" (Lasky 1998: 4). The past of the *shtetl* is narrated through the diary in form of side references which are often triggered by the Zippy's mother's old country ways. They are opposed to Zippy's rapid assimilation and therefore cause conflicts: "I hate Mama's old country ways. I hate her *shtetl*, village ways" (113). So the old country and the *shtetl* are deployed for comparative purposes: the old country and the *shtetl* are associated with traditionalism and old ways for

23 *Yeshiva*: traditional rabbinical school for the study of the Talmud.

24 *Shul*: Jewish house of worship, a congregation; used as a synonym for synagogue as well.

25 For information on the Jewish *shtetl* culture, its customs, traditions and holidays see Zborowski & Herzog 1967, Estraikh & Krutikov 2000, and Schoeps 2000.

which the mother stands. America, conversely, stands for change and modernism, hence for new ways.

The Eastern European Jewry still features strongly in contemporary young adult literature, but not necessarily the *shtetl*. It is here in young adult literature where the shift of focus is especially striking. There are a large number of books which simply delineate their protagonists' origin in Russia or a little village in Russia without exploring the *shtetl* itself because the books' focus is on the new country. Johanna Hurwitz, for example, describes the fate of her protagonist Dossi in New York City and Vermont in *Faraway Summer* (1998). She outlines her past in Russia in a few sentences (13f.) but the book's theme, Dossi's summer vacation with the Fresh Air Fund, takes on as a central theme. Hurwitz explains in the author's note of the book's sequel *Dear Emma* (Hurwitz 2002) that life in Russia was determined by "enforced inscription in the army, extreme poverty and starvation, and very limited chances for education and employment. Russian Jews also faced pogroms where hundreds of people were attacked and murdered for no reason other than their religion. And so people kept on coming" (146). Karen Hesse, who described an adventurous flight from imperial Russia to North America in her autobiographical book *Letters from Rifka* (Hesse 1993), explores the separation of children from their parents during the influenza epidemic in Boston in 1918 in her book *A Time of Angels* (Hesse 1995). The plot revolves around the Russian Jewish immigrant child Hannah whose mother "went to Russia to take care of Bubbe" (14) and who is now trapped in a "village in Russia" (51) due to World War I. But this information is mediated in the background. The novel centers on Hannah's and her sister's fate in the United States. Hazel Krantz pursues the story of the Jewish girl Sally Gottesman in Colorado in the 1880s and 1890s in her novel *Looking to the Hills* (Krantz 1995). Sally gets to know Daniel Rabinowitz, a Russian Jewish immigrant. A Russian Jewish background is imputed to him, but it remains only the background of the mass emigration of the Eastern European Jewry since the beginning of the 1880s in which "most were ordinary folk from the small *shtetl*s who refused to live under the painful restrictions of their native lands where good education was almost impossible, many occupations forbidden, and freedom to live wherever they wanted denied" (86).

The majority of the young adult novels of the past decade still features the history of the Eastern European Jewry, but not in the old country and not in the *shtetl*. Russia and the *shtetl* simply assume a characterizing function in order to outline a protagonist's background. The described development shows that the *shtetl* culture is less remembered in U.S.-American young adult literature of the past decade than it was 20 years ago, when Barbara Mirel drew attention to this fact. The focus of these young adult novels is not on the old country, but on the new country, the former target country of migration. This country coincides with the books' intended audience. By incorporating this topic, young adult literature takes up issues of forming teenage identities in an immigrant nation. Contemporary U.S.-American picture books with their

graphic and visual opportunities are inclined to tell journey stories. They also focus on migration but still exhibit *shtetl* settings. Regardless of the focus, migration stories for children invoke the genealogical connection of migration and children's literature. Migration inscribes itself into the genealogy of people whose identity is defined by being first, second or third immigrant generation. Migration stories are one means of weaving collective memory in an immigrant nation together. They not only contribute to cultural heritage of ethnic groups, but at the same time show how the process of remembering can be embedded in the fiction itself as in the case of the before-mentioned grandmothers-fiction.

In hovering between autobiography, biography, and fiction migration stories for children can give an insight into a child's perception of the migration process. Stories transporting such cultural memory remain, however, in the genre's boundaries and evidence the remembering process of a generation as shown for the example of the *shtetl*. However, these narrations have been created by an adult retrospectively after the migration through an individual and historical lens.

In shifting the focus away from elaborate *shtetl* descriptions, as done in the 1970s and 1980s, to an emphasis on the journey to the target country and the increasing portrayal of life in the new country, the *shtetl* is on its way of receding into the background in contemporary children's literature on migration. With this increasing focus on migration and the target country of migration, contemporary U.S.-American children's literature on Eastern European Jewry, and especially the young adult book of the past decade, exhibit a tendency of decreasing depiction of culture of origin. Picture books and young adult books have turned their attention to the shaping of national, i.e. U.S.-American, history and national heritage. In taking up migration as a topic, children's literature not only documents and informs, but can also assume an important function in shaping cultural memory, especially where children's books with migration topics are used for teaching lessons on history and ethnic diversity. The above-mentioned picture book *Escaping to America*, for example, is included in a history unit on immigration for second grade[26] by the curriculum "Bringing History Home," which has been funded by U.S. Department of Education Teaching American History Grants.[27] Migration stories are often set in a historical context recounting the migration history of ancestors. By remembering past migration processes children's literature sets out to keep these (hi)stories in the consciousness of the younger generation and thereby tries to pass on cultural memory.

26 See http://www.bringinghistoryhome.org/g2-imm/lp/immigrationhistory.doc and http://www.bringinghistoryhome.org/g2-imm/biblio/g2-imm-Booklist.html (July 20, 2004).

27 See http://www.bringinghistoryhome.org (July 20, 2004).

References

Aleichem, Sholem 2002: *The Letters of Menakhem-Mendl and Sheyne-Sheyndl and Motl, the Cantor's Son*. Translated by Hillel Halkin. New Haven: Yale UP (Modern Yiddish Library).

Aleichem, Sholem 1996: *A Treasury of Sholom Aleichem's Children's Stories*. Selected and translated by Aliza Shevrin. Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson.

Allison, Alida 1996: *Isaac Bashevis Singer. Children's Stories and Childhood Memoirs*. New York: Twayne (Twayne's United States Authors Series 661).

Bierman, Carol (with Barbara Hehner) 1998: *Journey to Ellis Island. How My Father Came to America*. Illustrated by Laurie McGaw. New York: Hyperion, Madison Press.

Blaine, Marge 1979: *Dvora's Journey*. Illustrated by Gabriel Lisowski. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Bresnick-Perry, Roslyn 1992: *Leaving for America*. Pictures by Mira Reisberg. San Francisco: Children's Book Press.

Brown, Joanne 1998: *Presenting Kathryn Lasky*. New York: Twayne Publishers (The United States Authors Series 708).

Burstein, Chaya M. 1970: *Rifka Bangs the Teakettle*. Illustrated by the author. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World.

Burstein, Chaya M. 1976: *Rifka Grows up*. Illustrated by the author. New York & London: Bonim.

Cohen, Barbara 1982: *Gooseberries to Oranges*. Pictures by Beverly Brodsky. New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard.

Eliach, Yaffa 1998: *There Was Once a World: A Nine-Hundred-Year-Old Chronicle of the Shtetl of Eishyshok*. Boston: Little, Brown.

Estraikh, Gennady & Mikhail Krutikov (eds.) 2000: *The Shtetl: Image and Reality. Papers of the Second Mendel Friedman International Conference of Yiddish*. Oxford: Legenda (European Humanities Research Centre. Studies in Yiddish 2).

Evernden, Margery 1985: *The Dream Keeper*. New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Books.

Fisher, Leonard Everett 1980: *A Russian Farewell*. Illustrated by the author. New York: Four Winds.

Hesse, Karen 1993: *Letters from Rifka*. New York: Puffin.

Hesse, Karen 1997 [1995]: *A Time of Angels*. New York: Hyperion.

Hest, Amy 1997: *When Jessie Came across the Sea*. Illustrated by P.J. Lynch. London, Boston, Sydney: Walker Books [London: Walker Books, 1997].

Heyman, Anita 1977: *Exit from Home*. New York: Crown.

Hurwitz, Johanna 2002: *Dear Emma*. Illustrated by Barbara Garrison. New York: HarperCollins.

Hurwitz, Johanna 2000 [1998]: *Faraway Summer*. Illustrated by Mary Azarian. New York: HarperCollins.

Krantz, Hazel 1995: *Look to the Hills*. Philadelphia & Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society.

Lasky, Kathryn 1981: *The Night Journey*. With drawings by Trina Schart Hyman. New York: Puffin.

Lasky, Kathryn 1998: *Dreams in the Golden Country: The Diary of Zipporah Feldman, a Jewish Immigrant Girl. New York City, 1903*. New York: Scholastic (Dear America).

Lasky, Kathryn 2005: *Broken Song*. New York: Viking.

Lasky Knight, Kathryn 1985: *Atlantic Circle*. New York, London: Norton.

McKoy Lowery, Ruth 2001: *Immigrants in Children's Literature*. New York, Washington, D.C. etc.: Lang (Rethinking Childhood 13).

Mirel, Barbara 1984: Lost Worlds of Tradition: *Shtetl* Stories for Suburban Children. *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 9 (1): 6–9.

Miron, Dan 2000: *The Image of the Shtetl and other Studies of Modern Jewish Literary Imagination*. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press.

O'Sullivan, Emer 2005: *Comparative Children's Literature*. London: Routledge.

Rosenblum, Richard 1992: *Journey to the Golden Land*. Illustrated by the Author. Philadelphia & Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society.

Roskies, David G. 2000: The *Shtetl* as Imagined Community. In: Estraikh, Gennady & Mikhail Krutikov (eds.): *The Shtetl: Image and Reality. Papers of the Second Mendel Friedman International Conference of Yiddish*. Oxford: Legenda (European Humanities Research Centre. Studies in Yiddish 2): 4–22.

Ross, Lillian Hammer 1994: *Sarah, also Known as Hannah*. Illustrated by Helen Cogancherry. Morton Grove, Ill.: Albert Whitman.

Schanzer, Rosalyn 2000: *Escaping to America. A True Story*. New York: HarperCollins.

Schoeps, Julius H. 2000: Das osteuropäische 'Schtetl.' Lebensumstände, Bräuche und Befindlichkeiten. *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 52 (2): 160–167.

Singer, Isaac Bashevis 1991: Naftali the Storyteller & his Horse, Sus. In: Singer, Isaac Bashevis: *Stories for Children*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux: 167–183.

Tarbescu, Edith 1998: *Annushka's Voyage*. Illustrated by Lydia Dabcovich. New York: Clarion Books.

Woodruff, Elvira 1999: *The Memory Coat*. Illustrated by Michael Dooling. New York: Scholastic.

Zborowski, Mark & Elizabeth Herzog 1967[5]: *Life is With the People: The Culture of the Shtetl*. New York: Schocken Books.