

BARUKH KURZWEIL AND MODERN HEBREW LITERATURE¹

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I. THEORETICAL STRUCTURE

FROM ITS EARLIEST days the criticism that evolved alongside modern Hebrew literature has perceived and grappled with the diffuse issue of Hebrew-European literary relationships. In the twentieth century Joseph Klausner, Zvi Woyslawsky, Yeshurun Keshet, (Ya'akov Kapilowitz), Shlomo Tsemah, Eliezer Steinmann, Simon Halkin, Israel Zemora, Avraham Kariv, Dov Sadan and Barukh Kurzweil have all, in very different ways, addressed themselves to this subject, sometimes implicitly.

1. This essay represents two chapters of my doctoral dissertation entitled *The Literary Criticism of Barukh Kurzweil: A Study in Hebrew-European Literary Relationships*, Indiana University, 1978. About half the Kurzweil corpus has so far been collected into eight volumes and where possible I have given the references to these volumes in accordance with the following key:

S=1959. *Siprutenu haḥadaša—hemṣek 'o mahpeka?* Tel Aviv. (Third enlarged edition, 1971).

BT=1960. *Bialik uTserniḥovski—meḥqarim bəširatam*. Tel Aviv. (Fourth enlarged edition, 1971).

A=1963. *Massot 'al sippurey Šay 'Agnon*. Tel Aviv. (Fourth enlarged edition, 1975).

H=1966. *Beyn hazon ləbeyn ha'absurdi—pəraqim ləderek siprutenu bamme'a ha'eśrim*. Tel Aviv. (Second enlarged edition, 1973).

J=1969. *Bəma'abaq 'al 'erkey hayyahadut*. Tel Aviv.

L=1976. *Lənokah hamməbuka haruḥanit šel dorenu—pirqeḥ hagut ubiqqoret*. Ramat Gan.
Where a given article by Kurzweil has not yet been collected I have made reference to its original place of publication as noted in the bibliography. In addition there are references to the memorial volume

SBK=1975. *Seper Barukh Kurzweil*. Tel Aviv and Ramat Gan.

To be sure, their interest in it bespeaks general ideological concerns: how to relate Hebrew literature to Jewish nationalism and its aspirations, to historic Jewish culture and the ancestral religious tradition, and to the humanistic legacy of European culture. Though most of the younger critics now writing are not so preoccupied ideologically and have chosen to concentrate on the specifically artistic and technical problems of literature, this does not mean that the larger comparative questions have been clarified and resolved.

In this connection my reasons for choosing Kurzweil (1907–72) specifically as the subject of this study are three-fold. For one thing, there is the matter of critical temper. Kurzweil is a product of Western Europe, a cultural milieu very different from the East European context of modern Hebrew literary creativity. Because he is at a greater distance from this context than virtually all of the above-named figures he is conspicuously more sensitive to and critical of the nationalistic sentiment and assumptions of modern Hebrew literature. Secondly, his German Jewish background and training qualify him well to deal with modern Hebrew literature both in its synchronic and its diachronic manifestations. Finally, of all the critics, his method is the clearest, the most obviously comparative, and the most easily studied.

Kurzweil's work on modern Hebrew literature represents the synthesis and fruition of all the strands of his thought and method. Here we find a theoretical as well as a practical fullness lacking in the criticism of European literature.² There is a much more carefully worked out conception of Hebrew literature as a national literature and greater attention is paid to individual figures and their specific works.

To anyone who studies the Kurzweil corpus the denotations of this oft-used term "modern Hebrew literature" are quite evident. "Modern" for Kurzweil means specifically the loss of religious faith in the transition from the integral past to the fragmented present; "literature" refers to the esthetic response of man-as-artist or artist-as-man to the uncertainty and chaos that swirl around him; and "Hebrew" implies a linguistic tradition rooted in a sacred world-view. In a sense it is the relation of this latter element, Hebrew, to the other two that Kurzweil seeks to achieve. Is "modern Hebrew literature" modern literature written in Hebrew or is it Hebrew literature written in the modern mode? Or, to put it in Kurzweil's own terms, does modern Hebrew literature represent a "continuity" of past Jewish culture or is it a "revolt" against it?

Kurzweil's notion of the impossibility of tragedy in the Biblical world hints at a larger network of ideas about the sacred and the secular as they pertain to art. There is a basic distinction here between sacral and secular art. The

2. Much of Kurzweil's critical writings on European literature has been collected in *Masseket haroman vehasippur ha'eropi*, Tel Aviv, 1973.

important point about this distinction is that it refers not to a difference in subject matter but in the world-view that energizes these respective esthetic manifestations. Thus, paradoxically,

sacral art does not know religion as a subject because its entire reality and world is—holiness. The religious subject [i.e., theme?] as one subject among others is the distinctive feature of secular art, of fictionalized art which springs out of an autonomous world. (J, p.22)³

Undergirding all this are the metaphysical postulates Kurzweil holds about Hebrew as a sacred tongue and Jewish polity as a sacred category. It is the connections between these postulates and modern Hebrew literature that I propose to illuminate here, for they lie at the heart of Kurzweil's contribution.

It should, however, be quite clear that the value of this contribution is not its originality. The ontological status of the Jewish people, their culture and their language is a given in classical Jewish theology, and secularism as the hallmark of modernity is widely recognized. Rather, it is the application of this given and this recognition to *belles lettres* created by Jews in Hebrew in the last century and a half that is Kurzweil's achievement. As Barzel (1967, pp. 271f) has astutely observed:

Actually it can be said that intellectual life is propelled forward precisely by proponents of one principle, who confront every thinking person with their root idea. The idea itself need not even be new. In the last analysis Marx did not invent the notion of the material, Freud eros, and Bergson intuition. Hillel the Elder did not discover the principle "What is hateful to you do not do to your fellow-man" and Rabbi Akiva did not formulate the dictum "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Application is the key.

In order more fully to understand and appreciate what Kurzweil sought to do as he developed his theory of modern Hebrew literature, it is first necessary to survey, however cursorily, the state of critical thought up to and including his time.

1. Other Conceptions of Modern Hebrew Literature

The two most influential histories of modern Hebrew literature, those of Lachower and Klausner, are in agreement on what this literature is and when it can be said to have begun. In their wake one finds not so much differing opinions as refinements and developments of their views. Both Lachower and

3. See also Kurzweil (1966b).

Klausner focus their histories on Hebrew literature as it began to be written in Europe in the eighteenth century. Lachower (1928, vol. II) starts in the second quarter of that century with Moshe Hayim Luzzatto, who he sees as the spiritual descendent of the Italian Hebrew humanists of the sixteenth century. Klausner (1930, vol. I), however, begins with the German *Haskalah* of the latter half of the eighteenth century, specifically with Wessely. The recognition implicit in both treatments is that these are the respective points at which the "new spirit" enters Hebrew literary creativity.⁴ Both Lachower (1928, I, p. 4) and Klausner (1930, I, p. 9) specify "secularism" as the distinctive feature of this creativity, but neither one develops this into an explicit literary norm. What "secularism" is and how modern Hebrew literature is related to the Hebraic literary tradition of the past we are not told by either Lachower or Klausner.

In any case, both include the philosophical literature of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* along with *belles lettres* within the purview of modern Hebrew literature. Inasmuch as the purpose of this literature, as Klausner sees it (1930, I, pp. 14f), was to "enlighten" the Jews, such philosophical works are, in his opinion, an integral part of it, since they, too, were written to propagate Enlightenment ideals.

The two differ in their periodization. Lachower begins with a geographical-chronological scheme but shifts to a more conceptual one. Whereas the first two volumes of his history deal with Hebrew literature "From the Growth of the New Literature in Italy Until the Decline of the Haskalah in the West" and "From the Early Days of the Haskalah in the East Until the Close of the Haskalah period," the third volume covers the period "From the Awakening of the Jewish National Ideal Until Our Own Times." Klausner superimposes more literary categories on those of time and place, but he is only willing to offer a configuration of the century of *Haskalah* literature. This he divides into three periods: the rationalistic, when the German Enlightenment was defended against the attack of the Traditionalists (1781–1830); the romantic, when religion and the Enlightenment were reconciled in Galicia (1830–1860); and the realistic, when the Enlightenment went on the offensive against religion in Russia and Poland (1860–1881). Though periodization is, to be sure, a highly problematical matter, and is a function of one's conception of the nature of the literature itself, a detailed discussion of these schemes is beyond the scope of my concern here. Suffice it to note Spicehandler's comment (1972, p. 178b) that

4. Sha'anan (1962, I, p. 17) notes that Lachower believes the "new spirit" actually originated in 16th century Italy but because he can find no artistically superior literary figure until Luzzatto he begins with him. Sha'anan's discussion of the entire matter I am here concerned with is lucid and altogether insightful (see pp. 13–19).

the schemes of Klausner and Lachower are faulty because they treat early modern Hebrew literature as a mature literature when in reality it possessed little esthetic value prior to 1881.⁵

The most important alternative definition of Hebrew literature is that of Dov Sadan. Sadan (1950, pp. 9–66) holds to a catholic, inclusivistic view whereby modern Hebrew literature is seen to embody the totality of literary creativity in that language in the last three centuries. He includes, besides *belles lettres*, all *Hassidic* and *Mitnagdic* writings. In fact, Sadan's literary holism brings him to consider together everything of Jewish content and concern written by Jews not only in Hebrew but in Yiddish, Ladino and various European languages. Sadan, too, notes secularism as the distinguishing feature of much of this literature, but he is more interested in its underlying unity. Unlike most of his critical counterparts, Sadan is much less exercised by the literature of the *Haskalah*. It is simply one aspect, the "conscious" aspect, of a new development in Jewish life; underneath the "sub-conscious" well-springs of normative Jewish creativity continue to flow, as the rabbinic and other non-imaginative writing indicates.⁶

Now in regard to the *terminus a quo* of Jewish modernism, the opposing view to those who locate this in the eighteenth century Enlightenment is held by those who follow Gershom Scholem in regarding the Sabbatian heresy and the movement it engendered as the first stirrings of the challenge to the Jewish past.⁷ Jewish modernism is thus pushed back to the seventeenth century and, more importantly, is now seen to be a development indigenous to the Jews rather than a response to external influences from European culture. In terms of modern Hebrew literature this view is of importance for two critics, H. N. Schapira and Simon Halkin.

Schapira uses it to buttress his contention that modern Hebrew literature is an "organic link" in the unbroken chain of Jewish culture, and is but a manifestation of an age-old tendency in Jewish life to affirm the concrete reality of the terrestrial world over the etherealized reality of the spiritual world. What is more, Shapira holds that such literature affirms this new reality as it is expressed in the collective Jewish will, whereas the old reality was lived out solely on the basis of an impotent individualism. Such generalizations come from Schapira's notion that all Jewish history is a dialectic between these two

5. For a superior critique of all the extant histories of modern Hebrew literature in the light of the norms and practices of literary history see Holtz (1967).

6. See Miron (1958).

7. Scholem (1937, pp. 347–392). English translation by Hillel Halkin as "Redemption Through Sin," in G. Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality*, New York, 1971, pp. 78–141.

sets of antithetical forces. Modernism for him begins when Jewish landlessness and spirituality reached their nadir after the expulsion from Spain in 1492 and the pendulum began to swing back toward the earthly, toward concern for corporate Jewish existence rooted in territorial realities.⁸ The Sabbatian heresy thus signifies a powerful impetus toward and an indicator of the new direction. The *Haskalah*, the literature of which is his main interest, represents an intensification of the process, but not its culmination—that Schapira sees in the Zionist movement (Schapira, 1940, pp. 43–49). What triumphs in the latter half of the eighteenth century, then, is not secularism—religious and secular elements were, in his view, always inter-woven in Jewish life and literature—but the impulse to the terrestrial. In other words, Schapira subordinates the secularism that Klausner sees as the distinctive feature of the new Hebrew literature to his own notion of the “terral,” which in the *Haskalah* is not a *novum* but a recurrence. What is new in the *Haskalah*, what was taken in from the outside, is rationalistic empiricism.

Accordingly, the periodization that Schapira embraces is keyed to the organizing principle that he sees within the process of Jewish modernism. He rejects the categories of Lachower and Klausner and, in tones reminiscent of Kurzweil, inveighs against purely esthetic criteria: Hebrew literature must be connected to Jewish life, and its periods must be related to historical developments.⁹ Schapira (1940, pp. 58–62) comes to discern three general stages of modern Hebrew literature, about which he, by his own admission, is imprecise in regard to dates. The *Haskalah* period marks the phase at which “terralism” became the predominant force in Jewish life, and it runs from the first issue of *haMe'asef* (1784) until the eighteen-eighties. The period of *Shivat Tsion* that follows shows the gradual transition from “terralism” as an idea and a force into the reality of political Zionism, and this period ends with the institutionalization of this reality in the Balfour Declaration of 1917. The third phase is the *Eretz Yisrael* period and it lasts until the present (1940).

Simon Halkin's views (1970, pp. 11, 15, 29–31) are in general similar to those of Schapira. While he does not purport to write a literary history, and while he is clear that “modern Hebrew literature is the product of the last two

8. See H.N. Schapira (1940, pp. 27–37). This work was originally conceived as a 12 volume *opus* but Schapira was murdered by the Nazis in 1943. In his preface to the 1967 reprinting, Ben Zion Benshalom says that Schapira had completed the manuscript of Volume 2 but it was destroyed. Schapira's terminology is most problematic. I have not attempted to find equivalents for such key concepts as “*terraliyut*” or “*superliyut*,” but have instead given the general sense of his argument.

9. See pp. 60f. In general I find many similarities in critical method between Schapira and Kurzweil in spite of the differences in outlook between them. Had he survived and continued his work in Israel, Schapira, I think, might have resembled Kurzweil more than any other figure even though he was a literary historian rather than a critic.

hundred years of Jewish life," Halkin nevertheless, like Schapira, finds in the Sabbatian movement as Scholem has depicted it, the precursor of the "hunger for a fuller human life in the heart of the simple Jewish folk" that animates modern Hebrew literature from its beginnings. But it is hard to find an overall, clearly defined idea of Hebrew literature in Halkin, for he touches all the bases without indicating what he thinks is primary and what of secondary importance. Sociological insights and historical events that have shaped the modern Jew are adduced in the same way as interior developments within the Jewish soul. Halkin is certainly alive to the larger questions posed by "the disharmonies in modern Hebrew literature . . . between this new body of Hebrew letters, mainly secular in character, and the religious Jewish folk life from which it sprang," but, outside of the tacit assumptions of normative political Zionism, I do not see any particular critical or otherwise esthetic perspective that he brings to bear on these questions that I might note here.¹⁰

The only other view of modern Hebrew literature immediately relevant is that of Avraham Kariv (1973a, pp. 13-29). His approach is not one that seeks to apprehend this literature in terms of its modernism or out of any esthetic categories. Kariv's focal point is the direction of Jewish national life. He mystically postulates a "spirit of the people" that includes its "eternity." He speaks of a "secret" in the depths of its existence. This has all the trappings of a religious postulate except that Kariv does not identify religion *per se* as the subject for Hebrew literature. Still, his position leads to a sharp critique of modern Hebrew literature. Since it has presented only the surfaces of Jewish life, and has done so in a wholly negative way, it has ignored the depths. This literature has, therefore, contributed nothing to the advancement of Jewish national life and it must be rejected. Kariv evidences a familiarity with and a cultural outlook similar to what one finds in Russian literature. He cites Dostoevsky and Blok as examples of artists who loved their people and so were capable of evoking its luminous and its simple human aspects in addition to the dark and despicable. But such Hebrew writers as Y. L. Gordon, Mendele and Brenner knew only how to satirize the foibles of their people; to treat literarily, for example, its martyrology, he charges, is beyond their capabilities. We may regard this unsparing judgment as Kariv's particular appropriation of secularism as the salient feature of modern Hebrew literature but his critique also implies a repudiation of normative Zionism's notion of *šəlilat haggalut* ("negation of Diaspora"). Running through all Kariv's criticism is the distinction between the sacred Hebrew writings of the Jewish past and the modern Hebrew literature that he describes as "the fruit of a Jewish decadence that has overtaken us," "a self-hate" that has resulted from a casting off of the ancestral past.

10. Halkin (1970, p. 33) and see epilogue, pp. 211-217.

Kurzweil's theory and criticism of modern Hebrew literature must be seen to be variously shaped by and related to all six of the above figures. He takes account of all of them, taking certain elements from each and developing them, while rejecting others.

The case of Sadan is clear. Kurzweil (1963a) is emphatic that Hebrew *belles lettres* as an esthetic category need to be separated from other kinds of non-imaginative literature and dealt with on their own terms.

It appears to me that Sadan's approach has no support, for it completely ignores the methodical need to define the limits of one's scientific [sic!] discipline. It is convenient for Sadan to set himself up as [the epitome of] associative omnipotence who can thus hover above and beyond the root problem [of modern Hebrew literature]. Indeed, he gives the impression not only of being at home in all the literatures in which Jews have ever had a share, but also of being the owner of the home itself.

On the other hand, Kurzweil does not deny the validity of looking for the Jewish problematic in other languages besides Hebrew. He does just this in his comparative study of Brenner, Weininger, Kafka and Kraus (S, pp. 112-128), and in his uncovering thematic similarities between Bialik and Kafka (BT, pp. X, 160f).

A selective eclecticism of a similar sort obtains with respect to Kariv. As Hebrew critics the two are remarkably similar, as Kurzweil himself understood, except that what Kariv calls "the spirit of the people" Kurzweil identifies (1960) as Jewish religious faith and practice, which he puts forth as a more concrete, objectively usable cultural criterion. The chief distinction between them lies in the willingness of each to grant esthetic value to modern Hebrew literature. Bakon puts it well (1972, p. 32):

Kurzweil departs from literature in order to return to it; literature is the necessary ground of his discussion. Kariv, however, comes to literature from life and then returns to life in order to draw conclusions about literature.

Kurzweil finds in Kariv the very inadequacies that others find in him (i.e., Kurzweil). Kariv's value judgments cause him to miss the art in certain writers, e.g., Mendele and Brenner; on Y. L. Gordon's position as an inferior poet they are apparently agreed. Kurzweil feels that Kariv would deny the historical dimension of Jewish existence, for the logical outcome of his approach would have to be a denial of the modern secular Jewish state, to which Kurzweil knows Kariv really will not agree and which he himself certainly refuses to do. Most interestingly it is Kariv he sees as forgetting that the clock of history cannot be turned back! But what he openly says he took from Kariv (1960) is the latter's

distinction between sacral and secular literature, a distinction he notes as instrumental in forcing the necessary revision in the reading of modern Hebrew literature.

The revision Kurzweil has in mind is that which challenged the accepted view that modern Hebrew literature is a "literature of revival" that parallels and reflects the reawakening of Jewish national ideals. Seeing the juxtaposition of Sadan, Kariv and Kurzweil we can understand why Kremer groups the three together in his outline of modern Hebrew criticism. All three, in his view, collectively brought about a second revision in the theory of modern Hebrew literature by judging it not on the basis of the individual work but in the light of the total Hebrew literary tradition.¹¹ All three, I would add, implicitly or explicitly follow Klausner and Lachower in regarding secularism as the dominant value of the new Hebrew literature. As Sha'anán points out (1962, I, p. 15), "the argument begins with the clarification of the nature of the secularism." Sadan sees it as only one aspect of Hebrew letters and is in the long run satisfied that there are other aspects to be studied also. Kariv sees it as the betrayal of the Hebraic spirit and is ultimately content to dismiss all the Hebrew literature in which it is manifested. Only Kurzweil sees this secularism as more than a surface phenomenon, a mere new "topic" for literature, but as an all-pervasive new content of consciousness which transforms human life and values.

The secularism of modern Hebrew literature is a given in that it is for the most part the outgrowth of a spiritual world divested of the primordial certainty in a sacral foundation that envelopes all the events of life and measures their value. (S, p. 16 and pp. 13–19)

Modern Hebrew literature is thus seen as a radical break with the Jewish past and not a continuation of it, and for this reason Kurzweil, unlike Sadan, is deeply troubled by it. But because it is literature—and here we do well to recall the details of Kurzweil's poetics—it cannot be merely condemned as Kariv condemns it but read correctly and contemplated, especially so because the secularism and the human condition it reflects are but the Jewish expression of a general human problematic. Accordingly, Kurzweil is satisfied only to track the process of secularism as he understands it by examining its concretizations in modern Hebrew *belles lettres*, and thus to expose the hollowness and self-deception of seeing it as a "revival" or a "continuity."

11. See Kremer (1966, pp. 365–368). The first revision, in Kremer's view, was accomplished by Shlonsky and his followers and was marked by a shift in emphasis—away from the values of collectivistic nationalism in favor of individualism.

In general terms, then, I believe we can see Kurzweil as adding to the foundation laid by Klausner and Lachower.¹² This perception of him allows us now to understand in a new way his extended polemic against Gershom Scholem and to regard it as an integral part of his literary work. Just as Klausner and Lachower included the *Wissenschaft* figures within the scope of their work, so does Kurzweil see fit to treat in his own way the leading representative of that approach of his time. Finally, his acceptance of Klausner's view of the European Enlightenment as the source for Jewish modernism necessitates his disputing the approach of Schapira and Halkin.

2. The European Context of Modern Hebrew Literature

If Klausner and Lachower treated the *Haskalah* in the historical-biographical terms of nineteenth century criticism, Kurzweil does so in terms of the phenomenological hermeneutics of the twentieth that I have discussed. Modernism is for him a general cultural phenomenon the essence of which is quite familiar to us by now. What I want to show now is how Kurzweil sees modernism operating on the Jews in particular and why he feels it was so especially traumatic to them.¹³

The decisive difference between the nations of Europe and the Jews as they experienced the dynamics of modernism lies in the place of religion in their respective cultures. In Christian Europe religion was not the sole component of culture and when it declined that culture had other value structures to fall back on, specifically those of secular humanism and nationalism. When an Englishman, a Frenchman or a German lost his faith his own existence *qua* Englishman, Frenchman or German was still unimperilled and had by no means lost its *raison d'être*. A secular literature was possible in such languages, for

the absence of belief in God did not precipitate in world literature the same changes and mutations it did in modern Hebrew literature, for the simple reason that Jewish existence is linked to religion in a completely different way than is the existence of all the other nations. Already in the first half of the eighteenth century Being without God was a basic pre-supposition of a large part of European literature without this shift causing such a profound shock in the conception of life, suffering and existence in general. The bulk of the culture of the nations of Europe was already then secular and they lived on their land and in

12. So, too, Yudkin (1974, p. 7). See entire discussion pp. 1-18.

13. The key source for much of the following discussion is Kurzweil's long introductory essay, "Ba'ayot yasod šel siprutenu hahadaša," (S, pp. 11-146), possibly his most important and certainly the quintessential single work. The core of the argument is in the first six sections, which were published first; section seven is a bridge passage to the expansion of the argument in sections eight through fourteen. But the structure of the latter seven sections follows those of the first six.

their states. In other words, their existence was not absurd. With the Jewish people the situation is different. And so there are certainly distinctive, different and fateful implications for modern Hebrew literature of this process of the rupture of religious faith. (H, pp. 282f)

Indeed it is in theory well-nigh impossible to create a Hebrew literature reflecting the new consciousness inasmuch as the language only operated in the sacral sphere of the synagogue and *Bet Midrash* (1944c and S, p. 30). This sacral sphere and sacral world-view infused and structured Jewish life as long as the Jews were insulated politically and sociologically within the Ghetto. When, however, the barriers between Jews and Gentiles were broken down; the moment the Jew came into unconditional, unrestricted contact with the outside world and imbibed the Enlightenment ideals then in play, at that moment his religious faith began to crumble and Jewish modernism began. For Kurzweil this decisive moment can only be the end of the eighteenth century.

In reaching this analysis Kurzweil was guided not only by his own understanding of European and Jewish life and history but by the important work of Max Wiener, *Jüdische Religion in Zeitalter der Emancipation*.¹⁴ Wiener's achievement is that he deals with the Emancipation not in terms of what it meant for the Jews externally—such historical studies have been done in abundance¹⁵—but what these cataclysmic changes in their external lives did to them internally.

Here the focus will be concentrated on the Jewish religion. The fact that this religion is inter-woven into the external aspects of the generations of the Emancipation, into the political, social and economic history of the period, will certainly prevent [us] from constructing . . . a thought-world removed from concrete realities . . . [But] even after taking these factors into consideration, it is worth attempting to draw a picture of how the Jewish spirit saw itself from within, out of the context of its religious life. (Wiener, 1933, p. 55)

Wiener's conclusions are confirmed for Kurzweil from another quarter, Natan Rotenstreich's authoritative study *Jewish Philosophy in Modern Times From Mendelsohn to Rosenzweig* (1968). The "transvaluation of values" within European Jewry came not with Berditchevsky at the end of the nineteenth century but a century earlier with the *Haskalah*. What before had been absolute was now relativized and the fateful dichotomy between "religion" and "life" was now in evidence. Kurzweil is clear that such a process could only have come from outside the Jewish sphere since internal Jewish values were unambiguous and all-embracing.

14. Berlin, 1933. Hebrew translation by Leah Zagagi, Jerusalem, 1974.

15. See, for example, Katz (1961) and Meyer (1967).

From this position Kurzweil is able to discern the claim of Scholem that the Sabbatian movement is the watershed of Jewish modernism as erroneous and tendentious. Scholem's error is that he exaggerates the importance of an exotic, transient event in Jewish history and over-estimates its historiographic weight. The fact is that

the Sabbatians were still "believers" in the Divine source of the Bible, while the *Maskilim* and modern Hebrew literature had already made peace with the secularization and the historicization of Judaism and, by the same token, with the loss of faith in a Divine source of the Bible. (S, p. 92)

The real meaning of the Sabbatian movement for Kurzweil is its attempt to throw off the rationalizing influence of *halakhic* norms in favor of an ecstatic return to the instinct and myth of pre-culture, and he cites Huizinga's observation that "when Mythos triumphs over Logos, barbarization enters also" (S, pp. 96f). The Sabbatian heresy is thus testimony to a sickness in Judaism, but it is a sickness from which it recovered, for Sabbatianism and the later Frankism never really took permanent hold over the Jews. Furthermore Kurzweil (S, p. 100) points to the conspicuous lack of any documentary evidence in the rationalistically oriented literature of the *Haskalah* of influence of the mystical Sabbatianism. There is, however, a great deal of evidence of the influence of such Enlightenment figures as Lessing, Herder, Schiller, Kant and Hegel. The two most revealing autobiographies of the period, those of Solomon Maimon and Moshe Leib Lilienblum, show no traces whatsoever of Sabbatianism, and Kurzweil concludes

A meticulous examination of the text allows us to observe the causes that precipitated the collapse of the world of traditional Judaism. The spiritual impetus came to Lilienblum as to all the *Maskilim* entirely from the outside—from the European Enlightenment. (S, p. 104)

The rejection of the approaches of Schapira and Halkin follows directly. In that both of them follow Scholem's historiography in their approach to *Haskalah* literature, both are accused of failing to comprehend fully the significance of the new secularism as a radical discontinuity with the Jewish past. Schapira's attempt to impose the dialectic of "territorialism" versus spirituality on all Jewish history is shown to be a wilful construction which ends up in a confused, self-contradictory view of modern Hebrew literature as an undeniable break with the past but really of a piece with it. Such a view for Kurzweil is in the final analysis meaningless (S, pp. 67–78). Similarly, Halkin makes the same mistake of seeing secularism as only a matter of surface detail;

. . . he does not see the difference between the sacral world of traditional Judaism, in which the Divine Torah structures the totality of life activities and a world which has become secularized in its totality but still preserves individual corners of interest in religious elements and subjects, . . . He does not understand that it is not this or that detail, "religious" or "secular," that determines the total world of our new literature."¹⁶

The real motivation of Scholem, Schapira and Halkin in Kurzweil's view has nothing to do with modern Hebrew literature as such. It is rather to serve the interests of Jewish nationalism. In according Sabbatianism the significance they do, the *Haskalah*, modern Hebrew literature and the Zionist movement can be proclaimed not as the unprecedented revolutionary developments they are but as organic links in a process that arose from within Judaism. In this way is Jewish secularism legitimized as the natural, inexorable and lawful heir of Jewish history and polity, when in fact it is a negation of them. This is essentially the same critique levelled against Ahad Ha-am. But with Scholem the redemptive pretensions of secular Zionism, which are daring and dangerous, are made to seem less so when they are presented as the resumption of forces that asserted themselves in the Sabbatian and Frankist movements, and the same is true of the antinomian thrust of secular Zionism (S, pp. 63, 83, 109). Here all that I have noted earlier about Kurzweil's opposition to Zionism in its purely secular form comes into play. Kurzweil (S, p. 107) plainly accepts Isaac Breuer's views on this matter: "the most profound analysis of secular Jewish nationalism is to be found in Isaac Breuer's excellent and important book, *Judenproblem*." The question posed by the title *Modern Hebrew Literature: Continuity or Revolt?* is rhetorical. It is not that Kurzweil denies the material reality of the biological continuity of the Jewish people or the formal similarity between modern and classical Hebrew; he is simply unimpressed by these things.¹⁷ This elemental fact was lost on those who attacked Kurzweil's view of modern Hebrew literature out of a secular Zionist stance.

I pass over for now the larger questions posed by this view. Suffice it to note that it rests on a number of assumptions and articles of faith about the Jews and

16. 1970, pp. 108f. The philosophical differential between Continental and American criticism shows through here. Note how Kurzweil talks in terms of the "totality" of reality, to which all details are subservient. Schapira, too, perceives by wholes; he simply disagrees with Kurzweil on the nature of the *Gestalt*. Halkin, trained in America, proceeds quite differently. For a defense of Halkin against Kurzweil's charges see Tishbi (1957a). The counterattack came in Kurzweil (1957), and the subsequent reply was in Tishbi (1957b).

17. In another place Kurzweil writes: "In what respect it [modern Hebrew literature] is a continuity is so clear as not to require emphasis. Rather, it is necessary and vital to call to mind the dialectical situation between continuity and revolt and to shift the emphasis to the *new* in modern [Hebrew] literature, to its revolutionary aspect . . ." (H, p. 304).

Judaism which are beyond the particular scope of this paper. Beyond this I think it is possible to find in the Kurzweil-Scholem argument over the genesis and nature of Jewish modernism a tacit debate over the venerable question of just what is a literary and a cultural influence. Kurzweil seems to admit only that which can be documented and, in taking this position, stands on solid critical ground. On the other hand, if there are subtler, non-literary aspects to be taken into account when determining influence, then Scholem is surely to be credited with doing something more than serving partisan Zionist causes in his interpretation of the Sabbatian movement.¹⁸

3. The Paradox Inherent in Modern Hebrew Literature

Now in seeing the development of modern Hebrew literature in this way, Kurzweil comes to posit a paradox —what he will call a tragic paradox—at its root. The paradox runs through the entire literature and is manifest in one way or another in virtually every one of its works. Let us see how Kurzweil arrives at such a sweeping claim.

It is clear, on the one hand, that in beginning when and where it did, modern Hebrew literature is very much a European development. A good share of its attitudes and values are those of the European Enlightenment. If the creators of the new Hebrew literature perceived Jewishness in nationalistic and not, as did the early *Wissenschaft* figures, in religious terms, this was already a nationalism of a secular European nature (S, pp. 19,21). Further, if in this literature a rationalistic, sceptical approach to religion and the Bible coexists dialectically with a Romantic attitude to the Jewish past—Kurzweil is insistent that it is a distortion of the nature of modern Hebrew literature to separate the two elements chronologically as Klausner and Sha'anan do—in any case both rationalism and Romanticism presuppose a dislocation from “naïve” pristine religious faith (S, pp. 26–30 and 1963a).

On the other hand, until the end of the eighteenth century, Jewish peoplehood and its culture were inherently grounded in religious faith. There was no available source for Hebrew literary creativity and cultural values other than the Bible and the religious tradition it engendered. When the force of the Emancipation hit, the shock was greatest in Eastern Europe, where the distance between the Jews and the Gentiles had always been greater than in the west and, consequently, the hegemony of the sacral world-view had been unchallenged.

18. Toward the end of the essay “*Bə’ayot yəsod*” Kurzweil admits: “There is no period, no matter how dynamic and revolutionary, whose ‘sudden’ changes, as it were, were not fostered by the slow movements and the quiet shifts, invisible to the naked eye, of the static period preceding,” and he bows in Scholem’s direction. But he still refuses to see Sabbatianism as anything more than a secondary cause (S, pp. 138, 140). See also S, p. 226 for the way the indirect influence of Nietzsche on modern Hebrew literature is validated. For discussion of the problems involved in determining influence see: Hassan (1955), Block (1958), Guillen (1959), and Balakian (1962).

And the new Hebrew literature arose precisely in Eastern Europe (1944c).

Hence the paradox at the heart of this literature:

This dialectical tension constitutes the tragic element of our literature. It is the fruit of the historic paradox that just at the historic moment when religious certainty ceases to be its most sublime asset, this people identifies with its past and affirms the priority of its essence—even as it is no longer able to live this past and this essence according to the accepted categories. For this reason the people gropes out of its own will-to-live toward a past that now requires a new understanding and explanation. This task, Herculean and tragic, is an almost super-human one. (S, pp. 31f)

A number of implications flow from this paradox, and Kurzweil seemingly never tires of reformulating them throughout his career. They are, in a sense, permutations of the central thesis, appositive conclusions held applicable to the entire body of modern Hebrew literature throughout the course of its development. For one thing, the paradox generates the grand theme, the central problematic of modern Hebrew literature: religious faith and its diminution in general, Judaism and its tradition in particular. Intellectually and spiritually these were the core issues for the Jewish intelligentsia in Eastern Europe; one hundred and fifty years later they are still the core issues for their successors in Israel. Kurzweil emphasizes that this is not a subjective judgment but an objective fact. It is, we might say, the “transcendental reduction” he performed on modern Hebrew literature.

To the extent that every literature worthy of the name is a testimony and a revelation of the spiritual destiny intrinsic to the nation in the name of which it speaks—and any literature which is not can at best be nothing more than formalistic acrobatics, purely esthetic—[to that extent] is nothing else possible other than what we have proved about our literature. (1951)

This does not mean that modern Hebrew literature is forced to “be religious” and must approximate religious content. On the contrary, a distinction must be made between a religious literature and a literature about the religious problem. Modern, secular Hebrew literature is the latter (1963a and 1959d). It is not subject that is important but attitude and treatment. Hazaz and Tshernichovski are as much concerned with the problem of “religious perdition” as are Agnon and Bialik. They differ only in regard to their attitude to the sacral Jewish past and its tradition. Kurzweil comes to discern two opposing streams in modern Hebrew literature: those poets and prose writers who in principle accept the primacy of tradition in defining the Jewish “national purpose” and who long for it when it is gone (e.g., Feierberg, Bialik, Agnon, Lamdan, Peretz and

Greenberg); and those who blithely reject tradition and search for new definitions of "national purpose" (e.g., Gordon, Berditchevski, Brenner, early Tshernichovski, Schneour and Hazaz). In all cases, though, there is a struggle to reacquire a certainty that has been lost—that is Kurzweil's essential point (1951 and S, pp. 36–40, 141).

The paradox can, therefore, be restated in terms of its implications for literary creativity. An artist who deigns to write in Hebrew in the modern period rightfully can and must relate to the sacral literature of the past as his legitimate, exclusive and treasured cultural possession. But at the same time, because it is a *sacral* literature, it must of necessity constitute a problem for him. The authentic Hebrew artist will realize and act on both these imperatives in his writing. He can do no other, and when he does he is both fooling and denying himself. The "national truth," as Ya'akov Steinberg noted, is "enshrined" in the twenty-four ancient books of the Bible, but it is as impossible to ignore this fact as it is to pretend that the Biblical world is coeval with the modern one (L, p. 233). That is why the paradox is both inescapable and tragic. It is this point that informs Kurzweil's negative appraisal of the younger *Sabra* writers.

The ludicrousness of the conventional definition of modern Hebrew literature as one of "revival" or "redemption" is, from Kurzweil's viewpoint now apparent.

What . . . most people in the Zionist movement call national "revival" is a secular process through and through which logically gave birth to a secular state, between which state and the belief-world of Judaism an absolute distinction must be made. (1959d)

Lastly, the paradox has implications, beyond those for the literature and its creators, for the critics, too. It leads Kurzweil (J, p. ix) to the conclusion that modern Hebrew literature cannot be read simply out of the canons of "American New Criticism."

4. The Crisis of Language

Kurzweil follows Heidegger in holding that language flows from Being (1971). The ontological status of the Hebrew language necessitates that it is rooted in the sacral sphere, and, in line with Rosenzweig, in the meta-historical realm. For this reason Kurzweil, as his treatment of modern Hebrew literature progresses, is increasingly attentive to the way in which the tragic paradox manifests itself in language.

The transition from a literature that was for the most part sacral into a modern one, secular in nature, occurs with such rapidity that it leaves the language no

alternative other than to be used as a general metaphorical discourse. All the meanings of words, images and similes continuously change. (H, p. vi)

Kurzweil seeks to trace the trajectory of this process from the earliest texts of the *Haskalah* until the most recent Israeli literature. In this way can the full effects of the secularization of modern Jewish consciousness be revealed. *Haskalah* literature, for example, because it is tendentiously antagonistic to religious tradition, is esthetically deficient, and its language is more feuilletonistic than literary.

There is a tremendous difference between publicism and that true artistic creation which always transcends the bias of the moment . . . until it attains to an objective approach to the subject of its material. (S, p. 32)

This is what happened in the course of the nineteenth century as the ideals of the *Haskalah* faded and their values were more and more understood as inadequate substitutes for faith in the living God. The *Haskalah* had disappointed and the result was that at the end of the nineteenth century a more objective attitude to the religious problem, which was still unresolved, does emerge, and an authentically imaginative literature begins. In prose Feierberg and Mendele are the first indicators; in poetry it is Bialik.

But this new engagement with the tradition is not and cannot be a full return to it. "It is a late return and its failure is foreseen from the beginning" (S, p. 37). This is the fundamental meaning of Agnon, who brings the tragic paradox of Hebrew literature, and with it the literature itself, to its early full flowering. From this point on what I have called the entropy of art begins to operate in Hebrew linguistic terms. "The language which arose in revival was transformed into a secular tongue and the holiness at its source disappeared from the consciousness of the new generation in Israel" (L, p. 177). Kurzweil talks of the "raping" of the Hebrew language as the normalization process it undergoes proceeds concomitantly with the normalization of the people for which secular Zionism strove. He asks:

To what extent can the normalization which speaks clearly out of Hebrew poetry today remain within the limits of what the Hebrew language can absorb without losing its soul? This is a view with which you may disagree; *to me it is apparent that the Hebrew language has a unique soul.* (1967)

Indeed, it is all too easy to disagree. A language, like the people who speak and write it, develops within history regardless of its changeless meta-historical status. Kurzweil certainly knew this with respect to the Jewish people, but he

was unwilling, and perhaps unable, to come to terms with this reality as it relates to Hebrew in its increasingly modern literary garb. This is the deficiency of Kurzweil's view of modern Hebrew literature, but I shall return to consider it only after investigating the main features of what this view enabled him to do—and not to do—with some of that literature's major figures.

5. Kurzweil's Periodization

His theory of modern Hebrew literature brought Kurzweil to formulate a periodization scheme of his own. It is the logical result of his development of the theories of Lachower and Klausner, whose periodizations Kurzweil feels impose categories that are derived from European literature and do not take into account the unique character of modern Hebrew literature, which underwent in fifty years what European literature did in two hundred (1963a and S, p. 30). Kurzweil's scheme encompasses four periods (S, pp. 110–131, 141):

- 1) the period of the "simplistic *Haskalah*," when the naive hope was that progressive Enlightenment humanism would be quickly reconciled with an enlightened Judaism purged of its anachronistic superstitions;
- 2) the period of the "militant-reformist *Haskalah*," wherein the "transvaluation of values" was struggled for in the certainty that universalistic Enlightenment humanism would inexorably replace particularistic Jewish religion as the new basis for Jewish existence;
- 3) the "tragic period," when disillusionment with the *Haskalah* and the shock of recognition that the Jew would never be permitted to neutralize his uniqueness in the ideal of secular *humanitas* were compounded by the realization that neither did he possess any longer the religious faith necessary to reaffirm that uniqueness;
- 4) the period of the apocalyptic "vision" of the reconstitution of the Jewish kingdom, when the tragedy of the modern Jewish situation is overcome in the merging of the meta-historic with the historic; Jewish existence in the present regains the primal wholeness of its past as the mythic basis for that past is re-established in the emergence of Jewish sovereignty over the land of Israel.

Of such a scheme Spicehandler (1961, p. 188a) has said: "His periodization of the East European era of Hebrew literature is vastly superior to any of the rather contrived schemes suggested by Klausner, Lachower or Schapiro." The qualification here is important: he finds Kurzweil's argument for the fourth period unconvincing, since it applies only to the poetry of Uri Zvi Greenberg and nothing else.¹⁹ Inasmuch, however, as the criteria for this fourth period are

19. Spicehandler (1972) proposes his own periodization. Holtz (1967, p. 264) arrives at an opinion of Kurzweil's periodization that is virtually identical with Spicehandler and he, too, observes that it "falls short of encompassing the whole literature, and the last period is very limiting."

the same as those used for determining the first three, questions must be raised about all of them, particularly in view of the fact that Kurzweil gives no place to Israeli literature of the post-1948 years. But, as I have already indicated, we will be in a better position to deal with these questions after we will have seen just who Kurzweil treats within these periods and why and how he does so.

II. THE STRUCTURE OF THE PRACTICAL CRITICISM

Kurzweil had no interest in writing a history of modern Hebrew literature. "The very fact of my scepticism of the objectives and presumptions of history in general is sufficient to keep [me] from writing a history of literature, even of the most specific period" (H, p. xiii). Yet his commitment to the hermeneutic approach of necessity is a commitment to the historicity of a work of art. The much maligned term *Zeitgeist* suggests itself here, and it is admissible as the real object of Kurzweil's interest, but only as Müller-Vollmer (1963, p. 179) defines it:

A *Zeitgeist* is not . . . the effect of mechanist or unconscious forces. It is the creation of the philosopher, the artist and the poet who realize that a "potential unity" . . . exists among the stubborn facts of the age and who co-ordinate them into a coherent and unified world-view. . . . Literary works thus do not derive their "historical content" from the spirit of the age; it is rather through them and their creators that this spirit comes first into being.

Additionally, the fact that Kurzweil is led to his own periodization is testimony to the essential inseparability in literary study between theory, criticism and history.²⁰

Such considerations supply the perspective I think is needed in Kurzweil's periodization. It is not a system of chronological categories rigidly applied, but a device that simply structures in a general way his practical criticism of the scores of poets and novelists of modern Hebrew literature. It is even possible to say that in the course of time Kurzweil lost sight of the discriminations inherent in his periodization. An example of this is his late discussion of Josef Perl (J, pp. 68–95), where we are never told exactly whether Perl belongs to the "naïve" or to the "militant" phase of the *Haskalah*, or even whether he is some sort of a bridge between them, as Kurzweil seems to imply. Minimally, however, I shall utilize this structuring function of Kurzweil's periods to take hold of the practical criticism. In terms of my overall purpose here there is no other way. To provide a detailed analysis of Kurzweil's treatments of particular figures and his interpretations of individual works is beyond the scope of this

20. See Wellek (1963, pp. 1–20).

study. To examine this criticism by genre is equally impossible; Kurzweil deals only once with the Hebrew drama (1946a) and his treatment of poetry and prose is, on balance, all of one piece—both are seen as aspects of a larger problematic. Accordingly, the following discussion follows the contours of the thematics, motifs or, more correctly, the hermeneutical “historical content” that Kurzweil sees in modern Hebrew literature as it develops.

1. The Haskalah

Kurzweil is essentially not interested in the *Haskalah per se*. Of its first “naïve” phase we hear no more than a brief description (S, pp. 111f), and of its second “militant” phase (S, pp. 112–117) there are but two essays on Perl and one on Mendele (S, pp. 172–189 and A, pp. 9–17). There are extended references to Lilienblum, Y. L. Gordon, Smolenskin and Berditchevski (S, pp. 241–250; H, pp. 283–285), and nothing at all, beyond a few mentionings of some of their names *en passant* of Wessely, Letteris, the Lebensonhs father and son, Erter, Mapu, Broides or Bershadski. The period as a whole is important for Kurzweil only insofar as it contains the seeds of the more complex ones that follow. The issue, in fact, is not whether the struggle against the tradition is waged in “naïve” or “militant” terms but the shift Kurzweil sees at its end from a critique of Judaism out of rationalistic humanism to a critique grounded in the irrationalism of *Lebensphilosophie* (S, pp. 225–269). The influence of Nietzsche on Hebrew literature at the end of the nineteenth century, which Kurzweil traces very skillfully, is obviously of more import to him than that of Voltaire at the end of the eighteenth.

This is the same tendency that can be observed in the criticism of European literature, where Kurzweil is much more interested in Rastignac and Julien Sorel than in Wilhelm Meister. In general Kurzweil finds a replication in modern Hebrew literature of the same demythologizing of religious belief and its sacred texts as he discerns in European literature. The relationship, for example, to the miraculous claims of the Ba’al Shem Tov that obtains in Perl’s *Megalle təmirin* is seen as of the same order as the relationship to the supernatural of the medieval chivalric romance in *Don Quixote* (J, pp. 88f), although there is no implication at all of an influence. Mendele’s language represents a continuation of this process, for his juxtaposition of sacral and secular connotations generates ironic incongruities (S, pp. 183ff).

But in both cases, of Perl and Mendele, we are dealing with fragmentary treatments. Kurzweil’s essays on Perl I judge to be the more valuable both because they concentrate on a single work and because they shed new light upon a relatively neglected figure. The arguments that Perl is to be read as a satirist and not as a novelist; that, as a Galician, he is to be seen not in the context of the

militant *Haskalah* of Czarist Russia but in that of the more moderate climate of the general Hapsburg culture; and that the "battle of the books" that he depicts is substantially the same struggle that a century later informs the key works of Bialik and Agnon—all these are, I think, valid and important contributions. The single essay on Mendele, on the other hand, seems incomplete and must be judged as unsuccessful. Kurzweil is principally concerned with disputing Brenner's and Kariv's estimations, certainly a legitimate critical task, but such ends in an epic writer of Mendele's breadth require a much more detailed and work-centered analysis than Kurzweil presents.²¹

Equally deserving of better readings than he gives them are Y. L. Gordon and Berditchevski. They are evidently judged to be artistically wanting, but it becomes obvious that Kurzweil handles more fully only those who fit into "the great tradition" that, like F. R. Leavis, he sets up.²² It is hard to escape the conclusion that there is much more to the *Haskalah* and its key literary representatives both in terms of content and technique than what Kurzweil tells us.

2. The Tragic Period

With the realization by the East European Jewish artistic élite that the ideals of Enlightenment humanism would not suffice as a new basis for Jewish existence, since the vague hopes for "progress" they aroused had proved illusory, the *Haskalah* declined and Hebrew literature enters a new phase, the "doubly tragic" one. The tragedy is twofold because at the same time when the aspirations of that élite, who lived "at the edge" in uncommon intensity, began to be turned away from the values of the Gentile world to inner Jewish ones, there came the shocking discovery that the necessary foundation for Jewish life, religious faith, had evaporated. This is the sensibility that Kurzweil sees animating Hebrew literature from the end of the nineteenth century through the first third of the twentieth, a period when he considers the literature to have achieved full esthetic consciousness of itself. It is on the painstaking explication of this sensibility as he finds it in its various expressions in Bialik, Brenner, Agnon and Tshernichovski that Kurzweil concentrates his critical energies.

There is a personal element here that cannot be ignored. The sensibility I have here described is very much a generational one, perhaps the Jewish analogue to the "lost generation" of American expatriates in Europe between the wars. In any case, this sensibility certainly mirrors Kurzweil's own existen-

21. For a further critique of Kurzweil's treatment of Mendele see Brinker (1954).

22. For an argument that Kurzweil may be misreading Gordon see Holtz (1968). Holtz contends that Gordon does not idealize the non-Jew (as Kurzweil claims) and shows, using Gordon's letters, that the poet was not against Jewish religion *per se* (as Kurzweil makes him out to be) but against its petrification into a sterile Orthodoxy.

tial situation. The twin themes of "loss" of religious faith and the attempt at a "late return" to it are the literary coordinates of what he knew experientially, intuitively. That is why he poured so much of himself into ferreting out this experience as he saw it manifested in the literature of the period. His overall perception of the period as "tragic" is an inversion of the prevalent view of it as the period of national "revival," a view undoubtedly fostered by critics who themselves were products of the Second and Third *Aliyot*.

If the literature of the *Haskalah* and the national revival still accorded to the religious-traditional message of our ancient literature a modern interpretation; if the divine message was still capable of being transmuted into some *vision*, some sublime modern secular imperative — the latter generation is completely lacking such belief, and the place of the vision is taken by the *absurd*. (H, p. vii)

Implicit here, the conventional terminology of a literature of "national revival" notwithstanding, is Kurzweil's essential point about the real trajectory of modern Hebrew literature. It is the trajectory itself, the process of passing "from vision to the absurd" that claims his attention, not the beginning and terminal points. This is the same feature I noted about his work in European literature. But here the treatment is copious and rooted in individual works. It represents the ripest fruit of Kurzweil's criticism. And its results are major revisions in the reading of all the important figures of this period of modern Hebrew literature. These I now note *seriatim*.

A. *Feierberg*. — Kurzweil (S, pp. 118–122, 149–171) considers that with Feierberg modern Hebrew literature arrives at its first authentic flowering. This is not only because "the problem of the tradition" is central here, but because for the first time that problem is treated with a semblance of the objectivity needed to transform a work from a didactic tract into art. The positions of both Nahman and his father are presented with equal weight so that the question "Whither?" is allowed to stand in its full complexity and painfulness as the fundamental question of Jewish modernity. Kurzweil thus shows how Feierberg does not belong to the nineteenth century *Haskalah*, and that he is inadequately served when read either according to the canons of Ahad Ha-am's melioristic positivism or Berditchevsky's "transvaluation of values," for the nationalistic concern of the former and existentialistic individualism of the latter are blended in Feierberg in a wholly new way. "His personal existence is dependent on the existence of the Jewish people and both of them depend for their ultimate consummation on the existence of Divine Providence" (S, p. 167). When these contingencies are laid open to question, as Feierberg forces them to be, then an entirely new itinerary of concerns comes into view. If Feierberg did not live to develop these concerns, Kurzweil (S, pp. 156f,

168–171 and BT, pp. 44–46) sees them as the very ones that preoccupy Feierberg's successors, especially Bialik.

B. *Bialik*. — The full force of Kurzweil's poetics and phenomenological method can be felt in his essays on Bialik. Until Kurzweil, Bialik was approached largely through the biographical and historical details surrounding his work. Lachower, for example, outdid anyone in the empirical accumulation of such facts, but, though he admires the effort, Kurzweil saw plainly its inadequacy. The nature of these details—Bialik's involvement in the Zionist movement, his relationship to Ahad ha-Am, the fact that his poetry begins in the late *Haskalah*, where the conflict is between religious tradition and enlightenment—has distorted and obscured the *Eidos* of Bialik as poet, and has fostered a view of him as the mouthpiece of the Jewish national renaissance, as a latter-day “chastising prophet.” What is lacking, in Kurzweil's view, is an intuitive interpretation of what all these facts mean, one that seeks to penetrate to the sources of Bialik's poetic creativity and defines him in his own terms.²³ It is to these ends that Kurzweil's work on Bialik is directed.

The ground for this is prepared (BT, pp. 3–22) by exposing the experiential roots that underly Bialik's *oeuvre*. Kurzweil does not say so here but it appears to me that it is the Diltheyan *Erlebnis* that is his focus. He comes to discern the unique poetic “I” that Bialik developed and, again without mentioning them, seems to lean on Fichte and Buber in emphasizing that this “I” needs to be understood not in isolation but in relational terms. In Bialik's case the key lines of relation are between the “I” and the world and between the “I” and Jewish religious tradition. It is the tension between and the shifts within these two intertwined relationships that are the fulcrum of Bialik's poetry. The result is a perception of a Bialik who, his nationalistic posture notwithstanding, is at heart an intensely subjective, lyrical poet. The fissures he knows to exist in the connection between himself and the world and between himself and his ancestral tradition are spanned only in the act of poetic creation.

Such a perception, in turn, gives rise to new readings of certain key works that, compared to earlier ones, are devoid of any ideological *ignis fatuus*. *Magillat ha'eš*, for example, is shown to be not exceptional or peripheral to the Bialik corpus, as was commonly thought, but paradigmatic of it. Kurzweil accounts very well (BT, pp. 23–51) for the form of the work as a displacement onto myth of the painful dilemmas of Jewish modernity as Bialik himself felt them. Kurzweil (BT, pp. 52–69) shows the nature poems to be a further development of the process of poetic objectivation of the subjective. His discussion of “*Habbereka*” contains some of the closest textural analysis to be

23. See BT, pp. 99–101. Yeshurun Keshet's work on Bialik is discussed in Kurzweil (1943), and Lachower's *Bialik —hayyav viycirotav* is discussed in Kurzweil (1945).

found anywhere in his criticism. "Metey midbar," given a major reinterpretation (BT, pp. 82–89), is seen now not as the national allegory Fichmann made it out to be but as the extreme example of the dissonance between infinite nature and the finite, now starkly alienated "I." The disjunctiveness between the silent language of the cosmos and the speech of poetic self-revelation is now apparent. Kurzweil comes to focus on the small group of poems written in 1910–11, what he calls the "personal poems," as the key to the entire Bialik corpus. Here the poetic "I" is in complete solitude, having left the world behind. There now can be no use of the ancestral past or nature as objective correlatives. All that is left is pure subjectivity as it is embodied in poetic language. But since, in the absence of a living religious faith, the road to the past is closed, and there is now no relationship to the external world, language carries no freight, discloses no Being. Language now conceals more than it reveals. In this situation resolution can come only with death or silence. The loss of faith in God thus brought Bialik to a loss of faith in the word, and Kurzweil notes the affinities between Bialik and the crisis in language as felt by Kraus. Bialik's perplexing poetic silence, the fact that he virtually ceased from writing poetry while at the height of his powers, is thus explained by Kurzweil (BT, pp. 99–147) more convincingly than by anyone before him. It is not due to any drying up of talent but is the natural result of his existential predicament.

We may, then, describe all Kurzweil's work on Bialik as a tracking of this predicament. In his final essay he comes to distinguish between the choices a Hebrew poet who faces them can make and those open to poets writing in other languages. Bialik, according to Kurzweil (BT, p. 192), when he reached the limits of his Hebrew linguistic medium, refused either to regress into the realm of esthetic banality or try to cross the chasm that lay before him and risk falling into the abyss of nihilism and madness, as did Hölderlin, Rimbaud, Mallarmé and Trakl. For the authentic Hebrew poet, creating in the sacral language of Divine revelation, neither estheticism nor nihilism are possibilities; there is only silence. If modernism in literature means the emptying out of language in consonance with the emptying out of primordial certainty, then

the poetry of Bialik stands at the borders of this process. Not within it. It defends itself against it and tortures itself with its nightmarish visions. It is still rooted in a reality that is whole, healthy, and [is founded] on a hierarchy of values such a reality contains. It follows, then, that his poetry is an unceasing struggle with the possibilities of return in all its modifications, from the literal return to the "nest," to the *Bet Midrash*, to nature, to the reviving [Jewish] people, until the ultimate, ghastly conception of return — of the "I" to itself, to the bosom of night, to death. Thus does this poetry of genius enclose within it all the possible way-stations of the Jew and of modern man. The "I" of the poet embraces them

all, but not any one of these various possible solutions will work for the modern poet.²⁴

To be sure, Bialik emerges from Kurzweil's hands still as the uncrowned poet laureate of the Jewish people in the twentieth century, but the significance of his stature is now irrevocably altered. Kurzweil shows him to have a much more profound grasp of the modern Jewish situation than his mentor (who Kurzweil emphasizes was only his intellectual, not his experiential mentor), Ahad ha-Am. Bialik as no one else represents the tragic paradox of his situation but he does not resolve or transcend it. Such attempts at solution come only in the secular humanism of Shlonski and Altermann, in the private mysticism of Shin Shalom and in the vision of a new Jewish reality in Greenberg.

The influence of Kurzweil's work on subsequent Bialik criticism is clear,²⁵ but its flaws are no less apparent. Many key poems do not receive the same careful reading that Kurzweil gives to those he feels illustrate his case. Further, as Dan Miron (1961) has noted, it is possible to say that in emphasizing the personal aspect of Bialik, Kurzweil over-states the case and thereby misses the variegated polyphony that Miron feels may well be the truly distinctive feature of this *oeuvre*. Then again, it is disquieting to realize that the fact that it is poetry and not fiction that Kurzweil is dealing with in his treatment of Bialik makes no real difference to him.

C. Brenner. — Brenner's thematics begin where Bialik leaves off.²⁶ The absurdity of a Jewish existence bereft of religious faith is the point around which Kurzweil sees all Brenner's work turning. The contribution here is similar to that made with respect to Bialik: Brenner is effectively rescued from those who would use him as a spokesman for a self-congratulatory Zionism or, as happened with Kafka, as a foil for psychological interpretations. In exposing the metaphysical issues in his fiction Kurzweil must be granted an important role in establishing Brenner's modernism and thus stimulating many younger critics to take a new interest in him. Moreover, Kurzweil's various discussions of Brenner suggest a recognition that the formal and stylistic aspects are by no means deficient or dysfunctional; the self-effacement of his anti-heroes is accompanied by a deliberate destruction of smooth speech and rhetorical patterns.²⁷

"Brenner's heroes never forgive God for not existing for them" (H, p. 287). It is the implications of this insight that Kurzweil pursues and it is to the

24. BT, p. xii. See also S, pp. 122–125.

25. See for example, Tsemah (1969).

26. On Brenner see S, pp. 131–138, 250–259, 337f, 373f; H, pp. 271–318.

27. See S, pp. 254, 257f, 337f, and H, pp. 315f.

Nietzschean elements within it that he points rather than to those more commonly associated with Brenner, the Dostoevskian. Jewish reality divested of its religious foundations is "life in quotation marks," the antithesis of the full feral *Leben* that Nietzsche espoused. As much as Brenner and his heroes affirm, yearn for and are consumed with envy of the latter, to that extent do they flagellate themselves and other Jews for accepting the frigidity of the former. The erotic problem in Brenner, the "erotomania" of such autobiographical characters — one wonders why Kurzweil, who is seemingly so sensitive to language, calls them "heroes" — as Jeremiah Feierman or Yehezkel Hefetz is thus fully accounted for: to love requires belief in life lived without quotation marks, where the self can be transcended, if not by God then at least by Woman. Where no such transcendence obtains, Eros is reduced to sex.

Kurzweil connects this attitude to the Jewish condition to that of Weininger, Kraus and Kafka. In all cases he sees not "Jewish self hate," as Theodor Lessing described it, but a repudiation of the contemporary Jewish life they saw around them that was satisfied to counterfeit itself in the phraseology of a banal secular nationalism. Implicit in all of them is an uncompromising refusal to lend themselves to such an absurd enterprise as well as a demand for a return to the sublimity and morality of the unsullied sacral past. This connection leads to one of the central conclusions of Kurzweil's criticism:

The problem of a Jewish existence that had become absurd is the focal point of Brenner's writings. But the absurd in Jewish existence only serves to uncover the absurd condition in general, of which other literatures bit by bit became conscious. (H, pp. 305f)

Brenner, therefore, is thematically as much an anticipation of modern fiction as is his Jewish contemporary Kafka.

We have, then, a pronounced concentration on the thanatopic elements in Kurzweil's reading of Brenner. Everywhere the focus is on the process of "breakdown and bereavement." Kurzweil's sense of personal involvement in this process is clear. It is probably not coincidental that Brenner is the author he was working on at the time of his death in the summer of 1972 and that the last essay he wrote was entitled "*Šekol vəkīšalon* — The Last Stop of Absurd Jewish Experience." It is this tendency toward pessimism that might account for Kurzweil's failure to deal with the affirmative element in Brenner, his paradoxical asseveration of life. This is an element Kurzweil unquestionably sees (H, pp. 281f, and 301f), but he does not, perhaps cannot, explain and relate it to the totality of Brenner's work. The discussion of *Šekol vəkīšalon* seems especially truncated. There is no mention at all of the character Menahem. The motif of the home which, Kurzweil tells us, "is one of the most important

elements for the understanding of the story, Brenner in particular and modern Hebrew literature in general,' to which motif Kurzweil promises to return and "submit it to a meticulous examination" (H, pp. 312f), receives scarcely more than two pages. Still, the Brenner criticism that Kurzweil wrote can only be described as seminal.

D. Agnon. — If the result of Kurzweil's work on Agnon is a new view of him as the artistic consummation of modern Hebrew literature, it is also the consummation of Kurzweil's work as a critic. Though before Kurzweil Agnon was given his due by a few isolated critics of stature, such as Eliezer Meir Lipschutz, Dov Sadan and Gustav Krojanker, he was read by most as a weaver of naive pietistic and neoromantic folktales and as a writer with a distinctly religious world-view. Kurzweil demonstrated as had no one before him that the various surfaces of Agnon's unique narratives constitute a series of carefully wrought fictive masks and that underneath them is an artist of uncommon craftiness wrestling with the root problems of Jewish modernism. A full assessment of this contribution has been done by Barzel (SBK, pp. 74–82) and there is no need here to reproduce its insightful details.

Instead it is only necessary to make a number of observations about where Agnon fits in thematically to the total scheme of modern Hebrew literature as Kurzweil perceives it. Unlike Brenner Agnon "cannot make peace with the absurd as the basis for his epic world" (A, p. 313) even though he is no less cognizant of its presence. In Agnon vision and absurdity are in equilibrium, and in the most exquisite way. The tensions between the Jewish past and present endow this fiction with an intrinsically bi-polar quality and it is just this dual focus on the "then" and the "now" that, Kurzweil feels, enables Agnon to treat Jewish reality with an objectivity unprecedented in modern Hebrew literature. The esthetic advance here is not only beyond Mendele and Feierberg but Kurzweil seems to imply it is beyond Bialik too. Whereas Bialik, who faced exactly the same tensions as Agnon, dealt with them out of the subjectivity of poetic utterance (a subjectivity which, as I have noted, assumed objective existence), Agnon's objectivity is the fruit of an epic distancing which captured the totality of life.²⁸ It is this preference for the artistic presentation of the fullness of life that we can now see animates Kurzweil's proclivity to prose over poetry and his apprehension of the novel primarily in epic terms. Moreover, it is important to note that what Kurzweil sees in Agnon and what his criticism of him celebrates is the triumph of dynamic artistic creativity over the sterility that results from the dessication of religious faith. It is art that reconstitutes for

28. See A, pp. 130–135, 336–339 and 9–17. "The great principle [is] that the lyric does not present an objective world and does not admit of a separation between subject and object; its whole nature involves the destruction of the barrier between the 'I' and the world in the art of creation" (H, pp. 110f).

Agnon the totality of life into its primordial unity, not religion (A, pp. 346–352) — this is the real reason why Agnon represents the organic culmination of the revolutionary process that is secular modern Hebrew literature.

Kurzweil's perception of what we may term the Hapsburg Empire aspect of Agnon must also be recognized as a vital element in the formation of his definitive interpretation. Here I have reference not only to the metaphysical and historical significance of the Empire, the Kaiser and the problems of authority and tradition, all of which Kurzweil explicates in Agnon and which are, I think, among his deepest insights. Rather I have in mind the sensitivity to language, style and technique that is in evidence more in the criticism of Agnon than of any other writer Kurzweil discusses, a sensitivity borne of Kurzweil's acquaintance with the deceptive "epic quietude" of Stifter. Equipped with this sensitivity Kurzweil (A, p. 380 and pp. 387–394) is able to pierce the veneer of Agnon's narrative and discern "no monolithic Agnon style but a unity of styles." It is this giving the formal aspect its due that enriches Kurzweil's criticism of Agnon immeasurably and saves the thematic conclusions it ultimately arrives at from being pure content analysis.

Thus, if at the beginning of his work on Agnon Kurzweil is not deceived by the pietistic nature of some portions of the narrative and is able, as with Stifter, to uncover its demonic depths, eventually he accounts for the plurality of styles in a much more extensive way. What Agnon presents more than anything else by these styles is a recapitulation of the sacral Jewish past; what he means by it is the same thing he means in his various presentations of Jewish time: an attempt to transcend the break between the past and the present by creating the possibility of a "new continuum," by implying the primacy of the timeless meta-historic over the finitude of history. In other words, the sacral quality of much of Agnon's language and style is ultimately seen not so much as veil as the linguistic concretization of "late return" which, paradoxically, may yet succeed.

To be sure, we do not have here a manifestation of simple belief but rather the volitional decision to envision the "then" and the "now," the "there" and the "here" in accordance with the categories immanent to the past itself. (S, p. 144)

In establishing this vision, or, more correctly, in re-establishing it, Agnon affirms its triumph over the "absurd" and thus reaches the limits of the tragic period. We are brought very close to the new Jewish reality, which is poetically beheld in all its fullness only by Uri Zvi Greenberg.

Kurzweil's interpretation of Agnon has never been seriously challenged and may properly be seen as the basis from which all subsequent Agnon criticism

proceeds.²⁹ It is obvious that this interpretation is the result of both the metaphysical postulates Kurzweil brought to his reading as well as the critical methods he employed. This fact raises a number of questions about Kurzweil in particular and criticism in general. Why did he succeed so brilliantly with Agnon? Which were more decisive in enabling Kurzweil to open up Agnon as he did: the presuppositions about religion, art, Judaism, history and language that he brought to his reading? Or the holistic reading of the individual work in relation to the hermeneutic of the total Agnon corpus? If we say that both sets of elements are involved, then the question becomes: can we isolate one from the other or are they necessarily related? What is, in fact, their relationship? Barzel, at the outset of his discussion, notes that

the critic was close to the author in terms of the primary spiritual experience of confronting a Jewish world whole in its values, faith and purpose caught up in the process of disintegration and the danger of destruction. (SBK, p. 74)

Does this mean that a given writer requires a critic with corresponding values, receptors and even commitments in order to be read with some degree of reliability? Or is it simply that a given writer attracts such a critic?³⁰ Or, conversely, that such a critic is naturally drawn to such a writer? The secret of great criticism seems as inscrutable as that of sublime artistic creation.

E. Tshernichovski. — These questions take on even more force when we consider Kurzweil's accomplishments with Tscherlichovski. Here the distance between the critic and his subject is ostensibly as wide as it is narrow with respect to Agnon. Tshernichovski seemingly lies outside the thematic circle

29. After Kurzweil's death Kariv (1973b and 1974) attempted to argue against Kurzweil's casting Agnon in a "European" mould. Kariv, to my mind, is as unsuccessful in proposing a convincing alternative overall reading of Agnon as is Band (1968). Barzel neatly points out that Band has recourse to Kurzweil's interpretation as much as he tries to propose a differing one (SBK, p. 89). The same is true of Hochman (1970) and Alter (1969, pp. 131-150). All three of these treatments of Agnon are largely derivative from Kurzweil; it is only Band who explicitly seeks to break away from him.

30. Murray Krieger suggests just this. As examples he gives Northrop Frye and his relationship to Blake and Georges Poulet's to Mallarmé. "Behind the vast structure in the *Anatomy of Criticism* we sense the profound commitment, personal and professional, that propelled his faithful study of Blake, *Fearful Symmetry*. The further we go from Frye's system's center in Blake—to Shakespeare or to Milton, for example—the more we sense the imprint of Frye's vision at the expense of our previous sense of the poet himself. . . . If we feel comfortable with Poulet on Mallarmé (as we did with Frye on Blake), it is because he is at home there, his person—as he tells us—becoming one with his object. So he is being faithful to this poet because he can do so by being faithful to himself. It is when he moves off to objects less natural to him, less obviously a reflection of himself, that we feel the need to forego our former sense of the author if we are to accept the critic who has usurped his place" ("The Critic as Person and Persona," in Strelka, 1973, pp. 83f).

which Kurzweil circumscribes around modern Hebrew literature, and, in fact, his identity as a Hebrew poet was for a long time very much open to question. Yet Kurzweil must be seen as instrumental in showing that Tshernichovski is not to be read as the great "pagan," "Greek" or "Scythian" poet of "freedom and light" who wrote in modern Hebrew but rather as an integral part of the modern Hebrew literary enterprise or, more accurately, of a specific strand of that enterprise.³¹ The victory here is of art over ideology — both in the poet and in the critic. In affirming and illuminating the artistic truth of Tshernichovski's poetry as the object of his critical attention, Kurzweil's esthetic sensitivity prevails over his own ideological considerations, for Tshernichovski surely does not conform to all of Kurzweil's metaphysical postulates.

At bottom here is an essential willingness to look for and accept the particular "intrinsic coherence"³² of Tshernichovski's work. In his first formulation of a schematic configuration of modern Hebrew literature Kurzweil observes that though the

creative, enchanting and prolific personality of Saul Tshernichovski requires its own particular evaluation . . . [it nevertheless] hints to a certain extent at a second strain . . . in our literature . . . whose representatives continue the line of the *Haskalah* and . . . bring out the anti-religious tenor until Judaism and its values are rejected. (S, pp. 38f)

Yet this movement "against the national purpose" is "a legitimate expression of the national secularization of our people in its ancestral land," (S, p. 142) for it too is in search of wholeness and certainty that have been lost, but in a way different from those artists who accept the religious definition of the purpose and meaning of Jewish existence.

Throughout Kurzweil emphasizes that in understanding Tshernichovski the distinction must be made between the intellectual position from which he began and the artistic stances he assumed as his lyric developed. The former, without question, is the *Haskalah* didacticism of Y. L. Gordon blended with the Nietzschean vitalism of Berditchevsky, and it is this position that is stamped on the early programmatic poems. But Tshernichovski is a poet, not a publicist or a philosopher, and as his art matures this dogmatism gives way to a more objective, less doctrinaire treatment of the Jewish past and tradition, as the King Saul poems testify (BT, pp. 217–220, 251–265). It is not ideological consistency that one should look for in Tshernichovski but poetic categories (BT, pp.

31. See, for example, BT, pp. 237, 253, 267, 277, and 289.

32. "Huqqiyut pənimit" in Hebrew. Prof. Henry Fischel has suggested (letter August 11, 1977) that this term "is in all probability a rendering of the German 'innere Gesetzmässigkeit,' which is slightly more substantial than 'intrinsic coherence.' The original is a term of German idealism, probably also of 19th century German romanticism . . ."

254, 294f), the most important of which is the idyllic. For Kurzweil the idyllic is not a genre but the "background" of all Tshernichovski's work, an esthetic posture of the same order as the tragic, though antithetical to it. The idyllic is, as we have seen, a main principle of Kurzweil's own poetics, and he applies it directly to Tshernichovski (S, pp. 301–328). It is thus the idyllic that enabled Tshernichovski to attain to a poetic "Anschauung" that brings together past and present, ancestral legend and reality, man and God, in such a way that it forces him to transcend his early tendentiousness against Jewish tradition. Such tendentiousness is but a cerebral construct, much more superficial than the idyllic which has experiential roots (BT, pp. 211–216). In this way Kurzweil forces attention on the artistic values of Tshernichovski's poetry, a contribution which has been acknowledged (Ha'efrati, 1971, p. 9) as having had "great influence on Hebrew criticism."

Beyond this Kurzweil discovers that Tshernichovski is no less engaged in the theme of "return" than Bialik, but in a completely different way. Tshernichovski's values, as well as his view of man and human freedom, derive not only from Judaism but from a universalistic humanism. His mature poetry, especially the two sonnet cycles, ponder the crisis of all western culture, not only Jewish culture, and the return is to the archaic in all its variety. This "mythological syncretism" is not, as is customarily thought, attained

out of a surfeit of healthiness and an abundance of vitalistic effervescence, but out of a deep suspicion of and discontent with the resources of the great culture of humanism, which progressively increase the more we are dependent on and rooted in it. (BT, p. 292)

History for Tshernichovski is not synonymous with progress and Kurzweil, as his treatment of the poet develops, probes the full significance of the "pagan" element. It is the numinous experience of ritual that Tshernichovski seeks to recover, and the consonance between this experience and the idyllic basis of his art indicates that at bottom that art is a profound search for the "lost unity" and that Tshernichovski is, though not in any formal sense, essentially a religious poet. Moreover, since all ritual is grounded in the concreteness of human history and society, Tshernichovski's language is of necessity anchored in this same concreteness. Kurzweil wishes to forestall any attempt to appropriate Tshernichovski as an estheticistic anticipation of *poésie pure* in Hebrew; there are no "flowers of evil" in his poetry just as this poetry is not "naïve" in Schiller's sense (BT, pp. 322–334).

The culmination of this interpretation comes in the reading Kurzweil gives to the late masterpiece '*Amma dədahaba*' (BT, pp. 296–321). Here the two strands of the idyllic and the humanistic are seen as fused into a new perception

of Jewish and human life. In thus showing how this work is both formally and thematically the cumulative creation of Tshernichovski's muse, Kurzweil barns the harvest of his approach, for the relationship of this complex work to the rest of the *oeuvre* is for the first time cogently demonstrated. The achievement here is similar to that which Kurzweil attains with Agnon's *Sefer hamma'aśim* and Bialik's *Məgilat ha'eš*. The irrevocable conclusions Kurzweil's criticism leads to are both a new definition of Tshernichovski's modernism and a recognition that this modernism nonetheless exists within the framework of the tragic and the Jewish.

These four pillars of modern Hebrew literature — Bialik, Brenner, Agnon and Tshernichovski — may be seen to constitute for Kurzweil the four major expressions of or responses to the Jewish condition as it exists in the tragic period. All other expressions of this period are derived out of them. That is why his sustained treatment of each of these four overshadows the discussion of other figures who belong here, which discussions are, in comparison, fragmentary and occasional. The impasse at which Bialik arrived is seen to have also been reached variously by Lamdan, Shlonski, Altermann, Shin Shalom and Uri Zvi Greenberg, except in each case there is some movement beyond it. Greenberg's solution is so radical as to cause him to transcend completely the tragic dimension, as I shall shortly note. The previous three each go in a different direction from where Bialik left off before he chose silence; all write poetry that is personal but make their stand now on secular, relative values that are put forth in place of the absolute of religious certainty.³³ Whereas Shlonski and Altermann both fasten on a progressive humanism without transcendence and on the powers of Eros, Shin Shalom descends to the depths of his poetic "I" and internalizes powers previously ascribed to God. Kurzweil feels in Shin Shalom a severe stress being placed on a sacral Hebrew language that is now being used in a wholly secular way. In his consideration of this poet he raises a question that is equally applicable to Shlonski and Altermann:

To what extent is this conquest of sacral expression legitimate at all, and does it not alter the spirit of the Hebrew language? . . . [This] process of the deification of the poetic "I" allows us to define the general problem: the legitimate limits of the transposition of a sacral linguistic system to the secular sphere. This is not only an intellectual, religious and moral question but a linguistic one, namely, is it possible that we are approaching the point beyond which we shall no more be dealing with a language that provides coverage through suitable meanings but, instead, poetry itself is in danger of turning into a rhetoric and a jargon which, like sacks that have become empty, contain that which is most opposed to the original significance of the metaphor, the image and the accoutrements of

33. See H, pp. 105ff., 114–116, 167–169, 225–234.

wonder and the wondrous? . . . This is the question of questions of modern Hebrew poetry. (H, p. 151)

In prose Kurzweil finds the same process to be adumbrated by Gnessin, who otherwise displays a thematics similar to Brenner (H, pp. 333–358). On the Tshernichovski axis, if we may so call it, belong Schneour and Hazaz, but this is the most undeveloped region of Kurzweil's criticism of the tragic period. Schneour he dismisses as an inferior poet (1950), and Hazaz, whom he admires, holds only early interest for him.³⁴ He does not deal at all with such important contemporaries as Fogel, Steinberg, Devorah Baron, Schoffmann and Peretz. We cannot gainsay him or any critic the right to deal with those whom he chooses to deal,³⁵ but at the same time when we equate volume and intensity of treatment with esthetic quality of the works treated, we see a sophisticated taste and a critical judgment with which it is hard to quarrel. Kurzweil did not seek to illuminate the obscure corners of modern Hebrew literature but to confront directly and penetrate its foremost facades.³⁶

3. The New Vision of Jewish Sovereignty: Uri Zvi Greenberg

What Kurzweil did with Uri Zvi Greenberg is essentially the same as what he did with Tshernichovski: a poet who had been read largely in ideological terms was now analyzed out of his own particular poetic context. But the nature of that poetic context, as Kurzweil apprehended it, and its relationship to the totality of modern Hebrew literature, brought Kurzweil to define Greenberg's significance in a wholly new way.

The conventional view saw Greenberg as the poet of extreme Jewish nationalism as formulated by Jabotinsky's revision of Zionist theory. Those who agreed with this revision fervently lauded Greenberg, while the more normative Zionists bitterly condemned him, some even charging him with approximating a Jewish fascism of sorts. The value of his poetry was thus linked to whatever ideological assessment was made. Kurzweil, although he was not literally the first to do so, was the most vigorous champion of reading Greenberg without reference to any partisan political considerations (Friedlan-

34. On Hazaz see especially the essays on *Ya'ïš* (1953). See also 1942, 1944b, 1947b, and S, pp. 260–269.

35. In his preface to H, Kurzweil observes that if a discussion of "the place of [various] important writers is lacking here, it certainly is not because of denigration . . . The selection is not arbitrary but it is subjective" (p. xv).

36. Abramson (1974, p. 87) equates the fullness of Kurzweil's treatment of certain authors with another factor: "It is in just those instances where he had to break new critical ground as in the cases of Agnon and U.Z. Greenberg, . . . that his perception inclines toward dialectical [richness] and many-sidedness."

der, 1974, pp. 7-34). Rather, as with Bialik, Tshernichovski, Shlonski, Shin Shalom and Altermann, his focus is on the nature of the poetic *Erlebnis* that lies at the bottom of the poetry and gives rise to it.

Kurzweil sees Greenberg as providing a poetic solution to the dead end Bialik reached that had forced him into silence. It is a solution attained not by fastening on a secular substitute for the lost religious faith but, as with Agnon, in terms of that faith itself and the tradition that concretizes it in life. The solution is the offering of a daring affirmation of the "otherness" of the Jews among the nations and an accompanying apocalyptic vision of Jewish existence as a millenial category transcending time and history. This grasp of the unity of the Jewish past, present and future, unprecedented and without parallel in modern Hebrew poetry, was unattainable by Bialik, and opens up a thematic field that is, in the modern period, completely new. The essential motif now is not the loss of faith but the reacquisition of the power to imagine redemption. The national revival that was bruited about is now not a cliché but a real possibility, since it is founded on the intrinsically religious nature of the Jewish people, not on secular models derived from Europe nor on dubious illusions of inexorable progress fostered by western bourgeois liberal humanism. In short, Kurzweil finds in Greenberg the definitive answer to the fundamental question of modern Hebrew literature as Feierberg had first posed it — "Whither?" Inasmuch as it "leaves behind it from the outset the entire problematic of the *Haskalah*," as well as such historical postures as the waiting for the Messiah in the unredeemed Diaspora, Greenberg's poetry, in Kurzweil's perception (S, pp. 125-131), brings modern Hebrew literature to a new phase unmeasurable by the criteria and thematics of those phases that preceded it. The notion of "late return" applies no longer, for the "synoptic vision" assures the reacquisition of the certainty of the primordial vision. This is why, incidentally, Kurzweil can link Greenberg to so different a spirit as Buber:

Like Greenberg, Buber also shows a critical attitude to the manner in which our political dream has been realized. . . . Both of them reject the present as it is because it is seen as a betrayal . . . (L, p. 96)

This, too, is why Kurzweil can say that

Uri Zvi Greenberg seems to me the greatest figure in our poetry, not because of his views or because his attitude to Jewish tradition is the most positive, but because . . . I find in them [his poems] the most concentrated, consummate and interesting expression of the intrinsic coherence of our destiny. (H, p. xiii)

Again, Kurzweil is speaking in phenomenological terms here and he means that the content of Greenberg's vision of meta-history corresponds to the objective

nature of Judaism and the Jewish people. One implication of this that Kurzweil pursues is that, in realizing his vision, Greenberg returns to and recreates the primal Jewish *mythos*. The dynamic is similar to that of Tshernichovski, except with Greenberg the myth that is reasserted is not pagan but that of the sacred covenant of Sinai between the Jewish people and its God. In his various discussions of this remythification of Jewish existence, Kurzweil shows an interesting dialectic. Myth, he emphasizes, is in the last analysis irrational; in his admonitions against Scholem and all who would glorify Sabbatianism we see his antipathy to the mythic. In his analysis of Greenberg's mythic consciousness as a possible microcosm of the collective Jewish consciousness, Kurzweil (H, pp. 30f) seems to suggest that the poet does not so much return to childhood as legitimize an immature, infantile regression. Furthermore, the actualization of ancient myth in a modern situation totally different from antiquity presents grave dangers; it dichotomizes, for example, humanity into Jews and Gentiles in a way that eventually will subvert Jewish myth (H, pp. 28, 46f). Here Kurzweil's own humanistic leanings show through. At one point he argues (1949) that it may be precisely the rational elements in the Jewish spirit and Jewish history, and not the mythical ones, that can be shown to be the most influential and decisive ones. Against all this are Kurzweil's repeated indications, as the quotation at the head of this paragraph shows, that the myth that Greenberg revivifies corresponds to living Jewish reality. It is not the

fruit of any ideology . . . historical or political platform, . . . not a fable or an esthetic fad or an artistic game . . . — myth for Greenberg is the reality of realities! The historic-mythic perception is for the poet absolute truth, not an experiment . . . (H, p. 86)

As his encounter with Greenberg deepens Kurzweil spends more and more time on the specifics of the poems. He examines the structure of such central images as "Sinai" and the "Blacksmith," and gets involved in formal matters to an extent only seen in the criticism of Bialik, Agnon and Tshernichovski. As with them the underlying unity of Greenberg's seemingly disparate works comes into focus. The perceptions of time, history and landscape are shown to be refractions of the essential mode of vision that animates the entire *oeuvre*, and over and over again Kurzweil stresses the uniqueness of this vision. He comes to the conclusion that in Greenberg the vision is so all-embracing that the universe reverts to its "seamless" form — the holy and the secular are undifferentiated and encompass beauty within them as in the beginning. In short, Greenberg represents the positive fulfillment of every one of Kurzweil's metaphysical postulates as well as the recrudescence of his esthetics. This leads Kurzweil finally to wonder whether Greenberg can even be considered a

modern poet or whether he represents a return to the sacral poetry of pre-modern times. If the latter is the case and his poetry is dealt with through the canons of modern literary criticism, there are problems:

Such evaluation is methodologically speaking meta-literary and is properly the concern of [religious] faith. Appropriate here for the literary scholar is silence. Meta-literary manifestations . . . are appraised through other criteria. (H, p. 92)

Now although Kurzweil's basic interpretation of Greenberg is of no less stature and importance than that of the other major figures, his linking this interpretation to a new fourth period of modern Hebrew literature must be seen as problematical. This is not because there is no one else besides Greenberg who belongs here;³⁷ theoretically an historical category, no less than a biological genus, can exist even if no exemplification or species is available for classification within it. Rather, I think, the difficulty is philosophical: the fourth period as Kurzweil defines it is an ultimate one that leaves no room for future development, at least as far as I can see, and a literature, like life, develops within time. It has no other sphere of existence. But here we come upon what I see as the real difficulty of Kurzweil's periodization: it is prescriptive, not descriptive. In designating Greenberg and his new vision as the legitimate heir of the tragic period, Kurzweil is asserting the primacy of the meta-historic over the historic and is, in effect, reading out of the modern Hebrew literary tradition that literature that issued out of the finite, secular historical context that chronologically followed the tragic period. Specifically, this is the literature produced after 1948 in the State of Israel. It is to Kurzweil's massive critique of such literature that I now turn.

4. The Critique of Post-1948 Israeli Literature

The crucial fact about all the poets and novelists whose works Kurzweil includes within the organon of modern Hebrew literature is that they were all born in the European Diaspora. This fact is crucial because of the relationship to the Hebrew language Kurzweil sees it implying. All the figures mentioned in this chapter thus far, in Kurzweil's view, of necessity received Hebrew in their formative years as a written language that existed only within the sphere of the synagogue and *Bet Midrash*, not as a spoken language utilized to communicate the trivialities of secular daily life. For them the spoken tongue was Yiddish or some European vernacular. This, of course, cannot be true for the Sabra writers and those who, like Amichai, were born in Europe but came to Israel at an early age. And as with the Hebrew language itself, so with the sacred texts which are

37. This is the objection raised by Holtz (1968) and Spicehandler (1961), who find Kurzweil's arguments for this fourth period unconvincing.

its principal expressions. From Wessely and Mapu down to Shlonski and Altermann all Hebrew artists legitimated their art as Hebrew creativity by recourse to the Bible, the *Mishnah*, the *Midrash*. Indeed, they had to deal with these sacred texts and the sacral sphere in which they are rooted even before they could deal with their own reality. This was an artistic legitimization, not a religious one. This fact of literary life does not obtain for Sabra writers, for whom the language was *ab initio* "normalized" and for whom the sacred texts possess no authority of any kind, artistic, religious or even historical. For them the Hebrew they write and the works they write with it are interchangeable with any other western language (1966b). "The more the [Hebrew] language attains the status of a natural language, the more it becomes more colloquial, [the more] it loses its link to its original, sublime implications" (1966d).

Here we have what I regard as the essence of the critique of Israeli literature Kurzweil developed early in his career and maintained steadfastly throughout it. This definition of the problem of Israeli literature as a linguistic one does not come until relatively late, but I see it as the clarification of what Kurzweil was saying even in the late Forties when he took on the "*Palmach*" writers. More than other criteria for judging the deficiencies of Israeli literature, criteria I shall presently discuss, it is the linguistic factor that, I feel, accounts for the consistent chip on Kurzweil's critical shoulder with respect to this literature. After all, Bialik, when he sensed the crisis of Hebrew language and Jewish being in the twentieth century, fell silent; Tshernichovski, Shlonski, Altermann and Shin Shalom maintained their muse by trying to go around the crisis, not by denying it; Brenner by wallowing in it; and Agnon and Greenberg, blessed with the miraculous gift of the tenth muse, transcended it. But these Sabra writers blithely put pen to paper with more proficiency to draw ink graphomically from the pot than authentic poetic inspiration from the well-springs of the Jewish soul. It is important to note here that Kurzweil's critique of these writers is fueled not only by a condemnation of this proficiency but by an implicit yearning for such inspiration, by a genuine interest in and concern for the literary creativity of the Sabra writers, an interest and concern he never abandoned in spite of his bitterness against them. We can say now, as the "*Palmach*" generation recedes to a distance of three decades, that if Kurzweil demanded much from it, he demanded more than it was capable of providing in the heady early years of statehood, when a Hebrew novel was a celebration of the new society in the making, and not a presentation of its totality with epic objectivity. In this respect the esthetic stance of Kurzweil the critic, who saw Agnon and Greenberg as the epitomes of the hermeneutic of modern Hebrew literature, was consistently antipodal to that of such young writers as the Moshe Shamir of 1948, the S. Yizhar or Natan Zach of 1958, or the Amos Oz or A. B. Yehoshua of 1968, who, whether they liked it or not, had to face a given Friday

edition of *Ha'aretz* with a trepidation or a disgust at which we can only guess. Esthetic stance is without question the issue here, not the talent of these writers, for even in his most scathing criticisms Kurzweil always pointed out that native poetic or narrative abilities were in evidence.

Now, although when looked at as a whole Kurzweil's treatment — let us say rejection — of the post-1948 writers is all of one piece, a closer inspection reveals that it is not. By the middle Sixties he himself recognized that the “*Palmach*” writers had been displaced by newer and younger ones, creators of what he called “contemporary Hebrew literature.” As hard as he was on the former, he was even harder on the latter. In order to appreciate the nuances of this negativity, we ought to look at the different esthetic arguments he employed in each case.

The assessments of the efforts of the “*Palmach*” writers (Kurzweil never calls them by that name) that Kurzweil wrote in the latter half of the Forties are of interest in a way very different from his criticism of, say, Bialik or Agnon. Important here is not the interpretive aspect of criticism but its judgmental function. These are, as I have said, assessments. It is the larger questions they ask — of the possibilities for an Israeli literature — that endows these particular essays with their value. Kurzweil is not concerned with the fine points of how their novels must be read; he is only zealous to demonstrate beyond doubt that any claims by or for a Mossinsohn, Shamir, Yizhar or Shaham that their work represents “the great Israeli novel” be exposed as arrant presumptuousness, as “snobby immaturity and inflated nothingness.” If anything, it is poetry and not prose that has the better chance in the new society, for the subjective lyric is less in need of artistic distance and of the solid, clearly defined world that fiction demands.³⁸ Yet Kurzweil was no more sparing of such younger poets as T. Carmi, who, he charged, were not writing Hebrew poetry at all but Hebrew imitations of English and American verse, though in time he came to accept Natan Zach and, especially, Daliah Rabikovitch.³⁹

Kurzweil's prognosis for Israeli prose was the antithesis of what the young writers and their followers wanted to hear. What animates the novel as a genre for Kurzweil is the dimension of time, the way in which it draws on the past of the society it reflects. “Any real work of fiction begins before the first line” (1947). The novel, he posits (1958), flowers at the end, not at the beginning of a

38. All the themes and parts of this entire argument are announced in Kurzweil's first attempt (1946b) to tackle Mossinsohn. It is repeated in full or in part in all subsequent discussions of the Sabra writers.

39. In Kurzweil (1956a) he holds up the works of three younger poets, Yonah David, Shlomo Shenhod and Adar Kesari as examples of what he likes. This was often held up as one of his biggest critical gaffes, especially by the major figures among the younger poets (see Zach, 1956). His two essays on Rabikovitch are in Kurzweil (1959e) and (1965).

society's development and such flowering is inversely proportional to political upheaval. So as opposed to the European Diaspora, where the ripe and coherent world of the *shtetl* served as a foundation for Hebrew fiction, no such basis had yet crystallized in the new-born nation. The Kibbutz and the *kəfar* were too new to serve as the social contexts for any real epic, and the city in the European sense did not exist in the new state. What is available is the city of Jerusalem but Kurzweil (1947a) fears that the secular Israeli writers would be unable to handle the religious freight with which this unique world is laden. Whereas the Diaspora writers had a deep understanding of the function of tradition in Jewish life, the Sabra writers, when they do not repudiate this tradition, know it only intellectually, not experientially. What is worse, the same is true of their relationship to European culture (H, p. 405). All that the new Israeli fiction can achieve, then, is a shallow depiction of the present, and this establishes it not as fictive art but as mere reportage and journalism, what Kurzweil frequently calls "a literarization of life" and not literature. This is what Kurzweil means when he pronounces continuously that such novels as Shamir's *Hu halak baśšadot* or Yizhar's *Hahurša baggib'a* lack the "dimension of depth" and a "sense of proportion" that a relationship to Jewish time would give them, and hence they are flat, two-dimensional, confined to the present and, therefore, superficial (1947a).

These formidable artistic problems are compounded by others. First there is the collectivistic, herd-like posture of such prose. The perspective is that of first-person plural, the "*Palmach*" refrain of "ever we," and not the individuated narrative "I" that is necessary for true art. This is related to what Kurzweil often terms the "narcissistic sentimentality" of such narrative, a quality that he feels contradicts the requirement in all good fiction for the narrator to stand back from his world and body it forth with objectivity. In doing this such a narrator will come to understand the esthetic value of compression of language and the subtleties of silence, as Agnon shows them. Kurzweil consistently advises the young writers to stay away from the novel and concentrate on the short story, which is a more suitable form for their lyrical effusiveness. It is easy to understand why Kurzweil, armed with such criteria, prefers Amichai the poet to Amichai the novelist⁴⁰ and why he demolishes Yizhar's *Yəmey Ciqlag*. His stern judgment of it (H, pp. 416–442 and 403–415) as not at all "the great Israeli novel" everyone had been waiting for but simply an overly long and stupendously boring expansion of a "*Palmach*" story remains one of his most controversial attempts to sabotage pretensions.

In the light of all these limitations in both the would-be artists and their embryonic society, Kurzweil warned almost from the outset of his career against the dangers of even making the demand "give us the great Hebrew

40. See Kurzweil (1961), (1963b), (1963c) and (1963d).

novel!" much less of hailing any work as such. Art, he cautions, is not created on demand but must grow organically from within.⁴¹ If the young writers will learn from Agnon and Hazaz how to link past and present organically and "the secret of silence," then Israeli fiction in time might flower:

We have only to decide if we truly intend to create something new, in which case what is needed is great patience, for the hour is not yet ripe for certain literary forms which appear only as exquisite fruits after centuries of a rich culture. (1947a)

Throughout the two subsequent decades no Israeli novel appeared that made Kurzweil alter this prognosis (H, p. 415, note 15). Yet by the mid-Sixties he senses that though technical standards have improved, the overall artistic situation has declined drastically.⁴² Instead of moving towards the admittedly difficult goal of authentic Hebraic creativity, such figures as Shahar, Tammuz, Aharon Meged, Amichai, and their younger counterparts Amos Oz and A.B. Yehoshua (in his earliest efforts) have modishly embraced the "contemporary" modernism of post-World War II. In other words, the anomic individualism and nihilistic tendency of French Existentialism have assured the entrenchment of Hebrew letters in the realm of the absurd. To be sure, the new Hebrew novel is not quite as preoccupied with surfaces as the French, but, in comparison, the "*Palmach*" novel that was judged to be so superficial he now sees as positively profound. For there at least fiction had reference to the semblance of a world, however inchoate, and, more important, to a set of ideals, however inadequate. Now the younger writers have become disillusioned with the Zionist vision no less than their forebears were with the traditional values of Diaspora; all that is left is a highly polished technical virtuosity that masks the emptiness beneath it (1966a). Kurzweil thus comes to repudiate completely one of the most widely read works of Israeli fiction perhaps since the founding of the state, Amos Oz's *Mika'el Šelli*. In one of his most spiteful and acrimonious essays (1968a) Kurzweil confesses to a total inability to grab hold of the work because there is no nexus whatsoever between it and anything outside it — author, society or reader. Its heroine, Hannah Gonen, he regards as more dangerous to Israel as a nation than all the Arab armies!

We can recognize here the conjunction of this judgment with Kurzweil's general unwillingness to accept all manifestations of literary modernism. I shall explore the significance of this unwillingness as well as of Kurzweil's critique of Israeli literature within the context of the assessment below of the totality of

41. Kurzweil early concentrated his attacks not on the writers but on the publishers for printing what should never have gone beyond manuscript (see 1944a).

42. For interim assessments see: 1956b, 1958, 1959b, and 1967 (originally delivered as a lecture at Rutgers University in the fall of 1964).

his criticism of modern Hebrew literature. We are left with the question: was Kurzweil unreservedly satisfied with any single work by any Sabra writer? He himself at various points answers positively: the poetry of Zach (whose work he never really deals with), Rabikovitch and Amichai, the early Yizhar (though not as fiction but as an example of another genre, heroic epic), Shamir's *Bəmo yadav*, parts of Mossinohn's *Derek geber* and a few of the stories of Shahar and Tammuz — these Kurzweil cites as works he admires (see H, p. 386 and 1966c). In the short stories of A. B. Yehoshua he perceptively sees the first intimations of the kind of fiction he is looking for from Israeli writers (1968b).

But such a list strikes me as the proverbial damnation with faint praise. The reality is that for Kurzweil, art, culture and man since World War II have been in decline, and post-1948 Israeli literature is but a mediocre, Levantine, relatively unexciting reflection of this process, and has contributed nothing to the development of modern Hebrew literature as he construes it.⁴³

5. Summary Evaluation

The structural resemblance between Kurzweil's Hebrew and his European criticism is clear. It should also be clear how with the same stroke he is able to show how modern Hebrew literature relates to the European tradition and how it is distinctive from it. The upshot of his unrelenting insistence on modern Hebrew literature as a rupture with the Jewish past is the insight which the following passage brilliantly conveys:

Modern Hebrew literature is qualitatively, as well as in its spiritual and social aspirations, a part of world literature. Its significance [as such] cannot be diminished . . . by an order of retreat back into its narrow national boundaries. . . . It was necessary to recall the dialectical situation between continuity and revolt and to push the emphasis onto the *new* . . . so as to break down the isolation [of] Jewish [literary scholarship] and to integrate it into the literary world of all cultures.

Since the hour of birth of modern Hebrew literature is the hour of the loss of simple religious faith, this literature overtly displays a new relationship to the very existence of the Jews. Jewish being possessed most distinctive qualities in that it was an existence without a land and without a living language. Therefore this literature proclaims through its greatest representatives the existential crisis of modern man in general before this crisis became pervasive and reached full consciousness in the literary creations of other nations whose existence was more "protected" and secure socially, politically and culturally. In other words: self-consciousness as *Sich-Selbst-Verständlich-Sein*, that is, to be se-

43. I do not discuss here Kurzweil's famous essay on the "Canaanite" movement (S, pp. 270-300). While this is of historic importance as the first attempt to examine the cultural significance of this movement, the essay's argument, I think, derives its cogency from the larger view of Israeli and modern Hebrew literature that I have focused on here.

cure about the certainty of one's own existence was for the Jew without religious faith something completely different than for the Englishman without Anglican faith or for a Frenchman living without the certainty of the Catholic faith. To the Frenchman, the Englishman, the German or the Russian his national existence in his land, state and culture remained [self-]evident. What, however, was left for the Jew, in Diaspora among the Gentiles, after the loss of his faith?

This is the burning question in modern Hebrew literature. It turns into a bitter wail in its greatest artists . . . The seismic sensitivity of the [Hebrew] artist[s] is an anticipation of what is fated for the illustrious artists of the world as a whole as, in the wake of the traumas of the twentieth century, the illusory bastions of culture are devastated.⁴⁴

I cite this passage in all its length because, written as it was in the last months of his life, I see it as the central insight toward which Kurzweil, as a comparatist in the Goethean sense, strove throughout his career as a critic. If the dynamic of modernity is the passage "from vision to the absurd," then the Jewish condition, as reflected in modern Hebrew literature, is the harbinger of the human condition as reflected in modern European literatures, for the linguistic crisis that the Hebrew language undergoes, in this view, is the most severe one that any language can experience. Moreover, if we begin to view, as I have suggested is possible, the body of Kurzweil's Hebrew criticism as a kind of history of modern Hebrew literature from *within*, one governed by norms inherent in the literature itself and not biographical facts imposed on it from without, then we must grant that this criticism may indeed begin to meet Wellek's demand (Wellek and Warren, 1956, pp. 52f) that

the problem of "nationality" and of the distinct contribution of the individual nations to the general literary process [be defined] with theoretical clarity [so that we are] able to analyze the exact way in which each national literature enters into the European tradition.

From a disciplinary perspective Kurzweil's work would seem to bear out Brouwer's suggestion (1962, p. 297) that comparative literature

must not over-look the small literatures; there are processes at work which have often in the past ended up in great literatures. Not in vain has Giacomo Prampolini more than once pointed out the importance of such small literatures, in themselves, and in their relation to great literatures.

Within the Hebrew literary sphere itself Kurzweil's work, both in its theory and in its *praxis*, must be seen as a source of enrichment. The manner in which

44. H, pp. 304f. Kurzweil here is referring specifically to Brenner but it is obvious that his point applies to all the major figures of the tragic period as I have noted them.

it dissociates modern Hebrew literature as literature from the assumptions and fortunes of the Zionist movement and all its attendant ideologies must be recognized as among its most important accomplishments. Artistically Kurzweil, in spite of the contumely vented upon him for doing so, probably demanded more of modern Hebrew writers than had any critic before him. It is important that we recognize why this had to be: if modern Hebrew literature is going to remove itself from its unique sphere—the sacral—and exist in the secular sphere in which all other literatures are created, then it has to be judged by the most discriminating esthetic criteria of that sphere (L, p. 219). On the other hand, Kurzweil never allows us to forget that this literature cannot ignore those criteria which come out of its own tradition. Thus, for example, the Israeli novelist (and critic) who would presume to create (or judge) an historical novel has to face both all the formidable problems the genre in general poses as well as those presented by the unique nature of the Jewish past. He must find a way to treat fictively an ancient society without rationalizing, historicizing or otherwise distorting its sacral nature, and he must be very careful that the sublime language of the Bible and the rabbinic periods does not get in his way and drown him out (1959a). The same is true in the poetic treatment of Biblical motifs like the *Akedah* (the sacrifice of Isaac); here, too, the religious context in which the whole story moves must be taken into account.⁴⁵

There is evidence that many of the younger writers respected and paid a great deal of attention to Kurzweil's strictures and in time came to accept them, whether consciously or not. Moshe Shamir in the Fifties abandoned the "*Pal-mach*" story and essayed a return to the Jewish past in *Melek baśar vadām*, an attempt that Kurzweil welcomed and took seriously (1954, and see H, pp. 411f). Shahar, Amichai, Oz and Yehoshua made a similar movement not in terms of form but of setting as they all came to explore Jerusalem as the locale for their works. Others, however, whether they felt it or not, refused to be the recipients of the back of Kurzweil's critical hand. A common complaint—and, I would add, an understandable one from their point of view—was that he held out no real constructive possibilities for them to follow. T. Carmi (1950) put it well: when the developing writers try to learn from Continental or American techniques Kurzweil condemns them as Levantine imitators, and when they ignore the Western literary tradition, they are condemned as Levantine provincials. Furthermore, transcendence and the Jewish past are really closed cases for them, and, if the present alone is, in Kurzweil's view, an inadequate basis for narrative art, then he gives them nothing to work toward except silence (see Bartov, 1952). The most eloquent response to this implication came from Amos

45. See 1959c. Kurzweil here cites Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* and Greenberg's "Bəlāyil gaśum biyrušalayim" as examples of what he means, Gilboa's "Yichaq" as an example of what he does not.

Oz (1966) who answered Kurzweil at the Israel-French literary dialogue in 1966. Oz refuses to cower in silence simply because it was his destiny not to have been born in the European Diaspora and to have had the experiences that foster the kind of Hebrew literary art Kurzweil demands. "I refuse," he says, "to stand in a posture of abnegation" with a permanently crippling inferiority complex that the humility toward the Jewish past that Kurzweil calls for really means. Instead, Oz avers that, his recognition that he is artistically in a more difficult position than his forbears notwithstanding, he has no other way but to write and in no other language but modern Hebrew.

This inability to introject critically what the Sabras were doing indicates the weaknesses that lie at the heart of Kurzweil's approach to modern Hebrew literature. It bespeaks a fundamental and consistent inability to grasp the reality that the young Israeli writers perceived and to accord esthetic value to its representation in literature. This is as true of his reaction to Shamir's *Hu halak baśādot* as it is of Yizhar's *Yomey Cīlag* and Oz's *Mika'el šelli*. In all cases it is possible to say that, in spite of an acute analysis, he essentially misreads these novels. In the latter case, especially, his insensitivity to the novel as a psychological and not only a social instrument is responsible for the misreading, but this is an insensitivity familiar from the European criticism. In the final analysis, Kurzweil's treatment of post-1948 Israeli literature seems to be of the same order as Kariv's handling of modern Hebrew literature of earlier periods.

It is a truism that everything in life has its price. So, too, I would conclude, in literary criticism. No method or critical approach apprehends literature in its totality. Kurzweil's inability to accept the Israeli phase of modern Hebrew literature, like his inability to accept European literature after Broch, is the price he pays for what he can achieve with the "tragic" phase and pre-World War II works. What forces him to pay this price, we can now see, are the particular presuppositions and postulates about literature, language and the Jewish people to which he is committed. Kurzweil himself doubtlessly would not have seen it this way, in terms of a price, for he would hardly have thought he was missing out on anything; if anything at all is not to be overlooked it is the crisis of man as literature depicts it, for otherwise literature itself is irrelevant if not immoral.

But here I am constrained to say that the definition of this crisis as essentially one of religious faith, noble and even sublime as it may be, is, no matter how phenomenologically arrived at, an existential one and, therefore, unverifiable. So, too, in the Jewish context: what Kurzweil regards as absurd, i.e. Jewish existence beyond belief in a living God and tradition, is not necessarily so for large numbers of Jews, just as the definition of "vision" as the timeless Divine covenant of Sinai is not one that is unanimously accepted. In any case, to found a theology upon the ontological nature of the Jewish

people and the Hebrew language is one thing; to found a body of literary criticism upon them is quite another. There are many who argue (see Ben-Gurion, L, pp. 246–248) from more materialistic premises that there is no such thing as meta-history and that the Jewish people, like the rest of the human family, is simply a physical organism developing in history with its own biological, demographic, cultural and intellectual dynamics. In this perspective religious faith may be nothing more than one possible mode or even stage of the organism's life. Logically it seems to me no less possible to make this argument, and anyone who would approach modern Hebrew literature from these premises would indeed have to dismiss Kurzweil's work as, in Band's words, "ultimately destructive" (1968, p. ix).⁴⁶ But then the onus would be upon him to apply his own particular assumptions, norms and criteria, for criticism cannot take place without these.⁴⁷ Such a critic, I think, would be hard put to match the comprehensiveness and coherence Kurzweil's criticism exhibits, not to mention its human passion and concern.

46. Band means something quite different in this judgment; he is bothered by what he feels is Kurzweil's violation of the autonomy of the literary work.

47. A very similar point is made in his excellent review of S by Evron (1960).

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