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## ISRAEL FOR AMERICAN EYES: LITERATURE ON THE MOVE, AND THE MEDIATED REPERTOIRE OF AMERICAN JEWISH IDENTITY, 1960–1980

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**Abstract:** *The translation and mediation of literature can play an important role in the ideologically charged transfer of ideas between cultures. This paper approaches the English translation of Hebrew literature as a subtle form of cultural appropriation, whereby agents such as literary critics, scholars, editors, and translators mediated Israeli notions and narratives into Jewish American literary discourse. The article discusses forms of mediation of Hebrew literature in the 1960s and 1970s that promoted a more progressive, yet less secular, notion of Judaism than that depicted in the source works, and subdued an ant diasporic view of Jewish identity. It shows how high moral standards were represented as an inherent feature of Judaism, and Israeli society was portrayed in a more positive moral light than in the sometimes self-critical source texts. American Jewish readership was thus introduced to a notion of Judaism that the agents assumed would be “easier to stomach” than that of the source literary works, and could serve to reinforce some of the tenets of contemporary American Jewish identity.*

While Israel’s impact on American Jews has long attracted scholarly attention, just in the last decade scholars have explored the religious, ideological, cultural, and political influence of Israel on the identity of American Jews, arguing that Israel has played a significant role, since its establishment in 1948, and particularly in the decades following the 1967 Six-Day War, in shaping the cultural discourse and self-understanding of American Jews.<sup>1</sup> As is clear from these and other studies, this impact had less to do with the actual ties between Israelis and American Jews, within or without the cultural and political establishments, than with the realm of ideas, images, and historical narratives—the realm of collective identity. Such abstract entities are usually not simply borrowed or taken from one culture to another “as is,” but rather, as posited by cultural theorist Itamar

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1. Danny Ben-Moshe and Zohar Segev, eds., *Israel, the Diaspora and Jewish Identity* (Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press, 2007); Chaim Waxman, *Religious Zionism Post Disengagement: Future Directions* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 2008); Jack Wertheimer, “American Jews and Israel: A 60-Year Retrospective,” *The American Jewish Year Book* 108 (2008): 3–79; Emily Katz, *Bringing Zion Home: Israel in American Jewish Culture* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2015).

Even-Zohar, they may be imported and appropriated as “goods”—material or semiotic—into the target culture’s repertoire, *without* maintaining their source culture functions.<sup>2</sup> From this viewpoint, it is the Jewish American appropriation of Israeli notions of nationality, religion, and ethics that may have had the most lasting effect on Jewish American cultural discourse. Indeed, as Emily Alice Katz has recently shown with regard to cultural phenomena such as Israeli folk dance and Israeli art during the early postwar years, “adopting Israel as a focus for such activity allowed American Jews to create what they felt was an authentically Jewish culture”—a culture that corresponded to their own social and communal needs.<sup>3</sup>

Translation studies is an especially revealing lens through which to view the phenomenon of appropriation. As translation scholars have demonstrated, literary translation can play an important role in the ideologically charged transfer of ideas between cultures,<sup>4</sup> and may even be considered “the framework par excellence for research into the formation, transfer and change of cultural (and not just textual or linguistic) repertoires.”<sup>5</sup> Along these lines, the translation of Hebrew literature can be seen as a subtle form of cultural importation, a negotiated absorption of Israel-related notions and narratives into Jewish American literary discourse.

Although it is hard to tell how wide an audience Hebrew literature has actually secured in the United States, it is generally agreed that most readers have been Jewish.<sup>6</sup> Literary scholar Gershon Shaked even suggested that “just as ancient Hebrew literature is being translated into English to make it part of the cultural heritage of American Jews, so also modern literature is being translated for the same purpose.”<sup>7</sup> Shaked further assumed that translated works of Hebrew literature, at least from the 1960s onwards, “have become part of their Jewish identity ... because the protagonists of these stories and their plots are close to their hearts.”<sup>8</sup> This is, perhaps, not too farfetched for the late 1960s and the

2. Itamar Even-Zohar, *Papers in Culture Research* (Tel Aviv: The Culture Research Laboratory, 2010), 52–76.

3. Katz, *Bringing Zion Home*, 15.

4. Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere, *Constructing Cultures: Essays on Literary Translation* (Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters, 1998); Naomi Seidman, *Faithful Renderings: Jewish-Christian Difference and the Politics of Translation* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

5. Rakefet Sela-Sheffy, “The Suspended Potential of Culture Research in Translation Studies,” *Target* 12, no. 2 (2000): 345–55, esp. 348.

6. Robert Alter, “The Rise and the Rise in the United States,” *Modern Hebrew Literature* 7 (1991): 5–7, esp. 6; Alan Mintz, *Translating Israel: Contemporary Hebrew Literature and Its Reception in America* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2001), 60; Yuval Amit, “Yizu’ shel tarbut yisra’elit: Pe’ulatom shel mosadot rishmiyim be-tirgum sifrut me-ivrit le-’anglit” (PhD diss., Tel Aviv University, 2008), 19–20.

7. Gershon Shaked, “Judaism in Translation: Thoughts on the Alexandria Hypothesis,” in *Hebrew in America: Perspectives and Prospects*, ed. Alan Mintz (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1993), 277–95, esp. 285.

8. *Ibid.* In 2001, while acknowledging the relatively high visibility of translated Hebrew literature in the American literary field, Alan Mintz was rather skeptical about a truly meaningful integration of this literature into Jewish American discourse. Mintz attributed this, among other things, to the fact that “the difficult and problematic knowledge of Israel provided by reading Israeli literature ... is the kind of demystifying knowledge that many American Jews would prefer not to have” (Mintz,

1970s, considering the omnipresence of Israel in American Jewish life at the time. However, if, as Shaked believed, “by means of translation, a spiritual bridge is built between Israel and the Diaspora,”<sup>9</sup> then one crucial issue has been overlooked in his and others’ approach to the subject,<sup>10</sup> namely, the role played by agents in shaping this bridge through the appropriation of literary representations of Israel for Jewish American readership.

The recent sociological turn in translation studies and its assumption that “the social function ... of a translation can best be located within the contact zone where the translated text and the various socially driven agencies meet,” are helpful in exploring the ideological role played by the mediation of Hebrew literature within American Jewish discourse.<sup>11</sup> In this framework, the people and institutions involved in the translation process are considered social agents, and their role within situated cultural and historical contexts is elaborated in social terms.<sup>12</sup> Investigating the mediation of translated works within the target culture—in this case, Jewish American culture—can therefore inform the question of communal American Jewish identity.

How, then, did agents, mostly literary critics, but also scholars, editors, and translators, mediate, even modify, images and narratives related to notions of Judaism and Jewishness in Israeli literary works, on their way into Jewish American discourse? What configuration of Jewish identity surfaces from these processes of mediation?

The following discussion of these questions focuses mainly on the decade following the 1967 Six-Day War, considered to be the peak of identification of American Jewry with Israel, but will also trace back a few years before this period.<sup>13</sup> This phase of “Zionization” of American Jewry coincided with several trends: the strengthening of the geopolitical ties between Israel and the United States,<sup>14</sup> the ethnic revival and growing presence of the Holocaust in the politics

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*Translating Israel*, 61). In the last section of this paper, I relate more specifically to the implications of this viewpoint.

9. Shaked, “Judaism in Translation,” 294.

10. Alter, “Rise and Rise”; Amit, “Yizu’ shel tarbut yisra’elit”; Nicholas de Lange, “Hebrew,” in *The Oxford Guide to Literature in English Translation*, ed. Peter France (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 395–401.

11. Michaela Wolf, “Introduction: The Emergence of a Sociology of Translation,” in *Constructing a Sociology of Translation* (Philadelphia: J. Benjamins, 2007), 1–36, esp. 1.

12. Claudia V. Angelelli, ed., *The Sociological Turn in Translation and Interpreting Studies* (Philadelphia: J. Benjamins, 2014).

13. As pointed out convincingly by recent studies, the influence Israel had on various areas of Jewish American cultural life was already evident in these earlier years. See, for example, Katz, *Bringing Zion Home*; Matthew Mark Silver, *Our Exodus: Leon Uris and the Americanization of Israel’s Founding Story* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2010); Deborah Dash Moore, *To the Golden Cities: Pursuing the American Jewish Dream in Miami and L.A.* (New York: Free Press, 1994), 227–61.

14. Campbell Craig and Frederik Logevall, *America’s Cold War: The Politics of Insecurity* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2009), 245–47, 279–81.

of Jewish American identity discourse, which saw a turning inward of many American Jews from the more “universal” stance of earlier years,<sup>15</sup> and the internal debate within American Jewry regarding its identity as a religious and ethnic group in the wake of the religious revival of the postwar years.<sup>16</sup> It is against this social and ideological backdrop that we find varied forms of mediation of Hebrew literature in American Jewish literary discourse, which promoted a more progressive, yet less secular, notion of Judaism than that depicted in the source works, and rejected, or at least subdued, a nationalistic, territorially centered understanding of Jewish identity. We further see how high moral standards were represented as an inherent feature of Judaism, and how, concomitantly, Israeli society was portrayed in a more positive moral light than in the sometimes self-critical source texts. These modes of mediation helped shape a form of Judaism easier to stomach than the one introduced in the source texts, a notion of Judaism that could serve to reinforce some of the tenets of contemporary American Jewish identity.

The works whose mediation is discussed here are not, and do not claim to be, representative of Hebrew literature. Nor should we presume that their depictions of Judaism captured the complex competing notions of Judaism within Israeli society, even as these notions did surface from more-or-less nuanced portrayals. Translations, as formulated by theoretician Gideon Toury, are first and foremost “facts of the target cultures”—it is there where they come into being and receive their meaning, according to target culture values and norms.<sup>17</sup> Thus the organizing principle for selecting the reviews and other forms of mediation considered here is that they communicated in some way or another a discursive demarcation of (American) Judaism. Their common denominator has less to do with the Hebrew source works they dealt with (or their authors), and more with the ways in which these works were appropriated for the American Jewish reader.

Of course, the pattern illustrated here is only part of a multifaceted and complex process of cross-cultural transfer, which has never been monolithic. Moreover, the instances of literary criticism discussed below were taken from varied venues, such as major newspapers and high-brow journals of different ideological orientations, which, in future research, it would be fruitful to have more finely delineated. Nonetheless, diverse as the sources are, the findings presented here point to a common ground that illuminates our understanding of the mediated role of Israel in American Jewish discourse. These findings strongly support, even as they augment and nuance, the claim that has been increasingly made in recent research about American Jews and Israel: that imported content related to Israeli or Zionist identity was negotiated within the frame of reference of the internal

15. Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2000), 171–84.

16. Jacob Neusner, *American Judaism, Adventure in Modernity: An Anthological Essay* (New York: Ktav, 1978).

17. Gideon Toury, *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond* (Philadelphia: J. Benjamins, 2012), 17–35, esp. 23.

cultural needs of American Jewry, and that this negotiation was often contextualized within a religious framework, and assigned some sort of religious meaning.<sup>18</sup>

#### (AMERICAN) BOUNDARIES OF JUDAISM

The desirable boundaries of Judaism, as a religion and blueprint for a collective ethos, shaped the way Jewish identity was appropriated through the integration of Hebrew literature into the Jewish American cultural discourse. Reviews of translated works formed the literary discourse in ways perhaps best understood in the context of the internal debate within American Jewry regarding its identity as a religious and ethnic group in the wake of the religious revival of the 1950s. Jacob Neusner's influential 1978 anthological essay *American Judaism: Adventure in Modernity*, an eclectic sample of writings by Jewish American thinkers mostly from the 1960s, reflects contemporary intellectual and theological trends.<sup>19</sup> It includes two recurring themes pertinent to our study: the expressed fear of the loss of a distinct Jewish identity through secularization or through a rupture with the Jewish past,<sup>20</sup> and, at the same time, a distancing of American Jews from the traditional observance of classical Judaism.<sup>21</sup> Similar anxieties are reflected in segments of the literary discourse around Hebrew literature. The inclination of reviewers to accept or reject conceptions of Judaism that arise from the translated Hebrew works essentially hints at the boundaries of a "preferable" form of Judaism for their readership.

The critique of translated works by S. Y. Agnon following his reception of the Nobel Prize in 1966 is particularly revealing. Agnon's works were increasingly translated and published in the late 1960s and 70s. In fact, his Nobel may have been an "early catalyst" in the process that led to the substantial rise of translated Hebrew literature in America in the 1970s and 80s.<sup>22</sup> As Sylvia Barack Fishman has argued, "translations of classical, poetic, tradition-steeped works by S. Y. Agnon tend to intensify feelings of the mystical connection that Jews around

18. This can be seen, for example, in the role Israel was given in religious practices and institutions. See Wertheimer, "American Jews and Israel," 8–22; David Ellenson, "Envisioning Israel in the Liturgies of North American Liberal Judaism," in *Envisioning Israel: The Changing Ideals and Images of North American Jews*, ed. Allon Gal (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1996), 117–48. See also Zohar Segev, "European Zionism in the United States: The Americanization of Herzl's Doctrine by American Zionist Leaders—Case Studies," *Modern Judaism* 26, no. 3 (2006): 274–91; Jonathan Sarna, "A Projection of America as It Ought to Be: Zion in the Mind's Eye of American Jews," in Gal, *Envisioning Israel*, 41–59; and Katz, *Bringing Zion Home*, esp. 49–80.

19. Neusner, *American Judaism*.

20. See Howard Singer, *Bring Forth the Mighty Men: On Violence and the Jewish Character* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1969), 227–32; Arthur A. Cohen, "Between Two Traditions," *Midstream* 12, no. 6 (1966): 31–34.

21. Arthur Hertzberg, "The American Jew and His Religion," in *The American Jew: A Reappraisal*, ed. Oscar I. Janowsky (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1964), 101–3, 115–17.

22. Alter, "Rise and Rise," 6.

the world may feel toward Jewish tradition and the Jewish homeland.”<sup>23</sup> Yet Agnon’s works, which relate to questions of religion and faith in an oftentimes suggestive and ambiguous manner, also provided a platform for reviewers to express views on contemporary religious issues in America. Two general responses, outlining opposite boundaries of liberal American Judaism, were the dismissal of classical observant Judaism, on the one hand, and the renunciation of an ultrasecular approach to Jewish identity, on the other. The first response—the implied rejection of (ultra-)Orthodoxy as a “primitive” system of beliefs and way of life—was more prevalent in reviews of Agnon’s works anchored in hasidic surroundings. For example, in his review of Agnon’s *The Bridal Canopy* in the *New York Times* in May 1967, writer and journalist Richard Elman states that the novel is flawed because of the way it celebrates the hasidic Judaism of early nineteenth-century Galicia.<sup>24</sup> Elman connects his unabashed objection to the “naïve” conventions of culture presented in the novel to the historical circumstances and eventual fate of European Jewry. Elman sharply reminds the readers that “just a few years after *The Bridal Canopy* was written, they were being herded into gas vans and before fusillades,” and goes on to assert that “the fact of God’s failure to ‘minister justice’ to his ‘peoples with equity’ does set limits on our ability to appreciate such celebrational works.”<sup>25</sup> Because of his preference for a more skeptical and less traditionally observant form of Judaism than Hasidism, Elman denied the literary value of Agnon’s novel. “I’m sure [the book’s translations] will be great successes,” he writes sarcastically, “on the coffee tables and in the Judaica shops of Jewish suburban communities.”<sup>26</sup> Elman seems to have missed the subtle irony Agnon directed at his pious characters, some of which was perhaps lost in translation. More importantly, Elman’s description of the Judaism of *The Bridal Canopy* as folkloristic and historically irrelevant allows him to chart the boundaries of the Judaism he finds desirable for his American readers.

A few months later, in December 1967, a review of Naftali Chaim Brandwein’s *In the Courtyards of Jerusalem* in the *New York Times* by historian Laurence Lafore was grounded in similar principles. Brandwein’s stories are situated in comparable socioreligious settings to those of Agnon’s work, rather uncharacteristically for translated Hebrew literature at the time, whose prevalent narratives revolved around secular mainstream Israeli society. Lafore cannot seem to hide that his uneasiness with the stories, which are anchored in the ultra-Orthodox community in Jerusalem, responds to some extent to the “backwardness” of Jewish life presented in them. “Some of the stories are moving,” he writes, “but the deeper human relationships do not often emerge from the theological and sociological details of ritual butchering, pillars of fire, shaven earlocks and sacrificial

23. Sylvia Barack Fishman, “Homelands of the Heart: Israel and Jewish Identity in American Jewish Fiction,” in Gal, *Envisioning Israel*, 271–92, esp. 278.

24. Richard Elman, “With Faith in the Lord,” *New York Times*, May 28, 1967, BR2.

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ibid.*

urges.”<sup>27</sup> Lafore’s estrangement from the stories cannot be separated from the alienation he feels towards ultra-Orthodox life, the features of which he lists with irony and aversion. By discarding the “primitive” sociology and theology of the “orthodox and rather archaic residents of the quarter-of-the-walls,”<sup>28</sup> Lafore implicitly hints at his preference for a more progressive form of Judaism.

While some reviewers, such as Elman and Lafore, did not separate the discussion of literary merits of works from their own socioreligious inclinations, others implied preference for a certain form of Judaism in literary discourse in other ways. Henry W. Levy’s review of Agnon’s *The Bridal Canopy* and *In the Heart of Seas* in the *Baltimore Sun* in May 1967 indicated his viewpoint more subtly. Levy declares the target audience of these books to be limited: “This is specialized reading,” Levy writes, “for Jews of piety and knowledge, and for all others who are knowledgeable and interested in biblical lore and Chassidic legend.”<sup>29</sup> By removing Agnon’s novels from the modernist canon and locating them in Jewish folkloristic lore, Levy, like Elman and Lafore, implies a distance not only from the literary works themselves but also from the kind of mystical Judaism they depict, underscoring the irrelevance of (ultra-)Orthodox Judaism for the contemporary educated American Jewish reader.

Discussions of Agnon’s works also touched on topics far removed from hasidic or more traditional Judaism. Agnon, perhaps paradoxically, also served reviewers to express reservations about secularism, the other extreme of Judaism. They wrote explicitly about Israeli secularism, but their critiques may also be seen as pertinent to the religious blueprint of American Jewry. The socio-religious judgments implied in such literary critiques helped outline additional boundaries of liberal Judaism in the American context in a period when American Jews, as Jacob Neusner argued, had grown more secular, but had not lost their need for traditional and historical particularity, the need to “remain Jewish.” As Neusner wrote, “The archaic ‘holy people’ has passed from the scene. In its place stands something different in all respects but the most important: its manifest and correct claim to continue as Jews, a different, separate group, *and* the claim that that difference is destiny.”<sup>30</sup>

After Agnon won the Nobel Prize in 1966, literary critic and Jewish studies scholar Curt Leviant described Agnon’s work in a piece in *The Nation* as something that “has little in common with the often cosmopolitan and consciously un-Jewish contemporary Israeli literature.” According to Leviant, Agnon suggested that “Judaism in exile is not complete without Zion, and that Jews in Zion are not complete without faith and Tora.”<sup>31</sup> Leviant expresses appreciation for the Jewish foundations of Agnon’s poetics, and for what he perceives to be Agnon’s message for contemporary Israelis about the persisting need in Israel for “faith and Tora.” Significantly, he not only dubs Agnon “the representative

27. Laurence Lafore, “Short Turns and Encores,” *New York Times*, December 10, 1967, 388.

28. *Ibid.*

29. Henry W. Levy, “Two Novels by Agnon, Nobel Laureate,” *Baltimore Sun*, May 21, 1967, D5.

30. Neusner, *American Judaism*, 148.

31. Curt Leviant, “Nobel Laureate of Hebrew Literature,” *The Nation*, December 12, 1966, 645.

Jewish artist of our time,” but also describes him as “a literary expatriate in his own homeland.”<sup>32</sup> Two years later, in his review of the literary anthology *The New Israeli Writers* in *The Saturday Review*, Leviant regrets Agnon’s absence from the anthology, and explicitly bemoans the lack of Jewishness in most of its stories, which he sees as a distinct weakness in these works, and which he connects to the loaded opposition between Diaspora and homeland: “Alienated from the religious tradition, these young Israeli writers are so rooted in their land that their Jewishness is no longer evident.” Leviant then continues, “In the Jewish state young writers are seeking a chic cosmopolitanism that strips their world of all identifying elements; The Jewish problem is equated with the despised Diaspora.”<sup>33</sup> Through this proposition, however, Leviant himself assumes an affinity between secularism and the “negation of the Diaspora” he so painfully ascribes here to Israeli culture. That is, inadvertently, he himself seems to adopt the dichotomy (Canaanite, in essence, as will be elaborated later) that sets “land” and “Judaism” as two antithetical alternatives, the gulf between which cannot be bridged. The undertones to his claim are both social and religious: Leviant not only deplors the marginal status of Judaism in Hebrew literature, but also obliquely dismisses secularism as a viable foundation for Jewish identity.<sup>34</sup>

In a similar vein, Richard Elman’s 1968 review of S. Y. Agnon’s *A Guest for the Night* in the *New York Times* relates in passing to what he sees as a spiritual void in Israeli culture. The review contrasts this void with Agnon’s oeuvre, which, as celebrated by Elman, profusely draws from classical Jewish sources. Elman does not refrain from taking sides, and suggests that “one can see Agnon’s chosen style and subject matter only as an implicit commentary on the narrow, behavioristic pragmatism which is at the center of so much Israeli life and thought.”<sup>35</sup> Parenthetically, in the 1990s, Alan Mintz, an avid Agnon scholar, in reviews of David Grossman and A. B. Yehoshua, similarly expressed

32. Ibid.

33. Curt Leviant, “The New Israeli Writers,” *Saturday Review*, December 6, 1969, 57.

34. Perhaps the most influential American Jewish thinker to propose such criticism of Israel was the Reform rabbi and Zionist leader Abba Hillel Silver. “[The Jews of the State of Israel] need Judaism quite as much as we do,” Silver stated in a well-known sermon. “A political state cannot be counted upon to preserve our spiritual heritage.” Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver, “Living Judaism,” in *American Jewish History: A Primary Source Reader*, ed. Gary Phillip Zola and Marc Dollinger (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2014), 291.

35. Richard Elman, “Parable and Commentary,” *New York Times*, April 28, 1968, BR5. During the first decades following the establishment of the state, representations of (the generally more traditionally observant) Mizrahi Jews in Hebrew literature tended to be negative and one-dimensional; they were portrayed as morally and culturally inferior to Ashkenazic Jews (Lev Hakak, *Yerudim ve-na'alim: Demutam shel Yehude ha-mizrah ba-sipur ha-ivri ha-kazar* [Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1981]). English translations, reflecting this tendency, did not offer the American readership a much different picture. Revealing as well is that the only Hebrew-language anthology of Hebrew literature published in America in the 1950s had one story with a character of a Mizrahi Jew, “A Guest for Pesach” by Sholem Aleichem. In this story, a Mizrahi Jew, whose clothes and accent are ridiculed, is hospitably invited by a generous Ashkenazic family to stay for Passover; during the night, he steals their money, jewelry, and silverware (Simha Rubinstein and Benjamin Benari, eds., *Reader in Modern Hebrew Literature* [New York: Jewish Education Committee of New York, 1956]).

disappointment at the secularist tendency of Israeli writers to barely draw, if at all, on the wealth of historical Jewish sources.<sup>36</sup> Emphasizing that his outlook is one “viewed through American Jewish eyes,” Mintz later emphatically regretted, in what could be seen as a summation of this viewpoint, that “Israeli culture often views the spiritual achievements and imaginative creations of Jewish civilization over the ages as so much poison fruit,” and warned that this denial of access to “the imaginative reservoir of the Jewish past” runs the risk of “desultory shallowness.”<sup>37</sup> When speaking of Hebrew literature in the past decades, he voiced his fear that at least “around the margins there are signs of cultural insufficiency that may signal more serious problems if a deeper connection to the past is not made.”<sup>38</sup>

This Israeli approach to the Jewish past, perhaps most explicitly manifested in the Zionist tenet of the “negation of the Diaspora” alluded to by Leviant, influenced the Israeli view of contemporary Diaspora Jewry as well. This, of course, was nothing new to American Jews, as evident in the circumstances of the Ben-Gurion-Blaustein exchange of the late 1940s and early 1950s, to state one well-known example from the political field.<sup>39</sup> Its mediation in the literary field, however, was different in tone, as the Jewish American response to the challenge seems to have been less “head-on.”<sup>40</sup>

Such an approach could be found, for example, in academic circles, where modern Hebrew literature was gradually treated more seriously.<sup>41</sup> A 1959 book by Eisig Silberschlag, professor of Judaic studies and then dean of Hebrew College in Boston, *Hebrew Literature: An Evaluation*, provides a short introduction to Hebrew literature from biblical times to the present day. Discussing contemporary Hebrew literature, Silberschlag writes with aversive irony about the anti-Jewish Canaanite movement, somewhat influential in Israel during the 1940s and 50s, which discarded the connection between Judaism and the new nation being built in Palestine, and called on Hebrew youth to disaffiliate themselves from Judaism, believing the nation should be rooted in territory and language alone, not religion.<sup>42</sup> “In creating an artificial dichotomy,” Silberschlag concludes, “the Canaanites have succeeded in branding all Jews who are not native to Israel as

36. Mintz, *Translating Israel*, 35–36.

37. *Ibid.*, 244–45.

38. *Ibid.*

39. Zvi Ganin, *An Uneasy Relationship: American Jewish Leadership and Israel, 1948–1957* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2005), 81–104. Following recurring, bluntly phrased demands made by David Ben-Gurion in the wake of the establishment of Israel that American Jews make Aliyah, the head of the American Jewish Committee, Jacob Blaustein, pressed Ben-Gurion to clarify the relations between the two Jewish centers by providing public assurances that American Jews owed no political allegiance to Israel.

40. As works by Cynthia Ozick and Philip Roth can demonstrate; see Ursula Zeller, “Between *Goldene Medine* and *Promised Land*: Legitimizing the American Jewish Diaspora,” *Cross Cultures* 66 (2003): 1–44.

41. Arnold J. Band, “From Sacred Tongue to Foreign Language: Hebrew in the American University,” in Mintz, *Hebrew in America*, 171–86.

42. Eisig Silberschlag, *Hebrew Literature: An Evaluation* (New York: Herzl Institute, 1959).

total strangers and foreigners. But their ideas and ideology are no longer in vogue. Jewish consciousness—*todaah yehudit*—is the current aspiration and slogan. And it emphasizes identification with total Jewry, historical continuity and knowledge of Jewish classics rather than exclusive veneration of a very remote past.”<sup>43</sup>

By ridiculing the Canaanites and depicting them as marginal, Silberschlag reflected, perhaps more than anything else, the Jewish American apprehension and dismay at the “negation of the Diaspora” in Zionist thought. Silberschlag’s claim about the centrality of “Jewish consciousness” and the “identification with total Jewry” in contemporary Israeli literature and thought, too, mirrored his own desire, and the desire of other contemporary American Zionists,<sup>44</sup> more than Israeli reality at the time. As famously posited by scholar of Jewish thought Eliezer Schweid, the tendency of major Israeli writers of the 1950s to search restlessly for new subject matter can be actually ascribed to the spiritual crises experienced as a result of these writers’ growing distance from Judaism and Jewish tradition.<sup>45</sup> As for Silberschlag’s claim about Israeli “identification with total Jewry,” in fact, Israeli literary discourse was rather disinclined to see contemporary Diaspora culture as a living source of Jewish identity. For instance, Israeli literary critic Yisrael Cohen assigned the translation of Israeli works into languages of the Diaspora a redemptory significance; Cohen saw such translations from Hebrew as a crucial means to breathe new life into the withering Diaspora and to help save it from its imminent and total cultural assimilation.<sup>46</sup>

While most Israeli works selected for English translation did not deal with the issue of the contemporary Diaspora directly, some diasporic characters in Hebrew works were portrayed extremely unfavorably; in these cases, we find literary reviews that rejected what they felt to be a demonization of the Diaspora. David Stern’s review of Amos Oz’s *Elsewhere, Perhaps*, translated into English by Nicholas de Lange in 1973, is a case in point. In his review in *Commentary* in July 1974, Stern protests that “Arabs and Diaspora Jews are forever being strait-jacketed into Oz’s embodiment of the power of Evil,” and declares that “Israeli literature, if it is ever to mature, will undoubtedly have to confront the critical issue of the relationship of Diaspora Jewry to Israel and the relation of Israel to Diaspora Jewry, in all its troubled complexity.”<sup>47</sup> While Stern’s tone may be condescending,<sup>48</sup> his rhetoric is revealing. By defining the capability of “successfully” dealing with Israel-Diaspora relations as a mandatory step for the full growth of Hebrew literature, Stern presupposes Hebrew literature almost as a

43. *Ibid.*, 61.

44. See, for example, Mordecai Menahem Kaplan’s seminal *A New Zionism* (New York: Theodor Herzl Press and Jewish Reconstructionist Press, 1959).

45. Eliezer Schweid, *Shalosh 'ashmorot* (Tel Aviv: ‘Am ‘Oved, 1964), 202–24. This would gradually change in later years, see Anita Shapira, “Le-‘an halkhah ‘shelilat ha-galut?,” *‘Alpayim* 25 (2003): 9–54, esp. 31–46.

46. Yisrael Cohen, “Yafyuto shel shem be-‘oholey yefet,” in *Sha‘ar ha-havhanot* (1957; Tel Aviv: Va‘ad, 1962), 132–41, esp. 136.

47. David Stern, “Morality Tale,” *Commentary* 58 (July 1974): 100–101.

48. As already noted by Alan Mintz, see *Translating Israel*, 34.

proxy of Israeli society; communally representative of Israel and bearing some kind of social responsibility for its American Jewish readers. In fact, it was not that rare for Hebrew literature to be equated with Israeli society by Jewish American critics. Often, the line between literary autonomy and social claims was readily blurred. It is clear that for pieces of Hebrew literature to be accepted within Jewish American literary discourse, at least as viable contributions to Jewish identity, it did not work in their favor to be perceived as outright anti-diasporic. If they were, some mediation was required on part of agents, so as to deal with this competing—perhaps threatening—conception of Jewish identity.

A more direct strategy of appropriation that interfered with the literary work, yet at the same time stayed hidden from sight, unavailable for scrutiny, was to deal with critique of Diaspora Jews through the manipulation of the translation itself. One such case appears in Dalya Bilu's 1980 translation of David Shahar's novel *His Majesty's Agent*, published by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. A close textual comparison of the Hebrew source and the English translation reveals methodical interference in the translation meant to subdue Shahar's acerbic depiction of a representative Jewish American character.<sup>49</sup> As I have learned from personal correspondence, Bilu herself was unaware of these alterations, and it was presumably the editor who made the changes while shaping the final draft of the translation.<sup>50</sup>

In one of the novel's chapters, the Israeli narrator, a soldier in the Yom Kippur War, is required to join the Jewish American thinker and writer Abie Driesel, who was invited to Israel by the Ministry of Public Relations to follow the war, with hope that Driesel would present Israel favorably in the American media. The character of Abie Driesel, who clearly stands for notable Jewish author and political activist Elie Wiesel, is caustically portrayed by Shahar. Driesel is painted as a pompous and self-indulgent media star who knows little about Israel and cares only about his own comfort. Because of the charged timing of Driesel's visit, this sarcastic chapter could be interpreted as targeting American Jewry in general, represented here by one of its biggest icons. To subdue the unambiguous satire of Elie Wiesel, the editor of the translation first changed the character's name from Abie Driesel to Jules Levy, blurring his identification with Wiesel. More blatant interferences in the translation were large-scale omissions of passages and scenes bearing various modes of ridicule, mostly targeting the character's "moral fiber," in an otherwise faithfully translated book.<sup>51</sup>

In sum, even as Israeli thought and literary expression were integrated into Jewish American cultural discourse, and even as translated Hebrew works were being read, as Robert Alter presumed, not only by Jewish readers indiscriminately committed to Zionism, but also by "more independent and more unpredictable

49. David Shahar, *Sokhen hod malkhuto* (1979; Tel Aviv: Yediot Sefarim, 2007); David Shahar, *His Majesty's Agent*, trans. Dalya Bilu (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980).

50. Dalya Bilu, telephone conversation, June 25, 2015.

51. Omri Asscher, "The Ideological Manipulation of Hebrew Literature in English Translation in the 1970s and 1980s," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 15, no. 3 (2016): 384–401, esp. 396–97.

Jews who are deeply curious about Israel, critically or passionately concerned about its complex fate,<sup>52</sup> negative portrayals of the Diaspora or of American Jews, as represented in certain works of Hebrew literature, were appropriated or moderated for the American Jewish readership. This tendency should not be taken only as a practical attempt to help maintain the ties between the two major centers of world Jewry by making the translated works less potentially objectionable. Rather, it could be understood in the context of the need to reassert the viability of Jewish nationhood and collectiveness without sovereignty,<sup>53</sup> as well as the viability of the Americanized version of Zionism.<sup>54</sup> That is, it should be seen as a negotiation of ideas about Jewish identity, and, implicitly or explicitly, as a demarcation of a “desirable” form of Judaism for American readership. If postwar Jewish American collective identity was founded primarily on notions of religion and ethnicity, while Israeli identity was more closely tied to ideas of nationality,<sup>55</sup> it is not surprising that through the American mediation of Hebrew literature, expressions of territorially based nationality, or negative portrayals of Diaspora Jews, were suppressed, while approaches to religion were appropriated for the target culture’s needs.

#### THE MORAL CRITERION

While mediating agents implicitly placed alternative interpretations of Jewish communal identity such as (ultra-)Orthodoxy and (ultra-)secularism, as well as a critical approach to the Diaspora, outside the boundaries of a preferable Judaism, they affirmed humanistic values and moral contemplation as tenets of Jewish religion and culture. Indeed, reviews of translated Hebrew literature demonstrated, in this respect, an affinity to the religious and intellectual discourse of the American Jewish elite at the time. The leadership of the Reform movement, in particular, “had come to stress activity for the promotion of social justice as one of the central pillars of Judaism.”<sup>56</sup> The reviews of *The Brigade* by Hanoch Bartov that appeared in 1968 are instructive in this respect, as they seem to echo something of this widespread theological trend.

Bartov’s novel describes the journey of a Jewish brigade from ‘Erez Yisra’el through defeated Nazi Germany after the end of the war. The protagonist, Elisha, struggles with the temptation to take revenge on the local Germans but withstands this temptation, as well as stops his friends from acting out their own reprisal. Henry W. Levy, who reviewed the novel approvingly in the *Baltimore Sun*, concludes his discussion by relating to contemporary political reality. Levy begins by

52. Alter, “Rise and Rise,” 6.

53. Zeller, “Between *Goldene Medine* and Promised Land,” 9.

54. Kaplan, *A New Zionism*; Yosef Gorny, *The State of Israel in Jewish Public Thought* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 79–91.

55. Eliezer Ben-Rafael, Judit Bokser Liwerant, and Yosef Gorny, eds., introduction to *Reconsidering Israel-Diaspora Relations* (Boston: Brill, 2014), 1–22, esp. 4–6.

56. Bernard Martin, “American Jewry since 1945: An Historical Overview,” in *Movements and Issues in American Judaism: An Analysis and Sourcebook of Developments since 1945* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1978), 3–24, esp. 14.

saying that “symbolically, our youthful protagonist is unquestionably pure Judaism in its highest moral stance,” but then asks if this was “a manifestation of importance, of unreality, in an amoral world? Can a nation, like Israel, survive on pure idealism?”<sup>57</sup> The conception of elevated humanistic values as the definitive feature of Judaism, central to Reform Judaism but present in one way or another in the ideology of the other major American denominations, is the clear undertone here. In fact, the identification of Judaism with high moral values finds another, more practical and political expression in Levy’s review: Israel, the Jewish state, is represented as the morally superior side in the Arab-Israeli conflict, a victim by definition (by being Jewish), guided by high ideals but hurled into an immoral world, and left undecided between complete and pure morality (“Judaism”), on the one hand, and more pragmatic, realpolitik policies, on the other.

A similarly subtle protective approach that touches on moral issues can be found in the reviews of Yoram Kaniuk’s *The Acrophile* that appeared in 1961. Kaniuk’s novel follows the life of Daan, a young Israeli living in New York, as he debates whether to return to Israel, towards which he is ambivalent, trying but failing to integrate into American life as a university professor. One of the main themes of Kaniuk’s work is the obsessive guilt that haunts Daan for accidentally killing an Arab boy in the 1948 War of Independence, perceived by some Israeli critics as the main reason for Daan’s withdrawal from Israel to America. This rather subversive representation of the ethics involved in the Zionist super-narrative was ignored or subdued in American reviews. The anonymous review of the novel in *Booklist*, for instance, states very generally that “[Kaniuk] illuminates an individual’s search for self-identity and emotional independence, and, in some degree, mirrors the apartness and loneliness of modern man,” yet never refers to the central scene of the killing of the Arab boy nor attests to its symbolic meaning in the novel.<sup>58</sup> Jane Hayman’s long and rather serious review of the novel in *Commentary* refers to the killing in passing, yet never reveals to her readers the fact that its victim was an Arab: “Daan, who took part in a bloody incident in Israel, longs to rise above his sense of sin. He divorces the human race and becomes a child symbolically.”<sup>59</sup> By describing the scene as a “bloody incident,” tucked within a dependent clause, without admitting its specific historical circumstances nor going into detail about the participants in the incident and their roles, Hayman disregards the national context of the scene and subdues its critical ideological meaning. Finally, the review of the novel by (Jewish) literary editor Rollene Sall in the *New York Times* does briefly note that the protagonist’s emotional anguish may be related to the killing, yet she too downplays its crucial national context: “[Daan] tries to destroy what is human within him. Perhaps it’s because he is desperately guilt-ridden. In Israel he watched and participated helplessly in the wanton slaughter of an Arab family. Man’s savagery was too

57. Henry W. Levy, “Victory—and Vengeance,” *Baltimore Sun*, January 28, 1968, D5.

58. “The Acrophile,” *Booklist*, June 15, 1961, 635.

59. Jane Hayman, “The Futile and the Uncertain,” *Commentary* 36 (June 1961): 550–52, esp. 552.

much for him, and he has tried to resign from the human race. Airplanes, tall buildings, mountains, the freedom of a fly attract him. Human life he denies.”<sup>60</sup> Sall’s interpretation strips the killing of its particular historical context and important national connotations: it is “man’s savagery” that brought Kaniuk’s character to “resign from the human race,” she broadly states. Ignoring the different outcomes of the war for the peoples involved, she does not reveal to her readers the symbolic dimension of the scene, so pertinent to Kaniuk’s novel, where a person of one nationality was responsible for the catastrophe of a person of another nationality.<sup>61</sup>

Reviews of Aharon Megged’s *Fortunes of a Fool* from 1962 took a similar approach. The chapter in the novel entitled “The White City,” in which Megged describes the Israeli conquest of Gaza in the 1956 Sinai Campaign as unnecessarily brutal, is one of the few examples of early Israeli literary works that show empathy to the suffering of Arab characters.<sup>62</sup> A testament to its importance was its selection, as an independent piece, for an anthology of short stories published in English in Israel in 1965.<sup>63</sup> The chapter was later included in a curriculum of Hebrew literature courses in American universities. According to Robert Alter, the deep moral crisis suffered by the protagonist in the novel stems primarily from his trauma depicted in the “White City” chapter.<sup>64</sup> Nonetheless, Rinna Samuel’s rather long appraisal of the novel in the *New York Times* does not mention this chapter at all.<sup>65</sup> Samuel notes that the work’s “greatest merit, perhaps, is the way in which, without ever mentioning that the background is Israel, Megged manages to flash before the reader portrait after portrait of Israel, her people, their most characteristic moods and postures,”<sup>66</sup> and indeed goes on to detail some of them, yet leaves out the aspect of Israeli reality that elicited Megged’s chief protest—the needless brutality of Israeli soldiers during the military invasion of Sinai in 1956. Samuel’s critique of Megged’s novel thus helps portray Israel in a more favorable light than does the source text. As in the reviews of Israeli works discussed above, problematic and “unpleasant” depictions of contemporary Jewish conduct were subtly left outside the boundaries of a desirable Judaism.

As evident from the Robert Alter’s 1970 course “America and Israel: Literary and Intellectual Trends” at the University of California, Berkeley, a comparable protectiveness of Israeli literature was also found in the academy.<sup>67</sup> In one of

60. Rollene Sall, “All Roads Led to Nightmare,” *New York Times*, March 5, 1961, BR40.

61. Yochai Oppenheimer, *Me-‘ever la-gader: Yizug ha-‘aravim ba-siporet ha-‘ivrit ve-ha-yisra’elit*, 1906–2005 (Tel Aviv: ‘Am ‘Oved, 2008), 205.

62. David C. Jacobson, “Intimate Relations between Israelis and Palestinians in Fiction by Israeli Women Writers,” *Shofar* 25, no. 3 (2007): 32.

63. Shemuel Yeshayahu Penueli and Azriel Ukhmani, *Hebrew Short Stories: An Anthology* (Tel Aviv: Institute for the Translation of Hebrew Literature, 1965).

64. Robert Alter, introduction to *Israeli Stories*, ed. Joel Blocker (New York: Schocken, 1962), 18.

65. Rinna Samuel, “Procession of Defeats,” *New York Times*, September 23, 1962, 325.

66. *Ibid.*

67. The course was documented in detail and published by Hadassah. Robert Alter, *America and Israel: Literary and Intellectual Trends* (New York: The Jewish Education Department of Hadassah, 1970).

the lectures in this course, Alter touched on the representation of the Israeli-Arab conflict in Hebrew literature. Alter chose to relay real wartime experiences told by Israeli soldiers—quite unusual in itself for a class in literature—taken from the 1967 *Siah lohamim* (literally “conversations with soldiers,” translated into English as *The Seventh Day* in 1970), a compilation of interviews with kibbutznik soldiers who fought in the Six-Day War. Relying on these interviews, Alter induced a generalization about what he perceived to be an asymmetry between Jewish and Arab ethics as revealed in the conflict, and went on to claim that “in stark contrast [to the Arab side], the degree of moral conscience Israelis have managed to preserve, the degree of their resistance to brutalization, is quite remarkable. And this moral conscience seems to me to have a peculiarly Jewish character.”<sup>68</sup> Alter makes similar assertions in his introductory comments to a story by S. Yizhar, in his 1975 literary anthology *Modern Hebrew Literature*,<sup>69</sup> widely used in Hebrew literature classes in American universities.<sup>70</sup> In both cases, he presents high moral standards as an inherent feature of Judaism, tied to Jewish communal identity.

Another pattern of shielding can be found in ideological manipulations in translations themselves, most of which had to do with the moral dimension of the portrayal of Israel and Israeli society. These are mainly interferences in subject matter related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In these cases, agents had (1) moderated descriptions of (Jewish) Israeli aggression targeted at Arabs, and brought the text closer to the hegemonic Zionist narrative; (2) subdued the national Otherness embedded in the voice of Palestinian characters; and (3) omitted explicit references to the Nakba or Palestinian refugee problem.<sup>71</sup> When asked in personal correspondence about the shifts in their translations, the translators who could still be contacted responded that they did not clearly remember the fine details of the translation process, which had indeed been undertaken more than thirty years ago, but that they strongly believed that they had not introduced, of their own accord, any ideological alterations to the original text. The authors who could still be contacted similarly rejected the idea of ever introducing changes for political considerations. The manipulations likely occurred during the editorial process, but, admittedly, this can never be verified. In any case, while it is true that “works of Israeli novelists and poets in translation have worked to counteract the stereotype of Israel as an idyllic and morally untroubled land,”<sup>72</sup> this interference in the text softened critical depictions of representative Jewish characters and morally questionable behavior on their part, as well as presented a less ambiguous version of the institutionalized Zionist narrative.

A representative case of these kind of interferences is the translation of Aharon Megged’s novel *The Living on the Dead* (1965) by Misha Louvish in

68. *Ibid.*, 39.

69. Robert Alter, *Modern Hebrew Literature* (New York: Behrman House, 1975), 293.

70. Cf. list of syllabi in Leon Yudkin and Bryan Cheyette, eds., *Modern Hebrew Literature in English Translation: Papers, Selected Syllabi and Bibliographies* (New York: M. Wiener, 1987).

71. For a detailed discussion, see Asscher, “Ideological Manipulation,” esp. 384–94.

72. Fishman, “Homelands of the Heart,” 278.

1971, which presents a less equivocal image of Israeli morals than the source text.<sup>73</sup> The novel's narrator, Jonas, plans to write a biography of the legendary Third Aliyah pioneer Davidov, and goes on to interview Davidov's many old companions and fellow pioneers. In the following paragraph, a friend of Davidov's from the early settlement days tells Jonas about the part played by Davidov in the establishment of Upper Hanita in the Western Galilee. After he mentions an affair Davidov was having with the wife of another worker, the man describes the Jewish settlers' forceful evacuation of the Arab farmers who lived and worked there.<sup>74</sup> (Phrases that were omitted in the translation are translated by me into English, incorporated in the translation, and crossed out, while what that was added to the translation is in boldface and in brackets.)

"Look, I don't take it upon myself to decide what is moral and what isn't, but there are some things, how should I say, that are like defying the order of nature, if I can put it like that."

~~There was a large stone house in Upper Hanita where Arab farmers dwelled. They refused to evacuate it before being compensated with large sums of money. Every day, men from the detail would come and negotiate with them, and they would ask for more. One day, Davidov suggested to take the place by force. Twenty men were brought up there, equipped with hoes, hammers, barbed wire, sacks. They entered the inner yard and started to turn it into a stronghold, surrounding it with a fence and trenches, and fixing its walls. The Arabs still would not leave, so all their things were taken out; the inhabitants and their possessions were mounted on donkeys and sent across the border. This was how Upper Hanita was conquered. A spotlight was then placed on top of the roof, and the two Hanitas would signal each other every night, from the stone house to the tower within the stockade.~~

**[When Upper Hanita was taken]** Davidov moved to the top of the hill. From then on he would set out from there to accompany the surveyors, the truck that maintained communications between the two points, the tractor that reaped the disputed fields. (English, p. 173; Hebrew, p. 158)

While Davidov's affair with another man's wife, and other portrayals of his immoralities, were not deemed condemnatory enough to be omitted from the translation, the novel's only scene to testify to any violence that was part of the Jewish acquisition of land in Mandatory Palestine was eliminated, and the English passage was neatly stitched around it. As a result of this omission, Davidov and his fellow settlers, and the story of the establishment of Hanita, are portrayed as more ethically sound, and the Arab farmers are now not even mentioned. The translation spares the reader "unpleasant" facts about the Third Aliyah pioneers and some of the dire consequences of the Zionist settlement enterprise for the local population.

73. Aharon Megged, *Ha-hai 'al ha-met* (Tel Aviv: 'Am 'Oved, 1965); Aharon Megged, *The Living on the Dead*, trans. Misha Louvish (New York: McCall, 1971).

74. Note that the first sentence refers to Davidov's affair, not the expulsion of the Arabs.

The protective tendency of this and other translations can be explained as stemming from a political desire to defend the image of Israeli society within the Jewish American community and American society as a whole; surely this explanation would not be wrong. However, these tendencies can also be understood as rooted in the internal discourse of American Jewish identity, and the felt need to produce and demarcate a certain image of Judaism, of which Israel is constituent. Various Jewish American thinkers had discussed Israel, and particularly its relation and meaning to diasporic Jewry, in religious terms.<sup>75</sup> Arthur Hertzberg and Leonard Fein even suggested that Israel became the religion of American Jews following the Six-Day War.<sup>76</sup> According to Bernard Martin, the Jewish state “strengthened [American Jews’] resolve to remain Jewish—a point of obvious and far-reaching religious significance.”<sup>77</sup> The protective mediation of Hebrew literature could thus be attributed to an American Jewish inclination to appropriate Israel so it could fill its quasi-religious role as a mainstay of communal identity. By emphasizing, in a specifically Israeli context, that moral dicta are the mainstay of Judaism, and by presenting Hebrew literature and Israeli reality as depicted in it in a more positive moral light than in the self-critical source texts, this subdiscourse projected a higher morality on American Judaism and diasporic Jewry. Therefore, unlike aspects of Jewish identity that were felt unseemly for the American Jewish ethos and curbed, as we have seen earlier in this paper, high morals were promoted as the fundamental imperative of being a Jew.

The blurred lines between literature and ideology seem all-the-more hazy when it comes to Jewish American literary discourse around Hebrew literature. While reviewers, editors, and other agents were not spokespeople for a larger public, they did play a mediating role and had an ideological impact on this public. It is not a coincidence that Alan Mintz called his book on the translation and reception of Hebrew literature in the United States *Translating Israel*. Works of Hebrew literature were often perceived as “deep probes into the psychic soil that supports the land,”<sup>78</sup> and tended to be discussed as pieces bearing national and political symbolism.<sup>79</sup> Correspondingly, through varied rejections and affirmations in literary reviews, paratextual elements (such as editors’ prefaces and epilogues), academic courses, and even translations themselves, Hebrew literature and its representations of Israel-related notions of Jewish identity were negotiated and accommodated for the American (Jewish) audience. If Israel had “emerged as a significant cultural touchstone in American

75. See Ben Halpern, “The Americanization of Zionism, 1880–1930,” *American Jewish History* (1979): 15–33; and Stanley Lowell’s viewpoint, in Gorny, *State of Israel*, 82–83.

76. Ted Solotaroff, “The Open Community,” in *Writing Our Way Home: Contemporary Stories by American Jewish Writers* (New York: Schocken, 1992), xv.

77. Martin, “American Jewry since 1945,” 11–12.

78. Chaim Potok, forward to *Firstfruits: A Harvest of 25 Years of Israeli Writing*, ed. James A. Michener (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1973), viii.

79. Omri Asscher, “Hebetim ‘ide’ologim be-tirgum sifrut ‘anglit ve-hishtalvutah ba-siah ha-sifrut ha-yehudi-‘amerikani” (PhD diss., Tel Aviv University), 196–205.

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Jewish life in the immediate postwar years,<sup>80</sup> and following the Six-Day War became “probably the paramount source of Jewish identity,”<sup>81</sup> and if Hebrew literature could be seen as one of the more refined ways to discuss questions of Jewish identity, and even considered in theological terms<sup>82</sup>—then we can indeed think of these negotiations, borne by and about literary translation from Hebrew, as assertions of, or claims on, American Jewish collective identity.

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80. Katz, *Bringing Zion Home*, 137.

81. Ted Solotaroff, “American Jewish Writers: On Edge Once More,” *New York Times Book Review*, December 18, 1988, 1, 31, 33, esp. 33.

82. Mintz, *Translating Israel*, 24–25, 227–42.