

Around the Point

Around the Point:
Studies in Jewish Literature and Culture
in Multiple Languages

Edited by

Hillel Weiss, Roman Katsman
and Ber Kotlerman

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P U B L I S H I N G

Around the Point: Studies in Jewish Literature and Culture in Multiple Languages,
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PREFACE

For millennia, Jewish letters have appeared in dozens of languages. The borderlines of Jewish letters—lingual, national, geographical, and thematic—are not positively defined. However, we see this immense nonlinear and dynamic multiplicity as revolving around one point—the consciousness of Jewish cultural continuity. The highly intensive and inclusive Jewish hypertextuality overwhelms all narrow contextual historicist limits, and invites complex philological, historiographical, and theoretical approach. Such approach is represented by this collection of papers.

The volume opens with the paper written by Hillel Weiss, proclaiming his vision of “around the point” idea, and proceeds to Arie Schippers’s research of medieval literature. Three papers, by Yigal Schwartz, Helena Rimon, and Ofra Matzov-Cohen, discuss Hebrew literature and analyze it through the prism of historiographical, comparative, and cultural problems. The papers by Ora (Rodrigue) Schwarzwald, David M. Bunis, and Rivka Bihar are devoted to Ladino studies, merging discussions of linguistic, social, and ideological problems. The papers by Thierry Joshua Alcoloumbre, Yaniv Hagbi, and Nurit Buchweitz focus on Jewish literature in the French cultural space, stretching from Alsace to Israel, over the period of the long 20th century. The complexity of Jewish-Italian cultural interrelations becomes evident in the articles by Sandra Debenedetti Stow, Marina Arbib, and Zipi Levin Byron. Of the four articles devoted to Jewish-German literature and culture, two focus on the oeuvre of Franz Kafka: one article is written by Karl Erich Groezinger and the other by Sarah Fraiman-Morris. The problems of multifaceted German modernism in literature, art, and thought are also discussed in the papers by Wolfgang Treitler and Dorothee Gelhard. The extremely complicated questions of lingual and cultural identities in the area of the former Yugoslavia are dealt with in the papers by Krinka Vidaković-Petrov and Dina Katan Ben-Zion. By no means less complicated are the problems of the Holocaust narratives in the Hungarian literature, discussed by Zsuzsa Hetényi, and of Hasidic narratives in the Polish literature, as presented by Dorota Burda-Fischer. The last part of the volume consists of papers on Jewish-Russian literature and art: by Efraim Sicher on the Yiddish context of Isaac Babel’s; by Helen Tolstoy on Marc Chagall; by Leonid F. Katsis on Osip Mandelstam and others; by Maxim D. Shrayner on Ilya Selvinsky

witnessing the Holocaust; by Dennis Sobolev on Jewish elements in the Strugatsky Brothers; by Klavdia Smola on Jewish poetics in contemporary writers from Efraim Sevela to Yakov Zigelman and Oleg Yuriev; and by Roman Katsman on the acceptance of Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* in Israel.

The purpose of this volume was not to cover all the languages of Jewish letters and their entire geographical or historical spread. Neither was our objective the discussion of the essence of Jewish literature and its definition. We rather aimed at creating a framework for scholars who consider their subject to be the multilingual literature, culture, and thought of the Jewish People. Although at the center of the People's creativity the Hebrew Sacred Writings have always remained, it has never been considered separate from writings and practices in other languages. Nowadays, the growing self-consciousness of Jewish writers all over the world as belonging to a united Jewish literature by no means undermines the unique role of Hebrew literature.

These suppositions were confirmed by the international conference "Around the Point," held at the Department of Literature of the Jewish People at Bar-Ilan University in December 2012, and by the present volume, which is partly based upon and further develops the achievements of this conference. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the writers, scholars, students, and administrators who participated in the conference and/or assisted in its organization. Special thanks go to the Department of Literature of the Jewish People, the Rena Costa Center for Yiddish Studies, the Naime and Yehoshua Salti Center for Ladino Studies, the Simone Veil Cathedra, and the Office of the Vice-President for Research (Bar-Ilan University). Heartfelt thanks go out to Tamar Wolf-Monzon, Shmuel Refael, Thierry Joshua Alcoloumbre, Anat Aderet, and Moshe Shimoni. We are grateful to the scholars who contributed their works to this collection; and we highly appreciate the assistance of the reviewers of the papers, language editors, and staff of Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Hillel Weiss, Roman Katsman, Ber Kotlerman

AROUND THE POINT

HILLEL WEISS

...Her paths have wandered off and you shall not know.
(Proverbs 5:6)

“Around the Point,” like the title of the story by Brenner in 1940 edited by Bialik in *Hashiloah*, is the title chosen for the International Conference on the Languages, Literatures, and Cultures of the Jews that took place at Bar-Ilan University on 4-6 Tevet 5773 (December 17-19, 2012) with an emphasis placed on literature. The conference focuses on delineating the space of belles-lettres, both that which was written in the past in its various languages and levels, phrases, and resonances of Jewish sources as well as that which is being written now which deals with ‘Jewish subjects’ such as ‘victimhood’ and ‘the other,’ literature which is written all around the globe and not only by Jews. More specifically Jewish literature is that which deals with a representation of the adventures of the Jewish people as individuals and in communities; both as individuals as well as groups and as a nationality in every possible state: ultra-Orthodox or apostate; righteous, wholehearted Jews such as Chaim Grade describes in his Lithuanian Yiddish or Hasidism-oriented literature in all its authentic and restyled guises, as well as the writings of assimilated Jews or apostates, either by choice or by force, such as Heinrich Heine, who despite converting to Christianity, remained Jewish by half or a third or a quarter; this, not necessarily in terms of *halacha* (Jewish law) but in terms of their personal identity and identification.¹ Those who reveal in their writing

¹ See interview of Shmuel Faust with György Spiró, a well-known Hungarian Jewish writer, “Ani opozitziонер ruhani” [I am a spiritual oppositionist], *Makor Rishon*, February 22, 2013 (weekend supplement): “I am not religious at all. But in my opinion, the study of man is the history of religion. Even I think in a religious way. I have some sort of faith, despite being an atheist.” See also Einat Talmon, in her article on Antonio Muñoz Molina, winner of the Jerusalem Prize for 2013, “Hayehudi shebetokham” [The Jew That Is Inside Them], *Makor Rishon*, February 15, 2013 (weekend supplement), and Ofer Lachmanovitz’s interview with Mario Levi, a central Turkish Jewish writer who also writes in the language of his

regular, reflexive responses based on personality and experience which find expression in literature in all the languages of humanity, both in the languages of the Jews and of other nations which are related to the inner Jewish experience.

Indeed, it is surprising what is being written even now, at the beginning of the 21st century all over the world at the same time. On the one hand, the Judaization of the world, and on the other, the anti-Semitic gale, an intensification of anti-Semitism. This is in addition to literature being written in Hebrew and known as “modern Hebrew literature” beginning with the Jewish Enlightenment in Berlin, and before that, from the era of the expulsion from Spain, and before that from the time of the Renaissance, and before that, the Middle Ages, and so on, when the distinction, sometimes artificial, is made between belle lettres and Torah *halachic* literature. It is conventional wisdom that modern Hebrew literature is secular and there are those like Baruch Kurzweil, founder of the Department of Hebrew Literature at Bar-Ilan and its head until his death in 1972, who saw in secularism a revolution that took place with the draining of the certainty of sanctity from Hebrew language and culture. Without entering into the controversy of whether such draining is possible anthropologically and culturally, this concentric totality is what preoccupies us despite the distance of light years and the darkness between stars and between sacred and profane literature—they are all in the same galaxy.

What is connected to the point, which is both present and absent, around, out of, and toward which everything revolves? What is closer and what is very distant, like the rings of Saturn?²

With literature, the later it is, the further along it is in the perpetual process of entropy, of depletion, losing the characteristic inter-textual quality of Hebrew Jewish texts. Of course, it is even more difficult to find this in texts written in non-Jewish languages. The language of the Jews is first and foremost ‘the holy tongue,’³ not just commonplace Hebrew as a

parents, Ladino, “Lihyot yehudi zot tkhusha tiv’it avuri” [To be a Jew is so natural feeling for me], *Israel Hayom*, March 19, 2013. For theory and a general description, see Gershon Shaked, *Zehut; Sifruyot yehudiyot bilshonot la’az [Identities; Jewish Literature in Foreign Languages]* (Haifa: Haifa University Press, 2006).

² The name of W. G. Sebald’s book is *Die Ringe Des Saturn* (1995) while more important to the subject of the article is his book *The Immigrants* (1992).

³ In order to create a defamiliarization between the prevalent use of Hebrew and its development into ‘Israeli’ language, I will note only the religious perception: ‘the holy tongue’ in which God speaks and gives prophecy to his prophets, the

language of neutral symbols like all the other languages, together with those which are close to Hebrew, i.e., the Semitic languages including various species of Aramaic.⁴

It is true that in the modern age, the historiography of the Hebrew language and Hebrew writing catalogs the Haskala-Biblical-figurative-Berlin language which reaches its culmination in the writing of Avraham Mapu; the Hebrew of ‘Nusakh’ as written by Mendele, a multi-level composite of classical Jewish sources and translations from Yiddish; the modern Hebrew of Ben Yehuda with its combinatorial ensemble which has evolved into contemporary ‘Israeli’ as Ghil’ad Zuckermann characterized it;⁵ and alongside and after it, Yiddish and Ladino which have existed for centuries, saturated in Hebrew in all its own diverse locations and metamorphoses, including modern and secularized Yiddish. This, despite the drastic decline in the number of speakers of everyday Yiddish and Ladino due to the obvious circumstances. Two centers were established for the study of the two languages’ literature in particular at the Department of the Literature of the Jewish people at Bar-Ilan University.⁶

language with which He created the world, in which His name is interwoven and in which the Torah was given, according to Nachmanides’s commentary on Exodus 30:13.

⁴ The Rishonim were in dispute as to the meaning of the expression ‘*lashon soresi*’ in BT, Baba Kama 73a. Rashi interpreted: *soresi* means a laughable or clumsy language [language which is emasculated or distorted] in contrast with the Baal Aruch and Rabbeinu Tam who explained it as the Syrian variety of Aramaic. In BT, Sotah 49b, Rashi explains: “It is a language close to Aramaic. And I say that this is the language of the Jerusalem Talmud, and the nations call it *lingua suria* [the Syrian language]. In other words, Rashi, too, could speak two languages, that of the midrash and of research, and from both perspectives on *lashon soresi*, he gave the reason for its name and characterized it as ‘a Syrian language.’”

⁵ Ghil’ad Zuckermann, *Yisraelit Safa Yafa [Israeli—A Beautiful Language]*, trans. by Maya Feldman (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2008).

⁶ The author of these lines was in charge as Head of the Bar-Ilan Department of Hebrew Literature in the beginning of the 1980s and he initiated its name change to “Department of Literature of the Jewish People.” General Evaluation of the Israel Council for Higher Education (MALAG) of the departments of literature for 2013 praised the change and stated: “Almost thirty years after its foundation, the ‘Department of Hebrew Literature,’ changed its name to the ‘Department of Literature of the Jewish People,’ thereby establishing its mission as a comprehensive study of Jewish literature, regardless of any linguistic or historical boundaries. Such a goal was timely, and corresponded with the changes that Israeli society experienced, almost forty years after the establishment of the State, representing the integration of the second generation of immigrants who arrived in Israel in the fifties into the main social and intellectual life of the society. This aim

After the establishment of these centers and the visit by former President Yitzhak Navon, the Law of Yiddish and Ladino was passed in the State of Israel.⁷ In the meanwhile, what is still missing is a center for the Judeo-Arabic languages which were the scholarly focus of many scholars.⁸

The present collection, *Around the Point*, is also entitled as *Studies in Jewish Literature and Culture in Multiple Languages*. This—from every personal and political viewpoint which confronts the Jewish issue, as well as from every emotional and personality-based position and every meta-linguistic theoretical analysis.

The hypothesis is that there in fact is a ‘literature of the Jewish people’ that revolves around a point, around which in a generalized sense the aforementioned literatures move and take shape and they become the expressions of artists who are grappling with the nucleus of holiness which is absent-present, attracts and repulses and threatens, artists making tireless attempts to connect with it or to eliminate it and free themselves of it.

This is in contrast to the objections against the very essence of a ‘literature of the Jewish people’⁹ which is connected by the Hebrew letter as a letter engraved on the tablets of law, charged with significance by its presence as related to the national experience of Divine Revelation¹⁰ and which is evolving, in translation as well, throughout the globe in all ages and all generations.

Professor Avner Holtzman characterized the essence of Jewish literature, noting among others the following markers:

- (A) Allusions to sources in the classical Jewish canon, or expressions and translations borrowed from Yiddish which are integrated into

is socially, intellectually and academically valid today, almost thirty years later. Furthermore, this vision has remained unique among the departments.”

⁷ The National Authorities for Ladino and Yiddish Culture Law was passed in the Knesset on 26 Adar 5756 (March 17, 1996).

⁸ See, for example, Yossef Chetrit, *Lashon umaagareha lashon uma'arageha: mehkarim sotsyo-pragmatim ba'arvit hayehudit biTsefon Afrikah uvamarkiv ha'ivri shebah: katavot, shirim, sipurim ufitgamim* [*Socio-pragmatic studies in Judeo-Arabic in North Africa and its Hebrew component: Articles, poems, stories, and sayings*] (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 2009).

⁹ Dan Miron, *Im lo tihye Yerushalayim; hasifrut haivrit beheksher tarbuti-politi* [If there were no Jerusalem; Essays on Hebrew writing in a cultural-political context] (Tel Aviv: Hakibutz Hameuhad, 1987).

¹⁰ See Moshe Shwartz, *Safa, mitus, omanut* [*Language, myth, art*] (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1966), particularly the chapters that relate to Franz Rosenzweig which refer to the religion of revelation, using the index.

writing in English to the point of creating a distinctive Jewish-American jargon.

- (B) Identifying the Jewish essence in a set of symbols: accessories of sanctity, expressions of terms, concepts, gestures, and expressions that join together to form the internal codes of the Jewish reality, which can be fully deciphered only by someone who is practiced in it.
- (C) Identifying prototypical characters and plot paradigms that reflect the underpinnings of the Jewish experience, such as exposing plots of banishment, persecution, wanderings, situations of alienation, emigration, otherness, victimhood, coping with a strange and hostile world. He also showed in American Jewish literature on the other hand an abundance of confrontations with the temptations that assimilation offers culturally.
- (D) Archetypal Jewish figures are interwoven throughout this world: the schlemiel [the inept bumbler], the schlimazel [chronically unlucky person], the alienated, the rebel against tradition, the beggar, the refugee, the emigrant, the survivor, the castrating mother, and even the psychiatrist.¹¹

Holtzman's evaluation is written about Gershon Shaked's research project in his summary work: *Zehut: Sifruyot yehudiot b'leshonot la'az* [*Identities: Jewish Literature in Foreign Languages*].¹² Shaked, apparently, in his later years of life preferred to regard himself primarily as an immigrant and publicized his quasi-autobiographical work *Hamehagrim* [*The Immigrants*] but he had clearly-defined national boundaries. He was a Jew with full self-awareness. A Jewish victim with Zionist-national self-esteem. In the later years Shaked was increasingly sidelined by some of the younger scholars who could not bear his type of Jewishness which was declarative, and his proud stance. It should be emphasized: Shaked was decisively a man of the Left, yet nonetheless a Zionist who was doubtful of the future of Zionism and its ability to survive.

One of the troubling questions is whether Jewish literature is always an outgrowth of the negative, of the experiences of alienation and wretchedness, of neurosis, a sense of not belonging anywhere, or whether Jewish literature also carries with it the presence of something positive, a continuum of life, family and community sagas, a destiny and connection to the Land of Israel, to Jerusalem, to the Temple and to the festivals and

¹¹ Avner Holtzman, "Ha'im yesh umahi sifrut yehudit" [Is there a Jewish literature, and if so, what is it?], *Haaretz*, November 17, 2006.

¹² Shaked, *Zehut*. The book won the Bahat Award for Non-Fiction.

holy days, a presence of not only fear and irony, sarcasm and criticism but on the contrary, also reflects confidence that throughout all the unspeakable trials there is a Divine Providence watching over everything, even when the writer and narrator do not understand its reasons, as Tevye the Milkman is sometimes portrayed, with mistakes or with a different understanding. Is the demanding, even audacious component embodied in the term 'Yisrael,' which is taken from the Hebrew wording of the verse: "Because you have struggled with men and with God and you have prevailed" (Gen. 32:28) in the language of the angel of God explains, or is it embodied in the language of the prophet "tola'at Yaakov" (the worm of Jacob) which became an epithet for the Jew of the diaspora, in contrast with the name Yisrael after the triumph over the angel. The stubborn demand for justice from God and man: "Shall the judge of the entire world not Himself act justly?", or as the expression goes: "Where was God in the Holocaust?" and in the language of Bialik: "If Justice appear after I am killed, then, let its throne be annihilated for ever." This is the ethical component that builds the fabric of consciousness and the narrative process, and it spins the thread 'around the point,' certainly for Brenner. It is the dimension that decides value-based aesthetic judgment, and is the underpinning, the innermost point of Jewish literatures as the totality of voices. This is the point that may be neither passed nor circumvented, and is an essential part of the letter *yud* in 'Yehudi.'

The *Kinnus* project

One can argue and become preoccupied with the politics of languages but it is essential to collect, to engage in a project of compilation because academic and financial organizational resources are required. And even if the treasure seekers ultimately use only one ounce or two of the search engine culture, there is still a responsibility to carry out the great project of *kinnus*, or ingathering, as in the project initiated by Bialik, the attempt to collect the fragments of Jewish literature from all countries of Diaspora which appeared in his essay 'The Hebrew Book' and as he presented it at the 11th Zionist Congress. But this time it is supposed to be more extensive because of the improved technological capabilities that are reshaping consciousness while causing damage to the culture of the printed letter, the culture of the book. But instead of allowing the search engines to take us where they will, to randomness and synthetic knowledge that is erased a second after it is copied, let us harness them to the cause of love, affection, and commitment to the past, as well as curiosity and a desire to influence the future, and the discipline of science, for a rational system of entry that

is chronological and spatial like a Dewey decimal system, for example, and whatever kind of new standardization that is necessary for an enterprise of this kind, which I will not present here in detail¹³ but simply mark out the objective. Let us recall as an important example the encyclopedic “Thematology of the Literature of the Jewish People Project”¹⁴ at Bar-Ilan University as an area whose focus is Hebrew but whose scope is multi-lingual.

This Kinnus project will note everything written by every Jewish writer and poet throughout the generations and the cultural, historical, and geographical context in which he operated. It will also include with the texts interactive and grammatical search ability such as the Responsa Project of Bar-Ilan—beyond the Ben Yehuda project which has only simple search functions—and it will have a connection to all of the dictionaries and thesauruses. The project will store everything that was written by the writers and thinkers of the Jewish people and about the Jewish people, as well as those who are not Jewish but who wrote about Jews or write by virtue of the Jewish metaphor, without distinction of religion, language, nationality, and gender.

It is an interest not only in the internal Jewish discourse such as it is, although of course one must not flee from it into the non-Jewish discourse as a proof of the legitimacy or illegitimacy of the Jewish nation and its individual people nor to the deniers of nationalism in general and Jewish nationalism in particular. Namely, those who see the languages of the Jews at best as proof of the languages of communities, tribes or ethnic groups which have no distinct nationality and who are willing at most to grant them the distinction of ‘peoplehood.’

But the deniers of nationhood, both writers and scholars, are also part of this project. There is no boycotting, no exclusion and not just because of the democratic ideology of openness and equality but essentially because of the desire to understand and to learn—without fear—how “the

¹³ I have been involved for many years in indexing and analyzing Agnon’s classic works. An electronic sample on the story *Ahot* may be seen in *Ayin Gimmel: A Journal of Agnon Studies* [ejournal by the Bar-Ilan Department of Literature of the Jewish People], http://www.biu.ac.il/js/li/aj/images_ag_eng/index_eng.html. Accessed on December 14, 2013.

¹⁴ Headed by Yoav Elstein, founder of the *Encyclopedia of the Jewish Story*, and Avidov Lipsker. See Yoav Elstein & Avidov Lipsker, “The Homogeneous Series in the Literature of the Jewish People: A Thematological Methodology,” in Horst S. Daemmrich & Frank Trommler (eds.), *Thematics Reconsidered: Essays in Honor of Horst S. Daemmrich* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995), 87-116.

other” sees and shapes “the other.” How the force of repulsion holds the force of attraction and in what proportions.

Professor Dan Miron for some thirty years has been debating the subject of the legitimacy of “the literature of the Jewish people” as the term used for a general entity that he questions and occasionally denigrates, the corpus of Hebrew belles lettres of the Jews, beginning in his article “If there were no Jerusalem” and continues with *Harpaya letsorekh negiya* and which is further developed in his expanded book *From Continuity to Contiguity*.¹⁵ Miron is troubled by the subject to the point where he expresses his sense that the time has come for a more mature confrontation with it. He proposes formulating a comprehensive theory for characterizing the Jewish literatures, while in his opinion there is nothing that tips the scales in favor of giving preference to any of the languages as the main one. In *Harpaya letsorekh negiya*, Miron says:

Israeli literature can have contacts out of a “relaxed tension” both within itself among its heterogeneous components as well as outside of itself, in its relations with the whole corpus of Jewish culture and literature, this expanding galaxy, in which our star also is found. [...]

Contiguous thinking that will replace holistic thinking will require those who begin a critical, meta-literary discourse to give up normative Jewish values and judgment according to them, as well as preferring or rejecting something in their name. This will not mean a surrender of vital and binding value judgment. There is no possibility of attributing a value to a totally relativist critical discourse devoid of criteria and therefore, the ability to prefer or reject. But the value of the discourse will be necessarily determined not by a foregone loyalty to some conceptualized abstract super-category (such as “Judaism,” “modernism”) but rather by loyalty to self and to its values that have been tested by experience.¹⁶

It seems right that such activity has no preconditions. As stated, there are no boycotts and no limitations in this project. All rivalries are legitimate in freedom of thought, freedom of knowledge, and freedom of research and investigation, whether you want to develop a theory or to present a methodology. There is primarily curiosity about a phenomenon that has been in evidence at the conference. Jews writing because of their Jewishness and about their Jewishness in absurd circumstances. This is

¹⁵ Dan Miron, *Harpaya letsorekh negiya: likrat hashiva hadasha 'al sifruyot yehudiyot* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2005); idem, *From Continuity to Contiguity: Towards a New Jewish Literary Thinking* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).

¹⁶ Miron, *Harpaya letsorekh negiya*, 171.

what Bialik wrote of Brenner's novel "Misaviv lanekuda" ("Around the Point"):

What do I care about literary theory when I see a living soul, passionate emotions and a fiery idea permeating every line, quivering in every letter. How much sensitivity, how much truth—I have no other word for it, you sought Truth, and how much venom is embedded there. [...] The power of your creation, although it seems to be European, is fundamentally and principally Hebrew creative power—and that of a son of the Exile, of course, of the exile of our age, whose desire is greater than his ability, who sees the decadence of the nation and wants its liberty; who believes and yet does not believe in the possibility of liberty, a liberty that that he knows not where it is and from where it will emerge, who is hopeful and despairing at the same time, strives and howls in pain, is suspended between thousands of magnets and cuts his own bands with sharpened cutters.¹⁷

The first one who laid out the holistic view, perhaps beside Yisrael Zinberg who wrote the history of Jewish literature, was Dov Sadan, who was motivated by the desire to "collect the sparks of light," out of theological, messianic motivations.¹⁸ But one can theoretically point to the whole corpus without any superfluous blend of ideology, such as the poly-system view which is disconnected in large sequences but connected at other segments, research-dependent in the style of Itamar Even-Zohar in his theory of the poly-system.¹⁹ Even if there remains a hint of structure—perhaps a meta-structure or even a meta-point—which is present-absent or present as in Brenner's own novel, that would be enough. And for this reason also one can attribute great importance to the attempt to decode Brenner's symbol, 'around the point,' when in his correspondence he considered calling his work "Beyond the Point," a point that could not be passed according to the experience of his protagonist Abramson.²⁰

¹⁷ Undated letter (apparently August 1904). Cf. Yosef Hayim Brenner, *Misaviv lanekuda: hu sefer le'atzmo*, commented by Yariv Ben-Aharon (Tel Aviv: Hano'ar ha'oved vehalomed, 2005), 6.

¹⁸ Dov Sadan, *Al sifrutenu: masat mavo* (Jerusalem: Reuven Mass, 1949).

¹⁹ Itamar Even-Zohar, "Polysystem Theory," *Poetics Today* 1 (1-2) (1979): 287-310.

²⁰ See "...and a full week will take me to copy the story 'Me'ever lanekuda,'" Brenner's letter to Bialik (August 14, 1904), cf. Brenner, *Misaviv lanekuda*, 228. The earliest name of the novel was "Haahronim" [The Latest] and after that "Haaharon" [The Latest One]. By preferring the name "Misaviv lanekuda" Brenner chose an enigmatic Kabbalistic symbol that is interpreted in some options. See *ibid.*, 11.

Brenner was portrayed as a secular holy man. It seems this was done either in haste or in order to salvage the last remnants of his fiery literary works in support of absolute secularism. As Yariv Ben Aharon wrote in an essay on the story “*Misaviv lanekuda*,” an interpretive hyper-textual commentary that relies on Brenner’s interpreters, particularly from the traditional Labor movement who are very familiar with Brenner, as well as scholars such as Yitzhak Bacon, Boaz Arpaly, Ada Zemach, Menahem Brinker, Yosef Even, and others who grappled before and afterward with Brenner’s works. Of particular note is the unique perspective of Shmuel Schneider who extracted references to the religious world from Brenner’s oeuvre.

Brenner’s story ‘Around the Point’ [1904] expresses the eternal doubts and misgivings of the Hebrew writer in relation to both his ability to disconnect himself and his dependence on the unattainable world which creates a relationship of attraction- repulsion and cuts short man’s pretension to establish for himself literary republics on relatively stable continents, expressing the balance of power between the influential and those who are influenced both ideologically and politically, in order to present theories that encompass every shift to the present phenomenon. “Now understand this, that man adheres to that same mysterious riddle, and also in all of that evil, his soul finds some secret pleasantness. And therefore? And therefore we must not stand around life as mere observers. We must struggle, reform, advance, and elevate. Hurling abuse at the holiness of life is the essence of being a mere observer! Cursed be those who are only observers!”²¹

And what is that point called by Yosef Hayim Brenner, *misaviv lanekuda* [around the point]?

Who is it who is holding him back? “Raise your eyes and see—she says to him—there, in the heavens up high, there is a point.” Fear assails him again. He summons up the remnants of his strength to pass beyond its boundary, beyond the limits of the point, but in vain: There is no passageway. The point cuts his heart. A single point. One point, small, black, terrible... He intends to go around it, to go around the path, and he circles it. A vicious circle. His lips are murmuring: a bit more, just a bit more ... and it seems to him that he is jumping and skipping over it. But now he realizes that he is mistaken: the point is after all in the heavens and not on the earth, so how could he pass over it? “For I am without blame—he is filled with defiance—my handkerchief is white!” But he shouts and his voice is not heard. The point remains unchanged. The road is all thorny.

²¹ Ibid., 92.

One point and there is no other. Up to the point—and then there is no passageway.²²

In the year such and such, three times, straight and backward. Outside, the rock shall bring death, and inside the house—the razor, the butcher's knife. And I shall rip my banner into twelve shreds, lest it fall into the hands of the enemy. "And Jacob remained alone." The dying has ended. Only one remains in all that empty space. And that is the way it always will be, endlessly, for all eternity. Jacob will perish—and one will remain. Always, one will remain for all eternity. There will never be total annihilation—there always will be a last one. And if he were to rouse himself to go to the garden on the mountain, the garden which stands like a point on the mountain, to pass the point and to go to his beloved children who are faithful to his covenant and to sow a seed that will bear fruit, the shining blade of the razor at his gates will turn back upon him and will not allow him to pass. And bandits and Amalekites will pursue him to the bitter end but they will not totally destroy him. Where can he escape? He will escape and circle the garden. He will circle it round and round, circle it—all day. His loins will be filled with fear and revulsion, and he will circle, again and again, around and around. Here ends the saga of Jacob.²³

The issue of 'Around the point' depends on the interpretation of Brenner's work where the dominant trend was that which notes the dimension of the 'secular holy man' or the secular man struggling against holiness (the revolution, according to Kurzweil²⁴) as opposed to the theory of Shmuel Schneider who points out the religious dimension in Brenner's writing.²⁵ As to "Mesaviv lanekuda," I will refer to the article by Yitzhak Bacon, "Hama'amad 'al hagesher be-Mesaviv lanekuda," which is part of the prevalent interpretive commentary from the Labor Movement's school of thought on Brenner.²⁶ In my opinion, standing on the bridge represents a replication and mirror image of the symbol 'around the point.' In looking at the water flowing in the river under the bridge and reflecting the heavens, according to Bacon, the new hero was born.

²² Ibid., 226-227.

²³ Ibid., 245-247.

²⁴ Baruch Kurzweil, *Sifrutenu hakhadasha: hemshekh o mahapekha?* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1959), 4.

²⁵ Shmuel Schneider, *The Traditional Jewish World in the Writings of J. H. Brenner* (Ph.D. Thesis, Yeshiva University, 1979).

²⁶ Yitzhak Bacon, "Ha-ma'amad 'al ha-gesher be-Mesaviv lanekuda," *Hasifrut* 4 (2) (1973), 274-283. See also: Anita Shapira, *Brenner: Sipur khayim* (Tel-Aviv: Am oved, 2008), 50; 71-66. Ada Zemach, *Tnu'a ba-nekuda: Brenner ve-sipurav* (Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz hameuhad, 1984), 158-144.

We are all still, for the time being, “around the point.”

This point, which simultaneously both maintains and negates the writer’s freedom of expression and of identity, the work itself, and the reader—one cannot escape but can only spin around it. The solution to the riddle periodically requires a new examination that is related to the vicissitudes of time: where is the center of gravity of the work from the imagined Jewish perspective of every writer and critic, especially a Jew, who is embedded in some dual root, in a trace of self-awareness by the new generation of researchers and writers about the connection between dependence and freedom. Can the present age—which covers up its distress by the use of post-modern inventions, such as the pretension of negating substance and turning history into literature and literature into history—can it be satisfied with its achievements—‘achievements’ to be read both with and without irony, without examining where it came from and where it is headed.

The fact is that there are extensive literatures of tiny Jewish population clusters such as in the former Yugoslavia, the Balkans, or Italy, and enormous concentrations—in Jewish demographic terms—such as in the US and even in the former Soviet territories in earlier periods and in those that follow, such as Jewish writers who were born in the Ukraine, that hub of Hebrew literature, which swallowed up substantial parts of Galicia: Bialik, Tchernichovsky, Agnon, Uri Zvi Greenberg. The writers were canonized because of the quality of their work and all together they revolve around the same point.

Every once in a while a seemingly new definition breaks forth that tries to recruit or to keep out Hebrew literature, in one direction or another. In the past year I found two fascinating examples of this. One in the book by Dror Burstein, *Netanya*, which uses a metaphor from the field of astrophysics,²⁷ and one in the book by Matan Hermoni, *Hebrew Publishing Company*, which although it is written in Hebrew, deals with Yiddish literature and writers and poets in the US in the last third of the 20th century, from their supposed perspective on the past and present, with a sense of heightened tension and feelings of repulsion and attraction toward Zionism and the State of Israel.²⁸

²⁷ Dror Burstein, *Netanya*, edited by Dror Mishani (Jerusalem: Keter, 2010), 226. See also Yotam Schwimmer, “Galaksiya ushma Netanya” [A galaxy named Netanya], *Ynet*, September 20, 2010. <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3955207,00.html>. Accessed on December 14, 2013.

²⁸ Matan Hermoni, *Hebrew Publishing Company* (Tel-Aviv: Kineret / Zmora / Bitan, 2011).

A prominent example is the writing of an author like Aharon Appelfeld, who is not a Hebraist, and the Hebrew language is not elemental in his writing, which can be translated into any language, like the writings of Amos Oz. The inter-textual links, if any, are negligible. All of his writings circle ‘around the point’ and create an elliptical circuit of moving close and drawing apart. In the larger issue, language is not the decisive factor and that was true also for the school of thought established by Dov Sadan. In preferring it, I did not ignore the school of thought of my revered teacher and mentor Baruch Kurzweil, the founder of the Department of Hebrew Literature at Bar-Ilan University. I only limited its pretensions of sovereignty. I hope it was not an oedipal act of patricide. Kurzweil did not remain abandoned and alone. In certain aspects he was right, up to this very day. But revolutionary secularism was not total. Choosing the doctrine of Dov Sadan is an anti-tragic, anti-depressive maneuver while choosing Kurzweil’s spiritual choice expressed a philosophic process that led to the physical demise of my most highly esteemed teacher. I came to realize, too, that in Agnon’s work as well as in that of Bialik and Uri Zvi Greenberg and all the poets of the Third Aliyah, continuity as well as revolution may serve as a creative force.

In conversations that I had with Kurzweil while writing my MA thesis (1968-1972), I told him this more than once. The main point of my thesis, which was written under his guidance, was the theme of *geniza*, or hiding, in several works of Agnon, including “Tehila.” Proof that he was convinced either on his own or because of our conversations was found in the last edition of his work “Essays on Agnon” which Kurzweil wrote about “Tehila” as a sequence in a continuum.²⁹ This was in contrast with other critics such as Adi Zemach, Yizhar, Oz, and A. B. Yehoshua who saw in “Tehila” a sick, perverted manifestation.³⁰ Is pointing out the expropriation of the sacred by the profane and impure, and inversely, the rectification of the profane with the sacred only an outward compromise, an attempt to be acceptable to everyone, or perhaps the acceptance of two ostensibly diametrically opposed maneuvers contains some kind of truth, or at least a fact that requires an explanation?³¹

²⁹ Baruch Kurzweil, *Masot ‘al sipurei Shai ‘Agnon [Essays on S. Y. Agnon’s Stories]* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1970, enlarged second edition).

³⁰ See the bibliographical list in David Fishelov “Tehila ‘aduya be-tsemah, amusa be-oz,” *Alpayim* 11 (1992): 129-148, and in my article “Siluk Shekhina” [Eliminating the Shekhina], *Akdamut* 13 (2003), 131-149.

³¹ See the academic and research literature such as Idit Einav-Nov, *Hareshuyot ha ‘ishiyot [Personal Reshuyot: A Literary Analysis of the Genre and its Relation to Other Sacred Poetry]* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2012). Avi Sagi,

“The Literature of the Jewish People” or in more accepted terms “The Literatures of the Jews” refers to a transition from a strong opposition to the thesis to reconciliation and acknowledgement. Indeed, an idea that was proven that one can agree to, especially in view of the illusion that the brothers will not again cast out Joseph who dreams a dream of Kingdom and sovereignty and that they do not intend to throw him into the pit because of that eternal frustration. And in the meanwhile, we run into the attraction-repulsion force of the absent-present point that rests upon all of existence. Is it possible to free oneself from that matrix?

Time will tell.

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MEDIEVAL LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES
IN ITALY AND SPAIN:
FUNCTIONS AND INTERACTIONS
IN A MULTILINGUAL SOCIETY AND THE ROLE
OF HEBREW AND JEWISH LITERATURES

ARIE SCHIPPERS

In Italy and Spain a multitude of languages and literatures coexisted together: Latin, used for learned epistles and scientific tractates, epics and other solemn genres, coexisted with several Romance vernaculars e.g. French for popular prose and epic literature and Occitan for lyrical poetry. We will deal with those languages and literatures which transcend their original space and come into contact with other literatures in Spain and Italy, and their interrelation, and their relation to certain domains of literature rather than others, and especially with regard to Hebrew and Jewish literatures.

There are not yet many handbooks in which this inter-relationship is dealt with in an adequate manner, although in recent times we find more and more consciousness of the fact that literatures which coexist in one territory should not be discussed in isolation from each other. This is obvious in the case of Latin narrative literature such as the *Disciplina Clericalis* by Petrus Alfonsi,¹ a Jewish convert to Christianity, who earlier wrote works in Hebrew as Moshe Sefardi (1062-1121).² The

¹ Petrus Alfonsi, *Disciplina Clericalis*, edited by Alfons Hilka and Werner Söderhjelm (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1911); the text is also in Jacques Paul Migne, *Patrologia Latina* (since 2000 on line available); there are several recent Spanish editions of this text; see also David A. Wacks, *Framing Iberia: Maqāmāt and Frametale Narratives in Medieval Spain* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 17-40 and Eberhard Hermes, *The Disciplina Clericalis of Petrus Alfonsi*, translated by P. R. Quarrie (Berkeley-Richmond: University of California Press, 1977).

² Arie Schippers, "Ibn Shāhîn (990-1062), Ibn Zabāra (1131-1209) et le répertoire narratif arabe en Europe médiévale," in Frédéric Bauden, Aboubakr Chraïbi and

sources of his *Disciplina* are mainly Arabic, and therefore can not be treated in isolation from Arabic literature. The same goes for Hebrew Andalusian narrative literature, such as the *Sefer Sha'ashu'im* [Book of Delight] by Josef ibn Zabāra (Barcelona 1131-1209) which is based upon Arabic and Hebrew antecedents, and Classical Greek and Latin literature and other world literature as well.³

The recent handbook dealing with the Arabic literature of al-Andalus (Muslim Spain) is officially part of the *Cambridge History of Arabic literature*, but the Andalus volume covers Hebrew Andalusian literature as well, and also Arabic and Romance literature of Sicily, but no Hebrew poets of Sicily are mentioned.⁴ It has even a chapter on Judeo-Spanish literature but it lacks chapters on Occitan and Galician Portuguese literature. This is a lacuna because both literatures are famous because of their love lyrics, which is also one of the favourite topics of Arabic and Hebrew literature. Moreover, many Occitan troubadours were born in Spain or lived there, even at the court of Alphonse the Wise (1221-1284), and Alphonse the Wise made himself Galician-Portuguese poetry, although he lived in Toledo. He was an arbiter in the question submitted to him by the troubadour Guiraut Riquer about the different functions of *trobador* (troubadour-poet) and *joglar* (performer).⁵ The Catalans were in a certain sense represented by the Occitan literature of the troubadours whose language was near to Catalan. Other Romance languages such as Valencian were also near to Catalan. Since the Catalans were the strongest in the nearby Mediterranean, it is not surprising that Dante in his *De vulgari eloquentia*, supposed the inhabitants of Spain to be Occitans.

When looking at the index of the Handbook of non-Castilian Hispanic literatures, we see that there exist—or existed—some twelve literatures within the boundaries of Hispania (the present-day Spain and Portugal).⁶ Here we do not deal with all of these literatures but only those that are relevant as literatures which transcend their original space and have a certain amount of interrelationship with other literatures within the same

Antonella Ghersetti (eds.), *Le Répertoire narratif arabe médiéval: transmission et ouverture* (Genève: Droz, 2008), 287- 299.

³ Arie Schippers, "Ibn Zabāra's Book of Delight (Barcelona, 1170) and the Transmission of Wisdom from East to West," *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 26 (1999): 149-161.

⁴ María Rosa Menocal, with Raymond P. Scheindlin & Michael Anthony Sells, *The Literature of al-Andalus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁵ Martin de Riquer, *Los trovadores* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1975), introducción.

⁶ Jose Luis Moralejo et al., *Historia de las literaturas hispanicas no castellanas* (Madrid: Taurus, 1980).

space. Not only some handbooks but also individual studies try to connect different Hispanic genres of narrative literature such as Wacks' *Framing Iberia* makes the connection between the Arabic *Maqāma* and Ibn Zabāra's *Sefer Sha'ashu'im*, the Castilian *Calila e Dimna*, *Conde Lucanor* and *Libro de Buen Amor*, and the Valencian Jaume Roig's *Spill*.⁷ The multi-ethnicity of Hispania was also evident from 11th century writings such as Moses ibn Ezra's *Mudhākara* and *Maqālat al-Hādīqa* and the Hispano-Arabic author Ibn Gharsiyya [García] and his *shu'ūbiyya* Letter.⁸

The most prestigious literatures of Spain were first Latin and then Arabic including the Hebrew poetry based upon Arabic poetic motifs, and afterwards Castilian. Hebrew as interactive language was especially important during the Translation School of Toledo, because it was an intermediate language between Arabic and Latin, and later on, between Arabic and Castilian.⁹ Many Arabic scientific writings in the Classical Greek tradition were translated into or originally written in Hebrew. Arabic literature in Spain in principle followed the development of Arabic in the East. It took over the role of Latin in Muslim Spain which was situated in the middle and southern part of the Iberian peninsula. Since 711 the Muslims and Arabs conquered part of Spain and settled there and arabicised culture and literature. Arabic is comparable to Latin in that it is no spoken language, only Arabic vernaculars were spoken and sometimes employed in literature in a stylized way.¹⁰ On the level of the spoken language, Arabic dialects replaced Romance dialects. Probably during a long period there was bilingualism: the many Romance Jewish or Judeo-Arabic family names like Ibn Naghrīlah [cf. negrello, negrelho], Ibn Chicatila [cf. chicatella], Ibn Cabron [meaning 'goat'] are testimony to it.

⁷ Wacks, *Framing Iberia*.

⁸ Paul B. Fenton, *Philosophie et exégèse dans Le Jardin de la métaphore de Moïse Ibn 'Ezra, philosophe et poète andalou du XIII^e siècle* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 247ff.; Göran Larsson, *Ibn García's shu'ūbiyya Letter. Ethnic and Theological Tensions in Medieval al-Andalus* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

⁹ Arie Schippers, "Wetenschap vertaald—de vertaalschool van Toledo," *Filter: tijdschrift voor vertalen & vertaalwetenschap* 4/3 (1997): 53-59; Charles Burnett, "The translation activity in Moslem Spain," in Salma Khadra Jayyusi (ed.), *The legacy of Muslim Spain* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 1036ff.

¹⁰ For the Andalusī Arabic language: [Federico Corriente], *A Descriptive and Comparative Grammar of Andalusī Arabic* (Leiden: Brill, 2013); also see Ibn Quzmān, *Dīwān*, edited by Federico Corriente (Cairo: Arabic Language Academy, 1995).

Hebrew itself was never a spoken language at the time. Spanish Hebrew poetry was a bookish language with the Hebrew Bible as its dictionary.¹¹

How was the switch of cultural language experienced in the ninth century? In a Latin text named *Indiculus Luminosus*,¹² reportedly written in 854, Paulus Alvarus [Paul Albar] showed how the Christians were attracted to Arabic poetry far more than to the Latin equivalent. Alvarus deplored how the Christians devoted themselves to Chaldaic [=Arabic] poetry and neglected Latin:

Alas! the Christians do not know their own law and the Latins pay no attention to their own tongue, so that in the whole community of Christ there can scarcely be found one man in a thousand who can send letters of greeting properly to his fellow. While there are found crowds of people who can produce learnedly Chaldaic parades of words so that they adorn their final phrases with the bond of a single letter in metrical fashion.¹³

This last remark refers to the fact that in Chaldaic (i.e. Arabic) poetry the poems have normally a single rhyme consonant which determines the rhyme. In this text, Alvarus exhibited good acquaintance with Arabic poetry and metre. Some twenty five years later (in the year 889) Ḥafṣ ibn Albar al-Qūṭī [Ḥafṣ the son of Alvarus the Goth] devoted himself entirely to the translation of the Psalms in Arabic *rajaz* metre, basing himself probably on a Latin original. His translation is important because it gives Moses ibn Ezra (1055-1138), the Judeo-Arabic author of the *Kitāb al-Muḥāḍara wa 'l-Mudhākara* [Book of Discussion and Memorization] the opportunity to make a point about translations. We can also deduce from this passage that “Latin” was still spoken in some pockets in Muslim Spain, although it is unclear whether with “Latin” is not meant “Spanish.” Moses ibn Ezra starts with a remark about the loss of the Hebrew language:

The splendor [*rawnaq*] of the [Hebrew] language was lost because of neglect [*ighfāl*]. People considered it insufficient because of its small

¹¹ Arie Schippers, *Spanish Hebrew Poetry and the Arabic Literary Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 41 ff.

¹² David Wasserstein, “A Latin Lament on the Prevalence of Arabic in Ninth-Century Islamic Cordoba,” in Alan Jones (ed.), *Arabicus Felix: Luminosus Britannicus—Essays in Honour of A.F.L. Beeston on His Eightieth Birthday* (Ithaca: Reading, 1991), 1-7.

¹³ Arie Schippers, “Ḥafṣ al-Qūṭī’s Psalms in Arabic *rajaz* metre (9th Century): a Discussion of Translations from Three Psalms (Ps. 50, 1 and 2),” in Urbain Vermeulen and J.M.F. van Reeth (eds.), *Law, Christianity, and Modernism in Islamic Society* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 133-146.