and dapper despite his age, Silberschlag was known to us as a disciple of the rebellious poet Saul Tchernichovsky and as the eminent translator of Aristophanes' comedies into Hebrew. We had little idea at the time that he was a remarkable lyric Hebrew poet with a broad erotic streak and a jaundiced eye for social satire. Of the teachers with whom we had everyday contact, some were scholars who published learned articles in Hebrew, and others were simply dedicated pedagogues.

What was common to all was a passionate and steadfast devotion to the Hebrew language. This was not merely a principled commitment but something on the order of a fierce and burning idée fixe that made Hebrew into the cornerstone of national and personal existence. These Hebraist teachers seemed old to us, and few were American; and although their monomania had the force to inspire awe, they often seemed to us alien and obsessed. We were American students in the 1960s, and the changes that were roiling our world seemed unrelated to the one thing that was all-consuming for our teachers, who, in turn, must have viewed us as distracted and unserious. The sovereignty of Hebrew had the curious effect of reordering other priorities. To our teachers, whether you were a believer and observed the commandments was far less important than the depth of your Hebrew literacy. About Israel and the imperative to make aliyah, there was much confusion and unspoken ambivalence. It goes without saying that the American Hebraists were enthralled by the creation of the state of Israel; the map of the new state, as well as all the crooked alleyways of Jerusalem, was etched in their brains—even if they had visited only briefly or had never been there at all. Yet, to them, Israel was only a manifestation of the great national Hebrew ideal; this was an ideal that remained larger than the state and enfolded within it the "pioneering" educational work (in the nationalist sense, *ḥalutsiyyut*) that they themselves were carrying out.

In our eyes, the fine madness of our teachers seemed curious, eccentric, and out of touch. When it came to Hebrew, everything that seemed vital and attractive to us at the time came from Israel: the latest songs, the folk dances, slang and the ring of real speech, and even the new poetry, which eschewed florid classical diction for the lilt of a conversational register. So it was not surprising that when

Hebrew is a priority, possesses something now, in the moment, that can be enjoyed, enhanced, and exchanged. Moreover, for the majority of the Hebraists, who were no longer religiously observant, Hebrew functioned as an everyday practice that allowed them intercourse with the *sancta* of the nation. (The spiritual and libidinal satisfactions that Hebrew provided in the life of the Hebraist are the subject of the next chapter.) Persky, the genial spirit of American Hebraism, expressed very simply in an open letter he wrote to his comrades in the pages of *Hatoren* (March–April 1915):[12]

> An ordinary Jew like myself who does not believe in religion and who does not keep the commandments, who does not stand on the soil of his national homeland, and for whom abstract conceptions of Judaism hold no appeal—for an ordinary Jew such as this, what can remain *real and palpable* for him of all the achievements of this people if it is not the extraordinary and eternal Hebrew language? For such an ordinary Jew, nationalism is embodied by the language, which fills his entire being and to which he will devote his entire life.

As the only salvageable component of the tradition, Hebrew becomes invested with all the sanctity and ultimate importance that inhered in the total system of which it was once a part.

The primacy of Hebrew was buttressed by several powerful philosophical and ideological arguments that arose out of the culture turmoil at the turn of the century. The growing assertiveness of Yiddish as a modern national Jewish language, which was highlighted by the Czernovitz Conference of 1908, required the proponents of Hebrew to go on the offensive and explain to others what they took for granted among themselves. The writings of Aḥad Ha'am were highly influential in the nationalist camp and gave a high cultural gloss to the partisan positions.[13] In the United States, the case for Hebrew was even more fraught because, however much Yiddish was a competitor, English and its blandishments presented the far greater threat. The convictions and assumptions of the American Hebraists within this debate can be summarized under several heads. First and foremost was the belief that every nation has its own genius or spirit and that its language is the embodiment of this inner life. This was a core tenet of romantic nationalism following the ideas of Johann Gottfried Herder

and Wilhelm von Humbolt, and it was easily absorbed into Zionism because the Jewish people, after all, already possessed a language of hoary pedigree that reflected its national life during its classic heroic age in the Bible. The Hebrew language therefore was not simply an ornament of the Jewish people or even a great creation or treasure. It was no more and no less than the very map of the nation's being in its best self, and it was by using this map that the nation could understand its own spirit and realize that best self.

A second argument concerns the power of the Hebrew language to guarantee the continuity of Jewish culture. In contrast to the political Zionists, who saw anti-Semitism as the greatest threat to the Jewish people, the cultural Zionists saw the crisis of Judaism as the greatest threat. What would be left of the "national spirit" of the Jewish people after the great complex of the Torah and the commandments collapsed under the twin pressures of enlightenment and emancipation? In a post-religious age, what could guide the people in negotiating modernity without losing an essential connection to the Jewish national genius? In proposing Hebrew for this redemptive role, the Hebraists were making a claim about the nature of language in general. Above all else, a national language is conservative in its nature. As new meanings arise, the old meanings are not discarded but rather retained and repositioned within the deeper recesses of the language. Like a great river moving toward the sea, language accumulates vast alluvial deposits that it moves over great distances. The Hebrew language, whose antiquity and continuous employment sets it apart from other great tongues, has seen the Jewish people through periods of great disruption; it has succeeded in doing so because of the treasure house of meanings it enfolds within it. Now that the Jewish people are facing its greatest challenge, identity-annihilating absorption into the stream of general culture, it is only the protean resources of the Hebrew language that can be counted on to enable the nation to remain authentically Jewish in the new order.

Third, Hebrew has the capacity to constitute a cultural matrix for the nation. Culture as a word and a concept was a late arrival within the discourse of Hebrew literature. The term for literature itself [*sifrut*] was a nineteenth-century neologism; literature per se as we know it did

the Histadrut Ivrit and did not view poetry as a proper medium for political passions.

Divergent, too, were the social and economic milieus of the two literatures. The Yiddish poets generally wrote from within the proletarian circumstances of their immigrant brethren. Leib was a boot maker, H. Leyvik, a paper hanger, Zisho Landoy, a house painter, and Moshe Leib Halpern a jack of all trades. Their identity as skilled workers was a badge of honor and integrity rather than a sign of their having failed to become bosses and owners. Their vocation was poetry and their livelihood, their trades. They were widely read in world literature even though they lacked university degrees. Even though publishing poetry in the Yiddish press was desirable to all, taking a job working for a newspaper, an option open to some, was viewed with suspicion by many. Jacob Glatstein eventually made a point of demonstrating that it was possible to maintain a separation between journalistic work and poetry writing.

The situation of the Hebraists was quite otherwise. A glimpse into that difference is provided by Efros in his attempt to explain to an Israeli readership in 1952 something of the atmosphere of the literary circles in which he had participated in America decades earlier.

> What about the yearnings for the faraway shtetl in which they were born, the anguish of immigrant adjustment, the anxieties of making a living? There were none of these, and they played no role in the thematics of their poetry. It was their brethren the Yiddish poets who underwent this long and difficult process; and something of the bitter afflictions of the sweat shop entered their blood stream and seasoned their verse. The young Hebraists, in contrast, knew nothing of factories. Because they arrived with their leaning already in hand, they began right away to give private lessons in Hebrew or to teach Hebrew school while they prepared for entrance to universities on their way to becoming doctors and professors. The immigrant experience? They put it behind them in one running leap.[17]

If we take Efros's generalizations with a grain of salt and keep in mind that he is talking about poetry and not prose, his observations about the *sitz im leben* of American Hebrew poetry are very acute. The Hebraists were far from being proletarians. Although they arrived on these shores as penniless as other immigrants, they brought

different parts of the city. When a Hebrew writer from Europe or Palestine visited the city, a banquet would be organized in his honor and the proceedings reported in the Hebrew and Yiddish press. But it would be a mistake not to look beyond New York. Most all major Jewish communities in America between the two world wars had Hebraist circles or clubs, and this was true not only in the Northeast but especially in the cities of the Ohio and Mississippi River valleys. This was a large and widely dispersed network. In a poem that will be discussed later in this volume, Ginzburg reflects on the paradox of interconnectedness and dispersion of these scattered cells by comparing them to lit-up train stations that pop into view and then fade away as he sits on a speeding train: "Like a sparse string of lights, scattered but connected / belonging to a strange and darkly snowy train station / that suddenly pops up among the winter fields, / forgotten somewhere between New York and Cleveland, / I have imagined you, Hebraists in the expanses of America."[18] To be sure, the anchors of these groups were the Hebraist educators who had branched out and colonized the Jewish communities of America; but the groups also attracted non-professionals called *shoḥarei ʿivrit* or *ḥovevei ʿivrit*, amateurs in the wider and romantic sense of the term, who were attracted to the Jewish national idea in its Hebraist garb.

The network of Hebraists in America can best be thought of in terms of a virtual or invisible community. Even in New York there was little day-to-day and face-to-face interaction. There may have been a Hebrew table at the Café Royal on the Lower East Side, but Hebraist culture had nothing of the contentious, lived density of its vastly larger Yiddish counterpart. Hebraism was an elite undertaking from the very beginning by self-definition and not just by force of circumstance. How, then, was a sense of interconnection and communication achieved among the scattered flock of the Hebrew faithful? Certainly, there were conferences and conclaves and gatherings, but the most significant mode of connection was newspapers and journals. The role of the periodical in creating community in modern Jewish life in general has been vastly understudied.[19] For the Hebraist world, the periodical was its life blood. *Hatoren* and *Miqlat* from the early period have already been mentioned; there were also *Bitzaron*, *Shevilei*

the 1940s that the best works in American Hebrew literature were produced: Halkin's *'Ad mashber* [The crash] (1945), Efros's *Zahav* [Gold] (1942), Regelson's *Haquqot otiyyotayikh* [Engraved are thy letters] (1946), Reuven Wallenrod's *Ki fanah yom* [Twilight in the Catskills] (1946), Lisitzky's *Eleh toledot adam* [In the grip of cross-currents] (1949), and others. American Hebrew writers had entered a mature stage in their careers and found their voices; but this was a late harvest that could be enjoyed mostly by other Hebrew writers in America and by the few critics in Palestine who were alert to the work of the Americans. A number of the poets—Halkin, Regelson, and Efros—moved to Palestine/Israel during these years. Halkin and Regelson had lived there in the 1930s, returned to the States during the war years, and afterward finally settled in Israel. These decisions to move were complicated by the availability of jobs, family considerations, and the disruption of the war. In the face of the waning reception of Hebrew literature in America, it is in some ways easier to understand the motives of those who departed for the cultural center of Hebrew than to plumb the hearts and minds of those who stayed on. Each case was different, and the essays on the individual poets in this volume attempt to sketch something of the mental world of each poet. But there remains much work to be done in understanding how these "prophets without honor" understood their place as time went on. The establishment of the State of Israel was the occasion for transcendent celebration in the Hebraist world; yet one wonders what mixed emotions the Hebraists experienced at a private, unspoken level about being left behind in the shadows. Moreover, the language they loved and the language whose august purity they had labored so long to protect was now moving on to a vernacular incarnation whose rough-and-tumble vulgarity was often distant from their spirit.

It was in the late 1930s that a generation shift took place that introduced fresh energies into the world of Hebrew culture and sought to change the very definition of what that culture was about. These energies flowed through the channel of the Histadrut Hanoar Haivri, which was founded in 1936. Although the name of the organization sounded like the Histadrut Ivrit, it was its own entity and independent from the older body. It was begun by American-born students in

their twenties who had acquired their Hebrew not "from the cradle," like the older Hebraists, but rather in the institutions, the Hebrew colleges, that the latter had founded. Among the founders and active members were young people who would go on to become significant figures in Jewish life: Moshe Davis, Gershon Cohen, T. Carmi, Jacob Kabakoff, Haim Leaf, Shlomo Shulsinger, Preil, and Milton Arfa. One of the most significant achievements of the Histadrut Hanoar Haivri was the publishing of a journal titled *Niv* [Expression], which appeared with different degrees of regularity for the next twenty years. Here, for all intents and purposes, was a counterculture that was organized under the banner of Hebrew but defined itself not so much in opposition to the older generation of Hebraists but in contradistinction to it. What was the new message it was announcing?

The novelty of their assertion centered on the question of what culture means. For the older generation, it was argued, *tarbut ʿivrit* [Hebrew culture], the grand banner that had been carried to America from Odessa of the 1890s, had never meant anything more than *sifrut ʿivrit* [Hebrew literature]. When the Hebraists talked about culture, what they really meant was the world of letters, namely, poetry, stories, essays, plays, reviews, memoirs, biographical profiles, and so on, in addition to publishing houses and the all-important journals. In this observation, the younger Hebraists were undoubtedly correct. But why was this necessarily a bad thing? Although literature and letters obviously remained highly significant activities in their eyes, they asserted that Hebrew culture should express the totality of the modern Jew's creativity. This meant not only literature and letters but also music, dance, and theater. Indeed, in New York City in the 1940s there was a Hebrew Arts Committee, chaired by Moshe Davis, which coordinated the activities of Pargod Hebrew theater, the Simfonetta Ivrit, a dance troupe, and various Hebrew choruses. At the age of twenty, Davis had been the first president of the Histadrut Hanoar Haivri, and later, as the young dean of the Teachers Institute of the Jewish Theological Seminary, he used his office to help promote the Hebrew arts. (A historian of American Jewry, Davis later moved to Israel and founded the Institute for Contemporary Jewry at the Hebrew University.) This impatience with the hegemony of literature

introduced his young comrades to the thinking of Simon Rawidowicz, a European Hebraist, historian of philosophy, and thinker who advocated a dual-center model of Diaspora-Eretz Yisrael relations based on the image of the dialectic between Babylonian and Palestinian Jewries during the talmudic period.[24]

Finally, the frustration with the restrictiveness of the older Hebraism found its most influential outlet in the creation of a Hebrew camping movement. Veteran educators had come to realize, as has been mentioned, that afternoon Hebrew schools would never be able to compete with the dominance of the English-language environment in which their students lived their everyday lives. Younger Hebrew educators, led by Shulsinger, proposed using the students' long summer vacations to create a counter environment in which Hebrew would function as the dominant norm rather than a burdensome add-on. Within this laboratory environment, it would be possible to experiment with fashioning a synthesis among the dynamic, new Hebrew-based culture of the Yishuv, a fidelity to religious observance, and an embrace of the positive elements of American society. Camp Massad, which later grew into a number of camps in the Poconos and Canada, was founded by Shulsinger in 1941 and benefited from the wider popularity of summer camping in American Jewish life.

It was only here and only under these special conditions that the dream of Hebrew becoming a vernacular for American Jewry was briefly and partially realized. Baseball, the quintessential American pastime, was played at Massad using Hebrew terms for ball, strike, and run, all of which could be found in the camp's own paperback dictionary of Hebrew equivalents for the terms in which American Jews lived their lives. The original Massad camps were dissolved in 1981, and the sad story of their final years tells us much about the waning power of Hebrew to serve as a trans-denominational ideal. The modern Orthodoxy of Massad's official culture had been sustained by the passions of religious Zionism, although in the excitement of camp life, Torah study and the commandments had always played a correct but secondary role to Hebrew and Israel. In 1947 under the aegis of the Jewish Theological Seminary, Davis and Sylvia Cutler Ettenberg founded the first Ramah camp, which aimed to retain the Hebrew

came across English and American writers unevenly. Some influences were swallowed whole and imitated derivatively only to be returned to more subtlety and less evidently in later years, while other English-language writers might remain remote and unfamiliar until a poet's intellectual journey made his verse open to their sway. In modern theory, moreover, the very concept of influence has been interrogated and has undergone several thorough revisions. For all these reasons, the thesis put forward by Halkin, and seconded by Ribalow and Epstein, remains a heuristic rubric within which fundamental work remains to be done.

When the Americans looked inward and took stock of themselves, they saw their poetry as distinguished by two chief characteristics: seriousness and simplicity. Seriousness is a term that Halkin drew from the Victorians with deliberate provocation. He knew that Victorian poetry (especially Tennyson, Browning, Arnold) was reputed to be the old regime in opposition to which modern verse had to define itself. Yet, he nevertheless saw in the "earnestness" of the Victorians an admirable focus on the essential questions of human existence, and this was precisely the focus that had been lost in the furious engagement of Palestinian Hebrew poetry with the politics of the moment. In clamoring to attach themselves to the avant-garde, the Hebrew modernists had ironically made Hebrew into a provincial poetry, a poetry limited in time and place and cut off from the deepest springs of human feeling. There can be no great lyric poetry, Halkin avers, without the poet's striving to unite "the moments of vision that appear like isolated bubbling streams that come from a common source." The fact that the poet's quest for *sheleimut hanefesh* [wholeness of the soul], the deepest drama of true poetry, is an embarrassment to the modernists and is an indication of an ultimate want of ultimate seriousness.[34] Taking care not to evoke a specifically Judaic frame of reference, Halkin formulated this quest in universal religious terms. Unsurprisingly, these were terms that were particularly well fitted to Halkin's own poetic project. Although his outlook is shared by a number of poets, a more representative and broader-spectrum characterization of the humanistic enterprise of American Hebrew poetry

וְסוֹד־הַחַיִּים יֵשׁ בַּצִּמְצוּם וּמִשְׁגָּב לַמַּחֲשָׁבָה;
שׁוּר, נִיצוֹץ אֵשׁ הֵן יַהֲרֶה לֶהָבָה,
וּבְגַרְעִין קָטָן זֶה מְקֻפָּלִים כָּל הַפֵּרוֹת אֲשֶׁר יִהְיוּ תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם,
וּבְאֵגֶל חֵשֶׁק אֶחָד מְפֹרָכְסִים דּוֹרוֹת בָּאִים.

There are magical flames and hidden secrets in frugality
That become strong wine if they touch you
Infusing your blood with strength, surging through your veins
To assault the fortresses and run the blockade up the mountain.

The secret of life and refuge for thought are in frugality;
Behold: a spark of fire will indeed give birth to a flame,
In this small seed all the fruit that will ever be are enfolded,
In this one drop of desire quiver all coming generations.[36]

In translating the poem's title as "Frugality," Naomi Seidman wisely opted for the homely and everyday meaning of a term that has profound and recondite associations. *Tsimtsum* is of course the term in Lurianic Kabbalah for God's voluntary self-containment that allows creation to take place, and the theologically loaded meaning of the term is made explicit in the second half of the poem, which is not quoted above. (Later Feinstein wrote a verse drama on the thirteenth-century mystic Abraham Abulafia; see in Chapter Ten.) Sparks and seeds are humble and simple things, and they are ostensibly signs of thriftiness and self-denial. Yet despite their modest garb, once activated they have Superman-like potential. This frugality unbound can intoxicate the senses, storm fortresses, and engender a bounty of living things. The paradox is no more acutely felt than in the *egel beṣheq eḥad*, the single drop of seminal fluid, which, in contrast to its appearance in Mishnah *Avot* (3:1) as a putrid excretion, here holds *in potentia* the whole future of the race. Feinstein's poem allows us to savor something of the tone of the American Hebraists' self-perception, which moves between pride and *resentiment*. The clarity, purity, and modesty that distinguish their works, they would strongly argue, were the result of choice, not incapacity. They renounced theatrical self-indulgence in favor of classic economy and restraint, and they did so in the hope of acceding to a poetic discourse made the more concentrated by these renunciations.

of address. Because there is no expectation of response, moreover, the ode provides safe cover for the speaker to indulge himself in expressing the fullness, and indeed the fulsomeness, of his extravagant feelings of adoration and devotion. With its hoary lineage, the ode authorizes the high pathos that Regelson brings to his grand subject.

Beyond its rhetorical function as a gesture of obeisance, the first line lays bare the fateful impress of Hebrew upon the speaker's life: the very letters of Hebrew have been carved into him. The root of *ḥaquqot* connotes the act of incising letters on stone, a kind of writing that is as difficult as it is permanent.[3] The same root in its *pi'el* form means to make law [*ḥoq*], to legislate. This act of forceful and norm-setting writing is inscribed not on the speaker's soul or flesh in some kind of romantic or martyrological stigma but rather on the deep structure of his world [*tavnit 'olami*]. It is not just world in the sense of a total worldview but the form or pattern [*tavnit*] that structures that world and undergirds it. This act of inscription, then, resembles the imprinting of a circuit onto a silicon chip or the encoding of a genetic sequence within an organism. Let it be clear, however, that the world that is thus inscribed is individual and personal: *'olami*, *my* world. This is not the ideological sphere of Zionist discourse that supposes that every "I" speaks for the collective. The "I" of "Ḥaquqot otiyyotayikh" is not allegorical or representative as in the manner of Haskalah odes to Hebrew but the distinct voice of a poet-speaker whose passionate affair with the Hebrew language is *experienced* as an exclusive encounter, even if he may know that his devotions are not the only ones being laid at the feet of his beloved. Finally, it should be noted that the agents of the act of inscription are letters and not words. Although Regelson's poem is obsessed with words, its most fervent veneration is reserved for the letters of the Hebrew alphabet because they are the tangible and tactile atomic units out of which all meaning is constructed. Regelson's belief in the world-shaping power of the Hebrew letters is a lineal descendent of Abulafia's *Sprachmystik* and the vivid combinatorial imagination of the kabbalists, whose work he knew well.

In the second line, the seed in the grape and the clapper in the bell are presented as instances of the "secret" of Hebrew that the speaker

Before finally being let go, our grape and bell can testify to one more essential feature of Regelson's poem: its semantic difficulty. "Ḥaquqot otiyyotayikh" is full to the brim with Hebrew words that are rare, obscure, and archaic. Instead of the disputed *zag* for grape, the common term *ʿeinav/ʿanavim* would have served; instead of the rare *zog* for bell, the universally recognized *paʿamon* would have enabled the reader to grasp the intended meaning. *Reḥimah* for beloved, in the first line, is an Aramaicism; although its use does abet Regelson's theme of knowing the innermost secrets of the woman—*reḥem* means womb—it also tweaks the nose of the uninitiated reader, who is likely to mistake the word for the more common *raḥamim/raḥum*, "mercy/merciful." It is not, after all, as if Hebrew did not easily possess a dozen recognizable terms for beloved, some of great elegance and sensuality. Regelson also delights in the use of what linguists call domain-specific lexicons, that is, lists of technical terms that belong to a circumscribed field of study. For example, the remainder of the poem's first section, following the lines quoted above, contains a list of the principle heavenly constellations followed by catalogues of field grasses and trees. To be sure, the inclusion of these catalogues is eminently justifiable on thematic grounds. Regelson is seeking to establish nothing less than an identity between the cosmos and Hebrew as Logos, as well to demonstrate the linguistic immanence of Hebrew from the most supernal realms to the lowliest shrubs in the meadow. Yet in pursuit of these exalted goals, Regelson lays down a raft of nouns that would be transparently comprehensible only to a Semitic philologist or a specialist in biblical and talmudic flora.

The issue is not intelligibility per se. Regelson's obscurities are not difficult in the sense that the term is used in literary theory to describe works of art in which surface gaps of meaning and coherence generate stubborn challenges to interpretation, say, the *Cantos* of Ezra Pound. With a good dictionary and a concordance in hand, intrepid readers can solve most problems that come their way and be assured of revealing the patterns of coherence beneath the apparent occlusion. Indeed, there is a crossword-puzzle kind of ingenuity that is piqued by the poem. Alternatively, readers can adopt the less rigorous—and arguably more pleasurable—course of allowing the meaning of unfamiliar

of these. Is Regelson merely showing off? Is he indulging in poetic grandiosity? I think not, although these are fair questions that must be reckoned with. This issue can best be approached by first observing that there are two dimensions to the performativity let loose in "Ḥaquqot otiyyotayikh." The more evident of the two is the performance of the poet's virtuosity: his encyclopedic mastery of the historical lexicon of the Hebrew language, his erudition in classical sources, and, most of all, his ability to take the language not just as given but rather to invent and proliferate provocative new words and dazzling new constructions by using and extending the existing templates for Hebrew word formation. The less evident dimension of performativity resides in the inherent resources of Hebrew that Regelson sets about to exploit. Regelson could not stage his pyrotechnics if the language had not already in its long history been witness in many periods to the grafting of new forms onto old. The very fact that Hebrew is built upon tri-consonantal roots or word stems means that the system of verb paradigms called *binyanim* (explained below) and noun paradigms called *mishqalim* can potentially generate hundreds of possible permutations for each root. Although only a fraction of these are alive in the language at any one time, the latent possibilities are huge, and they are there awaiting activation.

This is Hebrew's famous plasticity, and it is the quality that Regelson prizes above all others. It is also the quality that authorizes and even encourages his own demonstration of mastery over the language. "Ḥaquqot otiyyotayikh" is the site for a creative synergy between the plasticity of Hebrew and the virtuosity of the individual talent. In its historical development, Hebrew has already demonstrated dramatic metamorphoses and extraordinary adaptations to new cultural climates. Regelson takes upon himself to advertise the creative malleability of Hebrew that is already part of the historical record by performing his own improvised-for-the-moment high jinks. His is a virtuosity that is undertaken, as he sees it, *in the service of* the honor of Hebrew. The word virtuoso, it is worth considering, comes to us via Italian and Late Latin from the Latin *virtus*, virtuous. In Hebrew's plasticity, Regelson finds license for his linguistic cartwheels. He is indeed—or at the very least, in his own eyes—performing for the great glory.

eroticizing Hebrew is to materialize the language as a body. Sometimes it is the oceanic body of Hebrew as the great mother; at other times, the hewn limbs of the Hebrew goddess; and still others, the tangled appurtenances of a coy mistress. This is not the same method as the conceit, the figure used by the English metaphysical poets for a witty systematic analogy, as, for example, when Donne compares the Church to a cow in which the teats, the tail, and head all correspond to recognizable offices and institutions. In "Ḥaquqot otiyyotayikh," although there no lack of wit, there is no one-to-one correspondence between the parts of the body and the parts of speech. The endless formations and features of Hebrew that are catalogued in the next twelve sections of the poem are marvelously non-metaphorical; they are, simply and concretely, the *disjecta membra* that, sorted out and put together, comprise the body of Hebrew.

Regelson's depiction of Hebrew as a woman is informed by two important medieval models. The first is Yehudah Alḥarizi's *Sefer taḥkemoni*, the masterpiece of Hebrew *maqama* [rhymed prose interspersed with verse] from the turn of the thirteenth century in Spain. Before proceeding to relate the picaresque adventure of the work's protagonist and narrator, Hever the Kenite, in his introduction, Alḥarizi describes the prophetic experience that, quite literally, gave birth to the work. Dejected by the downtrodden fate of Hebrew amid the triumphalism of Arabic, the poet determines to raise the fortunes of the Holy Tongue. In return for his consecration to this mission, he is vouchsafed a visitation from none other than the Hebrew language herself, who appears to him as a beautiful maiden. "Before I could speak, her lips were on mine and I tasted wondrous wine. Drink deep my thoughts, she whispered—ah, her touch was silk!—seek 'neath my tongue my honey and my milk.'" Pressed to tell her story, she reveals that although she is of royal birth she has been reviled and defiled. She turns to the poet to reveal her true self: "I am your Mistress, the Holy Tongue: if I find favor in your sight, I will be your heart's delight—only be zealous for God's name: sanctify me, who am put to shame. Be you my redeemer from every slanderer, renegade, blasphemer."[11] The poet loses no time betrothing the maiden, and "Straightway I lay with the prophetess and from this union sprang one who godly sang."

The offspring can be parsed as either the composition itself, *Sefer teḥkemoni*, or Hever the Kenite, its protagonist-narrator.[12]

Although *Sefer teḥkemoni* furnishes precedent and license for an eroticized image of Hebrew, the differences between Alḥarizi's and Regelson's poems are especially instructive. In *Sefer teḥkemoni*, the betrothal of Hebrew is only the introductory premise of the work, which then proceeds at considerable length to delight us with its stories about tricksters and mistaken identities. To be sure, the whole work is, in a sense, a compendious defense and demonstration of the honor of Hebrew in the face of Arabic virtuosity, but that theme is consciously invoked only at the outset. In contrast, "Ḥaquqot otiyyotayikh" is about nothing other than the attributes of Hebrew from beginning to end. Yet when it comes to the relations between the poet and his fair mistress Hebrew, the medieval poet is far more precipitous and forward than his belated descendant. The persona of the poet-author in *Sefer teḥkemoni* would seem to have more business than pleasure on his mind in his encounters with Hebrew; he meets, kisses, betroths, and sleeps with his beloved in very short order, and he does so for the purpose of giving birth to his book and providing it with a pedigree beyond reproach. When it comes to the poet-speaker of "Ḥaquqot otiyyotayikh," however, one could never imagine his presuming so much. On the one hand, his whole delight is to touch and handle all of the polymorphous manifestations of Hebrew all the time. Yet on the other, he is a supplicant and a servant whose boundless adoration for Hebrew would never allow him to imagine perpetrating the ultimate intimacy. This is not because he is self-effacing or servile but because it is not mastery or ownership that he seeks. What he seeks instead is to dwell in the illuminating and fertile presence of the beloved and to admire, explore, stroke, handle, and play with all of her variegated charms. This is the jouissance of perpetual, tactile intimacy rather than the satisfaction of conquest and consummation.

One of the other medieval voices heard in this section of "Ḥaquqot otiyyotayikh" is that of Halevi in his great ode to Zion, "Tsiyyon, halo tish'ali." Halevi's ode was one of the best known medieval poems not only because it was integral to the morning liturgy on the summer fast day of the Ninth of Av but also because in modern times, it became a

key text in the grafting of Zionist aspirations onto traditional religious sentiments.[13] Like Regelson's ode to Hebrew, Halevi's ode to Zion is a sustained and fervent address to an exalted female object in which the unremitting use of feminine pronominal and verbal suffixes makes the presence of gender inescapable. Moreover, both poems anatomize their subjects, with Halevi's taking the form of an imaginary travelogue in which the poet visits the holy sites of biblical repute. His longing to be given the ability to make the journey is expressed in lines that will be echoed by Regelson.

מִי יִתְּנֵנִי מְשׁוֹטֵט בַּמְּקוֹמוֹת אֲשֶׁר
נִגְלוּ אֱלֹהִים לְחוֹזַיִךְ וְצִירַיִךְ!
מִי יַעֲשֶׂה לִי כְנָפַיִם וְאַרְחִיק נְדוֹד,
אָנִיד לִבְתֵרֵי לְבָבִי בֵּין בְּתָרַיִךְ!

Would I were a-wandering in the places where
God had been revealed unto thy seers and messengers.
Would I had wings that I might fly afar
And move the breakage of heart over thy mountain-breaks.[14]

On the verge of embarking upon his own extensive travelogue, Regelson's speaker poses a series of similar questions in the concluding lines to Section 3.

וּמִי יְשַׂחֵר סִתְרֵי תְמוּנַת אוֹתִיּוֹתַיִךְ, חִטּוּב־צַלְעוֹתֵיהֶן
וְאָהֳלִיאָבוּת־חֲלוּלֵיהֶן,
וּמִי יִסַּק אֶל גַּבֵּה תְּנוּעוֹתַיִךְ, מַזָּלוֹת מַנְהִיגִים לָאוֹתִיּוֹת,
וְכַמַּזָּלוֹת בָּרָקִיעַ זְעֵרוּ לָעַיִן, גַּם כִּי עָצְמוּ בְּמִאֹד־מְאֹד?
וּמִי יִרְגֹּל עַד חֲבִיוֹן טְעָמַיִךְ,
וְהֵם נְשָׁמוֹת לַתְּנוּעוֹת, מַנְגִּינוֹת לַכּוֹכָבִים?

Who will gain admittance to the secrets of the forms of your letters, their well-hewn planes and their well-crafted hollows?[15]

Who will soar to the heights of your vowels, the signs [*mazalot*] that guide the letters,

which, like the constellations [*mazalot*] in the heavens, appear minuscule to eye but are colossal in fact?

Who will spy out the hiding places of your *ta'amim*,
for they are the souls of the vowels, the melody of the stars?

The differences between these two sets of questions tell us something essential about the nature of these two projects. Halevi's questions are formulated in the optative mood; they express a wish and a desire that cannot be fulfilled. Although his heart is in the East, he is stuck in the West, and the only kind of wings upon which he can tour the Holy Land are the wings of poesy. Regelson's questions, by contrast, are mock-rhetorical in tone and express a paradoxical amalgam of humility and boastfulness. It is only the true lover and devotee of Hebrew who will be permitted to tour the language's precious secrets. The implied good news, however, is that the poet is just such a worthy person and that the grand tour is exactly what he is about to embark upon. This is the fateful difference between the Holy Land and the Holy Tongue, and for American Hebraists it was a saving difference indeed. In Halevi's time, access to the Land was nearly impossible, and the poet perished in a perilous attempt to reach it. In Regelson's time, even though the dream of return to Zion had begun to be realized, world war and conflict with the British and the Arabs also made approach difficult—"Ḥaquqot otiyyotayikh" appeared in 1946—and Regelson himself was stuck in America. Yet if one could not inhabit the Land, or could do so only through the imagination, the Tongue, in its infinite and perfect portability, presented no such obstacle. Nothing prevents the Diaspora-stranded poet from caressing the planes and hollows of the Hebrew letters and hearing the music of the spheres in its vowels and musical notations.

*

The great catalogue, which begins in Section 4 and occupies the central twelve sections of the poem, is at once a recitation and a demonstration of the features of the Hebrew language. This anatomy is not presented as a general disquisition; rather, in line with the rhetorical premise of the composition as a whole, the anatomy is declaimed as a communication from the speaker of the poem, the lover, to Hebrew, his beloved. The purpose of the utterance is both to pay tribute to the

narrative relies heavily on a secularized and nationalized interpretation of the drama of cosmic exile in Lurianic Kabbalah, especially as it is echoed in the Sabbath hymn to the Shekhinah, *Lekha dodi*, with its abundance of feminine word endings. Because of this reach toward mystical transfigurations, I call this the anagogic axis. In each of the sections in the catalogue core of "Ḥaquqot otiyyotayikh," the movement is toward redemption. The purpose of this praise, so lovingly addressed to Hebrew, is to restore her own sense of her dignity and high calling and to move her toward a kind of *unio mystic*—transposed into earthy nationalist terms—with the Jewish people. But unlike redemption in classical Jewish theology, which is deferred and patiently awaited, the redemption embodied by a revived Hebrew is a present fact; it has happened and it is happening, and it is experienced every time we write, speak, read, or hear the language. This is yet another dimension of the cleavage between territory and language in the Zionist vision that we have noted all along. This helps to explain the ecstatic tone of the poem, which should be understood not as the result of delusional inebriation or nationalistic zeal but a warranted response to something extraordinary that has indeed taken place in the world.

A good example of how these three levels of meaning function together is the first section in this sequence, Section 4, whose subject is the Hebrew *binyanim*.

רָצִיתִי בִּנְיָנַיִךְ,
קַלֵּךְ הָעוֹשָׂה בְּפַשְׁטוּת, לוֹקֶה בְּחֶטְאוֹ וְקָם בְּצִדְקוֹ,
וְהוּא בָּן וְכוֹתֵב מַה פָּעַל אֵל;
נִפְעָלֵךְ הַנִּכְנָע לַסֵּבֶל, וְנִשְׁבָּר, וְנִשְׁאָר בֶּאֱמוּנָתוֹ, וְסוֹפוֹ – נוֹשָׁע;
פִּעֶלֵךְ הַמְחַזֵּק יָדַיִם, הַמְעַשֶּׂה לְמַצָּוֹת וַחֲסָדִים,
יְסַקְּלֵךְ מְנַגְּפִים וִימַלְּאֵךְ טוּבִים;
פָּעֲלֵךְ הַמְלַמֵּד, מְקַטֵּר, וּמְעַטֵּר בְּיוֹם יְדַבֵּר בּוֹ, וּבְכָרְמָיו יְרַנֵּן וִירֹעַע;
הִפְעִילֵךְ הַמַּשְׂכִּיל וְהַמֵּיטִיב,
אֵין כָּמוֹהוּ מַנְעִיל יָחֵף וּמַלְבִּישׁ עֵרוֹם וּמַאֲכִיל רָעֵב,
וְהוּא מַרְנִין בִּגְוָנָיו:
עָלָיו מוֹרִיקִים, נִצָּנָיו מַלְבִּינִים וּמַוְרִידִים, וּפֵרוֹתָיו מַאֲדִימִים;

innovation. The dialectic swung the other way when it came to poets of the Spanish Golden Age, who saw the text of the Hebrew Bible as enrobed in a sacred purity that should not be lightly tampered with. The most casual glance at Regelson's hymn to Hebrew will leave no doubt as to with which party he stands. Like the ancient synagogue poets, Regelson delights in the paradox of a language that is highly regulated and rule driven and at the very same time opens the door to nearly endless artistic virtuosity.

The thematic axis of Section 4, then, could not be clearer. The subject is the *binyanim*, which are given pride of place among the chief topics of Hebrew grammar and laid out in their traditional order. However, the manner in which this orderly duty is performed—its actualization along the performative axis—provides an occasion for the display of wit and virtuosity. The trick Regelson pulls off is this: Each of the seven *binyanim* is presented using verbs inflected exclusively in that *binyan*. In each of these instances, which range from one to five lines, the poet describes the essential "personality" of the *binyan*—the simplicity of *qal*, the submissiveness of *nif'al*, the activism of *hif'il*, and so on—all the while working within the constraints of the *binyan*. It is a gross effect that can be appreciated by anyone with a modicum of familiarity with Hebrew grammar. For the connoisseur, there are an abundance of clever and amusing subtleties that are often variations on the theme of exceptions to the rule. *Qal* is an active *binyan*, but Regelson delights in adducing *loqeh* in line 2, which is a verb in the *qal* form that has a passive meaning [to be punished]. *Ban* [understands], also in line 2, is the rare *qal* form of the root *b.y.n.* that is in common usage in the *hif'il* form [*hevin*], which means the same thing.

When it comes to *hif'il* proper, Regelson devotes a whole line (11) to one of the great anomalies in Hebrew grammar. All verbs that denote turning a color (turning red, turning green, etc.) are conjugated in the *hif'il binyan* despite that fact that they possess none of the active and transitive meanings that mark nearly all verbs in that *binyan*. Morphology proves Regelson's playground in the final line of the section when he focuses on the reflexive *binyan hitpa'el*. Normally, the letter *tav*, which is the hallmark of this *binyan*, is followed by

the first letter of the verb stem. But in a case when the first letter is a *samekh*, *shin*, *sin*, or *zayin*, it changes place with the *tav* to make it easier for the mouth to pronounce a combination containing a dental consonant. When the first letter is a *tsadi*, it causes the *tav* not only to change places but to change itself entirely into another letter, a *tet*. Suffice it to say that at the close of this section, Regelson marshals an example of *each* of these exceptions.

There is a profound game that Regelson is playing here and in other, similar sections. (The fifth, e.g., refers to verbs in the future tense using that tense and to the imperative using only the imperative; in the sixth, the irregular verb stems, the *gizrot hashoresh*, are similarly discussed using instantiations of these paradigms.) In their important study of the poem, Gideon Katz and Gideon Nevo have made the case, based on the structural poetics of Girard Genette, that in these sections Regelson is deploying a particularly acute form of the rhetorical figure called metalepsis. A sign usually refers to something in the world, its referent. We understand words not as things in themselves as much as signs that represent objects and ideas. In Regelson's poem, however, "in front of our very eyes," Katz and Nevo argue, "the sign turns into a referent, and that which represents turns into the represented."[17] So, for example, when a verb that refers to the *binyan* of *pi'el* as a subject is itself set in the *pi'el*, then it makes itself into the thing represented. Although this crossing of the boundary between a sign and its referent can be used to subversive effect in some works of literature, in Regelson's poem it works mainly to "thicken and materialize" the sign and make us feel that the words of the Hebrew language are tangible and animate objects in themselves. In their apt and piquant formulation, Katz and Nevo present "Ḥaquqot otiyyotayikh" as "the supreme example of this semiotic trickery, and Regelson is revealed in it as the maestro of this rhetorical tool, the Yasha Heifetz of the grammatical-semiotic metalepsis. He utilizes it with incomparable panache and inventiveness. The sign reacts like a tame bear—when the wand is raised it dances a dance that is not its own, cajoled into doing that which it is not meant to do."[18]

With Hebrew being made to turn cartwheels and jump through hoops, it is only natural that our attention is not drawn to what is

taking place simultaneously in the other rings of Regelson's circus. What is taking place there is less brilliant but more ambitious. We can grab hold of that story line by looking to translation. One can argue that for obvious reasons "Ḥaquqot otiyyotayikh" is an untranslatable text; yet paradoxically, any translation, even the prose translation of the section I offer above, performs an important service. For the very fact that translation cannot hope to convey the language games Regelson is playing, it effectively squashes the performative axis and exposes a plainer narrative armature that has been there all along. This narrative, however, is not easily transparent because it speaks of higher things. To gain our bearings, let us first observe the rhetorical arrangements. When the speaker opens by declaring, "I have desired your *binyanim* [*binyanayikh*]," he is addressing the Hebrew language and referring to the *binyanim* as her possessions. So throughout, as each *binyan* is taken up in turn, it is not referred to as "the *nifʿal*," for example, as it would be in ordinary discussions of grammar, but as *nifʿaleikh*, <bf>your</bf> *nifʿal*. The *binyanim* here, like all the features of the language throughout the poem, are presented as appurtenances, appendages, aspects, or emanations of Hebrew conceived of as a great female Thou.

It is thus the behavior of *her binyanim* that form the action of Section 4. This is a "story" that begins modestly with each *binyan* simply acting out its own inscribed character but soon reaches for greater heights. As the *binyan* of simple, direct action, *qal* sins and repents and records God's actions. Although *nifʿal* is subjected to suffering and brought low, it remains faithful and in the end is redeemed. As the enabling *binyan*, *piʿel* strengthens the hands of the doers of good deeds and clears away obstacles. *Puʿal* is presented as the *binyan* of perfection and ennoblement, and it is here for the first time that the wedding theme is sounded with the allusion to Song of Songs (8:8): "What shall we do for our sister when she is spoken for?" *Hifʿil* puts into practice the good deeds mentioned earlier by shodding the barefoot, clothing the naked, and feeding the hungry, a process that thereby triggers the blooming of spring in its hues of green, pink, and red. *Hofʿal* puts in a brief appearance as the medium in which the concrete and the abstract are integrated. The greatest attention, finally, is

high and low, the drama is lodged not simply in the act of bearing witness to the omnipresence of the divine in nature but also in the act of *naming*, specifically, giving Hebrew names, in all of their exotic, obscure, and recherché glory, to the astral bodies and the terrestrial flora. It is as if it is through their Hebrew names that the divinity in these entities is unlocked and revealed. What is true in space is true in time. Section 2 of the poem delineates the stations of the sacred history of Israel from the Creation through Revelation and on to the future Redemption. At each stage, the refrain is: "with You" I went down to Egypt, "with You" I fashioned the tablets of the Law, and so on. Hebrew is presented as the medium through which Jewish historical time is enacted.

The theological radicalism of Regelson's poem can easily be missed amid the barrage of bravura linguistic effects. The elevation of Hebrew might seem like the profligate enthusiasm of a besotted Hebraist who should be viewed indulgently as writing poetry "under the influence." Katz and Nevo's work saves us from this mistake. They demonstrate that Regelson is proceeding along considered philosophical lines when he collapses God into Hebrew as Logos and that he fully intends to go as far as he goes. The considerable implications of such a national linguistic theology ~~is~~ are considered below.

But Regelson goes farther still. His greatest provocation concerns the matter of gender, although he would certainly never have characterized it as such. In the various anagogic schemes in Jewish thought, the ultimate cosmic principle is always male, whether this is the God of Israel in relation to the people Israel as bride in the Bible, or the Holy One Blessed Be He in relationship to *keneset yisra'el* in rabbinic discourse, God in relation to the soul in Maimonides, or the Ein-Sof in relationship to the Shekhinah in Kabbalah. Yet the ultimate divine principle created by Regelson's fusing of God and Hebrew is flagrantly and unremittingly female. There can be no other major poem in the Hebrew language, Halevi's ode to Zion notwithstanding, that is so thoroughly suffused with feminine grammatical forms, especially the second-person feminine imperative and the feminine possessive suffixes of nouns and adjectives. This "poetry of grammar," in Roman Jakobson's phrase, is inescapably present in every single line of the

His epic written and published, Silkiner walked away from the genre and returned to it only at the end of his life and then, in a fragmentary and modest way.[2] He began his career over again as a lyric poet and served as a mentor for a group of younger poets who were starting out in *their* writing, living as lyric poets without the benefit or burden of a major epic poem behind them.

Silkiner was born in 1882 in Vilkija, near Kovno, in Lithuania, the son of a merchant who allowed him some elements of a Western education alongside the immersion in traditional Jewish studies. At the age of eighteen, Silkiner moved to Odessa and spent several years in the circles of Hebrew renaissance writers dominated by Bialik and Aḥad Ha'am. He married there and emigrated to the United States in 1904. Although he earned a law degree, he devoted his work life to Hebrew education as the principal of the Uptown Talmud Torah in New York and as a faculty member of the Teachers Institute of the Jewish Theological Seminary, where he taught Hebrew literature and Bible. His early death in 1933 was widely mourned in the Hebraist community.

The group of poets who gathered around Silkiner's mentorship included Lisitzky, Bavli, Ginzburg, and Halkin. Although they were on average only ten years younger than Silkiner, they viewed him—with much esteem and affection—as their elder. He had been in America longer and had a large published work to his name; and he was conversant with the great figures of Hebrew literature in Europe. He corresponded with Bialik, who referred to him as *rosh haḥavurah*, the leader of the group of Hebrew writers in America.[3] Silkiner began to provide this leadership at a time when the prospects for modern Hebrew literature in America remained extremely fragile. Although modern Hebrew novels and poems had been produced in great profusion in Russia in the second half of the nineteenth century, precious little of this spirit infiltrated into America in the mass immigrations that began in the 1880s. Here and there the odd maskil or Hibbat Zion poet found his way to these shores and wrote bitterly of his crushing isolation.[4] Efforts at publishing Hebrew newspapers or journals were mounted and abandoned.

The turning point came in 1910. That year saw, in addition to the appearance of Silkiner's Indian epic, the publication of *Senunit*

himself as so damaged that he cannot give of himself to another.[11] The fact that he addresses her as *yaldati* [my daughter] (line 14) is not insignificant; while this is a standard term of endearment, it also implies that it is non-sexual tenderness that will characterize the relations he is inviting her to partake in.[12]

Third is the question of style. Readers of such contemporary poets as Yehuda Amichai and Natan Zach, whose verse attempts to represent the simplicity of direct speech, may find the Hebrew of Silkiner's poem ornate and difficult. But it is really no more so than the norms of other Hebrew poetry written during the Renaissance period that began in the 1880s. A poem of 1916, to be sure, is already located on the later verge of that period and looks forward to the aggressively modernizing trends of symbolism and expressionism, which will dominate Hebrew poetry in the interwar period in Palestine. In relation to the avant-garde waiting in the wings, the conservatism of Silkiner's poem signals the position of principled resistance that will be assumed by American Hebrew poetry.

As a preliminary generalization, we may fairly say that although American Hebrew poets created within the poetic paradigm of the Hebrew Renaissance, they sought to simplify that norm into a refined classicism. We will point out developments and variations in the formation of this American style in the works of the individual poets as we proceed. For now it is enough to notice the modified biblicism of Silkiner's poem. He has done away with the biblical tense signature that converts future into past and vice-versa, but he has availed himself of the elliptical concision of biblical syntax. There is none of the ornate periphrasis of Haskalah poetry, yet the lexical register remains high, although an educated reader familiar with the Hebrew Bible would encounter few obstacles. The poem is not, however, with its lexical rarities. The use of *ya'areh* in line 4 for "reveals" is uncommon though not obscure. The same is true for *neshiyah* [oblivion], which occurs in the construction *erets neshiyah* in Psalms (88:13), where it is an epithet for the grave or Sheol. Yet it is crucial to point out that, despite the erudition of Silkiner and his implied reader, this learning is not activated in a chain of complex allusions to classical sources as is so famously the case in Bialik's poetry. Because Silkiner's language

נִסְגְּרָה עִם זַעְמָהּ, מְרִיָּהּ
תּוֹךְ מַסֵּכֶת קוּרֵי־שְׁחוֹרָהּ.

וּמְסֻגֶּרֶת שְׁחוֹר־קוּרֶיהָ
יָנֵק תְּנִינַק מְרִיָּהּ, זַעֲמָהּ;
יִפְי, נֹעַם בַּל יְפַעֲמָהּ
בְּסִגּוֹר טְוִיָּהּ שְׁחוֹר־קוּרֶיהָ.

וּכְשׁוֹרְרִי שִׁירָתִי —
וְהַפְרִישָׁה מִשָּׁלָהּ לָהּ:
אֵיבַת־עַד, נְאָצָה, קְלָלָה,
מִדֵּי שׁוֹרְרִי שִׁירָתִי.

מילבוקי, תרס"ט

My Song

I

Not the screech of owls, not the trilling of nightingales,
Not the roar of storms, not the whisper of zephyrs,
Not the wail of oceans, not the murmur of brooks,
Not the rustle of pines, not the hum of sheaves.

None of these pours forth in the notes of my song.

Distances, mountains, valleys, planes,
Savannas, forests, wild fields, wetlands,
Domed azure skies, sun, moon, stars,
Birds, roses, maidens, love—

None of these vibrate the strings of my harp.

II

My soul has grasped the web of its darkness
And withdrawn itself within its armor;
It has become enclosed within its rage and revolt
Within the plated web of its darkness.

Closed tight within the blackness of its web
It will suckle its revolt and rage;
Beauty and loveliness will not move it
Within the woven web of its blackness.

read literature, some in English and a great many in Hebrew, and pursued glimmers of ideas for poems when they presented themselves in his rushing from patient to patient. When the Hebraist activity heated up in New York during World War I, Schwartz became a regular contributor of poems to *Hatoren*, *Miqlat*, and *Hado'ar* and a participant on the boards of various Hebrew educational and cultural institutions.

After settling into his steady work as a physician and his occasional work as a Hebrew poet, Schwartz's brief chronicle comes to an end, even though the next forty years were to see his poetic production increase several fold. It is a chronicle that is generous, if conventionalized, in its account of a young Talmudist's attraction to the new Hebrew literature yet reticent about what it meant to heed the calling of Hebrew poetry in the New World. There are also significant omissions. Schwartz does not mention Israel Jacob Schwartz, his younger brother by nine years who followed him to America in 1906. The younger Schwartz was a prominent member of the Di Yunge, the circle of Yiddish modernists in New York. He translated voluminously from Hebrew to Yiddish, especially the works of Bialik, and is best known for his *Kentucky*, an important epic poem in Yiddish about the adaptation of Lithuanian Jews to rural America.[2]

Now, while it is difficult to discover anything of Schwartz's lived life in his poetry, it is not impossible to discover there something of his spiritual life, if only obliquely. Scattered throughout Schwartz's poetic oeuvre are poems about biblical figures apprehended in a moment of heightened awareness. It is not farfetched to see in these highlighted experiences points of projection and identification that reflect on Schwartz's own sense of what, at root, defines existence. Consider, for example, Schwartz's 1916 poem "Moshe bamidbar" [Moses in the desert], which imagines Moses' thoughts in the moments before he comes upon the burning bush.[3] Reflecting on the magnificence of the desert sunset, Moses wonders about the purpose of this natural beauty if evil and oppression reign in the world and stormy emotions and ambitions rage in his heart. The wondrous fire that alights on the bush comes, in this telling, not as an unbidden spur to Moses' curiosity but as a direct response to his urgent appeal to God to reveal Himself and give some sign of the meaning of existence.

The biblical Ruth, in a poem of that name from 1918 (pp. 43–46), is apprehended by Schwartz at the lowest ebb in her fortunes. Widowed and impoverished, she gleans amid the alien corn at the moment when the Judean landscape blushes with its greatest splendor and abundance. As she stoops to scrounge for forgotten stalks, her mind is flooded with memories of the beauty of her native Moab and the warm embrace of her lost family. In the frozen frame of the poet, there is no redeemer yet in sight, and Ruth's loneliness is unremitting; it is the speaker of the poem, vouchsafed a retrospective knowledge of what is to come, who addresses Ruth and urges her to remain constant, assuring her that her ordeal will not be for naught. In "Biktseh ha'areimah" [By the edge of the haystack] (pp. 175–78), a companion piece written twenty-five years later, Schwartz returns to the same fields but shifts the focus to Boaz. After having awakened him from his sleep and to his responsibilities, Ruth is now asleep at his feet while he remains wakefully alert and agitated as he contemplates the sudden prospect of his life being transformed. Boaz is a middle-aged man of substance whose passions and ambitions are behind him, and in the presence of Ruth's Moabite beauty, he wonders whether he is capable of reentering the life of the senses, becoming again a husband and a father and thereby seizing his new destiny.

There are many others. There is a tormented Jeremiah in the pit (1908, pp. 47–49) struggling between his rage against the people's iniquities and the empathic awareness of the calamitous suffering that will soon be their fate. There is Abraham at the end of the three-day journey to Moriah, pausing in a moment of tenderness to take the burden of the wood from Isaac's shoulders onto his own before marching on to the terrible conclusion of his mission (1937, pp. 97–99). Against the stillness of the night after the holiday festivities have died down, Hannah's roiled heart rages before she pleads before God in Eli's presence (1939, p. 117). In her death throes, Rachel regains consciousness just long enough to glimpse the beauty of the boy she has just given birth to (1940, pp. 122–23). We encounter Joseph and his thoughts about his uncertain destiny at the moment a rope is thrown to him and he is pulled up from the pit (n.d., pp. 298–300).

enormity of the loss. "Be'irati en hogegim" [In my town there is no celebrating] (1946, pp. 191–92) renders that loss palpable by cataloguing all of the preparations for the Sukkot holiday that are *no longer* being made in the speaker's native town. In "Be'avor nezirah" [A nun passes by] (1947, pp.203–7), the sight of a nun recalls to the speaker's mind the presence of Christianity in his Lithuanian childhood. "Sefer torah misham" [A Torah scroll from over there] (1951, pp. 235–39) describes the mixture of joy and mourning that attend the installation of a Torah scroll saved from the European destruction. All of these are strong and controlled poems that reward attention.

Of all the figures in this volume, Schwartz, for a variety of reasons, is perhaps the most buried. He is an example of a figure who, despite his resistance of modernism, produced no small number of highly affecting poems. His work deserves to be better known.

❊ הַצְּבִי
The Deer

Analysis

הַצְּבִי

עַל שְׂפַת הַבִּקְעָה, אֵצֶל חֹרֶשׁ יָרֹק־כֵּהֶה,
הוּא עָמַד, סוֹקֵר אֶת הַנּוֹף וְעֵר וְגֵאֶה,
וְקַל, וְנָכוֹן לְהִנָּתֵק בְּכָל שָׁעָה
מִמְּקוֹמוֹ, לְשׁוּב לִרְעוֹת חָפְשִׁי בַּאֲשֶׁר רָעָה . . .

אֲדַמְדַּם־זְהוּב הַגֵּו, — בְּלֹבֶן אַחַר שְׁקִיעָה
שֶׁלְּהֶבֶת־שַׁחַר חַיָּה נָעֲצָה אֶת אֵיָּה;
בְּכָל עַצְמוֹתָיו רַעַד־חַיִּים תּוֹסֵס עָצוּר, —
כְּרַעַד קוֹפֶא לִנְגֹהוֹת־סוֹף־הַבָּצִיר;

צַוָּארוֹ הַמְחֻטָּב — קֶשֶׁת רוֹמָה דְרוּכָה,
וְרֹאשׁוֹ — מִגְדַּל מַקְרִין רָב עִם שְׁמֵי הַמְּנוּחָה . . .
וְלִי — מְשִׁיבַת עוֹלָם כַּאֲשֶׁר עָלַי נִגְלָה,
וְעֵינִי אֶת תִּפְאַרְתּוֹ הַקַּלִּילָה רִגְּלָה, —

readiness to bolt and run—underscores the privileged and unnatural nature of this momentary stasis. Here at the opening of the poem, the experience of glimpsing something extraordinary is marked positively as a source of simple wonderment. By the close of the poem, however, when the deer does in fact bolt and run, leaving an acute feeling of abandonment in his wake, the experience will be marked quite otherwise.

The description of the deer in lines 5–10 emphasizes three sources of admiration. The first (lines 5–6) is ostensibly concerned with color; the red-gold of the deer's back stands out against the white haze of twilight like a "dawn flare." But the scene is transformed from being a decorative tableau by the assertiveness, even violence, of the verb *na'atsah* [insert, stick into]. The deer inserts or sticks his inflammatory colorfulness into haze as if he were a vivid lone island on a drab sea. The second quality (lines 7–8) is the equipoise between power and restraint. The quivering the speaker notices throughout the deer's body is taken as a sign of a powerfully operating organism that is idling and voluntarily holding itself, at least for the moment, in abeyance. The third quality (lines 9–10) is the sculptural beauty of the deer's form, but here again a connection is made to the phenomenon of latent power. The tense arc of the deer's chiseled neck resembles a Roman arch in the sense that that architectural invention found an elegant way to keep the forces of gravity in check. The comparison of the proud head held aloft to a tower beaming messages in the tranquil skies establishes a noble and superior communion between this creature and Creation. This seemingly humble animal is connected to the cosmos in ways man can never hope to be.

Taken on its own terms as a sharply etched poetic rendering of an encounter with the natural world, Schwartz's description of the deer is very accomplished and a fine example of the craft of poetry. Yet for the Hebrew reader, there is another dimension. In the elegant Hebrew poetry composed during the Golden Age in Spain, the *tsevi*, often translated more romantically as the "gazelle," is a standard epithet for the ephebe, the beautiful boy who arouses the (male) observer's admiration and unrequited desire. Whether the *tsevi* is merely a literary topos or a figure that reflects actual homosexual relations is a question

was published there under the editorship of Asher Barash and Yaakov Rabinowitz.

All these years Bavli made his home at the Jewish Theological Seminary. Soon after returning to New York in 1917, Kaplan, the dean of the Seminary's Teachers Institute, recruited him to teach Hebrew language and literature; and Bavli grew with the institution as it moved from the Lower East Side to Morningside Heights. He communicated his love for Hebrew literature to several generations of students who became lay and professional leaders in the American Jewish community. The bibliography of Bavli's works, edited by E. R. Malachi after his death, was underwritten by subscription from several hundred of his students.[8]

Among the Hebrew poets in America, Bavli was assiduous in his devotion to the lyric. Unlike Lisitzky and Efros, he did not seek out epic narrative forms of poetry to express his embrace of the American vistas. He eventually grew more at home in America, and his long poem "Mrs. Woods" (1924), which is a monologue by a Yankee matriarch with bright eyes and sturdy values, justifiably became one of the best known pieces in the American Hebrew repertoire (see Pt. 3, Chap. 16 for a discussion of this poem). When Bavli's poetry was imbued with a sense of place, it was most likely to be the Land of Israel rather than his adopted native grounds, or as became the case later in his life, the Lithuanian shtetls of his childhood. His first journey to Palestine in 1926–27 resulted in the moving poem sequence *Neginot arets* [Melodies of the land].[9] Two later journeys furnished much material for what is a kind of contemporary continuation of the Hibbat Zion tradition. The numbered poem cycle, like *Neginot arets*, became a favorite mode of composition; this enabled Bavli to remain within the lyric while linking his poems together thematically and sequentially.[10] His main venture outside the lyric was the dramatic monologue, in the manner of Edward Arlington Robinson, who was much admired by Bavli and other American Hebrew poets. During the 1920s, in addition to "Mrs. Woods," Bavli wrote several other extended monologues;[11] and then twenty years later, he burst forth with a series of monologues spoken by figures who inhabited the Lithuanian village in which he grew up. These were gathered together

fellow American Hebrew poet Halkin, to whom he appeals: "Arise, my brother, and let us go out to encounter all of wonders:/ Our souls are bound up in the veil of faraway places."[18]

Because of the thinness of the membrane that separates the soul of the poet from the soul of the world, there is more occasion for the opposite of exuberance. The poet is exquisitely and inexorably exposed to baseness and iniquity and despair both in the world and in himself. But what oppresses him most is the adumbration of death, for in death his song will be extinguished. Before he dies, he prays to be given a moment of grace when all the forces of his life's poetry coalesce and ignite in a clarifying consummation ("'Od lo nadamah" [Not yet silent], p. 77). And he is bitterly anguished at the thought that his end will follow another course and fade away unremembered like the breaking wave whose fury is spent on the rocky shore ("Kegal adirim" [Like a mighty wave], p. 80).

✻ תְּפִלָּה
Prayer

Analysis

תְּפִלָּה

הָהּ אֵלִי, אֵלִי,
אֲבִיר חֶלְדִּי,
חֲמָל־נָא עָלַי בִּנְךָ נִדַּחֲךָ
אֲשֶׁר תָּעָה מִנִּי אֹרַח־אָבוֹת
וְגָלָה לְמֶרְחַקִּים זָרִים, קָרִים
לְבַקֵּשׁ קִרְבָתֶךָ —
וַעֲדֶן לֹא מְצָאֲךָ!

יָדַעְתִּי,
מָרוֹם אַתָּה מֶנִּי
וְנִשְׂגָּב מֵעֵין שִׂכְלִי
הִנְּךָ, אֵלִי.
אַךְ זֹאת גַּם זֹאת יָדַעְתִּי:

בִּמְקוֹם־מָה,
בַּמִּסְתָּרִים
תֵּשֵׁב, תְּחַכֶּה מִנִּי עוֹלָם
אֶל הָאַחֲרוֹן בַּעֲבָדֶיךָ
הַחוֹתֵר לָבוֹא שְׁעָרֶיךָ
בֶּאֱמוּנָה.

חָנֵּנִי וְרַחֲמֵנִי־נָא,
אֱלֹהֵי הָרוּחוֹת,
וּקְרַע הַמַּסְוֶה מֵעַל עֵינַי
לִרְאוֹת אֶת צֶל כְּבוֹדֶךָ!
כִּי הִנֵּה נָבוֹךְ אֲנִי, נִתְעֶה
בְּאֶרֶץ גְּדוֹלָה
וְנָכְרִיָּה
וְלֹא יָדַעְתִּי מָה.
כָּעַכָּבִישׁ שְׁתוּם־הָעַיִן
כֵּן אֶתְלַבֵּט בְּקוּרֵי־אֶמֶשׁ
אָרַגְתִּי לִי אָנֹכִי;
אֲפַרְפֵּר, אֶתוּר דַּרְכִּי,
אֲבַקֵּשׁ מִפְלָט —
וּמִפְלָט אָיִן.

הָהּ, אֵלִי, אֵלִי,
הוֹשֶׁט לִי יָדֶךָ
וְינַהֲלוּנִי רַחֲמֶיךָ!

Prayer

Oh my God, my God,
Mighty One of my existence,
have mercy on Your lost son
who has wandered from the ancestral path
and, exiled to cold and unfamiliar climes,
sought to be close to You,
but has not yet found You.

I know
that you are far beyond me;

Friedland's ascendancy in the world of Jewish education in America was fueled by his devotion to the education of girls. In 1910, at the age of nineteen, he founded the National Hebrew School (Beit Sefer Le'umi) in Manhattan, an afternoon school for girls run on nationalist-Hebraist principles. In seeking a setting in which to put his vision to work, a fusion of progressive education and Hebraism, Friedland understood that he would not be trusted with the education of boys, for whom only a traditionalist curriculum would do. Yet there was little precedent for the Jewish schooling of girls, and few other institutions offering the opportunity. Friedland's school filled a void, and the girls' parents did not much mind the kind of curriculum that was put in place. Friedland therefore had a free hand and created a school centered on Hebrew Bible, Hebrew language, and Hebrew literature. The school was alive with singing, dramatics, and clubs and drew over four hundred students within a few years of its inception. Between the forbidding and highly regimented public school classrooms, on the one hand, and small, overcrowded family apartments that allowed no private space, on the other, the afternoon Hebrew school became a zone of freedom and interest. Friedland also had a flair for public relations. He made the final examinations of the graduating classes a public event and invited Zionist dignitaries and the likes of Ben-Yehuda and his son Itamar, who were spending the war years in New York. The school quickly became the darling of the Jewish nationalist movement in America and an exemplary national institution frequently visited by outside educators.

After ten years at the school, Friedland abruptly left for Cleveland. Even though he was educating girls, the school's board began to pressure him to devote more time to teaching religious subjects. He was unwilling to make the accommodation, and after traveling to Boston to view opportunities there, he accepted an invitation to teach in Cleveland in 1920. What Friedland accomplished in Cleveland became the paradigm for the transformation in Jewish education that was taking place in most large Jewish communities between the two world wars. When Friedland arrived, he found a variety of afternoon Jewish schools, each connected to either a Reform, Conservative, or Orthodox synagogue. During his first years in Cleveland, Friedland

of the themes a responsible Hebrew poet *should* be addressing.[13] During the 1920s, Feinstein reconciled himself with both his gifts and limitations and acknowledged that his true domain was the reticulations of the soul and the gauzy veil that separates us from the hidden secrets of the cosmos. In the 1927 poem "Yehi lakhem hasa'ar" [Let them have the storm] (pp. 26–27), he makes this declaration and draws his line in the poetic sand. Cast in the high prophetic mode of Bialik, the poem castigates those who would presume to scale the peaks, float aloft great dreams of humanity, force their visions upon others, and relentlessly pursue their appetites. The speaker, for his part, renounces these great and noisy desires. Leaping off his fiery chariot, he sets his course for the quiet valley.

אֲנִי בַּדְּמָמָה אֶשְׁלַו רָחוֹק מֵהֲמוֹן בִּצְעֲכֶם וּמְזִמָּתְכֶם,
וְאֶקְשֹׁר כִּתְרֵי־דִמְעוֹת־כְּאֵבִי לְרֹאשׁ כָּל נִצָּן שַׁלְוָה,
וּפָרַח עֵמֶק הַדְּמָמָה וְהָיָה מִקְלָט לְכָל כְּמַהּ־אֱמֶת אֲשֶׁר יִיעַף מִן הַסַּעַר.

In silence I will be tranquil far from the clamor of your schemes and designs,
I will tie the crowns of my tears onto the tops of every bud of tranquility,
And the valley of silence will blossom and become a refuge to all who sincerely flee here from the storm.

Although the identity of these aggressive and coercive world changers is never specified, the decade of the 1920s, with its fiercely contending ideologies, offers a raft of choices. It would not be out of place, however, to take the poem reflexively and to see the agitators that Feinstein's speaker is addressing—perhaps entirely unconsciously—as representing the overreaching and inauthentic part of himself that, until now, has kept him from turning his poetic chariot toward the tranquility of the valley.

The promise that lay on the far side of that turning point was fulfilled in *Ḥalom vegoral*, an eighty-page poem that Feinstein published in 1937. It is the finest poem Feinstein wrote, and it is the contribution to American Hebrew poetry that rescues Feinstein from the marginality to which his slight production otherwise would have condemned him. Although its shortcomings do not qualify it as a masterpiece,

to develop. Suddenly, the long-suppressed dream has been aroused in the bosom of a woman who had long experienced herself a prisoner of fate. When it comes to the man, in addition to the absence of a name, there is no corresponding profile and virtually no backstory. We do not know whether his life before he stepped onto the ship included a wife or children. Given the possible exposure to scandal, it is possible that Feinstein thought that such blankness would offer him some protection. We do know that, once on board, he is as attracted to Sonia as she is to him, their affair is mutual, and the experience of suddenly falling in love has hit him with the same explosive power.

Why can't the lovers live happily ever after? The reasons are not given—is it due to his family encumbrances?—and it is simply understood as axiomatic that their affair cannot have a life beyond the length of the journey. In the cosmic-astronomical discourse of the poem we are informed that, "Thus it happens in the pathways of the heavens / That wandering stars meet for a brief moment in the eternity of time / And extend to each other caresses of joy and pain" (p. 6). It is this brief moment in the infinity of the universe that is the duration of the poem. Given the implicit boundaries of the relationship, the drama of the poem is therefore centered on how each of the lovers deals both with the eruption of this stunning event in his or her emotional life *and* with the fact of its inscribed impossibility.

The drama in *Ḥalom vegoral* takes place through a reversal in the lovers' stance toward their fate. The man begins by confidently asserting that he can save Sonia from her resigned sorrow. It is he; however, who ends up needing to be saved by her; and at the conclusion of the poem, she is accorded the status of a kind of teacher of wisdom. From the outset, the man regards the sudden revelation of late love as a miraculous opportunity to be seized, a golden second chance to wrest a fragment of the dream from the hands of fate. But she, at least at this stage, presents herself as an *eshet-ʿetsev*, a woman of sorrow who is immured within the narrative of her losses and disappointments. His challenge is to convince Sonia to take the chance and believe that it is possible to be rescued. His attempts and her demurrals are conveyed through a series of elaborate figures in which nautical images, not unsurprisingly, dominate. Standing on the deck of the ship, for

And, even if only for a moment, ease the burden of my distress.
A woman of sorrow am I, and the hand of Fate has been imposed
on my life without mercy. Indeed, the sea of anguish,
Which has beaten its breakers into your blue eyes,
Can contain my suffering, even if it rises mightily."

She did not notice the grimace of pain that seized his lips.
She heard him say, "Gladly will your trouble become my sea of
sadness.
It will be deposited in its depths because it is an authentic sorrow,
And it will shine there like a pearl in the darkest depths,
Its radiance cast upon the errant waves.
Yet pray now, my child, draw from your pain-purified source.
I have rolled away the stone covering your silent well;
Its depths yearn for the light and grace of heaven."

Although it has been the practice in this study to undertake close readings of whole poems rather than excerpts from longer works, Feinstein's work warrants an exception because of the superiority of *Ḥalom vegoral* and the paucity of his general lyric output. The passage (pp. 13–14) is taken from the first section of the poem, during which the lovers, having just met, are revealing themselves to each other. She has already suggested the essential sadness of her life, and he has already admitted to himself his disappointment with having fallen in love with a woman in whom he cannot forget *his* sadness. In these lines she asks for solace, and he gallantly offers it, but with a request of his own.

These acute and subtle psychological transactions are conveyed entirely though highly charged figurative language. It is as if collapsing the metaphorical distance and calling things by their real names would constitute a vulgar violation of unspoken poetic rules of engagement. Yet it is precisely these ornate tropes, as they are burnished and reformulated and passed back and forth, that allow the lovers to disclose their wills to each other and so negotiate the heightened moment they are living through. The master trope in the poem as a whole, unsurprisingly given the maritime setting, is water in all its various states and transformations. The lovers' ship of life, jointly and separately, sails over the depths toward the last port. The passage at hand develops two filaments in this vast metaphoric network. Sonia

stylistic barbarism of symbolism and expressionism by remaining true to the classical simplicity and purity of the greatest modern Hebrew verse, while at the same time jettisoning the cumbersome intertextual allusiveness of the previous generation. Although he adduced Efros's poetry as his example—Silberschlag was younger and unknown at the time—the best poems of *Bishevilim bodedim* would have in fact served as better evidence. In these, Silberschlag achieved a pure and limpid lyric precision, a quality missed by the similar efforts of many other American Hebrew poets. Unburdened by some of the conflicts that weighed down others, Silberschlag could let his verse warble plangently but within a tight register. This was the trade-off: deeper and more serious explorations would require the exertion of greater force.

That force, in the form of poetic authority, was gained during the sixteen years that intervened between Silberschlag's first collection and the publication in 1947 of his next book *'Aleh, 'olam, beshir* [Ascend, Oh world, in song], which became the canonical presentation of his poetry in the world of American Hebrew letters.[14] Although the intoxication with love, nature, and the lush artifice of language survives in places, this simple song has largely given way to the construction of a more formal aesthetic stance anchored in the authority of the poet as much as in the institution of poetry. *Ascend, Oh World, in Song*: the imperative mood of the title implies the existence of a Shelleyan poet-legislator commanding the world to transmute itself into the truer realm of poetry. Everything about this volume bespeaks the consolidation of a poetic identity. In *Bishevilim bodedim*, the table of contents, tucked away at the end of the volume, simply offered a list of the poems; in Silberschlag's second volume, however, the table of contents, placed directly following the title page, groups the poems under categories according to subject and genre, as if to say that before us is not just a collection of poetry ad quem but the presentation of a poetic career in which deliberate choices have been made to create poetry in the various modes appropriate to a major Hebrew poet.

In this formal arrangement, the first section, titled "Qavim lede-muti" [Lines of self-portrait], is a group of sixteen poems that lays out the components of Silberschlag's mature poetic persona. In the first place in this first section is the poem "Sevel yerushah" [Anguished

unseductive subject for Halkin's poetry. Ironically, what he viewed as a minor subject for poetry had a quite different valence in his prose fiction. During 1936–39 when he was settled in Tel Aviv and freed from worry by support from Salman Schocken, Halkin devoted himself to the writing of a great novel about New York and American Jewry set in the 1920s. *'Ad mashber* (1946) embraces the downtown world of the speakeasies and jazz clubs and left-wing politics, as well as the uptown lives of rabbi-professors and Jewish businessmen with traditional sympathies. The disciplined framework of the novel's demanding stream-of-consciousness-modernism is broken only in one place, when the narrator, after the manner of Thomas Wolfe's lyric monologues, undertakes a grand ode to the Jews of New York, their loves and follies and excesses. That, in personal and ideological terms, Halkin had categorically rejected American Jewish life, there was no room for doubt. He was to rationalize his rejection over the coming years in a series of Hebrew essays and tracts that offer an anatomy of the failings of the Jews of America and their communal institutions.[10] Yet despite this judgment, America remained in the forefront of Halkin's creative mind precisely during the years when he had made his break and settled in Palestine.

In a displaced and camouflaged fashion, America even becomes at this time the subject of one of the key poems in the Halkin oeuvre: "Tarshisha" [To Tarshish] (1935, pp. 300–305).[11] In the Bible, Tarshish is the name of the port city that is as far west and north from the Jaffa coast as could be imagined in ancient times. It was Jonah's destination when he sought to flee before God and avoid responsibility for his prophetic mission. Although Tarshish remains the distant double or other in relation to the Land of Israel in the poem, Halkin takes the liberty of translating it to the mountain streams and crisp air of North America. This is a poem of apology and leave-taking; the speaker, who has made many previous trips to Tarshish, is about to abandon his middle eastern motherland, and presumably his daughter, as well, to return to Tarshish, perhaps for good. Yet despite the reference to America, it would be a mistake to give the poem a biographical reading, as has often been done, or to make it into an allegory of Zionist temptations and loyalties. Tarshish is used as a metonym for one

Yet the dread of ages is the secret of your ways.

Slight, reddish, fearful of step,
The slits of your eyes—ice in the cracks:
If a stalk rustles, you become a rigid husk.
A clod of earth will block the horizon's light like a mountain.

Your foot looks like a wing and your tail like a fin,
You have neither height nor depth ,only fear and crawling.
Lurking like a corpse, you despairingly spy
an earthquake in the falling of a drop of dew.

Who can fathom your dread, oh, my lizard,
When you pretend to be dead on the roads?
A day or two old, unpitied,
Yet your muteness is filled with eternal dread.

Short poems do not abound in Halkin's poetry, especially short poems focused on the world rather than the poet's soulful response to it. "El haleta'ah" presents itself to the reader as a recognizable Enlightenment genre in which a poet addresses an animal to learn something edifying from its special endowments. The assumption is that the orderliness of Creation has lessons to teach us even in its slightest and most anomalous arrangements. Although the speaker of Halkin's poem learns something from the lizard, it is far from the elevating life lesson we might have expected.

The poem strongly privileges the position of the speaker in relationship to the mute natural object that he is observing. It is as if this small, luckless creature has suddenly come into a windfall of informed attention and fascination. Its lot in life, the very cards dealt it by Nature, are empathically laid out by an observer who is willing to make the effort to imagine how terrifying must be even the tiniest disturbances in the environment. The speaker's relationship to the lizard can be properly called patronizing in the sense that he absorbs the creature into his fascination and catalogues its features. Most of all, he makes the lizard the object of direct address, which not only constitutes the discourse of the poem itself but also becomes almost intimate and proprietary in tone (*lit'ati* [my lizard], line 13).

As eavesdroppers on this relationship, we the readers may well be led to our own observations of the motives for the speaker's

observations. Of the many things that might be interesting about a lizard, which ones captivate the poem's speaker? It quickly becomes apparent that the lizard's abrupt, jerky movements, its body slung low to the ground, and its habit of playing dead, features that could be interpreted as adaptive in various ways, are all recouped by the speaker around a single category: fear. In each instance, moreover, when the speaker makes a gift to the lizard of his empathic imagination, it is to see and feel the terrors that must dominate the creature's daily life. In the second stanza, it is the danger bruited in the rustle of a stalk or the sun blotted out by a tiny clod; in the third stanza, it is the helpless fear of the earth moving trigged by a miniscule droplet; and in the fourth, it is the fathomless terrors that must colonize its mind while playing dead, alone and exposed, on the road.

The largest observation is the most universalized, metaphysical, and least likely to be related to the poor creature's actual experience. At the opening and closing of the poem, the speaker summarizes the wonder of the lizard's existence as consisting in the fact that the creature's extraordinarily brief life span can concentrate within itself the "fear of the ages" [*paḥad-ʿidanim*, *paḥad hanetsaḥim*]. So awesome a truth conveyed by so slight a creature! The fraught weight of this truth leads us to wonder where the true sources of the poem's amazement reside. Is it the tiny reptile, or rather the speaker's obsessive fascination with fear that the lizard provokes? For the reader of "To the Lizard," the experience of the poem leads in a reflexive direction, back to the self of the speaker-observer and away from the creature of the poem's title.

Unlike conventional animal poems, "To the Lizard" leaves us with neither a useful moral nor an enlarged appreciation of nature. What is revealed, perhaps not so wittingly, is the speaker's preoccupation with fear as the deep continuity of existence. In the time shortly after the pinnacle experience at Santa Barbara when "To the Lizard" was written, according to its placement in *ʿAl haʾi*, a great decentering was taking place in Halkin's spiritual life. The passionate search for the divine in the pulsing phenomena of this world lost its drive. The anxieties animating the fascination of the speaker of Halkin's poem with a frightened little monster may suggest some of the forces that invaded the vacuum left behind.

of conveying the pathos of their situation by calling themselves, in a phrase that reflects their fascination and identification with American Indians, the last of the Mohegans. Preil, in this sense, was the last of the last. There may yet be Hebrew creativity in America, but Preil's death in 1993 signaled the conclusion of a coherent, century-long project. What joy, then, that this ending could come in the form of breakaway success rather than anonymous failure?

Preil was born in Dorpat, Estonia, in 1911 and raised in Krakes, Lithuania. His paternal grandfather was Joshua Joseph Preil (ca. 1850–90), a rabbinical scholar and also a man of Hebrew letters, who polemicized with Moshe Leib Lilienblum in the pages of *Hamelits*. More "enlightened" than rabbinic, Preil's father, Faivl Shraga Preil (ca. 1880–1921), was an ardent Zionist who struggled to make a living as a druggist and banker. Like her husband, Preil's mother, Clara Preil (née Matzkel, ca. 1888–1977), was well versed in Hebrew and read Russian and German literature as well. The father's early death led to the emigration of mother and son to the United States in 1922. Preil attended the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary and the Teachers Institute at Yeshiva University; his extensive familiarity with English and American literature was acquired through his own reading. His mother married Helman Kushner, who taught Talmud at the Rambam Yeshiva in Brooklyn. Both were supportive of Preil's poetic vocation. Until their deaths, Preil lived with his mother and stepfather in the Bronx. He never married and, with brief exceptions, did not work.[1]

Preil's first Hebrew poem appeared in *Hado'ar* in 1936 at about the same time that he began to publish verse in Yiddish. His first book of Hebrew poems, *Nof shemesh ukhefor* [Landscape of sun and frost] was published in a small run in New York in 1944. Although the volume was noticed by critics in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, it was not until the next two books, *Ner mul kokhavim* [Candle against stars] (1954) and *Mappat 'erev* [Map of evening] (1960) were published in Israel that his critical reputation flourished. Preil's first visit to Israel took place in 1968 around the publication of his fourth book of poetry, *Ha'esh vehademamah* [Fire and silence]. A milestone in Preil's career was the publication by Mossad Bialik of his collected poetry in 1972, *Mitokh zeman venof: shirim mequbatsim* [Of time and place: Collected

Preil from the word for pearl/pearls in Hebrew: *peninah/peninim*.[27] Employing a similar technique of deriving an adjective from a noun by using one of the passive verb conjugations (nuf'al and pu'al), Preil takes *panas* [street light] (line 5) and turns it into *mefunas* [lamp-lit] also, presumably, his invention. It is not difficult to parse the meaning of these new coinages, but the competent Hebrew reader must still pause for a moment to take them in. This is also the case with *meḥayeg* in line 3, which in modern Hebrew means to dial a telephone number; it was formed from the root *ḥug*, to circle, to describe the action of rotating the phone's dial. Preil takes this very ordinary but bounded term and applies it strangely to the reflection in the nighttime sky. Although all these are instances of the kind of license common in modernist Hebrew poetry, its use here creates a kind of poetry effect that makes us aware of the poet's linguistic resourcefulness and the constructed nature of the poem's language. *Even-odem* at the end of line 2 is not an invented word but a rare and exotic one. It is a red semi-precious stone that is one of the twelve gems that made up the breastplate of the high priest (Exodus 28:17 and 39:1); the gems would light up in special combinations to communicate God's directives in times of national crisis.[28] Again, if Preil had simply wanted to indicate the color red, he had numerous options that did not evoke the ancient cult and its modes of divination. An ancient or otherworldly ambience is also hinted at by the use in line 2 of *mar'ot*, which can mean either mirror or visions; although the main sense in this context—which is impressionistic in any case—is connected to the phenomenon of reflection, hints of visionary experience are present as well.

To summarize: the main thrust of the first part of the poem is to heighten the alienating power of the nighttime cityscape by defamiliarizing it, "making it new," and revealing the contending forces latent within it. It will be the job of the second part of the poem to ameliorate this picture by offering an antidote to its harshness. Yet already in the first part, we see signs of this redemptive ambition at work in a series of devices that serve to leaven the bleakness of the scene. The personification of the outdoors as a wayward student, the very premise of this section, wittingly perpetrates the pathetic fallacy so basic to the romantic code.

by seizing the opportunities now open to him in Western society. For the young Hebraist in New York in the years before World War I, those opportunities must have seemed vast; and devotion to the cause of Hebrew culture in America, despite an abundance of ideological enthusiasm, must have been a lonely path. It is not surprising, then, that one of the most moving sections of *Mul ohel Timurah* is the scene in the thirteenth canto when Mugiral allows himself to be seduced into abandoning his tribe at the decisive hour of its fate. In its romantic and operatic realization, moreover, it is a scene that must have originated wholly from Silkiner's imagination rather than from the historical sources he used as an inspiration. The following exchange takes place on the evening of the final battle with the Spaniards. The beautiful mystery maiden has asked Mugiral to accompany her that evening on a journey to the Temple of Happiness, where they will elude death and she will share her love for him forever. Mugiral responds:

"לַעֲזוֹב אֶת שִׁבְטִי אֵיךְ אוּכָל, עֵת יַחְתֹּם יוֹם נוֹלָד גּוֹרָלוֹ?"
עָנְתָה — וְקוֹלָהּ הִתְגַּבֵּר —: "כְּבָר נֶחְתַּם הַגּוֹרָל: בֵּין יַלְדֵי־
הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וְחַיְתוֹ־הַשָּׂדֶה וְעוֹף־הַשָּׁמַיִם יֵחָלְקוּ —
קוּמָה, מֻגְרָל, נֵלֵכָה!" הֵלְבִּינוּ אָז פָּנָיו וַיֹּאחַז
בְּיָדָהּ וַיַּרְעֵד אֶת קוֹלוֹ: "עִמָּם — אֹבְדָה, וְחֶרְפַּת־
עוֹלָם בַּל־תִּמָּח לַחֲרָדָה נַעֲרָצָה בְּמוֹתִי אֲהַפֵּךְ."
הִשְׁפִּילָה אֶת קוֹלָהּ וַתִּלְחַשׁ: "כּוֹכְבֵי־הַזָּהָב לֹא יֵדְעוּ
מְאוּמָה מִמּוֹתֶךָ, וְאַחֲרִיתְךָ לֹא יִתַּנֶּה יָם אַדִּיר בִּשְׁאוֹנוֹ —
תֵּן לִי אֶת יָדְךָ וְנֵלֵךְ בְּטֶרֶם יוֹם נוֹרָא יוֹפִיעַ."

"How can I desert my tribe at the moment their fate is being sealed?"
She answered, her voice growing stronger: "Their fate is already sealed: Between the Children
Of the Sun [the Spaniards] and the beasts of the field and birds of the heavens [their bodies] will be divided—
Arise, Mugiral, and let us depart." He blanched and clutched
Her hand, his voice trembling: "With them shall I perish,
And by my death let indelible eternal shame be exchanged for exalted awe.

indistinct and enigmatic forces that push him from within. The stunning descriptions of the variegated vistas of California are, in a certain sense, an answer unto themselves. As readers, we are complicit with Lunt in taking in the spectacle of his quest and owing to the fact that his story might not have engaged us if he had chosen to remain on his farm in New England. There are fateful cosmic intentions, the poem implies, which we cannot fully grasp.

At the conclusion of *Zahav*, Abby has journeyed to California in search of Ezra, and, believing him dead, she has remarried and reestablished her family on a farm on the fertile California soil. Looking about her at the industrious settling of this new territory, she wonders aloud whether Americans would have ever left their homes behind to risk their chances in a remote and unknown land had it not been for the lust for gold. It is with the broaching of this historical theodicy, a version of the Rabbinic notion of *mitzvah ba'ah be'aveirah* (the fulfillment of a commandment arrived at through transgression), that the poem ends.

The Salem homestead establishes a norm at the outset of the poem. The land has been passed down to Abby from her ancestors; it is a productive farm that forms a unit in the kind of rural village society that Preil describes admiringly in his New England poems. Living on the land and working it are central to Efros's proto-Zionist, physiocratic vision of the human endeavor; this was the message that Tom preached, with little effect, to the braves of the Nanticoke Indians in *Vigvamim shoteqim*, who left sowing and planting to their women while they pursued the hunt. Ezra comes to the Salem farm as a hired hand seeking security and quiet after his army service in Mexico. He marries Abby; they have a son, and Ezra happily settles into the routines of the agricultural life until the reports begin to circulate about the discovery of gold in California, the territory that had been won for the United States in that same Mexican-American War. He is, of course, not alone is contracting gold fever. As he accurately represents to Abby, men from all walks of life and social class in the towns of New England around them are preparing to set out for the West. Indeed, in the years after 1849, approximately 300,000 Americans made their way to California on this quest.

Eighteen In the Tents of Cush

Of necessity, the lives of Native Americans and California miners could be known by American Hebrew poets only second hand. But when it came to African Americans, the opportunities for observation were as unconstrained for the Hebraists as they were for other white residents of large northern cities. The fact that these opportunities were generally not taken advantage of is part of the larger turning away from urban life that, with notable exceptions, characterized the enterprise of American Hebrew poetry. Encounters with blacks can be found here and there among the poems of Silberschlag, Halkin, and Preil and, with somewhat more intensity, in American Hebrew fiction.[1] But there is only one work that aspires wholly to engage African American experience: Lisitzky's *Be'oholei Khush* [In the tents of Cush] (1953). This is a key text in the canon of American Hebrew poetry, not only because of its singularity but because of its insistence on going beyond observation and description toward an impersonation of the black voice. In a fiercely sincere and idiosyncratic act of identification, Lisitzky appropriates the voices of black preachers and, through the fluently ornate biblical Hebrew idiom they are made to speak, builds a poignant, if fragile, bridge between black and Jewish historical experience.

New Orleans is fundamental for understanding Lisitzky's difference. He arrived there in 1918 at the age of thirty-two after stays in Boston, upstate New York, rural Ontario, Milwaukee, and Buffalo, described in his classic autobiography *Eleh toledot adam* (1949), translated into English as *In the Grip of Cross-Currents* in 1959. The autobiography concludes with Lisitzky's settling in New Orleans, an act that

in which Lisitzky violates the premise of the work and speaks in his own voice. Every other poem, including the remaining forty-three pages of "'Ezra hakohen," is spoken through the personae of black speakers, whether preachers, choirs, singers, or sinners. (The complexities of this appropriation and the problems it raises will be addressed in due course.) The prologue's eight pages of blank verse, fluidly expository like the poem it introduces, manage to gather within themselves several interlocking narrative threads. The first is the poet-narrator's resolute quest to find a true native informant, a former slave who can describe to him firsthand the experience of slavery and its aftermath.

His determination comes from two sources. The spectacle of elderly blacks behaving obsequiously to whites and moving aside to make room for them on the sidewalks of New Orleans, the persistence of the behaviors of slavery after the abolition of slavery troubles and confuses him. Since settling in New Orleans, he has fallen in love with its azure skies, the paradisiacal lushness of its plantings, and with the compelling blackness of its citizens' physiognomies and the winning sincerity of their enthusiastic prayer services. The depth of his response, he realizes, stems in part from a childhood encounter with a Hebrew translation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and a heartfelt early identification of the enslavement of blacks in America with the bondage of Israel in Egypt.[8] He is, therefore, deeply stirred when he meets concrete embodiments of figures from the moral imagination of his youth. His yearning [*hishtoqaqti]* to locate a living former slave who could satisfy his desire for a firsthand account of that terrible period is continually frustrated. The memories of many of his informants are too compromised by old age to be of much good, and the abundant recollections of others are too obviously reshaped by nostalgia for youth and longing for the days when they were cared for by the benevolent master.

He draws closer to his goal as a direct result of his role as a kind of participant-observer in black prayer meetings. He is strongly drawn [*ahov ahavti]* to expressions of black spirituality of all sorts, and he makes a special point of attending a series of revival meetings held in a big circus tent and led by a visiting minister. The exceptional presence of a white man who is also a descendent of "Abraham, Isaac and

a poetry that generally does not indulge in biblical allusion nor evince interest in national experience, the echoes of Lamentations serve to widen the cosmic import of his situation and to present it as a fate from which no simple exercise of will power can save him.

Caught in the toils of bad faith, the protagonist is condemned to an existence of unending ennui. Attempts to escape into sex or alcohol always end in a redoubled sense of futility and orphanhood. Even books, which were once his companions, have become mute and alien; "the soul of their letters has flown off" (Sonnet 9). The last sonnets of "Ḥadarim meruhatim" describe an unrelenting process of entropy. The world has become disenchanted, its colors dimmed, its energies slowed down to a point approaching an existential absolute zero. The protagonist's response to this decline is to be engulfed by a nausea that makes the physical world into a grotesque excrescence.

קוֹדִיו אָרֵג עַל הַדְּבָרִים. יְתוֹם הָעֶלְט
זָב מִמַּצֵּבֹת־קִיר, לָפַת אָדָם־מַפָּלֶת,
כָּרְסֵם בְּתַאֲוָה נַפְשׁוֹ הָאָשְׁמָה. —

The orphan of deepest darkness
oozes from the gravestone-walls, grabs the human heap
and hungrily eats away at his guilty soul.
(Sonnet 13)

It is man's own awareness of his bad faith, his guilty soul, that makes him vulnerable to the depredations of noxious and malevolent forces. In images that owe not a little to Edgar Allen Poe, the room becomes a burial chamber or a cell with ever narrowing walls.

Where is the zone of human freedom in the world of these sonnets? Cannot the protagonist at least mount gestures of resistance against the forces that would entomb him? The answer is that it is simply not possible for him. The deprivations of his childhood, the hypnotic spell of the city, the incessant pressure of his needs—all these conspire to make him experience his situation as an irreversible fate. The language of ritual sacrifice that permeates the *Manhattan* poems is present here as well. Taking refuge in a bar, the protagonist takes a look at the table before him and concludes that it is a *mizbaḥ shulḥan, ʿalav adam ʿaqud, ʿazuv* [an altar upon which man is bound and abandoned] (Sonnet 5). *ʿAqud* is the unmistakable marker of the Binding of Isaac.

The Beginnings of the Hebrew Movement in America in *Hatoren*" in Alan Mintz (ed.), *Hebrew in America: Perspective and Prospects* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993), pp. 29–67.

11. Shapira, *Brenner.*

12. Persky was the only Hebraist to have been the subject of a *New Yorker* profile. See Dwight MacDonald, Profiles, "The Slave of Hebrew," *The New Yorker*, November 28, 1959, p. 57.

13. The Hebraist movement in America can properly be thought of as one of three branches that emerged from this late nineteenth-century consensus about the bond between the Jewish nation and the Hebrew language. The Tarbut schools in Europe between the two world wars are the counterpart to the Hebraist movement in America; and of course the other is the entrenchment of Hebrew in the school system of the Yishuv. Each branch developed differently according to local conditions.

14. Ironically, the connotations of *tarbut* in the few sources in which it appears are generally negative. Numbers 32:14 speaks of the company of evil men; Talmud *Hagigah* 16a describes the apostate sage Elisha ben Abuya as having gone astray [*yatsa letarbut ra'ah*]. The term is also used in rabbinic literature to describe the domestication of animals.

15. The best sources for an understanding of American Yiddish poetry are Ruth R. Wisse, *A Little Love in Big Manhattan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); Benjamin Harshav, *The Meaning of Yiddish* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: California University Press, 1990); and Anita Norich, *Discovering Exile: Yiddish and Jewish American Culture during the Holocaust* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007). Two important anthologies with rich introductions are Irving Howe, Ruth R. Wisse, and Khone Shmeruk (eds.), *The Penguin Anthology of Modern Yiddish Verse* (New York: Viking Press, 1987) and Benjamin and Barbara Harshav (eds.), *American Yiddish Poetry: A Bilingual Anthology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986).

16. One of the few joint enterprises was the literary miscellany *Aḥisefer*, edited by Menachem Ribalow and Shmuel Niger (New York, 1943); ~~Niger joint volume, Halevi translations (posthumous and late).~~

17. "Episodah ameriqanit," in Yisrael Efros, *Sefer hamasot* [Book of essays] (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1961), p. 232; the essay appeared originally in *Davar.*

18. See Chapter 8.

19. See the special issue of *Prooftexts* devoted to this topic, "The Role of Periodicals in the Formation of Modern Jewish Identities," *Prooftexts: A Journal of Jewish Literary History* 15 (January 1995), pp. 1–4.

20. Ribalow was born in 1895 and came to America at the age of twenty-one. He is particularly significant for this volume because he compiled an influential anthology of American Hebrew poetry, which remains the only work of its kind.

21. Moshe Pelli, *Hatarbut ha'ivrit ba'ameriqah: 80 shenot hatenu'ah ha'vrit ba'artsot haberit (1916–1995)* [Hebrew culture in America: Eighty years of the

The Beginnings of the Hebrew Movement in America in *Hatoren*" in Alan Mintz (ed.), *Hebrew in America: Perspective and Prospects* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993), pp. 29–67.

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2. For a work that is arguably a significant masterwork, the record of serious critical treatment is meager. The major exception to this generalization is Gideon Katz and Gideon Nevo, "Two Perspectives on Abraham Regelson's *Ḥakukot Otiyotayich*" [Engraved are thy letters], *Hebrew Studies* 48 (2007): pp. 299–320. This is an exceptional contribution that has informed my thinking and to which I shall return many times in the course of this chapter. A useful gathering of critical references to the poem can be found there in notes 23–25.

3. The choice of *ḥaquqot* is a clear echo of the opening of the mystical work *Sefer yetsirah*, which proclaims that God formed [*ḥaqaq*] the world through thirty-two mysterious paths, the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet and the ten *sefirot*. See Isidor Kalisch (ed.), *Sefer Ṭezirah: A Book on Creation* (New York: L. H. Frank & Co., 1877), p. 10.

4. See Efros's poem, "The Little Clapper," analyzed in Chapter 4.

5. In 1962, at the request of his daughter Sharona Tel-Oren, Regelson explained the references and difficult words in the *Ḥaquqot otiyyotayikh* on a line-by-line basis. The transcripts of these sessions, which were conducted in English, were later edited, translated into Hebrew by Sharona Tel-Oren, and posted, together with a note on their origins, on www.benyehuda.org/regelson. This is an illuminating and useful document, and as a comprehensive commentary by a poet on a major work of his own perhaps a unique instance in the annals of modern Hebrew literature. Yet for all of the reasons we speak in literature of the "poem itself," this commentary should be used as one, valuable explication rather than as an authoritative and definitive parsing of the poem.

6. My thanks to Ephraim Karnefogel for calling my attention to this passage in the Mishnah.

7. The case of Chana Kleiman from Chicago was noted in the Preface.

8. See, esp., "Hoy, artsi horati" and "El artsi," in Rahel Blaustein, *Shirat Rahel* (Tel Aviv: Davar, 1963), pp. 98, 58.

9. The most fascinating contemporary Israeli poem about Hebrew is Yona Wallach's "'Ivrit," which appears in *Tzurot* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hame'uḥad, 1985), pp. 17–19.

10. The relationship between the poet and Hebrew in Regelson's poem bears an uncanny resemblance to such signature poems of Alterman as "Pegishah le'ein qets" in his 1938 collection, *Kokhavim baḥuts*. See Natan Alterman, *Shirim shemikevar* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hame'uḥad, 1999), pp. 12–13.

11. The quotation is taken from David Simha Segal's dazzling translation and explication of *Sefer Ḥokhmoni. The Book of Ḥokhmoni: Jewish Tales from Medieval Spain* (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2001), p. 13. I am grateful to Raymond Scheindlin for suggesting this connection, as well as the link to Ibn Gabirol's *Keter malkhut* (see note 16 below).

12. Segal, pp. 13, 417–20.

25. It should be noted that responses to the Holocaust were widespread among the American Hebrew poets, especially Lisitzky and Halkin, in contrast to Hebrew letters in the Yishuv. See my *Ḥurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996), pp. 157–64.

26. *Soferim ʿivrim baʾameriqah* [Hebrew writers in America] (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1952), p.163.

27. *Makhon* has many meanings, including an institute of higher learning. It is also the name of one of the seven heavens in Merqavah mysticism as Regelson points out in his auto-commentary.

28. *Satat* connotes the craftsman who cuts and finishes quarried stone to make it suitable for use in building.

29. This is Regelson's own term as suggested both in the auto-commentary and the 1956 *ʿAl Hamishmar* article.

Chapter Three

1. See Chapter 15 below.

2. At the end of his abbreviated life, Silkiner was working on a long narrative poem on immigrant life in New York called *Shekhenim* [Neighbors]. It was an intriguing departure for him on several scores. It engaged the contemporary urban milieu; it put aside lyric self-absorption for a sustained focus on the lives of others; and it lowered the high biblical register of the Indian epic to a more flexible and utilitarian level. A long historical poem called "Manoaḥ Franco: Po'ema" [Manoah Franco: Poema] was published after his death in *Massad: Maʾasaf ledivrei sifrut 2* [Massad: A literary miscellany 2], ed. Hillel Bavli (New York and Tel Aviv: Haverim and Mitspeh, 1936), pp. 9–54; it appears in Silkiner's collected poetry, *Shirim* [Poems] (Tel Aviv and United States: Dvir/Haverim, 1927), pp. 63–67. It is unclear whether any more of the poem was written than this section.

3. For this detail and for much information about Silkiner's activities, see Jacob Kabakoff, "B. N. Silkiner and his Circle: The Genesis of the New Hebrew Literature in America," *Judaism* 39, no. 1 (Winter 1990): pp. 97–103. For other biographical information, see Menachem Ribalow (ed.), *Antologiah shel hashirah haʿivrit baʾameriqah* [Anthology of Hebrew poetry in America] (New York: Ogen, 1938), p. 55.

4. For a survey of these early attempts, see Jacob Kabakoff, *Halutsei hasifrut haʿivrit baʾameriqah* [Pioneers of Hebrew literature in America] (Tel Aviv and Cleveland: Yavneh and the Cleveland Institute for Jewish Studies, 1966).

5. On the cultural world of this journal, see my "A Sanctuary in the Wilderness: The Beginnings of the Hebrew Movement in America in *Hatoren*," in Alan Mintz (ed.), *Hebrew in America: Perspective and Prospects* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993), pp. 29–67.

is reprinted in *Shirim ufo'emot*, pp. 263–85; references are given as page numbers in that edition.

6. For an interpretation of Bialik's poem, with an emphasis on the ordeal of the prophet, see my *Ḥurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996), pp. 129–54; see also the special issue of *Prooftexts* (25, nos. 1–2 [2005]) on "Kishinev and the Twentieth Century."

7. Ginzburg refers to the discourse of the poem as *masa New York*, just as Bialik's poem originally appeared under the title *masa Nemirov*. *Masa* is a prophetic oracle often directed at a country or city-state.

8. Persky reports that for him, and the other young Hebraists starting out in writing careers, the idea of the *poema* was surrounded by an aura of hushed respect. Ginzburg, of course, had already written some.

9. For the way in which American Indians are figured in the poem, a subject I have not discussed here, see Michael Weingrad, *American Hebrew Literature: Writing Jewish National Identity in the United States* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011).

10. Halkin's lyric ode to New York ("Betokhekhi New York") in his magisterial novel *Ad mashber* [The crash] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1947) is one of the great meditations on the life of New York Jewry. It comes, it should be noted, thirty years after Ginzburg's fiery condemnation of the city.

11. See Abraham Epstein's fine pages on the poem in *Soferim 'ivrim ba'ameriqah* [Hebrew writers in America] (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1952), pp. 98–102.

12. An exception is the long poem "Hedvigah," pp. 288–316, which describes an attraction between a Jewish boy and a Polish girl.

13. One assumes that Ginzburg is describing the passing of his wife, a figure who does not figure in his poetry until this point. I do not have biographical information about Ginzburg's wife. Ginzburg may have married again because Kressel mentions biographical memoirs written after his death by "his wife Devorah Horkenos-Ginzburg," *Leksiqon*, p. 477.

14. In *Shirim ufo'emot*, see the poems on pages 84, 85, and 130–48; see also the many essays on Bialik in Ginzburg, *Bemasekhet hasifrut* [Literary essays] (New York: Va'ad Lehotsa'at Kitvei Shimon Ginzburg, 1945), pp. 79–113.

15. I have broken the prose translation into paragraphs for easier comprehension; this division does not reflect the Hebrew, which is divided into only two units, the first ending with line 32.

Chapter Nine

1. The best collection of biographical and critical writings about Friedland is Menachem Ribalow (ed.), *Sefer zikaron leH. A. Friedland* [Memorial volume for H. A. Friedland] (New York: Histadrut Ivrit, 1941). A useful essay with more information about his educational career is Shlomo Haramati, *Meḥankhim yehudim batefutsot* [Jewish educators of the Diaspora] (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense, 2003).

17. The phrase is Robinson's own from his "The Glory of the Nightingale," as quote by Dennis Donoghue in Harold Bloom (ed.), *Edwin Arlington Robinson: Modern Critical Views* (New York: Chelsea House, 1988), p. 32.
18. Irving Howe in *Edwin Arlington Robinson*, p. 121.
19. A parallel figure can be found in the subject of "Zeqenah" [Elderly woman] (p. 21), who, despite the comfortable circumstances of her own life, cannot *not* be aware of the troubles of others that she glimpses in her neighborhood.
20. H. A. Friedland, *Sonetot*, p. 20.
21. A well-known reference to Jammes appears in Rahel Blaustein's poem "Ani" [I], which opens with the declaration: "Quiet as lake water—/ this is the way I am: / fond of children's eyes, daily tranquilities, / the poems of Francis Jammes." Trans. by Robert Friend with Shimon Sandbank from *Rahel: Flowers of Perhaps* (New Milford, CT: Toby Press, 2008), p. 21.
22. There are unmistakable echoes here of Bialik's well-known autobiographical poem "Shirati" [My poetry/song], which evokes the muse of poverty. In Bialik's case, in contrast, the poverty is material and emotional.
23. For *tsah* as dazzling whiteness, see Song of Songs 5:10, Isa. 18:4, Jer. 4:11, and the entry in Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Talmud Bavli*.

Chapter Ten

1. This information comes from the useful chapter on Herzliah in Isidor Margolis, *Jewish Teacher Training Schools in the United States* (New York: National Council for Torah Education of Mizrachi-Hapoel Hamizrachi, 1964), pp.242–80.
2. Moses Feinstein, *Herzliah Hebrew Academy: Educational Survey 1921–1941* (New York: Herzliah Hebrew Academy, 1942), pp. 14–15.
3. Ibid., p. 6.
4. Ibid., p. 5.
5. Personal communication, June 22, 2006.
6. Translation mine. See my "The Divided Fate of Hebrew and Hebrew Culture at the Seminary," in Jack Wertheimer (ed.), *Tradition Renewed: A History of the Jewish Theological Seminary* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1997), 100–103; the poem originally appeared in *Hado'ar*.
7. Epstein's chapter on Feinstein in *Soferim 'ivrim ba'ameriqah* [Hebrew writers in America] (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1952), pp. 125–41) is a wonder of tact and sympathetic appreciation. Although Feinstein was his employer—Epstein was the instructor at Herzliah—Epstein gives an honest account of the poet's achievements and limitations. Epstein frames his assessment with the assumption that Feinstein would have been a greater poet if he had not heeded the call of Jewish nation and devoted himself to education.
8. My thanks to Dr. Sara Feinstein for providing a rich set of recollections about her father-in-law.

an asterisk in the table of contents that are meant to be read in the new Eretz Yisrael accent.

Chapter Twelve

1. The best source for biographical information about Halkin is Boaz Shachevitz, *Ya'arot metuhamim: Episodot babiographiah literariyah shel Shim'on Halkin* [Forest abysses: Episodes in the *biographia literaria* of Shimon Halkin] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hame'uḥad and Makhon Katz, 1982). See also, Hillel Halkin, "My Uncle Simon," *Commentary* (May, 2005): pp. 60–67 for a moving and insightful memoir by Halkin's nephew.

2. Simon Halkin, *Modern Hebrew Literature from the Enlightenment to the Birth of the State of Israel* (New York: Schocken, 1950 and 1970).

3. See Rachel Elior, *The Paradoxical Ascent to God: The Kabbalistic Theosophy of Habad Hasidism,* trans. Jeffrey M. Green (Albany: The State University of New York Press, 1993), pp.66–79.

4. See the chapter on Shelley and Neoplatonism in M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and Critical Tradition* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1953), pp. 126–32.

5. All page numbers refer to Shimon Halkin, *'Al ha'i* (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1946).

6. Belonging to this period (1922–23) is a sequence of seventy-six sonnets titled *Bayamim shishah veleilot shiv'ah* [In six days and seven nights] (pp. 117–54), which is devoted to the longing for human love and its tragic impossibility. Although the sequence demonstrates Halkin's mastery of the sonnet form, it also demonstrates his difficulty with representing intersubjectivity and making the existence of others deeply felt.

7. See the persuasive essay by Shimon Zanbank, "Yohai" and "Alastor: The Poet Who Chooses Negation" in his *Shetei bereikhot baya'ar: Kesharim vemaqbilot ben hashirah ha'ivrit vehashirah ha'eiropit* [Two pools in the woods: Connections and parallels between Hebrew poetry and European poetry] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hame'uḥad and Tel Aviv University, 1967), pp. 101–21. Reprinted in Dan Laor, *Shimon Halkin: mivḥar ma'amarei biqoret 'al yetsirotav* [Simon Halkin: A selection of critical articles on his work] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1978), pp. 107–26.

8. The novel was published by Shtibel in Berlin in 1929.

9. On the relationship of the poem to the anthology, see my "*Sefer ha'aggadah*: Triumph or Tragedy?" in William Cutter and David C. Jacobson (eds.), *History and Literature: New Readings of Jewish Texts in Honor of Arnold Band* (Providence: Brown Judaic Studies, 2002), pp. 17–26.

10. *Yehudim veyahadut ba'ameriqah* [Jews and Judaism in America] (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1947) and *Tsiyonut shelo 'al tenai: Masot verishimot*

9. Abraham Regelson, *Shirotayim* [Two poems] (Tel Aviv: Sifrei Siman Qeri'ah, 1972).

10. Abraham Regelson, *Er'elei hamaḥshavah* [Mighty ones of thought] (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1969).

11. Abraham Regelson, "The Unfettered Imagination and the Constrained Imagination" [in Hebrew], *Miqlat* 3 (1920): pp. 253–56).

12. ~~Note to the essay~~ "The God of Nature in American Poetry" in his *Melo hatalit 'alim: masot vesiḥot* [A shawl full of leaves: Essays and talks] (New York: The Committee for the Publication of the Writings of A. Regelson, 1941), pp. 9–26.

13. *Hatequfah* 11 (1921): pp. 357–72; when these poems were included in Regelson's first poetry collection, *El ha'ayin venivqa'* [To non-being and was cleft] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1943 and 1945), they were dispersed within the section labeled "Metered But Not Rhymed." This placement was carried over in *Ḥaquqot otiyyotayikh* (1964), and the page numbers here are from that edition.

14. Although printed in Jerusalem, the publisher is given as Yam, Cleveland, Ohio. (I have not seen other publications from this press, which may have been established only for the purposes of publishing this volume.) The poem was reprinted in Regelson's first collection, *El ha'ayin venivqa'* (1943, pp. 93–116), and again in *Ḥaquqot otiyyotayikh* (1964, pp. 115–34). In the latter printing, Regelson appended about 1400 words of notes explaining the philosophical roots of the poem in the thought of Schopenhauer and others.

15. Regelson abandoned the Ashkenazic accent after his sojourn in Palestine in the early 1930s.

16. Regelson derives Cain's character from its affinity to the Hebrew word *qinyan* [attainment]; Abel is allied to *hevel* from Ecclesiastes in the sense of vanity or vapor.

17. Pages are according to the version in *Ḥaquqot otiyyotayikh.*

18. Moshe Feinstein, "Cain and Abel," in *Massad: Ma'asaf ledivrei sifrut* [Massad: A literary miscellany], vol. 1, ed. Hillel Bavli (Tel Aviv: Haverim/Mitspeh, 1933), pp. 121–29. Moshe Meislish, "*Cain and Abel:* A Poem by Abraham Regelson," *Hado'ar,* February 9, 1934 (www.abrahamregelson.org); Abraham Epstein, *Soferim ivrim ba'ameriqah* [Hebrew writers in America] (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1952), pp. 154–60.

19. It should be noted that the epigram affixed to the poem is from William Blake's *The Book of Thel;* there are also several poetic texts from Blake in the section of literary translation in *Ḥaquqot otiyyotayikh.* Regelson's filiation with Blake bears further investigation.

20. In partial answer to this critique, Regelson added several pages of endnotes when the poem was reprinted in *Ḥaquqot otiyyotayikh* that explicitly explain the Schopenhauerian underpinnings of the poem. In a parenthetical paragraph (p. 343), he explains that today—one assumes the 1960s when the collection was published—he no longer holds the views expressed in *Qayin vehevel,* having progressed to a more life-affirming philosophy of life.

[From American Yiddish poetry] (Tel Aviv: Menorah, 1967) is a selection of poems by American Yiddish poets translated into Hebrew by Halevi; and *New York: Shirim ve-iyyunim besifruteinu behadashah* [New York: Poems and essays about modern literature] (Tel Aviv: Menorah, 1968). The latter was edited by the poet's brother-in-law, the writer Yaakov Rimon, who in turn, is the brother of the poet Yosef Zvi Rimon. The volume contains a biographical preface by Yaakov Rimon.

3. The information on Halevi's life is taken from Yaakov Rimon's preface in *New York*, pp. 9–14.

4. Shimon Halkin, "Avraham Zvi Halevi," in *Derakhim vetsidei derakhim basifrut* [Paths and byways in literature], vol. 2 (Jerusalem, 1969), pp. 121–28. The review first appeared in *Bitzaron* in 1949. It is interesting that Halkin focuses on the lyric poems in the volume and only mentions the New York City poems in passing. There are poems dedicated to Halkin in both of Halevi's collections. See also references to Halevi in Michael Weingrad, *American Hebrew Literature: Writing Jewish National Identity in the United States* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011), pp. 38–40, 212, and 228.

5. *Mitokh hasugar* is carefully ordered, and Halevi took care to place the Manhattan poems after the lyric poems and to conclude the volume with the corona. When Yaakov Rimon put together the posthumous volume *New York*, which includes all the poems in *Mitokh hasugar*, he took it upon himself to reorder the sections, and he placed the Manhattan poems in the first position, followed by the corona, and only then did he place the lyric sections. Although he was right in sensing that the city poems are Halevi's most distinctive achievement, it is unfortunate that he disturbed the compositional design that the poet had constructed.

6. For the role of the corona in Hebrew literature and esp. Tchernichovsky's important corona *Lashemesh* [To the sun], see the discussions of Tchernichovsky by Robert Alter, Arnold Band, and Aminadav Dykman in Alan Mintz (ed.), *Reading Hebrew Literature: Critical Discussions of Six Modern Texts* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2002), chap. 2.

7. *Ronen* in line 2 is ambiguous. The primary meaning of the word is to sing, but a secondary meaning, derived from Lamentations 2:9, is to shout in agony and supplication.

8. In Hebrew, the sonnet is often called a *shir zahav*, a golden poem, because the numerical value of the letters in *zahav* is fourteen, and the appellation strengthens the form's privileged lineage. See Halevi's poem, "Shir zahav," in *Mitokh hasugar*, p. 46.

9. All page numbers refer to *Mitokh hasugar*.

10. Halevi's translations of American Yiddish poetry into Hebrew were collected after his death and published as Avraham Zvi Halevi, *Mehashira ha'ameriqah* [From Yiddish American Poetry] (Tel Aviv: Menorah, 19