

BILINGUALISM AND POETIC MODERNISM: THE YIDDISH SOURCES OF THE HEBREW IMAGISM OF GABRIEL PREIL

by

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I. A Hebrew Modernist in America

No poetry, of course, is ever exactly the same as speech that the poet talks and hears: but it has to be in such a relation to speech of his time that the listener or reader can say "that is how I should talk if I could talk poetry."

T. S. Eliot: "The Music of Poetry"

There is something of the ironic in the attempt to render into English the unique effects of the Hebrew poetry of Gabriel Preil. Indeed, it is hardly possible. The fact is that Preil's artistic achievements, as well as his poetic charm, stem—at least in part—from his surprising mastery of the new Israeli vernacular. And surprising it is indeed, because geographically speaking, the American resident Gabriel Preil was twice removed from Israeli soil. Born in Estonia in 1911 and having spent his childhood in Lithuania, he escaped postwar Europe with his mother and migrated to the United States in 1922. New York has been his home ever since, and New England, his favorite rural landscape. It was only in 1968 that Preil visited Israel for the first time, but by then he had already published four volumes of verse,¹ and

1. *Nof shemesh u-khefor* (New York, 1944); *Ner mul kokhavim* (Jerusalem, 1954); *Mappat 'erev* (Tel Aviv, 1961); *Ha-'esh ve-ha-demamah* (Tel Aviv, 1968). In addition, he had also published by then a collection of his Yiddish poems, *Lider* (New York, 1966).

had already been recognized and embraced by Israeli poets and critics, modernists and conservatives alike. Special attention has been given—and justly so—to his “Israeli Hebrew.” After a visit to New York during which he met Preil for the first time, the poet Natan Yonatan wrote: “How does he speak such Hebrew, fresh and lively, and how does he fashion such Hebraic verse (*shirah ivrit ka-zot*), surrounded as he is by such alien speech sounds and literary echoes?”²

One could say that Preil’s life and art are a manifestation of two diametrically opposed movements: the course of his life led him further away from Israeli soil, but, through his artistic activity, he tenaciously bridged the distance and successfully approached the contemporary sources of his poetic medium. In order to do this, he had to cross two language barriers: Yiddish, his European mother tongue, which continued to be the language spoken at home throughout his life, and English—the language which he acquired in his new home country and which soon became a rich literary source to young Preil, the avid reader. These two barriers notwithstanding, Preil was confronted by one still more complex: the gulf between classical, or literary, diaspora Hebrew, used by his fellow poets in America, and modernized Israeli Hebrew, which was slowly branching out into differentiated registers: the literary, the journalistic, the spoken, and the colloquial, as in every living language.³ This last transition, even though intralinguistic, might have been the most difficult. As is well known, literary bi- (or even multi-) lingualism has always been the lot of Hebrew writers. No Hebrew writer, until very recently, has ever used Hebrew as his spoken mother tongue. In this respect Preil was no exception. He was, however, one of the few poets who managed to break away from the elevated rhetoric and stylization, as well as the classical diction and versification inherent in modern Hebrew verse. Instead, he developed his own conversational poetic mode, employing free verse and common speech, even before this mode was adopted by avant-garde poets in Israel.⁴ When his poems first reached

2. Natan Yonatan, “Be-hevel ha-migdalim ha-’aforim,” *Ad sof ha-qayis ha-indiyani* (Merhavia, 1968), p. 67.

3. As early as 1938 Shlonsky was aware of the different “styles” which were being spawned in Eretz Israel: “Home and street styles, the spoken and the written—styles of students and of urchins, of clerks and of laborers . . .” “Le-’or ha-’ashashit” in Avraham Shlonsky, *Yalqut ’eshel* (Merhavia, 1960), pp. 178–79. All translations of references to Hebrew or Yiddish sources are mine. Poems are translated as literally as English structures permit.

4. When the poet Natan Sach (b. 1930), the leader of the “new wave” of Israeli poets, delineated “The Stylistic Climate of Hebrew Verse in the Fifties and Sixties” (*Ha-aref*, July 28,

Israeli readers in the late thirties or early forties, the need to lower the poetic style and to incorporate the vernacular into the poetic domain had long been recognized but on the whole had not yet been attained. In Israeli verse, the ringing rhyme schemes and meticulous metrics of the Shlonsky and Alterman school were still competing with the visionary pathos and political rhetoric of U. Z. Greenberg. The personal free verse of Ben Yitzhak and Fogel did not yet constitute a school by itself. No wonder, then, that from the very beginning reviewers on both sides of the ocean acclaimed Preil as a new Modernist voice.

II. *Horizons of Expectations and Critical Reception*⁵

Preil's first volume, *Nof shemesh u-khefor (Landscape of Sun and Frost)*, was published in New York in 1944 and was warmly received by his American contemporaries as well as by Israeli poets. Yet there was a marked difference between the critical responses of the respective parties. While in Israel, Preil's innovation was vaguely felt as "American Modernism," the first American reviews pinpointed the novelty much more accurately; they indicated his conversational tone and his prose-like rhythm and described his verse as a departure from "Hebrew classical tradition."⁶ This divergence should not surprise us. As much as Preil's new style was a daring deviation from the mainstream of Hebrew verse in its new Israeli center, it constituted even a bolder departure from the norms of Hebrew poetry in America. Indeed, in order to appreciate fully the new ground he broke, we have to judge his verse not against the setting of the Israeli center, of which he was not even fully aware at the time, but against his immediate environment. Similarly, we will not be able to follow the dynamics involved in the recep-

1966), he included Preil among the representative "young" poets who broke the boundaries of the stanza, preferred short forms and organic compositions and lowered the traditionally high poetic diction.

5. Cf. Jauss's conception of "the aesthetics of reception" as the interaction between a new literary form and the cultural system into which it is received: H. R. Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," in Ralph Cohen, ed., *New Directions in Literary History* (Baltimore, 1974), pp. 11–41.

6. Menachem Ribalow, "Ha-Sifrut ha-'ivrit ba-'Ameriqah," *'Ahi-sefer* (New York, 1943), p. 178; Eisig Silberschlag, "Ha-Shirah ha-'ivrit ba-'olam he-ḥadash," *ibid.*, p. 245. See particularly Abraham Epstein, *Soferim 'ivriyyim ba-'Ameriqah*, 2 vols. (Tel Aviv, 1952), 1: 229–36; Cf. T. Carmi, "Nof shemesh u-khefor," *Niv* 3 (March-April, 1945): 23–27.

tion and effect of Preil's free verse, if we do not place it in the perspective of the tradition of American Hebrew verse.

American Hebrew poets were untouched by the modernizing ideas, if not the practice, informing the Eretz Israel center from the twenties on. Writing in the periphery farthest removed from the newly organized Hebrew literary polysystem, they were still perpetuating the poetic and prosodic norms of Bialik's era.⁷ The poetic genres mainly dominant in the American periphery were the narrative epic (treating intrinsic American topics—the life of American Indians), or the long, philosophically laden lyric. This last genre may attest to another source of inspiration: here the Russian models might have been replaced by English Romanticism.⁸ There is no evidence, however, for any contacts with contemporary American verse, particularly its Imagistic, free verse varieties. Clearly, whether they took their cue from their own Hebrew predecessors or from extrinsic sources, American Hebrew poets preserved an earlier stage of classical Hebrew, a kind of belated Revival poetry.⁹ Naturally, their literary output was marked by high diction and tone and by conventional metric and strophic forms.

It should be clear by now how unexpected was the appearance of Preil's short and compact poems, with their stark imagery and their understated individualism. No wonder their liberation from the traditional constraints of rhyme and meter was acutely felt—by American Hebrew standards in particular—to be a departure from all classical norms. This unpredicted breach of the horizon of expectations of the Hebrew literary circles in New York, and to a lesser degree in Eretz Israel as well, set readers on the detective trail. For a long time critical responses focused on defining Preil's Modernism and on tracing its sources.

7. For the term "Cultural Polysystem" and its applicability to the evolution of Hebrew literature see Itamar Even-Zohar, *Papers in Historical Poetics* (Tel Aviv, 1978); idem, "Polysystem Theory," *Poetics Today* 1 (1979): 287–310.

8. In his comparative study, *Two Pools in a Wood* (Tel Aviv, 1976), Shimon Sandbank compares Halkin's "Yoḥay" with Shelley's "Alastor" (pp. 103–22). Also, Halkin translated Shelley's "Defence of Poetry" (1928, reprinted in his *Derakhim ve-siddei derakhim ba-sifrut*, 3 vols. [Jerusalem, 1969], 1:271–300). Regelson, on the other hand, wedded the indigenous mysticism of Ibn Gabirol with that of William Blake. Cf. Epstein, *Soferim*, pp. 142–63, 172–94.

9. Similarly, the first generation of immigrant poets (arrived around 1890) kept writing verse in accordance with sentimental *Hibbat Şiyyon* norms, long after the dominance of these norms was superseded in the center. This tendency to preserve and petrify literary standards is typical of "the decline to periphery," and was noticed also in both social and linguistic behaviors: a cohesive group of immigrants tend to stick to their old culture in their new place, while in their previous home norms change and centers decline. See Even-Zohar, *Papers*, p. 77.

In their attempts to account for Preil's new style, his first reviewers (1945) attributed his innovation to the influence of American culture. Shin Shalom perceived in Preil's verse glimpses of E. A. Poe's America, and Sh. Bass added a list of American poets as diversified as Frost, Masters, Lowell, Millay and H.D.¹⁰ American critics were less generous: Silberschlag mentioned some resemblance to Frost, and Epstein brought up Whitman, Jeffers and Sandburg.¹¹ Epstein is also the only one to mention another influential figure, the Yiddish poet Jacob Glatstein (1896–1971): "Particularly was he [Preil] influenced by the Yiddish Modernist Jacob Glatstein in his *Inzikhist* period."¹²

Why and how this "particular influence" took place we are not told; this single statement is never elaborated on and subsequent reviewers ignore it altogether. That the young Preil was not only close to Yiddish circles in New York, but actually made his debut in Yiddish periodicals, seems to have passed unnoticed. Nowhere, including in Epstein's review (which was published in Yiddish as well!), is there any mention of Preil's contributions to the last issues of the Yiddish Modernist periodical *In-Zikh*, nor of his translations into Hebrew of Glatstein's poems.¹³ Most important, no one seems to accord any significance to Preil's *bilingual* creativity: many of Preil's early poems were concurrently published in both Hebrew and Yiddish. Whether or not they had also been simultaneously *composed* is another problem, not always easy to settle. Be this as it may, we are here confronted once more with the Jewish literary paradigm of autotranslation, as it was introduced by Mendele about a century ago and practiced by other writers until recently.

III. Preil's Bilingualism in Retrospect

A close examination of Preil's bilingual activity reveals that in his early stages he translated himself from Yiddish to Hebrew, and only later reversed the procedure. A few of his first Yiddish poems were not translated at all, and one was translated into Hebrew only after a conspicuously long

10. Shmuel Bass, "Nof shemesh u-khefor," *Gilyonot* 18 (1946): 295.

11. Eisig Silberschlag, "Ha-Shirah ha-ivrit ba-'olam he-hadash," *'Ahi-sefer*, (see below, n. 17); Epstein, *Soferim*, p. 229.

12. The movement and its manifest are discussed below, sec. IV.

13. Only a few are extant, some of them in the book *'Ahi-sefer* (see below, n. 17).

interval, and not accidentally so. Furthermore, there is a striking difference, in form and style, between the first Hebrew poems and the earlier Yiddish poems. Surprisingly enough, the early Hebrew originals are not as innovative as their Yiddish counterparts. Of course, they were quite novel in the context of Hebrew verse in America, but they were not yet as daring in their departure from the governing norms as they later became and as some of the Yiddish verse had been from the start. There is room to argue, then, that a close look at Preil's bilingual activity *in toto* may shed more light on the genesis of his poetic Modernism than the attempts to locate his inspiration in interliterary contacts. If we place his autotranslation in the perspective of the bilingual tradition of Jewish literature, we are likely to understand his growth in terms of intraliterary symbiosis. We might be surprised to find, that even in the America of the thirties, half a century after Mendele's enterprise, Yiddish still afforded the poet an appropriate experimental medium. Not unlike his great predecessor, he used Yiddish as a workshop in which he learned to lower and tone down his poetic medium. What was done in Hebrew prose around the turn of the century took longer to take root in Hebrew verse, due to its long tradition of high style. It should not seem accidental, therefore, that this transition was made possible once more through the mediation of Yiddish. This interaction, however, must have been significantly different from the one in prose, due to the divergence in inner development of Hebrew and Yiddish poetry in America. While Hebrew assumed the peripheral activity of preservation and automatization, Yiddish plunged into a fast process of modernization and deautomatization. This was no doubt enhanced by the colloquial nature of Yiddish, a feature which Modern verse adopted as one of its new dominant principles.¹⁴

Still, all this was clearly ignored by young Preil's contemporaries. Epstein's brief mention of his Yiddish contacts was soon forgotten. The

14. For Roman Jakobson's definition of novelty as the shifting of emphasis among the diverse potential (aesthetic) principles of organization (= *Dominanta*), see Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska, eds., *Readings in Russian Poetics* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), pp. 82–91. On the colloquial nature of American verse in the twenties and thirties and on the general modernistic tendency to "lower" style, diction and syntax, see Graham Hough, *Image and Experience* (London, 1960), pp. 3–38; Harvey Gross, *Sound and Form in Modern Poetry* (Ann Arbor, 1964), pp. 100–68; Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1971), and *A Homemade World: The American Modernist Writers* (New York, 1975), pp. 158–93.

On the "speaking rhythms" of modern Yiddish free verse see Benjamin Hrushovski, "Free Rhythms in Modern Yiddish Verse," *The Field of Yiddish*, ed. Uriel Weinreich (New York, 1954), pp. 219–66.

fact remains that even in New York, in the not too large Jewish literary community, Preil was judged by his Hebrew verse alone. His Yiddish verse was disregarded even by such a bilingual writer as A. Zeitlin and was not considered by such staunch Hebraists as Silberschlag.¹⁵ In 1962 the latter delivered a detailed comprehensive address in honor of Preil, on the occasion of a literary award granted to him. His insightful analysis was prefaced by an elaborate biographical sketch, outlining the influential figures in Preil's life, both literary and familial. Preil's Yiddish ties, however, were nowhere to be seen. Even more glaring is an act of omission on the part of Preil himself, or, perhaps, his interviewer. His first interview, recorded in the Israeli press in 1965,¹⁶ is largely biographical. But Preil's Yiddish contacts are not to be found there either. Whether this was determined by the questions of the interviewer or by the selection of information on the part of his interlocutor, it would seem that even the changing climate of the sixties did not affect the attitudes toward Yiddish, as they had been established by Shlonsky and his school in the twenties. On the whole, the Hebrew-Yiddish symbiosis, which saw its heyday in Europe at the turn of the century, uttered its last gasp in post-World War I Vienna (U. Z. Greenberg). Thus by the thirties, when Preil had just started out, the ideological (political) alliances, which came to be symbolized by each of the languages, also drew a cultural dividing line between the users and consumers of either. The calamity of World War II and the establishment of Hebrew as the official language of the new State of Israel, naturally changed the social and demographic balance between the two camps. In New York there was even an attempt at a cultural rapprochement, which was met, however, by the sardonic scorn of Jacob Glatstein.¹⁷

Nevertheless, and despite the mediating activities of some bilingual

15. See Aharon Zeitlin's "Ha-Nof ve-ha-nefesh," *Bitzaron* 43 (1960) : 37-41; Eisig Silberschlag, "Gabriel Preil, meshorer ha-'uvdot," *Hadoar* 18 (March 2, 1962) : 281-82.

16. See Moshe Hanaami, "Pegishah 'im Gavriel Preil," *Massa*, August 27, 1965.

17. In 1943, Hebrew and Yiddish men of letters, headed by Menachem Ribalow and Samuel Niger, collaborated in the publication of *Ahi-sefer* (New York), which included translations into Hebrew of American Yiddish verse and fiction and general surveys of both Yiddish and Hebrew letters in America. Sincere as the endeavor might have been, it was received with the biting irony of Jacob Glatstein, the leader of Yiddish belles-lettres. In a long sardonic poem, "On Reading *Ahi-sefer*," *Shvive* 7 (New York, April-May 1944): 25-29, he describes the translations as the funeral of Yiddish, and mockingly suggests that they "turned him over" into Yaakov Kdarleomer. Playing on the Yiddish word for "translate" (*iberzetsn*), he says: "Gib a zets dem Glatsteyn iber/oyf Yaakov Kdarleomer." In the final lines, a tragic note pervades the irony: "Singer, your way is easy,/you are eternal and dead,/you have lost your body."

writers, the bilingual aspect of Preil's verse was not properly perceived and understood. At the time when for all other purposes the bilingual symbiosis was virtually a thing of the past, he was the only poet to revive the practice of autotranslation and actually use it as a deautomatizing device. That his Hebrew Modernism greatly benefited from this practice altogether escaped his readers.

It took over a decade for a change to be effected. Preil himself elaborated on this point, in his second interview in the Israeli press.¹⁸ Asked about the effect American *Hebrew* poets had on him, he surprisingly said that when he first started out, he also wrote in Yiddish: "Here and there I published under the influence and with the encouragement of the well-known Yiddish poet, the late Jacob Glatstein." After humorously describing their first encounter, Preil explained that through Glatstein's group, *In-Zikh*, he absorbed Anglo-American Imagism, and consequently wrote in that style. Interestingly enough, the author's interpretation of his ties with Yiddish poets differed somewhat from the critic's view. While the former stressed Imagism as his connecting link with Yiddish, the latter emphasized Introspectivism,¹⁹ the two seemingly opposing but somehow complementary forces which indeed shaped Preil's mature poetry.

Yet there is more to Preil's reply in this interview. The report of his Yiddish ties unexpectedly leads in another direction:

Later on I began to search for Hebrew poets whose writing resembled the Imagist style. Thank God, I found one in Poland—the poet Ber Pomerantz. I read his few poems and right away found the points of contact between us. I was very happy to find another poet in Europe—who was close to me. I did not want to be an "only child" in Hebrew poetry. I looked for a peer, and I found one.²⁰

This confession is very instructive. It attests to the writer's self-awareness of being a *Hebrew* author. It points to a sense of belonging and obligation to the tradition and continuity of Hebrew letters. Preil's frame of refer-

18. *Yedi'ot 'aharonot*, December 21, 1977.

19. In his perceptive essay, "Shirei zeman 'aḥer: hirhurim 'al shirat Preil ha-me'uḥeret," *Bitzaron* 68 (1977) : 168–81, 202, Dan Miron suggests that Preil's early Introspectivism stems from his ties with Yiddish poetry. The following discussion modifies this suggestion; it would seem that only in his later stages did Preil turn to true Introspectivistic verse.

20. *Yedi'ot*, *ibid.*

ence emerges here as Hebrew literature, despite his personal and professional indebtedness to such a prominent Yiddish figure as Jacob Glatstein; while names of Hebrew poets crop up abundantly in his verse, Glatstein is not mentioned before the seventies. Nor is any other Yiddish poet. This is paralleled by the difference between his two interviews in 1965 and in 1977. Nor was this change accidental: apparently, only in the seventies did Israeli Hebrew (language and literature) feel sufficiently secure to endure the burden of the rediscovered Jewish bilingualism of the past.

Echoes of this sociocultural process reverberate in Preil's most recent verse. They demonstrate a conflict between the romantic impetus behind Preil's Hebrew poetry and contrary drives originating in Yiddish Modernism. The specific nature of Preil's Hebrew romanticism is beyond the scope of the present discussion and will be treated elsewhere; the nature and effect of his Yiddish sources are the subject of the present study.

IV. *The Yiddish Sources of Preil's Imagism*

Preil's romantic leanings are immediately signaled by an abundance of Romantic figures, both Hebrew and English, which populate his poems; his Imagistic Yiddish models, on the other hand, are kept at a rather low profile: not one modern Yiddish writer is mentioned throughout most of his work, namely, from the thirties to the seventies. When this trend is finally reversed, it is only the figure of Jacob Glatstein (1896–1971), the Yiddish Modernist poet and one of the founders of *In-Zikh*,²¹ who is admitted into one of Preil's latest books (*Poems from End to End*, 1976).²² The publication of this book concurs, however, with Preil's second interview (1977) in which he openly attributes his early Imagistic techniques to the influence of Glatstein and his fellow *Inzikhistn*. Nevertheless, this literary indebtedness is not the subject of the two poems into which Glatstein's figure is incorporated.

The first poem, "A Lecture,"²³ is a whimsical reconstruction of a lecture

21. Glatstein's poetic oeuvre was recently described by Janet Hadda in *Yankev Glatshteyn* (Boston, 1980).

22. *Shirim mi-shenei ha-qeşavot* (Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, 1976). His *'Adiv le-'asmi* (Tel-Aviv, 1981) has just appeared.

23. "Harşa'ah," *Shirim*, p. 39. For a detailed analysis see Miron, "Shirei zeman," pp. 180–81.

in which Glatstein is coupled with Mendele as the literary subject matter that comes alive:

בְּאֵלֶם מֵאֲבַחַן הַמְרָצָה סוּגֵי סִפְרוּת
 וְאֵת הַנְּרִידִים הָאֲבֹטוּבִיוֹגְרָפִיִּים
 הָעוֹבְרִים בָּהֶם. מַעֲלָה שְׁמוֹת
 מְהַבְהִיבִים בֵּין מִשְׁפָּט לְמִשְׁפָּט
 בְּצִלּוֹמֵי-פְתַע, בְּצִלְיֵי זְכָרוֹן.
 בָּהּ, לְמִשְׁלַל, בְּדֶרֶךְ-טִיּוּלוֹ סָר בָּאֵן
 מְנַדְלֵי-מוֹבְרֵי-סִפְרִים וּמַעֲזֵן בְּרֶק
 אֶשׁל פְּלִיאָה נְמוֹ מִמִּשְׁקָפָיו, אוֹ
 גְּלֻטְשְׁטִיין נִכְנָס בְּכַתּוּף שְׁלוֹ
 וְחִכִּים בְּאוֹר מְחִיד בְּעֵינָיו.

In the auditorium the speaker diagnoses literary genres and the autobiographical veins transversing them. He conjures up names flickering in between sentences as flash-photos, as echoes of remembrance. Thus, for instance, Mendele Mokher Sefarim stops by while taking a walk and something like wonder flashes off his spectacles, or Glatstein enters as if into his own and, wise like light, smiles with his eyes.

A more serious attempt is made in “Elul: An Autobiographical Experiment,” which is dedicated to Glatstein.²⁴ Here, Preil tried to span the distance of nearly forty years, by recalling a meeting which had probably taken place some time in the thirties. The concrete model for this poetic reconstruction might have been his “fateful” first encounter with Glatstein, which he humorously described in his interview:

I remember giving a few poems to Glatstein and asking for his critical opinion. He told me to come back a week later. I returned and since then I have been a miserable man, because he said I had talent and that I should continue.²⁵

24. “Elul: nissayon avtobiyyografi,” *Shirim*, pp. 40–41.

25. *Yedi'ot*, *ibid.*

Continuation is also the central thrust of our poem: mimetic biography is used only as a springboard for the establishing of a literary continuity. The generic expectations aroused by the title (“Autobiography”) are only partially fulfilled.²⁶ Of the meeting in that remote Elul (the month of taking account before the New Year and the Days of Awe), just a few impressions have survived: the portrait of the sympathetic authority is broken down into disconnected parts, with the head, hair and eyes serving as synecdoches for the whole personality; whereas the gnawing doubts of the young hopeful are metonymically transferred to a nearby witness—his cup of coffee:

אלול: נסיון אַבטוביִוגראַפֿי
ליעקב גלטשטיין

מאותו יום שְׁבָאָלוּל
נֶקְפוּ יוֹתֵר שָׁנִים
מִשְׁנֵתָן לְשַׁעַר.
רֵאשׁוֹ הָיָה אֲזִי כְּמִגְלֶה
נִצְנָץ בְּאוֹרוֹת בְּלוֹנְדִינִים
אִיוֹ רְצִינּוֹת חִיבָנִית
הַכְחִילָה, הַבְּרָה בְּעֵינָיו
וּכְמוֹ נִגְעָה בְּעֵלֵי צְעִירוֹתַי
שִׁפְזָרוּ עַל־יַד סֶפֶל קָפֶה
—מֵעֵין עַד צוֹגֵן וּמִסְפֵּק—

Elul: An Autobiographical Experiment
For Jacob Glatstein

Since that day in Elul
more years have passed
than are imaginable.
His head was as if engraved,
shimmered in blond lights,
a kind of smiling seriousness
in blue was speaking in his eyes
as if to touch the leaves of my youth,
scattered around a cup of coffee[,]
a sort of a cool and doubtful witness—

26. The autobiographical genre had been so excessively used by Yiddish poets, that Glat-

This description triggers an attempt at self-evaluation of the writer's own artistic career as it has developed since that day in Elul. The former opposition between the young beginner and the seasoned authority is now resolved into an equality of artistic responsibility and a shared literary burden:

עד שִׁמְמָרְתֶּק אוֹתוֹ יוֹם שֶׁבְּאֵלוּל
 נִעֲשִׂיתִי אֶתְרַאי לְגַלִּים מְאֻתְרִים
 שִׁפּוּעִמִּים בְּסִפֵּר מְגִלָּה וּמְנֵרָא
 חֲלָשׁוֹת גְּדוּלוֹת וּגְבוּרוֹת קִטְנוֹת:
 מְדַמְיוֹי זְמַן אוֹ נוֹף הֵן עוֹלוֹת, כְּשִׁכּוֹחֶכֶן
 מִתּוֹיֵר כִּיְרַח בְּטָרֵם נִפְגָּם.

Now, far removed from that Elul day
 I've been put in charge of recent waves
 throbbing in a book, revealing and reaffirming
 great weaknesses and small strengths:
 of images of time or place²⁷ they rise, while their author
 pales as does the moon before waning.

Yet as the poem unfolds, mimetic representation is gradually reduced. We will search in vain here for any clues to the Imagistic bond ostensibly obtaining between the two parties involved. "A sharp divergence" is mentioned but is never spelled out, whereas the listed similarities are of very limited referential value:

בְּאֵלוּל מְסֻבִּים-פְּרֻקִים זֶה
 כְּרִגִיל מִתְעַנְפִּים כְּנוֹ—
 שְׁנֵי חַד בְּמִקְצֵת, קִרְבָּה רַבַּת הֶקְפִּים.

stein had already parodied it; see his "Oytobiografie" published in *Kredos*, 1929 and reprinted in his collection *Fun mayn gantser mi* (New York, 1956), p. 323.

On the artistic use of biographic materials see Boris Tomashevskii, "Literature and Biography," in Matejka and Pomorska, *Readings*, pp. 47–55.

On the function of the title in arousing false expectations (generic and others) and on its role as an interpreting marker, see Michael Riffaterre, *The Semiotics of Poetry* (Indiana, 1978), pp. 99–114.

27. *Of Time and Place (Mi-toxh zeman ve-nof)* is the title of Preil's collected poems (Jerusalem, 1972).

ומשום־מה צמודים אני
 לעיר הטרוקה וקורחת
 שפזרה לכל רוח
 את עלי צעירותנו.
 אלא שהיא בספריו, אני בספרי
 הוא בעצמותו, אני בעצמותי
 כמו אומרים לקצין
 בנערות קוצים ותליות,
 לטוס בנשרי המליצה
 לארץ אין שניה לה
 וכחוף בונה צנדיח
 נחפז לפתח־קמה
 שלא תשמט מפלנו—

עד שישמט ממקומו הירח.

In this chapter-concluding Elul
 as usual they branch out within us—
 a rather sharp divergence, a multicircumferential relatedness.
 For some reason we are both attached
 to this insane, feverish city,
 which has dispersed to all winds
 the leaves of our youth.
 Yet, he in his books, I in mine,
 he in his fatigue, I in mine,
 somehow we try to cut down
 forests of thistles and gallows,
 and take off like the eagles of rhetoric
 to a land which is like no other,
 and, as if incidentally,
 we pray that a slice of wisdom
 will not fall out of our baskets—

until the moon falls from its place.

The analogy between the two unnamed writers draws upon common general terms (city, books, fatigue) or is couched in figurative language. A close scrutiny nevertheless reveals that the figurative language represents a

set of oppositions²⁸ which derive from a Romantic code: the city (negatively marked as insane) against the one and only land, aspired to, but never reached; the leaves of youth against the thistles and gallows of old age; the flight of rhetoric against the bread of wisdom. Indeed, nothing in the content of this poem addresses itself to the specific Imagism Preil supposedly learned from Glatstein. We might even doubt whether this set of values is as appropriate for Glatstein's poetry as it is for Preil's. In fact, it would seem that the poet has again grafted his own Romantic code onto a poem describing the alleged source of his Imagistic drive.

A similar, though less obvious, process of poetic "misrepresentation"²⁹ had taken place in Preil's Hebrew essay "On Jacob Glatstein," written for the latter's sixtieth birthday. In this short article Preil delineated the central role that Glatstein's original contribution had in the modernization of Yiddish verse. Characteristically his review is centered around Glatstein's daring beginnings in the twenties and thirties rather than around the older Glatstein, the spokesman of Jewish consciousness and of European Jewry after the Holocaust.³⁰ The periodical *In-Zikh* is described by Preil as "proving to the distrustful" that "Yiddish was also touched by the wings of Time"; namely: *In-Zikh* put Yiddish on the contemporary literary map; Yiddish writers proved themselves to be on a par with their Anglo-American counterparts. Invoking the name of Ezra Pound, Preil placed Glatstein's verse in the perspective of post-World War I literature:

Ezra Pound was then at the height of his power and influence. Poets in England and the United States followed in his footsteps. The Yiddish poet [namely, J. Glatstein] did not follow the extremes of Pound's poetry, but he was familiar with its secrets and did not refrain from employing them. Directly and indirectly he [Glatstein] also tackled the Imagism perpetuated by John Gould Fletcher and Amy Lowell. Yiddish writers endeavored to adopt the immediate approach with all its blessings—the nonconventional image and free verse. Glatstein, I believe, would not have been able to reach his own colorful expression without this style [*nusah*], the fruits of his era; he was one of the foremost creators of this style in Yiddish.³¹

28. For the function of semantic oppositions in textual analysis see Riffaterre, *Semiotics*, and Yury Lotman, *Analysis of the Poetic Text*, ed. and trans. D. B. Johnson (Ann Arbor, 1976).

29. Cf. Harold Bloom's notion of "misreading" or "misprision," attributed by him to the reading of "strong poets," *Kabbala and Criticism* (New York, 1976), pp. 103–5, 117, 123.

30. The disagreement among critics concerning the continuity or discontinuity of Glatstein's oeuvre is discussed in Hadda, *Yankev*, pp. 22–27.

31. "On Jacob Glatstein," *Hadoar* 12 (November 9, 1956) : 28.

This evaluation is no doubt faithful to the historical facts of the inception of the *In-Zikh* group and to the essence of their artistic credo, as it was formulated in the group's manifesto.³² Likewise, there was clearly a resemblance between the *Inzikhistn's* poetic principles and those stated earlier by Ezra Pound and his peers.³³ What is perhaps missing in Preil's description is the emphasis on *introspectivism* (hence the name *In-Zikh*—"inward," "into oneself") which was the *Inzikhistn's* rationale for their new poetic style:

Introspectively means that the poet has to listen sincerely to his internal voice, has to observe his internal panorama—kaleidoscopic, contradictory, blurred or confused as it might be; out of this should be created the expression of the interpenetration between the poet's spirit and the phenomenon about which he writes [sings]; simultaneously with the specific image or images which he sees *within* himself while doing this. [Emphasis in the original.]³⁴

Thus, introspectivism and individualism were the focal issue; the rest—unlimited, even "unpoetic," subject matter and language, immediate imagery and the rejection of formalistic constraints (free verse)—all those were concomitant devices. Jewishness, on the other hand, was not considered an issue, nor a theme justified for its own sake.³⁵ The mere fact of writing in Yiddish met this demand. Interest shifted from sociocultural concerns to the ego of the individual and his internal world.³⁶ This entailed a close look at the poet's creative processes, namely, the mechanics of memory and association typical of poetry.³⁷ In practice this resulted in linguistic experiments and innovations,³⁸ but also in the unrestrained expression of an innermost, morbid disillusionment with a hostile, menac-

32. The manifest, entitled "Introspectivism" and signed by its chief theorists (Jacob Glatstein, Aharon [Glantz] Leyeles and N. B. Minkov), opened the first collection of *In-Zikh* (New York, 1920), pp. 5–27. For the cultural background of the inception of *In-Zikh* (1920–1940) and for the prior stages of the modernization of Yiddish verse in America, see Irving Howe and Eliezer Greenberg, *A Treasury of Yiddish Poetry* (New York, 1969), pp. 25–55; Ruth R. Wisse, "Di Yunge and the Problem of Jewish Aestheticism," *Jewish Social Studies* 38 (1976): 265–76.

33. Referred to in the manifest as "The American Imagists — the most modernistic school," *ibid.*, p. 25.

34. "Introspectivism," *In-Zikh* (New York, 1920): 6.

35. *Ibid.*, pp. 19–22.

36. Cf. David Roskies, "The Achievement of American Yiddish Modernism," *Go and Study, Essays and Studies in Honor of Alfred Jospe*, eds. Raphael Jospe and Samuel Z. Fishman (Washington, 1980), pp. 353–68.

37. Cf. Miron, "Shirei zeman," p. 172.

38. See Hadda, *Yankev*, pp. 39–41, 56–66.

ing world. Consequently many of these introspective poems are marked by bitterness and mockery. Glatstein contributed his full share to this trend, as is clearly shown by J. Hadda.³⁹ Nevertheless, this part of his poetry only gets a brief mention in Preil's review: "Glatstein reacted to this in a few interesting poems." The reviewer then hurries on to point out the other Glatstein, not the one anchored in his environment, but the one "escaping—like poets in all times—to his private realms—singing his own atemporal song." Evidently, this is where Preil identifies with Glatstein. After demonstrating his claim, he sums up:

Here, too, the scheming external reality is felt, but it is accompanied by a forgiving, *Romantic* sadness [*tugah*]. It is as if the feeling of loss is compensated for by crystallized and premeditated imagery. Man is always in the center of a circle, from which he cannot get out unless he discovers *in himself* an opening into a *brighter world*. [Emphasis added.]

This formulation speaks for itself: Preil actually turned the Introspective method topsy-turvy. The *Inzikhistn* followed Freud in their search for psychological truth and therefore braced themselves for the possibility of coming up with morbid internal reality,⁴⁰ whereas Preil romantically sees the Self as a door to a brighter world. As for Glatstein's harsh and bitter poems, the writer evaluates them as "lip service paid by the poet to his times."

We can clearly see now that some aspects, at least, of Yiddish Modernism did not suit Preil's fundamental attitudes and leanings. Perhaps it is not accidental that in tracing his roots to Yiddish poetry (in his interview, discussed above, Section III), he ignored their overall Introspectivism and emphasized their Imagistic technique. The fact is, however, that Glatstein's poetry does not abound in nature descriptions or in purely Imagistic poems of the kind with which Preil made his debut in Yiddish. Nor was Preil's poetry, in its early stages, conspicuously introspective. Most often his poems attempt to capture external realities by a series of concise photographic images; in others he *reflects* about man in general rather than introspectively delving into his own mental processes.

So perhaps Preil was telling us more of the truth in his poetic indirection (see above, "Elul"), than in his direct statement in the interview. Glat-

39. *Ibid.*, pp. 28–38, 64–70.

40. *In-Zikh*, p. 10.

stein might have encouraged and inspired him but apparently he was not Preil's immediate model.

So our search must go on. In 1977, shortly after his visit to Israel, Preil published, in New York and in Israel simultaneously, an unusually long poem entitled "Yehuda Leib Teller (Five Years after His Death)." In Israel the poem created quite a stir—the name was utterly unfamiliar. Anticipating this, a footnote was added: "Y. L. Teller (1912–1972) was one of the first Yiddish Modernists, one of the outstanding poets in the post-Glatstein generation. He was a friend of the writer of this poem since his youth." Admittedly, the footnote was not much help; Teller was somehow overlooked by literary acknowledgment even among his fellow Yiddish writers. In New York, however, he may have been better known as a journalist-publicist in his position as chief editor of the Independent Jewish Press Service. He was also the author of a handful of books on Jewish socio-political subjects. His career as a poet, on the other hand, did not draw much attention. After publishing three slender books of verse (*Simboln*, 1930; *Miniatur*, 1934; *Lider fun der tsayt* [*Poems of the Time*], 1940), he stopped writing poetry altogether and did not resume it until 1959, when he contributed to the periodicals *Di tsukunft* and *Di goldene keyt*. A collection of his poems, entitled *Durkh yidishn gemit* (*In the Spirit of Yiddish*), was published posthumously in 1975.⁴¹

If interest in Teller's poetry was all but nonexistent, Preil's poem definitely contributed to changing this state of affairs. Unexpectedly Preil adopted in this poem a quasinarative style. This enabled him to be more generous with the referential aspect of his story. Thus he tells us, for instance, that:

יהודה-ליב טֵלֶר
(חמש שנים לפטירתו)

.א.

יהודה-ליב גַר בְּרֵחוֹב הַשְּׁמִינִי מוֹרְחָה
בֵּיתוֹ הָרֵאשׁוֹן אַחַר גְּלִיזְיָהּ, נִדְמָה לִי.
אֲנִי הָיִיתִי הַנְּעָר הַלִּיטְאִי הָרֵאשׁוֹן
שֶׁאָמַר לוֹ שְׁלוֹם כְּלַל-יְהוּדִי
(אֲשֶׁר לְאִמְרֵי קִנְיִית—זוֹ הָיְתָה מוֹבְנֵת מֵאֲלִיָּה)
עַל שֶׁפֶת יָם כְּהָה וְלֹא-אֲצִיל בְּיוֹתֵר.

41. Except for the collection, which was published in Tel Aviv, all books appeared in New York.

בְּמַקְרָה נִתְקַלְתִּי בּוֹ וְלִרְאֵשׁוֹנָה פָּגַשְׁתִּי
 שִׁיר יוֹצֵא מִפִּי מִנְבְּרוֹ חֵם וְקוֹרֵחַ—
 עַד אֲזֵי הָיָה אֶפִּילוֹ חַיִּים-נִחְמָן וְהָאִישׁ שָׂאוֹל
 צוֹלָלִים תוֹךְ עַרְפְּלִים בְּעֵרֵי-נֶמֶל סוּדִיּוֹת.
 אֲנִי הֵייתִי הַקּוֹרֵא הַתְּמִים, חוֹקֵר קְסָמִים
 שְׂלֵא לִי נוֹעֵדוּ. אֲשֶׁר לִיהוּדָה-לֵיב—
 מִחֲבַרְתַּת הַשִּׁירִים שֶׁבָּיְדוֹ גִּפְנָקָה
 בְּמַעֲיָן אִירוֹנְיָה וּבִטְחָה-עֲצָמִית, וְלֹא בַכְדִּי.

„יש משורר אנגלי-אמריקני ששמו אֵלְיוֹט
 והוא שונה לאין-שעור ממשורר ששמו סְנֵדְבוֹרְג.“
 יהודה-ליב ידע אֲזֵי רְבָרִים שְׁאֲנִי לֹא שֶׁעָרְתִּים.
 פְּתִיחוֹת הַבְּהֶבֶה בֵּין בַּיִת לְבַיִת
 שֶׁל חֲרוּזֵיו הַמְסַגְּרִים וְחֵם וּפְקֻחוֹת מְעַנְנֹת קֶצֶת.

פַּעַם, בְּשִׂמְקֻטְרוֹ הַבְּאוֹתָגִית מִתְנַדְּדָת
 בֵּין שְׁתֵּי שָׁנִים מְחִיכוֹת, פְּלֹט:
 „גִּבְרִי, אֲנִי חוֹשֵׁד בְּךָ. אוֹלֵי תִנְסֶה גַם אֶתָּה?“

Yehuda-Leib lived on East 8th Street,
 his first home after Galicia, I believe.
 I was the first Lithuanian boy
 to welcome him with a universally-Jewish *Shalom* [Hello]
 (as for Americanism—this was taken for granted)
 on the shores of a dark, not too noble, sea.

I ran into him as if by chance, and for the first time encountered
 poems feverishly coming out of their speaker's mouth—
 Until then even Hayyim Nahman and the man Shaul
 were lost in mists of esoteric seaports.⁴²
 I was the naive reader, investigating magic
 not intended for me. As for Yehuda-Leib—
 His notebook of poetry was brandished in his hand
 in a kind of irony and self-confidence, and not for nothing.

“There is an Anglo-American poet named Eliot
 and he is immeasurably different from a poet named Sandburg.”

42. H. N. Bialik and Saul Tchernichowsky, the two exponents of modern Hebrew poetry, lived in Odessa.

Yehuda-Leib then had knowledge which I had not even imagined.
 Openness and warmth and a somewhat clouded intelligence
 flickered between the stanzas of his enclosed rhymes.
 Once, his pipe dangling for effect
 between two smiling teeth, he spouted:
 "Gabi, I suspect you. Perhaps you should try too?"

The conversational charm of this narrative should not mislead us. The biographical information offered in part A is reworked in the following parts (B and C) and leads, once more, to the central theme of literary continuity.⁴³ It is the first time, however, that this very word surfaces in the lexicon of the poem:

עָבְשׁוּ סֵפֶר שִׁירָיו הַמֵּיָתֵם בְּיַד חֵבֵר אַחֵר
 וְאֲנִי מִתְחִיל לְחוֹשׁ בְּקִיּוּמָהּ שֶׁל
 אִיזוֹ הַמְשָׁבְיּוֹת שֶׁעוֹבְרֹת בֵּין זֶה לָזֶה.

Now his orphaned book of verse is in the hands of another friend
 and I begin to sense the existence of
 some continuity passing from one to the other.

Furthermore, this continuity is covertly expressed, as never before, in terms of a *bilingual* tradition. Teller's Yiddishism is not stated, except obliquely, via his better known master ("It has already been five years that he rests near Glatstein, his teacher/In the cemetery in New Jersey"). The poem concludes, however, with the explicit mention of Hebrew:

אֵךְ בְּנֵדָאֵי לֹא חָשַׁב שֶׁחֵבֵר אַחֵר שֶׁל בְּרִיאַל
 יִפְתַּח רְחוּב עֵבְרִי צָעִיר לְדַמְיָיו הַעוֹמְדִים
 מִחֲדָדִים בְּטוֹרִים חֲפְשִׁים בְּשֵׁאִיזָה פְּאֵתוֹם
 מְכַרְסֵם בְּבֶקֶת בָּהֶם.

He probably did not expect that another friend of Gabriel
 would open a young Hebrew street for his images,
 angling sharply in free lines while some
 gnawing pathos clings to them.

43. *Continuity* appears to be the un verbalized matrix of many of Preil's poems, as I demonstrate elsewhere. For the term "matrix" (the semantic nucleus generating the "semiotics" or "significance" of a given text), see Riffaterre, *Semiotics*.

We are finally back to angular images and free verse. At the same time it is clear that this poem in particular is bathed in the most cherished memories of early youth and of the very first contact with both the practice and the knowledge of modern poetry. No wonder the earlier concepts that young Preil had of Classical Hebrew poetry seemed dim, as if shrouded in mist, when they were compared with the lively poetic know-how exhibited by his friend. It is not surprising, then, that Teller's Yiddish poems offer the closest clue to Preil's Imagism. This is particularly true of Teller's second book, *Miniatur* (1934). Skimming through these miniature poems, we are immediately struck by the common features they share with Preil's early poems: their small format, some of their titles, and most important, their purely Imagistic technique.

Let us compare, for example, the following two miniatures, Teller's "Wind" and Preil's "Wonder-Mirror":⁴⁴

ווינט	וואונדער־שפיגל
די האָר בלאָזן אין פנים— ווי האָגל, ווי רויך און ווי רעגן.	מיידל־גאַנג אין לבנה מורמלט העלע רייד אין טונקעלן סאַמעט.
זון בלאַנקט מיט נאַענטע מעסערס פאַר די אויגן; טייכלעך גלוסטן דיינע פיס.	זי בליצט אויף שפיגלען, שניידט סילווען אין פאַראַנקערטע אויגן.
ביזט יונג. שפיגלען נעמען דיך ווי אַ פרוי, און הייסע זאַמדן לאַקערן אַרום דיין שאַטן.	זי טראַגט הייסן ווינט איבער קילע שטערן, אייזיקן אַטעם און זון.
<i>Wind</i>	<i>Wonder-Mirror</i>
Hair blows in face— like hail, like smoke and like rain.	Girl's walk in moon light murmurs bright words in dark velvet.

44. "Vint" ("Wind") was published in *Miniatur*, p. 7. "Vunder Shpigl" ("Wonder Mirror") is one of Preil's earliest poems, which was published in the Yiddish weekly *Nyu Yorker Vokhnblat* (February 8, 1935). It is included in *Lider*, p. 53, and was never translated into Hebrew.

Sun glitters
with knives close to eyes;
brooks desire your feet.

She flashes off mirrors
cutting silhouettes
in anchored eyes.

You are young. Mirrors take you
as a woman,
and warm sands lurk
around your shadow.

She carries hot winds
over cool stars,
a breath of ice
in the sun.

Though the stark imagery of these short, lucid poems clearly followed the instructions of the *In-Zikh* manifesto, they also betray a familiarity with the tenets of American Imagism and "Amygism."⁴⁵ Their brevity derived, in part at least, from the reaction against the verbiage of the long Romantic poem.⁴⁶ The Romantic poet's voice, commenting and interpreting nature, himself, and the relationship obtaining between them is superseded by a series of verbal paintings.⁴⁷ The organizing principle of these poems is the image itself; all other formal properties are subordinated to the image, hence the priority of common speech and conversational syntax over poetic diction and measured line and stanza.

The clash between this anti-Romantic new genre, deriving from both English and Yiddish sources, and the initial Romantic predilection of Preil's Hebrew roots cannot be overestimated. As we demonstrate elsewhere, he began by proceeding differently on two poetic fronts: writing pure Imagistic poems in Yiddish and Romantic free verse in Hebrew. As soon as he started to translate himself from Yiddish to Hebrew, his Imagistic techniques infiltrated his Hebrew writing. Experiments using pure Imagism in Hebrew followed, and in time Imagism (though not always pure) became the hallmark of his Hebrew poetry. As was previously mentioned, his Imagistic free verse signalled a departure from the poetic norms of his time. Still, the Yiddish sources of his innovations were unknown (or ignored) by literary Hebrew circles. It is most intriguing, therefore, to observe how Preil's bilingualism was received by Yiddish circles in New York.

45. This style is also reminiscent of some "Objectivist" poems by William Carlos Williams or by Charles Resnikoff, although Preil, at least, denies any familiarity with their tenets. On Resnikoff see Robert Alter, *Defenses of the Imagination* (Philadelphia, 1977), pp. 119–37. Cf. Hough, Gross, and Kenner (n.13), and William Pratt, *The Imagist Poem* (New York, 1963), pp. 11–39.

46. See below for Teller's critique on the rhetorical poetics of Shneur.

47. "In the Imagist poem human content is implied rather than stated"; "Imagist poems differ from other poems in leaving more to the reader to interpret." Pratt, *ibid.*, p. 30.

The earliest mention of Preil's bilingualism is by Glatstein (1940), who dubs Preil the *miznik* ("youngest son") of *both* Hebrew and Yiddish poetry in America.⁴⁸ He sees him as "a symbol of our twin languages which can dwell together in one poet without a poetic conflict." (In the original the last word is *vayisroytsetsu*, namely the biblical word describing Rebekah's twin sons [Jacob and Esau] as they ran about and "struggled" in her womb [Genesis 25:21].)

Glatstein continued this train of thought two decades later: while reviewing Preil's Yiddish poems (1961), he suggested a bilingual edition of his poetry.⁴⁹ This suggestion did not materialize, but a Yiddish collection did appear and was predictably followed by diverse evaluating reviews. In addition to themes formerly treated by the Hebrew critics (Preil's Americanism, his Imagistic technique, the cerebral quality of his verse), most of the Yiddish reviewers applauded Preil's bilingual creativity. One of them, Starkman,⁵⁰ even noticed a touch of Hebraism in Preil's Yiddish images (this applies, of course, to a later stage in Preil's writing, when he was translating from Hebrew to Yiddish). Outstanding among these Yiddish critiques is the early review of Y. L. Teller. He was the only critic who, while writing in Yiddish, evaluated Preil's Hebrew innovations from the perspective of the internal stylistic evolution of Hebrew literature itself.⁵¹ Since this was written in 1945 on the occasion of the appearance of Preil's first book, his literary-historical insight is indeed fascinating. He immediately sensed the conflict between Preil's way of writing and the governing norms of Classical Hebrew poetry, as it was then represented by Zalman Shneour (1887–1959). By poignantly defining Shneour's drawbacks as heirs to Bialik's poetics, he interpreted the difficulties of Hebrew poetry when encountered by the demands of Modernism:

Because the greatest Hebrew writer of recent times, H. N. Bialik, was a great declamatory poet (*plakat-poet*), an exalted folk-preacher (*folk prediker*), who utilized the rhetorical image which cannot be seen, but affects you by the power of speech alone, this very device has become the classical model in

48. *Nyu York morgn zhurnal*, February 18, 1940.

49. *Der yidisher kemfer*, New York, October 27, 1961.

50. Moshe Starkman, "A molerisher liriker," *Svive* 21 (December, 1966) : 44–46.

51. J. L. Teller, "Das ershte bukh fun hebreyish-yiddishn dikhter Gavriel Preil," *Getseltn* 4 (New York, July-August 1945): 135–36.

modern Hebrew verse. With Shneour, for example, the rhetorical image is used to convey erotic and other purely introspective experiences—an unbearable practice for sensitive poetry lovers. Whatever was a natural instrument for Bialik's themes is just as unnatural when used for introspective ones. In erotic poetry, declamation and rhetoric are unesthetic, and [they] too strongly recall the operatic *mise-en-scène* (not its music!).⁵²

As for Preil's poetics, Teller sees as his greatest contribution the introduction of the "mood image," which is "a very delicate instrument, bridging the poetic word and the *melitse* ["poetic diction" or "trope"] and by which one can immediately recognize the difference between a real poet and a rhymster." After describing the organic cohesiveness effected by the use of the visual image, he concludes that:

This by itself is a contribution to Hebrew verse, which for the last twenty years has been involved in a struggle (in its homeland as well) to free itself from the rhetorical vulgarity which debased Bialik's wonderful rhetoric, just as Freud's popularizers have vulgarized and misinterpreted Freud.⁵³

Apparently, Teller knew what he was talking about. Not too long after this was written, Hebrew verse did free itself from the rhetoric of former generations. The liberating tendencies reflected in Preil's verse became a governing principle in Israeli poetry in the fifties and the sixties. Evidently, only then did colloquial Hebrew feel vital enough to break the barriers of literary expression. This process was no doubt encouraged by new contacts with Anglo-American Modern poetry which replaced the Russian models of the former generation. As a result of this change young Israeli poets tried to redefine the contours of their poetic heritage. Not unlike T. S. Eliot, they reacted against their immediate predecessors and reached back to the peripheral, "minor" poets of the beginning of the century. This was the first generation of Hebrew poets who did not have to rely only on foreign models in their attempts at deautomatization. This time the new poets unearthed and canonized so-called marginal poetic "grandfathers" (Ben-Yitzhak) or "uncles" (Fogel) to help them drive aside—for a while, at least—the central (Russified) axis of Bialik-Shlonsky-Alterman. To this

52. *Ibid.*, pp. 135–36.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 136.

new lineage a third link was soon added—a younger uncle, from still a further periphery—the American poet Gabriel Preil, who started to publish his individualistic free verse in 1936, just when, in Eretz Israel, traditional modes of versification reached a new apex.

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