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Kibbutz fiction and Yishuv society on the eve of statehood: The *Ma'agalot* (Circles) affair of 1945[1]

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The novel *Circles* (1945) by David Maletz, a founding member of Kibbutz Ein Harod, created a furor both in kibbutz society and among its readers in the Yishuv. The angry responses raise numerous questions about the status of kibbutz society at the time and the position of the writer in it. This article examines the reasons for the special interest in Maletz's book and considers its literary qualities. On the basis of the numerous responses to the book, it analyzes how kibbutz society was viewed in that period, both by its own members and by the Yishuv in general, and addresses the special dynamics of the work's reception in a totally ideological society. The case of *Circles* sheds light on the ways in which kibbutz literature participated in the ideological construction of the new society, while at the same time criticizing its most basic assumptions from within.

Keywords: David Maletz; Berl Katznelson; kibbutz; Hebrew literature; kibbutz literature; Yishuv society; readers' response; ideological dissent

Introduction

The novel *Circles* by David Maletz, a founding member of Kibbutz Ein Harod, created a furor both within and outside kibbutz society upon its publication in 1945, in many ways marking the start of an internal crisis in kibbutz society that erupted in full force only some forty years later, in the late 1980s. Reading this novel in historical perspective provides insight into the roots of this crisis. The novel was one of the first works that offered a personal and collective self-examination, investigating the ideology of the kibbutz and its realization. The autonomous voice of the writer presented kibbutz practices as complex and highly problematic, even when he himself was totally involved in the all-consuming endeavor of the pioneering enterprise.

The scholar of Hebrew literature Gershon Shaked classifies *Circles* – with certain reservations – within the genre of the "settlement novel" that was dominant in the literary polysystem of the 1920s and 1930s. The novels of Ever-Hadani (*The Wooden Hut, Thorns, The Enterprise in the Desert*), Yosef Aricha (*Bread and Vision*), Alexander Carmon (*Man and Soil*), and Israel Zarchi (*An Unsown Land*) – none of whom were kibbutz members – sought to testify to the Zionist drama, extolled the settlement endeavor, and gained a special, if not a canonical, place in Israeli consciousness.[2] Kibbutz literary writing was a latecomer on this stage. The settlement endeavor consumed the energy of the kibbutz members, who were engaged in hard physical labor, mainly tilling the soil. Literary writing was postponed, or even abandoned.[3] Over twenty years elapsed from the beginnings of communal settlement in the Jezreel Valley to the appearance of the first novels. In the course of the 1940s only three novels written by kibbutz members were published: *Beginning* by Shlomo Reichenstein (1943), *Circles* by David Maletz (1945), and *Time of Tents* by Emma Levin-Talmi (1949). Two more, *Land without Shade* by Yonat

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and Alexander Sened and *A Man's Home* by Zvi Arad, were published in 1951 after the War of Independence. Some of the characteristics of these works, especially *Land without Shade*, met the ideological demands of the "settlement novel." The texts in many ways "document" the initial period and the building of the kibbutz, based upon events taken from the life of labor and self-realization. But even within this small corpus of early works from the kibbutz novel genre, the uniqueness of *Circles* is pronounced. The novel's plot does not deal with the initial period and the "conquest" of place, its protagonists do not represent the ideal pioneer type, and the kibbutz society described in the novel is an existing entity that has become institutionalized and even fossilized.

The book relates the story of a couple, Menachemke and Hanka, neither of whom is among the outstanding figures of the kibbutz. Hanka works industriously in the kibbutz cowshed, and Menachemke is the "drawer of water" responsible for irrigation in the forage crops branch. Their love is put to the test when Hanka is seduced by the field crops worker, Shmuel Grossman, the Don Juan of the group. The crisis ends when Hanka returns to her beloved husband. In the course of the action the narrator takes the reader through the different circles of life in the kibbutz community, from work, the dining hall, and the children's houses to the aged parents of kibbutz members. The naive protagonist that Maletz places at the center of the novel – the antithesis of the ideal figure of the pioneer – clashes with the community's different institutions and is puzzled by the rigid rules that dominate him. Nevertheless, in the novel's closing scene the couple climb the hill on which the kibbutz is built; at their side are their three children, and in the valley below the golden fields, and they sum up their life: "In spite of everything – it was all worthwhile!"[4]

The *Ma'agalot* affair

The *Circles* affair takes us back to a fateful point in the life of the kibbutz movement. As noted, the novel generated a furor both in and outside kibbutz society. Even urban workers displayed great interest in it, and workers' councils throughout the country invited the author to literary gatherings to discuss the book and its conclusions about life in the kibbutz. Many of these workers, members of the labor movement, had spent some time in kibbutzim after their arrival in the country. For them too, the kibbutz was the acme of socialist-Zionist realization, and they were deeply involved in the fate of the idea and those who adhered to it.

Members of the kibbutz movement were affected by the furor to an even greater extent. Many kibbutzim convened meetings and discussions attended by the author, which took the form of a kind of "literary trial" of the work and its author alike. The book was sold out shortly after publication, and copies were passed from hand to hand. A letter sent to Maletz from a member of Ein Harod named Takatch, who at the time was serving with the Jewish Brigade in Europe, describes how a queue of readers formed around the only copy that had been sent to him from home.

> Where we are there are a few dozen comrades. The majority are members of kibbutzim such as Ya'avor [*sic*], Gvat, Sha'ar Ha'amakim, Hasharon, Geva, and Tel Yosef. They are more interested in reading the book than the others and a queue formed immediately, and in fact it is being read by three people at once, for we each have time to read at different times of the day.[5]

The book was prominently reported in the press, an unprecedented event with regard to a literary work. Thus, for example, the newspaper *Ha-Boker*, which was not affiliated with the labor movement, reported the debate on its front page under the headline: "Stormy Debates in Kibbutzim over Maletz's Book."

> In the kibbutz settlements and the left-wing camp in general the book by Mr. D. Maletz, a founding member of Ein Harod, has generated a great storm. All the kibbutzim in the country have held, and are holding, literary trials of this book by one of the first members of the Third *Aliyah* [wave of immigration, 1919–23], who in his book has condemned the kibbutz. At Ein Harod a week-long literary trial was held at which the members of Faction B [Mapam] condemned the book and the author, whereas the members of Mapai defended it. At the same time many voiced complaints against Am Oved for publishing a book such as this that vilifies the kibbutz. The book, *Circles*, extensively discusses kibbutz life and its negative aspects. Its conclusion is that the individual in the kibbutz is repressed and dominated by those able to push their way forward. The Hashomer Hatza'ir kibbutzim have even banned its entry to them, and it has been declared one of the heretical books proscribed for reading in kibbutzim. Despite all the proscriptions, the book is in great demand and is being read extensively in the young kibbutzim.[6]

The angry responses that the book elicited from its readers raise some extremely interesting questions regarding the kibbutz readership, the author's position in it, and the status of the kibbutz in Israeli society in that period. For today's reader of what would probably seem a somewhat naive book it is difficult to understand what precisely engendered such an intensive dialogue between the book and its readers. Should the readership's interest be attributed to the novel's literary qualities or to extra-literary factors of time and place?

The developments within the kibbutzim on the eve of the ideological split in Hakibbutz Hame'uhad (United Kibbutz Movement), and the dramatic historical circumstances – the end of World War II and the terrible shock at the magnitude of the Holocaust – placed the Jewish enterprise in Palestine under great pressure, particularly the unique human experiment of the kibbutz. With the end of the war a vast wave of immigrants, the remnants of European Jewry, was expected to reach the country's shores. The kibbutz movement, which had been formed and developed by the wave of mass immigration of the Third *Aliyah*, which it had succeeded in turning into a dynamic force that determined the map of settlement, again found itself at a fateful historical crossroads. The questions were whether history would repeat itself and accord the kibbutz a central national role, as it had after World War I, and whether the developments that had taken place within the kibbutz since then would enable it to preserve the spiritual forces that had contributed to the realization of the Zionist project or whether the process of institutionalization would prevent it from returning to its pioneering heyday.

The intensive dialogue that was documented both publicly (in newspaper articles, journals, and kibbutz newsletters) and privately (in personal correspondence kept in Maletz's archive) sheds light both on the image of the kibbutz in Israeli society of the time and on the reception of a critical work within a totally ideological society.

The author and the book

David Maletz's early biography is fascinating due to the seemingly contradictory elements that compose it.[7] Maletz was born into a Hasidic family in Bendin (Będzin), Poland, in 1899. His father, a Kotsker Hasid, sent his son, when he was only eleven, to the yeshiva of the Rabbi of Sochatshov. Maletz's father was Zionist – the leader of the Mizrachi movement in the town – but also in favor of general education for his children. Maletz's four sisters studied at Polish gymnasia, and the eldest went abroad to study medicine. The mother, too, was fluent in Polish and well read in Polish literature. He was thus raised in the warm atmosphere of a traditional home, combined with the influences of Zionist ideology, general education, and the austere tradition of Kotsker Hasidism (the Rabbi of Kotsk, Menahem Mendel, spent half his life as a recluse in a locked room, preached speaking the unadulterated truth, and despised anything connected with false social conventions).

The young Maletz did not complete his studies, for with the outbreak of World War I the yeshiva was closed, and the fourteen-year-old boy returned to his home. But his yeshiva experience left a deep imprint on his literary and publicist work. The demand for the truth was also expressed in his kibbutz life in which he became known as a man who did not fear protest, even during the years when ideology completely dominated kibbutz social life. Maletz was known for his uncompromising quest for personal truth, and as a "tribune of the individual" in an environment that mainly nurtured compliance with the interests of society.

His articles, which were later collected in his book *Misaviv la-ikar* (Around the essence, 1970), show that Maletz, in his life and philosophical writing, was an "existentialist" well before Albert Camus. In the article that gave the name to this collection, "Misaviv la-ikar," published in 1940, Maletz chose the figure of Sisyphus as an allegory for modern man. Like Camus, Maletz depicted modern man as cast into the universe without a god and as destined to carve out the moral directives of his life from his own soul.[8] Maletz was also among the first to become disillusioned with communism. He did not believe in the possibility of redemption at the expense of the individual. He realized that ideas could repress people, even when those ideas are universally perceived as infallible truths.

Maletz devoted himself to labor – the principal commandment of the pioneering religion – working for all his life as a young man in Ein Harod's forage crops branch. He wrote his books before dawn, before going out to the fields. This was the physically hardest work in the kibbutz. In the winter the carts would get bogged down in the mud; in the summer the workers cut down the tall maize and loaded it onto the carts with pitchforks: "Maletz was not a great athlete, he didn't give that impression. I'm sure it was hard for him. He never complained. He'd scythe alfalfa all day long," recalled a fellow kibbutz member.[9] Yet his attitude toward A.D. Gordon's doctrine of labor was not free of ambivalence.[10]

During the first years following his immigration to Palestine Maletz felt, and also wrote, that the "Gordonian" moments in which man opened up to Nature were rare; that physical exhaustion brought stupefying spiritual fatigue; and that "the New Jews" would not find the strength to channel "nobility of spirit" (*shefa*) from the few moments of light into their everyday life. He recalled his first encounter with A.D. Gordon as a significant but contrary event. One day, not long after his immigration, a cart drove into Merhavia bearing an old Jew. Everyone gathered round him, including Ya'akov Rizik, one of the most prominent figures of the group that later founded Kibbutz Geva. Maletz, the young new immigrant, heard the old-timer Rizik speak some harsh words about life in the *kvutzah* (pioneering group) to Gordon, in Yiddish: "Es fidlt zikh nisht" (it doesn't play well). Maletz was struck by the skeptical words of the "dissident" who dared to speak – in Gordon's presence – of the discordant notes arising from the new life.[11]

In his first articles in the 1920s and 1930s Maletz raised some serious questions from the perspective of a courageous observer regarding the new way of life of the pioneers and the tragic contradictions it embodied. Maletz expressed concern that the diversion of all physical and spiritual effort to labor, following Gordon's teachings, held the great danger of spiritual diminishment for "we have elevated the 'material' in general – not only labor and productivity – to the status of sanctity," and the material, he feared, would be likely to take over life in its entirety like the golem lurking in wait for its creator, Rabbi Yehuda Löw of Prague.[12] He feared that the new lifestyle would be unable to equal that offered by the previous Jewish experience. Instead of the spiritual-religious tension of the past, the pioneering ideal proposed reducing all life to everyday activity; in place of man's responsibility toward Divine providence, kibbutz society proposed social authority. Social life devoid of an overall spiritual basis, he warned, was liable to degenerate into relations of "a terrible indifference," and the extreme exertion necessary for living the new

life might lead to a sudden fatigue in which the effort would be replaced by "emptiness between people and between hearts."[13]

Maletz was the first who dared to point out that kibbutz society had upset the vital balance between individual and society. His great sensitivity toward the life of people as individuals was also manifested in the literary characters he created. His protagonists are always from the rank and file, in contrast with the figures of the "ideal" pioneers that peopled the Zionist myth.

Circles attempts to deal with two of the dilemmas that preoccupied Maletz. The first concerned the possible fulfillment of the "Gordonian" option, i.e., an attempt to deal, in the language of literature, with the pioneering ideal of utter devotion to a life of labor, as embodied in the novel's leading protagonist. The second focuses on the problematic nature of replacing divine authority with a social-secular authority that was given almost exclusive control over the individual's life. This dilemma is expressed in the critical way in which social "togetherness" is presented in the novel.

Circles places at its center the figure of a simple, even naive man, whose life has brought him to the kibbutz. He had never belonged to a pioneering youth movement and so does not talk "ideology." The protagonist is intentionally shaped as an innocent, but who nevertheless possesses great sensitivity toward the natural world. Through Menachemke's profound love of nature, Maletz attempted to employ a kind of new, Spinozan metaphysics.[14] The social critique embedded in the novel is created through the protagonist's clash with a world whose rules he finds difficult to comprehend. He comes into conflict with social institutions, falls victim to them, and cannot, as it were, decipher the secrets of the customs and conventions formed within the society.[15] Menachemke is particularly sensitive to instances where social norms are formulated in harsh, even fanatical, ways that run counter to the founding principles of the society itself. The criticism put into Menachemke's mouth is sometimes voiced in the puzzled language of a child: "Why all this and what do we need it for?" (a recurring query, for example, on pp. 164 and 166). Society has become so accustomed to its own distortions that it no longer sees them.

All the novel's typological characters are shaped either grotesquely or ironically: Nahumi, "who has a scientific worldview," who never forgets to take a plant nomenclature book to the fields, cannot actually distinguish one indigenous wildflower from another (p. 142); Ben-Avraham, "the ideologue," reveals his petty nature when he demands Hanka and Menachemke's apartment, which is slightly bigger than his, because, having no children, he takes up less room than they do in the children's house (p. 180); and Malka the "dietician" exploits her control over the sick people in her care (pp. 123–24).

In the novel's antithetical structure the contrast between the inner circles (the tent, house, family) and the outer ones of the group stand in stark contrast. "Togetherness" is almost always depicted as a repellent experience in which the individual finds himself downtrodden and threatened by the anonymous power of the majority: "The big group machine, the organization of life in the big group economy, requires an ordinary person. People who are equal. Who do their deeds communally, at the same rate ... the special person, who demands particular attention, the exceptional person, disrupts the working of the machine" (p. 123). Within the egalitarian world of the kibbutz had emerged a kind of rule of the jungle which repeatedly placed the rationale of collective life in question.

Maletz invested his main intellectual effort in the character of Menachemke, whom he depicted as a man who is not subject to existential agonizing, who perceives reality not so much through his mind, by means of his intellectual abilities, as through emotional experience. Thus the author portrayed a character whose openness to the natural world, the field, and tilling the soil is spontaneous and not derived from an ideological-rational decision.

The semiotic core around which the character's unique features are organized is connected to water, both as a physical element and a metaphorical expression. Menachemke was born in a village where his parents rented a watermill. Water is a source of vitality and the rhythm of the river is the "proper" flow of life. The calm, flowing rhythm is presented as a stark contrast to the feverish pace that guides the work of other members of the group, for whom each plowing, each planting, is a "military operation." Maletz's protagonist, who acts from within the depth of spontaneous experience, would have preferred the new life to be conducted at a proper pace:

> To listen to the ripple of flowing water and the ripple of the flow of time without inquiring into their direction and path. One can grow like vegetation and trees without inquiring into the purpose. But unfortunately that is not allowed. To live and work like that needs time. Here everything is urgent and we are forced to hurry and not allowed to listen and grow. (p. 171)

Ehud Ben-Ezer first drew attention to the similarity between the sensual character of Maletz's descriptions and the style of D.H. Lawrence (especially in *The Rainbow*). Ben-Ezer was referring to one of Maletz's first stories, *Diversions*, which appeared in *Davar* in 1926. The sensual atmosphere portrayed in this early story, its focus on a female character, and the same type of sexual tension that characterizes Lawrence's stories, place Maletz within the same literary circle who protested against the oppression of natural instinct by "cultural" inhibitions.[16] *Circles*, too, reveals similar qualities, particularly in the descriptions of nature conveyed through Menachemke's eyes:

> It was the end of winter, days of gold. Menachemke wakes up at sunrise. Still in bed he peeps through the tent flap and there, far in the east, is a string of translucent pearls shining in the golden light. To Menachemke, who was never given to abstract thought, it seems like a smile of light, a sort of morning blessing appearing on the face of God. Heart pounding, he gets out of bed, puts on his clothes, and goes out to his work. A soft, young sun will greet him with a kiss and make every vein in his body quiver. Delicate birds twitter joyfully, flirting in the pure, fresh air of the morning. Menachemke's heart beats silently. The whole [Jezreel] Valley is becoming green, calling, calling. In the evening Menachemke will whisper to Hanka: The fields of the Valley opened their heart to me, like those spread on the riverbank. (p. 35)

However, the figure of the naive man of nature was not one that kibbutz members were willing to identify with.

Readers' responses

Maletz himself collected and preserved a large quantity of documentary material: invitations to assemblies at kibbutzim and workers' councils in the towns and *moshavot*; reviews that appeared in the daily newspapers and kibbutz movement journals; and also scores of readers' letters. This collection is just the tip of the iceberg. Minutes were not taken at the majority of the public debates. At Ein Harod, for example, I found no record of the debate that, according to various testimonies, was held over a period of several days. In many kibbutzim the meeting was accorded the character of a "trial by the members," yet according to Rina, Maletz's daughter who sometimes accompanied her father on these journeys, Maletz was happy to attend these meetings since he viewed them as a kind of mission, giving him the opportunity to talk with his readers directly.

In Maletz's archive there are 30 responses from the daily papers of the time; 16 from kibbutz movement journals; 18 from various kibbutz newsletters; and 34 personal letters. The majority of the newspaper articles and a considerable number of the personal letters were not written by kibbutz members. The numerous responses to the novel, both from within kibbutz society and outside it, show the significant place occupied by kibbutz literature in Yishuv society of the time. The case of *Circles* indicates that this literature

broke the bounds of its own society and clearly served a dual addressee – kibbutz society and the concerns of the general population as well.

The literary conventions followed by kibbutz writers, who aimed to integrate life and literature in their texts, based upon documentary material and models taken from reality,[17] created an intentional blurring between reality and fiction. Maletz's novel, which presented a broad canvas, was therefore perceived by its readers as a reflection of reality, as a book that evaluated and judged the kibbutz way of life. The twenty years that had elapsed since settlement in the Jezreel Valley had commenced were sufficient for assessing that generation's achievements, and the stocktaking undertaken by the author regarding the most ambitious human experiment of the Zionist project found it flawed. The kibbutz members who stubbornly adhered to the dream, and whose Spartan new life demanded so much sacrifice and hard work, could not accept with equilibrium a book that questioned the worthiness of their endeavor. Criticism threatened to open cracks and bring down the entire structure. Maletz's book was the first that dared to pose questions. This was also the impression of its editor, Berl Katznelson: "At this moment I cannot recall any other story that lifts the curtain from over kibbutz life with concentrated and deliberate observation, and poses the question: Why?"[18]

The dozens of documented responses to the novel are a veritable treasure trove for research, providing the responses of specific readers, and in the present case, of a "community of readers" with common cultural and ideological norms. Reception Theory accords the reader power based on his consciousness as a faithful and responsible reader, while, on the other hand, the same reader is perceived as a more or less conditioned product of sociocultural norms, i.e., as being controlled by a dominant normative system internalized by him/her, and as such mainly capable of creating those meanings for which she/he has been pre-programmed. Their skills as readers depend on the cultural range of expectations to which they belong.[19] An independent stance will be very rare in a society with a total ideology like kibbutz society during the period in question, which demanded absolute loyalty to the group's norms in every sphere of life.

Extra-literary reading

As noted, the period under discussion, the mid-1940s, was characterized by intense ideological tension. The group dynamics unique to kibbutz members demanded a high level of identification with the values of the group. The desire for absolute consensus derived both from concern for the fate of the communal enterprise (on the eve of the political split in Hakibbutz Hame'uhad)[20] and the members' own need to affirm their difficult choice of a total way of life, which demanded from each individual so many sacrifices. Any deviation from group loyalty (or what the group interpreted as a deviation) engendered extreme responses. Any negative portrayal of the normative precepts was perceived as a "betrayal" of collective values, of "the truth." The entire social system spoke in a code related to the sphere of faith, and the "deviant" author was perceived as a "heretic," as one who failed to perform the ritual role of a public emissary.

A similar approach, albeit less intense, can also be discerned in the responses of the audience outside the kibbutz. One long article, published in two parts in the left-wing *Al ha-Mishmar*, addressed the sociopolitical context in which the novel was written.[21] The writer attributed the book's "good fortune" to both its subject and timing. In his view, the kibbutz was the great subject of life in the country, the principal innovation of the Jewish people in *Eretz Yisrael*, the only dream in human life that was not put off until the End of Days but existed in the present and was within reach. This "fantastic" fact complicated the

attitude of the majority of people toward the phenomenon. Hence, every literary work that portrayed kibbutz life affected not only the people who lived in the kibbutz but many others too, members of the same generation, who were captivated by the dream, even if they had not succeeded in realizing it.

This attitude turned Maletz's book – to its disadvantage – into an arena in the sociopolitical, extra-literary debate. From the perspective of today, it is hard to understand how readers of that time could become so absorbed in a stormy debate on the meaning of life in the kibbutz, particularly against the background of the terrible news that was reaching the country about the magnitude of the Holocaust. One of Maletz's letters to the book's editor, Berl Katznelson, ends with the words: "A few days ago there was a report in the paper saying that in Bendin, where I was born, the Jews have been totally annihilated. And I had a father and a mother and three sisters there. Yesterday there was a report that there were fierce battles between Jewish youth and the Germans."[22]

The novel became a bestseller, but attention was diverted to realms outside the work of fiction. Much of the ostensibly "literary" debate on the book was devoted to either defending or attacking the kibbutz way of life. Among these responses was criticism by political elements that were in fierce conflict with the kibbutz movement, who pounced on a book criticizing the kibbutz from within. On occasion strange "alliances" were forged between opposing sectors critical of the kibbutz – each from its own perspective. I shall give here two examples, one representing Orthodox circles, and the second the Communist Party. The first was published, under the pseudonym "Spark," in *Ha-Boker*, a right-wing daily, under the headline: "No, It's Not Worthwhile!" The second appeared in a special Communist Party booklet, and was signed by P. Ironi, apparently a pseudonym too (possibly *Po'el Ironi*, "City Worker").[23]

The writer in *Ha-Boker* used episodes from the book to attack what he saw as the licentiousness rife in the kibbutz with regard to the values of Jewish tradition: the customs of freedom in marriage (a shared hut instead of a wedding ceremony), dining customs that ran counter to the traditional beauty of the family table, the kibbutz members' disdain for the precepts of marriage and circumcision ceremonies, the pain caused to elderly parents by the profanation of the Sabbath, birth control that was destructive for the fate of the Jewish people, and, in particular, the ritual of labor for its own sake, which he likened to the sin of the Tower of Babel generation.

The fifteen-page communist booklet attributed the failure of Menachemke, the novel's protagonist, and of the entire kibbutz, to their adherence to old petty-bourgeois values such as "ownership," from which kibbutz members had still not freed themselves, a characteristic that stained the entire communal enterprise: "Marx says that the proletariat needs a revolution not only to end the bourgeoisie, but also to erase in the course of the revolution the 'inherited stains' of capitalism."[24] The writer's anger was mainly directed at what he viewed as the shift of responsibility from the individual to the collective: "A collective without concern for the individuals comprising it is inconceivable. A person must be nurtured the way a gardener tends his flowers – that is what Stalin, the educational genius of the masses said." In his opinion the kibbutz lacked socialist-Stakhanovite competition, and kibbutz labor was nothing more than a means of accumulating wealth, a "kulak-like" way of getting rich that could not be compared to the Soviet kolkhoz.[25] It is therefore hardly surprising that the writer expressed support for the "theory" put forward by Shmuel Grossman, the novel's Don Juan, about sharing women in the kibbutz. The comments by these two different critics reveal the desire of groups opposed to the kibbutz to undermine the widespread acceptance of the superiority of its way of life.

Even within kibbutz society there was a group of readers who feared that the novel might provide ammunition to political rivals. The hypersensitivity of readers from both within and outside kibbutz society to the elitist image of the kibbutz and its members prevented some of them from reading the text as a work of literature. Each character in the novel was perceived as typological, and the work itself was seen as representing the entire kibbutz. Instead of a personal and social moral stocktaking, these readers conducted a political one. They feared that Maletz's barbs of social criticism might be exploited by opponents of the kibbutz and the communal idea in general (which is indeed what happened). In some of the articles this became a sub-debate within the broader one. In different variations, some fifteen responses related to the question of "What will the neighbors say?" This concern preoccupied even readers who accepted the novel's criticism but feared that readers from "outside the camp" might apply the book's descriptions to the entire kibbutz movement enterprise:

> At first I read [it] as if with two pairs of eyes, my own, the eyes of a kibbutz member familiar with what the book describes, and with the eyes of someone living outside our way of life. And I had to admit to many things with the same discomfort that Menachemke sometimes feels.... Yet at the same time I was assailed by the same feeling that often assails me at our general meetings when we discuss something that is important, but not very pleasant, and there are people there from outside, and even from the training group, who listen to the discussion. It always seems to me that we should conclude these matters among ourselves.[26]

One fifth of the "defenders" of kibbutz society also made comparisons with the society outside the kibbutz in order to prove that despite all its shortcomings the kibbutz way of life was preferable to any other alternative. They read Maletz's text as if it were a legal "document": "And how would all these little people of Maletz, from the children's house to old age, seem outside of the kibbutz? And what about the invalid, the depression of the pregnant woman, or the burdensome feeling of the mother who has no milk in her breasts – to what degree is their situation so bad in the kibbutz?"[27]

The comparison with "the other society" is particularly salient in letters from soldiers serving in the Jewish Brigade at the time. Of the 34 personal letters, nine are from soldiers serving on the various European fronts, and remarkably, even though there was no connection between them, five of these draw the comparison with "the other world," this time the terrible world of Europe at the end of the war:

> For us kibbutz members who are here, the kibbutz is such a beautiful dream that it is almost difficult for us to believe that such a thing exists in the world. We have seen the destruction of an entire continent, the annihilation of our people, with our own eyes, moral annihilation too. How, in a world such as this, I ask you, can there be a place where a person can live free of numerous cares, with communal education, with children like ours, with people who read literature other than detective stories, a place without prostitution, without drunkenness? You put it so well in the mouth of the old Yekke, You don't know how good you've got it![28]

Haya Potash-Weichselbaum, an ATS driver, concluded her letter in a similar vein, referring to the statement that ends the book – "Perhaps, Hanka, perhaps it was all worthwhile": "I look at the hundreds of our soldiers here. They are tired, but they do their job, the endeavor whose reward is still far away. Had they not known what the 'worthwhile' was they would have been lost.... There are many people who if they were called upon to give their life for something, they would certainly give it for that 'worthwhile'!"[29]

"Ideological dissent"

In cases where the book presented a complex or ambivalent picture, a dynamic of "ideological dissent" was created among the readers, which prevented most of these

readers from moving beyond a pragmatic level of reading to more complex and committed dialogic relations with the text.

"Ideological dissent," a term coined by Susan Suleiman, refers to those situations in which the reader "dissents," so to speak, from cooperating with the rhetorical guidelines that the work attempts to impose on him.[30] And indeed, many of the readers of *Circles* who had difficulty accepting the novel's implied criticism, since it undermined their fundamental beliefs, were incapable of "reading" the author's guidelines. This was particularly salient in their attitude toward the novel's main protagonist, Menachemke, whom they perceived as unworthy of representing the kibbutz image and who aroused among many of them a dynamic of "ideological dissent."

The situation of the writer writing from within the kibbutz can to a certain extent be compared to that of the tribal storyteller. Even though the audience is not actually sitting in front of him and the book is created by the writer sitting alone at his desk, it may be assumed that he is well acquainted with his immediate readers and that he can even guess their possible responses. Maletz certainly knew that he was sending his protagonist, Menachemke, into a hostile world. The vast majority of internal, kibbutz readers were the same destructive community among whom Maletz's unique protagonist unsuccessfully attempted to navigate his life. Maletz sought to go beyond the consensus to address the minority group. His novel sought to forge an alliance with those attentive to the voice of "the underground soul."[31] To emphasize his ironic attitude toward the general consensus, he places the kibbutz jargon in quotation marks: Menachemke does not yet have "status"; he has not yet acquired the honor of "pulling his weight" in the branch where he works, like, for instance, Tamari, "king of the hoers"; Hanka acquires recognition but not "status," and so forth. The collective idioms, a sort of new lexicon created within kibbutz culture, which was well known to the internal addressees, are reduced by the quotation marks to simplistic slogans. Throughout the novel the author places the words signifying the attitudes of the majority in quotation marks: "problems," "produce," "deficits," "budgets" (for example, p. 17), as if these people have no personal language and tone. Instead they all use a superficial collective lexicon that is quick to resort to readymade labels. The rules are set by the dominant group which has its own rulings on everything. Thus, for example: "'The group' made the rule: anyone wearing glasses was unfit to quarry stones" (p. 18).

The group which speaks the language of the consensus is placed in quotation marks, whereas the individual coping with the harsh reality speaks a personal language, both simple and lyrical, particularly in the wonderful passages describing the Jezreel Valley or the joy of working in nature in the spring or on sunny winter days. He is presented to the reader as a unique individual. In this way Maletz attempted to create a covert understanding with that part of the society that was not carried away by the enthusiasm of endeavor to the point of self-effacement. He tried to reach the reader who did not keep silent on difficult questions even in the midst of a social revolution that was changing the face of a generation.

About half the writers who addressed the character of Menachemke were "insulted" by it and attacked the author for choosing such an inappropriate protagonist in a novel on kibbutz life. Thus, for example, an unsigned report in the Health Fund Workers' magazine asserted:

> The book clearly does not meet literary-artistic standards. Although Menachemke flounders in his deliberations, we do not see him raising himself, and he therefore is not the *archetype* of the kibbutz member. The author sought to create certain characters (either real or fictional) – we, the readers, have no interest in one character or another, except insofar as they are *types* integrating the possible inclinations of people who have taken the experimental life of the kibbutz upon themselves....[32]

An article in the kibbutz journal *Mibifnim* (From within) was equally judgmental:

> Can a weak, passive man be employed as an expression of social creation that consists entirely of innovation and activism? And we might ask: When will Menachemke become Menachem? Where does he come from, he and the other characters in the story? To judge from the story, it is as if they had all been brought to the kibbutz by chance. Why would a person, who came by chance, who suffers so greatly from the burning sun, be compelled to build a pioneering enterprise in the Jezreel Valley?[33]

Dissent prevented readers from identifying the unique language imprinted in the discourse of the central character (the spontaneous attitude toward nature, sensuality, the metaphors of water). Even skilled readers failed to detect this element in which the author undoubtedly invested great effort. Readers' disregard for this aspect was so disappointing that Maletz himself addressed it at every meeting he had with them. In the end he even published a response in *Davar*:

> Menachemke also possesses some very worthy psychological traits. From his childhood he brought a longing for equilibrium, for putting down roots. He knows how to listen to the flow of water, the growth of plants. These are things that we also prayed for when we went to *Eretz Yisrael*, to the village, to create a Hebrew field. And we aspired to something else too – less urgency, less haste. More roots, growth, and these are to be found in Menachemke. He possesses spiritual wealth – perhaps as compensation for his incompetence in organization and society. He also knows how to love, a great, loyal love. And that too is a God-given gift.[34]

The other half of the readers perceived Menachemke as a legitimate choice by the author. In their view Menachemke represented "the little man," "the ordinary man." These readers saw Maletz as continuing Brenner's tradition in Hebrew literature. For them, Maletz's choice of such a character was correct since it replaced the sham ideal with a realistic image, closer to true life: "The book has redeemed a character – Menachemke – who exists in kibbutzim, and who must be written about."[35] It therefore emerges that half the readers remained captive to the "realm of expectations" that fed the first phase of settlement literature, still desiring the kibbutz novel and its characters to represent the heroic story of the early days. But the other half was prepared to accept changes in previous hierarchies and priorities, seeking to free the writers from the "propaganda levy"[36] and ideological restrictions that subjugated all elements in the novel to the communal Zionist enterprise and its slogans.

Public platforms and personal letters: The underground soul

Both the quantity and the intensity of the responses attest to an ideological earthquake.[37] The 30 responses in the daily press and 16 in journals are evidence of the protracted debate that continued for several months after the book's publication. A comparison of the different platforms in which these responses were published is also revealing. The most vehement attacks on the book appeared in the daily press and the kibbutz movement journals, i.e., in public platforms. The more public the platform, the more heated the attack, and vice versa – when the response was expressed in a more closed circle, in kibbutz bulletins and personal correspondence, the criticism was more moderate and the level of identification and reception rose accordingly. The most virulent attacks appeared in the daily press that also served as a platform for party-political attacks; in the kibbutz movement journals there was almost a balance between those who supported and opposed the criticism; while in the kibbutz newsletters, which were the intimate mode of expression of a single kibbutz, not intended for dissemination beyond internal discussion, there was greater willingness to acknowledge the value of the social criticism expressed in the novel. The highest level of identification with the author and the human distress he

dared to express in his book can be found in personal correspondence. In these letters some of the writers share with Maletz their own experiences in coping with life in the "kibbutz machine," and even tell him of similar events in their own life. It seems that the more intimate the platform, the more the oppositionist, subterranean voice is heard, seeking to free itself from the shackles of the demand for conformity.

However, one of the pessimistic conclusions emerging from a study of the responses to Maletz's novel is that the book as a literary-artistic work missed its target. Only a few readers (eight out of sixty) addressed the central character's unique features (his closeness to nature, sensuality, the water metaphors), and none of these comments appeared in the daily press. I found an attempt to understand the process of the novel's overall construction of meaning in one of the private letters:

> The question I dare to put to you concerns the basic issue raised by Avraham Klein. He indicates that nationalism and socialism are insufficient. I fully understand this, and I think that many people feel the void in which we exist, struggle. We do not have the faith that things will be better and there is also no possibility of going back and returning to the level of primitive innocence.[38]

The writer seems to have succeeded in identifying the main ideological issue presented in the novel. He does not give a detailed explanation for his understanding that Menachemke is an innocent, anti-intellectual possibility that proposes a solution to the tragic duality in the image of "the pioneer" as an intellectual confined to a narrow life of backbreaking work. This is suggested in merely one sentence formulated as a personal conclusion: "there is also no possibility of going back and returning to the level of primitive innocence." But this lone sentence indicates that the reader identified the option proposed by the author, and reached the conclusion that this was impossible for him.

A reference to the water motif can be found in a six-page typed letter from Pesach Kadishson of Tel Yosef: "The water carrier, pumping the water slowly, slowly, listening to its murmur, the murmur of the river in his town, is suddenly told to hurry, because there, beyond him, urgent work awaits."[39] But the novel's main theme – the confrontation with the Gordonian demand to find the meaning of life in that of a Jewish pioneer tilling the soil as an alternative to the spiritual life of the Jewish people – was missed. The attention of most readers was diverted from center stage to the backdrop, i.e., the social satire, the typological characters, the wicked children's carer, the dietician in the dining room, and so forth.

Maletz's book therefore served as a catalyst for a profound moral stocktaking with the background of the novel, i.e., with expressions of social criticism. Many readers felt that the book demanded moral decisions from them, as well as practical ones that determined the meaning of their life. I shall give only one example, a letter from a young person who read the book eight years after its publication and was so affected by it that he viewed it as a guide for his personal destiny:

> I have a question for you: In light of your book, should I draw conclusions that the path along which I am directing myself is a false one, since it does not lead to the way of life I mean? Should I conclude that the kibbutz movement has missed its mark and has not achieved the values it intended to? Should I draw conclusions and abandon the path of self-realization and all my comrades in my training group and all the members of the pioneering youth movements . . . ?[40]

The debate with Berl Katznelson: Editing as literary censorship

The debate with kibbutz readers was preceded by a similar one that occurred before the book was sent to press. Berl Katznelson, the founder and chief editor of the Am Oved publishing house, edited the novel's manuscript. He had asked David Maletz to send his work to Am

Oved when it was established, and Maletz, who had begun writing what he initially thought was a long story, gave the manuscript of *Circles* to Katznelson for his appraisal.

Berl Katznelson was extremely influential, and his intellectual leadership was almost unchallenged in wide circles. His wisdom and good literary taste lent him a special status that extended far beyond that of a publishing house editor. Katznelson and Maletz had a special relationship over many years, and Katznelson was in fact Maletz's literary patron. He accompanied the young writer from his first steps in the literary field and constantly placed at his disposal the literary platforms that were within his sphere of influence. Katznelson, and later Dov Sadan, always found room for Maletz's stories in the *Davar* literary supplement. In Katznelson's view Maletz was the rare incarnation of the desired combination of writer and worker.

In Maletz's archive I found correspondence between writer and editor on the manuscript, and I also found the manuscript itself with Katznelson's editorial notations.[41] Deletions appear throughout the text, lines drawn in red ink through entire sentences and paragraphs. However, the original text can still be clearly deciphered from under the deletions. All these passages were omitted from the printed version. The first kind of censorship was imposed on what the editor evidently considered as far too detailed descriptions of the erotic relations between Menachemke and his wife; while the second sought to moderate the work's social criticism. Passages containing sharp criticism of the kibbutz were also deleted. Some of these issues also emerged in the discussions between the two in their correspondence.

The long letter in which Katznelson addressed the novel after reading the manuscript reveals his perceptive insight into one of the book's weak points. Katznelson argued that the main protagonist was subject to the limitations of personality and character as depicted by Maletz. Because of these limitations, he could not be presented as innocent and simplistic on the one hand, and yet capable of identifying and analyzing – sensitively and in great detail – the problems of the kibbutz social experience, on the other. Katznelson argued that the character was actually comprised of two people. Who was the person analyzing kibbutz society so meticulously, Katznelson asked, Menachemke or the narrator breathing down his neck? And indeed, in some places the author abandons the protagonist's mediated consciousness in the middle of an episode and interposes himself into the story with comments that cannot be attributed to the character through whom the story is being conveyed at that particular moment. A clear example of such intervention appears in chapter 26, in a polemical passage describing the collective as a "big machine" (pp. 122–23). In such passages the narrator breaks the rules of the game that he took upon himself and speaks in "two voices."[42]

But Katznelson's criticism was not confined solely to matters of literary structure. Like other readers, he found it hard to accept the author's choice of an innocent, spontaneous, anti-intellectual character. He too would have wanted Menachemke to read more books, be spiritually richer, more active in the struggle for social reform, and also in his struggle for his wife's heart – in short, that he be worthier of standing at the center of a novel on kibbutz life. "And it is this character that you have chosen to be your *mouthpiece*? What have you done?" Katznelson complained.[43]

Mitigating the social criticism

Even Berl Katznelson's criticism was flawed by an extra-literary approach or hypersensitivity to the image of the kibbutz in the eyes of the readers. This emerges in several suggestions for deletion from the manuscript. Thus, for example, the editor rejected a paragraph in which Maletz described in malicious terms the dietician in the dining room

and suggested that the author also delete some acerbic expressions from his description of the children's carer. But in particular he attempted to modify and even completely remove from the novel the ironically depicted character of the "kibbutz ideologue." Katznelson feared that readers would identify him with the leader of Hakibbutz Hame'uhad Yitzhak Tabenkin, a member of Ein Harod, as suggested by his very name – Ben-Avraham, son of Abraham (i.e., Yitzhak/Isaac). Thus, for example, he wrote:

> Ben-Avraham, the "ideologue".... If you wish to depict the figure of a kibbutz leader then he is worthy of a substantial description, and perhaps even multifaceted, and not contemptuous, lethal stigmatization in one phrase. Just as you have taken the trouble to reveal Klein's split personality, so it would be appropriate to deal with the ideologue, or *take him out of the picture completely*. Incidentally, in this particular case, when the environment is specific and limited, and the place is given, geographically defined, and the very mention of the term "ideologue" diverts the eye to *one specific person* – even if the author meant someone else – it would be appropriate not to slip and stumble from the field of the story to that of the pamphlet lurking for narrator and reader alike.[44]

The current situation did not make life easy for the editor – the tense atmosphere prevailing in the kibbutz movement in general, and in Ein Harod in particular, on the eve of the split in Hakibbutz Hame'uhad.[45] In the debate, Katznelson, who dearly wanted unification of the kibbutz movement, sided with David Ben-Gurion against his old friend Yitzhak Tabenkin, who now, to his distress, became his bitter rival. The fact that Maletz's critical novel was to be published by the publishing house that he headed, and not, for example, by that of Hakibbutz Hame'uhad, which had been active since 1938, may have made him feel "responsible" for the problematic content of the book, as his confidants have suggested.[46] What appears to today's readers as trivial was – in terms of that time – politically explosive.

Maletz did not give in and ultimately did not remove the "ideologue" from his book. This character had an important place in the oppositional structure of the novel. In the published version the more moderate suggestion was accepted, and he is called "one of the kibbutz's ideologues." A particular identity became a typological name.

Puritanical censorship

However, most of the editor's deletions, some thirty, relate to passages describing erotic relations. In some places, isolated sentences were deleted, while in others entire paragraphs were censored. As I have noted, the couple's sensual hold on each other is presented as an integral part of Menachemke's character as a sensual man. But for Katznelson explicit descriptions of lovemaking, even between man and wife, were anathema.

To illustrate this, I shall cite two examples of sections that were deleted. The first describes the couple's relations during Hanka's first pregnancy. Sentences and lines that, in the editor's opinion, describe too openly the course of the pregnancy and its psychological and physical effect on Hanka are consistently deleted (in the following quotes the deletions appear inside brackets):

> Menachemke drank deeply from Hanka's springs of splendor and life. She cleaved to him. She would make him part of the changes in her body and soul. She had this need to completely adhere to him, to be as one. To be completely open to him [She had the need for Menachemke to see her often, all of her, all of her, all the mysteries of her body]. She wanted the transitions and changes she felt inside herself to be his, totally his. This was partly because, with the start of her pregnancy, there arose within simple, clear Hanka [in a kind of mysterious fashion] a hidden, obtuse feeling of the profound mystery of the outburst of growth and blossoming that had begun in her, in every part of her body. [She felt the connection of this mystery with the assimilation into herself of Menachemke's blood and seed] It was mainly caused, so it seems, by that heavy feeling of fear that had weighed upon her heart on the Saturday morning when

> she had given Menachemke the news of her pregnancy. She had a deep-seated need to lean on him, on Menachemke, that he be with her completely in this, all of him. [a deep, strange need, to be completely with him frequently, without any barrier of clothing between them, for their bodies to be of one flesh. Menachemke drank deeply from these hidden springs that gushed from inside Hanka. He drank deeply from the splendor of her body and the wonders of its blooming]. His eyes dimmed at the sight of the great light and his heart could not contain all the abundance of the mysteries of life that Hanka endowed him with at the beginning of her first pregnancy. (The edited version appears on pp. 55–56 of the book)

Another example is an erotic description that appears during the reconciliation between Hanka and Menachemke, after she has an affair with Shmuel Grossman, the Don Juan. On her return to being a loving wife, Maletz describes the encounter as follows:

> He knew that they had found one another anew. The recent period of distress and anguish had passed never to return, they had come back to their original shore . . . [Again they lay together, together; again their being was as one. Menachemke reached out to the lamp hanging above them to extinguish it. Hanka grasped his hand and pulled it downward: No, no, let there be light, I want to see you, come, come, come closer to me and hug me, that's how I want to see you, like that, yes, with me, part of me. Hanka caressed Menachemke's body, his whole body. Her stroking hands were excited. She kissed his eyes, her lips quivering with a new thirst, a new love, giving herself completely]. They lay close, quietly gazing into each other's eyes. (The edited version appears on p. 128 of the book)

As we can see, the editor deleted the entire description of the act of love. According to the censored version, there was no sexual contact between the two at all. The serenity of reconciliation prevailed between them, and no more. A detailed description of intercourse, and in full light, evidently could not pass the puritanical barrier. Accordingly, throughout the novel phrases such as "Hanka's wonderful breasts," "the white thrust of her breasts," "the abundance of her full, mature, warm body" were consistently deleted.

Berl Katznelson, who throughout his own life wavered between two women and certainly did not maintain a puritanical lifestyle, is revealed as a censor who silenced any naturalistic description of the body. Thus, for example, he deleted a passage in which Menachemke first feels the movement of the fetus in Hanka's belly and a detailed description of the furunculosis that affected his private parts. This puritanism was not peculiar to Katznelson. It was one of the signs of the times, especially among kibbutz members who in this regard continued the tendency of the Second *Aliyah*. Even some readers responded with anger to the excessive eroticism in Maletz's book, even though they had read the censored version:

> I was frequently angry, very angry with the author, for exposing it before me, for immodestly opening Menachemke and Hanka's tent when they had closed it to the prying eyes of strangers. . . . These are intimate matters, which in themselves are beautiful and sublime when the couple are alone, but become positively unaesthetic when they are in full view of the observer. They should therefore be veiled and there is no need to open the tent flap when it is closed.[47]

Ideological zealotry often goes hand in hand with puritanism. The repression of sexual drives, or at least of their expression, is part of the same trend that halted all forms of creative energy in kibbutz society in its early years, including that of artistic expression. The sexual drive, like artistic creativity, was perceived as expropriating energy from the general endeavor and therefore as a threat to the success of the pioneering enterprise.

The argument between editor and author ended in partial surrender. All the passages marked by Katznelson were deleted from the published version. In some instances, which they continued to discuss in their correspondence, Maletz moderated his criticism but did not capitulate completely. Katznelson did not live to see the final version of the book, which was published after his death.

Epilogue

The world of fiction is a "competing world" with the world of reality, since it offers new models, new observations, of human experience, which possess the power to change the reader. *Circles* had the potential to stimulate change since it provided an opportunity to reexamine the kibbutz worldview. But most of the readers were incapable of entering into such a dialogue. They tended to remain immersed in the referential level and endeavored to rehabilitate the damaged image. The prevailing ideology offered an a priori model for organizing human experience as the only, exclusive possibility, and the ideological schematization that the readers brought with them dominated their reading, creating "ideological dissent" and blocking any possibility of a genuine encounter with the book's literary qualities.

But a controversial literary work, even when it triggers in its readers "antibodies" that lead to its rejection, can still influence their worldview precisely because of the great shock it causes. The public debate on the novel's legitimacy to shape reality in unconventional ways paved the way to new possibilities. The views voiced in internal platforms – kibbutz newsletters and personal correspondence – demonstrate that even in an ideological society a kernel of free judgment can be preserved and that a considerable number of readers were prepared for change in the cultural-literary and social norms. This may lead us to wonder what would have happened had the kibbutz movement establishment paid greater attention to the criticism that emerged from Maletz's provocative book. Unfortunately, the required social changes, in particular the restoration of equilibrium between the individual and society, were suppressed for many years, until they reached crisis point.

From a literary standpoint, Maletz undoubtedly succeeded in creating a normative change. His daring in the 1940s later enabled other writers like Yigal Mosenzon, Moshe Shamir, and Amos Oz to break the consensus in their own works. Oz even affirmed Maletz's influence on his work in a note on the last page of his book *A Perfect Peace* (1982): "In 1959 a novel, *The Locked Gate*, was published by David Maletz against the backdrop of kibbutz life; several threads connect my own book with Maletz's; such things have been known to happen."

The dialogue with Maletz's work continues to this day. For many years students at the Oranim Academic College's Midrasha, a center for secular Jewish studies, have been studying Maletz's theoretical writings in an attempt to understand his unique religious approach in a "godless" world, his thoughts on secular Jewish identity, the shaping of the festivals in kibbutz society, and the place of art and music in the education of the younger generation.[48] Two recently published studies have also contributed to returning Maletz's unique voice to public consciousness. One by Galia Bar-Or, curator of the Ein Harod Museum of Art, describes Maletz's significant influence on kibbutz culture and his deep involvement in the building of the Ein Harod Museum of Art, which continues to make a most important contribution to Israeli art.[49] The second book, an excellent monograph by Moti Zeira, who in recent years has headed the Midrasha, reassesses the figure of the man who in the author's words, "is a great believer in the togetherness of kibbutz life, but who in his writing reveals – without mincing words – the agonizingly high price exacted by that way of life."[50] Young people are also showing an interest in Maletz's ideas. For example, graduates of the youth movements affiliated to the kibbutz movement and of Hamahanot Ha'olim movement, who dream of building a new society based on urban communes, study Maletz's social thought and find in it profound insights that will – they hope – assist them in creating a better equilibrium between the individual and the cooperative group they are attempting to build.[51] The author, who knew how to create an intense personal and collective discourse with his readers in 1945, continues to speak to them from the distance of time.

Notes

1. This article is a revised and abridged version of chapters from my book, *Ha-mahteret ha-nafshit*, 144–61, 212–42.
2. For an extensive review of the novels published in the 1920s and 1930s, see Shaked, *Ha-siporet ha-ivrit, 1880–1980*, 2:280 ff. For his view on *Circles* and its place in the "settlement novel" genre, see 287–93. In the discussion that follows I critically address the novel's definition as a "settlement novel."
3. On the paucity of literary writing in the kibbutz, see Keshet, *Ha-mahteret ha-nafshit*, 39–54.
4. Maletz, *Ma'agalot*, 260. (Subsequent references to quotes from this novel will appear in the text.) For varying optimistic closures to kibbutz critical novels and stories, see Milner, "'Agitated Orders,'" 167.
5. Takatch to Maletz, 20 January 1945, Maletz Archive (hereafter MA). The Maletz Archive was transferred to the Genazim Archives of the Israeli Writers Union in Tel Aviv and the Yad Tabenkin Archives, Ramat Efal.
6. "Se'arat vikuhim ba-kibbutzim beshel sifro shel Maletz," *Ha-Boker*, 11 February 1945.
7. See Moti Zeira's recent biography of David Maletz, *Af be-knafayim shvurot*.
8. Maletz, *Misaviv la-ikar*, 13–15. On Maletz's response to the condition of modern man who has lost his God, see also Zeira, *Kru'im anu*, 76–80.
9. Ze'ev Dorsini, in *David Maletz hoveret zikaron*, 31–32.
10. On Gordon's demand to focus on the new pioneering life as the true creative activity, and particularly on tilling the soil as personal redemption, see, Gordon, "Be-inyanei sifrut" (On matters of literature), *Ha-Po'el ha-Tza'ir*, 17 (1924): 3–5, 26–27; idem, "Ha-sofrim veha-ovdim" (The writers and the workers) [1928], in idem, *Kitvei A.D. Gordon*, 2:140–57; idem, "On Reading," in ibid., 1: 210–37.
11. Ruhama Maletz (Maletz's wife), in *David Maletz, hoveret zikaron*, 8.
12. Maletz, "Aleinu ve-al yeladeinu" (On us and our children) [1929], in idem, *Misaviv la-ikar*, 40.
13. Maletz, "Li-dmutenu ha-ruhanit."
14. In his second novel, *Ha-sha'ar ha-na'ul* (The locked gate, 1959), the protagonist attempts to "convert" an entire kibbutz to Spinozan belief.
15. On the similarity of this model to that of the protagonist in social satire, see Even, *Ha-dmut be-siporet*.
16. E. Ben-Ezer, "Be-ein motza la-adam" (No way out for man), *Davar* literary supplement, 16 October 1981.
17. See the chapter on reader expectations in Keshet, *Ha-mahteret ha-nafshit*, 36–55.
18. Katznelson, letter to Maletz, Passover 1945, MA.
19. Freund, *The Return of the Reader*, 96.
20. On the atmosphere on the eve of the split in the kibbutz movement, see Near, *The Kibbutz Movement*, vol. 2, chap. 18, "Politics and Crisis, 1949–1954," 446–68; and Kanari, *Sanverim*.
21. D.B. Malchin, "Vikuah gadol al sefer katan" (A big debate about a little book), *Al ha-Mishmar*, 28 and 30 March 1945.
22. Maletz to Katznelson, 19 October 1943, MA.
23. "Nitzotz," "Lo, lo kedai!" (No, not worthwhile!), *Ha-Boker*, 30 March 1945; P. Ironi, "Ribu'a ha-ma'agal" (Squaring the circle: Critical remarks on D. Maletz's book *Circles*). The booklet in which this article appeared was given to me for study from Maletz's personal archive. The booklet is not available in libraries and stores.
24. Ironi, "Ribu'a ha-ma'agal," 15.
25. Ibid., 8, 12.
26. Meri Abramson, Beit ha-Aravah, a letter to Maletz, 17 January 1945, MA.
27. Gittel Meisel, "Shnei sfarim al ha-kibbutz" (Two books about the kibbutz), *Al ha-Mishmar*, literary supplement, 23 March 1945.
28. Schnolen, a kibbutz member writing from Terezin, 11 July 1945, MA.
29. Haya Potash-Weichselbaum to Maletz ("May, in a foreign land, on the road"), MA.
30. Suleiman, "Ideological Dissent from Works of Fiction."
31. I took "underground soul" as the title of my book on the early kibbutz novel from the words of Menachem Dorman, one of the editors of the kibbutz journal *Mibifnim*: "Some things may be expressed solely in a work of art, revealing some things and concealing others. Without the article, the poem, or the story, the underground soul in our life will not be able to find expression. And we need this expression. Without it we face the danger of clogging the spiritual arteries of

our social cells." "Le-darkhei ha-mibifnim" (To understand the spirit of *Mibifnim*), *Mibifnim* (June–August 1938): 310.

32. "Leyad madaf ha-sfarim?" (On the bookshelf), *Beinenu* (February 1945): 35 (emphasis in the original).
33. S. Karel Shulamit, "Arba'ah sfarim al ha-kibbutz" (Four books about the kibbutz), *Mibifnim* (January 1946): 480–85.
34. David Maletz, "Al Ma'agalot" (On the book *Ma'agalot*), *Davar*, 4 May 1945.
35. Dov Glulov, Afikim bulletin, 22 February 1945.
36. Yosef, Genigar bulletin, 26 January 1945.
37. This can be compared with a similarly powerful event, the "Brenner Affair" (1911). See Govrin, *Me'ora Brenner*.
38. From an undated letter by Nahum Steinhauer, a Jewish Brigade soldier who was not a kibbutz member, MA.
39. Letter from Pesach Kadishson to David Maletz, 5 February 1945, MA.
40. Letter from Uri Beit-Or to Maletz, 10 May 1953, MA.
41. The identity of the "censor" can be confirmed by comparing the editorial deletions with the discussion on some of them that appears in the correspondence between Maletz and Katznelson.
42. Katznelson, letter to Maletz from Arza, Passover 1945, MA.
43. The correspondence between Katznelson and Maletz is cited in full in an appendix to the chapter on the *Circles* affair in Keshet, *Ha-mahteret ha-nafshit*, 243–58. The citation here is on p. 250 (emphasis in the original).
44. Ibid., 249 (emphasis in the original).
45. On the tense atmosphere that preceded the book's publication both in the kibbutz movement and in Kibbutz Ein Harod, see Zeira, *Af be-knafayim shvurot*, 207–28.
46. See the response of Eliezer Slutzkin, Katznelson's brother-in-law and member of Ein Harod, as related by Maletz's widow, in Keshet, *Ha-mahteret ha-nafshit*, 236.
47. Y. Meirson, "Im kri'at Ma-agalot" (On reading *Circles*), *Mibifnim* (June 1945): 129–33.
48. For these writings, see Maletz, *Misaviv la-ikar*.
49. Bar-Or, *"Hayenu mehaveyim omanut."*
50. Zeira, *Af be-knafayim shvurot*, back cover. The titles given by the authors to these two books are taken from articles by Maletz.
51. There is an urban kibbutz ("irbutz") in Migdal Ha'emek and Nazareth Illit. These groups are engaged mainly in education. As part of their studies they discuss works by founders of the kibbutz, in particular Maletz's philosophy. *Circles* has become a textbook for the group in their attempts to construct a more effective communal group.

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