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Nathan Alterman's Bilingual Adaptation of Heinrich Heine's »Lorelei«

Hebrew-German Homophony as Parody

»...le comique n'est qu'un tragique vu de dos.«¹

I.

The *Lorelei* (*Loreley* in German) is not only one of the most famous poems by Heinrich Heine, but also of German literature. Unsurprisingly, it is also one of its most translated poems.² Even though Heine's œuvre attracted Hebrew translators only relatively late – at the end of the nineteenth century³ – more Hebrew translations exist of the *Lorelei* than of any other German poem. Currently, I count at least sixteen published versions.⁴ Hardly any other text of German literature was as

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1 Gérard Genette: *Palimpsestes. La littérature au second degré*. Paris 1997, p. 34 (Ch. IV).

2 The Oxford Guide to Literature in English Translation. Ed. by Peter France. Oxford, New York 2000, p. 321.

3 Na'ama Sheffi: *Vom Deutschen ins Hebräische. Übersetzungen aus dem Deutschen im jüdischen Palästina 1882–1948*. Göttingen 2011, p. 72, 106, 159. S. a. Idem: *גרמנית בעברית: תרגומים: מגרמנית ביישוב העברי 1882–1948* [German in Hebrew: Translations from German into Hebrew in Jewish Palestine: 1882–1948]. Jerusalem 1998. Hamutal Bar-Yosef writes that over two hundred poems by Heine were translated into Hebrew between 1888-1918. Before that Heine was absent in the corpus of Hebrew enlightenment literature since Heine was deemed decadent. Public interest increased greatly in the 1880s, reached its peak in the 1890s and until 1910. »The Heine Cult in Hebrew Literature of the 1890s and its Russian Context«. In: *The Jewish Reception of Heinrich Heine*. Ed. by Mark H. Gelber. Tübingen 1992 (*Conditio Judaica*; 1), pp. 127–138, here pp. 127f.

4 So far, no comprehensive study of the Hebrew translations of Heine's *Loreley* is available. The following list, therefore, is necessarily only a rudimentary and incomplete one: One of the first translations appears to have been published in 1903 by Y. L. Brochowitz, in: *הצפה* [*Hatzopheh*] 1,

popular among German Jews. Popularity, however, is not tantamount to an argument for relevance. As the first Jew to become a successful writer in German literature, Heinrich Heine remains a controversial figure until today.⁵ He is the first writer to have introduced complete transcribed sentences from Hebrew liturgy into German literature⁶ and is, therefore, relevant to German-Hebrew Studies, in

Warsaw, p. 687. Later translations by Esha'el Puchzewski (1914); by Simha Ben-Zion (in his anthology of poems by Heine titled: צלילים [Sounds], Jerusalem, Berlin 1923, p. 13f.); by Yitzhak Katznelson (ספר השירים [Book of Songs], Warsaw 1924); by Pinchas El'ad [-Lander] (עתידות [Atidot], Vol. 3, 1949, p. 185; פסיפס [Psipas] 98 (2016), p. 8); by Fritz Noff (מעריב [Maariv] 20.11.53, p. 10; על המשמר [Al Hamishmar] 1.4.1956, p. 13); by Gila Ori'el (הבוקר [Haboker] 17.2.1956, p. 5); by Yehuda Ophan (Al Hamishmar 2.3.1973, p. 6); by Shlomo Tenai (שירים ומכתבים [Selected Poems and Letters], Tel Aviv 1990); by Moshe Zinger (דימוי [Dimui] 9, 1994, pp. 28–29); by Pinchas Sadeh (אהבה – אנטולוגיה משירי העולם [Love – Anthology of Worldpoetry] Jerusalem 1989); by Amir Or and Ariel Hirschfeld (עיתון 77 [Iton 77] 162 (1993), p. 23); by Yosef Tzur (משירי הינריך הינה [Of Heine's Poems], Tel Aviv 1995); and by Amit Kravitz (הארץ [Haaretz] 2.3.2018). Some of these translations are collected in: הנשיקה מבעד למטפחת [The Kiss Through the Handkerchief. Selection of Poem-translations in Comparison]. Ed. by Asher Reich, foreword by Aminadav Dickman. Tel Aviv 2001, pp. 43–48. And also in: עיתון 77 [Iton 77] 162 (1993), pp. 20–23. A selection of these translations, including those by Aday Brodsky (no year) and Moshe Ganan (2010) were made accessible online by Victor Herzberg: <http://mymilim.info/?p=3446> (Acc. 16.12.2019). S. a. Shalom Rosenfeld's short comparative study which includes Alterman's version discussed below: «ה«לורליי» – מהינה עד מאנגר – ה«לורליי»» [The «Lorelei» – From Heine to [[Itzik]] Manger]. In: קובץ מאמרים על יצירתו-הינריך הינה [Collected Essays on Heinrich Heine's Work]. Ed. by Jehuda Eloni. Tel Aviv 2001, pp. 54–62. S. a. Asher Reich: השוואת תרגומים. [And that's what, with her singing, / was done by Lorelei. Translations in Comparison] In: Ibid., pp. 157–168. I owe heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Giddon Ticotsky for his kind help in the research of this collection.

5 Cf. Anja Oesterheld: «Verfasser unbekannt?» Der Mythos der Anonymität und Heinrich Heines «Lorelei». In: Anonymität und Autorschaft. Zur Literatur- und Rechtsgeschichte der Namenlosigkeit. Hg. von Stephan Pabst. Berlin 2015, pp. 325–357. S. a. Gelber (ed.), The Jewish Reception of Heinrich Heine (see note 3).

6 Cf. «Lecho Daudi Likras Kalle!» in Heinrich Heine: Prinzessin Sabbath. In: Romanzero. Drittes Buch: Hebräische Melodien. Düsseldorf Heine Ausgabe, Bd 3/1, bearb. von Frauke Bartelt und Alberto Destro. Hamburg 1992, p. 126, Z. 60f., p. 149, Z. 244. Carmen Reichert remarks hereupon: «Heines Verbindung dieser Mode spanischer Romanzen mit der sephardischen mittelalterlichen Dichtungstradition in hebräischer Sprache befremdete die Zeitgenossen kaum. [...] Auch [...] die für die deutschen Leser fremd und orientalisch klingenden Worte des Gebets »Lecha dodi [Sic!]< (»Auf, Geliebter«) passen zu einer spanisch-hebräischen Romanze. Irritationen löste dagegen offenbar die nicht immer ausreichend »lyrische« Sprache Heines in Formulierungen wie »Hund mit hündischen Gedanken« aus.» Carmen Reichert: Poetische Selbstbilder. Deutsch-jüdische und Jiddische Lyrikanthologien 1900–1938. Göttingen 2019 (Jüdische Religion, Geschichte und Kultur; 29), p. 264.

the context of a recent multilingual turn,⁷ furthermore to today's debates on multiculturalism and nationalism, as well as on post-monolingualism and a possible dawn of post-nationalism.⁸

Despite, or because of Heine's conversion, he remains an ambiguous figure. Some Germans were interested in augmenting his Jewishness, others primarily emphasized his Germanness. To the former belonged the Nazis, who had tried to annihilate him retroactively through eradicating his work and memory;⁹ to the latter belong those Jews, who presented him as their voucher for emancipation and as a reminder of their right to count as equal citizens in Germany.¹⁰ But the parties are not as clear-cut, as my formulation might suggest. The intimate relationship between German, Jewish and even French culture and literature embodied in Heine points to the danger of conflating conceptual and linguistic boundaries in the context of the monolingual paradigm of modern nationalism.¹¹ To some it is threatening, to others encouraging.

Such ambivalence of a simultaneous belonging to – at times – two mutually exclusive spheres of existence is reflected also in the phenomenon of multilingual homophony. Homophony is a subcategory of homonymy (from the Greek ὁμώνυμος [homonymos]: same name), that is to say, of words which have different meanings, yet sound and look identical (homophones and homographs, respectively). I treat the phenomenon of bilingual homophony as both a most intimate and also dangerous form of contact between two languages – in this case of

7 Amir Eshel and Rachel Seelig (eds.): *The German-Hebrew Dialogue: Studies of Encounter and Exchange*. Berlin, Boston 2017. The Eaton Group: *A Multilingual Turn in German Studies: Premises, Provisos, and Prospects*. In: *Die Unterrichtspraxis / Teaching German* 52.1 (2019), pp. 14–31. S. a. Mark H. Gelber: *The Hebraic Poetics of German Cultural Zionism: An »Umlaut« over the »Vav«*. In: *Integration und Ausgrenzung. Studien zur deutsch-jüdischen Literatur- und Kulturgeschichte von der Frühen Neuzeit bis zur Gegenwart. Festschrift für Hans Otto Horch zum 65. Geburtstag*. Hg. von Mark H. Gelber, Jakob Hessing und Robert Jütte in Verbindung mit Dominic Bitzer, Doris Vogel und Michaela Wirtz. Tübingen 2009, p. 171–180.

8 Cf. Yasemin Yildiz: *Beyond the Mother Tongue. The Postmonolingual Condition*. New York 2012. I am grateful to Dr. Abraham Rubin who pointed me to this fascinating study.

9 Oesterheld, »Verfasser unbekannt« (see note 5).

10 Lothar Kahn and Donald D. Hook: *The Impact of Heine on Nineteenth-Century German-Jewish Writers*. In: Gelber (ed.), *The Jewish Reception of Heinrich Heine* (see note 3), pp. 53–66. S. a. Na'ama Rokem: *Prosaic Conditions – Heinrich Heine and the Spaces of Zionist Literature*. Evanston 2013, p. 122: »For some, Heine was an attractive vehicle for defiance against the Nazis; others felt his German language and his will to assimilate in the field of German literature embodied a world that came to an end with Nazism. Max Brod's Heine biography, published in 1934, is emblematic of the dilemma.«

11 David Gramling: *The Invention of Monolingualism*. New York, London 2016.

Hebrew and German. In its intimate contact, bilingual homophony may undermine the signifying function of language by dissolving boundaries between semiotic and semantic distinctions. Bilingual homophony can lead to the poetic entanglement of tongues, but may also lead to uncanny communication conflicts. For this reason, as an illustration for my ongoing study of German-Hebrew and Hebrew-German homophonic contact zones,¹² I suggest the metaphor of a Hebrew-German French Kiss, with respect to the German *Zungenkuss* – a »kiss of tongues«, as it were, which retains its double meaning of »tongue« and »language« in Hebrew and also in English, partaking in the triple entanglement as the language in which this paper is written. In this case, this third language allows for an equal distance to both Hebrew and German, as well as for a word-play, which already hints at the subject of irony and parody, which is central to this case-study of bilingual homophony.¹³

II.

This paper focuses on an extraordinary Hebrew adaption of Heine's *Lorelei* by the renowned Hebrew poet and Israeli publicist Nathan Alterman.¹⁴ Alterman was born in 1910 into the Yiddish environment of Eastern European Jewry. Yiddish was his mother-tongue, but his father was a Zionist and Hebrew pedagogue, who laid grounds, too, for Nathan's career as a Hebrew writer. Nathan Alterman had also learned French and German for about five years at the Magen David elementary school of Kishinew.¹⁵ Nevertheless, his oeuvre became a monolingual Hebrew one. All the more astonishing, therefore, is his adaptation of Heine's *Lorelei*,

¹² Cf. Jan Kühne: A German-Hebrew French Kiss: On Bilingual Homophony and Other Multilingual Intimacies in German-Jewish Literature. In: Yearbook for European Jewish Literature Studies 6 (2019), pp. 41–89.

¹³ This becomes apparent, too, by considering the polysemic relations to which this metaphor also lends itself in Hebrew, e. g. as: »לשון מעבר השפה«, i. e. as »tongue (*lashon*) beyond language (*safa*)«, which also translates as: »tongue beyond lip«. Cf. Ludwig Strauss's aphorism: »Which is the language [*safa*], in which I can say all that is in me? / My two languages [*zug sfata*] are the pair of lips of my heart.« Lina Barouch: Between German and Hebrew. The Counterlanguages of Gershom Scholem, Werner Kraft and Ludwig Strauss. Berlin, Jerusalem 2012, Ch. III, 2; p. 306. S. a. Julia Matveev: Ludwig Strauss: An Approach to His Bilingual ›Parallel Poems‹. Berlin, Boston 2018, p. 177. Cf. Jan Kühne: »Vom Misrachipoet zum *juden dichter*«. Mati Shemoelof setzt über. In: Jalta 7 (2020), pp. 52–56.

¹⁴ I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Prof. Ruth HaCohen who first pointed me to Alterman's Heine adaptations.

¹⁵ Dan Laor: Nathan Alterman. A Biography [Hebrew]. Tel Aviv 2013, p. 30, 154.

which is his only genuine and most accomplished bilingual German-Hebrew poem.¹⁶ The poem integrates German lines in Hebrew transcription in a symmetric form and is, therefore, a rare phenomenon and a decisive, hitherto overlooked contribution to the corpus of German-Hebrew Studies. So far, most studies of this discourse analyze Hebrew insertions in German texts, and not vice versa, as I have discussed elsewhere.¹⁷ I have shown, how writers like Ludwig Strauss or Sammy Gronemann were attracted to bilingual homophony in their symmetric bilingual poems as part of their overall monolingual German oeuvre, but shied away from manifesting it. Alterman's adaptation of Heine's *Lorelei*, however, is a rare case of German insertions in his overall Hebrew corpus.¹⁸

The poem was originally published on July 17th 1942 in the *Ha'aretz* newspaper as part of the column *Rega'im* (רגעים, *Moments*), in which he commented with his poems satirically on political events of the time.¹⁹ Alterman's adaption of Heine's *Lorelei* is called *Lorelei* (לורֵלֵי), too, and announces itself through this quotation already as a parody – at least to those familiar with the German hypotext by Heine,²⁰ that is to say to most of the readers of *Haaretz* at the time.²¹ I

16 Another two poems exist that fuse German into Hebrew, however to a considerably lesser degree – they do not feature interlingual rhymes, which interest us below, but only sparse intra-lingual ones through occasional literary code-switching: דְּרַנְג נַח [Drang nach Westen] (14.5.1943), לִוְרֵלִי, שְׁחֻרְרָהּ [The Liberation of the Lorelei] (22.9.1944). For a list of further German as well as other multilingual insertions into Alterman's poems, see Gidi Nevo: המדוד השניתי־סטירי בשירתו העיתונאית של נתן אלתרמן – לאור אפלט הקמים [In the Light of Darkness: The Satiric Mode in Nathan Alterman's Journalistic Poetry]. In: עיונים בתקומת ישראל [Iyunim Bitkumat Israel] 21 (2011), pp. 38–79, here: pp. 63–68.

17 Kühne, A German-Hebrew French Kiss (see note 12).

18 For another case see my study on Dan Pagis, albeit, which was conducted only after this study on Alterman was finalized: Jan Kühne, Dan Pagis' bilingual poem »Ein Leben« – An Ophthalmologic Poetics of German-Hebrew Eye-Contact. In: Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook [forthcoming 2021].

19 From the same year, s. a.: *Mikol Ha'amim* (27.11.1942), Bayom Hahu (18.12.1942). Beginning in February 1943, Alterman published in the newspaper *Davar* his *Tor Hashvi'i* [The Seventh Column], in which he commented for 24 years with his poems on the political events of his time. Republished in: Nathan Alterman: הטור השביעי [The Seventh Column], Vol. 3. Ed. by Menachem Dormann. Tel Aviv 1972, p. 15. I could not find a manuscript of Alterman's adaption of Heine's *Lorelei* in his archive at the Kipp Center for Hebrew Literature and Culture.

20 »Michael Butor was justified in saying, albeit from a different perspective, that every quotation is already parodic, [...].« Gérard Genette: Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree. Trans. by Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky. Nebraska 1997, p. 17.

21 *Haaretz* had been acquired in 1934 by the German-Jewish businessman Salman Schocken and appealed to the majority of German-Jewish refugees and immigrants to Mandatory Palestine who read in Hebrew.

present the poem here with my working translations into German (and English in the footnote), with a focus on its intertextuality with Heine's *Lorelei* and its at times interlingual alternate rhyme-scheme. Italics in the translation and in the rhyme-indicators mark transliterated German in the Hebrew version.²²

Loreley

לורלי

[a] Türme wachen über dem Flusse
[b] und der *Führer* erhebt sich auf einem Felsen.
[a] *Er kämmt seine goldene Haare*
[b] *mit einem goldenem Kamm.*

מגדלים נבטים הנהרה
והפיר על סלע קם.
אר קמט זינה גולדנה הרה
מיט אינם גולדנע קאם.

[a] Kehrt wieder, kehrt zurück, Tage der *Nibelungen*.
[b] Feuer und Dunkelheit. Und *Judenrein*.
[a] Fernab begraben liegen *die Jungen*,
[b] *und ruhig fließt der Rhein.*

שבו שבו ימי גיבלינגן.
אש וחשך. ויידנרין.
במרחק נקברים הינגן,
אונד רוהיג פליסט דר רין.

[a] Denn für *diese goldenen Haare*
[b] und für *diesen goldenen Kamm*
[a] gallopierten Bataillone in den Osten
[b] im Blut der Don dann dampfend schwamm.

פי בשביל דיזע גולדנע הרה
ובשביל דיזע גולדנע קם
הגדודים למנחה דהרו
נהדון האדים מדם.

[a] Es gallopierten Bataillone in den Osten,
[b] die wissen genau: Nah ist der Tag
[a] dann werden andere Flüsse gereinigt,
[b] rot fließt dann nur noch der *Rhein*!

הגדודים למנחה דהרו,
אף יודעים הם: קרוב היום
ונהרות אחרים יטהרו,
רק הרין יסלף אדם!

[:] Über Verwandte Trauernde werden schrei'n
[b] und kein Haus ohne Tote auf der Schwelle,
[:] *und das hat mir ihrem Singen*
[b] *die Lorelei getan.*

מספדים את עורכיו יזעקו
נאין בית בלי מת על מפתן.
אונד דס הט מיט איהרם זינגן
די לורלי גטן.

²² An English translation: »Towers watch river-wards / and the Führer rises on a rock. / He combs his golden hair / with a golden comb. // Return, days of Nibelungen. / Fire and gloom. Cleansed of Jews. / In the distance lie buried young men, / And quiet flows the Rhine. // Because of these golden hairs / and of this golden comb / Bataillons galloped to the east / and the Don steamed of blood. // Bataillons galloped to the east, / but they know: nigh is the day / when other rivers will be cleansed, / when red will flow only the Rhine. // Mourners of their relatives will scream / and not one house without the dead on its threshold, / And that's what, with her singing, / was done by Lorelei.«

Like most of Alterman's poems, this one, too, is carefully constructed. However, its bilingual arrangement is particularly intriguing. By comparing the intra-lingual with the inter-lingual rhymes,²³ the following pattern becomes apparent: Stanzas 1, 3, and 5 feature inter-lingual rhymes (partial homophonies in German and Hebrew), whereas 2 and 4 feature intra-lingual rhymes, i. e. the rhymes remain limited to one language – in stanza 2 to German and in stanza 4 to Hebrew, respectively. Note, that the intra-lingual rhyme scheme with which the poem begins and ends – two Hebrew endings, followed by two German ones – is inverted in the middle stanza. Furthermore, the sequence of these symmetrically constructed five stanzas (A-B-C-B-A) is reflected in that of the five letter palindrome in the second verse (ע-ל-ו-ל-ע), that leads up to the bilingual homophone.

Although the poem begins in Hebrew and ends in German, its content is complemented by its form. Key to this conflation is the bilingual homophony, with which the poem starts and successively moves away from until the interlingual rhyme breaks off in the last stanza with a death wail. This lament stands in dialectical relation with Lorelei's »singing« and accentuates the final interlingual rhyme, which presents the war casualties on the threshold of civilian houses as the work of Lorelei's seductive power. The poem does not end, but begins in the conflation of the ascent of Hitler with the comb of Lorelei. In Hebrew, *ḵam* (חָמ) means »to rise« and here it forms a complete identical rhyme with the German *Kamm* (קַמ, i. e. a comb).²⁴ Except for a minor difference in the vocalization whose sound is negligible in modern Hebrew (*qamatz* and *pataḥ*), both words sound the same. *Ḵam* (חָמ/חַמ) forms the only genuine bilingual homophony in this poem, which otherwise consists of partial bilingual homophony in the inter-lingual rhyme patterns.

III.

Alterman's bilingual homophone is transformed in the third and central stanza, which brings about the inversion. Here, the bilingual homophony of *ḵam* and *ḵam* (חָמ and חַמ) – of Hitler's ascent and his comb – becomes only a partial

²³ For a distinction between inter- and intra-lingual rhymes, see Kühne, A German-Hebrew French Kiss (see note 12).

²⁴ Note also the semantic affinity: In order to comb one's hair one has to raise that particular hand holding that comb. In the literal sense, the German *durchkämmen* denotes also, similar to the English *combing through* (*scouring for*), violent police or military actions such as mass persecutions and arrests, etc.

bilingual homophony, i. e. a regular interlingual rhyme between *ḵam* (חַם) and *dam* (דָּם), i. e. blood. Thereby, the initial bilingual intimacy suggested by the same sounding ascent of Hitler and Loreley's comb, becomes associated with blood and turns into violence. The trajectory of meaning across this German-Hebrew contact zone is clear: Hitler's ascent, paired with his self-aggrandizing vanity and aspiration for a greater Germany, are made responsible for the bloodshed at the Eastern Front of the Second World War. In the last stanza, this same-sounding rhyme is further subverted: the dead people on every doorstep – *miftan* (מִפְתָּן) – are the making of Loreley; what she had done – »getan«.

Thus, the allusion is obvious. Hitler is presented here as a travesty of the »Lorelei«, i. e. literally as that »lure of the rock«, which seduces the boatman in Heine's poem, who then does not pay attention to the cliffs underneath and therefore drowns. In Alterman's poem this boatman has become a collective; young German soldiers who had crossed the river Don in order to conquer Russia, were about to be driven back that same year – a turning point at the Eastern Front of the Second World War. Alterman already anticipated the defeat of the German army in 1942 and the bloodshed upon their withdrawal back to that historic border with France, which had given rise to another famous German song during the Rhine crisis of 1840: *Die Wacht am Rhein* (*The Watch on the Rhine*), to which Alterman's poem, among many other texts, alludes.²⁵ Obvious, too, is his reference to Wagner's *Nibelungen* saga as a mythical driving force behind Nazi-ideology. Less obvious maybe is the reference to the biblical Exodus myth, which is employed especially in the last stanza with a clear allusion to Pessach.²⁶

The trans-textuality of this Hebrew poem, therefore, is predominantly found in its relation to German hypotexts. Especially, however, in relation to Heine's *Lorelei*. From it, Alterman's poem quotes whole German lines in Hebrew transcription and, in the case of its bilingual homophone, also in transphonation. Thereby, transtextuality becomes closely intertwined with translinguality, through the relationship between Hebrew-German homophony and bilingual

25 Compare Alterman's »Türme wachen über den Flusse (i. e. the Rhein) with the watch towers (»wachen«/»Wacht«) next to the river Rhine described in *Die Wacht am Rhein*: »Zum Rhein, zum Rhein, zum deutschen Rhein! / Wer will des Stromes Hüter sein? / Lieb' Vaterland, magst ruhig sein, / Fest steht und treu die Wacht, die Wacht am Rhein!« Walter Moßmann and Peter Schleuning: *Alte und neue politische Lieder*. Hamburg 1978, p. 76.

26 Cf. Exodus 12:13: »And the blood on the houses where you are staying shall be a sign for you: when I see the blood I will pass over [hebr.: *pessakh*] you, so that no plague will destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.«

parody, according to Genette's definition of the genre, as I will demonstrate in the following.²⁷

Alterman's parody of Heine's *Lorelei* is a poem composed as an imitation of another poem: »The parodic text follows the parodied text as closely as possible, by allowing itself to make only the few transpositions required by the change in the subject.«²⁸ For example, the term »*Jungen*« is, next to »*Judenrein*« and »*Führer*«, the only one of the three German words in this Hebrew poem, which are not directly quoted from Heine's *Lorelei*. However, the term »*Jungen*« relates to the siren-like *Jungfrau*, the erotically seductive maiden Lorelei, which leads the boatman into his death in Heine's poem. With this shift in metaphor, therefore, Alterman less explains than poetically transforms his Hebrew-German French Kiss into a Midrashic kiss of death.²⁹ The erotically seductive, narcissistic power Hitler had enacted upon the German people is also presented as the performative power of myth, which presents itself as a self-referential, world-creative story untouched by historical time, i. e. as eternal. But not only as eternally young, but also as eternally vain and self-aggrandizing. That very attraction which Heine managed to capture in words that enact their enchanting melancholic spell to this day (»Ich weiß nicht, was soll es bedeuten, dass ich so traurig bin...«).

Alterman's adaptation, however, is a parodic counter-chant, in which this melancholy gives way to consternation over the horrors of war that were caused by that very lure, which continues to echo in a cynical call for vengeance after the end of the poem.³⁰ Unlike Heine's melancholic reflexive contextualization of his ballad-like poem, Alterman's satirical version is descriptive and constitutive of a factual reality which he is not part of. Alterman's poetic »I« watches securely and from afar like the towers at the beginning of his poem. Similar to Odysseus' hearing the sirens, he prevented himself from following their attraction. Alterman,

²⁷ Cf. note 2.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 18, cf. p. 16.

²⁹ The kiss (נִשְׁקָה) marks a highly ambivalent gesture in the Bible. Next to kisses between human protagonists, primarily as expressions of respect and only secondarily of affection (usually accompanied by weeping), Rabbinic exegesis identifies also kisses between God and humans, e.g. where the biblical idiom »died by the mouth of God« is read as a »kiss of God«, i. e. causing Moses' death (בִּנְשִׁיקָה, Rashi on Deuteronomium 34:5).

³⁰ Alterman's poem anticipates not only the defeat of the German army, but in an ironic kind of Schadenfreude, the urge for retaliation is also anticipated in *kam* – the root of the Hebrew word for revenge: *nekamah* (נִקְמָה). At some point, apparently, Alterman did archive »all of the translations he had made from the German, and was explicitly outspoken against German music in concert halls«. Furthermore, he »discarded from his library every German book written in German (except for Heine's poems) [...]« Ziva Shamir: על עת ועל אחר ביצירת פואטיקה ופוליטיקה בנצירת. Tel Aviv 1999, p. 44.

however, bound himself to the Hebrew language by means of his German-Hebrew homophone, in order to distance himself, as it were, from Heine's German lure without falling prey to it in his Hebrew adaptation.

IV.

By not choosing to translate or thereby »redeem« the German poem in Hebrew (as Bialik would have it for the sake of Zionist ideology),³¹ but rather to adapt and integrate it in a unique bilingual fashion, Alterman made an important choice. Whereas translations are one-directional, supportive of the monolingual paradigm which informs modern nationalisms like Zionism, bilingual homophony is a bi-directional transphonation that subverts this paradigm. This quality produces the uncanniness of Alterman's bilingual homophone. With semiotic distinctions dissolved, there is a flow of uncontrolled meaning into both directions, back and forth between Hebrew and German, as well as between narcissism and Nazism. It is this uncanniness, which is augmented in the German-Hebrew historical context, and which can be emphasized in this first close reading³² of Alterman's only Hebrew-German poem. That is to say, potentially, any familiar word can reveal itself as a foreign one in one's own tongue, albeit as meaningful also

31 For Bialik, multilingualism was a »historic plague of the multiplicity of language in Jewish literature« to be »redeemed«: »there is no greater act in the nature of »ransoming of captives« than a Hebrew translation of the poems of Heine, that Jew whose sufferings expiated his transgression, and whose death brought peace between him and the God of Israel. Not only Heine's poetry but all the praiseworthy works produced by Jewish talent in foreign languages, [...]« Haim Nahman Bialik: *The Hebrew Book*. Transl. by Minnie Halkin. Jerusalem 1951, p. 23, 25. For the impact of this work on German-Jewish literature in Palestine/Israel, see Sebastian Schirrmeister: *Begegnung auf fremder Erde – Verschränkungen deutsch- und hebräischsprachiger Literatur in Palästina/Israel nach 1933*. Berlin 2019, p. 56f.

32 Cf. the mentions in passing: Rosenfeld (note 5); Reich (note 5); Laor (note 16, p. 154). Na'ama Rokem is the only one so far, who has paid closer attention to Alterman's extraordinary poem. To her mind, »The poem moves back and forth between Heine's German and Alterman's Hebrew and between two dark, yet fundamentally different, visions: Heine's romantic image of the alluring, yet threatening female figure of Lorelei, on the one hand, and Alterman's perception of the violence and danger inherent in the Nazi advance eastward, on the other. Alterman produces a grotesque parody of Lorelei in the image of the Nazi führer who rises on a cliff overlooking the river; the poem paraphrases Heine, transcribing his German in Hebrew letters [...]«. A transcription, which she considers as standing in the tradition of writing »Judendeutsch«, that is, of transcribing standard German in Hebrew letters. Rokem, *Prosaic Conditions* (see note 10), p. 128f.; p. 189, fn. 20.

in another tongue. In bilingual homophony, hypotext and hypertext are equally present simultaneously, symmetrically; one could say, it is a phonetic quotation of itself.³³ For this reason, distancing was necessary by way of parody, which »does not actually subject the hypotext [Heine's *Lorelei*] to a degrading stylistic treatment but only takes it as a model or template for the construction of a new text which, once produced, is no longer concerned with the model.«³⁴ In this sense, too, Alterman's parody of Heine's *Lorelei* is directed, at once, against the poem's canonical and dignified position both in German literature, as well as in the canon of German Jews in Mandate Palestine, who would have been its primary readership.

If foreign words are, as Adorno had called them, »Jews of language« and »exotic girls« in a given mother tongue,³⁵ then German Jewish readers, who are able to read Alterman's Hebrew-German parody also stand metaphorically for bilingual homophony in Mandate Palestine.³⁶ From Germany, where they were the persecuted Other because of their Jewish belonging, they had fled to British Mandate Palestine. There, it was their German cultural background that turned them into the Other in the framework of the monolingual Hebrew language politics of Zionist nation-building.³⁷ In this hegemonial paradox, Alterman's bilingual homophone *ḵam* represents also a metaphoric *Lorelei* – an exotic girl of two mother-tongues whose lure sounds also in a third language, i. e. in the English calling: »Come!«, as in »Come to me!«. Furthermore, *ḵam* also transposes same-sounding words across linguistic divides that otherwise would remain excluded and *kam* (كَمْ), i. e. merely »another«, as the Arabic homophone further elucidates.³⁸

33 »The most rigorous form of parody, or minimal parody, consists, then, of taking up a familiar text literally and giving it a new meaning, while playing, if possible and as needed, on the words, [...]. The most elegant parody, since it is the most economical, is then merely a quote deflected from its meaning or simply from its context, or demoted from its dignified status.« Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (see note 20), p. 16.

34 Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (see note 20), p. 27.

35 Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue* (see note 8), p. 97, s. a. pp. 84–94.

36 E. g. Tuvia Rübner, who »sees his Hebrew and German poems as twin expressions of a single voice.« Rachel Seelig: *Stuttering in Verse: Tuvia Rübner and the Art of Self-Translation*. In: *The German-Hebrew Dialogue: Studies of Encounter and Exchange*. Ed. by Amir Eshel and Rachel Seelig. Berlin, Boston 2017, pp. 77–103, p. 101. For reflections on uncanny relations in translating from Hebrew to German, see *ibid.*, p. 94.

37 Cf. Jan Kühne: *Deutschsprachige jüdische Literatur in Palästina/Israel*. In: *Handbuch der deutsch-jüdischen Literatur*. Ed. by Hans Otto Horsch. Berlin, Boston 2015, pp. 201–220. Marc Volovici: *German as a Jewish Problem*. Stanford 2020, Ch. 7.

38 Both in the sense of close to each other, as well as in the sense of an enhanced sense of estrangement between both words.

Thus, whereas polysemy is hardly distinguishable from homophony within one particular language, the notion of homophony becomes clearer in multilingual analysis. Such diversity and multiplicity of meaning within one word or name, however, are always in danger of being reduced to a single meaning. In Alterman's example, such a shift appears in the transition towards the rare case of bilingual homonymy, because in the republication of Alterman's poem the letter »X« disappeared from the Hebrew transliteration of the German *Kamm*.³⁹ Thereby, this German word was further removed from its Yiddish guise and assimilated into the Hebrew language (קאַם became קם). This transition from a bilingual homophone to a bilingual homonym reflects, paradoxically, the force of the Hebrew monolingual paradigm in Israeli nation-building, which causes a substantial manipulation in the poem. However, this kind of »Singen« – even though he would eventually become a supporter of Greater Israel⁴⁰ – was *not* done by Alterman.

39 Cf. Nathan Alterman: הטור השביעי [The Seventh Column], Vol. 3. Ed. by Menachem Dormann. Tel Aviv 1972, p. 15.

40 Encyclopedia Judaica (2nd ed.), Vol. 2, p. 19.