

Introduction

The following papers were originally given at a seminar that met over a three-day period at the annual meeting of the American Comparative Literature Association in Montréal in April of 1999. The conference organisers had given this seminar the whimsical title "Narrative Chunnels," which turned out to be happily appropriate. "Narrative" identifies the mode, and "chunnels" the subversive and subverting tunnelling that has always characterised the myriad ways in which intellectual traffic travels from country to country, from culture to culture. This traffic has always been polyphonic and multivalent; the traditional, no longer adequate pigeonholing of literature as the product of a hermetic nation-state culture could not do justice to its dynamic complexity. Thus, "translation," crossing, constitutes both literally and metaphorically the topic or matrix of all following papers.

Dror Abend-David's study of renderings of Shylock's speech in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* into German, Hebrew, and Yiddish opens up wide vistas of how language both constitutes and reflects cultural difference. Melanie Eckford-Prossor offers a witty and perspective insight into currencies of identity on the model of the Euro. Michael Hanne explores the boundaries and relationships between metaphor and narrative, both as utterances and as defined fields of scholarly study. Giuliana Perco investigates the manipulated reader, what she calls "the constructed reader" in the works of Milorad Pavić and Italo Calvino. My contribution considers the possible future of literary translation, now that culture and language are becoming increasingly international. Simona Sawhney explores the problematisation of genre theory that results from confronting the Sanskrit epic and the Homeric epic, and the limits on how the former can be read and understood in Western culture. Ian Wilson considers Samuel Beckett's self-translation of *Company/Compagnie*, which presents the reader with the ironic situation of two authoritative texts that differ from each other in important ways, preventing interpretive closure. Steven G. Yao examines how Pound, through creative translation of Confucius, imposes his meaning on the Western reader in the *Cantos*.

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A Comparison of Translations and Adaptations of Shylock's Speech in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* into German, Hebrew and Yiddish

The following is a comparison of a number of translations into German, Hebrew and Yiddish of what is perhaps the most famous passage in *The Merchant of Venice*: Shylock's speech in act III, scene i. Shylock's "speech," is, of course, a part of a dialogue. However, the passage in which Shylock asserts the humanity of the Jews, declaring that they have eyes, hands, dimensions and emotions, has become such a famous part of the play that it can be thought of as a monologue. I refer to this passage as "Shylock's Speech." In this comparison, I choose to concentrate on three issues that inform the choices of German, Hebrew, and Yiddish translators: the representation of Jews as a "nation"; the declaration that they have bodies and souls equal to those of Gentiles; and the expression of their eagerness, and ability, to take revenge. In Shakespeare's play, Shylock's speech is a declaration of complete similarity between Jews and Gentiles in terms of national existence, physical appearance, emotional reaction, and social behaviour. Such equality is undercut in German, as well as in Yiddish and Hebrew translations of the play, providing various modifications of Shakespeare's text. In his speech, Shylock raises the question of Jewish identity – a question that, after more than five thousand years, is still a source of intense inquiry.¹ Since no Jewish community, up to 1948, existed as a modern nation, different translations take different approaches in repeating Shylock's use of the word, "nation." Similarly, since Jews very often lacked political power, their ability to take revenge is not as clear as it may be represented in Shylock's speech ("we will resemble you in that [revenge]"). Finally, the external appearance of Jews and Christians ("hands,

1 In Israel, the debate between Orthodox and Conservative / Reform Jews has been entitled by the Press: "Who is a Jew?" The debate centers mainly on the status of Jews who are converted by non-orthodox Rabbis – and whether such people may partake in the duties and privileges of Israelis who are recognized as Jewish by the state.

organs, dimensions as a Christian") has been historically – and in some events, still is – radically different. In places and times in which relations between Jews and non-Jews were significant parts of civil life – and, consequently, of the play – these differences were shown through various modifications of Shylock's speech.

Between 1894 and 1946, at least fifteen different translations and adaptations of the play were prepared by Yiddish writers, mainly for the Yiddish theatre in New York.² Only one translation, by Joseph Bovshover, was published as a book in 1899. Two other manuscripts, by Jacob P. Adler and Abish Mayzels were used for acclaimed performances in New York in 1901 and in London in 1946. The other manuscripts were not published. They have been seen by few people, and are mentioned in the works of Leonard Prager and Joel Berkowitz (Berkowitz 1995, Prager 1965, Prager 1968). Because these manuscripts are so rare³ and because the Yiddish translations of the play provide some of the most outstanding variations on Shylock's speech, I concentrate in the following discussion on the Yiddish translations at the expense of the impossible task of referring to all, or even most of the existing translations in German. These begin with the colourful seventeenth century adaptation, *Das Wohlgesprochene Uhrtheil, oder Der Jud von Venedig* [*The Well Spoken Judgement, or The Jew of Venice*],⁴ and continue through eighteenth and nineteenth century translations by Wieland (1762–66), Eschenburg (1775), Schröder (1776), A. W. Schlegel (1797), Voß (1818–29), Ortlepp (1838–39), Bauernfeld (1824), Benda (1825–26), Meyer (1824–31) and, finally, the Schlegel and Tieck edition of 1833. I choose to look at Schlegel's translation, as his Shakespearean translations are considered a

"standard" edition⁵ and two relatively recent translations, by Richard Flatter, in 1954, and by Erich Fried, in 1968. The final discussion, of two existing translations into Hebrew, and two recent references to Shylock's speech in an Israeli drama and an Israeli film, reveals, like the tip of an iceberg, a multitude of ways in which Shylock's character haunts Hebrew and Yiddish Theatre, art, and literature, as well as cultural, religious, and political issues up to our very own time.

Between 1797 and 1801, August Wilhelm Schlegel translated sixteen plays by William Shakespeare, including *The Merchant of Venice*. Schlegel performs a number of interesting variations on Shylock's speech. He replaces Shakespeare's "nation" with *Volk*, and describes Jewish corporeality ("organs, dimensions") with *Gliedmaßen*, *Werkzeuge*⁶ – limbs, instruments. Another description of the "dimensions" of the Jew, is provided more than a century later, in Dr. I. E. Walter's introduction to the 1955 edition of Schlegel's (and Tieck's) translation:

In der Mitte des Geschehens steht der Jude.... deutlich sichtbarer Ausdruck des Andersartigen.... Ohne Gnade und ohne Licht.

In the middle of the action stands the Jew.... clear expression of the other... Without grace and without light.

(Shakespeare 1955, 252–53)

Translating the play in 1954, Richard Flatter comes closer to the original with "Glieder, einen Körper [limbs, a body]," and, in 1968, Erich Fried's translation compensates for the denial of Jewish corporeality, substituting three terms for "organs, dimensions:" "*Organe, Leib und Glieder*" – organs, body and limbs. However, what remains in the three German versions is a certain incredulous attitude towards Jewish revenge. In the last sentence, both Schlegel and Flatter interpret Shakespeare's use of the word "but" as an archaic form that means "or" or "or else," translating: "es muß schlimm hergehen, oder... (Schlegel)," and: "Und hart müßt' es hergehen, oder... (Flatter)," with the implication of: 'although it shall go hard, I will (still) better the instruction.' The act of revenge is therefore represented as difficult to accomplish, necessitating a special effort on the part of the Jewish speaker. Finally, all

2 Moris Mayer's 1907 manuscript was actually prepared for a performance in London. Similarly, Abish Mayzels' 1946 manuscript was prepared for a performance in London as well (Shakespeare 1907, Shakespeare 1946). The manuscripts of Avraham Morevski's production in New York in 1926, Michael Weichert's production in Warsaw in 1929, and David Hofstein's production in Kiev in 1935(?) were not found in this research. There is also a record of a possible Yiddish performance in 1817 (*The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, Vol. X, 216).

3 I am particularly pleased with my success in obtaining a grant from the Israeli Lerner foundation that enabled the creation of a microfilm containing more than a dozen manuscripts of translations of *The Merchant of Venice* into Yiddish.

4 A translation of *The Well Spoken Judgement* into English appears in Ernest Brennecke's *Shakespeare in Germany 1590 – 1700*. The play raises interesting issues in the two monologues that the character of the Jew (Barrabas) is allowed in Act II, scene i, and act III, scene ii. Particularly in the second monologue, the change of physical appearance, as the Jew is allowed to wear expensive clothes when he comes from Cyprus to Venice, empowers the Jew to behave like a citizen, change his name, and take revenge against the Prince of Cyprus.

5 For a provocative discussion of the status awarded to the Schlegel-Tieck translations, see two interesting articles by Kenneth E. Larson and Christa Jansohn (Larson 1987, Jansohn 1995).

6 The derivative meaning of *Werkzeuge* as limbs, the Greek etymology of this usage, as well as Schlegel's choice in this translation are mentioned Grimm's dictionary of German etymologies.

I expected that the denial of Jewish corporeality that exists in the German translations would be rectified in Yiddish, and even anticipated the use of the archaic expression "*Koma Vatoar*" – height and countenance.

However, the treatment of the Jewish body in all of the manuscripts manifested a very similar attitude to that of Schlegel and Walter – of divorcing Jews from physical existence. In five of the translations, including Bovshover's, a term for "dimensions" is skipped altogether. And, in almost all of the manuscripts, the physical description is followed immediately by two equivalents of the term "senses," using both a German and a Hebrew term: In German – *Gefühlen* or *Sinne* and in Hebrew – *khushim* (senses). In Adler's manuscript, all three terms are used: "*Gefühlen, Sinne, khushim*" – creating a list of five terms of spirituality (together with "affections" and "passion" rather than three. The most interesting treatment, however, is that of the description of Jewish revenge in the monologue. Like in the German versions, in almost all of the Yiddish manuscripts, the words "*wollen*" or "*darfen*" – "want" or "need" – are substituted for the word "will" in "we will resemble you in that [revenge]." The last sentence of the monologue ("The villainy you teach me, I will execute; and it shall go hard, but I will better the instruction") receives a special treatment in Yiddish. Schlegel's use of the word 'but,' with the implication that revenge is difficult to accomplish, is not adopted in Bovshover's translation, as Bovshover uses the flexibility of Yiddish in this case, allowing the word *ober* [but] to mean both 'however,' and 'or else.' "... און עס וועט שווער, אבער [and it shall be difficult, but...]. In other translations, however, the implication of Schlegel's choice is brought out rather explicitly. In six cases, the translation reads: "וועט עס זיין [it shall go hard *with me*,] emphasizing the pain of the one who is taking revenge. In 1925, Bernard Elving translates: "It will be a little difficult for me, as Jews have not done so yet (Shakespeare 1925)." Finally, Jacob Adler replaces the word "revenge" that appears in Shylock's speech ("What should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why, *revenge*." with two entire sentences that explain and justify Jewish revenge:

The Jewish back, which you, Christians, had bent down with floggings and persecutions, I will now straighten, and I will now pay you with the same coin [with the same compliment].
(In Yiddish)¹⁰

The last part of the sentence ("but I will better the instruction") lends itself to a number of interesting interpretations as well. In Mayzels' manuscript,

this clause is rewritten three times. In the first version, similar to German translations, the text reads: "I will surpass my teacher." This clause is crossed out, and replaced with: "I will complete my assignment (*oysgabe*) even better." However, this version is crossed out as well, and replaced with: "I will do better than *you* have taught me." The insistence on the identity of the instructor – indicating the sense of provocation and justification of revenge – repeats in three manuscripts. In Goldberg's manuscript, in Adler's manuscript, and in one more anonymous manuscript (Shakespeare RG289 1301E), the same clause reads: "*fun meine lehrer, di Kristen*" – from my teacher(s), the Christian(s).

Almost all the Yiddish manuscripts, then, seem to promote a certain Jewish spirituality at the expense of Jewish corporeality – both private and national. In this, the inability of Jews to exist in the physical world in terms of social, cultural and political interaction with non-Jews is transformed into a self-motivated myth of intellectual and spiritual existence. The denial of the body that is first inflicted on Jews by a Gentile environment is finally embraced in celebration of spirituality that Jews are said to possess. In order to claim such alleged spirituality, the similarity to non-Jews, in external features and social behaviour (revenge) is denied by Yiddish translations as forcefully, in fact, more forcefully, than by German ones. Revenge is presented as a behaviour that is foreign to Jews, and can only be learned from a specific teacher – a non-Jewish one.

Even when it is justified and encouraged (as in Adler's manuscript), revenge still must contain the notion that it damages the very moral fiber of the avenger who suffers as much as his victim, perhaps even more so. The Yiddish manuscripts, almost all written during the twentieth century, respond to a historical situation in which Jews appear, behave, and acquire positions of powers similar to those of non-Jews, with an assumption of an essential emotional and moral difference that distinguishes Jews from Gentiles. It is only in the context of this myth that one can realize the extent to which the (otherwise obvious) assertion of legal, social, and emotional equality between Jews and Gentiles can be explosive. In 1928, Louis Zukofsky wrote the following lines (in English), in his epic, "Poem Beginning 'The,'" of his experience as a student in Columbia University:

I might as well look Shagetz just as much as Jew.
I'll read their Donne as mine,
And leopard their spots.
I'll do what says their Coleridge,
I twist red hot pokers into knots.
The villainy they teach me I will execute
And it shall go hard with them,
For I'll better the instruction,

10 This strong nationalist statement may be one of the reasons that Adler's work was pronounced as written in "perfect Yiddish" while Bovshover's was declared "Daytshmerish" – too Germanized. See note 7.

Having learned, so to speak, in their colleges.

(Zukofsky 1928, Lines 254-61)

Louis Zukofsky's native language was Yiddish, and his schooling, which took place in Yiddish, included the Yiddish theatre and the plays of William Shakespeare in their Yiddish adaptations. Perhaps it is his early acquaintance with a Yiddish Shylock that leads him to accept an economy, later expanded in his discussion in *Bottom*,¹¹ in which external similarity to non-Jews ("look Shagetz [non-Jew] just as much as Jew"), necessitates a similarity in behaviour as well. This similarity, more than the poetry of Donne and Coleridge, is what the poet learned, "so to speak," in non-Jewish colleges. Zukofsky kisses his mother, "who could never sing Bach, never read Shakespeare" (240) but accepts a certain loss of Jewish tradition that is necessitated by the loss of external differences between Jews and Gentiles. What the poet gains, however, is a certain position of power, in which revenge will "go hard," not with the Jew, but with the Gentile ("it shall go hard with *them*"). However, Yiddish translators of *The Merchant of Venice* prefer to neglect this position of power for the sake of a mark of difference between Jews and non-Jews.

The passage into Hebrew is always baffling. Hebrew criticism is filled with libel against Yiddish translations of Shakespeare, referring to them (in Yiddish!) as "*Farteitsht un Farbessert*" – explained and improved.¹² However, because of the national motivation of the Shakespearean project in Israel, Shakespeare's archaic language has been almost always translated into various forms of archaic, biblical and *talmudic* Hebrew that match the mythic and powerful characteristics of Shakespearean language. In his article, "Shakespeare in Hebrew Literature during the Periods of Enlightenment and [Hebrew] Renaissance," Dan Almog refers, jokingly, to Alkind's late nineteenth century translation of *The Taming of the Shrew* as the first Shakespearean translation into Aramaic (Almog 750). While Shakespeare's language is vital and flexible, archaic Hebrew very seldom possesses those qualities, and Hebrew translations offer many original modifications of the original.

My first expectation was that the main difference between the Hebrew and Yiddish translations would be in their treatment of Jewish nationality.

11 In *Bottom*, Zukofsky is interested in issues of sight and insight in relation to *The Merchant of Venice*, as well as Jewish tradition – with its skeptic and sometimes-ironic view of the term "light" (Zukofsky 1963, 106, 205).

12 Of course, this quip is based on actual advertisement of early Shakespearean productions during the turn of the century, that were intended for audiences that were not familiar with Shakespeare's work. Hebrew critics enjoy referring to amusing incidents from this early period in the Yiddish Theater. It is, nonetheless, a period in which Hebrew Theater has not yet taken its first steps (Lahad 1966, Almogor 1975).

However, the two existing translations of *The Merchant of Venice* by Shimon Halkin and Avraham Oz present views of nationality that are as ambivalent as those of the Yiddish translators. Although Halkin writes before the establishment of the state of Israel (1929), and Oz does so long afterwards (1989), both use the term "עם" – people, rather than a term closer to the word nation such as *לאנד*,¹³ *אומה*, *אדמה*, *אדמה* etc. Perhaps because Israel always presented itself as the state of the "Jewish people" rather than the sum of its citizens (and non-citizens), there is a certain hesitation to speak of a "Jewish nation." Halkin and Oz do rectify, however, the image of the Jewish body. Halkin uses the biblical term "*Koma Vatoar*" – height and sight, for dimensions, and Oz simply enters the term "*Tzura*" which means figure or form. The two Hebrew translations also demonstrate the Jewish power of revenge, translating, as in the English original, "וְגַם אִם יִקְשְׁרֶנּוּלִי" [here we will resemble you in this matter [revenge] as well]. However, in the last sentence of the monologue both translators repeat earlier Yiddish choices, writing: "וְגַם אִם יִקְשְׁרֶנּוּלִי" [and even if it will be difficult for me [to take revenge]. Halkin even ends the dialogue with: "I will do more than all that *you* have taught me." There is a certain ambivalence here. The Hebrew translators want to present the Jew as physically fit ("*Koma Vatoar*") and powerful. But unlike Zukofsky, who is willing to exchange a certain moral ground for the privilege of functioning in a heterogeneous society as an equal, they still present the Jew as an underdog, and as the victim of non-Jewish aggression. The potential of Jewish revenge, as in the English original, is presented as an undisputed fact. Its execution, on the other hand, is depicted in a fashion similar to that of the Yiddish manuscripts, rendering the avenger acutely conscious of his actions, and unhappy to resort to violence.

Two Hebrew texts that are reminiscent of *The Merchant of Venice* are Yehosua Sobol's play, *Ghetto*, and Rafi Bukai's film, *Avanti Popolo*. Both texts were published in 1984. Sobol's play presents a Shylock-like caricature of a Jew, who, under the Nazi regime, tries to benefit from the special power relations that are formed in the Jewish Ghetto. Weiskopf, Sobol's Shylock, funds a banquet in which he hopes to convince the Germans to open a laundrette in the Ghetto. He delivers a speech (with some interruptions) to a group of Jews, who are preparing a banquet:

WEISKOPF: We'll show them how the Jews can throw a party. We'll show those pigs.... Make the beef look nice. Let them eat. Let them choke on it. May they stuff their bellies and never empty them again, so that they will be blocked on both ends when Titus's worm will climb into their heads. Put the rice here!

13 Despite their close sounds, "עם" and "לאנד" (or *אומה*) are of different roots, one using the letter *ל* (*Alph*) and the other *א* (*Aleph*).

May they be constipated so their entrails will pop out of their asses and wrap around their necks. *The actresses walk in. They look gorgeous with new dresses and makeup. Heeey! Not bad... He lays his hand on L/JUBA's behind and she smacks him. Hey! Hey! Don't forget why you're here. Don't worry if you get a little dirty. Everything will be washed out in our new launderette.* (Sobol, II, iv. In Hebrew)

In Weiskopf's speech, Sobol uses a binary opposition to present the servicing of the German soldiers with food, flowers, and sex as revenge. Sobol achieves this, again, through an economy that equates external appearance with power, writing: "We'll *show* them how the Jews can throw a party. We'll *show* those pigs." The stress here is on external appearance, assuming that the mere appearance of the place will overwhelm the Germans: "Don't spare the flowers. *Show* them what the Jews can do. Let their eyes pop out and drip into their mouths." The description of the Germans as pigs is negated by the description of the Jewish women, again placing the issue of external appearance as a vehicle of power. Beautiful flowers, food, and women are translated into a new launderette that will make money, employ Jews, and even save their lives. Corporeality (demonstrated acutely through the sexual services that the Jewish women award the German soldiers) is therefore presented as an essential characteristic that Jews during the war (and in the Post-War era) have to adopt in order to survive in a non-Jewish world.

In Bukai's film, a very different power relation is employed. The film takes place in the Sinai Desert during the Israeli-Arab war of 1967. Two Egyptian soldiers are captured by an Israeli troop, and they beg for water. One of the prisoners unexpectedly recites Shylock's monologue, in English, before the Israeli soldiers. After the monologue is delivered, the Israeli soldiers give the Egyptian soldiers water, explaining that the confused prisoner has "reversed the roles." The two prisoners, we are told, are drunk, stink, and look like clowns. When the Israeli soldiers report this to headquarters, they are told: "If they are drunk you can shoot them." The prisoners have, as Bukai writes, "reversed the roles," not only by taking the position of the underdog, but also by putting the Israeli soldiers in a position of power, listening to the litigation of those who can only claim their humanity as a justification for human treatment. Like the soldiers, the prisoners are thirsty, and, like them, they will die if they do not have a chance to drink. The reversal of roles between Jews and non-Jews that has haunted Israel since its victory in the war of 1967, is demonstrated already in the first minutes after the war, as Israelis are baffled by their newly acquired position of power.

Within the economy that is demonstrated by Zukofsky and the Yiddish translators, it is difficult to keep Jewish identity and political power at the same time. Certainly, in both Sobol's and Bukai's works this has been presented as an acute problem for postwar Jews and Israelis. But Bukai

complicates the issue of Jewish revenge even further. Non-violence, initially forced on European Jews by their non-Jewish neighbours, and later adopted by Jews as a sign of moral supremacy, is put to the test once Israeli Jews secure a position of power. Of course, the comparison between the plight of dishevelled, thirsty, and defeated Arabs in the Middle East, and that of humiliated, poor, and oppressed Jews in Europe, is not obvious to many Jews and Israelis who find in Jewish history a justification for mistrust and fear of non-Jews. In the fall of 1997, former Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu whispered into the ears of a popular Rabbi (and into the microphone of national television) that 'left wing Israelis forgot what it is to be Jewish,' later explaining that 'being Jewish' in this context is to remember Jewish suffering and, therefore, never trust non-Jews. The inability of Israel to sign a peace treaty with its Arab neighbours is easily explained by this statement. As in Halkin's and Oz's translations of the *Merchant of Venice*, the Jew must remain the underdog, the innocent victim. The *appearance* of the victims of Zionism, the Palestinians, as a homeless and poor nation that suffers horrible persecution, is judged through this vision, not only as an underhanded ploy, but also as shameless appropriation of Jewish identity.

This identity, initiated by the banning of Jews from the physical world, was later adapted into a myth of spiritual supremacy. Finally, such identity became to resemble Judaism as it is portrayed in Shylock's character: apparent in (and limited to) bitterness and distrust of others. Thankfully, Netanyahu's government was replaced in the summer of 1999 by one that officially declared its intentions to promote the peace process in the Middle East. But Israeli Jews must still make the choice, not between war and peace, but merely between "but" and "or" – as in the interpretations of Schlegel, Bovshover, and Zukofsky – determining whether Jewish action is deemed to have consequences in the real world or in a spiritual one, in a *kabalist* realm of bitter memory and moral indignation, or in what must be determined as a nation, with its own dimensions, organs, and morals – possessing the power to act, and a responsibility for its actions.

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