Mothers in Israel:
Images of Motherhood in Hebrew and Yiddish Song

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Table of Contents

Introduction

The Jewish Mother is enjoying something of a renaissance in the public consciousness. In the last year alone, four books about the Jewish Mother have been published: *The Portable Jewish Mother: Guilt, Food, And...When Are You Giving Me Grandchildren*; *Yiddishe Mamas: The Truth About the Jewish Mother*; *25 Questions for a Jewish Mother*, and *You Never Call! You Never Write!: A History of the Jewish Mother*, an academic book by Joyce Antler that traces the image of the Jewish Mother in American popular culture from the late 19th century to the present. In the last four years, four CDs have been released that celebrate the "Yiddishe Mama": in 2003, *Di Eybike Mame: The Eternal Mother: Women in Yiddish Theater and Popular Song 1905-1929*; in 2004, the first volume of the series *Songs From The Attic: The Best Of 78 Records*, entitled *A Letter From Mother*; and in 2007, the Sirba Octet, a French ensemble, released *A Yiddishe Mame*, and the Irving Fields Trio released *My Yiddishe Mama's Favorites*. Clearly, the figure of the ethnic Jewish Mother is as relevant as ever, and these examples demonstrate that it is still desirable to capitalize on the nostalgia value she holds for Jews (and presumably non-Jews as well).

Although not as culturally current, the figure of the mother as a symbol of the nation has been no less relevant in the creation of shared Jewish communities. The metaphor of Land as Mother is common to many cultures, and represents the political and ideological need to subsume cultural differences into a single group. While the ethnic "Yiddishe Mama" of the above examples frequently reflected the sentimentalism, adherence to tradition, and shared sense of loss experienced by diasporic communities, the figures of "Mother Zion" and "*Rachel Imeinu*" ("Rachel our Mother") reflected the adoption of similar 19th-century nationalist motifs and the use of more universal imagery in order to create the sense of a

single Jewish nation. The thesis will address the use of these two depictions of motherhood in Hebrew and Yiddish song and how poets and composers used the associations behind them with the aim of cultivating a certain kind of Jewish identity.

In order to illustrate the contrast between these two depictions of Jewish motherhood, I will be applying the framework utilized by Svetlana Boym in her book *The Future of Nostalgia.* Boym describes two types of nostalgia: restorative nostalgia, which evokes national past and future; and reflective nostalgia, which represents individual and cultural memory.[1] The figure of the mother is an excellent example of how a symbol can be used to evoke both restorative and reflective nostalgia. One of the most malleable cultural symbols, the figure of the mother can denote something as broad and communal as a country while conveying the most personal sentiment. The mother can signify both the deeply-missed birthplace and longed-for imagined homeland. She can be both a symbol of loss—the lost biological mother, lost traditions, or lost homeland—and, as Mother Zion and *Rachel Imeinu,* the symbol of the fulfillment of nationalistic aspirations. She can express collective solidarity in both the service of Zionist ideology and the establishment of an immigrant community. She can carry religious significance as well: biblical figures such as personified Jerusalem and Rachel the matriarch are drafted to stand in for the motherland or the actual mother.

The mother-land analogy has been part of our cultural consciousness since ancient times, and it is important to provide a brief historical context for Jewish concepts of motherland. Metaphors of woman-as-earth go back to the earliest extant Sumerian poetry and ancient autochthonous mythology, in which the earth itself gives birth to its inhabitants.

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[1] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

This analogy is present in early Jewish tradition as well: Tikva Frymer-Kensky points out in her book *Motherprayer: The Pregnant Woman's Spiritual Companion* the connections made between woman and earth made by the Rabbis in the Babylonian Talmud, in *Ta'anit* 8a:

> Resh Lakish said in the name of Bar Kappara:
> Scripture says "stopped up" about a woman (Gen. 20:18)
> And "stopped up" about the sky: (Deut. 11:17)
> Scripture says "birth" about woman (Gen 30:23)
> And "birth" about the earth. (Isaiah 55:10)
> Scripture says "took note of" about woman (Gen. 21:23) [sic]
> And "took note of" about the earth. (Ps. 65:10)[2]

As Lynne Huffer writes, the mother is an "originary sign," meaning that "in the Western tradition the mother is a symbol of beginnings; as the one who gives birth, she occupies the place of the origin. Metaphorically speaking, everything begins with the mother. Second, because the mother marks the place of the origin, she also marks the place of return.... as the ground of meaning, the mother can only ever be the empty foundation of meaning: she is never meaning itself, but only that which allows meaning to come to be."[3] Male historical figures, while susceptible to cultural and political "reworking," are for the most part still bound by place and time, and are tied to individual historical agents. Although a personality like Herzl may attain almost mythological status, "Mother Zion" or "Mother Earth" can be made and remade to satisfy nearly any political or cultural demand: the far more malleable female allegorical figures or national personifications can easily be

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[2] Tikva Frymer Kensky, *Motherprayer: The Pregnant Woman's Spiritual Companion* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1995), 34. Note: the correct quotation from Genesis 21 is Genesis 21:1.

[3] Lynne Huffer, *Maternal Pasts, Feminist Futures: Nostalgia, Ethics, and the Question of Difference* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 7, 9-10.

manipulated to fit the ideological needs of the moment, regardless of the immediate historical circumstances.[4]

The mother/land figure has proved valuable in modern nation-building as well. In the introduction to *Art, Nation, and Gender: Ethnic Landscapes, Myths, and Mother-Figures*, Tricia Cusack notes that "one of the ways in which women have been constantly figured in relation to the nation over the last two centuries has been through the use of allegorical figures representing civic attributes, such as justice or liberty, or standing for the nation itself, the motherland....In the modern period, the national territory, regarded as the body of the nation, bounded, vital, and indivisible, is anthropomorphized in metaphorical references...but above all by being gendered as female."[5] The range of ways in which one may choose to relate to the idea of mother, land, or motherland, is represented in the variety of songs and poems that draw on the mother/land image, and the variety of ideologies that result.

The "Mother Earth" image is a manifestation of the autochthonous myth, which, although ancient in origin, serves the purpose of modern nation-building; forming a kind of collective memory. Assaf Sagiv notes: "the autochthonous myth helps an ethnic group develop its identity, deepen solidarity among its members, and defend its territorial rights against competing claims."[6] But Jews, as Sagiv states further, were not "born out of" the land of Israel; rather, the Torah repeatedly asserts that the Children of Israel were given the rights to the land by God, not by some elemental, organic connection to the land. In doing

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[4] Ibid, 5-6.
[5] Tricia Cusack, introduction to *Art, Nation, and Gender: Ethnic Landscapes, Myths, and Mother-Figures*, ed. Tricia Cusack and Sìghle Bhreathnach-Lynch (England and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2003), 6.
[6] Assaf Sagiv, "Zionism and the Myth of Motherland," *Azure* 5 (Autumn 1998), 93.

so, the Torah affirms God's power and rejects the worldview of the pagan religions dominant at the time, a "matriarchal conception of nature" in which "man experiences nature as an all-embracing mother, upon whose graces he is utterly dependent."[7]

Although this interpretation of Torah implies having to make a choice between a relationship with God and a relationship with the motherland, Jewish texts from the Bible to the present make no such distinction. Female allegorical figures appear throughout the Bible and other classical Jewish sources, manifesting in such personae as the *Shechinah*, the exiled feminine aspect of God; Jerusalem personified as a widow; the figure of Wisdom; and Rachel the Matriarch, a symbolic representative of the Jewish people, weeping for her children in exile. Medieval period poets, notably Yehuda Halevi, continued to use female personifications of Zion and the land of Israel in their poetry, and this practice continued through the modern Zionist period as well.[8]

Early Zionist leaders, in their attempt to imitate "organic" European nationalism, adopted elements of the autochthonous myth from the political models of other 19th-century nationalist movements.[9] The Zionist movement reinvigorated maternal and female allegorical figures unique to Jewish tradition and fused them with generic motherland figures that resembled those of more established European nations. The depictions of specifically Jewish mother/land figures like Mother Zion and *Rachel Imeinu*, while drawing on Jewish textual tradition, were strongly influenced by those of contemporaneous female national personifications, such as Mother Russia, Britannia, and Maraianne.

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[7] Ibid., 96
[8] Wendy I. Zierler, *And Rachel Stole the Idols: The Emergence of Modern Hebrew Women's Writing* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004), 128.
[9] Sagiv, 103-104.

In Chapter One, we will see the ways in which the mother/land image was developed by the *Shirei Eretz Yisrael*, Songs of the Land of Israel, a genre of song that was expressly designed to celebrate the Jewish national experience and encourage Zionist settlement in the land of Israel. Female personifications of the land are especially common throughout the *Shirei Eretz Yisrael.* These songs, and the mother figures invoked throughout, were intended to help forge a Jewish national identity, lend legitimacy to the Zionist cause, and otherwise aid in the project of nation-building. More than the other examples of mother-songs analyzed here, the *Shirei Eretz Yisrael* glorify the communal relationship with the land, emphasizing the Zionist principle of collectivism and the Biblical injunction to return to the land. The pervasive use of first-person plural language and Biblical imagery and allusions, together with descriptions of the Israeli landscape, are major characteristics of this genre of song.

In contrast, the poets of the Israeli art songs analyzed in Chapter One sought to create a more intimate bond between themselves and their adopted motherland, Eretz Yisrael. While some of the conventions of the *Shirei Eretz Yisrael* are used here as well, predominantly the landscape imagery and use of Biblical allusions, the language used is individualistic rather than collective, and the feelings expressed more ambivalent and nuanced.

In Chapter Two, the role of reflective and restorative nostalgia in Hebrew and Yiddish "letter songs" of the late 19th and early 20th centuries is explored. The letter song, a genre of song that peaked in popularity during this period of mass Jewish migration, illustrates how conflicted attitudes toward home, ethnic and national identity, and loyalty to family can be conveyed using the framework of letter-writing. By nature, the epistolary

genre implies an interpersonal, dialogical, typically familial structure, which allowed poets and composers to frame responses to these issues as dialogues between family members rather than in the form of a philosophical treatise or political argument. Often, these letter songs conflated mother with motherland: leaving mother symbolized leaving all that was familiar. Chapter Two discusses a number of letter songs, some of which primarily serve to provoke a cathartic emotional response in the audience members, some of which fuse religious Zionist principles with nostalgic *shtetl* motifs, often using idiomatic Yiddish expressions and imagery. Songwriters and poets employ the sentimental image of the *shtetl* mother throughout the letter song genre, but to different ends. In some instances, she serves as a symbol of the Old World, to be left behind in search of a new life, and in others, she becomes "Mother Zion," welcoming her children home to Eretz Yisrael, their "true" motherland.

Expression of nostalgia for one's homeland was a defining characteristic of immigrant culture, and the mother figure was one of the primary symbols of this nostalgia for home. However, the mother, and by extension, the home, were not always symbols that historically evoked nostalgia. The widespread immigrant experience of separation from home and family contributed to an unprecedented rise in the expression of nostalgia. According to Shari L. Thurer, nostalgia for home and mother was brought into being by the sudden differentiation in public and private spheres that occurred as a result of the Industrial Revolution. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, men and women predominantly shared work and social space, now woman's sphere was almost exclusively defined as in the home. Whereas father and mother previously had worked in close proximity to each other, tending to the daily needs of the family, after the Industrial Revolution the domestic and work

spheres split, with father occupying the "public" work sphere and the mother the "private" home sphere. [10] Thurer describes the Industrial Revolution as "the most cataclysmic of all the social upheavals for the mother," stating that it "shattered the traditional structure of the family by splitting apart what had been an indivisible whole—the home and the workplace—never to be reunited."[11]

As families moved from rural environments and household production to cities and large-scale factory production, the family evolved from a community unit to a private entity. Concurrently, home was "imbued with sentiment; it became a place 'where the heart is' as well as, in its ideal manifestation, the locus of intimacy, peace, spontaneity, and unwavering devotion to people and principles beyond the self. Home was transformed from a mere four walls into a refuge, a haven where one might retreat for repose or renewal or inner fortification." [12] This new "cult of domesticity" begged for the ideal authority figure: "So stridently did this new cult of domesticity cry out for an appropriate mistress to oversee things that it would have been impossible not to upgrade mother's status. In the reflected glory of her exalted home, she could no longer be seen as a mere functionary. Motherhood became a 'noble calling.'"[13] Even though "public patriarchy" remained the norm, the mother typically assumed the position of authority in the home, and the father's domestic position became more and more marginalized. Gender and family roles were increasingly less well-defined. In immigrant cultures, the cultural upheaval was most pronounced, as immigrants suffered from the effects of physical displacement as well as this new challenge to traditional

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[10] Shari Thurer, *The Myths of Motherhood: How Culture Reinvents the Good Mother* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), 183-84.
[11] Ibid., 183.
[12] Ibid., 184.
[13] Ibid., 184-85.

gender roles. The mother figure, as reflected in the letter songs, served as a symbol not only for the home, family, and traditions relinquished (or newly adopted), but as a means of articulating the tension between the new culture and the structures of tradition and family left behind.

Chapter Three will discuss how concerns about Jewish national sovereignty are expressed through the highly personal image of *Rachel Imeinu* weeping for her exiled children. The themes most associated with Rachel the Matriarch are maternity, fertility (or conversely, barrenness), and national exile and return. Depending on the ideological principles valued by the poets and songwriters, one or another of these themes are emphasized, but until recently, the figure of Rachel was predominantly used as a symbol for collective rather than personal aspirations. Historically, poets have invoked her as a symbol of the religious implications of the exile, and others as a metaphor for the Zionist goal of *aliyah*. The poetry of Rachel Bluwstein (1890-1931) subverts this tendency, however, likening her own struggles to those experienced by Rachel the Matriarch. While she incorporates similar themes—infertility, exile, motherhood—she does not necessarily see in them solely a metaphor for the condition of the Jewish people. Bluwstein seeks to relate to Rachel as one individual to another, and expresses the longings of one woman, not those of an entire nation. Her poetry reflects her relationship to Rachel as an individual woman, and demonstrates the larger trend in Israeli song towards a more individual approach to collective issues.

Mother figures like those explored in this thesis are present in Jewish literature, visual art, and popular culture. Music, due to its nature as a performative art, creates a unique sense of shared community among the audience members and produces a communal emotional

response. While some of the repertoire is rather straightforward in its depiction of the mother figure, not all of it can be categorized as easily. The image of the personal, "sentimental' mother is not limited to Yiddish repertoire, nor is the mother-as-nation limited to *Shirei Eretz Yisrael*. How these differing images of motherhood are used by the poets and songwriters can tell us a great deal about contemporary Jewish cultural and political ideologies.

Please note: unless otherwise indicated, translations are the author's. All translations of Biblical texts are from the 1999 Jewish Publication Society translation of the *Tanakh*.

Chapter One: Songs to the Motherland

Female personifications of the land are common throughout the *Shirei Eretz Yisrael*, songs created by the modern Zionist movement for the express purpose of celebrating the Jewish national experience and encouraging settlement in the land of Israel. The main objective of the *Shirei Eretz Yisrael* was the promotion and dissemination of Zionist ideology both within the land of Israel and the Diaspora, and thus was "heavily loaded with ideological expectations. Folksongs and dances were designated to extol the spirit of the pioneer settlers, whether rural or urban; to depict the romanticized scenery of the land; to enhance the revival of Hebrew through settings of both biblical texts and modern lyrics; and to unify people through communal singing."[1]

The communal nature of the *Shirei Eretz Yisrael* was seen as crucial to creating an authentic Israeli song tradition: "the ideologists of the Yishuv never doubted that the new national folk song of Palestine would fulfill its goal only when actively sung by all strata of the heterogeneous society."[2] Consequently, the use of the first-person plural is a major characteristic of the *Shirei Eretz Yisrael*, and one that distinguishes it from the art song genre: "Using the plural reflected the concern of Hebrew/Israeli folk songs with the Jewish community in Eretz Yisrael as a collective, rather than with the individual. The change from 'we' to 'I' in Hebrew/Israeli songs marks a major turning point in the gradual transformation of [*Shirei Eretz Yisrael*] from folk to popular song."[3] As we will see in the analysis of the poems, this grammatical element has a significant effect on the author's representation of his

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[1] Jehoash Hirshberg, *Music in the Jewish Community of Palestine 1880-1948: A Social History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 146.
[2] Ibid., 147.
[3] Motti Regev and Edwin Seroussi, *Popular Music and National Culture in Israel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 57.

or her relationship with the motherland. A collectivist approach to the motherland, using first-person (masculine) plural language, was far more in line with Zionist nationalist ideology than the nuanced, individualistic poetry of Rachel Bluwstein and Leah Goldberg.

A comprehensive survey of the musical and literary aspects of the *Shirei Eretz Yisrael* is beyond the scope of this thesis. It is important to note, however, the main distinction between the folk and art song genres, which are not necessarily immediately apparent in the repertoire of Israeli song. According to Motti Regev and Edwin Seroussi, the difference between folk and art song has less to do with musical and literary style than with thematic content. They write of the "ambiguous status" of the *Shirei Eretz Yisrael*, a literary genre

> located between two opposed systems: the 'light song'...a song with [a] refrain...and the art or lyrical song. The social source of this ambiguity is located in the identity and status of writers who contributed to the [*Shirei Eretz Yisrael*] repertory. Many texts of [*Shirei Eretz Yisrael*] were written by poets who also wrote high or canonic poetry.....However, what distinguishes [*Shirei Eretz Yisrael*] poetry is not its formal or poetic aspects, but rather its themes. Designed to celebrate the renewed Jewish national experience and the ideals of the Zionist settlement in Eretz Yisrael, [*Shirei Eretz Yisrael*] emphasizes specific topics. Among these are descriptions of the Land of Israel (especially such locations valued by the Zionist ethos as the Jezreel Valley or the Jordan River), cultivating the land, and the defense of the territory. In other words, these songs focus on the major themes of Hebrewism."[4]

These Zionist tropes, together with the image of the motherland are prevalent throughout the following examples.

The first song, written by Avraham Broides (1907-1979), "*Adama*" ("Land")[5] demonstrates a straightforward use of the land-as-mother metaphor, and illustrates the Zionist

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[4] Ibid., 56-57. This shift in grammar is typically accompanied by a corresponding shift in musical complexity: owing to the communal nature of the *Shirei Eretz Yisrael*, one of the "requirements" for success was a melody that could easily be sung by groups. Art songs, typically written for a solo singer of some musical ability and accompanied by piano, were not constrained in the same respect.

[5] *Songs of Israel*, edited Seymour Silbermintz (Young Zionist Actions Committee: New York, 1949), 63.

use of collectivist language. Broides, born in Lithuania, immigrated to Palestine in 1923, and like many of the early Zionist poets and composers, worked as a laborer for several years while writing his poetry. Much of his early poetry reflects this experience working the land.

"*Adama*" ("Land")

Land, land,	אַדָמָה, אַדָמָה,
In the lowland and in the heights	בִּשְׁפֵלָה וּבְרָמָה,
In the rain and in the sun	בַּמָּטָר וּבַחַמָּה,
You are our mother, land—	אַתְּ אִמֵּנוּ, אַדָמָה –
Mother of man,	אֵם אָדָם,
Land of all that lives!	אַדְמַת כָּל חַי !
Land, land,	אַדָמָה, אַדָמָה,
In the hunger and in the thirst	בָּרָעָב וּבַצָמָא,
In you is the source of consolation	בָּךְ מְקוֹר הַנֶחָמָה,
You are our mother, land—	אַתְּ אִמֵּנוּ, אַדָמָה –
Mother of man,	אֵם אָדָם,
Land of all that lives!	אַדְמַת כָּל חַי !
Land, land	אַדָמָה, אַדָמָה,
The revelation and the wonder	הַגִלוּיָה וְהַפְלָאָה,
Body and soul are yours,	לָךְ הַגוּף וְהַנְשָׁמָה,
You are our mother, land—	אַתְּ אִמֵּנוּ אַדָמָה –
Mother of man,	אֵם אָדָם,
Land of all that lives!	אַדְמַת כָּל חַי !

The refrain *"At imeinu, adama— /em adam,/admat kol chai*!" ("You are our mother, earth—mother of man, / Land of all that lives!"), and the lines "*bash'felah uvaramah,/bamatar uvachamah"* ("in the lowland and in the heights/in the rain and in the sun") and "*bara'av uvatzamah*" ("In the hunger and in the thirst") attempt to show the scope of the motherland's power: she is in everything, and everything comes from her, even the torment of hunger and thirst.

Broides also references the language of the Bible and Hebrew liturgy, doing so in a fashion that almost secularizes the sacred text. The lines "*bach m'kor hanechamah*" ("In you is the source of consolation") and "*lach haguf v'han'shamah*" ("body and soul are yours"),

while emphasizing humanity's intimate relationship with the motherland, also recall Biblical and liturgical texts. The word "*nechamah*," "consolation," and its Hebrew root *nun-chet-mem*, connotes in particular prophetic texts alluding to God's consolation after exile, as in Jeremiah 31:15, Isaiah 40:1, and Lamentations 1:16-17, all of which refer to an exiled (and personified) Jerusalem after exile. The phrase "*lach haguf v'han'shamah*" may be a reference to the prayer "*Han'shama lach*" in the High Holiday Selichot and Kol Nidre liturgies. The phrase "*Han'shama lach v'haguf po'olach, chusa al amalach. Han'shama lach v'haguf shelach*" (The soul belongs to you and the body is your work, spare your creation. The soul belongs to you and the body is yours") is parallel to "*lach haguf v'han'shamah*" ("body and soul are yours") of the song. This may be seen as a reference to the liturgist and poet addressing God and the motherland in second person feminine grammatical form. While this poem does not emphasize specific borders or locations as other poems of this type do, the fact that the language is Hebrew and draws on sacred Hebrew texts, makes it clear that the land referred to is Eretz Yisrael.

The metaphor of "sons" in the motherland is prevalent throughout nationalist imagery, and nearly all countries with a tradition of land-as-mother have similar descriptions of making the motherland fertile by sowing, plowing, and tilling, or protecting the body of the motherland from its rape by invading armies. Johanna Valenius asserts that female national personifications are not just symbols of the nation, they are embodiments of the nation: "the manifestation of cultural and political prescriptions, representations and ideals. The body of the Maid of Finland is a metaphor for these cultural and political prescriptions. Her body is a space, both psychological and material. She is the embodiment of the nation

imagined and of the geographical territory known as Finland."[6] While the motherland is frequently portrayed as abundantly life-giving, it is also vulnerable, in great need of defense by her sons, as the potential violations of the boundaries of the motherland symbolize the boundaries of the female body.[7]

"*Anachnu sharim lach*" ("We Sing to You")[8] is a prime example of the type of poetry that characterizes the *Shirei Moledet* (Songs of Motherland), a subset of the *Shirei Eretz Yisrael* often conflated with *Shirei Avodah,* Songs of Labor. It uses collective language that objectifies the mother as motherland/Mother Earth, typically placing her in relationship to her sons. It was written in 1930 by Yaakov Orland (1914-2002), and was his first Hebrew poem set to music. Born in the Ukraine, Orland arrived in Palestine at the age of seven with his parents. He is considered to be an outstanding author of "high" poetry whose poems were set by numerous composers of *Shirei Eretz Yisrael.*[9]

"*Anachnu sharim lach*" ("We Sing to You")

We sing to you, homeland and mother,	אֲנַחְנוּ שָׁרִים לָךְ מוֹלֶדֶת וְאִמָּא
A Song of Songs to labor	אֶת שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים לָעֲמָל,
As long as the fire in our hearts is inward,	כָּל עוֹד הָאֵשׁ בִּלְבָבֵנוּ פְּנִימָה
Your song will not cease from our mouths.	מִפִּינוּ שִׁירֵךְ לֹא יֶחְדָּל.
We fled from a foreign country, from poverty and insult,	בָּרַחְנוּ מִנֵּכָר בְּעֹנִי בִּבְלִי־מָה
We guarded the glory just for you,	שָׁמַרְנוּ תִּפְאֶרֶת רַק לָךְ;
We are your sons, mother,	אֲנַחְנוּ בָּנִים רַק לְאִמָּא לְאִמָּא,
We are all yours.	אֲנַחְנוּ כֻּלָּנוּ שֶׁלָּךְ.

[6] Johanna Valenius, "(Dis-)Embodying the Nation: Female Figures, Desire and Nation-Building in Early Twentieth-Century Finland," in *Art, Nation, and Gender: Ethnic Landscapes, Myths, and Mother-Figures,* ed. Tricia Cusack and Sìghle Bhreathnach-Lynch (England and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2003), 39.
[7] Linda Edmondson, "Putting Mother Russia in a European Context," in *Art, Nation, and Gender: Ethnic Landscapes, Myths, and Mother-Figures,* ed. Tricia Cusack and Sìghle Bhreathnach-Lynch (England and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2003), 61.
[8] *Songs of Israel,* 53.
[9] Regev and Seroussi, 57.

Remember that we swore to go forward Our hearts will reveal the secret to you We want to love you, mother, We want you to live!	זְכְרִי כִּי נִשְׁבַּעְנוּ לָלֶכֶת קָדִימָה לִבֵּנוּ יְגַל לָךְ הַשּׁוּד; אֲנַחְנוּ רוֹצִים לֶאֱהוֹב אוֹתָךְ אִמָּא, אֲנַחְנוּ רוֹצִים בָּךְ לִחְיוֹת.
Gaze upon your blue heavens, mother, The shoots of your dream are flowering again, You will not believe it, because we will appoint you Homeland of labor and peace.	צֵל כְּחֹלֶת שָׁמַיִךְ הַבִּיטִי־נָא אִמָּא פּוֹרְחִים עוֹד כִּרְמֵי הַחֲלוֹם; אַתְּ לֹא תַאֲמִינִי אוֹתָךְ כִּי נָשִׂימָה מוֹלֶדֶת עָמָל וְשָׁלוֹם.

Ostensibly this poem is a paean to the motherland, but it extols the deeds of her sons far more than the qualities of the motherland. The narrator(s) of "*Anachnu sharim lach*" boasts of his/their offering as "*Shir hashirim le'amal*" ("the Song of Songs to labor") before detailing the feats they have achieved for the motherland's sake. They "fled from a foreign country in poverty" ("*barachnu minecher b'oni*"), they "guarded the glory" ("*shamarnu tif'eret*"), they "swore to go forward" ("*nishbanu lalechet kadimah*"), they promise to "appoint her homeland of labor and peace" ("*nasima moledet amal v'shalom*"). Their song "will never cease" ("*mipinu shirech lo yechal*").

In addition to the protective aspect of this relationship between mother and sons, there is an oedipal element. The intimate relationship of the mother(land) to the sons is made abundantly clear: "*anachnu banim rak l'ima, l'ima,/anachnu kulanu shelach*" ("we are your sons, mother/we are all yours") and "*anachnu rotzim le'ehov otach ima,/anachnu rotzim bach lich'yot*!" ("we want to love you, mother/we want to live with you/in you!"). Although the sexual imagery is not as explicit as it is in some of the *Shirei Avodah*, in which the plowing, tilling, and sowing are described in detail, the lover/mother relationship is clear. The opening line, "*Shir hashirim le'amal*" ("the Song of Songs to labor"), references the opening lines of the biblical book, the Song of Songs ("*Shir hashirim asher li'Shlomo*," "the Song of Songs, that is Solomon's"). Although "labor" is emphasized in place of Solomon,

the romantic and sexual elements present in the Song of Songs are alluded to implicitly. In particular, the lines "*anachnu kulanu shelach*" ("we are all yours") and "*anachnu rotzim bach lich'yot*" ("we want to live with/in you") have a distinctly oedipal connotation.

This manner of relating to the motherland, so prevalent in the *Shirei Eretz Yisrael*, has not gone unnoticed by feminist critics. The incestuous implications of the sons fertilizing the motherland is highlighted by Lesley Hazleton, who, citing Isaiah 62:5 ("As a youth espouses a maiden, your sons shall espouse you"), insists that to "act out on" the longing for Zion is "tantamount to an act of incest," and that the return to Zion is imagined in terms of "the return of sons to mother in sexual union."[10] She quotes psycho-historian Jay Gonen: "Mother Zion, after being made love to by her 'homecoming' sons, gave birth to new life....Thus, the children replaced their father, husbanded their mother, and fathered themselves. They therefore experienced a Zionist 'rebirth' in which they played the new and masterful role of the potent life giver."[11] In other words, this use of the mother/land metaphor was another means of appropriating the creative power of the land and displacing women's generative capabilities, by reassigning it to the sons, who in effect, bring about their own rebirth, as well as the land's.

Sheila H. Katz further emphasizes this displacement of women, in her analysis of the relationship between the concepts of "*adam*" and "*adama*." She points out that whereas the grammatically masculine "*adam*" means "human" or "man" and "*b'nei adam*" means "sons of Adam" or "mankind," the female form of the word "*adam*," "*adama*," means "earth" or

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[10] Lesley Hazleton, *Israeli Women: The Reality Behind the Myths* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977), 91.
[11] Ibid., 93.

"land."[12] In this dichotomy, the relationship is no longer between man and woman, but between man and land, effectively removing "real" women from the equation. As we will see in the following example, "*Pakad Adonai*" ("God Remembered"), this is another way poets have related to the land. Here, the poet speaks as an individual, not collectively as in the previous examples, and he uses Biblical images that refer directly and indirectly to rebirth, pregnancy, female/maternal national personifications, and God remembering His people, but for the effect of supplanting them or adopting their characteristics himself—diverting power from the motherland to himself.[13]

"*Pakad Adonai*" ("God Remembered")

To my homeland you have brought me, On a sea of waves and foam I will kiss your masts, my ship, I will never forget you.	לְמוֹלַדְתִּי הֲבִאת אוֹתִי, גַּיִם גַּלִּים וְקֶצֶף. אֶשַּׁק תְּרָנַיִךְ, אֳנִיָּתִי, לֹא אֶשְׁכָּחֵךְ לָנֶצַח.
Chorus: God took note of the strayed corner of Zion Ho, how good it is to sit brothers all together.	פָּקַד ד׳ פִּנַּת צִיּוֹן הַנִּדַּחַת, הוֹי, מַה-נָּעִים שֶׁבֶת אַחִים גַּם יָחַד.
How aged, my mother, my parent, Dearest of all stepmothers, The ruins of my motherland are better than all festive towns!	מַה זָּקְנָה אִמִּי הוֹרָתִי, יְקָרָה מִכָּל אֵם חוֹרָגֶת. טוֹבוֹת חָרְבוֹת מוֹלַדְתִּי מִכָּל קִרְיָה חוֹגֶגֶת!׃
Here is wind from the coast, The scent of citrus groves caresses me, Refresh me with apples, For I am motherland-sick.	נְשָׁבָה פֹּה רוּחַ מֵהַחוֹף, רֵיחַ פַּרְדֵּסִים לְטָפָנִי, כַּפְּרוּנִי בַּתַּפּוּחִים, כִּי חוֹלָה מוֹלֶדֶת אָנִי.

[12] Sheila H. Katz, *Women and Gender in Early Jewish and Palestinian Nationalism* (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2003), 87.

[13] Please see Wendy I. Zierler, *And Rachel Stole the Idols: The Emergence of Modern Hebrew Women's Writing* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004), 128-129 for an analysis of Avraham Shlonsky's poetic cycles *Yizrael* and *Adamah*, further examples of a male Zionist poet appropriating the generative properties of the mother/land and assigning them to himself.

The beginning of the chorus, "*Pakad Adonai pinat tzion hanidachat*" ("God remembered the straying corner of Zion") references a number of Biblical events. The verb "*pakad*" is frequently associated with the Exodus: God "takes notice" or "remembers" the Israelites in Egypt (Exodus 3:16, 4:31), but it is also connected with the childbearing of Sarah and Hannah, both of which are preceded by the declarations "*Va'adonai pakad et Sarah*" ("And God took note of Sarah") in Genesis 21:1, and "*Ki fakad Adonai et Chanah*," ("God took note of Hannah") in I Samuel 2:21. The word "*pakad*" therefore has two connotations that might be useful in the context of this poem: the reference to God remembering the Israelites and eventually freeing them from bondage in Egypt is valuable in that this poem is a celebration of the poet's arrival in Eretz Yisrael. The other association, perhaps familiar to its audience from the traditional Torah reading for the first day of Rosh Hashanah, is that of pregnancy, new life and new beginnings. As previously cited, *pakad* is also one of the three verbs used in the Talmud to make the connection between women and earth, citing both Genesis 21:1 and Psalm 65:10 in their use of *pakad*: God takes note of both Sarah and the earth. In the passage from Psalms, God also irrigates the earth, "*pakad'ta ha'aretz vat'shok'keha*." There is also a strong connotation of redemption: "*pakad*" plays a role in the Exodus story as well. In Exodus 3:16, God tells Moses to inform the elders of Israel, "*pakod pakad'ti:*" God has "taken note" of the Israelites and of what is being done to them in Egypt, thus paving the way for the birth of a free Israelite nation. Perhaps the poet chooses "*pakad*" because of the implication of rebirth, his own as well as the land of Israel's. The word "*nidachat*," translated here as "strayed," could refer to the idea discussed in Deuteronomy 13:13-19 of the "*ir nidachat*," a "forsaken city" that has been lost to idolatry. It also could refer to the Jerusalem of Jeremiah 30:17: "*Ki a'aleh aruchah lach*

umimakotayich erpa'eich, n'um Adonai, di nidacha kar'u lach, Tzion hi doresh eyn lah" ("But I will bring healing to you and cure you of your wounds—declares the Lord. Though they called you 'Outcast, that Zion whom no one seeks out'").

Zion/Jerusalem is also referenced, if indirectly, in the last line of the first verse: "*lo eshkachech lanetzach*" ("I will not forget you, not ever"), an allusion to Psalm 137:5, "*Im eshkachech yerushalayim tishkach y'mini*" ("If I forget you, Jerusalem, let my right hand wither"). While ostensibly the narrator is speaking of the ship, which is also a feminine singular word as Jerusalem would be, it seems clear that the audience would assume a reference to Jerusalem. This Biblical verse is well known, and was also a popular text for Eretz Israeli composers, having been set to music by no fewer than ten.[14] Another allusion to "*lo eshkachech,*" perhaps less well known, is the passage from Isaiah 49-14 in which Zion cries out that God has forsaken and forgotten her. The following verse reads: "Can a woman forget her baby, or disown the child of her womb? Though she might forget, I never could forget you" ("*Hatishkach ishah ulah merachem ben-bitnah gam-eleh tishkachnah v'anochi lo eshkachech*"), and in the subsequent verses, God promises that Zion shall be rebuilt, and her children will return in droves to her.

These references to pregnancy, rebirth, and return from exile as symbolized by a maternal Jerusalem are quickly followed by a near-quotation from Psalm 133:1, which reads: "*hinei mah tov umah na'im/shevet achim gam yachad*" ("Behold, how good and how pleasant/that brothers dwell together") The song text reads: "*hoi, mah na'im shevet achim gam yachad*" ("Ho, how pleasant that brothers dwell together"). The text is familiar from the folk song if not from the psalm, but apart from injecting another Biblical reference into the

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[14] Natan Shahar, *Shir Shir Aleh-Nah: Toldot Hazemer Ha'Ivri* (Moshav Ben Shemen, Israel: Modan Publishing House, 2006), 103.

poem, it also returns the poem to its homosocial atmosphere. After the feminine references of "*pakad*" and the allusion to a personified Zion in the first verse, the poet reinforces the masculine character common to songs of this time by speaking to his "*achim*," ("brothers"). Although the more typical relationship portrayed in *Shirei Eretz Yisrael* is between Zion and her sons, "brothers" are also common, particularly in songs extolling the value of labor or describing the pioneer life.

The second verse personifies the land of Israel as a mother, "*zak'na*" ("aged") and "*y'kara mikol em choreget*" ("dearest of all stepmothers"[15]), but then moves from the personification back to the motherland imagery: "*tovot churvot molad'ti/mikol kirya chogeget*" (The ruins of my motherland are better than any festive town"). The individual mother ("*immi horati*," "my mother, my parent") of the first two lines again is turned into a larger entity, the mother-city of Isaiah (44:26, 51:3, 49:19) whose ruins will be rebuilt.

The poet evokes the Song of Songs in the third verse: he suggests the lushness of the Song of Songs environment with the phrases "*ruach mehachof*," (wind from the coast) and "*re'ach pardesim*" ("scent of orchards") before quoting directly from 2:5 in the second half of the verse: "*rapduni batapuchim/ki choleh moledet ani*" ("refresh me with apples/for I am motherland-sick"). Of course, only "*rapduni batapuchim*" is a direct quote: "*ki choleh moledet ani*" is a play on the original text, "*ki cholat ahavah ani*," ("for I am sick with love"). The word change is slight; however, it results in a fundamental shift in meaning. The poet reverses the gender: whereas in the Song of Songs text the female lover speaks "*ki cholat ahavah ani*," and as a result the gender of the adjective "*cholat*" is feminine, in

[15] The phrase "*em choreget*," translated here as "stepmother," could also be translated as "adoptive mother" or "extraordinary mother." It is important to note that the negative connotations "stepmother" has in English are not present in Hebrew.

"*Pakad Adonai*," the gender is changed from feminine to masculine: "*cholat*" to "*choleh*," indicating that the speaker is male. The change of "*ahavah*" ("love") to "*moledet*" ("motherland") not only removes the word "*ahavah*" from the equation, it removes the actual object: the lover herself. "Lovesick" implies the existence of another person, the lover, and introduces a relationship. By being "motherland-sick," that person-to-person relationship no longer exists, since apart from the speaker there is no other individual involved, only the entity of the motherland.[16]

As a result of this type of displacement of the individual woman, even women as a group, feminist scholars have questioned the value of the land-as-woman metaphor altogether. Hazleton asks: "What value could all this libidinous attraction have for [the women pioneers]? What archetypal images could it arouse in a woman's mind? What role was there for women in this scenario of sons and fathers fertilizing the motherland?" She concludes that the "mysticism of tiling the soil, plowing mother earth to implant seed in her and make her fruitful once more" was "exclusively male."[17] The only options women have in this metaphor are to "'become men,' or to remain with the conventional female roles of Eastern Europe."[18] Sheila Katz writes: "The bride/lover metaphor functioned to exclude women from nationalist imagery. The gendered core of certain aspects of Jewish tradition left women out of the process of rebirth. Their lack of covenant through Brit Milah, circumcision, reduced them to incomplete Jews, just as the epiphany at Sinai reduced them to objects to be avoided in spiritual preparation for meeting God."[19] The only other option

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[16] It may also imply the literal meaning of sickness: many pioneers contracted malaria from the swamps and literally became "motherland-sick."
[17] Hazleton, 93.
[18] Ibid., 95.
[19] Katz, 87.

offered by this metaphor, according to Katz, is that of lesbianism. In order to relate to the motherland in the same way that men have traditionally, women would have to replace the male lover with themselves as the female lover.[20] Nevertheless, numerous female poets have not shied away from using this metaphor for their own ends.

There are a number of explanations as to why metaphorically becoming a man or a lesbian is not the only option for women seeking to engage with their homeland. It is evident that aspects of the land-as-mother metaphor essentialize women. It has historically followed that women were not as involved in the nation-building process as men, or were paid lip service while continuing to hold conventionally feminine social roles. Even so, it does not necessarily follow that any feminism-minded woman would want to distance herself from this metaphor, as Wendy Zierler writes: "Based on these usages of the land=woman analogy, one would assume that Hebrew women poets writing about the landscape of Israel would eschew the convention of female personification of the land....Yet one discovers that early Hebrew women poets embraced rather than rejected the masculine habit of feminizing or maternalizing the land. The tradition of personifying the land in feminine terms seems to offer a means for the Zionist woman poet to forge a poetic intimacy and solidarity with her homeland."[21] It does not necessarily follow that women identify themselves as the "mother" in the metaphor: they may also want to see themselves as the children of the motherland. In fact, female poets have consistently portrayed themselves as the children, not the mother. Shari Thurer provides a psychological reason for women's desire to identify the land as mother. She argues that, during the eighteenth century, the "egoless mother figure" became a fixture in women's literature, and from then on the "maternal martyr" was a staple of

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[20] Ibid.
[21] Zierler, 130-131.

melodrama, a female-oriented genre of literature. She asks why this type of character is appealing to women: why are sacrificing mothers part of mothers' fantasy lives? She answers: "women do not really identify with maternal martyrs much; rather, they identify with the children of those beneficent creatures."[22] The suggestion of turning lesbian or male in order to engage with the land only furthers the notion that there is only one way to relate to the (female) land: as sons or (male) lovers. This equation only allows "masculine" ways of loving the mother, and female poets have proved largely unwilling to accept the implications of this metaphor, choosing instead to write themselves as children of the motherland, rather than "becoming" men or lesbians. In the following three poems, we will see examples of ways in which female poets have appropriated the conventional mother-as-land imagery and in what sense their use of the mother(land)-child metaphor subverts that of the male poets.

The song "*Shir la'Moledet*" ("Song to the Motherland"),[23] written by Miriam Shteklis-Vilensky (also known as Miriam Yalan-Shteklis, 1900-1983) was published in 1948 as part of a collection of Israeli folksongs intended for distribution in the Diaspora. Shteklis-Vilensky, the daughter of a Zionist rabbi, was born in Russia and immigrated to Eretz Yisrael in 1920, where she was primarily known as a children's writer. She is one of the few women poets whose poetry, set to music, entered the canon of Israeli folksong.

"*Shir la'Moledet*" ("Song to the Motherland")

Go up, my people, upon your earth,	עֲלֵה, עַמִּי, עַל אַדְמָתֵךָ,
Go up, go up, conquerors!	עֲלוּ, עֲלוּ, כּוֹבְשִׁים!
Defend, my people, your inheritance,	הָגֵן, עַמִּי, עַל נַחֲלָתֵךָ,
Defend, ploughmen.	הָגְנוּ, הַחוֹרְשִׁים.

[22] Shari L. Thurer, *The Myths of Motherhood: How Culture Reinvents the Good Mother* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), 194.
[23] *Songs of Israel*, 54.

Chorus:	
Arise, oh, my sons and my daughters,	קומו, הוי, בני ובנותי,
Rebuild my ruins,	קום תקימו הריסותי,
Get up, arise!	קומו, עורו!
I will ignite the flame in my heart,	אצית בלב הלהבה,
I will sing the song of freedom,	אשיר שירת הדרור,
Irrigate, irrigate the dry land [Arava],	הרוו, הרוו הערבה,
Out of nothing we will create!	מאין יש ניצור!
From Mount Sinai to Chermon	מהר סיני עד החרמון
Proclaim a song of peace!	השמיעו שיר שלום!
The desert will bloom, will bloom	יפרח, יפרח הישימון —
Will it—this is no dream!	תרצו — אין זה חלום!

Shteklis-Vilensky uses the typical language of *Shirei Moledet*: exhorting the people to ascend upon their land ("*Aleh, ami, al admat'cha*"), to defend and protect their inheritance ("*Hagen, ami, al nachalat'cha*"), and to irrigate the desert ("*Har'vu, har'vu ha'aravah*"). She also includes the specification of location so common to *Shirei Eretz Yisrael* ("*Me'har Sinai ad ha-Chermon,*" "from Mount Sinai to Chermon") and a characteristic reference to the blooming of the desert ("*yifrach, yifrach ha-y'shimon*"). She includes an allusion to Herzl's famous saying ("*Im tirzu, ein zo agada,*" "if you will it, it is no fairy tale") in the last line of the last verse ("*Tirzu—eyn zeh chalom,*" "Will it—this is no dream"). There is even a suggestion of the pioneers' appropriation of the earth's creative powers: "*me'ayin yesh nitzor*" ("out of nothing we will create").

The curious aspect of this song is its inclusion of daughters in the typical exhortation to the sons: "*kumu, hoi, banai uv'notai*" (Arise, oh, my sons and my daughters"). Although "*banai*" is grammatically masculine, it has the potential to be inclusive of both sons and daughters, in spite of its masculine gender and our tendency to translate it as "my sons." However, the addition here of "*b'notai*" makes it abundantly clear that daughters are to be involved as well as sons. It acknowledges the desires of women to be the daughters of the

motherland, not merely subsumed into the category of "sons" or "potentially" included by the use of "*b'nei*" or "*banim*" as "sons" or "children." It is impossible to say whether Shteklis-Vilensky chose to add this noteworthy detail "as a woman"; suffice it to say that a brief survey of the repertoire will demonstrate the relative rarity of both a female poet writing *Shirei Eretz Yisrael* and such an inclusion. However, while this seemingly minor inclusion may increase the perception of the poem's egalitarianism, the overwhelmingly masculine ethos of the poem—the use of conventional masculine imagery such as "conquerors," "ploughmen," "irrigating," and "making the desert bloom"—places it within the same category as the previous examples.

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"*At Moledet*" ("You, Motherland")

Upon the mountain the pathways climb,
In the distance the bell of the camels
On the path in front of the curtain of night
The shadow of a solitary cypress prays.

עַל הָהָר חֲסִיפִּסִים הַשְׁבִילִים,
בַּמֶּרְחָק פַּעֲמוֹן הַגְּמַלִּים,
בִּמְשַׁעוֹל מוּל פָּרֹכֶת הַלַּיִל,
צַל בָּרוֹשׁ צָרוּד מִתְפַּלֵּל.

You are the motherland of white light
You are like a mother remembering her child
Your window that opens facing the stillness
Does not know deep sleep.

אַתְּ מוֹלֶדֶת לְאוֹר לָבָנָה
אַתְּ כְּמוֹ אֵמָּא זוֹכֶרֶת אֶת בְּנָהּ
חַלוֹנֵךְ שֶׁנִּפְתַּח מוּל דְּמָמָה
לֹא יֵדַע תַּרְדֵּמָה.

Next to us are the thorns of the cactus,
On our lips a smile—never mind!
And our flesh hurts
And loves the touch of your scorching earth.

צַל יְדֵינוּ קוֹצֵי הַצַּבָּר
צַל שְׂפָתֵינוּ חִיּוּךְ: — אֵין דָּבָר! —
וּבְשָׂרֵנוּ כוֹאֵב וְאוֹהֵב
אֶת מַגַּע אַדְמָתֵךְ הַצּוֹרֶבֶת.

"*At Moledet*," written in the early 1930s by Leah Goldberg (1911-1970), begins with typical Eretz Israeli landscape imagery: the mountain and its pathways, the camels' bells, a cypress tree. Mountains and deserts figure heavily in Israeli imagery for obvious religious and topographical reasons. Camels, too, have a significant place in pre-state Israeli culture, particularly in Hebrew song. The camel was such a common image in early Hebrew song

that Natan Shahar, in his book *Shir Shir Aleh-Na: Toldot Zemer Ha'Ivri* discusses the phenomenon in a separate section entitled "*Mar'ot vatzl'ilim: Shirei hag'malim*," ("Sights and sounds: Songs of the camels"). These songs were particularly prominent in the 1920s and -30s,[24] so the use of camel imagery here would possibly suggest both a certain period in Israeli history as well as the more conventional Biblical connotations. Either way, the "Israeliness" of the scene is unmistakable, and the mention of the cactus thorns in the third stanza further reinforces this effect.

The phrase "*parochet haleil*" ("the curtain of night") evokes a specific type of desert encounter. The word "*parochet*" strongly connotes the Tabernacle, and perhaps Goldberg is turning the night into a shrine. It also evokes the visually striking image of darkness being pulled over the land like a curtain (the production of which was traditionally a feminine art form). The idea of an encounter at night with a semi-divine figure, here, the motherland, is reminiscent of Jacob's encounter with the angel. Like that encounter, this one seems more mysterious, more "mystical" because it occurs at night. Nighttime is traditionally a time of vulnerability, when convention can be upended: boundaries blurred and roles reversed.

Goldberg addresses the motherland directly with "*at moledet*" ("you are the motherland"): the entity of the land is initially more transcendent than immanent. Goldberg does not refer to herself as "*bitech*" ("your daughter") when describing the land as a mother: she maintains the distance, leaving the relationship somewhat remote. Interestingly, Goldberg chooses to use collective language to describe the "children" in the third stanza: "*al yadeinu*," "*s'fateinu*," and "*b'sareinu*" (next to us, our lips, our flesh) are all in first person

[24] Shahar, 130.

plural. The mother relates to her child as an individual, however, and rather than the sons remembering the abandoned mother, here, the mother remembers the child.

Goldberg's use of the word "*tardema*" is also noteworthy. The land does not know "*tardema*," the deep sleep cast upon Adam by God when Eve was created. By saying the land does not know this deep sleep, perhaps Goldberg is attempting to refute the idea of the autochthonous myth, in spite of her use of mother and child imagery. Perhaps it is also a subtle allusion to the *adam/adama* dichotomy: Adam had this *tardema* passively cast upon him, whereas this *adama* has not. In order for Adam to produce a living creature, God needs to "do" something to him; the land needs no such divine assistance to create. There is also a simpler explanation: perhaps the image is that of an all-seeing, watchful mother, who, like God in Psalm 121, neither slumbers nor sleep.

This song acknowledges the mixed experience of living in this country: it is not a straightforward paean to labor, singing the praises of toil. The author, the implied "we" of the first person plural, experiences the motherland, and in so doing, she describes and frames her, but she does not "do" anything to her. The only real "action" in the poem, the "*magah,*" the "touch" of the scorching earth, is reciprocal, and gives both pain and pleasure. It reflects the ambivalence in the poet's relationship with the motherland, the smile through the pain and the perseverance of love, conflicting emotions that may have reflected the reality of the pioneers' experience more than the simplistic songs of labor.

"*El Artzi*" ("To my land"), written by Rachel Bluwstein (1890-1931) in 1926, deceptively straightforward at first glance, reflects the same ambivalence, perhaps even more so.

"*El Artzi*" ("To my land")

I have not sung to you, my land,	לֹא שַׁרְתִּי לָךְ, אַרְצִי,
And I have not glorified your name	וְלֹא פֹאַרְתִּי שִׁמֵךְ
With epic deeds of heroism	בְּמַעֲלִילוֹת גְּבוּרָה,
Or spoils of battles,	בְּשָׁלַל קְרָבוֹת;
Only a tree—my hands have planted	רַק עֵץ — יָדַי נָטְעוּ
On the quiet shores of the Jordan.	חוֹפֵי יַרְדֵּן שׁוֹקְטִים.
Just a path—my feet have trod	רַק שְׁבִיל — פָּסְעוּ רַגְלַי
Through fields.	עַל פְּנֵי שָׂדוֹת.
Indeed, very humble—	אָכֵן דַּלָּה מְאֹד —
I know this, mother,	יָדַעְתִּי זֹאת, הָאֵם,
Indeed, very humble	אָכֵן דַּלָּה מְאֹד
The offering of your daughter;	מִנְחַת בָּתֵךְ;
Only a voice of the cry of joy	רַק קוֹל תְּרוּעַת הַגִּיל
On a day when the light shines,	בְּיוֹם יִגַּהּ הָאוֹר,
Only tears in secret	רַק בְּכִי בַּמִּסְתָּרִים
For your affliction.	עֲלֵי עָנְיֵךְ.

Her tone sounds almost apologetic: "I have not sung to you, my land,/and I have not glorified your name/With epic deeds of heroism/Or spoils of battles." This is in sharp contrast to "*Anachnu sharim lach*," for example, whose poet fairly boasts of the sons' tributes to their motherland. Rachel details her "offerings" to the land, each time preceding them with a self-effacing "*rak*" ("only" or "merely"): "*rak etz*" ("only a tree), "*rak shvil*" ("only a path"), "*rak kol tru'at hagil*" ("only a voice of the cry of joy"), and "*rak b'chi bamistarim/alei onyech*" ("only tears in secret/for your affliction"). After the first two gifts, the tree and the path, Rachel stops to acknowledge their meagerness ("*achen dalah m'od*," "Indeed, very humble"), but seems almost to interrupt herself to speak impulsively to a maternalized land ("*yadati zot, ha'em*", "I know this, mother") before continuing. She presents two more gifts, also preceded by "*rak*": a "voice of the cry of joy" and "tears in secret." The poem concludes almost despondently, the "tears in secret" are for the motherland's "poverty" or "affliction."

Interpreted in this fashion, the poem seems a mere acknowledgment of Rachel's modesty: her gifts are not like others'; whereas theirs are majestic and epic, hers are ephemeral and unpretentious. She acknowledges this herself, and perhaps the tears she cries at the end "*alei onyech*" ("for your poverty" or "for your affliction") are for the poverty of her own gifts. But there is perhaps another reading of this surface layer: that her modesty is feigned, and in some way she is actually disparaging the "masculine" gifts. Both "epic deeds of heroism" and "spoils of battles" have implications of violence and arrogance, in stark contrast to Rachel's gentle gifts. While the repeated "*rak*" may highlight the comparison between the types of gifts, it may also have the effect of defiance: "my gifts are as good as yours, maybe better."[25]

Another layer of meaning may be related to the poet's changing form of approach: she initially addresses the figure of the motherland formally, but over the course of the poem, treats her more and more familiarly, a structure reminiscent of traditional petitionary prayer. At first, she addresses the land almost ceremonially as "*artzi*" ("my land"), and begins with formal words and epic images of battles and heroism. Even the acknowledgment of the meagerness of her gifts seems symbolic, as in an official offering to a ruler or deity. But with her impulsive interruption of "*yadati zot, ha'em*" ("I know this, mother"), she breaks the formal structure of "offering," addressing the land not as "my country" or "my land," but as "mother," calling herself "your daughter." The transcendent motherland has become more of a personal mother with whom the poet is intimately connected.

An analysis of Rachel's gifts further illuminates the deeper meanings of the poem. Each pair of gifts seems to complement each other in some way: the first pair, the tree and

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[25] See Dan Miron, *Imahot meyasdot, achayot chorgot* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hame'uchad, 1991), 98-99.

the path, represents Rachel's interaction with the natural aspect of the land. However, the tree will presumably live a long time, existing long after Rachel is gone, whereas a path through fields is more temporal and may vanish not long after she walks through. The second pair has to do with Rachel's emotional responses to the land, and represent the ambiguity of her relationship to it. On the surface, the "cry of joy" and the "tears in secret" may denote her responses to different aspects of the land: she cries out in joy on days of beauty and light, and she cries in secret for the hardship of living in the land. The Biblical allusions in this poem, however, belie this interpretation, and lead one to a more ambivalent conclusion.

The words "*b'chi bamistarim*" ("tears in secret") have two allusions in Jeremiah: the first, in Jeremiah 13:17, reads "*b'mistarim tivkeh nafshi*" ("my innermost self must weep"), regarding the destruction of the Temple and the subsequent exile. Later, in Jeremiah 31:15, the famous verse "*kol b'rama nishmah—n'hi b'chi tamrurim—Rachel m'vakah al baneha. Me'anah l'hinachem al baneha, ki eynenu*" ("A voice is heard in Ramah—wailing, bitter weeping—Rachel weeping for her children. She refuses to be comforted for her children, who are no more") describes Rachel the matriarch's tears over her exiled children. In both instances, the tears are because of the exile, the destruction; and in the latter, Rachel the matriarch is specifically identified with those tears.

The "*kol t'ru'at hagil*" is more ambiguous. The word "*t'ru'ah*" is associated with the blast of the shofar, a trumpet blast, a call to arms: martial images more in line with the "other" gifts mentioned in the first stanza. However, in Ezra 3:13, the "*kol t'ru'ah*" describes the cries of joy of those witnessing the rebuilding of the Temple, and interestingly, juxtaposes those cries with the weeping of the old men who had seen the first Temple

standing: "*v'eyn ha'am makirim kol t'ru'at hasimcha l'kol b'chi ha'am, ki ha'am m'rir'im t'ru'ah g'dolah v'hakol nishmah ad l'merachok*" ("The people could not distinguish the shouts of joy from the people's weeping, for the people raised a great shout, the sound of which could be heard from afar"). In this instance, the weeping appears to be from happiness and not despair as in Jeremiah. Nevertheless, the verse underscores the fine line between tears of joy and tears of sorrow.

The final line, "*alei onyech*," also has multiple layers. The difficulty of living in pre-state Israel has been much documented, as have the shattered expectations of many of the early pioneers upon encountering it. Here as well the Biblical allusion may shed some light. The word "*oni*" ("poverty" or "affliction") and its derivations are not uncommon throughout the Bible, but there is only one instance of "*onyech*." This occurs in Genesis 16:11, during the first annunciation to Hagar: "*hinach harah v'yolad't ben, v'karaht sh'mo Yishmael, ki shama Adonai el onyech*" ("Behold, you are with child and shall bear a son, and you shall call him Ishmael, for Adonai has heard your affliction"). While of course it is not certain that Rachel had this verse in mind when writing this poem, it presents a compelling, hopeful conclusion to a poem that might otherwise appear to end on a negative note. As we know, after this encounter with the angel, Hagar returns to Sarah, and continues to subject herself to Sarah's maltreatment. But her suffering has not gone unheard, and she is rewarded with a child. Perhaps Rachel hints that the motherland's affliction will also be rewarded with fertility, that the hardships the pioneers endure for her sake will not be in vain. Rachel's acknowledgment of the suffering of her "mother" may also point to the complex relationships with and between her other "children": the strident, macho "sons" so frequently depicted in the *Shirei Eretz Yisrael*, and Hagar's descendents, the Arabs. In doing so, Rachel

depicts a nuanced relationship with the motherland, subtly undermining the bravado of the male-centered songs.

It is interesting that, although the approaches that Goldberg and Rachel take in these poems were unconventional at the time, they have now become commonplace in contemporary Israeli music; in fact, popular musical settings of Rachel's and Goldberg's poetry now comprise two out of three 2007 CD releases in the NMC "Great Poets" series, Natan Alterman filling out the set. As we have seen, the shift from the first person plural "we" to the individual "I" in Hebrew song marks a major turning point in the transformation of *Shirei Eretz Yisrael* from folk to popular song.[26] It follows that the shift from collective to individual also helps create a sense of relationship not present in early Eretz Israeli song. While the conventional, masculine approaches to the motherland may still have nostalgic appeal, it would appear that the subtlety and multivalent meanings present in poetry like Rachel's and Goldberg's continue to characterize Israeli culture and inspire audiences.

[26] Regev and Seroussi, 57.

Chapter Two: Letters to Mother

Leaving mother and motherland behind was part and parcel of the Jewish immigrant experience of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The "letter song," a genre that peaked in popularity during this period of mass Jewish migration, illustrates how conflicted attitudes toward home, ethnic and national identity, and loyalty to family are conveyed using the framework of letter-writing. Often, these letter songs conflated mother with motherland: leaving mother symbolized leaving all that was familiar.

In *The Future of Nostalgia*, Svetlana Boym describes two types of nostalgia: restorative nostalgia, evocative of national past and future; and reflective nostalgia, representative of individual and cultural memory. Boym asserts that restorative nostalgia gravitates toward collective pictorial symbols and oral culture, while reflective nostalgia is more oriented toward an individual narrative that "savors details and memorial signs, perpetually deferring homecoming itself."[1] It does not have a single theme but "explores ways of inhabiting many places at once and imagining different time zones; it loves details, not symbols."[2] In contrast, restorative nostalgia is at the heart of nationalist revivals, and the return to origins its predominant idea. According to Boym, understanding nostalgia through these distinctive forms allows us to distinguish between "national memory that is based on a single plot of national identity, and social memory, which consists of collective frameworks that mark but do not define the individual memory."[3] In the *Shirei Eretz Yisrael* of Chapter One, we saw textual characteristics of restorative nostalgia: the collectivist language, the communal experience of the motherland, the theme of returning to the (national) mother.

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[1] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 49.
[2] Ibid., xviii.
[3] Ibid., xviii.

The songs analyzed here, all letter songs to and from mother, each evince characteristics of reflective and restorative nostalgia. Each uses the framework of reflective nostalgia: individual narratives filled with personal and familial imagery. Each one draws on the epistolary form and the mother image to convey their ideological messages, but some use it towards its own end—the emotional experience of nostalgia itself—and others use it in order to advocate a Zionist nationalist ideology.

Letter-writing between family members was a significant part of the immigrant experience. Nearly every immigrant left someone behind, and the letter was the sole means of communication available in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The "letter song" reflects the universality of this experience among immigrants. The sense of nostalgia created by these exceptional historical circumstances generated songs about family and homesickness, which were often expressed using the framework of the letter.

The roots of the letter song are in the epistolary genre. The letter itself represents a problematic means of communication. The communication itself is always deferred: it is not experienced in real time. It is both public and personal: even the most intimate communication passed through numerous hands on the way to its destination. Letters were also written for publication, as in the *Bintel Brief*, the *Jewish Daily Forward*'s advice column in which letters written by Jewish immigrants and the editorial staff's responses were printed. These letters straddled the public and private spheres: the personal troubles of the immigrants were posted in a public forum. The overwhelming popularity of this column confirmed the universality of these private problems. The epistolary form was also featured in a number of 18th- and 19th-century novels, one of the appeals being the author's ability to portray characters "in their own words," directly, without using the device of the omniscient narrator.

The use of the epistolary form subsequently creates a sense of intimacy through personal expression, and is frequently used as a vehicle to express love.

By nature, the epistolary genre implies a recipient—and a dialogue—even if none exists. Paradoxically, it connects the writer and the recipient, but its very existence always implies distance and separation. It both bridges and emphasizes the distance between writer and recipient: a letter allows for contact between the two, but its very existence would be unnecessary if they were together. Wendy Zierler writes: "Unlike works of published fiction, criticism or memoir, letters are incomplete forms of communication, ever awaiting a response and a continuation of their narrative. As such, they are distinguished by the blank spaces that surround them and by the physical and temporal distance separating author and addressee. They are, by definition, partial and provisional texts."[4] It is this tension that characterizes the letter song: in every song analyzed here, a major theme is the overwhelming sense of separation between the writer and recipient, and their attitude towards that separation.

While letter songs between lovers, husbands and wives, and abandoned fiancées were common, the letter songs that attained the status of popular folksong were almost exclusively between mother and son.[5] Referring to "*A Brivele der Mamen*" ("A Little Letter to Mother"), Mark Slobin writes:

> "this Small/Smuelwitz masterpiece is part of a series of 'letter' songs that faithfully follow one of [Sigmund] Spaeth's commandments of songwriting: if a topic works, use it repeatedly. Thus we have "A Letter to the Bride" (about a boy away at the front), "A Letter to the Groom," and "A Letter to Dad," among others. It is important to note the context of the sole survivor of this series, "*A Brivele der Mamen*,' since

[4] Wendy Zierler, "Hava Shapiro's Letters to Reuven Brainin," *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies and Gender Issues* 16 (2008), 74.
[5] Ruth Rubin, *Voices of a People: The Story of Yiddish Folksong* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1974, reprinted 2000), 347.

> there has been such overemphasis on the archetypal Jewish Mother in every possible literary and entertainment medium. As maudlin as "*A Brivele*" may be, it is only one of a number of ballads based on family relationships in a community under stress."[6]

However, he goes on to note that, as the immigration period recedes, the emphasis shifts from the family in general to the mother in specific.[7] As we saw in Chapter One, poets created relationships between themselves and their motherlands. In the letter song genre, authors often sought to articulate the tension between their allegiance to their biological mothers and their motherlands, adopted or original. Letters to mother, then, more clearly articulated this ambivalence of identity than love letters, or letters to other family members.

Although the songs analyzed here reflect a Jewish perspective, this experience was not limited to Jewish immigrants. Slobin considers the "mother song" universal among immigrant cultures, and categorizes it as one of the "Genres Shared with the Mainstream." He writes: "America had a passion for songs of home and mother, an obsession that cuts across ethnic lines. A yearning for mother, father, and the innocence of childhood is hardly surprising among immigrants, many of whom were far from home."[8] Nahma Sandrow also considers the mother songs in the Yiddish repertoire to be part of a larger "mother love" genre, one that is represented in different cultures by similar songs with similar conventions, but different cultural markers. Indeed, nearly every ethnic immigrant group produced its own repertoire of "mother songs," such as the Irish-American "Mother Machree" and "A

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[6] Mark Slobin, *Tenement Songs: The Popular Music of the Jewish Immigrants* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 124.
[7] Ibid., 125. It is interesting to note as well that the father figure in all of the songs analyzed here is either dead (as in "*Shnei Michtavim*," and "*A Briv fun Amerike*"/"*Der Mames Entfer*") or not mentioned at all (as in "*A Brivele der Mamen*" and "*A Brief fun der Mutter Zion*").
[8] Ibid., 124.

Mother's Love is a Blessing."[9] Neither was it limited to ethnic immigrants: Americans who left the rural world behind for city life experienced this dislocation as well, reflected in songs like "Old Folks at Home." The Yiddishe Mame figure that seems specific to Jewish culture is in reality just one of several ethnic stereotypes manifested in such songs, one that reflects the universal experiences of guilt and the mother-child relationship.

Nonetheless, a number of factors made these songs unique to the Jewish experience. The increasing emphasis on the mother figure in nostalgic song corresponded with the emergence in nostalgia for the Old World among American Jews.[10] But while the abandoned mother/land inevitably symbolized the Old World for most immigrants, for Jews, the "new" motherland was not necessarily America. One of the issues that distinguished the Jewish immigrant experience from others in America was the Jews' alternative option of immigration to Eretz Yisrael. This conflict calls into question the idea of the "true" motherland: was it the Old Country, America, or Zion?

While Jewish-American letter songs typically sought to bridge the divide between America and the Old Country, the Zionist, land-of-Israel-centered songs, enlarged rather than bridged the geographical divide between *Galut*, exile, and Eretz Yisrael.

The effectiveness of the letter song was dependent on its nostalgic appeal, and many of the conventions of these songs are similar, at least superficially. However, the Zionist songs typically contain an ideological message of restorative nostalgia, using nationalist and collective symbols and advocating a return to origins, whereas the Jewish-American songs manifest characteristics of reflective nostalgia, focusing almost exclusively on the personal

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[9] Nahma Sandrow, *Vagabond Stars: A World History of Yiddish Theater* (New York: Harper & Row: 1977), 122-123.
[10] Slobin, 125.

narrative of the characters portrayed in the songs. While the appeal of such personal songs is "universal," the songs themselves serve almost exclusively as cathartic vehicles; they are expressing emotions experienced collectively by their audiences, but do not promote collective action. Yiddish folksong, like Yiddish theater, was a way in which Jews could affirm group identity and experience vicariously the troubling emotions of being an immigrant, perhaps finding comfort and catharsis through the shared group experience.[11]

"A Brivele der Mamen" ("A Little Letter to Mother"), a song written by Solomon Shmulewitz (1868-1943) in 1921, is one of the most popular letter songs, one that adheres overwhelmingly to the principles of reflective nostalgia.

***"A Brivele der Mamen"* ("A Little Letter to Mother")**

My child, my comfort, you're going away,	Mayn kind, mayn trest, du forst avek,
Remember to be a good son.	Ze zay a zun a gutter;
With anxious tears and fear I beg you,	Dikh bet mit trern un mit shrek,
Your loyal, dear mother.	Dayn traye libe muter.
You're traveling, my child, my only child,	Du forst, mayn kind, mayn eyntsik kind,
Across distant seas.	Ariber vayte yamen.
Just arrive in good health	Akh! kum ahin nor frish gezunt,
And don't forget your mother.	Un nisht farges dayn mamen...
Oh, travel in health and arrive in good spirit.	Oy, for gezunt, un kum mit glik,
Please send a letter every week,	Ze yede vokh a brivl shik,
And lighten your mother's heart, my child.	Dayn mames harts, mayn kind, derkvik.
Refrain:	
A letter to your mother,	A brivele der mamen
You shouldn't delay.	Zolstu nit farzamen
Write right away, my beloved child,	Shrayb geshvind, libes kind,
Grant her this consolation.	Shenk ir di nekhome,
Your mother will read your little letter	Di mame vet dayn brivele lezn,
And she will recover.	Un zi vet genezn.
You'll heal her pain, her bitter heart,	Heylst ir shmerts, ir biter harts,
You'll delight her soul.	Derkvikst ir di neshome.
These eight years I've been alone;	Dos akhte yor ikh bin aleyn,
My child has sailed far away.	Mayn kind iz vayt fashvumen.

[11] For more on the communal emotional experience of Yiddish theater, see Sandrow, 91-131.

His childish heart is hard as stone	Zayn kindersh harts iz hart vi shteyn.
Not a single letter has arrived.	Kayn eyntsik briv bakumen
How can my child go on?	Vi ken mayn kind gor hobn mut?
How is his life going?	Vi geyt im ayn dos lebn?
He must be doing very well there,	Es muz im geyn dort zeyer gut...
Since he's forgotten me.	Vayl er keyn nakhrikht gebn.
I've sent him a hundred letters	Kh'hob im geshikt a hundert briv,
And he still has no sense	Un er hot nokh keyn shum bagrif,
That my pain is so deep.	Az mayne shmertsn zenen tif.
In New York City there's a wealthy home	In shtot New York, a raykhe hoyz
With hearts that have no feeling.	Mit hertser on gefiln
Her son lives there in lavish style.	Dort voynt ir kind, er lebt gor groys.
He has a lovely family:	A gliklekhe familye.
A beautiful wife and two children	A sheyne froy un kinder tsvey
With radiant faces.	Mit likhtike geshtaltn.
And as he sits and beams with pride,	Un vi er zitst un kvelt fun zey,
He receives a letter:	Hot er a briv derhaltn:
"Your mother is dead," It has happened,	"Dayn muter toyt,"—es iz geshen;
In life you neglected her.	In lebn hostu ir farzen,
This was her last wish:	Dos iz ir letster vuntsh geven:
Say a little *Kaddish* for your mother	A kadishl der mamen
Don't delay.	Zolstu nit farzamen
Say it now, dear child,	Zog geshvind, libes kind
Grant her this consolation.	Shenk ir di nekhome...
Your mother will hear the *Kaddish*	Di mame vet ir kadishl hern
From her grave.	In ir keyver gern.
You'll heal her pain, her bitter heart.	Heylst ir shmertz, ir biter harts,
You'll delight her soul.	Derkvikst ir di neshome.[12]

The song text consists of a mother's entreaty to her only child, a son who has left her in the Old Country in order to make a new life in America. All she asks of him is to write her "*a brivele der mamen*" ("a little letter to mother") to help heal her breaking heart. In eight years he writes nothing, and, as he enjoys a rich life and happy family in New York City, his mother dies, in the last verse begging her negligent son to say "*a kadishl der mamen*" ("a little Kaddish for mother"). In this rather maudlin song, the mother figure serves as a

[12] Translation and transliteration by Eliyahu Mishulovin, in accompanying booklet, *Great Songs of the Yiddish Stage, Volume 3: Joseph Rumshinsky and Other Songwriters of His Circle,* Naxos American Classics 8.559455, 2006, compact disc.

reproach, a warning not to forget one's past even as one enjoys the fruits of the new world. Only the mother's perspective is presented, and although presumably the audience was (newly) American, and would therefore more easily identify with the son, it seems likely that their sympathy would lie with the mother.

The language is Yiddish, which also connotes the Old World, and the music is in a minor key with occasional shifts to major, is written in a lyrical 3/4, and while the range is over an octave, it is fairly easy to sing, and the refrain is memorable, all of which are characteristic of Yiddish folk song. It is strophic, which makes it all the more powerful when the refrain "*a brivele der mamen*" changes to "*a kadishl der mamen*" in the final verse. All the musical and textual characteristics are reminiscent of reflective nostalgia: the folk-song character of the melody, the detailed narrative, and the personal language all contribute to a nostalgic longing for the past, not a desire to restore the nationalist homeland.

"*A Brief fun der Mutter Zion*" ("A Letter from Mother Zion"), was written in 1892 by Eliakum Zunser (1836-1913). Zunser, a songwriter born in Vilna, became a Zionist after the pogroms of the early 1880s and immigrated to New York City in 1889, where he lived until his death in 1913. It is unknown why Zunser, who was affiliated with the *Hovevei Zion* and *BILU* movements, chose to immigrate to the United States rather than Eretz Yisrael, but perhaps in writing this propagandistic song, one of his numerous Zionist songs, he was working through some of his own feelings of guilt over "abandoning" Mother Zion. This song uses the conventions of reflective nostalgia, but the ideological message is more characteristic of restorative nostalgia. In this example, the mother figure is personified as Mother Zion, but rather than a generic national personification similar to Marianne, Britannia, or some other Greek goddess-like figure, she is portrayed as a shtetl mother. From

Zion, she writes a letter to her children in America, appealing to them to return, join their brethren already in Eretz Yisrael, and help rebuild the Holy Land.

"*A Brief fun der Mutter Zion*" ("A Letter from Mother Zion")

Via the poets, those omnipresent guardians
That God has set over me,
Your Mother Zion sends you a letter,
My Children, from the other side of the world.
Greetings to you from me and from your sisters,
From Carmel, Lebanon, from the port of Jaffa,
From the walls of the Temple, those solid foundations,
From the Mount of Olives, that holy place,
From Mount Hermon, from the Jordan, the best place to stroll,
Where you used to play as young ones.

I have good news for you.
My youth is now being restored,
My children are coming to heal my wounds,
To rebuild the ruins which have lain in devastation.
They're founding colonies, and sitting down once again
At their Mother's table, courageous and free,
Eating, and drinking and singing songs to one another.
The language and the Bible live once more.
And they are happy and live as brothers.
My heart kvells as I stand and look on.

But from you, my Children, I've received no word,
Apparently you've forgotten about me;
You don't want to bother with me, with Zion,
Not one of you will open my door.
They're building cities around me, new names blossom,
But if someone says "Zion," you ridicule him immediately.
You don't have to be ashamed of your Mother:
She was, and she hopes once again to be, great.

Things are good for you there, you have a fine life,
My heart is gladdened that, there, my Child lives free.
Even so, you certainly can still be devoted
To taking part in Zion's reconstruction.
But experience has long since shown me—
Experience that will soon have lasted two thousand years—
That anti-Semites, like thorns, like spears,
Hate you suddenly when you rise and prosper,
You're swiftly banished from your inn, your home:

And once again you must seek out a dwelling, a store.

Thousands of years have passed,
Many peoples have arrived at my shores;
My earth has given no fruit, my air—yellow fever.
Because I suffer not strangers, with them I do not live well.
As soon as my Children came back,
They founded colonies with so little money,
Great men and heroes are born there now,
All the sicknesses, gone from the land—
They soar joyfully, the years bloom,
As in Solomon's times, a happy world!

A Jewish city, New York is the biggest;
You cannot find its equal in all the world.
And from every country, guests come to me:
I look over my Children—America is missing!
Have you said your last good-byes to Zion?
A stranger, as though we had never met,
You don't desire to see me, you don't thirst for a drink.
Remember, it could yet happen that it will snow or rain—
I beg you, take this letter and greeting to remember me by.[13]

Musically speaking, "*A Brief fun der Mutter Zion*" is not terribly different from "*A Brivele der Mamen.*" They are both set in 3/4, written in a minor key that flirts with the relative major, and strophic. "*A Brief*" is not as musically sophisticated as "*A Brivele*," but it has the same folk characteristics that make it appealing and easy to sing.

"*A Brief fun der Mutter Zion*" is rife with familial images as well. The word "mother" appears in the first three verses as well as the title, and the phrase "my child" or "my children" appears in all six verses. The father figure is noticeably absent (perhaps the mention of God in the first verse is intended to fill that role), but "sisters" (cities and other locations in and around Eretz Yisrael) and "brothers" are present. The second verse describes the mother welcoming her children back to the table, sitting together happily,

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[13] Eliakum Zunser, *Selected Songs* (New York : Zunser Pub. Co., c1928), 155-157. Translation by Yankl Salant. Please see Appendix A for original Yiddish text.

eating, drinking, and singing songs. However, Mother Zion also evokes the reproachful mother figure of "*A Brivele*;" like her, she chastises the neglectful child: "from you, my chidren, I've received no word/Apparently you've forgotten about me," and "I look over my children—America is missing!/Have you said your last good-byes to Zion? A stranger, as though we had never met." As in "*A Brivele*," New York City is singled out as representative of Jewish life in America, and Mother Zion also alludes to the prosperity of her children there: "Things are good for you there, you have a fine life,/My heart is gladdened that, there, my child lives free./Even so, you can still certainly be devoted/To taking part in Zion's reconstruction."

While the predominant convention of the mother-letter song—the aggrieved, forgotten mother pleading for her son to come home—is present, this image is used in order to further the Zionist cause, not provide a cathartic experience for the audience. Although the mother/land here is cast in the mold of a stereotypical "Yiddishe mame," the concerned, scolding shtetl mother, she is still personified as Mother Zion. It is true that the visual imagery of a personal, sentimental family and the convention of letter-writing is representative of reflective nostalgia on the whole; however, Zionist tropes are present throughout this song, and not-so-subtly promote the Zionist ideological message. In the six verses of "*A Brief*," Zunser references numerous Zionist symbols: locations in and around Eretz Yisrael (Carmel, Lebanon, Jaffa, the Temple walls, the Mount of Olives, Mount Hermon, and the Jordan River), the Hebrew language (both that of the Bible and the rebirth of Hebrew as a spoken tongue), the reconstruction of Zion (both in terms of building colonies and new cities as well as Biblical references to rebuilding the *chorvot*, the ruins of Zion and Jerusalem). Even King Solomon is invoked as a symbol of prosperous, joyous times for the

Jews. In the fourth verse, there are also warnings of anti-Semitism, reminders of two thousand years of wandering and banishment. The final verse is in a similar vein and is somewhat ominous: "Remember, it could yet happen that it will snow or rain—/I beg you, take this letter and greeting to remember me by."

Although the Yiddish language is used, here it is not intended to connote the old world in the same fashion: in other words, although the language itself may recall feelings of nostalgia, and the mother and family imagery is certainly intended to have a nostalgic effect, the language in and of itself does not serve as a "claim" supporting the old world as it does in "*A Brivele.*"[14]

"*Shnei Michtavim*" ("Two Letters") also demonstrates aspects of both restorative and reflective nostalgia, but, like "*A Brief fun der Mutter Zion,*" it largely uses the mother image and the letter structure as a framework for the song's Zionist message. Composed by Joel Engel (1868-1927) to a Hebrew poem of Avigdor Hameiri (1890-1970), it borrows the letter format and the maudlin diasporic mother of "*A Brivele der Mamen,*" but, like "*A Brief fun der Mutter Zion,*" the ideology is Zionist. Hameiri, born in Carpatho, Ukraine (then Hungary), served in the Austrian army during World War I and was captured by the Russians in 1916. He was imprisoned in Siberia and released in 1917, after which he immigrated to Palestine in 1921. Hameiri, according to Eisig Silberschlag "created the vogue for filial piety among the pioneers who left their parents in Europe and suffered from frustration of filial love.... Just as the Jewish mother was more than mother, so Palestine was more than

[14] The language debate between Hebrew and Yiddish is well-documented. For a brief history, please see Hillel Halkin, "The Great Jewish Language War," *Commentary* (December 2002), 48-55.

Palestine to Hameiri."[15] The painful tension of conflicting loyalties towards mother and motherland experienced by so many is reflected in this poem.

Initially, the imagery follows the trajectory of the other songs: a mother, longing for her child, writes a letter asking him to return to her.

"*Shnei Michtavim*" ("Two Letters")

On delicate paper, as white as the dawn,
Came a letter from the Golah (Diaspora),
A mother is writing with tears in her eyes:
"To my good son in Jerusalem:
Your father is dead, your mother is sick,
Come home, gentle son.
We wait for you endlessly,
From morning to evening.
Come home for spring, gentle son.
Come home, come home, gentle son."

On simple paper, as gray as ashes,
A letter goes to the Diaspora.
A pioneer writes with tears in his eyes,
In 1924, in Jerusalem:
"Forgive me, my sick mother.
I will never move from here.
If you still love me, come hug me.
I will be a wanderer no longer.
I will never move from here, never.
I will not move, I will not move,
Not ever."[16]

The first stanza describes a letter arriving from the Diaspora, written on "delicate paper, as white as the dawn." A sick, tearful mother writes to her son in Jerusalem, begging him to come home "for spring." His father is dead, but "we wait for you endlessly." The song repeats the text "*bo habbayta*" ("come home") no fewer than six times. The second stanza contains the son's reply: a resounding "no" to her request. The *chalutz*'s letter,

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[15] Eisig Silberschlag, *From Renaissance to Renaissance: Hebrew Literature in the Land of Israel: 1870-1970* (Ktav Publishing House, New York, 1977), 36.
[16] The original Hebrew poem is unavailable. Please see Appendix A for the sheet music.

written on "simple paper, gray as ashes," asks for his mother's forgiveness, but states "*lo azuz mipoh la'ad*" ("I will never move from here, not ever"). The intensity of the mother's appeal is mirrored in the second verse: again, the phrase "*lo azuz*," ("I will not move") is repeated multiple times. In fact, the piece concludes "*lo azuz mipoh la'ad, lo azuz, lo azuz, lo, lo, la'ad*," ("I will never move from here, I will not move, I will not move, no, no, not ever") further hammering home the pioneer's refusal. The audience's sympathy is clearly intended to be with the *chalutz*, whose perspective is equally represented, unlike the sons of "*A Brivele der Mamen*" and "*A Brief fun der Mutter Zion.*" The use of Hebrew rather than Yiddish further emphasizes the author's support of the cause of the *chalutz*, rather than that of the mother, who would undoubtedly have spoken Yiddish "in real life."

Although the song is strophic and lyrical, it is musically and textually more complex than either of the two previous examples. The rhythm is difficult, shifting between 4/4, 3/4, and 2/4, and there are modal shifts throughout. The poem, too, is difficult: if the ultimate goal is to justify and support emigration to Eretz Yisrael, why is the Diaspora letter on "dawn-white" delicate paper, whereas the letter from Eretz Yisrael is written on "ash-gray" paper? Perhaps Hameiri is referencing the difficulties of living in pre-state Israel, or at least acknowledging that the pioneer lifestyle, so frequently romanticized in the *Shirei Eretz Yisrael*, is far from ideal. If the father is dead, who is the "we" of "we wait for you endlessly?" Is the implication that the entire Jewish community waits? The rest of the chalutz's family? Who else is the chalutz abandoning? While the maudlin mother figure is familiar from "*A Brivele*," both the mother and the son have tears in their eyes: neither wants to be parted from the other. Although the song clearly supports aliyah, it also acknowledges

the difficulty of doing so and the almost inevitable conflict—internal as well as external—that results.

Written by Mark Warshawsky (1845?-1907), the song set of "*A Briv fun Amerike*" ("A Letter from America") and "*Der Mames Entfer*" ("The Mother's Reply") also presents a dialogue. However, "*A Briv fun Amerike/Der Mames Entfer*" is distinctive in that it presents the child's letter first, and only then the mother's response. Whereas a major theme in "*A Brivele der Mamen*" and "*A Brief fun der Mutter Zion*," is the child's indifference to the mother's entreaties, in this example the child expresses his[17] distress first, and only in "*Der Mames Entfer*" does the mother respond with words of comfort and reassurance.

"*A Briv fun Amerike*" ("A Letter from America")

Darling Mama, darling Mother
You, my dearest heart of hearts
Do you know my tears of sorrow
How deep my soul is torn apart?

How I would give just anything
To glance at you, your face to see
How I would sacrifice my life
If only to come back to thee.

But we cannot turn back the clock
Back to when all things could be
Mama, I cannot come there
Writing this is hard for me!

Leahle holds tight, she's frightened
The *priziv* makes her shake
And my baby, little Dvora
Grasps me with her little hands.

To see her gives me some relief
You should hear her speak to me!
How she points with pretty fingers

[17] The gender of the child, while unclear in "*A Briv fun Amerike*," is revealed in "*Der Mames Entfer*."

At your picture, "Granny, see!"

And my handsome boy, my Sonny
Works—two hands of gold, it's so.
Moshele can say his blessings
Rochele you wouldn't now.

Probably you talk about them
And you bless them there, I'm sure
They all send you love and kisses
You be well! And one word more:

Shvuos Eve is Father's yahrzeit
Tell my Daddy how I love him
And I send him my regards.

Darling Mama, darling Mother
You, my dearest heart of hearts
Do you know my tears of sorrow
How deep my soul is torn apart?

"*Der Mames Entfer*" ("The Mother's Reply")

Son of mine
Every line
You wrote cut deep inside me.
God alone
He has known
What anguish did betide me.
My lips kissed
Every word
Written there by you
I was near
To you dear
And your children too.

With God's will
Meet we will
No one knows His ways
Yes, my son
The day will come
That finest day of days.
Yes my son,
The day will come
That finest day of all

You will see
For you and me
And for your aching soul.

Child, don't cry
Son, don't weep
Your heart must hold its own
Near the woods
Here I stood
Beside your father's stone
You, my crown
My heart's own
It's you your mother blesses
Just as great
As your pain
Shall be your successes.

You be well
With wife and child
Your mother loves you dearly
Why, oh why
Do you cry
With tears that flow so freely.
Yes, my son
The day will come
That finest day of all
Child don't cry
Son don't weep
Respect your mother's soul.[18]

Textually, the content of "*A Briv fun Amerike*" and "*Der Mames Entfer*" strongly evokes the characteristics of reflective nostalgia. Like "*A Brivele der Mamen*," the text is first and foremost a personal narrative. The vast majority of the text consists of the emotional response of child and mother to their separation. "*Der Mames Entfer*" in particular is highly emotional, and describes the mother kissing "every word" written by her son, saying "I was near to you, and to your children" ("*Yedes vort/in briv tsu mir/Hob ikh*

[18] Aharon Vinkovetzky, Sinai Leichter, and Abba Kovner, eds, *The Mark Warshavsky Volume, vol. 6 of Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2002), 169-176. These singing translations by Vivian London], while not word-for-word, closely approximate the Yiddish text. Please see Appendix A for the original Yiddish poem.

oysgekusht bazunder;/Ikh bin geven/Nebn dir/Un nabn dayne kinder"). She blesses him and attempts to comfort him in his sorrow, saying "Be well with wife and child, I am your beloved mother" ("*Zay gezunt/Mit vayb un kind—/Ikh bin dayn trayer muter*"). Unlike "*A Brivele*," the mother appears truly to wish her child well: her letter does not carry the same intent to make the child experience guilt over leaving. This could be due in large part to her letter being framed as a reply to the son's letter: she does not need to make him feel guilty because he already has expressed deep regret over leaving.

In addition to the purely emotional content, both songs are overflowing with small details that fill out the distinctively Jewish personal narrative, another major characteristic of reflective nostalgia. The son's children have typical Jewish names ("Leahle," "Dvorah," "Moishele," and "Rochele"), and are described one-by-one for grandmother's benefit. The son references his father's yahrzeit on "*erev shvuos*," Shavuot Eve.[19] Warshawsky even alludes to the Russian call-up to the army, the *priziv*, a phenomenon that undoubtedly inspired the emigration of countless Russian Jews.

Warshawsky wrote the text of both "*A Briv fun Amerike*" and "*Der Mames Entfer*," and presumably composed music for both, but only the setting of "*A Briv fun Amerike*" remains, which attained folk song status.[20] Warshawsky was neither a professional poet nor composer, but nearly half of his songs became household tunes before they were published and he was known to be their author. He is considered to be "the last folk bard of the nineteenth century, bridging the gap between the songs in folk style and the Yiddish art songs

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[19] It seems probable that Warshawsky chose Shavuot not for any religious significance, but because "*shvuos*" rhymes with "*grus*" and is consistent with the ABABCDC rhyme scheme of the song.
[20] Rubin, 347.

of the twentieth century.[21] Meir Noy (1922-1998), a composer and musicologist, composed the setting of "*Der Mames Entfer*" that follows Warshawsky's setting of "*A Briv*" in the sixth volume of the *Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs*.[22] Because Meir Noy's setting of "*Der Mames Entfer*" was first published in 2002, and therefore could not have been known at the same time as "*A Briv fun Amerike*," it would be inaccurate to consider both musical settings in the same historical light. It is interesting to note, however, that Noy appears to have tried to distinguish his setting tonally from that of "*A Briv*," perhaps in order to indicate the geographical difference between the mother and son, or to point toward a level of aural ethnicity in the mother's reply that is absent in the son's letter. Both songs have folk-like settings with an easily-singable ranges, and neither is particularly exceptional musically. However, "*A Briv fun Amerike*" is set in D minor, whereas "*Der Mames Entfer*" is written in D Ahava Raba, one of the three Jewish religious modes. While the minor mode has no real "ethnic" association, Ahava Raba, with its characteristic augmented second between the second and third scale degrees, has a strong ethnic connotation, and is frequently associated with Jewish music. As a result, "*A Briv fun Amerike*" sounds more like a generic folk song, whereas "*Der Mames Entfer*" sounds more ethnically "Jewish," connoting both the religious mode and the numerous folksongs also set in this mode.

Of course, unless this musical distinction had also been present in Warshawsky's original setting, its historical significance is limited. But it is interesting to note that, approximately a century after "*A Briv*" was presumably composed, an Israeli composer chose

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[21] Ibid., 272-274.

[22] Only 48 songs of Warshawsky's are known to have survived. Of the four editions of Warshavsky's songs that appeared from 1900 to 1958, only 31 songs appeared with the music. The melodies of the other songs have been lost, but Meir Noy, an Israeli composer and musicologist supplied the music for those song texts present in the *Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs* series. See Vinkovetzky, Leichter, and Kovner, xxii.

to set its companion piece using the same tonic, but utilizing a different, more "Jewish-sounding" mode in his setting of the mother's reply. Perhaps Noy intended it to be a tonal reflection of the child's assimilation and the mother's continued attachment to the Old Country.

While these songs do not represent every Jewish letter song written, they demonstrate the breadth of the letter song genre. On the surface, these songs share many common elements: the letter format, the familial symbols of mother and child, an identifiably Jewish language (both literally—as in Yiddish or Hebrew—as well as symbolic Jewish language), and content. Their authors' objectives in writing them, however, are markedly different. Some, like "*A Brivele der Mamen*" and "*A Briv fun Amerike*"/"*Der Mames Entfer*" have predominantly personal, cathartic messages that seek to understand feelings of guilt over leaving home and family for life in a different country. Others, like "*Shnei Michtavim*" and "*A Brief fun der Mutter Zion*," have overtly nationalistic Zionist goals, and, rather than seeking to make an immigrant feel less guilty over their choice to leave the Old Country, they seek to inspire immigration to the "true Motherland," Eretz Yisrael. The mother figure in general, and her role in the epistolary genre and letter song in specific, proves to be a symbol malleable enough to represent the characteristics of both reflective and restorative nostalgia, thus furthering the goals of both personal catharsis and national collectivism.

Chapter Three: *Rachel Imeinu*

Susan Starr Sered refers to the biblical matriarch Rachel as "the only female figure around whom a long-lasting and extensive Jewish cult crystallized."[1] As we have seen, the mother figure has manifested as the Motherland, Mother Earth, and Mother Zion, all of which have roots in Jewish religious and cultural imagery. However, Rachel Imeinu, "Our Mother Rachel," has a unique place in Jewish and Zionist culture. Sered calls her a "root icon" that is

> deeply embedded within the Jewish cultural imagination and coming to the surface in different ways at different times. In its oldest and most comprehensive design, that root icon takes form as the cult of Our Mother Rachel. Later cultic versions pick up on and expand certain elements of the root Rachel icon and gloss over other elements. These variations, whether ostensibly identified with Jewish folk religion or with Zionist civil religion, leave intact a cultic constellation comprising themes of suffering, self-sacrifice, self-abnegation, exile, domesticity, and the unique ability to understand the needs of pilgrims.... From the mid-nineteenth century through the late twentieth century, a series of social and political changes gave rise to themes that seem to have resonated (in the popular cultural imagination) with aspects of the Rachel myth that we have laid out above. These themes...are the sacralization of femininity, fertility, the return from exile, and nationhood.[2]

The songs analyzed here all echo one or more of these themes. Each song emphasizes a different facet of the Rachel figure, depending on the ideological goal of the authors and composers. Some use her to reflect on the religious implications of the exile, and others as a symbol of the Zionist goal of *aliyah*. Still others emphasize the personal relationship over the collective. All, however, invoke a specifically maternal Rachel in order to promote their ideology.

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[1] Susan Starr Sered, "Our Mother Rachel," *The Annual Review of Women in World Religions vol. IV*, ed. Arvind Sharma and Katherine K. Young (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1996) 1.

[2] Susan Starr Sered, "A Tale of Three Rachels, or: The Cultural *Her*story of a Symbol," *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies and Gender Issues* 1 (1998): 6, 8.

The Biblical account of Rachel's life does not designate her as "mother of mothers" or particularly point to her as a distinctively maternal figure above any of the other matriarchs or mother figures in the Bible. She is first introduced in Genesis 29, a shepherdess, the daughter of Laban. Jacob, sent to Haran by his parents in order to find a wife from among his mother's family, sees her at the well and falls in love with her. He serves Laban seven years for the right to marry Rachel, but Laban tricks him at the wedding and gives him Rachel's older sister Leah in her stead. Jacob serves Laban an additional seven years for Rachel. The Genesis account continues with Rachel's and Leah's childbearing efforts: like Sarah and Rebecca, Rachel struggles with infertility; Leah gives birth to six sons and one daughter before Rachel finally gives birth to Joseph. Rachel's death, occurring during her labor with Benjamin, and her burial on the road to Ephrat (Bethlehem) are reported rather perfunctorily several chapters later in Genesis 35:19.

In light of Rachel's struggles with barrenness and her death in childbirth, her role as a mother figure in the Bible is intriguing. While Sarah and Rebecca also experience infertility, beyond their titles as "matriarchs," neither has been especially associated with maternity, and certainly not to the same degree as Rachel. It is unknown exactly why Rachel came to be "chosen" to serve as an allegorical mother figure and representative of the Jewish people, but her maternity, her struggle with infertility, and her ability to intercede with God are emphasized throughout Jewish texts, from the book of Genesis to the present.

Rachel's first appearance in a Jewish text as a symbol representative of the nation of Israel occurs in the book of Jeremiah, the events of which take place nearly a thousand years after the Genesis story. Jeremiah 31:15 describes her, although long-dead, as continually lamenting her children's absence:

Thus said the Lord:
A cry is heard in Ramah—
Wailing, bitter weeping—
Rachel weeping for her children.
She refuses to be comforted
For her children, who are gone.

God responds to Rachel's tears, and promises that Israel will be returned to its land in the following verses (31:16-17):

Thus said the Lord:
Restrain your voice from weeping,
Your eyes from shedding tears;
For there is a reward for your labor—declares the Lord:
They shall return from the enemy's land.
And there is hope for your future—declares the Lord:
Your children shall return to their country.

As Tikva Frymer-Kensky points out, we will never know whether Jeremiah deliberately "resurrected" Rachel for this vision, or if she had "already become a figure of Israel's folklore, a once-and-forever personage seen as the mother of Israel."[3] But it is true that this single verse helped set the stage for Rachel's larger role as "Mother of Exiles" and her historical association with Israel's exile and redemption.

Jewish texts from as early as the 1st or 2nd century begin to highlight Rachel's role as intercessor and mediator, both in her own right and in the context of other mediating female figures, particularly the *Shechinah*, which became the "symbol of divine immanence, residing in Jerusalem, among the people, and in humanity."[4] Hints of her association with such allegorical figures begin in the *Targum Jonathan*, an Aramaic translation and interpretation of the Prophets section of the Bible from the 1st or 2nd century. In this *Targum*, the image of Rachel weeping for her children is conflated with the figure of Jerusalem

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[3] Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture, and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1992), 166.
[4] Ibid., 183.

herself. Rachel is identified with both the house of Israel and Jerusalem, praying on the heights.[5] Rachel's appearance in Lamentations Rabba, a 7th century midrash, also supports her role as intercessor with God, specifically on the subject of exile and redemption. In this midrash, various biblical figures and symbols, including the Patriarchs, Moses, the Torah, and the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, argue for and against God's returning Israel from exile. Only Rachel is successful; she relays the story of how, when Laban had Leah take Rachel's place in her marriage with Jacob, she was able to give Leah a sign so that Jacob would not know that it was Leah and not Rachel herself in the marriage bed. Because of her ability to overcome her jealousy, she reasons, God should also be able to forgive the people Israel and return them from exile. God's mercy is aroused, and He promises to return Israel to their Land. The passage concludes with Jeremiah 31:17, in which God promises Rachel to return the exiles from captivity.[6]

Later, in *Tana debe Eliyahu*, a 10th century midrash, Rachel is compared to God's own spirit: 'Read not Rachel weeping for her children, but *RuaH EL*—the spirit of God—weeping for her children.' This understanding comes from the comparison of the three Hebrew consonants of Rachel's name—***resh, chet, lamed***—and the Hebrew words for "spirit of God"—***ruach el[ohim]***.[7] The *Zohar*, a 13th century Kabbalistic text, further develops the concept of the exiled *Shechinah*, first understood in the Talmud as an interpretation of Psalm 91:15. In the *Zohar*, Rachel becomes the *Shechinah*, weeping as Israel marches into exile, and continues to suffer with them as long as the exile lasts. Eventually, according to the

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[5] Frederick M. Strickert, *Rachel Weeping: Jews, Christians, and Muslims at the Fortress Tomb* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007) 21, 31.
[6] Sered, "Tale of Three Rachels," 7-8.
[7] Ibid., 31.

Zohar, Israel's exile ends with the appearance of the Messiah, who leads the people home past the road by Rachel's grave, and Rachel's weeping will at last be at an end:

> Where shall this be?
> On the way to Ephrat
> At the crossroads,
> Which is Rachel's grave.
> To mother Rachel he will bring glad tidings.
> And he will comfort her.
> And now she will let herself be comforted.
> And she will rise up
> And kiss him. (2.7-9)[8]

Nachman of Bratslav, an eighteenth-century Hasidic rabbi, incorporated this concept of Rachel-as-*Shechinah* in a prayer he composed: "Master of the world, take pity on the tears and the wailing of our mother Rachel, who is the *Shechinah* and who moaned over our great anguish. For Rachel wept for her children who were dismissed from their father's table and exiled from their land, 'weeping sorely at night, her tears upon her cheeks, and among all her friends none to comfort her' (Lam 1.2)....So take pity on us, O merciful one....'"[9]

Although in these texts, Rachel is mythologized and elevated into something beyond her original Biblical persona, her particular association with maternity and maternal figures flourished in the nineteenth century, when a Jewish maternal figure was deemed to be useful for the propagation of Zionist ideology. According to Sered, the emergence of the Rachel cult took place from the mid-nineteenth century through the late twentieth century, and until the nineteenth century, Rachel was "no more important than any other biblical heroine in the Jewish cultural and mythic imagination, and her name was not especially coupled with the honorific title *Imeinu* (Our Mother), a title which is used consistently today."[10] While it drew

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[8] Ibid., 31-32.
[9] Qtd. in Ibid., 31-32.
[10] Ibid., 8.

on themes and symbols from traditional Jewish texts, the "true cult" of Rachel was dependent on the convergence of two socio-historical developments: "the European Marian revival which was part and parcel of a more general feminization of religion in the West, and the emergence of Zionism as a nationalistic political and cultural ideology. The two aspects of Rachel that embody these two social-historical movements—Rachel as the tender mother who understands and cares for her children, and Rachel as the protector of the exiles—converged in the twentieth century."[11] It is these aspects that are most frequently represented by the poems and songs in which Rachel is a featured character.

The text of "*Rochel m'vakoh al boneho*," a cantorial showpiece composed by David Roitman (1844-1943), arranged by Abraham Wolf Binder (1895–1966), and published in 1930,[12] consists of a collection of Biblical verses taken from the *Tikkun Rachel* section of the *Seder Chatzot*. The *Seder Chatzot*, also referred to as *Tikkun Chatzot*, is an ancient Jewish custom in which worshippers arise in the middle of the night to say prayers and lament the destruction of the Temple and the exile of the Shechinah. The *Zohar* references it several times, and the practice gained significance with the kabbalists. The ritual itself dates from the sixteenth century and was created by Isaac Luria and his followers.[13] The prayers are divided into two parts, *Tikkun Rachel* and *Tikkun Leah*. *Tikkun Rachel* includes Psalms lamenting the *Shechinah*'s exile and the Temple's destruction, the last chapter of Lamentations, and special laments composed in Safed and Jerusalem. *Tikkun Leah* consists of recitation of Messianic psalms and a long hymn, in the form of a dialogue between God

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[11] Ibid.
[12] David Roitman, "*Rochel m'vakoh al boneho*," arranged by A.W. Binder (New York: Mills Publishing Co., 1930).
[13] Gershom G. Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, translated Ralph Manheim (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), 149.

and the mystical community of Israel.[14] Gershom Scholem writes: "According to this Kabbalah, Rachel and Leah are two aspects of the *Shekhinah*, the one exiled from God and lamenting, the other in her perpetually repeated reunion with her Lord. Consequently the *tikkun Rachel*, or 'rite for Rachel,' was the true rite of lamentation. In observing it, men 'participate in the suffering of the *Shekhinah*' and bewail not their own afflictions, but the one affliction that really counts in the world, namely, the exile of the *Shekhinah*."[15]

The text of "*Rochel m'vakoh al boneho*" reflects the atmosphere of unrelenting lament present in *Tikkun Rachel*. The liturgical paragraph set by Roitman consists of verses from Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Lamentations:

כֹּה | אָמַר יְהוָה קוֹל בְּרָמָה נִשְׁמָע נְהִי בְּכִי תַמְרוּרִים רָחֵל מְבַכָּה עַל־בָּנֶיהָ מֵאֲנָה לְהִנָּחֵם עַל־בָּנֶיהָ כִּי אֵינֶנּוּ: יְהוָה מִמָּרוֹם יִשְׁאָג וּמִמְּעוֹן קָדְשׁוֹ יִתֵּן קוֹלוֹ שָׁאֹג יִשְׁאַג עַל־נָוֵהוּ וַיִּקְרָא אָדֹנָי יְהוִה צְבָאוֹת בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לִבְכִי וּלְמִסְפֵּד וּלְקָרְחָה וְלַחֲגֹר שָׂק: עַל־אֵלֶּה | אֲנִי בוֹכִיָּה עֵינִי עֵינִי יְרָדָה מַיִם כִּי־רָחַק מְמֶנִּי מְנַחֵם מֵשִׁיב נַפְשִׁי הָיוּ בָנַי שוֹמֵמִים כִּי גָבַר אוֹיֵב: הֵן אֶרְאֶלִּם צָעֲקוּ חָצָה מַלְאֲכֵי שָׁלוֹם מַר יִבְכָיוּן:

> Thus said the Lord: A cry is heard in Ramah—wailing, bitter weeping—Rachel is weeping for her children. She refuses to be comforted for her children who are gone. [Jeremiah 31:15] The Lord roars from high. God makes his voice heard from his holy dwelling; God roars aloud over God's [earthly] abode. [Jeremiah 25:30] My Lord God of Hosts summoned on that day to weeping and lamenting, to tonsuring and girding with sackcloth. [Isaiah 22:12] For these things do I weep, my eyes flow with tears; far from me is any comforter who might revive my spirit; my children are forlorn, for the enemy has prevailed. [Lamentations 1:16] Hark! The Arielites[16] cry aloud; Shalom's[17] messengers weep bitterly. [Isaiah 33:7]

Presented in the context of the *Tikkun Rachel/Tikkun Leah* dichotomy, it is appropriate that Jeremiah 31:16-17, the verses immediately following the description of Rachel's weeping

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[14] Aaron Wertheim, *Law and Custom in Hasidism*, translated Shumel Himelstein (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav Publishing House, 1992), 99. See also Scholem, 150.
[15] Scholem, 149.
[16] "Ariel": poetic name for Jerusalem, c.f. Isaiah 29:1
[17] A reference to Jerusalem—"*Shalem*"—c.f. Psalm 76:3

and those relating to God's promise of redemption, are not included in the text. As Scholem points out, in *Tikkun Leah*, "the emphasis is no longer on exile but on the promise of redemption."[18] In order to preserve the dichotomy of exile and redemption as represented by the figures of Rachel and Leah in *Seder Chatzot*, the promise of redemption given to Rachel in Jeremiah 31:16-17 is not included in the collection of verses. The verses following, although taken from disparate sources, have in common their description of visions of Jerusalem's destruction, and maintain Rachel's exclusive association with exile and lament in the context of this particular ritual.

The shift from third person to first person beginning with Lamentations 1:16 is notable: it supports the impression of Rachel-as-Jerusalem, as seen in the Targum Jonathan and subsequent texts. In its original context, this verse is from the section of Lamentations that is told from the first-person perspective of Jerusalem, who is portrayed as a desolate widow. Personified Jerusalem speaks the words "For these things do I weep, my eyes flow with tears; far from me is any comforter who might revive my spirit; my children are forlorn, for the enemy has prevailed." However, in the context of the liturgical lament, it would appear as though Rachel herself is speaking these words, given the strong references to the text of Jeremiah 31:15. It is emotionally effective as well: it erases the distance created by the intermediate verses describing God's wrath, and allows the worshipper/audience member a "close up" of Rachel-Jerusalem's pain. The personal nature of Rachel's grief is brought out in this line before the piece concludes with a final outcry of anguish from the people of Jerusalem.

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[18] Scholem, 150.

Although they share a title, the words of Eliakum Zunser's (1836-1913) song "*Rochel m'vakoh al boneho*" were written by Zunser himself rather than taken from a liturgical text. Like the text of the Roitman setting, it too is an unrelenting lament, without much hint of the promise of redemption, but this is fitting if one views the text as though it were something of a midrash on Jeremiah 31:15: Zunser imagines the setting and the content of Rachel's lament, and the "cliffhanger" at the end of the piece, Rachel's cry to God, "answer me now," anticipates God's response, the promise of redemption present in the Biblical text in 31:16-17. Like many of Zunser's songs, it is strongly influenced by Zionist principles, and here he takes the opportunity to embellish the Biblical scene with a Zionist ideological message. Zunser describes the oppression suffered by Jews throughout the Diaspora, suggesting emphatically that the subjugation of Rachel's children would—and should—be relieved by their return to Eretz Yisrael.

"*Rochel m'vakoh al boneho*" ("Rachel weeps for her children")

The western sun has shown
With its red flames that it is on its way out,
And the night's darkness
Has clothed the earth in a black garment.
The earth and its people are silent,
Nature sleeps—mountain and valley alike,
The moon circles without a sound,
The stars too remain mute.
Only one voice breaks the silence,
The voice of a woman weeps and laments,
Accompanied by a tragic melody
That she plays on a fiddle.
From her tune, from her lament,
One can lose all one's strength,
And she cries pitifully from her tent:
"I am all alone in the world!"

For a short time I had "*nakhes*,"
While God nurtured you in your Land;
The sacrificial altar was sated with its offerings,

The winged cherubs protected you,
David's children wore crowns,
The High Priest in his robes,
The Sanhedrin, like a garden in bloom,
And the Temple, like a spring flower!
Thrice a year at the appointed time,
People would come from far and wide:
This one bringing offerings to sacrifice,
And that one coming with first fruits!
The Levites would play their instruments,
Jews felt holy,
The streets were full of joy—
Then I had "*nakhes*!"

But Zion lost its delight,
Staked its fortune in a game and lost;
The site "Bethlehem" where my bones lie,
Is by now clothed in bereavement!
You, Mount Lebanon! You good friend!
Whose feet tread upon you today?
You, Mount Moriah! You holy place!
Right there stands a Muslim mosque!
The streets are now empty,
The roads are deserted,
In Carmel no flowers bloom,
The towers glint no more!
The Kohanim who assisted,
The Prophets—Where do I see them now?
Where is your crown, where are your riches?
What has become of you today?!

Now I look at Jerusalem near the Western Wall,
I see my children now, black as coal,
Their heads propped up by their bony hands,
They moan and groan that their hearts are breaking!
In Jerusalem there is neither tree nor stone
That has not been dripped with my children's tears!
Oppressing my offspring is child's play,
Wherever they take aim—there stands the target!
I hear a cry from Moldavia:
My child calls out, "Oy vey!"
From Arabia he cries, "No good!"
His blood is being spilled there like water!
From Asia he wails—pity upon him—, "So bad!"
There are no rights for him there!
In Persia he soaks the earth with his tears,

There, they treat him like a dog!

In Heaven, the thousands of stars
Lament my child's misfortune!
All the trees are weeping,
And even the birds respond in kind!
But the hearts of your enemies are like stone,
Misfortune has locked away their hearts!
The crocodile, the brute: even they shed tears,
But your enemies' hearts are hard as iron!
Oh, God! Answer me now!
Tell me—Is there no end to
The suffering, generation after generation?
In strife—two thousand years!
You, stars, tell me, if you know,
Will there ever be consolation for me?
Oh, no! I still feel it, I feel it!
Oh, God, answer me now![19]

The first verse sets the scene: the setting sun, it is nighttime. Everything is quiet, save for Rachel's voice. Playing a fiddle, she cries from her tent, "I am all alone in the world!" The remaining verses are from Rachel's perspective, voiced in first person. She speaks of the "good old days," when sacrifices were performed in the Temple and the people were protected. "Then I had *nakhes*!" she cries. In the third verse, she explains, "Zion lost its delight" and describes the landscape desolate of Jews: even a Muslim mosque stands on Mount Moriah. Verse four details the suffering of her children throughout the world: they cry out "*Oy vey*" and "*Nit gut*" ("Not good") from places as far-flung as Moldavia, Arabia, Asia, and Persia. Even in Jerusalem they moan, their hearts breaking. The grief swells to a climax in the final verse; nature herself—the stars in heaven, the trees, the birds—cries out and laments Rachel's child's misfortune. Even the brute and crocodile weep while the enemies' hearts are like "stone and iron." The song ends with a question and a petition to

[19] Eliakum Zunser, *Selected Songs* (New York : Zunser Pub. Co., c1928), 136-138. Translation by Yankl Salant. Please see Appendix B for original Yiddish text.

God and the heavens: "stars, tell me, if you know,/will there ever be consolation for me?/Oh, no! I still feel it, I feel it!/Oh, God, answer me now!"

While the song text itself provides no words of comfort from on high, the title evokes for its listeners not only the Biblical verse of the title, but the verses following—God's response, God's consolation, and the promise of future redemption—as well. Moreover, the emotional content of the song is greatly heightened by the poignant image of a mother—a mother who uses such familiar expressions to the audience as "*nakhes*"—bewailing the fate of her children in contemporary terms. This mother Rachel is more in line with the nineteenth-century Rachel that Sered describes: a tender mother and protector of exiles.

Zunser continues this portrayal of Rachel in his 1884 song, "*Shivas Zion*" ("Return to Zion"). Like "*Rochel m'vakoh al boneho*," this image of Rachel is more personal than iconic, even bordering on domestic at times. However, the conflation of Rachel with the land of Israel itself is strongest here. Rachel and her children, portrayed by Zunser as though they were a shtetl family, simultaneously function as allegorical figures: Rachel as Zion, and her children as the ancient tribes of Israel. The familial imagery combined with Biblical references and Zionist themes makes the connection between the Biblical promise of redemption, the maternal image of Rachel/Zion, and the contemporary Zionist movement. Zunser successfully joins elements of restorative and reflective nostalgia, couching nationalist, Zionist rhetoric in domestic images in order to appeal both emotionally and ideologically to the audience.

"*Shivas Zion*" ("Return to Zion")

What is it that I see through my window?
They soar towards me like doves,
My Joseph, my Benjamin knock at my door!
Oh Heavenly Father, how wondrous!

Once again I behold my children,
My most beloved, most faithful now return to me!
So many years have passed,
It seemed as if I were forsaken,
A desolate widow whose table was bare...
And you? How have you fared
Since you were captured?
How are Judah and Ephraim? Give me their news!

Do not rant at God, children!
This is God's wonder:
The darkness becomes even darker before the dawn!
At the first redemption,
It was also that way:
The burden became heavier at the last moment, as Moses shouted his laments.
You are judged and blamed,
But that is actually for the good.
If you build your center, you will be oppressed with poverty.
If you hadn't been driven out,
You would have stayed there,
And your covenant [or league or alliance or union] and national identity would have remained undeveloped!

"How does it look?
My enemies ridicule me
When a few young boys step on my soil.
Can they be trusted?
Will they really rebuild
My glory and my realm, as they once were?"
No! You must compare it to
The greatest of rivers,
Which start out as a trickle of water from a tiny spring;
Streams flow into it,
Until it becomes renowned,
And masts and sails glint everywhere upon it.

My youthful years
Have again returned!
Off with the black of mourning and on with my silk dress!
My house is full again!
My heart and body revived!
So many of my children are arriving full of happiness!
Tears of joy are flowing,
Let me hug and kiss you,
Rest your weary bodies, my beloved guests!
You will receive from me

All of the joys and pleasures;
No longer will you eat at a stranger's table,
but your board will be provided by your Mother!

These young people
Will be blessed by the world,
Leaving their homes, goods, riches, fortunes;
Educated people,
Highly cultured,
Will sacrifice themselves for all Jews!
They have decided,
Despite every resentment and dismay,
To rid the road of all obstacles,
To bear the hardships
Like in the time of Ezra,
And their name will survive like Ezra's
Until the end of time![20]

Rachel's domesticity is established in the first verse. Although she is intended to serve as something of a national personification, she is portrayed throughout the song as a doting mother, full of pride in her children. She looks out her window, sees her children coming and knocking at her door, and cries out in delight that they are returning to her. She depicts herself as having been "a desolate widow whose table was bare" and calls out "How have you fared/since you were captured?" like a concerned mother. In the fourth verse, she exults in her change of station: her youthful years have returned, and she will exchange her black mourning dress for a silk one. She rejoices in her house full of children: "My house is full again!"/"My heart and body revived!/So many of my children are arriving full of happiness!" and describes her emotional (and very maternal) response to her children's homecoming: "Tears of joy are flowing,/Let me hug and kiss you,/Rest your weary bodies,

[20] Zunser, 21-23. Translation by Yankl Salant. Please see Appendix B for original Yiddish text.

my beloved guests!"/You will receive from me/All of the joys and pleasures;/No longer will you eat at a stranger's table, but your board will be provided by your Mother!"[21]

Zunser utilizes both traditional and unexpected Biblical references. It is not surprising that Zunser's Rachel mentions Joseph and Benjamin, her two biological children, "knocking at her door," but she also asks after Judah and Ephraim. Ephraim, Rachel's grandson, is textually linked with Rachel: he is mentioned directly following Jeremiah 31:15, the description of Rachel weeping for her children. In Jeremiah 31:20, Ephraim is seen as representative of all Israel,[22] and God extends the promise of redemption to the people through him: "Truly, Ephraim is a dear son to Me, a child that is dandled! Whenever I have turned against him, My thoughts would dwell on him still. That is why My heart yearns for him; I will receive him back in love—declares the Lord." Frymer-Kensky also points out that Ephraim, Joseph's son, was legally considered to be Rachel's son after he and Menasheh are blessed by Jacob and allowed to inherit along with their uncles, Joseph's brothers.[23]

Zunser mentions one other tribe by name, that of Judah. In the Bible, the relationship between Judah and Rachel is of no particular significance when compared to her relationship with Jacob's other children. However, the relationship between Judah and Rachel's children becomes clearer in the prophetic books. For example, in Ezekiel 37:19-22, Ezekiel describes a vision in which Judah—symbolizing the southern kingdom—and Joseph—symbolizing the northern kingdom—come together as one:

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[21] While it is impossible to know if Zunser was familiar with Nahman of Bratslav's prayer described above, there are clear parallels between the two. There, the worshipper is dismissed from his father's table and exiled from the land; here, in Zunser's text, he is invited back to his mother's table, and symbolically liberated from diasporic wandering.
[22] Strickert, 15.
[23] Frymer-Kensky, n. 27, 268.

> "Thus said the Lord God: I am going to take the stick of Joseph—which is in the hand of Ephraim—and of the tribes of Israel associated with him, and I will place the stick of Judah upon it and make them into one stick; they shall be joined in My hand." You shall hold up before their eyes the sticks which you have inscribed, and you shall declare to them: Thus said the Lord God: I am going to take the Israelite people from among the nations they have gone to, and gather them from every quarter, and bring them to their own land. I will make them a single nation in the land, on the hills of Israel, and one king shall be king of them all. Never again shall they be two nations, and never again shall they be divided into two kingdoms.

Zechariah 10:6-7 also references Joseph, Judah, and Ephraim: "I will give victory to the House of Judah, and triumph to the House of Joseph. I will restore them, for I have pardoned them, and they shall be as though I had never disowned them; for I the Lord am their God, and I will answer their prayers. Ephraim shall be like a warrior, and they shall exult as with wine; their children shall see it and rejoice, they shall exult in the Lord." The following verses, Zechariah 10:8-9, continue the promise of redemption, using the familiar image of children returning from exile: "I will whistle to them and gather them, for I will redeem them; they shall increase and continue increasing. For though I sowed them among the nations, in the distant places they shall remember Me, they shall escape with their children and shall return." This verse indicates that the exile is God's will: having deliberately scattered the children of Israel throughout the world, God will bring about their return as well. Zunser uses the characters of Joseph, Judah, Ephraim, and Benjamin not only to create a familiar domestic environment for their Biblical personae, but also to evoke the Biblical texts and themes associated with them.

Such Biblical references, couched in the imagery of parent and children, aid in the fusion of religious concepts of exile and return with contemporary Zionist principles that takes place in "*Shivas Zion*." Zunser takes the concept of exile as God's will and declares that the exile, and the Jewish suffering that resulted, also served a higher purpose: that of

developing and strengthening Jewish national identity. The second verse is particularly interesting in this regard: Rachel asks her children not to blame God, saying "This is God's wonder:/The darkness becomes even darker before the dawn!" The Jews' humiliation, so vividly described in "*Rochel m'vakoh al boneho*," was not in vain, but in fact good for them: "You are judged and blamed,/But that is actually for the good./If you build your center, you will be oppressed with poverty./If you hadn't been driven out,/You would have stayed there,/And your covenant and national identity would have remained undeveloped!"

The focus of the song gradually shifts from the past to the present. Whereas the opening verses emphasize Rachel's biological children, the final verse calls attention to the young people currently making *aliyah*: Rachel's children of today returning to Zion's borders and fulfilling Jeremiah's prophecy. They are described as educated and cultured, and have chosen to leave homes and fortunes; "despite every resentment and dismay" they have decided to bear the hardships of life in Eretz Yisrael. They too, however, are linked to those in the past: "like Ezra's," their names will survive for all time.

Sered notes that the events of the late 1930s and 1940s caused a resurgence in the cult of Rachel. World War II, the Holocaust, and the War for Independence contributed to "a kind of societal liminality...[in which] the Jewish people stood between extinction and redemption. Old symbols and cultural metaphors had become insufficient, but new ones had not yet crystallized. The acceleration of Rachel's cult at this time reflected a communal attempt to make sense out of a turbulent current reality by linking it to sacred history."[24] In the 1940s, Rachel's Tomb became "explicitly identified with the return to Zion, Jewish

[24] Sered, "A Tale of Three Rachels," 14.

statehood, and allied victory...[and] had special significance for European Jewish refugees during and after the Holocaust."[25]

The element of post-Holocaust communal mourning associated with Rachel's Tomb is reflected in "*Kever Rachel*" ("Rachel's Tomb"), a song published in 1958 as part of a collection of songs called *MiDan v'ad Eilat* (From Dan to Eilat), which consisted in turn of volumes 19-22 of a series of songbooks published by the World Zionist Organization Department for Education and Culture in the Diaspora from approximately 1956-1961.[26]

"*Kever Rachel*" ("Rachel's Tomb")

In the fields of Bethehem, on the road to Efrat[27],
On a grave from ancient times stands a tombstone.
And as midnight comes, from a land of darkness,
The beautiful one[28] arises, the interior of her grave forsaken.

Refrain:
Eastward, to the Jordan, she marches in silence,
Toward its bright waves, silently looking on.
From her beautiful eye a tear falls down
To the waves of sacred waters, silently flowing.

Tear after tear secretly flows,
There is no weeping or lament, but tears pour out.
Tear after tear, falling to the Jordan,
And the waters rush and flow silently.[29]

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[25] Ibid., 16.
[26] The "mission statement" of these songbooks is described in the inside cover of each songbook: "Zemirot booklets, issued by the Department for Education and Culture in the Diaspora of the World Zionist Organization, aim at disseminating Hebrew and Israeli songs throughout the Jewish world. Each booklet, dedicated to a specific subject, includes songs—drawn from the various epochs of Hebrew literature—for community groups, choirs, and schools." See *Zemirot: Songs for School, Community, and Group Singing*, edited by Yosef Kariv and Isaachar Miron-Michrovsky, vols 1-38 (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization Department for Education and Culture in the Diaspora, 1956-1961).
[27] Referencing Genesis 35:19, Rachel's death "*b'derech Efrat*"
[28] Referencing Genesis 29:17, "*y'fat to'ar viyfat mar'eh*"
[29] *Zemirot: Songs for School, Community, and Group Singing*, edited by Yosef Kariv and Isaachar Miron-Michrovsky, volumes 19-22 (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization

None of the songs in this series is translated, and subsequently each song is preceded by a short description in English, French, and Spanish. Although the Hebrew text is essentially a somewhat gothic, eerie description of Rachel silently leaving her grave and weeping into the Jordan, the English description of "*Kever Rachel*" reads as follows: "At midnight, Mother Rachel leaves her tomb, located on the Bethlehem road, and walks to the river Jordan, into which she weeps, remembering the fate of her sons."[30] The inclusion of the phrase "remembering the fate of her sons" has no basis in the Hebrew text of the song, and is perhaps there as to clarify the implicit reference to Jeremiah 31:15. Clearly, at the time of this song's publication, the image of Rachel weeping was still seen as culturally valuable for the Jewish community as a whole. Although the Hebrew text does not actually state that she is crying for her children, it was clearly important that this specific aspect be highlighted in the song summary, particularly in light of the Holocaust and War of Independence, and presumably intended for the audiences in the Diaspora for whom this series of songbooks was compiled. Another interesting aspect is the element of exile associated with Rachel's death itself, on the road to Bethlehem: she is buried apart from her family's burial place, and is "exiled" in this manner as well. Perhaps the element of families separated in death by the Holocaust, not knowing where their loved ones were buried, is also reflected in this song.

Rachel's Tomb is associated not only with national exile and return, but with fertility as well. Historically, women have gone to Rachel's Tomb to pray about fertility issues, a somewhat ironic fact given her struggles with barrenness. However, the issue of fertility has had national significance for the Jewish people, particularly since the Holocaust: "the

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Department for Education and Culture in the Diaspora, 1958), 28. Please see Appendix B for original Hebrew text.

[30] Ibid.

ideology that lies behind Israel's pro-natality culture combines the desire to replace the Jews lost in the Holocaust with the need to provide a new generation to build the land and defend its borders. In religious communities the social demand for children is even greater; women bearing and raising children is a holy calling."[31]

This preoccupation with fertility goes back to the Bible, where almost all the matriarchs struggle to conceive and bear children. Their barrenness has significance not just for them, but also for the future Jewish people. While at first blush Rachel's association with both fertility/barrenness and exile may seem unrelated, the idea of a barren woman as a national figure connoting exile was not limited to Rachel. The image of a barren woman was also used in Isaiah 54, in which "the suffering of the barren woman becomes an explicit metaphor for the exiled People of Israel whom God will ultimately redeem, just as He ultimately gave children to the once barren matriarchs."[32]

The Israeli preoccupation with fertility and the pro-natal policies of the Israeli government have been well-documented.[33] The personal implications of barrenness for individual women, however, devastating enough already, can be overwhelming when their inability to reproduce is also laden with national significance. Lesley Hazleton writes: "modern Israeli Rachels have adapted the biblical fertility cult to create their own Israeli one. In modern as in ancient Israel, the childless woman may be seen, and often sees herself, as

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[31] Sered, "A Tale of Three Rachels," 16.
[32] Wendy I. Zierler, *And Rachel Stole the Idols: The Emergence of Modern Hebrew Women's Writing* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004), 188.
[33] Please see Sachlav Stoler-Liss, "'Mothers Birth the Nation': The Social Construction of Zionist Motherhood in Wartime in Israeli Parents' Manuals." *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies and Gender Issues* 6 (2003): 104-118; Einat Ramon, "Equality and Ambivalence: The Polictical Repurcussions of A.D. Gordon's Maternal Ethics," *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies and Gender Issues* 3 (2000): 74-105, and Hazleton, 63-90.

sad and bitter, a failed woman."[34] Barrenness can mean personal exile from the community, not just an allegory of national exile.

The poetry of Rachel Bluwstein serves as an excellent example of how the allegorical becomes personal. Three of her poems, "*Akara*" ("Barren Woman"), "*Zemer nugeh*" ("Sorrow song"), and "*Rachel*," reference Rachel the Matriarch and contend with the themes of fertility, exile and return, and national legitimacy as well, but do so in a highly personal, intimate fashion. All three poems have been set to music by numerous Israeli composers, and reflect the trend in Israeli popular music towards a more personal approach toward national concerns.

The events of Rachel Bluwstein's life, according to Sered, have acquired a myth of their own, focusing on her love for children (though she has none of her own), her unfulfilled romantic life, and her tragic death at a young age.[35] Rachel, born in northern Russia in 1890, immigrated to Eretz Yisrael in 1909. She lived at an agricultural school for girls near the Kinneret until 1913, at which point she went to France to study agronomy and drawing. She returned to Russia, where she taught refugee children and contracted tuberculosis. She returned to Palestine in 1919 and settled in Kibbutz Degania, but was too ill for physical labor. After her condition became public, her fellow kibbutzniks forced her to leave and abandon her work with the children. She settled in Tel Aviv, where she lived until her death in 1930. She was buried in a cemetery outside of Tiberias and near the Kinneret, and a copy of her poems is kept near her grave.

The poems of Rachel have proved to be enormously popular with Israeli composers and the Israeli public. Sered writes: "Her best-known poems are the ones set to music, and

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[34] Hazleton, 64-65.
[35] Sered, "A Tale of Three Rachels," 19-24.

they are still played on the radio and taught in schools today. In fact, the lovely and memorable melodies of some of her poems are probably better engraved in the popular imagination than the actual words that she wrote."[36] While a comprehensive survey of the musical settings of poems by Rachel is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is worthwhile to discuss these poems as examples of contrasting representations of Rachel the Matriarch seen in popular Israeli culture.

Rachel's poem "*Akara*" (1928) is a superb illustration of Bluwstein's ability to dramatize a "personal rather than a national quest."[37] There are at least six known musical settings of "*Akara*." The collection *MiShirei Rachel* (*Of the Songs of Rachel*), published in 1947 or 1948 by *Ha-Mercaz l'Tarbut* (the Center for Culture) in Tel Aviv, contains twelve settings of Rachel's poems, written for voice and piano and predominantly in the art song style. Of these twelve songs, four are settings of "*Akara*." Mordechai Zeira also composed a setting, and most recently, the popular Israeli singer and songwriter Achinoam Nini (Noa) composed "*Uri*," set to the same text, and released on the album *Noa* in 1994.

"*Akara*" ("Barren Woman")

If only I had a son! A little boy,
Black-curled and clever.
Just to hold his hand and stroll slowly
Through park lanes.
A boy.
Small.

Uri, I'd call him. My Uri!
Soft and clear is this short name.
A bit of light. My dark-haired boy,
"Uri!"

בֵּן לוּ הָיָה לִי ! יֶלֶד קָטָן,
שְׁחֹר תַּלְתַּלִּים וְנָבוֹן.
לְאָחֹז בְּיָדוֹ וְלִפְסֹעַ לְאַט
בִּשְׁבִילֵי הַגָּן.
יֶלֶד.
קָטָן.

אוּרִי אֶקְרָא לוֹ, אוּרִי שֶׁלִּי!
רַךְ וְצָלוּל הוּא הַשֵּׁם הַקָּצָר.
רְסִיס נְהָרָה.
לְיַלְדִּי הַשְּׁחַרְחָר
"אוּרִי !" —

[36] Ibid., 24.
[37] Zierler, 203.

I'd call!	אֶקְרָא!
Still, I'll be embittered like Rachel.	עוֹד אֶתְמַרְמַר כְּרָחֵל הָאֵם.
Still I'll pray like Hannah in Shiloh.	עוֹד אֶתְפַּלֵל כְּחַנָּה בְּשִׁילֹה.
Still I'll await	עוֹד אֲחַכֶּה
Him.[38]	לוֹ.

In this poem, Rachel takes up the theme of infertility associated with Rachel the Matriarch. While previous poets have viewed infertility as a broad metaphor for the condition of the Jewish people, as did Isaiah, Rachel here understands it as a personal sort of exile. An individual woman's barrenness, while having national implications in light of Israeli pro-natal policies, exiles her from the personal experience of motherhood. Here, Rachel's bitterness and Hannah's prayer for a son at Shiloh do not serve as metaphors for Israel's punishment or exile; rather, Bluwstein uses these references to connect her own longings with those of the Biblical women.

Wendy Zierler further notes Bluwstein's use of liturgical language to convey this sense of desire: "The notion of personal rather than national yearnings is underlined in the last two lines of the poem ("*od achakeh/lo*," "still I'll await/him") which allude to the liturgical statement of belief in the coming of the messiah—*achakeh lo bechol yom sheyavo* (I'll wait for him whenever he comes). But instead of a statement of national religious belief in the eventual coming of the messiah, Rachel's clipped use of liturgy depicts the individual yearnings of a woman for a son."[39] Bluwstein takes the conventional metaphors associated with the figure of Rachel and these liturgical lines and creates a personal metaphor for the pain of childlessness, one that, judging by its widespread appeal for composers, has been appreciated collectively as well as individually.

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[38] Translated in Zierler, 202.
[39] Ibid., 203.

"*Zemer nugeh*" ("Sorrow song")

Will you hear my voice, my distant one,
will you hear my voice, wherever you are—
a voice calling strong, a voice crying silently
and above time, commanding blessing?

This world is wide with many paths.
They meet narrowly, part forever.
a man seeks, but his feet fail,
he cannot find what he has lost.

Maybe my last day is already near,
already near, the day of tearful parting,
I shall wait for you until my life dims,
as Rachel awaited her lover.[40]

הַתִּשְׁמַע קוֹלִי, רְחוֹקִי שֶׁלִּי,
הַתִּשְׁמַע קוֹלִי, בַּאֲשֶׁר הִנָּךְ –
קוֹל קוֹרֵא בְּעוֹז, קוֹל בּוֹכֶה בְּדֻמִּי
וּמֵעַל לַזְּמַן מְצַוֶּה בְּרָכָה?

הֶבֶל זוֹ רַבָּה וּדְרָכִים בָּהּ רַב.
נִפְגָּשׁוֹת לְרַק, נִפְרָדוֹת לָעַד.
מְבַקֵּשׁ אָדָם, אַךְ כּוֹשְׁלוֹת רַגְלָיו.
לֹא יוּכַל לִמְצֹא אֶת אֲשֶׁר אָבַד.

אַחֲרוֹן יָמַי כְּבָר קָרוֹב אוּלַי,
כְּבָר קָרוֹב הַיּוֹם שֶׁל הִמָּעוֹת פְּרִידָה.
אֲחַכֶּה לָךְ עַד יִכְבּוּ חַיַּי,
כְּרָחֵל רָחֵל לְדוֹדָהּ.

Like "*Rochel m'vakoh al boneho*," "*Zemer nugeh*" calls attention to Rachel's voice. Zierler points out that, although Rachel's name is not mentioned until the final line of the poem, the first stanza of the poem, with its focus on voice, strongly connotes Jeremiah's Rachel: "the speaker calls out strongly, cries silently, transcends time, and commands blessing, elements that evoke the matriarch Rachel as she appears in Jeremiah 31:15."[41] The text of the poem juxtaposes personal and universal elements. The first and final stanzas are in first person singular and address an absent Other, spoken to in the masculine second person singular: "Will you hear my voice, my distant one,/will you hear my voice, wherever you are" and "I shall wait for you until my life dims." The middle stanza, in contrast, is more universal, speaking of "this wide world" and "many paths," and written in third person impersonal: "a man seeks, but his feet fail,/he cannot find what he has lost." Oppositional elements are highlighted: hearing and distance; a strong voice, a silent voice; a wide world

[40] Translated in Ibid., 84-85.
[41] Ibid., 85.

with narrow paths; finding and losing. The final lines, "*achake l'cha od yichbu chayai/k'chakot Rachel l'dodah*" ("I shall wait for you until my life dims,/as Rachel awaited her lover"), emphasize Bluwstein's relationship with Rachel, and are reminiscent of the final lines of "*Akarah.*"

The most famous setting of this text is that of Shmulik Kraus, a member of *Hachalonot Hag'vohim* (The High Windows), an Israeli pop trio active in the 1960s that also included Arik Einstein and Josie Katz.[42] Their setting of "*Zemer nugeh,*" heard on their self-titled 1967 recording, was composed as a trio, and sung by two male voices and one female voice.

The fact that the poem is set as a dialogue between male and female voices rather than a (female) monologue emphasizes the poem's romantic aspect, the relationship implied by the final line of the poem ("I shall wait for you...as Rachel awaited her lover") and undercuts the original intent of the poem as an unanswered, perhaps unheard, call to a distant lover. Although the music itself is fairly straightforward, in a light pop style, a major key, and for the most part strophic and adhering to Bluwstein's versification, the combination of the male and female voices highlight the relational elements of the poem to the exclusion of the individual, personal elements. The male and female voices alternate singing the melody and the echo, the male voices initially singing the melody in the first verse with a female echo and the female voice singing the melody in the next verse with the male voices in echo. The juxtaposition of male and female voices, the melody and echo intertwining, creates a sense of conversation, of dialogue, which undermines the individualistic nature of the poem.

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[42] Motti Regev and Edwin Seroussi, *Popular Music and National Culture in Israel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) 147-148.

"Rachel"

Surely, her blood flows in my blood,	הֵן דָּמָהּ בְּדָמִי זוֹרֵם,
Surely, her voice sings in mine—	הֵן קוֹלָהּ בִּי רָן–
Rachel who grazed Laban's flock,	רָחֵל הָרוֹעָה צֹאן לָבָן,
Rachel—Mother of mothers.	רָחֵל-אֵם הָאֵם.
Therefore, the house is narrow to me,	וְעַל כֵּן הַבַּיִת לִי צַר
And the city—strange,	וְהָעִיר–זָרָה,
For her scarf once waved	כִּי הָיָה מִתְנוֹפֵף סוּדָרָהּ
To the winds of the desert;	לְרוּחוֹת הַמִּדְבָּר;
And therefore, I shall hold firm to my way	וְעַל כֵּן אֶת דַּרְכִּי אֹחֵז
With assurance such as this,	בְּבִטְחָה כָּזֹאת,
For safeguarded in my feet are the memories,	כִּי שְׁמוּרִים בְּרַגְלַי זִכְרוֹנוֹת
Of back then, of back then![43]	מִנִּי אָז, מִנִּי אָז!

"*Rachel*" represents a significant departure from the early Zionist texts about Rachel the Matriarch. Rachel the Matriarch here is personalized as well as allegorized: she is "*em ha'em*," "mother of mothers," but also almost at one with the author herself. Rachel envisions herself as sharing the blood and voice of Rachel the Matriarch: "*Hen damah b'dami zorem/hen kolah bi ran*" ("Surely, her blood flows in my blood,/Surely her voice sings in mine"). The "spiritual kinship"[44] Rachel the Poetess claims to share with Rachel the Matriarch is unlike any described in the previous song texts. While those may describe Rachel in maternal terms and utilize maternal imagery, they do so in order to transform the biblical figure into an archetypal Jewish mother figure for the purpose of promoting Zionist goals.

Here, Rachel's relationship with Rachel the Matriarch is personal and intimate, almost like that described in *tchines*—supplicatory prayers for women, usually in the

[43] Translated in Zierler, 82-83. For further analysis of "*Rachel*," please see 81-84.
[44] Ibid., 82.

vernacular— particularly those described as *tchines* of the Matriarchs.[45] While this analogy is not entirely accurate—traditionally, Matriarchs in *tchines* not only provide a link between the worshipper and the matriarch, they also serve as intercessors between the worshippers and God—this poem successfully connects the mythological character of Rachel with an actual, individual woman, which can certainly be said to be true of the *tchine* genre. In this respect, Bluwstein provides the sole example seen here of a truly individual, even familial relationship with the Matriarch.[46]

There is a Zionist element to this poem as well: as we have seen in Chapter One, poets used mother/son imagery in order to legitimize their rights to the land. By referring to themselves as "sons" of the motherland, an almost biological bond was implied, establishing an undeniable connection to the land. Here, Rachel asserts a similar biological bond: "surely, her blood flows in my blood,/Surely her voice sings in mine." Rachel the Matriarch is not only her namesake, she is her mother, and Bluwstein is her daughter—after all, they share the same blood—and thus her legacy transfers to Rachel herself. Although the land of Israel may be foreign to her ("the house is narrow to me,/and the city—strange"), somewhere in Bluwstein's biological makeup, Rachel the Matriarch's blood flows, and just as she once walked these paths and "possessed" them, so shall Bluwstein: "for her scarf once waved/to the winds of the desert;/and therefore, I shall hold firm to my way/with assurance such as this." Bluwstein's presence in Eretz Yisrael is legitimated by her relationship with her ancestor, "for safeguarded in my feet are the memories,/of back then, of back then!"

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[45] Please see Kathryn Hellerstein, "The Metamorphosis of the Matriarchs in Modern Yiddish Poetry" in *Yiddish Language and Culture: Then and Now,* Vol. 9 Studies in Jewish Civilization (Omaha, NE: Creighton University Press, 1998) 201-231.

[46] For other examples of the connections modern Hebrew women poets sought to create between themselves and Biblical characters, please see Zierler, 43-126.

"*Rachel*" has not held as much appeal for Israeli composers as have many of Rachel's other poems. But an assessment of the two known settings demonstrates the continuing influence of previous representations of Rachel the Matriarch's character. The setting of Yehuda Sharet (1901-1972) is strophic, following Rachel's own versification, and thus no particular verse or phrase of text is especially highlighted musically over another. This setting has the feel of a folk song, with a narrow range of only a fourth, and three repeated verses undistinguished from each other musically. Contrast this with the setting of Levy Sha'ar, published in 1980.[47] Although this song too is strophic, the first musical verse consists of the first two poetic verses, and the second verse consists of the third poetic verse followed by a repetition of the first poetic verse. He also has created a refrain out of the poetic text: "*Rachel em ha'em, Rachel em ha'em, damah b'dami zorem*" ("Rachel, mother of mothers, Rachel, mother of mothers; her blood flows in my blood"), the text of which is repeated twice each time the refrain occurs. The net result is that, throughout the course of the entire song, the words "*Rachel em ha'em*," "Rachel, mother of mothers," are repeated no fewer than ten times. Both contribute to the Rachel "myth": Sharet by creating a folksong out of Rachel's poem and helping further mythologize both Rachel and Bluwstein in the public mind, and Sha'ar by highlighting Rachel the Matriarch's continuing significance as "mother of mothers."

The themes most commonly associated with Rachel the Matriarch—maternity, infertility, and national exile and return—were historically invoked as symbols for collective rather than personal aspirations. Clearly, the songs represented here emphasize the maternal aspect of Rachel over her other characteristics described in the Bible. While she is not the

[47] Levy Sha'ar, *Shnei Shirei Rachel l'kol u'fsanter* (Tel Aviv: Or Tav, 1980).

sole maternal figure associated with either traditional Jewish texts, the Zionist movement, or modern Hebrew poetry or music, she is the maternal figure who most successfully blends all three genres. More so than the more allegorical figures used by Zionist writers—Mother Zion, the *Shechinah*—the figure of Rachel appeals to a broad audience, bridging the spectra of Jewish political and religious beliefs. Bluwstein uses the figure of Rachel as a metaphor for her own desires for love, children, and a sense of belonging in a new motherland. Bluwstein, unlike the other poets considered here, expresses solidarity with Rachel as one woman to another. Her poetry suggests her desire to relate to Rachel as an individual woman, and the mass appeal of her poetry reflects the larger trend in Israeli song towards a more individual approach to collective issues.

Appendix A

"A Brief fun der Mutter Zion"
"A Letter from Mother Zion"
Text and music: Eliakum Zunser

דורך די פאָסטען, די שטענדיגע הימער,
וואָס נאָט האָט זיי ביי מיר פאַר וועכטער געשטעלט,
שיקט איך א בריוועל, איך ציון, די מוטער,
צו אייך, מיינע קינדער, פון צוויימען זייט וועלט.
געגריסט זייט פון מיר און פון אייערע שוועסטער,
פון כרמל, לבנון, פון יפו ביים פאָרט,
פון די וואַנט פון מקדש, דער מיטער דער פעסטער,
פון הר הזיתים, דער היילינגער אָרט,
פון חרמון, פון ירדן, דער שפּאַציר דער בעסטער,
וואו איהר פלעגט יונגערהייט שפּילען זיך דאָרט.

פרעהליכע בשורות קען איך אייך מיטטהיילען,
מיין יוגענד ווערט איצטער צוריק אָבגעפרישט,
עס קומען די קינדער די וואַנדען צו הײלען,
צו בויען די חורבות, וואָס שטעהען פאַרוויסט.
זיי גרינדען קאָלאָניעס, און זעצען זיך ווידער
צום טיש ביי דער מוטער, ווי טויביג, ווי פריי,
און עסען און טרינקען און זינגען זיך לידער;
די שפּראַך און דער ביבעל לעבט אָף אויף דאָס ניי;
און ווינען גאַנץ גליקליך און לעבען, ווי ברידער;
מיין הארץ קוועלט צו שטעהן און צו קוקען דערביי.

נאָר פון אייך, מיינע קינדער, האָב איך קיין גערישטען,
איהר האָט זיך, אפּנים, פערגעסען אָן מיר;
איהר ווילט פון דער מוטער, פון ציון ניט וויסען
עס גיט פון אייך קיינער, וואָס עפענט מיין טהיר.
ביי מיר בוים מען שטעדט, עס בליהט נייע געסען,
דערמאָנט אייך ווער „ציון", — גלייך לאָבט איהר איהם
אים
מיט אייער מוטער דאַרפט איהר זיך ניט שעהמען:
זי וואַר, און זי האָפט ווידער זיין אמאָל גרויס.

איז אייך דאַרפען גוט און איהר מאַכט פיין א לעבען,
פרעהט מיר מיין הארץ, אז מיין קינד לעבט דאָרט פריי.
מעגט איהר זיך אודאי דאָמיט איבערגעבען
צו נעמען אנטהייל אין ציון'ס געביי;
נאָר מיר האָט די פּראַקטיקע לאַנג שוין געוויזען,
א פּראַקטיקע וואָס דויערט באַלד צוויי טויזענד יאָהר,
אז אנטיסעמיטען, ווי דערנער, ווי שפּיזען, —
האָסטען אייך פלוצלונג ווען איהר שטייגט אין פלאָר,
איהר ווערט גיך פון ווירטה און פון הויז אויסגעוויזען:
היינט זוך פון דאָס ניי אויצט א וואַנדער, א סטאָר.

טויזענדער יאָהרענלאַנג זיינען פאַראיבער,
עס קומען אָן פעלקער צו מיר אַלערליי;
מיין ערד ניט קיין פרוכטען, מיין לופט — געלעכער פיבער,
דען איך ליד קיין פרעמדע, איך שטים ניט מיט זיי.
ווי מיינע קינדער זיינען אָנגעפאָהרען,
געגרינדעט קאָלאָניעס מיט גאַנץ ווייניג געלט,
גבורים און העלדען. ווערען דאָרט געבאָרען,
די אַלערליי פיבערס איז דאָרטען געפעהלט, —
זיי בליהען זיך גליקליך, עס בליהען די יאָהרען,
ווי אין שלמה'ס צייטען, א פרעהליכע וועלט!

א אידישע שטאָט איז נויארק די גרעסטע;
איהר געפינט ניט איהר גלייכען אין דער גאַנצער וועלט,
און פון אַלע לענדער קומען צו מיר געסטע:
איך בעטראַכט מיינע קינדער — אמעריקא פעהלט!
האָט איהר זיך מיט ציון אויף עוויג געזעגענט?
אין הארצען פערלאָשען דעם לעצטען פונק?
פרעמד, ווי מיר וואָלטען זיך קיינמאָל בעגעגענט,
איהר גאַרט מיך ניט ווען, אייך דורשט ניט קיין טרונק.
געדענקט, פילייכט טרעפט אייך, עס שנייעט צי עס
רעגענט, —
צום אנדענקען נאָט אייך מיין בריעף און מיין וואונק.

404A

SHNE MICHTAVIM

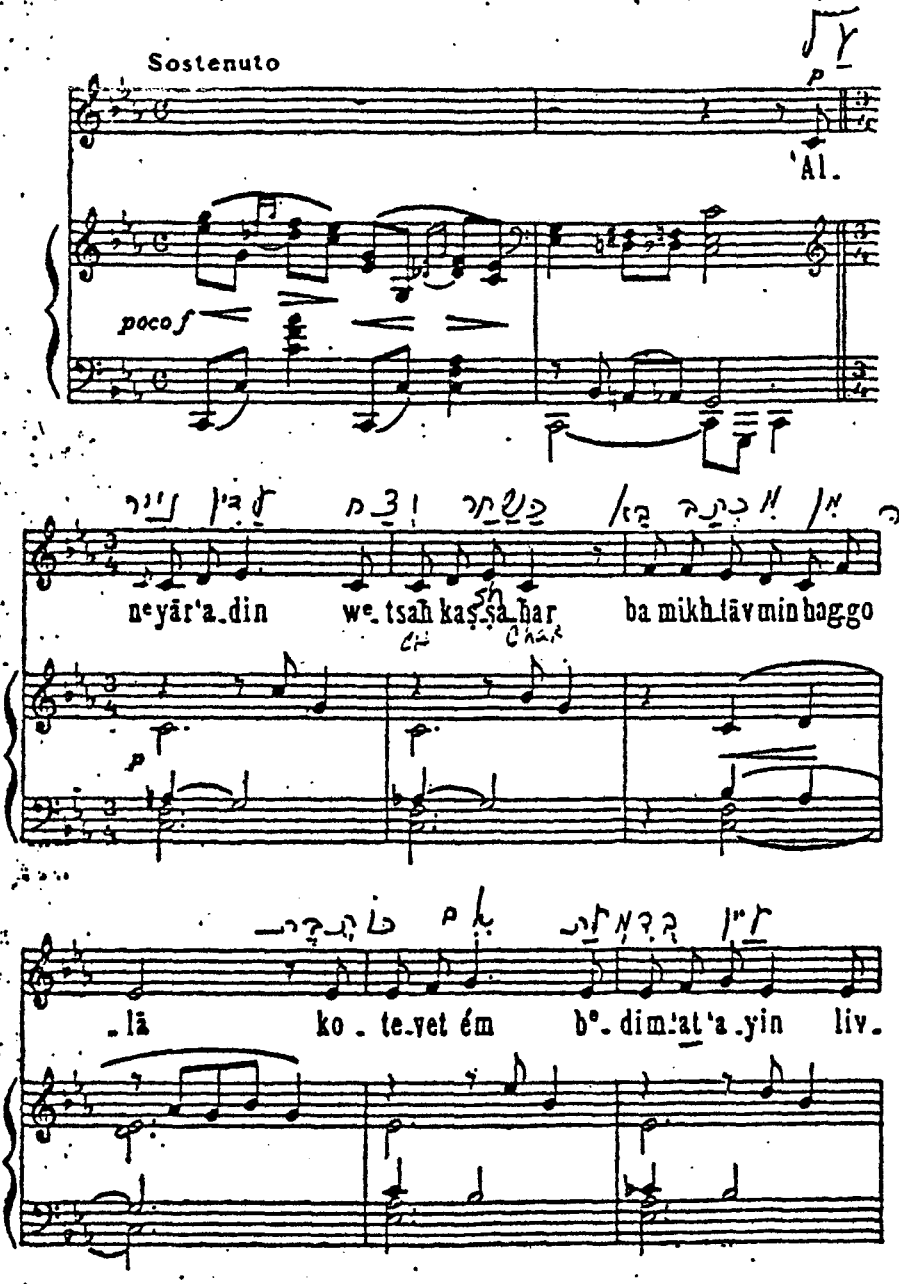
Y. Engel

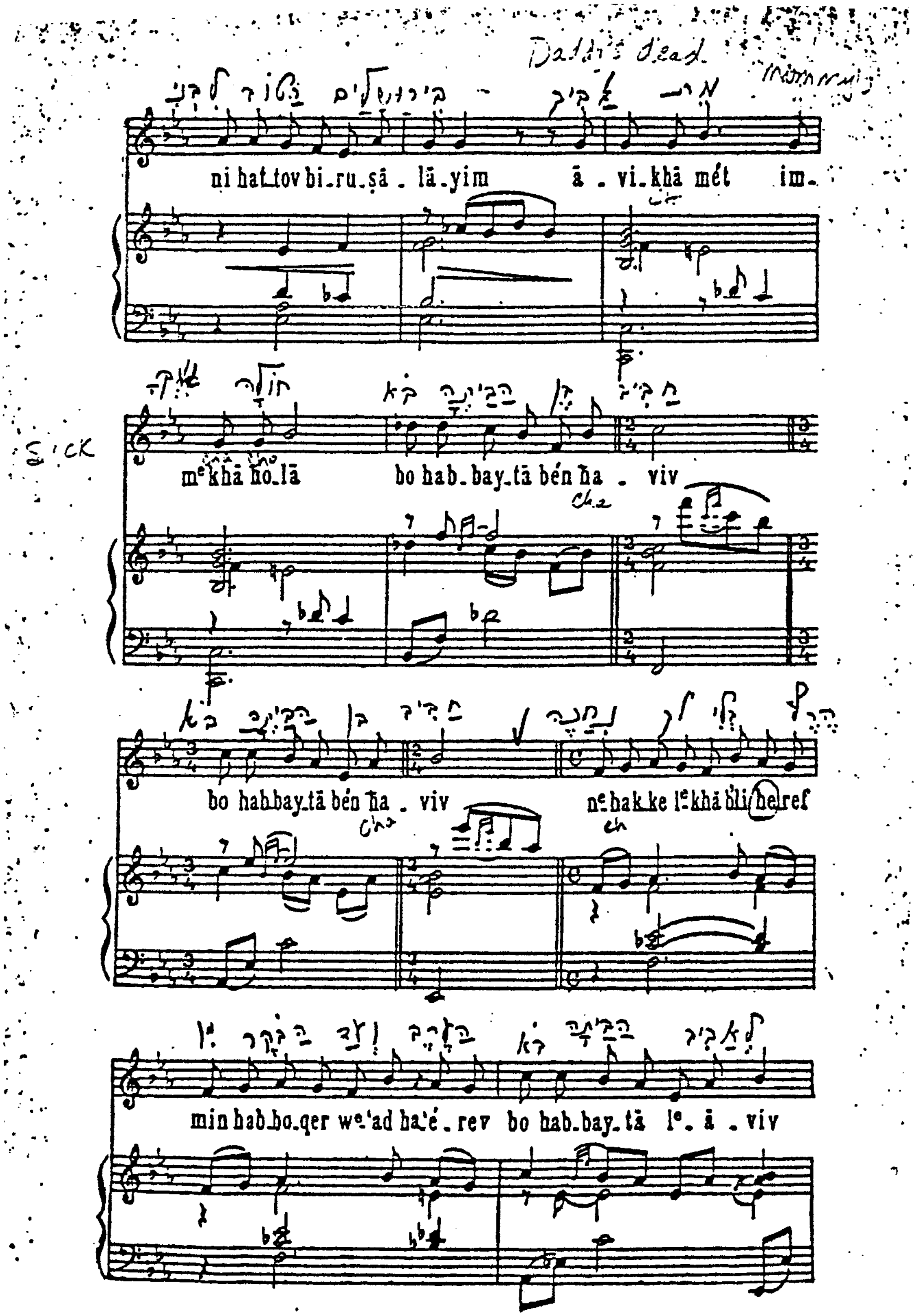
86. שְׁנֵי מִכְתָּבִים

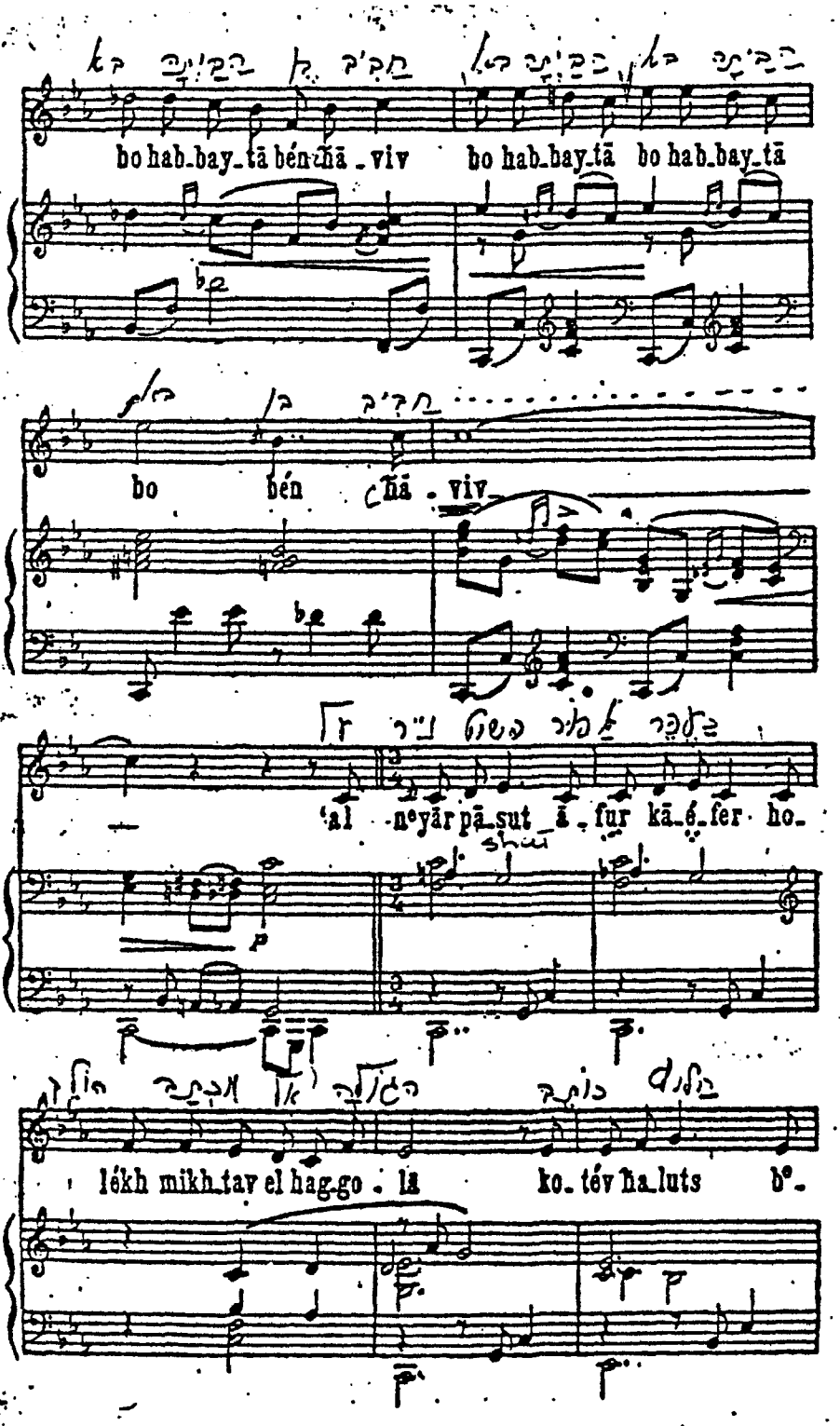
(המלים בעמוד 42)

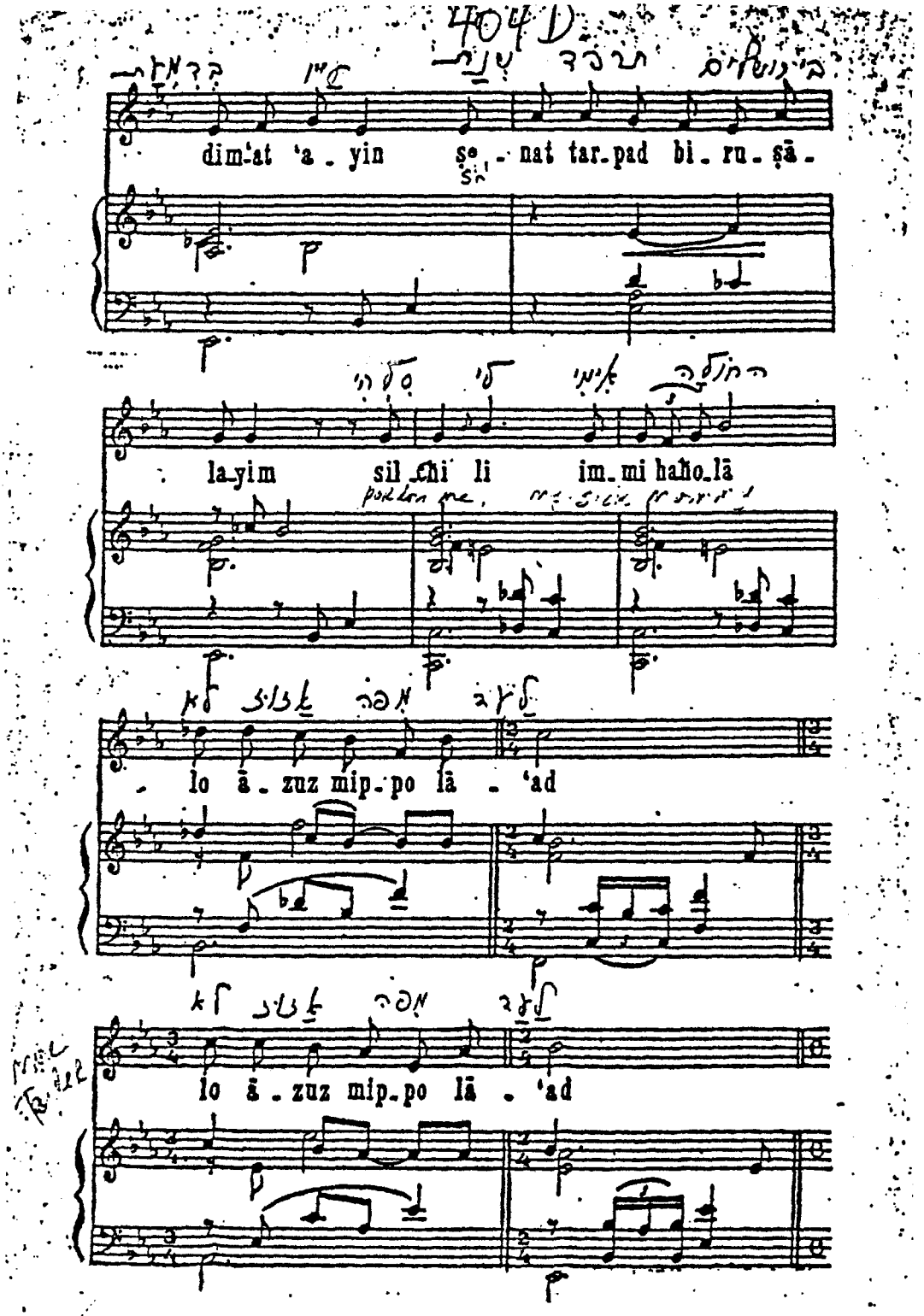
השיר מאת א. המאירי

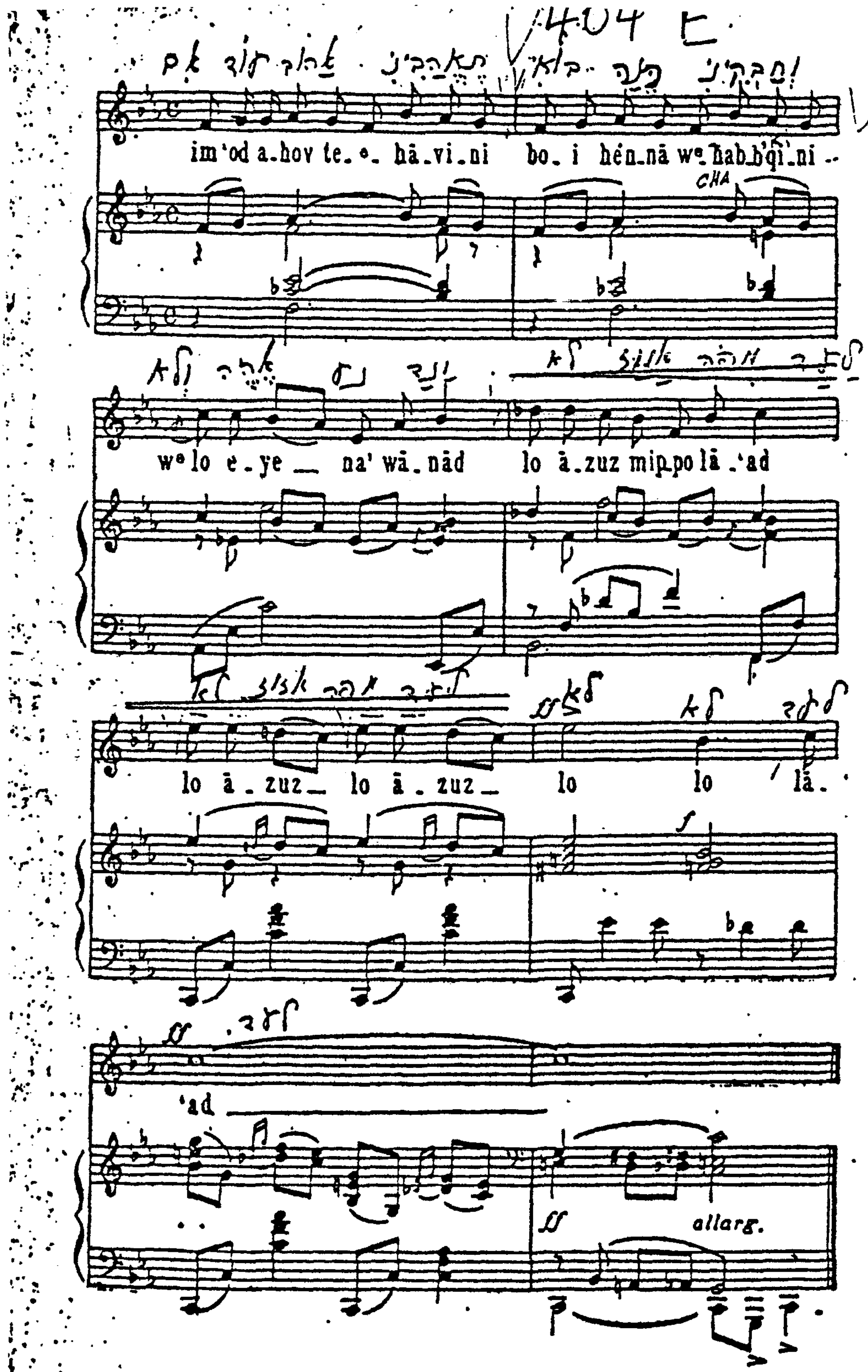
המוסיקה מאת י. אנגל




Daddy's dead
ni hat-tov bi-ru-ṣā - lā-yim ā - vi-khā mét im-
SICK
mᵉkhā ho-lā bo hab-bay-tā bén ha - viv
bo hab-bay-tā bén ha - viv nᵉhak-ke lᵉkhā bli herel
min hab-bo-qer wᵉ'ad ha'é - rev bo hab-bay-tā lᵉ- ā - viv


bo hab_bay_tā bén_ñā _ viv bo hab_bay_tā bo hab_bay_tā
bo bén ñā _ viv
'al n°yār pā_sut _ ā _ fur kā_é_fer ho_
lékh mikh_tav el hag_go _ lā ko_ tév ha_luts b°_


dim'at 'a . yin se . nat tar . pad bi . ru . ṣā .
la . yim sil . chi li im . mi hañ . lā
lo ā . zuz mip . po lā . 'ad
lo ā . zuz mip . po lā . 'ad



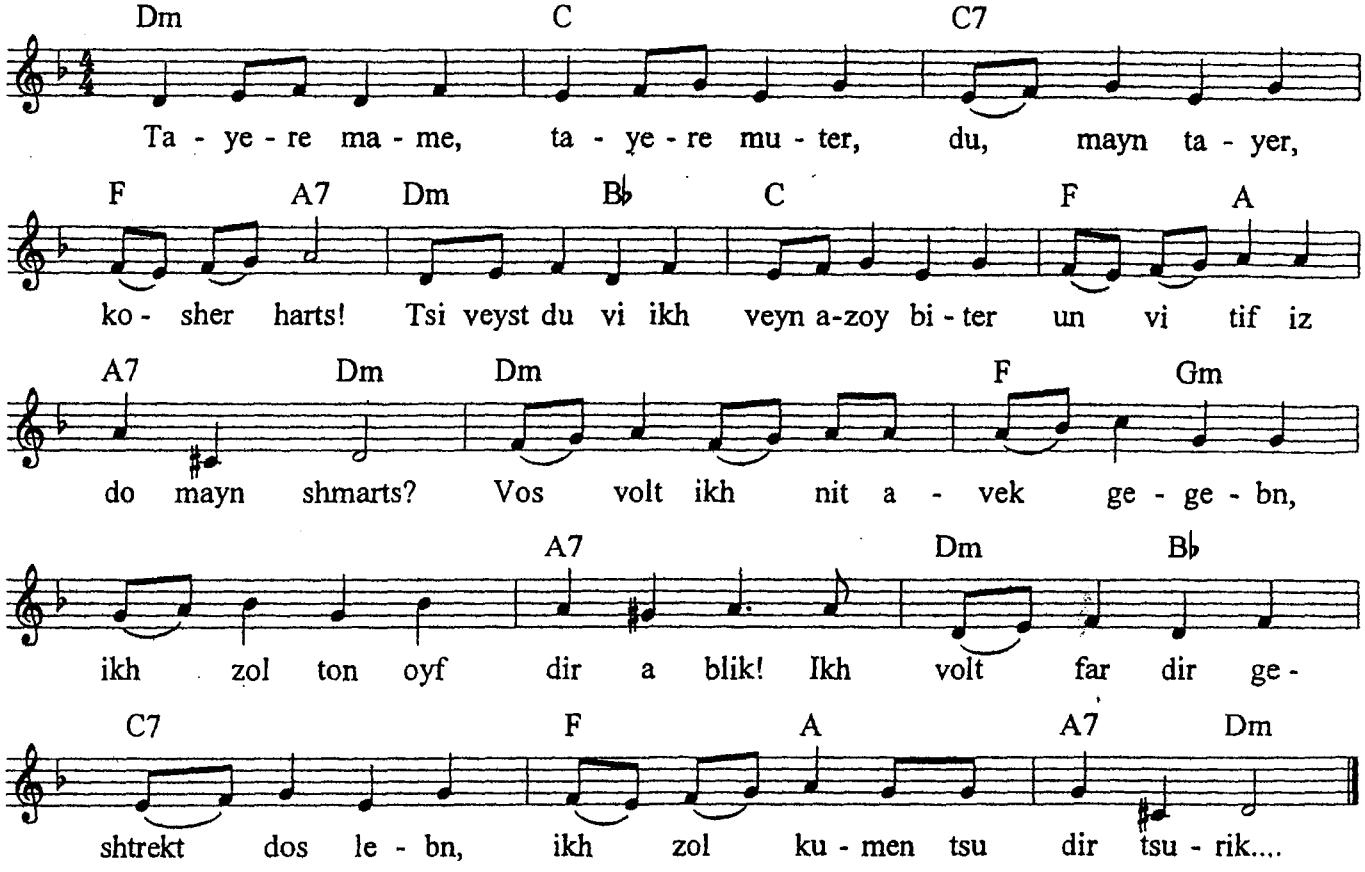
V404 E
im'od a-hov te-e- hā-vi-ni bo-i hén-nā we-hab-b'qi-ni
CHA
we lo e-ye na' wā-nād lo ā-zuz mip-po lā-'ad
lo ā-zuz lo ā-zuz lo lo lā-
'ad
allarg.

A BRIV FUN AMERIKE
A LETTER FROM AMERICA

אַ בריוו פֿון אַמעריקע
מִכְתָּב מֵאַמֶרִיקָה

טעקסט און מוזיק: מ. וואַרשאַווסקי
Text and Music: M. Warshavsky

Moderato



– Tayere mame, tayere muter,
Du mayn tayer, kosher harts!
Tsi veyst du, vi ikh veyn azoy biter
Un vi tif iz do mayn shmarts?
Vos volt ikh nit avekgegebn,
Ikh zol ton oyf dir a blik!
Ikh volt far dir geshtrekt dos lebn,
Ikh zol kumen tsu dir tsurik...

– טײַערע מאַמע, טײַערע מוטער,
דו מײַן טײַער, כּשר האַרץ!
צי ווייסט דו, ווי איך ווײַן אַזוי ביטער
און ווי טיף איז דאָ מײַן שמאַרץ?
וואָס וואָלט איך ניט אַוועקגעגעבן,
איך זאָל טאָן אויף דיר אַ בליק!
איך וואָלט פֿאַר דיר געשטרעקט דאָס לעבן,
איך זאָל קומען צו דיר צוריק...

Nor s'iz nit di dozike yorn,
Vos men ken gikh ton altsding:
Mame, kh'ken tsu dir nit forn –
Shraybn iz mir dos nit gring!
Leahnyu lozt nit, zi hot moyre,
Far dem "priziv" tsitert zi,
Un mayn pitsele kind mayn Dvore,
Halt mikh mit ire hentlekh tsu.

נאָר ס׳איז ניט די דאָזיקע יאָרן,
וואָס מען קען גיך טאָן אַלצדינג:
מאַמע, כ׳קען צו דיר ניט פֿאָרן –
שרײַבן איז מיר דאָס ניט גרינג!
לאהניו לאָזט ניט, זי האָט מורא,
פֿאַר דעם "פּריזיוו" ציטערט זי,
און מײַן פּיצעלע קינד מײַן דבֿורה,
האַלט מיך מיט אירע הענטלעך צו.

Az ikh ze zi vert mir gringer:
Du zolst hern vi zi redt!
Vi zi vayzt mitn groysn finger
Oyf der babenyus patret...
Un mayn sheyner yung, mayn Sani,
Arbet – goldene hot er hent!
Moyshele zogt shoyn "moyde ani",
Rokhlen volstu nit derkent...

אַז איך זע זי ווערט מיר גרינגער:
דו זאָלסט הערן ווי זי רעדט!
ווי זי ווײַזט מיטן גרויסן פֿינגער
אויף דער באַבעניוס פּאַטרעט...
און מײַן שיינער יונג, מײַן סאַני,
אַרבעט – גאָלדענע האָט ער הענט!
משהלה זאָגט שוין "מודה אני",
רחלען וואָלסטו ניט דערקענט...

Du dermonst zey min-hastame
Un du bentshst zey avaday dort...
Zey grisn, kushn dikh, tayere mame,
Zay gezunt! Nor nokh eyn vort:
Yortsayt hobn mir erev shvues –
Zolst du dort dem tatn zogn,
Az ikh shik im op a grus...

דו דערמאָנסט זיי מן־הסתּמא
און דו בענטשסט זיי אַוודאי דאָרט...
זיי גריסן, קושן דיך, טײַערע מאַמע,
זײַ געזונט! נאָר נאָך איין וואָרט:
יאָרצײַט האָבן מיר ערבֿ שבֿועות –
זאָלסט דו דאָרט דעם טאַטן זאָגן,
אַז איך שיק אים אָפּ אַ גרוס...

– Tayere mame, tayere muter,
Du mayn tayer, kosher harts!
Tsi veyst du, vi ikh veyn azoy biter
Un vi tif iz do mayn shmarts?

– טײַערע מאַמע, טײַערע מוטער,
דו מײַן טייער, כשר האַרץ!
צי ווייסט דו, ווי איך ווײן אַזוי ביטער
און ווי טיף איז דאָ מײַן שמאַרץ?

DER MAMES ENTFER

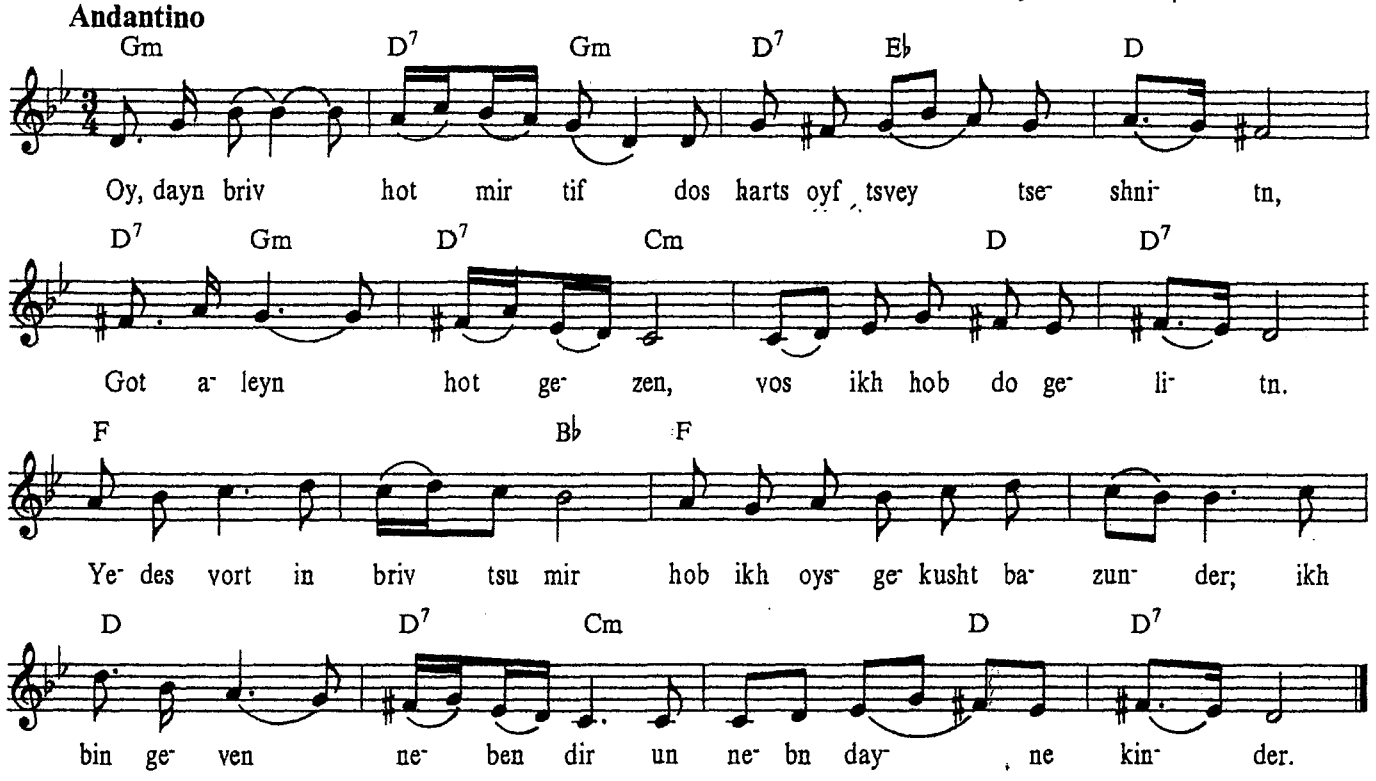
MOTHER'S REPLY

דער מאַמעס ענטפֿער

תְּשׁוּבַת הָאֵם

Text: Mark Warshavsky טעקסט: מאַרק וואַרשבסקי

Music: Meir Noy מוזיק: מאיר נוי



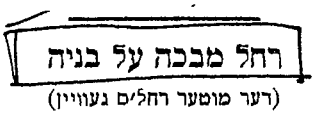
Oy, dayn briv	אוי, דיין בריוו
Hot mir tif	האָט מיר טיף
Dos harts oyf tsvey tseshnitn;	דאָס האַרץ אויף צוויי צעשניטן;
Got aleyn	גאָט אַליין
Hot gezen,	האָט געזען,
Vos ikh hob do gelitn.	וואָס איך האָב געליטן.
Yedes vort	יעדעס וואָרט
In briv tsu mir	אין בריוו צו מיר
Hob ikh oysgekusht bazunder;	האָב איך אויסגעקושט באַזונדער;
Ikh bin geven	איך בין געווען
Nebn dir	נעבן דיר
Un nebn dayne kinder.	און נעבן דיינע קינדער.

Got vet gebn,	גאָט וועט געבן,
Mir veln zikh zen –	מיר וועלן זיך זען –
Gots viln veyst nit keyner;	גאָטס ווילן ווייסט ניט קיינער;
Kumen vet	קומען וועט
Der tog tsu geyn,	דער טאָג צו גיין,
Kumen vet der sheyner.	קומען וועט דער שיינער.
Kumen vet	קומען וועט
Der tog tsu geyn,	דער טאָג צו גיין,
Kumen vet der sheyner.	קומען וועט דער שיינער;
Mir zol zayn	מיר זאָל זיין
Far dir, mayn zun.	פֿאר דיר, מײַן זון,
Un far dayne beyner!	און פֿאר דײַנע ביינער!
Kind, nit klog	קינד, ניט קלאָג
Un nit veyn,	און ניט וויין,
Du darfst dos harts farshlisn;	דו דאַרפֿסט דאָס האַרץ פֿאַרשליסן;
Oyf dem feld	אויף דעם פֿעלד
Bin ikh geven,	בין איך געווען,
Dem tatn lozn grisn.	דעם טאַטן לאָזן גריסן.
Du, mayn kroyn,	דו, מײַן קרוין,
Du, mayn harts,	דו, מײַן האַרץ,
Nem tsu der mames brokhe;	נעם צו דער מאַמעס ברכה;
Azoy groys,	אַזוי גרויס,
Vi do mayn shmarts,	ווי דאָ מײַן שמאַרץ,
Zol groys zayn dayn hatslokhe!...	זאָל זײַן דײַן הצלחה!
Zay gezunt	זיי געזונט
Mit vayb un kind –	מיט וויַיב און קינד –
Ikh bin dayn traye muter;	איך בין דײַן טרײַע מוטער;
Vos zhe veynstu	וואָס זשע ווײַנסטו
Azoy atsind,	אַזוי אַצינד,
Baklogst zikh azoy biter?	באַקלאָגסט זיך אַזוי ביטער?

Kumen vet	קומען וועט
A mol der tog,	אַ מאָל דער טאָג,
Kumen vet der sheyner!	קומען וועט דער שיינער!
Kind, nit veyn	קינד ניט וויין
Un nit klog,	און ניט קלאָג,
Farshoyn der mames beyner!	פֿאַרשוין דער מאַמעס ביינער!

Appendix B

"Rochel m'vakoh al boneho"
"Rachel weeps for her children"
Text and music: Eliakum Zunser



(רער מוטער רחל׳ס נעוויין)

כה אמר ר׳ קול ברמה נשמע נהי בכי
תמרורים רחל מבכה על-בניה מנאה להנחם
על-בניה כי איננו (ירמיה ל״א ט״ו).

1

די זון האָט אָנגעוויזען אין מערב זייט,
מיט די רויטע פלאמען, אז זי נעהמט אבשייד,
און די נאַכט מיט איהר פינסטערקייט,
האָט אָנגעטהאָן די ערד אין א שווארצע קלייד.
די וועלט מיט איהרע לייט שווייגען שטום,
די נאַטור שלאָפט — סאי בערג, סאי טהאָל,
די לבנה געהט זיך גאָנץ שטיל ארום,
פון די שטערען הערט מען אויך קיין קול;
נאָר א שטימע די שטילקייט צושלאָגט,
א קול פון א פרוי וויינט און קלאָגט,
מיט די פידעל שפיעלט זי נאָך צו
א טראָגישע מעלאָדיע;
פון איהר ניגון, פון איהר געוויין,
קען די כוחות אויסגעהן,
און שרייט נעבעך פון איהר געצעלט:
— פערוואָגלט בין איך אויף דער וועלט!

2

א קורצע צייט האָב איך נחת געהאַט,
בשעת גאָט האָט אייך אין אייער לאַנד געשטיצט;
דער מזבח איז געווען מיט קרבנות זאָט,
די כרובים מיט די פליגלען האָבען אייך בעשיצט,
דוד׳ס קינדער אין א קרוין געקליידט,
דער כהן גדול אין זיין קאָסטיום,
און די סנהדרין — ווי א געפלאַנצטער בייט,
און דער בית-המקדש — ווי א פריהלינגס-בלום!
דריי מאָל אין יאָהר אין דער צייט,
געקומען פון נאָהענט און פון ווייט:
דער בריינגט קרבנות צום שלאָכט,
און דער האָט ביכורים געבראַכט!
לוים האָבען מיט כלים געשפיעלט,
דער איד האָט זיך הייליג געפיהלט,
די גאסען מיט פרעהליכקייט זאָט, —
דאָן האָב איך נחת געהאַט!

3

אָבער ציון האָט פערלאָרען איהר פערגעניגען,
איהר מאַיאָנטעק פערשפיעלט אין קאָן;
דער אָרט „בית-לחם", וואו מיינע ביינער ליגען,
געהט שוין אין אבלות אָנגעטהאָן!
דו, בארג לבנון! דו, גוטער פריינד!
וואָסערע פים צוטרעטען דיך הייגט?
דו, בארג מוריה! דו הייליגער אָרט!
א מחמד'אָנער „מעטשעט" שטעהט נאָר דאָרט!
די גאסען שטעהען שוין פוסט,
די וועגען זענען פערוויסט,
אין כרמל קיין בלומען בליהט,
די טהורעמס גלאָנצען שוין ניט!
די כהנים וואָס האָבען געשטיצט,
די נביאים — וואו זעה איך זיי איצט!
וואו איז אייער קרוין, אייער רייך?
וואָס איז היינט געוואָרען פון אייך?!

4

איך קוק איצט אויף ירושלים ביי׳ם מערב-זואנט,
איך זעה דאָרטען מיינע קינדער ווי קוילען שוואָרץ,
זיי שפאָרען אָן די קעפ אויף די דאָרע העגט,
און אָכצען, און קרעכצען, אז עס פערקוועטשט דאָס האָרץ!
ניטאָ אין ירושלים קיין בוים, קיין שטיין,
וואָס איז ניט געווען נאָס פון מיין קינדס געוויין!
מיין קינד צו דריקען איז א קינדער-שפיעל,
וואו מען שיסט — איז דער ציעל!
פון מאַלאַוויע הער איך א געשרייי,
מיין קינד שרייט דאָרט, — אוי וועה!
פון אראביען שרייט ער „ניט גוט"! —
מען פערגיסט דאָרט ווי וואסער זיין בלוט!
פון אזיען שרייט ער נעבעך „שלעכט!" —
דאָרטען געפינט ער קיין רעכט!
אין פרם בעווינט ער די ערד,
דאָרט טהוט מען מיט זיי ווי מיט פערד!

5

אין היטעל די טויזענדער שטערען,
בעווינען אלע מיין קינדס אומגליק!
די אלע בוימער ניסען טרעהרען,
די פויגעלעך ענטפערען אויך צוריק!
נאָר דאָס הארץ פון דיינע פיינד איז פערשטיינט,
דער אומגליק האָט זיי דאָס הארץ פערשפארט!
דער קראָקאָדיל, דער אכזר, טרעפט אויך ער ווייגט,
נאָר דיינע שונאים׳ס הארץ איז ווי אייזען האָרט!
אָך, גאָט! — ענטפער שוין מיר!
זאָג שוין — פיעל איז דער שיעור
צו ליידען, א דור נאָך א דור,
אין צרות — צוויי טויזענד יאָהר!
איהר, שטערען, זאָגט מיר, — אויב איהר ווייסט,
איז דען אייביג פערלאָרען מיין טרייסט?!
אוי, ניין! איך שפיר נאָך, איך שפיר!
אָך, גאָט, ענטפער שוין מיר!

"*Shivas Zion*"
"Return to Zion"
Text and music: Eliakum Zunser

שיבת ציון

שאי סביב עיניך וראי כלם נקבצו באו לך זכו׳.
(ישעיה מ״ט י״ח)

1

וואָס זעה איך דורך די שויבען? —
עס פליהען אַן ווי טויבען,
מיין יוסף, מיין בנימין, קלאפען אין מיין טהיר!
אַך, הימעל גאָט, די וואונדער!
איך זעה דאָך מיינע קינדער,
די ליעבסטע, די טרייעסטע, קומען אַן צו מיר!
אַווק אזוי פיעל יאָהרען,
געמיינט איך בין פערלאָרען,
אַן אלמנה, א פערווויסטע, — ליידיג ביי מיין טיש...
מיט אייך ווי איז געגאנגען,
צייט מען האָט אייך געפאנגען?
וואָס מאכט יהודה און אפרים? — גיט מיר א געזום!

2

אויף גאָט ניט ליאַרעמט, קינדער!
אָט דאָס איז גאָטעס וואונדער:
די פינסטערנים ווערט שטאַרקער איידער עס ווערט טאָג!
ביי דער ערשטער גאולה,
איז דאָס אויך געווען די פעולה:
דער לאָסט צולעצט ווערט גרעסער, אז משה שרייט מיט קלאָג.
מען איז אייך דן לחבוה,
און דאָס איז גראָד א טובה,
איהר זאָלט בויען אייער צענטער, דריקט מען אייך מיט נויט.
וואָלט מען אייך ניט טרייבען,
וואָלט איהר דאָרט פערבלייבען,
און אייער בונד און נאַציאָנאַלנאָסט בלייבט דאָך אונגעבויט!

3

„וואָס האָט עס פאר א פנים?
עס לאכען מיינע שונאים,
אז עטליכע קליינע אינגלאך טרעטען אַן מיין פּאָל,
צי קען מען זיי דען טרויען?
צי וועלען זיי דען בויען
מיין גלאנץ און מיין סלוכה, ווי עס איז געווען אמאָל?!"
ניין! — דאָס מוזט איהר פערגלייכען,
צו די גרעסטע טייכען,
פאנגען זיך אַן ווי א שנירעל, פון א קליינעם קוואל;
עס פאָלען איהר צו שטראָמען,
ביז עס שטייגט איהר נאָמען,
און אויף איהר די מאסטען מיט די זעגלען גלענצען איבעראל!

4

אהער קומט יענע יאָהרען!
איך בין יונג געוואָרען!
איך ווארץ אראָפ מיין טרויער, אהער מיין זיידען קלייד!...
פול ווערט מיין הויז וויעדער,
עס הויבט דאָס הארץ, די גליעדער,
פיעל פון מיינע קינדער פאָהרען אַן מיט פרייד!
פון שמחה טרעהרען פליסען,
לאָזט מיך האלדזען, קושען,
רוהט אייך אויס ביי מיר די ביינער, מיינע הערצענס־געסט!
איהר וועט ביי מיר קריגען,
אלע פערגעניגען,
איהר וועט ניט וויסען פרעמדע טישען, נאָר די מוטערס קעסט!

5

אָט דיעזע יונגע מענשען,
וועט די וועלט זיי בענשען,
פערלאָזען הייזער, גיטער, גלאנץ און גליק און פראל;
מענשען געשטודירטע,
הויך ציוויליזירטע,
ווילען זיין קרבנות פאר דעם גאנצען כלל!...
זיי האָבען זיך בעשלאָסען,
אויף אלערליי פערדראָסען,
נאָר אָפצואווארפען אלע שטיינער וואָס ליגען אויפ׳ן וועג.
צו ליידען שווערינקייטען,
ווי אין עזרא׳ס צייטען,
און זייער נאָמען בלייבט ווי עזרא׳ס ביז די לעצטע טעג!

Kever Rachel

קֶבֶר רָחֵל

LYRICS BY A. SHAPIRA

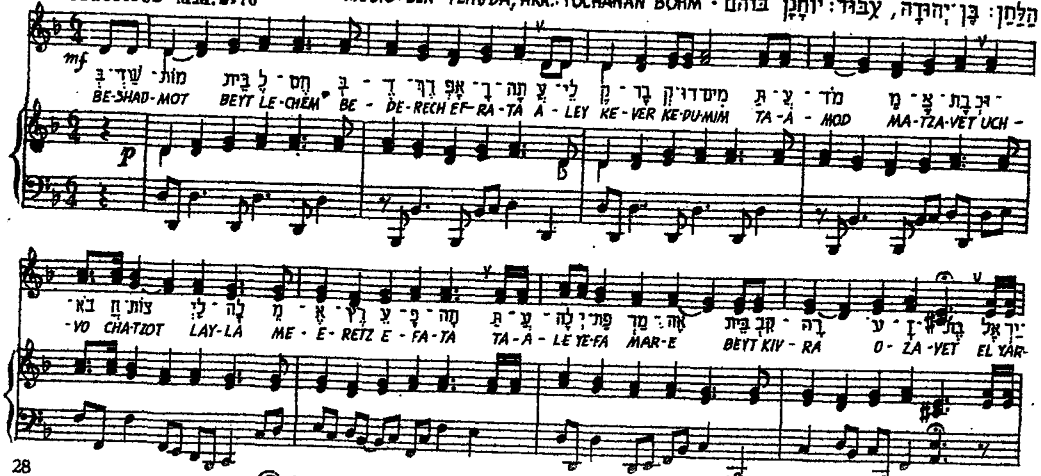
הַשִּׁיר: א. שַׁפִּירָא

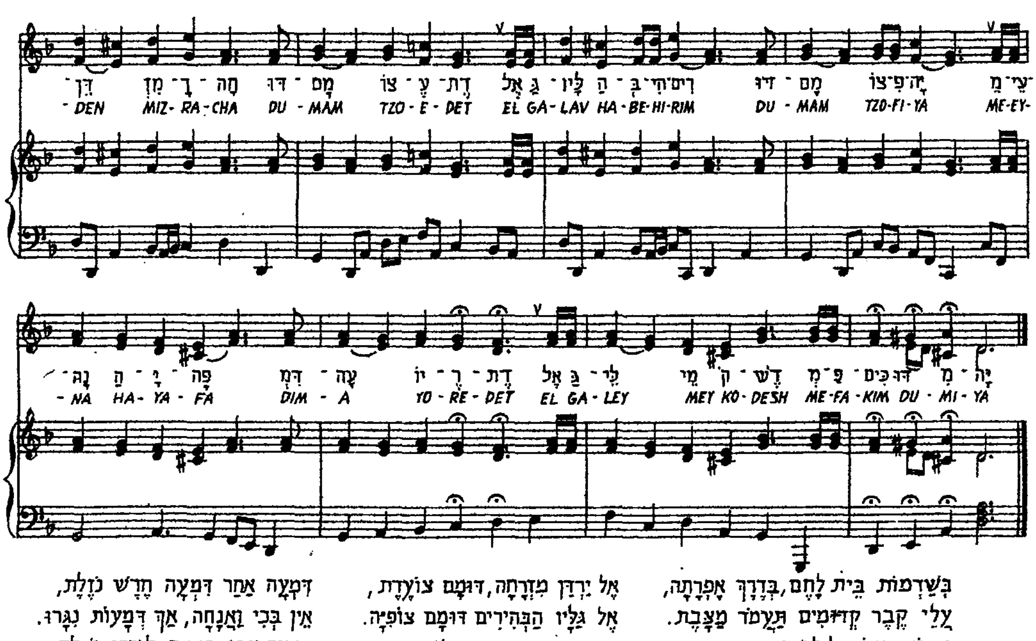
Rachel's Tomb. At midnight, Mother Rachel leaves her tomb, located on the Bethlehem road, and walks to the river Jordan, into which she weeps, remembering the fate of her sons.

Le tombeau de Rachel. *A minuit, la mère Rachel sort de sa tombe sur la route de Bethléem et se dirige vers le Jourdain. C'est là qu'elle pleure en se souvenant du triste sort de ses fils.*

La Tumba de Raquel. Al filo de medianoche, la madre Raquel sale de su tumba, situada en el camino a Belén, y se dirige hacia el rio Jordán, en donde llora la triste suerte de sus hijos.

Maestoso M.M. ♩=76 MUSIC: BEN-YEHUDA, ARR.: YOCHANAN BÖHM · הַלַּחַן: בֶּן־יְהוּדָה, עִבּוּד: יוֹחָנָן בּוֹהֶם





בְּשַׁדְמוֹת בֵּית לֶחֶם, בְּדֶרֶךְ אֶפְרָתָה,
עֲלֵי קֶבֶר קְדוּמִים תַּעֲמֹד מַצֶּבֶת.
וּבְבֹא חֲצוֹת לַיְלָה מֵאֶרֶץ עֶפְתָּה,
תַּעֲלֶה יְפַת מַרְאֶה, בֵּית קִבְרָהּ עֹזֶבֶת.

אֶל יַרְדֵּן מִזְרָחָה, דוּמָם צוֹעֶדֶת,
אֶל גַּלָּיו הַבְּהִירִים דוּמָם צוֹפִיָּה.
מֵעֵינֶיהָ הַיָּפָה דִּמְעָה יוֹרֶדֶת
אֶל גַּלֵּי מֵי קֹדֶשׁ, מְפַכִּים דוּמִיָּה.

דִּמְעָה אַחַר דִּמְעָה חֶרֶשׁ נוֹזֶלֶת,
אֵין בְּכִי וַאֲנָחָה, אַךְ דְּמָעוֹת נִגָּרוּ.
דִּמְעָה אַחַר דִּמְעָה, לַיַּרְדֵּן נוֹפֶלֶת,
וְהַמַּיִם חֶרֶשׁ יִשְׁטְפוּ, יִנְהָרוּ,
אֶל יַרְדֵּן מִזְרָחָה...

שִׁיר זֶה מוֹפִיעַ כְּפִי שֶׁהוּא מוּשָׁר בְּפִי הָעָם, וְלֹא תָמִיד הוֹלֶמֶת הַטְּעָמָה הַמִּלִּים אֶת דִּקְדּוּק הַלָּשׁוֹן.

Biographical Appendix

Abraham Wolf Binder (1895-1966) was born in New York City and attended the Settlement Music School there. He attended Columbia University from 1917 to 1920, graduating from the New York College of Music with a bachelor of music degree. He became an instructor of liturgical music in 1921 at the Jewish Institute of Religion, which merged in 1950 with Hebrew Union College. Binder was appointed professor of Jewish liturgical music at the newly merged Jewish Institute of Religion and Hebrew Union College, and in 1948 helped to found its School of Sacred Music. Binder composed numerous services for use at the Stephen S. Wise Free Synagogue in New York, where he served as the music director for many years. Binder was the editor of the third edition (1932) of the Union Hymnal and wrote a widely-used guide to cantillation, *Biblical Chant* (1959). As a prime mover in the restoration of liturgical music tradition, he enriched and infused Reform practice with long-established melodies, biblical cantillation, and the adapted work of some of the principal European synagogue composers of the modern era.

Rachel Bluwstein (1890-1931) was born in northern Russia and arrived in Eretz Israel in 1909, where she lived in an agricultural school for girls on the shores of the Sea of Galilee until 1913. She then went to France to study agronomy and drawing, and with the outbreak of World War I returned to Russia, where she worked in educational institutions for refugee children. During this period she contracted tuberculosis. In 1919, she returned to live on Kibbutz Degania. Unable to work with children because of her illness, she left the kibbutz and settled in Tel Aviv, where she lived the final five years of her life. She died in 1931 at the age of forty, and was buried near the Sea of Galilee. She published her poetry under her first name only, and published most of it during her last six years. Rachel's poetry is lyrical, excelling in its musical tone, simple language and depth of feeling. Her love poems stress a feeling of loneliness, distance, and longing for the beloved. Other poems deal with human fate, with the poet's relation to her own difficult life, and death. Some of her best-known verse expresses love for Eretz Israel and a nostalgia for the Sea of Galilee. Rachel's life has taken on mythic proportions for Israel's reading public, and books of her collected verse remain among the country's greatest bestsellers.

Avraham Broides (1907-1979) was born in Vilna, Lithuania and settled in pre-state Israel in 1923. He worked for several years as a laborer, an experience that rooted itself in his poetry. He was the editor of the Hebrew Writers Association from 1928 to 1964. He first began to publish in the early 1920s, predominantly poetry describing the anguish and the toil of the poor. Later he wrote landscape poetry with a simple and lyrical line. He was also the author of several volumes of children's verse.

Joel Engel (1868-1927), born Yuli Dimitriyevich in Berdyansk, Russia, was a composer and ethnographer whose early work helped inspire the creation of the Society for Jewish Folk Music in 1908. He studied at the Moscow Conservatory and worked as a music critic for 20 years. In 1900, he began to adapt Jewish folk songs and organize concerts for their performance. He also went on ethnographic expeditions to collect folk songs among the Jewish population in South Russia. He settled in Tel Aviv in 1924 and devoted himself to

the creation of original Hebrew-Palestinian songs. He composed songs in Hebrew and Yiddish and also published a collection of children's songs.

Leah Goldberg (1911-1970) was born in Konigsberg, East Prussia (now Kaliningrad, Russia), and started writing Hebrew verse as a schoolgirl in Kovno. She received a Ph.D in semitic languages from Bonn University, and immigrated to pre-state Israel in 1935. Goldberg was a renowned poet as well as a successful children's author, theater critic, translator, and editor. In 1952, she established the Department of Comparative Literature at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and remained its chairperson until her death. Goldberg published nine books of poetry, two novels, three plays, six books of non-fiction, and 20 books for children. Goldberg was awarded many prizes, including the Israel Prize for Literature in 1970.

Avigdor Hameiri (1890-1970) was born in Carpatho, Ukraine (then Hungary). He published his first poem in Hebrew in 1907 and his first book of poetry five years later. In 1916, he was captured by the Russians while serving as an Austrian officer on the Russian front. He was imprisoned in Siberia and released in 1917 after the October Revolution. Hameiri immigrated to Palestine in 1921, joined the staff of the daily *Haaretz*, and was the editor of several literary and cultural journals. In 1932, he founded the first social satirical theater in Hebrew in Tel Aviv. Hameiri wrote well over 30 books, including poetry, novels, short stories, non-fiction and children's books. He was awarded the Israel Prize. His work has been published in 12 languages.

Yaakov Orland (1914-2002) was born in the Ukraine and arrived in Eretz Israel when he was seven years old. His parents were founders of the "Working Brigades." During World War II, he organized the first military Hebrew-performing group and after the war studied at the Royal Drama Academy in London. Orland's first poem was published in 1933, and until his death in 2002 he continued to publish poetry, lyrics, plays, and translations. He also edited literary publications and served as chairman of the Hebrew Writers Association. He has been awarded several prizes, including the Alterman Prize for Poetry and the Israel Prize for Lyrics.

David Roitman (1884-1943) was born in Derezinke, Ukraine. As a youth, he was apprenticed to several cantors before he became the cantor of Vilna City. He was later *chazzan* at a congregation in St. Petersburg, until the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 when the community was completely destroyed. Roitman and his wife fled to Odessa, where they remained until 1920, when they immigrated to America. He served a Brooklyn congregation for two years before obtaining a position at Shaare Zedek in Manhattan, where he remained for eighteen years. He composed numerous cantorial recitatives, and is considered one of the great cantorial masters. He made extensive concert tours in North America, Europe, and South America until his death in New York City in 1943.

Miriam Yalan-Shteklis (1900 - 1983) was born in Kremenchug, Russia. As the daughter of Yehuda Leib Nissan Vilensky, a Zionist leader who was a descendant of a long line of rabbis, Yalan-Shteklis learned Hebrew as a small child. She studied Humanities at the University of Kharkhov, continued at the College of Judaic Studies in Berlin, and in 1928 she studied

Library Science in Paris. In 1920 she settled in Jerusalem and after returning from her studies in France in 1929, she joined the National University Library. She spent the next 30 years as director of the Slavic department there. Yalan-Shteklis established herself as a children's writer in 1939. In addition to writing poetry, prose and songs, she served as an editor and translator. She received the 1956 Israel Prize for Children's Literature.

Mordechai Zeira (1905-1968), born in Kiev, Ukraine, immigrated to Israel in 1924. As did many young early pioneers, he worked in road building and construction. He wrote several hundred songs, many of which are a vital part of Israeli culture. Many of his tunes were influenced by the Eastern music to which he and the other immigrant composers were exposed upon their arrival. With his gift for melody and emotional intensity, he is considered to be among the greatest creators of Israeli song.

Eliakum Zunser (1836 - 1913), born in Vilna, Lithuania, was a Yiddish-language poet and songwriter. He grew up poor and first worked braiding lace in Kovno, where he first associated with the Musar movement of Rabbi Israel Salanter, but he was later drawn to the *Haskalah*, or Jewish Enlightenment. Forcibly conscripted into the Russian Army just before his twentieth birthday, he was soon released due to Czar Alexander II's revocation of the harsh conscription law. The plight of Jewish draftees would be a major subject of his early poetry and songs. Sol Liptzin describes Zunser's songs as having "simple words and catchy tunes," singing of the "melancholy fate and few joys of the inarticulate masses." About a quarter of his roughly 600 songs survive. He suffered great personal tragedy, and in 1871 he lost his wife and seven children to cholera. After the pogroms of the early 1880s, he became a Zionist and was affiliated with the *Hovevei Zion* and *Bilu* movements. In 1889 immigrated to New York City. Zunser continued to write songs and poetry until his death in 1913.

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