

TWO PERSPECTIVES ON ABRAHAM REGELSON'S "HAKUKOT OTIYOTAYICH" (ENGRAVED ARE YOUR LETTERS)

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"Hakukot Otiyotayich" (Engraved are your letters), the "amazing"¹ song of praise to the Hebrew language by the Hebrew-American poet Abraham Regelson (1896–1980) has received very little critical attention, none of it from a major literary critic. The system that filters, absorbs, and canonizes Hebrew culture has consigned the poem, as well as Regelson's poetic corpus in general, to relatively minor critics who themselves were all but forgotten. The crowning glory of Regelson's poetry remains forgotten, absent, unknown. "Hakukot Otiyotayich" is a poem of dense and rich rhetoric, wound in a tight web of philosophical concepts and ideas. The present article proposes a rhetorical and philosophical analysis of this long (twenty stanzas) and complex composition, one of the most unique and extraordinary poems in modern Hebrew poetry.

1. RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

Generally speaking, Regelson's writing in "Hakukot Otiyotayich,"² as in fact in all of his poetry, is one of highly developed process and style. His is quite the opposite of the "writing degree zero" espoused by Roland Barthes, that utopian, ideal, pristine kind of writing which, on the way towards total stylistic neutrality, sheds all ornamentation and frills, striving to become colorless, functional and egalitarian—a pure equation, as transparent and intangible as algebra itself.³

In keeping with poetry that calls for enhancing and intensifying the literary or poetic nature of the utterance, the language of "Hakukot Otiyotayich" is tense, pushing Hebrew syntax and vocabulary to spheres and distances far and varied from the commonly accepted standardized language, far from the oral and written performance of daily discourse. This is grand and glorious literary language, high-headed, laden with ornamentation and device, a lan-

¹ This is the word used by Dan Miron who mentions the poem flittingly in his essay *הרפיה לצורך גייעה* (From continuity to contiguity; Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2005).

² A. Regelson, "Hakukot Otiyotayich" (Engraved are your letters) in his collection *Hakukot Otiyotayich* (Tel Aviv: Machbarot Lesifrut, 1964), pp. 7–26. The poem was first published in the journal *Hatkufa* in 1946. All page references are to the 1964 edition.

³ R. Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998).

guage clad in royal poetic cloaks, carrying itself with stately dignity, although not without a considerable degree of agility and nimbleness.

The literariness, the stylization, the distancing from mundane, everyday language are expressed in both major aspects of language—the syntactic and the semantic.

“Hakukot Otiyotayich” kneads Hebrew’s standard syntax, twisting and rolling it into non-standard shapes. This reshaping is achieved by such means as changing standard word order (סִלְעִיךְ לְמִלְאכְתִּי מְחַצֵּב),⁴ using intransitive verbs as transitive ones (הַבְּרִקֶּת בְּרִיקוֹת, הַבְּהִקֶּת יְקוֹד),⁵ employing “unnatural” or archaic prepositions and conjunctions (אֲשֶׁר; הַנְּאָמֹן עִם אֲמָתוֹ),⁶ or, displaying regal indifference, simply dropping conjunctions altogether (יִדְעֶם רַק/ מִי סִיר בְּרִשׁׁי; תִּינוּקוֹת עֲבָרִים דְּעָכוּ בְּיַד מְרַצְחִים),⁷ and utilizing a variety of elliptical, condensed grammatical forms, such as deleting verbs, copulatives, and other elements (עַל אֲנוּלוֹת-הַמוֹנִים יְהָבִם); הַסְּמִכָּת מִצּוֹת הַשֵּׁשֶׁת; עוֹלָמוֹת מְקִיפֵי עוֹלָמוֹת לְגֹדֵל, עוֹלָמוֹת מְמַלְאֵי עוֹלָמוֹת לְקוֹטָן (וְשִׁעְרֵתִיו שְׂאֵר-נִצְרִיךְ וְקִלְט בְּאֶקְלִימְךְ; בְּנֵי עַמִּי רְתַקוּנִי סוּס-דָּיֵשׁ; לְמִצּוֹת הַשְּׂבִיעִי).⁸ Also to be taken into account is the generous use of infinitives (פָּרַט קִצּוֹת),⁹ constructs (יָם, וְדָרִי בּוֹ; דְּלוּעֵי-הַמָּאָה),¹⁰ and the possessive form (מְשַׁחֲפִיךְ [...] וְתַמִּיךְ; רִ״קִיךְ וְגִ״מִיךְ)¹¹ in far excess of their use in common Hebrew.

The unusual syntax creates unique syntagmata which form the matting for the embedding and sprinkling of lexical gems, rife with exotic verbalism, coating the poems with gold beads and silver scales, cloaking it with crystal and sapphires and all manners of brilliant color. The exotic verbalism seems to emanate from two main sources. First, use of esoteric scientific-professional or domain-specific glossaries. This use is expressed, for the most part, in the Homeric catalogues that Regelson uses (e.g., the botanical glossary in the first stanza: פּוּאָה, אֲבָרֶשׁ וְיוֹעֶזֶר, בְּרִשְׁיָנָה וְאֶפְעוֹן,¹² or the zoological glossary in the nineteenth stanza: וְחֻמּוֹת עִמּוֹ לְפִזָּר רִצְפִית, / וּבְנוֹצָה, (אוֹ לְלִיוֹן, אוֹ חוֹחַ, אוֹ גְלוּלִית, לְהַפִּיץ זֶרְעוֹנָיו).¹³ The second source is a bubbling morphological creativity, expressed in the form of taking existing linguistic

⁴ *Hakukot*, p. 25.

⁵ *Hakukot*, p. 19.

⁶ *Hakukot*, pp. 22, 26.

⁷ *Hakukot*, pp. 21, 22.

⁸ *Hakukot*, pp. 23, 24, 25, 26, 26, respectively.

⁹ *Hakukot*, p. 22.

¹⁰ *Hakukot*, pp. 20, 23, respectively.

¹¹ *Hakukot*, pp. 14, 25, respectively.

¹² *Hakukot*, p. 7.

¹³ *Hakukot*, p. 24.

roots and placing them in nominal and verbal paradigms (mishkalim and binyanim) in which they are not usually housed (e.g., הִזְדָּדוּתָךְ¹⁴ from the root זבד); even more radical is Regelson's extracting roots out of names (of people or objects) and pouring these new roots into familiar grammatical structures (e.g. מְתַלְשָׁמִים וּמְשַׁתְּהָמִים¹⁵ from the gems לָשֶׁם and שֶׁהָם, akin to “opaling and onyxing”), a procedure that reaches its peak in the chain of verbs עָשָׂה וְכִסְלָה וְכָמַת¹⁶ (derived from the ancient biblical names [כָּסִיל, עֵשׂ, וְכִימָה] of Ursa Major and the constellations Orion and Pleiades).

This combination of a “beheaded,” nonstandard, dense syntax, lexical esotericism, and morphological creativity yields a stubborn, abstruse text, riddled with opaqueness, which is reminiscent of the language of the *piyyutim*, notorious for its outlandish vagaries, idiosyncracies and obscurity. The poem seems to demand simultaneous on-line translation which will provide “down-to-earth,” “ordinary” paraphrasing for the tortuous formulations studded with arcane vocabulary.

In “Hakukot,” such language serves as a tool for the expression of heavy, uninhibited pathos, that turns its object—Hebrew—into a national and cosmic fetish. Reading the poem is like trudging through viscous rivers of unrestrained emotional fervor. Within the framework of this pathos Hebrew becomes a huge cosmic entity, all-penetrating and meta-historical, and at the same time a sensuous erotic object, which the dazed and crazed poet—fumbling desperately to find a linguistic vessel that would not burst from the intensity of his emotion¹⁷—burning with desire, buries his face, as it were, into its curves, inhaling it as if inebriated:

הִגַּע אֶצְבְּעֵי אֵל פְּאוֹת דְּקְדוּקִיךָ,
וְאֵת הַלֵּא בְּפִסּוּקֵיךָ פֶּשֶׁר-יִפְיֵךְ וּבִסְגֻנוּתֵיךָ שְׁעָרוֹת-עֲזוּךְ
מֵה-מָה מִיִּקְרוֹת מְלוֹתֵיךָ אֶלְקִט, —

¹⁸ וּמִי יִשְׁחַר סִתְרֵי תְמוֹנַת אוֹתֵיךָ, חֲטוּב-צִלְעוֹתֶיךָ וְאֶהְלִיאָבוֹת-חֲלוּלֵיךָ.

However, it is not the pathos as such that makes the poem unique, but rather the conjunction between the pathos and its object, as well as the way this object is presented and described. The Hebrew language has enjoyed its share of love songs and songs of adoration, although never before, it seems,

¹⁴ *Hakukot*, p. 18.

¹⁵ *Hakukot*, p. 14.

¹⁶ *Hakukot*, p. 19.

¹⁷ בְּטוּיֵי קֶצֶר מְרִגְשׁוֹ (his powers of expression do not measure up to his emotion).

¹⁸ *Hakukot*, p. 8.

were these songs so voluminous and passionate. But “Hakukot Otiyotayich” is not a run-of-the-mill song of praise. In fact, the poem is a unique combination of the ode (as proudly and openly declared in its confident subtitle: “hymn” [המנון]) and of the anatomy—the literary form which is based on a careful, detailed, “microscopic” analysis of its subject. In a way, then, this is an “odatomy,” which branches out the large river of pathos into myriad tributaries of rigorous analysis of the language. This analysis is done according to both familiar, well-established, “orthodox” parameters and totally unorthodox and idiosyncratic ones. The familiar parameters include universal ones, applicable to virtually all languages (tense, verbal system, prepositions, conjunctions, and foreign words that have been incorporated into the language) as well as some that are particular to Hebrew (diacritical marks, biblical cantillation). The idiosyncratic ones include inverse semantic links between like-sounding words or those with identical roots (הטאת—הטאת, קדושים—קדושים), and “botanical” etymologies that supposedly track down words referring to abstract or distinctly human concepts to elements in the world of flora:

קחתך שעפים מסעיפי אילנות,
 לדתך זמרת הגרון מזמרת הארץ,
 חתכך אמר מאמיר,
 ונקך ניב-שפתים מתנובת-שדי.¹⁹

This unique amalgamation of the ode and the anatomy creates a somewhat paradoxical impression: On the one hand, the strict grammatical analysis acts as a moderating and regulating Apollonian factor, a cold harsh island in the boiling streams of erupting lava of pathos (pathos is also moderated by the epic scientific-cosmic classifications in the text). On the other hand, this analysis contributes to enhancing and increasing pathos, even as its accumulation slowly but consistently generates in us a feeling of the uncanny or the bizarre. This is the feeling that we experience when we come face to face with an emotional field completely taken over by a tyrannical principle of order, such as when, before our eyes, an object of desire is being systematically and carefully dissected, broken down into finer and finer elements, each of them—carefully classified, wrapped and stored—congealing onto an object of desire in and of itself.

¹⁹ *Hakukot*, p. 17.

Within this integration of anatomy and ode, “Hakukot Otiyotayich” contains a unique rhetorical figure or trope, in which, it seems, more than in any other element in the poem, lies the power of its wonderment. This is a figure that does not easily yield to description yet is perceived intuitively. It first appears in the fourth stanza and lives on in different guises in the next stanzas, alongside the anatomical dissection of the language that takes place in them. The fourth stanza is devoted to the seven verbal paradigms of Hebrew (binyanim), grantedly a rather “singular” thematic choice, although a fairly natural one for a poem that, like “Hakukot,” models itself, at least in part, on a Hebrew grammar book. But the crux of the matter is that the poem describes each of the paradigms using verbs conjugated in that paradigm:

קַלֵּךְ הַעוֹשֶׂה בְּפִשְׁטוּת, לֹקֵה בְּחֻטְאֵי וְקֵם בְּצַדִּיקוֹ [...];
 נִפְעֵלֶךְ הַנִּכְנַע לְסִבָּל, וְנִשְׁבֵּר, וְנִשְׁאַר בְּאַמוֹנָתוֹ, וְסוֹפוֹ – נוֹשָׁע;
 פִּעֵלֶךְ הַמְחֻזָּק יָדַיִם, הַמְעַשֶּׂה לְמַצּוֹת וְחֻסְדִּים [...];
 פִּעֵלֶךְ הַמְלַמֵּד, מְקַטֵּר, וּמְעַטֵּר בְּיוֹם יְדִבֵּר בוֹ, וּבְכִרְמִיו יִרְנֶן וּוִירָעָע;
 הַפְעִילֶךְ הַמְשַׁכֵּל וְהַמִּיטִיב,
 אֵין כְּמוֹהוּ מְנַעִיל יַחַף וּמְלַבֵּשׁ עָרוֹם וּמְאַכִּיל רָעֵב [...];
 הַפְעֵלֶךְ, מְשַׁזֵּר בְּמוֹחַשׁ וּבְמוֹכַח, וּבוֹ הַמְחַלֵּט יִבַּע;
 הַתְּפַעֵלֶךְ – מֵה-מְאֵד אֲשֶׁתּוֹמֵם עָלָיו, כִּי רָכַב וְשָׁכַב בוֹ הַתְּאַחֲדוֹ,
 בְּצוּרוֹ יִדְבֵּק וְעוֹלָמִית לֹא יִטְמָא, בֵּין תְּמִימִים יִתְמָם וְכוּי.²⁰

The fifth stanza refers to the future tense using verbs in that tense (ומְלִכְיֹת (עֲתִיד, כִּי יְהִי כָּל הַלְבָבוֹת אֶחָד וְיִמְלִיכוּ עֲלֵיהֶם אֶחָד שִׁמְיָנִי הַד לְצוּוֹיֵךְ הַכְּבִיר, / הָאוֹמֵר לְטַבֵּעַ מְשַׁעֲבֵד גִּוְעִי! וְלְטַבֵּעַ בֶּן-),²¹ and the Hebrew Pa’ul and infinitive are expressed by roots conjugated in these forms. The sixth stanza, which discusses root types (גזרות שורש), especially irregular ones, works wonders in referring to each type using verbs and nouns which belong to that type, etc.

What happens with this rhetorical device then is that the sign functions simultaneously both as sign and as referent, as the meaning of the sign. The sign becomes the materialization of that which is signed, part of its own extension (of course, what enables Regelson to do so is, inter alia, the fact that language itself—or certain aspects of it—is his referent). This is a semiotic grammatical stunt of sorts, which continues in the following stanzas and which Regelson exhibits a great deal of virtuosity manipulating. The sign

²⁰ *Hakukot*, p. 9.

²¹ *Hakukot*, p. 10.

crosses conventional semiotic lines, positioning itself on both sides of the line separating the sign and its referent.

This semiotic line-crossing parallels what Gerard Genette called, on the narratological level, *metalepsis*.²² Following Genette, *metalepsis*—a term with a long and interesting rhetorical history—came to be identified with the crossing of boundaries separating various diegetic levels, levels that should be organized in a strict hierarchical order and sharply distinguished from one another (as each represents a different possible or “real” world). For the most part, the term came to be identified with a “transplantation” or “migration” of characters from one diegetic level to another, as in the migration or planting of the author (and possibly other elements from his world) in the world of fiction he created, or when a character moves “up” from its own diegetic level to the extra-diegetic one of the individual(s) who have made it up from the gossamer threads of literary imagination.

In “Hakukot Otiyotayich,” the differentiation between the sign and the referent is blurred. In front of our very eyes the sign turns into a referent, and that which represents turns into the represented. With Regelson, this procedure does not carry the subversive implications it often has in narratological *metalepsis*. Turning the sign into a referent does not undermine the system of signification or representation but rather thickens and materializes it.

“Hakukot” is the supreme example of this semiotic trickery, and Regelson is revealed in it as the maestro of this rhetorical tool, the Yasha Heifez of the grammatical-semiotic *metalepsis*. He utilizes it with incomparable panache and inventiveness. The sign reacts like a tamed bear—when the wand is raised it dances a dance that is not its own, cajoled into doing that which it is not meant to do. By nature, signs are meant to *refer* to the referent, not *be* it. The word “red” need not be red, the word “table” need not be a table. A road sign indicating a steep incline need not be a steep incline. A momentous effort of taming, of reeducation, of going against the grain was required from the author to turn the sign into a referent, yet leave its symbolic function intact. Even as the amazed reader watches, Regelson uses this fantastic trick again and again, employing different language categories. The resulting effect is not unlike that obtained by a musician who can play a full Beethoven symphony on a saw, or by an acrobat who can carry out a routine activity, such as operating a machine, while juggling various objects in the air, including a plastic bowling pin, an apple and a machete. This is a

²² G. Genette, *Narrative Discourse* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1980), pp. 234–235.

grammatical calembour of sorts, an incredibly intricate Baroque-style *jeu de grammaire*. It is this rhetorical figure, of which Regelson is the great, perhaps the only artist, that turns “Hakukot Otiyotayich” into a poetic locus where the reader wanders in amazement, nodding his head incredulously as it were, a poetic locus which is a sort of a literary nature preserve, where this very rare beast resides, the dinosaur of the forests of rhetoric—the grammatical-semiotic metalepsis.

2. PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS

“Hakukot Otiyotayich” presents Hebrew in two contexts, viewing it from a dual perspective. On the one hand, Hebrew is imbued with cosmic status—it was there at the moment of Creation and will be there at the hour of Redemption. Hebrew is the key to all knowledge; it is the logos of the world, within which are encrypted the universal laws of nature. Hebrew is described as part of the universe and part of the Divine, at times as itself the universe and a Divine Being. Beginning with the seventeenth stanza, the poem takes on a more concrete tone. Regelson mentions the destruction of the Jewish people in the holocaust, the revitalization of the Hebrew language and Zionist settling in the Land of Israel, adding a sorrowful note that he himself does not live there. Such a concrete note is understandable, considering the historical context of the time of writing—the poem was published in 1946, a year after the end of the Second World War and not long before Israeli statehood was declared.

As mentioned earlier, there is a paucity of writing on Regelson’s poem. Major researchers of literature ignored it or mentioned it in passing. Those who did address “Hakukot Otiyotayich” paid no heed to the relationship between these two contexts—the eternal-cosmic one and the historical-current one—or made a feeble, often unfounded, passing comment on it. In an article about Regelson, Israel Zmora provided a rather schematic description of the first, abstract part of the poem,²³ and erroneously misrepresented the last stanzas. Thus, he described stanza seventeen, where the destruction brought about by the holocaust is the main theme, as follows: “This is a chapter full of joy and gaiety, happiness and rejoicing over the fact that Hebrew has turned into the common language of babes, a language of laughter and levity and a language of the bitter weeping of the holy flock.”

²³ I. Zmora, “בחבלי שיר” (In the throes of poetry) in his *ספרות על פרשת דורות* (Literature at a generational crossroads; Tel Aviv: Mahbarot Lesifrut, 1949), 2:221–222.

Regelson's personal history, which appears at the end of the poem—the fact that he himself does not live in the Land of Israel even as it is emerging and gaining life—is glossed over. Zmora does not address the relationship between the cosmic existence of Hebrew and its historical manifestations. Abraham Epstein is somewhat more expansive, and mentions that “an echo of the horrors of our generation emerges from the hymn-like notes, that generations-old mournful note that accompanies our poetry and is concealed in the very material of Jewish living.”²⁴ He takes issue with Regelson's more personal notes, stating that “the final bars are born of impure poetic origins, and are alien notes, marring the music. They are too bitter and contain harsh personal feelings of insult and account settling.”²⁵

It is our understanding that the relationship between both these contexts of Hebrew—the cosmic dimension bestowed upon it and the historical background in which the last stanzas root it—is the theoretical and philosophical focus of the poem. The main object of the present discussion is to explore this relationship.

In general, what the reader is offered here is an analysis of the ideas contained in Regelson's song of praise, an analysis that the very nature of this poem calls for. The poem has a clear philosophical atmosphere. In it Regelson presents a pantheistic perception, both directly (e.g., אֱלֹהִים מִתְגַּלִּים, -מִתְעַלֶּה מִתְאֱלֶה) and indirectly, as will be demonstrated. The poem also makes abstract claims and statements regarding such matters as the nature of the Hebrew language, the virtue of its unity, and the relationship between Hebrew and the world.

This will be a three-part discussion. Sections 2.1 and 2.2 will describe the essential nature of Hebrew as expressed in Regelson's poem, and will take a short look at two ideas which Regelson discusses in his theoretical articles. All in all, these two sections will address the cosmic or metaphysical significance that the poem accords to Hebrew, and the poet's role as dis-

²⁴ A. Epstein, *סופרים עברים באמריקה* (Hebrew writers in America; Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1953), p. 163.

²⁵ A. Epstein, *Hebrew Writers*, p. 163. Other references to “Hakukot” include: S. P. Hudson, *Fragmentation and Restoration: The Tikkun Ha-Olam Theme in the Metaphysical Poetry of Abraham Regelson*, pp. 109–112; D. Rudavsky, “Abraham Regelson: A Reflective Hebrew Poet,” *HS* 18 (1977): 91–104; S. Halkin, “בציצית ראשו: על ראשית שירתו של אברהם רגלסון” (By the tuft of his hair: On the beginning of Abraham Regelson's poetry) in his *דרכים וצדי דרכים בספרות* (Ways and sideways in literature; Tel Aviv: Yachdav, 1984), pp. 39–43; M. Giora, “ייחוד שירתו של אברהם רגלסון” (The uniqueness of Abraham Regelson's poetry), *Ha'uma* 11 (1965): 547–552; Y. Lichtenbaum, *בתחומה של ספרות* (In the realm of literature; Tel Aviv: Aleph, 1963), p. 102; Sh. Y. Pnueli, *חוליות בספרות העברית החדשה* (Links in new Hebrew literature; Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1953), pp. 54–61; Y. Peles, “רגלסון: משוררם של משוררים” (Regelson: A poets' poet), *Mozna'im* 53.5–6 (1981): 390–394; and H. Liff, “אברהם רגלסון: איש השירה והמחשבה” (Abraham Regelson: Man of poetry and thought), *Bitzaron*, 3.11–12 (1982): 3–4.

coverer of the magnificent existence of this language. The last section, 2.3, will explore the relationship between this cosmic meaning of Hebrew and what is said in the historical parts of the poem. What is the relationship between historical events—the destruction of European Jewry—and the exalted existence of the Hebrew language? Our overall argument is that in this poem Regelson endows Hebrew with a special theological, pantheistic status. He turns to the language as if it were a deity, attributing immeasurable power and presence to it. It is thus that Hebrew becomes a total, all-penetrating entity which accompanies the Jewish people, “engulfing” it and providing the People of Israel with a solid subsistence. This song of praise to Hebrew also includes a literary reaction to the destruction of the Jews of Europe, and its theological-pantheistic nature relates it to some of the philosophical attempts to grapple with the holocaust and search for consolation in its wake. In order to understand how Regelson finds comfort in Hebrew, its status in this poem must be understood—and vice versa. As we shall see, the Jewish destruction and the search for consolation in Hebrew reveal an important aspect of the language itself.

2.1 Pantheism and Logos

In his theoretical essays on pantheism in American poetry²⁶ and on Ernst Cassirer’s and Heraclitus’s perception of language,²⁷ Regelson presents two ideas that could act as a good point of departure for our understanding of the unique status of Hebrew in his poem. Neither idea is original, and Regelson correctly attributes them to others; their importance to our discussion lies not in their contents or origins per se, but rather in the way they are integrated into Regelson’s poem and in their role in formulating the special cosmic status accorded the Hebrew language. One idea is pantheism. Regelson claims that pantheistic thought is an attribute of American poetry:

This pantheistic thought—recognition of the divinity of every inanimate object, everything growing and living, and each and every human being—permeates the corpus of American poetry wherever it took off its Old World coverings and became independent.²⁸

²⁶ A. Regelson, “אלוהי-הטבע בשירה האמריקאית” (God of nature in American poetry) in his *מלוא הטלית* (A Tallith full of leaves: Essays and talks; New York: The Committee for the Publication of the Writings of A. Regelson, 1941), pp. 9–26.

²⁷ A. Regelson, “קאסירר על האדם בראי התרבות” (Cassirer on man in the mirror of culture) in his *ארזלי* (Angels of thought: Listening to the words of those of the late generations; Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1969). Cassirer’s book that Regelson discusses here is E. Cassirer, *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1944).

²⁸ A. Regelson, *A Tallith*, p. 22.

Shortly thereafter he quotes from D. H. Lawrence and explains what pantheism is:

Creation is an immense current, forever flowing with beautiful and awesome waves. In everything—there is the spark of creation and the process of creation, and never the end of creation, never something finite and immutable. There can never be a distinction between God and the works of God, nor between spirit and matter. Everything, everything is a little sparkle of creation.²⁹

The type of pantheism Regelson describes here does not content itself with the general identification of God with nature, but rather emphasizes the deep unity of nature, the identification of God and nature in the context of Creation. The Creator is not distinct from the Creation, he is not a finalized entity outside the world, but rather is completely integrated with all manifestations of nature and the dynamic life within them.

The second idea related to our discussion is one that Regelson mentions in his discussion of Cassirer's book, where he follows Cassirer's developmental analysis of language. The first stage is myth, when humans attribute active force to words and use them as a means to try and control nature. Next, people discover that nature does not obey their demands and language then takes on a different meaning: "If language has been drained of magical powers, it still has powers of meaning. The weight has shifted from the sound and resonance of the word to the logic within it."³⁰ Following Cassirer, Regelson finds that this change in the perception of language occurred within Greek philosophy, most notably in Heraclitus, in whose fragments language has cosmic meaning. Language becomes that which reflects the deep order of the universe and therefore becomes the main key with which to unlock the mysteries of the universe.³¹ Regelson quotes a section from Heraclitus and explains that "'the Word' exceeds its human boundaries and becomes cosmic truth. Heraclitus said, 'Don't listen to me, listen to the logos, and you will confess that all is one'"³². The general idea expressed in the perception of language as universal logos deals with the relation between language and the world. Language expresses or reflects the world, and therefore has a very intimate relation to the objects symbolized within it. Language is not distinct from them but serves to conceal—and can

²⁹ A. Regelson, *A Tallith*, pp. 23–24.

³⁰ A. Regelson, *Angels of Thought*, p. 37.

³¹ See also the discussion in A. Regelson, *Angels of Thought*, pp. 69 ff.

³² In adapting this meaning, Regelson brings Heraclitus's position closer to that of linguistic pantheism, which is actually Regelson's attitude, not Heraclitus's.

reveal—their secrets.³³ In his article, Regelson attributes this perception to Heraclitus, although it clearly also has other philosophical origins.³⁴

However, our main focus here is not the ideas of pantheism and language-as-logos in and of themselves, but rather the way Regelson integrates them in “Hakukot Otiyotayich.” These ideas have a common tendency—unifying the universe and its various manifestations. The main point in both ideas is the identification and fusion of apparently separate entities—God and the universe in pantheism and language and the universe in Heraclitus’s perception of logos. In other words, these ideas are something of an equation. God equals the world (pantheism), language reflects the world (logos), and thus emerges in Regelson’s song of praise a broad, almost amorphous identity with far reaching metaphysical implications: language, God, and the universe become different facets of one and the same thing. This broad identity can be thought of as a triangle, each of its apexes being inextricably bound with the other two. In short, in his poem Regelson combines two different ideas, and the resulting broad unitarian perception is the intellectual foundation for the cosmic and theological status of Hebrew in “Hakukot Otiyotayich.”

2.2 The Cosmic Status of the Hebrew Language

The poem begins with declarations of Hebrew’s all-penetrating being. Cosmically ubiquitous, from the stars and constellations (*את בצדק וכוכב! את*)³⁵ to the very last inhabitant of the world of flora—grasses, bushes, and precisely distinct plant species (דפנה הררית, צפצפה, מילה אחות זית, תות, אמזוג וכולי). Rhetorical hyperbolic questions that point to the futility of trying to describe the Hebrew language—*ומי ירגל עד חביון טעמין, והם נשמות לתנועות, מנגינות לכוכבים?*—emphasize its inexhaustible and richly intense nature.³⁶ This presence of Hebrew is expanded in the second stanza—Hebrew is found not only in every nook and cranny in space but also all along history and throughout all time. It accompanies the major events in the life of the Jewish people (leaving the land of Canaan to go to Egypt, the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai), and spreads out to the beginning and end of time: *ותהיי לי לשון*

³³ A. Regelson, *Angels of Thought*, p. 68.

³⁴ The best known are Wittgenstein’s early ideas in his logical-philosophical tractate.

³⁵ *Hakukot*, p. 7.

³⁶ *Hakukot*, p. 9.

בְּרִיאָהּ, לְשׁוֹן הַתְּגִלוֹת וּלְשׁוֹן קַץ-הַיָּמִים.³⁷ This is further expressed in the sixteenth stanza. Half this stanza is devoted to the motif of “light” and the other to the revival of Hebrew and other historical events of the day. This stanza reiterates the ideas expressed in the first three stanzas, and so emphasizes—even as it turns to the level of actual historical events—Hebrew’s cosmic mode of existence.

As stated, the main term in this stanza is “light.” Hebrew is presented as the light of the world, that which in its very presence reveals all others: אֹרֹר הָיִיתָ, וַתֵּאִירִי בְּמֵאוֹרוֹת הַגְּדוֹלִים וּבְכּוֹכָבִים בְּקִדְמוֹת-הַמְּעֻשָׁה.³⁸ Immediately thereafter Hebrew radiates onto each of the mythical and historical chapters of the Jewish people: it shined like the noon sun on Noah’s ark, burned in the bush, gleamed over Moses, flooded Ayalon Valley with moonlight, and sparkled with brilliance from the Maccabeans’ menorah. Hebrew was present at all moments in Jewish history and in the formative text of Jewish literature. It is the light shining from generations of Jewish creation: גָּחַלְתָּ בְּגוֹנֵי יוֹד סְפִירוֹת: וְלִמְ“ד-בֵּי“ת נְתִיבוֹת, [...] / פָּנְסָתָּ בְּהִשְׁכָּלָה וּבִגֵּר “הַמְתְּמִיד” הַבְּלַחָתָּ וְהַבְּהִבָּתָּ (Thou embered in hues of ten spheres and two and thirty paths, [...] / Thou lanterned in learning and candly and brightly flickered for scholars).³⁹

From all that has been said thus far we could conclude that Hebrew’s unlimited presence endowed it with an autonomous standing. It is not a result of human use or creation—or at least that is not all it is. Hebrew was present at creation, at the making of the sun and the moon, and preceded the human race. It is therefore presented as an august entity, somehow paralleling the world and God, an entity constantly shining and lighting history and all inexhaustible universal manifestations. These attributes—an independent existence and the revealing of the world—are the first moves toward perceiving language as logos, as the essence of this perception is the fact that language is not limited to human existence but is a cosmic phenomenon.

A more radical conception of language as logos is implied in the stanzas devoted to the structure of Hebrew. At some points in these stanzas Hebrew is not conceived as that which reveals objects in the world but as the source of the world itself. Things of the world are attributed to it. Hebrew is presented as the source of life and knowledge: כָּל הָאָדָם עַץ-הַשָּׂדֶה בְּנֵה, / וּבַעֲצָתְךָ, — עַץ-חַיִּים לוֹ, אֵף עַץ-דָּעַת (מְקוֹר) the very source

³⁷ *Hakukot*, p. 8.

³⁸ *Hakukot*, p. 19.

³⁹ *Hakukot*, p. 19.

⁴⁰ *Hakukot*, p. 17.

(מָקוֹר) of life is to be found: בְּמִקְוֵהְךָ, מִקְוֵה-הַחַיִּים מִפְּקֹד.⁴¹ In the same stanza, when dealing with the tense system, Regelson addresses Hebrew as the source of both song and nature: שִׁמְיִי הַדָּ לְצוּיִךְ הַכְּבִיר, / הָאוֹמֵר לְטֹבַע מְשַׁעֲבֵד, וְיִגְעֵי וְלִטְבֵּעַ בֶּן-חֹרֵיךְ יְהוּלֵד!! (Make me an echo to your great decree/ Which commands enslaved nature to perish and free nature to be born).⁴² Here language is not only light, a passive entity whose existence merely reveals objects, but an active, godlike power. Language orders creation and death.⁴³ Similarly, the poem, the words, and the poet's actions are all echoes of the language itself, and in their status they stress language's primordial being.

Viewing language as logos is the deep philosophical foundation of the figure described and analyzed in section one, that of the semiotic-grammatical metalepsis. In fact, it is this figure, whose essence is breaking the boundaries between the sign and that which is being signed *within language*, that becomes a model for the relation between language and the world that Regelson expresses in this poem. The permeation from linguistic sign to linguistic signed, typical of this figure, illustrates the wider relationship between language and the world as envisioned by the poet. Regelson rejects the separation between the linguistic-symbolic level and the ontological one (the notorious "arbitrariness of the sign") and establishes deep bonds of inclusion (language is in the world), analogy (language is like the world), reflection (language reflects the world), causality (language causes the world), and identity (language and the world are one and the same). Here we may be able to find the basis for the tenacity with which Regelson repeatedly uses this figure and for the magic it holds for him. The linguistic arena offers him a locus where he can directly demonstrate his conception, giving it concrete form, providing it with a sort of objective correlative. At the same time, the very virtuosity demanded, the very hypnotic acrobatics required to bridge or obliterate the gap between sign and signed, and the very power of this trick to amaze and astonish us, indicate that this is indeed a real gap, and that the boundary between sign and signed—even within language—is a deep-rooted one, a formative element in our *weltanschauung*.

⁴¹ *Hakukot*, p. 10.

⁴² *Hakukot*, p. 10.

⁴³ This is reminiscent of the midrashic tale that God created the world out of the letters of the Torah. This association could have well been on Regelson's mind when he wrote these lines, yet is further from the overall viewpoint presented in the poem than would first seem. The main point is that in the midrash God is active, whereas Regelson does not see God as a separate entity but rather as being expressed by the Hebrew language.

What has been said so far has to do with the identity between Hebrew and the world, and is related to the perception of language as *logos*, that is, language as a cosmic issue, not a solely human one. We commented (in 2.1) that the ideological basis for the status of Hebrew in this song of praise is a very broad resemblance, broad to the point of being amorphous, between language, world, and God. We will now address the other identities entailed in this triadic relation, the godlike status Regelson accords Hebrew, the pantheistic spirit informing it, and the implications thereof.

We have already mentioned some of the signs of divine status accorded the Hebrew language in “*Hakukot Otiyotayich*”: Hebrew is a cosmic, omnipresent active force; it accompanies Jewish history and is part of all natural creation; it is all-engulfing, was present at Creation and will be present at Redemption. In some part of the poem, Regelson addresses Hebrew in phrases and terms used for addressing the biblical God: *מי במשפטך יקום?* (stanza eighteen),⁴⁴ and in the next stanza he addresses those who are abhorred by Hebrew and those who sin against her—again, evoking the idea of the personal biblical God. Among the “abhorred” mentioned, there are those who *מקפיאים אותך אל נסח אהד*,⁴⁵ referring to those who believe that Hebrew had already reached its apex and that henceforth all Hebrew writing will be nothing but imitation. Regelson’s argument against the “abhorred” is important for our discussion. He counters “those who adhere to one frozen version” with reference to *מנורת היקום על כל פרקיה*⁴⁶—the universal menorah with all its segments—by which he means the great variety in all creation. It might be worthwhile to present an excerpt from this section in order to feel the power of Regelson’s rhetoric and the argument entailed in it:

ים, וְדַרְי בּוֹ : סִנְפִיר וְהַגֵּל וְגַחֲוֹן, מִקְפּוֹת רוּעֵדוֹת,
 קִלְפוֹת—עַיִן דָּר וְעַיִן כְּסֹף, עַיִן הַמְרַמֵּר הַוּרְדָּרֵד,
 שְׂרוֹךְ אָדוֹם—סִפְק בַּעַל-חַיִּים סִפְק צָמַח,
 וְאַלְמוֹג מִשְׁתַּרְג, וְכַלְנִיּוֹת-יָם זוֹלָלוֹת,
 יוֹנְקִים אֲדִירִים—לְוִיִּתְנִים וְכַלְבֵּי-מַיִם וְנִמְרֵי-מַיִם,
 סוּסוֹן צָף, זָנְבוֹ כְּסִמּוֹן-הַשְּׂאֵלָה, וְרִסְיִסִּים גַּעְלוֹנִיִּים, כּוֹכְבוֹנִיִּים, וְכִדּוֹרֵיִים.
 יְבִשָּׁה, וְאַשֶּׁר בָּהּ מִן הַהוֹלֵךְ וְהַזּוֹחֵל וְהַמְתַּגְלָּל וְהַמְנַתֵּר,
 וְתוֹלַעַת-אַרְגָּמָן, מִתְרוֹמְמֶת מַעֲשֵׂה-קֶרֶס,
 [...]
 עֲרַבְלוֹת-אוֹר, אֲבָקוֹת-אוֹר, וּפִיחֵי-קִדּוֹר,

⁴⁴ *Hakukot*, p. 22.

⁴⁵ *Hakukot*, p. 23.

⁴⁶ *Hakukot*, p. 23.

מַמְלָכוֹת-כּוֹכָבִים מֵעֶבֶר לְמַמְלָכוֹת-כּוֹכָבִים ;
 מוֹרָאוֹת תְּעֻלוֹמוֹת הַחֹשֶׁמֶל הַפְּנִים-פְּרָדִיּוֹת,
 עוֹלָמוֹת מְקִיפֵי עוֹלָמוֹת לְגֹדֵל, עוֹלָמוֹת מְמַלְאֵי עוֹלָמוֹת לְקֶטָן,
 דְּרָגוֹת עַל דְּרָגוֹת לְעֶצֶם וְשֹׁגֵב, וּבֵין דְּרָגָה לְדְרָגָה—דְּרָגוֹת אֵין-סְפוּר,
 מְצַלֵּי-מְצֻלוֹת, וְכֹל מְצַלָּה מִשְׁרִיפָה דְּגִיה-טְבֻעִיהָ, וְקִטְנוֹנוֹן בְּדָגִים
 אֶף הוּא מְצַלָּה מְלֵאֲתֵי דָגִים טְבֻעִים,
 וְאֵין טְבֵע דְּזֹמָה לְחִבְרוֹ — —
 אִם יֵשׁ קְצָבָה לְהַדְרֵת אֱלֹהֵינוּ?
 גַּם לְהַדְרֵת לְשׁוֹנְנוֹ יְהוּ קְצָבָה וְגִבּוֹל!⁴⁷

The conclusion of this section is that there is no limit to the Lord's glory. What Regelson expresses here is what he also attributes to American poetry: "Recognition of the divinity of every inanimate object, everything growing and living, and each and every human being," and also, "in everything—there is the spark of creation and the process of creation, and never the end of creation, never something finite and immutable."⁴⁸ The endless variety of the universe, the tiniest of creatures and the grandest of objects, the endless movement within creation—all bear direct witness to Him. In other words, because God and his deeds are one and the same, descriptions of the fullness and dynamism of the universe all necessarily apply to Him. Significantly this pantheistic mood ends with an analogy to Hebrew. Just as the universal menorah sheds light on God, so does it illuminate the Hebrew language. As there is no end to the majesty of the Lord, there is no end to the majesty of Hebrew. The assumption is that they are one and the same and that both are equally related to the "universal menorah."

An understanding of this assumption requires that we clearly define the role of pantheism implicit in this stanza. We shall, therefore, mention again the polemical context within which this epic catalogue is brought forth to spread its resplendent fan. This context is the attack against the "lingual sinners," in particular those whose aim is to incarcerate Hebrew in a narrow cell of excellence that is presumed to be part of the history of the language. Their sin is the attempt to freeze language. Therefore, all that will be said against these "cryo"-sinners points to what is completely ignored by them—the dynamic nature of the language. And why is the language dynamic? The answer can only be understood through the analogy to God. Based on the previous discussion (section 2.1) and on the present discussion, we are able

⁴⁷ *Hakukot*, pp. 23–24.

⁴⁸ A. Regelson, *A Tallith*, pp. 22, 23–24.

to reconstruct that which is missing, that which is hidden within the analogy. The concept of language-as-logos emphasized the cosmic meaning of language, and the pantheistic way of thinking related God with the world and identified Him with it. Pantheism, then, provides one of the equations required for the purpose of cracking the fortress of cryo-sin with the battering ram of the universal menorah. Pantheism does not only provide the necessary “middle ground” which is needed to weld God and the language—it establishes a common dynamic character to both. It is pantheism that gives God His dynamic nature. God is not a finished entity, certainly not a transcendental one, but rather bustles with the infinity of his manifestations, just as does its image—the Hebrew language. All this underlies Regelson’s answer to the cryo-sinners. Hebrew is not static, and its very being—just as that of the pantheistic deity—is brimming with cosmic life. This argument is of special significance in the understanding of the last part of the poem. We will soon turn to clarify this point. At the moment, however, suffice it to state the main point: Despite the majestic existence of the Hebrew language, although it was there at the Beginning and will be there at the End, Hebrew is not detached from the world and its events. It is constantly being renewed. Hebrew is of metaphysical dimensions on the one hand and part of real life on the other. This “linguistic pantheism” is the key to understanding the relationship between Hebrew and contemporary events—the destruction of European Jews and the national rebirth in the Land of Israel.

2.3 Hebrew vis-à-vis Contemporary Historical Reality

Regelson devoted the last part (stanzas 16–22) of his ode to the revival of Hebrew, the destruction of the Jews of Europe, and the settling in the Land of Israel. The inalienable rock solid existence of Hebrew is the starting point for Regelson’s account of contemporary events:

אורים ותמים אשר לאמה!
⁴⁹ היא כפוכבים, נגהו ספירך ואחלמתך

And yet, only a few lines later, this לשון-אורים, this inextinguishable flame which has accompanied Jewish history and has been alive since time immemorial, is presented as conditional, if not fragile. This is clear in the descriptions of the destruction (the annihilation of European Jews) and the revival (settling in the Land of Israel and the recrudescence of Hebrew).

⁴⁹ *Hakukot*, p. 19.

גַּחַת מִתְּכַרִּיכֶיךָ, מִחֶבֶשׁ-סֶפֶר וּמִחֲנֹט-קִדְשִׁים,
 נִשְׁמַת אֲוִיר כַּחֹל וְכִלִּי-דְבוּרָךְ מֵלֹאן מִמְּנוֹ,
 [...]

וּתְפָרְשֵׁי כְּעֵלִים מְלִים וְכֶאֱרֵג צְרוּפִים,
 כְּסִית מֵלֵאכֹת, מְסַחֲרִים, מִדְּעִים, מַעֲשֵׂי-חֶשְׁבוֹן וּמַעֲשֵׂי-חוֹשֶׁב—
 אַחַד הַזֹּרֶת מַעֲגְלֵי מְקוֹם-זָמַן בְּמַחְתֶּרֶת הַכּוֹכְבִית,
 וְאַחַד הַמְּסַדֵּר אוֹתֵיּוֹת-דְּפוּס לְמֵלִים, פְּסוּקִים, סְעִיפִים וְחִבּוּר,
 כְּפָרְדִּים לְגַפִּיפִים, גְּפִיפִים לְתֵאִים, תֵּאִים לְאַבְרִים,
 וְאַבְרִים לְגוֹף נוֹשֵׁם וְהוֹגָה;
 אַחַד הַמְּשַׁלַּח תְּבוּת-אֶשְׁכּוּלִיּוֹת אֶל חֲבָלִים רְחוּקִים,
 וְאַחַד הַמְּשַׁקֵּה חֲרָרִים, אוֹ מְרַחֵץ רְגָבִים מְלוּחִים
 עַד יִתְּנוּ עֲנָבִים שְׁחֹרוֹת, דְּלוּעֵי-חֲמָאָה, צִפְרוֹ וְנֹרֵד.
 חַיִּית עִם תְּחִיַּת הָעֶרְבָה,
 גְּאִית עִם גְּאוֹן עֲרֵי-גְּנִים,
 כִּם רֵאשֶׁת עַל הַר-הַצּוּפִים,
 וּבְמִלְל יְלָדִים רַחֲמַת וְרַעֲנָנָה.⁵⁰

Hebrew, which according to the first part of the poem is an eternal cosmic entity, is depicted here, quite surprisingly, as contingent upon the events of the day. Prior to this, it was inconceivable that such a grand entity could be actually wrapped in shrouds. We now suddenly learn that it is breathing “blue air,” and that the neologisms, the creation of words expressive of the life and work of the pioneers in their new land, breathes new life into it. Hebrew becomes a “living and breathing being,” completely enmeshed with the locale—be it the wilderness, the new garden cities (ערי-גנים),⁵¹ or Mount Scopus. How can that which was described in the first part of the poem—Hebrew’s cosmic existence and extra-human being—be reconciled with that which the pioneers’ bold enterprises can imbue with such potent life? Why did the cosmic, eternal dimensions of Hebrew not place it beyond the contingent vicissitudes of history?

These questions become more poignant in the next stanza (17), where Regelson describes the holocaust of European Jews—which took place at about the time he was writing his great poem or very soon before it (the poem, we recall, was published in 1946). The stanza opens with the declaration *חַיִּיךָ לֹא חַיִּים בְּלֵעֲדֵי הַיָּל פִּי תִינּוּקוֹת* (Without babies’ breath, your life is not living). Regelson writes powerfully expressive lines to tell of the disaster

⁵⁰ *Hakukot*, p. 20.

⁵¹ Alluding, most probably, mainly to Tel Aviv, which was designed by Patrick Geddes in the 1920s in accordance with Ebenezer Howard’s concept of “garden city.”

that befalls a language whose speakers are being massacred, נַחֲנֶקוּ הַגְּרוֹנוֹת, בְּנוֹת-עֵין לֹא תִתְלַקְחֶנָּה-גֵּיל לְקִרְאָתָ/ רַבּוּעֵי אֲשׁוּרִית, and הַדְּקִים, מִתּוֹכָם יַעֲלוּ נְגוּנֵיךְ שְׁחוּרִים וּמְנַקְדִים. At the end of this lamentation it is clear that the destruction of the Jews is a death blow to Hebrew:

וְעַל עֲצֻמְךָ בְּכִי, לְשׁוֹן,
הוּ נִתְמַעֵטָה דְמוּתְךָ אֶתְּ, נִפְרָץ בְּךָ פָּרֵץ,
בְּהִקְטָם עִם נוֹשְׂאֵיךְ וּמְטַפְחֵיךְ.
בְּגִוִיּוֹת הַשְּׂרוּפוֹת, בְּשִׁלְדִים הַמְדַרְדְּרִים—
מְנַדְלָאִים שֶׁל עֵתִיד, אֶחָד-הָעַמִּים שֶׁל מָחָר,
עַל דּוֹרְשֵׁיהֶם יָחַד, —
מָה חֲלִית וְעִנִּית!⁵²

It would seem that all we discussed previously regarding the first part of the poem is at odds with everything said here. The fact that Hebrew has a god-like status, that it is perceived as logos, means that it has cosmic existence stretching far beyond the scope of its speakers, that it exists in the universe and even acts within it as a great force, somehow identical to the world and to God. All these attributes are not at all commensurate with the idea of a fragile entity dependent upon the actions and discourse of pioneers and diminishing with the destruction of its speakers—“the chopping down of its bearers.” The depiction of destruction and rebirth in two consecutive stanzas emphasizes the dependence of language on the events of the day, as the Hebrew language—presented as a majestic and eternal entity—is fiercely rocked by an inexplicable force between death and life.

The answer to this contradiction can be found in the nature of the theology of language we described in the two previous sections—the theology we called “linguistic pantheism.” God is the bustle of cosmic life. The pantheistic *weltanschauung* contains no independent transcendental entity, one which stands unto itself and exists outside of the world. God, and similarly language, are what they are by their very becoming so. Therefore, the cosmic dimensions of the language do not mean an eternal detached existence, but rather an existence that is immanent in nature. Hebrew’s cosmic character does not clash with its seemingly inferior dependence on present events, but rather dictates it: cosmic existence and historical dependence are manifestations of immanence. The fact that language has been around since

⁵² *Hakukot*, pp. 20–21.

Creation does not rule out its dependence on what happens to it in the present.

This pantheistic theology of the Hebrew language has two implications. The first relates to the role of the poet as well as to the understanding of Regelson's personal address at the end of the poem. At the end of stanza seventeen which discusses the holocaust, Regelson succinctly defines his poetic mission:

וְאֲנִי אֶל שְׁלִיחוֹתַי הַקִּיץ :
פְּרֵט קְצוֹת יַפְעוֹתֶיךָ וְסֵהַד צְדָקֶךָ.⁵³

This mission is also mentioned previously (stanza 11):

הֲכִי נִקְרָאתִי סוֹפֵר—וְכִי לֹא דִקְתִּי לְסֹפֵר כָּל תַּג וְקִמְט בְּךָ,
וְאֵף-כִּי לְקָרֵב כָּל קֵט וְנִדְחִי?⁵⁴

Thus, it is the poet's role to bear testimony to Hebrew, a testimony we may better understand if we refer to stanza seven which is devoted to nominal paradigms (משקלים). Regelson begins by stating: אָרְקִים עֲתִיקוֹת רִקְמֵי- (משקלים). Regelson begins by stating: אָרְקִים עֲתִיקוֹת רִקְמֵי- , and continues to define what he means by these embroideries:

וּבְמַעֲבַדְתִּי אֶתֶיךָ מִתְכוֹתֶיךָ לְמִטְבְּעוֹת לֹא נוֹצְקוּ מְעוֹלָמִים,
דְּפוּסֵי מְשֻׁלָּשׁ, מְלֻבֵּן, מְשֻׁשָׁה, עֲגֻלָּה, סְגֻלְגוֹלֶת וְרוֹמְבוֹס,
אֲפָקִיּוֹת וְאַנְכִיּוֹת וְנִשְׁקִיּוֹת — —
הוּ הַגִּיאוֹמֶטְרִיָה הַיְצִירָתִית שֶׁל מְרַחֲבֶיךָ!⁵⁵

The poet's activity includes the creation of new words through smelting Hebrew's linguistic material and pouring it into hitherto unused molds. It is interesting to note that this creative activity is not attributed to the poet but rather to "the creative geometry of thy spaces" (הַגִּיאוֹמֶטְרִיָה הַיְצִירָתִית שֶׁל (מְרַחֲבֶיךָ). Hebrew includes not only empirical linguistic reality but also linguistic potentialities, which are tested in the poet's volcanic "laboratory" and find their way into his poetry. It is thanks to the poet's creative energy that this linguistic space is gradually unveiled. The poet, then, is entrusted with revealing the treasures of language. The poet's mission is not merely a detailed, loyal, and affectionate description of a finished, external entity, rather, it is active participation in the constant creation and coming into be-

⁵³ *Hakukot*, p. 22.

⁵⁴ *Hakukot*, p. 15.

⁵⁵ *Hakukot*, p. 12.

ing of that entity. The mission he is entrusted with is to give evidence, even as he actively participates in creating it, of the real and possible life of the language.

It is clear, therefore, that just as language is not transcendent, so too its empirical realization is not pre-determined. It is contingent, among other things, upon the work of the poet who reveals what is concealed within it. The essence of this approach to Hebrew is a perception of the language as a cosmic substance that is not bound to a fixed, unchanging identity or a transcendent status, but rather takes place within a free-forming, terrestrial celebration of coming into being. It is this approach which brings Regelson to such a staunch support of the linguistic innovations formed by everyday use of the language. His opinion on this subject is voiced in the accounts he settles with the sinners against the Hebrew language (stanza nineteen). We have already mentioned one type of such sinners, those who freeze the language into one formula. Others are הַכּוֹלָאִים אוֹתָךְ בְּעֶדְן-נֶיֶר, forcing Hebrew into שְׁבִתִּיּוֹת עַד-עֶקְרָה—an eternal sabbatical of barrenness. This sin is not remote from the previous one, and both are types of resisting the immanent and dynamic character of Hebrew. Hebrew is created on earth and resides on it; Hebrew is within all manifestations of life. Those wishing to incarcerate it into some perfect formulation or limit it to live only within sacred texts, dedicated for nothing but liturgical purposes, really desire to kill it. Favoring the renewal of Hebrew is an expression of loyalty to its fundamental nature, to its immanent and dynamic existence. For Regelson, all this takes on overtones of a pantheistic theology, one that involves the unity of God and the world, the sacred and the profane, the eternal and the mundane:

לְהַעֲלוֹת חֵלֶךְ אֶל קִדְשֶׁךָ וּלְהוֹרִיד קִדְשֶׁךָ אֶל חֵלֶךְ,
 לְמַעַן יִהְיוּ כָּל פְּעֻלֵי-אָדָם דְּרוֹכִים אֶל נֶצַח חֲסִדְךָ וְהוֹדְךָ,
 לְמַעַן יֵאָסְרוּ אוֹרְכֶךָ וְנִיבֶיךָ
 אֶל יַעוֹר וּמִיּוֹן וְזָבוּל וְחֲשָׁמוּל וּמִכּוֹן וְתַעִישׁ וְשׁוּק וְשִׁכּוֹן,
 כָּל הַלְכוֹת קָמוּם וְשִׁתּוּף, וְהִגְנָה עַל הַמּוֹקָם.⁵⁶

The poet's role is in the constant effort to realize the possibilities offered by Hebrew and to bear evidence to its nature. In all these the poet harnesses his life to that of the Hebrew language, and his action is part of Hebrew's dynamic existence. Clearly, such a description is based on the pantheistic approach through which Hebrew is presented. By means of dwelling on his

⁵⁶ *Hakukot*, p. 25.

activity as a poet who harnesses his life to that of the majestic national entity, and who is conscious of the theological dimensions of such an activity, Regelson resolves his agony about being in exile. Thus, having resolved this issue, he uses the last lines of “Hakukot Otiyotayich” to proclaim his inclusion among the new pioneers in the Land of Israel:

כְּתַבִּינִי עַל לֹחֶדְךָ עִם קוֹדְחֵי בְּאֵרוֹת וּמִנִּיחֵי צְנוּרוֹת,
 עִם כָּל חוֹרֵשׁ וְזוֹרֵעַ וּמִנְכֹּשׁ וְעוֹדֵר,
 עִם מְנַפֵּץ סְלָעִים, חוֹתֵךְ יָמִים וּמְמַחֵט אָוִיר,
 עִם עוֹשֵׂי בְכָתוֹן וּבְצֶמֶר, בְּסִיד וּבְמִלֵּט, בְּבָרוֹם וּבְאֲשֵׁלֶג,
 בְּעָץ, בְּבִרְזֵל, בְּיַהֲלוֹם—
 הַנוֹשְׂאִים תְּרוּעָתְךָ לְתַכְלֵת
 וּמְגִידִים בְּגְבוּלְךָ כְּבִישִׁים אֶל תְּכָלִית-הָאָדָם בְּפִקְעֵיזוֹת הַכֶּמֶס,
 בְּהוֹן אֶלֶף מִתְגַּלְּם-מִתְעַלֵּם וְעוֹלָם מִתְעַלֶּה-מִתְאַלֶּה.⁵⁷

Up to now we discussed the first issue that is a corollary of linguistic pantheism—the role of the poet and the meaning of Regelson’s personal plea at the end of the poem. The second issue is the public comfort that may be derived from this pantheistic perception. To reiterate, the poem was written during the Holocaust (or very close to it) and published in its aftermath. As we read them, the verses about destruction and rebirth are not an unnecessary appendage to this song of praise, as some critics have suggested. Rather they are expressions of the distress and the hope for redemption that are at the basis of the theological significance accorded Hebrew in this poem. Regelson’s embracing of the godlike Hebrew language, with its cosmic power and immanent existence, is a way of finding solace in the face of the atrocities of destruction, and also acts as a tacit settling of accounts with the traditional God. Jewish theology—in any and all varieties of Judaism—is not pantheistic, placing as it does a transcendent God in center place. This is common knowledge which was also shared by Regelson and his readers. This traditional theology is hinted at in “Hakukot Otiyotayich,” for example, in the mention of Creation and Redemption.⁵⁸ However, the poem accords no space whatsoever to this theology, and it was replaced, and totally so, by a pantheistic approach. The disappearance of traditional theology and its replacement with a pantheistic theology of the Hebrew language cannot be without significance. Events of the present day rock the Jewish people, perching it between life and death, and Regelson places an immanent

⁵⁷ *Hakukot*, p. 26.

⁵⁸ For example, at the end of stanza 2, *Hakukot*, p. 8.

god to face these events. The transcendental—and quite possibly the absent—God of the Jews is replaced with the divine power of the Hebrew language. Regelson speaks to the Hebrew language and says:

בְּכִי, שֶׁכָּלָה, וּבְעוֹד הַדָּמַע חַם עַל לְחֵיךְ,
 עֲשֵׂי לְמַעַן אוֹדֶיךָ-יְתוֹמֵיךְ, אֱלוֹ הַנוֹתָרִים,
 הַכְּלִים אֶל נַחֵם וְלֶחֶם וּבִגְד וְסֵפֶר,
 הַתְחַזְּקִי, וְשׁוּבִי אֶל עֲמָסֵי-תַפְקִידֶיךָ : קַיִם, כֹּפֵּא וּבְנֵה,⁵⁹—

Cry, O you bereaved one, and with your tear still warm against your cheek,
 Act on behalf of your charred orphans, those who have remained,
 Who long for comfort, a loaf, a garment, a book,
 Regain your strength and return to your burdening duties: sustain, heal, and
 build,—

Instead of an alienated entity, the reader is given a cosmic power whose huge force sustains and nurses the people. This power gives the reader the force of the universe, but does not remain distant, beyond everything. This is a god who partakes of life, comes into being in the manifestations of life, and is even fragile and vulnerable. The main rhetorical effect we discussed in the beginning of this article—the internal identification between the sign and the signed—receives a deep meaning here. The transcendental god, the hidden, non-existent god, is being replaced by a cosmic presence, palpable and immanent. The immanence of this entity is realized in the grammatical-semiotic metalepsis whereby language is transposed from its status as a detached, arbitrary mechanism of signification and—holding on to its full array of signification powers—is thrust into the realm of the signified, the realm of “things,” while its constant coming into being is displayed in the plethora of neologisms which are concrete and immediate instances of a linguistic life force. The present analysis then shows “Hakukot Otiyotayich” to be a site of numinous revelation. The divine entity which is the subject matter of the poem reveals itself or becomes realized in the very modus of its rhetoric, pulsates in its very words and sentences. It is through this pervasive, omnipresent, divine entity, that the poet tries to sweeten the pain of his exile in the aftermath of destruction; perhaps the public too may find in it a modicum of comfort.

⁵⁹ *Hakukot*, p. 22.

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