

A Modern (Jewish) Woman in a Café: Leah Goldberg and the Poetic Space of the Coffeehouse

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the complex role of the urban café in Leah Goldberg's poetic texts and Goldberg's place as a woman writer in Jewish café culture. The café appears as a real and imaginary "thirdspace" in both her poetry and her prose and as part of her activity as a writer, editor, essayist, and cultural and literary critic. The article investigates all these aspects of coffeehouse culture through three decades of Goldberg's career in Europe and in the Yishuv and Israel (especially in Berlin, Tel Aviv, and Jerusalem), shedding new light on Goldberg's life and work and her unique place in modern Jewish culture.

Key words: Leah Goldberg, coffeehouses, Hebrew literature, gender

On April 22, 1937, *Tesha' ba-erev*¹—the first popular magazine published in the Yishuv—dedicated its entire weekly issue to the topic of “the modern woman.” Part of this issue was a questionnaire that the editors presented to a number of women, asking them, “Who and what is the modern woman in the Yishuv?”² Among others, they spoke with Leah Goldberg, whom they called “the youngest and most modest of our poets.” They met her in “the twilight hour in Café Kassit, the dwelling place of the writers, artists and inspiration.” To the question posed to her, Goldberg answered with the following:

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It is my opinion that there are two kinds of modern women in the Yishuv. The first one is the working woman and her place is on the kibbutz. . . . The second one is the woman whose modernity is conveyed by her way of dressing and her sitting in fancy urban cafés. The life of the working woman is difficult, especially when she is intellectually developed; then her private life is particularly hard! The second one is, thank God, a fleeting, short-lived phenomenon whose origin is the bourgeois society and its antimodern attitude to women.³

The two kinds of modern women in the Yishuv, according to Goldberg, were the working women on the kibbutz, who fit the ideal of Labor Zionism (and perhaps lacked intellectual development), and the woman whose modernity was conveyed by sitting in urban cafés. Since Goldberg herself was sitting in Café Kassit⁴ in Tel Aviv when she gave her answer, she apparently belonged to the second category. But then she added, paradoxically, that this kind of woman was a “fleeting, short-lived phenomenon,” one whose origin was the “bourgeois society” and its “antimodern attitude.”

Given her place as a young woman poet and a habitué of Tel Aviv cafés (and yet also one who identified with the cultural program of Labor Zionism), how should we understand Goldberg’s answer to the editors of *Tesha’ ba-‘erev*? Should her overt distinction between the working woman on the kibbutz and the urban woman of leisure be taken as sincere or ironic? Did Goldberg intend to make a social and cultural distinction between the “bohemian” or “literary” café (like Kassit) and a “fancy,” “bourgeois” one? Did she intend to distinguish between the modern women in a European café on the one hand and women in the cafés of the young and provincial Yishuv (to which she herself had immigrated two years earlier, in 1935) on the other? Did Goldberg’s answer express her internal conflict about her role as a modern woman in the café (viewing herself as a “fleeting phenomenon”), or was she pointing to double standards in attitudes toward modern (Jewish) women and cafés in general and in the Yishuv in particular?

I open with this text by Goldberg despite the fact that it is not particularly important in her extensive poetic oeuvre; she never published it under her own name. However, this paradoxical text and the questions surrounding it provide a good point of entry for inquiring into the complex role of the urban café in Goldberg’s poetics texts and into her place as a woman writer in Jewish café culture.

Like other writers and artists born and raised in Europe, Goldberg was attracted to cafés not only in the cities in which she lived—

Kovno, Berlin, Bonn, Tel Aviv, and Jerusalem—but also in the many other European cities that she visited. She sat and wrote in cafés alone and with others. The café played a significant role in her relationships and also appears as a real and imaginary space in both her poetry and her prose. It was part of her activity as an editor, essayist, cultural and literary critic, and scholar. In the following pages, I will touch, in a necessarily succinct way, on all these aspects, through three decades in Goldberg’s literary career. Before moving on, however, I must say a few words about the history and theory of the urban café (especially the so-called literary café) and its place in modern European and Jewish culture.

Both coffee and the coffeehouse had their origins in the Middle East. The first coffeehouses in the world appear in sources from the sixteenth-century Ottoman Empire.⁵ The first coffeehouses in Christian Europe were established in London and Oxford around 1650, and coffeehouses became popular in the rest of Europe in the following decades.⁶ Industrialization and capitalist growth turned what had been a modest place to drink coffee into a social and cultural institution, and cafés became urban centers, spaces reflecting the pulse of the city. Though coffeehouses in the Anglophone world lost some of their cultural significance in the nineteenth century, it was in this period that continental European iterations of the institution (*café*, *caffè*, *kaffeehaus*, *karwiarnia*) gained prominence. The golden age of the European café in the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth was also the time of modernism in literature and art. As a consequence, *literary cafés* were important institutions in the development of modernist groups and trends in cities such as Paris, Vienna, and Berlin.⁷

In this period of modernization and rapid urbanization, café culture extended into urban centers heavily populated by Jews as well. Many Jews were enthusiastic participants in this culture, both as owners (some of the earliest coffeehouses in Christian Europe were established by Sephardi Jews) and as customers who frequented these cafés and became known as some of their most devoted habitués, or *stammgästen*. Cafés influenced modern Jewish culture to such an extent that the coffeehouses of Vienna, Warsaw, Berlin, and Odessa were identified—for better or worse—with Jews.⁸ The writers and intellectuals who emigrated from small towns in eastern Europe at the turn of the twentieth century and wrote in Hebrew and Yiddish were especially attracted to the café and its culture not only in European cities but also in new centers of Jewish immigration like New York and Tel Aviv.⁹

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From a theoretical point of view, any discussion of the café should begin with the writing of Jürgen Habermas, who examined the café as a key example of how “bourgeois culture” necessitated the creation of new institutions (his case in point was London coffeehouses from the late seventeenth through the eighteenth centuries). For Habermas, the coffeehouse was the sphere of private people who came together in public to “engage in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor.”¹⁰ In Habermas’s account, the public sphere is founded on its simple accessibility to individuals, who come together without hierarchy. Through their discussions, first of literature and later of news and politics, the individuals who assemble in the coffeehouse come to form a new public culture. This is a powerful and influential notion, but Habermas also idealizes the public sphere of the coffeehouse to a certain degree, and his writing on the subject of the café has been challenged and revised in many ways, in terms of both history and gender. Scholars have questioned his notion of the democratic nature of the café as a public sphere in England and elsewhere and have demonstrated that it is wrong to assume that “women had the same unfettered access to the coffeehouses as men.”¹¹

This critique of Habermas, as well as some new work on café culture (especially in the relevant era of modernism), reveal that the café was a commercial site of consumption, leisure, and commodity on one hand and on the other was a space for bohemians and avant-gardists who aspired to undermine the values of bourgeois society.¹² In order to better understand the café in an era of modernism, we might see it as “thirdspace,” a concept that emerged from the work of Henri Lefebvre and Edward Soja and has been productively appropriated by scholars of gender, space, the public sphere, and the coffeehouse.¹³ The café is a site of enunciation of identity, lived experience, and contested meanings. The café often functions as a thirdspace in the way that it mediates between real and imaginary, public and private, and elitist and popular. In the context of modernist Jewish culture, the thirdspace of the café is often experienced as the threshold between Jew and gentile, immigrant and native, and masculine and feminine.

Leah Goldberg was part of a group of Jewish writers of European origin who were attracted to the thirdspace of the café, yet she was also different in a number of ways. Not only was she one of the youngest of the generation of European-born modernist Hebrew writers who began their careers in Europe, but she was also one of the very few women to participate in modernist Jewish literature and the

burgeoning café culture.¹⁴ In fact, the so-called literary cafés were predominantly masculine despite being open to women, who frequented them mostly as owners, servers, and companions rather than as habitués who created and fully participated in this culture.

In the context of modern Jewish literature and culture, the masculinity of the café was pronounced. Numerous literary texts, memoirs, letters, and newspaper articles point to the fact that cafés served (or were perceived as serving) as modern substitutes for the traditional beit midrash (house of study). This common comparison highlights the fact that the café was gendered in a specifically Jewish way, one that was especially marked by homosociality and “homosocial desire.”¹⁵ Thus, it is not particularly surprising that very few women were part of Jewish literary café culture as insiders/outsideers. Three women stand out in this context: Else Lasker-Schüler, who wrote in German, Anna Margolin, who wrote in Yiddish, and Leah Goldberg, who wrote in Hebrew.¹⁶

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Berlin Cafés and Goldberg’s Early Poetry

Goldberg was attracted to European café culture from an early age. Between 1920 and 1929, when she was a student at the Hebrew gymnasium and the local university of Kovno, Goldberg visited the modest local cafés (like Café Metropole, near the Jewish theater) with friends, some of whom belonged to the Hebrew modernist group Petah (Opening).¹⁷ In 1930, when she was almost 20 years old, Goldberg moved to Berlin, where she studied for two years for a masters degree, followed by another year and a half in Bonn, where she completed her doctorate in Oriental Studies. These years, which also happened to be the last years of the Weimar Republic and the first of Nazism in Germany, were meaningful for the artistic and intellectual development of the young Goldberg.¹⁸ These were also the years of Goldberg’s most intense encounter with coffeehouses, especially in Berlin. Goldberg’s early writings, both poetry and prose, reflect her charged and fruitful encounter with Berlin, one of the most thrilling periods in her life.

Most of the poems in Goldberg’s first collection, *Taba’ot ‘ashan* (Smoke Rings), were published between 1929 and 1934 and were later collected in a volume whose publication coincided with her immigration to Palestine in 1935. These are intimate and at the same time urban European poems, lacking any mention of the Zionist project in Palestine, which was the main topic of poetic and political

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interest for most male Hebrew writers at the time.¹⁹ In a recent article, Giddon Ticotsky claims that “through her poems, Goldberg introduced into contemporary Hebrew literature a new feminine subject largely made in the likeness of Berlin’s modernist ethos.”²⁰ Ticotsky shows that in spite of the fact that Berlin is hardly mentioned in *Taba’ot ‘ashan*, the very title of the volume refers to smoking, a habit that Goldberg adopted in Berlin (as a “new woman”) and made part of her poetic persona, which was very unusual for a Jewish woman writer. In conjunction with the act of smoking cigarettes, many of the poems in Goldberg’s first volume take place in a smoky café and reflect her experience of café culture in Berlin.

A good example of this is the untitled poem (number 1 in the appendix) that begins with the line, “A slow dancing song soaked in the wine glass.”²¹ The poem describes a separation scene between two lovers in a café and is similar to many such poems in the volume. On the face of it, it is a static poem about unrequited love, but in fact it is much more complex and dynamic. The poem employs the urban café as a space of both romantic longing and reflection and transformation. In the first two stanzas, the speaker describes the melancholic dance-song playing in the café, which seems to “bring to her” a note of separation from her lover as “a present” (*doron*). In the last two stanzas, however, the speaker discards the mask of beauty, melancholy, and ceremony. She understands that the stars, the moon, and the autumn leaves are merely conventional accoutrements of romantic love and that the intimacy was imaginary. She thus realizes that it was not herself but her projection—the flower on the café table—who “loved” the man from whom she has now been estranged. If the poem began with intoxication from wine in the café, the speaker at the end of the poem is sober (perhaps caffeinated), recognizing that a “very dark hand between two cups / tears the gloomy flower.” She rejects the artificiality of the romantic worldview and the equally romantic image of the café that goes with it.

Another untitled poem (number 2 in the appendix), beginning with the line “I saw my God in the café,”²² uses a similar setting—an urban café, a female speaker, and her frustrated love—but its theme is slightly different.

I saw my God in the café.
He was revealed in the cigarette smoke.
Depressed, sorry and slack
He hinted: “One can live still”!

He was nothing like the one I love:
Nearer than he—and downcast,
Like the transparent shadow of starlight
He did not fill the emptiness.

By the light of a pale and reddish dusk,
Like one confessing his sins before death,
He knelt down to kiss man's feet
And to beg his forgiveness.²³

The poem is part of a group of poems in the volume that deal with the decline of God and his marginalization in a secular age. In that book and in Goldberg's early writing in general, God repeatedly appears as fallen from grace, to the point of having to ask man for help.

Here, the rejected God is "revealed" in the thick cigarette smoke of the busy café as an ephemeral entity (Goldberg uses the prophetic terminology of *hitgalut* (revelation) yet one that is also consoling and comforting. For a moment, the speaker mistakenly identifies God as her lover, but then she realizes that he is (or is similar to) someone "nearer than he," perhaps even herself. God seems to accept the role of being unloved but also teaches her that she "can still live." Like the previous poem, though without the same melancholic tone, this is also an ironic and urbane poem. The speaker is fully aware that the God who was revealed to her in the café was her own creation, emerging from her mouth with her cigarette smoke, a reflection of herself and her yearnings. Paradoxically, the scene in the café that Goldberg's poem creates also embodies radical modern religiosity, in which the desire for encounter between human (in this case, a woman) and God, and the change in roles between them, is part and parcel of the realization of divine intangibility in a secular, urban world.²⁴

In a third poem, entitled "Baladah harsinit" (A China Porcelain Ballad, number 3 in the appendix),²⁵ the Berlin café is the center of a deceptive reality of mirrors and reflections: a visual, theatrical spectacle. This poem was Goldberg's first attempt at writing a ballad, and unlike the Hebrew romantic ballads of Saul Tchernichowsky and others of the previous generation of Hebrew poets, this is a distinctively modernist one.²⁶ The speaker creates in words a fantastic-symbolist vision: "far away / in India or China," with "pale porcelain girls" and "a branch of snowy cherry flower."²⁷

While the speaker takes the reader on a visual tour of faraway vistas and images in the oriental environment of "India or China" (which the smoky café seems to encourage with its blurry field of vision), she

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simultaneously breaks down the legendary balladic atmosphere. The speaker reminds readers time and again that this entire visualization takes place in the urban and modern European reality of the 1930s: “in Berlin / in the café / with the dimming lights . . . and the smoke of the pipes.” In fact, both the Eastern fantasy and the illusion of the smoky café are nothing but reflections of the poet and her desires. Thus, what seems at first glance to be a typical orientalist poem of a European Jewish writer ends up being a sophisticated, urban self-examination of the young Goldberg, one that is set in a Berlin café but that also creates a critical distance with the lure of its smoky atmosphere.

Cafés play a role as real and metaphorical poetic objects in other poems from *Taba’ot ‘ashan* as well. However, I would like to turn here to a poem that Goldberg wrote during the same period—the early 1930s—while she was living and studying in Germany.²⁸ The poem is entitled “Ba-kafeh” (At the Café, number 4 in the appendix).²⁹ Goldberg wrote it as part of an ekphrastic cycle of poems inspired by and accompanying woodcuts by the Belgian artist Frans Masereel (1889–1972).³⁰ These Hebrew poems were handwritten on the pages of Masereel’s book of woodcut prints, *Landschaften und Stimmungen* (Landscapes and Voices, 1929).³¹ Masereel’s woodcuts, hugely popular all over Europe in the interwar period, typically depict the urban experience in terms of the individual’s struggle within the metropolis.

As Ticotsky argues, Goldberg’s cycle of poems was clearly stimulated by her encounter with metropolitan Berlin, and Masereel’s artwork (figure 1) helped her “translate” her experiences into poetic expression.³² “Ba-kafeh” depicts the interplay between the big city of Berlin and the space of the café, between the individual and the crowd, and between the man in the café and the woman in the house.

At the Café³³

Tufted hair, forelocks, hats, caps,
And hands, hands, and hands . . .
And the city in the window not knowing if
The coming hours will die here unplanned.

And the city still loves and closely stores
The grief of a different room:
Where a light-beam cast a fishing rod
Into the child’s dreams, deep-ebbing waves,
And a weary woman near the door
Waits, and waits, and waits . . .

And here he sits and forgets
The one he so much remembers,
And wants only to be friend and guest
Of himself, and of any other.

But the one facing him knows
What the city in its nights has begotten
And he told in advance with his scorn
How that room is never forgotten.

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Figure 1. Woodcut by Frans Masereel. From *Landschaften und Stimmungen* (Munich, 1929), 47.



There is an obvious link between the woodcut and the poem but also an interesting tension between the visual and the textual works of art. This is especially evident in the first stanza of the poem, which ostensibly depicts in words the scene in Masereel's woodcut. The poem emphasizes the modernist, disjointed form of metonymic gaps and discontinuities in the café scene depicted in the woodcut: "Tufted hair, forelocks, hats, caps / and hands, hands, and hands." The poem also highlights the tension between the city reflected in the window and the interior of the café, between the inside and the outside. In the woodcut and in Goldberg's poem, the metropolitan city is a personified character in its own right, "not knowing" whether "the coming hours" in the café "will die."³⁴

However, as it continues, the poem becomes increasingly detached from the woodcut, expressing themes that were central to the poems in *Taba'ot 'ashan* and to other works by Goldberg from the 1930s. The speaker creates a contrast between the space of the café and "the grief of a different room," which is more private and is probably situated in an anonymous apartment building. The reader's gaze is diverted from the café to the domestic room, where the individual's weary wife and his dreaming child wait without hope. The following two stanzas focus on one specific character, a man who visits the café and "wants only to be friend and guest." But his sociability in the café might also be a way to forget "the one he so much remembers," namely, his wife. As Ticotsky observes, "the poem seeks to penetrate through the façade of joy and liveliness" of the café (and perhaps also of Masereel's woodcut) and inquire into the heavy load that the café dwellers carry with them, especially when it comes to gender roles within the thirdspace of the café and the gendered distinctions between domestic and public that it generates. In all of her early modernist poems set in Berlin cafés, Goldberg interrogates not only the iconic urban thirdspace and its gender dynamics but also its place between the real and the imaginary, the inside and the outside, and the religious and the secular in a way that complicates any preconceived notions of the café and its culture.

Berlin Cafés and Goldberg's Prose Fiction

The role of the Berlin café in Goldberg's early poems is similar to but also distinct from the café's function in Goldberg's prose from the 1930s. The most extensive description of the Berlin café, and also the most central, appears in the novel *Avedot* (Losses), which

Goldberg had written by the time she lived in Tel Aviv (it was probably written sometime in the second half of the 1930s) but which was not published during her lifetime.³⁵ *Avedot* is an urban novel set in Berlin during the final years of the Weimar Republic. The main protagonist of the novel, Elhanan Yehudah Kron, is a Hebrew poet and scholar, an East European Jewish immigrant to Palestine who travels to Berlin in 1932 to research the Islamic origins of Jewish mysticism. He writes his masterpiece modernist cycle of poems and transcribes them on antique parchment, which he loses while attending a lecture. Like the seemingly autobiographical female speaker in Goldberg's poems, the fictional Kron is a kind of male alter ego of Goldberg herself, who was a poet and student of Oriental Studies at the time of the novel's setting.³⁶ Using a male alter ego in the novel might have been a reflection of Goldberg's uneasiness at being identified as an *'almah kotevet shirim* (a poetess, or literally, a maiden who writes poems), but it also complicates the gender dynamics in the café and elsewhere.

The first chapter of the novel opens with an episode that takes the reader almost immediately into one of Berlin's cafés. The reader is introduced to Kron for the first time not directly but through free indirect discourse, in which the narrator describes Kron's perceptions of the cityscape and his thoughts and doubts as he wanders the streets of Berlin. Kron observes: "In distant villages the cats who understand loneliness are howling. In the metropolis, people are going to the coffeehouses. They know the meaning of death."³⁷ Kron's contemplation of the café as a means for the modern urban man to avoid loneliness leads the narrator to present a fictional portrait through Kron's eyes, a textual tableau vivant of an interwar Berlin café:

Smoke was burning at the tables. Small altars were on the round tables. Every man was offering his dreams, his loves, his friendships as a sacrifice on these altars. And everything fell into the large ashtrays, and their smoke rose to the ceiling. The waiters smiled: high priests, in their black uniforms, they knew that they would eat from the offering. The tables that were standing outside, by the low partition, were extremely close to the pedestrians on the street, and yet there was a clear and articulated border between them.³⁸

The café is clearly described by the narrator (and Kron) as a modern substitute for an ancient temple, in which the smoke of cigarettes is like the incense of the offering, the waiters are the high priests, and the round marble tables of the café are the altars on which people sacrifice their loves and dreams.³⁹ The tableau continues with a description

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of the space of the café as a place in which the borders between inside and outside, between private and public, and between the café dwellers and the workers walking in the street are all blurred, in spite of being clearly marked: “Those who walked with bent heads moved their bodies to the beds, the rivers, the blooming trees and the factories. These were not the people who follow the *religion* of the café.”⁴⁰

This scene sets the entire novel in motion and is therefore critical for setting its tone and presenting the character of Kron. The tense relations between religious and secular, urban and rural, individual and crowd, and native and stranger are embodied in this Berlin café. In the café, Kron’s complicated predicament and his entanglements with a number of women begin to play out. Kron sees his former wife, Lily, with another man, and this pushes him away from the café and from the city center to the train, where he meets the (non-Jewish) German Antonia, who becomes his lover.

Toward the end of the novel, the narrator recounts another visit that Kron pays to a Berlin café, emphasizing the ethnic and gendered nature of the space and the fluid, sometimes deceptive sexuality that marks it. At this point, Kron meets Elvina Shaydman, a young divorced bohemian actress from a German Jewish family who lost her work in the theater with the rise of Nazism. Together with Elvina, Kron enters

an expansive café hall lit by a large chandelier, in the style of the large restaurants before the war. By the round tables were soft, heavy armchairs, upholstered with ruby red fabric. The café was cozy, unmodern, and it reminded one of a Jewish bourgeois house in the “old west” of Berlin. . . . The red curtains on the windows separated them from the night of the big city. The German night of the year 1933.⁴¹

Precisely because the café interior resembles a bourgeois Jewish home (as opposed to the modern-style cafés that became common in Berlin) and because its curtains shield him and his companion from the city’s tumult, nothing prepares Kron for what he witnesses inside the café. After Elvina orders coffee and cakes and smokes her cigarette, Kron meets Elvina’s family friend, Mr. Hilds, an older Jewish businessman who owns a mannequin factory. Hilds is at the café with a real-life mannequin, a blond woman with heavy make-up, and Elvina discovers that Hilds has broken off his longtime business partnership with Dr. Waldhorn, a non-Jewish German.

After the conversation with Hilds, which leaves him feeling uneasy, Kron turns his attention to an orchestra playing a tango in the

café. Suddenly, Kron notices that the violin player has the “face of a girl; his lips are painted and his eyebrows are done with pencil. The musician did not harmonize with the petit-bourgeois appearance of the café, with its soft armchairs and the solid, heavy fabric of the curtains.”⁴² The musician smiles at Kron, “an indulgent and promising smile,” but Kron turns away in fear. Elvina tries to explain what Kron has seen as “fashion . . . a sexual perversion that one relates to with tolerance or admiration. It’s becoming a matter of politics.”⁴³ In this case, the bourgeois look of the café emphasizes sexual openness and experimentation with identity confusion. It also highlights the political, ethnic, and religious tensions in the city at the time. Kron discovers that the thirdspace of the café, in which the inside and the outside, the private and the public, the male and the female meet, cannot, after all, “[separate] them from the night of the big city. The German night of the year 1933.”⁴⁴

Another central scene, from the middle of the novel, takes place in a café on the Kurfürstendamm (perhaps the famous Romanisches Café?). Here, “in the yellow smoke of the café,”⁴⁵ Kron comes across a group of East European Jewish immigrants who (like Kron himself) came to the city after having spent some time in Palestine. The group includes the Hebrew poet Shochberg, the painter Zilberman, the philosopher Zayd, and the journalist Shimshony, who is accompanied by his wife, Hemda.

At the beginning of the scene, the conversation between these figures seems to be smooth and smart, but the narrator interjects with unflattering descriptions of them. The poet Shochberg’s face is “flat and unusually round, as if reflected in a funhouse mirror of an amusement park. In his fat-sweet voice a drop of poison sizzled.”⁴⁶ The “poison” of gossip has much to do with Kron and his lost cycle of poems (and his ex-wife Lily), which is at the center of the conversation in the café. Nevertheless, when Kron arrives at the café he has mixed feelings about this gathering. Gazing at the group, he thinks to himself: “No, this must have been a mistake. He never ever missed *those people here*. It was only empty imagination.”⁴⁷

Yet Kron cannot deny that during his time studying and writing in Berlin he reminisced about Palestine and the culture of the Yishuv. He remembers that when it got very hot in Berlin and there was nowhere to escape the heat,

[h]e suddenly felt the stifling *hamsin ba-moledet* [the hot southerly wind in the homeland] and remembered the blinding light, the unbearable bright light, the light of his city with the white houses. He began to

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yearn for them, those who understand Hebrew and read his poems. He was standing like this in the middle of the Kurfürstendamm and was sensing beneath his feet the heat of that stinging sand, the white sand on the shore of the Mediterranean.⁴⁸

Meeting his Jewish friends from Palestine in the thirdspace of the Berlin café brings out Kron's ambivalent attitude to and his liminal position between eastern Europe, Palestine, and Berlin, Hebrew and German, the secular and the religious. Sitting among these Jewish intellectuals in Berlin, in spite of the fact that he misses speaking and hearing Hebrew, it seems to him that "all of these people speak an old language covered with rust. This was not his language."⁴⁹ Kron believes that even the medieval Hebrew poet Solomon ibn Gabirol or the modernist European prose writer Uri Nissan Gnessin (both of whom he, like Leah Goldberg, admired) would feel the same stifling air that he feels with his Hebrew-speaking friends from Palestine. This is in spite, or perhaps because, of the fact that he is one of them.⁵⁰ As much as Kron is attracted to urban café culture in Berlin, he is also repulsed by it and by the complex predicament it puts him in by accentuating sexual, religious, and national differences in a public sphere. Kron's sense of loss, which is the central theme of the novel, is related to the multiple crises he experiences in the café.

This central scene from *Avedot* brings to mind the ambivalent way in which cafés are represented in an earlier novel by Golbberg, *Mikhtavim mi-nesia' medumah* (Letters from an Imaginary Journey, 1937), published in Palestine two years after she immigrated there (though she apparently wrote it in the fall of 1934, as she was waiting in her mother's Kovno home to immigrate to Palestine). Despite the clear autobiographical foundation of the text in this epistolary novel, Goldberg writes about a fictional journey that she takes by means of her counterpart, the first-person narrator Ruth.⁵¹ In the third chapter of the novel, Ruth writes to her lover El (Immanuel) about her wanderings in the streets and cafés of Berlin shortly after arriving in the city:

because those who now sit at the Romanisches Café are Jews looking for sensational news in the foreign press, and because Café Lunte doesn't exist anymore, and because the disciples of Jesus who worshipped Else Lasker-Schüler left the temple of Café des Westens a long time ago and found their Mount of Olives in Le Dome and La Coupole in Paris . . . and because Menzel, who used to sit in Café Josty, had died before I was even born. . . . Because of this and other reasons, I'm sitting in Kwik, a small café that our Jewish "brothers" still frequent.⁵²

This is a complex, painful, and ironic text, full of details about real cafés in Berlin that Goldberg knew very well.⁵³ It is a unique text not only because Goldberg, like the German Jewish poet Else Lasker-Schüler, about whom Ruth is writing,⁵⁴ was a lone woman writer in a very masculine environment but also because of Ruth's awareness of her own belatedness in the café. Ruth is writing about the fact that the early 1930s are twilight years—the golden age of Berlin's cafés has already passed: "They say that the lions of art and literature used to sit in the Romanisches Café. . . . I didn't see these lions. . . . But for anyone interested in Jewish literature, there was a rare opportunity to encounter some of their wild manes in this café."⁵⁵

From 1917 and throughout the Weimar period, the huge and shabby Romanisches Café on the Kurfürstendamm, near the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche, was the new headquarters of the expressionists (replacing Café des Westens), of the so-called Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity) movement, and indeed of all writers, artists, intellectuals, and bohemians, German and non-German alike.

Among the many well-known figures who frequented the café were Else Lasker-Schüler, Franz Werfel, Kurt Tucholsky, Stefan Zweig, Alfred Döblin, Erich Kästner, Ludwig Meydner, Gottfried Benn, Joseph Roth, Berthold Brecht, and Walter Benjamin, many of whom wrote in and about the café. They described it as a second home for writers during the day, a place where heated debates on a variety of subjects were conducted far into the night and a place where literary and artistic activities were carried on.⁵⁶

But the Romanisches Café was indicative of Weimar culture in many ways, including the fact that it was far from being the exclusive location of a small group of German expressionists. Rather, it was a place in which insiders and outsiders, locals and strangers, bohemians and bourgeois, politics and art, avant-garde and mass culture (both high and low) coexisted in an elusive mixture (figure 2). As I have argued elsewhere, the Romanisches Café attracted many Hebrew and Yiddish writers in the 1920s (Dovid Bergelson, Moyshe Kulbak, U. Z. Greenberg, Ya'acov Shteynberg, A. N. Stencel, and many others), to the point that people as far away as New York and Tel Aviv spoke about it as "the center of Jewish literature."⁵⁷ When Goldberg arrived there in the early 1930s, she felt, like Ruth in the novel, that she was seeing the shadow of the place.

However, there is another element in the novel's description of the café that goes beyond Goldberg's actual encounter with the Romanisches Café and other specific coffeehouses. The Berlin café, here and elsewhere in Goldberg's writing, also serves as a microcosm

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Figure 2. Photograph of a young woman in the Romanisches Café, Berlin, 1924. Courtesy of BPK, Berlin/Art Resource, New York.

of and an extended metaphor for a world of European and Jewish culture. The descriptions of these cafés are thus always belated because of Goldberg's awareness—in real time and in retrospect—that the café and what it metaphorically represented had been lost. Goldberg's writing about the café and about the European and Jewish world comes out of this loss, one that she is witnessing and documenting but one that she also refuses to fully accept. As Yfaat Weiss

has argued, in *Mikhtavim mi-nesia' medumah* “Goldberg turns her back on Europe and cuts herself off from the Berlin she loved so dearly.”⁵⁸ But the farewell is not (and cannot be) complete. In her letters, Ruth seemingly takes leave of Europe but never in fact leaves it. The act of parting and separating paradoxically appears to be its opposite, namely, an affirmation of Europe’s presence.

Apart from Berlin cafés, Goldberg sends her fictional counterpart Ruth to cafés in other European cities, including Cologne (which Goldberg visited as a student) and Paris (which Goldberg had only visited, at this point in her life, in her imagination). An entire chapter of the novel is devoted to a meeting in Cologne between Ruth and a character named Shanthilal the Indian, a long-standing acquaintance.⁵⁹ Ruth writes that she does not like Cologne, finding the mixture of darkness and poverty in the old city side by side with the elegant cafés and shops of the modern Kölner Ringe strange and disconcerting. She prefers to go with Shanthilal to a small café near the opera, which she remembers as a place in which, two years ago, she sat and wrote poems. Ruth sits with her Indian friend by a table in the corner of the small café and conveys her feelings about the meeting: “When I first met [Shanthilal], he was someone exotic to me. . . . Now he is someone who is close to me; virtually a brother.” She senses that “[i]t was good to sit with him in this small café and make small talk, without saying anything important, knowing that this was perhaps the last conversation we would ever have together.”⁶⁰

The gloomy atmosphere of a last encounter with someone who is both distant and very dear to her heart is a result of Ruth’s knowledge that both of them are strangers and will probably soon move to a different place (he to India and she to Palestine, a place that she has never visited but considers a homeland of sorts). But the melancholy, which lingers throughout the meeting in the café, is not just about the mutual sense of being outsiders, immigrants in Germany. Shanthilal and Ruth talk about Shanthilal’s love affairs, but the conversation terminates in silence, which is suddenly and violently broken: “A group of SA passed by in the street, singing: *Hängt die Juden, stellt die Bonzen an die Wand* [Hang the Jews, put the rich against the wall]. . . . I trembled. I must have turned pale. Shanthilal bowed his head. He always felt guilty at outbreaks of anti-semitism (when together with me). And nevertheless, this was a barrier.”⁶¹ Ruth’s Jewishness, which she could have bracketed while spending time with Shanthilal—a “brother,” a fellow human being—is being exposed by the violence of the Nazis. Now it presents a barrier between her friend and herself and makes her feel even more

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out of place in Europe, despite her affinity for and encyclopedic knowledge of European culture.

[18] Later in the novel Ruth visits Paris, and she writes to El about Parisian cafés. In one particular café in the Latin Quarter she senses

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the loneliness that always guards me in *every café around the world*—my small table is sailing from me onward into the ocean of words. And I—on my lonely island, located between the table and the lamp—I cannot overcome the desire to talk to you. . . . In short, I want to write a poem.⁶²

This seems like a romantic image, a cliché of the lonely poet in the café who replaces conversation (which is at the heart of café culture and sociability) with the solitary act of writing poetry. But the image is quickly interrupted when Ruth hears the noise of Jewish refugees arriving in Paris from Berlin and Frankfurt, disturbing a seemingly idyllic scene. Ruth's first reaction is irritation and even shame at the Jewish immigrants, whose French is imperfect and tinged with an accent. But as the people around her talk about "étrangère! Salle Juive! [foreigner! Dirty Jewish!]" she quickly remembers that she is just like them, one of them. She notices that these immigrants are disturbing the quiet of a French girl, whom she imagines as someone who writes poems, like herself just a few minutes ago. She views the immigrants and herself from the point of view of a young French poetess, and the irony is not lost on her, reminding her of the complex and tense political divide that exists in this thirdspace of the Paris café, especially at this moment.

Once again, Ruth—like Goldberg herself—realizes her predicament: a young, modern Jewish woman writer and intellectual from eastern Central Europe who is nurtured by, indeed admires, classical and modernist European culture, living as an immigrant in the metropolises of Europe. Yet the rise of Nazism and antisemitism and the signs of impending war force her (like many others) to make the painful departure from Europe to Mandatory Palestine. This is what Ruth does at the end of the novel, when she gets ready to sail to the *admat terashim* (the dry rocky ground) of Palestine, and this is what Goldberg did in 1935 when she departed for Tel Aviv.

Tel Aviv Cafés and Goldberg

In the first letter that Goldberg sent from Tel Aviv, to her friend Mina Landoy in Europe, on January 31, 1935, she wrote, "Tel Aviv is

a very European city. It is noisy, always in the process of being built; something between Berlin's Westend and the old city of Kovno. For people without a wide social circle, it is probably very unpleasant to live here."⁶³ Goldberg was one of many middle-class European immigrants who arrived in Tel Aviv during the Fifth Aliyah (1929–39) and saw the city as "a speck of Europe in the middle of Asia."⁶⁴

An important part of this Europeanness was the new cafés established in the small city by immigrants in the 1920s and 1930s.⁶⁵ Goldberg was immediately attracted to cafés like Retzky, Ararat, Kassit, and Herlinger. There are numerous texts, photographs, and even paintings that show Goldberg in Tel Aviv cafés, either as a lone woman in a group of men or sitting alone in "her" cafés (figures 3 and 4). For example, the painter and illustrator Aryeh Navon wrote:

When I came back to Tel Aviv from Paris, I found out that a new café named Kassit (the first one) opened and went there in the evening. [The poet Avraham] Shlonsky approached me, greeted me, and invited me to join the group. Among them sat a young delicate woman, somewhat tense, with her eyes gazing as if expecting something. Shlonsky introduce her: Leah Goldberg. She used to sit in the afternoon in Café Herlinger. . . . I used to see her from the street, through the large window of the café, she would be revealed poring over her notebook, thin, her back rounded like a bow. Shrouded in a fog of cigarettes, she looked like she was made entirely of spirit.⁶⁶

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Figure 3. Photograph of Leah Goldberg and the writer Ya'acov Horowitz, 1935. Courtesy of the Gnazim Archive and Yair Landau.



Figure 4. Illustration of Leah Goldberg in a Tel Aviv café by Nahum Gutman. Courtesy of the Nahum Gutman Museum, Tel Aviv.

The editor and critic Israel Zmora wrote about the literary cafés of Tel Aviv,

In most cases the habitués of the café were all men. Women writers were very few, and they didn't come to the café regularly, but only sporadically. Leah Goldberg was the exception. She used to go to the café almost daily, but on her own, in a café of her own, and only occasionally mix with all of us in our cafés.⁶⁷

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These two men, Navon and Zmora, who played an important role in Goldberg's literary life in Tel Aviv for years, emphasized her uniqueness as a modern (Jewish) woman in the café. They saw her as different from the collective, whether she was trying to be part of it or trying to find "a café of her own." Goldberg herself gave very different testimonies about café culture in Tel Aviv and her participation and role in it. In a late essay dedicated to Avraham Shlonsky in 1954, she described herself as part of the *havurah*—the modernist group *Yahdav* (Together; figures 5 and 6). She wrote in a somewhat apologetic tone, trying to explain their habit of sitting in cafés:

The evening hours continued till after midnight. Horse carriages used to pass by the small café in which we met every evening. . . . Later, many



Figure 5. Caricature of Leah Goldberg with modernist poets and writers in Café Ararat by Adam Shlayn. From left to right: Leah Goldberg, Y. Sa'aroni, A. Shlonsky, Y. Zmora, Uri Keisari, Menashe Levin, Alexander Penn, Natan Alterman, Natan Grinblatt, Y. Aricha. Published in *Tesha' ba'erev*, Feb. 2, 1939, p. 24.



Figure 6. Photograph of Leah Goldberg with modernist poets and writers in Café Ararat. Courtesy of the Gnazim Institute Tel Aviv and Yair Landau.

people said that these *batlanim* [idlers] were spending day and night in “Kassit.” . . . Well, these batlanim actually met there after an exhausting day of work. . . . All of us used to “steal some time” in order to write poems. . . . In the evening, instead of going to sleep, we were allowing ourselves to be batlanim, sit in the café, converse, and argue.⁶⁸

In contrast to Goldberg’s answer to the questionnaire in *Tesha’ ba-’erev*, in which she spoke about the regrettable woman “whose modernity is conveyed by her way of dressing and her sitting in fancy urban cafés,” here she wrote about the productive role of the café, which allowed her as a female poet to be together with a group of poets, all men, to steal time, write, argue, and converse.

Goldberg’s choice of Hebrew—*batlan*, an idler—is not coincidental. There was much discussion in the Yishuv about cafés in the new Jewish urban environment of Tel Aviv and the place of writers and artists in them, almost always with the question of the “productivity” of the writer for a new society with a socialist Zionist ethos.⁶⁹ In a society in which working the land was the ideal, the urban European café was seen as an anomaly, yet the Hebrew writers of the period, who cast themselves as pioneers, liked the urban café. This is the reason for the intense discussion about *batlanut* (idleness) and for Goldberg’s apologetic tone (although it was not without a touch of irony). This is especially pronounced in an article dedicated to Shlonsky and his role in *Yahdav*.

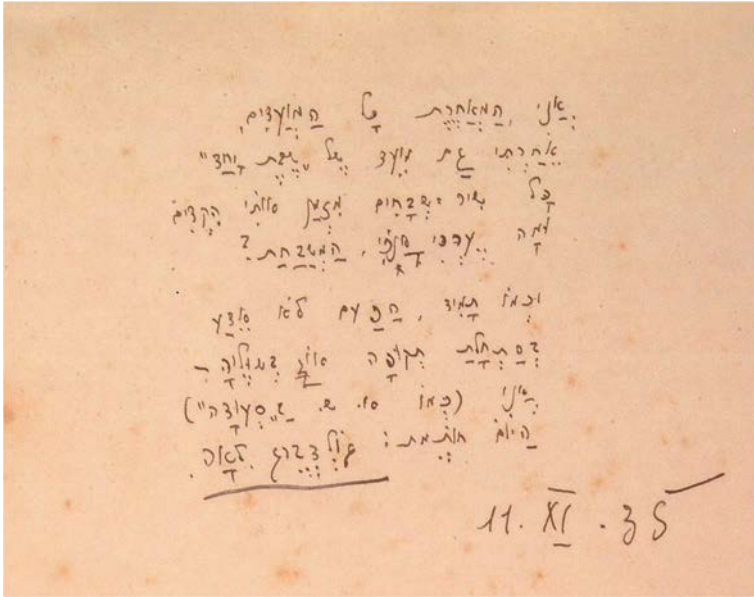


Figure 7. Leah Goldberg's contribution to the guestbook of Caf  Retsky in Tel Aviv. Published in *Beit-kafeh, makom katan koh! Beit-kafeh, davar adir! Kafeh Retski, kafeh sifrutit be-Tel Aviv, 1932–1935* (Ben Shemen, 2006), 146.

But Goldberg also felt a real ambivalence about the caf , especially in Palestine, which reflected two seemingly conflicting tendencies. As Hamutal Bar-Yosef has claimed, on the one hand Goldberg was attracted to what can be called “cultural aristocracy” and to the bourgeois gentility in which she grew up in Europe. On the other hand, Goldberg was repulsed by “petite-bourgeoisie” and saw herself as a proletarian poet, not so much in the political socialist sense but in her rejection of the prominent notion that writers only write for themselves (or for each other) and in what she saw as vulgar, shallow bohemianism.⁷⁰

In this context, it is essential to look at a very different (and much earlier) piece that Goldberg wrote about Tel Aviv caf s, a short limerick that she inscribed in the guestbook of Caf  Retski, which was established in 1932 (at the corner of Allenby and Bialik Streets) and was for a few years a center of Tel Aviv literary and artistic life (figure 7):

I, who am late for any occasion
I was also late for this occasion of “sitting together.”
Every song of praise has preceded my own

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so what is the value of me or my tribute?

And as always, this time I wouldn't know whether it is the beginning of a period or its ending,

I (like A.S. in "the banquet") today sign: Goldberg Leah.⁷¹

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In spite of the lighthearted tone of this short and simple text, the motifs of belatedness and marginality are important, even crucial. Goldberg takes a position—a poetic and psychological one—of being late, which is related to her general position of marginality, of being an outsider/insider.⁷² As in Berlin's Romanisches Café, Goldberg also feels marginal and belated in the cafés of Tel Aviv, despite the fact that in 1935 Hebrew culture and café culture in Tel Aviv were on the rise, not in their twilight.⁷³ This position surely has to do with the fact that Goldberg was a woman in a group of male writers and with the fact that she did not understand herself as a "poetic pioneer" in Palestine, a position that most important male poets of the time—Avraham Shlonsky, U. Z. Greenberg, Yitzhak Lamdan, Natan Alterman—adopted (as is evident, for example, in Shlonsky's famous description of himself as a "road-builder bard in Israel" in the poem "Amal" [Toil, 1927]).⁷⁴ Goldberg did *not* see herself as a pioneer, either in the common (and clearly masculine) sense or in the more poetic sense of literary history. She saw herself as someone who explicitly aspired to perpetuate the poetic world that existed in Europe. As Ticotsky has argued, Goldberg admired and tried to emulate the writers of the generation before her, those writers (like Gnessin, Yosef Hayim Brenner, Avraham Ben-Yitzhak, and others) who were born toward the end of the nineteenth century and experienced World War I, the Russian Revolution, and the first waves of modernism in Europe.⁷⁵

Goldberg's feelings of belatedness and marginality, which were at least partly voluntary, meant that, unlike some of her male counterparts, she wrote frequently about the crisis of physical and cultural immigration. This is beautifully expressed in her writing about Tel Aviv cafés. In poems and short stories composed in the late 1930s and early 1940s, Goldberg wrote about local cafés in such a way that it is difficult to tell whether they are in Europe or Tel Aviv. These poems emphasize, paradoxically, the simultaneous similarity and unbridgeable gap between these two worlds. This is especially salient in a cycle of poems, published in the newspaper *Davar* in 1937, with the title "Arba'ah shirim mi-beit kafeh" (Four Poems from a Café).⁷⁶

There is a strong narrative element in this cycle, each poem a story in miniature, the combination of images creating a complex

narrative structure. The cycle—both in its title and in its style, mood, and content—is clearly in dialogue with Ya’akov Shteinberg’s celebrated cycle “Sonetot mi-beit-ha-kafeh” (Sonnets from the Café), written and published in Berlin in 1922.⁷⁷ In her poems, of course, Goldberg sits in and writes about Tel Aviv cafés, but it is plausible that the cafés of Berlin, about which she had written so much, were also on her mind.

Much of the cycle takes place in a café on the beach of Tel Aviv. Although Tel Aviv had developed away from the sea, closer to the railway station and the train to Jaffa, in its early years, in the late 1920s development increased along the beach, with numerous cafés dotting the streets close to the seashore.⁷⁸ This development, and a certain tension between beach cafés (many of them spaces with live music, dancing, and cabarets) and “inland cafés,” is related to another division, namely the one between the European and the Levantine café. This division was present from the very beginning of the twentieth century, when Hebrew culture was created in Jaffa, and writers like S. Y. Agnon described the differences between the Arab cafés of Jaffa, the German cafés of Sarona (the German colony of Jaffa), and the first Jewish cafés in the outskirts of Jaffa, which were a mixture of both.⁷⁹ All these divisions and tensions are present in Goldberg’s cycle of four Tel Aviv café poems, in the way that she straddles Palestine and Europe, orient and occident, modern and biblical, and male and female.

In the first poem (number 5 in the appendix), the woman speaker tells readers about a certain man who is part of a group of bohemians, writers, and artists, someone who “sat by the table of friends and spoke about humans’ death.” The Tel Aviv café, with its smoke and its modern, nontraditional (and nonharmonic) jazz music—a new arrival in Tel Aviv—seems to be the perfect setting for what this man is saying: “The wine got warm in the café and on the radio the saxophone shrieked, / a shadow was hanging and froze on an ancient wise face / and blushed the paleness of someone who listens like me.” The female speaker, perhaps the poet Goldberg herself, is apparently only a passive listener; the jazz syncope is laughing at her, as if saying, “you will never, ever understand.”

The second part of the poem moves from the wise man to the speaker, who is revealed to understand what is being said, perhaps more than the wise man and his group of male friends. Her understanding is ostensibly the result of her experience, which the poem describes as separation from “the one who promised to come—the one who is the closest of all.” Her anguish at being the lone woman

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in the café, her love unrequited—and perhaps also being a new immigrant, one who (in spite of her relatively young age) experienced the traumas of separation and immigration—helps her to understand that “the small hand of the clock (the hand of the hours) is not mistaken.” The speaker’s understanding is double: she knows that the one she awaits will not come, but she also says, “Soon. The living? The dead? Those who are gone. / Those who are gone will not come.” Her disappointment and ultimate acceptance of her unrequited love are also an acceptance of death and those who are gone.

The second and third poems in the cycle continue to describe the atmosphere, the characters, and the events in the Tel Aviv café from the point of view of the female speaker/poet. In the second poem, which takes place in the late evening after a long day of work, the speaker highlights not only the intimate, almost familial atmosphere of the café’s habitués (perhaps the masculine poetic group *Yahdav*, represented metonymically by the “forelocks” in the third line of the poem) but also the social and erotic tensions between them and the female customers at the café.

The speaker provides poetic snapshots from the smoky café, in addition to fragments from the conversations taking place there. The café conversation is compared to “that wind that whirlleth about in the book of Kohelet [Ecclesiastes].”⁸⁰ The comparison between the conversation in the café and the famous wind of Ecclesiastes has at least two different motivations: one is the obvious connection between the wind that goes around and comes around and the endless rhythmic waves of conversations in the café. The second is the unusual biblical assertion (unusual from a Eurocentric point of view) that “the wind goeth toward the south,” typical of the *hamsin* (the hot southerly wind), so unfamiliar to European immigrants to Palestine (and about which Goldberg wrote extensively).

This is only the first of many comparisons that the speaker in Goldberg’s cycle of poems makes between the modern Tel Aviv café and the ancient, mythological biblical past. The speaker employs Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs, and Genesis in these poems in a way that emphasizes the linguistic and geographical proximity to, as well as the ironic distance (and huge difference) between, the semi-oriental Levantine Tel Aviv café and the Bible.

The conversation in the second poem of the cycle, which mainly takes place between a man and a woman, seems to be casual, even flirty. However, the lightness of the conversation (light as the wind) barely hides the presence of erotic tensions: “to pay, and on the way out [of the café] to smile at the neck of a [female] guest.” It can also

barely hide the unbearable weight of “longing,” the “carpet that covers the abyss,” and the chatter that helps to pass a sleepless night in anticipation of “a cold, lame day” and another “evening around the [café] table.”

The third poem in the cycle (number 6 in the appendix, which Goldberg chose to include under the title “Jacob and Rachel” in her second volumes of poems, published in 1939) begins with a nocturnal description of the cityscape of Tel Aviv through the eyes of the speaker, who sits in a café not far from the beach.⁸¹ The speaker watches the “ships” that “sing to the waves / and bodies sail to the border of the hamsin.” In contrast to these ships, which are able to sail away, the stationary speaker writes that she “sits in the café / and counts the pulse of lamps.” This “pulse of the lamps” (lamps that are presumably reflected in the windows of the café) is also the pulse of Goldberg’s European years: “twenty-nine, thirty-two”—these are the years in which she completed her studies in Kovno and Berlin and moved on to different places. The ellipses following the numbers express the break in Goldberg’s life and the continuation of it in Tel Aviv. At the same time, as Wendy Zierler has noted, “twenty nine . . . thirty two . . .” are also (foreshadowing the following stanzas) the chapters in the book of Genesis in which Jacob meets Rachel and in which Jacob, Rachel, and Leah finally part from Laban.⁸²

The urban café on Tel Aviv’s beach is a point in the present, but it is also frozen in time and takes her to a different time in Palestine: “O God, you have stretched the sky / on top of the soil of an oriental legend.” This “oriental legend” is the story of Jacob and Rachel, and the speaker creates a fascinating, ironic parallel between herself, the modern woman poet sitting in a Tel Aviv café, smoking and waiting, and the biblical matriarch Rachel, who yearns for Jacob. Of course, the irony here is double (or even triple) because Goldberg’s name is Leah and not Rachel. Leah—or rather, the female speaker of the poem, who is parallel to Rachel (described in Genesis 29:17 as “beautiful of form and appearance”)—is the one whose “eyes are tender” (presumably from crying), like the biblical Leah. But this modern-day Rachel, who does the watching, thinking, and feeling, is a very different female protagonist from the biblical Rachel, who is seen only from Jacob’s point of view as a great beauty.

Still, this active role of being the poetic *I* does not stop the modern-day Rachel—a woman poet like Leah Goldberg—from sitting alone in the Tel Aviv café, smoking and waiting for the lover who, as she already knows very well, will never come. Though the frustrating situation is familiar, going back to the Hebrew Bible, the speaker of the

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poem seems to accept her predicament and even exploit it for purposes of contemplation and poetic insight.⁸³

This ironic double speaker—both modern and biblical—also appears in the fourth poem of the cycle. Here, Goldberg takes us again to the café where the speaker sits on her own. She hears (or imagines hearing) “a long, melting oriental tune,” which leads the female speaker’s longing to the subject of her lover: “If only you would be with me, if only you would sit opposite. / Who will be silent and listen to the story?” The next stanza, however, brings the bittersweet, ironic realization that “it’s always been so”—not only in the European “wine-house” (in which the “fluttering gaze” of the lover quickly “returns to itself”) but even as far back as the Bible. As the poem continues, the speaker (Goldberg’s alter ego), sitting and longing in the modern-day café, imagines the Song of Songs’ Shulammitte entering the Tel Aviv café herself.

The cycle “Arba’ah shirim mi-beit kafeh” and its dynamics of gender (along with its interplay between European and Levantine, old and new, inside and outside) bring to mind the opening poem of another cycle, one that Goldberg published in 1939 with the title “Aviv ehad” (One Spring).⁸⁴ This dramatic piece (number 7 in the appendix), which takes place “on the small terrace of a [Tel Aviv] café,” poetically enacts the separation of its female speaker from her lover after what seems like a short-lived affair. From the café terrace, she looks at the city’s “display windows” and “glistening road” and feels the “coolness after a hamsin,” which spring evenings in Tel Aviv sometimes bring. On the café terrace, she and her lover sit together one more (probably the last) time, contemplating the “weightless, evaporated nothingness” that surrounds them. As she sits in the café, with its “checkered tablecloth” like a “fortified and straitly shut up wall” (an allusion to the wall of Jericho in Joshua 6:1), the speaker realizes that “the slight quivering in the tip of my fingers / no longer yearns for those opposite.” In this moment she feels the demise of erotic desire and insists that now “everything was simple.” This mundane scene, however, cannot conceal the tense eroticism inherent in the setting: “the sea behind our back / that licked the body of the living sand / . . . those couples / who hug each other in the darkness of the street.” The speaker must admit that these ordinary sights, and the “late bloom” smell of flowers, are a burden that “weigh on her like a foreign loved body,” arousing desire and humiliating her with a “caressing, masculine indifference.”

If the poem thus far gives the impression of an aroused and irritated woman, its ending provides the reader with a moment of

unexpected release. The speaker is sure that the (former) male lover is thinking “probably tonight / you will open all the windows / and not sleep. And you will try to rhyme / the thinness of my body with the heat of the hamsin.” Though this happens in the mind of the speaker, the ex-lover then “gets up” and with a “faint shadow of a smile” hints to her that it is time to go: “It’s eleven-thirty.” This emotionally turbulent poem sets in motion the rest of the revealing cycle of poems, one that constitutes a longer autobiographical *poema* (narrative poem). The fact that the poem takes place in a café shows us how charged, erotically and otherwise, the space of the Tel Aviv café was for Goldberg, with its drama of gender dynamics and its interplay between the sea and the city and between the natural and the artificial.

Tel Aviv cafés also play an important role in a number of short stories that Goldberg wrote around the same period, especially in the story entitled “Ha-nes ha-shahor” (The Black Flag, or The Black Miracle, 1938).⁸⁵ This is a story within a story, told from the point of view of Israel Nedanya, an older writer from Europe who has just arrived in Tel Aviv. The story opens with Nedanya’s recurring daily routine, a scene that highlights his sense of loss and estrangement in his new environment. He sits every day in a café, “on the spacious balcony overlooking the sea.” Nedanya does not “direct his first gaze at the sea.” Instead,

he first noticed the white and red stripes of the fabric . . . and how they are reflected like the glass that covers the café tables. Then, his ear is finely tuned to the quiet and soft music of the spoons against the demitasse cups, the rustle of the newspaper and the steps of the waiter.”

Only after “the hot cup of coffee is served to his table” can he “glance at the sea and the beach in front of him.”⁸⁶

The Tel Aviv beach café (figure 8), which functions for Nedanya as a space for inner reflection and for careful attention to the familiar sounds and sights of the café, is also his substitute for Europe. Nedanya’s attachment to the daily rituals of the European-style café (which has now found an old-new life in the Levant), more than anything else, marks the break in his world following his immigration from Europe to Palestine. The black flag, which Nedanya sees in the background of the white sand (signaling danger on the stormy sea for swimmers), is also an expression of his predicament in Tel Aviv. It reminds him of a disturbing letter he received from Europe, which he cannot stop thinking about. The reader first learns about this letter

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Figure 8. Photograph of Leah Goldberg and the poet Raphael Eliaz in a café on the beach of Tel Aviv. Courtesy of the Gnazim Institute Tel Aviv and Yair Landau.

from Nedanya's thoughts, conveyed by the third-person narrator. Later in the story, the narrator recounts the story of the letter, as Nedanya meets a friend by the name of Anshel Dor, another new immigrant to Palestine who has left a position as lecturer in ornithology at the University of Cologne and now sits in the Tel Aviv café. He "cannot even hear a shout" because he has lost his hearing.⁸⁷

As the awkward conversation between these two European Jews continues, the reader learns that the disturbing letter sitting in Nedanya's pocket was actually written by Dor's daughter, the 19-year-old Agatha, who committed suicide (shortly after writing the letter) in Vienna. Nedanya is procrastinating, trying to avoid giving Dor the terrible news. Nedanya tries to talk about the black flag on the beach in an attempt to foreshadow the dark news, but Dor cannot guess what is about to come. He has a secret of his own about his daughter, namely, that when she was a young schoolgirl she was secretly in love with Nedanya, who was then a Hebrew teacher at her Jewish school in Europe.

The story ends abruptly when Nedanya finds out that he was the object of Agatha's unrequited love, with Dor on the verge of discovering that his daughter is not alive anymore. Unable to shout the news to him (after it was whispered but not heard), Nedanya cannot bring himself to reveal the contents of the tragic letter. As the story ends, the two men sit opposite each other in the Tel Aviv café in a

tense, charged silence. They probably do not need words to convey to each other the remorse and responsibility they both carry for the lost life of the young girl left behind in Europe. The scene in the Tel Aviv café, centered around the girl as a symbol of a Europe that, in 1938, is on the brink of war, becomes an arena for the demise of European culture and for the irreparable break that older European immigrants in Tel Aviv, figures like Nedanya and Shor, feel.⁸⁸

This break also appears in a journalistic essay, a feuilleton, that Goldberg wrote and published under the pseudonym Ada Grant in 1944. In it Goldberg describes a visit to the Tel Aviv zoo:

I'm walking between the cages of the exotic birds, the water birds and the land birds. The more I look at them, the more I feel that I happened to be in an Immigrant Society house. Such alienated creatures! And each one of them carries a testimony of its past life. Anyone who visits a large café in Tel Aviv will see something akin to this will. Each bird shows in its face a mark of the past with a foreign landscape and a longing for the world it had to leave. Without much choice they are adapted to the new environment, but how pronounced is the fact that they were forced to do so.⁸⁹

This sensitive description of the café as a zoo,⁹⁰ as an Immigrant Society house, repeats itself later in Goldberg's well-known retrospective cycle of poems, "Ha-masa' ha-katsar be-yoter" (The Shortest Journey) (1961). In this cycle, the older Goldberg revisits her experience as an immigrant in Tel Aviv, the city in which "every raven announces a different continent/shore."⁹¹

In the second poem in the cycle, "Erev be-veit ha-kafeh" (Evening in the Café), Tel Aviv appears from within the space of the café as "a city in a many-colored robe / on the balconies' awnings." The perspective of the speaker is double, both the older and the younger women. Her gaze is directed not only to the "very young" who "know the value of time and its meaning" but also to "the old man . . . who has no reason to hurry."⁹² The speaker (parallel to the 50-year-old Goldberg) sees herself both as a young immigrant to Palestine, sitting in Tel Aviv café, and as a veteran European-Israeli poet looking backward.

Jerusalem Café Epilogue

In 1961, when Goldberg published the poem "Erev be-veit ha-kafeh," she had just moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in order to become a

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lecturer in European literature at the Hebrew University, where she later served as chair of the newly founded Department of Comparative Literature. Even before moving to Jerusalem, Goldberg was familiar with the city. In Jerusalem, she met and became friendly with European figures like Gershom Scholem, Martin Buber, Shlomo Pines, and other prominent members of the Hebrew University academic community. She also became acquainted with Hebrew writers such as S. Y. Agnon and Shlomo Tsemah, and she was a sought-after figure for younger students and writers, some of them, like Tuvia Ruebner, who had come from Europe as Holocaust survivors.

Part of Jerusalem's literary and intellectual life took place in cafés like Hermon, Atarah, Rehavia, Europah, Sichel, and Vienna that were established in the city in the 1930s and 1940s, mainly by immigrants from Central Europe.⁹³ Goldberg was familiar with some of these cafés from visits to Jerusalem while she was still living in Tel Aviv. When she finally moved to Jerusalem, she sat, met people, and sometime worked and wrote in these cafés.

Compared with the wealth of literary texts that Goldberg created about Berlin and Tel Aviv cafés, she wrote very little about Jerusalem cafés. However, one of the most significant pieces in which Goldberg reflects on café culture in the Yishuv and the newly founded State of Israel is a memoir, *Pegishah 'im meshorer* (An Encounter with a Poet, 1952). Goldberg relates an encounter with Avraham Ben-Yitzhak (known as Dr. Sonne), whom she admired and whom the book is primarily about.⁹⁴ In the same book, which some people justifiably read as another of her novels, Goldberg also writes about café meetings with Else Lasker-Schüler.⁹⁵ It is hardly surprising that so many of these meetings happened in cafés, as both Ben-Yitzhak and Lasker-Schüler were central figures in café culture in Vienna and Berlin and both were refugees in Jerusalem after World War II.⁹⁶

Although Goldberg met Ben-Yitzhak for the first time in a Tel Aviv café shortly after he arrived in Palestine in 1938,⁹⁷ most of their encounters were in Jerusalem cafés. A crucial scene in the memoir takes place after one of these café meetings, during which, as the narrator reports, the older male poet talked about "the complacency, routine and laziness of politicians and clerks."⁹⁸ After the meeting, Goldberg describes taking a walk in the streets of Rehavia and making her way to a meeting with a female friend in Café Hermon, at 10 Keren Kayemet Street. Café Hermon was well known to Goldberg as a meeting place for German Jewish scholars, writers, and thinkers, who were its most celebrated habitués.⁹⁹ However, on the specific evening that Goldberg wanted to visit the café, there was

a meeting of clerks from the Histadrut, the Jewish labor federation (the café was also known as a place for gatherings of politicians, clerks, and activists). Goldberg cannot help but recall Ben-Yitzhak's words, engendering in her a strong feeling of shame. The reason for Goldberg's heightened sensitivity was her feeling that she was also part of this *havayah pekidudit-henvanit* (clerk-grocer existence), as Ben-Yitzhak called it.¹⁰⁰

Goldberg describes dragging her female friend outside Café Hermon and urging her to move somewhere else. They find themselves in a small café called Sichel, on Ben-Yehudah Street. "We went to Café Sichel" writes Goldberg, and then,

[as] soon as we entered we saw Else Lasker-Schüler sitting at one of the tables. The café was practically deserted, and she was sitting in her usual place, grey as a bat, tiny, ragged, immersed in herself. Suddenly I was possessed by all the echoes of that afternoon's conversation [with Ben-Yitzhak], and by a feeling of guilt that had become overwhelming. Terrible poverty, mad loneliness of a great poet! Hadn't I been living a lie, sinning against truth, purity, poetry? Wasn't the terrible image of her sitting there a symbol of the unjust lives we had, we the others, the rhyme-makers from time to time? I had seen two poets that evening; both of them were tragically alone, living in a dreadfully black world. And I—how could I stand in front of them with my "normal" life?¹⁰¹

At this point in the narrative, Goldberg feels that she must do something but is not sure what. She sees a boy entering the café carrying violets on a tray and ends up purchasing a bouquet of flowers, which she gives to Lasker-Schüler, shy as a schoolgirl. "It's for you," Goldberg has to repeat twice to the irritated old woman. "I love your poems," Goldberg says to Lasker-Schüler, and she feels that "her face lit up. A sweet lighting of understanding crossed her eyes. She extended her hand and took the violets without thanking me."¹⁰²

In this haunting and highly complex scene, characteristic of the book as a whole, Goldberg brings into sharp relief the paradoxical contrasts in her personality and in her literary cultural work, the same contrasts that appear many times in her writing about cafés, and in her place in the café as a Jewish woman writer in Europe and in Palestine. This memoir, written in the latter half of Goldberg's life, also sheds light on the enigmatic quote from *Tesha' ba-erev* with which I began this essay.

On the one hand we see the petit-bourgeois "clerk-grocer existence," as Ben-Yitzhak called it, and on the other hand the bohemian

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spirit of the café. The strict gender relations that the space of the café dictates become visible, but so does the freedom that the café enables, sometimes even celebrates: the closeness to others, as well as the emphasized loneliness. Through the lens of the thirdspace of the café, we see not only Goldberg's strong ties to European Jewish poets and writers of the previous generation whom she admired but also her attempts to release herself from their influence in order to find her own voice.

The role of the café as a real and imaginary thirdspace in Goldberg's life and literary work—in different styles and genres, and over a long period of time—sheds a new and focused light on crucial themes such as gender, space, urbanism, modernism, and immigration; Goldberg's attitude toward Europe and Palestine; her writing in different genres; and her dynamic, ever-changing place in Hebrew and Jewish literature and culture. Goldberg's presence in café culture and her writing about it emphasized her sense of belatedness and being an insider/outsider—one who is part of creating modernist Hebrew and Jewish literature and also removed from many aspects of it. As such, an examination of Goldberg and the poetic space of the coffeehouse also complicates the gendered narratives of the café and the story of the transformation of Jewish café culture from Europe to the Yishuv and, eventually, the State of Israel.

Appendix

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שירת מחול אטית טובלה בכוס היין
הערב מתעטף בקשקשי כוכב,
גולשת הלבנה – דמעה זכה בעין
של זה השחק הרחב.

קרב הסתו מבין האילנות
ושעות־פרדה מביא לי לדורון.
של־הבת־ליל באלף לשונות
תאיר את חיזכי האחרון.

איני מאמינה באתמולי,
ואמתות־מחר אורכות במבטך.
הפרח הקמה ממולי
הבין שהוא אהב אותך.

חכמת האהבה שיש לה סוף
פזרה את וילאות הערפל.
ויד־כה מאד בין שתי כוסות
קורעת את הפרח האפל.

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את אלהי ראיתי בקפה.
הוא נתגלה לי בעשן סיגריות.
נכה־רוח, מסתלח ונרפח
רמז לי: "עוד אפשר לחיות!"

הוא לא היה דומה לאהובי:
קרוב ממנו – ואמלל,
כצל שקוף של אור הפוכבים

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הוא לא מלא את החלל.

לאור שקיעה חור וְאֲדָמָדָם,
כמתנדדה על חטא לפני מותו,
ירד למטה לנשק רגלי אדם
ולבקש את סליחתו.

3.

בְּלִדָה חֲרִיבִינִית

זֶה הִיָּה רְחוֹק מְאֹד –
בְּהַדְוֹ אוֹ בְּסִין
(וְאוֹזִי' זֶה הִיָּה בְּבִרְלִין,
בְּקֶפֶה וּבְדָמְדוֹם פְּנִסִים).

נְעֻרוֹת חֲרִיבִינִיָּה חֲרוּרוֹת
רְקֵדוּ אֶת מַחֹל הָאֲבִיב
(וְאוֹזִי' זֶה הִיָּה פּוֹקֶטְרוֹט
בְּקֶפֶה בְּעֵשֶׂן מְקֻטְרוֹת).

וּשְׁנִיִּים בְּמַסְכוֹת –
פִּיּוֹת עֶקְמִים מְצֻחֹק –
הַבִּיטוּ עַל הַמַּחֹלוֹת
בְּתוֹנֶה לְמַרְחֹק.

וּמַעַל אֵילָן מְלֻבֵּב,
אוֹ מְתוֹךְ אֲגֻרְטֵל עַל שְׁלֹחַן,
לְרִגְלֵיהֶם נָפֵל עֵנֶף
זְרוּעַ שְׁלֵג פְּרָחִי דְּבִדְבָן.

הוא הרים את ממת האלים
וקלעה לתוך שערה,
נהיו הפרחים לשמשות,
ונמלא כל הסדר אורה...



זֶה הִיָּה רְחוּק מְאֹד –
בְּהֵדוּ אוֹ בְּסִין
(אוֹיֵלִי זֶה הִיָּה בְּבֶרְלִין
בְּקֶפֶה וּבְדַמְדוּם פִּנְסִים)

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בְּלוֹרִיּוֹת, כּוֹבְעִים, מְגַבְעוֹת,
יְדִים, יְדִים, יְדִים...
וְהַפֶּרֶךְ בְּחֵלוֹן לֹא יָדַע אִם
פֶּה מִתּוֹת הַשְּׁעוֹת הַבְּאוֹת.

וְהַפֶּרֶךְ עוֹד אוֹהֵב וְנוֹצֵר
יְגוֹנוֹ שֶׁל חֶדֶר אַחֵר:
קָרַן אוֹר בּוֹ הַשְּׁלִיכָה חִפָּה
עַל פְּלָגִי חִלּוּמוֹ שֶׁל הַיֶּלֶד
וְאִשָּׁה עֵינֶיהָ מוֹל הַדְּלֵת
מִחִפָּה, מִחִפָּה, מִחִפָּה...

וּפֶה הוּא יוֹשֵׁב וְשׁוֹכֵחַ
אֵת זוֹ שֶׁהוּא כֹּה זוֹכֵר,
וְרוֹצֵה לִהְיוֹת אוֹרֵחַ
שֶׁל עֲצָמוֹ וְשֶׁל כָּל אַחֵר.

אֶךְ אֶחָד מִמּוֹלוֹ יוֹדֵעַ
מֵה נּוֹצֵר בְּלִילוֹת הַפֶּרֶךְ
וּבּוֹזוֹ פֶּתֶר לְמִפְרָעוֹ,
שֶׁהַחֶדֶר הַזֶּה לֹא נִשְׁכַּח.

דבר', 19.3.1937

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א

הוא יֵשֵׁב לְשִׁלְחַן יְדִידִים וְדֹבֵר עַל מוֹתוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם,
הַהִבִּילוֹ יֵינֹת בְּקֶפֶה וּבְרָדוֹ יִצְחוֹ סֶסְסוֹפוֹנִים,
צֶל שֶׁל בְּלִימָה נִתְלָה וְהִקְפָא בְּפִרְצוֹ קַדְמוֹנִי וְחִכֵּם
וְהִצִּיף אֶת חוֹרוֹן־הַפְּנִים שֶׁל אַחַת הַמְּקֻשָּׁבֶת כְּמוֹנִי.

הוא סָפַר עַל גְּסִיסָה אֶרְכָּה וְעַל רֵיחַ בְּתִי־הַחֹלִים,
פָּרֵט קָטָן שֶׁל שְׁעָה אַחֲרוֹנָה... אֶזְרִי וְתִמָּה וְצִינִי,
בְּעֵשֶׂן הַסִּיגָרָה תַּעֲוֹ מִבְּטִים שׁוֹקֵקִים וּפּוֹזְלִים
וְסִינְקוֹפָה שֶׁל גִּז' לְגִלְגָּה: "לְעוֹלָם, לְעוֹלָם לֹא תִבְנִי".

פְּנִסֵי הַמְּכוֹנִית בְּחִלּוֹן... כִּרְ פְּשׁוּט נְפָרְדִים מְעוֹלָם.
מִן הָאֶפֶר הַחֵם עַל הַיָּד, מִחֲרוֹז מְלַבֵּב עַל שְׁפֵתִים,
וּמִזָּה שֶׁהִבְטִיחַ לְבֹא – הַקְּרוֹב מְשׁוּם־מָה מְפָלֵם –
(וְהַעִיֵן צוֹפֶה בְּשֵׁעוֹן וְקוֹבַעֶת: אַחֲרֵי. שְׁעֵתִים).

אֲנַחָה. וּמִבֶּט מִתְאַבֵּן. גַּם אֲנִי בְּאוֹתָהּ הַשְּׁעָה...
אֵיזָה לִילָה רוֹעֵד בְּחִלּוֹן! אֵיזָה לִילָה שְׁקוֹף וְגִבּוֹה!
כִּכָּה סִתֵּם נְפָרְדִים מִן הַכֹּל? הַמְּחֹג הַקָּטָן לֹא תַעֲה –
עוֹד מַעֲט. הַחַיִּים? הַמֵּתִים? הַהוֹלְכִים. הַהוֹלְכִים לֹא יָבֹאוּ.

.6

ג

בְּלִילָה סְפִינּוֹת מְזַמְרוֹת לְסַעַר
וּגוֹפּוֹת מְפִלִיגִים אֶל גְּבוּל הַחֲמִסִּין,
וְאֲנִי יוֹשֶׁבֶת בְּבֵית־הַקֶּפֶה
וּמוֹנָה אֶת תְּנַדּוֹת הַפְּנִסִים.

עֶשְׂרִים וְתִשְׁעֵ... שְׁלִשִׁים וְשֵׁתִים...
וּמִלְקֶקֶת הַשְּׁלֵהֶבֶת אֶת שְׁחוֹר הַזְּכוּכִית.
– רְבוּנוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, פְּרִשֶׁת שָׁמַיִם



על אדמת אגדה מזרחית.

פה היתה ערבה והצאן רעתה בה.
הגדו: יים נרדמו בין זרועות הנשים,
ובלילה השחירו החולות כמו כעבה
מנשיקות שפתותי הפושעים.

ובן הרועה הלך אל החוף
לדלות מן הים פוקב צולל
וישמע קול: "יעקב, יעקב,
מלאכים בונים סלמות בבית-אל!"

אבל פה בנו בית-קפה קטן
(ארבעה שלחנות בחוץ וששה בפנים)
אז אמר יעקב לבתו של לבן:
חפי, חפי לי, רחל, שבע שנים.

והיא ישבה ועשנה. עיפות. קפאון.
המטטלת לוחשת: לחכות. לחכות.
מרדפה אהרי מחוג השעון
גם עיני רחל רכות.

"יעקב, יעקב, ארשתיך לעד,
אבוי למחדש הזמנים!
פי באהבתי אותך – לילה אחד
היה לי קשבע שנים..."

.7

מתוך "אביב אחד"

א

בחלונות הראזה מנגד
כבה האור. הכביש הבהיק פתאם
ונאנך כליד מתעורר
מכבד המכונית הנעצרת.



הייתה קרירות של אחרי חמסין.

על המרפסת הקטנה של בית־קפה
ישבנו והבטנו אל הרחוב.

אותו המה־בכר הקל, המתאדה,
הצניח את ידיו זו מול זו,
ורקט דק בקצה אצבעותי
לא עוד בקש את אלו שממול,
כאלו משבצות־מפת־שלקן
נהיו חומה בצורה, סוגרת ומסגרת.
היזה הכל פשוט.

– היים הזה מאחורי גבנו
אשר לקק את גוף החול הסי,
המסתמר מזכר החמסין,
ואלה הזוגות
המגששים באפלת הרחוב
ולוחשים, ולוחשים בלי הרף,
ולוחשים כאלו להכעיס, –
כל זה היזה פשוט, כל כך פשוט!

רק ריח הפריחה המאחרת
העיק עלי כגוף אהוב זר,
הסעיר והתגרה בי והשפיל
באדישות גברית ומלטפת.
ואז חשבת:

– בודאי הלילה
את תפתיחי את כל החלונות
ולא תישני. ותשתדלי לחרז
את דל גופי עם להט החמסינים.

וקמת.

ובשמינית שבשמינית של צל חיוך
רמזת לי:

אחת־עשרה וחצי.

Notes

Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from foreign-language sources are mine.

- 1 The founder and editor of *Tesha' ba-'erev* was Uri Keysari (1901–71). The magazine was published from 1937 until 1946; in 1946, it was renamed *Ha-'olam ha-zeh*, which was edited by Uri Avnery from 1950 until 1993. On Keysari and the magazine, see Oren Meyers, “Contextualizing Alternative Journalism: Ha-'olam ha-zeh and the Birth of Critical Israeli Newsmaking,” *Journalism Studies* 9, no. 3 (2008): 374–91.
- 2 “Ha-ishah ha-modernit be-Erets Yisrael: Ha-ankitah shel '9 ba-'erev,” *Tesha' ba-'erev*, Apr. 22, 1937. For the background on this questionnaire, which was created by the editors as a response to a “public sentence” on the status of women in the Yishuv initiated by the Women’s International Zionist Organization, see Oz Almog, *Predah mi-serulik*, 2 vols. (Or Yehudah, 2004), 2: 866–69.
- 3 “Ha-ishah ha-modernit be-Erets Yisrael,” 9.
- 4 Café Kassit was the most important, long-lived, and well-known café in the history of Tel Aviv and a center of its literary and artistic life. It was established in April 1935 at 59 Ben-Yehudah Street by Lyuba Goldberg (not related to Leah) and Ilana Mardechovitz. The name Kassit was probably given by Avraham Shlonsky and refers to a gem mentioned in the Talmud. Lyuba Goldberg left Kassit in 1937 and opened Café Ararat at 9 Ben-Yehudah Street. In 1942, Goldberg reopened Kassit on Dizengoff Street. In the summer of 1944 she sold it to Yehezkel Weinstein, who shortly thereafter Hebraized his name to Ish-Kassit (Man of Kassit). See Batya Carmiel, *Batei ha-kafeh shel Tel Aviv* (Tel Aviv, 2007), 226–30.
- 5 Ralph S. Hattox, *Coffee and Coffeehouses: The Origin of a Social Beverage in the Medieval Near East* (Seattle, 1985).
- 6 Markam Ellis, *The Coffee House: A Cultural History* (London, 2004); Brian W. Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee: The Emergence of the British Coffeehouse* (New Haven, Conn., 2005).
- 7 Malcolm Bradbury, “The Cities of Modernism,” in *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890–1930*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (London, 1991), 96; Michael Rössner, ed., *Literarische Kaffeehäuser* (Vienna, 1999).
- 8 Harold B. Segal, *The Vienna Coffeehouse Wits, 1890–1938* (West Lafayette, La., 1993); Marci Shore, *Caviar and Ashes: A Warsaw Generation’s Life and Death in Marxism, 1918–1968* (New Haven, Conn., 2006); Sarah E. Wobick-Segev, “German-Jewish Spatial Cultures: Consuming and Refashioning Jewish Belonging in Berlin, 1890–1910,” in *Longing, Belonging, and the Making of Jewish Consumer Culture*, ed. Gideon Reuveni and Nils H. Roemer (Leiden, 2010), 39–60.

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- 9 Shachar Pinsker, "The Urban Literary Café and the Geography of Hebrew and Yiddish Modernism in Europe," in *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*, ed. Mark Wollaeger (Oxford, 2012), 433–58. My forthcoming book, *A Rich Brew: Urban Cafés and Modernist Jewish Culture*, will be the first scholarly attempt to map this global phenomenon in Jewish culture.
- 10 Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Darmstadt, 1962); idem, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989).
- 11 Emma Clery, "Women, Publicity and the Coffee-House Myth," *Women: A Cultural Review* 2 (1991): 168–77; Geoff Eley, "Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures: Placing Habermas in the Nineteenth Century," *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory* 318 (1994): 297–335; Brian Cowan, "What Was Masculine about the Public Sphere? Gender and the Coffeehouse Milieu in Post-Restoration England," *History Workshop Journal* 51 (2001): 127–57.
- 12 See W. Scott Haine, introduction to *The Thinking Space: The Café as a Cultural Institution in Paris, Italy and Vienna*, ed. Leona Rittner, W. Scott Haine, and Jeffrey H. Jackson (Burlington, Vt., 2013), 1–22.
- 13 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford, 1991); Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Oxford, 1996). See also Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place: Cafés, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community* (New York, 1999).
- 14 See Shachar Pinsker, *Literary Passports: The Making of Modernist Hebrew Fiction in Europe* (Stanford, 2011); Allison Schachter, *Diasporic Modernisms: Hebrew and Yiddish Literature in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 2011).
- 15 See Shachar Pinsker, "New York City Cafés as Spaces of Modern Jewish Masculinity" (paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Association for Jewish Studies, December 2014, Baltimore, Md.).
- 16 On Else Lasker-Schüler, see Sigrid Bauschinger, "The Berlin Moderns: Else Lasker-Schüler and Café Culture," in *Berlin Metropolis: Jews and the New Culture, 1890–1918*, ed. Emily D. Bilski (Berkeley, 1999), 58–83. On Anna Margolin, see Avraham Nowersten, "'Who Would Have Believed That a Bronze Statue Can Weep': The Poetry of Anna Margolin," *Proof-texts* 10, no. 3, (1990), 435–67.
- 17 See Dov Levin, *The Litvaks: A Short History of the Jews in Lithuania* (Jerusalem, 2000), 157–58, and Leah Goldberg to Mina Landoy, Mar. 9, 1934, in *Na'arot 'ivriyot: Mikhtevei Leah Goldberg min ha-Provintsyah, 1923–1935*, ed. Giddon Ticotsky and Yfaat Weiss (Tel Aviv, 2009), 166.
- 18 On Leah Goldberg's life and studies in Germany, see Yfaat Weiss, "Nothing in My Life Has Been Lost: Lea Goldberg Revisits her German Experience," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 54 (2009): 357–77; idem, *Lea Goldberg: Lehrjahre in Deutschland, 1930–1933*, ed. Dan Diner, trans. Liliane Meilinger (Göttingen, 2010).

- 19 On the rise of women's Hebrew poetry during the 1920s and 1930s and women's avoidance of writing about the Zionist project in Palestine from a political point of view, see Dan Miron, *Imahot meyasedot, ahayot horegot: 'Al shtei hathalot ba-shirah ha-erets-yisreelit ha-modernit* (Tel Aviv, 1991). Chana Kronfeld has shown that women's Hebrew poetry in this period was part of a parallel minimalist trend of modernist Hebrew writing with which male poets like Avraham Ben-Yitzhak, David Fogel, and others were affiliated; see Chana Kronfeld, *On the Margins of Modernism: Decentering Literary Dynamics* (Berkeley, 1996).
- 20 Giddon Ticotsky, "Ekphrasis as Encryption: Lea Goldberg in Berlin," *Prooftexts* 34, no. 1 (2014): 1–52.
- 21 The poem was first published in the journal *Turim* in November 1933 and collected in Goldberg, *Taba'ot 'ashan* (Tel Aviv, 1935). It was republished in Leah Goldberg, *Shirim*, ed. Tuvia Reubner, 3 vols. (Tel Aviv, 1973), 1: 21.
- 22 Goldberg, *Taba'ot 'ashan*, 12; idem, *Shirim*, 1: 24. The poem was first published in the journal *Turim* in November 1933.
- 23 Lea Goldberg, *Selected Poetry and Drama*, trans. Rachel T. Back (New Milford, Conn., 2005), 29.
- 24 On this poem and others that deal with issues of modern religiosity, see Dan Miron, *Ha-adam eyno ela . . . Hulshat ha-koah, 'otsmat ha-hulshah; 'Iyunim ba-shirah* (Tel Aviv, 1999), 309–88. On Goldberg's first book of poetry, see also the recent article of Barbara Mann, "Material Visions: The Poetry and Collage of Leah Goldberg's Native Landscapes," *Journal of Jewish Identities* 7, no. 1 (2014): 163–86.
- 25 Goldberg, *Taba'ot 'ashan*, 62–63; idem, *Shirim*, 1: 74–75.
- 26 On the Hebrew ballad, see Sholomo Yaniv, *Ha-baladah ha-'ivrit: Perakim be-hitpathutah* (Haifa, 1986).
- 27 On Goldberg's interest in China as part of her orientalist attraction, see Yfaat Weiss, "A Small Town in Germany: Leah Goldberg and German Orientalism in 1932," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 99, no. 2 (2009): 200–229.
- 28 Leah Goldberg and Frans Masereel, *Shir, 'ir: Tseror shirim genuzim me-et Leah Goldberg le-hitukhei ets Frants Mazerel*, ed. Giddon Ticotsky (Ra'anana, 2012).
- 29 Incidentally or not, "At the Café" is also the title of Anna Margolin's well-known poem, published in her only volume of poetry, *Lider* (1929), just a few years before Goldberg wrote her poem. It is difficult to know whether Goldberg was aware of Margolin's Yiddish poems.
- 30 *Ekphrasis* (Greek, description), refers to the vivid description of a scene or, more commonly, a work of art. Through the imaginative act of narrating and reflecting on the "action" of a painting or sculpture, the poet may amplify and expand its meaning.
- 31 Frans Masereel, *Landschaften und Stimmungen* (Munich, 1929).
- 32 Ticotsky, "Ekphrasis as Encryption," 17.
- 33 Translation by Rachel T. Back.

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- 34 Note how Goldberg alternates between the masculine Hebrew noun *krakh* (metropolis) and the feminine Hebrew noun *ir* (city), thus making gender dynamics part of the interplay between the city and the people in the café.
- 35 See Giddon Ticotsky's detailed discussion of the history of the manuscripts in Leah Goldberg, *Avedot*, ed. Giddon Ticotsky (Tel Aviv, 2010), 331–34.
- 36 See Weiss, "Small Town in Germany," 200–229; Allison Schachter, "Orientalism, Secularism, and the Crisis of Hebrew Modernism: Reading Leah Goldberg's *Avedot*," *Comparative Literature* 65, no. 3 (2013): 345–62.
- 37 Goldberg, *Avedot*, 12.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 This description of the café as a modern temple is very similar to Shimon Halkin's 1926 Hebrew feuilleton about the Café Royal in New York City, which Goldberg might have been familiar with. See S. H. [Shimon Halkin], "Al beit ha-kafeh," *Ha-doar* 5, no. 41 (1926): 804–5. Ya'akov Shteinberg also describes the café as a modern temple in "Sonetot mi-beit ha-kafeh"; Ya'akov Shteinberg, *Shirim* (Lipsia, 1923), 334–51.
- 40 Goldberg, *Avedot*, 12; emphasis original.
- 41 Ibid., 280.
- 42 Ibid., 284.
- 43 Ibid., 285.
- 44 Ibid., 280.
- 45 Ibid., 85.
- 46 Ibid., 285.
- 47 Ibid., 89; emphasis original.
- 48 Ibid., 90.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 On the crisis of Kron in Goldberg's novel and on Hebrew modernism in the context of orientalism and secularism, see Schachter, "Orientalism."
- 51 By making it impossible to distinguish between fiction and reality, author and narrator, or addressee and reader in this epistolary text, Goldberg's novel interrogates questions of fiction, gender, and authenticity.
- 52 Leah Goldberg, *Mikhtavim mi-nesia' medumah* (Tel Aviv, 1937), 15–16.
- 53 There is no doubt that Goldberg visited these places while she lived in Berlin. In a letter she wrote to her friend Ilsabe Hünkevon Podewils years after (in the early 1960s), she said: "Do you remember how your father ordered dinner for both of us at Kempinski's? And then we ate ice cream at Café Josty? At the time we both thought we were so mature especially when your father ordered us cigarettes, just like two ladies. . . . I could write pages and pages about that day"; Weiss, "Nothing in My Life," 361.

- 54 In the fictitious *Briefe nach Norwegen*, published first in *Der Sturm* and later as the extended epistolary novel *Mein Herz* (1912), Else Lasker-Schüler portrayed herself among the Berlin café bohemians. The work is both a vivid picture of Berlin emerging as a cultural capital around 1910 and a very personal testimony of a woman artist about to start a new life, alone but independent. These texts might have been models and sources of inspiration for Goldberg's epistolary novel. The comparison between the texts requires further research and analysis.
- 55 Goldberg, *Mikhtavim*, 16.
- 56 Jürgen Schebera, *Damals im Romanischen Café: Künstler und ihre Lokale im Berlin der zwanziger Jahre* (Frankfurt, 1988).
- 57 Daniel Charney, *Oyfn shvel fun yener velt: Tipn, bilder, epizodn* (New York, 1947), 36; Israel Rubin, "Bay di tishlekh fun romanishn kafe," *Literarische bleter*, Jan. 10, 1930, p. 28. For a discussion of the Romanisches and Berlin cafés in the context of Hebrew and Yiddish modernism, see Shachar Pinsker, "Spaces of Hebrew and Yiddish Modernism: The Urban Cafés of Berlin," in *Transit und Transformation: Osteuropäisch-Jüdische Migranten in Berlin 1918–1939*, ed. Gertrud Pickhan and Verena Dohrn (Göttingen, 2010), 56–75.
- 58 Weiss, "Nothing in My Life," 364.
- 59 Goldberg, *Mikhtavim*, 26–33. Goldberg's letters and diary entries show that the character of Shanthilal is based on a real person, the student Datatria Padka, with whom Goldberg was briefly involved while both of them were students in Bonn; see Weiss, "Small Town in Germany."
- 60 Goldberg, *Mikhtavim*, 29.
- 61 *Ibid.*, 46. In 1932, Goldberg had already published a short story entitled *Be-simtat ha-akhbarim* (In the Alley of the Mice), in which a young Jewish girl, Dita, meets an Indian friend in a tavern and is suddenly identified as a Jewish woman, in the context of rising Nazism and antisemitism.
- 62 Goldberg, *Mikhtavim*, 62–63.
- 63 Leah Goldberg to Mina Landoy, Jan. 31, 1935, in Ticotsky and Weiss, *Na'arot ivriyot*, 230.
- 64 From a Yiddish text about Tel Aviv, quoted in Barbara Mann, *A Place in History: Modernism, Tel Aviv, and the Creation of Jewish Urban Space* (Stanford, 2005), 18.
- 65 See Carmiel, *Batei ha-kafeh*, 58–143, and Anat Helman, *Young Tel Aviv: A Tale of Two Cities* (Waltham, Mass., 2010), 105–30.
- 66 Aryeh Navon, *Be-kav uve-khtav: Pirkei hayim* (Tel Aviv, 1996), 85.
- 67 Israel Zmora, "Batei ha-kafeh ha-sifutiym shel shenot ha-30 ve ha-40 (3)," *Yedi'ot aharonot*, June, 1, 1978, p. 3.
- 68 Leah Goldberg, "Pegishot aherot: Pirkei zikhronot ve-hirhurim," *Al ha-mishmar*, Nov. 12, 1954, pp. 5–6. Republished in Leah Goldberg, *Ha-omets la-hulin: Behinot u-teamim* (Tel Aviv, 1976), 153.
- 69 A. S. Lirik, the Yiddish journalist from Warsaw who lived in Tel Aviv for a few years, wrote in the book of Café Retzky: "There is no urban

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- culture without coffeehouses, without idlers.” See more about these discussions in Helman, *Young Tel Aviv*; Maoz Azaryahu, *Tel Aviv: Mythography of a City* (Syracuse, N.Y., 2007); and Carmiel, *Batei ha-kafeh*, 212–73.
- 70 See Hamutal Bar-Yosef, *Leah Goldberg* (Jerusalem, 2012), 54–58. See also Anat Weisman, “After All of This, I Will Have to Muster All of My ‘Courage for the Mundane’: On Leah Goldberg’s Paradigmatic Temperament,” *Prooftexts* 33, no. 2 (2013): 222–50.
- 71 Mordechai Naor and Shula Vidrich, eds., *Beit-kafeh, makom katan koh! Beit-kafeh, davar adir! Kafeh Retzki, kafeh sifrut be-Tel Aviv, 1932–1935* (Ben Shemen, 2006), 146.
- 72 Michael Gluzman uses the expression *insider/outsider* to characterize Goldberg’s place in the literary Hebrew canon, but it also captures her place in café culture and other aspects of her personality and literature; see Michael Gluzman, *The Politics of Canonicity: Lines of Resistance in Modernist Hebrew Poetry* (Stanford, 2003), 36–67.
- 73 A party in honor of Goldberg and the publication of her first book, *Taba’ot ‘ashan*, took place at Café Retzky; see Bar-Yosef, *Leah Goldberg*, 137.
- 74 Eric Zakim, *To Build and Be Built: Landscape, Literature, and the Construction of Zionist Identity* (Philadelphia, 2006).
- 75 Giddon Ticotsky, afterword to Leah Goldberg, *Kol ha-sipurim*, ed. Hamutal Bar-Yosef and Giddon Ticotsky (Tel Aviv, 2009), 208.
- 76 Leah Goldberg, “Arba’ah shirim mi-beit kafeh,” *Davar*, Mar. 19, 1937, weekend supplement, p. 5. The first, second, and fourth poems were republished in Goldberg, *Shirim*, 3: 132–35. The third poem was published (with the title “Ya’akov ve-Rahel”) in Goldberg, *Shirim*, 1: 153–64.
- 77 Shteinberg’s cycle was inspired by his experience in the same Romanisches café in Berlin that Goldberg experienced in 1930–31 and wrote about in *Mikhtavim mi-nesia’ medumah*; see Ya’akov Shteinberg, *Kol kitvei Ya’akov Shteinberg* (Tel Aviv, 1959), 67–68. For an English translation of the sonnets (by Adriana Jacobs) and analysis of them in the context of Berlin cafés, see Pinsker, “Spaces of Hebrew and Yiddish Modernism,” 72–74.
- 78 See Carmiel, *Batei ha-kafeh*, 157–70.
- 79 S. Y. Agnon wrote about these cafés and the differences between them during the period around the establishment of Ahuzat Bayit, the neighborhood established outside Jaffa in 1908 that a few years later became the foundation of the city of Tel Aviv, in his masterpiece novel, *Tmol shilshom* (Tel Aviv, 1959), 129–33.
- 80 The reference is to Ecclesiastes 1:6: “Southward blowing, / Turning northward, / Ever turning blows the wind; / On its rounds the wind returns” (NJPS).
- 81 There are some similarities between “Arba’ah shirim mi-beit kafeh” and the play “Yam ba-halon,” which Goldberg wrote in 1938. This was Goldberg’s first play, and it was staged (under Alfred Wolf’s direction)

- in 1938 by a group that called itself Hebrew Theater: Original Stage. Goldberg's play dealt with a group of bohemian artists who left Europe in order to create art in Tel Aviv. The heroine of the play, the dancer Helena Vik, gets drunk and cannot visit her sick daughter. The tragic death of the girl leads Helena's partner, the painter Yohanan Maram, to commit suicide. The play occasionally mentions Tel Aviv cafés; see Leah Goldberg, *Mahazot genuzim vi-yeduim*, ed. Tuvia Rivner and Giddon Ticotsky (Tel Aviv, 2011).
- 82 Wendy Zierler, *And Rachel Stole the Idols: The Emergence of Modern Hebrew Women's Writing* (Detroit, Mich., 2004), 89. Zierler also provides an English translation of the poem.
- 83 This ironic, even sardonic perspective is also evident in the comparison between the angels on Jacob's ladder in the biblical story (Genesis 28:10–19) and the building of the café on Tel Aviv's beach. For more on this poem and how Goldberg employs the biblical story, see Zierler, *And Rachel Stole the Idols*, 89–90.
- 84 Leah Goldberg, "Aviv ehad," *Turim* 35–36 (1939): 3, republished in Goldberg, *Shirim*, 3: 147–48.
- 85 Goldberg, *Kol ha-sipurim*, 60, 64.
- 86 Ibid, 60.
- 87 Ibid, 62.
- 88 In the stories "Nekhar" (Foreign Land, 1939) and "Ma'aseh be-burgani za'ir (A Story of a Petit Bourgeois, 1944), Goldberg also goes back and forth between Germany and Palestine. In both, she employs the space of the café in order to describe the break of immigration. Immigration to Palestine and to its cafés has, in these years, become a double break. The cultural shock of the immigrants, who left Europe behind, was amplified in the knowledge that the advent of World War II put European culture in grave danger of destruction.
- 89 Ada Grant, "Me-agadot ha-hai: Me-'inyan le-'inyan," *Mishmar*, May, 3 1944, p. 2.
- 90 The first and only zoo in Tel Aviv opened in 1939 and was active until 1980.
- 91 Goldberg, *Shirim*, 3: 14; English translation, Goldberg, *Selected Poetry and Drama*, 134.
- 92 Goldberg, *Shirim*, 3: 15; English translation, Goldberg, *Selected Poetry and Drama*, 135.
- 93 A historical-cultural study of Jerusalem cafés has yet to be written. There is some information about Jerusalem cafés in a popular book about Rehaviyah by Amnon Ramon, *Doktor mul doktor gar: Shekhunat Rehaviyah bi-Yerushalayim* (Jerusalem, 2006) and in the study of Jerusalem architectural history by David Kroyanker, *Yerushalayim: Shekhunot u-vatim* (Jerusalem, 2006). For an excellent account of several Jerusalem cafés in the relevant period of the 1950s and 1960s, see Aharon Appelfeld, *A Table for One: Under the Light of Jerusalem* (New Milford, Conn., 2007).

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- 94 Leah Goldberg, *Pegishah 'im meshorer ('al Avraham Ben-Yitshak)* (Tel Aviv, 1988).
- 95 See Natasha Gordinsky, "Crossing the Spectrum of Solitudes: Lea Goldberg's Lyrical Conversation with Avraham Sonne," *Naharaim* 7, no. 1–2 (2013): 75–110.
- 96 On Ben-Yitshak in the context of Vienna café culture, see Shachar Pinsker, "Jewish Modernism and Viennese Cafés, 1900–1930," in Rittner, Haine, and Jackson, *Thinking Space*, 51–64. On Ben-Yitshak in Palestine, see Maya Barzilai, "Poetics of Statelessness: Avraham Ben Yitshak after World War I," *Naharaim* 7, no. 1–2 (2013): 111–30. It is possible that Goldberg met Lasker-Schüler for the first time in Berlin. For a brief time, both of them lived on the same street, Motzstraße, in Berlin.
- 97 On the first meeting with Ben-Yitshak in a Tel Aviv café, see Goldberg, *Pegishah*, 7–8.
- 98 *Ibid.*, 42–43.
- 99 See Appelfeld, *Table for One*, 43–44.
- 100 Goldberg, *Pegishah*, 43.
- 101 *Ibid.*, 43–44. My translation is based, with some modifications, on the translation of the poet Arie Sachs, in *Retrievements: A Jerusalem Anthology*, ed. Dennis Silk (Jerusalem, 1968), 151–52.
- 102 *Ibid.* In an earlier essay about Lasker-Schüler, Goldberg also described meeting them in a Jerusalem café; see Leah Goldberg, "Else Lasker-Schüler," *Mishmar*, Feb. 9, 1945, literary supplement, p. 4. On the meeting between the poet Zelda and Lasker-Schüler in Café Sichel, see Aza Tzvi, "Ha-pegishah ha-sodit be-kafeh Sihel," *Hadarim* 10 (1993): 130–39.

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