# INTRODUCTION
## What to Expect When You're Not Expecting

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אַתְּ לִי בְּשׂוֹרָה נִפְעָמָה, מִצְוָה
עַל מַהוּת אַחֶרֶת לִשְׁמֹר.
אַתְּ לִי פְּגִישָׁה לֹא-צְפוּיָה, צוֹהֶלֶת,
בְּטֶרֶם עוֹד רָאֲתָה אוֹר.

אַתְּ לִי גִּלּוּי סַף רָחוֹק וְנֶעְלָם
שֶׁל וַדַּאי הַחוֹלֵם לִהְיוֹת,
שֶׁל הֲזָיָה עוֹרֶגֶת, מִתְעַטֶּפָה,
עַל מַה שֶּׁלֹּא יוּכַל הֱיוֹת.

אַתְּ קוֹרֵאת, חוֹזֶרֶת לֹא-נִרְאֵית
וָאַעַן לִקְרָאתֵךְ אֲנִי.
טוֹב לִי הֵעָלְמֵךְ מִפָּנַי,
טוֹב לִי הִתְעַטְּפֵךְ בְּדָמִי.

טוֹב לִי בְּסִתְרֵי מֶרְחַקִּים
אֵלַיִךְ לְחַכּוֹת בִּכְדִי.
אַתְּ תִּקְוַת דַּם לִבִּי הַשְּׁלוּחָה
אֶל אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָבוֹא עוֹד לִי.

* * *

To me you are enraptured annunciation, commanding
Another essence to keep.
To me you are un-expected encounter, rejoicing
Ere still the light it did see.

To me you are a discovery's distant vanishing verge
Of a certainty dreaming to be,
Of a yearning delusion, enwrapped
By that which cannot be.

You call, repeat un-seen
And answering you is me.
Good for me your vanishing from me
Good for me your enwrapping silently.

Good for me in secrets-distance
To wait for you in vain.
You are my heart's blood sent hope
For that which will no more come to me.[1]

This poem, written in Hebrew by Yocheved Bat-Miriam in 1930, stages an "un-expected encounter" at the same time as it insists on the impossibility of en-counter, foreclosing future fulfillment. The hyphen in the word *un-expected* in the Hebrew (*lo-tsfuyah*) perfectly holds this paradoxical combination, bringing together the expectation and its negation, which would otherwise be two sep-arate words. In my translation the hyphen separates what would otherwise be a single uninterrupted word, *unexpected*, placing emphasis on the negation, while also making it a homophone for its opposite, inviting *an*-expected encounter. It is in this intricate combination of anticipation and preemptive negation that I recognize this poem as a queerly expectant text. This expectancy is queer in that it resists the future it expects. However, it is the expression of resistance that gives voice to those expectations. Moreover, this queer expectancy works not only forward, but also backward. Texts expressing resistance to the past's expectations refuse to fulfill those expectations, while bringing them into being. Queer expec-tancy, then, is generated not by looking forward, but by looking back, to, and through the past's unfulfilled desires. Challenging biology, linearity, and other hegemonic norms and dictates, queer expectancy creates a backward continuity.

This backward continuity, the act of turning back, my turn and the turn of the writers I read, forges a new kind of lineage, constituted not by generative texts (say, like an expectant parent), but by what Christopher Nealon calls "foundling texts"[2]—orphan texts waiting to be adopted, not by the prior generation of

parents but by future generation of (queer) readings and readers, who will adopt them across time. Despite this dependence on future readers, an essential aspect of the queer lineage I construct is rooted in resisting futurity. By "futurity" I do not mean the progression of time toward the future, but rather, I am referring to a current emphasis on the value of the future, with a particular set of dictates and goals to be fulfilled in the service of this future to come. If the future is what comes, futurity is the present orientation toward that future. While this is perhaps most easily comprehended in relation to pressures of biological reproductive normativity, undermining futurity is about more than the choice whether or not to reproduce. What is at stake is a subversion of the symbolic order derived from the reproductive imperative, put bluntly by queer theorist Lee Edelman: "Fuck the social order and the child in whose name we're collectively terrorized [. . .] fuck the whole network of Symbolic relations and the future that serves as its prop."[3] Reproductive futurity, structuring the social order far beyond actual reproduction, renders both the present and the past dependent on bringing about a future to come. Queer expectancy undoes this dependence, replacing future fulfillment with a backward-looking present resistance.

Writing in the interwar period, Hebrew poet Yocheved Bat-Miriam offers a resistance of futurity while setting up her own foundling status by naming herself "backward." Born Yocheved Zhelezniak, in Belarus in 1901, the poet took on the name "Bat-Miriam," daughter of Miriam.[4] She thus connects to the poetic legacy of Miriam the Prophetess, who sang the Song of the Sea with her brother Moses in Exodus. But in so doing, she also reverses the order of Biblical lineage, making the Biblical Yocheved (mother of Moses and Miriam) the daughter of Miriam.[5] Here, as Naomi Seidman writes, the "biological affiliation and the respect and authority traditionally invested in the older generation give way to a fluid model of imaginative and voluntary affiliations."[6] Such alternative affiliations were strategically deployed in the three historical moments this book turns to: the emergence of Jewish American women's writing in the late nineteenth century, Hebrew and Yiddish women's writing in the interwar period, and the Jewish lesbian writing of the 1970s–'80s. As writers from these diverse moments subvert simple biological or linear notions of lineage, the texts themselves become expectant, inviting future readers to make use of their texts in ways they could not yet imagine.

Besides this backward foundling adoption, Bat-Miriam also adopted a language, Modern Hebrew, which was not her mother tongue. She was born to a religious Hasidic Jewish family, where Yiddish was spoken in the home, and

was educated in Russian, from childhood through studies at the universities of Kharkov, Odessa, and Moscow. She became involved with the communist literary group "The Hebrew Octoberists" in 1918, and began writing Hebrew poetry. She immigrated to Paris in 1926 and then to Palestine in 1928, where she lived until her death in 1980. Bat-Miriam was part of a generation of Jewish writers who chose Hebrew as a literary language, only later expanding it to a fully functional vernacular. Her poetic efforts are in fact part of the normalization of the language, at the same time that her poetic language is uniquely dense and far from conversational. Indeed, a major challenge to a fulfilling encounter with Bat-Miriam's poetry in general, and specifically with the poem here, is the challenge of translation. The most significant aspect lost in translation is the fact that the poem speaks in first-person feminine, to a grammatically female-gendered addressee. Another challenge lies in the fact that the poem is constructed almost entirely in the present tense, veering from this norm only in two instances (which I will discuss below). Both aspects, of time and of sexuality, are part of my reading of the poem as a queerly expectant text. In fact, time and gender are both key to my understanding of queerness in this book.

Attending first to sexuality, via Bat-Miriam, we can read queerness as an expression of desire between women, which this poem stages using a female speaker and female addressee. While the longing (*'ergah*) described is not explicitly sexual, the fact that the speaker insists on its impossibility underscores a reading of this desire as forbidden lesbian desire. The fact that historically such desires could only be alluded to is fundamental to the backward adoption of foundling texts. Speaking from one woman to another, Bat-Miriam's poem sets up this desire and its impossibility. The first stanza speaks of an "un-expected encounter" that has not yet happened ("ere still the light it did see"). The second stanza invokes "a certainty that dreams to be," yet declares it "will not be able to be." These paradoxical statements thus narrate a promise and its negation. In the third stanza, Bat-Miriam opens a dialogue: "you call, repeat, unseen / and answering you is me." But as the speaker says in the next verse, she prefers her addressee in her preemptive vanishing, her hiding ("*tov li he'almekh mipanai, tov li hit'atfekh bidmi*"). The fourth stanza reveals that the speaker herself is also hiding, in the realm of "secrets-distance" ("*besitrey merḥakim*"). It is there that she chooses to wait for her, the addressee, who will not come, as the poem tells us in its closing line.

To retroactively read this desire as queer or lesbian when Bat-Miriam herself did not claim such an identity exposes my role as queer reader, the one

Nealon calls a "hermeneutic friend," who can identify (and identify *with*) desires that were not, or could not be, intelligible to authors in the past.[7] However, I want to emphasize that this interpretation does not seek to claim any sort of "truth" regarding Bat-Miriam's lived experience or desires. My queer reading of Bat-Miriam is not anchored in her sexual practice. Similarly, my use of Bat-Miriam to discuss a resistance to heteronormative futurity and reproduction does not rely on her biography. For the record, Bat-Miriam bore two children to two men while still in the Soviet Union. Her daughter Mariassa Bat-Miriam Katzenelson (1925–2015) has left us a beautiful account of her mother.[8] Her son, Nahum (Zuzik) Hazaz (born 1928), was killed in the war of 1948. Ironically, the strongest evidence for reading "actual" lesbian desire in the poem might be the staunchness with which the speaker denies the possibility of its fulfillment. The foreclosure described in the poem fits well with the likelihood that at the historical time of Bat-Miriam's writing, in the early 1930s, lesbian desire, if expressed, would also likely be disavowed. Indeed, it is the depiction of same-sex love as impossible, tragic, and doomed to failure that makes it recognizable to us across history. If early work in Gay and Lesbian Studies tended to deny the significance of these depressing accounts, according to Heather Love, queer studies have turned to them.[9] Suggesting a queer model of "feeling backward," Love shows how the fact that queers have historically felt outside of progress, positivity, and productivity can serve as a point of connection, by way of our own ability to feel backward (in time and across time), creating an affective genealogy and a "backward future."[10] This backward future is echoed in Bat-Miriam's cementing of the future impossibility into the present of her poem.

The collapse of the future into the present heralds another form of queerness, queerness in relation to time. When the speaker prefers her addressee to disappear, when she chooses to wait in vain, and to see in her addressee the revelation of that which "will come no more to me" (or: already will not/will not come again/will no longer come—*asher lo yavo od li*), she generates a queerly impossible time of expectancy that resists futurity in its narrative, as well as in its grammatical structure. The lack of fulfillment is written into the poem's adherence to the present tense. The two instances which veer from the present do not represent past or future alternatives, but rather construct the temporal complication of the poem; the first case is the statement indicating the foreclosure of what "will not be able to be," which uses the future tense *will*, but only in the form of a preemptive negation. The second case is the use of the verb *to answer*,

"*va'a'an likratekh ani*" ("And answering you is me"). The statement could indicate a future answer, "and I will answer," as is the case in Modern Hebrew. However, the same verb can be read as an answer past, using the "conversive *vav*," a Biblical aspectual form, which implies a completed action: the answer has already been given. Drawing on Biblical Hebrew, Bat-Miriam was taking on a linguistic and literary history from which women were traditionally excluded. Drawing on Modern Hebrew, Bat-Miriam was participating in the creation of a future language for poetry. Activating the tension between the modern tense, according to which Bat-Miriam's speaker *will answer*, and Biblical aspect, according to which the speaker *has answered already*, creates an ahistorical time. Combining expectancy and foreclosure, queerness emerges as a category transcending sexual practice; rather, it is a relation to time itself.

However, it is precisely this ahistorical time that makes the impossible encounter available for my present queer reading. Indeed, if the addressee won't come, the reader will; each time the speaker utters the word *you* (*at*), a female reader is also implicated; as she repeats the phrase "you are to me" ("*at li*") this reader is brought into an unmediated encounter with the female speaker. This address is, however, as direct as it is impeded and impossible, by the very nature of the poetic address (which has already taken place and cannot receive an answer),[11] but also by the impossibility of encounter thematized here and in much of Bat-Miriam's poetry.[12] The reader is further implicated here by the verbal/textual nature of the nonencounter. The addressee's only (reported) address to the speaker is her "calling," a word that means also "to read," thus: "you call/read" ("*at koret*"). Furthermore, the encounter has *not* come into being in the same words used in Hebrew for publishing: "to see light" (here: "*beterem od ra'atah or*"). In fact, the poem's publication history plays directly into the complex expression of desire and temporality under discussion here, revealing an un-expected queer intertextual dialogue, which I only discovered after many years of working with the poem.

My own encounter with Bat-Miriam entailed looking for a history outside the canon of Hebrew Literature. Even though she was critically acclaimed in her time, receiving the Bialik Prize in 1968 and the Israel Prize in 1972, her poetry did not continue to circulate in the years since. This can be attributed to the often complex and even opaque nature of her poetry,[13] and to Bat-Miriam's own vow of literary silence after the death of her son Zuzik in the war of 1948, as well as to the fact that works of many women (and others) who did not enter

the literary canon were not passed down through the generations. Bat-Miriam's poetry was out of print and hard to find for the most part of the past decades. The text of the poem produced above originates in the 1972 reprint of the 1963 edition of Bat-Miriam's collected poetry, which was until recently the most accessible edition of her work. It was only in 2014 that her complete works were collected and published. This collection offers a different version of the poem, based on Bat-Miriam's first book, *Meraḥok*, published in 1932. In addition, the meticulous critical apparatus of this new edition leads to an even earlier version of the poem, published on August 21, 1930, in *Moznaim*, an Israeli literary journal active to this day. This original version of the poem, as well as the 1932 version (which the 2014 collection relies on), reveals that this poem was originally part of a cycle, and only stands alone in the 1963 edition. This stark difference between a stand-alone poem and a cycle makes the two other versions appear identical. However, there is one significant point of difference: the later poem is dedicated to the Hebrew poet Rachel Bluvshteyn (1890–1931). If my initial reading of Bat-Miriam saw the reader (that is, myself) as the addressee, the hermeneutic friend needed to bring the encounter in the poem into being, the dedication, "To Rachel" (as the poet herself signed her poetry, with no last name), offers a very different history.

The dedication does not appear until the 1932 version. Because the 1932 version was published shortly after Rachel's death in 1931, it has been taken to be a response to her death, explaining the impossibility of the address in the poem itself: "In the cycle '*Pelekh dmama*' ['realm of silence'] (whose name speaks for itself)," writes Dan Miron, Bat-Miriam addressed "the dead Rachel Bluvshteyn to announce she would soon be joining her in the kingdom of silence and death."[14] While this interpretation fits the date of Rachel's death, the fact that the poem itself was originally published *before* Rachel's death precludes using her death as the ultimate key to deciphering the poem. Instead, following the publication trail of the poem itself, predating Rachel's death, we discover an intricate literary exchange between the two poets, complicating my initial queer interpretation by offering textual traces of dialogue and distinctly erotic echoes.

If Bat-Miriam initiates this dialogue in the poem we read, inviting an encounter (even as she declares it impossible), Rachel actually answers her in a poem of her own to Bat-Miriam, just three months later. Rachel's poem, "*Ivria*" [a combination of "Hebrew" and "Jewess"], was published in the Hebrew paper

*Davar* on November 14, 1930, and was dedicated to Bat-Miriam.[15] It is only after receiving the dedication and poem from Rachel that Bat-Miriam added the dedication to Rachel. We cannot know if this addition happened before or after her death, since the poem does not appear again until 1932 (after Rachel died). Yet in tracing this intertextual dialogue, it becomes clear that the initial desire Bat-Miriam expresses is not for death (via Rachel's death), and furthermore, that whatever desire it expressed was answered by Rachel. Finally, adding the dedication to Rachel forms a recognition of this response, creating a queer dialogue that extends beyond death.

Rachel's poem, probably more known than any of Bat-Miriam's poetry, is powerful and erotic. In it a female speaker describes standing "enraptured" ["*nif'emet*"] before another woman (perhaps Bat-Miriam herself), who appears "as if she emerged from the Bible," with "antiquity's grace, blackness and flaming-passion" ["*beḥen kedumim, bish'ḥor velahat altah min hatanakh*"]. The word *enraptured*, used by Rachel twice to describe her speaker's state, is very similar to the word Bat-Miriam uses to describe her addressee in the first line of her poem: "to me you are enraptured annunciation." Bat-Miriam uses the word in an unusual form, *nif'amah*, which is then echoed in Rachel's repetition of the word in its more common form, *nif'emet*. The repetition of this unusual word together with the direct dedication by Rachel to Bat-Miriam and later by Bat-Miriam to Rachel gives flesh to the possibility of actual dialogue, while the poems themselves tell two different stories of the (im)possibility of encounter.

If Bat-Miriam's poem sets up the impossibility of encounter, Rachel sets up its inevitability; where Bat-Miriam proclaims a desire for hiding and vanishing, Rachel stages the ultimate gaze and revelation. To quote the closing stanzas of the poem,

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אַךְ אִם מָעַלְתִּי—לֹא לָנֶצַח,

כִּחַשְׁתִּי—לֹא עַד תֹּם.

וְשַׁבְתִּי שׁוּב כְּשׁוּב הַהֵלֶךְ

אֶל כְּפַר מוֹלַדְתּוֹ.

כֹּה אֶעֱמֹד פֹּה לְפָנַיִךְ

נִפְעֶמֶת אֲחוֹתִי,

בְּחֵן קְדוּמִים, בִּשְׁחוֹר וָלַהַט

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אָזֹון עֵינֵי תִכְלַתִּי.

> If I betrayed—not forever,
> Denied—not to the end.
> And I return again like the wanderer
> to the village of his birth.
>
> So I stand here before you,
> my sister, enraptured
> by antiquity's grace, blackness and flaming-passion
> I feed my eyes of blue.[16]

Here Rachel sets up the encounter as a compulsive, inescapable return, underscored in the Hebrew by the repetition of versions of the word *shuv* three times, employing an intricate alliteration of "shin" sounds in the third line of the penultimate stanza: "*veshavti shuv keshuv hahelekh*."[17] The return, staged in the present tense, results in the speaker standing before her addressee, but as in Bat-Miriam's poem no dialogue takes place. Still, there is an encounter, and instead of the disappearance Bat-Miriam stages (and prefers), here the speaker "feeds" her eyes on the vision of her addressee. If Bat-Miriam's poem stages a call and response while foreclosing encounter, here there is meeting with no dialogue. But taken together, both meeting and dialogue materialize in a delayed back and forth, enacting the literary dialogue Bat-Miriam's poem describes: reading, returning, responding. Moreover, my own hermeneutic role suddenly becomes clearer, for these poems have awaited the reader, her archival work, her queer desire; She has the task of bringing this call and response into being, thus queerly joining it.

My ability to join this history derives from what Carolyn Dinshaw defines as the queer historical impulse, which simultaneously seeks to historicize and to reach cross-temporally. The drive toward historicism is derived from the fact that what is considered queer is dependent on the norms of each given time and place. In this sense queerness is a "relation to a norm, a relation that can be historicized *and* traced across time," to follow Dinshaw.[18] Dinshaw's understanding of queerness thus generates a historical awareness that is deeply embedded in individual disparate times. At the same time, the queer historical impulse is based in the possibility of moving across time, allowing past and present (each activated by historicist endeavors) to pleasurably touch. The need to define a relation

to norms in time forces me to simultaneously historicize my own time and the time of the historical subjects I turn to, placing the queer both in the past and in the present. Yet it is also an antihistoricist endeavor, where the very idea of connection across time undermines the separation between past and present, undoing notions of linear progression. Anachronistically moving between disparate historical groundings, queer time undermines binary separation between past and present, undoing linear, teleological and progressive notions of history. If my initial reading of Bat-Miriam staged the queer encounter as purely a product of my anachronistic interpretation, the work of historical research revealed a dialogue that exceeded my queer fantasy. After I discovered the back-and-forth exchange with Rachel, the encounter seemed far more real, undermining my queer fantasy. The truth of this story is, however, relegated to "*sitrey merḥakim*," the hidden realms of history, for we will never know what actually transpired between the poets. Instead, this story enacts the combination of historicizing and anachronistic reading at the heart of my queer methodology. Somewhere between the traces that Rachel and Bat-Miriam left, the clues I collected, and the time of my own reading, the story of queer desire becomes possible, inevitable, undeniable.

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"We must strive, in the face of the here and now's totalizing rendering of reality to feel a *then and there*," writes José Esteban Muñoz. The *then and there* Muñoz offers is queer futurity, where "queerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present."[19] Over and against Muñoz's futurity, this book searches for a way out of the predicament of the present by way of the past. Looking back to Jewish women's writing in the nineteenth century and in the interwar period, and to Jewish lesbian writing from the 1970s to the 1980s, I find writers wrestling with their limited access to history, with their circumscribed role in their disparate presents, and consequently, with the ultimate value of futurity—the same conditions that force me to look back to the past rather than forward to the future. Aiming to intervene in my present, I am in search of alternative pasts offered to me by Jewish women's poetry and politics. I turn to poems from 1880 to 1990, in English, Yiddish, and Hebrew, and show how Jewish women writers have used poetry to draw genealogical lines of continuity that connect themselves to Jewish women of the past. This continuity resists heteronormative imperatives of biological reproduction, inheritance, and

futurity, and offers instead queer expectancy, breeding connection by disrupting expected models of gender, time and history. By looking back, the looking back of the poets and my own looking back, a queer continuity is formed.

This project began in West Jerusalem, when my love of Hebrew women's poetry became my official subject of study at Hebrew University. It was as part of that all-Hebrew and overwhelmingly male curriculum that I was exposed to Yiddish women's poetry as well. In *Imahot meyasdot, aḥayot ḥorgot* (Founding Mothers, Stepsisters) (1991), one of the first books on Hebrew women's poetry, Dan Miron rejects the idea that Hebrew poetry was inhospitable to women's writing, citing the glorious past of Yiddish women writing at the same time.[20] While my political education taught me better than to take the success of one part of a minority as a refutation of the struggles of others from that same minority (in this case, Jewish women), I was stunned by what this comparison revealed: that women wrote poetry in Yiddish. My Israeli education taught me next to nothing of modern Yiddish literature, and I had certainly never heard of women writing modernist poetry in Yiddish. This erasure was not accidental; rather, it was very much tied to the association of Yiddish with women (as *mama loshn*/ mother-tongue, not as literary tongue) and with the Diaspora/*goles* (to be negated). What I encountered in my studies was not only Yiddish as a language of Jewish diaspora, but also a different, Diasporic Hebrew. Through nineteenth-century Hebrew literature I realized how deeply anchored the language had been in Diasporic life and literature, long before it was naturalized and nationalized. The fact that Hebrew was also being written by Jews outside of Europe was not part of the curriculum in Israel, nor was Jewish creation in Ladino, Judeo-Arabic, or any non-European vernacular. Still, my two discoveries, of Hebrew as a language of Jewish diaspora and of Yiddish as a language of modern Jewish culture, both deeply unsettled how I understood the history that led to the present I was living in, a present I was struggling with. It was 2001, a moment of extreme violence in Israel/Palestine, and especially in Jerusalem. This is not the place to recount how quickly everything deteriorated over those first years of the Second Intifada, or to trace my own process of disillusionment. Rather, I want to highlight how in those rather desperate times, discovering a new Jewish history was the one thing that gave me hope, by proving to me that the reality I lived in was but one option the past had held for the Jewish future. Today, when Yiddish can no longer be considered a competitor for *the* Jewish language, and Hebrew reigns as the language of Jewish nationhood, I choose to go back to moments when

neither of these realities had come to be. I connect to all those possibilities past, and recognize the existence of new possibilities for my present, and even for my still unforeseen future.

When Bat-Miriam began writing in the 1920s, the future, which is our present, was anything but expected. The interwar period was a time of past potentiality for the future in/of Jewish literature, culture and life, for men and women alike. At the time both Hebrew, the language Bat-Miriam adopted, and Yiddish, her mother tongue, were still nascent modern secular literary vehicles, emerging from a long past of largely religious textual orientation; these years of Jewish history were rich with possibility. Linguistically and culturally, Jewish writers could choose between Jewish languages such as Yiddish, Hebrew, or Ladino, and local languages such as Polish, Russian, Arabic, or English, and even had the ability to inhabit multiple positions at once, or move fluidly among them.[21] No writer could anticipate the effect of her linguistic choices in relation to how Jewish literary history would evolve, yet these choices proved critical for the lives of writers and for the course of Jewish literary history. As Dan Miron writes, the choice of language had momentous implications, "for the choice of language amounted to a choice of a cultural Jewish future."[22] But the choice of a future was deeply embedded in the choice of a past as well, as Miron suggests: "In nothing did the new literatures convey their sense of troubled awareness of their newness more than in this need to choose and justify the selection, its choice of a past or pasts."[23]

As much as men and women shared uncertainty about the future, the available pasts to choose from were significantly different for women.[24] Most significantly, women were largely denied access to the sacred tongue, Hebrew, and to religious textual heritage in that language.[25] The religious past of Jewish letters meant there was hardly a long or continuous tradition of women writing in Jewish languages. Moreover, because women had limited access to the religious texts, they were also less likely to produce modern literature. While Jewish men could repurpose the Hebrew of the Bible and the Talmud to create a new secular literature, women came to writing Hebrew and Yiddish without the cultural and linguistic inheritance that traditional male education afforded.[26] Even outside the realm of Jewish tradition, women had to contend with a historical disadvantage, for they were writing without an acknowledged tradition of women writing before them, a predicament feminist literary criticism names as one of the fundamental challenges for women's writing.[27] In terms of "women's history," the

problem was first the fact that it was less likely for women to come to writing, and even when they did, their texts were less likely to be saved, circulated, and passed down. The force of these dynamics left women outside of history and without access to history. Indeed, the "newness" Miron invokes as conditioning the turn to the past was particularly acute for women, for without a past, what could women's writing-future be?

While Jewish women were recognized as readers of Yiddish literature, they were not meant to be producing it.[28] Their access to Hebrew was even more limited; the few who were taught Hebrew being the exception rather than the rule, an exception very much dependent on the disposition of unique fathers rather than the product of a cultural norm.[29] Jewish women thus faced not only a lack of access to the production of a textual past and a lack of access to women's history, but also a one-track future that would perpetuate their present marginalization. Therefore, for women, to choose a "cultural Jewish future" depended not only on challenging past and present norms, but entailed a struggle against a particular form of future, by gaining access to a past. Looking backward worked simultaneously against women's past erasure and against their future imperative of reproduction.

Despite or possibly due to Jewish women's historical disadvantage, they were deemed an essential part of the Jewish future, as agents of reproduction producing future Jewish (male) scholars (and later, Jewish soldiers).[30] Whereas men metaphorically birthed texts, Jewish women were meant to be birthing babies, not writing. Discussing these conditions, I do not mean to evoke an essentialized notion of "womanhood" as stable and unchanging across history. On the contrary, I think of gender, through Judith Butler, as an "identity tenuously constituted in time,"[31] and argue that in order to understand women's history (and lack thereof), we must account for the way gender is socially constructed in any given time, and what role that allowed women in society, and consequently in history. Women's childbearing capacities have been perhaps the most deciding factor in women's social positioning, linking them to the (re)production of the future, while limiting their role in the present. It is my contention throughout this book that Jewish women writers have had to undo the imperative of reproduction, as well as the normative history structured by that imperative, in order to become writers.

This undoing demands not only reclaiming and inventing histories, but also generating alternative modes of queer history and temporality alike. If "the modern sense of linear temporality with the celebrated logocentrism of Western

thought" assumes "that history is a chronological development through linear time," [32] it also uses the present outcome to justify this development, "selecting past material so as to identify a tradition leading to the present."[33] This, according to Jewish historian David Myers, is historicism's success, and has come to dominate our way of thinking about the past as a justification of our present. [34] The manner in which we have been conditioned to place the single event in context and then link it to a chain of other contextually bound events thus constructs historical narratives that appear to be both natural and inevitable, thereby erasing the very act of construction. Queer theory, on the other hand, is invested in exposing the act of construction of the very ideas of "natural" and "inevitable," from the individual level of gender (questioning the very category of "woman"), all the way through to society at large, including our understanding of history, and of time itself. Bringing together gender and temporality, queer histories undermine the heteronormative dictates structuring time as consecutive, progressive, and reproductive teleology.

Jewish lesbian literature serves as a leading model for this mode of intervention: when the radical lesbian movement emerged in the 1970s, it had to (re)create a lesbian history, for there were very few forerunners to be found. At the same time, this movement rejected heteronormative reproduction (or at least demanded alternatives modes of reproduction). Unable or unwilling to be measured by the sons they produced (or did not produce), the Jewish lesbian poets of the 1970s challenged the role relegated to them by finding their *hemshekh*, their continuity, not in the children to come, but through the women who came before them. As a result, this literature constructed continuity by producing a past rather than a future, offering a model of queer history. Indeed, this ties together my approach to women's writing and to Yiddish writing as bound by the challenges of history, for reaching the history of Yiddish, in my personal experience and in the experience of so many others, entailed overcoming our own historical disadvantage; it meant uncovering a history very much repressed by the Israeli literary establishment where I received my early training, and by the American Jewish establishment as well. It was a past that had to be forgotten,[35] a past without a future. But even this lack of future has a past, connecting not just to the current state of Yiddish, but to the entire (short) history of modern Jewish literature, in relation to the language politics, policy, and poetics of Yiddish and Hebrew alike, for neither language represents uninterrupted continuity.

If the lesbian lineage I trace—and ultimately, join—offers new nonnormative ways of looking forward, by challenging the default mode of heteronormative

reproduction (that you have to have children, and that they have to be made one certain way), Yiddish offers a similar challenge to the future, because of the way it is, for the most part, no longer transmitted as mother tongue outside of ultra-Orthodox circles. In order to have a future, it must be actively (queerly) chosen rather than (heteronormatively) produced and inherited. Turning away from the languages of my present (Hebrew and English) to Yiddish means adopting a past I did not inherit, making Yiddish itself a foundling language, rather than a normatively generative one.

The turn to Yiddish was itself part of the lesbian history project that emerged in the United States in the 1970s. While many women in the lesbian movement went in search of lesbian histories, and women's history more broadly, some Jewish lesbians sought their own history through Yiddish literature. Consequently, Jewish lesbians played a major role in discovering, translating, and publishing a significant portion of the Yiddish women's poetry available today. While none of these Yiddish poets (none discussed here and none that I know of) lived or identified as lesbian, in the lesbian model of history and its queer temporality, new connections were drawn by lesbian authors looking back to the past, retroactively making these Yiddish women writers part of a lesbian lineage—whether or not they would have wanted to be included. Similarly, many lesbian authors of the 1970s would have, or actually have, resisted the label "queer," which was only reclaimed in the 1980s.[36] Just as lesbian authors made Yiddish women writers part of their lesbian lineage, I, in turn, make lesbian writers, and Yiddish women writers, part of my own queer genealogy. This genealogical move proves to be most challenging in places where the past is indeed not quite gone. Accounting for the privilege of having lesbian foremothers who can—and do—talk back, and Yiddish foremothers whose voices are no longer heard, in its complications of linear temporality and transmission, the queer genealogy I draw insists on affective and erotic continuities, even in points of contest and conflict.

This complication is manifested in my own accesses to the lesbian and the Yiddish past. If for many readers the lesbian history project provided the first encounter with Yiddish women's poetry, for me, the Yiddish component is what gave me full access to this lesbian project at a time when I was still trying to understand it, and myself. As I negotiated my own sexuality and identity in my first years of graduate school, lesbian literature was my guilty pleasure. It was only through Yiddish—and through the sage advice of one of my teachers, Elizabeth Abel— that I realized that this lesbian literature did not have to be my (nonacademic)

mistress (as Abel put it). Rather, it was part of what was connecting me to the past, and to the very act of searching for new pasts that Yiddish had always represented for me. Legitimizing my interest in lesbian literature also entailed making English a central language of my investigation. This choice brought me back to my mother (and father's) tongue*,* and to my surprise, brought me back to Israel/Palestine, where I was hired as a scholar of American literature.

For Jewish American lesbians of the 1970s, the turn to Yiddish was not only a turn to the past, but also served as a present intervention, for it was the very frustration with the Zionist focus of American Jewish politics in the 1970s to the 1980s that led Jewish lesbians backward toward Yiddish, positioning it again over and against Hebrew, past and present. The (limited) lesbian turn to Hebrew, which is also represented in lesbian letters, was not as a turn backward, but across, connecting to the story of the nascent lesbian movement in Israel rather than to historical Hebrew-speaking figures. The connection with the Israeli women's movement is based not only in lesbianism and Judaism but also in a shared politics against the Occupation.[37] Similarly, my own turn to the Yiddish past reflected a frustration with contemporary politics. In both cases, the past is recruited to rethink and indeed reconfigure the present; turning to the past, as Blanche Cook wrote in 1979, gives us "the resources and the evidence to name and analyze our world" so we "may begin to change its very contours."[38] The project of lesbian history, and the project of Yiddish are, then, contemporary political projects.

In the present, where Yiddish is no longer a widely circulating language of Jewish literature, (hetero)normative history would only tell the story of its demise, especially once we take into account the way the rise of Hebrew has been cemented into a national narrative. Linguistically speaking, then, the queer histories I identify and create resist a deterministic retrospective reading by which Yiddish was fated to vanish into English or Hebrew. Concurrently, this nonteleological thinking is also crucial for reading Hebrew poetry beyond the national lens, as part of the *Jewish literary complex* (a term I borrow from Dan Miron, and which I ultimately take issue with, precisely for its failure to undo Hebrew's ultimate supremacy).[39] Moreover, I take up the idea of language choice as a temporal choice—of past and future alike—recognizing the role language choice has in the construction and transmission of history. I look at the surprising acquisition of languages outside of the heteronormative model of mother tongue, whether in the choice of certain poets to adopt Modern Hebrew in its process of becoming a vernacular language, or in the choice of certain poets to use Yiddish when it was only just becoming a

literary language. Positioning languages *in time*, while reaching for their histories *across time*, renders language a tool of queering temporality.

I also seek to interrogate the process of translation from new angles. When providing translations for the Hebrew and Yiddish texts in this book, I often analyze both the translation and the significance of the act of translation itself (for example, looking at translation as a major aspect of the feminist project of recovering unknown texts of women past). At times, however, I was forced to create my own translations. More than anything, this experience provoked frustration, where more often than not the aspects that drew me to a certain poem were the first ones lost in translation (for example, issues of gender, which are so central in Hebrew and Yiddish and become invisible in English). At the same time, I have come to understand this frustrating exchange as a form of dialogue, where the meaning of the poem and the meaning I mean to make of it, where languages and histories, are activated and negotiated. Finally, through the bilingual Yiddish-English poetry of Irena Klepfisz, lesbian activist and scholar living and writing to this day in New York, I was also able to see translation itself as a site where meanings are queerly undermined and new ones queerly produced. I have thus come to understand translation as a potentially queer process of transition and transformation between languages and between generations. Over and against translation as a naturalizing process that erases difference and construction, I adopt a notion of translation as transgression, creating affective relationships between texts, writers, and readers.

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As I bring together Yiddish, English, and Hebrew poems seldom if ever before read side by side, the literary history that emerges undoes the linear narratives of each single literature and of the movements between them. Consequently, I am also generating a different mode of literary history. The book's structure reflects this mode, as I move between time and language queerly rather than chronologically. Each of the six chapters brings together poems from multiple times and multiple languages, which I read in relation to their disparate contexts, in relation to their potential connections (whether actual or imagined), and in relation to my own, also ever-shifting moment. Together, poetry, historiography, and theory, create queer connections based in nonlinear cultural transmissions, affective affinities, and cross-temporal encounters, in which I invite the reader to join.

Chapter 1 reads Kadya Molodowsky's Yiddish "Froyen-lider" (Women's Poems/Songs) (1927/28) as answering the expectancy of her foremothers, not by

fulfilling their expectations, but by staging a dialogue with them and questioning their power over her. Examining multiple versions of the original poem, as well as multiple instances of its translation, I extend the line Molodowsky draws to the 1970s lesbian poetry of Adrienne Rich. The encounters discussed in this chapter, in life and in text, in conversation and translations, join together to offer queer models of intergenerationality and intertextuality, threading different moments and moments of difference, in multiple queer lines.

Chapter 2 puts queer continuity into practice by setting up nineteenth-century American poet Emma Lazarus as an origin of Jewish women's poetry. Choosing Lazarus, a Sephardic poet writing in English, challenges the Ashkenazi focus of modern Jewish literary scholarship and reverses the dominant narrative describing a unidirectional movement from Yiddish to English. Bringing Lazarus together with Yiddish poet Anna Margolin, who wrote in New York during the 1920s, I identify in the works of both poets a shared strategy of collapsing temporality. Together, the poets construct a queer history extending from Ancient Greece to Mandatory Palestine, while distinctly transgressing borders of identity and chronology, undoing binary divisions and opening up new routes to the Jewish past.

Chapter 3 connects this transgressive approach of Margolin's to the early work of Hebrew poet Leah Goldberg, writing in the 1920s in Eastern Europe. Like Margolin, Goldberg turns to the dominant European culture and to the history of Christianity to carve out a space for Jewish women's poetry. Looking back at Goldberg and Margolin together reveals a moment of multilingual potential, while embracing the pessimism of the poems themselves becomes a mode of connection between past and present. Linking disparate poetic moments together, the chapter connects to the past by virtue of a shared future-resistance.

Chapter 4 brings together historical traces of queer desire in Jewish poetry (in poems by Emma Lazarus and Anna Margolin) and poems of cross-temporal haunting (also by Margolin, as well as Kadya Molodowsky). It explores haunting in general, and lesbian ghosts in particular, as enabling an otherwise impossible movement across time, as well as otherwise forbidden (lesbian/queer) desires. Between absence and presence, ghosting and being ghosted, this chapter creates a lesbian Jewish history that moves queerly across time.

Chapter 5 looks at two moments of community: Ezra Korman's 1928 anthology *Yidishe dikhterins* (Yiddish Women Poets), and the first collection of Jewish lesbian writing, *Nice Jewish Girls* from 1982. Distinguishing the stakes of each of these moments, I also expose overlooked connections between them,

while recognizing the challenges posed by actual encounters, including my own encounters with 1970s lesbians. While many feminist projects have aimed to recover women's lost pasts, I explore what it means to write without a past, what the stakes are in recovering the past, and what complications arise when the past is not quite gone. Confronting moments of queer contiguity and contemporaneity, this chapter complicates straight lines of lineage.

Chapter 6 reads the bilingual poetry of Irena Klepfisz, written in New York in the 1980s, as a queer mediation of Yiddish invention and reclamation. We will see Klepfisz writing *as* a lesbian Yiddish woman poet, first using the voice of a Yiddish poet past, and then creating her own original Yiddish poetry. Allowing Yiddish as well as English to voice her poetic and political concerns, and using the English/Yiddish encounter to undermine dominant norms in both languages, Klepfisz invents a model of temporal translation that undoes the borders between past and present, English and Yiddish, creating a poetics of queer historiography.

The closing coda asserts that even if "it is unwise during periods of stress / or change to formulate new theories" (in the words of Irena Klepfisz),[40] the theoretical avenues opened by the material realities of language and sexual politics explored throughout the book all call for a reconsideration of Jewish literary thinking, recognizing the vitality of the alternative pasts and alternative temporalities revealed through Jewish women's poetry.

Like the map of these chapters, my own movement has been equally nonlinear; beginning with a movement from Jerusalem to Berkeley, it follows a circuitous path back through Poland, where instead of searching for Jewish history I joined a nascent lesbian movement, to Tel Aviv where I discovered a queer politics of resistance, to archives in New York, to the Universities of Toronto and Pennsylvania (the very same institutions where each of my grandfathers received their degrees), and finally back to Israel/Palestine, where the situation seems, as always, worse than it has ever been. As I go about building my queer home (familial, academic, political, spiritual), I think of Dareen Tatour, Palestinian citizen of Israel under house arrest for a poem she published online. I think of all of the voices of dissent and cries for justice struggling to be heard, here and worldwide, as the far right's powers continue to rise. It is then that the histories offered by the poems in this book become all the more vital. Not because they are hopeful (you will see, they are not), but because their existence gives me something to look back to, without knowing what to expect.

Looking back in time to and through the poems, I encounter a past very different from the present. In the interwar period, when Hebrew and Yiddish women's writing was emerging, the balance between Hebrew and Yiddish was about to tip, just before Yiddish inherited Hebrew's role as the hallowed language of the Jewish past, a language whose future is in question, much like Hebrew's was. Today one is incredulous at reading Hebrew national poet H. N. Bialik's statement made in 1905 that those invested in the resurrection of Hebrew are also those willing to admit the possibility of the language's final demise.[41] Our distance from this statement is the result of both a century of literary history (and what has been termed the *revolution*[42] of the Hebrew language within the Zionist project), and of the particular way that history has been told. How differently might we read Hebrew today if we reinscribe the fact that its present and future were once highly insecure, that it was not the obvious, natural, or only choice? Embracing Yiddish through its present precariousness can bring back the past precariousness of Hebrew and open a space for future precarious potentialities of a Jewish literature that we cannot yet imagine. Rather than investing in future viability, this literary thinking resists futurity, showing that if we are to rethink Jewish literature, perhaps the future is not where we should be looking at all. Instead, I look back to a past I did not know existed, one so often erased "ere still the light it did see," to quote return to the words of Bat-Miriam. Here I find the "un-expected encounter" of Bat-Miriam's poem, forming a community across time. This book explores such encounters with the past and in the past to generate a genealogy that is not an expression of, but a resistance to biology, linearity, and other hegemonic norms and dictates, offering instead an alternative history of resisting futurity through Jewish women's writing. Taken together, the various chapters of this study share a strategy of turning backward rather than forward; they offer new models of lineage and of potential continuity. Between the pasts that never happened, or whose stories I never knew, and the futures that did not come to be, I find new possibilities for my present. Finally, I recognize that the future I inherited was only one possibility, and I encounter another past, one accessible to me precisely because it already holds the seeds of my disappointment over how the future has turned out, and "over that which will come no more to me," in Bat-Miriam's words. It is in this queer time and place of possibilities foreclosed preemptively and retrospectively that a meeting space is formed. It is there that we may find what Bat-Miriam calls "another essence," which is incumbent on us to keep. Whether or not it ever really *was*, here it is, expectantly waiting.