At Opposite Ends of Asia – Contact between East Asian Culture and Modern Hebrew Literature from the Late Nineteenth Century until Today. A Historiographical and Linguistic Study

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Abstract

This article deals with contact between East Asian thought and modern Hebrew Literature from the late nineteenth century through the twentieth century, until today.

In the first part, the article suggests that from a historiographical perspective, one may outline three waves of contact between these two cultural phenomena, at opposite ends of Asia. In the first wave, which began in the early twentieth century, Asian influence on Hebrew literature written in Europe was mediated mainly through the philosophers Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. The second wave, which emerged in the 1950s, relates to the influence of the leaders of the Beat Generation, who, in turn, were influenced by modernist poetry in English, which was colored by contact with Asian poetry. The third wave is part of the glocal New Age phenomenon and its appropriation of certain Buddhist traits.

The second part of the article presents several theoretical possibilities of symbioses between cultures, as they appear within language.

The third part presents the symptomatic example of the work of contemporary Hebrew writer Yoel Hoffmann, who appears to be a representative of the second wave; however, his work maintains dialogue with the first wave, and its current popularity is part of the third wave. Hoffmann's work serves as an example of how to apply the theoretical possibilities presented in the second part of the article, as an instance of literary contact between two cultures and their respective languages.

In 2014 an issue of the academic journal, *Iyunim Bitqumat Yisrael* was published, entitled, *Beyond Halakha, Secularism, Traditionalism and "New Age" Culture in Israel.*[1] The articles in this volume, which contains more than 600 pages, describe deep cultural processes that have taken place in Israel in the past decades. Among these processes is a change in the monistic center of gravity of culture, from Western influences to neo-Orientalism – mainly the influence of the Jewish culture of Islamic countries via the second and third generations of immigrants from these countries.[2] The articles also describe changes in orthodox thought, the establishment, and way of life, moving toward the softening of traditional codes, and the introduction of multi-cultural elements as part of the rituals. Some authors point out that new influences on ritualistic ways of life have been made possible, leading to the creation of a new sphere combining secularism and traditional religiosity, as a world view and as praxis.[3] Finally, they discuss the dimension of Western New Age culture, which is present in communal and personal patterns of behavior.[4]

Immediately after the section on New Age in its Israeli guise, a short section called "Changes in the Mirror of Art" is included containing two articles, in symptomatic and interesting fashion. The first of these discusses gender and ritual in video-art,[5] and the second is about the author Yoel Hoffmann and his affinity with Zen-Buddhist thought.[6] Discussion of Yoel Hoffmann in this section is symptomatic, since he is neither a political nor an ideological writer. He has never published an op-ed piece about current events, nor does he touch upon them in his literary work. In general, he avoids appearing in the

1 Gideon Katz / Shalom Ratzabi / Yaacov Yadgar (eds): Iyunim Bitequmat Yisrael, Thematic Series, Vol. 7, Beyond Halacha: Secularism, Traditionalism and "New Age" Culture in Israel, Sde Boqer 2014 [All articles are in Hebrew].

2 These include Arie Kizel: Secular and Traditional Mizrahi Caught in the Israeli Narrative Struggle, pp. 401–433; Hadas Shadar / Liat Vardi: The Baba Sali Facility in Netivot as a Reflection of Society, pp. 371–400.

3 Among these see Asaf Shar'abi, "Soft" Religion and "Strict" Religion: The Teshuva Movement in Israel, pp. 434–460; Asaf Leibovitch: Spiritual Traditionalists: A new Social Movement and the Israeli Identity Today, pp. 461–497; Anna Prashizky: Inventing Jewish Rituals: Non-Orthodox Marriage and Funeral Rites in Israel, pp. 283–242; Rachel Werczeberger: The Identity Narrative of the Proponents of Jewish-Spiritual renewal in Israel, pp. 55–579.

4 Marianna Ruah-Midbar: A Channeler, A Healer, and a Shaman Meet at the Rabbi's: Jewish Israeli Women in the New age, pp. 498–528.

5 Yael Guilat: Gender, Ritual and Video Art, pp. 580–612.

6 Dror Burstein: An Introduction to Zen-Buddhist Reading in Yoel Hoffmann's Writings, pp. 624–612.

media to an extreme degree, refusing to give interviews or to express himself on communal affairs, social or ethical issues, and similar public issues. Nevertheless, the editors of the volume deemed this article, written by writer Dror Burstein and dealing with poetics, as relevant to its topic, since it expresses a process within the new Israeli culture with which it is concerned. Hence, the context of this article indicates that Hoffmann's work, which contains Zen Buddhist elements, reflects something of the changes undergone by the Hebrew-reading society in the past decades.

I

Indeed, East-Asian thought, mainly that of India, China, and Japan, has appeared in various currents of modern Hebrew literature, from the turn of the twentieth century to the present. In many ways, these currents may be regarded as part of the influence of what is known as "the Far East" on European culture in general. That is to say, the influence of Asian religions and thought on Hebrew writers and thinkers may be seen as part of European and American influence on these authors over various periods. This is a genealogical matter. However, beyond the genealogy of these influences, one may also speak of the various ways in which Hebrew – partly as a result of this genealogy but also as a matter with independent substance and character – has created various connections with East Asian culture, over what the present paper describes as *three waves* of influence, each of which has a slightly different character.

The First Wave is marked by the influence of Schopenhauer and, later, Nietzsche on the intellectual climate of the turn of the twentieth century in Germany and Central and Western Europe in general, an influence which markedly seeped into Hebrew literature and art.[7] This can be viewed as part of the process of modernization of Hebrew and of European Jewish culture, for these influences arrived via young people who had left the traditional

[7] See for one example among many, the comment on Nietzsche's influence on Hebrew literature in the authoritative literary lexicon by Avraham Shaanan: Dictionary of Modern Literature, Special "Dvir" Edition, Tel-Aviv / Yavneh 1959, p. 515, in the margins of the entry of Nietzsche as indicative of conventional collective knowledge of the matter as summarized and presented in lexicons [Hebrew]. Regarding the influence of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer on Hebrew literature at the turn of the nineteenth century, see, for example, Hamutal Bar-Yosef: Decadent Trends in Hebrew Litarature: Balik, Berdychevski, Brener, Beersheba 1997, pp. 222–233 [Hebrew].

Jewish realm and gone to study in European universities, or had moved to the large cities of Western Europe to partake in their intellectual discourse, either as part of the emerging community of modern Jewish discourse, or in mixed European communities of discourse. The most prominent indication of Nietzsche's influence and cultural significance for Hebrew literature, can be found in the work of Micha Berdyczewski (1865–1921), especially in his quest for new vitalism in the overly textual Jewish culture.[8] In this respect he followed Nietzsche himself, who sought to imbibe alternative vitalistic sources following what he defined as "the Death of God," finding them in Zoroastrianism, that is, in cultures viewed by Europe as Oriental. In contrast, perhaps the writer most decidedly influenced by Schopenhauer was Uri Nissan Gnessin (1879–1913), whose temperament and artistic personality were well suited to Schopenhauer's theory of will, which was influenced by Hindu thought, and, indeed, in his work one can find the Hindu-Buddhist spirit of denial of will, as it appeared in the writings of Schopenhauer.[9]

This wave is closest of all to the sense of the Jewish community transitioning into modernization that new sources of creativity and cultural life had to be found outside of traditional Judaism, which had reached an overly abstract level. In this respect the influence of East Asia was indirect,[10] and part of Western influence on these writers, which included Asian influence. Here Hebrew literature partook in the phenomenon of Asian influences on all of high modernism, such as the influences of visual and textual art on modernistic painters like Degas[11] and on authors like T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, Hermann Hesse, and others.[12] Moreover, it should be viewed as part of the tendency in the West to seek vitalistic or primordial sources, out of an awareness of its own cultural decadence, as can be seen in the work of

8 A pronounced example of such influence can be seen in M. Y. Berdychevski: The Book and Life, in: The Collected Writing of Yosef Bin-Guryon [Berdychevski] – Articles, Tel Aviv 1960, pp. 30–31 [Hebrew].

9 See Leah Goldberg: Around 'Etsel, in: Uri Nissan Gnessin / Lily Rattok, A Selection of Critical Essays on his Literary Prose, Tel Aviv 1977, pp. 97–99 [Hebrew].

10 There was also more direct influence. See, for example, the case of Avraham Ben Yitshaq Sona, who traveled to China. He was a Sinophile and learned Chinese, according to Leah Goldberg in: Meeting with a Poet (on Avraham Ben Yitshaq Sona), Tel Aviv 1952, pp. 20–23 [Hebrew].

11 Jill DeVonyar / Richard Kendall: Degas and the Art of Japan, New Haven / London 2007, pp. 10 ff.

12 See for example Lawrence Normand / Alison Winch (eds): Encountering Buddhism in Twentieth-Century British and American Literature, London / New York / New Delhi / Sydney 2013, pp. 1–22.

Paul Gauguin, who sought primitive inspiration in Tahiti, and Pablo Picasso, who was influenced by African art. Buber's *Ecstatic Confessions* (1909)[13], and the introduction he wrote to Chinese tales[14], are further examples of this trend.

We may suggest an interesting dimension that distinguishes the influence of cultures such as that of Asia on Europe from its influence on Hebrew. Whereas the deep interest of the West in ancient non-European cultures, including that of India, China, Japan, Algeria, Egypt, and others, was intricately bound up with Western colonialism, that is, with objects, aesthetic principles, ideas, kinds of spices, textiles, ritual customs, and linguistic phenomena, which Europeans took home from the colonies, this interest, when it appeared as philosophical influence on Hebrew literature, was entirely different. In fact, to use Marxist terminology, one can see the colonial influences as a concern of the aristocracy and the high and middle bourgeoisie, which absorbed these abstract and material items as part of their lifestyle. An example of this can be found in the architecture and interior design of the Art Nouveau and Art Deco styles, which included ancient Egyptian objects, inspired by English archaeological excavations in Egypt (sometimes these were actual objects from excavations), or textiles and screens imported from East Asia, which were included in the design of architectonic spaces. This trend was present even earlier, as in the Napoleonic Empire style, and it continued well into the twentieth century, as exemplified by Freud's collection of small, ancient Egyptian sculptures, which are known to have decorated his desk in Vienna, among other ethnic items. This phenomenon can, of course, also be observed in earlier periods, such as the eighteenth century, when Chinese objects were a popular item in the collections of German palaces,[15] and so on. All of this was part of cultural and material exchanges, whose ethical legitimacy is suspect today, as they sometimes had a tinge of cultural hierarchy and colonial proprietorship, yet at other times, these were truly the result of admiration or adulation of the achievements of distant and foreign civilizations.

However, writers and readers of Hebrew literature usually had nothing to do with colonialism, and, using the same Marxist categories, they can be seen as distinct representatives of the petite bourgeoisie or craftsmen – though in

[13] Martin Buber: Extatische Konfesionen, Jena 1909.
[14] Songling Pu / Martin Buber: Chinesische Geister- und Liebesgeschichten. Frankfurt am Main / Berlin 1920.
[15] Such as Schloss Charlottenburg, Berlin.

its Jewish version this class also possessed broad textual education and knew at least three languages – Yiddish, ancient Hebrew, and Talmudic Aramaic – which is to say that they were representatives of a class that was not implicated in colonial power, which was not part of their conscious everyday life. In the case of Hebrew, Asian influence was exercised within the philosophical tradition and in styles of writing, as they passed through the academies of the West into the emerging canon of Hebrew literature.

While there might have been exceptions, such as the Sephardic Jews of Amsterdam, who were deeply involved in international trade in the seventeenth century, this was not true of the authors mentioned above, for they had nothing to do with the Europe of colonial acquisition.

The entire issue of colonialism can also mark the decided difference between the first wave in the entire West and the second wave, which is in fact American in origin, and whose roots and spirit are entirely different.

The *second wave* passes through the 1950s–1970s in America, in what is known as the revolution of the Beat Generation. This phenomenon is different from the earlier one, and it concerns shifts in spiritual authority, changes in models of freedom, adolescent rebellion, and the exchange of transcendental European or romantic religiosity for spirituality and the search for enlightenment. One might view this trend as a variant of existentialism, which replaced idealism on the continent, and perhaps also a return to Cartesianism and the search for truth within consciousness, but without the Cartesian-Freudian focus on the ego, and rather as an act without a center. To a certain degree, it can also be viewed as a continuation of the modernistic literary project of the English stream of consciousness school and of the French surrealism of André Breton and others. In fact, the link that connects these two waves, among other possibilities, is the work of Ezra Pound, as testified by one of the leaders of this trend, the poet Gary Snyder.[16]

This trend is expressed in the lives and works of Jack Kerouac, Gary Snyder, Allen Ginsberg, William S. Burroughs, and others,[17] who created literature using, among other things, surrealistic techniques similar to those proposed by André Breton in his two *Manifestes du surréalisme* (a fine example of this is

[16] Interview with Gary Snyder, by Matt Jechke: cuke.com/Cucumber%20Project/interviews/gary-snyder-mj.html. (23.12.1994).

[17] On Ginsberg's connection to Buddhism, see the article by Yaakov Ariel: A New Kind of Jew: Allan Ginsberg and Asian Spirituality, in the present volume, pp. 133–148.

Kerouac's *On the Road*, which was written directly on a roll of paper as a single draft, typed at high speed in just three weeks).[18] Although Kerouac knew French from home and even wrote fiction in French, so he might well have read Breton and the other French surrealists in their original language, *On the Road* seems to be influenced more by the English writing tradition of stream of consciousness, which emerged in the 1920s in the work of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, among others. The Beat writers developed a strong affinity with Buddhism and with various Asian philosophical schools. Each was influenced in his own manner but in a common system of discourse, and they included this affinity in their work. In contrast to Gary Snyder, who tended more toward Zen Buddism (first the Sōtō then the Rinzai Zen school), Kerouac introduced his Buddhist attitudes, in the Mahayana tradition, in the words he placed in the mouths of his characters, modeled on himself and his friends in *The Dharma Bums* (1958), whose title testifies to this influence.[19] Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Snyder all engaged in various forms of Buddhist meditation at various times and defined themselves as Buddhists of one kind or another.[20]

Their enormous influence on the literary culture, lifestyle, ideology, and Zeitgeist of America was manifested, as they themselves state, and as scholarship shows, in the Hippie movement of the late 1960s, whose followers regarded the Beat Generation as their spiritual fathers.[21]

Of the three, Gary Snyder can be seen as the primary and deepest force in this question, as he spent about ten years in Japan, where he underwent training as a Zen monk and studied Japanese and Chinese.[22] He translated texts from these languages and maintained his monastic practice upon returning to America. He reported that his affinity with Zen began with the reading of Ezra Pound's translations of Chinese poetry and haiku.[23] Although Kerouac did not undergo such deep training or undertake systematic study of the subject, he wrote about Buddhism and about characters who were immersed in Buddhism as a recurring theme in his work, and, in parallel, he wrote about a

18 Jack Kerouac: On the Road, New York 1957.
19 Jack Kerouac: Dharma Bums, New York 1959.
20 Interview with Allen Ginsberg, at the beginning of Gary Snyder: "The East West Interview", in: Gary Snyder, The Gary Snyder Reader: Prose, Poetry and Translations 1952–1998, Vol. I, Berkeley 2000, p. 1236 ff.
21 See n. 19.
22 Gary Snyder: "The East West Interview."
23 Gary Snyder: "The East West Interview."

thousand "Western" haiku poems, which he imbued with a poetic logic akin to English (he did not restrict himself to seventeen syllables, but he did retain the simplicity of three short lines, etc.).[24] Allen Ginsberg, who was influenced by Buddhism in a slightly different manner, can be seen as the prototype of the Bu-Jew, though he has stated that Judaism, in contrast to his Buddhism, was a matter of identity and self-definition for him, rather than praxis.[25]

This trend, which began in the 1950s, reached Israel during the 1960s and 1970s in various ways[26]. Among other things, during the 1970s small, somewhat marginal, Buddhist centers were established in Israel, where one could learn and practice Buddhist meditation,[27] and a number of translations became available, notably of the work of Allen Ginsberg, especially his long poem, "Kaddish," which is a variation on the Jewish text, and through him the influence of the climate of the entire Beat Generation was felt. However, Israeli interest in Zen Buddhism that belongs to the second wave did not necessarily obey chronological rules. For example, the work of Yakov Raz, a professor of Japanese at Tel Aviv University, who has introduced and commented upon classical Buddhist texts and meditation practices, belongs to the second wave, which continues to this day.

In addition to the influence of books, during the 1960s and 1970s, after the Six Day War, many backpackers came to Israel from the United States and Europe as part of a spiritual journey like that of the Beats and their followers. They were part of the landscape in Jerusalem, on kibbutzim, and around the country in general, and thus helped this trend seep into Israeli culture.

One of the leaders in the academic study of Asian philosophy and a founder of the philosophy department of Tel Aviv university in 1955, was Ben-Ami Scharfstein (b. 1919). In the new department that he helped establish, as part of the introductory studies in philosophy, he introduced systematic study of Eastern philosophy. The main emphasis was the study of this system among other (Western) philosophical systems in a non-hierarchical manner, that is to say, not as a distant, esoteric matter, but as part of the comparative study of philosophy, in which both Western and Eastern philosophies were studied

[24] Jack Kerouac / Regina Weinreich: Book of Haikus, New York / London / Victoria 2003, p. ix.
[25] Interview with Ginsberg, in: Gary Snyder: "The East West Interview", and see Ariel, New Kind.
[26] See Ariel, New Kind.
[27] Personal conversation with a member of the audience at one of my lectures.

as part of a single human endeavor.[28] Scharfstein himself immigrated to Israel from New York in 1950, and in that respect he may be seen as part of the spirit of the Beat Generation, which was imported to Israel by this immigration. Although his discourse, behavior, and academic authority are different from those of the Beat Generation, still the spirit of new possibilities that the Beat Generation introduced affected his work and is embodied in it, in accordance with the Zeitgeist of those years.

Yoel Hoffmann, with whom this article is concerned as an example of the symbiosis between Hebrew and Buddhism, studied with Ben-Ami Scharfstein at Tel Aviv University and wrote his doctoral dissertation in comparative philosophy under his direction. In collaboration with Hoffmann and two other young scholars, Shlomo Biderman and Dan Daor, Ben-Ami Scharfstein published in 1978 a book on comparative philosophy entitled, *Philosophy in the East and Philosophy in the West*. This volume contains extensive academic introductions to Asian philosophy, chapters devoted to various comparisons between canonical Western philosophers, and chapters making various comparisons between these Western philosophers, mainly of the continental school, and Hindusim, Buddhism, Taoism, and more. Scharfstein sent Yoel Hoffmann to the University of Kyoto to supplement his studies of Asian culture and to complete his doctorate. In this respect, one may view Hoffmann as part of this second wave, especially in that he was a disciple of a decided exemplar of that generation such as Scharfstein.

Thus Hoffmann lived in Japan for a number of years in the early 1970s, studying Japanese and Chinese there, and translating classical Buddhist and Taoist writings, including haiku poems and Zen tales, from those languages into Hebrew and English.[29] He attended the Zen university, Hanazono, where he underwent monastic training under the Zen master, Hirano Sojo, with whom he remained in contact for many years after his sojourn in Japan, until Hirano's death in 2002. Hoffmann's literary work, which began to be published after his return to Israel, is deeply influenced by his work in Kyoto, and it might be said that in his training and work he embodies a model akin to

[28] Shiri Lev Ari: A Negative Philosopher in the Positive Sense (Interview with Ben-Ami Scharfstein), in: Galeria, Haaretz (16.03.2005) [Hebrew].

[29] For an overview of Yoel Hoffmann's work, including his translations from Japanese and Chinese, see Rachel Albeck-Gidron: Exploring The Third Option: A Critical Study of Yoel Hoffmann's Works. Beer Sheva 2016, pp. 178–179 [Hebrew].

that of Gary Snyder, though about twenty years later. In this sense one may see Hoffmann as an Israeli exemplar of the Beat Generation. He was also a frequent visitor to a Buddhist temple that was established in Haifa during the 1970s, and it was from there that his spiritual journey to the East began.

However, Hoffmann's literary writing, as well as his translations of Asian classics, found only a small, elite audience in Israel, and, although Hoffmann was part of the phenomenon of this wave of Buddhist influence, he never gained great popularity or influence in Israel, similar to the influence gained by the founders of the Beat Generation in America from the 1950s onwards. This is mainly because of the cryptic, esoteric, and highbrow nature of his main body of work, and because of the abstract and esoteric dimension of the works he translated. His main reception can be attributed to the third wave of Buddhist and East Asian influence in Israel[30].

The third wave is a New Age phenomenon, which developed in the early 1970s in America, as an extension of trends that began in the 1950s and continued throughout the 1960s and early 1970s through the anti-establishment Hippie movement.[31] By the 1970s and 1980s, it was already regarded as a milieu and a broad cultural trend, so much so that by the 1990s it was already described in academic literature as a period with distinctive features.[32] In Israel, it began to take root during the 1980s,[33] and is present to this day.

Its characteristics in Israel, in the United States, and as a global phenomenon, tend to be formulated by etic criticism, whose goals are not emic (describing a culture in terms of its internal elements and their functioning), with caution and reservations, very often by saying what it is not (for example: it is not a religion, but rather a leaning toward religiosity,[34] and the like). This is due to its scattered and eclectic nature, and its resistance to both academic definition and conceptual control. Researchers agree that it is a tendency toward individualistic spiritual quest, with perennialistic, ritual, cultic, religious,

30 Paul Heelas: The New Age Movement – The Celebration of the Self and the Sacralization of Modernity, Cambridge 1996–2003, pp. 1–2.

31 Wouter J. Hanegraaff: New Age Religion and Western Culture – Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought, New York 1998, p. 23 ff.

32 "The New Age began to be present in Israel only at the end of the 1990s, though it is possible to point to its global dispersion (without any clear local distinction)." Ruah-Midbar, A Channeler, n. 4, p. 505.

33 Ruah-Midbar, A Channeler, p. 525.

34 Ruah-Midbar, A Channeler, pp. 525 ff.

semi-religious or sacral characteristics, often leading to alterations, on one level or another, of the ritual and cultural source from which the praxis or conceptual network is drawn, in order to adapt it more softly to the individual's spiritual needs.[35] Some even see it as a consumer trend, because of the iconic and magical dimension given to objects such as stones and crystals, incense sticks, prayer beads, and the like, and because of the tendency towards ecological conceptions aimed at ecological consumerism, and refraining from consumption which is not of that kind. Pagan and magical practices (channeling, for example), and tribal ceremonies, are held according to personal choice and adhesion, for the purposes of personal growth. Thus, it may be said that what distinguishes the New Age movement from the Hippie movement that preceded it – both as a global movement and as a glocal one, as the literature has it[36] – is that New Age is not a social protest, and is not bound up with collective responsibility, nor is it connected with scholarly, performative, or conceptual responsibility toward the ancient sources from which it draws its terminology, ceremonies, and meanings. Rather, the responsibility it embodies is toward the spiritual development of the acting and experiencing individual. Thus, one may identify affinities between shamanic praxis from South America, the channeling of Christian, Jewish, and Sufi entities, and Buddhist recitations of mantras. Moreover, all these practices may be performed by a single individual, or a group resembling a small tribe.

It may be said, for the purposes of the present article, that in Israel, as in the entire global New Age movement, the question of Buddhism is not posed as an intellectual, monistic, comprehensive matter that requires learning languages such as Sanskrit and Pali, Chinese, Tibetan, or Japanese, as it was possible to see it in the two earlier waves described here. At the same time, since this Age tends to prefer in principle the mystical and enigmatic over the rational and the clear, and it tends to prefer the esoteric, the ancient, and the eclectic, it provides, suprisingliy, a natural haven for the absorption of texts like those of Hoffmann, although by no means can one view Hoffmann himself or his writings as part of the New Age. It may be said that his reception in New Age fashion is what enables him to reach a broad readership, despite the distance between the period's tendencies and those of the author and the

[35] Ruah-Midbar, A Channeler, pp. 521–522.
[36] Ruah-Midbar, A Channeler, p. 500.

meaning that he himself ascribes his text. Because of New Age readers' tendency to accept dimensions of texts that are not comprehensible to them, and to seek a kind of soft, imprecise, and intuitive understanding, they are capable of reading complex and cryptic works like those of Yoel Hoffmann not as an elitist message for the initiates, and not as a game or a riddle, but as exotic esotericism, which does not require deciphering but rather an experiential, imprecise reading connoting mood and environment of meaning.

Thus we find that the influence of Hoffmann's contact with Indian, Chinese, and Japanese Zen Buddhism on his work is an extension of European influence. This influence is part of the sphere of influence of the beginning of the twentieth century on Hebrew culture, including English and French stream of consciousness, and the Asian influence on it. It may also be said that Hoffmann is the heir of modern Europeanism dating back to the seventeenth century, and of the exotic influences on it, including those of the early twentieth century, for he ridicules that culture in his writings, and negates its power to provide meaning to human life and its adversities. This ridicule is part of the Zen Buddhist practice, which he performs by means of his poetics.

Hoffman is thus both an heir of the first wave and subversive of it. He is part of the second wave, that is, part of the Beat generation's cultural project, and as I suggested, can be viewed as a kind of Hebrew Gary Snyder.[37] However, his current acceptance by a growing readership is part of the third wave, that of the New Age, in its contact with what it views as the religions of the East. His growing presence in Israeli culture can be seen in public discourse, in blogs on the Internet and in posts on Facebook, in scattered and random fashion, and as shown by the fact that the Cameri Theater chose to devote an evening to him, on January 1, 2017, in honor of the first monograph to be published about him, written by me.[38]

[37] I am grateful to Professor Carl Bielefeldt of Stanford University for making me aware of the possibility of making this comparison in our conversations on the subject in 2007, while I was a visiting professor there during a sabbatical year.

[38] See n. 28 above.

II

Let me focus now on the phenomenon of Hebrew-Buddhist symbiosis in the work of Yoel Hoffmann, in the context of what I have called the Second Wave of influence of East Asian systems of thought on European-American-Hebrew writing. As noted, Hoffmann's years of initiation in Kyoto during the 1970s had a decisive influence on the creation of this new possibility within literature, which he established and activated in his poetic work after returning to Israel and beginning to publish literature. One may view his literary works as a kind of Bu-Judaism, that takes place within language itself, or, more precisely, as creating a Bu-Hebrew.

The years of initiation in Kyoto included Hoffmann's unofficial years of study at the University of Kyoto during the days of its student revolution. Hoffmann studied in the company of Japanese students with socialist ideals and cosmopolitan and inter-cultural thinking (for example, Katsumura, one of his student friends, later became one of the translators of the Song of Songs from Hebrew to Japanese. Katsamora and Hoffmann taught one another while they were both students at the University of Kyoto – regularly exchanging lessons in Hebrew and Japanese over a long period. Another student friend, Professor Yoshiko Oda, is a recognized scholar of Islamic culture, and a professor of monotheistic religions at the University of Kansai[39]). Hoffmann's writing in Hebrew was deeply influenced by his intensive study of Chinese and Japanese and his translation of classical texts from those languages into English and Hebrew, as well as by the long introductions to these texts that he composed and by his comparative work in philosophy and poetry. His monastic training with Zen master Hirano Sojo of the Rinzai school also influenced his work, as did his stay in Kyoto with his family for several years, during which his children attended Japanese schools, and his collection of Japanese texts such as death poems. These texts required efforts both as a collector and a linguist, such as, specific expertise in this literature in the original language, and the ability to hold conversations and correspondences in Japanese with antique stores and book dealers[40].

[39] I am grateful to Professor Yoshika Oda and Professor Hitoya Katsumura for their important and illuminating conversations on Hoffmann's studies at the University of Kyoto, which we held during my sabbatical year in Kyoto in 2012.

[40] Following the lecture by Jenine Beichman, "Yoel Hoffmann's Japanese Death Poems," at the ninth CISMOR Conference on Jewish Studies: Judaism and Japanese Cultures: Encountering

Next, I will discuss these influences and the deep and innovative symbioses Hoffmann created with their inspiration on his Hebrew writing, as a Buddhist-Hebraic phenomenon, which is not bound up with praxis or with a collective or religious identity. Rather, it is a matter of language, literature, and art, which is made possible within the textual boundaries of the art of poetry.

III

One may speak of an inter-cultural connection that is effected within languages on six strata. Each of these is present in Hoffmann's work, and their combination makes it possible to speak of Zen-Hebrew, or Bu-Hebrew, as a phenomenon that merits definition.

For example, the use of Hebrew to describe the city of Kyoto, its Zen and Shinto temples, its landscape, objects made in typical Japanese style, characters in Kyoto, remarks about components of the Japanese language, and so on. In this respect, it is reminiscent of Rudyard Kipling's descriptions of the Indian space in his novel *Kim*. Kipling uses English to describe the matters of the Indian colony, its political networks, the Buddhist, Hindu, and Muslim religious ceremonies there, the languages spoken there, the various types of people common there, and so on. However, Kipling's English did this under the metaphysical and linguistic umbrella of English colonialism, with its ethical, social, and aesthetic markers, and with the hegemonic consciousness it exemplifies. Of course, there are also examples in which the imperialist character is less marked.

The second stratum is that of the changes that take place within *language* itself as part of the contact with other languages. These changes may be syntactic, lexical, stylistic, rhetorical and so on. Here one may offer the pronounced example of the modern Hebrew language, which adopted during the twentieth century several characteristics of other languages as it learned them in the various ways of translation from them. Thus, it has been influenced by translations from Russian, French, German, American English, and other languages. One can point to certain decades in which modern Hebrew was influenced mainly by one language, while at other times a different language influenced it. One may also offer the example of the influences of Aramaic

Judaism and Buddhism in Hebrew Literature, Conference in Honor of Yoel Hoffmann's Writings, Translations and Beyond, Kyoto (28.11.2016).

and Greek on post-biblical Hebrew, or of Arabic influences during the Middle Ages in Spain.

The third stratum is what might be called the *metaphysics of language*, that is to say, the core values embodied in the various invisible mechanisms of language. Therein lies what might be the greatest difficulty in translation. Here one may speak of issues such as the way the subject is conceived, according to each language's preference regarding its place in the sentence (for example, some languages tend to say, "he thought about the spring," as opposed to those that tend to say, "spring was thought about by him," or "the thought of spring arose in his mind," and so on; some express a tendency to bring out the abstract, as opposed to the tendency to bring out the subject, or the action, and so on). These factors are bound up with deep cultural preferences. For example, it is possible to regard the language of the preceding century as embodying Freudian psychology, or the Cartesian *cogito*, by means of its syntax, as shown by the literary style of stream of consciousness. One may point to Japanese Zen's struggle against abstract concepts and its quest for "Suchness", as a presence within Japanese, as a preference for the palpable over the abstract within language itself. One may point to the work of Heidegger or Derrida on the deconstruction of language, as thinkers who introduced the possibility of inner deconstruction into the grammar of their languages, for the sake of precision in meaning and breaking away, as it were, from language into the "real" phenomenon. One may also speak of the perception of language as a holy tongue, and thus about the precise hermeneutics of the dotting of an "i", and so on.

The fourth stratum is the *performative aspect of language*. This is the case of speech as ritual: for example, prayers, mantras, meditation, focusing on the present, focusing on an object, by means of language and speech, as part of linguistic usage. One may speak of a text as performing a ritual or a mental process in the very act of its writing, reading, or recitation. This is the case with speakers of modern languages, who repeat verses of their culture's prayers in ancient, foreign languages such as Sanskrit, Latin, Aramaic, or ancient Hebrew, without being able to translate them fluently, as part of a ritual. One may also speak of the recitation of texts in the language of one culture as performing a ritual in another culture. Contrariwise, borrowed expressions from a foreign culture, devoid of their content, may be included idiomatically in speech, thereby nullifying their performative and ritual aspect.

The fifth stratum of connections between languages moves within the sphere of language as *embodying values* – social, personal, aesthetic, and so on. These values can be embodied in one language, though their source is in another language and culture. This also pertains to differences in the semiotic dynamic of languages, such as denotative semiotics as in the West versus contextual semiotics, as in Japanese, which is bound up in hierarchical and obligatory social structures, which are embedded in the grammar and syntax. Even components such as a tendency toward emotional neutrality of a linguistic culture, or a tendency toward economy, precision, or the opposite – to bathos and sentimentality – are all a matter of action within language. A language that tends toward one pole can host within it the tendency to the other pole. An example of this can be seen in the work of immigrants who write in their mother tongue within an absorbing culture, such as Russian writers within English culture, Arabic writers within French culture, Polish writers within Hebrew culture, and so on.

The relation between languages can also be effected on a sixth stratum, which is that of *language as material object*: typography, the material space of ink and paper, and so on. Here enter matters such as writing from left to right, or from right to left, or up and down, writing in emphatic capital letters, writing in ink, by hand, writing as drawing, or writing as a symbol, and the like.[41]

Up to now Hoffmann has written twelve literary works. The first was a children's book. The second was a collection of stories, but not until the third did his distinctive language crystallize in a characteristic way, which was innovative and controversial, and decidedly individual. In this work, features brought into Hebrew from the author's work on the thought and poetry of Asia, and from his years of residence in Kyoto, are evident.

The first critics to review his literary writings, which were published after his Hebrew translations of Chinese and Japanese classics, were quick to point out this fact. However, the first pioneering work that dealt with this specifically and in a well-argued manner was "Poetiqat haperspektiva shel Yoel Hoffmann," (Yoel Hoffmann's Poetics of Perspective) by Hannah Hertsig, which appeared in the semi-academic avant-garde quarterly, *Siman Qri'a* in 1991. Her article, written close to the time of publication of *Kristos shel dagim*

[41] See the discussion of this topic in Ben-Ami Scharfstein / Shlomo Biderman / Dan Daor / Yoel Hoffmann: Philosophy East / Philosophy West, Jerusalem 1978, pp. 20–31.

(1991) and after *Bernhardt* (1989) and *Sefer Yosef* (1988), called attention to some of the principles of Zen thought that were reflected in the language and composition of Hoffmann's work. She pointed out "the rejection of every principle" as the principle governing the text, as in Zen thought, and spoke of a poetics which describes experience in a manner "escaping intellectual analysis," as also being Zen in spirit.[42] She referred to what she called Zen "madness," according to the pattern of dialogues between master and disciple, the purpose of which is to be absolutely simple and at the same time to accomplish "the departure from ordinary mind."[43] She also pointed to phenomena of mingling the abstract and the concrete, to the deconstruction of language into categories according to Zen thought, and to the manner in which the "wonder" of Taoist thinker Zhuangzi permeates Hoffmann's text. She sought to retain the enigmatic nature of the text, which, she claimed, contains a mixture of simplicity and strangeness. Hertsig's article was groundbreaking in that it provided a basis and a preliminary systematization of the general feeling that prevailed in criticism regarding Hoffmann's writing. It therefore pointed out the thematic, metaphysical, performative, and stylistic features of Zen Buddhism and of Taoism in Hoffmann's rhetoric and poetic language, and in fact in his Hebrew itself, according to the categories laid out at the beginning of this discussion.

Another fundamental, comprehensive article that can serve as an introduction to any article on Hoffmann, is Nili Gold's "Bernhardt's Journey: The Challenges of Yoel Hoffmann's Writing," published about two years after Hertsig's article.[44] Quite possibly the insufficient influence of this excellent, erudite, and comprehensive article on the discourse regarding Buddhist thought and Japanese aesthetics in Hoffmann's works derives from the hidden but palpable barrier between scholarship on Hebrew literature in Hebrew and that published in English. It appears that a sort of competition regarding the Lingua Franca of scholarship on Hebrew literature has created separate discussion groups, between which the flow is usually unidirectional, and Israeli scholars seldom refer to criticism in other languages. It is interesting to note this fact

[42] Hannah Hertsig: "Poetiqat haperspektivot shel Yoel Hoffmann," Siman Qri'a: Riv'on Me'orav Lesifrut, 22 (July 1991), pp. 169–181.

[43] Hertsig, Poetiqat, p. 170.

[44] Nili Rachel Scharf Gold: Bernardt's Journey: The Challenges of Yoel Hoffmann's Writing, in: Jewish Studies Quarterly, 1 (1993–1994), pp. 271–287.

when discussing matters of interconnections between languages and the cultures signified by them. Literary criticism in Israel utilizes theories imported from various languages that are regarded as hegemonic in paradigms such as the humanities, the arts and literature – and it even participates in the formation of these theories. Yet despite this fact, there is still the thought, not unexplained and certainly contemporary in its non-universalistic character, that the Lingua Franca of literary scholarship in national literatures ought to be that of each particular nationality, a thought which runs contrary to the very idea of a Lingua Franca.[45]

In any event, Gold's article covers almost all the core issues of the matter at hand by means of a close reading of *Bernhardt*.[46] Gold addresses a number of issues typical of Asian thought (Hinduism, the various branches of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism) and reexamines the dimension of "wonder" Hertsig wrote about. She also points to the focus on death as a typical theme of that thought, and to the metaphorical conventions that set it apart (such as transient entities like the seasons of the year, blossoming, and the momentariness of fleeting moments), as well as to death as a concrete matter in the form of its introduction into Hebrew writing at Hoffmann's hands. As aesthetic principles, Gold points to suggestion and indirection as central characteristics of Japanese poetics,[47] and regards them, along with other processes, as Buddhist practices of liberation from suffering. Gold speaks of haiku and the homage paid to this form in Hoffmann's work, especially in giving attention to the present, to the epistemology of granting autonomy to the individual moment within the continuum of times and phenomena. Gold was also the first to point out the typography of Hoffmann's writing, features such as leaving the right page blank, and the minimalistic printing of several groups of short lines on an empty page, as an homage to Zen thinking, and as part of the haiku tradition. She also speaks of the aspiration for enlightenment and the subject as a non-self in his work. Moreover, she mentions the Japanese genre of Zuihizu[48] as a possible source for some components of the unique style of Hoffmann, who has created a genre of his own within Hebrew and

45 Gold, Bernardt's Journey, p. 274.
46 Yoel Hoffmann: Bernhardt, Jerusalem 1989.
47 Gold, Bernardt's Journey, p. 274.
48 Gold, Bernardt's Journey, p. 275.

Western writing. Thus, she brings up issues that touch upon every one of the categories raised at the beginning of this discussion.

Another important paper on the affinity between Hoffmann's Hebrew writing and Zen and Asian thought in general is that of Dror Burstein, published in 2016. Burstein translated Hoffmann's book, *Radical Zen*, from English to Hebrew.[49] His paper, mentioned at the beginning of the present article, overlaps with Gold's work on certain matters and adds new dimensions to it. The main one is the Zen idea of the Indra-network, that is, understanding the world of phenomena as a network of inner connections among all phenomena, so that nothing is irrelevant to the overall conception of the universe. Here he develops other directions of the idea that arose in the articles by Hertsig and Gold about lack of hierarchy (conceptual and hegemonic hierarchies, among others) in Hoffmann's descriptions as part of his poetics, which represents this metaphysic. Burstein goes on to develop the idea of Buddhist compassion as part of the character of Hoffmann's text.

I might add that my own research also dealt with this aspect at length over the years.[50]

The studies mentioned here therefore point to traditions that Hoffmann imported into his poetics from Kyoto, traditions of metaphysics and the metaphysics of language and fiction, traditions of aesthetic and rhetorical conventions, linguistic-ritualistic practices, typography, and its meaning-bearing qualities, and so on, which is to say they encompass every aspect of the list presented above. To this one must add the thematic issue, which appears in some of Hoffmann's works describing the life of the protagonist in Japan, mainly in *Gutta-percha* and *Curriculum Vitae*, which depict the daily life of the protagonist, a linguist who has arrived in Kyoto with his family to investigate linguistic phenomena, and who has relations with figures in various spheres such as the Japanese academy, temples, streets, household, and so on. Various linguistic phenomena which are woven into the fiction are also described there, as the protagonist studies the local language as a scholarly effort and a day to day concern.

[49] Yoel Hoffmann: Radical Zen: The Sayings of Jōshū, Cambridge 1978. (Translated with a Commentary).

[50] Albeck-Gidron, Exploring the Third Option, extensive discussion in chapters 1, 2, and 5.

Hoffmann's work was ultimately consolidated in a typography of numbered fragments of partially vocalized Hebrew, which includes visual elements of photographs and drawings. It is written in enigmatic language, mingling in non-hierarchical fashion cosmic phenomena and the minor events of daily life. Moreover, it presents in a compassionate manner, without bathos, the distress of its protagonists, and can be seen as a novel or novella, but also as a chain of apothegms of riddles and as a rhetorical practice of estranging the familiar. One may therefore say that his work embodies a kind of Japanese within Hebrew, with its transmittable markers. Nowadays, whether as a genre, a typography, or a manner of description, it has begun to influence writing in Israel and to accrue a kind of belated charisma, because of its alien charm. As noted above, Hoffmann's growing presence in Israeli culture is evident in the increased attention paid to his work.

In closing, let me discuss an example from Hoffmann's work, showing how all the elements that the critics have mentioned, as well as other elements from the world of Japan, are brought into it to demonstrate the new phenomenon of Zen, Israeli, and Japanese Hebrew, evident in recent decades in Israel. At present, it is the project of a single artist, but it already extends its field of influence to generations of new possibilities within Hebrew.

The various aspects that have been mentioned above can be exemplified using an excerpt from Hoffmann's *Gutta-Percha*. This is one example of many, in fact rather a random example, for almost every paragraph of Hoffmann's oeuvre can serve as at least a partial example of the claim every line displays this cultural symbiosis. Here, the protagonist, Franz, who has come to Japan to improve his Japanese and to extend his research on isoglosses, meets a Japanese professor of linguistics at the University of Kyoto and leaves his baby in his house, formerly an ancient temple but no longer in ritual use. This information is not given to the reader sequentially, as facts, but as a collection of numbered fragments like the one below, from which the reader must deduce the development of matters and the space and time of the fiction, the plot and the physical and social background underlying it.

"186

When Franz goes to Professor Takaotsi the baby

Remains with the statues.

It is very hard to know whether there are any thoughts in him. Maybe

He is looking at the curtains and thinking about light [which is
The end of the sun]. Maybe it shines by itself.
Franz in any event finds it very hard to understand
The word *shujako*. If it's explained to him, he'll understand.
But will it be explained to him?"[51]

We may start by first pointing out the somewhat archaic register of the Hebrew here, embodied in Hoffmann's use of the preposition "*etsel*," in the expression "*etsel hapesalim*" [with the statues], which in Modern Hebrew would be "*bein hapesalim*" [among the statues] or "*leyad hapesalim*" [near the statues]. In modern Hebrew "*etsel*" is used mainly like the French "chez": for example, "*etsli*" would be the equivalent of "*chez moi.*" "*Etsel hepesalim*" [with the statues] not only has an archaic ring, it also suggests that the place where the baby has been left is the home of the statues, linking them to the paganism of Mediterranean lands, to transgression, and actual ritual, as attributed to them by biblical Hebrew. The simple fact that the baby has been left at home, a home in which there are various Buddhist statues, is presented here as a matter invoking an ancient Hebrew paradigm, which is an entirely different possibility. The reader must perform these two alternative manners of deciphering simultaneously.

However, before the ancient Hebrew expression, the reader encounters the Japanese name of the professor, which for him has no context and is mute, because of the basic mutual estrangement of the two languages. This estrangement is a result of the fact that migration between the two countries has barely existed, and therefore Japanese words (except for the names of certain foods served in sushi restaurants) and the proper names of Japanese people are not familiar to the Hebrew reader from his daily life.

For this reason, the reader also feels unsure regarding which of the two adult figures is the antecedent of: "It is very hard to know whether there are any thoughts in him." Indeed, this phrase might even refer to the infant, whose thoughts are also indecipherable. It could be the Japanese professor, who is so alien, of whom it is difficult to know anything, or Franz, the protagonist of the event, regarding whom the reader is accustomed to have the narrator create a meta-poetic attitude, tending to present him as someone

[51] Translated from the Hebrew source.

who stands beyond the range of full knowledge, and therefore, the narrator himself finds it hard to "know" his thoughts.

One of the two, Franz or the Japanese scholar, is thus the object of a conjecture as to his thoughts. However, the conjecture extends beyond immediate reality, to a broad theoretical question. That is, the infinite and the immediate are equally possible. Someone is looking at the curtains, that is, at something nearby and concrete, and thinking about light, that is, something abstract and general. An identity statement is placed in square brackets: "[which is / The end of the sun]." This could be interpreted as a poetic or metaphorical statement, or as a philosophical or optical matter, presented as a quotation from an unknown classic of one of the two cultures, or of some third culture. For the reader, this remains an unsolved riddle. But suddenly the possibility is introduced into the reader's conceptual vocabulary that light is "the end of the sun," whatever that might mean. The other possibility that is presented here, "Maybe it shines by itself," verges on borderline of nonsense, as often happens in Hoffmann's text, but perhaps it is a possibility recounted in some culture, as an explanation for the experience of seeing light. In any event, the attention placed on the curtains, which have suddenly become a point from which several explanations are drawn regarding that experience, is akin to an act of Zen focusing, which the text preforms via the situation. That is, it is the praxis of focus meditation.

The following line contains a Japanese word, "shujako." For the reader as well as for the character, as the text claims, it is meaningless. It is a collection of sounds that is immediately recognized as Japanese, but, as such, it remains a riddle. Unless they happen to know Japanese or are able to consult a Japanese dictionary, neither the reader nor the character can know that the word means "scholarship," and that is a technical term relevant to the academic situation in which the character is placed. But, since it is unknown, it could be anything, huge or small, sacred or quotidian, a ritual mantra or the name of a food, and the lack of explanation hangs in the air as a fact.

Indeed, the fact that the meaning of the word is not explained to the protagonist is conveyed with a sort of rhetoric drawn from Yiddish: "If it's explained to him, he'll understand / But will it be explained to him?" The reader familiar with this rhetoric understands that it won't be explained to him, and that this is annoying, thanks to the Yiddish mode of deciphering this form of a rhetorical question.

Formalistically speaking, this is not a particularly important or prominent fragment in Hoffmann's work, nor is it of particular importance for deciphering the plot, but it is typical in that it crosses languages, cultures, types of national character, and local material culture, and out of this it creates a kind of vain riddle, in the spirit of Koan enigmas, and even in their didactic nature: the presentation of a series of concepts in an absurd or ridiculous manner to the point of their total abstraction. That is, it responds in various ways to the categories that were presented above as a kind of theme, praxis, meta-language, metaphysics, and typography, borrowed from Japanese language and culture and introduced into Hebrew.

Hoffmann's text, in this book as well as in others, is accompanied by various images, which are always placed outside of the textual context, thus immediately generating a ridicule of dichotomies, affinities, and thoughts of wholeness. In their appearance, they are decidedly influenced by Zen, a subject which demands a separate research, and with which I have dealt elsewhere. Some of them are whole photos by photographers August Sander and Wynn Bullock, some are photographic fragments of the work of André Kertész, which appear reduced and in irregular repetition alongside the text. They always create a sensation of unusual affinities between objects in the world and between them and the text, and they embody an adaptation to the non-hierarchical nature of the Zen demand, as well as practice and implementation of it. Other images appearing in the text are drawings by the author himself. These drawings are created using a long continuous line, drawn with the eyes closed, as Hoffmann testifies, and may actually be viewed as the result of an act of Zen meditation. They are part of the Zen tradition of calligraphy and meditative drawing, though different from it in content. The humorous mood of some of the Chinese and Japanese Zen works is also present in these drawings by the author.

The enigmatic way in which the story is told, the surprising context into which the details of concrete realia lead, the use of questions and answers in the tradition of monastic training and the hierarchies it seeks to institute, the theme itself, the meta-linguistic question, the unusual transition from that which is experienced to that which is thought, and from the concrete to the inferred, the unique typography of the page, and the presence of all of these within Hebrew and its shifting strata – all these form the intersection I sought to exemplify in this article.

Hebrew and Japanese were never in a situation of siblinghood. Hoffmann creates this situation for the first time in the history of these two languages, and he does so within language itself and as part of his linguistic art.

The physical presence of objects from Japan in the space of Israel has already been manifested in various forms, such as the Tikotin Museum of Japanese art, which was established in Haifa in 1959. However, this siblinghood that languages have the capacity to create was formed for the first time by Hoffmann in the 1980s. Tracing the development of this possibility within Israeli culture is a subject for further research. It requires a historical perspective, since this influence has only just begun to be felt, following the introduction of new possibilities for absorption of enigmatic texts from the East, and it is still too early to know the abilities and power it holds.