

The Memoirs and Journalism of Yakov Vladimirovich Veynshal: Exploring the Interplay of Autobiography and Psychoanalysis

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Abstract

This article explores the interplay between autobiography and psychoanalysis through the writings and personal experiences of Yakov Vladimirovich Veynshal, a prominent Zionist Revisionist journalist and Hebrew writer in Mandate Palestine. Veynshal's memoirs and journalistic work provide insights into the connection between these two fields by using personal experiences, literary analysis, creative expression, and cultural and political commentaries. They also demonstrate how literature and psychoanalysis intersect through creative and symbolic expression. The article explores first Veynshal's journey, from a non-traditional 'bar mitzvah' trip to Palestine to his experiences in Russia and his complex relationship with Russian culture. Secondly, it demonstrates how his writings reflect the formation of his Zionist sentiments and unique identity. Additionally, Veynshal's experiences in Palestine during the 1920s are analysed, highlighting the historical and political context of British Mandate Palestine and the development of Jewish and Arab relations.

Keywords: *autobiography, psychoanalysis, Weinshall memoirs, journalism, Zionist-Revisionist, Mandate Palestine, identity formation*

This article delves into the psychological dimensions present in the writings and personal narratives of Yakov Vladimirovich Veynshal, a Zionist Revisionist journalist, Hebrew writer, and a prominent figure in Mandate Palestine. These narratives are often called the Weinshall memoirs. My article examines through a psychoanalytic lens the formation of Zionist sentiments within the persona and from the perspective of Dr. Yakov Veynshal, by comparing the various material published in his memoirs (1954) with the breadth of the diversity of his articles (1922–1927), published in the émigré newspaper *Rassvet*.

Many protagonists of Zionism with all its facets, including Revisionism, were Russian speakers, who addressed an extensive Russian-speaking audience. One of the press organs that spread their ideas was the weekly *Rassvet*, published first in Berlin (1922–1924) and then in Paris (1924–1934). The call to 'review' Zionism, to bring it back to its original principles, generated the Zionist revisionist movement, a vibrant community of activists who campaigned against the prevailing streams in the World Zionist Congress and called for a Jewish state on both sides of the Jordan River.

Yakov Vladimirovich Veynshal was a Zionist physician, and, in his own words, ‘the first revisionist of the land of Israel.’¹ He was born in Tiflis in 1892 and died in Israel in 1981.

The Veynshal family came to the Caucasus from St. Petersburg. The mild climate of the southern regions was considered an excellent treatment for those suffering from respiratory diseases, as was Vladimir Veynshal, Yakov’s father. After completing his studies at the Baku Gymnasium, Yakov moved to Germany. He followed in his father’s footsteps and became a Doctor of Medicine.

Yakov Veynshal’s Identity Formation

Veynshal made his first trip to Palestine accompanied by his father and his brothers Abraham and Eleazar. For Veynshal, that visit was a rite of passage. He compares it with a *bar mitzvah*:

In the summer of 1909, my father decided to visit Palestine, and with the consent of my mother, he took us, his three sons, with him. This was my ‘bar mitzvah’, as I was not honoured with another, traditional one, like my brothers. What a pity that this innovation – instead of a bar mitzvah going to Palestine with children – has not yet become fashionable among the Jews of the Diaspora. Thanks to this trip, my Jewish citizenship received the significance of an inviolable oath to the country and its people. A father’s trip with his children’s luggage – the youngest of us was 14 years old – made a strong impression at that time, especially on the Palestinians, it was remembered for decades. Apparently, we, as tourists, were unique.²

This passage as well as many others from the *Memoirs* reveal Veynshal’s respect and affection for his parents who would share the fate of their children, since they all emigrated to Eretz Israel. The excerpt touches upon topics such as Veynshal’s journey of self-discovery, identity formation, family dynamics, and the lasting impact of early experiences on memory and individuality. It also hints at the complex interplay between cultural identity, nationalism, and the desire to be recognized as unique within a foreign cultural context. The initiation of Jewish awareness finds its origins in an unconventional *bar mitzvah*. To fully grasp the significance of such an unconventional *bar mitzvah*, it is imperative to have a firm understanding of the conventional Jewish ceremony. The *bar mitzvah* stands as a momentous Jewish rite of passage, symbolizing a young boy’s transition into adulthood at the age of thirteen. Traditionally, it entails the public reading of a Torah portion and is typically a formal and religious affair. However, Veynshal opts for a non-traditional path, departing from the established religious and cultural norms. In doing so, he reinterprets and customizes traditional practices, including religious rites, thereby challenging the prevailing taboos and expectations within the Jewish community. This endeavour laid the foundation for a novel faith, notably the Zionist one. In this context, the central point of societal adaptation regarding rituals and beliefs has shifted away from Torah readings, now revolving around the appropriation of the Promised Land, as theorized by the Zionist Revisionists. The mention of the ‘*bar mitzvah* journey’ to

¹ Yakov Veynshal, ‘Vospominania’ [Memoirs], *Iyerusalimskiy zhurnal* 10 (2002 [1954]); available at <https://new.antho.net/wp/jj10-weinshal/> [accessed 11 March 2023]. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are mine.

² Yakov Veynshal, ‘Vospominania’, *Iyerusalimskiy zhurnal* 9 (2001 [1954]); available at <https://new.antho.net/wp/jj09-weinschal/> [accessed 11 March 2023].

Palestine carries profound significance as a pivotal moment of formation of Veynshal's identity and personal development. The author's experience of a non-traditional *bar mitzvah* is setting him apart from his siblings. This divergence can be viewed as a manifestation of individuality and the innate desire to assert his unique identity. In the chapter 'Ancient Myths and Modern Man' of Carl Gustav Jung's *Man and his Symbols*, Joseph L. Henderson writes that

the ritual takes the novice back to the deepest level of original mother-child identity or ego-Self-identity, thus forcing him to experience a symbolic death. In other words, his identity is temporarily dismembered or dissolved in the collective unconscious. From this state he is then ceremonially rescued by the rite of the new birth. This is the first act of true consolidation of the ego with the larger group, expressed as totem, clan, or tribe, or all three combined.³

The alternative *bar mitzvah* serves as a symbolic death for Veynshal as a Russian Jew and marks his rebirth as a Zionist. However, we should delve deeper into Veynshal's emotions and thoughts regarding his Russian identity. Presenting texts in Russian by an author who, by his own admission, did not speak any language as well as he spoke Russian (despite his excellent command of German and Hebrew), it is important to emphasise that for Yakov Veynshal the connection with his homeland was purely linguistic. In rationalizing his choice to pursue a medical education in Germany, a decision influenced to some degree by the policy of *numerus clausus*, which restricted Jewish enrolment in Russian universities, the memoirist expounds upon his significant disapproval of Russian culture and society:

I studied at the gymnasium poorly, partly consciously, as I dreamed of getting a higher education abroad. If I received a medal, then I was in danger of falling into the percentage norm for Jews 'entering' a Russian university. For some reason, I had an idiosyncrasy towards everything Russian – up to the spiritually resonating Tolstoy and the diabolically hysterical Dostoevsky, these two idols of Russian culture. I could not stand the scent of holy Russia, with and without a tsar, just as the Russians of that time could not stand the smell of garlic, which, in their opinion, accompanied every Jew. I paid back in kind.⁴

The passage highlights a complex relationship with Russian culture and the narrator's Jewish identity. His resistance to Russian culture and its stereotypes associated with Jews mirrors a psychological defense mechanism. This resistance can be seen as a way of protecting one's ego and identity from external pressures and avoid the risk of assimilation. In this context, the narrator's aversion to Russian culture and his determination not to excel academically for a chance at education abroad could be seen as manifestations of defense mechanisms employed to navigate a challenging environment and to cope with societal expectations and threats to his self-concept.⁵

In this fragment, the significance of scent in Veynshal's memory stands out, as it holds psychoanalytical significance. It can be associated with deep-seated psychological and emotional responses. It elicits a '*madeleine*-effect' in the reader, reminiscent of the odour or taste-triggered recollection of memories, known as the 'Proust phenomenon', named after the literary incident, where Marcel Proust's consumption of a *madeleine* biscuit dipped in Linden tea transported him to a long-forgotten childhood moment. While

³ Joseph L. Henderson, in Carl Gustav Jung, *Man and His Symbols* (London: Pan Books, 1978), 123.

⁴ Veynshal, 'Vospominania', *Iyerusalimskiy zhurnal* 9 (2001 [1954]); available at <https://new.antho.net/wp/jj09-weinschal/> [accessed 11 March 2023].

⁵ Anna Freud, *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense* (London: Karnac Books, 1993 [1936]), 28-50.

Proust and existing neuropsychological literature focus on the actual sensory experience, where an odour or taste awakens the remembrance of a significant personal past event, in Veynshal's case, the 'scent of holy Russia' and the 'smell of garlic' associated with Jews are fictional. Scent-triggered memories, being less frequent, and predominantly associated with early-life experiences as opposed to memories elicited by words or images, exemplify the overarching theme of Veynshal's manipulation of memory and trauma within the *Memoirs*. Scent-induced memories are often noted for their ability to elicit particularly strong emotional and vivid recollections in contrast to other *stimuli*. However, it is essential to clarify that in this context, we are referring to metaphorical rather than empirical experiences. The subsequent passage, which reveals Veynshal's awareness of antisemitism, uses the contrived nature of the scent *stimulus*.

Veynshal justifies his disassociation from Russian national identity by invoking the principle of 'an eye for an eye,' expressing his intent to respond in kind. He also underlines the negative attitude towards Jews in Russian society. The awareness of the existence of a strongly antisemitic sentiment came to the author many years before, during childhood:

I was then no more than six years old. Robbery attacks on Tatar boys were our main children's amusement. [...] In our legion of four there was a miller's son, our own age. One of the stones of the enemy troops bruised him too. On this occasion, the miller's wife, a simple woman, burst into a curse at our address: 'Zhidy, they killed Christ!' The phrase sounded somewhat mysterious to my ears. I asked my mother for an explanation. She explained to me that *zhid* is a swear word for a Jew, and the Russians consider us to be the culprits in the murder of their God.⁶

This episode illustrates antisemitism as a process of phobogenesis. Veynshal and his brothers become the phobic objects for the Russian child's mother. According to Frantz Fanon, phobic objects are those elements that trigger in a subject irrational feeling of dread, fear, and hatred, often with an exaggerated sense of threat.⁷ In his analysis, Fanon identified the black person as a phobogenic object, inciting anxiety in the eyes of white subjects. In Veynshal's example, Jewish children are perceived as dangerous, unpleasant in odour, thus fitting the pattern of being revolting and threatening simultaneously. Veynshal's recollections continue with the trauma caused by that antisemitic event, which yet makes him stronger:

My mother told me: 'Stop playing with the miller's son...'
But for me at that moment the whole world was no more than a big mill, in which poisonous lies are ground instead of flour. And at that moment I decided that I, provoked, would accept the fight, no matter how unequal it may be. My mother told me that they consider one murdered Jew their God. I decided that even if this was to be like that, then it doesn't matter at all who killed him, it is only important to silence them so that they did not interfere in others' affairs. If they need God, then let them look for him elsewhere, and not among us. Not they, but we ourselves have the right to conduct ourselves as we please.
It was a cruel experience, and I have no doubt that this offense of the stupid miller's wife became the starting point of all my development. My pride was hurt.⁸

⁶ Veynshal, 'Vospominania', *Iyerusalimskiy zhurnal* 9 (2001 [1954]); available at <https://new.antho.net/wp/jj09-weinschal/> [accessed 11 March 2021].

⁷ See Frantz Fanon, *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs* [Black Skin, White Masks] (Paris: Éditions Points, 2015).

⁸ Veynshal, 'Vospominania', *Iyerusalimskiy zhurnal* 9 (2001 [1954]); available at <https://new.antho.net/wp/jj09-weinschal/> [accessed 11 March 2023].

In his discussion of the constructed nature of memories, Freud states that ‘the most frequent content of the first memories of childhood are occasions of fear, shame, physical pain, etc.’⁹ The unmotivated cruelty of the miller’s wife’s words marks the author’s fate. It erases his feeling of belonging to Russian society, excluding the possibility of assimilation. A compensation for the vindictive harshness of this tale will be given a little later, when Veynshal, offended by being expelled from the school choir, but realizing his inability to sing, will be forced to jokingly admit that ‘not all singing teachers are antisemites’.¹⁰ As *Posledniye Novosti*’s correspondent Antonin Ladinsky, whom Vladimir Jabotinsky asked Veynshal to accompany during his trip to prepare the book *Journey to Palestine*, would later say, Veynshal’s style is ‘witty and cheerful’ and his mind is ‘sceptical and mocking’.¹¹

Laura Marcus, in her scrutiny of autobiographical works and their correlation with psychoanalysis, observes a recurrent pattern among writers. She highlights their tendency to often concentrate on a pivotal event or an inherent characteristic believed to have a profound influence on the entirety of an individual’s life: ‘Psychoanalysis has also been a shaping force on 20th-century autobiography, [... it] became a totalizing method of interpretation’.¹² When delving into the unconscious, a central theme in this issue, one should note that in his reminiscences, Veynshal constructs his own ‘purposeful childhood,’ infusing it with his adult ideological stance, notably his Zionist position.¹³ In his investigation tracing the transformation of childhood portrayals from the romanticized renditions within the Russian gentry tradition to Trotsky’s exposure of their inherent deceit, A. B. Wachtel highlights the prevalent skepticism surrounding the precision of childhood memories in autobiographical narratives. Usually, autobiographers strive to reclaim and endorse their earliest reminiscences. However, upon thorough examination, they often find it necessary to omit certain specifics due to their lack of veracity or uncertain status as genuine recollections.¹⁴ Within this methodical curation process, Veynshal’s selection of episodes proceeds without an overriding preoccupation for details that could potentially fail the authenticity assessment. The author aligns with Gorky’s ‘anti-childhood’ paradigm, reflecting Gorky’s inclination to disregard certain childhood episodes despite being compelled to acknowledge their role in shaping his life. Notably, Gorky emphasizes that his personal experiences were not exceptions but rather the establishment of a novel norm. This interpretation by Gorky might be construed as adopting a psychoanalytical approach in writing and revisiting memories, where ‘autobiography is not a nostalgic attempt at eternal return but means of overcoming the

⁹ Sigmund Freud, ‘Screen Memories’, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 3, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1962), 305.

¹⁰ Veynshal, ‘Vospominania’, *Iyerusalimskiy zhurnal* 9 (2001 [1954]); available at <https://new.antho.net/wp/jj09-weinschal/> [accessed 11 March 2023].

¹¹ Vladimir Khazan, *Osobennyiy evreysko-russkiy vozdukh* [A Peculiar Russian-Jewish Atmosphere] (Moscow-Jerusalem: Mosty kul’tury – Gesharim, 2001), 299.

¹² Laura Marcus, *Autobiography: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford Academic online editions, 2018), 58.

¹³ On such practices, see Edward Waysband, ‘The Politics of Childhood in Vladislav Khodasevich’s ‘Infancy’’, *Journal of Modern Literature*, forthcoming 48.1 (2024), where he describes how ‘Khodasevich apparently attempted to reconfigure his “infancy” biographically to substantiate his evolving diasporic program, while redefining a discursive mode of his childhood ego-writing.’

¹⁴ Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *The Battle for Childhood. Creation of a Russian Myth* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 146.

past, of leaving it behind.’¹⁵ Freud posits the absence of an exact verbatim recall concerning childhood memories. Instead, memory appears to be a result of a selective and imaginative reconstruction influenced by the desires and necessities of adulthood. His exploration of the genesis of childhood memories, as exemplified in his essay ‘Screen Memories,’ shares numerous parallels with the scrutiny applied to analyzing dreams.¹⁶ Regarding childhood memories, Freud states that ‘people often construct such things unconsciously – almost like works of fiction’¹⁷ and ‘it may indeed be questioned whether we have any memories at all from our childhood: memories *relating to* our childhood may be all that we possess’;¹⁸ they ‘were instead assembled and shaped at each moment with specific set of dynamic needs in mind.’¹⁹

This episode played a crucial role in the author’s self-narrative, marking a significant juncture in Veynshal’s recognition of his ethnic identity. The forthcoming episode, as cited below, acts as a profound catalyst for the latent Zionist sentiment within him:

Once my father told me that some doctor from Vienna suggested that all Jews go to Palestine. This idea also impressed me from a purely technical point of view. I immediately imagined that everyone would get on a train, which would have an innumerable number of cars, and go to Palestine. After my father’s horse, on which I often raced along the roads, the railroad was my biggest idol. Especially the steam locomotive! We always dragged all the chairs in the house into our nursery; they served as wagons. Therefore, I liked Herzl’s idea terribly, as if we sat down to drive a steam locomotive.²⁰

The evocation of a ‘doctor from Vienna’ may understandably lead one to entertain the possibility that this doctor could have been Max Nordau. Originating from Austria-Hungary, Nordau primarily resided in Paris but contributed writings to the Zionist publication *Die Welt* in Vienna. Notably, Nordau was a physician. Another compelling reason to contemplate Nordau as a plausible candidate is found in Veynshal’s terminology in later articles, specifically his mention of the word ‘degeneration’, which happens to be the title of one of Nordau’s renowned books. An alternative perspective in considering the identity of the ‘doctor from Vienna’ advocating for Jewish emigration might lead to Sigmund Freud, renowned as the father of psychoanalysis, as a potential candidate. A brief lapse in judgment may occur due to Herzl’s non-medical background, the application of the term ‘doctor’, and his non-Viennese origin – attributes that clearly distinguish him from Freud, yet should not result in confusion. Indeed, Freud did not advocate for the notion of all Jews relocating to Palestine. On the contrary, his stance on Zionism is elucidated in his correspondence with Chaim Koffler, the head of the Vienna branch of Keren HaYesod (a Zionist fundraising organization), particularly in the aftermath of the events of 1929. On August 16, 1929, an Arab mob, incited by the Supreme Muslim Council, attacked the Western Wall, expelling Jewish worshippers and burning holy books. The resulting violence, known as the Palestine Riots of 1929, led to

¹⁵ Wachtel, 147.

¹⁶ Madelon Sprengnether, ‘Freud as Memoirist: A Reading of ‘Screen Memories’’, *American Imago* 69.2 (2012): 215-40.

¹⁷ Freud, 315.

¹⁸ Freud, 322, original italics.

¹⁹ Howard B. Levine, Gail S. Reed. *On Freud’s ‘Screen Memories’* (Boca Raton: Routledge, 2014), 28.

²⁰ Veynshal, ‘Vospominania’, *Iyerusalimskiy zhurnal* 9 (2001 [1954]); available at <https://new.antho.net/wp/jj09-weinschal/> [accessed 11 March 2023].

over 130 Jewish deaths in various cities within a week.²¹ In 1930, after the violence ceased, Keren HaYesod launched a PR campaign for the Yishuv, the Jewish community of the region of Palestine. Seeking support, they contacted prominent Jews worldwide. Chaim Koffler's letter, sent to Freud, requested a statement of support for Jews in the Land of Israel. Freud's reply on February 26, 1930, was a carefully worded refusal. While declining to issue support, he expressed his lack of sympathy for the Yishuv, stating, 'I cannot do as you wish. My sober judgment of Zionism does not permit rousing and inflammatory statements to influence the masses.'²² In the event that Freud's tenuous connection with Zionism or his explicit opposition to it, failed to provide sufficient clarity, the memoirist's own words illuminate the matter when he stated, 'I liked Herzl's idea terribly.' Nonetheless, when delving into the symbolism of the locomotive, there is no room for ambiguity. It invariably conjures associations with Freud due to his well-documented fascination with trains, a theme that has been thoroughly examined by Shuli Barzilai in her article 'Freud and the Topos of the Wandering Jew' in this issue, particularly emphasizing 'Freud's train connections' which encompass his theoretical reflections on and personal experiences with railroad journeys.²³

Emigration to Israel

Prior to repatriation, Veynshal served as a doctor on the Persian front. At the beginning of World War I he was expelled from Germany since he was a Russian citizen. He had an adventurous journey from neutral Switzerland, where he took refuge with his brother, to St. Petersburg and then to the Caucasus. The stories of this journey are among the most humorous pieces of the *Memoirs*.

In November 1922, before landing in Palestine, as many other Russian refugees, Veynshal stopped in Constantinople where he wrote a three-episodes reportage titled 'S beregov Bosfora' [From the Shores of the Bosphorus].²⁴ In these articles he analysed the Turks' attitudes towards Jews and Zionism. If the Turks' attitude towards Jewish people was unequivocally defined as positive, the feelings towards the Zionist movement were more mixed. Indeed, the Turkish administration and population feared the nationalist movement as an external influence. While Veynshal's press review also brought to the fore positive sentiments toward Zionists, the journalist cautioned against lowering one's guard, considering the strategic significance of Turkey as a refuge for exiles. In his words:

All this cannot be indifferent to us. Constantinople will for a long time remain the most important of the existing milestones for Jewish emigration to Palestine. Even now, despite all the carefully guarded border slingshots, emigrants from Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, Crimea, the Caucasus, Turkestan, Bukhara and even Persia continue to flock here. Here, on the threshold of Palestine, these emigrants linger for a long time, fulfilling all the necessary legal formalities to enter the country. Here they are given all possible help, and all this work

²¹ Tom Segev, *One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs Under the British Mandate* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1999), 314-27.

²² Ro Onarim, 'What Did Freud Really Think of Zionism?'; available at https://blog.nli.org.il/en/freud_on_zionism/ [accessed 7 November 2023].

²³ Shuli Barzilai, 'Freud and the Topos of the Wandering Jew', *Word and Text – A Journal of Literary Studies and Linguistics* 13 (2023): 121-43.

²⁴ Ya. Veynshal, 'S beregov Bosfora' [From the Shores of the Bosphorus], *Rassvet* 30, 5 November 1922, 11; 'S beregov Bosfora', *Rassvet* 31, 12 November 1922, 13-14; 'S beregov Bosfora', *Rassvet* 33, 26 November 1922, 14-15.

cannot be carried on if there is an unhealthy atmosphere of confusion from the part of elements hostile to Zionism.²⁵

The author spoke in third person, but in those days, he was one of those emigrants about to land in Eretz Israel. This becomes clearer in the second instalment of the series from Constantinople, that began with a romantic and evocative description of the city:

How desolate and empty of content this city has become for us, which until recently so vaguely agitated us with its enormous possibilities. Over the course of a long series of years, Constantinople has teased, encouraged, and discouraged the political imagination of Zionism so many times. It seemed as if some special, much-talking reticence, deliberate indistinctness and intriguing mystery, full of surprises: large and small, pleasant and frightening, imaginary and real, were poured in the very air here. This atmosphere of tense anxiety had its own special flavour for us, intoxicated us in its own way, and somehow strangely strengthened our sense of confidence and cheerfulness.²⁶

The transition from a third-person to a first-person perspective and the emotional metamorphosis within the passage can be examined through a psychoanalytic lens, shedding light on the author's evolving self-awareness, collective identity, and cultural memory. The utilization of inclusive terms like 'us' and 'we' implies a profound connection or identification with a larger group or community, which carries psychological significance in terms of collective identity. Initially, the author provides an objective and analytical portrayal of the city of Constantinople. The city is depicted as a force that has both intrigued and discouraged the Zionists' political imagination. However, as the passage unfolds, there's a noticeable shift towards a more nostalgic and yearning tone. The use of collective pronouns such as 'us' and 'we' suggests the shared identity of the Jewish diaspora and their communal experiences. As previously discussed, the author's journey to Palestine for the *bar mitzvah* could have played a pivotal role in shaping this collective identity. The author's narrative might serve as a manifestation of the cultural memory of the Jewish people, moulded by the collective history and aspirations of their community. He compares the variety of the social composition of Jewry in Constantinople to the different currents flowing in the Bosphorus, describing a 'Constantinopolitan Tel Aviv' with the peculiar Jewish faces one can encounter at the Galata Tower, the Jewish hotel 'Jerusalem', the cafe 'Gatikva' or the restaurants 'Jaffa' or 'Theodor Herzl'.²⁷

Yakov Veynshal finally landed in Palestine in 1922, between the second and third *Aliyah*.²⁸ He first worked as a doctor in the areas of Zikhron Yaakov, Karkur and Beit Shean, then in Jerusalem, and finally accepted the 'offer from Kupat-Holim'²⁹ to move to Tel Aviv and left Jerusalem without regret.³⁰ The author's passion for this romantic city 'on sand and from sand' will be significant.

²⁵ Ya. Veynshal, 'S beregov Bosfora' [From the Shores of the Bosphorus], *Rassvet* 30, 5 November 1922, 11.

²⁶ Ya. Veynshal, 'S beregov Bosfora' [From the Shores of the Bosphorus], *Rassvet* 30, 5 November 1922, 11.

²⁷ Yakov Veynshal, 'S beregov Bosfora', *Rassvet* 31, 26 November 1922, 14-15.

²⁸ The Hebrew term 'Aliyah' holds a literal meaning of 'ascent' or 'rise,' but over generations, it has become synonymous with 'immigration to Israel.'

²⁹ The health insurance fund (Hebrew, Kupat Holim) is the backbone of the Israeli healthcare system to this day. Yakov Veynshal was among the founders of this system.

³⁰ Yakov Veynshal, 'Vospominania', *Iyerusalimskiy zhurnal* 10 (2001 [1954]); available at, <https://new.antho.net/wp/jj10-weinshal/> [accessed 11 March 2023].

The description of Tel Aviv as a dynamic and constantly evolving city, the earthly miracle of the Jews in Eretz Israel, is not exclusive to Veynshal. It is described in similar terms in the essay ‘An American City in Palestine’, written on 20 March 1925 by Isaak Shklovsky (1864–1935), a Russian author who wrote under the pseudonym Dioneo. He was based in London from 1896, and an uncle of a major figure associated with Russian formalism, Viktor Shklovsky. The essay was placed in the Riga émigré newspaper *Segodnya*:

An American city that arose in Palestine on the dunes [...], a large city with gardens, boulevards, schools, factories, newspapers, theatre. Houses are growing at a rapid pace. Entire neighbourhoods spring up at once at different ends, and thus the suburbs, which were at a considerable distance last year, are now within the city limits. [...] The observer does not have to chase the ‘local colour,’ because the local colour is chasing the observer.³¹

The émigré poet Dovid Knut characterized Tel Aviv as ‘[t]he last word of urbanism and technology against the backdrop of a genuine Bible.’³²

Veynshal’s ‘Palestinian Letters’ fit perfectly into the trend outlined by the scholar Maria Gatti Racah in her article on Russian-language travel essays on British Mandate Palestine.

In this sense, the gradual desacralization of the experience of travelling to the Holy Land can be seen as a thinning of the ancient overtones and the introduction of a dimension of the future that breaks the binary opposition between the past and the present. Biblical suggestions and descriptions of sacred places are, in fact, complemented by a strong focus on the region’s current situation and its development prospects [...] We are witnessing a crisis not only of religious experience, but also of the introspective aspect, which is giving way to the historical and political.³³

The thinning of ancient overtones may represent a way for society to balance the traditional and sacred (superego) with the need for change, progress, and future-oriented thinking (id). ‘Even the holy places have to be described in connection with the political situation,’³⁴ wrote A. P. Ladinsky (1896–1961), poet and publicist. The interest aroused by Palestine at this stage is related to the ongoing political upheavals. The focus of attention is on the events caused in the region by the Balfour Declaration of 1917, which authorized British support for the creation of a Jewish national home, and the subsequent Zionist immigration.

A testament to this shifting perspective on the Holy Land is exemplified through Veynshal’s account of his voyage from Turkey to Palestine, which he published under a pseudonym rarely used for publications on *Rassvet*, ‘Baier’. In this *feuilleton*, Veynshal-Baier decidedly changed the style of composition. From a political reportage he shifted to a travel diary genre. While describing the country, his attention was diverted by his fellow passengers. A silent Finn and an exuberant British writer gained only passing

³¹ See Roman Timenchik, ‘Russkoe slovo o zemlye Izrailya’ [The Russian Word about the Land of Israel], *Lekhaim* 4.168 (2006); available at <https://www.lechaim.ru/ARHIV/168/timenchik.htm> [accessed 18 October 2023].

³² Dovid Knut, ‘Al’bom puteshestvennika’, *Russkiye zapiski* 5 (1938): 91-108; 7 (1938): 113-25.

³³ Maria Gatti Racah, ‘La Palestina del mandato britannico: sguardi incrociati dal mondo russo’ [Palestine under the British mandate: Glances from the Russian World], *ESamizdat. Rivista di culture dei paesi slavi* 11 (2016): 17.

³⁴ Antonin Ladinsky, *Puteshestviye v Palestinu* [Journey to Palestine], http://ricolor.org/arhiv/redkie_knigi/ladinsky/9/ [accessed 3 March 2023].

comments of an ironic nature by the author, while the object of Baier-Veynshal's contemptuous sarcasm was a United States citizen who did not know Mark Twain because he confused him with a small tobacco entrepreneur while the American traveller 'worked only with wholesalers.'³⁵ There is a greater familiarity with the local landscape, even in the use of Hebrew terms transliterated into Russian, such as 'kvuca' (group), 'takciv' (budget).

Using a pen-name provided him with the needed distance when he wrote the 'Palestinian Letters'. The etymology of the pseudonym, which means 'Bavarian' in Russian, can be linked to a significant chapter in his biography. As previously mentioned, Veynshal pursued his studies in Germany, initially enrolling in the Faculty of Science at the University of Munich, where he studied chemistry. Subsequently, he transferred to the medical department within the same university. His years spent abroad were not solely dedicated to academic pursuits but also marked by active involvement in Zionist activities. He was a dedicated member of the Munich student corporation 'Maccabean' and played a major role as one of the founders of the Zionist student organization 'Gechaver', serving as a member of its Central Committee. The reason for choosing one pseudonym over another can obviously be only speculated upon. Given that 'by adopting a pseudonym, one not only disguises his own name, but also expands his personality with a self-chosen meaning, which also allows him to fictitiously distance himself from himself',³⁶ the interpretation of 'the desire to hide one's origin by choosing a name that is more characteristic of a given country or environment'³⁷ becomes pertinent. Veynshal's 'idiosyncrasy towards everything Russian', as noted previously, may have influenced his choice to adopt the pseudonym 'Bavarian.'

Veynshal's 'Palestinian Letters'

Veynshal's 'Palestinian Letters' were published in *Rassvet* from December 1922 to August 1927. They focus on historical-political developments and the economic situation of Palestine in the 1920s, as determined by the trend mentioned above. To better understand their content, a brief review of the historical context in which they were written, British Mandate Palestine in the 1920s, may be helpful.

The defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I led to its collapse, and the Sykes-Picot agreements of 1916 divided the Middle East into zones of influence for France and Great Britain, with special international control over Palestine.³⁸ In 1917, Lord Balfour expressed British support for a Jewish national home in Palestine, but with the stipulation

³⁵ I. Baier [Ya. Veynshal], 'Na motore. S palestinskogo alboma [On the Motor: From the Palestinian Album]', *Rassvet* 15, April 15, 16-14.

³⁶ Shtefan Schmidt, 'K poetike psevdonima. Kratkiy obzor issledovaniy [On the Poetics of a Pseudonym. A Brief Research],' in *Psevdonimy russkogo zarubezhya. Materialy i issledovaniya* [Pseudonyms of the Russian Diaspora: Materials and Research], ed. Manfred Shrubu and Oleg Korostelev (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2016), 37.

³⁷ Manfred Shrubu, 'O funktsiyakh psevdonimov (po perepiske deyateley russkoy emigratsii pervoy volny) [On the Functions of Pseudonyms (According to the Correspondence of Figures of the Russian Emigration of the First Wave),' in *Psevdonimy russkogo zarubezhya. Materialy i issledovaniya* [Pseudonyms of the Russian Diaspora: Materials and Research], ed. Manfred Shrubu and Oleg Korostelev (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2016), 42.

³⁸ Michael Brenner, *Israele. Sogno e realtà dello stato ebraico* [Israel: Dream and Reality of the Jewish State] (Rome: Donzelli editore, 2018), 58.

that it shouldn't harm the rights of non-Jewish communities.³⁹ This statement was a success for the Zionist Organization, but Palestine had a diverse population in 1918. The British military administration counted 512,000 Muslims, 66,000 Jews, and 61,000 Christians. According to Ian Black, 'the Arabs were largely peasants and artisans, and, in the countryside, where Bedouin tribes still roamed, overwhelmingly illiterate.'⁴⁰ Large estates with absent owners, often Lebanese or Syrian, predominated. Jerusalem had dominant patrician families and notables who played an important role in the Ottoman administration. Tensions between Jewish and Arab communities began in the late 19th century due to Jewish immigration and land purchases. The hope that economic development would benefit both populations did not materialise. After the 1920 San Remo Conference, Arab attacks on Jewish settlements increased. Heroic events like the defense of Tel Hai⁴¹ and riots in Jerusalem underscored growing tensions. In response, the Haganah defense organization was established in 1920.⁴² The 1920s brought further Jewish immigration, but also bloodier riots in Jaffa. Nevertheless, the era witnessed relative calm, economic development, and the growth of Tel Aviv.

At this point, it is worth delving into Veynshal's testimony, as he was a participant in a dynamic and controversial period when the Arab and Jewish communities concurrently collided and intersected:

The question of the struggle for morality in Tel Aviv takes centre stage. And that is not because this issue has become particularly acute right now. On the contrary, almost everything has remained the same, according to the 'patriarchal' style. And the world's first Jewish city will be able to be proud of the fact that it is the only city in the world that will not have either street or neighbourhood prostitution for a long time to come. The family, of course, is not without its black sheep, but things are not as the Arab newspapers shout about, as the semi-official informants visiting here - bureaucrats in skirts, and as our Jewish saints whisper hysterically about it.⁴³

A sense of the complexity of relations between Arabs and Jews in Mandatory Palestine is outlined in this article, which presents Tel Aviv, the city of modernity, destruction, and eternal torment, as a theatre of meeting and clash between the forces of innovation and integration, and the forces of tradition and segregation.

The heterogeneity of the style and the themes present in the 'Palestinian Letters' makes it difficult to unequivocally identify their genre, and it seems simplistic to limit them only to the category of 'correspondence.' Ze'ev Jabotinsky, the leader of the Revisionist Zionist Party and the editor of the weekly *Rassvet*, which published the 'Palestinian Letters' from late 1922 until mid-1927, describes them as follows: 'many complain about you for your letters from Palestine. I myself do not know what you write:

³⁹ Arturo Marzano, *Storia dei sionismi. Lo stato degli ebrei da Herzl ad oggi* [History of Zionisms. The State of the Jews from Herzl until Today] (Firenze: Carocci, 2017): 82-6.

⁴⁰ Ian Black, *Enemies and Neighbors: Arabs and Jews in Palestine and Israel, 1917-2017* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2017), 19.

⁴¹ Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 43.

⁴² Georges Bensoussan, *Il sionismo. Una storia politica ed intellettuale (1860-1940)* [Zionism. A political and intellectual history (1860-1940)] (Torino: Einaudi, 2007), 1117.

⁴³ Yakov Veynshal, 'Palestinskie pisma. Medvedi [Palestinian Letters: Bears],' *Rassvet* 17, 25 April 1926, 9.

these are not correspondence, these are not feuilletons, this is not an essay, this is the devil knows what ... But you write well, and therefore I ask you to go on writing.’⁴⁴

Leaving aside purely political issues, it should be remembered that the Yishuv was a community that boasted the Hebrew University on Mount Scopus in Jerusalem (1925), the Polytechnic Institute (Technion) in Haifa (1924), and the Habima Theatre in Tel Aviv (1928). Despite the focus on conflict with the Arabs and British policies, Veynshal’s letters also discuss the economic development of the country, the emergence of a working consciousness, and the growth of civil and cultural life in the Jewish Yishuv. Topics range from trade and labour laws to the attempts to organize Arab workers and the challenges of Arab-Jewish relations, especially in the context of Balfour’s visit. Veynshal’s letters provide a multifaceted view of the events in the Yishuv, demonstrating his ability to switch between genres, maintain a moderate tone, and report on a wide range of topics, from cultural events to mundane matters like Carnival mask competitions.

Notably, from these letters, Veynshal’s essays that are worth analysing through a psychoanalytic lens are his writings on the theatre. Here is an illustrative instance:

The problem of theatre is as complex in Palestine as other aspects of life and creativity. The diminutiveness and filigree of the Yishuv did not lessen, but infinitely increased these difficulties. There is no rhythm yet, subjective *luxus* dominates amid objective poverty, and diversity characterizes any side of the Palestinian construction, from the patchwork of Tel Aviv streets [...].

The same variety applies to the theatre.

Utilizing this innovative technique, the author effectively draws parallels between the theatrical realm and the actual socio-political landscape, allowing for a simultaneous discussion of both within a single article:

Diaspora in Palestine! What a slippery and dangerous game with fire! Palestine received its *raison d’être* through the ideological denial of diaspora. Palestine and diaspora are two cultural poles: rebirth and degeneration. Presenting diaspora to Palestine is as tactless as talking about a rope in the house of a hanged man. And if the rope is covered with soap with a heavenly scent, the situation does not become lighter.⁴⁵

Using theatre as an example, Veynshal suggests that Palestine’s identity and purpose are closely tied to the ideological denial of the diaspora. Within a psychoanalytic framework, this could be seen as a form of identity formation through negation or denial. The denial of the diaspora may reflect an attempt to establish a cohesive, uncompromised identity. The discussion of the diaspora in Palestine as a ‘slippery and dangerous game with fire’ implies that the deeply repressed emotions and unresolved traumas generated there cannot shape either the collective or the individual identity of ‘here’.

In this theatre review of the debut production of the Ohel Theatre, which presented a Hebrew adaptation of stories by the Yiddish writer I. L. Peretz, the author praises Halevy and Peretz’s new Palestine studio for their innovative approach in depicting the Palestinian diaspora on stage. This production aimed to portray the decline of life in the Diaspora in contrast to the emerging Jewish life in the Land of Israel. Veynshal urges the audience to view the diaspora from the perspective of an art critic. The review commends

⁴⁴ Yakov Veynshal, ‘Vospominania’, *Iyerusalimskiy zhurnal* 10 (2002 [1954]); available at, <https://new.antho.net/wp/jj10-weinshal/> [accessed 11 March 2023].

⁴⁵ Ya. Veynshal, ‘Palestinskie pisma. Golus v binokl’ [Palestinian Letters: Diaspora through Binoculars], *Rassvet* 31, 1 August 1926, 9-10.

the studio for daring to showcase the diaspora and suggests that this is the key to its remarkable stage success. By doing so, he believes the studio has made a significant cultural contribution to the Palestinian theatre scene, allowing the past to interact with the present and offering a unique perspective on the future.

In another essay, Veynshal expresses admiration for the artist Agadati,⁴⁶ a pioneer of Israeli cinema and a multi-talented dancer, choreographer, artist, film director and producer. According to Veynshal, Agadati's collection of moves displays an exceptional level of defiance and sharp wit. It can truly be considered 'his unique narrative':

His repertoire is unusually defiant and caustic. This is truly 'his fairy tale'. If we call the dances not as on their programs but by their real names, then between them one can find the dance of the smug chin and the dance of the angular careless hands, and the dance of facial grimaces, especially of the eyelashes, the dance of the lively knee 'scissors', and a whole Greek bacchanalia of Jewish reflexes. A dance of deformities subordinated to a vibrating rhythm: a caricature brightly illuminated by the arc of both Volta and Terpsichore.⁴⁷

Agadati's dance and the theatrical stage bear resemblances to a Winnicottian 'transitional space.' The stage, akin to a transitional space, serves as a platform where actors and audiences converge, facilitating the exploration and bridging of the divide between fiction and reality.⁴⁸

[...] dance is the fruit of individual perception, it is just memory. The memory of an amateur ethnographer. There is a whole herbarium of Jewish antics, grimace and gesticulation long ago canonized by the diaspora. A copy of the ghetto, that ghetto that fills old Jerusalem under the pressure of five atmospheres, according to the number of all five continents of the Jewish diaspora. [...] His dance is an album of photographs, merry weddings, solemn seders⁴⁹ and dreamy beit-hamidrashe.⁵⁰ Decals from humorous sketches with a 'stinky' staging. Staging of antisemitic cartoons directed by a philo-semitic. Agadati is the first Jew who fearlessly picked up the glove thrown by the antisemites of the whole world, devoutly brought it to the incense lips and twirled with it in a dance, as dervishes twirl. [...] In search of a Jewish rhythm, Agadati [...] carries a search for Jewish folklore that has died out in the diaspora. That is how it is... 'his fairy tale', a fairy tale of a pearl seeker for diaspora, a fearless and cheerful 'Ghetto Diver'.⁵¹

In this context, Pierre Bourdieu's interpretation offers valuable insights. The human body can be seen as a form of memory repository, storing the fundamental principles of one's culture. These principles are ingrained in the way individuals are taught to stand, behave, and communicate. They become imprinted in the body's memory and are often resistant to conscious change.⁵² In his interpretation of Agadati's performance, Veynshal appears to perceive the dance as a manifestation of the national cultural unconscious. Given that dance is a non-verbal and non-cognitive form of expression, deeply rooted in the physical and natural realm, it inherently resides within the domain of the unconscious. Dance

⁴⁶ Barukh Agadati (Koshinski, 1895–1976) was born in Bessarabia. He moved to Tel Aviv in 1910. See <https://museum.imj.org.il/artcentre/newsite/en/?artist=Agadati,%20Baruch&list=A>. [accessed 19 October 2023].

⁴⁷ Ya. Veynshal, 'Palestinskie pisma. Agadati.' *Rassvet* 34, 22 August 1926, 7-8. Volta refers to a couple dance of the Renaissance period. Terpsichore is the Greek Goddess of dance.

⁴⁸ Donald W. Winnicott, *Psycho-Analytic Explorations* (New York: Routledge, 2018): 200-201.

⁴⁹ Jewish services including ceremonial dinners.

⁵⁰ Jewish houses of study.

⁵¹ Ya. Veynshal, 'Palestinskie pisma. Agadati', *Rassvet* 34, 22 August 1926, 7-8.

⁵² Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 94-5.

serves as a powerful embodiment of cultural memory, where it is not just an art form but a repository of individual and collective recollection. In this passage, it is portrayed as the fruit of individual perception, akin to memory itself. It suggests that dance becomes a means by which Agadati remembers and expresses his cultural identity, especially in the context of the Jewish diaspora.

Veynshal introduced the artist as an ‘amateur ethnographer,’ indicating that Agadati engaged in dance as a form of ethnography, capturing and preserving Jewish cultural practices in diaspora. He also posited that through Agadati’s interpretation, a canonization of a repertoire of Jewish antics, grimaces, and gesticulations crystallizes. This suggests that specific cultural expressions gradually attain canonical status, becoming an inherent component of the collective memory. Veynshal unconsciously acknowledges the impact of migration, displacement, and the scattering of communities. The diaspora, in this context, is regarded as a ‘pearl,’ a valuable entity that molds and perpetuates cultural memory. The portrayal of Agadati as a ‘fearless’ and ‘cheerful’ ‘Ghetto Diver’ may be interpreted as a reflection of the author’s need or the need of the collective unconscious to confront and overcome historical trauma and adversity. Veynshal referred to dance as a response to antisemitic cartoons, which suggests a form of coping with external threats and prejudice. Thus, the act of dancing becomes a way to counteract antisemitic stereotypes and animosity.

Sensitivity to art, so far from his own activity, speaks of the soul of Veynshal, by nature a man of the arts. The charm of the multifaceted figure of Agadati had struck Veynshal many years before, since he mentioned him more than once in his memoirs. The creative interest in the physics of the human body, which is emphasised in Veynshal’s review, was a feature of the Bezalel Academy of Arts, where Agadati studied as a painter and sculptor.

The issue number 37 of *Rassvet* (24 December 1922) marks the beginning of the ‘Palestinian Letters’ cycle, but there is no clear end. From issue 43 (1926), the ‘Palestinian Letters’ change their title into ‘Letter from Palestine,’ but the signatory is still Veynshal. After August 1927, the contributors to the rubric ‘From Our Correspondent’ are different from one issue to another. By the time Veynshal stopped contributing to *Rassvet*, he had started writing Hebrew literature, as evidenced by the collection of novels identified by Vladimir Khazan. The ability to become a writer in a language that he learned only after the age of thirty is further evidence to ‘the brightness and colourfulness of his personality’.⁵³

Throughout his memoirs and journalistic work, Veynshal navigated the complex terrain of identity, grappling with the tension between his Russian heritage and the traumatic experiences of antisemitism. His recollections and insights are imbued with psychological depth, and the use of scent-triggered memories adds a unique dimension to his storytelling. Veynshal’s writings reveal the ongoing process of identity formation and the multifaceted interplay between memory, culture, and individuality.

As Veynshal embarked on his journey to Palestine, we witnessed the transformation of his identity from a Russian Jew to a passionate Zionist. His ability to convey the vibrant, evolving landscape of Mandatory Palestine and the complex relations between Arab and Jewish communities gives us the picture of a vibrant dynamics of cultural memory.

Veynshal’s engagement with the arts, including theatre and dance, offers a window into the complex interplay of cultural expression, memory, and the coping mechanisms

⁵³ Vladimir Khazan, ‘O Yakove Veynshale’ [About Yakov Veynshal], *Iyerusalimskiy zhurnal* 9, (2001 [1954]); available at <https://new.antho.net/wp/jj09-khazan/> [accessed 25 May 2023].

used to confront external threats and prejudice. His exploration of the diverse artistic landscape in Palestine reflects a broader cultural and political context shaped by events like the Balfour Declaration and Zionist immigration.

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Memoriile și jurnalismul lui Yakov Vladimirovich Veynshal. Explorarea interacțiunii dintre autobiografie și psihanaliză

Acest articol explorează interacțiunea dintre autobiografie și psihanaliză prin scrierile și experiențele personale ale lui Yakov Vladimirovich Veynshal, un jurnalist zionist celebru și un scriitor de limbă ebraică din Mandatul Palestinei. Memoriile lui Veynshal și opera sa jurnalistică ne oferă indicii despre conexiunea dintre cele două domenii prin utilizarea experiențelor proprii, a analizei literare, a creativității și a comentariilor politice și culturale. Ele demonstrează cum literatura se intersectează cu psihanaliza prin creație și simbolizare. Prima parte a articolului explorează călătoria lui Veynshal de la o excursie în Palestina, ce a reprezentat un „bar mitzvah” netradițional, către experiențele sale din Rusia și relația sa complexă cu cultura rusă. A doua parte a articolului demonstrează cum scrierile lui Veynshal reflectă formarea sentimentelor lui zioniste și identitatea sa unică. Adicional, experiențele lui Veynshal din Palestina în timpul anilor 1920 sunt analizate, subliniind contextul istoric și politic din Mandatul Britanic pentru Palestina și dezvoltarea relațiilor dintre evrei și arabi.