



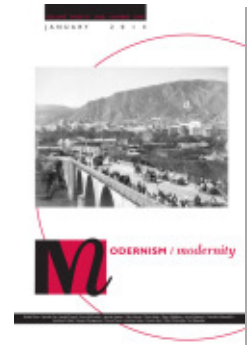
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Cosmopolitan, Diasporic and Transnational: The Flourishing of Hebrew Modernism

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Review Essay

Cosmopolitan, Diasporic and Transnational: The Flourishing of Hebrew Modernism

By Rachel S. Harris, University of Illinois

***Literary Passports: The Making of Modernist Hebrew Fiction in Europe.* Shachar M. Pinsker. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010. Pp. xiv + 504. \$60.00 (cloth).**

***Diasporic Modernisms: Hebrew & Yiddish Literature in the Twentieth Century.* Allison Schachter. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. Pp. x + 198. \$35.00 (cloth).**

***Reconfiguring Surrealism in Modern Hebrew Literature: Menashe Levin, Yitzhak Oren and Yitzhak Orpaz.* Giulia Miller. London: Vallentine Mitchell Publishers, 2013. Pp. 198. \$84.95 (cloth).**

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Modernist Hebrew prose was shaped by the encounter between young Jewish writers attempting to forge a sense of self in Hebrew and the shifting terrain of European modernity.¹

Hebrew modernism was a Diasporic, transnational voice that, like other European modernist literature, was characterized by the “inward turn” that focused on the inner life of protagonists, “as well as describing the urban experience and the contemporary preoccupation with gender and sexuality.”² Influenced by European rather than Anglo-American modernism, it drew its roots from the spirit of the *fin de siècle* at the turn of the twentieth century. Continental philosophers and writers, including Nietzsche, Rilke, Trakl, Hofmannsthal, Mann, Musil, Kafka, Döblin and Brecht, influenced the movement of Hebrew literary thought as it passed from traditionalism to modernity. Their literary heritage can be traced to Russian modernism (1890–1917) and writers



362 of the “Silver Age” of Russian literature, such as Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Anton Chekhov, Alexander Blok, or Leonid Andreyev, to name a few. Hebrew modernism was in many ways a reaction to decadent and symbolist trends, and in time would also adopt selected elements from the post-symbolist movements of Futurism, acmeism and, after 1917, imagism. Yet in contrast to their many European modernist influences, which were inextricably linked with the local nationalist ideals of the day, Hebrew writers were part of a cosmopolitan milieu moving between the centers of European literary creativity. Among those cities were Odessa, Warsaw, Lvov, Vienna, Berlin, Paris, Moscow and London. Searching for an income, publishing opportunities and a literary life, some wandered as far afield as New York. Many eventually settled in Tel Aviv, which became the center of Hebrew literature from the 1920s onwards. Thus Hebrew modernism began in the first decade of the twentieth century and lasted into the 1950s, eventually morphing into other modernist movements, such as Hebrew surrealism.

Though many important Hebrew writers would start out as modernists, their work within Europe, and its influence on their fiction, has generally been neglected by scholars and the public at large. This disregard primarily resulted from the rise of Hebrew nationalism, which used literary fiction chiefly as a way to represent Zionist principles and beliefs. The emerging nation idealized novels that celebrated Zionist values and disavowed the European Diasporic life. Meanwhile, the experimental fiction that viewed this project ambivalently, negatively or neglectfully was excluded from the canon of national literature, and was relegated to the margins of history. Pinsker reflects that the “Zionists wanted large scale social and realistic novels in Hebrew” that would articulate the epic concerns of nationalism and build on the realist and nationalist tendencies that emerged in the late nineteenth century; meanwhile, the young modernist writers were more interested in short pieces, particularly “fragmentary novellas and short novels” (14). Later, modernist fiction was viewed as decadent by the realists and social realists, who made up many of the key players of Hebrew literature in the Yishuv (the Jewish Zionist settlement in Palestine) and in the early years of the State.

The so-called modernist camp struggled to rally supporters both in terms of readership but also funding. The dismal financial situation was exacerbated by the fact that by the end of the 1930s Modern Hebrew literature had become increasingly tied up with political and ideological interests, and writers who failed to cultivate a relationship with certain public bodies were automatically left without any support or backing.³

Funding, publication opportunities and the impossibility of earning a living curtailed many modernist writers’ output, and they were eventually driven to the margins of Jewish literary life in Mandate Palestine and Israel.

By contrast, poetry was able to maintain a modernist influence without the risk of cultural censorship because it was considered the most important literary medium in the early years of the Israeli State. However, that trend further marginalized the European and American Hebrew fiction writers who never became part of the establishment. Critics also believed that literary experiments in poetry had originated in symbolism, which was deemed artistically acceptable. At best, migrant writers often found that their European past was considered irrelevant to their work. For example, Yosef Haim Brenner’s (1881–1921) time in London was excised from later critical accounts of his literary trajectory, even though he published his major novel *Misaviv LaNekudah* (*Around the Point*, 1904), edited the Hebrew periodical *HaMeorer*, and published the work of many of his modernist peers during this period. With his permanent move to Palestine in 1909 and his death in the 1921 Arab riots in Jaffa, his legacy was folded back into the national narrative. Similarly, Leah Goldberg’s (1911–1970) literary development in Weimar Berlin and her attempts to rewrite gender boundaries in both Jewish and European literary traditions were marginalized, while her importance as a journalist, translator and poet in Israel was celebrated.

Three recent studies have sought to fill some of these crucial gaps in Hebrew literary history: Shachar M. Pinsker’s *Literary Passports: The Making of Modernist Hebrew Fiction in Europe*, Allison Schachter’s *Diasporic Modernisms: Hebrew & Yiddish Literature in the Twentieth Century*, and Giulia Miller’s *Reconfiguring Surrealism in Modern Hebrew Literature: Menashe*

Levin, Yitzhak Oren, and Yitzhak Orpaz. They demonstrate that European Jewish writers used Hebrew as a statement of transnationalism, while simultaneously remaining in dialogue with their local and contemporary literary currents. As these three books show, most Hebrew modernists were of Russian heritage, and were profoundly affected by the tides of European history. “In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, approximately two million Jews left the Pale of Settlement and the Polish territories of the Russian empire, fleeing poverty, pogroms, civil war, and revolution. Among them were many of the period’s prominent Hebrew and Yiddish authors.”⁴ Many fled to escape conscription into the Russian army and the waves of anti-Semitic violence during 1903. Following the failed revolution of 1905, they headed towards the Austro-Hungarian Empire, or the cosmopolitan cities of Odessa and Warsaw. Brenner immigrated to Whitechapel, where he worked as a Hebrew typesetter after deserting the Czar’s army in 1904. Four years later, he moved to Lvov with Gershon Shofman.

These European cities were to become the home of early Hebrew modernism, which revolted against State-endorsed, nineteenth-century realist fiction, written in “erudite, perfectly balanced Hebrew,”⁵ with a literature that reflected the disrupted, multicultural and fragmented reality of the modern condition.

Odessa, a port city whose polyethnic mix included Russians, Ukrainians, Greeks, Moldovans, Turks, Bulgarians, Armenians, French, Italians and others, is situated on the Black Sea at what was once the southwestern border of the Russian Empire. Situated at a distance from the Russian cultural and literary centers of Moscow and Saint Petersburg, and on the southern tip of the Pale of Settlement, where Jews were normally required to live, the city offered freedom from many of the Czar’s restrictive and discriminatory policies. A well-established and highly educated Jewish middle class emerged, making up one-third of the city’s population. Odessa became the heartland of Zionist thinking, a home to Hibbat Zion and the Odessa Committee (The Society for the Support of Jewish Farmers and Artisans in Syria and Palestine), as well as multiple proto-Zionist charitable organizations that supported and encouraged immigration to Palestine. Alongside political and social developments, the city housed a flourishing Hebrew and Yiddish literary scene.⁶

The “Odessa Style” was practiced by the great writers of the day. Espousing clarity, continuity, historicity, and the importance of representing the collective in their writing—in a theme that would later dominate Zionist fiction—the founding generation of modern Hebrew fiction writers set the tone for the Jewish literary output. Ahad Ha’am, who was based in Odessa, advocated “Spiritual Zionism” by arguing that art and culture would unite the Jews and create a sense of national and political identity. He believed in a normative Hebrew literature that would promote specific themes and extol the virtues of collectivism. S. Y. Abramovitz (Mendele Mocher Sforim, 1836–1917), considered the father of modern Hebrew literature, was practicing a “mimetic” Hebrew linguistic style “that could represent and express the experiences of modernity.”⁷ His radical reform of realist fiction would remain the dominant mode of Hebrew writing into the 1960s and 1970s. Haim Nahman Bialik, editor of the weekly literary newspaper *Hashiloah*, was influenced by Ahad Ha’am’s ideology, and composed idealistic, nationalist poetry that sang the terrors of Diasporic life. These and other pre-modern Hebrew writers reconstituted the *shtetl*⁸ as a world centered around petty domestic concerns, idealized for its simplicity, beauty and traditionalism, while Odessa signified urban living, looming as a threat to this old world with its promise of secularism and assimilation.

The modernists found these ideas and literary devices restrictive. They viewed the city differently from their predecessors and were attracted to the “anti-rationalistic and anti-positivist thought of Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Bergson, and Lev Shestov, as well as the writers and thinkers of contemporary Russian and German symbolism, decadence and impressionism.”⁹ The older Micha Josef Berdyczewski (1865–1921), who would eventually move to Berlin, embraced the moral relativity of antinomian thought, while Uri Nissan Gnessin, Ya’acov Shteinberg and Ya’acov Fichman spurned the traditionalism of realist fiction and dismissed Odessa as a city of the past. Although the 1917 Bolshevik revolution marked the official point of decline for Jewish cultural creativity in Odessa, the city’s abandonment by the younger generation had already led to the death of its literary industry.

With the proliferation of journals and newspapers, Hebrew and Zionist intellectual leaders such as Leon Pinsker, Moshe Lilienblum and Ahad Ha'am, as well as the writers Ravnitzky, Bialik and Ben-Zion, had been Odessa's literary aristocracy. But the new writers, who endeavored to escape Jewish traditionalism, had no interest in replacing it with a comparable literary mode of nationalism. They saw Hebrew writing as an apolitical vehicle for representing the human condition. Confronted by the secularism and technological innovation of modernity, and rethinking the boundaries of sex, gender and masculinity, the Hebrew modernists sought to find who they, and the Jews of Europe, were becoming. The urban setting offered a bridge between tradition and modernity, paralleling the Jewish experience of the peripatetic émigré, or the exile ever on the move.¹⁰ The new generation of Hebrew writers thus worked to transcend the formal conventionalism of the "Odessa Style" in favor of more experimental and humanistic literary directions.

Warsaw, Homel and Lvov attracted many young writers. It was during this phase that the development of modernist writing first became clearly evident through "little magazines" (short-lived literary journals, which reflected the influence of multiple modernist movements, including symbolism, impressionism, expressionism, and futurism). The writing was the product of an era of artistic migration and internationalism. Gnessin, Shofman and Brenner cultivated their individual voices through representations of the urban landscape in the image of Homel. Later, Lvov's café culture became famous for its fostering of Hebrew literary talent and artistic debate. "In many memoirs and literary texts, Lvov emerges as a place in which Jewish writers and intellectuals thrived in cafés, and various literary coterie were created in these establishments. . . . The young writers, students, and intellectuals sat at small sidewalk tables and watched the crowds pass by as they sipped coffee slowly."¹¹ Following the Russo-Japanese war of 1904, many Jewish writers fled to Lvov (situated near the Polish border) in an effort to avoid being drafted into the Russian army. Shofman was extremely productive during his stay, and Brenner arrived with a "renewed energy."¹² Together they set up a literary review, in which they published their own work, as well as that of other young modernist writers such as Berdichevsky, S. Shneior, David Shimonovitz (Shimoni), Fichman, Rabbi Binyamin (Yehoshua Radler-Feldman), S. Y. Imber and others.

Yet Homel and Lvov remained relatively peripheral loci of Hebrew modernist writing as compared to Warsaw, which would become the largest Hebrew and Jewish publishing center in the world. By 1910, thirty-eight percent of the city was Jewish. Among the many writers who spent time in Warsaw were Isaac Bashevis Singer, Shalom Asch, I.L. Peretz, David Frischman, and Nachum Sokolow. There were three Hebrew and six Yiddish daily papers and literary journals, which attracted many up-and-coming modernists looking for work and publishing opportunities. The attraction to Warsaw lay in "its lack of authority, the semi-bohemian life with its cafés and coterie, the fertile connections between Hebrew and Yiddish, and the opportunities for literary work that the city offered. Indeed, Warsaw was the 'city of youth' for many modernist Hebrew writers and probably their first encounter with a large metropolitan center."¹³ Many Hebrew modernists passed through the city, although few made it a permanent home. Yiddish took deep root in Warsaw, but by 1905–7 Hebrew modernism had begun to decline there. As Pinsker observes, "[t]he numerous attempts to reconstruct the Hebrew center in Warsaw during the 1910s and in the interwar period were only partially successful" (51–52).

Pinsker also argues that there is no conclusive way to explain why the Hebrew modernists left Warsaw. He suggests that they may have been disappointed with the lack of acknowledgement they received from the more established literary voices of the time, or that their distance from Russian culture and language posed too great a challenge. Nonetheless, Pinsker claims that this "life of wanderings" that many writers lived also proved "quite constructive for the creation of modernist Hebrew fiction" (53).

In the early 1900s, Galicia became the new center of Hebrew modernism. Removed from the influences of Odessa and Warsaw, it offered a relatively safe space for writers to experiment free from the pressures of their literary ancestry. But an internal rift existed between the local Austro-Hungarian Jews and the Russian émigrés, fleeing conscription, pogroms, and the aftermath of the 1905 revolution. As with Lvov, Vienna was a city of café life, and had a short but prolific period of Hebrew and Yiddish literary activity before the First World War. Yet, by contrast with Berlin, those who wrote in the Jewish languages were isolated and marginalized within the

flourishing literary culture of Vienna. The new Russian immigrants lived in Leopoldstadt, an area both linguistically and geographically removed from the center of art and culture. Cities like Lvov and Homel had served as a landscape for the theme of the émigré seeking, though never completely finding, a sense of home in the city. However, this large metropolis inspired some radically different fictional representations of urban life. Brenner faced this kind of culture shock in London, and Shofman and David Vogel encountered it in Vienna when they immigrated there in 1913. They would remain in the Austro-Hungarian capital for the next decade and cultivate a literature of *flânerie*, themed upon the immigrant awakening and confronting the shock of discovery. The Hebrew novel par excellence, Vogel's *Married Life*, would come to represent the Russo-Jewish experience of Viennese café life, "with its elusive promise of social engagement and sense of belonging, [which] actually comes to prevent real human connection and communication."¹⁴ Thus, in the words of Pinsker, the "crowdedness of urban space set against the isolation of the individual" (96) became a central theme in Hebrew modernist fiction.

Following the First World War, Weimar Berlin emerged as a center for Hebrew art and literature. It was a culturally vibrant city with a dynamic Hebrew publishing industry on the rise. Writers brought their income from foreign, and relatively stable, economies while Germany was experiencing hyperinflation, which made Berlin an inexpensive place to live and publish in. Just like in Austria, "German-language writers were largely indifferent to the presence of the émigré Yiddish writers in their midst, although there were some important points of convergence. Else Lasker-Schüler befriended Yiddish writers in the Romanisches Café and developed a close relationship with the Yiddish poet Avrom-Nokhm Stencl,"¹⁵ thanks to which she was warmly received in Palestine later. After a brief resistance to the burgeoning Hebrew and Yiddish modernist culture of Berlin and Vienna, German-Jewish writers eventually became "increasingly invested in traditional Jewish culture and Jewish languages"—particularly after the First World War. Martin Buber, Franz Kafka, Döblin and Joseph Roth showed an ethnographic interest in the "backward" world of the shtetl, as well as religiosity, spiritualism, traditionalism, and Jewish culture at large, which formed a response to what they perceived as an "assimilated bourgeois Jewish culture."¹⁶ Thus authors who were attempting to find new audiences and redefine the parameters of Yiddish and Hebrew fiction came into conflict with the expectations of those writing in German. This alienated the two groups from each other, both culturally and intellectually. But with the deutsche mark stabilizing and the eventual rise of Nazism, Hebrew writers would be compelled to migrate again. Some would move to New York, others to South Africa. Yet, as Europe became increasingly inhospitable to Jewish immigrants, Palestine gradually developed into a new central location for publishing. That shift would greatly influence the outlook of Hebrew modernist writing after the Second World War.

The first modernists set the stage for writers interested in linguistic experimentation and invention. All of them were polylingual, and many wrote in multiple languages, including Yiddish, Polish, Russian, French, German, English, and Hebrew. Later, Hebrew nationalist historians would treat this experimental literary period as a phase of cultural decline. However, the foundations of modernist writing lay in its authors' rootless existence, as they moved from place to place, adopting and adapting to the innovative literary currents of much European fiction and poetry. Stylistic inventiveness was their way of responding to the conservative traditionalism of nineteenth-century Hebrew writing. The shifting political and economic climate in Europe placed the physical and intellectual homes of Jewish writers in jeopardy. In 1915, printing in Hebrew was outlawed in Russia, while the rise of Nazism exiled many writers from the literary scene. The mass migration to New York and Tel Aviv signaled the end of European Hebrew modernism. Although Yiddish culture would continue to flourish in Europe during the interwar period, Hebrew had been driven out long before the holocaust extinguished the Jewish cultural centers of Europe.

Pinsker's study leads us through the most prolific periods of Hebrew writing in Europe. His book, divided into three sections, explores the writers and their output in a historical and thematic framework. Each section traces one of three major themes: Jews in the urban space; sex and gender, the "crisis of masculinity" and the rise of the "New (Jewish) Woman" with its erotic triangles and homosocial bonds; and the complex relations among "tradition, modernity, and religion" in the post-Nietzschean quest for a new kind of religiosity. Pinsker contextualizes

366 Hebrew literature within other modernist movements (migration, collaboration, literary society). In that way, he reframes the discussion of Hebrew modernism to allow it to be historicized beyond its resistance to traditionalist, nineteenth-century realist fiction. Pinsker's approach thus challenges the premises of epoch-defining critic Gershon Shaked, who has suggested that Hebrew modernism was a movement quashed by its failure to propagate Zionism through realist fiction. Though Hebrew modernism was not necessarily formed or influenced by the same forces as other literary movements of its time, Pinsker's conceptualization of it as a "transnational modernism" places it in the broader scope of European modernism. He also discusses the debate about center and periphery, rejecting the previous model that upheld Zionist fiction as the center of European Hebrew letters, based in Odessa, Warsaw and later Tel Aviv. Instead, he shows that peripheral cities like Lvov, Homel, Vienna and London in fact fostered a rich literary repertoire that was unimaginable in those other locations. Moreover, the Jewish authors who populated great modernist centers, such as London and Vienna, were actually living in peripheral areas like Leopoldstadt or Whitechapel. The Hebrew writers, who were all multilingual, frequently read the modernist works of their contemporaries, while often remaining invisible to them. Though they lived but a few miles apart, what did Virginia Woolf or Ezra Pound know of Brenner and his ilk? Pinsker also raises questions about the impact of power structures, ethnicity, religion, class and gender on modernist Hebrew writing. He demonstrates that, even in the midst of other literary modernisms, the Hebrewists actively influenced each other, and were especially moved by Yiddish, Russian and Polish writing.

Shachar Pinsker's work may be seen as a foundational text in rethinking the development of early twentieth-century Hebrew literary movements. Furthermore, it has influenced both Schachter's and Miller's criticism. It is the most sizeable and substantial text of the three. However, Pinsker's study takes a broader approach to the common theme, while Schachter and Miller offer closer readings of the fiction. Miller and Pinsker deal specifically with works written in Hebrew; and Schachter fills a gap in the others' thinking by addressing the importance of different European languages in the work of Jewish writers.

Schachter builds on Pinsker's work by accentuating the transnationality of Jewish modernism, and specifically focuses on the importance of Yiddish to many early Hebrew writers. She shows that many of them were bilingual, and actively wrote, published and edited in Yiddish as well as Hebrew. Furthermore, modernist circles treated Yiddish literature more generously than did the Zionists, who deemed it a threat to the Hebrew language. Schachter's book is divided into five sections, each dedicated to an individual author and city. Most of the writers she examines coincide with those discussed in Pinsker's study. Yet *Diasporic Modernisms* also complements *Literary Passports* with new perspectival dimensions. For example, while Pinsker focuses on Brenner's relationship with the urban landscape of London, Schachter examines the author's transnationalism via his bilingual, Hebrew-Yiddish writings produced in Palestine, as well as through his artistic evolution in the midst of a culture that viewed modernist prose with hostility.

Schachter's outstanding contribution lies in her attention to the role of gender in the reformation of literary languages and cultures in Hebrew modernism. Pinsker examines masculinity and the rhetoric of effeminacy that dominated cultural attitudes to the Jewish male, which was influenced by anti-Semitic discourse and the cult of nationalism that pervaded every avenue of modernist thinking. Schachter develops this conversation with an in-depth discussion of the gendered transformation of language. For example, she argues that writers deliberately developed a "masculine voice" in literary Yiddish in an attempt to redeem the language from Zionist prejudice. In Schachter's words, "Zionists argued that Yiddish embodied the reviled, effeminate culture of diaspora, and they held that Hebrew was a necessary tool for transforming the weak diasporic Jew into the 'new Hebrew man.' In response, Yiddishists sought to masculinize Yiddish culture, to fend off Zionist critiques and to embrace the masculine ethos of social revolution" (9). Meanwhile, there were concurrent efforts to "soften" Hebrew prose in order to attract a female readership, which would be "necessary for the creation of a modern reading community." As Schachter explains: "Jewish writers reoriented themselves to the new gendered-linguistic politics of diasporic Jewish culture, and language became shorthand for the gendered politics of Jewish diaspora" (9). She also points to Leah Goldberg as an example of a modernist writer who sought to reconfigure the position of women in male-dominated European culture.

Jewish culture sustained the traditional roles of women, while Europe celebrated the “feminine aesthetic,” and ignored and marginalized the individual woman.

In her final chapter, Schachter takes us to the Hebrew literary center of New York, which has received increasing scholarly interest in recent years. Jewish writers saw a parallel between the annihilation of Jewish European culture and the disappearance of Native American art and history in the United States. However, these were marginal voices even within Hebrew modernism. Gabriel Preil, an author who self-identified as Israeli though he never immigrated to Israel, wrote in both Yiddish and Hebrew while living in America. His displaced identity reflects the complicated nature of the last Hebrew modernists, who were active between the 1950s and 1970s. He wrote at “a time when Jewish bilingual writing was on the wane and American Jewish writing in English was on the rise. He was a diasporic Hebrew poet at the moment when the Hebrew literary center had moved to the new Jewish State.”¹⁷ Preil argued that the American Hebrew modernists had infused Hebrew writing with Anglo-American modernist traditions, which would shape the future of literary creativity even in the Hebrew heartland.

Giulia Miller takes up the conversation at a later stage by examining Israeli authors who were influenced by the earlier European modernists, both Hebrew and French. She examines the development of their writing in a culture dominated by the Zionist hegemonic literary framework, which disapproved of stylistic deviance in literature. Modernist writers “faced opposition and criticism from members of the Zionist Workers’ Movement who argued that the modernist project was elitist and divorced from the realities of Jewish life in Palestine.”¹⁸ Attempts to continue the experimental work begun in Europe increasingly disappeared, and the powerful work of Gnessin and Brenner found no equal among the late modernists in Palestine.

Moreover, few writers chose to sustain modernist literary activity. “By the late 1930s the political situation in Palestine was such that European modernism and avant-gardism was becoming less and less relevant to the developing Modern Hebrew culture.”¹⁹ Miller argues that the Arab riots (1936–9) and the trauma associated with them “meant that European modernism and avant-gardism would have been viewed as frivolous and unnecessary. Certainly in the case of Menashe Levin, his experimental writing was perceived as trivial and even irresponsible, in the light of the catastrophic experiences of the Second World War” (6–7). The influences of Soviet realism, and realism more broadly, extolled nation-building, one of whose chief proponents, Moshe Shamir, published a manifesto titled “With my Generation” (1946). In it, “he decried western modernism and declared it to be degenerate.” Miller examines works that were not overtly or consciously surrealist, but which did perform some of the “marvelous” element associated with the movement. She examines three authors—Menashe Levin, Yitzhak Oren and Yitzhak Orpaz—who wrote at different moments in history and were therefore subject to different influences. Their most significant literary achievements stepped outside of the mainstream by countering Zionist ideals. According to Miller, “Oren began writing experimental prose as early as 1950, addressing themes that were antithetical to Labour Zionist ideology, such as Jewish sexual violence towards the Arab, psychological regression, and the blurring of boundaries between the perceived and the real” (32). Meanwhile, Orpaz was writing at a time when it was possible to engage “with issues that are considered almost universal to this generation: disenchantment with the Zionist project; a sense of alienation and of not belonging to the collective” (119). That reflects a more encompassing change in the Hebrew literary ethos, marking new directions and modes of diversity in Hebrew fiction.

All three scholars demonstrate that Hebrew modernist fiction, no matter where it was being written, shared some common literary and cultural ideals. The writers “advocated the departure from a socially and historically grounded mimesis towards a portrayal of the ‘hidden’ realities of human existence, to engage with universal (and modernist) concerns such as sexuality, religiosity, existential angst and related themes.”²⁰ Experimentation in Hebrew literature was not simply tied up with Zionism and the creation of a national homeland, but also reflected a broader and more complex history that valued the power of language to articulate a modern, cosmopolitan Jewish experience. By contextualizing Hebrew modernist writing within European, American and Native American cultural history, and tracing the development of modernism in Israel, wherein it was vastly neglected, all three works raise new questions about the role of place, thought and language in the life of the movement.

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1. Shachar M. Pinsker, *Literary Passports: The Making of Modernist Hebrew Fiction in Europe* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 8.
2. Pinsker, *Literary Passports*, 306.
3. Giulia Miller, *Reconfiguring Surrealism in Modern Hebrew Literature: Menashe Levin, Yitzhak Oren and Yitzhak Orpaz* (London: Vallentine Mitchell Publishers, 2013), 33.
4. Allison Schachter, *Diasporic Modernisms: Hebrew & Yiddish Literature in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 9.
5. Pinsker, *Literary Passports*, 45.
6. Pinsker, *Literary Passports*, 42.
7. Shachter, *Diasporic Modernisms*, 8.
8. Shtetls were towns with large Jewish populations, mostly centered in the Pale of Settlement. While Yiddish fiction and popular culture has idealized them as small villages, they could often be large, thriving, semi-urban settlements. They have become the symbol of the lost traditional Jewish world, annihilated by the Russian pogroms and later the Holocaust.
9. Pinsker, *Literary Passports*, 44–5.
10. Pinsker, *Literary Passports*, 33.
11. Pinsker, *Literary Passports*, 68.
12. Pinsker, *Literary Passports*, 70.
13. Pinsker, *Literary Passports*, 51.
14. Pinsker, *Literary Passports*, 95–6.
15. Shachter, *Diasporic Modernisms*, 102.
16. Schachter, *Diasporic Modernisms*, 103.
17. Schachter, *Diasporic Modernisms*, 158.
18. Miller, *Reconfiguring Surrealism*, 33.
19. Miller, *Reconfiguring Surrealism*, 6.
20. Miller, *Reconfiguring Surrealism*, 33.