JÖRG SCHULTE

Saul Tchernichowsky and Vladislav Khodasevich
A Chapter in Philological Cooperation

When Saul Tchernichowsky arrived in Berlin in December 1922, he was forty seven years old and at the height of his creative strength.¹ Within two years he published the *Book of Idylls* (Sefer ha-idilyot), the *Book of Sonnets* (Maḥberet son- etot) and the volume *New Songs* (Shirim hadashim). The first to announce Tchernichowsky’s arrival in Berlin was his fellow poet Iakov Kagan who wrote a long article for the Russian journal *Razsvet* on January 14, 1923. Kagan revealed to his readers what Tchernichowsky had told him about his yet unpublished works. He also reported that Tchernichowsky had studied medieval Hebrew medical manuscripts in the State Library of St Petersburg (then Petrograd) and had been forced to leave a considerable part of his work behind when he fled to Odessa.² We still do not have any trace of these materials. We know that in the company of H.N. Bialik, Tchernichowsky attended the farewell concert of the Russian songwriter Alexander Vertinsky at the Scala theatre (in Berlin) on November 7, 1923, and was deeply impressed by the poet who sang his own verses.³ We also know that in the same year, he lived next door to the actress Miriam Bernstein-Cohen who, like himself, held a degree in medicine and translated from Russian into Hebrew.⁴ In her memoirs, Miriam Bernstein-Cohen notes that she introduced Tchernichowsky to Aharon (Armand) Kaminka who had been the first to translate a part of the *Iliad* into Hebrew in 1882.⁵ Besides the memoirs of Bentsion Kats,⁶ we have those of Josef Patai and his son Rafael⁷ who met the poet in Swinemünde in 1924 where he stayed in the villa of Alexander Riwkin. Josef Patai recalled

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¹ Tchernichowsky crossed the border in Passau on December 15 (Genazim Archive Tel Aviv, I–165); on December 29, he published a German article to celebrate Bialik’s fiftieth birthday: *Das Herz Israels*, in: *Jüdische Rundschau*, 29.12.1922, p. 670.
³ Tchernichowsky described his visit (together with Bialik) in a letter to H.D. Nusboym (John Nussbaum) on December 25, 1923; Nurit Govrin, Shnei mikhtavim shel Tshernihovsky, in: *Ma’ariv* 16.9.1984, p. 44 and 5.10.1984, p. 32; the concert on November 7 was Vertinskii’s last concert in Berlin in 1923; cf. Karl Schlögel, *Chronik russischen Lebens in Deutschland 1918–1941*, Berlin 1999, p. 203 (no. 3126).
⁶ The memoirs were published in the journal *Ha-zeman* in 1944 and have been collected in the Makhon Kats at the University of Tel Aviv (II–736).
(in an unpublished review to Nachum Slouschz’s *Sefer ha-yam*), how the poet read his translation of the *Odyssey* at the shore of the Baltic sea and suddenly exclaimed: “Is this not an original Hebrew song?” (“Hari zo ke’ein shirah ‘ivrit makorit mamash!”).\(^8\) For Tchernichowsky’s later years in Berlin, we have the memoirs by Moshe Ben Menachem\(^9\) who describes the poet’s life in the village of Fichtengrund, some twenty miles north of Berlin, where he lived from 1927 until his immigration to Israel in 1931.\(^10\) In this village, Tchernichowsky was compared to Hassidic rabbis because he cured his patients without salary, even giving them medicine for free; if Ben-Menachem did not exaggerate, they said: “he is not only an excellent doctor but also a just man, one of the thirty six just of his time.”\(^11\)

The most precious source for Tchernichowsky’s later years in Berlin, however, are the letters to Jenny.\(^12\) The poet visited the United States in 1928 where he met a beautiful young widow, Jennie Perrie Hurvitz. Around eighty letters to Jenny, written in splendid and tender Russian, stretch over a period of four years and are now preserved in the Makhon Kats in Tel Aviv.

I would like to return to Tchernichowsky’s first weeks in Berlin. On January 11, 1923, the Russian poet Vladislav Khodasevich noted in his diary which is known under the title *Kamerfur’erskii zhurnal*: “visit to Tchernichowsky.”\(^13\) The friendship between the two poets (arguably the best poets in their languages at the time) is well known,\(^14\) as is Tchernichowsky’s appreciation of Khodasevich’s

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\(^8\) Gnazim Archive Tel Aviv, Nachum Slouschz, fond 3203–1.
translations. Khodasevich had begun to translate Tchernichowsky’s poems when he was asked by Leib Yaffe to contribute to the “Jewish Anthology” published by the Pushkin scholars, Mikhail Gershenzon and Khodasevich; the brief memories they wrote of one another have been re-published both in Russian and in Hebrew. One precious side of their contact – the philological side – is yet to be discovered. An episode from the time before they worked together illustrates exactly why their cooperation in Berlin became so interesting: In 1918, Leib Yaffe had provided Khodasevich with interlinear translations of those poems which he had selected for the Evreiskaia antologiia. One of them was Tchernichowsky’s idyll “Brit Milah”; one of the guests at the Brit is called a “taḥmas polani” because “every Pole was called a ‘taḥmas’ or a thief.” The word “taḥmas” was translated as “ostrich” (Gesenius) and as “night owl” (the Septuagint has γλαύξ, the Vulgate “noctua”); Ben Judah suggested “nightjar” (caprimulgus). Joseph Klausner and Yehudah Gur use “falke, sokol” (falcon), following Mendele Mokher Seforim’s Hebrew translation of Harald Othmar Lenz’s Naturgeschichte. Khodasevich translates “korshunom polskim u nas prozvali ego” (“they called him a Polish black-kite”). When Tchernichowsky received the published translation he wrote a postcard (dated St. Petersburg, March 4, 1918) to Leib Yaffe to inform him that in his village – i.e. in Michailovka between the Dnepr and the Sea of Azov – Poles were not called “korshuny” (black-kites) but “yastrebi” (hawks). On the same postcard, which is now in the Central Zionist Archives, he adds that, had he been asked, he would have recommended translating part of the idyll into Ukrainian, in order to “preserve the local colour”.

15 Cf. Z. A. Shakhovskaia, Otrazheniia, Paris 1975, p. 185; in an interview for the Polish journal Opinia in 1936 Tchernichowsky complained that the translations of his works into English, German and Polish “left much to be wished for”; Cwi Wohlmuth, W 60-lecie urodzin swego, in: Opinia, 12.1.1936, pp. 6–7 (p. 6).
17 Khodasevich’s article “O Chernikhovskom” (originally a lecture given in Berlin at the Union of Russian Jews) was first published in Evreiskaia tribuna in 1924 (№ 13) and can be found in Kopelman (see note 14), pp. 51–53; Tchernichowsky’s “Ha-meshorer ha-ṭra’gi” was published in Ha-arets, 30.6.1939, pp. 9–10, republished by Boaz Arpaly, (see note 14), pp. 503–506 and translated into Russian by Zoya Kopelman, (see note 14), pp. 89–92.
18 “Ka’asher yiḳru lekol polani taḥmas ‘o ganav”; Tchernichowsky, Shirim, Tel Aviv 1955, p. 160.
19 Lev. 11.16; Deut. 14.15; Hiob 39.17; Lam. 4.3.
21 Yosif Kloyznner, Yehudah Gur, Milon shel kis, me-‘Ivrit le-Rusit ve-‘Ashkenazit une-Rusit le-‘Ivrit ve-‘Ashkenazi: ḥelek rishon: ‘Ivrit-rusi-ashkenazi, Warsaw 1912 (the second part was never published).
22 Harald Othmar Lenz, Sefer toldot ha-teva’, ḥoveret shniyah: ha’of, Zhitomir 1866, p. 62.
23 Harald Othmar Lenz, Gemeinnützige Naturgeschichte, Gotha 1835–1839.
24 Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem, fond Leib Yaffe.
The same fond contains the manuscripts of the only extant fragments of interlinear translation made by Tchernichowsky himself.\(^{25}\) The translation of the sonnet “‘Aliti bro’sh ha-har” (“I Ascended to the Summit of the Mountain”)\(^{26}\) was entrusted by Yaffe to Osip Rumer (1883–1954).\(^{27}\) On Yaffe’s request the poet translated the first quartet of the sonnet:

> Я взошелъ на вершину горы – там цепью глыбы скаль
> (Горѣли) изумрудом и вѣчными снѣгами,
> Раскинувшись предъ престоломъ творца мира въникомъ,
> Положенными небесными серафимами въ восхищеніи и изумленій.

Yaffe had also asked the poet to translate a passage at the end of the poem “Le’ashtoret shir ule-va’al” which Khodasevich translated under the title “Pesn’ Astarte i Belu” (“The Song To Astarte and Bel”). This is the only fragment for which we have both Tchernichowsky’s Russian interlinear and Khodasevich’s poetic translation.

> А стихія водъ – направо и нальво
> На востокъ и на западъ – несеть бремя
> Вчной беременности и родовъ,
> Начиная со свергающеся потока
> И до мора въ его скайлстой оравѣ,
> В капляхъ водостока у стѣны,
> У истоковъ ручья и у берегов канала,
> Во мрake бездны и въ виннія дня.

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> Глянъ на запад и восток –
> Всюду вод кипучий ток
> Поли зачатій и родов:
> В шумном рокоте ручьев,
> В море, сжатом между скал,
> Там, где медленный канал,
> Где капель поет, звѣня –
> В бездѣ тьмы и въ свете дня.\(^{28}\)

Without Tchernichowsky’s assistance, Khodasevich translated the masterpiece “Kekhom ha-yom” (“In the Heat of the Day”) which contains a passage on various species of pigeons.

> (1) ‘elu hen yonei mitsrayim, ul’elu ye’amer nezirim,
> (2) vyeshnan ba’alot-mur’ah mavlitot hehazehek kifkidim;
> (3) nikhkan yonat-tukiym mshaperet ‘et znahav ha-ne’eh,
> (4) ba’alot-hara’mah mithadrot bmaḥlefet meketet le’arpan,
> (5) knufyah shel yonei-taltelim ‘im turim-’ana’im nifgashim,
> (6) bpinah zo hogim ‘ahavim zug romim vezugot kushiyim

\(^{25}\) Letter from Tchernichowsky to Yaffe, October 17, 1917.
\(^{26}\) Tchernichowsky, Shirim (see note 18), p. 209.
\(^{27}\) Leib Yaffe (ed.), Evreiskaia antologiia, Berlin 1922, p. 89.
\(^{28}\) V. F. Khodasevich, Sobranie stikhov, Paris 1982, tom 2, p. 208; the Hebrew text can be found in Tchernichowsky, Shirim (see note 18), p. 250.
Leib Yaffe and Vladislav Khodasevich were clearly left perplexed by some of the dove species. Khodasevich misses for example the Russian “zobastyi golub’” (the Russian “zob” means “goitre”) behind “ba’alot-mur’ah” in line 2 (the English name of the species is Pouter pigeon) and the Russian “grivun” (from “griva”, mane) behind “ba’alot-hara’amah” (the English name of the species is Nicobar pigeon). Therefore he had to come up with the additional species of the “generaly” (which is not mentioned in the original) in order to explain the arrogance of the Russian clerks (the Russian word behind the “pa'idim” is certainly “chinovniki”). The “generaly” were a famous species that had been bred by a Russian General in Odessa and won golden medals at all the pigeon fairs of the time, and it shows just how seriously Khodasevich took his work. It is remarkable that he correctly identified the “yonat-tukiyim” in line three. He recognizes “tukiyim” (which, in the Bible, appears only in 2. Chr. 9:21 and which means “parrots”) today as “pavliny” which is literally “peacocks” (the interpretation of “tukiyim” as peacocks goes back to the Vulgate); and the “pavlin’i golubi” are, indeed, a well known pigeon species. We can thus learn something very useful from Khodasevich’s translations if we do not take every word for granted.

The close cooperation between the two poets began in Berlin in 1923. We know, from the memoirs of Bentsion Kats, that Tchernichowsky translated every single...
line of “Hatunatah shel ’Elkah” (The Wedding of Elka) for Khodasevich. Louis Bernhardt had learned from Nina Berberova that Khodasevich also helped him during his work on the translation. Whereas the translations of “Brit Milah”, “Kekhom ha-yom” and “Levivot” which Khodasevich had translated with the help of Leib Yaffe, were included in his volume Iz evreiskikh poëtov published in Berlin in 1923, “The Wedding of Elka” was published separately in Maxim Gorky’s journal Beseda in Berlin in 1924. Maxim Gorky had asked the poet to translate it himself but Tchernichowsky had declined despite his financial hardship and the offer of a considerable royalty. Six years after the first publication, “The Wedding of Elka” was chosen for a lavish edition to celebrate Khodasevich’s twenty-fifth anniversary as a poet. The publishing house Omanut commissioned illustrations from Emmanuel (Mane) Katz (whom Tchernichowsky had visited in his atelier in Paris in 1927, following a visit in Chagal’s studio); but this greatly hurt the pride of Abraham Stybel who had commissioned illustrations from Leonid Pasternak. Unfortunately, neither Omanut nor Stybel brought the book to print, the artists did not receive any payment and the illustrations are not known to the estates of either artist.

Khodasevich’s translation is a precious source for anybody who reads Tchernichowsky’s work closely and who wants to know exactly what the guests on Elka’s wedding table were served beside the obvious “geilte ish”:

(1) V’arkhu ha-shulhan kadat: melihim gezurim ukhtutim
(2) bshemen-zayit va'omets, na'aárei zeitim bik'arot,
(3) mišlej-Astrahan veKértsch udgat yám-Berdiansk hámehulálah,
(4) bilak vsultání zhavhvim ve'lihit metukát habáser,
(5) vayín, yein-sáraf veyin-gélen, mei-dbásh ubábku'ei hashekhár […]
(18) 'efes lo' paskú mekomam shel 'otam hadagim hákhatánim,
(19) pirkah matokáh v'avromáh v'okunós 'otep ha-keseft,
(20) tikhalon hsár hákashkészet vekorshyáh rahavat hagiyyáh 39

34 Bention Kats, Zikhronot: Hamishim shanah behistoriyah yehudei Rusiyah, Tel Aviv 1963, p. 294.
36 Iz evreiskikh poëtov, ed. Zoya Kopel’man (see note 14), p. 56.
38 Ya’akov Tam [Sha’ul Tšernihovskij], “Mišpíšasò shel Ya’akov Tam”, in: Ha-’olam, 15.4.1927, pp. 282–284 (p. 283).
39 Tchernichowsky, Shirim (see note 18), pp. 368–369.
Были закуски все те, что обычай велит, — и во-первых
Сельди в оливковом масле и в уксусе; с краю тарелок
Ровным бордюром лежали оливки; с селедкой из Керчи
Сельдь астраханская рядом лежала; помимо селедок
Были сардинки, кефаль, золотой пузанок; а в графинах —
Водка, и мед, и вино, и пиво в зеленых бутылках. [...] 
(18) Не было тут недостатка и в рыбе помельче: был окунь,
(19) Широкогрудый карась, и судак, и лещ серебристый.

The guests were given herring ("melia", line 1); but what are “hilak” and “sultanit” in line 4? Both species are mentioned together in the Babylonian Talmud: "what is hilak? It is the [or 'a species of'] 'sultanit'. There have been several attempts to identify the species, but recent translations of the Talmud simply use the Aramaic terms. Even-Shoshan, the only lexicographer who considered Tchernichowsky’s work and made suggestions for some of his obscure expressions, offers sultanit for “clupea sprattus”, the sprat. The problem is that the sprat is very common in the Baltic sea but not known in the Sea of Azov or the Black Sea. If a translator ever needed the poet’s assistance it was in this passage. We therefore turn to Khodasevich’s translations: he has “puzanok”, the Caspian shad, and “kefal”, the mullet; the Sea of Azov is famous for both species. “İltit” can already be found in Steinberg’s dictionary of 1899, meaning salmon. In the following passage, Khodasevich is less precise. He transfers, for metrical reasons it seems, the attribute “dressed in silver” from the perch to the bream (“avromah”) and omits the tench (“tikhlon”) altogether. He may have been irritated by the fact that the tench does have scales (despite these being very small and deeply embedded into the skin making the tench slippery and giving the impression that it does not have scales at all). Tchernichowsky gave the Hebrew “‘okunos” the meaning of the Russian “okun” (perch; the word is commonly derived from Russian “oko”, eye) but he certainly knew that “‘akunos” was the Aramaic name of an unknown small fish, a corruption of the Greek κολίας.

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The plants in Elka’s garden are not quite as difficult. The botanical details are interesting for any reader who wants to understand every word in Tchernichowsky’s idyll. Tchernichowsky wrote several articles on plants himself and widely used plant names of his own invention throughout his œuvre.

40 V.F. Khodasevich (see note 28), tom 2, pp. 237–238.
41 T. B. Avoda zara 39a.
42 Milon 'Even-Shoshan: be-shishah kerakhim be-hishtafut hever 'anshe mada', Jerusalem 2003.
(1) Между деревьями грядки тянулись. На грядках - петрушка, лук и укроп ароматный, фасоль на высоких тычинах,
(2) в сотне одежек своих - капуста, горох шаловливый,
(3) редька, морковка-каротель и хрен, вызывающий слезы.
(4) там же - подсолнечник, гордо глядящий на солнце, и тыквы.
(5) Что до деревьев, то чаще - ветвистые яблони, груши,
(6) но попадаются также багровые вишни; крыжовник тычет колючки свои, за одежду хватая прохожих;
(7) есть одинокая слива и белые две шелковицы.
(8) Но попадаются также багровые винни: кръжинник.
(9) Тычет колючки свои, за одежду хватая прохожих;
(10) Есть одинокая слива и белые две шелковицы.
(11) Если ж по средней дорожке пройти до конца, то упрешь в тесный большой полукруг постриженных желтых акаций.
(12) Элька - невеста вела подругу милую Геню прямо в любимый свой угол, под старой развесистой ивой.
(13) Густо в нем разрослись лопухов широкие листья,
(14) в синих цветочках пикорий, крапива … укрыто и тихо.

Khodasevich omitted line 6 (“in many tiny furrows, seeded in numerous patches”) which is half a quotation from the Mishna\textsuperscript{46} and half a quotation from the Gemara\textsuperscript{47} of the tract Kilayim of the Talmud Yerushalmi. The tree “tsaftsafah” (in line 13) is used today for the poplar tree; this meaning can be found in almost

\textsuperscript{44} Tchernichowsky, Shirim (see note 18), pp. 342–343.
\textsuperscript{45} Khodasevich (see note 28), tom 2, p. 219.
\textsuperscript{46} Mishna Kilayim 2.3 et alt.
\textsuperscript{47} Talmud Yerushalmi, Kilayim 9.3.
all modern dictionaries. Even Klausner/Gur’s pocket dictionary gives “topol’, Pappel”; this dictionary is otherwise priceless for translating Tchernichowsky because it reflects the word lists that circulated among the Hebraists and were published in journals as *Safah* and *Lashonenu*; Joseph Klausner was not only Tchernichowsky’s closest friend, he also edited many of his poems which can still be seen in the manuscripts. In this case, however, Khodasevich translates “ива”, willow, and this translation was probably indicated to him by the poet himself. Tchernichowsky uses the biblical “tsaftsafah” consistently for the willow, beginning with a list of biblical plant names which he had published in the St Petersburg journal *Safah* in 1910, together with a brief article.48 The list is based on the list of biblical plant names in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* that was published in New York between 1901 and 1906.49 Tchernichowsky merely added German and Russian equivalents (in this case “ива” and “Weide”), and presented the list as his own work. In Elka’s garden the “tsaftsafah” provides shelter (or even creates a tent) with its branches; this attribute fits much better to the willow than to the poplar. For “‘alshe-var” the same list gives “tsikorii”. For the biblical “½arulim”50 which appears in line 14 of the fragment we find the Latin “Lat(h)yrus” along with the Russian “polyn’” and the German “Wermut”, i.e. Common Wormwood. Wormwood has nothing to do with Lathyrus (in English: vetchling). By the time he wrote “The Wedding of Elka” Tchernichowsky must have noticed his mistake; we can assume that he himself indicated Khodasevich the Russian “lopukhi”, burdock; Khodasevich contracts “harulim” and the “plants with big leaves” into one species and translates “the broad leaves of the burdock,” which gives a precise description of the burdock. It is possible that the Russian text is correct and the Hebrew text corrupted because “plants with large leaves” is untypically vague for Tchernichowsky as he frequently references attributes. Unfortunately we do not have a manuscript of the “Wedding of Elka”. However, I have found another example in which the editor misread a “he” as “vav” and created a plant that Tchernichowsky never intended to describe: in “My Father Was a Horse-Doctor” all editions read ““ešev bakhot u-ksamim”51. Whereas “ešev bakhot” is a translation of the Russian “plakun-trava” (Purple Loosestrife), there is no Russian or Ukrainian equivalent for the alleged Hebrew plant “ksamim”. The solution can be found in an early version of the manuscript which reads “ešev bakhot ha-ksosem”52 which simply means “the magical purple loosestrife”. In the manuscript, “hakowskiem” is not set in inverted commas as it appears in the printed editions, i.e. it is not marked as a plant name; and “plakun-trava” is, indeed, one of the most famous Russian magical plants.

I return to Elka’s garden: In line 2, Khodasevich translates “shumar” as “dill” (“ukrop”) instead of “fennel”; the mistake can easily be explained: he must have

51 Genazim Archives Tel Aviv, I–30455 (“‘Iftros le’et metso’ hayah ‘avi”).
been given the Russian “ukrop aptechnyi”, a common Russian name for fennel; the adjective “aptechnyi” which makes all the difference, did not fit into the metre. Line 11 gives a good example how Tchernichowsky translated plant names from the Russian. Just as he uses “‘akakyah halevanah”, i. e. the “belai akatsia” (which Odessa was famous for) for the Black Locust (Robinia pseudoacacia), he coined “‘akakyah tsehuva” as a literal translation of the Russian “zheltau akatsia”, which again is not an acacia, but caragana, or Siberian peashrub. In his autobiography, Tchernichowsky describes the semicircle of caraganas in his neighbour’s garden and how, as a child, he made whistles from the green husks of the tree.53 Khodasevich automatically found the correct translation in Russian. I am not entirely sure about the “‘at tavo’nah” in line 3. Khodasevich translated the “mischievous peas”, but according to Gur/Klausner the adjective “shovev” also designates a wild growing species.

The fifth song contains a brief passage (modelled on the bird simile in the Iliad)54 which describes the agitation of the girls attending the wedding. The names of the birds that ruffle their feathers pose greater difficulties than the dove species in “In the Heat of the Day”.

For metrical reasons, Khodasevich changed the order of the birds; it seems, however, that he had exact translations from the poet and tried to be precise. The bird name “‘admonyah” was not accepted into modern Hebrew but can be easily recognized as Tchernichowsky’s translation of “krasnosheika” (rubythroat); the name “‘ori”, which Khodasevich translated as “chizh” (siskin), can be found in Mendele’s translation of Harald Othmar Lenz’s Naturgeschichte; Mendele used “‘ori” for the genus Fringilla and “‘ori ha-‘an” for “Zeisig”, siskin (which is in Russian “chizhik” or “chizh”);57 similarly the name “ha-yargaz” had been used by Mendele for the genus Parus58 and it is very likely that Tchernichowsky had found it in Mendele’s work and later provided Khodasevich with the translation “sinitsa” (tit). The form “‘al’i” can be found in all editions since the first publication of the idyll in Ha-teku’fat.59 Only in the latest edition it has been

54 Homer, Ilia II, 459–463.
55 Tchernichowsky, Shirim (see note 18), p. 358.
56 Khodasevich (see note 28), p. 230.
57 Harald Othmar Lenz, Sefer toldot ha-teva’, (see note 22), p. 67, 158; cf. Éliezer Ben-Ieguda, Polnyi russko-evreisko-nemetskii slovar’, Warsaw 1912.
58 Harald Othmar Lenz, Sefer toldot ha-teva’ (see note 22), p. 150; cf. Ben-Ieguda (see note 57).
replaced by “ḥoḥit”⁶⁰; unfortunately we do not know who made the revision and on what basis (no manuscript of the work survives); and though I have not been able to find “ḥalḥi” in any dictionary, “ḥoḥit” can be found in Gur/Klausner as “scheglenok” (goldfinch)⁶¹ which corresponds with Khodasevich’s translation; equally difficult is the bird name “sharshor” which can only be found with the vocalization “shirshur” in Kenaani’s dictionary as an unspecified bird name;⁶² Khodasevich translated it as “ziablik” (common chaffinch); in this case the translation made with the poet’s assistance helps to establish the meaning of two words.

Unfortunately, Khodasevich’s translation is not always a reliable commentary. Khodasevich made some small and pardonable mistakes, when he translated, for example, the village “Lopatiah ha-gdolah” as “Lopatikha Bol’shaia”⁶³ instead of “Velikaia Lopatikha” which can be found, as all other village names, on a map of late ninenteenth century Tauria. In one case he clearly had difficulties understanding the interlinear translation and contracted four lines into one.⁶⁴

 shale mimino – “shelo”, ve’eḥad miṣmo’lo – “shel kalah”
(vzug hashoshvinim gam-shneyhem ha’ish veha’ishah zug r’ishon, r’ishon le’ishto, ve’ishto r’ishonah lo, ve’yesh lahem banim).⁶⁵

[With measured step the bridegroom went with the two “escorts” on his sides, / the one on his right was “from his side”, the one on his left “from the side of the bride” / (also the “escorts” were married – both themselves and their wives in their first marriages,⁶⁶ / they were the first husband to their wives, and their wives were their first wife, and they had sons.]

Тихо жених между двух посаженных отцов подвигался.⁶⁷
[“The husband moved quietly between the two fathers by proxy”]

Tchernichowsky uses “shoshvinim” and “shoshvinot” throughout the idyll;⁶⁸ they almost always appear in pairs, which indicates that the bride and the bridegroom had one “shoshvin” and one “shoshvinah” each, and these were married couples. He never mentions witnesses (“’edim”) so that from a halakhic perspective Elka’s

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⁶⁰ Sha’ul Tchernihovsky, Po’emot ve’idilyot, Tel Aviv 1990, p. 153.
⁶¹ Ben-Jehuda gives for shcheglenok “ḥoḥit”; Ben-Ieguda (see note 57).
⁶² Ya’akov Kena’ani, Otsar ha-lashon ha-’ivri, Jerusalem 1960 – ; the entry quotes a passage from an essay by David Frishman, which can be found in his Mikhtavim ’al devar ha-sifrut VII, in: Ha-tekuflah 9 (1920/21), p. 458–474 (p. 468).
⁶³ Tchernichowsky, Shirim (see note 18), p. 217.
⁶⁴ In another passage Khodasevich added six lines (“El, nasyshchalsia […] obidy il’ gneva …”); Khodasevich (see note 28), p. 239.
⁶⁵ Tchernichowsky, Shirim (see note 18), p. 366.
⁶⁶ T. B. Sota 2b, Sanhedrin 22a (with the meaning “a couple in the first marriage”).
⁶⁷ Khodasevich (see note 28), p. 236.
⁶⁸ Cf. Tchernichowsky, Shirim (see note 18), pp. 360, 361, 362, 367 and 368.
wedding can hardly be acknowledged. Khodasevich makes things worse and translates “shoshvin” consistently as “otets posazhënyi” which designates a role in the Russian orthodox wedding and has never been used in the context of a Jewish wedding. Khodasevich made no attempt to identify the dances, he omits the “volakhl” and the “kozachok” at the end of the fourth song, and translated the “maḥolot maḥanim” (“a dance of two camps”) with “obnimaia druga kruzhis’.

For other, which Khodasevich did not translate into Russian, the poet’s own manuscripts can help us understand the botanical terminology. One example is the sequence of plant names in the idyll “The Broken Spoon” (Ha-kaf ha-shvurah)

(1) pereg lohe ʿatʃiporen tsahov vrv bešem
(2) byḥad ʿim “zḵano shel melekh” hadur beʿargman-nitsanav,
(3) ʿezi “ben-paritsim mitpatel” ʿolim vneʿhazim bagader,
(4) tolim kosotam sarbanim, kos Ivanov vešel yakinṭon
(5) vsivkhei pol yeteh ʿaleh u“bigdei tsoʿanim” mavḥiḳim,
(6) helmit zeḵuṭah teʿunah kosot tsvʿonin leminah,
(7) maṭlīt-maṭlīt leḥud, ktifanit gedushat-hatseva.

“Pereg” (poppy) in line 1 is from the Mishna, “tsiporen” is translated from the Russian “gvozdiki” (literally “little nails”), “zaken shel melekh” (in line 2) is the translation of the Russian folklore name “tsarskaia boro dka” (“the tsar’s beard”); in the article “tsemaṭim u peraṭim”, in: Ha-shiloah 23 (1910/11), pp. 372–376 (p. 374).
cal names “Aristolochia vulgaris” or "A. tenuis” and explains that he used “za-
kan shel melekh” in order “to preserve the local colour”; “ben paritsim mitpatel” in line 3 is literally a “bending Puritz”, an interesting translation of “kruchenyj panych,” a Russian folklore name for Ipomoea purpurea; for “bigdei tso□anim” in line 5 there is a footnote in Shirim ḥadashim (1924) that such was the Ukrainian name of the plant. Though I have not been able to find any equivalent Ukrainian plant name, the flower can be identified: the flowers which Tchernichowsky combined in this passage can be found in the description of his mother’s garden in the manuscript version of the poet’s autobiography edited by Boaz Arpaly. The Genazim archives hold a Russian manuscript draft for this version of the autobiography which includes a list of the very same flowers: the only flower without an equivalent in the above passage is “nogotki”, calendula—or “skirts of the gypsies” is a very likely name for the blossoms of the calendula; “ḥelmit” (mallow) in line 9 is mishnaic, Tchernichowsky provides its meaning in an annotation; “ḵṭifanit” in line 10 is derived from the Russian “barkhatki” or “barkhatsy” (from “barkhat”, velvet). As we can see from this short passage Tchernichowsky invented most of the plant names himself. I have only found one instance where he followed the Russian-Hebrew dictionary of A. M. Kagan which went through four editions between 1907 and 1919 (and can still be found in Tchernichowsky’s library in the Genazim Archives): here he had looked up “kryzhovnik” (goose-berry) and found the Hebrew “‘akavit”, which appears in the Midrash as an unknown species of edible thistles. Khodasevich found the same translation in the interlinear text for “The Wedding of Elka.”

Tchernichowsky’s terminology reflects the particularities of Russian botanical lexis: he has two words for strawberry (“tut ha-sadeh” for “zemlianika”, wild strawberry, and “tut ha-ginah” for “klubnika”, garden strawberry) and two words for blackberry (“tut sneh” for “ezhevika kustistaia”, rubus fruticosus, and “tut ha-sia” for “ezhevika sizaia”, rubus caesius). The latter name misled Benjamin from “sneh”, the burning bush in Ex. 3.2 and in Deut. 33.16.

The words “tut sneh” and “tut ha-sia” appear in the autobiography in an enumeration together with raspberry (ha-petel), wild strawberry (tut ha-sadeh, “zemlianika”), garden strawberry (“tut ha-ginah”, “klubnika”) and European Cornel (“ha-moran”). In the manuscript of the autobiography, only “tut-sia” is given an annotation—the Ukrainian „ozhina” and the Russian “ezhevika” which both mean blackberry (Boaz Arpaly, the editor of the manuscript, transcribed, without any visible reason, “brusnika”, cowberry); Me’eizin ’avtobiografyah (see note 53), pp. 17–141 (p. 18). In the word list in Ha-safah (see note 48) Tchernichowsky gives for “[tut] sneh” the Russian “ezhevika”, the German “Schwarze Brombeere” and the Latin “Rubus sanctus (Schreb(er))”. He had found the Latin name in the Jewish Encyclopedia (see note 49), vol. 10, p. 72); the name had been coined by Johann Christian von Schreber (1739–1810), the German translator of Linné, in 1766. Schreber had derived the name from the biblical “sneh”—and this satisfied the editors of the Jewish encyclopedia who were grateful for a Latin name even if they had no idea of its botanical

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77 Sha’uš Tshernihovski, Shirim ḥadashim, Berlin 1924, p. 270.
78 Sha’uš Tshernihovski, Me’eizin ’avtobiografyah (see note 53), pp. 17–141 (p. 18).
80 Mishna Kilayim 1.8.
82 Khodasevich (see note 28), p. 219.
83 From “sneh”, the burning bush in Ex. 3.2 and in Deut. 33.16.
84 The words “tut sneh” and “tut ha-sia” appear in the autobiography in an enumeration together with raspberry (ha-petel), wild strawberry (tut ha-sadeh, “zemlianika”), garden strawberry (“tut ha-ginah”, “klubnika”) and European Cornel (“ha-moran”). In the manuscript of the autobiography, only “tut-sia” is given an annotation—the Ukrainian „ozhina” and the Russian “ezhevika” which both mean blackberry (Boaz Arpaly, the editor of the manuscript, transcribed, without any visible reason, “brusnika”, cowberry); Me’eizin ’avtobiografyah (see note 53), p. 38–39 (commentary on p. 128); In the word list in Ha-safah (see note 48) Tchernichowsky gives for “[tut] sneh” the Russian “ezhevika”, the German “Schwarze Brombeere” and the Latin “Rubus sanctus (Schreb(er))”. He had found the Latin name in the Jewish Encyclopedia (see note 49), vol. 10, p. 72); the name had been coined by Johann Christian von Schreber (1739–1810), the German translator of Linné, in 1766. Schreber had derived the name from the biblical “sneh”—and this satisfied the editors of the Jewish encyclopedia who were grateful for a Latin name even if they had no idea of its botanical
Harshav to assume that Tchernichowsky had created his own word for raspberry\textsuperscript{85} for which, in fact, he uses consistently “petel” (which is, again, confirmed by Khodasevich’s translation of “The Wedding of Elka”).\textsuperscript{86}

Being an ardent Hebraist did not prevent the poet from consciously creating a “subtext” in other languages: He describes the profession of his father as “iifiatros,”\textsuperscript{87} The Aramaic loan word from the Greek is Tchernichowsky’s translation of “konoval”, a historical profession whose main duty was to castrate horses and bulls but also to cure all domesticated animals and sometimes humans; in the village, he shared the medical duties with a “mayshir ‘atsamot” and a “hovesh degunda”\textsuperscript{88} the first is a “kostoprâv” (bonesetter), the second a “batalyonnyi feldsher” (feldsher of the batallion). Some of the medicinal plants used by his father were “kapot ribono shel ‘olam”, “bozhi ruchki” (primula veris), “on kaful tesha” (“deviatissil”), tansy, “badyan” (the Russian word for star anise) and “kalgan” (the Russian word for lesser galangal).\textsuperscript{89} None of these terms were accepted in Hebrew, nor was “dme shiv’ah ‘am”, a literal translation of “semibratnaia krov’” (hypericum). Only the international “tal shemeshe” (the Russian “rosa sol-nechnaia”), sundew was accepted. The subtext of another language creates some proper rebuses, and this is not limited to plant names: “sus ba’al tapu’im,” the young poet’s favorite toy, is a literal translation of “loshad’ v iblokakh”, a dapple-grey horse. This is confirmed by a handwritten Russian draft for the poet’s autobiography which is preserved in Genazim.\textsuperscript{91} One of the most difficult rebuses is a form of a beehive which has the Hebrew name “kayeret tavnit sharvul shel Limburg”\textsuperscript{92} – a “Lüneburger Stülper”; Tchernichowsky translated “Stülper” which is related to the old German word “Stulpe” (the turn-up cuff on the sleeve) as sleeve (“sharvul”) and then confused Limburg and Lüneburg. Another example is the bird called “tispor ha-solet”\textsuperscript{93} which has been taken for an unknown bird of the Ukrainian steppes. It shows once more that the poet was – for better or worse – thinking in Russian when he created this new terminology. The “semolina bird” is a breed of two Russian expressions: “mannaia kasha” and “mannaia ptitsa”. The adjective “mannyi” is a homonym: in the case of “mannaia ptitsa” it is derived from “manit” – “to attract” or “to decoy”, whereas “mannaia krupa” is the fine flour from which the hot porridge called “mannaia kasha” is made (which etymologically goes back to the biblical food “manah”). It should be noted that the “subtext” is not always Russian, it can also be Greek, for example when the


\textsuperscript{86} Khodasevich (see note 28), p. 235.

\textsuperscript{87} Tchernichowsky, \textit{Shirim} (see note 18), p. 716.

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., p. 717.

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., p. 718–719.

\textsuperscript{90} Tchernichowsky, \textit{Me’eyin avtobiografyah} (see note 53), p. 42.

\textsuperscript{91} Genazim 1–40814, p. 6 (under “moi igrushki”).

\textsuperscript{92} Tchernichowsky, \textit{Shirim} (see note 18), p. 797.

\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., p. 850.
poet uses the aramaic word “galinah”\textsuperscript{94} for the doldrums on the sea; “galinah” is a loan word from the Greek \textgreek{γαλήνη} which Homer uses no fewer than five times in the \textit{Odyssey} – and in exactly the same metrical position.\textsuperscript{95}

Looking at the Homeric subtext we can perceive another important aspect of Khodasevich’s translation. Khodasevich was aware of the Greek echoes; he observed that Tchernichowsky created the “Homeric spirit of his idylls” with repetitions, comparisons (imitations of the Homeric similes), and detailed descriptions; and he explained the result: “The sense of the idylls is not only descriptive but philosophical. Reminding the reader persistently of Homer, Tchernichowsky emphasizes that only the appearances change, and the essence of human life remains, and that the difference between Nausicaa and Elka is not at all that big.”\textsuperscript{96}

He had certainly noticed the imitation of the Homeric ship catalogue in the description of the wedding guests in the first song of “The Wedding of Elka”. He then went on to recreate some of the linguistic particularities which only the eye of the poet could perceive. One of these is parallelism: Tchernichowsky uses the caesura of the Homeric hexameter in order to recreate what has been the only generally accepted feature of Tanakhic poetry since the pioneer work of Bishop Robert Lowth (1710–1787).\textsuperscript{97} Khodasevich recreated this effect and, in his best lines, raised the Russian hexameter to a level that it had not reached before.\textsuperscript{98} He then recreated some characteristic stylistic devices. Particularly interesting is the use of the hendiadys because it belongs both to classical antiquity (most notably to Vergil)\textsuperscript{99} and to the Hebrew Bible.\textsuperscript{100} Tchernichowsky used it, particularly in his idylls, to an extent that is unparalleled in modern literature, and with poetic ingenuity that was only surpassed by Shakespeare.\textsuperscript{101} I will discuss Tchernichowsky’s hendiadys in a forthcoming study but offer here a very clear example which contains two hendiadys from “Brit milah”: “Vkhalvei harhorov mizdrazim veratsim lifneihem va’reihem / mmal’im alal ha’avir binvi / ol sa-son” (literally: “the street dogs hurry and run before and behind [the carriage] and fill the space of the air with joyful barks and with a happy voice”).\textsuperscript{102}

\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., p. 703.
\textsuperscript{95} Homer, Od. V, 391, 452; VII, 319, X, 94; XII, 168.
\textsuperscript{96} Khodasevich, “O Chernikhovskom” (see note 14), p. 52.
\textsuperscript{98} To give just one example out of many: “Net granits tishine, i net predela prostoru” (“The are no borders to the silence, there is no limit to the space”); Khodasevich (see note 28), p. 227.
\textsuperscript{102} Tchernichowsky, \textit{Shirim} (see note 18), p. 153.
dogs were, of course, running quickly and the happy voice of their barking filled the air. To recreate the hendiadys to the same extent in translation would have invariably produced a comical effect. Khodavich’s use of the device therefore is only a distant echo of that of original hendiadys. There is, however, evidence that he was well aware of the device (despite his reliance on interlinear translations): he uses hendiadys in passages where they are not present in the original: where the original reads simply, “gadlah ha-bkhiyah” (“the weeping increased”), Khodasevich translates “sil’nyi i gromkii byl plach” (“the weeping was strong and loud”) meaning that it was very loud; similarly, “po mnogim i vazhnym prichinam” (“for many and for important reasons”) means “for many important reasons”. The hendiadys add to the epic tone, in which there is no instance that provides a hierarchy or logical relation between various attributes. In other cases he simply reiterates the use of Biblical Hebrew: “I govoril ei badkhan, i kazhduiu zapoved’ strogo / ei nakazal sobliudat’” (“and the badchan spoke to her, and told her to follow every commandment strictly”). Khodasevich also uses other stylistic devices characteristic of Biblical Hebrew such as the tautological initive (“spastis’-to spassia”, literally “saving he saved himself”), or the figura etymologica as in “krikom kricha” (“yelling with a yell”). There is conclusive evidence that Khodasevich very consciously tried to recreate the Homeric subtexts: rendering the stable formula “‘Elkah ha-tsnu’ah” (“the humble Elka”) as “razumnitsa Él’ka” he gives Elka the attribute of Homer’s Penelope: Vasilii Zhukovskii had translated περίφρων Πηνελόπεια (which occurs more than fifty times in the Odyssey) as “razumnaia Penelopa” or as “mnogo razumnaiya startsa Ikariia doch’” (“the very sensible daughter of the old Icarios”). The translation of the attribute “tsenu’ah” (“humble”) as “razumnitsa” (“sensible”) instead of the literal “skromnaia” or “skromnitsa” can only be explained by the reference to Penelope. If Tchernichowsky did not suggest the translation himself, he was certainly pleased: in his Hebrew version of the Odyssey, on which he worked during the same years, Penelope consistently received the same attribute as Elka: “Penelopeyah ha-tsnu’ah.”

Tchernichowsky used the subtext of another language intentionally, not only to create a “local colour”, as he had written himself twice, but to lay open the ways

103 Ibid., p. 361.
104 Khodasevich (see note 28), p. 232.
105 Ibid., p. 223.
106 Ibid., p. 232.
108 Khodasevich (see note 28), p. 178.
109 Ibid., p. 225.
112 Homerus, ‘Il’iadah. ‘Odiseyah, tirgem mi-Yevanit Sha’ul Ţshernihovski, Tel Aviv 1954, p. 237 (Od. I, 328) et passim; I would like to thank Agata Grzybowsa (Warsaw) for this hint.
in which Hebrew interacts with other languages. That he understood translation as an integral part of his poetics can be seen from his late poem “Zemirot” (“Festive Songs”) of 1943 which changes the Talmudic expression “shnayim mikra’ ve’ehad targum” (“twice Scripture and once translation”)\(^{113}\) into “ehad mikra’ veshnayim targum” (“once Scripture and twice translation”),\(^{114}\) turning a halakhic dictum into a metaphor which describes his poetry. “Targum”, here, does not refer to the Aramaic translation of the Tanakh but to Russian, Ukrainian and Bulgarian songs which his mother had sung when she was young.

There is yet another source which shows that Tchernichowsky was very aware of his role in Hebrew poetry: Tchernichowsky had written an article on H. N. Bialik in Russian for the journal *Evreiskaia zhizn’* (Jewish Life) in 1916\(^ {115}\) which has remained almost unnoticed. In this article, he proposes a distinction between the “poët narodnyi” (from “narod”, the people) and the “poët natsional’nyi” (from “natsiia”, nation).\(^ {116}\) Both terms would be translated as “national poet” in English. The distinction goes back to Vissarion Belinskii\(^ {117}\) who had described Pierre-Jean de Béranger as “poët narodnyi” and Goethe and Schiller as “poëty natsional’nye.”\(^ {118}\) The topic had been revived by Mikhail Gershenzon, one of the editors of the *Evreiskaia antologiia*, in his book *Mudrost’ Pushkina* (The Wisdom of Pushkin).\(^ {119}\) According to Tchernichowsky, Bialik is the only “poët narodnyj”; he does not give a Jewish example for a Hebrew “poët natsional’nyi”, but anybody familiar with the Hebrew poetry of the time will have recognized that he himself was the first and obvious candidate: The “poët natsional’nyi” can show a “higher degree of individuality”, of personal creativity and of general humanistic ideals; whatever he receives from his people, including its language, is merely the essential environment without which creative work is impossible. His people give him complete freedom, his thoughts and feelings can go against those of his people, and can even be hostile towards it. Tchernichowsky’s examples for the “poët natsional’nyi” are Byron, Ibsen, Anatole France, John Keats and Oscar Wilde.

Saul Tchernichowsky used the freedom of the “poët natsional’nyi” to introduce layers of other languages. These layers create difficulties and even rebuses for the reader but they challenge a translation that reveals the common elements – not in images or ideas, but in the very essence of the languages. The translation of

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113 T.B. Berakhot 8a (referring to the practice of reading the weekly portion of the Torah).
114 Saul Tchernichowsky, *Shirim* (see note 18), p. 768.
Tchernichowsky’s Hebrew idylls into Russian meant, to some degree, to uncover and re-create what was already there. The translation becomes a commentary, just as the Targum had been used as a commentary that helped to understand difficult passages in the Hebrew Tanakh. The most interesting aspect, however, is that supreme translation unveils that two texts belong to a common cultural field, and that translation in this sense belongs to the very essence of poetry.

Appendix: A Note on the German Translations of Tchernichowsky’s poetry

The small number of German translations of Tchernichowsky’s poems has fallen into oblivion. The best was a fragment of thirty six lines from “Baruch of Mayence” translated by Martin Buber. It was published in the *Jüdischer Almanach* of 1902. The best was a fragment of thirty six lines from “Baruch of Mayence” translated by Martin Buber. It was published in the *Jüdischer Almanach* of 1902.120 Martin Buber rendered the iambic tetrameters of the original in iambic pentameters; and his occasional use of rhyme recreates the tonality of the original. Apart from a few scattered translations of short poems121 there were three further attempts to translate Tchernichowsky’s poetry: the first was made by the historian and political scientist, Hans Kohn. The back cover of his book *Nationalismus* published by Löwit in Vienna and Berlin in 1922 announced a forthcoming volume with the title “Saul Tschernichowskij: Lieder und Gesänge: Nachdichtungen aus dem Hebräischen, gemeinsam mit Hugo Knöpfmacher”, but this announcement was never fulfilled. The translations can be found in the archive of Hugo Knöpfmacher in the Leo Baeck Institute in New York. They contain some of Tchernichowsky’s nature and love poems as well as translations of “Deianira” and of the first part of “Brit Milah”. Though the hexameters are formally correct they more closely resemble a first draft than a translation of a piece of art. The first chapter of “Brit Milah” was published in the journal *Das Zelt* in February 1924 under the name of Hans Kohn. The preface to this publication announces more information on the poet in a forthcoming book with the title “Wesen und Wege des Juden” – which was yet another unfulfilled promise. There is no trace of the book in Kohn’s archive. A metrical translation of the final part of “In Front of the Statue of Apollo” can be found in Hans Kohn's monograph on Martin Buber. It is hard to decide if the translation is his, or if he quotes from an unpublished manuscript by Martin Buber. The second attempt was made by the otherwise unknown Max Elk from Stettin. His translation of the third chapter of “Brit Milah” was published under the title “Das Mahl” in 1934.125

122 Leo Baeck Archives, AR 7172–3/4 (Hugo Knoepfmacher Collection 331, 1).
His hexameters are much better than those of Knöpfmacher and Kohn but still belong to those which Tchernichowsky himself described as, “leaving much to be wished for.”\(^{126}\) The translation was slightly improved by the anthropologist Max Grunwald and re-published in 1936.\(^{127}\) The third attempt was made, it seems, by the Zionist poet Marek Scherlag who also wrote a German sonnet on Tchernichowsky in 1940 (upon the occasion of the Bialik prize which Tchernichowsky was granted that year);\(^{128}\) to be more precise: the typescripts of some translations are filed under his name in the Genazim archives.\(^{129}\) They include German versions of “Levivot”, “In the Heat of the Day”, “Man is Nothing But…”, and “In Front of the Statue of Apollo”. The translations of the two idylls were published much later under the name of Gershon Stein.\(^{130}\) It is unclear whether Gershon Stein simply adopted Scherlag’s translations or if the typescript has been misfiled in Genazim. Whoever made the translation allowed the use of anacrusis in the German hexameter without gaining much suppleness in syntax and expression.

\(^{126}\) Cwi Wohlmuth, W 60-lecie urodzin Szaula Czernichowskiego: Wywiad z poetą, in: Opinja, 12.1.1936, p. 6–7 (p. 6).


\(^{129}\) Genazim Archives, fond I–4751 sq.

\(^{130}\) Gershon Stein, Die unzerstörbare Brücke, Osnabrück 1996.