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On the Role of *Melitzah* in the Literature of Hebrew Enlightenment

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In the study of the writers of the Haskalah ("Enlightenment") and their language, few issues are as problematic as their use of Haskalah-type "melitzah" ("high-flown figures of speech," "euphuism").[1] Scholarly treatment of the underlying nature of such melitzah leaves much to be desired. The very definition of melitzah is uncertain; nor do we have a clear picture of how it was employed in Haskalah literature. The topic has, of course, attracted its fair share of Hebrew scholars—one might single out Boaz Shabevitch, in particular, for his studies on the language of Naftali Herz Wessely[2]—but a comprehensive picture based on a systematic, scholarly analysis of the melitzah of the Haskalah is still wanting.

In a survey of the various definitions of melitzah in dictionaries and scholarly works, Shahevitch has found that the general use of the term is a derogatory one. And sure enough, the definition for melitzah provided in the Gur dictionary is: "empty words couched in an imprecise style (in ridicule).[3] Even-Shoshan defines melitzah as "bombastic phraseology, scriptural verses and snatches of verses inserted into sentences, high-sounding diction;[4] so too *Otzar Ha-Lashon Ha-Ivrit:* "a bombastic style tending to use snatches of scriptural verses."[5]

Shahevitch observes that scholars such as Lachover and Klausner used the term melitzah interchangeably in its variegated meanings, usually to derogatory effect. He notes that the word originally denoted "rhetoric"—an aesthetic and artistic use of language—but later it "fell into disrepute and acquired a pejorative meaning." Shahevitch then proceeds to enumerate all the accusations levelled at melitzah: that it is overextended and verbose, that it is imprecise, a patchwork of verses and snatches of verse, that it is ornate, it makes excessive use of puns, it cherishes biblical hapaxlegomena, it is cliché, it is empty and bombastic. Shahevitch argues that this long litany of argumentations fails to provide a unique characterization of *melitzah;* and they are equally applicable to other styles of writing.[6]

In effect, concludes Shahevitch, these criticisms of melitzah relate in the main to the "extreme" "verbosity as a quantitative extreme, *shibutz* [an "inlay" of segments of biblical verses] as an extreme of associations, the ornamental as a qualitative extreme, the use of rare words as an extreme of the unique and the unusual." The Maskilim ("enlightened") employed Hebrew as a language "acquired from the

Scriptures," and were not sensitive enough to distinguish "the levels of words and expressions" (Shahevitch 1970: 667). Thus even Shahevitch comes to subscribe to the negative conception of melitzah.

A better understanding of the negative attitudes to melitzah may be found in the writings of one of the giants of twentieth-century Hebrew literature, Hayyim Nahman Bialik, who certainly had a hand in determining this attitude to the melitzah of the Haskalah. It is now over fifty years since Bialik came out strongly against the *shibutz* ("inlay" or "mosaic") style of the *piyyut* poetry that had endured up until the period of the Haskalah. He defines this usage as "language which emits the flash of the occasional block-busting word or stirring expression, sometimes with half-verses culled from Holy Scripture."[7] The Hebrew poets had imitated Arab poets in the use of words—"They saw the importance of the word not in its being a small piece of an artistic work but as a precious stone with an independent value all of its own" (ibid.: 12).

To Bialik's mind, the Hebrew poets "employed rhymes and *shibutz* prose rather than perpetuating the Biblical forms, in which there is no external ornament and in which the beauty of the word derives from the place it occupies and not from itself. . . ." Herein lay the "grating" strangeness in reading their prose. "There is no inner beauty in it, nothing in which form and content are equally matched." For Bialik, it was precisely this that flawed the writings of the Haskalah too; and on this basis he claimed that M. H. Luzzatto (RaMHaL, 1707–47), who "threw down the gauntlet to the *shibutz* style of Hebrew prose," was the first modern Hebrew poet (ibid.: 14–15).

Elsewhere, Bialik argued that until Mendele Mokher Sefarim (Shalom Yaakov Abramovitch, 1835–1917) Hebrew literature had amounted to an artistic "zero." "They had forever been scratching around on the surface of the shell, but their pen never seemed to get inside . . . for portraying nature, it was again a case of two or three well-worn coinages lifted from the Bible. . . ."[8] "Until Mendele what we had were linguistic tricks and games, linguistic capers, linguistic shreds and patches; Mendele handed us one language that was a whole. . . . He was virtually the first in our modern literature to stop imitating the Book—he imitated nature and life" (ibid.: 327).

Bialik thus gives voice to that negative response to Haskalah style, an attitude that has taken a hold on our literary life, even penetrating into literary criticism and historiography of literature, realms which are supposed to be balanced and objective.

Of course, when we turn to more recent scholarly studies of medieval Hebrew poetry, we find a somewhat different picture of the use of the biblical *shibutz,* and a different attitude to melitzah. Ezra Fleischer, dealing with sacred poetry, explains, "the stylistic bond between the preclassical *piyyut* and biblical melitzah":

> The biblical *shibutz,* i.e. the insertion of fragments of Tanakhic verses and phrases into the stylistic fabric of a literary work, is one of Hebrew literature's old and established ornamental devices. Each and every period in Hebrew literature "inlaid" biblical quotations into its style, some more, some less. The inlay adds prestige to the literary text, enriching it with the harmonics that the inlaid word brings from its original "environment," lending it the charm of the unexpected. And the hearer is

aroused to an appreciation of the writer's talent, of his excellent command of the
Scriptures and his skill in taking words from another time and place—from another
topic even—and welding them so smoothly together with a text being composed in
the here and now.[9]

Dan Pagis, in his study of secular Hebrew poetry, has explained the phenome-
non of the *shibutz* style as a "consequence both of the biblical revival and of con-
temporary poetics."

It is a truism that the Hebrew poetry of medieval Spain utilized not only a biblical
vocabulary but also whole verses and parts of verses, integrating them into the poem
in a new context. . . . An intertwining of the biblical is already a feature in the earliest
of these Spanish poets, and in some poems the very linguistic fabric is a weave of
verses from here and there in Scripture. Now the Bible was an inseparable part of the
education of every Maskil: a snatch of a verse was an allusion to the text in its entirety.
Readers could derive a special, sometimes a surprising, flavor from the new knit of
old familiar verses and from the new context set up by the poem. An inlay of verses
at their best . . . is no mere collection of high-flown, euphuistic quotations but a new
and dynamic creation.[10]

Dan Miron is one of the few modern literary critics to have addressed the subject
of inlaid melitzah in Haskalah literature from a literary angle, in his discussion of
the style of Avraham Mapu (1808–67). Miron explains that the sweeping dismissals
of the melitzah of the Haskalah were necessary and understandable in their time,
within the context of a literary reevaluation. However,

the entrenchment of such views in criticism and in routine exposition of the history
of literature up to our own day betokens a laziness of thought and a lack of sensitivity
and understanding for our literary heritage. The inlay style, like any of the other
devices of *"melitzah"* literature, is not intrinsically worthless; only the bad instances
. . . are worthless . . . the literary taste evident in the inlay style is not inferior but
merely different from our own conventional taste. The aesthetic-poetic notions upon
which it rests do not conform to the notions on which . . . our own literary judgment
is based.[11]

Examining the positions that have been held since Bialik, Miron has attempted,
in the article just cited, to arrive at a definition of the *shibutz* style (as compared to
the "free" poetic style presented by Bialik) as

a system of linguistic connective practices, which seeks to convey a certain expressive
meaning by combining linguistic units—perceived as pre-constructed and as pos-
sessing a linguistic-aesthetic value of their own—without there being a link between
these units and the one-off meaning which they effect. Thus the controlling power of
meaning in the linguistic organization of the utterance is rather limited, sometimes
being reduced to the selection of units that appear to be roughly appropriate and to
stringing these units syntactically together. In no case may the meaning blur the inde-
pendence of these units or melt them down to the point of destroying the autono-
mous wholeness which they had already acquired, as it were, before the creation of
the contextual and syntactic bond between the unit and the whole. This wholeness
has its source mainly in those familiar literary sources from which the units derive.

And Miron continues: "Most characteristic of the Hebrew inlay style is the use of phrases from sacred texts, particularly the Tanakh, as fixed, finished elements which the author may only string together in different orders but may not radically alter" (ibid.: 28–29).

Miron has proposed utilizing the analysis of Mapu's writings "as point of departure for a reexamination" of "the essential quality and artistic value of the *melitzah.*" In a brilliant presentation, he dwells upon the sophisticated art of the melitzah in Mapu and its tie-in with the system of structures running throughout Mapu's work. He argues that "in order to comprehend the art of the *melitzah,* one must train the ear to listen to the stereophony of the language." Sometimes, indeed, "the polyphony of the *shibutz* style expands . . . from stereophonic to triphonic or even polyphonic effect" (ibid.: 33).

The Hebrew writer of the Haskalah, at the start of that period, was forced to grapple with a newly emerging Hebrew tongue and with the new demands of modern composition. He sought to express a new path and a new approach, and in his sensitivity to the language problem he was rebelling, first of all, against the rabbinic style, which he saw as expressing an old world. The Hebrew Maskil sought new and modern means of expression to convey the new world-picture he wished to draw. The wish to address oneself to a new style may in itself appear commendable, but achieving this style was no simple matter; certainly, not all the Maskilim found their way to this goal. The early Maskilim drew upon that very same old cultural world against which they rebelled; thus, despite their efforts to escape rabbinic idiom, we find several of them using the old-style expressions that they so condemned.[12]

As I have pointed out in my book,

> there was a natural tendency by *Maskilim* to use the Tanakhic idiom, which they saw as representing pure Hebrew at its best. And indeed, they contrived to apply Tanakhic Hebrew to the epic poem and the poetic drama, which revolved in part around biblical themes, and thus succeeded in achieving a harmony between style and content. However, this was not the case with their philosophical writings or in their essays on themes of language, let alone on topical themes—in matters pertaining to education, science, and society. Trained as they were in the philosophical and theological Jewish writings of the Middle Ages, . . . the *Maskilim* tended to opt for a medieval Hebrew for writing in the non-belletristic sphere (ibid.: 23).

The assumption that biblical style predominates throughout the literature of the Haskalah is a false one.[13] "The utilization of the familiar, conventional idiom, derived from the rich array of sources in the Hebraic cultural heritage, led . . . to the creation of the Haskalah-type melitzah, in its modern use" (ibid.: 24).

It should be emphasized that a Haskalah text in a melitzah style—such as the one to be analyzed in the present study—depends for its reading and comprehension upon the reader too. One of the problems in reading a Haskalah text today resides not in the text itself but in today's Hebrew reader, who connects differently to the textual sources than did the Haskalah readership. Educators are duty-bound to be aware of this problem when teaching the literature of the Haskalah and to draw the

student's attention to the sources underlying the text. Needless to say, the task is as important as it is difficult—and one that confronts anyone making a serious study of Hebrew literature through the ages, modern literature included.

Melitzic *shibutz*-inlays are not all of a kind. Pagis (ibid.) distinguishes various types of medieval *shibutz,* and his distinctions can be called upon in examining the *shibutz* of the Haskalah. He lists three types:

(a) "A neutral *shibutz,* primarily linguistic in function"—using words, phrases and bits of verses without allusion to the Tanakhic context (ibid.: 17).

(b) "A *shibutz* that acts primarily via a knowledge of the source-text, though it can in fact be self-contained" (ibid.: 72). As an example: the inlay that undergoes meaning-shift—not only divorcing the source-verse from its original context but changing the meaning of the words, satirically or sarcastically on occasions (73).

(c) "An inlay or system of inlays acting on the whole, or the major portion of, the poem as a conceptual or descriptive center, or as part of its inner structure" (75).

With the use of the biblical melitzah, the biblical text being alluded to may sometimes become a subtext underlying the modern story. Where compatible with the event or description, it contributes to these and enriches them with the original substance and colors, and where incompatible with the modern story it creates an ironic contrast, potentially enriching it in terms of irony. Of course, incompatible melitzah can cause incongruity between the surface text and the (biblical) text being alluded to, thus creating a tension which the author had not intended (assuming that we can monitor such intent, or that it is the critic's affair) and which does not enrich the text. This would be an unsuccessful use of melitzah.

I will explore the functions of melitzah in the writings of a number of Hebrew Maskilim, with particular reference to Shmuel Romanelli's *Masa Ba'rav* (1792), a book that belongs to the genre of travelogues. Romanelli describes his real-life journey to North Africa and his four year sojourn there. The analysis presented here forms part of a broader treatment I have undertaken of the travelogue genre in the Hebrew Haskalah.[14]

At the start of his book Romanelli describes a break for lunch during a journey. He begins with the time: *vayehi hashemesh el mahatzit hayom* ("and the sun was at midday"). Further on, he gives the event: *vaneshev le'ekhol lehem* ("and we sat to eat bread"). Forthwith, a description of the location: *bine'ot deshe tahat tse'elei atzei hasadeh el mikhal mayim hanigarim balat uvenahamat hesed* ("in a green pasture under the boughs of the trees of the field by a stream of water flowing discretely with a kindly murmur"). Having depicted the location, the narrator describes the setting of the table: *hamelitz riped smikhah al hehatzir* ("the interpreter spread a blanket on the grass"), and finally the meal: *vayikhreh lanu kerah makolet mibeyto dei hashiv et nafshenu* ("and he served us a feast of food from his home, sufficient to restore our souls").[15]

Romanelli employs conventional Tanakhic imagery and conventional scriptural expressions to convey his experiences and impressions. When he gives the

time, he means to say, in the elevated literary style current today: *amdah ḥamah be'emtza harakia* ("the sun stood in the middle of the sky"), but using the melitzah style he says: *vayehi hashemesh el maḥatzit hayom.* Romanelli employs the Tanakhic expression *vayehi hashemesh* ("and the sun was"), taken from the verse *vayehi hashemesh lavo vetardemah naflah al avram* ("And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram"), Gen. 15:12.[16] And he transfers it to the situation described in his story, combining it at the same time with the expression *maḥatzit hayom* ("mid-day"), drawn from Neh. 8:3: *min ha'or ad maḥatzit hayom* ("from the morning until midday"). The two inlaid expressions are tied together by the preposition *el.* Romanelli has changed the sense of the first sentence and omitted the verb *bo,* which in collocation with "the sun" denotes "setting," and has thus broken down the original biblical meaning, fashioning it into a different and original sense. Nonetheless, he has left us to infer an omitted verb *ba'ah*—though with a change in its meaning—from the tie-in with the original verse, as if saying: *vayehi hashemesh ba'ah el maḥatzit hayom* ("and the sun *was coming* to midday"). The usage *vayehi . . . el* is generally found in the Bible as a linguistic convention indicating an opening to a prophecy, such as *vayehi devar hashem el . . .* ("and the word of the LORD came to . . ."), and the basic figure of Verb + Noun + Preposition has to an extent been preserved here too.

The continuation of the sentence, *vaneshev le'ekhol lehem* ("and we sat to eat bread"), appears to be founded on the verse *hu yeshev bo le'ekhol leḥem* ("he shall sit in it to eat bread"), Ez. 44:3—with a change in person and with the "conversive vav" common in similar cases: *vayeshev hamelekh al haleḥem le'ekhol* ("and the king sat him down to the meal to eat", I Sam. 20:24)—or *le'ekhol leḥem im ḥoten moshe* ("to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law"), Ex. 18:12. Romanelli's language would appear economical and to the point, and functions well in supplying information about the meal.

The sentence, *bin'ot deshe taḥat tze'elei atzei hasadeh* ("in green pastures under the boughs of the trees of the field"), describing the location, stitches together pieces of verse that are well-suited to the description: *bin'ot deshe* is based on the verse *bin'ot deshe yarbitzeni* ("he maketh me to lie down in green pastures"), Ps. 23:2, minus the verb. Note that for readers conversant with the Bible, its style and its phraseology, both during the Haskalah and in our own day, the idyllic Tanakhic image conjured up by the underlying original *bin'ot deshe yarbitzeni* and the sequel (not mentioned here) *al mei menuḥot yenahaleni* ("he leadeth me beside the still waters") infuses a calm even into Romanelli's modern tableau. By using a scriptural verse that also features in the prayers,[17] he reinforces the contextual-Tanakhic allusion of the *shibutz.*

The description of the location continues: *taḥat tze'elei* ("under the boughs of"), based on the original *taḥat tze'elim yishkav* (AV: "he lieth under the shady trees," NEB: "under the thorny lotus he lies"), Job 40:21, minus the verb as the author is depicting a place, and with the noun *tze'elim* switched into the construct form.[18] The rare use of the name of a shrub or tree, thus called originally because its boughs cast shade *(tzel),* in the sense of "bough," serves to hark back to the scriptural source of this tree name and its meaning, "caster of shade." Furthermore, the

use of *tze'elei* adds a homophonous quality and a musical sound that connote the desired image of "shade."

Tze'elim has been made construct to *atzei hasadeh* ("the trees of the field"), derived from Is. 55:12: *vekhol atzei hasadeh yimḥa'u khaf* ("and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands"), et passim,[19] transposed here minus the word *kol* and the verb.

In the phrase, *el mikhal mayim hanigarim balat uvenahamat ḥesed* ("by a brook of water flowing gently with a kindly murmur"), the preposition *el* is used here meaning "by" (e.g., *vayehi hem yoshvim el hashulḥan* "as they sat at the table", 1 Kings 13:20). *Mikhal mayim* ("brook of water") is taken from 2 Sam. 17:20: *avru mikhal hamayim* ("they be gone over the brook of water"), stitched together with *mayim nigarim* ("flowing water") based on *ki mot namut vekha-mayim hanigarim artza* ("for we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground"), 2 Sam. 14:14. The two turns of phrase are thus interwoven by use of the shared word *mayim,* to form an "original" inlaid melitzah. The adverb *balat* is not used biblically of water, and figures in Judges 4:21: *vatavo elav balat* ("and went discretely unto him"); it has been revamped to mean "slowly, gently."

The expression *nahamat ḥesed* ("a kindly murmur") is apparently an innova-tion of Romanelli's, based perhaps on *kenahamat yam* ("like the roaring of the sea"), Is. 5:30, or *minahamat libi* ("by reason of the disquietness of my heart"), Ps. 38:9, the construction . . . *ḥesed* being patterned on *veahavat ḥesed* ("and to love kindness"), Mi. 6:8. Innovation is achieved by replacing *ahavat* with *nahamat,* identical in vocalization and rhythm, while preserving the internal rhyme *a-a-at*.

The sentence, *hamelitz riped smikhah al heḥatzir* ("the interpreter spread a blanket on the grass"), appears altogether modern, with none of the direct Tanakhic turns of phrase or scriptural references. Particularly noticeable is the absence of the "conversive *vav.*" Nonetheless, the Tanakhic connection is there, fairly witty and sophisticated. The author is relying on the reader to trace the alluded biblical ref-erence of the expression by making the association between the verb *riped* ("spread") and the noun *smikhah* ("blanket") by reference to the verse *samkhuni ba'ashishot rapduni batapuḥim* ("stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples"), Song of Songs 2:5. In the source-text the verbs *simekh* and *riped* are in comple-mentary parallelism. The author is counting on this parallel and on the reader's ability to spot the wit and novelty in the inlaid melitzah. The term *hamelitz* is bib-lical (Gen. 42:23) and it is used here in its biblical meaning, "the interpreter."

Al heḥatzir ("on the grass") is borrowed from the biblical word that frequently denotes wild grass (but not specifically dry), e.g., *matzmiaḥ ḥatzir labehemah ve'esev la'avodat ha'adam* ("He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man"), Ps. 104:14. It may be supposed that the author had some difficulty getting Scripture to yield a description of picnic preparations, and there-fore went for a description of the repast itself: *vayikhreh lanu kerah makolet mibeyto dey hashiv et nafshenu* ("and he set out a feast for us of food from his home, sufficient to restore our souls"). *Vayikhreh lanu kerah,* based on *vayikhreh lahem kerah gedolah* ("and he prepared great provision for them"), 2 Kings 6:23 changes the suffix in *lahem* to suit the tale and drops the inappropriate adjective *gedolah*.

Makolet mibeyto follows the pattern of *makolet leveyto* ("food to his house-hold"), 1 Kings 5:25, with a change of preposition. *Dey hashiv* is given on the basis of the verse *ve'im lo matz'ah yado dey hashiv lo* ("but if he be not able to restore it to him"), Lev. 25:28, while the expression *hashiv et nafshenu* rests upon *lehashiv nafsho* ("to being back his soul"), Job 33:30, in line with the story and with added *et*, the two expressions being stitched together to form a blend.

Romanelli's innovation lies in blending two biblical expressions sharing the same link-word, to form a turn of phrase with an altogether biblical ring about it.

Insight is gained into Romanelli's way with Biblical *shibutz* by making compari-sons with similar descriptions of luncheons in the language of the early *Haskalah* and in the Hebrew and non-Hebrew travelogue.

In the fable-like idyll *Gideon Haro'eh* ("Gideon the Shepherd"), published in the periodical *Ha-Me'asef*, Hayyim Keslin uses an economical Scripture-based style to depict lunch as follows: *vayehi be'et hatzohorayim ve'ehav yashvu le'ekhol velishtot* ("And it came to pass at noon time that his brothers sat down to eat and drink").[20] Notice that the time is specified here with none of the graphic quality found in Romanelli, who described midday with an image of the sun. The meal too is conveyed in generalities, using the verbs *yashav* ("sat") and *akhal* ("ate"), plus the verb *shatah* ("drank") not found in Romanelli.

A similar method of conveying time is to be found in *Mashal Hasheleg, Ha'adamah Vehanahar*, printed in the same issue of *Ha-Me'asef: vayehi le'et ha-tzohorayim vehashemesh yatza al ha'aretz* ("And it came to pass at noon time that the sun came out upon the Earth"). Rather than specifying the hour, the author uses a conventional figure of time.[21] It appears that the tendency is to refer to time in generalities, using conventional terms rather than exact reference to time.

An interesting comparison can be made with a similar picnic tableau by the Haskalah author and editor of *Ha-Me'asef*, Isaac Euchel. His letters, too, belong to the literary genre of the travelogue, and were also written at a point of time close to the composition of Romanelli's book. We thus have a special interest in Euchel's description, though the ambience is a more cultured one from a European point of view than Romanelli's:

> *malon ahat al em haderekh, po nish'anu tahat ha'etz lish'of tzel kehom hayom, ve'akhalnu lehem tzohorayim me'et asher nitztayadnu, veyashavnu sham ad asher kilu ha'avadim le'esor et hamerkavah* ("an inn at a crossroads, where we reclined beneath a tree to breathe in some shade in the heat of the day, and we ate a noontime repast from what we had packed, and sat there until the servants were done with sad-dling the carriage").[22]

Euchel makes short shrift of describing the location, merely talking of an inn at a crossroads, which suits his well-planned travel more than Romanelli's and is also more suited to the company of ladies journeying with him. The tree appears here again but without any of the detail or linguistic ornament of Romanelli. Euchel explains the stop as a pause for rest and as a chance to ready the carriage (to change horses?), so the verb *nish'anu* ("we reclined") serves its purpose. There is no adver-bial of time here, but there is an adverbial of circumstance relating to the noon-

time—*kehom hayom* ("in the heat of the day")—which is a Tanakhic inlay (Gen. 18:1 et passim). Close to it is the phrase *lish'of tzel* ("to breathe in some shade"), itself a Tanakhic inlay based on Job 7:2: *ke'eved yish'af tzel* ("like . . . a slave longing for the shade"). The combination of the two phrases yields an image of a hot day.

The expression *lish'of tzel* sounds bizarre to the modern ear, but in terms of Tanakhic inlay Euchel has plucked the verb *yish'af* from its scriptural context, where it parallels the verb *yekaveh* (*ukhesakhir yekaveh fo'olo* "and as an hireling looketh for the reward of his work")—originally an abstraction from the act of inhalation (*sha'af = kivah*)—and has restored it to its original sense. However, using the verb in a non-abstract sense has left it somewhat estranged from its object—for one cannot inhale shade as one inhales the breeze. Yet the metonymous image is an attractive one, both witty and original, of shade being inhaled as if it were a breeze. . . . The information about the luncheon is limited, with added details of the carriage not found in Romanelli's description.

A travel description like Euchel's is found in the writings of the traveller Lempriere, who visited Morocco just when Romanelli was staying there: "At noon I fixed upon the most shady spot I could find, and, agreeably to the Moorish fashion, sat down cross-legged on the grass and dined."[23]

Lempriere conveys time with the sparing adverbial "at noon," without mention of where the sun stood in the sky. The search for shade is stressed, and a little local color added with the detail of the Oriental way of sitting (found elsewhere in Romanelli: 13/40, 29/61). Where he sat, on the grass, is given the maximum brevity, as is the information on the meal. The comparison of Romanelli's style with the others illustrated here reveals a linguistic richness and poetic craft that are a standing credit to Romanelli's name.

To our mind, the Tanakhic linguistic routine, though it may be full of generalities, ill-designed for self-expression and unsuited to relaying personal experiences, enjoys the great advantage of rousing the reader to an involvement in the events described. Moreover, the compositional technique of the inlaid melitzah works to create a bond between author and reader through the game of spotting sources and uncovering the way they have been reworked and recast.

With generality, however, come—more often than not—loss of detail, superficial description, and lack of a concrete sense of happenings and places. And thus, routinely: luncheon is *be'emtza hayom* ("in the middle of the day"), a repast is *vaneshev le'ekhol lehem* ("and we sat to eat bread"), a picnic is held on the grass in the shade of a tree. Even the picture of a flowing brook has a conventional look about it, as in the contemporary romance or idyllic tableau, although the linguistic mode of expression of Romanelli is particularly lofty in the use of biblical hapax-legomena (e.g., *mikhal hamayim*—"the brook of water," *balat*—"gently," *kerah*—"food," *makolet*—"provisions") and there is something special about the new phrases being coined (*hanigarim balat*—"flowing gently," *uvenahamat hesed*—"and with a kindly murmur," and the like).

The description of the blanket appears matter-of-factly at the picnic, with none of the Tanakhic linguistic routine—perhaps owing to its "modern" character—

aside from Romanelli's aforementioned innovation of the expression *riped smik-hah* ("spread a blanket").

On the other hand, the repast vouchsafes us nothing concerning what they ate, and how much or how they ate. The generality or abstraction, *karah kerah* ("pre-pared food"), "covers" for all possibilities and fills the gap. As we noted, however, even Euchel's travelogue does not go into the details of a meal.

It should be borne in mind that the idyllic portrait of the surroundings occupies a respectable portion of the passage concerned: two out of six sentences, thirteen out of thirty-four words, are devoted to depiction of landscape. Note that scenery and landscape serve as indirect characterization for the figures in the narrative while the idyllic picture reflects their mood. The emphasis on nature and its tranquility marks the Haskalah's Rousseauesque trend of "back to nature," far from the tumult of civilization.

Romanelli espoused linguistic and literary conventions that invoked the phra-seological routines of Tanakh. This phraseology led, by its very nature, to a gener-alization of experience rather than to a precise and distinctive description reflecting unique personal experience. The use of the linguistic conventions will not validate an experience or event through description per se. Conversely, generality can point toward universally shared elements, thereby involving the reader in the experience itself.

We cannot accept the term "shreds of verses"—conventionally employed, it will be recalled, in criticism of the melitzah style—as being true of Romanelli. What one has here, as we have seen, is no abritrary or random shredding of verses but an artistic use of verse "off-cuts" to enhance the description or serve the narrative. Klausner was thus correct when he spoke of the melitzah in Romanelli's *Masa Ba'rav;* Shahevitch's claim that "his [Romanelli's] language is virtually melitzah-free"[24] does not hold up.

As we have argued elsewhere,[25] while the luxuriant style of melitzah was artifi-cial, clumsy, and at times hazy and inappropriate to everyday language, it had qual-ities that served the Hebrew authors well, enabling them to embrace the whole multi-layered history of the language. Literary Hebrew thus evolved subtly with all its array of allusions and fine distinctions; this evolution, in fact, was itself a reflec-tion of all that is problematic in the duality of Jewish existence in the modern, sec-ular world. Hebrew in this manner was being expanded from a sacred into a secular, mundane tongue.

Notes

1. An additional article of mine on melitzah has been published in the journal *Lashon ve-Ivrit* and another will be published in the journal *Bikoret U-Farshanut.*

2. One chapter in Shahevitch 1963; idem, 1967; 1968a; 1968b; 1970b.

3. Grazovsky-Gur 1935: 538.

4. Even-Shoshan 1966: 1366.

5. Canaani 1968: 2959. And see, e.g., Rivlin 1934: 96: "There were "authors" for whom melitzah was the main thing and who put no thought into it. However, even those who had something to say . . . could not find the *mot juste* for their thought, and melitzah so

clouded their thinking that one could not tell what they wished to say." Melitzah is also referred to in derogatory terms in Sokolow 1933–34: 40.

   6. Shahevitch 1970b; and compare Shahevitch 1965 and Sadan 1965.

   7. Bialik 1935a.

   8. Idem 1935b. Compare Bialik's use of the word *melitzah* in the translation of *Don Quixote, the Man of La Mancha* (1961: 43): *"uleshon hasfarim af hi amukah ukhvedah venifialah mehavin, lo hadar la velo ta'am, kulah melitzah al melitzah, ishah tfelah mere'utah"* ("and the language of the books too is profound and heavy and contorted beyond comprehension, without beauty or taste, entirely *melitzah* upon *melitzah*, each one more insipid than the last").

   9. Fleischer 1975: 103–104.

   10. Pagis 1976: 70.

   11. Miron 1979: 32–33.

   12. And see the discussion in Pelli 1988a: 23–24.

   13. As already observed in Halkin 1984: 100–101.

   14. Pelli 1988b.

   15. Romanelli 1792: 2 and p. 26 in 1969 edition.

   16. Similarly, Gen. 15:17: *vayehi hashemesh ba'ah va-alatah hayah* ("And it came to pass that when the sun went down and it was dark").

   17. In *kabalat shabat* ("Introduction of the Sabbath") of the Sefard rite and after Washing of the Hands in Hasidic custom.

   18. In the next verse, Job 40:22, one reads *yesukuhu tze'elim tzilelo, yesubuhu arvei-nahal* ("The shady trees cover him with their shadow; the willows of the brook compass him about").

   19. Ez. 17:24: *veyad'u kol atzei hasadeh* ("and all the trees of the field shall know") et passim.

   20. H . . . K. = Hayyim Keslin 1785: 21.

   21. R-K. 1785: 85.

   22. Euchel 1785: 137.

   23. Lempriere 1813: 69.

   24. Shahevitch 1967: 236 n.

   25. Pelli 1988a: 24.

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