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REFLECTIONS ON ARNOLD BAND, SCHOLAR, TEACHER, MENTOR

William Cutter

This collection of essays honors a scholar and mentor by way of a traditional, established format. Its audience, however, is a unique scholarly community that its honoree has helped create. It is a broadly based community scattered by ideology and professional assignment, but it revolves in one way or another around Arnold Band. The editors wish to take note of the even larger community that has benefited from the work of Band and his students: the Jewish community at large as well as the more scholarly world. He has been a vigorous emblem of learning and public service, of Torah and *derekh erets*, for the more than forty years he has devoted to American Jewish studies, to Hebrew letters, and to the university and city he has served with such distinction.

As Band's graduate student, I learned what it might be like to become a professor. His day was filled with surprisingly different kinds of projects, from serving on requisite university committees to passionate attention to graduates and undergraduates. It included work with his wife Ora on issues of Hebrew pedagogy, at which she has excelled, and meetings at schools that needed his linguistic talents. This daytime work preceded a remarkable nocturnal energy for editing or preparation for classes, and for the creation of one of his over one hundred beautifully crafted articles. Behind all of the communal activity, scholarship, and pedagogy that occupied Band's imagination lay a canny mind schooled in Greek classics, Hebrew Bible, medieval literature, and modern Hebrew culture and a mind self-taught in even more occupations. He has been a scholar of many parts whose origins were embedded in different though confluent elements, and whose passion has been to ensure intellectual solidity in his students while they pondered the lives and the work of the artists who created what he called "The Grand Tradition" of Hebrew letters.

Band has been modest about informing his friends that he was chosen one of the twenty great teachers at UCLA during the twentieth

century. But most of those close to him do know the relationship between his scholarly contributions and his love of teaching and mentoring. The *Daily Bruin*, when it announced its selection of the century's twenty greatest teachers, placed his name just below the picture of UCLA's legendary basketball coach, John Wooden, the master mentor of sports heroes who went on to become famous themselves. Wooden certainly was the more familiar public figure. The journalistic layout may remind us of a great similarity between them: that just as Wooden was more than a coach—his protégés continue to lead the sport—so Arnold Band's academic guidance made possible an astounding number of careers: lives of women and men who have carried their mentor's legacy into their own unique projects.

UCLA has been his base, and there Band, the Harvard Bostonian, helped create a Department of Near Eastern Literature, a Judaic Studies Program, and a Comparative Literature Program. More globally, he helped mastermind and chronicle the development of Judaic studies in the American university. From a small office in Royce Hall he had a hand in helping UCLA reimagine its role in America's second-largest city, fashion some of its architecture, and train leading intellectuals in American life. Band himself mentored twenty-five doctorates and several more prominent academics and teachers for Israeli and American schools. It has been especially notable that a number of students who were to become leading teachers and scholars in Israel would have studied in what some Israelis insist on seeing as "Diaspora" in the sense of secondary status. The names of many of these Israeli students are listed in this volume as authors of the essays in honor of their teacher: Ruth Kartun-Blum, Dan Almagor, and Tamar Alexander, and there is a memory of the late luminous Yosef Ha-Efrati, whose loss is felt especially at such times of celebration. Other Israeli intellectuals in our volume have been influenced by Band, as he has been nurtured in his friendships with them. Band's teaching résumé includes a list of American protégés who have had a commensurate impact on the settings in which they have worked. Under his tutelage, major works have been created on the writings of Micha Yosef Berdyczewski and Yosef Hayim Brenner, the history of Hebrew drama, folklore themes, Hasidism, and on the poetry of such figures as Dan Pagis and the founders of poetic modernity, Bialik and Tschernichowski. His American doctoral students have produced hundreds of articles and books that have bridged the two cultures that dominate modern Jewish literary study, and Band himself has created much of the communication between the Israeli and American intellectual communities, even as he has identified with some of the conflicts between them. He enhanced the communication between Israel and America by insisting that his students get to

know important Hebrew literary figures personally. This teacher's influence resides not only in the scholarship his students have produced but in the creative writing and teaching that some of them have done and in the development of institutions that some of them have achieved. Finally, as Nahman of Bratslav states in a notable sermon on *bikkurim* and the occult, leadership and authority can reside beneath appearance, so that within our present volume are contributions written by people who have been influenced by the work of Arnold Band in all manner of indirect ways. The titles of this volume's articles and its authors are excellent indices of many of Band's interests during the forty plus years of his career.

The well from which Arnold Band has drawn with such care is the same well to which he has contributed with such generosity; and it is the source that provided these students and protégés with so much raw material for what has radiated out of the center of Band's influence. Now a cluster of Band's students and friends have contributed intellectual content to this volume, adding to the well. Others have placed their personal means at the disposal of its editors and Brown Judaic Studies. The scholarly work and the subsidies create a splendid blend of spiritual and material contribution, of *qemah* and Torah. We are particularly grateful for generous gifts from Lloyd and Margit Cotsen and from the Hebrew Union College Press Publication Fund, as well as assistance from the Hebrew Union College Weinberg Fund. In addition, we very much appreciate contributions by Lewis M. Barth, Behrman House Books, Jean and Jerry Friedman, David and Felice Gordis, Philip Levine, Allan L. Smith, and Ezra Spicehandler. I wish also to thank two people close to me, who also know Arnold Band from close up, Ben Cutter and Alan Bloch, both readers par excellence.

My essay is an effort to take the scholarly and intellectual measure of the man by describing a few of his principal concerns and achievements. Band has continued throughout his life to be fascinated by the accommodations of Jewish life to modernity and by the relationship of the individual to the cultural surroundings. One sees a thinker who has discovered multiple examples of those personal struggles in the texts he has illuminated and in the educational thinking he has developed and described. He has amplified understanding of the social condition of the modern Jew to include the means by which its literary subject has been represented. He has taught many of us to consider the ambiguities of the human condition as developed through language and the purposes to which language is most nobly put: the narrative and the poem. And although he is usually considered a modernist, his work has broken important chronological barriers. He has enjoyed continuing his attachments to the more ancient Jewish canons, and he

has called attention to the surprising classical pathways that led to modern literature.

In his introduction to the tales of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav, for example, Band unites the theological qualities of secret, enigma, and ambiguity with the narrative functions of Nahman's work in a way that suggests an understanding of classic religious impulses and modern theories about the paradox of mystery and revelation embedded in story. This example is important precisely because of the authentic attachment Band has to the broader Jewish classical literature. When he draws classical Judaism and modernity together, there is no sense that one interest has been grafted artificially onto another. To the contrary, Band uses the "graft" to enrich the narrative and reduce the possibility of simplistic interpretation. As he cautions in his introduction to the tales of Rabbi Nahman: "by both evoking the biblical passage and blocking the possibility of facile allegorizing, the author (Rabbi Nahman) forces the audience into the enigmatic mode of response." This very resistance to allegorization, while at the same time acknowledging the inevitability of its temptations, characterizes much of Band's own work and teaching as well. Perhaps that is one of the things that brought Band to produce his translations of the Bratslaver's tales for Paulist Press. The tales have by now occupied an important place in the university classroom and in the adult education parlors of our public institutions, and Band's translations and introductions have made that possible.

Since Band's translation and essay on Nahman appeared, a great many articles have emerged from his students and from others, during a period when Nahman's "Torah" became a fashion among both populist and elite audiences. Among them, younger critics (some of them Band's students, such as Yoav Elstein) who may have first learned the literature as either hagiography or folklore have treated the material through the lenses of contemporary theory and have widened the window on Hasidic theology and the relationship of theology to narrative. During Band's second sabbatical term in Israel (1967), and just as he was leaving the Agnon project for awhile, he arranged for his students to work on Rabbi Nahman with Yosef Dan and Amos Funkenstein. He thus opened an entire universe to me and to many of his students who continued with Band when he returned from Israel. We came to understand that the Hasidic story took its place at the crossroads of modernity: a homiletical farewell to Judaism's classic religious period and an introduction to Judaism's modern attachment to belletristic narrative.

Of course, Band's most powerful turn at narrative study has been his lifelong engagement with the stories and novels of Shmuel Yosef Agnon. His magisterial treatment of Agnon's life and work (*Nostalgia and Nightmare*) remains indispensable for the study of Agnon's *oeuvre* and

continues to make the master available to students throughout the world. Since *Nostalgia and Nightmare* appeared in 1968, a tremendous amount of Agnon scholarship has been developed. Agnon's home has become a museum and a shrine, hundreds of books and articles have been written, and reminiscences about Israel's only Nobel laureate abound. Agnon is now part of cultured discourse in the literary West. But those early days were days of simpler fame, when Agnon would engage Band in informal conversation and when a bridge to America could be created from that hill in Talpiot on which his home was built. One can say that Band's sharing the idea of the Hasidic story as precursor of modernity contributed greatly to his reading of the modern narrative master who himself was so naturally linked to that premodern milieu. Band's perspectives on the Nobel laureate must still be addressed whether they had to do with Agnon's language, the historical context of the Galician and Hapsburg Empire or late nineteenth-century economic environment, or Agnon's theological ironies, which seemed to have set Band at odds with the important early Israeli Agnon interpreter Baruch Kurzweil. Band is as comfortable describing linguistic cadences as he is explicating the relationship of tenor and vehicle in highly symbolic stories. He is as comfortable uncovering a mystery as he is in appreciating mystery's frequent insolubility. He has often pointed out features of an Agnon narrative that seem, looking backward, to be simple and obvious, but which turn out to be surprisingly innovative. In his understanding of the tension between love of God and the physical erotic love of modern literature, Band drew weighty conclusions from the legendary story "Aggadat hasofer" ("Tale of the Scribe") by pointing out that the scribe's wife was barren because the couple had never consummated their marriage. He has always enjoyed uncovering the obvious.

The ideological struggle with Kurzweil had to do with whether the outcomes of Agnon's narratives constitute normative and moralizing statements, and they were based on a serious theoretical difference in their approaches to literature. While Band never eschewed ideological readings of narrative material, he understood that a work of prose was, like a poem, still primarily a work of art. In that sense he was more modern than the luminous Kurzweil, one of the creators of the field of modern Hebrew literature and certainly one of the major expositors of Agnon's writing. The two critics met at the turning of the literary generations, one as the intellectual father who faced the past, and the other as the father of new generations of critics and teachers. It is no surprise that eight articles within our current volume are devoted to Agnon study and that they are written from a remarkably wide range of perspectives—suitable to the range of Band's vision and to the richness of the original Agnon *oeuvre* itself.

In Band's work the social and psychological situation of a character or a plot has always been viewed primarily as a product of the creative imagination. He has applied the strategies he developed for dealing with the tension between literary technique and theme in Hebrew literature to his examination of writers as diverse as Kafka, Karl Kraus, and Elias Canneti. The present volume confirms the importance of uniting these artistic probes with attention to psychology and social setting in the articles on early twentieth-century figures. Dislocation of the literary figure as a theme of the early twentieth century turns out to have a contemporary echo within this volume as well. And the intellectual struggle with modernity is reflected in two essays on the struggle to adapt Jewish intellectual tradition to post-Enlightenment modernity.

One of those dislocated figures in modern Hebrew literature—almost the prototype—was the amazing scholar essayist and short-story writer Micha Yosef Berdyczewski (1865–1921), who also created displaced figures like the protagonists of *Miryam*, *Maḥanayim Urva parah*, and a remarkable series of short stories. In my view Berdyczewski often vied with Agnon for Band's passion, and he wrote a number of important treatments of that turbulent scholar-author-anthologist's work. In his contribution to the 1975 volume celebrating the jubilee of Simon Halkin ("Qera satan," on the function of the devil in Berdyczewski's short story "My Enemy"), Band not only resurrected an important and underappreciated story, but he laid out the old dispute about autobiographical approaches to the Jewish literature of the late nineteenth century. At the Eighth International Congress of Jewish Studies, he probed the image of Moses in Berdyczewski's essays and moved from the art of Berdyczewski to questions of other ways in which Berdyczewski developed character. On a few occasions (including an effort to place it on the widest possible canvas, "The Beginnings of Modern Hebrew Literature: Perspectives on Modernity"), Band reintroduced the division between the two principal streams in the development of modern Hebrew culture through a discussion of the tension between Ahad Ha-Am (Asher Ginsburg) and Berdyczewski. In that context Band recapitulated his oft-stated critique of the sense of detachment of modernity from classic Judaism that one finds in Kurzweil's canonical book *Our Young Literature: Revolution or Continuity?* (*Sifrutenu haḥadashah: hemshekh o mahpekhah?*).

Our management of Berdyczewski's narratives, essays, and scholarship could use more of Band's deft critical touch. Too little is known among English readers about Berdyczewski the artist, and his place as a dramatic figure in early twentieth-century Hebrew letters is secured more by his ideological writings than by his short stories or novels. Of course, modern Jewish intellectual life is often dominated by concerns of history and ideology (aside from some work on interpretation theory and

on biblical narrative), and so Berdyczewski is often grasped as an ideologue. But even here, Berdyczewski is too little considered. Band's students Dan Almagor and Samuel Fishman have made Berdyczewski accessible through their remarkable bibliography, which has itself enabled more scholarship on that intriguing early twentieth century figure; and his colleague Avner Holtzman has extended that accessibility through his publications and management of the Berdyczewski Archives. Band's presentation of the two poles of modern intellectual discourse makes his work on the disagreements between Berdyczewski and the more prominent Ahad Ha-Am among Band's most relevant essays. While Band makes clear that Berdyczewski has to be understood as an entirely more modern writer than Ahad Ha-Am, he also explicates the reasons for the greater endurance of the "elusive prophet," as Steven Zipperstein has identified him. Berdyczewski was a figure who, like Band, understood that the tensions within fictional narrative are more suited to the modern ironic universalist sensibility. Berdyczewski's endurance as an icon of popular versions of modern Zionism was just not in the cards. When, however, Band cited Ahad Ha-Am's critique of Berdyczewski's linguistic blunders in Hebrew, I am able to imagine that Band just may have sided with the "elusive prophet's" commitment to linguistic propriety.

Band's essay on that controversy deals with two issues: how universal should be the content of their shared periodical *Hashiloah* (published between 1896–1926) and with the discontinuities that Berdyczewski saw in Jewish history. It is a particularly lucid model of writing and certainly the best representation of these issues in English. It also anticipates some of the more elaborate work on Berdyczewski that I personally think Band inspired his students and disciples to pursue. Yosef Oren had not yet published his full collection of the letters between the Zionist essayist and his junior editor, and we did not know then just how rich that controversy might be. But Arnold Band did. At the time Band had published his short essay, the Western scholarly community still lacked a definition of the Jewish *fin de siècle* dispute between the so-called Nietzscheans and those who—their atheism aside—tried to create a sense of seamless continuity with the Jewish past. The year is 1897, a time before which Berdyczewski had fully articulated his aesthetic and historical position and before he had written those cultural essays that more clearly defined his argument with Ahad Ha-Am. In my view this aspect of the controversy between the two giant late nineteenth-century essayists is deeply symbolic of Band's own convictions about the intellectual neighborhood in which the tents of Shem can be established in the same neighborhood as the tents of Yafet. This is not surprising when one considers Band's training in Greek classics and the experience he has

had in almost all phases of the arts. And it is not unusual if one ponders his essay "Confluent Myths," on growing up Hebraically in Boston. What is unusual is that these probings have existed in one man and that this man became a figure within Hebrew letters, Jewish studies, and comparative literature and has, along with his colleagues in Los Angeles and Berkeley, brought a less known literature into the center of one of the largest university systems in the world.

Arnold Band has been one of the few critics in either America or Israel to comment authoritatively on the general scene of Jewish studies from the perspective of one whose scholarship has been dominated by aesthetics. Reading his studies of the Hebrew language in American universities, and his discussions of the state of Jewish studies in the American university, one might never guess that Band comes from the world of literary criticism and Hebrew prose and poetry. But it is precisely his literary sensibility that gives texture to these essays. Band has been particularly passionate about the place of Hebrew language training in the American university and—with his younger colleague Alan Mintz—about the place of Hebrew language in general within the Diaspora. Here his work has ranged from commenting on the linguistic condition at our universities and describing the history of Hebrew within America, to working on the intellectually less prestigious but practically most daunting area of language study: textbooks for young people. He has also boldly remarked on the new Diaspora Hebrew of Israelis who have settled in the United States and delivered two papers on this topic. His love of language is reflected especially in his scholarly essays about Hebrew poetry, to which I will now turn our attention.

Arnold Band's work with poetry was originally shaped by that close attachment to the language of Hebrew and to the language of the text itself. He somehow managed, in spite of his interest in time and place, to preserve a version of the New Literary Criticism that flourished while he was at university. Poetry suits his particular strength in language and linguistics, and the sounds of words are still a powerful part of the way he experiences any literary text. (Once in a while, he will surprise the reader with a comment about the lyrical sound of prose Hebrew.) Even his friends may not know that he is one of those scholars of poetry to have become a published poet himself, and his intriguing collection of poetry, *Hare'i bo'er ba'esh* (*The Mirror Aflame*), remains a too little examined collection. His work on Bialik and Tschernichowski focuses especially on close readings of the poetic text, and his essay on semantic rhyme in Bialik can still open doors to the art of rhyme. The focus on the linguistic art continues in slightly less known articles on the work of Yocheved Bat-Miriam and Uri Zvi Greenberg. He was as fascinated with discussions of prosody as he was

with theory that challenged the prevailing approaches to prosody, and I recall particularly his enthusiasm about Otto Jespersen's work challenging the predictability of prosodic patterns. Band has written about or taught the poetry of Amichai, Alterman, Goldberg, Shlonsky, Greenberg, Ravikovitch, and has moved his students from the grand traditions of Bialik and Tschernichowski to the most contemporary works of two relatively new periodicals: *Alpayim* and *Dimui*. He displayed similar suppleness when it came to bartering his fascination with literary theory in favor of that close textual reading. A glance at some of the titles of his essays indicates the theoretical questions that fascinated him: irony, the archaeology of the literary text, parody, literary tropes, and historicism. Theory may have fascinated him, and context was always basic, but the linguistic sounds and prosodic patterns always fixed his gaze. Yet his students had to do more than fix their gaze on a text.

He always highlighted—for his students most of all—the importance of historical empirical scholarship, and he usually contextualized the literary work within a specific historical period. In classes he might chastise students who were not attentive to major historical or technological achievements of the period in which a work was set, and how such elements might have either helped create that text. He might hammer home the obvious points related to those events (the importance of a railroad in an Agnon setting; a change in monarchy or an interregnum of an unstable province; the place of a Yiddish expression among families of a certain background). His vision of a literary text as a product of its time did not compromise his loyalty to the way that text operated as a thing in itself. There were occasions when he seemed like an heir to the intimacy with historical time and place that characterized the personality and teaching of the great literary scholar Dov Sadan. His articles on Kafka and Agnon, Yehoshua, and Hazaz all reflect this interest.

In all, his has been a remarkable career of balancing different priorities and of bringing them together, of harmonization in the interest of illuminating human conflict, and of bringing worlds into contact with a rich and stubborn imagination. His imagination has been embedded in essays that are composed with great simplicity and eloquence. He achieved that balance and that synthesis when it needed highlighting, and he highlighted the conflicts when the occasion demanded. As we honor a man who found the literary form to be the vehicle for examining the lived life, but who enjoyed the lived life above all, I wish to conclude my essay with a comment about a recent occasion on which Arnold Band honored yet another colleague of unique stature.

In his introduction to the Festschrift honoring his beloved friend Walter Ackerman, Band departed from customary scholarly practice. Here he chose to reminisce about their shared youthful days in Boston.

His informal essay "Confluent Myths" (discussed in David Ellenson's essay) is a narrative of the Boston in which two Jewish boys from middle-class immigrant families grew up. He must have sensed that this Proustian moment was its own kind of literature, and he presented a surprising perspective on the saga of the young Jew in America.

Band's "Confluent Myths" adds a unique dimension to the many anecdotes of American Jewry, as it does not draw on the simple legends of "making it" or "civility" made so familiar by Norman Podhoretz or John Murray Cuddihy. Further, his myths lack the ironies of Philip Roth's comic and angry voices. The myths he describes are embedded in the quintessential American immigrant city, including Latin, English, and Hebrew in a unique combination. The myths are described by Band, the American Hebraist, while honoring another Bostonian who had chosen to live in Israel. While acknowledging that not all of his peers carried the myth forward, the essay holds out the promise of new confluences and further synthetic creations of the American Jewish story. Best of all, it is wonderful history narrated from a personal point of view.

In some ways, the present gathering of important articles on a variety of Jewish texts suggests what that kind of thinking can produce—both the multiple provenance of its contributors as well as the multiple interests and talents that blossomed within Arnold Band. In the case of Boston Jews of a certain predisposition, "Confluent Myths" reflects the intense Hebraic atmosphere of the heder and the post-heder experience, and the classic version of the American dream captured in the products of the ever-evolving social composition of the Boston Latin School that led inexorably to Harvard (if one had the intellectual goods) and to double duty at the Hebrew College of Boston. While there were dual mythologies in the majority of Jewish American families in that period, the unique tones of Boston added an element of gravity to what Peter Berger described as the double consciousness that has characterized so much of American Jewish life. It is a doubleness that continues to follow Band as he multiplies his dynamic intellectual pursuits. And he used it brilliantly to teach his students.

Arnold Band has enlivened the dialectics of American-Israeli intellectual life at various times and in his several studies, and he has done so through his passion about both poles of the dialectic. He encouraged me, and all of his students, to ponder the nature of intellectual community and the task of Jewish culture within community. His community was closer to Berdyczewski's than to Ahad Ha-Am's, because he always let the text take one in independent directions no matter how devoutly he might have wished to find a Jewish essence. Literature for him and for his students has always had the power to embrace the dynamics of the individual human experience within community, in all of its multiplicity,

while reflecting the internal aesthetic values of the art. The search for essences often lurked behind his work, but the little textual clues always won out and thus prompted antinomian ruminations because each element of a work of literature had its own value. His students have brought a rich variety of new themes and ideas into public discourse, and his friends and colleagues have enjoyed a rich challenge from one of the great "counter-readers" of our time. Many of the imaginative textual readings of the essays in this volume have been influenced by Arnold Band's methodological legacy, and those that may be independent of that influence will yet be pondered by Band as he considers the next stage of his work. One never knows where an intellectual will turn next, but anyone who knows Band and who grasps the significance of his bibliography will know that Arnold/Avraham/Arnie Band will continue to turn toward Israel and will continue to be the man from Boston. He will always be the man from the Eastern Shore (his accent ensures that) and the Charles River, at home near the wadis of the Middle East and the dry riverbeds of Los Angeles, where other mythologies have been fostered, and where Arnold Band has created new realities. His experience of confluence is not limited to his New England boyhood, and his reflections on that confluence continue near the shores of the Pacific Ocean.



