On his first visit to America in the early 1930s, Zalman Shazar, a historian and man of letters who became Israel's third president, came upon a surprising discovery: a strange band of Hebrew poets whose existence he had know nothing about. He describes his astonishment in the preface to the posthumously collected poetry of A. S. Schwartz, an unusual member of this group whom he met on his early visit to America and drew close to as a friend many years later when Schwartz lived briefly in Jerusalem. Drawn with the keen eye of a sympathetic outsider, Shazar's report of what he discovered is perhaps the best collective snapshot we have of the American Hebraists.

> They were not exactly a group because they were not joined together but rather a scattering of proud and lonely individual writers who seemed to be prophesizing to themselves. In their isolated nobility, they attached themselves only to the intangible and absolute in the national spirit. They utterly controlled the Hebrew language in all its depths and vitality as if they lived in the Land of Israel, and they were utterly unreconciled and even oblivious to the surroundings in which they actually lived. In their loneliness, there was the sadness of being the chosen few, and in their sadness there was a marked but unexpressed pride. Just as they were alienated from their surroundings they were also separated from each other "like one star to the next in the firmament." Most of them were scattered among various cities, a few here and few there, as if no single Jewish community in America could handle a group of them. They appeared like a phalanx of knights loyal to the Hebrew language whose pride forbad them both from admitting the least hint of their difficulties to a Jew from Palestine and from paying the least head to the seductions of English. No one of them had yet had the good fortune to see his poetry appear in book form in America, and the late Yitzhak Lamdan had not yet arrived on the scene to help them publish their works in Eretz Yisrael. In this conscious renunciation of popular attention there was something of the self-gratification that proud artists allow themselves, something of the feeling of superiority enjoyed by monks offering obeisance to the Hebrew Princess and serving her with no expectation of reward either in this world in the world to come, either in the diaspora or in the Land of Israel.

Shazar describes the American Hebrew poets with the rapt fascination of an ethnologist who has discovered a hitherto unknown tribe. The very fact that their existence was a surprise to a man like Shazar, the editor of the Histadrut's newspaper *Davar* and the editor-in-chief of Am Oved, is itself a revealing instantiation of the American Hebrew poets' double marginalization. It is understandable they would go unacknowledged at home by a Jewry rushing to Americanize and leave Jewish languages behind. But that their existence should have been hidden to the intelligentsia of the Yishuv and its Hebrew literary establishment is less accountable and, for the poets themselves at the time, more dispiriting. Shazar perceptively suggests that their broad streak of pride was a reaction formation to the pain induced by this deep isolation. To a

representative of the Yishuv they would never let on how they suffered no more than they would to the boorish representatives of American Jewry among whom they worked and lived. They saw themselves—again Shazar's eye proves true—as members of a secret society who served a higher authority, and their confidence in their high calling was enough to shield them from the ignominy of being ignored.