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Fogel and the Forging of a Hebrew Self

THE FACT THAT DAVID FOGEL has come to be seen, quite posthumously, as a pioneer of modernism in Hebrew poetry and still more recently, as an innovative figure in early twentieth-century Hebrew fiction, should not deter us from the perception that his literary and linguistic enterprise was a most peculiar one. In part it was a peculiarity common to all Hebrew literature written in Europe, but Fogel pushed the paradox at the root of this whole cultural project to an extreme. No text he produced is more instructive in this regard than the diary he kept intermittently from September 1912, when he was twenty-one, until August 1922. There is no indication in the diary itself that he ever intended it for publication: the diary would only appear in print a quarter of a century after his murder by the Nazis in 1944, in a somewhat bowdlerized periodical version, and is now available in the more reliable edition of Menakhem Perry.¹

The linguistic oddness of Fogel's undertaking, as well as what I would regard as its linguistic achievement, is worth considering in detail. In his late adolescence, he had followed the path of many Europeanizing Jewish intellectuals of Orthodox upbringing: he had left his native Russian shtetl, made his way to the big city (in this case, Vilna), abandoned religious observance, experienced an autodidact's introduction to European culture, and had undergone his sexual initiation (for him, a rather complicated one, becoming the lover of an older woman who would soon seem repulsive to him in the midst of his persistent infatuation with her eleven-year-old daughter). This whole period of crucial transition was recorded by Fogel in a diary, which he says, at the beginning of the text that has survived, was stolen from him. The diary that disappeared might have been written in either Hebrew or Yiddish,

but Hebrew seems the more likely candidate because he mentions that he was making concerted efforts to perfect his Hebrew during his sojourn in Vilna. Now, in September 1912, he is back temporarily in his native Satanov, and thoroughly disgruntled to be there, weaving plans to move on to a truly "Western" city, Vienna (where he would arrive in mid-December), and in accordance, beginning to teach himself German. A certain tension between his loyalty to Hebrew and the urgency of his mastering German is felt in several entries. He is afraid, he notes in the late fall of 1912, that his Hebrew may be slipping away from him, yet he has no choice but to concentrate on German. Within a few months he will be reading the leading European writers of the day—Ibsen, Hamsun, Maeterlinck—in German translation, but with some misgivings about his neglect of Hebrew. "I thirst—in the idiom of the Maskilim of the well-known type—for knowledge, for light . . . the day is short and there is so much to do. I am now entering a world that is foreign to me, entering a foreign way of life and a foreign tongue—a period of transition. I regret my Hebrew language, having nothing with which to nourish it; I have no Hebrew books" (April 12, 1913). It is worth noting that Fogel, even at the tender age of twenty-two, interposes a certain ironic distance between himself and the prototypical Maskilim, proponents of Hebrew Enlightenment, even as he seems to be following their program of supreme devotion to the ennobling force of European culture. His own project was really not Enlightenment in character, but for better (in terms of authenticity) and for worse (in terms of personal anguish) modernist, as I shall try to show.

Fogel's attachment to Hebrew was neither sentimental nor nationalist, and it is something of a puzzle as to why this profoundly isolated, neurasthenic, desperately unhappy young man trying to find a place for himself in Vienna should have chosen to record his most intimate thoughts in a language he had almost no occasion to speak, whose revival as a vernacular was being undertaken elsewhere. In Vienna, certainly in comparison with Vilna, there was hardly a Hebrew literary milieu he could have entered, nor would there be later in Paris, where he took up residence in the mid-1920s, still pursuing his anomalous vocation as a Hebrew poet and writer of fiction. Fogel, moreover, unlike most of his fellow Hebraists in the early decades of the century, was not a committed Zionist, and indeed, every ideological movement repelled this fundamentally apolitical person: "I am especially disgusted and infuriated by the contact with those superior creatures who aspire to redeem the world. These people, who would set the world straight, how much unnaturalness and falseness they have in their make-up. They are antipathetic from head to toe" (August 13, 1918). When Fogel began the diary, he was not yet a poet, not even clearly aware that this was what he should or could

become, though he does express vague literary ambitions, and by the end of the period covered in the diary, he was producing important poems (a process unfortunately not dealt with in the text of the diary).

It may be best to begin an explanation of Fogel's embrace of Hebrew in negative terms. No European language—Russian, German, or later, French—could have served as his medium of expression because he was not sufficiently at home in any of them. Yiddish, the one obviously viable alternative to Hebrew for the young Fogel, lacked the aura of literary prestige, especially for a writer with his aestheticizing bent, and was no doubt too much associated with the world of pious earlocks and dirty caftans and musty prayer rooms that he wanted to put behind him. There were, of course, talented young writers at precisely this moment who shared Fogel's European and modernist agenda and yet were not troubled in the least by such negative associations as they adopted Yiddish for their literary ambitions. Fogel himself, for reasons that are not entirely clear, switched to Yiddish around 1942 when he composed the fictionalized diary that was his last sustained text. But it is reasonable to infer that the young Fogel shared the predisposition of Hebraists in the early modern era to see Hebrew as the one indigenous Jewish language that had an unambiguous claim to the status of high culture. The Haskalah, for over a century before Fogel's birth, had dreamed of a secular Hebrew literature that would take its place among the culturally "advanced" literatures of Europe. In his strange way, Fogel carries forward this project, though with none of the naïveté or optimism of the Haskalah. Paradoxical though it may seem, he chooses Hebrew because it is the one avenue open to him for being European, for joining European high culture. Indeed, his incorrigible Europeanness is no less determinative of his identity than that of his exact Germanophone coeval, Walter Benjamin: both men in the end perished because they could not manage to extricate themselves, even as the clouds of destruction gathered, from the European setting they had made their only conceivable theater of operation.

I do not want to pretend that Fogel's diary is one of the great unknown documents of self-exploration of modern European literature. It is too raspily complaining, too drearily repetitious for that, too clotted with scores upon scores of sentences that are mere variations of the following: "My condition is very bad; I sense that my powers are dwindling more and more from one day to the next, that I become weaker from one moment to the next—and there is no way out" (February 8, 1913). There are, one must grant, passages in which the diarist comes to startling insights into himself and his relations with others, but what I think is truly compelling about Fogel's diary is the palpable feeling it conveys of fashioning a living language, a language that, though not the

writer's actual vernacular, is able to trace the twisting contours of his inner life, to body forth a thoroughly modern and European sense of self and other, motive and identity.

For a Hebrew reader at the end of the twentieth century, Fogel's language in most respects sounds remarkably contemporary. There are, of course, little peculiar archaisms as well as occasional lexical or idiomatic innovations of Fogel's that never caught on and that hence merely seem odd now. But the basic patterns of syntax, the terms used for self-analysis and moral experience, what I would call the rhythms of conceptualization of this prose, still have considerable immediacy, and by no means sound quaint. It is worth trying to understand how this could be.

The sharp introspection that is the very purpose of this text repeatedly leads the writer to attend minutely to the fluctuations of his own physical and spiritual condition and to select with precision from the available Hebrew lexicon—rich enough, even then, in regard to representing inner states and symptomology—for rendering that condition: "Illnesses, too, have swooped down on me. One illness includes them all. That weakness in the limbs and slackness of the mind. Incessant headache. And the desire for life I had within me, despite all those contortions and grimaces, is draining away. Apathy to everything" (February 23, 1918). Although general Hebrew usage in the three-quarters of a century since these lines were written has traversed the distance, say, from Defoe's English to ours, the language here sounds strikingly natural, virtually contemporary. The vocabulary, moreover, is all indigenously Hebrew, the sole loan-word, "apathy" (*apatia*) a borrowing that still has currency today.

As a writer of prose fiction, Fogel would attain complexly orchestrated effects of considerable subtlety—adumbrated in the diary in a couple of descriptive passages—but what is arresting about his language of introspection is its simplicity and directness. When he needs to conceptualize inner life, he makes the most ordinary Hebrew terms serve admirably, and his notation of inner tensions has the transparency of the notation of pieces moved on a checkerboard. Thus, he contrasts his sense of himself when he was in Vilna and now in Satanov: "My soul [then] was not flawed, and it left its imprint in all my behavior; I always knew myself, this self of mine [*ha'ani sheli*], and ever since I left there, I haven't known myself; I am not I" (13 Tishrei 5673 [September 1912]). I don't know who was the first to use the first person singular pronoun *'ani* with the definite article in front of it as a noun meaning "the self," but it could not have been very common in the Hebrew of 1912. Although it is philosophically suspect to call any linguistic practice "natural," Fogel's promotion of "I" to "self" has an *air* of naturalness: he requires a term to designate "self" as distinguished from soul, consciousness, and mind. Without the slightest neologizing strain, almost as though the term with that

acceptation were already fully established in the language, he adopts the ordinary *'ani* for his purpose.

Linguistic usage follows the lead of introspective perception. What makes Fogel a modernist even before he has imbibed the new works of European modernist literature is his sense that the self is not whole, or one, or reliably continuous. (There are manifold expressions of just this sense in European literature on the verge of World War I; its most subtle and densely complex articulation was achieved by Proust in precisely the time span that Fogel was writing his diary.) The language of estrangement from self, inner division, crops up again and again in the diary. "I am not I," he says here boldly but strikingly, and elsewhere (in a prison camp for alien subjects during the war), "I don't know myself. Fogel has lost Fogel" (June 1, 1915). When he has not lost himself, he perceives a violent succession of selves destroying each other in turn: "This David tramples on the grave of the previous David. There are no remnants from yesterday. . . . I am walking into an abyss of darkness and chaos, constantly walking onward. And alone, alone" (July 22, 1914). Again and again, he exhibits an ability to make the simplest Hebrew words serve to represent a process of self-alienation in virtually spatial terms: "I have gone out of myself. By entering into another. I have become outside (*na'aseiti huts*). And there is no inside" (May 25, 1919).

Fogel's relentless self-observation leads him to a language that persuasively encompasses psychological patterns or, if you will, psychodynamics, without recourse to any technical terminology. Thus, in a long reflection on his affair with the older woman he designates as Ts., he notes the following about his own motives and feelings: ". . . at a time when life in Vilna had already made me a despairing pessimist . . . I needed to become intoxicated on the one hand, in order to forget reality, and on the other hand—I needed the soft and warm caress of a mother, a sheltering wing. I was alone and abandoned and suffering—and I thought to find a good mother in Ts., an instrument of intoxication, oblivion, healing—in her warm body" (9 Heshvan 5673 [November 1912]). I suspect that behind Fogel's formulation here, whether consciously or not, is Bialik's perennially popular poem, *Hakhnisini taḥat kenafeikh* ("Take me under your wing / And be for me mother and sister . . ."), though it does not really operate as a literary allusion, for Fogel has taken apart the elements of the sheltering mother imagery and reassembled them as a literal representation of his sexual involvement with Ts.

A little later in the same entry, as Fogel reflects on the rapid and extreme devolution of his relationship with his first mistress, one palpably senses his careful selection of terms to define the refractory nature of the moral and psychological phenomenon he is reporting: "She was no longer the beloved Ts., for whom you tremble with love, or more precisely, with lust, when you recall her, but the hated, despised Ts.,

whose recollection causes anguish, and the necessity of hatred causes anguish. Yes, last year at this time I was filled with regret and suffered terribly for hating her, for not being able to dismiss her and consider her dead. Half a year I lived with her; I quarreled and was reconciled with her and again we lived together. We spent the entire winter in quarrels and reconciliations and the intoxication of sexual lust." All this is reported with a lexical precision to which my translation barely does justice. The "quarrels" (or perhaps better, "squabbles") is not the weightier *riv* or *merivah* but *qetatah*, with its connotation of pettiness, just the right term for a fatiguing, spiteful, frictional falling out of once passionate lovers. A long time ago in Hebrew, there had not been a sharp demarcation between love, *'ahavah*, and lust, *ta'avah*. In the story of Amnon and Tamar (2 Samuel 13), the verb *'ahav*, which elsewhere in the Bible means love, clearly refers to a condition of lust. By the early twentieth century, love and lust in Hebrew had definitely become distinct terms—perhaps under the influence of the moral semantics of European languages, though that is a conjecture that could be confirmed only through documented philological investigation. (The verb that is cognate with *ta'avah*, *hit'avah*, remains morally neutral, simply meaning "to want.") In any case, it is patent that the distinction between love and lust is essential for Fogel, who does not want any blurry idealizing vocabulary to misrepresent the actual nature of what he has experienced. To reinforce this distinction, in the last two words of the passage quoted, Fogel couples *ta'avah* with *min*, "sex," again a relatively precocious usage of a Hebrew term that previously meant "kind" or "gender," in precisely the sense of libidinal relation that the equivalent abstraction has in the various European languages. His account reads so smoothly and aptly that in a way it seems quite unexceptional, but I think we need to remind ourselves how exceptional this in fact must have been in Hebrew eighty years ago. A twenty-one-year-old refugee from the world of Orthodoxy, not entirely confident that his recent efforts to consolidate his literary Hebrew have given him a real mastery of the language, is able to record what he has undergone morally and psychologically in prose that is nicely discriminating, unstrained, and quite free of the fustian and the ostentatiously allusive rhetoric so common in the Hebrew of the period. (This last feature must owe a good deal to the young Fogel's reading of anti-*nusah* writers—especially Gnessin, I would guess—but his own linguistic intuition is nevertheless remarkable.) What this means is that Fogel at twenty-one had already found a way of thinking about himself as a European person—not filtering his experience through Bible and Talmud and hasidic homily but observing, with the appropriate lexical terms, how his first sexual partner offered him an ambiguous mixture of physical rapture and maternal warmth, how lust became hatred, how the hatred itself proved to be not a simple emotion as it roused in him resentment over his

incapacity to feel detachment from her. Fogel at this early moment does not yet imagine becoming a writer of fiction, but one can already glimpse here the future author of his fine novella on the depredations of erotic life, *Facing the Sea*, as well as of the somewhat less focused novella, *In the Sanitarium*, and the intriguing if psychologically overwrought novel, *Married Life*.

The Hebrew literary tradition, in some ways from the Bible onward and certainly from the rabbinic period onward through its multiple historical offshoots, is by and large strongly tilted toward collective experience, often inclined to see the individual as a prototype or spokesman for the collective. It is hardly an accident that the first truly artful fiction in modern Hebrew, the stories and novels of S. Y. Abramovitch (the novels of course reworked from the Yiddish) use a prototypical narrating persona, Mendele the Bookseller, and take as their subject *kelal Yisrael*, collective Jewish existence in the Pale of Settlement. Against this whole tradition, the young Fogel counterposes a stubborn perception that no individual's experience is reducible to common denominators and collective terms. Walter Benjamin said of the novel that it deals with the "incommensurability" of individual existence, and that is quite how Fogel sees it. In a 1913 entry, after having received a letter from Ts.'s daughter, who was now in America, exhorting him not to think of death—he had at least toyed with the idea of suicide—because he had not yet drunk from the cup of life, he reflects: "'the cup of life'—a worn-out phrase! Why haven't I drunk from the cup of life?! I am now twenty-two, and in these few years I have lived more than other people do in their whole lives. I have drunk from the cup of life: I have suffered. There is no cup of life but rather cups of life, for every individual—a special one different from the next. I have drunk a large, full cup" (February 8, 1913).

Examining the bitter but interesting contents of that cup is not only the underlying motive for writing the diary but also the exacting activity that determines the innovative shape of its prose. I would like to quote one somewhat longer passage in order to illustrate how this process works, how Fogel's Hebrew develops what I called earlier a distinctive "rhythm of conceptualization." I have preserved his somewhat eccentric sentence divisions and concomitant punctuation because they are essential manifestations of that rhythm. The entry was made about a month after his release from detention camp in the summer of 1916, and turns on his initial involvement with the woman who was to become his first wife.

עבשיו נטפלה אלי עלמה משונה. אַלְקָה. שחופה וחולנית. והריהי מחבבתני. וצר לי עליה מאוד. כי מה אני?! רצוץ. בחור שנס ליחו. ואיני מסוגל לאהוב בכלל. ואותה בפרט. והריני מטייל איתה ארוכות וקצרות ומרגיש אליה קרבת נפש ונהנה מאופן דיבורה הילדותי. אולם כשאינה אצלי, הריני מרגיש פחד נסתר מפניה. פחד אי מחזור לי. אפשר גורמת שחפתה לזה. אני מרגיש בה את המיתה. ומתוך רחמנות הריני מתקרב אליה ומראה לה גם סימני חיבה. — הוזה הכל? סתומים לי החיים. עומד אני לפניהם תוהה ובלתי מבין. כאילו

הייתי יורד זה עכשיו מאיזה כוכב אחר. אין אני מבין כלום. הולכים . . . עמידה . . . ריצה. שיחה עם אנשים וכו' – איני מבין כלום. כתינוק. למה ועל שום מה??? ואפילו אימה אינה תוקפתני. ועלמה שחופה אוהבת אותי. שחורה. לא יפה. לא מכוערה. אוהבת וסובלת וסובלת. ואני איני אוהב וסובל וסובל. ואיני מבין כלום.

Now a strange young woman has attached herself to me. Ilka. Consumptive and sickly. And I find that I like her. And I'm very sorry for her. Because who am I?! Shattered. A lad whose juices have dried up. And I'm not capable of loving at all. And her in particular. And I go walking with her long and short and feel an inner closeness to her and enjoy her childish way of talking. Yet when she's not with me, I feel a secret fear of her. A fear that is unclear to me. Perhaps her consumption causes it. I feel death in her. And out of compassion I draw close to her and also show her signs of affection.—Is that all? Life is inscrutable to me. I stand before it wondering and uncomprehending. As though I had just descended from some other planet. I understand nothing. You walk around . . . stand still . . . run. Conversation with people etc.—I understand nothing. Like an infant. Why and for what??? And even terror does not grip me. And a consumptive young woman loves me. Swarthy. Not pretty. Not ugly. Loves and suffers and suffers. And I understand nothing. (August 11, 1916)

What is most remarkable about this passage—and there are a good many others like it in the diary—is that Fogel, evidently writing only for himself, in an effort to make some sense of his own experience, flatly ignores the decorum of literary Hebrew in order to make the language fit the disjunctive nature of his thought and feeling. The most salient expression of this swerve from precedent is the use of a staccato series of fragmentary phrases. The prose is neither paratactic nor hypotactic but atomistic, articulated as a chain of brief non-sentences and sentences, many of them only one or two or three words long, separated from each other by the full stop of periods or sometimes question marks. What leads Fogel to do this? As he watches himself, scrutinizes his fears and desires, nothing has necessary connection, nothing has dependable coherence, contradictions abound, and the assurance of connexity implicit in conventional syntax must be abandoned. Ilka, as he tries to encompass her in his imagination, is not an intelligible whole, not Ilka, who is such and such, in the tidy subordination of a dependent clause. Instead, in stroboscopic discontinuity, she is: Ilka. Consumptive. Swarthy. Not pretty. Not ugly. Loves and suffers. The same discontinuity and impenetrability are manifested in Fogel's perception of his own feelings: he wonders, for example, whether he is drawn to Ilka out of the fear and attraction of death she rouses in him, and moments later in the concatenation of fragmentary utterances, he announces that he feels no fear. If elsewhere he emphasizes the incommensurability of his life experience with anyone else's, here he goes still further and asserts that this incommensurable stuff is also unintelligible to himself (another notion Walter Benjamin attaches to the novelistic sense of life, *perplexity*, is apposite here). Thus, life itself seems

to him inscrutable or impenetrable (*setumim*), and he imagines himself as an alien not in the national but in the science-fiction sense, dropped from another planet and baffled by the workings of the one in which he finds himself.

In terms of literary form, this staccato prose—fashioned, by a gracious coincidence of the *Zeitgeist*, at the very moment Joyce was laboring on *Ulysses*—represents an incipient stream of consciousness. I don't think Fogel actually had any literary models for it. The one deployment of a form of interior monologue that he was most likely to have encountered, in the Hebrew novellas of U. N. Gnessin, works with long paratactic sentences that produce an opposite effect. His approximation, however, of stream of consciousness is dictated by a motive at least in part akin to Joyce's: a desire to make language intimate the immediacy and disjunctiveness of mental process, make it convey the way that experience bombards consciousness with so many pellets of discrete data that it may threaten to become unmanageable.

When Fogel began to experiment with prose fiction, only three years after the last entry in the diary, he did not adopt any technique of stream of consciousness. In the handful of fictional texts he actually produced, the interiority of the protagonists is definitely the focus of representation, but his aspiration to turn out finely wrought aesthetic wholes led him away from fragmentation and toward a version of *style indirect libre* in which he could achieve a supple interweave of outer and inner, scene and subjectivity, narratorial authority and the emotional fluctuations of the fictional personages. In regard to these narrative procedures, too, the early diary proves retrospectively to be not only a laboratory for self-exploration but a technical testing ground for the future writer of fiction. Indeed, for someone with literary ambitions, the two impulses are hard to separate: fictional invention itself is another vehicle of self-knowledge, a way of recasting one's experience under the camouflage of fabulation; and, correspondingly, even so scrupulous an effort to observe what one has undergone as we find in Fogel's diary is also on some level a playing with the possibility of turning it into literature.

One very early entry, from the autumn of 1912, vividly illustrates this delicate interplay between the aim of self-articulation and the aim of literary representation. The young Fogel, just back from his year in Vilna, is much preoccupied with the erotically charged, now forever frustrated relationship he had there with the pubescent Haniah. Now he tries to capture one resonant and representative moment in that relationship, prefacing the entry with the notation, "something from my past." The realization of scene, the minute and subtle attention to physical details, are qualities relatively rare in the published Hebrew fiction available in 1912; and the atmospheric treatment of the scene, the way it is made to appear suffused with feeling, intricately mirroring the emotions of the

principal actor and his fraught relationship with the young girl, is a remarkable anticipation of the accomplished narrative art, twenty years later, of *Facing the Sea*. There are, to be sure, a few clumsy elements of repetition in the choice of language, and perhaps the lexicon of the emotions is somewhat wanting at a couple of points, but the evocative-ness of the writing already looks forward to the Fogel who would be the last European master of Hebrew prose. His conscious intention in this passage is of course to "recapture" an experience that has moved him, but he imagines it novelistically, conceives all its defining features in the narratological and stylistic terms of the fiction he has been reading. Here, without further comment, are the last three quarters of the entry dated 20 Heshvan 5673 [1912]:

בחדר מתקתק השעון צלולות, ובחוץ מטפטפות טיפות מן הגג בהפסקות קצרות ונופלות לתוך השלוליות מתוך בעבוע. אני יושב אצל השולחן ומעיין בספר. השולחן הפרוש במפה מוזהמת – קצהו הימני משמש לי לכוננית, עליו מסודרים כמה ספרים זה על גב זה, – חלקו האמצעי משמש לי שולחן עבודה, ועל הקצה השמאלי פרוש עיתון ישן על המפה ועליו עומדת כוס בקעריית, שבקרקעיתה יש שיור של תה. השעון מתקתק והטיפות מטפטפות, ובחדר מרחפת עצבות אלמית, קלה ונעימה. בחצר נשמעים צעדים איטיים; אני מכירם. הדלת נפתחת איטיות ומתנונת; נכנסת הילדה. אני איני מודרו להסב את ראשי אליה, מפני שאני יודע שהיא נכנסה ולא אחרת. הילדה מברכת בערב טוב את בעלת מעוני, ניגשת אלי לאט, מפליטה "שלום" קצת חנוק, כשהיא תוחבת בידי את ידה הקרירה. אני מראה לה מקום לשבת על הדרגש העומד בין הכותל החוצץ את המיטבה מן החדר השני לבין התנור – לאורכו – ובין שולחני, לימיני, לבין הכותל – לרוחבו; הדרגש – מישכבי. הילדה יושבת בחשאי – ושותקת. אני מעיין עוד בספר; צריך אני לגמור את העניין, והיא יושבת לימיני ומזהרת מה, כשנודף ממנה ריח חוצי, רטוב וגשמי. אני גומר את העניין, פונה אל הילדה ומתחיל לדבר אליה בחשאי. מסתכל אני בעיניה החולמות, במגעתה הכחולה-כהה, בצווארון סודרה האדום ובשימלתה הקצרה, התלמידתית. אנו מתלחשים, מתלחשים. בחדר אור כהה ועל הכותל שלימיני מתנועע צל ראשי שבשערות ארוכות, וצל הילדה. ומספרת לי הילדה בקול חשאי ועצבני על העיניים שאמה הרעה והמקנאת מענתה מפני שהיא הולכת אלי, ועל החלולים והחירופים שהיא מחרפתה, – ומקוננת הילדה חשאי על מצבה, וצלה מתנועע איטיות על הכותל – ואני שומע וצער לחץ את לבי, מרככו וממסמסו. אני מדבר על לבה, מנחמה ומשדלה בדברי פיוס. הילדה מתפייסת קצת ומגחכת גיחוך קל, פגחוך השקיעה ביום חורפי, על השלג. והכל בחדר מביע צער אילם ונעים, – הכל: האור הכהה והזוכיית המעשנת, הראי המאובק שאצל הספרים – והספרים, הדרגש והמצעות המקופלים למראשתיו, הנפשות השותקות וצלליהן, החלון היחיד המסוכך במסך עד לחציו, ומחציו ולמעלה משקיף בו הלילה השחור וחלון הבית שמנגד, ודלי המים שעל הכיסא אצל החלון. הילדה שותקת ומביטה עלי במסירות ובתקווה, ואני מביט עליה באהבה אבהית. ככה אנו יושבים ויושבים . . .

Within the room the clock ticks distinctly, outside drops run off from the roof at brief intervals and fall into the puddles making bubbles.—I sit at the table studying a book. The table is covered with a soiled tablecloth—the right corner serves me as a bookshelf, several books stacked one on top of another upon it—the middle part is my desk, and at the left corner an old newspaper is spread out over the tablecloth, and on it is set a glass in a saucer, at the bottom of which are the lees of tea. The clock ticks and the drops fall, and in the room a mute, gentle, pleasant sadness hovers. In the courtyard slow steps

sound; I recognize them. The door opens slowly and deliberately; the girl enters. I do not hasten to turn my head toward her because I know it is she and no one else who has come in. The girl says good evening to my landlady, approaches me slowly, emits a slightly choked hello as she thrusts her cool hand into mine. I indicate to her a place to sit on the bench that stands between the wall separating the kitchen from the second room and the stove—lengthwise—and between my table, to the right of it, and the wall—breadthwise; the bench is where I sleep. The girl sits down unobtrusively—and is silent. I continue to study the book; I have to finish the passage, and she sits to my right, musing about something or other, giving off a scent of outdoors, wet and rain-soaked. I finish the passage, turn to the girl and begin to speak with her confidentially. I look at her dreamy eyes, her dark blue hat, the collar of her red sweater and her short gymnasium-student's skirt. We whisper and whisper. There is a dim light in the room, and on the wall to my right the shadow of my long-haired head and the girl's shadow sway together. And the girl tells me in a quiet nervous voice how her ill-spirited jealous mother torments her for coming to see me, how she humiliates and insults her—and the girl quietly bemoans her situation, and her shadow slowly sways on the wall—and I listen and feel an inward pressure of sorrow, tenderness, melting compassion. I comfort her, console her, tell her reassuring things. The girl is a bit encouraged and smiles a little, like the smile of a sunset on a winter day, over snow. And everything in the room expresses mute and pleasant melancholy—everything: the dim light and the smoky glass, the dusty mirror by the books—and the books, the bench and the folded bedding at its head, the silent souls and their shadows, the single window covered with a curtain halfway up, and in its upper half the black night peers in and the window of the house opposite, and the pail of water by the window. The girl remains silent, looking at me devotedly and hopefully, and I look at her with paternal love. Thus we go on sitting . . .

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NOTE

1. David Fogel, *Taḥanot kavot*, ed. Menakhem Perry (*Siman qri'ah*: Tel Aviv, 1990), under the title *Ktsot hayamim*, pp. 269–326. All citations are from this edition and all translations are mine.



Group photograph with Ch. N. Bialik seated second from left, Fogel in knickers standing on far right, November 23, 1931. *Courtesy of the Genazim Institute, Tel Aviv.*