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Uri-Nisn Gnesin:

Between the Worlds, Belonging to Both

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Uri-Nisn Gnesin:

Between the Worlds, Belonging to Both

by

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Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2012

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my teachers who have planted its seed: to Yosef ben Avrom Levkovich, who revealed to me the fragile beauty of Jewish literature, and to r. Gershon Weiner (ז''ל), who has illuminated my way with the sparks of its Holiness.

Acknowledgements

Blessed is the Almighty who has granted us life, sustained us and enabled us to reach this occasion. This dissertation marks an important stage in my studies. I am fortunate to have been prepared for this stage by many distinguished teachers in Russia, France, Israel and the United States. In mid 1980s, Mikhail Fishbeĭn and Aleksandr Knîa͡zhit͡skiĭ made me feel and respect the unlimited power that words possess over the human soul. Artemiĭ Karapetîant͡s, Dmitriĭ Voskresenskiĭ, Ivan Semenenko, and other professors at Moscow State University generously shared their deep knowledge with me and exemplified the high standards of the Russian academic tradition.

I am exceedingly grateful to Shifra Shvartsberg (ע"ה), Lev Dagovich (ז"ל), Gershon Weiner (ז"ל), Yosef Levkovich, Shimen Sandler (ז"ל) and Mariĭa͡ Kotlîarova (ע"ה). Each of these people initiated a long chain of events, which ultimately ended with this dissertation. Meeting them is a true blessing and a big honor for me. Over the years, I have greatly benefited from studying with Dov Noy (ז"ל), Yitskhok Niborski, Mordkhe Schaechter (ז"ל), Avrom Novershtern, Dov-Ber Kerler, as well as other scholars of Yiddish language and literature whom I have had the privilege of calling my teachers.

I would like to thank the professors at the University of Texas who not only offered their wisdom, wit and broad knowledge, but helped me to adjust to the new academic environment. Katherine Arens introduced me to the foundations of American scholarship, while Nina Warnke and Zsuzsi Abrams taught me how to teach others. I wish to thank Seth Wolitz for many invigorating discussions, and particularly for challenging me in my study of Uri-Nisn Gnesin. A special thanks to Robert King, who showed me the art of historical linguistic from a completely new and exciting

perspective. I was extremely lucky to study with Aaron Bar-Adon, Avraham Zilkha, and Adam Newton, from whom I have learnt so much. I thank Esther Raizen for her kind thoughtfulness. Her love for the Hebrew language and passion for sharing her knowledge with her students have influenced my thinking and teaching much more than I can understand. I am most indebted to Karen Grumberg who guided my studies with delicate patience and sincere concern, encouraging me during hard times and providing highly appreciated and valuable criticism, comments, and ideas.

I wish to express deep gratitude to the members of my dissertation committee for their support, criticism and advice. I owe much to John Hoberman who agreed to join my committee in an emergency situation and provided important and constructive advice. A special thanks to the Department of Middle Eastern Studies, which, through generous travel grants, helped me to present parts of my work at the AJS conferences. My sincere thanks also goes to Marina Flider who kindly agreed to read and edit the manuscript.

This project would have neither been started nor completed without the support of my family, including the invisible presence of my late grandfather Alexander (ז"ל). I wish to thank my parents, Alexander and Tatiana, who have been helping me stay on the right path ever since I was a little child (which I will always remain in their eyes, regardless of my academic progress). I am especially indebted to my wife, Natalia Gutman, for her faithfulness. Her sensitive and unconventional mind is a true blessing, affecting my life in more ways than I can list here. And I am very grateful to our kids Khanna, Shaya, Shlomo and Hava, whose understanding of this project never ceased to surprise me, and whose childish straightforwardness has always been an endless source of refreshing and nourishing energy for me.

Uri-Nisn Gnesin:

Between the Worlds, Belonging to Both

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2012

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This dissertation examines the life and work of the Jewish writer Uri-Nisn Gnesin (1879-1913). Living in Russia, using Yiddish in his daily life, and writing prose in Hebrew, Gnesin was part of a multicultural and multilingual generation, which was too assimilated to live the traditional life of its fathers, and yet, not able to break with it completely. For many Russian Jews, this dual identity, rarely recognized in modern scholarly discourse on Hebrew literature, resulted in psychological discomfort, feelings of guilt, and other traumas. Addressing this identity crisis, I show how the worldview of an assimilated Russian Jew is reflected in Gnesin's Hebrew fiction. I offer an alternative view of Gnesin as a Jewish-Russian writer whose dual identity played a more complex role in his literary work and whose influence transcended a simple knowledge of languages or classic texts. It was not merely a language or a book, but the unique Jewish-Slavic atmosphere of small Eastern European towns that provided Gnesin with all the models necessary for thinking, feeling, and writing.

In my study, I consider theories of canonization to demonstrate the reason why Gnesin has first and foremost been categorized as a Hebrew writer. Contemporary scholars of modern Hebrew fiction generally agree that Gnesin's fiction is secular due to the non-

Jewish associative infrastructure of his work. By exploring the historical and spiritual conditions of Gnesin's generation, I attempt to overcome the limitations of such a view, which overemphasizes the role of language in his development as a writer. A functional analysis of Gnesin's literary language maintains that although he found his best form of expression in literary Hebrew, it appeared mostly in the final stages of his writing. I propose that Gnesin and that whole generation of modern Hebrew writers used a special "hyper-language" consisting of three integral parts: a natively spoken language, a commonly spoken non-Jewish national language, and a written literary language. Ultimately, Gnesin appears to be a *fin de siècle* writer who used Hebrew language as a sophisticated tool to propagate his troubled Jewish-Russian experience.

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Introduction

The examination of individual authors as persons and products of their environment is a critical component of literary studies. Despite the fact that written languages are collective systems of communication, shared by many users, works of fiction are created by individual authors who have differing commands of these languages. Creative writing, one of the most sophisticated mental activities, predictably bears the unique personal impression of the people who produce it. The individuality of every author's work makes biographical research a crucial tool for the interpretation of a literary text. Made in the broad historical and cultural context of Jewish life in the Russian Empire at the turn of the century, biographical research is the foundation for my study of the Jewish writer Uri-Nisn Gnesin (1879-1913).[1]

The biographical investigation of an author's corpus has a particular significance for Jewish literature, because, as Hana Wirth-Nesher contends, there is no consensus on what makes literary texts Jewish, nor is it likely that there ever will be one.[2] Is it the language of a work or its topic? Does the author have to be Jewish, and how important is the author's place of living and writing? Does the audience play any role in this consideration? These questions become more complicated when asked in the multilingual and multicultural context of Jewish history. Was Gnesin a Hebrew writer because he wrote in Hebrew? Does writing a story in Yiddish also make him a Yiddish writer? Can one, then, simply call Gnesin a Jewish writer because he was a Jew, and wrote for Jewish

[1] In Hebrew script Gnesin's last name is spelled גנסין, גנעשין or גנעסין. In English, it is often transliterated as Gnessin, and the first name is commonly given according to the modern Hebrew pronunciation, Uri Nissan. I prefer the spelling without double letters because it is closer to how the name is pronounced in Yiddish and Russian, which was spoken by Gnesin in his everyday life.

[2] *What is Jewish Literature?* ed. Hana Wirth-Nesher (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1994) 3.

readers, many of whom could easily identify with his characters? It is unlikely that non-Ashkenazi Jews could understand his works in the same way as European Jews; would it not be possible then to call Gnesin a Jewish-Russian or Jewish-European author, since he was born, raised and lived in the Eastern European part of the Russian Empire? Would Russian-Jewish or European-Jewish be a more precise label? The answer to these questions often requires additional biographical information, which can rarely be found in the body of fiction. Living in a Russian-speaking part of Eastern Europe, using Yiddish in his daily life, and writing prose in Hebrew, Gnesin belonged to a generation which was already too assimilated to live in the traditional world of its fathers, but not able to break with it completely. This dual Russian-Jewish identity left a deep imprint on Gnesin, making the thorough examinations of its effects crucial to the analysis of his works.

Since the 1910s, studies of Jewish literature have made tremendous contributions to this analysis. Early critics and scholars of Gnesin's writing, such as Yosef Khayim Brener, David Frishman, Zalman Shneur, Asher Beylin, as well as several others, most of whom were Gnesin's friends, tended to hear a confessional tone in his works, and associate the characters of his stories with his personality. Their essays and memoirs are a valuable source of biographical information about Gnesin, although none paid much attention to the literary aspects of his writings (with the exception of the critical review by Fishl Lakhover in the 1914 edition of Gnesin's collected works). It was not until the 1950s that the scholars who had not known Gnesin personally began studying him in a more formal way, at which point voluminous critical literature devoted to Gnesin emerged in Israel and United States. In his lectures, complied and published under the title *Mavo la-siporet ha-ivrit* [Introduction to Hebrew Prose],[3] Shimon Halkin explored the relationship

[3] Shimon Halkin, *Mavo la-siporet ha-ivrit [Introduction to Hebrew Fiction]* (Jerusalem: Mif'al ha-shikhpul, 1958) 341-396.

between Gnesin's characters and the experience of alienation typical of the Jewish-Russians of nineteenth century. Barukh Kurzweil was the first to relate Gnesin's modernism to the modern spiritual crisis caused by a break from the traditional world.[4] In 1959, Adi Tsemakh published the essay *Ba-derekh le "khoresh metsel"* [On the Way to a "Shady Grove"], in which he connected Gnesin's narrative technique with stream of consciousness.[5] In his later study of figurative and symbolic patterns in Gnesin's long stories, Tsemakh treated Gnesin as a sophisticated lyricist, strongly rejecting any autobiographical allusions in his writings.[6] Gershon Shaked, considered one of the leading authorities on Jewish literature, shared Tsemakh's interpretation of Gnesin's narrative style as stream of consciousness. In a meticulous study of Gnesin's style, *Zman ve-merkhav ba-signon* [Time and Space in the Style], Shaked introduced the notion of "spatial" structures that corresponded to an "endless flow of impressions through which he realizes the attitude of a sensitive soul towards existence."[7] In another study, Shaked interpreted Gnesin's plot as a medium for the exploration of the inner emotional lives of his characters.[8]

Shaked was among the first scholars who questioned the Jewishness of Gnesin's work. He claimed that Gnesin's writing was not related to his identity as a Jew, and that the works' associative infrastructure was not Jewish.[9] This opinion is shared by Avner

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[4] Barukh Kurzweil, *Beyn khazon le-veyn ha-absurdi [Between Vision and the Absurd]* (Jerusalem: Shoken, 1966) 293-393; 304-318.

[5] Adi Tsemakh, "Ba-derekh le-'khoresh metsel' [On the Way to a 'Shady Grove']," *Uri Nisn Gnesin: mivkhar ma'amerey bikoret al yetsirato [U. N. Gnesin: A Selection of Critical Essays On His Literary Prose]* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved: 1977) 100-115. Originally published in 1959.

[6] Adi Tsemakh, "Efroim khozer la-ganim [Epfroim Returns to the Gardens]," *Uri Nisan Gnesin: mekhkarim uteudot [U. N. Gnessin: Studies and Documents]*, ed. Dan Miron, and Dan Laor (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1986) 105-126.

[7] Gershon Shaked, "Zman ve-merkhav ba-signon [Time and Space in the Style]," *Uri Nisan Gnesin: mekhkarim uteudot* 176-195. Originally published in 1967.

[8] Gershon Shaked, *Modern Hebrew Fiction*, trans. Yael Lotan (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2000) 56.

[9] The existence of the State of Israel dramatically altered the relationship between the terms Jewish, Hebrew, and Israeli. Today Hebrew is the official language of a secular democratic state, spoken by non-

Holtzman, who writes that Gnesin removes himself from the horizon of Jewish themes more than any other writer of his generation.[10] This dissertation is, to a large degree, a response to Shaked's claim. My reading of Gnesin in the Russian-Jewish cultural context of in-betweenness is inspired by Chana Kronfeld's assumption that "many of the exclusionary practices of literary theory and historiography can be traced back to an optical difficulty […] to see writers like Kafka, for example, as simultaneously maintaining multiple literary affiliations, and to view these multiple affiliations as partial, potentially contradictory, and ambivalent."[11] Exploring Gnesin's dual identity, I argue that his work is not Jewish, and certainly not Russian, but rather exists in-between these two mutually exclusive "associative infrastructures."

In the last decades of the twentieth century, scholars have been displaying more interest in linguistic aspects of literary texts. Maya Agmon-Frukhtman studied the adverbial phrases in Gnesin's stories as the syntactic reflection of the characters' inner world; Itamar Even-Zohar examined the Russian models on which Gnesin based his dialogs; Hamutal Bar-Yosef published a book about Gnesin's metaphorical language, and Yitskhak Bakun, in a separate monograph, explored Gnesin's Yiddish-Hebrew bilingualism, identifying the Yiddish language to have been a primary influence on his style.[12] Several studies of Gnesin's contribution as a critic and translator have also been

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Jews as well as Jews, and Israeli is also not necessarily Jewish. However, for the purposes of my study, Hebrew is considered Jewish language because in Gnesin's time these words were synonymous.

[10] Avner Holtsman, "Mavo histori-sifruti [Historical-Literary Introduction]," *Ha-sipur ha-ivri be-reyshit ha-mea ha-esrim [Hebrew Story of the Early Twentieth Century]* (Tel-Aviv: Ha-universita ha-ptukha, 1992-1993) 94.

[11] Chana Kronfeld, *On the Margins of Modernism: Decentering Literary Dynamics* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1996) 12.

[12] Maya Agmon Fruchtman, "Tserufim adverbialiim ke-meargenim signoniim shel zman u-makom be-sipure Gnesin [Adverbial Phrases as Stylistic Organizers of Time and Space in Gnesin's Stories]," *Uri Nisan Gnesin: mekhkarim uteudot* 91-101; Itamar Even-Zohar, "Gnessin's Dialogue and its Russian Models," *Poetics Today* 11:1 (1990): 131-153; Hamutal Bar-Yosef, *Metaforot u-smalim bitsirato shel Gnesin [Mataphors and Symbols in Gnesin's Works]* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibuts ha-meukhad, 1987); Yitskhak

published: *Hearot le-ma'amerey ha-bikoret shel U. N. Gnesin* [Comments on the Critical Essays of U. N. Gnesin] by Dan Laor and *Ha-zimun ha-meshulash – U. N. Gnesin, Yakob Vaserman ve-Shabtay Tsvi* [Triangular Appointment – U. N. Gnesin, Jakob Wassermann, and Shabtay Tsvi] by Shmuel Verses.[13] Other scholars focused on particular images or texts. Yosef Even analyzed Gnesin's descriptions of nature and their relation to the characters' existence; Lili Ratok identified the patterns of "un-defined" in *Etsel* [Near] as a special narrative device; Ruth Shenfeld made a psycho-sociological examination of the female characters in the same story.[14] The majority of these groundbreaking studies were published in two anthologies by Lili Ratok in 1977, and Dan Miron in 1986.[15] Dan Miron is also the author of *Khakhim be-apo shel ha-netsakh* [Posterity Hooked], the major critical work on Gnesin and his writing, in which Miron analyzes the entire corpus of his works. In his book, Miron offers an analysis of impressionistic sequences in Gnesin' early stories, reveals formal distinctions between his four long stories, which had been viewed by many as chapters of one long narrative, examines the various literary contexts of Gnesin's prose, and analyzes the multiple effects and function of his textual allusions, quotations, intimations and analogies.[16]

Bakun, *Brener u-Gnesin ke-sofrim du-leshoniyim [Brener and Gnesin as Bilingual Writers]*. Be'er Sheva: Universitat Ben-Guryon, 1986.

[13] *Uri Nisan Gnesin: mekhkarim uteudot* 175-228.

[14] Yosef Even: "Tmunot ha-hof be-sipurav shel U. N. Gnesin [Nature Scenes in the Stories of U. N. Gnesin]," *Uri Nisan Gnesin: mekhkarim uteudot* 42-59; Lili Ratok, "Sodo shel ish va-ish: le-sha'alat i-hamugdarut be-'Etsel' [Everybody's Secret: To the Problem of Un-Defined in 'Etsel']," *Uri Nisan Gnesin: mekhkarim uteudot* 127-152; Ruth Shenfeld, "Ha-nashim halolu – dmuyot na-nashim be-Etsel [These Women – Women's Images in 'Etsel']," *Uri Nisan Gnesin: mekhkarim uteudot* 153-172.

[15] *Uri Nisan Gnesin: mivkhar ma'amarey bikoret al yetsirato [U. N. Gnesin: A Selection of Critical Essays On His Literary Prose]*, comp. Lily Rattok (Tel-Aviv: Am oved, 1977); *Uri Nisan Gnesin: mekhkarim uteudot [U. N. Gnessin: Studies and Documents]*, ed. Dan Miron, and Dan Laor (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1986).

[16] Dan Miron, *Khakhim be-apo shel ha-netsakh: yetsirato shel Uri Nisan Gnesin [Posterity Hooked: The Travail and Achievement of Uri Nisan Gnessin]* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1997).

Three dissertations are devoted to Gnesin: Hamutal Bar-Yosef's linguistic study of the metaphors and symbols in Gnesin's works (1985), Deborah Steinhart's analysis of Gnesin's narrative techniques in the context of modern Hebrew literature (1989), and Shachar Pinsker's examination of the complex intertextual relations between rabbinical literature and the modernist fiction of Gnesin, David Fogel and Dvora Baron (2001), which is particular relevant for my study. In his dissertation, Pinsker views Jewish classical texts as a major source of influence on Gnesin's work, and convincingly identifies a dialogue with these texts as a crucial aspect in his modernism.[17]

When attempting to identify Gnesin's influences, some scholars emphasize the Russian environment as a major source of inspiration for his writing. Holtzman, for instance, argues that most of Gnesin's works reflect the Russian intellectual and mental atmosphere of the day.[18] Similarly, in a recent comprehensive study of Russia's impact on Hebrew literature, Rina Lapidus isolates and articulates these influences in a definitive way by drawing heavily on "patterns of thought and behavior unique to Russian society," and claims that "the creators of Hebrew literature […] saw Russian literature […] as an ideal model from which to learn." [19] While Lapidus describes the multilingual environment of Jewish writers to be the coexistence of Hebrew and Yiddish with foreign languages such as Russian, I suggest addressing Gnesin's linguistic situation from a different perspective, eliminating the division of these languages into "foreign" and "native" categories, and paying special attention to the extra-textual biographical factors which influenced his writing. In this dissertation, I approach modernism as a cultural movement, a world-view which transcends such specific cultural phenomena as art or

[17] Shachar Pinsker, *"Old Wine in New Flasks": Rabbinic Intertexts and the Making of Modernist Hebrew Fiction*, diss., U of California, Berkeley, 2001, (Ann Arbor: UMI, 2002) 1.
[18] Avner Holtsman, *Mavo histori-sifruti* 94.
[19] Rina R. Lapidus, *Between Snow and Desert Heat: Russian Influences on Hebrew Literature, 1870-1970* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College P, 2003) vii.

literature. In addition, I attempt to expand on the factors of Gnesin's influence, suggested by Pinsker, Holtzman, Lapidus and other scholars, beyond literary texts and linguistic structures. Ultimately, I wish to show that it was not a single text, but the entire milieu of Jewish-Slavic small East-European towns that provided Jewish modernist writers with the necessary models for their thinking, feeling, and writing.

Today, Gnesin is generally considered a pioneer of Hebrew modernist literature, and among the first to introduce psychological prose and the stream of consciousness narrative technique into Hebrew literary texts. While this interpretation acknowledges important aspects of Gnesin's writing, it tends to overlook the historical conditions of his life, and downplays several important characteristics of his writing. First, although most of Gnesin's works are written in Hebrew, categorizing him primarily as a Hebrew writer dilutes the complexity of linguistic and mental processes he undertook in his writing. Second, this formulation establishes Gnesin's canonical status as one of the fathers of modern Hebrew literature, which is supported by the Israeli educational system.[20] In doing so, it overlooks the fact that Gnesin was first and foremost a Jewish-Russian writer, an identity that informed his writing more than that of a Hebrew author. In fact, Gnesin's canonicity challenges the very concept of the Hebrew canon as it exists, and its ability to accommodate a writer like Gnesin. Finally, reading Gnesin within the context of the Russian literary tradition allows us to identify his narrative mode as internal monologue, rather than stream of consciousness. Such a reading establishes a relationship between Gnesin's writing and works by Dostoevskiĭ, Tolstoĭ, Chekhov, and other writers of Russian psychological prose, in which interior monologue was one of the major narrative tools.

[20] Gnesin is included in the list of writers who are studied in Israeli schools today. This list is designed and approved by the Ministry of Education.

Ultimately, biographical research presents Gnesin as a writer of the *fin de siècle*, who used Hebrew language to express his troubled Jewish-Russian experience.

This dissertation suggests a new approach to Gnesin, which acknowledges Gnesin as a Hebrew writer, while emphasizing the historical and spiritual in-betweenness of his generation. I investigate this condition and offer an alternative view of Gnesin as a Jewish-Russian writer whose dual identity affected his literary work in a more complex way than can be attributed to his bilingual background or knowledge of classic texts. This complexity allows me to show that, in addition to traditional Jewish texts, Gnesin had alternative models for his modernist writing, such as the whole corpus of Russian literature. By examining several of Gnesin's works, I demonstrate how the assimilated Russian-Jewish worldview informed his Hebrew fiction. In a wider sense, my study aims to complement the existing readings of Gnesin by exploring new historical and cultural dimensions of his writing.

In the first chapter, I attempt to reconstruct the most crucial historical, cultural, spiritual, and intellectual aspects of Gnesin's life, detailed documentation of which is still missing from scholarship. Many important life events are only briefly mentioned by Gnesin's biographers, while a wealth of information is scattered over memoirs, reviews, and especially letters. Most of Gnesin's letters in Hebrew, Yiddish, and Russian are published, and more of them are likely to be found in the private archives of friends and colleagues with whom he corresponded. An analysis of these letters redefines Gnesin's position in the history of Jewish literature, adding a new dimension to his works and filling gaps in the existing biographical studies. My study of Gnesin's life treats separate historical events as part of the general canvas of the time, focusing on its major social and literary movements.

The biographical reconstruction made in the first chapter addresses Gnesin's extensive use of the Jewish tradition, not only in his writings, but also in translations, which are the main concern of the second chapter. While Gnesin translated works by many authors from different languages (Sigbjørn Obstfelder, Guy de Maupassant, Mordekhay Spektor, Jacob Wassermann, and others), the Russian short stories of Anton Chekhov attracted him more than any other works. There are two factors to consider regarding Gnesin's translations. First, a close reading of the Hebrew text alongside the Russian original challenges the commonly accepted view that Gnesin's syntactical structures as borrowed directly from Russian. Rather, it demonstrates the innovative nature of Gnesin's syntax. Second, the original stories provide contrasting modes of speech, reflecting the wide social spectrum of his different characters. Their verbal interactions complicate their translation into Hebrew, a language which in Gnesin's time lacked tools to represent direct speech. Additionally, certain words that were familiar to Russian-Jewish readers did not exist in modern Hebrew vocabulary. In such cases, Gnesin had to infuse old words with new meanings, substitute words, or transliterate the words from the original text. Another characteristic feature of Gnesin's translations is the skillful utilization of Judaic allusions. Gnesin integrated key words from the Tanakh, the Talmud, or rabbinical literature into the translated text in order to establish a complex polyphony between ancient and modern textual layers. With the help of these words, Gnesin connected classic Jewish texts to his translations and his original works, dramatically expanding their meaning. Gnesin's choice of lexical strategies is interesting not only to a Hebrew-language historian, but also to a curious reader: Gnesin's use of this literary technique helps one understand how Gnesin read the Russian original and related to it.

The second part of the chapter centers on the controversial content of Chekhov's stories. As a writer, Gnesin creates a complex emotional atmosphere in his translations. On the one hand, this sensual web of feelings emanates from the literary heritage he shared with his readers, and on the other, from a new modernist perspective. I propose that the main goal of Gnesin's translations was to create an emotional rendition of the original text. However, the atmosphere in Chekhov's stories is inevitably different from that in Gnesin's translations, since the two authors came from and belonged to very distant social and cultural worlds. A comparison and analysis of these differences and similarities reveals Gnesin's mechanism of translating non-Jewish texts into Jewish languages.

Gnesin's first critics regarded his early work to be mediocre and epigonic, and offered high praise for his late stories, although little time lapsed between these two periods. The third chapter suggests possible reasons for such a rapid change in Gnesin's writing style, by exploring his psychology, historical and cultural background, contemporary audience, and the history of his publications. Drawing from biographical research, I reconstruct Gnesin's major spiritual crisis resulting from his alienation from the traditional Jewish lifestyle. Gnesin's abrupt change in writing style occurred at the peak of this crisis. At the same time, his assimilation into Russian culture made Russian literature particularly influential and attractive for him. Gnesin regarded it as repository of imagery and narrative devices, which Hebrew lacked at the time. Gnesin's way of integrating these images and devices into literary texts, to a large extent conditioned by the Jewish tradition, makes him stand out against both earlier and later generations of Jewish writers. A close reading of Gnesin's story *Ba-ganim* [In the Gardens] demonstrates how these two contrasting realms of life, Jewish and Russian, affected his writing. My study relates Gnesin's story to the work of popular Russian writer, Leonid

Andreev, and draws particular attention to his scandalous story *Bezdna* [Abyss], in order to demonstrate my concept of Gnesin's adaptive technique in his translations of non-Jewish texts.

The final chapter of this dissertation examines Gnesin's place in Jewish literature. It begins by asking the question "Who was Gnesin?" and turns to a functional analysis of his languages to answer this question. My study contests Gnesin's common designation as a primarily Hebrew writer, and maintains that although literary Hebrew allowed for his best artistic expression, this language was part of a more complex linguistic structure. I propose that Gnesin and the whole generation of Jewish-Russian writers used a complicated linguistic tool, which can be best described as a "hyper-language," in their creative work. It consists of three integral parts: their native language (Yiddish), the state language spoken with a near native proficiency (Russian), and the written language of the final product (Hebrew). Writing in a Jewish literary hyper-language assumes that ideas and images are formed in Yiddish, and later translated, read and revised in Hebrew. At the same time, this process is indirectly affected by Russian, which provides certain writing models absent in Hebrew classic texts. Along the way, I consider theories of canonization in order to explain the reason behind Gnesin's conventional categorization as, first and foremost, a Hebrew writer, and to show that this identity informed his writing less than that of his identity as Russian-Jewish author.

Reading through a wide range of European Jewish fiction, I have always had the impression that beyond the similar ethnic origin of their authors, they all share some elusive uniting feature which, to use the words of Russel Ferguson, "whenever we try to pin it down, always seems to be somewhere else."[21] Shared by such disparate writers as

[21] Russel Ferguson, "Introduction: Invisible Center," *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures* (New York, Cambridge: MIT P, 1990) 9.

Gnesin, Brenner, Bashevis, Agnon, Grossman, Babel and others, this common feature is apparently not root in linguistics, since not every Hebrew, Yiddish or Russian text possesses it. Neither is it contingent on location, because many works are written in the same country or city, and yet lack this hidden attribute. However, a brief look at these writers' biographies reveals one common fact: they were all born in Eastern Europe, and spent their early years in the Slavic literary world of the nineteenth century. This secular environment — its languages, literatures, and lifestyle — shape a significant part of these writers' mental framework; however, another major source of influence was their traditional Jewish background. These two dissonant and oftentimes contradicting worldviews created the unique dual identity that forms the basis of East European Jewish literature at the turn of the century.

For Gnesin, this dualism resulted in psychological tension, depression, guilt, and other trauma. This psychological state was not unique to Gnesin, but rather was the condition of the age among many European Jews, and even extends beyond its Jewish context to other ethnic, religious, or cultural groups who also face similar processes of assimilation. This dualism resulted in a sad irony that marks the works of Gnesin, Brener, Shofman, and other writers of his circle: it is these authors who extensively used Jewish traditions in order to tell the story of assimilated Russian Jews, who tried hard to break with this very tradition, but never achieved their goal.

Notes on Transliteration

This study contains a number of transliterated Hebrew, Yiddish, and Russian words, including terms, names, titles, and bibliographic entries.[22] All Yiddish words are transliterated according to the YIVO (Yiddish Scientific Institute) standard (e.g. Sholem-Aleykhem). In the few cases where the original writing is important, but its transliteration does not allow us to unambiguously recover the Yiddish spelling, the words in question are provided in Yiddish in parentheses. The transliterations of Russian words are based on the ALA-LC (American Library Association and Library of Congress) guidelines. The Hebrew transliterations also follow the guidelines of the ALA-LC, excluding specific names with an established spelling tradition (e.g. Joseph Klausner), and, similar to the Yiddish words, no exceptions are made in the bibliographic entries (*Yosef Klozner*). It has to be noted that in Ashkenazi pronunciation, as well as in the speech of many Israelis, there are sounds that are marked with different letters in accordance with the Hebrew grammar (such as ח and כ, both of with are pronounced as [kh]). ALA-LC transliteration does not reflect these spelling nuances. However, it does not lead to misunderstanding because all the Hebrew words in my study are followed by an English translation.

My transliterations of proper names and other words of Hebrew origin are an attempt to reflect the historical sound of these words as accurately as possible. In Gnesin's time, native Yiddish speakers normally pronounced Hebrew personal names, as well as other Semitic words, in the Ashkenazi manner of pronunciation (e.g. Moyshe, Avrom, Yankev, Dovid; *shabes*, *besmedresh*, *khosn-kale*, *svore*).[23] However, in certain situations, some speakers would also use Sephardic pronunciation, especially for the less commonly

[22] For the transliteration charts see Appendix.

[23] In the Sephardic tradition these words (משה, אברהם, יעקב, דוד, שבת, בית-מדרש, חתן-כלה and סברא) are pronounced as Moshe, Avraham, Ya'akov, David, *shabbat*, *bet-ha-midrash*, *khatan-kala*, and *svara*.

used words. There are no available records of Gnesin's speech, and while some written secondary sources provide information about his pronunciation preferences, these records are insufficient for speech reconstruction. For example, in several of his letters the Cyrillic headers spell the name of the publishing house *Nisyonot* according to Sephardic tradition,[24] which is also supported by the address of this publishing house from the last page of *Beyntaim*.[25] This allows readers to conclude that in formal situations and for this particular word Gnesin preferred Sephardic pronunciation, although his choices for other words and in more casual situations is a complex socio-linguistic problem beyond the scope of my study. For this reason, the transliterations of Hebrew and Yiddish words in this dissertation are to a great degree assumptive and open for discussion.

[24] Нисіонотъ (pronounced *Nisionot*). See Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 83, 84, 91, 92, 94, 97, 109.

[25] Verlag "Nisionoth" Potchep, Chernigov Gub., S. L. Bichovsky, Russland. See Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Beyntaim* (London: Nisyonot, 5666 [1906]).

Chapter 1: "We Are Sons of Russia":
The Life and Work of Uri-Nisn Gnesin[26]

My study owes much to the theory and practice of historical-biographical criticism. Dating back to Aristotle,[27] this critical method reached its peak in the nineteenth century, particularly in the works of Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve (1804-1869) and Hyppolite Taine (1828-1893). Sainte-Beuve, considered one of the major figures in European literary history, wrote: "I may enjoy a work, but it is hard for me to judge it independently of my knowledge of the man who produced it."[28] Despite the fact that the historical-biographical methodology was rejected by the New Critics in the 1920s as the "biographical fallacy," recent scholarship witnesses its rehabilitation, at least partial, along with the increased interest to such aspects of pre-deconstructive readings as authorial intention and personal voice. As Lawrence Lipking declared in 1981, "biographical speculation has returned as a permitted analytical tool."[29]

From this point of view, the biographical study of Gnesin's life is crucial for interpretation of his literary work. I view the historical and cultural background of Gnesin, to use the words of George Hoffmann, as a portal through which one inevitably passes in an attempt to relate his work to its immediate social, political, and economic

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[26] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve Uri Nisan Gnesin [Works by U. N. Gnesin]*, vol. 3 (Merkhavya: Sifriyat po'alim, 1946) 47.

[27] Aristotle's students, the Peripatetics, had a particular interest in biographical information about poets, reading their works as sources of knowledge about their lives.

[28] Charles Augustin Saint-Beuve, *Saint-Beuve: Selected Essays* (London: Doubleday & Company Inc., c1963) 281.

[29] Lawrence Lipking, "Literary Criticism," *Introduction to Scholarship in Modern Languages and Literatures* (New York: The modern Language Association of America, 1981) 80. Also see the collections of essays *EMF, Studies in Early Modern France: The New Biographical Criticism*, vol. 9 (Charlottesville, VA: Rockwood P, 2004); *Contesting the Subject: Essays in the Postmodern Theory and Practice of Biography and Biographical Criticism*, ed. William H. Epstein (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue UP, 1991); and *Writing the Lives of Writers*, ed. Warwick Gould and Thomas F. Staley (New York: St. Martin's, 1998).

context.[30] This chapter provides the foundation for my analysis of Gnesin's work through the examination of his origins, education, relations with the nearest friends and contemporaries, travels, financial and health condition, as well as his professional and literary work.[31]

1.1. EARLY YEARS IN CHERNIGOV GUBERNIA

Uri-Nisn Gnesin (אורי ניסן גנסין) was born on the 17th of October, 1879[32] (י''ב חשון תר''ם) in Starodub, a small town in the Chernigov *gubernia* [governorate], part of the Russian Empire.[33] Gnesin traveled his whole life, staying for brief periods in different countries, cities, and towns, but his only permanent residence was his parents' home – a place to which he always returned from his wanderings. He never lived in one place for a long time.[34] Even when he stayed in the Land of Israel, visiting famous Jewish historical

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[30] *EMF, Studies in Early Modern France* 2.

[31] Saint-Boeve believed that there were never too many questions to ask about an author, and none of them were immaterial for judging the author of a book or the book itself. This includes such seemingly irrelevant questions as: how did he behave toward women? What was his attitude toward money? What was his vice or weakness. See Charles Augustin Saint-Beuve 290.

[32] There are different opinions among scholars on the date of Gnesin's birth. Rachel Albeck-Gidron calls it "a wonderful and surprising aspect," because not only was an exact chart of dates concerning Gnesin's biography published several times, but Gnesin also lived in a relatively recent time. Albeck-Gidron writes that Gnesin was born in the winter of 1879 (see Rachel Albeck-Gidron, introduction, *Beside & Other Stories*, by Uri Nissan Gnessin (New Milford, CT: The Toby Press, 2005) vii-xxix). Some encyclopedias give 1881 as a year of Gnesin's birth (*Kratkai͡a evreyskai͡a en͡tsi͡klopedii͡a [Short Jewish Encyclopedia]*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Keter, 1982) 148; *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., vol. 7 (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2007) 648), others – 1882 (*Evreyskai͡a en͡tsi͡klopedii͡a [Jewish Encyclopedia]*, vol. 6 (1906-1913; Moscow: Terra, 1991) 597). It seems to me that these two dates, 1881 and 1882, come from an obituary published in *Ha-Tsefirah,* on the next day after Gnesin's death. It is written that Gnesin was born in the Jewish year of 5642 (תרמ''ב), which approximately corresponds to 1882. However, Gnesin was born before the non-Jewish New Year, making it still 1881. This study follows the inscription on Gnesin's tombstone at the Jewish cemetery in Warsaw. The photograph of this tombstone is published in the book *Uri Nisan Gnesin: mekhkarim u-teudot [U. N. Gnessin: Studies and Documents]*, ed. Dan Miron, and Dan Laor (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1986). If not specified otherwise, all the dates before 1918 are given in the old (Julian) style.

[33] Here and everywhere, I refer to locations historically, and not according to the present map. In the past two centuries, many European borders were redrawn more than once, so the location could be part of different states over the years. In such cases, I use the territorial division of period to which I refer.

[34] The dates on the published letters demonstrate that the combined time spent by Gnesin at home was close to fifteen years (1898-1913), while in other places, he lived for less than a year: Vilno and Kiev (nine months in each); Warsaw (seven months); Borisoglebsk, Ekaterinoslav, and London (six months in each).

landmarks, he continued moving from one town to another,[35] and in the same year returned to Russia. Gnesin's hometown was an exception to his nomadic lifestyle, because soon after returning home from the Land of Israel,[36] he stayed with his parents for almost four years. In his wanderings, Gnesin never forgot to send letters home, usually addressed to his father and written in Hebrew. Most of these letters included a few words or sometimes a paragraph or two in Yiddish for his mother, Ester, to whom Gnesin could express his emotions more openly: "Dear Mom, if you only knew how I sometimes miss you. That's why, if God grants us with favor and we will see each other soon, God willing, all of us, your child, and Menakhem, I will kiss you then so hard!"[37]

Gnesin's upbringing in a Litvak family

Some scholars describe Gnesin's birthplace, Starodub, as a Ukrainian town, and claim that he grew up and lived in Ukraine, although there is linguistic and historical evidence that neither Starodub nor other places of Gnesin's youth were Ukrainian towns, making Gnesin a Litvak and not a Ukrainian Jew. In the context of Jewish history in the Russian Empire, it is especially significant that Gnesin was born and raised in the Chernigov *gubernia* and returned frequently for unusually protracted periods.. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, Russian Jews were forbidden by law to choose their place of residency outside of a designated territory known as the Pale of Settlement. Eventually, the diverse demographic and geopolitical conditions within the Pale contributed to the formation of separate groups of Diaspora Jews. Superimposed upon the official political maps existed several borderless Jewish states, each with people speaking their unique dialects, wearing their unique clothes, having their own religious views, and

[35] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 145.
[36] In Gnesin's time, The Land of Israel (ארץ ישראל) was the Jewish name of Ottoman Palestine.
[37] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 143. This and all other translations are made by me, if not stated otherwise.

most important, having their distinct mentalities. One of these territories was *Lite* [Lithuania], populated by the Litvaks,[38] who, in contrast to the Jews from Galicia, Poland, and Ukraine, were believed to be rational and cold people, relying more on their minds than on their hearts.[39] This distinction is particularly important for the biographical study of Eastern European Jewish writers because it allows us to view them in the context of a specific emotional and intellectual mode of existence, which is manifested in most of their works.

Although no audio recordings of Gnesin's voice are available for research, personal letters ([1898]-1913) provide valuable linguistic data about his regional dialect. Gnesin wrote mostly in Hebrew, Russian, and Yiddish, and while the nature of Hebrew does not allow us to judge his pronunciation, his written Yiddish can often serve as a true transcription of his speech.[40] A close reading of these letters proves that Gnesin spoke as a Litvak: his correspondences contain numerous examples of Lithuanian Yiddish, such as the word *ye* [yes], which corresponds to the standard *yo*, the words *kusn* [to kiss] and *kus*

[38] From the Yiddish word (ליטוואק), meaning "a Jew from Lite (pronounced *lee-teh*)." This term is misleading for two reasons. First, it is impossible to define the territory of Lite precisely, because it is not a political formation, but rather an imagined land, which contained the city of Vilno (also known as 'Jerusalem of Lite') in its center. It includes parts of Lithuania, Belorussia, northern Poland, and Russia, and is inhabited by people who share some common mental, cultural, and linguistic features. Secondly, this term has different meanings if used by people from Lithuania, Poland, Ukraine, by followers and antagonists of Hasidism, by speakers of different dialects, etc. For a detailed description of Litvaks, see Don Levin, *The Litvaks: A Short History of the Jews in Lithuania* (Jerusalem: Yad va-shem, 2000).

[39] The difference between Litvaks and other Ashkenazi Jews is a source of numerous anecdotes and stories both in folklore and fiction. One of the best-known literary illustrations of this phenomenon in Jewish literature is the story *Oyb nisht nokh hekher* [If Not Higher] by Y. L. Perets.

[40] In late nineteenth century, Yiddish speakers applied the phonological patterns of their native Yiddish dialect to Hebrew words. Those, for example, who pronounced *kamats* in Yiddish as [u] (*tug* [day]), did the same with *kamats* in Hebrew (*Duvid* [David]). Therefore, written Hebrew verse sometimes reflected the author's dialect because of the rhyme, but not the prose. As for written Yiddish, in Gnesin's time it was not studied formally, and no fixed spelling existed for this language. Jews wrote in Yiddish as it seemed right for them, oftentimes reflecting the pronunciation of their dialect. Obviously, the spelling of educated writers was more consistent because of the influence of more standardized printed texts.

(a kiss) instead of *kushn* and *kush* in other dialects,[41] and typical lexical preferences, such as *bulbe* [potatoes] and *gret* [laundry].[42]

Accounts of Gnesin's father provide more evidence of Gnesin's Litvak background. When the new Jewish spiritual movement of Hasidism appeared in the early nineteenth century among Ukrainian and Polish Jews, most of the Litvaks aggressively opposed it.[43] The Litvaks who accepted this new movement had to adapt it considerably in accordance with their rational worldview, combining Hasidic aspirations with cold Talmudic rationalism, bring to life *Khabad*,[44] the most secular movement in Hasidism.[45] Gnesin's father, Yehoyshue Nosn (also known as Hershl Note or Tsvi Note), and grandfather, Uri-Nisn, were prominent *Khabad* rabbis and heads of *yeshivas*.[46] "Dad knew only one road in his lifetime – from Pochep to L͡yubavich," Gnesin's brother Menakhem (1882-1951) used to say.[47] Born in 1840, Hershl Note became a rabbi, and in the 1870s he settled in the small town of Starodub, where his son Uri-Nisn was born. Hershl Note taught Talmud at a local *yeshiva*, and in 1883 was invited to become a rabbi in Krichev,[48] about 100 miles northwest of Starodub. In 1890,[49] Hershl Note moved his

[41] Many speakers of Lithuanian Yiddish lack the [sh] sound, and their dialect is often called a *sabesdike losn* (Shabes language) in order to illustrate this funny feature, because in other dialects the same words are pronounced *shabesdike loshn*. See note on Translation in *Landmark Yiddish Plays: a Critical Anthology*, ed. Joel Berkowitz and Jeremy Dauber (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006).
[42] Uri Nisn Gnesin. *Kitve* 27-149.
[43] One of the leading Jewish scholars of that time, the Gaon of Vilno (1720-1797), "determined that the new Hasidism was a heresy, and […] brought the community establishment to fight against it." See Etkes, Immanuel. *The Gaon of Vilna: The Man and His Image* (Berkeley: U of California P, 2002) 95.
[44] *Khabad* (חב''ד) is an abbreviation of Hebrew words meaning "wisdom, understanding, and knowledge."
[45] In late nineteenth century, the rivalry between followers and antagonists of Hasidism (known as *khasidim* and *misnagdim* respectively) was not as strong as it used to be in the eighteenth century, having moved from open wars to intellectual debates. In Lite, this tension had a unique character because both sides were Litvaks: *misnagdim* from Vilno and *khasidim* from L͡yubavich.
[46] Avner Holtsman, *Ha-sipur ha-ivri be-reyshit ha-mea ha-esrim [The Early 20th Century Hebrew Short Story]*, vols. 8-10 (Tel-Aviv: Ha-universita ha-ptukha, 1993) 9.
[47] D. Zakay. "Menakhem Gnesin." *Davar* (19 Feb 1954): 3.
[48] Albeck-Gidron gives another date, 1881, although she does not provide any sources (see Rachel Albeck-Gidron, introduction viii). Some scholars (Dan Miron, Lili Rattok) believe that in 1883 Hershl Note went to

family to Pochep, a small town in the Mglin district of the Chernigov *gubernia*, where a third of the population was Jewish.[50] Pochep became Gnesin's "psychic homeland and an expansion of his soul that persisted throughout his entire life."[51] Hershl Note served as the head of a rabbinical court and established a famous *yeshiva* in Pochep, which he headed until his death in 1920, and which was a major source of Gnesin's Jewish education.[52] Therefore, Gnesin was born and raised in Lite, received a formal Jewish education from his father in the tradition of Khabad Hasidism, and likely inherited such features associated with Litvaks as an inquiring mind, intellectual rationalism, and an anxiety for knowledge.

Russian neighbors in Starodub and Pochep

Another way to understand Gnesin's origins is to view him as a native of Starodub in the northern Chernigov *gubernia,* the most eastern part of the Jewish Pale. Like *Lite*, this region produced a unique cultural imprint on its population.[53] While Ukrainian and Polish peasants constituted the majority of the population in the southern

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Pochep, and not to Krichev. See *Uri Nisan Gnesin: mivkhar ma'amerey bikoret al yetsirato [U. N. Gnesin: A Selection of Critical Essays On His Literary Prose]*, comp. Lily Rattok (Tel-Aviv: Am oved, 1977) 209.

[49] Albeck-Gidron gives another date, 1888, although she does not provide any sources (see Rachel Albeck-Gidron, introduction ix). However, on the 23rd of Shvat, 5650 (February 13, 1890) Gnesin's father was still in Krichev, because with this date and location he signed an approval for a book by Yoel Fishman. See Yoel Arye-Leyb Fishman, *Likutim niflaim [A Wonderful Collection]* (Vilno: Yehuda Lipman, 1891) 6. Also, after 1890, Krichev rabbis were Yehuda-Leyb Krendel and Khayim-Yehuda Kagan. See *Rossiĭskai͡a evreiskai͡a ėnt͡siklopedii͡a [Russian Jewish Encyclopedia]*, vol. 5 (Moscow: Rossiĭskai͡a akademii͡a estestvennykh nauk, 2000) 208-209.

[50] In 1880s, there were 3,172 Jews in Pochep (32.6% of the total population). See *Evreĭskai͡a ėnt͡siklopedii͡a*, vol. XII, 785.

[51] *Uri Nissan Gnessin: Besides* ix.

[52] For more about *yeshiva* in Pochep see *Ohale shem: kovets le-inyane halakha u-veurim be-torat raboteynu nesieynu [Tents of the Name: A Collection of Legal Issues and Commentaries to the Works of Our Teachers and Leaders]*. (Kfar Khabad: Makhon Ohale Shem Lyubavich, 1991) 13.

[53] The Chernigov *gubernia* was a governorate of the Russian Empire in the territories of present-day Ukraine (Chernihiv, Sumi, and parts of Kiev districts) and Russia (Briansk district). It was created in 1802, partially reformed in 1919 and 1923-1926, and finally eliminated in 1925. Its modern borders roughly coincide with the Chernihiv district but also include a section of the Sumi district, some parts of the Kiev district of Ukraine, and most of the Briansk district of Russia.

districts of the *gubernia*, in Starodub, as well as in a few other northern districts, the Jewish population was predominantly surrounded by Russians, including Old Believers.[54] Relations between Jews and their neighbors in Starodub and Pochep were complex, but generally better than Jewish-Russian relations in rest of the Chernigov gubernia.

Several generations of frequent interaction with the Russian population had a significant effect on the Jewish communities of Starodub, Pochep, and other towns.[55] Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the Jewish communities of the Chernigov gubernia became much more open to influences from the outside world, namely of their non-Jewish neighbors. Gnesin's education is a good illustration of this cultural expansion and fusion: while studying at the *kheyder* (Jewish elementary school) and later at the *yeshiva*, he was also learning Russian language and literature with private tutors hired by his father. While some scholars view such openness to a foreign culture to be incompatible with the position of a rabbi,[56] for the Lithuanian Jewry in general, and for the family of a Khabad rabbi in particular, it was not at all exceptional.[57] Overall,

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[54] The demographic situation in the northern part of the *gubernia* (Mglin, Starodub and Novozybkov) was so different from the other parts of the *gubernia* mostly because of Russian sectarians known as Old Believers, who settled in these districts in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries while fleeing from persecution. These schismatics differed from Ukrainians in language, culture, and religious customs. Old Believers lived in isolated communities, did not marry people from outside, and often had to bribe local authorities in order to keep their traditions. They rarely owned land and were known for their entrepreneurial success. State oppression made certain aspects of their lives similar to the lives of Jews in the Russian Empire, also ostracized by the government for their marginality. Old Believers and Jews were both restricted in residency rights, paid additional taxes, had their own courts, and often suffered from various false accusations. See I. Orshanskiĭ, *Russkoe zakonodatel'stvo o evrei͡akh [Russian Laws on Jews]*, vol. 5 (Sankt-Peterburg: A. E. Landau, 1875) 52-55.

[55] In 1850, Chernigov's governor even suggested canceling "all the existing restrictions" for the Jews of his *gubernia* on the grounds of the "striking difference between them and the Jews from other *gubernias* in language, clothes, and ways of life," and because "they almost fully assimilated with the local people. See *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiĭskoy Imperii [Complete Collection of the Russian Empire Laws]*, vol. XL (Sankt-Peterburg: II otdelenie E. I. V. kant͡seli͡arii, 1867) 695.

[56] *Uri Nissan Gnessin: Besides* viii.

[57] Khabad did not oppose the study of other languages; thus, the seventh rabbi Menakhem Mendl Shneerson (1902-1944) learned Judaism from his father, while his mother took care of his general education, which included Russian, French, and mathematics. Later he continued with secular studies, and in 1936 came to Paris to study philosophy at the Sorbonne, See *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 18, 148-149.

knowledge of local languages was viewed as a useful skill beneficial to the entire community; since Belorussian Jews had a closer relationship with Russian authorities, the demand for knowledge of the Russian language was much greater than in Ukraine or Poland.

Gnesin's childhood in the Chernigov *gubernia* and his upbringing in the house of a Khabad rabbi both significantly influenced his personality. Gnesin's early exposure to traditional Litvak education, with its concentration on intellectual rigor, prepared him to embrace the intellectual challenges of a non-Jewish education; all the while close contact with Russian neighbors ultimately contributed to his further assimilation and integration into European society.

1.2. GNESIN'S EDUCATION

The benefit of knowing the official language of the state was not limited to its pragmatic usage; it also resulted in new knowledge. Russian literature, which addressed alternative moral and political issues, attracted many young Jews, and it was common to organize group readings of Russian books and newspapers (accompanied by tea and snacks) which were often followed by heated discussions.. Gnesin frequently participated in such events, which were organized by a young assimilated intellectual, Sholem Sender Baum,[58] who later introduced Gnesin to the ideas of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer.[59]

At his father's *yeshiva*, Gnesin became interested in foreign languages, such as German and French, and later English, although his proficiency in the latter two is questionable. When Gnesin became fluent in Russian, he started educating himself in the fields of world literature, history, and culture, since many popular scholarly and literary

[58] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 16-17.
[59] *Yoysef Khayim Brener: fun zayn lebn un shafn [Y.-Kh. Brener: on His Life and Work]*, ed. Sh. Grodzenski (New York: Yidish natsionaler arbeter farband, 1941) 32.

texts were available in Russian translation. The number of these works was so overwhelming that it was hard to establish and follow any reading plan. In one of the letters to his close friend, the critic and publisher Shimen Bikhovski (1880-1932),[60] he wrote: "I read Draper;[61] today I found the eleventh volume of Goncharov. I read his 'Literary Evening.'[62] There is absolutely no right order in my studies these days, in what I read, and also even in what I do."[63] In other words, Gnesin's autodidactic approach was unsystematic resulting in an eclectic non-Jewish education, common among his peers. His spiritual life was a strange dialectic of the permitted and the prohibited. It was a modern culture grafted to old traditions. The *Haskalah*[64] [Enlightenment] movement was as flourishing in Pochep as was the religious life of Torah learning and piety, and many young Jews were intellectually attracted to contemporary Russian and European literature. Along with the works of Jewish writers, everybody read Tolstoĭ, Gor'kiĭ, Chekhov, and Turgenev. Menakhem Gnesin, who lived in Pochep until moving to the Land of Israel in 1903, wrote in a memoir that "later came discussions, debates, and comparisons about 'our' Russian writers [...] many 'patriots' among us preferred our writers to those 'Scandinavians,' and talked about us with a lot of pride."[65]

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[60] Bikhovski studied together with Gnesin in yeshiva in Pochep and became one of his most devoted friends. In 1906, Bikhovski established the publishing house *Nisyonot* (Experiments) where the Gnesin's first novel was published, and helped Y. Kh. Brener with his periodical *Ha-Meorer* (Awakening).

[61] John William Draper (1811-1882) was an American scientist, philosopher, physician, and historian. In 1900, several books by Draper were translated and published. Gnesin could have read any of them, for instance, the *History of the Intellectual Development of Europe* (1864). This book made a huge impression on Russian readers; there were four editions in Sankt-Peterburg (1866, 1869, 1873, 1885), and a few more in Kiev.

[62] The Russian writer Ivan Aleksandrovich Goncharov (1812-1891) is mostly known for his novel *Oblomov*. The story *Literary Evening* was written in 1877.

[63] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 14.

[64] *Haskalah* [Enlightenment] is a Jewish movement that originated in the eighteenth century in Europe. It advocated for non-Jewish education, for a better integration into the cultural and political life of the neighboring nations, and strongly opposed Hasidism, accusing it of fanaticism and superstitions. The followers of Haskalah are often called *maskilim* (singular: *maskil*).

[65] Menakhem Gnesin, *Darki im ha-teatron ha-ivri, 1905-1926 [My Way with the Hebrew Theater]* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibuts ha-meukhad, 1946) 16.

A small provincial town, Pochep could not satisfy Gnesin's educational needs, and in 1898 he began traveling to Homel, an important *Khabad* center, where more than half of the population was Jewish.[66] In the late nineteenth century, Homel attracted hundreds of young Jews, for whom Jonathan Frankel coined a special term in Russian, *polu-intelligent͡si͡a* [the half-intelligentsia], describing them as "radicalized youth who had some formal Jewish education, but otherwise were autodidacts, uprooted and penurious, who were denied access to the gymnasium and the university."[67] Coming to bigger cities from *shtetlekh* (small towns), they usually earned their living by teaching private lessons, and often played active roles in various political organizations. Despite their differences, Gnesin was close to these people and lived a similar lifestyle to them. The Jewish youth's painful search for answers to eternal philosophical questions became a major topic of Gnesin's later works. In Homel, Gnesin met with the Jewish philosopher and writer Hilel Tseytlin (1871-1942) and was heavily influenced by Nietzsche's pessimism, which was extremely popular among the Russian youth. Jewish readers of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, equipped with Talmudic logic and ethics instilled in them by their fathers, were confronted with a tragedy expressed in Nietzsche's brave and shocking statements. Tseytlin admitted that "for us, a true pessimist was Friedrich Nietzsche with

[66] In the 1890s, there lived more than 20,000 Jews in Homel (about 55% of the total population).

[67] Jonathan Frankel, *Crisis, Revolution, and Russian Jews* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009) 103. An important factor contributing to the rapid growth of this group was the *numerus clausus* (quota system), introduced in 1886, soon after the pogroms of the early 1880s. By this law, the Russian government limited the number of Jewish students in institutions of higher education to 10% within the Pale of settlement, 5% outside it, and 3% in the capitals. In 1887, about 23,000 Russian Jews emigrated to the United States, while many other Jewish students settled in Western European university cities. Those who remained in Russia had the option of maintaining external (non-matriculating) status by studying on their own and passing the state exams. Such autodidacts were called *externs*, and made up a significant part of the Jewish half-intelligentsia in Homel, as well as in the other cities of Russian empire. For more on the quota system, see Gerald Sorin, *A Time for Building: the Third Migration, 1880-1920* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Samuel D. Kassow, *Students, Professors, and the State in Tsarist Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Patrick L. Alston, *Education and the State in Tsarist Russia* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1969).

all his 'joy of life' and 'great health,' about which he talks so much. In his 'superman,' as in all of his theories and paradoxes, we heard only a cry full of pain from a man who wants to fill the terrible abyss of life with whatever."[68]

By the end of the century, the major loci of Jewish spiritual and political life in Homel were the Khabad *yeshiva*, the Bund, various Zionist groups, and the intellectual study circle of Sholem Sender Baum, who had lived in Pochep and organized literary evenings there until 1899.[69] Baum subscribed to Nietzsche's philosophy and strictly avoided any political affiliations. Initially, Gnesin and his friends were affiliated with Baum's intellectual circle and partially shared its leader's political apathy. However, Tseytlin, as well as other members of this circle who had a yeshiva background and strongly identified as Jewish, were not satisfied with Baum's attitude towards Zionism in particular, and the Jewish question in general. Soon they created a new group, *Tseire Tsion* (The Youth of Zion). For some time Gnesin was associated with this circle, being attracted to the balance between its Jewish nationalist ethos and its Russian cultural environment.

The polysystematic relationship between Jewish and Russian cultures is oftentimes reduced to literary interaction.[70] However, it is difficult to explain the origins of "patriotism" and "pride" without taking into consideration the full spectrum of Russian-Jewish existence in the Pale of Settlement. The *Haskalah* affected many aspects of Jewish life, mainly by creating the necessity for knowledge of the state language and for secular education. The Jews of the *Haskalah,* speaking and reading in Russian, fostered closer relationships with Russians than their fathers had. Following the vision of

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[68] *Yoysef Khayim Brener: fun zayn lebn un shafn* 32-33.
[69] Moshe Waldoks, "Hillel Zeitlin: The Early Years (1894-1919)," diss., Brandeis U, 1984, 14-21.
[70] See, for example, a comprehensive study of Russian-Jewish literary influences by Rina R. Lapidus: *Between Snow and Desert Heat: Russian Influences on Hebrew Literature, 1870-1970* (Hebrew Union College Press, 2003).

Yehuda Leyb Gordon, many of them were Jews at home and Russians in the street.[71] Gnesin's lifestyle adhered to this vision in Pochep and abroad, It also explains why Gnesin took pride in the superiority of Russian literature – not because it was superior to Jewish literature, but because it was Russian.

As a Russian Jew, Gnesin lived in a rich multicultural world, and when he started writing during his years at *yeshiva*, there were enough people representing multiple literary traditions whom he could claim as his predecessors if not teachers. He wrote poetry, short stories, and critical essays, several of which, published in *Ha-Melits* [Advocate],[72] survive. The earliest known publication dates back to 1896 and is signed "U. N. Gnesin." Later, he occasionally wrote under the pseudonyms U. N. Esterzon or just U. Esterzon.[73] From the very beginning, Gnesin chose Hebrew as his primary literary language. He only wrote one story in Yiddish: *Tsvishn gertner* [Between the Gardens], later translated into Hebrew under the title *Ba-ganim* [In the Gardens]. However, Hebrew was by no means the only literary language choice for a person who was a native speaker of Yiddish and also had a good command of Russian.

Jewish writers in the late nineteenth century could choose from several identities.[74] As Jews, their writing was likely to appeal to Jewish readers, but living in a non-Jewish state, they might also try to nationally integrate themselves through literature.

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[71] This motto of Jewish Enlightenment, "Be a Jew at home, and a man in public!," is attributed to a Russian Jewish writer and journalist, Yehuda-Leyb Gordon (1830-1892), one of the leading figures of Haskalah in Eastern Europe. According to a less common opinion, this phrase belongs to Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786), a German Jewish philosopher who has been referred to as the father of the Haskalah.

[72] *Ha-Melits* (המליץ) was the first Hebrew weekly published in Russia from 1860 to 1904. Associated with Haskalah, it became one of the most popular Jewish papers, especially in the late nineteenth century, when it was edited by Y. L. Gordon. See Alexander Orbach, *New Voices of Russian Jewry: A Study of the Russian-Jewish Press of Odessa in the Era of the Great Reforms 1860-1871* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980) 54-154.

[73] In Germanized Yiddish, *Esterzon* means "son of Ester."

[74] For a detailed discussion of this choice, see Leon Israel Yudkin, *Jewish Writing and Identity in the Twentieth Century* (London: Croom Helm, [1982]) 11-26.

However, it is hardly possible to separate any language from its heritage, and since the mainstream Christian cultures of Russian, Polish, German, and other European nations were hostile toward Jews, it was less common for Jewish writers to express themselves in non-Jewish languages. Additionally, since Gnesin learned Russian relatively late in his life, he was not as comfortable writing in Russian as he was writing in Hebrew or Yiddish which may be another reason why he did not employ Russian in his literary works.

Jewish language authors were presented with a choice between writing in vernacular Yiddish with its huge audience but modest literary tradition, and writing in Hebrew, the quintessence of cultural, historical, and spiritual Jewry, with a very limited readership, especially in the Russian Empire. Many Russian Jews "could not cope with the language [Hebrew], and of those who could, the majority were traditional, Orthodox, and unwilling to read the work of the rebels, the *apikorsim*."[75] A rabbi's son, Gnesin belonged to this marginal group of Hebrew fiction readers, which was so small that the readers sometimes overlapped with the writers.

Surprisingly, Gnesin's language choice was not dictated by his political affiliation. In general, Yiddish was identified with the labor movement, with revolutionaries, and later with the members of the Bund, a Jewish socialist party. On the other hand, Hebrew was the language of the Zionists, the political rivals of the Bundists. Therefore, those authors who had pronounced political views were in most cases forced to write in one of the two languages and publish their works in corresponding periodicals. But Gnesin was known to be indifferent to Zionist activity,[76] so his choice of Hebrew as

[75] Jonathan Frankel, *Crisis, Revolution, and Russian Jews* 104.
[76] Shachar Pinsker, "Intertextuality, Rabbinic Literature, and the Making of Hebrew Modernism," *Jewish Literatures and Cultures: Context and Intertext*, ed. Anita Norich and Yaron Z. Eliav (Providence, RI: Brown U, 2008) 214.

a literary language was not made for political reasons. Rather, it was an aesthetic choice made in favor of a language with an enormous literary tradition.

Young Jewish intellectuals and writers like Gnesin were fully bilingual, if not trilingual: they had a solid knowledge of written Hebrew and Aramaic, and they could speak, read, and write Yiddish as well as some of the official languages (Russian, Polish, German, etc.). It was not unusual for a Jewish writer of the nineteenth century to make contributions to both Hebrew and Yiddish literature. Elkhonen Tseytlin (1902-1942) wrote in his memoir:[77]

> In those years before the [First World] war, there was no sharp division between Yiddish and Hebrew writers yet, although the Yiddish-Hebrew battle was already heated. Yiddish and Hebrew writers felt as if they belonged to one family, they fought – but worked together […].Yiddish belletrists often came to Lakhover, who was exclusively a Hebrew writer, and almost every Hebrew writer in Warsaw used to come to my father, whom Yiddishists treated as their own.[78]

In other words, there was tension between Hebrew and Yiddish, both in the cultural and political sense, and some writers were associated with one language more than with the other. However, the border between these two languages was never set in stone, and Jewish writers could move between Hebrew and Yiddish without any efforts, as evidenced by their personal correspondence.[79]

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[77] The youngest son of Hilel Zeytlin, Elkhonen, was a Yiddish poet, critic, journalist, and social activist.
[78] Elkhonen Tseytlin, *In a literarisher shtub: bilder, bagegenishn, epizodn [In a Literary House: Images, Meetings, Episodes]*, vol. 1 (Varshe [Warsaw]: Elchonon Cejtlin, 1937) 72-73.
[79] The letters of Gnesin and Brener have numerous examples of sentences combining Hebrew and Yiddish.

Gnesin, who only recognized art for art's sake, did not have to choose between these two languages.[80] While colloquial Yiddish was his mother tongue, it did not compete with Hebrew in prestige nor did it enjoy the authoritative support which Hebrew texts did. The only possible motivation for Gnesin to write in Yiddish would have been his sympathy towards the Jewish labor movement. However, he had no such political affiliations. Unlike his closest friend Yosef Khayim Brener (1881-1921), considered one of the most important figures of modern Hebrew literature, Gnesin did not partake in socialist (or any other) ideology, and, in contrast to his contemporaries, deliberately avoided any political affiliations.[81] His apolitical stance is clearly manifested in his works: instead of concentrating on political or moral messages, Gnesin focused on literature as an aesthetic phenomenon able to express the most subtle of emotions.

Gnesin's extensive knowledge of classic Judaic texts, acquired at his father's *yeshiva*, became a major reason for his choice of Hebrew as a literary language. Parallel to traditional Jewish education, he also received thorough instruction in the Russian language. In a few years, Gnesin became well read in Russian literature and, through translations, also in European literature, both of which noticeably affected his writings.

1.3. GNESIN AND BRENER

In the fall of 1894, Brener came to Pochep to study in the *yeshiva,* entered into a circle of *maskilim*, and soon became a close friend of Gnesin.[82] Together with Bikhovski,

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[80] In a letter from January 1st, 1900, Brener wrote to Gnesin that he did not agree with his theory about literature for the sake of literature, described in a previous letter. Unfortunately, Gnesin's letter is not preserved, but from Brener's response it is possible to get an insight into Gnesin's position. See Yosef Khayim Brener, *Kol kitve Y. Kh. Brener [Complete Works of Y. Kh. Brener]*, vol. 3, (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibuts ha-meukhad, 1967) 222.

[81] David Patterson, and Ezra Spicehandler, introduction, *Out of the Depths and Other Stories*, by Yosef Haim Brenner, (New Milford: The Toby Press, 2008) 75.

[82] Yitskhak Bakon gives another date of Brener's arrival in Pochep, 1896. See Yitskhak Bakon, *Brener ha-tsair: khayav vi-tsirato shel Brener ad le-hofaat "Hameorer" be-London* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibuts ha-meukhad, 1975) 10. I follow 1894 as a more commonly accepted date. For example, see Nurit Govrin,

Gnesin and Brener issued three journals at the *yeshiva*: the monthly *Ha-Perakh* [The Flower], the weekly *Ha-Kaits* [The Summer], and for some time even the daily *Ha-Kof* [The Monkey]. All the editing was done at dawn before the first class at the *yeshiva* started, when Uri-Nisn's father went to morning prayer - and late at night, when his father was busy in his room. The size of these journals was impressive: each volume of *Ha-Perakh* was 120 pages.[83] It is unknown how many issues were published, since only one of them survived, a copy of *Ha-Kof* from December, 1898, in which Gnesin was the main contributor.[84]

Gnesin and Brener had a painful friendship, "impaired by a lovers' quarrel and rivalries."[85] Indeed, Gnesin and Brener had hardly anything in common other than being students at the same *yeshiva*. Even the fact that both were Jewish writers did not strengthen their relationship, because their writing styles and goals were too different. Gnesin came from a family of rabbis, received an excellent education, and was financially independent, while Brener was raised in a poverty-stricken family with a father who barely made his living as a *melamed*.[86] Over the years, these differences became more pronounced: Gnesin started disliking Brener's involvement with the Bund and shared neither his social views nor his understanding of art and literature. Brener considered Gnesin was too introverted and removed from reality. Shortly after Gnesin's death in 1913, Brener wrote a eulogy wherein he tried to define their relationship:

"Brenner, Yosef Khayim," *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, online, Internet, 2 Feb. 2011, and *Uri Nisan Gnesin: mivkhar ma'amerey* 209.

[83] A. B. Yofe, "Beyn Gnesin le-Brener [Between Gnesin and Brener]," *Davar* 29 Apr. 1948: 4.

[84] In 1897-1898, Brener wrote a few poems, articles, and stories for *Ha-Perakh*, and send them to Gnesin from Bialistok. See David Patterson, and Ezra Spicehandler, introduction 19.

[85] Rachel Albeck-Gidron, introduction xii; David Patterson, and Ezra Spicehandler, introduction 75.

[86] *Melamed* (a teacher in Jewish elementary school) was one of the less paid and less prestigious professions.

> What Uri-Nisn was to me before he came to me to London – I would not be able to tell even if I desired so. […] Our relationship was always true and deep, from the day we met one with another, but I see it now as if through a fog. Love? – Of course, of course, at least from my side […] There was, there was love – without any doubt. Admiration? This was probably not so strong and deep, especially when we both fell into what was called 'life.' Always, it seems to me that – together with the envy, with some impossible burning jealousy at his many great virtues – on the other side, there is a feeling in my heart, that he was weaker than me, that he was less prepared than me to express his whispering inner world. And as for the hardships of external life, he was also less prepared to withstand this war. Uri-Nisn took too much pride in his ancestry and was too gentle, and lacked stubbornness and iron for me to admire him.[87]

Brener studied in Pochep for three years. In 1897 he noticed that the community changed their attitude towards him, suspecting heresy.[88] Brener decided to flee to a bigger, more tolerant town, and moved to Bialystok. A few years later, he wrote his first novel, *Ba-khoref* [In the Winter], a fictional autobiography of a young Jew, who belonged to Brener's "specific and minute milieu: the ex-*yeshiva* students, with their first-class knowledge of Hebrew, of Aramaic, of rabbinic texts and of Yiddish, their mother-tongue, but with only a late-acquired and patchy grasp of Russian […]."[89] The main character of this novel gives an interesting account of a literary journal, which he put together with his friends in *yeshiva*:

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[87] Yosef Khayim Brener, *Kol kitve* 115.
[88] David Patterson, and Ezra Spicehandler, introduction 75. For Brener's letter see: Yosef Khayim Brener, *Kol kitve* 203.
[89] Jonathan Frankel, *Crisis, Revolution, and Russian Jews* 103.

> The name of our paper was "A Small Light to Enlighten the *Yeshiva*," and the content consisted of different debates between the Torah and the Enlightenment, the rich and the poor, students of *yeshiva* and children of prosperous families, faith and research, *khasidim* and *misnagdim*, nationalists and assimilationists […] My work looked holy in my eyes, and I felt like a war hero. The number of copies was one. It was copied with nice handwriting for the pleasure of my dozen of readers, and for my complete happiness.[90]

This paper was obviously inspired by the real journals that Brener and Gnesin issued together. The detailed description of the journal in *Ba-khoref*, particularly the information about its content and its reception by other students, sheds light on the journals from the *yeshiva* in Pochep that have been lost.

After a year of hardship and sickness in Bialystok, Brener returned to Pochep, and in January of 1899 he left for Homel. He hoped that Homel would be a more tolerant place than Pochep, and planned to find a job and study languages and secular subjects in this large industrial city. Soon after his arrival in Homel, Brener met with Hilel Tseytlin and became his devoted friend. Some time later, Brener introduced Tseytlin to his friends from Pochep, Gnesin and Zalmen Yitskhok Aronson (1878-1947), a popular Hebrew and Yiddish writer.[91] In 1901, Gershon Shofman (1880-1972), who served in the army in Homel and later became a well-known Hebrew modernist writer, joined their circle. Gnesin and Aronson did not live in Homel permanently, but traveled the 100 miles from Pochep every now and then. As a result, they were exposed to the same intellectual and political influences as Brener, who interacted with Tseytlin daily until joining the army in

[90] Yosef Khayim Brener, *Ba-khoref; Me-saviv le-nekuda [Wintertime; Around The Point]* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1988) 53.
[91] Z. Y. Aronson was better known by his pen-name Anokhi.

1901 and remaining in the Russian town, Orël. Gnesin and other friends occasionally visited Brener, but the hardships of military service were so unbearable that in early 1904 he deserted with the help of the local Bund activists. Brener illegally crossed the border, and after a short stay in Galicia, reached England.

In London, Brener launched a Hebrew journal, *Ha-Meorer* [Awakening], and desperately sought help with this project, which was too large an undertaking for one person. Throughout 1906, his letters asked Gnesin to come to London, and finally Gnesin agreed, although Brener would later suggested a different version: "I did not advise him to come to London [...] I clearly wrote to him – I remember it – this place is not for you, but if you are not waiting for anything anymore, and you have nothing to lose – [then] come!"[92] In May 1907, Gnesin arrived in London and moved in with Brener. The two friends had not seen each other since 1901 and had communicated only by mail. Both were excited at the opportunity to restore the intimacy of their friendship, which had begun years ago in Pochep. However, their reunion turned out to be a disappointment. Gnesin was depressed and sick; and Brener, who knew nothing about Gnesin's poor health, considered his friend self-indulgent. Six years later, in a short essay published after Gnesin's death, Brener gave an honest account of his hurt feelings:

> To my shame, I was blind. I was not aware of his physical disease because he did not inform me. If I knew of it, then maybe [everything] would be different. But because I did not know, I could not move away from upsetting thoughts: why would he pamper himself? Was it right for such a high-minded person as he to indulge himself? He was broken as we all were – so what? […] What gave him the right to look at us from above? But it was even worse when I felt that in fact it was not so simple, that in

[92] Yosef Khayim Brener, *Kol kitve* 116.

> fact he was hiding some secret, that in fact he came to me in pain – just the opposite, I was upset even more: why did he hide it from me? Why would he not tell even me? I did not deserve it! Uri-Nisn! Uri-Nisn![93]

Gnesin's father unwittingly contributed to the misunderstanding. When his son was London bound, he sent a letter to Brener, in which he cautioned his former student to ensure that he and his friend [Gnesin] fulfilled the important commandments of *shabes*, *tfiln* and *tsitses*. Hershl Note understood that his letter may not please Brener: "Believe me, my student, it was very, very difficult for me to write this letter, as if you both were under my suspicion, God forbid."[94] Brener answered in a formal and polite manner, addressing Gnesin's father as "my teacher, great rabbi, righteous and God-fearing, the honor of his glorious name, our teacher and rabbi, Yehoyshue Nosn, the judge of the town of Pochep, may his Rock and Redeemer protect him." In his letter, Brener assured Hershl Note that there was no reason to worry, that both he and Gnesin knew how to respect and to honor Jewish traditions and stay away from the wrong ways.[95] The day after his arrival, Gnesin wrote to his father a short letter: "To your letter Y"Kh already responded, and I myself have nothing to add, rather than that you can be sure that our old age will never embarrass our youth. [...] Let your heart be sure about us, my dear!"[96]

One of the main reasons for Gnesin's move to London was to co-edit *Ha-Meorer*. This position did not provide any salary. Instead Brener taught his friend to typeset and expected Gnesin to work with him at Naroditski's printing house. However, this job was too hard for Gnesin, and further aggravated their relationship. Brener believed that Gnesin despised and avoided him; in turn, Gnesin grew tired of the hyperactive and

[93] Yosef Khayim Brener, *Kol kitve* 116.
[94] Yosef Khayim Brener, *Kol kitve* 308.
[95] Yosef Khayim Brener, *Kol kitve* 308.
[96] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 135-136.

mentally unstable Brener. The old friendship was obviously coming to an end. They could no longer work together, so Brener resigned as editor of *Ha-Meorer* and suggested that Gnesin take the position as his successor. Gnesin began to form a close friendship with Osher Beylin (1881-1948), a third member of their small circle, a Hebrew and Yiddish playwright and journalist. He soon moved out of Brener's apartment and moved in with Beylin, which marked, as Spicehandler put it, an "open break" with Brener.[97] In a letter to his niece, sent in August 1907, Gnesin wrote that "everything was going toward the end."[98]

Gnesin's health worsened upon moving to London. In September 1907, he decided to leave England, regardless of his editorial position. He informed Brener and Beylin of his decision in an urgent meeting. Since it was impossible to publish *Ha-Meorer* without its editor, all three agreed to terminate the journal. In early October Gnesin left London, and never again saw Brener, who later recalled with bitterness that "from that day till the day of his death, be it from Pochep or from Warsaw, he wrote to Beylin, but I never received a single line from him."[99] Neither of the former friends tried to revive their relationship, although their breach made both of them suffer.

Gnesin and Brener made their first literary steps together, editing and contributing to several school journals. For over a decade after 1894, they shared their deepest thoughts and feelings in conversations and correspondences.[100] Many of these letters

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[97] David Patterson, and Ezra Spicehandler, introduction 79.
[98] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 138.
[99] Yosef Khayim Brener, *Kol kitve* 117. Gnesin also never received any letters from Brener after his departure from London, although he too could not forget their old friendship. He wrote to Beylin: "When I close the eyes, I remember so much, Beylin. What do Shofman and Brener write to you about it? Although this one probably does not write because of the principle." (Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 153.) In another letter, he asked Bikhovski to send to him all the issues of the [weekly] *Akhdut* [Unity] which had Brener's articles. (Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 169.) And just a few months before his death, Gnesin asked Beylin whether he had heard anything from Brener lately. (Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 189.)
[100] See Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 42-136; and Yosef Khayim Brener, *Kol kitve* 199-250.

included excited assurances of eternal friendship: "Only death will separate us!"[101] For an introvert like Gnesin, the loss of his close friend turned out to be a particularly stressful experience. It also left an imprint on Gnesin's writing, which, as David Frishman, a Hebrew and Yiddish writer, literary critic, and editor, commented, reflects his inner world: "I absolutely cannot picture him writing about anybody's life but his own."[102]

For instance, the plots of Gnesin's first major works, *Hatsida* [Aside] and *Beyntaim* [Meanwhile], are built around the tension between the main protagonist and his old friend, who returned home after living abroad for several years. These stories were written between 1904 and 1906 when Brener, still an old friend of Gnesin's, had been living in England; it is easy to recognize him in the characters of Gavriel Karmel (*Hatsida*) and Dovid Ratner (*Beyntaim*). Gnesin missed his friend and apparently had hoped for his return. Brener never came back to Russia, but he nonetheless manifested there as a fictional character in Gnesin's first two stories. In 1908, after their friendship came to an end, Gnesin began to write two more long stories, *Beterem* [Before] in 1908-1910 and *Etsel* [Near] in 1911-1913. As with his previous narratives, both of these stories have protagonists who share biographical features with the author, but in neither can one find the persona of an old friend who returned home from abroad. After their falling-out, Brener no longer appeared as a character in Gnesin's writing. The event changed the nature of Gnesin's narrative in his last stories. In *Beterem*, which was written immediately after Gnesin's stressful months in London, the main character, Uriel Efros, is motivated by his homecoming; however, upon his return to his parents house, he

[101] Yosef Khayim Brener, *Kol kitve* 213.
[102] David Frishman, "U. N. Gnesin," *Hatsida: kovets-zikaron le-U. N. Gnesin [Beside: a Collection in Memory of U. N. Gnesin]*, ed. Y. Kh. Brener (Jerusalem: Akhdut, 1914) 97.

discovers that his longing was unreal, and that nobody can resurrect the feelings and relations of the vanished past.

Gnesin's long and complicated relationship with Brener lasted for nearly two decades, and was a significant part of both author's lives, even after their complete estrangement in 1907. This breach not only negatively affected Gnesin's health, but also left a noticeable imprint on his works. Thus, the details of Gnesin's friendship with Brener allow readers to gain better insight into his works.

1.4. GNESIN'S WANDERINGS

The Hebrew and Yiddish writer Zalman Shneur (1887-1959) suggested that Gnesin's four long stories are four chapters of one "poem of great loneliness," which began with *Hatsida* and continued until the last line of *Etsel*.[103] At the turn of the century, anxiety, unrest, and loneliness predominated among assimilated young Russian Jews, especially those attracted to the ideas of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. Some were able to control their feelings and follow a traditional way of life while other more sensitive youth were unbearably burdened by the uneasiness of their emotions. Always grappling with their psychological state, such people rarely occupied a stable position in the society and frequently moved from one town to another, remaining eternal students without families and homes.

For Gnesin, this emotional burden became backbreaking. Lonely and distraught, he wandered through Russia for most of his life, rarely staying in the same place longer than a few months. His arrivals and departures were usually unexpected, and many people who knew him noted his strange behavior. In a short memoir, Shneur called Gnesin's arrivals "surprising":

[103] Zalman Shneur, "Ishiyuto ve-khishrono [His Character and Talent]," *Hatsida* 105.

> Meanwhile Gnesin left Vilno[104] in the same way he had arrived, and left without saying good-bye to anybody, as he always did. Where is Gnesin? He has left already. […] For instance, he pays an early visit to his friend in Warsaw. Or somebody meets him, for instance, on Dzika street in that same Warsaw: "Gnesin, are you here, in Warsaw?" "No, [he answers], I am still in Pochep, ha-ha."[105]

Another acquaintance, Nakhmen Mayzil (1887-1966), also mentioned this peculiarity of Gnesin's: "[He] roamed in Kiev in a most remarkable manner – he was, and he was not there, with his wonderful rose-pale face, full of cheer and mystery." Nakhmen Mayzil's first few encounters with Gnesin produced the impression that the wandering author was "strange, somewhat not-from-here, [as if] from the other world."[106] Others shared this impression of Gnesin. Elkhonen Tseytlin, who was a little child when Gnesin came to his father's house in Warsaw, recalled that Gnesin "spoke rarely and quietly – for every ten words he answered with one, but each of his words was soft and mild, like a pleasant wind on a hot day. A nobility, which was not from this world, was covering his long yellowish face, his sad eyes, his blond mustache."[107]

Gnesin's first trip to Warsaw

In the late 1890s, Gnesin began taking trips on his own, and actually split his time between Pochep and the neighboring towns, mostly Homel. During a short stay in Warsaw, he met with the influential journalist Nahum Sokolow and soon received an

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[104] Vilnius, the capital of today's Lithuania, has been known in many spellings throughout its history: Wilno, Wilna, Vilno, Vilna, Vilne, Vil'n͡yus. I prefer "Vilno" as a more common option in Jewish Russian literature at the turn of the century.
[105] *Uri Nisan Gnesin: mivkhar ma'amerey* 47.
[106] Nakhmen Mayzil, *Forgeyer un mittsaytler [Predecessors and Contemporaries]* (New York: Ikuf, 1946): 328.
[107] Elkhonen Tseytlin, *In a literarisher shtub* 75.

offer for an editing job in a prestigious literary journal, *Ha-Tsefirah* [The Dawn].[108] Gnesin accepted the offer, and in the spring of 1900 he moved to Warsaw. However, the daily editorial job did not excite him, and the financial prospects of a literary career in Warsaw did not look promising either. In a letter to his friend Bikhovski on July 16th, 1900, Gnesin wrote:

> Warsaw, for example, as I was convinced after long investigation, is absolutely not a place wherein one can earn a living by giving lessons. There are plenty of teachers here. It is not possible to live off the press either. [...] You have to know that our Hebrew publishers are not used to paying. This winter I hope to publish a new daily here under the name *Ha-Et* [The Epoch] (edited by Ben-Tsion Kats), but that also does not give any hope. In general, our literature is still far from providing its contributors with bread to eat and clothes to put on.[109]

In early 1901, Gnesin quit the job at *Ha-Tsefirah* and returned to Pochep. There is an opinion among scholars, first put forth by Dan Miron, that Gnesin was turned off by the literary milieu in Warsaw, one of the major Jewish cultural centers of that time: "After a short time, he was bitterly disappointed in Warsaw, and very soon all his enthusiasm about liveliness and activeness of the literary 'centers' disappeared."[110] Albeck-Gidron puts forth this theory more strongly: "[Gnesin] was fed up with Warsaw, particularly with its group of young authors." The scholar even concludes that "he left without saying good-bye to anyone."[111]

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[108] In 1885, Nahum Sokolow (1859-1936) became an associate editor of Khayim Zelig Slonimski's journal *Ha-Tsefirah*, which became a daily in 1886, and chief editor *de-facto*. It is plausible that Gnesin brought him his early works in 1899.
[109] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 19-20.
[110] Dan Miron, *Khakhim be-apo shel ha-netsakh: yetsirato shel Uri Nisan Gnesin [Posterity Hooked: The Travail and Achievement of Uri Nisan Gnessin]* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1997) 67.
[111] Rachel Albeck-Gidron, introduction xiii.

Miron supported this interpretation with evidence from one of Gnesin's letters, written in June, 1904: "The big cities are no longer what they used to be – absolutely!"[112] This sentiment can hardly explain Gnesin's reasons for leaving Warsaw, since it is not connected to the events of 1901. On the contrary, several letters from the period under discussion demonstrate that Gnesin was actively involved in literary life. His poems and essays were being published, and he envisioned living in Warsaw, at least for the near future. "Now I read different books, including Schiller in the original […]. I visit different literary evenings, speak, argue, and debate with others and with myself,"[113] wrote Gnesin in 1900. Nevertheless, two factors were responsible for Gnesin's departure from Warsaw. First, the weather in Warsaw was bad for his health, which he admitted in a letter to Zalmen Anokhi two years later:

> […] Don't ask me why I ran away from Warsaw. To a certain degree, I really – I would not say regret, because I knew everything in advance – but still tortured myself with this: Warsaw has already affected my health enough during the days of my stay, and, therefore, I would not recommend you to come here. You do not know how terrible this city is for sick people. And we, my dear, are sick.[114]

Warsaw presented Gnesin with another unsolvable problem: financial instability. Gnesin rented a room together with the young Hebrew poet Z. Y. Yofe.[115] He worked hard, and published his works in quite a few periodicals; however, low and irregular compensation

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[112] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 52.
[113] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 21.
[114] The Hebrew original clearly indicates that Gnesin uses "sick" in the physical sense (חולי-הגוף). See Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 40-41.
[115] When Brener came to Warsaw in August of 1900, he stayed together with Gnesin and Yofe. See Brener's letter in Yosef Khayim Brener, *Kol kitve* 222.

made it hard for him to live as a writer. In addition, severe competition among too many teachers made it even harder for him to earn a living by giving lessons.

While some scholars claim that Gnesin left Warsaw because he felt disappointed and rejected by its literary circles, historical analysis reveals other reasons which appear to be more mundane: cold Warsaw winters and financial hardship. In other words, Gnesin's departure from Warsaw is not evidence of his political and cultural incompatibility with this city. Rather, it was a practical decision, resulting from the general disappointments of life in a big city. These hardships did not reflect his literary and cultural life in Warsaw which made him feel "simply drunk" on impressions, emotions, and reflections.[116]

Gnesin from 1901 to 1907

After a short time in Pochep, Gnesin left for Borisoglebsk, a provincial Russian town beyond the Pale of Settlement, 900 miles east of Warsaw and almost 400 miles from his home town.[117] As a Jew, Gnesin could not stay in Borisoglebsk legally, although he lived there for a year, working as a private tutor and writing his first stories. In contrast to Warsaw, Gnesin did not have trouble finding work as a teacher in Borisoglebsk, which may be the reason for his choice of residence.

In the summer of 1902, Gnesin quit his tutoring job in Borisoglebsk and returned to Pochep, although he did not stay at home for long. A few months later, Gnesin moved to Kiev, found himself a job, and completed a collection of stories. In the spring of 1903, he returned to Pochep and sent the stories to the Warsaw publishing house, *Tushiya*.

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[116] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 41.

[117] In 1897, only 354 Jews lived in the town, which was less than 2% of the total population. See *Rossiĭskai͡a evreiskai͡a ėnt͡siklopedii͡a [Russian Jewish Encyclopedia]*, vol. 4 (Moscow: Rossiĭskai͡a akademii͡a estestvennikh nauk, 2000) 163.

When its owner, the Jewish writer and publisher Ben-Avigdor (1867-1921),[118] read the manuscript, he invited Gnesin to come and discuss some editorial issues. Gnesin immediately came to Warsaw and stayed there for several months. However, insufficient funds and the approaching winter were cause enough for him to leave again. At first, Gnesin was planning to travel to Odessa and meet with Anokhi, but his plans never actualized, and at the end of 1903 he returned to Pochep.

In March 1904, his first book was released by the *Tushiya* publishing house, and on April 12th he received the author copies.[119] Gnesin still wanted to visit Odessa, most likely because of its literary life. Odessa had the second largest (after Warsaw) Jewish population in Russia, and was known as a stronghold of *Haskalah.*[120] A Yiddish saying about the city claims that *zibn mayl arum odes brent der genem* [seven miles around Odessa is a burning hell] because, as Stephen Zipperstein wrote, the impact of cultural and social modernization in Odessa was immeasurably greater than in other cities.[121] Its literary, political, and philanthropic milieu attracted enlightened Jews from many smaller towns. Odessa was the hometown of Mendele Moykher-sforim, Ahad Ha'am, Pinsker, Lilienblum, Bialik, Ravnitski, and other important Jewish writers and editors. At the time, Gnesin wrote to Brener, "as soon as I receive the money [from *Tushiya*], the first place I will go be Odessa, and from there – I'll see where to, because I do not want to live there."[122] Although, Gnesin received money for his book, there is no available evidence of his trip to Odessa; even if he visited the city, his stay had to be short according to the

[118] Ben-Avigdor is a pen name of Avrom Leyb Shalkevitsh (1867-1921).
[119] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 47.
[120] In the early twentieth century, there were about 140,000 Jews in Odessa (a third of the total population). See *Evreĭskaia͡ Ent͡siklopedii͡a*, reprint, Moscow: Terra, 1991, vol. 12, p. 58.
[121] For more about Odessa, see Steven J. Zipperstein, *The Jews of Odessa: A Cultural History, 1794-1881* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1986); Steven J. Zipperstein, "Odessa," *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, online, Internet, 10 June 2010.
[122] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 42.

postal stamps on his correspondences: in June he was in Pochep, and in August in Ekaterinoslav.

In the early spring, Gnesin began preparing to leave Pochep, but was waiting for better weather, as it was still too cold in the region for significant travel.[123] Most of his trips follow a pattern. Gnesin leaves his hometown in a bout of depression, as if he were trying to find relief with the help of proverbial Jewish wisdom from the Talmud: *meshane mokem meshane mazl* [a change of place changes luck]. His choice of destination depended on the amount of money available. At the time, Gnesin was considering a pilgrimage to the Land of Israel with one of his non-Jewish friends, as well as a trip to London. In reality, he would travel to some remote towns in Chernigov or Minsk gubernias, and if not, he would have to be satisfied with touring one of the provinces. "If I will not have a lot of money then the trip will be short, and after that I'll go to live I have no idea where."[124] It seems that Gnesin was wandering across Russia just for the sake of being on the road. Once he confessed to Brener: "A strange thing, or maybe my nature, that there is no place where I would desire to live. Any place. All I want is to keep changing my residence."[125]

At the end of summer, Gnesin arrived in Ekaterinoslav — a large city with a huge Jewish population — and started looking for a teaching job. In late September, he found a student and immediately invited Anokhi to come and join him in Ekterinoslav. Gnesin hoped to get more work, rent his own apartment, and eventually to focus on his writing.[126]

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[123] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 45.
[124] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 45.
[125] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 45.
[126] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 60.

In early 1905, Gnesin left Ekaterinoslav. Although his subsequent destinations appear random, they were generally plotted according to publishing opportunities. Thus, when Gnesin wanted to publish a story in *Ha-Shiloah*, he planned a trip to Odessa where the journal was published. However, after Bialik rejected one of his stories, *Ha-Shiloah* was no longer an option for him. *Ha-Dor* [The Generation] closed in the fall of 1904, and *Ha-Tsefirah* did not publish novels. The only place that would accept his new work was a Hebrew daily, *Ha-Zman* [The Time], founded by journalist and editor Ben-Tsion Kats (1875-1958).[127] Gnesin made his way to Vilno, where this daily was published. His friend Hilel Tseytlin lived in Vilno, and his house was a meeting place for many Jewish writers. Gnesin was a frequent guest of Tseytlin's and was regarded as member of his family. In his memoir, Elkhonen Tseytlin wrote about a party celebrating the birth of his younger sister Rivke:

> All the close folks came; Anokhi, Halpern, Bershadski, Sh. Tshernovitsh (Sfug), the tall, blond, and always quiet Uri-Nisn Gnesin, with a long, noble nose, a high pale forehead and blue mild eyes, and the plumpish Y. D. Berkovich with black eyes. There were publishers and editors of *Ha-Zman* [...] and also, of course, Shneur.[128]

Gnesin submitted the manuscript of his new story to the editors of *Ha-Zman*, but did not hear from them for a long time. In the summer, he returned to Pochep only to learn that his story was to be printed in August, requiring him to return to Odessa to collect his payment. Such long waiting periods between publications forced Gnesin to explore other ways of publishing his works, and together with Bikhovski, he founded a

[127] *Ha-Zman* was founded in 1903 in St. Petersburg as a weekly with a literary quarterly under the same title. Because of financial problems, the editorial staff soon moved out of the capital, and from the end of 1904 to its closure in 1915, *Ha-Zman* was published in Vilno in the format of a Hebrew daily, a Yiddish paper *Di tsayt* ("The Time"), and a belletristic monthly (sometimes a quarterly) in Hebrew.
[128] Elkhonen Tseytlin, *In a literarisher shtub* 72-73.

publishing house *Nisyonot* [Attempts]. Gnesin worked hard and traveled the whole country in search of new materials and funding, spending less then a few weeks in any one place. In a letter to Arn Shoel Nivilyov dated December 29th, 1905, Gnesin shared his vision for his new periodical, and asked his friend to help him find subscribers in Homel.

His first destination was Vilno, where he spent part of the spring of 1906. In May, Gnesin left for Homel to meet with Nivelyov. From Homel, he went to Kiev, returned to Pochep two months later, and again traveled to Homel for a week. Sometime between these trips, Gnesin visited Bobruĭsk and met Tsilya Levin (1888-1956), who showed him her Russian poems. Gnesin praised her poetry and encouraged her to write more. Levin "formed a passionate friendship with Gnesin,"[129] and followed him to Kiev. Later she wrote about their meeting, describing Gnesin of that time as "an assimilated Jew, somewhere from the depth of Russia, from the wide rivers and plains [...] dressed in a white Russian shirt with a blue silk collar."[130]

In July 1906, Gnesin returned to Pochep, feeling tired and depressed:[131] his expectations for *Nisyonot* were not realized for various reasons. Perhaps there was not enough readership to support the publication, despite the low price of subscriptions; perhaps Brener and Gnesin were much too involved in other publishing projects.[132] As a result, only three issues were published, and happened to include three stories by Chekhov and *Beyntaim*. Gnesin was so disappointed by his failure that he decided to leave Russia. He debated between accepting Brener's invitation to come to London and traveling elsewhere in Europe. There was no freedom of travel in the Russian Empire,

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[129] Jules Chametzky, et al, *Jewish American Literature: A Norton Anthology* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2001) 258.
[130] *Uri Nisan Gnesin: mekhkarim u-teudot* 406.
[131] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 114.
[132] Brener published and edited a literary journal *Ha-Meorer* [The Awakening] which came out from January 1906 to September 1907. Gnesin worked on a collection *Ha-Adam* [The Man].

and going abroad involved huge payments and a certificate of loyalty processed by the local police department. Gnesin had neither the money nor the required paperwork to apply for a certificate. Instead, at the end of August 1906, he decided to travel to Kiev and attempt to cross the border between Russia and Galicia near the town of Radzivil. He was stopped by the border patrol, arrested, and sent back to Kiev.

After a short trip home, Gnesin returned to Kiev, and stayed there for several more months, during which he repeatedly complained to his friends and relatives about depression and poor health.[133] He could not find a job, had no means sustaining a living, and completely stopped writing. Once he asked Bikhovski: "What do you think, will they give me at least a pound of plain bread, that black bread full of sand, filling everything? Also, I haven't written anything because I cannot do it: I am hungry, and nothing more. At night I do not light a candle, and during the day I am wandering like a dog."[134] From Tsilya Levin's memoir we can infer that Gnesin did not want to leave Kiev because he was attracted to Gulya Tokorov, one of the three daughters of Yankev Tokorov from Pochep. Levin recalls an episode that illustrates the romantic tension present between Gnesin, Gulya, and herself:

> Once, Tokorov's daughters came, and Yulia gave him a letter from her younger sister Gulya. Gnesin took the letter with open joy, read it with great attention, then carefully folded it, and put into his breast pocket. I felt very depressed. When he was putting the letter close to his heart, I shrunk in height, as if I had been hit. At that moment, I noticed he was looking at me. He saw my sorrow, he felt my jealousy, and I immediately felt relieved.[135]

[133] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 126-133.
[134] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 124.
[135] *Uri Nisan Gnesin: mekhkarim u-teudot* 407-408.

Apparently, Gnesin's feelings were not reciprocated because he suddenly agreed to go to London and help Brener edit and publish the journal *Ha-Meorer*. In November 1906, he received a passport, and in late December he returned to Pochep to finish the paperwork required for his travels. A few months later, Gnesin arrived in London, where he stayed until the fall of 1907. As we already know, the plans for a joint editorship turned out to be a failure: the relationship between the two old friends dramatically worsened, the journal was not to Gnesin's liking, and the British winter was unbearable for his rapidly deteriorating health.[136]

A trip to the Land of Israel

In light of his failure in London, Gnesin planned a trip to the Land of Israel, and in November 1907 he arrived in Jaffa. He tried to find a source of income, but apparently did not succeed, as he wrote shortly after his arrival: "I still haven't found a job here for myself, and what is to come after all, even that I do not know: maybe yes, maybe no. And I think that 'no' will win."[137] Gnesin was feeling bad, both physically and emotionally. His father criticized his lifestyle, which only aggravated his condition. In one of his letters to his parents, Gnesin wrote: "I know that when a man feels healthy and has a little income – that is 'pleasure;' and it is very possible, that I would be happy if I could sit peacefully in some corner […] and earn my living by giving a few lessons."[138] However, he could not get any students in Jaffa, and at the end of 1907, he started traveling to other settlements, such as Emek Shoshanim[139] and Petakh-Tikvah. As he traveled across the

[136] David Patterson, and Ezra Spicehandler, introduction, 75-79.
[137] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 141.
[138] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 142.
[139] Emek Shoshanim was more known by its Arabic name, Wadi al-Khanin. Later, parts of this settlement became the town Ness Ziona.

country, he was disappointed by the Jewish life he observed, and even warned his father against coming to the Land of Israel:

> In my opinion, she [the Land of Israel] completely lacks any purpose […] If you decide to go and settle down here, I will be fully against it, for the reason that it is not a place of rest for a Jew who is not in the Judaism business. The Jewish soul is in the Diaspora, and here there are only Jews who wear long *kapotes* and grow their beards, and Jews who dress short and shave their beards. The only thing they have in common, is that they don't have any values that are worth a penny […] I know that it will fill you with sorrow, but this sorrow is nothing in comparison to the great sorrow that you would behold when you are here.[140]

The wet and cold climate of the coast worsened Gnesin's health, and he remained in the central region of the country for most of the spring months of 1908. Every now and then he went to Petakh-Tikvah and Jaffa to see his relatives. He visited his brother, Menakhem, and some time later, his nephew, Yisroel-Noyekh Shprints, joined him in Jaffa. After one such trip in April 1908, he felt particularly bad and was advised by a physician to go to Jerusalem, where he only spent one week before leaving for Petah Tikva: "I am only sorry that I have to hurry because they [Menakhem Gnesin and Yisroel-Noyekh Sprints] wait for me, and because I am afraid to stay in one place for a long time."[141] A few weeks later, Gnesin left the Land of Israel and returned home to Pochep.

[140] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 144.
[141] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 145.

Gnesin's last years (1908-1913)

Contrary to his sentiments, Gnesin returned to Pochep and remained there for almost two years, surrounded by his caring and loving family. Henceforth, Gnesin led a much less active lifestyle, mainly concerned with writing and the constant search for a stable salary. He did not work, and the household income had become limited because his father no longer served as a town rabbi. Gnesin could not even afford subscriptions to literary journals, so he asked his friends to send him their copies to Pochep.[142] Literature became a major source of income for Gnesin's family, and most of his letters written to publishers between 1908 and 1913 contain requests for money advances.

Between 1908 and 1912, Gnesin's health noticeably deteriorated. He often mentioned it in the letters to his friends and editors: "I swear, my dear, that mom's soft bed is all [I] need for sweet sleep, and I am a sick person, may it not happen to you […]"[143] Kathryn Hellerstein suggests that as early as in 1906, Gnesin had contracted tuberculosis,[144] while some other scholars diagnose him with heart disease (Miron)[145] or starvation (Kopelman).[146] There is no reliable information supporting Gnesin's contraction of tuberculosis but the possibility that Gnesin suffered from heart disease may be deduced from his letters. In early 1910, he equated the deterioration of his health to "sinking in a pleasant swamp," and added, in Russian, that the doctors diagnosed him with *shum s pervimi vremenami* [Rus.: noise at the first times].[147] This medical term is no

[142] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 146.
[143] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 146.
[144] Hellerstein does not provide any sources. (In a private email, she commented that this statement came from a Yiddish biographical note about Dropkin without any documentation, and is probably wrong.) See Jewish American Literature: a Norton Anthology. – New York: W. W. Norton, 2001. p. 258; Hellerstein, Kathryn. "Celia Dropkin." *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*. 1 March 2009. Jewish Women's Archive. August 1, 2010 <http://ltl.dev.jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/dropkin-celia>.
[145] *Uri Nisan Gnesin: mivkhar ma'amerey* 210.
[146] Kopelman, Zo͡ia. "Posledniĭ iz mogikan [The Last of the Mohicans]," *Ierusalimskiĭ Zhurnal* 9 (2001) 73.
[147] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 156.

longer used, but it was common among physicians in the first half of the nineteenth century.[148] Today, this "noise" is called a systolic murmur, and in most cases it indicates a dangerous disease know as aortic valve stenosis. Its symptoms include syncope, chest pain, and heart failure. Aortic stenosis can be a result of age-related valve calcification or rheumatic fever. The latter is a more plausible cause of Gnesin's stenosis, because calcification is very uncommon in people younger than forty.

In the summer of 1910, in spite of his poor health, Gnesin made a few short trips to Kiev, Homel, and Moscow, trying to publish more of his works and find other sources of income. When he returned to Pochep, he did not write anything for several months. Later, when Gnesin started working on a new short novel *Etsel*, he had a short meeting with Tsilya Dropkin, who left valuable information about Gnesin's last year in her memoir:

> I tried to see in his eyes that joy of life, which he used to have, and could not find it. He stopped burning. He was cold like a man who starts to drown, looking into a depth of the abyss, and has no more will to swim back to the shore […] There was absolutely no flesh on his wonderfully built broad shoulders or arms. He did not have any muscles at all, but there was a beautiful symmetry to him. His appearance reminded me of Dürer's drawing of death. On his face he put a hard, suffering smile, a smile which I will never forget.[149]

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[148] For example, in 1897 Chekhov wrote that he had examined his friend, a Russian artist Isaak Levitan (1860-1900), and was worried about him: "His heart does not thump, but blows. Instead of lub-dup you can hear pf-dup. It is called in medicine – noise at the first time." See Anton Pavlovich Chekhov, *Polnoe sobranie sochineniĭ i pisem: v 30 t. Pisma: v 12 t. [Complete Works and Letters in 30 Volumes. Letters in 12 volumes*, vol. 6 (Moscow: Nauka, 1974-1983) 301.

[149] The original manuscript of Dropkin's memoir is written in Yiddish with many corrections and a few missing paragraphs. It is kept in the Israeli archive *Makhon Gnazim* (ms. 10452/15). In 1986, this memoir was partially published by Shlomo Tsuker in Hebrew translation: *Uri Nisan Gnesin: mekhkarim u-teudot* 398-424.

Dropkin not only left a written description of Gnesin during his last year but also a visual hint. Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528) devoted quite a few artistic works to the topic of death, but only one among his etchings portrays death as a fleshless figure. In her description, Dropkin was most likely referring to this famous work, readily reproduced and available in Russia:

Fig. 1. Death and the Landsknecht by Albrecht Dürer (1510).

Source: http://www.the-athenaeum.org/art/full.php?ID=33762

In the hot summer months of 1912, Gnesin became particularly anxious and restless. On several occasions, he left home without any purpose: "It was not one of our usual trips, but rather just – just a trip. Some fever of soul which requires a change of place."[150] That summer, his physical sufferings were aggravated by the needed medical treatment that he could not find in Pochep; this was the main reason for his trip to

[150] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 176.

Warsaw in the fall of 1912. A secondary reason for his trip was the prospect of finding employment, namely a job offer from Lakhover, who had recently launched the publishing house *Akhisefer*. After a short trip to Homel, Gnesin left his home for the last time, and in early September 1912 set out for Warsaw.

Gnesin's death

In November 1912, Gnesin complained to Tokorov about pains in his arm. By the end of the year his condition became so bad that he was put in the hospital.[151] According to Tseytlin, Gnesin's brother, Menakhem, and his niece, Khave, were both in Warsaw at that time, and Khave took care of her uncle.[152] In one of his letters, Gnesin wrote that his doctor promised he would soon recover, and skeptically added that he wanted to believe his doctor very much. He also informed his friends that his parents did not know of his ill health, and he did not want them to know.[153] Apparently, Gnesin doubted his doctor's optimism. In his last letter to his old friend Moyshe Hofenshteyn, he wrote:

> If they at least returned to me my pants and shoes, since I am in the Hospital of the Child Jesus, I am sorry, in my underwear, alone, weak... And what will be the end, this [question] is for the Almighty! … Oh, Moshke, Moshke – will a day come when we will together laugh our sad laugh of the dead? You see! The day came when even for such laughter you feel pity! Moshke! My dear![154]

Gnesin died on the 21st of February, 1913 (כ"ז אדר א' תרע"ג), in a house at Ogrodowa street. A group of his friends, as well as his brother and niece gathered in a small room,

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[151] One of the major hospitals in Warsaw, *Szpital Dzieciątka Jezus* (Hospital of Child Jesus), was intended primarily for the poor and pregnant patients.
[152] Elkhonen Tseytlin, *In a literarisher shtub* 76.
[153] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 195.
[154] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 195-196.

where Gnesin was lifted from the bed and put down on the floor in accordance with a Jewish custom. Eleven-year-old Elkhonen Tseytlin was also in that room and later wrote in a memoir: "Even then, a strange sad smile was quietly hiding in the corners of his mouth. And it seemed to me that in a second Uri-Nisn would stand up, shake his blond head, and whisper, as he usually did when people started fussing over him: 'Eh... there is no need... thank you...'"[155] A few weeks later, a small group of Gnesin's friends gathered in Pochep to pay a tribute to his memory. Bikhovski suggested, and everybody agreed, that the best way to honor Gnesin would be to publish a book in his memory, edited by Brener.[156] In 1914, this book appeared in print in Jerusalem under the title *Hatsida* [Aside]. The tome consisted of Gnesin's early poems, unpublished works, letters, and pictures, as well as excerpts from memoirs of close family and friends. It is impossible to conceive of a better way to honor a man who had devoted all his energy to Jewish literature.[157]

The biographical study of Gnesin's writing is a particularly valuable tool for the analysis and interpretation thereof due to the strong autobiographical content of his major works. Gnesin's short life, full of hardships, wanderings, alienation, and angst, resembles both the lives of his friends Brener and Shofman and the fictional lives of the wandering Jewish intellectuals who comprise the main characters of his major works.

1.5. GNESIN'S WRITINGS BEFORE 1905

The journals that Gnesin edited and published together with Brener and Bikhovski in Pochep turned out to be a successful experiment, since all the contributors became

[155] Elkhonen Tseytlin, *In a literarisher shtub* 77.
[156] Brener agreed to edit a collection in Gnesin's honor, although there was much discussion about its content: he wanted to publish a refined literary almanac which Gnesin himself might liked, and Bikhovski insisted on including essays, memoirs, letters and other biographical materials. See Yosef Khayim Brener, *Kol kitve* 381-403.
[157] Yosef Khayim Brener, *Kol kitve* 382.

well-known writers and editors. By 1898, Gnesin had written several essays, short stories, poems, as well as translations from German and Russian into Hebrew. Many of his first writings were amateurish,[158] although some of them were good enough to attract the attention of Nahum Sokolow, one of the leading Jewish journalists of the time. Sokolow invited Gnesin to come to Warsaw to assist editing the Hebrew paper, *Ha-Tsefirah*, wherein Gnesin published his first poem, "*Matan-tora*" [The Giving of the Torah],[159] and two critical reviews, both signed under Gnesin's pen name U. N. Esterzon.

Gnesin as critic

Gnesin's first critical essay appeared in August 1900.[160] It was a review of a collection of stories, *Tipusim u-tslalim* [Characters and Shadows], by a renowned Hebrew writer, Yeshayahu Bershadski (1871-1908).[161] This critical essay can be read as an introduction to Gnesin's own collection of stories published a few years later. Even the title, *Tsliley he-khayim* [The Shadows of Life], echoed Bershadski's book, and it was in this essay that Gnesin used the image of "shadows" for the first time:

> Kingdom of shadows! In every corner that we turn to, in every direction that we look, we meet only shadows, shadows, and shadows […] Because we do not live a real life, broad and full of meaning; life in its entirety, the

[158] For instance, Gnesin wrote a story *Me-khaye ha-rabonim* (From the life of rabbis) in 1898, but seeing its weakness, destroyed the text. See *Uri Nisan Gnesin: mivkhar ma'amerey* 209.
[159] Gnesin Uri Nisn, "Matan-torah [The Giving of the Torah]," *Ha-Tsefirah* 115 (1900): 1.
[160] Gnesin Uri Nisn, "Sikha be-olam ha-sifrut: Y. B. Bershadski, tipusim u-tslalim [A Conversation in the World of Literature: Y. D. Bershadski, Characters and Shadows]," *Ha-Tsefirah* 186-187 (1900): 2.
[161] Bershadski started publishing essays and stories as early as 1889, but his big literary success came him at the turn of the century, after he wrote two novels, *Be-eyn matara* (Without a Purpose) (1899), and *Neged ha-zerem* (Against the Current) (1901), and a collection of short stories *Tipusim u-tslalim* in two volumes (1899-1902). See Avner Holzman, "Bershadsky, Yesha'yahu," *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, online, Internet, 19 September 2011.

> life roaring outside, is not our life; here are shadows looking at the shadow of life! How horrible![162]

Bershadski's protagonists were young Jewish intellectuals heavily influenced by Nietzschean pessimism and their own erotic urges. Readers could easily recognize the familiar face of a social outsider based on their previous readings of Turgenev, Goncharov, and Lermontov. These Russian melancholic characters had complex spiritual lives, lost many of their childhood beliefs, and were intensely introspective. In addition to this psychological tension, the Jewish literary adaptation of these Russian characters, the *talush* [Heb.: uprooted] suffered from a split between the stable, traditional life of their ancestors and the tumultuous secular, modern world of the *Haskalah*. The *Talush* was always depressed, could not live in the same place for a long time, wandered from one town to another, could not foresee any future plans, and because of his despair, was always on the brink of suicide. Bershadski was one of the first writers who introduced the *talush* to Hebrew literature. Similar to Reuven Braynin, Aleksander Ziskind Rabinovich, and Ezra Goldin, Bershadski shifted the subject of his prose away from the national and social agenda of the *Haskalah* to the individual psychological life of his protagonists. The psychological realism of these Warsaw writers clearly attracted the young Gnesin, and their influence is evidenced in his critical essays and prose.

Gnesin's second critical essay, published a year after *Tsliley he-khayim,* was devoted to Ezra Goldin's story *"Demon" yehudi* [A Jewish "Demon"].[163] Gnesin wrote Bikhovski about it, describing his essay as "not very detailed, as a result of [limited] space, but apparently, hot."[164] The choice text for this review was also not accidental.

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[162] Gnesin Uri Nisn, *Sikha be-olam ha-sifrut* 2.
[163] Gnesin Uri Nisn, "Demon yehudi: sipur me-et E. Goldin [A Jewish Demon: A Story by E. Goldin]," *Ha-Tsefirah* 266-267 (1901): 2.
[164] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 21.

Ezra Goldin (1868–1915) was known for his attempts to portray the inner world of common people in a manner that contradicted the stereotypes of *Haskalah*. His characters are torn between the pursuit of traditional Jewish scholarship and secular knowledge. They are predecessors of the *talush* whose appearance in Hebrew texts marks a significant event in modern Hebrew literature.[165] In November of 1900, Gnesin's review was printed in two issues of *Ha-Tsefirah*, almost immediately after Goldin's story appeared in print (the censor's approval is dated to the 9th of October).[166]

The same year, Gnesin published a few poems in the Warsaw annual literary anthology edited by Sokolow;[167] he also managed to publish several poems in the Krakow journal, *Ha-Shavua* [The Week] and a Hebrew translation of stories by Mordekhay Spektor (1858-1925) in *Tushiya*.[168] In one of the letters he sent from Warsaw, Gnesin wrote that he "greatly regretted giving Sokolow these two poems for publication in the yearbook," because the poems "absolutely did not seem good enough in his eyes, although there were many, including Yosef Khayim [Brener], for whom they seemed all right."[169] Gnesin also wrote about his plans to publish a large critical review of the last issue of the *Luakh Akhiasaf* [Akhiasaf Almanac]. Early the next year, this review appeared in *Ha-Magid* [The Preacher] under the title *"Shivre Lukhot"* [Pieces of [Stone] Tablets].[170] This literary annual was published in Warsaw from 1893 to 1904.

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[165] Avner Holzman, "Goldin, Ezra." *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, online, Internet, 10 June 2010.

[166] Ezra Goldin, *Meha-ovar ha-karov: a. 'Demon' yehudi [From the Near Past: a) A 'Jewish 'Demon']* (Varshe [Warsaw]: Tushiya, 1901).

[167] Uri Nisn Gnesin, "Le-navi [To A Prophet]; ***," *Sefer ha-shana* 2 (1901): 384-385.

[168] Mordekhay Spektor, *Sipurim ve-tsiurim [Stories and Scenes]* (Varshe [Warsaw]: Tushiya, 1901).

[169] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 21-22.

[170] Gnesin Uri Nisn, "Shivre lukhot [Broken Tablets]," *Ha-Magid* 119-120, 130-132, 143-144 (1901). There is word play in this title: the Hebrew word *luakh* means both 'calendar,' 'almanac,' and the stone tablet containing Commandments given by the Almighty to the Jewish people. These two tablets were broken by Moshe into pieces when he saw the transgressions of his people. In the first paragraph, Gnesin wrote that he called his review *Shivre lukhot* because he had no intention to cover all the issues of the almanac, and limited himself to the field of belles-letters.

For the first three years *Ha-Magid* was edited by Ben-Avigdor, and the subsequent volumes each had a different editor, such as Moshe Leyb Lilienblum (1843-1910), Joseph Klausner (1874-1958), and David Frishman. This magazine had a small practical section with calendars, names of the royal family, advertisements, postal regulations, and other useful information, and a sizable (over 400 pages) literary section with poetry, prose, reviews, and essays. In a comprehensive review of this Almanac for the years 1900-1901, Gnesin reviewed the works of major contemporary Jewish authors, such as Khayim Nakhman Bialik (1873-1934), Shmuel Leyb Tsitron (1860-1930), Mordekhay Dovid Brandshteter (1844-1928), Yitskhok Leyb Borukhovich (1874-1953), Arn Lyuboshitski (1874-1942), Bershadski, Aleksander Ziskind Rabinovich (1854-1945), Yitskhok Leybush Perets (1852-1915), and Shaul Tchernichovski (1875-1943).

The first collection of stories

It is plausible that Gnesin started work on his own fiction as early as his first trip to Warsaw. According to the obituary from *Ha-Tsefirah*, "[…] in 1899, when he came to Warsaw, he submitted the collection of his first stories called *Tsliley he-khayim*, to *Tushiya* [publishing house]. It was published that same year."[171] This view is shared by at least two scholars. The early twentieth-century literary critic Fishl Lakhover (1883-1947) wrote that before leaving Warsaw, Gnesin gave the manuscript to Ben-Avigdor to be published in *Biblioteka ha-ivrit* [Hebrew Library], but the actual publication did not occur until 1904. This fact gives reason for Lakhover to conclude that *Tsliley he-khayim*

[171] The obituary is signed by a letter ט, which probably stands for Tokorov. See [Sh. Tokorov], "Uri Nisn Gnesin z"l [Uri Nisn Gneisn, Blessed Be the Memory of Him]," *Ha-Tsefirah* 4 Mar. 1913: 2. The first known edition of this collection appeared in the *Tushiya* only five years later, in 1904. One of the most comprehensive bibliographical lexicons of Jewish literature, *Beyt eked sfarim* by Ch. B. Friedberg, does not list any earlier editions, and it is highly unlikely that they existed. Thus, the information in the obituary cannot be regarded as correct (for another mistake in this obituary, see footnote 1).

was written before 1900.[172] In the comprehensive *Lexicon of Jewish Literature, Journalism and Philology*, Zalmen Reyzen claimed that the collection, *Tsliley he-khayim,* was written and published in 1899.[173]

Dan Miron, however, believes that Gnesin's stories were only finished in 1903 and that they were not given to Ben-Avigdor earlier.[174] More importantly, during his first visit to Warsaw, Gnesin was able to establish useful literary connections with the publishing companies, especially with *Tushiya*, which, at that time, was one of the leading Hebrew publishing houses in Eastern Europe. Founded by Ben-Avigdor in 1896, *Tushiya* published Hebrew translations of world literature classics, as well as original Hebrew fiction and nonfiction texts. Ben-Avigdor opposed the intellectual elitism of Ahad Ha'am and had a broad conception of his target audience; in order to increase readership, all the books published by *Tushiya* came in the form of little booklets, which could be bought cheaply. Ben-Avigdor created several series of publications targeted towards specific age groups under the common title *Biblioteka* [Library], all of which were written in simple, easy-to-understand language. The same simple language characterized the realist writing style of Ben-Avigdor and other writers of the *Ha-mahalakh he-khadosh* [New Way] circle.[175]

The *Ha-mahalakh he-khadosh* writers were preoccupied with concrete questions regarding the individual in society as opposed to their contemporaries who generally made inquires into abstract national problems. They readily depicted the dark and ugly side of daily life, and demonstrated a particular interest in the lower classes of society.

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[172] Fishl Lakhover, *Rishonim ve-akhronim [The First Ones and the Seconds Ones]*, (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1966) 352.
[173] Zalmen Reyzen, *Leksikon fun der yidisher literatur, prese un filologie [Lexicon of Yiddish Literature, Press, and Philology]*, vol. 1 (Vilno: Kletskin, 1927) 593.
[174] *Uri Nisan Gnesin: mivkhar ma'amerey* 209.
[175] The Warsaw group of realists included too many different writers to be called a movement, although they all shared Ben-Avigdor's views on content, composition, characters, and language of a literary work.

Ben-Avigdor shared one central motif with the *Haskalah* writers, namely the conceptualization of social conflicts as the ethical juxtaposition of good and evil; however, the rest of his motifs were far from Enlightenment ideals. Ben-Avigdor's writing displays a deep respect for Judaism, and attempts to reconcile Jewish tradition with the secular reality. Gnesin was attracted to Ben-Avigdor's new type of Hebrew fiction, and identified with many of the characters. Soon, Gnesin began working on a critical essay about Ben-Avigdor's writings:[176]

> I do not know if it will be done, but I would like to write a large work of criticism on all the stories by Ben-Avigdor, comprehensive and detailed criticism, because there is a lot to say about these stories, and especially about the time in which they appeared. I have material already, I have put together all my thoughts, and I will present them in a book, but who knows when I will approach this work.[177]

However, his project was never completed. Gnesin left Warsaw and settled in Borisoglebsk, far from the hubbub of Jewish literary life that is Warsaw. While away from his hometown, he wrote a few poems and translated several stories by Hersh Dovid Nomberg (1876-1927) for a new weekly *Ha-Dor* [The Generation], edited by Frishman.[178]

As one can see, Gnesin had already published quite a few of his works in a number of Jewish periodicals and maintained good relations with several publishers. Therefore, he had several options to choose from when deciding to which publishing house he would send his new work. Gnesin decided that *Ha-Dor* was the journal best

[176] Among published critical essays by Gnesin there is no work on Ben-Avigdor.
[177] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 21.
[178] *Ha-Dor* also published original works by Nomberg, including his first story *Layla al pne ha-sade* (Night in the Field).

suited to publish his poetry. This weekly was founded in 1901 in Warsaw by the publishing house *Akhiasaf*. The journal aimed to offer an alternative public forum to the popular monthly *Ha-Shiloah*, established by a prominent Hebrew political writer Ahad Ha'am (1856-1927). Ahad Ha'am was the creator of a "cultural Zionism" that sought to establish a "spiritual center," rather than a Jewish state, in Palestine. *Ha-Dor* intended to attract readers who did not share Ahad Ha'ams's views on Jewish "national spirit," and to increase the number of subscribers to *Akhiasaf* publications. Frishman, known for his critical attitude towards Ahad Ha'am, was offered to edit *Ha-Dor* on the conditions that he would maintain complete anonymity and comply with the general policies of the publishers.[179] As a critic, David Frishman most valued the literary form, and always sought to graft European aesthetics into Hebrew literature. *Ha-Dor*'s fiction section offered selections of works by the best Jewish writers of the time, while its critical section included essays on such European authors as Friedrich Nietzsche and Charles Baudelaire. It may be that the Hebrew readership in the early twentieth century was not yet ready for such a journal – *Ha-Dor* did not have enough subscribers and survived only one year of publication.[180]

Gnesin's chose his translator projects as carefully as he chose his publish house. Nomberg and Gnesin were only a few years apart in age, had a similar *yeshiva* background,[181] and started writing Hebrew poems at about the same time. Under the

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[179] Frishman's name never appeared on the masthead of *Ha-Dor*. Instead, one of the printers was listed as editor.

[180] *Ha-Dor* reappeared in 1904 as Frishman's independent journal, but did not have much success, and so the project was terminated in the same year.

[181] Nomberg was born in Mszczonów, the center of the Amshinov school of Hasidism, in a wealthy Hasidic family. His father, who was the great-grandson of the rabbi of Prague and the grandson of the rabbi of Lodzh, died early, and Nomberg was brought up by his grandfather Ayzenberg, a grandson of Hoshen Mishpet, and himself a Lyubliner Hasid. Later, Hersh Dovid was sent to study at the *yeshiva* in Radomsk, where he was married, and lived at the house of his father-in-law, a wealthy Gerer hasid, Mordkhe Szpira. See Zalmen Reyzen, *Leksikon fun der yidisher literatur, prese un filologie [Lexicon of Yiddish Literature, Press and Philology*, vol. 2 (Vilno: B. Kletskin, 1927) 523.

influence of Y. L. Perets, Nomberg switched from Hebrew to Yiddish, and often translated his works from one language into the other. The protagonists of Nomberg's stories were the same alienated young Jews that appeared in Bershadski's, and later in Gnesin's, stories.

Soon after finishing his translation of Nomberg's texts, Gnesin wrote a story, *Zhenya*. As mentioned earlier, some scholars link this story to Gnesin's stay in Warsaw. However, solid evidence against this argument could be found in a letter to Aronson, dating from the 8th of March, 1902, in which Gnesin told his friend: "During these days I also wrote a longer story called *Zhenya*."[182] The story centers on a young girl, Zhenya, who is attracted to Zionism, the Hebrew language, politics, and literature. Zhenya's true motive for taking such an active part in Jewish life is not Zionism, or any other ideology, but the young men, the members of these groups, with whom she flirts. The story does not deal with any Jewish matters, but rather with erotic encounters between people who happen to be Jewish. Although Zhenya is strikingly similar to the female characters in Nomberg's stories, Gnesin's protagonist is more active, and displays more desire for life than for men. As Hamutal Bar-Yosef writes, she is always ready to engage in "serious or frivolous sexual affairs without shame, while the men cannot do so as easily."[183]

Gnesin did not try to publish *Zhenya* on its own. Instead, his plan was to write a few more stories and put together a collection under a single title. While staying in Kiev, Gnesin wrote two stories, *Ma'ase be-otelo* [The Case of Othello] and *Shmuel ben Shmuel* [Shmuel, the son of Shmuel]. Both of these stories portray ambiguous erotic adventures and are thematically close to *Zhenya*.[184] Sometime in the spring of 1903, Gnesin sent all

[182] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 25.
[183] Hamutal Bar-Yosef, "Gnessin, Uri Nissan," *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, online, Internet, 21 Aug. 2011.
[184] In *Ma'ase be-otelo*, the main character falls in love with his married student, while in *Shmuel ben Shmuel* he has a love affair with a village girl while his wife is pregnant.

three stories for publication to *Tushiya* in Warsaw and returned to Pochep. As soon as Ben-Avigdor received the manuscript, he invited Gnesin to come and discuss some editorial issues. Gnesin immediately left for Warsaw and in July 1903 started reworking the collection. Ben-Avigdor liked his stories but suggested that Gnesin would benefit from improving the style. In particular, he was asked to remove *rusitsizmot* (Russian words, expressions, and syntax). Gnesin felt hurt and insulted: "Overall, his empty comments made a very bad impression on me. I expected a much more serious attitude, more consideration of the essential."[185] Apparently, Gnesin did not want to remain in Warsaw for long, despite the exhilaration of residing in a major Jewish literary and cultural center.[186] In late 1903, he returned to Pochep, and a few months later his first book came out in print by *Tushiya* printing house.[187]

Gnesin's unsuccessful attempt to publish in *Ha-Shiloah*

In early 1904, while living in Pochep, Gnesin corresponded with Bialik, one of the most influential Hebrew poets. At that time, Bialik had accepted the position of literary editor at *Ha-Shiloah* and lived in Warsaw. Moshe Ungerfeld, Bialik's personal secretary, wrote later that Bialik was looking for materials, and asked Gnesin, among other writers, to send him something for publication.[188] He also asked Gnesin to help him get in touch with Brener and Shofman.[189] Since both writers were wanted by the Russian authorities for desertion, Gnesin did not want to reveal their addresses to police. Because the correspondence was commonly under surveillance in Russian, Gnesin chose to omit

[185] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 41.
[186] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 41.
[187] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 47.
[188] Moshe Ungerfeld, "Yakhse Bialik - Gnesin [Relationship Between Bialik and Gnesin," *Davar* 1 Mar. 1963: 5.
[189] In 1902-1904, Shofman served in the Russian army in the town of Homel. In March 1904, he ran away to Lemberg (Lvov). At the same time, in 1901-1904, Brener also served in the army (in Orël), and in January 1904, also escaped, crossed the border, and settled down in London.

the requested information from his letter. On the 8th of February 1904, he replied to Bialik: "Please don't ask me about the addresses of Sh-n and B-r, if you still need them. I hope that, accidentally, I'll be able to provide you with [this information]. Or they will write to you themselves. For now, please wait."[190] Even in his letters to Brener, Gnesin avoided using the full names of his incriminated friends – he called Shofman *Bal-ha-ardalayim* [Master of the Overshoes], hinting at his recent publication of the story *Ha-ardal* [The Overshoe].

By the end of March 1904, Gnesin finished a story for Bialik's journal.[191] Gnesin first called his story *Oreakh* [Guest], but before sending it to *Ha-Shiloah*, Gnesin changed the title to *Ba-vet saba* [In Grandfather's House], although he was not sure whether the story would benefit from the name change. It is clear that Gnesin was uncertain of Bialik's reaction, as he wrote, "I do not know what will come of it."[192] Luckily, Bialik saved Gnesin's two letters, one of which, dated May 7th, 1904, was accompanied by the manuscript. In this letter, Gnesin wrote that he was eager to hear Bialik's opinion about his story, which he had corrected, edited, and copied so many times that he could not deal with it any more.[193] It took Bialik a few weeks to respond. He wrote that he had read the story twice, and still decided not to print it.

Bialik's negative response must be viewed in the context of the Jewish ideological debates of the time. As an editor of *Ha-Shiloah*, the main organ of "spiritual Zionism," Bialik shared many of the political and cultural views of its owner, Ahad Ha'am, and actively opposed his rivals. In his many polemic works, Ahad Ha'am rejected the need for Hebrew belles-lettres in the European sense of the word, and limited the goal of

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[190] Moshe Ungerfeld, "Yakhse Bialik - Gnesin" 5.
[191] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 43.
[192] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 45.
[193] Moshe Ungerfeld, "Yakhse Bialik – Gnesin" 5.

Hebrew literature to its role in the revival of the Jewish national spirit.[194] His position was sharply criticized by several Jewish writers, lead by Mikha Yosef Berdichevski (1865-1921). In the late 1890s, Berdichevski launched a series of polemical essays criticizing the modest role that Ahad Ha'am had assigned to Hebrew fiction, attacking the cultural isolation of nationalism, and calling upon the Jewish youth to become well-rounded Hebrew human beings. The polemics of both camps gradually developed into a heated debate, which was "one of the most important in the history of modern Hebrew literature."[195] For Gnesin, and especially for Brener, Berdichevski's individualism was much more appealing than the nationalism of Ahad Ha'am. The Jewish editor and critic Nakhmen Mayzil (1887-1966) describes an episode in his memoir in which he came to Odessa to see Bialik. Somebody mentioned a recent discussion in Hebrew papers concerning Brener's attack of the idolization of the Tanakh and against Ahad Ha'am's enragement about Brener. Bialik got excited and started criticizing Brener: "Who is Brener? A bloodless *yeshiva* student [...] a poor man, who cannot start a household! He hates the world; he poisons society with his despair!"[196]

Thus, because Gnesin was associated with Brener and was known to be a follower of Beridichevski, Bialik read Gnesin's manuscript as a work from the other camp. Gnesin was very disappointed and apparently disagreed with Bailik's sentiments: "God be with him [Bialik], but how much this story cost me! For after all these 'deep' critical comments of his, I am absolutely sure that, at least in our [literature], such stories do not appear [even] twice a year. And that is only if everybody, including myself,

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[194] Ahad Ha'am, *Selected Essays*, trans. Leon Simon (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society Of America, 1944).
[195] See Avner Holtzman, "Berdyczewski, Mikhah Yosef." *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, online, Internet, 8 Aug. 2011.
[196] Nakhmen Mayzil, *Forgeyer un mittsaytler* 208-210.

participates."[197] After this incident, he never sent any more works to Bialik. He cast the rejected story aside — it was only published posthumously in 1913.

Hatsida and the first success

In the fall of 1904, Gnesin was living in Ekaterinoslav. He had found a teaching job, and could, therefore, focus on his literary projects.[198] He wrote a story, *Seuda mafseket* [Meal before the Fast], and began writing a longer story, *Hatsida* [Aside].[199] According to Bikhovski,[200] Gnesin was simultaneously writing a second long story, *Beyntaim* [Meanwhile], although this fact cannot be confirmed by means of Gnesin's correspondence. In early 1905, Gnesin came to Vilno and submitted the manuscript of *Hatsida* to a Hebrew daily, *Ha-Zman*, but apparently it did not impress the editors. About half a year later, the newly appointed editor, David Frishman, was looking through the stacks of manuscripts, which had accumulated in the editor's office, and found Gnesin's work. Shneur describes Frishman's reaction in his memoir:

> All of a sudden, one morning, I received a letter of panic from David Frishman, who, at the time, edited the literary monthly journal of *Ha-Zman*, asking me not to waste any time in giving him Gnesin's address, if I had it. "This man, he wrote me in the letter, surprised me a few days ago with his story *Hatsida*. I have to curse him very well, very well. A guy who spends so much time in my house, and does not say even one word about the beautiful worlds that are contained inside..."[201]

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[197] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 51.
[198] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 60.
[199] The story *Seuda mafseket* was published in the 1906 annual literary collection of Nahum Sokolow. The novel *Hatsida* is translated into English by Hillel Halkin, and titled 'Sideways.' I prefer to keep the adverbial nature of the Hebrew title and call it 'aside' rather than 'sideways,' which is an adjective.
[200] Shimen Bikhovski, *Hatsida* 92.
[201] *Uri Nisan Gnesin: mivkhar ma'amerey* 47.

Shneur showed the letter to Berkovich, who told him that the manuscript had been received seven months prior, but nobody dared to publish it because it was such a "strange story." [202] When Frishman became an editor and read *Hatsida*, it was immediately approved for publication, and appeared in print in August 1905, in the 8th issue of *Ha-Zman*. Around the same time, Gnesin published his last poem, *"Ha-khalom ha-akharon"* [The Last Dream]. It is most likely that he returned to Pochep: although there are no letters sent from there in summer, in a letter to his niece Khave, Gnesin wrote that he would probably come home in June or July.[203] When Frishman received Gnesin's address, wrote to him, and published *Hatsida*, Gnesin came to Vilno, received money for the novel, and very soon returned to Pochep.

1.6. GNESIN'S WRITINGS AFTER 1905

Gnesin's publication in *Hatsida* marked a new period in his writing. Everything he wrote before 1905 draws heavily on realist works of such Hebrew writers as Goldin, Bershadski, and Ben-Avigdor. There is an autobiographical element in these early works, but the author's personal experiences are usually generalized to such a degree that his own persona is dispersed among several of his characters. Contemporary readers treated these early stories as "not extremely good, and not extremely bad […] in some places more or less successful, stories that could be written by any beginner."[204] In contrast, Gnesin's later stories (1905-1913) are much more original and personal, largely because the main characters bear a strong resemblance to the author. Critics immediately acknowledged Gnesin's original voice. In 1925, Mayzil wrote: "The mood that took hold of him was his own, completely his own. Not brought from somewhere else, from

[202] *Uri Nisan Gnesin: mivkhar ma'amerey* 47.
[203] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 68.
[204] *Uri Nisan Gnesin: mivkhar ma'amerey* 46.

outside. He is entangled in it, it is his very existence, he is captured by it, he is the shadow of this mood."[205] Modern scholars generally agree with Mayzil, calling Gnesin's "late" works a unique and unparalleled phenomenon. They view his excellent prose to be quite innovative, even among the larger community of European writers.[206]

Frishman was a respected critic, and his decision to publish *Hatsida* inspired Gnesin. However, his negative experiences with *Ha-Shiloah* and *Ha-Zman* urged Gnesin to explore other, and together with Bikhovski he founded a private publishing house, *Nisyonot* [Attempts]. *Nisyonot* was not a proper publishing house in the full sense of the word. Rather, it aimed to publish cheap booklets with original Hebrew poetry and prose, translations of the best works in European literature, and Russian translations of the best Hebrew writers. Gnesin's friends Tseytlin, Shofman, and Aronson were among the Hebrew language contributors to the project. All the editorial work was to be done in Pochep, with Brener organizing the typesetting in London. Gnesin traveled the country in search of new material, while preparing his own work for publication. He translated many stories by Anton Chekhov (1860-1904),[207] although the few issues of *Nisyonot* that appeared in print included only three translations of Chekhov and only one original long story, *Beyntaim*. Gnesin's project was quickly terminated due to the lack of subscribers. After the failure of *Nisyonot*, Gnesin stopped writing fiction for nearly two years. The only work he published between 1906 and 1909 was a translation of several essays by the Russian philosopher Lev Isaakovich Shestov (1866-1938).[208]

During his stay in the Land of Israel in 1908, Gnesin began writing again but burned most of his manuscripts.[209] Meanwhile, a market for Hebrew publications was

[205] Efroim Margolis, p. 5
[206] Rachel Albeck-Gidron, introduction xv.
[207] Shimen Bikhovski, *Hatsida* 93.
[208] Lev Shestov, "Tkhilat dvarim akhronim [The Beginning of the Last Words]," *Ha-Meorer* 8-9 (1907).
[209] Shimen Bikhovski, *Hatsida* 90.

developing in Russia and becoming amenable to Jewish writers. Several new Hebrew periodicals appeared, such as Sokolow's *Ha-Olam* [The World] or Frishman's weekly *Reshafim* [Sparks] and *Sifrut* [Literature]. The last two journals were co-edited by Lakhover, who was especially interested in the modernist and innovative literature of Berdichevski and Gnesin. In the summer of 1908, Lakhover asked Gnesin to contribute to one of his journals, and in 1909-1910 a new story by Gnesin, *Beterem* [Before], appeared in installments in *Reshafim*.

Gnesin was working on a few literary projects at the time. He was writing a short story *Ba-ganim* [In the Gardens], which Lakhover received in September 1910. Yitskhak Bakun suggests that Gnesin first wrote this story in Yiddish as early as in 1906, and later translated it into Hebrew.[210] *Ba-ganim* appeared in *Sifrut* in 1910,[211] while the Yiddish version *Tsvishn gertner* [Between Gardens] was published posthumously.[212] Gnesin was also planning to write a series of novellas under the title *Tkhumim* [Borders], although this project was never realized.[213] In the same year, Gnesin read "Daphnis and Chloe" by Longus, and translated a few chapters, which were never published, and no fragments of Gnesin's translation of this poem remain.

In 1911 Gnesin, wrote a short story, *Ktata* [Quarrel],[214] published several translations of poetic works by Charles Baudelaire,[215] and began a new long story, *Etsel* [Near]. A few months later, Gnesin wrote to the Hebrew poet David Shimonovich (1886-1956), who co-edited the literary journal *Netivot* [Directions]: "I am writing a novel now,

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[210] Yitskhak Bakon, *Brener u-Gnesin ke-sofrim du-leshoniyim [Brener and Gnesin as Bilingual Writers]*. (Be'er Sheva: Universitat Ben-Gurion, 1986) 47-48. For more on *Ba-ganim*, see Chapter 3.
[211] Uri Nisn Gnesin, "Ba-ganim [In the Gardens]," *Sifrut* 1.4 (1909-1910): 99-112.
[212] Uri Nisn Gnesin, "Tsvishn gertner [Between Gardens]," *Di yidishe velt* Apr. 1913: 18-31.
[213] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 155.
[214] Uri Nisn Gnesin, "Ktata [Quarrel]," *Ha-Tsefirah* 38.228, 231, 236 (1912).
[215] Uri Nisn Gnesin, trans, "Mi-shirat Bodler: poemot bi-froza [From *Baudelaire: Poems in Prose],"* *Maabarot 3.1 (1911): 69-77.*

and there are three first chapters already […] I cannot tell exactly when I will finish it because the Almighty endowed me with too many troubles."[216] The novel was finished in five months and sent to Berlin. The other editor of the journal, the Hebrew writer and publisher, Shay Ish Hurvits (1861-1922), suggested changing the name *sipur* [Heb.: story] to something else, but Gnesin insisted on not making any changes,[217] and in early 1913, *Etsel* appeared in the first issue of *Netivot*. In the last months of his life, Gnesin moved to Warsaw, where Lakhover had recently launched the publishing house *Akhisefer*, and invited Gnesin to contribute to a series of European literary works in translation. The first book in this series included two works translated by Gnesin: *Bi-me Shabtay Tsvi* [In the Days of Shabtay Tsvi] by Yacob Wassermann (1873-1934)[218] and *Ha-tslav* [The Cross] by Sigbjørn Obstfelder (1866-1900).[219]

Soon after Gnesin's death, Bikhovski made a brief description of his friend's archive. Along with the various documents, letters, and manuscripts of his published works, there were also unpublished manuscripts: several story fragments, one complete story, many poems, and the beginning of a drama.[220] The present location of the entire archive is unknown, although some documents related to Gnesin and his brother Menakhem can be found in *Mekhon Gnazim*, an Israeli literary research institution.[221]

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[216] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 168. *Netivot* was published and edited in Berlin by Hurvits together with Lakhover and Ben-Avigdor. Shimonovich also participated in editing the journal for a short time.
[217] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 181.
[218] German original (*Die Juden von Zirndorf*) appeared in print in 1897, and is sometimes translated in English as *The Dark Pilgrimage.*
[219] The Norwegian original (*Korset*) appeared in print in 1896. The source language of this text unclear, but it was mostly likely Russian, because its Russian translation appeared in 1909, while the first German translation of this novel was only published in 1924.
[220] Shimen Bikhovski, *Hatsida* 94.
[221] File 206.

Conclusion

Gnesin was neither a prolific writer nor a successful journalist. In fifteen years, he wrote a handful of stories, a few reviews, and a number of translations into Hebrew. In contrast to the copious writings and feuilletons of many Jewish writers who made their living from literary publications at the turn of the century, Gnesin's literary corpus is relatively modest. There were months and even years when he did not write anything, although in memoirs and letters he appears unwaveringly devoted to literature. The biographical study of Gnesin's life made in this chapter explains this paradox.

Gnesin was known to write slowly, making numerous corrections and changes. Some sections of *Beterem*, for instance, were rewritten five or six times. It was common for him to rewrite whole chapters because he found one sentence in the beginning and another in the middle to be inadequate.[222] Gnesin's literary output was also contingent on his poor health, which made him unable to write for protracted periods. His physical pain was often accompanied by psychological anguish brought on by the loss of a close friend, the death of a dear nephew, poverty, and hunger, as well as the persistent feeling of being alienated from traditional Jewish life as a product of his cultural assimilation. Suffering from depression, Gnesin could not write as much as he wanted, and eventually developed a pessimistic view of modern Hebrew literature, with its extremely limited readership. He complained to his friends that Hebrew literature had no audience, and once even told Bikhovski: "Who will read it [*Beyntaim*], who needs it? Nu, it is you, Brener, Shofman, this one, that one, three or four more people from our *yeshiva*, and that's it. [...]"[223]

Although present throughout the whole of Gnesin's literary career, these hardships were not as pronounced at the beginning of his life as they had become during

[222] See Shimen Bikhovski, *Hatsida* 93.
[223] Shimen Bikhovski, *Hatsida* 93.

his last years. Gnesin's work on *Nisyonot* marked the peak of his literary productivity. This period was the only time when Gnesin had the opportunity to live out his literary vision, both as an author and as a publisher. His project allowed him to make decisions at every stage of the writing process, from choosing a source text to designing the title page of his periodical. Translation was of particular significance to Gnesin, and it is not a coincidence that most of the space in the three published issues of *Nisyonot* was devoted to his translations of Chekhov. While little scholarship exists regarding Gnesin's translation work, a closer historical and linguistic analysis of his translations sheds much light on his literary tastes and strategies: it demonstrates how Gnesin managed to remain true to the original text, and simultaneously offered an alternative reading of Chekhov, one of the most influential Russian writers of the late nineteenth century.

Chapter 2: Gnesin's Translations

Considered a major modern Hebrew writer, Gnesin is almost unknown as a translator, despite the fact that he was actively engaged in this practice until the last months of his life.[224] Numerous works of Russian and European literature translated by Gnesin between the years of 1901 and 1913 enriched Hebrew literature by giving Hebrew writers access to European, and particularly Russian, literary forms. In turn, the influence of European literature upon Hebrew writers contributed to the development of literary Hebrew language. According to Even-Zohar, Gnesin became "both source and precedent for new means of translating Russian literature, adopted much later (in the late 1920s) by Shlonsky and his followers."[225] Additionally, Gnesin's original Hebrew writings can be viewed as translations from his mother tongue, Yiddish, and by extension, the whole of Hebrew literature created in Europe by non-native Hebrew speakers can be regarded as literature in translation. In this chapter, I examine several of Gnesin's translations in order to better understand his strategies as a translator, and to explore the new historical and cultural dimensions of his original writings, since the technical aspects of translating and writing are quite similar in essence.

The rich Judaic tradition of translation, dating back several hundred years helped Gnesin translate various European secular works of fiction into Hebrew. As early as the

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[224] Gnesin translated almost exclusively into Hebrew. Only once, together with his Russian acquaintance from Pochep Ivan Chumazov, did he make a Russian translation of a story by Y. L. Perets. It was published in a Russian journal without the mention of Gnesin's name: Ivan Chumazov, trans, "Mysl i arfa: arabskai͡a skazka [A Thought and a Harp: Arabic Fairy Tale]," *Vestnik znanii͡a [The Journal of Knowledge]* 3 (1905) 16-23. There is also a Yiddish version (1913) of Gnesin's story *Ba-ganim*, published after the Hebrew version (1909), although it is not clear which version was the original. Gnesin's main source language was Russian, but he also translated from Yiddish and German, and possibly from French. There is no information about whether his translation of Baudelaire was done from the French original, from the Russian translation, or, most likely, from both.

[225] Itamar Even-Zohar, *Gnessin's Dialogue and Its Russian Models* 135.

Middle Ages, Hebrew translation became an art with established forms and rules. Oftentimes, Jewish translators changed the source text in order to make it less contradictory to Jewish practice. They avoided references to Islam and omitted Christian vocabulary, usually paraphrasing or replacing citations from the Qur'an with verses from the *Tanakh* and rabbinic dicta.[226] Books would be altered so radically that it would be difficult to connect them to their original texts.[227] After Jews were expelled from the Iberian Peninsula in the fifteenth century, many new communities started appearing in Western, and later, Eastern Europe. Written Hebrew was still widely used for a variety of purposes, while a new Jewish language, Yiddish, quickly spread over the continent, becoming the universal vernacular of European Jews. New foreign languages, such as French, German, English, Polish, and Russian, replaced Greek and Arabic although medieval forms and practices of translation were still employed and considered valid for nearly five more centuries. For Eastern European Jewish authors living in the time of *Haskalah*, translating from these new languages posed the same challenges it did for their ancestors in Spain.[228]

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[226] Until recent times, most rabbinic authorities viewed Christianity as idolatry, which is strongly forbidden in Judaism. In contrast, Islam was recognized as a monotheistic religion, although some of its theological concepts and practices were met with contradicting opinion by Jewish scholars. See *Medieval Islamic Civilization: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Josef W. Meri, vol. 2 (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2006) 822.

[227] For example, the Jewish translator and physician Yehuda ibn Tibbon (1120-1190 [?]) preferred to altogether omit quotations from Arabic liturgical poetry in Shlomo ibn Gavirol's *Tikkun Middot ha-Nefesh* [Improvement of the Moral Qualities], and Avraham Ibn Hisdai, in his translations of the Muslim philosopher Al-Ghazali, replaced Arabic poems with Hebrew verses from the pen of Shmuel Hanagid. See Salo Wittmayer Baron, *Social and Religious History of the Jews*, vol. 7 (New York: Columbia UP, 1958) 191. For more examples of such changes, see Moritz Steinschneider, *Die Hebräischen Übersetzungen des Mittelalters und die Juden als Dolmetscher* (Berlin, 1893) XV—XXV.

[228] In the time of *Haskalah*, written Hebrew still lacked modern vocabulary and narrative patterns, especially when conveying dialogue. Itamar Even-Zohar states, the Hebrew reader "did not really possess an 'ear' with which to hear 'non-Hebrew' intonation patterns, because he had never heard 'Hebrew' patterns spoken in the first place. See Itamar Even-Zohar, "Gnessin's Dialogue and Its Russian Models," *Poetics Today* 11:1 (Spring 1990) 132.

2.1. GNESIN AS A TRANSLATOR

A historical study of Gnesin's translations provides important information about his literary and aesthetic preferences, the development of his writing strategies, and an understanding of the tasks and limitations of Hebrew translation. It is not at all accidental that Gnesin, as Albeck-Gidron's writes, "gave the same prominence to his translations as to his original works."[229] Gnesin treated translations very seriously, be they his own work or those done by other translators. Translation is never the central topic of his letters, but there are still a few scattered hints among his correspondence that provide evidence of Gnesin's views on the subject. In 1906, he wrote to Yisroel-Noyekh Sprints:

> If my heart had a little bit more sympathy for our Ivan, I would have decided right now to translate *Hatsida* and *Beyntaim* together with him into Russian – maybe it could bring a few rubles but first, I don't have great sympathy for him, and second, even if we had one success with the *Agode* [Legend] by Perets, I do not know whether his non-Jewish soul would be able to translate such works. Surely, the translation will be done by me, but you know very well, that even a cat can make a mess, particularly with the works of belles-lettres, and belles-lettres like this, where everything is built on half-words, which say nothing when put in the wrong place. Nevertheless, I will think more about it, after all I do like his vivacious and powerful Russian style.[230]

In this short paragraph, Gnesin raises an important question regarding a translator's background and cultural identity. Who can translate his works? Should it necessarily be a Jew, or can a good writer, like his acquaintance Ivan Chumazov achieve success? Gnesin

[229] Rachel Albeck-Gidron, introduction xvi.
[230] Uri Nisn Gnesin. *Kitve* 109.

did not provide a clear answer, but expressed strong doubt about the appropriateness of the latter option. Even if Gnesin were to be the main translator, and Chumazov, a native Russian speaker, were merely to edit and polish his version, Gnesin would feel uneasy about the finished work. On the one hand, Ivan's style definitely attracted him, and on the other, Gnesin questioned Ivan's understanding of his texts. He needed more time to make a decision and was probably ready for a compromise; however, this project was never started, and both stories remained untranslated.[231]

Gnesin wrote to his nephew in Hebrew, and the term he used for 'non-Jewish soul' was *ha-neshama ha-arelit* [uncircumcised soul]. This expression is more exclusive than the common way of referring to a non-Jew, *goy*. The word *goy* could be also used as a derogatory term for a Jew who abandoned Jewish traditions and started living like a Gentile. In contrast, the word *arel* (Heb.: uncircumcised) referred strictly to non-Jews. Gnesin also used the Hebrew word *neshama* [soul], clearly focusing on the mental and spiritual otherness of the potential translator.[232] What elements of *Hatsida* and *Beyntaim* made Gnesin suspect that a *neshama ha-arelit* such as Chumazov would be problematic as his translator? A partial answer can be found in the same letter. Gnesin was afraid that Ivan would not understand the complex nature of his narrative, built on allusions and "half-words." The meaning of these words could easily be lost if misplaced in translation. Gnesin was clearly not concerned about the literal translation of his prose as he himself worked on the direct translation of his stories. Rather he was worried about the linguistic nuances, word order, and syntactic overtones of the final Russian version, which was

[231] *Hatsida* appeared in the Russian translation (made by Zoi͡a Kopelman) about a hundred years after it had been written by Gnesin. *Beyntaim* is still unavailable to the Russian readers.

[232] There are at least two more words in Hebrew, *nefesh* and *ruakh*, which can be both translated in English as 'soul.' *Nefesh* is associated with the body, sometimes simply meaning a 'living being,' while *ruakh* dwells in human's heart. In rabbinical literature, it is more common to use the word *nefesh* in conjunction with *arel* for a non-Jew, which supports my reading of Gnesin's letter.

supposed to be Ivan's part of that project. As a non-native speaker of Russian, Gnesin knew that he might be unable to catch such subtleties in the final translation of his text, and had to be sure that he and his translator shared the same understanding of his work. However, Chumazov, having the mindset of a *neshama ha-arelit,* was an inadequate translator for Gnesin.[233]

It is hardly a coincidence that Gnesin wrote the above-mentioned letter after he finished *Hatsida*. As stated earlier, this story marked a new period in Gnesin's writing.[234] Everything written before it is influenced by the naturalist works of Goldin, Bershadski, and Ben-Avigdor. In contrast, Gnesin's later stories (1905-1913) are much more individualistic. Modern scholars generally call Gnesin's late writings a unique and unparalleled phenomenon, and express high regard for his refined prose.[235] This sharp change in Gnesin's writing style was also reflected in his translations. They too can be divided in two periods, which chronologically and stylistically reflect he early and late periods of his original writing.

Before 1905, Gnesin translated from Yiddish into Hebrew. The exact date of his first translated work is not known, but his earliest published translation was a collection of Yiddish stories by M. Spektor. It appeared in print in 1901, three years before the publication of his first original book, *Tsliley he-khayim*.[236] According to Lakhover, that same year Gnesin translated two stories by Nomberg, and published them in *Ha-Dor*.[237] Unfortunately, the authorship of these two translations is under question because neither of them was signed, and there are no other proofs that they were Gnesin's work. Yet,

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[233] It is plausible that Gnesin had similar concerns in 1905, when he started translating a story by Perets together with Ivan, even though it was not his own text, and he could not have the same expectations.
[234] See Chapter 1.
[235] Rachel Albeck-Gidron, introduction xv.
[236] Mordekhay Spektor, *Sipurim ve-tsiurim [Stories and Scenes]* (Varshe [Warsaw]: Tushiya, 1901).
[237] Uri Nisn Gnesin. *Kitve* 225.

before 1905, translation work was not a priority for Gnesin, who translated only a few short stories, mostly from Yiddish to Hebrew. However, when *Hatsida* was published and highly praise highly praised by Frishman, Gnesin began a new period in his own writing, and his attitude towards translation also changed.

From 1905 to the last days of his life, Gnesin was actively translating works by various authors, all written in non-Jewish languages (Russian, German, French, Norwegian, and Greek). His predilection for translating European literature was likely the influence of Frishman, a prominent Hebrew translator of English, German, and Russian texts. By the end of 1905, Gnesin founded a publishing house, *Nisyonot*. The first issue was supposed to come out in January of 1906, but preparation for publication took more time than expected. Information about a new journal only appeared in *Ha-Meorer* in February:[238]

> Our editing office has complete sets of beautiful and sophisticated translations of selected works by Chekhov, Strindberg, Maupassant, Dostoevskiĭ, Przybyszewski, Ibsen, Schnitzler, Maeterlinck, Andreev, and others. In the near future, when *Nisyonot* sees that our readers want it, we will also publish original beautiful stories by different writers which we have in our office […].[239]

This description of *Nisyonot,* probably written by Brener, emphasized the Hebrew translations of European writers. The list of translated authors begins with Chekhov. Gnesin planned to launch his journal with his own recent translations of three Chekhov stories. He had lined up translators for future issue, including Brener, Tseytlin, Shofman, Nivilyov and Aronson; however, in the course of the journal's short life, only three of

[238] *Ha-Meorer [Awakening]* 1.2 (1906).
[239] Uri Nisn Gnesin. *Kitve* 83-84.

Gnesin's Chekhov translations were published: *Talant* [Talent], *Isha mesaperet* [A Woman Tells a Story], and *Be-aviv* [In Spring].[240] At the time, Gnesin translated a few more of Chekhov's stories. One of them, *Bitsa* [Swamp], was published by Brener later in 1912.[241] Another story, *Sipuro shel ish almoni* [The Story of an Unknown Man], was mentioned briefly in Gnesin's correspondence with Brener and Radler, (the publishers of *Ha-Meorer*), and also advertised in the second issue of the *Nisyonot*, but never published.[242]

In 1907, Gnesin translated a series of essays by Lev Shestov from Russian. The essays were written in a sophisticated style that balanced the philosophical language and elegant fictional narrative. It was published that same year in two consecutive issues of *Ha-Meorer*.[243] After a long break from translation work, Gnesin shifted his focus away from Russian literature and, in 1911, translated several of Baudelaire's prose poems. On this instance, it is plausible that he used a Russian translation of the French alongside the original text.[244] *Mi-shirat Bodler* [From Baudelaire's Poetry] appeared in one of the first literary periodicals in Palestine, *Maabarot* [Camps], edited by Yaakov Fikhman.[245] That same year, Gnesin also began translating a Longus' "Daphnis and Chloe," apparently from a Russian translation, and offered it to Ben-Avigdor for publication in *Tushiya*: "A Greek poem, a poem in four books [...] I incidentally came upon it not long ago, and it

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[240] In Russian: *Talant* [Talent], *Rasskaz gospozhi NN* [Mrs. NN's story], and *Vesnoĭ* [In the spring]. From here on, all the references to Chekhov's works are to the A. P. Chekhov, *Polnoe sobranie sochineniĭ i pisem v 30 t. [Complete Works and Letters in 30 vol.]* (Moscow: Nauka, 1974-1983). This edition has separate numerations of volumes for works and letters, indicated here with "W" for works, and "L" for letters.

[241] In Russian: *Tina* [Algae]. See A. P. Chekhov, *Bitsa [Algae]* (Jerusalem: Y. Kh. Brener, 1912).

[242] In Russian: *Rasskaz neizvestnogo cheloveka* [The story of unknown man]. In a letter from the 24th of January1906, Gnesin wrote: "I have translated for the future issues the *Sipuro shel ish almoni* […] This gem is finally translated in Hebrew." See Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 87.

[243] Lev Shestov, "Tkhilat dvarim akhronim [The Beginning of the Last Words]," *Ha-Meorer* 8-9 (1907).

[244] Baudelaire's poems in prose were available in Russian translation in several different editions (1902, 1909, and 1910).

[245] Uri Nisn Gnesin, trans, *Mi-shirat Bodler 69-77.*

made a great impression on me, and I have already translated a few chapters. If you write to me that you agree [to publish it], I will finish the whole [poem]."[246] Most likely, this project did not attract Ben-Avigdor, because the poem never appeared in *Tushiya*.

In 1912, Gnesin edited and contributed to a series of translations of European literature, *Universal biblioteka* [Universal library], published by Lakhover's *Akhisefer*. These were the last two translation projects he undertook: a long story, *Bimey Shabtay Tsvi* [In the days of Shabtay Tsvi], by the German-Jewish author Yacob Wassermann,[247] and a novel *Ha-tslov* [The Cross] by Norwegian writer Sigbjørn Obstfelder.[248] Gnesin may have translated more works, but only two poems by Heine were published posthumously in *Hatsida*. The location of other manuscripts is unknown.

2.2. *NISYONOT* AND GNESIN'S TRANSLATIONS FROM CHEKHOV

Of the numerous texts Gnesin had translated, Chekhov's three stories published in the second issue of *Nisyonot* best represent Gnesin's translating methodology. The analysis of these three stories sheds light on Gnesin's regard for Chekhov, and also establishes a parallel between the Russian literary trope of the "superfluous man" and the Hebrew literary trope of the *talush*. This period, during which these stories were

[246] There are no direct indications about the source of this Greek poetic novel, but it is more than likely that Gnesin used a Russian translation by a well-known poet Dmitriĭ Sergeevich Merezhkovskiĭ (1865-1941), one of the earliest leaders of Russian symbolism. It first appeared in print in 1896, had two more editions (1904, 1907), and was the only available Russian version of this novel in the early nineteenth century. More important, Merezhkovskiĭ wrote an introductory essay about the symbolism in "Daphnis and Chloe," in which he offered an alternative reading of this text from philosophical and religious perspectives inspired by Nietzsche and Dostoevskiĭ. The pessimism of Merezhkovskiĭ, his decadent view of nature, his attempts to resolve the eternal conflict between soul and body through synthetic combination, were all close to Gnesin's problematic as it appears in his works. See Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 166.

[247] In German: *Die Juden von Zirndorf* [The Jews from Zirndorf]. This novel appeared in print in 1897, and is sometimes translated in English as *The Dark Pilgrimage.* Gnesin translated only the first part of the novel (the prologue). Just as is the case with Gnesin's Baudelaire translations, it is not clear whether Gnesin used th German original, the Russian translation (1909), or both versions.

[248] In Norwegian: *Korset* [Cross] appeared in print in 1896. The source language was most likely Russian, because the first German translation was only published in 1924, while in Russian this novel appeared in 1909.

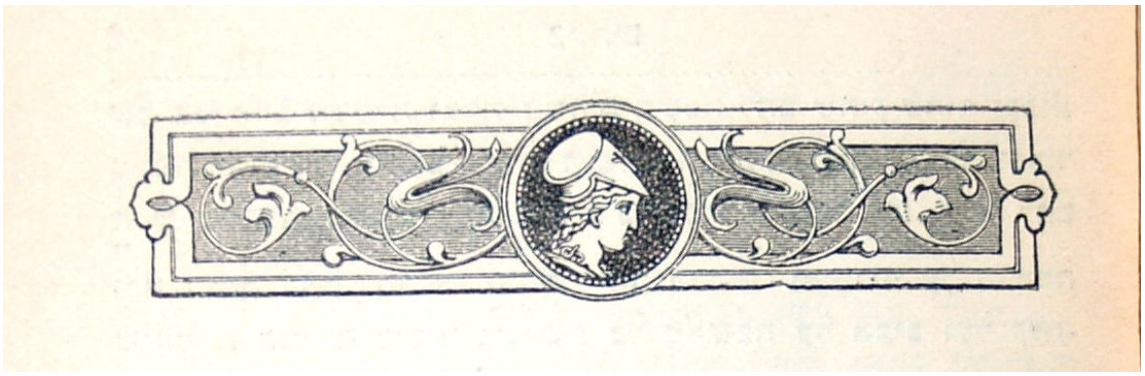
published, was the only time Gnesin was able to actualize his literary vision of a literary work, both as a writer and a translator. After *Nisyonot*, Gnesin published other translations, but was never again able to have complete control over the final, printed version of his work. From the order in which his stories were to appear to the typeface in which they were set, Gnesin's letter to Brener demonstrates how scrupulous he was about every detail at every stage of the printing process of his translations:

> Here are three translations for the first issue of *Nisyonot.* They have to be printed in the following order: first *Talant*, then *Isha mesaperet*, and at the end *Ba-aviv*. The paper, if possible, should be as in *Hu omar la* [A story by Brener, published in London in 1905. – A. B.] and the same goes for the width and the length, and the letters – petite, and also let the jacket be white. On the external side, print the same vignette as you printed on *Hu omar la* (and as for the background, it has to be white), but in the center there should be a picture of Chekhov, just as in the newspaper that we are sending to you. On top: *A. Chekhov*, beneath: *stories*, and under the line in petite [letters]: *"publishing house Nisyonot"* – and that's it. The inside of the jacket should be without any lines at all, and without vignettes – let it be straightforward, and this is what you need to print there: *A. Chekhov* (small type); *stories* (big type, as in *Hu omar la*); *A*. (small type); *Talant – Isha mesaperet – Ba-aviv* (petite); *translation* (petite); *U. G.* (small); *publishing house Nisyonot in Pochep* (petite).[249]

These seemingly excessive technical instructions are nonetheless closely related to Gnesin's views on writing. His preoccupation with visual aspects of his literary journal aligns him with contemporary European modernist writers.

[249] Uri Nisn Gnesin. *Kitve* 84.

a b c



d

Fig. 2. Comparison of a traditional book (a) and Gnesin's *Nisyonot* (b, c, d). Note the vignette on the title page (b), and especially the vignette with a woman's head from the first page of *Beyntaim* (c, d).

A book historian and typographer, Alan Bartram writes, that for nearly 450 years printers had arranged the layout of a page, but in the era of modernism "poets, writers, architects, artists, from a background outside the printing industry, challenged the old ways."[250] The modernist layout of *Nisyonot* with its unusual fonts and asymmetrical

[250]Alan Bartram, *Bauhaus, Modernism, and the Illustrated Book* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2004) 16.

vignette on its title page perfectly matched the novelty of its content: the first Hebrew translation of Chekhov's stories.[251]

Gnesin's desire to publish an exceptional journal dictated his aesthetic choices in regards to *Nisyonot,* from its unique layout to its selection of translations. Gnesin translated at least five of Chekhov stories, three of which, written around the same time, (1886-1887) share common subject matter and protagonist – a weak, depressed man who is wasting his life.[252] Chekhov had written other stories during that period in the late 1880s, but they significantly differ in content: one of them had a Jewish protagonist, while another describes the hardships of a Russian political terrorist. Gnesin could have translated any other author, but his choice to translate Chekhov is telling.

What attracted Gnesin to Chekhov's writing? The exact date when Gnesin read and began translating these stories is unknown, although all of his translations were completed after he became a close friend of Frishman. Frishman was an avid adherent of European modernism, and criticized Ahad Ha'am's view that a Jewish writer should be a national preacher.[253] Frishman envisioned the emergence of a European Jewish literature, which was free of politics and ideologies, and recognized that "the development of taste

[251] The only known Hebrew translation of Chekhov before *Nisyonot* was done by M. Chrisman, and was published in Tel Aviv in 1900. The graphic design found in *Nisyonot* and *Ha-Meorer* have many common features, and both noticeably differ from traditional editions of Jewish books and periodicals. On the traditional Jewish title page, text was placed with vertical symmetry, vignettes (if used) wrapped it, and were never scattered on the page – they always formed some figure, most often a portrait oriented rectangle. Brener reshaped his vignettes, broke their lines, and let them mix with text. See Fig. 3.

[252] All three translations were published together in *Nisyonot*.

[253] The concept of a poet as first and foremost a citizen, and only after that as an artist, has deep roots in Russian literature. In the early nineteenth century, Vasiliĭ Zhukovskiĭ (1783-1852), one of the main figures of Russian romanticism, believed that a poet is "a skilled liar." Afanasiĭ Fet (1820-1892) argued that there was no connection between art and real life. Aleksandr Pushkin (1799-1837) had a different opinion: he compared a poet to a prophet and encouraged him to "burn humane hearts with a word."This view was further developed by Nikolaĭ Nekrasov (1821-1878), the author of a well-known aphorism, "You don't have to be a poet, but you must be a citizen." Apparently, Ahad Ha'am, Klausner, and many other Zionist leaders shared some similarities with Nekrasov regarding the social role of literature.

and aesthetic sensitivity was the key to a modern Jewish renaissance."[254] Without Frishman's passionate dreams about the future of European Jewish literature, Gnesin's progression from his first naturalist novel, *Tsliley he-khayim* to the impressionist *Hatsida* would hardly be possible. Among Russian literature of the late nineteenth century, impressionism is best represented by the works of Anton Chekhov. In his comparative study of Henry James and Chekhov, Peter Stowell wrote that Chekhov "broke from the transcendent subjectivity of realism to forge the subjective objectivism of literary impressionism."[255] The same can be said of Gnesin. Even a brief glance at *Hatsida* will demonstrate the similarities in the two author's writing styles. Apparently, these stylistic similarities are the reason Gnesin chose to translate Chekhov.

Just as impressionist artists created atmosphere with only a few brush strokes, Chekhov was able to show life as he perceived it, to transmit mood through scenic depictions, to concisely express the essential.[256] These are the elements that most attracted Gnesin to the Russian writer's prose. When presenting people and nature, Chekhov followed his feelings, accenting immediate emotions. In his stories, his perceptions of reality are often broken down into minor sensations, manifested in the ceaseless ruminations of his protagonists. These sensations affect readers psychologically, evoking vivid emotions and images in their minds. Gnesin tried to preserve this effect in his translation of Chekhov, and aimed to produce the same effect through his own writing.

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[254] Hamutal Bar-Yosef, "Frishman, David," *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, online, Internet, 9 August 2010.
[255] Peter H. Stowell, *Literary Impressionism*, *James and Chekhov* (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1980) 4.
[256] One of Chekhov's favorite artists was his friend Isaak Levitan (1860-1900), who painted mood landscapes. If compared to other impressionists, Levitan's paintings were closer to Sisley's than to Monet's or Renoir's.

Gnesin was particularly influenced by the plotline of these three stories, in which young people who failed in life suffered from their irreversible failure. These stories attracted Gnesin because Chekhov's protagonists had much in common with many Russian Jews of his own generation, who had also failed in life and experienced similar feelings of alienation. In Hebrew literature, these people constitute the common image of a *talush* (uprooted),[257] and prominently feature in many works by Bershadski, Berdichevski, Fayerberg, Brener and Gnesin.

The main character in Chekhov's *Talent*, a young artist named Egor Savvich, had spent his summer holidays in the country and intended to move back to town the next day. His plan was to paint a picture, sell it, and go abroad. However, because of heavy drinking and procrastination, he hardly started on his project, is left with no income, and is in debt. He had a love affair with Katía, the landlady's daughter, who worships his talent and wants to become his wife, but Egor Savvich has no intention of marrying Katía. He believes that "an artist, and also any other person who lives for the art's sake, should not marry […] an artist has to be free."[258] Egor Savvich is depressed; only a glass of vodka can make him feel as if "the dark cloud in his soul slowly disappeared and […] all his inside is smiling in his stomach."[259] Later, two of his friends, also artists, arrive and join Egor Savvich. They drink, make plans, and dream about their brilliant future.[260] Some readers begin to hope that these dreams will come true, but Chekhov shatters the reader's expectations:

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[257] Among many stories written by Chekhov in the years 1886-1887, one has particular relevance for the *talush* image. It is called *Perekati-pole* [Rus.: tumbleweed], and tells of a Jew who left his family, converted, and was wandering from one place to another in search of permanent residency and occupation. Constance Garnett translated this story as "Uprooted."

[258] A. P. Chekhov, *Polnoe sobranie sochineniĭ* vol. W5, 277.

[259] A. P. Chekhov, *Polnoe sobranie sochineniĭ* vol. W5, 278.

[260] This story had a personal meaning to Chekhov: his brother Nikolaĭ (1858-1889) was a talented painter, who died at the age of thirty-one mostly because of his drinking and bohemian lifestyle.

> And it doesn't occur to any of them, that time runs, and every day life gets closer to the sunset, that they ate a lot of other's bread, but have not done anything yet, and that all three of them are victims of an unforgiving law, according to which only two or three out of a hundred promising beginners have success, while all the rest take a back seat, and perish as cannon fodder...[261]

Another of Chekhov's stories, *Mrs. NN's Story*, is narrated by the protagonist, who reflects on the romantic episode nine years prior. During a summer spent in the country, a noble and rich young lady, Natal'i͡a Vladimirovna, meets the deputy prosecutor, Pëtr Sergeevich, who soon falls in love with her. She feel happy having wealth and rank, and being loved, but their relationship soon dies because of the invisible wall that separates her from Pëtr Sergeevich: she "was noble and rich, while he was poor, not even a nobleman, but only a son of a deacon and a deputy prosecutor."[262] At the end of the story, Chekhov leaves his character with nothing but memories and a bleak future:

> […] The time went and went... People and their love passed, clear days and warm nights slid away, nightingales sang, it smelled of hay – and [...] it went away from me, just as from everybody else, really quickly, leaving no imprint, without being appreciated, and disappeared like fog... Where it is now? My father passed away, I grew old; everything what I liked, everything that pleased me and gave me hope […] has all become memories. I see in front of me a flat desolated distance without a single living soul, and there on the horizon it is dark and scary...[263]

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[261] A. P. Chekhov, *Polnoe sobranie sochineniĭ* vol. W5, 280.
[262] A. P. Chekhov, *Polnoe sobranie sochineniĭ* vol. W6, 452.
[263] A. P. Chekhov, *Polnoe sobranie sochineniĭ* vol. W6, 452-453.

Eventually, Natal'i͡a Vladimirovna sinks in depression, and spends her time lamenting over her wasted life. She forgets about the social wall that separated her and her lover, and begins accusing Pëtr Sergeevich of failing to make a life for both of them. Later this accusation is extended to the whole generation of "heroes of the modern romance."[264]

The third story Gnesin published and translated, *In Spring*, tells the tale of an unsuccessful writer, Makar Denisych. When the story begins, everybody is celebrating return of spring, and he, alone, is unhappy: "Instead of excitement, joy, and hope, the spring brings forth some vague desires that disturb him, and so he walks around, and does not know what he wants. Indeed, what does he want?"[265] People do not recognize him as a writer; they laugh at his failures and openly mock him. Makar Denisych has no friends, and "his soul is full of loneliness, parentlessness, it is that very melancholy which is experienced only by very lonely people, and great sinners."[266] Once in a while, he meets an equally unfortunate fellow, and looking at each other, both come to life. They argue, they laugh, they are filled with delight and excitement. Just as in his previous stories, Chekhov gives his reader a tiny glimmer of hope, only to destroy it in the subsequent paragraphs: "This is how their youth wears out and fades away, without joys, love and friendship, without peace of mind, and without everything that gloomy Makar is so fond of describing in the evenings, in the minutes of inspiration. And together with the youth also goes the spring."[267]

As one can see, Chekhov did not give his protagonists (an artist, a lady, and a writer) any chance at true happiness. In fact, he put them in situations in which they, given their nature, were the makers of their own unhappiness. Chekhov openly condemns

[264] A. P. Chekhov, *Polnoe sobranie sochineniĭ* vol. W6, 452.
[265] A. P. Chekhov, *Polnoe sobranie sochineniĭ* vol. W5, 54.
[266] A. P. Chekhov, *Polnoe sobranie sochineniĭ* vol. W5, 56.
[267] A. P. Chekhov, *Polnoe sobranie sochineniĭ* vol. W5, 56.

his characters: they are "too shy, inert, lazy, and hypochondriac, and too readily admit that they are failures, that their personal life has betrayed them; instead of fighting they just criticize, calling the world vulgar and forgetting that with time their criticism also turns into vulgarity."[268]

Chekhov's characters remarkably match the well-established Jewish literary trope of the *talush*. In Russia, the literary trope of the young man who is alienated from the "world of his fathers" has been in existence since the 1830s. The trope was most readily used in the 1860s, when the persona of the "superfluous man" became popular in Russian literature.[269] These people were generally considered to be a product of Western education and to hold values that are diametrically opposed to those of traditional Russian society. The main characteristic of the "superfluous people" is their feeling of alienation from society, which ultimately leads them to skepticism, nihilism, and general passivity.[270] Despite all the socio-historic differences between Russian and Jewish people, there are many formal similarities between the "superfluous man" and the *talush*. Both images are the result of a deep chasm between traditional and modern life. Just as the former struggles to adapt to life in industrial Russia, the latter suffers a spiritual crisis brought on by the *Haskalah* and rapid assimilation.[271] Both the "superfluous man" and

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[268] A. P. Chekhov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*ĭ vol. W6, 452.

[269] The figure of the "superfluous man" can be found in such works as *Evgenii*ĭ *Onegin* by Pushkin (1832), *Geroi*ĭ *nashego vremeni* [A Hero of Our Time] by Lermontov (1839), *Oblomov* by Goncharov (1859), *Otsy*͡ *i deti* [Fathers and Children] by Turgenev (1862), and many others.

[270] For a thorough analysis of this literary image, see David Patterson, *Exile: The Sense of Alienation in Modern Russian Letters* (Lexington, Kentucky: The UP of Kentucky, 1995).

[271] The reason this image became so popular in Hebrew literature of the late nineteenth century has to do with the historical conditions of the time. The pogroms of 1881-1882 destroyed many illusions of *Haskalah*, and a whole generation of young Jews who could have otherwise become *maskilim* unexpectedly found themselves uprooted and lost between traditional and secular realities. For more on *talush* in Hebrew literature see Nurit Govrin, *Tlishut ve-hitkhadshut: ha-siporet ha-ivrit ba-gola uve-Erets-Israel be-reshit ha-me'a ha-20 [Uprootedness and Renewal: Hebrew Prose in the Diaspora and Palestine in the Early Twentieth Century* (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense, 1985) 20-30; Shachar M. Pinsker, *Literary Passports: The Making of Modernist Hebrew Fiction in Europe* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2011) 169-184.

the *talush* reject the traditional lifestyle of the older generation and search, unsuccessfully, to find their place in life. However, two literary personas are not exact replicas of one another. The image of the "superfluous man" created by Pushkin, Lermontov, Turgenev, Chekhov and other Russian writers not only attracted Gnesin as a reader and a translator, but also provided him with the literary models against which he would create the figure of the *talush* in his own works. Even-Zohar writes that Gnesin's uniqueness takes on "a very different appearance when viewed in the context of Russian literature […] In this context, Gnesin appears solidly rooted, anchored in luxurious literary tradition, and, consequently, more comprehensible."[272] The *talush* persona, though influenced by Russian literature, is the literary embodiment of historical and social tensions specific to European Jews.

The common theme of all three Chekhov stories — wasted youth and the meaningless existence that follows — also appears in Gnesin's works. In fact, the two writers were contemporaries, living in Russia, and largely partaking in the *fin de siècle* Zeitgeist. For example, Naftole Berger, the protagonist of *Beyntaim*, is a typical Chekhovian character – depressed, weak and uncertain. One day, when his private student was reciting a lesson, he stopped listening, and there was silence:

> And that silence was like the extension of a long, subdued plaint, which pressed on his heart and closed it and told him of sadness, told him of fates that were lost in life, and dreams that withered in the bud, and life that ended in error. Many, many had been the days of light and tranquility, and those days had been good and generous […] and nevertheless they pass and are lost, and there is no redemption.[273]

[272] Itamar Even-Zohar, "Gnessin's Dialogue and Its Russian Models." *Poetics Today* 11:1 (Spring 1990) 135.
[273] Uri Nissan Gnessin, *Besides* 35.

This paragraph echoes the words of Chekhov's Natal'i͡a Vladimirovna and her bitter lamentation of her youth. Despite the fact that these two characters exemplify two completely different social spheres and lead different lifestyles, both are bitterly disappointed with their lives, and both appear in identical states of depression. Unlike the Jewish writers of previous generations who adopted secular images from European literature and ended up writing about Jewish princes and knights, Gnesin applied the non-Jewish literary model of the "superfluous man" to his own experience as an assimilated Russian Jew. Instead of introducing foreign non-Jewish characters, he achieved a much stronger effect by focusing on the image of the *talush*, who is a more tragic and alienated persona than the "superfluous man", considering the socio-historical conditions of Jewish life in the Pale of Settlement.

2.3. GNESIN'S STRATEGY OF TRANSLATION: CASE STUDY I

Gnesin faced two major linguistic challenges when translating Chekhov into Hebrew: vocabulary and syntax. A close reading of the stories alongside with their Russian originals and alternative Yiddish translation by Leon Kobrin sheds light on Gnesin's strategies for overcoming these problems. Using a special adaptive mode of translation Gnesin partially re-formulated Chekhov's message to achieve the desired emotional effect.

The distinction between literal translation (metaphrase) and free translation (paraphrase) has existed since early antiquity, and all translations are in fact a combination of these two approaches. Eugene Nida, one of twentieth century's most influential translation theorists, called these approaches equivalences, and distinguished between formal equivalence and functional (or dynamic) equivalence. In his work, Nida gave preference to the latter, although he recognized the lack of sharp boundaries

between them, and therefore viewed the ideal translation as an elaborate blend of these equivalences.[274] Nida's definition of functional equivalence stemmed from the theory and practice of biblical translation, his main textual field of study. Mostly concerned with the transmission of the essential ideas and thoughts in the Tanakh, Nida did not value any lexical, grammatical or cultural literality in his translations. Hence, Nida definition of functional equivalence perfectly describes the nature of Gnesin's translations of Chekhov, with one exception: instead of translating Chekhov's ideas, Gnesin was more concerned about conveying the emotional atmosphere of the source text into Hebrew.

One of Gnesin's four published translations from Chekhov, *Isha mesaperet*, is particularly interesting to present as a case study. Only a few years after the Hebrew version appeared in print, an American Jewish writer, Leon Kobrin (1873-1946), translated this story into Yiddish,[275] allowing us to compare the two Jewish perspectives and translation approaches of the same Russian text. Kobrin's translation is strikingly different from Gnesin's, and is an excellent example of the formal equivalence approach to translation. Of course, Kobrin would not have been able to produce his literal translation if Yiddish was not so syntactically flexible and close to Russian.

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[274] Nida's theory was formulated in many works, including books and articles. Three of his major works are: Eugene A. Nida, *Toward a Science of Translating: With Special Reference to Principles and Procedures Involved in Bible Translating* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1964); Eugene A. Nida, and Charles R. Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969); Jan De Waard, and Eugene A. Nida, *From One Language to Another: Functional Equivalence in Bible Translation* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1986).

[275] Kobrin was born in Vitebsk, not far from Gnesin's hometown, Pochep. He was fluent in Russian and started writing in it before coming to United States in 1892. Later he became known as a prominent playwright and translator. He translated many works by Dostoevskiĭ, Tolstoĭ, Chekhov and Gor'kiĭ. Kobrin also translated from Maupassant and Zola, using their Russian editions because of his limited command of French. The story *Vos zi hot dertseylt* [What She Has Told] was published in 1910: A. P. Chekhov, *Geklibene shriftn fun Anton Chekhov [Selected Works by Anton Chekhov]*, trans. Leon Kobrin, vol. 4 (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1910) 26-32.

Problems of Russian-Hebrew translation

Gnesin faced quite a few difficulties when translating from Russian. Some words that were well known to Russian-Jewish readers simply did not exist in the Hebrew vocabulary of the early twentieth century. In such cases, Gnesin could have either left the Russian in a transliteration, used a word that was semantically similar, or infused old Hebrew word with new meaning. For example, in a letter to his editors in January of 1906 regarding his translation of *Talant*, Gnesin requested that they decide how to translate two Russian words that had no Hebrew equivalent: a) *tarakan* [cockroach] and b) *naturshchik* [model].[276] The editors did so, although both of their word choices were questionable. In the published Hebrew translation, cockroach appears as *pishpesh* [bedbug],[277] while the word *naturshchik* was replaced with a Russian synonym, *model'*, ending in a plural suffix (מוֹדלין).

The lack of Hebrew vocabulary presented a major obstacle for Gnesin's translations. The easiest solution was to borrow missing words from Russian. Here are a few examples of such words and phrases:

סיורטוקים של זרים	other people's frock coats	<	чужие сюртуки
והיה מוֹתח את מידת-הביקוֹרת על "העולם הגבוה"	and applied critical attitude to the "high world"[278]	<	критиковал высший свет
רק האלוהים יודעים משום-מה	Only God knows why[279]	<	бог знает почему
האלוהים אתוֹ!	God be with him![280]	<	Бог с ним!

[276] Uri Nisn Gnesin. *Kitve* 85.
[277] Both 'cockroach' and 'bedbug' are insects, but the original phrase, describing the thickness of the artist's hair, emphasized the relatively large size of an insect: "His hair […] was all so thick, so matted, that if a fly or a beetle had been caught in his hair, it would never have found its way out of this enchanted thicket." Garnett's translation is better, because a beetle is usually bigger than an almost invisible bedbug, but also far from perfect.
[278] "He would criticize aristocratic society." (Garnett)
[279] "For some unknown reason" (Garnett).

Another possible solution was to find other Hebrew words to create the same meaning in their totality. Gnesin translated the phrase "against the background of a cloud" using the Hebrew word *kipa* [cupola; dome],[281] which evoked the shape of a cloud, and successfully conveyed Chekhov's expressive image of the Earth covered in darkness.

Gnesin also could not find the equivalents to a few other words and phrases, some of which were indeed untranslatable:[282]

הם יודעים רק להיות מוֹתחים את מידת-הביקוֹרת על כל דבר	they know only how to apply their critical attitude towards everything	<	they only criticize (они лишь критикуют)
תחת כיפתה הקוֹדרת	under the dark dome[283]	<	against its background (на ее фоне)
בקצה, באפסיים, אפלה, אפלה ופחד	in the end, where there is nothing, darkness, darkness and fear[284]	<	on the horizon it is dark and frightening (на горизонте темно, страшно)
וקוראים לכל מה שיש לאחרים נוולוּת	calling everything that belongs to others ugly[285]	<	calling the world vulgar (называя свет пошлым)
מידת-הביקוֹרת שלהם עצמה הולכת גם היא	their critical attitude itself is becoming more and more	<	their very criticism passes little by little into vulgarity

[280] "God help him!" (Garnett). Garnett's translation is incorrect. The Russian colloquial emphatic expression *(nu i) bog s nim* is close to "whatever" or "let it ride" in English. It is used as a conclusion to something that the narrator does not like or disapproves of, but unwillingly agrees to. In this story, Natal'i͡a Vladimirovna would like to hear something from Pëtr Sergeevich, but he said nothing, which made her use this expression.

[281] כיפה

[282] Russian words *poshlost'* (noun) and *poshlyĭ* (singular masculine adjective) refer to something banal, vulgar, base, and common at the same time.

[283] "Against the background of [the storm cloud]" (Garnett).

[284] "Out there on the horizon it is dark and terrible" (Garnett).

[285] "Calling the world vulgar" (Garnett).

ונעשית יותר ויותר מנוּוָלה ושכיחה וזולה מאוד	ugly, common, and cheap		(сама их критика мало-помалу переходит в пошлость)
ערב	Evening	<	weather (погода)

A similar approach was used to render grammatical structures that did not exist in Hebrew, such as adverbial participles.[286] Gnesin substituted these words using a variety of grammatical devices: verbs in the past, present, and future tenses, descriptive constructions with the helping verb *to start*, and adverbial clauses with infinitive and pronominal suffixes. Here is an example:

היה [...] רודף	chased	<	chasing (гоняясь)
החילותי מתכווצת קצת	started to huddle a little bit	<	hudding (пожимаясь)
ואתחיל משוררת חרש	started to sing silently	<	singing (напевая)
מדי שבתוֹ	in the time of his being	<	being (бывая)
קוראים	call	<	calling (называя)
מחשבה לא באה אל לבי שאהיה [...] מבינה	a thought did not come to me that I should […] understand	<	without trying to understand (не стараясь понять)
מחשבה לא באה אל לבי שאהיה יודעת	a thought did not come to me that I should know	<	not knowing (не зная)
איני יודעת	do not know	<	not knowing (не зная)
לחצתי	Pressed	<	pressing (сжимая)

[286] There are nine adverbial participles in the Russian original. Garnett translated eight of them with a gerund and one with an adverbial clause. Yiddish has this part of speech, and Kobrin used it seven times (one adverbial participle was translated with a verb in the past tense, and another one with a verb in the present tense).

The dearth of Hebrew vocabulary is not the only reason for Gnesin's figurative translations. Kobrin, for example, also translated "against the background of a cloud" figuratively, as "from the distance, under the cloud," although the Yiddish word *fon* [background] was in common usage at that time.[287]

Names of plants and animals often create difficulties for translators, especially when these words have different cultural weight in the source and target languages. A Hebrew translator's method for filling these lexical gaps is not only of interest for linguists, but also intimates how Jewish translators and their readership understood the Russian original. For example, Gnesin translated the word *lipa* [Rus.: linden] as *livne* [Heb.: birch],[288] although for most Russian readers, these two trees have nearly opposite connotations. The linden was considered an ornamental tree, and was widely planted by the Russian nobility in parks, near houses or walkways. Even a passing reference to these trees brings forth the image of a beautiful shady allée leading to a country estate. Unlike the linden, the birch tree was rarely cultivated – it grows mostly in forests and near villages, and was an important natural resource for peasants. The national tree of Russia, birch is inseparable from its folk associations. Therefore, in the Russian original, the shadows of the linden trees on Natal'i͡a Vladimirovna's bed is an apropos and evocative symbol that helps readers picture the rest of the house and its surroundings. In the Hebrew translation, such symbolism is lost.

Similarly, both Gnesin and Kobrin made translation mistakes in a paragraph that reference various types of grains. Chekhov's description of a storm includes the phrase *po rzhi i po ovsi͡anomu poli͡u probezhala pervai͡a volna* [the first wave raced through the rye and a field of oats]. Chekhov recognizes the distinction between these two plants,

[287] All the other problematic words from above-mentioned examples were translated by Kobrin literally.
[288] Kobrin used a correct Yiddish word (לינדען) for this tree.

which are literally rooted deep in Russian soil and culture. He assumes that his readers will be able to do the same. Rye and oats are plants that are significantly different in appearance from one another: the former has long, grain-bearing ears and a relatively weak stalk, while the latter features a compound raceme known as panicle, attached to a sturdy stalk. As a result, the waves wind do not shack the oats as much as they shake the rye. In addition, during their bloom, oat plants are noticeably darker than rye plants, making Chekhov's description even more vivid and impressionistic.[289] Both translators seem to be indifferent to these nuances which were foreign and lost upon their audiences: Gnesin simply translated rye as *kama* [Heb.: ripe grain], and oats as *shibulim* [Heb.: stalks of grain], while Kobrin's translated rye and oats as *veyts un korn* [Yid.: wheat and rye].[290] Regardless of what Gnesin knew about fields and trees, the majority of his readers who were not involved in agriculture or grain trade were not likely to know the difference between rye and oats, or linden and birch, even if this difference was adequately preserved in the Hebrew translation. In other words, these culturally loaded images were doomed to be lost in Gnesin's translations because of his target readership.

Notes on syntax

Stylistic similarities between Gnesin and other writers have brought some scholars, such as Bakon, Lapidus, Even-Zohar, Bar-Yosef, to the conclusion that many of Gnesin's syntactical structures borrow directly from Russian and Yiddish. It is important to make a clear distinction between style and syntax, as well between different areas of syntax. When we refer to an author's writing we also refer to his syntax; however, we are

[289] Although we cannot confirm this fact, it is more than plausible that Chekhov saw a well known painting "A Rye Field" (1878) by a famous Russian landscape painter Ivan Shishkin (1832-1898).
[290] Rye and oats were well known in rabbinical literature because of their connection with Passover (laws of *khomets*), and there is no doubt that even if Gnesin and Kobrin did not know these words, they definitely had easy access to them.

also addressing a broad range of other features that appear in the text such as the author's ethical views, his spiritual life, and anything else that constitutes his inner world and is then reflected in writing. Syntax, which is both the study of the rules and the rules used for creating sentences, has two distinct fields that correspond to written and spoken language. This distinction has particular significance for the Hebrew of Gnesin's time, when Hebrew was frequently used in writing, but rarely spoken. Thus Hebrew had syntactical rules for writing the body of a narrative, but had no linguistic foundations for composing dialogue. For Gnesin, constructing the syntax for Hebrew dialogue required him to borrow grammatical structures from other languages spoken as his time. Syntactically, such passages noticeably differ from the sections of his text without direct speech.

Except for the instances when Gnesin is writing dialogue his syntax does not seem to be influenced by Russian or Yiddish. Syntactically, all these languages are relatively close and flexible enough to create similar constructions without borrowing from one another. Gnesin's translations from Russian are particularly useful for this study, because they allow us to look at both texts simultaneously and analyze his syntactical choices. Or course, these choices are partially predetermined by the translator's choice to do a free translation. Gnesin concentrated on the impressionistic elements of Chekhov's work, which weakened a direct dependency from the original text, and allowed him to use a wider selection of syntactical structures. The opening paragraph of the story in Russian consists of a standard sentence in adverbial-subject-predicate-adverbial order:

[About nine years ago (AT1)[291]] [once before evening (AT2)] [in hay-making time (AT3)] [I (S1)] [and Pëtr Sergeich (S2)] [holding a position {of a deputy prosecutor (mm)} (m)] [went (P)] [on horseback (AM)] [to the station (AL)] [for the letters (AP)].[292] (Лет девять назад, как-то раз перед вечером, во время сенокоса, я и Пётр Сергеич, исправляющий должность судебного следователя, поехали верхом на станцию за письмами.) The same sentence in Hebrew is constructed totally differently:

באחד מימות הקציר לפנות-ערב הייתי רוכבת פעם אחת ביחד עם פטר סרגאיץ, אשר היה בימים ההם ממלא מקומו של חוקר-המשפטים בסביבתנו, לבוא אל התחנה ולקבל את המכתבים אשר באו לנו. זה היה לפני תשע שנים.[293]

[On one of the harvest days (AT1)] [before evening (AT2)] [I (S)] [rode (P)] [once (AT3)] [together with Pëtr Sergeich (AM)] [who {was {in those days (m1)} holding the position <of a deputy prosecutor (m2m)> (m2)} {in our area (m3)}] [to come to the station (AP1)] [and to receive the letters {which came to us (m)} (AP2)]. [That (S)] [was (P)] [nine years ago (AT)].

As one can see, Gnesin took the first prepositional phrase 'about nine years ago' and made it into a separate second sentence. He turned the complex subject ("I and Pëtr Sergeich") into a simple ("I") subject, followed by an adverbial of manner ("together with Pëtr Sergeich"). Finally, he converted everything else into a long clause with many modifiers. Gnesin translated a vast majority of complex sentences in the similar way. The syntactical differences between the Russian and Hebrew paragraphs is demonstrated in the following chart:

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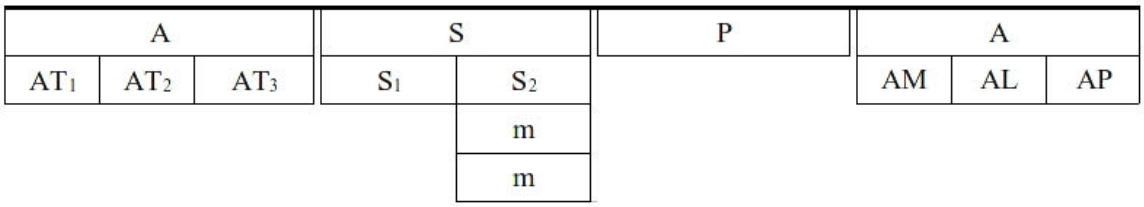
[291] The following abbreviations are used in the analysis of the sentences: AT — adverbial of time; AM — adverbial of manner; AL — adverbial of location; AP — adverbial of purpose; S — subject; P — predicate; m — modifier. For the purpose of demonstrativeness, only major syntactical units are considered.

[292] A. P. Chekhov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* vol. W6, 450.

[293] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kol kitve Uri Nisan Gnesin [Complete Works by U. N. Gnesin]*, ed. Dan Miron, and Israel Zmora, vol. 2 (Tel-Aviv: Ha-kibuts ha-meukhad, 1982) 192.

a) Russian



b) Hebrew

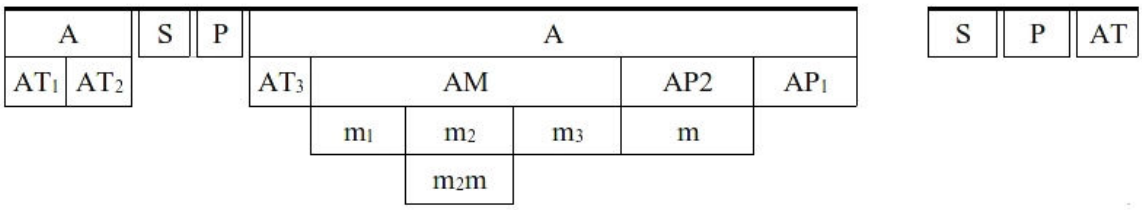


Fig. 3. The syntactical structure of the Russian and Hebrew versions of the same fragment.

In contrast, Gnesin was generally satisfied with rhythm of shorter sentences and had no intention of altering their structure in translations; thus, shorter sentences tend to be structurally similar to the originals. For example, compare this short Russian sentence with its Hebrew translation, featuring identical syntactical structures: "He was standing near me on the threshold and, breathing heavily from being tired, was looking at me,"[294] and "He was standing beside me on the threshold and, breathing heavily from the fast ride, was looking at me."[295] This syntactical practice also appears in Kobrin's Yiddish translation of the same story, and in the writings of Alter Druyanov (1870-1938), Gnesin's contemporary.

The syntax in Kobrin's text is influenced by the old Jewish *taytsh* tradition, which originated as a literal, morpheme-by-morpheme technique of translation of the Torah and

[294] A. P. Chekhov, *Polnoe sobranie sochineniĭ* vol. W6, 451.
[295] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kol kitve* 193.

prayers, resulting in a specific language characterized by its awkward word order.[296] The structure of Kobrin's sentences precisely follows the Russian original, slightly deviating only when it would otherwise violate Yiddish grammar rules: the above-mentioned first paragraph appears in Yiddish as a word-for-word translation of the Russian text. Rather than promoting his own aesthetic views on literature, Kobrin's goal was to convey Chekhov's style with utmost fidelity.

Druyanov's translation of *Slepoĭ muzykant* [The Blind Musician], a short novel by Vladimir Korolenko, is another pertinent example of direct translation. Korolenko was Chekhov's favorite contemporary writer; Chekhov admired his style,[297] although Korolenko's syntax is more elaborate and tends to be constituted of longer clauses. The Hebrew translation of *Slepoy muzykant* is methodologically similar to Kobrin's work. Druyanov tried to make as few structural changes as possible, very rarely broke or combined the original sentences, and successfully kept Korolenko's punctuation. Here are two sentences from the Russian (1) and Hebrew (2) versions, presented for comparison:

1: The midwife heard nothing peculiar in the baby's cry,

2: But the midwife did not hear anything unusual in the sound of baby's cry,

1: and having seen, that the mother also speaks as if in some obscure drowsiness

2: and having seen, that the mother was saying her words as if being perplexed

1: and, probably, was just wondering in her mind,

2: and her words, apparently, were spoken from fever,

1: left her and occupied herself with the baby.

2: left her and turned her attention to the baby.

[296] For more on *taytsh* see Neil G. Jackobs, *Yiddish: a Linguistic Introduction*, (New York: Cambridge UP, 2005).
[297] A. P. Chekhov, *Polnoe sobranie sochineniĭ* vol. L2, 191-192.

1: The young mother became silent, and only now and then some grievous suffering,

2: The young mother fell silent, and only occasionally that heavy sickening feeling,

1: which could not break out with movements or words,

2: which could not break through with air and movement,

1: forced out big tears to her eyes.[298]

2: sucked hot and full tears from her eyes.[299]

The similarities between the original and translated sentence are obvious. There is no need to break this sentence down into syntactical units to conclude that this translation approach is very different from Gnesin's. In comparison with the works of Kobrin and Druyanov, the syntax of Gnesin's translations appears to be innovative, flexible, and relatively independent of the source text.

The goals and methods of adaptive translation

One of the most striking features of Gnesin's translations is their remarkable lexical and syntactical flexibility, fully in accordance with the theory of functional equivalence. The goal of Gnesin's translations was to recreate same psychological effects

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[298] V. G. Korolenko, *Povesti i rasskazy*, vol.1 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoĭ literatury, 1960) 303:

Бабка не слыхала в крике ребенка ничего особенного и, видя, что мать и говорит точно в смутном забытьи и, вероятно, просто бредит, оставила ее и занялась ребенком. Юная мать смолкла, и только по временам какое-то тяжелое страдание, которое не могло прорваться наружу движением или словами, выдавливало из ее глаз крупные слезы. Они просачивались сквозь густые ресницы и тихо катились по бледным, как мрамор, щекам.

[299] Vladimir Korolenko, *Ha-menagen ha-iver [The Blind Musician]*, trans. A. Druyanov (Petrakov: Tushiya, 1900) 4:

ואולם המילדת לא האזינה שום דבר בלתי רגיל בקול בכיתו של הילד, ובראותה כי האם מדברת את דבריה כנבוכה ודבריה נאמרים, כנראה, מתוך חום הקדחת נסתלקה ממנה ותשים את לבה אל הילד. האם הצעירה נאלמה דומיה, ורק לפרקים מצץ איזה רגש כאב אנוש, שלא יכל לבקוע החוצה באויר ותנועה, דמעות חמות ומלאות מעיניה. הדמעות הבקיעו מבין העפעפים השחורים ותתגלגלנה אשה אחרי רעותה על פני הלחיים הלבָנות כשיש.

produced by the source text. Therefore, certain syntactical elements had to be adjusted or compromised. It is important to distinguish between changes that Gnesin was forced to make in light of the linguistic gaps between Russian and Hebrew, and those he intentionally made that helped him achieve his desired rhetorical effect. A close look at his translation demonstrates two major types of changes from the source text: (a) the intensification of impressions through the addition of words similar in meaning (there are no examples of removing sememes), or the syntactical reconstruction of a phrase with the help of added elements; and (b) complete lexical substitution, leading to a significant change in meaning.

Here are examples of literal changes to the original text through the addition of single words and prepositional phrases:

בימות-החורף מדי אראה אילנות החשופים	in the winter, when I see naked trees	<	when I see trees in the winter (когда я зимою вижу деревья)
פטר סרגאיץ צחק בהנאה.	Pëtr Sergeich laughed with pleasure.	<	Pëtr Sergeich laughed. (Пётр Сергеич рассмеялся.)
אבי המנוח	my deceased father	<	my father (моего отца)
הוא הכיר היטב	he understood well	<	he understood (он понимал)
יותר חריפה ויותר חזקה	sharper and stronger	<	stronger (сильнее)
ביליתי את אביבי בחיים.	I spent my spring of life.	<	I spent my spring. (Я провела свою весну.)

In some cases, Gnesin found it necessary to significantly expand predicate or even to add an exegetic clause, explaining the main part of the phrase:

הכל עבר ונפל אל	Everything has gone and fell	<	Everything has become a single

תהום הזכרונות.	into abyss of memories.		memory. (Всё это стало одним воспоминанием.)
נלחמים בגבורה עם כל אשר עומד להם לשטן	fighting with courage everything that they hate	<	struggling (бороться)
בשל פחדנותו החולנית לא ידע לעשות לא את חיי אני ולא את חייו הוא	because of sickly cowardice could not make a life for me, nor for himself	<	could not make a life for me, nor for himself (не сумел устроить ни моей жизни, ни своей)
צחוק-פרא פרץ מחזי בהנאָה רבה	wild laughter broke from my chest from great joy	<	I laughed with delight (я засмеялась от удовольствия)

Radical syntactical restructuring, as it can be seen from examples, was made by adding one or more independent clauses, partially compensating laconic Chekhovian style:

ופתאום נעקרתי ממקומי ורצתי אל הבית	suddenly I took off from my place and ran to the house	<	ran […] to the house (побежала [...] к дому)
ושמחה באה אל לבי וחזי התחיל נושם לרווחה והתחלתי גם-כן צוחקת.	And joy filled my heart, and my chest began breathing wide open, and I also began laughing.	<	I began laughing too. (Я [...] тоже стала смеяться.)
זכוֹר זכר באותה שעה את הסופה ועיניו ראו את זרמי-הגשם האלכסונים ואוזניו הקשיבו את צחוקנו הצוהל ופנַי אָז רפרפו לנגדו	he recalled at that moment the storm, and his eyes saw the oblique streams of rain, and his ears heard our happy laughter, and my face was floating against him then	<	at that moment he recalled the storm, the streaks of rain, our laughter, my face that day (в это время вспоминал он грозу, дождевые полосы, наш смех, мое тогдашнее лицо)

אין כל תהום אשר אי-אפשר לאדם לעבור עליה וכל חומה איננה אשר לא יוכל לקרקרנה	there is no abyss that a man cannot go over, and no wall exists that he cannot shatter	<	there is no wall that cannot be broken through (нет такой стены, которой нельзя было бы пробить)

Changes of the second type are aimed to produce the same effect, but are executed differently: instead of adding new words and expanding of the syntax already present, Gnesin replaced one word with another, completely shifting the meaning of phrase, and dramatically altering the original story:[300]

לאשה לא תהיי לי לעולמים	you will never be my wife	<	you cannot be my wife (вы не можете быть моей женой)

Chekhov's hero, who was in love with Natal͡ia Vladimirovna, recognizes the social distance between them, and admits that she could not marry him. However, he then asks her to be silent, creating the illusion of hope. Gnesin changed the modality of the phrase, removing any hope and emphasizing the tragic impossibility of the hero's happiness.

Another example illustrates an instance when the shift in meaning creates an intertextual connection with the help of imagery from the target language. It is not unusual for both Chekhov and Gnesin to begin their stories with an expressive description of nature, constructing the emotional framework of the narrative that follows, and introducing their characters in the background of this description. Therefore, the first few paragraphs are of central importance for the proceeding narrative, and it is not at all

[300] There are two changes in *Isha mesaperet* which belong to this category, but seem to be quite purposeless: the word 'church' *(t͡serkov*) is replaced with 'mosque' (מסגד), and 'winter' *(zima*), which is translated in most places as 'days of rain' (ימות-הגשמים). This substitution was definitely not a translation problem, since all these words existed in Hebrew, and were well known to Gnesin. For example, he used the first one in *Hatsida* (בתי-תפילות), and the last one in *Isha mesaperet* (ימות-החורף). However, unlike the rest of the changes, this replacement does not contribute in any way to the emotional intensification of the translation, and therefore its rationale remain unclear.

surprising that one of most striking changes in Gnesin's translation was made at the very beginning of the story:

הלבינו […]	in the distance, the house of	<	our house and church looked
במרחקים בית-אבי	my father and the village		white and the tall poplars shone
והמסגד אשר לכפר	mosque appeared white, and		like silver ([…] белели наш дом
והכסיפו אשרות	tall *asherot* glistened with		и церковь, серебрились
גבוהות	silver		высокие тополи)

Chekhov portrays a typical Russian countryside landscape in which the fields and trees surround a landlord's house and a church. Most of Chekhov's readers regularly attended church, and even for those who did not, this photographic image was nonetheless welcoming: a white church, surrounded by the beautiful trees with silver leaves. Known as white poplar, this tree can commonly be found all over Europe. One species of poplar and five species of willow, which belong to the same family and have similar morphologies, are native in the Land of Israel; therefore, there are at least two words in Hebrew for poplar (ערבה and צפצפה).

There is no doubt that Gnesin knew these words since they can be found in Tanakh and Talmud.[301] However, he didn't use either of them, and translated poplar as *ashera* [an idol in the shape of a wooden post, or a tree worshiped as an idol]. It is said in the Torah: "You should not plant for yourself an *ashera* from any kind of tree."[302] The Talmud also provides a clear definition for *ashera*: "There are three kinds of *ashera*: a

[301] *Tsaftsafah* is mentioned in Yekhezkel 18:5, *aravah* in Vayikra 23:40, Yeshayahu 44:4, 15:7, Yov 40:22, and in Tehilim 137:2. The sages of Talmud discussed the difference between these two species in the tractate Sukkot 33a, because branches of the *aravah* were used during the holiday, while *tsaftsafah* was considered to be unfit. There is no common view among modern scholars regarding these trees, and 'poplar' is often used for another tree, a birch (לבנה), while *tsaftsafah* can also be translated as 'willow.' However, this fact cannot change the conclusion that Gnesin could not miss a word for 'poplar.'

[302] Tanakh, Dvarim 16:21.

tree which has originally been planted for idolatry – behold this is prohibited."[303] Gnesin would have had difficulty finding another image with such a negative connotation. The Torah clearly indicate how one should regard the *ashera*: "You must destroy all the places, where the peoples that you will possess, served their gods […] And you must break their altars, and smash their pillars, and burn their *asherim* with fire, and cut their idols, and destroy the name of that place."[304] Most of the Gnesin's readers knew these verses by heart since childhood, and instantly arrived at the negative association rendered in the translation. Had Gnesin used a name of a real tree, even of a wrong tree, instead of the word *ashera*, the symbolism latent in Chekhov's landscape would be culturally lost and the author's emotional message would be ruined.[305] Paradoxically, Gnesin was able to reproduce the psychological effect of Chekhov's emotional landscape with a help of a single word: *ashera* evokes powerful images from the Torah and creates an impressive atmosphere which surpasses the emotional resonance of the original.

Just as he changed the beginning of Chekhov's story, Gnesin also emphasized completely different aspects of the protagonist's relationship. In the Russian original, there exists an obvious contradiction between Natal͡ʲa Vladimirovna's words and actions, and the author shows less sympathy than one would expect. On one hand, she seems to regret that her relationship with Pëtr Sergeich did not develop, and on the other hand, she was not in love, and it is her wealth that ultimately makes her happy: "I recalled that I was free, healthy, noble, and rich, that I was beloved; and the main thing that I was noble and rich, noble and rich – my God, how nice it was! […] I tried to figure out whether I

[303] Talmud Bavli, Avoda Zara 3:7.
[304] Tanakh, Dvarim 12:2-3.
[305] Kobrin followed a different path and translated this depiction in Yiddish almost verbatim, using a Russian loan-word *topol'* for poplars: "The tall *topol'*-trees shone with a silver gloss." See A. P. Chekhov, *Geklibene shriftn* 26.

loved Pëtr Sergeich or not, and fell asleep unable to decide anything."[306] Natal͡ʹia Vladimirovna casts the blame for her life's failures on Pëtr Sergeich. She claims that he and all the other heroes of the modern romance are "too shy, inert, lazy, and hypochondriac, and too readily admit that they are losers [...] instead of fighting they just criticize."[307] Ironically, she behaves in exactly the same way throughout the story, doing absolutely nothing to secure her future or bring her present life to order. In their final encounter, Chekhov further intensifies this irony. Natal͡ʹia Vladimirovna saw in his eyes that he was sorry for her, and "she was sorry for him, too, and vexed with this shy unlucky fellow."[308] The Russian word *dosadno* [vexed] is almost opposite in meaning from *zhalko* [sorry]: both reflect disagreement with something or somebody, but the first conveys a negative feeling of annoyance and embarrassment resulting from the disagreement, while the second expresses sympathy and compassion.

Gnesin entirely removed Natal'͡ʹia Vladimirovna's feelings of vexation from his translation:

רחמים גדולים היו	there was a great mercy	<	vexed with this timid, unsuccessful
בלבבי לאדם חלכה זה	in my heart for this		man (досадно на этого робкого
	miserable person		неудачника)

And again, he drew heavily on his readers' knowledge of scripture. The Hebrew expression he used was *rakhamim gdolim* [great mercy].[309] This phrase is used only once in the whole Tanakh, in the book of Yeshayahu, referring to the Jews' return to Jerusalem after exile: "[...] how can a wife from one's early days be rejected? I abandoned you for a short while, but with great mercy I will take you back."[310] Gnesin's change not only

[306] A. P. Chekhov, *Polnoe sobranie sochineniĭ* vol. W6, 451-452.
[307] A. P. Chekhov, *Polnoe sobranie sochineniĭ* vol. W6, 452.
[308] A. P. Chekhov, *Polnoe sobranie sochineniĭ* vol. W6, 453.
[309] רחמים גדולים
[310] Tanakh, Yeshayahu 54:6-7:

transformed the main heroine into a much more compassionate person but also gave Hebrew readers hope for the future happiness of the protagonists — that very hope which Chekhov had tried so hard to kill.

2.4. *TINA* AND *BITSA*: CASE STUDY II

Tina [Rus.: Algae] is one of the stories originally translated for *Nisyonot*, but only came out in print in 1912. It has a special significance in the study of Gnesin's translations because it adds new extra-lingual dimensions to the aesthetic and literary understanding of Gnesin's work. A historical overview of the heated debates in the Russian press of the day show that Chekhov's intention was not to write an anti-Semitic story about a seductive Jewish woman, but rather to present his own frustration with and fear of independent, dominating women in a literary form. Approaching Chekhov's story from the cultural perspective of a Russian Jew, Gnesin significantly re-worked it and ultimately created a different version of the main character.

Gnesin's only translation from Russian that contained Jewish content, *Tina* is thematically dissimilar from the other three Chekhov stories translated for *Nisyonot*. Written at the same time and in the same language and style as Chekhov's other stories, *Tina* is nonetheless strikingly different because of its content. It is plausible that it was this very content, especially the controversial figure of a Jewish *femme fatale*, that attracted Gnesin to the story and made him undertake the translation of it into Hebrew. As with any other story that makes a public stir, *Tina* never existed in a vacuum. From the day of its publication, there has been much debate about this story: numerous reviews, letters, talks, and conversations, only a fraction of which are available to a modern scholar. Gnesin's translation of *Tina* was inevitably affected by this hypertextual

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כִּי-כְאִשָּׁה עֲזוּבָה וַעֲצוּבַת רוּחַ, קְרָאָךְ יְהוָה; וְאֵשֶׁת נְעוּרִים כִּי תִמָּאֵס, אָמַר אֱלֹהָיִךְ. בְּרֶגַע קָטֹן, עֲזַבְתִּיךְ; וּבְרַחֲמִים גְּדֹלִים, אֲקַבְּצֵךְ.

additions to Chekhov's original text. The study of this story as a hypertext provides the necessary foundation for the analysis of its translation.

Reception of *Tina* by readers and critics

Tina appeared in print in a popular conservative daily, *Novoe vremi͡a* [New Time] in 1886, and immediately created public uproar.[311] It is a story about Susanna, a young Jewish woman who has recently inherited a vodka distillery business. In the opening scene, a young Russian lieutenant, Sokolskiĭ, comes to Susanna to collect her late father's debt. Susanna agrees to pay, and in a long conversation expresses many of her views on women, men, various nationalities, and Jews. Suddenly she snatches the debt papers from the table, and they disappear in her hand. Sokolskiĭ attacks her but cannot get the papers back. In spite of the awkwardness of the situation, they have lunch together. Sokolskiĭ returns home the next morning and tells his cousin what happened. His cousin, Kri͡ukov, goes to Susanna seeking revenge but also ends up spending a night with her. At the end of the story, Kri͡ukov comes to Susanna again, and sees a party in full swing with Sokolskiĭ in the company of the local gentry.

Most of the initial responses to the story were negative. A week after its publication, Chekhov learned that the chief editor of the respected magazine *Russkai͡a mysl* [Russian Thought], V. M. Lavrov, had disliked the story.[312] A month later, Chekhov sent the story to the writer M. V. Kiselëva, and received a sharp critique in reply. Kiselëva acknowledged that the story had been written well, but added, "I was personally disappointed seeing how a writer of your caliber […] shows me nothing but a dunghill."[313] In January 1887, Chekhov wrote back, defending himself. He claimed that

[311] More about the public reaction to this text in *Helena Tolstoy*, "From Susanna to Sarra: Chekhov in 1886-1887," *Slavic Review*, 50.3 (1991) 590-600.
[312] In a letter from the poet and translator L. I. Palmin (1841-1891). See A. P. Chekhov, vol. W5, 660.
[313] A. P. Chekhov, *Polnoe sobranie sochineniĭ* vol. W5, 660.

"ancient writers had not been afraid of raking through a dunghill, although they stood on firmer moral ground than modern writers. Belles-lettres' only goal is unconditional and honest truth […]. There is nothing pure on the Earth for a chemist. A writer must be as objective as a chemist."[314]

Russian readers unanimously regarded *Tina* as a "dunghill." Nine years after *Tina* was published, the poet and critic Pl. N. Krasnov wrote that while reading the story "the heart becomes clenched from horror and cold, as everything is so shallow, base, and vulgar, and this vulgarity suppresses, embraces and consumes everything!"[315] According to K. K. Arsen'ev, *Tina* belonged to a genre of merely anecdotal stories.[316] Other critics, such as K. P. Medvedskiĭ from the reactionary *Russkiĭ vestnik* [Russian Bulletin], believed that Chekhov had written a story with "meager psychological material," accusing him of misunderstanding his own story.[317] The only Russian author who praised *Tina* was Ivan Bunin. He included this story in the list of Chekhov's best works. In his memoirs, Bunin wrote: "I am amazed, how [Chekhov] could write […] *Tina* being under thirty… Beside his artistic talent, his knowledge of life and his deep penetration of the human soul at such a young age is astonishing."[318] These critics' general agreement on the stylistic merits of *Tina* suggests that the main reason for such contrasting stances was not a question of form, but rather of content, especially the fact that its main character is a Jewess. There is hardly any doubt that Gnesin was well aware of the controversial reception of *Tina* by Russian readers, although for him, Susanna's Jewish identity was not her major feature, only an external characteristic.

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[314] A. P. Chekhov, *Polnoe sobranie sochineniĭ* vol. W5, 661.
[315] Pl. N. Krasnov, "Osennie belletristy," *Trud [Labor]* 1 (1895) 207.
[316] *Vestnik Evropy [European Bulletin]* 7 (1888) 260.
[317] *Russkiĭ vestnik [Russian Bulletin]* 8 (1896) 283.
[318] *Literaturnoe nasledstvo [Literary Heritage]*, vol. 68 (Moscow: AN SSSR, 1960) 244.

In Russia, where many cultural values had religious origins, the common attitude towards Jews and Jewish converts was indeed negative. Thus, Jewish literary characters were usually presented unfavorably. Did Chekhov use Susanna Jewishness in order to showcase his anti-Semitic (or pro-Semitic) views? There are two compelling arguments against it. First, there are no references to Susanna's Jewish background in any of the above-mentioned reviews. This fact indicates that contemporary readers did not perceive Susanna and her interaction with the Russian characters to be directly connected with her Jewishness, nor did they read the story as Chekhov's statement on the Jewish question. Susanna's ethnicity was part of her person, and it worked against her, but for the author it was definitely not an essential part of her character. A second argument was made by Chekhov himself, in an address to a young Jewish writer, M. B. Polinovski: "Why would you want to write about Jews as if it is 'about Jewish life,' and not just 'about life'? Have you read the story *In a Sleepy Shtetl* by Naumov (Kogan)? It is also about Jews, but you feel that it is not about 'Jewish life,' but about life on the whole."[319] As Leo T͡Akovlev writes in a study of Chekhov's relationship with the Jews, "there was no such thing for him as French life, or Italian, or German, or Japanese […] he knew only one life, the life of a human being."[320] In other words, it was Susanna's life, her personality and actions, that was of primary concern for Chekhov.[321] Such universal, psychological prose

[319] A. P. Chekhov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii͡* vol. L9, 547.

[320] Leo T͡Akovlev, *Anton Chekhov. Roman s evrei͡ami [Anton Chekhov. A Romance with Jews]* (Kharkov: Ra-Karavella, 2000) 49.

[321] Susanna's image may have had a real life prototype. In January 1886, Chekhov proposed to a young Jewish woman, Evdokii͡a Efros, his sister's classmate. He wrote about it in his letters but soon stopped mentioning marriage at all, considering himself to be too young and unfit for it (L1, 213). The engagement did not end with a marriage, and in September, Chekhov wrote to Kiselëva: "You asked my sister whether I had married. I am answering: no, and I am proud of this. I am above marriage!" It is known that Chekhov presented the story to an actress, C. A. Karatygina, with the remark, "written from nature" (A. P. Chekhov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii͡* vol. L1, 262). To all those who were familiar with Efros, the image of Susanna was easily recognizable. In the first description of Susanna we read: "From under the knitted woolen kerchief one could only see a pale long nose with a sharp tip and a little crook in it, and one big black eye."

appealed to Gnesin who, like Frishman, rejected the idea of literature as an expression of the national spirit.

Susanna and Shoshana

The image of Susanna is remarkably expressive. From the very beginning the young woman appears exotic and mysterious. Sokolskiĭ sees her sitting in a large armchair, dressed in expensive Chinese nightgown, with her head muffled in a woolen shawl, and only one eye and her nose exposed.[322] Later Susanna appears in a long black dress, and the reader discovers that she has black curly hair and a pale thin face. Her arms are white and beautiful, and she speaks in a mellow feminine voice with a pleasant rolling "r." Even her bedroom is unusual, and Sokolskiĭ is amazed at the abundance of plants in full bloom, the singing birds, and the sweet, heavy fragrance of jasmine. It seems to him that this scent was coming not from the flowers, but from a bed that was not yet made, and from a long row of slippers under the bed.[323] Sokolskiĭ's first impression was ambiguous: "What a strange woman! […] She speaks well, but… too much, and too frankly."[324]

Through the perceptions and emotions of Susanna's visitors, Chekhov created an eluding atmosphere of feminine charms, irrational, exciting, and fatal. He called this atmosphere *tina*, and made it the title of the story. In comparison with the straightforward titles of Chekhov's other stories translated by Gnesin, *Tina* gave a lot of room for interpretation, both because of the semantic complexity of the word, and because of its

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(A. P. Chekhov, *Polnoe sobranie sochineniĭ* vol. W5, 362) This long nose appears several times in Chekhov's many jokes about Efros (A. P. Chekhov, *Polnoe sobranie sochineniĭ* vol. L1, 241-262).

[322] A. P. Chekhov, *Polnoe sobranie sochineniĭ* vol. W5, 362.

[323] A. P. Chekhov, *Polnoe sobranie sochineniĭ* vol. W5, 363.

[324] A. P. Chekhov, *Polnoe sobranie sochineniĭ* vol. W5, 365.

remoteness from the immediate plot.[325] In Russian, the word *tina* means algae, a large group of simple water growths, ranging from unicellular forms to long weeds. The Russian linguist Vladimir Dal defined *tina* in his dictionary (1863-1866) as a water plant which grows and collects on lake floors, mixing with silt, and forming a spongy, swampy bottom (but *tina* is not silt).[326] The active growth of algae is a problem for swimmers, who can get tangled amongst it. *Tina* is usually seen in standing or slow waters, giving it its figurative meaning of stagnation. English translations loosely use such words as 'mire' (Constance Garnett), 'slime' (Virginia Llewellyn Smith), 'quagmire' and 'slough' (Donald Rayfield), all of which express the idea of dirt and marshiness. This figurative meaning is not conveyed in the Russian word, and it is a good example of how the translator's understanding of the story can affect his word choice.

Being a Russian Jew, Gnesin had empathetic understanding of the Jewish characters, and it is no surprise that he read the story differently from its Russian, English, or any other non-Jewish readers. This difference is best expressed in his translated title. Gnesin chose to translate the word *tina* with the Hebrew word *bitsa* [swamp]. As it has been pointed out, most of Gnesin's readers knew much of the *Tanakh* by heart, especially those parts that have been read publicly or used throughout Jewish liturgy. The word *bitsa* is seen only once in the *Tanakh*. Employing it in a translation established an explicit intertextual connection between the short story and the sacred text. It is used in a rhetorical question when comparing papyrus, which thrives in wet areas (*bitsa*) but dies without moisture faster than any other plant to those people who may prosper at the beginning but lose everything when they reject God:

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[325] The significance of the title of this story was not clear to everybody. For example, literary critic Medvedskiĭ wrote in 1896: "What is the connection with the *tina*?" (A. P. Chekhov, *Polnoe sobranie sochineniĭ* vol. W5, 662)

[326] It is worthy of note that in the southern dialect of Russian, spoken in Chekhov's native city of Taganrog, *tina* is called *shmara*, which also means 'a prostitute.'

> Can papyrus shoot up without a marsh? Can the reed-grass grow without water? When it is still green, it will not be plucked, but before any other grass, it will dry up. So are the ways of all those who forget God, and the hope of the sinner will be lost, whose confidence shall be cut off, and whose trust is a spider's web.[327]

Gnesin's translation of the word *tina* is almost as loose as those by Garnett and Rayfield, because a direct translation of the word is missing in both English and Hebrew. After all, it is not the literal meaning of the title that is important, be it a swamp, a wetland, or seaweed, but associations created by it. It is the imagery that makes the title so effective.

In the Russian original and in several English translations, the images conjured by the title are negative. For example, Rayfield used the word "mire" in connection with Susanna's house: "[…] his cousin and all the men of the district [were] also there, in the mire."[328] It is used again when referring to her life as a whole: "the mire is the world of a Jewish woman who lives alone on her estate, ignoring convention."[329] This "mire" is even defined as sexuality.[330] Gnesin's word *bitsa* brings with it different associations. With the help of a verse from the book of Yov, Gnesin offered his readers a view of Susanna's world, not as a dirty swamp that sucked its victims down to their death, but rather as a swamp that gives life to plants and makes them grow. The next verse allows one to expand on this idea: assimilated Shoshana (Hebrew form of Susanna) rejected her father's faith, and "so are the ways of all those who forget God."[331] The last link of the

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[327] Tanakh, Yov 8:11:
הֲיִגְאֶה-גֹמֶא, בְּלֹא בִצָּה; יִשְׂגֶּה-אָחוּ בְלִי-מָיִם. עֹדֶנּוּ בְאִבּוֹ, לֹא יִקָּטֵף; וְלִפְנֵי כָל-חָצִיר יִיבָשׁ. כֵּן--אָרְחוֹת, כָּל-שֹׁכְחֵי אֵל;
וְתִקְוַת חָנֵף תֹּאבֵד. אֲשֶׁר-יָקוֹט כִּסְלוֹ; וּבֵית עַכָּבִישׁ, מִבְטָחוֹ.

[328] Donald Rayfield, *Understanding Chekhov: A Critical Study Of Chekhov's Prose And Drama* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1999) 37.

[329] Donald Rayfield, *Understanding Chekhov* 37.

[330] Donald Rayfield, *Understanding Chekhov* 38.

[331] Tanakh, Yov 8:11.

textual chain established by the word *bitsa* obviously implies the possibility that Shoshana will grow and thrive if she returns to Judaism.

Gnesin's translation of *Tina* features the same two prominent translation methodologies as the stories from *Nisyonot*: words are added to intensify the emotional quality of the text, and certain lexical units are replaced, resulting in a change of meaning. Here are examples of changes by means of adding single words and prepositional phrases:

והסירה בזהירות רבה את ידו ממותנה.	and removed with great caution his hand from her waist	<	cautiously removing his arm (осторожно отводя его руку)
ובקרוב היתה מרכבת-המרוצה של קריוקוף דוהרת ומנַקשת במסילה וממלַאתה תמרות, תמרות של אבק.	Soon Kr͡iûkov's racing droshky were galloping and knocking on the road, filling it with pillars, pillars of dust.	<	Soon Kr͡iûkov's racing droshky was knocking on the dusty road. (Немного погодя беговые дрожки Крюкова уже стучали по пыльной дороге.)
היא לא מצאה חן בעיניו, הגם שלא מצא אותה לא יפה כלל וכלל.	She did not find favor in his eyes, although not at all did he find her unattractive.	<	She did not catch his fancy, but did not appear unattractive either. (Она не понравилась ему, хотя и не показалась некрасивой.)
בפתח התייצבה היא גופא בכבודה – זקופת קומה וישרת הגו ורכוסה בשמלה	on the threshold appeared she herself[332] – with an erect stature[333] and a	<	on the threshold appeared she herself, slim, in a long black dress, with a tightly laced finely cut

[332] The last word of the Hebrew expression *bi-khvoda* (היא גופא בכבודה) literally means 'with honor.' The whole phrase stands for 'she herself,' but the literal meaning contributes a certain respectfulness to the image.

[333] The expression *zkufat koma* (זקופת קומה) literally means 'straight stature,' although its figurative meaning is 'triumphantly, with lifted head.'

שחורה וארוכה, החובקת יפה, יפה את מותנה החטוב.	straight back, and was fastened in a black and long dress, which gracefully, gracefully enclosed her carved waist		waist (на пороге появилась она сама, стройная, в длинном черном платье, с сильно затянутой, точно выточенной талией)
הפנים החיוורים והרזים במקצת ואת הראש השחור המוכתר תלתלים, תלתלים מקורזלים, כצמר זה של כבשים.	a slightly pale thin face, and a black head, crowned with curls, curls as wavy as the wool of sheep	<	a white thin face, a black head of hair, as curly as a little lamb (белое худощавое лицо, черную кудрявую, как барашек, голову)

Despite her attractiveness, Susanna, is a negative character in the Russian text, and Chekhov keeps reminding the reader of this fact throughout the story by inserting brief passing remarks: a pink canopy above her bed was like a funeral canopy; she talked fluently, but far too much, and too freely, so she must have been neurotic; she was slim and her thin face was pretty, but her nose and ears were white, as if they belonged to a corpse; when she smiled she showed her pale gums as well as her teeth, and so on. In Gnesin's Hebrew translation, Shoshana is treated with much more respect than Chekhov's Susanna, and consequently appears in a different light. Chekhov achieves this effect using his second technique, replacing or adding words in order to alter the negative construction of her character. For example, in Russian she is 'luring,' but in Hebrew she is 'amazing,' and her originally 'cursed' suddenness becomes 'hellish' explosiveness in translation:[334]

[334] The Russian adjective *anafemskiĭ* (*lit.* related to excommunication) is used colloquially and means "terrible, nasty," to be differentiated from a noun *anafema* [curse; excommunication], which belongs to a much higher stylistic register. Both words have an exclusively negative meaning; however, Gnesin's substitute, *hellish,* which is obviously affected by the Russian words *adskiĭ* [hellish] and especially *chertovskiĭ* [devilish], is often used as a neutral and even positive intensifier as in *chertovski smeshno* [devilish funny].

אלו הקפיצות הפתאומיות הללו שבמוח, אלו השינויים המבריקים, אותם חילופי הגונים המהירים, התפרצות-שאול זו	these sudden jumps in her mind, these brilliant changes, those quick shifts of colors, this hellish explosiveness	<	sharp transitions, swiftly shifting colors, this nasty impetuosity (резкие переходы, переливы красок, эта порывистость анафемская)
מה שמפליא ביותר בנפש זו	what is most amazing about her	<	what is so alluring about her (что в ней завлекательно)
לא היתה לברנש זה כל נטייה לפנים שאינם פנים רוסים	this person[335] did not have any inclination for non-Russian faces	<	he had a prejudice against non-Russian faces (к нерусским лицам он питал предубеждение)

Another translation strategy Gnesin employed was the replacement of pronouns and other signifiers.[336] In the Russian original, there are four ways of referring to the main character in the third person: "Susanna," "Susanna Moiseevna," "Jewess," and "she."[337] Together, these expressions are used a total of sixty-six times in the story, fifty of which appear in the body of the narrative, and the rest of which are used by Sokolskiĭ and Kri͡ukov in direct speech. In dialogue Susanna is commonly referred to with pronouns:

[335] Gnesin translated the emotionally neutral Russian pronoun with the Aramaic word *barnash* (בר נש), which means 'guy, person' and is used in ironic or derogatory sense.
[336] Gnesin did not use this technique in the stories from *Nisyonot*, probably because in those stories he did not try to alter the images of the heroes in such a radical way.
[337] The first name (Susanna) is used in informal situations between two equals or when an older or more respected person addresses a younger or less important one. The combination of the first name and patronymic (Susanna Moiseevna) is used in formal settings, between people who do not know each other well, or in instances when a young person addresses a senior.

Table 1

References to Susanna in the original version of *Tina*

Term	***author***	***Sokolskiĭ***	***Kri͡ukov***	***Total***
she (*она*)	19	7	6	32
Jewess (*еврейка*)	10	0	1	11
Susanna (*Сусанна*)	12	0	1	13
Susanna Moiseevna (*Сусанна Моисеевна*)	9	1	0	10

Gnesin used ten different words and phrases to translate Chekhov's four forms of referring to Susanna:[338]

a) pronouns[339]: "she" (היא) and "this (feminine)" (זו);

b) addresses: "Madame" (גברת) and "Madame Shoshana" (גברת שושנה),

c) social markers: "mistress" (גברת-הבית), "lady" (מטרוניתא), and "woman" (אשה);

d) ethnic markers: "Jewess" (יהודייה) and "daughter of Israel" (בת-ישראל);

c) personal name: "Susanna Moiseevna" (שושנה מואיסיובנה).

In translation, the emotionally neutral pronoun 'she' is used only in half the instances it is used in the original text. In Hebrew, the two forms of personal names are preceded either by the polite address *geveret* [Madame], or a pronoun, or a descriptive words such as "lady," "mistress," or "woman." The word Russian *yevreĭka* [Jewess] is used fairly often (eleven times) in Chekhov's text, and therefore puts emphasis on the Jewish origins of Susanna. Gnesin uses the Hebrew equivalent, *yehudiya* [Jewess], only once; in the other ten instances, Gnesin uses phrases such as *bat-yisrael* [daughter of Israel], *isha* [woman],

[338] The English (by Garnett) and the Yiddish (by Kobrin) translations of the same story precisely follow Chekhov's original words without a single change.

[339] Hebrew grammar allows the omission of the third person pronoun in the past tense because it is included in the conjugation of the corresponding verb.

or polite formal address *geveret Shoshana* [Madame Shoshanna]. In addition, Gnesin refers to Susanna using her first and patronymic names, Shoshana Moiseevna, only once in contrast to Chekhov, who refers to her in such a manner ten times. In the remaining nine times, Gnesin refers to her as “Madame Shoshana” or simply “Madame.” Gnesin never simply referred to the protagonist as “Shoshana,” as opposed to the Chekhov, who address her by her first name, “Susanna,” thirteen times. In the Hebrew text, “Susanna” is most frequently translated as “Madame Shoshana.” The distribution of words can be seen in the following table:

Table 2

References to Susanna in the Hebrew version of *Tina* [a]

	Total	פועל	היא	זו	[-]	שושנה מואיסיובנה	גברת	גברת הבית	גברת שושנה	מתראוניתא	בת ישראל / בני ישראל	יהודייה	אשה
she	**32**	7a 1k 2s	5a 2s	2a 2k 2s	3a 2k		1a	1a		1k 1s			
Jewess	**11**	2a	1a		1a		1a		2a		2a	1k	1a
Susanna	**13**		1a	2a			4a		4a	1a	1k		
Susanna Moiseevna	**10**					1s	2a	1a	6a				
Total	**66**	12	9	8	6	1	8	2	12	3	3	1	1

[a] Letters after numbers stand for source of expressions: *a* (author), *k* (Kri͡ukov), and *s* (Sokolskiĭ).

Replacement of the reference words in the Hebrew translation has two significant effects. First, it shifts the focus from Susanna's Jewishness to Shoshana's humanness. Regardless of Chekhov's intentions, the Russian linguistic and cultural opposition between the concept of *svoĭ* [one's own, one of us] and *chuzhoĭ* [Rus.: stranger, foreigner] sufficiently alienates Susanna on the grounds of her non-Russianness.[340] In the Hebrew version, however, Shoshanna's Jewishness is deemphasized, and substituted with neutral forms of addressing. Second, Shoshanna is regarded in a more respectful tone than Susanna in the Russian original. In Hebrew translation, she is most commonly referred to as "Madame" and "Madame Shoshana," confirming her relatively high social status, whereas in Chekhov's original, she is most frequently referred to simply by her first name, Susanna. In other words, the Hebrew translation preserved the plot yet subtly changed the tone of Chekhov's story with a few added and restructured phrases. Instead of a "dunghill," as seen by Russian critics, Hebrew readers received it as a story of a lonely young woman who was victim to her hostile environment.

To argue that Gnesin made these changes because of his ethnic kinship with the protagonist would be too limiting and superficial. While Chekhov's Jewish protagonist definitely interested Gnesin as a reader, the fact that he did not translate any other Chekhov stories with Jewish main characters demonstrates that the ethnicity of the main character was not his primary interest. Gnesin did not try to modify the seemingly anti-Semitic tone of *Tina,* simply because it was not anti-Semitic: Chekhov's story is an attack on a particular type of a woman, who could be of any ethnicity but happened to be

[340] This opposition has been an integral part of the Russian national psyche for centuries. It is widely manifested on various societal levels (ethnic, religious, sexual, and others), oftentimes becoming a sole reason for opinions and attitudes.

Jewish. Gnesin presented Susanna more sympathetically not because of his national solidarity, but because he did not partake in the general misogynistic undercurrent permeating Russian literature in the late nineteenth century, nor did he share Chekhov's negative attitude towards women.[341] In *Tina,* Gnesin's aspired to create a psychological narrative about a young woman whose questionable behavior deserved understanding and compassion rather then criticism and disgust.

2.5. ADAPTATION IN GNESIN'S ORIGINAL WRITING

Gnesin's adaptive translation technique also plays an important role in his original works, although there is a considerable difference in the way this technique is executed. Translation, which may adapt the source text, is still always a byproduct of a specific text. In original writing which is a much more independent activity, the literary work is inevitable influenced by other literature, journalism, movies, public debates, private conversations, and many other elements of the cultural polysystem. The adaptive technique is, therefore, applied not to the authorial message directly, but to these external factors of influence, forming a two-stage process. A close reading of several fragments from the story by the Russian writer A. I. Kuprin shows that Gnesin was influenced by Kuprin's writing, and adapted the Russian text to suit his literary goal in Hebrew.

Modern translation theory distinguishes between the many modes of communicating meaning from a source language into a target language. The concept of equivalence is central to all these modes, ranging from a literal word-for-word translation (metaphrase) to a loose representation of a source text (paraphrase). Translation is usually understood as a procedure that preserves the essence of the text by reproducing as much

[341] Several critics and literary historians accuse Chekhov of being a misogynist. See Donald Rayfield, *Anton Chekhov: A Life* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern UP, 1998) 341; *Anton Chekhov*, ed. by Harold Bloom (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2003); Virginia Smith, *Anton Chekhov and The Lady With The Dog* (London: Oxford UP) 1973.

of its linguistic features of the source language in the target language. Additionally, adaptation is used to achieve equivalence in situations when cultural elements need to be translated.[342] European Jewish translators used both strategies depending on the type of texts: religious and legal documents were usually directly translated from Hebrew into vernacular languages, and non-Jewish literature was usually adapted. The popular Yiddish expression *fartaytsht un farbesert* [translated and improved] was most likely first used on the title page of a translated Shakespearean play, and since then has acquired a comical meaning. Today, scholars look for other explanations of this phrase, trying to acquit the Jewish audience of this seemingly ignorant image: "it could simply mean that an earlier translation has been *farbesert* [improved] in the sense of 'corrected' […] (of printing errors, etc.)."[343] However, it was neither characteristic for Yiddish book market to make corrections,[344] nor was the Jewish audience well read in dramatic literary works.[345] Leaving aside the origin of this phrase, 'improved' should be understood literally, meaning that the Jewish translator changed or adapted elements of the text that would be lost on a Jewish audience. This argument raises important questions: What was changed? How was it done? And why was it needed to be changed?

Jewish translators have been improving original works for centuries. The oldest Yiddish manuscript (dated 1382), known as the Cambridge Codex, contains medieval epic poems such as *Dukus Horant* and the King Arthur legend, which were intended for

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[342] *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, ed. by Mona Baker (London: Routledge, 2001) 6-10.
[343] Leonard Prager, *Mendele: Forum for Yiddish Literature and Yiddish Language*, online, Internet, 21 May 2010.
[344] Printed in the same Jewish letters as Hebrew books, Yiddish books traditionally were supposed to be used primarily by women and poorly educated men for their entertainment, as opposed to the Hebrew religious books published for study. Their different positions in the books hierarchy meant that printing errors in Yiddish books were never considered important, and no author or editor would have spent the time correcting them.
[345] Another joke tells that once, after a performance of *Hamlet,* the audience applauded with a great excitement and called for the author.

public recital in front of a Jewish audiences.[346] These poems, and many other Celtic and German legends, were adapted according to Jewish laws and customs: the Christian content was deleted, descriptions of fights and tournaments were shortened or excluded, while sections describing the moral qualities of the heroes were extended. There was definitely a demand in the Jewish Diaspora for Gentile popular literature, especially from the lower classes; however, along with this demand came the sentiment that these texts were incompatible and inappropriate for Jewish life, and so the translator had the duty of changing these texts in order to accommodate them to their readership. For example, Shakespeare's plays have scenes that are impossible to directly translate into the culturally constructed ideal Jewish context. Adapting such texts by deleting or changing these sections made the text *kosher* (acceptable) for the Jewish audience, which was a sufficient reason to call the text 'improved.' In the late nineteenth century, adaptation was just as vital as it has been centuries before. Among the key issues of Jewish literary debates at the close of the century, Kenneth Moss lists the discussion of "how Jewish writers could legitimately and successfully transplant contemporary European literary trends into Hebrew literature."[347] The answer to this question is partially found in the rich tradition of adapting non-Jewish texts for Jewish readers; a tradition that originated in the Middle Ages, with numerous examples available in Hebrew and Yiddish.[348]

This tradition becomes especially important for modern Hebrew literature, written by authors who were not native Hebrew speakers but had an excellent command of the

[346] This manuscript was found in the late nineteenth century in Cairo (Egypt), and today is kept in the Cambridge University Library (Taylor-Schechter collection, t.-S. 10K22) in Great Britain. It was probably written in Egypt. In the fourteenth century, Cairo had a small Ashkenazi community, which had fled from Europe. See Dovid Katz, *Words on Fire: The Unfinished Story of Yiddish* (Cambridge: Basic Books, 2004) 60.

[347] Kenneth Moss, "Jewish Culture between Renaissance and Decadence: *Literarishe Monatsshriften* and Its Critical Reception," *Jewish Social Studies* 8.1 (2001): 157.

[348] There are also examples of certain works of Middle Eastern literature, translated into Hebrew using the same adaptive mode, although these non-European works are beyond the focus of my study.

written language. It may sound like a paradox, but it is to be argued that the original works of such authors as Gnesin are, to some extent, translations from their mother tongue – in most cases from Yiddish. The whole of Hebrew literature produced in Europe during this period can, therefore, be viewed as literature in translation. This argument explains why the same adaptive strategies are found in both Gnesin's original and translated works, although applied differently in each case. Translations are, by definition, formally restrained because the author predetermines many components of the text. Thus, the translator is left with a limited number of linguistic devices to adapt. Original writing does not have these limitations, and Gnesin was free to adapt any cultural image from any literature, according to his artistic tastes.

Russian literature was one of the sources from which Gnesin drew his adaptations. Some scholars who are in agreement with this statement try to differentiate amongst the hundreds of the nineteenth century authors who have been influential in the Russian literary world. Even-Zohar, for example, pointed out that it was not always the most famous Russian writers whose works offered models for adaptation: "More often than not, this transfer, or movement of models, takes place through less renowned writers who have not gained a central canonized position and who were likely to have been quickly forgotten after their deaths, yet who might have been extremely popular and widely read."[349] Hamutal Bar-Yosef claims that Turgenev, Nekrasov, Nadson, Frug and Chirikov had more influence on Hebrew literature than Tolstoĭ and Pushkin did. Bar-Yosef suggests three explanations for this phenomenon: first is the popularity of a writer in a given time period; second is the writer's engagement in Jewish problems; and third is motives that are analogous to the hardships of the Jews.[350] However, these explanations

[349] Even-Zohar, "Gnessin's Dialogue and Its Russian Models." 135-136.
[350] Hamutal Bar-Yosef, "Hitkablut shel Leonid Andreev ba-sifrut uva-teatron be-ivrit uve-idish [The Reception of Leonid Andreev in Hebrew and Yiddish Literature and Theater]." *Khulyot* 8 (2003) 329-342.

contradict the facts. Neither Tolstoĭ nor Pushkin was any less popular in Russia than Nekrasov or Nadson.[351] The personal attitude of Russian writers towards the Jewish question can hardly have affected their popularity. A pertinent example is Dostoevskiĭ, who had no sympathy for Jews but nonetheless was very popular with the Jewish youth. Finally, the motives of the most influential Russian writers are rarely, if ever, at all related to Jewish hardships. On the contrary, the works of Tolstoĭ, Dostoevskiĭ, Andreev, and other writers attracted Jewish readers because they dealt with a wide range of universal existential problems that transcended the boundaries of ethnicity and religion.

Therefore, it is difficult to single out a group of texts that most influenced Gnesin. Rather than the works of any specific author, it was the Russian and European literary Zeitgeist, fostered by the works by famous writers as well as amateurs, that influenced Gnesin's imagery. Even articles in a newspaper or short stories in a literary journal were potential sources from which Gnesin would draw his imagery. In many cases it is possible to point to the particular text that provided Gnesin with narrative models. For instance, a comparative reading of several scenes from the Gnesin's story *Etsel* [Near] (1913) and *Na glukhareĭ* [Hunting Wood Grouses], published in 1899 by the Russian writer Aleksandr Kuprin (1870-1938), provides a vivid example of the adaptive technique in Gnesin's original writing.

Kuprin's autobiographical story describes a hunt, and its opening paragraph makes it clear that the narrative is focused more on the emotions of a hunter than at the hunt himself: "I cannot think of any feelings in the world that are comparable to what you

[351] Lev Tolstoĭ was especially influential because of his active public life. Hilel Tseytlin wrote in his memoir about life in a small Belorussian town in 1908: "[…] there was a short period in our spiritual life, when we were followers of Nietzsche, but at the same time, according to the higher aspirations, we wanted to start a complete change of our lives based on the most true and consequent *Tolstoyism*. If anyone is interested in the real followers of Tolstoy on a pure Jewish ground, he should read Brener's *Mesaviv le-nekuda.*" See *Yoysef-Khayim Brener: fun zayn lebn un shafn* 45-46.

experience at a wood grouse hunt. It leaves such an unexpected, exciting, mysterious, troublesome, and charming impression, that you will never in your life forget it."[352] The story begins at night, whilst most are sleep: "You wake up amid a dark, moonless, March night, and in the first instance cannot understand where you are […]"[353] The forester Trofim, a very good hunter, who accompanies the hunter is not asleep:

> He calmly observes me with his sleepy impassive eyes, and arduously sucks on a short extinguished pipe. Having noticed that I am awake, he moves the pipe in the corner of his mouth with his tongue, and says in a muffled voice:
>
> – Hey!.. You are not asleep, panich?[354]

Gnesin's story also begins at night. The main character, Efroim, wants to go fishing by the bonfires together with an old man, Arkhip, and his son, Prokop.[355] When Efroim fell asleep, the old man

> sighed, removing his extinguished pipe from his mouth to spit foamingly to his side.
>
> – Look, he's fallen asleep here – that nice looking youth? Eh? […] Asleep of course! That would stand to reason, wouldn't it, that he's fallen asleep, eh?[356]

When the main heroes in both stories wake up, they gather their things ("our gathering does not take much time" (Kuprin); "he gathered his many tools" (Gnesin),[357] and off

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[352] A. I. Kuprin, *Izbrannye sochineniia͡ [Selected Works]* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1985) 78.
[353] Kuprin, *Izbrannye sochineniia͡* 79.
[354] Kuprin, *Izbrannye sochineniia͡* 79. The word *panich* was used by people from the lower classes when addressing a young nobleman.
[355] *Trofim* in Kuprin's story, and *Archip* and *Prokop* in Gnesin's are obviously very close. These disyllabic words have the same [r] sound after a consonant in the first syllable ([*tr*-], [*ar*-], [*pr*-], and end with a closed stressed syllable – [*-fim*], [*-chip*], [*-kop*].
[356] Gnessin, *Besides* 179.

they go "in such a deep darkness that it seems as if we were immersed into a giant ink well" (Kuprin), and were "lost in the thicket of dusky fleeced shrubs next to the riverbank" (Gnesin).[358] They are both afraid of the dark, but their guides do not see any reasons to be scared, as they are interested exclusively in hunting and fishing:

[…] there is not a single star in the sky, and suddenly a mystical, uneasy thought flickered in my mind: is everything alive condemned to sink after death in the same invincible, eternal, horrible murk? 'Hey, what is with you, *panich*? Follow me, – I hear somewhere ahead the muffled voice of Trofim.'[359]	And that fellow – why isn't he showing up? There's nothing left to do, but to go over there and see what's holding him up, after all. Eh? Only … only that *panich* won't be the only one to worry about the devils, eh?[360]

The similarity between the two fragments is striking, as is the overlap of sounds, words, syntax, composition, and plot in the two texts. Gnesin used Russian literary models in order to render immediate impressions in his writing, which are not necessarily identical, but similar in mood to the original. It would be incorrect, however, to compare these two stories in their entirety, because they do not share more than a few images, which were translated from their Russian source, and adapted for Hebrew readers. A closer look at both fragments will reveal the changes Gnesin made to Kuprin's images in order to 'improve' them. It will also reveal the motive for these change and the manner in which Gnesin executed them.

First, it must be noted that in Gnesin's text the entirety of the fishing episode is only an opening scene, which serves as a starting point for the protagonist's reflections

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[357] Gnessin, *Besides* 179.
[358] Gnessin, *Besides* 179.
[359] Kuprin, *Izbrannye sochineniia͡* 80.
[360] Gnessin, *Besides* 179.

and remembrances. In contrast, for Kuprin, hunting was the central event of the narrative. At the end of the story, his hero kills one grouse, and Trofim kills two. Kuprin's story features a nuanced description of the bird's agony and death. Gnesin followed Kuprin's compositional structure and created a similar effect, but he substituted hunting with fishing. It may look like a minor change, but it has important cultural meaning. Hunting was never considered virtuous among the Jews. The two best-known hunters in the Torah, Nimrod and Esav, are also among its most negative characters. In rabbinical literature, they both symbolize evil and are often contrasted to the righteous Avraham and Yaakov.[361] According to Jewish law, it is frowned upon to hunt: doing so for pleasure violated the important principle of mercy and compassion towards animals (known as *tsa'ar ba'ale khayim* [sufferings of animals]), and doing so for food was prohibited by the dietary regulations of *kashrut* (an animal not slaughtered properly by a *shoykhet* [ritual slaughterer] was not kosher and, therefore, forbidden). Fishing is different: fishing is not as cruel as hunting and fish (with certain exceptions) are considered *kosher* to eat without undergoing any slaughtering process. Thus, by changing the action from hunting to fishing Gnesin adapted the Russian text for Hebrew readers, and in doing so 'improved' it. Moreover, the readers never find out about the success of the fishing trip: it is not clear from the text whether any fish were caught. The actual fishing trip was only the premise of Gnesin's story, as opposed to the hunting trip, which is the central event of Kuprin's text. Just like medieval Jewish translators, Gnesin deletes bloody images of hunting and tournaments from the Gentile romances, in order to produce his Jewish text.

[361] Tanakh describes the rivalry between Esav and Yaakov: "Esav was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Yaakov was a quiet man, dwelling in tents" (*Bereshit* 25:27), and although it does not tell about any meetings between Nimrod and Avraham, there are stories about their opposition in Talmud (for instance, see *Psakhim* 118a, *Eruvin* 53a).

Conclusion

Gnesin, and other Jewish writers who could also call themselves "sons of Russia,"[362] found a rich source of inspiration in the Russian literature. They borrowed many narrative and conversational models from it, and either directly used them in their Hebrew texts, or adapted them for their own work in compliance with the old Jewish tradition of 'improving' Gentile texts to suit their readership. Gnesin's translations of modern Russian and European texts into Hebrew marked an important stage in his development as a writer. At the beginning of his writing career, he translated only from Yiddish, but later turned to Chekhov, and soon published his first long story *Hatsida*, which marked a completely new period in his writing. Gnesin's translations of Chekhov can, therefore, be seen as an exercise that honed his writing art to a much higher level.

The uniqueness of his work, however, does not lie in his manipulation of words written by others, but rather in his skillful utilization of authentic Jewish allusions, mostly borrowed from the Tanakh, the Talmud, or other rabbinical literature. These allusions are transparent to those who shared Gnesin's deep knowledge of Jewish exegetic traditions. They established a complex polyphony between the ancient and modern texts. With the help of certain key words, Gnesin connected his original stories and translations to classic Jewish texts, which vastly expanded the meaning of his works. The sad irony permeating Gnesin's stories comes from the fact that he made extensive use of the Jewish tradition to tell a story of his own generation of assimilated and spiritually sick Russian Jews, who broke with this very tradition, and suffered from a permanent feeling of guilt.

[362] Uri Nisn Gnesin. *Kitve* 47.

Chapter 3: "We Are Adulterers of Spirit": the Painful Price of Assimilation

Gnesin belonged to a unique generation in the history of the Russian-Jewish community because of their position between Jewish and non-Jewish worlds. Previous generations possessed a much more integral Jewish identity. They were also exposed to assimilation, but this exposure was too minute to affect their lives and views in a significant way. On the other hand, the following generations of Russian Jews continued to assimilate so rapidly that, within a few decades, the majority of them had blended with the native Russian population, regaining a monocentric identity. In contrast, the antagonistic and in many cases mutually exclusive relationship between Jewish and Russian cultural poles made Gnesin's dual identity a heavy psychological burden, leaving a deep imprint on his life and significantly affecting his writing.

This chapter examines readers', critics' and scholars' perception of Gnesin's fiction, which correlates with his evolution as a writer. Assuming his major role as an author in literary exegesis and considering Gnesin's state of in-betweenness, I discuss lingual and spiritual consequences of assimilation and their relation to the Russian context of his works. This discussion is supported by a case study, the story *Ba-ganim* [In the Gardens], which demonstrates how the interaction and the resulting tensions between Jewish and non-Jewish components of the author's dual identity are manifested in a literary text.

3.1. Perception of Gnesin's Fiction

The Gnesin's contribution to the Jewish literature made over a period of less than twenty years is modest in volume but impressive in quality. At the beginning of his

writing career (in the early 1890s), he experimented with such literary forms as poetry, newspaper reports, critical essays, short stories, and plays. After 1904, Gnesin focused on narrative fiction in prose: he wrote and published four novellas and seven short stories in Hebrew (one of them was also published in Yiddish). Unpublished works and other related materials, including personal letters, are kept in the Asher Barash Bio-Bibliographical Institute in Tel-Aviv, Israel.

Until 1905, Gnesin was barely known. Most of his poems and essays were printed under a pseudonym, and his first collection of stories (*Tsliley he-khayim*) appeared almost without the notice of Jewish critics.[363] The readers were not impressed either. Zalman Shneur recalled in his memoir (1913):

> The name of Uri Gnesin as a writer was absolutely unknown in those days [in 1904], and even caused natural curiosity [...] We heard from writers that his small collection *Mi-tsliley he-khayim* was coming soon in the *Tushiya* [publishing house], along with another little book, which copied the Hebrew of Mordekhay Spektor's stories.[364] The few poems and short stories that he published then were completely worthless.[365]

Some of these poems were published by David Frishman, who also expressed his opinion in a memoir (1913): "I was an editor of *Ha-Dor* then, and he [Gnesin] brought me a

[363] There were only two reviews of *Tsliley he-khayim* in press (by D. Frishman and M. Y. Berdichevski): D[a]n [David Frishman], "U. N. Gnesin. Tsliley he-khayim," *Ha-Dor* [Krakov] 2:11-12 ([1905]) 31-34; M. Y. Berdichevski, "Be-sifrut ha-yafa (bikoret al 'Tsliley he-khayim')," *Ha-Zman* [Vilno] Feb. 1905: 256:258.

[364] Shneur made two mistakes: Gnesin's collection was called *Tsliley he-khayim* [Shadows of Life], not *Mi-tsliley he-khayim* [From the Shadows of Life], and Spektor's stories were originally written in Yiddish, therefore Gnesin did not "copy" Spektor's language, but translated the stories into Hebrew. These mistakes inadvertently confirm Shneur's words about Gnesin.

[365] *Uri Nisan Gnesin: mivkhar ma'amerey* 45.

poem. And that poem was not particularly great. A nice poem, fair enough among hundreds of other nice poems, but it did not have that special spark. I published it..."[366]

When Shneur finally read *Tsliley he-khayim* (in 1908), he was disappointed: "Stories. Certain parts are more or less successful; but such stories can be written by anyone."[367] The situation changed drastically in 1905, when *Hatsida* was published and received many positive reviews. Shneur was so excited after reading this story that he completely forgave his disappointment with *Tsliley he-khayim*: "As if Gnesin's gifted hand removed the curtain that covered him from our eyes, and we saw him with all his sounds and shadows, with all his shine and in all his depth..."[368] With Frishman's support, Gnesin became a recognized and admired writer in a very short time,[369] although there were some critics and writers who found his Hebrew to be corrupted by Russian words and syntax (Ben-Avigdor) or refused to print his works (Bialik).[370] Gnesin's untimely death from heart disease at the age of thirty-three intensified his romantic image as a suffering poet and caused a new wave of interest in his works.

According to Shachar Pinsker, a major shift in Gnesin's critical reception happened in Israel from the 1940s to the 1970s, when "Gnessin's pioneering modernism was very often highlighted, for better or for worse."[371] At the beginning of this period, Hebrew modernist writers affiliated with the journals *Ktuvim* and *Turim*, such as Israel Zmora (1899-1983), were attracted by Gnesin's innovative style, and looked to his works

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[366] *Uri Nisan Gnesin: mivkhar ma'amerey* 39.
[367] *Uri Nisan Gnesin: mivkhar ma'amerey* 47.
[368] *Uri Nisan Gnesin: mivkhar ma'amerey* 48.
[369] Osher Beylin wrote in a memoir that in 1907, when Gnesin lived in London, he frequently received small parcels, postcards, photographs, scented letters, and dried flowers from one or another girl. See A. Beylin, "Uri Nisan Gnesin: shivre zikhronot [Uri Nisn Gnesin: Scattered Memoirs]." *Ha-Tsefirah* [Warsaw] 18 Mar. 1913.
[370] For more details on Ben-Avigdor's criticism of *Tsliley he-khayim* and Bialik's rejection of *Ba-vet saba*, see Chapter 1.
[371] Shachar Pinsker, *"Old Wine in New Flasks"* 40.

as a foundation for their own experiments. In the 1950s, Adi Tsemakh and later Gershon Shaked focused on the formal technical aspects of Gnesin's writing, connecting his narrative style with the European modernist technique of stream of consciousness, especially popular in the first half of the twentieth century. In a short essay published in 1951, Tsemakh outlined a critical approach to Gnesin, which is still used by many scholars today. Tsemakh and Shaked treated Gnesin as a sophisticated lyricist, not acknowledging any autobiographical allusions in his works: "His fiction is sometimes read as an autobiographical expression of feelings that lacks borders and form, and there is no view that would be more dangerous for a story written in the mode of stream of consciousness as such a 'confessional' reading." [372] These critics rejected the biographical mode of reading Gnesin's works because of the legacy of those early critics, particularly of Yakov Fikhman and Fishl Lakhover, who did not understand his lyricism, mistaking it for confession. Also, the historical-contextual reading connected Gnesin's work with realism and focused on plot lines and the depiction of the heros' everyday lives. This focus sharply contradicted Tsemakh's and Shaked's text-centered interpretations of Gnesin's modernist writings as a web of repeating motifs, which reveals the consciousness of the characters and ultimately make narrative structures meaningful.

These two points of view, however, are not contradictory, and I argue that it is both possible and beneficial to simultaneously read Gnesin's texts for their linguistic structures of astonishing syntactic novelty on, and for their autobiographical documentation of the author's life. In most cases, biographical studies have vast potential to complement linguistic, stylistic, or any other formal analysis of literary texts. It is

[372] Adi Tsemakh, "Ba-derekh le-'khoresh metsel' [On the Way to a 'Shady Grove']," *Uri Nisn Gnesin: mivkhar ma'amerey* 100.

hardly accidental that the "biographical imperative" (to use the language of Marcus Moseley) of the early critics eventually reappears in contemporary Israeli criticism of Hebrew and Yiddish literature.[373]

This recent criticism (from the 1980s to the present) inherited and further developed the view of Gnesin as a pioneer of Hebrew modernism. Thus, rejecting the biographical approach of early twentieth-century criticism as a "subjective fallacy," in 1991 Deborah Steinhart almost verbatim re-established Tsemakh's reading of Gnesin:

> To some early critics who did not understand the modernist logic of the novellas, the text appeared to be an amorphous personal confession. The same stream of mental ruminations, reveries and memories seemed to flow through all the stories, and contemporary critics concluded that the young author had been too overwhelmed by his own emotions to pay much attention to form.[374]

What makes this period distinct from the earlier criticism is that Dan Miron, Hamutal Bar-Yosef, Itamar Even-Zohar, Shachar Pinsker, and other scholars have shifted their attention away from Gnesin's use stream of consciousness and other issues of narrative technique towards the thematic and linguistic aspects of Gnesin's fiction.[375] Despite their common modernist ground, these scholars agree on little in their discussions of Gnesin's

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[373] Cf. studies by Dan Miron, Yitskhak Bakun, Nurit Govrin, Avner Holtzman and Amia Lieblich. For more on this reorientation to the biographical and autobiographical, see Marcus Moseley, *Being For Myself Alone: Origins of Jewish Autobiography* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2006) 18-24.

[374] Debora Steinhart, "Is Anybody There? The Subjectivism of Uri-Nissan Gnessin Reconsidered," *Prooftexts* 11 (1991) 131-132.

[375] Among the most important works of this period are the following studies: Debora Steinhart, *The Modernist Project of U. N. Gnessin*, diss. U of California (Berkeley, 1989); Itamar Even-Zohar, "Gnessin's Dialogue and Its Russian Models," *Poetics Today* [Durham] 11:1 (1990); Dan Miron, *Khakhim beapo shel hanetsakh: yetsirato shel Uri Nisan Gnesin [Posterity Hooked: The Travail and Achievement of Uri Nisan Gnessin]* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1997); Hamutal Bar-Yosef, *Metaforot usmalim biyetsirato shel Gnesin [Mataphors and Symbols in Gnesin's Works]* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibuts ha-meukhad, 1987); *Uri Nisan Gnesin: mekhkarim uteudot [U. N. Gnessin: Studies and Documents]*, ed. Dan Miron, and Dan Laor (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1986).

style and language, his place in the canon, or his cultural identity.[376] For instance, Avner Holzman follows Shaked and claims that Gnesin's fiction is not Jewish, but rather is an expression of the intellectual and spiritual life of the Russian intelligentsia;[377] Pinsker challenges such an understanding of Jewishness, and suggests that Gnesin's intertextual dialogue with classic Jewish texts had important implications for the emerging Jewish cultural, national, and gender identity.[378] In several recent studies by Anna Petrov Ronell and Anita Norich, Gnesin's intertextuality is explored from the secular perspective of Russian literature,[379] while other scholars prefer to use the terms "literary context" (Miron) or "allusion" (Ben-Porat) in the discussion of different texts that influenced Gnesin's writing.[380]

In other words, the majority of modern scholars view Gnesin either as a Jewish writer or as a Russian writer, but not as someone who combined both of these identities. I propose an alternative view of Gnesin as a Jewish-Russian writer. This view acknowledges that Gnesin did, as Holtzman points out, express the inner world of the Russian, or more precisely, Jewish-Russian intelligentsia, although not at the expense of the Jewish world. Indeed, he balanced and belonged to both the Russian and the Jewish worlds. Russian literature offered him an endless source of inspiration, imagery, and narrative models, while his Jewish background and excellent knowledge of classic texts conditioned a specific technique of accommodating these images and models, all of

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[376] Shachar Pinsker, "*Old Wine in New Flasks"* 41.
[377] Avner Holtsman, "Mavo histori-sifruti [Historical-Literary Introduction]," *Ha-sipur ha-ivri be-reyshit ha-mea ha-esrim [Hebrew Story of the Early Twentieth Century]* (Tel-Aviv: Ha-universita ha-ptukha, 1992-1993).
[378] Shachar Pinsker, *"Old Wine in New Flasks"* 44-45.
[379] See *Jewish Literatures and Cultures: Context and Intertext*, ed. Anita Norich and Yaron Z. Eliav (Providence, RI: Brown U, 2008); Anna Petrov Ronell, "Reading Gnessin's 'Sideways' in its Russian Context." *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 1472-5894, 3:2 (2004) 167-182.
[380] Dan Miron, *Khakhim be-apo shel ha-netsakh* 375-385; Ziva Ben-Porat, Ziva. "The Poetics of Literary Allusion." *A Journal for Descriptive Poetics and Theory of Literature* 1 (1976): 108.

which resulted in a highly sophisticated Hebrew prose style. From this perspective, Pinsker's informative study of the role of Jewish literary heritage in Gnesin's works can be seen as an exploration of one of several sources of influence, rather than encompassing the singular precondition for his texts.[381]

Although Gnesin is commonly recognized as one of the major figures in Hebrew modernism, there is still no consensus among scholars about what exactly constitutes his modernism. Is it his writing technique, his style, or his language? Is it the predominance of uprooted characters (*tlushim*), the protagonists of his fiction? Is it his psychological drama, eroticism, or rebellion against realism? Or is it a mixture of all these features? In fact, the vagueness of the term "modernism" justifies all these options, including Pinsker's suggestion that Gnesin's modernism is created by "the intense intertextual engagement of his narrative fiction with the enormous body of classical Jewish texts."[382]

One topic in this discussion is the sharp stylistic break, dividing Gnesin's realist writings before 1904 and the four longer modernist stories written after 1905. The difference between *Tsliley he-khayim* and *Hatsida* was acknowledged by contemporary critics as well, although they mostly compared their literary qualities rather than their status as modernist or realist texts.

This distinction made Western and Russian scholars use the inaccurate term "novella" for Gnesin's long stories in order to set them further apart from "stories" (shorter works). Western literary scholarship defines novella as a narrative "restricted to a

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[381] Shachar Pinsker, *"Old Wine in New Flasks"* 45.

[382] Shachar Pinsker, *"Old Wine in New Flasks"* 44. It is obvious that recognition of anything except anti-realism would vastly expand the body of modernists, because writers have been utilizing peculiar techniques and styles since the beginning of literature, and literary eroticism by no means emerges in the era of modernism. In the same way, every Jewish writer who lived in the past nineteen centuries with a solid knowledge of classic texts could be defined as a modernist on the grounds of being inevitably influenced by these texts, which happen to be the only source of writing samples for a non-spoken language as Hebrew.

single event, situation or conflict, which produces an element of suspense and leads to an unexpected turning point *(Wendepunkt*) so that the conclusion surprises even while it is a logical outcome."[383] None of the four long stories by Gnesin have these features. On the contrary, they all have a minimal plot development, which is compensated for by complex psychological quests in the realm of their characters' unconscious. There is no suspense in his stories, whether short or long, and there is not even a sharp division between their beginning and conclusion. In 1905, Gnesin wrote to his close friend Zalmen Aronson: "Everything starts in the middle, and everything ends in the middle, and everything you see is nothing but the middle."[384]

The author himself defined his genre as a "story" in both Hebrew and Russian (see Fig. 4) and used the term "story" regardless of the text's length. The Hebrew word *sipur* [story] can be seen in parentheses on every title page of his published original works. Moreover, in early 1910, Gnesin was planning to publish a volume of stories under the title *Tkhumim* [Borders] in the journal *Sifrut* [Literature]. It was supposed to include three long stories (*Hatsida*, *Beyntaim* and *Beterem*) and one short story (*Ba-ganim*). In a letter to Lakhover Gnesin called them "a complete series of stories."[385] Apparently, he based this notion on content rather than the length of the literary works, which indicates that Gnesin did not treat his short and long stories as if they belonged to different genres.

[383] J. A. Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (London: Penguin Books, 1999) 600.
[384] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 75.
[385] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kol kitve Uri Nisan Gnesin* 155, 585.

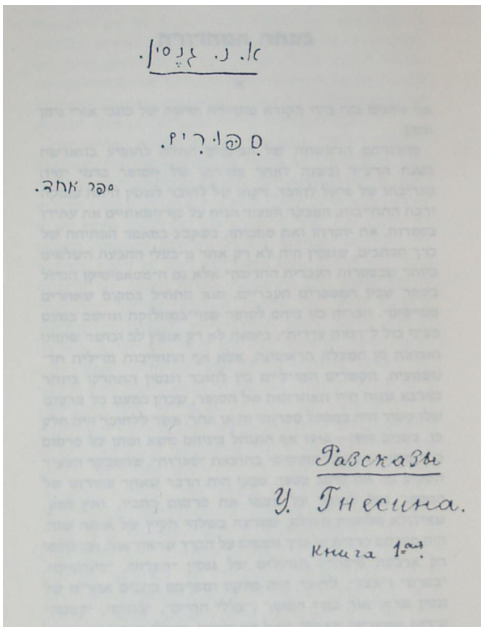

Fig. 4. Title page of "Stories" in several volumes, prepared by Gnesin for Ben-Avigdor in 1910. The first volume included three long stories (*Hatsida, Beyntaim*, *Beterem*); Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kol kitve Uri Nisan Gnesin [Complete Works by U. N. Gnesin]*, ed. Dan Miron, and Israel Zmora, vol. 1 (Tel-Aviv: Ha-kibuts ha-meukhad, 1982) [9].

In fact, the content of all Gnesin's fiction is quite homogeneous. His earliest and latest works have the same protagonists – young Russian Jews. The secondary characters are their older relatives and both Jewish and non-Jewish acquaintances. The action takes place in different towns and cities of the Russian Empire in the early twentieth century. Even the plots have major similarities; they are always centered on the character's dissatisfactions, which varies from slight discomfort to excruciating frustration, and can be caused by family, friends, a job, or some other situation.

Despite this formal similarity, there is indeed a difference between Gnesin's early and late stories, which is understood by Miron, Steinhart, Pinsker and some other scholars to be the result of his artistic growth, the crystallization of his skills, and a

manifestation of his aesthetic shift from realism towards modernism.[386] However, there is an alternative view on Gnesin's development. I argue that neither his literary aspirations nor the key elements of his signature style underwent substantial changes over the entire period of his writing career. Nokhem Khagzer (*Hatsida*), Naftole Berger (*Beyntaim*), Uriel Efros (*Beterem*), and Efroim Margolis (*Etsel*) are all none other than the same Dovid Fridin (*Zhenya*) – an oversensitive provincial Russian Jew with a frustrated conscience, who is drawn to several young women but does nothing to win their affections, and has great plans for the future, but never goes forward with them. In other words, Gnesin's early and late stories form one whole, differing mostly in format and focus. Such a view of Gnesin's fiction poses an important question: what made him change his format and shift the focus in his later works so abruptly? The answer can be found through the exploration of Gnesin's psychological life.

3.2. THE AUTHOR'S ROLE IN LITERARY EXEGESIS

Post-structuralist theory heavily influenced modern literary scholarship on both sides of the Atlantic. Among many concepts reconsidered in the 1960s was the traditional view of the author. Roland Barthes claimed that the author should no longer be regarded as an influence at all, because the prime locus of power has shifted to the reader.[387] Michel Foucault created the term "author-function," which questioned the common notion of authorship, and suggested that the author is nothing but a function of a written work, and in this capacity must be excluded from the interpretive process of a text.[388] Modern scholars of Jewish literature were also affected by this school of thought and

[386] Pinsker calls Gnesin's late stories a "continuation and crystallization of the modernist project which he embarked upon in writing *Zhenya* and the other early stories." See Shachar Pinsker, *"Old Wine in New Flasks"* 44.
[387] Ronald Barthes, *Image-Text-Music* (London: Fontana, 1977) 142-148.
[388] Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" *Critical Theory Since 1965*, ed. Hazard Adams, and Leroy Searle (Tallahassee: Florida State UP, 1986) 138-148.

some chose to replace the biographical study of the author in favor of a more formal textual analysis. Pinsker wrote in 2001:

> I have deliberately avoided discussing Gnessin's modernist intertextual strategy in the context of his background as a Yeshiva student and the fact that he was a son of a Hasidic Rabbi who was the head of the Yeshiva. This avoidance reflects my weariness of the biographical mode in which so many critics read Gnessin.[389]

Deliberately ignoring Gnesin's educational background is at best a questionable approach because it overlooks Gnesin's knowledge of classical Jewish texts, which enabled his intertextual allusions, one of the elements of his texts that makes them modern. Possible consequences of such an approach include a general misunderstanding of his texts, false interpretative assumptions, and a failure to identify his allusions. On the contrary, supporting literary research with ample biographical and relevant historical data can help to avoid at least some of these problems. Pinsker's analysis of the Hebrew word *rkhov* (רחוב) [street] provides a good illustration.

In the 1982 edition of *Tsliley hekhayim*, Miron and Zmora commented on Gnesin's usage of *rkhov*, claiming that the author was persistent in treating this word as a feminine noun, although in literary Hebrew it is masculine. The commentary also provided sources for the word's usage (Daniel, 9:25; Bialik's poem *Ha-masmid*[390]), and assumed that Gnesin might have been influenced by one of the other languages he knew such as Yiddish, Russian, and German, because in all of these languages this word is feminine (*di gas*, *ulit͡sa*, *die Gasse*).[391] Pinsker focused on this "important lexical and

[389] Shachar Pinsker, *"Old Wine in New Flasks"* 107.
[390] Bialik's poem is not a convincing example, because the feminine form of the word 'streets' is apparently used for the sake of rhyme: the corresponding feminine adjective הריקות (*ha-rekot* "empty") at the end of the line rhymes with the word *ha-dvekot* (devoted).
[391] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kol kitve Uri Nisan Gnesin* 555.

grammatical element in the narrative discourse," and insisted that "in Gnessin's texts, the word 'street' almost always appears in its feminine form."[392] Defining this form as deviant, Pinsker saw its usage as a way to create "modes of lyrical, impressionistic narrative fiction in European languages," and the "impression of a more 'faithful' realistic representation."[393] Gnesin's usage of a word in the feminine form was interpreted as the "creation of modernist fiction;" this stylistic choice was understood as an "act of creating an analogy between the 'living' European language in order to represent a social and psychological reality, and a rich employment of previous literary Hebrew language"[394] A closer look at Gnesin's stories suggests that this is not necessarily the case.

The word *(ha)rkhov(ot)* [(the) street(s)] appears a total of 108 times between the three stories featured in *Tsliley he-khayim*, the short story *Seuda mafseket*, and the four long stories (*Hatsida*, *Beyntaim*, *Beterem*, and *Etsel*). In half of these cases the grammatical gender is not expressed because this word is used without adjectives or pronouns. The other half contains 30% more masculine forms than feminine (31 instances against 22). These statistics do not support the claim that Gnesin preferred the feminine form of this word. When treated separately, his works provide different statistics regarding the use of "street," which partially explains Miron and Zmora's inaccurate assumption. In most of Gnesin's stories, the grammatical gender is almost fully consistent throughout each individual work: masculine in *Tsliley he-khayim*, *Seuda mafseket* and *Etsel*, and feminine in *Hatsida* and *Beyntaim*.[395] The phrase with the feminine noun *bi-rkhov shoketa* [in the quiet street][396] from *Zhenya*, analyzed by Pinsker,

[392] Shachar Pinsker, *"Old Wine in New Flasks"* 52.
[393] Shachar Pinsker, *"Old Wine in New Flasks"* 53, 55-56.
[394] Shachar Pinsker, *"Old Wine in New Flasks"* 56.
[395] The story *Beterem* is less consistent, but still has a tendency towards the masculine form (8 against 5).
[396] ברחוב שוקטה

can be found in the masculine form in the same collection (*Ma'ase be-otelo*): *ha-rkhov haya sheket* [the street was quiet][397] (see Table 3). Why is the gender of such a seemingly common word as "street" treated so differently in these stories? [398] And how much does the printed version reflect Gnesin's own preference?

Table 3

Grammatical gender of the word *(ha)rkhov(ot)* in Gnesin's major works

Story or collection of stories	Masculine	Feminine	Unspecified
Tsliley he-khayim (Warsaw, 1904.)	3	1	5
Hatsida (Vilno, 1905.)	0	4	5
Beyntaim (London, 1906.)	1	12	9
Beterem (Warsaw, 1909.)	8	5	20
Etsel (Warsaw, 1911.)	17	0	16
Total	**31**	**22**	**55**

Source: Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kol kitve Uri Nisan Gnesin [Complete Works by U. N. Gnesin]*, ed. Dan Miron, and Israel Zmora, vol. 1 (Tel-Aviv: Ha-kibuts ha-meukhad, 1982).

It is important to remember that what is called "Gnesin's usage" of words could actually be the preference of his editors, publishers, and even printers, since all these data are taken from the printed editions. Since the only story (*Beyntaim*) Gnesin self-published in his own periodical *Nisyonot*, is one of his two texts where feminine form is predominant, [399] it is reasonable to suggest that he preferred this form over the grammatically correct masculine one. *Hatsida*, the other story which features 'street' as a

[397] הרחוב היה שקט

[398] In fact, this word was not very common when Hebrew existed mostly as a written language. It appears only a few times in the Tanakh, and is not used in prayers, so it was neither frequently read nor heard by Gnesin and his contemporaries. For example, *layla* [night] is another Hebrew noun which is masculine though morphologically seeming feminine. However, *layla* was never used in a wrong gender because it is a frequent word in the Tanakh and prayers, and is used in such common expression as *layla tov* [good night], which clearly indicates its gender.

[399] The printing was done in London, so Gnesin had a limited control over the typesetting, which explains the single masculine form of 'street' in *Beyntaim.*

feminine noun was published by Frishman, who had friendly relations with Gnesin, held him in high esteem, and apparently was a respectful editor.

All of Gnesin's other stories with predominantly masculine forms of 'street' were printed and edited by different people, who often made changes in the author's manuscripts according to their own literary taste and knowledge of Hebrew. In the manuscript of *Etsel*, for example, Gnesin wrote *ba-rkhov ha-smukha* [in the adjacent street][400] in the feminine,[401] but in the 1914 edition of his collected works, the form has been changed to the masculine (*ba-rkhov ha-samukh*) by Lakhover,[402] who also had edited the story *Beterem* (in the literary weekly *Reshafim*) a few years earlier. The first collection of stories was published by Ben-Avigdor, notorious for making authors unhappy with his strict editing approach.[403] The book was published several months later, and according to Shneur, was "muddled, with many mistakes, and [printed] on bad paper – a true *Tushiya* publication."[404] Two other stories (*Seuda mafseket* and *Etsel*) have no irregular feminine forms at all. The first one appeared in Warsaw in a yearbook edited by Nakhum Sokolow,[405] and the second one was published in Berlin by a prominent Hebrew essayist and editor Shay Ish Hurvits. Sokolow valued Gnesin's writing, and even offered him an editorial job in 1899, but the editor would hardly tolerate any ungrammatical form in the work of a young Jewish writer. The same is true of Hurvitz,

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[400] ברחוב הסמוכה

[401] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kol kitve Uri Nisan Gnesin* 486.

[402] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kol kitve U. N. Gnesin [Complete Works by U. N. Gnesin]*, vol. 1 (Varsha [Warsaw]: P. Lakhover, 1914) 49.

[403] When Gnesin sent him the manuscript of *Tsliley he-khayim*, Ben-Avigdor invited him to come and discuss it, suggesting that Gnesin should improve his style. In particular, he had to remove all the Russian words, expressions, and syntax. See Gnesin's letter in Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 41.

[404] *Uri Nisan Gnesin: mivkhar ma'amerey* 47.

[405] Sokolow is recognized as the father of Hebrew journalism and a brilliant editor, who "served as a mentor for new literary talent, to the extent that a journey to Warsaw to present oneself before Sokolow became an almost essential rite of passage for many aspiring writers." See Avner Holtzman, "Sokolow, Nahum." *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, online, Internet, 11 Feb. 2011.

who had extraordinary talent, made huge progress in Hebrew as a child, and at the age of twelve wrote a study on Hebrew grammar.[406]

Thus, the biographical mode of analysis allows for two conclusions: first, Gnesin indeed leaned towards the ungrammatical feminine form of "street", and second, his choice was usually corrected by his editors. Gnesin's personal letters demonstrate that he was involved in the preparation of his texts for print, arguing with the editors and defending his vision, although his opinion was not always the last word. However, when the issue seemed important, Gnesin refused to make changes. For instance, from Gnesin's letters to David Shimonovitsh (Hurvitz' assistant), one can learn that Hurvitz did not like the subtitle *sipur* [story] and wanted Gnesin to replace it:

> And regarding Mr. Hurvitz's comment, I hope you will tell him that there is no need to replace the term "story" with anything else. And really, he should not. As much as he does not find the term "story" to be appropriate (and for me, it is indeed a story and nothing else;[407] I put in a lot into this notion), all the other terms are even less appropriate.[408]

In spite Hurvitz'authority, *Etsel* was printed with the subtitle "story," but without a single feminine rendering of the word "street," which implies that for Gnesin this word's gender was not worth arguing over with Hurvitz. His usage of an ungrammatical form of a word, which is seen only once in the Tanakh, does not seem to constitute "a rich employment of previous literary Hebrew language." Neither did it "represent social and psychological reality," nor create an "impression of a more 'faithful' realistic representation," because other words in Gnesin's works do not show similar deviations. Ultimately, there are no

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[406] Stanley Nash, *In Search of Hebraism: Shai Hurwitz and His Polemics in the Hebrew Press* (Leiden, 1980).
[407] הרי זה דוקה ספור ורק ספור
[408] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 180-181.

grounds for viewing the usage of this noun's feminine form as a "creation of modernist fiction."[409] It seems reasonable to suggest that this issue was not a top priority for Gnesin, and that he occasionally used this word in the feminine form simply under the influence of the daily usage of, Yiddish and Russian, in both of which it is feminine (*di gas* and *ulit͡sa* respectively).

This particular case highlights the exegetical significance of the author for a literary analysis. As one can see, the "biographical mode" of reading, which requires a study of Gnesin's historical and cultural background, his contemporary audience, and his relationships with publishers and editors, can provide a reasonable explanation of certain linguistic inconsistencies (such as gender instability of a single word). In contrast, New Critical reading of Gnesin's works as self-contained objects tends to ignore extratextual information, which may result in insufficiently grounded conclusions. I suggest that it is unreasonable to eliminate the author from interpretation of his works, and attempt to reestablish, in Barthes's words, the position of "the author, his person, his history, his tastes, his passions."[410] The application of this strategy sheds light on Gnesin's abrupt change of writing style around 1905.

3.3. THE SPIRITUAL CRISIS OF THE LOST GENERATION

Gnesin belonged to the first substantially assimilated generation of the Jewish intelligentsia, born in the Russian Empire in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Although previous generations were also affected by the Enlightenment to various degrees, they nevertheless lived in a traditional Jewish world. It was not until Gnesin's time that the new Jewish culture "constituted a fundamental break with traditional Jewish

[409] Shachar Pinsker, *"Old Wine in New Flasks"* 56.
[410] Roland Barthes, *Image-Text-Music* 143.

religious civilization."[411] Thousands of young Jews were leaving their homes in small provincial towns for urban centers like Odessa, Kiev, and Warsaw. The absence of family and community in these new urban arenas was in violent contrast to their life in *shtetlekh* (small towns), and caused many of these young people psychological discomfort.[412] For Scott Ury, the "ongoing discourse of alienation, loneliness, and depression that pervades so many of the letters, diaries, and other sources from the period" is a remarkable characteristic of the "turn-of-the-century lost generation of Jewish youth that flooded cities across East Central Europe."[413]

One of these young assimilated Jews, nineteen-year-old Gnesin left his hometown in 1899 for Warsaw, and continued wandering between large cities in Russia and abroad until his death in 1913. However, Gnesin's roamings only partially explain the numerous instances wherein he expresses confusion, unrest, and despair in his many letters written between 1898 and 1913: "My God, everything is so confused, everything! […] There are many cities in this country, and more abroad; but I have no money, and no interest, and no nothing."[414] It is important to note that Gnesin always returned home and stayed with his family whenever there was occasion to do so, and he spent the last years of his life almost entirely in Pochep (1908-1912). In one of Gnesin's earliest published letters, which he sent to his close friend Bikhovski from home in August of 1898, he wrote:

> Look inward, my brother, and don't be late... What have you found there?.. – Emptiness!.. Empty barrels! Where is the place for love? Faith?

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[411] Kenneth Moss, "Jewish Culture Between Renaissance and Decadence: Di Literarishe Monatsshriften and Its Critical Reception." *Jewish Social Studies*, ns. 8:1 (Autumn, 2001) 154.
[412] According to Scott Ury, "as a result of this movement to the city, approximately one-half of Warsaw's Jewish residents in 1905 had been born elsewhere." See Scott Ury, "The Generation of 1905 and the Politics of Despair: Alienation, Friendship, Community," *The Revolution of 1905 and Russia's Jews (Jewish Culture and Contexts)*, ed. Stefani Hoffman and Ezra Mendelsohn (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2008). 98.
[413] Scott Ury, "The Generation of 1905 and the Politics of Despair" 98.
[414] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 75.

> Look. No hope either. And where?... Look here: terrible despair! It is the only thing that is left, the only thing that fills the whole heart! […] How terrible, how depressing, how painful is such a situation!... The heart has dried out, it is all wrinkled... wrinkled!... Indeed, there is some other thing there too... You see? Pains of *Iyev* [Yid.: Job], pains of Faust, pains of Demon in his first days...[415]

It was not the absence of a community[416] that made Gnesin feel so confused. Rather, it was a feeling of emptiness, of a spiritual vacuum, created by the absence of a traditional Jewish world-view with its hierarchy of values, which he no longer shared with his fathers and grandfathers due to the influence of the Enlightenment. However, he was still connected to them by a strong family bond. Gentile culture, languages, and knowledge, which Gnesin had been absorbing since late childhood, quickly filled this spiritual emptiness with despair and pain; even this pain was partially foreign, coming from European literature. Gnesin's letters reveal the full depth of his suffering, dramatically elevating his personal experience to the level of a collective crisis.

In early 1907, he wrote a letter to his friend Aronson. Written in a macaronic mixture of Yiddish and Hebrew, the letter began with a sharp disapproval of Aronson's recent story, followed by the sad conclusions that their writing is irrelevant to the vast majority of readers. And then, without much connection with the topic of the letter, as if answering his own thoughts, Gnesin made a strange confession: "We are adulterers – as is everybody else here. […] A nation of adulterers, adulterers of spirit and of everything related to it, no more."[417] Even without a spiritual dimension of adultery (נואפי-הרוח) it is

[415] Gnesin was referring to Demon, the main hero of a poem with the same title by Mikhail Lermontov (1814-1841). See Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 11-12.
[416] Scott Ury, "The Generation of 1905 and the Politics of Despair" 99.
[417] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 128.

obvious that the unmarried Gnesin used the Hebrew word *noef* [adulterer] not in its literal sense of sexual infidelity to a spouse but in the sense of spiritual unfaithfulness, a sense deeply rooted in a traditional Jewish understanding of the relationship between God and Israel.[418]

This word appears in one of the Ten Commandments, the moral and legal foundation of Jewish law: *lo tin'of* (לֹא תִנְאָף) [you shall not commit adultery].[419] Some of the prophets clearly treated Israel's worship of idols as spiritual adultery: "for they have committed adultery, and blood is in their hands, and with their idols have they committed adultery."[420] This crime logically led to the breaking of the covenant between God and Israel (divorce) and exile from the Land of Israel: "And I saw, when, forasmuch as backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a bill of divorcement."[421] In a broader sense, especially in the European cultural context, idol worship also stands for assimilation, as a break with Jewish tradition and an adoption of foreign attributes with respect to morals, languages, customs, and clothes. Therefore, Gnesin was well aware of how his father, Yehoyshue Nosn, the head of the *yeshiva* in Pochep and the person most responsible for his Jewish education, viewed his secular lifestyle as an assimilated Russian Jew. Several letters which Gnesin sent home from Europe and the Land of Israel in 1907-1908 show that his father was still concerned about his behavior:

> When you write to me about this issue, it always looks as if you demand something from me, as if I am accused, and you don't know that it is not

[418] For example, rabbinical treatment of the book *Shir ha-shirim* [Song of Songs] as the Holy of Holies is based on an interpretation according to which the *lover* is God, and the *beloved* is the Jewish people (the community of Israel).
[419] Tanakh, Shmot 20:12; Tanakh, Dvarim 5:16.
[420] Tanakh, Yekhezkel 23:37.
[421] Tanakh, Yermiyahu 3:5.

> because I am so happy living as I live. And also you write in this letter that I must "rule my spirit" – as if this matter depends only on me. My good father, my dear father – if you only knew that you sprinkle salt on my wounds, even though your salt is pleasant to me like your medications.[422]

Their correspondence persuasively testifies to emotional stress in their relationship. Gradually, Gnesin developed a strong guilt complex, exacerbated by his deep attachment to his parents and other family members. Gnesin wanted to make his father happy by following in his footsteps, but he could not do so, and suffered because of this unresolvable situation.[423] His guilt complex progressed with time. Feelings of unrest and confusion, which were only occasionally expressed in his early letters (1898-1904) became a leitmotif starting in 1905: "Everything is so twisted, so confused, and there is not even a moment of rest for me – although different stupid things find for themselves both place and time."[424]

Gnesin's "spiritual adultery" resulted in changes not only to his lifestyle and dress, but also to his language. A few memoirs of those friends who cared to detail his speech patterns provide evidence that he used quite a few Russian words in his conversations, mainly emotionally loaded expressions. Beylin recalled an occasion when Gnesin was sick for two or three days. In response to Beylin's offer to call a doctor, Gnesin sharply refused: "*Stop*. *Ne smeĭ*! [Stop. Don't even think about it!] I'll kick him out. Nonsense."[425] On another occasion, Gnesin told Beylin about a girl who decided to

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[422] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 142.

[423] Yehoyshue Nosn also suffered from his son's break with the traditional life of a pious Jew. In 1907, when Gnesin was on the way to London to meet with Brener, Yehoyshue Nosn sent a letter and asked Brener to encourage Gnesin to observe Shabes, put on *tfiln* and wear *tsitses.* Brener assured Gnesin's father that he should not worry, because they both knew well how to avoid wrong ways. For more about their letter exchange, see Chapter 1.

[424] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 102.

[425] Beylin's memoir was printed in Hebrew, but the original language of the conversation was most likely Yiddish: the word 'nonsense' is with a masculine plural ending (שטותים) as it is used in Yiddish, while in

visit Lev Tolstoĭ and discuss some burning existential issues with him. Having finished the story he exclaimed: "No, *chërt voz'mi*! [Damn it!] […] I cannot tell it the right way. You should hear how she tells it herself!"[426]

Gnesin's letters also reveal significant information about his language usage. Moreover, a brief comparison between letters written to his close friends (Aronson, Brener, Shofman, Bikhovski) and those, which he wrote to his father and others of the older generation (Yankev Tokorov) expose a glaring contrast in language usages. His letters to friends, most of whom were of the same age and also guilty of "spiritual adultery," often contained a mixture of Hebrew and Yiddish (sometimes within one sentence), as well as Russian words, emotional punctuation (exclamation and question signs, dashes, ellipses), and incomplete sentences. Dates are always given according to the Gregorian calendar, and his closings are short and simple ("be healthy, your Uri-Nisn"). Overall, they give the impression of a written monologue or section of a conversation. Letters to Yehoyshue Nosn and Tokorov are, on the contrary, written in Hebrew (with the exception of a paragraph or two in Yiddish, intended for Gnesin's mother) without any foreign words. They follow many conventions of traditional Hebrew correspondence: in most cases the dates are given according to the Jewish calendar, the name of the addressee is enveloped in expressions of politeness, and the words that resemble the name of God are shortened with an apostrophe (הי'). The rhythm is calm and balanced, and blessings and good wishes are always included at the end. As one can see, Gnesin had several modes of literary expression at his disposal and could easily switch between them in accordance with his changing writing goals.

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standard Hebrew the same word requires feminine ending (שטויות). See A. Beylin, *Uri Nisan Gnesin: shivre zikhronot*.

[426] A. Beylin, *Uri Nisan Gnesin: shivre zikhronot*.

The goals that Gnesin set for himself at the beginning of his literary career were closely related to the ideas of Mikha Yosef Berdichevski, one of the main figures of the Jewish literary scene and a leader of the younger generation of writers. In the late 1890s, Berdichevski launched a series of polemical essays against Akhad Ha'am, criticizing the modest role that he had assigned to belles-lettres, attacking his advocation of cultural isolation, and calling on the Jewish youth to become well-rounded "Hebrew people." Akhad Ha'am and his followers responded, and the dialogue gradually developed into a heated debate which lasted more than two years, and is regarded by some scholars as "one of the most important in the history of modern Hebrew literature."[427] Gnesin accepted both Berdichevski's ideas and fiction with enthusiasm.[428] In one of his letters to Arn Shoel Nivelyov, Gnesin wrote a long and excited general review of Berdichevski's works, and another of his story *Makhanaim*: "The protagonist's soul is very confused, but this is the terrific point that makes this book so fascinating for us..."[429] The review was followed by a practical conclusion: "We must change our life values; but there are too many obstacles, and we have to work hard to remove them, to get what we deserve, and to adopt our national culture, together with world culture."[430]

Inspired by Berdichevski's faith in literature, which he considered to be one of the major instruments for "changing life values," Gnesin began working in Warsaw as an editor at *Ha-Tsefirah*. He wrote several reviews of new books by well-known authors, and actively participated in the cultural life of Warsaw: "I visit different literary evenings,

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[427] See Avner Holtzman, "Berdyczewski, Mikhah Yosef," *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, online, Internet, 10 June 2011.
[428] In 1899-1900 Berdichevski published nine books (four collections of stories, and five volumes of essays). All the stories portray a painful conflict between the intellectual aspirations of the younger generation and the conservative world of traditions of the youth.
[429] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 17-19.
[430] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 18.

speak, argue, and debate with others and with myself..."[431] On that same wave of enthusiasm, he wrote several stories of his own, which owed much of their form and style to Bershadski. Three of these stories appeared in print in 1904 as a collection, *Tsliley he-khayim*, but did not make a successful debut. There were only a few reviews of it in press, including a dismissive critique by none other than Berdichevski. It is, therefore, of little wonder that Gnesin's enthusiasm about literature started to diminish. The young author was so discouraged that even two years later, after successful publication of *Hatsida*, he wrote to Aronson:

> We don't need any belles-lettres, we don't need it. There are maybe ten people including us, not in the town, but in the whole nation, who have a need, not even a need, but when […] this matter "comes into their hands," their souls [can] somehow absorb it, but no more […] We need no belles-lettres, we need no poetry.[432]

This rejection of fiction and poetry should be taken with a grain of salt; it did not prevent Gnesin from writing more stories, short and long, in the years to come. Rather, his expression of general dissatisfaction with Jewish literature (its readers, writers, publishers, critics, and institutions) was typical of a person of the late 1890s who was devoid of excitement and enthusiasm, and disenchanted with literature as a medium of enlightenment.

Gnesin's correspondence of 1905 also shows his reluctance to be part of the literary establishment. In a letter to Aronson, written a few months after Frishman had discovered and highly praised *Hatsida*, he mentioned the words of an artist from a draft of this story:

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[431] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 21.
[432] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 128.

> "They brought me to such a state, that, from now on, I would be afraid to take a brush in my hands." Why can I not say the same thing to myself? […] I am afraid to walk into the thickness of the forest, r. Abe. There is so much stupidity (ההבל) there, so much stupidity, my friend."[433]

And indeed, in a certain sense he gave up walking in "the thickness of the forest": all of Gnesin's works starting with *Hatsida* were published on the initiative of his editors (with the exception of *Beyntaim*, which Gnesin published himself). His aloofness from the wider literary community reached its apogee in 1906, when Gnesin practically stopped writing for three years,[434] one year of which he spent abroad in England and in the Land of Israel.

These facts testify to a major psychological crisis experienced by Gnesin in the form of two internal conflicts: dissatisfaction with his place in the literary community and a schism between the traditional and secular worlds he both inhabited. This crisis made his innate introversion even more profound, and around 1904 caused a noticeable change in his writing: the focus of his writing shifted from plot to the psychological impressions that arise with the character as a result of the plot. As Hillel Halkin claimed, this shift was a natural outcome of Gnesin's narrative goals: "Indeed, in a world in which nothing ever 'happens,' […] one of the few ways to tell a story is through the thoughts of one of its characters."[435] Moving the focus of his writing away from plot caused a chain reaction of changes. On the syntactic level, one of the most marked changes was the usage of much longer and much more complicated sentences.[436] Dialogues decreased both in number

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[433] These words are not found in the final version of *Hatsida*. See Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 70.
[434] The only work published by Gnesin in 1906-1909 was a translation from Russian of philosophical essays by Lev Isaakovich Shestov.
[435] Hillel Halkin, "[Sideways: Introduction]," *Prooftexts*, 2:3 (September 1982), 237.
[436] In the vast majority of Gnesin's complex sentences clauses are "spliced" with commas, which is not only normal but also compulsory in Russian and to a lesser degree in Yiddish.

and length, as their narrative function was transferred to inner monologues and "psycho-narration."[437] The plot became minimal, and the linear organization of the early stories necessarily turned into a circular one in accordance with the chaotic movement of consciousness conveyed in dreams and memories. One of the most conspicuous formal manifestations of this change is Gnesin's usage of adverbs and conjunctions, which regulate and specify the order of events, thoughts, and feelings. A closer look at his usage of *before*, *after*, and *suddenly* as the most common indicators for establishing a temporal narrative sequence allows several important conclusions regarding Gnesin's treat of time (see Table 4).

Table 4

Temporal indicators *before* and *after*, and adverb *suddenly* in Gnesin's major works

Story and year	Words	*before* and *after*[438]	*suddenly*[439]
Tsliley he-khayim (1904)	22,413	79 **0.35%**	48 **0.21%**
Hatsida (1905)	10,852	66 **0.61%**	18 **0.17%**
Etsel (1913)	42,121	74 **0.17%**	195 **0.45%**

Source: Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kol kitve Uri Nisan Gnesin [Complete Works by U. N. Gnesin]*, ed. Dan Miron, and Israel Zmora, vol. 1 (Tel-Aviv: Ha-kibuts ha-meukhad, 1982).

First, this textual analysis reveals Gnesin's choice of different expressions for the introduction and the sequential connection of two and more events, and may reflect a

[437] The term "psycho-narration" was coined by Dorrit Cohn, and stands for the narrator's description of the character's thoughts and feelings. See Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

[438] לפני ("before"). In Hebrew, there are several ways to convey the idea of *after*. The data in the table includes:

אחר, (ל)אחר (זה), אחרי, אחרי כן, אחר כך

[439] פתאום [suddenly].

change that took place over the course of ten years. For instance, the expression *(le)akhar ze* [after this] is found only in his last work (*Etsel*), while the word *akharey* [after] was common in the earlier works, but almost disappeared from the later ones.[440]

Second, the total usage of the words *before* and *after* shows significant increase from his early stories to his first longer work, *Hatsida*. However, in the last long story, *Etsel*, these prepositions were used less than half as frequently as in *Tsliley he-khayim*. This data illustrates Gnesin's shift away from the events themselves to reflections upon these events as part of the inner monologue of his protagonists: plot creates a fixed chronological framework and therefore, does not depend upon additional lexical markers to create temporal order. In contrast, as time in the realm of consciousness becomes "experiential and elusive to the grasp of experience, constantly slipping away in a movement of restless change,"[441] reflections on events require more lexical markers in order to create a narrative framework.

Finally, the adverb *suddenly* appears with the same frequency in his works during the period of 1904-1905, but its usage is tripled in *Etsel* (0.45% against 0.17%). This phenomenon, in addition to the sharp decrease in his usage of the conjunctions *before* and *after*, confirms the hypothesis that Gnesin's changes in writing was a product of his psychological crisis. During his overseas trip in 1907-1908, Gnesin experienced a break with Brener and a bitter disappointment with the Jewish life in the Land of Israel. These two factors were so devastating for his psychological condition that he quit writing for a long time. In addition, his financial situation was critical, and he could not even afford a newspaper subscription. Gnesin obviously suffered from depression, occasionally

[440] This analysis is based on the printed versions of Gnesin's works, which have been edited, and, therefore, may be not a true reflection of his own preferences.
[441] Robert Alter, *The Invention of Hebrew Prose: Modern Fiction and the Language of Realism* (Seattle: U of Washington P, 1988) 53.

complaining to his friends in the very few letters he had written after 1909: "I have no news. A man sits and 'worries about his lost life.' Oh, how annoying is this feeling that I have had in recent days."[442] His condition marked the last period of his writing, between 1909-1913, making his late prose as different from *Hatsida* as *Hatsida* is different from his early short stories: *Etsel* is free of any chronological framework of events and its fragments can be read in random order without compromising the reading. In this story, the objective world is disintegrated and merged with the subjective reflections of the characters, resulting in the destruction of the causal relationships between events: almost everything happens *suddenly* and is unrelated to any other event.

To conclude, the exploration of Gnesin's life in its social context persuasively explains the changes in his writing in 1904-1905 as a result of a deep psychological crisis. These changes, however, did not make his later works "superior in quality" to the earlier stories, as Halkin suggested.[443] Rather, Gnesin's late stories were similar to the early ones, but they were told from a different perspective: their narrative focus shifted towards the representation of the characters' thoughts and emotions, resulting in a number of technical adjustments. Other than that, the whole corpus of Gnesin's works exhibit a visible thematic and aesthetic unity.

3.4. THE LINGUAL AND SPIRITUAL CONSEQUENCES OF ASSIMILATION

In 1897, nearly all the Jews who lived in the Chernigov *gubernia* of the Russian Empire were native speakers of Yiddish. Over half of the men and about one third of the women could read and write.[444] (Usually, Jewish boys studied Hebrew from early

[442] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 167.
[443] Hillel Halkin, *[Sideways: Introduction]* 227.
[444] According to the 1897 census, 113,787 out of 114,452 Jews (99.4%) in Chernigov *gubernia* called Yiddish their native language; 33,447 men out of 55,053 (60%) and 21,681 women out of 59,399 (37%) were literate. See *The First Total Census of Russian Empire*, ed. N. A. Troynitsky, vol. XLVIII (Sankt-Peterburg: Central statistical bureau of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 1905) 119.

childhood, and, therefore, men were literate in both languages, while girls, who were not required by religious law to study, rarely had command of the Hebrew language.) Those Jews who had the opportunity to study Russian, the official language of the state, were also able to speak, read, and write in it with different levels of proficiency. This information is crucial for the present study, which follows the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, also known as the principle of linguistic relativity. This principle assumes that people who speak different languages necessarily have different cognitive systems – they perceive the world in different ways, and cannot think outside the limits of their language. In other words, language influences (and possibly determines) human thought and behavior.[445]

Yiddish was literally Gnesin's mother tongue: he wrote to his mother, who could hardly read any other language, exclusively in Yiddish. It was in Yiddish that he said his first word. As a child, Gnesin learned to read and recite written texts in Hebrew and Aramaic. Later he studied Russian and other European languages (German, French, and English), and apparently achieved a near-native fluency in Russian. Building on her recent studies in cognitive linguistics, Lera Boroditsky claims that learning a new language is not simply learning a new way of talking, but also inadvertently learning a new way of thinking.[446] Application of this idea helps one better understand the relationship between the Enlightenment and assimilation. In most instances, generations of Gnesin's ancestors had minimal command of any language other than Yiddish and

[445] Discussion of linguistic relativity goes beyond the study of Gnesin's works. For more on the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis see Edward Sapir, *Selected Writings of Edward Sapir in Language, Culture, and Personality*, ed. David G. Mandelbaum (Berkeley: U of California P, 1949); Benjamin Whorf, *Language, Thought, and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*, ed. John B. Carroll (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1956); S. Pinker, *The language instinct* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1994); *Language in Mind: Advances in the Study of Language and Cognition*, ed. D. Gentner, and S. Goldin-Meadow (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).

[446] Lera Boroditsky, "How Does Our Language Shape the Way We Think?" *What's Next: Dispatches on the Future of Science*, ed. Max Brockman (New York: Vintage Books, 2009) 116-129.

Hebrew. Followers of the Enlightenment thus absorbed its concepts without the result of any cognitive changes. For instance, Gnesin's father never studied Russian beyond basic colloquial speech, and was obviously immune to any mental changes that could be caused by a non-Jewish language. At the same time, he was known for his liberal and enlightened views,[447] although he never stray from his traditional Jewish lifestyle or mindset.

In contrast, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a whole new generation of Jews with a good knowledge of Russian (or Polish) appeared and experienced all the consequences of linguistic relativity. Slavic languages are quite different from both Germanic (Yiddish) and Semitic (Hebrew and Aramaic) languages, and it is no surprise that Gnesin, Brener, Shofman, and most of their friends who shared this new lingual diversity could no longer find a place within the traditional world of their fathers. Modern studies in cognitive neuroscience support the idea that different languages are processed in separate areas of the brain,[448] which makes these changes in thinking even more irreversible.

In such circumstances, Gnesin's first choice of a literary language was most likely Yiddish or Russian, because, unlike Western *maskilim* who generally expressed themselves exclusively in German, followers of the multilingual Russian *Haskalah* produced their works in many languages. However, Gnesin rejected Yiddish and Russian for several reasons. Yiddish had the established reputation of being a vernacular, and being the language used by women and uneducated men, it had relatively low social prestige. Hebrew had enjoyed the status of being the standard language of written communication among Jewish communities all over the world for many centuries, and

[447] His son was allowed to study non-Jewish languages and other subjects, was not married at an early age, and was not expected to become a Jewish scholar, continuing a rabbinical chain of his family.
[448] S. Romaine, *Bilingualism* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1995) 74.

was, therefore, a much better choice for those who could write in both languages.[449] Mendele and Sholem-Aleykhem began to write in Hebrew, and later switched to Yiddish, not because they could express themselves in one language better than in another, but because it guaranteed a much wider audience for their works. There was, as Halkin called it, a certain division of labor: Yiddish authors dealt more with the "pressing social and economic issues," while Hebrew writers tended to be occupied with the "modernist crisis in religious tradition and the nature of Jewish identity in a secular age."[450] Gnesin was neither a socialist nor a Bundist, and therefore his writing in Yiddish was limited to one story (*Ba-ganim*). Finally, Gnesin chose not to write in Russian because his command of it did not meet his own strict criteria. It was good enough for conversations, private letters, and the occasional word into his Hebrew text, but apparently did not allow him to express all the subtle nuances of thought and feeling. Gnesin's only publication in Russian (a translation of a story written by Y. L. Perets) was done together with a native Russian speaker.

Although Gnesin wrote neither in his mother tongue nor in the official language, both languages nevertheless determined his way of thinking, and, thus, influenced his writing in a number of ways. Unlike Yiddish, which shared a lot of extralingual content with Hebrew, Russian was completely different both linguistically (as a Slavic language) and culturally (as a Gentile language). Its influence was, therefore, much more pronounced. Gnesin's letters unequivocally portray his regular social circle, consisting of people of both sexes, mostly of his age group, coming from small Russian towns within

[449] In general, written communication among people in Europe had been very standardized until the twentieth century, when technology offered new ways to exchange information, and the publication of special manuals with many samples of letters on different topics sharply decreased in volume. These samples were widely based on standard clichés, which can be found in the vast majority of authentic letters and postcards.

[450] Hillel Halkin, *[Sideways: Introduction]* 229.

the Pale of Settlement. Most of them were raised in traditional Jewish homes, but later stopped following Jewish laws. Very few of them were married, had good jobs, or financial stability. They all had studied secular subjects, and were well read in Russian literature. Being one of them, Gnesin knew their feelings and thoughts. Thus, it is no surprise that these people became prototypes of his fictional characters, who all lead a "Russian provincial life of boating parties and nature walks, soirées and samovars, that would appear more at home in the pages of Chekhov than in the streets of the *shtetl* as we conceive of them today."[451] Their lives were so different from their parents' that the two generations were barely able to talk about anything but simplest, most mundane issues. One of the most obvious outcomes was bitterness, stemming from the sense of being misunderstood. Once, in a letter to his father, Gnesin allowed himself to remark: "You sit in the tent of Torah, and you do not know what is going on around you."[452] In his fiction, however, Gnesin was not as restrained by respectfulness as he was in his private correspondences, and had the freedom to express his bitter feelings. One passage from *Beterem* is particularly illustrative.

At first, when Uriel Efros receives a letter from his father, inviting him to come back home and have some rest, he laughs: "Ha – as if he needs it. Really – could it be that he needs it? And even if he did need it, it is clear to him that he would not find it, and then what? Just see each other? But it has completely lost all of its meaning [תוכנו]."[453] Nevertheless, Uriel decides to make a trip home. His father says a few welcoming words and immediately returns to his studies, barely noticing his son. His mother looks much happier, although even her hugs and kisses could not destroy the wall that separated them:

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[451] Hillel Halkin, *[Sideways: Introduction]* 230.
[452] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 167.
[453] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kol kitve Uri Nisan Gnesin* 215.

> Uriel suddenly felt that he was really weak: but this happy old woman in her bed, fluttering and fussing over him... who is like a shadow, my friend. Like a shadow amidst its wanderings, strange, outcast and alien, you come to this innocent and quiet abode. What would be if he suddenly told this old woman something like this:
>
> – Mom, you think – I am Uriel? Ha-ha. Uriel is lost, old woman. Ha! Uriel went away from here then – do you remember? Nu – and may his soul rest in peace. R.I.P., ha-ha... And I – I am the other one.[454] Old woman. I want to sleep.[455]

As one can see, Uriel's father did not even try to talk to his son. And had he tried, they would hardly have had a meaningful conversation. Their common language (Yiddish) was no longer common, and to a certain extent, it was altogether lost: it remained the same for the older generation but changed for their children resulting from their lives, which they lived in Russian. This is precisely the reason why Gnesin never wrote to his father about his ideas, thoughts and concerns, and confessingly shared his ruminations with his friends. In other words, their "Russian lives" made a whole generation of young Jews feel, perceive and reflect on their human condition from a non-Jewish perspective.

The traditional narrative conventions of Hebrew and Yiddish literature were as useless for a Jewish writer leading a non-Jewish life as the Hebrew and Yiddish languages themselves were for parents trying to understand their children and their new ways of speaking and living. In contrast, Russian literature was an ideal source of writing methodology and inspiration for those who could say together with Gnesin: "We are sons

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[454] The Hebrew word אחר [other] can be also understood as Akher, which is used in the Talmud in reference to Elisha ben Abuya who had been a rabbi but later lost his faith and was known for learning Greek language and philosophy.

[455] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kol kitve Uri Nisan Gnesin* 259.

of Russia (אנו בני-רוסיה)."[456] Some of them chose to write in Russian, and eventually created what Shimon Markish called Russian-Jewish literature.[457] Other writers preferred a more technically challenging approach – they used Jewish languages (Hebrew and Yiddish) to reflect their "Russian lives."

3.5. THE RUSSIAN CONTEXTS OF JEWISH FICTION

Despite all the differences between Jewish and Russian societies, both had to deal with assimilation. In the course of this process, certain parts of a population received a non-traditional education, became fluent in foreign languages, and adopted a mindset which was at odds with the world view of their ancestors. In the first half of the nineteenth century, many assimilated Russians found their mission to be the political and ideological struggle between the Slavophiles (traditionalists) and Westernizers (adepts of Western European science and liberalism). Others, however, could not apply their knowledge and energy to any social movement, which made them feel uncomfortable and estranged within the traditional Russian world. Similarly, a few decades later, many assimilated Russian Jews successfully substituted their lost faith with Zionism and socialism, while the rest had not chosen "one or another clear cut historical option […]. [They were] obliquely buffeted by all these currents, yet ultimately swept in none of them."[458]

The spiritual closeness of these two otherwise dissimilar national and social groups was brought to life in the works of Berdichevski, Bershadski, Gnesin and other Jewish writers in a series of "uprooted" characters (*tlushim*). These characters were, to a

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[456] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 47.
[457] Shimon Markish (1931-2003) devoted the greater part of his life to Russian-Jewish literature. In fact, he was the person who established and promoted this much-debated definition. Markish wrote essays about Vladimir Jabotinsky, Grigoriĭ Bogrov, Semën Ĭ Ushkevich, Isaak Babel and other Russian-Jewish authors.
[458] Hillel Halkin, *[Sideways: Introduction]* 231.

considerable degree, modeled on the image of the alienated Russian, who lives in a web of fruitless fantasies and battles against boredom. These characters were known as *lishnie li͡udi* [superfluous people], and abounded in Russian literature.[459] This "transfer of models" (to use the language of Even-Zohar) occurred between a wide range of literary works, and included the works by non-canonical but popular authors. Thus, Khone Shmeruk's comparative study of Shneur, Bialik and Perets in the context of a long prophetic tradition in Russian poetry, established a direct connection between Bialik's poems and the works of Russian poet Semën Nadson (1862-1887), who was tremendously successful in his time, but from the early twentieth century on was commonly read as a marginal and definitely non-canonical author.[460]

The title of Gnesin's first book, *Tsliley he-khayim* [Shadows of Life] provides an example of literary model transference. Building on Bershadski's, Ben-Avigdor's, and other writers' use of this expression, Pinsker related Gnesin's title to the "representation of what were construed as 'weak characters' in Eastern-European Jewish society, 'deficient' or 'flawed' in one way or another."[461] An alternative view takes into consideration the book by the Russian poet Apollon Korinfskiĭ (1868-1937), published in 1897 under the title *Teni zhyzni* [Shadows of Life]. This popular author was especially appealing to Jewish readers because of his pronounced philo-Semitism, and many poems in this collection resonated with the same general mood as Gnesin's stories. This fact does not contest the popularity of the expression *tsliley he-khayim* in the works of

[459] For more on superfluous man see Chapter 2.
[460] Nadson died at the age of twenty-four, and published only one collection of poems. He was quite popular in the 1880s, but critics nevertheless considered him to be a minor poet. See Khone Shmeruk, "Ha-kria le-navi: Shneur, Bialik, Perets, Nadson [A Call to a Prophet: Shneur, Bialik, Perets, Nadson]," *Ha-sifrut* 2.1 (1969): 241-244.
[461] Shachar Pinsker, "*Old Wine in New Flasks"* 48.

Gnesin's contemporaries; rather, it adds a new interpretative dimension to improve one's understanding of stories collected under this title.

With the idea of "transferring models" in mind, a close reading of Gnesin's texts in Hebrew and Yiddish reveals many literary connections to Russian writers (Turgenev, Dostoevskiĭ, Chekhov, Ivan Bunin, Gleb Uspenskiĭ, Alexander Kuprin, Vladimir Korolenko, Leonid Andreev) and European thinkers (Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Hamsun).[462] A careful examination of the story *Ba-ganim* [In the Gardens] vividly demonstrates some of these connections.

3.6. *BA-GANIM* [IN THE GARDENS]: A CASE STUDY

The story *Ba-ganim* occupies a special place in Gnesin's literary corpus. It is his only known work to be written in two languages, Yiddish and Hebrew. Other than his letters and a few poems, this story is the only sample of Gnesin's Yiddish writing. When it appeared in print in Hebrew (1909) and in Yiddish (1913), critics barely took notice.[463] This story was not even included in the first two editions of Gnesin's collected works, published in 1914 and in 1930. These events create the false impression of *Ba-ganim* as an incidental and less important work, especially in comparison with his four longer stories. For Gnesin, however, *Ba-ganim* was an integral addition to his oeuvre. This fact is demonstrated by his plans to publish the story together with *Hatsida*, *Beyntaim* and *Beterem* as "a complete series of stories" under the common title *Tkhumim* [Borders].[464]

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[462] Even-Zohar did not consider Tolstoĭ, Dostoevskiĭ and Turgenev as writers who had influenced Gnesin, but included in his list of such writers Maksim Gor'kiĭ. However, his study did not provide any supporting arguments. See Itamar Even-Zohar, "Gnessin's Dialogue and Its Russian Models," *Poetics Today* [Durham] 11:1 (1990): 136.

[463] There is no available information about the reception of the Yiddish version of 1914. See Miron's discussion of the two reviews of the Hebrew version (1909), one positive and one negative, in: Dan Miron, *Khakhim be-apo shel ha-netsakh* 303.

[464] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kol kitve Uri Nisan Gnesin* 155, 585.

Evolution of the story

Modern scholars have different opinions regarding the original language of *Ba-ganim*. In several studies of Gnesin as a bilingual writer, Yitskhak Bakon claimed that Gnesin wrote the first draft of his story in Yiddish under the name *Tsvishn gertner* [Between Gardens] as early as in 1906, when he had plans of translating *Beyntaim* into Yiddish and publishing it in a volume of Yiddish works together with *Tsvishn gertner*. This plan was unrealized, and Gnesin did not return to the draft until he translated it into Hebrew and published it in Frishman's *Sifrut* in 1909.[465] Dan Miron offers an alternative view. In late 1907, while still in the Land of Israel, Gnesin began writing *Beterem*. A correspondence with Lakhover shows that this work took much more time than expected, and was finished only in January of 1910. Trying to appease the annoyed Lakhover and somehow compensate for the delays with *Beterem*, Gnesin sent him *Ba-ganim*, which was originally a section of *Beterem,* but was rewritten as an independent story.[466] Later, he translated *Ba-ganim* into Yiddish, willing to join the circle of innovative Yiddish writers such as his young acquaintance Dovid Bergelson.[467] Although many textual parallels support Miron's reading of *Ba-ganim* as a fragment of *Beterem*, Gnesin's letters suggest a different time line: in 1906, Gnesin wrote *Tsvishn gertner*, which remained unpublished until 1913, and in 1909, he might have incorporated the setting of *Tsvishn gertner* into the larger work *Beterem*, simultaneously translating it for Lakhover into Hebrew as *Ba-ganim*.

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[465] Yitskhak Bakon, *Mitokh ha-khavura [In the Company]* (Tel-Aviv: Papirus, 1982) 64; Yitskhak Bakon, *Brener u-Gnesin ke-sofrim du-leshoniyim [Brener and Gnesin as Bilingual Writers]* (Be'er Sheva: Universitat Ben-Guryon, 1986) 47-48.

[466] Miron's claim is based on the striking similarity between the settings of these two stories. On the day after his return home and after a frustrating meeting with the parents, Uriel Efros (*Beterem*) borrowed a boat from an old friend and left for a trip that lasted eight days. The main character of *Ba-ganim* had been also traveling in a boat for a few days, docking at nights and paddling during days, recollecting his childhood, and meeting his old acquaintances, just like Uriel Efros.

[467] Dan Miron, *Khakhim be-apo shel ha-netsakh* 304-308.

In April of 1906, Gnesin sent Brener a letter about his new attitude towards writing in Yiddish, and also shared with him some publishing plans:

> I have a story, which I had already promised to Frishman […] and now I suddenly started "dreaming" (do you know these dreams?) about an anthology. At first it was [supposed to be] a Hebrew anthology, now – a collection in Yiddish. [If there is] a place for the first – doesn't there also exist one for the second? In general, Jews are sitting and waiting for us, but the question is only whether they wait for anthologies in Hebrew or in Yiddish. […] The fact of the matter is, if they publish this collection, I will give them my story in Yiddish.[468]

In order to fully understand Gnesin's letter it must be read alongside Brener's reply written the same day Gnesin's letter was received. Brener wrote to Gnesin and Tseytlin, who were both in Vilno at that time, and were working closely together:

> Brothers, I received your letter this morning, and hid my face in the pillow, and now I know for sure that we are lost. And not only because you all went out of your minds […] Anyway, I am tired from my work, and I cannot write. What did I want to say? […] I am tired and sick. The only pleasure I had [was] the hope that you would publish a decent Hebrew anthology, and this hope has also died after today's letter. Let the god of Vilno jargon [Yiddish][469] be with you. I wish you great success. The people will recognize you.[470]

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[468] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 102.

[469] Brener used the word *jargon* for Yiddish (יהי אלוהי הז'ארגון הוילנאי עמכם), which was a common way of referring to this language at that time.

[470] The last two sentences were written in a markedly bad macaronic Yiddish with many Russian words. See Yosef Khayim Brener, *Kol kitve Y. Kh. Brener [Complete Works of Y. Kh. Brener]*, vol. 3 (Tel-Aviv: Ha-kibuts ha-meukhad, 1967) 250.

Brener's bitter disappointment came from the fact that he, and other friends of Gnesin's, had been waiting for more than three years for the Hebrew anthology of *Ha-Adam* (The Man); suddenly they learned that it would appear in print in several Yiddish volumes. Gnesin understood that they would not meet his switch to Yiddish with enthusiasm, and would treat it as a betrayal of the Hebrew language. However, this feared switch did not occur because everything written by Gnesin thereafter was in Hebrew. There is no evidence of Gnesin's involvement with Yiddish literature in the years 1908-1913, when he was occupied with *Beterem* and *Etsel*, as well as two large translations of Yacob Wassermann and Sigbjørn Obstfelder into Hebrew. Neither is there any correspondence available between Gnesin and Bergelson.[471] In other words, the only time when Gnesin mentioned his story in Yiddish was in his letter to Brener. *Tsvishn gertner* is Gnesin's only known Yiddish story which supports Bakon's claim that it had been written in 1906.[472]

The Hebrew and Yiddish versions share the same plot and are both told in the first person, unlike *Beterem* and his three other long stories, which are all narrated in third person. For two days, the main character, Efroim, has been traveling down a river, passing the familiar places from his childhood, when he meets an old acquaintance, a country Jew known by the nickname Archnose, and his imbecile daughter Suli. After a short conversation, Efroim asks for a glass of cold milk. At first, Archnose agrees, but

[471] The influence of Gnesin and his works on Bergelson was discussed in detail by Avraham Novershtern: Avraham Novershtern, "Ha-zar uve-karov: dmuto shel Gnesin vitsirato be-aspaklariya shel 'Nokh alemen' ('Kikhlot ha-kol) le-Dovid Bergelson [The Stranger and One of Ourselves: Gnesin's image and work from the point of view of 'After Everything' by Dovid Bergelson]," *Uri Nisan Gnesin: mekhkarim uteudot* 371-397.

[472] In 1901, Gnesin translated seven stories by Mordekhay Spektor from Yiddish into Hebrew. A comparison of these stories in the original and in translation, on one hand, and *Tsvishn gertner* and *Ba-ganim* on the other, reveals several common writing strategies, such as the omission of sequences of repetitious adverbials, characteristic for Yiddish in general, making the Hebrew text more laconic. These similarities indirectly show that *Ba-ganim* was translated from Yiddish, and not vice versa.

later changes his mind after hearing Suli's voice, coming from somewhere. Efroim insists, promising to pay as much money as Archnose wants. Finally, he receives the milk, pays a lot of money for it, and leaves. Instead of getting in his boat, Efroim decides to take a nap, climbs on top of a nearby hill, and finds a place to sleep under a shady bush. Soon he hears Suli's laughter. Efroim looks downhill and sees Suli, sitting in the tall grass barely dressed. A few moments later he witnesses a shocking scene: Archnose approaches Suli, rapes her, and then beats her with a whip.

Yiddish and Hebrew versions

Despite the overall similarity between the Yiddish and Hebrew versions of "In the Garden", there are quite a few places in the two texts that emphasize different parts of otherwise similar phrases. For instance, in *Tsvishn gertner*, the "healthy" silence of the morning was just "breathing," creating a relaxing and smooth transition to the approaching hot day. In *Ba-ganim*, however, the silence was not healthy, and it was "breathing with all its might," which creates quite a different impression. Also, the end of this Hebrew phrase has a more aggressive verb ("to conquer") than one used in the Yiddish text, where a similar idea of oppression is conveyed in accordance with the tranquil beginning ("to receive its great power"):

Ba-ganim	*Tsvishn gertner*
Around me that *morning, the silence of the field* was already *breathing with all its might*, which lacks nothing but the	Around [me] that *healthy silence of the morning fields* has already been *breathing*, which lacks nothing more but the burning

heat of the burning day *to conquer the flesh and senses of man*.[473]	heat of the afternoon sun *to receive its great power over all of man's senses*.[474]

Ba-ganim is not an exact translation of *Tsvishn gertner*. It is rather a rewriting of the story, wherein quite a few focal points of the text are shifted, noticeably making the overall emotional atmosphere darker and more expressive. Several places in the Hebrew text not only have omitted and added words, but occasionally differ by entire phrases, sometimes conveying the opposite meaning. In the final scene of the story, when Efroim was on top of the hill, his tiredness is more strongly conveyed in the Hebrew text using the evocative description of heavy eyelashes and drowsiness, in contrast to the Yiddish text which simply states that he was tired:

Ba-ganim	*Tsvishn gertner*
At last, *when some kind of dowsiness had started hovering over me, and my eyelashes had started to become heavy*, a weird groan that had also something of a strange laughter suddenly came to my ears from the bottom of the hill. One. Two. Three. *At first I did not pay attention to it*, but later my desire to see became stronger, and I turned. I started looking at the scene below, and	*Having gotten very tired*, I suddenly heard from the bottom of the hill something like a groan, a strange groan, which was similar to a weird laughter: once, twice, and three time. *It aroused my interest*, and lazily, as I have been tired, I turned and started looking down onto the grass at the bottom of the hill. In the tall grass over there, just near the gardens, *I saw*

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מסביבי היתה כבר נושמת בגבורתה אותה דממת הבוקר שבשדה, זו, שבכדי שתהא כובשת לה את בשר האדם ואת חושיו, אינה חסרה אלא את חום היום הלוהט.

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ארונד ארום האט שוין געאטעמט יענער געזונטער שטילשווייגן פון די אינדערפריענדיקער פעלדער, וואס אים פעלט מער נישט ווי די ברענענדיקע היץ פון דער בייטאגעדיקער זון, כדי ער זאל שוין קריגן זיין גרויסע שליטע איבער דעם מענטשן מיט אלע זיינע חושים.

right there, in the tall grass beneath the hill, sitting, there was a figure of a quite tall and full woman. She was not dressed in anything but a coarse gown *revealing her flesh*, and *shadows of the sun and of the grass blades* silently *danced and glided* on her apparently quite full and chubby naked shoulders and across the *muscles* of her plump and soft arms.[475]

something unusual. Some woman, a really tall one it seemed, and also plump, dressed in nothing more than a coarse homespun gown, *was sitting right in the sun*, and *the sunbeams together with the shadows of the tall grass* silently *played* on her naked and quite full shoulders and soft arms, which were also quite bare.[476]

In Yiddish, when Efroim heard Suli's groans, it "aroused his interest, " and made him look to see "something unusual, some woman;" in Hebrew he "did not pay attention at first," but then looked and saw "the figure of a woman." This logically justified chain of expressions (tired, suddenly heard, aroused my interest, saw something unusual, a woman) makes the Yiddish version more conventional and less expressive. Furthermore, in the Yiddish version, Suli was sitting "in the sun" in her "gown," and the "sunbeams" were "playing" on her naked shoulders and arms. Her image in Hebrew is noticeably darker and more erotic: instead of sun there are "shadows" of the sun, which "dance and

475 לאחרונה, כשהתחילה כבר תנומה כל שהיא מרפרפת אצלי וריסי התחילו כבדים, באה פתאום לאוזני מתחת ההר איזו גניחה משונה שיש בה גם משום צחוק זר. אחת. שתיים. שלוש. בתחילה לא הייתי שם אליה את לבי; אבל, לאחרונה, גבר יצרי ונפניתי. התחלתי מסתכל אל אשר מתחת והנה בדשא הגבוה שלרגלי ההר יושבת תמונת אשה גבוהה למדי ומלֵאה למדי. זו לא היתה לבושה אלא את חלוקה הגס והפתוח לבשרה וצללי השמש ואלו של טרפי הדשא היה מפזזים ומחליקים דומם בכתפותיה המלאות והלזוגות, כנראה, למדי, אלו שהיו חשופות יחד את קיבורות ידיה הרוָיות והרכות.

476 מיד געווארן גאר אין גאנצן, האב איך מיט איין מאל דערהערט פון אונטערן בארג עפעס א קרעכץ, א מאדנעם קרעכץ, וואס האט געהאט עטוואס ענלעכס מיט א משונהדיקן לאכן. א מאל און צוויי און דריי. מיך האט עס פאררעגטערעסירט, און פויל, ווי איך בין געווען, האב איך מיך אומגעקערט און כ'האב אנגעהויבן אראפקוקן אין די גראז פון אונטערן בארג. דארטן, אין די הויכע גראז, באלד נעבן די גערטענער, האב איך דערזען עטוואס אומגעוויינלעכס. עפעס א פרוי, א גאנץ הויכע, ווי עס ווייזט, און אויך א באלייבטע, אנגעטאן נישט מער ווי [אין] א גראב-צוגעשניטענע אונטערהעמד, איז געזעסן גראד אויפן זון, און די שטראלן פון זון, צוזאמען מיט די שאטנס פון די גרויסע גראז, האבן זיך שטום געשפילט אויף אירע בלויזע און גאנץ פולע אקסלען, מיט די ווייכע ארעמס, וואס זענען אויך געווען גאנץ הויל.

glide" on her body, rather than "play," and her gown "reveals her flesh," described with more detail.

The Yiddish version is closer to Gnesin's early stories, which are more focused on the sequential relationship of events, while in Hebrew there is a tendency towards a causal independence of events and an emotional spontaneity. Due to the formal restraints of translation, the contrast between these two versions is definitely not as obvious as it is between self-sustained stories such as *Hatsida* (1905) and *Etsel* (1913). However, the difference between the two texts written in 1906 and 1909 — separated by a period in Gnesin's life which included his unsuccessful stay in London, his break with Brener, and his painful disillusionment with Jewish life in the Land of Israel — becomes more comprehensible when perceived as the reflection of Gnesin's progressing spiritual crisis. Differing in their nuances of expression, *Tsvishn gertner* and *Ba-ganim* both exhibit to a considerable degree the same non-Jewish literary context, conspicuously related to the works of Leonid Andreev.[477]

"This Andreev, the devil take him..."

Gnesin knew Andreev's work well, and admired his talent. In early 1904, he read a story, *Zhizn Vasilîa Fiveĭskogo* [Life of Vasiliĭ Fiveĭskiĭ], which Andreev had published a few months before. Gnesin shared his excitement in a letter to a friend:

> Not long ago, I have read the collection *Znanie* [Rus.: Knowledge].[478] You probably have read it also. This Andreev, I swear to God, his little finger is thicker than everybody's thighs. […] The devil take him, this

[477] Andreev owed much of his metaphysical and moral nihilism to Friedrich Nietzsche, who was exceptionally influential in late-nineteenth-century Russia. See Edith W. Clowes, *The Revolution of Moral Consciousness: Nietzsche in Russian Literature, 1890-1914* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois UP, 1988); *Nietzsche in Russia*, ed. Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1986).

[478] Andreev's story appeared in print in a collection of publishing company *Znanie* ("Knowledge") edited by Gor'kiĭ in March, 1904.

> Andreev, yes, you will laugh, gentlemen, but really it [Andreev's story] should have been written in Hebrew by one of the new Jews, I swear to God. It's only a pity that he, Andreev, is Russian according to nature, [and] his work is also Russian from a certain point of view.[479]

In fact, Andreev's story is "Russian" from every point of view: it is based on a handwritten confession of a Russian Orthodox priest, A. I. Apollov, who, influenced by Tolstoĭ's ideas, had abandoned his position. In 1901, Andreev learned about this event from Maksim Gor'kiĭ, and immediately decided to write a story about this priest.[480] Like his prototype, Vasiliĭ Fiveĭskiĭ is a Russian Orthodox country priest, and the story describes his tragic quest for the true faith. Gnesin, as one can see from his emotional letter, made a distinction between Andreev's powerful style and the content of his story. He was obviously attracted by potential of Andreev's sensual prose, and would have liked to see a similar story in Hebrew. At the same time, he also understood that a story about Russian Orthodoxy written in Hebrew would be absurd, because this part of the Russian cultural polysystem was foreign and closed off to even the most assimilated Jews with the best command of Russian. However, despite such thematic incompatibility, Andreev's powerful prose had influenced many Hebrew and Yiddish writers,[481] such as Berdichevski, Nomberg, Shofman, Gnesin, Brener, An-ski, Der Nister, Bergelson, Sholem Ash and Perets Hirshbeyn.[482]

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[479] The letter had been written in Russian, and was published in Hebrew translation. See Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 47.

[480] L. N. Afonin, "'Ispoved' A. Apollova kak odin iz istochnikov povesti Leonida Andreeva 'Zhizn'' Vasiliĭa Fiveĭskogo' [A. Apollov's 'Confession' as One of the Sources for Leonid Andreev's 'Zhizn'' Vasiliĭa Fiveĭskogo']," *Andreevskiĭ sbornik* (Kursk, 1975) 90-101.

[481] Andreev was translated into Yiddish more often than he was translated into Hebrew. He was also accepted by Yiddish critics with much greater enthusiasm. See Hamutal Bar-Yosef, *Hitkablut shel Leonid Andreev* 330.

[482] In 1907, Brener translated Andreev's story *Marselyeza* [La Marseillaise] into Yiddish). Later, his attitude towards Andreev changed, and he criticized him in a number of articles and letters. Writing about Hersh Dovid Nomberg, Brener attributed his "primitive pessimism" to the "unpleasant rhetorical method of

In part, Andreev's tremendous popularity in the early twentieth century was connected to his ability to expose the dark sides of the human soul that had rarely, if ever, been addressed in the literature. In many of his stories, his characters suffer from the burden of eternal existential problems, and look deep inside of themselves only to find ugly and perverse passions leading to ugly and perverse behavior. One of Andreev's goals was to shock his audience, as he wrote once in a letter to Gor'kiĭ: "I write well only then, when I can speak with absolute ease about uneasy things, and do not hit the ceiling myself, but rather make the ceiling hit the reader."[483] When discussing Andreev's influence on Gnesin it is, therefore, not surprising that modern scholars turn to the connection between *Ba-ganim* and *Bezdna* (The Abyss), written by Andreev in 1901, and regarded by many as one of his most flagrant and "uneasy" texts.

Bezdna is a story about the young student Nemovet͡skiĭ and his girlfriend Zina, who were walking in the forest until late in the evening, had lost their way, and were attacked by a group of drunk local thugs. The student is knocked out in a short fight, and the girl tries to escape but is caught and brutally raped. Some time later, the student comes too, begins looking for his girlfriend, and eventually finds her nearby, in the grass, half naked, shocked, and motionless. Nemovet͡skiĭ tries to comfort Zina, but his efforts are in vain. Suddenly he feels an "abyss in front of him, dark, horrible, attractive."[484] Losing his last remnants of sanity, he falls into this abyss.

Andreev in the Russian literature, which also can be seen in our [literature]." Later, Brener commented that Andreev's story *T'ma* [Darkness] is "absolutely unnecessary for us." Quoted in: Hamutal Bar-Yosef, *Hitkablut shel Leonid Andreev* 336. At the same time, obvious similarities in writing patterns and common "realist symbolism" suggest that Brener was spiritually close to Andreev: both liked to horrify readers with cold truths, and both liked to place their heroes in extreme situations, sometimes revealing their real selves at the expense of their sanity.

[483] *Maksim Gor'kiĭ i Leonid Andreev: neizdannai͡a perepiska [Unpublished Letters of Maksim Gor'kiĭ and Leopnid Andreev]*, vol. 72 of Literaturnoe nasledstvo (Moscow: Nauka, 1965) 212.

[484] Leonid Nikolaevich Andreev, *Povesti i rasskazi [Short Novels and Stories]*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Khudozhestvenna͡i͡a literatura, 1971) 47.

Andreev's story appeared in print in January of 1902, immediately becoming a huge literary and social scandal, and causing a storm of negative criticism in the press. Tolstoĭ, for instance, was reported to say: "It's a nightmare…! How filthy, how filthy…! […] Yuck...! And why was it written…? What for…?"[485] Andreev did not agree, and even called his story the illegal daughter of Tolstoĭ's story *Kreĭt͡serova sonata* [The Kreutzer Sonata].[486] Moreover, Andreev had to write a public apology, in which he insisted that human beings had only mastered external forms of culture while basically remaining animals. In 1903, Andreev composed a public letter and signed it with the name of his hero (Nemove͡tskiĭ). It started a peculiar literary game: Vladimir Jabotinsky wrote his own letter under the name of the raped girl (Zina), and another author, who remained anonymous, wrote a letter representing the drunk hooligans.

Gnesin wrote "In the Gardens"[487] four years after *Bezdna* had been published. At first glance, these two stories appear quite different. The figures of Efroim and Archnose unambiguously make Gnesin's story Jewish. Even the strangeness of the Jewish gardener, who had been living on the farm his whole life and avoiding contact with people, is counterbalanced with such descriptive details as his daily visits to the synagogue, where he prayed in the loud, coarse voice of a peasant.[488] Similarly, *Bezdna* is, without any doubt, a distinctively Russian story (however, less so than *Zhizn Vasilíi͡a Fiveyskogo*): all the characters have Russian names, recite Russian poetry, and sing Russian songs. In addition, the action takes place in a typical Russian suburb. However, a closer look at both these stories reveals a striking similarity between the most basic

[485] F. G. Muskablit, "V Ya͡snoĭ Polía͡ne (Beseda s L. N. Tolstym) [In Ya͡snai͡a Polía͡na (A Conversation with L. Tolstoĭ)]," *Birzhevye vedomosti* [S.-Pb.] 31 Aug. 1902: 3.
[486] *Russkai͡a literatura [Russian Literature]* (Moskva: Nauka, 1962) 198.
[487] The English translation "In the Gardens" is used hereafter in reference to both Yiddish and Hebrew versions, unless when languages are part of the discussion, in which case *Ba-ganim* stands exclusively for the Hebrew text.
[488] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kol kitve Uri Nisan Gnesin* 355.

elements of the plots: each one tells about a young man from town who has found himself in nature (a forest, a river, gardens) while on a pleasant trip. Later, both characters see a barely dressed woman, and are involved in a rape (as an observer or as a rapist), which produces feeling of strong erotic anxiety. These core elements are essentially neither Russian nor Jewish but universally human, and, as amplified by Andreev's expressive metaphorical writing style, they can be equally appealing to people of various backgrounds. This is one of the main reasons Andreev was so important to both Russian and Jewish writers.[489]

"In the Gardens" has several traces of Andreev's work. First, Gnesin's story can be read as an artistic intervention into the debates which arose in Russia soon after *Bezdna* had been published; it could even be read as an expanded version of the "letters to an editor" written by Andreev, Jabotinsky and others. Second, Gnesin's story explores a theme crucial for Andreev – the absolute power of human primordial instincts manifesting in the eternal conflict between mind and body. Finally, the image of a many-colored stylistic mosaic, used by some modern scholars to describe Andreev's works (a combination of symbolism, impressionism, and realism[490]), precisely reflects the style of "In the Gardens." In all likelihood, more than one of Andreev's stories inspired Gnesin to write "In the Garden," although no other text is alluded to quite as much as *Bezdna*. Gnesin uses what Ziva Ben-Porat calls a "device for the simultaneous activation of two texts."[491] In the very first paragraph, for instance, Gnesin portrays a countryside morning, which, with the help of several key words (*sun*, *green*, *dark*), alludes to the description of

[489] The same reason explains the huge popularity of the anti-Semite Dostoevskiĭ among the Jews.
[490] *Handbook of Russian Literature*, ed. Victor Terras (New Haven: Yale UP, 1985) 414.
[491] Ziva Ben-Porat, "The Poetics of Literary Allusion," *A Journal for Descriptive Poetics and Theory of Literature* 1 (1976): 108.

a countryside evening in *Bezdna*. Despite the difference of in setting, both passages create an almost identical impression:

Bezdna	"In the Gardens"
A small grove darkened ahead, on a sloping hill, and through the tree branches *the **sun** glowed like red fiery charcoal*; it burned the air up and turned it into a flaming golden dust. […] Somewhere far away, about a mile or even more, the red sunset found the high trunk of a pine tree, and *it was burning amid the **green** like a candle in a **dark** room*; the road ahead was tainted scarlet, and *every stone cast long **dark** shadows*.[492]	A leprous white spot blossomed and quickly spread over *the morning **sun***, causing the surrounding radiance to pale. *The **golden sparkle***, glittering like the slow streams of water one used to romp around in as a child, trembled in sudden fright and went out. In the open plain to the left, *the lush vegetation had earlier been laughing in **green** contentment*, its flowers nodding toward *the newly risen **sun** in a blaze of yellow, and red, and white*; but now, appalled by the *sudden disappearance of its shining gem*, *it let its laughter **darken** into gloom*.[493]

The twofold purpose of this allusion was to evoke the uneasy atmosphere of approaching catastrophe, and to make contemporary readers recall the familiar story by Andreev. The allusions in "In the Gardens" do not merely speak of Andreev's influence on Gnesin's story. The coexistence of two texts necessarily produces new interpretation of *Bezdna*, which may be quite different from Andreev's original message. As one can see, the very

[492] Leonid Nikolaevich Andreev, *Bezdna [Abyss]* (Berlin: Ioann Rede, 1903) 4.
[493] Uri Nissan Gnessin, *Beside & Other Stories* (New Milford: The Toby P, 2005) 67.

title “In the Gardens” implies a psychological effect distinct from the one in *Bezdna*: instead of “the abyss,” there are “gardens,” and while Nemovetskiĭ was following a gloomy dark “road, tainted with scarlet,” Efroim came to the gardens by the “quiet, beautiful river” of his birthplace.

The uniqueness of Gnesin’s writing is not exclusively found in the adaptation of Andreev’s words (he was not alone in using this technique). What is special about Gnesin’s text is its integration of authentic Jewish allusions — partially the inherent byproduct of using Hebrew, and to a lesser degree, Yiddish — as most of the words in the text could also be found in the Tanakh, the Talmud, or rabbinical literature. Thus, for most Jewish readers, the first Hebrew words of Gnesin’s story, *baheret levana* [white spot],[494] would have immediately established a connection with the Torah:

> When a man shall have in the skin of his flesh […] a *spot*, and it becomes on the skin of his flesh the plague of leprosy, then he shall be brought to Aaron the priest, or to one of his sons, the priests […]. And if the *spot* be *white* on the skin of his flesh […] then the priest shall shut him that hath the plague seven days.[495]

The English translation tries to maintain this allusion by adding an extra word (“a *leprous* white spot”[496]), but even with this addition, it is not possible to preserve the whole associative chain. Several types of skin deformation are distinguished in the Torah, and a *white spot* is one of them. The main goal of this discussion is to define the disease, which can be leprosy (making a person ritually unclean) or can be a scab, psoriasis, vitiligo, or other condition. It is clear from the text of the Torah that it was the duty of a priest, and

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[494] וויסער פלעק (“white spot”) in Yiddish.

[495] Tanakh, Vayikra 13:4-6:

אָדָם, כִּי-יִהְיֶה בְעוֹר-בְּשָׂרוֹ [...] **בַּהֶרֶת** וְהָיָה בְעוֹר-בְּשָׂרוֹ לְנֶגַע צָרַעַת וְהוּבָא אֶל-אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן אוֹ אֶל-אַחַד מִבָּנָיו הַכֹּהֲנִים.

[…] וְאִם-**בַּהֶרֶת לְבָנָה** הִוא בְּעוֹר בְּשָׂרוֹ […] וְהִסְגִּיר הַכֹּהֵן אֶת-הַנָּגַע, שִׁבְעַת יָמִים.

[496] Gnessin, Uri Nissan, *Beside & Other Stories* 67.

not of a doctor, to investigate the disease, as what was called leprosy was not thought to be contagious in the modern medical sense of the word. Rather, it was treated as a disease inflicted by the Almighty as a punishment for evil deeds. Gnesin only needed these two key words from the Torah to imbue his text with the powerful allusion to leprosy, transgression, and punishment. The story is set in modern times, but it is closely related to the ancient world: it takes place in the gardens, and evokes leprosy as a punishment for the people who live outside the community and transgress its laws.

There are more literary allusions to classic Jewish texts in the Hebrew version of "In the Gardens." For instance, when Efroim saw Archnose for the first time, he had a feeling that he was not faced with a real man, but the mighty silence of the fields bound by human flesh, breathing with the suffocating irritation of attained desire (תאוה נהיה). The following words come from the book of Mishley: "Desire attained is sweet to the soul, but turning from evil is an abomination to fools."[497] The combination of the two texts produces a new interpretative image: the vivid image of evil desires which Archnose was loathe to overcome, and which is no less impressive or powerful than the corresponding image of Nemovet͡skiĭ's wild desire in *Bezdna*. However, the major difference in these artistic representations of depraved passions is Andreev's need for a brutal rape scene in order to present the "comprehensive and unbiased interpretation of the meanly-noble human nature."[498] As a result, Andreev had to put his heroes in an awkward and unnatural situation, which was read by many as perverse.[499] The storyline of *Bezdna* is for the most part a forced interaction between binary oppositions: both

[497] Tanakh, Mishley 13:19:

תַּאֲוָה **נִהְיָה** תֹּעֲבַת לְכְסִילִים סוּר מֵרָע.

[498] *Maksim Gor'kiĭ i Leonid Andreev* 135.

[499] The "farfetchedness" of *Bezdna* was a commonplace contemporary criticism. Some authors even claimed that the end of this story was a "physiological absurdity from the medical point of view." See L. Voĭtolovskiĭ, "So͡tsial'no-psikhologicheskie tipy v rasskazakh Leonida Andreeva [Socio-psychological Characters in the Stories by Leonid Andreev]," *Pravda* [Saint-Petersburg] 8, 1905: 138-139.

Nemovet͡skiĭ and Liza came from wealthy families, whereas the drunken thugs were from the lowest social strata. The young people lived in the city, and found themselves in the unwelcoming forest unintentionally after they had lost their way, while the thugs felt absolutely comfortable there, drinking and looking for adventure.

"In the Gardens" tells a similar story about the animal inside a human being, but its heroes are not put in improbable situations. Efroim does become an eyewitness to sexual abuse, but he is on friendly terms with the abuser, observes this ugly scene from a distance, and does not have to make any existential choices. Still, in the final scene Gnesin achieves the same emotional climax as Andreev does:

> My heart began to dance with terror, and suddenly I was out of breath. I remember. I remained lying like a log – just as I had been lying [before], with my arms stretched forward, and only my hands had enough time to clasp, as if trying to grip handfuls of grass which I pulled out, and was squeezing hard, hard...[500]

Additionally, the narrative logic of *Bezdna* required an elaborate account of the attack, the chase, and the rape of Zina, first by the thugs and later by Nemovet͡skiĭ, in contrast to "In the Gardens," wherein the rape scene is only depicted briefly from Efroim's distant perspective:

> I did not start to feel my hands, which hurt because of my nails sticking into them, until I saw red Archnose rising [from the ground], breathing like an beast, fastening his pants, while spitting loudly and whispering with a groan: "Shit! I'll kill her, this bitch! Bitch![501]

[500] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kol kitve Uri Nisan Gnesin* 374.
[501] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kol kitve Uri Nisan Gnesin* 374.

Another significant difference between Gnesin's story and *Bezdna* is that the characters of "In the Garden," Efroim, Archnose, and Suli, are not strangers. They all have known each other for many years, and all the events take place in their natural environment. That is to say, Gnesin had found an alternative way to continue Andreev's exploration of dark human instincts. He did not throw his characters into implausible situations or use extraneous factors such as Andreev's thugs; rather, he depicted closely related and supposedly loving people (a father and a daughter), peacefully living in nature like animals.[502] However, it is exactly the sharp contrast between delusive normality and Efroim's terrible discovery that makes the overall impression of "In the Gardens" so ferocious. The word "garden*"* in the title is equally deceptive.

Presumably, Gnesin set the action of the story in gardens on purpose. To create an appropriate environment for his shocking story, Andreev drew widely on the trope, well-established in Russian folklore and literature, of a forest as a dangerous place. In contrast, Gnesin used images of gardens, which had quite a different connotation for both Jews and Russians.[503] Furthermore, the girl's name, Suli, which is a short for Shulamis, alludes to the main female character from the *Song of Songs*. A literal reading of *Song of Songs* may create the false impression that Gnesin's allusion is a skillful parody. Indeed, although black and swarthy from hard work in the vineyard (garden),[504] Shulamit was nonetheless praised for her exceptional beauty, while her namesake, Suli, appears completely differently: her black short hair, constantly rough and full of feathers is

[502] Gnesin widely used direct metaphors to intensify this animalistic image: Archnose spoke in the coarse voice of a bear and on the holiday *Simkhes-toyre* was heard to sob with bear-like grunts; Suli had the face of an animal, etc.

[503] *Les* [forest] in Russian is most commonly described with such adjectives as *tëmnyĭ* [dark] and *gustoĭ* [dense]. It is also a natural habitat for monsters and outlaws. A *garden,* on the contrary (*gortn* and *gan* in Yiddish and Hebrew respectively), is created and maintained by men, is exposed to sun, and provides people with fruits and vegetables.

[504] See Tanakh, Shir-ha-shirim 1:5-6.

always paired with the image of her full and dirty hands somewhere behind the oven. Efroim and his friends liked to make fun of Suli. Trying to make her speak, they used to call her by name. Suli then raises her dumb face, and yells back with the strange hollowing voice of a man. Her words scratched like a dull knife.[505] This is again an allusion to Shulamit, who had a voice others longed to hear for a completely different reason: "You, who live in the gardens, friends are listening to your voice. Let me hear it!"[506]

However, the traditional reading of the *Song of Songs*, about which one of the most prominent authorities in Jewish law, Rabbi Akiva, said that "the whole world is not as worthy as the day on which the *Song of Songs* was given to Israel, because all the Writings are holy, but the *Song of Songs* is the Holy of Holies,"[507] makes Gnesin's allusion much more tragic than what a verbatim interpretation of this text can suggest. According to such a reading, especially important to Hasidic thought (to which Gnesin had been exposed since early childhood) the story of the love between Shlomo and Shulamit is a metaphor for the complicated relationship between the Almighty and the people of Israel. Gnesin offered an almost blasphemous new version of these relations. He told a story of Suli, a mentally ill girl, living like an animal and longing for love like an animal. She calls her father with sweet and seducing words and, after being assaulted, is cruelly punished with a whip. The allusion between Suli and Shulamit had not only activated the two texts, but ultimately enabled the transference of an interpretative model from the *Song of Songs* to "In the Gardens." Gnesin accomplishes this effect in a manner that allows the story of Suli to be perceived as the story of assimilated and spiritually sick

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[505] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kol kitve Uri Nisan Gnesin* 356.

[506] Tanakh, Shir ha-shirim 8:13:

היושבת בגנים, חברים מקשיבים לקולך—השמיעני.

[507] Mishna Yadayim, 3:6:

שאין העולם כולו כדאי ביום שניתנה בו שיר השירים לישראל שכל הכתובים קודש, ושיר השירים קודש קודשים.

Russian Jews, who were torn between two polar identities, and searched for faith but found only secular substitutes – in other words, a story about Gnesin's lost generation.

Conclusion

The first critics divided Gnesin's oeuvre in two contrasting categories, and suggested that within a short period of time he had grown from producing mediocre and epigonic works to writing the most excellent and refined prose. This view become common in modern scholarship, and was accepted by many later critics. However, no attempts have been made to explain the rapid change in Gnesin's style. In fact, the historical figure of Gnesin is rarely, if ever, examined in recent scholarship. To find a reason for this change in writing style, I attempt to read Gnesin's works biographically, exploring his personality, historical and cultural background, contemporary audience, and the publication history. With the help of the historical overview (Chapter 1), and the analysis of his translations from Russian literature (Chapter 2), this chapter reconstructs Gnesin's major spiritual crisis, caused by his assimilation into Russian culture, as well as his feelings of alienation from traditional Jewish life. Gnesin's writing changed most abruptly when this crisis reached its peak around 1905.

Russian literature's impressive imagery was particularly influential for Gnesin's writing, and his works bear many traces of this influence. A close reading of the story *Baganim* demonstrates how the integration of non-Jewish imagery into a literary text that is otherwise Jewish affects Gnesin's writing, making it distinct from the works of both earlier and later generations of Jewish writers. Inspired by Andreev's frightening story, and building on his successful experiments with adaptive translations, Gnesin managed to combine Andreev's dark insights about the human psyche with the endless allusions to

Jewish classic literature, resulting in a Hebrew narrative of immense expressionistic power.

The first three chapters of this dissertation discuss Gnesin's life and work and their mutual influence on one another. This discussion forms the necessary foundation for answering the major question about Gnesin: who was he? The next chapter explores Gnesin's multilingual environment, his choice of literary language and mechanisms of his literary production in Hebrew. It offers an alternative view of Gnesin as a Jewish-Russian writer. It also examines questions of literary canonicity and the Zionists interpretation of literature. I will especially focus on the formation and functioning of the Israeli canon in revisiting Gnesin and redefining his place in modern Jewish literature.

Chapter 4: "Such a man was among us, and we barely knew him:" Gnesin's place in the Jewish literature[508]

At Gnesin's funeral someone approached David Frishman and asked, "This dead writer, who, who exactly was he?"[509] In fact, Frishman was not in a much better position to answer this crucial question than any modern reader or researcher is one hundred years later. In this chapter, I intend to demonstrate the crucial role of the biographical study of Gnesin in the analysis of his multilingual environment and works, his canonical status, and his place in modern Jewish literature. Indeed, was Gnesin a Hebrew writer because he wrote in Hebrew? Does writing a story in Yiddish also make him a Yiddish writer? Paraphrasing Naomi Seidman, one may alternatively ask: Is there a Hebrew Gnesin and a Yiddish Gnesin, or are they the "same" author?[510] Maybe one can simply call him a Jewish writer because he was a Jew and wrote for Jewish readers, many of whom could easily identify with his characters. It is, however, unlikely that non-Ashkenazi Jews could read his works in the same way that Ashkenazi Jews did; so would it be better to call Gnesin a Jewish-Russian or Jewish-European author, since he was born, raised, and lived in the Eastern European part of the Russian Empire?

4.1. An Author of Modern Jewish Literature

In one of her essays, the Israeli writer Shulamit Hareven writes that "a child who learns a language […] is already learning subconsciously the system of thinking peculiar

[508] These words are from David Frishman's essay "U. N. Gnesin," published in *Ha-Tsefirah* on the thirtieth day after Gnesin's death. See *Uri Nisan Gnesin: mivkhar ma'amerey* 42.
[509] *Uri Nisan Gnesin: mivkhar ma'amerey* 39.
[510] Naomi Seidman, *A Marriage Made in Heaven: the Sexual Politics of Hebrew and Yiddish* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1997) 10.

to his language, and also its mental categories."[511] This statement has a particular importance for biographical studies: once learned in childhood, "the system of thinking" and "its mental categories" stays with the author and directly influences his life and works. These categories are unique to every language, and ultimately it is these categories that culturally define the people who share one native language. I maintain that literary studies can significantly benefit from a sensitivity to this cultural uniqueness.[512]

A good example is Hannan Hever's illuminating study of the modern Hebrew canon, in which he applies post-colonial theory to Hebrew literature and exposes the "hegemonic Zionist 'cover story' that represses and excludes social, ethnic, and national minorities."[513] Discussing cultural and literary debates at the turn of the twentieth century in Galicia, and particularly Brener's negative criticism of a few Galician Jewish writers, Hever looks at these debates as a power struggle. Hever concludes that the Galician writers Ruvn Fan (ראובן פאהאן) (1878-1939) and Yitskhok Fernhof (1866-1919) were excluded from the emerging Hebrew canon because they were writing "minor literature" and did not follow the standards of the "major" literary establishment set by Brener and Berdichevski.[514] While this may be true, a closer look at the aesthetic qualities of Fan's and Fernhof's works, and a brief excursus on Jewish life in Lemberg (Lvov), where Brener lived in 1908, can make a valuable contribution to Hever's discussion of these writers.[515] This approach demonstrates the influence of historical,

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[511] Shulamit Hareven, "The Limits of My Language Are the Limits of My World," *Hebrew Writers on Writing*, ed. Peter Cole (San Antonio: Trinity UP, 2008) 189.

[512] This is especially important in those cases when the language of literary works and the original language of a certain theory belong to different "systems of thinking" or when a later theory is applied to an earlier text and "mental categories," become different because of the language change.

[513] Hannan Hever, *Producing the Modern Hebrew Canon: Nation Building and Minority Discourse* (New York: New York UP, 2002) 4.

[514] Hannan Hever, *Producing the Modern Hebrew Canon* 11-45.

[515] These shortcomings have been reflected by several reviewers of Hever's book. See Nancy E. Berg, "Book Review," *Prooftexts* 24:2 (Spring 2004): 240-248; Risa Domb, "Book review." *Journal of Jewish Studies* 54:1 (2003) 184-186.

cultural and linguistic factors on these authors' literary production, and argues that historical background and aesthetic qualities equally contribute to the nature of their literary works, as well as to their exclusion from the emerging Hebrew canon.

Lemberg, the capital of eastern Galicia, was particularly famous for its mixed national, linguistic, ethnic, and cultural population.[516] Soon after the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese war (1904-1905), many Jewish refugees and deserters of the Russian army arrived and settled down in Lemberg, the nearest Austro-Hungarian city across the border.[517] The relations between local Jews and the newcomers were marked with hostility because Russian and Lithuanian Jews (Litvaks) traditionally viewed Galician Jews (Galitsyaner) to be greedy, lazy, dirty, and ignorant people, a prejudice that is reflected in many anecdotes. In addition to these cultural tensions, there were several objective factors resulted in Brener's sharp criticism of Fan, and particularly of Fernhof. Both writers grew up in Galicia and were much less influenced by Russian culture and literature than was Brener, who was an ardent follower of Dostoevskiĭ and Tolstoĭ. One can say that the two parties not only spoke different dialects of Yiddish, but also expressed themselves in different literary languages.

Fan, for instance, was known as an amateur ethnographer and historian of the Karaite folklore.[518] In 1908, Fan published his first collection of stories, *Me-khaye ha-karaim* [From the Life of the Karaites]. Mikhail Kizilov, a historian of Galician Karaites, writes that Fan's book is "abundant in scrupulous ethnographic descriptions and details of an epigraphic and linguistic character, which are absolutely superfluous in a work of

[516] For a brief account of Lvov's role in the history of Jewish literature see Shachar M. Pinsker, *Literary Passports: The Making of Modernist Hebrew Fiction in Europe* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2011).
[517] Among such Russian immigrants was Gershon Shofman, a close friend of Brener.
[518] In 1897-1914, Fan lived in the town of Halicz, which had the only Karaite community in Galicia. See Nurit Govrin, "Fahn, Re'uven." *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, online, Internet, 6 Aug. 2010.

fiction."[519] For Brener, who was interested mostly in aesthetic values of literature, Fan's collection was not a work of fiction, but rather a piece of scholarship.

The same year, another Galician author, Fernhof, published in a book titled *Me-agadot he-khayim* (From the Legends of Life) which, according to contemporary critics, was indeed a mediocre work. For example, the Hebrew literary critic, editor, and political activist Israel Cohen (1905-1896) wrote: "[...] the line between adaptation, translation and the original [writing] was not clear [...] the style was sloppy, and the purpose blurred."[520] It is hardly possible that an experienced editor like Brener would not criticize the literary shortcomings of Fernhof's book, doing so on purely aesthetic and not on ideological grounds of fighting its pro-Diaspora stance. Moreover, Fernhof's son, William, wrote a memoir which provided evidence that Fernhof did not support Jewish assimilation: "Every place my father found himself, he was the head of the Zionists and Hebraists, and he filled our hearts, the hearts of children, with a love to Zion, and if not for the wars we would have made *aliyah* to the Land of Israel as *khalutzim*."[521] This memoir unambiguously testifies that Fernhof was a Zionist and did not support the assimilationists.

I argue that such factors as personal relationships, cultural atmosphere, and literary quality of the works under discussion have been critical to the authoritative formation of the Hebrew canon by two people, Berdichevski and Brener. All these factors can be sufficiently explored by means of historical study of authors, critics, editors and readers. By analogy, the same study is required for an understanding of Gnesin's place in Jewish literature and his canonical status in modern Israel.

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[519] Mikhail Kizilov, *The Karaites of Galicia: an Ethnoreligious Minority Among the Ashkenazim, the Turks, and the Slavs, 1772-1945* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2008) 16.
[520] *Sefer Buchach: matsevat zikaron le-kehila kdosha [The Book of Buchach: A Memorial to a Holy Community*, ed. Israel Kohen (Tel Aviv: Am oved: [1955]) 125.
[521] *Sefer Buchach* 128.

Until recently, many important aspects of Jewish life globally, and particularly among the Eastern European Diaspora, were regulated and affected by the Talmud. In his monumental book on the history of the Yiddish language, Max Weinreich defined Jewishness as the way of the Talmud, the permanent foundation code.[522] The Talmud includes hundreds of laws and regulations derived from the Torah by Jewish scholars between the second and the fifth centuries. Among the most important questions these scholars asked regarding multiple or contradicting opinions in the Talmud were "Who said that?" or "Whose opinion is that?" The importance of the authorial voice penetrated the Jewish "system of thinking" and consequently became one of the "mental categories" which Jews had been learning through their language since early childhood.

For Gnesin and many other Jewish writers of his generation, the importance of the author was intensified by the Russian regard for a writer as "a regent of our thoughts," as Pushkin had called English poet Byron.[523] This sense of significance obviously affected Jewish writers and readers of the Pale of Settlement. In the study of Gnesin's works, the figure of an author can be reconstructed out of the three distinct components, each one requiring its own research strategy. The primary component is the knowledge about Gnesin's personality, evidence of which is found in his memoirs and letters; the indirect component includes secondary information from his contemporaries, such as memoirs, essays, and obituaries; finally, the external component includes scholarship about Gnesin and his works. Obtaining primary information about Gnesin entails significant difficulties

[522] See Max Weinreich, *History of the Yiddish Language*, vol. 1 (New York: YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 2008) 209.

[523] This expression comes from Pushkin's poem "To the Sea" (1825): И вслед за ним, как бури шум, / Другой от нас умчался гений, / Другой властитель наших дум. [And following him like the roar of a storm / Another man of genius has left us, / Another regent of our thoughts.] The view of an author as a citizen, and only after that as an artist, has deep roots in Russian culture. Pushkin often compared a poet to a prophet, and encouraged him to "burn humane hearts with a word." See more on that in Chapter 2, Section 2.4.

caused by peculiarities of his personality. In their memoirs, many of his friends and acquaintances mention his extraordinarily reserved and reticent character.[524] According to David Frishman, "it would be easier to get a bar of gold from a mountain than to get another word from his mouth."[525] Gnesin rarely spoke in public, and, in social situations, he would typical sit quietly in the corner. This is why most accounts of Gnesin present their authors' impressions rather then transmit Gnesin's own words. Another direct source is made up of approximately 200 letters that Gnesin wrote over the course of his short life.[526] Apparently, for such an introverted person, it was much easier to express himself in writing – when the "meaning of what is spoken," using the words of Gadamer, "exists purely for itself, completely detached from all emotional elements of expression and communication."[527]

Thus, with the exception of a small circle of relatives and friends, Gnesin was almost a stranger in the eyes his contemporaries. Readers of Hebrew literature knew his name but not his persona. Soon after his death, Frishman wrote, "such man was among us, and we barely knew him."[528] One way to expand upon the existing knowledge of Gnesin's life is to extract new facts from relevant letters and memoirs. At the same time, external scholarship presents the possibility of reviewing and contesting previous accepted information. It seems that of all the existing directions of study, a functional analysis of Gnesin's language best contests his common designation as a Hebrew writer,

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[524] See Chapter 1.
[525] *Uri Nisan Gnesin: mivkhar ma'amerey* 39.
[526] Most of these letters are only available in printed sources. In 1914, Brener published 60 letters in *Hatsida*. Later, more letters appeared in *Davar*, *Daf le-sifrut*, *Mishmar* and other periodicals. The most comprehensive collection of Gnesin's letters was published as a separate volume of *Kitve Uri Nisan Gnesin [Works by U. N. Gnesin]* (Merkhavya: Sifriyat po'alim, 1946). I was able to locate several letters in Israeli archival institutions, but the majority of the manuscripts are either lost or kept in private collections.
[527] Gadamer, Hans-Georg. "Truth and Method" *Critical Theory Since 1965*. Ed. by Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle. – Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1986. p. 848.
[528] *Uri Nisan Gnesin: mivkhar ma'amerey* 42.

and provides a reasonable answer to the question asked at his funeral: "Who exactly was he?"

4.2. JEWISH LANGUAGES IN THE DIASPORA

For the last 2,000 years, the majority of Jews have rarely, if ever, used only one language. Even though there is no universal definition of this linguistic phenomenon, Jewish bilingualism became an established fact in modern Jewish scholarship,[529] although it is not clear how well languages have to be mastered for a person to be classified as bilingual. Some scholars require speakers to be equally proficient in both languages, while another school of thought considers people withbasic communicative skills in a second language to be bilingual. In the 1990s, the British linguist Vivian Cook claimed that very few multilingual speakers perfectly satisfy these two extreme definitions. Most people fit somewhere between these poles of proficiency and are called multi-competent rather than bilingual speakers.[530] The concept of multi-competency is especially useful in the discussion of Jewish languages in the Diaspora because of their obvious differences in function and acquisition.

Since late antiquity, when Hebrew ceased to be a vernacular, knowledge of it became an exclusive prerogative of men, supported by religious laws. Hebrew became a liturgical language, a "language of (quasi-oral) religious rites,"[531] as Robert Singerman called it. Occasionally, it was used for non-religious purposes, as the lingua franca of Jews from different countries. In contrast, Jewish women were traditionally exempt from learning Hebrew, and spoke either their national languages (Spanish, French, English,

[529] In the works of Max Weinreich, Samuel Niger, David Shneer, Joshua Fishman, Anita Norich, Naomi Seidman, and Dan Miron, just to name a few.
[530] *Language and Bilingual Cognition*, ed. Vivian Cook and Benedetta Bassetti (New York: Psychology Press, 2011).
[531] Robert Singerman, *Jewish Translation History: A Bibliography of Bibliographies and Studies* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 2002) x.

Polish, and others), or another Jewish language written in Hebrew script, such as Ladino or Yiddish.[532] Children, who spent their first few years of life mostly in the company of women, first acquired the language of their mothers; according to the critical period hypothesis proposed by linguist Eric Lenneberg in 1967, linguistic ability emerges between the ages of two and three years.[533] Later, Jewish girls were ideally taught to be literate in their vernacular, while boys were instructed in Hebrew and Aramaic. The main goal of instruction was the ability to read and understand written texts: students would read a Hebrew phrase aloud, and then translate and discuss it in their native language. Therefore the Jews of the Diaspora grew up speaking a mother tongue, which was determined by their geographical location, and were also proficient, to varying degrees, in other languages both Jewish and non-Jewish.

For Gnesin, as well as for the majority of the Jewish population of the Pale of Settlement in the nineteenth century, the mother tongue was Yiddish, the first language that he heard and spoke. There is no doubt that he was also exposed to other languages, such as Hebrew and Russian; Hebrew was used at home to recite blessings, and Russian could be heard on the street from a Gentile neighbor. However, neither of these languages was a fully functional linguistic tool for young Gnesin, because he did not use them on a regular basis for communication. When his formal education began, Hebrew became his second language. Later Gnesin learned Russian, German, French, and English. Apparently, he knew Russian much better than the rest of these languages, because he lived in a Russian-speaking environment and had the chance to use it every day. There is no reliable information about when Gnesin began his formal studies. Bearing in mind,

[532] For different reasons, a limited number of Jewish women throughout history managed to become proficient in Hebrew, which by no means changes the general situation.
[533] Matthew Saxton, *Child Language: Acquisition and Development* (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 2010) 53.

however, that Jewish education was a priority for his father, and that it is difficult to simultaneously study several languages, it is plausible that Gnesin had first mastered Hebrew, and only then learned Russian and other non-Jewish languages. Gnesin's letters contain many examples of code switching between Hebrew and Russian, indicating his proficient knowledge of Russian.

Following Steven Krashen's hypothesis, it is important to make a distinction between acquisition, as "the process by which young children develop a first language," and learning, which is "a conscious process that enables a learner 'to know about' the second language."[534] Gnesin's study of Hebrew (and Aramaic) was focused on the comprehension of written texts. He was neither taught to independently speak in Hebrew, using his own words, nor to participate in a normal conversation. In other words, while his first language, Yiddish, was acquired through authentic daily communication, his Hebrew was learned as a second language by means of formal study.[535] Attempts to evaluate the "nativeness" of Gnesin's Hebrew are meaningless: functionally Gnesin's Hebrew is so different from his native Yiddish that it constitutes a separate category of usage reserved for written language, which cannot be native by definition.

The relationship between Yiddish and Hebrew can be best described as diglossia, which is quite different from bilingualism. As Charles Ferguson noted, the latter assumes the functional equality of two languages, while the former assumes one of the two languages has higher prestige: one language is reserved for religious practice, scholarship, education, and other spheres of high culture, while the other language, usually acquired as the mother tongue, is used for daily communication.[536] Another

[534] Colin Baker, and Sylvia Prys. Jones, *Encyclopedia of Bilingualism and Bilingual Education* (New York: Multilingual Matters Ltd., 1998) 649.
[535] Steven D. Krashen, *Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning* (Oxford: Pergamon P, 1982).
[536] Charles A. Ferguson "Diglossia." *Word* 15 (1959): 325-340.

important distinction to be added is that children acquire the "low" language naturally at home, and master the "high" language through a formal education. As a result, the entire community has the same proficiency in its mother tongue but is stratified according to their knowledge of the second language, which is precisely the case with the Hebrew-Yiddish diglossia in communities of nineteenth century Eastern European Jews.

A full picture of the linguistic environment in which Gnesin lived and wrote is more complicated because it has to make room for Russian as the official spoken and literary language of the state. The diglossic hierarchy of Hebrew-Yiddish appears to be valid only within the isolated Jewish community. On a national scale these Jewish languages merge into a single unit, and create diglossic relationship with Russian, or polyglossia (see Fig. 5):

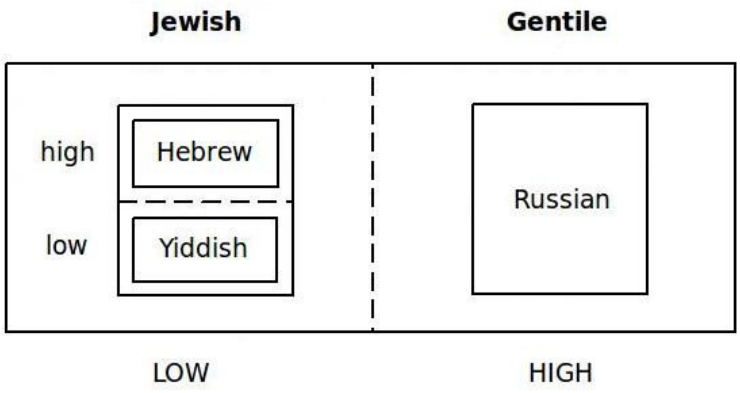

Figure 5. Gnesin's polyglossic environment.[537]

Another distinct feature of Gnesin's polyglossia, particularly regarding the high languages, is the fact that at his time and place Hebrew was neither a spoken national language in the full sense of the word, nor anyone's mother tongue. It was a written

[537] The term 'environment' does not include every language that Gnesin might have learned to the different degree of proficiency, but only those that were used among his peers for communication depending on the situation. Therefore, European languages are excluded as they were not commonly used either in speech or in writing.

language comprising a huge corpus of texts, which was organized around the Torah, and served as a foundation for all Jewish life. Although Hebrew has the status of *lashon ha-kodesh* [sacred language] in the Jewish tradition, its character is nonetheless subsidiary. Rabbinical authorities criticized a purely linguistic interest in the Hebrew language *per se* to be a "waste of time, and some even considered such study heresy."[538]

Two major factors determine the unique position of Hebrew in Gnesin's polyglossia. First, Hebrew was traditionally taught to children as a graphic representation of written texts, and as such was associated with the images of letters rather than with the sounds of speech. This prevents the possibility of achieving native proficiency, since all first languages are acquired acoustically. There is no doubt that students were somewhat exposed to oral Hebrew, and learned how to vocalize written texts, because oftentimes they had to be recited in public or in private. But even in such cases the words had to be read aloud from a page, not constructed together by memory. Second, the absence of most vowel signs in the traditional Hebrew writing system intensified the visual role of a printed page, bring Hebrew closer to logographies in its phonetic ambiguity. It must be noted, however, that the revival of Hebrew in the twentieth century has almost completely eliminated these two factors: the fast growth in the number of native speakers and the introduction of new spelling conventions have dramatically changed modes of Hebrew acquisition and function.

In fact, Gnesin had to shift his linguistic framework when adjusting to Semitic consonant spelling. For Gnesin, nineteenth century Hebrew was as different from his native Yiddish as it is from the modern Hebrew of today. It may seem strange that Gnesin did not choose to write in Yiddish; it was his mother tongue, and having a phonetic script, one could as easily write in Yiddish as one could speak it. Was it not more natural for

[538] William Chomsky, *David Kimhi's Hebrew Grammar (Mikhlol)* (New York: Bloch, 1952) xxviii.

Gnesin to write in a native language that he used in his daily life? And if Yiddish was not the better candidate, why was it still used by some writers who shared Gnesin's linguistic background?

The choice of literary language

The fact is that Gnesin hardly had a choice of literary language other than Hebrew. It does not mean that he could not express himself in Yiddish or Russian (which he could, as evidenced by his letters), but under the influence of objective circumstances, no other language could be a better or even a comparable choice for him. Russian should not be considered at all, because Gnesin learned it too late to achieve a sufficient command of its literary conventions. Gnesin only attempted one project in Russian, a translation from Hebrew, but even this undertaking was completed together with a native Russian speaker.[539]

Certain groups of Jews actively promoted Yiddish as a literary language, but it was hardly possible to change the historical functional division: being a written language, Hebrew was used mostly for writing, and Yiddish was first and foremost a tool of oral communication. The literariness of the former was supported by a tremendous textual canon originating in the early days of human civilization, while the latter was a relatively young language with a much lower cultural status. Still, there were writers who used Yiddish with great success, despite its low prestige. There are two reasons that can explain this phenomenon.

In Gnesin's time, the Jewish political life in the Pale of Settlement offered an impressive number of possible affiliations, all of which, however, can be broadly categorized into the "nationalist" or "socialist" camps. The former group advocated for

[539] See Chapter 2.

an autonomous Jewish state in Palestine with Hebrew as its spoken language, and the latter group accepted life in the Diaspora, giving preference to the use of Yiddish. There was much crossover between these two schools of thought, bringing to life such movements as Zionist Socialism. In general, however, a decision to write in Yiddish required a certain sympathy with the Bund or other socialist movement. Unlike his friend Brener, who wrote quite a few articles in Yiddish, Gnesin was critical of Jewish socialism;[540] therefore, Yiddish did not attract him politically.

Another reason to authors chose to write in Yiddish was their insufficient knowledge of Hebrew. Since Hebrew had to be learned formally, there is no doubt that some writers had a better command of it than the others. Most encyclopedia entries on Jewish male writers born in the nineteenth century begin with nearly the same phrase: "[...] received a traditional Jewish education..." It became an unquestioned view that this education enabled effortless switching between Hebrew and Yiddish, making Jewish writers "bilingual." In reality, "Jewish education" was different in both quality and quantity. There was a huge gap between the knowledge of Hebrew acquired at a *kheyder* from an elementary teacher and the knowledge of Hebrew gained after years of study in *yeshivas* with the best scholars of the time. Gnesin had a superior knowledge of the Hebrew language and its literature because he studied under the guidance of his father, Yehoyshue Nosn, a prominent scholar and the head of a *yeshiva*.[541] It should be noted that "knowledge" in this context is understood as erudition in the field of Hebrew texts, and does not include linguistic creativity, which is undefinable in any language. A brief look at the main three classics of Yiddish literature confirms this assumption.

[540] See Chapter 1.
[541] See Chapter 1.

Mendele Moykher-sforim (Sholem-Yankev Abramovich) is known to be a "grandfather" of Yiddish literature, and at the same time a Hebrew "novelist of the highest rank."[542] His father was known for his linguistic talents, knew the entire Tanakh, wrote in Hebrew, and served as a state rabbi. As a child, Abramovich was taught by a private tutor who put special emphasis on Hebrew.[543] Later, he studied Talmud at the eminent *yeshivas* in Slutsk and Vilno. Throughout his writing career, he used both languages, translated many of his own Yiddish works into Hebrew, and came to be considered an important figure in modern Hebrew fiction.

Yitskhok Leybush Perets, the "father" of Yiddish literature, was born to a family of merchants. His pious father arranged private Hebrew education for him, including the Talmud and the commentaries. From tutors, Perets also learned Russian, German and Polish, and later taught himself French. He did not study in *yeshiva*, but his autodidactic readings as an adolescent included Rambam (Maimonides), Jewish mysticism, and Hebrew Enlightenment literature.[544] Like Mendele, Perets wrote in both languages, and translated his Yiddish works into Hebrew. According to Yosef Klausner, "not only in Yiddish literature, but also in Hebrew, he is the originator of the short, compact artistic literary sketch, the fine, delicate description, the symbolical story, and the allegorical legend."[545] However, his contribution to Hebrew fiction was not as impressive as that of Mendele.

The third Yiddish classic writer, Sholem-Aleykhem, was also born to a family of merchants. He studied for a few years at a *kheyder* and was later encouraged by his father

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[542] Joseph Klausner, *A History of the Modern Hebrew Literature (1785-1930)* (London: M. L. Cainlingold, 1932) 130.
[543] Ken Frieden, *Classic Yiddish Fiction: Abramovitsh, Sholem Aleichem, and Peretz* (Albany, N.Y.: State U of New York P, 1995) 18-22.
[544] Ruth R. Wisse, "Peretz, Yitskhok Leybush." *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, online, Internet, 12 Nov. 2010.
[545] Joseph Klausner, *A History of the Modern Hebrew Literature* 139.

to learn Russian. Instead of going to a *yeshiva*, Sholem-Aleykhem attended Russian secondary school. He began writing in Hebrew without much success, and then switched to Yiddish, becoming one of the most popular Jewish writers of all time. Unlike Mendele and Perets, Sholem-Aleykhem is considered to be an exclusively Yiddish writer: Klausner, Shaked, and Halkin do not mention his name in their histories of modern Hebrew literature. Sholem-Aleykhem did not translate his Yiddish works into Hebrew himself, but let his son-in-law, Hebrew and Yiddish writer Y. D. Berkovich, do the translation. Apparently, Sholem-Aleykhem's knowledge of Hebrew was inferior to that of both Mendele and Perets.

Comparing the education of these three writers demonstrates a clear correlation between their command of Hebrew and their position within the Hebrew-Yiddish literary continuum: Sholem-Aleykhem's wrote in Yiddish because he was less proficient in Hebrew than he was in Yiddish. Gnesin's expertise in Hebrew, which he developed at his father's *yeshiva*, made writing in Yiddish unnecessary. In other words, he could not write in Russian, and had no reasons to write in Yiddish, leaving Hebrew to be his best choice. However, while Gnesin wrote in one language, he actively used three, and this phenomenon is reflected in his Hebrew prose.

The mechanism of literary production in Hebrew

Modern studies in psycholinguistics conclude that the complex cognitive process of externalizing thoughts and emotions that are activated by writing consists of three parts: planning, translating, and revising.[546] Ideas are mentally created from retrieved memories (planning), turned into the word of written product (translating), and then

[546] See *Handbook of Psychology*, ed. Irwing B. Weiner, vol. 7: *Educational Psychology* (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2003); Patrick O'Brian Holt, and Noel Williams, *Computers and Writing: State of the Art* (Oxford: Intellect Books, 1992) 188.

finalized by means of reading and editing (revising).[547] Although there is no agreement among scholars regarding the connection between cognition and language, recent work in cognitive linguistics (George Lakoff, Dan Slobin, Lera Boroditsky, and others) proves that languages do influence the thoughts of their speakers.[548] In an event when a writer knows more than one language or writes in a non-native language, the planning stage is most effectively executed in the mother tongue – a primary, and therefore more competent, oral language.[549] Thus, the final written product may or may not be the same as its author's mother tongue. Application of this psycholinguistic concept of writing to Gnesin's works suggests the universal hypothesis of a "literary hyper-language," which is applicable to Eastern European literature in Hebrew in particular, and to any other literature produced in a polyglossic society.

Formally, all of Gnesin's fiction is written in Hebrew, except for one story in Yiddish, which he later translated into Hebrew.[550] However, a holistic psycholinguistic account of his writing presents Hebrew not as an autonomous and self-sufficient tool of literary production, but rather as the tip of the iceberg. The full writing process involved a hyper-language which consisted of three integral parts and coincided with elements of Gnesin's polyglossic environment: his native language (Yiddish), the national language (Russian), and the written language of the final product (Hebrew). Writing in a Jewish literary hyper-language involves same stages as writing in a mother tongue, although

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[547] *Writing as a Learning Tool: Integrating Theory and Practice*, ed. Päivi Tynjälä, Lucia Mason, and Kirsti Lonka (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001) 9.

[548] See George Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Other Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal About the Mind* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1989); Dan I. Slobin, "From 'Thought and Language' to 'Thinking for Speaking.' *Rethinking Linguistic Relativity*, ed. John Joseph Gumperz (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999); Lera Boroditsky, "How Does Our Language Shape the Way We Think?" *What's Next: Dispatches on the Future of Science*, ed. Max Brockman (New York: Vintage Books, 2009) 116-129. For more on the principle of linguistic relativity see Chapter 3.

[549] Donald Davis, *Writing as a Second Language: From Experience to Story to Prose* (Little Rock, Arkansas: August House, 2000).

[550] For more on this story see Chapter 3.

each stage is processed by different language centers. Ideas and emotions are retrieved from memory (Yiddish), converted or translated (Hebrew), and later read and revised (Hebrew). Russian also has a specific role at each stage of this process. In the planning stage, both semantic and phonetic images of Russian origin are evoked, since prototypes of many of Gnesin's characters used Russian in their daily life.[551] Russian, being a literary language, also affected the translation and revision stages by providing certain writing models that are absent in Hebrew classic texts.[552]

In the second stage of production, creative writing in a hyper-language acquires its distinct set of characteristics, which differentiates it from the second stage of creative writing in a mother tongue. In the second stage of writing in a hyper-language a cognitive translation of mental images into verbal forms is supplemented by a lingual translation from one language into another. Therefore, one can make the conclusion: although Hebrew is the language of Gnesin's fiction, he actually uses a hyper-language which can be most accurately defined as "translative Hebrew." In fact, beginning in Late Antiquity, when Hebrew had been replaced by other vernaculars (around the second century CE), and ending in the twentieth century when Hebrew had been revived as a modern spoken language, nearly every literary work was written in translative Hebrew. From a linguistic perspective, this fact separates the authors of these works from Hebrew of the twentieth century for whom Hebrew was a native language.[553]

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[551] Obviously, planning could be affected in the same way by Hebrew, although in situations relevant for Gnesin's fiction, its phonetic input was much more limited in comparison with Russian.

[552] One such model is a dialogue. See Itamar Even-Zohar, "Gnessin's Dialogue and its Russian Models," *Polysystem Studies* (Poetics Today 11:1 [1990]) 131-153.

[553] A similar difference may exist between the authors of works in translative Hebrew and those writers who spoke native Hebrew before it was replaced by Aramaic and Greek, and later by other languages, although an extremely limited amount of literature from that period is available for research.

4.3. GNESIN: A QUEST FOR DEFINITION

The two cognitive acts of naming and knowing are closely related: the latter is impossible without the former. As stated by the French commentator on Lacanian psychoanalysis, Juan-David Nasio, "a correct interpretation consists precisely in giving the right name to an event that emerges."[554] Thus, one cannot know Gnesin's works without first naming what kind of author Gnesin was. Traditionally, Gnesin is identified as "a Hebrew writer." This label refers to the language Gnesin chose to write in, Hebrew, rather than any national affiliations with the Hebrew people. However, categorizing him as a Hebrew writer dilutes the complexity of the linguistic processes he undertook in his writing, which involved "translative Hebrew" rather than "native Hebrew."

Those who deny Gnesin's and other European Jewish author's works the status of Hebrew literature are not without precedent. It was first propagated by the Hebrew poet Uriel Halperin, better known by his pen name Yonatan Ratosh (1908-1981), a leader of the radical movement of Canaanism.[555] Ratosh insisted that Hebrew literature can be written only by Hebrews, living in their own land and speaking their national language. He provocatively claimed that Hebrew literature is not Jewish, and contrasted the values of the Jewish Diaspora with those of the Hebrew nation.[556]

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[554] Juan-David Nasio, *Five Lessons on the Psychoanalytic Theory of Jacques Lacan* (Albany: State U of New York P, 1998) 48.

[555] Canaanism is a political and cultural movement in Palestine associated with a group of writers and scholars who were most active in the 1940s. Although this group was small in numbers, it had a significant influence on the emerging Israeli identity, particularly among youth and intellectuals. Historically, Canaanism was an extreme offshoot of radical right-wing revisionism, which hoped to create a new Hebrew nation disaffiliated with Judaism, Zionism and the Jewish Diaspora. True Hebrew literature, according to the views of the Canaanites, is the one which is written in Hebrew and rooted in the Biblical and Ugaritic tradition.

[556] Yonatan Ratosh, "Israeli or Jewish Literature?" *What is Jewish Literature?* ed. Hana Wirth-Nesher (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1994) 88-94.

The subject of Jewish literature

A reasonable way to eliminate contradictions between Hebrew, translative Hebrew, and Yiddish is to use a collective term "Jewish," which accurately describes the role of these three languages within Gnesin's polyglossia, as opposed to Russian and other non-Jewish languages. However, calling Gnesin a Jewish writer and placing his works in the controversial category of Jewish literature creates additional problems.[557] In a study of Jewish literature, Hana Wirth-Nesher contends that there is no consensus regarding the definition of "Jewish literature," and it is not likely that there ever will be one.[558]

Indeed, there are many aspects of "Jewishness," but none of them alone is capable of defining a literature in an exclusive way, because it is always possible to find a counterexample. For instance, defining Jewish literature as a literature written by Jews is problematic for at least two reasons: there is no single understanding of who a Jew is, and there is too much diversity in the Jewish cultural universe to produce a common foundation for literary texts. More criteria exist, such as particular topics, languages, the emphasis of religious traditions or the alienation of the author; however, each of these elements can be compromised by specific texts that are devoted to a "wrong" topic or language, and still be commonly accepted as Jewish. This situation made Dan Miron completely reject the idea of a unified Jewish literature. In a sharp polemic essay on modern Hebrew literature he urges us to refrain from "applying our habitual reductive procedures," and claims that "Jewish history in modern times […] produced […] two or three or four independent Jewish literatures as well as many Jewish-oriented literary

[557] In the broad sense of the word, Jewish literature represents every historical, geographical, religious and cultural group of Jewish writers in the world. However, in my study of Gnesin, I use this term in a much more narrow sense, referring to European Jewish literature.
[558] *What is Jewish Literature?* 3.

developments, which evolved within the contexts of non-Jewish literatures." [559] The concept of several independent Jewish literatures is partially the result of the fragmentations of Jewish national culture, caused by the historical developments of language and society, the two major factors in any literary process. Even nations that have peacefully lived on the same land and have spoken the same language since birth are no exceptions; their social, cultural, political, and linguistic development also produces changes, and can be neither described nor understood without them. When a literature does not reflect these developments directly, it still bears their social and linguistic features, which in turn defines the literature. In other words, it is quite feasible to define any particular literary process precisely by reducing it to a certain period, language, theme, or any other relevant criterion.

The many changes, including the most devastating ones, that Jews witnessed in the course of their history has made Jewish literature so fragmented that some modern scholars adopt Miron's concept of multiple Jewish literatures and abandon the "act of defining, circumscribing, and demarcating" Hebrew literature, claiming that "the boundaries have proved elusive."[560] While acceptance of the multiple Jewish literatures theory constitutes a legitimate methodology for research, the concept of independent Jewish literatures raises questions, because it automatically suggests the existence of independent writers, and ultimately independent Jewish peoples. This concept is not new: more than a century ago one of the first Yiddish literary critics, Bal-Makhshoves (Yisroel Elyashev), argued against it:

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[559] Dan Miron, "Modern Hebrew Literature: Zionist Perspectives and Israeli Realities," *What is Jewish Literature?* 95.

[560] *Modern Jewish Literatures: Intersections and Boundaries*, ed. Sheila E. Jelen, Michael P. Kramer, and L. Scott Lerner (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2011) 1.

> Jewish literature, God forbid, is not dying. It is one, and it has one name, but it comes to the reader in two forms, balancing one against another like the scale-pans of a scale. […] We do have two languages and a dozen spirits of foreign languages, but we have only one literature.[561]

In fact, all the literary movements identified by Miron as related to *Haskalah*, Hasidism, and secular Yiddish culture, are connected by a complex web of interdependencies. Participants in these "literatures" were by no means isolated from one another, as it was common to write and read in several languages. Thus, it is more reasonable to conceptualize Jewish literature as a tree with many branches where each one is firmly attached to the same root, and freely grows in its own direction. Further developing the view of Bal-Makhshoves, one can define more specific offshoot of Jewish literature beyond the major branches of Hebrew and Yiddish. These offshoots reflect a wide variety of fields such as geography (Jewish literature of Galicia), time (modern Jewish literature), ideology (Zionist literature), religious affiliation (Hasidic literature), demography (women's literature), or even a combination of some or all of these (Yiddish literature for children in Poland), depending on the goal of discussion. One of these branches is a Jewish-Russian literature in Hebrew or Yiddish.

Gnesin as a Jewish-Russian writer

In the nineteenth century and in the first half of the twentieth century, most Eastern European Jews lived in the Russian Empire, and from a geographic perspective can be identified as Russian Jews regardless of any other affiliations. The phrase *russkiĭ yevreĭ* [Russian Jew] and the corresponding adjective *russko-yevreĭskiĭ* [Russian-Jewish] became common figures of speech in the discussions of Jewish literature in the Russian

[561] Bal-Makhshoves, "Tsvey shprakhn - eyn eyntsike litaratur [Two Languages - One Literature]," *Geklibene shriftn [Selected Works]*, vol. 2 (Varshe [Warsaw]: Kooperativ "Bikher," 1929) 59, 64-65.

press. These expressions were traditionally used for the literature written by Jews in the Russian language; everything related to Hebrew or Yiddish was either *yevreĭskiĭ* [Jewish], or more specifically, *drevne-yevreĭskiĭ* [ancient-Jewish] and *novo-yevreĭskiĭ* [neo-Jewish] respectively. The idea that Russian-Jewish literature must be written in Russian is supported by several modern scholars: the literary historian and translator Shimon Markish (1931-2003) defines Russian-Jewish literature as a "Jewish literary creativity (broadly conceived) in the Russian language […] one of the branches of the New Jewish letters."[562] For American Slavist Alice Nakhimovsky, a Russian-Jewish writer is "any Russian-language writer of Jewish origin for whom the question of Jewish identity is, on some level, compelling."[563]

It is important to note that the passionate criticism of the biographical approach to literary studies made by Itamar Even-Zohar is hardly applicable to the case of Russian-Jewish literature. In an essay on Israeli Hebrew literature, he wrote that "only a nationalistic Jewish approach, or a racist antisemitic one, or ignorance […] would adopt the term 'Jewish literature' on the basis of the origin of writers."[564] For Even-Zohar, the crucial element of Jewish literature is not the writers' ethnicity, but rather the Hebrew cultural framework in which they exist. Developing this idea, he claims that in the early twentieth century Yiddish literature liberated itself from any relations with Hebrew, and therefore separated itself from Jewish literature: while recognizing Sholem-Aleykhem as a Jewish writer, Even-Zohar excludes the work of later writers such as Yitskhok Bashevis, from the realm of Jewish literature.[565] However, it is common among modern

[562] Cited in *An Anthology of Jewish -Russian Literature: Two centuries of Dual Identity in Prose and Poetry*, ed. by Maxim D. Shrayer (New York: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 2007) xxxviii.
[563] Alice Stone Nakhimovsky, *Russian-Jewish Literature and Identity: Jabotinsky, Babel, Grossman, Galich, Roziner, Markish* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1992) 17.
[564] Itamar Even-Zohar, *Papers in Historical Linguistics* (Tel Aviv: The Porter Institute for Poetics and Semiotics, 1978) 79.
[565] Itamar Even-Zohar, *Papers in Historical Linguistics* 80.

scholars to understand literary Jewishness in a more inclusive way, not only as the Jewish "origin of writers," but also their numerous cultural, educational, spiritual, and other identities, which altogether form a specific Jewish worldview. Critics agree that not every writer who is born Jewish belongs to Jewish literature. But since most, if not all, of the writers who do belong to Jewish literature are Jews, Jewish origin must be a necessary but insufficient condition for being a Jewish writer.[566]

The American literary scholar, translator, and author Maxim Shrayer has a noticeably different view of Russian-Jewish literature. First, he suggests reversing the order of adjectives, preferring, by analogy with African-American or French-Canadian literature, the term "Jewish-Russian literature." He considers this term to be more direct and transparent than "Russian-Jewish literature." The reason for such preference is that the first adjective of the term has to determine the main distinguishing aspect of the definition, which in this case is Jewishness, while the second adjective plays a clarifying role. Second, Shrayer emphasizes the predominantly secular nature of Jewish-Russian literature, defining the Jewish component of this term as "aspects of the Jewish condition that a Jewish religious mind would commonly seek elsewhere and a non-Jewish mind might not at all be conscious of during the act of reading."[567] At the same time, he relates the identity of a Jewish-Russian writer not only to his origins, confessions, or self-awareness, but also to the "perception of the writer and his legacy by the public and the literary community."[568] Such a broad definition of what constitutes the identity of a

[566] Some scholars consider the Russian poet and writer Elizaveta Zhirkova (1988-1949), better known by her pen name Elisheva, to be a Jewish or a Jewish-Russian writer because at some point in her writing career she switched from her native Russian to a learned Hebrew. Such a view seems to be neither persuasive nor consistent, but even if it is correct, Elisheva appears to be an anecdotal exception to the rule, and by no means calls into question the Jewish origin constituent in Nakhimovsky's definition of a Jewish writer.

[567] *An Anthology of Jewish -Russian Literature* xxvi.

[568] *An Anthology of Jewish -Russian Literature* 23.

Jewish- Russian writer allowed Shrayer to include the Russian poet Afanasiĭ Fet (1820-1892) in an anthology of Jewish-Russian literature on the grounds of some rumors about his possible Jewish origin. Finally, Shrayer does not limit the Russian component of the expression to works being rendered in Russian, but understands it to include "the country, language, or culture with which this literature is transparently identified by choice, default, or proxy."[569]

Shrayer's veiws are shared by some other literary scholars (Sheila Jelen, Michael Kramer, L. Lerner), who adopt the "perspective, broadly conceived, of modern Jewish writing moving back and forth between and through categories, of intersections and boundaries as mutually inclusive by way of continual movement across borders, of separations and syntheses."[570] Such an inclusive and fluid definition of Jewish-Russian literature may risk the obfuscation of its subject. The contents of Shrayer's anthology can serve as a good example of this pitfall: it contains works by Jewish-Russian writers who were born non-Jewish (Elisheva), semi-Jewish by the fact of birth to Jewish parents who converted to Christianity (Semën Nadson), or Jewish (Semën Frug). Some lived as Jews (Osip Rabinovich), while others converted to Christianity (Osip Mandelshtam). One may assume that it is Shrayer's understanding of the various "aspects of the Jewish condition" that justify his gathering of these writers in one anthology, but the inclusion of Boris Pasternak proves an exception to the rule.[571] Even a brief acquaintance with the Pasternak's verse or prose shows that the sphere of his artistic interests was exclusively Russian; in those few fragments where he portrays Jews, he does so as an outsider, and in such a manner that David Ben-Gurion, the first Prime Minister of Israel, called his

[569] *An Anthology of Jewish -Russian Literature* xxxi.
[570] *Modern Jewish Literatures* 1-2.
[571] There is no reliable information about Pasternak's religious affiliation. Born to an assimilated Jewish family, he nonetheless shared many Christian values, which makes him in some sense a spiritual convert.

magnum opus *Doctor Zhivago* "one of the most despicable books about Jews ever to be written by anyone of Jewish origin."[572] Although Ben-Gurion's treatment of this Nobel Prize-winning novel as a "book about Jews" is inaccurate (this book is an epic narrative about the Russian intelligentsia), his statement reflects the negative reception of *Doctor Zhivago* by many Jewish critics and readers in Israel as well as in other countries.[573]

Missing in Shrayer's anthology is the third major defining element of Jewish-Russian literature, which is the author's attitude toward subjects broadly considered to be Jewish. Texts presented from within the Jewish-Russian discourse maintain a dual "we," the Jewish "we" and the Russian "we," while texts presented by outsiders of this discourse create an exclusive opposition in which the Jewish "they" are no longer part of Russian "we", recalling the wicked son from the Passover Haggadah.[574] I argue that this first mode of writing constitutes the true body of Jewish-Russian literature in Russian, Yiddish or Hebrew. It embodies the literary legacy of Jews who lived in the Russian Empire, were affected by the Russian language and culture and identified themselves as both Jews and Russians. The second mode of writing, on the other hand, belongs to Russian or Russian-Jewish writers, whose Jewish origins are a minor biographical fact.

As stated earlier, the "Russianness" of Jewish-Russian writers is not limited to the language in which they write, but also includes other sources of influence such as territory, culture, and identity, all of which are responsible for creating an author's life experience. In this sense, it is possible to draw a parallel between this literature (particularly in Hebrew and Yiddish), and American Yiddish poetry of the twentieth

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[572] Guy de Mallac, "Pasternak and Religion," *Russian Review* 32:4 (Oct., 1973): 366.

[573] For more information on the negative reception of this novel, see Leonid Kat͡sis, "'Doktor Zhivago' B. Pasternaka: ot M. Gershenzona do D. Ben-Guriona ['Doktor Zhivago' by B. Pasternak: From M. Gershenzon to D. Ben-Gurion, *Evreĭskiĭ knigonosha* 8 (Moscow-Jerusalem: Gesharim, 2005) 54-71.

[574] During the Passover celebration the wicked son asks a question: "What is this service *to you*?" Jewish tradition understands the second person pronoun *you* as a sign of isolating oneself from the Jewish people, observing the Holiday from a distance rather than participating in it.

century (M. L. Halpern, A. Leyeles, H. Leyvik, Y. Glatshteyn, A. Tseytlin, and others).[575] Both literatures employed marginal languages unknown to the cultural majority in their respective countries, both were on the periphery of literary life, yet both were influenced by and placed themselves within Russian and American literary traditions respectfully. Benjamin Harshav writes:

> From an American perspective, Yiddish poetry must be seen as an unjustly neglected branch of American literature, a kaleidoscope of American experience and art entombed in yellowing, crumbling books, in the muteness of its own dead language.[576]

When viewed from the Russian perspective, Jewish-Russian literature can also be treated as part of Russian literature, presenting a similar "kaleidoscope" of Russian experiences.. Although such a view is quite speculative because Jewish-Russian literature is almost completely unknown to Russian readers and scholars, it is nonetheless plausible that when the major Jewish-Russian works become available in Russian translation, the situation will change, and an "unjustly neglected branch" of literature will be discovered.

All of the above-mentioned Russian factors influenced Gnesin as well as many other Jewish writers of the Russian Empire, who are traditionally viewed as Hebrew, Yiddish, or Russian-Jewish authors according to the language of their works. Taking into account Gnesin's origin, dual identity, and depiction of the Jewish life from an insider's perspective, one can with certainty identify him as a Jewish-Russian writer and claim that his works belong to Jewish-Russian literature. This category is particularly significant because this literature occupies a unique place in a long history of Jewish letters. On the

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[575] There is a noticeable linguistic difference in this comparison: the structurally similar term "Jewish-American literature" is used today to describe works written in English, while Yiddish and Hebrew American writers are situated in separate categories (Yiddish American writers and American Hebraicists).
[576] *American Yiddish Poetry: A Bilingual Anthology*, Benjamin and Barbara Harshav (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1986) 4-5.

one hand, its emergence in the nineteenth century was a result of the rapid assimilation of Russian Jews, and for this reason, it has no direct predecessor. On the other hand, German fascism and Soviet communism almost completely destroyed the physical and spiritual resources of this literary movement, and by the middle of the twentieth century, it ceased to exist. Neither did it leave any successors: the Jewish community in Russia decreased to a twentieth of its size, and the percentage of Yiddish and Hebrew speakers among the Jewish population accordingly dropped from 97% to 13%.[577] In other words, Jewish-Russian literature is a cultural phenomenon with clearly marked spatial and temporal borders. However, many works from this literary corpus, primarily the works written in Hebrew, and to a much smaller degree, also in Yiddish, have played an important role in the formation of the Israeli literary canon before and after 1948. Israeli scholars perceived this cannon to be Hebrew rather than Jewish, and certainly not Jewish-Russian. Such an obvious discrepancy between the Jewish-Russian nature of this literature and the emphasis on its production in the Hebrew language by the creators of the Israeli canon is a natural byproduct of the early Zionist views on the cultural status of Russian Jews.

4.4. JEWISH-RUSSIAN LITERATURE AND ZIONISM

Since the 1860s, the cultural identity of Russian Jews in general and of Jewish-Russian writers in particular has attracted much attention in Russia, where the so-called "Jewish question" has traditionally played an important role in history, and often was a matter of heated debates in press. One such discussion took place in a liberal Petersburg

[577] The Jewish population in Russian dropped from 5,215,805 people in 1897 to 229,938 people in 2002. For the 1897 Census see *The First Total Census of Russian Empire*, ed. N. A. Troynitsky, vol. I (chart XII), vol. II (chart XIII) (Sankt-Peterburg: Central statistical bureau of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 1905); for the 2002 Census see http://www.perepis2002.ru.

paper *Svobodnai͡a mysl* [Free Thought], and lasted for almost a year.[578] It started with a short essay, "Jews and Russian literature," by the young critic and writer Korneĭ Chukovskiĭ (1882-1969). This piece was shortly thereafter reprinted in two other papers, *Neva* and *Rassvet* [Dawn]. The main point of his essay was that Jewish writers should write in Hebrew or Yiddish, which have rich literary traditions, and not in Russian, because they have not created any significant works in this language, nor can they fully comprehend Russian literature because of they did not participate in its history and culture: "I maintain that a Jew is not capable of understanding Dostoevskiĭ, just as an Englishman, a Frenchman, an Italian cannot understand him, otherwise either Dostoevskiĭ is not Dostoevskiĭ, and a Jew is not a Jew."[579]

Most of the numerous responses were written by assimilated Russian Jews, who could clearly read between the lines of Chukovskiĭ's essay: he questioned the ownership of what many of them considered their own. Some responses, such as the one written by the well-known Russian literary scholar, translator, and journalist Arkadiĭ Gornfeld (1867-1941), demonstrate how irritating this perspective was for Russian-speaking Jews, especially for those who studied at Russian universities and made successful careers for themselves. A skillful and experienced critic, Gornfeld challenged his rival personally: "Why does Chukovskiĭ not yell with the same enthusiasm that he, being a Russian, can never understand either Shakespeare, or Aeschylus, or Goethe, or Ibsen – nobody."[580] Others agreed with Chukovskiĭ, making a distinction between a formal understanding and emotional involvement in literature: "[when reading] foreign literature we understand the

[578] This paper was published in 1907-1911 by a Jewish journalist and editor Il'i͡a Markovich Vasilevskiĭ (1883-1938).
[579] Korneĭ Chukovskiĭ, "Evrei i russki͡a literatura [Jews and Russian Literature," *Svobodnai͡a mysl [Free thought]* [Sankt-Peterburg] 14 Jan. 1908: 2.
[580] Arkadiy G. Gornfeld, "Chukovskiĭ," *Stolichnai͡a pochta [Capital Post]* [Sankt-Peterburg] 18 Jan. 1908: 1.

beauty of its thought and its general psychological movements, we understand its objective depictions of life, but we do not feel the souls of live people as ours, intimate and dear, we do not feel it like a mother feels when her child is sick."[581]

Some contributors admitted with pessimism that exposure to Russian culture was destroying Jewish individuality,[582] and even agreed that Jews can never fully integrate into Russian society: "let us not be afraid to tell the truth: the whole Russian life with its problems and spiritual seeking is foreign to us."[583] Others welcomed assimilation as progress, rejected Jewish languages as a form of spiritual ghetto, and insisted on their dual identity as Russian Jews. The prominent Russian linguist, anthropologist, and writer Vladimir Bogoraz (1865-1936), who converted to Christianity as a teenager, exclaimed: "I am a Jew, and also a Russian. I cannot deny my dual nature. Neither do I know to what extent I am a Jew, and to what extent I am a Russian. If you want to know – rip my heart out and weigh it."[584] There were responses with passionate declarations of loyalty to Russia together with no less passionate denunciations of Jewish languages. For instance, the popular journalist Iosif Orsher (1878-1942) wrote, apparently paraphrasing the famous words from the "Book of Ruth:"

> My motherland is Russia. Her people are my people. Her language is my language. Her literature is my literature. […] Your Palestine is dead for me. […] I could not love [Jordan], its place in my heart has been taken by the Dnepr a long time ago. […] Jargon [Yiddish] is not only not ours, it is

[581] Ibn-Daud, "Zametki [Notes]," *Svobodnai͡a mysl [Free thought]* [Sankt-Peterburg] 14 Jan. 1908: 2.
[582] Emes, "Evrei I russkai͡a literatura [Jews and Russian Literature]," *Svobodnai͡a mysl [Free thought]* [Sankt-Peterburg] 14 Jan. 1908: 2.
[583] Ibn-Daud, *Zametki [Notes]* 2.
[584] V. G. Tan, "Evrei i literatura [Jews and Literature]," *Svobodnai͡a mysl [Free thought]* [Sankt-Peterburg] 18 Feb. 1908: 3.

> foreign to us. We are disgusted by this German-Russian-Polish-French-Italian-Spanish-Portuguese language.[585]

As one can see, for the majority of contributors, this literary discussion became a reason to pronounce their personal credo on the burning issue of self-identification, which was a common trend in the highly polemical Russian press. However, the tone of debate considerably changed when a young writer, journalist, and Zionist leader, Vladimir Jabotinsky (1880-1940) published his response to Chukovskiĭ.[586]

In 1908, Jabotinsky became one of the main contributors to the Jewish-Russian press, fighting against assimilation and the Bund. Raised on Russian and European literature, he was making strides as a Russian writer, but after the Kishinëv pogrom in 1903, he experienced a radical change of priorities, alienated himself from Russian culture, and devoted all his energy to political Zionism.[587] His rhetorical skills and much of his "culture repertoire"[588], however, were deeply rooted in Russian journalism and literature. Jabotinsky's numerous essays and feuilletons show that he fully shared the conventional Russian understanding of literature as a powerful aid in implementation of certain political and cultural goals. In principle, it was close to the literary strategies of *maskilim* who also understood literature as a "vehicle in the pursuit of ideological aims

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[585] L. O. d'Or, "Lichnye nastroeniĭa [Personal Mood]," *Svobodnaĭa misl [Free thought]* [Sankt-Peterburg] 31 Mar. 1908: 3.

[586] It is important to note that Chukovskiĭ and Jabotinsky knew each other from the late 1880s when they were going to the same day care in Odessa. Later they became close friends, and worked together for the paper *Odesskie novosti* [Odessa News] until 1903. In 1908, Jabotinsky was in Vienna, and could only participate in this debate via mail. It is plausible that Chukovskiĭ informed his friend about debates in *Svobodnaĭa misl* and asked him to contribute a response. See Evgeniĭa Ivanova, *ChiZh: Chukovskiĭ i Zhabotinskiĭ [Chizh. Chukovskiĭ and Jabotinsky]* (Moscow: Gesharim, 2005).

[587] The term "political Zionism" is used here to distinguish Jabotinsky's specific ideology from the "cultural Zionism" of Akhad Ha'am. Among many types of political Zionism, the one developed by Jabotinsky is commonly defined as a nationalist faction, and is called a "revisionist Zionism" because of its attempt to revise the "practical Zionism" of David Ben-Gurion and Chaim Weizmann.

[588] According to Even-Zohar, a polysystem is an interaction between *repertoire* which refers to the "aggregate of laws and elements that govern the production of texts," and *texts* which can be viewed as actualizations of these law. See Itamar Even-Zohar, *Polysystem Studies* (Durham: Duke UP, 1990) 17.

for Jewish people."[589] Similar to the other participants of the discussion, Jabotinsky briefly expressed his opinion about the issues raised by Chukovskiĭ, and, in the main part of his bitter and aggressive feuilleton, attacked the assimilationists, and suggested a political rationale for language and literature.

In his statement on Jewish-Russian literature, Jabotinsky rejected the significance of a writer's origin as the determining factor of his authorial identity. Instead he proposed that the psychological condition of the author and his audience is what determines his identity:

> The decisive factor is not the language, and on the other hand, not even the author's background, and not even the plot: the decisive factor is the author's mood – for whom he writes, whom he addresses, and whose spiritual needs he has in mind in creating his work.[590]

It is easy to notice that the "author's mood" is another expression for the third defining element of Jewish-Russian literature discussed earlier, namely the author's attitude towards his Jewishness. For Jabotinsky, Jewish literature was not an act of artistic self-expression, but mainly an answer to the "spiritual needs" of the masses; in his view, it was writer's responsibility to satisfy these needs. From such a pragmatic point of view, language became an arbitrary factor: "one can not know the jargon [Yiddish], and still not desert, serving his own people to the best of his abilities, speaking and writing for them. It is not as much about language, it is all about desire."[591]

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[589] Isaiah Rabinovich, *Major Trends in Modern Hebrew Fiction* (Chicago: The U of Chicago P, 1986) vii. Also see Simon Halkin, *Modern Hebrew Literature: Trends and Values* (New York: Shocken Books Inc., 1950) 34-53.

[590] Vladimir Zh[abotinskiy], "Pis'mo (O yevreĭakh i russkoĭ literature [A Letter (Jews in Russian Literature)]," *Svobodnaia mysl [Free thought]* [Sankt-Peterburg] 24 Mar. 1908: 4.

[591] Vladimir Zh[abotinskiy], *Pis'mo* 4.

In other words, Jabotinsky shifted the debate in a completely different direction, contesting the connection between an author's language choice and his identity. Chukovskiĭ claimed that, for Jews, writing in Russian was a mistake, while writing in Yiddish or Hebrew lead them to great literary discoveries. Jabotinsky, though, argued that languages did not matter that much, and writing in any of them could be good as long as it served the interests of Jewish people:

> Some Jews […] grow up without speaking the jargon [Yiddish] […] It is a huge obstacle to working on a Jewish street, they have to write in Russian, but writing in Russian alone does not mean going away from Jewish literature. […] I consider the jargon [Yiddish] because people use it, and therefore, in order to work among people and together with people, one must work in the jargon.[592]

Jabotinsky evaluated literary works, not according to their eminent aesthetic features, but rather, according to their political usefulness and accessibility. Accordingly, creative writing was not an end in itself, but rather a tool to promulgate a certain ideology – in this case, a Zionist one.

Needless to say, this feuilleton caused a strong negative reaction among assimilated Russian Jews, and it even made the Russian philosopher and writer Vasiliĭ Rozanov (1856-1919) publish a critical review of Jabotinsky's essay: "The Zionist dream […] is also a literary and an imitative dream, similar to the 'Pan-Germanism' of Germans and 'Pan-Slavism' of old Slavophiles."[593] Jabotinsky was doomed to receive such criticism: in the early twentieth century, Russian Jews could be addressed in Russian, Yiddish or Hebrew, but since Jabotinsky did not have a sufficient command of Jewish

[592] Vladimir Zh[abotinskiy], *Pis'mo* 4.
[593] V. Varvarin [Vasiliĭ Rozanov], "Pëstrye temy [Motley Themes]," *Russkoe slovo [Russian word]*. 13 May 1908: 7.

languages in the early periods of his life, he had to write in Russian, which was read mostly by anti-Zionist assimilated Jews.[594] Chukovskiĭ's ideas were not shared by everyone either, but they belonged to a non-Jew and were offered in a relatively polite form, which created a certain formal distance and helped keep the discussion from becoming too emotional. Jabotinsky's essay, on the other hand, was written by an insider, by a likewise assimilated Jew who nonetheless had rejected assimilation and subscribed to the tenants of Zionism with such fervor that nearly every statement he made sounded like an accusation of betrayal. This is why, in the discussion of Jewish literature, most of Jabotinsky's opponents attacked his political rather than his literary views:

> OK, I am an assimilator. I agree with that. But there is a much more terrible word than 'assimilator.' This word is Zionist! […] Where do you call Jews? You call them to a country that will never be their own. You tear them away from a live language, and instead of it you give them a corpse.[595]

In contrast, a non-Jewish participant of this debate, Rozanov, did not deviate from the theme set by Chukovskiĭ, and only briefly touched upon the issue of Zionism in the context of Jabotinsky's abrupt ideological shift.

Indeed, political Zionism sharply contradicted a pluralistic multilingual and multicultural world view, shared by the vast majority of the Russian-Jewish intelligentsia. In comparison to European cosmopolitan humanism, Zionist ideology stood out in its pronounced mono-ethnic goals, imposing many limitations on the cultural demands of

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[594] There is a report by a Russian secret agent about a Yiddish newspaper which Jabotinsky published in London in 1916. The agent wrote that the materials were "written in poor Yiddish, because although Jabotinsky knows some Yiddish, he nonetheless cannot write in it well." See Evgeniĭa Ivanova, *ChiZh.* 205.

[595] L. O. d'Or, "Lichnye nastroeniĭa [Personal mood]," *Svobodnaĭa mysl [Free thought]* [Sankt-Peterburg] 31 Mar. 1908: 3. It is worth mentioning that 100 years later, Russian assimilated Jews, such as the popular writer Dmitriĭ Bykov, attack Jabotinsky with exactly the same arguments.

Russian Jews. Literature and journalism, which were the most important public forums at that time, and, therefore, helped to satisfy these demands, underwent a radical rethinking by Pinsker, Ahad Ha'am, Jabotinsky and other Zionist theoreticians. As stated earlier, the primary criterion of literary quality was its political value: any work of fiction or poetry was good to the extent that it supported the main Zionist goals of Jewish self-determination and the creation of a Jewish national homeland in the Land of Israel.[596] In fact, it was not until the 1950s that a younger generation of Israeli literary critics began to evaluate Hebrew writer without consideration of the political context of their works.[597] From this perspective, Gnesin was a much more marginal writer than Brener, and such is the status quo in the modern Israeli canon: the latter writer enjoys much more popularity then the former. Since 1948, only five editions of different works by Gnesin have appeared in Israel, while Brener's works have been published in more than thirty editions.[598] Moreover, a Jewish-Russian writer such as Gnesin, who openly distanced himself from Zionism, socialism, and any other political affiliation, and was bitterly disappointed after a visit to the Land of Israel, would not be likely to enjoy popularity in a state rooted in the Zionist ideology. Nonetheless, Gnesin was not only accepted in Israel, but was praised as a pioneer of Hebrew modernist fiction. This counterintuitive phenomenon cannot be explained in the context of the Zionist understanding of literature

[596] Jewish literature in the Soviet Union was also evaluated from a political point of view: in order to be recognized as good, literary works had first of all to comply with the ideals of communism, socialist realism, and other dogmatic concepts.

[597] Yarach Gover, *Zionism: The Limits of Moral Discourse in Israeli Hebrew Fiction* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1994) 15.

[598] The information about Brener's and Gnesin's publications is obtained from the electronic catalog of The National Library of Israel. The popularity of Brener in Israel is a complicated issue, because on one hand, his writings did not comply with the Zionist agenda, while on the other hand, his tragic and untimely death contributed towards the creation of a myth which later neutralized much of Brener's anti-Zionism and established his image of a martyr. Also, between 2009 and 2011, I conducted an informal survey, which demonstrated that while all of 16 Israeli citizens (born and raised in Israel) knew the name "Yosef Khayim Brener" and could identify him as a Hebrew writer, only 4 of them recognized the name "Uri Nisn Gnesin."

alone, and requires additional data, namely about the perception of Jewish literature in the *yishuv* and later, in the State of Israel. There are two reasons for such a shift in geography away from Eastern Europe: first, from 1917, when the Russian Empire collapsed, and throughout the existence of the Soviet Union (1922-1991) and the Russian Federation (1991 to the present), the cultural and religious center of Ashkenazi Jewry split and moved to the Land of Israel and the United States. This split marked the end of Jewish-Russian literature. Second, it was in Israel, and to a smaller extent, in Palestine under the British Mandate, that Hebrew turned into the national language of letters, and Hebrew literature became a political issue in the full sense of the word. The Hebrew language's deep, multilevel integration into the educational system, scholarship, journalism, and many other spheres of life that were completely or partially regulated by the state, created an urgent need for an official literary canon.

From the time when this new canon emerged and materialized in school and university curricula, its content has been actively debated in Israeli society. One of the main stimuli for public discussions of the modern Hebrew canon is its inconsistent nature. It reflects the dominant ideology, and at the same time it includes such Jewish-Russian writers as Gnesin, who did not participate in the Zionist movement. The canon also includes major Yiddish writers like Yitskhok Leybush Perets, although it treats works by another classic Yiddish writer, Sholem-Aleykhem, as a foreign literature in translation. In this canon, Yitskhok Bashevis and Ida Fink are placed in the same category with Tawfiq al-Hakim and Samira Azzam. The fact that these inconsistencies emerge from one agreed-upon curriculum makes them even more notable. However, being a joint effort of politicians, writers, teachers, and other Israeli leaders, the selection of literary works to be preserved by educational institutions is by no means random, despite all these contradictions. The inclusion or exclusion of writer from the ever-

changing canon was always a conscious political act. Recent scholarship on canon formations and functions helps to identify the reasons behind these political acts. It also provides a working hypothesis that explains the inclusion of Gnesin and other Jewish-Russian authors in the Israeli literary canon, and its exclusion of the whole *Haskalah* literature of the nineteenth century.

4.5. LITERARY CANONICITY

Much of the heated debates over "the canon," which began in the twentieth century and are not likely to cease anytime soon, are caused by the vagueness of this term: it has had many meanings in the past, and has acquired more today. The term is thought to derive from the Hebrew word *kaneh* (קנה) [reed]. Greeks borrowed it for their word κανών which meant "a ruling stick [made of reed]," and later expanded its meaning to "measure" or "[correct] model." The earliest application of this term to a literary text belongs to the Greek historian of the first century BCE, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who wrote that Herodotus "represented the canon of the Ionic dialect."[599] Christian scholars have extensively used this term for many centuries to define the divinely inspired composition of the Bible; thus, different denominations produced their own biblical canons. For musicians, this term meant a special type of a polyphonic composition. Later it started to designate a corpus of works credibly attributed to some author, or in a wider sense, a group of works by those "authors who, by a cumulative consensus of critics, scholars, and teachers, have come to be widely recognized as 'major,' and to have written works often hailed as literary classics."[600] The history of the idea of the "classics" and

[599] *Dionysius of Halicarnassus: The Three Literary Letters*, ed. and trans. W. Rhys Roberts (Cambridge: UP, 1901) 114-115. For the history of the term 'canon,' see George A. Kennedy, "The Origin of the Concept of a Canon and Its Application to the Greek and Latin Classics," *Canon vs. Culture: Reflections on the Current Debate*, ed. Jan Gorak (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 2001) 105-115.

[600] M. H. Abrams, and Geoffrey Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (Boston, MA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009) 38.

their social functions were actively studied in Europe in the1960s and 1970s. [601] It was not, however, until the American "culture wars" of the 1980s that the term "canon" began to attract much attention among the general public and became a major topic of debate in the academy.

Debating the canon

Most American schools and higher education institutions offer a mandatory course of study, known as a core curriculum. Usually, it includes courses in literature and the humanities that provide students with a unified understanding of Western thought using a survey of "great books." Until recently, the list of these books was based on the Western classics and, therefore, was more or less stable because of a general agreement on the list of these texts.[602] However, in the 1980s, the situation began to change. American Slavist Mikhail Gronas attributes this change to the ascendancy of European post-structuralist, post-modernist, and post-Marxist theories that stimulated feminist, post-colonial, black, queer, and other emancipation studies.[603] Despite their differences, all these critical schools shared Foucauldian ideas, which interpreted culture and morality as products of discourse and power. From this perspective, the role of the traditional core curriculum in instilling in students the cultural values of "dead white males" was an object for criticism.

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[601] For a thorough analysis of this research, see B. V. Dubin, and N. A. Zorkaĭa, "Ideĭa 'klassiki' i eë sot͡sialnaĭa funkt͡siĭa [The Idea and Functions of the Classics]," *Problemy sot͡siologii literatury za rubezhom [Sociology of the Foreign Literature]* (Moscow: INION, 1983) 40-82.

[602] Although the classic authors are usually the same, lists of the "great works" may slightly differ from one university to another, or from year to year within the same college. For example, undergraduate students at Columbia University during their first semester study Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Thucydides, Aristophanes, Plato, and a few fragments of the Bible. In the second semester they read Virgil, Ovid, Augustine, Dante, Boccaccio, Montaigne, Shakespeare, and Cervantes, as well as three relatively modern authors (Austen, Dostoevskiĭ, and Woolf).

[603] Mikhail Gronas, "Dissensus: Voĭna za kanon v amerikanskoĭ akademii 80-kh-90-kh godov [Dissensus: The Canon War in American Academe in the 80s-90s]," *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie [New Literary Review]* 51 [Moscow] 2001:8-39.

In the debates of the 1980s, the word "classics" was gradually replaced with "canon" because it better reflected the authoritarian nature of "the great books," evoking associations with the fixed corpus of biblical texts. Liberal advocates for the radical rethinking and the "opening the canon" argued that the unified understanding of traditional values contradicted the diverse reality of American society, and, therefore, could not be representative of women, black people, gender minorities, immigrants, and other groups.[604] Literary merit was not a priority in the liberal critique of the canon, as John Guillory defines this movement, because one can never be sure about the actual quality of literary works in a truly representative canon.[605] Their conservative opponents maintained that the classic canon included foundational texts whose content transcended ethnic, political, and sociological divides. Some argue that, precisely for that reason, the classics could serve as a common cultural denominator unifying every distinct group into a nation.[606] Others, like Harold Bloom, reject social implications of the canon, and claim that its aesthetic power is addressed exclusively to the individual reader: "The Western Canon, despite the limitless idealism of those who would open it up, exists precisely in order to impose limits, to set a standard of measurement that is anything but political or moral." [607] Comparison of the present day core curricula of the major American universities gives evidence of at least a temporary peace treaty in the campaign against the traditional canon: most campuses made significant changes to the required coursework by reducing their lists of "the great books," adding extra-canonical texts, and offering a variety of multicultural courses. This practical solution, however, did not stop

[604] One of the first and most influential anti-canon books was *English Literature: Opening Up The Canon*, ed. Leslie Fiedler, Houston A. Baker, Jr. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1979).
[605] John Guillory, "Canon," *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago: The U of Chicago P, 1995) 235.
[606] For example, see Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How the Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987).
[607] Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1995) 33.

the debates over literary canonicity, but rather shifted the debate's focus towards more general and theoretical questions about the formation and function of canon.

Canon formation

Scholars consider one of two factors, external and internal, to determine a text's literary canonicity. The former understands textual canonicity as a historical and sociological construct, while the latter use the eminent features of a text to explain its canonical status. Some scholars call these approaches "sociological" and "axiological."[608] In fact, these two interpretations discuss different types of canons, and, therefore, are not at all contradictory, which makes the debates between their followers meaningless. John Guillory, one of the leading theoreticians of the sociological school, argues that "the problem of the canon is a problem of syllabus and curriculum, the institutional forms by which works are preserved as great works." [609] His opponents treat the material representations of a canon (curricula or anthologies) as a secondary manifestation of the text's innate values, independent of political, social, or any other interests. It is obvious that the object of Guillory's study is the institutionalization of the literary canon, which cannot exist without a complex combination of historical factors. After all, any school curriculum is designed, approved, and implemented by people who necessarily represent certain social, cultural and political groups. At the same time, this approach recognizes the necessity of evaluating the canon, which is viewed to be social function of universities:

> Evaluative judgments are the necessary but not sufficient condition for the process of canon formation, and it is only by understanding the social function and institutional protocols of the school that we will understand

[608] See Mikhail Gronas, *Dissensus* 14.
[609] John Guillory, *Canon* 240.

> how works are preserved, reproduced, and disseminated over successive generations and centuries.[610]

Followers of the axiological approach argue that canonical works transcend institutional protocols, and possess superior literary merit, and, therefore, do not need any external factor securing their status. According to Romanian-American literary critic and cultural historian Virgil Nemoianu, the canon is shaped by "sensibilities, communitarian orientations, broad axiological decisions, tacit preferences, modes of behavior and being."[611] In other words, its formation depends on the personal preferences of people, contradicting the very notion of a unified national canon, and more so, of a unified trans-national Western canon. It is, therefore, possible to distinguish between a major canon, which functions on the institutional level, and a multitude of "personal canons," existing within various social and cultural groups. While both are human constructs open to change, the former is an impersonal product of the social contract, reflected in historical documents, while the latter manifests personal attitudes and preferences, resistant to objective evaluation.

An illustrative example of a personal canon is the book *The Modern Jewish Canon* by Ruth Wisse. At the core of this book is a list of works, which the author believes to be the best, based on her personal aesthetic preference: "In this book I set out some of my favorite Jewish works."[612] Wisse admits that since her tastes in Jewish fiction may differ from those of many educated readers, they are "free to make a case for additional writers," although she would not expect anyone's lists to exclude the books she

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[610] John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: The U of Chicago P, 1993) vii.
[611] Virgil Nemoianu, "Literary Canons and Social Value Options," *The Hospitable Canon*, ed. by V. Nemoianu, and R. Royal (Philadelphia: Benjamin, 1991) 222.
[612] Ruth R. Wisse, *The Modern Jewish Canon: A Journey Through Language and Culture* (New York: The Free P, 2000) 5.

had chosen.[613] Alan Mintz, whose research is focused on Hebrew literature in America, calls this type of canon making "a combination of drawing the list and then mounting arguments to defend the choices," and claims that "she has projected her views into the public realm and called it a canon."[614] Wisse's Jewish canon is addressed to the general public, and is not enforced by any educational institutions. It may, however, affect the reading lists of modern Jewish literature courses in universities worldwide.

Nemoianu compares the relationship between the institutional canon of Guillory and the "personal canons" to that of deep structure and surface structure in linguistics. This comparison, however, does not reflect the mutual influence that these two types of canon have upon each other. "Evaluative judgment" is an important factor in the canon formation, since all the participants in the production of an institutional canon have their own personal canons. At the same time, a school curriculum, shared by students from different social backgrounds, affects the formation of their individual canons. It seems to be more reasonable to propose that these two types of canons represent two distinct existential modes: individual and social. In the case of the twentieth-century Hebrew canon, its major (institutional) form is a particularly illuminative object of study because of the unique situation in Israel. Within a few decades, Hebrew became a spoken language, the Jewish population dramatically increased,[615] and the State of Israel was created, together with all the necessary political and educational institutions. Among the

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[613] Ruth R. Wisse, *The Modern Jewish Canon* 19.

[614] *Arguing the Modern Jewish Canon: Essays on Literature and Culture in Honor of Ruth R. Wisse*, ed. Justin Cammy, Dara Horn, Alyssa Quint, and Rachel Rubinstein (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2008) 25, 33.

[615] The Jewish population of Palestine and later of Israel has grown from 24,000 in 1882 to over 1,000,000 in 1949 and to over 5,000,000 in 2000. See *Israel in the Middle East: Documents and Readings on Society, Politics, and Foreign Relations, Pre-1948 to the Present*, ed. Itamar Rabinovich, and Jehuda Reinharz (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis UP, 2008) 571-572.

first accomplishments of the new government was the production of an institutionalized Israeli literary canon taught as part of the school curriculum.

The Israeli literary canon

Created, funded, and managed by political establishments, the educational system of the *Yishuv* was the main vehicle for spreading Zionist ideology. Unlike the literary canons of nations with a long-established statehoods and a natural history of development, the Hebrew institutional canon appeared abruptly, and its formation is remarkably well documented by the Israeli Ministry of Education and the Academy of the Hebrew Language in numerous editions and revisions of its educational laws.[616] As early as 1933, the Zionist Organization decided that education could not be left to discretion the teachers. From that point on, writes Israeli educator and scholar Haim Gazi'el, the Teachers Union lost its hegemony in the formulation of educational policy, and was replaced by the Zionist Organization.[617] In other words, the school curriculum in the *Yishuv* and in Israel was created to support and spread Zionist ideology. This fact confirms the state's obvious dependency on education to produce the ideal society. This dependency is defined by Guillory as the "relation between the institution of the school and the social order that allows the former to exist in only such a way as to meet the latter's demands."[618]

Created in 1953 by the Knesset, the Academy of the Hebrew Language superseded the Hebrew Language Council (established in 1889), and has played a major

[616] It is important to mention that the position of a minister is traditionally held by influential politicians rather than educators: from its establishment in 1949, the Ministry of Education was headed such state leaders as Zalman Shazar (1949-1950), David Ben-Gurion (1951), Abba Eban (1960-1963), Yigal Alon (1969-1974), Yitzhak Rabin (1993), Ehud Barak (2000-2001), and others.
[617] Haim Gazi'el, *Politics and Policy-Making in Israel's Education System* (Portland: Sussex Academic P, 1996) 33. For more on the education system of the *Yishuv* see Oz Almog, *The Sabra: The creation of the New Jew*, trans. Haim Watzman (Berkeley: U of California P, 2000) 23-72.
[618] John Guillory, *Canon* 243.

role in establishing, strengthening, and promoting Hebraic culture. It defines itself as the deciding authority on matters of Hebrew language, and its decisions on grammar, terminology, and transliteration are binding for all academic and educational institutions, as well as all divisions and branches of the government.[619] The Academy is deeply involved in literature and education: it is run by a plenum of nearly forty members, most of whom are writers and university scholars. At the same time, it is controlled and funded by the Ministry of Education, and for this reason follows the political and ideological guidelines of the state.

The fact that the actual work done in the Academy is generally met with ambivalence by Israeli society[620] does not reduce its role, together with the Ministry of Education, in the shaping of the official literary canon. Viewing the institutional canon as an important political tool, created by and used in the interests of certain social groups,[621] it is necessary to acknowledge that the selection of "the great works" was originally designed to imbue a new generation of Israeli Jews with Zionist values.[622] This political project was undertaken when it was still unclear whether Hebrew would prevail as the national language. Thus, the existence of an official state authority that dictated the rules of national language was especially important. Although modern literary scholars no

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[619] *Handbook of Language and Ethnic Identity: The Success-Failure Continuum in Language and Ethnic Identity Efforts*, ed. Joshua A. Fishman and Ofelia García, vol. 2 (New York: Oxford UP, 2011) 73-75. For more on the goals and administrative structure of the Academy of the Hebrew Language, see its website: http://hebrew-academy.huji.ac.il/English/Pages/default.aspx.

[620] In a study of language planning American linguist Lewis Glinert writes that this public ambivalence was "epitomized by the newspaper confession from 1970 […]: 'Haven't we always uttered the word [Academy] with a taint of mockery. Haven't we always imagined it as composed of idle academics, killing each other over the dot of an i." See Lewis Glinert, "The 'Back to the Future' Syndrome in Language Planning: The Case of Modern Hebrew," *Focus on Language Planning: Essays in Honor of Joshua A. Fishman*, ed. David F. Marshall, vol. 3 (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1991) 327-236.

[621] John Guillory, *Cultural Capital* 65.

[622] In Israel, inclusion in the school program is still considered to be a main criterion of literary success. Thus, when during a television interview in 2010 the renowned poet Nathan Zach commented about the cultural inferiority of Sephardic Jews as compared to the Jews of European origin, hundreds of people signed a petition to the Minister of Education asking to remove Zach's works from the school curriculum.

longer consider the language of a text to be a major criteria for its canonization because of its ignorance of "cultural affiliations that are not always consistent with language choices,"[623] the Zionist canon prioritized Hebrew texts.

A brief look at the canonical works included by the Israeli Ministry of Education in the school curriculum unambiguously shows that the canon is Hebraic rather then Jewish. All the modern fiction in it is divided into four categories: works by Shmuel-Yosef Agnon, Hebrew literature of the first half of the twentieth century (the pre-state period), Hebrew short stories from the second half of the twentieth century (the statehood period), and world literature in translation. Mendele Moykher-sforim and Y. L. Perets are part of the Hebrew literature group, while Sholem-Aleykhem, Yitskhok Bashevis, Primo Levi and Ida Fink are perceived as writers of world literature together with Giovanni Boccaccio, Nikolaĭ Gogol, and Guy de Maupassant.[624] As one can see, in the eyes of the Israeli canon makers, the language of a text (Yiddish, Italian, and Polish) outweighs its content and origins.

Another important criterion for selection is the literary works' relevancy to present day reality in Israel. Twelve writers represent literature in the pre-state category as opposed to the twenty authors who represent the statehood period. Except for Yehuda Burla and Yitskhak Shami, all the pre-state writers were born in the Russian Empire. This ratio is reversed in the statehood period of literature: fourteen writers were born in the Land of Israel, and another four arrived there under the age of five;[625] hence, 90% of canonized literature was written by native Hebrew speakers. The cultural and linguistic wall separating modern Israelis and the Jews from the Pale of Settlement makes the

[623] *What is Jewish Literature?* 4.
[624] The pre-modern period is represented in the curriculum with Tanakh and medieval Hebrew poetry by Yehuda Halevi, Shlomo ibn Gabirol, Moshe ibn Ezra, and Shmuel Hanagid.
[625] Two remaining writers came to Israel at the age of fourteen (Aharon Appelfeld) and twenty (Shimon Ballas) respectively.

reading of Jewish-Russian authors, even those who wrote in Hebrew, too difficult for today's Israeli students. As the Ministry of Education acknowledges in its introduction to the last revision of its literature curriculum, "in Israeli society, which is comprised of people from different cultural backgrounds, selecting writers for the school program is especially hard, and even more so considering the huge language barrier separating many works of Hebrew and world classics and the [Israeli] students."[626]

In 2007, the divide between Jewish-European and Israeli societies lead to a dramatic change in the Hebrew institutional canon: the Curriculum department within the Pedagogical administration of the Ministry of Education made an unprecedented decision to remove all novels from the canon. The students are still expected to read novels (two books over the course of a school year), but no list of required works is offered anymore. Members of the Council for the Program in Literature (*Vaadat ha-tokhnit limudim be-sifrut*) suggested that the Ministry abandon the existing list of canonical novels because the majority of students cannot comply with it. Instead, they can now "substitute the nineteenth century novel, which is so difficult to read for many students, with some other novel which can be read for its content and with pleasure."[627] Teachers can introduce literary works they find appropriate, although they must first submit a written application to the supervisor of literature instruction at the Ministry of Education.

It is possible that this change presages future revisions of the Hebrew canon, because the gap between the Jewish Eastern European past and the Israeli future is likely to increase in the years to come. In addition, the gradual replacement of classic secular Zionism that originated in Europe with the indigenous ideologies of Neo-Zionism and

[626] http://cms.education.gov.il/EducationCMS/Units/Tochniyot_Limudim/Safrut/Kitot10_12/
[627] http://cms.education.gov.il/educationcms/units/tochniyot_limudim/safrut/kitot10_12/2yechidot/sipur_kasar.htm

Post-Zionism will also contribute to a change in the canon.[628] New authors like Etgar Keret, who represent "a generation […] that rejected many of the old Zionist truisms, refusing to sacrifice itself unnecessary on what is perceived to be a false national altar,"[629] will be included in the canon, while some other writers will follow the fate of the nineteenth century novel and be removed from the canon. Taking into account that the institutionalized literature curriculum and literary canon were focused on national revival and affiliated with Zionism, particularly in the pre-state period, it seems plausible that in the near future Gnesin will be removed from the Israeli canon. Indeed, every one of the eleven pre-state writers who remains part of the Israeli canon was affiliated with the national revival to various degrees: two of the writers were born in Palestine, six of them settled down in Palestine, and except for Brener, who was killed in 1921, and Yakov Steinberg (1887-1947), all died in the State of Israel. The three other authors, Mendele, Perets, and Berdichevski, shared the common vision of replacing an old Jew with a new Hebrew. To use the words of Canadian literary scholar David Aberbach, regarding Mendele's literary life (which can be applied to the two other authors as well): "their ambivalence toward and satire of diaspora Jews were interpreted as a justification of Zionism."[630]

A much more interesting question about Gnesin's writing, is not about how and when he will be excluded from the school curriculum, but rather, how and when he became part of it. There have to be compelling reasons to include an author in the Israeli school program who was not a Zionist, who disdained socialism, who visited the Land of

[628] Not only literary curriculum but quite a few other school subjects are likely to be affected by ideological changes in Israeli society, such as Jewish history, general history, civics, and archaeology.
[629] Yaron Peleg, *Israeli Culture Between the Two Intifadas: A Brief Romance* (Austin: U of Texas P, 2008) 7.
[630] David Aberbach, "Hebrew Literature and Jewish Nationalism in the Tzarist Empire," *The Emergence of Modern Jewish Politics: Bundizm and Zionism in Eastern Europe* (Pittsburgh, PA: The U of Pittsburgh P, 2003) 145.

Israel for only several months, and who wrote to his father on the subject of the idealistic euphoria of the Second Aliyah, only to comment that "the Jewish soul is in exile, and not here: here are only Jews who wear long *kapotes* and grow their beards, and Jews who dress short and shave their beards. Their only common feature is that they don't have values worth a penny."[631] Aside from Agnon, who had left Palestine for a decade, but came back in the end, Gnesin is the only canonical fiction writer with a record of returning to Europe and staying there. Even his choice of language cannot be accepted as a sufficient factor for canonization because there were other significant Hebrew writers of comparable caliber, for instance Fayerberg, who nonetheless were not included in the modern canon.

However, Gnesin has not always enjoyed the status of "the greatest writer of modern Hebrew prose,"[632] to use the expression of an Israeli researcher, Rachel Albeck-Gidron. His works received mixed reviews from contemporary critics,[633] literary scholars of the early twentieth century do not consider him "the greatest" of the Hebrew writers. Thus, the ardent Zionist and chair of modern Hebrew literature at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Yosef Klausner (1874-1958), devoted only one brief paragraph to Gnesin in his "History of Modern Hebrew Literature." Without any references to specific works, Klausner labeled Gnesin as the "most individual and aloof of Hebrew story-writers," and went on to call his career "brief and unhappy," his characters "dumb souls," his works a "handful of sketches," and his style obscure, although admirably suited to the vague subject-matter of his stories.[634] In 1950, Shimon Halkin (1899-1987), who succeeded

[631] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kitve* 144.
[632] Rachel Albeck-Gidron, introduction vii.
[633] See Chapter 3.
[634] Joseph Klausner, *A History of the Modern Hebrew Literature* 190-191. At the same time, Klausner discussed Brener in much greater detail in his work. In another review of modern Hebrew literature, which was published in 1916, Gnesin is not mentioned at all. See Abraham Solomon Waldstein, *The Evolution of Modern Hebrew Literature: 1850-1912* (New York: Columbia UP, 1916).

Klausner at Hebrew University, published his own history of modern Hebrew literature, treating it "ideologically rather than from the standpoint of purely literary appreciation."[635] Gnesin is not even mentioned in Halkin's work.

Perceptions of Gnesin began to change when Hebrew modernist writers, such as Israel Zmora (1899-1983), tried to use his works as a foundation for their own writing. Later, literary scholars Adi Tsemakh and Gershon Shaked shifted the focus of their study to the formal aspects of Gnesin's writing, and connected his narrative style with stream of consciousness writing. Such an approach allowed Israeli critics to view Gnesin as a pioneer of Hebrew modernism. In their reevaluation of his works they no longer found his style obscure, but rather "as revolutionary and innovative as any of the modernist European authors who wrote in French, German, and Russian."[636] Moreover, it is possible to consider Gnesin as the originator of this technique, because he has used the technique of stream of consciousness before its major European practitioners such as Dorothy Richardson, James Joyce or Virginia Woolf. Since Gnesin and these European authors were unaware of each other's works, Shaked explains their formal similarities by virtue of their coinciding social and literary developments. Hence, Shaked presents Gnesin as a Jewish-European rather than Jewish-Russian writer. From the late 1960s on, Israeli writers and scholars have secured Gnesin's place in the official Hebrew canon, a status that speaks to a departure away from the ideological values of traditional socialist Zionism.

The tendency to increase the prestige of the national literature by moving certain writers into its canon can be demonstrated using the example of other Jewish-Russian authors. Dvora Baron (1887-1956) published eleven collections of stories after arriving in

[635] Simon Halkin, *Modern Hebrew Literature* 12.
[636] *Jewish Literatures and Cultures: Context and Intertext*, ed. Anita Norich, and Yaron Z. Eliav (Providence, RI: Brown U, 2008) 214.

pre-state Israel in 1910, but her biographer, Amia Lieblich, writes that her name was unknown to native Israelis, and "even at school […] her name had never been mentioned."[637] However, the growing feminist movement and the emerging interest in the European Jewish culture in Israel both contributed in making Baron famous as the first modern Hebrew female writer. Her sad exilic stories, which would otherwise never have been read by young Israelis, were promptly included in the school program. Another case is Yakov Steinberg (1887-1947), who wrote poetry in Ashkenazic Hebrew, and whose best Hebrew stories were originally written in Yiddish before his moving to Palestine in 1915.[638] Very much like Baron, he was thematically too deeply rooted in Eastern Europe culture to be able to enter the Israeli canon all by himself; it was not until the late 1950s, when the modernist poet Natan Zach began his rebellion against Zionist poets that Steinberg was recognized as the precursor to a new poetic generation. Only then did Israeli students began to study his works at school.[639]

Paraphrasing Shaked's words about modern Hebrew poetry, it would not be an exaggeration to conclude that the intention of including these Jewish-Russian authors in the Israeli literary canon was to give it "a legitimacy derived from the past and to lay out a path for a national future."[640] Thus, the mechanism behind such canon-making is relatively simple: literary scholars and writers "discover" forgotten Jewish authors, state officials approve some of them for inclusion in the school curriculum in accordance with the present political goals of the state, and, finally, public media confirms and disseminates the canonical status of the selected authors. The major drawback of this

[637] Amia Lieblich, *Conversations with Dvora: An Experimental Biography of the First Modern Hebrew Woman Writer*, trans. Naomi Seidman (Berkeley: U of California P, 1997) vii.
[638] All the four stories by Steinberg included in the program were written in Yiddish between 1912 and 1914, and later translated into Hebrew.
[639] Natan Zach (1930-) was born in Berlin, and has been living in Israel since the age of six.
[640] See Gershon Shaked, *The New Tradition: Essays on Modern Hebrew Literature* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College P, 2006) 4.

mechanism, however, is the authors' unstable position within the canon. Designed to satisfy specific ideological needs and rooted in the current political agenda, the Israeli literary canon is obviously prone to regular adjustment as it is adaptated to the needs of different political forces, the general public, and scholars.[641]

4.6. GNESIN REVISITED

Gnesin's presence in the most recent edition of the Israeli school curriculum (2007) is justified by his status as a founder of Hebrew modernism and his title as the pioneer of the stream of consciousness technique. His status was established by Israeli literary scholars several decades ago, and has become commonly accepted in Israel and worldwide. These unshakable axioms contributed towards the creation of a new "legend of Gnesin," as Lili Ratok called the first period of Gnesin's critical history. Most of the early critics were strongly influenced by his personality, and tended to read his works "as if they were direct personal confessions."[642] The later period of Israeli critical writing on Gnesin was concerned strictly with his works. The new legend heavily emphasizes Gnesin's stream of consciousness writing technique, and makes a sharp distinction between the early (naturalist) and the late (modernist) periods in his writing. This sharp distinction is achieved by calling his early works mediocre and epigonic, and on the other hand, by reading his late stories as "the most excellent and refined of Hebrew prose since the eighteenth century."[643] In some cases, this assumption contradicts historical facts. For instance, writing about the positive reception of *Hatsida*, Albeck-Gidron states that

[641] For instance, in 2000, the Minister of Education Yossi Sarid's decision to add works by the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish to the school curriculum was rejected by Prime Minister Ehud Barak. However, after the poet's death in 2008, an influential Israeli peace activism organization, Gush Shalom, sent an official telegram to the Minister of Education, Yuli Tamir, with a request to honor the memory of the national Palestinian poet by including his poems in the curriculum, and it is quite plausible that in the near future Israeli students will study Darwish.

[642] *Uri Nisan Gnesin: mivkhar ma'amerey* 12.

[643] Rachel Albeck-Gidron, introduction xiv.

"when it came out, it was applauded […] by the eulogies of the greatest authors of the time;"[644] however, Frishman, who was very exited about *Hatsida,* was hardly "the greatest" author of his time, and several published biographies by Miron, Ratok, and Laor do not support Albeck-Girdon's claim. Similarly, the modern "legend of Gnesin" tends to ignore such mundane facts of Gnesin's life as hunger, poverty, and financial instability. Gnesin's letters show that he was unable to support himself with his literature. Thus, he was driven from town to town, not because he had a romantic restless nature, but because he was driven by the prosaic hope of earning some money. For instance, he went to Borisoglebsk and stayed there for over a year not because "he was fed up with Warsaw, particularly with its group of young authors,"[645] as Albeck-Gidron suggests, but because it was nearly impossible to get a private tutoring job in Warsaw.[646]

Gnesin's use of stream of consciousness, which is at the core of his myth, appears in a totally different light when examined in the context of Russian literature. Such an examination leads to a new understanding of his innovativeness, and ultimately to a re-evaluation of his place in Israeli canon. The narrative technique that attempts to record human impressions, thoughts, and minute impulses, both conscious and subconscious, is commonly known as "interior monologue" and was used in literary works long before American psychologist and philosopher William James (1842-1910) coined the term "stream of consciousness."[647] It can be found in *Tristram Shandy* by Laurence Sterne (1713-1768), as well as in many European works of the nineteenth century.[648] These two

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[644] Rachel Albeck-Gidron, introduction xvi.
[645] Rachel Albeck-Gidron, introduction xiii.
[646] See Chapter 1.
[647] J. A. Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (London: Penguin Books, 1999).
[648] The most renowned stream of consciousness authors such as Dorothy Richardson, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and T. S. Eliot were influenced to various degrees by the interior monologues of French poets (Mallarmé, Rimbaud, Valéry, and others).

narrative devices are not synonymous, although some scholars use them interchangeably. Interior monologue has a longer history and a broader meaning. Generally speaking, stream of consciousness is an extreme form of interior monologue: it is a flow of speech in which logic, syntax, and even punctuation are abandoned to emulate the continuous stream of human thought. Interior monologue has a similar function; however, it complies with linguistic conventions of organized human speech and narrative.

In Russian psychological prose, which reached the peak of popularity in the second half of the nineteenth century in works by Dostoevskiĭ, Tolstoĭ, Chekhov, and other writers, interior monologue was used as one of the major narrative tools. An influential Russian critic and writer, Nikolaĭ Chernyshevskiĭ (1828-1889), wrote that the young Tolstoĭ was particularly interested in the psychological process, its forms and laws. Tolstoĭ wanted to trace the developments of feelings and thoughts, and observe how a feeling comes into being as a direct result of a certain situation or impression, and then transform into other feelings under the influence of memories or fantasy.[649] These "wanderings of feelings" continue to characterize the interior monologues in Tolstoĭ's later works, and the same meandering constitute the signature stylistic device in Gnesin's four long stories. The following fragment of *Anna Karenina* exemplifies this technique. Anna is returning home after visiting her brother's wife, Dolly, and a meeting with her sister, Kitty. She looks at the street through the cab' window:

> I don't know myself. I know my appetites, as the French say. Here you go, they want that dirty ice cream. They know it for sure, – she thought, looking at two boys who stopped an ice-cream seller, who took off a box from his head and began to wipe his wet face with a towel. – We all want

[649] N. G. Chernishevskiĭ, *Polnoe sobranie sochineniĭ [Complete Works]*, vol. 3 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoĭ literatury, 1947) 422-423.

> something sweet, something nice. If there are no candies, then let it be a dirty ice cream. And Kitty is the same – if not Vronskiĭ, then Levin. And she envies me. She hates me. And we all hate each other. I hate Kitty, Kitty hates me. It is true. T͡iut'kin, coiffeur. *Je me fais coiffer par T͡iut'kin*... I'll tell him about it when he comes, – she thought and smiled. But at the same time she recalled that she had nobody now to tell anything funny to. – And after all, there is nothing funny, nothing amusing. It's so disgusting. They are ringing for the evening service, and how carefully that merchant crosses himself! As if he were afraid to drop something. Why all these churches, and this singing, and this lying? Only to conceal that we all hate each other like those cab-men, who curse each other so angrily.[650]

Tolstoĭ frames the internal monologue of his protagonist with punctuation and the syntactic markers "she thought" and "she recalled." He clearly describes the changing events that produce Anna's feelings and cause her reactions. She sees boys eating dirty ice cream which is also sweet, and her thought about good candies and bad ice cream transforms into a comparison of two men, Vronskiĭ and Levin, which in turn leads to the idea that Kitty wants to be with Levin just as the boys want dirty ice cream. Looking at a sign in French displaying the name of someone who is apparently her personal

[650] Я сама не знаю. Я знаю свои аппетиты, как говорят французы. Вот им хочется этого грязного мороженого. Это они знают наверное, — думала она, глядя на двух мальчиков, остановивших мороженика, который снимал с головы кадку и утирал концом полотенца потное лицо. — Всем нам хочется сладкого, вкусного. Нет конфет, то грязного мороженого. И Кити так же: не Вронский, то Левин. И она завидует мне. И ненавидит меня. И все мы ненавидим друг друга. Я Кити, Кити меня. Вот это правда. Тютькин, coiffeur... Je me fais coiffer par Тютькин... Я это скажу ему, когда он приедет, — подумала она и улыбнулась. Но в ту же минуту она вспомнила, что ей некому теперь говорить ничего смешного. — Да и ничего смешного, веселого нет. Все гадко. Звонят к вечерне, и купец этот как аккуратно крестится! — точно боится выронить что-то. Зачем эти церкви, этот звон и эта ложь? Только для того, чтобы скрыть, что мы все ненавидим друг друга, как эти извозчики, которые так злобно бранятся. (Lev Tosltoĭ. *Anna Karenina*. Part VII, Ch. XXIX).

hairdresser, Anna switches to French for a second, and smiles, but immediately begins thinking about her problems at home, and feels disgusted, which makes church on the street also seem false and nasty to her. As one can see, the use of monologue is appropriate in this fragment because it is justified by the narrative logic of the plot, and creates a balance between events and feelings. In Tolstoĭ's other stories, the storyline may require other tools for psychological analysis. For example there is an abundance of internal monologues in *Metel'* [Snow-storm], yet this literary device is completely absent in *Zapiski markëra* [Notes of a Billiard Marker].

In Gnesin's works, this technique is also applied in accordance with the author's narrative needs. Thus, in *Etsel* the traditional first-person form of interior monologue is replaced with the dreams and memories of the protagonist Efroim Margolis. In the story, Efroim revives his memories and lives them through again and again. Yet, even in this story the quasi-monologues are structurally similar to their Russian models; however, Efroim's feelings are often stimulated by memories rather than external events:

> And again his ears heard nothing. From that day on, [he heard] nothing about Zina and how she was doing. As if from that time on he didn't even remember her. Except, maybe, on one or two sleepless nights. It happens so, for instance, when a man cannot sleep and suddenly recalls a young branch of a birch – soft, whitish and gorgeous, which he looked at, but didn't notice along the distant and bare roads, stretched toward the sunlight of silent noon, when the hand of God had thrown him there in the dawn of his childhood – he recalls it and immediately forgets it again. Zina... there was some Zina. Ha! Full of years, the sun rises drop by drop in the east, and reddens like blood, and falls into the great sea, and every day people get excited, and people meet, and people leave, and dreams are

> woven, and the dreams are carried away by wind, and Zina – who will remember Zina? Isn't she more of an old and vague legend that he suddenly recalled from the dawn of his childhood? In lands and countries where he had never placed his foot, in generations and times forgotten by his ancestors, there was once a girl... And why did he recall her all of a sudden? Why recalled her? The bear! The bear! Here is the bear: in the cold time of snow it huddles in its lair, and curls up real good, and takes its big paw in the mouth, and sucks, and sucks. The time of snow is cold, and the dark groves were thin, and it seemed that hives with honey were nothing but a shattered dream – and here he is, snuggles real good inside, and taking his big paw in his mouth, and he sucks and sucks...[651]

Efroim cannot forget a girl he saw for the last time more than three years ago. He looks at an ironic postcard she wrote for him, and begins to talk to himself about her as if he were talking about his memories. Such a double-layered monologue with multiple repetitions and rich metaphoric imagery creates the tangible illusion of the girl's presence. At the same time, it allows Gnesin to express subtle nuances of his protagonist's melancholy. Thinking of Zina makes Efroim sad because once he did not notice her, just as one does not notice a beautiful tree along the road. The roads are stretched towards the sun, and, therefore, Efroim begins to visualize the sun as the eternal background of human life,

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[651] Uri Nisn Gnesin, *Kol kitve Uri Nisan Gnesin* 395:

ושוב לא קלטה אוזנו כלום. מהיום ההוא והלאה לא קלטה כלום בדבר זינה ואת אשר אֻתה. כמדומה לו, שמאז והלאה לא זכר אותה אפילו. לאפוּקֵי, אפשר, בליל-נדודים אחד ובמשנהו. ככה יש, למשל, אשר אדם בנדודיו יזכור פתאום דָּלְיַת לְבֵנָה אחת רכה ולבנבנה ויפה-פייה, שפגָשה ולא השגיח בה בצִדי הדרכים הרחוקות והחש֯ופות, השטוחות כלפי אור צהריים שותק, שיַד האלוהים טילטלה אותו לשם בשחר ילדותו – יזכור ויחזור וישכחנה מִיד שוב. זינה... היתה זינה אחת. חה! רבות רבות בשנים חמה מטפטפת ויוצאת במזרח ומאדימה כדם ונופלת לים הגדול ובכל יום ויום בני-אדם מתרגשים ובני-אדם נפגשים ובני-אדם נפטרים וחלומות נארגים וחלומות יִש֯א רוח, וזינה – מי זה יהא זוכר את זינה? האם לא אגדה נושנה ואינה-ברורה היא אשר זכר פתאום משחר ילדותו? בארצות ובמדינות, אשר רגלו לא דרכה שם, ובדורות ותקופות, אשר אבות אבותיו לא זכרו אותם, הי֯ה היתה ריבה אחת... ולמה זה זכר אותה פתאום? למה זכרה? הדוב הזה! הדוב הזה! בתקופת השלגים הקרה הרי אותו דוב מתכנס במאורתו ומתקפל יפה יפה ונוטל את כפּוֹ הגדול אל פיו ויוֹנקה ויונקה. תקופת השלגים קרה היא והחורשות האפֵלוֹת מפולשות כבר וכַוורוֹת הדבש לא היו, כנראה, אלא חלום שנתבדה – והרי-זה מתפנס יפה יפה לתוֹכוֹ ונוטל את כפּוֹ הגדולה למו פיו והוא יוֹנקה ויונקה...

upon which the singular Zina is a barely visible legend. The word "legend" made Efroim adjust his speech style, just as a French word on a sign made Anna Karenina utter a phrase in French. The legend appears to be the last ring in the chain of associations. Efroim tries to connect this chain to his own life by defining his relationship with Zina. The image of the hibernating bear who is missing his honey and who is, in its place now sucking on his paw, culminates this fragment.

Gnesin's internal monologues are somewhat free of formal linguistic conventions, and, therefore, rarely utilize introductory markers. The reason for this is self-evident: while Tolstoĭ wrote in a language with strict grammatical rules from which he could not deviate, Gnesin was free of such restraints because in his time there were no standardize forms for representing speech in Hebrew. Another distinct feature of Gnesin's internal monologues is the focus on the analysis of feelings rather than on the events that cause these feelings.

It is important to note that there are no violations of standardized syntax in Gnesin's works: following the Russian literary tradition, he attempts to present the feelings of his heroes as if they were spoken in a series of internal monologues. This technique is essentially different from the recreation of human cognition through suppression of logic and syntax, as it is commonly practiced in the writings of the stream of consciousness school:

> Yes. Thought so. Sloping into the Empire. Gone. Plain soda would do him good. Where Pat Kinsella had, his Harp theater before Whitbred ran the Queen's. Broth of a boy. Dion Boucicault business with his harvest-moon face in a poky bonnet. Three Purty Maids from School. How time flies eh? Showing red long pantaloons under his skirts. Drinkers, drinking laughed splattering, their drink against their breath. More power, Pat. Course red:

> fun for drunkards: guffaw and smoke. Take off that white hat. His parboiled eyes. Where is he now? Beggar somewhere. The harp that once did starve us all.[652]

The thoughts and feelings of Joyce's hero, Leopold Bloom, are represented in this frequently quoted paragraph as a sequence (or a stream) of short and grammatically incorrect phrases, most of which are not logically related to each other, and are not caused by any events outside of Bloom's mind. Since these features are not found in Gnesin's writing, "stream of consciousness" is not an appropriate label for his prose.

Alternative readings and interpretation of Gnesin's writing starts to emerge, and the "legend of Gnesin" begins to lose its credibility. Thus, Philip Hollander defines the most crucial elements of Gnesin's style as "complex syntax and rich vocabulary, psycho-narration and interior monologue."[653] Shachar Pinsker also rejects the presence of the stream of consciousness technique in Gnesin writing. He claims that the striking innovation of his story *Hatsida*

> lies in its impressionist and symbolist modes of narration, and its unprecedented employment of what Dorrit Cohn calls 'psycho-narration' (the reporting of the character's thoughts and feelings in the language of the narrator), and 'narrated monologue' (the representation of the inner speech of the character).[654]

In order to avoid creating a new "myth of Gnesin," the word "unprecedented" has to be understood in the Jewish-Russian context. The uniqueness of Gnesin's works comes from

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[652] James Joyce, *Ulysses* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2002) 159-160.
[653] Philip Hollander, "Rethinking Modern Hebrew Literature: A Review of Shachar M. Pinsker's "Literary Passports," *A Jewish Journal of Thought and Culture*, online, Internet, 26 Aug. 2011.
[654] Shachar Pinsker, *Literary Passports* 207.

his usage of European, especially Russian, literary models,[655] and his rejection of the social and didactic aspirations of these literary traditions. In other words, Gnesin managed to adopt certain formal devices, successfully implementing them in his writing, but refused to view literature as his moral contribution to society.

Conclusion

Gnesin's original works, letters, and memoirs convincingly support the assumption that Gnesin subscribes to the aesthetic theory of "art for art's sake," advocated for by one of his favorite writers, Oscar Wilde (1854-1900).[656] Gnesin's aesthetic views were also responsible for his tensions with Brener, who recognized the didactic and moral purposes of writing, and renounced the autonomy of art, arguing for a traditional Russian understanding of literature's goals.

At the turn of the century, Jewish writers who shared Gnesin's aesthetic position were often condemned by critics for their unwillingness to reflect national realities and contribute to the eternal national spirit of the Jewish people.[657] Gnesin, the "cold impressionist" (to use Brener's words), who used to roam along the streets of big cities hungry and carrying a volume of Schopenhauer in his pocket, was a perfect target for such criticism. He, no more than anybody else in his artistic milieu, was preoccupied with his memories, reflection, exotic sensations, and eroticism. It was for this reason that

[655] Some of the Russian models are studied in Itamar Even-Zohar, *Gnessin's Dialogue and Its Russian Models*.
[656] Osher Beylin wrote in his memoir how during his stay in London in 1907 Gnesin was excitedly reading aloud *Salome* despite his serious sickness, which made speaking and breathing painful for him. In the same year Brener published *Salome* in his journal *Ha-Meorer*. See A. Beylin, *Uri Nisan Gnesin: shivre zikhronot*.
[657] Hamutal Bar-Yosef, "Romanticism and Decadence in the Literature of the Hebrew Revival," *Comparative Literature*, 46:2 (Spring, 1994): 150.

Bialik rejected Gnesin's story in 1904, and Klausner nearly ignored Gnesin in his study of modern Hebrew literature.[658]

Frishman's belated regret at being close to Gnesin and yet barely knowing him is just another example of why so many questions are left unanswered about this highly introspective writer. While there is no way to penetrate the barrier of years and acquire the knowledge Frishman longed for, it is nonetheless possible to answer the question asked at Gnesin's funeral: "Who was he?" The present study allows us to view Gnesin as a Jewish-Russian *fin de siècle* writer who expressed his painful experiences in sophisticated Hebrew prose of such density that its reading has been compared to a swim through linguistic honey.[659]

[658] Among the first scholars who suggested that Gnesin's decadent tendencies negatively effected his reception in Hebrew literature was Israeli writer Ortsion Bartana (1949-). See: Ortsion Bartana, *Tlushim ve-khalutsim: hitgavshut ha-mgama ha-neo-romantit be-sifrut ha-ivrit [Uprooted and Pioneers: Integration of Neo-Romantic Tendency in Hebrew Literature]* (Jerusalem: Dvir, 1984) 144-172.

[659] Philip Hollander, *Rethinking Modern Hebrew Literature*.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Russia is notorious for paying great attention to the reading habits of its citizens: many readers of "wrong" books were considered harmful enough by the authorities to be arrested, interrogated, sentenced, and even executed. In fact, the printed word remained the major mass medium for communication around the world until new technologies began to emerge in the 1950s. For Russian Jews, reading was, therefore, not only a social practice but also a way of life, and a reliable source of self-identification. Bialik, Berdichevski, Brener, and other influential poets, writers, and journalists were true modern prophets among numerous worshipers. Having played a significant role in the shaping of national ideology, their works were canonized by educational systems in Palestine and later in the State of Israel.

Uri-Nisn Gnesin was among such canonized authors. Gnesin was a sophisticated intellectual who deliberately rejected any didactics in literature and carefully avoided all political affiliations. His works manifest the idea of "art for art's sake," and by no means intending to make their readers "better" people or citizens. In this sense Gnesin sharply stands out among the majority of his contemporary writers. However, he is read and studied in Israeli schools alongside with his friend Brener, one of the symbolic Zionist figures of the Second Aliya (1904-1914). Gnesin's canonization in Israel conflicts with Harold Bloom's concept of a "strong author" as an essential factor in the construction of the canon. It also demonstrates the political nature of this process, as suggested by John Guillory. An examination of Gnesin's life and work proposes an adequate explanation of this seeming contradiction, and also allows us to redefine Gnesin's place in Jewish literature. The main objective of this study is to reposition Gnesin as a Jewish-Russian, rather than Hebrew, writer, who presents a foreign element to the Israeli literary canon.

Therefore, Gnesin's writing must first and foremost be regarded as a vanished branch of Jewish-Russian literature.

The theoretical framework of this study originated from a dissatisfaction with the postmodern critical tradition that has gained prominence in American literary studies since the 1970s, namely Marxist criticism and post-structuralism. The main practice of this largely relativist tradition includes the destabilization of texts through a special mode of analytical reading known as deconstruction, as well as the decentering of the author's role in the creation of textual meaning, ultimately replacing it with the role of the reader. I assume the examination of individual authors to be a critical component of literary studies. I find it justified to interpret literary works as the intentional creations of their author, and to derive their meaning from readings supported by the exploration of the author's life against its historical and cultural background. This systematic approach is inspired primarily by the scholarship of Itamar Even-Zohar. In many ways, this project follows the model of philological research, wherein philology is defined as a combination of literary studies, history and linguistics.

Therefore, the main focus of the first chapter is an attempt to reconstruct the factual, political, cultural, spiritual, aesthetic, and intellectual aspects of Gnesin's life using numerous memoirs, reviews, letters, and other primary and secondary sources written in Yiddish, Hebrew, and Russian. The analysis of this material fills several gaps in existing biographical studies of Gnesin, and serves as the foundation for the conclusions made in the following chapters.

The close reading of Gnesin's translations in the second chapter is predicated on the figure of the assimilated Jewish-Russian writer, who was a native of Russian culture, and drew on its language and literature. At the same time, the adaptive strategies used in his translations of Russian works were part of the old Jewish tradition of "improving"

secular texts. These "improvements" were considered a manifestation of the Jewish hierarchy of ethical values, which Gnesin acquired in his early childhood and shared with many of his friends.

The third chapter explores the noticeable change in Gnesin's writing, which could be dated to 1904. This event is concomitant with Gnesin's deep psychological crisis resulting from his alienation from the literary community, and the growing schism between traditional and secular worlds that he occupied. This crisis shifted the focus of Gnesin's writing transforming it from a traditional narrative to a narrated monologue. However, it is unfair to say, as some scholar do, that Gnesin's later work is superior to his early stories: although the focus of Gnesin's later stories shifts away from plot to the psychological exploration of his character's thoughts and emotions, the whole corpus of his works exhibits a thematic and aesthetic unity.

The fourth chapter presents a functional analysis of Gnesin's use of languages. The results allow us to contest the common view of Gnesin as first and foremost a Hebrew writer, and claim that, although the formal language of his fiction is Hebrew, he nonetheless wrote in a special hyper-language that can be defined as a "translative Hebrew." Gnesin's origins, his dual identity, and his depictions of Jewish life in Russia from an insider's perspective place him into a special category of Jewish writers; unlike modern pre-State or Israeli Hebrew authors, Gnesin was not a native speaker of Hebrew. Nonetheless, Gnesin's works were included in the Hebrew literary canon before and after 1948, together with the writings of many other prominent Jewish-Russian writers. The investigation of the historical and political factors of literary canonization highlights the early Zionists' pragmatic view of literature as an important ideological instrument, rather than an aesthetic phenomenon. It also explains how several decades ago, Israeli scholars and politicians reappropriated Gnesin and made him part of the modern Hebrew canon,

labeling him as a founder of Hebrew modernism, and a pioneer of the "stream of consciousness" technique. My study attempts to redefine his writing technique as an internal monologue connected with the works of Dostoevskiĭ, Tolstoĭ, Chekhov, and other nineteenth-century writers of Russian psychological prose, in which interior monologue is used as major narrative tool. From this perspective, Gnesin appears as a *fin de siècle* writer who masterfully used Hebrew language to express his troubled Jewish-Russian experience.

In the broader context, redefining Gnesin as primarily a Jewish-Russian author raises important questions, outlining the direction of research to be done. It opens the door for the re-examination of Berdichevski, Brener and other "founding fathers" of modern Hebrew literature, as well as of those marginalized writers who have not yet attracted much critical attention, such as Shofman, Nomberg and Yakov Shteinberg. What do they have in common with Gnesin? Did they suffer from the same spiritual crisis and feelings of alienation that affected Gnesin's writing style so intensely? And to what extent did their similar backgrounds influence their work? At the same time, highlighting the influence of Russian literature on Gnesin's writing complicates the continuing debate, which pits Hebrew writing against Yiddish writing as the source of modern Hebrew literature. Although there has been some discussion of the Russian influence upon particular Hebrew writers, it is crucial to examine it more systematically. How typical is Gnesin's rootedness in Russian literature for a European Jewish writer of his time, and what is the outcome of the Jewish and non-Jewish vectors in their writings? In other words, are Dostoevskiĭ and Tolstoĭ as crucial for understanding the emergence of modern Hebrew literature as Mendele Moykher-sforim?

My main theoretical argument is that the thorough examination of individual authors, made in a broad historical and cultural context, is critical for the study of modern

Hebrew literature. Supported by this argument, the present study explores new historical and cultural dimensions of Gnesin's life and work, and demonstrates how the assimilated Russian Jew's dual identity and worldview conditioned his Hebrew prose. I argue that Gnesin's fiction should be placed in the narrow space between Jewish and non-Jewish "associative infrastructures" (to use the language of Gershon Shaked). Neither exclusively Jewish nor Russian, but simultaneously both, his works occupy a unique and indivisible Jewish-Russian literary realm. Offering an alternative view of Gnesin as a Jewish-Russian writer, focusing on his spiritual in-betweenness and highlighting the role of non-Jewish culture upon his writing, this dissertation contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of Gnesin's works through the analysis of Russian literature as a primary model for his modernist fiction, in addition to traditional Jewish texts. It would, however, be inaccurate to consider literary texts and languages as the sole factors which formed Gnesin's identity and impacted his writing; rather, it was the whole Jewish-Slavic atmosphere of the Eastern European Diaspora that provided Jewish modernist writers with the necessary models for thinking, feeling, and writing.

Appendix A. Transliteration Charts

RUSSIAN ROMANIZATION CHART

А а	A a	К к	K k	Х х	Kh kh
Б б	B b	Л л	L l	Ц ц	t͡S t͡s
В в	V v	М м	M m	Ч ч	Ch ch
Г г	G g	Н н	N n	Ш ш	Sh sh
Д д	D d	О о	O o	Щ щ	Shch shch
Е е	E e	П п	P p	ъ*)	‘‘
Ё ё	Ё ё	Р р	R r	Ы ы	Y y
Ж ж	Zh zh	С с	S s	ь*)	‘
З з	Z z	Т т	T t	Э э	Ė ė
И и	I i	У у	U u	Ю ю	I͡U i͡u
Й й	Ĭ ĭ	Ф ф	F f	Я я	I͡A i͡a

*) This letter does not occur in the beginning of a word.

HEBREW ROMANIZARTION CHART

א	-	ט	t	פ	f
בּ	b	י	y	צ	ts
ב	v	כּ	k	ק	k
ג	g	כ	kh	ר	r
ד	d	ל	l	שׁ	sh
ה	h	מ	m	שׂ	s
ו	v	נ	n	תּ	t
וו	v	ס	s	ת	t
ז	z	ע	‘		
ח	kh	פּ	p		

YIDDISH ROMANIZATION CHART

א	-	זש	zh	ס	s
אַ	a	ח	kh	ע	e
אָ	o	ט	t	פּ	p
ב	b	י	i	פ	f
בֿ	v	י	y	צ	ts
ג	g	יי	ey	ק	k
ד	d	יִ	ay	ר	r
ה	h	כּ	k	ש	sh
ו	u	כ	kh	שׂ	s
וו	v	ל	l	תּ	t
וי	oy	מ	m	ת	s
ז	z	נ	n		

Appendix B. Selected Maps

THE PALE OF SETTLEMENT[660]

Fig. 6. Pale of Settlement in 1865 (without Congress Poland).[a]

[a] The numbers indicate the Jewish percentage of population.

Source: *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiĭskoĭ imperii [Complete Collection of the Laws of the Russian Empire]*, vol. XL (Sankt-Peterburg: II otdelenie E. I. V. Kantseli͡arii, 1867) 698.

[660] In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Pale included sixteen Russian *gubernias* and one district, as well as 10 Polish *gubernias*. Four large cities were closed to Jews. In 1882, Jews were expelled from rural areas within the Pale, forcing them to concentrate in small towns (*shtetl*).

CHERNIGOV GUBERNIA

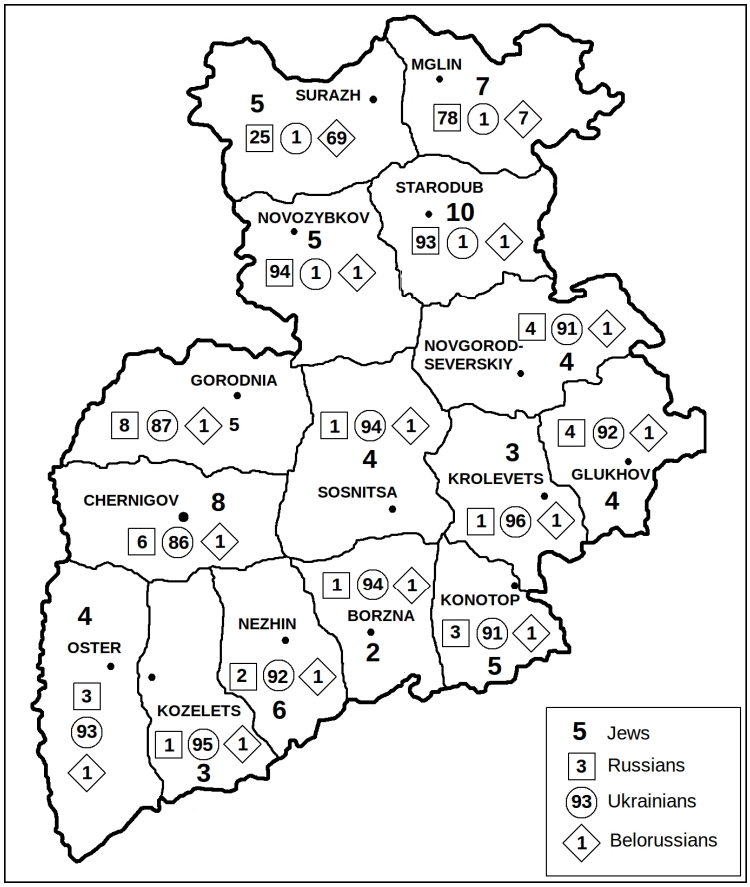

Fig. 7. Districts of Chernigov *gubernia* in the second half of nineteenth century with the percentages of Jewish, Russian, Ukrainian and Belorussian population.

Source: *Ėnt͡siklopedicheskiĭ slovar [Encyclopedic Dictionary]*, vol. XXXVIIIa (Sankt-Peterburg: Brokgauz-Efron, 1903) 590; *Pervai͡a vseobshchai͡a perepis' naseleniі͡a Rossiĭskoĭ imperii 1897 g. [The First Total Census of Russian Empire]*, ed. N. A. Troyni͡tskiĭ, vol. XLVIII (Sankt-Peterburg: T͡Sentral'nyĭ statisticheskiĭ komitet Ministerstva vnutrennikh del, 1905) xii.

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Vita

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This manuscript was typed by Andrey Alexander Bredstein.