

“Something about the Critic’s Taste”: Leah Goldberg’s Cultural and Literary Critiques in *Davar Leyeladim*

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In her essay, “Something about the Child’s Taste” (1943a), Leah Goldberg claims that most children are inclined toward a sentimental and mawkish taste which she identifies as “kitsch.” However, she adds that: “The good thing about children’s taste is that it’s flexible; the child has an inherent imagination which can be influenced and guided in the right direction” (Goldberg, 1943a, pp. 55-56). In addition, Goldberg states that it is the role of those adults who have a fine taste in the arts to guide the child’s taste.

Goldberg’s prolific work in the field of children’s literature indicates that she considered herself as belonging to this group of adults. From 1936—one year after she immigrated to Israel—until 1943, she published more than 500 texts in *Davar Leyeladim* (*Davar for Children*), the leading children’s magazine of the time. Goldberg also served as the magazine’s associate editor, preparing its poetic sections for publication.¹ Apart from the children’s poems that she composed and the texts she translated, she published dozens of stories in *Davar Leyeladim*, and wrote short essays and even stories for comic strips. But, her desire to influence the taste of young readers was most evident in her cultural and literary critiques.

Critiques of children’s literature were then—as they are today—quite a unique genre. In this essay I will focus on Goldberg’s critical writing for children, examining the texts she chose to write about as well as the cultural events and artists she chose to introduce to the

¹ In August 1943, Goldberg left her position as sub-editor at *Davar Leyeladim* for a job in *Mishmar*, the journal of Hashomer Hatzair Movement (from Goldberg’s letter to Itzhak Yatziv, Aug. 11, 1943b). She did, however, continue to publish in *Davar Leyeladim* at a reduced capacity.

young readers of *Davar Leyeladim*. I will also address the distinctive manner in which these critiques were written, which exemplifies Goldberg’s central position as a “tastemaker” in the local field of children’s culture in *Eretz Israel*.²

The *Eretz Israel* literary field in the 1930s-1940s

Background:

In the 1930s and 1940s, the literary field in *Eretz Israel* was highly polarized, both ideologically and aesthetically. On one hand, the political atmosphere in the *Yishuv*³ demanded a fervent commitment to the Zionist cause (as implemented mainly by the Labor Movement), and in the literary context this was translated into a dictate to publish ideologically-motivated texts. On the other hand, and in opposition to the above zealous movement, some writers advocated a depoliticized, autonomous writing idiom dedicated to universal and aesthetic values. During the 1930s, and especially after the Arab revolt in Palestine (1936-1939) and with WWII on the horizon, the entire literary scene in *Eretz Israel* began leaning toward an ideological theme of recruitment for the Zionist cause. This call for ideological literary works was mainly presented in realistic novels and short stories of the time, while lyrical and symbolist poetry were associated with “aesthetic autonomy” (Gertz, 1988, pp. 70-90, 108-110).

Leah Goldberg was a member of a writers’ group called *Yakhdav* (*Together*), which included poets such as Avraham Shlonsky, Nathan Alterman and Avraham Halfi. They viewed themselves as part of the European Modernist movement of that time. During the 1930s, *Yakhdav* published a literary journal, *Turim* (*Columns*), which in its early years represented a tendency for literary forms whose motif

² A traditional Hebrew name for the *Land of Israel* and part of the official Hebrew name of Mandatory Palestine.

³ The term *Yishuv* refers to the Jewish settlement in *Eretz Israel* under the British Mandate.

was “art for art's sake.” This direction started to change in the late 1930s, when members of *Turim* began to incorporate ideological and political elements into their texts. Nevertheless, *Turim* also continued to publish non-politicized lyrical-symbolist poetry as it had done in its early years (Gertz, 1988, pp. 108-110; Zviely, 1997).

Ideologically-committed literature was the prevalent strand in children's literature during the 1930s. The majority of texts for children aimed to create new role models for young Jewish children of the *Yishuv*. In the novels of many of these writers for children, such as, Eliezer Smoli, Tzvi Lieberman-Livne, Yemima Avidar-Tchernovitz and others, the protagonists were idealized versions of a young *Eretz Israeli* Zionist child. Usually this protagonist was the leader of a group of children and he or she would guide them through—or experience by him or herself—adventures in the new land, often taking part in the efforts to build and defend it (Arbel, 1994, pp. 13-16, 35-66; Shavit, 1998, pp. 439-465).

Many of the works published in *Davar Leyeladim* were ideological and Zionist-oriented. However, the magazine also consistently included works by authors who advocated a depoliticized aesthetic, devoted solely to artistic ideals. By doing so, the magazine functioned as a literary center in which Modernist writers who had gained a key position in the adult literary field could achieve a similar status in children's literature. *Davar Leyeladim* published works by Goldberg and other members of her literary group, such as Shlonsky and Alterman, as well as poems by Anda Pinkerfeld-Amir and psychological poetry for children composed by Miriam Yalan-Shteklis. Most of their poems did not deal with Zionist and Labor Movement themes.⁴ The Modernists tried to create a new classical canon for children that would be based on universal and aesthetic

⁴ Although Pinkerfeld-Amir and Yalan-Shteklis were not part of the Modernist group, their children's poetry contained components used by this group in its writing for children, for example, nonsense, lyrical poetry, and rhyming short stories.

principals. This canon was meant to challenge the prevailing canon of the time, which was highly motivated by Zionism and the Labor Movement's set of beliefs and practices (Darr, 2007, pp. 110-117).

As a critic and a poet, Goldberg followed the Modernist principles that featured in her own writings for children. Nevertheless, as an editorial staff member and a writer in *Davar Leyeladim*, she was also attentive to the political requirements of the field in which she worked. During her employment by the magazine, Goldberg published 20 literary and cultural critiques and 15 biographical notes on highly influential artists who represented her artistic taste and the cultural preferences she wanted to instill in her young readers.

Literary criticism in Hebrew journalism

From its early stages, Hebrew journalistic criticism of literature devoted itself to ideological and national objectives. Even the first Hebrew critics in mid-19th century Europe adopted and circulated their social and ideological ideas about literary works. One example is Peretz Smolenskin, the Hebrew-writing Russian-Jewish novelist, who authored such texts in the journal he edited, *Hashakhar* (Golan, 2006, pp. 12-51), in the 1870s and 1880s in Vienna. These ideas were also part of a realist and nationalist trend that developed in the next century and dominated the literary magazines of *Eretz Israel*, as well as the literary supplements of major political papers such as *Davar* and *Al Hamishmar*.⁵

The principal Hebrew critics during the end of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century were also affected by ideological trends. Even David Frishman (1859-1922), who was considered a distinct aesthete, incorporated national and social elements in his critiques (Glasner, 2011, pp. 228-230). Later on, in Israel, the critic

⁵ In regard to literary magazines during the 1930s, see Gertz, 1988; on the cultural role of Israeli newspaper literary supplements, see Neiger, 1999.

Shlomo Zemach (1886-1974) asserted that literary criticism had a national, moral and social role (ibid., p. 228). This type of view was also echoed by the well-known critic, Baruch Kurzweil, who “wrote his critiques out of an overall ideological approach to the society in which the literary work grows.” (ibid., p. 230)

While various aspects of Hebrew children's magazines have already been studied,⁶ the field of Hebrew journalistic literary criticism—essentially written *for children* about children's books—has yet to be thoroughly addressed. This paper offers a preliminary glance into the field by examining the writings of one of the prominent “tastemakers” of this unique genre.

The child Miriam as a critiquing literary construct

The vast majority of critiques published by Goldberg were presented as a dialogue between the children-protagonists and the writer's likeness. In one of the texts, she is even mentioned by name — Leah; in the others, she remains nameless. She is portrayed as an aunt-like figure who brings the children new books to read and discuss. In most of the critiques, Goldberg converses with a girl named Miriam, who gradually becomes the critique's protagonist because she is the individual who reads the books and voices her opinions of them. Similar to the image of Goldberg herself, Miriam is quasi-real and quasi-fictional. This manner of writing brings to mind Goldberg's own prose style in her children's writing, especially her stories “Nissim Venifla'ot” (literally: “Miracles and Wonderful Things,” 1954)⁷ and “Yedidai Merkhov Arnon” (“My Friends from Arnon Street,” 1943). This “aunt,” the writer's counterpart, holds no position of authority over the children (as would a teacher or parent) and is thus free to befriend them and create a more liberated

⁶ See: Ben-Gur, 2010; Darr, 2007; Shavit, 1998; Shikhmanter, 2014.

⁷ “Nissim Venifla'ot” was first published in *Davar Leyeladim* as a series, from vol. 6, no. 4, Nov. 10, 1939, to vol. 6, no. 9, Dec. 15, 1939.

and egalitarian dialogue with them, in this case, on the subject of children's books.

The first critique Goldberg published was of Erich Kästner's *Emil and the Detectives* (1935). It opens with the adult narrating: “Several kids have asked me: What is the most interesting children's book you have read lately? I answered: *Emil and the Detectives* by Erich Kästner.”⁸ Later on, she explains to one of the children why she thinks this is a good book despite the fact that it belongs to a genre she does not like, namely, the detective story.⁹ Her next critique is of the book, *Bnei Hayoreh* (*The Sons of the First Rain*, 1937), by Eliezer Smoli, and it opens as follows: “I entered the room and found Miriam lying supine on the floor, her legs raised and her head resting on her elbows, engrossed in the pages of a new book. What are you reading, Miriam? I asked. The new book by Eliezer Smoli, *Bnei Hayoreh*, she answered and went back to her reading.”¹⁰ The rest of the critique is a dialogue between Goldberg and Miriam, the latter explaining and enumerating the book's virtues and shortcomings. It concludes with Goldberg expressing her agreement with Miriam.

Most of Goldberg's critiques are reminiscent of the *Bnei Hayoreh* piece with the pattern repeated in which it is Miriam who voices her opinion of the books, and not the critic-author herself. Presenting the figure of Miriam as the literary critic, while Goldberg merely provides the books and the opportunity to engage in dialogue about them, was meant to lead Goldberg's young audience to identify with the young critic. This empathy with the child critic contributes to the molding of the readers' literary taste far more effectively than an adult merely pontificating about the need to read a certain book,

⁸ Goldberg, *Davar Leyeladim*, vol. 1, no. 11, Dec. 3, 1936, p. 14. Citations of the primary sources around which this paper revolves, i.e., Goldberg's critiques in *Davar Leyeladim*, will be enumerated in the footnotes to avoid overextension of the bibliography section.

⁹ Discussion of the content of the critiques themselves and their subjects takes place below. The focus of this portion is on how they are written.

¹⁰ Goldberg, *Davar Leyeladim*, vol. 3, no. 19, Aug. 19, 1937, p. 9.

or telling the children why he or she liked it—as in Goldberg's first and exceptional critique of *Emil and the Detectives*.

Furthermore, writing the critique as a form of prose rather than a direct expression of opinion by an older critic blurs the lines between fiction and reality. Goldberg breaks the predetermined genre rules of prose and critique. The genre rules of journalistic critical writing dictate a direct voicing of opinion by the critic in regard to a certain text or event, even if the reader is young. In prose intended for children, however, the author directs the readers toward the desired messages by creating identification with the protagonists. Goldberg combines the two genres in her critiques. This method of writing renders the boundaries between reality and fiction indistinct, thus intensifying the direction of the child-reader's tastes.

Another prominent element in Goldberg's critiques is the existence of a dialogue, albeit fictional, between an adult and a child. The adult, in this case, Leah Goldberg, listens to the child's opinion and respects his or her thoughts and views. This complies with the Labor Movement's educational ideology, which attempted to establish equality between children and adults. This equality was represented by the democratic and informal relations between teacher and students (Dror, 1994, pp. 107-109, 119-120). However, since Miriam is in fact a figment of Goldberg's imagination, it is Goldberg who fashions the child's taste, building Miriam up as a sort of ideal reader according to her (Leah's) own tastes. Goldberg even openly writes that the normative child's natural inclination frequently veers toward what she defines as "bad" taste and therefore requires guidance by adults who are connoisseurs of fine taste themselves (Goldberg, 1943a, p. 56). The dialogues at the center of the critiques present the tastes of both the adult, Goldberg, and Miriam, the child; they are even portrayed as entwined together, however, the two tastes in actual fact reflect that of the solitary

writer, Leah Goldberg.

Therefore, it seems as if Goldberg essentially sought to camouflage the critic's role as a cultural agent who is responsible for shaping children's literary tastes by putting emphasis on the role of the young child in the process of their cultural education. Furthermore, Goldberg did not sign these critiques with her full name, but rather used her initials in different variations. Her signature obfuscates the critic's true identity — is it Goldberg or Miriam? —thus blurring the distinction between reality and fiction in the dialogue embodied in her critiques. Devising these critiques as a sort of prose or reportage also blurs the boundaries between the artistic endeavor itself —the writing of the books, the subjects of these critiques —and the critiques, which function as compact literary creations in their own right.

A book about everything: The child as autodidact and the book as a teacher substitute

According to Goldberg's critiques, the central element in fashioning the children's taste is to provide them with a broad general education and to teach them to conduct unmediated dialogues with texts. Goldberg brings most of the books which Miriam reads herself and usually Miriam finishes them quite quickly. In their subsequent discussions, Goldberg listens to Miriam mostly refraining from influencing the child's opinion during the conversation or reading. Therefore, although Miriam's positions are written and conceived by Goldberg herself, she makes sure to create the girl as an independent, critical reader, who does not need an adult to mediate the text for her.

A review of the books that make up the entire focus of her critiques reveals that six of the 25 texts and cultural events that Goldberg herself recommends or brings for Miriam to read are linked to world culture and general reading. Goldberg also published 16

essays on major personages in the fields of art and culture whose work she sought to introduce to children via *Davar Leyeladim*. Together, these essays and her critiques created a cultural canon for children.¹¹

In a critique titled “Tshurat Hanukah” (“Hanukah Gift”),¹² Miriam’s brother receives a book on the Hasmoneans, which their father then reads to the two siblings. This follows Miriam’s complaint that she has been told the story of the Hasmoneans a great many times at school, but her real desire would be to learn from the pages of a book, and not in the closed confines of a classroom. As a general rule, Goldberg encourages the children to achieve self-education by means of books, and not from the classroom or teacher. The latter are consistently absent from her critiques, as well as from her poems and stories in *Davar Leyeladim*.

In another critique, Leah recommends that Miriam read a historical atlas of *Eretz Israel* (1936) that also includes the depiction of Biblical events.¹³ This is after the young girl asks for a serious book she can study and read over and over again. Goldberg complies, taking her to the bookstore so that the girl can see for herself how useful the book really is. Studying the Bible and its connection to the Zionist settlement of *Eretz Israel* was central to Zionist conceptions of history, as stressed in the educational system that evolved during the *Yishuv* period (Shapira, 1992, pp. 155-179). Goldberg,

11 It bears mentioning in this context that *Davar Leyeladim* published essays on different personages by writers such as: Jacob Fichman, who wrote about Yosef Haim Brenner, vol. 1, nos. 8-9, April 23-30, 1936; and Chaim N. Bialik, vol. 1, no. 18, July 9, 1936; Aryeh Lerner who wrote about Louis Pasteur, vol. 2, no. 10, Sept. 30, 1936; Bracha Habas who wrote about Moshe Beilinson, vol. 2, no. 10, Nov. 26, 1936; or Itzhak Yatziv who wrote about Benjamin Ze’ev Herzl, vol. 5, no. 13, July 14, 1938; and many more. A review of these texts demonstrates that they combine essays about prominent artists alongside Zionist leaders and major international scientists. As I show below, the personages Goldberg chose to write about were mainly European artists whose texts she admired, as she herself asserts in her essays.

12 Goldberg, *Davar Leyeladim*, vol. 2, no. 12, Dec. 10, 1936, p. 9.

13 Goldberg, *Davar Leyeladim*, vol. 11, no. 21, Sept. 11, 1941, p. 335.

in this instance, fulfills her educational role on the pages of the *Davar Leyeladim* while at the same time she seems to challenge the system itself. For, although she introduces the historical conception that was desirable during that period in children’s education, she simultaneously entreats Miriam to study these ideas by and for herself, and not at school.

In a critique entitled “Sefer al Hakol” (“A Book about Everything”), Miriam declares that if it were her birthday, she would ask for a book about everything — animals, stars, the human body, and authors.¹⁴ Goldberg explains that such a book, in fact, exists — it is called an encyclopedia, and she brings her the first volume of *Encyclopedia Ne’urim* (an encyclopedia designed for youth), which had just been published (1938). Although pleased, Miriam points out that it is not really about everything, and Goldberg explains that this is only the first volume, so Miriam will be able to read much more in the following volumes. Leah Goldberg in fact suggests that Miriam should undertake her schooling independently, using the encyclopedia to broaden her horizons in whichever direction she chooses.

The encouragement to engage in autonomous education and the broadening of one’s horizons appears in other forms in Goldberg’s writing for *Davar Leyeladim*. Among these are essays she published about famous personages, including the giants of European literature she adored and from whom she drew inspiration. Often her essays were accompanied by a translation of a short piece of the writer’s work, allowing children to sample some of their remarkable creations. She wrote synopses of some 16 artists (writers and painters): Heinrich Heine, S. Ben-Zion, Maxim Gorky, Mordechai Zvi Mane, Alexander Pushkin, Mark Twain, Emile Zola, Rembrandt van Rijn, Hans Christian Andersen, Honoré Daumier,

14 Goldberg, *Davar Leyeladim*, vol. 5, no. 2, April 28, 1938, p. 15.

Marc Chagall, Jacob Lerner, Selma Lagerlöf, Leo Tolstoy, Molière and Chaim Nachman Bialik. She also published two essays on Zionist politicians: Moshe Beilinson and Henrietta Szold; and three essays on scientists who made their mark: Guglielmo Marconi, inventor of the telegraph, explorer Roald Amundsen and famous chemist and physicist Marie Curie.¹⁵

A considerable number of European writers feature in Goldberg's essays yet only very few are known as children's writers (e.g., Andersen and Lagerlöf), while others occasionally wrote children's literature alongside their main work for adults (such as Tolstoy and Gorky). Her articles briefly describe the artists' biographies, stressing the hardships of their lives and the major themes of their work. Quite noticeably, Goldberg attempts to tie the essays to a world familiar to the children, encouraging them to identify with these artists. Often she writes about the artists' relationship to Judaism, such as Gorky's helpfulness and affection toward Jews, Zola's connection with the Dreyfus affair, and Heine's conversion from Judaism to Christianity (which she describes as having been inevitable). Moreover, she stresses in her articles how these artists yearned for liberty and peace, for instance, in her depictions of Pushkin and Heine.

15 Heinrich Heine, vol. 1, no. 10, May 14, 1936, pp. 7-8; S. Ben-Zion, vol. 1, no. 11, May 21, 1936, p. 7; Maxim Gorky, vol. 1, no. 15, June 18, 1936, p. 11; Mordechai Zvi Mane, vol. 2, no. 25, Nov. 5, 1936, p. 14; Alexander Pushkin, vol. 2, no. 25, March 11, 1937, pp. 4-6; G. Marconi, vol. 3, no. 16, July 29, 1937, p. 14; Mark Twain, "The Prince and the Pauper," vol. 4, no. 11, Dec. 16, 1937, pp. 12-13; Emile Zola, vol. 4, no. 16, Oct. 20, 1938, pp. 13-14; Rembrandt van Rijn, vol. 5, no. 5, May 19, 1938, pp. 1-3; Hans Christian Andersen, vol. 6, no. 1, Oct. 20, 1938, pp. 7-8; and vol. 6, no. 2, Oct. 27, 1938, pp. 12-13; Honoré Daumier, vol. 7, no. 3, April 27, 1939, p. 7; Marc Chagall, vol. 8, no. 13, Jan. 4, 1940, p. 6; Jacob Lerner, vol. 8, no. 23, March 21, 1940, p. 8; Selma Lagerlöf, vol. 8, no. 23, March 21, 1940, p. 3; Leo Tolstoy, vol. 10, no. 6, Dec. 5, 1940, pp. 1-3; Molière, vol. 10, no. 18, Feb. 27, 1941, pp. 13-14; Chaim Nachman Bialik, the boy, vol. 13, no. 13, Dec. 17, 1942, p. 100; Moshe Beilinson, vol. 8, no. 7, Nov. 23, 1939, p. 2; eighty-year-old Henrietta Szold, vol. 10, no. 8, Dec. 19, 1940, pp. 4-5; Roald Amundsen, vol. 5, no. 15, Aug. 7, 1938, pp. 13-14; Marie Curie, vol. 5, no. 19, Sept. 1, 1938, pp. 13-14; and vol. 5, no. 20, Sept. 8, 1938, pp. 12-13.

In general, the qualities Goldberg chose to stress about these artists reveal her conception of good art —specifically, art appropriate for children. For example, regarding Pushkin, she quotes his detractors, who asked: "How can such simple language be used in poems?" In response, she writes: "They did not know that this language was poetry's exalted language, whose simplicity was the fruit of much labor."¹⁶ It seems that in these lines, Goldberg touched on a subject that troubled her (and would trouble her critics) regarding her own poetry. With respect to Jacob Lerner, a lesser-known, Hebrew Polish-Russian poet, she writes that "indeed many of his poems written for adults may be read, understood and loved by children —there is a cordial tone to them, a love of nature and childhood memories [...] understand that anyone who can faithfully tell [you] about themselves —is also telling you about yourself."¹⁷ This is a rule that Goldberg tried to follow in her own writing as well.

Sometimes she combined these essays with a critique of current cultural affairs. Thus, for instance, her article on Molière opens with Leah and Miriam just leaving the theater after viewing a performance of the play, *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*. In response to Miriam's questions, Goldberg explains about Molière and his work.¹⁸ Similarly, on the occasion of an exhibition of Rembrandt's Biblical-themed paintings at the Tel Aviv Museum, Goldberg broadens the discussion to cover the painter's life and work.¹⁹ In her essays, Goldberg links the children's present to the great artists of the past, so that the children can experience or wish to further acquaint themselves with them after reading her pieces.

Furthermore, six out of the 20 books that Goldberg recommends are texts not originally meant for children, but which in her opinion

16 Goldberg, *Davar Leyeladim*, vol. 2, no. 25, March 11, 1937, p. 5.

17 Goldberg, *Davar Leyeladim*, vol. 8, no. 23, March 21, 1940, p. 8.

18 Goldberg, *Davar Leyeladim*, vol. 10, no. 18, Feb. 27, 1941, pp. 13-14.

19 Goldberg, *Davar Leyeladim*, vol. 5, no. 5, May 19, 1938, pp. 1-3.

may enrich their world. In a general article that she would later on write about children's literature (Goldberg, 1959, pp. 949-957), she presents her view of the influence of adult literature on children who "make it their own." This kind of literature, according to Goldberg, often surpasses in quality the literature written especially for children, as the writer is not concerned mainly with his or her target audience and their reading level, but rather with the things he has to say. In this essay, Goldberg refers to different kinds of literature of this genre — popular writing, fairy tales, and even classics such as *Robinson Crusoe* and *Gulliver's Travels*. Books from this genre were written originally for adults but over the course of time they became well-known children's books. Goldberg even cites classics, such as the epic *Odyssey*, from which children and teenagers can draw much knowledge, but are not considered children's literature.

In her critiques, Goldberg recommends several texts written originally for adults which she thinks can help broaden a child's knowledge. Examples can be found in her critiques of books such as Konstantin Davydov's *Masa'ei Hatziporim (Bird Migrations, 1941)* — a lyrical-scientific book translated from Russian by Shlonsky²⁰ — as well as Valentin Katayev's *Mifras Boded Malbin Ba'ofek* (lit., *A Single Whitening Sail on the Horizon*, transl. version: *A White Sail Gleams, 1942*), in her own translation, recounting the events of the 1905 Russian Revolution.²¹ In one session entitled "Sfarim Khadashim" ("New Books"), Miriam is told that these two books should be held in safekeeping and not passed on to her younger brother, so that she can further develop her understanding of them as she grows up. According to Goldberg, these books, originally meant for adults, are long-term investments. They are literary texts

²⁰ Goldberg, *Davar Leyeladim*, vol. 12, no. 27, March 26, 1942, p. 215.

²¹ *Ibid.* Goldberg omits the fact that it was she herself who translated Katayev's book, and therefore her recommendation of this translation can be seen as an attempt to promote the text and not necessarily introduce it for purely literary reasons.

that challenge the young readers over the course of years, placing the latter in a greater perspective of their own childhood and the setting of the Jewish settlement in *Eretz Israel*.

Therefore, it seems that the child Goldberg sees in her mind's eye is a curious individual and a lover of reading who is interested in learning by him or herself. The adult's role is mainly consigned to exposing the rich worlds of art and culture to the children. It is also evident that in Goldberg's view, it is important to emphasize — with the help of the figure of Miriam — that the desire for reading and learning should take prevalence over the momentary pleasures derived from the types of literature and culture Goldberg perceives as inferior. For example, in a critique she published following the opening of an *ulpana* cinema, she tells Miriam about the nature films and anthropology movies she saw there. Miriam, in response, declares: "As soon as they open [a children's] cinema, I will go! [...] and I will tell my friends to come with me, too. *The Life of the Forest* — that's very interesting. Even more interesting than Shirley Temple!"²²

This last utterance seems less than credible, since Goldberg maintains (as she states in the quote at the beginning of this article) that children in fact tend toward "kitschy" tastes, and it is more plausible that they would prefer watching a light, enjoyable film rather than an enriching, educational nature documentary. Therefore, it seems that Goldberg sometimes presents Miriam as an over-idealized reader or culture consumer. These characteristics do not necessarily square with the writer's desire to present her as the readers' counterpart, or in fact with her own theoretical conception of children's inherent tastes.

²² Goldberg, *Davar Leyeladim*, vol. 5, no. 3, May 6, 1938, p. 14.

In praise of fiction: Realist literature versus legend and adventure

On the whole, during the years Goldberg was active at *Davar Leyeladim*, the journal published texts for children who sought to assimilate the dominant ideology of Zionism and the Labor Movement as well as texts that primarily adhered to universal aesthetic ideals. In the role of a literary and cultural critic who guided and shaped children's tastes, Goldberg selected works that belonged to both types of ideals, with a clear bent for the aesthetic and the universal. Fifteen of the critiques she published dealt with autonomous literary pieces that principally adhered to literary and universal ideals, while only five of them focused on texts that engaged in, directly or indirectly, national or political ideology.

In fact, one of the first critiques Goldberg published addressed a didactic, realist novel penned by Eliezer Smoli, one of the distinct representatives of the generation of writer-teachers who preceded her in the realm of children's literature. The novel is the aforementioned *Bnei Hayoreh* (1937), which deals with a schoolroom of workers' children and is based on a class Smoli had taught at the Tel Aviv's Workers' Children School. *Bnei Hayoreh* clearly conveys the ideological agenda of the Zionist Labor Movement. Although written from the point of view of one of the students, it describes the students' collective experiences, such as, class trips, ceremonies, and work on the school farm—as befitting the requisite agenda.

In Goldberg's critique of the book, Miriam relates to her adult accomplice how she read it with bated breath because it very much reminded her of her own life. However, Miriam then adds: "Maybe this book tries a bit too hard to make us love the land, to be Zionists. We love it anyway. We live on it."²³ Criticism of the distinct

ideological line taken by Smoli, which Goldberg ventriloquizes through Miriam, expresses Goldberg's disapproval of indoctrinated writing whose central goal is the inculcation of Zionist ideals and Labor Movement values.²⁴ However, Goldberg's attitude does not stop her from recommending a reading of the book, of which the children of the period were much enamored. Miriam claims in this article that she identifies with the characters in the book, which is narrated from the perspective of a young girl. Thus, while Goldberg chooses to recommend a book very much in keep with the desired agenda, she nevertheless criticizes the exaggerated fashion in which that agenda is delivered. According to Goldberg, the element of identification and the characters' believability are extremely important in children's literature, and these are qualities positively cited in her critiques of other books as well.

Leah Goldberg's preference for writing from the viewpoint of the child and his or her world while creating characters they can identify with is expressed in her critique of Kästner's *Emil and the Detectives* (1935). She lauds Kästner's book to the children, claiming that the writer had truly brought the lives of the children and the city of Berlin to life for the readers: "When I read a book I love to see the people being described as if they were living before my very eyes, as if I knew them well and believed this is how they act and how they speak [...] It seems like we are taking part in all of the actions of Emil and his friends, that we live with them in Berlin and wish to help them."²⁵ As opposed to Smoli's book, the focus of *Emil and the Detectives* is not ideological or pedagogic, and Goldberg recommends it mainly for its author's humor and because it provides

²³ Goldberg, *Davar Leyeladim*, vol. 3, no. 19, Aug. 19, 1937, p. 9.

²⁴ This disapproval of blatantly Zionistic writing has been discussed in some detail in the context of Goldberg's writing for adults, and is also articulated in her references to her "two homelands" — Israel and Europe (see: Gluzman, 2003; Gordinsky, 2005; Ticotsky, 2006; Weisman, 2012).

²⁵ Goldberg, *Davar Leyeladim*, vol. 2, no. 11, Dec. 3, 1936, p. 14.

children with interest and pleasure. In an essay she wrote for adults about this book, she claims that a beautiful story told to children can achieve much more than a pedagogical narrative where the moral is the most prominent thing on the author's mind (Goldberg, 1935, p. 6).

It is worth mentioning that *Emil and the Detectives* and *Bnei Hayoreh*, despite their marked differences, are actually the exceptions that prove the rule, as they do not belong to the usual literary model Goldberg tended to recommend. Reading her critiques for children in *Davar Leyeladim*, it is clear she prefers children's fairy tales from around the world to the realist genre depicting life in *Eretz Israel*—the prevalent theme of Hebrew children's literature at the time. Subsequently, Miriam is also represented as an avid fan of fairy tales: "'Fairy tales!' exclaimed Miriam and her little nose, which began falling asleep over the plate of salad, rose suddenly upwards. When speaking of interesting fairy tales, Miriam is willing to wake in the middle of the night and ask to be told them, or be given a fairy tale book to read."²⁶

Among the fairy tale books Goldberg recommends in her critiques are: *Amim Mesaprim (Peoples' Tales, 1938)*²⁷—nine Chinese and Arab fairy tales translated by Yitzhak Spivak; "The Nightingale" (1931),²⁸ a Chinese tale reworked by Hans Christian Andersen into a play; and *Asher Haya Velo Haya (What Was and Was Not, 1942)* a book of fairy tales for toddlers by Shaul Tchernichovsky.²⁹ These fairy tales come from different parts of the world (China, Europe and Arabia), for, as I have stated above, Goldberg felt it was important for children to be acquainted with a variety of cultures.

Furthermore, in her essays about artists she mentions the

²⁶ Goldberg, *Davar Leyeladim*, vol. 4, no. 6, Nov. 4, 1937, p. 9.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Goldberg, *Davar Leyeladim*, vol. 12, no. 27, March 26, 1942, p. 215.

²⁹ Ibid.

authors' use of legendary themes in their work, saying that these especially appeal to children. Thus, in regard to Lagerlöf,³⁰ she writes: "[...] few writers are as beloved by both adults and children as this Swedish woman, whose many stories, always veering between legend and reality, have spoken to the heart of man for many years."³¹ About Chagall, she writes: "It often seems to me that of all the painters currently working, Marc Chagall is the children's painter. For, who else but children love the childhood stories of those who have already grown up. And who else but a child understands fairy tales!"³² In addition, fairy tales allow children to break away from the reality surrounding them and become absorbed in a fictional-literary world, an important element in the function of literature according to Goldberg.³³

One of the other books Goldberg recommends, which provides this escapist effect, is *Be'eretz Lobengulu Melekh Zulu (In the Land of Lobengulu King of Zulu, 1940)*, a fictional adventure story in Africa created by Nahum Gutman, her colleague at *Davar Leyeladim*, who handled the journal's aesthetic image. In her critique of the book, she writes: "We are living in hard times, and it's good to have some of this joy that can help us differentiate between the holy and the mundane!"³⁴ In this critique, Goldberg's attitude toward wartime literature is quite clear. In her essay,

³⁰ The author of *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils* (1906) and many other books.

³¹ Goldberg, *Davar Leyeladim*, vol. 8, no. 23, March 21, 1940, p. 3.

³² Goldberg, *Davar Leyeladim*, vol. 8, no. 13, Jan. 4, 1940, p. 6.

³³ Goldberg reworked children's fairy tales written in different parts of the world. These appeared in *Davar Leyeladim* in the years 1939-1943 and half of them were later edited and compiled to form her book, *The Little House* (Ankorim Publishers, 1945). The work on international fairy tales for children can be perceived as a kind of reaction to the events of the war in Europe. To a certain degree, it was an attempt to commemorate the life in the villages of Europe and the entire world by recording certain cultural traditions before they were ruined. At this time, she also published a cycle of poems for adults, "Shir Bakfarim" ("Poem in the Villages", 1942), which some perceive as a preliminary and indirect reaction to the events of the war (Hever, 2000; Rübner, 1980).

³⁴ Goldberg, *Davar Leyeladim*, vol. 9, no. 19, Oct. 3, 1940, p. 15.

"Al Oto Nosseh Atzmo" ("On the Same Subject Itself," Goldberg, 1939, p. 9), Goldberg addresses the elevated status of this writing and the powerful imperative to write about the events of the hour. And yet, she claims that the role of artists is to focus on human and aesthetic subjects even during wartime, to remind us that beauty and goodness continue to exist even in the most difficult of times.

In his book, Gutman creates a fictional world—both beautiful and terrifying—where marvelous things happen, a world that sparks children's imaginations and removes them both from the harsh events of the day and the mundane affairs of their daily life in *Eretz Israel*. Therefore, *Be'erez Lobengulu Melekh Zulu* is, for Goldberg, an example of a desirable children's literature, superseding both the "holy" writing about the harsh events of the day and the "mundane" writing that deals with the everyday concerns of the Hebrew *Yishuv*, bringing with it the beauty and joy of giving one's self wholeheartedly over to fiction.

"O wonder, o wonder, to have my books above and under": Children's rhyming narrative poetry

The works of Modernist writers in the field of Hebrew children's literature in the 1930s and 1940s were based on literary models that stressed the writer's uniqueness alongside the universality and aesthetics of their messages. In addition, the Modernists sought to create a set of motifs in the artistic experience that was shared by both the young reader and the adult writer. The main patterns in the Modernists' works were: nonsense poetry, including many word games whose aim was to amuse through humor and puns; children's rhyming stories where humor and linguistic virtuosity replaced the ideological messages prevalent during that period; and lyrical poetry for children, a model that focused on private, emotional and

personal experiences, and not on the collective that, again, was stressed in the texts of that period (Darr, 2008, pp. 139-154).

In her critiques in *Davar Leyeladim*, Goldberg's preference for these models is evident. She especially favored children's rhyming stories, which featured in several books at the time, and which she herself published in *Davar Leyeladim*.³⁵ In two of her critiques, Goldberg recommends two texts written by Pinkerfeld-Amir in this tradition:³⁶ "Gad Ve'dan," a reworking by Pinkerfeld-Amir of Wilhelm Bosch's "Max and Moritz" (1939)³⁷ and "Gad Gamad" ("Gad the Gnome," 1942), a fictional rhyming short story about a gnome and his encounter with a magical mushroom.³⁸ These works deal with subjects that have a universal appeal to children—animals, gnomes and various adventures—and do not describe realistic situations as customary in the ideological literature. A substantial part of the focus of these texts is the rhyme and the pleasure derived from it as well as the enjoyment from the text form that takes the readers to the realms of imagination and fun.

Goldberg also devotes a review essay to Alterman's "Ha'efro'akh Ha'asiri" ("The Tenth Chick," 1943), a humorous rhyming narrative poem about a chick trying its hardest to hatch itself free from its egg.³⁹ The poem's plot, which does not take place within the typical

³⁵ Among Goldberg's texts in this genre are her poem, "The Rascal" (vol. 1, no. 3, March 19, 1936, p. 10), which deals in the adventures of a yellow bear, or a poem-story entitled, "The Birthday Guest" (vol. 4, no. 18, Feb. 3, 1938, pp. 10-11), which is about a tiger who shows up at a girl's birthday party. In addition, there are her translations of stories written by Samuel Marshak in this genre, such as, "The Scatterbrain of Kfar Azar," published first in *Davar Leyeladim* as "The Scatterbrain of Hor Hahar" (vol. 6, no. 17, Feb. 9, 1939, pp. 8-9).

³⁶ Pinkerfeld-Amir did not in fact belong to the Modernist group, but published pieces both in her own books and in *Davar Leyeladim* in the rhyming narrative story format that typified this group's texts for children.

³⁷ Goldberg, *Davar Leyeladim*, vol. 7, no. 19, Aug. 17, 1939, p. 12.

³⁸ Goldberg, *Davar Leyeladim*, vol. 12, no. 34, May 14, 1942, p. 271.

³⁹ Goldberg, *Davar Leyeladim*, vol. 13, no. 29, April 8, 1943, p. 231. Before the book was issued, the poem was published earlier in *Davar Leyeladim*, as Goldberg herself states in the critique. In the latter, she also explains to the children that the book's illustrator, Aryeh Navon, may be known to them from the illustrations of "Efro'akh Bilbul Mo'akh" ("Nonsense

local environs, instead takes the reader to the realms of the Jewish shtetl of Eastern Europe, and to the preparations for the Jewish holiday of Rosh Hashanah, on whose eve the chick finally hatches.⁴⁰

Alterman's humorous rhyming writing style was influenced by the ideas of the Russian children's literature writer, Korney Chukovsky. In the book by the popular Russian poet, *From Two to Five* (1926/1985), Chukovsky analyzed children's linguistic development and formulated 13 guidelines, mainly formalistic, for writing quality rhyming poetry for children. It seems Alterman knew these guidelines and even though he did not adhere to all of the dictates, his book has the imprint of Chukovsky's spirit. Goldberg even mentions, in her review essay of Alterman's "Ha'efro'akh Ha'asiri," that Alterman, the poet who translated Chukovsky's book *Limpopo* (1942), wrote in a similar rhyming narrative style, and that Shoshana, Goldberg's heroine in the critique of Alterman's book, liked it very much.⁴¹ Thus, formalistically, as well as thematically, this story-poem is a distinct representative of the rhyming narrative poetry model, which most commonly does not deal with subjects related to the dominant ideology.

Goldberg herself also translated some of Chukovsky's texts, and in a later essay, "Al Sfat Yeladim" ("On the Language of Children"), she explores the theoretical ideas of *From Two to Five* (Goldberg, 1956, p. 6). Following Chukovsky's ideas, Goldberg describes young readers as sensitive poets who often write poems in simple rhyme and meter. In her critiques, she presents several poems that Miriam or some other child allegedly writes out of the joy of receiving one of the books: "O wonder, o wonder, / to have my books above and under / books you read without end / the best of books is like a

Chick"), which he had published in the weekly with her at that time.

⁴⁰ However, contemporary allegorical allusions to the specific period in which it was written can be found in the poem (see Shamir, 2005, pp. 71-89).

⁴¹ Goldberg, *Davar Leyeladim*, vol. 8, no. 29, April 8, 1943, p. 231.

friend."⁴² Or: "I have the book on Gad the gnome / when I read, I feel at home."⁴³ These naïve poems, reminiscent of the rhymes in the books Goldberg recommended, tell us about her ideal reading process—esthetic and interactive—which invigorates the reading child's senses and encourages him or her to also create and write.

Here and there: Reflections on the tension between Israel and Europe in Goldberg's critiques

Besides dealing with texts that help children escape concrete reality, in her critiques Goldberg frequently relates to texts that combine the childhood experiences of their European authors with *Eretz Israeli* early exploits and events. This model was ascendant during the late 1930s, and increased in popularity after the beginning of World War II (Darr, 2006, pp. 13-23, 91-95). During the war, the "negation of the Diaspora" attitude, which dominated the educational system as well as the larger Hebrew *Yishuv*, began changing into empathy toward the Jews of the Diaspora, especially the Jews of Europe, where most *Yishuv* residents came from (Dror, 2003).

The model of the ideological text which targeted children in pre-WWII *Eretz Israel* operated under the influence of the "negation of the Diaspora" narrative. It usually presented a child protagonist designed according to the image of the new, secular, strong and independent Jew,⁴⁴ or kids who had left the Diaspora behind and became "new Jews" in *Eretz Israel*.⁴⁵ During World War II, children's literature in *Eretz Israel* vacillated between attempts to silence the horrific events taking place in Europe in order to shield the local children, and employ an indirect narrative to describe what was

⁴² Goldberg, *Davar Leyeladim*, vol. 4, no. 10, Dec. 9, 1937, p. 13.

⁴³ Goldberg, *Davar Leyeladim*, vol. 12, no. 34, May 14, 1942, p. 271.

⁴⁴ See, for instance, books by Tzvi Lieberman-Livne, *Oded Hanoded* (*Oded the Wanderer*, 1932), and Yemima Avidar-Tchernovitz's *Shmona Be'ikvot Ekhad* (*Eight in Pursuit of One*, 1944).

⁴⁵ Such as Smoli's *Bnei Hayoreh* (1937), discussed at the beginning of this article.

transpiring there. The last was an effort aimed at creating empathy for the Diaspora Jews, their tradition, culture and hardships (Darr, 2006, pp. 90-91).

One of the methods used to achieve this identification was to tell stories about protagonists from the Diaspora who immigrated to Israel and fondly remembered their past in their European country of birth. One of the prominent books that made this particular connection was Jacob Fichman's *Ayelet Ha'emek (Doe of the Valley, 1942)* which presents the stories of local *Eretz Israeli* children who affectionately remember the landscapes and experiences of their childhoods in the Diaspora (Darr, 2006, pp. 90-91). Goldberg mentions this book in a critique named "Sfarim Khadashim" ("New Books"), in which she and Miriam review the latter's bookshelf and briefly go over the list of books she had recently enjoyed reading or was planning to read in the near future.⁴⁶ The critique does not elaborate on the content of Fichman's book nor offer a discussion of it, however, the mere indication of this book points to Goldberg's interest in it.

Goldberg's interest in literature linking the Jewish *Yishuv* in *Eretz Israel* to Europe, and the Jews of *Eretz Israel* to the Diaspora, is even more distinctly expressed in several other critiques she wrote. Thus she chose to recommend Itzhak Schweiger-Dmi'el's *Kakha Sipru Li (I Have Been Told So, 1938)*⁴⁷ which includes the landmark story, "Simlat Hashabat shel Khanaleh Haktana" ("Hannaleh's Sabbath Dress"), previously published in *Davar Leyeladim*.⁴⁸ This story was written as part of the attempt to invent a Hebrew tradition combining the "here" (*Eretz Israel*) and the "there" (Europe). The story includes elements of traditional Jewish lore ("*ma'asiyah*") although it was written in modern times and combines local *Eretz*

Israeli landscapes with characteristic European scenery. The story brings together an old, Diasporic man carrying a large bag of charcoal on his back, who represents the old tradition, and a young, local girl celebrating the Sabbath in her own way. This creates a link between the Jewish tradition of the Diaspora and the contemporary, secular life of *Eretz Israel* (Darr, 2006, p. 90; Zimmerman, 1992, pp. 137-149).

Indeed, in Goldberg's critique of Schweiger's book, Miriam tells Leah that she especially likes this story. Goldberg's choice to focus on this story indicates her desire to establish its elevated status in contrast to other texts that appear in Schweiger's book, such as the narrative poem, "Haya'ar Ha'afel" ("The Dark Forest"). This latter text, according to Miriam, is not good because it does not belong to a specific genre —it is not really a story and not exactly a poem.⁴⁹ Thus Goldberg, with the help of Miriam's words, clarifies that her recommendation refers to "Simlat Hashabat shel Khanaleh Haktana" and not to the other texts in the book, which do not make the connection between the cultures and also suffer from an inadequate literary quality in her view.

Another book that may be included in this trend, although not explicitly written for children, is Devorah Baron's *Ma Shehaya (What Has Been, 1939)*, which deals with the writer's childhood in Lithuania in a remote Jewish shtetl.⁵⁰ Leah Goldberg proposes that children read this book and become acquainted with their parents' childhood experiences in Europe. In this critique, Miriam is absent, and the recommendation of Baron's book is combined into an essay about Baron herself —a writer Goldberg held in high esteem —accompanied by two short stories by the author. Additionally, Goldberg writes that one of the qualities of Baron's style is her ability to depict a concise and beautiful picture of reality on paper, a necessary quality for good literature.

⁴⁶ Goldberg, *Davar Leyeladim*, vol. 12, no. 27, March 26, 1942, p. 215.

⁴⁷ Goldberg, *Davar Leyeladim*, vol. 4, no. 10, Dec. 9, 1937, p. 13.

⁴⁸ Itzhak Schweiger, *Davar Leyeladim*, vol. 2, no. 20, Feb. 4, 1937, pp. 10-11.

⁴⁹ Goldberg, *Davar Leyeladim*, vol. 4, no. 10, Dec. 9, 1937, p. 13.

⁵⁰ Goldberg, *Davar Leyeladim*, vol. 7, no. 5, May 11, 1939, pp. 4-5.

Summary

Leah Goldberg often gives particular attention to the serious approach that is necessary for writers of children's literature to have toward their craft. This is clearly one of the main criteria she set for herself in her own writing, as well as in her critiques for children. This is evident in an essay she wrote for adults on Kästner's *Emil and the Detectives*: "The writer [Kästner] does not scream from every sentence: 'I'm a child, I'm your friend,' but dares to tell his little readers —'I'm an adult who sees you, the children, as humans, little people, but having all human qualities, I respect you and tell you about yourself in complete earnestness'" (Goldberg, 1935, p. 6).

The similarity, according to Goldberg, between the qualities of an adult and a child is also apparent in her critiques for children. In these articles, she seeks to transform the child into a serious and worldly culture consumer as she would expect of the adult the child is destined to become. Her critical writings posit clear literary and cultural preferences. These include the need to expose children to different world cultures and orient them toward a broad general education, developed mostly by self-teaching, reading, listening, and viewing. As well, Goldberg indicates a preference for fairy tales and for the rhyming narrative poem model, which advances the readers' imagination. Goldberg also directs the children's taste toward a realistic model that combines the contemporary events of children readers together with experiences from far-off lands, especially in Europe.

The manner in which Goldberg guides and forges the tastes of the *Davar Leyeladim* weekly's young readers is mostly implicit and carried out by a part-fictional, part-realistic style of writing. By employing this writing technique, she seeks to create a link between the children and "one of their own," the girl protagonist Miriam. In these critiques, Miriam converses with Goldberg's counterpart, giving Leah her views on the works discussed. The child readers

of the critiques can identify more with the opinionated young protagonist, Miriam, instead of listening to a sermonizing adult. In this manner, the influence of Leah Goldberg on the taste of the child readers is more effective.

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and cultural criticism, he acquired a life-long interest in the tangled connections between culture, class and power. Where his contemporaries among the "scholarship" straightforward records of significant moments and events and the educated taste for experimentation with visual styles and effects. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1979) brought the insights generated by these various programmes of research together, supplemented them with a major survey of popular taste conducted in 1963 and 1967-1968, and integrated the results into a highly innovative theoretical schema. It made an immediate Critique is a literary technique that means to critically evaluate a piece of literary work, or a political or philosophical theory in detail. A critique could be a critical essay, an article evaluating a literary piece, or a review. It may be just like a summary that identifies the central issue, raises questions, takes notice of theoretical and experimental approaches, and reviews the significance of the results. Apart from that, its purpose is to highlight both the shortcomings as well as strengths of a literary piece or a work of art. Moreover, critical evaluation or assessment requires serious literary critics, who have been interpreting the world's greatest novels since Daniel Defoe first put pen to paper. Here are ten critics to remember—but don't expect everything they say to be nice; Harold Bloom. Where best to begin than perhaps the most famous literary critic of them all? The legendary critic previously told the HuffPost that he remembers everything he has ever read. Unfortunately for him this presumably includes *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, which he didn't seem too crazy about. When answering the question "Why read it?" he answered, "Presumably, if you cannot be persuaded to read anything better, Rowling will have to do." Michiko Kakutani. Michiko Kakutani is the Queen of Mean in literary criticism.