

Harshav's Likrat: Toward a New Poetics and Politics of the "Statehood Generation"

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BETWEEN JUNE 1952 AND SEPTEMBER 1954, Likrat, considered the first Israeli literary group, launched what was to become the Statehood Generation of Hebrew poetry (*dor ha-mdina*). As a literary circle or group (*chavura*), it was short-lived and didn't produce all that much: four issues of the journal *Likrat*, the first two in a homemade mimeographed edition of forty copies; in 1953 one anthology of poems, *Bi-shlosha* (By three), featuring three of the members (Moshe Dor, Arye Sivan, and Nathan Zach); and in 1954–55 a publishing house (also named Likrat), which managed to publish just three volumes of poetry. By equating quantitative *output* with literary *impact*, the group's detractors—of which there were many—attempted to minimize its importance. But even they were hard put to claim that the 1955 publication by Likrat of Yehuda Amichai's first book of poetry, *Akhshav u-va-yamim ha-acherim* (Now and in other days), was anything short of an epoch-making event in modern Hebrew literature.

Despite its forward-looking name (Toward), Likrat has been described both by its detractors and by its proponents primarily as a *reaction against* what came before it. Although it had two—quite-different—immediate literary precursors, Likrat was supposed to be against both of them. On the one hand, it is perceived as a rejection of Palmach¹ Generation literature. This generation (aka *dor ba-arets*, "a generation in the land") was characterized by Chaim Gouri's pathos-filled "Hineh mutalot gufoteynu" (Here lie our bodies), Moshe Shamir's *Yalkut ha-re'im* (Comrades collection) yearbooks, and the "Progressive Culture" faction of the writers' union, with its collectivist poetics of socialist realism. And, on the other hand, Likrat is seen as a reaction against the then-still-dominant antirealist and politically diverse *moderna* of Avraham Shlonsky, Nathan Alterman, Lea Goldberg, and Yocheved Bat-Miriam, with their maximalist, Eastern European-inspired modernism of figurative and prosodic plenitude.

Clearly, there is nothing socialist-realist about Shlonsky and Alterman, and nothing avant-garde about the Palmach Generation. Nevertheless, account after account lumps together Shlonsky's

* I want to thank Allison Schachter and Eyal Bassan for their assistance with the research and preparation of this essay.

¹ Palmach, acronym for "Strike Forces," was the fighting force of the Haganah, the underground military organization of the Jewish community in British Mandate Palestine (1941–48).

left-wing politics and immense literary influence with Palmach Generation socialist-realist poetics, claiming that Likrat and subsequently the Statehood Generation rejected both. This has resulted in a critical confusion that, I believe, doesn't stop with the reception of Likrat but informs—or, rather, misinforms—much of the standard historiographic construals of Statehood Generation poetics. It also “backshadows” Likrat's stance vis-à-vis Shlonsky through Zach's subsequent attacks on his fellow *moderna* poet Alterman during the 1960s—on poetic and especially prosodic grounds—though Alterman and Shlonsky were, of course, quite distant politically from each other.

The conflictual reading of *Likrat's* poetics is belied by a close examination of the journal's four issues. The pages of *Likrat* reveal that many of the young poets published here for the first time adopt a distinctly Shlonskyesque style (including the early Yehuda Amichai!). Moreover, the editors self-consciously offer the *moderna* as a poetic paragon: the epigraph they choose for the first issue of *Likrat* is a quotation from a poem by Konstantin Fofanov, in Shlonsky's translation, cited from Shlonsky and Goldberg's anthology *Shirat Russia* (The poetry of Russia), an anthology that was emblematic of the *moderna's* Russian avant-garde models.² Nor does an affinity for their modernist precursors preclude for the editors of *Likrat* an attempt to construct a similar sense of continuity with the Palmach Generation: *Likrat 2* opens with an extended quotation from Shamir's *Yalkut ha-re'im*, a quotation that serves as the full first page of the issue, in lieu of a manifesto!³

And while the *Likrat* editors explicitly dissociate themselves from “the extreme narrow confines of [Israeli] party politics,” they don't attack any political or poetic precursor, because, they say, they wish to shift their focus to the works themselves (“no line except the one that underlines the name of the poem”).⁴ Amos Levin goes so far as to claim that the issues of *Likrat* “lack any polemical note. Whoever tries to find polemics in them is simply inventing things [*ro'eh me-hirhurey libo*].”⁵ This, of course, is highly problematic, if only because such a flight from poetic and political polemics was itself highly polemical during the period.

Furthermore, on purely political grounds, there wasn't really any significant difference between Shlonsky, Shamir, and Likrat members such as Moshe Dor, Yehuda Amichai, or H. Binyamin (Benjamin Hrushovski; later on, Harshav): they were all left-wing socialists, factional squabbles notwithstanding. And on March 5, 1953, when the “Sun of the nations set,” it was Amichai, whose poems had already appeared in *Likrat*, who published in Shlonsky's and Mapam's⁶ *Al ha-mishmar* newspaper an ambivalent and ambiguous sonnet on Stalin's death. Even years later, Amichai refused to denounce this sonnet; “I still think it's a good poem,” he told me in a 1986 interview in Jerusalem.

Now, more than sixty years since Likrat officially disbanded on September 21, 1954, it is clear that what started out as a much maligned fringe circle provided in fact the blueprint for normative Israeli poetry at its most canonical and launched at least two of its major paragons: Nathan Zach and Yehuda Amichai. Hamutal Tsamir has argued persuasively, though somewhat ahistorically, that ultimately the Statehood Generation consolidated, through its objection to the “we” of the Palmach generation, a poetic “I” that in his masculine-singular subject position lays claim to the

² *Likrat*, no. 1 (May 1952): 1 (mimeographed edition).

³ *Likrat*, no. 2 (July 1952): 1 (mimeographed edition). Eleven lines are cited from volume 3 of the 1946 issue of *Yalkut ha-re'im*.

⁴ *Likrat*, no. 1 (February 1953): 1 (print edition).

⁵ Amos Levin, *Bli kav* [No line/direction] (Tel Aviv: Ha-Kibbutz ha-me'uchad, 1984), 20.

⁶ Mapam was the most left-wing political party in Israel within the so-called “Zionist consensus.”

national, normative “we” in their statist, individualist, late-capitalist phase.⁷ This retrospective analysis, insightful though it is, clearly accounts for the subsequent canonical appropriation of Statehood Generation poetry, but obscures its revolutionary beginnings, beginnings that no doubt were neutralized as they were mobilized in due course for the statist national narrative. For, as Raymond Williams reminds us, the fringes of the twentieth century were filled with “marginal or rejected [modernist] artists [who would later] become classics of organized teaching.”⁸ A more nuanced historicized reading of the *Likrat* manifestos and published work reveals that what is at stake for these poets is not a rebellion against literary precursors but a critique of ideology, and of the institutional regulation of ideology in all realms of private and public life, including literature. As if anticipating Theodor Adorno, the *Likrat* poets insist on the autonomy of the verbal work of art, on its right to embody “a questioning reflection [*tehiya*] on the personal, critical, all-baring aspects of the surrounding reality . . . a questioning reflection which can also be **the freedom of responsibility, of the full burden of responsibility.**” They add: “It is necessary to question reflectively the validity of values and to shed a collective light on them [*le-ha'iram be-or meshutaf*].”⁹ In their explicit and implicit poetics, the *Likrat* writers do not reject the values of a shared communality but offer again and again alternatives to the institutional formations of a national collective such as party, religion, army, or state. Highlighting *shituf*, the socialist key term for shared communal life, they declare: “Better to have shared communal thought and creation than barren isolation in the private domain,”¹⁰ and “Toward—together” (*Likrat—be-tzavta*).¹¹ Why then was *Likrat* attacked so fiercely?



The contentious critics of *Likrat* in the early 1950s may have unwittingly been on to something, something that only today begins to be speakable: that the first Israeli phase of modern Hebrew poetry may have been mediated by, indeed partially modeled on, not only the “corrupting influence” of Anglo-American Westernizing trends, as the contemporary attack had it, but also the once-flourishing international Yiddish modernism, Hebrew culture’s excluded other. Benjamin Harshav, as I will argue here, is the one who imported the influence of Yiddish modernism into the heart of Israeli modernism.

But before I get to this concealed history, it might be helpful to review briefly what the anger against *Likrat* was explicitly about. Critical attacks came in two distinct waves, each associated with poetic and political turning points in Israeli literature. The first wave occurred in the 1950s, starting with the publication of the *Likrat* journal and intensifying once the poetry books by group members were published. Contemporary critics who belonged to very different cultural factions such as Azriel Ukhmani, B. Y. Mikhali, Gideon Katzenelson, and Shlomo Tzemach were united by their opposition to the new poets, accusing them of betraying both collectivist values and the national project of establishing a “literature of origins” (*sifrut makor*) with their poems, which

⁷ Hamutal Tsamir, *Be-shem ha-nof: Le'umiyut, migdar ve-subyektiviyut ba-shirah ha-yisra'elit bi-shnot ha-chamishim ve-ha-shishim* [In the name of the land: Nationalism, subjectivity, and gender in Israeli poetry of the Statehood Generation] (Jerusalem: Keter; Be'er Sheva: Heksherim, 2006).

⁸ Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*, ed. Tony Pinkney (London: Verso, 1989), 34.

⁹ *Likrat*, no. 1 (February 1953): 1 (print edition).

¹⁰ *Likrat*, no. 1 (May 1952): 1 (mimeographed edition).

¹¹ *Likrat*, no. 1 (February 1953): 1 (print edition).

“cast a foreign shadow.”¹² Ironically, the same critics who realized that there was something politically threatening in this new poetry also claimed that it was incomprehensible. The second wave came some thirty years later, in the 1980s, in the wake of the rise of the Likkud to power and the first Lebanon War, and in the midst of the struggle between political protest poetry on the left and the now more dominant neonativist, nationalist trends. Critics on the cultural right such as Amos Levin and Ortzion Bartana implicitly or explicitly bemoaned—to quote Bartana—the “Road Not Taken” by Likrat, a road that might have led the Statehood Generation, and Hebrew poetry at large, in a nativist, patriotic, and “truly Israeli” direction rather than toward the Westernizing “Anglo-Saxon delusion” and “ideational nothingness” (*lo-khlum ideyi*) of Zach and Amichai.¹³

Bartana makes much of the fact that Likrat was a split group (*kvutza mefutzelet*) between East and West but not, as one might expect, along ethnic lines. Though he uses the term *mizrachiyut* once to describe what the dominant faction within the Statehood Generation lacked, Bartana shies away from what might have been a powerful, indeed an overdue, critique of the marginalization of Mizrahi poets and poetic culture within the Ashkenazi-dominant Statehood Generation. Thus, Bartana makes nothing of the *mizrachiyut* of two of the more marginal members of Likrat, Aharon Almog and Moshe Ben-Shaul, only of their native “Israeliness,” which is lumped together with that of Moshe Dor (Klebanov) and Arye Sivan (Bumshteyn) just because they were born in the “Land of Israel.” Native-born poets necessarily possess the “roots of some Israeli-national collectivity.”¹⁴ Somehow this supposedly ensures that they evince a greater continuity with the poetics of Shlonsky and Alterman (those famous sabras, who of course didn’t have any foreign influences . . .). The tragedy of modern Israeli poetry is that Likrat ended up dominated by a “new immigrant,” Nathan Zach (Zeitelbach)—never mind that Zach immigrated to Palestine at age five. He was the importer of foreign influences (one wonders how much poetry even the talented Zach was supposed to have read by age five). Only slightly better, according to Bartana, is Yehuda Amichai (Pfeuffer), who immigrated when he was twelve but at least had the sense to keep to a marginal role in the group and never actively edited any of its publications. This “diasporic faction” of Likrat came to represent for the nativist critics the shallow, rootless, Westernizing direction that Israeli poetry had chosen, to its detriment.

So at the core of the threat that Likrat represented was the issue of immigration, that vestige of multilingual diasporic Jewish culture, which threatened to destabilize the reterritorialization of Hebrew as a statist monolanguage of a national literature. The literary scholar Gershon Shaked (né Gerhard Mandel), who also started out as a poet and a member of the original Likrat circle, provided an important corrective to the historical account by pointing out that the dominant “immigrant faction” (*ha-peleg ha-mehager*) in Likrat was led not only by Nathan Zach but also by a true *oleh chadash* (new immigrant), indeed a refugee like Shaked himself from the Nazi genocide, Benjamin Hrushovski, who arrived on the last illegal boat (*oniyat ma’apilim*) in May 1948 and joined the Palmach the same night.¹⁵ Now, both critics and fellow members of the circle (including the so-called nativist ones) have acknowledged the central role Hrushovski-Harshav played

¹² See, e.g., Shlomo Tzemach, *Shti va-erev* [Woof and warp] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1959), 216–35. First published in the newspaper *Davar*, June 28, 1957.

¹³ Ortzion Bartana, *La-vo cheshbon* [Settling accounts] (Tel Aviv: Alef, 1958).

¹⁴ “Ha-shorashim shel eyzoshehi kolektiviyut le’umit-yisre’elit” (*ibid.*, 35).

¹⁵ Gershon Shaked, “Yehuda Amichai ve-chavurat Likrat: Reshito shel Amichai u-kvutzat ha-hityachasut ha-sifrutit shelo” [Yehuda Amichai and the Likrat group: The beginnings of Amichai and his literary reference group], *Tzafon* 5 (1998): 179–208.

in the group. Thus, Moshe Dor, for example, describes Harshav as the “Urim and Thummim [i.e., the Oracle or the Guru] of Likrat” and as having played a crucial role in molding the group both socially and poetically. Using a Talmudic idiom for a scholar with perfect erudition and total recall, Dor says of Harshav: “Binyamin was considered by us a lime cistern that does not lose a drop. [His] contribution to Likrat, both social and literary, was crucial.”¹⁶ Harshav’s own account is more anecdotal and, as we shall see, conceals as much as it reveals:

From my uncle in New York I got that precious invention, Nestle’s “Nescafé,” and a Hermes Baby Hebrew typewriter. Several young poets gathered in my room in the evenings. . . . In 1951 [*sic*], several young poets, initially Arye Sivan (Bumshteyn), Moshe Dor (Klebanov), Nathan Zach (Zeitelbach), and I (Hrushovski), launched our own literary journal *Likrat* (“Towards”), to which several dozen young poets and writers gravitated. At the age of twenty-three, barely three years in the country, I had read most modern Hebrew poetry and wondered where Hebrew poetry should go (three years later, I started teaching poetry at the Hebrew University). I was two or three years older than my friends and some kind of authority on European poetry (in collaboration with Sivan or Dor, I translated poems by Blok, Lorca, Moyshe-Leyb Halpern, and published them in various places). I was actually the editor, proof-reader and typist of the mimeographed journal *Likrat*; yet I was attentive to the authoritative value judgments of the young Nathan Zach. I typed it all on stencils on my Hebrew Hermes Baby and ran it off in our friend Chaim Hagiti’s Jewish Agency youth office in 40 copies. (The operation cost 10 Lirot, which we had a hard time collecting.) We sent copies to all the literary supplements of the newspapers; they all attacked us furiously, as if we were undermining the Jewish nation and Hebrew and World Culture; we were especially ostracized in the name of “Socialist Realism”—and *Likrat* became famous overnight.¹⁷

As Ziva Ben-Porat shrewdly points out, “Harshav’s emphasis of his practical contributions (coffee, typewriter, a room of his own) must not obscure his real function as editor and senior member of this group. He was the midwife at the birth of the leading poetry of the 1950s and 1960s, providing the younger poets with a vast repertoire of poetic models and much needed editorial guidance.”¹⁸

But what exactly did this literary midwifery consist of? What did the vast repertoire of poetic models include? All the critics and memoirists, Harshav included, give the impression that it is as an editor and authority on world literature that he played such a central role. Bartana expresses the consensus here when he says that unlike Zach and Amichai—the two Western-leaning immigrant poets in the group—“Hrushovski’s image was much more that of a man of culture than a poet.”¹⁹ But of all the members of *Likrat*, he is the only one who, as he arrived in Israel at age twenty, already had a book of poetry published, though it remained unmentionable because it was in Yiddish. Aptly named *Shtoybn* (Dusts), it was published in Munich in 1948 and reissued, along with a large collection of his Yiddish poetry written in Israel and the United States, in a volume titled *Take oyf tchikaves*—an untranslatable idiom, something like “just for kicks”

¹⁶ Moshe Dor, “Paytanim le-atid lavo” [Forthcoming poets], *Siman kri’a* 9 (1979): 342.

¹⁷ Included in Harshav’s “On the Beginnings of Israeli Poetry and Yehuda Amichai’s Quatrains,” in his *The Polyphony of Jewish Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 175–85. The quotation is from 176–77. A somewhat different account appears in Hebrew. See Benjamin Harshav, “Hirhurim ishi’ym al Amichai: Ha-shira ve-ha-medina” [Personal reflections on Amichai: Poetry and state], *Alpayim* 33 (2008): 127–28.

¹⁸ Ziva Ben-Porat, “Benjamin Harshav (Hrushovski): A Personal Retrospect,” *Poetics Today* 22, no. 1 (2001): 249–50.

¹⁹ Bartana, *La-vo cheshbon*, 31.

(literally, “just for the sake of curiosity”). Harshav’s collected Yiddish poems were published in Wales—talk about self-marginalization!—only in 1994. His posthumous *Collected Poetry* in Hebrew and Yiddish is in press as the present issue of *Dibur* is being prepared.²⁰ *Shtoybn*, the Yiddish poetry book Harshav brought with him to *Likrat*, is a brilliant avant-garde volume that deals primarily with the experience of the Shoah at a time when precious little was being written about it in Hebrew literature. It employs experimental, pared-down cadences that thematize dislocation and loss prosodically, through sonorous fragmentation and unsettling tensions between symmetry and asymmetry, polyvalence and obsessive reiteration of sameness.

The importance of rhythmic suspense in the poetics of *Likrat* and the Statehood Generation has always been attributed to Zach’s Anglo-American modernist models and to his critique of Alterman’s prosody, all of which took place in the post-*Likrat* era and reached their zenith in his book and series of articles of the mid-1960s. It is time to begin exploring the extent to which Yiddish modernisms, and their great prosodic innovations, served as a submerged, marginal prototype for the Statehood Generation at its very moment of formation: the *Likrat* circle. An odd, and atypical, dating error in Harshav’s anecdotal account of his role in *Likrat* may be an instance of the return of the repressed: 1951 was the year of the first issue, not of *Likrat*, but of the publication of another group of young Israeli modernists that Harshav (in his Yiddish persona of H. Binyomin) helped establish. The Yiddish group Yung Yisroel (a transparent transplantation of the earlier modernist group name Yung Vilne) was formed at the end of October 1951 and remained active till 1959, much longer than *Likrat*, by new immigrant, mostly refugee Yiddish writers, like Harshav, who convened in Kibbutz Yagur, in northern Israel, to form their new circle. Their work was published for the first time in a special issue of Avrom Sutzkever’s quarterly, *Di goldene keyt* (The golden chain).²¹ As Shachar Pinsker describes in his extensive research on the group, Yung Yisroel went on to issue a journal by the same name (1954–57) and to publish seven books of poetry and prose fiction by group members (1954–66).²² Four of them had already published a first book before emigrating, including two writers who were to carve out a special liminal place between Yiddish and Hebrew culture: Yossl Birshiteyn, whose book *Unter fremde himlen* (Under foreign skies) was published in Australia in 1949, and of course H. Binyomin (Harshav), whose *Shtoybn* established his reputation in the less-than-visible world of Yiddish culture in Israel, a world whose rich prestatehood literary production Yael Chaver describes in an important book.²³ Interestingly, Yossl Bergner, whose father, Melekh Ravitch, was one of the leading poets of the expressionist Yiddish *Khalyastre* (The gang), and who was to become a major Israeli artist associated with Statehood Generation modernisms, published his sketches for illustrations of Kafka’s stories in Yung Yisroel’s various collections. In this Bergner transferred to Israeli soil a collaborative practice common in the diasporic Yiddish avant-garde: major artists like Chagall,

²⁰ *Kol ha-shirim* (Jerusalem: Carmel, in press). The volume includes translations into Hebrew of Harshav’s Yiddish poems; most of the translations were done by Harshav and a few are by me. The Yiddish poetry was published under the name H. Binyomin; and the Hebrew poetry, under the pen name and persona Gabi Daniel.

²¹ See the series of essays about the group by David G. Roskies, “The Group Yung Yisroel and Its Writers” [in Yiddish], *Yugntruf* [The call to youth] 28–29 (1973): 7–12; 33 (1975): 7–8, 24; 34 (1976): 4–7, 12.

²² See, e.g., Shachar Pinsker, “Choosing Yiddish in Israel: *Yung Yisroel* between Home and Exile, the Center and the Margins,” in *Choosing Yiddish: New Frontiers of Language and Culture*, ed. Lara Rabinovitch, Shiri Goren, and Hannah S. Pressman (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2012), 277–94.

²³ Yael Chaver, *What Must Be Forgotten: The Survival of Yiddish in Zionist Palestine* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2004).

El Lissitzky, and Ben Shan were regular contributors to the great modernist Yiddish journals and poetry volumes in Europe and the United States. As Harshav later told me, he was following this model when he and Zach enlisted a young, exceptionally gifted, Surrealist refugee artist, Marain Marinel, to create the cover art for the first printed edition of *Likrat*. When Harshav published his collection of Yiddish poems in 1994, he incorporated illustrations by the important Israeli artist Moshe Kupfermann, paying homage to this tradition of modernist dialogue between the visual arts and Yiddish poetry. It is therefore not accidental that Harshav explored the same dialogue in his scholarly work on the role of Yiddish idioms and proverbs in Chagall's painting.²⁴

But the similarities don't end here. At their founding gathering in Kibbutz Yagur in 1951, the members of Yung Yisroel agreed, as David Roskies relates, to deviate from the tradition of Yiddish modernism and not sign on to a poetic or social platform or reject the previous generation's credos but rather to oppose any rigid programmatic ideology and poetics.²⁵ Their anti-ideological stance was motivated by the decimation of Yiddish culture and its speech community but may also have been driven by their doubly marginalized position within nascent Israeli literature, as Yiddish and refugee writers. Interestingly enough, however, Yung Yisroel's anti-ideological position was echoed a couple of years later in the language of the *Likrat* manifesto, which is really an antimanifesto. While the motivations for rejecting both political and poetic slogans may, as we have seen, have been very different for the members of *Likrat*, the subterranean intertextual dialogue between the two near-contemporary groups, and Harshav's role in both, cannot be ignored. Thus, deriding the "atmosphere of extreme and narrow-minded party politics" in Israel in the early 1950s, the editors of *Likrat* renounced any poetic or social program:

In this atmosphere we couldn't—neither did we want to—make an appearance with some new slogans. We came and said—Toward. Just—Toward. Toward—no line, except for the one that underlines the name of the poem or the story we write. Toward—together, while highlighting the road itself, precisely because its end is unknown. Toward—without banners, without manifestos, instead of "believe" we'll attempt "understand."

For, like Faulkner, we too are not ready to concede that the end of man has come.²⁶

The self-proclaimed liminality of *Likrat* and its emphasis on process rather than end product continue a long tradition of what Chaver describes as liminal or inchoative names of Yiddish modernist publications in Palestine: *Onheyb* (Beginnings), *Tzvishtn tzvey un dray* (Between two and three), and so on.²⁷

The history of Yung Yisroel as a precursor of *Likrat*, and of Harshav's role as a smuggler of modernist Yiddish poetics into the formative group of Statehood Generation Hebrew poetry, remained hidden for many years. When I discovered in 2004 the uncharacteristic error in dating, I realized immediately that something was afoot—Harshav, I knew all too well, had a phenomenal memory, so something else must have happened in 1951 that he was part of. I then followed the trail to David Roskies's 1973 series of essays on Yung Yisroel, and—as I describe above—started putting together the various hints he left in the introductions and afterwords to his translations

²⁴ Benjamin Harshav, *Marc Chagall and His Times: A Documentary Narrative* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004); and Susan Tumarkin Goodman, Zvi Gitelman Vladislav Ivanov, Jeffrey Veidlinger, and Benjamin Harshav, eds., *Chagall and the Artists of the Russian Jewish Theater* (New York: Jewish Museum, 2008).

²⁵ See n. 21 above.

²⁶ *Likrat*, no. 1 (February 1953): 1 (print edition).

²⁷ Chaver, *What Must Be Forgotten*, 98ff.

of modernist Yiddish poetry into Hebrew and English, all of which led me to the first meeting of Yung Yisroel in Kibbutz Yagur at the end of October 1951. At the same time, Shachar Pinsker began reconstructing the group's activity, interviewing surviving participants, and collecting extensive archival material. Neither of us could initially get Harshav to admit to his participation in the group—an astonishing example of the depth of the repression of Yiddish in Israel, even on the part of one of its greatest practitioners, translators, and scholars. In the last years of his life, I was fortunate to hear from Benjamin heart-wrenching details about his parallel participation in the two groups, about the ambivalence and complexity that accompanied his life as a bilingual poet in a culture that erased Yiddish and its literary achievements. Thus, for example, Benjamin told me that to his wedding with his first wife, Rina, he invited friends from both literary circles—Dor, Sivan, and Zach from Likrat, and Birshteyn, Rintzler, and Yungman from Yung Yisroel—but each group remained seated the whole time in separate rooms, without any contact between them. Harshav's opening up about Yung Yisroel helped me and his son Udi persuade him to publish his collected Yiddish poetry alongside the Hebrew in one massive volume. Sadly, he did not live to see it completed: he died a year ago, on April 23, 2015.



While Harshav's official list of publications in his two-volume festschrift, compiled before he acknowledged the link between Likrat and Yung Yisroel, avoids any mention of his contributions to *Yung Yisroel*, it does disclose that his involvement with translating Yiddish poetry goes back to the early sixties. In his recollections of the Likrat days cited above, however, Harshav mentions parenthetically that “together with Dor or Sivan” he translated “Blok, Lorca, and Moyshe-Leyb Halpern, and published them in various places.” In our conversations during the last couple of years of his life, Harshav disclosed that reading and translating Yiddish modernist poetry were indeed activities that he shared with his Likrat friends from the very beginning. A volume of Halpern's poems was finally published in 1963. His other early translations of Yehoash (1957), Avrom Glantz-Leyeles (1960), and Sutzkever (1964) introduced early readers and practitioners of Statehood Generation poetry, even those who didn't read—or claimed not to read—Yiddish, to the diverse field of Yiddish modernist poetry. Importantly, his earliest prosodic studies, which coincided with his and Zach's earliest versions of a poetics of free verse in *Likrat*, use Yiddish poetry as a prosodic paradigm. Consider, for example, his revolutionary essays “On the Free Rhythms in Modern Yiddish Poetry” (1954) and “The Creation of Accentual Iambs in European Poetry and Their First Employment in a Yiddish Romance in Italy” (1964) and his volume *Heirs of Symbolism* (1964), where Yiddish modernist manifestos take their place alongside “high modernist” and Hebrew ones, in an insistently multilingual—though still narrowly Ashkenazic—modeling of modern Hebrew literature.

In recent years, Harshav's translation projects from Yiddish poetry into Hebrew have begun to contain hints about the role of one Yiddishism in particular in the construction of the poetics of Likrat and the Statehood Generation. In his anthology *Shira modernit* (Modern poetry, 1990), he says of the chapter dealing with Yiddish modernism: “This is a literature that used to be within the horizon of Hebrew literature and is not sufficiently known, even though you can find in it some of the best poetry of the 20th century.” He goes on to say: “The poets of the introspectivist trend [or *in zikh*, meaning “within the self”] in New York articulated in 1919 a manifesto that

could perfectly describe the directions of Hebrew poetry in the '50s."²⁸ In another anthology, *Introspectivism bi-New York* (1997), he reveals that "some of the poems of this anthology were translated in the early 1950s, during the days of Likrat."²⁹ His concluding essay in the anthology opens with the following statement: "Introspectivism' was a trend in Yiddish poetry in New York, established in 1919, and its principles are very reminiscent of the poetics of Hebrew poetry in the generation of Zach and Amichai."³⁰ Most self-consciously perhaps, though still not telling all, Harshav writes in his *Shirat ha-yachid bi-New York* (2002) about Glatshteyn's poetry that

whoever reads these poems cannot shake the sense of immanent affinity/kinship [*kirva mahutit*] with the poetry of the "Likrat" generation in Israel of the 1950s, especially with poets such as Nathan Zach, Arye Sivan, and Yehuda Amichai. They had to refight the same battles that the Inzikhists in New York had to fight in the teens in the field of poetics and the public reception of their poetry. And indeed, one of the later Inzikhist poets, Gavriel Preil, came to be considered an ally of the "young ones" in Israel, when he switched to writing in Hebrew.³¹

Yael Feldman and Allison Schachter have examined—in very different ways—Preil's bilingual oeuvre as a link between Yiddish introspectivism and Statehood Generation poetry.³² But broader points of contact and circulation between modern Israeli poetry and the Yiddish avant-garde remain to be explored.

As I suggest elsewhere,³³ submerged connections can have stayed invisible all these years only because of the ideological blinders, the restricted vision, imposed by a monolingual pseud-onativist historiography, where Yiddish and Hebrew literary histories were forcibly kept apart, ignoring the long joint history of their bilingual articulations. But there is a bit of a *zisse nekome*, sweet revenge, in discovering that *davka* (just to spite) Yiddish modernism ends up serving as the hidden blueprint for the first Israeli literary trend, Likrat. For monolingualism diminishes us all. A

²⁸ Benjamin Harshav, *Shira modernit* [Modern poetry] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1990), 10.

²⁹ Benjamin Harshav, *Introspectivism bi-New York* [Introspectivism in New York] (Tel Aviv: Ha-Kibbutz ha-me'uchad, 1997), 233.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Benjamin Harshav, *Shirat ha-yachid bi-New York* [The poetry of the self in New York] (Jerusalem: Carmel; Tel Aviv: Porter Institute for Poetics and Semiotics, Tel Aviv University, 2002), 75.

³² Yael S. Feldman, *Modernism and Cultural Transfer: Gabriel Preil and the Tradition of Jewish Literary Bilingualism* (Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 1985); Allison Schachter, *Diasporic Modernism: Hebrew and Yiddish Literature in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), chapter 5. See my afterword to Harshav's *Kol ha-shirim*.

³³ Chana Kronfeld, "The Joint Literary Historiography of Hebrew and Yiddish," in *Languages of Modern Jewish Cultures: Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Joshua Miller and Anita Norich (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 15–35.