



ROMAN KATSMAN

Bar-Ilan University (Ramat Gan, Israel)



ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0607-8047>

## The Hebrew Poetry of the Younger Generation of Immigrants from the Former Soviet Union in Israel Part 2: Yael Tomashov, Rita Kogan (the beginning was published in the previous issue)

Hebrajska poezja młodego pokolenia repatriantów z byłego Związku Sowieckiego w Izraelu.  
Część druga: Yael Tomashov, Rita Kogan

**Streszczenie:** W kolejnych dwóch częściach artykułu na przykładzie twórczości czterech izraelskich poetek (Alex Rif, Nadi-Adiny Rose, Yael Tomashov i Rity Kogan) zaprezentowane zostały kulturowo-estetyczne właściwości poezji hebrajskiej przedstawicieli młodego pokolenia — tzw. *generation one and a half* — dzieci wychodźców z byłego ZSRR. Obszernie omówiono kwestię dziedzictwa oraz transformacji kulturowej i psychologicznej, a także praktyk poetyckich odróżniających poszczególnych autorów, w twórczości których wspomniane dziedzictwo i transformacja są obecne. Niniejszy artykuł poświęcony jest utworom Yael Tomashov i Rity Kogan (część pierwsza traktująca o twórczości Alex Rif, Nadi-Adiny Rose ukazała się w poprzednim numerze).

**Słowa kluczowe:** poezja hebrajska repatriantów z byłego ZSRR, *generation one and a half*, tożsamość kulturowa, sprzeciw wobec wiktymizacji

Ивритская поэзия молодого поколения выходцев из бывшего Советского Союза в Израиле  
Часть 2: Яэль Томашов, Рита Коган

**Резюме:** На примере творчества израильских поэтов (Яэль Томашов, Рита Коган), рассматриваются культурно-эстетические особенности ивритской поэзии молодого поколения и «полупорного поколения» выходцев из бывшего СССР. Особое внимание уделяется вопросу о культурной преемственности и тем поэтическим практикам, различающимся у разных авторов, в которых эта преемственность формируется. В данном номере публикуется окончание статьи — начало, посвященное произведениям Алекс Риф и Нади-Адины Роз, см. в предыдущем номере.

**Ключевые слова:** ивритская поэзия выходцев из бывшего СССР, полупорное поколение, культурная идентичность, отказ от вiktимности

This article discusses the Hebrew poetry of four emigrants from the former Soviet Union in Israel: Alex Rif, Nadia-Adina Rose, Yael

Tomashov, and Rita Kogan. The previous part<sup>1</sup> was focused on the poetic features of Rif's "language of babushka" and the transcultural identity of her protagonist — proud, combative, provocative, as well as on Rose's metaphorical, contemplative, melancholic poetry. In this final part I shall discuss the works of Yael Tomashov and Rita Kogan and make some notes of comparison between the four poets.

### **The Music of Wandering** ***An Unfamiliar Sea* by Yael Tomashov**

Yael Tomashov's poetry combines the storytelling typical of Alex Rif's poetry and the intense use of metaphor which is typical of Nadia-Adina Rose's. Consequently, her perception of time and sign combines different elements. As with Rif, the past is separated from the present and is represented in distinct historical signs. As with Rose, these signs seek metaphoric connections. A distinct example of this poetics is found in the cycle "Recipe of Time", which opens the book *An Unfamiliar Sea*<sup>2</sup>. The first three stanzas of the little poem on the protagonist's grandmother correspond with three points in time: Joseph Brodsky receives the Nobel Prize in literature, the protagonist is six years old; Brodsky dies, the protagonist is nearly sixteen; the grandmother dies, the protagonist notes that Brodsky wrote his first poem at the age of sixteen, a poem that "gave birth to those which followed after it"<sup>3</sup>, and that she "now succeeds in identifying the conjunctions. / A full stop that foretells a capital letter, / a beat of time on the other side of the page" (13)<sup>4</sup>. Fates resonate accidentally — Brodsky's, the protagonist's and her grandmother's. They connect as one large, historical metaphor, a weave of mysterious, obscure symbolic reflections that arouse a kind of vague admiration, similar to the way destinies intertwine in ancient mythologies. Like many poets before her, including Rif and Rose, Tomashov seeks in these reflections the "beats of time", attempts to reconstruct the "recipe of time" that her grandmother would "sketch" on the "tablet of her heart" "with chalk of flour" (12)<sup>5</sup>. This dialogue with other poets is part of the recipe (also in the poem *The Morning of Luis Garcia Montero*, 14–16).

<sup>1</sup> "Iudaica Russica" 2020, 1(4).

<sup>2</sup> Y. Tomashov, *An Unfamiliar Sea* (Hebrew), Keshev Ieshira, Tel-Aviv 2011. The page numbers appear in parentheses in the body of the text.

<sup>3</sup> "שהוליד את הבאים אחריי" (13)

<sup>4</sup> "מפליחה לזהות עתה את סימני החבור. / נקודה שמנבאת אות גדולה, / פעימת זמן שמעבר לדף" (13)

<sup>5</sup> "בגיר של קמח" (12)

Tomashov's writing takes form in a multiplicity of "full stops that foretell a capital letters" and contain endless possibilities, like continua of singularities and miniature big bangs. The metaphors take over the expression, but existing alongside them there are also fragments of a simple narrative discourse and realistic pictures of everyday life. The two languages — the metaphoric and the realistic — exist side by side without mixing, as in counterpoint, and this can be viewed as a major feature of Tomashov's poetry. Her protagonist stresses the duality in her language, in her inherited stuttering that resembles Rose's: "My father's stuttering in my mouth / and my mother's silence"<sup>6</sup>, which turns her speech from reality to the possibility of injury: "Maybe I'll still say something. / Finally something, a morsel, / a remark, a snippet of a thought" (*In One Word*, 20)<sup>7</sup>. The fragmented, asymmetrical weave of the themes in this poem turn it, from the standpoint of its composition, into a kind of fugue or brief jazz variation, the yearned for recipe of time. It appears as if the hands of the protagonist are trying to return to the "days of the piano, when [her hands] played a masterpiece of giants" (15)<sup>8</sup>.

The piano — "an exemplar of nobility and restraint"<sup>9</sup> — is the major part of the protagonist-immigrant's Russian "baggage". The piano arrives in the *Levant* after a long voyage "in the heart of an unfamiliar sea"<sup>10</sup>, and it is likened to another "baggage" — the protagonist's great-grandfather, who "descended from the airplane at the Ben Gurion airfield / on a wheelchair given by the Jewish Agency, haughty and senile, / and waited for the festive reception / to mark all the years of his Zionist activity" (*Baggage*, 19)<sup>11</sup>. The instruments and the music are the main image that organizes the cultural load — both the one destined to disappoint, to turn into an unwanted piece of junk and be forgotten, such as the piano-Zionism, as well as the one destined to become the structure of the reality and the consciousness, such as the poetry and the music itself with all its fine, complex mathematical structures, such as "the tulle of memories spread over the box of childhood" (*Quiet Rain*, 25)<sup>12</sup>. In the flutter of the curtains made of this tulle, the protagonist reads the message: "Not / belonging not / belonging"

<sup>6</sup> "בפי גמגומו של אבי / ושתיקתה של אמי" ("על רגל אחת", 20)

<sup>7</sup> "אולי עוד אומר דבר מה. / דבר מה בסופו של דבר. / גדל / הגד. / גזיו מתשכה" (20)

<sup>8</sup> "ימי הפסנתר, [כשידיה] נגנו מופת של ענקים" (15)

<sup>9</sup> "מופת לאצילות ולאורך רוח" (19)

<sup>10</sup> "בלב ים לא מפר" (19)

<sup>11</sup> "שייך מן המטוס בנמל התעופה בן-גוריון / על כסא גלגלים של הסוכנות, גא וסבילי, / והמתין

לקבלת הפנים התגיית / לציון כל שנות פעילותו הציונית" (19)

<sup>12</sup> "טול זכרונות הפרוש על ארצו היקדו" ("ישם שקט", 25)

(Ibid.)<sup>13</sup>, but the melody of the message, the musical tone behind the words and within the silence of the rain, like the grandmother's snores, in Rose's poems and the silences of the mother in Rif's — is a sign of belonging.

A distinct example of Tomashov's poetics of belonging is the poem *Apocatastasis*, and the meaning of the word, as the epigram of the poem explains, is a return to a prior condition, the reestablishment or completion of a circular cycle:

I remember a record of a children's story. The swan freezes or is forgotten  
 Or dies of loneliness. I am seven and the pain hurts  
 Each time I listen to it.  
 Summer ends right now. A fan turns slowly [...]  
 My rain forests pile up on the table.  
 As long as I read in them  
 I will not die.  
 The swan freezes or dies of loneliness [...]  
 Maybe there was no swan there. But something in that story stayed behind  
 And death sat with autumn on the turning vinyl plate  
 Like two mice, silently.  
 Right now summer is drawing to a close. The fan begins again and turns  
 The pages back resolutely.  
 There, in the white, concentrated space before the first word,  
 A mistake (26–27).

אני זוכרת תקליט עם ספור וקדים. הברבור קופא או נשכח  
 או מת מבידודות. אני בת שבע והקאב פוצע  
 בכל השמעה.  
 הקיץ מסתים ממש עקשיו. מאונרר מסתובב לאטו [...]   
 יצרות הגשם שלי נענמים על השלקון.  
 כל עוד אקרא בהם  
 לא אמות.  
 הברבור קופא או מת מבידודות [...]   
 אולי לא היה שם ברבור. אבל משהו בספור הוא נותר מאחור  
 והמנת ישב עם הסתיו על פלטת הויניל המסתובבת  
 כמו שני עקבירים, חרש.  
 ממש עקשיו הקיץ מגיע לקצו. המאונרר שב והופך  
 את הדפים לאחור בעקשנות.  
 שם, בחלל הלבן והמרוכז שלפני המלה הראשונה,  
 שגיאה (26-27).

In the fragmented, rhythmic poem, which resembles rap, the protagonist affirms her belongingness, and identifies with the seven-year-old girl and the swan from the children's story. The poem is made up of eccentric circular movements, namely around different unfocused axes: revolutions of the record and the fan, repeated listening to the record, the cycle of the annual seasons, the

<sup>13</sup> "לא / שיכתת לא / שיכתת" (25)

reading back and forth, the cycle of life and death. The continuity, revolving or reading supposedly ensure the continuity of life, but the revolving inevitably leads to end-beginning, namely to death and rebirth, and that is the paradox or the mistake. The protagonist is a kind of Scheherazade who goes on living as long as she is telling stories, and she knows with the beginning of each story that when it ends she will be at the same point where she began and will have to begin again, but she cannot stop. The rhetorical identification with this figure enables the protagonist to shape her identity as someone belonging to this ancient melodic, rhythmic line that is at the foundation of literature, which thus draws near to magic and mythology, to the sequence of tribal legends told around the bonfire or a festivity of Decameron tales in the midst of the plague.

The composition contains a counterpoint of two themes: cyclical time, which is reversible, and linear time, which is not. The record turns and repeats itself, but each time the swan dies and that is not reversible. "And the pain hurts"; the cycle of annual seasons repeats itself, but this summer draws to the end, and that is irreversible. In this way the vinyl plate becomes a philosophical allegory, on the one hand, and an object of transition, the magic object, symbol of the identification which contains within itself the myth of the formation of the protagonist's personality, on the other hand. The repetitions, the refrains, the variations on the themes, the rhymes and the alliterations — all these accessories of classic poetics serve to create a figure of fragmented, polyphonic identification — naïve and sensible, infantile and adult, all at one and the same time. This figure refers to and reconstructs the rite of passage that has never been completed. The sound of remembrance in the story from her childhood is too strong in the protagonist's consciousness, it "hurts" and the hurt dictates the way in which she perceives the present, the summer that is drawing to a close "right now". Unlike Rif, Tomashov does not "draw forth salt from the wound", the matryoshka of the past does not empty out in order to enable the matryoshka of the present to hide inside it. Nor does Tomashov's dynamic, paradoxical record of memories resemble Rose's snow-covered memory card. The identity (as well as the poetry) is not war, as it is in Rif's poetry, nor is it uniformity, as it is in Rose's. Rather it is a fugue — music of multiple voices and races between them (in Latin, *fugere* — to run, escape), echoes, variations and counterpoints.

Even when Tomashov inundates her poetry with signs of Russian culture (which is rather rare for her), they do not function as

simulacra or metaphors, or indicate anger, pride or compassion. Instead they undergo a polyphonic transformation, break down into two different melodic and thematic lines, into two series of almost-homonyms — signs that are nearly identical but have different meanings. So, it is in the poem, *Tel Aviv in Rhyme*, which describes the dialogue between a woman who looks like a “Russian tourist” and a taxi driver as they drive through the center of Tel Aviv, in streets bearing the names of poets. Evidently that neighborhood, as well as a few humoristic provocations, cause her to start a conversation about poetry with the driver, and he says:

“A Russian tourist, the very best”  
 Now I’m really touched! [...]  
 Only here do they understand poetry.  
 “Tsvetaeva?” directing my question at the driver,  
 “She’s also good, don’t you think so?”  
 “Leave Svetaeva, there’s one called Sveta”,  
 He points, “Worked once here on Masger” [...]  
 “So then, Akhmatova? Tell me what’s your opinion! [...]”  
 “Good or not good, how should I know”.  
 It’s Abraham from the station that did her  
 Said she’s crazy”. [...]  
 “It’s here, Madam. We’ve arrived. Foshkin”.  
 [...]  
 “It’s Pushkin, sir”, I replied.  
 And the street takes off slowly (34–36).

“תַּיִרַת רוֹסִיָּה, הִכִּי שָׁנָה”  
 עֲקָשִׁי אֲנִי נִרְגָּזֶת! [...]  
 רַק פֹּה הֵם מְבִינִים יְשִׁירָה.  
 “צִבְטֵיבָה?” מִפְּנֵה שְׁאַלְתִּי אֶל הַמְסִיעַ,  
 “גַּם הִיא שָׁנָה, הָאֵינן אַתָּה חוֹשֵׁב?”  
 “עֲנֹבִי סְבֵטֵיבָה, אַחַת קוֹרְאִים לָהּ סוֹשָׁה,”  
 הוּא מַצְבִּיעַ, “עֲבֹדָה פֹּה פַעַם בְּמִסְגֵּר.” [...]  
 “אִז אַחַמַטוֹבָה? תְּבִיעַ דַּעְתְּךָ!” [...]  
 “טוֹבָה אוֹ לֹא טוֹבָה, לֹא לִי לְדַעַת.  
 זֶה אֲבִרְהָם מִהַמְחַנֶּה עֵשָׂה אוֹתָהּ  
 אָמַר הִיא מְשֻׁגָּעַת.” [...]  
 “זֶה פֹּה, אֲבִרְתִּי. הִעֲנֵנוּ. פּוֹשְׁקִין.” [...]  
 “זֶה פּוֹשְׁקִין, אֲדוֹנִי,” עֲנִיתִי.  
 וְהָרְחֹב מְקָרִיא לֹאט (34-36).

In the counterpoint thought, it is not only the Russian names, the iconic and the regular, the corrected and the distorted, that are separate and conflicting, but also different perceptions of the essence of “Russianess”, of the meaning of the word “good”, of the content of concepts such as “a city of culture, perfection, and en-

lightenment" (36)<sup>14</sup>. The two series of signs seem to be similar, but in fact they are not related. Their meaning is not created out of the differences between them, they belong to parallel worlds, and hence the problems, linked to crisis and otherness, such as identity, belonging, translation, communication and understanding, cannot even take form. What intrigues the poet in this satirical, comic scene is the counterpoint itself, the hopeless mistake and misunderstanding that are the systematic quality of reality, the inevitable polyphony of the discourse as a cosmologic principle consummately expressed first and foremost in music. It is also the organizing principle of Tomashov's book, which is evident, among other things, in the heading of the last part of the book — *A Little Night Music*.

Mozart's *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* is the most famous work in this classical genre of light, entertaining music, but the roots of the genre are in the medieval serenade, a love song that men in love would sing under the windows of the pitiless women they courted. Later, despite the uniqueness of its form and mainly its clearly mystical, storytelling qualities, the romantic ballad served as a kind of demonic double of the serenade. Tomashov's poem with its bleak atmosphere and enigmatic content, seems to be a combination of a serenade and a ballad. At the center of the poem there is the figure of the solitary protagonist, but her thoughts turn into a polyphony of voices, fragrances, flecks of light and internal dialogues. Thus, an atmospheric description of a routine evening in Tel-Aviv turns into an orchestrated cosmic drama. The poem can be divided into five parts, according to the characters-doubles that the protagonist touches, or in which her senses and thoughts are reflected (in Mozart's *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*, there are four movements, and it's known that there was also a fifth, which was lost). The train is her first double:

I secretly smoke from the window of my flat.  
Under cover of darkness only the train crawls above Yehoshua Park  
Bearing a guilt heavier than mine.  
Its meaningless whistle rests softly on dozing buildings,  
That surround me like a wall of a shared destiny (43).

אני מעשנת בהקבא מחלון דירתי.  
בכסות החשכה רק הרקבת הזוחלת מעל גני; הושע  
נושאת באשמה גדולה משלי.  
צפירתה חסרת הפשר נחה ברפות על בננינים מנמנמים,  
שמקיפים אותי בחומה של שתפות גורל (43).

<sup>14</sup> "עיר תרבות, מופת והשקלה" (36)

At night, the urban ordinariness changes shape, turns into a secret. Nothing is clear here: what is the guilt she refers to (it can't be only the need to smoke secretly)? What meaning does the protagonist seek in the train's whistle? What shared destiny is she speaking about — sinking into darkness, the fear of loss and death? The buildings are also likened to the protagonist, and their "wall" creates a solipsistic and claustrophobic feeling.

In the second section, the protagonist's attention is diverted to another subject: "In the parking bay beneath me / silent vehicles are anchored in the dim light of the lamp / that connects chassis to chassis" (Ibid.)<sup>15</sup>. The parking lot is depicted as a port in which ships anchor, and thus the subject of the mysterious voyage, that arose together with the sounds of the train, is given a romantic, maritime development. With the sense of foreign distances, in the third section, we also arrive at: "A sudden, foreign fragrance / of shampoo, or a laundry softener: / the aristocratic essence of human existence" (Ibid.)<sup>16</sup>. In the fourth section, consisting of one line, the protagonist introduces herself and her loneliness and uniqueness vis-à-vis "too many neighbors, / whose sleep is too heavy to grasp their essence" (Ibid.)<sup>17</sup>, which expresses her inability to grasp her own essence. The limitation or even the impossibility of self-awareness or awareness in general turns out to be the main subject of the poem. All the images and symbols — from the hiding of the protagonist and to the foreignness of the fragrance of human existence — are contained in the paradigm of the concealment, the not knowing. The protagonist is not alien to this existence, she is not detached; on the contrary, the secret of the one is part of the secret of the other. This idea is fully expressed in the fifth and last section of the poem:

|   |   |
|---|---|
| A black cat crosses the empty yard,<br>Stops and raises its head.<br>We check each other out with dim eyes.<br>I know, I know, I say and retreat to the room.<br>I've spoiled everything (Ibid.). | תתול שחור חוצה את התצר הריקה,<br>עוצר ומרים את ראשו.<br>אנחנו אומדים זה את זה בעינים פהות.<br>אני יודעת, אני יודעת, אני אומרת ונסוגה אל הקדר.<br>קלקלתי הכל (43). |
|---|---|

The protagonist talks to herself, to the magic, demonic animal inside her, and again points an accusing finger at herself. In the other two poems in this chapter — *The Small Roof Apartment* (44)

<sup>15</sup> "במפךרץ התנהה שמתחתי / עוגנים רכבים דוממים לאורו העמום של הפנס / הקושר שלדה אל שלדה" (43)

<sup>16</sup> "ניחוח זר ופתאומי / של שפופו, או מרפךר כביסה: / תמציתה האריסטוקרטית של התנהה האנושית" (43)

<sup>17</sup> "שכנים רבים מדי [אשר] שנתנם כבדה מקדי לתפש את מהותם" (43)

and *San Francisco* — the protagonist describes her belonging and non-belonging to different cities — Cambridge, Massachusetts and San Francisco — and states: “No one lives where he should” (45)<sup>18</sup>. Here one can see an allusion to the source of her guilt, but at the same time it is clear that in this guilt too she shares in everyone’s guilt.

While Rif is a poet of the **repair**, and Rose is a poet of **uniformity**, Tomashov is a poet of the **flaw**, in the sense that in her world, the flaw is the normal existential human condition. It is the same state of alienation or inner separation that causes the protagonist to sing that nighttime serenade to herself, to seek the essence of her existence, to fall in love with herself all over again, and to aspire to respond to love. In this poetry of longing there is a tragic element, but it is basically not pessimistic: in the Tel-Aviv urban language, in the foreign fragrance, she lauds the “aristocracy” of the “flaw”, a person’s chivalrous freedom not to give in to the dictate of the necessary and the given, not to live “where he should live”. The three poems — on Tel-Aviv, Cambridge and San Francisco — shape the character of the noble immigrant-wanderer, narcissistic enough to be free of the limitations of place and time, and lacking in knowledge enough to sail from the window of her home to the open spaces of “an unfamiliar sea”.

### **“White Air, Compressed into Nothing” A Horse in a Skirt, by Rita Kogan**

In the work of the three poets we have discussed so far, we have seen various strategies for managing signs. Rif and Tomashov tend to replace signs; the former tends to plant one sign inside another and then join them together, while the latter tends to place them in parallel alongside each other and then to separate them. In contrast, Rose tends to compress the metaphoric meaning within the unified signs. Rita Kogan’s poetry also shows a tendency to compress metaphors. Her poems of immigration (the cycle, *Shiragirah* in the book *A Horse in a Skirt*) are a consummate example of that. In these poems, the signs of the past are not simulacra, metaphors or diverging series. They break down into two unequal groups: signs of absence (the larger group) and signs of confusion or reversal. We will begin with the poem “*A Pilfering Guest*, which is amazingly similar to Rif’s poem, *My Beloved Jachnun* that we discussed above.

<sup>18</sup> "איש אינו חי היכן שפעליו לקיחת" (45)

I came to your house.  
I stole your language.  
I filled my pockets  
With medleys and rhymes.  
In the corner I vomited  
Precious gems and nuts.

I will pierce my tongue so I can  
Wear your stolen language.  
When I suck you with a pierced tongue,  
You will moan with pleasure until you come.  
I am a weird loving stranger,  
Insolence just disguised as submission (81).

באתי אֶל ביתכם.  
גנבתי אֶת שְׂפֹתְכֶם.  
אֶת כִּיסֵי מְלֵאֹתֵי  
מְחֻרוֹזוֹת נְחֻרוֹזִים.  
בַּפֶּה הִקָּאתִי  
מִרְקָלִיּוֹת נְאֻגֻזִים.

אֶנְקַב אֶת הַלְשׁוֹן לְעַנְד בָּהּ  
אֶת שְׂפֹתְכֶם הַגְּנוּבָה.  
כִּשְׂאֵמֶצִיץ לְכֶם בְּלִשׁוֹן מְנַקֶּבֶת,  
תִּאֲנָקוּ מֵעֲנַג עַל סֹף בִּיאָה.  
אֲנִי זָרָה מִזְזָרָה וּמֵאֶרֶבֶת,  
הַצֶּפֶה שֶׁרָק הִתְחַפְּשָׂה לְכַנִּיעָה (81).

As in Rif's case, the motif of breaking into a house, and transgressive behavior in the guise of oral, sexual and other images, is very pronounced. The female figure in the poem is more like the figure of the immigrant mother, the whore, in Rif's poems that were mentioned above.

In Kogan's poem too, the attempt to adjust to the new environment evolves from a paradigm of flattery and surrender to one of insolence and pride. But in the context of this image, the difference is striking: the "strangeness" and the "weirdness" of the protagonist are not marked by cultural signs or symbols (like the bow tie or the socks and sandals in Rif's poem). In Kogan's work, the metaphors are not empirical and cultural but rather analytical and philosophical. The vile physicality is translated, in its entirety, into metaphysical concepts, while in Rif's dramatic pictorial style, even after the metaphors and symbols are deciphered, a hard non-metaphorical core of empirical realness remains.

As in Rif's poetry, Kogan's immigration discourse often turns to concepts of war, but it is totally anchored in the present, as if the trauma is an event in the present without any memory, and as if the attributes of foreignness were naturally inherent to the protagonist, devoid of any historical and cultural past:

From among the ruins of the language  
 Disarmed of its fist  
 A fourteen-year-old immigrant  
 (a refusenik mouth)  
 Waves a white flag  
 Says  
 Shalom  
 Class (69).

מבין קרבות השפה  
 פרוקה מאגרופה  
 עולה בת ארבע עשרה (פה סרבו)  
 מניפה דגל לבן  
 אומרת  
 שלום  
 פתה (69).

Here too the submission (a white flag) is bought for a heavy price of insolence (destruction of the language). Nonetheless, in the poem, as in all of her work, the destruction of the language remains within the realm of fantasy or speculation. The poet does not use “a license to make spelling errors”, as in the title of her first book, and that same fighter with an imaginary white flag seems to be rising from the ruins of the language, where she was born and grew up. The major sign of absence in the poems of the cycle is the word “no”/ “not”: “I will not know [...] do not know [...] did not know” (*Enter the Year of Immigration*, 63)<sup>19</sup>, “I did not build a house, / did not deduce a word” (*Ulpan*, 64)<sup>20</sup>, “My grandmother — is not breathing. / My mother — is not breathing. / I — am not breathing. / My sister — is not breathing” (*Eastern City of Death*, 71)<sup>21</sup>. And, in addition, other signs of absence, such as silence, concealment, forgetting, loss: “About what are things staying silent? / What is hidden at the bottom?” (*Ibid.*, 64)<sup>22</sup>, “a missing present” (*Fine Motor Skills*, 66)<sup>23</sup>, “Thick cobwebs / stick to one another and to me / instead of reality” (*Enter the Year of Immigration*, 63)<sup>24</sup>, “That same thing that has no name in words” (*As They Leave*, 72)<sup>25</sup>.

The tendency towards self-deprecation is also evident in poems outside the cycle: “Who are you? — I’m nothing, / a word in a language of exile with a sealed mouth” (*Portrait*, 31)<sup>26</sup>, “My body goes on a trip / of self-destruction” (*Gevefofe*, 38)<sup>27</sup>. Self-deprecation is also expressed in the invalidation of poetry and language in general: “I must stop pasting / words this to this, that to that [...] I must separate / word from word, / word in word [...] I ought to ask for muteness. / To pare down tongues [...] In the beginning there was

<sup>19</sup> "לא אדע [...] לא יודעת [...] לא נדעתי" ("יש לציין שנת עלייה", 63)

<sup>20</sup> "לא בנית בית. / לא הסקתי מלה" ("אולפן", 64)

<sup>21</sup> "סבת – לא נושמת. / אמי – לא נושמת. / אחותי – לא נושמת" ("קריית מוות מורחית", 71)

<sup>22</sup> "על מה שותקים הדברים? / מה קבוי בקרקעית" (שם, 64)

<sup>23</sup> "הונה נפקד" ("מוטוריקה עדינה", 66)

<sup>24</sup> "קורי עכביש סמיכים / נדבקים זה לזה ואלי / במקום מציאות" ("יש לציין שנת עלייה", 63)

<sup>25</sup> "אותו הדבר שאין לו שם במלים" ("בעזבתם", 72)

<sup>26</sup> "מי את? – אני לא כלום, / מלה בקלשון גלות בפה בלום" ("דיוקן", 31)

<sup>27</sup> "גופי יוצא למסע / השמדה עצמית" ("גברופא", 38)

a word. / In the end there was dust" (*A Million Letters M*, 150)<sup>28</sup>. The image of the disintegration of the language is transformed into an apocalyptic picture of the end of the theological project of creation (*New Testament*, John 1:1) in chaos and death, even the death of time: "But time ran off and was run down, sterilized, eulogized and buried" (*Gmiluy*, 151)<sup>29</sup>. Together with time, the protagonist dies and is forgotten, she "suckles-throws up bubbles of forgetfulness" (*Ibid.*)<sup>30</sup>, and says: "The knowledge slips away from me" (*Panicattack*, 158)<sup>31</sup>.

In several poems, the difficulties the protagonist encounters when she immigrates as a school pupil are described, but they relate mainly to the environment, while her figure remains abstract, almost vanishing, almost nameless: "Smelly / Russian / whore" (*My Profession*, 75)<sup>32</sup> — so much so that even her social status is nearly effaced in the place named in the title of the poem *City of Death*: "I was a new i" (*High School in the City of Death*, 74), where "i" means "immigrant", but has also symbolic significance<sup>33</sup>. Self-effacement, suicide, often appears as the sole epistemological certainty, the existential axis of humanity, as in the poem *Enter the Year of Immigration* mentioned above, in which the protagonist declares her lack of knowledge, but adds: "I knew how to draw red lines / with a utility knife / on the inside of my arms" (63)<sup>34</sup>. From this standpoint, "Zion, Don't Ask" is a programmatic poem, that creates a philosophical basis for the poetic strategy:

Zion, don't ask,  
 Don't ask, immigrant where have you come from,  
 Where were you born [...]  
 I'm sick of the small talk  
 Between you, lady of the land, and the peddler woman.  
 You're the hostess and I stare into space and eat. [...]  
 I will spit out the chunks of the past.  
 The great, beautiful past  
 Will fill plates and pots, The great, beautiful past  
 Will fill plates and pots,  
 Glut the land,  
 Seal its heart.  
 Not from where —  
 Where am I coming to? (84–85).

<sup>28</sup> "עלי לחדל להדביק / מלים זו לזו, זו בזו [...] עלי לנמק / מלה ממלה, מלה במלה [...] עלי לבקש / אלמות. / לגזם לשונות [...] תחלה היתה מלה. / בסוף היתה אבק" ("מיליון אות מם", 150)

<sup>29</sup> "אף הנזמן נמלט הנדרס, / תפא. הקפד ונטמן" ("גמילוי", 151)

<sup>30</sup> "יונקת-פולקט בועות נשיה" (151)

<sup>31</sup> "הידיעה הזמקת ממני" ("התקפחורה", 158)

<sup>32</sup> "זונה / רוסייה / מקריחה" ("מקצועי", 75)

<sup>33</sup> "אני הייתי ע / תדשה" ("תיכון קריית מוות", 74)

<sup>34</sup> "ידעתי לצר קוים אדמים / עם סכין פניתי / על פנים הירועות" (63)

ציון אל תשאלי,  
 אל תשאלי מהגרת מאין באה,  
 איפה נולדה [...] ]  
 קצתי בשיחות הסלון  
 בינה, אדונית הארץ, לבין הרוקלת.  
 את מארסת נאני בוקה נאוקלת. [...] ]  
 אפלט את נתחי העבר.  
 העבר הגדול, הקפה  
 ומלא צלחות וסירים,  
 יגדיש את הארץ,  
 נאטם את לבה.  
 לא מאין —  
 אנה אני באה? (85–84).

This is a parody of two well-known works, pillars of the Jewish literary education: the poem *Zion, Do You Wonder?* by Yehuda Halevi and the story *Lady and the Peddler* by Shmuel Yosef Agnon. In both instances, the meaning of the original is overturned, and the holy land becomes the country that devours its inhabitants or its guests. The protagonist's rhetorical identification with the hero in Agnon's story, Yosef the peddler, actually singles out the immigrant, the foreigner, as the "true" Jew, as the chosen sister, who wanders and returns, the victim of the brothers' hatred and the source of the redeeming love (similar to the figure of Joseph in Rif's poem "My Beloved Jachnun"). The correspondence with the Agnonian story makes it possible to underscore one more thing: the temptation of obliterating eating from the fruits of the host culture, a kind of mythological lotophagi that endangers the voyage of self-realization of the Jewish or universal Odysseus. The present remains unknown. As in the poem *Enter the Year of Immigration* it is not represented by specific cultural signs and is replaced by a question mark. In contrast there is the past, and it too lacks any real representation. Nonetheless, it is given symbolic representation in the vomiting (again, as in the poem *A Pilfering Guest*, discussed above) and in the threat of the fatal illness ("seal its heart," 85). In the warning that the past "will fill plates and pots" we can also hear an allusion to the "flesh pots" in the complaint of the Jews after the exodus from Egypt (*Exodus* 16:3). If so, then in the last three lines of the poem, the diaspora- Israel relationship again is overturned and goes back to normal, as the diaspora past is meant to be forgotten and to vanish for the sake of a rebirth and full, healthy lives in Israel (in contrast to the indigestible "chunks"). The poem attests to a liminal consciousness, stuck in a rite of passage from old to new, as they both disappear, unidentified, and exchange places in dizzying carnivalesque turns, leaving the protagonist in the darkness of the cave in which the personality transformation takes place, in semiotic helplessness.

In the cycle *Shiragira*, alongside the poems of absence, are two poems with distinct codes that mark the protagonist's Russian cultural background: *Fir Trees Don't* and *Stage of Proofs*. In these poems, as in Rif's poetry, the signs of the past serve as simulacra that signal the wound, anger and disappointment in the Israeli present:

Fir trees don't look you right in the eye.  
 Our names don't feel right in your mouth.  
 To you we are a Russian circus:  
 Submissive women,  
 Men who drink,  
 Old men with medals,  
 Old women cleaning,  
 Children doing well at physics,  
 Little girl hussies. [...]  
 For I am a submissive man  
 A woman who drinks,  
 An old man in a parking lot,  
 A boy in a tutu,  
 A girl developing in Python.  
 We all dance the hora  
 To the tunes of Pussy Riot (*Fir trees Don't*, 82).

עצי אשוח לא באים לקם טוב בעין.  
 השמות שלנו לא באים לקם טוב בפה.  
 בשבילכם אנתנו קרקס רוסי:  
 נשים כנועות,  
 גברים שומים,  
 זקנים במדליות,  
 זקנות מנקות,  
 ילדים מצטיינים בפזיקה,  
 ילדות שרמוטות. [...]  
 פי אני גבר קנוע,  
 אשה שוטה,  
 זנו בתגיון,  
 ילד בהנצאית טוטו,  
 ילדה מפתחת בפיתון.  
 כלנו רוקדים הורה  
 לצלילי פוסי ריוט ("עצי אשוח לא", 82).

This time, too, when the signs of "Russianness" inundate the discourse, they are represented not as details of personal memory, as components of metaphors or narratives, but rather as stereotypes in the minds of "them" as opposed to "us", of the hostile, rejecting Sabra "other" (no... not...), as a "metaphoric prison"<sup>35</sup>. From that vantage point, the protagonist, like Rif's protagonist, presents herself and her community as a circus. Like Rif and Tomashov, Kogan adopts, with pride and sarcastic glee, the role of "the bad girl" and merges the aspiration for repair with the passion for foul up: with

<sup>35</sup> H. Pedaya, *The Return of the Lost Voice* (Hebrew), Hakibutz Hameuhad, Tel Aviv 2016, p. 158.

a carnivalesque reversal of the stereotypes, she expresses the demand for justice and the repair of injustice, but the new system of signs that is created is a collage, part of which is realistic and serious and part of which is a clown-like trick, an ironic, grotesque self-caricature, even more monstrous and confusing. This is a true circus.

In the last two lines, a grotesque picture is created that combines the cultural codes from two sources: the Israeli hora and the Russian Pussy Riot band. The band was founded in 2011 and raised a flag of social protest based on feminist and anarchist ideas. In 2012, in the wake of its Punk Prayer: "Mother of God, drive away Putin!", which the group held at the Christ the Savior cathedral in Moscow, two of the members of the band were sentenced to two years in prison (freed in 2013 because of a general amnesty). The mention of this band in Kogan's poem of protest seems altogether organic, but its connection with the traditional Zionist hora and the overall carnivalesque context undermines the validity of the protest. Yet the second poem, also a protest addressing "you", the Israelis, prefers a lofty tragedy to carnivalism and sarcasm, which has a direct effect on the definition of the subject, who speaks not as "we" as in the previous poem, but rather as "I" — lonely and tormented:

On what train will you put me to prove I am Jewish?  
 A toy railway car of my childhood?  
 What will be the final destination?  
 A ghost town dripping with radiation in Ukraine?  
 A not-big, not-small district city in White Russia?  
 A marble tombstone lying on its side alongside granite tombstones of Neva?  
 Will you ask me to count the dead on both sides?  
 Who by fire?  
 Who by water?  
 Who by day?  
 Who by night?  
 And the crown of my Jewishness will be placed like a barbed wire wreath,  
 A mark of honor bestowed by Citizen Cain,  
 And I have proven (*The Stage of Proofs*, 83).

על איזו רכבת תשימו אותי להוכיח את יהדותי?  
 קרון צעצוע של ילדותי?  
 מה יהיה יעד נסיעתי?  
 עיירת רפאים נוטפת קרינה באוקראינה?  
 עיר מחוז לא גדולה-לא קטנה ברוסיה הלבנה?  
 מצבת שיש נוטה על צדה לצד מצבות גרניט של נבחה?  
 תבקשו שאספר את המתים משני הצדדים?  
 מי באש?  
 ומי במים?  
 מי ביום?  
 ומי בלילה?  
 וכתר יהדותי יבא כמו גזר חוט תיל,  
 אות כבוד מזדי האורח קון,  
 והוכחתי ("שלב ההוכחות", 83).

The poet is protesting against the concept of identity and the legal and cultural practice of proving one's Jewish identity in Israel. This practice is represented as being based on the paradigm of the victim, embodied here in codes of the Holocaust and of other catastrophes, both ancient and modern. The poem is evocative of Dan Pagis' poem *Written in Pencil in the Sealed Railway Car*, but the protagonist's rhetorical identification with the figures of a Holocaust victim, of Cain, and Jesus ("wreath of barbed wire") incontrovertibly marks the Israeli "you" as a hangman. The poem quotes from the *piyut* "Let us Speak of the Awesomeness" which is part of the Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur prayers, and thus the definition of the victimlike Jewish identity is bound up in the theology and dogma of atonement and repentance, reward and punishment. Although the poem is replete with signs of the past and "foreign" cultural codes, the protagonist is addressing Israeli interlocutors in the present. However, unlike the case of the "language of babushka", these signs do not become simulacra, because they are raised, together with the entire poem, to the level of epic historiosophical symbolism, so the series of colorful pictures are somewhat like Mark Chagall's symbolic expressionism. Although the basis of the poem is rhetorical and lyric, it appears as a collage of emblematic pictures that express collective insult and pain. So it transpires that here too a representation of a memory of the living, personal Russian and Soviet past is absent, and is replaced by an epic, mythic iconography, just as in other poems mentioned above, only signs of its effacement, psychological traces, more or less traumatic, remain. This poetics can be called psychological imaginative mannerism; it expresses the plastic, visual, and graphic nature of Kogan's poetry. The other poets discussed here also tend, to one degree or another, toward mannerism, but in Kogan's case it becomes markedly integrated as the fusion of formal and technical aestheticism, playful decadence, spiritual and erotic sensuality, and refined intellectualism.

By looking at a few examples from other parts of the book, we will see how signs of absence construct the mannerist poetics. This is how a poem on disillusioned love opens: "The cobwebs of my love freeze in a chamsin / ochre flakes fly upward, erasing heaven" (*Not Necessarily*, 12)<sup>36</sup>. The motif of effacement develops to the absurd in the poem *Erasure*:

I'll take all the poems and in them erase the word "I".  
After the erasure the lines that remain are Flemish lace:

<sup>36</sup> "קורי עכביש של התאנבותי קופאים בסמסין, / פתותי אוכרה חומקים מצלה, מוהקים שמים" ("לא בהכרח", 12)

Nice patterns of spaces, white air, compressed in nothing .  
 Now I will erase the word "you".  
 No poems will remain (*Erasure*, 24).

אָקח אַתּ כּל הַשִּׁירִים וְאֶמְחֶק מֵהֶם אֶת הַמֶּלֶךְ "אָנִי".  
 אֶתְחַרֵּי הַמְּחִיקָה יִשְׁאַרְוּ שְׂרוּת שֶׁהֵן תַּתְּרֶה פְּלִמִּית:  
 תִּכְנִיּוֹת נְאוֹת שֶׁל רוּחֵימִים, אֲוִיר לָבוֹ, דְּחֹס בְּאֵינוֹ.  
 עֵתָּה אֶמְחֶק אֶת הַמֶּלֶךְ "אֶתָּה".  
 לֹא יִשְׁאַרְוּ שִׁירִים ("מְחִיקָה", 24).

The following poem illustrates the mannerist, decadent sensual-ity: "And when someday / my death will drop from the skies / your name will blossom slowly / from my sleeping limbs" (*The Impossibility of Im*, 29)<sup>37</sup>. It is characterized by the image of distorted or wounded limbs, as in the poem *Through the Wounded Limbs* about the little finger that has no "neural passage" (33). When love is disappointed, it turns into "poison. emptiness. evil" (*Geverofe*, 37), especially when it is love for a father who has left his small daughter, and hence she is ill and her blood is poisoned (*Ibid.*, 38). The pain of abandonment is expressed by the protagonist in an ars-poetic image: "And once a month dead parts come out of me / in black blood / in red words" (*Ibid.*, 39)<sup>38</sup>. The repugnant abjection and the attractive poetry intertwine and merge in one source — the absence of the father. The protagonist's body is devoured from within by a dybbuk called Yaga, an incarnation of the well-known witch from Russian folk tales (*Little Girl Yaga*, 45), and she also loses her mind: "Get lost inside of time. / The screen shows: your trips are over. / The forecast: small, bad depression" (*Lament of a Crazy Girl*, 48)<sup>39</sup>.

In the cycle *A Horse in a Skirt*, which includes the last two poems, the subject of the family is reinforced, and signs of the past and symbols of Russian and Soviet culture abound. Other than Baba Yaga, there is Greatgrandma who "survived wars" and a grandmother who "fought in Stalingrad" (*Song of the Sea*, 47), Grandma Dora dressed in "an evening dress to sit on the bench" (*Dora*, 54), a mother, whose Hebrew, during a trip abroad "evaporates from her mouth / as if it never existed" (*The Traveler*, 58)<sup>40</sup>, as well as a father who is compared, with the aid of a long, developed image, to "adeft Bauhaus building / of four floors"<sup>41</sup>:

<sup>37</sup> "וּכְשֶׁבִּיּוּם מִן הַיָּמִים / מוֹתֵי יִצְנַח מֵהַשָּׁמַיִם, / שְׂמֵךְ יִפְרַח בְּעֶצְלֵתִים / מֵאֲבָרֵי הַנְּדָמִים" ("אי" 29) אֲפִשְׂרוֹת שֶׁל אִי", 29)

<sup>38</sup> "וּפְעַם בְּחֵדֶשׁ תִּלְקִים מֵתִים יוֹצְאִים מִמְּנִי / בְּדָם שָׁחַר, / בְּמִלִּים אֲדָמוֹת" (39)

<sup>39</sup> "הוֹלֵקֶת לְאֲבוֹד בַּתּוֹךְ הַזָּמֵן. / הַצָּג מְרָאָה: אֲפִסּוֹ נִסִּיעוֹתֶיךָ. / הַמַּתְנוּזוֹת: דְּכֹדוּךָ רַע וְקִשְׁוֹן" ("שִׁיר קִינָה" 48) שֶׁל עֵלְמָה מִשׁוֹעֶת", 48)

<sup>40</sup> "מֵתְנַדְפֶּט מִפִּיהָ / כְּאֵלוֹ מְעוֹלָם לֹא הֵיָתָה" ("הַנוֹסְעוֹת", 58)

<sup>41</sup> "בְּגִינָן בְּאוֹהֵאוּס מוֹבֵס / בְּן אַרְבַּע קוֹמוֹת" (52)

Three top floors abandoned  
 The lower turned into a synagogue  
 The eyes of the balconies sealed  
 For the sake of a built-up area, closed in by missing shutters.  
 His teeth smile in a row of supports of black iron.  
 The folds of his neck are the stairwells  
 Scattering flakes of plaster, exposing a glacier of cement  
 (*My Father is a Building*, 52).

שלוש עליונות נטושות.  
 המתחזקה הוסקה לבית כנסת.  
 מרפסות עיניו נאטמו  
 לטובת שטח כנוי, שנסגר בתריסים חסרים.  
 שניו מחזכות בטור תומכות מברזל שחר.  
 קפלי צנארו הם הדרי מדרגות  
 זורעים פתיתי טיח, חושפים קרחון בטון  
 ("אבי הוא בניין", 52).

This picture extends over scores of additional lines and piles deprivation on deprivation, hurt on hurt, adds a legend on a bad witch who turns brothers into trees, and on their mother who saves them, and ends with the expectation that the trees in her father's inner yard "will once again become human beings" (*Ibid.*, 53)<sup>42</sup>. Complex psychological imagery, consisting of deprivations and longing, merges with fairy-tale-mythic symbolism, overly decadent and pedantic, which makes the poem a consummate example of Kogan's mannerist aesthetic. In this aesthetic, the realism and sensual concretism of gender, feminine representation is meant to offset the abstract representation of the Russian past, the tendency toward self-deprecation and erasure of the signs. Femininity is perceived as a sign of the erasure, while the erasure is itself a way of marking the feminine. Through it all, the object of the erasure is evident in the intensified and diverse physical presence. We can see how this mechanism works in the poem *Dora* mentioned above:

Dora's Rs came out in a whirl,  
 Shattered on the tall cliff of her breasts  
 Inside spacious, white fields,  
 Inside green, twisting stalks,  
 Inside red, gaping flowers,  
 That were her dress [...]  
 "Ritochka, Ritochka, where are you going now? It's nighttime!"  
 She called out to me, in the feminine.  
 Her Rs pursued me like breakers on the shore,  
 Pushed me against her stalwart, trembling body.  
 "Give Grandma a kiss!" the two neighbors, the sirens, sang.  
 Their broad body tensed and quivered in anticipation of the "kiss!"

<sup>42</sup> "ישוברו לקיאת בני אדם" (53)

I gave Dora my cheek with closed eyes.  
 I held my breath  
 Before diving under the sharp eau de cologne,  
 Into the deep water between the fissured cliff of her breasts.  
 I secretly wiped off the foam of her ripples,  
 After it was no longer possible to see  
 Me or the swimming lane I left  
 Inside the darkness (*Dora*, 54–55).

הַרְיָשִׁים שֶׁל דּוֹרָה יָצְאוּ בַּמַּעֲרָבוֹלוֹת,  
 הִתְנַקְצוּ עַל מִצּוֹק שְׂדֵיָהּ הַנִּשְׂאָ  
 בַּתּוֹךְ שְׂדוֹת פְּרוּשִׁים, לִבְנִים,  
 בַּתּוֹךְ גְּבֻעוּלִים מִתְפַּתְלִים, יָרְקִים,  
 בַּתּוֹךְ פְּרָחִים פְּעוּרִים, אֲדָמִים,  
 שֶׁהָיוּ שֶׁמָּלְתָהּ [...] "  
 "רִיטוּצ'קָה, רִיטוּצ'קָה, אִיפֹה אֶת הוֹלְכֶת עֲכָשְׂיוֹ? לִילָה!"  
 קָרָאָה לְעֶבְרִי בְּנִקְבָּה.  
 הַרְיָשִׁים שֶׁלָּהּ רָדְפוּ אוֹתִי כַּמְשָׁבְרֵי חוֹף,  
 הִדְפוּ אוֹתִי כְּגַגְד גּוֹפֵה הַיָּצִיב, הָרוֹטֵט.  
 "תְּנִי לִסְבֵּתָא נְשִׁיקָה!" שָׂרוּ שְׂמֵי הַשְּׂכֵנוֹת, הַסִּירְנוֹת.  
 גִּיפּוּ הַרְקֵב נִדְרָךְ נִרְטֵט בַּצִּפִּית "נְשִׁיקָה!"  
 הָיִיתִי מְגִישָׁה לְדוֹרָה אֶת לְחֵי בְּעֵינַיִם עֲצוּמוֹת.  
 עֲצַרְתִּי אֶת נְשִׁימָתִי  
 בְּטָרָם צִלְלָתִי מִתַּחַת לְמֵי הַקּוֹלוֹן הַסְּרִיפִים,  
 אֶל הַמִּצּוּלָה שֶׁבִּין מִצּוֹק שְׂדֵיָהּ הַמְּבֻקֵּעַ.  
 אֶת קַצֵּף אֲדוֹתֶיהָ מְחִיתִי בַּסֵּתֶר,  
 אֲחֲרֵי שֶׁאֵי אֶפְשָׁר הֵיָה לְהִבְחִין  
 בִּי אוּ בַּנְתִּיב הַשְּׂחִיָּה שֶׁהִשְׁאֲרָתִי  
 בַּתּוֹךְ הַחֲשֵׁכָה ("דּוֹרָה", 54–55).

The way the signification works can be depicted as a chain of coding substitutes: the real "Russianness" (the characteristics of speech, body, dress and behavior) recoded as mythological femininity (the images of water and sea, field, flowers, sirens) and the latter is recoded as a sign intended for erasure ("wiped off", "darkness", self-concealment). The element that gives this gender-oriented picture a particularly complex and mannerist character is the similarity, created at the end of the poem, between the feminine protagonist (who is identified by her name — a very rare occurrence in Kogan's work — with the poet) and the figure of the mythological masculine hero, a man of journey and warfare, such as Odysseus, who flees from the "foam of ripples" of femininity, which is born out of the foam like the goddess of love Aphrodite — the seducing femininity, that causes a delay in the journey and poses a danger to the success and self-fulfillment involved in it. This mechanism, mythopoetic in its essence, also works in poems that do not relate to Russian women; a life experience is translated into mythological images — and through them, into symbols of assimilation into nonexistence.

I shall conclude with an example of mythopoetic mannerism, in a poem that continues the sea motif from the earlier poem and covertly or overtly incorporates images of blood and other body fluids that appear in many of Kogan's poems — motifs of physical presence that mark the way to self-deprecation and absence:

At night a sea came and drained my poisoned fluid,  
 Disinfected my festering skin with a pale flame.  
 Instead of the noise of time, came the noise of one wave upon another upon  
 another.

The fur of the Great Bear, outstretched, shivering  
 Over my supine body, and underneath rolled up  
 A deck damp with dew—a spray of the spit of the serpent of Andromeda.  
 My poisoned fluid imbibed salt, was diluted, purified.

Triton blew a drawn-out note of delight and no-knowledge

(*Nighttime, Leaving*, 155).

בלילה בא גם ונגזז את נוזלי המרעל,  
 חטא את העור המדלק בשלהבת חזרת.  
 במקום שאון הזמן בא שאון גל חובק גל חובק גל.  
 פרות הדבה הגדולה נפרשה מצמררת  
 מעל לגופי השוכב, ונמתחת נגלל  
 ספון לח מטל – רקס רק של נחש אנדרומדה.  
 נוזלי המרעל רנה מלח, נמהל והתפל.  
 טריטון נשף תו ממשך של רב-טון ואין-נדע ("לילה. יציאה", 155).

The poet refrained from identifying the main character in the poem as a female; there is no verb or action of which she is the subject. Hence, I will leave aside the possibility of interpreting the poem in the biographical context<sup>43</sup> and will take a more universal approach. The poem presents a picture of high tide or a flood that offers a remedy for the character's illness. What at first seems to be a sickness of the body turns out to be a sickness of time, and it is healed when time is annulled as the character sinks into mythological atemporality. The sea that arrives at night is both the physical sea and a symbol of the dream. And in the dream, the protagonist sees herself (I use the feminine for convenience) inside a cosmic vision. It looks static, like a picture or a sculpture, but inside it an ambivalent, internal process takes place, one that is bound up in the dual symbolism of salt: disinfection and purification, on the one hand, perpetuation of the wound and the pain, on the other (as in the Bible: Elisha's "remedy of the water" to save the city from "death and miscarriage" [2 Kings 2:19–22], and the "sowing of the salt" by Abimelech in the soil of the city that he "shat-

<sup>43</sup> M. Averbuch, *Life in the Shadow of Immigration, a Disappearing Father, Rape: the Poet Rita Kogan publishes a second book*, (Hebrew), "Haaretz", 11.7.2018. <https://www.haaretz.co.il/gallery/literature/premium-MAGAZINE-1.6264740> [1.09.2020].

tered" and whose people he "slew" [Judges 9:45]). The character's lack of movement is explained by her illness and her willingness to consign herself to the healing waves of eternity and forgetfulness. But at the same time, she presents herself after the dramatic action has ended, by mentioning figures from Greek mythology, in particular from the myth whose events took place, in one interpretation, on the shores of Jaffa.

The myth tells of beautiful Andromeda, whose father Cepheus was prepared to sacrifice her in order to appease the sea monster that threatened to destroy his kingdom. The monster was sent by Poseidon as punishment for the excess pride of Cassiopeia, Cepheus' wife. Cassiopeia boasted that she (or her daughter) was more beautiful than the Nereids, the daughters of Poseidon. In the poem, the monster is called "serpent of Andromeda", which endows the character with aspects of Eve in the Garden of Eden eating of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. Thus the "binding of Andromeda" on a rock near the sea and her unrealized sacrifice can be interpreted as a scene of the seduction of the mythological hero, Perseus in this case. Perseus, on his way from the battle in which he slayed the medusa Gorgon, kills the monster, saves Andromeda and marries her. The character in the poem, lying on "spray of the spit of the serpent of Andromeda", can be Andromeda or by the same token, can be Perseus, as they sail in a ship to their new home and navigate it with the aid of the constellations — the Great Bear (Ursa Major) and Andromeda. Triton, who appears in the last line of the poem, is the son of Poseidon, who, according to the myths, blows on his conch shell to herald the end of the flood. He too, like the "serpent of Andromeda" often appears as a creature with the body of a snake or a fish (a comparison of the poem to the painting by Arnold Böcklin, *Triton and Nereida* 1874, in which a sea serpent appears alongside Triton and Andromeda, makes it possible to assume that the character of the protagonist in the poem may also be identified with Nereida; the eroticism in the painting projects onto the poem and underscores the force of its symbolic eroticism). Sometimes Triton assists heroes with prophecies and advice. In the poem, on the other hand, when he blows on his conch shell, he is not only heralding the healing flood, he is also marking the sinking of the protagonist into "no-knowledge".

The way this expectation is thwarted is compatible with Kogan's main paradigm — erasure and the pleasure of absence — and creates the mystic paradoxical concept, according to which no-knowledge is the knowledge. The salty sea water symbolizes

both repair, knowledge and life, as well as chaos, forgetfulness and death. To complete my analysis of the poem, I will add to this mythopoesis the psychological aspect: the protagonist's identification with Andromeda presents her as a victim of her father, as guilty without guilt. And this is compatible with the perception of the relations between the figure of the daughter and the father who abandoned her, which, as I have noted, appears in other poems by Kogan. However, that same identification dismisses the notion of the victim, since Andromeda's sacrifice was never carried out. We therefore arrive at the conclusion that the poem embodies the perception of identity as nothingness. Not only is the identity not victimlike, it does not exist: it appears like an undefined cloud of various possibilities of rhetorical identification, according to psychological and poetic needs. The struggle over its formation between the cosmic powers continues; the myth never ends.

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The poetry of the four poets discussed here (Alex Rif, Nadia-Adina Rose, Yael Tomashov, Rita Kogan) strives to work out the trauma of immigration and to repair the social and psychological distortion, culminating in normalization. The structure of the identity is fueled not by insult, but rather by pride. Some of its main technologies are carnivalism, clowning, grotesque, abjection, and mythopoesis. Alex Rif builds a passage from loss of identity to a proud repair — clownlike and militant. In her poetry, the Russian past serves as a sign of disappointment with the Israeli present, so that signs of the past mark absence in the present, become simulacra structured one inside the other, into what I called "language of the babushka". While in Rif's work, we discern psychological realism, Nadia Adina Rose's poetry can be characterized as mythopoetic symbolism. Rose has no need of the language of the babushka, to hide one language within another, because all of her languages are connected to one another in the non-hierarchical space of the metaphor, of the "internet of everything" in which everything is connected to everything. Her ontological metaphors endow every creature, object or relationship with an identical ontological status. Her neo-romantic and decadent poetry strives to achieve poetic uniformity and a uniform picture of the world, in which there is no room for distinctive identities. Yael Tomashov adopts a different strategy; she creates a fugue of identities, a counterpoint of languages. In her case, the identity and the poetry are not

at war, as in Rif's case. Nor are they uniform, as in Rose's poetry. Rather they are polyphonic music. Signs of the Russian culture do not function in her work as simulacra or metaphors; they do not signal anger, pride or compassion, but break down into divergent series. In Rita Kogan's poems, unlike those of the other three poets, the signs of the Russian past and of identity are mainly signs of absence. The representation of the memory of the past is replaced by an epic and mythic iconography or leaves behind only signs of its effacement. Kogan's psychological, imaginative mannerism unites aestheticism, playful decadence, erotic sensuality, and intellectualism. The sensual materiality of the gender-oriented identity offsets the abstraction of the representation of the Russian past and the tendency towards self-deprecation and erasure of the sign. The experience of the reality is translated into mythological images, and through them into symbols of the assimilation into nothingness. In this way, Kogan shapes her concept of identity as "white air, compressed into nothing", which reflects the direction of the poetry of the generation and a half.

Translated from Hebrew by Haya Naor