

The Hebrew Lyric in Critical Perspective*

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As is well known, poetic tradition for the Andalusī Hebrew poets was embodied initially in a pre-existent canon — the mono-rhymed Arabic poetry that functioned as the catalyst for the new style of Hebrew verse. What exactly did Hebrew poetry in tenth-century al-Andalus inherit from Arabic in the way of lyric genres? Arabic critics largely held to the view that all poetry was derived from the rhetorical categories of praise and blame, corresponding to the Arabic themes *madḥ* and *hija'*. In practice, distinct lyric genres such as wine poetry (*khamriyya*), love poetry (*ghazaliyya*) and lyrical complaint (*tazallum*) had long since evolved from brief thematic exercises called *qit'at* and were reshaped and recast in the Muslim East during the ʿAbbasid age when Arabic poetry began to reflect the new urban environment of Islamic civilization.¹ The conventions for these occasional poems, “set pieces from a rather small inventory of themes,” as Andras Hamori has referred to them,² were also derived from thematic blocks in the classical mono-rhymed *qasīda* whose traditions are presumed to be the product of the pre-Islamic Arabian peninsula. In Arabic, then, an inter-generic mix in the form of the

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1 M.M. Badawi, “From Primary to Secondary *Qasīdas*: Thoughts on the Development of Classical Arabic Poetry,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* XI (1980): 1–31.

2 Andras Hamori, *On the Art of Medieval Arabic Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 6.

classical ode accompanied the development of distinct lyric genres. For its part, Hebrew poetry in Muslim Spain, its genres and their conventions, arose out of the dialectical relationship between a well-established yet still evolving Arabic tradition on the one hand and its own emergent sub-cultural processes on the other.

In order to understand some of the problems associated with the study of medieval Hebrew lyric genres let us begin with testimony contemporary to the production of the poetry. Moses ibn ‘Ezra’ refers to genres and verse-forms in *Kitāb al-muḥāḍara wal-mudhākara* yet does not bother to discuss them at any length, presumably because genres were self-evident categories of composition, each with its own structure, register and formulation of themes, voices, and styles. Poetic tradition in the form of textual parodies also testifies to the recognition of genres and their conventions. A poem by Todros Abulafia, for example, begins with a long parody of a conventional passage in the Hebrew *qasīda* [ll. 1–18]:

Many (poets) sing only erotic verse
but dissipate their virility in desire.

Another is always talking about Wandering
and claiming he’s ensnared,

That he moans by day without respite
and tracks the stars by night...

Another swears his heart and soul
are ropelessly in tow to a beauty.

He claims that a beauty stole his heart,
when he’s actually pierced in the testicles! [ll. 8–10; 12–13]

Really a meta-ode on how to compose (or not compose) a poem, the parody naturally presupposes the existence of the genre and the reception of its thematic conventions.³

3 Todros Abulafia, *Gan ha-meshalim wē-ha-ḥidot*, 2 vols. in 3 parts ed. David Yellin

Poetic genres also seem to have been recognized as an organizing principle in the transmission of a poet's literary corpus. For example, Samuel ha-Nagid's poetry was edited in three collections, roughly according to genre: *Ben Mishlei* (gnomic verse; edited by his son Elyasaf); *Ben Qohelet* (reflective and meditative poems; edited by ha-Nagid himself); and *Ben T^ehillim* (edited by his son Yehosef). The contents of *Ben T^ehillim* are varied and difficult to classify by genre but include many poems of an occasional and lyrical nature.⁴ Notable among them are the Nagid's forty-one "war poems," idiosyncratic lyrics representing Samuel's forays into the world of Andalusí politics and his apparent involvement with the army of Zirid Granada on some twenty military expeditions.⁵ Moses ibn 'Ezra', a poet absorbed with the Arabic literary tradition, also composed a book of *tajnīs* (paronomasia)-mannerisms each of whose ten chapters is devoted to epigrammatic rhetorical exercises within one of the distinct poetic genres Hebrew assimilated from Arabic.⁶

The question of genre in medieval Hebrew verse is further attested and complicated by the medieval editors' textual notes. The scribes

(Jerusalem: Weiss Press, 1932–36), 1:173–74 [*"M^eshorer lo' y^edabber raq hatulim"*] and in Hayyim Schirmann, *Hebrew Poetry in Spain and Provence*, 4 vols. [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv and Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik and Dvir, 1960), 4:418–420. The poem is discussed in Brann, *The Compunctious Poet*, 153–56.

- 4 The problems surrounding the identification of the *dīwān* with the collection *Ben T^ehillim* are discussed by Jarden [ed.], *Diwan sh^emu'el ha-nagid*, 1: 5–7 [Introduction]. For a different view see Nehemya Allony, "Diwan u-ven t^ehillim einam zehim," reprinted in his *Studies Medieval Philology and Literature: Collected Papers* (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1991), 4:97–112.
- 5 The nature and extent of this involvement, unattested in any Arabic source, are open to question. The texts and their Arabic superscriptions may be found in Jarden (ed.), *Diwan sh^emu'el ha-nagid*, 1:3–145. Although the poems draw heavily upon the genre conventions of the Arabic (*al-ḥamasa*) the headings of many of the Nagid's "war poems" replicate superscriptions found in the biblical Book of Psalms (*t^ehillah*; *zimrah*; *n^eginah*; and *shirah*) apparently suggesting genre-correspondences with the psalms. For a discussion of the Nagid's reasons for evoking the correspondence between his poetry and biblical literature, see Brann, *The Compunctious Poet*, 46–58.
- 6 Moses ibn 'Ezra', *Sefer ha-^canaq*, in *Moses ibn 'Ezra': Secular Poems* [Hebrew] 3 vols., ed. Heinrich Brody and Dan Pagis (Berlin and Jerusalem: Schocken Publishing, 1934–1977), 1:295–404.

who transmitted the poets' *diwans* often added Arabic superscriptions identifying the poem's "central theme," such as praise, love, or wine. Frequently the glosses of the manuscript tradition convey additional literary information or biographical data deemed relevant to the text. Until very recently readers of medieval Hebrew poetry were content to follow these textual notations as authoritative when it came to questions of genre, presumably on the assumption that historical proximity to textual production confers authenticity. The implications of this presupposition were obviously far-reaching, because for most readers, as E.D. Hirsch noted, "all understanding of verbal meaning is necessarily genre-bound".⁷ The copyists' notes thus supplied the basis for seemingly "authoritative readings" of the lyrics.

Consider the Hebrew *qasīda*. Like the Arabic neo-*qasīda* from which it is derived, the Hebrew *qasīda* is more a verse-form than a genre. In terms of theme it typically consists of a panegyric dedicated to the poet's patron, yet more often than not the so-called panegyric "core" of the poem is introduced by an Arabic-style *nasib*. These introductory mood-pieces (which can be brief or go on for ten lines or more) do not differ significantly from the typically brief lyrics of, say, an independent wine song, love poem, a song about the garden in spring, or a lyrical complaint. One of Samuel ha-Nagid's longer wine songs that has come down to us in *Ben Tehillim* incorporates verses transmitted as two independent compositions in *Ben Qohelet*.⁸ The same can be said for one of his dirges, a war poem, and a panegyric respectively as well as other poems preserved in *Ben Tehillim*.⁹ Nevertheless, the aforementioned superscriptions to medieval Hebrew poems frequently identify the composite *qasīda* with its panegyric unit, often ignoring, as it were, the complex interplay

7 E.D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 76.

8 See for example, Samuel ha-Nagid, *Diwan (Ben Qohelet)* 3: 23 [nos. 42 & 43] = *Diwan (Ben Tehillim)* 1:291 [#147 ll. 1-4 & ll.5-6].

9 Samuel ha-Nagid, *Diwan (Ben Qohelet)* 3: 44 [#80] = *Diwan (Ben Tehillim)* 1:251[#105 ll. 3-10]; 3:15 [#27] = 1:117-121 [#35 ll. 1-14; 48-51]; 3:12 [#22] = 1:151-2 [#45 ll. 3-14].

between the poem's various thematic elements.¹⁰ How odd it is to read of the irresistible charms of a merciless beauty whose dagger-like eyes and spear-like breasts skewer the poet only to be told that the lyric is a poem of praise for the patron. For example, the introductory passage [ll. 1–11] of the famous *qaṣīda* by Joseph ibn Ḥisdai relates a desperate, albeit conventional seductive fantasy [ll. 5–8]:

And as he slept I plucked, with his consent,
that which he angrily refuses me when awake.

With the hand of sweet sleep,
he gave me the nectar of his mouth to drink in ruby bowls.

I lay down, and on my breast were locks
flowing with myrrh over blushing cheeks.

My right hand embraced the white moon,
my lips kissed the warm sun.¹¹

The superscription as well as Ibn ʿEzra's comments on the poem in *Kitāb al-muḥāḍara* are attuned to the laudatory sequence of lines 12–33 and simply present the poem as a panegyric for Samuel ha-Nagid, to whom the lyric is addressed.¹²

The dazzling forty-four line poem by Solomon ibn Gabirol (*L^ekha reʿi w^e-reʿa ha-m^eʿorim*) presents a different type of Andalusī fantasy and nearly the opposite problem of genre classification. Reminiscent of Keats' famous "The Eve of Saint Agnes," Ibn Gabirol's lyric — something of a descriptive floral poem in the Arabic tradition — invites us (ll. 1–33a) into an exquisite palace and its resplendent courtyard garden whose perfect

10 For example, forty-two of the sixty-three *qaṣīdas* preserved in Moses ibn ʿEzra's *dīwān* have introductory passages. Twenty-seven of these are lyrical complaints.

11 The so-called "Orphan Poem" or "Singular Song," "*Haliṣvi hen g^eevurat on w^e-ʿosmah*," in Schirmann, *Hebrew Poetry in Spain and Provence*, 1:172–175.

12 Moses ibn ʿEzra', *Kitāb al-muḥāḍara wal-mudhākara*, 69.

opulence and lush setting respectively are vividly rendered (ll. 1–7).¹³ Appearances can be as deceiving as genre classifications. Despite the imposing nature of the structure delineated, the otherwise static palace is brought to life by the vibrant activity in the garden that is in turn abruptly frozen at the poet’s command. The poet-observer fancies himself in complete control of the scene and thus the poem [ll. 25–27; 31–34].

The poet’s immediate purpose is to enchant by representing an ideal setting until such time as he sings the required praises of his patron [ll. 34–44]. In this instance the textual superscription does not essentialize the patron-poet relationship in the production of poetry by focusing the reader’s attention on the poem-concluding panegyric. Rather it offers a note of literary criticism having to do with the extended “lyrical prelude” and its centrality to the text: “the poem is called “The Garden”; it is among his most exceptional lyrics.” The limited usefulness of generic designations is also apparent in the tendency of the themes of the garden, wine, and love to be treated together. Furthermore most composite poems simply defy simple classification whatever the textual tradition may say. Moses ibn ‘Ezra’ refers to an exceptional sixty-two line epistolary *qaṣīda* dedicated to a friend (according to the superscription) as a “wine song” (Ar. *khamriyya*).¹⁴ The “wine song” actually serves as the poem’s so-called prelude (ll.1–39) and is followed by a lyrical complaint (ll. 40–62).

If Judeo-Arabic poetics and the textual tradition purport to identify and classify some Hebrew poems according to genre how has criticism approached the question of genres? A major problem posed in any discussion of Hebrew genres is the distinction between the synchronic and diachronic approaches used to study and define them. Dan Pagis remarked that “[Hebrew] genres were an obvious but not strictly defined element in the poetic tradition; though often mentioned in poetical treatises, they were never imposed as strictly normative categories” in

13 “*L^ḥkha re^ḥi w^ḥe-re^ḥa ha-m^ḥ’orim,*” in Schirmann, *Hebrew Poetry in Spain and Provence*, 1:223–25.

14 Moses ibn ‘Ezra’, *Kitāb al-muḥādara wal-mudhākara*, 246 [128b]; “*Esh qadḥu uraw w^ḥ-lo’ nuppahu,*” in Brody, *Moses ibn ‘Ezra’: Secular Poems*, 1:72–75 [#72].

poetic practice.¹⁵ Nevertheless Pagis attempted to make sense of medieval Hebrew poetry precisely by establishing rules for reading it. To that end he undertook an exhaustive inductive analysis of the structure, tone, attitude, and imagery in the poetry of Moses ibn ‘Ezra’, arguably the most conservative Hebrew poet of Muslim Spain.¹⁶ In the most detailed study of the normative poetics of the school — a manifestly structuralist project as defined by Adena Rosmarin¹⁷ — Pagis demonstrated that genres such as panegyric, lament, love poetry, and wine songs were stylized in form and conventional in content and tended to represent a static, idealized, and impersonal literary universe. Even occasional poems such as lyrical complaint (in which the poet laments his fate and vents feelings of grief and loss at his separation from family and friends) while open to a somewhat higher degree of self-expression were also inclined to formulaic expression of conventional themes. Since they “implied a well-understood code” poets shared with their audience, what Todorov called recurrent, institutionalized “discursive properties,”¹⁸ Pagis concluded that genre conventions served as the ultimate source of meaning in the production and reception of Hebrew verse.

Building upon Pagis’s basic approach Israel Levin too sought to elucidate the generic norms of medieval Hebrew verse, particularly in the comparative light of its Arabic models.¹⁹ Somewhat more open to diachronic methods of research than Pagis’s early work Levin also endeavored to describe in detail the characteristics of each genre and to utilize the results — his constructions of genre — as the standard for reading and evaluating individual poems. Levin adopted a somewhat more

15 Dan Pagis, *Hebrew Poetry of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 21.

16 Dan Pagis, *Secular Poetry and Poetic Theory: Moses ibn Ezra and His Contemporaries* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1970).

17 Adena Rosmarin, *The Power of Genre* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 45.

18 Tzvetan Todorov, “The Origin of Genres,” *New Literary History* 8 (1976): 162.

19 Israel Levin, *The Embroidered Coat: The Genres of Hebrew Secular Poetry in Spain*, 3 vols. [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, 1995).

flexible view of the salient power of genre conventions in the production of Hebrew verse, perhaps because he drew upon texts composed by all the major figures of the school as well as their successors in twelfth and thirteenth-century Christian Spain rather than the oeuvre of single poet.

Because they set forth new ground in defining the formal and stylistic limitations imposed by poetic tradition upon the Hebrew poets of Spain, Pagis and Levin catalyzed new thinking about the complex relationship between individual creativity and poetic tradition in the making of Hebrew poetry. Subsequently, readers of medieval Hebrew verse (including Pagis himself) sought to identify what was original in the work of inventive and imaginative poets by analyzing the ways in which they transcended the rules of their craft, transformed its stylistic prescriptions and varied the formulation of traditional themes. Research in the field came to focus on aspects of the poets' "poetic experience," individuality, and originality, and the means by which they achieved distinctive expression while still observing the requirements of rhetorical style and working within the system of thematic and genre conventions. Raymond Scheindlin, for example, adopted a fresh approach to independent Hebrew wine and love poems. Examining the modality of their treatment of subject matter Scheindlin views Hebrew lyric poetry as made up of a combination of descriptive, affective, and petitionary elements.²⁰ This insight proves to be especially significant in that it permits the reader to notice the ways in which Hebrew love songs function as dramatic monologues: they project a purely external image of the figure of the beloved; involve the (internal) depiction of the poet/lover's anguished state, and frequently convey the poet's petition to the beloved. Integrating literary-critical readings of the texts along with observations of a literary-historical nature Scheindlin's work has the advantage of focusing attention on the interplay between conventional and unorthodox elements in the Hebrew lyric (the project that came to occupy both Pagis and Levin) and most importantly of situating the poems in historical relation to the cultural system they represent.

To illustrate the limitations of the formalist approach to genre studies

20 Scheindlin, *Wine Women, & Death*, 19 ff.

consider the distinctive tone and attitude evident in Solomon ibn Gabirol's four-line "love poem" "*Amnon ani holeh*."²¹ As treated by Raymond Scheindlin this distinctively Gabirolian lyric represents the realization of some of the darker impulses implicit in the conventional lyrics of love.²² Yet Ibn Gabirol in effect reinvented the Hebrew love lyric by taking the full measure of its characteristic despair to the logical extreme and embracing suffering. Devotional lyrics by Judah ha-Levi that confront the breach between God and Israel provide an interesting parallel in pushing a lyric theme to its absolute limit as well as a sign of the interpenetration of the secular love lyric and religious poetry. Like Ibn Gabirol's forlorn lover, the liturgical poet (speaking on behalf of Israel or as Israel personified) revels in abasement and represents his suffering as the ultimate sign of his love for God.²³ In the hands of many readers such exceptional variations on a theme as are evident in Ibn Gabirol and ha-Levi are more likely to be treated as departures from convention, as anomalous cases rather than as variations, end-points on the continuum of lyrics governed by genre conventions. Similarly, structuralist methods do not sufficiently distinguish between love poetry of the conventional variety and the lyrics of spiritual love. Nor do they account for Moses ibn 'Ezra's mention of the idea of the latter during the eleventh century ("the soul's love for another soul, not the body's love for another body")²⁴ or its subsequent development in lyrics by Todros Abulafia in the thirteenth ("In my desire for her I do not want the pleasure of the body, Only the pleasure of the spirit.")²⁵

21 Trans. Scheindlin, *Wine, Women, & Death*, 110. Text in Schirmann, *Hebrew Poetry in Spain and Provence*, 1:214.

22 Scheindlin, *Wine, Women, & Death*, 112–113. So too the poem "*Yeshureni w'af-apo k'holeh*," in Schirmann, *Hebrew Poetry in Spain and Provence*, 1: 215; trans. and discussed in Scheindlin, *Wine, Women, & Death*, 130–134.

23 For example, Schirmann, *Hebrew Poetry in Spain and Provence*; 2:464–65 ["*Ya'avor 'alai r'sonkha*"; "*B'khol libbi emet*"] and "*Me-az m'con ha-ahavah*," 2: 467.

24 Moses ibn 'Ezra', *Kitāb al-muhādara*, 278–9. Dan Pagis relates to a single line by Moses ibn 'Ezra (*Secular Poems*, p. 186, line 14) as the only possible hint at spiritual love in classical poetry in Spain. See his "A propos de l'amour intellectuel dans les oeuvres de Moïse Ibn Ezra," *Revue des études juives* 126 (1967): 191–202.

25 Todros Abulafia, *Gan ha-meshalim*, vol. 2 (part 1, #714): 124–125 [l. 21].

As Pagis's research turned to the literary history of medieval Hebrew poetry from Muslim Spain to Renaissance and Baroque Italy he came to more clearly appreciate the individuality of the Hebrew poets as opposed to their strict observance of rigid conventions.²⁶ This awareness necessarily reshaped Pagis's approach to genre. In what amounted to a major revision of his views on the overriding significance of genre conventions, Pagis noted that "it is not true that all of medieval poetry was impersonal stylization. Some genres were impersonal, even universal; others were emphatically personal, intended to be taken as self-expression and providing real and specific details. It is not just a question of themes but of genres."²⁷ Such reconsiderations have yielded more nuanced views of the production of Hebrew verse. They have shown that the poets' inventive treatment of conventional subject matter, novel formulations of traditional motifs, recasting of stock figures and innovative use of rhetorical devices were no less dependent upon stylistic requirements and the system of genre conventions as conventional exercises and highly stylized formulations themselves. As Adena Rosmarin observes: "Genre, in other words, is a finite schema capable of potentially infinite suggestion".²⁸

In general, then, the mono-rhymed Hebrew lyric whether brief and independent or as a passage within the composite *qasīda* can be said to rest upon a set of delicate balances between formulaic and expressive lyrics and between representation of communal (that is, class) ideals and values and individual self-expression. Viewed in historical perspective the tension between poetic tradition and literary creativity acted as a destabilizing force upon "genre conventions" and by extension upon the genres themselves.

In emphasizing the problematic aspects of structuralist discourse on genres and the significance of their conventions for mono-rhymed verse I do not mean to give the impression that literary-critical and literary-historical study of the medieval Hebrew lyric has been without its

26 Pagis, *Hebrew Poetry of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, 7 ff.

27 Pagis, *Hebrew Poetry of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, 67.

28 Rosmarin, *The Power of Genre*, 44.

difficulties or conflicts. On the contrary, how to give a contextually valid reading of Hebrew love songs has been among the most contested areas of scholarly discussion on medieval Hebrew letters. I am referring to the controversy over the figure of the beloved when the object of the poet's amorous intentions is a male (as in the poem by Joseph ibn Ḥisdai noted above). In this context it is worth recalling Paul Zumthor's keen articulation of the problem of reading medieval texts: "The ultimate term we aim for is really to bring the ancient text into the present, that is, to integrate it into that historicity which is ours. The pitfall is that in doing so we may deny or obscure its own historicity: we may foreshorten the historical perspective and, by giving an achronic shape to the past, hide the specific traits of the present."²⁹ Indeed, the rancorous polemics of two generations ago over the question of the male beloved in the Hebrew lyric seemed to have subsided only to resurface in recent Israeli scholarship with new extra-literary issues at stake.³⁰ Nevertheless it is now largely accepted that the prevalence of lyrics such as Ibn Ḥisdai's (and Ibn Ghiyāth's below) cannot be explained away as slavish imitation of Arabic literary style and taste. It is increasingly understood that the medieval Hebrew lyric attaches no particular importance to the beloved's gender and that love poetry signals the poets' (and their audience's) ritual appreciation of every manner of beauty.³¹ The dispute over whether the lyrics of love actually set in relief the poets' social and sexual practice has recently given way to another discussion contingent upon historical concerns: the representation of women in medieval Hebrew literature.³²

Of course, the etiquette of love poetry requires that the beloved be utterly cruel and the lover completely frustrated. The poet can demonstrate that he is truly a lover only if his anguish is absolute and he is prepared

29 Paul Zumthor, *Speaking of the Middle Ages*, trans. S. White, foreword by E. Vance (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 33.

30 See Pagis, *Hebrew Poetry of the Middle Ages*, 62–71, and the bibliography cited there.

31 See Brann, *The Compunctious Poet*, 77–78, and the bibliography cited there.

32 Tova Rosen, "On Tongues Being Bound and Let Loose: Women in Medieval Hebrew Literature," *Prooftexts* 8 (1988): 67–87, challenges the conventional assumptions about the supposedly charming and innocuous medieval Hebrew love lyric.

to sacrifice everything for love. But the reader must take care not to be misled by the figure of a young woman seemingly so empowered as to hold the poet's life in the balance. She is a woman as imagined by men, an ideal and objectified figure whose frequent appearance in Hebrew love poetry underscores the fact that real women were denied much of a voice in Andalusian-Jewish society and were altogether silent in its literature.

This observation brings us to the sole Hebrew lyric verse-form in which women figures are regularly permitted to speak. The *muwashshah* was the most important lyric verse-form Hebrew derived from the Arabic and the outstanding manifestation of the lyrical sensibility among the Andalusian Hebrew poets. Alongside the well-developed tradition of lyric genres (i.e., love and wine songs, floral poetry, and lyrical complaint) attested in mono-rhymed Hebrew verse as short poems or as passages in the composite *qasīda*, the *muwashshah* was a strophic poem sung to musical accompaniment. Generally devoted to the theme of love but not infrequently to panegyric or their composite (with the panegyric introduced by an "amatory prelude" as in the *qasīda*), the Hebrew incarnation of this verse form appeared during the eleventh century, apparently some 100 years after the Arabic. The Hebrew *muwashshah* flourished during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries when Judah ha-Levi and Todros Abulafia each composed some fifty strophic songs that have come down to us.

Since publication of S.M. Stern's work on Romance *kharajāt* preserved in Arabic and Hebrew script (1948; rev. 1953) scholars have been preoccupied with demonstrating either the Arabic or Romance cultural provenance of the lyric verse-form. Claims put forward regarding the origins of the *muwashshah* and *kharja* and their metrical, linguistic, and socio-cultural relationship have in fact rendered the *muwashshah* the most contested subject in all of Andalusian-Arabic literature.³³ Remarkably,

33 Samuel Miklos Stern, *Hispano-Arabic Strophic Poetry*, ed. L.P. Harvey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974). For a fresh look at the controversy see Maria Rosa Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History: A Forgotten Heritage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), 91–113, and various articles by James T. Monroe and Alan Jones appearing in *La Coronica*. Tova Rosen's recent essay

the literary form that seems to textualize the linguistic, musical, cultural, and social interaction among confessional communities on the western frontier of Islam and Europe is more often than not treated as evidence of the cultural hegemony of one Iberian community over another rather than as testimony to their convergence. Readers of the Hebrew *muwashshah* have been far less concerned with the questions of genesis and cultural ascendancy than their Romanist or Arabist colleagues. They are unencumbered by these particular considerations because the Hebrew *muwashshah* like all of the secular Hebrew poetry of al-Andalus was clearly predicated on an Arabic model. Recent work on the Hebrew *muwashshah* has suggested new strategies for rendering it intelligible. Combining structuralist methods with literary-historical and literary-critical analysis Tova Rosen studies elements such as esthetic structure and style (e.g. strophic love songs may be descriptive, dramatic, and narrative) and examines how the *muwashshah* works as a lyric poem (e.g., how formulaic diction governs the thematic relationship between the penultimate strophe and the *kharja*).³⁴

Because its prosody, form and structure set it apart from the classicizing

“The Muwashshah” in *The Literature of Al-Andalus* (edited by Maria Rosa Menocal, Raymond P. Scheindlin and Michael Sells, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, 165–189) surveys the relations between the Arabic and the Hebrew genres, as well as between their secular and religious modes, and summarizes the scholars’ debates.

- 34 Tova Rosen-(Moked), *The Hebrew Girdle Poem [Muwashshah] in the Middle Ages* [Hebrew] (Haifa: University of Haifa Press, 1985), 170–78; 188 ff. Of particular interest to students of the Romance lyric is Rosen’s presentation of generic Hebrew expressions (“a maiden’s song”; “a gazelle’s song”) in the penultimate unit that introduce the *kharja* and qualify it as a feminine lyric. She concludes that the *kharja*’s thematic material (especially Romance *kharajāt* in Hebrew *muwashshahāt*) differs radically from conventional Arabic and Hebrew love poetry and is closely related to romance lyric genres such as the *cantigas de amigo*, *cantica puellarium*, and *cantica amatoria*. See also her “Towards the *Kharja*. A Study of Penultimate Units in Arabic and Hebrew *Muwassahāt*,” in *Poesia Estrofica*, ed. F. Corriente y A. Sáenz-Badillos (Madrid: Universidad Complutense, 1991), 279–288. In another article she contends that penultimate units in religious Hebrew *muwashshāt* manifest similar feminine traits. See Tova Rosen, “Ha-ḥaṭiva ha-aharona b^e-fiyyuṭei ezor,” *Dappim le-mehqar b^e-sifrut* 7 (1991): 239–254.

mono-rhymed poem transmitted in the poets' *dīwāns*, the Hebrew *muwashshah* was preserved in its own collections of verse. Setting aside such formal considerations, the Hebrew *muwashshah* presents a rather complicated picture with regard to thematic criteria and genres. The formal and textual linkages of contrefaction (*mu-ārada*) among *muwashshahāt* readily stretched across the generic boundary between love songs and panegyric and bridged secular love lyrics and allegorical, devotional love poems. It should be noted that the latter transaction was considerably eased because all Hebrew love poetry, social and liturgical alike, shared diction and imagery drawn from the Song of Songs. Hebrew poets from the time of Ibn Gabirol and Isaac ibn Ghiyāth also utilized the form and structure of the *muwashshah* in devotional lyrics written for recitation by the precentor during the synagogue service. The corpus of liturgical *muwashshahāt* further includes many compositions produced in direct imitation of Arabic and Hebrew love songs, indicating that worshippers were exposed to the secular music and textual associations of secular *muwashshahāt* during the synagogue service.³⁵ Andalusian-Arabic and Mozarabic *kharjas* were excluded from liturgical *muwashshahāt*. But secular Hebrew *kharajāt* in the form of piquant lines uttered by a young girl in the throes of love (a speaker new to the Hebrew lyric) or by the persona of the lover seem to have found their way into liturgical poems. In this new context the *kharajāt* served as the speech of figures involved in a fundamentally different kind of love affair, that between catholic Israel and God, or between God and the individual soul.³⁶ On the one hand

35 Some rabbinical authorities, notably Moses Maimonides, expressed opposition to this practice (as well as to the production and consumption of love poetry in Hebrew or Arabic in general). See Brann, *The Compunctious Poet*, 77; 107. Yet more than two hundred religious *muwashshahāt* by Abraham ibn 'Ezra' (1092–1167) have survived [Israel Levin (ed.), *The Religious Poems of Abraham ibn 'Ezra'*, 2 vols. [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1975–80)]. In general the number of extant religious *muwashshahāt* dwarfs the secular *muwashshahāt* by comparison.

36 In addition to the thematic and formal connections between secular and liturgical *muwashshahāt* the persona of the beloved in secular love poetry known as "the gazelle" (male or female beloved) reappears in liturgical Hebrew *muwashshahāt* (as well as in mono-rhymed liturgical verse).

these developments can be attributed to the prevalence of strophic verse forms in the traditional liturgical verse the Hebrew poets of al-Andalus inherited from the Eastern *piyyut*; on the other hand they parallel the tradition of penitential *muwashshahāt* on religious themes developed by Arabic poets.³⁷

In a secondary development unique to Hebrew secular strophic love songs seem to have influenced the emergence of strophic epithalamia. In these compositions the form, structure, themes, and imagery of secular *muwashshahāt* are absorbed by and recast in the lyrics sung at weddings, a sacred occasion with important textual links to the liturgy of the synagogue.³⁸ Judah ha-Levi's poem "At *ʿofrah sʿeviat armon*"³⁹ reads like a proper epithalamium addressed to the bride, utilizing common motifs from erotic poetry. However, its sixth strophe reveals a liturgical theme. A hope is expressed that the time will come when the "daughter of Zion" will rest in the canopy of her divine lover, from where she will hear His voice urging her to arise, and announcing that the sun (of salvation) has already risen. The mention of motifs of light turns the poem into a liturgical poem of the specific type of *m^ec-ora* (intended for the morning prayer of Shabbat and holidays).

Another strophic epithalamium by Judah ibn Ghiyāth further exemplifies the fluid inter-generic production of the Hebrew *muwashshah*.

The connection was studied by Israel Levin, "I Sought the One Whom My Soul Loveth — A Study of the Influence of Erotic Secular Poetry on Hebrew Religious Poetry" [Hebrew] *Hasifrut* 3 (1971): 116–149. See now, Raymond P. Scheindlin, *The Gazelle: Medieval Hebrew Poems of God, Israel and the Soul* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991). And see also Zvi Malachi, "Observations on the *Hargas* in Hebrew Poetry," in *Poesía Estrófica*, 256–257.

37 See Stern, *Hispano-Arabic Strophic Poetry*, 81–91; Israel Levin, "A Survey of the *Muwashshah* and its Various Strophic Variations in the Religious Hebrew Poetry in Spain," in *Poesía Estrófica*, 225–231.

38 One such link is the acrostics. Though not liturgical, many wedding poems, especially strophic ones, bear acrostics of the poet's name. See for instance in H. Brody and A. M. Habermann (eds.), *Dīwān des Abū-l-Ḥasan Jehuda ha-Levi* (Berlin: Mekize Nirdamim, 1894–1930; reprinted Farnborough: Gregg International Publishers, 1971), 2: 11, 34, 43, 53, 320, and others.

39 Ibid, 49–50.

The first two strophes of “Revive me with the wine of my fawn’s lips”⁴⁰ detail the poet’s failed efforts to be passionately kissed by his (male) beloved (ll. 1–14). He proclaims that his lovesickness knows no cure and that he is prepared to die for love. In the third strophe the poet abruptly admonishes himself, uttering the rhetorical formula: “Drop the subject of love and start praising the paragon, Joseph!” (ll. 15–16). This figure is thus duly regaled (in the third and fourth strophes, ll. 15–26). When (in the fifth strophe, ll. 27–32) the poet urges Joseph to rejoice on his (that is Joseph’s) wedding day the lyric shifts to the theme of the love’s fulfillment, an essential element in epithalamia that is absent from conventional love poetry. The love song and panegyric of the first two and third strophes respectively are thereby transformed into a legitimate wedding song. Then in the sixth strophe (ll. 33–36) an enchanting girl appears (as in the penultimate strophe of a secular *muwashshah* and its *kharja*) apparently to encourage the groom. Although she has claimed many victims she tranquilizes her own beloved with kisses before singing (the *kharja*, ll. 37–38) the *matla*^c (incipit) of an Arabic *muwashshah* by the court philosopher Ibn Bājja (d. 1139):

Drag your coat-tails whene’er you can
and add intoxication (of your beloved’s kisses) to your
debauchery!⁴¹

Medieval audiences seem to have identified love poems or wine poems by genre without qualification. In this respect it appears that lyric genres were self-evident categories in the production and reception of Hebrew verse.

40 “*Samm^ekhuni b^e-yein s^efat ‘ofri,*” ed. J. (Hayyim) Schirmann, “Poets Contemporary with Moses ibn Ezra and Judah ha-Levi” [Hebrew], *Studies of the [Schocken] Research Institute for Hebrew Poetry* 2 (1936): 188–89. The outline of the poem follows Joseph Yahalom, “Love’s Labour’s Won: The Materialization of Love in Hebrew Girdle Poems,” in *Circa 1492: Proceedings of the Jerusalem Colloquium*, ed. Isaac Benabu (Jerusalem: Misgav Yerushalayim, 1992), 197–200.

41 “*Jarriri-l-dhayla ayyamā jarri/wa-sili-l-sukra minhū bi-l-sukri*”; S.M. Stern, “Imitations of Arabic *Muwashshahs* in Spanish-Hebrew Poetry” [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 18 (1947/47): 175, and *Hispano-Arabic Strophic Poetry*, 180–81.

Although formalist readers have endeavored to reconstruct the generic codes according to which the poems were understood we have seen that the Hebrew lyric resists efficient generic mapping. The prevalence and sheer messiness of composite poems, the tendency for the themes of the garden, wine and love to be grouped together in many poems so as to be undifferentiated, and the formal and textual linkages and generic transactions among various types of social and liturgical *muwashshahāt* complicate attempts to impose either stable or contingent definitions of Hebrew lyric genres. A way out of this quandary is available in Hans Robert Jauss' model for integrating diachronic and synchronic approaches to the texts: "It is (also) necessary to jettison the idea of a juxtaposition of genres closed in upon themselves; instead [one must] look for the interrelationships which help them to constitute a literary system at a historically given moment."⁴² It remains for readers of medieval Hebrew lyric poetry to fully consider such a method and its balance of relativistic and non-contextual approaches.

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