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Hebrew Dreams in the Berlin of Yesterday: German-Jewish Symbiosis Fantasy on the City's Streets in *Lifney Hamakom* by Haim Be'er and *Avedot* by Lea Goldberg

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Abstract: This article examines Berlin's urban space as represented in the novels *Lifney Hamakom* by Haim Be'er and *Avedot* by Lea Goldberg. Based on close reading as well as distant reading methods (mapping, annotation, and visualization), the article argues that, despite being written in different periods, both novels are similar in their representation of space: neither novel depicts Berlin as an actual living city or as a concrete setting for their plots. Rather, in both novels Berlin's space is seen as a symbol for a German-Jewish fantasy of symbiosis: cosmopolitanism in the spirit of *Bildung*. Poetically, however, this impression takes two different forms: while *Avedot* freezes the city as an image of potential symbiosis, *Lifney Hamakom* is significantly affected by the mass of symbols of the city's space.

Keywords: German-Jewish studies; urban literary studies; spatial humanities; computational literary studies; Hebrew literature; Berlin

1 Introduction

In his essay *The Pity of It All: A Portrait of the German-Jewish Epoch*, Amos Elon questions the relationship between Jewish and German culture. He describes, with some suspicion, the similarities between the cultures up until World War II. These similarities were also described by both Jewish and German intellectuals, such as

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Kafka who described how both Jews and Germans are "ambitious, able, diligent, and thoroughly hated by others."[1]

Elon continues by scorning the German-Jewish symbiosis as irrelevant for the current time:

> At various times there has also been speculation – much of it rather tedious – […about] a 'symbiosis.' […] mostly [by] Jews. […] After the Holocaust, only penitent Germans evoked it, guilt-stricken and rueful over 'their' loss. Altogether, the idea of symbiosis was always suspect. Why does nobody ever speak of an American-Jewish, French-Jewish, or Dutch-Jewish symbiosis?[2]

In this paper, I offer a different view of German-Jewish relations: as I will show, in Hebrew novels of the 20th and 21st centuries, a fantasy of German-Jewish symbiosis prevails, despite the understanding that this symbiosis is, in fact, impossible. This unique literary situation has more than one manifestation; I could illustrate it, for example, by examining stories of an unfulfilled love affair between the Jewish heroes and the German women they meet, which partially shapes the novels discussed below. But that would be to somewhat trivialise the situation. Instead, I will illustrate it in another way, by exploring the representation of space, which might tell a more complex story.

In the novels I discuss, *Avedot (Losses)* by Lea Goldberg,[3] and *Lifney Hamakom (Upon a Certain Place)* by Haim Be'er,[4] the fantasy of symbiosis underlines the image of Berlin. This exploration of Berlin's representation as a space follows the work of Hebrew literature, history and culture scholars such as Zali Gurevitch, Yigal Schwartz and Maoz Azaryahu, who argue in different ways that the concept of 'place' in this culture tends to be bound to mythological patterns and images, bearing heavily symbolic and religious meanings.[5] On this reading, the representation of the space of a city, like any other space, may challenge its realistic perception as a

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1 Amos Elon, *The Pity of It All: a Portrait of the German-Jewish Epoch, 1743–1933* (New York: Picador, 2002), 10. Elon's book, half-journalistic in character, echoes a wider historical study of German Jewish relations. See for example: Paul Mendes-Flohr, *German Jews: A Dual Identity,* (New Haven & London, Yale University Press, 1999); Marion A. Kaplan (ed.), *Jewish Daily Life in Germany 1618–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Ya'akov Shavit and Jehuda Reinharz, *Glorious, Accursed Europe: An Essay on Jewish Ambivalence* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2010). For the purpose of this paper, which has to do more with literature than with history, Elon's description suffices.

2 Ibid., 11.

3 Lea Goldberg, *Avedot* (Losses), (Bnei-Barak: Hakibutz Hameuchad, 2010) [Hebrew].

4 Haim Be'er, *Lifney Hamakom (Upon a Certain Place)* (Tel Aviv: Am oved, 2007) [Hebrew].

5 Maoz Azaryahu, *Tel Aviv – The Real City* (Beersheba: Ben Gurion University Press, 2005) [Hebrew]; Zali Gurevitch, *On Israeli and Jewish Place* (Tel-Aviv: Am-Oved, 2007) [Hebrew]; Yigal Schwartz, *Do You Know the Land Where the Lemon Blooms: Human Engineering and Landscape Conceptualization in Hebrew Literature* (Or Yehuda: Dvir, 2007) [Hebrew].

concrete background, foreshadowing the plot. The space is turned into a *symbol* of something – in our case, a symbol of *fantasy*, as well as the disappointment stemming from it.

Although written in different periods, *Avedot* and *Lifney Hamakom* reflect this tension quite similarly. *Avedot* was not published during its author's lifetime; it was discovered in Goldberg's archive and was probably written in the 1930s.[6] Its plot takes place between 1932 and 1933, when the novel's protagonist, the Hebrew poet Elchanan Kron, travels from Eretz Yisrael to Berlin in order to complete his scientific research. *Lifney Hamakom*, published in 2007, takes place in Berlin between 2005 and the summer of 2006; during the course of its plot the Second Lebanon War breaks out. It tells the story of a writer, the protagonist Haim Be'er (who shares his name with the actual author), who is frustrated has he cannot finish his novel. Zussman, a successful realtor, invites him to join a group of intellectuals convening in Berlin in order to determine the topic for a seminar honouring the memory of his daughter. While staying in Berlin, Be'er wanders the city with Shlomo Rapoport, an educated book collector.

Thus, it is difficult to avoid the similarities between these novels, even though they were written in different periods, with the later one being written without knowledge of the earlier one. In both novels, the protagonists are Hebrew writers who arrive in Berlin from Eretz Yisrael (or Mandatory Palestine) for a short time. They each have an unfulfilled love affair with a considerably younger German woman. And, most important for us here, the city is important to both, not only as a geographic landmark or temporary place of residence. It is charged with meanings for them. They wander the city, wondering about its future and culture. Be'er views the city in the light of the horrors of the past, while Kron foresees the changes to come.[7] In a certain sense, and as we will see later, the urban space seems to represent the story of Jewish-German mutual relations.

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6 The novel was published by Giddon Ticotsky, who explains in an editor's epilogue that the novel was probably written between 1935 and 1937. Based on Goldberg's diaries, he speculates that her dissatisfaction with her prose writing led her not to release the novel. According to Ticotsky, the outbreak of the Second World War didn't allow Goldberg to finish the novel because its narrative is not aware of the dreadful future. She published several portions of the novel in a different novel, *And This is the Light*, that was written after the war and published in 1946. *Avedot* as published in 2010 is a combination of the chapters that were already published in several literary journals, and of Goldberg's manuscript as found in her archive in *Gnazim*. In the archive Ticotsky discovered one hundred and 40 printed pages, and three hundred handwritten pages. He reported that he did not edit the manuscript heavily, but rather revised a few phrases to fit contemporary Hebrew. See Giddon Ticotsky "Epilogue," in *Avedot* (Losses), Lea Goldberg (Bnei-Barak: Hakibutz Hameuchad, 2010), 315–377 [Hebrew].

7 Given the limited space of this paper, I am not able to discuss the issue of other urban spaces design in Goldberg and Be'er's work. In addition, even though urban spaces research has evolved in Hebrew

2 German Jews and the German Metropolis

The fantasy of symbiosis that outlines the novel's urban space is not confined to fiction. It is rooted in the history of Jews in Germany, the characteristics of the Weimar Republic and the nature of Berlin as a cosmopolitan city.[8] It is worth mentioning, for instance, that both the journalist Amos Elon and the historian Michael Brenner see the arrival of Moses Mendelssohn in Berlin as marking the onset of the German Jews' modern age.[9] Mendelssohn, the first German Jewish philosopher to be admired by non-Jewish intellectuals, was "the first of a long line of assimilated German Jews who admired German culture and civilization and whose enterprise, two centuries later, would come to a horrendous and abrupt end."[10] Hence, Mendelssohn's arrival in Berlin signifies something deeper.

Clear evidence for the German Jews' admiration of German culture is reflected in their pursuing after Goethe's idea of *Bildung* – an aspiration for a multicultural society that admits of a rich cultural life to each individual, allowing them to shape their own life in a free, creative and autonomous manner. Furthermore, the society's identity is determined by law and not by genetics.[11] In fact, *Bildung* became the informal religion of German Jews, whose identity derived from the German language and culture.[12] For many Jews *Bildung* was even synonymous with Jewishness itself.[13]

Literature in recent years, it is still quite new and limited. For further reading see: Chen Bar-Yitzhak, *A Mixed Space: The Literary Representations of Haifa* (Sede Boqer: Ben-Gurion Institute Press, forthcoming) [Hebrew].

8 Cosmopolitanism has a wide range of meanings, some of which are contradictory. For our discussion here, cosmopolitanism refers to the Greek notion, later developed during the Enlightenment, of universal identity and values. It also refers to the idea of Immanuel Kant – global norms and justice. As this paper argues, cosmopolitanism, as an idea similar to that of the *Bildung*, is shared between both Jewish and German cultures. However, cosmopolitanism was used as an anti-Jewish term by Nazism, referring to Jews' lack of place and therefore lack of loyalty to Germany. This was because Jews promoted liberal ideas that undermined the "origins" of German culture. For further reading see: Cathi Gelbin and Sander Gilman, *Cosmopolitanism and the Jews* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017).

9 Elon, *The Pity of It All*., 8–10; Michael Brenner, "Introduction", in *German-Jewish History in Modern Times* (volume 2), ed. Michael A. Meyer (New York: Columbia University Press), 1–3.

10 Elon, *The Pity of It All*, 5.

11 Ibid., 9.

12 See for example Ibid. 9; Mendes-Flohr, *German Jews*, 4–5; Marion A. Kaplan "As Germans and as Jews in Imperial Germany", in *Jewish Daily Life in Germany 1618–1945*, ed. Marion A. Kaplan, 245–250; Guy Miron, *German Jews in Israel: Memories and Past Images* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2004), 64 [Hebrew].

13 George L. Mosse, *German Jews beyond Judaism* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1985), 4–5.

Goethe himself saw *Bildung* as being shared by both German and Jewish cultural practices centred around the idea of "Tikun Olam."[14] In one way or another, Germany, from the very beginning of modern times, was for some Jews more a universal ideal concept than a concrete location.

During the Weimar Republic, this universal ideal seems to have reached its peak. On the one hand, the condition of the Jews was never better than when they attained complete emancipation in a democratic republic. On the other, the republic's politics tended to be unstable, with rising incidents of anti-Semitism. However, notwithstanding the rising violence, the Jews continued to support the republic and identify with the *Bildungsideal*.[15] Elon describes the desperate situation of the German Jews when they were "caught in a vicious circle: the more they embraced the republic, the more it was discredited as a *Judenrepublik*."[16]

Weimar Berlin, as beautifully described by Boaz Neumann, represented the highlights of modern culture: fashion, cinema, LGBT culture, sexual liberation, psychoanalysis, hip cafés, and widespread political activity.[17] Weimar Berlin symbolized the fulfilment of the *Bildungsideal*, of cosmopolitanism, just before its dark end. Against this background, it is noteworthy that early Nazi propaganda, already in 1933, used the image of the urban cosmopolitan liberal Jew as an enemy of the hardworking patriotic German, and thus connected the hatred towards the liberal metropolis with the hatred towards Jews.[18] Joseph Roth described the origins of the connection between the Jews and the metropolis that appeared in this propaganda:

> Jews have discovered and written about the urban scene and the spiritual landscape of the city dweller. They have revealed the whole diversity of urban civilization. They have discovered the café and the factory, the bar and the hotel, Berlin's bourgeoisie and its banks, the watering holes of the rich and the slums of the poor, sin and vice, the day of the city and the city by night, the character of the inhabitant of the metropolis.[19]

Roth's urbanist Jew becomes, then, the embodiment of the Jewish-German symbiosis fantasy; and it is, in fact, an urban fantasy: It contains the hope that human diversity will be integrated into a flexible culture which is only possible in a city like Berlin. As

14 Elon, *The Pity of It All*, 9.

15 Guy Miron, *The Waning of the Emancipation Era: Historical Memory and Images of the Past Under the Impact of Fascism: Germany, France, Hungary* (Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 2011), 43 [Hebrew].

16 Elon, *The Pity of It All*, 374.

17 Boaz Neumann, *Being in the Weimar Republic* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2007) [Hebrew].

18 Kerstin Schoor, *Jewish Writers in Nazi Germany: A Forgotten Chapter in the History of German Literature* (Gadi Goldberg translation., Jerusalem: Carmel and Yad Vashem Press, 2019), 32–33 [Hebrew].

19 See Joseph Roth, "The Auto-da-Fé of the mind," in *What I Saw: Reports from Berlin 1920-1933* (New York/London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003), 215.

we will see, this fantasy has played a significant part in shaping the Hebrew literary conception of the city.

3 Looking Down on, and from Down Below: The City as a Literary Object (Methodological Notes)

If the literary city is our object of study, the question is how to approach it. The representation of the urban space in the novels discussed here will be examined by using two different views of the city, as explained by Michel de Certeau. The panoramic view, looking down on, enables an overall perspective, detached from the daily walks in the city's streets.[20] It could be seen as a type of distant reading, as defined by Franco Moretti, enabling us to focus on units that are either much smaller or much larger than the actual text.[21] Turning the literary description of a space into a map, then, as I will show below, is an example of distant reading: The literary map is a visual analytical tool that organizes the text in a different way, that shows relations between the sites mentioned in the novel, thus enlightening the inner spatial logic of the narrative.[22] Yet, it is not enough to look at the literary city only from above, only by distant reading of the text through a map. Because, in the course of their walking through the city, as represented in the novels, the characters, as well as the narrators, perceive the city in individual ways. And here, the view "from down below" parallels, and is comparable to, close reading. De Certeau describes the pedestrian's point of view as chaotic and undermining the structured city map. The pedestrian moving from site to site in the city is described as a 'speech act', as he is acting out the space into language and creating relations between different locations.[23] Like a language, walking has its own 'rhetorical style' – it creates a fragmented, ambiguous story that avoids coherent and comprehensive interpretation.[24] De Certeau calls the experience of walking: "lacking of a place."[25] This chaotic, unaware walking, resembles *the flâneur* as described by Walter Benjamin. The walking of the *flâneur* is also "lacking of a place" and, unconscious, as he wanders the streets without a definite purpose,

20 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 92.

21 Franco Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature," *New Left Review*, 1 (2000):54–68.

22 Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800–1900* (London: Verso, 1999), 3. Literary maps are only beginning to be used in Hebrew literature, and there are very few examples available. Among the most notable examples is: Schwartz, *Do You Know the Land Where the Lemon Blooms*.

23 De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 97–99.

24 Ibid., 93.

25 Ibid., 103.

follows the temptations and memories which the streets arise. The *flâneur* is not a tourist but a local, and when he strolls through the streets, he experiences the fragmented realities of the modern city. He enjoys the diverse experiences of the city but is aware of the terrible social reality around him.[26]

As I will demonstrate, those strategies of movement and reading have profound interpretational potential. The German-Jewish symbiosis fantasy and its downfall will be examined in light of the representation of space in both novels, using continuous integrative close and distant reading, combining different methods of interpretation, looking both down on and from down below, spatial mapping and structural narrative analysis.

4 *Avedot* – A City under a Crystal Ball

> But I saw you today, anguished Europe, your wounds, your blood, your terrible ugliness. You stood before me as never before. As a most precious thing, as a beaten, and wounded child wallowing in its own blood. And I wanted to kiss all your wounds. You were once again in my Jewish eyes like Jesus on the cross, a martyr – not a saviour. No, not a saviour but a simple fool walking the path of misery.[27]

This passage is taken from Lea Goldberg's essay "Your Europe" published at the end of the Second World War. With that essay, *Avedot* forms part of Goldberg's work mourning the loss of Europe. Goldberg, despite being raised in Lithuania, regarded herself as belonging to a Western European culture, and as a "provincial girl," she longed for assimilation into the rich culture of the cosmopolitan European city.[28] She

26 Walter Benjamin, "The Flâneur," in *The Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin (Cambridge/London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 416–455. It is important to mention that Benjamin emphasizes the psychological state of mind of the flâneur, as an individual who maintains his unique perspective and interpretation even when he strolls through the city's mob. On the other hand, de Certeau focuses on pedestrians rather than the lonely flâneur, as he emphasizes the mass of steps in the city, their inconsistencies and mostly what they pass by, and by that they appropriate the geographical system and disrupt the social order. Nevertheless, for our purposes, the importance here is the act of walking through the city, and a few questions derived from it, such as what are its direction, nature and style, and how it can be interpreted.

27 Lea Goldberg, "Your Europe," *Mishmar* (the Guard) 30.4.1945, 6. [Hebrew]. The essay was published again in Yfaat Weiss and Giddon Ticotsky, eds. *Hebrew Youth: Lea Goldberg's letters from the province* (Bnei-Barak: Hakibutz Hameuchad, 2009), 291–293 [Hebrew]. All translations unless mentioned otherwise are mine. I would like to thank Yael Dekel and Jonathan Gilis for their help.

28 See for example the novel *Letters from an Imaginary Journey* (Bnei-Barak: Hakibutz Hameuchad, 2007 [Hebrew]). The protagonist (Ruth, Goldberg's self-image) details her imaginary farewell journey from her home, Europe. She chose a new home: the land of Israel. Another example is the protagonist of the novel *And This is the Light* (Bnei-Barak: Hakibutz Hameuchad, 2005 [Hebrew]) who returns home for a summer break after studying in Berlin. Upon returning, she was struck by the

arrived in Berlin in 1930, two years before *Avedot's* fictional protagonist Elchanan Kron, and, like for him, her destination was the Humboldt University.[29] Her arrival in Berlin marked a new beginning for her:

> I am in Berlin – I have been here a whole month. Which is saying an awful lot: it means I have left Kovno; it means no more grey boredom; it means I can believe in the changes in my life and breathe easily. Lightness – how many years have I prayed for a bit of lightness, a bit of simple joy, for days spent smiling for no reason; and now those days have finally arrived. They have arrived.[30]

The fast rhythm of the opening of the passage is replaced with a long and breathy sentence that conveys the feeling of "lightness" and easy arrival in Berlin. Nevertheless, as Maya Barzilai has pointed out, Goldberg arrived in Berlin too late, a decade after the peak of Hebrew Literature in the 1920s,[31] when Hayim Nahman Bialik, Micha Josef Berdyczewski, and Shaul Tchernichovsky lived in the city.[32] Even though Goldberg left Berlin in 1932, she still witnessed the collapse of the Weimar Republic and the rising hatred on Berlin's streets.

Avedot was first published by Giddon Ticotsky in 2010 but it takes place over the course of a year, 1932–1933,[33] and describes the story of the poet Elchanan Kron, who travels from Eretz Yisrael to Berlin in order to complete his academic work. Research discussing *Avedot* emphasizes the centrality of the loss motif.[34] And indeed the loss of

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"provinciality" of the Lithuanian small town, which contrasted with Berlin's cosmopolitan ambience. Goldberg's affinity for Europe is also present in her diaries and essays. For further reading see: Giddon Ticotsky, *Light Along the Edge of a Cloud: Introduction to Lea Goldberg's Oeuvre* (Bnei-Barak: Hakibutz Hameuchad, 2011) [Hebrew]; Hamutal Bar-Yosef, *Lea Goldberg* (Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center, 2012) [Hebrew]; Yfaat Weiss, *Lea Goldberg: Lehrjahre in Deutschland 1930–1933* (Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center, 2014) [Hebrew].

29 The reason Goldberg arrived in Berlin instead of Moscow, another city she desired, is financial: Goldberg won a scholarship that allowed her to study in Berlin. There she stayed until 1932, and she finished her Ph.D. in Bonn. Her advisor was Professor Paul Kahle who was the inspiration for Professor Braka in *Avedot*. See Yfaat Weiss, *Lea Goldberg: Lehrjahre in Deutschland 1930–1933*, 21.

30 Lea Goldberg, *Lea Goldberg's Diaries,* eds. Rachel Aharoni and Arie Aharoni (Bnei-Barak: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2005), 210 [Hebrew].

31 Maya Barzilai, "The Lost German City: Leah Goldberg's Berlin," *Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature* 30 (2019):143–168 [Hebrew].

32 See Michael Brenner, *The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany,* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), 185–211; Shachar M. Pinsker, *Literary Passports: The Making of Modernist Hebrew Fiction in Europe*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 105–143.

33 Kron, like Goldberg, arrived in the city after its Hebrew literature centre flourished. According to Natasha Gordinsky (*In Three Landscapes: Leah Goldberg's Early Writings* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2016), 181 [Hebrew]), Kron represents the last link in a long chain of Hebrew writers that wrote in Berlin. In that sense, he represents the end of Hebrew writing centres in Europe.

34 Ticotsky, "Epilogue" and Giddon Ticotsky "Ekphrasis as Encryption: Lea Goldberg in Berlin," *Prooftexts* 34,1, 2014: 1–52 mention that the loss is the narrative's engine: Kron lost both his poem and

the big city and the loss of European culture and Hebrew literature in it, are quite evident. As Goldberg writes in the novel's opening, Berlin is "this solid city hanging by a thread, the city of peace and liberty on the edge of the abyss."[35]

However, I would like to argue that, aside from portraying the disintegrating city, Goldberg portrays Berlin as a literary postcard of *farewell*, or, if you like, as the literary equivalent of the familiar snow globe souvenir. This is the city that Goldberg had longed for since childhood, the intellectual cosmopolitan city that she loved and cherished, albeit for a short while.

Clear evidence for this can be seen from a panoramic view of the city as outlined in its literary map. Franco Moretti asserted the interpretational potential of the literary map: it reduces the narrative into an artificial object helping us to focus on the connections between sites – connections that are as important as each site on its own.[36] In our case, contrary to literary conventions that portray protagonists wandering in modern city streets, the map of Goldberg's novel is not one of wandering; it is a map of measured and calculated spatial framing. (Map 1)

The first map presents the sites that Kron visits, numbered according to the order in which they appear in the plot: 1. Berlin Hauptbahnhof. 2. Grünau. 3. Der Tiergarten. 4. Litzensee Park. 5. Humboldt-Universität6. Lehrterstraße. 7. Friedrichstraße. 8. Grenadirstraße – the Jewish Street, today called Almstadtstraße. 9. Bahnhof Berlin-Charlottenburg. 10. St.-Hedwigs-Kathedrale.

Clearly, besides Grünau (where Antonia and Kron arrive by train, and from where they return to the centre of Berlin), the sites are relatively close to one another. In fact, Goldberg focuses on a narrow area of the city, an area with specific characteristics: the university, public parks and train stations.

The map outlined is highly selective and fragmented. On the one hand, as Barzilai argues, Goldberg mentions the names of sites and thereby to some extent provides an orientation. On the other hand, it is very sketchy: Goldberg does not mention all of the exact locations of cafés and the characters' homes.[37] It is as if the narrative were

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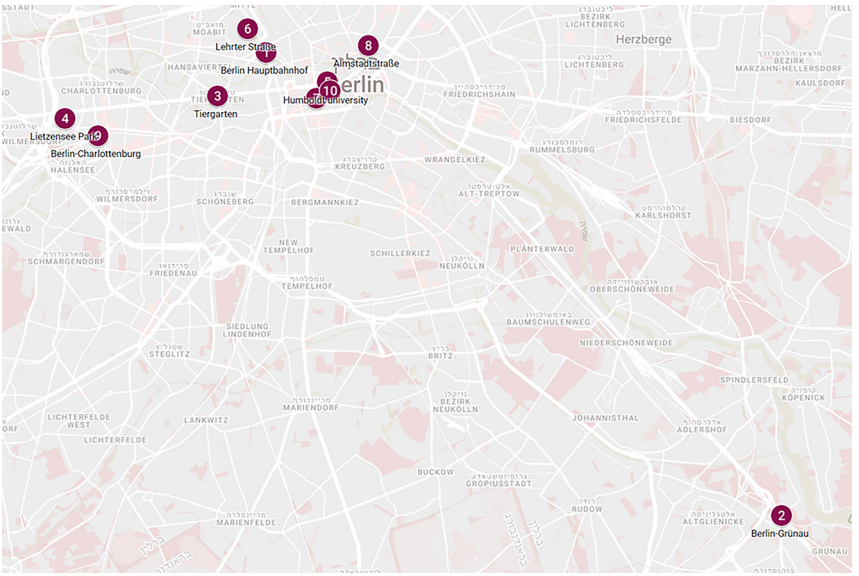
Berlin, that symbolizes the centre of European enlightenment and education; Barzilai,"The Lost German City" sees Berlin as the main character of the novel, a lost lover that Goldberg tries to revive; Dekel Shay-Schory "Lost in Berlin: The Urban Experience in Lea Goldberg's Losses" [conference presentation], *Centres of Yiddish and Hebrew Literature: Berlin, Warsaw, Tel Aviv* [Jesus College: University of Cambridge, February 2020] claims that Kron is lost and sunk in the city; Gordinsky *In Three Landscape* and Alison Schachter "Orientalism, Secularism, and the Crisis of Hebrew Modernism: Reading Leah Goldberg's *Avedot*," *Comparative Literature* 65, 3, 2013: 349–353 emphasizes the loss of Hebrew writing in Europe, and the loss of being part of European literature.

35 Goldberg, *Avedot*, 14.

36 Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History* (London: Verso, 2007), 94.

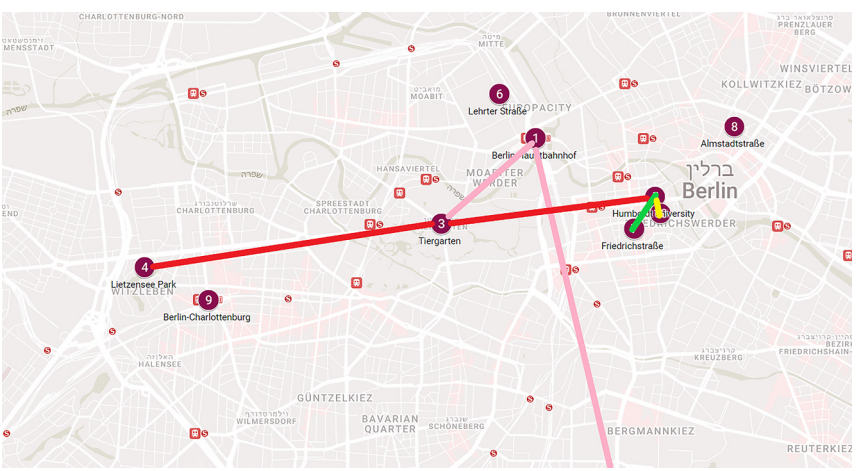
37 Barzilai, "The Lost German City," 160–161.



Map 1: The sites mentioned in Avedot.

undermining spatial continuity when Kron ends up in an unknown place. In fact, the deficient map emphasizes the few sites on it, the ones that were important to the author, by focusing on them, making them memorable to the reader. Actually, the 'real' Berlin is not what is represented in *Avedot*, but rather a city that the narrator longed for.

Adding another layer of the routes depicted in the novel contributes to the realization of a frozen-crystallized city. (Map 2)



Map 2: The walking routes in Avedot.

Map 3: Berlin Alexanderplatz's literary map.

One can assume that in any urban wandering novel, there will be a variety of routes, and maybe even no single central point. But what clearly stands out here are the very *few* routes, and the centrality of the university (that does not link all the routes).[38] This geographic centrality demonstrates the thematic central role of the university in the plot: Kron has arrived in Berlin to finish his academic research and therefore the university is his professional and social milieu. Nevertheless, the centrality of the university, and the routes that lead to it, shape the image of Berlin as an intellectual cosmopolitan city. In other words, this is not what strolling in the city looks like.

We can think for example of *Berlin, Alexanderplatz* by Alfred Döblin (1929), another novel, written at about the same time in Berlin. As opposed to *Avedot*, the urban space in *Berlin, Alexanderplatz* is not selective at all, and therefore conveys a much stronger sense of urbanity, as being hectic and chaotic. This can be seen in the map below taken from the project "Novel City Map."[39] The map, although more artistically designed than the one above, accurately illustrates the extent of Franz Biberkopf's strolling in the city. (Map 3)

Even though the maps are different in appearance, they both represent the stroll in the cities of the two protagonists, and some conclusions can be reached in light of the comparison. Döblin's novel map is spread over many areas of the city and is therefore less selective. Moreover, it seems that Biberkopf is moving in a more hectic manner than Kron: we can see all sorts of walking patterns between different places,

38 The route to Grünau is partially shown due to Grünau's distance from the other sites.

39 See Jan-Erik Stange, *NOVEL CITY MAPS: A poetic view on the city:* https://uclab.fh-potsdam.de/projects/novel-city-maps/. I want to thank Stange for his permission to use these maps.

as opposed to *Avedot,* where, as mentioned earlier, the walking in the novel is mainly toward the university. *Berlin, Alexanderplatz*, therefore, provides a completely different perspective on the same city, and, with it, a completely different perception of urban experience.

The crystallised view of the city that emerges from the panoramic view, can also be seen from 'looking from down below,' or from a close reading point of view. In fact, most of the narrative takes place in the characters' homes or in public areas and is spent in staying put rather than in walking. In contrast to Benjamin's *flâneur*, Kron does not turn the street into a home, as he does not spend much time exploring the urban space. He prefers visiting his friends in their homes or spending time in cafés, attending lectures at the university, or sitting in the public gardens. In other words, there is an incompatibility between the appearance of a big hectic city and the sense of homeliness that the text creates. In fact, the big city has become small and familiar.[40]

To analyse whether the few descriptions of wandering in the city portray an urban *flâneur* who experiences fragmented reality in Berlin, or whether they demonstrate, as I argue here, a somewhat lyrical and poetic mode, I will compare the first description of wandering in the novel to the first description of wandering in *Going to the Dogs: A Story of a Moralist* by Erich Kästner (1931).[41] First, because the latter was also written about the same time in Berlin, and second, because, like *Berlin, Alexanderplatz*, it is an urban novel that represents hectic wandering in Berlin.[42]
Avedot:

> Like a great, wounded raven, evening descended on the city. Immediately the streetlamps burst through the darkness, and like frisky dogs licked the smooth asphalt with their long and thirsty tongues, chasing, cheerfully barking after every car on the street, trying to bite off the tops of the tender buds on the linden trees; jumping along the river under the arches of the bridge, as an agile squirrel hopping from branch to branch. Only, there was no bridge in that part of the city, and nor was a river there. Square, imposing houses, cast their shadow over the street.[43]

40 On 9.11.1925 Goldberg writes in her diary: "I have the desire to travel from Kovno to some big city, to see famous paintings and beautiful buildings but most importantly: *to see other people*. All the people I know are the same; no one is different from the other […] I find it very difficult to believe that there are no other kinds of people in the world" (*Lea Goldberg's Diaries*, 73 [Hebrew]. Italics are mine]. Thus, for Goldberg, diversity is part of a big city's image, but in *Avedot* everyone knows everyone: Antonia, the young German woman Kron meets on the train and again at the university because she is studying Oriental studies; Nina, who also worked in the past for Kron's friend Shimshon Berson. In fact, each character in the novel is part of a complex net of acquaintances, and no one is a real "other."

41 Erich Kästner, *Going to the Dogs: A Story of a Moralist,* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2012).

42 The similarities between *Berlin, Alexanderplatz* and *Going to the Dogs*, and their differences from *Avedot* require a more extensive discussion, which cannot fit in this paper.

43 Goldberg, *Avedot,* 11.

The somewhat surreal atmosphere becomes a bit more concrete but still retains its lyrical poetic quality:

> The light spring wind carried a smell of dust and gasoline. People hurried, more than usual. And the voice of the lame woman, calling out the name of some dubious magazine from the corner of the street. […] He knew: far away in the villages, the cats, only too familiar with loneliness, yowl. In the metropolis, people take a walk to the cafés. They also know the meaning of death. And then spring entered the cafe.[44]

Now, let's compare this to the first description of wandering in *Going to the Dogs*:

> Fabian placed a mark on the table and left the café. He had no notion where he was. If you board a No. 1 bus at Wittenberg-Platz, get out at Potsdam Bridge and take a tram, without knowing its destination, only to leave it twenty minutes later because a woman suddenly gets in who bears a resemblance to Frederick the Great, you cannot be expected to know where you are.[45]

He then stops trying to navigate and decides to follow the mob:

> He followed three workmen who were striding along at a good pace, stumbled over planks of wood, passed hoardings and grey, dubious hotels and arrived at Jannowitz Bridge Station. In the train, he found the address which Bertuch, the manager at his office, had written down for him: 23 Schlüterstraße, Frau Sommer. He got out at the Zoo. In the Joachimsthaler Straße, a thin-legged young lady, rising and falling on her toes, asked him what about it. He rejected her advances, wagged his finger at her and escaped.[46]

The two segments seem similar: they are both led by an omniscient narrator, viewing the same city's streets. But this is where the similarity ends. One needs only a brief reading to feel the differences in the atmosphere: *Avedot* creates a slow, lyrical, calm and organised rhythm,[47] whereas the segment from *Going to the Dogs* is hectic, creating a sense of disorientation: "He had no notion where he was."

Indeed, Kron's gaze is characterized by its slow pace, slowly and deliberately describing the streets, giving the view a symbolic significance, like the existential loneliness of the people in the café. On the other hand, Fabian's thoughts and steps

44 Ibid., 11–12.

45 Kästner, *Going to the Dogs*, 22.

46 Ibid.

47 Maya Barzilai analysed the two opening paragraphs as lyrical but unorganized, since the first paragraph gives one option of viewing the city, and the second contradicts it. The first paragraph is like a calm impressionist painting of a modern city, while the second presents the city's darkness and shadows. According to Barzilai this combination confuses readers as to whose point of view they are reading. It is consistent with Kron's theme of unawareness and blindness throughout the text. See Barzilai, "The Lost German City", 147–150. I agree with this analysis. However, in contrast with the paragraph from *Going to the Dogs*, the segment from *Avedot* is organized, allowing the reader to follow the sites' descriptions and Kron's line of thought, unlike Fabian's associative thinking.

are much more associative. He is trying to reach a certain address but does not know how he will get there. He changes trams for random reasons and follows other pedestrians. It is a classic example of disrupting the city's order as de Certeau explained, when Fabian refuses to obey the shortest, structured route to his destination.[48] His walking is disrupted by the mob that cannot be ignored, while in *Avedot* "People hurried, more than the usual," but without interrupting Kron's slow gaze on the city.

We should look also at the orientation in the city: while the segment from *Going to the Dogs* is filled with street names and sites, the segment from *Avedot* lacks even *one* concrete reference. It could be a description of *any* city, and not only of Berlin. This is in fact a poetic representation of a universal experience of a young man in the bustling city of the 1930s, a symbol of loneliness in the modern metropole, more than a specific wandering in specific streets.

Thus, while *Going to the dogs* represents the fragmented modern reality of Weimar Berlin – the fast rhythm, the mob, the sights, represent the city 'as is,' without a sublime sense of wandering in it – *Avedot,* in its sad lyrical loneliness, clings to an image of the city that once existed, and is now gone.[49]

Another unexpected phenomenon in the novel could add to the crystallized image of Berlin: the manner in which Nazism rises in the city, both spatially and temporally. In fact, from Figure 1,[50] it is apparent that Berlin is described as a city

48 de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 102–119.

49 This lyrical and sad poetics is typical of Goldberg's poetry, while the description of cold and tender Berlin is what Ariel Hirschfeld (inspired by Friedrich Schiller) calls "naive speech out of sentimentality." According to Hirschfeld, Goldberg expresses the generation's trauma and pain by describing fragments of childhood. Goldberg's personal trauma (her father's imprisonment in the First World War) caused her to fixate on the primary childhood moment of speaking with nature, and as a result she described the reality in her poems as both pure and terrifying. Goldberg uses symbols and images from the European Christian world in order to express the naivety that was lost in adulthood, and the leaving of Europe. See Ariel Hirschfeld, "Standing Guard Over Naivety: On the Cultural Role of Lea Goldberg's Poetry," in *Meetings with a Poet,* eds. Ruth Kartun-Blum and Anat Weisman (Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv: The Hebrew University and Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2000), 138 [Hebrew].

50 Those descriptions were manually annotated using CATMA and visualized using Vis A Vis. CATMA (Computer Assisted Textual Markup and Analysis) is a web service that supports undogmatic reading through the use of tags. It allows close reading by annotating the text, as well as distant reading when it transforms the manual tags into measurable data that can be used to find their frequency in the text. For further information see: Evelyn Gius et al., CATMA 6 (Version 6.5). Zenodo. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.1470118; Jan Horstmann, "Undogmatic Literary Annotation with CATMA: Manual, Semi-automatic and Automated," in *Annotations in Scholarly Edition and Research*, eds. Julia Nantke and Frederik Schlupkothen (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2020) ,157–175; Jan Christoph Meister "Toward a Computational Narratology," in *Collaborative Research Practices and Shared Infrastructures for Humanities Computing*, eds. Maristella Agosti and Francesca Tomasi (Padova: CLEUP, 2014), 17–36. Vis A Vis is another web-service for visualization based on CATMA annotations. For further information

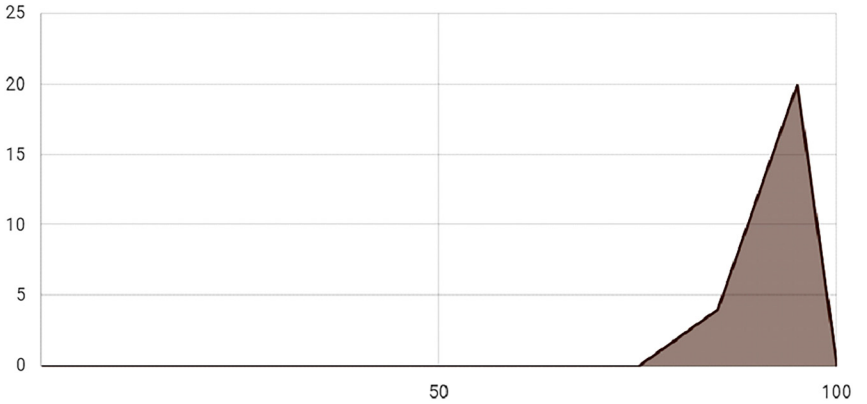


Figure 1: Descriptions of anti-Semitism in Berlin axis X presents the 'timeline' of the novel (the segments are divided by CATMA and do not have narratological meaning) and axis Y presents both the frequency of manual-based annotations and their proportional volume in each segment of the narrative. Here, these are annotations of descriptions of anti-Semitism in Berlin. Clearly, all of them appear only at the end of the novel, and their numbers increase rapidly.

with Nazi violence only at the end of the novel, with the result of the 1933 elections and the Reichstag fire. Even though this aligns with the narrative, it is nonetheless surprising, as the narrative describes anti-Semitism and the Nazis gaining power across Germany from the very beginning.

This interesting finding invites further reading of the different descriptions of anti-Semitism and Nazi activity in the novel. It seems that in the first part of the novel there are no descriptions of such activity occurring in Berlin itself, since they actually occur *outside* the city: the sign forbidding foreigners to enter Neubabelsberg lake, which Kron mentions in his conversation with Berson;[51] the Nazi flag hanging outside the house of Rüdiger's family near the border with Poland;[52] Elizabeth's partner who lives with her outside Berlin and one day leaves her to join the Nazi party.[53]

see: Moshe Schorr Oren Mishali, Benny Kimelfeld and Münz-Manor Ophir, "ViS-\'A-ViS: Detecting Similar Patterns in Annotated Literary Text," *arXiv preprint arXiv:2009.02063*, 2020); Ophir Münz-Manor and Itay Marienberg-Milikowsky, "Visualization of Categorization: How to See the Wood and the Trees," DHQ 17,3 (2023).

51 Lea Goldberg, *Avedot,* 32.

52 Ibid., 73. Rüdiger is Antonia's good christian friend.

53 Ibid., 108–109. Elizabeth is the Jewish friend of the Berson family, who later marries Kron in order to flee to Palestine.

Following the spread of Nazism and anti-Semitism throughout Germany, it burst into Berlin, first blaming Jewish researchers for plagiarism, and then assassinating Prof. Braka because of his liberal views. Germany's Reichstag fire completed the Nazi occupation of Berlin's streets. It is interesting that Kron was staying outside Berlin when the Reichstag fire occurs. At the time, he was travelling to the Harz mountain area to meet Antonia and begin their love affair. One cannot ignore the symbolism of this tragic "coincidence": just when Kron is willing to give his love for a young German woman a second chance, symbolising the willingness to give Berlin a second chance, the worst of all happens, and the window for symbiosis has been shut. Kron is able to look at the city from an even more distant point of view by staying outside of it at the time. He refuses to believe the city has changed, because:

> A man is made in such a way that he loves a little bit every country whose language he knows – and Kron had managed to love deeply this city that caused him so much grief. Which is why he is angry now, and why he refuses to understand; and why he does not want to admit to the sheer illogicality of all of this. *Ribono shel Olam*![54]

The panoramic view from above, and the view of the city from below; the literary map of Berlin, and the descriptions of wandering through the city – all portray a picture of a seemingly big and lonely city. It appears, however, that underneath that image lies a crystallised image of the city – beautiful, cold, tender – whose future, according to the end of the novel, will be one of utter failure. It appears as though the dreadful ending is being held back, outside the city, in a way that allows the city itself to maintain its beautiful image intact a little while longer. The poetics of *Avedot*, in other words, preserve the dazzling view of the city, one that barely survives until the wave of hate sweeps the city, breaks its crystallised image, and changes the face of Berlin and Europe forever.

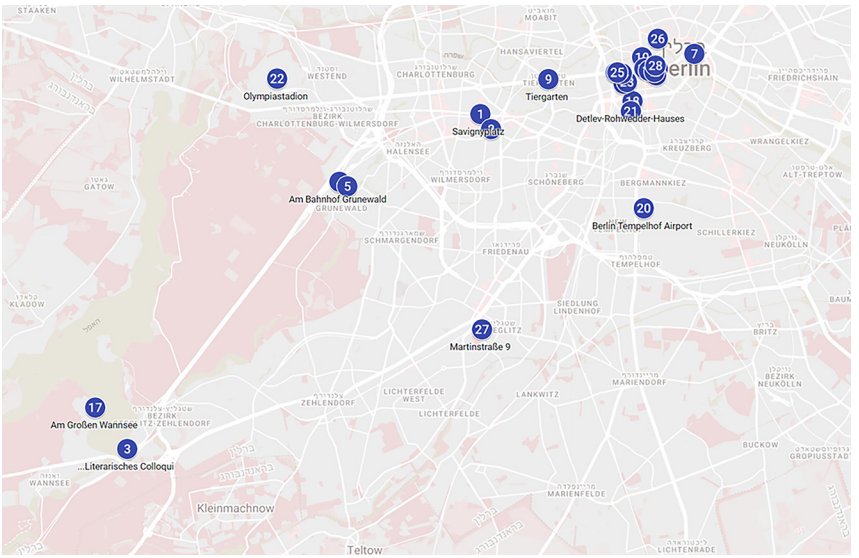
5 Lifney Hamakom: A City Under a Mass of Symbols

In his Autobiography, Stephan Zweig wrote:

> For this was something on the credit side that distinguished the First world War from the Second – words were still powerful then. They had not yet been devalued by the systematic lies of the propaganda. People still took notice of the written word and looked forward to reading it […] The moral conscience of the world was not yet as exhausted and drained as it is today; it reacted vehemently, with all the force of centuries of conviction, to every obvious lie, every transgression against international law and common humanity.[55]

54 Ibid., 295.

55 Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 263–264.



Map 4: The sites mentioned in Lifney Hamakom

The power of words in the face of the abyss is in fact the idea around which *Lifney Hamakom* turns, and which shapes its literary map. Thus, if in *Avedot* the selective nature of the city's map creates a connection between the idea of cosmopolitanism and a concrete location, the literary map which is depicted in *Lifney Hamako*m presents Berlin's image as neither realistic nor concrete. (Map 4)

The following map presents the 28 sites that Haim Be'er visits during the course of the novel: 1. Savignyplatz. 2. Literaturhaus. 3. Literarisches Colloquium Berlin. 4. Am Bahnhof Grunewald. 5. Winklerstraße. 6. Flughafen Berlin-Schönefeld.[56] 7. Fernsehturm. 8. Brandenburger Tor. 9. Der Tiergarten. 10. Bahnhof Berlin Friedrichstraße. 11. Unter den Linden. 12. Bebelplatz. 13. Deutsche Oper Berlin. 14. St.-Hedwigs-Kathedrale. 15. Deutsche Bank. 16. Bibliothek. 17. Am Großen Wannsee. 18. Detlev-Rohwedder-Haus. 19. Führerbunker 20. Flughafen Berlin-Tempelhof. 21. Topographie des Terrors. 22. Olympiastadion. 23. Hannah-Arendt-Straße and Wilhelmstraße. 24. Hotel Adlon. 25. Pariser Platz. 26. Oranienburgerstraße. 27. Martinstraße 9. 28. Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin.

Seemingly, a lot of places appear, and, unlike *Avedot,* the novel enables a full orientation of the city, a fact that itself supports the realistic framework of the novel. Nevertheless, it can be easily identified that most of the spots on the maps are monuments or historical sites, to which Be'er travels with Rapoport, such as the Empty Library, the Topography of Terror monument, the Führerbunker, and so forth.

56 Is not on this map due to its distance from the other sites.

Even though the map is spread over various areas of the city, it is guided by a single definite rule: the memory of the Holocaust. Despite the many sites mentioned in the novel, the plot barely moves between them, as it mostly takes place in the literary colloquium and in cafés, whose specific locations go unmentioned. Similar to *Avedot*, the fact that most of the plot takes place indoors marks outdoor events as the exception. This draws one to the conclusion that neither novel is an urban novel in the fullest sense of the term, since neither describes diverse experiences of the city. In other words, it can be argued that the story of the novel does not unfold in a spatial horizontal manner, but in a vertical one: thus, the focus of the novel is on the intellectual *symbolic experience of memory*,[57] as manifested in the 'Empty Library' by Micha Ullman that appears on the novel's cover.

This can also be seen through close reading. The wandering segments in the novel are purposeful, moving towards a definite location, mostly towards a historical site or a monument. The actual space is scarcely described, and the wanderings are accompanied by intellectual debates that expropriate the space from its realistic function. Here, for example, is Be'er's and Rapoport's first tour in Berlin:

> "A decent place, Grunewald, indeed decent he muttered as we arrived at his home-suburb, walking in the tunnel under the railroad track above us. […] Quietly, Rapoport signalled to me to follow him, as the light from his torch hovered upwards to the stairs. The platform was deserted, and a dark and burdening silence weighed heavily upon it."
>
> "What platform is this?" I asked with a kind of dread.
>
> Platform 17.
> And where does one travel to from here?
>
> "Theresienstadt, Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen" Rapoport announced monotonically, like the train announcements where the names of all destinations are relayed in the same dull monotone, and he traced a circle around us with the light from his torch.[58]

On this tour, Rapoport 'puts on a show': he creates a dramatic setting and becomes a morbid storyteller. Rapoport uses the space *as a method* for the intended lesson: his decision to live near the train platform from where his father was sent to a

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57 De Certeau refers to the city as palimpsests as its sites carry the layers of the past; they store up wordless stories of the past, and memories are like spirits haunting the present, leaving clues of their past existence, but remaining enigmatic. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life,* 105–109. Similarly, Andreas Huyssen examined cities across the world in light of their layers of memory, as being palimpsestic in nature, as the literary texts that document them. See Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

58 Haim Be'er, *Lifney Hamakom* (Tel Aviv), 49 [Hebrew].

concentration camp places the past as a perpetual monument. The present cannot be just the present, and nor should it be.

As opposed to Rapoport's guided tour, when he travels to Berlin a year later, Be'er allows himself to walk slowly in the city. Here Be'er travels to Steglitz, to Rapoport's late father's printing press, a place Rapoport has refused to visit:

> It seemed like time had not touched Martinstraße. Well-kept buildings of four or five storeys, painted in light colours of grey-blue and pink, shut in the street from both sides. Chestnuts and plain trees growing in front of the houses, cast their shadow over the street. […] Every time a car passed by, the sound of its wheels on the road became mingled with the sound of the blackbirds. Martinstraße number 10 had gone, making way for a playground for the neighbours' children: a rocking horse, swings, a small maze, and a slide.[59]

Arriving at a place that Rapoport refused to visit is to allow it to be explored in light of the current moment, pausing over certain details: pedestrians, buildings, trees and birds, experiencing this pleasant urban neighbourhood. But the time anticipates what is already known: that the wandering in Berlin cannot avoid the hidden past:

> Had the house that had once stood there been destroyed by an Allied shell? Or perhaps there had never been a house there. […] It seemed like number 9, painted in ochre, remained as it was in the 20s and 30s […]. At the corner of the street, under a canopy of green-red-white, a family was happily receiving spaghetti Bolognese and pizza casa mia. I entered the Italian trattoria and asked for a Campari.
>
> "Would you like it neat or mixed with orange juice?" the waiter asked.
>
> I preferred the Campari neat, to preserve its natural bitterness and original scarlet colour. It felt like this would be the most fitting drink for the occasion, a private memorial ceremony for the people of the Berlin Hebrew book society, who had lived and worked at the end of this very street seventy or eighty years ago.[60]

The urban idyll, then, is merely a cover for the main event: the past. Despite the everyday situation, the point of raising a glass in a restaurant is to conduct a private memorial ceremony.

"*Goyishe Naches*" is Rapoport's description for the only cultural experience he and Be'er share in Berlin: attending an opera.[61] In fact, they have arrived at the location at the heart of the novel – Bebelplatz – which represents the tragedy of the Jewish people. There, they are trying to enjoy the best of European culture, but obviously this "*Goyishe Naches,*" or symbiosis if you like, is impossible in Berlin;

59 Ibid., 109–110.
60 Ibid., 110–111.
61 Ibid., 170.

wandering in it through the eyes of the present is impossible when the pain of the past is what is actually guiding one's steps.

As noted above, due to the fantasy of symbiosis, the novel does not allow for a concrete experience of the city on a horizontal plane, when narrative realism collapses or becomes distorted under the weight of "vertical" symbols. Additionally, the fantasy of symbiosis not only "collapses" realism but also lies at the heart of the symbols' entanglement which Be'er places on Berlin's streets, and especially the 'Empty Library' that stands at the heart of the city, offering "*Goyishe Naches.*"[62]

The central motif of the novel is the book burning, which has a spatial significance since the action returns to both the Opera square and the Empty Library. Nevertheless, the novel undermines Heinrich Heine's antiquated statement: "Where they burn books, they will, in the end, burn humans too." The book burning act does not register as a warning for future events, but as a major event on its own which shows an attempt to destroy a culture, to destroy its library, and in that way, to bring about a spiritual destruction which is worse than a physical one.[63] Furthermore, the book fire is described as "the parchment burning and its letters flying up to heaven," an idiom from the Babylonian Talmud (Avoda Zara, 18b) that aims to distinguish between the material quality of the written book and the Torah, which is not substance but spirit, as Be'er explains to Katerina, a young German researcher and Be'er's unfulfilled love object:[64]

> At the heart of the story lies the belief that the world in which we live is not the only existing reality, but that somewhere, hidden from view, lies a different, superior by far and truer world, from which new life will flourish. And just as when, at the time of death, the soul departs from the body and soars up to reunite with the God of the spirits who will, in the fullness of time, place such soul in a different body, so the words and letters depart from the broken tablets and the burned parchment and pages, and soar into the air and return to their origin in the lap of God, where they had once

62 The interpreters of Be'er's work have described the "interpretational entanglement" in his work: an echo chamber that entangles readers with metaphors and symbols. This poetic may augment the text and delight educated readers, but it does not and cannot lead to a fully understood interpretation. See for example: Avner Holtzman, "From a City of Gold until *Upon a Certain Place:* Haim Be'er between Revealment and Concealment," in *Festschrift in Honor of Haim* Be'er, eds. Hanna Soker-Schwager and Haim Weiss (Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 2014), 21–36 [Hebrew]; Itay Marienberg-Milikowsky, "Upon a Certain Place: On the Dialectics of Transmitting Tradition in the work of Haim Be'er," *Zutot: Perspectives on Jewish Culture* 1 (2016):94–106;Dina Stein, "With my Coins and my Sticks: Truth, Authority and Allusions in *Upon a Certain Place*," in *Festschrift in Honor of Haim Be'er*, 262–277 [Hebrew].

63 This is implied from the extensive motif of bibliophilia in the novel, from Martin Lamberg, Be'er's protagonist in his unwritten novel, who collects books in order to get them out of Israel to New York, to Rapoport's attempt to recover his father's library and other Jewish communities in Europe.

64 See Marienberg-Milikowsky, "Upon a Certain Place".

> entertained Him in His loneliness before ever creation began, and He will send and return them at a time of His choosing to the pens and computers of authors and scholars.[65]

Fire, in fact, burns the substance, thereby destroying the mediation between man and God. The Empty Library demonstrates this idea in a fundamental way: the substance is removed, and now it is only the words rising to the skies that represent God. The fire of books, then, paradoxically creates a living fantasy of being able to communicate with God without a mediator. Hades and God are both nowhere;[66] the book fire moves between the awful and the divine as an alternative to Bildung and the fantasy of symbiosis.

As the flames rise from the burning books, there is a comparison between fire and water, the two opposite elements. When Katrina and Be'er sit in a café at Savignyplatz to resolve the narrative's conflicts, she makes this comparison. In this conversation they discuss the mythological creature "part dragon part whale" that sometimes appears in traditional Jewish art (in synagogues, on challah covers, on the gates of medieval communities etc.).[67] Katerina shows Be'er how she concluded that this figure is similar to the ancient German dragon that suffocates Worms and aims to destroy it. She points out how this German mythological figure became transformed into the Jewish tradition:

> After the excitement had subsided a bit, Katrina explained that the greatness of those unknown Jewish artists lay in the dramatic transfiguration they engineered in the Rein's Lindwurm. Once the threatening dragon had been inserted under the wings of the Shekhinah and made Jewish, it could become transformed into a likeable whale, like a pet of God, whose flesh is to be served as the first course to the Tzadikim in heaven during the feast where the Messiah himself is to be the honoured guest.[68]

Thus, the dragon, the symbol of fire and the German horrors, became a friendly whale. It symbolizes the universal nature of the divine, which has no place, similar to the Jewish people – the wanderers, the unlocated. The whale is in fact the symbol for the *Bildungsideal*, a symbol for a cosmopolitan European fantasy. Fire, then, is the

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65 Be'er, *Lifney Hamakom,* 141.

66 Bebelplatz is in fact a place of distorted revelation: the connection between God's place and the concrete place. Evidence of this is in Rapoport's words when he and Be'er arrive at the Bebelplatz for the first time: "How full of awe is this place!" from Genesis 28,17, the words of Jacob in response to his vision on his way to Haran. This is the *axis mundi* as explained by Mircea Eliade (see *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965)) that in Jewish culture is Mount Moriah, the place of the Temple. But in Be'er's novel, the awed place in Berlin is Bebelplatz, a sacred mountain in reverse; the Empty Library's pit in the ground that gaped downwards is the opposite to Jacob's ladder, heading directly to Hades. The revelation of God as both the awful and the divine, and at the same time as mundane as the people who pass through it in the daylight without even seeing it, as Be'er notes: "it is just a pit". Be'er, *Lifney Hamakom,* 101.

67 Haim Be'er, *Lifney Hamakom,* 284.

68 Ibid., 286.

substance that burns, the quality of nations with a homeland. Liquid, on the other hand, is limitless, allowing them to continue wandering, until they are forced to stop.

According to Benjamin, strolling through the city exposes urban reality – the present as well as the memories of the past. The *flâneur* can walk through the stories that the streets give rise to. In a way, strolling in Berlin of *Lifney Hamakom*, is similar to the *flâneur's* experience, as he bumps against both concrete and symbolic pits, revealing vertical and mythological axes that raise existential questions about the essence of God. But on another level, Benjamin's *flâneur* leaves behind the tension between the concrete and the mythological, as he walks through the streets with no concrete guidance but his own inner desires and thoughts. In *Lifney Hamakom* it seems that the present as well as the unintentional strolling *cannot exist*, as a concrete "symbiosis" is not feasible even for one night just to enjoy "pleasure from the one and only Wolfgang Amadeus."[69]

6 Conclusions

This article attempts to demonstrate how the German-Jewish symbiosis fantasy, as described by historians, prevails in Berlin's urban space in the novels *Lifney Hamakom* and *Avedot*. If *Avedot* freezes the city as an image of potential symbiosis, *Lifney Hamakom* is significantly affected by the mass of symbols of the city's space – in both novels undermining the literary representation of Berlin as an actual living city. The novels express an intellectual passion to merge with the city's space. Although Elchanan Kron seems a typical detached Jewish protagonist who is alone in the big city in the 1930s, he is actually longing to be part of the academic and intellectual life of the city: attending lectures at the university, enjoying the fresh air in the city's gardens, or sitting in a café. The lyrical gaze of Kron as he strolls through the city conjures up fond memories of the beloved city that is now lost. Even though the motif of loss and the atmosphere of the horrors yet to come play an undeniable part in this novel, my argument is that underneath this appearance, the image of Berlin which the novel presents is trying to save the city just before it plunges into abyss. It is thus like the souvenir of a snow globe, a city encased in a crystal ball upon which gentle snowflakes settle. The city's literary map rises from *Avedot*, showing how Goldberg connected the cosmopolitan ideal to a concrete location, the Berlin of her childhood fantasy.

As opposed to *Avedot, Lifney Hamakom's* literary map shows that the novel almost does not allow a *horizontal* experience of the city. The literary city is loaded with symbols, which force the reader to explore it from a vertical perspective. As

69 Ibid., 171.

much as it is true that Be'er and Rapoport yearn to enjoy some "*Goyishe Naches*," writing the novel through the symbol of the Empty Library raises the possibility of living without books, libraries, temples, or even prayer; the possibility of eliminating the notion of God from history and replacing it with some kind of abstract faith. The German space is paradoxically the one that enables such faith; the violence and brutality of the book fire is the force that drives humanity into the abyss, to the stairs of Hades, to the stairs of the Empty Library: it establishes God in nowhere.[70] As opposed to Elon's belief, with which I opened this paper, the German-Jewish symbiosis – as these novels tell us – is destined to remain an open, bleeding wound.

70 It is interesting to mention that both Be'er and Goldberg were interested in Lasker-Schüler's image and work, and in both works she represents a meeting point between German and Jewish (Hebrew) cultures, that is also reflected spatially. She represented for both the ideal of cosmopolitanism, as she was a symbol of symbiosis: of the merging of European and Jewish cultures. See for example: Haim Be'er, "In Train Station, Waiting for Else," in *Master Key*, Haim Be'er (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2019), 41 [Hebrew]; Lea Goldberg, *Meeting with a Poet,* (Merhavia: Sifriat Poalim, 1952), 51 [Hebrew].