Title

The Other(’s) Lyric: Piyyut, Identity, and Alterity in Modern Hebrew Mizrahi Poetry

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By

Oren Yirmiya

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
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Committee in charge:

Professor Chana Kronfeld, Chair
Professor Danial Boyarin
Professor C. D. Blanton
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Abstract

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This dissertation examines the intersections of lyric poetry and piyyut (medieval Hebrew liturgical poems) in two historical contexts where the genre of lyric and the notion of the "East" have been placed in a false dichotomy. The first half of the dissertation traces the evolution of the terms "lyric" and "piyyut" in the Middle East and Europe from the Hellenistic period to the nineteenth century, focusing on Hebrew, German, and English literature, scripture, and philosophy. The second half leaps forward to the contemporary work of two Israeli-Mizrahi poets of Moroccan descent, Erez Biton (b. 1942) and Shimon Adaf (b. 1972), exploring how these poets generate lyric poetics and piyyutic intertextuality and how they channel the conventions of these genres to communicate and challenge Mizrahi identity politics.

The dissertation's central conclusion is mirrored in both halves, revealing how the term "lyric" has been defined by European actors as a medium of individual autonomy and how this definition has been used to argue that poets of non-European origins lack the capabilities and dispositions needed to create lyric consciousness in their work. This is evident in nineteenth century lyric theory in Germany and England, where "oriental" poetry (mainly in Arabic, Hebrew, and Persian) is often defined as too devotional or disposed to despotism; and in the State of Israel, where Mizrahi poetry is frequently segregated from the main corpus of Hebrew Literature as critics accuse it of being too prosaically committed to its thematic materials and sociological positioning within Israeli ethno-economic stratification.

By returning to the discursive origins of the lyric genre and treating it as a malleable cognitive concept, the dissertation demonstrates the contingency of the notion of lyric as the medium of autonomous expression. This approach shows that lyric self-consciousness has always been accessible through means other than total autonomous individuation, especially intertextual poetic techniques that generate heteronomous self-expression. In this vein, the dissertation illustrates how classic piyyut offers polyphonic intertextual rhyming structures and how modern Mizrahi poets channel this staple of piyyut into constituting original lyric personhood structures. This methodological emphasis allows us to see piyyut is a variant model of lyric poetry and to analyze Mizrahi poetry by focusing on its lyric forms and not only its content.

To substantiate these large claims, the dissertation makes several overarching arguments throughout its chapters: During medieval times (fourth to fourteenth centuries) in the Middle East and around the Mediterranean basin, poetic devices began to appear more frequently across various languages from both Semitic and Indo-European families. These devices (e.g., rhyme, acrostics, alliteration) contributed to making poetry "denser" or more "artificed." This density was achieved using fewer words and shorter lines that carried more meaning through formal and intertextual techniques, allowing words to possess meanings far beyond their denotation. As these devices developed across different cultures, by the 14th century, the poetic corpora of European and Middle Eastern languages had become more similar than ever before. In Europe, these devices were incorporated into genres described contemporaneously or retrospectively as lyric forms (e.g., ode, ballad, sonnet).

During Europe's Enlightenment and Romantic periods, a new focus on "oriental poetry," specifically poetry in Arabic, Persian, and Hebrew, fostered a rich intellectual conversation about the lyric. Based on the notion of the lyric as the least mimetic classical genre, and with the influence of the long East-West development of dense verse, this dialogue allowed thinkers to first conceive of lyric poetry as a genre that mediates through self-expression the universal aesthetic apprehension of the world and particular cultural differences. This discourse marked Western lyric poetry as a literary medium of autonomous expression while deeming oriental poetry as inherently heteronomous.

The history of this conversation, which intermingled lyric theory and Orientalism is often overlooked. Yet, it is crucial for understanding the twentieth and twenty-first century persistent assertions that lyric poetry is an inherently secular and autonomous genre. By retracing the origins of this idea, the dissertation identifies an alternative path that views religious, heteronomous poetry such as piyyut as capable of generating lyric self-consciousness through different means.

Intertextual rhyme is the primary device for piyyutic lyric self-consciousness, combining midrashic exegesis with alliterative sound-play norms. This device creates an expansive, open interpretive field, inviting readers to engage with the poem by connecting similar-sounding phrases, in-text meanings, and the interplay of evoked texts that clarify or contradict one another. Poetry is thus made "lyrical" by enabling words and allusions to work together to produce novel, indeterminate meanings. In doing so, piyyut and piyyut-like poetry do not assume autonomy or primacy as prerequisites for lyric consciousness, as they inherently rely on other texts and speakers to generate meaning.

In post-1948 Israel, hegemonic groups have used the concept of lyric to marginalize Mizrahi poetry, often treating it as a thematic supplement rather than a core component of Hebrew poetics. Recent approaches to Mizrahi literature do better by arguing for this poetry's recognition as minor literature within Hebrew literature or as a manifestation of Israeli cultural hybridization. Without negating these perspectives, my dissertation emphasizes the importance of examining Mizrahi literature as poetry unto itself and not only by the labor it performs towards other aspects of Hebrew literature and culture. This can be achieved by reading Mizrahi poetry for its lyric forms, particularly the new formations of lyric personhood and the revitalization of piyyutic intertextuality.

I exemplify this approach through the works of Erez Biton and Shimon Adaf. In Biton's poetry, I trace his engagement with piyyut from his early works in the 1960s and 1970s, highlighting his development of a lyric epistemology shaped by societal stratification and oppression. Biton's poetic code, characterized by piyyutic intertextuality, multilingualism, and irony, reveals the contingency of supposedly objective language and exposes alternative

configurations of meaning by emphasizing the gap between hegemonic language and the reality it fails to describe. I also situate Biton's lyric practice within and against the poetics of the Israeli Statehood Generation, particularly Natan Zach, to demonstrate the intergenerational dynamics linking his work to the preceding major generation of poetry. By doing so, I establish Biton's place in the dual lineages of piyyut and modern Hebrew poetry.

Adaf's writing, particularly in the poetry volume *Aviva-No* (2009) and the novel *Frost* (2010), demonstrates efforts to channel piyyutic writing conventions to transcend biographical readings and achieve a Mizrahi phenomenology not constrained by colloquial identity discourse. In a dual endeavor to find the alterity central to his idea of identity and to find how melancholic writing can sublimate absence into presence, Adaf uses piyyutic intertextuality to provide a complex understanding of identity committed to specific biographical events without being confined to the idea of a biography. In these writings, Adaf interrogates and pushes to its limit the recent trend of biographic poetry by offering a structure of lyric personhood that relates to life history in the same indeterminate way that tradition refers to scripture.

By examining these works, the dissertation challenges traditional identity politics that emphasize fixed notions of sameness. Instead, it promotes a radical understanding of identity that embraces alterity and fluidity, offering a nuanced perspective on how self-expression can offer lyric forms that manifest collective identities and histories.

My research highlights the significant yet often overlooked role of piyyut in modern Hebrew literature, arguing for its relevance and transformative potential in contemporary poetic expressions. Engaging with scholars like Chana Kronfeld, Gil Anidjar, Haviva Pedaya, and Lital Levy, this dissertation redefines the scope of "New Hebrew Literature," challenging the secularized assumptions that have historically governed the field. It advocates for a rethinking of this literary category, emphasizing the interconnectedness and mutual influence of diverse literary traditions, integrating secular literary origins and traditional liturgy. This approach fosters inclusivity and diversity, encouraging an open-ended exploration within Hebrew literature that honors its European and Middle Eastern roots, recognizing the rich tapestry of cultural and poetic exchanges that have shaped its evolution.

To everybody who taught me anything
To the broken, the beaten, and the damned
To all those resisting erasure at the margins of Hebrew literature
And to the Angel of History, in case they are watching

*

"When science was proliferated by man and nation, the forces working through the kingdoms and states realized that just as only material strength—the might of the sword— can weaken matter, so can only spirit weaken spirit […], and so they decided to spread Western culture in the East. […] their work weakened the Easterner's national culture. The varied educations, fashions, and new, pretty rituals baffled the Easterners and made them forget their selfhood until, gradually, they had to comply with the false realization that they were, in essence, weakling beings—second-rate, inferior people.

[…]

Assimilationists say, "Let us, the people of Israel, be like the people of all nations," and nationalists say, "Let us, the people of Israel, be one nation like all the nations." It is beyond my expertise to conclude on this topic. But in this discussion, we must be vigilant against the encroachment of this new [European] culture, with its novel methods and devices, that threatens to erode the proud Jewish self-impression that has persevered in the East more than elsewhere. We must stay steadfast in sustaining our unique cultural characteristics and olden spirit, ensuring that we do not succumb to becoming just a European culture speaking Hebrew language."

from: "The European Culture in the East" by my great-grandfather, Ḥayyim Ben-Kiki, published in Do'ar Ha-yom Newspaper, Jerusalem, Oct. 12th and 15th, 1920.

*

Though his funeral lengthened
Though his mourners thickened
Magic never fled
Though laws were carved in marble
They could not shelter men
Though altars built in parliaments, they could not order men
Police arrested magic, and magic went with them
For magic loves the hungry

But magic would not tarry, it moves from arm to arm
It cannot come to harm, it rests in an empty palm
It spawns in an empty mind, but magic is no instrument
Magic is the end

from: "God Is Alive, Magic Is Afoot" by Leonard Cohen, as made famous by Buffy Sainte-Mary

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments

It takes an entire universe to function in total harmony for even one speck of dust to move from one place to the next. This thought places a project like this dissertation into perspective, as it contains many moving parts, often traveling in various trajectories and velocities, but also as it will inevitably become nothing but dust, moved by the universe without anyone noticing. In the meantime, between the chaos of writing and the entropy of dissolution, the fact that you, the reader, are now observing one unified object seems to me a small wonder, and the first thank is directly to you as you read these words. But you should know that this miracle would have never come to fruition without the help offered to me by the following people:

First and foremost, I want to thank my parents, Nurit and Raz Yirmiya. I often joke that I am incredibly lucky to have already had my first peer review, conducted by two esteemed professors at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem while turning in my fourth-grade elementary school papers. But beyond that joke, my parents are the foundational rock, אבן הפינה of my life and my first teachers on the path toward curiosity. I want to thank my dad specifically for the Bible stories he told me when I was a child during long drives, and my mom for the rigorous self-examination and radical empathy she taught me, using toolkits that only years later I would discover to be the like of partial-object psychoanalysis for beginners. I could only develop my opinions because they knew how to ask for them. I also want to thank my siblings, Karen, Erez, and Tamir, and the new family members they brought into my life.

I also want to thank my grandparents—Dov Yirmiya, Menocha Yirmiya le-beit Yaffe, Hadassah Mor, Reuven Lazarowitz, and Rachel Hertz-Lazarowitz—and the great-grandparents I met in life or through stories: Batya Hertz, Haim ben-Kiki, and David Yirmanovitz. My first life's work has been to understand all of you and the intricate journeys you took from Russia, Tiberias, Nahariya, Haifa, Poland, Romania, and Morocco to become that unit I can effortlessly call "my family." If there were an X-ray machine for research manuscripts, one could see that your biographies have served as this dissertation's bones. Thank you, and I hope to write more in your memory. I wish you could have read this text.

I want to thank my advisor, Chana Kronfeld, an exceptional scholar, teacher, and guiding star, always pointing to the true north of compassion and scholarly precision. In one of my first weeks of graduate school, Chana took me to UC Berkeley's famous Free Speech Café. Over a lunch she provided (the first of many meals she supplied as part of her self-diagnosed "feeding disorder"), we discussed my passion for writing about lyric poetry and theory, breaking away from the common assumption that poetry must always be an individual, solitary endeavor and that it can, and maybe should, be a collective act of intersubjective solidarity. Chana was the first to point out to me that if we take liturgical poetry seriously, addressing God cannot be an apostrophe but is instead a true address. I am overjoyed to finally present Chana with the results of that conversation.

I also had the incredibly good fortune of assembling a dream committee at Berkeley and beyond. I came to Daniel Boyarin's class with only a few weeks of Intro to Talmud under my belt. In the extraterritorial space he held in his office almost weekly to read M. Pesachim, I fell in love with the rabbinical texts of late antiquity. I often say that I came to Berkeley as an Israeli and left it as a Jew, and Daniel's seminars played no small part in this late-in-life transformation. Dan Blanton not only opened the door for me to the world of Kant and Hegel but also agreed to take the time to read with me a makeshift assemblage of Enlightenment and Romantic German and British writers of the last three centuries in an attempt to understand the role of Jewish alterity in

the cannon of Critical Theory. While I still cannot answer that question fully, encountering those writers' obsession with the Hebrew language has become my own obsession and the framework of this project. Without Dan's guidance, I would have never navigated that ocean of knowledge unscathed. Finally, I thank Naomi Seidman for her teaching on Jewish feminist and queer theory and for constantly giving me the best and most honest advice on academic life. Even while I was sometimes slow to take her advice, it often turned out to be the only thing that allowed me to progress when my natural disposition would have led me astray. Without those words of advice, I might have still been in the basements of the Social Science Building, placing "just one more" important point in a never-ending, never-to-be-published manuscript.

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I also want to thank my fellow Berkeley graduate students and others I met through graduate school, who made my Ph.D. journey not only enlightening but also survivable. I have always done my best thinking when talking to passionate friends and colleagues, or even better while reading a text together with them. The rabbis say, "אדם שמדליק נר מנר, הנר דולק וחברו אינו חסר," which means "One who uses a candle to light a candle finds that the new candle burns bright, and the first candle, his friend, lacks for nothing." I want to thank the following people for being my friendly candles, sometimes the only sources of light in dark and scary times. I might have quit this project ten times over if it hadn't meant giving up the chance to share its results with you: Anna Tomi, Aya Elia, Ella Elbaz-Nir, Eyal Bassan, Shir Ganor, Madeline Wyse, Danny Luzon, Bat-El Alon, Shirelle Maya Doughty, Brooke Norton, Yael Segalovitz, Elena Solomon, Simone Stirner, Rafael Balling, Lubna Safi, Elya Piazza, Julia Havard, Emanuelle Klachky, Betty Rosen, Doaa Atamna, Linda Istanbulli, Aria Fani, Ruth Haber and especially Jenna Kemp.

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Finally, I thank Yael Flusser, my closest ally, colleague, and confidant, with whom I have had the longest and most fruitful dialogue about most, if not all, of the work included in this dissertation and more. Shimon Adaf wrote about *chavruta*, that is, the institutionalized scholarly friendship that is the cornerstone of rabbinical learning:

"חברותא היא לנצח, שיננו להם בישיבה, לא רק את המחשבה ואת כושר הטיעון אתם מחדדים זה כנגד זה, אלא תבניות שלמות אתם מפנימים, מנגנונים של היסק וליבון. בן החברותא שלכם יהפוך לצופר בתודעה שלכם, לחוט של היגיון המוכלב ברעיונותיכם."

"'A chavruta study partner is forever,' they repeated in the yeshiva. 'Not only do you sharpen your thinking and argumentative skills against each other, but you also internalize entire patterns and mechanisms of reasoning and analysis. Your study partner will become a beacon in your consciousness, a thread of logic interwoven with your ideas" (Memory Flaw, 2023, p. 11).

I thank Yael for being this chavruta for me in my work and for all the helpful comments she made along the way.

Finally, I want to cite rabbi Gamliel, who said: "יפה תלמוד תורה עם דרך ארץ, שיגיעת שניהם משכחת עון. וכל תורה שאין עמה מלאכה, סופה בטלה וגוררת עון." That is, "Rigorous study goes well with worldly work, as only together can they keep the mind from going astray. And any theory without praxis annuls itself and leads to transgression." In this vein, I want to thank all the comrades I met in demonstrations and direct actions for a better future. At times, I had to stray far from activism and worldly affairs to complete this academic manuscript, and looking back, it's hard for me to explain how I got from the streets to my department's offices. But I hope this dissertation will still find a place in our fight and that some praxis can be found in it. Ultimately, nothing is better than being true—for knowledge and justice. May this dissertation outlive all the wrongs it was written against.

Chapter One:

Orientalism and the Global Lyric in the *Longue Durée*

Introduction

Since its beginning in Greek antiquity, the term "lyric" has died and been resurrected many times, accumulating various definitions and connotations along the way. In its numerous lives, lyric was deemed both the most inconsequential type of poetry and the pinnacle of human expression. Anthology editors associated it with short, thought-like verses but also with long, expressive poems; scholars conceptualized it as part of a culture-specific modern European taxonomy and as a universal standard of "true" poetry.[1] But since Horace revived the term while declaring himself the first Latin poet of Greek lyric,[2] the word "lyric" has been emancipated from its old classical context, becoming a foundling genre adopted by many languages and regions worldwide. Between these different times, locales, and meanings, the field of lyric theory has become a Tower of Babel (or the biblical story's mirror image), wherein all the laborers use the same name to refer to different objects. Nevertheless, through the semiotic haze, the term's endurance and propagation still call for new writers to investigate and consider it further. In my work, I answer the call and argue that while "lyric" might be a floating signifier, as some contemporary scholars have suggested, its floating significance is not without rhyme or reason.

In this introduction and throughout the dissertation, I shed new light on the history and meaning of lyric poetry through its complex and overlooked relation to the genre of piyyut, commonly defined as medieval Hebrew liturgical poetry. Although these two genres are rarely considered in tandem, their histories exhibit numerous correspondences and points of contact, spanning from late antiquity to the modern age. Furthermore, the inclination to segregate secular literary poems from liturgical poetic texts is a relatively recent development, younger by far than the two genres in question. Even in the 19th century, as exemplified in Hegel's work which I discuss

[1] See, for example, Theodor W Adorno, "On Lyric Poetry and Society," in *Notes to Literature*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 37–54; Charles Batteux, *The Fine Arts Reduced to a Single Principle*, trans. James O. Young, First edition (Oxford ; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015); G.W.F. Hegel, "Lyric Poetry," in *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 1111–57; Virginia Jackson, "Lyric," in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Roland Greene et al., 4th ed (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 826–34; Marion Thain, ed., "Introduction," in *The Lyric Poem: Formations and Transformations* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1–9. See my following discussions of these sources below.

[2] Michaíl Paschális and Michael C.J. Putnam, eds., *Horace and Greek Lyric Poetry*, Rethymnon Classical Studies, vol. 1 (Rethymnon: University of Crete, Department of philology, 2002).

below, religious and secular poetry were analyzed as constituents of the same system. Only later did "lyric poetry" emerge as both a term and a body of poetry set apart and celebrated as a modern and distinctly secular mode of poetic expression, representing a form in which individualized consciousness engages with itself through language.

However, the central argument of this introductory chapter posits that the evolution of the term "lyric" into its current meaning is intricately entwined with Orientalist perspectives of the 18th through 21st centuries. In the course of that development, European literati initially recognized distinctive stylistic characteristics in poetry from beyond Europe, then shaped new forms of lyric poetry and theory to mimic and respond to that difference, and subsequently disavowed the "othered" bodies of writing as insufficiently "lyric" or "literary." Likewise, I contend that by reevaluating these processes over an extended historical period, we can not only gain a deeper understanding of the past but also acquire new insights into the present. I propose that revisiting piyyut and similar forms of poetry can shed light on new avenues of departure from current writing conventions. In particular, piyyut offers an exemplary instance of poetry uniquely enriched by intertextuality and non-individualized concepts of personhood. In the next chapter, "Piyyut, a Model for Lyric Poetry," I exemplify these notions and subsequently, in the rest of the dissertation, demonstrate how modern Mizrahi poets, that is, Hebrew poets descended from the Muslim world's Jewish communities, revisit them to expand upon the norms of modernist poetry, thereby creating something novel and captivating.

Consequently, the purpose of the present and the next chapter read together is threefold: to provide a comprehensive survey of the genre of piyyut, to elucidate how lyric poetry's history touches on piyyut and other "oriental" poetic forms, and to argue for the transformative potential inherent in the reintegration of the genres.

As mentioned, piyyut is commonly defined as medieval Hebrew liturgical poetry, a definition whose every term demands an amendment. First, while piyyut is mainly written in Hebrew, it has historically also been written in Aramaic and, more recently, in multilingual forms, mixing the Jewish scriptural languages (Hebrew and Aramaic) with spoken tongues (in modern times, most notably Judeo-Arabic).[3] Secondly, piyyut is not limited to the Middle Ages but forms a transhistorical genre with a history that outlasts most others.[4] Piyyut was already a robust poetic practice in late antiquity, starting, at the latest, around the 5th century CE.[5] It reached its "classical"

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[3] Ruth F. Davis, ed., *Musical Exodus: Al-Andalus and Its Jewish Diasporas*, Europea: Ethnomusicologies and Modernities 19 (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015); Michael Sokoloff and Joseph Yahalom, "Aramaic Piyyutim from the Byzantine Period," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 75, no. 3 (1985): 309–21.

[4] Haviva Pedaya, ed., *הפיוט כצוהר תרבותי: כיוונים חדשים להבנת הפיוט ולהבנייתו התרבותית [The Piyyut as a Cultural Prism: New Approaches]* (Jerusalem: The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute and Hakibbutz Hameuchad Press, 2012).

[5] Moshe Weinfeld, *הליטורגיה היהודית הקדומה: מהספרות המזמורית ועד לתפילות במגילות קומראן ובספרות חז"ל [Early Jewish Liturgy: From Psalms to the Prayers in Qumran and Rabbinic Literature]* (Yerushalayim: Hotsa'at sefarim 'a. sh. Y.L. Magnes, ha-Universiṭah ha-'Ivrit, 2004); Joseph Yahalom, *שורשי שירת הקודש [Sources of the Sacred Song]*, Meḥḳar Ṿe-'iyun (Yerushalayim: Magnes, 2019).
While there are interesting and robust corpora of writings in Yiddish that similarly bridge liturgy and literature with multilingual practices, such as the *tkhines* (תחינות), the term "piyyut" is rarely used in these contexts despite its applicability. Modern poets like Miriam Ulinover and Kadya Molodowsky have built on that genre of modernist

period in the early Middle Ages (5th-7th century) and has been continuously practiced and written to this day.[6] During these seventeen centuries, piyyut has moved through three main periods.

The first phase of piyyut, which I will discuss in the next chapter, is sometimes referred to simply as "piyyut" (sans adjectives) and other times as "Byzantine" and "Eretz-Yisraeli" piyyut. This era consists of the liturgical poetry written mainly in Palestine (and, to a lesser exent, in Babylonia) during the first millennium CE. The second phase is the Andalusian (or Sephardi) piyyut. This period starts symbolically with the 10th-century poetic works of Dunash ben Labrat, the first to adopt classical Arabic meters to Hebrew poetry and the poet whose travel to Cordoba marks the transition of the Hebrew literary center from the Abbasid Caliphate to the Iberian peninsula.[7] Finally, the latest phase of piyyut, which is the background for my fourth and fifth chapters, begins after the Alhambra decree (1492 CE) and the expulsion of Jews and Muslims from the Iberian peninsula, as the center of piyyut poetic production moved with the Sephardic exiles back east to the Ottoman empire. In this new-old region, piyyut adopts the mystical thought of Lurianic Kabbalah and the musicality of its contemporaneous *maqāmāt* musical scales and melodic framework. Due to the diverging paths of European Jewry and the Muslim world's Jewish communities, piyyut became associated with Mizrahi Jewish-Arab heritage during this period.

This periodization and my decision to treat the three phases of piyyut as one cohesive genealogy requires some explanation. While each of the three phases has its own linguistic markings and distinct models of prosody and musicality, in actuality, older models of piyyut were rarely entirely forsaken for the sake of new ones. Thus, Andalusian poets have written piyyutim that follow the conventions of the Eretz-Yisraeli style throughout the late Middle Ages, and new piyyutim written in the Arabic-inspired Andalusian meters can be found well into the 17th century and beyond.

Despite this temporal overlap and the clear intertextual and traditional connecting threads, the academic study of the three periods during the 20th century has been highly segregated along the lines of discipline and subdiscipline. This is especially the case for Ottoman period piyyut. The roots of this segregation go back as early as 1928, when the discipline of Hebrew literary studies was first institutionalized as a department at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. In that crucial moment, the study of Hebrew literature was cut into three divisions: rabbinic literature, modern Hebrew literature, and medieval poetry. Hebrew Bible remained the domain of a separate

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poetry, which resembles what I term piyyut-like poetry. However, the decline of piyyut's cultural status in Ashkenazi circles over the last few centuries has likely contributed to its limited use in describing these works. This process is discussed in detail in the third chapter of this dissertation.

[6] Shulamit Elizur, *סוד משלשי קודש: הקדושתא מראשיתה ועד ימי רבי אלעזר בירבי קליר [The Secret of the Sacred Triplets: The Qedushta From Its Origins Until the Time of Rabbi El'azr Berabbi Qillir]* (Jerusalem: ha-Igud ha-'olami le-mada'ei ha-Yahadut, 2019); Aaron Mirsky, *הפיוט: התפתחותו בארץ ישראל והגולה [The Piyyut: The Development of Post-Biblical Poetry in Eretz Israel and the Diaspora]* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1990); Pedaya, *The Piyyut as a Cultural Prism*.

[7] Rina Drory, *Models and Contacts: Arabic Literature and Its Impact on Medieval Jewish Culture*, v. 25 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2000); Dan Pagis, *חידוש ומסורת בשירת-החול: ספרד ואיטליה [Change and Tradition in the Secular Poetry: Spain and Italy]* (Keter, 1976).

department. The medieval poetry division was headed by David Yellin[8] and focused mainly on the Hebrew poetry of the Andalusian golden age (10th-13th century).[9] Yellin's successors, most notably Aaron Mirsky and Ezra Fleischer, extended the division's focus in the 1950s and 60s to include earlier Byzantian piyyut. Mirsky and Fleischer's students who wanted to work on later piyyut in the Muslim world faced difficulties doing so in Jerusalem.[10] Eventually, piyyut of the last five hundred years was studied in less influential institutions (at least for Hebrew literature study) and as part of the "Literature of the Jewish People" and "Hebrew Language" departments (as done by Ephraim Hazan and Haim Zafrani). It was also studied in the Faculty of Social Sciences, most notably the Department of Ethnomusicology (spearheaded by Amnon Shiloah and Edwin Seroussi).[11] As Haim Weiss and Shirah Stav note, the 1928 segmentation of Hebrew literature into these three divisions has rooted its way into the foundation of Hebrew literature's scholarly imagination, shaping its notions of canonicity and historicity to this day.[12] At its core, the foundation of this conception lies in "the negation of the diaspora," which

> refers to the consciousness that deems the present Jewish settlement in, and sovereignty over, Palestine as the "return" of the Jews to the land believed to be their home, and imagined, prior to its "redemption," as empty. The negation of exile appeared to be the "fulfillment" of Jewish history and the realization of Jewish prayers and messianic expectations. According to this perspective, the cultural framework that the Zionists wished to actualize and uncover was the "authentic," original Jewish culture, as opposed to the exilic culture, described in blatant orientalist terms as stagnant, unproductive, and irrational.[13]

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[8] As Samuel Werses relates, each of the divisions was suited to one foundational scholar's expertise. Rabbinic literature was built around Simcha Assaf's scholarship of the Geonic period, and modern Hebrew literature around Joseph Klausner's research of the European Haskalah literature. See Samuel Werses, " יוסף קלוזנר וראשית ההוראה והמחקר של הספרות העברית [Joseph Klausner and Hebrew Literature Scholarship's Inception]," in *The History of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem: Origins and Beginnings* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1997), 487–515.

[9] On the origins of the segmentation that separates Al-Andalusian Jewish poetry from its intra- and inter-cultural contexts, see Yuval Evri, "Return to Al-Andalus beyond German-Jewish Orientalism: Abraham Shalom Yahuda's Critique of Modern Jewish Discourse," in *Modern Jewish Scholarship on Islam in Context*, ed. Ottfried Fraisse (De Gruyter, 2018), 337–54, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110446890-019; John M. Efron, *German Jewry and the Allure of the Sephardic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

[10] See Ephraim Hazan's remarks on this subject in his interview. Riki Rat, "אפרים חזן, איש וביתו [Efraim Hazan, a Man and His House]," *Makor Rishon*, December 26, 2017, https://musaf-shabbat.com/2017/12/26/%d7%90%d7%99%d7%a9-%d7%95%d7%91%d7%99%d7%aa%d7%95-%d7%a8%d7%99%d7%a7%d7%99-%d7%a8%d7%98/.

[11] Several other notable scholars have added to the study of this era of piyyut, almost exclusively outside of Hebrew literature departments, and sometimes outside of academia altogether. Some of these scholars are Abraham Ben-Ya'akov (independent scholar), Joseph Chetrit (Hebrew Language Department at the University of Haifa), Ḥananyah Dahan (independent scholar), Joseph Tobi (Comparative and Hebrew literature, University of Haifa), Yehuda Ratzaby (Bar-Ilan University's Department of Literature of the Jewish People).

[12] Haim Weiss and Shira Stav, *שובו של האב הנעדר: קריאה מחודשת בסדרת סיפורים מן התלמוד הבבלי [The Return of the Missing Father: A New Reading of a Chain of Stories from the Babylonian Talmud]* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2018), 13–14.

[13] Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, "The Zionist Return to the West and the Mizrahi Jewish Perspective," in *Orientalism and the Jews*, ed. Ivan Davidson Kalmar and Jonathan Derek (Brandeis University Press, 2005), 167, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1d1qmmz.14.

The segmentation of Hebrew literature into three distinct sections manifests an intense perception of schism and rebellion that, as part of "the negation of the diaspora," is "characteristic of the study of modern Hebrew literature, which sees itself as having been created, to some extent, from the spirit of modernity and in opposition to pre-modern Jewish literature.[14]

Separating piyyut from Modern Hebrew Literary scholarship also meant that much of it had been studied without the toolkits of close reading and other literary reading techniques. Only more recently have we seen a surge of new scholarship reading and discussing these piyyutim not only as cultural artifacts but also as poetic texts proper, in the works of scholars like Haviva Pedaya, Almog Behar, Yehoshua Granat, Laura Lieber, Tzvi Novick, Michael Swartz, and Ariel Zinder.[15] I discuss this development in more detail in the dissertation's third chapter.

Despite these divisions, I argue that piyyut transcends the linguistic and temporal boundaries within which it is usually understood. For that purpose, I explore the modifier of piyyut's standard definition in this introductory chapter, the term "liturgical" in the conception of piyyut as "Hebrew liturgical poetry." First and foremost, the adjective "liturgical" denotes the genre's public and ritual nature. At its core, mainly as it emerged during the early rabbinic period, piyyut is part of communal synagogue practice. Some piyyutim are meant for communal singing by the entire synagogue congregation. Some are arranged so that one synagogue official vocalizes the text while the crowd responds with a refrain. Other piyyutim are arranged to be sung by the whole congregation, and some to not be sung at all. However, we should note that, especially within this framework, piyyut is defined as devotional poetic texts that are not required to fulfill religious rites.[16] I return to this point and elaborate on it in the next chapter. While the relationship between prayer and piyyut has evolved in myriad ways throughout the last two millennia, with some texts crossing the line between the categories within Jewish practice, the term "piyyut" retains its independence from prayer.

Nonetheless, labeling piyyut as "liturgical poetry" often aligns piyyutim with prayers, their former counterparts. This tendency foregrounds the religious modality of the two categories, thus readily contrasting them with lyric poetry or poetry at large. As Joseph Yahalom writes in his essay "Piyyut as Poetry:"

> [While i]t is well known that the word פייטן (*payṭān*), liturgical poet, is the Hebrew form of the Greek ποιητής [*poiētḗs*], meaning maker or creator, and that the word piyyut is derived from the same Greek root as the English words poetry and poem […] one may [still] ask whether, by western standards, this ancient type of liturgical composition is real poetry.[17]

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[14] Weiss and Stav, *שובו של האב הנעדר: קריאה מחודשת בסדרת סיפורים מן התלמוד הבבלי [The Return of the Missing Father: A New Reading of a Chain of Stories from the Babylonian Talmud]*, 13.

[15] A more detailed history of this development is available in Ariel Zinder, "Poem, Prayer, Supplement: The Destabilizing Logic of Piyyut," *Prooftexts* 39, no. 1 (2021): 36–39.

[16] Zinder, "Poem, Prayer, Supplement"; Laura S. Lieber, *Yannai on Genesis: An Invitation to Piyyut*, Monographs of the Hebrew Union College 36 (Cincinnati (Ohio): Hebrew union college press, 2010).

[17] Joseph Yahalom, "Piyyut as Poetry," in *The Synagogue in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: Jewish Theological Seminary and American Schools of Oriental Research, 1987), 111.

Yahalom answers this question ambiguously, appreciating the differences and similarities between piyyut and poetry while not determining the exact resemblance between the two. In this study, I return to the question and push it further by focusing the scope of comparison on piyyut and *lyric* poetry. This leads us to the historical and theoretical matrix that created the modern tension between sacred and secular poetry, a process in which the term "lyric" played a definitive role. In understanding this historical progression, we can discover the distinct yet comparable lyric quality of Hebrew piyyut and the way the genre stands in close relation to – while in no way being coterminous with– the corpus of European lyric poetry.

Chapters Overview

To substantiate this study's claims, I reevaluate the historiographies that segregate piyyut from global lyric poetry and show how, with very minute changes, we can establish a conceptual framework that allows for piyyut's inclusion in this system. In the second half of the dissertation, I then take the notion of piyyut and show how its textual legacy affects contemporary Mizrahi poetry.

The dissertation's first chapter surveys three approaches to lyric theory: the historical poetics school, led by Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins; the formalist approach, championed by Jonathan Cullar; and the neo-Adornian study of poetry, exemplified by the work of Robert Kaufman. Integrating historical poetics and neo-Adornian methods, my study challenges the conventional notion of lyric as an unchanging poetic form inherited from ancient Greece. Instead, drawing on the insights of Aamir Mufti, María Rosa Menocal, and Ophir Münz-Manor, the chapter details the rich history of interaction between piyyut, other "oriental" corpora of poetry, and European lyric poetry around the Mediterranean basin during the Middle Ages (4th-14th centuries), demonstrating how in this period the term "lyric" evolved to signify a textual contact zone between European and Middle Eastern poetry, in which the poetry of the region adapts textual devices that make it semantically "denser" through sound play, intertextuality, and more.

As the work shows, European intellectuals openly discussed this shared heritage from early modernity to the Romantic era, ultimately leading to our current conception of lyric poetry. In this Orientalist discourse regarding the differences between European and Middle Eastern poetry, the term "lyric" first gains its distinct meaning as a genre mediating a speaking "I" and its society. This process reaches its zenith in Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics* (1835), in which he identifies lyric poetry as one in which formal devices of meaning densification (those mentioned above as shared East-West developments) allow the speaker to externalize subjective meaning onto objective language, thus "inwardizing" the objects of their speech into his subjective experience, and resulting in "consciousness becoming self-consciousness through self-expression." By reading Hegel's lyric theory closely, the chapter shows how essential Orientalist dialectics are to the history of the field since, in his lectures, Hegel speaks of both oriental and occidental modes of lyric poetry, distinguishing them by framing the former as "heteronomous" and the latter as "autonomous." The chapter concludes by arguing for the liberatory lyric power of heteronomous poetics, showing that there can be more than one model of the lyric.

In the second chapter, I turn to piyyut and focus on its place and meaning within the multisystem of late antiquity rabbinic literature. I present two central arguments. First, we find evidence of the foreignness of piyyut within Byzantine Palestinian Jewish culture, suggesting contemporary awareness of this genre's participation in cross-cultural developments. Second, in the classical period of piyyut (5th-7th century), the Hebrew term for rhyme, "*ḥaruz*," refers to both alliterative and intertextual devices, suggesting that at the time, the two functions were inseparable. The chapter then offers an analysis of a 7th-century *kinah* (lament) for Tish`a Be'av written by Eleazar Hakalir, "Alas, His quiver opened like a grave," focusing on its "*ḥaruzim*," i.e., its soundscape and allusions. As I show, Hakalir's complex schema of intertextuality and rhyme folds the text back on itself, detaching the words of the piyyut from their lexical definition and imbuing them with additional possible meaning through the intertextual echo chamber. Most interestingly, even though the piyyut is written in the first-person singular, the allusions break the monovocality implied by it, making each "I" statement a polyphony. In this manner, the piyyut gains a lyrical complexity of articulation and self-consciousness while refusing individualized and self-segregated subjecthood.

Chapter three is dedicated to Erez Biton (1942-), the founding figure of Israeli Mizrahi poetry. Building on the theories of Barbara Johnson, Sara Dowling, and Haviva Pedaya on lyric personhood and the poetic "I," I argue that Biton's poetry introduces a unique lyric structure and a triadic epistemology. In this triad, the speaking "I" is inherently related to a bifurcated society, divided into hegemony and the oppressed. The chapter begins with a historical survey of Mizrahi history, focusing on the migration of Jewish communities from the Muslim Middle East and North Africa to Israel in the 1950s and their socio-economic challenges. It then explores Biton's biography and the influence of his experiences as a Moroccan immigrant. The first section of the chapter contrasts the Statehood Generation's lyric theory with Biton's approach, highlighting his socially and politically aware lyricism by analyzing his early poem "Frenzied" (first published 1964), and particularly Biton's use of rhyme as both form and theme to mark the historicity of even the most abstracted and universal poetic device. The second section examines Biton's reception and the discourse on Mizrahi literature, reviewing key scholarly works by Ktzia Alon and Yochai Oppenheimer and presenting Haviva Pedaya's critique. This section also surveys the piyyut revival in Israel over the last twenty years and its role in Mizrahi culture. The third section focuses on Biton's engagement with the piyyut tradition in his 1976 volume *Moroccan Offering*, particularly the poem "Moroccan Piyyut," illustrating how his work reclaims and revitalizes Mizrahi cultural heritage as part of his lyric formal innovation.

The fourth chapter explores the interplay of piyyut and loss in Shimon Adaf's poetry volume *Aviva-No* (2009) and sci-fi novel *Frost* (2010), highlighting Adaf's innovative use of piyyutic intertextuality to navigate lyric form, identity formation, and mourning. The chapter begins with Adaf's distinction between "colloquial" and "radical" identity politics, arguing that while the former category seeks sameness as a precondition of identity, the latter finds alterity in every selfhood. Adaf aims to produce poetry that refuses the notion of sameness, making his identity ungraspable—a project he finds contemporary lyric poetry unable to achieve. The chapter

examines Adaf's early works from "Icarus' Monologue" (1997) and "That Which I Thought Shadow Is the Real Body" (2002), highlighting his struggle to distance his poetry from biographical constraints. It then explores Adaf's melancholic approach as revealed in his essays and interviews, framed around significant personal losses and his engagement with the P*itum ha-ktoret* prayer, a detailed liturgical text that Adaf uses as an example of textual melancholic sublimation of absence into presence. The chapter then analyzes *Aviva-No*, and how it intertwines autobiographical elements with piyyutic references to *Pitum ha-ktoret* and other scriptures to express Adaf's mourning over his sister. Despite succumbing to biographical conventions, in this volume, Adaf mobilizes piyyutic intertextuality to break from total individuation. In the novel *Frost,* Adaf offers a counterpart to *Aviva-No*, using a speculative narrative that articulates his experience of loss while altering its details, set in a futuristic Tel Aviv that reflects contemporary Israeli politics and poetics in a slant reflection. This radical change, along with a deconstruction of rhyme into a prose narrative device where plot elements are connected through sound play, allows Adaf to explore grief and Mizrahi identity as contingent entities, offering a new model of personhood that relates to biography as tradition relates to scriptures: through deep commitment that is always mediated and reshaped by transmission, schisms, reinterpretations, augmentations, and textual changes.

Throughout these chapters, I challenge the post-Enlightenment (specifically Romantic and Modernist) conception of the lyric as exclusively Eurocentric and individualistic.[18] In doing so, I pave the way for reimagining the genre, drawing inspiration from premodern intertextual and interpersonal conventions, as seen in piyyut. Across the dissertation's chapters, I trace the thread of non-individualized subjecthood and intertextual practices into modern Hebrew poetry. This approach diverges from the historiographic norms of the "New Hebrew Literature" school [הספרות העברית החדשה]. Originating in the 19th-century Hebrew enlightenment or *Haskalah* and the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* movements of central and eastern Europe, this school (despite its professed rejection of Haskalah poetics) emphasizes the discontinuity of Jewish poetry from its past and the schism of modernity. However, I argue that scholars of the "New Hebrew Literature" school often interpret the "newness" of modern Hebrew poetry by applying secular reading sensibilities. While they acknowledge specific poems' Jewish traditional particularities, they simultaneously read them to uncover a universal meaning that is then placed in antinomy with traditional elements. In future projects, I intend to delve into this dynamic in detail. For this dissertation, I will only highlight the contrivance of this antinomy. As demonstrated in the chapters that follow, no objective mandate exists to perceive universalist and traditionalist features and trends as opposite. Therefore, once we understand universalism and traditionality as complementary aspects of any given moment in the last 200 years of literary production, there is no need to separate new and old Hebrew literature. In this vein, the dissertation's chapters illustrate

[18] As I soon show, the notion of the lyric as individualistic is a claim made mostly by critics theorizing the meaning of lyric poetry and should not be accepted as exhausting the full range of the forms it is practiced even in the West. Many lyric poems and poets, including those I discuss in the dissertation's chapters, have explicitly opposed this tendency and tested its boundaries to their extreme.

how pre-modern poetic devices from piyyut are repurposed to articulate the modern fate of the Jewish people.

"I Shall Praise" (Anonymous, 4th century)

Before diving into the main body of this chapter, I find it pertinent to elucidate the stakes and frustrations of this research through an inductive approach. I will present a reading of one piyyut, elucidating how it invites a lyric interpretation and simultaneously eludes it. The piyyut under consideration is "I Shall Praise" ("אביע זמירות"), originating in Byzantine Palestine in the 4th or 5th century. It belongs to the first historical stratum of the genre, commonly referred to as "pre-classical" piyyut. Like most piyyutim from this period, the poem reaches us without the name of its author(s). The 22 verses are organized in an alphabetical acrostic, and each verse consists of four short versets. Each verset, in turn, is crafted as a succinct two- or three-word subject-predicate sentence.[19] Notably, the last verset of each stanza alternates between bidding farewell to winter rains and welcoming spring's morning dew. These refrains are tied to the second benediction of the *Amidah* statutory prayer, a point I will revisit shortly.

Thematically, the poem consists of two marked halves. The first half (stanzas 1-11) deals with the seasonal changes in nature and the speaker’s response. Here are the first five stanzas of the piyyut, on which I focus my discussion:

I shall give voice in praise	אַבִּיעַ זְמִירוֹת בְּהַגִּיעַ עֵת זָמִיר
Now, as picking season has arrived,	וּבְזִמָּרָה אַעֲנֶה:
And I shall answer chanting:	לֵךְ לְשָׁלוֹם גֶּשֶׁם.
Leave in peace, rain.	
I shall look at my Keeper’s deeds,	בְּמִפְעֲלוֹת צוּרִי אַבִּיטָה כִּי נָעִימִים בְּעִתָּם
As they are pleasant in their time,	וּבְנֹעַם אֲמַלֵּל:
And I shall pleasingly utter:	בֹּא בְשָׁלוֹם טַל.
Come in peace, dew.	
The rain has gone away,	גֶּשֶׁם חָלַף וּסְתָו עָבַר
The winter has also passed,	וְהַכֹּל בְּצִבְיוֹן נוֹצָר:
And everything takes on its desired form,	לֵךְ לְשָׁלוֹם גֶּשֶׁם.
Leave in peace, rain.	
In the lovers’ garden	דּוּדָאִים נָתְנוּ רֵיחַ בְּגִנַּת דּוֹדִים

[19] Most of these longer versets are composed of two “semantic units” –as in this particular piyyut’s second verset, in which the noun phrase “picking season” is the subject. Some contain a conjunction that serves as a third word. These exceptions follow the organizing poetic and prosodic norm system of biblical poetry’s parallelism and show biblical sources' more pronounced influence on the pre-classical piyyut. See Benjamin Harshav, *Three Thousand Years of Hebrew Versification: Essays in Comparative Prosody* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 40–63, 72–76.

The mandrakes emit redolent scent	וְחָלְפוּ דְוָיִים:
Mending all dire aches:	בֹּא בְשָׁלוֹם טַל.
Come in peace, dew.	
The Earth is crowned with grain and wine,	הָאָרֶץ עֻטָּרָה דָּגָן וְתִירוֹשׁ
And every creature cries:	וְכָל יְצוּר צוֹוֵחַ:
Leave in peace, rain!	לֵךְ לְשָׁלוֹם גֶּשֶׁם!
[…][20]	[...]

The first stanza commences with an odic dedication, dedicating the verse to the arrival of spring and justifying the speaker's expressions as a response to the shifting seasons. In this stanza, the anonymous author strengthens the implied causal link between their poetic expression ("I shall give voice") and nature through a paronomasia, playing on the words "praise" (*zmirot*), "picking season" (*zamir*),[21] and "chanting" (*zimra*). This wordplay motivates the poet's declaration, establishing that, just as the environment displays spring in flowers and fruits, the speaker cannot help but articulate these transformations in song. Language itself reinforces the connection between nature and vocal expression.

The second stanza introduces a third party into the poem—God, referred to here as "my Keeper" (*tsuri,* literally: my creator; homophonous with "my rock"). Contrary to expectations, the author's portrayal of God's presence in the poem takes on a deductive and idyllic nature, emerging through observing the mundane world. In the fifth line, the speaker, already engaged in perceiving the world and its changes, describes them as "deeds" or "accomplishments" (*mif'alot*),[22] framing it in a noun-noun genitive construct state that calls for attribution, with the speaker's God as the second noun to whom the deeds are ascribed. The syntactic secondariness of the divine produces a natural theological argument in the poem's language. This notion reappears in the subsequent verset, where the speaker contends that these deeds are pleasant in "their time." Attributing timeliness to the changes evident in nature shapes them as a meticulously orchestrated system, once again implying the presence of the clockmaker.

In the next stanza, the totality of the world, "everything," is described by the obscure phrase "בצביון נוצר" (*be-tsivyon notsar*). This phrase creates consonance with God's moniker used in the previous stanza (*tsuri*), which is derived from the same Semitic root .y.ts.r.. It also marks a moment

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[20] Based on T. Carmi's translation, with modifications. See T. Carmi, "Go in Peace, Come in Peace," in *The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 203. For the full Hebrew and commentary, see Ezra Fleischer, "לקדמוניות פיוט הטל (והגשם) קרובה קדם-ינאית לגבורות טל [On Piyyut of Dew and Rain's Antiquity – a Pre-Yannai Qruva for the Powers Benediction]," *Kovez Al Yad* 8, no. 18 (1975): 93–139.

[21] It should be noted that "zamir," is an ambiguous word in this context, just as in the Song of Songs verse in which it first appears. While starting from the 10th century, as in Rashi's commentary, the word denotes the singing of birds, and later it comes to denote the specific (highly lyrical) bird the nightingale, it is more likely that in antiquity this term refers to the pruning of excess vines from tree fruits or a metonym alluding to the entire early spring period in which one starts picking summer fruits. See Tamar Katz, "על דרכן של מילים מקראיות קשות אל לשון ימינו (On the Transmission of Opaque Biblical Words to Modern Hebrew)," *Leshonenu* 76 (2014): 61.

[22] Following the language of Psalm 46:9.

of semantic ambiguity, as the phrase activates the polysemy of both words and offers no indication of directionality: The verb "נוצר" (*notsar*) can either mean "is created" or "takes shape" (from *tsura*, shape). The noun "צביון" (*tsivyon*) can mean "form," "shape" but also "desire" or "will." Put together, the line can mean anything from "everything is created according to [God's] will" to "everything takes the shape in which it is most desired [by humans]." However, as is often the case with piyyut's more complex wordings, the ambiguity of meaning calls on its readers to look for intertextual aid. In this case, the wording alludes to the discussion of the creation story in the Babylonian Talmud (*Masekhet Rosh Hashana 11a*), in which R' Yehoshua ben Levi says:

> All acts of creation were created with their full stature, with their full consent, and with their [full] form [*le-tsivyonan nivre'u*]. As it is stated: And the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their host. Do not read "their host [*tseva'am*]," rather read "their form" [*tsivyonam*].[23]

Reading Genesis 2:1 with midrashic playfulness, R' Yehoshua ben Levi uses "*tsivyon*" to mean "form," explaining that during the six days of creation, all things were created with their own consent, at their full size, and most actualized shape. The midrash allows us to dispel some of the piyyut's ambiguity by contrasting the verset "*betsivyon notsar"* to the midrash's "*le-tsivyonan nivre'u*." First, we can see that the piyyut's choice of verb (*notsar*- was created/was given form) collapses the more extended midrashic teaching into one word, pointing to the explanation that God created everything in its fullest form by using a verb that means both creation and shape. Second, by omitting the possessive suffix (*tsivyon,* instead of *tsivyonam*), the piyyut depersonalizes the phrase, making room for the midrash's narrative, which tells us that the worldly beings were created as they are following both God's will and the creations' consent.[24] The piyyut adds a third layer to this duality: the speaker's aesthetic pleasure in these shapes (see the repetition of the adjectival and adverbial forms of "pleasing," "*ne'imim" and "be-no'am").* Furthermore, as R' Yehoshua ben Levi argues on the same Talmud page that the world was created in the spring, we learn that nature presents itself to the speaker as if on the sixth day of creation. In that manner, the desire of God, nature, and the speaker synchronize, blurring the lines between the divine, the natural, and the personal.

This piyyut embodies several conventions of modern lyric poetry. It adopts a wandering perspective, almost ethereal in nature, as the speaker depicts the natural landscape, blurring the boundaries between internal and external realms through the adept use of alliteration and semantic ambiguity. Furthermore, the speaker's voice emerges as distinctly individualized, establishing a

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[23] "דאמר רבי יהושע בן לוי כל מעשה בראשית לקומתן נבראו לדעתן נבראו לצביונן נבראו שנאמר ויכולו השמים והארץ וכל צבאם, אל תקרי צבאם אלא צביונם."

All Talmud translations here and forwards are based on The William Davidson Talmud edition as made available on www.Sefaria.org, with modifications.

[24] There is an additional thematic connection between the piyyut and this Talmud segment, which makes the allusion more available for a larger portion of its recipients. As detailed below, the piyyut in question relates to the second benediction of the *Amidah* prayer, which changes twice a year, on the Jewish months of Tishrei (Fall) and Nissan (Spring). The Talmudic source from *Masekhet Rosh Hashana* is a segment of a longer discussion among the rabbis that are debating whether the world was created on Tishrei or Nissan.

profound personal connection to nature through linguistic techniques such as sound play and allusion, but also following the norms of the Psalms by personalizes the relationship to the divine – "*my* keeper/creator/rock." Additionally, the marginalization of God within these stanzas, evident through the syntactic and conceptual secondary position, challenges the expectations typically associated with ancient devotional poetry.

However, occurring once every stanza of the piyyut is a predetermined element that cannot be explained using a modern literary toolbox. The two refrains: "Leave in peace, rain" and "Come in peace, dew" cannot simply be read along the same lines as, say, Thomas Gray's "Ode to Spring" because these lines evoke the spring variants in the *Amidah* prayer, which is the prayer at the core of Jewish daily devotional practice. During the winter, the second benediction of this prayer ("*Gevurot*") includes the line "He who causes the wind to blow and the rain to fall." In most Jewish prayer customs, including the community in which this piyyut originates, this line changes during the spring and summer months, saying instead, "He who causes the dew to descend." Thus, the refrain of the piyyut reveals its original context as part of a *qedushta*, a special long form of piyyut meant to be performed in the synagogue alongside the *Amidah* prayer, adorning each of its short parts with a unique addition. Like other similar *qedushta'ot* dedicated to the seasonal change in the second benediction, the full piyyut is exceptionally long and extremely complicated in parts.[25]

Thus, the question of contextualization also invokes the issue of segmentation and formatting. As Virginia Jackson shows, while much of lyric theory deals with conceptual abstract notions of art and language as consciousness, the effect of lyric is sometimes reducible to as simple a matter as setting a text in clear short lines on empty white paper.[26] To exemplify this point, we can examine the cited piyyut in four different formats: the medieval manuscript from the Cairo Genizah,[27] the piyyut's first complete scholarly publication as arranged by Ezra Fleischer in 1975,[28] its 1981 rendition by the poet T. Carmi for *The Penguin Book Hebrew Verse*,[29] and its publication in the volume *The Early Piyyut*, edited in 2015 by Ophir Münz-Manor.[30] (See images on the following pages).

[25] Ezra Fleischer, "לקדמוניות פיוט הטל (והגשם) קרובה קדם-ינאית לגבורות טל [On the Antiquity of Dew and Rain Piyyut – a Pre-Yannai Qruva for the Gvurot Benediction]," *Kovetz Al Yad* 8, no. 18 (1975): 93–139.

[26] Virginia Jackson, *Dickinson's Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2005), 16–45.

[27] Item add.3360 of the Cambridge Genizah collection. Pages 13b and 14f.

[28] Fleischer, "On the Antiquity of Dew and Rain Piyyut."

[29] Carmi, "Go in Peace, Come in Peace."

[30] Ophir Münz-Manor, ed., "אביע זמירות בהגיע עת זמיר [I Shall Praise]," in *Hapiyyut Haqadum*, מהדורה ראשונה (Tel-Aviv: Tel-Aviv University, 2015), 29–30.

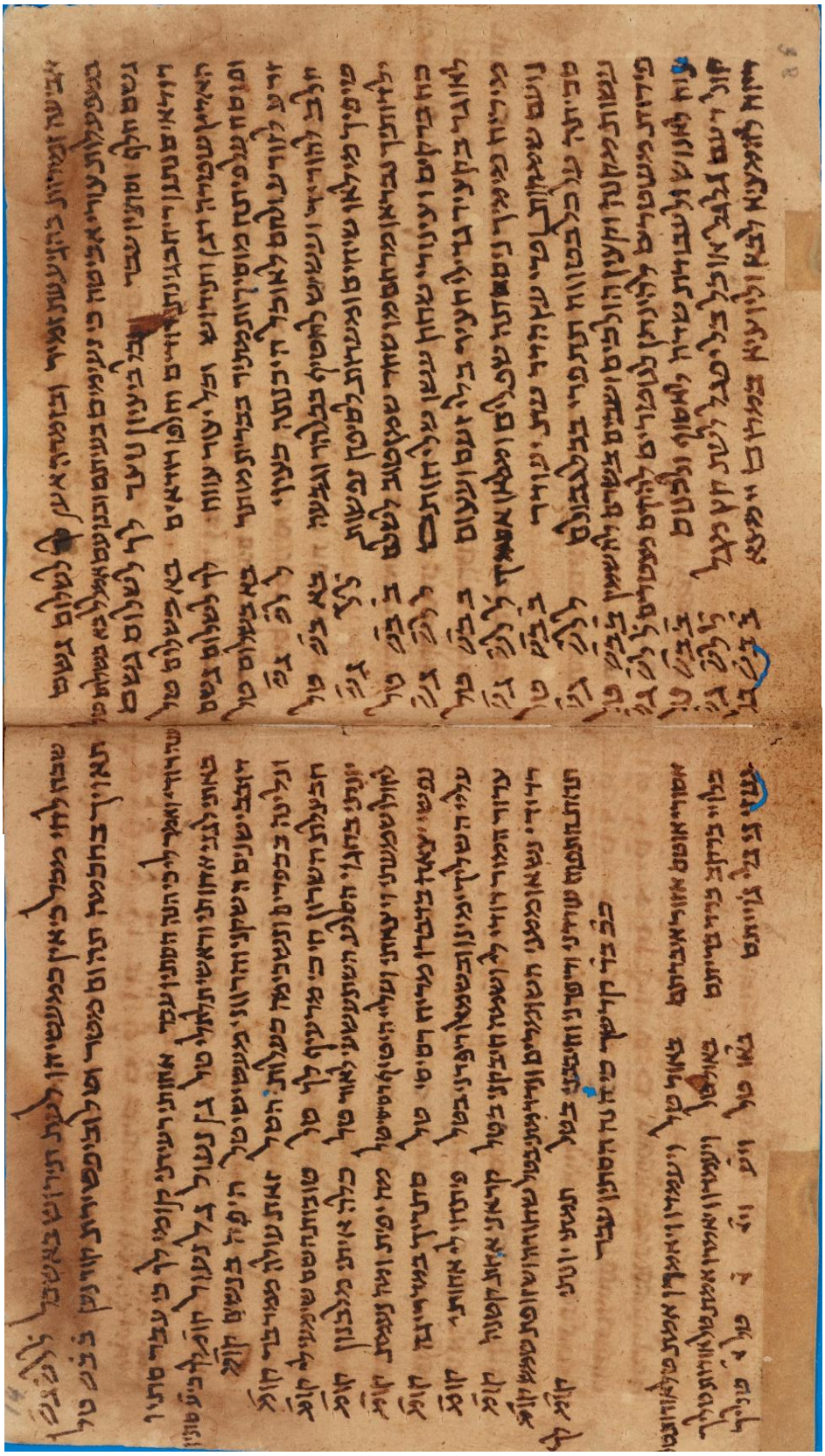
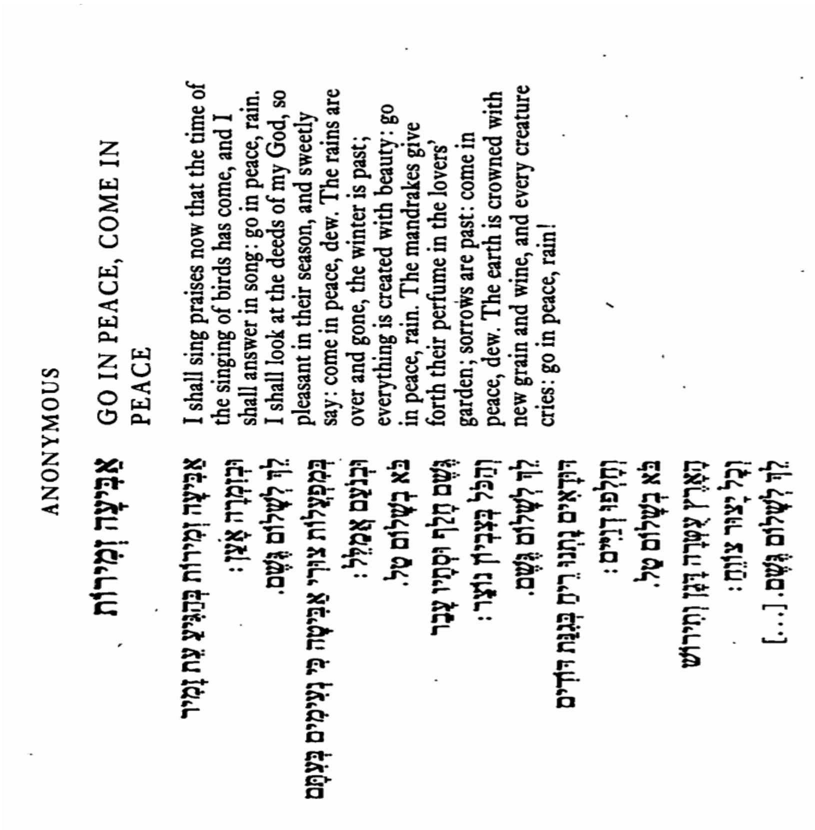


Figure 1: item add. 3360 from the Cambridge Genizah Collection


ANONYMOUS

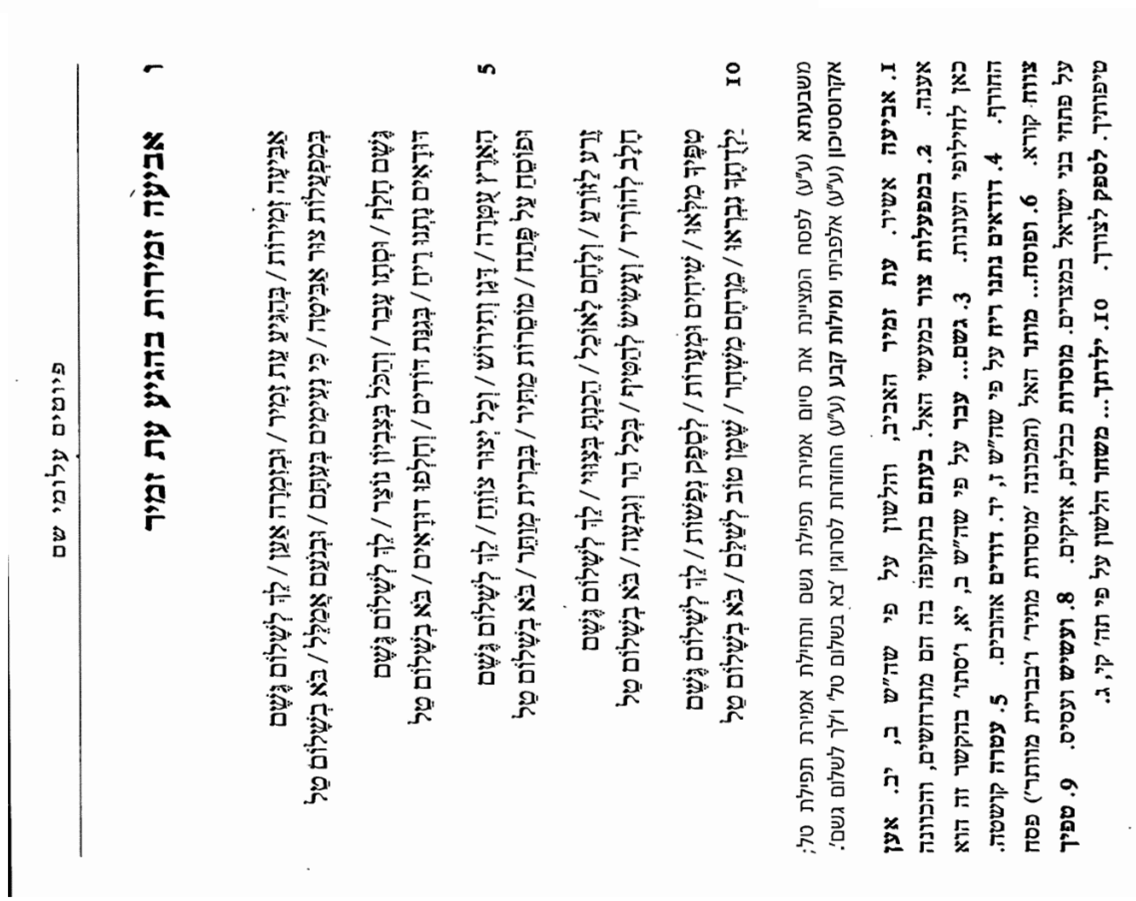
אֲבִיעָה זְמִירוֹת

אֲבִיעָה זְמִירוֹת בְּהַגִּיעַ עֵת זָמִיר
וּבְזִמְרָה אֶעֱן:
לֵךְ לְשָׁלוֹם גֶּשֶׁם.
בְּמִפְעֲלוֹת צוּרִי אַבִּיטָה כִּי נְעִימִים בְּעִתָּם
וּבְנֹעַם אֲמַלֵּל:
בֹּא בְשָׁלוֹם טַל.
גֶּשֶׁם חָלַף וּסְתָיו עָבַר
וְהַכֹּל בִּצְבִיוֹן נוֹצָר:
לֵךְ לְשָׁלוֹם גֶּשֶׁם.
דּוּדָאִים נָתְנוּ רֵיחַ בְּגִנַּת דּוֹדִים
וְחָלְפוּ דְוָיִים:
בֹּא בְשָׁלוֹם טַל.
הָאָרֶץ עֻטְּרָה דָּגָן וְתִירוֹשׁ
וְכָל יְצוּר צוֹוֵחַ:
לֵךְ לְשָׁלוֹם גֶּשֶׁם. [...]

GO IN PEACE, COME IN PEACE

I shall sing praises now that the time of the singing of birds has come, and I shall answer in song: go in peace, rain. I shall look at the deeds of my God, so pleasant in their season, and sweetly say: come in peace, dew. The rains are over and gone, the winter is past; everything is created with beauty: go in peace, rain. The mandrakes give forth their perfume in the lovers' garden; sorrows are past: come in peace, dew. The earth is crowned with new grain and wine, and every creature cries: go in peace, rain!

Figure 2 T. Carmi's rendition of the Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse, 1981 (above); From the volume of early piyyut edited by Ophir Münz-Manor for general Hebrew readership, 2015 (below).


פיוטים עלומי שם

1 אביעה זמירות בהגיע עת זמיר

אֲבִיעָה זְמִירוֹת / בְּהַגִּיעַ עֵת זָמִיר / וּבְזִמְרָה אַעַן / לֵךְ לְשָׁלוֹם גֶּשֶׁם
בְּמִפְעֲלוֹת צוּר אַבִּיטָה / כִּי נְעִימִים בְּעִתָּם / וּבְנֹעַם אֲמַלֵּל / בֹּא בְשָׁלוֹם טַל

גֶּשֶׁם חָלַף / וּסְתָו עָבַר / וְהַכֹּל בְּצִבְיוֹן נוֹצַר / לֵךְ לְשָׁלוֹם גֶּשֶׁם
דּוּדָאִים נָתְנוּ רֵיחַ / בְּגִנַּת דּוֹדִים / וְחָלְפוּ דוּדָאִים / בֹּא בְשָׁלוֹם טַל

הָאָרֶץ עֻטְּרָה / דָּגָן וְתִירוֹשׁ / וְכָל יְצוּר צוֹוֵחַ / לֵךְ לְשָׁלוֹם גֶּשֶׁם
וּפוֹסֵחַ עַל פֶּתַח / מוֹסֵרוֹת מַתִּיר / בִּבְרִית מְוֻתָּר / בֹּא בְשָׁלוֹם טַל

זֶרַע לַזּוֹרֵעַ / וְלֶחֶם לָאוֹכֵל / הַכֵּנָתְ בְּצִוּוּי / לֵךְ לְשָׁלוֹם גֶּשֶׁם
חָלָב לְהוֹרִיד / וְעָשִׁישׁ לְהַטִּיף / בְּכָל הַר וְגִבְעָה / בֹּא בְשָׁלוֹם טַל

טִפֶּיךָ מִלְאוּ / שִׁיחִים וּמְעָרוֹת / לְסַפֵּק נְפָשׁוֹת / לֵךְ לְשָׁלוֹם גֶּשֶׁם
יַלְדְּתֶךָ נִבְרְאוּ / מֵרֶחֶם מִשְׁחָר / שֶׁמֶן טוֹב לְשַׁלֵּם / בֹּא בְשָׁלוֹם טַל

משבעתא (ע"ע) לפסח המציינת את סיום אמירת תפילת גשם ותחילת אמירת תפילת טל; אקרוסטיכון (ע"ע) אלפביתי ומילות קבע (ע"ע) החוזרות לסרוגין 'בא בשלום טל' ו'לך לשלום גשם'.

1. אביעה אשיר. **עת זמיר** האביב, והלשון על פי שה"ש ב, יב. **אען** אענה. **2. במפעלות צור** במעשי האל. **בעתם** בתקופה בה הם מתרחשים, והכוונה כאן לחילופי העונות. **3. גשם... עבר** על פי שה"ש ב, יא, ו'סתו' בהקשר זה הוא החורף. **4. דודאים נתנו ריח** על פי שה"ש ז, יד. **דודים** אהובים. **5. עטרה** קושטה. **צווח** קורא. **6. ופוסח... מותר** האל (המכונה 'מוסרות מתיר' ו'בברית מוותר') פסח על פתחי בני ישראל במצרים. **מוסרות** כבלים, אזיקים. **8. ועשיש** ועסיס. **9. טפיך** טיפותיך. **לספק** לצורך. **10. ילדתך... משחר** הלשון על פי תה' קי, ג.

ח אַבִּיעָה זְמִירוֹת בְּהַגִּיעַ עֵת זָמִיר
וּבְזִמְרָה אַעֲנֶן / לְךָ לְשָׁלוֹם גְּשֶׁם
בְּמִפְעָלוֹת צוּר אַבִּיטָה כִּי נְעִימִים בְּעִיתָם
וּבְנוֹעַם אֲמַלֵּל / בֹּא בְשָׁלוֹם טַל
גְּשֶׁם חִלְּף וְסָתָיו עָבַר
וְהַכֹּל בְּיָצִיר נִצַּר / לְךָ לְשָׁלוֹם גְּשֶׁם
דּוּדָאִים נָתְנוּ רֵיחַ בְּגִינַת דּוֹרִים
וְחִלְּפוּ דוּדָאִים / בֹּא בְשָׁלוֹם טַל
הָאָרֶץ עוֹשֶׂרֶת דָּגָן וְתִירוֹשׁ
וְכָל יְצוּר צוֹנֵחַ / לְךָ לְשָׁלוֹם גְּשֶׁם
וּפוֹסֵחַ עַל פֶּתַח מוֹסֵרוֹת מַתִּיר
דְּבָרִית מָוֵתֵר / בֹּא בְשָׁלוֹם טַל
זֶרַע לַזּוֹרֵעַ וְלֶחֶם לָאוֹכֵל
הֵיכָנְתָה בְּצִיּוּי / לְךָ לְשָׁלוֹם גְּשֶׁם
חֵלֶב לְהוֹרִיד וְעָשִׁישׁ לְהַטִּיף
בְּכָל הַר וְגִבְעָה / בֹּא בְשָׁלוֹם טַל
טִיפָּךְ מִילְּאוּ שִׁיחִים וּמְעָרוֹת
לְסִיפֵק נְפָשׁוֹת / לְךָ לְשָׁלוֹם גְּשֶׁם
יַלְדוֹתַיִךְ נִבְרְאוּ מֵרֶחֶם מְוֹשָׁחָר
שֶׁמֶן טוֹב לְשַׁלֵּם / בֹּא בְשָׁלוֹם טַל

ח. טורים ראשונים מן הפיוט מופיעים גם בכ"י ט"ש H2/36 בנוסח זה: **הגשם יופטר / [והטל] יעוטר** / ואמרתי תזל כטל / לך לשלום מטר ק[בוא] ב[שלום] טל // **אביעה זמירות** / בהגיע עת זמיר / ובזמרה אען / לך לש[לום] גש[ם] וב[וא] ב[שלום] טל // **במפעלות צורי** / **אביטה** בטעמים / ובנועם אמלל // **גשם חלף** / **והסתיו עבר** / וקול התור השמיע // דודאים נתנו ריח/בגינת דודי לחרית / **נחלפו גשמים** // **הארץ עושרת** / דגן ותירוש / וכל יציר [צוו]ח // ופסח על פתח / ומוסרות התיר / **בברכות מותר** // [.....] / ולחם לאוכל / [הכ]נתם בציוי // **חלב להוריד** / **ועטים** לה[טיף] / בכל הר וגבעה /. כיוצא בזה בכ"י אוכספורד 2707/1, בנוסח הבא: **ל' פז'** הקר יבטל / והגשם יעוטר / ואמרתי תזל כטל / לך לשלום גשם ובוא בשלום טל // אביע זמירות / בהגיע עת יאמר / ובומרה אען // פז' הקור // **במפעלות צורי** / **אביעה** הטל / בנעימים אמלא / **גבורות הטל** // הקור וכ' // **גשם חלף** / **והסתיו** עבר / וקול התור השמיע // הקור וכ' // הדודאים נתנו ריח / בגינת דודי / נחלפו דודאים /. חקור וכ'. קטעים כפיוט זה נדפסו בידי זולאי בעתון הארץ י"ד בניסן תש"א (= מבחר תשבעים סימן 2). 6 **ביציון**: נראה משובש. זולאי תיקן: **בצביון**. 8 **וחלפו דודאים**: לכאורה: ונתחלפו הפרזים, או צבעם. זולאי תיקן: דויים. 11 **זפוסח על פתח**: ר"ל: ממשמש ובא. **מופרות מתיר**: כינוי לקב"ה. 12 **מברית מותר**: גם כן כינוי לקב"ה: **הותרן בברית**. 19 **מרחם מושחר**: צ"ל משחר. השווה גם לעיל ו, 149. **והוא על פי תהי** קי: ג: מרחם משחר לך טל ילדתך. 20 **שמן טוב** וכו': שיעורו: בוא בשלום טל לשלם שמן טוב.

Figure 3: A page of Ezra Fleischer's 1975 scientific edition

As Fleischer shows in his scientific edition of the piyyut, item add. 3360 contains one long *qedushta*, covering the fronts and backs of pages six to sixteen. This long piyyut contains seventeen sections. While all three modern publishers printed the same material based on this manuscript, the latter two (and I following them) single out the eighth section of the piyyut. In their arrangements, each scholar follows a different model. Working in his field of traditional textual criticism and philology, Fleischer aims to recover and make available as much of the piyyut as possible, including the original reading directions and those parts of the manuscript he deems to be alterations and later additions from different sources. Still, Fleischer moves to arrange the full piyyut in a more readily accessible poetic form for modern readers. In the manuscript, the original scribe or scribes show an acute awareness of the shape of the page they were writing on, demonstrating a precise aim to match each stanza's length as written with the width of the page. While some might assume that this practice is due to material scarcity, the vast blank spaces in the manuscript (as seen on pages 8b, 9b, 13f, and more) show that the scribes' held some aesthetic considerations.

Similarly, it is interesting to note how much the scribes relied on the reader's knowledge of scripture and prayers. In many instances, biblical idioms are abbreviated, for example, "dew droplets," "אגלי טל" is abbreviated as "א' טל," following the language of Job 38:28. The opening phrase of the prayer benediction, "Blessed be" ("ברוך") is similarly abbreviated, but using a unique notation, which starts with the opening letter *beit*, and extends its leg into an underline concluding with a loop -  . This notation stands in for the complete word and signals the points at which the praying community needs to return to the statutory prayer. When the piyyut gives way to citations from the Bible , those quotes appear in line with the end of the piyyut in a manner that does not segregate original content and scripture. These practices are evident in the eighth section of the piyyut, in which each stanza is laid out as one continuous line, ending with one of the alternating refrains. The refrains appear in each line following a short gap and are abbreviated to different degrees after the first five lines. Fleischer, however, breaks each stanza into two lines, marking the original's gaps before each refrain with a backward slash. Most of the original text's abbreviations appear in Fleischer's text as whole words without tracks of this change. The abbreviations that mark segues to the statutory prayer and scripture are similarly reconstructed but marked by square brackets and segregated by paragraph breaks. These changes result in the eighth section of the piyyut appearing to a modern reader as a chain of couplets isolated from any other writing modality.

T. Carmi, working within a literary model, goes even further in familiarizing the text to his readers. Carmi publishes only the five stanzas of this piyyut that I, following his choices, include above. In that manner, the poem stops with the natural description and omits the following stanzas that move to a more agricultural landscape, and later, at the piyyut's conclusion, express thanks to God in a more traditional Psalm-like manner. Furthermore, Carmi lays each stanza out in three lines, injecting the poem with enjambments that make it more readily lyrical for modern(ist) readers. Finally, Münz-Manor, who publishes his collection for the consumption of Hebrew

reading literati who are not necessarily familiar with the world of piyyut, takes a middle road. Each stanza is laid out as one line, with backward slashes separating each stanza's four versets.

While some of these publications present more of the source text than others, it is crucial not to confuse that feature with accuracy or loyalty to the piyyut's ancient context. We know surprisingly little about the pre-classical paytanim's self-theorization and how their original audiences would have reacted to Carmi's and Münz-Manor's segmentation. However, when it comes to a modern readership, it is easy to see that many more readers would recognize the lyric aspects of the piyyut in Carmi's anthology, which presents it as short and decontextualized text than in Fleischer's more historically situated edition. In the next two sections, I will address this tension between lyric effect and piyyut history, mapping the tendencies that put the two in opposition.

Section 1: Lyric Theory in the 21st-Century

Like "piyyut," "lyric" is a term that originated during antiquity and has been transmitted throughout history, from ancient Greek to contemporary writings. The question of this genre's antiquity, or rather, of the relation between the ancient poems marked as "lyric" and the abstracted notion of "lyric poetry" has gained new attention in recent years. Lyric theory has been divided between two prominent schools of thought in addressing this topic.[31] The first school, known as "New Lyric Studies" or "Historical Poetics" has brought renewed attention to the field by critiquing the concept of lyric *poetry* and describing it instead as a mode of *reading*. According to the two leading scholars of this school, Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins, in reading poetry as lyric, one individualizes it, thus segregating poems, poets, and readers from their biographical, historical, and societal contexts. Furthermore, Jackson and Prins show how "lyric reading" is the outcome of a long historical process of "lyricization," in which critics have argued for the de-contextualization of poetry, making this the only legitimate reading methodology in academia, education facilities, and print. While this process began in 19th-century romanticism, Jackson and Prins hold 20th-century New Criticism and post-structuralism's prioritization of "close reading" responsible for the proliferation of this reading to the point that no other primary reading strategy has remained.[32]

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[31] For details concerning the development and interactions between these two schools see Stephanie Burt, "What Is This Thing Called Lyric?," *Modern Philology* 113, no. 3 (February 1, 2016): 422–40; Claudia Hillebrandt et al., "Theories of Lyric," *Journal of Literary Theory* 11, no. 1 (2017): 1–11; Marjorie Levinson, "Lyric - The Idea of This Invention," in *Thinking through Poetry: Field Reports on Romantic Lyric*, First edition (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2018), 254–96; Thain, "Introduction."

[32] This approach was first articulated by Prins in *Victorian Sappho* (1999) and codified more explicitly in Jackson's *Dickinson Misery* (2005). The two later collaborated in editing *The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology*, writing the introduction as a clear and precise summary of their historical and theoretical position. Jackson has also written the 2012 entry for "lyric" in the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics.* She has recently returned to re-articulate and update her position on Anglo-American lyric poetry and theory in response to Paul Fry. See Jackson, *Dickinson's Misery*; Jackson, "Lyric"; Virginia Jackson, "Historical Poetics and the Dream of Interpretation: A Response to Paul Fry," *Modern Language Quarterly* 81, no. 3 (2020): 289–318; Yopie Prins, *Victorian Sappho* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1999); Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins, "General Introduction," in *The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 1–9.

For Jackson and Prins, this decontextualization is a methodological and ethical problem. As the scholars show, poems carry the markings of history and politics within their original social reality. Often enough, these marks are not only discursive but truly material, as they appear in the elements of the poems that are denied by close reading – the media in which the poetry is written (palimpsests, newspapers, diaries, correspondences), the paraphernalia the poets or editors surround it with (dates, signatures, dedications, notes), and more. In decontextualizing poetry from these aspects, close reading elevates an imagined abstracted version of any poem as if it exists outside of any specific manifestation. However, following Jackson and Prins, we can see that in effacing history from "poetry," close readings allow poems to become ideological blank parchments on which hegemonic forces compulsively write themselves. As readers attempt to de-historicize their reading, they move to separate and negate the elements they think of as "political" or "historically specific." However, this negation, intended to leave us with the merely apolitical, also affirms those political elements the close reader thinks of as nonpolitical and standard, i.e., those that most easily fit into the prevailing ideology of the reader's own historical moment. In attempting to depoliticize critique, close reading ends up admitting into view only those political perspectives transparent enough to survive its process of negation.[33]

In this manner, Jackson and Prins show how lyric readings subjugate poetry participants (readers, writers, and critics) to hegemonic ideologies of "proper" gender and sexuality (*Victorian Sappho)*, individualized capitalist consumerism (*Dickinson's Misery*), and cis-gendered patriarchal whiteness ("Historical Poetics and the Dream of Interpretation").[34] Jackson and Prins also maintain that while "lyric" is often cast as an ancient Greek genre distinction transmitted unto modernity, it is, in fact, a modern invention of tradition, originating in 18th- and 19th-century literary criticism, to later gain such ubiquity that practically all contemporary poetry has been "lyricized."[35] I address the historical side of this argument later in the chapter.

The other side of this debate focuses on a more formal understanding of lyric poetry and, in response to Jackson and Prins's criticism, thinks of it through genre and reader-response theories.[36] Most notable among this school's scholars is Jonathan Culler, who argues that while lyric poetry does not exist per se, the category of the lyric still "make[s] sense, [as] there is a Western lyric tradition, created by poets themselves who read each other, [and] who attempt similar

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[33] While Jackson and Prins argue against "close reading" as a category, it is crucial to distinguish between decontextualized reading—what Chana Kronfeld refers to as "closed-off reading" in seminars—and close reading itself. Although some close readers fall into the pitfalls described by Jackson and Prins, many integrate contextual elements effectively. More work is needed to explore the intellectual history distinguishing these two strains of readers, recognizing that close reading remains valuable when performed with contextual awareness.

[34] See footnote 32.

[35] Jackson, "Lyric," 830–33; Jackson and Prins, "General Introduction," 2–7. See also: Jackson, "Lyric Reading," *Dickinson's Misery*, 68-117.

[36] It should be noted that this position, exemplified by the work of Culler in the 21st century, differs from his earlier, more essentialist notion of lyric poetry, especially regarding the centrality apostrophe as an address to an absent figure that is only the outwardly addressed interiority of the speaker. Culler covertly agrees with much of Jackson and Prins' earlier criticism in this newer articulation. See Jonathan Culler, "Apostrophe," in *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (London: Routledge, 1981), 149–71.

things."[37] In his book *Theory of the Lyric*, Culler finds in this lyric tradition a type of poetry that is "fundamentally nonmimetic, non-fictional, a distinctive linguistic event" that "involves a tension between ritualistic and fictional elements - between formal elements that provide meaning and structure [...] and those that work to represent character or event."[38] Thus, these formal and structural elements - namely rhythm, repetition, apostrophe, and the hyperbolic dramatic monologue - inform the readers that the poem belongs to the lyric tradition, invoking the reader's existing concept of lyric poetry to guide them in their reading. At the reading's end, the reader (who might also be a writer) has a modified understanding of what lyric poetry is and can be, and the process starts anew.

As Marjorie Levinson points out, while thinking of this divide through a "form/history binary" is customary, it aligns more neatly as an argument between "Aristotelian realists against Baconian nominalists."[39] Following Levinson, we can think about the debate not as one of the nature of lyric poetry's existence (does it exist, or does it not) but as a debate on the level of inquiry on which we should theoretically analyze poems as lyrical. Framing it in such a manner, Levinson shows that the two schools align in using the term "lyric" to denote a Western form that delivers monological thought-like utterance while still disagreeing on this denotation's ontological nature. Culler argues that this monological form is a cohesive impersonal model that runs through literary history regardless of the different names it might take. Jackson and Prins argue that this monological form is a contingent entity that has historically taken different meanings and gained its current definition through its specific genealogy. Simply put, Culler's approach argues that studying a poem as lyrical only sharpens our articulation of that which is already contained in it and communicated by its formal elements. In contrast, Jackson and Prins' approach argues that in calling a poem "lyric," we shape it by overriding the textual material with our expectations and perceptions.

While most accounts of this debate attend only to the two approaches mentioned above, a third school of thought must also be addressed. This is the neo-Adornian approach to lyric theory, often left outside the discussion due to linguistic and departmental border lines. This third approach is based on Theodor W. Adorno's work on lyric poetry as a dialectical mode mediating the relations between the speaking "I" and the outside world, often in conjunction with the writing of Walter Benjamin and other Frankfurt school members. Scholars like Robert Kaufman have further developed this line of thought in recent years.[40] This third school argues that lyric poetry is a modality of thought available to all human beings regardless of its tradition. In this mode, the poem becomes lyric as it presents a subjective experience that a speaking consciousness is articulating

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[37] Jonathan Culler, "Extending the Theory of the Lyric," *Diacritics,* 45, no. 4 (2017): 6.

[38] Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015), 7.

[39] Levinson, "Lyric - The Idea of This Invention," 258.

[40] Robert Kaufman, "Lyric's Expression: Musicality, Conceptuality, Critical Agency," *Cultural Critique* 60, no. 1 (2005): 197–216; Robert Kaufman, "Lyric Commodity Critique, Benjamin Adorno Marx, Baudelaire Baudelaire Baudelaire," *PMLA* 123, no. 1 (2008): 207–15.
Some works by Chana Kronfeld also fit the general approach of the Neo-Adornian school, though Kronfeld relation to historiography leans closer to that of Jackson and Prins. See Chana Kronfeld, "Beyond Thematicism in the Historiography of Post-1948 Political Poetry," *Jewish Social Studies* 18, no. 3 (2012): 180–96.

in words, and as the specific articulation moves the speaking consciousness into reflection in a manner that decouples the experience and the speaking voice who experienced it. In this sense, as Adorno puts it in *Aesthetic Theory*, the content of lyric expression "articulates itself in formal structures,"[41] creating a conceptual movement of objectification in which the experiences transcend their origins and open the door to thinking of them in new ways, not available outside poetic articulation. In this manner, Robert Kaufman writes the following:

> Each art has its unique character; lyric's is to take language, the presumably bottom-line medium of objectivity [...] and, first to subjectivize it, affectively to stretch conceptuality's bounds in order to make something that seems formally like a concept but that does something that ordinary, "objective" concepts generally do not do: sing. [...] it [lyric] must then construct its own form of objectivity or coherence, though the logic is that of art [...] rather than strictly mathematical-conceptual logic.[42]

Thus, Culler's Aristotelian realism and the Baconian nominalism of Jackson and Prince are contrasted here with Hegelian phenomenology, which Kaufman supplements with Kantian and Heideggerian thought. This approach is specifically indebted to Hegel's notion, as stated in his *Lectures on Aesthetics,* of lyric poetry as the most liberated form of art (on which I write more later in this introduction). In this approach, lyric poetry does not exist ontologically in the text regardless of readership, nor is it only a discursive label that governs our interpretive horizon. Instead, lyric poetry is an event that happens in the meeting of subject and object, as the subject thinks of the object in a dialectical manner that reconstitutes both. Therefore, according to this theory, "lyric" is a modality of writing and reading that is only realized as a segment of objective language (e.g., a poem) that is contemplated reflexively by a living subjective mind. In calling a poem "lyric," we do so synecdochically to signal that it has the minimum conditions to engage in a lyric event of reading and thinking, in which the reader takes advantage of the poem's ability to "make concepts sing" and allows their mind to consider novel relations between ideas, images, and words.

This third approach also brings another axis of comparison into view, that is, the question of lyric poetry's political stance and its relation to society. In his influential piece "On Lyric Poetry and Society," Adorno argues that lyric poetry is inherently political by virtue of its ability to trace society negatively. According to Adorno, the "I" whose voice is heard in the lyric is an "I" that "defines and expresses itself as something opposed to the collective, to objectivity."[43] However, through the tenacious consistency of this "I"'s resistance to the outside world, lyric poems end up tracing the exact measures and nature of the collectivity and objectivity they deny.[44] In examining this negative mimesis, Adorno argues that we can look at the political and societal reality in a manner not afforded even by direct, intentional representation. As lyric poetry refuses the surface of society, it provides a much deeper insight into it, revealing not the regular names and concepts

[41] Theodor W Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Christian Lenhardt (London, 1984), 327.
[42] Kaufman, "Lyric Commodity Critique, Benjamin Adorno Marx, Baudelaire Baudelaire Baudelaire," 212.
[43] Adorno, "On Lyric Poetry and Society," 41.
[44] Adorno, 43.

of political life but the dynamical and dialectic reality constituting it. In this articulation, and true to Adorno's Marxist philosophy, we can think of lyric poetry's unique nature as a product of a double dialectical move. A lyric poem is a dialectical negative image of a social reality which itself is a product of material historical dialectics. In this manner, for Adorno and later neo-Adornian scholars, reading poetry lyrically is a politically committed practice (and, in my opinion, one that is also liberatory) through which we interpret the condition of our society anew and are moved into new political praxis, as lyric poetry is the most valid way to glimpse past any ideological superstructure into the genuine base of historical material dialectics, as they are inscribed directly onto subjective life.

Jackson and Prins show similar tendencies in viewing lyric poetry as political, but they do so by turning Adorno's idea on its head. While Adorno argues that by its intrinsic nature, lyric poetry goes behind the back of hegemonic ideology, Jackson and Prins show how the label "lyric" has been commodified and fetishized throughout the 20th century by conservative reading methodologies, so as to make it, and poems labeled as lyric, available for general, non-threatening consumption. The scholars' divergent methodologies feed into their different approaches. Adorno works with poems as circulated in the 20th-century press and implicitly thinks of them as divorced from a physical medium and language. Jackson and Prins, however, go to great lengths to recover the manifold ways the type of poems labeled "lyric" were initially published and circulated in many different media and how their original physicality situates the lingual forms within their context.

There is also a historical difference leading to these different methodologies. Adorno was writing when his notion of the lyric was in open competition with New Criticism and various notions of formalism. Jackson and Prins are writing in a world they define as one where that competition has long since concluded in favor of close, non-dialectical reading. Thus, Jackson and Prins imagine a different liberatory practice of de-lyricization, in which "once we see the outlines of that idea [of lyric poetry], that notion of poetry may not seem so stable or appropriate for other places and other times, and from that insight other histories of reading – and other ideas of poetry and its possibilities – may appear."[45] In trying to recover notions of poetry beyond the lyric, Jackson and Prins open the door to thinking about different notions of personhood set against the hegemonic ideologies. Sarah Dowling's *Translingual Poetics* is an example of such research that picks up this opportunity and runs with it.[46] I discuss this development further in the dissertation's third chapter.

Through these comparisons, we can summarize the differences and similarities between the three approaches to lyric theory, as seen in the Venn diagram in Figure 4. Both historical poetics and the neo-Adornian approach see lyric poetry as inherently political, whether as a liberatory

[45] Jackson and Prins, "General Introduction," 8.

[46] Sarah Dowling, *Translingual Poetics: Writing Personhood under Settler Colonialism*, Contemporary North American Poetry Series (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2018).

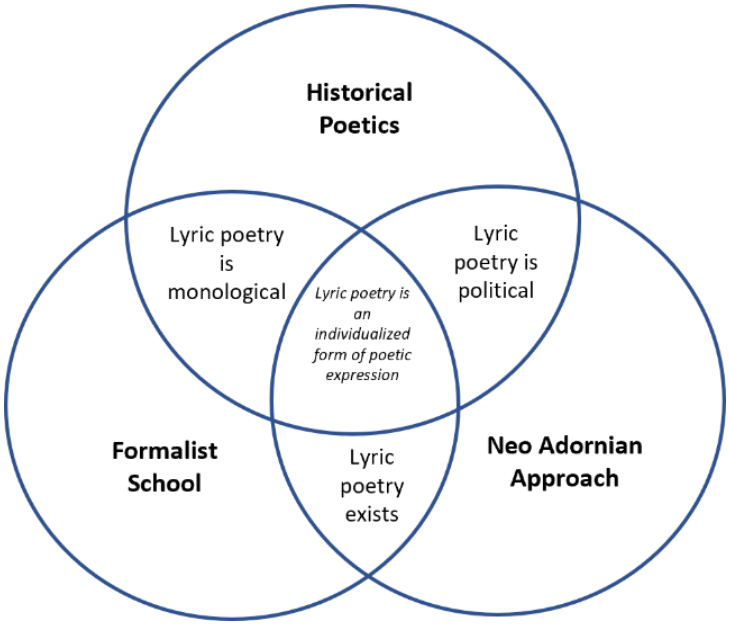

Figure 4: Venn diagram of different approaches to the lyric

medium or as the medium from which we must be liberated. The formalist school, however, considers the relationship between lyric poetry and political discourse as excessive to the form, arguing that "there is no one form of social efficacy for the lyric."[47] Neo-Adornian and formalist approaches to the lyric proclaim that lyric poetry exists beyond the critical genealogy of historical poetics, whether as a formal tradition or as a cognitive linguistic modality. Both the formalist and historical poetics schools define lyric poetry first and foremost as a monological form that is characterized by questions of address and soliloquy, whether by the power of the form (Culler) or forced reading convention (Jackson), while the neo-Adornian highlights lyric poetry's dialectical dualism, in which its externalized solipsism always confronts the outside world as well. However, despite these differences, all three approaches converge on a shared notion, according to which calling a poem lyric means that we read it as an individualized poetic expression that speaks in one cohesive voice and manifests one autonomous consciousness.

I argue that this definition itself is contingent and open to expansion. I contend that the shared approach among these perspectives is not inherent to the history or forms of lyric poetry. Instead, it is a product of the fact that all three approaches model their understanding of the genre after a modern European tradition without paying sufficient attention to premodern and non-European traditions that contribute to it. This modeling is overt in the case of the formalist and historical poetics schools. While the neo-Adornian approach does not strictly condition lyric poetry on a Western tradition, it tends to highlight lyric's existence as part of a history of bourgeois culture that is definitionally European, leading many of the mentioned scholars to focus on similar poetic devices and textual corpora as Culler and Jackson.

In focusing the gaze of lyric theory on the European poetic tradition, whether while arguing that it is an endemic part of the genre's history or seeing it is an anachronism, and whether it is intentional or habitual, all approaches create what Chen Bar-Itzhak calls "an unequal distribution of epistemic capital."[48] That is, all of the approaches, together and separately, create an episteme through which poetry can be thought of as lyric only by its similarity or difference from the agreed

[47] Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, 347.

[48] Chen Bar-Itzhak, "Intellectual Captivity: Literary Theory, World Literature, and the Ethics of Interpretation," *Journal of World Literature* 5, no. 1 (February 14, 2020): 79–110..

upon Western model. Furthermore, excluding non-Western poetry from this discussion is anachronistic, as it presupposes an unproblematized image of a secluded European culture, a culture that never existed. This image occludes from vision those moments in history in which Eastern and Western literatures interacted. Aamir Mufti points out this fallacy in his discussion of William Jones's 18th-century translations of "Asiatic" poetry:

> Jones's text is a key and early moment in what, in a series of works, Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins have called the "history of lyric reading," [...] This gradual transformation is one of the more marked literary developments of the modern era in the Western tradition. But this change in habits of reading and writing is in fact an intercultural and worldwide process, though it is important to stress that these transformations have been far from either linear or symmetrical in their unfolding. [...] [I]n fact the historical trajectory is a more complex one, for the prehistory of "lyric reading" in the West leads back to the constellation I have been discussing [...] - the Orientalist "discovery" of the "ancient" poetic traditions of the "Eastern" nations."[49]

Following Mufti's remarks, I see this non-linear and complex historical trajectory in the connection of the following four elements: lyric poetry, "Eastern" poetry, European lyric theory, and European Orientalism. I do so by identifying two significant turns in lyric poetry during the common era and showing how they are products of an intercultural East-West relationship. The first is the strophic turn during the Middle Ages, in which "material artifice," e.g., rhyme and other forms of linguistic sound play became the defining characteristics of lyric poetry.[50] The second turn is the phenomenological shift in lyric theory during the Romantic era, especially in the wake of Hegel's seminal work, *Lectures on Aesthetics*. I describe these two turns in the following section.

Section 2: The* Longue Durée *East-West History of Lyric Poetry

This section explores two historical transformations that have significantly shaped the contemporary understanding of lyric poetry as described in the section above. The first shift involves a strophic turn that takes place during the Middle Ages, marked by the rise of dense poetry that incorporates more sound play and figurative language. The second transformation is characterized by a turn toward conceiving lyric as individualized poetry that allows for personal reflection through self-expression. These historical developments laid the groundwork for the emergence of the notion, converged upon by all three approaches to lyric theory outlined above, that lyric poetry is a form of individualized poetic expression.

It is crucial to recognize that these transformations are not the initial instances in which the lyric genre is dislodged from one tradition and embraced by a new language and context. In its earliest manifestation in ancient Greek culture, lyric poetry, named for its accompaniment by a lyre, encompassed works written over three to four centuries in various Greek dialects, each with

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[49] Aamir Mufti, *Forget English! Orientalisms and World Literatures* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: Harvard University Press, 2016), 71.

[50] Roland Greene, "The Lyric," in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, ed. Glyn P. Norton (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 216–28.

distinct metric and melodic traditions. The scholars of the Alexandrian Library in the later Hellenistic period were the first to consolidate these poetic works under the label "lyric." This lyric canon then returned from North Africa to Southern Europe, where later Latin poets adopted it. Especially important in this context is the work of Horace, who positioned himself as the heir to the canonized lyric poets, adapting their Greek style to the contemporary Latin language and culture, and in the process divorcing it from its original musical context.[51]

In this manner, lyric poetry enters late antiquity as a "foundling" genre, already gifted with a legacy of adoption and adaptation. The Roman period also marks the last moment, for a while, in which "lyric" serves as a prominent category of literary thought, but even then, it is far from being regarded as a singularly important one. This relative anonymity lasted even as late as the 16th century, in which "it was common for poets and critics to think of lyric (when they thought of it at all) as a loose collection of odes, idylls, paeans, and celebratory compositions."[52] However, during the Renaissance, lyric leaps forward to new heights of importance, which I will now explore.

2.1 – The Strophic Turn of the Middle Ages

As pointed out by Roland Greene, lyric poetry was hardly known during the Middle Ages, but during the Renaissance, it gained a newfound prominence:

> Lyric, it might be extrapolated from a developing Renaissance consensus, is the kind of poetry in which material considerations, from simple rhymes to elaborate technopaegnia or graphic patterns, are nearly always recognizable and immediate. Materiality can be for lyric what a common national or political culture can be for epic, and what the social experience of the theatre can be for drama, namely a horizon that organizes individual responses into a collective reception, and allows the genre its distinctive stamp as a literary kind.[53]

Thus, Renaissance lyric poetry became a newly distinguished genre with a rise of textual devices accentuating typography, sound-play, and figurative language. Overall, I think we can understand this development as a process of densification, in which poets adapted new ways to express more meanings and emotions with fewer words, condensing what might be described prosaically with long sentences into short prosodic feet. This dense verse also becomes less descriptive in nature, as its concise style lends itself well to non-mimetic and ambiguous meaning. This ambiguity itself is a way of imbuing words with more potential meanings without enlarging the verse's length. These changes are often understood within the boundaries of European studies, finding their origins in Western Christian hymns and the popular songs sung by traveling troubadours. However, if we are to enlarge the scope of our attention a little, we can note that the trend is applicable on a

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[51] Alessandro Barchiesi, "Lyric in Rome," in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Lyric*, ed. Felix Budelmann (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 319–35; Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, 49–55; Shimon Bouzaglo, *חריץ מושחת: מבחר מהשירה הלירית היוונית במאה השישית לפנה"ס [Opening of Filth: Greek Lyric Poetry in the Sixth Century B.C.]* (Ra'anana: Even Hoshen, 2016), 9–14.

[52] Jackson, "Lyric," 826.

[53] Greene, "The Lyric," 218.

much larger scale–both temporally and spatially. The double trend in which poetry gains more material considerations while leaning towards dense, multilayered poetic devices begins much earlier than the late Middle Ages and is not limited to the Northwestern shores of the Mediterranean.

In fact, the rise of this densified poetry can be traced back as far as 4th century CE, when it begins to appear in greater frequency across the Mediterranean and the Middle East, in both European and Semitic languages. Among the earliest examples of this trend, we can count the pre-classical Piyyut in Hebrew (4-5th century CE),[54] the rhymed elevated prose genre of Saj' in Arabic (pre-Quranic),[55] the *Madrāše* hymnology of St. Ephraim the Syrian (306-373 CE), and the rhymed north-African Latin verse of St. Augustine (354-430 CE).

The strophic turn I describe is a change of degree and social importance more than an unprecedented invention. Several strophic structures precede this turn in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew poetry (the dactylic hexameter and biblical parallelism, for example). Likewise, occasional rhymes and acrostics are found in various sources, from Psalms to Virgil. Furthermore, even the possibility of systematically pairing words using their end sounds was available long before the term "rhyme" was coined, as in the manner Euripides has Hercules speak in rhyme while drunk in his play *Alcestis* (438 BCE). However, as these examples show, before the turn I describe, these devices appear sporadically, or worse, as a way to de-poeticize a text. We can find an illuminating theorization of this tendency in the writing of Quintilian, a first-century Latin rhetorician. He is quoted and interpreted by Hugh Kenner: "Quintilian is content to tell us the Greek name for the immediate device — *homoioteleuton*, "like endings" — and disconcerts a little by classing it with the pun, which he calls 'a poor trick even when used in jest.'" [56]

By the end of the 5th century, we find a diametrically opposite approach to rhyming all around the Mediterranean basin. Following the earlier manifestations listed above, densified verse became the governing norm of the poetry of the Levant and Arabian Peninsula during the 5th and 6th centuries CE.[57] This process has often been studied along linguistic and devotional lines, segregating Hebrew and Aramaic Jewish piyyut from Syriac and Greek Christian hymns from the Arabic Mu'allaqat and early Muslim poetry. Recently, new attention has been given to the cultural

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[54] Joseph Yahalom, "Midrashic Rhyme," in *Sources of the Sacred Song* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, n.d.), 62–85.

[55] Abdulla El-Tayib, "Pre-Islamic Poetry," in *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, ed. A. F. L. Beeston, The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 27–113; A. F. L. Beeston, "The Role of Parallelism in Arabic Prose," in *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, 180–85.

[56] Quintilian, *Instituto Oratorio*. 9.111.69. quoted in Hugh Kenner, "Rhyme: An Unfinished Monograph," *Common Knowledge* 10, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 383.

It is also important to note that the oldest, and perhaps most robust, history of rhymed poetry lies to the east of the geography that I am drawing on here, in the classic Chinese poetry of the 10th century BCE and onwards, for example in the *Shi* poems included in the *Shijing*, which was compiled during the Zhou Dynasty. Sadly, due to my own limitations, I am unable to bring the history of East Asian poetry into this study. I do however suspect that different yet parallel research which will explore the relations between Chinese and central Asian poetry will recover essential information for understanding world poetry.

[57] Harshav, *Three Thousand Years of Hebrew Versification*, 84–90; Zaki N. Abdel-Malek, *Towards a New Theory of Arabic Prosody* (The Tajdid online forum for Facilitating Arabic Studies, 2019).

exchange between these corpora and the extent to which their parallel development suggests mutual influence, akin to the Alexandrian exchange. In that manner, Ophir Münz-Manor uncovers a lively cultural dialogue between Byzantian Jewish, Christian, and Samaritan liturgies written in Semitic languages. For example, Münz-Manor explores some of the shared stylistics evident in the 6th-century Greek poetry of Romanos (d. 555 CE), a bilingual Syriac-Greek speaker who at one point became the court poet to the Emperor in Constantinople.[58] Laura L. Lieber charts a similar trajectory by examining theatrical elements in the performance of late ancient hymnography.[59]

Within this overall history, there is crucial importance in tracing the rise of rhyme as a major poetic device governing the new strophic verse. The earliest visible crystallizations of this phenomenon are in Hebrew and Arabic. In Hebrew, the adoption of rhyme into piyyut happens around the turn of the 6th century, marking the transition from the pre-classical to the classical period of byzantine piyyut. During that time, the works of notable paytanim such as Yanai and Eleazar Hakalir offer us a glimpse of the richness of this practice. Over the same period, classic Arabic meters and rhyming conventions were developing similarly. During the 8th century, the philologist and lexicographer Al-Khalil ibn Ahmad summarized and analyzed these rhyme and prosody rules, initiating this trend's rhetorical and literary criticism. In the two centuries that followed and in the domain of the Abbasid Caliphate, Hebrew and Arabic poetry grew closer while still maintaining their distinct forms in late antiquity.[60]

During the 7th to 9th centuries, rhyme also became a common device in the Carolingian Empire and Southern regions of Europe. However, it did not achieve ubiquity, as European critics and poets of the time often resisted and even rejected it.[61] This rejection was more stringent when it comes to major works of poetry that follow the example of Greek and Latin epics, but more permissive in the genres we nowadays categorize as lyric. Dan Norberg explains this leniency by the fact that "lyric poetry was often written in new forms free from the classical [i.e., Greco-Roman] models and in which rhyme could never be suppressed."[62] Later, the 10th-12th century poetry of Al-Andalus in Arabic, Hebrew, and Mozarabic languages marks a high point in the history of rhymed Mediterranean poetry. This is also a time in which we can pinpoint direct contact

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[58] Ophir Münz-Manor, "Liturgical Poetry in the Late Antique Near East: A Comparative Approach," *Journal of Ancient Judaism*, no. 1 (2010): 336–61.

[59] Laura S. Lieber, "Theater of the Holy: Performative Elements of Late Ancient Hymnography," *Harvard Theological Review* 108, no. 3 (July 2015): 327–55.

[60] Drory, *Models and Contacts*.

[61] Dag Ludvig Norberg and Jan M. Ziolkowski, "The Beginnings of Rhythmic Versification: Rhythmic Versification and Music," in *An Introduction to the Study of Medieval Latin Versification* (Washington, D. C: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 81–129; M. L. Gasparov, Gerald Stanton Smith, and Leofranc Holford-Strevens, "Greek and Latin Medieval Syllabic Verse: The Appearance of Rhyme," in *A History of European Versification* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press and Oxford University Press, 1996), 96–102. Both Norbeg and Gasparov argue that medieval Latin rhyme developed from Latin rhetorical prose, but point out that this explanation cannot account for St. Augustine's verse, which must be explained by an external influence which is "hard to identify."

[62] Dag Ludvig Norberg and Jan M. Ziolkowski, *An Introduction to the Study of Medieval Latin Versification* (Washington, D. C: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 34.

between Semitic and European vernacular poetries. The most outstanding examples of this poetic contact zone is the *Muwashahaat* and *Shir ha-ezor*, two parallel lyrical structures in Arabic and Hebrew that mix Arabic, Hebrew, and vernacular Romance dialects.[63]

In the final stages of this process, around the 12th-13th centuries, there is a notable surge in strophic rhymed verse forms, culminating in an explosion of poetic innovation. The sonnet, among the most renowned of these new forms, epitomizes a trend toward densification, where poets endeavor to achieve more with fewer lines. This gradual process of densification, unfolding over centuries, ultimately leads to the crystallization described by Greene. Consequently, in this late medieval moment, various poetic traditions, including Arabic, Hebrew, Latin, and European vernaculars, converge towards each other's norms. While maintaining distinctive characteristics, these poetic corpora become more alike than ever before.

Typically, each of these medieval developments in poetry is studied independently, overlooking the fact that they emerge simultaneously in neighboring cultures known for the exchange of goods, ideas, and texts. As María Rosa Menocal argues in her trailblazing work,[64] this refusal to think of Mediterranean cultures together stems from "the myth of Europe," which asserts that all European poetic norms must have originated west of the Bosporus and north of Gibraltar. Drawing from Menocal's work, the Medievalist literary criticism she inspired,[65] and the subsequent field of New Mediterranean Studies,[66] I argue that the history of rhyme, sound play, and densification during the Middle Ages can be traced jointly from Baghdad to Florence and beyond. Moreover, as part of this process, European literati experimented with shared forms, tropes, and

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[63] Maria Rosa Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History: A Forgotten Heritage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 91–114; Ezra Fleischer, "תחנות בהתפתחות שיר-האזור העברי (מספרד ועד תימן) [Stages in the Development of the Hebrew 'Muwashshaḥ' (from Spain to Yemen)]," in *Studies in Hebrew Literature and Yemenite Culture* (Jerusalem: Bar Ilan University Press, 1991), 111–60; Dan Pagis, *Hebrew poetry of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), https://www.nli.org.il/he/books/NNL_ALEPH990012218950205171/NLI.

[64] Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History*.

[65] Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Idols in the East European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100-1450*, 2009; Suzanne Conklin Akbari and Karla Mallette, eds., *A Sea of Languages: Rethinking the Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History* (Toronto ; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2013); Sahar Amer, *Crossing Borders: Love Between Women in Medieval French and Arabic Literatures*, 2013, https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812201086; Jerrilynn Denise Dodds, Maria Rosa Menocal, and Abigail Krasner Balbale, *The Arts of Intimacy: Christians, Jews, and Muslims in the Making of Castilian Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Alexander E. Elinson, *Looking Back at Al-Andalus: The Poetics of Loss and Nostalgia in Medieval Arabic and Hebrew Literature*, Brill Studies in Middle Eastern Literatures, v. 34 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2009); Michael Frassetto, *Christians and Muslims in the Middle Ages: From Muhammad to Dante* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2019); N Hermes, *The European Other in Medieval Arabic Literature and Culture: Ninth-Twelfth Century Ad.* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Karla Mallette, *The Kingdom of Sicily, 1100-1250 A Literary History*, 2011; Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History*; Ross Brann, "The Fire of Love Poetry: Hebrew Lyric," in *Medieval Lyric: Genres in Historical Context*, ed. William D. Paden (University of Illinois Press, 2000), 317–33; Adam Talib, *How Do You Say "Epigram" in Arabic? Literary History at the Limits of Comparison*, Brill Studies in Middle Eastern Literatures, volume 40 (Leiden Boston: Brill, 2018).

[66] David Abulafia, *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford, U.K.; Malden, Mass: Blackwell, 2000); Sharon Kinoshita, "Mediterranean Literature," in *A Companion to Mediterranean History*, ed. Peregrine Horden and Sharon Kinoshita, 1st ed. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell: Wiley, 2014), 314–29.

devices in what we now recognize as lyric genres. Thus, medieval lyric poetry is a contact zone, bridging various literary traditions.

Given that the adoption and development of poetic devices unfold over several centuries, encompassing intra- and intercultural changes, it becomes untenable to identify a single culture as the originator or claim autonomous creation of rhymed densified verse in any one language. Instead of seeking primacy or asserting the autonomous creation of rhyme in a specific language, it is more fruitful to recognize the interconnectedness and shared experimentation across diverse cultures during the Middle Ages.

An example of this circulation can be found in the history of Italian Hebrew rhyme during the 9th to 13th century. During the early 9th century, Italian Jewish piyyut writers practiced the strophic norms of Palestinian piyyut in which each stanza is defined by one end monorhyme (aaa bbb ccc, etc). During the time leading up to the 13th century, Latin and vernacular Italian poets were diversifying their verse, adapting earlier quantitative norms of versification to accented rhymes, thus producing poetry more similar to that in Semitic languages. However, these Latin and Italian poets differed from the contemporary Semitic norms by privileging multi-rhymed stanzaic schemas (such as abab, cdcd) and experimenting with alternating masculine and feminine rhymes. Following their neighbors' example, Hebrew poets started adopting this new invention, grafting it onto their existing poetic system. As Palestinian piyyut quantitative word rhythm conventions did not lend themselves easily to the versification of alternating masculine and feminine rhymes, some poets started borrowing the Andalusian Hebrew metrical system, which itself is an adaptation of classic Arabic meters.[67] In such a manner, Jewish Italian poetry of the 13th century was an amalgam of legacies, a mix of foreign and domestic revolutions in poetic languages.

I argue, therefore, that we should let go of the separating lines between the developments in different literatures of the region. We also need to relinquish our assumption that there must be a first culture that started these trends. Instead, I propose focusing on the overwhelming evidence supporting the notion of an intercultural poetic development traceable from the Middle East to Western Europe. When it appeared on European soil, this progression found its home in the lyric genre, which at that time was mostly thought of as an assortment of lesser forms and occasional poems. However, under the cover of its perceived lack of importance, lyric became a fertile ground for these experimental changes, encountering less resistance from traditionalists. Furthermore, as I show below, this densification and the textual devices associated with it played a crucial role in the next turn in the development of lyric poetry as Enlightenment and Romantic period European thinkers started to theorize its distinguishing features.

While contemporary scholars often focus on lyric poetry's classical "odic" nature to explain the romantic lyric theory, I argue that all too often they emphasize the emotive content of lyric poems (and even then, the classical focus might be overstressed). However, suppose we shift our gaze from content to form. In that case, we can see that lyric poetry, as it enters modernity, is

[67] Harshav, *Three Thousand Years of Hebrew Versification*, 113–20.

a product of a regional, cross-cultural progression that crosses and blurs national and devotional separations. It also forces us to slow our progression down the timeline from ancient Greece, and fully consider medieval lyric with its many varied forms. In this sense, as we think about the lyric genre on a global scale, we must remember that it was always global to begin with.

2.2 – From "lyric" to "Lyric" in The Long 19th Century

While the history of this densified rhymed verse as a Mediterranean contact zone is a forgotten chapter for many contemporary readers, it has not always been so. During early modernity and as late as the Romantic period, the history of the East-West lyric connection was a constant presence in the writings of European literati. The "Arabian hypothesis to the origin of rhyme," as it is sometimes referred to, appears as early as in Giammaria Barbieri's 1500 analysis of verse in Provence and has been repeatedly rediscovered and dismissed.[68] We can see the remnants of this cultural memory in John Milton's defense of his choice to write *Paradise Lost* unrhymed as he writes that "Rhime being no necessary Adjunct or true Ornament of Poem or good Verse, in longer Works especially, but the Invention of a barbarous Age, to set off wretched matter and lame Meeter."[69] More explicitly, Joseph Trapp, the first Oxford professor of poetry, writes in 1711 that Pindar "and the rest of the *Grecians*, receiv'd their Learning from the Nations of the East, the *Jews,* and *Phoenicians*."[70] In his 1772 highly influential *Poems Consisting Chiefly of Translations from the Asiatick Languages*, William Jones includes an ode by Petrarch among the translations from Arabic, Persian, and Turkish. Jones explains this choice thus: "The reader might compare the manner of the Asiatick poets with that of the Italians, many of whom have written in the true spirit of the Easterns," and adds: "Some of the Persian songs have a striking resemblance to the sonnets of Petrarch, and even the form of those little amatory poems was, I believe, brought into Europe by the Arabians."[71]

It is worth noting that during this early modern period, the poetic forms and devices that eventually became synonymous with lyric poetry were not yet subsumed by that label. Even the word "lyric" itself has not yet crystallized as the proper noun denoting the category it nowadays describes. Instead, "lyric" is used interchangeably with similar terms, most notably "ode."

The changes to this label and the preconditions that necessitated its change in the first place should be situated within the larger movement of modern thought, particularly the Enlightenment era. This shift can be seen as the emergence of a newly synthesized notion of "art" as an all-encompassing category—an umbrella term applicable to various forms of human creativity across multiple media. Today, it seems almost impossible to think of sculpture, painting, drama, literature, and poetry in complete isolation. However, before the modern period and even throughout its

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[68] Roberto M. Dainotto, "Of the Arab Origin of Modern Europe: Giammaria Barbieri, Juan Andrés, and the Origin of Rhyme," *Comparative Literature* 58, no. 4 (2006): 271–92.

[69] John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 11.

[70] Joseph Trapp, *Lectures on Poetry* (London: C. Hitch and C. Davis in Pater-Noster-Row, 1742).

[71] William Jones, *Poems, Consisting Chiefly of Translations from the Asiatick Languages. To Which Are Added Two Essays; I. On the Poetry of the Eastern Nations. II. On the Arts, Commonly Called Imitative* (London: W. Bowyer and J. Nichols; for N. Conant, 1777), xi, https://archive.org/details/poemsconsistingc00joneiala.

earlier half, these terms were often discussed separately with no appeal to their affinity, or, alternatively, they were discussed in alignment with other forms of human cultural production, such as rhetoric, philosophy, and mystical practice. One possible clear turning point in this process can be found in the 18th-century works of Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten and Henry Home, Lord Kames, who engaged art as a more fully synthesized system or category. Only with the delineation of art as a distinct category do we begin to see a new way of referencing lyric as a sub-category or as its own art form.

In this manner, during the early modern period, when the word "lyric" does appear as marking a significant classification, as in Antonio Sebastiano Minturno's 1559 volume *De Poetica* or Charles Batteux's 1747 book *The Fine Arts Reduced to a Single Principle*,[72] it is nestled among other newly reinvigorated terms and applied to a miscellaneous poetic category, encompassing the various forms that are more emotive and, therefore, not mimetic enough to be included in the more prestigious genres of epic and drama. However, during the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Enlightenment and Romantic critics focused on this nonmimetic capability of lyric poetry and, paired with the devices of densified verse, made it the crux of its definition and proof of its elevated poetic nature. Following their work, on which I elaborate in this subsection, the definition of lyric changes significantly, to the degree that it becomes a near-synonym for modern poetry. In this manner, while the 1823 entry for "Lyric Poetry" in Encyclopedia Britannica contains only a few lines regarding the lyric poetry of Greece and Rome, the 1911 edition covers over two pages and includes the assertation that "lyrical poetry is, really, nothing more than another name for poetry itself."[73]

Virginia Jackson explains the leap in the importance and scope of the term "lyric" during this time through the rise of professional literary criticism, arguing that "since all along the lyric had been more idea than genre," then "in modernity [it] became an idea that could transcend genre." Therefore, according to Jackson, by the end of the 18th century, "the idea of the lyric needed critics to understand and further it, and critics needed the slippery idea of the lyric as a field for debate."[74]

I argue that this hypothesis anachronistically assumes the universality of literary discourse common today, projecting it to the highly racialized discussions of the time. In that manner, Jackson omits two crucial elements that defined lyric poetry and theory of the 18th and 19th centuries: the questions of Orientalism and racial knowledge. As Aamir Mufti points out, literary criticism of the period was far from limited to the materials that nowadays define it and often included what nowadays is the domain of anthropology, Middle Eastern studies, history, theology,

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[72] James W. Biehl, "Antonio Sebastiano Minturno's De Poetica: A Translation" (Ph.D. Dissertation, USA, Southern Illinois University, 1974); Batteux, *The Fine Arts Reduced to a Single Principle*.

[73] Unsigned, "Lyric Poetry," in *The Encyclopedia Britannica: Or, A Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, and Miscellaneous Literature* (Edinburgh: Printed for A. Constable, 1823); Edmund Gosse, "Lyrical Poetry," in *The Encyclopedia Britannica. A Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, Literature and General Information.* (Cambridge, England; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1911).

[74] Jackson, "Lyric," 830.

and political science.[75] Therefore, as Rei Terada argues, we need to think of these theoretical texts as the onset of a dialectical move which constitutes the categories of "racial" and "non-racial" knowledge[76]; that is, for the purposes of our discussion, the distinction between universal forms of poetry like the lyric and forms of poetry that are marked by their connection to a particular grouping like piyyut. It is important to stress the degree to which this move is dialectical, that is, how each category still carries the negative imprint of its other. As Terada shows, any discussion of a "universal" category as non-racialized is preconditioned by our definition of the categories of "racial" and "race," and, therefore, by the idea that we can identify racial characteristics and show their absence.[77] Therefore, to follow Mufti and Terada, I bracket the by now assumed universality of romantic lyric poetry and examine the complicated and highly racialized intellectual progression through which this genre gained its meaning. My research shows that it is not the blurriness of the term "lyric" that made it a preferable "field for debate" for the emerging field of literary criticism but its legacy as a contact zone and the ways new generations of orientalist scholars analyzed it. These aspects made the lyric genre the most available field to mediate the line between universal aesthetics and culture-specific poetic customs.

Lyric theory comes to mediate universal and differential aesthetics during modernity in a twofold manner. First, the notion of lyric poetry as nonmimetic and as constituted by dense indirect verse allows 18th- and 19th-century thinkers to de-emphasize lyric poetry's relation to objective reality and emphasize the role of human consciousness in mediating relations between world and words. Second, the history of lyric poetry as an East-West cultural contact zone meant that it did not reside solely in the domain of classical taxonomy (even if the name was borrowed from this context), and therefore, it was easier for modern thinkers to use lyric poetry as a cross-cultural axis of comparison – a shared background against which one can evaluate the differences between Eastern and Western poetries. While earlier examples of orientalist thinking about lyric poetry manifest these two strains of thought separately, as time progresses, they grow closer together until reaching their fullest convergence in Hegel's work of the early 19th century. In this work, Hegel defines lyric poetry as the most individualized form of poetry that, in its individualization, also carries the imprint of societal understanding of reality. To exemplify this development, I will quickly summarize a few early moments of this progression, culminating in a reading of Hegel.

This progression thinks along the lines laid out by Denise Ferreira da Silva's critique of the Enlightenment, fitting in with what she names "strategy of engulfment," that is, "the productive violent act of naming," which is the use of scientific concepts (in this case, scientific philosophy of "lyric") in a manner that explains the conditions of the "others of Europe" as variations of those found in Europe.[78] In this coerced conceptual inclusion, which mirrors and coincides with colonial physical forced inclusion, there is a double separation between content-form and subject-object.

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[75] Mufti, *Forget English!*
[76] Rei Terada, "Hegel and the Prehistory of the Postracial," *European Romantic Review* 26, no. 3 (2015): 289–99.
[77] Terada, 290.
[78] Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race*, Borderlines 27 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 29–30.

In this separation, and in a manner that takes us from earlier Enlightenment to the Romantic period, the scientific method (which included the social sciences and the humanities) is perceived as an objective universal form of thinking that consists of all humans and civilizations. Therefore, the people who actualize scientific methodology in practice are the perceived subjects of history who, through this praxis, can be thought of as taking part in the universal development of all humanity. At the same time, the content of the sciences, the actual humans and civilizations upon which the scientific method is executed, are rejected from the category of the universally human, becoming "particular" and only the objects of this research.[79] Da Silva argues that strategies of engulfment are always the first of two steps. The successful engulfment of the non-European difference always leads to the conceptual its subsuming in what she calls "obliteration." This second step, which can and did come with the physical obliteration of people and communities, cuts the former objects of research out of universal science completely, symbolically "obliterating" them from the view of the scientists. That is, once the science is established as universal by including materials from all around the world, new waves of scholars turn to argue that these objects are too particular, too foreign to the universal science, and therefore should be excluded from it and dealt with in other venues. I will return to this point after discussing Hegel and reflecting on the strange transparent afterlife his definition of the lyric has today.

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An early moment in the development I am charting can be found in an unpublished work by the philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder, titled "Essay on a History of Lyrical Poetry," composed around 1764-8. While this text was not published in any form until after the author's death, some snippets of it made their way into later writings.[80] In this essay, Herder argues against the divine origins of poetry, contending instead that poetry must have had many origins, as it can only be a development of nearly spontaneous occurrences of speech as emotive reactions to the world. In this context, Herder focuses his discussion on "lyrical poetry," specifically the ode, and remarks that to define it, one must think about the varied strains of odes around the known world:

> But, what is ode? The Greek, the Roman, The Middle Eastern, The Skaldic, the ode of more recent origins, they are not quite like one another; which of them is the finest, the others merely being deviations? I could easily demonstrate that most investigators have decided the question in accordance with their own favorite notions, because each one drew his concepts and standards from only *one* kind, manifested by *one* people, and declared the others deviations. The impartial investigator will consider all kinds equally

[79] As Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin show, Western mobilization of "universality" in the imagination of other people has roots already in the universalizing tendencies of Paulinian Christianity. See Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin, "Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity," *Critical Inquiry* 19, no. 4 (1993): 693–725.

[80] Johann Gottfried Herder, *Johann Gottfried Herder: Selected Early Works, 1764–1767*, ed. Ernest A. Menze and Karl Menges (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 261–62.

> worthy of his commentary, and he therefore will seek first to create for himself a totality of history […][81]

Herder ties the question of the nature of lyric poetry to the question of its variations, arguing that only by understanding the totality of differences and similarities can we learn what essentially defines it. Herder then focuses his discussion on what he believes to be the earliest form of ode: the hymn to divinity – be that the divine pagan gods or the God of the Bible. In a classic opposition of Greek and Hebrew antiquity, Herder examines early hymns of ancient Greece and those that he constructs as antediluvian Hebrew devotional poems. He points out that both describe the world as already imbued with divinity, detailing natural events as the objects of God's (or gods') actions and subsequently allowing the speaker to ask for the gods' (or God's) favor.

Therefore, Herder argues, in describing the world as if in constant godly action and by praying for that world to change, the lyric poets of old do not care for mimetic representation. Instead, they focus on figurative language that illustrates the gods' (or God's) involvement in the world and the emotive language that validates the poets' requests. In this manner, we must understand the differences between these corpora as products of the poets' different faiths. Their ideas of their gods' (or God's) morality, power, and domain alter how the poet describes the relation between the world, the speaker, and the divine.

In this essay by Herder, we see how questions of nonmimetic representation are tied to that of cultural difference, and how early modern notions of the lyric change once they are placed into a comparison between what the German Herder thinks of as "Eastern" and "Western" traditions. For Herder, in discussing the genre of the ode, we must consider poetry that does not attempt to replicate in words the world as it is but rather presents the world as the poet believes and wishes it to be. Therefore, when faced with different poetic conventions of expressing faith and desire, we must consider the mediating power not only of the individual poet's mind but also the entirety of the belief of this poet's society.

In England in 1772, William Jones offers a similar account, one that like Herder's connects nonmimetic poetry and questions of societal relativism. In his above mentioned collection of translations, Jones supplements the poems with two essays aimed at facilitating the readings of these foreign poems for a British audience. In the first essay, "On the Poetry of the Eastern Nations," Jones turns to explain the essence of "Eastern" poetry through an environmental hypothesis He correlates the geography, climate, agriculture, and customs of the societies he writes about (Arabian, Persian, Indian, and Turkish), arguing that the interactions of these elements determine the poets' choice of figurative language and style. For example, he argues that in "Arabia the heat of the sun, which must be very intense in a climate so near the line, is tempered by the shade of the trees, that overhang the valleys, and by a number of fresh streams, that flow down the mountains: hence it is, that almost all their notions of felicity are taken from freshness, and verdure."[82] Jones' second essay complicates the first, arguing that true poetry, including that which

[81] Herder, 71.
[82] Jones, *Poems, Consisting Chiefly of Translations from the Asiatick Languages*, 180.

is found "among the Hebrews, the Greeks and Romans, the Arabs and Persians,"[83] reaches its effect "not by imitating the works of nature, but by assuming her power, and causing the same effect upon the imagination, which her charms produce to the senses."[84]

In the intersection of the two essays we can see that Jones, at this point without claiming the word "lyric," tries to distinguish between mimetic and non-mimetic poetry, showing how, in the case of non-mimetic poetry that "assumes nature's power," natural and societal specificities appear to adorn the true imaginative power of art. While this tendency is universal, the specificities of style and figurative language are determined by the poet's social, geographical, and ethnic origin.

Once we take note of this tendency to tie questions of lyric, odic, and nonmimetic poetry with questions of cultural differences and non-European poetry, it almost becomes unavoidable to see it everywhere around 18th- and 19th-century Europe. It is present in Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock's poetry and essays and in Robert Lowth's lectures, in Lord Byron's 1815 volume *Hebrew Melodies* and is the core of Goethe's 1819 *East-West Diwan*.[85] This latter example is particularly interesting for our discussion, since in the book's 1827 edition, to which Goethe added an extended essay explaining the project, the poet presents us with a clear taxonomy of the "natural forms of poetry," which are the epic, the lyric and drama. Unlike most of his contemporaries, Goethe does not conceptualize these forms as exclusive but rather as modes that can be combined and contrasted within one poetic piece.[86] Afterward, Goethe remarks that Oriental literature "does not include drama" and that "had a dramatic poet been enabled to arise, their whole literature would have gained an altered outlook."[87] In that manner, the question of cultural difference is attested to by a different mixture of the three natural forms, not specifically by lyric poetry unto itself, which, like the epic, is a form shared globally.

These select European literati are foundational figures in modern literary thought, especially in English and German literature. Nevertheless, contemporary scholars often extract their works from their original context, downplaying the Enlightenment and Romantic period writers' engagement with the "Oriental" other. Consequently, in several of the sources I laid out in the first section of this chapter, this engagement is discussed as a mere curiosity, a dead end, or an irrelevant historical tangent. This (lack of) reading is often carried out in the name of progressive

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[83] Jones, 211.

[84] Jones, 216.

[85] Adam Nagi Ahmed, "Carrying Over: Poetry as Translation in Early Romantic Poetics" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Berkeley, CA, University of California, Berkeley, 2017); Hamid Dabashi, *Persophilia: Persian Culture on the Global Scene* (Harvard University Press, 2015); Katrin M. Kohl, "I. The Early Hymns in Klopstock's Theoretical Writings," in *I. The Early Hymns in Klopstock's Theoretical Writings* (De Gruyter, 2018), 15–36, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110873139-005; Yosefa Raz, "Imagining the Hebrew Ode: On Robert Lowth's Biblical Species," *Prooftexts* 40, no. 1 (2023): 85–109; Navid Naderi, "World Literature as Persian Literature," in *Persian Literature as World Literature*, ed. Mostafa Abedinifard, Omid Azadibougar, and Amirhossein Vafa, Literatures as World Literature (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 225–47; Galili Shahar, "Goethe's Song of Songs: Reorientation, World Literature," *Prooftexts* 40, no. 1 (2023): 110–39.

[86] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *West-East Divan: The Poems, with Notes and Essays*, trans. Bidney (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 2010), 227–28.

[87] von Goethe, 228.

causes and in the hopes that modern classrooms can be more inclusive by avoiding these "othering" contexts. However, I find it essential to convey how avoiding these texts serves the "myth of Europe," which propagates the notion that European thought developed autonomously, independent of external influences and outside sources of inspiration. Despite this myth, the examples above vividly illustrate the critical role played by exposure to the East and Orientalism in the evolution of lyric theory and demonstrate how non-European cultures have always already been included in Western thought. As we have started to see in the examples above, this is the case with the development of the term "lyric." The attempt to contextualize non-European artistic expressions and the distinct characteristics of poets' respective societies and languages leads this term to mediate between the poet's "I" and their "society."

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This Orientalist perspective on lyric poetry sets up the next major shift in lyric theory, which occurs in Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*.[88] Hegel first delivered a version of these lectures in Heidelberg in 1818, and they were compiled for publication in 1835, a few years after his death. In these lectures, Hegel contends that art is a tangible manifestation of the spirit, in the sense of *Geist*, realized through artistic production and theory. Employing his characteristic historical-philosophical approach, Hegel presents a comprehensive account of all human civilization, arguing that history develops in a series of "moments" of *Geist*. These moments are arguably chronological, though at times they are also presented as structural conceptualizations of chronological development, organized by their dialectical progression from one phase to the next. Within this framework, Hegel argues that art emerges in the wake of religion, and it is destined, or rather, that its inner dialectics necessitate it to dissipate into the next moment of spirit, philosophy.

Within the moment of art, Hegel organizes the different artistic fields into a taxonomy that unfolds as a progressive developmental narrative. This hierarchy is always dialectical in the sense that it negates itself: While it privileges the later steps in its progression as closer to the full realization of spirit, it also argues for the prior steps to be more themselves, in this case, more "art." In this progression, lyric poetry, or more specifically, what Hegel labels as "romantic" lyric poetry, occupies the penultimate position (with drama having the ultimate spot) as one of the most developed forms of art. The romantic lyric is close to the realization of art, i.e., art's end, as Hegel considers it the most subjective form of art, representing an artistic articulation that not only happens in individuation but also maps the preconditions and ramifications of individualization. While Hegel is not the first to discuss lyric poetry in such terms, he is among the first to augment inductive definitions of the genre with deductive reasoning. This shapes his explanation of lyric poetry not only as a description of past poetry but as an argument concerning future poetry (of which he thinks there won't be much). To understand this distinction and see how it fits within the larger project of this chapter, I will first present the two axes of Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*,

[88] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. Thomas Malcolm Knox (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press, 2010).

moving to explain how they define the difference between Oriental "symbolic" lyric and European "romantic" lyric.

In his lectures, Hegel's first axis examines the relationship between art's conceptual content and its capacity to convey sensory representations. Hegel categorizes art that can grasp abstract concepts but struggles to anchor them in sensory experiences as "symbolic." This classification is associated with Middle Eastern cultures, including the Egyptians, Zoroastrians, Hindus, Muslims, and Jews. In contrast, art that focuses solely on sensual beauty without transcending it into conceptual realms is termed "classical" and is linked to the ancient Greek world. The pinnacle of this taxonomy is occupied by "romantic" art, which dexterously combines the best aspects of symbolic and classical arts. According to Hegel, this type of art thrives uniquely in Western Christendom due to the special relationship fostered by Christianity between faith, freedom, and spiritual interiority.

The second axis of differentiation in Hegel's analysis charts art's trajectory based on the tension between its material constraints and the freedom of the creative human spirit. This taxonomy is a trifold fractal pyramid comprising three tiers, with each top tier further divided into three sections. At the first division's lower levels, Hegel places architecture and sculpture, while the top tier encompasses what he refers to as "the romantic arts": painting, music, and poetry. These romantic arts diverge in their medium—distinct from the "heavier materials" of architecture and sculpture—and their emphasis on temporal rather than spatial comprehension. Among the romantic arts, poetry occupies the highest position. In this form of expression, the creative individual is unshackled from material constraints, as language becomes the medium for projecting their consciousness outwards. Hegel posits that poetic language is superior to the media of other arts, as it appeals to sensory apprehension by invoking already-internalized notions of sensory experiences, thereby adding a wrinkle to the tension between objective reality and subjective perception in an unparalleled manner within the realm of art.

In discussing poetry, Hegel again divides the category into three smaller headings: epic, lyric, and dramatic. Hegel's definition of the term lyric is likewise divided into three subheadings: "content," "form," and "the stage of consciousness and culture at which the lyric poet is when he discloses his feelings and ideas."[89] Regarding content, Hegel draws on earlier Enlightenment-era definitions of lyric as a genre that deals with subjective matters, making it less inclined towards mimetic representation of the world. Hegel maintains that this definition does not bar any specific topic from the realm of lyric poetry. Still, in lyric poetry, "even the most factual and fundamental matter must appear as subjectively felt, contemplated, portrayed, or thought."[90]

According to Hegel, this subjective appearance is achieved through lyric poetry's formal aspects, i.e., the "concerns [of] the external form and objective character of the lyric work of art. The chief things here are meter and musical accompaniment." [91] Here, Hegel identifies an epistemological advantage in the lyric's meter, rhyme, and sound play. These poetic devices enable

[89] Hegel, 1113.
[90] Hegel, 1123.
[91] Hegel, 1135.

the poet to generate linguistic meaning separated from the words' referential mimetic function. In other words, by placing words in specific metric units, coupling them in rhyme, or employing any of the various devices described by Roland Greene as the signature "technopaegnia" of Renaissance lyric and by me as "densified verse," the poet infuses new idiosyncratic meaning into the words, imparting a personal "spiritual" essence to the "objective" language. In doing so, the poet materializes the defining aspect of lyric poetry as poetry of subjectivity within the form of the poem itself. Thus, as Simon Jarvis argues in his discussion of the topic, in Hegel's thought, "the *Gleichklingeln* of rhyme rings us back to ourselves in a way that is indifferent to firmly regulated measurements of time. Rhyme marks off the time of innerness against the world's time. Rhyme, through the return of similar sounds, does not merely lead us back to those sounds. It leads us back to ourselves."[92]

Thus, for Hegel, the term "lyric" describes poems that embody the internalization of the objective world as felt subjectively, and the concomitant externalization of emotive moods through poetic devices that impart subjective meaning to objective language. In this interplay between that which is external to consciousness and that which is internal to it, lyric becomes not only a mode of poetry but a transformative moment in which consciousness becomes aware of itself—a mode of self-consciousness through self-expression.

According to Hegel, the type of self-consciousness is dependent on the historical and societal context in which the poetry is situated. Here Hegel connects the two axes of his lectures, as he argues that a subjective experience can be transposed into poetic language in three possible formations of abstracted thought and (internalized) sensual representation: the symbolic, the classic, and the romantic. At this juncture, Hegel explicitly turns to an Orientalist perspective, constructing a hierarchical taxonomy of different lyric orders. Hegel places Romantic lyric at the top of this hierarchy, modeled after his contemporary German poetry. In romantic lyric poetry, the poet can "assert himself as a self-enclosed subject," that is, think of themselves as a truly autonomous individual, and "accept the principle of particularization and individualization" to its fullest extent.[93] Somewhere below the Romantic type, Hegel places the "Oriental" lyric, defined as "symbolic" due to the heteronomous relations it builds between self and the world, i.e., the way the speaking subject subjugates itself to others. This is how Hegel phrases the difference:

> The oriental lyric is specifically and essentially distinguished from the Western one by the fact that, owing to its general nature, the East attains neither the independence and freedom of the individual nor the depth of the romantic heart which characteristically inwardizes its object without a limit. […] the [oriental] poet's mind, on the one hand, is sunk directly in what is external and single and he expresses himself in the situation and circumstances of this undivided unity, while, on the other hand, unable to find any firm support in himself he cancels himself […] What we find here is not so much the poetic expression of independent ideas about objects or relations as rather the direct description of an unreflective assimilation of such objects, with the result that what is revealed to us is not

[92] Simon Jarvis, "Musical Thinking: Hegel and the Phenomenology of Prosody," *Paragraph* 28, no. 2 (2005): 64.
[93] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 1132.

> the poet in his inner life and its reversion from externality, but only his self-cancellation in face of external objects and situations. […] not free in himself in his own inner life, [the oriental poet] can express himself only by assimilating himself to something external and different from himself.[94]

As we can see, Hegel defines "Oriental" lyric poetry along the lines of his contemporaneous Orientalist scholars and their biased assumptions regarding the nature of "oriental men" who cannot endure true freedom. That is, while "Oriental" poets can, like their Western counterparts, imbue words with spiritual meaning by nonmimetic artifice, they cannot, according to Hegel, muster the spiritual strength to explore the freedom they've already produced by "inwardizing" the objects of their poetic articulation. Instead, according to Hegel, they turn away from freedom, assimilating their selfhood with that of the collective or the divine.

This notion of a symbolic Oriental society is a clear example of Hegel's conception of race, which, as Rei Terada puts it, is "the prehistory of the postracial."[95] That is, Hegel's notion of racial knowledge, and in this case, racial poetry, is predicated on the antinomy of racialization vs. transparent humanity which works through "the construction of criteria for abstract conceptuality that continue to predetermine what counts as what and, through this, the political priority of the 'non-racial' over the racialized."[96] In this case, the main criterion that Hegel is abstracting as a "non-racial" concept is autonomy, which, in Hegel's argument, is the true manifestation of freedom. At the same time, but in a different register, Hegel also argues that autonomy is a historical condition that individuals can only achieve once it is made available in, or possibly by, their society. Furthermore, Hegel argues that the conditions for this autonomy developed only in Western Christendom. Therefore, there is a tension between the abstraction of "autonomy" as a concept and its definition as a specific historical stage. In this manner, while supposedly autonomy is available to all humankind, it is also genuinely available only to those born in Europe. Through this discursive dynamic, Hegel aligns, on the one hand, the concepts of "autonomy," "non-raciality," and "truth" without appealing explicitly to history, while on the other hand marking "Oriental" heteronomous poetry with the history and raciality of its poets. Thus, Hegel's notion of lyric poetry as poetry defined by autonomy seems hermeneutically sealed and immune to history and raciality.

As can be seen here, raciality, as I've discussed it so far, is intrinsically entwined with what, from Hegel's perspective, can be argued to be "past history" or the attribution of "pastness." In a significant way, the entire movement of the system laid out in Hegel's lectures works toward a negation of that past. Note that I am not arguing that we should refuse that basic movement of negation altogether. I contend that it is Hegel who fails his own system by conceptualizing oriental cultures through Orientalist perspectives, thus misunderstanding what is being negated in the move toward freedom and self-consciousness.

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[94] Hegel, 1147–49.
[95] Terada, "Hegel and the Prehistory of the Postracial."
[96] Terada, 290.

As I will show in the next chapter through my discussion of classical piyyut, there are ways to interrogate Hegelian dialectics of the spirit within pre-modern Hebrew writings for their cultural specificities. These texts can demonstrate how, without appealing to autonomy, they generate something entirely different from what Hegel describes that still enables the liberation of the mind into self-consciousness. My project thus showcases the elements that disappear as Hegel transitions from considering the distinct "pasts" of different groups to a singular "past" of all humanity.

Throughout this dissertation, I will argue that no true faculty of the mind can negate history in its totality without being defined by the epistemologies and phenomenology of thinking about history in a specific, contextual, racialized manner. This means that Hegel's European movement of negation is contingent, defined by the specificities of Western Christianity, and therefore not a necessary condition for the functions of the mind he seeks to explore. Therefore, an emergence of a different kind of a "subject of consciousness" is possible.

We must thus ask if it is necessary to follow Hegel's notion of the lyric, and subsequently, what happens if we decouple freedom and autonomy, thinking of other ways of gaining "spiritual" and artistic freedom outside total autonomic individuation. These are the questions I believe we can and should ask while reading piyyut and lyric poetry together, as I do in the next chapter and throughout the rest of the dissertation. As I will show, thinking about autonomy and freedom as fully synonymous can lead to many self-contradictions. Moreover, as was recently reiterated by the Mara Benjamin,[97] any notion of self-enclosed individual autonomy is preconditioned on an overwhelming denial of basic truths of human life, not at all reconcilable with ideas of self-consciousness. Instead, I believe we should mark autonomy as one possible path to freedom, understating the two as converging only in those conditions in which they actually do. One can be completely autonomous, in that they are free to act only on what they articulate as duty and desire, and still shackled in various ways. In a similar vein, we can think about freedom, artistic and otherwise, as a state to which many roads lead, some of which are ostensibly traditional and heteronomous.

However, before advancing to the next stage of my analysis, it is crucial to dwell on the afterlife of Hegel's concept of lyric. As we can see, Hegel's differentiation between symbolic and romantic lyric epitomizes what da Silva identifies as a strategy of engulfment—coercively assimilating non-Europeans as objects of knowledge.[98] As mentioned earlier, da Silva contends that engulfment is inevitably succeeded by another phase, the (symbolic or literal) obliteration of the non-European knowledge incorporated before. In this progression, once assimilation is achieved and non-European cultures are framed as racial variations within a purportedly universal science, a subsequent movement unfolds. This movement involves severing these variants from the pertinent body of knowledge, relegating them to the academic periphery—often consigned to specialized departments, such as area studies, or to less prestigious academic sub-divisions. In

[97] Mara H. Benjamin, *The Obligated Self: Maternal Subjectivity and Jewish Thought*, New Jewish Philosophy and Thought (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2018).
[98] da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race*.

essence, after the non-European "other" is incorporated as a racial object of knowledge, facilitating the establishment of European knowledge as universal, it is subsequently marginalized and compartmentalized away as too particular for the now canonically universal science.

In this progression, while Hegel initially distinguished between three types of lyric, at least one of which was exclusively non-European, later scholars in the field have predominantly focused on a singular prototype of lyric poetry—specifically, the European one. Over the two centuries following Hegel's work, most lyric theorists have tended to incorporate non-European lyric poetry within a comparative framework only if it explicitly seeks to resemble modern European verse. Temporally, this approach favors non-European lyric poetry that emerged after European colonization and acculturation, implying a form indebted to that particular historical context. Within this comparative framework, the lyric's mediation of the "I" and "society," originally explored in discussions of global variation, becomes detached from its worldly origins. Instead, it is portrayed as a distinctive feature of European literature, cementing "lyric" as an achievement mark against which non-European bodies of poetry are measured.

In this vein, Theodor W. Adorno commences his lecture "On Lyric Poetry and Society" by acknowledging his inability to discuss Chinese, Japanese, and Arabic lyric poetry due to his lack of proficiency in their original languages. Despite this limitation, Adorno confidently dismisses the ability of these literatures to embody what he deems true lyric quality, reducing them to "only isolated flashes, just as the backgrounds in older painting occasionally anticipate the idea of landscape painting." [99] Peter Dronke, in his highly influential work *The Medieval Lyric*, also advocates for the independence of European lyric. Dronke goes a step further in his examination of *muwashshah* poetry, a strophic Arabic and Hebrew poetic form that, in Muslim Al-Andalus, culminates in a final stanza called *Kharja*, sometimes composed and sung in the local Romance languages. Confronted with this rich heritage of multilingualism and shared poetic tradition, Dronke asserts:

> From the *kharjas* we can win some notion of what [the] earlier range of European song was like. And even if certain formal developments within Arabic poetry helped to pave the way for the *muwashshah*, it was undoubtedly the vivacious and flourishing strophic lyric in the Romance vernacular that gave the principal impetus towards the innovation of strophic poetry in Arabic, and later in Hebrew.[100]

Dronke's account is notably inaccurate and reflects a certain intercultural anxiety of influence; however, this misconception persists. For instance, the latest edition of *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (published in 2012) still propagates the argument that "the sonnet entered the Heb. lang. (in hendecasyllables) in Italy and Spain, as a primary form in which rhyme entered its poetry at the end of the 13th century."[101]

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[99] Adorno, "On Lyric Poetry and Society," 40.

[100] Peter Dronke, *The Medieval Lyric*, 3rd ed (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK; Rochester, NY, USA: D.S. Brewer, 1996), 90.

[101] In the entry for sonnet. See Roland Greene et al., eds., *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 4th ed (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 1319.

Recent historiographies of the lyric show some improvement but still exhibit a degree of discomfort in considering European lyric history alongside its non-European counterparts. In his *Theory of the Lyric*, Jonathan Culler dedicates forty-two pages to a historical survey. Arabic poetry is the sole non-European case receiving attention—albeit briefly, in one paragraph. Importantly, this paragraph remains more exploratory than conclusive, opening with the line, "There are lively debates about priority: is the Arabic poetry of Muslim Spain [...] the precursor of Hebrew and Provencal lyric?" and concluding, "Questions of origins and influence in these centuries of linguistic heterogeneity are far from settled."[102] Virginia Jackson's entry for "Lyric" in the 2012 Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics follows a similar pattern, spanning from ancient Greece to modern-day poetry without mentioning any poetic traditions outside Europe and North America. [103]

In this sense, the process of "lyricization" described by Jackson and Prins is also a process of the Europeanization of global lyric poetry, in which the modern European notion of individualized poetic articulation comes to monopolize the term "lyric." My dissertation tries to reverse this historical trajectory by considering the relevance and power of piyyut, a type of poetry exiled from the core of comparative literature, as lyric poetry. As I will show in the second half of the dissertation, as I move to discuss modern Mizrahi Hebrew poetry, piyyut also still plays a determining role in contemporary poetry. By better understanding the relation of piyyut and western lyric poetry, we can also better understand piyyut-like poetry of recent decades.

In doing so, I am relying on the neo-Adornian approach to lyric poetry, which argues that this poetry is defined by its dialectical mode that mediates the relations between the speaking "I" and the outside world and by its ability to move the speaking consciousness into reflection in a manner that decouples the experience and the speaking experiencer. As noted above, this approach does not condition lyric poetry on a Western lyric tradition, even when other factors have led many of the scholars included in it (and most notably Adorno himself) to focus on the same poetic devices and textual corpora as Culler, Jackson, and Prins. Yet, this theoretical approach is ripe with potentiality for non-European textual traditions and poetic devices. Specifically, as I show in the next chapter and throughout this dissertation, this approach allows us to notice how piyyut manifests an non-determinate play of concepts and language through its own devices. These devices include the first-person plural address (the lyrical "we") and intertextual practices such as allusion and midrash.

In arguing for the lyric power of these devices, I do not attempt to claim that piyyut and Western lyric poetry are one and the same, nor that they reach the same type of lyric conceptuality by different means. Instead, I argue for a diversity of lyric conceptualities. Concerning piyyut, I want to reclaim Hegel's problematic notion of "Eastern" poetry as heteronomous, that is, as one in which the speaker's self seeks connection and relation with others. At the same time, I urge us not to assume, as Hegel does, that this connection and relation means the total subjugation of the "I" to that to which it connects and relates. In this manner, my work joins other recent writings on the

[102] Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, 66.
[103] Jackson, "Lyric."

lyric as a non-solipsistic and interpersonal medium.[104] In this next chapter, I describe how piyyut's intertextual fusion of horizons ignites the process of self-consciousness in its readers and listeners. While the following discussions only focus on piyyut, contemporary piyyut-like poetry, and their endemic devices, by moving the argument from one universal lyric to that of global diverging paths, I hope to exemplify the myriad potentialities a global approach to lyric theory can offer. In that, my research joins some of the recent scholarship to examine forms of non-European poetry that are lyric, even if in a way that is, at first glance, othered to the canon of this genre.

[104] Dieter Burdorf, "The I and the Others. Articulations of Personality and Communication Structures in the Lyric," *Journal of Literary Theory* 11, no. 1 (January 1, 2017), https://doi.org/10.1515/jlt-2017-0003; Walt Hunter, "A Global 'We'? Poetic Exhortations in a Time of Precarious Life," *Cultural Critique*, no. 98 (Winter 2018): 72–94; John Michael, "Lyric History: Temporality, Rhetoric, and the Ethics of Poetry," *New Literary History* 48, no. 2 (2017): 265–84, https://doi.org/10.1353/nlh.2017.0013; Antonio Rodriguez, "Lyric Reading and Empathy," *Journal of Literary Theory* 11, no. 1 (January 1, 2017), https://doi.org/10.1515/jlt-2017-0012; Adam Nathaniel Scheffler, "'My Life Is Only One Life': Turning to Other People in American Lyric Poetry After New Criticism" (Dissertation for the degree of Ph.D., Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University, 2017); Chana Kronfeld, "שירה פוליטית כאמנות לשון ביצירתה של דליה רביקוביץ [Political Poetry as Verbal Art in the Work of Dahlia Ravikovitch]," in *Sparks of Light: Essays about Dahlia Ravikovitch's Oeuvre* (Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, 2010), 214–43; Vered Karti-Shemtov, "' כולמתי מאוד עם כולם' - ה'אנחנו הלירי', הטקסט והקהילה בשירתו המאוחרת של יהודה עמיחי ["I Was Deeply Ashamed with Everyone" - The 'Lyrical We,' the Text, and the Community in the Later Poetry of Yehuda Amichai]," in *The Craft of the Book: Studies in Jewish Literatures Presented to Avidov Lipsker* (Israel: Bar Ilan University Press, 2020).

Chapter Two:

Piyyut, a Model for Lyric Poetry

In the preceding chapter, I posited that an examination of piyyut and lyric through the lens of the last two centuries of lyric theory, coupled with an exploration of the extensive historical interplay between European and Middle Eastern poetry in the Middle Ages, motivates a recognition of piyyut as a distinctive model of lyric poetry. This chapter presents the counterpart of that argument, demonstrating how piyyut, in its nascent form during the first few centuries of the common era in Palestine, offers a uniquely lyric model within Jewish rabbinical writing. So while in the previous chapter I argue that we must recognize the role of Middle Eastern poetries in the history of European lyric poetry, here I argue that we should also consider deeply how piyyut, and specifically classical piyyut of the 6th to 7th century, is also marked by its Greco-Roman context. In the process, this discussion illustrates the potential gleaned from interpreting piyyut in Byzantine Palestine while acknowledging its capacity to instill self-awareness through unindividualized expression.

The chapter is divided into three parts. First, I argue for the speculative explanatory power of conceptualizing piyyut as a shared contact zone between Jewish textual formations and poetry in Greek and Latin. Second, I analyze two moments of Palestinian midrash from *Vayikra Rabbah* and *Shir Hashirim Rabbah*, demonstrating how they support my arguments regarding piyyut's inherent foreignness and the connection between sound play and midrashic intertextuality. Finally, I examine a classical piyyut for Tish`a Be'Av, "Alas His quiver opened like a grave" by Rabbi Elazar Hakalir (circa turn of the seventh century), illustrating the benefits of reading piyyut within my proposed framework.

Throughout these sections, I aim to situate Byzantine piyyut within its nascent matrix, to establish two primary points. First, during its emergence, piyyut was recognized as an independent genre within the system of rabbinic Hebrew literature, occupying a unique and liminal position within the tapestry of Jewish religious textuality. Second, in its classical stage (6th-7th centuries), piyyut developed distinctive rhyming patterns characterized by the intricate interweaving of sound play and midrashic intertextuality, a practice I refer to as "piyyutic writing conventions." Additionally, this chapter enhances the historical framework detailed in section 2.1 of the first chapter by providing a specific example that elucidates the intricate interplay between inter- and intra-cultural developments in late antique Palestine.

Section 1: Between Piyyut and "Shira:" A Potential Reconstruction

To clarify what we can know of piyyut in its earliest stages, it is essential to distinguish it from two other terms: "shira" and "tefillah," which in modern Hebrew mean poetry and prayer, respectively. While in contemporary Hebrew, "piyyut" denotes liturgical, Jewish-specific poems,

and "shira" (שירה) refers to secular poetry in any language, these distinctions were somewhat inverted in late antiquity and the early medieval period.

In Talmudic sources, the rabbis use the term "shira" to encompass two interrelated sacred corpora. The first consists of the poetic sections within the Hebrew Bible, distinguished from prose by their prosody and parallelisms. The second corpus comprises the songs sung during worship in the Jerusalem Temple. Using the name "shira" for both of these corpora indicates that, for the rabbis, the distinction between various forms of written, sung, or instrument-accompanied expressions was secondary to their similarities and that they were not entirely exclusive categories. Consequently, "shira" could also apply to all three forms in contemporaneous compositions.[105] We can discern that the rabbis of late antiquity intended to distinguish piyyut from any previous forms of sacred Hebrew poetry. This distinction underscores the rabbis' recognition of piyyut as an independent genre within the system of rabbinic Hebrew literature, marked by unique conventions and a distinct identity.

Similarly, it is imperative to incorporate the concept of prayer (*Tefilah, תפילה*) into our triangulations. During the early Tannaitic period, and especially after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, the rabbis were deeply engaged in establishing prayer as a liturgical equivalent to the sacrificial rituals conducted in the Temple.[106] This endeavor involved adapting and expanding upon the available biblical textual repertoire. By the culmination of this process, the rabbis formalized a canon of prayers and benedictions. According to rabbinic logic, these prayers are deemed obligatory for all practicing Jews and are structured to fulfill that obligation with utmost efficiency and accuracy. This collection of prayers is commonly referred to as the statutory prayer (*Tefilat qeva, תפילת קבע*, sometimes translated as the "fixed" prayer).

Piyyut distinguishes itself from both "shira" and prayer in various ways. In prosodic and structural aspects, piyyut aligns more closely with the norms of biblical "shira," particularly in its pre-classical period (an example of which, "I Shall Praise," I read closely in the first chapter). During this phase, piyyutim frequently draw upon biblical poems, evident in their lexical choices and thematic elements. Despite these parallels, piyyut, like prayer, is primarily associated with the evolving realm of the synagogue.[107] However, unlike prayer, piyyut does not carry the mandate to fulfill specific liturgical obligations. In this regard, piyyut assumes a tangential essence, relating to both the Bible and prayer while also serving a supplementary role to them.

This supplementary role is often conceptualized within a functionalist framework, wherein piyyut is perceived as a liturgical tool designed to diversify synagogue proceedings and engender interest in statutory prayer. Laura Leiber argues that piyyut blends the formal standardized

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[105] For example, in *M. Sukkah 50b-51a*, we observe a lively debate among the sages, trying to determine whether the essence of "shira" is primarily vocal or instrumental—whether the term denotes accompanied or unaccompanied singing.

[106] Ruth Langer, *To Worship God Properly: Tensions between Liturgical Custom and Halakhah in Judaism*, Monographs of the Hebrew Union College, number 22 (Cincinnati, Ohio: Hebrew Union College Press, 1998).

[107] For more on the importance of piyyut within the context of early synagogue see Steven Fine, *Art and Judaism in the Greco-Roman World: Toward a New Jewish Archaeology* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Jodi Magness, "Heaven on Earth: Helios and the Zodiac Cycle in Ancient Palestinian Synagogues," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 59 (2005): 1.

elements of prayer with the "unfixed elements of prayerfulness,"[108] providing space for intentionality and personal experience within the structure of statutory prayer. Ariel Zinder further accentuates this tension, contending that "the [piyyut] poem both elevates the fixed prayer, reestablishing its importance and centrality and reveals its fragile position, exposing its vulnerability."[109] Zinder elaborates:

> Piyyut, in its premodern setting, supplements the fixed prayer. Once the poem appears, it acts neither as an internal part of the blessing nor as a mere external addition. It is neither the prayer proper nor entirely independent. As the piyyut surfaces and acts, then, neither fixed prayer nor poem stand before us independently. Instead, a new, transformed body appears as a result of the contact between the two elements. Within this body, the riches and shortcomings of the fixed and the fluid, the canonical and the poetic, are fully intertwined.[110]

Piyyut thus serves as a supplement and development in poetic production, as well as an infusion of texts that are not part of the canon and do not ask to be so. I wish to make an additional claim based on my historical analysis in the previous chapter. Piyyut was marked, in form and discourse, as a liminal entity with a foreignness to it, part of Jewish life but also partly external to it. In other words, my argument is that a lot of the ambiguity and peripheral position of piyyut in Jewish history can be better explained if we understand it to stem from the fact that in its earliest moments, it was recognized as part of intercultural exchange between Jewish and non-Jewish forms of poetry.

This argument about the nature of piyyut in its earliest stages should be considered with some caveats, as any discussion of this topic is inherently constrained. There is a paucity of primary sources that can shed light on the inception and early developments of piyyut in the initial half of the first millennium CE. The limited range of available sources may have posed less of a problem to the pioneering scholars of the 19th century, who predominantly engaged with the more limited selection of canonized piyyutim transmitted through the centuries. However, the landscape of the field has transformed over the past century with the discoveries from the Cairo Genizah and other newly accessible archives, revealing a staggering abundance of piyyutim that circulated in the Jewish world during late antiquity and the early Middle Ages.

The cornucopia of newly discovered old piyyutim underscores the robust cultural prominence of piyyut as a practice, making it inconceivable that such a significant cultural phenomenon did not instigate substantial discussion, contextualization, and self-theorization among the rabbis and paytanim (liturgical poets) of the time. Yet, if this discourse ever existed, evidence remains missing, neither documented in writing nor transmitted orally. Consequently, unraveling what we can discern about piyyut within its original context necessitates scholarly detective work to bridge these information gaps, occasionally relying on speculative reconstruction.

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[108] Laura S. Lieber, "The Rhetoric of Participation: Experiential Elements of Early Hebrew Liturgical Poetry," *The Journal of Religion* 90, no. 2 (2010): 122, https://doi.org/10.1086/649845.
[109] Zinder, "Poem, Prayer, Supplement," 31.
[110] Zinder, 36.

I am not the first to conduct such a speculative investigation. Most notably, a similar method was used by Mirski in his reconstruction of the development of piyyut out of older midrashic practices,[111] as well as by current comparativist scholars such as Münz-Manor and Lieber, who had to fill some informational gaps while substantiating their arguments about the continuity between separated communities.[112] My speculation is similar to those suggested by Münz-Manor and Lieber, since I too argue that we can, and perhaps must, imagine piyyut as a distinct textual practice of Jewish late antiquity that is defined by its connection to a non-Jewish form of poetry and perhaps even music (as the two were never fully distinct during that period). This hypothesis emerges from the historical analysis I offered in the previous chapter and offers us, as I will show in this chapter, a more coherent understanding of the available primary sources.

Furthermore, this speculative framework is supported by two facts often overlooked while discussing Byzantine piyyut. First, I want to draw our attention to the apparent Greek etymology of the genre's name. Notably rare in the rabbinic corpus of late antiquity, the term "piyyut" only surfaces in the form of the profession "paytan" (פייטן), derived from the Greek word for "poet" (*ποιητης - poētēs*), with the Semitic professional suffix "-an." Laura Leiber aptly observes that "the fact that the Rabbis referred to these compositions by a Greek term, rather than applying the biblical terminology for poetry (*shir*, *mizmor*, *tehillah*) to these works, suggests that their innovativeness was recognized very early on."[113] We can extend this observation, positing that by adopting the Greek term for poetry to characterize this innovative corpus, the rabbis acknowledged an inherent facet of the genre. I argue that the rabbis used this Greek word for poetry because they described a poetic form that seemed infused with Greek artistic conventions. Given that many rabbis of the Hellenistic and late-antique periods were acquainted with Greek literature and art, it is likely that the name, as a clear loanword, articulated an artistic affinity between the Greek poetry they knew and this emergent new form of Hebrew poetry. The connection of piyyut to the synagogue, particularly to the mosaics inspired by Hellenistic culture of the time, further supports this assertion, especially since archaeological research shows how this space shared Hellenistic artistic practices.

To bolster this assumption, it is noteworthy that in later, more well-documented periods, piyyut unequivocally engages in precisely this kind of intercultural dialogue. In Al-Andalus, piyyut evolves into a platform where classical Arabic meters intertwine with Hebrew liturgy biblical poetic conventions. In the modern era, we observe the creation of numerous piyyutim set to local non-Jewish melodies and musical conventions. While caution is warranted in directly applying these models to the pre-classical and classical piyyut, it is crucial to recognize that the possibility of a comparable cross-cultural diffusion in Hellenistic and Byzantine Palestine should not be summarily dismissed. This diffusion, echoing most prominently in the nomenclature of the genre itself, hints at an intriguing historical trajectory.

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[111] Mirsky, *Ha-Piyuṭ*.
[112] Münz-Manor, "Liturgical Poetry in the Late Antique Near East: A Comparative Approach"; Lieber, "Theater of the Holy."
[113] Lieber, "Theater of the Holy," 119.

Section 2: Piyyut and Rhyme in Palestinian Midrashim

Reflecting the intricate nature of piyyut's tangible tangential role is the infrequent appearance of the term in the entire rabbinic corpus of late antiquity. When it does surface, it is typically in the form of the profession *paytan* (פייטן). The earliest instance of this term's usage can be traced to *Vayikra Rabbah*, a midrashic collection compiled during the 5th century CE. This use sheds light on the somewhat uneasy inclusion of the practice of piyyut within rabbinic thought.[114] The relevant passage (*Vayikra Rabbah* 30:1) beautifully encapsulates the tensions inherent in this genre. It recounts the eulogy delivered for Rabbi Elazar berabbi Shimon, a second-century rabbi residing in Roman-occupied Palestine:

> When Rabbi Elazar be-Rabbi Shimon rested [i.e., died and was brought to rest], his generation read over him, "Who is she that comes up from the desert like columns of smoke, in clouds of myrrh and frankincense, from all the powders of the merchant?" (Song of Songs 3:6) Why is it [that they read] "from all the powders of the merchant?" It is because he was a scholar of Torah and Mishnah, a paytan and a darshan.[115]

This passage opens with an interesting temporal signifier that demands unpacking to understand the narrative's full dramatic force. The Aramaic opening verb "מך" (*makh*) means "rest," and it is often employed as a euphemism for death or burial. Ordinarily, it does not matter if it means one or the other, as per Jewish burial rites, the two happen in close succession. However, in the case of Rabbi Elazar be-Rabbi Shimon, matters are not as straightforward. Drawing from the narrative included in *m. Bava Metzia 83b-84b*, we learn that r' Elazar be-Rabbi Shimon remained unburied for a span of eighteen to twenty-two years due to disputes between him and his contemporaries, and of his antemortem worries that the other rabbis would mishandle his burial. Consequently, the term "*makh*" appears to carry a deliberate ambiguity, drawing our attention to the central source of Rabbi Elazar's concerns before his passing: his dual role in life as both a Jewish rabbi and a police officer for the Roman authorities.

It is within this context of dual roles that we can better appreciate the significance of the excerpt from the Song of Songs recited as he is laid to rest, especially the section reiterated in the subsequent inquiry: "clouds of myrrh and frankincense, from all the powders of the merchant." The second verset of this parallelism contrasts two categories of perfumes: On the one hand, the sacred fragrances used in the offerings of incense at the Jerusalem Temple: myrrh and frankincense. On the other hand, a multitude of unnamed powders acquired from distant regions by the merchant. The relevance of this parallelism is even more poignant in an alternate manuscript (Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek heb. 117) in which the explanation of the verse describes r'

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[114] Among the many manuscript variants of this compilation the form of the term changes, from פויטס (poytes) to פטויי (ptoie) and פייטין (paytin). I am following the version of the 1512 *editio princeps*, but I address some of the variants below..

[115] My translation. Original:

כַּד דְּמַךְ רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בְּרַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן, הֲיָה דּוֹרוֹ קוֹרֵא עָלָיו (שיר השירים ג, ו): מִי זֹאת עֹלָה מִן הַמִּדְבָּר כְּתִימְרוֹת עָשָׁן מְקֻטָּרֶת מֹר וּלְבוֹנָה מִכֹּל אַבְקַת רוֹכֵל, מַהוּ מִכֹּל אַבְקַת רוֹכֵל, אֶלָּא דַּהֲוָה קָרֵיי וְתָנֵיי וּפַיְיטָן וְדַרְשָׁן.

Elazar be-Rabbi Shimon as "a scholar of Torah and Mishnah, a *karov* and a *poytes*."[116] As Joseph Yahalom elucidates, the term "karov," deriving from the root k.r.b., literally "close," signifies both drawing closer and making sacrifices. In late antiquity, it is intrinsically tied to the responsibilities of the *ḥazan*, or cantor, within the synagogue.[117] In this light, Rabbi Elazar's involvement with Torah and Mishnah is aligned with the rituals and practices of the Temple, while his duties in the synagogue, encompassing the fully transliterated Greek term "poytes," mirror the activities of a merchant who traverses various locales.

While it is impossible to draw any specific conclusion from just one short segment, it is somewhat more significant because this is the only text we have from a rabbinical source that uses the explicit term "paytan." The fact that it does so regarding such a controversial figure, who spent his time in between Jewish and Roman spaces, seems to substantiate the notion that for the rabbis, piyyut was likewise a liminal thing.

The worldly nature of piyyut and its liminal position as a textual contact zone becomes increasingly apparent as we transition from the genre's "pre-classical" period to its "classical" stage. A key stylistic evolution distinguishing these phases is the development and adaptation of Hebrew rhyme during this period—a development I elucidated in the previous section, showcasing its regional and cross-cultural character. Evidence for this linguistic evolution in Jewish texts of the time can be traced through the progression of the Hebrew term for rhyme, "חרוז" (*ḥaruz*). The root *ḥ.r.z.* conveys the notion of stringing together objects. The root is commonly used in biblical and rabbinic texts to describe mundane objects like a tied bundle or aesthetic objects like beads in a necklace. However, in a few rare instances detailed here, the root is employed figuratively to characterize textual practices, specifically in "stringing together" different biblical verses. By placing these occurrences on a timeline, we can better understand the meaning of this practice and its changes over time.

The clearest example of a meta-discussion of this poetic development can be found in the reiteration of one story between two midrashic sources: *Vayikra Rabbah* 16:4, which was compiled around the 5th century CE, and *Shir Ha-Shirim Rabbah* 1:10:2, which is a later composition, dated to as late as the 8th century CE. The basic narrative of these two passages is identical: they tell of Rabbi Simeon ben Azzai, a second-century sage who used to sit and practice biblical verses with such vitality that fire would blaze around him. When asked to explain this effect, ben Azzai uses the root ḥ.r.z. to describe his actions. In the contemporary printed editions, he uses "maḥriz" in *Vayikra Rabbah*, and "ḥorez" in *Shir Hashirim Rabbah*. I include the two passages in translation for our discussion, leaving the ḥ.r.z. conjugations untranslated for now:

> *Vayikra Rabbah (16:4): Ben Azzai used to sit and make midrash, and the fire was around him. They said to him: is it possible that you are occupied in the practice of God's chariot*

[116] Vayikra Rabbah, Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek heb. 117. Original: דהוה קריי תניי קרוב ופויטס.

[117] Joseph Yahalom, "חזן-פייטן בבית הכנסת בתקופה הביזנטית [Ḥazan-Paytan in the Byzantian Synagogue]," in *Continuity and Renewal: Jews and Judaism in Byzantine-Christian Palestine* (Jerusalem: Dinur Center for the Study of Jewish History, Yad Ben Zvi Press, The Jewish Theological seminary of America, 2004), 443–44.

> *(Merkava)?*[118] *He said to them: "no, but I am* ***maḥriz*** *the words of Torah, and the words of the Torah to Nevi'im [Books of Prophets], and of the Nevi'im to Ketuvim [Later Writings], and the words of the Torah were as happy as they had been on the day they were given on Mt. Sinai.*[119]
>
> *Shir HaShirim Rabbah (1:10:2): Ben Azzai used to sit and make midrash, and the fire was around him. They [the students] went to Rabbi Akiva and told him: Rabbi ben Azzai sits and teaches, and a fire is burning around him. He [Rabbi Akiva] went to him and said: "I heard that you made midrash, and a fire was burning around you." [Ben Azzai] said, "yes." He [Rabbi Akiva] said: Is it possible that you were busying yourself in the rooms of the chariot (Merkava)? He [Ben Azzai] said: No, but I sat down and* ***ḥorez*** *the words of Torah, and of Torah to Nevi'im [Books of Prophets], and of Nevi'im to Ketuvim [Later Writings], and the words were as happy as they had been on the day they were given on Mt. Sinai.*[120]

Clearly, the two stories share remarkable similarities, with the primary difference being the latter text's inclusion of Rabbi Akiva. This addition, I posit, is primarily attributed to Rabbi Akiva's familiarity with Merkava mysticism and serves to distinguish it from Rabbi Azzai's mystical practice. Another noteworthy difference, more pertinent to our discussion, emerges in the manuscript variants outside the current print version, and sheds light on the contextual meaning of the root *ḥ.r.z* during this early period. Among the eleven manuscripts of *Vayikra Rabbah*, six variants incorporate the root *ḥ.r.z.* in different forms. However, the remaining five variants present an alternative metaphor for ben Azzai's textual practice. In these versions, ben Azzai is described as "*ḥozer*," "*maḥzir*," and "*mehadren*" the biblical verses.[121] These verbs, conjugations of the Hebrew root ḥ.z.r, a metathesis of h.r.z., and the Aramaic root h.d.r, both mean "to return," and in this context, invite an image of a sauntering movement or walking back and forth. These variations are consistent with a parallel narrative recounting rabbis who brought fire from the heavens through discussing biblical verses during Elisha ben Abboya's *brith milah* celebration, in which we also find the root ḥ.z.r..[122]

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[118] *Merkava* (מרכבה), literally meaning chariot, is the name for a Jewish mystical practice or school of mysticism. Borrowing its name from the prophet Ezekiel's first vision, the Merkava tradition concerns stories of sages' ascension to divine planes where they can perceive or literally be present at God's throne room or on His chariot.

[119] My translation. Original:
בֶּן עַזַּאי הָיָה יוֹשֵׁב וְדוֹרֵשׁ וְהָאֵשׁ מְלַהֶטֶת סְבִיבוֹתָיו, אָמְרוּ לֵיהּ שָׁמָּא בְּסִדְרֵי מֶרְכָּבָה אַתָּה עוֹסֵק, אָמַר לָהֶן לָאו, אֶלָּא מַחְרִיז דִּבְרֵי תוֹרָה לִנְבִיאִים, וּנְבִיאִים לִכְתוּבִים, וְדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה שְׁמֵחִין כְּיוֹם נִתְּנָתָן בְּסִינַי, עִקַּר נִתְּנָתָן בָּאֵשׁ נִתְּנוּ, הֲדָא הוּא דִכְתִיב (דברים ד, יא): וְהָהָר בֹּעֵר בָּאֵשׁ.

[120] My Translation. Original:
בֶּן עַזַּאי הָיָה יוֹשֵׁב וְדוֹרֵשׁ וְהָאֵשׁ סְבִיבוֹתָיו, אֲזַלוּן וַאֲמַרוּן לְרַבִּי עֲקִיבָא, רַבִּי בֶּן עַזַּאי יוֹשֵׁב וְדוֹרֵשׁ וְהָאֵשׁ מְלַהֶטֶת סְבִיבוֹתָיו, הָלַךְ אֶצְלוֹ וְאָמַר לוֹ שָׁמַעְתִּי שֶׁהָיִיתָ דּוֹרֵשׁ וְהָאֵשׁ מְלַהֶטֶת סְבִיבְךָ. אָמַר לוֹ, שָׁמָּא בְּחַדְרֵי מֶרְכָּבָה הָיִיתָ עָסוּק, אָמַר לוֹ לָאו, אֶלָּא הָיִיתִי יוֹשֵׁב וְחוֹזֵר בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה, וּמִתּוֹרָה לִנְבִיאִים, וּמִנְּבִיאִים לִכְתוּבִים, וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים שְׂמֵחִים כְּנָתִינָתָן מִסִּינַי.

[121] Department of Talmud - Bar-Ilan University, "ויקרא רבה מהדורה סינופטית [Vayikra Rabbah Synoptic Edition]," accessed November 14, 2023, https://www2.biu.ac.il/JS/midrash/VR/.

[122] See Yerushalmi m. Ḥagigah 2:1: "Rebbi Eliezer and Rebbi Joshua said, while they are occupied in theirs let us be occupied with ours. They sat occupied with words of the Torah, from the Torah to Prophets, from Prophets to Hagiographs. Fire descended from Heaven and surrounded them. Abuya told them, my teachers! Why do you come to burn down my house? They told him, Heaven forbid! But we were sitting reviewing the words of the Torah, from the Torah to Prophets, from Prophets to Hagiographs, and the words were joyful as at their giving on

However, in the parallel text, *Shir Hashirim Rabbah*, a noteworthy consistency emerges among the manuscripts, with five out of seven employing the verb *ḥorez*.[123] This uniformity is inherited from the biblical text of *Shir Hashirim*, as the redactor incorporates the story of ben Azzai to expound on the biblical verse, "Your cheeks are lovely with looped earrings, your neck with beads [*ḥaruzim*]" (Shir Hashirim 1:10).[124] As previously mentioned, in Hebrew, the word for "beads" is derived from the root *ḥ.r.z.*, signifying beads [*ḥaruzim*] as items that one strings [*ḥorez*] on a necklace [*maḥrozet*]. Consequently, within the interpretative context of the sages of *Shir Hashirim Rabbah*, engaged in reading *Shir Hashirim* as an allegorical love poem between God and the people of Israel, the beads described in the biblical source are equated with the biblical verses strung together by ben Azzai.

We can formulate some informed hypotheses upon comparing the two versions of this story. First, within the rabbinic imagination, there appears to be a distinct practice of interweaving biblical verses from the three main sections of the Hebrew Bible. This practice is similar to other forms of Midrash that tie together biblical verses but different in its potency and effect. This practice is also set in deliberate contrast with *Merkava* mysticism, establishing a clear distinction that attests they might have been considered too similar to tell apart at some point. The depiction of this practice involves two competing metaphors, utilizing the semantic fields of stringing verses together or walking back and forth among them.

Second, a plausible hypothesis is that the oscillation between the two Semitic roots, *ḥ.r.z.* and *ḥ.z.r.,* arises from one being a metathesis of the other. It is reasonable to assume that ḥ.z.r., meaning "walking around," takes precedence, supported by its use in a similar context in various Rabbinic texts, including the translation into Aramaic. Additionally, *ḥ.z.r.* also conveys the meanings of "return" or "go back and forth," synonymous with the root *sh.n.a,* which usually means "to repeat." Notably, *sh.n.a* gives us the name for the first textual collection of Rabbinic Judaism, *The Mishnah*, and is the primary root employed to describe textual repetition and transmission during this period. Therefore, it is conceivable that initially there was a semantic slippage between *sh.n.a* and *ḥ.z.r.*, eventually leading perhaps to using *ḥ.r.z.* to describe the pertinent textual practice. In any case, we must imagine that in the context of ben Azzai himself and for the 5th-century audience of Vayikra Rabbah, this practice was not that of rhyming but probably the "chaining" of verses with similar words or themes, as described in Boyarin's *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash.*[125]

Sinai." Translation from The Jerusalem Talmud, edition by Heinrich W. Guggenheimer. Berlin, De Gruyter, 1999-2015. Original: אֲמַר רִבִּי לִיעֶזֶר לְרִבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ. עַד תְּאֵינוּן עֲסִיקִין בְּדִידוֹן נַעֲסוֹק אֲנָן בְּדִידָן. וְיֵשְׁבוּ וְנִתְעַסְקוּ בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה. מִן הַתּוֹרָה לַנְּבִיאִים וּמִן הַנְּבִיאִים לַכְּתוּבִים. וְיָרְדָה אֵשׁ מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהִקִּיפָה אוֹתָם. אָמַר לָהֶן אֲבוּיָה. רַבּוֹתַי. מַה בָאתֶם לְשָׁרוֹף אֶת בֵּיתִי עָלַי. אָמְרוּ לוֹ. חַס וְשָׁלוֹם. אֶלָּא יוֹשְׁבִין הָיִינוּ וְחוֹזְרִין בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה. מִן הַתּוֹרָה לַנְּבִיאִים וּמִן הַנְּבִיאִים לַכְּתוּבִים. וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים שְׂמֵיחִים כְּנִתְּנָן מִסִּינַי.

[123] Among the remaining two manuscripts, one uses the verb *ḥozer* and another omits the story. See Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies, "מדרש שיר השירים רבה - מהדורה סינופטית [Midrash Shir Shirim Rabbah - Synoptic Edition]," accessed November 14, 2023, https://schechter.ac.il/midrash/shir-hashirim-raba/.

[124] Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary*, First edition (New York; London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2018).

[125] Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

However, our assumptions necessitate a reconsideration as we progress to *Shir Hashirim Rabbah*, compiled as late as the 8th century, placing it after the emergence of Hebrew rhyme. As detailed in section 2.1, from the 3rd to the 7th century, we witnessed a notable surge in the use of rhyme across various languages around the Mediterranean. This era also saw more systematic contemplation on the meaning and potential of rhyme, reaching an early zenith in the works of al-Khalil ibn Ahmad al-Farahidi during the 8th century. In Arabic we also find rhyme described as beads on a necklace, for example in the poetry of Abū Tammām, the ninth-century poet who wrote:

> Rhymes and deeds resemble a necklace
> perfected by a unique stone:
> His deeds are like scattered gems—
> when arranged as poetry, they become an adorning necklace.[126]

Similarly, in our 8th-century *Shir Hashirim Rabbah*, the understanding of the textual practice described by the root ḥ.r.z has shifted to denote what we recognize today as rhyme. This transformation becomes even more pronounced as we examine later sources from the 11th century, where "ḥaruz" is already firmly established as the proper Hebrew term for rhyme.[127] Although this genealogy doesn't pinpoint the exact moment when ḥ.r.z came to describe rhyme, it demonstrates that within Hebrew textual history, rhyme, midrash, and intertextuality are intertwined in expressions that imbue words with such fervor that they seem to spontaneously combust.

Section 3: "Alas His Quiver Opened Like a Grave" – Rhyme, Intertextuality and the Polyphonic Speaker

Continuing the theoretical approach from the first chapter and aiming to elucidate the relationship between rhyme and intertextuality, I present a sample stanza from a classical period piyyut. Authored by R' Eleazar Hakalir, also known as Eleazer ben Kalir, berabi Kalir, or simply "Hakalir." Rabbi Eleazar Hakalir stands out as one of the eminent paytanim of classical piyyut. Renowned for his enigmatic poetry and inventive, elaborate rhymes, recent scholarship places his birth at the close of the 6th century CE. It is believed that he lived through and wrote about the Sassanid-Byzantine war (602-628). However, specifics about the city of his residence and other biographical details remain elusive.[128] The piyyut at hand is a lament, read annually on Tish`a Be'Av, the Jewish date on which the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed:

אֵיכָה אַשְׁפָּתוֹ פָּתוּחַ כְּקֶבֶר, וּלרוֹדֵי בְּאַף הוֹסִיף אֶבֶר, אֲנִי הַגֶּבֶר
אֵיכָה אֶשָּׁא עָוֹן הָגֹ, וְחוּסַם פִּי מְפֻלָּל לַהַגֹ, אוֹתִי נָהַגֹ
אֵיכָה אָץ זַעֲמוֹ לִשְׁפּוֹךְ, הָכִיל נַלְאֵיתִי וְנָם שְׁפֹךְ, אַךְ בִּי יָשֵׁב יַהֲפֹךְ
זְכוֹר אֶפְיָתַי בַּשָּׁרָב, וְנָם כִּי יִנָּטוּ צִלְלֵי עֶרֶב, וְהֵבֵאתִי עֲלֵיכֶם חָרָב

[126] Cited in Ibn Qutaybah, *The Excellence of the Arabs*, trans. Sarah Bowen Savant and Peter Webb (NYU Press, 2019), sec. 2.8.2.

[127] See the introduction to *Machzor Vitry* (order of Shavuot 287:4), composed c. 1055-1105, or in *Chovat Halevavot* (Eighth Treatise 3:46), written at 1040.

[128] Shulamit Elizur, "מכתבי חידה אל ליריקה זכה: לבחינת יצירתו של ר' אלעזר בירבי קיליר," *Dahak - Ktav Et Lisifrut Tova* 2 (April 2012): 16–71.

Verse translation[129]

Alas His quiver opened like a grave, and to my chaser wings He gave – I am the man in danger grave.
Alas, God said my evil he cannot bear, and my mouth he muzzled from saying prayer – it is I who was forced out of there.
Alas, He was quick in anger, I cannot withstand it and his rage burns like ember – but it is I whom he again dismembers.
Remember my wandering in the desert, Lord, when You first decided on my grim reward – and You said "I will raise on you a sword."

Prose Translation:

Alas, how [did God come to] open His quiver like a grave; and [why did] He give wings to my oppressor; [how did it happen that] I am that [oppressed] man.
Alas, [God said] how can I carry the burden of your wrongs; and my [the speaker's] mouth He barred from saying prayer; I am the person whom He has driven [out of Zion].
Alas, how can it be that He [came to] pour out his anger so fast; I cannot contain [what is happening], and He [is still] saying: pour [more punishment]; and it is me [who] is destroyed over and over.
Remember when I was circling in the desert; and as the night's shadows pitched [their tents] God said: "And I will bring upon you a Sword."

This poem unfolds across 22 stanzas, each comprising four lines. Within each line, three distinct rhyming versets are meticulously crafted. Structured as an acrostic, the opening three lines of each stanza feature three words that commence with the designated letter of that stanza. The rhyme scheme predominantly employs a rich monorhyme, occasionally interspersed with minimal monosyllabic rhymes—consisting of a single consonant and vowel—across the 88 lines of the composition. Though lacking a stringent meter, the poem adheres to what Benjamin Harshav defines as "accent-syntactic-semantic free rhythm," reminiscent of biblical rhythmic patterns.[130] In each stanza, the versets maintain a consistent number of semantic units, guided by their natural speech accents. For instance, in the stanza under consideration, the Hebrew text of the first verset contains four words, the second three words, and the last merely two. The inaugural line of the poem, featuring the acrostic letter A (א) and the rhyme "*eve*r" ("ֶבֶר"), is structured as follows:

[A...] [A…] […] […*éver*], […] […] […*éver*], [A...] […*éver*]

The verse's contracting progression is notable, underscoring the significance of the final verset, where both of its semantic units actively contribute to the poem's material devices. Yet formal constraints extend beyond rhythm and rhyme, as the poem intricately weaves a dense network of biblical intertextuality. In the initial three lines, Hakalir references the opening of *Eicha* (*Lamentations*), the biblical poetry book traditionally recited in synagogues on *Tish`a Be'Av*. It's noteworthy that the biblical text itself is structured as an acrostic composition, adding another layer of allusion to the piyyut's formal arrangement. Moreover, akin to many other biblical books, the

[129] In preparing these translations I have consulted the *Lev Aharon* commentary, written by Aharon Veckselstein, see: Aharon Veckselstein, *סדר קינות לתשעה באב : עם פירוש לב אהרן [Seder Kinot for Tisha B'av: With Lev Aharon's Commentary]* (Jerusalem: Self-Published, 2012).

[130] Harshav, *Three Thousand Years of Hebrew Versification*, 44–46.

name of this book is derived from its initial word - *Eicha* ("איכה"). While numerous translations render it as "alas," encapsulating its elegiac connotations, this translation doesn't fully convey the essence of *Eicha* as an interrogative, questioning "how come" or "how can it be" that such a calamity has taken place. Beyond its linguistic nuances, the prominence of this book and its awe-inspiring artistry establish it as a seminal example of the lament genre in Hebrew. This opening of the piyyut signals its affiliation with the genre of the lament.

In the present stanza, the first verset opens with a question from *Eicha* 1:1, the second echoes *Eicha* 2:1, and the third references *Eicha* 4:1. Notably, the third chapter of *Eicha* is a triple acrostic, wherein each triad of verses repeats the acrostic letter. This structure serves as a formal blueprint for Hakalir's poem. Hakalir strategically allocates the three verses of *Eicha* 3:1-3 across the stanza's three opening lines, positioning them as the third verset of each. Consequently, the quotation from *Eicha* 3 governs the rhyme scheme of these lines. This arrangement can be succinctly visualized as follows:

[A-(Eicha 1:1)] [A…] […] […*ever*], […] […] […*ever*], [A-(Eicha 3:1)-*ever*].
[A-(Eicha 2:1)] [A…] […] […*hag*], […] […] […*hag*], [A-(Eicha 3:2)-*hag*]
[A-(Eicha 4:1)] [A…] […] […*shpokh*], […] […] […*shfokh*], [A-(Eicha 3:3)-*fokh*]

A distinctive structural shift characterizes the last line of each stanza. The rhythm of these concluding lines varies not only from stanza to stanza but also within each verset, creating an atmosphere that is both free and elevated, in stark contrast to the preceding lines' contracting progression. Simultaneously, the intertextual resonances within this echo chamber undergo a transformation. In the final line of each stanza, the first verset commences with a quotation from *Eicha* 5 (which lacks an acrostic structure), while the third verset concludes with a citation from the *Bechukotai* (*בחוקותי*) portion of the book *Vayikra* (*Leviticus)*. Hakalir specifically cites the subsection known as the "Admonitions Speech" (*פרשת התוכחה*). In the last line of the initial stanza, the rhyme is dictated by the first verse of the "Admonitions Speech," marked by the word "*Rev*." Intriguingly, this rhyme forms a partial palindrome when compared to the rhyme dictated by *Eicha* 3:1(a) in the first line.

Thus, the poem is intricately woven between two primary intertextual poles that shape its narrative. The first, more prominent intertextual layer draws from *Eicha*, vividly recounting the harrowing details of Jerusalem's destruction. The second layer emerges from the "Admonitions Speech," where God forewarns the Israelites of the consequences awaiting them if they fail to heed His laws. In addition, a third layer of intertextuality is introduced in the stanza, as every line references verses from Jeremiah, specifically chapters 5-7. Notably, in the first and last lines, these quotes contribute to the rhyme scheme, creating a dual connection to the citations from *Eicha*—both in terms of thematic content and poetic sound play. Placing this intertext in the poem's initial stanza may be a deliberate choice by Hakalir, considering the traditional attribution of *Eicha* to the prophet Jeremiah. Through this intricate interplay, Hakalir establishes an intertextual narrative that, similarly to the practice of ben Azzai, spans the three main sections of the Hebrew Bible. Hakalir goes from the *Torah* to *Nevi'im* to *Ketuvim,* encompassing *Vayikra*, where God cautions the

Israelites of their destiny if they stray from His laws; *Jeremiah*, where God announces the imminent punishment; and *Eicha*, where the somber warnings of God are starkly realized.

However, a dialogic element is intricately interwoven into the piyyut's dramatic tableau beneath the linear narrative that exclusively emphasizes God's will. In this context, the speaker assumes the role of addressing God directly, employing a form of direct address that utilizes the honorific third person (He instead of You). The tension inherent in this dramatic plea to God becomes palpable in the second line, as the speaker acknowledges the futility of their words in the face of a God who "muzzles" their expression. Despite the apparent impotence of language, the speaker persists in reminding God of the Israelites' time in the wilderness, a futile attempt to influence the divine. This endeavor intentionally remains fruitless—not merely because it seeks to sway a predetermined God, as posited by the poem, but also because it endeavors to alter the course of the Temple's destruction, an event that had unfolded centuries prior even in Hakalir's time. However, the piyyutic utterance's apparent futility does not negate its potency; instead, it underscores its enduring power.

The somber and linear narrative unfolded between the three intertextual axes above encounters even more disruption through additional intertexts woven into each of the stanza's four lines. These citations deviate from the typical structure of this piyyut, eschewing a clear and predictable pattern. The distinctive intertexts are underlined, revealing the following final schematization of the stanza:

[A-(Eicha 1:1)] [A-(Jeremiah 5:15)-ever], […] […] [(Deuteronomy 32:11)-ever], [A-(Eicha 3:1)-ever].
[A-(Eicha 2:1)] [A-(Deuteronomy 1:12)] […] […hag], […] [(Jeremiah 7:16)] […hag], [A-(Eicha 3:2)-hag]
[A-(Eicha 4:1)] [A…] [(Psalm 69:25)-shfokh], [(Jeremiah 6:11)] […] […shfokh], [A-(Eicha 3:3)-fokh]
[A-(Eicha 5:1)] [A-(Psalm 18:5)] […rev], […] [(Jeremiah 6:6)-arev], [(Vayikra 26:25)-arev]

Within the tapestry of intertexts drawn from *Eicha*, *Jeremiah*, and *Vayikra*, Hakalir disrupts the piyyut's established intertextual pattern by irregularly introducing citations from *Deuteronomy* and *Psalms*. This departure from the expected outline infuses the poem with a complex multifocality, causing it to coil back upon itself and fracture the linear narrative outlined earlier. What adds an intriguing layer to this intertextual web is the unquoted segments of the verses that the piyyut evokes and their role in shaping potential readings of the piyyut. Following the notion established by C.D. Blanton with the term "shadow text," we observe a dynamic in which "two poems [are] contained within a single text," creating a dialectical interplay between that which is explicit in the poem and that which resides in its shadow.[131] Chana Kronfeld's use of the term "shadow texts" becomes particularly compelling when considering intertextuality, since "in many cases, the crucial component of the text that an allusion evokes is omitted, relying on the reader's familiarity with that which is not quoted to do the poem's political work."[132]

[131] C. D. Blanton, *Epic Negation: The Dialectical Poetics of Late Modernism*, Modernist Literature and Culture 24 (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 10, 18.

[132] Chana Kronfeld, *The Full Severity of Compassion: The Poetry of Yehuda Amichai*, Stanford Studies in Jewish History and Culture (Stanford: Stanford university press, 2016), 37.

In this way, the stanza at hand and the piyyut as a whole encapsulate two dialectically intertwined readings: one derived from the systematic axes of intertextuality (*Eicha*, *Jeremiah*, *Vayikra*), and another that unveils itself in the shadows, represented by the components omitted from the allusions to *Deuteronomy* and *Psalm*. Neither of the readings is defined by itself. Instead, they constitute two parts of a dialectical dynamic in which the text and shadow text negate each other and compel the reader to consider the antinomies of the poem regarding divine justice, human suffering, and the possibility of salvation.

For instance, in the second verset of the stanza, Hakalir employs a rare term for "wing," "אבר" (*ever*), which is found in the Hebrew Bible only once: in Moses's "*Ha'azinu*" poem delivered before his death. In this poem, Moses likens God to an eagle, stating: "Like an eagle who rouses his nest, over his fledglings he hovers, He spread His wings, He took him, He bore him on His wing [=*ever*]. The LORD alone did lead him" (Deuteronomy 32:11-12(a)).[133] The underlined word in this citation connects to the preceding verset, where Hakalir quotes the opening line of *Eicha*, "Alas, how she sits alone, the city once great with people. She has become like a widow." Both *Eicha* 1:1 and *Deuteronomy* 32:11-12 share the poetic version of the adverb "alone" (*badad* בדד), which is marked rare and not as common as "לבד" (*le-vad*), from the same root. These two verses also utilize this adverb within familial metaphors describing the relationship between the Israelite people and God. In *Deuteronomy*, God alone leads the people, akin to an eagle protecting its offspring. In *Eicha*, God abandons the people. Leaving them alone, akin to a husband leaving his widowed wife behind. In this fashion, the piyyut resonates with the rabbinic hermeneutical tool of *gezerah shava*, analogous inference, whereby sages inferred the applicability of one verse to another from their shared use of a particular word. However, unlike the explicit declaration of *gezerah shava* in Talmudic texts, in this piyyut, the analogy is drawn at the periphery of the text, shaping the poem's meaning while existing externally to it.

It is crucial to note that these parallel metaphors evoked by the word "alone" don't neatly align, particularly concerning gender and kinship. In *Deuteronomy*, the relationship between God and the Israelites is framed by a patriarchal metaphor of inheritance, casting God as the father and Israel as his children, indicating an intrinsic and predetermined value (as reflected in the poem's inner cosmology).[134] In *Eicha*, the relationship takes on a marital metaphor, with God portrayed as Zion's husband, emphasizing God's right to forsake the Israelites.[135] Additionally, the potency of God as a soaring eagle in *Deuteronomy* sharply contrasts with his inability to act as Zion's husband in *Eicha*.

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[133] All biblical translations are based on Robert Alter's translation of the bible, with modifications. Alter, *The Hebrew Bible*, 2018.

[134] See specifically Deuteronomy 32:6-8. This notion of predestination is highlighted by later commentaries as in Rashi and Ibn Ezra.

[135] The language of *Eicha* also brings forth a model that merges the patriarchal and matrimonial relations, that of the father-husband, spelled out for example in Ezekiell 16. For more on this metaphoric system, see Chana Kronfeld, "The Land as Woman: Esther Raab and the Afterlife of a Metaphorical System," *Prooftexts* 39, no. 2 (2022): 141–207.

The tensions between the alluding and the evoked texts can be interpreted in various ways. One manner might be through the theodicy implicit in the evoked texts from *Vayikra* and *Jeremiah* or as an ironic dual perspective pointing an accusatory finger at God's shifting stance and harsh punishment. The piyyut itself accommodates multiple interpretations, allowing for diverse perspectives.

This interplay between the text and the shadow text also unfolds in the subsequent line. In the first verset, Hakalir draws from Moses's reflection in *Deuteronomy* on the burden of being the only one leading the Israelites: "Alas, how can I carry by myself your trouble and your burden and your disputing?" (Deuteronomy 1:12). Notably, this verse opens with the same question word as the evoked verse from Eicha 2:1. Furthermore, the unquoted part of this question in *Deuteronomy*, where Moses expresses the loneliness of his responsibility using the word "לבדי" (by myself), forges a connection back to the allusion in the first line. Additionally, Moses's quoted words resonate with the uncited portion of the evoked text in the next verset, sourced from *Jeremiah* 7:16: "As for you, [Jeremiah,] do not pray for this people, and do not carry out for them a chant of prayer, and do not entreat Me, for I do not hear you." Once again, the shared word between these citations, the verb "carry" (*`esa* תשא ,אשא), bears significantly different meanings in the original contexts. In *Deuteronomy*, Moses recounts how, during the Israelites' sojourn in the desert, he couldn't endure the leadership burden alone, ultimately delegating executive and judicial powers with the assistance of Jethro, his father-in-law. In *Jeremiah*, God instructs the prophet not to waste time praying for his fellow Judeans, emphasizing his isolation from them, as they are engrossed in worshiping foreign gods. Thus, Hakalir contrasts Moses' capability to delegate his responsibility with God's decision to deny Jeremiah the opportunity to carry out his role as a delegate of God's will.

This interplay also manifests in the subsequent lines. In the invoked *Jeremiah* text of the third line, Jeremiah is overcome with God's wrath, unable to contain it, and poised to pour it out on "the babe in the street" (Jeremiah 6:11). In contrast, the speaker in the irregularly invoked text, *Psalm* 69, recounts the humiliation suffered from enemies and implores God to "pour out upon them Your wrath." Moving to the fourth line, the speaker of *Psalm* 18 describes God rescuing him from enemies, while in *Vayikra*, God declares the intention to leave Israel at the mercy of its enemies. Here, the poem doesn't provide guidance on reconciling the divergent positions of the evoked texts, where God is depicted as both savior and destroyer, a just adjudicator and a harsh judge.

The similarities and differences between the verses significantly impact our ability to imagine the speaker of the piyyut. Read simplistically, the poem seems to be spoken by an individual "I" addressing God using the third and second person, describing the horrors of exile by ventriloquizing Jeremiah's prophetic voice. However, once the entirety of the poem's intertextual echo chamber is mapped out, the uniformity of the speaker is undone. For example, consider the verset "איכה אשא עון הג" (Alas, how can I carry the burden of your wrongs, [said God]). Supposedly, in this verset, the speaker reports God's speech, as he [the speaker] says He [God] cannot bear the Israelites' misdeeds. However, through the poem's echo chamber, we also hear the

verse from *Eicha* 2:1: "Alas, how has the Master beclouded in His wrath the daughter of Zion;" that is, we hear the speaker of *Eicha* asking in disbelief how could God destroy Jerusalem. Simultaneously, we hear Moses asking how he can bear the Israelites' misdeeds, and we remember that in this context, Moses was able to carry on by delegating his power to helpful agents. At the same time, we already have moved to the next verset, in which God tells his prophet, his agent in Judea, not to bother carrying on prayers.

In this manner, in these two versets alone, we have at least four speakers - God, Moses, Jeremiah, and this poem's paytan, Eleazar Hakalir. While the poem uses the first-person singular pronoun "I," that "I" stands for many speakers who utter the exact words in different circumstances. Those utterances are activated in the piyyut, creating a type of collective multifocal speaking "I" that resonates with all of their "others."

Finally, in this intertextual overlapping, the lexical meaning of the words is augmented by cumulative contextual contingent meaning crafted by Hakalir's choice of intertexts and by the dialectical opposition of text and shadow text. In this manner, the piyyut achieves what Robert Kaufman (following Adorno and Hegel) defines as the marker of lyric poetry: an indeterminate relation between language and concepts. However, this indeterminacy is not achieved by the same devices described by Kaufman as the hallmarks of lyric poetry, nor do they accomplish the exact same loosening of lexical determination.

In its dynamics, the piyyut here does not appeal to a sense of unmediated individual encounter with the world, i.e., something that is part of a prelingual sensory experience or intuitive self-perception of the mind by itself. On the contrary, the piyyut adds a thick lingual layer of mediation between language and thought, demanding that we think about the relation between expression and experience through a lexicon condensed with the totality of the Jewish textual tradition. However, the "overdetermined" nature of this thickened lexicon is intentionally set to collapse under its own weight, releasing the consciousness contained in the poem to roam the intertextual layers of the text and reconcile them in ways that cannot be entirely determined beforehand. The non-conceptual space of lyric poetry is thus revealed to be accessible by both the reduction of language to free it from predetermined concepts and by overloading language to make it unable to carry a clear sign-referent relation.

Each intertextual layer brings a different perspective on the relation between God and the people of Israel, each plays on the reader's faculties of cognition, doubling and destabilizing preexisting mental conceptions of divinity, justice, and exile. Thus, in piyyut, consciousness is pushed to become self-consciousness not by the power of the individualized mind seeking to "assert himself as a self-enclosed subject" but by the ability of an individual mind to construct and decipher layered intertextual expressions. Piyyut's lyric nature is manifested in the participants' minds in a bilateral intertextual process that changes the meaning of both alluding and evoked texts.

To conclude, my analysis of Rabbi Elazar Hakalir's piyyut's opening stanza aims to demonstrate how the speaking "I" becomes detached from the immediate dramatic scene of utterance. Instead, it imposes a non-individualized sense of speakerhood on the participant—

whether the participant is a solitary reader in their room or a member of a congregation sitting on the synagogue floor, reading the piyyut with others (as is customary on *Tish`a Be'av*). By infusing the piyyut's words with intertextual meaning that guides and shapes the poem's sound play, Hakalir imbues each line with what Hegel termed "spiritual" meaning. This refers to a semantic process in which internal thoughts and notions are externalized into communal speech, changing its range of possible meanings. Although the piyyut addresses God, His relationship with the people of Israel, and the speaker specifically, it is overly simplistic to conclude, as Hegel might have, that the poem culminates in an "undivided unity" of the speaker, the collective, and the divine. As demonstrated above, Hakalir establishes a dialectical dynamic between text and shadow text, the speaker and the addressee. Without negating crucial components, this dynamic cannot settle on a singular conclusion or reach a moment of “unreflective assimilation.” Thus, this poem, set to describe the horror of exile, becomes an act of willingly engaging in a mental exile—a process in which the mind is liberated from predetermined notions of divine justice and selfhood. Instead, the piyyut directs the participant’s focus toward an ongoing process of self-reflection that transcends individualized selfhood.

Chapter Three:

Lyric Resistance and Piyyut in Erez Biton's Early Poetry

This chapter focuses on the poetry of Erez Biton (1942-), who, immediately upon publishing his early volumes of poetry in the late 1970s, has been regarded as the founding father of Mizrahi poetry, that is, poetry that relates to the experience of Jews from the Muslim world post-1948.[136] This chapter also tends to the question of Mizrahi poetry as a category and, with the paradigmatic example of Erez Biton, shows how it can be contextualized within the larger corpus of MENA Jewish literature, with piyyut being the scarlet thread running through its pre- and post-1948 corpora of poetry.

Throughout the chapter, I will argue that Biton has offered in his work not only a new thematic territory into which Hebrew literature can delve but also a new form of lyric personhood, that is, a new (or, rather, renewed)[137] relation among the speaker, world, and poetic language. In this structure of personhood, individuality is produced while being positioned between competing codes of signification, one of which is in danger of erasure by the other. Biton's poetic language structurally seeks to show the multiplicity of meanings that the objects of perception can take and how those meanings are already always marked socially, ideologically, and historically, creating a vortex of denotations in which the speaker himself becomes endangered. Unlike many other models of lyric personhood in Hebrew literature and beyond, the threat to which Biton's lyric speaker responds is not existential, in the sense that it is not focused on an individualistic experience of ennui or dread of death, but a collective threat of cultural eradication of one group by another.[138] In this manner, Biton's poetry complicates the common dyadic assumption of lyric

[136] "Mizrahi" (מזרחי) is an adjective and a noun, meaning "easterner" or "oriental." In modern Israeli Hebrew the adjective denotes a relation to the Jewish communities of the Muslim Middle East and North Africa (MENA). I further explain the meaning and history of this term below.

[137] As with any argument regarding primacy, it is easy to deconstruct the lyric structure I present in this chapter and strip it of its novelty by showing how it mixes preexisting aspects of older poetic schools. I happily accept this fact and encourage this deconstruction. In many ways, Biton himself has never clung too closely to the argument that he is the first of Mizrahi poets or has revolutionized Hebrew poetry (though, as I will show, many others did). In this manner, it is essential to mention the two earlier poets with whom Biton often aligned himself: Haim Nahman Bialik (1873-1934) and Avot Yeshurun (1904-1992). Both of these very different poets, especially Yeshurun, present a similar mixture of poetic devices and historical circumstances while marking their Jewish-Ashkenazi origins. Similarly, one should consider the often-overlooked poets Aharon Almog (1931-2021) and Shlomo Zamir (1929-2017) as poets of Mizrahi origin who participated in the Statehood Generation of poetry while highlighting their own history.

[138] An interesting Hebrew precursor to this structure of personhood can be found in the collective (so-called "national") poetry of the *Ha-teḥiya* generation, particularly in the work of Bialik. The glaring difference between these corpora is that, in turn-of-the-20th-century Ashkenazi poetry, it is an outside group that threatens the speaker's audience's

sociality, which positions the lyric "I" as the counterpart to an unmarked "society." Instead, Biton offers a triadic structure in which the "I" is produced by the double grindstones of "hegemony" and "the oppressed."

Three recurring textual devices produce this form of personhood and show the unique mixture that constitutes Biton's position in Hebrew literature. The first is irony, which Biton shares with the generation of Hebrew literature before him, the Statehood Generation. The other two are piyyutic intertextuality (as I defined it in the previous chapter) and multilingual translation within the text. Biton draws these two additional devices from piyyut, mainly Mizrahi piyyut, which is the piyyut tradition of the last 500 years within the Jewish communities of the Muslim world. In this chapter, I highlight Biton's use of irony and intertextuality, relying on Almog Behar, Haviva Pedaya, and Omri Ben-Yehuda's extensive discussions of Biton's mixture of Hebrew and Judeo-Moroccan Arabic. [139]

I argue for the importance of framing Biton's revolution by its lyric form, poetic devices, and connection to piyyut to defy a prevalent trend in scholarship, in which Biton's innovation is defined only by its thematic content and sociological positioning. An example of this tendency is Dan Miron's 2019 argument, that the uniqueness of Biton's oeuvre "is evidently related to that which is 'not-Ashkenazi' in the poems," Biton's ability to sketch "the lived experience of the entire population," and the fact that he offers Hebrew literature a post-1950s Mizrahi equivalent to the social-realist literature that defined Eastern-European Ashkenazi literature around the turn of the 20th century.[140] Miron argues, however, that one should read Biton's poems for "their lyrical essence and the poetic personality that uniquely shines through them" and not for "their ethnic attires, which ostensibly align with the turn towards the East."[141]

In this manner, Miron reiterates the dichotomy I try to dismantle throughout this dissertation between "lyric" and "the East," even while concluding that the essence of Biton's poetry is lyrical despite its Eastern "attire." In the first chapter, I showed how the antinomy between these terms was set up within European literary studies; here, we can see how it functions

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existence, while in Biton's poetry, both groups are part of the immediate assumed readership. This similarity between the two positions warrants further exploration and can explain much of Biton's (and other Mizrahi writers') attention to Bialik's work, adding another layer to how that relationship has been discussed in the scholarship so far. See Lital Levy, "Bialik and the Sephardim: The Ethnic Encoding of Modern Hebrew Literature," in *Poetic Trespass: Writing between Hebrew and Arabic in Israel and Palestine* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 60–102.

[139] Almog Behar, "'בוא מן הפינה אל במת הבמות' - על הלשונות השונות בשירתו של ארז ביטון" ["Come from the Corner to the Stage of Stages" - On the Different Languages in the Poetry of Erez Biton]," in *Anna Min Al-Magrab - Reading Erez Biton's Poetry*, ed. Ketzia Alon and Yochai Oppenheimer (Israel: Hakibbutz Hameuchad and Gama Publishing, 2014), 147–94; Haviva Pedaya, *שיבתו של הקול הגולה: זהות מזרחית: פואטיקה, מוזיקה ומרחב [Return of the Lost Voice]* (Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2016); Omri Ben-Yehuda, "The Minor Move of Trauma: Reading Erez Biton," in *Contemporary Sephardic and Mizrahi Literature, A Diaspora*, ed. Dario Miccoli (London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 115–31.

[140] Dan Miron, "אחרית דבר: לתת צלקת בעולם פצע שהגליד ולא הגליד על שירתו של ארז ביטון [Afterword: To Leave a Scar in the World, a Wound That Has Healed and yet Not Healed, on the Poetry of Erez Biton]," in *Stiches* (Israel: Hakibbutz Hameuchad and Mosad Bialik, 2019), 315.
All translations from the Hebrew are mine unless otherwise stated.

[141] Miron, 316.

on the stage of Hebrew literary studies in Israel. Other recent research on Biton's poetry, including work that is more progressive by nature by scholars such as Hanan Hever, Ketzia Alon, and Yochai Oppenheimer, has similarly framed his oeuvre as founded in various ways on its "non-Ashkenazi" content markers. For example, these scholars have focused on its thematic inclusion of "folkloric" Moroccan objects and traditions, on its protest against Ashkenazi hegemony, its revolutionary repudiation of the Zionist ideology of "the rejection of the Diaspora," and its representation of the subaltern positioning of mimicry within Israeli culture.[142] While all these arguments are valid, indeed crucial for a complete understanding of the politics and poetics of Biton's work, they also frame him as an internal "other" within the world of Hebrew literature—as a marked poet who allows an unmarked reader to become acquainted with something new from the East.

Following in Haviva Pedaya's footsteps,[143] I argue that this type of scholarly approach to Biton's poetry attests to the dynamism of his work and speaks volumes about its power within its original matrix; however, it cannot fully capture Biton's ultimate position in the annals of Hebrew literature as a forefather of a rich and still-developing school of poetics. To fully understand Biton's poetry, we must recognize that his self-positioning as an "other" is always accompanied by a parallel self-positioning as a "self." In this chapter, I discuss Biton's poetry not as an addendum to the mainstream of Hebrew poetry but as a core moment in its development. This approach also answers Uri S. Cohen's provocative statement, which he raised in reviewing Biton's 2022 volume, *Stitches*:

> Hebrew poetry should not inquire about Mizrahiness, but, rather, Israeli poetry should inquire about the Ashkenaz State [that is, the assumption that the State of Israel is unquestionably Ashkenazi]. The Ashkenaz state is the anomaly, and its poetry, which saw itself as Israeli poetry, was voluntarily blind to the changes in the human makeup of the Israeli collectivity.[144]

Indeed, the problem I located within the critical reception of Biton is also that facing "Mizrahi poetry" and "Mizrahi literature" as categories and the way they are frequently treated not as a cross-section of the larger corpus of "Hebrew Literature" but as an offshoot to be discussed separately. As I illustrated above, one discursive tool by which people segregate Mizrahi poetry from other subfields of Hebrew poetry is examining its lyric aspects in segregation from its Mizrahi content. In this manner, the larger historical argument, which I unfolded in the first two chapters of this dissertation, for the need to reconceptualize piyyut as a variant of the global lyric is fractally mirrored here: we need to recognize the lyricality of Mizrahi poetry in relation to the overall corpus of Hebrew lyric poetry and as a unique variant within it, and see its Mizrahi materials not only as content but also in form.

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[142] See these authors' research in the edited volume dedicated to Erez Biton's poetry: Ketzia Alon and Yochai Oppenheimer, eds., *אנא מן אלמגרב - קריאות בשירת ארז ביטון [Anna Min Al-Magrab - Reading Erez Biton's Poetry]* (Israel: Hakibbutz Hameuchad and Gama Publishing, 2014).

[143] Pedaya, *שיבתו של הקול הגולה: זהות מזרחית: פואטיקה, מוזיקה ומרחב [Return of the Lost Voice]*, 87–103.

[144] Uri S. Cohen, "התנועה הפיוטית מהפיצוץ אל השירה [The Poetic Movement from Explosion to Poetry]," *Haaretz*, July 13, 2022.

Let me conclude the introduction with a brief survey of Mizrahi history and Biton's biography from the 1940s to the present. In the process, I also offer a new perspective on Biton's biography, emphasizing the intersection of his initial attempts to break into the Israeli poetry scene and the evolution of his poetics. Additionally, I address Biton's canonization by various actors in the 21st century, highlighting significant moments of change in his recent reception.

Following this survey, the chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, I argue that to think of Biton's oeuvre as a core member of the corpus of Hebrew poetry, we must reconsider its origin and explore the poetic intergenerational dynamics between Biton as a young poet and the poetic generation that came before him—the Statehood Generation. I especially highlight Biton's relation to Natan Zach (1930-2020), who, in the 1960s, the decade in which Biton started publishing, took the leadership position among his generation's poets.[145] To demonstrate this point, I first review Zachian poetics from a Mizrahi perspective by integrating the conclusions of prominent Statehood Generation scholars (Kronfeld, Tsamir, and Gluzman), with Pedaya's critique of the lyric "Thin-'I'" of Hebrew poetry, which was left in the wake of that generation.

As I show, Zach sees lyric poetry as generated by relinquishing a shared language to favor a private, constantly renewing, poetic language. As Gluzman and Tsamir show, this notion of poetics as a personal linguistic autonomy is coterminous with the overall surrounding moment of Zionist statehood and its emphasis on independence and the erasure of the diasporic past. Pedaya's critique, however, allows us to see the difference between Zach's self-erasure, in which he becomes a subject by claiming his agency while poetically negating those parts of his selfhood he conceptualizes as objects, and the position of Mizrahi writers who manifest their agency by resisting that erasure and exposing the ways it treats them and their selfhoods as objects to be negated.

To clarify this position and its poetic manifestations, I read one of Biton's earliest poems, "Frenzied" ("רוח תזזית") in its original 1964 publication form. While no specific Mizrahi thematic markers appear in this early version, it nevertheless expresses a structure of personhood and resistance similar to that which will make him the influential poet he is. He already offers here formal innovation in his use of intertextuality and lyric collective address. Furthermore, I read this poem as a manifesto, in direct dialogue with the Zachian poetics of the time, manifested in the poem's use of rhyme, both as form and content. I show how Biton took Zachian poetics, specifically its explicit (and, at times, reductive) expression in manifestos, and pushed it to its limits.

In the second section, I turn to the label "Mizrahi poetry" and examine how prominent scholars of the last fifteen years, Ktzia Alon, Yochai Oppenheimer, Haviva Pedaya, and Almog Behar, attempted to define it. As I show, the discussion of this term can be conceptualized as between two poles. At one end, Oppenheimer, and to some extent Alon define Mizrahi poetry by its culturally "marked" oppositional role against unmarked Israeli culture or as hybridization and de-binarization of prevailing Israeli cultural dichotomies. At the other end, Pedaya and Behar see

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[145] Amos Lavin, *בלי קו: לדרכה של "לקראת" בספרות העברית החדשה [Without a Line: To the Path of "Likrat" in the New Hebrew Literature]* (Israel: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1984).

Mizrahi literature as part of a larger context of centuries of textual heritage that predates the state of Israel. This leads me to the second half of this section, in which I detail the revival of piyyut in Israeli Mizrahi culture over the past twenty years and how it reinforces Pedaya's notion of Mizrahi literature.

Finally, in the third section, I return to Erez Biton's poetry and show how, even in his first book of poetry, he manifests this notion of Mizrahi poetry as a textual continuity by alluding to piyyut. Here I discuss one poem from *Moroccan Offering* (1976) titled "Moroccan Piyyut" ("פיוט מרוקאי"). As I show, this poem offers a rare move in which Biton addresses an imagined Mizrahi in-crowd and, through piyyutic intersectionality, connects his poetic project with the long history of MENA Jewish textual traditions. This poem offers an example in which Biton establishes a lyric personhood that generates self-consciousness by overlaying textual and historical meanings through dense, multifaceted allusions. This poem achieves this selfhood by claiming its heritage, the "others" that came before him, as a core aspect of itself, not obfuscating the past but celebrating it. Biton thus merges models and textual devices of modern and pre-modern Hebrew literature, presenting a heteronomous selfhood that later becomes a core principle of contemporary Hebrew poetry.

A Short Survey of Mizrahi History and Erez Biton's Biography

"Mizrahi" (מזרחי), which translates to "easterner" or "oriental," is an adjective denoting relation to the Jewish communities of the Muslim Middle East and North Africa (MENA). During the early 1950s, in the wake of the British and French empires' post-WWII partial withdrawal from the area, many of the Mizrahi Jewish communities in the MENA were forced out of their countries of origin and migrated to the newly formed state of Israel.[146] Upon arrival, the new MENA immigrants faced discriminatory legal and economic policies. The newly formed state was administratively and economically ill-equipped to absorb the newcomers, even while encouraging and financing their relocation. Israeli Government workers and policymakers' orientalist and racist approaches compounded the harm done to the new immigrants, who were treated in a dehumanizing manner and exploited for demographic and political goals.[147]

In Israeli cultural memory, the symbol for this mistreatment was the immigrants' forced placement in transit camps called *ma`abarot* (singular: *ma'abarah*).[148] The ma`abarot were often

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[146] For the larger historical context, see Yinon Cohen, "Migration Patterns to and from Israel," *Contemporary Jewry* 29, no. 2 (2009): 115–25; Esther Meir-Glitzenstein, "Turning Points in the Historiography of Jewish Immigration from Arab Countries to Israel," *Israel Studies* 23, no. 3 (2018): 114–22; Dalia Ofer, *בין עולים לוותיקים : ישראל בעלייה הגדולה . 1953-1948 [Israel in the Great Wave of Immigration 1948-1953]* (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1996); Sammy Smooha, "The Mass Immigrations to Israel: A Comparison of the Failure of the Mizrahi Immigrants of the 1950s with the Success of the Russian Immigrants of the 1990s," *Journal of Israeli History* 27, no. 1 (March 2008): 1–27; Aziza Khazzoom, "Did the Israeli State Engineer Segregation? On the Placement of Jewish Immigrants in Development Towns in the 1950s," *Social Forces* 84, no. 1 (September 2005): 115–34.

[147] Sami Shalom Chetrit, *המאבק המזרחי בישראל: בין דיכוי לשחרור, בין הזדהות לאלטרנטיבה 1948-2003 [The Mizrahi Struggle in Israel: Between Oppression and Liberation, Identification and Alternative 1948-2003]* (Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 2004), 41–72.

[148] Batya Shimony, *על סף הגאולה: סיפור המעברה דור ראשון ושני [On the Threshold of Redemption: The Story of the Ma'abara: First and Second Generation]* (Israel: Dvir and Heksherim Institute, 2008).

located on top of Palestinian towns and villages ruined during the *Nakba* or in "development towns" along the state of Israel's disputed borders. Inside the ma`abarot, appointed officials policed the immigrants' living conditions, employment opportunities, and geographical mobility. In addition, the ma`abarot's infrastructure, built for obsolescence, offered no reliable access to sanitary, dietary, and healthcare facilities. This social and physical structure created a de-facto state of dependency, wherein those living in the ma`abarot were not allowed the autonomy to better their situation.[149] The introduction of the Israeli education system to the ma`abarot reinforced the dependency, as the government placed ma`abarot's children and youth in special education programs operated by non-Mizrahi teachers and principals who set explicit goals of assimilating the children and severing them from their parents' cultures and languages.[150] The ma`abarot, meant to be a temporary solution, were prevalent for the better part of the 1950s, with some camps disbanded only during the early 1960s.

As a result of these circumstances, the heteronomous immigrant communities that arrived in Israel with varied languages and cultures were reshaped into a new social category within one generation. This new group, which in the 1970s took the label of "Mizrahi" people (plural: Mizrahim), was publicly perceived as homogeneous and defined in opposition to the (equally heterogenous) hegemonic group of European "Ashkenazi" Jews. While the new identity label "Mizrahi" never fully subsumed other pre-1948 identities relating to the immigrants' origins, it often overshadowed them, adding an air of excessive specificity to such labels as "Egyptian-," "Bagdadi-," "Amazigh-," or "Persian-" Jews.[151]

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, different Mizrahi communities in the ma`abarot and urban areas attempted to change their conditions in organized and semi-organized campaigns and direct actions.[152] Those attempts were disrupted and disregarded by the Israeli government and its police force. In the 1970s, as the first generation of children born or raised in the country entered the national public sphere, Mizrahi attempts to coordinate political campaigns reached a critical mass, allowing Mizrahim to emerge as a distinct and active agent in Israeli culture and politics. During the decade, Mizrahi people became a political force in myriad ways, including the radical left movement of the Israeli Black Panthers (est. 1971) and a voting block that allowed the *Likud* right-wing party to first achieve a majority over the *Knesset* (Israeli parliament) in 1977.[153] The literary articulation of this newly formed Mizrahi identity also reached the mainstream of Hebrew

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[149] Ammiel Alcalay, "Postscript: 'To End, to Begin Again,'" in *After Jews and Arabs: Remaking Levantine Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 220–84; Mordecai Naor, ed., *Immigrants and Ma'abarot 1948-1952* (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1986); Ella Shohat, "Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Jewish Victims," *Social Text*, no. 19/20 (Autumn 1988): 1–35.

[150] Shlomo Swirski, *חינוך בישראל - מחוז המסלולים הנפרדים [Education in Israel: Schooling for Inequality]* (Israel: Brayrot, 1990).

[151] Chetrit, *The Mizrahi Struggle in Israel*, 43–47.

[152] Gadi Algazi, "התארגנות נוכח כפיפות: מאבק המעברות, 1951-1952 [Organizing in the Face of Subjugation: The Struggle of the Transit Camps, 1951-1952]," *Zmanim, a Quarterly Journal Devoted to History*, no. 149 (2024): 76–95; Bryan K. Roby, *The Mizrahi Era of Rebellion: Israel's Forgotten Civil Rights Struggle, 1948-1966* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse Univ. Press, 2015).

[153] Chetrit, *The Mizrahi Struggle in Israel*.

literature during this period, first in the prose works of Shimon Balas (1930-2019) and Sami Michael (1926-2024) and later in poetry through the groundbreaking first two poetry volumes by Erez Biton: *Moroccan Offering* (*מנחה מרוקאית*, 1976) and *The Book of Mint* (*ספר הנענע*, 1979).[154]

Biton's life story, some of which he includes in these two books, exemplifies much of the history detailed above while also diverging from it in several crucial points. Biton was born in Oran, Algeria, to Moroccan parents displaced during the Second World War. At birth, his first name was *Ya`ish* (*יעיש*). In 1948, at age six, Biton and his family migrated to the newly founded State of Israel. They were placed by Israeli authorities in a ma'abara in Ra'anana and later moved to Lod (Lydda).[155] In 1952, at the age of ten, Biton was injured after finding a live grenade near the town, left over from the 1948 war.[156] Due to this injury, Biton lost his left hand and his sight. He was sent to the Jerusalem Institute for the Blind, where the faculty changed his first name from Ya`ish to Erez, literally: "cedar." This new Israeli name borrows the name of a local tree to manufacture an air of nativeness while also embodying the new statist cult of physical strength. This triple change, from sight to blindness, from Ya'ish to Erez, and from Lod to Jerusalem, completely changed Biton's life trajectory. On one occasion, Biton relates:

> I often wonder: who is this Biton who was called Ya`ish and is called Erez today? Who would I have been if I hadn't been injured? I probably would have become a permanent worker at the airport,[157] started a family, and most likely lived in Lod. […] I would not have been who I am now. Blindness transformed me from Ya`ish to Erez, into a curious person who constantly wonders about things.[158]

As Hadas Shabat-Nadir argues, Biton's forced separation from Lod and from his given name is a distinctive variant of the common cultural erasure Mizrahi children experienced during the early decades of Israeli statehood.[159] Shabat-Nadir also shows how, in his poetry, this unique mixture of blindness and cultural difference allows Biton to complicate the stereotypical dichotomy between Ashkenazi and Mizrahi cultures, creating instead a new hybrid code of "Mediterranean" culture.

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[154] Aviad Moreno and Noah Gerber, "חקר יהודי ארצות האסלאם בישראל: התפתחויות ופיצולים [The Study of the Jews of Islamic Countries in Israel: Developments and Divisions]," in *The Long History of Mizrahim: New Directions in the Study of Jews from Muslim Countries* (Sde-Boker: The Ben-Gurion Research Institute for the Study of Israel and Zionism, 2021), 7–39; Hannan Hever, *ספרות שנכתבת מכאן: קיצור הספרות הישראלית [Literature Written from Here]* (Israel: Miskal - Yedioth Ahronoth books, 1999), 94–115.

[155] Amit Gish, "ביטון ארז (יעיש) [Erez (Ya`ish) Biton]," *Heksherim Lexicon of Israeli Authors* (blog), accessed July 18, 2024, https://heksherimlexicon.bgu.ac.il/lexicon-entry/ביטון-ארז-יעיש/.

[156] Erez Biton has presented a few competing stories regarding the origins of the ammunition that took his sight, blaming it on the 1948 war but also claiming it was left there more recently by the "Fedayeen" (Palestinian combatants from Jordan). While Biton often calls the explosive he found a "grenade," he has also described it as a bomb and a landmine. All these stories are probable. I reproduce above the story as it is most often cited.

[157] Israel's central airport (Ben Gurion Airport, TLV airport) is close to Lod, and many of its laborers are from the city's Mizrahi population.

[158] Cited in Hadas Shabat-Nadir, "'ילד בלי פנים': על העיוורון בשירת ארז ביטון ["Child Without a Face": On Blindness in the Poetry of Erez Biton]," in *Anna Min Al-Magrab - Reading Erez Biton's Poetry*, ed. Ketzia Alon and Yochai Oppenheimer (Israel: Hakibbutz Hameuchad and Gama Publishing, 2014), 115.

[159] Shabat-Nadir, "'ילד בלי פנים': על העיוורון בשירת ארז ביטון ["Child Without a Face": On Blindness in the Poetry of Erez Biton]."

At the same time, within Biton's narrative of self, his years at the school for blinded children, away from Lod, allowed him the creative opportunities with music and literature that later made him a poet. This is partly due to the unique nature of the institute to which Biton was sent. Jerusalem Institute for the Blind (בית חינוך לעיוורים בירושלים), first established in 1902, was an extremely respected and progressive institute that has been at the forefront of holistic, child-focused education since its inception.[160] This institute differed from most of the parallel assimilatory educational programs in the ma`abarot, which explicitly sought to disconnect Mizrahi children from their heritage while tracking them to become manual laborers in the newly industrialized market.[161] Like those programs, The Institute for the Blind was an assimilatory institution; however, from Biton's recollections, it seems that it also offered Biton the means and connections to develop artistic experiences.[162] Biton recalls that one of the institute's staff, Elisheva Kaplan, brought his early poems to Shimon Halkin, then the Chair of the Hebrew Literature Department at the Hebrew University. Through that faculty member, Halkin encouraged Biton to continue his poetic endeavors and send his poems to literary journals.[163]

After graduating high school, and as his hand injury did not allow him to be employed in the jobs usually offered to the institute's graduates (or to be conscripted to the army, as most Israeli-Jews are forced to do at that age), Biton was able to start his undergraduate studies in social work in the early 1960s. During that time, Biton began publishing poetry in newspapers and literary journals, most notably in *Keshet,* as per Halkin's recommendation.[164] Most of his poems of the 1960s, which Biton never collected, show little similarity to his later, more famous work. They also demonstrate an evident influence by contemporary leading poets, especially David Avidan.[165]

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[160] Renana Kristal, "אור בחשכה: בית חינוך לעיוורים בירושלים, המוסד הראשון לחינוך מיוחד ביישוב היהודי בארץ ישראל" [Light in the darkness: the Jewish institute for the blind in Jerusalem the first speical education institution in the Jewish yishuv in Eretz-Israel]," *Dor Ledor*, no. 49 (2015): 208–36.

[161] Swirski, *חינוך בישראל - מחוז המסלולים הנפרדים [Education in Israel: Schooling for Inequality]*, 87–102.

[162] The Jerusalem Institute for the Blind had its own tracking system, in which it trained students for "blind appropriate" manual jobs. However, Biton was exempt from that program due to his hand injury. See Shabat-Nadir, "'ילד בלי פנים': על העיוורון בשירת ארז ביטון" ["Child Without a Face": On Blindness in the Poetry of Erez Biton]," 117–26; Helit Yeshurun, "המרוקאית היא אני אחר: ארז ביטון [Moroccan Language Is Another Me: Erez Biton]," in *How Did You Do It? Interviews with Poets* (Israel: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2016), 473.

[163] Yeshurun, "Moroccan Language Is Another Me," 474.

[164] The founding editor of *Keshet*, Aharon Amir, was fluent in Arabic and a member of the Canaanite Movement, which advocated replacing Zionism with "becoming one with the Semitic realm." Under Amir's editorship, Keshet became a significant platform for creators of Mizrahi origins. Alongside Biton's early publications, it was also the initial Hebrew literary home for Jacqueline Kahanoff and A.B. Yehoshua.
Biton's first significant publication appears in *Keshet 24* (Summer 1964). For some of his earliest publications during the 1960s and 1970s, see Erez Biton, "וריאציות על נושא של באך; הפטרה [Variations on a Theme by Bach; Patra]," ed. Aharon Amir, *Keshet*, no. 24 (Summer 1964): 42–43; Biton; Erez Biton, "בלדה על הגשר הנופל [A Ballad Over a Falling Bridge]," ed. Aharon Amir, *Keshet*, no. 44 (Summer 1969): 70–71; Erez Biton, "לזהרה אלפסיה," *Ma`ariv*, October 17, 1975; Erez Biton, "מנחה מרוקאית (שיר) [Moroccan Offering (A Poem)]," ed. Aharon Amir, *Keshet*, no. 68 (Summer 1975): 71; Erez Biton, "הדוד יהודה שרביט [Yehuda Sharvit, My Uncle]," ed. Jacob Besser, *`Iton 77*, no. 4 (October 1977): 9; Erez Biton, "עיתון," *Ma`ariv*, January 14, 1977; Erez Biton, "קסידות סוליקה," ed. Jacob Besser, *`Iton 77*, no. 11–12 (October 1978): 5.

[165] Biton reports that he has had little opportunity to engage with the Statehood Generation poetry as a young person, explaining that very little of it was transcribed in Braille and that he had to rely on radio readings instead. In his

There is one notable exception, "Frenzied" (רוח תזזית), which Biton published in August 1964 in the literary supplement of the newspaper *Haaretz*. This poem was collected in *Moroccan Offering* (1976), and became a paradigmatic example of Biton's work, even giving the name to the movie that Sami Shalom Chetrit made about Biton's life and work. I discuss the poem, in its early form, in the next section.

After finishing his undergraduate studies in Jerusalem, Biton moved to Ashkelon, a city in the southwest of Israel deemed geographically but also culturally part of the "periphery" because of its predominantly Mizrahi population. There, Biton focused on his tasks as a social worker and stopped writing poetry almost completely. In his capacity as a social worker, Biton became reacquainted with the Israeli-Mizrahi population, especially the most marginalized and unassimilated among them. This also allowed him to form a new connection with the Arabic language, the language in which he spoke with many of his clients. In the early 1970s, Biton began his MA studies at Bar-Ilan University just outside Tel-Aviv, establishing new relations with people in the Israeli geographical and cultural center. During this time, he returned to writing poetry. Here is how Biton explains his return to poetry and the immense change in his poetics due to these socio-geographical movements:

> […In Ashkelon] I accumulated life experience meeting society's unfortunates, immigrants who were wandering the streets as if moonstruck, living in tiny tenement apartments in a foreign language […] All these materials became a reservoir for a great surge that sought to burst forth from within me. […] My return to the metropolitan center, to Tel-Aviv, created this schism, this inner collision between my worlds, and so the poems were written […].[166]

This "collision" between his experiences in Ashkelon and Tel-Aviv led Biton to write a new type of poetry, focused on the experience of Mizrahi immigrants in Israel, Moroccan cultural heritage, and the mixture of "proper" Modern Hebrew with Judeo-Arabic and the rabbinic Hebrew of prayer and piyyut. After some earlier publications in daily newspapers and *Keshet* in the mid-1970s,[167] Biton published his first book, *Moroccan Offering* in 1976, followed three years later by his second volume, *The Book of Mint*.

By the 1980s, amid Biton's publications, the prose work of Mizrahi prose authors, and the political rise of Mizrahi political movements, Mizrahi identity became a mainstay of Israeli prose

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interview with Helit Yeshurun, he relates that only one of Yehuda Amichai's books was available and that he only "became aware of Zach" after the publication of *All the Milk and Honey* (1966). Avidan is completely unnamed in this interview, and in all the others I have read. Still, Biton's poems of 1964 align neatly with Avidan's early poetry, especially those of *ברזים ערופי שפתיים* [*Lip-Lopped Faucets* (1954), in their prosody, rhyme, and rhetoric. One can explain this similarity by citing Biton's admitted admiration of Natan Alterman at the time and argue that both early Biton and Avidan reached similar destinations as they began their journeys working with similar poetic origins. Another explanation is that Biton read Avidan as a youth—or heard him recite his poetry—but did not include him in these interviews for other reasons. See Yeshurun, "Moroccan Language Is Another Me."

[166] Yeshurun, 480.

[167] See footnote 164.

fiction and non-fiction and a hot topic many intellectuals felt they must address.[168] At the same time, Mizrahi poetry was siloed from its mainstream counterpart and labeled a political, non-lyrical subgenre.[169]

This segregation is immediately established in the reception of Biton's work in the late 1970s and early 1980s. While critics warmly received Biton's poetry books and were excited about their new thematic content, other ideological and sociological factors led to Biton's seclusion within the Hebrew literary scene. When asked about this time and his relation to contemporaries like Yona Wallach and Meir Wieseltier, Biton explains that during the years after the publication of his books, he "felt isolated" and as if "no one was paying any attention" to him.[170] This remoteness from the literary scene resulted in sporadic publications between 1979 and 2009, a poetic near-silence only interrupted in 1990 with one additional book of poetry, *Transcontinental Bird* (*ציפור בין יבשות*).

While his poetic output was limited during this time, Biton remained an active commentator on Israeli public life, and to that extent fulfilled the role of a public intellectual as Israeli writers usually do. He led the "Tikva" student movement during his MA studies at Bar-Ilan University, wrote a weekly opinion column for *Ma'ariv* newspaper from 1983 to 1992, edited the literary journal *Apirion* from 1982 onward, and more.[171] So, while Biton added only a few more poems to his oeuvre during this period, his influence was felt nevertheless. Being a public figure and commenting on political affairs every week in multiple venues, Biton played a prominent role as a spokesperson for Mizrahi perspectives and interests. In many of his weekly columns, Biton argued for the need to harmonize the different Jewish cultures in Israel, as well as for a consensual two-state peace agreement with the Palestinian nation. At times, Biton's stance was too assimilatory for Mizrahi activists, even leading to a 1987 event where his house was sprayed with graffiti, accusing him of being a sellout and worse.[172] From 1991 to 1993 Biton served as the director of the Hebrew Writers Association in Israel. In 1993, he registered with the Israeli Labor Party and even ran in its 1999 primaries, albeit unsuccessfully. He left the Labor Party to join the One Nation party in 2003, headed at the time by `Amir Peretz.

Biton's importance as a leading poet and inspirational Mizrahi figure was reiterated at the beginning of the new millennium, as a slew of new journals and publications appeared on the Israeli literary scene. In 2006, the literary-cultural journal *Ha-kivun Mizraḥ* ("*The Direction:*

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[168] Dror Mishani, *בכל העניין המזרחי יש איזה אבסורד [The Ethnic Unconscious: The Emergence of "Mizrahiut" in the Hebrew Literature of the Eighties]*, 972, Ha-Sidrah Le-Tarbut Meduberet (Tel Aviv: 'Am 'oved, 2006), 11–36.

[169] Ketzia Alon, *אפשרות שלישית לשירה: עיונים בפואטיקה מזרחית [Oriental Israeli Poetics]* (Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2011), 27–36.

[170] Yeshurun, "Moroccan Language Is Another Me," 473.

[171] For a fuller list of his activities in the 1980s and 1990s, see the biographic summary he published in the special issue of *Ha-kivun Mizraḥ* dedicated to his work. Mati Shemoelof and Bat-Shakhar Gorfinkel, eds., *הכיוון מזרח 12: לגנוב גבולות בבהונות שקטים – הומאז' ליצירת המשורר ארז ביטון ודיון ביצירה הביוגרפית והאוטוביוגרפית [The Direction East 12: Stealing Borders with Quiet Toes - a Tribute to the Work of the Poet Erez Biton and a Discussion of Biographical and Autobiographical Work]*, vol. 12 (Israel: Bimat Kedem, 2006), 9.

[172] Baruch Naeh, "כתובות נאצה גזעניות נרשמו על דלתו של ארז ביטון [Racist Hate Slogans Were Written on the Door of Erez Biton]," *Ma`ariv*, 1987.

East") dedicated a special issue to Biton's work and cultural legacy.[173] This issue, edited by Mati Shemoelof and Bat-Shakhar Gorfinkel and published by *Bimat Kedem,* with the support of the feminist Mizrahi movement *Aḥoti* ("My Sister"), reframed the discussion of Biton's work in terms of generational knowledge and intergenerational erasure. The editors highlighted Biton's importance for the new generation of writers, most of whom are third- and even fourth-generation Mizrahi immigrants. This publication underscored the lasting impact of his poetry and the way it is read by literati who grew up in a world where Biton's early poems were a given fact. Speaking in familial terms, this issue was one of the first sources to claim Biton not as a peer or a "big brother" figure but as a poetic grandparent and ancestor, and calling to cement his place in Israeli canon anew.

Three years later, in 2009, Biton published his fourth volume of poetry, *Timbisert - A Moroccan Bird* (*תמביסרת - ציפור מרוקאית*), which included new poems alongside reprints of his earlier volumes of poetry from 1976-1990, making those out-of-print works available for new readerships. This new publication served many influential critics, from Eli Hirsh and Almog Behar to Ariel Hirschfeld, to reflect on Biton's long career and discuss his lasting impact on Hebrew literature, further fortifying the new frame established by the writers of *Ha-kivun Mizraḥ*.[174]

Biton's impact during this period is powerfully described by Sami Shalom Chetrit, one of the most vital Mizrahi poets and scholars of Mizrahi history of the generation between Erez Biton and the editors of *Ha-kivun Mizraḥ*. In 2006, Chetrit characterized Biton's early poetry as "the spark that ignited the fire, the quarry from which Mizrahi poetry was mined," adding that:

> Erez Biton is for Hebrew poetry and Hebrew Literature as a whole, what the Israeli Black Panthers Movement was for the state and for society. I don't need to wait for the luminaries of Hebrew Literature to conclude decisively now: Erez Biton has saved Hebrew poetry and the Hebrew language from complete annihilation. Just try and imagine poetry and literature in Israel today if Biton's voice had not appeared to reattach Hebrew and Hebrew poetry to the realms of Arabic, Mizrahiness, and the Mediterranean.[175]

While many throughout the 1980s and beyond have framed Biton's work as a pivotal moment that allowed later Mizrahi writers to express their experiences for the first time, it is only twenty-some years later that we see an insistence on the enduring legacy of that "first time" and how it facilitated something entirely different within the realm of Hebrew literature on the deepest of levels.

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[173] Shemoelof and Gorfinkel, *הכיוון מזרח 12: לגנוב גבולות בבהונות שקטים – הומאז' ליצירת המשורר ארז ביטון ודיון ביצירה הביוגרפית והאוטוביוגרפית [The Direction East 12: Stealing Borders with Quiet Toes - a Tribute to the Work of the Poet Erez Biton and a Discussion of Biographical and Autobiographical Work]*.

[174] Ariel Hirschfeld, "ארז ביטון, אמן המסכות [Erez Biton, Master of the Persona]," *Haaretz*, November 26, 2009, sec. כללי, https://www.haaretz.co.il/misc/2009-11-26/ty-article/0000017f-e099-df7c-a5ff-e2fbd28f0000; Eli Hirsch, "ארז ביטון, תְּמְבִּיסָרְת, ציפור מרוקאית [Erez Biton - Timbisert, A Moroccan Bird]," *אלי הירש קורא שירה* (blog), October 2, 2009, https://elihirsh.com/?p=426; Almog Behar, "להיטמן כאן בין החיים בשנות החמישים בעיר לוד [To be buried here, among the living, in Lod of the fifties]," *Haaretz*, October 30, 2009, sec. ספרים, https://www.haaretz.co.il/literature/2009-10-30/ty-article/0000017f-db94-db5a-a57f-dbfe36a30000.

[175] Sami Shalom Chetrit, "דברים לערב לכבוד ארז ביטון [Remarks in Honor of Erez Biton]," The Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow - New Discourse, March 12, 2006, http://www.ha-keshet.org.il/דברים-לערב-לכבוד-ארז-ביטון-סמי-שלום-שי/.

Concurrently with the renewed interest in and scholarship about Biton in the late 2000s and early 2010s, a new wave of interest in Mizrahi literature as a category has awakened, in no small part due to the enduring work of the *Aḥoti* Mizrahi-feminist movement, *Ha-kivun Mizraḥ* Journal, the poetic activist group of *Guerrilla Tarbut [Guerilla Culture]*, and the flowering of a new global iteration of identity discourse. It is in this junction that we see, for the first time in Hebrew,[176] scholarly monographs on Mizrahi literature as a category, most notably Ketzia Alon's *Third Option for Poetry: Oriental Israeli Poetics* (*אפשרות שלישית לשירה*, 2011) and Yochai Oppenheimer's *What Does it Mean to be Authentic?: Diasporic Mizrahi Poetry in Israel* (*מה זה להיות אותנטי*, 2012), whose title is taken from one of Biton's famous poems.

Circa 2012-2014, the most recent significant movement in Mizrahi poetry emerged with the rise of the *`ars-Poetica* literary circle, spearheaded by Adi Keissar, Tehila Ḥakimi, Roy Ḥasan, and Shlomi Ḥatuka. The poets of this group invigorated the Hebrew poetry world during those years by reintroducing poetry that not only details the Mizrahi experience but also frames it as a question of literary practice, performance, and polemics.[177] At least one of these poets, Roy Ḥasan, acknowledged Biton's importance to his own work, dedicating a poem titled "My Future" to Biton as a prophetic ancestor.[178]

However, as was the case with Biton's reception in the late 1970s, the 2010s saw the Mizrahi poetry of *`ars poetica* being read through a lens that often ignored its lyrical qualities, instead fitting it into cultural narratives about Mizrahi identity and politics. As Keissar has explained, even the framing of the poets as a unified school was a product of external journalistic intervention. While all of the circle's prominent poets participated in *`ars-Poetica* events organized by Keissar and wrote from their biographical positions, drawing inspiration from established Mizrahi poets and global identity politics, they never saw themselves as a single, unified literary movement. This notion was imposed from the outside, as the press lumped them together, highlighting their more provocative anti-establishment poems. Consequently, the *`ars-Poetica* poets gained public recognition in a way that privileged political content over poetic innovation, leading much of the public discourse to overlook the specificities of each poet, as well as the formal, stylistic nuances of their work. This meant that many critics skipped over Adi Keissar's

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[176] American academia has been more welcoming of scholarship on Mizrahi literature and history, and some of the earlier monographic publications on the topic came from professors in this hemisphere, notable among them Ammiel Alcalay, Lev Hakak, and Nancy E. Berg. Lev Hakak also published in Hebrew, and together with Yosef Halevi, was one of the first to think of Mizrahi literature as a subject of inquiry, though without the term "Mizrahi literature" itself. [See references below.]

[177] Chana Kronfeld, "'I Can Write in the Dark:' Radical Intertextuality in the Poetry of Adi Keissar," *Lyre – Studies in Poetry and Lyric* 1 (2023), https://www.biupress.org/index.php/lyre/article/view/102; Alex Moshkin, "The Poetics of Marginality in Israel: Ars Poetika and the Russophone Poets of the 1.5 Generation," *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 42, no. 1 (2024): 175–99, https://doi.org/10.1353/sho.2024.a932342; Lital Levy, "Accent and Silence in Literary Multilingualism: On Postarabic Poetics," *Dibur Literary Journal*, no. Literary Multilingualism, ISSUE 7, fall 2019 (April 10, 2019), https://arcade.stanford.edu/dibur/accent-and-silence-literary-multilingualism-postarabic-poetics.

[178] Roy Hasan, *הכלבים שנבחו בילדותנו היו חסומי פה [The Dogs That Barked during Our Childhood Had Their Mouths Muzzled.]* (Israel: Tangier, 2014), 59.

deep, iconoclastic, intertextual long poems[179] or failed to appreciate Tehila Hakimi's reflexive deconstruction of desire under late capitalism.

Thus, from the early work of Erez Biton to that of the *`ars-Poetica* poets, we can observe how the label "Mizrahi poetry," defined by the strictly thematic portrayal of Mizrahi lives or the poets' biographical identity, has posed a challenge for Mizrahi writers, causing considerable discomfort. As the poet and scholar Shira Oḥayon writes in the 2006 special issue of *Ha-kivun Mizraḥ* dedicated to Erez Biton, while attempting to define the work of her contemporary Mizrahi writers:

> This new poetry of Mizrahi writers is sometimes classified as 'Mizrahi Poetry,' a category I find problematic as it cannot account for these hybridized compositions that do not mimic the Western model of modern poetry (and in our case, the Ashkenazi-Zionist model called 'Hebrew Poetry'), and do not follow any traditional models of classic 'oriental' poetry such as piyyut [...] This is poetry that transcends boundaries, that tries to blend east with west, mother- and father-tongues with the state's language, Jewish with Arab identities, secularism with religion.[180]

As Oḥayon states, the term "Mizrahi poetry" fails to describe the full reach of the poems, reducing their complex representation and refraction of social and mental reality to a non-literary identity tag. This discomfort touches on how the label "Mizrahi poetry" has been weaponized against itself. It has been used pejoratively to imply that the poetry of Mizrahi writers differs thematically, but not poetically, from any other and, therefore, should be subsumed by larger, socially unmarked categories. This label has sometimes even been mobilized to imply that works subsumed under "Mizrahi Poetry" are not genuinely poetic at all. In the 21st century, the main torchbearers of this argument have been the neo-modernist Hebrew poets working concurrently with writers of *Ha-kivun Mizraḥ* and *`ars Poetica.*[181]

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[179] Kronfeld, ""I Can Write in the Dark."

[180] Shira Ohayon, "שירה מזרחית או שירת כלאיים? [Mizrahi Poetry or Hybrid Poetry?]," *Hakivon Mizrah* 12 (Summer 2006): 35–44.

[181] These poets could also be framed as neo-neo-modernists, to calculate the number of modernist revivals between them and the modernists of the early 20th century. These poets center the journals *Hava Lehaba* (Edited by Oded Carmeli, 2011-), *Dahak* (edited by Yehuda Vizan, 2011-) and their original mothership *Ketem* (2006-2008, edited by Carmeli and Vizan). In 2015, Vizan, true to his self-description as a "radical conservative," wrote the following on Mizrahi poetry: "As there can be no separation between a poem's content and form, it is inconceivable that a poem that follows a mostly Anglo-Saxon model (i.e., free verse, bitnik rhythm, spoken word—or in this case, unmusical prose in chopped-uplines—low everyday register, first-person speaker, etc.) adorns itself with the adjective 'Mizrahi' […] the truth must be told: Mizrahi poetry, in its current form, is of the *Mizrah* [East] just as a person who holds a baguette while wearing a beret is French." (p. 622-623). In 2014, Carmeli wrote similarly in his signature tongue-in-cheek futuristic voice: "Every 'otherness' that is counted in millions is annulled in the billions […] We are all work-immigrants out of Africa, we are all refugees of the big bang. […] The future is forever more complete than the past, as the imagination is unimaginably more authentic than memory. Why write minoritarian, local, prosaic poetry? Is the universe minor? No, it is not! Is the universe local? No, it is not! Is the universe prosaic? No, it is truly profound!" (p. 5). Another recent example from the same environment appears in the Israeli literary journal *'Akhshav*, which in its heyday was one of the main journals of the Statehood Generation poetry scene. In 2018, the journal published David Neo Buḥbut's review titled "Can Mizrahi Poetry Exist without Ashkenazim? (On the Poetry of Adi Keissar)," in which Buḥbut repeats several of the talking points above. These

The rise of new publications about Mizrahi poetry and the public attention to the *`ars poetica* poets were significant and immediate precursors to the resurgence of the "Mizrahi question" in Jewish-Israeli discourse. The question of inequality between Israeli Jews of Ashkenazi and Mizrahi heritage came to be a hot topic, discussed by everyone and exploited for political gains by many differing actors.

Within these moments, through multifaceted efforts by both Mizrahi activists and hegemonic actors—roles sometimes occupied by the same individuals—Biton's contributions to Israeli poetry and society were acknowledged and greeted with accolades and prizes of the highest order. Between 2014 and 2016, Biton received several of Hebrew literature's most prestigious awards: the Amichai Lifetime Achievement Award for Hebrew Poetry (2014), the Bialik Award for Hebrew Poetry and Lifetime Achievement (2014), and the Israel Prize for Hebrew Literature and Poetry (2015). Also in 2014, Yochai Oppenheimer and Ketzia Alon published an edited volume of articles about Biton's work, a rare achievement for a living poet at the time.[182] In 2016, Biton was also invited to serve as the chair of the special national committee for the inclusion and empowerment of Mizrahi identity in the Israeli public education system. This committee, named after its chair, "The Biton Committee," was at the heart of public interest throughout its work from February to July 2016. These developments sparked a new wave of creativity for Biton, who published four new poetry books during and following that time: *Blindfolded Landscapes* (*נופים חבושי עיניים*, 2013), *The House of Pianos* (*בית הפסנתרים*, 2015), *Signals* (אותות, 2019), and *Stitches* (*תפרים*, 2022).

This late bloom brought Biton closer to canonicity than ever before. In a 2018 interview with Ilan Berkovitz, while reflecting on his earlier poems, Biton said: "I am no longer in that place of alienation and estrangement. I feel that I am part of the [Israeli] Elite, the group that needs to suggest a better, more positive, societal direction of knowing the 'other.'"[183]

I agree with Biton's late framing of his life and believe that we must find new ways to think about his long career, including its many hardships and years of silence, to better accommodate its later developments.

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arguments are as vicious as they are ignorant. However, I include them here to stave off the misconception that these anti-Mizrahi sentiments are a thing of the past. See David Neo Buḥbut, "האם השירה המזרחית יכולה להתקיים בלי אשכנזים (על שירתה של עדי קיסר) [Can Mizrahi Poetry Exist without Ashkenazim? (On the Poetry of Adi Keissar)," *'akhsav*, no. alef (2018): 64–65; Oded Carmeli, "לנכדינו המדוזות [To Our Descendants, The Jellyfishes]," *Hava Lehaba* 4 (2014): 4–5; Yehuda Vizan, "ליבי אינו במזרח ואנוכי לא קשור לספרות - או - כוס אורז על כוס וחצי מים. על 'שירה מזרחית' עכשיו ובעת האחרונה [My Heart Is Not in the East and I Have Nothing to Do with Literature – or – One Cup and a Half for One Cup Rice. On 'Mizrahi Poetry' Now and in Recent Years]," *Dahak - Ktav Et Lisifrut Tova* 5 (March 2015): 621–36.

[182] Alon and Oppenheimer, *אנא מן אלמגרב - קריאות בשירת ארז ביטון [Anna Min Al-Magrab - Reading Erez Biton's Poetry]*.

[183] Ilan Berkovitz, "המשורר ארז ביטון: אני מרגיש את עצמי שייך לאליטה [The poet Erez Biton: I feel that I belong to the elite]," *Haaretz*, September 7, 2018, sec. שירה, https://www.haaretz.co.il/literature/poetry/2018-09-07/ty-article/.premium/0000017f-e332-d75c-a7ff-ffbf179a0000.

Section 1: Erez Biton's 1960s Revolution

1.1 – Statehood Generation's Lyric Theory from a Mizrahi Perspective

The bad-faith criticism of Mizrahi poetry I mentioned relies, sometimes explicitly, on an Anglo-American modernist notion of the lyric, as adopted and adapted by the Israeli Statehood Generation. One of the points of origin of this notion of the lyric is its 19th century precursor, John Stuart Mill. In his essays on the subject, Mill defines lyric poetry as an "utterance overheard" that is differentiated "in the poet's utter unconsciousness of a listener."[184]

During the 20th century, modernist poets and academics like Wallace Stevens, Northrop Frye, T.S. Eliot, Cleanth Brooks, Robert Penn Warren, and I.A. Richards made John Stuart Mill's ideas ubiquitous in the reading of poetry, often blurring the line between lyric poetry and poetry as a category.[185] This is not to say that these writers shared a uniform approach to lyric as a concept or that they necessarily addressed "lyric" as a leading term. Instead, as Jackson and Prins argue, they all shared a "lyricized view of poetry,"[186] in which most poetry is assumed to conform to lyric protocols, which decontextualize and individualize poems.[187]

Furthermore, the rise of academic literary teaching during the post-WWII years meant that these writers' meta-poetic essays and scholarly articles were taught, sometimes by their authors, in a manner "ideally positioned to resolve the contradictions evident in Mill's metaphors."[188] The undergraduate classroom setting collapsed Mill's descriptions with the real-world studious environment. Students were taught to think about poetry as if it were an utterance overheard by an audience while bodily sitting in an audience, hearing the poem as it was read by a lecturer (who, we can imagine, sometimes read the poems they were teaching without paying too much attention to their listeners).

The Anglo-American scholars mentioned, especially Elliot, Pound, and Stevens, influenced the Israeli Statehood Generation poets, who were gathered around the literary journals of *Likrat* (Towards; 1952-1954) and *`Akhsav* (Now; 1957-).[189] This model of reading later also made its way to the Tel-Aviv neo-formalist School of Poetics and Semiotics based in Tel-Aviv University's Department of Poetics and Comparative Literature, founded in 1967 by Benjamin Harshav.[190]

Natan Zach's influential 1966 essay "Regarding the Stylistic Climate of Our Poetry during the 1950-1960s" is an exemplary text that tells us about this time's mode of lyric reading. This

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[184] John Stuart Mill, "What Is Poetry?," *The Monthly Repository* 7 (1833): 64.
[185] Jackson, "Lyric."
[186] Jackson and Prins, "General Introduction," 4–5.
[187] See my discussion of Jackson and Prins in this dissertation's first chapter.
[188] Jackson and Prins, "General Introduction," 5.
[189] Lavin, *בלי קו: לדרכה של "לקראת" בספרות העברית החדשה [Without a Line: To the Path of "Likrat" in the New Hebrew Literature]*; Chana Kronfeld, *On the Margins of Modernism: Decentering Literary Dynamics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 60–61.
[190] Kronfeld, *On the Margins of Modernism*, 124–30; Yael Segalovitz-Eshel, "New Criticism Int.: The Close Reader in the U.S., Brazil, and Israel" (Ph.D. Dissertation, California, UC Berkeley, 2018).

piece serves Zach, who was at the height of his career then, to summarize his poetic creed and reflect on the first decade and a half of his generation's publications, shaping the cultural memory and the aesthetic values associated with Israeli Statehood Generation poetry in real-time.[191] As I will elaborate shortly, this source is only sometimes reliable as a true testament to the period's poetry. However, it is irreplaceable in the generation's historiography in its succinct and clear phrasing of that generation's explicit poetic code.

In point thirteen of the essay (out of fifteen), Zach encapsulates what he believes to be his generation's position on the poetic relation between the speaking "I" and the world outside the poem, specifically those realms of the "political" and "social." This tendency will later be most challenged by Mizrahi poets:

> Point 13 - Wishing that poetry express something of a "*rapport*"[192] (connection, relation) with reality – the poet's biographical reality or his perspective – while highlighting the autonomy of art as art (and not just reflecting reality as it is), as well as its [the poetry's] right to stylize (i.e., to distort, warp) any realist perception of "objective" reality. – An attempt to name an always-changing novel reality. I quote from Pasternak's autobiography: "We cease to recognize reality. It appears in some new form. This form seems as if it is an inner attribute of itself, not of us. Besides this attribute, everything in the world has its own name. Only that one is new and nameless. We try to give it a name. The result is art." – Emphasis on individuality, alongside an awareness of the dangers that await it in the current world. When a modern poet says "I," we cannot automatically assume that he means "you" or "we."[193]

Even more than the explicit mention of lyric forms in point twelve,[194] point thirteen shows the clearest convergence of Zach's manifesto and the lyric theory of Mill, Stevens, and New Criticism. Like these Anglo-American writers, Zach also declares the importance of a poet's independence from mimetic representation. Zach argues that true free poetry "stylizes," "distorts," and "warps" any perception of "an 'objective' reality." Thus, he marks the common names and shared definitions of the world as a non-poetic antithesis to poetry. This creed manifests in Zach's poetry of the time as epistemological absurdism. He asserts his radical poetic freedom and achieves cognitive dominance by prolonging apprehension through litotes, ellipsis, and negation.[195] In the process, Zach tests the mind's capability to know the world's unknowability in words. This negatively prolonged "rapport" with reality, which refuses to use objects' common names,

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[191] Michael Gluzman, *שירת הטבועים: המלנכוליה של הריבונות בשירה העברית בשנות החמישים והשישים [The Poetry of the Drowned: Sovereignty and Melancholia in Hebrew Poetry after 1948]* (Israel: Haifa UP and Miskal - Yedioth Ahronoth Books and Chemed Books, 2018), 27–28.

[192] English used in original: "rapport המשאלה שהשירה תבטא"

[193] Natan Zach, "לאקלימן הסגנוני של שנות החמישים והשישים בשירתנו [Regarding the Stylistic Climate of Our Poetry during the 1950-1960s]," in *The Poetry Beyond Words* (Israel: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2011), 169.

[194] "A disposition toward short lyric forms." Zach, 169.

[195] Gluzman, *The Poetry of the Drowned*, 125–32; Dan Miron, *עוד! : תשתיות קוגניטיביות בשירה הישראלית המוקדמת [More! Cognitive Formations in Early Israeli Poetry]* (Ramat Gan: Afik, 2013), 442–43; Shaul Setter, " הלשון הפוליטית: שלושה מהלכים בשירה עברית רדיקלית [The Political Tongue: Three Movements in Radical Hebrew Poetry]" (M.A. Thesis, Tel-Aviv, Tel-Avivi U, 2006), 134–36.

manifests through a universal-local "thin-I" speaker unattached to markers of any specific place and period but highly attuned to the happenings in their immediate proximity.

Within the framework of Zach's generation, this is a revolt (almost Bloomian in nature) against the political poetics of past generations, who wrote alongside the idea, already prevalent in the turn of the 20th-century *teḥiyah* movement, of literature as "the Watcher over the House of Israel," i.e., as socially committed to the nation's shared goals and the people's collective well-being. Zach's position is even more explicitly in defiance of the two previous literary generations that have also published alongside the Statehood Generation. These are the *Moderna* generation, headed in the 1940s by Natan Alterman and Lea Goldberg,[196] and the *Palmaḥ* generation, which gained a short-lived prominence at the turn of the 1950s. The former was a symbolist movement, privileging strong prosody and symmetrical poetic forms, and the latter was a realist-socialist group showing an openness to formal spontaneity. Both generations converged on defining their projects as poetic commentary on political affairs. Against this background, Zach's position was explicitly a radical move into the sphere of individuation that focuses on the personal and mundane rather than collective politics.[197]

This explicit focus on the personal and individualized was never as cohesive and absolute as one might believe on reading Zach's essay. As Chana Kronfeld has shown, Zach heavily models this manifesto on his own work, distorting the literary reality of the 1950s and 1960s in which other poets, notably Yehuda Amichai and Daliah Ravikovitch, unapologetically integrated lived experience and shared history into their poems, and refused to repudiate the work of their predecessors, embracing both Shlonsky and Goldberg.[198]

Furthermore, recent studies of Statehood Generation poetry, working with Foucauldian and Freudian toolboxes, have unpacked the manners in which Zach's negation of the public sphere was, in its way, an assertion of collective historical realities. In that manner, Hamutal Tsamir has shown how Zach's erasure of "common names" in service of personal autonomy is synchronous with the newly formed State of Israel's erasure of pre-1948 history in establishing its sovereignty.[199] Similarly, Michael Gluzman showed Zach's poems to be filled with traumatic

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[196] In real time, the *Moderna* was led by Alterman (1910-1970) and Avraham Shlonsky (1900-1973). In that formation, Goldberg was considered a secondary poet. However, as has been argued since, most recently by Uri S. Cohen, in hindsight, that initial hierarchy has changed completely, and for contemporary readers, Alterman and Goldberg are the two prominent poets of the period. See Uri S. Cohen, "האפשרות של גולדברג ואסכולת שלונסקי-אלתרמן [The Goldberg Approach and the Shlonsky-Alterman School]," *OT* 6 (Fall 2016): 7–31.

[197] At the same time, I want to draw our attention to the way Zach's own poetry sometimes manifests a different rapport with reality. In this way, one of Zach's most famous works opens with the words "One moment, quiet please," directly addressing the readership as if they were an audience in an auditorium, asking them to remain silent to allow the speaker his poetic speech. While critics often highlight this poem's address as a testament to its individuality, the fact that it asks its audience for agreement, or even consent, to that individual utterance should be further explored.

[198] Chana Kronfeld, "Double Agency Amichai and the Problematics of Generational Literary Historiography," in *The Full Severity of Compassion: The Poetry of Yehuda Amichai*, Stanford Studies in Jewish History and Culture (Stanford: Stanford university press, 2016), 267–92.

[199] Hamutal Tzamir, "שירת נתן זך והסובייקט הלאומי ישראלי החדש [Natan Zach's Poetry and the New Israeli National-Subject]," in *In the Name of the Land: Nationalism, Subjectivity and Gender in the Israeli Poetry of the Statehood*

traces, leading away and, at the same time, toward the poet's family history of destructive immigration and an overall "melancholy of sovereignty."[200]

However, as Haviva Pedaya remarks, the historical facts and the specific poetics of Zach's poetry are not as crucial for the history of Hebrew poetry as their afterlife in cultural memory. Pedaya (1952-) is an influential Mizrahi poet and thinker, as well as a professor of Kabbalah, Hasidism, and Jewish textual history at Ben-Gurion University. In her writing on Zach and his legacy, Pedaya employs a Mizrahi perspective, tending to the political weight of the myth of the "universal thin-'I' speaker" left in Zach's wake.[201] She shows how this modality became Hebrew's prominent writing style long after the 1960s, especially in neo-modernist and lyric circles in the 1990s up to today.[202] However, this version of Zachian poetics is, in many ways, a reduction of his complicated posture, a distillation of it, a "xerox of a xerox." In that sense, it is much less potent than the original and much more limiting. As Pedaya writes:

> What does Natan Zach's universal fragmented 'I,' that 'I' currently dominating Hebrew poetry, make possible for us, and what does it prevent? This 'I' that demands no localization, conceals an inability to be situated – in a place, in a time, in a language, in depths of text and speech. In other words, one of the immediate repercussions of Zach's universal 'I''s reliance on elusive temporality is the total blurring of that poetry's spatiality. This poetry lacks the backbone of a place to sustain it. Instead, the poem meanders with no demands. Desolate in an empty space. Uncommitted.[203]

Pedaya argues that the perpetuation of Zach's poetically distorted "rapport" with reality has created a literary landscape in which poets cannot situate themselves again. There are several ways to understand this argument. First, Pedaya seems to articulate a case of intertextuality and influence

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Generation (Yerushalayim : [Beersheba]: Keter ; Merkaz Heḳsherim, Universiṭat Ben-Guryon ba-Negev, 2006), 59–90.

[200] Gluzman, *The Poetry of the Drowned*, 101–39.

[201] Haviva Pedaya, "הגיע הזמן לומר 'אני' אחרת בשירה העברית [It Is Time for Hebrew Poetry to Say 'I' Differently]," in *שיבתו של הקול הגולה: זהות מזרחית: פואטיקה, מוזיקה ומרחב [Return of the Lost Voice]* (Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2016), 104–22.

[202] While it is not easy to ascertain the time to which Pedaya refers, it seems to coincide with the period after the decline of such prominent journals as *`Akhshav* (1957- , ed. Gabriel Moked,) and *Siman Kri'ah* (1972-1991, ed. Menakhem Perry) and before the rise of the journals that now define the Israeli poetry scene such as *Ho!* (2005- , ed. Dory Manor,) and *Ma`ayan* (2005-2019, ed. Roy "Chicky" Arad,). Thus, while the period in question unquestionably includes the 1990s, one can argue that it begins earlier during the 80s (or even earlier than that, immediately after the end of Zach's own halcyon days of the late 1960s) and leads up to the time of Pedaya's article original publication in *Haaretz* on May 2nd and 9th, 2006. Other literary scholars also mark this period as a nadir of Hebrew poetry and define it as a time in which commercializing processes (the rise of for-pay poetry workshops, the introduction of bestseller lists in daily newspapers, and author-self-financing routs in major publishing houses) have commodified poetic production, diminishing for a while the genre's critical faculties. See Hannan Hever, "'תנו לו בדרנים - וינוח בשלום' - קנוני ופופולרי בעידן של כיבוש" [Give Them Entertainers and Let Them Have Peace - Canon and Popular Writing in an Age of Occupation]," in *Popular and Canonical: Literary Dialogues* (Israel: Resling, 2007); Tami Israeli and Yaara Shehori, "'אצלי היגייני, אזור כתיבה' על שירת הפנאי העברית ['Chez Moi Hygienic, Writing Zone: On Hebrew Leisure Poetry]," *Mita`am* 1 (January 2005): 63–74.

[203] Pedaya, "Time for Hebrew Poetry to Say 'I' Differently," 112.

here. To borrow the terms of T.S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent,"[204] Zach's poetry of negation is indeed "depersonalized" in a manner that created for it a place in the Hebrew tradition. However, Zach's specific trajectory of depersonalization created an impasse one cannot follow. Poets who try to do so, either by perfecting the approach or innovating within it, end up caught in its gravity well, unable to escape the event horizon and rise to the simultaneous no-space of tradition Eliot describes.

These are the terms in which we can think of such interesting leading poets of the last sixty years as Meir Wieseltier, Maya Bejerano, or Arik Aleph. All three, while writing within a universal depersonalized "thin-'I'" modus, seemed for a moment to be taking part in new waves of Hebrew poetry or taking the next step in the revolution started by Zach and his contemporaries.[205] Even more importantly, and in a manner addressed below, these poets, especially Wieseltier, turned and committed much of their poetry to explicitly political and collective struggles. However, even in successfully creating exciting, beautiful poetry, in hindsight, they failed to escape Zach's shadow and gain lasting prominence and circulation that competes with either Zach's legacy or that of Biton, which I described above. In that sense, we should consider Pedaya's argument regarding the "thin-'I'"'s inability to situate itself as an inability to provide fertile ground for further generations. The step taken by the Statehood Generation into the Hebrew poetry tradition cannot be retaken.

Another lens, which is more crucial for understanding Pedaya's overall argument, is social. As Pedaya argues, the autonomy produced by Zach's negation of shared reality has become a fixture of the Israeli hegemonic social structure. That is, while the "thin-'I'" started as a negation of prevailing social dispositions, and specifically of a "we" that speaks for Zionist nationalism, it has come to coincide with the values of the new hegemony. Thus, writing within this modality reproduces Ashkenazi-led liberal Zionist ideology and reinforces current Israeli ethnic and class stratification. We can integrate this claim by Pedaya with the work of Tsamir and Gluzman and see that this hegemonic aspect has been present in Zach's poetics since its inception. According to Tsamir, Zach's individuation process was, in a politically unconscious manner, a poetic manifestation of full citizenship privileges. I would add that these are the exact privileges not allowed to the Palestinians at the time, who were under martial law, and to the Mizrahi communities in the ma`abarot.

Similarly, Gluzman shows that Zach's poetics of depersonalization reflect the cultural erasure of pre-1948 European-Jewish history on an individualistic and psychologized level.[206] Gluzman's framing of Zach's self-erasure conflates the subject and object positions. According to Gluzman (who follows here Cathy Caruth), trauma, while internal to the subject's mind, works on the consciousness in a manner that feels external to it, objectifying the subject from within while feeling like an outside coercive intervention. In his articulation, the subject lacks agency as they

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[204] T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methune, 1920), 25–30.

[205] The continuity between these different poets and the Statehood Generation is not only in stylistics but also in publication. All three got their first publication in the `Akhsav Journal in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, respectively.

[206] Gluzman, *The Poetry of the Drowned*; Tzamir, "The New Israeli National-Subject."

respond to the trauma and articulate it in poetic speech. However, we get a different scheme while working with lyric theory and questions of lyric personhood. Following this other approach, we can see that Zach's poetry generates a personhood in which an individual becomes a subject by their ability to accommodate and innovate within the erasure of their biography and past, which they objectivize outside of themselves and then omit and erase.

Zach's poetic dismantling of objective political reality is thus infused with personal agency and self-making, produced by poetic devices of negation. This negation is turned vitally outwards. In this manner, and following Adorno's notion of lyric poetry,[207] Zach's poetry maps what is external to the poems, negatively tracing the shape of the omitted history and allowing us to note its details by the imprint left in their absence. This is in striking contrast to the erasure of Mizrahi culture that occurred at the same time as Zach's early career. This erasure happened on a sociological, collective level—a negation that originates from outside and is aimed inward, with Mizrahi people being not the subjects of erasure but its objects.[208]

While Pedaya does not refer to this dynamic using the Adornian vocabulary I use in this chapter, I argue that it is Zach's negativity and dialectical nature that she finds to be lacking among her contemporary Hebrew poets. Zach generates his universal modus in the 1950s-60s through a matrix of contradictions and absences. The universal-local setting and "thin-I" speaker position are not the goal of this process but the remnants left in the wake of the negation. However, since the 1960s, these residual aspects have been researched, taught, and galvanized as a positive conceptual entity - a knowable (and imitable) style. Unfortunately, this affirmation has created a legacy of, in Pedaya's words, "a megalomaniacal 'I'" that is "so bloated and fattened with its own so-called 'thin' poetics that it does not notice that which is too full or those in front of it who are too thin and poor."[209]

I would add that several central poets who came after Zach tried to inherit his poetics but only adopted its stylistics without working through its dialectics, failing to find something outside of themselves to test and explore. Writing in the style of Zach's "thin-'I'" from an affirmative position, therefore, fails them. Instead, they turn to their biography and write poetry genuinely focused on themselves. But the completion of the task that Zach began also means its extinction. The preoccupation with the self and the lack of dialectical engagement with an "other" leads to epistemological narrowing, as this poetry is missing an integral method of mapping reality and thus defaults to upholding the world as it is presently, without changing or critiquing it.

Thus, in taking the outwardly visible product of the early Statehood Generation's style without its core dialectics, current poetry's new iterations of "thin-'I'" speakers align themselves

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[207] Adorno, "On Lyric Poetry and Society."

[208] During a conversation I attended, hosted by Uri S. Cohen at Tel Aviv University circa 2015, Gluzman, who at the time was writing his book about Zach, asked the poet Roy Hasan about Zach and the poetics of traumatic erasure. The question came in no small part on the heels of Hasan's famous provocative lines "I did not mourn Kaniuk / and I burned Natan Zach's books." Gluzman was asking about the possible equivalence between Mizrahi minoritarian experience and that of Ashkenazi immigrants (like Zach) who reached Israel without any economic, social, or cultural capital. In response to the question, Hasan said, "Even though the outcome is the same, there is a clear difference between suicide and murder."

[209] Pedaya, "Time for Hebrew Poetry to Say 'I' Differently," 2016.

politically and epistemologically with egocentric psychology and ethnocentric Israeli politics. As Pedaya attests, this argument does not mean that this poetry is bad poetically or cannot resist Israeli hegemony thematically. Without forcefully stating otherwise, this poetry defaults towards shapes of personhood that align with the current socio-political order.

In that sense, Pedaya's argument goes beyond the case of Zach and Hebrew poetry and into the intersection of historical poetics, lyrical personhood, and postcolonial studies. In her book *Translingual Poetics*, Sarah Dowling attends to this interdisciplinary interaction, thinking about how "the word 'lyric' metonymizes an expressive humanistic subject"[210] and the legal and social notion of what a person is. In this vein, Dowling quotes Barbara Johnson, who in the 1980s showed that even while legal personhood is often thought of as "rational, right bearing, institutional" and lyric personhood as "emotive, subjective, individual," the two nevertheless illuminate each other.[211] As Johnson shows in the case of anti-abortion laws and poems directed to the unborn, approaches and sensibilities about what counts as a person can be cultivated in one sphere and impact the other.[212]

This surprising connection between the lyrical and the legal is partly due to their overt shared intellectual origins. As discussed above, much of the Anglo-American model of the lyric can be traced back to John Stuart Mill. Mill, much more than a literary critic, is remembered as a political figure and a forefather of modern liberal politics. While there is tension between Mill the critic, and Mill the philosopher, in both roles his work foregrounds the notion of individuals who move of their own free will between a private space to which politics is essentially foreign and a social shared space of politics whose job is to facilitate, while not private life while not infringing on it.[213] The description of lyric poetry as "utterance overheard" manifests a similar structure of private and public domains and the free movement between them, in which poetry is conceptualized as a private "asset" that naturally belongs to the individual poet and that they share of their own free will and against the utterance's nature.

In this imagining of lyric poetry through a conception of private property shared freely in a public sphere, there is no place for the positionality of people deprived of that freedom, that is, those who have become dispossessed of privacy and private property through colonialist and capitalist violence, or those marginalized within the system of capitalist ownership to the brink. This is not to say that they cannot participate in this discourse and publish poetry but that the experience of dispossession is excessive to the imagination of their participation. Therefore, while other aspects of personhood are always already conceptualized as cognitive faculties that belong within lyric poetry, being dispossessed is framed as external to poetry—something that poetry can be about, but not as something that poetry should be in form.

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[210] Dowling, *Translingual Poetics*, 6.
[211] Dowling, 61.
[212] Barbara Johnson, "Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion," in *The Barbara Johnson Reader*, ed. Melissa González et al. (Duke University Press, 2014), 217–34, https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822399070-016.
[213] Zoe Beenstock, "Reforming Utilitarianism: Lyric Poetry in J. S. Mill's 'Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties' and Autobiography," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 81, no. 4 (2020): 599–620, https://doi.org/10.1353/jhi.2020.0027.

In this sense, in both the conceptualization of lyric and legal personhood, social strife never exists as an authentic quality of a person's present but only on its temporal horizons. Subjugation is either in the person's past, as the historical muck from which the person emerged, or in the future, as a problem that needs to be solved by a new political order. The present moment of this discourse is one in which particularity has already resolved itself, transfigured into a universal "I" that is uncommitted to any marked time or space and yet entrenched in its immediate context.

This temporal not-nowness of social strife clearly contradicts the annals of history, in which vast and diverse groups (past and present) are first introduced into given public spheres as non-people. These non-people live, write, struggle, and die without being granted the quality of being a legal person. Furthermore, this liberal discourse of non-particularized personhood is still mobilized globally by insisting on egalitarian relations between former colonizers and colonized people in a way that ensures material and cultural supremacy for formerly colonial powers and groups. In that manner, Dowling argues, lyric poetics that call for a universalized non-specific positionality reproduce poetically the legal and state-sanctioned violence done to marginalized groups physically. It calls on writers from these groups to leave behind the history of violence done to them and transcend it to gain a lyric voice.

Pedaya's discussion of Mizrahi poetics fits within this conceptual framework. "Thin-I" poetics' refusal to take place in time and space aligns with Israeli hegemonic temporality that refuses to discuss the specific history of Ashkenazi violence against Mizrahi culture and people (as well as against other groups, Palestinians first and foremost). In this manner, the political and poetic decrees coincide. In Zach's poetic demand to engage with reality as an undifferentiated, cohesively abstracted entity against which the individual contends directly through un-politicized individual episteme, there is no place to include the history of Mizrahi communities.

Therefore, Pedaya calls for a different conceptualization of reality and the way poetic language reshapes it. This conceptualization, I argue, is no less lyrical than that of Zach and the Statehood Generation. Mizrahi poetry, specifically the poetry of Erez Biton, manifests this rapport with the world by conceiving reality as an already politicized totality, broken and stratified by ideological epistemes. As such, the common names of events and objects that the hegemonic groups have given are not mimetic language (that, according to Zach, needs to be avoided to create "private language") but a distortion unto themselves. Naming the place in which the poet writes by its proper name, for example, "Tel-Aviv," is already a distortion of reality, as that one name covers the many other names the place had in the past (specifically the names of the villages destroyed during the *Nakba* and on which Tel-Aviv neighborhoods were established, such as Salama, Shaykh Muwannis, Jarisha). This proper name can also hide the way different groups name it in the present (e.g., Jaffa) and the various locales, real or imaginary, with which the one current name was associated in the past (the town called "The Diaspora Tel-Aviv" in the biblical book of Ezekiel and Hertzel's "Altneuland" which was translated by Nahum Sokolow into "Tel-Aviv," with the archaeological "Tel" marking the "alt," and "aviv" – spring – the new).

Therefore, for a poet to have a "distorted" rapport with reality, they do not need to come up with their own private names for objective reality but rather write about the supposed

"objective" reality in a manner that shows how shared language is itself not objective but "hegemonic." The poetry Pedaya calls for tends to the already misaligned aspects of this language, finding them not in the distance (potential or actual) between the world and cognition but in the power relations conditioning that distance. To phrase it differently, we can mobilize the notion of negation once more. While Zach argues for a poetic negation that is generated inwardly and then externalized in language, Pedaya, in my interpretation, argues for poetry in which the poet experiences a negation that is already external and that now, through language, he can mediate and shape.

For Pedaya, Erez Biton is the greatest model for this positionality in Modern Hebrew poetry. In the next section, I will read one of Biton's earliest poems, both exemplifying how it follows this "other" lyric model and how it is situated with and against the writing of Zach

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Before moving on to Biton's poetry, however, I need to clarify how the above criticism is relevant, though differently, to the later writings of many Statehood Generation poets and those writing within its "thin-I" poetics during the 1980s and 1990s as they changed their stylistics and addressed political reality head-on during this time. Most telling are the cases of Zach's later work and the poetry of Meir Wieseltier. Those works return to the older position of "The Watcher Over the House of Israel" in that they appeal to the Hebrew-speaking readership with the two aspects Hanan Hever and Amir Banbaji identify with the position:

> The Watcher Over the House of Israel has to be an autonomic intellectual, elevated in their position from the rest of the people, but also, at the same time, they must convincingly show an intimate knowledge, accompanied with empathy, of the nation's historical and social conditions.[214]

Reading these poets' political poetry of the 1980s and 1990s, we see both this elevated position and the intimate tone. Specifically, I would argue, we see the poets take an oppositional role, presenting the same "thin-'I'" personhood that negates a shared language and now turns it towards the political language surrounding them. Working with Banbaji and Hever's articulation, I want to highlight the importance of autonomy as both the limit of the Watcher's position, i.e., the thing that keeps him separated or elevated from the people, and the proof of the validity of this position, i.e., as what makes the Watcher worth listening to. The later political poetry of the Statehood Generation and the generation immediately following it, frames the poet as the one who notices what's wrong with society, even when nobody else does (or perhaps, especially when nobody else does). Consider, for example, Zach's famous poem "On the Importance of Being Precise," in which the speaker exposes the cruelty of common arguments regarding descriptive accuracy of the death

[214] Amir Banbaji and Hannan Hever, "היסטוריה ספרותית וביקורת הספרות [Literary History and Literature Critique]," in *Literature and Class: Towards a Political Historiography of Modern Hebrew Literature*, ed. Amir Banbaji and Hannan Hever (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad and Van Leer Institute, 2014), 13.

of innocent lives, or Wieseltier's "To Be Continued." Or consider how Daliah Ravikovitch complicates and criticizes from within this type of external perspective in her poem "Hovering at a Low Altitude," with its repeated line "I am not Here."

In this manner, Zach, in his later career, Wieseltier, and others like Yitzhak Laor, while turning to politics and social strife as objects of their poetic expression, do not shape it as a precondition of their utterance, and (most of the time) do not turn to destabilize shared language to invoke its historical stratification as a precondition of their lyric positionality. It is no surprise, then, that the main topic of discussion in this political poetry is the oppression of the Palestinians by Israel and the need to allow them their separate sovereignty, as this perspective aligns more neatly with the positionality described so far. When it comes to inner Jewish ethnic-social stratification, such as the plight of Mizrahi Jews, these poets have a much harder time addressing the issue. There are many more nuances to explore in this argument, and it is worth noting how the trajectories of poets like Amichai and Ravikovitch differ here as much as they differed from Zach in the 1960s, but that is beyond my scope here.

1.2 – Erez Biton's Revolution in Poetic Language

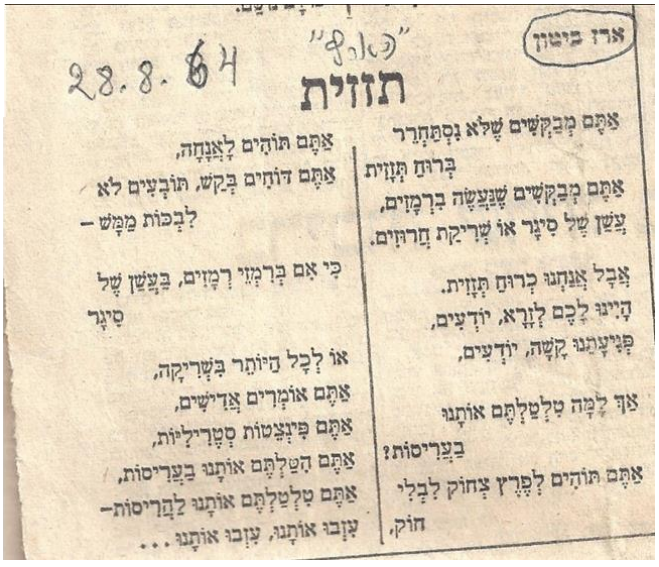
Pedaya finds the stance for which she advocates in the work of Erez Biton, the founding father of Mizrahi poetry. To better explain my insistence on reading Biton within the context of Zach's legacy, I turn to one of Biton's earliest publications, which shows how he manifests a new rapport with the world while staying in dialogue with the Statehood Generation's poetics. The poem in question, "Frenzied" ("רוח תזזית"), was first published in the *Haaretz* weekend edition on August 28, 1964, predating the publication of Biton's first poetry book by over a decade. In this earlier layer of his writing, which is contemporaneous with the heyday of the Statehood Generation, we can see the sharp difference between the two poetic stances. Biton republishes this poem in his first book, *Moroccan Offering* (1976) as well as in his third book, *Intercontinental Bird* (1990) in a modified, more extended version.

According to Biton, the difference between the versions is due to editorial interference, as the original draft was "shortened and torn from all sides" by the editor of *Haaretz* literary supplement, Yakov Horowitz (1901-1975), who was himself a writer, influential editor, and early member of the *Moderna* generation. According to Biton, the later published version is the original, and it is also his "manifesto."[215] However, I return to the original publication as some poetic devices and lyric sensibilities that Biton later nuanced and substantiated are more bluntly and strikingly evident in it. Furthermore, in this earlier publication, Biton (with Horowitz's editing) follows more closely the free-irregular-verse form of Zach's poetry, thus paradoxically making the differences between the two more pronounced. Here is the full poem with my translation:

[215] Yeshurun, "Moroccan Language Is Another Me," 480.

Frenzied	תזזית
You require us not to whirl in frenzied winds	אַתֶּם מְבַקְּשִׁים שֶׁלֹּא נִסְתַּחְרֵר בְּרוּחַ תְּזָזִית
You ask us to speak in clues -	אַתֶּם מְבַקְּשִׁים שֶׁנְּדַבֵּר בְּרָמָזִים,
Cigar smoke or whistle rhymes in lieu.	עָשָׁן שֶׁל סִיגָר אוֹ שְׁרִיקַת חֲרוּזִים.
But we are like frenzied winds.	אֲבָל אֲנַחְנוּ כְּרוּחַ תְּזָזִית.
You are sick of us. We know.	הָיִינוּ לָכֶם לְזָרָא, יוֹדְעִים,
You're worried about our harm. We know.	פְּגִיעָתֵנוּ קָשָׁה, יוֹדְעִים,
So why did you rock us in our cradles?	אַךְ לָמָּה טִלְטַלְתֶּם אוֹתָנוּ בַּעֲרִיסוֹת?
You wonder when a laughter unruly roars	אַתֶּם תּוֹהִים לְפֶרֶץ צְחוֹק לְבָלִי חוֹק,
You wonder at a sigh	אַתֶּם תּוֹהִים לֶאֱנָחָה,
You reject us with a lame excuse, demand we don't let our cry loose	אַתֶּם דּוֹחִים בְּקֹשׁ, תּוֹבְעִים לֹא לִבְכּוֹת מַמָּשׁ—
But speak in subtle clues, in the smoke of cigars	כִּי אִם בְּרָמְזֵי רְמָזִים, בַּעֲשַׁן שֶׁל סִיגָר
Or at most with a whistle,	אוֹ לְכָל הַיּוֹתֵר בִּשְׁרִיקָה,
You talk indifferently,	אַתֶּם אוֹמְרִים אֲדִישִׁים,
Sterile tweezers, you,	אַתֶּם פִּינְצֶטוֹת סְטֶרִילִיּוֹת,
You who tossed us in the cradles,	אַתֶּם הַטַּלְטֶלֶתֶם אוֹתָנוּ בַּעֲרִיסוֹת,
You who rocked us to ruins -	אַתֶּם טִלְטַלְתֶּם אוֹתָנוּ לַהֲרִיסוֹת—
Leave us alone, leave us alone…	עָזְבוּ אוֹתָנוּ, עָזְבוּ אוֹתָנוּ...

In this poem, Erez Biton addresses an unknown group of addressees using the plural "you," speaking on behalf of a collective "we." In the poem's first line, the speakers present the addressees' demand that the poem's lyrical we not "whirl in frenzied winds" and, instead, communicate their experiences indirectly through clues, smoke signals, and "rhyme whistles." This request is later reiterated as a demand not to express their emotions through groans or crying. This imaginary dialogue poetically codifies the real-world stereotypical view of Mizrahi communities as impulsive, emotional, dangerous, primal, and nonverbal individuals. The speakers' response is an act of reclamation, as they identify themselves with the simile of the "frenzied winds," likening themselves to what the addressees view as an external problem. Biton also states that the addressees are "sick" of the speakers and worry about their "harm." In the third stanza, it becomes apparent that the speakers' emotional expressions, the sounds of life that convey meaning without words, are incomprehensible and uncomfortable to the addressees.


ארץ וישוב

28.8.64

"פיוט"

תזזית

אַתֶּם מְבַקְּשִׁים שֶׁלֹּא נִסְתַּחְרֵר
בְּרוּחַ תְּזָזִית
אַתֶּם מְבַקְּשִׁים שֶׁנְּדַבֵּר בְּרָמָזִים,
עָשָׁן שֶׁל סִיגָר אוֹ שְׁרִיקַת חֲרוּזִים.

אֲבָל אֲנַחְנוּ כְּרוּחַ תְּזָזִית.
הָיִינוּ לָכֶם לְזָרָא, יוֹדְעִים,
פְּגִיעָתֵנוּ קָשָׁה, יוֹדְעִים,

אַךְ לָמָּה טִלְטַלְתֶּם אוֹתָנוּ
בַּעֲרִיסוֹת?
אַתֶּם תּוֹהִים לְפֶרֶץ צְחוֹק לְבָלִי
חוֹק,
אַתֶּם תּוֹהִים לֶאֱנָחָה,
אַתֶּם דּוֹחִים בְּקֹשׁ, תּוֹבְעִים לֹא
לִבְכּוֹת מַמָּשׁ –

כִּי אִם בְּרָמְזֵי רְמָזִים, בַּעֲשַׁן שֶׁל
סִיגָר

אוֹ לְכָל הַיּוֹתֵר בִּשְׁרִיקָה,
אַתֶּם אוֹמְרִים אֲדִישִׁים,
אַתֶּם פִּינְצֶטוֹת סְטֶרִילִיּוֹת,
אַתֶּם הַטַּלְטֶלֶתֶם אוֹתָנוּ בַּעֲרִיסוֹת,
אַתֶּם טִלְטַלְתֶּם אוֹתָנוּ לַהֲרִיסוֹת—
עָזְבוּ אוֹתָנוּ, עָזְבוּ אוֹתָנוּ . . .

Figure 5 Original publication in Haaretz newspaper

The contrasting perspectives on the "frenzied winds" and the lack of understanding between the two groups cause the speakers to stop responding to the addressees' demands and instead accuse them of creating the conditions leading up to the poem. The speakers refer to the addressees as "sterile tweezers," blaming them for "rocking their cradles" and violently bringing the speakers to ruins. Finally, the speakers ask the addressees to leave them be.

The accusations the speakers direct at the addressees serve a triple purpose in the poem: they function as poetic devices that hint through metaphoric language at the violence, masquerading as parental care, that prompted the speakers' response; they are historical signifiers referring to extratextual events; and they carry meta-poetic meaning. Through metaphorical language, the accusations imply that the addressees' violence acquires medical and scientific undertones, comparing the addressees to adults who wield violence against babies.

The accusations in the poem's final stanza also allude to the historical grievances of Mizrahi communities against Ashkenazi hegemony in Israel. The reference to "sterile tweezers" evokes the mistreatment of Mizrahim by the medical establishment, specifically the "ringworm affair," in which thousands of Mizrahi children were exposed to harmful radiation. The mention of being carried to "ruins" refers to the placement of MENA immigrants in Palestinian towns that were destroyed during the Nakba, a process that Biton addresses more personally in his later poems. The repetition of the word "cradles" resonates with the "abducted children affair," in which a yet-to-be-determined number of Mizrahi immigrant newborns were reported by the medical authorities as dead to their families while they were allegedly given for adoption to Ashkenazi parents. It's important to note that all three of these events are highly contested and have been downplayed or silenced by the Israeli government over the decades. In this sense, the addressees' request for the speakers to communicate indirectly about these topics reflects a political decree to remain silent about these controversial issues. This decree stands to this day.

By considering the inner- and extra-textual meanings of these accusations, we can understand the meta-poetic commentary that Biton is making about the Statehood Generation's approach that claims art to be autonomous of reality. Biton collapses the difference between the political mandate only to share the official, hegemonic version of history, which ignores the internal violence against Mizrahim, with the poetic desire to have a distorted relationship with reality, in which the only way to address historical violence is through indirect means such as allusions and rhymes. In doing so, Biton shifts the negation present in Zach's poetry from an individualized consciousness constituted by a binary of "self" and "world" to a political and collective layer, consisting of a stratification of the world into different groups in conflict with each other over the definition of reality. From this position, Biton speaks as a "we," adopting a non-individualized Mizrahi personhood.

Biton can present this maneuver against Zach's poetics through a lens highly associated with Zach, that of irony. On the poem's surface level, Biton is following the decree of the addressees, which, as I've shown, is that of Zach's school of poetry: the speakers indeed only allude to these different political affairs through "clues" and "rhymes." However, unlike Zach's "clues" that, as Gluzman shows, lead us both toward the personal trauma and away from it at one

and the same time, Biton uses clues that work both meta-poetically and socio-politically. Biton uses clues and pushes against this mode of codification from within simultaneously, giving his poem an air of poetic malicious compliance.

It is also worth noting the intertextual piyyutic elements in Biton's poem. On the surface, the poem may seem colloquial and unscriptural in its register, but it in fact contains a complex web of polysemy and scriptural allusions. The title term "frenzied wind," "*ru'aḥ tzazit"* in Hebrew is semantically and stylistically multivalent. In modern Hebrew, it refers to a sudden, violent gust of wind or a local storm. It can also describe a person's mood, connoting deep restlessness or a crazed frenzy —which, as mentioned, is a common stereotypical view of Mizrahi people. These meanings have their roots in rabbinic Hebrew, where "*ru'aḥ tzazit"* is the name of a *maziq*, a demonic entity that takes control of people and drives them to crazed behavior (*Talmud Yerushalmi m. Yuma 8:5, Bamidbar Raba* 19:8, *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana* 10:3). Biton's poem invokes all three of these meanings, depicting the speakers as an agitated group akin to a sudden storm or a Talmudic demon.

Tracing the term back to its origins also adds depth to the fourth line, in which the speakers identify with the *ru'aḥ tzazit.* In the Rabbinical corpus, this entity appears at times as an agent of God that is sent to facilitate a beneficial restlessness in people and nature (*Bereshit Raba* 12:9, *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana* 10:3). By identifying with the "*ru'ah tzazit*," the speakers claim space for themselves and reclaim the stereotype used to belittle Mizrahi people, while also implying that there is a higher purpose for their existence.

Biton's description of the addressees' perception of the speakers is also citational. In the fifth line, the speakers claim they have been "*zara"* to the addressees, which I translated as the addressees being "sick" of the speakers. This is a biblical *hapax legomenon*, appearing only in *Numbers* 12:20. In this verse, God, frustrated with the Israelites' complaints, promises to provide them with such an abundance of meat that it will become so nauseating to them that it "will come out of [their] noses and become a loathsome thing [*zara*] to [them]."[216] Here, the intertextual echoing induces more irony in the poem. On one level, the speakers admit they are something "bad" of which one can get sick. However, following the intertextual connection, the term is specifically used to describe a good thing in a context where those who get sick of it are invoking God's ire. This allusion also fortifies the previous one, as the meat of *Numbers* 12:20 and *ru'ah tzazit* are a literal Godsend.

In the sixth line, the speakers allude to the Talmudic term *pgi'atan ra'ah*, which translates literally to "their harm is bad," and contextually, as suggested by Joshua Kulp "It is a losing proposition to meet up with them."[217] This term appears in *Mishna Baba Kama* 8, which discusses categories of compensation for those who have caused harm to others. In this text, the rabbis establish different categories of recompense and explain how to calculate them. The concept of personhood is central to this Mishna, as it moves from discussing persons whose peoplehood is

[216] All biblical citations are based on Robert Alter's translation (with modifications). See Alter, *The Hebrew Bible*, 2018.

[217] See Klup commentary on this Mishna, as made available by *Sefaria* at: https://www.sefaria.org.il/English_Explanation_of_Mishnah_Bava_Kamma.8.4?lang=he

undeniable within this context (i.e., Jewish men) to cases involving animals, women, non-Jewish enslaved people, and others. In *Mishna Bava Kama 8:4*, we see the term "*pgi'atan ra'ah"* used to refer to three such liminal cases: deaf-mutes, simpletons, or children. The continuation of the Mishna explains why "their harm is bad" in this context of legal compensation: "he [a Jewish man with full standing] that injures them [the marginalized] is obligated; and they [the marginalized] that injure others are exempt [from compensation]."

By exploring the sources of these idioms in Biton's poem, we can better understand the strength of his criticism of the addressees. When we consider the poem in relation to the biblical story from Numbers, we see the addressees—who, based on the historical allusions, are identified with Israeli Ashkenazi elites—as being analogous to the Israelites who, despite being provided with an abundance of manna, still complain about not having enough to eat. In that manner, Biton undercuts the addressees' complaint, showing its misplaced entitlement. Biton's use of the Mishnaic concept of liability is even more poignant, as Biton employs the grammatical ambiguity of the Mishna to its full potential. In the Mishna, the possessive suffix "*an*" is added to the noun "*pgi'ah"* in relation to the category of "non-persons" to denote a predicate-object relation (with an implied subject unmentioned in the clause). That is, it is harming these "non-people" that is bad. However, in modern Hebrew, the same conjugation denotes a subject-predicate relation, that is, that the harm done by these people is bad. Biton activates both of these reading options in the poem, as the phrase appears to imply that the speakers know that the addressees perceive them as harmful. However, the Mishnaic synthetic directionality ironically reverses the supposed agreement of the addressees with the speakers' assessment, which now becomes an admission of guilt. In other words, if the speakers fall into the category of *pgi'atan ra'ah*, any harm done to them by the addressees is culpable unconditionally, while any harm they exert back cannot be culpable. Furthermore, by stating that the addressees view the speakers as such, Biton accuses the Ashkenazi elite of treating the Mizrahi people as non-persons, not deserving of the full legal personhood granted others. As in the works Sarah Dowling discusses in her research, Biton also calls on non-lyric historical texts to stress the limitations of lyric poetry's disposition towards hegemonic, unmarked personhood.

The last poetic device to note in the poem is the use of rhyme, which appears as both form and content. The focus on this device places this poem in direct conversation with Zach's poetic revolution, which, in the common conception, was a direct assault on the idea of symmetrical rhymed poetry. In Zach's manifesto mentioned above, Points One through Four are dedicated to this topic. In Point Three, titled "An Increase of the irregular rhyme," Zach defines his generation's style as one that "aligns the rhyme in untraditional positions […] searching for rhymes that sound and seem more natural, less extravagant […] preferring dull, 'tired,' or purposely monotone rhymes."[218]

The version of "Frenzied" before us fits these guidelines perfectly, turning Zachian rhymes against Zachian codes. The poem uses functional rhyme throughout, with one noticeable internal

[218] Zach, "לאקלימן הסגנוני של שנות החמישים והשישים בשירתנו [Regarding the Stylistic Climate of Our Poetry during the 1950-1960s]."

rhyme nestled within a near-perfect alexandrine line (*bekash - mamash*, line 10),[219] and another assonance rhyme hidden by the repeated ending "we know" (*lez**a**r**a**', yod`im – k**a**sh**a**h, yod`im*, lines 5-6). The other two prominent rhymes in the poem are the two pairs: clues-rhymes (***remaz**im*-*ḥaruz**im***, lines 2-3), and cradles-ruins (***`arisot**-h**arisot***, lines 15-16). Both rhyme pairings are rich, i.e., include more consonants and vowels than the minimum needed to form a rhyme. However, for modern Hebrew readers, these pairs will still read as "dull" since the accented syllables, i.e., the core of the rhyme, are the plural suffixes of *-im* and *-ot*. During the heyday of the *Moderna* generation, this type of grammatical rhyme was considered too simplistic, minimalistic, and unappealing, which is precisely why some Statehood Generation poets adopted it in their poetics. Biton's poem also aligns with Statehood Generation poetics on this matter.

The topic of rhyme also appears in the content of the poem. In line three, the speakers report on the addressees' demand to only speak indirectly, through "rhymes' whistle," a locution which, in the poem, encodes the Statehood Generation's (or at least, early Zach's) poetic norm of not naming the world using a shared language. Biton produces the greatest yield of this coupling between "rhyme" and the concept of unmarked poetry in the last rhyme I mentioned: cradles-ruins (***`arisot**-h**arisot***, lines 15-16), as he manages to show how the form of rhyme can itself be marked by history and social belonging. As mentioned, the two words involved in this rhyme echo each other in their plural suffixes. While this was an abandoned and rejected model of rhyming in Modern Hebrew Literature, it was the primary mode of Hebrew rhyme during late medieval times, most notably during the Andalusian age. This rhyme serves as a prosodic intertextual allusion to that past moment of Jewish-Arabic culture, highlighting how rhyme itself can carry extratextual significance.

This reminder of how rhyme can carry with it social markers is compounded by the distinguishing sound between the two components of the rhyme cradles-ruins (עריסות-הריסות, *`arisot-harisot*). In this rhyme, only the first consonant is different: "***h**arisot*" opens with the letter *hei* (ה), while "***`a**risot*" begins with an 'ayin (ע). In Ashkenazi pronunciation, the sound difference between the two letters is minimal, the first being a voiceless glottal fricative and the other a glottal stop.[220] Moreover, in colloquial Ashkenazi Israeli Hebrew, the "h" is often silent, so that both hei and 'ayin are pronounced as an "a." In Mizrahi pronunciation, however, the *'ayin* is pronounced closer to its Arabic cognate, as a voiced pharyngeal fricative. In this sense, again, Biton shows the inherent positionality of rhyme as he covertly highlights how Hebrew-speaking communities in Israel and around the world would read the rhyme differently. For those readers accustomed to the Israeli standardized accent, which in this case follows the Ashkenazi lineage, the rhyme will sound even more superficial or as a complete repetition. Ironically, the homophony between cradles and ruins would underscore the powerful irony. Mizrahi accented audiences, however, will hear the

[219] Line 10 present us with a play on the classic alexandrine meter, in which the usual six iambic feet are separated not only by the midline cesura, but also a superfluous broken foot which breaks the line's symmetry and rhythm, giving us: ˘ – ˘ – ˘ – / ˘ – ˘ –(˘)– ˘ –. The added stress creating the unsymmetrical foot is the word "no" (לא *lo*). The rhythm of the line forces the reading to prolong the "no" for two bits, placing further emphasis on the negation.

[220] respectively, the "h" as in "hit" and the juncture marked by the hyphen in "uh-oh."

distinction between the two words, giving the rhyme a richer soundscape. Biton uses the poetic device of functional rhyme, supposedly offered by the addressees to cover the complicated history of the two unnamed groupings of the poem, as a way to cryptically allude to the historical reality outside the poem and the way that even the most transparent poetic device also carries within its history and positionality. At the same time, he gestures towards the continuity of the textual tradition in the East, despite attempts at its erasure.

In 1976, Biton rearranged the poem for publication in *Moroccan Offering*, maintaining all of the previously mentioned poetic devices while deemphasizing the rhythm and frequency of rhyme throughout the poem, making it soundscape closer to the spoken language. Most glaring is the omission of line 10 with its apparent internal rhyme ("You reject us with a lame excuse, demand that we won't let our cry loose"), which is replaced with a more extended series of lines that allows Biton to add a handful of further scriptural allusions. The most exciting addition to the poem in this rendition is its ending. While the 1964 version ended with the repeating phrase "Leave us alone… leave us alone" the new version ends with the following:

You who tossed us in the cradles,	אַתֶּם שֶׁהִטַּלְתֶּם אוֹתָנוּ בָּעֲרִישׁוֹת
You who rocked us through all the ruins -	אַתֶּם שֶׁטִּלְטַלְתֶּם אוֹתָנוּ בְּכָל הַהֲרִיסוֹת
Do us this one small favor	אַךְ זֹאת עֲשׂוּ עִמָּנוּ לְפָחוֹת
Leave us to our sighs	עֲזְבוּ אוֹתָנוּ לְאֲנָחוֹת
We are broken rhymes.[221]	אֲנַחְנוּ שִׁבְרֵי חֲרוּזִים.

In this version, the speakers not only wish for the addressees to leave them alone be but also clarify that they wish to be left with their sighs. In Hebrew, "לעזוב לאנחות" (*la-azov le-anaḥot*), "to leave [someone] to [their] sighs" is a common idiom, usually used to accuse someone of forsaking a friend or a loved one wholly and violently. Here, Biton ironically revitalizes this dead idiom by reversing its meaning. While commonly, being forsaken is terrible; the addressee's history of abuse in the guise of care makes "being forsaken by them" a favorable state, better than being in their charge. The poem's speakers ask the addressees to leave them alone so they can sign and express their pain freely, something the Israeli cultural ethos—and the Statehood Generation's poetics—frown upon in their rejection of the lachrymose diasporic culture.

Furthermore, this term also has a liturgical origin, as it first appears in the pre-classical piyyut "Men of faith no longer with us" ("אנשי אמונה אבדו"), which is commonly read as part of the *Seliḥot* on the days leading up to the ten Days of Awe, on fast days, and in the *Tachanun* (supplication) portion of daily prayers. This short piyyut deals with the idea that human generations are on the decline ("ירידת הדורות" *yeridat ha-dorot*) and the sense that people of stature equal to the great men of faith of old are no longer among us to protect us with their righteousness. By evoking this piyyut, Biton deepens the irony of his phrasing by hinting that those addressees who seem to think highly of themselves might want to borrow the humility one can find in texts such as the piyyut evokes.

[221] Erez Biton, *מנחה מרוקאית [Moroccan Offering]* (Tel Aviv: Eked, 1976), 14–15.

In this new ending, Biton also extends his meta-poetic treatment of rhyme. In the final line, the speakers say, "We are broken rhymes." This identification speaks volumes compared to the simile at the beginning of the poem, in which they said they are "like" the frenzied wind. Here, the figurative language intensifies in the transition from simile to metaphor, as Biton has the speakers claim full identity with the broken poetic fragments of language. As Hanan Hever remarks, this statement presents "a poetic language that is broken and stuttering, striving to represent the unrepresentable."[222]

This concluding statement can also be read as a paradigmatic defiance of the Zachian poetics of the 1960s. While the Statehood Generation called for breaking the symmetry and constraints of "monotonous rhyme," establishing their power over it from the outside and, therefore, their autonomy, Biton positions his speakers as those broken rhymes in their very being, as the essence of poetry itself. This shift from simile to metaphorical identification via metaphor underscores a profound embrace of fragmented expression and consciousness, challenging the prevailing norms of poetic form and asserting an inherent value of marginalized voices and experiences as ways to embody what for hegemonic writers can be merely external aesthetic questions.

The power of this maneuver is fortified by Biton's mastery over rhyme in these lines. In the new ending, the penultimate line and the one preceding it are connected with rich, full rhymes (*lefaḥot-anaḥot*) while also rhyming with the grammatical suffix *-ot* ending of the previous lines (*`arisot-harisot-lefaḥot-anaḥot*). In the last line, Biton adds one more turn of the same screw: immediately after the enjambment, he creates a maximalist rich rhyme connecting the last word of the penultimate line and the first word of the last line: "sighs" and "we," which in Hebrew are "***Anaḥot***" and "***Anaḥnu***." In this manner, Biton makes it clear that the sighs the addressees wanted the speakers to stifle are at the core of the collective being oppressed.

Furthermore, the rhyme before us is what the scholar and bilingual poet Benjamin Harshav called a "modernistic rhyme," in which "at least one member ends with a neutral sound that does not participate in the rhymeme [the shared consonants-vowels]."[223] In this case, both rhyme members share their consonants and vowels, excluding each word's last consonant. Furthermore, the last vowel moves in placement, making the first rhyme member end with a closed syllable and the other member end with an open one. In this way, this modernistic rhyme deviates from traditional rhyme norms to the utmost degree while also being rich to the utmost degree, thus extenuating the difference between the classic and modernistic norms of rhyming, making this specific rhyme feel especially "broken." In this way, Biton manifests a "broken rhyme" in form just a moment before it appears as the concluding phrase of the poem: "We are broken rhymes."

In this early poem, Biton presents a dual perspective on reality, articulating the world in language to show how the supposed common names of events are already politicized. In this poem,

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[222] Hannan Hever, *"אנחנו שברי חרוזים": שירת ארז ביטון בין מזרח למערב ["We, Broken Rhymes": Erez Biton's Poetry between East and West]*, ed. Ketzia Alon and Yochai Oppenheimer (Israel: Hakibbutz Hameuchad and Gama Publishing, 2014), 96.

[223] Harshav, *Three Thousand Years of Hebrew Versification*, 143.

he does so without turning to practices that will define his first two volumes of poetry. Even as he collects the poem in his 1976 debut volume, he places it in the second section and not in the third, which contains most of the explicit "Mizrahi materials" for which this poem is celebrated. In "Frenzied" in all its variants, Biton does not name the different groupings in opposition to each other and does not state a clear connection between the implied speaker and his biography. He thus manifests an abstracted "rapport" with reality that functions differently and to the same degree of indeterminacy as that proposed by Zach. However, while Zach's formation of selfhood is defined by the autonomy between the speaking individual and society writ large, Biton's form of self is set against a reality that is already set against itself by the bifurcation of social struggle. Instead of an "I-society" dyad, Biton presents a triad of a speaking "I" (or, in this case, a speaking "we"), located between the hegemony and the oppressed. The speakers' personhoods are thus not autonomous, as they do not seek personal liberation from all others. Instead, Biton's speakers are heteronomous as they seek to resist by tracing their social subjugation back to the people and institutions who cause it. In this tracing, the speakers present consciousness about the conditions of their own consciousness, or in Hegelian terms, they come to self-consciousness through self-expression. As I've shown above, this complex cognitive structure already manifests in the title "frenzied wind." Throughout the poem, Biton shows the contingent nature of this wind's definition and how vastly different it is from the points of view of the speakers and addressees. Biton's intertextual and rhyming practices further lay bare this contingency of language and poetics.

Section 2: Mizrahi Poetry After Biton

2.1 – Biton's Reception and the Question of Mizrahi Literature

Biton's early poem provides an abstract cognitive template for his more mature poetry, in which he pushes his poetic principles further by entirely refusing abstraction and naming and detailing his biographical experiences. For many readers, this change in content obscured Biton's innovative formal mode of rapport with reality, leading them to read this poetic revolution as unlyrical. In this vein, while the early reception of Biton's poetry has been outwardly positive, many of his erstwhile critics tended to his poetry in a fragmentary manner, creating a hierarchy between what they thought of as lyric poetry and the "Mizrahi materials" they isolated and condemned. For example, in 1976, following Biton's first volume of poetry, Alex Zehavi wrote the following in *Davar* daily newspaper's literary supplement:

> Erez Biton's first volume of poems includes three poetry sections, the third of which gives the book its name, "A Cycle for a Moroccan Offering" (*מחזור למנחה מרוקאית*). It is indeed this third section that contains the more original poems, and here there is a more experimental attempt to combine aspects of Jewish folk poetry (most of which is not Hebrew) with modern poetry – but it is precisely the first two cycles, containing lyric poems, that are deserving of attention. […] His attempts are interesting but do not offer an independent poetic expression. Mixing traditional elements in the lyric poem, as Avot Yeshurun does, rarely succeeds. [… These attempts] are lovely unto themselves and

> interesting, but they are still missing the personal expression of Biton's complicated and sensitive inner world, which appears freshly in his first cycles of poems.[224]

Zehavi builds upon the structure of Biton's book, contrasting the first two sections, which he describes as containing lyric poems, with the last section, which lacks the "personal expression" of Biton's "inner world." Although Zehavi acknowledges that the last section is more original and experimental, he also argues that it fails to achieve its purpose as it includes elements that are not lyric. Zehavi associates the lyric nature of the poems with language and ethnos, as evidenced by his use of the adjective "not Hebrew" to describe the folkish elements in Biton's poetry. As a result, Zehavi suggests that Biton's supposed poetic failure stems from his incorporation of Jewish heritage that is inconsistent with modern, non-diasporic Hebrew literature in a Zionist context. In this manner, Zehavi only hints at the words "Mizrahi" or "Arabic" but does not explicitly mention them.

On the other hand, Moshe Ben-Shaul, a contemporary critic and an early member of the Statehood Generation poetry cycle *Likrat*, addresses Biton's Mizrahi identity in his review of Biton's second book in 1979. However, this acknowledgment still moves to alienate Biton's poetry from Hebrew poetry's inner circle:

> I said 'accent' and almost gave the book away. Of course, one can write about the rhythm, content, narrative, melody of the thematics of these poems by Erez Biton – But their accent is first and foremost an enclosed world, colorful, with the wonderful spices and smells of an ethnic group,[225] of a very stereotypical Moroccan childhood that lingers in the Land of Israel, in the early 50s, the years of distress when new immigrants arrived here directly to the ma`abarot […] Beyond this "Moroccan" poetry and its supposed, or not supposed, ethnicity, stands a poet whose unique expression holds a power that suggestively, very attractively, sometimes almost magically, calls you to read him again and again.[226]

Like Zehavi, Ben-Shaul perceives Biton's ethnicity as extraneous to the core of poetry, the lyric text that invites readers to reread it. Unlike Zehavi, who views the differences in the context of folk elements and considers them excessive and disconnected from lyric poetry, Ben-Shaul views them as an accent. This metaphorical framing is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, Ben-Shaul uses it to suggest musicality and originality. On the other hand, portraying these qualities as inherent in an accent frames them as unintentional, instinctive, and unchangeable. Only by looking beyond the "Moroccan" accent in the poems, according to Ben-Shaul, can the reader fully

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[224] Alex Zehavi, "מנחה רעננה [Fresh Offering]," *Davar*, June 25, 1976..

[225] The Hebrew term used here is *`eda* (עדה), which serves in Israel to discuss inner-Jewish ethnic diversity while deemphasizing the issue, implicitly arguing for it as non-political taxonomy nestled within the much more crucial unity of Jewish peoplehood, and of Jewish Israeliness most of all. Historically, this term is marked by its semiotic distinction from the words *geza* (race גזע) and *etniyut* (ethnicity אתניות), both of which are charged with overt political and national implications. This allows many Hebrew speakers to use the word *`eda* for just such a content as seen in the example above – as a way to "*other"* non-Ashkenazi Jews and disenfranchise them in the guise of political speech. Currently, and due to the proliferation of the Mizrahi movement, this term is uncommon in the public sphere. See Yehuda Shenhav, "אתניות [Ethnicity]," in *In\Equality*, ed. Uri Ram and Nitza Berkovitz (Be'er Sheva: Ben-Gurion University, 2006), 55–63.

[226] Moshe Ben-Shaul, "רבאבא עברית [Hebrew Rebab]," *Maariv*, September 7, 1979.

appreciate the work. Despite its overall positive tone, the review contains statements that differentiate Biton's work from other poetry and consign it to a secondary position compared to unmarked and unaccented poetry.

These two early reviews illustrate that the distinct lyric style of Biton's poetry was initially met with confusion and resistance by critics. This perception hindered Biton's integration into the institutions of Hebrew literature and the Hebrew poetry canon. Despite significantly impacting later poets in the 1980s and 1990s such as Sami Shalom Shitrit, Amira Hess, and Viki Shiran, it was not until the mid-2000s and the rise of third- and fourth-generation Mizrahi poets that a new appreciation for Biton's work emerged, as I described in the introduction to this chapter.

The increased attention to Biton's poetry was also intertwined with a contemporaneous development in the scholarship of Hebrew literature, which during this period started to address the question of Mizrahi literature as never before. This new discourse modeled itself after Biton's work, using it as a paradigm around which a new notion of Mizrahi poetry developed. The publication of two key works drove this trend, Ktzia Alon's *Third Option for Poetry: Oriental Israeli Poetics* (2011) and Yochai Oppenheimer's *What Does it Mean to be Authentic?: Diasporic Mizrahi Poetry in Israel* (2012).[227] These books provided comprehensive examinations of Mizrahi poetry, starting with Biton's generation and moving forward through the decades. This scholarship viewed Mizrahi literature through postcolonial lenses, building on the sociological study of Mizrahi identity by scholars such as Ella Shohat and Yehuda Shenhav. Biton is seen as a central figure in the field of Mizrahi poetry and is foregrounded as such in Alon and Oppenheimer's work, as demonstrated by their subsequent edited volume, *Ana Min Al-Maghreb – Reading Erez Biton's Poetry*, published in 2014.[228]In these studies, Alon and Oppenheimer present a similar argument about the defining characteristic of Mizrahi poetry. Alon writes that she

> [w]ishes to address Mizrahi identity not as a *thing* but as a *position*, an in-between, mobile location that does not wish to settle or be settled, but to gesture towards a current perspective that, by its connection to the present, is a manifestation of inherent temporariness.[229]

To do this, Alon builds on Shenhav's approach in *Arab-Jews: A Postcolonial Reading of Nationalism, Religion, and Ethnicity*,[230] and argues that "Mizrahiness is that which is found in between the schisms that divide Israeli society, disrupting any common dichotomic divisions and epistemological segregations."[231] Similarly, Oppenheimer defines Mizrahi literature by its liminality, exploring it as "an active involvement with the experience of marginalization, and an organizing category for a new position of resistance."[232] Oppenheimer focuses on this category

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[227] Alon, *אפשרות שלישית לשירה: עיונים בפואטיקה מזרחית [Oriental Israeli Poetics]*; Yochai Oppenheimer, *מה זה להיות אותנטי : שירה מזרחית בישראל [Diasporic Mizrahi Poetry in Israel]* (Israel: Resling, 2012).

[228] Alon and Oppenheimer, *אנא מן אלמגרב - קריאות בשירת ארז ביטון [Anna Min Al-Magrab - Reading Erez Biton's Poetry]*.

[229] Alon, *אפשרות שלישית לשירה: עיונים בפואטיקה מזרחית [Oriental Israeli Poetics]*, 22.

[230] Yehuda Shenhav, *The Arab Jews: A Postcolonial Reading of Nationalism, Religion, and Ethnicity*, Original printing, Cultural Sitings (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2006).

[231] Alon, *אפשרות שלישית לשירה: עיונים בפואטיקה מזרחית [Oriental Israeli Poetics]*, 22.

[232] Oppenheimer, *מה זה להיות אותנטי : שירה מזרחית בישראל [Diasporic Mizrahi Poetry in Israel]*, 15.

through the lenses of anti-hegemonic writing and diasporic positionality, acknowledging that it does not cover all poetry written by Mizrahi poets but instead defines the primary tension that constitutes the category.

Alon and Oppenheimer discuss Mizrahi literature while following Deleuze and Guattari's concept of minor literature. According to Deleuze and Guattari, minor literature is literature written in the hegemonic language, in this case Hebrew, while using variants of the language that are considered marginal or peripheral in a given society, in this case, Judeo-Arabic and Israeli Mizrahi dialects, while also focusing on themes that are typically overlooked or marginalized such as the history of Mizrahi oppression. The focus is on poetry that manifests Mizrahi oppression and othering and the negative tracing of societal stratification as in Biton's poetry. Through its expression, Mizrahi poetry deconstructs the orientalist gaze aimed toward the Mizrahi people, becoming a liberatory poetry project that de- and re-territorializes Israeli space and perception.

However, this liberatory project, like all others, has its limitations. Haviva Pedaya, who writes concurrently with Alon and Oppenheimer but forming her own school of thought, approaches her discomfort with their scholarship through the mediation of Deleuze and Guattari. According to Pedaya, the reception of Deleuze and Guattari's *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*[233] in Israel has often led to a "schematic application" of the theory in which "the idealization of 'being a stranger within one's own language' is nothing but a worn-out variant of the older theory of defamiliarization."[234] Pedaya argues for the power of thinking about the theory of minor literature bidirectionally, allowing the many histories of worldwide de-territorialization to change the one model that Deleuze and Guattari established in the mid-1970s. In this manner, Pedaya joins Chana Kronfeld's criticism in arguing that well-meaning applications of Deleuze and Guattari's theory that focus on drawing similarities between Deleuze and Guattari's abstractions of Kafka and other bodies of literature must consider the contexts of Kafka's turn of the century Prague, Deleuze and Guattari's post-May '68 Paris, as well as Hebrew poetry own history and social stratification.[235]

Pedaya continues by describing how the history of Mizrahi poetry amends and changes the model suggested by Deleuze and Guattari. First, by comparing Kafka's German literature and the poetry of Hebrew Mizrahi poets through the mediation of pre-modern mystic Jewish texts, Pedaya shows how Deleuze and Guattari's notion of minor literature is predicated on a universalization of Kafka's specific Jewish historical circumstances. This universalization leaves out the intertextual, linguistic, and social specificities that connect Kafka's work to his community of origin. In this manner, minor literature theory highlights in Kafka only the textual elements that dialectically define the hegemonic culture, which creates an epistemological asymmetry. This asymmetry allows the hegemonic culture to maintain its particularity and history, while the minor culture

[233] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Theory and History of Literature, v. 30 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).
[234] Pedaya, *שיבתו של הקול הגולה: זהות מזרחית: פואטיקה, מוזיקה ומרחב [Return of the Lost Voice]*, 35.
[235] Kronfeld, *On the Margins of Modernism*, 1–17.

producing the minor literature becomes only a shadow, defined by the work it does for that hegemonic group.[236]

This critique can be better understood in Hegelian terms to show how minor literature is constituted as a bondsman that is working in dialects of negation (de-territorialization) that allow the master a new state of self-consciousness (re-territorialization). Pedaya's critique, however, enables us to see how Deleuze and Guattari's notion also includes the conclusion of the bondsman-master dialectics, the struggle for life and death, in which only one side emerges as possessing self-consciousness. To escape this one-sidedness, there must be a mutual recognition of the two cultures that produce major and minor literature; in the case of Kafka, this mutual recognition must include his Jewish textual heritage, which is so often overlooked, problematized, and abstracted.

Secondly, Pedaya gestures towards the as yet understudied (but prevalent in primary sources) adoration of Kafka by the Statehood Generation prose fiction writers and his being hailed as the epitome of "thin-I" literary language.[237] This development has led to convoluted relations between the de-territorialization of the Hebrew language and hegemonic forces. As Hanan Hever has argued as early as 2002, the fiction of the Statehood Generation post-1948, especially pre-1967, attempts to facilitate the transition from "Hebrew" to "Israeli Literature" by manufacturing writing from a demographic majority that has a "minority consciousness."[238] Hever is ambivalent regarding that project's political value, noting its benefits and drawbacks. Pedaya, however, raises a crucial moral objection, noting that as "the major culture writes itself through the codes of minority," it "continues to impoverish the othered majority of the minor social group – that is, of Mizrahi people."[239]

Building on Pedaya's criticism, we must consider that Alon and Oppenheimer's current approach to Mizrahi literature, while progressive at its core, frames it too reactively and too closely to the perspective of the Israeli Ashkenazi gaze. Defining Mizrahi literature as predicated on liminality, diasporic nature, and its ability to negate hegemonic social structure limits the scope of Mizrahi writing to only the reductive modes relevant to the central and hegemonic culture. In a sense, it forces Mizrahi Israeli culture into the Hegelian dialectics of bondsman and master, in which Mizrahiness is only defined as so far as it de- and re-constructs Ashkenazi culture and as it de- or re-territorializes Israeli Hebrew literature. In this manner, the argument (made explicit in Oppenheimer's research), according to which Mizrahi literature is first and foremost protest literature, stands in the way of a more holistic view, that can allow a mutual reorganization of both Ashkenazi and Mizrahi cultures.

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[236] Pedaya addresses this context more fully in her research on Kafka's literature, as she compares Kafka's *The Castle* to the rabbinic and Hassidic *Hekhalot* literature. See Haviva Pedaya, " הטירה וההיכלות - תוקף ומשמעות בראי המיסטיקה היהודית [The Castle and the Hekhalot - Validity and Meaning in the Mirror of Jewish Mysticism]," in *קפקא - פרספקטיבות חדשות [Kafka - New Prespectives]* (Tel-Aviv: Safra, 2013), 346–92.

[237] Pedaya, *שיבתו של הקול הגולה: זהות מזרחית: פואטיקה, מוזיקה ומרחב [Return of the Lost Voice]*, 34–38.

[238] See Hannan Hever, "רוב כמיעוט לאומי בסיפורת ישראלית מראשית שנות ה-60 [The Majority as a National Minority in Israeli Fiction since the Early 1960s]," in *The Narrative and the Nation: Critical Readings in the Canon of Hebrew Fiction* (Israel: Resling, 2007), 239–56.

[239] Pedaya, *שיבתו של הקול הגולה: זהות מזרחית: פואטיקה, מוזיקה ומרחב [Return of the Lost Voice]*, 35.

The search for articulating Mizrahi culture outside of the context of Ashkenazi oppression has been developing over the past decade, as new scholars of Mizrahi literature, history, and sociology have been taking a new approach past the "short history" of Mizrahim in the state of Israel. In the introduction to the recently edited volume *The Long History of Mizrahim: New Directions in the Study of Jews from Muslim Countries* (2021), two of the volume's four editors, Aviad Moreno and Noah Gerber detail the intellectual history of the scholarship (or the lack thereof) of Mizrahi communities in Israeli academia, the segmentation of that study into disjointed fields, and the overall problems originating in centering Mizrahi history around the schism of Jewish immigration from Muslim countries to Israel during the 20th century. Instead, they call to "disrupt the structural segmentation" that divides the study of Mizrahim in Israel and the history of their community of origins.[240] While this approach has already been advanced in American academia, as in the scholarship of Aziza Khazzoom and Ammiel Alcalay,[241] this volume and its publication in Hebrew has been a recent watershed moment.

Also in this volume, Almog Behar offers the literary implications of this approach, surveying a comprehensive account of "the literary system in which Jews of the Arabic world participated over the last two centuries."[242] In this article, Behar looks jointly at literature written in Rabbinic Hebrew, Judeo-Arabic, colonial languages (esp. English and French), classical Arabic, and modern Israeli Hebrew. Behar highlights the contact zones between these systems and literary reading communities as well as their discontinuations, thus pointing out the dynamic nature of this history.

Similarly, Gil Hochberg and Lital Levy, in a series of works starting in 2007, argue for the need to reorient the conception of modern Hebrew literature to fight against segregationist imagination and to include the development and circulation of Jewish writing in MENA regions.[243] Gil Anidjar examines the conceptual separation between Jewish, Muslim, Hebrew, and Arabic literature(s), arguing that keeping these literatures apart is unattainable while accounting for their developments from late medieval through modern times.[244] These scholars, as well as other notable

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[240] Moreno and Gerber, "חקר יהודי ארצות האסלאם בישראל: התפתחויות ופיצולים [The Study of the Jews of Islamic Countries in Israel: Developments and Divisions]."

[241] Ammiel Alcalay, *After Jews and Arabs: Remaking Levantine Culture* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1993); Aziza Khazzoom, *Shifting Ethnic Boundaries and Inequality in Israel: Or, How the Polish Peddler Became a German Intellectual* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

[242] Almog Behar, "בין ספרות ישראל במזרח לספרות המזרחית בישראל - רצפים ושברים במאתיים השנים האחרונות [Between the Literature of Israel in the East and Mizrahi Literature in Israel - Continuity and Schisms of the Last Two Centuries]," in *The Long History of Mizrahim: New Directions in the Study of Jews from Muslim Countries* (Sde-Boker: The Ben-Gurion Research Institute for the Study of Israel and Zionism, 2021), 211–32.

[243] Gil Z. Hochberg, *In Spite of Partition: Jews, Arabs, and the Limits of Separatist Imagination*, Translation/Transnation (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Lital Levy, "Reorienting Hebrew Literary History: The View from the East," *Prooftexts* 29, no. 2 (2009): 127–72; Lital Levy, "The Nahda and the Haskala: A Comparative Reading of 'Revival' and 'Reform,'" *Middle Eastern Literatures* 16, no. 3 (Winter 2013): 300–316; Lital Levy and Allison Schachter, "Jewish Literature / World Literature: Between the Local and the Transnational," *PMLA/Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 130, no. 1 (January 2015): 92–109, https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2015.130.1.92.

[244] Gil Anidjar, *Semites: Race, Religion, Literature*, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2008).

writers like Zvi Ben-Dor-Benite and Yuval Evri[245] explore new avenues of thinking about Mizrahi literature by enlarging the category's scope. These scholars carry the project of emancipating Mizrahi literature forward, divorcing the discussion from the primacy of the Ashkenazi gaze.

2.2 – Piyyut Revival and New Mizrahi Literature

Within this context, I want to turn to the history of piyyut to facilitate our understanding of Mizrahi literature further. The history of piyyut in the last 500 years and more specifically in recent decades is deeply connected to the question of Mizrahi textuality and can allow us to conceptualize and contextualize Mizrahi literature outside its power relations with the Ashkenazi hegemony.

As noted in Chapter One, piyyut's third period, following the 1492 Alhambra decree and the expulsion of Jews and Muslims from the Iberian Peninsula has developed along different lines in European and MENA regions. In both areas, new piyyutim were written and practiced continuously in one form or another, and both areas' systems of piyyut stemmed from the Andalusian syllabic-quantitative meters, with different modifications and cross-cultural prosodic circulations. However, the new piyyutim written among Ashkenazi communities remained local traditions – sometimes celebrated but not transmitted or circulated overall.[246] The cultural domains that piyyut held before in Jewish communal life were replaced to some extent by other forms of devotional and artistic practice, specifically Hasidic *nigun*, Yiddish folk songs, and modern Hebrew poetry.[247]

These three practices are akin to piyyut, involving communal events of poetry, song, and music or relating to prayer and scripture in a "supplemental" manner, albeit more distantly than piyyut which shared its liturgical role with prayer. Concurrently, these practices reveal an increasing separation between music and text and between the Yiddish and Hebrew languages. Over time, Ashkenazi folk music and poetry emerged as significant cultural domains through which literati and social leaders propelled secularization and modernization. These processes further distanced these art forms from traditional piyyut, even when their texts closely resemble it.

The works of many writers often cited as luminaries of early modern Hebrew literature can be reframed within the context of piyyut. Not only does Ramha"l (Moshe Haim Luzzatto, 1707-1744) explicitly write piyyutim and call them by that name, but later notable poets also write poems whose relation to the liturgical genre is clear, though often undisclosed. Rachel Luzzatto Morpurgo (1790-1871) shows in her poetry a similar relation to scripture and premodern piyyut, participating not only in the creation of modern Hebrew poetry but also in such longstanding piyyut genres such as the riddle poem. Naftali Hirtz Vizel's *Songs of Glory* (1782-1802 ,שירי תפארת) retells Moses' life

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[245]Evri, "Return to Al-Andalus beyond German-Jewish Orientalism"; Moshe Behar and Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, eds., *Modern Middle Eastern Jewish Thought: Writings on Identity, Politics, and Culture, 1893–1958* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2013), https://www.brandeis.edu/tauber/publications/books/behar-middle-eastern.html.

[246] Elisabeth Hollender, "Poets (Almost) Without an Audience? Ashkenazic Piyyuṭim in Local Manuscripts," in *The Poet and the World*, by Joachim Yeshaya, Elisabeth Hollender, and Naoya Katsumata (De Gruyter, 2019), 117–34, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110599237-009.

[247] Pedaya, *The Piyyut as a Cultural Prism*, 14–15.

in five volumes of verse. This long poem, often cited as one of the starting points of modern Hebrew literature, is explicitly influenced by Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock's *Der Messias* (*The Messiah*, 1748-1773) and is usually perceived as a localization in Hebrew of that period's German literary sensibilities. At the same time, in its essence, it is a midrash set to Hebrew verse and bears uncanny similarities to piyyut. This is also true of many poems by Micha"l (Micah Joseph Lebensohn, 1828-1852), which recount biblical and tannaitic affairs, or, in modern Yiddish, the poems by Yehoash (Solomon Blumgarten, 1872-1927), which similarly interpret and retell Jewish scripture in its contemporary poetic norms. The relationship between piyyut and these moments of poetry will await further research.

In any case, by the late 19th century, while piyyut was still practiced among European Jews within synagogues, it was considered little more than a relic outside of them. As relics, piyyut was sometimes cherished by Hebrew poets and intellectuals, held up as a source of inspiration and wonder. However, just as often, it appeared in discourse as an easy target for mockery, as evident in Mendele Mokher-Sfarim and H.N. Bialik's lampooning of Hakalir's famous poem *Atz kotzetz ben kotzetz*.[248] By the early 1940s, the scholar and essayist Moshe Eliyahu Zhernensky remarked on the cultural memory of piyyut:

> No longer are the words piyyut and poetry uttered in the same breath as synonyms, but, for the typical reader, they are nothing short of an antinomy. Poetry's domain is emotion, written like pure prayer and meditative invocation.[249] By contrast, Piyyut is hewed in bricks of erudition, grasping for reparative verbiage and arid eloquence.[250]

By the time of the Mizrahi mass immigration to Israel in the 1950s, piyyut, as a distinct genre of modern creativity, had all but vanished from the Ashkenazi cultural landscape. Musically and devotionally, Ashkenazi piyyut still had an afterlife in art-music and cantorial practice. [251] As detailed in previous chapters, it was also continuously studied in its medieval forms. In these contexts, it was always framed as something belonging to the past.

However, in non-European Jewish communities over the past 500 years, piyyut not only survived but flourished. Beginning with the rejuvenation of the genre in 16th-century Safed and continuing through the 20th century, piyyut developed through both inner and intra-communal practices in the Muslim world and the Ottoman Empire. A prominent figure of this revival is Israel

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[248] Joseph Yahalom, "אץ קוצץ: גישות ועמדות בשאלת סגנון הפיוט ולשונו [Atz Kotzetz: Approaches and Attitudes on the Style and Language of Piyyut]," *Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature* 32, no. 1 (1981): 167–81.

[249] The terms used by Zhernensky are meant to show the ridiculous nature of this argument as he is describing poetry using two religious prayer-related terms "תפילה זכה" and "צקון לחש," thus collapsing the binary between piyyut and poetry while presenting it.

[250] Moshe Eliyahu Zhernensky, "פיוט ושירה [Piyyut and Poetry," accessed July 23, 2024, https://benyehuda.org/read/29929.

[251] Irit Youngerman, "'A Melody That Doesn't Exist Anymore': Negation, Erasure, and Void in Israeli Art Music, as Reflected in Hanoch Jacoby's Mutatio," *The Musical Quarterly* 103, no. 1–2 (December 1, 2020): 139–83; Amit Klain, "מגלות לגאולה - על השינויים בחזנות מאירופה של ראשית המאה ה-20 למדינת ישראל של ראשית המאה ה-21 [From Exile to Redemption: On the Changes in Cantorial Music from Early 20th Century Europe to Early 21st Century Israel]," in *Music In Israel*, ed. Gideon Katz, Michael Wolpe, and Tuvia Friling (Sde-Boker: The Ben-Gurion Research Institute for the Study of Israel and Zionism, 2014), 741–69.

Najara (c. 1550-1625), who, along with his contemporaries, infused piyyut with new developments in Lurianic Kabbalah and Arabic Ottoman maqāmāt, creating a unique style of poetry and music. Najara's works, such as the collection *Zemirot Yisrael*, combined spiritual and mystical themes with the melodies and rhythms of the Ottoman sphere of influence, making them widely popular across Jewish communities of Asia and North Africa.[252]

The infusion of Arabic and Ottoman maqāmāt created a music school with a clear connection between Jewish and Muslim cultures, as paytanim borrowed songs and melodies from their non-Jewish neighbors and arranged their own words. The musicality of this school made it popular for life cycle ceremonies and holiday festivities, making piyyut inseparable from both devotional and secular communal events.[253] Eventually, many MENA Jewish communities developed new devotional practices centered around piyyut, such as the *bakashot* event, where synagogue-goers sing special piyyutim during the pre-dawns of Shabbat in the winter months.

The development of this type of piyyut took place in various regions, including western North Africa (Libya, Algeria, and Morocco), Iraq (especially Baghdad), Yemen, and Greater Syria (notably Aleppo and Jerusalem), from the 17th to 19th centuries. Piyyutim were often collected in prayer books and special volumes and circulated by the paytanim in a continuous process of amendment and editing. It wasn't until the *Naḥda* period, and as MENA Jewish communities were more fully exposed to European sensibilities, that one started seeing more stable collections that not only disseminated piyyutim but also emphasized the importance of collecting the texts as they were. [254] The collection of piyyutim reached its peak in the 19th century and was heavily influenced by contemporary fields of anthropology and folklore. As a result, these piyyutim, some of which were works of linguistic and artistic play, were approached as non-artistic, traditional texts worthy of preservation but not analysis.

Unlike the piyyut of Al-Andalus, which focused on biblical Hebrew, the post-1492 piyyut returned to the multilingualism of classical piyyut, incorporating rabbinic Hebrew and Aramaic alongside contemporary local dialects of Hebrew. This linguistic openness eventually expanded further to include local Judeo-Arabic dialects. In North Africa, for example, poets like Rabbi David Buzaglo (1903-1975) continued the tradition, blending Hebrew liturgical poetry with Arabic musical traditions.

These developments in piyyut were facilitated by a strong tradition of oral transmission and communal singing, which ensured that these poetic forms remained vibrant and relevant. Piyyutim were often performed at life cycle events, religious festivals, and communal gatherings, creating a dynamic interaction between the text, music, and the community. While the texts of the

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[252] See the articles on Najara and his legacy in the Arab-Jewish world by Pedaya, Shelly Elkayam, Edwin Seroussi, and more in Pedaya, *The Piyyut as a Cultural Prism*, 29–220.

[253] Haim Zafrani, *שירת יהודי מרוקו [The Poetry of Moroccan Jews]* (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1984); Amnon Shiloah, *The Musical Tradition of Iraqi Jews: Selection of Piyyutim and Songs* (Iraqi Jews' Traditional Culture Center, Institute for Research on Iraqi Jewry, 1983).

[254] This survey summarizes Efraim Hazan and Hanna Pattaya's overview, see Ephraim Hazan and Hannah Pattaya, "הפיוט מהו? הגדרות ותולדות [What is piyyut? Definitions and History]," Israeli National Library, ND, https://www.nli.org.il/he/discover/music/jewish-music/piyut/articles/introductions/piyut/about-the-meaning-of-the-piyut.

piyyutim kept their liturgical devotional nature, the spaces in which they were performed varied from the synagogue to the private life. In this manner, piyyut of this period allowed for many moments in which men and women were singing together and, in the cases of the *shevaḥ* and *kinah* (exultation and lament), spaces that privileged female singers.[255]

The practice of piyyut reached its dire hour during the 20th century. Concurrently with the mass immigration from MENA countries to Israel around the 1950s, Mizrahi communities faced material hardships and cultural erasure, which marginalized their piyyut traditions.[256] While these practices never went extinct, they dwindled in number and frequency due to different social trends, among them the secularization of Mizrahi youth in Israel, the homogenization of differing MENA communities into less varied Mizrahi culture and synagogue institutions, and the assimilation of Mizrahi clergy and cantors in Ashkenazi religious schools, where they were taught European Jewish practice instead of their heritage.

The direction of this cultural trend was reversed in the early 2000s in an overarching cultural shift spearheaded by the *Kehilot Sharot* project. *Kehilot Sharot* is an ongoing cultural recovery and preservation project established in 2002 by Yosi Ohana and Haviva Pedaya. It has been collecting piyyutim (as written texts and recorded singing) and disseminating them among a new generation of participants in structured weekly and annual events. For many reasons, including institutional pressures from donors, the project collected both Ashkenazi and Mizrahi piyyutim. Still, due to the history described above, much of its focus turned toward the piyyut of the Mizrahi world, which was the most understudied and under threat of erasure. Kehilot Sharot set out to give these communities their voice back, literally and metaphorically.[257]

In 2005, one of *Kehilot Sharot's* early facilitators, Yair Harel, established an online counterpart to the project*, Ha-zmana Le-piyyut ("*Invitation to Piyyut*"),* which contains a massive database of piyyutim as texts and recordings, as well as scholarship and commentaries facilitating access to this dense liturgy.[258] While originally developed with the NGO *Snunit*, the project was invited to join the Israeli National Library in 2014 and rebranded as an official state-sponsored collection in 2016.

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[255] Pedaya, *The Piyyut as a Cultural Prism*, 16–17.

[256] Edwin Seroussi, "שינוי והמשכיות בשירת הבקשות של יהודי מרוקו: תמורות במשמעות הסימבולית של מנהג מוסיקאלי מסורתי" [Change and Continuity in the Bakashot Poetry of Moroccan Jews: Transformations in the Symbolic Meaning of a Traditional Musical Custom]," *Pa'amim*, no. 19 (1984): 113–29; Essica Marks, " היבטים חברתיים ותרבותיים בזמרת הפיוט המתחדשת בישראל [Social and Cultural Aspects of Jewish Piyyut Revival in Israel]," in *Music In Israel*, ed. גדעון כ"ץ, מיכאל וולפה, and טוביה פרילינג (Sde-Boker: The Ben-Gurion Research Institute for the Study of Israel and Zionism, 2014), 769–88.

[257] Yossi Ohana, "מן המוזיקה הברברית ועד 'קהילות שרות'" [From Berber Music to 'Singing Communities']," in *The Piyyut as a Cultural Prims: New Approaches* (Israel: The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute and Hakibbutz Hameuchad Press, 2012), 389–99.

[258] Carmel Raz, "Tafillat's 'Soulmate' and the Israeli Piyyut Revival," in *Musical Exodus: Al-Andalus and Its Jewish Diasporas*, ed. Ruth F. Davis, Europea: Ethnomusicologies and Modernities 19 (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 165–80.

In spring 2008, Yair Harel and other members of the burgeoning piyyut revival scene initiated the first Piyyut Festival, which has since become an annual affair.[259] The renewed interest in piyyut has also launched a crossover success in Israeli popular music, with performers from varied musical genres such as Jazz, World, Ethnic, Mizrahi music, indie rock, and pop producing songs and records devoted to traditional and original piyyutim.[260] Similarly, though to less recognition, Israeli poets started writing "neo-piyyut," in which they experiment with classical and Andalusian piyyut forms to a larger degree, a process that, to the best of my knowledge, has not yet been explored in scholarly writing.

Academics have only recently begun to study the phenomena associated with the piyyut revival movement. So far, this corpus has focused almost exclusively on piyyut as devotional and musical events, giving virtually no attention to the impact of this cultural trend on Hebrew literature. This is a crucial intersection to explore. As I show in the next and final section of this chapter, Mizrahi poetry has engaged with the piyyut tradition since it began with Erez Biton, and in many ways, it served as a precursor to this revival. In another sense, Mizrahi poetry can be seen as one of the places where this tradition was preserved during the latter half of the 20th century when it was under threat of vanishing—a hidden reservoir, keeping the tradition alive while awaiting new generations to claim it.

Section 3: Erez Biton's "Moroccan Piyyut" (1976)

In 2014, when asked about his relation to giants of piyyut such as Israel Najara and Yehuda Halevi, Biton said:

> I must have internalized my father, who, together with his friends, used to come back Friday nights from the synagogue with those piyyutim that were influenced by the Andalusian music, those that Moroccan Jews brought with them from Spain […] as far as I am concerned, those are ironclad assets of our heritage and part of contemporary Israeli culture. When I speak of needing tradition, *masoret*, I do not speak of regression, of going back. I mean that there is space to take foundations and inspiration from the wondrous texts and music that flourished and originated from previous generations' longings and meditations, from Judaism and global writings.[261]

Biton's interest in these "ironclad heritage assets" is already evident in his earliest poems. As I have previously demonstrated in this chapter, even in his initial publications, Biton's supposedly universal "unmarked" poems contain piyyutic intertextuality. The connection to piyyut, which was

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[259] Raheli Riff, "לנשום את כל העולמות [Breathing all Worlds]," *Shabbat Supplement - for Torah, Thought, Literature, and Art* (blog), August 30, 2013, https://musaf-shabbat.com/2013/08/30/%d7%9c%d7%a0%d7%a9%d7%95%d7%9d-%d7%90%d7%aa-%d7%9b%d7%9c-%d7%94%d7%a2%d7%95%d7%9c%d7%9e%d7%95%d7%aa-%d7%a8%d7%97%d7%9c%d7%99-%d7%a8%d7%99%d7%a3/.

[260] Raz, "Tafillat's 'Soulmate' and the Israeli Piyyut Revival," 166; Roni Ish-Ran, "הפיוט הצליח, הלחן מת [The piyyut succeeded, the melody died]," *Ynet*, November 4, 2009, https://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3800221,00.html; Essica Marks, "New Contexts and New Audiences for Piyyutim," *Musica Judaica* 21 (2015): 113–32.

[261] Yeshurun, "Moroccan Language Is Another Me," 471.

previously implicit, becomes explicit as Biton published his first volume of poetry in 1976. The title of the volume *Moroccan Offering* already establishes this connection. In Hebrew, the word for "offering" is "מנחה" (*minḥah*), which is also the name for the daily afternoon prayer in Jewish practice. This, along with the morning and evening prayers (*shaḥarit* and *`arvit*), constitutes the core of the daily devotional routine. This connection is further reinforced as we open the book and note that it is divided into three sections, the third of which gives the book its name – "A Cycle of Moroccan Offering." The word used for "cycle" is "מחזור" (*maḥzor*). In modern Hebrew, this term describes a cycle of poems. However, it also has a devotional meaning, as the Jewish prayer book for holidays and other important days is called "*maḥzor*," as were the collections of piyyutim circulated in the Ottoman Empire. So while the title of this section can be read as "A Cycle of Moroccan Offering," it can also mean "A *Maḥzor* for a Moroccan *Minḥah*" or "Prayers and Piyyutim for a Moroccan Afternoon Prayer," inviting us to think of the volume's poems as supplemental liturgy, relating to Jewish devotional practice while also being excessive.

This evocation of the specific prayer is not merely a cultural wink towards a knowing audience but, as piyyutic intertextuality, it calls for further interpretation and dialogue with the evoked source materials. Thus, we must examine what is suggested by the *minḥah* prayer specifically. Out of the three central daily prayers, this is often considered the most minor, as it is permitted and, in some places, customary to attach it to the evening prayer. This lowered stance aligns the modern Hebrew and traditional meanings, since "offering" carries connotations of humility and optionality—something being offered, not bestowed, mandated, or imposed. However, the lower state also holds more profound mystical power. According to the rabbis of the Talmud (*m. Brachot 6b*), the time of *minḥah* is when God is most likely to hear and answer the praying person.[262] In this manner, the nature of Biton's offering is saturated with liturgical meanings, suggesting that he not only offers something of Moroccan culture to his readers (as the title is sometimes interpreted), but also performs a Moroccan textual practice dedicated to a particular sacred timing of potency.

Therefore, Biton's choice of *minḥah* shows an intricate layering of humility and divine potentiality. This choice can be read within the context of the Statehood Generation as well, in which the notion of humility, outward weakness, and "smallness" is marked as a true sign of cultural significance and importance. This suggests that his humble yet potent poems play a significant role in Biton's wish for a broader spiritual and cultural dialogue beyond just expressions of Moroccan heritage.

The fourth poem of this cycle, or *maḥzor*, titled "Moroccan Piyyut," makes the connection between Biton's lyric poetry and piyyut explicit. In later renditions, as in the 2009 *Timbisert - A Moroccan Bird*, Biton moves the poem so it concludes the section of "Moroccan Offering."[263] Here is the full poem with my translation. The explanatory epigraph is also included in the original, as

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[262] "And Rabbi Ḥelbo said that Rav Huna said: One must always be vigilant concerning the afternoon minḥah prayer, as Elijah's prayer was only answered in that time." Original:
"וְאָמַר רַבִּי חֶלְבּוֹ, אָמַר רַב הוּנָא: לְעוֹלָם יְהֵא אָדָם זָהִיר בִּתְפִלַּת הַמִּנְחָה, שֶׁהֲרֵי אֵלִיָּהוּ לֹא נֶעֱנָה אֶלָּא בִּתְפִלַּת הַמִּנְחָה."

[263] Erez Biton, *תמבירסרת - ציפור מרוקאית [Timbisert - A Moroccan Bird]* (Israel: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2009), 58.

are the interspersed additional syllables between the poem's words, simulating how it is meant to be sung.

Moroccan Piyyut	פיוט מרוקאי[264]
The following piyyut is in the spirit of Moroccan piyyutim, which drew from the unique melody of Spain, and it is recited in a traditional Moroccan Jewish tune	הפיוט דלהלן ברוח הפיוטים המרוקאיים אשר ינקו את המלודיה המיוחדת של ספרד והוא נקרא במנגינה יהודית מרוקאית מסורתית
Night of Distress	לֵיל בַּצַּר
Your words eh eh eh are esteemed in the ears ee ee ees of soongs,	נִכְבָּדוּ נוּ נוּ, דִּבְרֵיכֶם נַה נַה בְּאָזְנֵי נַנַּנִי שִׁירִיִּים,
Your profound aa aa aa wisdom is wo wo wo wondrous	נִפְלְאוּ אוֹ אוֹ, תְּבוּנֵיכֶם שַׁגִּיאִיִּים
And you have ave ave ave endeared yourselves to mee, my beloved	וְאַלֵּי נַנַּנִי נֶחְמַדְתֶּם אוֹהֲבִיִּים
And you, uh uh uh	וְאַתֶּם נַה נַה
Kings of old East, praiaised	מַלְכֵי נַנַּנִי קֶדֶם שְׁבָחִיִּים
A new song oh oh ong I will sing to you, uh uh uh	שִׁירָה נַה נַה נַה חֲדָשָׁה נַה נַה אָשִׁיר לָכֶם
Heavenly oones	רְקִיעִיִּים

At the core of this poem, in lines 2-5, is an address where Biton turns to a plural "you," expressing his love for their songs, wisdom, and his high regard for them. This form of address is similar to the one in "Frenzied," where the speaker addresses an initially unmarked group; however, here, the relationship between the speaking "I" and the addressees is aligned rather than oppositional. In this poem, written in the spirit of piyyut, the poet turns inward to an audience he identifies with. This identity of the addressees is made clear in line five, as the speaker calls them "kings of *kedem*."

In biblical Hebrew, "*kedem*" means both "old" and "east," likely because the East is the direction in which the sun first rises. This polysemy allows Biton to craft a phrase that conflates pastness—something under threat of erasure under Ashkenazi hegemony—and Mizrahi culture, which is, again, framed as the culture of the East (even though many Mizrahim come from countries west of Israel). In direct opposition to the "negation of the diaspora," Biton elevates the position of being "old" and "Eastern," praising his Mizrahi audience and bestowing upon them the valor of royalty. This act of naming and valorizing reinforces the importance and dignity of Mizrahi heritage and culture, positioning it as a source of pride and strength rather than an unnecessary relic of the past.

This type of polysemy appears in two other places in the poem. The poem opens with a time marker, noting that it occurs on a "night of distress." As the epigraphical note tells us that the poem should be read as a sung piyyut, performed collectively, we can also interpret this line as indicating the time it is to be performed—a type of in-text instruction sometimes found in traditional

[264] Biton, *מנחה מרוקאית [Moroccan Offering]*, 31.

piyyutim. This marker of time also includes a biblical allusion, as the Hebrew word for "distress" is "בצר" (*ba-tzar*), a rare form that appears in the Bible only a handful of times, meaning "in the straits," in a narrow, difficult place, but also "in trouble, in a sorrowful state." Notably, this word appears four times, one after the other, in Psalm 107, as part of a refrain that sections the Psalm at verses six, thirteen, nineteen, and twenty-eight, saying: "and they cried to the Lord from their straits, and from their distress He saved them." In many communities, this Psalm is read as part of the Passover celebration, commemorating the salvation of the Israelites by God.

This Psalm is particularly significant as it also holds a modern role in the State of Israel. In its opening lines, the Psalm describes how God redeemed His people and "gathered them from the lands, from east and west, from north and south" (Psalm 107:3). In modern times, and based mainly on verse three, the Israeli Central Rabbinate declared this Psalm to be read on Israeli Independence Day, aligning the Psalm's narrative of divine salvation with the modern establishment of Israel as a homeland for all Jewish people, and the fulfillment of the biblical promise about the ingathering of the exiles.

However, this alignment is complicated by the poem's framing. While the Psalm is read on Israeli Independence Day to highlight the collective unification of different Jewish communities arriving in Israel as equals and peers, the other poems in "A Cycle of Moroccan Offering" illustrate the systemic discrimination and marginalization faced by Mizrahi Jews within the Ashkenazi-dominated society. The term "night of distress" thus becomes a polysemy, conflating the biblical dire straits of the Israelites and the dire state of Mizrahi people in the State of Israel.

Finally, in the concluding stanza, Biton includes one more allusion, telling his audience that he intends to sing them "a new song," which in Hebrew is "שירה חדשה" (*Shira Ḥadashah*). As noted throughout this dissertation, "*shira*" means both song and poetry. This duality of meaning is evident throughout the poem, written as if sung, and dismantling the ideological barrier between poetry and song. In this poem, Biton promises his audience new poetry, an endeavour that can be seen as framing the entirety of Biton's book (and maybe career).

The phrase "*Shira Ḥadashah*" appears in the *shaḥarit* prayer, where the worshipers say: "With a new song, the redeemed people praised Your Name at the seashore." The term also appears in the Passover Haggadah during the Magid portion, thus connecting this allusion to Psalm 107, which, as noted, is also used liturgically during Passover. In both contexts, the "new song" the Israelites sing is the Song of the Sea (Exodus 15:1-18), in which they praise God for delivering them from Egypt.

This allusion corresponds to the opening line of the poem, creating a poetic and thematic arc, superimposed on the Exodus story. While the poem begins in a "night of distress" with the addressees caught in their "straits," it concludes with a new song of deliverance. The structure and the fact that the concluding allusion leads us to the morning *shaḥarit* prayer add another dimension to this correspondence, poetically and liturgically, as we move from the darkness of night to the early dawn and from piyyut to daily prayer. In this manner, we can imagine that Biton had in mind not just any Moroccan piyyut custom but specifically *Shirat Ha-bakashot*, one of the more distinct practices of North African Jewry, in which Jewish worshipers gather in the pre-dawn hours to sing

piyyutim in the synagogue. This custom mirrors the poem's transition from night to dawn. It similarly hints at the hardship of Mizrahi people in Israel, as, following the correspondence, the new Egypt in which the audience of the piyyut poem is placed is Israel itself.

The phrase "*Shira Ḥadashah*" also has one crucial modern occurrence to which Biton refers. This term appears in the opening lines of the poem "Alone" by H.N. Bialik (1873-1934). Bialik is one of the foundational writers of Modern Hebrew Poetry during *ha-teḥiya* generation, and Biton has often commented on his love and adoration of his work. The poem "Alone," which in Israel is one of his better-known works, finds a speaker within a compromised position among his people and the traditional Jewish bookcase, as the opening lines communicate:

> The wind blew them all; light drew them away,
> A new song now revives their mornings.
> Only I, a young hatchling, remain forsaken
> under the *Shekhina*'s wing.[265]

In this poem, the young speaker is left behind alone with the *Shekhina*, the feminine aspect of God, which, following the midrash about Psalms 102:8, Bialik likens to a lonely bird. In the following stanzas, the speaker details how he and the *Shekhina* are the only ones left in the *Beit Midrash*, the Jewish study hall, practicing the study of rabbinical texts. As is often the case in the literature of the *Teḥiya* generation, Bialik configures Godly presence and the study of scripture in a dual manner as a suffocating space of distress and a homey intimate relationship. The "new song" that carried all of the speaker's contemporaries away from that double bind is, therefore, both a way to escape that religious suffocating space and a way to become reacquainted with its national-biblical core—that is, escape the *Beit Midrash* for embodied national experiences, as that described in Exodus. At the same time, that exodus is presented by Bialik as a exile for the familiar home and the forsaking of intimacy. Bialik presents in this poem a highly complex emotional and ideological position on the question of textual heritage and national revival, in which the "new song" or "new poetry" is a marker of togetherness that paradoxically connects the Jewish people through the mediation of biblical heritage while necessitating that they leave behind traditional relation to liturgy and scripture. The question of autonomy, as mediated by the smothering figure of the *Shekhina* as an "other" (not to say, "Other") is crucial for this poem. While later Zionist Israeli readers can argue that the poem calls to leave the *shekhinah* behind in the pursuit of personal and national autonomy (that as we can see in the poem, is also coded in the poem along the lines of masculinity), Bialik's poem is much more ambivalent about the issue, and it can be argued that in a lyric manner, it is the liminal position of contemplating, as manifested in language, that is the one Bialik associates most closely with agency and subjectivity.

Biton's "new song" is both a reprisal of the contemplative liminal position we can find in Bialik, and a complete rearrangement of the matrix between religious practice, poetry, and Jewish peoplehood. Biton sidesteps the dichotomy between scripture and togetherness by focusing not on

[265] Based on the translation by Ruth Nevo, with modifications. See Chaim Nachman Bialik, "Alone," accessed July 24, 2024, https://www.poetryinternational.com/poets-poems/poems/poem/103-3345_ALONE.

the institutional Gemara study of late modern Ashkenazi yeshiva but on the Moroccan tradition of piyyut, specifically the communal practice of *Shirat Ha-bakashot*. By starting in this space, Biton does not need to turn to models of lyric poetry that can be marked as "new" to Jewish textual heritage. Instead, Biton promises (and delivers) to write a new poetry that takes Jewish texts, specifically piyyut, as a model, allowing him to create, in his earliest as well later writings, poems that generate lyric consciousness of the world without turning to the sphere of total autonomous individuation.

But Biton also ironizes the notion of "New poetry" in this poem. Over the past two centuries, this term has been used to describe modern Hebrew poetry, even lending this corpus one of its names as "New Hebrew Poetry" ("שירה עברית חדשה" *Shira Ivrit Ḥadashah*). However, Biton wishes to push against this notion of "newness" and offer poetry that is new in its ability to engage the past and the extratextual world. As Almog Baher shows, Biton continues to do so throughout his career, referring to piyyut in later works and making this intertextuality a core tenet of his writing and his vision for a new Hebrew textuality in Israel. As Behar states:

> Erez Biton, and the new Mizrahi poetry manifest strong bonds with the other poetic traditions around them, and in this manner refuse to constitute themselves through the framing of 'schism,' as that which defines the ideas of the 'new Jew,' 'new Israeli' and 'new Hebrew poetry' […] Biton converses with piyyut, the longest standing Hebrew poetic tradition, that lasted until the 20th century. Through this connection, we can understand much of his poetic language, as well as his decision to interject Arabic into his poems, not only as a protest within the Israeli context but also as a continuation of tradition […][266]

Chapter Conclusions: New Lyric Personhood and Old Piyyutic Intertextuality

In facilitating this new relation to Hebrew literature and refusing the schism so often found in its historiography, Biton turns to piyyutic conventions of writing, especially piyyutic intertextuality. He offers his readers a new lyric personhood, one that can take in the history of piyyut throughout the ages as well as modern Hebrew literature of the *Teḥiya* and Statehood generations. By thinking of Biton as a core member of Hebrew literature (both modern and transhistorical), we can also frame Mizrahi literature by its long continuous history of textual practices and devices, thus not imagining it only in terms that define it in relation to Ashkenazi Israeli culture.

Both of Biton's poems that I have presented above offer examples of his innovative form of lyric personhood, as something generated by refusing autonomy and delivering a stratified triadic epistemology, in which the speaking "I," or more in the first poem I read, the lyric "we," is

[266] Behar, "'בוא מן הפינה אל במת הבמות' - על הלשונות השונות בשירתו של ארז ביטון" ["Come from the Corner to the Stage of Stages" - On the Different Languages in the Poetry of Erez Biton]."

in constant relations to a society that is conceived as a bifurcated entity consisting of both hegemony and an oppressed group or groups.

These poems show how Biton establishes a lyric self-consciousness by overlaying textual and historical meanings through dense, multifaceted allusions and soundscapes, to claim its heritage, the "others" that came before him, as a core aspect of the self. In these manners, Biton merges models and textual devices of modern and pre-modern Hebrew literature, presenting a heteronomous selfhood that never seeks to set clear boundaries between its selfhood and the collective around it.

Chapter Four:

Piyyut and Loss in Shimon Adaf's *Frost* and *Aviva-No*

In this chapter, I focus on the poet, author, and essayist Shimon Adaf. Adaf, born in 1972 to Jewish-Moroccan parents in the city of Sderot, Israel, began publishing poetry in various literary journals during the early 1990s. In 1993, he founded the short-lived literary journal *Ev* (אב) alongside other poets, most notably Dory Manor. In 1997, he published his first collection of poetry, *Icarus' Monologue* (*המונולוג של איקרוס*), followed by *That Which I Thought Shadow Is the Real Body* (*מה שחשבתי צל הוא הגוף האמיתי*) in 2002. Following these publications, Adaf shifted almost exclusively to prose. Over the years since, Adaf has become one of the most prolific writers in contemporary Hebrew literature, publishing fourteen novels, two non-fiction books, and two additional volumes of poetry. Alongside his literary work, Adaf writes and composes indie rock music, releasing four albums over the decades, either as a solo artist or with musical groups.[267] He is also currently the head of the Program for Creative Writing at Ben Gurion University of the Negev.

Throughout his oeuvre, Adaf actively engages critically with questions of identity politics and lyric conventions of writing, specifically with what he argues is the "colloquial" identity discourse and the expressive biographical lyric poetry that he contends is its poetic counterpart. After introducing Adaf's articulation of this problem, primarily based on his essay "The 'I' Who Yearns to Say 'I,'"[268] the chapter presents three movements in Adaf's work. These movements illustrate Adaf's journey from lyric forms that center the speaking "I" in individuum to a more pronounced use of piyyutic writing conventions around the turn of the 2010s. The central question this chapter poses is what part piyyut plays in Adaf's poetics of alterity and his attempts to, as he phrases it, "unfreeze" Hebrew lyric poetry.

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[267] Adaf was a member of the band *Ha-atzulah* ("the Nobility") in the 1990s, primarily as a lyricist (but he is also credited as an acoustic guitar player). The band released only one album, "Need" ("צורך," 1996). Adaf recorded an album to accompany his second book of poetry, *That Which I Thought Shadow Is the Real Body* (2002), where he reads six of its poems over music he composed. He followed that album with an EP of original songs, "Soon Summer Will Descend" (עוד מעט ירד הקיץ, 2005). Since 2017, Adaf has been running a musical project named *Reqamot* ("Living Tissues"), with which he records fictional songs included in his novels. The project released an album, "A Full Mythology under the Fingernails - the Songs of Daliah Shushan" (– מיתולוגיה שלמה מתחת לאצבעות" השירים של דליה שושן," 2019). The album is situated meta-textually as a tribute album, in which the participating cover songs by Daliah Shushan, the character whose murder is the instigating event of Adaf's *Lost Detective* trilogy (*One Mile and Two Days Before Sunset*, 2004; *Detective's Complaint*, 2015; *Rise and Call*, 2017). See the trilogy's translation - Shimon Adaf, *One Mile and Two Days before Sunset*, trans. Yardenne Greenspan (New York: Picador, 2022); Shimon Adaf, *A Detective's Complaint*, trans. Yardenne Greenspan (New York: Picador, 2022); Shimon Adaf, *Take up and Read*, trans. Yardenne Greenspan (New York: Picador, 2022).

[268] Shimon Adaf, *אני אחרים [I Am Others]* (Israel: Kinneret, Zmora-Bitan, Dvir, 2018), 9–19.

The first section of the chapter revisits Adaf's two earliest volumes of poetry, demonstrating his experimentation with new forms of lyric selfhood while still working within the poetry scene of the time. In this section, I closely read the poems "Autobiography" from his debut collection *Icarus' Monologue* (1997) and "Finale" from his sophomore poetry book *That Which I Thought Shadow Is the Real Body* (2002). Through these analyses, I will examine how Adaf establishes a need to escape the notion that the poet's biography must authenticate their poetry. I will also demonstrate how Adaf failed to create this new personal language that he explicitly sought in poetry and how the critics of the time still chose to read his poetry through a biographical lens. This discussion will set up Adaf's motivation to turn to more explicitly piyyutic conventions of poetic writing.

In the second section, I jump forward to 2009 and analyze an uncollected poem, "This Zephaniah, why Is He Here," which was only published in *Get Out! An Anthology Against the War in Gaza*.[269] In that section, I discuss the melancholic dynamics of Adaf's meta-poetic articulations as expressed in interviews and essays, and I focus on the ways he frames his career as a never-ceasing initiation into poetry that involves loss and the sublimation of absence into presence through writing. I then read the liturgical text with which Adaf constructs a dialogue throughout the turn of the 2010s, the *Pitum ha-ktoret* prayer, and its own Jewish-historical sublimation of temple sacrifice with prayer. I show how piyyutic conventions of writing, and specifically a melancholic type of allusion to the prayer of *Pitum ha-ktoret*, allow Adaf not only to resist the 2009 assault of the Israeli army against Gaza but also to offer a different type of lyric utterance.

In the last section of the chapter, I turn to Adaf's 2009 poetry volume *Aviva-No*[270] and the 2010 novel *Frost*,[271] showing how Adaf's melancholic articulation of alluding to *Pitum ha-ktoret* manifests in both. In *Aviva-No,* Adaf presents highly autobiographical expressive poetry dealing openly with the passing of his sister, Aviva. The piyyutic allusions throughout the book, of which there are many, allow Adaf to articulate his biographical materials which he attempts to escape, while also placing his personal loss in indeterminate relations with other textual modalities of mourning.

I then analyze the novel *Frost*, showing how Adaf rearranges his biographical materials and the intertexts he worked with in *Aviva-No* in a new fictional narrative. To do so, Adaf also sets to test the social positioning of piyyut. In *Frost*, Adaf presents a futuristic 26th-century city-state version of Tel-Aviv in which piyyut is the privileged textual medium of the speculative Jewish hegemony. Adaf reexamines here the role piyyut plays in contemporary Israeli politics and poetics against the grain, speculating on the nature of piyyut by framing it not as a subversive genre

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[269] Boaz Yaniv et al., eds., *לצאת! אסופה נגד המלחמה בעזה [Get Out! An Anthology Against the War in Gaza]* (Israel: Etgar, Ma'arav, Sedeq, Daka, Ma`ayan, Gerilah Tarbut, 2009).

[270] Shimon Adaf, *אביבה-לא [Aviva-No]* (Israel: Kinneret, Zmora-Bitan, Dvir, 2009); Shimon Adaf, *Aviva-No*, trans. Yael Segalovitz (Farmington, Maine: Alice James Books, 2019).

[271] The Hebrew title of this novel contains a polysemy. "Kfor" can be read as the noun "frost" or as the imperative second person singular masculine form of the root k.f.r, meaning "deny" or "confute." As in other novels by Adaf, the inside cover page does not have an English translation but a Latin alternative, "Nuntia," meaning female messenger. I address the ambiguity in the last section of the chapter. Shimon Adaf, *כפור [Kfor - Nuntia]* (Israel: Kinneret, Zmora-Bitan, Dvir, 2003).

destabilizing hegemonic Ashkenazi politics but as an institutionalized state-sanctioned practice. Reading these two books jointly allows me to see how they complement and complicate one another, revealing the inner boundaries of conducting the work of mourning in both autobiographical and fictional modes of poetic writing.

In this large arc, this chapter shows that in the earlier period of Adaf's career, he faced a similar reception to that of Erez Biton. The Israeli Hebrew poetry scene received his writing with a warm welcome that, at the same time, retained its anti-Mizrahi orientalist bias. Adaf's response to this reading framework was different from Biton's. As I show, his writing attempts to stop supplying his readership with personal markings that would allow them to reduce his work to its biographical-sociological thematics. Instead, Adaf writes so as to make his identity as a person and a Moroccan poet perceived through an ineffable phenomenological perspective. Most importantly, he shapes his particular history into a poetic form, not content.

As I will argue throughout the chapter, Adaf's ways of shaping his own lyric personhood are not set against the biographical anti-hegemonic modus established by Biton. Rather, Adaf complicates the assumptions one might have about what biographical writing is, and instead of defining biography by its factual relation to the author's life, he builds a speculative non-factual framework to present a biography that is defined by his own life but not in a manner that leaves the text predetermined by extratextual facts. Adaf performs three tasks that push poetic language away from established modes of identity politics and lyric writing. First, he creates a notion of non-essentialist Mizrahi identity that is defined not by its content but by its epistemic perspective on history, tradition, and *longue-durée* changes in cultural capital. Second, he works with a melancholic approach to language and identity that assumes the constant sublimation of situated life experiences into language that, at the same time, destroys and preserves them. Third, he reworks the meaning of piyyut not as a cultural artifact but as a modus of modern writing – in both poetry and prose.

This chapter examines an additional facet of lyric poetry in Israel, specifically in the intersection of Mizrahi identity politics, lyric personhood, and the mobilization of piyyut's aesthetics norms. While Biton embraces piyyut explicitly as a model for contemporary Mizrahi personhood, Adaf's relation to piyyut is more ambivalent and contrarian. And yet, as I show throughout the chapter's second half, in engaging piyyut, Adaf is able to shake up the field of Hebrew lyric poetry.

Radical and Colloquial Identity Discourses and Phenomenologies

In the opening essay of his book, *I Am Others*, titled "The 'I' who Yearns to Say 'I,'" Adaf explains the difference between what he deems "colloquial" identity discourse and what he calls its "critical-theoretical" variant, which I will call in this chapter "radical" identity discourse. Radical identity discourse for Adaf is fundamentally interested in identity as a category produced by alterity. As Yael Segalovitz phrases it: "[this theory] tries to examine where, within the network oriented towards the solidification of identity, one is able to hold on to a sense of otherness or

difference."[272] The core assumption of this theory is that every identity formation, on both micro and macro scales, is a product of multifaceted processes of inter-subjective and societal "othering." These processes segregate and regulate the infinite combinations of human lives in any society, creating overarching categories. These categories, whether produced within or outside the groups they describe, are then coopted by elite groups to control and subjugate people.

The power of this radical identity discourse lies in its ability to celebrate both major and infinitesimal differences between these subjugated people, always being willing to nuance any categorization further to finer classifications. This celebratory instinct reveals the artificiality of any social category but, at the same time, also refuses any wish to homogenize or erase the differences between them. Thus, this radical discourse can point out that these categories are social constructs while opposing their erasure, leaving their aims solely trained on dismantling the mechanism of oppression they might find associated with the categories. In this respect, radical identity discourse is a liberatory practice, seeking alterity to find identity and leveraging identity to abolish visible and invisible prisons.[273]

However, that which Adaf dubs "colloquial identity discourse" ("זהותית מדוברת") refuses to accept inner alterity as a core feature of identity, thereby annulling the liberatory aspects of identity discourse. Adaf identifies the kernel of this more common manifestation of identity politics in its careless coupling with liberalism. Specifically, in colloquial identity discourse, the liberal categorical decree "coercion is wrong" is augmented by a reductive summary of radical identity discourse, producing the notion that "coercion is wrong when forced on the powerless." This minor difference has significant consequences, as it allows groups with agnostic relations to liberal values to coopt the rhetoric and logic of identity discourse and argue their own powerlessness, thereby justifying their coercion of other groups, reimagined as powerful. In this sense, identity discourse that follows the conditional opposition to coercion shifts focus even when mobilized by marginalized groups, as it "no longer aims to dissolve the subjugating power of different societal categories."[274] Instead, it is preoccupied with

> [t]he infinite dynamics of imagining and reimagining power relations and weaknesses among different identities. Thus, critical-theoretical identity discourse's urge to abolish all prisons fades, and another urge appears in its stead, an urge to reconceive those prisons, while eagerly anticipating the transfer of responsibilities from wardens to prisoners (however, the prison cells do not become more comfortable, nor less cruel simply because we built them with our own hands).[275]

In this colloquial identity discourse, there is no interest in interrogating the history of identity labels, understanding their material preconditions, or thinking about the dynamism of their positionality in society. Rather, there is only an opportunistic interest in these labels as conduits of

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[272] Yael Segalovitz, "Queering Identity Politics in Shimon Adaf's Aviva-No," *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 22, no. 1 (April 28, 2020): 4.
[273] Adaf, *I Am Others*, 10–11.
[274] Adaf, 11.
[275] Adaf, 11. All translations from the Hebrew are by me unless otherwise specified.

power and useful rhetorical devices in what is now imagined as a zero-sum game for political power.

This identity discourse thus seeks to unify and essentialize identity labels, eradicating any inner alterity that might complicate their usability. In this solidification process, this discourse gives all identities the same shape, making them interchangeable entities with different superficial characteristics that are now meaningless outside the power relation matrix. Put bluntly, this discourse attempts to shape identity along the capitalist marketing strategy of "Coke or Pepsi," as if identity is just a personal choice that, no matter which one you choose, serves the same purpose and the same hegemonic forces. In this sense, this type of identity discourse seeks sameness both inside each identity and among all identities.

Shimon Adaf, Erez Biton, and the Question of Biographical Personhood

As evident in the discussion so far, Adaf thinks of these variants of identity discourse in a fractal manner; that is, the distinguishing features of the two variants (sameness vs. alterity) manifest both in the general larger conversation and on the personal and inter-subjective level. Facing this colloquial identity discourse, Adaf seeks to fight, in his writing and literary selfhood, the applicability of any category preconditioned by "sameness.". Instead, he attempts to present the materials of his life in a manner that is always, to some extent, alienated from any one label and, therefore, cannot ever be grasped fully – linguistically, economically, and epistemologically. In his literary work, Adaf constantly shows how the alterity that is most formative for oneself is the otherness of the self to itself.

Scholars have pointed out Adaf's reluctance to be so easily consumed and identified. Rina Jean Baroukh sees this aspect of Adaf's writing as a dialectical move between responsiveness and resistance to literary conventions, traditional roles, and readerly expectations.[276] Dorit Lemberger employs a Wittgensteinian lens to read Shimon Adaf's work, showing how different language games produce ambivalences and disillusionments in his writing, especially regarding language and its ability to capture reality.[277] Many reviews of his work in newspapers' literary supplements similarly argue that Adaf's literature is incomprehensible, sometimes negatively so.[278]

Without refuting these articulations, my approach in this chapter frames Adaf's refusal to be grasped through a different lens. Specifically, I wish to trace Adaf's repudiation of communicative writing within the discourse of lyric personhood. To clarify the stakes of this discussion, let me refocus on the relevant arguments as I laid them out so far in previous chapters.

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[276] Rina Jean Baroukh, "'המוות קרה אבל איכשהו המשכתי לחיות': היענות והתנגדות ביצירתו של שמעון אדף" ["Death Has Already Happened but Somehow I Lived on:" Responsiveness and Resistance in the Work of Shimon Adaf]," *Mikan, Journal for Hebrew and Israeli Literature and Culture Studies*, no. 21 (2021): 203–29.

[277] Dorit Lemberger, "Questioning Boundaries of Language and the World: Ambivalence and Disillusionment in the Writings of Shimon Adaf," *Hebrew Studies* 56 (2015): 265–94.

[278] See, e.g., Omri Herzog, "'הלשון נושלה' של שמעון אדף: יצירה פלאית, שרק מחברה יכול להבינה במלואה" [Shimon Adaf's 'Tongue Untangled': A Miraculous Work, Which Only the Writer Can Fully Understand]," *Haaretz*, August 26, 2021; Yohai Jarfi, "'אהבתי לאהוב' של שמעון אדף: מי רוצה לצלול בנהר גועש?" ["I Loved to Love" By Shimon Adaf: Who Wants to Dive into a Roaring River?]," *Haaretz*, November 21, 2019.

Scholars such as Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins have extensively discussed the phenomenon they refer to as "lyricization," which, according to them, has dominated the last two centuries of poetry criticism. By the end of this process, "lyric reading" has become a monolithic mode that decontextualizes speakers, readers, and poems from their social environments, instead prioritizing a notion of individualized consciousness that aligns with hegemonic heteronormativity.[279] In my interpretation, Jackson and Prins place Adorno's conception of lyric poetry on its head, claiming that reading poetry through a "lyric" lens tames its critical potential and transforms it into a commodified product for unthreatening consumption. That is, framing a poem or poetry as "lyric" preconditions our approach to the text as something that delivers an utterance that should be grasped and consumed for enjoyment without affecting change in our mind or world.

This notion of lyricization as commodification leads to the theoretical works I discussed in the context of Erez Biton's poetry, namely Sara Dowling's *Translingual Poetics* and Haviva Pedaya's *Return of the Lost Voice*.[280] Building upon Barbara Johnson's idea that lyric and legal personhoods touch on each other, Dowling argues that this correspondence means that personhood "is not simply an unmarked or abstract referent – a container that can be filled with any substance"[281] but rather, a contingent concept with multiple possible forms. Therefore, each theory of the lyric that argues for a way we should constitute lyric speakerhood also promotes a corresponding form of thinking about real-world personhood, elevating those for whom that specific shape is more available. Likewise, poetry can create new shapes of personhood for its readers, either by dismantling the personhood brought about alongside the process of lyricization or by nuancing it and changing it from within.

As I've shown, Biton's poetry negates the previous Zachian Statehood Generation's explicitly depersonalized mode of lyric personhood, introducing a conflictual notion of self, hegemony, and opposition as a core aspect of Israeli and, specifically, Mizrahi poetry. As Pedaya argues, this revolution in poetic language allows a new "I" to be spoken in Hebrew poetry, an "I" that brings a situated self into the lyric already assumed to be saturated with biography. The evolution of that speakerhood coincided with, if not promoted, a new kind of privileged personhood in both poetry and general society. Instead of the universal unmarked self that corresponded with Zachian poetics and settler-colonialist Zionist politics, a new kind of personhood became prominent—one that carries with it the history and scars of their immigration and oppression.

However, as I demonstrate shortly, for Shimon Adaf, this new Bitonian selfhood is too compatible with colloquial identity politics as it does not allow for the inner alterity he seeks. In "The 'I' who Yearns to Say 'I,'" Adaf writes as much, saying that in his opinion, lyric poetry (here

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[279] Jackson, "Lyric"; Jackson and Prins, "General Introduction." For sources and a full discussion, see the section "Lyric Theory in the 21st Century" starting on page 17 of this dissertation.

[280] Pedaya, *שיבתו של הקול הגולה: זהות מזרחית: פואטיקה, מוזיקה ומרחב [Return of the Lost Voice]*; Dowling, *Translingual Poetics*; Johnson, "Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion." For sources and a full discussion, see the section 1.1 – Statehood Generation's Lyric Theory from a Mizrahi Perspective" starting on page 73.

[281] Dowling, *Translingual Poetics*, 22.

meaning the contemporary Hebrew version of this genre) is "the writing form in which colloquial identity discourse has been most fully embedded."[282] We can find clarification of that position in an interview, which Adaf gave around that same time:

> The form of lyric poetry presents me with a problem. I look at the possibilities available today in poetry and prose, and it is clear that the lyric genre is frozen. There are plenty of good poets whose work I follow, […] but as a field of creative work, poetry is simply not experimental enough. Its experimental aspects are somewhat expelled in favor of an experiential layer in which people express what is on their hearts. Poetry returned almost completely to its primordial holistic state as a mere outburst of emotion, self-enunciation, and experience. This is not necessarily the poetry in which I can find myself. The 'I' of contemporary poetry is too firm. In prose, you can find a larger expanse of experimentation that interrogates the "I" more critically.[283]

In this interview, Adaf presents an argument that parallels the theoretical corpus described above, highlighting the homogenization of lyric poetry in our current moment as poetry that centers on self-expression while obstructing the exploration of that self. In Jackson and Prins' terms, Adaf is arguing for a smaller wave within the tsunami of "lyricization," claiming that in Hebrew poetry this process has led to a unified formation where poetry is written and read solely as an "outburst of emotions"—expressive poetry akin to stylized journal entries.

In Dowling's terms, Adaf argues that the shape of this lyric style's personhood is "too firm" and un-interrogable. This "I" aligns with colloquial identity discourse by presenting a selfhood that is always predetermined and shaped by biographical, often autobiographical, measures to which poetic language is external.

Adaf's project, then, is to create an alternative shape of personhood in which poetic language is a necessity. He seeks to break away from the confines of expressive lyric poetry that merely documents emotions and instead explores a form where the self is not preconfigured but continually redefined through the act of writing. This approach challenges the conventional boundaries of identity and self-expression, aiming to dissolve the rigid structures that lyric poetry and colloquial identity discourse often impose.

At the same time, Adaf rejects the neo-neo-modernist schools I described in chapter three, whose rejection of Biton's explicit biographical poetry leads to a return to a Zachian universality. Adaf wishes to find a way to present his personal biography within poetic language without being bound by it. In this sense, Adaf's poetic project is also his political one. Adaf seeks to present his personal Mizrahi identity in a manner that expands the possible meanings of collective Mizrahi identity. Specifically, Adaf aims to uncover the inner alterity within Mizrahiness, focusing on Moroccan identity as a distinct entity worthy of exploration. He articulated the experimental political goals of his writing in these terms during a 2011 interview conducted with author Sarah Blau:

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[282] Adaf, *I Am Others*, 13.

[283] Adi Yotam, "ריאיון: לא תמיד הקוראים שלי יקבלו מה שהם רוצים [Interview with Shimon Adaf: My Readers can't Always Get what They Want]," *Hamosach* (blog), September 1, 2021, https://blog.nli.org.il/mussach-107-interview/.

> I am bound to continue engaging the hurdles facing Moroccanness on its way to becoming articulated as an all-encompassing worldview and perspective, one that does not seek the sanctions of the old Israeli centers […][284]

Seven years later, in "The 'I' who Yearns to Say 'I,'" Adaf expands on this quest, giving it origins and examples:

> Again and again, I am stopped by the trees, how the light pools among the branches at different times of day and in different seasons. Sometimes, other occurrences demand my full being and mandate me to face them. The cutting movement of a bird mid-air, the journeys of a shadow, an expression, a gesture, eyes, the accent of people I loved, dense with unrelenting warmth, behaviors, and customs that became my neural network, the cells tiling my blood vessels. Even "Moroccan" is too broad of a word for that mandate, even the Moroccanness of the Adaf and Yifraḥ families, the Moroccanness of Hananiah Adaf and Tamar Yifraḥ, even the words 'my Moroccanness' are an empty vessel. This mandate has no name but the private name I give it each instant.[285]

Adaf's explanation here is deeply phenomenological, reminiscent of the transcendental experience described by Edmund Husserl using the term *epoché*. Briefly, *epoché* can be summarized as the "bracketing" of entities as they appear to us through perception, focusing not on the objects of our experiences but on the experiences themselves as we perceive them directly.[286] For Husserl, the process of phenomenological inquiry has to do with the "reduction" of the *epoché*, which is a complicated process of assessing the viability of our original "bracketing." In this sense, in the cited segment, Adaf describes the world as immediately given to his consciousness in his primordial *epoché*, accustomed to perceiving the world through specific patterns over a lifetime. In that immediate perception, there is no difference between the mechanisms that cause "light" to be perceived as "pooling" and those that make a certain speech accent be perceived as "dense with unrelenting warmth." There is no need to separate the objects from their attribution. Things are what they appear, as in their appearance, they give us what we know of them.

Moving from that immediate sensibility to any other context invalidates these cognitive patterns and the holistic experience of these entities as they are perceived. Specifically, in trying to communicate about it with other people with different lifelong cognitive patterns, we have no choice but to understand the contingency of the perception. Light cannot "truly" pool and no accent is objectively warmer than any other. This annihilation of experience by objective reflection forces Adaf to "face" the experiences he describes and name them in a personal language that recaptures the totality in which he subjectively perceives them. He makes these experiences available for objective contemplation by placing them in a shared language and reshaping that collective language. In this manner, Adaf's specific Moroccanness is not merely sociological information

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[284] Sara Blau, "אלוהים דומה לבעל דירה [God Is Like a Landlord]," *Kvish `arbahim* 122 (2011). Cited in Zohar Elmakias, "'מה שמעודו לא נשכח באמת': הערה על מוקס נוקס ["That Which Has Never Been Truly Forgotten": A Note on Mox Nox]," *Mikan, Journal for Hebrew and Israeli Literature and Culture Studies*, no. 21 (2021): 144.

[285] Adaf, *I Am Others*, 14.

[286] Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, 12. impr, Springer Classic Titles in Philosophy (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publ, 1999).

that he communicates through language but rather a phenomenological perspective that conditions language.

However, for Adaf, preserving the naked experience in language only obliterates the validity of communication differently. The private names Adaf gives these lost elements lose their holistic sense as they move from being experienced to being expressed. Accordingly, the notion of lyric utterance changes. Following Adaf's argument, we must imagine the speaker not as a general human "I" nor as one particular "I." Instead, this "I" can be many people so long as they share the same cognitive patterns that have become Adaf's "neural network."

Adaf aims to write literature that does not direct our attention to a universal-particular notion of subjecthood but rather operates on the axis of contingency and arbitrariness. He underscores how arbitrary facets of life—such as the group you were born into, the place, and the surrounding scenery—gain contingent, universalizable meaning without losing specificity. This aim can be conceptualized as an attempt to synthesize the modes I ascribed to Zach and Biton in the previous chapter.

While the Zachian mode of universal particularity relied on the omission of proper nouns and the obfuscation of the speaker's immediate circumstances, and Biton's mode of writing relied on the correspondence between Biton's life and the details included in his poetry, Adaf seeks to find a third way. He wishes to both name particular details and, at the same time, allow his specific biography to gain universal meaning without sacrificing its private names. This approach endeavors to balance the particular and the universal, ensuring that the personal and the contingent can resonate universally without losing their unique, individual essence.

This goal allows Adaf to divorce ethnically specific experiences from the realm of factual sociology and instead conceptualize them as parts of immediate, ineffable primary experiences of the mind. By doing so, he reopens the relationship between biography and reality, positioning poetry as the site for this contemplation. The cost of this procedure is that Adaf's selfhood becomes unattainable for expressive description. He relinquishes his right to say, "I am what I am," and replaces it with the assertion, "I am that which is already lost to me as I say that I am." Poetry becomes a space for flexibly rethinking the relationship between selfhood and reality while simultaneously prolonging the process of losing one's self.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will try to sketch out the different ways Adaf pursues this goal, mapping his trajectory into piyyutic conventions of writing that align or work against the attempts detailed above.

Section 1: Biography, or, The Nightmare of Always Being Content and Never Form

Adaf's dissatisfaction with contemporary Hebrew poetics, particularly regarding the inflexibility of the lyrical "I," is a product of a personal progression, developing over the first decade of the 2000s, and brought about in no small part due to his inability to break away from those conventions in his first two volumes of poetry. As I show, in his early poems, Adaf is already contending with the limitations of biographical writing, attempting to create something new that

cannot be reduced to sociological affinities and the "colloquial" identity discourse as defined above. To elucidate this point, I will first examine two early poems by Adaf, exploring how they shape the speaking lyric selfhood. I also show how the radical nature of those attempts has not been recognized in real time, setting the stage for his later experiments.

1.1 – "Autobiography" (1997)

"Autobiography" is the concluding piece in Adaf's debut collection *Icarus' Monologue*, published in 1997. I present the Hebrew original along with my translation:

Autobiography	אוטוביוגרפיה[287]
Not far,	לֹא רָחוֹק מִכָּאן
It can really be any place around the country.	יָכוֹל לִהְיוֹת כָּל מָקוֹם בָּאָרֶץ.
There I was born,	שָׁם נוֹלַדְתִּי,
under molten Tammuz skies.	תַּחַת שְׁמֵי תַּמּוּז מֻתָּכִים.
When her mother died her grief was great.	בְּמוֹת אִמָּהּ נוֹרָא הָיָה צַעֲרָהּ.
Laboring on white sheets.	כּוֹרַעַת לָלֵדֶת עַל סְדִינִים לְבָנִים.
On white sheets	עַל סְדִינִים לְבָנִים
the sorrow of death and the sorrow of birth banded together to overcome her.	צַעַר הַמָּוֶת וְצַעַר הַלֵּדָה חָבְרוּ יַחְדָּיו לְהַכְרִיעָהּ.
I would like to believe that somewhere	הָיִיתִי רוֹצֶה לְהַאֲמִין כִּי אֵי שָׁם
a bird gulped	גָּמְעָה צִפּוֹר
down the dawn of before-me	אֶת הַשַּׁחַר שֶׁל טֶרֶם הֱיוֹתִי
and shrieked,	וְצָוְחָה,
or that a white-hot star was lit to mark me.	אוֹ כּוֹכָב מְלֻבָּן נִדְלַק לְסַמֵּן אֶת בּוֹאִי.
In my childhood	בְּיַלְדוּתִי
a lightning-stricken olive tree thickened and shed	סָבַךְ עֵץ זַיִת מֻכֶּה בָּרָק וְהִשִּׁיר
its heavy fruits on the head of a girl	אֶת פֵּרוֹתָיו הַכְּבֵדִים עַל רֹאשׁ יַלְדָּה
I loved from afar.	שֶׁאָהַבְתִּי מֵרָחוֹק.
And the seashore drew for me with thin irony	וְחוֹף הַיָּם צִיֵּר לִי בְּאִירוֹנְיָה דַּקָּה
twin blisters on my shoulders,	שַׁלְפּוּחִיּוֹת תְּאוֹמוֹת בִּכְתֵפַי,
the likes of wings for a child seeking flight.	דִּמּוּיֵי כְּנָפַיִם לְיֶלֶד שׁוֹחֵר מָעוֹף.
There is my childhood,	שָׁם יַלְדוּתִי,
packed up in sand sketches, rounded	אֲרוּזָה בְּשִׂרְטוּטֵי חוֹל, מְעֻגֶּלֶת
by puddles, paper boats, tied	בִּשְׁלוּלִיּוֹת, בְּסִירוֹת נְיָר, קְשׁוּרָה
with invisible thin strings	בְּחוּטִים דַּקִּים מֵהָרְאוּת
with hooks to my adulthood.	בְּקָרָסִים אֶל בְּגֵרוּתִי.
In my adulthood	בְּבַגְרוּתִי
a spring-stricken rose bush thicket and shed	סָבַךְ שִׂיחַ וְרָדִים מֻכֶּה אָבִיב וְהִשִּׁיר
its heavy flowers on the head of a young woman	אֶת פְּרָחָיו הַכְּבֵדִים עַל רֹאשׁ נַעֲרָה
I loved from afar.	שֶׁאָהַבְתִּי מֵרָחוֹק.

[287] Shimon Adaf, *המונולוג של איקרוס [Icarus' Monologue]* (חבל מודיעין: Kinneret, Zmora-Bitan, 1997), 77–78.

Anyway,
I would like to believe that somewhere
a bird gulps
the dawn of before
and shrieks,
or that a white-hot star is being lit to mark my path.

מִכָּל מָקוֹם ,
הָיִיתִי רוֹצֶה לְהַאֲמִין כִּי אֵי שָׁם
גּוֹמַעַת צִפּוֹר
אֶת הַשַּׁחַר שֶׁל טֶרֶם
וְצוֹוַחַת,
אוֹ כּוֹכָב מְלֻבָּן נִדְלַק לְסַמֵּן אֶת דַּרְכִּי.

The poem's opening lines immediately communicate its central tension between fact and figure. The first line revolves around an indexical identifier, explicitly stating that the speaker's birthplace exists elsewhere, somewhere removed from the present location where the poem is read. Adaf further accentuates this indexical relativity of place by imbuing it with a sense of contingency. Although this birth occurred at a specific time and place, the poem asserts that this birth could have "really" happened "anywhere around the country." As Reut Ben-Yaakov writes, "in this manner, he [Adaf] gives us coordinates but does not locate us anywhere, just marks the lack of location."[288]

Similarly, the distinct reference to Tammuz, the first summer month of the Jewish calendar, delineates the temporal aspect of birth. The description of the Tammuz sky as "molten" takes us away from the simple marking of time, as it evokes the month's namesake, the Sumerian god Tammuz (known in Akkadian as Dumuzi). In the book of Ezekiel, chapter 8, the prophet receives a Godly vision of the first temple in Jerusalem during its last days, and he sees "the entrance of the gate of the house of the Lord that was to the north" where "women were sitting there keening for Tammuz."[289] Rashi, the most renowned rabbinical commentator from the 11th century, annotates the verse and explains Tammuz as "an idol that they heated from the inside, whose eyes were made of lead and used to **melt** from the heat of the furnace, so it would look like it is crying."[290] Adaf's description of Tammuz should bring this figure of a crying idol to mind, already injecting into this temporal marker the emotional charge we see in the following lines.

Furthermore, the act described in the biblical verse is part of the cult of Tammuz, who, like Adonis or Persephone, dies and goes to the underworld each summer, only to come back to life in the winter, bringing with him the changing of the seasons. As Robert Alter writes in his commentary on the verse, "Women in ancient Near Eastern societies were assigned the role of keening for the dead, and so they took over the cultic function of keening for Tammuz."[291] In this sense, the evocation of Tammuz prefigures the figure of the mother in the coming lines, for which

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[288] Reut Ben-Yaakov, "עדיין חבויה מפאת העננים": טכניקות של הסתרה בשירה המוקדמת של שמעון אדף ["Still Hidden by The Clouds": Concealment Techniques In Shimon Adaf's Early Poetry]," *Mikan, Journal for Hebrew and Israeli Literature and Culture Studies*, no. 21 (2021): 183.

[289] Ezekiel 8:14. All biblical translation based on Robert Alter's translation of the Tanakh. See Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary*, First edition (New York ; London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2018).

[290] Hebrew original: "דמות א' שמחממות אותו מבפנים והיו עיניו של עופר' והם נתוכין מחום ההיסק ונראה כאלו בוכה."

[291] Alter, *The Hebrew Bible*, 2018, 3553.

"The sorrow of death and the sorrow of birth banded / together to overcome her." The story of Tammuz, in which life and death are conflated, is mirrored in these human sorrows, and the keening, idol-worshiping women of the Temple are aligned with this one woman, giving birth to the speaker.

The factual elements of the speaker's birthplace and time take a backseat to alternative classifications: the place can be anywhere on the periphery of the place in which the poem is read, and the time of birth can be any time that mirrors those mythological and biblical elements that "the molten sky of Tammuz" brings to the front.

The rest of the poem similarly defines Adaf's life not by what happened in it but by what didn't happen, and furthermore, by how that which did not happen can be articulated in words by the speaker. A few recurring lines illustrate this point, appearing after the birth segment and again at the poem's end:

> I would like to believe that somewhere
> a bird gulped
> down the dawn of before-me
> and shrieked,
> or that a white-hot star was lit to mark me.

The images presented in these lines are messianic. The star marking the speaker's arrival in the world evokes the nativity narrative in the Gospel of Matthew, and the bird gulping the dawn adds another mythic element, aligned with tropes of modern "chosen one" fantasy literature.[292] However, in Adaf's poem, these images are relegated to a subjunctive status. The structure "I would like to believe" indicates that the bird and the star do not exist in the poem's diegetic world but only in the possible belief of the speaker, a belief that itself does not exist but is merely desired. This twice-removed, or even thrice-removed existence forms the poem's core, serving as the refrain Adaf places as the capstone of his so-called autobiography. It is not the images or the faith (or lack thereof) that are central, but rather the emotional and cognitive remoteness from one's own foundation. Here Adaf introduces a wedge between the speaker's selfhood and any factual biographical information. This detachment challenges the conventional lyric "I" by presenting a self that is mediated through layers of potential beliefs and desires rather than straightforward autobiographical detail. In this manner, Adaf invites readers to contemplate the conceptual non-specific distance one can have from one's own core memories while still possessing (and being possessed by) them.

This call, however, was disregarded by Adaf's readership. As Reut Ben-Yaakov, Hadas Shabat-Nadir, and Rina Jean Baroukh show in their studies, when Adaf's first book of poetry was published, critics and other literati focused on the objective, biographical markings supplied by the

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[292] Adaf himself wrote such fantasy fiction books, most notably *The Buried Heart* (2007) and *Sunburnt Faces* (2008). More on this trope and the importance of Adaf's decision to place his "chosen one(s)" in the Israeli periphery, see Yigal Schwartz, "כשחוני המעגל נפגש עם איקרוס: פריפריה ומרכז ברומן בחורף ליי"ח ברנר וברומן הלב הקבור לשמעון אדף" [When Ḥoni the Circle-Maker Meets Icarus: Periphery and Center in Y.Ḥ. Brenner's In Winter and Shimon Adaf's The Buried Heart]," *Mikan, Journal for Hebrew and Israeli Literature and Culture Studies*, no. 21 (2021): 19–38.

book, rather than its subjunctive conceptuality.[293] Ben-Yaakov argues that while Adaf "exploited" the automatic assumption that lyric poetry should be read autobiographically, this technique went over many critics' heads as they read the book with those assumptions, regardless of Adaf’s challenge to these expectations.[294] Shabat-Nadir similarly argues that Adaf attempts to “disrupt the concepts of ‘center’ and ‘periphery,’ to break the boundaries of the identity ‘Mizrahi,’ and thus to turn upside down the power relation between Sderot and Tel-Aviv, establishing a new center.” However, his revolution was not recognized then, and Adaf was still read as a peripheral poet.[295] Adaf himself discussed his discomfort with this earlier reception, saying:

> I felt as though people expected something folkloric from me, and I do not wish to be a clone of Erez Biton or Dorit Rabinyan. It seemed they wanted me to include some couscous and harissa in my poems, and questioned why I wrote about Greek mythology instead of Sderot. This expectation stirs resistance within me, as it implies that the only path to recognition in Israeli culture is through folklore.[296]

Adaf’s refusal to be pigeonholed by an ethnographic mold underscores his desire to explore a more expansive and nuanced poetic landscape, one that transcends the constraints of cultural and autobiographical expectations. Despite his wishes, the critics of the time used the markers they found in Adaf’s poetry as a cipher, emphasizing his origins in the rural Israeli city of Sderot (which, in fact, is “not far” from the Israeli cultural center) and Adaf’s identity as a Mizrahi Moroccan Jew, that is, as part of a marginalized inner-Jewish community in Israel. This reception fits with the findings of Dorothy J. Wang, who, in the context of Asian-American poetry, argued against critics who imagine ethnicity in terms of content and therefore contrast ethnicity to “form.”[297] In this manner, the Israeli critics who read Adaf for ethnic content subjugated his poetic articulations to the biographical materials, indeed finding an opposition between the poet’s lyric voice and his origins and therefore marking his poetry as a site in which this opposition is revealed, concealed, or reconciled.

Reading the critical reception of Adaf in the late 1990s and early 2000s, one can see the new regime of lyric reading which Adaf later criticizes. In this reading regime, there is a common disposition to think of any new poem’s speaker as a synecdoche of the poet’s biographical self, and to take any poem’s linguistic articulation also as an opportunity to learn some socio-

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[293] Ben-Yaakov, “Still Hidden by the Clouds,” 166–69; Baroukh, “Death Has Already Happened but Somehow I Lived On,” 206; Hadas Shabat-Nadir, “‘הצל הפרטי והצללים שמוטלים עליי’: מהו מחבר מזרחי? על שירתו המוקדמת של שמעון אדף ["The Private Shadow and the Shadows Cast upon Me": What Is a Mizrahi Author? On the Early Poetry of Shimon Adaf],” in *Brilliance from Tears: Mizrahi Identifications in Educational and Cultural Contexts*, ed. Mimi Haskin and Nissim Avissar (Israel: Resling, 2019), 299–324.

[294] Ben-Yaakov, “Still Hidden by the Clouds,” 166.

[295] Shabat-Nadir, “‘הצל הפרטי והצללים שמוטלים עליי’: מהו מחבר מזרחי? על שירתו המוקדמת של שמעון אדף ["The Private Shadow and the Shadows Cast upon Me": What Is a Mizrahi Author? On the Early Poetry of Shimon Adaf],” 303.

[296] Yehuda Koren, “רוצים שאכניס קצת קוסקוס לשירים [They Want Me to Put Some Couscous in the Poems],” *Yedi’ot Aharonot*, March 22, 2002, 26.

[297] Dorothy J. Wang, “Introduction: Aesthetics Contra ‘Identity’ in Contemporary Poetry Studies,” in *Thinking Its Presence: Form, Race, and Subjectivity in Contemporary Asian American Poetry*, Asian America (Stanford, Calif: Stanford Univ. Press, 2014), 1–47.

psychological truth about the poet's groupings. In a sense, this new mode of lyric reading, which in earnest is a return to ideas of poetry that were common as early as in the romantic period, pushes poetry into the realm of mimesis, as in it we read poetry as a representation of biographical experiences, and we conceptualize biographical experiences as representative of larger social realities.

This is not to say that biographic lyric poetry is "bad" or unworthy of close reading. Even within the parameters of the biographic lyric, densified linguistic articulation destabilizes the relationship between the speaking "I" and the biographical self in a way that marks the poems as objects worthy of poetic inquiry. However, there is an assumption that once the biographical experience has been obtained, we can decipher its relationship to the social reality stably and reliably, i.e., by means outside the poem, as if the sociological groupings are unified, stable objects with no inner alterity. Following this assumption, the supposed integration of politics and poetics is one-sided. For example, in reading "Autobiography" for its sociological value, we, the readers, allow ourselves to remain "here" looking at Adaf's birthplace, which is "not far." Our concepts of "here" (where the poem is read) and there (where the poem is happening or not happening) are not changed in a meaningful way by our reading. Therefore, approaching Adaf's poetry through this specific lyric prism does nothing to destabilize Israeli hegemony and move closer to understanding the world from a phenomenological position that begins with Moroccanness.

Instead, as Jackson and Prince might have predicted, reading this poem within biographic lyrical reading makes the experience of Mizrahi marginalized *Bildung*-narrative available for unmarked (i.e., hegemonic) readers, as now "Mizrahi," "Ashkenazi," and any other label interchangeable on a great axis of human biographies. The idiosyncrasies of Adaf's poem are rephrased as "cultural difference" and, therefore, mere "information" that can now be grasped by all who wish to do so.

Returning to the quotes from Adaf in the introduction, we can see that the presumed perfect correspondence between the speaking "I" and the biographical self is the winter in which lyric poetry has frozen. Today, it is hard to advocate for expressive biographical poetry, i.e., poetry committed to personal experience, in a manner that does not leap from speaker to biography to sociology in a predetermined and unthreatening way. In a sense, my argument is that the rest of Adaf's career is dedicated to searching for this new, experimental possibility of a lyric "I," whose idiosyncrasy cannot be annulled by liberal multiculturalist reading, with which the colloquial identity discourse aligns.

1.2 – "Finale" (2002)

Adaf returns to the notion of biography in his second volume of poetry, explicitly setting his goals of escaping these lyric conventions in the book's last poem, "Finale." This poem mirrors "Autobiography," as is made clear in its second line, which situates us "in a noon sharper than the high noons of Tammuz." Here is the full poem with my translation. To facilitate my discussion, I've added an additional column, marking the recurring lines with Latin characters.

Finale		גמר[298]
Yet, I shall wake up from the dreadful dream of biography	a	אֲנִי עוֹד אֶתְעוֹרֵר מֵחֲלוֹם הַבִּיּוֹגְרַפְיָה שֶׁל הַבִּיּוֹגְרַפְיָה
in a noon sharper than the high noons of Tammuz, finally ready and braced	b	בְּצָהֳרַיִם חָדִים מִצָּהֳרֵי תַּמּוּז, דְּרוֹךְ לְבַסּוֹף
to guess what portion of the light is sledgehammers	c	לְנָחֵשׁ כַּמָּה הָאוֹר קוּרְנָסִים
how potent to suffocate is the air	d	כַּמָּה עַז לְהַחֲנִיק הָאֲוִיר
in which a bruise is acquired, a love injury, ahah	e	שֶׁבּוֹ קוֹרֵית חַבָּלָה, מַכָּה אַהֲבָה, אֲהָהּ
Yet, I shall wake up from the dreadful dream of biography	a	אֲנִי עוֹד אֶתְעוֹרֵר מֵחֲלוֹם הַבִּיּוֹגְרַפְיָה שֶׁל הַבִּיּוֹגְרַפְיָה
my back dusks the fireworks of desperate birds	f	גַּבִּי מַעֲרִיב עַל זִקּוּקֵי צִפּוֹרִים נוֹאָשׁוֹת
to guess what portion of the light is sledgehammers.	c	לְנַחֵשׁ כַּמָּה הָאוֹר קוּרְנָסִים.
Birth maybe breaking me into the world	g	לֵידָה אוּלַי שׁוֹבֶרֶת אוֹתִי אֶל הָעוֹלָם
in which a bruise is acquired, a love injury, ahah	e	שֶׁבּוֹ קוֹרֵית חַבָּלָה, מַכָּה אַהֲבָה, אֲהָהּ
but no, I say, no	h	אֲבָל לֹא, אֲנִי אוֹמֵר, לֹא
my back dusks the fireworks of desperate birds	f	גַּבִּי מַעֲרִיב עַל זִקּוּקֵי צִפּוֹרִים נוֹאָשׁוֹת
after the city, the mother, the futility of the outcry.	i	אַחֲרֵי הָעִיר, הָאֵם, חֹסֶר הַטַּעַם שֶׁל הַזְּעָקָה .
Birth may be breaking me into the world	g	לֵידָה אוּלַי שׁוֹבֶרֶת אוֹתִי אֶל הָעוֹלָם
in these exact moments as I sing my life into dust	j	בִּרְגָעִים אֵלֶּה מַמָּשׁ שֶׁאֲנִי שָׁר חַיַּי לֶעָפָר
but no, I say, no.	h	אֲבָל לֹא, אֲנִי אוֹמֵר, לֹא.
Birth may be breaking me into the world	g	לֵידָה אוּלַי שׁוֹבֶרֶת אוֹתִי אֶל הָעוֹלָם
to guess what portion of the light is sledgehammers	c	לְנָחֵשׁ כַּמָּה הָאוֹר קוּרְנָסִים
but no, I say, no	h	אֲבָל לֹא, אֲנִי אוֹמֵר, לֹא
Yet, I shall wake up from the dreadful dream of biography.	a	אֲנִי עוֹד אֶתְעוֹרֵר מֵחֲלוֹם הַבִּיּוֹגְרַפְיָה שֶׁל הַבִּיּוֹגְרַפְיָה.

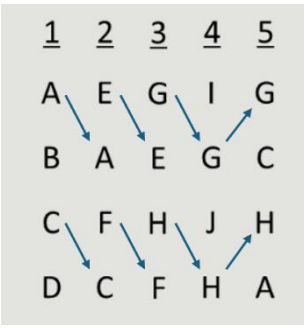
"Finale" opens with the provocative line, "Yet, I shall wake up from the dreadful dream of biography." This line already marks the concept of biography not as a factual retelling of events but as a "dreadful dream," that is, a nightmare, that, like any dream, is an unconscious mental activity that refracts reality as much as it reflects it. The speaker never elucidates what is so dreadful about that dream. Still, injecting our previous discussions into this poem, we can imagine that Adaf is lamenting his own inability to be taken seriously while telling his life's events without those stories being collected and cataloged in a biography. However, in the poem, the speaker seems to escape biography, at least to the extent that he refuses to deliver it "correctly." Let's look at stanza 4:

> after the city, the mother, the futility of the outcry.
> Birth may be breaking me into the world
> in these exact moments as I sing my life into dust
> but no, I say, no.

This stanza gives us an entire lifespan—from birth to death (dust). Other figures from Adaf's 1997 "Autobiography" also come back in this poem: the mother, the city, and the outcry. However, in

[298] Shimon Adaf, *מה שחשבתי צל הוא הגוף האמיתי [That Which I Thought Shadow Is the Real Body]* (Israel: Keter, 2002), 75.

this poem, the figures appear as simple, adjective-less nouns, undeveloped and almost illegible in their anonymity. Adaf counts these images off but refuses to give them any local, particular meaning. Moreover, he argues that the moment of the poem is happening "after" them. They are only a mythic background, foregrounding the end of the stanza in which he refuses the biographical reductiveness by saying "no" twice." This double refusal is, in this sense, a meta-poetic stance, declining to develop these images into full, graspable concepts. Even though birth may be "breaking him" into the world, forcing him to make sense of his life as he sings it (and in Hebrew, "sing," "*shar*," also means "composes poetry," "*shira*"), he can say no, and not elucidate that about which he sings, or writes poetry.



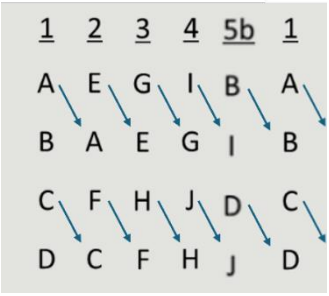
This general opacity and its relation to refusal is also constituted through form. The poem's dense lines repeat—as in a villanelle, though in a unique pattern. Marking each line with a letter, the five stanzas can be schematized thus: ABCD-EAFC-GEHF-IGJH-GCHA. The repetition format in the first four stanzas is highly schematic – each stanza's odd lines become the next stanza's even line, i.e., the first and third of a stanza repeat as the next stanza's second and fourth. Marking in bold each line's second appearance, these stanzas give us the pattern ABCD-E**A**F**C**-G**E**H**F**-I**G**J**H**. However, just as an attentive reader might notice the pattern, Adaf changes things up for the last verse. In stanza five, lines G and H appear out of order, with lines C and A repeating to fill out the verse, giving us the scheme **GCHA** (see figure on the right for visual representation).

On the first read, this deviation gives the poem an appearance of symmetry, as it opens and concludes with the same line, and this is how Jean-Baroukh interprets it:

> The poem ends with the line with which it begins, creating a circular form. This poem can be read repeatedly in a loop, in a never-ending attempt to wake up or escape. Ironically, even viciously […] the speaker remains trapped in his attempt to wake up, condemned to repeat his wish again and again, but the only possibility available is the repetition of the wish – not its fulfillment.[299]

However, we must complicate this reading by noting the asymmetry within the poem's apparent symmetry. By using the first line as the last, Adaf breaks the pattern he established, creating a veneer of closure that masks the systematic disruption. Adaf signals to the attentive reader that the poem they read is "wrong," coaxing them to find the "current" version. The poem provides guidelines for such an extrapolation, allowing an alternative, shadow fifth stanza to be gestured at. To construct that alternative fifth stanza, we need to continue the existing pattern. This step yields the sequence ABCD-E**A**F**C**-G**E**H**F**-I**G**J**H**-x**I**x**H**. Following the example of the published poem, we can fill the empty position with lines B and D from the first stanza (not used in the printed version), resulting in ABCD-E**A**F**C**-G**E**H**F**-I**G**J**H**-**BIDH**.

[299] Baroukh, "Death Has Already Happened but Somehow I Lived On," 205.



This arrangement makes the poem fully circular, with the first stanza seamlessly following the fifth, adhering to the established pattern in which the odd lines become the even lines of the next stanza, as illustrated in the visual representation to the right. This extrapolated stanza would make sense as it allows us to maintain the pattern and have stanza 1 follow stanza 5. It is also more symmetrical, ensuring all lines appear exactly twice, unlike the printed version, where some lines appear only once, and others appear three times. The new, hidden stanza that we uncover through this method reads as follows:

In a noon sharper than the high noons of Tammuz,	
finally ready and braced	בצהרים חדים מצהרי תמוז, דרוך לבסוף
after the city, the mother, the futility of the outcry.	אחרי העיר, האם, חוסר הטעם של הזעקה.
How potent to suffocate is the air	כמה עז להחניק האויר
in these exact moments as I sing my life into dust	ברגעים אלה ממש שאני שר חיי לעפר

As we can see, this alternative "finale" stanza creates a much more definitive closure, as it ends with the speaker's death, in which he "sings his life into dust." At the same time, it allows for an easier transition from end to beginning, from death to rebirth, and back again. In this manner, the alternative fifth stanza is no less ironic or vicious than the original. However, Adaf's construction of two versions of the poem, one printed and one extrapolated, creates a much richer resonance that sheds a new light on the poem. While the speaker of each variant is encapsulated within their own single version of the poem, the readers and the writer manifest for themselves a greater degree of freedom. By printing a "wrong" version of the poem that breaks the pattern, Adaf gives us two versions of similar repetitions from which we can choose. Both versions are trapped by the "dreadful dream of biography," but now there is a choice that we can make about it.

It is interesting to look at the only two lines that repeat three times in the printed poem, and the opposition between them. While line G conveys that the speaker's birth may have broken him into the world, highlighting the most arbitrary moment of each person's life, line H appears alongside it, offering an ultimate refusal to conceptualize life within this linear narrative. The poet can simply say, "no, I say, no," and break the pattern. The printed variant thus emphasizes these two moments more, making them equal in the poem. While not allowing an escape from biography, this emphasis highlights the fact that we can still refuse it momentarily by rearranging the biographical materials.

The fact that we need to pay close attention to the structure of the poem and follow the clues in order to figure out what it might have been is likewise extremely important. In Adaf's refusal to be fully grasped, he leaves space for the reader to cooperate with him actively—not to consume him, but to follow him into less obvious, hidden meanings. This active engagement of the reader is a testament to the poem's depth and the reader's value in the interpretation process.

In "Autobiography," Adaf left in some particularities of his life in a manner that was centered by readers who then felt free to consume his biography as something that they can grasp

and see as relating to their own biography. In "Finale," however, only readers who prioritize form can gain more freedom, and only in a way that makes no attempt to biographize Adaf's life.

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In this section, I have examined Adaf's argument that lyric poetry is frozen in its current state by analyzing two poems from his early career. In both poems, Adaf actively engages with the concept of biography, using different poetic devices to separate his lyric poetry from conventional biographical readings. In the context of his first book of poetry, I highlighted critics' resistance to accepting this distance. I argued that this mimetic alignment between Adaf's poetry and his biographic life allows hegemonic readers to label his poetry as "marginalized" in a way that enables them to consume it without contemplating any changes to the social order.

Adaf, I contend, seeks to escape this disposition by opening up the relationship between biography and reality to poetic discussion. This is evident in the second poem I presented, where he shapes it to include a hidden element accessible only to readers who engage with the poem's form slowly and thoughtfully. In this manner, Adaf creates a literary space where his biographical materials are presented in a double manner, thus becoming structurally alien to themselves. However, in this 2002 poem, he could only achieve this to a limited degree, which he felt was insufficient for unfreezing lyric poetry under the terms he would later construct. In the next two sections, I present two more attempts, exploring whether turning to piyyutic conventions of lyric writing enables Adaf to accomplish something still unattainable in his first two volumes of poetry.

Section 2: Melancholic Writing, Lost Selfhood, and the Pitum Ha-ktoret Prayer

2.1 – The Writing of Loss and Loss as Writing

Shimon Adaf's exploration of self-alterity that touches on the intersection of identity politics and lyric conventions returns time and time again to a question of loss. This connection is manifested clearly in the long citation from *I am Others* I presented in the introduction to this chapter, in which Adaf notes that to experience the world is also to perceive its ever-changing nature, and that what was experienced is lost once it is put into language. The vanishing experiences mandate Adaf to give them a private name, but in doing so, he also loses something of the event or experience that he is attempting to communicate. In this sense, Adaf's efforts at exploring selfhood touch on our ability, or inability, to survive the demise of someone or something dear by placing that loss into language.

Adaf has centered this transformation and its failure in his poetic development, as evident in a series of interviews and pseudo-autobiographical essays published over the past twenty years. In this section of my chapter, I trace how Adaf phrases this process and argue that it is a melancholic position, as defined by Julia Kristeva. I then demonstrate how this melancholic sublimation applies to a primary liturgical text Adaf engaged with during the turn of the 2010s,

Pitum ha-ktoret prayer, which details the incense offering at the Jerusalem Temple before its destruction. Finally, to demonstrate the poetic yield of alluding to *Pitum ha-ktoret* in a melancholic manner, I analyze a short poem Adaf published in 2009, "This Zephaniah, why Is He Here."

In his essays and interviews of the last twenty years, Adaf returns to three major moments of loss that organize the trajectory of his poetic career. Rina Jean Baroukh discusses the earlier two of these moments as auto-thanatographical narratives that interweave the death of the self with that self's initiation into poetry.[300] As I show shortly, in each of the two moments, the death of the beloved object takes something away from Adaf, constraining his ability to think and write about the world in the same manner as before. At the same time, that constraint liberates him from the necessity of being committed to the lost object, freeing him to explore past former limitations.

The first of these moments, which Adaf mentions only once in an essay from 2000, is the death of God, or at least the loss of assurance in His existence:

> At twelve, I spoke to God in front of the Torah ark. He did not answer. From beyond the screen, I heard a rustle. My name was not called. Since then, my desire has grown to describe the days differently than they were before.[301]

Adaf describes this scene using biblical and tannaitic Hebrew terms, ambiguously referring to the Torah ark and screen as "*'aron ha-kodesh*" (ארון הקודש) and "*pargod*" (פרגוד), terms that can denote both modern synagogal objects and the artifacts of the Jerusalem Temple. In doing so, he explicitly draws on the story of Elisha ben Abuyah, the most famous Talmudic heretic.[302] In the referenced Talmudic passage, ben Abuyah explains his refusal to repent by recounting a divine message he heard from beyond the destroyed Temple's curtain, which singled him out by name, declaring that all Jews could be redeemed except him.[303]

Adaf juxtaposes his moment of adolescent heresy with that of ben Abuyah, presenting his experience as even more desolate. While ben Abuyah receives a divine communication that affirms his heresy, Adaf's name is not called, and he hears only a "rustle." This absence of divine words drives Adaf to seek new ways of describing the world about which God remains mute. He is epistemologically confined to a world in which God's intervention is unknowable and uncertain.

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[300] Baroukh, 209–16.

[301] Shimon Adaf, "הקלדתי באלימות, רק כדי לשמוע את שאון הכתוב [I Typed Violently, Only in Order to Hear the Noise of Writing]," *Haaretz*, October 17, 2000.

[302] Elisha ben Abuyah, as Baroukh discusses, is also an explicit model for Adaf's protagonist of the *Lost Detective* trilogy. Baroukh, "Death Has Already Happened but Somehow I Lived On."

[303] This evocation harmonizes two iterations of the Elisah ben-Aboya's story. In the Babylonian Talmud, *Hagigah 15a*, ben Abuya says that he has heard the divine message from the ruins of the Temple's *sanctum sanctorum*. In the cognate portion of the Palestinian Talmud, Hagigah 2:1, ben-Aboya says he has heard that message from "beyond the veil," an idiom appearing in the Talmudic corpus several times in a sense similar to the modern English phrase. Many later renditions of the story, including Adaf's allusion here, combine the two variations, overlaying the "veil" separating this world from the paranormal one with the curtain that sectioned off the *sanctum sanctorum* from the rest of the Temple.

But at the same time, he is expressively liberated from being beholden to God's word, and in a sense, he is freer than ben Abuyah, who was bound to and by his heresy.[304]

The second moment to which Adaf returns happens at the age of twenty-two when he purifies himself from his own biographical past. Adaf recounts that at that time, "I made a big bonfire in my parents' backyard, and I burned everything I had written up to then. I was overcome with revulsion, and I thought that [the fire] would be a way to purify myself."[305] Adaf later conflates this moment with a semi-fictional one in an essay written for *Haaretz* newspaper in response to a question about the origins of his writing:

> Later, the meaning [of writing] changes. You think writing means examining how you became who you are now. Who are you now? You are twenty-two years old […] you've published poems here and there. You don't understand what it means. To write them. To send them to the slow burn of the journals. […] Do you understand? […] death has happened, but somehow, I kept on living as usual. […] I have a second, false, set of memories. I once drowned. I remember the water, the gasping for air, the weight of my body. But somehow, I woke up the following day and kept living. And the other one that I should have been also kept going, separated from me, and with him, the world. I'm not alive; I'm just longing for everything that left me. I'm dying of longing.[306]

As Baroukh notes, "the symbolic death of the body in water parallels the burning of the poems," and both events, whether fictional or not, change the goals of Adaf's writing by creating "a double positioning of an experiencing 'I' and a writing 'I.'"[307] If previously, up to the age of twenty-two, Adaf turned to writing to "examine how he became his present self," by burning the poems and fictionally drowning, he became free from the obligation only to write to understand who he is. This freedom also imposes a constraint. The death of what once seemed real, the past self, necessitates that Adaf describe the world from a position of longing. The gap between Adaf's experiential and writing "I"s is always preconfigured as a lacuna, as something ineffable that is missing.

A few years later, in an interview with Helit Yeshurun, Adaf focuses on the nature of this longing, stating: "Writing is the transformation of absence into presence. While my everyday experience of the world is marked by a lack, a deficit, it is the text, at the time of its writing, that allows me to give shape to the work of mourning."[308]

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[304] While Adaf does not return to this moment of absence in his non-literary writing, the question of God's absent presence is a constant fixture of his prose fiction. It is especially palpable in *Sunburnt Faces* (2008), in which the protagonist hears the voice of God during childhood only to grow up in a world where that voice never speaks to her again. Similarly, in *Undercities* (2012), we meet several characters who gain partial exposure to the divine, but all those experiences gain a Lovecraftian hue since any revelation the heroes gain is only partial, and to hear the true names and symbols of the non-human is always dangerous. See Shimon Adaf, *פנים צרובי חמה [Sunburnt Faces]* (Israel: Am Oved, 2008); Shimon Adaf, *ערים של מטה [Undercities]* (Israel: Kinneret, Zmora-Bitan, Dvir, 2012).

[305] Aviva Lori, "צומת אדף [Adaf Crossing]," *Haaretz*, October 31, 2001.

[306] Shimon Adaf, "המוות קרה אבל איכשהו המשכתי לחיות [Death Has Already Happened but Somehow I Lived On]," *Haaretz*, October 5, 2008.

[307] Baroukh, "Death Has Already Happened but Somehow I Lived On," 212–13.

[308] Helit Yeshurun, "הפנים האינסופיים של ההיעדר: שמעון אדף [The Infinite Faces of Absence: Shimon Adaf]," in *How Did You Do It? Interviews with Poets* (Israel: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2016), 513.

The term Adaf uses in this context, "work of mourning," evokes a seminal text from the core canon of psychoanalysis: Sigmund Freud's 1917 essay "Mourning and Melancholia." In this foundational work, Freud distinguishes between the two titular conditions, arguing that mourning is the typical response to losing a beloved object or person, leading to "a withdrawal of the libido from this [lost] object and a displacement of it onto a new one." In melancholia, however, "the free libido was not displaced onto another object; it was withdrawn into the ego," thereby establishing "an identification of the ego with the abandoned object."[309] Freud contends that melancholia attests to an unconscious ambivalent relation to the lost object, which is then processed by the psyche by splitting the ego into two voices: that of the self and that of an internalized image of what was lost (these voices can be compared, respectively, to the experiencing and writing "I"s which Baroukh described). According to Freud, the original ambivalence towards the object makes this second voice hostile to the ego despite being a part of it. This leads to an economy of emotions in which the internalized image of the lost object leads the self to self-effacement. Therefore, therapy's goal, Freud continues, is to recognize the original ambivalence between the self and the lost object, facilitating the resolution and dissolution of melancholia.

Subsequent work on melancholia has challenged Freud's privileging of mourning over melancholia, suggesting that the internalization of the lost object has a generative aspect and that, therefore, the swift resolution Freud described as "mourning" might represent a doubling of the loss. In this manner, Julia Kristeva argues that we must consider the propagative nature of melancholia as a foundational aspect of language and creative meaning-making. Kristeva asserts that "there is no imagination that is not, overtly or secretly, melancholy."[310] Without missing the primary loved objects of infancy, namely the somatic immediacy of the mother, the child has no drive toward conceptualizing the world in parallel to the sensory intake. Melancholia, in this manner, is one of the psyche's nascent mechanisms that drives us from "the real" to language, that is, from a relation to reality that can only function indexically, to one that can support imagination and symbolism.

Kristeva also rejects the notion that the "withdrawal of the free libido into the ego" happens solipsistically only in the confines of one's organic mind. Instead, Kristeva includes a "third party" in her model of melancholia, which must be a code or matrix of depersonalized axioms that guide the self as it sublimates the lost object into a "symbolic equivalent of what is lacking." For Kristeva, the clearest examples of these third parties are "father," "form," or "schema."[311] Therefore, for Kristeva, it is poetry, not therapy, that is the most effective vehicle for navigating the ambivalence inherent in the relationship between the self and what has been lost. She asserts that "melody, rhythm, semantic polyvalency, the so-called poetic form, which decomposes and recomposes

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[309] Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Volume XIV (1914-1916)*, trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1957), 249.

[310] Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 6.

[311] Kristeva, 23.

signs, is the sole 'container' seemingly able to secure an uncertain but adequate hold over the Thing [i.e., the lost object]."[312]

In this way, Kristeva is articulating a psychoanalytical formulation of lyric poetry not unlike the one Hegel's, substituting that which Hegel called "spirit" with her notion of "melancholia."[313] According to Kristeva, then, in lyric poetry one externalizes the internal psychological processes of loss and memory through the "third party" of poetic language while at the same time personalizing the impersonal forms of densified poetic language with a symbolization of the lost object. The self can internalize the newly created linguistic utterance and hold on to it in a manner that doesn't resolve the melancholic mourning yet still offers solace. Lyric poetry, for Kristeva, is not a cure for melancholia but the thing that makes melancholic life (i.e., all life) worth living.

Shimon Adaf shapes the ethos of his writing as melancholic in Kristeva's sense, that is, as a practice motivated by a "longing for everything that left [him]," which is given form by a third party: poetic writing. The specific aspects of poetic writing that fulfill this role for Adaf are varied and evolve from project to project, largely because Adaf challenges his own models by directing the readers' attention to the inherent failure of the sublimation he performs. In this way, Adaf turns the poetic model against its own melancholic preconditions, dwelling on the question of linguistic representation and its futility. He is interested in articulating the lost object (God, the self, and, as we shall see – a loved one) through poetic language while exposing the limitations of poetic language to restore the lost connection fully. Thus, Adaf seeks to test his melancholia, exploring what aspects can withstand his rigorous scrutiny.

This relationship between loss and language evolves as we approach the third moment of death to which Adaf frequently returns: the death of his sister, Aviva. Like the previous two moments, Aviva's death compels Adaf not only to mourn her loss but also to reconfigure his relationship with language. In the same interview with Helit Yeshurun, Adaf says:

> In this sense, I do not want the pain [over Aviva's passing] to go away. I do not try to sustain it, but its disappearance will lessen me. This is the forgetting for which poetry can, for a moment, serve as a substitute. I project my heart's desires onto other poets. For Ovid, at the end of the metamorphosis, there is a sentence of elation: I built a building, and as long as the Roman language exists – so will my poetry. It's megalomanic and built on the writer's ego, but in writing, the one who will survive is her—Aviva.[314]

In the following section, I return to this claim regarding Aviva's textual survival and the way Adaf dismantles the explicit goals he sets up in this interview. Before doing so, I need first to present a recurring text with which Adaf contends around the turn of the 2010s and around the topic of his sister's passing, the aforementioned *Pitum ha-ktoret* prayer.

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[312] Kristeva, 14.
[313] See my discussion in chapter 1.
[314] Yeshurun, "The Infinite Faces of Absence: Shimon Adaf," 514.

2.2 – Pitum Ha-ktoret and the Melancholy of Proper Nouns

Pitum ha-ktoret, literally "packing the incense," refers to the ceremony of the incense offering in the Jerusalem Temple and the prayer recited in its stead. The main text of *Pitum ha-ktoret* originates from two cognate segments in the Babylonian Talmud (*m. Keritot 6a*) and the Palestinian Talmud (*m. Yoma 4:5*). These two variants were synthesized during the late Geonic period (circa 10th century), resulting in the earliest forms of the text as we have it today.[315]

The text opens with an invocation, addressing God directly and proclaiming: "You are God, our God, before Whom our ancestors burned the incense of spices when the holy Temple was standing, as You commanded them by the hand of Moses Your prophet, as it is written in Your Torah."[316] It then continues by citing Exodus 30:34-36, which details the Temple's daily and annual ceremonies involving the incense. Following this, the text moves to the Talmudic content, specifying the exact components and measurements of the spices included in the incense:

> The composition of the incense consisted of balm, onycha, galbanum, and frankincense— by weight, seventy minas each; myrrh, cassia, spikenard and saffron by weight— sixteen minas each; twelve minas of costus, three mina of aromatic bark, and nine minas of cinnamon. [Also used in compounding the incense were:] Nine kabin of Carshina lye, Cyprus wine [measuring] three s'in and three kabin—if he had no Cyprus wine, he could use strong white wine—a fourth of a kab of Sodom salt, and a minute quantity of ma'aleh 'ashan. Rabbi Nosson of Babylonia says, Add a minute quantity of Jordan amber. If one were to add honey, the incense would become unfit; and if one omitted any of its spices, he would be liable to the death penalty.[317]

The text of *Pitum ha-ktoret* is extremely focused on the physicality of the offering, giving us the most minute of details, including not only the ingredients and their portioning but also various ways in which they can be prepared.

At the same time, this description and its high precision fail at its explicit task of conserving the information needed to recreate the preparation of the *ketoret*. The lost knowledge relates most extensively to the functioning of language and the problem of proper nouns. For example, the first ingredient, "balm," called in Hebrew "צרי" (*tzeri*). In the second half of the prayer, the nature of this substance is clarified, as the text cites Rabbi Shimon ben Gamaliel of the second century CE who states that "the balm mentioned here is nothing other than a resin exuded from the *ktaf* tree" (*m. Keritot 6.*). A couple of centuries later, in *Midrash Bereshit Rabah* 91:11*,* we get an additional clarification from the amora Rabbi Yehoshua deSachnin, who states that the *ktaf* tree is also known as *balsam ktaf* (בלסם קטף). This name is preserved in both Greek and Arabic writing and was

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[315] The Mar'ah Institute, *קובץ פירושי הראשונים על ברייתת פיטום הקטורת [A Collection of Commentaries by Rishonim on the Packing of the Incense]* (The Mar'ah Institute, 2005), 13.

[316] My translation:
"אתה הוא יי אלוהינו שהקטירו אבותינו לפניך את קטורת הסמים בזמן שבית המקדש קים, כאשר צוית אותם על-יד משה נביאך, ככתוב בתורתך"

[317] Translation based on the *Metsudah* linear siddur by Avrohm Davis, 1981

reabsorbed into the Hebrew of the Talmud as "אפרסמון" (*'afarsemon*).[318] Skipping to the time of the *Rishonim*, that is, the late middle ages, we find even more elucidations that attempt to substitute older, unclear names with new ones. The 10th century late Gaon Ḥafetz ben Yitzliḥ argues that it is the sap of the tree known as *livni* [319] and Rashi explains that *tzeri* is *gome* (nutsedge) plant.[320] In these attempts to keep this list of ingredients legible and transmittable, translations into other languages, Jewish or otherwise, become more and more prominent. In this manner, Rashi also translates *tzeri* to the Middle French word "triacle," which gives the modern (though archaic) French "*theriaque*,"[321] related to the English word "treacle." Through that multilingual network, current scholars believe the biblical *tzeri* relates to the Commiphora plant genus. Some argue that, based on available information, we cannot determine what specific plant was the one used in the *ketoret*, while others argue *tzeri* to be produced from specific species (such as *Commiphora gileadensis*).[322]

In this manner, *Pitum ha-ktoret* prayer exemplifies a melancholic dynamic as articulated by Kristeva in a uniquely tangible way. The sublimated lost object, the ceremony of *Pitum ha-ktoret* in the Jerusalem Temple, is formalized in language through the mediation of a new code—prayer. This is, overall, the case of Jewish liturgy, which is presented within its own history as a linguistic equivalence to the erstwhile system of sacrifice worship, which is no longer available or allowed after the Temple's destruction.[323]

However, in the case of *Pitum ha-ktoret*, the mechanism of sublimation is fully visible, as the aspects of the lost object that are concentrated through the poetic language are not turned into symbols but are frozen in their concreteness. This precision, relying on naming the ingredients by their proper nouns, renders the text unintelligible, making it difficult for later readers to grasp the original text's exact meaning. Consequently, translation and other forms of multilingual engagement become the precondition for the text's transmissibility. Here we find another contradiction in the melancholic dynamic of this text. To preserve the most intimate information relating to the Jerusalem Temple, Jewish culture must rely on the multilingualism of its Diaspora. Only by maintaining the double consciousness endemic to the diasporic condition can we hold onto the meaning of practices specific to the land of origins and its original language, Hebrew.

These features might lead modern readers to find the text tedious and obsolete but I believe we can read it as purposefully paradoxical. While the prayer ostensibly abstracts the ritual into a linguistic form embedded in Jewish collective memory, it does so by anchoring itself in the precise, physical details of the ritual, conveying that even the slightest alteration of the original materials

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[318] Hadas Gideon, "The Balsam 'Afarsemon' And Ein Gedi During the Roman-Byzantine Period," *Revue Biblique* 114, no. 2 (2007): 161–73.
It is important to note that the plant in question is completely different from the modern fruit named as such, which follows the English name for persimmon and borrowed the preexisting name due to their similarity.
[319] The Mar'ah Institute, *A Collection of Commentaries by Rishonim on the Packing of the Incense*, 43.
[320] The Mar'ah Institute, 3.
[321] Moshe Z. Albartes, *מעם לועז, או, הלעזים שבפירוש רש"י על כתבי הקדש [From Tongues of Gentiles, Or, The Loan Words of Rashi's Commentary on the Sacred Writings]*, vol. 2 (New York: Levant Press, 1923), 72.
[322] Gideon, "The Balsam 'Afarsemon' And Ein Gedi During the Roman-Byzantine Period."
[323] Langer, *To Worship God Properly*, 5–14.

can lead to catastrophe. In this manner, the text as transmitted challenges dedicated readers to break through its opaqueness and localize the proper nouns in their time and languages. The tension between sublimation and physicality is at its peak here and calls for an interpretive praxis that revitalizes the dead rituals in the minds of the participants. *Pitum ha-ktoret* thus becomes a textual incarnation of a specific melancholia that reaches its sublimation by first refusing it.

Adaf's evocations of the prayer highlight how this textual tradition substitutes the ceremony with its verbal descriptions. By invoking the meticulous details of *Pitum ha-ktoret* prayer, Adaf parallels his own process of capturing loss and memory. This act of textual substitution, where the physical ritual is preserved through its verbal recounting, mirrors Adaf's literary approach to navigating his work of mourning and longing. Just as the prayer transforms the lost Temple ritual into a living memory through language, Adaf's writings seek to keep his sister's presence alive through his words' creative and symbolic power. In doing so, he intertwines personal and cultural mourning, demonstrating how poetic and narrative forms can serve as vessels for melancholic remembrance and the continual search for meaning in the face of loss.

2.3 – "This Zephaniah, Why Is He Here:" Pitum Ha-ktoret, Melancholic Intertextuality, and the War on Gaza

An additional moment in which Adaf refers to *Pitum ha-ktoret* was written around the same time as *Frost* and *Aviva-No*. Titled "This Zephaniah, why Is He Here," this poem was first published a few days after the commencement of the "Cast Lead" Israeli military 2008-2009 campaign against the Gaza Strip in an anthology titled *Get Out! An Anthology Against the War in Gaza*.[324] As I show below, this poem mobilizes Jewish scriptures, including the titular Zephania and *Pitum ha-ktoret* prayer, to offer an alternative historical perspective on Israeli politics and to call on its audience to resist the ongoing hostilities.

While establishing this oppositional frame, Adaf contemplates the preconditions of his own resistance, indicating how his ability to manipulate scripture against the war also stems from a coercion that must be criticized. Adaf then turns to a piyyutic manner of allusion, which allows him to impart to the reader with a new level of liberty in interpreting the poem. This freedom, which stems from Adaf's deferral of authoritative authorship, can allow the readers to reframe the entire poem as a mystical melancholic practice aimed at preserving Gaza in reality and in the Hebrew-speaking textual collective mind.

This last point is why I include this interlude in the chapter. In addition to serving as a companion piece to my discussion of Adaf in the context of mourning, lyric selfhood, and piyyut, "This Zephaniah, why is he Here" reflects the reality of war that I see in my home as I am writing this chapter. In the poem, Adaf takes a prophetic text from the Book of Zephaniah and reshapes it into a eulogy for the dead of the ongoing war around him. Today, in 2024, we are in a new stage of the same aggression Adaf described in 2009. As the death toll grows ever higher, I turn to this poem to inquire how we can envision a divergent poetic political line that can lead us away from

[324] Yaniv et al., *לצאת! אסופה נגד המלחמה בעזה [Get Out! An Anthology Against the War in Gaza]*.

the ideologies and philosophies that have created this conflict. Furthermore, I ask a question similar to the one I find in Adaf's poem: What can I, a scholar of Hebrew literature, do now that the culture in which I am most deeply involved in my research has become so murderous? Can reading Hebrew literature after the crimes against humanity in Gaza be anything other than barbarism?

With that in mind, below is the poem, accompanied by two translations: one prioritizing lexical precision and the other striving to preserve the original's alliteration and rhythmic cadence. Both translations are mine, with the first one deeply indebted to Robert Alter's translation of the Bible:

צפניה זה למה הוא בא[325]

וַאֲנִי בְּאֶבְלִי הִתְעוֹרַרְתִּי בַּבֹּקֶר אֶתְמוֹל וּצְפַנְיָה עַל שְׂפָתַי: כִּי
עַזָּה עֲזוּבָה תִּהְיֶה וּשְׁדֵרוֹת תְּשֻׁדַּד וְאַשְׁקְלוֹן

לְשִׁמָּמָה אַשְׁדּוֹד בַּצָּהֳרַיִם יְגָרְשׁוּהָ וְעֶקְרוֹן תֵּעָקֵר. מִי הִכְרִיחַ
אוֹתִי לִקְרֹא תְּרֵי עָשָׂר כְּשֶׁהָיִיתִי צָעִיר מִכְּדֵי

לְהִתְנַגֵּד

This Zephaniah, why is he here

And, in my mourning, I woke up yesterday morning, and Zephaniah on my lips: for
Gaza shall be abandoned, and Sderot will be harrowed, and Ashkelon

A desolation. Ashdod shall be banished at noon and Ekron be uprooted. Who forced
Me to read the twelve minor prophets when I was still too young to

Resist

This Zephaniah, why is he here

And, in my mourning, I woke up yesterday morning, and Zephaniah on my lips: for
Ghaza shall be razed, and Sderot be destroyed, and Ashkelon

Sacked by an echelon, Ashdod by noon shall be ash upon the dunes, and Ekron crashed like an acorn. Who forced me
To read the Twelve Minor Prophets when I was still too young

to
Resist.

The centerpiece around which the poem is organized is the citation of Zephaniah 2:4. In the three-chapter prophecy book of Zephaniah, he prophesies about "the day of the Lord" in which God will smite all those who don't follow his teaching. These visions of destruction cut across the ethno-religious lines of the time, promising the destruction of Israelite and non-Israelite cities alike. In

[325] Yaniv et al., 12.

the specific verse cited in the poem, Zephaniah describes the annihilation of the Philistine nation metonymically through four cities: Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Ekron.

Adaf, in his rendition of the verse, inserts another city into the list. This is his hometown, Sderot—a modern town near the four biblical cities and devoid of scriptural legacy. Both the prophet Zephaniah and Adaf envision a cataclysmic day of utter devastation, wherein these cities are razed and pillaged in a sudden surge of violence. The verse prophesies the destruction of these cities by assigning each city a verb that offers full or partial alliteration with their names, therefore framing their destruction as a case of nominative determinism. Thus, *`Aza* (Gaza) shall become *`azuva* (abandoned), *Sderot* will *tesudad* (be harrowed), and *Ekron* will *te`aker* (be uprooted).

As I write these words in the Spring of 2024, reality has drawn eerily close to the cited text. The State of Israel is once again embroiled in military aggression against Gaza, resulting in the loss of over forty thousand Palestinian lives and widespread destruction of homes and properties on an unprecedented scale. The city of Gaza itself has been decimated by IDF bombardments, with over 70% of its homes reduced to rubble, alongside the destruction of numerous archaeological and historical landmarks. Simultaneously, many Israelis are still reeling from the horrors of October 7th, 2023, when Hamas combatants breached the siege on the Gaza Strip, seizing control of several towns and military bases in the Israeli southwest and killing over twelve hundred individuals. These events led to the partial or complete evacuation of numerous cities in the region, including Sderot, Adaf's hometown, as well as Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Ekron.

Adaf's inclusion of Sderot among the biblical cities stands out in this context, or at least it should. This inclusion is veiled by the biblical lexicon surrounding it, not only by the original composition of the verse but also by the verb that Adaf attaches to the city name, "*tesudad*," which is a rare biblical word unfamiliar to most modern Hebrew speakers. Once the reader realizes Adaf's manipulation of the biblical text, they see that the inclusion of Sderot in this catalog of cities introduces a modern non-biblical element into the biblical narrative. This inclusion breaks the cohesion of the list of cities, showing the diverging historical paths the biblical cities took in the 20th century. It reminds us that while Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Ekron are Israeli municipalities today, just like Sderot, Gaza is a Palestinian city.

In this manner, Adaf's rendition of the verse leads our attention to the discontinuity between biblical and modern geographies. This fact is inconsistent with Zionist political discourse, in which the biblical narrative is often mobilized to justify Jewish sovereignty over historical Palestine. If the biblical land of Israel defined Israeli borders, then those cities mentioned in Zephaniah would have been left out of the modern state. However, we can see that Israeli boundaries result from far more complex historical processes. Adaf's deliberate juxtaposition of these now-Israeli cities with the now-Palestinian Gaza shows the porous nature of these borders, thus demonstrating the historically contingent nature of territorial claims by any single nation.

Through this lens, Adaf focuses our gaze on the two fundamental aspects that bind these cities regardless of current state concerns: time and space. That is, regardless of current or future national state entities, these five cities will forever share a common history and geographical proximity, a connection no human can erase. The poem's prophetic register suggests that this

connection translates into a shared fate. When destruction falls on these cities, it falls on all of them simultaneously—even if there is a man-made border between them.

This question of human agency is woven through the poem, beyond the cited verse. Curiously, the poem refrains from attributing the modified citation of Zephaniah to the speaker's conscious volition. Instead, the citation emerges "on his [the speaker's] lips," suggesting a passive reception rather than an active selection. This wording metaphorically relocates the act of recalling the verse from an abstract cognitive process internal to the speaking consciousness to a physical orifice—a liminal position through which things enter and exit the body.

Furthermore, the phrase "on my lips," with its distinctly archaic Hebrew formulation, alludes to Jewish scripture. Like many Hebrew allusions, it evokes more than one possible source. One prominent allusion is to Psalm 51:17, in which the biblical speaker beseeches God to allow him speech: "Master, open my lips, that my mouth may tell Your praise." This biblical verse is also prominent in modern Jewish practice, as it inaugurates the *Amidah* prayer, a central component of Jewish synagogue services. Here, the agency of speech resides entirely outside the speaker, and the recitation of the verse functions as a speech act that enacts the preconditions of the prayer.

Should we follow the allusion in this direction, we see Adaf presenting an ironic twist on the biblical wording. While the original Psalm and prayer implore God to open the speaker's lips so they may extol divine praises, express gratitude, and invoke divine mercy, in the modern poem, the biblical phrase on the poet's lips foretells destruction and desolation – as it does for the prophet. The allusion to Psalms underscores the disparity between God's benevolence and His might, emphasizing the divergence between His grace and power and accentuating the horror of the destruction described.

However, a more profound and intricate intertextuality surfaces if we follow the allusion to the Book of Daniel, Chapter 10. This allusion is more fertile, as it ties the marked expression "on my lips" with the unmarked word "mourning" of the first line, In Daniel 10, the protagonist, the prophet Daniel, recounts experiencing a divine vision after a three-week mourning period. As noted by the 16th-century commentator Joseph ibn Yaḥya, Daniel's "mourning" assumes an ascetic significance in this narrative, precipitating the subsequent apocalyptic vision.[326] In this vision, Daniel encounters a figure resembling a human being. Overwhelmed by the encounter, Daniel falls down and is unable to speak. Subsequently, the divine figure touches Daniel's lips, enabling him to open his mouth and receive the prophetic vision that foretells the rise and fall of kingdoms from Daniel's era to the culmination of time.

There is an analogy between the alluding and evoked texts within the intertextual framework, and thus between Zephania and Daniel, and their respective prophecies. In this analogy, the verse uttered by the speaker in Adaf's poem parallels Daniel's apocalyptic vision, and

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[326] Joseph ibn Yaḥya on Daniel 10:2, as made available in sefaria.org. Original:
וספר אופן ההכנה שעשה לקבל השפע ההוא כי היה בשעבדו החמר. ובעומדו מתאבל כדי להשפיׁ נפש המרגשׁ שהשמחה במעונה. ובמונעו ממנו תענוגי נפש הצומחת מאכילת הפת ההכרחי לחיים מהיפה והנחמד. ואמנם היה אוכל לחיות מהפת קיבר השחור. ובמונעו הבשר שהוא מועיל החיים. ובמונעו היין והשינה שהוא דבר מותריי. אשר בהשפלת החמר ג׳ שבועים יתעלה השכל והנפש אלהית ותשיג את מבוקשה כי לא יעיקה הצר הצורר הגופני.

the fall of the five cities mentioned in the poem takes on the added role of an apocalyptic vision, demonstrating how God's divine power seals the fate of kings and kingdoms.

The phrase "on my lips," with its allusion to Psalms and Daniel focuses on similar notions of human agency and the way personal utterance and military might are conditioned on God's will. Adaf's allusion to Daniel temporally complements that to Zephaniah. Where the citation of Zephaniah 2:4 forces us to think of the past of Israel/Palestine, the evoked apocalyptic vision of Daniel invites us to think about the future and imagine a world in which the sovereignties and nations populating it now will pass or change beyond recognition. Putting these two verses together cautions readers against thinking about the history of the world, past or present, only through the prism of current borders. It negates the all-consuming enlisting power of Israeli ethnonationalism, making the argument that this version of Jewish peoplehood, too, shall pass eventually to make space for something new.

So far, we have seen how Adaf alludes to scripture to show the limitations of human agency with respect to time, space, and God. These limitations are presented in the poem as channels through which we can resist the war and imagine a history of the region that refuses and opposes the Zionist colonialist argument for the sole ownership of the land. In the latter half of the poem, Adaf shifts the poetic perspective, and the speaker reflects on the imposition of learning the text of Zephaniah and presumably the other scriptures cited. This part of the poem grows similar in nature to the poetry I presented in the first part of this chapter, in which Adaf reflects on the constraints that his biography places on his poetic speech.

As part of this shift, the question of agency is focused anew on the individual history of the speaker. The poem shows that he was forced to learn the texts early when he was "too young to resist." Suddenly, the scriptural practice guiding this interpretation through the poem's first half coils back on itself. The scriptures are no longer a liberatory corpus, through which we are released from the bonds of hegemonic Zionist ideas of history. Instead, they are a product of coercion that aims to ensure that Jewish cultural continuity survives even if against the will of Jewish children are too young to resist its teachings. Furthermore, the entirely Jewish context of these scriptures is revealed, as only people who are educated in Jewish texts can decipher the intricate resistance Adaf is presenting. Adaf shows that his own text is more comprehensible to others like him, that is, those familiar with the oppressor's culture, and not that of the oppressed. In a way, Adaf's piyyutic intertextuality is placed in alignment with the coercion done to him as a child, which is also likened to the violence done by Jewish Israeli governments at large.

The poem's coda, which in Hebrew consists of only one word, "resist," serves both these narratives and is caught between them. On the one hand, it reads as a call for arms to act against the war in Gaza. The essence of the speaker's prophetic utterance, the one he found "on his lips," boils down to one word the reader is welcome to take with them. Facing the totality of space, time, and the divine, we have no choice but to resist the doings of militant worldly powers and the destruction of human life. At the same time, Adaf shows how resistance is always preconditioned on the tools by which we articulate it, which can be born of forceful collective oppression. Just as

in "Finale," the freedom that can be found in lyric poetry is defined and bounded by its limitation, never escaping into true freedom.

In many ways, this last point seems to be a natural stopping point for reading the poem, both as we work through its body entirely and as we encounter here a paradoxical tension generated by the speaking consciousness that has no predetermined conclusion and that uses the highly individual articulation of the speaker's selfhood to map the social world around him. However, there is yet one allusion not included in this interpretation, one that shows the power that Adaf finds in what I earlier defined as the writing conventions of piyyut. This is the poem's title: "This Zephaniah, why Is He Here?" (צפניה זה, למה הוא בא?). The allusion in the title is much more covert than the ones in the body of the text. Lexically, none of the words (bearing the prophet's name) are marked as rare or extraordinary, thereby calling for intertextual analysis. The oddness of the phrase comes from its syntax. Instead of asking more directly, "Why is this Zephaniah here," we have here what linguists call a *fronting* of the subject (Zephaniah) in a clause with a deictic (this), and it precedes the main clause, which anaphorically refers back to the subject using the pronoun "he" (הוא). This construction is typical in Rabbinic Hebrew and has equivalences in Arabic but is not normalized in Modern Hebrew.

While it might appear to be a generic construction, this exact phrasing ("This X, why is he here?"), it can be found only in one classic rabbinic text: the prayer version of *Pitum ha-ktoret*. In the relevant portion of the text, the rabbis discuss one component of the incense, the onycha (ציפורן, *tsiporen*),[327] and its preparation: "Carshina lye, why is she here? To refine the onycha in order to make it pleasant. Cyprus wine, why is he [it; wine is masculine in Hebrew] here? He is here to soak the onycha in it so it will be pungent."

In Hebrew, the term for "pungent" is more generally used to mean forceful—"`aza" ("עזה"). This is a full homonym of the Hebrew name for Gaza. Thus, the clause "so it will be pungent" reads "*ked'ei shete'he Aza*." When read independently, and with Gaza on our minds and lips, this phrase can take on a completely different meaning, and read to mean - "So there will be a Gaza." Connecting this phrasing to the title of the poem, it can read "צפניה זה, למה הוא בא? כדי שתהא עזה" that is, "This Zephaniah, why is He here? So Gaza Shall Remain." The poem, in this manner, becomes a textual equivalent to the Cyprus wine, in which the object under threat of annihilation, onycha or Gaza, is soaked so it can be pungent or so it can endure.

In this final maneuver, Adaf restores a sense of agential freedom that he initially negated through the poem itself. This freedom is achieved by planting a secretive seed, a non-obvious call for intertextual interpretive labor that, once completed, can provide the reader with a fuller understanding of the text and call on him to act in the world. This covert intertextuality is highly

[327] In modern Hebrew, "*tsiporen"* means "cloves," the aromatic flower buds used as a spice. This Hebrew term also means fingernail, suggesting the similarity in shape between the two (just as in English, "clove" gets its name from the Latin for nail "*clavus*"). This denotation is a modern innovation. The rabbinic "*tsiporen"* denotes a different ingredient identified often as the operculum of water snails. The operculum is a trapdoor-like sheet part of the shell attached to the water snail's foot and shaped, perhaps, like a fingernail or a claw. There are other hypotheses as to the nature of this ingredient, and its identity is unclear. See Zohar Amar, "שחלת צפורן [Onycha Tsiporen]," *`Al-Atar*, no. 3 (1998): 31–37.

piyyutic, reminiscent of the textual devices I elaborated on in the second chapter. We once again see the piyyutic tendency to rely on the power of the shadow text. Just as in piyyutim of the premodern period, the text can function with or without this full understanding, giving the reader the freedom to decide whether they want to pursue it.

Through this shadow intertextuality, Adaf offers readers an agency he himself did not have. Readers can choose their own adventures in the text, following it in different directions. However, only when the task is completed does the magical ceremony come to fruition, revealing the answer to the question posed in the title. By embedding this intricate intertextual challenge, Adaf not only enriches the reader's engagement with the poem but also parallels the layered complexity of piyyutic tradition, inviting a deeper exploration of meaning that honors both personal and collective narratives.

This poem offers a twist on the melancholic dynamic I sketched out above, since the lost object of the poem—the thing Adaf is mourning—is not yet lost. In 2009, during "Operation Cast Lead" Gaza had not been destroyed to the extent it is now, and Adaf's poem could read as a mystical practice aimed at finding minds and hearts willing to work poetically to ensure Gaza's survival through political acts. The allusion to *Pitum ha-ktoret* serves as a warning, reminding us of the destruction of Jerusalem in the hope that such a fate will not come over Gaza.

Currently, following the horrors enacted by the State of Israel and the IDF to make Gaza uninhabitable, and as the future of the region seems more doomed than ever, this evocation reads differently. It now appears as preparation for the sublimation of Gaza's actual existence into language, transforming it into another lost object, ruined due to the transgressions and cruelty of those in power. While this poem was unable to fulfill its initial purpose, it has foreshadowed another task this text can fulfill in the future: to never forget what Israel did to Gaza. Tying Israeli violence and crimes against humanity to the destruction of the Temple allows Adaf to manipulate the meaning of Hebrew literature past any racially exclusive meaning of the term. The work of Hebrew literature and Hebrew scripture is to carry the actions and history of the people speaking the language, not only including the times Jews were abused and oppressed, but also those time when they have been the abusers and oppressors. Or, at least, that is an option Adaf wishes to impart to all future readers of Hebrew.

Section 3: **Aviva-No *and* Frost – *Piyyut, Poetry, and Prose***

So far in this chapter, I have discussed Adaf's late 1990s and 2000s work within the trifold matrix of identity discourse, biography, and melancholy. In this last section, I wish to examine the two books by Adaf that align most closely with my own project, evaluating the afterlife of piyyut within modern Hebrew literature, specifically in *Aviva-No* (2009) and *Frost* (2010). As I will show, Aviva-no is the most autobiographical project by Adaf to date. In this volume of poetry, Adaf turns again to Pitum ha-ktoret as a model for his own melancholic project of lamenting the loss of his sister Aviva. This modeling allows him to extend the poems past his personal grief and, along the way, to create a poetic project that privileges Mizrahi readership vis-à-vis the essentialization of Mizrahi identity. In *Frost*, Adaf plays on the biographical reading assumptions to which *Aviva-No*

surrendered, creating a game of mirrors between his own grief and the multiple narratives of the novel. Adaf also alludes to *Pitum ha-ktoret* throughout this novel, but as it deals with a futuristic speculative strain of Jewishness, it cannot center any essentialized definition of Mizrahiness. I argue that the two pieces should be read as complementary parts of the same project, shining different lights on how turning to piyyutic writing conventions can "unfreeze" lyric poetry within and beyond the genre of poetry, while radicalizing identity discourse.

3.1 – Aviva-No*: Intertextuality and Biography*

In 2009, Shimon Adaf published *Aviva-No*, marking a return to poetry after having established himself as a respectable prose fiction author. This book details several months of Adaf's life following his sister's passing. It is arranged in three sections, structured, as Lilach Lachman writes, "like a *kina* [lament] or a *Qasida*, moving between his sister's death ('object, 1'), through attempts to satiate her image ('Poetry, 2'), and ending with wishing her farewell ('unhand, 3')."[328] The narrative, stretching between the book's three sections and among its forty-three poems is highly autobiographical, marked by the specific months and stages of his grief. Adaf has remarked a few times after the fact on the directness of the book and how easily it surrenders itself to the readership, especially those biographical reading conventions I detailed above. In some interviews, Adaf even expressed remorse for having published the book. In 2012, Adaf said:

> Today, I would not have published it. Undoubtedly, the book changed something fundamental in how I view the world, and perhaps I needed to write it, but I'm not sure it should be out there. As I was grieving, they ripped my shirt [one of the Jewish mourning customs for close relatives], and now that the book is out there, I feel like all my shirts are torn. It is just hanging out there, my mourning, as if I placed my torn shirt in a museum or a storefront.[329]

The ambivalence expressed by Adaf about the publication of *Aviva-No* is because it fully surrenders itself to biographical reading. Even while delving into additional venues of inquiry far beyond Adaf's personal life,[330] this volume invites a biographical reading that seeks to determine the relationship between the expression of the poem's speaker and the actual work of mourning undertaken by Shimon Adaf, the person. In this sense, this is the most graspable Adaf has ever made himself. The last line of the cited interview shows how Adaf envisions this position. Adaf likens the book, and his position of being graspable, to becoming an exhibit in a museum, conserved for a public viewing, or to merchandise in a store, available for purchase.

Adaf establishes the immediacy of this volume in the first poem, where he states that the poems to come are defined by "straightforwardness," which he describes as being mediated "not

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[328] Lilach Lachman, "לא על דרך השירה אלא לפי הכאב [Not by Way of Verse but by Pain]," *Haaretz*, January 8, 2010.

[329] Eli Eliyahu, "שמעון אדף על הרגע שבו סופר נולד [Shimon Adaf on the Moment a Writer Was Born]," *Haaretz*, December 25, 2012.

[330] As Segalovitz shows in her introduction to the translated volume and her subsequent article, this book also delves deeply into the question of the queerized body and the intersection between inner Jewish identity politics and the Jewish/Palestinian conflict. See Segalovitz, "Queering Identity Politics in Shimon Adaf's Aviva-No"; Adaf, *Aviva-No*, 1–9.

by way of verse but by pain.”[331] Outwardly, this ethos aligns *Aviva-No* precisely with what Adaf has criticized in contemporary Hebrew lyric poetry—a poetry in which “the experimental aspects are somewhat expelled in favor of an experiential layer in which people simply express that which is on their heart. Poetry [that] returned almost completely to its primordial holistic state as a mere outburst of emotion, self-enunciation, and experience.”[332] Indeed, as Shabat-Nadir writes, even the book's title can be read as an outburst of emotion, which is the cry of the bereaved: “Aviva, please, No.”[333]

However, as Eli Hirsh remarks, the book's poems are anything but straightforward. While Adaf’s pain does lend the poems much power, it also motivates him to write some of his most sophisticated and complex work.[334] Most interesting for the aims of my project is the intricate, and as I will show, piyyutic intertextuality that Adaf weaves throughout the poems. In this manner, even the supposedly naked emotive call “Aviva-No” evokes one of the works to which *Aviva-No* has been most often compared (including by Adaf himself). This is Rainer Maria Rilke’s 1923 *Duino Elegies*, which famously opens with the question, “Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the Angelic Orders?.”[335] For comparison and elucidation, here is the full poem and the translation by Yael Segalovitz, who translated the entirety of *Aviva-No*.

Following the poem, I will highlight its overwhelmingly rich intertextual echo chamber and show how, just in this one poem, Adaf evokes three models of scriptural relation between language and death, negating their power to mediate the loss he is feeling. I will then discuss how we can think of this poem and the whole volume within this dissertation’s larger argument regarding piyyut and lyric, as well as within Adaf’s overall project of dismantling colloquial identity discourse and “unfreezing” lyric poetry.

א.
אֲנִי בְּמַצָּב אֵיךְ לְהַגְדִּירוֹ וְאֶקָּרֵאהוּ אֲבִיבָה-לֹא אֶקָּרֵאהוּ אֵינָחוֹת
וַאֲדַבְּרָה בּוֹ יְשִׁירוֹת לֹא עַל דֶּרֶךְ הַשִּׁירָה אֶלָּא לְפִי כְּאֵב
וְזֹאת הִיא תּוֹרָתוֹ אֵין לוֹ תּוֹרָה – מַלְאָכִים מְחַנְּקִים נְשִׁימָה וְחַיּוֹת
בּוֹעֲרוֹת עֵינַיִם, בָּאִינְטֶרְנֶט מִמַּעַל וּבַסְּפָרִים הַנֶּקֶבָרִים, אֵין
לוֹ תּוֹרָה, רַק הָרֵגַע בְּעַצְמוֹת הֶחָלָל הוּא נוֹקֵב כִּסְכָּה בַּזְּכוּכִית
וְהַלֵּב הֶחָדוּל וְקָרוּי הֶבֶל
מִשּׁוּם שְׁלוֹשׁ מֵאוֹת שִׁשִּׁים וַחֲמִשָּׁה מָנִים שֶׁל עָשָׁן שֶׁבּוֹ
כְּנֶגֶד שְׁלוֹשׁ מֵאוֹת שִׁשִּׁים וַחֲמִשָּׁה מְנָיָן יְמוֹת.[336]

[331] Adaf, *Aviva-No*, 12.
[332] Yotam, “ריאיון: לא תמיד הקוראים שלי יקבלו מה שהם רוצים [Interview with Shimon Adaf: My Readers can’t Always Get what They Want].”
[333] Hadas Shabat-Nadir, “הכוח להעניק שם- מאמר על הספר אביבה לא (שמעון אדף) הדס שבת-נדיר [The Power to Give a Name],” In the direction of the spirit, NA, https://www.bkiovnhroh1.com/page197.asp.
[334] Eli Hirsch, “שמעון אדף, אביבה לא [Shimon Adaf, Aviva-No],” *Yedi’ot Aharonot*, November 20, 2009.
[335] Rainer Maria Rilke, “Duino Elegies [1923],” trans. A.S. Kline, 2004, https://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/German/Rilke.php.
[336] Adaf, *אביבה-לא [Aviva-No]*, 7.

1.
I'm in a state of how does it go and I shall call it Aviva-no I shall call it sisterless
and I shall speak of it with straightforwardness not by way of verse but by pain
and thus is its Law it has no Law—stifling-breath angels and blazing-eyed
beasts, in the internet above and the buried books below, it has no
Law, it is only the moment piercing space like a pin into glass
And the heart is arrested and named mere breath
For the three hundred and sixty-five minas of smoke within it
Against the count of three hundred and sixty-five days of. [337]

This poem opens with a generalized description of Adaf's new state, which he articulates using two neologisms: first, the titular state of "Aviva-no," describing the totality of his new existence as defined by the absence of his sister, Aviva; and second, the portmanteau "אֵינָחוֹת" (*'eynaḥot*), blending the words for "there is not" (*אין, 'eyn*) and "sister" (*אחות, 'aḥot*). These descriptions of Aviva's absence are tied together in the poem's first line by rhyme and rhythm. The line breaks down to fourteen iambic feet, with the second and fourth feet missing a syllable exactly in the spaces following each of the first two words, thus creating a stuttering effect. These holes in the prosodic net formalize the poem's content in rhythm, as the speaker cannot find words to describe his new state at first, and when he does find them, they pour out of him in an unceasing stream. [338]

The words "להגדירו" (*le-hagdiro*, "to define it"), "ואקראהו" (*ve-ekra'ehu* "and I call it"), "לא" (*lo*, "no"), and "אקראהו" (*ekra'ehu,*" I call it") lead the reader through the reading, repeating the open syllables "U" and "O" at the sixth, ninth, eleventh, and thirteenth feet. This repetition, captured by Segalovitz in her translation with the words "so" and "no," calls to mind the vocative "O," famous for its role in lyric poetry. However, no being is invoked in this poem, and Aviva is not even present as an apostrophe, an address to someone who cannot answer. Instead of calling Aviva directly, the "O" assonance crashes at the end of the line with the closed syllable "*ot*" which concludes the new combined word for sisterless, "*'eynaḥot*."

The third line continues to articulate this new state of being using a biblical idiom, "זאת תורתו היא," which Segalovitz translates as "thus is its Law," and which could also be translated as "this is the Torah relevant to it." This idiom appears in biblical and rabbinical literature as a section title to mark the beginning of a new set of laws or ritual instructions. This term appears often in the context of sacrificial offerings in the Temple and the laws of *tum'ah* and *taharah*—the states of being ritually pure and impure.

Most relevant to our discussion are verses 14-22 of *Bamidbar* (Numbers) chapter 19, which open with the statement, "This is the Law [Torah] regarding a person who dies in a tent" and continue to discuss the state of ritual impurity that a person or an object assumes by being in a tent under which someone passes away, or by touching a dead body. I suggest reading this passage specifically as it enriches our understanding of line five of the poem. In this line, Adaf continues

[337] Adaf, *Aviva-No*, 12.
[338] This line schematized:

\ –◡\ – ◡\–◡\ – ◡\ – ◡\ – ◡\–◡\ –◡\ –◡\ –◡\ –◡\ –(◡)\ –◡\–(◡)\ –◡
אֲנִי\ ()בְּ\מַצָּב\ ()אֵי\דְּ\לְהַגְ\דִּירוֹ\ וְאֶקְ\רָאֶ\הוּ אֶ\בִיבָה\-לֹא אֶקְ\רָאֶ\הוּ אֵי\נָחוֹת\

to articulate the lawlessness of being sisterless, saying that this state "has no / Law, it is only the moment piercing the bones of the space like a pin into glass." The weird term "bones of space" (*`atzmot heḥalal*) uses two elements mentioned in *Bamidbar* 19:17 to denote remains of the dead, "*`etzem,*" bones, and "*ḥalal*," a term that literally means "void" or "space." In modern use, such as in Adaf's poem, it means "outer space." By extension of its literal meaning, it can also denote a "slain person," which is the explicit meaning of the noun in the biblical verse. The rabbis, however, in *m. Nazir 53b* argue that this word also means any piece of flesh curved of a living body, i.e., anything cut out in a manner that leaves a void in its wake.

Adaf plays on this polysemy through the intertextual echo chamber, making the phrase "*`atzmot heḥalal*" refer to both the remains of the dead that imbue impurity and "the bones of the space," that is, the core of spatial existence. By collapsing both of those options, Adaf manifests again the totality of his loss. The entire universe has become akin to the bodily remains of Aviva, and there is no avoiding their proximity and the effect they imbue. In this manner, Adaf employs the idiom "thus is its Law" to destabilize any notions that being in proximity to the passing of a loved one is something that can have rules and regulations—not only due to the chaos of that state, but also as that state is projected onto the entire universe, and the laws that only deal with a chance encounter with a dead body cannot protect one whose whole universe has become that one dead loved one.

This poem has two additional core allusions, offering other scriptural modalities of relating to the dead. In lines 3-4, to describe the new state to which no Torah is relevant, Adaf tells us of "stifling-breath angels and blazing-eyed beasts" that reside in "the internet above and the buried books below." These angels once again suggest Rilke's elegies, but more prominently, this description alludes to the tropes of the *Hekhalot and Merkabah* mystic Jewish literature of the Hellenistic and late antiquity periods. This type of literature deals with the ascension of the mystic practitioner closer and closer to God and His seat of power, be that His throne at the center of a castle (*היכל, hekhal*) or on the chariot (*מרכבה*, *merkabah)* by which He travels. Crucially, this literature is tied with the question of creation (מעשה בראשית). As the world was created through language, a sage who studied and ascended enough can also affect creation through linguistic production, written and spoken.[339]

Lines 3 and 4 of our poem allude to one of the biblical precursors of *Merkabah* literature, the vision of Ezekiel detailed in the first chapter of his biblical book. In this chapter, Ezekiel sees God in a chariot of fire and storm carried by beasts and *ofanim* ("wheels within wheels"). In the Babylonian Talmud, *m. Hagigah 12b*, we see a codification of that encounter as a type of mystical practice, learning that in one of the firmaments through which one can ascend, we find "the *ofanim*,

[339] Adaf continuously engages with the question of creation and language, especially in his *Blade of Light* duology: *The Buried Heart* (2006) and *Tongue Untangled* (2021), in which we meet sorcerers, evil and good, who can speak the language of creation or its proximity. Shimon Adaf, *הלב הקבור [The Buried Heart]* (Israel: Achuzat Bayit, 2006); Shimon Adaf, *הלשון נושלה [Tongue Untangled]* (Israel: Pardes Publishing, 2021).

the *seraphim*, the holy divine beasts, and the ministering angels, and the Throne of Glory [where] The King God, the living, lofty, exalted One dwells above them."[340]

Here, the state of sisterlessness is likened to a mystical practice, or rather, it stands in contradiction to it. The mystical practice seeks to understand the logic (the Torah) of creation and higher planes in a manner that allows human speech to affect reality. Adaf's poetry of being sisterless, which he can only speak "straightforwardly" and "by way of pain," also explores the higher planes. Within the poem, this pain allows Adaf to know something about those angels and beasts that is accessible to the mystic practitioner. However, instead of gaining new linguistic power over reality, Adaf's grief takes over the higher planes and mutes them, causing the angels to silently hold their breath.

This exploration of the relationship between Aviva's absence and God's presence stretches throughout the volume, continuously using the register and vocabulary of the *Hekhalot and Merkabah* literature. This is most succinctly phrased in the last stanza of the penultimate poem in the book, in which Adaf mentions the Jewish date of Aviva's passing and the room in which she died:

מִיּוֹם שֶׁחָדְלָה הַבְּרִיאָה, דִּבְּרוּ הַמֵּתִים
בְּעִבְרִית:
יוֹד חֵית בְּכִסְלֵו הַתַּשְׁסַח
סַנְטִים מַחֲרִיד
אֶת בֵּית הַכִּסֵּא
מִכִּסֵּא הַכָּבוֹד.

Ever since creation ceased, the dead have spoken
In Hebrew:
on 18 Kislev 5768
only inches came between
the toilet seat
and the Throne of God.[341]

The notion that only a few inches separated the toilet seat, near which Aviva passed, and God's seat, on which He resides, encapsulates the tension between absence and presence and the ability, or lack thereof, of human language to change such a reality as the passing of a loved one. Moreover, there is a great degree of irreverence in mentioning the two seats together. The verb used in the original to describe the distance between the two chairs, "*maḥrid*" (*מחריד*), which in modern Hebrew means "horrendous," describes the horrifying moment of thinking of the two places simultaneously and allows Adaf to express the epitome of his despair that something so lowly as a toilet can become as important as the seat of God. The verb "*maḥrid*" also carries with it a crucial intertextual use. Throughout the Tanakh, it is used as a nominalized verb by God to promise Israel that if they keep his laws, he promises that they can remain in their land, with no

[340] The Hebrew original: שָׁם אוֹפַנִּים וּשְׂרָפִים וְחַיּוֹת הַקֹּדֶשׁ, וּמַלְאֲכֵי הַשָּׁרֵת, וְכִסֵּא הַכָּבוֹד, מֶלֶךְ אֵל חַי רָם וְנִשָּׂא שׁוֹכֵן עֲלֵיהֶם.
[341] Adaf, *Aviva-No*, 130. Some changes to the translation.

"*maḥrid*" to terrorize them and drive them away.[342] In this manner, this word should be read spatially and in terms of power. That is, the death of Aviva came close, to the smallest measure, to terrorize the Throne of God and break the rules of creation.

In this sense, the poetry Adaf writes, through its intertextuality, approaches mysticism. However, it cannot achieve the goal it seems to aspire to, and instead, Adaf and the readers are only left with a profound awareness of the boundaries between human experience and divine presence, highlighting the poignant reality that, despite the desire for transcendence, the pain of absence remains inexorably grounded in the mundane world. This concluding stanza of the poem seems to reiterate the biblical poetry of Psalm 115:

בְּרוּכִים אַתֶּם לַיהוָה עֹשֵׂה שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ׃
הַשָּׁמַיִם שָׁמַיִם לַיהוָה וְהָאָרֶץ נָתַן לִבְנֵי־אָדָם׃
לֹא הַמֵּתִים יְהַלְלוּ־יָהּ וְלֹא כָּל־יֹרְדֵי דוּמָה׃
וַאֲנַחְנוּ נְבָרֵךְ יָהּ מֵעַתָּה וְעַד־עוֹלָם הַלְלוּ־יָהּ׃

Blessed are you by the Lord, maker of heaven and earth.
The heavens are heavens for the Lord, and the earth He has given to humankind.
The dead do not praise the Lord nor all who go down into silence.
But we will bless Yah now and forevermore, hallelujah[343]

Like in the Psalm, and unlike the mystical literature, the boundary between the heaven, i.e., between the "internet above and the buried books below," is reinserted, and the dead cannot do anything about it nor say anything about God and his nature. However, in Adaf's poem, they do not go down silently but rather keep asserting the truth of Aviva's death: its date and place and how closely it came, mere inches, from affecting God's own chambers. The modern poem concludes with a bitter aftertaste, accentuated by the juxtaposition to the Psalm. In the biblical text, the encounter with death leads the speakers to extol and bless God in a celebration of the fact they are alive. But the speaker of the modern poem, in his anguish, cannot do anything but contemplate his dead sister.

With the failure of the mystical practice, the text turns to its final allusion that cites parts of *Pitum ha-ktoret* in the poem's last three lines: "And the heart is arrested and named mere breath / For the three hundred and sixty-five minas of smoke within it / Against the count of three hundred and sixty-five days of."[344]

This allusion has a meta-poetic motivation, as *Pitum ha-ktoret* is traditionally recited during Jewish mourning rituals. As Segalovitz writes, one way to understand Adaf's turn to *Pitum ha-ktoret* is that its ritualistic reading "helps the mourner cope with a time out of joint and engage in the labor of sewing the 365 days of the year back together, even if this labor is doomed to fail."[345]

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[342] This word also appears often in the negative, where God promises the Israelites that soon a "*maḥrid*" shall come to uproot them.
[343] Based on Robert Alter's translation of the Psalm, see Alter, *The Hebrew Bible*, 2018.
[344] Adaf, *Aviva-No*, 12.
[345] Lori, "צומת אדף [Adaf Crossing]," 5.

In addition to this function, I believe the prayer's role can be extended to modeling the work of language in the wake of destruction, specifically in showing how refusing abstraction and writing in a manner truly straightforward (and what is more straightforward than what seems mostly like a recipe?) is simultaneously the most concrete and the most obscure manner of sublimating a lost person into language. In a way, *Pitum ha-ktoret* can be read as a codification of Adaf's poetic creed throughout the volume, as a promise to remember Aviva as she was, by reciting her attributes and history. But, at the same time, Adaf is highly aware of the paradoxical nature of this task.

In line 6, he describes "the heart," not specifying if it is his own or his sister's, as having become "arrested" and named "*hevel.*" Segalovitz translates this last word (and follows Robert Alter's translation of the Bible) as "mere breath." This term "*hevel*" evokes the first line of Qohelet (Ecclesiastes), where the entirety of the world and human action is described as the "merest of breath." Adaf explains that this arrested heart is a mere breath due to the smoke within, which is quantified as the *ketoret*, the incense of the Temple in units of "minas." However, the number presented in the poem is only partial. As we learn from the prayer, the ketoret is blended to contain 368 "minas:" 365 for each day of the year, with an additional three for the rituals of Yom Kippur. Adaf's poem doesn't count those additional minas. Furthermore, Adaf citation is explicitly incomplete, concluding in the preposition "days of" to which no object exists.

Again, Adaf's allusion is defined by what is not included in it, by its shadow text. According to the prayer, the 365 minas of the ketoret are counted against the number of "days of the sun", i.e., one year. However, Adaf's rendition omits the sun and disrupts that circular time. All we have left is the number without assurance about its meaning. There are only days, but there is no concept of their accumulation.

Furthermore, as noted, Adaf only evokes the minas of everyday worship, omitting those prepared specially for the rituals of Yom Kippur. This omission is intriguing when considered alongside Adaf's reflections on this day. In the interview with Helit Yeshurun, Adaf discusses the poet Avot Yeshurun (the interviewer's father). Adaf pays special attention to how Avot Yeshurun, whose family of origin was murdered during the Nazi genocide, has shaped his work of mourning:

> I've been returning to the poetry of Avot for years now […] I am overtaken by his ability to bypass the mourning; to create an impossible presence of memory […] he ventriloquizes his lost objects by interweaving them with Yum Kippur, with the prayers of that day and its duality of meaning as a day for both atonement and justice. But for Avot, both atonement and justice are suspended, and therefore the day carries on, conquering the rest of the year. Thus, *Tish`a Be'av*, [the day on which the Temple was destroyed], with all its meanings of the destruction of the House and lament, is completely omitted. Yom Kippur is the day in which he is born again and again to a sealed fate that is only opened to be sealed again by his, Avot's, own hands.[346]

Adaf argues here that in Avot Yeshurun's poetry, through which Yeshurun does his work of mourning, Yom Kippur takes over the entirety of the year, in a manner that leads Yeshurun to omit Tish`a Be'av from his poetry completely. Along the way, we see that for Adaf, Yom Kippur is

[346] Yeshurun, "The Infinite Faces of Absence: Shimon Adaf," 513.

defined by the attributions of atonement and justice, while Tish`a Be'av by lament and "*ḥurban ha-ba'it*"—the destruction of the "*ba'it*." This term can be read in several ways, as "*ba'it*" can mean both house and home, and when definite (as in "*ha-ba'it*") it is also shorthand for a family home, homeland and the Temple. This term also carries a poetic meaning, as "*ba'it*" is also the term for one stanza of a poem. In this manner, Tish`a Be'av is a day defined by the destruction of home- religious, familial, personal, and prosodic.

Adaf reveals in the interview something essential regarding his own mourning project, in which Yom Kippur is omitted, and instead, Tish`a Be'av, as a semiotic field of the "destruction of the *ba'it* and lament," takes over all other days. *Pitum ha-ktoret* becomes the main text through which Adaf alludes to the destruction of the Temple and brings into his poems the melancholic dynamic endemic to the liturgical texts of Tish`a Be'av.

This mode of memorialization is both similar to and different from the other pre-modern example Adaf discussed in the interview. As cited above, Adaf likened his project to that by Ovid who wrote at the end of the *Metamorphoses*: "I built a building, and as long as the Roman language exists – so will my poetry."[347] This Roman glory, however, is tempered by Adaf's focus on *Pitum ha-ktoret* and Tish`a Be'av. Adaf indeed "built a building" that will memorialize Aviva in perpetuity, or so long as the Hebrew language exists, but that building is shaped in the mold of the Temple's ruins, already destroyed as it is being built.

In this project, Adaf's relation to Hebrew is even less forgiving than in previous ones, and it seems that Adaf is unsure throughout the volume if Hebrew would be able to carry the memory and give solace in the melancholic ways that it did after past lossesAdaf reported on that feeling himself:

> During those months [of mourning], I thought that if I opened my mouth, only profanities or screams would come out. Writing poetry was a way to learn to speak again. […] The feeling of disintegration and the distrust in language were my starting point, not the result. I worked against them, to eliminate them, but their traces had to remain because they were also the dead end I reached.[348]

Language leads Adaf to this "dead end" due to its descriptive failure, forcing him to describe a world irrevocably changed by Aviva's passing. This is how Aviva's death becomes the continuation of the two prior moments of loss that I discussed in the second section of this chapter. However, Aviva's death also supersedes those previous moments. The first two losses provided a paradoxical space where the absence became a source of creative expression and new linguistic forms. By contrast, and despite Kristeva's articulation of melancholy, Aviva's death represents an existential void that resists such transformation. The language that once served as a conduit for exploring and overcoming absence now becomes inadequate, unable to encapsulate the profundity of this ultimate grief. The suddenness and arbitrariness of her death, and the way her absence only

[347] Yeshurun, 514.

[348] Vered Lee, "הרגע החי של השיר | חמש שאלות לשמעון אדף [Five Questions for Shimon Adaf]," *Haaretz*, November 18, 2009.

worsens Adaf's life, and does not allow him to rely on the same melancholic sublimation he had used in the past. The sublimation of the lost object through previous poetic codes fails.

However, a different poetic code does offer itself, that of piyyut. In the first poem of the volume that I analyzed, Adaf, as part of his self-reintroduction into poetic language, turns to three scriptural models of dealing with death and loss: the priestly code of corpse impurity, *Merkavah* literature and the language of creation, and the liturgical melancholic sublimation of sacrifice into prayer. The first model is negated outright, the second is silenced, and only the third is privileged at its utmost paradoxicality. Just as *Pitum ha-ktoret* leads us toward the lost object and its sublimation, so does Adaf's *Aviva-No* remain in the paradoxical space of Aviva's present absence.

Within the framework of my analysis of piyyut, I want to turn our attention not to the specific relations that Adaf sets up between his personal experience and those in the text but to the form by which he connects his current work to previous Jewish scriptures. Specifically, he places the old and new texts in relations that offer indeterminate access from one another. The new poem draws on the scriptures it quotes and refocuses its meaning in relation to current events in Adaf's life and the collective world of Hebrew speakers. However, these allusions do not use those citations in a closed manner, which makes the parts irrelevant to Adaf's life excessive to the processes of reading and interpretation. The entire cosmology of scripture is invited into the poem for our contemplation. This is, in fact, the precondition of Adaf's projection of the horrid mundanity of his sister's death onto the sacred and mystical cosmologies offered by the texts he cites. This projection does not sanctify his sister's passing nor secularize the biblical and rabbinic writing but rather opens a dialogue that seeks no resolution.

Whether or not the cosmologies of Jewish scriptures survive the test is an interesting question worthy of longer exploration. For the conclusion of my discussion, I will, however, focus on the medium of that test, not on its result. As cited above, Adaf portrays in his poems the death of Aviva as a moment of ultimate change in the world, a change to which his previous poetic language cannot attest. That poetic language was mediated by questions of freedom and constraints, of the sublimation of the loss into new modes of representation. However, Aviva's death cannot fit into that shape of melancholia. At that junction, however, Adaf is able, or is mandated by the immediacy of his perception of death, to turn away from modern secular poetic codes. Instead, he finds himself learning how to speak his work of mourning through the poetic codes relating to Jewish mysticism and the destruction of the Temple. This turn toward the "other," specifically other texts and the Other who is God, have a paradoxical result of returning Adaf's selfhood to himself. Turning to texts of the collective and rearranging them to externalize his loss in collective language and corpora frees him to relearn how to speak in poetic language. This language has been depersonalized through its scriptural intertextuality and rearranged to become re-personalized. While obviously it cannot perform the miracle of resurrecting Aviva, it can allow Adaf to find a context in which he can speak his pain. Only by speaking in the language that touches upon the firmaments of heaven and the stones of the ruined Temple, a language that uses historical registers that carry with them the entire history of the Hebrew language, a language that takes for its poetic building blocks idioms and verses from other text—that is, only by writing with

piyyutic convention—can Adaf find a linguistic canvas on which he can speak his pain "straightforwardly."

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As I suggested in my analysis of "This Zephaniah, why Is He Here" and "Poem 1," Adaf's 2009 poetry is much more piyyutic, in the sense I ascribe to the word, than the poetry of his first two volumes. This is not only to point out its rich intertextuality (a feature of Adaf's poetry throughout his career) but also to note how that intertextuality offers avenues leading away from any individualistic notion of self-consciousness. Adaf does not call on his intertexts to use them to only add volume and meaning to his own, but as escape vectors through which the reader can move freely to build a robust network of connections, contradictions, and availability. However, at the same time, in *Aviva-No*, that network is aligned with Adaf's biographical self. This is lyric poetry in the sense that Adaf has been writing against. Adaf presents here "an 'I' that yearns to say 'I'" in a way that is immediately graspable through biographic reading.

However, this is not to say that *Aviva-No* surrenders easily to the colloquial identity discourse Adaf writes against. As Segalovitz shows amazingly well, throughout the volume, Adaf queerizes Israeli identity discourse across axes of gender and ethnicity, as the poems mix and cut past the boundaries between man/women and masculinity/femininity as well as those between being Jewish and Arab.[349]

Furthermore, Adaf's piyyutic intertextuality also works with his goals of presenting Mizrahiness, or Moroccanness, as a primordial positionality, marked in form and not in content. This is how Haviva Pedaya writes about *Aviva-No* and the question of Mizrahi positionality:

> In Israeli culture, Mizrahi children can often find themselves striving to fully understand a cultural object that perhaps captivates them with its overwhelming beauty yet also repels them because they lack the tools to access it. Why shouldn't the center stand similarly in relation to the periphery—at least to that which is repelled by its indisputable beauty—and strive to enter into the obscure? And what is the peripheral here? It is that language of depths that has fallen beneath the surface of a flat Hebrew. [...] The identity journey of Israeli poetry as a whole is gradually opening up in its attentiveness to what comes from the East. What kind of East is this? It is one laden with religious education whose cargo is the sacred language.[350]

Pedaya argues that *Aviva-No* reverses the ordinary relation of center and periphery, placing an object of "overwhelming beauty" in Israeli Hebrew culture that is immediately more accessible to people of Mizrahi upbringing than to those without it. In that sense, *Aviva-No* also subverts the position into which early reception tried to pigeonhole Adaf. Adaf didn't incorporate "*couscous* and *ḥarisa*" into his poetry, the folkloric elements with which many Ashkenazi Jews mark Mizrahi

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[349] Segalovitz, "Queering Identity Politics in Shimon Adaf's Aviva-No."

[350] Haviva Pedaya, "'אביבה-לא' מאת שמעון אדף לא על דרך השירה אלא לפי כאב [Aviva-No by Shimon Adaf-Not by the Way of Verse but by Pain]," *Haaretz*, March 24, 2010.

difference. Instead, he added the "burden of religious education" and the "cargo of sacred language." Rather than consumable food, he infused his work with rich intertextual piyyutic writing conventions.

Returning to Adaf's stated goals in the introduction to this chapter, it turns out that even in this oppositional reversal, Adaf's Mizrahiness is not fully comprehended through its alterity. Instead, as evidenced by Pedaya's review, his Mizrahi identity is celebrated as a synecdoche of a larger "Mizrahi experience." Pedaya's image of Mizrahi culture, which Ashkenazi readers need to strive to enter, reflects exactly the type of reversal that Adaf identifies as the mark of colloquial identity politics, where the prisoners of the political order can only dream of replacing their place in the cell with the wardens.

It is interesting to look at another book Adaf published almost simultaneously, the novel *Frost*. This novel explores extremely similar themes and intertexts as *Aviva-No*. However, by relying on the generic conventions of dystopian literature, sci-fi, and detective novels, Adaf is able to shake off biographical lyric conventions, and offer a shape of personhood that is more aligned with the goals he states in his non-fiction writing.

3.2 – Frost*: Intertextuality vs. Biography*

Frost (כפור, *Nuntia*, 2010) is the first installment in the *Rose of Judah* trilogy, which continues with the novels *Mox Nox* (מוקס נוקס, 2011) and *Undercities* (ערים של מטה, 2012).[351] The three books are connected through a speculative narrative of parallel universes whose full extent will be explored in future work. This novel is narratologically intricate, as it consists of framing and core narratives set in an ambiguous relation that can be understood in several different ways. The frame narrative is set in 20th-century Tel Aviv, where the fictional contemporary poet Doron Aflalo—who closely resembles the author, Shimon Adaf—is suffering a mental breakdown during which he writes an impossible script for a movie that will never be made. This script is the novel *Frost*, including the first-person detailing of the framing device we read. In this manner, meta-poetically, the novel as a whole can be read as if it were truly written by Aflalo within our world.

As becomes clearer in the last installment of the trilogy, the world described by Aflalo in the core narrative is a parallel universe to that of Aflalo (which may be our own or a parallel to it). As suggested by the follow-up book, *Undercities*, Aflalo is the "name keeper" of this novel's universe. Name keepers are special individuals who live in one universe while holding the name that can open the seal to another. While in the text, Aflalo perceives his writing of the script in psychopathological terms; readers of the entire trilogy can understand it as a prophetic vision—a supernatural glimpse from one reality to another through the secret passageways of the "rose of Judah" that is both a mystical seed sown in Aflalo's soul and the map of the multiverse.

As we progress in the novel, we learn of the reason for Aflalo's deteriorating mental state: the death of his older sister. Here we see how Adaf plays on readerly expectations, especially biographical reading assumptions, as he is baiting the readers to assume that Aflalo's grief that led

[351] Shimon Adaf, מוקס נוקס *[Mox Nox]* (Israel: Kinneret, Zmora-Bitan, Dvir, 2011); Adaf, ערים של מטה *[Undercities]*.

him to author the novel *Frost* is a fictionalization of Adaf's own grief that led to the writing of *Aviva-No*. However, several differences exist between the deaths of (real) Aviva and (fictional) Miriam Aflalo. Most notably, while Aviva passed away due to a medical condition when both she and her brother were mature adults, Miriam committed suicide at the age of seventeen after a turbulent adolescence. While Adaf writes *Aviva-No* during the months of mourning, Doron Aflalo carries his mourning with him for four years, at which point he attempts suicide himself. After his parents prevent the attempt, Aflalo writes the text we read as the novel *Frost* while recovering in his parents' house.

The play on similarities becomes even more potent as the core narrative expands to include lyric poetry supposedly written by Doron Aflalo about the death of his sister Miriam. These poems mirror those of *Aviva-No* as if through a mirror darkly, sharing themes and images, though with an even sharper edge. Here, for example, is the first poem we read in *Frost,* along with my translation:[352]

* *

כְּשֶׁהָיְתָה אֲחוֹתִי בַּת שְׁבַע עֶשְׂרֵה
הֻמְצָא הַמָּוֶת.
קֹדֶם הָיוּ בָּעוֹלָם חֲלוּפִים מְתוּקִים.
בְּמָקוֹם שֶׁזְּנְקָה אִשָּׁה מֵרֹאשׁ גַּג פָּרְחָה צִפּוֹר
בְּמָקוֹם שֶׁכָּמְשָׁה צִפּוֹר גָּאָה וֶרֶד
בַּמָּקוֹם שֶׁפְּרְפֵּר וָרַד פַּעַם דָּג
בְּמָקוֹם שֶׁשָּׁבַק דָּג אָחֲזָה אִשָּׁה
בְּלוּחַ לִבָּהּ.

וְיָכֹלְנוּ לִשְׁהוֹת כָּךְ לָעַד
בְּחֻפַּת הַבְּשָׂרִים
הַצּוֹמְחִים זֶה מִזֶּה.

אֲבָל
אֲחוֹתִי לֹא רָצְתָה

מַשֶּׁהוּ הֵעִיר אַנְקוֹרִים מֵרִבְצָם
וְהֵם צָעֲקוּ לָהּ
הַרְאִי אֶת עֲנַן הָאָבָק
הַדְּחוּס לְךָ תַּחַת הָעוֹר.
הָיָה לָהֶם הַסּוֹד הֶחָשׁוּךְ
בְּמַקּוֹרָם.

וּבְסִדְקֵי הָאֲוִיר רָאֲתָה אֲחוֹתִי
בַּלָּהַת מְכוֹנָה
גַּלְגַּלֵּי שִׁנַּיִם נוֹקְשִׁים וְגוֹנְחִים
בְּבֶטֶן הָהָר נִכְרוֹ פֶּחָמִים

When my sister was seventeen
death was invented.
Before, the world only knew sweet transformations.
In the place where a woman leaped from a rooftop,
blossomed a bird
in the place where a bird withered, surged a rose
In the place where a rose fluttered throbbed a fish
In the place where a fish died a woman
clutched at her heart.

And we could have stayed like that forever
under the canopy of flesh
that grows from one to another.

But
my sister did not want

Something woke sparrows from their rest
and they shouted to her
show us the dust cloud
compressed beneath your skin.
They had the dark secret
in their beaks.

And in the cracks of the air, my sister saw
the terror of machinery
cogs clashing and groaning

[352] Adaf, כפור *[Kfor - Nuntia]*, 42–44.

coal was mined in the mountain's belly	לְהַסִּיק אֶת הַקַּיִץ
to fuel the summer	וַאֲחוֹתִי לֹא רָצְתָה עוֹד
and my sister did not want anymore	
	יָדָהּ לִטְּפָה אֶת מִצְחִי
Her hand caressed my forehead	הִיא אָמְרָה
as she said	זְכוּתוֹ שֶׁל מִי לְהַגִּיד,
Who has the right to say,	הַלָּשׁוֹן הִיא שֶׁלִּי,
the tongue, it is mine,	מַגַּע הַתַּעַר בַּוְּרִיד
the touch of the razor on the vein	אֲנִי יְצַרְתִּיו .
I created it.	אַף אָדָם לֹא יִטְעַן, כַּמּוּבָן.
No one will claim them, of course.	אַךְ זֶה לֹא יִמְנַע
But that will not prevent	בְּעַד אִישׁ
anyone	לִשְׁאֹל כִּרְצוֹנוֹ מִן הַשְּׁנַיִם.
from borrowing their share of the two.	

Like Adaf in the poem opening *Aviva-No*, the fictional poet Aflalo reshapes the entire universe after his sister's death. In the opening lines, Aflalo (that is Adaf, writing the poem as if by Aflalo) projects his introduction to death onto the universe, claiming that there was no death at all before Miriam's death. Instead, the world worked in a mythic framework of transformations, specifically one influenced by Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, a text cited later in *Frost*. The poem facilitates these changes by assigning polysemous verbs to the genesis of the new subjects. Thus, for example, the bird in line 4 comes into being in the verb "*parḥah*" (פרחה), which can mean both "fly" and "blossom." When the bird who flew becomes a rose, it does so as it "withers" (כמשה, *kamshah*), a word much more appropriate to a rose then to a bird. The predicates of these sentences, even while explicitly describing actions of raising and dying, already contain the new essence of the object they become after their transformation. This structure of chained transformation is a Leitmotif throughout the novel, specifically in the case of the dead sister Miriam, for whom there is also a *Doppelgänger* in the core narrative of the novel, Mirah. I return to the relation between the two later in this section.

Like the poems of *Aviva-No*, this poem also surrenders itself to biographical reading conventions, with the added caveat that the biography is fictional. This poem focuses on Miriam Aflalo's suicide, an act foreshadowed in the fourth line, where a woman jumps off a rooftop. It is also evident in the recurring phrase "my sister did not want." In Hebrew, "want" is a transitive verb that takes a direct object. In making "want" intransitive, Aflalo makes Miriam's lack of wanting a defining feature of her mental state, describing depression as an unfulfilled desire without an object. The last stanza touches on Miriam's method of self-harm, cutting her veins with a razor. In this stanza, the sister speaks directly to the speaker and the readers, coupling the question of self-injury and language as two heritages of humanity to which there is no single originator. As in the first poem of *Aviva-No*, poetry is defined here "by way of pain." However, this pain is not solely that of mourning but rather encompasses the pain of self-mutilation.

As we can see, Adaf connects Aviva and Miriam's deaths to different relationships with language at large and poetic language specifically. While the poems of *Aviva-No* attempt to

reconcile with arbitrariness as a core feature of death, the poems Adaf writes as Doron Aflalo reckon with death as a willful action, as a choice. This difference casts a heavy shadow over the entire book that eclipses the many similarities between the poems of Adaf as Adaf and those of Adaf as Aflalo. These similarities include the constant mention of the year's season (winter and early spring in *Aviva-No*, summer for the poems in *Frost*) and recurring images, such as the sparrows mentioned in this poem, which also appear in *Aviva-No* "Poem 4."

Most crucially, while Adaf's biographical loss is marked by him as sudden and arbitrary, akin to a force of nature or an act of God, Aflalo (that is, Adaf as Aflalo) marks Miriam's death as a product of personal freedom.[353] As I've argued above, it is the arbitrariness of Aviva's passing that pushes Adaf to write in piyyutic conventions of textuality—rich, indeterminate allusions that do not seek autonomy within language but rather aim to submerge the speaking self in collective language, blending personal and collective loss without subjugating one to the other.

However, Aflalo's poetry differs greatly from that included in *Aviva-No* in not turning to scripture or any other form of intertextuality, consisting solely of original personal language. This relation to language is signaled in the poem above, as Aflalo writes, as if in Miriam's voice (that is, as Adaf writes Aflalo's poetry in which Aflalo is writing as if Miriam is speaking). According to the poem, no one person "has the right to say / this tongue is mine." In Aflalo's poetry, language is an unmarked being from which anyone can "borrow" their share freely. But that freedom, in the poem, is equated with that of hurting oneself.

Both unmarked language and pain are free for Miriam. She borrows these entities for herself and, at least from Aflalo's perspective, does so with complete autonomy. However, that is not the case for Aflalo, who himself tried to commit suicide as a traumatic response to the suicide of his sister. His relationship with her, and that relationship's sharp end, mark that pain as something "created" not by Doron Aflalo but by Miriam. Moreover, as we learn from different moments in *Frost* and *Undercities*, Miriam's depression also had other origins outside her autonomous spirit. Those origins include the tense relationship she had with the parents of the family and the mystical legacy related to the "Rose of Judah" from which, as a woman, she was excluded. In that sense, Adaf clarifies that while we might want language and pain to be two realms in front of which we can stand as autonomous individuals, that perspective will always be partial. For Adaf, losing a loved one is a moment in which that notion of individuality is found wanting.

The "script" Aflalo is compelled to write is then the counter-weight to his poetry, as the core narrative of *Frost* is rich with allusions, symbols and other devices of intertextuality to a degree that can be dizzying. That hyper-intertextuality is manifested already in the world-building and is even more pronounced in the narrative. I will now present the novel's world, specifically the intricate future history that Adaf details sparingly throughout the book. I will illustrate the complex narrative by focusing on the two characters who serve as the novel's protagonists. I will conclude

[353] Adaf writes in Aflalo's voice, as he describes the months leading up to his own suicide attempt: "And I began to despise Tel-Aviv, I walked the streets and said to myself "this old lady, why is she alive while Miriam is not," even though I knew that Miriam made a choice, "and these poets, idling at the cafés, why shall they live and not Miriam, and these trees, shall they live? Shall these trees live […]" (281).

by attempting to decipher the symbolism of the novel's final scene, which closes the narrative in a causal ouroboros form, wherein the final event triggers the initiating event of the plot.

Following this discussion, I will argue that Adaf establishes a new form of lyric personhood in this novel—one that truly escapes biographical reading conventions while remaining committed to personal experience and rejecting colloquial identity discourse. Additionally, I will demonstrate how Adaf's configuration of piyyutic writing conventions facilitates this project and how this maneuver fits within the larger argument of this dissertation.

The core narrative of the novel, written or reported by Aflalo, is set in the 26th century in a futuristic city-state version of Tel Aviv. From Aflalo's narrations, we learn that in the centuries between the present and the 26th century, global warming has long since ruined Earth. Additionally, we find that the true cause of this climate change, in keeping with notions associated with Jewish mystical writings, is the proliferation of bad Hebrew poetry during the 20th- and 21st-century (which might include the poems of Aflalo himself). As one character explains in the novel:

> Bad poetry pollutes space and the soul. Only the rarified piyyut can purify it. Before the destruction of Tel-Aviv, the air grew hotter, and the humidity grew, burdened breath, and the years grew thin, and people's hearts grew gross and coarse, and no man understood that it comes from the multiplication of bad poets working at the time, that using the sacred language foolishly is more destructive than smoke and soot and construction dust and corruption and blood. (160)[354]

In the futuristic theocracy of the city-state Tel-Aviv, only licensed paytanim are allowed to create poetry. "Wild" poets, who write in lyric forms, are hunted down by the police and punished for their potential harm.

This unintentional destruction of the Earth extends far beyond climate change. Hebrew, the Holy Tongue revived during the 20th century for mundane and governmental use and eventually intertwined with Zionist nationalist goals, leads to the distortion of the human form. This phenomenon, perceived by the non-Jewish world within the novel as rampant genetic mutation, transforms people into creatures resembling fantastic beasts, specifically *seraphim*—one of the orders of angels often described in the *Hekhalot and Merkabah* literature of Jewish mysticism. The people affected grow fangs and wings, and although they can communicate with humans, they lose their ability for human speech. I return to the symbolism of this transformation below. Most of the world dealt with those mutations by implementing post-human technologies, from gene splicing to cybernetic augmentation. But the Jewish community of the dark ages between our present and that of the novel chooses differently. Here is the description of that process:

> The camera hovers like a hummingbird outside Maimonides's house in Fes, [Morocco,] then charges the windows and invades its inside. Two people in elegant suits are sitting on each end of a large table made from bare wood, thick with fibers: one prohibits, the other permits—a woman who came to need a liver transplant that was grown in the insides of a pig. Rabbi Michael ben Akhnai says it is impure, and rabbi Hananya ben `Akshia argues

[354] Going forward I will mark citations of the novel in-text. All marking refer to Adaf, כפור *[Kfor - Nuntia]*.

> it's pure. A large audience is gathered in the hallway, on the stairways, on the upper floors, fingers grasping the ornate grilles, white-knuckled, it is suffocating, and they are debating—babies that are born with soft bones, ben `Akshia permits and ben Akhnai prohibits, this says it is *pikuach nefesh*, a matter of saving lives, and that one says it interferes with the order of creation; this one argues "one who saves a soul," and the other argues "an abominable *piggul* of the gentile." Eventually, rabbi ben Akhnai stands up and calls: "If halakha follows me, let the carob tree prove so." A rustle grows in the floors, a substance moves in them, and from the cracks, a twig grows, and twists and branches shoot out, and leaves and an ammoniac smell rises in the air, and the trunk thickens, and the green canopy widens, and the black sheaths of the fruits are already dangling. (162)

This speculative rabbinical debate moves between modern literary and Talmudic registers. In content and form, it calls to mind two crucial junctions in rabbinical history. The first Talmudic story Adaf alludes to in this segment is the famous disagreement between rabbi Shamai and Hillel that took place on "the upper floor of Ḥananya ben Ḥizkiya ben Garon's house." Told in the first chapter of M. Shabbat, this is a fierce debate in which one rabbi argues the purity of several practices against another that prohibits them. As in our novel, the stringent rabbi, Rabbi Shamai, wins the debate in the Talmud. He does so by taking steps to ensure his disciples are the majority on the day of the discussion and, according to the telling in the Palestinian Talmud, by killing some of the rabbis not following his teaching.

The second story, which is even more relevant, is "The Oven of Akhnai" (*m. Bava Metziah* 59:). Here, we find rabbi Eliezer ben Horcanus in a minority position, arguing the purity of an oven all other rabbis argue to be impure. Rabbi Eliezer performs a series of miracles to prove his opinion is right. For the first of them, he calls, "If halakhah follows my opinion, let the carob tree prove it." In the Talmud, a carob tree moves from its place. However, the other rabbis refuse to accept this proof, based on the notion that the Torah "is not in heaven," therefore, all decisions must follow the human ruling of the rabbis, regardless of any miracles.

In his non-fiction book *Art and War*, Shimon Adaf comments on this story, saying: "This story is usually read as a parable about asserting the authority of the Sages over human affairs by forbidding divine intervention."[355] Adaf reads it differently: "What Rabbi Eliezer did was open the possibility of Judaism interfering with the world." For Adaf, this is the thing the story rejects for Jewish rabbinical culture. The story is not only about divine and human authority, but it's about the question of power. Adaf goes on to suggest that the story, when read in full, asks and answers: "Why not improve the life of Jews under a foreign regime, vindicate them? Because it never ends there, there is always a price to pay. Rabbi Eliezer was excommunicated for not accepting the decision of the sages. If you go on and read the story, you find out that in his sorrow, he kills, just by praying and imploring heaven, his brother-in-law."[356] Adaf suggests that the story warns us that in exerting power, one can never restrict that force to the originally intended objects toward which

[355] Lavie Tidhar and Shimon Adaf, *Art and War* (Place of publication not identified: Repeater, 2016), 44.
[356] Tidhar and Adaf, 45–46.

that power was aimed. Turning to magical forces and affecting reality for a collective cannot but in the end do violence to members of that collective.

The Jewish culture of the city-state Tel Aviv in the 26th century is very different from that Adaf identifies with traditional Talmudic Jewishness, defined by its rejection of power and its awareness of the harm that the use of power leads to. As is made clear in the paragraph I translated above, the teaching of Rabbi Michael ben Akhnai, whose righteousness was proven by a miracle, adopts that power. The Jewish culture created at the wake of that debate assumes state power and builds an isolationist regime based on their stringent understanding of Jewish text.

That understanding, we learn, is limited as their access to Jewish textual history is impaired. Specifically, the Jews of future Tel Aviv only have access to texts "up to the end of the twelve centuries from the Mediterranean European countries and up to the end of the fourteenth century from areas in Asia and Africa" (122). This Jewish community has access only to texts up to and including the time of *Rishonim*, missing core textual corpora of Lurianic Kabalah, Enlightenment, Hasidism, Zionism, as well as modern period codex of mitzvot (decrees and Jewish laws), most notably *Shulhan Arukh*, which is the cornerstone of contemporary Jewish practice.

This futuristic Jewish culture is, therefore, both extremely different and uncannily similar to any that we know, a speculative offshoot, defined by both a closer relation to Jewish texts of premodernity and to futuristic technologies; extremely religious, but following halakhic notions that can only parallel, never connect with, those taken in our timeline. It is also specifically an offshoot of Jewish culture of the time before the rise of Ashkenazi Jewish communities in Eastern Europe. In this manner, it is not truly "Mizrahi," but it touches on Mizrahi's textual legacies, imagining a future history in which it is Ashkenazi culture that is marked by its erasure.

This uncanny Jewish culture offers a new avenue in our thinking of Mizrahi and Ashkenazi relations to modern Hebrew literature. As Haviva Pedaya writes, writing within the codes and intertextualities of piyyut, such as in *Aviva-No*, allows a reversal of the hegemonic allocation of center and periphery, as it facilitates the creation of objects of "overwhelming beauty" that are more accessible to people of Mizrahi upbringing than to "unmarked" Ashkenazi audiences. However, the precondition of that argument is the essentialization of all Mizrahi people. The resulting political imagination of encouraging that type of aesthetic is the reversal of power relations, the making of the powerful powerless, and not a liberatory abolition of those power relations altogether.

The speculative Jewishness that Adaf invents here offers a third, new way of approaching scripture in modern literature. It is still dense with intertextuality and offers easier access to a reader who comes with scriptural training, but at the same time, it places that intertextuality in a genre that is historically estranged from religious texts—pulp science-fiction literature. The coupling of the two creates a hybrid that, while still being "overwhelmingly beautiful" in its poetic language and piyyutic overlaying, has no predetermined audience that can be defined using everyday identity labels. This is not to say that this book does not privilege certain readers over others or that it negates all and any relation to the sociological power dynamics involved in Hebrew

literature. However, one will be hard-pressed to define what is the center of that dynamic and what is the periphery. In this manner, the novel only offers different access points for different readers.

Having gone through the framing narrative and the world-building, let us progress towards the novel's plot. The core narrative starts with the unsolved murder of one rogue poet, Hoshea ben Zakai, who, in physical appearance and address of residence, is a doppelganger of the novel's narrator, Doron Aflalo (who, as noted, is himself a doppelganger of Shimon Adaf). This murder intersects with another affliction that is affecting the city: a new wave of transformations that turns the city children into *seraphim*. As the novel begins, the children are being treated with the Temple incense, the *ketoret* of *Pitum ha-ktoret* prayer, used medicinally to halt the children's metamorphosis. However, at the novel's beginning, we learn of the fatal flaw of this design. In reconstructing the list of ingredients used to prepare the *ketoret*, the Jews of the future misunderstood, and produced a list that only has ten components, not the eleven mentioned in the prayer. Specifically, they are missing the myrrh (33). While an informed reader can catch that lacuna, the characters have no way of learning about it. Furthermore, as mentioned, the *Pitum ha-ktoret* prayer explicitly states that "if one omitted any of its spices he is liable to the death penalty." Therefore, unbeknown to them, the entire Jewish society is liable to death due to their misinformed practice. These two mysteries of the murdered wild poet and the transforming children affect the lives of the novel's two protagonists: Yehezkel ben Grim and Mirah eshet Yossi. I will present their narratives in full before moving on with my discussion.

Yehezkel ben Grim is the chief scientist working for the Tel-Aviv government. He is busy finding a cure for the transforming children until he is pulled away to work on the case of the dead wild poet. Throughout the novel, it becomes clear that he himself is changing into something akin to the *seraphim*, a fact he hides from his colleague but shares accidentally with Greda, a foreign woman who fell in love with him as he was visiting European universities for a way to fix the *ketoret*. Yehezkel himself does not remember their previous encounters, and while the text does not confirm it, the reader might suspect his government has tampered with his memory.

Yehezkel's name offers a good example of the rich, overburdening intertextuality found in almost every aspect of the novel. In his first name, Yehezkel takes after the prophet *Ezekial*, whose first encounter with God includes one of the earliest models for *Merkabah* literature and descriptions of *seraphim*. This name foreshadows Yehezkel's dealing with the continuing transformation of humans into *seraphim*-like beings. Like all other male residents of Tel Aviv, Yehezkel has a name testifying to his parental legacy. But his father's name, "Grim" is highly marked as non-Jewish. One explanation can be in pronunciation: this name can be read as the plural of גר, which means "foreigner" or "convert." This explanation will tell us that Yehezkel's parents were both converts, a fact that can explain much of the hostility turned against him throughout the novel as a future manifestation of the prejudice many children of converts have to face today. This name can also be a wink thrown in the direction of Sci-Fi fans. The name "ben Grim" is spelled in Hebrew exactly like the name Ben Grimm, who, as "The Thing," is part of the comic book superhero team the *Fantastic Four* (created by Jack Kirby and Stan Lee in 1963). Like Yehezkel ben Grim, Ben Grimm is defined by his bodily transformation from human to mutate

and the existential dread this change invokes.[357] This interpretation has extra flare, as Ben Grimm is one of the most well-known comic book characters who are Jewish, however, in a manner that might feel uncanny to most readers of Hebrew.

Lastly, the name "ben Grim" also evokes the Brothers Grimm and their famous collection of fairy tales. This last option might be the most productive, as throughout the novel, Greda calls Yehezkel "Kai." In this manner, Adaf introduces to this novel another intertext, the fairy tale "The Snow Queen" by Hans Christian Andersen. In this story, the girl Greda goes into the land of winter to save her beloved playmate Kai, who is under the Snow Queen's thralls.

Between the implied breach of trust by his government, his anticipated transformation into one of the *seraphim*, and his rekindled love affair with the non-Jewish woman, Yehezkel becomes more and more erratic. Eventually, he forces the issue of the missing *ketoret* ingredient and is told by his supervisors to abandon this avenue of research as it undermines the state's authority. He refuses and loses his rank, becoming unhinged as he moves to examine every single plant in Tel Aviv in hopes he can rediscover the ingredient that was lost. This image again is akin to a scene in "The Snow Queen" in which Greda finds Kai sitting on a frozen lake called "the mirror of reason," trying to combine pieces of ice into words that can free him if shaped correctly.

Eventually, at the novel's end, he is reapproached by Greda, who, mirroring her namesake, implores him to leave his impossible puzzle behind:

> Kai, what is this between you and this gloomy Hebrew delusion? Between you and the Jewish theater of sorrows? […] Kai, I love you, I. Love. You. Don't you understand this is the only reason I came to Tel Aviv? Don't stay this child, with shards of frost in your soul for the rest of your life. Don't stay in this city. It will destroy you, Kai. (282-283)

In this address, we find one origin of the novel's polysemic title *Frost*. This frost is akin to the shards of the evil mirror that, in Andersen's tale, lodge themselves in Kai's eyes and heart. By proxy, this frost is Yehezkel's impossible quest to find the missing ingredients of the *ketoret*. At the same time, this allusion to "The Snow Queen" can be read as an allegory for the whole core narrative of the novel, as through this last attempt by Grade to save Yehezkel, she likens the "shards of frost" to the entirety of 26th century Tel Aviv. Read in this manner, and while leaning into the psychological explanation of the relation between the framing and core narrative of the novel, it is easy to conceive of the entirety of the novel's futuristic world, with its many intricately designed allusions and developments, as similar to the pieces of ice Kai is moving around in the Snow Queen's palace.

The frost for which the novel is named is revealed to be the frozen state of melancholia, here in the Freudian nongenerative sense, an overburdened linguistic formation by which Doron Aflalo's ego can maintain its interaction with the lost object, Miriam. In this sense, the lost object of Doron Aflalo's mourning, Miriam, becomes aligned with the missing ingredient of the *ketoret*,

[357] Adaf has shown much interest in superhero comics, especially Marvel characters, as evident in the many descriptions he gives them from the point of view of his character Elisha ben Zaken in the novels *Detective's Complaint* (2015) and *Rise and Call* (2017).

the myrrh. The alignment is fortified by the alliteration between the two words. By the same token, Greda is the internal faculty within Aflalo that calls him to finish his work of mourning and move on.

However, at the end of the novel, we do not know what comes of Yehezkel. As Greda reaches her end asking for Yehezkel to join her, he "makes one step toward her outstretched arm, or did he even move toward her at all?" (283). Adaf invites his readership to imagine Yehezkel happy but does not force the narrative into that happy ending.

Like Yehezkel, Mira eshet Yossi also fits into the melancholic structure of the novel, though by a different avenue. Mira eshet Yossi (literally, Mira, wife of Yossi) begins the novel as a mere witness to the death of the wild poet. While all others around managed to shield themselves from the event's effects, Mira was exposed directly. This leads to her infatuation with the lyric poetry of the dead poet. That poet, as noted, was a doppelganger of Doron Aflalo, and his poetry is, in fact, the poetry of Aflalo about his dead sister Miriam. The poetry that Mira moves to produce throughout the novel is, likewise, Aflalo's poetry. It comes out in uncontrollable bursts, which poses an immediate problem. If Mira is found to be a working lyric poet, she will be arrested immediately and imprisoned, or worse. To hide her secret, Mira moves back in with her stepfather, who is also the last living paytan able to perform miracles in all of Tel Aviv.

There, we learn the truth of Mira's life, which was hidden even from her. From a young age, her stepfather knew she had the capacity to create poetry that could change the reality of the world. However, the Jewish practice of this time refuses to recognize that a woman can have that power. Therefore, he kept her away from the world until maturity, thinking that this capacity, unnourished, would die out. Instead, the encounter with the dead poet releases her power in full force, but in unison with the unseen presence of the novel narrator. The stepfather and Mira try to tame her power and teach her the practice of piyyut, which is forbidden to her. The intimacy and secrecy between the two results in an incestuous relationship between them. When found out, the stepfather is murdered by the police, and Mira is arrested and sentenced to death by fire.

The scene at the execution pyre reveals the other meaning of the novel's title. *Kfor* is also the singular imperative form of the verb "confute" (לכפור, *likhfor*) and is related to the noun "כפירה" (*kfirah*) which means "apostasy" or "heresy." As Mirah is being prepared for her public execution, she faces reality in a new formation, through the grief over her dead lover and father figure, and another doubled grief over her life: both the life she could have had if she was allowed to practice piyyut and the life she has for a few more short minutes. In that moment, she denounces the theocratic authority of the Tal-Aviv rabbis and reaches her full capacity to speak cosmically affecting poetry.

In doing so, she touches the "ḥashmal" of the cosmos. This word appears in the Bible as part of Ezekiel's first encounter with God's chariot. While this word means "electricity" in Modern Hebrew, this term's meaning in the bible is not as clear. It might mean a specific hue of the fire surrounding God's chariot, perhaps a golden-silverish color of the element "electrum." In *m. Hagigah 13b*, however, rav Yehuda explains it as an abbreviation of the phrase "*ḥayyot esh memallelot,"* that is, "mumbling beasts of fire." These are the beasts mentioned earlier in the

Talmudic masekhet (*12b*) as co-occupants of the same firmament as the *seraphim* and the Throne of God, and that were mentioned in Aviva-No's "Poem 1" as the "blazing-eyed beasts" next to the "stifling breath angels." In Adaf's oeuvre, this term, "*ḥashmal*," appears again in the context of multiversal travel, especially in *The Wedding Gifts* (2014).[358] Thus, this moment of touching "ḥashmal" is a moment of mysticism aligned with Merkabah literature and multiversal traveling, and specifically here, a moment in which Mira is becoming cosmically aware to her new position as a fully materialized mystical paytanit (the female version of the paytan). In this new role, however, she only manages to say two short lines before being burned at the stake.

First, she reflects on her new ability and recites a biblical verse, Daniel 12:6: "Until when is the wonders' end?" This verse carries with it many possible interpretations. In the novel, the wonders Mira reflects on are the miracle of her actualized full potential. At the same time, traditionally, in line with the overall interest in Daniel as a book dealing with the end of human kingdoms and kings, this specific line is read against the grain with "wonders" meaning the persecutions of the Jews by earthly powers. In that sense, she is also reflecting on her own persecution by the Jewish authorities executing her, asking until when will states be allowed to use their powers to oppress those they deem too dangerous or unworthy, like her.

As interesting as the specific verse is, the fact remains that when Mira is saying this line, through the multiversal network of "*ḥashmal*" which she touches, there are echoes of her statement coming back in different languages, specifically Aramaic, Latin, and Adaf's own heritage language, Judeo-Moroccan Arabic. Knowing that "*ḥashmal*" can mean "speaking beasts of fire," we might imagine these translations to be uttered by said divine angelic beings. The languages into which the verse is translated are not arbitrarily invoked, as throughout Adaf's oeuvre, he tends to use all three and explore their different legacies in a global society, in Jewish history, and his own life. In this manner, the Aramaic brought in here, which is specifically that of the *targum*, i.e., the translation of the Bible into Aramaic,[359] functions as a colloquial language that, through the ages, left its colloquialism behind and became a sacred tongue to itself. Latin, which gains a more prominent role in the second installment of Adaf's trilogy, *Mox Nox*,[360] represents an intimate adversarial role, the language of the historical other (the Roman Empire that destroyed the temple) whose historical hostility is brought into the fold, but, as we see in *Mox Nox*, only in sideways and hidden passages. The final language is that of Adaf's mother. This maternal allocation is literal, as Tamar Adaf, the author's mother, helped him with the translation. This is a language that is historically mostly spoken, as it is neither the holy tongue nor the more common regional variant of Arabic in Morocco. This is also a language that was silenced as part of the erasure of all Mizrahi cultures upon their arrival in Israel. In Adaf's novel, all these languages sit side by side,

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[358] Shimon Adaf, *מתנות החתונה [The Wedding Gifts]* (Israel: Kinneret, Zmora-Bitan, Dvir, 2014).

[359] The book of Danial, written in large part in Aramaic, has no Aramaic *targum*, and therefore, this is a novel translation of the verse. However, as written in the novel, it seems to be fashioned after the Targum of Onkelos: עַד אַמַּתַי קְצָא דְמוֹפְתִין.

[360] For the discussion of the role of Latin in this novel and the world of Adaf as a whole, see Elmakias, "That Which Never Been Truly Forgotten."

communicating the same verse in different alphabets and vocabularies, letting the reader hear their similarities and differences in the novel's climax.

The second verse Mira utters before being burned alive is the passage from Ovid's *Metamorphosis* with which the last book ends, saying, "If Poets' prophecies have any truth, through all the coming years of future ages, I shall live in fame." Mira first screams the Latin original, repeating the verb for "live" in all four languages as she is dying:

> And Mira lifts her head. And Mira is looking at the crowd gathered to view her. And Mira yells to it, in the tongue of the gentiles which she just acquired: '*siquid habent veri vatum prasegai. Vivam. Vivam! Vivam!*' and up high, like a beam of light breaking into hues through a prism, the yell breaks into its sisters: *'im yesh 'emet binvu'ot ha-meshorerim, eḥ'ye; 'im 'it qshot bfitgemey nvu'ah dmshabḥin 'etqayam; 'ila qayt yinba lrnaya lḥoq, ana n`ish*. And the echoes assimilate one into the other, multiply: *Eḥ'ye! 'Etqayam! Vivam! Ana n`ish! 'Etqayam!! Ana n`ish!! Eḥ'ye!! Vivam!!"* (280).[361]

I argue that Mira's antemortem moment of speaking in tongues is a moment of extreme piyyut and, within the novel, heretically so. She is taking a role forbidden to her and executes it successfully with her dying breath. Though the piyyut she manages to utter is rudimentary, it fits the generic meaning that I have sketched throughout the dissertation. That is, Mira is creating a poetic expression connecting different intertexts for an utterance fitting for her moment through the citation of words written and created by those who came before her. Even in making her piyyut, Mira, or more precisely, Adaf, the novel's author, is irreverent as she's mixing Jewish scripture with the language of its enemy, the Roman Empire.

That textual alterity is compounded by the multilingual nature of the piyyut she is composing. All these languages are being presented as equal media able to carry the magic of piyyut and affect the world. Here, once again, our discussion of *Pitum ha-ktoret* becomes crucial. As I've shown earlier in the chapter, much of our ability to reconstruct the referential meaning of *Pitum ha-ktoret* prayer depended on the multilingualism of Jewish communities. The translation and multilingualization of Jewish texts make the originals more accessible and transmissible. This is the opposite of how Adaf communicated Ovid's saying in the interview with Hilit Yeshurun, that is, the notion that "I built a building, and as long as the Roman language exists – so will my poetry."[362] Survival in monolinguistic form can never be enough, especially so when it comes to proper nouns.

Mira's act of piyyut also becomes a "translation" in two additional ways. First, Mira heals the city of Tel Aviv from the danger facing its children, as her ashes become the missing ingredients needed to complete the *ketoret*. This is a translation metaphorically, as her body becomes something else. However, as we are already thinking with Latin, we can note that this is another

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[361] Original:
"ומירה נושאת את ראשה. ומירה מביטה בציבור שנקבץ לחזות בה. ומירה צועקת אליו בלשון הגויים שסיגלה לה: siquid habent veri natum prasesagia. vivam. vivam! vivam!! ובגובה הרב, כמו אלומה הנפרטת לגוונים מבעד מנסרה, הצעקה נשברת אל אחיותה, אם יש אמת בנבואות המשוררים, אחיה; אִים אִית קְשׁוֹט בְּפִתְגְמֵי נְבוּאָה דְּמְשַׁבְּחִין, אֶתְקַיַּם; אִלַּה קַיִת יִנְבָּא לְרַנָיָה לְחֹק, אֲנָא נְעִישׁ!! וההדים נבלֵלים זה בזה, נכפלים, אחיה, אתקיַם! ויָם! אנא נעיש! אתקיַם!! אנא נעיש!! אחיה! ויָם!!"

[362] Yeshurun, "The Infinite Faces of Absence: Shimon Adaf," 514.

meaning of the verb *translation*, used in the church to describe the transition of saintly relics, especially saintly remains. In this manner, as the ash from Mira's pyre reaches the afflicted children in the hospital, it mixes with the incomplete *ketoret* to which they were just exposed and heals them.

That result is to the children's disappointment, as at that moment, they are all looking up to the sky, where they see the one child who escaped and completed his transformation. The rest of the children, who were healed by Mira's translated body, "look up to it [the former child, the new member of the *seraphim*] with longing, so it seems, with straining, helpless eyes" (284). From this development, we see that in her moment of piyyut and death, Mira becomes akin to the missing *ketoret* ingredient, the myrrh. I will return to this last point shortly.

The second effect of Mirah's piyyut is the calling forth of Doron Aflalo to witness the last months of her life and death and set that vision into writing. In the final entry in the novel, we go back to the framing narrative, as Aflalo reports that during his recovery, he is feeling "something" happening to him "in the subatomic layers of matter" and in the "pale electrum" that resides there. Implicitly, I believe the novel is telling us that this "something" that is occurring is Mira's call on the pyre. This shapes the narrative of the novel as a closed loop, in which Mira's death calls in Aflalo's presence into her universe, causing his lyric poetry to infect and accidentally kill the wild poet Hoshea ben Zakai, which causes Mira's poetic powers to awaken and call Aflalo from across the multiverse as she dies, etc., ad infinitum. Mira's citation of Ovid thus becomes literal within the novel's fiction. As long as the poet Doron Aflalo's prophetic vision holds true, there is a recurring time loop that happens again and again; and in that time frame, which stretches from the 19th of Tamuz of the Jewish year 6268 to the 16th of Av, 6269, (July 19th, 2508 - August 3rd, 2509), Mira, who is also the mirror image of Miriam, is always alive.

At the same time, this causal link is also a poetic one, as the connecting tissue of the narrative that crosses universes, languages, and time itself is that of a lyric poetic device: the alliteration. In this novel, we see three missing objects that stand in equivalence to one another: Miriam, Mira, and myrrh (מרים, מירה, מור; *Miryam, Mira, mor*). The last moment of the novel adds another beat to this rhyme, as Aflalo, who, unlike Mira, must live past the intersection of the time loop and his own timeline, reports that he is still in the thrall of his unfinished work of mourning, addressing Miriam directly, as in an apostrophe. I will first transliterate and then translate that address that closes out the novel: "*Aval Miryam, Miryam, mar hamavet, mar li mavet*;" "Oh Miriam, Miriam, death is so bitter, I feel bitterness to death," or perhaps "oh Miriam, Miriam, mortality made me morbid, death's moroseness mutilates me mortally." (284) Regardless of the partial successes of Mira's piyyut, Aflalo remains frozen in his grief.

In this novel, the melancholic dynamic endemic to Adaf's writing is spread thinly on the entire cosmos and laid bare in the narrative. Just as in Aflalo's first poem of the novel, death is revealed to be a "series of transformations." However, this is not a "sweet" set of transfigurations, as while the lost object of melancholia takes new shapes, each shape is eventually lost anew. The loss of Miriam makes Aflalo susceptible to the call of her doppelganger from across the universe, Mira. But Mira is eventually also killed by the pyre, on which she is translated into Ash, which is

the myrrh, and this new myrrh becomes lost as it is absorbed into the skin of the transforming children.

These children seem to point toward the only way out of this unceasing cycle of loss - to become one of the *seraphim* who roam the sky unconcerned with human affairs and free from the constraints of human language. Here again, the question of language and pain intervenes, as the only way to lose one is by losing the other. The *seraphim* of the novel cannot use human speech, and they also seem to forget their origin and the human relations they had before their transformation. In this manner, the seraphim are set in opposition to Mira's piyyut. While the latter conserves memory in language at the cost of pain and death, the former offers freedom from all that, but at the cost of language and memory.

In a sense, it seems that the position Adaf most identifies with is that of the children who watch their former friend's freedom enviously: they understand its beauty, but they are bound to the earth and to their origins. In a manner, this is another way to think of Adaf's poetic project: a search for a poetic code that can escape being graspable but is tied to memories and human affinities.

We can close out the chapter with another correspondence, this time between these children in 26th century Tel Aviv who watch enviously at their former friend, the childhood Adaf describes in his poem "Autobiography," in which he tells us of himself as a kid, watching the girl he "loved from afar" while "the seashore drew with thin irony […] the likes of wings for a child inclined to fly." Despite the eleven years between the poem and the novel, the two images share a stunningly similar effect of disappointment and disillusionment. This reprise can also show the difference between the two texts' poetic codes. While in his early poetry, the mechanism that allowed Adaf to imagine his flight into new selfhood is the simile ("the likes of wings"), at the end of which Adaf must always remain the tenor of the figurative language, in this novel the device preferred is piyyutic intertextuality, that can remain freer from any graspable biographical conventions. At least in that manner, by turning to new piyyutic writing conventions, Adaf is able to fly further away from his biography, while still highlighting the manner in which that flight is defined by his origins.

Chapter Conclusions: Intertextuality as Biography

Comparing *Aviva-No* and *Frost*, we can see how Adaf writes the two books to complement and complicate one another, as the world-building and narratives of *Frost* include a rearrangement of the biographical, thematic, and intertextual materials Adaf writes about in *Aviva-No*. Writing about lyric poetry and piyyut in speculative fiction allows Adaf to escape the limitations he sees in lyric poetry differently. Here are three quick points to summarize these escape vectors:

Through creating many fractal biographical mirror images, Adaf explores the essential nature of the writing "I" beyond the need to follow events as they happened. This is particularly evident in Doron Aflalo's framing narrative, and the intra-textual connection Adaf establishes between this novel and *Aviva-No*. By writing about his grief while altering the details, Adaf demonstrates a form of personhood defined by its contingent capabilities. In this way, he can delve into the minutiae of his experience, illuminating the core elements and distinguishing them from

superficial aspects. He thus validates his articulation of experience in language not by appealing to its universality but by showing what is true to it beyond changing circumstances. Specifically, in the pairing of these two books, we are forced to ask about the difference between death perceived as arbitrary and death perceived as by choice. However, that difference might be less important than it seems to begin with, as the seismic nature of death makes these details seem small. The bitterness of death holds past the question of arbitrariness or autonomy.

We might thus think of the two books in dialectical terms as a double test of negation. In *Frost* Adaf can test the creed he adopts in *Aviva-No*, i.e., his need to tell the events of Aviva's death "straightforwardly." I believe that in *Frost*, we find that even while writing that loss fictionally, Adaf still finds its pain and bitterness. At the same time, *Aviva-No* reveals what is not available to be memorized in fiction, which is, more than anything else, the proper noun itself, the name "Aviva." The core intertext of the two pieces, *Pitum ha-ktoret,* serves to highlight this point, as it showcases the fragility of any attempt to memorialize lost objects through their proper nouns. In this manner, if one is to follow the core alliteration structuring *Frost*—that of Miriam, Mira, and the myrrh—they will never reach the name "Aviva." But knowing that name from outside the novel, specifically from *Aviva-No*, we can find it in Mira's piyyut as well. During her moments of death, which also allow her to immortalize herself, she is screaming in Latin "*Vivam"* an almost full anagram of Aviva. In that manner, through the translation of *Aviva-No* to *Frost*, Adaf can also place Aviva's name within the fictional magic he writes into fictional existence.

Similarly, using speculative prose, Adaf can also show the contingency of the Mizrahi identity. In this novel, he presents a Jewish state that shares the textual heritage and religious practices of Mizrahi culture, testing the question of what a Mizrahi Jewish sovereign state might be. While some ideas proclaim that Mizrahi tradition is, by its essence, warmer and more accepting, Adaf puts forth the claim that if this tradition were aligned with state power, it would become similar to any other elite grouping – violent, patriarchal, and rigid in its ways. He even extends this thought experiment to piyyut, a form of Jewish liturgical poetry that was reaching its height as a Mizrahi cultural modality at the time of the novel's publication. However, as this process is happening around him, Adaf moves in the opposite direction to show that piyyut can also be a tool of hegemony under different circumstances. Adaf's work also tests the limitations of the study, showing that while piyyut is, currently, "the other's lyric," it is not so in any essential manner. In this fashion, Adaf finds the possible point of inner alterity within Mizrahi culture, exploring its many shapes without solidifying it. As Adaf weaves together several of Mizrahi Jewish culture's idiosyncrasies as the departure points that produce that futuristic society, he also makes it hard to imagine a different culture that, if it were to be exposed to the same fictional conditions of the novel's world, would have come out the same as the culture of futuristic Tel Aviv. In this manner, Adaf presents how Mizrahiness is not simply interchangeable with other identities and cultures.

Lastly, and most interestingly, writing about his biography, Mizrahi identity, and Jewish tradition while displacing the discussion to a speculative space and time allows Adaf to place these ideas as analogous, but in a way that does not subjugate one layer of the reading to another. See,

for example, the triad we have already sketched: the loss of the sister, the persecution of women's piyyut, and forgetting the myrrh. In poetry that is read as lyric, the experiential details of the speaker and/or poet take precedence over these other aspects, and the loss of the sister, understood as the "real" experience articulated, is privileged as a key by which the reader needs to decipher everything else.

However, in this science fiction piece, the need to understand each subplot diegetically delays the subjection of one storyline to another. It creates an imbalanced, shimmering interpretation that cannot simply be held to a predetermined objective chronology. In that manner, Adaf finds the liminal space he sought – where he can explore his identity without committing to strict objective necessities, compare personal and cultural loss without making one a metaphor for the other, and interrogate his "I" without presupposing he knows what that is. Building a dense piyyutic network allows Adaf to speak of his biography without speaking it directly, making it manifest in form, not content.

Earlier in this study, I discussed Sarah Dowling's argument that personhood is not a predetermined shape to be filled by biographical and sociological particularities. I believe that following Adaf's engagement with piyyut can best articulate the shape of personhood he seeks and offers to his readership. It is a discursive shape that follows the dynamics of tradition—not the orthodox notion of tradition, where institutionalized authority dictates what is in and out, pure and impure, but the critical, complicated truth of tradition, full of schisms, lacunas, and differing opinions. Here, we find the model for self-alterity Adaf promotes as the core of radical identity formation and discourse. In his literature, Shimon Adaf invites us to imagine biography as just another textual corpus that defines us, alongside all other corpora with which we engage. We have the right to examine it, find its shortcomings, and augment it with intertextualities, to become ourselves by first becoming others.

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