

# Abstracts of the Hebrew Essays

## **Unconditional or Academic Love**

Daniel Boyarin

It is, perhaps, not too extravagant to suggest that in the history of western thought there are three great explorations of the philosophy of love, Plato's, Augustine's, and Freud's. If, for the former two, sex is either the gateway or the obstacle to love (which remains to be seen), for the latter, love is the mystification of sex (or one possible such a one). In this essay, I hope to explore the proposition that all love in the West from Plato into the Christianity and Judaism of late antiquity is Platonic love. The goal, as in so much of my work, is to thoroughly displace the notion of the natural in human behavior, insisting on its absolute, fundamental queerness.

## **Christians and Christianity in Payytanic Literature: Between Typological and Concrete Representations**

Ophir Münz-Manor

This essay compares representations of Christians and Christianity in *piyyutim* (liturgical poems) from late ancient Palestine and from medieval Europe. Allusions to Christianity, I argue, were rare in the earlier period but became frequent in later times, especially after the First Crusade. Moreover, in late antiquity references to Christianity were for the most part typological, based on the identification of the biblical Esau with Edom, with the Romans, and ultimately with the Christian empire. *Piyyutim* from medieval Europe continued to exhibit this typology but also increasingly contained concrete references to contemporary Christendom. Furthermore, the medieval poems become considerably harsher, rife with expressions of scorn, invective, and calls for revenge. The significant differences between the two periods should be understood in light of the transition from late antiquity, when Jewish culture flourished under Byzantine rule, to the more hostile attitudes displayed, in theory and in practice, by the Christian empire in medieval Western Europe.

## Poem, Panegyric, and Tokens of Appreciation

Peter Sh. Lehnardt

Poetry is first of all a testimony for the ways of poetry. But medieval poetry is also a testimony about the uses of poetry, especially in a courtly world where panegyrics were in highest esteem and were at least in part written in aspiration for the favor of the eulogized. Thus panegyrics had to be on the one hand enough poetry to be a contribution of art in a political and material social setting, but on the other hand a clear enough expression of the poet's material expectations. From the early eleventh century in the Arabic hemisphere to the thirteenth century in the Christian world, Hebrew secular poetry reflects the important transition of feudal societies around the Mediterranean from gift economics to a commodity money economy. While Andalusi courtly poetry shows from its very beginnings a clear tendency to abstract metaphors like dew and rain drops in praise of the panegyric's addressee, its continuations in Christian Europe reflect the fact that courtly life there continued according to the norms of gift economics for at least two more centuries, as contemporary poetry in other languages also attests.

### Pearls or Herds: The Beautiful according to Solomon Ibn Gabirol

Uriah Kfir

This article deals with a short, somewhat vague poem by Solomon Ibn Gabirol: *Veshine hatzvi* (וְשִׁינֵי הַצִּבְיָ). Although seemingly a "love poem" describing the beauty of a beloved gazelle (and strangely enough focusing solely on its pearly white teeth), I suggest reading the poem as an arspoetic work dealing with the aesthetic question of what is beautiful. Furthermore, I place the poem in the context of the *Shu'ubiyyah* movement and its poetry, which flourished, among other places, in al-Andalus. This movement of non-Arab Muslims challenged the privileged status of native Arabs and criticized archaic conventions and values, including the canon of beauty, in traditional Arabic poetry. Reading Ibn Gabirol's poem in light of the poetry of the *Shu'ubiyyah*, in particular works by the famous Iraqi poet Abu Nuwas, shows not only that Ibn Gabirol was familiar with and even influenced by that movement's opposition to archaic Arabic poetry, but also that he took a similar stance against what he saw as the equivalent in archaic Hebrew poetry, namely King Solomon's Song of Songs.

## **Dirges for Unusual Female Figures**

Tova Beeri

Though education for women was hardly the rule in medieval Eastern Jewish societies, there were some exceptions. This article presents a critical edition and discussion of four dirges from the Cairo Genizah bemoaning the death of female teachers and learned women. Another poem lamenting the death of a faithful female slave is also included here, alongside some background on the status of slaves in the Mediterranean Jewish societies of the classical Genizah period.

## **A Dialogue about Dialogue: R. Yehuda ha-Levi and an Ancient Poetic Drama**

Shulamit Elizur

At the center of the present article stands an extensive *silluq* composed by R. Yehuda ha-Levi for his *qedushta* for *Shabbat Zakhor*. The *silluq* is composed largely as a dialogue between the wicked Haman, the enemy who counsels evil against Israel, and God, who scorns him and brings his counsel to naught. As is traditional, the angels are mentioned at the *silluq*'s end, which serves as a bridge to the *qedushta*. The present article investigates the structural roots of the *silluq*, which turn out to reach back to classical, primarily Qillirian, *piyyutim*. The choice of the dialogue's *dramatis personae*, Haman and God, is represented here as a possible poetic response to an early Eastern *piyyut*, dubiously attributed to Qillir, in which a dispute is conducted between Haman and Ahasuerus: Haman attempts to convince Ahasuerus to destroy the Jews, while the latter resists out of fear. The representation of God as the one who answers Haman casts the drama in a new light: it is not Ahasuerus, nor any other Gentile king, who can nullify the counsels of Israel's enemies, but rather God.

## **Judah Halevi's Criticism of Andalusi Courtly Culture and Shlomo Ibn Zakbel's "Ne'um Asher Ben Yehudah"**

Matti Huss

This paper investigates the possible connection between Judah Halevi's criticism of Jewish Andalusi courtly culture, on the one hand, and Shlomo Ibn Zakbel's maqama "Neum Asher Ben Yehudah," on the other. A short survey of Halevi's criticism of courtly culture is followed by a discussion of Tova Rosen and Ross Brann's suggestion that Halevi's censure led to the formation of an alternative

poetics of Hebrew poetry. The article develops this assumption and focuses on a new subgenre of erotic epithalamia created by Moses Ibn Ezra and Halevi which offered an alternative to secular Hebrew love poetry. An analysis of Ibn Zakbel's maqama supports this thesis: the maqama's main topic, it shows, is the confrontation between the decorum of love poetry and the conventions of the erotic epithalamia, a confrontation which ends with a complete affirmation of matrimonial love and a condemnation of free, non-institutionalized relations. The article concludes with an analysis of the impact this confrontation had on rhymed love narratives written in the East as well as in Christian Spain.

### **"A Man of Understanding Shall Attain Wise Counsels": The Introduction and Opening Verses of the Two Versions of Joseph Qimhi's *Sheqel ha-Qodesh***

Nili Shalev

The twelfth century marks the beginning of a true Renaissance of learning and attainment of knowledge among the Jews of southern France. In this period of cultural change, Provence was host to the activities of a number of Andalusí scholars who had emigrated from Spain and disseminated the cultural heritage of Spanish Jewry throughout southern France. One of these scholars was R. Joseph Qimhi (c. 1105-1170), a translator, grammarian, biblical commentator, religious polemist, and poet. In this paper I focus on Qimhi's main work in the field of poetry, *Sheqel ha-Qodesh*, which he composed in Narbonne, his new place of residence. This work is a collection of gnomic proverbs and ethical sayings formulated as rhymed verses in quantitative meter, based mainly on *Choice of Pearls*, a collection of Arabic aphorisms attributed to Ibn Gabirol. The purpose of this paper is to present Qimhi's introduction to *Sheqel ha-Qodesh* and to publish its two versions, including the opening verses, for the first time, based on all the available manuscripts, with a vocalized text, variant readings, and commentaries. The short accompanying discussion examines the background and features of the two versions of *Sheqel ha-Qodesh*, the structure and role of each introduction, and the differences between them.

### **On the Oedipal Rebellion of Todros Abulafia: An Intellectual Revisionist in Thirteenth-Century Spain**

Haviva Ishay

Todros Abulafia has been identified by scholars as an unconventional poet in the

Spanish school of Hebrew poetry. He engages in a 'secular' dialogue with the Jewish religious tradition and in a 'modern' one with the ancient Andalusi poetic tradition. For this reason, there exists an ongoing conflict in his poems between text and intertext. This article tries to analyze this conflict using Harold Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence*. Through an analysis of Bloom's six revisionary ratios in one of Abulafia's qasidas, the article revisits Abulafia's image as an epigone imitating the poems of his predecessors and recasts him as a 'strong' poet endowed with an inertial force that enabled him to transform poetic influences into revisionist insights. Abulafia rewrites his precursors' poems in an original way, and in so doing creates authentic poetry. Bloom's model distinguishes him as an innovator and groundbreaker—an authentic son of thirteenth-century Spain.

## **The Courtier as the "Scepter of Judah": The Letters and Panegyrics to Courtiers of Yomtov ben Hana, Scribe of the Jewish Community of Montalbán**

Ram Ben-Shalom

Yomtov ben Hana (Abenhanya) was the scribe of the Jewish community of Montalbán in Aragon during the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century. Ben Hana's poems express the courtiers' widespread image—and self-image—as fulfillers of the prophecy "the scepter shall not depart from Judah" (Gen. 49:10), a reputation they enjoyed in virtue of their political power in Spain. Foremost among the courtiers, in ben Hana's view, was Judah ben Lavi, described in one of the poems as a lion, a venerable leader at the end of a long line of exalted figures, from Adam through the Patriarchs and Kings Saul and David to his own day, and even as a "son of God." In time, most of Saragossa's Jewish courtiers succumbed to the pressure to convert to Christianity, culminating in the mass conversions of 1414-1415. Ben Lavi was an exception. Faithful to his people and religion and, with his family, almost a lone Jewish remnant of the Lavi-Cavalleria family in Saragossa, ben Lavi fulfilled, to some extent, the vision of ben Hana's poem.

## **"Wait for me until I Speak": Women's Tales in Ms. Jerusalem (National Library 8<sup>o</sup>3182)**

Eli Yassif

The misogynic attitude to women in medieval Hebrew literature is well known by now. It has been studied, however, only in the learned literature of the time—legal documents, *midrashim* and commentaries, poetry, mystical treatises,

and moral writings. All these were written documents put down by men and for men. Whether there is a way to hear the female voice in medieval Jewish culture, in which women did not write, is a question often asked, usually with a negative answer. Following studies in general folkloristics and feminist theory, I suggest that the female voice could be heard in the medium that was open to them—oral folk literature. As the major contributors to everyday life, women expressed themselves in various events, both intimate and more public, by telling stories and listening to them. In the early-sixteenth-century Ms. Jerusalem we find transcribed tales from a much earlier period (the thirteenth century) which express the ideas, feelings, and mentalities of broader strata of Jewish society, not just its male and learned members. Thirteen tales identifiable as 'women's tales' appear in this manuscript and are published and discussed here.

## **Between Proverb and Poem in the Sephardic Tradition**

Tamar Alexander

The article's aim is to characterize several of the inter-genre links between the proverb form and the traditional poems of Sephardic Jewry. These connections are examined for the three main genres of Sephardic traditional poetry, the *romanca*, the *copla*, and the *canción*. The article proposes a model for categorizing these links according to four different phenomena: (a) a proverb interpolated into a poem; (b) a proverb adapted for inclusion in a poem; (c) a line from a poem becoming a proverb; (d) a proverb co-opted by a poem. In each case, the poem and the proverb gain from one another. Poems serve as additional sources for the creation of new proverbs, provide proverbs with new contexts that imbue them with further meaning, and serve as another channel for the transmission of proverbs within the community. Proverbs, in turn, provide poems (especially new ones) with collective authority and tradition, help introduce them to audiences already familiar with the proverbs, and encourage audiences to view them as expressions of truth.

## **Try Us with Riddles, Try Us with Structures: On the Element of Transformation in Structuralism as a Bridge from Modernity to Postmodernity**

Galit Hasan-Rokem

The article discusses the important role of structuralism in the humanities and the social sciences of the twentieth century. Special emphasis is placed on

some central figures in this school, primarily Claude Lévi-Strauss, and their shaping of structuralism's conceptual framework, in particular their theoretical treatment of 'myth'. The article suggests, first, that we consider structuralism as an epistemological bridge from modernist to postmodernist modes of thought, and, second, that we view premodernity, modernity, and postmodernity not only as linear and chronological concepts but as analytical concepts in a synchronic paradigm. Significant to this perspective is the idea that transformation, rather than binary opposition, is the most important and seminal of Lévi-Strauss' conceptual contributions. The study of folk literature, the article further reveals, was central to the development of structuralist thought and methodology. Special attention is paid to the contributions of structuralist methodologies to the study of riddles.