

“The Rift” by Hezy  
Leskly, 1992

*Translated from Hebrew by Adriana X. Jacobs*



## Translator's Introduction

Hezy Leskly (1952–1994) was an Israeli-born Hebrew poet, choreographer, and dance critic who lived most of his life in the environs of Tel Aviv, apart from a pivotal period in the Netherlands in the 1970s. These years afforded Leskly, who was openly gay, the opportunity to explore and express his sexuality without the constraints of Israeli social conventions and to develop as a poet and performance artist on his own terms. His published poetry collections include *Ha-akhbarim ve-Leah Goldberg* (The mice and Leah Goldberg, 1992), where the poem “The Rift” appears, and *Sotim yekarim* (Dear perverts, 1994), which was published shortly after his death of AIDS-related complications.

In English, the word *rift* often refers to the cracks that occur in relationships but also refers to the fissures that break open the Earth's crust, separating and reshaping continents. The title of Leskly's poem (in Hebrew “Ha-shever”) seems to allude to both meanings, in the way that the poem's dinner party risks bringing the past and present into closer proximity. This encounter is partly biographical, with the words “this room in Tel Aviv draws closer to the room in Bratislava” nodding to Leskly's Czech heritage (in 1952, Bratislava was part of the Czechoslovak Republic). But it is also imaginary since the Czech poet Milan Rozum never existed. He is one of several imaginary poets that Leskly's poems conjure, and his presence in this poem blurs the line between history and imagination, while revealing a third rift, between present and past versions of the poem. In Rozum's version, the words “fall into” anticipate the breaking away of the line “the time came to cover our faces with our palms and cry,” but the remaining “forgotten lines” migrate into the present poem like seashells found in the Appalachian Mountains.

In my translation, the line break between the present and past poems creates a fourth rift. When I first read this poem, many years ago, it instantly recalled for me the work of the Hebrew poet Avot Yeshurun (1904–1992), author of the 1974 collection *The Syrian-African Rift* (*Ha-shever ha-suri-afrikani*). Yeshurun's poems are full

of cracks, tears, rifts, and shards, of poetic lines that break away and make their way into other poems. The space in my translation, which precedes Rozum's poem, is not quite "the width of the slit of a blind," but it's just enough room for a forgotten line to get through.

## **“The Rift”**

After the nice meal and nice conversation that stretched our minds to the width of the slit of a blind and not the size of a pit you can fall into, after all of this, it was time to leave. This is the time and place to say goodbye and move on. It must happen now, before this place draws closer to another place, and this time is swallowed into another time. Now, before this room in Tel Aviv draws closer to the room in Bratislava, and this time is swallowed up by another time: 9/16/52, in the early morning, when the Czech poet Milan Rozum was born, the one who, thirty-six years after that morning, wrote these forgotten lines:

After a nice meal and nice conversation  
that stretched our minds to the width of the slit of a blind,  
and not the size of a pit  
you can fall into,

The time came to cover our faces with our palms and cry.