

= rebuttal of Sadan .

exclusivist - Hebraist on grounds of Normalizatsiya

This article proposes a formulation of the major issues involved in a historical description and analysis of Israeli Hebrew literature (See Section 2). An adequate historical description of literature is a goal of historical poetics, which is a branch of the science of literature. Unfortunately, the usual "histories of literature" are in fact bibliographical and chronological works, where selection and elimination of data proceed according to a certain (usually vague) aesthetic taste, rather than being systematic historical descriptions based upon adequate historiographic principles. The history of Hebrew literature in general, and of modern Hebrew Israeli literature in particular, is no exception. It is for this reason that this article attempts to put forward a series of working hypotheses for a history of the latter, hypotheses which can be verified, however, only by large scale research projects. It is hoped that such projects will gradually be launched by various institutes and individuals.¹

In the preface (0.), the major premises of historical poetics are stated as follows:

(a) A literature is a polysystem, which consists of both canonised and non-canonised works, both original and translated;

(b) history of literature deals with both synchronic and diachronic aspects:² (1) the relations between the centre and periphery in a given literary polysystem, and between the latter and extra-literary systems (synchrony); and (2) the changes which occur in these relations (diachrony);

(c) history of literature analyses the relations between various literatures, i.e. literary contacts, which include such peculiar situations as literary (poly)systems combined by unilateral, bilateral or multilateral interference.

Section 1 (Introduction) analyses the characteristic features of Hebrew literature in the pre-Israeli periods (roughly speaking between 500 and 1880 B.C.). These are suggested to be (a) multiterritoriality and (b) a multiple false polysystem. Multiterritoriality means that Hebrew literature wandered during the ages from one territory to another. As a consequence, instead of a "normal" uniterritorial shift of "literary periods", which occurs on the time scale only, one can observe in Hebrew literature periodic shifts in both time and place, where what has become "peripheral" literature (after a shift) often remains in the "deserted" territory or moves further on to another, usually "marginal" territory. A multiple false polysystem means that Hebrew literature existed (a) in a sort of a literary symbiosis with other Jewish literatures (e.g. Yiddish), where this other literature usually functioned as the non-canonised system within the "united" (though "false") polysystem, and/or with another, non-Jewish literature (e.g. Arabic in medieval Spain); (b) in a multilingual situation, where Hebrew functioned only for a part of the linguistic necessities of the Jewish community.³

The latter fact caused the coining of the notion of "Jewish literature", which, though justified during the periods of "symbiosis", becomes baseless on literary grounds after the disintegration of the literary symbiosis (towards the end of World War I). Hence, writers such as Shalom Aleikhem (Yiddish) or S. Frug (Russian) are integral members of the "false polysystem", i.e. of the multilingual Jewish literature (where Hebrew literature is the major component), but by no means Saul Bellow or Isaac Bashevis-Singer.

Section 2 poses the question "From what point in time may one speak of Israeli Hebrew literature?" All "irrelevant" criteria, where "Israeli" is conceived of as "being Israeli in spirit", and the like, are discarded as irrelevant. The only adoptable unequivocal criterion is then suggested to be simply the territorial one. Hence, the beginnings of Israeli Hebrew literature should be dated at around 1880. Nevertheless, it is only after World War I that Israeli Hebrew literature begins to take its central position in Hebrew literature, of which it becomes the exclusive component towards the late nineteen thirties. The causes for this process were mainly the following:

(a) the Russian centre of Hebrew literature was physically destroyed by Soviet anti-Zionist policy, warmly supported by Jewish Yiddishists ("Yevsekis");

(b) the Hebrew reading public in Europe and America diminished considerably (i) because of the rise of Yiddish in central Europe, the Soviet Union and the USA to a status of the main cultural language of Jewish populations (in the USSR and some other places, Yiddish was declared to have become "the only national Jewish language", Hebrew being considered to belong to the "Zionist bourgeoisie") and (ii) because of the accelerated process of the assimilation of Jews in other national cultures;

(c) the Jewish population in Israel (then Palestine) became increasingly dependent on the Hebrew language, thus becoming the most direct and natural public for Hebrew letters;

(d) the Nazi policy in the late thirties and during the holocaust annihilated all remnants of Hebrew letters in Europe.

Section 3 describes and analyses the *inventory* of Israeli Hebrew literature.

3.1 deals with the canonised literature (for adults). This system is naturally the one which has been given major (if not exclusive) attention by critics and even scientists of literature, but there is still much to be desired from the point of view of historical poetics. One can however make some general observations and one of the most obvious is the difference in the lines of evolution of narrative fiction and poetry. In prose fiction, changes were introduced almost exclusively on the thematic level and in "background material", while the literary structure remained hardly touched. It was not until the sixties that a total shift in all textual components took place in prose fiction. (A case apart, however, is S. J. Agnon, the literary features of whose work, and

its intricate relations with that of other writers of narrative fiction, are briefly sketched). On the other hand, the evolution of poetry was very marked, with shifts manifested quite clearly in all textual components.⁴

3.2 deals with the non-canonised literature (for adults). This system was traditionally lacking in Hebrew literature, and its place was filled by literatures in other languages, e.g. Yiddish. But the rupture between Yiddish and Hebrew literatures did not bring about the creation of an original non-canonised Hebrew literature on a large scale, as one might have expected. The need for such literature has normally been supplied by translations, though attempts have occasionally been made to create original works (notably in the thirties).

3.3 deals with children's literature, where both canonised and non-canonised norms manifest themselves, though often as "petrified" or "simplified".

3.4 deals with literature translated into Hebrew from other languages. Translated literature may constitute an integral part of the whole of a literature, particularly in special periods (and, of course, in some literatures more than others). In Hebrew literature, translations always fulfilled various roles: (1) they supplied what was missing in the original literature, especially light reading and children's books; (2) they functioned as a vehicle for literary contacts; (3) they helped in the crystallization of stylistic norms, in the enriching of the language, etc.

3.5 shows that so far it is impossible to give a precise description of the interrelations between the various literary systems. E.g., since the non-canonised literature has been but slightly investigated, no adequate assumptions can be made about the interrelations between the latter and the canonised system. One may, however, presume that the lack of such a non-canonised system even in Israeli Hebrew literature has contributed to the obvious "serious" and "heavy" nature of its canonised system. The interrelations between adults' and children's literature, the "migration" of norms from the canonised literature for adults to the canonised one for children, or from the non-canonised (for adults) to the (non-) canonised for children are some of the fascinating objects for future study.

Section 4 deals with various systematic aspects of the history of Israeli Hebrew literature.

4.1 states that there was never overlapping simultaneity in the evolution of the various literary genres. Poetry changed at a far different tempo and in different features than narrative prose.

4.2 outlines the literary contacts with Russian literature which prevailed from the middle of the 19th century and lasted up to the 1940s, when they were gradually replaced by contacts with Anglo-American literature. Other literatures affected Hebrew literature via literature translated into Russian, German or Polish, and only recently — via literature translated into English (which is considerably less internationally oriented than the first mentioned languages). As for the literary trends, there was never contemporaneity of literary norms between Hebrew and foreign literatures. The contacts occurred usually between different periods, and norms were selected by the inner evolution of the Hebrew literature

itself. Thus, for instance, Hebrew poetry between 1890 and 1920 had most affinity to Russian poetical norms from the Russian romantic period (Puškin, Lermontov, Fet, Tjutčev). In the twenties, a more contemporary contact took place with European modernism, but even this was relatively belated, so that affinities to various modernistic trends could be maintained at the same time. But again, later in the sixties, the "neo-imagist" generation holds more affinity to the English and European twenties than to any particular contemporary poetic trend.

4.3 describes some of the economic aspects of Israeli Hebrew literature. Literary mecenates (such as the famous tea merchant Wyssocki) contributed greatly to the very existence of Hebrew literature in Eastern Europe. This kind of patronage never interfered with literary policy or norms. In Palestine, this was partly replaced by the patronage of political bodies, which established publishing houses, magazines, newspapers, literary clubs and other literary institutions. The leftist ("Labour") movement was the biggest, and hence the most influential in material matters. Its literary institutions, critics, youth movements and highly organised distribution systems (e.g. per subscription) enabled it to play an important role in what Frye calls "the seesaw of taste". Only the diminution of the social role played by literature, a process which began around 1950, prepared the ground for individual (or group) initiatives that were not linked to any political body (though they may have had political affinities), and diminished the interference of ideology-makers in literary matters. Another implication of the same phenomenon, however, was a general decrease of interest in literature.

4.4 makes some concluding statements about the diachronic evolution of Israeli Hebrew literature. Hebrew literature, by being transferred to Israel (then Palestine), gradually became uniteritorial. Moreover, the new territory can be said to have saved Hebrew literature, since no other territory was left for Hebrew letters. Thus, Hebrew literature became the literature of the Israeli-Jewish nation exclusively, while all those millions of Jews in the rest of the world became no longer concerned with Hebrew secular culture, even when they care for Israeli political existence and/or for Jewish religio-cultural survival and/or vitality. As a result of the process of uniteritoriality, one can observe a gradual liberation from the multiple false polysystem. The literary symbiosis though, stopped earlier than the linguistic one, which is more difficult to trace, since many of its manifestations are latent. Some features of Israeli Hebrew literature caused by this changing situation are analysed in this section, e.g. its stylistic conservatism is explained as being caused by the unwillingness to adopt the new linguistic stratification, register differentiations of previously neutral elements etc.).⁵

⁵ For more detailed information see my article "Note sur la situation linguistique de la littérature israélienne d'aujourd'hui" [13a].

∴ Mod. Israeli Lit = complete break with

- 1) Jewish people
- 2) Jewish past
- 3) Jewish tradition