2. For an example, see Mekhilta Shirata 10, Lauterbach, vol. 2: 79–80.

3. On the regularization of the mashal, see "Rhetoric and Midrash," pp. 266–69.

4. "The Function of the Mashal in Rabbinic Literature" [Hebrew], *Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature* 7 (1985): 90–102.

5. The function of praise in this mashal can be seen even more clearly in the very similar mashal that appears in Mekhilta Baḥodesh 2, Lauterbach, vol. 2:203, which seems to be a truncated version of our mashal though the exact relationship between the two compositions is unclear. The unusual form of the mashal with the Scriptural verses cited in the course of the narrative—the nimshal, in effect, collapsed within the mashal—is simply a feature of the pre-regularized form of the mashal: on the process of regularization, see my comments in the *Prooftexts* article cited by Boyarin.

6. I must acknowledge that I am still uncertain as to the meaning of this mashal and its precise interpretation. The exegetical side of the mashal is clear: as Boyarin writes, the midrash on Exod. 14:21 interprets the phrase describing Moses stretching his hand out over the sea as part of a larger drama that is explicated through the interpretation of Ps. 114:3–5; that narrative also connects the phrase about Moses stretching forth his hand with the subsequent phrase in the verse, "and the Lord drove back the sea with a strong east wind all that night. . . ." Nonetheless, when the guard in the mashal-proper flees at the king's appearance and explains why he does, just as the sea in the nimshal similarly does as well, it is not clear whether his explanation is meant to justify his earlier refusal or to praise the king (God) or to slight the buyer (Moses). If there were a historical anecdote about the Roman emperor or the like as the basis for this narrative, I would not be surprised (though I have been unable to locate any such source). Still, why Boyarin judges the nimshal to possess "vast aesthetic superiority" over the narrative in the mashal-proper is unclear to me. What can this even mean?

7. On this, see again the *Prooftexts* article. Note, in addition, that not every element in the mashal's narrative is necessarily paralleled in the nimshal. Cf., for example, the discrepancies between the geography in the narrative in the Mekhilta mashal *ad* Exod. 14:21 and the actual situation facing Israel when they wished to cross the Reed Sea. Note, too, that the nimshal regularly begins its "translation" of the narrative *in medias res*, and provides the reader with only the information he requires to understand the rhetorical message of the mashal within the Scriptural context.

8. In this regard, I also do not see the exegetical function of the mashal as being similar to that of the enumeration-form Towner described, although the regularization of both forms, the enumeration and the mashal, is part of the same overall process of regularization throughout rabbinic literature.

REVIEWS

Criticism as a Calling: The Case of Barukh Kurzweil

James Diamond, *Barukh Kurzweil and Modern Hebrew Literature.* Scholars Press: Brown Judaic Studies, 1982.

Barukh Kurzweil, *Ḥippus ḥasifrut ḥayisre'elit* [*In Search of Israeli Literature*]. Eds. Zvi Luz and Yedidya Yitshaki. Bar-Ilan University Press, 1982.

Never has a Hebrew author taken so seriously Bialik's conception of "the dual hubris" involved in the act of creative writing as did Barukh Kurzweil (1907–1972). For Kurzweil, Israel's most volatile and controversial critic for three decades, artistic expression was a mystical process. It provided momentary salvation from "the void" of nothingness. Writing, however, was also the ultimate arrogance, at once casting a veneer of meaning over the "void" and, at the same time, presuming to say something of lasting import. Every true writer walked a tightrope over the Bialikian abyss, reflecting the struggle of his perilous vocation in every word. To write in facile abundance, therefore, was to trivialize the creative process, to sin.[1] Hence, if a writer dared to produce a literary work that could be judged to be superfluous, then, said Kurzweil, "its sentence should be summarily pronounced with every legitimate weapon (Diamond, p. 7).

Kurzweil's self-imposed determination to sefeguard the precincts of Hebrew literature is the subject of James Diamond's well-crafted and multidimensional study of the Israeli critic. Indeed, Kurzweil's quasi-religious fervor, frequently taking on the intensity of a witch hunt, begins to be comprehensible when placed in the dual context of European thought and a displaced, somewhat anti-Zionist, neo-German Orthodoxy. Diamond has rendered a special service in highlighting the philosophical and literary underpinnings of Kurzweil's obsession with language as a surrogate for religious belief. His objectivity is a lesson to us all, since it is impossible to discuss Kurzweil's work dispassionately. Kurzweil's tone in article after article was dramatically judgmental. His diatribes against Ahad Ha'am and Gershom Scholem (not discussed by Diamond)[2], and his vitriolic critiques of Yizhar, Oz, Shaham and many others easily provoke

1. Kurzweil, "On the Absence of a Sense of Proportion," *In Search of Israeli Literature*, pp. 70–73. Bialik's essay is "Revealment and Concealment in Language," available in English in Robert Alter, ed., *Modern Hebrew Literature* (New York, 1975), pp. 127–37. The precise meaning of "the void" is not clear in either Bialik or Kurzweil. Cf. Diamond, pp. 45–47 and n. 8 below.

2. Diamond claims that his focus is on Kurzweil as a literary critic. He does, however, marshal lengthy philosophical and European cultural data that do not seem to me to be as

PROOFTEXTS 5 (1985): 281–95

5:3

responses in kind. Nevertheless, one thing is certain: Kurzweil brought a rhetorical intensity and intellectual acumen to Hebrew criticism that have rarely been equaled.[3]

Diamond's lengthy attributions of Kurzweil's influences to Dilthey and Heidegger are fascinating and illuminating, if not entirely convincing. More impressive are the parallels drawn by Diamond between Kurzweil and the Austrian critic Karl Kraus. Diamond uses as a point of departure a rejoinder to Kurzweil made by Ernst Simon, which charged that in his unrestrained glee at polemic Kurzweil fancied himself a Karl Kraus in Hebrew garb (Diamond, p. 19). This insight is the most intriguing element in the vast amount of attention devoted to Kurzweil's German cultural background, and it deserves to be expanded on.

Kraus was obsessed with the need for integrity in the use of language in a manner similar to Kurzweil. The way Kraus assailed the "Jewish cult" of psychoanalysis that wrought havoc with words and created new myths to debase humanity[4] parallels Kurzweil's assault on Ahad Ha'am and Scholem. In his article "Self-Hatred in Jewish Literature,"[5] Kurzweil also cites the fact that Kraus's assault on Herzl was part of his campaign against the linguistic abuses of journalists. Journalists and psychoanalysts alike could be what Thomas Szasz in his study of Kraus labels "base rhetoricians," whereas Kraus, for Szasz, was a "noble rhetorician."[6] These points are not brought out by Diamond, yet they are important because they help us to see that Kurzweil and his German critical model, Karl Kraus, were not only absorbed in "language mysticism," as some of Diamond's sources would have it, but that there were specific issues at stake. Kurzweil's controversial articles about Ahad Ha'am and Scholem contain the

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relevant to the question as Ahad Ha'am and Scholem. It is only fair and illustrative to cite the brief citation from Kurzweil's attack on Scholem which Diamond does bring (p. 51):

> Science cannot replace religion, and a scientific approach to Judaism has no authority as far as Judaism as a living substance goes. . . . It is possible to say that, paradoxically, a mathematician or a physicist is more authorized to appear as a spokesman for Judaism than Messrs. Baer, Baron, or G. Scholem, just as a gynecologist, *qua* gynecologist, is unable to evoke the mysteries of *Eros*, even though he is familiar with every aspect of the female body. The poet and the lover, without their ever having known woman, know a great deal more about it (*Eros*) and love than any gynecologist.

Diamond notes after the quote that this is similar to Kurzweil's campaign against all "attempts to cast literary criticism into a scientific discipline." This view domesticates the passion of Kurzweil's defense of the faith. The correct view may be that Kurzweil chose literature as his arena for sefeguarding Judaism, and his other interests were ancillary to that central concern.

3. As a tendentious literary critic he was similar to Avraham Kariv. On today's cultural scene Dan Miron's recent attack on the lyricist Naomi Shemer and his earlier critiques of the "commercialism" of some novels of the seventies is reminiscent of Kurzweil's polemical expansion of the jurisdiction of the critic.

4. See Thomes Szasz, *Karl Kraus and the Soul Doctors* (Baton Rouge, 1976) and Allen Jenik end Stephen Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna* (New York, 1973), pp. 75 ff.

5. Kurzweil, *Sifrutenu haḥadashah hemshekh o mahpekhah*, 2nd ed. (Jerusalem, 1965), pp. 331 ff.

6. See n. 4.

key to his passionate crusade against the "demonic" linguistic mystique of these two "arch culprits" of modern Jewish life.[7] Ahad Ha'am and Scholem were for Kurzweil what Freud and his followers were for Karl Kraus, cultural demons to be exorcised.

Diamond cites approvingly Kurzweil's thesis that Kraus (and we might add, Yosef Haim Brenner, on the basis of ample evidence in both Kurzweil and Diamond) were not "self-hating Jews" but critics of contemporary Judaism who longed for "a higher reality" (p. 123). This is a claim that simply does not ring true. The fact that both Brenner and Kraus referred positively and sympathetically in one or more corners of their oeuvres to an old-world pious Jew in no way indicates that they were advocating a return to old-time religion. Nor are there any grounds for making this assertion with regard to Kafka or Weininger. Moreover, the ruling hypothesis of all of Kurzweil's work on modern Hebrew writers, that of "late return" (the sense of wanting to embrace devout religiosity once more, but not being able to) is subject to question, even with regard to Bialik, Agnon and Uri Zvi Greenberg. Nostalgia and guilt are part of the mind-set of this generation, but so are rebellion and the desire for a new earthbound life in Zion. Life has its anxieties, its ennui, its fear of "the void," but these do not lead one back perforce to the bosom of tranquil faith. Let us even grant the "deformation, dehumanization and deheroization" which Kurzweil speaks of over and again. Certainly with regard to Brenner, Kraus, Weininger and Kafka, it is not helpful to repeat Kurzweil's back-to-faith thesis uncritically.

Another theoretical construct which Diamond presents is Kurzweil's alleged life-long effort as a critic to follow Dilthey in "bracketing" a creative work and communing with its author's mind and spirit in a kind of I-thou experience or *Erlebnis*. This "phenomenological criticism" Kurzweil developed against the inroads of the new criticism, which threatened to dissect the work of art in an overly objective and dry way. Kurzweil undoubtedly had many successes in doing this, and he *was* a great critic. His method suffered, however, from the danger of distorting the artistic creation through the exclusive prism of the great critic's personality. Moreover, Kurzweil occasionally fell into bringing extraneous ad hominem data into the "brackets." He was guilty of precisely that abuse which Karl Kraus decried in Freud's defamation of Leonardo da Vinci. He ascribed "cheap" extraliterary motives to such Israeli authors as S. Yizhar, Amos Oz and Natan Shaham.

The "threat" of Israeli literature for Kurzweil is that it diverts the focus of attention away from "the void" (presumably the nullity of a Jewish life divorced from religion)[8] to bohemian concerns and the workaday experience of Israel. Kurzweil was more sympathetic towards the literature of the thirties and forties (David Maletz's important novel *Ma'agalot* is a case in point), which reflected a

7. Cf. Diamond, pp. 29–30 on the "demonic." I find Diamond occasionally a bit too abstract. "Demonic" was a favorite insult of Kurzweil's. I do not see the relevance of Diamond's discussion of *Eros* and *Thanatos*. For Kurzweil, Ahad Ha'am and others were insidiously appealing, i.e. "demonic."

8. Diamond (p. 38) cites Kurzweil's view that with the decline of faith "the universe of language has shrunk. . . . It now turns man back to his wretched self. It no longer redeems men and can no more open him to worlds beyond. Language can now bring man only to the borders of the chaotic void." He also cites Kurzweil's affinity for the fear of

struggle for and with the value system of pioneering collectivism as a surrogate for religion (Kurzweil, p. 25). The more recent Israeli literature he regarded as value-less; Kurzweil was consistently unwilling to acknowledge the legitimacy of the nonideological concerns of young Israelis as a subject for literature. He refers to the hasty "literization [sic] of life," the "graphomania," and "narcissism" of Israeli authors such as those mentioned, Shamir, Kaniuk, Sadeh and others. Kurzweil writes (p. 59) that he would have expected normalcy to bring with it simplicity or naivete. What he finds instead is an alarming sophomoric pretension of depth: "Workaday deeds have been casually elevated to a self-conscious dimension. . . . Life, before it has a chance to become a life of substance, is already set down on paper."

Kurzweil draws an interesting comparison between the one-dimensional story of the Haskalah period with its extravagant focus on biography or history and the burgeoning literature of Israel (p. 76). For Kurzweil the great challenge was for Israel to produce a social novel of epic dimensions. The young country's inability to yield such a work was proof of Israel's immaturity as a culture.

Kurzweil's analysis of Amichai is quite insightful. This is due in no small measure to the fact that Amichai is overtly trying to do what Kurzweil contends all Israeli literature *must* do. Amichai persistently revisits his father's world and toils to establish its relevance for Amichai's Israeli reality. Kurzweil shows how Amichai's lexicon derives from the liturgy, because the synagogue, rather than the bet midrash was the center of Orthodox Jewish life in Germany. He acknowledges Amichai's giftedness and the importance of many of his poems, but Kurzweil notes: "What is primarily disturbing is the fact that the sense of loss is described out of levity and out of a narcissistic self-satisfaction." What Kurzweil says about Amichai is mild by comparison to his censure of other writers. It is worth citing as an illustrative example of Kurzweil's work and also because of the current interest in Amichai. Kurzweil fears that many of Amichai's tantalizing metaphors may be guilty of the same fault which Amichai ascribes to W. H. Auden's poems, that they are like "a child pulling a rope with nothing at its end" (p. 229).

Experimental writing was legitimate for Kurzweil if it had roots. For that reason he affirmed the efforts of Amichai and Dahlia Rabikovitz, two writers who harked back to their Eastern European moorings. Similarly, Mordechai Tabib and Yehudit Handel earned his praise for their works reflecting the Sephardic Jewish milieu. And David Shahar was perhaps the Israeli writer whom Kurzweil heralded more than any other, here too because of Shahar's engaged search for roots in old Jerusalem. Diamond does not highlight these positive assessments adequately. And indeed, one can be overwhelmed by the overall negative assessment.

Diamond devotes two very fine chapters to Kurzweil on modern Hebrew literature. He provides a lucid analysis of the ideological debate over whether

Franz Rosenzweig that the Hebrew language will no longer demarcate the sacred, and that the day will come when the mere fact that a literary work was written in Hebrew might suffice to make it important for undiscriminating Jewish readers. The sense of calling and frustrated intensity in Kurzweil is most evident when he speaks of language and "the void."

the Haskalah's secularism derived from outside influences alone or from an internal dialectic linked to Sabbateanism. The latter view is that expounded by Scholem, Shapira and Halkin, and Kurzweil's assault on it is an important statement for all contemporary historiography. Diamond notes that Kurzweil is on solid ground in that he bases himself on the views of Klausner and Lachover. These historians of Hebrew literature chart the beginning of the modern period through an assessment of specifically "secular" events and themes.

It is one thing, however, to say that "modern" equals "secular." It is quite another to say, as Kurzweil does, that there can be no overlapping between secular developments and internal religious sectarianism. For Kurzweil the break between traditional and "modern" would appear to be sharp and absolute, allowing no place for shades of development. But he contradicts himself more than once on this score. Diamond may be reflecting his awareness of Kurzweil's vacillation when he discusses Kurzweil's periodization, specifically with regard to the satirist Josef Perl. Kurzweil never tells us, Diamond notes, whether Perl belonged to the "first stage," the "naive Haskalah," or to the "second stage," the "militant Haskalah," or whether Perl was a bridge between the two. The so-called "naive Haskalah" hoped for a rapprochement between Enlightenment humanism and an enlightened Judaism purged of superstition. What Kurzweil could not admit was that the same person could be both "naive" and "militant," the latter disposition inclining to the view that no rapprochement was possible. Perl was a borderline type, as were many other writers, particularly the satirists, who were virtual cultural heroes for Kurzweil. If Kurzweil saw in Agnon, as Diamond notes, "an exquisite balance between vision and absurdity," and if Perl, Bialik, Agnon and Hazaz reflected, for Kurzweil, the blurring of the lines between sacred and profane, why not accept the Scholem-Shapira-Halkin view that modern Hebrew literature is neither a "continuation" nor a "revolution" but rather the crystallization of revolutionary impulses within Judaism? Doubt was not born in the twentieth century, nor was it spawned only by Emancipation. Yet any hypothesis attached to Scholem's name was anathema for Kurzweil due to his fear of Scholem's "demonic" "secret agenda" to relativize and liberalize Judaism. Satire, unexplicated and ambiguous, may have been Kurzweil's more palatable aggressive outlet for some of the same impulses Scholem diagnosed in his too explicit manner.

Diamond presents amply and very well Kurzweil's pioneering contribution to the reading of Agnon, Bialik, the idyllic mode in Tchernichovsky and the "apocalyptic" "remythification" of Uri Zvi Greenberg. Agnon criticism, in particular, will forever have to contend with Kurzweil's brilliantly engaged reading of a number of Agnon's stories. While Diamond's chapter is a fine overview, and he points the reader to articles by Barzel and Friedlaender for specifics, the book might have been more satisfying to the general reader had it contained more detailed examples of Kurzweil's exegesis, at least of Agnon. Kurzweil did indeed possess a remarkable sensitivity for language. Particularly memorable, for example, was his exegesis of the words *lishkat hagazoz* in Agnon's "A Whole Loaf." The juxtaposition of the word *lishkat* from the sublime context of *lishkat hagazit* (Solomon's sanctuary) and the most mundane *gazoz* produces what Kurzweil, in the volume before us, describes as "the short circuit in which satire is ignited" (p. 28). Similarly, Kurzweil's ingenious reading of Uri Zvi Greenberg's

incantatory use of the word "*zeh*" in "Tale of an Ancient Jerusalemite from the Days of King Yannai" helped show how Greenberg induces an awareness of a timelessly present reality. Some taste of Kurzweil's excellent appreciation of Tchernichovsky's poems of King Saul would also have been welcome.

Now of course, much of this is nitpicking with regard to a study as fine as Diamond's. Nevertheless, I think his book could have told us a bit less about Heidegger and Walter Benjamin and "Wittgenstein's Vienna" and a bit more about the nuts and bolts of the critic's workshop. After all, Kurzweil's immortality will ultimately be linked to his indispensable work on Agnon and to parts of his other detailed studies rather than to his dubious eminence as a Hebraic reincarnation of Dilthey or Kraus.

Diamond makes several comments which indicate to me his critical, albeit on balance flattering, evaluation of Kurzweil. That Kurzweil had the mentality of a survivor of the Holocaust is a point well taken. This fact helps us to understand and better tolerate his explosive berating of the bohemianism and irreverence for history in Yizhar's *Yemei Ziklag* (pp. 124–33). Similarly, Diamond's terse verdict that Kurzweil's criticism suffers from being "prescriptive rather than descriptive" speaks volumes.

Diamond is somewhat less critical in maintaining that there is "evidence that young writers took [Kurzweil's] strictures seriously." This is far-fetched. Most of the young writers regarded Kurzweil as a cavalier "European" outsider. On the other hand, a rather large number of distinguished critics of the Bar-Ilan school (among them Yehudah Friedlaender and Hillel Barzel) have honored Kurzweil's name by pursuing important research on Hebrew satire, Agnon, Uri Zvi Greenberg and other areas initially adumbrated by Kurzweil. It is important to mention, however, that Kurzweil did not align himself with the mainstream of Israeli criticism. He held himself aloof from mentioning the contributions of other critics; footnotes are virtually absent from his oeuvre. As Diamond noted, this might well have been a function of Kurzweil's creed of "bracketing" or the *Erlebnis* of mystical communion with the mind of the author. He also addressed himself to relatively few major subjects. Symptomatically, therefore, in a work such as Shmuel Werses's *Criticism of Criticism*[9] or in the lengthy collection of studies on criticism, *Peles*,[10] Kurzweil's name is barely mentioned. This is so because he was remote from the academic enterprise of viewing oneself as part of a tradition of criticism with roots in late nineteenth-century Eastern Europe and in Eretz Yirael before he arrived there.

Diamond's book is, on balance, a lucid, comprehensive and provocative recasting of the critic's formidable presence. It is a superb introduction to a major figure in recent Israeli cultural history, Barukh Kurzweil was consumed by his awe of the Bialikian "void," driven to write yet tormented, I believe, by the hubris or futility of his enterprise. "For the satirist," Kurzweil noted well before his death at his own hand, "there are two modes of expression, silence or

9. *Biqqoret habiqqoret, ha'arakhot vegilgulehen* (Tel Aviv, 1982).

10. *Peles, meḥqarim beviqqoret hasifrut ha'ivrit*, ed. N. Govrin (Tel Aviv University Press, 1980).

suicide."[11] He also cited admiringly Karl Kraus's eulogy for Otto Weininger, the tragic genius with whom Kurzweil identified so strongly: "This suicide was committed out of an attack of intellectual clarity."[12] And Kraus, too, in a famous final issue of his journal after Hitler's entrenchment in power, wrote: "I have nothing to say."[13] With all the imponderables of a suicide, one is tempted to speculate that Kurzweil's Krausian or Bialikian reverence for words and his pained vision may have led him to the point where he, too, had nothing more to say.

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Dual Vocations: The Biblical Scholar and the Biblical Storyteller

Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*. Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1983. 180 pp.

Adele Berlin has written something of an enviable work: quiet, elegant, eminently sane. Its pedagogical clarity will make it a valuable teaching tool for years to come. It is, at the same time, a useful work of theory, one which advances the young science of biblical narrative poetics, whose contours Berlin sketches with a trustworthy eye. Her penchant for well-chosen examples, for a minimum of jargon, and for an abundance of commonsense analogies make the book easy to read, accessible to lay readers, and concretely persuasive. If I was not uniformly persuaded in every aspect of her argument, as I shall suggest further on, my dissensions emanate more from my biases about the biblical texts she deals with than from any lack of appreciation for her accomplishment. If, in the long run, biblical narrative poetics can be said to consist of more than Berlin presents, the field is illuminated by what she does present, and the debate she will occasion will enrich it still further. One is left with the sense that Berlin may also have a great deal of consequence to say about the Hebrew Bible once she steps beyond what she defines as "poetics" into the more volatile and uncertain realm of interpretation. Nevertheless, where poetics leaves off and interpretation begins is perhaps a major unresolved question this book leaves behind.

Berlin's sense of the boundary line seems, to be sure, quite firm. "Poetics, the science of literature," she writes, "is not an interpretive effort—it does not aim to elicit meaning from a text. Rather, it aims to find the building blocks of

11. *In Search of Israeli Literature*, p. 95. Also, see Diamond, p. 30. In the interview with Rachel Eitan which closes the Kurzweil volume, he states his belief in "the redeeming power of intelligence and irony." Throughout the volume he speaks of the fine line between satire and caricature. It is likely that delicately balanced satire was crucial for Kurzweil both in literature and life. The failure of this satirical coping reflex might have had devastating consequences for him.

12. Cited by Diamond, p. 138, n. 83.

13. Szasz, *Karl Kraus and the Soul Doctors*, p. 7.