

Introduction

Poland was a very significant cradle of modern Hebrew literature, and the purpose of this volume is to introduce in a nutshell the richness and intensity of Polish Jews' literary creation in Hebrew. Some of the authors and works are unfamiliar to the contemporary reader and placing them in the center of this volume will bring to the reader's mind the less known aspects of the trilingual literature of Polish Jews. In that respect it will fill the gap for Polish and other scholars and students interested in Jewish studies, who are better acquainted with literature of Polish Jews written in Polish and Yiddish due to a number of works on the topic published in recent decades.

The complete story of modern Hebrew literature in Poland is still to be written, but until a courageous scholar will undertake such a demanding task, this volume offers a glimpse into some of the most intriguing writers who have lived and created in Hebrew in the second part of the nineteenth century till the outbreak of World War II. The literary spectrum of the articles in this volume spans from the great achievements of late Haskalah literature till Hebrew modernism, which was untimely interrupted in Poland by the Shoah.

In the first article Avner Holtzman presents the life and writings of the Tarnów-based Maskilic writer Mordekhai Brandstetter. Brandstetter, managed to live in, or between, two worlds: Hasidism and the Haskalah. In his early writings, published in the periodical *Ha-Shahar*, he expressed conflicts between a Maskilic perspective and the traditional Hasidic one in a realistic manner combined with satire and humor. However, in his later writings, he succeeded, as Holtzman shows, to rejuvenate with a new poetics and narrative patterns. In his late, almost forgotten, stories he abandoned the Haskalah values and the didactic tone, and presented what Holtzman calls “an unresolved symposium-like story”

characterized by uncertainty, multiple possibilities and openness to new directions, in which one can find a polyphony of voices and viewpoints.

The article by Einat Baram Eshel portrays one of the key writers of the Haskalah, Reuben Asher Braudes. Baram Eshel concentrates on the writer's neglected short stories, which he wrote concurrently with his novel *Ha'dat ve'ha-hayim* (Religion and Life) that brought him acclaim at the time he lived in Lviv (Lwów). It turns out that Braudes' short stories displayed different poetics than his novels. In the latter he used literature as a platform for propagating Haskalah ideas, and one of its targets was a reform of religion; in other words, it was literature totally engaged ideologically. However, his short stories, restrained and realistic but also lyrical, underlined the intimate worlds of his characters, and in them Braudes broke with the dominant conventions of Haskalah literature.

The accepted opinion concerning modern Hebrew literature is that it evolved together with Jewish nationalism and was the voice of Zionist ideology. However, from Iris Parush's article we learn that a man of letters like David Frishman, who cherished and loved Hebrew literature and had great hopes concerning its future, opposed Zionism and was afraid that it would be one more messianic (and therefore destructive) movement in Jewish history. The dispute between Frishman and Bialik shows how complicated, in fact, the relationship between Hebrew literature and Jewish nationalism and Zionism tended to be. Parush indicates the unique standpoint of Frishman who struggled against the sacralization of the national discourse and for the foundation of Jewish identity based on the perception of Judaism as culture.

In her article Ela Bauer draws our attention to the crucial importance of newspapers and journalists–editors in the creation and growth of modern Hebrew literature, as it was manifested in the personality of Nahum Sokolow. The article presents the tasks, aims and roles that Sokolow believed Hebrew literature, particularly engaged literature, should have in Jewish life, and his contribution to it at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. Bauer also discusses the influence of the Polish environment and its intellectual trends, especially positivism, on Sokolow's thought. As she proves, Hebrew literature was not closed to external inspirations and had some encounters with Polish culture.

Shachar Pinsker portrays Hebrew literary life in Warsaw, one of the most significant centers of Jewish literature. The most important years for the prosperous and dynamic Hebrew literature in the city were at the turn of the twentieth century, when Warsaw became highly attractive for Hebrew writers. Pinsker tries to answer the question “what kind of engagement can be found in Hebrew literature written in Warsaw with the urban space and the experience of intense life in a big city.” He shows, in a detailed analysis of works by Frishman, S.Y. Abramovitz (Mendele Moykher Sforim), and Ezra Goldin, that Warsaw in the late nineteenth century was portrayed as a metropolis with the social dynamism of its Jewish inhabitants. However, in Hebrew fiction written at the beginning of the twentieth century by Sholem Asch, Yaakov Shteinberg, and Eliezer Shteiman, Pinsker perceives a “psychological turn,” i.e. the focus on the social and economic sphere was replaced by the one on the inner life of individual characters and on their existential torments.

Although the interwar period is perceived as an epoch of decline in Hebrew literature in Poland, it seems that Hebrew writers were struggling for survival. In 1938 the poet Berl Pomerantz asked not to eulogize the Hebrew literary center in Poland. It appears that even on the eve of World War II it was inconceivable for Hebrew writers in Poland that their existence there was approaching its tragic end. Magda Sara Szwabowicz presents in her article Hebrew literary centers and periodicals in Poland in the interwar period. She points to their unstable condition, their struggle for survival in spite of their difficult situation, and their complicated relationships with the Hebrew literary center in Palestine. This article shows that interesting Hebrew writings in Poland also existed in the period in which it was considered a center in decline.

The last article, by Anna Piątek, discusses Hebrew poetry of two great modern Hebrew poets, Uri Zvi Greenberg and Avot Yeshurun, written after the annihilation of the Polish-Jewish world, and the image of their lost homeland in their poetry. The author presents the bi-lingual Hebrew-Yiddish poetry of Greenberg and shows that from each of these languages emerges a different picture of Poland. In the comparison between the two poets one can see that Yeshurun writing in Hebrew is much closer in his frame of mind and the atmosphere of his poems to Greenberg writing in Yiddish. In both one can find an intimate and nostalgic poetics, while in his Hebrew poems Greenberg assumes a voice of a prophet of apocalypse and rage.

There are issues and literary personalities in Hebrew literature in the Polish lands that obviously could not be discussed due to the limited format of this volume. However, what is presented is highly essential to this topic, and I hope will encourage further research. Hebrew literature in Poland does not exist any more. And yet, the importance of Polish Jews and their great culture inspires Polish motifs in Hebrew literature even in our time, in the writings of some of the most prominent Israeli writers, including Yehudit Hendel, Shulamit Hareven, Eleonora Lev, Amos Oz, David Grossman and Aharon Appelfeld.

I would like to thank the contributors for their readiness to dedicate their time and talents to this volume. I also thank Marcin Wodziński, who asked me to undertake this challenging assignment, for his support. It was a great pleasure to work with him.

Shoshana Ronen