

Hebrew Poetic Manifesto *Kotzo shel yod* (1878) by Y. L. Gordon translated into Ladino *La punta de la yod* (1901). On the oppressed state of the Jewish woman (between Ashkenaz and Sefarad)

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Zusammenfassung

Kotzo shel yod von Y.L. Gordon (1832–1892) – einem wichtigen Intellektuellen der jüdischen Aufklärung – ist ein bekanntes hebräisches Gedicht. Dieses Gedicht zeichnet sich durch eine kühne, scharfe Kritik an den traditionellen jüdischen Einrichtungen aus, welche nach Meinung des Autors ein unbedingtes Überdenken erforderten. Gordons literarisches Werk ist von der jüdisch-ashkenasischen Welt inspiriert. Dieses einzigartige und innovative Gedicht wurde ins Judenspanische (Ladino) übersetzt. Der Artikel möchte die sephardische Version von Gordons Gedicht vorstellen. Es soll versucht werden, die Hintergründe für die Übersetzung dieses Werks in Ladino zu analysieren, die Rezeption der Übersetzung durch die Leserschaft und die Herausforderungen, denen sich der anonyme Übersetzer stellen musste, der das Werk der ladino-lesenden Öffentlichkeit im vollen Bewusstsein zugänglich machen wollte, dass diese Version sich deutlich vom zugrundeliegenden ashkenasischen Original unterscheidet.

Abstract

Kotzo shel yod by Y.L. Gordon (1832–1892) – one of the prominent intellectuals of the Jewish Enlightenment period – is a well-known Hebrew poem. This poem is characterized by a daring, sharp criticism of the traditional Jewish institutions, which the author felt required a critical shake-up. Gordon's literary works were inspired by the Jewish Ashkenazi world. This unique and pioneering literary work was translated into Judeo-Spanish (Ladino). The aim of this article is to present the Sephardic version of Gordon's poem. The article will attempt to examine the motives behind the translation of this work into Ladino, the reception of the translated work by its readership and the challenges faced by the anonymous translator who sought to make this work accessible

to the Ladino-reading public, in the clear knowledge that this version was quite far removed from the Ashkenazi original from which it sprang.

A. Preface

Yehuda Leib Gordon (1832–1892) was one of the prominent intellectuals of the Enlightenment period. His work is characterized by a daring, sharp criticism of the traditional Jewish institutions, which he felt required a bold literary-critical shake-up.¹ Thus, for example, the rabbinical establishment was the focus of his literary criticism, and his poem *Kotzxo shel yod* (The tip of the yod)² is a work in which the author brings this literary device to the height of sophistication against the rabbinate, its stagnation and lack of adaptation to life's changing realities. The source of this criticism was the rabbinate's attitude toward Jewish women, who were required to comply with outmoded, archaic dictates. To this day Y.L. Gordon is considered a trailblazing author in his time. *LdY.* was translated into Ladino in 1901 and was published for the Ladino-reading public in Jerusalem. Later, this work was also published in Salonica. The original work lost its lyric form and the adapted version was rejuvenated as a novella in Ladino. This article will attempt to examine the motives behind the translation of this work into Ladino, the reception of the translated work by its readership and the challenges that faced the anonymous translator who sought to make this work accessible to the Ladino-reading public, in the clear knowledge that this version was quite far removed from the Ashkenazi original context from which it sprang.

B. Yehuda Leib Gordon: The man and his works

Who was Yehuda Leib Gordon and what was his monumental contribution to Hebrew literature? Y.L. Gordon was one of the great Hebrew poets of the Enlightenment period. He was born in Vilna in 1830 to a family of intellectuals and was exposed to Hebrew from a young age. He received a traditional

¹ A concise version of this article was presented in the international conference *Mujeres sefardíes lectoras y escritoras (siglos 19-20)*, that took place in CCHS, CSIC, Madrid, 17–19 October 2012. I would like to thank Prof. Paloma Díaz-Mas who invited me to participate in the conference and to present a paper.

² The poem *Kotzxo shel yod* was published in: Gordon, Yehuda Leib: כתבי יהודה ליב גורדון; שירה (The Writings of Y.L. Gordon – Poetry). Tel-Aviv 1950, pp. 129–140. The title *La punta de la yod* was given to the Judeo-Spanish (Ladino) translated version of the poem. Along this article the abbreviation *LdY.* will be used to present the Ladino title of the work.

Jewish education and wrote his first poetry at the age of 20, under the influence of the Hebrew poets of his time. His poetry consisted of both lyric poems and ballads. Y.L. Gordon's poetry is also known for taking its inspiration from Jewish sources, such as the epic poem about the life of David, *David's Wars against the Philistines* (1852). Y.L. Gordon also published a selection of rhymed fables, most of them translated under the title, *Yebuda's Fables* (1860). His writings were published frequently in the Hebrew, Russian and Yiddish press. As he matured, his pen became sharper against the ultra-Orthodox world, and even though he worked as a teacher, he had no compunction about expressing his opinion against the radical ultra-Orthodox community. During the years 1870–1876 he began writing the draft of *LdY.*, his satiric poem against the ultra-Orthodox Jewish establishment. This work was completed in 1876.

Y.L. Gordon is considered one of the great disseminators of Enlightenment in Russia and was even imprisoned on suspicion of subversive activity against the tsarist regime. In 1884 all his poetry was published in four volumes, in St. Petersburg. Later editions of his works included two volumes of his stories. Y.L. Gordon led a stormy life as a believer in the necessity of leaving benighted religion for the enlightened secular life, and this ideology is strongly expressed in his writings. To this day Y.L. Gordon's poetic works are studied as a model of early Hebrew literature in the Enlightenment period, and both his poetry and his prose works still challenge groups of researchers and students.³

C. *Kotzo shel yod* – the work, its content and its unique character

Kotzo shel yod is a massive work, consisting of 76 verses, for a total of 760 lines, with a fixed abab | cdcd | ee rhyme pattern. This poem is written in Hebrew

³ We will mention here some important insights into Y.L. Gordon and his literary works. See for example: Fiengold, Ben-Ami: *קצו של יוד: אנטומיה של סאטירה* (*Kotzo shel yod: The Anatomy of Satire*). In: *Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature II* (1983), pp. 73–103; Friedlander, Yehuda: *הפולמוס הסאטירי - בין יל"ג לרבני ליטא: עיון משוה בכתבי פולמוס* (*The Polemic Satire – Between Y.L. Gordon and Its Generation – A Comparative Study*). In: *Bein Halakhah le-haskalah Hebrew Satire and Polemics in Europe During the 18th–20th Centuries*. Ed. by Yehuda Friedlander. Ramat-Gan 2004, pp. 181–194; Lahover, Fishel. *תולדות הספרות העברית החדשה* (*The History of Modern Hebrew Literature*). Tel-Aviv 1927; Shamir, Ziva: (*Kotzo shel yod: The First Mock Heroic in Hebrew Literature*). In: *Sadan III* (1988), pp. 45–77; Werses, Shmuel: *מגמות וצורות בספרות ההשכלה* (*Trends and Forms in Haskalah Literature*). Jerusalem 1990.

in a high linguistic register, draws heavily from biblical and Talmudic language, and is somewhat of a display of the poet's proficiency in the intricacies of Hebrew language throughout the ages, especially considering the period in which this poem was written – at a time when Hebrew was not the vernacular of the masses. The narrative at the foundation of this work is the dramatic story of a beautiful girl who is introduced as the daughter of Hefer Bat-Shua, who decided to betroth his daughter at a young age to a very diligent and erudite but ugly Torah scholar. The other girls in the protagonist's village – Ayalon – envy her marriage to the scholar, whose name is Hillel, and everyone is certain she will have a life of happiness. For three years the young couple is supported by the bride's father, as agreed before the wedding, and when these three years are over, the couple faces an economic crisis. The husband must travel far away to provide for his family, and the wife's father loses his fortune. The woman is left alone with her children, and in order to support them she opens a small store that sells dried legumes. A Jewish widower named Fabi falls in love with her and wants to marry her. Since her husband Hillel has not returned from his travels, under Jewish law she becomes an *aguna*, a woman „chained“ to an absentee husband, and cannot remarry until her husband's fate is determined. Fabi tries to help find the husband, and after extensive inquiries Hillel is found to be living and working in Liverpool, England. Fabi sends a courier to obtain from him a signed *Get* – writ of divorce – in order to realize his own aspirations to marry the young woman. They wait impatiently for the arrival of the *Get* and when the letter is finally brought to them, they discover that the name of the divorcing husband – Hillel – was written without the required Hebrew letter yod. Vafsi Hakuzari, the rabbi of Ayalon, rules according to the strict letter of Jewish law, and deems the *Get* invalid – all for the lack of the yod in Hillel's name. This strict ruling, which epitomizes the religious extremism prevalent in Y.L. Gordon's milieu, prevents the young woman from starting a new life and she is forced to continue her life of poverty and deprivation.

This literary work unfolds on two levels, and herein lies its uniqueness. On the superficial level, this poem is the dramatic story of a young woman and the complexities of her journey through life. On a deeper level there is harsh, particularly pointed social criticism of the rabbinical establishment and its strict approach to women, and in our case the distress of a young woman. The poem opens with a sharp, radical description of the life of the Jewish woman,

with a portrayal that leaves the impression that the life of the Jewish woman is particularly miserable. She is described as being born into darkness and dying in darkness, deprived of all worldly pleasures, and is someone whose life will be one of subservience. Talent, wisdom and beauty have no power to assist the Jewish woman. Misery, exclusion from the masculine domain and submission to the man's desires are the basic components of the woman's fate according to Y.L. Gordon, in this poem written in 1876 – long before the status of women became a major issue in global society.

The issue of *aguna* women or of women denied a *Get* by their husbands is well known in Hebrew literature, and has already been addressed by Nurit Govrin. According to Govrin,

“Generations of authors wrote about this issue and harnessed it for ideological and social struggles of their time. This was part of the struggle between the individual and the family, which represented society, and between the individual and the rabbis, who represented the religious establishment; between life and Jewish law, but no less, this issue served as a focal point for describing the fate of the individual, eroded by forces stronger than him – whether divine or fate – and over which the individual had no control.”⁴

Some examples of this are *Vehaya He'akov lemishor* (And the Crooked Shall Become Straight) by Shmuel Yosef Agnon, (1912); *Mishpaha* (Family), by Dvora Baron (1933); *Keberet Ayin* (In the Blink of an Eye) by Yehuda Burla (1943); and of course Y.L. Gordon's poem *Kotzo shel yod*, which is the focus of the current study.

Y.L. Gordon's poem can be described as applied satire, used by the author to fight the battle of the Enlightenment movement against the adherents of the rabbis.⁵ This struggle was waged against the stagnant Jewish law; against the rigid interpretation of the law and for the rights of the individual to realize his desires. The war being waged by Y.L. Gordon is used to raise awareness of the social customs and the consensus, which he believed were behind the times and should be changed. These customs included marriage at an early age, arranged marriages and the dismal status of women in Jewish society.

⁴ Govrin, Nurit: פסילתו של גט בספרות העברית (The Disqualification of a Divorce in Modern Hebrew Literature). In: Kriat Hadorot (Reading the Generations) I, Ed. by Nurit Govrin. Tel-Aviv 2002, pp.430–442.

⁵ See: Fiengold: *Kotzo shel yod*, pp.91–92.

Y.L. Gordon demonstrates how the stringency regarding a single little letter – a yod – which was missing in a writ of divorce, led to a life of misery, poverty and suffering, for which there was no remedy. Y.L. Gordon emphasizes the absurd: the missing, inanimate letter is more important than a living person. Y.L. Gordon turns the rabbi into a demonic figure and describes the rabbinic establishment as cruel and stone-hearted. Thanks to Y.L. Gordon's daring to address this issue, his poem was read by a wide audience and became an important subject in Hebrew literature. Y.L. Gordon's poem became a symbol and a metaphor for the deprivation of the Jewish woman and anyone who takes up the cry of the women goes back to the opening lines of the poem.

D. *LdY* – the Judeo-Spanish version

In 1901 the prose version of Y.L. Gordon's poem was published in Filipopoli, also known as Plovdiv, in Bulgaria, under the title *La punta de la yod*. This translation appeared in *Hasbofar*⁶ newspaper and the identity of the translator is unknown. In 1907 *LdY* was republished in Jerusalem by Salomon Israel Cherezli, but due to the Turkish censorship of Jewish publishing houses, the publication was credited to Carmona y Zara in Cairo. Cherezli's publishing house was known at that time as a center for Ladino books and has been the subject of scholarly research, such as the PhD thesis of Iacob Haguel, who examined Cherezli's achievements as an agent of Sephardic culture in Jerusalem.⁷

LdY was published once more in 1927, in Salonica, in an anthology titled *Mueva guerta de istorias*, edited by Magda Jean Florian, and retained the original version of the Ladino translation.

The fact that the Ladino translation of Y.L. Gordon's poem was first published in Plovdiv is not surprising.⁸ This city was known as a center of

⁶ *Hasbofar* was published in Bulgaria between the years 1901–1912 and was considered as a Zionist publication. Among his editors were Marco Romano (the first editor), Eliezer Abraham Kalev and Abraham Capon (the last editor). The Journal was published in Plovdiv and later on in Sofia and Russe. I would like to thank Dr. Dov Cohen for the important information on *Hasbofar*.

⁷ See: Haguel, Iacob: בראשית ותרומתו בירושלים: האיש, הספרותי מפעלו למפעל ותרומתו בירושלים: בראשית ותרומתו בירושלים (Salomon Israel Cherezli – The Man, His Literary Work, His Activity and His Contribution to the Judeo-Spanish Book Promotion in the Beginning of the 20th Century in Jerusalem) (=unpublished Ph D Thesis). Ramat-Gan 2009.

⁸ On the Jewish press in Bulgaria see: Israel, Salvator: The Jewish Periodical Press in Bulgaria in Ladino and Hebrew. In: Annual 2 (1967), pp. 139–168.

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לה פונמה די לה יוד

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פריסייו און גרוש



La punta de la yod, Filipopoli (Plovdiv), 1901, Courtesy of BZI, Jerusalem.

Sephardic Enlightenment,⁹ and Ladino translations of many important Jewish literary works were published in Plovdiv, appearing in the literary platforms available at that time. A few such examples are:

- a. *Las cuatro dimensiones* (The Four Dimensions) (1906) by Shmuel Gordon;
- b. *Nicola el primero y el judío* (Nicola I and the Jew) (1907) by Pesach Kaplan;
- c. *Rajel* (Rachel) (1907) by Nissan Turov;
- d. *La punta de la yod* (The Tip of the Yod) (1907) by Yehuda Leib Gordon;
- e. *Lulu* (Lulu) (1908) by Hemda Ben Yehuda.

All but the first of these five works were published in *Hasbofar* – a newspaper aimed at promoting the spirit of the Enlightenment and which viewed itself as a worthy stage for the dissemination of important literary works.¹⁰ Plovdiv was also the city that was home to several Ladino pioneers, such as Zemach Rabiner¹¹, whose book, *Las madres judías de la época bíblica* (The Jewish Mothers of the biblical Era) proposed an educational-philosophical model for women's behavior, based on that presented in the bible.¹²

E. *LdY* – between poetry and novel

The Ladino translation of Y.L. Gordon's poem is in novella form, and as such deserves a critical review. There may have been a host of reasons that prompted the anonymous translator to turn the poem into a story, including:

⁹ See: Collin, Gaëlle; Studemund-Halevy, Michael: Un trésor oublié: le fonds judeo-espagnol de la bibliothèque municipale Ivan Vazov de Plovdiv (Bulgarie). In: *Miscelánea de estudios árabes y hebraicos* 55 (2006), pp.83–118.

¹⁰ On the Sephardic periodicals in Bulgaria see: Cohen, Dov: הספר בלאדינו לאור מפעל הביבליוגרפיה של הספר העברי לקראת מיפוי מחדש של עולם הספר (Towards a New Panoramic Map of the Judeo-Spanish (Ladino) Printings in Light of 'The Bibliography of the Hebrew book' Project) (=unpublished Ph D Thesis). Ramat-Gan 2011, pp.96–98.

¹¹ Zemach Rabiner was born in 1864 in a small village near Kaunas, Lithuania and died in 1936 in Sofia. In 1902 he has immigrated to Sofia to serve as a Rabbi. In 1921 he became the chief Rabbi of the Jewish Bulgarian Communities.

¹² See: Rivlin, Tina; Rodríguez Ramírez, Eva Belén: El legado sefardí de Semah Rabiner. In: *Miscelánea de Estudios Árabes y Hebraicos* 58 (2009), pp.181–212; Rivlin, Tina: ספרות מוסר בלאדינו על רקע השפעות תרבות המערב (Judeo-Spanish (Ladino) ethic and Rabbinic literature during the Westernization of the Bulgarian Sephardic communities a generic and thematic study on *Las madres Judías de la época Bíblica* by Rabbi Dr. Zemach Rabiner (Istanbul, 1913) (= unpublished Ph D Thesis). Ramat-Gan 2012.

- a. The complexity of the lyric text;
- b. The particularly long poetic structure;
- c. The inability to meet the stringent demands of the fixed rhyming pattern;
- d. The high linguistic register;
- e. The difficulty in translating terms from the world of Judaica and Jewish law;
- f. The difficulty in translating linguistic devices such as metaphors, parallels and symbols;
- g. And finally, the translator's desire to focus on the message conveyed by the text, while deliberately forgoing the poetic components in favor of the emphasis on the dramatic story component portrayed by the text.

The translator's choice in presenting a novella in Ladino is connected, among other things, to the fact that the translator discerned the force of the narrative in the poem, and it was this forceful narrative that he sought to bring to the attention of the readers. It is also possible that the translator was proficient in the history of Hebrew literature and was aware of the fact that Y.L. Gordon's choice of the poem genre stemmed from his wish to broker between Hebrew poetry, which was on the decline, and Hebrew prose, which was beginning to flourish at that time. This aspect of the translator's genre choice has already been addressed in Hebrew literary research literature. In this regard, Shmuel Werses wrote that

“Y.L. Gordon's poetry took form in the era of the struggle over the poetic heritage of Hebrew literature, a struggle that was abandoned during his time, giving way to Hebrew prose.

This struggle attempted to uproot poetry in order to replace it with prose. Y.L. Gordon's leanings toward poetry was therefore one of the expressions of the effort to rescue poetry, at a time of genre change [...] Y.L. Gordon's poetry was formulated during the period when Hebrew novels were beginning to take form.”¹³

One more significant reason is worth mentioning in addition to all of the above – the translator of the poem into Ladino was well acquainted with his target audience, and was also aware of the fact that his audience would accept

¹³ See: Werses: Trends and Forms, p.370.

an abridged work in prose far more readily than a long poetic work. Thus the translator's decision to present a narrative version of this work was based on considerations of the difficulties in the work of translation, both due to the desire to adapt the work to its target audience in Ladino and his recognition that the story content embodied in this work was far more important than all the impressive poetic components that are given expression in the Hebrew version.

F. *LdY*. – Some remarks on the translation

The difficulties in translating literary works into Ladino from various other languages are well known. Much has been written in research literature on the quality of the translation of biblical sources and passages of prayer from Hebrew to Ladino,¹⁴ and there has been hardly any research into the issue of translation into Ladino and the quality of Hebrew literary works translated into this language.¹⁵ Some translators offer information on the quality of a translation on the front page of a translated work, and declare that their work is an adaptation (adoptado), imitation (imitado), revision (reeditado), summary (resumido), rewrite (reescrito) or simply a translation (traducido) of the original. The differences in the quality of these translations require in-depth research. The translator of *LdY*. wrote on the front page of this work that it is a translation from the Hebrew – „tresladado del hebreo.“ He made no mistake in describing the work he had done, as the translation is true to the original text, although it ignores most of the original text's components – those that give it its exceptional literary qualities. Y.L. Gordon's unique lyric language has disappeared as if it had never existed; no trace remains of the poetic structure; the rhyming pattern has been completely lost; the division into poetic subsections has been obliterated and instead the translation is presented as a single textual unit. The resulting Ladino translation can be described as an abridged paraphrasing of the original. Even the satirical components of the sharp, acerbic language were lost, and instead the narrative is related as a dry

¹⁴ Bunis, David: *Translating from the Head and from the Heart: The Essentially Oral Nature of the Ladino Bible-Translation Tradition*. *Hommage à Haïm Vidal Sephiha*. Ed. by Winfried Busse; Marie-Christine Varol-Bornes. Bern 1996, pp. 337–357.

¹⁵ For a preliminary study on H.N. Bialik's poetry which was translated into Ladino see: Refael, Shmuel: *חיים נחמן ביאליק בספרותה לאדינו* (Haim Nahman Bialik in Ladino Literature). In: *Ladinar II* (2001), pp. 121–148.

report. It is evident that the task the translator took upon himself was difficult, and that it was more important to him to retain the narrative components of this work than its poetic components. In order to adapt the translation to his target audience, he made a few essential lexical changes. Thus for example, the name of the protagonist, Bat Shua bat Jefer, became Bat Sheba. This change is evidence that the translator himself did not understand the original. Y.L. Gordon deliberately never called the young woman by her name, and throughout the poem she is mentioned only as her father Hefer's daughter. The disregard for the woman's name is intended to serve a clear purpose in Y.L. Gordon's poetics – his desire to show that even the names of women were not important at that time, in contrast to the importance that the rabbis attributed to the man's name. The Ladino translator did not understand this aspect and decided to give the woman a biblical name – Bat Sheba, perhaps due to the similarity in the sound of the names Bat Shua and Bat Sheba.

G. *LdY* – from Ashkenaz to Sefarad via a modern ballad?

A reading of the Ladino text reveals the fact that the translator drew components from the original poem that are common to ballads as a generic form, especially elements that are familiar to us from Sephardic ballads. From a thematic point of view, the story encapsulated in the translation *LdY* could have been a Judeo-Spanish ballad. We could easily claim that this text contains components from the following themes: The epic ballad (el romancero epico); the abandoned bride (la novia abandonada); the anticipation of the husband's return from the dead (la vuelta del marido); the miserable wife (esposa desgraciada) – all these are themes that fired the imagination and were used by Judeo-Spanish women as poetic strategies against their exclusion from the public space. Was the translator of *LdY* from Hebrew to Ladino aware of this? Did he knowingly present a text that included Judeo-Spanish balladic qualities? This is a difficult question to answer, but the fact remains that the balladic qualities of the translation are quite obvious, and it is not unreasonable that the translator intended the translated text specifically for the Judeo-Spanish women, no less than for men. Considering the fact that this work was published in Bulgaria during the period of Enlightenment and secularization, this translation acquires a unique relevance.

Ballads are a pan-Hispanic well known genre and the Judeo-Spanish genre was typical of the feminine realm and was a substantial component of the

closed social networks established by the Judeo-Spanish women.¹⁶ The women would sing ballads in one another's company, and much of the content of this genre was devoted to women and feminine matters. It is no wonder, therefore, that Judeo-Spanish women who knew ancient long ballads by heart passed them on from mother to daughter, and used them for functional purposes (as songs for new mothers, childbirth, weddings, mourning, etc.) as well as for didactic purposes (as songs aimed at shaping behavior patterns, to educate daughters and to warn of dangers). Ballads provided women with a broad tapestry for their imagination, and all the spatial boundaries and restrictions – both in the home and in the so-called public space – simply disappeared.

In my research into ballads I have devoted various chapters to an examination of the nature of the connection that Judeo-Spanish women developed with this ancient Spanish genre.¹⁷ Whether as performers, listeners or as blood-and-flesh or dream characters in the ballads, women played a significant role in the existence of ballads over generations, and the age-old genre was a refuge from the restrictive male institutions.

The dream qualities of the ballads and the imaginary world they hosted served as poetic tool that enable escape for medieval man, and even more so as a literature therapy tool that women used for channeling some of the distress in their daily lives. The ballad is an infinite form of a dream that is no competition for other genres, and its main strength lies in its ability to fire the continuous human-psychological urge to seek out an imaginary utopian world. Northrop Frye compared the ballad of dreams and wishes to the quest for the libido that would distance man from the fears of the real world, but still be within the boundaries of reality.¹⁸ For this reason ballads can be said to facilitate the existence of fabrication in the framework of everyday life. The ballads do not take place in surrealistic worlds, but rather in the very real world of the mortals who dream of the ideal world. Ballads can transport their singers from the real world to the dream world – and therefore cross over to other spaces – depending on the abilities of the heroes and their willingness to make sacrifices to achieve the ideals of their dreams.¹⁹ It appears that women

¹⁶ See: Ben-Naeh, Yaron: חיייהן של נשים יהודיות בירושלים העות'מאנית במאה ה"ט (The Life of Jewish Women in Jerusalem During the 19th Century). In: *El Prezente I* (2007), pp. 179–192.

¹⁷ See: Refael, Shmuel: מאביר הרעיה השבויה: מחקר ברומנסה של דוברי הלאדינו (The Knight and the Captive Lady: A Study of the Judeo-Spanish Romance). Ramat-Gan 1998.

¹⁸ See: Frye, Northrop: *Anatomy of Criticism*. Princeton 1957, p. 203.

¹⁹ See: Refael: *The Knight*, p. 32.

were willing to do just that, to cross the spaces and exchange the places where they were allowed to be others; to go where their imaginations could run wild and unrestricted. The Sephardic ballads were therefore a poetic escape route from the exclusion of women from the masculine public space. Even more than this, the ballad was a feminine strategy for creating new spaces that could even replace the legitimate ones allocated them by the male establishment.

Researchers such as Northrop Frye and Ruth Weber²⁰ realized that the plot of the ballad is constructed from the power relations between two main figures – a man and a woman. The plot of the ballad is always based on this type of power relationship and is a reflection of the everyday life of those who sang the ballads and used them for social-didactic purposes.²¹ Ruth Weber noted that the feminine figures in the ballads can be divided into four distinct categories: A. Noble titles (queen, princess, countess); B. Family relationship (mother, daughter, fiancée, daughter-in-law, mother-in-law); C. Role and situation (temptress, prisoner) D. Religious affiliation (Christian, Jew, Moor). Webber states that ballads reserve a special status for women in four specific situations: victim, lover, heroine or adulteress/deceiver.²²

Every ballad has a dialectic array of figures who play out their roles in opposite directions. Sometimes these figures are a man and a woman, with the man more rooted in the real world, while the woman tends toward the dream world. There can also be two women, with one rooted in the real world, and whose main role is to discipline, educate and control the feminine behavior of her friend in the spirit of the patriarchal androcentric ideology. This dominant figure could be a mother, mother-in-law or some other agent of the male establishment. While the policing figure is faithful to the principles of her dispatchers, the other figure is faithful to her own principles, which lead her to escape, run away and cross over from one reality to another, all in order to gain freedom and freedom of choice. This type of scenario is an indication of ballads as a clearly therapeutic tool. Indeed, Judeo-Spanish women made continuous use of ballads, and despite the objections of the rabbinic establishment and its attempts to silence the Sephardic ballads, these poems

²⁰ See: Webber, Ruth House. *Hacia un análisis de los personajes romancísticos*. In: *El Romancero. Tradición y pervivencia a finales del siglo XX*. Ed. by Pedro M. Piñero Ramírez. Cádiz 1989, pp. 57–64.

²¹ See: Refael: *The Knight*, pp. 32–33.

²² See: Webber: *Hacia un análisis*, pp. 59–60.

stood firm alongside the safeguards of the male restrictions, and flights of fancy to faraway Spain continued to fire the imaginations of Judeo-Spanish women for generations.

One of the principles in the translation of *La punta de la yod* from Hebrew to Ladino was its adaptation for the target audience that would be reading it, by altering the genre for this target audience. This poem in its original format – which was suited to the Ashkenazi readership – had to undergo an adaptation process to make it acceptable to the Sephardic reading audience. Although the translator did not harm the content elements, he did change the poem to suit its target audience. The ballad, which was so well-known to Sephardic Jews, was therefore the most appropriate format for Y.L. Gordon's literary work.

H. *LdY* – the motives for translating this work into Ladino

There were several motives for the translation of this work into Ladino, with the most important being the desire to raise the cry of the deprived status of women via a fateful story. The woman, as portrayed in the story, fits the model of the oppressed woman in the research conducted by Tova Rosen, who closely examined the representation of the woman and the feminine and her exclusion from medieval Hebrew literature.²³ Rosen's research found that in order to complete the exclusion of the woman from the masculine domain – the androcentric domain with its misogynist characteristics, as she described it – there was also an attempt to exclude the woman even from the textual domain, which was accomplished in several ways. Even when women seemed to be present or represented in a literary text, there were ways to make them disappear, as Rosen writes:

“They can be presented as abstracts without bodies; or on the other hand, as objectified bodies devoid of subjectivity and without vitality or personality. In both such cases, they are absent.”²⁴

Rosen adds that it is possible to transfer women to the metaphoric, imaginary or fantasy realm, and that women can be poeticized, narrativized and dramatized – in other words, they undergo textual manipulation imposed on them by male literature.

²³ Rosen, Tova: קיראה מגדרית בספרות העברית בימי הביניים (Unveiling Eve: Reading Gender in Medieval Hebrew Literature). Tel-Aviv 2006.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 45.

The exclusion of the woman from the masculine domain was an inseparable part of the construction of the feminine role. The distancing of women from the public domain was done because of the fear of harm to their sexual purity and the social order – both the Jewish and the Moslem, and was preceded by a long, continuous educational process aimed primarily at domesticating the woman and turn her into the “ideal wife,” who Rosen believes is nothing more than a wish that can never be realized, and if it is, such a women is a rare occurrence beyond compare. The man’s goal – which is expressed in androcentric manifestos with patriarchal characteristics – is to acquire an ideal female figure, a kind of “shelf product” whose patriarchal design is a continuous matriarchal task, and to this end she must be disciplined and domesticated. While the mother is in charge of the domestication and discipline process until the daughter’s wedding day, the man’s task is to hone the policing and supervision tool and thus – in Rosen’s words – “married life becomes an arena for training the rebellious wife.”²⁵

Conclusion

The translation of *LdY.* into Ladino can therefore be viewed as a kind of feminist manifesto designed to draw attention to the status of the woman in Jewish society, a manifesto whose purpose is to warn against the rabbinic establishment’s control of Jewish life and a manifesto that has the potential to be a lighthouse for Sephardic society, to warn against its adoption of strict halakhic customs, as these are manifest in Ashkenazi society. It was well known that the Sephardic interpretation of halakha was much more moderate, and even though women were subject to male discipline and policing in both societies, in Ashkenazi society this policing and supervision was exceptionally strict. Sephardic women found an interesting way to circumvent the male supervision framework, and via the ballad, the folk tale and even literary works translated for them from Hebrew to Ladino, the women displayed feminine strength, power and hope. Even though *LdY.* has a harsh patriarchal overtone, a Sephardic reading of this text can result in a slightly different interpretation – an interpretation that glorifies the feminine power concealed in the text, the determination to change her fate and the desire to right a terrible wrong.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 45.