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A Review of "Literary Passports: The Making of Modernist Hebrew Fiction in Europe"

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that tends to favor diegesis over mimesis. Alexis Grohmann has called this narrative technique “errabundia.”

Herzberger makes few claims to theoretical novelty of his own, but he advances ably and methodically through the collected works of Marías to establish a thematic account of their elaboration over time. Although this gesture toward comprehensiveness is well realized, one is surprised at times that Herzberger takes so many of Marías’s statements about his own writing at face value. For example, Javier Marías has insisted steadfastly that his work has nothing in common with Spain’s modern and contemporary authors and traditions, and he has criticized Spanish authors’ embrace of what he has described as a parochial realism or myopic modes of experimentalism. But surely there are other authors in Spain with whom we might compare Marías, aside from Juan Benet. Antonio Muñoz Molina, Carmen Martín Gaité, and Esther Tusquets come to mind, of course, along with younger writers such as Antonio Orejudo or Javier Cercas who have similarly sought to explore the uncertain if foundational link between language and thought, fiction and reality. But this is a *Companion* to Javier Marías. Any lack of critical distance is more than balanced by the coherence and completeness of Herzberger’s description of Marías’s worldview. The principal strength of Herzberger’s study lies in its meticulous reading of the individual novels and articles by Marías, placing them all within the context of the author’s life and writing.

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Samuel Amago teaches courses on modern and contemporary Spanish literary history, cinema, and culture at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. His most recent book is *Unearthing Franco’s Legacy: Mass Graves and the Recuperation of Historical Memory in Spain*, a coedited interdisciplinary volume dedicated to the analysis of the ongoing ramifications of Franco’s repression and how the country’s violent past continues to manifest itself in the present.

Shachar M. Pinsker. *Literary Passports: The Making of Modernist Hebrew Fiction in Europe*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011. 487 pp.

Shachar Pinsker’s *Literary Passports* is one of the most impressive books to come out of what may be called the University of California-Berkeley School of Jewish Literary Studies. For decades, that group has been led by Robert Alter and Chana Kronfeld, with Naomi Seidman nearby at the Graduate Theological Union. Dozens of serious students have been trained there in Hebrew and Yiddish literature, and many of them now hold tenured positions in the United States and Israel.

There are several distinctive features of the “Berkeley School”: a comparative literature approach that often includes both Hebrew and Yiddish; a valuing of European Jewish writing, with a concomitant move away from the typical focus on Israeli writing; a combination of close reading with ideological criticism; and a movement toward New Historicism.

Shachar Pinsker's *Literary Passports* began as a dissertation at University of California-Berkeley and appeared as Pinsker's remarkable first book in 2011. It won the prestigious 2011 Jordan Schnitzer Prize, awarded by the Association of Jewish Studies to the best book in Jewish literary studies.

The title *Literary Passports* alludes to the tenuous existence of Jewish writers in Europe during the early twentieth century. Pinsker gives the examples of Gershon Shofman and Y. H. Brenner, who traveled without proper documents to Vienna and Warsaw. According to the anecdotes Pinsker tells, his point is that "[a]lthough Brenner had neither the passport nor the documents that would enable him to enter Warsaw officially, his Hebrew writing clearly provided him with a kind of calling-card into the city's Jewish literary community" (5). Pinsker thus emphasizes the encounter of Hebrew writers, who had received a traditional Jewish education, with European modernism. According to Pinsker, the European contexts of Hebrew modernism have been neglected because "we are used to thinking of modern Hebrew literature in the last century as linked exclusively with the Zionist narrative, with the creation of a Jewish community in Palestine" (8).

The first part of *Literary Passports* reconsiders modernist Hebrew writing by connecting it to the places where it emerged, especially Odessa and Warsaw, Homel and Lvov, Vienna and Berlin. He argues that we need to "*spatialize* the notion of Hebrew modernism as being a literature 'on the margins' by examining its actual centers" (29; emphasis in original). Hence, Pinsker gives vivid accounts of the cafés, publishing houses, journals, and other contexts in which modernist Hebrew literature developed. This may be understood as a corrective to an earlier approach that focused almost exclusively on texts, to the neglect of the lives of the people who wrote them. The sites of Hebrew modernism were "provisional, temporary, and constantly shifting." Pinsker emphasizes that there was no real center, but instead "an abundance of 'margins'" (141).

The second part of *Literary Passports* takes a more thematic approach, reexamining sexuality and gender in modernist Hebrew writings. Whereas representations of sexuality had been scarce in prior Hebrew literature, "around the turn of the twentieth century, there was an outpouring of literary texts preoccupied with themes of erotic desire [. . .] and with gender roles" (155). Pinsker associates this development with the context of fin-de-siècle Europe, with the emergence of the "New Woman" and discussions of Jewish masculinity, together with an interest in psychology. In addition to Sigmund Freud, on questions of Jewish virility, there was awareness of authors such as Oscar Wilde and Otto Weininger. Several sections provide close readings of outstanding Hebrew stories by Y. H. Brenner, Uri Gnessin, and S. Y. Agnon. For example, Pinsker astutely reconsiders Agnon's stories "in which erotic desire is linked to artistic creativity" (227). Subsequently, he analyzes the "New Woman" as represented in modernist Hebrew literature. Because few women were writing Hebrew fiction early in the twentieth century, "feminine subjectivity in Hebrew modernist fiction was created by male writers and written almost exclusively from a masculine point of view" (243). An exception lies in the work of Dvora Baron, who wrote several stories about female protagonists. In one of them, an erotic triangle is presented from multiple viewpoints (264), contributing to a "sexual turn" in Hebrew writing (269).

The final section of Pinsker's book turns to a very different aspect of modernist fiction: "the reinvention of Jewish traditions" (275). Pinsker aptly associates this trend with authors such as H. N. Bialik, M. Y. Berdichevsky, and I. L. Peretz. They attempted to combine the influence of European culture with a revival of Jewish traditions. Sometimes this meant anthologizing traditional Hebrew works, while elsewhere, it involved retelling folktales. This culminates in the neo-romanticism of Berdichevsky and Peretz, where they rework hasidic traditions. I find

myself in agreement with his argument—especially because in this section, Pinsker’s analysis of Peretz closely follows my own interpretation of a neo-hasidic story (299–301). The story is “Mishnat Hasidim,” or “Teachings of the Hasidim,” which in 1894 was a breakthrough for Peretz in the neo-hasidic genre. Using first-person narrative and taking on the persona of a disciple of a hasidic Rebbe, Peretz immersed the reader in a world of mystical beliefs—while at the same time, he retained some critical or ironic distance. Pinsker cites the commentary on “Teachings of the Hasidim” in my book *Classic Yiddish Fiction* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995).

Literary Passports is an astonishingly ambitious and successful book. It takes us back to the decades before the establishment of the State of Israel, when Hebrew writing took place in the margins of European modernism. In retrospect, it is important to recall this period when Hebrew was still being used primarily as a literary language, while Yiddish was more commonly spoken.

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