

**NOSTALGIA AS A LITERARY DEVICE:
GABRIEL PREIL'S DIASPORIC CONDITION***

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Abstract: *This article sheds light on an important and previously unexplored aspect of the oeuvre of the prolific Hebrew-American poet Gabriel Preil (1911–1993). The essay argues that Preil elaborated a lyrical theory of nostalgia in his poetry, which was unique for Hebrew literature both in its scope and its poetic depth. Building on an interdisciplinary corpus of nostalgia research developed by such scholars as Linda Hutcheon, Svetlana Boym, and Nicholas Dames, I trace the poetic-historical development of Preil's nostalgic thinking over almost five decades of his writing in Hebrew.*

In the first part of the article, I focus on Preil's early poetry to demonstrate that he found in nostalgic discourse a partial poetic solution for reflecting on the post-war historical condition. In the second part of the article, I draw on recent theories of diaspora developed by scholars such as Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin, as well as Lily Cho, to argue that, starting in the 1970s, Preil attributed a radically new function to nostalgic discourse—namely, it became a literary device through which he constructed and represented his diasporic literary subjectivity.

In one of the most famous poems of his late period, “Another Time,” the Hebrew-American poet Gabriel Preil declared, “There is no escaping my time/ It is Lithuania, it is America, it is Israel. / I am a unique copy of these lands and one way or another they absorbed my weathers.”¹ This autobiographical and poetic statement was the result of Preil's life-long reflection on the meaning of writing in Hebrew in the diaspora. Unlike the other Hebrew modernist poets of his generation, Preil never lived in Israel. He was born in Estonia, attended a Hebrew gymnasium in the shtetl of Krakes in Kovno, and immigrated to New York with his mother in 1922.² In the first and only monograph on his work, Yael Feldman addressed the fact that Preil was a bilingual poet who wrote mainly in Hebrew while

* I thank Allison Schachter and the anonymous readers for their insightful comments and critique.

1. G. Preil, *Sunset Possibilities and Others Poems* (trans. R. Friend; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985), p. 51.

2. For Preil's biography, see A. Mintz, *Sanctuary in the Wilderness: A Critical Introduction to American Hebrew Poetry* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), pp. 326–327.

living in New York for almost fifty years.³ Allison Schachter recently explored the diasporic quintessence of Preil's poetic oeuvre in her important book *Diasporic Modernisms*.⁴

In this article, I focus on another aspect of the diasporic condition in Preil's work, which has not yet been explored in the research, namely, that Preil is the nostalgic poet par excellence, or even more importantly—the only Hebrew lyric theorist of nostalgia. In the first part of the essay, I demonstrate that Preil strove to find an appropriate poetic mode that would enable him to come to terms with the Holocaust, World War II, and the loss of the Eastern European Jewish life-world to which he belonged. In order to do so, he gradually revised a romantic conception of nostalgia and in the process developed a reflective nostalgic thinking in which he saw a poetic solution for reflecting the shattered temporality that those catastrophes caused. In the second part of the article, I argue that Preil's nostalgic discourse took on a new function in his late poetry—being transformed into a literary device that he used to constitute and represent his diasporic literary subjectivity.

Preil's lyric theory of nostalgia illuminates current theoretical debates on nostalgia and diaspora. First, since Preil's nostalgic thinking undergoes a radical change, which sets him apart from other writers whose nostalgic discourse remains unchanged throughout their literary careers, it facilitates a more dynamic and nuanced understanding of nostalgia in general. Second, and even more importantly, as we will see, Preil's poetry complicates current theoretical formulations of nostalgia and diaspora because it articulates different vectors of nostalgia, both for his Eastern European home as well as for Jerusalem. While, as I have shown elsewhere, this literary condition of twofold longing—for the profane and the sacred—is unique to Hebrew literature, Preil's late poetry radicalizes this conception by adding a third, stabilizing space, namely, New York.⁵ Such a tripled spatial configuration, instead of a double spatiality in the case of other diasporic writers, in combination with a multilayered temporality, enables him to put forward an original poetic definition of a diasporic condition.

3. Y. Feldman, *Modernism and Cultural Transfer: Gabriel Preil and the Tradition of Jewish Literary Bilingualism* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1986).

4. A. Schachter, *Diasporic Modernisms: Hebrew and Yiddish Literature in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 152–184.

5. N. Gordinsky, "Time Gap: Nostalgic Mode in Hebrew Modernism," in *Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook 11* (ed. D. Diner; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht 2012), pp. 443–464.

1. NOSTALGIA AS A LITERARY TROPE IN PREIL'S EARLY POETRY

The problem of longing and nostalgia already started to preoccupy Preil in his second poetic volume, *נר מול כוכבים* (Candle under the stars), which was published in Israel in 1954.⁶ In this sense, my argument disputes Dan Miron's thesis formulated in his influential essay on Preil's literary oeuvre, which is one of the few articles written in Hebrew on Preil. Miron argued that it was mainly in the late poems that Preil ventured to unite different forms of temporality "in the sphere of memory—the one that joins not the spatial parts, but the parts of time, the past and the present."⁷ However, Preil already began to formulate the main characteristics of his nostalgic thinking in his early poems.

Preil's nostalgic thinking can be read as a lyric theory of nostalgia which anticipates the current wave of multidisciplinary research on nostalgia that started in the early 1990s. Nearly four decades after *Candle under the Stars* was published, the prominent theorist of postmodernism, Linda Hutcheon, described the main pitfalls of nostalgic discourse in her paradigmatic article "Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern."⁸ Hutcheon's work was central to later developments in the field of nostalgia studies, including work by Svetlana Boym, Peter Fritzsche, and John J. Su. Hutcheon's primary critique of nostalgia is that it is inauthentic. She claims that nostalgia, through the seductive process of recollection, represents an idealized form of the past, which was not experienced. Hutcheon asserts that nostalgia "'memorialized' as past, crystallized into precious moments selected by memory, but also by forgetting, and by desire's distortions and reorganizations" exiles us "from the present as it brings the imagined past near."⁹ In Hutcheon's view, the aesthetics of nostalgia is dangerous because exiling the present results in the idealization of history. Thus, the power of nostalgia's power as well as its emotional and political impact, summarizes Hutcheon, is at least partially derived from its structural "doubling-up of two different times, an inadequate present and an idealized past."¹⁰

6. G. Preil, *נר מול כוכבים* (Candle under the stars; Jerusalem: Bialik, 1954).

7. D. Miron, "בין הנר לכוכבים" (Between the candle and the stars), in *Collector of Autumns: Collected Poems 1972–1992* (ed. D. Miron; Jerusalem: Bialik, 1993), p. 349.

8. L. Hutcheon, "Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern," in *Methods for the Study of Literature as Cultural Memory* (ed. R. Vervliet and A. Estor; Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 189–207. Online: <http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/criticism/hutchinp.html>.

9. L. Hutcheon, "Irony, Nostalgia," p. 195.

10. L. Hutcheon, "Irony, Nostalgia," p. 198.

As a scholar of irony, Hutcheon calls for the ironizing of nostalgia that can be performed by postmodern writers. Such a literary operation will enable the creation of “a small part of the distance necessary for reflective thought about the present as well as the past.”¹¹ However, Hutcheon fails to address the fact that nostalgia was already reflected ironically by some late modernists, those writers that Svetlana Boym refers to as “reflective nostalgics” in her seminal book *The Future of Nostalgia*.¹² And yet, despite her critical view of nostalgia—or maybe precisely because it is critical—Hutcheon’s insights are invaluable for interpreting Preil’s nostalgic endeavor, particularly in his early poetry.

2. THE TWOFOLD TEMPORALITY OF THE LONGING FOR CHILDHOOD

The doubled temporal structure of an idealized past and a threatening historical present appears in dozens of Preil’s poems from the 1950s and 1960s. The core of his nostalgic thinking is to be found in his understanding of childhood not only as lost time but also as lost space. Readers looking for autobiographical details or representations of his Eastern-European past in Preil’s poetry will be disappointed. Despite writing dozens of poems related to his Lithuanian past, Preil offers little concrete information.¹³

What, then, is to be found in these very personal poems? First of all, they attempt to relate to another form of time—a time of childhood that cannot be experienced by adults. This aspect of Preil’s longing for “innocent time,” as he will call it later, explicitly relies on the nostalgic discourse of Romantic poetry, a style for which Preil felt a strong affinity throughout his life.¹⁴ Linda Austin, a specialist on British literature, analyzed the early nineteenth-century poetic tendency toward representing a longing for childhood and a yearning for the past when she refers to “one of the most romantic images, the innocent child of nature.”¹⁵ While

11. L. Hutcheon, “Irony, Nostalgia,” p. 207.

12. S. Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), pp. 41–56.

13. In his recent article, Yoram Popliker addresses Preil’s loss of biography and his poetic attempt to reconstruct it; see Y. Popliker, “‘The Need to be Recorded’: Gabriel Preil’s Archival Prosthesis in the American Diaspora,” *Dibur Literary Journal* 3 (Fall 2016): 1–12.

14. For Preil’s relation to Romantic poetry in his formative years, see Y. Feldman, *Modernism*, pp. 73–89.

15. L. M. Austin, “Children of Childhood: Nostalgia and the Romantic Legacy,” *Studies in Romanticism* 1.42 (2003): 75–98.

focusing mainly on Wordsworth's canonic "Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood," which became paradigmatic for its nostalgic discourse on childhood, Austin's analysis provides us with a new way of understanding Preil's fascination with Romantic poetry. Thus, we can connect his nostalgia for childhood, which he shared with the British poets, to this fascination. Austin argues that Wordsworth's Ode "treats the loss, awe, and estrangement framing the adult's sense of childhood as features of a common psychological profile" and that it evokes a shared sense among the adults "of inevitable forgetting, of the remoteness of the condition of childhood."¹⁶

The very same unbridgeable distance between the adult subject and the child that Wordsworth described in his famous lines as "The vacancy between me and those days / Which yet have such self-presence in my mind / That, musing on them, often do I seem / Two consciousnesses, conscious of myself / And of some other Being"¹⁷ is evoked in one of the opening poems of Preil's second volume, "איך הרחיק זמני עוף" (How did my time take a distance).¹⁸ This is the first poem in which Preil juxtaposes two forms of time—the time of childhood as a concept, or even as a Romantic topos, and his biographical time.

Thus, echoing Wordsworth, Preil points to one of the major challenges of formulating a nostalgic discourse on childhood—representing the distance between the subject of the lyric utterance and the child he used to be. But Preil takes his meditations on longing for childhood one step further; it is not just the poet's coming of age, which is part of the universal course of events, that makes his childhood inaccessible, but the historical events magnify the gap between lost childhood and the lost world of childhood. Thus, if, as a child, Preil could fully experience an "innocent time" in sync with the cyclic time of the year, with the particular beauty of nature in each of the seasons, it was because at that time he "did not know a thing about innocence."¹⁹

To put it more precisely, Preil perceives childhood as a space of memory, or in his own words "a country of memories" from which one becomes separated due to a twofold process, both spatial and temporal. So in the poem "How Did My Time Take a Distance," Preil touches upon the

16. L. M Austin, "Children of Childhood," p. 83.

17. W. Wordsworth, quoted in L. M Austin, "Children of Childhood," p. 84.

18. G. Preil, מתוך זמן וגוף: שירים מקובצים (Out of time and landscape; Jerusalem: Bialik, 1972), p. 138.

19. G. Preil, *Out of Time and Landscape*, p. 71.

ramifications of the threatening presence of historical disruptions of war on the biographical level and points not only to the lost time of childhood but also to the difficulty of accessing this space of memory: אֵיךְ הִרְחִיק זְמַנִּי עוֹף מֵאוֹתָהּ אֶרֶץ-זִיכְרוֹנוֹת/בָּהּ הָיִיתִי אָנוּכִי נְקוּדָה קְבוּעָה לְכְאוֹרָה מְנַצְנֶצֶת ‘How did my time distance itself from that country of memories / in which I was as it were a fixed point, shimmering’.²⁰ The reason for the “country of memories” is twofold: on the one hand, World War II and the Holocaust destroyed the place of his childhood. On the other hand, due to the experience of immigration, the country of memories itself was divided into two periods of time: his early childhood in Lithuania and his coming of age in pre-war New York. Preil articulated this double loss in his next volume, *מפת ערב* (Map of evening).²¹

In the poem with the self-evident title “אָדָם מוֹל תְּמוֹנַת עֶבֶר” (A man in front of the picture of his past), an adult man is looking at an image of himself as a child in a photograph. However, the child has disappeared, “he is only a picture now.” Not only does the child no longer exist, but the picture is one of the few relics from the Eastern-European Jewish world that has disappeared: הַבַּיִת שֶׁמִּמֶּנּוּ יָצָא לְעֹלְמוֹ הַיָּלֵד – אֵינְנוּ. / חֲצִי בָּאֵשׁ נִקְבְּרָה; חֲצִי אוֹקִינֹס עֶבֶר ‘The home which the child left for his picture ceased to exist: / half was buried in fire, half crossed the ocean’.²² “The nostalgic representation of childhood,” argues Austin, “paradoxically seeks through memory to slough off the burden of memory.”²³ It is important to notice that Preil’s poetry does not seek to represent childhood objectively—and this is where his poetic standpoint clearly differs from that of the Romantic poets. Instead, he offers a nostalgic representation of childhood because, in his view, the lost temporality of childhood can only be evoked partially through poetic form within a poetic space. And yet, perhaps, it is the stark influence of the present on the past that accounts for the burden of memory.

Childhood memories are thus continuously at risk of being pushed even further aside by a violent present. In the other poems that are central to *Candle under the Stars*, Preil reflects on different aspects of historical time and demonstrates how it threatens to take over the universe of the lyrical subject and infiltrate his own time. Preil situates his lyrical subjects in a present that is shaped by its relation to past, present, and future

20. G. Preil, *Out of Time and Landscape*, p. 138.

21. G. Preil, *מפת ערב* (Map of evening; Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1960).

22. G. Preil, *Out of Time and Landscape*, p. 101.

23. L. M. Austin, “The Children of Childhood,” p. 85.

traumas—World War II, the Cold War, the Korean War, and the threat of a third world war. So, for example, in the poem “המתנה למחר האטומי” (Waiting for the atomic tomorrow), the speaker describes everyday existence as if it unfolds on borrowed time, a kind of Beckettian time of waiting for the inevitable atomic explosion of “our little world.”²⁴

It is important to mention, however, that reflecting on the substance of historical time was not new to Preil. The various manifestations of time within the continuum of human life became one of the main motifs in his first poetic volume *The Landscape of Sun and Frost* which was printed in New York in 1944.²⁵ It is in this volume that the first signs of his affinity for Romantic nostalgia appear. And yet, the presence of historical and political time already challenge the possibility of relying on the Romantic tradition. The last part of the volume, “Flames and Night,” which was written from his “American haven” during World War II, consists of poems that try to come to terms with the destruction of European Jewry by opposing images of nature with images of the war. So, for instance, the poem “למקרא מכתב מליפציג” (While reading a letter from Leipzig) opens with a citation from the closing lines of a letter, probably the last letter written by an Ultra-Orthodox friend of the poet, sent from Germany after Hitler’s rise to power, describing nature awakening in spring: התפוח כבר עומד בבלובו ותקותי שהכל יגמר בכי טוב/פודה ישראל מגן לנו תמיד ‘The apple tree is already standing in its blossoming and my hope is that everything will end with the best. / The Redeemer of Israel is our constant shield’.²⁶ By stressing the tragic gap between the cyclical time of nature and historical time, Preil echoes Bialik’s language, despite lacking the pathos and poetic scope of Bialik’s “In the City of Slaughter.” The opposition between nature and war as a cultural product of the twentieth century becomes even more present in the poem “צפורי ברזל” (Metal birds), in which birdsongs are violently replaced by the terrible noise of airplanes spreading death all over Europe: רק שפת הרבן לצפרי-ברזל תשמע/מעל ‘Only the language of the destruction of metal birds will be heard / over the binding and breath-holding cities’.²⁷

24. G. Preil, *Out of Time and Landscape*, p. 152.

25. G. Preil, נוף שמש וכפור (The landscape of sun and frost; New York: Ohel, 1944).

26. G. Preil, *The Landscape of Sun and Frost*, p. 63.

27. The poetic language of Preil’s early poems that seeks to describe the catastrophe of the European Jewry does not exceed the borders of the “language of destruction” (שפת החורבן) which was developed by Jewish writers after a wave of pogroms swept through Eastern Europe in the first decades of the nineteenth century.

3. THE HISTORICITY OF NOSTALGIC DISCOURSE

What changed, then, in Preil's perception of nostalgia as a literary trope between his first and second volumes was the way he understood his yearning for nostalgic discourse in historical terms, that is, that his nostalgia is a historical product of modernity. In this sense, Preil's lyrical analysis of the nostalgic condition corresponds with Bryan S. Turner's description of the nostalgic paradigm, namely, that nostalgia "represented a waxing attempt...to register the growing pains of historical existence."²⁸ Already in *Candle under the Stars*, Preil evoked the nostalgic mode that he continued to elaborate on throughout his career. For Preil, nostalgia is not a form of amnesia; on the contrary, it is a way to remember and recognize the gap between the idealized past of childhood and the threatening present, while being ironic about the process of idealization.²⁹

In order to grasp the complexity of the double temporality reflected in Preil's nostalgic discourse, it is instructive to take a closer look at one of the poems central to the volume *Candle under the Stars* "חורף 1951" (Winter of 1951). The poem consists of two parts—whereas the shorter one entitled "שוב הפחדים" (Again the fears), offers a sharp and laconic portrait of his contemporaneity, the second poem, "המאה התשע-עשרה" (The nineteenth century), addresses, as the title reveals, the previous century.³⁰

חורף 1951	Winter of 1951 ³¹
א. שוב הפחדים... שוב הפחדים שאינם עיוורים כלל, מבטים כל, שוב האימות המתהלכות באש לא- גזירה;	A. Again the Fears Again the fears that are not blind at all, covering everything Again the awes pacing in the non-ascetic fire;

28. B. S. Turner, "Note on Nostalgia," *Theory, Culture & Society* 4 (1987): 150.

29. Compare with A. Enn's critique of the "anti-nostalgic" strain in research: "What these critics fail to acknowledge, however, is that despite the fact that nostalgia does not provide any critical distance from the past, it still retains the potential to foster a critical distance from the present. Indeed, this argument is already implicit in Hutcheon's own characterization of nostalgia as the projection of an idealized past that reveals a profound disappointment with the present" (A. Enn, "The Politics of *Ostalgie*: Post-Socialist Nostalgia in Recent German Film," *Screen* 48.4 [2007]: 474).

30. G. Preil, *Out of Time and Landscape*, p. 203.

31. I thank Liat Keren for her help in the translation of Preil's poems.

<p>וְאֲנִי – אָדָם נוֹלָד אֲשֶׁר בַּמָּאָה אֲשֶׁר כְּגַנְרִית לִי מִקְצִיעָה - מוֹדֶדֶת אֲרוֹן בְּמִין שִׂמְחָה-לְאִיד עַל-זְמַנִּית; וְאֲנִי אָדָם נוֹלָד בַּמָּאָה זֹרַעַת גְּרֵדוֹמִים בְּיַד אוֹהֶבֶת, וְשָׁלִי – שְׁלִי הָרֵאשׁ הַנִּיתָז. וְאִם בְּאֵי-מְקוֹם עוֹד חַיָּה הַתְּקוּוֹה, הָרִי הִיא בּוֹדָאִי יִלְדָה קִטְנָה, הַמוֹצֵצֶת אֶצְבַּע תְּמִימָה.</p>	<p>And I—a man born in the century that, like a carpenter, planes me, measuring a coffin for me. In a sort of joy—to a meta-temporal calamity; And I, a man born in a century that sows gallows with a loving hand, and mine, mine is the sprayed head. And if somewhere hope lives on, it must be a young girl, innocently sucking her thumb.</p>
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ב. הַמָּאָה הַתְּשֻׁעָה - עֲשָׂרָה...

B. The Nineteenth Century

<p>הַמָּאָה הַתְּשֻׁעָה-עֲשָׂרָה, שְׁדוּבֵר בָּהּ כֹּה הַרְבֵּה, עַל הָאֲוִילוֹת שְׁלָה וְעַל פְּשָׁעֶיהָ, עַל זְמִירֵיהָ הַבִּירוֹנִים וְהַקִּיטְסִים, הַיִּיתָה טוֹבָה וְרוֹחוּמָה כָּל כָּף: הַיְרוֹק שֶׁבְּאֶפְקִים הָיָה אֵיתָן, רֵךְ הָיָה לֵהָב הַשּׁוֹשֵׁן, הַזֹּרַע הוֹצִיא לֶחֶם-אֲמִיתוֹ מִנֵּיר וַיּוֹפִי מִלְכָּה וְחֻכְמָתָּ מִלֶּךְ הַזֵּרִיחוֹ בְּעִיר. וְאֲנִי – לָאוּ דוּוֹקָא רּוֹמַנְטִיקוֹן אֲנִי, הַחוּצָה מְשִׁי-גָן בְּכַרְכָּרָה רְתוּמָה לְסוֹסִים-נְשָׁרִים. אֲנִי רַק קוֹבֵעַ עוֹבְדוֹת נְקִשׁוֹת עַל שׁוֹלְחָן פְּרִיץ, וּבְמֵאֲתֵי זֶה, אֲשֶׁר פְּשָׁעֶיהָ אֲדוּמִים מְשֻׁנִי, וְחֻכְמָתָהּ – חֻכְמַת אֲבִדוֹן.³²</p>	<p>The nineteenth century, spoken of at such great length, its injustice and crimes, its Byronic and Keatsean nightingales, was so good and compassionate: The green in the channels was solid, the lily's tongue was soft, the sower produced real bread from a meadow and the queen's beauty and the king's wisdom illuminated the city. And I—I'm not necessarily a romantic, who crosses over a silk garden in a carriage harnessed to eagled-horses. I simply determine hard facts on a tottery table, and in this my century, whose crimes are redder than scarlet, and whose wisdom is the wisdom of destruction.</p>
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32. G. Preil, *Candle under the Stars*, p. 99.

By giving the short cycle the title “Winter of 1951,” the poem not only marks the beginning of the second half of the century, but it also reflects the immediate political context in which it was written—Truman’s declaration of a national emergency after the Chinese intervention in the Korean War, which “raised cold war tensions to the new heights.”³³ The poem references the sense of dread felt by many Americans at the prospect of a third world war.³⁴ Preil’s lyrical speaker refers to these fears, which were experienced by millions of people, when he writes: “Again the fears that are not blind at all, covering everything / again the awes pacing in the non-ascetic fire / and I am a man—born in the century that, as a carpenter, planes me / measures a coffin for me.”³⁵

The anaphora שׁוּב ‘again’ in the opening strophe stresses the repetitive element in the twentieth century’s reverence of war. The personification of time paints the cruelty of the century in almost deterministic terms. It seems that with the transition from the present to the previous century, the tone of the lyrical speaker transforms from pathos to subtle irony, a device characteristic of Preil’s work.

Unlike the first poem, which focuses on the subjective perception of the lyrical “I,” which in this instance is history, the second assumes a humorous, seemingly ahistorical point of view on the nineteenth century. But this is, of course, a mere illusion—instead of concentrating on the historical events, Preil just offers a meta-literary perspective on the previous century, by playfully evoking Romantic discourse—“with its Byronic and Keatsian nightingales.”³⁶ Therefore, if in the first poem Preil voices common fears regarding the present, in the second he clearly positions himself as a poet who “is not necessarily a romantic” because of the ethical imperative of his own times, and yet he longs for it.³⁷ Dan Miron emphasizes this issue when he writes that Preil saw the Romantic position as “a preferable one, or even as a prayed one, both spiritually and psycho-

33. For the history of the Korean War, see W. Stueck, *The Korean War: An International History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 6.

34. So, for example, in October 1951 *Collier’s* weekly magazine devoted an entire issue to the events of the hypothetical World War III.

35. G. Preil, *Out of Time and Landscape*, p. 203.

36. G. Preil, *Out of Time and Landscape*, p. 203.

37. In the poem שׁוֹאֵל קָטָן ‘A little asking poem’ written twenty years later, Preil wonders what happened to the Romantic songs (*Lied*) that his mother used to love in her youth, at the turn of the century. His own answer to this question was that “perhaps they are memories that perished” (זיכרונות (שנספו). Once put into the historical frame of Preil’s thinking, one can interpret this statement to mean that romanticism is a form of memory that came to an end with the Holocaust.

logically,” even though this position was unavailable to him, or even impossible, in the post-war era.³⁸ This standpoint becomes particularly visible in this poem.³⁹

Preil approached his own nostalgia with irony, or to paraphrase the concluding remarks from Svetlana Boym’s groundbreaking book *The Future of Nostalgia*, Preil is a “survivor of the twentieth century,” who was nostalgic “for a time when he was not nostalgic,” but this time ceased to exist a long time ago.⁴⁰ His poetic and epistemic perception of nostalgia can best be described through the prism of Boym’s theory of reflective nostalgia. Boym put forward an influential thesis about certain kinds of nostalgias, namely the reflective one, that might not only have an important ethical function in creating an alternative view of the past but also in imagining other forms of the future. Boym suggests viewing nostalgia as a historical emotion that mediates between individual and collective forms of memory, enabling writers to negotiate between their personal understandings of home, often caused by the experience of immigration and, at the same time, their desire to find universal meaning in the concept. By juxtaposing the two ideal types of nostalgia, the reflective and the restorative, Boym privileges the former, which acknowledges the impossibility of returning home, cherishing “shattered fragments of memory and temporalizes space” over the latter, which aspires to rebuild the lost home in the perfect work of memory and might have a dangerous political impact.⁴¹

As we have seen, the different manifestations of the problem of nostalgia, namely, what Linda Hutcheon calls the very “pastness of the past” of which, as we saw, Preil was perfectly aware, are to be found in many poems in the second volume.⁴² In one of the central lyric cycles, Preil already starts seeking poetic justification for the use of nostalgic discourse, precisely because of his awareness of the fact that the past cannot be retrieved. As in “Winter of 1951,” Preil’s poems suggest that the juxtaposition of the present and the past does not promote forgetfulness; rather, it makes the reader aware of the political shortcomings of the past. Moreover, according to Preil, a certain form of nostalgia is es-

38. D. Miron, “Between the Candle,” p. 301.

39. For Miron’s discussion of the second poem in the cycle, see D. Miron, “Between the Candle,” p. 302.

40. S. Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, p. 356.

41. S. Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, p. 49.

42. L. Hutcheon, “Irony, Nostalgia,” p. 195.

sential for the future, at least for the one that can be imagined in literary texts. For reflective nostalgics, irony serves as a crucial existential tool to insure an unsentimental approach to their own longing. But what would it mean for Preil, then, to be a nostalgic poet, and what function should his nostalgic discourse have exactly? In order to answer these questions, Preil situates his lyrical subject in his “natural” surrounding—the New York coffee shop, which is a dominant topos in his poetry. It is in *שירים מבית הקפה* (Poems from the café) that he first introduces his poetic strategy for representing the nostalgic paradigm.

שירים מבית-הקפה

Poems from the Café

משמרת ערגון	The longing shift
בבית-קפה זה, תקרתו שקיעה נוגה,	in this café, whose ceiling is the setting
חשמלית	light, electrical
וכתליו יאמרו לבלוב - גן, קטוף - פרי-	and its walls will speak of flowering—a
	garden, an orchard, fruit—
אהיה על משמרתי, משמרת ערגון.	I shall assume my shift, the longing shift.
בשרטוטי-עפרון לי אקים העבר,	In pencil outlines I shall construct the
	past,
בכוסי אבקש צללי השנים.	in my glass, I shall seek the shadows of
	the years.
הן אדע:	Thus I shall know:
אלה לא יתנכרו לי	These will not become removed to me
כהתנכר יום מתקמר בזהב עוזו נקשה;	like the day that boasts of its hard, strong
	gold;
אלה לא יבגדו בי	these will not betray me
כבגוד שעה זו סחופת זיו מסמא.	like the betrayal at that time swept away
	by the blinding light.
אכן יש עושר עצום לארוחת-צללים,	There is indeed great richness in a
	shadow-feast,
חכמה גליות-עין לשנים הזוכרות.	wisdom open wide to the remembering
	years,
העכשיו רק הוא מהסס כנער	the present is the only one that is hesitant
	like a youth
בטרם ניער מעץ התפוח:	before he has shaken fruit from the apple
	tree:
העכשיו רק הוא שער אטום—	Only the here and now is a closed gate—
בחיק העבר זרקו מפתחות. ⁴³	the keys cast into the bosom of the past.

43. G. Preil, *Out of Time and Landscape*, p. 148.

The poem's opening chronotope merges a basic temporal topos of Romantic poetry—the dusk—with the modernist space of the coffee shop. At sunset, the poet sits in a café and watches the play of the colors and their reflections as they merge with the poem's texture and the café's architecture. The constitution of this urban metaphor functions here as an appropriate set for the staging of the poetic action to which the lyrical subject is keen to devote himself. The poem reveals that *משמרת ערגון*—literally “longing shift” or “longing guardianship” is a conscious action, and not a sentimental condition caused by a nostalgic emotion. This manifesto-like poem contains the root of Preil's nostalgic thinking. Here, his nostalgia is not yet fully developed, but he elaborates on its meaning and offers a lyric definition. Engaging in a “longing guardianship” is an aesthetic and existential choice that the lyrical subject makes in order to create a version of the past.

Nostalgic discourse should serve as a bridge to the *השנים הזכורות* ‘remembering years’ and protect the lyrical speaker from the changing “now” that blocks the past, creating instead a permanent, unchangeable past.⁴⁴ This sort of diving into the past might slow down time, allowing it to be examined more closely. Following Ruth Abbott's interpretation of Wordsworth's nostalgic operation, one could argue that Preil's “[b]ackward-looking nostalgia for lost times gives birth to forward-looking writing seeking to give shape to time itself.”⁴⁵ The decision to assume the “longing shift” entails writing a certain kind of poem in which the hermetic past and present are united in a single shape.⁴⁶

It is important to notice that the ironic perception of nostalgic discourse already appears in the second poem of the same lyric cycle, which I discussed earlier, “Lines for Avraham Mapu.” In this poem, Preil juxtaposes his own time with the time of the author of the first modern Hebrew novel, *אהבת ציון* ‘Love of Zion’. At the beginning of the poem, he establishes a parallel between himself and the nineteenth-century Lithuanian Jewish novelist based on their shared country of origin, cultural background, and attitude toward literary work: *אני כמוך יהודי ליטאי / אשר ניסה להוציא מאדמה עצים פיקחים בנהם משתלהב החלום* / *סתמית / עצים פיקחים בנהם משתלהב החלום* ‘I am like you, a Lithuanian Jew, who strove to bring forth from ordinary soil sober trees in which the dream

44. G. Preil, *Out of Time and Landscape*, p. 149.

45. R. Abbott, “Nostalgia, Coming Home, and the End of the Poem: On Reading William Wordsworth's Ode Intimations of Immortality,” *Memory Studies* 3.3 (2010): p. 208.

46. Compare with R. Abbott, “Nostalgia,” p. 209.

blazes'.⁴⁷ After establishing the points of similarity in their literary genealogy, Preil turns to the nostalgic gaze in order to take a look at the landscape of his childhood—the forest, the river, the Eklust Mountains—where he, like his predecessor, took walks. In his novel, Mapu transforms this landscape into the biblical hills of the land of Israel. But right after evoking his nostalgic discourse, Preil creates an unbridgeable temporal and spatial gap between the two writers: *אולם אני יושב במאָרְבֵי עָנָן שֶׁל זְמַן אַחֵר* 'However, I am sitting in the clouds ambushed by another time'.⁴⁸ This historic and epistemic gap between the two times affects the nature of Preil's literary project, which he calls in the poem *חלום* 'a dream'. By composing the poem in another time—the historical time of the post-World War II era—the poet cannot write about the past in order to imagine the future in the way, for example, Mapu did in *Love of Zion* when he “walked toward the past”:

אוֹשֶׁרֶת, רַבִּי אַבְרָהָם, עַל שִׁיּוּצֵאתָ מְזַהֵיר לְקִרְאָתָא עֵבֶר / מְאַכְלֵס רוּעָה וּמְלַךְ, עוֹלָה
בְּתִמְרָ וּבְזֵית, מְזַמֵּר בְּקוֹל-צִפְּרִים.⁴⁹

May you be blessed, R. Abraham, for setting out declaratively toward the past / populating shepherds and king, climbing the palm and olive trees, trilling in the voice of birds.

Preil suggests that the Romantic conventions of Mapu's prose, which enabled him to distance his fiction from the historical reality of his times, are no longer available for the Hebrew poet writing during the second half of the twentieth century.⁵⁰ Therefore, Preil employs the reflective nostalgic discourse in order to mark the very limits of nostalgia. Unlike Mapu, Preil cannot look back at the past through the idyllic prism of the biblical text because his own literary imagination is contaminated by unrepairable loss: *אֵין שְׁבִיל בְּדַמְיוֹן לֹא יָגַע בְּדַרְכֵי אֲבִדוֹן* 'there is no path in the imagination that does not touch upon the paths of destruction'. Romantic nostalgia, which Mapu utilized so effectively in his novel, is no longer available to Preil; however, he is still able to evoke the Hebrew literary tradition in his poetry. For this reason the poem should also be read as expressing Preil's nostalgia for nineteenth-century Eastern European Hebrew literature, a

47. G. Preil, *Out of Time and Landscape*, pp. 149–150.

48. G. Preil, *Out of Time and Landscape*, p. 149.

49. A. Mapu, *אהבת ציון* (*Love of Zion*; Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1924).

50. Compare with T. Cohen, “Avraham Mapu,” *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*. Online: http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Mapu_Avraham.

tradition which he clearly saw as his own literary roots and to which he yearned to belong despite living in a different historical time.

In her article on romantic nostalgia, Ruth Abbott raised an important question, namely, whether nostalgia has a particular function in poetry. Her answer is instructive. According to Abbott, nostalgia is an intrinsic element of every poem, insofar as we integrate the poem's elements retrospectively. Abbot calls this process "the critical homecoming."⁵¹ I argue that Preil's "longing shift" is a poetic attempt to use nostalgia to constitute both writing and reading. His ideal reader thus becomes an accomplice in the nostalgic project and, in so doing, a member of the poet's Hebrew-speaking diasporic community. In the second part of the article, I will address the function of nostalgia in the constitution of Preil's diasporic literary subjectivity.

4. RESHIFTING NOSTALGIA IN PREIL'S LATE POETRY

In the 2010 special issue of the journal *Memory Studies* dedicated to the relevance of nostalgia for understanding memory, Nicholas Dames, a leading authority on nostalgia, offered concluding methodological remarks on the essays collected in the journal. Dames's insightful critique, which included a critical reappraisal of his own book, put forward a new *modus operandi* for the interpretation of nostalgic discourse.⁵² Instead of using a hermeneutic approach that first diagnoses the writers as nostalgic and then denounces the features of their nostalgic discourse "that one already knew were there all along," Dames proposes exploring particular historical case studies of nostalgia.⁵³ He advocated for the use of "functionalist language" to treat historical cases of nostalgia—not "as a symptom that explains something, but as a force that does something."⁵⁴ Dames concluded with a point that is particularly relevant for our understanding of Preil's nostalgic discourse: "Nostalgia implicitly recognizes loss, but it gives us form—or at least the desire for form—as compensation."⁵⁵ Viewed in this light, Preil's implementation of nostalgic discourse in the last decade of his literary production can be read as a transition from a

51. R. Abbott, "Nostalgia," p. 212.

52. N. Dames, "Nostalgia and Its Disciplines: A Response," *Memory Studies* 3.3 (2010): 269–275.

53. N. Dames, "Nostalgia and Its Disciplines," p. 270.

54. N. Dames, "Nostalgia and Its Disciplines," p. 272.

55. N. Dames, "Nostalgia and Its Disciplines," p. 273.

self-diagnosed nostalgic poet to a “functionalist,” or to a poet for whom nostalgia becomes a literary device.

Building on Allison Schachter’s discussion of Preil’s Yiddish and Hebrew poetry, in which she argued that his literary project should be understood within the modernist tradition of diasporic writing, I would like to argue that, in his late poetry, Preil developed a new aesthetic of nostalgia that shaped his diasporic subjectivity and offered meta-literary insights into his own writing.⁵⁶ In the early stage of the creation of his diasporic subjectivity, Preil experimented with the position of the lyrical subject vis-à-vis the past, or to put it more precisely, he sought a suitable vantage point for relating the lost past. As we saw, in order to do so, he continuously situated the lyrical subject in the chronotope of New York. The nostalgic thinking that enabled him to touch upon different forms of the past—his autobiographical past in the Lithuanian shtetl that was swept away by the Holocaust and the literary past of Romantic poetry, both Anglophone and Hebrew—enabled him to take shelter, at least in the lyrical space, from historical time.

Although Preil continued applying the same nostalgic principle in his late poetry, in the mid-seventies he assumed a new epistemic vantage point from which he viewed his own nostalgic discourse.⁵⁷ “Instead of recreation of the lost home,” contends Boym, “reflective nostalgia can foster a creative self.”⁵⁸ Preil’s reflective nostalgia becomes one of his main poetic tools for shaping his diasporic subjectivity.

In my understanding of Preil’s diasporic subjectivity, I build on the recent work of Canadian scholar Lily Cho, who argues that the diaspora should be understood as a condition of subjectivity rather than an object to be analyzed. “Diasporic subjects,” she elucidates, “emerge in turning, turning back upon those markers of the self—homeland, memory, loss—even as they turn on or away from them.” Cho proposes understanding the temporality of diasporic subjectivity as “that which is profoundly out of joint, neither before nor after a particular event or experience, haunted by

56. A. Schachter, *Diasporic Modernisms*, p. 8.

57. It is important to notice that Preil applies the very same nostalgic principle in dozens of his late poems and even develops a certain poetic technique that signals to the reader the appearance of nostalgia. These poems open with a specification of time, be it the time of day or a season of the year. He then stages the very moment in which the present becomes the past as unpredictable and sudden. We see this in the opening lines of the poem מניסן עד ניסן ‘From Nisan to Nisan’: ולפתע/הפשרת ניסן כיום, ושלגים בוענה רחוקה/ואני הוטלתי למחוזות הירוקים ‘Nisan is today and suddenly / the snow is melting in the distant season / and I have been cast into green vistas’ (G. Preil, *Out of Time and Landscape*, p. 88).

58. S. Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, p. 254.

the pastness of the future.”⁵⁹ Cho’s arguments can help us to understand the use of reflective nostalgia in Preil’s poetry as a continuous attempt to constitute his diasporic subjectivity through the articulation of this out of joint of temporality.

5. PREIL’S REVISION OF LONGING FOR JERUSALEM

In order to view Preil’s reflective nostalgic discourse as such, it is crucial to understand another fundamental aspect of his diasporic subjectivity, namely, the way in which he deals with the other vector of nostalgia in his Hebrew poetry—the one which we will call “sacred nostalgia” because it is directed toward Zion.⁶⁰ This type of nostalgia dates back to the Bible and can already be found in its paradigmatic form in the opening line of Psalm 137: ‘עַל נְהַרֹת, בְּבֶל--שָׁם יִשְׁבְּנוּ, גַם-בְּכִינוּ בְּזַכְרֵנוּ, אֶת-צִיּוֹן’ ‘By the rivers of Babylon—there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion’.⁶¹ Jerusalem, which is the object of Preil’s longing in his early poetry, is imagined in biblical terms. For example, in his poems “זְבוּלוֹן בָּא לְחוּפוֹ” (From a distance to Jerusalem) and “מִמְרַחֲקִים לִירוּשָׁלַיִם” (Zvulun comes to his shore) he explicitly connects Zion and nostalgia: ‘עַד עֲרָגוֹן לֹא יֵאָכֵל הַבְּקִיעַ קָרַחִי / אֶהְיֶה לְדַבֵּר אֶלֶיךָ צִיּוֹן’ ‘Until the longing is destroyed, my ice broke through, / I will dare to speak to you, Zion’.⁶²

Thus, in most of his early poems, Preil draws on the long-standing Jewish literary tradition of representing Zion.⁶³ In these poems he constantly turns to the restorative nostalgic mode, the one that represents a longing to come home. It probably will not be surprising to discover, then, that all of these early texts share an important feature—they are all apostrophic poems that echo an eroticized discourse on Jerusalem. At this point, we are confronted with the unresolvable tension between the two forms of nostalgia, the reflective and restorative. So, for example, his lyric volume *Map of Evening* opens with a poem in which he reimagines the

59. L. Cho, “The Turn to Diaspora,” *Topia* 17 (2007): 15, 16. Online: <https://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/politicalfeeling/files/2007/10/cho-topia11-30.pdf>.

60. On the representation of sacred nostalgia in Hebrew modernism, see N. Gordinsky, “Time Gap,” pp. 450–453.

61. On the role of Psalm 137 as a founding text in the Jewish literary imagination of exile, see S. D. Ezrahi, “צִיּוֹן הֲלֹא תִשְׁאַלִי? יְרוּשָׁלַיִם כַּמְטַאפּוֹרָה נְשִׂית” (Zion, will you not ask? Jerusalem as a feminine metaphor), in *A Moment of Birth: Studies in Hebrew and Yiddish Literature in Honor of Dan Miron* (ed. H. Hever; Jerusalem: Bialik, 2007), pp. 674–685.

62. G. Preil, *Out of Time and Landscape*, pp. 204 and 132.

63. On the literary tradition of the representation of Jerusalem in Hebrew letters, see S. D. Ezrahi, “Zion, Will You Not Ask?”

journey of the prototypical poet of such nostalgia, namely—Yehuda Halevi's pilgrimage to the Holy Land across the ocean and describes his nostalgia for Zion as *בְּמִיָּהָתוֹ בְּקִטְיָה לְוַחֲשֵׁת* 'his longing like whispering like silk'.⁶⁴ In another poem from the same volume, "מְנַהֵר לְנַהֵר" (From river to river), Preil explicitly refers to Psalm 137 when he writes, *עַל יַד נְהַר הָרְלֵם אֲשָׁב* 'By the river of Harlem I will sit', and reformulates the question of the possibility of singing a Hebrew song in exile.⁶⁵ Thus, his poetry from the fifties and the sixties maintains the crucial gap between the representations of opposite forms of nostalgia that are at the core of his diasporic subjectivity—on the one hand, a reflective longing for Eastern Europe and, on the other hand, a restorative, ahistorical and idealizing gaze toward Jerusalem.

The complexities of representing Jerusalem became acute for Preil once he visited Israel for the first time in 1968 when he faced the contrast between the real, post-1967 Jerusalem and the biblical city. After experiencing this confrontation, he could no longer rely on the traditional literary image of Jerusalem. Moreover, from the seventies on, his nostalgic thinking underwent a radical change as a result of his exposure to both Israel and his Israeli readership. In his pivotal study of American Hebrew poetry, Alan Mintz demonstrates that, as Preil was being introduced to Israel, he undertook another poetic project that is strongly linked to nostalgic discourse—namely, autobiographic representation. Mintz argues that this new development in Preil's poetry is a result "of the gathering excitement around Preil's poetry among the younger Israeli poets of the time."⁶⁶ It is striking to notice that his encounter with everyday life in Jerusalem and contemporary Hebrew poetry, as his autobiographical poems testify, forced Preil to revise his diasporic subjectivity in general and his nostalgic discourse in particular. It is in the autobiographical poems written during and after his visit to Israel that Preil bestows upon his nostalgic discourse a new aesthetic and meta-poetic function: namely, to assist him in situating his poetry in the diasporic literary space.

I argue that his poetic development starts from his resistance to partaking in the restorative nostalgic representation of Jerusalem. This crucial

64. G. Preil, *Out of Time and Landscape*, p. 81. On Yehuda Halevi's pilgrimage, see R. P. Scheindlin, *The Song of the Distant Dove: Judah Halevi's Pilgrimage* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

65. G. Preil, *Out of Time and Landscape*, p. 119.

66. A. Mintz, *Sanctuary in the Wilderness*, p. 326.

step is to be found in the poem with a deliberately modest title: “הַעֲרָה
 מִירוּשָׁלַיִם” (A little note from Jerusalem). The poem describes the
 poet’s confrontation with an imagined Jerusalem that insists on existing
 and his refusal to take part in the production of the nostalgic discourse on
 it: הָאָדוֹן עוֹשֶׂה דְרָכָיו בֵּין עַנְנִים וְיָרְחִים, אֹמֵר לְעַצְמוֹ / שְׂאֵפְלוֹ מְגֹדוּלִים בְּשֶׁטַח
 הַפְּסוּק הַגְּמִיחָה לֹא יִלְמַד דְּבַר. / סוֹף פְּסוּק
 ‘the gentleman who makes his way
 between the clouds and the moons tells himself that even from the greatest
 on the field of longing, he would learn nothing. Full stop’.⁶⁷ It would be
 enough, though, merely to refuse continuing the literary tradition of
 longing for Jerusalem during his stay in the city (this is why the title, in-
 dicating that the poem was written in Jerusalem, is so important) and to
 represent the urban everyday space of Jerusalem instead.⁶⁸ In order to do
 so, a poet needs to forget the “imported similes” of Jerusalem that offer a
 constant poetic temptation. Once Preil’s lyrical subject manages to forget,
 at least temporarily, the figurative language of Jerusalem, the map of
 “awaited forgetfulness” can be put aside, for this is also the moment in
 which the poet can set himself free from the chains of nostalgia. The
 closing strophe of the poem reads: הַיְתָה הַפּוֹגָה לְפְמִיחָה ‘there was a recess
 from longing’. This line should be interpreted in a double way—on the
 one hand, it summarizes a process that ends with the lyrical speaker finally
 taking a break from his continuous state of longing, and, on the other hand,
 it is a meta-poetic statement on the nature of nostalgic discourse.

By referring to the nostalgic condition at the end of the poem, Preil
 hints at the major poetic transformation his poetry underwent during his
 stay in Israel. It is striking to see that writing on Jerusalem in Jerusalem
 offers Preil a poetic alternative to nostalgia as an aesthetic principle, par-
 ticularly because this alternative offers the possibility of renouncing nos-
 talgic discourse. But such a step would force Preil to question his diaspora
 subjectivity. Therefore, instead of renouncing nostalgic discourse, he
 finds a much more complex solution to this problem. Preil grants nostalgic
 discourse a crucial epistemic role in defining his Hebrew poetry as poetry
 written within a diasporic space.

67. G. Preil, *Collector of Autumns*, p. 79.

68. In the next poem in the same volume, “גִּינוֹ בִירוּשָׁלַיִם” (Gino in Jerusalem), which was
 written during the same stay, Preil already applies this newly achieved technique of representing the
 everyday Jerusalem.

6. CONSTITUTION OF DIASPORIC INTIMACY

In their foundational introduction to *Powers of Diaspora*, Jonathan and Daniel Boyarin argue that genealogy and contingency “are the two central components of diaspora,” and that they constitute the power of diaspora. On the one hand, they elucidate, “everything that defines us is compounded of all the questions of our ancestors,” and, on the other hand, “everything is permanently at risk.”⁶⁹ Starting with the poems written in the late seventies, Preil employs nostalgic discourse in order to narrate, for the first time, a genealogy of the Hebrew diaspora in his poems. At the same time, in reaction to the almost complete eradication of the diasporic Hebrew literary tradition, he strives to guarantee his own place within it. Thus, the transformation in Preil’s nostalgic discourse can be understood as a lyric reflection on questions of genealogy and contingency—the two poles of diasporic existence.

Preil creates his diasporic genealogy by evoking his family history. In the numerous poems dedicated to his grandfather, Rabbi Jehoshua Josef Preil, a distinguished scholar of Talmud and autodidact, Preil addresses the fact that his grandfather already wrote in Hebrew and wrote for the first Hebrew newspaper in the Russian Empire, *Hamelitz*. By retelling the biography of his grandfather, whom he never had a chance to meet, Preil presents himself as the heir of a Hebrew legacy he must carry on. In this case, nostalgia is an “autobiographical tablet,” to use Preil’s own poetic idiom from “פְּרָקֵי זְמַן: שְׁלִי-שְׁלוֹ” (Chapters of time: His and mine), containing his predecessor, which enables him to express his yearning to live in the times of his grandfather.⁷⁰ In his insightful close reading of the poem, Alan Mintz stresses that Hebrew is the only “common denominator” between the literary activities of two different generations, but more importantly, in their commitment to writing in Hebrew in the diaspora.⁷¹

Apart from his familial Hebrew genealogy, Preil strives to establish an alternative literary genealogy by using nostalgia as a device. By expressing a longing for the two previous generations of his Eastern European compatriots—Uri Nissan Gnessin, David Fogel, Berl Pomeranz, and Haim Lensky—Preil reconstructs and mourns the loss of

69. D. Boyarin and J. Boyarin, *Powers of Diaspora: Two Essays on the Relevance of Jewish Culture* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2002), p. 4.

70. See G. Preil, *Collector of Autumns*, p. 15.

71. For Mintz’s analysis of the poem, see A. Mintz, *Sanctuary in the Wilderness*, pp. 330–333.

the Hebrew diasporic literary space destroyed by the two worlds and ultimately by the Holocaust. By creating diasporic intimacy, to use Svetlana Boym's term, Preil thus redefines his own diasporic project and creates a literary bridge with the Eastern European Hebrew tradition. According to Boym, diasporic intimacy is a multi-faceted, shared emotion of "longing without belonging," which thrives "on the hope of the possibilities of human understanding and survival, of unpredictable chance encounters."⁷² And yet those who share it know that diasporic intimacy does not promise "a comforting recovery of identity through shared nostalgia for the lost home and lost homeland."⁷³ The very different poets and writers that appear in Preil's various poems are not only tied together by their common future-oriented longing for Hebrew to become a European literary language, but also by nostalgia for their lost Eastern European home, which, of course, each writer experiences for different cultural and political reasons. In the late programmatic poem "שְׁלוֹשָׁה קְרוֹבִים לִי" (The three close to me) written in 1991, Preil creates diasporic intimacy between Fogel, Pomeranz, and Lensky, despite their different poetics. This intimacy would have had to have been articulated and meditated on if it were to have appeared in the poems from an earlier period. So, for example, in the poems "זְמַנִּי כְּעַתָּה" (My time now) and "חֲפוּזֵי הָאָזוּן" (Searching for the equilibrium) the act of reading Gnessin is in itself an act of nostalgia that is sometimes too overwhelming, for it connects Preil to his Eastern European past.⁷⁴ Likewise, in the poem "שְׁנֵי וּזְגָלִים" (Two Vogels), when he encounters a new neighbor named Vogel, Preil hopes that a Polish-Jewish immigrant is a relative of one of his beloved poets.⁷⁵ This is another expression of his longing for diasporic intimacy, no matter how improbable or fragile. Preil's nostalgic attempts to create both a literary genealogy and diasporic intimacy fostered the spatial aspect of his poetry.

One could argue that in his late poetry Preil does not only become a "geographer of himself," as he testifies in one of his poems, but also a lyric theorist of diaspora.⁷⁶ From the eighties on, his poetry simultaneously combined two poetic and epistemic processes that sustain each other: namely, the temporalization of space and the spatialization of time.

72. S. Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, p. 253.

73. G. Preil, *Collector of Autumns*, p. 254.

74. G. Preil, *Collector of Autumns*, pp. 98, 112.

75. G. Preil, *Collector of Autumns*, p. 124.

76. This metaphorical self-definition appears in the poem "וְשֵׁב: 21 לְאוּגוּסְט" (And again: 21st of August) in G. Preil, *Collector of Autumns*, p. 146.

In this complex and intriguing process, nostalgia plays a crucial role, for it enables Preil to shape a chronotopic understanding of the diaspora by linking different time-space constructions.⁷⁷ Thinking along the lines of the contemporary cultural theorist Esther Peeren, who suggests viewing the diaspora as dischronotopicality—a “conflict between the way time-space constructions governed subjectivity, community and memory in the homeland and the way they govern subjectivity, community and memory in the place of dispersal”—we can interpret the nostalgic discourse in Preil’s late poetry as a manifestation of this dischronotopicality.⁷⁸ It is in this epistemic context, I would like to suggest, that we should also understand the poems in which Preil experiments with using nostalgia as a literary device, particularly the quote from the poem with which I opened my discussion: “There is no escaping my time, it is Lithuania, it is America, it is Israel,” as well as a few other important poems from the same period in order to understand diaspora in chronotopic terms.⁷⁹

This epistemic and aesthetic position is crystallized in one of Preil’s late poems, with which I would like to conclude this article.

אָדָם-מָקוֹם	Man-place
פָּתַע אֲנִי מוֹצֵא עֲצָמֵי רוּשִׁים עַל מַפִּית שְׂמָה שֶׁל עִירָה בְּלִטְבִּיָּה.	Suddenly, I find myself recording on a napkin the name of the city in Latvia.
מָה לְעֵטִי שׁוֹהֶה בְּצִפּוֹן הַבַּלְטִי	What now resides in the northern Baltic?
הֲאֵם יֵשׁ לְבִקְתוֹת עֵץ שָׁם עֲדִיפוֹת עַל טִירוֹת נְיוֹ-יֹרְק;	Are the wood cabins there better than the castles in New York?
לֹא חֲשׁוֹב – הַזְּגוּגִית בְּשִׁמְשׁוֹת	Never mind—the glass in the windscreens
הַמְכוֹת שְׁלֵהֵן מִתְמַקְמֶת יָפָה עַל הַמַּפִּית.	as they hit the screen fits very well on the napkin.
אַחַר כֵּךְ וּכְעֵין פִּרוּשׁ, קוֹפֵץ אִישׁ מִזְקֵן בְּעֶרֶב שְׁקֵט, בְּמִסְבָּה,	Then, and as a sort of exegesis, a person leaps from old age on a quiet evening, at a party,

77. See the argument that diasporic identities are “always chronotopic specific” in D. Boyarin and J. Boyarin, *Powers of Diaspora*, p. 31.

78. E. Peeren, “Through the Lense of the Chronotope: Suggestions for a Spatio-Temporal Perspective on Diaspora,” *Thamyris/Intersecting* 13 (2006): 67–78.

79. G. Preil, *Sunset Possibilities*, p. 51. See, for example, “תּוֹת שְׂדֵה, הַמַּפְרָץ הַפְּרָסִי” (Strawberry, the Persian Gulf), pp. 190–191, or “פְּרָק גֵּיאוגְרָפִי קָצֵר” (A short geographic chapter), p. 192, as well as “וִירְדִים, אֶסְטוֹנְיָה וְאֲנִי” (Roses, Estonia and I), p. 200 in G. Preil, *Collector of Autumns*.

<p>זֹרֶק בִּי כְּמִטְעֵן קוֹל בְּרִיטוֹן כְּבִיד: "אֵינְךָ מְשַׁחֵק בִּהֲלִצוֹת, שְׂמֵךְ פְּרִייל? אַבוֹת אַבוֹתַי – מִשָּׁם. וְהֵרִי מֵעוֹלָם לֹא נִתְקַלּוּ בְּאִישׁ מִפְּרִייל, וְהֵנָּה אָדָם וְשִׁמוֹ שֵׁם הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא. שְׁוֹה בְּנַפְשְׁךָ הַפֶּתַעֲתָם הַשְּׂמִיחָה, אֲנִי אֵלּוּ אֲנִי מְשׁוֹרֵר הֵייתִי אוֹמֵר: אָדָם מְקַפֵּל בְּכִיסוֹ עִירָה, צְרוֹר בְּקִתּוֹת-עֵץ גּוֹנֵב בְּתַרְמִיל קֶטָן לְאַרְץ חֲדָשָׁה. אָדָם-מְקוֹם. בְּאַמָּת, פְּרִייל, בְּאַמָּת? כֵּן, יֵשׁ אָדָם כָּזֶה בְּנְיוֹ-יֹרֶק. הַשָּׁנִים מַחְזִיקוֹת בּוֹ בַּגְּבוּרָה מִתְחַזֶּה לְצִעִירָה, וְלִפְעָמִים מְכַתִּיבוֹת שִׁיר כְּמוֹ עֹכְשׁוֹ עִם הַשְּׂקִיעָה הַמְחֻוֶּרֶה נֹפֶלֶת עַל גַּגּוֹת פְּרִייל הַשָּׁחִים בְּמַעֵין אִי-אֲכַפְתִּיּוֹת וְהוֹפְכֶת לַפְתָּע, לְלֹא מַעְרָב לְשֶׁמֶשׁ נְיוֹ-יֹרֶקִית שׁוֹאֵגֶת כְּלִבִּיאָה עִם שְׂקִיעָתָהּ בְּוִרְדֵי פְּרִייל מְפַכֶּה הַוֶּרֶד הַחֲרִישִׁי הַשׁוֹאֵג לֹא פָחוֹת – שֵׁם נְרַדֵּף לְרֹדוּפֵי שְׂקִיעָה.</p>	<p>Casting into me a heavy baritone voice like a charge: “Are you not playing with jokes, you whose name is Preil?” The ancestors of my fathers—from there. And they have never Encountered a man from Preil—but here is one. And his name is the name of that place. Compare in your soul their joyous surprise, I if I as a poet would say: A man holds a city in his pocket, a cluster of wood cabins he steals in his small backpack taking it to a new land. Man-place. Really, Preil, really? Yes, there is such a man in New York. The years hold him tightly looking like a young girl, and sometimes dictating a poem like now, with the blinding sunset falling on the roofs of Preil, bent over in a sort of apathy and suddenly becoming, with no transition, the New York sun that roars like a lioness within its setting in the pinks, Preil gurgles the silent pink that roars no less— a synonym for the sunset hunters.</p>
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The poem starts with a description of a moment familiar to the reader of Preil's oeuvre: the poet writes his family name, which is also the name of a shtetl in Latvia. This simple act evokes a longing for the poet's childhood in Eastern Europe. Later, an encounter with an American whose great-grandparents came from Preil makes the object of his longing even more real. At the same time, for his interlocutor, it is the family name of

the poet that makes the Eastern European shtetl exist as more than a family memory.

This is the very moment that is supposed to inform the reader of the appearance of nostalgia, on which the lyrical speaker reflects humorously in the second part of the poem. Apart from a genealogical discovery, Preil ascribes a crucial insight into the meaning of immigration to a man who is neither a poet nor an immigrant, whom he meets at a party. The man suggests describing an immigrant as a person who transfers part of the space in which he grew up to another place. The nostalgically charged metaphor of *Man-place* receives another poetic interpretation in the second part of the poem. Preil performs a twofold hermeneutic operation—he confirms the statement of his interlocutor—“yes, there is such man in New York” and by doing so he interprets the metaphor of *Man-place* literally. The literal reading of the metaphor leads to the process of its realization—as a result of which the man becomes a place. This process of metamorphosis occurs within a poetic space, during which Preil the person becomes Preil an American city in which the Eastern European past dwells. At the same time, it reveals on the performative level the meta-poetic impetus of Preil’s diasporic writing—to contain the different time-spaces of Lithuania and Israel in his Hebrew American writing. Thus, if in his early poetry Preil developed a nostalgic discourse in order to reflect, in his late poetry, nostalgic thinking enabled him to relate to the future of Hebrew diasporic writing.