

of natural phenomena; etc. It concludes with a comment on the likeness but ultimate dissimilarity between the contrastive parable and paradox. Chapter 3 looks at the syntactical and semantic relations between the two parts of the parables, themes A and B. It describes the formal linguistic means for expressing the contrast between the two parts (A and B). Chapter 4 deals with the role of the contrastive parable after attending with care to the functions of the direct and the royal parable. Chapter 5 describes the stylistic characteristics of the contrastive parable: (1) direct speech; (2) inclusion of the addressee; (3) symmetrical structure; and (4) the unity of language and content in the royal parables including the contrastive.

The retrospective that brings this work to a conclusion offers a thoughtful comment on the material traversed and ends with these words:

Das Kontrastgleichnis, diese rabbinische literarische Erfindung, mit all seinen Varianten spiegelt auf eine eindeutige und ausschliesslich Weise das zentrale Verlangen, den wichtigsten Gedanken und die lautere philosophische Wahrheit der Rabbinen wider: Gott und seine Verherrlichung. (p. 135)

One must be grateful to the author for the care with which she has examined the texts, avoiding the all-too-prevalent practice of writing about texts but seldom reading them or enabling others to observe how the boldly proclaimed results were arrived at. Not only is it of value for established scholars in the field of midrash but it will certainly serve as a splendid model for students who are learning to make their way into the field.

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**MEDIAEVAL HEBREW POETRY IN A DOUBLE PERSPECTIVE: THE VERSATILE READER AND HEBREW POETRY IN SPAIN. PAPERS IN COGNITIVE POETICS.** By Reuven Tsur. Pp. 221. Tel Aviv: University Publishing Projects, 1987. Paper.

Professor Tsur is one of the few researchers in Israel whose investigation of medieval Hebrew poetry is but a part of his study of Hebrew

literature in its various periods (including the modern) and, indeed, who has made a study of literature in general. In his various works, including this one, he has applied research methods known and accepted in the study of comparative literature, though not as common in the study of medieval poetry. In this effort he has sought ways of bringing medieval poetry within the reach of the modern reader who is far from the culture and atmosphere of that period. Indeed this is the chief goal of the book under review, although it was not written as a single work. Rather, it is a collection of different articles that treat medieval poetry with these particular methods.

The foreword bears the title "The Versatile Reader and the Conventions of Poetry." According to his definition (p. 7), the versatile reader is one capable of responding more or less appropriately to a broad spectrum of literary styles. That is to say, the basic question that he raises here addresses the skills a reader needs in order to enjoy any sort of poetry or, in Tsur's lexicon, to *realize* the poetry. In other words how can a modern reader contend with the style of remote literary periods? Among the three approaches to the study of the literature of any period—relativism, absolutism, and perspectivism—Tsur identifies himself with the last approach: that is, the approach that recognizes that there is one poetry, one literature, which can be compared in all generations, which develops, changes, and is pregnant with possibilities.

Tsur places his approach in clear opposition to the approach of his teacher for medieval poetry at the Hebrew University, Professor Hayim Schirmann. Tsur identifies Schirmann as a "sworn relativist" because the main body of Schirmann's work in the study of medieval Hebrew poetry was philological, the study of the conventions of the time and the investigation of the lives of the poets themselves, and because Schirmann "fought like a lion" against the attempt to compare medieval poetry with modern or post-modern poetry. Tsur relates that when he was a student at the University he proposed to Professor Schirmann that he write an M.A. thesis comparing the poetry of Ibn Gabirol with the metaphysical English poetry of the seventeenth century. The answer was a definite negative, with the reason that such a thing was impossible.

Since I was not one of Schirmann's students at the University, I cannot attest to his approach except on the basis of his writings. In fact what Tsur has to say seems correct in the main. Schirmann's relativism clearly emerges in his writings as well as from the testimony of his other students. I doubt, however, whether Schirmann should be evaluated in such a one-

sided way. It seems that even with Schirmann a certain change in research approach took place in the last period of his life. In an article that he wrote in 1966 on research problems in medieval poetry,<sup>1</sup> he criticized the “outdated method” of investigation, alluding to the relativist method—which has to do with the appraisal of contemporaries belonging to the same literary school—that had characterized his own path to a great extent.

Schirmann went on from this point to express his opinion about the fact that “for several years a vigorous excitement has been felt in Europe in the area of literary studies; rather successful attempts have been made to build a bridge over the generations and examine ancient literary works with weak instruments.” He expressed the hope that “we will reach a similar change in values in the field of Hebrew poetry as well.”

What Tsur could not accomplish as a student in the presence of his teacher he has done in the second chapter of this book. Here he offers a comparative discussion on “The Personal Creator and the Neo-Platonic Conception” both in the poetry of Ibn Gabirol, the Jewish poet who lived in Spain in the eleventh century, and in the poetry of Milton, the English poet of the seventeenth century. In several chapters of the book, Tsur considers various topics relating to the Hebrew poetry of Spain on the basis of the method that he presented in the foreword. These topics involve both the theory of poetry and specific poems of Ibn Gabirol and Moses Ibn Ezra.

The impression obtained from the last chapters of this book, in which Tsur applies his theoretical concept, is that despite the abundant charm in this literary theory (a charm that is also based on correct and obligatory literary concepts), it is not easy to free oneself in practical research-work on medieval poetry from the need to address the values of that poetry and the cultural-social atmosphere that characterized it and its environment. Indeed, such freedom may not be possible. In any event it seems that what is most desirable for the versatile reader whose profile Tsur presented in his foreword is to possess intimate knowledge both of the culture of the Middle Ages and of literary concepts not bound by time and place.

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<sup>1</sup> “השירה העברית שלאחר תקופת המקרא ובעיות מחקרה.” דברי האקדמיה הלאומית הישראלית למדעים, כרך ב, חוברת 12, ירושלים.