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## The Hebrew Poetry of the Younger Generation of Immigrants from the Former Soviet Union in Israel Part 1: Alex Rif, Nadia-Adina Rose

Hebrajska poezja młodego pokolenia repatriantów z byłego Związku Sowieckiego w Izraelu  
Część pierwsza: Alex Rif, Nadia-Adina Rose

**Streszczenie:** Na przykładzie twórczości izraelskich poetek (Alex Rif, Nadi-Adiny Rose) opisane są kulturowo-estetyczne wyznaczniki poezji hebrajskiej młodego pokolenia — tzw. *generation one and a half* — dzieci repatriantów z byłego Związku Sowieckiego. Szczególna uwaga poświęcona została zagadnieniu kulturowej spuścizny oraz tym poetyckim praktykom, w ramach których owa spuścizna znajduje swój wyraz. Jest to pierwsza część artykułu, następną — dotyczącą twórczości Yael Tomashov i Rity Kogan — ukaże się w kolejnym numerze.

**Słowa kluczowe:** hebrajska poezja repatriantów z byłego Związku Sowieckiego, *generation one and a half*, tożsamość kulturowa, sprzeciw wobec wiktylizacji

Ивритская поэзия молодого поколения выходцев из бывшего Советского Союза в Израиле.  
Часть первая: Алекс Риф, Надя-Адина Роз

**Резюме:** На примере творчества израильских поэтов (Алекс Риф, Надя-Адина Роз), рассматриваются культурно-эстетические особенности ивритской поэзии молодого поколения и «полуторного поколения» выходцев из бывшего СССР. Особое внимание уделяется вопросу о культурной преемственности и тем поэтическим практикам, различающимся у разных авторов, в которых эта преемственность формируется. В данном номере публикуется первая часть статьи, вторая — посвященная произведениям Яэль Томашов и Риты Коган — ожидается в следующем.

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

The emotional and intellectual attraction to sectionalism in the literature and research has undermined the concept of the literary, cultural and scientific melting pot. Dichotomies such as hegemony-margins and nativism-migration have penetrated nearly

every sphere of criticism. Scholars like Hannan Hever tend to regard nativism as an illusion and invention<sup>1</sup>, and the awareness of an element of immigration or exile<sup>2</sup> in the literature of the various *aliyot* is growing<sup>3</sup>. Nissim Calderon described the “multiplicity of cultures of Israelis” in literature, ideology and politics, and noted the multiplicity of ways in which the immigrants and the members of the second generation find their way to their original cultures. He also stressed that often these are not different cultures but rather an emphasis on the difference between a sector and its environment or between one sector and another<sup>4</sup>. Calderon has shown that the discourse on the subject calls not only for an *equal* attitude to all the actors<sup>5</sup> on the social scene but also a *different* attitude to each of them. The main actor today — the Mizrahi (Oriental) voice — calls for, as Haviva Pedaya writes, a study of the “deep cultural continuities” that bind it to its historical roots<sup>6</sup>. But the attitude towards the past reemerges differently in each and every sector. That is true of the relations between one or another sectoral literature and the hegemonic literature, especially since the boundaries of the latter as well as of the concepts of identity and authenticity are in no way defined or uniform, as Yochai Oppenheimer has stressed<sup>7</sup>. Adia Mendelson-Maoz has banded together writing in various sectors and diverse languages<sup>8</sup> under multicultural categories along with marginal literature but in doing so has also further sharpened the differences between the various sectors in this writing. Identity is then defined, today as in the past, by means of the affiliation to a sector.

At the end of 2018, Francis Fukuyama’s new book *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment*<sup>9</sup> was published. It redefined, in keeping with the needs of the time, the concept of

<sup>1</sup> H. Hever, *From the Beginning, Three Essays on Native Hebrew Poetry* (Hebrew), Keshev Ieshira publishing house, Tel-Aviv 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Y. Oppenheimer, *Remembering the Diaspora in Hebrew Literature* (Hebrew), Mosad Bialik, Jerusalem 2015.

<sup>3</sup> For several years, Rachel Albeck-Gidron has been teaching a course “Hebrew Immigrant Literature” in the Department of Literature of the Jewish People at Bar-Ilan University.

<sup>4</sup> N. Calderon, *Pluralists against their Will, On the Multiplicity of Cultures of Israelis* (Hebrew), Zemura Bitan, Haifa 2000, p. 142–151.

<sup>5</sup> An actor is viewed as a subject of social activity — private and collective, human and non-human. See: B. Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 1993; L. Boltanski and L. Thevenot, *On Justification: Economies of Worth*, trans. C. Porter, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2006.

<sup>6</sup> H. Pedaya, *The Return of the Lost Voice* (Hebrew), Hakibutz Hameuhad, Tel Aviv 2016, p. 15.

<sup>7</sup> Y. Oppenheimer, *What Does it Mean to be Authentic, Mizrahi Poetry in Israel* (Hebrew), Resling, Tel Aviv 2012, p. 10–20.

<sup>8</sup> A. Mendelson-Maoz, *Multiculturalism in Israel: Literary Perspectives*, Purdue University Press, West Lafayette, IN 2014.

<sup>9</sup> F. Fukuyama, *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York 2018.

identity, not based only on nationality, geography, religion, ethnos, community, etc., but rather on perceptions and views, and more so on emotions: the insult and the demand for respect. At the same time, Alex Rif's book of poetry, *Tipshonet mishtarim* (Silly Girl of the Regime) was published. She is one of the founders and prominent figures in an artistic group called "Generation and a Half" or "Cultural Brigade", which brings together young artists who were born in the former Soviet Union, immigrated to Israel at a more or less young age, and today create in Hebrew while drawing on the cultural loads they acquired in their childhood and from their families. Owing to the social agenda of the group's art and activity, it has become a perfect test case for the concepts proposed by Fukuyama. On the other hand, his new book about his attempt to grasp the social developments of the last decade has become the object of a critical test in view of the artistic facts presented by the members of the "Generation and a half" and artists who are close to them. An analysis of their poetical and cultural works, particularly in poetry, may reveal their perceptions regarding identity and the modes of establishing it, and thus create an imagined stage of dialogue between them and one of the major trends in contemporary social thought.

I will open with a discussion of Rif's book and then proceed to the works of Nadia-Adina Rose, Yael Tomashov, and Rita Kogan. I will show that the poetry of the generation and a half rejects the paradigm of insult, anger, victimhood and the demand for respect, and moves, through sublimation of violence and a carnivalesque relief, to a paradigm of compassion, generosity, love and pride.

### **The language of Babushka of a Generation and a Half *Silly Girl of the Regime*, by Alex Rif**

The generation and a half struggled to acquire the new language and at the same time to preserve the "old" language, and while the symbolic, silent mother becomes an object of anger and protest, the grandmother (the "babushka") remains a pure source of discourse, story, formative legend. But within the discourse, the void, an imperceptible layer of life from a memory of the foreign past, entrenches itself, and demands a renewed plunge into the redeeming Hebrew, the present and clear Israeliness, which is also vexatious, pushing one back into the bosom of the mother-babushka, and so it goes back and forth. Thus

a language of many bodies is created, which is reminiscent of the Russian matryoshka doll, also known as Babushka — a stereotype of Russianness which refutes its own stereotypy in its mysterious, doleful complexity, so full of yearning for the infinity within. A consummate example of this is found in Alex Rif's writing. In her book *Silly Girl of the Regime* (2018)<sup>10</sup>, the poem *My beloved jachnun* seems like the manifest, compact and fiery, of her lyric protagonist:

Wait for me, I will break into your apartments,  
 With a bow tie made of toilet paper, sandals and socks.  
 This time too you will smile when I come in,  
 And when I pass you by, you'll roll your eyes.  
 Like Joseph, I will return  
 To sit among you at Friday night dinner,  
 And all my lice and titles will bless he who brings forth  
 Salt from the wound in a polite voice.  
 When they ask how my parents are doing  
 Or how I caught on so quickly to the language  
 I'll laugh at them with a mouth full of jachnun  
 And I will vomit with pride (24).

הכי לי. אני עוד אֶתְפָּרֵץ לְדִירוֹת שְׁלֶכֶם.  
 עִם פָּפִיר גִּנְרֵי הַטּוֹאֵלֵט, מְסַנְדְּלוֹת גְּרָבִים.  
 גַּם הַפֶּעַם תִּסְמְכוּ בְכַנִּיטָתִי,  
 וְכִשְׁאַחֶרְךָ – תִּגְלַגְלוּ עֵינַיִם.  
 כְּמוֹ יוֹסֵף, אֲחֻזֵּר  
 לְשֵׁבֶת בֵּינֵיכֶם בְּאַרוּחַת שַׁבָּת,  
 וְכָל כֵּנִי וּתְאֵרִי יִבְרַכּוּ הַמּוֹצֵיאַ  
 מִלַּח מִן הַפֶּצֶע בְּקוֹל מְתַרְפֵּת.  
 כְּשֶׁתִּשְׁאַלוּ מֵה שְׁלוֹם הַהוֹרִים  
 אוֹ אֵיךְ תִּפְסְקִי יִפִּי אֶת הַשִּׁפָּה  
 אֶצְחַק לָכֶם בְּפִה מְלֵא גְ'אֲחֻנוּ  
 וְאִז אֶקְיֵא בְּגָאוֹה (24).

The poem is constructed like a rhetorical speech or a dramatic scene with a dialogue and a vigorous, violent action at its center, in the style of Antonin Artaud's theater of cruelty<sup>11</sup>. It is framed by two transgressive events: a break-in, in the first line, and vomiting in the last line. Their meanings are identical: the breaking down of a boundary between the I and the other, between private and public, between inner and outer. The poem creates an allegory of immigration along the lines of the "powers of horror" and "abjection"<sup>12</sup>: a gesture of the grotesque violence of the break-in by the stranger, swallowing up the local culture in a grotesque ritual, vomiting the swallowed up culture as a grotesque expression of successful socialization. At the center of the enthusiastic speech of the protagonist there is her rhetorical identification with the biblical Joseph, by means of which she creates her myth<sup>13</sup> as the loved, chosen brother, an object and victim of the brothers' hostility who becomes their redeemer. The meaning of this remedial transformation is reinforced by

<sup>10</sup> A. Rif, *Silly Girl of the Regime* (Hebrew), Pardess, Haifa 2018. The page numbers will be inserted in the text.

<sup>11</sup> A. Artaud, *The Theatre and its Double*, trans. V. Corti, Alma Classica, London 2013.

<sup>12</sup> J. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. L.S. Roudiez, Columbia University Press, New York 1982.

<sup>13</sup> The myth is understood here in the concepts of Alexei Losev: miraculous personality history transmitted by words, when the miracle is the realization of the transcendental purpose of the personality in empirical history. See: A. Losev, *The Dialectics of Myth*, trans. V. Marchenkov, Routledge, New York 2003, p. 185.

means of the reversal of one of the main blessings of the ritual of a meal: he who brings forth bread from the earth — he who brings forth salt from the wound. This parallelism has two sides — metonymic and metaphorical: the bread is linked with the salt in metathesis and in a metonymic form (dipping of bread in salt as is customary during the blessing), and the earth is likened to a wound in a physical, material metaphor. The wound with the salt sprinkled on it is a symbol of the trauma of immigration, but by means of the new myth and the new ritual created in the poem, the trauma is processed and corrected — the removal of the salt from the wound presents a possibility of recovery. Like the vomiting at the end of the poem, the wound and the removal of the salt from it are a transgressive breach of the boundary of the body and a reference to the aesthetics of cruelty and abjection.

The metaphorical wound of immigration, analogous to the earth, is embodied in the sickening reality of the open mouth of the body. The wound with the bandage on it is the unique, one-time body of the entity, the personality in its embodiment, the reality itself. Jacques Derrida writes about the wound and poetry, when he revises the ethics of Emmanuel Levinas: “The signature of the writer, that same person who exists in the poem, as in every text — is always a wound. Whatever is open, never heals — that opening is the mouth, and that mouth speaks at the place where the wound is... those lips mark the mouth that speaks, even when it is silent, calls to other, without any preconditions, in the language of a hospitality that allows for no choice”<sup>14</sup>. Rif’s poem creates that stage of hospitality and speaks to the hosting other in the language of the wound, but it is also the language of abjection and of the bursting forth of violence. As long as the protagonist is talking and saying the blessing on the bringing forth of the salt from the wound, the wound remains open, the poem continues to be written, the trauma must be worked through<sup>15</sup>.

The main strategy the poet adopts for working through the trauma is the hyperbolic humoristic reversal, an aesthetic which, owing to Mikhail Bakhtin’s famous work, is known as carnivalesque<sup>16</sup>. At the opening of the poem, the protagonist is represen-

<sup>14</sup> J. Derrida, *The Wounding Truth. Or the corps-à-corps of Tongues*, interview with Evelyne Grossman, trans. M.S. Lieberman, “European Journal of Psychoanalysis” 2004, 19:2. <http://www.psychomedia.it/jep/number19/grossman.htm> [1.03.2020].

<sup>15</sup> On the wound of immigration, see also: Pedaya, *Return of the Lost Voice*, 90–93.

<sup>16</sup> M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. H. Iswolsky, MIT Press, Cambridge MA 1968.

ted in the figure of a girl-clown, heart-rending and annoying, like a caricature of the new immigrant from the Soviet Union with its two external cultural characteristics: a bow in her hair and sandals worn with socks. The bow tie is made of toilet paper so instead of being a symbol of festivity and high culture, it turns into low physicality, the head becomes the backside, in keeping with the laws of the carnivalesque laughter, and the aesthetic of abjection. It is like the vomiting at the end of the poem, when the mouth, the swallowing organ, becomes the secreting organ. In the same paradigm of the secreting mouth there is also the grotesque laughter of the protagonist, as the vomiting seems like its direct continuation. The clown-like, carnivalesque laughter destroys the hierarchy and creates chaos that undermines the order of the ritual discourse, so hypocritical and banal, of the native, hosting society: “how my parents are doing”, “how I caught on so quickly to the language”. The immigrant is perceived as a small girl, and hence the patronizing, paternal attitude towards her, but she, with artistic zeal, adopts that character as a carnivalesque mask in order to offend her adoptive “parents”.

This is the essence of clowning, and it is already embodied in the title of the book, in the words the author uses to describe herself: “silly girl”. The name refers to the tradition of silly, foolish characters in literature and culture: from *In Praise of Folly* by Erasmus of Rotterdam and *Ship of Fools* by Sebastian Brant, Shakespeare’s fools, and up to the character of Ivan the fool in Russian fairytales, the younger but smarter and more successful son, which is similar to the character of the biblical Joseph. The “silly girl of the regime” is the figure of the naïve Soviet person, the double of the figure of the mother, and the speaking character is the confused character who does not tell: “her stifled lips confuse years/that are not from here” (47)<sup>17</sup>. She is the one who creates around herself the tiny, private gulag, as in the poem *My gulag*. That is how the character of the immigrant is depicted as a clown-silly girl-fool, and implicitly, is the one who triumphs, which is expressed both in her laughter of superiority and in her moving testimony in the last word of the poem — “pride”. This is not pride elicited by the compliments of her pathetic hosts, but rather her ability to “bring forth salt from the wound” and to laugh at the two “homelands”, to become integrated in both cultures (signified by the strange food and the strange clothing) and at the same time to be alienated from both of them, to sequester herself from them and through them.

<sup>17</sup> (47) “שִׁפְתֶיהָ הַקְבִּירוֹת מְבַלְבְּלוֹת שָׁנִים / שִׁלָּא מִכְּאֵן” (47)

We will see several other examples of the clownlike figure or of a carnivalesque reversal in the book. In the poem *Yevgeny* a process similar to the one in the previous poem takes place. The I establishes him/herself by offending and mocking the other while exchanging roles. This time the protagonist is the one wearing the mask of the native or the pathetic oldtimer, while the other plays the role of the despised new repatriate. The protagonist is a girl in a kindergarten who undertakes the task of socializing little Yevgeny:

I was already the one  
 Who explained to him,  
 In distinct Hebrew words,  
 That socks and sandals are,  
 How to put it, ugly,  
 That a sandwich with herring is,  
 How to put it, smelly,  
 And that he should speak Hebrew,  
 It's not Russia here!  
 The day Yevgeny came to kindergarten,  
 I was overjoyed (12).

זאת כבר הייתי אני  
 שהסבירתי לו,  
 במילים עבריות מפורדות,  
 שגרבנים וסנדלים זה  
 איך לומר, מכוער,  
 שסנדביץ' עם דג מליח זה,  
 איך לומר, מסריס,  
 ושדבר עברית.  
 פה זה לא רוסיה!  
 ביום בו יבגני הגיע לגן  
 הייתי מאושרת (12).

The poem reflects an early stage of immigration, with its typical imitative behavior, while the previous poem presents a mature, independent character. Nonetheless, in both poems, the protagonist's behavior is infantile, in both the figure of the victim-clown is center stage (here she is sadder and not violent) in the scene of the cruel circus, and they both lead to the point of healing moment at the end, when the speaker achieves a sense of joy or pride by realizing her comic superiority, replete with venal self-irony.

In the poem *Air conditioner*, the protagonist describes how it took twenty-five years for her parents to install an air conditioner: "One day an air conditioner was born / just like a stork brought my brother / and they bought me in a store" (29)<sup>18</sup>. The comic reversal between a child and an object and between a birth and a purchase sharpens the absurd in the family life of immigrants, and the disparity between the acquisition of culture and of physical comfort: "there was money for ballet class, for organ lessons and a summer camp / but not for an air conditioner" (29)<sup>19</sup>. The protagonist mocks and laments the situation in which she herself is forced to be a kind of substitute for the lacking air conditioner. At the end of the poem, the heavy silence of the mother in front of the new air conditioner leaves no room for laughter or triumph.

<sup>18</sup> "יום אחד נולד מזנן. / כמו שפאת אח שלי הביאה תסידה / ואותי קנו בתנוחת" (29)

<sup>19</sup> "היה כסף לחוג בלט. לישעורי אורגנית ולקושנת גל-עף / אבל לא למזנן" (29)

In the poem, *A recurring dream*, the figure of the mother is shaped in a carnivalesque, humiliating and cruel manner:

My mother tells me	אמא שלי מספרת לי
That when we immigrated to Israel,	שכשעלינו לארץ,
And money was scarce,	והמזבב הפלפלי היה קשה,
She sold her body to men.	היא מכרה את גופה לגברים.
In other words, my mother didn't clean	כלומר, אמא שלי לא עבדה בנקיון.
houses,	אמא שלי הייתה זונה. [...]
My mother was a whore...	אמא שלי לא הייתה עולה מטריחה מרוסיה.
My mother was not a smelly immigrant	אמא שלי הייתה לבן לית,
from Russia.	עם מיניות מתפרצת
My mother was liberal,	והשווקה אסורה.
With brazen sexuality	לא סמרטוט רצפה,
And forbidden passion.	אמא שלי הייתה מוכנה
Not a floor rag,	לרדת.
My mother was ready	פדי לגרד את הספוי לעלות חזרה.
To go down,	אמא שלי הייתה זונה! (34)
To try for a chance to rise up again.	
My mother was a whore! (34)	

In her nightmarish dream, the protagonist interprets the reality in a way that breaks the discourse and the culture down into three planes: the immigration, the duality of body and soul, the morals of victimhood. With bitter sarcasm, she places her mother at the center of the circus, and becomes a clown herself, with the unbearable mocking commentary on the character of the mother, that reverses the meanings and the values, turns the lofty into the despicable. In this nightmare, as in a distorted mirror, liberal, humanistic and feminist values, fundamental ideas absorbed in literature and culture studies, unravel. As in the earlier poems, this one leads to a point of reversal, the revelation or the proud self-fulfillment, while at the same time erasing the identity of the previous image. And as in the previous poems, this fulfillment mocks itself: “Not a floor rag” but rather “a whore”. This is clown-like pride or pretension, like the ending of the poem “In the holy land I learned”: “to travel in the world / to love the sea / and to feel contemptuous of ev-ry-one” (43)<sup>20</sup>. The tension between the concept of the melting pot and the concept of multiculturalism is manifested in the internal conflict and the difficulties of self-fulfillment, namely in an identity crisis. The crisis is given clown-like expression in the poem *Song of tranquility*:

Sometimes the melted part of me	לפעמים המתכת שבי
Fails to identify who	לא מזוהה את מי

<sup>20</sup> “לטייל בעולם / לאהב את הים / ולהתנשא על כולם” (43)



The discourse of the Holocaust and the victims (the ‘patch’) is intertwined with the discourse of fighting and heroism (“weapon”, “battle”, “war”). On her internal stage, the protagonist presents her living room — a sign of normality and reconciliation, an end to the life of wandering, finding a home. However, the sarcastic tone shows that this too is an act, one more segment in the circus show. When she enumerates the three main means at the disposal of the Israeli ideological combat, she stresses only their power: the Holocaust, the Hebrew language and Zionism. She finished her compulsory military service, but the war isn’t over, other soldiers are now loading their rifles, other victims are now wearing the patches of the immigrants. The lyrical confession about the achievement of peace draws the “portrait of immigration” (like the subtitle of the book), the front lines of the war. “To the glory of the melting [pot]” is a slur on it. The humor and the irony need not mislead the reader: the battle is still raging, and this is underscored by other poems in the book and stories about other wars.

The poem *Modern legend* tells about three siblings — “a pretty girl, a clever child, a mischievous infant” (79) — who, in the wake of World War II become “a widow, a hunchback, and a barren” (80). It is a quick sketch of the history of the twentieth century, similar to the poem *History*: “A pension of one thousand four hundred new shekels each month. / To move to a new country is like flying into space. / At the age of 42, deaf, mute. / Karelia, Kolyma, the Ural mountains, / Order number 22, to shoot anyone retreating, / clause five in your ID: Jewish” (74)<sup>24</sup>. This enables the protagonist to enumerate with one breath, without making any distinctions, all the afflictions of the Soviet regime and anti-Semitism, on the one hand, and the hardships of immigration and absorption, on the other. That is the victim-like identity of those who have experienced both of these. This parallelism is not cynical but rather it expresses the protagonist’s consternation at the historical absurdity as well as her militant protest, more philosophical-historical than social. The historical absurdity is translated into an existential absurdity, so much so that the protagonist needs psychological treatment during her military service, as she relates in the poem *Therapy*:

My grandfather was a veteran  
Two fronts, two war medals  
And one dead family.  
I joined the IDF

סבא שלי היה וטרון  
שתי חזיתות, שני אותות מלחמה  
ומשפחה אחת מתה.  
אני התגייסתי לצה"ל

<sup>24</sup> “אלף ארבע מאות שקלים חדשים פנסיה בחודש. / לעבר מדינה זה כמו לטוס לקהל. / בגיל 42, הרש, אלם. / קרליה, קולימה, הרי אורל, / פקדה מספר 227, לירות במי שנסוג, / סעיף חמש בתעודת הגהות: יהודי” (74)

Outstanding rookie, completed officers training,	מצטיינת טירונות, בוגרת קורס קצינים, יושבת אצל הקב"ן:
Sitting with the mental health officer: You need to deal with your relationship with your father.	את צריכה לטפל בקשר עם אבא. אבא שלי לא התגייס לצבא [...] אמא שלי בכלל רצתה להגר לגרמניה אבל אבא שָׁלָה אֶמֶר רְגֵלִי לֹא תִדְרֹךְ (50).
My father didn't join the army [...] My mother just wanted to immigrate to Germany	
But her father said I'll never step foot there (50).	

Rif's girl soldier, who's in therapy, creates a parallel between herself and her grandfather, above her father's head with the help of military service, even if this parallel is charged with self-irony and ridicule, in somewhat carnivalesque self-deprecation. As a member of the third generation of combatants in World War II, she feels a deep identification with them, sees them as an historic example of firm psychological strength, as in the poem *How was it in school*: "Look at me, my grandma said, / a woman for myself, a math teacher. / If not beautiful at least not ordinary, / not rich so then a communist, / not tall then at least conceited" (51)<sup>25</sup>. The grandmother, a former math teacher, appears again in the school (*Grandma and me*, 75), in a nursing home, with math exercises in her hand (*Questions*, 76), and in a cemetery with the possibility of making her a tombstone in the form of a math notebook made of marble (*New visit in the cemetery*, 69). The Grandmother seems distant but also close to the protagonist, almost her double, as in the poem *Grandma and me*:

And during her life we didn't speak. When I insisted on Hebrew, she didn't understand.	ובחיייה לא דברנו. כשהתעקשתי עברית, לא הבינה. כשותרנה רוסיית, לא הקשבתי.
When she gave up on Russian, I didn't listen.	את תקחי מורה למתמטיקה, הצהירה. עקשיו היא באה לי בתלומות.
You'll be a math teacher, she declared. Now she comes to me in my dreams. Hand in hand she leads me To my first day of study. She mathematics, me English. And I worry about her. Will they understand her poor Hebrew? Will they listen? And only after she went into the classroom, Proud and sure of herself, Did I remember: I actually wanted Literature (75).	יד ביד מוליכה אותי ליום הלימודים הראשון שלי. היא מתמטיקה, אני אנגלית. נאני דואגת לה. האם יבינו את העברית הקשה? האם יקשיבו? ורק אחרי שנגנסה לפתח, באה ובטוחה, נזכרתי: אני בקלל רצייתי ספרות (75).

<sup>25</sup> "תסתפלי עלי, אמהך לי סבתי, / אשה עצמית, מורה למתמטיקה. / אם לא יפה אז לא סתמית, / לא עשירה אז חומיניסטיט, / לא גבוהה אז לפחות גאונתנית" (51)

In this poem, too, as in *Therapy*, a psychological and historical parallel is created between the protagonist and the generation of grandparents. In her dream, she sees herself as a large-small woman-child, as a teacher and pupil at the same time, and that is her way of communicating with the memory, compensating herself for the lack of conversation and common language with the grandmother during her lifetime. The grandmother's pride and confidence are reminiscent of the protagonist, as she appears in other poems. The poem itself, in its broken down and nearly ungrammatical language also seems like a combined discourse, as if it were derived from the grandmother's speech. It attempts to insist on Hebrew without giving up on Russian, even though that's not possible, to listen although it's late and in fact there is nothing to listen to. But the protagonist creates the attentiveness in an artificial, symbolic manner, as attentiveness to myself-the other, as happens in dreams. This poem can be defined as minor literature<sup>26</sup>, because beyond the psychological dynamics, it also contains social-historical thought, and can be read as an allegory about relations between the generations and the *aliyot* to Israel — the relations between those who do not understand and those who do not listen.

Between the protagonist and her roots — grandfather and grandmother, mother and father, the country in which she was born — silence prevails, and that arouses her anger, anxiety and aggression. Although she is cut off from her mother tongue, she experiences a rupture in the connection with the mother-country and a yearning for "re-territorialization"<sup>27</sup>. This is how she turns to her homeland in the spiritual, despairing defiance of an orphan:

You gave birth to me and  
disappeared.  
You hid your soul from me [...]   
And if I ask you today — will you  
tell?  
As if three decades of silence  
have not passed between us,  
As if I did not read your secrets  
in the books of that damned war  
You will want to repair and you  
will remain repaired,  
And you won't tear (11).

ילדת אותי והעלמת.  
העלמת נפשך ממני. [...]  
ואם אשאל אותך היום – את תספרי?  
כמו לא עברו בינינו שלשת עשורי שתיקה,  
כמו לא קראתי סודותיך בספרי המלחמה  
הארוכה ההיא  
תרצי למשוך ומשארתי מתקנת.  
ולא תקרעי (11).

<sup>26</sup> G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. D. Polan, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1986.

<sup>27</sup> Pedaya, *The Return*, 100–102.

Here, as in other poems, the demand for a story and the frustration at its absence is very evident. The “rupture” in the narrative is perceived as violence and arouses violence, as an impediment to any possibility of correction. The story is not created, not because it is impossible to tell it or there is nothing to tell, namely, not due to the postmodern situation and what it involves — the collapse of narratives, facts and truths — but rather as a result of concealment. The protagonist points to “secrets” that lurk behind the silence, although the secrets are not secrets but rather a game and infantile simulation, because all of them are open to everyone and written in books. Everyone has such “secrets”— the mother, the grandmother and the other actors, but the protagonist does not join in the game of simulated secrets and chooses to break the silence that envelops the story of the immigrants from the Soviet Union. Unlike the generation of her parents, in her case it is not the silence but rather its belligerent fracture that arouses her pride. Although from a social viewpoint, in particular within the Russian-speaking community, she is preaching to the converted, on the Hebrew-speaking scene, the artistic and largely also the social, she does succeed in creating a scene for the formation of a new culture. It is one in which Hebrew appropriates the “secrets”, stories and the very “soul” of the Russian immigration, the creation of a discourse that is not torn between the generations and the languages, the rectification of the discursive, cultural and mental orphanhood. The stories that were not told are parallel to the possibilities of a life unfulfilled, disappointed loves. In dreams or fantasies in the style of alternative history, the protagonist compensates herself for the non-fulfillment of the desire for a psychological remedy. Thus, for example, in the poem *The ballad of Sasha Sokolov* about the love of childhood:

On long nights, in a child's bed, in the  
redeeming Zion  
He pursued me, around the  
slim-trunked birch tree  
For him, I was the light for the  
gentiles  
And for me, he was the remembrance  
of childhood  
Of everything promised, that does  
not exist.  
And in another life, when I search for  
him on Facebook  
To put out unkindled embers  
Dozens of blue-eyed unknown Sasha  
Sokolovs  
Will smile at me from the unfamiliar  
photographs (15).

בלילות ארוכים, במשטת ילדים, בציון הגואלת  
הוא רדף אחרי, סביב עץ הלבנה זק המג  
הייתי לו אור לגויים  
והוא הנה לי ילדות למזכרת  
של כל מה שהבטח נאין.  
ובחיים אחרים, כשאחפש אותו בפייסבוק  
להשקיש שלקבות מהמצות  
עשרות סשה סקלוב זרים תכולי עינים  
תזכרו לי מתמונות נכריות (15).





The quote from the Russian rock song is, then, an expression in the language of the babushka. In a satirical, sharp parodic poem *Shura sings a song* (as in the Hebrew expression “Sara sings a song”) the figure of the poet appears with the name Shura, one of the Russian names derived from the name Alexander, Alex, which makes the protagonist the opposite double of the poet. She “gushes poetically” “in the promised land” “in the language of the diaspora”, who “sings of roots” and is perceived by the sabras as having “faultlessly integrated here”, while “the parents clean for others” (38–39). Here “a sad, old, painful Russian song” (38–39) is a stereotypical, caricatural image of the imagined literary Russianness that is meant to silence the real pain of the parents and the guilt feelings of the children: “No one blames” (38–39). Finally, the successful “integration” of the protagonist is also revealed as a lie, her “Russian song”, like the earrings from the above poem, symbolically fused into her flesh, becomes “a speaking voice”, when she no longer sings, but rather “screams from the cage” (38–39). This cage, into which the Russian poet has closed herself, is the cruel, actual reality, in the face of which the Russian song is merely an illusion and a falsehood. In the poem *Grandma cooked a crucifixion* (the parody of the Hebrew *Grandma cooked porridge* and of the Russian *Magpie-crow cooked porridge*), the flash of memory from childhood about a game, which was intended to educate the child and make her feel guilty, leads to a self-characterization that sounds as if it refers to the present, provocative and goading, somewhat clown-like, somewhat serious: “A very bad little girl” (17).

In the poem *My Gulag*, the Soviet emblems, like “Grandfather Lenin”, “Father Stalin” and “Gulag” are intended to signify the reason for the silence that links her mother and father: “The cold in Karelia unites / silent memories, / a *corrective labor camp* / with his daughter” (47)<sup>32</sup>. And this silence is intended to cast light on the reason for her silence towards her daughter, her refusal to tell here, in the Israeli present. The title of the poem — my gulag — further underscores the mechanism of appropriating the historical Russian or Soviet signs for the purpose of metaphorizing or mythifying them, establishing the Israeli-immigrant subjectivity, which contains within it its frustration and pride. Thus the historical phenomenon of the gulag as a “corrective labor camp” becomes a poetical, philosophical and *ars poetica* image, to characterize the existential distress of the protagonist

<sup>32</sup> “הקור בקרליה מאגד / זכרונות שותקים, / בין מחנה עבודתה לתקוה, לבין בתו” (47)

as an immigrant, and to characterize the poet herself as a prisoner of her artistic and social work to better humanity and the world — a brave and quite provocative analogy (although the comparison of the artist to a worker, slave or prisoner is not rare in literature).

Another example — *Novy God*, the poem and the concept that presents the new year that begins on the eve of December 31, the secular family holiday that is much beloved by immigrants from the Soviet Union. The system of the signifiers of this holiday is breaking apart, and in the words of the protagonist that collapse serves as a bleak picture of the dissolution of the family. Thus in the poem, *Brothers*, she “draws yolkas [spruce trees] with a star of David” (53), and she is most amazed in *Novy god*:

I decorated their tree.	קשטתי את העץ שְׁלָהֶם.
Not with the usual ritual	לא בשָׂקֶס הַרְגִיל
Nor with the right intention [...]	וְלֹא בְכוּנָה הַנְכוּנָה. [...]
What will I pass on [to my children]	מָה אֶעֱבִיר [לִילְדֵי] מִלְבַּד מִרְדָּף עָמָר,
other than a barren pursuit,	חֲטוּט בְּתוֹף עֵבֶר.
A search into the past,	שְׂבָר צָר (73).
A narrow fragment (73).	

Thus the tree of New Year denotes the absence of the festive meaning of itself, signifies its death: “I excel in reading the inscriptions on tombstones” (53). With these bitter words we can summarize, the character of a Russian signifier in Alex Rif’s poetry, as demonstrated in *Silly Girl of the Regime*: an inscription on a tombstone.

### **The Snow of Metaphors** ***Ink of Snow*, by Nadia-Adina Rose**

Unlike Alex Rif, Nadia-Adina Rose, a painter and poet, immigrated to Israel as an adult, at the age of twenty-two, and thus does not belong to the generation one and a half. For her, as someone who stammers from childhood, the decision to write poetry in Hebrew arose from the desire not to hear her language<sup>33</sup>. Whereas Alex Rif’s protagonist is a merry clown, Rose’s protagonist in her book of poetry *Ink of Snow (Dio shel sheleg)*<sup>34</sup> is a sad clown: “The globe turns and turns / between the stars / like a snowball / and

<sup>33</sup> N.-A. Rose, Lecture given at Bar-Ilan University, 18 Dec. 2019.

<sup>34</sup> N.-A. Rose, *Ink of Snow* (Hebrew), Halycon, Tel Aviv 2015. The page numbers will be cited in parentheses in the body of the text.

I with a nose of carrot / in its center" (*Negative*, 101)<sup>35</sup>. Rose's circus clown is metaphoric and, unlike Rif's social orientation, hers is one large existential metaphor, the grotesque *danse macabre*. In the poem *Aunt Leah*, the elderly aunt is compared to the whipped cream on the cake whose layers are her dead relatives (16). The protagonist mourns the death of her sister in the poem *Unicycle*:

I am the clown	אני הליצנית
Appearing on a unicycle	המופיעה על חד אפן
Since you went away.	מאז לכתך.
A smile stretches over my face	חיךך על פני מתוך
Like a trapeze.	פטרפז.
I juggle balls of words	מלהטטת בכדורי מלים
And lose those	ומאבדת את אלו
That express your name.	שמבטאים את שמך.
There is no counterweight	אין שווי משקל
For my longing (73).	לגעגועי (73).

In the poem *I didn't believe*, the medical clown tells the protagonist that she is funnier than him, and the next day her father dies, and his face is covered with a sheet "like once when he played hide and seek [with her]" (39)<sup>36</sup>. Thus she completes the clownlike transformation: "A red nose / mismatched socks — / I put on the big / shoes of death" (39)<sup>37</sup>.

The loss is confusion, and even time itself is befuddled, its hand "fumbling in confusion / over the letters RIP" (66)<sup>38</sup>. The carnivalesque transgressive reversal in Rose's work is tragic, fragile and very cautious as in the poem in memory of her sister who was killed in a terrorist attack: "I do not stand / when the siren sounds / I go with you / on bus number 19" (68)<sup>39</sup>. Or as in the poem *I Searched*, that confuses joy and sorrow, finding and loss: "I walked about / back and forth / did not see [...] I was so glad / I found / your grave" (69)<sup>40</sup>. The poet's intuition perceives the profound mythic link between the violence of the carnivalesque turnabout, the wearing of the mask and the violence of the loss of identity, life and meaning. The violence forms the new text, and in it the letters and stones, the bodies and signs, the relations between them, which are given expression grammatically and visually, are objects that have an identical ontological status:

<sup>35</sup> "כדור הארץ מתגלגל / בין הכוכבים / ככדור שלג / נאני עם אף של גזר / במקרקזו" (תשליל, 101)

<sup>36</sup> "כמו פעם כששחק [אתה] מחבואים" (39)

<sup>37</sup> "אף אדם, / גרבים לא תואמים – / נקנסתי לנעלים / הגדולות של המנת" (39)

<sup>38</sup> "מגשששת במבוכה / על האותיות / תנצבה" (66)

<sup>39</sup> "אני לא עומדת / בצפירה / נוסעת אהך / באוטובוס קו 19" (68)

<sup>40</sup> "ההסתובבתי / הלוך ושוב / לא ראיתי [...] כל כך שמחתי / מצאתי / את קברך" (69)

Tombstones crowd	מצבות מצטופפות
Like acronyms	כְּרֵאשֵׁי תְבוּחַת
Of a man's life.	שֶׁל חַיֵּי אָדָם.
The narrow path between them	הַשְּׁבִיל הַצָּר בֵּינֵיהֶן
In unvoveled spelling, sums up	מְסַכֵּם בְּכֵתִיב הַסָּר
The transition	אֶת הַמַּעְבָּר
From here	מִפֹּה
To there.	לְשָׁם.
There I stand in front of you	שָׁם אֲנִי עוֹמֵדָת מוֹלְךְ
And the soles of my feet	רַגְלֵי וְכַפּוֹת רַגְלֵי
Like apostrophes	פְּגִישִׁים
Before the last	לִפְנֵי הָאוֹת
Letter (71).	הָאֶתְרוּגָה (71).

That is how Rose's central poetic strategy, which can be defined as the use of ontological metaphors, is expressed. Here is another distinct example from the poem *On the thirtieth day*:

The last rain	הַגֶּשֶׁם הָאֶתְרוּן
Came down [from the heavens]	יָרַד מֵהַשָּׁמַיִם] [מֵהַשָּׁמַיִם]
Like a captain	כְּרֵב חוֹבֵל
From the sinking ship.	מֵהַאֲנִיָּה הַטּוֹבֵעֵת.
I swayed from side to side	הִתְנוּעַעְתִּי מִצֵּד לְצֵד
On the deck of the kaddish	עַל סִפּוֹן הַקַּדִּישׁ
Between Aramaic clods of earth and the lawn (70).	בֵּין רִגְבֵי אַרְמִיית לְדִשָּׁא (70).

While the first four preparatory lines contain anthropomorphic mythopoesis with the comparison image at the center and the double meaning of the Hebrew word *yarad* (came down), the last three lines create a pure metaphor — “deck of the kaddish” — which combines several synecdoches: ship – kaddish, sways of the worshipper – movements of the sailor, the heavens – the land, the dead language – lawn of the cemetery. The exaggerated metaphors in Rose's poetry can be explained by the desperate desire to create continuity, to unite fragments of reality — objects, relations, words, thoughts, pictures and facts. Thus poetry supposedly meant to advocate crisis and absence turns out to be mythopoetic — neo-romantic and decadent, surprising in its poetic uniformity and in the world picture it offers — a world in which everything resembles everything, is connected to everything, is at one with everything (opposites and contrasts are part of this uniformity). From the poet's vantage point, this total metaphoric uniformity enables recognition, understanding, remembrance and learning, as in the poem *History*, in which the protagonist learns history through her grandmother's snores that enter into her dreams (13). Then in the dream the grandmother's image turns into a metaphor of the history that inspires historical truth:

Daydreaming	סקרורית
I gazed at the colorful blanket	בהיתי בפשיקה הצבעונית
That covered her tiny body	המכסה את גופה הזעיר
Like flowers on a battlefield.	כפרחים את שדה הקרב.
I was afraid that she	פחדתי שלא
Would not return in the morning, but would stay	תשוב בבקר, שתשאר
In that same war	באותה המלחמה
In which she lost my grandfather (13).	בה אבדה את סבי (13).

Like the figures of the grandmother and the mother in Rif's poetry, this grandmother is silent during the day, but in her case there is no need for talk, because she herself — her body, her position, her visibility — turn into a hieroglyph, a pictogram that tells the story of her participation in the World War II and her loss. It is a mythopoetic story, in which the grandmother is likened to the earth, she spends her nights with her dead husband, and hence already in her lifetime (in the protagonist's dreams) belongs to the other world. Materialistic mythification of the body is also evident in other poems by Rose. In the poem *Naptime*, the body is likened to an article of clothing, existence — to a hem in the clothing (20). Another examples: "I wear time like socks, / put on to my face / another pair of wrinkles" (*First rain*, 23)<sup>41</sup>; "The hand of the train twists / into the sleeve of the movement, / its elbow shoves aside who I was" (*Trip*, 24)<sup>42</sup>; "I shake expressions off my face / wear a bathing cap. / No one will recognize" (*Daytime buttons*, 27)<sup>43</sup>; "High voltage lines / on my forehead / I walk about on them / back and forth" (*Voltage lines*, 43)<sup>44</sup>. In these examples, the carnivalesque penchant for confusion, the wearing of masks and loss or blurring of identity is very pronounced, a tendency that entralls the protagonist (or perhaps also the poet herself) far more than the definition of identity.

Nonetheless, the identity that derives from dreams and memories does find its expression. Thus in the poem *1972*, from which the title of the whole book is taken, and in which the protagonist recalls her father: "Trees dipped in the white ink of snow [...] the Russian hat on your head / like the title of a folktale / you taught me to read" (93)<sup>45</sup>. The metaphor unites body, clothing, writing and text, and creates the continuity of remembrance, learning, observing and reading. The protagonist learns history through her grandmother's snores and blanket, reads the folk tales through

<sup>41</sup> "אני גורבת את הזמן / מושקת על פני / עוד זוג קמטים" (יורה, 23)

<sup>42</sup> "יד הרקבת מתפתלת / בשרוויל התנועה, / מרפקה דוחק / את מי שהייתי" (נסיעה, 24)

<sup>43</sup> "מנערת פני מהבעות / חובקת כובע גם. / אף אקד לא וזהה" (כפתורי יום, 27)

<sup>44</sup> "קני מתח גבוהים / על מצחי / אני מתהלקת עליהם / הלוד נשוב" (קווי מתח, 43)

<sup>45</sup> "עצים טבילים בדיו לבן של שלג [...] הכובע הרוסי על ראשי / פכותרת לאגדה. / שלמדת אותי לקרא" (93)

her father's hat and learns to write through the wintery body: trees like pens, snow like a white page in a notebook, tracks of sleds mark the lines on the page, the father is the one who "dictates" the text (93). Although the ink is white, the pictogram drawn with it is not invisible, nor does it signify absence. On the contrary, the snow is the main identifying code in Rose's book (much as it is in her paintings and installations). The snowfall appears as the image of immigration (*Immigration*, 92), the snowflakes are "trapped" in "language" (*Stutters*, 96), the protagonist compares herself to a snowman in the example cited above (*Negative*, 101), the snowfall is likened to a resurrection of the dead, and the protagonist, "wrapped in layers / like many generations", goes out "to welcome the souls" (*Resurrection of the dead*, 105)<sup>46</sup>. The poem *Backing up data* presents the processes of remembrance and writing in a metaphorical form:

A winter screen updates	מסך חורפי מעדכן
A storm above Jerusalem.	סערה מעל ירושלים.
From a non-computerized past	מעבר לא מחשב
An order is sent to touch	נשלחת הוראה לגעת
Frozen flakes of information	בפתימי מידע קפואים
Of my childhood.	של ילדותי.
I press on Back	לוחצת על Back
Move over to Russian	עוברת לרוסית
Fill out memory cards	ממלאה כרטיסי זכרון
With the snow	בשלג
Print my footsteps	מדפיסה את עקבותי
On a page (102).	על דף (102).

One can observe the difference between Rose's and Rif's poetry: While in Rif's poems we discern psychological realism, Rose's can be characterized as mythopoetic symbolism. Rose replaces the direct representation of the signifiers of childhood with material and physical metaphors; historical truth with metaphorical truth<sup>47</sup>; storytelling with atmosphere. This gives rise to another difference between her poetry and Rif's: since Rose's poetics are not based on direct mimetic representation, she does not turn the representation into simulation, the Russian past into simulacra. This past has no plot narrative, but it does have a solid ontological presence. It is white, fine and powdery like snow, its form more like an area, blanket or lawn, a chaotic fractal, rather than like any structure. But it is built into the "hardware" of reality like a memory card in

<sup>46</sup> "צטופה שִׁבּוּת / כְּמוֹ דוֹרוֹת רַבִּים, יוֹצֵאת לְקַבֵּל אֶת פְּנֵי הַנְּשֻׁמוֹת" (תחיית המתים, 105)

<sup>47</sup> P. Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: The Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. R. Czerny, K. McLaughlin, J. Costello, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1977, p. 291–302.

a computer. Unlike Rif, Rose does not need the “language of the babushka”, to conceal one language within another, because all her languages are interconnected within the non-hierarchical area of the metaphor, of the “internet of everything” in which everything is linked to everything. The snow, like rhizome<sup>48</sup>, is the metaphorical network of the unifying meaning of the objects in reality, the images in the memories and the lyrical “footsteps” on the pages of the book. Although the poet refers to the subject of time on numerous occasions, in the network, time has nearly no validity: “I sit in the first / row / like in the front of time / there is scarcely any scenery / to distinguish between past / and future” (*Year-end play*, 107)<sup>49</sup>. The consciousness is presented here as if on the stage of the theater of the absurd: “The kaleidoscope of the stage devours / the characters once again” (107)<sup>50</sup>. In space-time covered with snow, the boundaries of personality and identity are also effaced. This situation makes it possible to create picturesque images and complex characters: “Holding on to the school chair / delicate / memorizing the monologue / of my childhood” (107)<sup>51</sup>. Thus in the metaphors, the boundaries between contents, subjects and signifiers melt, are erased, since, on the one hand, the content of that “monologue” is not presented, and on the other, the discourse itself, the book in its entirety becomes a monologue of the childhood<sup>52</sup>.

<sup>48</sup> G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. B. Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1987, 3–25.

<sup>49</sup> “אני יושבת בשורה / הראשונה / כבתזית הזמן. / כמעט אין תפאורה / להבחין בין עבר / לעתיד” (הצגת סוף השנה, 107)

<sup>50</sup> “קלדוסקופ הבמה טורף / את הדמיות מקדש” (107)

<sup>51</sup> “אוחזת בכסא בית ספר / עדין / משננת את המונולוג / של ילדותי” (107)

<sup>52</sup> Translated from Hebrew by Haya Naor.