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Re:orienting/writing the Mediterranean

Alcalay, Ammiel, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1989

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RE-ORIENTING / WRITING THE MEDITERRANEAN

by

AMMIEL ALCALAY

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in
Comparative Literature in partial fulfillment of the
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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Date

Allen M. Smith
Chair of Examining Committee

January 30, 1989
Date

Robert C. Simpson
Executive Officer

Allen M. Smith
Brian Pike
Jason Smith
Supervisory Committee

Introduction

The institutionalized transmission of European culture has deftly extricated references to the Levant, with its semitic past, from most, if not all standard versions of its curriculum. Writing, even more than other art forms, has suffered the consequences of this: major works and literatures remain largely unknown, attended to by an ever dwindling corps of scholars ready and able to muster all the prerequisites needed to grapple with difficult texts, far removed from what appears more familiar to us. But are these texts really more difficult and distant than many others we consider "ours" or is there not just more than a bit of mystification at work here, estranging us - to paraphrase the Asiatic Heraclitus - from what we may be most familiar with?

Re-Orienting / Writing the Mediterranean is an amateur's attempt to shed some light on a realm that has been left in the hands of experts and ideologues too long. While the erudite guard the bastions of power that serve as their own exclusive enclave (forever shrouding the real and fertile connections between peoples and cultures in the veils of arcane knowledge), my intent has been to chip away at the ramparts with sudden bursts that might occasionally break through to illuminate those dark confines deemed too complex or exotic for the uninitiated to enter. The convoluted punctuation and syntax of the

title itself should give some sense of my direction, implying both the stance of the amateur and the dedication of commitment: take a memo (Re:) about getting your bearings, try to look at things in a different light, in order to set them straight. Any attempt to "right" such volatile terrain, however, exposes one to accusations of righteousness, the replacement of one exclusivity with another. Setting something straight, of course, also presupposes that something's gone wrong, that once things were one way and now they're another. This, too, leaves the work open to a broadside, categorical critique in which the very structure of the work can be seen as a set up: once there was unity and harmony, now there is fragmentation and dissonance. Yet, the central categories that concern me - the qualities of mobility, diversity, autonomy and translatability possessed by the Jews of the Levant for a very long time - have eroded drastically. The marker for this, of course, is literal and unequivocal: most of the Jewish communities of the Mediterranean and Arab world simply no longer exist. Those that do are but a mere shadow of their former selves. The deeply tragic nature and complex human consequences of this fact, it seems to me, cannot be overstated and are most vividly illustrated by the effects of the often brutal socialization process undergone by Mediterranean and Arab Jews in Israel, another theme that courses throughout Re:Orienting.

While I would obviously hold the qualities noted above as positive, they relate solely to themselves and do not necessarily imply further harmonies or idealized relations between either Arabs

and Jews or Jews and themselves. The paradigms chosen to illustrate these qualities simply provide a catalog of possibilities that, given the constrictions of the present context, seem almost inconceivable. In addition, the work is clearly framed not only by what could be termed the negative aspects - the bitterness of exile(s) and lost past(s) - but by the very lively and innovative culture(s) now being produced in the Levant, by Arabs and Jews. This, too, signals an effort to move past the critique of institutional orientalism into an examination of how cultures produce themselves out of the materials available to them. I would hope, at any rate, that a careful reading of the work, along with some of the qualifications given in this brief introduction can help to, if not dispel, then at least hold in abeyance the kinds of objections to my approach that are most likely to come up. Many of these, it seems to me, may just be a case of misplaced expectations; Re:Orienting does not, by any means, even pretend to be a comprehensive history of the life and culture of Jews in the Levant.

The underlying theme of Re:Orienting / Writing the Mediterranean is threefold: first, the relationship(s) between Jew(s) and Arab(s) on the literary, cultural, historical, social and political planes, seen through paradigmatic episodes; second, the relationship of the Jew to the Arab within him or herself; and third (a notion so foreign to the modern dogma of the Jew as eternal stranger that it might appear almost unthinkable), the relationship of the native Jew to a native space, namely, the Levant. For the "West," itself a construct, the "Arab" largely remains a constructed and self-perpetuating "enigma," ruled by primal and unfamiliar forces, operating

through a crude and, ultimately, inscrutable logic. Nor has the Arab Jew fared much better, accruing a similar set of characteristics though to a lesser degree. Being, for some reason, more familiar, the Arab Jew can still be reformed, given the right circumstances, to the point of becoming one of "us." While seemingly polemic, these are simply givens of most academic and popular discourse on the subject, examples of which abound at all levels. Despite this, ReOrienting is not about victors and victims: to pit a powerless and gnawed at "East" against a voracious "West," with its consuming imagery, energy and capital, is to propose an argument as blind in its reliance on essences as the one it purportedly was trying to topple. The model, rather, is ecological, through the reclamation and recycling of antithetical episodes that can perforate circumscribed versions of history and serve to inform a forward looking future.

Human history is no one else's; its shape and bent literally determine our future, through images and stereotypes, fears and hopes, textbooks and politics, realms and relations fertile with new union and creation and those that are dismissed out of hand, not even deemed imaginable. Not to hold the most current manifestation of Jewish/Arab relations (the double transfer of Jews out of the Arab world and Arabs out of Palestine, along with the present site of encounter in the disputed lands of Israel and Palestine) as the clearest lens through which any productive interpretations of the past have to be refracted, seemed to me, at best, disingenuous. Taking this roughly 50 year period (from the 1930's to the present)

as one limit point, I took my cue (for determining where to set the other), from what has always been uppermost in the culture of the Jews: language and books. This other limit point ranges between the appearance of Sa'adia Gaon's Arabic translation of the Bible and the appearance of Arabic meters, forms and themes in the 10th c. Hebrew poetry of his prize student, Dunash Ben Labrat. These two literary events also limit the sweeping social and economic changes brought about by what S.D. Goitein called "the great bourgeois revolution" of the 9th c.; it was then that the long process transforming the Jews from a primarily agricultural to a primarily urban people had reached its final stage. By sticking to these two points - marked specifically on one end (in approximately 965) by the appearance of Dunash's famous wine song (the first "secular" Hebrew poem), and on the other by the appearance (in 1951) of the Yemenite laments - I have suggested a time span within whose limits (with before and after), a certain fluidity exists. This fluidity does not signal an ahistorical aversion to the specificities of time and place, but is an attempt (within a very broad framework), to mirror the conditions of space, at least as I have presented them, in the Levant. My sole justification for this is decidedly historical: Jews lived and traveled, settled down and created from one end of this realm to the other throughout the 1000 year period in question.

On the literary side, the texts of the Levant have long been held at a safe distance by the intimidating amount of things a reader supposedly needs to know before taking a crack at them. The subordination of writing to other concerns - philosophical, religious, political,

linguistic, anthropological or exotic - has effectively stifled the possibility of these texts entering a common literary vocabulary. While ReOrienting / Writing the Mediterranean certainly takes into account the functions and meaning of writing within social and political contexts, it approaches the writing itself as part of a "general economy" in which literary works, no matter where they are from or how "marginal" they might seem, must be accorded, if not equality, then equal intentions of quality or "seriousness." In this respect, juxtaposing a narrative of Jabes with the autobiography of the great Egyptian singer Umm Kulthum in a chapter where the French theorist Baudrillard, the American performance poet David Antin and post-modern critics help explicate contemporary prose and poetry emerging from Cairo and Beirut, should not be seen as an outlandish and arbitrary whim but an exercise in testing new parameters of knowledge.

ReOrienting is presented in something close to the essay form; as such, it maintains the original intent of that form - to test out, try or experiment - while differing from many essays in its solid scholarly basis and apparatus. One of its primary aims, in addition to those already mentioned, is to incite and instigate further exploration into a fertile area that has been either neglected or kept off limits. The bibliography is meant to give readers an idea of just how much writing from the Levant is available in English or other European languages, and just how uncritical it is not to take it into account by "reorienting" one's own referential parameters. Given the fact that this work encompasses an enormous variety and range

of texts while breaking new organizational ground, there may be more than a few rough edges left. I can only hope that those who find things of interest and value here and go on to investigate them further will refine and improve upon my conjectures.

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1.

Discontinued lines / Drafts for an itinerary

When the LORD your God brings you to the land you are about to invade and occupy, and He dislodges many nations before you - the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations much larger than you - and the LORD your God delivers them to you and you defeat them, you must doom them to destruction: grant them no terms and give them no quarter...

The LORD said to Moses:
You are soon to lie with your fathers. This people will thereupon go astray after the alien gods in their midst, in the land which they are about to enter; they will forsake me and break My covenant which I made with them...

Therefore, write down this poem and teach it to the people of Israel, put it in their mouths, in order that this poem may be My witness against the people of Israel...

This poem
shall confront them as a witness, since it will
never be lost from the mouth of their offspring.

Deuteronomy 7:1-3; 31:16,21

It is easy to say: My homeland is where I was born.
But you have returned to the place of your birth
and found nothing. What does that mean? It is easy
to say: My homeland is the land where I shall die.
But you can die anywhere. Possibly you will die on
the border between two countries...

You abandon
the past when you write a history of it. Make
amends with your past, date your wounds and
your estrangement...

Mahmoud Darwish / Fragments from a Diary of Everyday Sadness

The only thing that begins by reflecting itself
is history. And this fold, this furrow, is the
Jew. The Jew who elects writing which elects
the Jew... (Jacques Derrida)

difficulty of being a Jew, which coincides
with the difficulty of writing; for Judaism
and writing are but the same waiting, the
same hope, the same depletion.
(Edmond Jabès)'

I.

The modern myth of the Jew as pariah, outsider and wanderer has,
ironically enough, been translated into the post-modern myth of the
Jew as "other," an other that collapses into the equation:
writing=Jew=Book. By what sleight of hand? Metaphor? Metaphysics?
Such an exclusive address (whether it's an open or a closed book),
ultimately obscures the necessity of mapping out a space in which
the Jew was native, not a stranger but an absolute inhabitant of
time and place. The urgency of reiterating not only the memory but
the possibility of such a world can be felt most acutely now, upon
the present scene, where the political context of "the people of the
Book" has undergone a radical transformation while the terms used
to record and interpret their history and culture have not only

remained static but even regressed into a kind of fixed, iconic solidity.

Writing and reading - interpretation - no matter where, have a lot to do with the unearthing, the grasp, the mastery of and giving over to both presences and absences: reading as recovery and relapse; the ink of writing as life-blood, animator, nourishment - the book as fertile ground nurtured by ink. But the "furrow," the "fold" that may be both "history" and the "Jew," run the risk of diffusion, dispersion and, finally, inertia: like anything that looms large in a people's memory, this field can become muddy and these furrows turn to drainage ditches that empty out into a still-born swamp, final resting place for what is allowed to go unquestioned, uninterpreted and unrelated to social fact or present circumstance. Paradoxically, the movement of memory too often reappears in the form of inert, unyielding images: resilient and indelible, their clarity is blinding: in his Commentary On the Mishnah, also known as The Eight Chapters, Maimonides wrote:

One action may resemble another action, so that the two actions are thought to be identical even though they are not. For example, consider three dark places: the sun shines upon one of them, and it is illumined; the moon rises over the second place, and it is illumined; a lamp is lit in the third place, and it is illumined. Light is found in each one of them, but the reason for the first light and its cause is the sun, the cause of the second is the moon, and the cause of the third is fire... There is no notion common to all of them except through equivocation. Grasp this notion, for it is extraordinarily marvelous.²

History, with its rigid paradigms of order, comes to shore up the insecure ramparts of a failing memory: untangling the strands of the past - or submitting to their confusing but exhilarating intricacy - cannot simply be an act of recognition, of fitting events into fixed patterns, of just seeing the light; it must begin, rather, by apprehending the source(s) of light and the present objects they shade or illuminate, and follow with an active, incessant engagement in the process of naming and re-naming, covering and uncovering, consuming and producing new relations, investigating hierarchies of power and effect: distilling light into sun, moon and fire. Just as maps interpret and redefine terrain in the image of their makers, readings can yield both retro and prospective orders: in the Crimean port of Theodosia, not far (in mind) "from Smyrna and Baghdad," Osip Mandelstam wrote of a "bookish earth" and dreamt of a place that, within the inherited wisdom of its people, embodied an allegiance to words. Sentenced to internal exile, Mandelstam placed the form of his vision and the memory of his biblical ancestry in a Mediterranean world in which Spain was central: sowing dormant seeds, he unearthed his own geneology.² In the world and of the world, these Jews - settled in and moving between far-flung communities in constant communication revolving around trade going through the Mediterranean, lived in a space stretching from the Maghreb (West) to the Mashreq (East), "from Samarkand, Central Asia and the port cities of India and Indonesia in the East, to Seville, Spain, and Sijilmasa, Morocco, in

the West; from Aden, Arabia, in the South, to Constantinople, the capital of Byzantium in the North."

But a deeply ingrained sense of nationalism, along with misconceptions as to the extent or possibility of physical, intellectual and spiritual mobility in times more or less remote from ours, makes it hard to envision a world in which passage was neither exotic nor indifferently equivocal. At the same time, institutionalized and conventional patterns and hierarchies for the study or ways of thinking about Western civilization and European culture (Greece/Rome/Medieval Christendom/Renaissance/Baroque/Enlightenment and The Industrial Age followed by various "posts"), has left little room for Semitic matters, particularly - in this case - the development of Hebrew culture within an Arabic and Islamic context. At the same time, despite the current resurgence of interest and scholarship in Judaica, the lack of self-criticism and questioning regarding the assumptions under which many aspects of Jewish culture have been examined, transmitted and institutionalized in the modern era is surprising; this is particularly true for literature, since so much of the cultural space of Judaism is taken up by writing. The preferred modes of approach seem to be dismissal on one hand and axe-grinding partisanship on the other: dismissal is achieved through the deceptively generous granting of a begrudgingly acknowledged, hotly debated but meticulously researched or wholeheartedly approving but entirely uncritical status of "influence," serving to relegate the

entire realm to the marginal. For students of comparative literature, the most well known chapter of this tale is the continuing controversy regarding either Hebrew or Arabic "influence" on the early Romance lyric and the European narrative. While much nitpicking takes place in the field, critics have not really made any significant attempts to place the corpus of early and late medieval Hebrew and Arabic lyric and narrative within the context of a still very Mediterranean Europe whose contours would run from the Troubadours to the end of the Baroque period and include, amongst many other things, The Canterbury Tales, El Libro de Buen Amor, The Decameron, the picaresque novel, Tirant Lo Blanc and Cervantes; the dolce stil novo, Dante, Petrarch, the English courtiers and metaphysicals, and the Spanish and Italian flourishes of Lope de Vega, Calderon, Gongora, Ariosto and Marino.

The axe-grinders, on the other hand, manage to achieve the same status of marginality by insisting on an ethno-centric revenge that reinstates a "centrality" or order to the events or achievements within the culture that has neither been clearly defined on critical grounds nor responsibly weighed in relation to the present social and political position of the objects of their scrutiny. The subordination of Hebrew language study at its inception in Europe to theology, relegating much rabbinic writing such as textual commentary to the field of religious polemic rather than literary criticism, poetics or linguistics; the lack of a less polemically ideological and more historically acute inquiry into

the Jewish/Islamic symbiosis due to the ossification of Jewish/Arab relations within the schema of institutionalized Orientalism and super-power politics; or the use of works written by Jews in Spain during the Inquisition almost exclusively in terms of their documentary yield are all examples of a marked tendency to see everything - like the perennial elephant of the Jewish joke - in terms of one of the many forms of the "Jewish question"; as history, theology, a question of identity, the national fate, or some other extrinsic factor that is, itself, often based on questionable or mystified assumptions. The willingness to use writing as documentary evidence for or against one supposition or another has resulted both in a loss of autonomy - a diminution in the intrinsic possibilities of the writing as writing - as well as effecting a subtle denigration of the truer worth of the writing as potentially useful material in the context of the present.

Stress is thus put on the division between something conceived of as "tradition," a hermetically sealed area cut off from the "worldly" concerns of other writers, and the "perils" of attraction to that worldliness that is secretly admired and often considered or assumed to be superior to "tradition." This self-imposed bind isolates and diminishes the fuller possibilities of the writing to the point of alienating it from a whole range of potential readers through a combination of parochialism, lack of intellectual rigour and sound contextual comparison, and an unwillingness to go beyond the trauma of catastrophe and

powerlessness to reinterpret and confront the writing not in light of nostalgia but through the current terms and implications of Jewish political empowerment. On another level, a number of these issues have crystallized in the very odd "exchanges" currently taking place institutionally between literature and Jewish studies departments. While second or third hand deconstructionist methods are reluctantly being allowed to enter the realm of Jewish studies, this innovation is seen as a sign of openness in relation to the common currency of other fields. On the other hand, the complete embrace of deconstruction within a neo-Kabbalistic framework by the "humanist" readers of English and Comparative literature departments, even further obfuscates any notion of outlining the parameters of a possible or probable "Jewish" culture. In both cases, these tendencies seem to be tactics to avoid getting down to what the proper business of each of these branches of the academy should presumably be, namely, the thorough embrace of each of their respective subjects to further knowledge and gain a subtler - and hopefully applicable - understanding of human activity through time. In both cases, again, much realia falls through the cracks: English departments contemplate Heidegger while studiously ignoring Stein and Williams and the poets associated with or forming part of the clusters known as the Objectivists, the Black Mountain School, the New York School and the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets; neo-Derridian readings are exercised on the almost ludicrously misrepresentative selection of American verse presented in something

like Helen Vendler's Harvard Book of Contemporary American Poetry, while the French claim, in a representative anthology that includes poets rarely even mentioned in American English departments that "What constitutes American literature, in the second half of the twentieth century, is poetry, indeed the explosion of poetry."¹⁶

In Jewish studies, a completely innocuous form of revisionism obscures issues that lie at the very basis of the validity of its current practice: questions arising, for instance, from the fact that one of the most innovative modern Hebrew writers just happens to be a Palestinian Israeli cannot even be broached within the confines of the current atmosphere, despite the far reaching implications it holds for a non ethno-centric reading and re-reading of Jewish and Hebrew writing. The relocation of the central focus of Jewish life back within the heart of the Mediterranean and Arab world and the creation of a distinctly new nationality through whose filter the past is constantly being reinterpreted contradicts many of the prevalent divisions and suppositions regarding the study and categorization of "Jewish" texts. Most current modes of approach can almost fully be derived from certain Euro-centric biases based on models that remain inadequate and incapable of conveying the particular differences and diversities of other Jewish experience. Of all the Jewish pasts, since it is almost impossible to speak of a recent single past, that of Mediterranean and Arab Jewry has been recorded, transmitted and interpreted in a way most alien not only to itself but to the very character and

basis of the more ancient structures out of which it grew. Disenfranchised, the head and heart safely removed from the body politic, this Jewry has remained an anomalous and enigmatic entity to the vision of Judaism predominant since the French revolution, a vision that finds its primary reference point (distorting even to the diversity of its own experience) in the restrictive, oppressive (but paradoxically protective) space of the ghetto, and is largely shaped by opposition and dichotomy: body and spirit, internal and external, secular and religious. Within this schema, the history and memory of Mediterranean and Arab Jews, the life space of their creative power and the almost singular diversity of their experience have been reduced to a frantic shuttle between light and darkness (the light of the golden age, the darkness of the expulsion from Spain and its aftermath), without ever fully apprehending their sources of light or the subtle and sundry tones of their recalcitrant shades.

This 'old' Mediterranean world coincides with but is not exclusive to Islamic rule; although its central source of nourishment remains the fertile symbiosis of Arabic, Jewish and Romance culture created in the Western Caliphate of Spain from the 10th to the 13th c. and known as the golden age, the culture formed there also refers back to Baghdad and the Eastern Caliphate and its roots, connections

and conflicts with Persia, Byzantium, the remnants of the Hellenic world and the ancient Near East. Prospective as well, it survives the Inquisition to go forward and feed Europe, to enrich and stabilize the Ottoman Empire, to collude and collide with the Enlightenment before crashing head on into the powers and colonialism, often emerging fragmented and uncertain, oddly bereft of its own nativity, arbitrarily cut up into radically revised national "units," constructs as synthetic - if not even more so - than Mandelstam's own elected affinities. The dense and intricate interconnectedness of this world - both its conceptual and concrete though not necessarily political unity and texture - remained remarkably intact, particularly for the Jews, well into the 20th c. Although by no means always smooth or uniform, the identical geographical space of this world both sustained and outlasted a variety of ruling, administrative and ideological orders through communal and familial ties, along with an international network of trade and communications (often intertwined with a strategy of economically advantageous marriages linking and expanding family and business conglomerates") all bound together and woven through by educational, religious and intellectual authorities, traditions and institutions. The early and decisive formation and structuring of these orders and connections, "the displacement of the center of gravity of Judaism from the frontiers of Persia to the Western Mediterranean" did not come about through "the internal social or ideological logic of Judaism;" it came

about, rather, through the expanded frontiers - physical, social and intellectual - forged by Islam:

With the great Arab conquests following the rise of Islam, which converted all the countries between Spain and Persia into a single territory dominated by the new religion, and soon after by the Arabic language as well, the majority of the Jewish people of that time came under Arab rule. Thus began the long and great period of Jewish-Arab symbiosis... At the time of the Muslim-Arab conquest, the majority of the Jews were still engaged in agriculture and manual labor... The Jewish people, too, more or less, disappeared as an agricultural people during the seventh and eighth centuries, but, unlike other ancient populations, returned to life as a nation of merchants and artisans. This transformation was due to the great "bourgeois revolution" of the ninth century. Due to this revolution, the civilization of the Middle East during early medieval times was characterized by its commerce, industry and beaurocratic organization, at a time when Western Europe was mainly agricultural and dominated by knights and feudal lords. The Jews took their full share in this great Middle-Eastern mercantile civilization, in particular from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries; and it was at that time and in that part of the world that Judaism itself received its final shape.⁷

The journey leading from this period to the only other subsequent period imbued with such unequivocal and far-reaching significance for Jews of the region - the replacement of religious, communal and cultural affiliations by a national entity as the focus of world Jewish life and the years between 1948 and 1967 when roughly 800,000 Arab, Persian, Turkish and Mediterranean Jews immigrated to the new state of Israel only to undergo a

proleterianization process directly opposite that of the 9th c. enbourgeoisement - is, indeed, long, intricate and relentlessly complex. Even naming these "natives" accurately is problematic. Are they Asian, African, North African, Middle-Eastern, Turko-Iranian, Sephardi, Arab, non-Western, Eastern or even, as they have been pejoratively labeled in modern Israel, "children of the Oriental ethnic groups"? Every category seems to come at the expense of another, either leaving something out or succumbing to a negative definition that presupposes one group to be the standard of measurement or all groups to be in possession of some common, primordial "essence." As Ilan Halevi notes, "these vaguenesses of vocabulary, reservations and obstructions reflect in reality the shifting character of the barriers themselves, and the fact that the language is not ready for the social reordering that is underway."² No matter how diverse or connected these communities might have been in the old world, the radical displacement and realignment to and in the new order saw to it that they would share a common fate, albeit one with entirely different, unfamiliar and externally imposed elements binding them together.

People from places as various as Marrakesh, Baghdad, Aden and Isfahan all found themselves dispossessed in the promised land. The only communities left in that ancient world (many with histories pre-dating the Islamic empires, going back as far as the Babylonian exile in 586 B.C.), are in North Africa, Turkey, Iran and Syria. A fraction of their original size and distinction, all told

they number about 60,000 or 70,000 according to recent estimates. Those who didn't come to Israel settled primarily in France, England, North and South America, following the immigration patterns of their respective compatriots: those from Asia Minor, for example, arrived in the Pacific Northwest with other Greek refugees after the turn of the century; Jews from Syria and Lebanon settled in Brooklyn and Latin America in the same waves that brought Christians and Muslims to seek their fortunes in the New World; those from Cairo and Alexandria joined Greek, Armenian and other foreign nationals also forced to start new lives in various diasporas; those from Algeria, Tunis and Morocco found themselves in a very familiar milieu with other North African emigrés in Paris and Montreal. While those with the means or luck of reaching Europe or the New World were able, for the most part, to maintain or successfully strive toward the same economic, educational and cultural standards that would have been expected of them in their countries of origin, the situation in Israel was, to say the least, somewhat different. Heirs to a truly astounding diversity of experience and culture (manifested in the unbroken Hebrew textual tradition whose works span the generic gamut while even adding some new ones, as well as innumerable writings in at least 20 or so odd languages, not to mention the vast store-house of native and hybrid musical and artistic styles and conventions), these Jews found themselves succinctly dismissed, in Ben Gurion's infamous phrase, as "human dust;" raw material to be remolded into the

idealized forms acceptable to the new state's professed European/Socialist ideology. The "socialists," however, turned out to be the owners, while the "Europeans" turned out to be Poles, Russians and others from beyond the pale of settlement who had never reconciled themselves with their own marginality in relation to a glorified "west."

The prevailing terms of complete economic and cultural hegemony on the part of a particular sector of Eastern European and Russian Jews put the new (often unwilling and certainly bewildered) immigrant/refugees into a state of radical alienation and displacement, despite the fact of their citizenship. Denigrated and stigmatized for their primarily Arabic, Levantine, Turkish or Persian culture, language and communal structure became the primary targets at which the darts of socialization were aimed. Housing, naturally, was the most efficient way of tackling both "problems." By being scattered along the borders, two birds were killed with one stone: as a buffer zone for continuing acts of resistance by exiled Palestinians, these Jews could be initiated into the state's rites of power, suspicion and fear regarding the Arabs; by breaking up families and communities and institutionalizing practically all forms of expression, ties to language and native culture would as well dissipate and "absorption" into a distinctly new but not yet very clearly delineated national identity could begin. That most ironic of all prophecies (the only place in the biblical text where Sepharad, that site to be of Arabic/Hebrew symbiosis, is

mentioned), had come true - in spades: "And the exiles of Jerusalem, who are in Sepharad, shall occupy the cities of the Negev." Which is precisely, almost to the letter, as it happened. The memory of Jerusalem (however faded for some), and the legal, liturgical, poetic and mystical texts written in or emerging from Sepharad/al-Andalus (whether ritually practiced or not), still formed (in conjunction with modern French, English, Italian, Persian, Turkish or Arabic education), the "semiotic" parameters, if not the basis, of much of the "exiled" "native's" broader cultural boundaries. The new curriculum, however, based itself on a combination of 19th century Russian, Eastern European and Hebrew Enlightenment ideology and texts along with the narrowest mode of Ashkenazi religious culture; political life was monolithically paternalistic and party oriented while the cities of the Negev were little more than border outposts or cynical company towns to which people were dispatched in what ended up a singularly one-way trip.

Here, though, "one must be careful not to reduce this movement to a single pattern, or this problematic to a single and contingent event. The Jews of the Arab countries did not spontaneously uproot themselves from the world where they had lived for centuries moved solely by their own will, and without heartbreaks: the double pressure, both repulsion and attraction, of the changing Arab society in which they were living, and the alluring devices used by the Zionists already established in Palestine, played a decisive role in this self-extraction."¹⁴ The background to this mass

exodus stretches back at least a hundred years to the colonial presence in the region and the varying forms of competitive protectionism offered the people(s) of the Book, both Jews and Christians. The inroads, conflicts and pressures superimposed by colonial rule both upset the traditional forms of confessional autonomy and went into creating "an unequal process which linked the Jewry of the Mediterranean Islamic countries to the movement of European expansion, and detached it from the fate of the Arab peoples."¹¹ While this may have been particularly true in the case of Tunisia, Algeria and Egypt, the situation in Morocco, for example, was quite different - there, it was the Moroccan King himself who offered protection to the Jews, even in defiance of the Vichy regime. In a country like Iraq, on the other hand, the situation was defined by its own unique history: there Jews were thoroughly assimilated into Arab society and did not (despite the violence of 1941 that was ignited by social unrest, nurtured by British non-intervention and fuelled by struggles between Axis collaborators, deposed rulers and up and coming opportunists) act out premonitions of impending doom, as indicated by the fact that, "Even after the proclamation of Israeli statehood in 1948, new schools were still under construction - out of nine schools established by the community after Iraqi independence, six were built in the 1940's, including two in 1948-49."¹² Snapshots from this period testify to analagous situations in other countries: a packed hall full of attentive parents in Aleppo in 1936; girls in

wide silk trousers and vests posing before a dance performance at the Alliance in Damascus in 1939 or joining other students in the streets to demonstrate against "Imperialism" that same year; groups of scouts holding signs celebrating Israel's first independence day in Tripoli; exhibits at Hebrew book week in Tunis in 1956; lines of neatly dressed students under trees shedding their autumn leaves in a schoolyard in Rabat; camping trips and school plays in Teheran and Abadan; flower girls before the bride and groom at a fashionable wedding at the Magen Abraham Synagogue in Beirut in the 1960's.¹³

But beneath the surface of these contained images, a tremendous push and pull of often diametrically opposed forces was being exerted on and within the Jewish communities. The exclusive ideology of the Zionist movement, along with its Euro-centrism and utter disregard for Arabs did not simplify matters. By essentializing all of Jewish experience into the single objective of recreating the "homeland" and having all Jews settle in it, the prevailing forces within the movement often allied themselves to precisely those reactionary forces that would rather lend their support to a far off Jewish state than open their own gates to the suffering and persecuted Jews of Europe. Besides attempting to appropriate Jewish history in one fell swoop, the practical repercussions of their push toward materializing the projection of historical claims through the establishment of new physical, economic and cultural realities in Palestine could be felt as a

ripple effect throughout the Arab world, and sensed most acutely within the Jewish communities there, now placed within the binding dilemma of a double allegiance. The use of historical right, however, did not pass unnoticed or unopposed. Skepticism and outright antagonism (not to mention resistance) came from both the people it purported to displace as well as Jews of the region who foresaw some of the potential dangers involved. Yusuf al-Kabir, for example, a prominent Jewish lawyer from Baghdad, had this to say regarding the Balfour declaration in a letter to the Iraq Times on 5 November 1938:

Reconstruction of historical geography, if accepted as practical theory, would for instance bring the case of Ulster to ground, and provide a recognized legal basis for German claims on Eastern Europe. In a certain influential section of the German press, the theory is now being held out that Eastern Europe, up to the Volga, was in some remote time wholly occupied by Germans. If the legal basis is accepted, there remains nothing but to work out history in detail for a suitable epoch, and everyone knows that modern science can do anything. Moreover, if one goes reconstituting history two thousand years back there is no reason why one should not go still further back, say four or five thousand years, and presently have the world ruled by militant archaeology.'⁴

This archaeology would, indeed, become more and more militant as the impending shift from "strife" to "war" in Palestine and the subsequent intensification of the stakes implied in that transition exacerbated many of the already tenuous social and political relations in the surrounding countries. At the same time (while bandying about the ultimately meaningless categories of "Jews" and

"Arabs," particularly in these specific contexts), too little attention has been paid to the specifics of each situation. Class structure, for example, and the social struggles involved, also played a decisive role in determining the direction things went: often, as in other periods throughout the history of the region, wealthier Jews could find themselves in a much better position than poor Muslims while the fate of poor Jews was often more closely linked to that of the Arab masses. Amongst Jews themselves, there were distinct divisions between the more culturally Arab working class (who lived in the traditional old Jewish Quarters, the hara or the mellah), and the more Europeanized middle and upper classes who tended to live in the newer quarters; as Jacques Hassoun, an Egyptian Jew wrote: "From the late 1920s one could observe in some of these synagogues the ceremony of the "Initiation Religieuse des Jeunes Filles" in which young girls, all dressed in white, their heads veiled, candles in hand, would walk in procession in a manner all too reminiscent of a Catholic ceremony. What relation could have existed between those Jews and the Jews of the hara? Between the world of the Jewish khawagat, oriented to Paris and London and crowned by the glittering circle of Jewish beys, pashas, and barons - and the world of galabia and caftan, of ful, malukhia, and qulqas, of those for whom even the siddur (prayer book) had to be translated into Arabic?"¹⁰

In addition, changing relations of authority and generational dynamics fuelled new conflicts: within the Jewish community,

manifestations of this can be seen in the record of an extended and deep involvement on the part of younger people with various Arab nationalist, communist and socialist movements, as well as branches of the Zionist movement itself, often against the wishes of an older, more conservative and traditional generation. Those who won the struggle, however (a new Arab ruling class and a united Zionist movement), did so at the expense of both the suppression and defeat of movements based on principles cutting across ethnic lines and religious differences, and any genuine tolerance that the older, more traditional generation might have once possessed. Here, the warring parties managed to find common ground. The increasingly reactionary Arab regimes also had their proverbial two birds and they, too, could be killed with one stone: by expelling the Jews, they could confiscate a substantial amount of wealth and property; at the same time, the Jewish question could be manipulated as a scapegoat to mask their own inert rhetoric, indifference and lack of resolve regarding the question of Palestine which, in turn, could help deflect attention from the more pressing, volatile and brutal power struggles and social conflicts transpiring in their own countries. The Zionists, desperately in need of a large influx of "raw material" to inhabit and rebuild what remained after the "miraculous cleansing of the land," suddenly rediscovered the world of Arab Jewry, upon whom it had previously placed strict immigration quotas.¹⁶

In this often cynical "rediscovery," gathered in the place of "origin" (the site professed as primordial source by the ideology of return), Mediterranean and Arab Jews found themselves completely cut off from the most enduring sources of their culture, not to mention that of the peoples amongst whom they had lived for thousands of years. There can be little doubt that the most short-sighted and devastating effect of the socialization process undergone by the Arab Jews following their mass exodus was "de-Arabization," most acutely felt in the loss of Arabic as a native tongue and, as corollary to that, their loss of grounding in any native tongue, forced, as they were, to conform to the non-semitic structure, syntax and pronunciation of "new Hebrew."¹⁷ The repulsion towards things Arabic projected by the prevailing ideology was thus inscribed phonetically within the very deepest recesses of the personal psyche, within language itself. Most uncharacteristically for "the people of the Book," Israeli Jews - like the unvowelled consonants of Semitic alphabets or a voice without a text - have become disembodied, mono-lingual, mono-cultural. The age old system of checks and balances, illustrated by the paradigm of following the reading of the portion of the week from the Hebrew Bible in synagogue with an interpretive translation in Aramaic or Arabic, has gone by the boards. The generative model of reading the outside world into the text and then reprocessing it out again through active interpretation,¹⁸ has been superceded by a regressive instinct: the nostalgic desire to be relieved from the

strain of individual responsibility (represented by the burden of a "reading" whose high stakes and universal application are implicit), in order to collapse within the collective. This "absorption" of the old world's ancient Jews within a national Israeli collective has managed "what no empire had been able, or wanted, to achieve:" the exchange of the legal, covenantal and communal basis of Jewish existence for the racial, the ethnic and the national, a rupture whose further implications and deeper marks are only beginning to surface.

II.

One of the sources usually not considered in tracing the archaeology of this exchange can be found in the initial collapse of terminology used by European settlers to describe both Arabs and Arab Jews. This dynamic can be seen, for example, in the case of Albert Antebbi, a leader of the Palestinian Jewish community from Damascus who had sharply criticized the prevailing Zionist policies at the turn of the century, and the initial encounter of the Hebrew novelist and critic Yosef Haim Brenner with the promised land. Brenner, born in the Ukraine in 1881, came to settle in Palestine in 1909; his first evening in Haifa, "seeing a band of Arab urchins insult him and his comrades," he noted: "There is yet another species of gentile in the world we must suffer... We also have to suffer this filth."⁴⁰ In Breakdown and Bereavement, Brenner's most acclaimed novel, Yehzekel Hefetz, the protagonist, goes mad after a nightmare in which he awakens in the presence of an Arab woman who has come to his settlement to look for her brother just before Passover. Hefetz, in a state of frenzy, connects this woman to a blood libel in Russia. Haifa and

the Arabs simply become a backdrop for superimposed images from another world: the Cossacks, Poles and Russians of the Ukraine. The space is transparent: for all their professed "love of the land," the early European settlers had X-ray vision, seeing through things without seeing them.

The same year Brenner arrived, Albert Antebbi (who, after noting that "the ill will of the local population coincides with the creation of Zionism," was characterized as an "arrogant, haughty, capricious, perverse, irascible, violent, despotic, ruthless Asiatic")¹ wrote a scathing letter to Meir Dizengoff and Daniel Brill, two Zionist functionaries stationed in Jaffa:

As far as ties to our other compatriots in the Land is concerned - see here, they can only be well-disposed towards us insofar as we identify with them. From the first day I prophesied those disturbances to you, and I now predict there will be even more severe disturbances... How exactly do you expect to prevent doubt and even hatred given such provocation? Last Sabbath I came upon two Muslims and was surprised to find several issues of HaZvi with articles in them blue-pencilled, their intention being to seek a court order from the Governor against Ben-Yehuda for incitement to murder. I can assure you that the most lenient courtroom in the freest country in the world would find incriminating evidence in reading the advice given Jews to arm themselves and not rely on the government for protection.²

Antebbi's non-essentializing discourse moves from an assumption based on common sense and common experience to a specific

incident clearly bringing his argument - based on an interpretation made in the form of a prediction - sharply into focus. From the particular, he then moves again to a plausible and more general conjecture that puts the scope of his opposition into a broader context. In other letters, Antebbi applies his experience and knowledge to shake his correspondents out of the stupor of unchecked assumption and generalization, castigating them for incompetence and pointing out the real dangers that can result from the ignorance or "misreading" of local conditions and signs:

How is it possible that you were unable to find someone of influence, a Jew or a non-Jew, in Damascus or Beirut, who could have opened the gates of those high-ranking officials before you? Why didn't you prepare yourselves with letters of introduction from your co-religionists in Constantinople? The matter could have been handled easily, and I know many people in Constantinople, Beirut and Damascus...¹³

Antebbi remained unequivocal in presenting plans that he thought would meet the requirements of a local population of which he considered himself a part, always stressing the need "to defend general political equality as well as safeguard regional economic interests."¹⁴

In his last piece of writing, "From the Notebook," Brenner referred to Arabs as "those poles of the Orient." A contemporary Israeli critic pointed out that this, like Brenner's other works,

"did not conceal the depths of hatred dividing him from them - seeing them as a collective with a nightmare like essence, alien, seething with hatred... He saw something foreign on the lowest erotic, aggressive level, the level of the threat of distorted eros, perverted and brutal sex, homosexuality, bestiality. In Brenner's opinion the latter danger was no less than the sword and perhaps seductive to the same degree. He also feared the Jews would be swallowed up by the Arabs..."¹³ Several days after finishing this piece, Brenner himself fell victim (killed in the riots of 1921) to the severe consequences of irresponsible deeds and incitement as prophecied by Antebbi whose stress remained on politics and economy, the two fundamental realities most often subsumed in essentialist discourse, that "fantasy of understanding at no cost." Yet, in the prevailing climate of self-fulfilling prophecies (where things seem to be based more on "proving" projected and unchallenged "truths" in order to maintain power rather than testing possibilities based on the interpretation of knowledge and experience), Brenner has come to be seen as a "realist" who "harbored no illusions," while someone like Antebbi is labeled a hopeless romantic, catalogued with those "charmed by the exoticism of the Orient."¹⁴ Nor are either of these cases isolated examples: the kind of assumptions out of which Brenner's texts emerge (in which the "Arab" serves as a collective projection of imported fears and the Arab Jew is little more than a mirror image of vulgar stereotypes)¹⁵ constitute fundamental codes and points of

reference in almost all "official" contemporary Hebrew literature while the texts of writers emerging from a Mediterranean/Arabic milieu (like those of Yehuda Burla, Itzhak Shami and Jacqueline Kahanoff which will be examined later) are either ignored or treated condescendingly as part of a "rich folklore."

The legacy of Brenner's initial gaze is still operative through more or less subtle means in many aspects of Israeli life and culture. From 1931 to 1986, for example, only a thousand items - mostly single poems - were translated from Arabic into Hebrew; presently, there is not a single full-time Arabic/Hebrew literary translator in the country. This lack of concrete translated texts is just indicative of the lack of many different kinds of translation and exchange on the official level. The "vaguenesses of vocabulary" and collapse of terminology have assumed endemic proportions, while "militant archaeology" has reapportioned physical and cultural space on a massive scale. The original terms of the conflict (drained of any real exchange value by their constant deployment as covers masking a more pragmatic and covert distribution of power), have been turned into what Meron Benveniste calls "a new Latin for the Middle East," an arcane and exclusive language used by "the sub-culture of the mighty" to give the impression that something is actually being done to alleviate the constant tension that by now everyone simply assumes to be an unavoidable function of the essentialized, eternal qualities of strife implicit in and between the terms "Jew" and "Arab." It is

not only in Jerusalem that the number of people born into a new reality has multiplied: all over the Arab world (except in Morocco), there are fewer and fewer people who can still recall either the diverse Jewish cultural presence or the full range of human encounters with people who just happened to have been Jews; at the same time, there are more and more people for whom Jews can only be seen through the dull film of "Zionism," "Israel" and war. Ironically, it is only the protracted occupation following the 1967 war that has "broken the geo-cultural isolation of Israel in the Arab world... This transformation, which marked the movement from self-contained settlement colonization to expansionism, also affected the Arab Jews. They who had attempted to forget the language of their parents could now, thanks to their knowledge of Arabic, do good lucrative business with the Arabs in the occupied territories, speculate and trade, and even move up a military and police hierarchy in which knowledge of Arabic became a professional advantage of extreme importance. Culturally, the occupation after 1967 marginalized the Europeans in terms of linguistic, musical, culinary or family traits, and made their monopoly of power appear more flagrant and more shocking."¹¹

This ironic return has engendered another situation entirely, that of a seemingly unending status quo characterized by its blatant imbalance of power. One vision of this new reality, now the primary site and filter through which the terms Jew and Arab, floating signifiers bloated to the point of explosion, take on

meaning, is described in a nightmare recounted by the Palestinian writer Raja Shehadeh:

I feel empty: in the hollow center of a wheel with rusty spokes. At the end of every spoke is a head - a haunted, hunted, greedy, cruel death-mask. The wheel begins to spin and I get dizzy trying to find my face among the masks. I look out into the other side, the backs of the masks, and instead of hollows I see twin masks - the fragmented faces of our occupiers: riveted to the backs of ours in a way that ensures that we will never see each other, as the wheel spins faster and faster."

While Brenner's nightmare is still rooted deeply in the psyche and discourse of many Jews, Shehadeh's has almost fully occupied the once qualitative but now quantitative space that remains the site of a riddle. This riddle, God's most treasured pun, 'aber ve 'arab (the two displaced letters - the "b" and the "r" of Hebrew and Arab), and its two unvowelled peoples built around consonants, both each other's vowels, shape and story, seems most difficult to resolve without succumbing to some provisional "answer" that relegates apparently contradictory phenomena to some identifiable and unthreatening limbo. In a world governed by "indeterminacy and the code," words and sites become whatever one invests in them and it is left up to the reader, the "seer," to declassify the material, renegotiate the signs and produce intelligible and defensible meaning. An ideological investment, on the other hand,

assures a secure return by suppressing, denying or co-opting the ambiguities and particulars of experience that stand in contradiction to the ideology. The events of history, "what it was before it damn well was history, what urgency or laziness or misery it was to those who said and did what they did," demand that the remains be redressed, that the writings and objects not collapse into a "demonstration, a separating out, an act of classification," but serve "the present, which is the only place history has context."¹¹ The land will not rest until all the sources of her memory have been tapped, until the interrupted synapses pass from one neuron to another, until the signals are picked up, the discontinued routes reinstated, and new blood can freely flow through the severed veins. It is only then, in the words of Mahmoud Darwish, that the witness, as writer, will have a chance to "guard the plot of the Book against the prophets."¹²

III.

The 1938 Hachette Illustrated Blue Guide to the Eastern Mediterranean and Egypt (the same year Yusuf al-Kabir voiced his scepticism about accepting the "reconstruction of historical geography" as "practical theory"), suggests the following four day trip:

Beirut to Jerusalem via Damascus

Setting out from Beirut in the morning by car, you can reach Damascus in three hours; once there, the afternoon can be used for sight-seeing. The second day should be devoted to the trip from Damascus to Jerusalem, and the third for touring Jerusalem. This itinerary also gives you the chance to be in Cairo - or Alexandria - the fourth day after parting Beirut. By skipping Damascus and traveling along the coast, an extra day can be gained.

The trip to Jerusalem and the sites within it are removed from time: "What one seeks in Jerusalem is the material testimony of historical events whose consequence has traversed the globe to our very own era." Two and a half pages devoted to the three varied types (places and artefacts unaltered by time; those changed or reconstructed; and those only authenticated by more recent

traditions) of "material testimony of the Savior's life and the great drama of the Passion"¹² follow. In between this enumeration and three quarters of a page devoted to the Jews, "who have returned to the Promised Land... despite Arab hostility,"¹⁴ the following lines are devoted to Muslims:

The Muslims are numerous in Palestine but, even though they are the majority in every city except Jerusalem and Tiberias, there is nothing particularly notable about them for the traveler. Thus, we shall wait until our arrival to Egypt before describing some Islamic customs.¹³

This majority, the "natives," in guidebook parlance, was in the process of having their fate decreed for them by a complex and increasingly distant network of force and circumstance: the first drafts for the partition of Palestine were drawn in 1938, a plan in which the proposed Jewish state would receive 33% of the total area of the country at a time when Jewish ownership did not exceed 6% of the land.¹⁵ In the fierce tri-lateral struggle between Palestinians, Zionists and British colonizers, the issues at stake for the "natives" remained the demand for at least some form of representative government, and protests over land transfer, mass immigration and the segregated labor policies of the new settlers; in other words, political and economic equality and participation, precisely those issues foreseen by Antebbi as crucial and whose protracted irresolution would so distort the

images as to create Shehadeh's nightmare vision. The subsequent events - the actual partition of Palestine, the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, and the mass population movements of "exile" and "return" - made following the itinerary of the Blue Guide difficult for many, if not impossible for some. Old and familiar routes and enduring lines of communication had unnaturally and abruptly been cut off. As the terms of the extended conflict (determined by an asymmetry of power embedded within an already rigidly established set of possible claims, counterclaims and tactics on the part of all the sides involved), moved into the open to take on the guise and jargon of nation/states, the more tangible and concrete reasons behind the intransigent nature of the fight and its broader consequences seemed to recede further and further into obscurity.

While an old Mediterranean world whose Jewish and Arab presence is accounted for and considered in relation to Europe still remains largely unexplored, a new Mediterranean world - more discrete and fragmented but still aware of the possibilities of its space - is in the making. It is within the gap of these two worlds, along the margins of the many struggles fought to reorder its constellations, that the texts of Jabès and Derrida - for whom

the qualitative space of the Blue Guide's itinerary was still real - emerge. In Glas, Derrida writes:

In Algeria, in the middle of a mosque that the colonists had changed into a synagogue, the Torah once out from derriere les rideaux, is carried about in the arms of a man or a child... Children who have watched the pomp of this celebration, especially those who were able to give a hand, perhaps dream of it long after, of arranging there all the bits of their life.

What am I doing here? Let us say that I work at the origin of literature by miming it. Between the two."

Writing in a mode that attempts to situate Derrida's approach to textuality within and on the outskirts of a rabbinic tradition, Susan Handleman points out that "Glas was written shortly after the death of Derrida's father, just as The Interpretation of Dreams was written after the death of Freud's father, facts which have much to do with the nature of both works. Indeed, what is Derrida doing here: unveiling the veiled scroll, the veiled writing, and here arranging all the bits of his life? Gayatri Spivack interprets this passage as the Jewish child's inspiration at the absence of the Father, or truth behind the veil, an inspiration that allows him to place his autobiography in that place, producing the "origin" of literature. We would also again find here the displacement of the Father, the reappropriation-repetition (miming the origin) of his Scripture. Like Freud, like Paul, like

Jesus, Derrida, in spite of all, is another in the line of Jewish prodigal sons, who try to perpetuate the law in its own transgressions, indeed who make the very concept of "perpetuating the law through its transgressions" the center of their theory."¹¹ This reading, tempting as it is, places Derrida squarely within the terms he himself chose to participate in; that is, within a discourse that leaves the current scene of the dream far behind.

Here, a strange reversal has been effected, inspired and aided by the interdepartmental "exchanges" described earlier as now taking place within certain parts of the academy. Jews from the former colonies - whose immediate concerns with the actualities of that Mediterranean/Arab world have receded to the point of internalized loss or the textual material of memory - have been reinscribed within a resurrected "humanist" tradition of "Jewish" textuality. This reversal, in turn, operates within two clearly reciprocal but presently discrete spheres which are, themselves, the result of the reapportioning of "historical geography" and cultural space. The first sphere finds itself progressive in one context and reactionary in another: as the discipline of Jewish studies opens its discourse to the vocabulary of écriture, it seems to only buttress its distance from a gesture of reconciliation that would at least signal the acknowledgement of a "reoriented" nexus of elements going into the making of a very new textual tradition. This new tradition, being forged by Israeli Jews and Palestinians writing in Hebrew, finds itself

completely removed - referentially, spiritually and actually - if not from the texts themselves, then certainly from the implications of this academic textual diaspora, and much closer to a second sphere comprised of those writers - particularly franco-phone and Arabic - whose referential space may range very wide but whose social and political concerns remain inextricably linked to the topography, archaeology and possibility of their origins. In by-passing or ignoring this very fertile ground in which a linguistic and cultural multiplicity takes place not on an interdisciplinary level but within language itself inscribed upon a political scene, literature departments curtail vital areas of inquiry that should be part of their natural domain.

To ignore the possibilities of such a configuration also reduces the yield this kind of contextual relocation can produce in a text like Derrida's, with its sense of leaving something behind as it moves into another discourse that opens the possibility of inscribing other routes not taken. Such a reading could take its "here" to mean both "here" as the place of the writing and "there," as the dream of memory, a "there" which maps a succinct directory of crucial presences and absences. The mosque that "the colonists had changed into a synagogue," limns both the preferential and precarious position of the Jews since the time of Crémieux's decrees proclaimed in 1870 in which "the local Jews became Frenchmen in the eyes of the law, enjoying civil rights not enjoyed by 90 per cent of the Algerians."²² The arms of the man

or the child embracing the Law emerging from behind the curtains - and the subsequent patrilineal line of interpretation, seek the specific and only more recently addressed location of the women. As Yvette Chamache, an Egyptian, writes:

He carries the mark of his pact with God and with his fathers upon his body: he is a Jew, he knows it, and will occupy the place inscribed for him naturally. But in tranquility?

And the woman? She is there, up in the gallery, watching. Is it possible to say she feels excluded? She doesn't even know herself, she's gotten so used to it all...

The woman, in the gallery of the synagogue, watches. She watches and she follows them. She will testify. Out of the silence. To anticipate oblivion.⁴⁰

And as Hélène Cixous, another Algerian Jew has written, of a time before the curtains veiling the Law obstructed her gaze, when she too could have been a child let down from the gallery:

Yesterday I was small. Today I'm different and something of another. Yesterday time, the world, History, life, every science was in my father's head, and I was in his hands, and I didn't need anything. All I had to do was grow.⁴¹

Mining and mining these origins can trace the gaps between markers given as clues to what is present and the absences they adumbrate, the space of and between two worlds, the growing into and out of a rite; the "here" of writing and a "there" forever past but still insisting to know: "What am I doing here?" A question that also implies asking: how did I get here? Derrida's reading of Jabès poses this even more poignantly in what amounts to a cautious burrowing into the more openly grounded and obsessive preoccupation with loss that clearly marks a point of departure in The Book of Questions. This point is the core of a theme and problematic that has been seized on by commentators only too willing to appropriate the work of Jabès to an ethno-centric and simplistic ideology of equivalence (that of Jew=Writing=Book), without being attentive enough to the actual linguistic and cultural "collective duration" the work emerges from.

This "collective duration" can be seen as a set of concentric circles of varying circumference, each circumscribing a range of sequences, events, activities and attentions. The first, in the case of Jabès, would include a dense and palimpsestial Biblical text intimately shaped by Egypt's contours and transcribed by Moses, the perfect writer who never reaches his destination. A second circle would encompass the "semiotic" parameters of classical Sephardic culture: social, psychological and aesthetic expectations and markers; the legal, liturgical, poetic and mystical texts engendered by Sepharad/al-Andalus and disseminated

all over the Mediterranean and Arab world. A third circle could be that of the last generation of Jews in Egypt, a delineation of the pressures of their time impinging upon that space, and the position of Jabès himself within that configuration. Each of these circles would have to confront the question of linguistic and cultural choices and intersections, not as they effect some ideal and essentialized Jew but in terms of concrete political, economic, geographic and generic exigencies. If the problematic is a "Jewish" one, then it must be grounded in a context that is both broader and more specific than the standard binary approach which would see "rabbis" on one side and thought that "dislikes residence and offers itself as a philosophy for nomads"⁴² on the other.

These distinctions have not been introduced in order to turn Jabès into something other than the very French writer he is, but simply to emphasize that he was part and parcel of a culture deeply rooted in and clearly informed by both Hebrew and Arabic antecedents and surroundings; when asked, in an interview, whether Arab culture had entered his education, Jabès had this to say:

Not right away. Because at first of course, there were the French schools: French philosophers, French writers, the history of France. But fairly quickly I became very interested in the great writings that are the masterpieces of these countries. Unfortunately in translation. I read Arabic, but still it was an effort. So, I had a certain rapport with Arab literature and philosophy, and then I realized in the Moslem tradition,

with the Sufis for example, there were completely amazing things, as in the questioning of language. And at the same time I was also beginning to read the great Jewish mystics, who wrote in Hebrew and Arabic at the same time. All that is a part of the East, which is a world quite apart. The West, which penetrated quite considerably, didn't deeply mark the East, didn't shake things up. For example, in the time of Romanticism, they created an East of fantasies, the men with their harems, the sad women and so on, it's not that at all. The West has lived on this image of the East which is completely false."

In this imaginary combination of flight and mastery, the specter of Egypt loomed large in the European imagination as an ideal site for unmasking the secrets of the "East," containing and transforming the material and symbolic order of its history into another logic, "rendering it completely open, making it totally accessible to European scrutiny." A work like Lane's An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians, whose "objective is to make Egypt and the Egyptians totally visible, to keep nothing hidden from his reader, to deliver the Egyptians without depth, in swollen detail," typifies the conceptual underpinnings and renegotiations of power that make such imagery and ultimately the snapshot - an after effect of the hundred or so years of "the Orient as spectacle, as tableau vivant" - possible. In this respect, the difference between the narratives of sojourners and natives is striking - for the visitor, the surplus value of tourism (even in its earlier forms of voyage and pilgrimage), is reinforced by investing the scene at hand with psychological baggage: events, people and places serve as a backdrop,

insignificant in and of themselves unless their value has been "culturally" sanctioned. Instead, the view, and even the experiences themselves, seem like a Rorschach test. Thus, the discrepancies between text and place, the imagined, dreamt and yearned for vision and the concrete particulars mirrored back to the viewer, can be a cause of bitter disappointment and even personal loss, as in this locus classicus of Nerval's:

I have already lost, kingdom after kingdom, province after province, the most beautiful half of the universe, and soon I will know of no place in which I can find a refuge for my dreams; but it is Egypt that I most regret having driven out of my imagination, now that I have sadly placed it in my memory.⁴⁵

And how could the outcome be any different, once such loss assumes prior possession, or at least the right of inheritance? As Edward Said points out, one of Napoleon's great projects - the Description de l'Egypte, "published in twenty-three enormous volumes between 1809 and 1828" - presented an Orient that "existed as a set of values attached, not to its modern realities, but to a series of valorized contacts it had had with a distant European past." Egypt's significance had less to do with itself, than with the fact that "Homer, Lycurgus, Solon, Pythagoras, and Plato all went there to study the sciences, religion and the laws," or that "Alexander founded an opulent city there."⁴⁶ In writing,

the symbolic tension gleaned from an education based on accumulation, detail and description finds itself embedded and sublimated within a contradictory "cultural" urge: the wish to "civilize" the native and at the same time be inspired by their "barbaric" energy. Yet, much more than an individual psychological situation, this process masks an almost total disregard for the particulars of the human condition in specific places while cordoning off a space in which power can fulfill its function within an ideology of supremacy. If the "natives" amount to nothing more than romantic landscape (or, as in Brenner's narrative, nightmarish obstruction) - refracting material that only reflects distorted or idealized images of the visitors back at themselves, then it stands to reason that the land of the natives is of no particular value unless that value is invested by someone else: namely, the colonizer, imperial power, corporate shareholder or tourist.

An insufficiently examined irony coursing throughout The Book of Questions is that of the exiled writer/narrator producing and inhabiting a native space contained by the text but clearly arising from and alluding to the very personal circumstance and situation of Jabès himself. Born in Cairo in 1912, he only left when forced to - in 1957, at the age of 45. There is nothing "exotic" in the Egypt of Jabès; the reliefs, the desert, the Nile and the Pyramids are not filtered through any hierarchy of significance that doesn't grow out of the logic of memory,

narrative and language; references to Egypt (written in Paris), have the certainty of intimate gesture, as in these two passages from Volumes III and IV:

I shall always remember a bas-relief in the temple of Abydos where the god Horus and the sun-god Ra united in one body under the name Rharakhti, Horus of the Horizon. I let Ramses II smell the "ankh," the symbol of life. I dreamed of my pen infusing this sign, which in ancient Egypt represented eternal life, into words so that every letter would be charged and enriched with it.

* * * * *

I also remember well how I first became aware of the gravity of silence: watching the Nile flow with its cargoes reminded me of an unbroken line of red ants carrying their food. Hope made breath bolder. The world, all brightness, was dead to itself, was revealed to death in the most surprising lesson of life it had ever had. And I thought that a book ought to oscillate between these two silences, just as the tip of the pen should temper and bend it toward the words which people would read after God.⁴

While the work does not, in any sense, delineate what might be termed a "social space," it also, on the other hand, refrains from valorizing the "scene" of its events. Sequences of perception and event, rather, manage to mime the process of coming to know, as "the unbroken line of red ants" that parallel the flow of the river mines a first coming to awareness of the nourishing quality of silence. Characterized as a whole by its almost complete lack of any kind of description and a language that often appears

amorphous, the work still manages - as well - to refrain from projecting and consuming the specific. To reach the temple of Abydos meant traveling through the desert, a place which - no matter how many different ways it appears and is used in the book - remains absolutely grounded in the experience of Jabès as a "great fascination." Like any fascination, it is returned to again and again, each time initiating another process, another encounter; as Jabès notes, the desert was "a place I went to depersonalize myself, to no longer be who I was in appearance to others in Cairo."⁴¹ The text constantly seems to reproduce this process, to describe and redescribe a desert of words, a gallery of rabbis, a bundle of narrative fibre in the form of journals, letters, and a love story. The desert of the words, like the vacuum packed realm of the rabbis, the journal, and the story of the lovers, is itself the space of interpretation, the place the reader goes to find him or her self. The self in Cairo is only constituted through its appearance to others; in this sense, paradoxically, the city is so fully a part of the self, so clearly there within, that it need not be described. The further paradox of the undescribed and indescribable city is that, having once lost it and the world of others within it who literally made up the self, recollection may simply turn into an ordeal too painful to bear. The following catalogue from Volume III, rare in the desert/"no-place" bookscape of Jabès, touches the core of this pain:

In the cemetery of Bagneux, département de la Seine, rests my mother. In Old Cairo, in the cemetery of sand, my father. In Milano, in the dead marble city, my sister is buried. In Rome where the dark dug out the ground to recieve him, my brother lies. Four graves. Three countries. Does death know borders? One family. Two continents. Four cities. Three flags. One language: of nothingness. One pain. Four glances in one. Four lives. One scream.⁴¹

A map of the shattered self in which each city is a private monument, an identical signature of death, significant only insofar as it points to the life once within. By domesticating and then inhabiting the book, Jabès leaves the space of one world behind and situates his text on the threshold of another. Shaped by the shock of his own exile, the writing of disaster and the disaster itself, Jabès sums up a lost and finally internalized world of activity by translating it into another consciousness and set of conditions, just as the consciousness and conditions of the world he left behind have themselves changed radically since his departure.

This departure, and the subsequent development of the writing out of that rupture, can be seen to mark a watershed point in one particular area of a "history of things" that would "aim beyond narration to find cleavages in history where a cut will separate different types of happening;" this approach sees "any work of art as a portion of arrested happening, or an emanation of past time" in which the work is also "a graph of an activity now

stilled, but a graph made visible like an astronomical body, by a light that originated with the activity."⁶⁰ In concluding The Shape of Time, George Kubler goes on to make these remarks on the "plural present:"

Everything varies both with time and by place, and we cannot fix anywhere upon an invariant quality such as the idea of style supposes, even when we separate things from their settings. But when duration and setting are retained in view, we have shifting relations, passing moments, and changing places in historic life. Which is now valid: the isolated work in its total physical presence, or the chain of works marking the known range of its position?⁶¹

The graph that the work of Jabès charts includes many of the sequences and concerns falling within the concentric circles making up the very particular "collective duration" that he forms a terminal part of. The talmudic and kabbalistic aphorisms serving a certain function in one age are translated into terms comprehensible to another; the search for the truth once taken into the desert by the saintly mystic leads into the labyrinths of a book challenged by despair, suicide and mass-murder; the exile from Egypt is met by graffiti on the walls of Europe. The source of light making this graph visible goes back to the distinctions between sun, moon and fire made by Maimonides; this Maimonides, however, lived and worked in Cairo, and wrote as a Levantine

between and within an intersection of cultures and languages in the sense conveyed by Jacqueline Kabanoff, another Cairene who found herself at the threshold of a cleavage:

The Levant is a land of ancient civilizations which cannot be sharply differentiated from the Mediterranean world, and is not synonymous with Islam, even if a majority of its inhabitants are Moslems. The Levant has a character and history of its own. It is called "Near" or "Middle" East in relationship to Europe, not to itself. Seen from Asia, it could just as well be called the "Middle West." Here, indeed, Europe and Asia have encroached on one another, time and time again, leaving their marks in crumbling monuments and in the shadowy memories of the Levant's peoples. Ancient Egypt, ancient Israel and ancient Greece, Chaldea and Assyria, Ur and Babylon, Tyre, Sidon and Carthage, Constantinople, Alexandria and Jerusalem are all dimensions of the Levant. So are Judaism, Christianity and Islam, which clashed in dramatic confrontation, giving rise to world civilizations, fracturing into stubborn local subcultures and the multi-layered identities of the Levant's people. It is not exclusively western or eastern, Christian, Jewish or Moslem. Because of its diversity, the Levant has been compared to a mosaic - bits of stone of different colors assembled into a flat picture. To me it is more like a prism whose various facets are joined by the sharp edge of differences, but each of which, according to its position in a time-space continuum, reflects or refracts light. Indeed, the concept of light is contained in the word Levant as in the word Mizrah, and perhaps the time has come for the Levant to reevaluate itself by its own lights, rather than see itself through Europe's sights, as something quaintly exotic, tired, sick and almost lifeless."

IV.

In "The South," the last chapter of The Book of Yudel, the writer, after learning of the death of Yudel's lover Sarah, goes out into the rainy streets of Paris. While walking:

He remembered a phrase (but why did this one rather than any other pop up in his memory?), a single phrase from a forgotten story whose tone he recalled in quoting:

"Father, which was this city
of which we were guardians?"

This city is not Paris. And yet Paris is the Capital of his senses."²

Outside, in the rain again, it is Yudel this time who is on his way to a tailor whose card he finds in a suit he wants redone. The tailor, a Central European Jew, recognizes Yudel as the writer of the story of Sarah and Yudel and calls in his wife to meet him:

"Ach," said the woman. "You're Jewish, like us. You know, she went on, "we were deported too. My husband and

me, we came back, but our children, our son and daughter died over there. Were you in France during the war?"

"No. I was in Egypt."

"Then you're a lucky Jew. No matter what you've suffered, you're a lucky Jew."

"That'll do, mama," said the old man. "You're not going to bother the gentleman with..."

But the old woman interrupted.

"He's a Jew, no? He's a writer, no?"

And she talked of the days of coming back, the interminable nights of coming back with death inside them..."

Yukel is reduced to silence as the scene in the small, crowded shop becomes progressively more and more claustrophobic; the chapter, and the book, end with this:

What pressing urge pushed Yukel to take a train south a few hours later?

To see the Mediterranean again, listen to the lesson of the sea which keeps forever its salt and its color.⁵⁴

The next volume, Return to the Book, opens with the catalogue of graves quoted earlier and suggests Cairo as this city, not Paris, in a forgotten story, "of which we were once guardians." Even though the Mediterranean is an eternal opening, the sequence emphasizes those markers of death that circumscribe the borders of both forgotten cities and stories. Jabès himself left that world behind, never returning to Egypt: "Perhaps, to put it simply,

I invented a mythical Egypt. Maybe I was scared of confronting Egypt - or that one that is in my books - with a reality which, at any rate, no longer corresponds to the one I knew. And that would mean losing it a second time."⁵⁶ Even given this admission, by maintaining the integrity of an interior space inextricably linked to the fate of the writer himself, Jabès manages a mythology that differs unconditionally from the projections of flight and mastery so characteristic of either Romantic or colonial narrative sequences. At the same time, this nativity is contained and frozen in exile, far from the scene of its inspiration, caught in the gap and cleavage that marks the drawing to a close of one world and the possible initiation of another, reinvested with the sources of "its own lights."

In a topological approach to writing attentive to setting and duration, fundamental distinctions could be made between writers who have stayed in a given area; those who left entirely; the newly arrived; and others relocated within the wider sphere of the same area but whose work has been realigned by altered conditions. Of the writers touched on so far, Antebbi can be seen as an example of the first category; Jabès, Derrida, Hélène Cixous and Yvette Chamache examples of the second; Brenner an example of the third, and Jacqueline Kahanoff - an Egyptian who emigrated to

Israel - an example of the fourth. A very different Egypt, gleaned from an account that would find its place in the first category, can contribute to tracing an understanding of the present context. In this account, an autobiography, the legendary Egyptian singer Umm Kulthum writes about the beginnings of her career, singing "on hundreds of station platforms in many, many stations along the Delta railroad line...

As the months passed, I began to realize that there was a world beyond the Delta railroad line, that there were other cities, even bigger than Zaqqaziq. One day we were invited to a big city called Cairo, which I had never heard of before. This is how it happened. A well known pasha, 'Izz al-Dinn Yakun, was speaking with the estate manager in our village, telling him about the special festivities planned in his palace at Hilwan, to celebrate the night of the Mi'raj (the night when the Angel Gabriel first spoke to Muhammad).

The estate manager said, "By God, we have a girl right here in Tamay who has a beautiful voice."

"Well," said the landowner, "bring her to sing for us, why not?"

We traveled with the estate manager to Cairo. I don't remember anything about the city, and I have no impression of it at all in my mind, except the Bab el Luq station, where my father bought me a piece of candy better than any I had ever had before."⁵

The understated tone almost camouflages the compression of the narrative in this account, the extent of the distance traveled in such a short space. Events are allowed the significance of their own order and names left to the domain of their singularity. There

is no imposition or restructuring of events; the gaps between things provide a transparency in which the reader's imagination can wander and work at the range of emotions each incident might imply. In referring to the night of the Mi'raj, the narrative thread almost unnoticeably weaves itself into an event whose significance reaches far beyond the parameters of the particular story being told, but with no need for commentary since the teller of the tale remains part of a sequence that still maintains the integrity of its own structure. The internalization of this structure, and the irony of the narrative position in Jabès, slightly alter the qualities of even the most intimate gestures in The Book of Questions, reverting and referring them to the circularity of the whole: going through the desert to reach the temple of Abydos is not connected to a rite but to the larger - although still absolutely integral - scheme of writing, the book and exile. In Umm Kulthum's movement within a space still inhabited, there is no projection and the city - although nothing about it is remembered - is also not forgotten; the walker in it, the traveler to it participates in its life, interacting as the city drops its own hints, projects its own codes and signals.

After having spent some time in Cairo, Umm Kulthum tells of an incident in which a magazine article puts her honor and reputation in question. As her father packs the family bags in preparation for the trip back to their village, people begin coming to their apartment to try and convince him of the error of

his ways. Among them is Amin al-Mahdi, a famous oud player, who finally says:

"Let me tell you something, Shaykh Ibrahim. You realize, of course, don't you, that leaving Cairo right after this article appears means only one thing to those of us in the city."

"Yes," said my father. "It means that I will not listen to such stories about my daughter's honor."

"No," said Amin al-Mahdi. "To the people of Cairo, it will mean that the story is true. Here honest people do not run away from false accusations."

The message, naturally, is grasped immediately and the family stays: the experience is translated into knowledge and Umm Kulthum breaks her narrative, precisely after this incident, to outline the extent and implications of this newly gained recognition:

Before I go on, my readers might like to know something about Cairo at that time, the kind of city I came into in the early twenties, a young village girl wearing a long blue coat and a black head scarf and singing the religious songs of the Prophet. For the boy's clothes had now been given up. My father had stopped deceiving himself. I was a girl, I was a singer, and I was making slow progress in the city. But it was not easy for my father, and it was not easy for me.

Cairo, 1926

An egg cost one millieme.

A kilo of meat cost 2 piasters; barbecued, 3 piasters.

A pack of al-Anbarul cigarettes: 2 piasters.

A luxurious sedan car: 360 pounds.

The school text for the government exam was Zahrab wa-Rustum.

On the stage 'Ali Effendi al-Kassar was playing the comic role of the Nubian in the Army.

Yusuf Wahbi was the star of the world of the theater.

The chief of the mixed courts was Mr. Sansom.

The population of Egypt was twelve million. Twenty-six percent of the population died at birth because of poverty and malnutrition. Those who could read and write, over the entire country, totaled 197 per thousand. Traveling from Cairo to Alexandria took seven hours on the new express trains.

The revolution of 1919 was over, and Egypt fought within itself and with the British army of occupation. Sayyid Darwish summarized the political situation in his satirical operetta, A Good Relationship, where the song that brought down the house was "To Rise and Rise and Rise We have to Bow and Bow and Bow!"²²

Here the city - its possibilities and magnitude - is both listened to and heard. To fully rise, though, would take another 30 years, a period marked by Nasser's triumph in the 1956 Suez crisis, an event that no less a historian than Marshall Hodgson called "a corollary of the end of European world hegemony."²³ A year after this, Jabès, along with most of Egypt's Jewish community - and other foreign nationals - left, some for Europe, some for America, some for Israel. Colonialism, officially at least, came to a close during the 1950's and 60's, but the newly independent states were left with a staggeringly compounded set of problems. Like the young village girl and her father coming into the city, progress was slow and not easy. The boy's clothes

had been given up and, like the other girl who "didn't need anything," since "time, the world, History, life," and "every science was in" her "father's head," all that was left "to do was grow." Processes that proceeded internally in the "developed" countries, from the industrial age onwards, were squeezed into the suffocating framework of a short time span and the limited means of an often dependant and depleted economy. Advances that were of the utmost importance - lower infant mortality rates and longer life spans, for instance - put enormous pressure on housing, the labor force, transportation and, ultimately, the environment. Nothing took place in isolation: each element in the process, each revision or innovation affected a chain reaction coursing throughout the system. Cities, naturally, became the nerve centers and shock absorbers into and out of which all these impulses charged.

In "A Tale Told by a Dog," the Egyptian writer Yahya Taher Abdullah also describes an arrival from the village to the city:

The night of the city has two days, each day has two suns, and the people in the city run about on the streets like flood water; their clothes are odd - it's as though they're at a festival or a saint's day.

I saw the most extraordinary things as I loitered around the city's souks:

Colored birds imprisoned, singing inside their cages. Lights in all colors, colors winking and changing places. Human beings, shoes, clothes and children's balls imprisoned within glass cages. A woman hanging on the wall crying out soundlessly as she drowned in the water of the sea, and no one going to her rescue.

The shops closed their doors, the light grew less and the people vanished. Were it not for the cars and the car owners, I would have barked into the face of the city: 'O city, your inhabitants have forsaken you.'

People are in heaps and the garbage is in heaps, and the houses are empty of men, populated by women sitting in front of their doors, cooking and washing and eating and throwing the scraps to us dogs. But the small homeless boys assault dogs with stones and seize the bones from their mouths: the day here is a sun without eyes, and life here is an unremitting hell."

The Cairo of this story is a city of at least 12 million, the population of the whole of Egypt described in Umm Kulthum's memoirs. The tale goes on to become a cruel allegory of upward mobility; Mahzouz the dog changes his name to the more "refined" Mizu and leaves behind the kind and patient ants who helped him when he first came into the city; now he spends his time "divided between the circus, the cinema, television, broadcasting, evening parties, interviews, and agreements with producers, distributors and directors, with the hairdresser, the masseur, the manicurist."" But the "past pursues" him - when the wise ant's mother comes in search of her daughter, Mizu scratches her away and tells her to go find Mahzouz. The story ends with the following awesome scene:

Looking in the mirror, I addressed my reflection: "Tell me, O reflection - whose reflection are you? The reflection of Mizu or the reflection of Mahzouz?" Before it replied the doctor came in and gave me a fix; the yellow liquid coursed through my veins and the past came back, and when sleep came and put spectacles on me I saw through them that everything was burning, everything, and that the fire was drawing close to me, while I did not move, did nothing."

Confronted with his own reflection in the mirror ("an out of focus confusion of an antique present, a precious past and a disjointed future")⁴⁴ aware that "everything was burning," and "the fire was drawing close," Mahzouz/Mizu becomes paralyzed. More than just the inability to act, this paralysis locates its antithetical thrust specifically within the given ideological assumptions of "backwardness" and "progress." In Baudrillard's terms, "the circular response of the polled, the analyzed, the natives is all the same a challenge and a triumphant revenge... they place the spotlight back on the question itself, isolate it in offering it the mirror of the answer it was awaiting, and show it helpless to ever quit the vicious circle which in fact is that of power."⁴⁵ By simply staring back at his own undefined image, Mahzouz/Mizu mocks any and all notions of "self-help," or "improvement;" the irony of his own "progress" gains the precise quality of allegory defined as "the epitome of counter-narrative." In this, "allegory is also the epitome of the antimodern, for it views history as an irreversible process of dissolution and decay. The melancholic,

contemplative gaze of the allegorist need not, however, be a sign of defeat; it may represent the superior wisdom of one who has relinquished all claims to mastery."⁴⁴ The stakes are drawn between a vicious circle of power and the gaze that relinquishes mastery: it is only here where the materials can be reclaimed and action, based on a consciousness of the dilemma, be initiated.

Less than fifty years after the Blue Guide's description of an itinerary through an intertwined network of cities in a still accessible space, some of those cities - Cairo, Beirut and Jerusalem - have become limit points, endgames, each in their own way. Cairo, the city of the fourth day of that itinerary, now exists on "a scale and complexity that threatens incoherence at our level of discourse about the city. A sense that we really are not sure how to write 'Cairo' is evident in the urgency with which categories of the 'urban' are being questioned."⁴⁵ The description given by the Qadi of Fez, quoted by Ibn Khaldun in the 14th c., seems even more apt now than it might have been then: "What one can imagine always surpasses what one sees, because of the scope of the imagination, except Cairo, because it surpasses anything one can imagine." A Jewish traveler, Meshullam of Volterra, wrote: "We arrived in Cairo on Sunday, June 17, 1481. I had come to see the Calrenes and their deeds. However, if I were to write about

its wealth and its people, all of this book would not be sufficient. I swear that if it were possible to put Rome, Venice, Milan, Padua, Florence and four more cities together, they would not equal in wealth and population half that of Cairo."'' The city that seems so surreal and unmanageable to a westerner (pyramids dotting a skyline of high-rises, medieval mosques and quasi-grandiose 19th c. buildings; people living in Mameluke tombs and under Roman aqueducts; 5 star hotels, converted palaces and casinos catering to international businessmen and sheikhs from the Gulf; streets jammed with every possible means of transportation - horses, donkeys, cars, taxis and buses with arms and heads sticking out of the windows and doors), is certainly no less alarming or alienating to its own residents: the crucial difference still remaining seems to be who is doing the negotiating and how one reacts to or uses those negotiations.

This process of "scaling" occurs in many discourses about many cities. How does one react when confronted with the wild discrepancies, the misery, impossibility, privileged abundance and size of cities like Cairo, Rio, Mexico City or Bombay; cityscapes divided into nameless "inhabitants" crowded into densely populated, outdated and underserviced neighborhoods, the more and less well off who would rather not think about what is usually artfully hidden, and those who might stop and even catch a glimpse, though often through the window of a moving car?

Bombay life has no order. It is so disordered it is magnificently disciplined. The city is an out of focus confusion of an antique present, a precious past and a disjointed future. It's a city that never stops. I could grow to love it. All the beauty and all the ugliness the world could ever muster has collapsed into an agonising and challenging heap called Bombay.

In vivid afternoon daylight, looking with a panicky glance through a taxi window, Bombay is like any major city, except it's been left to rot and crumble. When it falls down no one will rebuild it.

Roadside hoardings advertising fluoride toothpaste, the best brand of cigars, mentholypus sweets and Cadbury's chocolate, mock the charismatic crisis of Bombay with explicit cruelty."

As a "representative" of this explicit cruelty, how does one traverse the crisis - not to ease a guilty conscience borne by "the white man's burden" - but to gauge points of access, methods of translating these extremities into other ways of thinking, acting and forming different ideas of culture and value? Guides to the outsider, even the best of them, bluntly dictate the limits:

This entire district is known as Darb el-Ahmar, a name which nowadays epitomizes a poorer, broken-down section of the city. At the Citadel end which is entirely residential the street is fairly quiet and fairly filthy; it becomes livelier, and you do not notice the filth so much, as you enter the bazaar area further north. Apart from the ruins of many old houses and some fine intact monuments, you may also encounter the gaiety of a marriage procession, a great noise of motor scooters, car horns, tambourines, ululations, whistling, chanting and cries."

The names, even the places are irrelevant. What remains essential is that the tourist avoid "filth," that the monuments remain "intact" and accessible, that whatever else might seem to be going on - birth, death, poverty, joy, rage - not cause too much of an imposition in reaching the goal, the destination, the historical site itself from which the sojourner can emerge victorious, having "taken" its picture.⁷⁵ Vision is mechanized as the photographer's gaze gratuitously "reproduces" the "experience." Here, tourism becomes the surplus value of social relations totally divorced from "the economic, political and ideological contexts in which they are embedded and which they activate."⁷⁶

Maybe such circumstances call for another possibility - what David Antin, in a talk recounting various experiences of misapprehension, calls "tuning" and the process of "learning not to understand." The phrase comes after one of the central events spoken of in his talk: a friend invites Antin to see an Egyptian movie at a neighborhood theater in Brooklyn and, although he had been studying Arabic at the time, Antin finds the movie progressively more incomprehensible until: "the movie is over and i haven't the vaguest idea of what it is that i've seen." On his way home waiting for the subway, Antin begins a conversation in French with an Egyptian who has also just gotten out of the movie. Someone else appears in the station and somehow enters the discussion which soon turns to politics and the involvement of the "powers" in the Suez crisis. Since the newcomer speaks neither

French or Arabic, Antin finds himself unwillingly elected to translate. The discussion ends as the train pulls in, but exactly what was said still remains uncertain:

now i

understood everything that had been said to me i knew what
the words were what they appeared to signify and i kind
of had a feeling i understood roughly what kind of
conceptions were being pointed to but i wasn't sure my
impression was that there was something here that was too
subtle for my understanding altogether i gave up on it
because i think i had reached the point where the cell divides
and there was no way i could get through that wall

i thought

about it all the time i was on the train and when i reached my
station i got off the train and went home and i felt that
i understood as well as i would ever understand what he
had said to me and what i had said to him without a great
deal of further effort at tuning as i also knew i was not
even close to an understanding of what he meant by
"england" or "france" as he was not even close to what the
american had understood as the "united states" and "russia"

and still i could imagine i suppose
with the help of all sorts of historical discourse

i could

imagine such a frame of mind but i would
have to imagine it without experiencing it

but that i can only imagine it is
what makes this a trivial illusion of understanding because
there would still be no common knowing
there would have been no tuning only my own
arrogant fantasy of standing in that egyptian's place
because after all his place was still egypt and much closer
to cairo and the suez canal than mine

i was
beginning to arrive at a notion of how far we might be from
each other and what sort of distance we might have to travel
i would
like to contribute to human not understanding i would like
to slow down the fantasy and illusion of understanding so
that we could inspect the way and the pace at which we are
approaching or leaving other people and see how far away
they are and whether there is any reason or prospect for
reaching them because one thing that's been promoted
endlessly in this world is the fantasy of understanding the
notion that it is always possible desirable and costs
nothing'

V.

Beirut, the starting point on the 1938 itinerary, fully tests the limits of this "fantasy of understanding." After prolonged civil war and periodic invasion, Beirut has become "almost unimaginable - an icon of chaos, anarchy, meaninglessness - an image saturated in signs and lacking all sense; a kind of grotesque unreality surpassing the imagination and language."⁷² Although Beirut (like Old Cairo, Jerusalem and Damascus) is also an ancient city, its true significance is belated and only comes into full play in the late 19th and 20th century:

Until 1853, Beirut was a completely fortified seaport of about one quarter of a square mile, surrounded by gardens. From 1840 to 1876, expansion to the east and to the west resulted in the demolition of the remaining city walls, and since that time Beirut has developed and expanded in all directions, despite the surrounding steep slopes. By 1970, Beirut had become, to a certain extent, the cultural, business and commercial center of the Middle East.⁷³

This growth and centrality was formed "during the fifties and sixties, decades when all around Lebanon revolutions and coups

brought into the country a sizeable number of dissident or dispossessed classes, intellectual, political and commercial,"¹⁴ turning it into a microcosmic reserve for both greater and more fragmented conflicts that either broke free or were banished from their own place of origin. Above all, the city also served as a refuge, meeting place and reference point for writers insisting on the unity and universality of the Arabic language. But unlike certain tenets of Arab nationalism which, like Zionism, attempted to reduce and homogenize a plethora of social, historical, political, economic, cultural, ethnic and religious differences under the all embracing rubric of either "Arab" or "Jew," these writers expressed their vision of a borderless and uncensored Arabic as a way of speaking for people without a voice. By extending the threads connecting all Arabs (as well as those Arab Jews who so wished) through their literary heritage, they hoped to open a new space for creation between the manipulative rhetoric practiced by "regimes that exploited the Arab public's fascination regarding Western modernity in order to establish almost absolute power,"¹⁵ and the corresponding sterility reigning within "acceptable" native or imported cultural productions. The natural contradiction between this poetic intent and the ideological monopolies or interests of states often resulted in poets finding themselves in exile. In fact, modern Arabic poetry begins in exile, through the work of Lebanese and Syrian writers who settled in New York and São Paulo in the 1920's. In many ways, the modern

period also ends with the beginning of another exile, marked by the suicide of the great modernist Khalil Hawi at the onset of the Israeli invasion of Beirut in 1982. "Lebanon," probably Hawi's last poem, sums up both the general despair as well as suggesting the limits of a way of expression:

We were walls facing walls
 It was painful to talk
 It was painful to feel the distance
 Choked by the tragedy
 It was painful to talk⁴

The pain is tangible but impenetrable, like the walls everyone has become. The pain of talking, the silence, suggests that only an act (suicide, violence?) or a knowing look emerging from the depths of a common fate could possibly even hope to hint at the extent of the outrage. The invasion had come to once and for all drive the nails into the coffin: a new order was being ushered in, not only in Beirut, and all the poet could do now was numbly register the multiplying wounds of distance. Those distant wounds - colonization, Palestine, the shattered hopes for progressive independence - had been fully transformed by a massive diffusion of the locus of control; imperial interests had found not only willing but eager partners amongst the native ruling class and in such a lucrative equation Arabic culture was certainly an outmoded

and disposable commodity. What the Moroccan writer Tahar Ben Jelloun called "the malaise" had set in: "No one is celebrating; the creators, like the consumers, are conscious that Arab culture is in a bad way. There is talk of crisis, of emptiness, and even of decadence... whether through the ideological control of one-party regimes, through the common place system of censorship, or through the disappearance of the contemporary centers of culture like Cairo (since Camp David) and Beirut."'' The voice of the voiceless - the energy that carried Nizar Qabbani's banned 1967 "Footnotes to the Book of the Setback" by word of mouth throughout the Arab world and, as well, maintained Beirut's conspicuous role as the nerve center of the Arabic printed word - had finally been drowned out, "choked by the tragedy." The tension between the reference point of that earlier, vital Beirut and the one of disaster goes full circle to encompass the experience of Arab modernity and push its writing beyond collision and dichotomy into collusion with a world that can only be defined by shelving what came before it through a miraculistic leap: "post-industrial," "post-colonial:" post-modern.

An unequivocal critical thrust, against both formal and political constraints, has governed Arabic poetry in the 20th c. and there are a number of markers along a line leading from a "modern" oppositional or confrontational poetics to what could be called a post-modern "poetics of indeterminacy."'' The two emigrant movements Pen Bond and The Andalusian Group, found

models in the extended New World line of Walt Whitman and Old World Abbasid poets like Abu Nuwas, Ibn al-Mu'tazz, and Abu al-Ma'arri. From these movements, "the New York poets Ameen Rihani and Gibran Khalil Gibran stand out as the most inventive, having revived the Jahili (pre-Islamic) and Sufi concept of the poet as visionary, and introduced two new poetic forms which Rihani called shi'r manthur (free verse) and qasidat al-nathr (prose poem)." In addition, "Rihani introduced mythological and Christian themes, and metaphors which would become trade-marks of modern Arabic poetry. Gibran's contribution," on the other hand, "was his revolutionary attitude to the establishment and to language; he brutally attacked the hypocrisy and corruption of the political, religious and social order of his day."⁷²

By the 1940's and 50's, the hypocrisy and corruption of those social orders had multiplied as poets "witnessed their countries being ravaged by coups d'état, wars and civil wars."⁷³ Bringing things into relief and filling in what falls through the cracks of rhetoric and the abuses of power are acts that have traditionally put Arabic poets in a precarious position. Two of the most important Abbasid poets, Bashar Ibn Burd (d. 783) and Salih Ibn Abd al-Quddus (d. 783), for example, were both condemned as heretics and executed by the Caliph al-Mahdi. The poets of this period and the following decade are no exception to this tradition, as clearly manifested in the work of writers like Nazik al-Mala'ika, Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, Abdul Wahab al-Bayati and

honed this bitterness to a new edge, as in these lines by Nizar Qabbani:

It's painful to listen to the news in the morning.
It's painful to listen to the barking of dogs.

Our enemies did not cross our borders
They crept through our weaknesses like ants."²

In another poem of Qabbani's, "The Ruler and the Sparrow," the death notice of a megalomaniac strain of Pan-Arab unity is finally delivered:

I travelled to the Arab homeland
To read my poems.
I was convinced
Poetry was the public's bread.
I was convinced
The words were fish
And the public their water.

I travelled in the Arab homeland
With only a notebook.
Police stations tossed me about,
Soldiers tossed me about,
And all I had was a sparrow in my pocket.
The word in my country needs a passport.

I waited for the pass
Staring at the sandbags,
Reading the posters
That spoke of one homeland,
That spoke of one people.
I was discarded at my country's gates
like broken glass."³

Out of the splinters and shards of this rupture, a new distinction emerges: the Palestinian experience as both a true source of energy and its equivocal use as an empty sign, vulgarly bandied about in yet another round of exploitation. Nurtured by "Hagar's tears - the first woman to weep at an endless migration,"²⁴ the Palestinian became a "universal" particular. Since it was more obvious, or at least it then seemed more obvious in their case just who their enemy was, Palestinian poets could embody everything that had been suppressed, deflected or symbolized. Those parts of the identity (personal, communal, religious, ethnic, urban, economic and sexual), that had been traded in for or subsumed under some amorphous notion of "nationality" began to emerge more freely. The key to a new store-house of energy - long poised in readiness and pent up like an atomic stockpile about to erupt - had been unearthed. The materials of history could be endowed with ironic substance and the private allowed to become political; in "Leaving the Mediterranean Coast," Mahmoud Darwish writes:

I am those who are alive and the old cities. Try to wrench
 out your names, you will find my hands. Try to shed your
 clothes, you will find my blood. Or try to burn these maps,
 you will behold my body -
 I am those who are alive and the homeland they wrote in
 your history.
 From my corpse began the invaders, the prophets, the refugees
 -
 And in it they end to begin their biography anew.²⁵

Unlike the escape in Jabès, the flight into haunting memories of death, forgotten cities and stories, this Mediterranean bitterly celebrates its "new migration." The sense of exile is even further honed here than in the previous generation of Arab poets: here, biography can begin anew, beyond the strictly critical, to become autobiography - written so long for and by others, the Mediterranean can begin writing itself, as it literally does in this poem by Darwish. Present as well (like in Jabès), is an underlying but deep conflict between getting lost or losing oneself in the desert, and remaining open to the sea, an antithesis that was at the root of two of the regions most alluring and potentially radical poetic movements: the Hebrew Canaanites, and the ideology of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, under the leadership of Anton Sa'adah.

In reaching the conclusion that "We are Syrians, and we constitute a distinct national entity,"- despite the influence of European fascism - Sa'adah "argued that national unity was not based on race or purity of blood, but that it was the by-product of historical continuity of a group of people who occupy a defined piece of land; and a by-product of the interaction between these people and this geographical spot."²² This ideology was influential not just to Syrians (most notably Adonis and Yusuf al-Khal), but to Arab modernist thought in general. Thus, the people of Palestine, for example, could be seen as "an Arabian (i.e. Semitic) blend of Amorites, Canaanites, Hittites, Jebusites,

Phoenicians, Hebrews and late Arabians with Philistine, Roman, Greek and Frankish flavoring - who have lived out their centuries and moved from one semitic tongue to another in a series of religious-political experiences as animists, as Jews, as Christians, and finally as Muslims."'' In this context, then, the referential range (including Moses, the crucifixion, baptism, Mary of Magdalene, the Crusaders, and the Caliphate) in the poetry of Darwish (a Muslim by birth and a Marxist by choice), does not seem at all out of place. In Darwish this palimpsest has been accrued casually - in language, custom and gesture - and not implanted ideologically. Space does contain memory, and it is only one of the many ironies that Darwish - a Palestinian whose exile has ranged between Beirut, Paris and Tunisia - manages to convey a less programmatic and more plastic sense of this than any of the Hebrew Canaanites, despite their presence in the land.

In a long and complex poem called "The Desert: Diary of Beirut Under Siege, 1982," Adonis writes:

The cities break up
 The land is a train of dust
 Only poetry knows how to marry this space."''

What was cultivated reverts to wilderness: the desert finally overruns the city, paradoxically marking an end to growth and a return to the primal place of purification - but whose place? The poetry of Adonis from the 1950's exclusively associated the desert with "the sterility of a senile and collapsing sand-culture;"¹¹ sand and the desert are always obstructions, atavistic and stifling throwbacks to an alternative and forward looking Mediterranean, yet the circumstances of the new poem almost seem to demand a retreat. Although Adonis himself continues to speak of the current condition in terms of "modern Arabic poetry," the return of and back to the desert seem to delineate an enticingly rich terrain for a poetics not based on modernist assumptions, one whose impetus may derive from the West, but whose sources are decidedly native.

As early as 1967, Adonis wrote: "We no longer believe in Europe. We no longer have faith in its political system or in its philosophies. Worms have eaten into its social structure as they have into... its very soul. Europe for us - us backward, ignorant, impoverished people - is a corpse."¹² The irony of this condition is that, in its critique of received ideas, "Arabic thought - in dialogue with itself prior to the problem of its dialogue with Western thought,"¹³ most often reaches back to the texts of tradition for its most unsettling innovations and most potent ammunition, but through a circuitous route:

It was reading Baudelaire that brought me to discover Abu Nuwas. It was reading Mallarmé that restored Abu Tammam's poetic language to me. Rimbaud, Nerval and the Surrealists made me grasp the experience of the mystics. Reading contemporary French criticism prepared me for the unfolding of al-Jurjani's originality. I think many Arabs, poets and critics, went through a similar process."

Given the "malaise" described by Tahar Ben Jelloun, the fact that "homecoming is out of the question," and "the mechanics of loss," have been transformed "into a constantly postponed metaphysics of return,"¹¹ the path into a qualitatively different state of resolve than that presented by a modernist poetics of opposition and confrontation seems clear. This resolve and the use of old materials is not exactly a search for a referential Ur-text lost in paradise; neither is it a "return" to the sublimated energies stock-piled and labeled "differences," nor a wish to "reinstate" the particulars of lives or texts gone by as "presence," something that could only, ultimately, lead to a somewhat pathetic ethnography or roster of classics. The intent, rather, is to play along the margins of absences, to both visit and inhabit "the space in which literature can exist," in the sense defined by Blanchot:

Blanchot's writings investigate the absolute responsibility the writer has to language. Civilization has convinced us that to speak is to control that which is spoken of; Blanchot's entire occupation has been to call that glibness into question. He has shown us that

the void writing creates between itself and the world can never be filled adequately; the writer's hope to tell a story is futile, yet this void is, infinitely and mysteriously, the only space in which literature can exist. In Blanchot's words: to discover the language of literature is to search for the moment which precedes literature."²

Adonis manages to assimilate the poetics of Jabès and écriture, but in a language that is still Arabic, in a space still Mediterranean, "penetrated" but not "deeply marked" or "shaken," at "the beginning of a new era," but "not looking for a new beginning." It is precisely this point of departure - beyond the illusion of control, situated at these intersections and paradoxes, within "the icon of chaos, anarchy and meaninglessness" - that is conveyed in the major poems written from the precipice and in the void that Beirut had become; it is these texts, as well, that constitute the last word for all the poets within ear or eyesight of the tragedy.

"The Desert" remains acutely aware of both the classical and modern texts behind it while ruthlessly interrogating them: "Whatever comes will be old / So take with you anything other than this madness - get ready / To stay a stranger."²⁴ In the tangle of styles that constitute the text - narrative, fragmentary dialogue and monologue, litanic catalogues and lyric interludes - this aphoristic irony (while itself commenting on his own earlier poetry), unmistakably refers to the Abbasid Abu al-Ala al-Ma'arri,

a poet who witnessed and survived one of the Crusaders bloodiest campaigns.

The soul driven from the body
Mourns the memory it leaves behind.

A dove hit in flight sadly turns
Its neck and sees its nest destroyed.²⁶

The more abstract statement of the first stanza in al-Ma'ari's poem is jolted into focus by the clarity of the second, a very common sequence in semitic poetry;²⁷ in the lines of Adonis, both clauses in the formula are stretched to the point of indeterminacy. "whatever comes; anything other than;" while the preparation for a state of constant homelessness - the condition of the dove whose nest has been destroyed - is also left within the space of this unspecified abyss. Beginning the new exile marked by the invasion and Hawi's suicide also means embarking on a much longer and uncertain journey, one that plumbs and perforates the ideology of the book:

This is the beginning of a new era.

Whenever I say: my country is within reach
And bears fruit in a reachable language
Another language kicks me
To another language.

The papers that love ink,
 The alphabet, the poets say goodbye,
 And the poem says goodbye

All the certainty I have lived slips away
 All the torches of my desire slip away
 All that was between the faces of my exile
 and me slips away
 I have to start from the beginning
 To teach my limbs to reach the future,
 To talk, to climb, to descend from the beginning
 In the sky of beginning, in the abyss of the alphabet."

This retreat into the interior, into "the sky of beginning, the abyss of the alphabet," is not the escape one might have once thought in such a highly politicized arena, but precisely the opposite. It is an attempt to repossess what Mahmoud Darwish has cynically referred to as "the surplus value of the slaughter,"²² a demand not to let that surplus value be manipulated once again within a vicious circle of corruption and power, but relocated and reinvested within the terms of an altered political and cultural economy.

One of the strongest works to come out of the ruins of Beirut is Hoda al-Manani's "I Remember I Was A Point, I Was A Circle," the title poem from a collection of the same name. This work, along with Hannan al-Sheikh's novel, The Story of Zahra, further confounds, problematizes and throws into stark relief both destruction and revolution by countering the predictably patriarchal order of those scenes through the simple fact of

women's experience within them. In al-Sheikh's novel, revulsion with any and all forms of arranged marriages and incestual prying on the part of older uncles, drives Zahra, the narrator, into an obsessive and passionate affair with a sniper on a roof of the city; throughout the affair Zahra creates and recreates possible romantic scenarios which are never reciprocated: a blank mirror, even the sniper's allegiance to one of the many sides engaged in the battles raging in the streets below is never clarified. Zahra's story ends as she dimly realizes - fading away - that her own death has come at the hand of her "lover."

In al-Namani's poem, the sense of relational ambivalence and ambiguity is even further refined, fully woven into the very texture of the language itself. Sufi elements culled from the poet's own family traditions are drawn into a chilling kaleidoscope of blending and crashing figures, but nothing is conclusive: any kind of closure is constantly negated and denied, the line recedes while going forward as the poem deconstructs and comments upon itself:

In death I find none but you,

in the breeze too, and the scythe and the drizzle, the
barricades and handguns and men in hoods, in live broadcasts
and telephones cut dead, in bulletins of news, the safe roads
and the unsafe, interrogations, delays, prayerbooks and beads,
chess pieces, tranquilizers, pine and saffron, weddings, births
and spare time, and arguments, arguments,
arguments,

I find none but you.

Here I am bending down to drink and I lose my memory.

I have not let my face leap like a bat, I have not kicked my
foot against the place of my exile, I did not move like
phantoms over the rooftops, I did not try child hunting,
I did not steal the sea's wings, I did not break glass
over a breast, I did not eat my flesh that burns, I have not
withdrawn into despair, I did not go mad in gathering honey,
I did not go mad, I did not go mad, I did not go mad."³

Men are involved in barricades, live broadcasts, bulletins, interrogations and prayerbooks; for the women, there is pine and saffron, there are weddings: the time not spent in labor - giving birth - is "spare" time. But faced with death, that restrictive space of "spare" time and the activities of the men are forgotten: memory is lost and with it "everything other than this madness," all the "ordered" relations, even the rebellion against them seem dwarfed in comparison. Throughout the poem, the "you" serves as an undefined shifter whose locus of reference is never fully disclosed; instead of being confined to either a religious or erotic allusion, the "you" and the "I" join up to become a kind of relational scanner that skims across the surface of the whole poem, continually attempting to realign the tensions of everything within it. The repetition at the end of the stanza, "I did not go mad," becomes madness itself: the literal "meaning" of the sentence is turned into its exact antithesis. In this kind of work, it is

"not the appearance of a word, but the manner of its reappearance that counts."¹⁰⁰ Like "The Desert," the poem also presents a visual field that is not typical in Arabic poetry and seems to stand astride the "image of the authority of 'right thinking' conveyed primarily through 'right printing' - justified margins and conventional punctuation."¹⁰¹

What is most striking about al-Namani's poem, "The Desert" by Adonis, and another major poem that came out of Beirut, "Brief Reflections of an Ancient and Beautiful City on the Coast of the Mediterranean Sea" by Mahmoud Darwish, is the fact that all three avoid closure and conclusion by ending in paradoxes:

I cannot die in a death
That has no death now...

Nothing moves death in this place.
(Darwish)

I remember I was a point, I was a circle.

She is a voice... any voice.
He is a land... not every land.
(al-Namani)

My obsession is here now, loss.
My concern is the end
Is not over.
They are falling, I am not looking for a new beginning.¹⁰²
(Adonis)

In winding down like this, the poems seem to relinquish a certain form of power, in turn perforating and picking apart the preceding text retrospectively. Both the mode and use of materials in these poems correspond to many of the definitions that have been formulated to set the "modern" apart from the "post-modern:"

The deconstructive impulse is characteristic of post-modern art in general and must be distinguished from the self-critical tendency of modernism. Modernist theory presupposes that mimesis, the adequation of an image to a referent, can be bracketed or suspended, and that the art object itself can be substituted (metaphorically) for its referent... Postmodernism neither brackets nor suspends the referent but works instead to problematize the activity of reference.¹⁰⁴

Maybe even more accurately, the poems correspond to what Marjorie Perloff has formulated as the "poetics of indeterminacy" alluded to earlier. In such a poetics, there is, in John Cage's words, "a demilitarization of language" which preserves "a respect for the unintelligibility of what can't be understood."¹⁰⁵ Reverting to perplexing riddles that send shock waves back "to problematize the activity of reference," the poems both skirt and court despair while retaining an equilibrium that forces the reader past feeling to intellect and participation in the crisis of choice that goes into the production of meaning. even if that meaning amounts to a renunciation of understanding. These poems remain an initial place

- the place of initiation - even if the poets themselves wearily tread the worn and varied routes of exile in successive waves. No grand blueprint, lost paradise or unreachable destination - the voyage is all - journey work that chronicles with the accuracy and compression of ancient Near Eastern verse; poetry that maps contradictions, "makes amends with the past, dates the wounds and the estrangement." At the same time, the work does not succumb to the cult of the "text" or the "book" since the political climate and consciousness in and with which these writers work assume language to be just "one strategic part of the total social fact." The often deadly meaning that the configurations and constellations of interpretation can take on within the "reconstruction of historical geography" that has characterized the very turbulent modernity of the region, lends a very different weight to writing and its possibility. As Ron Silliman has pointed out: "New meanings exist only to the extent that they have been previously repressed, not permitted to reach consciousness. But it is necessary to seek the social base of any meaning not in the self-reflexivity of the text, as such, but in its relation to the social positionality of its audience & author."¹⁰⁵ While the Western academy has moved comfortably into a highly technocratic phase in which "the curricula of most literature departments are constructed almost entirely out of monuments, canonized into rigid dynastic formation, serviced and reserviced monotonously by a shrinking guild of humble servitors,"¹⁰⁶ much outside of that

realm remains "unread." It is reading now, and rereading that is producing new writing out of the dense and crowded palimpsest that comprises the Old Mediterranean and Arab world, and it has been the prism of Beirut - both in its days of brilliance and eclipse - through which many of the most characteristic lights of that old world have been newly refracted.

VI.

Jerusalem rests between two limit points, 250 miles from Cairo (the city "whose scale and complexity threatens incoherence and questions the discourse and categories of the urban")¹⁰⁷, and only 136 miles from Beirut, the city whose poets struggled to keep routes to the sea open, only to be enveloped by the desert. Cairo, although accessible to Israelis, remains a tourist site and not an urban point of reference. Neither the interior city (through the work of Jabès), nor the exterior city (through weather reports, newspapers, trade, new translations of contemporary Egyptian writers or any other significant forms of exchange), have fully entered Jerusalem's vocabulary; Beirut, its culture dispersed and transplanted, has not been appended to this lexicon in terms of a possible poetics of disaster and politics of restitution but only as a closed chapter in a reckless and disturbing adventure.

Ironically (akin to the irony in which Jews of European origin found themselves more and more marginalized vis à vis both Palestinians and Arab Jews after the 1967 occupation), in

putting the nails on the coffin of Beirut. Israel has bound itself to the fate of the region more firmly and inextricably than ever before. Many realities and realizations (a growing awareness of Israel/Palestine as the country of the people living in it, rather than some ever expanding "home" for all Jews; the progressive relocalization of the Arab/Israeli conflict and its dwindling significance on the international agenda; an altered Israeli economy relying more and more on an internally colonized local Arab market than the undated blank check of American aid), have all contributed to the creation of a potential climate for one of those "significant cleavages in history where a cut will separate different types of happening."¹⁰⁶ This cut (in which a truer rapprochement between Israelis and Palestinians and the Mediterranean and Arab worlds could turn a potential climate into an actual one, reconnect old and familiar routes and realign the cultural constellations of the region), only skirts the margins of current "official" discourse.

Despite the possibility of a new order in the making, Jerusalem still encloses the space of another incoherence. A complete microcosm of Mediterranean and Arab Jewry (as well as containing the full range of diverse Palestinian affiliations), it remains effectively cut off from significant access to the texture, substance and wider sphere of

determinants that comprise the world it forms a part of. As Jacqueline Kahanoff wrote:

To those of us who were born in the communities of the Orient, the names of places which were once familiar - Baghdad, Damascus, Cairo, Tunis, Algiers - are now the far away places in that mythical geography of hearts and minds, where distances do not correspond to those on maps.¹⁰⁰

The mirror image of this sense of being locked in as "the far away places in that mythical geography" shrink and fully recede into the interior, is also conveyed by Raymonda Iawil, a Palestinian, in the form of memory from the limbo of a divided city:

In 1954, I changed schools once more, moving to Saint Joseph's in Jerusalem. Mother used to come to see me there, taking me for walks toward the demarcation line dividing the city. We would stand on the roof of Notre Dame, gazing across the border... Invariably, her thoughts and mine turned to her sons - my brothers - only a few hundred yards away, so near, but so unreachable... We walked the streets of Jerusalem, as though we were trudging through the desert, from mirage to mirage; wherever we went, our thirst remained.¹⁰¹

With the "re-unification" of the city in 1967, Jerusalem found itself almost completely isolated from the "old and

habitual" world it had once formed an indivisible part of, with some intervals during the Crusades, since the time of the Jebusites "And Melchizedek, King of Salem, a priest of God Most High."'' Twenty years later, the processes set in motion then have become institutionalized. The percentage of people knowing only victory or defeat - those born into either side of the occupation - has steadily muffled even the possibility of hearing voices that could articulate the knowledge of a different experience. As the nerve center of a globalized conflict whose roots have been even further mystified through the manipulation of religious signs transplanted from a long symbolic order and reappropriated as national symbols, the city also serves as a testing ground. The city itself becomes a test - coding and recoding itself like an endless movie or news report constantly interrogating and sounding out its viewers about the claims and counterclaims of its contenders, forcing them to determine why this frame was shot at that angle, who edited what out.

The land itself vividly reflects this struggle as the face of the city finds itself irreversibly deformed. Instead of terraced olive groves and fruit trees, massive residential and institutional structures (built on the tops of levelled off hills), surround the city like ominous fortresses, overshadowing rural enclaves and the remaining "natives", holding onto the little land they have left. Analogies between

these current proclamations of intrusive presence and the Crusaders' bastions of alien power have often been made by city planners, historians and even poets. In "The Crusader Man," by the Israeli poet Shelley Elkayam, there is no need to revert to the "proof" of archaeology or document; instead, the poem relies on an even surer source: knowledge localized in traces of the land's memory encoded and inscribed in her own accumulated experience as a 7th generation resident of it:

The Crusader man paid the Land a visit
and that was
around
so and so many
years back

The Crusader man did the country
in this
or that many days.

The Crusader man became the landlord.
An enemy with holdings.
Full of trust,
sword-bearing, armor-wearing, with a coat of mail.

Kind of a jumpy guy, the Crusader man.

The Land is a witness,
she sees it from
the way he
laid his

place out,
 from the fact
 that he never did make himself a home.
 From the way he'd attack
 and cut himself off on the mountain tops.¹¹¹

The dates and facts are not that important: "so and so many years back; this or that many days." What does count are the Crusader man's intentions; here, it's clear that his "trust" only amounts to holdings, whatever can be kept by sword and armor: booty seized or paid for, the pleasures of a whore and not a companion. The Crusader man's trip to the Land is just a visit, he "sees" everything he has to in a matter of days before becoming the landlord and lording it over the land - laying the land without grasping the lay of the land. By cutting off the tops of mountains, the Crusader man cuts himself off from the source of wisdom she can provide, the knowledge needed to build a home. Far from being a passive object, the land as subject absorbs the architect's intent and reacts accordingly. Recalling the Crusader man's insult in giving her the once over without stopping to savor and be taught the intricacies of her nature, she stores up the scars inflicted upon her.

The figure of the Crusader man pours salt on very old and newer wounds, recalling allusions in the text of Adonis to the Abbasid al-Ma'ari and his experience of the unspeakable

atrocities committed by barbarian hordes as they overran the ancient cities of Syria and Palestine; in concluding The Crusades Through Arab Eyes, Amin Maalouf writes:

Although the epoch of the Crusades ignited a genuine economic and cultural revolution in Western Europe, in the Orient these holy wars led to long centuries of decadence and obscurantism. Assaulted from all quarters, the Muslim world turned in on itself. It became over-sensitive, defensive, intolerant, sterile - attitudes that grew steadily worse as world-wide evolution, a process from which the Muslim world felt excluded, continued... The Arab world - simultaneously fascinated and terrified by the Franj, whom they encountered as barbarians and defeated, but who subsequently managed to dominate the earth - cannot bring itself to consider the Crusades a mere episode in the bygone past... There can be no doubt that the schism between these two worlds dates from the Crusades, deeply felt by the Arabs, even today, as an act of rape.¹¹²

VII.

Fulfilling almost every imaginable cliché of the city as palimpsest, one embedded layer of Jerusalem has been further and further marginalized in a discourse within which gratuitous tourism - the search or affirmation of an often vague, amorphous or negatively defined ethnic identity - has replaced the ritual of pilgrimage. Despite the short shrift given Muslims by the Blue Guide, during the 1,310 year period dating from the Arab conquest in 638 until 1948, there were only 129 years in which Jerusalem was not under one form or another of Islamic sovereignty. While this is not to suggest that such sovereignty was in any way uniform, ideal, or free from the practice of various kinds of occupation or exploitation, it can suggest the parameters of a context within which the city and its inhabitants actively expressed themselves using a vernacular language of pre-industrial knowledge, the lingua franca of the old Levantine, Mediterranean and Arab world. Implicit connections spanning the currency of this vernacular can be sensed in two descriptions of the city, written almost a thousand years

apart from each other; the first is by the historian and geographer al-Muqadassi, a 10th c. native Jerusalemite:

The buildings of the Holy City are of stone, and you will find nowhere finer or more solid construction... The grapes are enormous, and there are no quinces equal to those of the Holy City. In Jerusalem are all manner of learned men and doctors, and for this reason the heart of every man of intelligence yearns towards her. All the year round, never are her streets empty of strangers. As to the saying that Jerusalem is the most illustrious of cities - is she not the one that unites the advantages of This World and those of the Next? As for the Holy City being the most productive of all places in good things, why, Allah - may He be exalted! - has gathered together here all the fruits of the lowlands, and of the plains, and of the hill country, even all those of the most opposite kinds: such as the orange and the almond, the date and the nut, the fig and the banana, besides milk in plenty, and honey and sugar.¹¹⁴

The second account, by the Palestinian writer Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, speaks of the city in the late 1930's and early 1940's from the other side of catastrophe, through memory, in a voice already shaded by the tone of commemoration:

"Do you know Jerusalem? I don't know whether it really has seven hills, but I have walked up and down all its hills, among its houses built of stone - white stone, pink stone, red stone - castle-like houses, rising high and low along the roads as they go up and down. You'd think they were jewels holding

the mantle of the Lord... those long walks on Jaffa Street or in the labyrinth of rocks and olive trees that surrounded the city. Have you ever sat down on the red earth, under an old, knotted olive tree, surrounded by thorn bushes and a few anemones that fought their way out through the struggling thorns? Or by those little yellow flowers that our farmers called bannun? How beautiful the olive groves were in Talbiyya, Katamon and Musallaba! How beautiful was the valley that stretched all the way to Maliha! It was there that we left part of our lives as a gift, as a pledge that we would return.'''

Jabra's piece, even though located beyond the vocabulary of the climate of neglect (written, as it is, from the backward glance of exile), still manages to fully express what is most striking about both passages: the fluid exchange between organic and human creation, between the urban and the rural.

The finely constructed stone houses, the hand-crafted jewels celebrating divinity, the learned people (implying the existence of libraries and schools), the constant traffic of pilgrims and visitors - all blend in unnoticeably with the vegetation of the lowlands, the plains and the hill country; with the uncrafted labyrinth of rocks, the red earth, knotted olive trees, thorn bushes and anemones. The diverse terrain and the varied crops delivered by each part of the land also seem to indicate, without explicitly stating it, that a delicate balance of agricultural technique and urban economy can yield true riches. Tracing the threads that bind such a social structure together confirms this sense:

The Muslim city can be defined less as a willed, conscious, so to speak "programmed" social and physical entity than as a series of tensions between contradictory and at times downright incompatible poles, always subject to the variables of time and area. The city is commercial and artisanal, but much of its wealth derives from agriculture, and the physical separation between urban living and the cultivation of land is never very clear.¹¹⁶

Both terrain and architecture, repository of the most cohesive lexicon of the lingua franca mentioned earlier, provide a means for illustrating how the Islamic context enriched and informed the age old intent of traditional culture to create objects imbued with the aura of events.

The labyrinth of rocks and terraced olive trees described by Jabra as surrounding Jerusalem, ~~mime~~ the concentric nature of the architectural layering that attempted to redefine certain sites without usurping them, most obviously the Temple Mount area where the Dome of the Rock now stands. This monument, initiated in 685 and completed in 692, set not only the visual but the structural tone of the city as "a mosaic of religious, ethnic and linguistic communities within the unifying field of a broadly defined Islamic civilization: a civilization that drew its characteristic qualities as a social order from the overwhelmingly Muslim character of the population without restricting participation in that civilization to Muslims."¹¹⁷ Yet, this "overwhelmingly Muslim character" was itself a palimpsest and prism of the people,

languages, texts, material culture and places within which the faith was revealed and sought its new adherents. The Dome of the Rock clearly expresses the nature, needs and choices offered by such a social order: the stunning vigor of the Prophet Muhammad's revelation is announced through the brilliant engineering of a building that squares the circle and hovers along the divide between earth and heaven, between the proposal for a new set of relations and a tribute to those already existing. At a time when Islam had little material proof to entice the more ancient and well endowed civilizations it encountered, its new monuments were determined to impress, astound and directly engage "the people of the Book," both Jews and Christians.

By situating itself where it did, the Dome of the Rock completely redefined the "memory of the qualitative space upon which all religious rites and orientation are based." This sense of qualitative space is particularly apt for the Dome of the Rock since: "In Islamic architecture space is never divorced from form: it is not the materialization of abstract Euclidean space which then provides a frame into which things are "placed." Space is qualified by the forms that exist in it. A sacred center polarizes the spaces about it."''' By incorporating the complex network of existing event and myth regarding the sacred center of its own location (Mount Moriah as the earth's navel and place of Adam's creation and death;

the rock where Abraham brought Isaac to be sacrificed; the area of the Temple Mount of Solomon and the Holy of Holies; the spot from which Muhammad ascended to heaven), the Dome shares the characteristics of a mode called "building the site." In this method, "the specific culture of the region - that is to say, its history in both a geological and agricultural sense - becomes inscribed into the form and realization of the work. This inscription, which arises out of "in-laying" the building into the site, has many levels of significance, for it has a capacity to embody, in built form, the prehistory of the place, its archaeological past and its subsequent cultivation and transformation across time. Through this layering into the site the idiosyncracies of place find their expression without falling into sentimentality."¹³

Just how successful the Dome of the Rock has been in "polarizing space" and maintaining the "aura" of a complex occasion of events transformed across time, can be seen through its present situation. Surrounded on the wider concentric plane by sprawling modern suburbs crisscrossed by highways, the Dome is now witness to a radical transformation of a once familiar structure and economy of relations. Although threatened by the possibility of being "symbolized" out of actual time and place, hijacked into the sterile realm of ideological imagery and swamped by the scale of a new order (not to mention being blown up by new soldiers of faith bent

on inducing a preview of the apocalypse), the Dome seems to have remained impervious to the kind of reductive reproduction that would deprive it of its "integrity and otherness." Commenting on a telephoto shot in which the Dome is seen through a compressed foreground of minarets and tv antennas against a background of trees and white gravestones lined along the Mount of Olives, Edward Said writes:

All across the Arab world there is a mixture of cultural styles that characterizes rapid development: Modern Western modes of dress, activity, and architecture are superimposed on traditional settings and ways of being. The commonest symbol of this is to be found in the typical photographs of an old city across which is laid a grid of radio and television antennae. What we get is a site of intensity that makes reference to two traditions, one native, the other foreign or Western, held in a kind of awkward check by each other. You are left to compute the various gains and losses resulting from this kind of balance, and you are also led to think of two worlds in sustained tension. A more just representation of how the mixture of elements actually occurs and is experienced in modern Arab life is found, I think, in photographs of traditional sites whose undeniable centrality stands out, and draws in, by subordinating, the intruding symbols of metropolitan modernity. This is the slower way everyone absorbs and reorients the new according to the still redoubtable force of the old and habitual.¹²⁰

More than just "drawing in" and "subordinating," the ability to look back in return invested with the ironic gaze of

allegory lends the Dome an "aura" in the precise way defined by Walter Benjamin:

Experience of the aura rests on the transposition of a response common in human relationships to the relationship between the inanimate or natural object and man. To perceive the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return... The uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being embedded in the fabric of tradition. This tradition is itself thoroughly alive and extremely changeable. That which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of a work of art... the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition.¹⁴

VIII.

The inscription of time within a site marks an integer that is not necessarily a "progression" but certainly a fact: Islam comes after and evolves out of the earlier texts and prophecies of "the people of the Book" and in so doing redefines them. Its social order and the variety of writing produced within it occupy a large block of time, even though the interstices and nuances of that duration have largely collapsed into even larger, but more amorphous and safely uncontradictory categories. As Ilan Halevi writes: "There must be a way out of this sad history. A way of neither remaining prisoners of its sad parameters, nor remaining entranced by the turn of phrases, the echo of visions, the texture of the paper. The page must be turned." The turning of the page, the further integer that another newer social order has superimposed over its predecessor, the definition and location of the "cleavage" that will initiate another "collective duration," relies very much on the generosity of interpretation and the hand art and imagination can lend to

piercing "the sad parameters" of unchecked assumptions. As John Cage has remarked: "The function of art at the present time is to preserve it from all the logical minimalizations that we are at each instant tempted to apply to the flux of events. To draw us nearer to the process which is the world we live in."

The old Mediterranean world, the prism of the Levant, is still the process of finding the right angle through which the rays of its own light can be refracted. Although they may remain parenthetical (bracketed off in expectation of either perfect time and the final correspondence of words and things, or the aftermath of global disaster), the cities are inhabited and the people within - what they and their cities have gone through - exert unyielding pressure on the remaining and "unrelieved" traces. The once qualitative space that is the site of a riddle circumscribing two ancient people is now as densely crowded with claims and counterclaims as Cairo, the city that "escapes us," and as filled with rough edged shards (pieces of the puzzle), as Beirut is with rubble. But a dream can lead away from mirages and out of the desert, to Damascus and the next part of the itinerary: Haim Vital, the renowned mystic who recorded the following, was born in Safed in 1542; in 1593 he was known to have been in Jerusalem, most likely staying there until his arrival in Damascus in 1598 where he remained until his death in 1620:

The Muslim: A Dream

Friday full moon in Adar 5355 a Sabbath evening dreamt that I was in Jerusalem. A Muslim with a brilliantly white cap came up to me. He smiled. Salaamed. He placed a hand over my head and said in a soft but audible voice "Rise up o God and scatter all thine enemies." Then Rabbi Massoud led me to the house of Rabbi Ashkenazi. He rose for me bowed down and sat me at his right side. He took the Zohar in his hand and told me "Let us study." There was a passage that he couldn't understand but I explained it. It was a section of the Zohar Shemot that tells about a man who danced for Rabbi Eleazar and so showed him he would enter Paradise. In the dream I thought the Muslim was the prophet Elijah'~'

Footnotes:

1. Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1978), p. 65.

2. Ethical Writings of Maimonides, edited by Raymond L. Weiss with Charles E. Butterworth (New York: Dover, 1983), p. 62. The study of Maimonides, within the context of modern, primarily European Jewish thought, is a perfect example of the kinds of distances that have been traversed and the very different uses classical Mediterranean and Arab Jewish thinkers have been put to. For one of the rare studies treating Maimonides within the whole scheme of Mediterranean and Arab culture and rabbinical practice, see Jose Faur, Studies in the Mishne Torah (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1978) (Hebrew); more accessibly, see Faur's Golden Doves With Silver Dots: Semiotics and Textuality in the Rabbinic Tradition (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), particularly Chapter III, "Freedom, Language and Negativity," pp. 59-83. For a very different approach to Maimonides, certainly the most accomplished of its kind but quite far removed from the practical cultural context in which Maimonides still operates as a familiar figure and authority, see Isadore Twersky, Introduction to the Code of Maimonides: Mishneh Torah (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980).

3. Mandelstam's lines are from "Theodosia," and section XII of "Armenia," found in Osip Mandelstam, Selected Poems, translated by David McDuff (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975), pp. 61 and 109. In Hope Abandoned, trans. Max Hayward (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1976), Nadezhda Mandelstam traced her husband's sense of Jewish identity in the following terms: "M., who was Osip, not Joseph, in his birth certificate, never forgot he was a Jew, but his 'blood memory' was of a peculiar kind. It went right back to his biblical ancestors, to Spain, and to the Mediterranean, retaining nothing from the wanderings through Central Europe. In other words, he felt his affinity with the shepherds and kings of the Bible, with the Jewish poets and philosophers of Alexandria and Spain, and had even decided that one of them was his direct ancestor: a Spanish poet who was kept on a chain in a dungeon during the Inquisition. 'I must have just one drop of his blood,' he said in Voronezh, reading the life of this Spanish Jew, who composed sonnets during his confinement ('You could not take away his moving lips') and wrote them down after he had been released for a brief period." p. 563.

4. S.D. Goitein, A Mediterranean Society (Berkeley: University of California, 1967-1983), p. 1; vol. IV.

5. See Marjorie Perloff's "Of Canons and Contemporaries," Sulfur 16: p. 159. The quote used here, and cited by Perloff, is from

Jacques Roubaud and Michel Deguy's Vingt poètes américains (Paris: Gallimard, 1980).

6. Ilan Halevi, A History of the Jews, trans. A.M. Berrett (London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1987), p. 71. Originally published as Question Juive. La Tribu. La Loi. L'Espace (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1981). For whatever faults some may find with Halevi's work, he is one of the rare historians who has seriously taken into account what he calls the two 'great transfers' (the native Palestinian Arab population away from Palestine and that of the native Mediterranean and Arab Jewish population into Israel/Palestine), and their implications for a re-reading of the history - beginning from the present - of the Jews.

7. S.D. Goitein, A Mediterranean Society, pp. 6-7; vol. I.

8. Ilan Halevi, A History of the Jews, pp. 208-9. For the most accessible, and by now standard, sociological work on the "oriental" problematic in Israel, see: Sammy Smooha, Israel: Pluralism and Conflict (London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978). Smooha's work supplanted the established old guard of Israeli sociology, particularly the approach of S. N. Eisenstadt, with its framework of the "integration" and "absorption" of non-western Jews into a "western" (read: Eastern European Ashkenazi) social, cultural and political framework rather than the "absorption" of Israel as a whole into a pluralistic Levantine context. To get some sense of this Levantine approach, see Nissim Rejwan, "Israel's Communal Controversy - an Oriental appraisal," Midstream 10 (June, 1964), pp. 14-26; also his "The Two Israels: A Study in Europocentrism," Judaism 16 (Winter, 1967), pp. 97-108; "Israel's Ethno-Political Cleavage," Midstream (June/July, 1983), pp. 18-22. For one of the rare Israeli sociologists to put the "oriental" question into economic and class terms, see Shlomo Swirsky, Not Underprivileged But Made To Fail (Haifa, 1980) (Hebrew). More accessibly, see Avraham Shama and Mark Iris, Immigration Without Integration: Third World Jews in Israel (Cambridge: Schenkman Publishing, 1977). The most comprehensive alternative "native" approach to the problem - in terms of both history and sociology - can be found in Nahum Menahem, Ethnic Tension and Discrimination in Israel (Tel Aviv: 1983); a French edition is available as: Israel: Tensions et Discriminations Communautaires, trans. Michèle Bitton (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 1986).

Two other accessible and valuable collections can be found in a special issue of Les Temps Modernes, No. 394, 1979, called "Le second Israel: La question Sépharade;" and Khamsin 5, "Oriental Jewry." Articles from this issue can also be found in Forbidden Agendas: Intolerance and Defiance in the Middle East, selected and introduced by Jon Rothschild (London: Al-Saqi, 1984), pp. 17-122.

9. From the Prophet Obadiah: 1:20. The Jerusalem Bible (Jerusalem: Koren, 1977), p. 695.

10. Ilan Halvei, A History of the Jews, p. 198.
11. Ibid., p. 201. For the best general survey of this process available, see: Marion Woolfson, Prophets in Babylon: Jews in the Arab World (London: Faber & Faber: London, 1980).
12. Abbas Shibliak, The Lure of Zion: The Case of the Iraqi Jews (London: Al-Saqi, 1986), p. 23. This is the only work I am aware of that analyses the modern displacement of one specific Arab Jewish community in its global sense, that is, in relation to the push and pull of Zion and the fate of the Palestinians. Shibliak is also the first scholar to work with British archival material that had heretofore been unavailable. Also see Nissim Rejwan's extremely cohesive account in Part Three ("A Century of Radical Change / 1850-1951") of his The Jews of Iraq: 3000 Years of History and Culture (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1985).
13. The very rare photographs described here - which shed more than some light on a largely unknown world, particularly in the Israeli context - can be found in the Hebrew edition of Nahum Menahem's Ethnic Tension and Discrimination in Israel (Haifa, 1983), pp. 294, 264, 192, 184, 147, 227, 229, 242. Three recent and very significant works providing access to the other "other," the Palestinian, through photographs are: Sarah Graham Brown, The Palestinians and their Society: 1880-1946 (London: Quartet Books, 1980); Walid Khalidi, Before Their Diaspora: A Photographic History of the Palestinians / 1876-1948 (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1984); Edward Said and Jean Mohr, After The Last Sky, (London: Faber & Faber, 1986). Although the Israeli Museum of the Diaspora in Tel Aviv has published a number of photographic essays on the Mediterranean and Arab Jewish communities (From Carthage to Jerusalem: The Jewish Community in Tunis (Tel Aviv: Beit Hatefusoith, 1986), as well as an exhibition catalog on Libyan Jewry), these works remain within the framework of the "integration" and "absorption" models, stressing the uniqueness of each community in the past and their leaps into "modernity;" in addition, the disruptive nature of the transfer and socialization process undergone in Israel is completely avoided. For projects that come much closer to the recuperative intent that distinguishes the books on the Palestinians, see: Juifs d'Egypte: Images et textes, ed. Jacques Hassoun (Paris: Editions du Scribe, 1984), and Les Juifs d'Algerie: Images et textes, eds. Jean Laloum and Jean-Luc Allouche (Paris: Editions du Scribe, 1987). The fact that these two works appeared in France (while the books on the Palestinians appeared prior to them and in English), gives some indication of the intricate nature and configuration of cultural assumptions, balances and spaces of reception available now for works dealing with Mediterranean and Arab Jews.
14. Abbas Shibliak, The Lure of Zion (as above, note 12), p. 44. For some of the implicit and explicit alliances of the Zionist movement

during this period, see Lenni Brenner, Zionism in the Age of the Dictators (New York: Lawrence Hill, 1983).

15. Jacques Hassoun, "The Traditional Jewry of the Hara," in Shimon Shamir ed., The Jews of Egypt: A Mediterranean Society in Modern Times (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987), p. 172.

The whole set of relations discussed here and further on can, so far, unfortunately only be gotten in bits and pieces; there is as yet no comprehensive study dealing with the whole plethora of social relations both within the Jewish communities of the Levant and in relation to the greater societies they formed a part of. For some examples of works that at least suggest the complexities involved, see Shiblak's The Lure of Zion; chapter 28, "Youth in Revolt," of Rejwan's The Jews of Iraq; Renzo De Felice's superb Jews in an Arab Land: Libya, 1835-1970, trans. Judith Roumani (Austin: University of Texas, 1985); Maurice Mizrahi L'Egypte et ses juifs: Le temps revolue - XIX^e et XX^e siecles (Lausanne: Maurice Mizrahi, 79, av. Victor Ruffy, 1977); Juifs du Nil, ed. Jacques Hassoun (Paris: Le Sycamore, 1981), particularly Gudrun Kramer and Alfred Morabia's "Face a la modernite: Les juifs d'Egypte aux XIX^e et XX^e siecles;" also see Gudrun Kramer's "Political Participation of the Jews in Egypt Between World War I and the 1952 Revolution," in the Shimon Shamir volume cited above; Michael M. Laskier, The Alliance Israelite Universelle and the Jewish Communities of Morocco: 1862-1962 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983); Y.D. Eskandarany, "Egyptian Jewry, Why it Declined," in Khamsin, no. 5, 1978.

For the most cohesive Marxist approach to Jewish society as a whole, see: Abraham Leon, The Jewish Question: a Marxist Interpretation (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970); this should be accompanied by Maxime Rodinson's critical introduction, "From the Jewish Nation to the Jewish Problem," in Cult. Ghetto and State: The Persistence of the Jewish Question, trans. Jon Rothschild (London: Al-Saqi, 1983).

For good background works, one general, the other particular, that help give some sense of the greater context within which Jewish communities existed in the Arab world, see: Albert Hourani, Minorities in the Arab World (London: Oxford University Press, 1947), and H. Batatu, The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movement in Iraq: A Study of Iraq's Old Landed Commercial Classes and its Communists, Ba'athists and Free Officers (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

16. See, for example, Rejwan's The Jews of Iraq, p. 232. Also, Nahum Menahem's original archival research analysing correspondence between Mediterranean and Arab Jewish communities and the Zionist authorities in Palestine, pp. 163-333 [Hebrew edition]; pp. 155-326 [French]. Also see Eliyahu Eliachar, Life is with the Palestinians (Jerusalem: The Council of the Sephardic Communities, 1975), particularly pp. 168-290 [Hebrew]; also his "The Status of the Sephardic Jews Since the

Balfour Declaration," Shevet Ve'Am 1 (Jerusalem: The Council of the Sephardic Communities, 1970), pp. 67-84[Hebrew].

17. See Dr. Abraham Matalon's important study The Hebrew Pronunciation in its Struggle (Tel Aviv: Hadar, 1979)[Hebrew]. Also see José Faur's "A Sense of Language," The Sephardic World (Summer 1972), pp. 5-9. For this problematic in a different context, see Jacques Hassoun, Fragments de langue maternelle (Paris: Editions Payot, 1979), as well as his "Eloge de la dysharmonie," in Actes Colloques sur le bilinguisme A Rabat (Paris: Editions Denoël, 1975).

18. See José Faur's Golden Doves with Silver Dots: Semiotics and Textuality in Rabbinic Tradition (as above, note 2). Of particular relevance here are all of Chapter III ("Freedom, Language and Negativity," pp. 59-83); Chapter IV ("Textuality in Rabbinic Tradition," pp. 84-113), and Section 1 ("Semiotic and Semantic Reading," pp. 118-122) of Chapter V. For two examples of the ritualistic aspects of reading amongst Jews, see: A. Stahl, "Ritualistic Reading Among Oriental Jews," Anthropological Quarterly 52, and S. Deshen, "Ritualization of Literacy: The Works of Tunisian Scholars in Israel," American Ethnologist 2.

19. Ilan Halevi, A History of the Jews, p. 222.

20. Cited by Ehud Ben-Ezer in "Brenner and the 'Arab Question,'" Modern Hebrew Literature Vol. 12, Nos. 3-4; Spring / Summer 1987 (Tel Aviv: Institute for the Translation of Hebrew Literature), p. 20.

21. Dr. Michael M. Laskier, "Albert Antébi - On His Activity in Eretz Israel, 1897-1914," Pe'amin 21, 1984 (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute)[Hebrew], p. 59 (my translation). Walid Khalidi also notes Antebbi's views in his Before Their Diaspora (see above, note 13), p. 32. Antebbi was, by no means, a lone figure; a careful examination of accounts by Mediterranean and Arab Jews of this (and the following) period would reveal that his concerns about political and economic parity between Jews and Arabs were not extraordinary but, in fact, just reflected the consensus amongst native Jews in the region. The most representative, and accessible, of these figures is, of course, Eliyahu Eliachar. Besides Life Is With the Palestinians (see above, note 16), see Philip Gilon, Israelis and Palestinians: Co-Existence Or... The Credo of Elia Eliachar (Tel Aviv: Gedalyah Cornfeld, 1977), where there are some references to the attitudes of the generation preceding him.

For just a hint indicating how widespread such attitudes were, see Aharon Cohen, Israel and the Arab World (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976), pp. 72-93. In speaking about Haim Arlosoroff, a Zionist leader whose way of thinking veered from the consensus and whose assassination remains unsolved to this day, Cohen brings up other dissenters: "Arlosoroff was to some extent 'exceptional' in official Zionist thinking. The Zionist leaders who came from Europe were far removed

in spirit and mentality from even the Jewish intelligentsia of Eastern countries, some of whom were solidly established in the Arab cultural world and could have constituted an excellent bridge between the Jewish and the Arab national movements. Men like Professor A.S. Yahuda, David Yellin, Rabbi Nahum of Egypt, and several leading Sephardi Jews in Palestine, could have contributed a great deal to the creation of a relationship of understanding and cooperation between the two peoples, but were not given the opportunity to do so. The upshot was that they resigned in an atmosphere of bitterness, and some of them even became confirmed opponents of anything connected with Zionist leadership and policy." p. 81. For some material on A.S. Yahuda, see his remarkable Dr. Weizmann's Errors On Trial (New York: 1952) (published privately by Ethel R. Yahuda).

The chief rabbi of Alexandria and great scholar Moise Ventura, for example, in a New Year's sermon delivered as late as 1942, had this to say: "After the lamentable failure of Western civilization, the Orient is again called upon to play an important part in the cultural life of Nations. The Orient means Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Iraq; more specifically, the Semites - Jews and Arabs - are again called upon together to play a vital role within the scene of history... Everyone whose mental capacities are in free working order must recognize that today the enemies of the Jews are as well the enemies of the Arabs - that is, the enemies of civilization." Soupirs et Espoirs: échos de la Guerre 1939-45 (Paris: Librairie Durlacher, 1948), pp. 76 and 86 (my translation). Needless to say, Ventura's sentiments were a far cry from the prevailing climate of Zionist leaders.

To get a sense of precisely how deep the 'moderate' attitudes of Orientals are, see my: "Reorienting: Sephardim in the Middle East," New Outlook: Middle East Monthly (Tel Aviv: January/February, 1987), pp. 51-4; and my "La communauté sépharade en Israël et le processus de paix," in Perspectives Judeo-Arabs 7 (Paris: August, 1987), pp. 47-85. Another indication, public opinion polls and racist assumptions notwithstanding, can be gotten from the fact that Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef (Israel's former chief rabbi and still the most respected Sephardi rabbinic authority now practicing), has formulated halakhic (legal) opinions stating that giving up portions of the Land of Israel is desirable and even necessary for the sake of peace. Needless to say, again, like the thought of the figures mentioned above, such opinions are not only not studied or granted legitimacy but even, to a great extent, suppressed within the Israeli context.

22. As above, Pe'amim, p. 77 (my translation, as below).

23. Ibid., p. 79.

24. Ibid., p. 76. Again, these attitudes are not just those of Antebbi; any of the sources cited above (note 21) reveal identical positions.

25. Ehud Ben-Ezer in "Brenner and the 'Arab Question,'" p. 22 (see note 20, above).

26. Ibid., p. 22. Ben-Ezer here just reflects the prevalent attitude of the contemporary Israeli literary establishment towards non-European pre-state Hebrew writers.

27. For some of the sources tracing this, see: Lev Hakak, Lockfast and Lowly: Oriental Jews in the Hebrew Short Story (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sepher, 1981) [Hebrew]. To see just how ingrained such attitudes are, see the very good work done on the image of Arabs in Hebrew children's literature by Fouzi El-Asmar, Through the Hebrew Looking Glass: Arab Stereotypes in Children's Literature (London: Zed Press, 1986), as well as Risa Domb's The Arab in Hebrew Prose (London: Valentine, Mitchell, 1982).

For a more recent controversy that essentially follows the same typology, see Amos Oz, In the Land of Israel, trans. Maurie Goldberg-Bartura (London: Fontana, 1983), pp. 25-48. This section of the book, perhaps the most "hopeless" in Oz's despairing journey, portrays a visit made by him to the working-class town of Beit Shemesh outside of Jerusalem and the rage of its residents that greeted him there. Oz's bewilderment and revulsion at this scene is quite apparent; moreover, the chapter is juxtaposed with a very earnest and searching visit to a group of young Palestinian intellectuals. The book itself, and particularly this juxtaposition - between brutal and enraged Orientals and sensitive, intelligent Palestinians - was vehemently attacked by Oriental Jewish intellectuals. Unfortunately, this whole exchange took place mostly in the Hebrew press; except for the Rejwan articles cited above (see note 8), the best and most accessible piece available is Inge Lederer-Gibel's, "Radical Chic in Israel," in Christianity and Crisis, Vol. 44, No. 16, October 15, 1984. The extent to which class, ethnic and cultural questions regarding Israel's "middle-easterness" are either totally ignored, suppressed or distorted within Israeli liberal discourse - i.e., practically all of the literature and information that reaches the West - is truly remarkable and one does not have to search farther than the nearest magazine (see, for example, the newest Jewish American liberal production, Likhn), book review (see reviews of Amos Oz's latest novel, Black Box), or translated work (see David Grossman's Yellow Wind, trans. Haim Watzman [New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1988]).

28. Ilan Halevi, A History of the Jews, p. 210. While Israeli liberal thought sees 1967 as the beginning of the end, Halevi is one of the few to make this important distinction about Israel's re-emergence within the Arab and Mediterranean world only after 1967 in precisely these terms.

29. Raja Shehade, The Third Way: A Journal of Life in the West Bank (London: Quartet, 1982), p. 133.

30. Charles Olson, "Billy the Kid," in Human Universe and Other Essays, edited by Donald Allen (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 137. Also see Olson's The Special View of History, edited by Ann Charters (Berkeley: Oyez, 1970), for an expanded treatment of this.
31. Mahmoud Darwish, "When The Martyrs Go To Sleep," in Modern Poetry of the Arab World, edited and translated by Abdullah al-Udhari (Hammondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986), p. 139.
32. Guides Bleus Illustrés: Méditerranée Orientale, Égypte (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1938), p. 151 (my translation, as below).
33. Ibid., p. 173.
34. Ibid., p. 176.
35. Ibid., p. 176.
36. Remarkably enough, in this seething cauldron of conflicting contentions, these figures are not really disputed; this particular instance is from Khalidi's Before Their Diaspora, p. 189 (see note 13, above). In general, the work to be consulted is: A Survey of Palestine: Prepared in December 1945 and January 1946 for the Information of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry, 2 vols. and supp. (Jerusalem: Government of Palestine, 1946).
37. Jacques Derrida, Glas (Paris: Editions Galilée, 1974), pp. 268-9. Cited also in Susan Handelman's The Slayers of Moses: The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982), p. 165.
38. Susan Handelman, The Slayers of Moses, p. 166.
39. Ilan Halevi, A History of the Jews, p. 199. Also see Alistair Horne, A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962 (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1977), pp. 58-9 and this, on p. 36: "In 1870 the Crémieux Decrees had made the exception of conferring automatic French citizenship upon the whole Jewish community of Algeria. Here, for Muslims, was a constantly open wound: why should the Jewish minority be open to political privileges denied to the indigenous majority?"
40. Yvette Chamache, "Contrepoint," in Juifs du Nil, edited by Jacques Hassoun (Paris: Editions Le Sycomore, 1981), pp. 198 and 204 (my translation).
41. Hélène Cixous, Dadans (Paris: des femmes, 1986), p. 27 (my translation).
42. Denis Donoghue, Ferocious Alphabets (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), see chapter 6, "Graphireading," pp. 149-202,

particularly the section on Derrida, pp. 155-166, and the title chapter, pp. 203-11.

43. "An Interview with Edmond Jabès Conducted by Jason Wiess," Conjunctions 9 (New York), pp. 140-1.

44. Edward Said, Orientalism (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), pp. 158-62. Also see pp. 80-92. For a superb commentary on the analysis of photographs in the context of the "Orient," see "Photographs and History," Sarah Graham Brown's introduction to her Palestinians and their Society (see above, note 13), particularly pp. 1-19. Also see Nisan Peretz, Focus East (New York and Jerusalem: Abrams and Domino, 1988). Some of the most useful and thorough work on relations between the "Orient" and "Europe" is that of Norman Daniel; see his Islam and the West: The Making of an Image (Edinburgh University Press, 1980), and Islam, Europe and Empire (Edinburgh University Press, 1966).

45. Cited in Edward Said, Orientalism, p. 100; for more on Nerval, also see pp. 180-84.

46. Ibid, pp. 84-5. The part of this quote citing classical figures is actually by Jean-Baptiste-Joseph Fourier from the "préface historique" to the Description de l'Egypte.

47. Edmond Jabès, The Book of Questions Vols. 1-7, trans. Rosemarie Waldrop (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1972-1987). The first passage is from Vol. IV, Yael, p. 25; the second passage is from Vol. III, Return to the Book, p. 160.

48. As above, note 43, pp. 137-39.

49. Edmond Jabès, The Book of Questions, Vol. III, p. 145.

50. George Kubler, The Shape of Time: Remarks On The History Of Things (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1962), p. 19. Kubler's unorthodox theories of segmentation inspired much of the thinking that went into my conception of the subject at hand; in turn, I was led to this line of thought by Ad Reinhardt's typically laconic but invaluable suggestions in "Art Vs. History." Following 9 rhetorical questions on Islamic art (whose answers would entail the rewriting of art history as we know it), Reinhardt asks: "What is there for artists in art historian George Kubler's book The Shape of Time, which has been called a "manifesto" and described as having "something of the quality of a work of art" itself and which is now out in paperback?" See pp. 224-7 of Ad Reinhardt, Art As Art: Selected Writings, ed. Barbara Rose (New York: Viking, 1975).

51. George Kubler, The Shape of Time, pp. 129-30.

52. Jacqueline Kahanoff, From the East the Sun; ms. of her collected essays obtained from her literary executor, Mrs. Eva Zeintraub of Tel Aviv; pp. 4-5 of preface. Her work is available in a Hebrew translation bearing the same title and published in Tel Aviv by Yariv/Hadar Publishing in 1978.
53. Edmond Jabès, The Book of Questions, Vol. II, pp. 137-8.
54. Ibid., pp. 139-40.
55. Du désert au livre: Entretiens avec Marcel Cohen (Paris: Belfond, 1980), p. 49 (my translation).
56. From The Umm Kulthum Nobody Knows, originally published in Cairo in 1969; these excerpts appear in Middle Eastern Muslim Women Speak, edited by Elizabeth Warnock Fernea and Basima Qattan Bezirgan (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1977), pp. 146-7; translated from the Arabic by the editors.
57. Ibid., p. 153-4.
58. Ibid., p. 154.
59. Marshall G. S. Hodgson, The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization Vol. 3 "The Gunpowder Empires and Modern Times" (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1974), p. 376.
60. Yahya Taher Abdullah, The Mountain of Green Tea, trans. Denys Johnson-Davies (London: Heinemann, 1984), pp. 72-4.
61. Ibid., pp. 80-1.
62. Paul Morley, Ask: The Chatter of Pop (London: Faber & Faber, 1986), p. 103.
63. Jean Baudrillard, Simulations, trans. by P. Foss, P. Patton and P. Beitchman (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), pp. 130-1.
64. The quote here is from "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism" by Craig Owens in The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture, edited by Hal Foster (Port Townsend: Bay Press, 1983), p. 80. In coming to this sense of allegory, Owens cites Angus Fletcher; for more, see his definitive Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1964).
65. Michael Gilson, Imagined Cities of the East (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 20.
66. The Ibn Khaldun anecdote appears in Michael Haag's Guide to Cairo (London: Travelaid, 1985), p. 4. The Meshullam of Volterra

quote can be found in Norman Stillman's The Jews of Arab Lands: A History and Source Book (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1979), p. 264. Other accounts of the period testify to the impressive nature of the city; for example, Obadiah of Bertinoro, a Jewish pilgrim on his way to the Holy Land, wrote in 1488: "I shall not speak of the grandeur of Cairo and of the streams of traffic there, for many before me have described this, and all that has been said of the town is true... The city is very animated, and one hears the different languages of the foreigners who inhabit it. It is situated between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean and all merchants come from India, Ethiopia, and the countries of Prester John [fabulous Christian monarch of Asia, whose seat from the fourteenth century onwards was located in Abyssinia] through the Red Sea to Cairo to both sell their wares, which consist of spices, pearls, and precious stones, and to purchase commodities which come from France, Germany, Italy and Turkey across the Mediterranean Sea through Alexandria to Cairo." This text appears in Franz Kobler's Letters of Jews Through the Ages (New York: East and West Library, 1952), p. 299.

Literature on the Islamic city and urban culture within the Arab and Mediterranean world is vast; the following are works I have found particularly useful: L.C. Brown ed. From Medina to Metropolis: Heritage and Change in the Near Eastern City (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1973); A.H. Hourani and S.M. Stern eds., The Islamic City (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970); Ira M. Lapidus, ed., Middle Eastern Cities: A Symposium on Ancient, Islamic and Contemporary Middle Eastern Urbanism (Berkeley: University of California, 1969); H.A. B. Rivlin and Katherine Helmer, eds., The Changing Middle East City (Binghamton: Center for Social Analysis, 1980); Phillip K. Hitti, Capital Cities of Arab Islam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1973); Abdulazziz Y. Saqqaf The Middle East City: Ancient Traditions Confront a Modern World (New York: Paragon House, 1987); Ira Lapidus, Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967); Andre Raymond, The Great Arab Cities in the 16th-18th Centuries: An Introduction (New York University, 1984); Janet Abu-Lughod, Cairo: 1001 Years of the City Victorious (Princeton University Press, 1971); Janet Abu-Lughod and Richard Hays, Jr., eds., Third World Urbanization (Chicago: Maaroufa Press, 1977); Janet Abu-Lughod, Rabat: Urban Apartheid in Morocco (Princeton University Press, 1980).

67. As above, note 62, p. 103.

68. Michael Haag, Guide to Cairo, p. 53.

69. An odd and interesting aside to this is that rural Egyptian tourists have the custom of asking westerners to pose with them for a photograph which they take and keep!

70. Eric R. Wolf, Europe and the People Without History (Berkeley: University of California, 1982), p. 9.
71. David Antin, tuning (New York: New Directions, 1984), pp. 137-39.
72. As above, see note 65, p. 20.
73. Hana Abu Khadra, "A Pictorial Essay of the Reconstruction Process," chapter 16, p. 277 of A. Saqqaf, The Middle East City (see above, note 66).
74. Edward Said, After The Last Sky (London: Faber & Faber, 1986), p. 171.
75. Adonis, Introduction A la poetique arabe, translated by Bassam Taban and Anne Wade Minkowski with a preface by Yves Bonnefoy (Paris: Sindbad, 1985), p. 115 (my translation).
76. Modern Poetry of the Arab World, translated and edited by Abdullah al-Udhari (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1986), p. 119. Hawi's poetry has appeared in what may be the best critical edition of a contemporary Arab poet: Naked in Exile: Khalil Hawi's The Threshing Floors of Hunger, interpretation and translation by Adnan Haydar and Michael Beard (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1984).
77. Cited in "Letter from Paris: Arab Cinema in Exile," Miriam Rosen in NERIP Reports Nos. 136/137, October/December 1985, p. 48.
78. This phrase was coined by Marjorie Perloff and defined in her The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage (Northwestern University Press, 1983). The sense of it here should also be considered in the context that Baudrillard places current discourse: "After the metaphysic of being and appearance, after that of energy and determination, comes that of indeterminacy and the code." Simulations, p. 103 (see above, note 63). Also see John Cage's 1958 talk, "Indeterminacy," in Silence (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1973).
79. Modern Poetry of the Arab World, p. 19.
80. Ibid., p. 19.
81. Ibid., p. 46.
82. Ibid., p. 98.
83. Ibid., pp. 103-4.

84. Mahmoud Darwish, The Music of Human Flesh, selected and translated by Denys Johnson-Davies (London: Heinemann, 1980), p. 65.

85. Ibid., p. 63.

86. See Joseph Zeidan's excellent article "Myth and Symbol in the Poetry of Adonis and Yusuf Al-Khal," Journal of Arabic Literature X (Leiden: E.J. Brill), p. 71.

87. Abdullah Schleiffer, The Fall of Jerusalem (New York and London: The Monthly Review Press, 1972), p. 5.

88. Modern Poetry of the Arab World, p. 64.

89. As above, see note 86; p. 80. Zeidan analyses the early poetry of Adonis, particularly "Resurrection and Ashes," in terms of its conceptual, ideological and metaphorical relationship to the thought of Antun Sa'ada.

90. Ibid., p. 86.

91. As above, see note 75; p. 112 (my translation, as below).

92. Ibid., p. 108.

93. Gilbert Sorrentino, "Language - Lying and Treacherous," in The New York Times Book Review; May 25, 1986; p. 23.

94. Modern Poetry of the Arab World, p. 70.

95. Birds Through A Ceiling Of Alabaster: Three Abbasid Poets, translated by G.B.H. Wightman and Y.A. al-Udhari (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1975), p. 122.

96. For just one example, see Umberto Cassuto, A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1961), p. 91: "When the Torah described man's creation (twice), the one in brief, general outline as an account of the making of one of the creatures of the material world and the second at length and in detail as the story of the creation of the central being of the moral world - it had no reason to refrain from duplicating the theme, since such a repetition was consonant with the stylistic principle of presenting first a general statement and thereafter the detailed elaboration, which is commonly found not only in Biblical literature but also in the literary works of the ancient east.

97. Modern Poetry of the Arab World, pp. 74-5.

98. Ibid., p. 139.

99. Hoda al-Namani, "I Remember I Was A Point, I Was A Circle," trans. Tim Mitchell, in Women and the Family in the Middle East: New Voices of Change, edited by Elizabeth Warnock Fernea (Austin: University of Texas, 1985), pp. 305-6.
100. Marjorie Perloff, The Poetics of Indeterminacy (see above, note 78), p. 86. Also see p. 324.
101. Ibid., p. 316. Cited by Perloff from David Antin's talking at the boundaries (New York: New Directions, 1976).
102. The Darwish text is from Modern Poetry of the Arab World, p. 139; for Adonis see the same book, p. 75; for the al-Namani text, see above, note 99, p. 307.
103. Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," October 12 and 13 (1980); this quote is from Part II of the article, pp. 79-80.
104. John Cage, Empty Words. Writings '73-'78 (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1979), p. 11. The second part is a paraphrase from David Antin cited in Perloff (see above, note 78), p. 302.
105. Ron Silliman, "IF BY 'WRITING' WE MEAN LITERATURE (if by 'literature' we mean poetry (if...))..." in The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book, edited by Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), pp. 167-8. Also see Silliman's New Sentence (New York: Roof, 1987), particularly Part I, pp. 7-56.
106. Edward Said, "Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies, " in The Anti-Aesthetic (see note 64 above), p. 150.
107. As above, note 65, p. 20.
108. As above, note 50, p. 2.
109. As above, note 52; "A Letter from Mama Camouna," p. 1.
110. Raymonda Hawa Tawil, My Home. My Prison (London: Zed Press, 1983), pp. 45-6.
111. For a survey of the more ancient aspects of Jerusalem, with references to the appropriate sources, see Henry Cattán, "The Repercussion of Israel's Occupation of Jerusalem," in The Middle East City, ed. A. Saqqaf (see above, note 66), chapter 8, pp. 149-51.
112. My translation from Shelley Elkayan, Song of the Architect (Tel Aviv: Zmora Bitan, 1987)[Hebrew], p. 48.

113. Amin Maalouf, The Crusades Through Arab Eyes, trans. Jon Rothschild (London: Al-Saqi, 1984), pp. 265-66. Also see Francesco Gabrieli, Arabic Historians of the Crusades (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1969).
114. Guy Le Strange, History of Jerusalem Under the Moslems (no place of publication, publisher or date), p. 5.
115. Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, The Ship, translated by Adnan Haydar and Roger Allen (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents, 1985), pp. 20-24.
116. Oleg Grabar, "Cities and Citizens," in The World Of Islam, ed. Bernard Lewis (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976).
117. Abdullah Schleifer, "Islamic Jerusalem as Archetype of a Harmonious Environment," in A. Saqqaf, The Middle East City (see above, note 66), pp. 164-5.
118. Nardel Ardalan and Laleh Bakhtiar, The Sense of Unity: The Sufi Tradition in Persian Architecture (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1973), from the foreword by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, p. xii.
119. Kenneth Frampton, "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance," in The Anti-Aesthetic (see above, note 64), p. 26.
120. Edward Said, After the Last Sky (see above, note 13), pp. 147-9.
121. A Benjamin melange, see: "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in Illuminations, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), p. 188, and "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" from the same volume, p. 221. For the sense of "aura" referred to here, see Ron Silliman's "Benjamin's Aura" in The New Sentence (New York: Roof Books, 1987), pp. 32-54.
122. Ilan Halevi, A History of the Jews (see above, note 6), p. 252.
123. This text appears in A Big Jewish Book, edited by Jerome Rothenberg with Harris Lenowitz and Charles Doria (Garden City, New York: Anchor Doubleday, 1978), p. 307.

2.

A Garden Enclosed / The Geography of Time

When I was a small child, it seemed natural that people understood each other although they spoke different languages, and were called by different names - Greek, Moslem Syrian, Jewish, Christian, Arab, Italian, Tunisian, Armenian.

Jacqueline Kahanoff

To see the Mediterranean again, listen to the lesson of the sea which keeps forever its salt and its color.

Edmond Jabès

I.

Sometime around 1160, Benjamin of Tudela set out from his native city on a journey that would take some 13 years; his itinerary covered three-quarters of the then known world and included stops in several hundred cities in Europe, Asia and Africa. Describing the Great Mosque of Damascus, Benjamin wrote:

Here is a wall of crystal glass of magic workmanship, with apertures according to the days of the year, and as the sun's rays enter each of them in daily succession the hours of the day can be told by a graduated dial. In the palace are chambers built of gold and glass, and if people walk around the wall they are able to see one another, although the wall is between them.'

Not everyone, of course, lived in palaces with chambers of gold and glass. Yet, what Benjamin saw - and the way he described it - is precisely the figure that Jacqueline Kahanoff chose to convey her sense of the Levant as "a prism whose various facets are joined by the sharp edge of differences, but each of which, according to its position in a time-space continuum, reflects or refracts light."² The image

of people walking around walls through which they can still see remains a most fitting metaphor for the way the many heterogeneous communities of the pre-industrial Mediterranean world both knew about and related to each other. For Jews, the poetics of this knowledge certainly lasted as long as the communities did: that is, until the middle of the 20th century, despite the deeper schisms and changing power relations leading to the dissolution and displacement of those communities that had begun with modernity proper, at the French Revolution. This poetics, though, takes into account not just the possibility of seeing through the walls and into the chambers but the facility of accurately calibrating the effects and nuances of the play of light through the apertures.

Marking the start, however, of the effective life-span of the see-through walls/prism metaphor is more problematic than declaring its demise, given that more than the fact of physical presence is in question. After all, fully autonomous Jewish communities flourished throughout the Mediterranean and Near East since the Babylonian exile in 586 B.C., (under the aegis of Mesopotamian, Greek, Carthaginian, Roman, Persian and Byzantine rule), long before the great "bourgeois revolution" that made such a journey as Benjamin of Tudela's not only possible but commonplace, before the enormous expansion and "internationalization of space" brought on through "the

trading civilization established by Islam between the 9th and 11th centuries." Nor were the sharp edged differences, the various facets refracted by Jews through the very 'distinctive epicentre' of and from the Mediterranean Levant all the way back to Southern Arabia, by any means, a negligible factor in the earlier formation and subsequent unfolding of the new religion itself. Wasn't Mashallah, for example, an 8th c. Jewish engineer, astronomer and heir to Hellenic traditions, one of the choice few picked to determine the optimal location to lay out Madinat-as-Salaam, the utopian project better known as Baghdad, a project that would decisively mark the Islamic ascendancy over and transformation of the rich and varied cultures and civilizations it encountered? Like the earlier construction of the Dome of the Rock inscribing the 'older' peoples of the Book within a new religious/textual order, "the new city was intended to begin a novus ordo saeculorum or, as the 'Abbasids called it, a "turning" (dawlah), in Islam," which would, from then on, "pursue its course as a universalist religion with Baghdad as its symbolic Constantinople."

Although symbolically linked to Constantinople, "intellectually, commercially and circumstantially, Baghdad inherited within the Dar al-Islam the role played by Alexandria in the old Hellenic oikoumene. Turbulent, cosmopolitan, invincibly successful, given more to scholarship

and trade than to piety, the unrivaled center of arts and letters and the seat of the secular and religious power in Islam, Baghdad had, like its Egyptian counterpart, no past. Its present was frequently unruly, since rich and poor, Arab, Iranian and Turk, Shi'ite and traditionalist, Christian and Jew, scholar, merchant and soldier rubbed shoulders within its walls."⁴ The fact that the city had "no past" helped to emphasize and guarantee a sense of perpetual contemporaneity, manifested most dramatically through the almost unprecedented extent of linguistic adoption and adaption of, within and through Arabic. Many of the most innovative users of Arabic - those who indelibly marked the language from within - came from other cultural and linguistic backgrounds, particularly Persian, like the poet Abu Nuwas (d.810) and the philosopher Ibn Sina (980-1037), to give only two of the most striking examples. The remarkably heterogenous crowds of the city were matched by the crowds of imported texts. The open book of translation served as a screen through which the regenerative field of raw materials could be sifted to form the basis for an Islamic Renaissance whose accumulation of knowledge irrevocably shifted to Europe only after the fall of Baghdad. Both the Umayyad (656-750) and the Abbasid (750-1258) courts not only encouraged and patronized translation but established schools to carry out the systematic transference of texts from Greek, Persian, Syriac and the Hindu languages into Arabic.

The influx of so many new and conflicting ideas made Baghdad, particularly under the leadership of al-Mansur (founder the city), Harun al-Rashid and al-Mamun, a place of intense speculation, bewilderment and innovation. During the reign of al-Mamun (813-833), for example, Christian and Jewish scholars were invited, housed and supported to devote themselves to the translation of hundreds of Greek manuscripts acquired from the Byzantine Emperor Leon of Armenia. Not only did mathematics, mechanics, astronomy, geography and logic enter the field of discourse but Hippocratic and Neoplatonic texts and doctrines, Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, Indian philosophy and every possible form of Christian dogma as well, from different brands of orthodoxy to the Spanish school of adoptianism. Various sects (influenced by Philo, the Manichaeans and diverse forms of gnosticism) also emerged amongst the Jews and the switch from Aramaic to Arabic as a primary language proved decisive in fully involving the Jews in the revolution of thought, the wave of modernity that effected every aspect of life in the Islamic world from the 8th to the 13th c. "

Usually ignored in simplistic approaches that see "Islam" as an all-embracing, pervasive and conquering force subsuming everything in its unspecified but always frightening trail, the phenomenon of the old meeting the new and the ensuing synthesis and relations developing from that encounter are of utmost importance in any accurate assessment of life within

Islamic society, particularly the life of minorities. To fully weigh and register the precise give and take, the social, economic, psychological and aesthetic push and pull exerted by the particular peoples, communities, religions and sects incorporated within the new structure is an enormous and complex undertaking. As the art historian Oleg Grabar has emphasized: "If a Muslim writer like Muqaddasi could still in the 10th c. complain that Jews and Christians had the upper hand in Jerusalem, it is likely indeed that by that time many cities of the Islamic Near East, not to speak of the countryside, had a strong, if not always predominant, non-Muslim population whose degree of cultural islamization is as difficult to assess as it is essential to know."~ A glimpse of the depth and intricacy of these relations can be caught in a section of Benjamin's account of Baghdad, where even the Caliph himself seems a newcomer in the presence of the Jewish Exilarch, the resh galutha, head of the Gaonic Academy and rightful heir to the crown of David:

And every fifth day when he goes to pay a visit to the great Caliph, horsemen, Gentiles as well as Jews, escort him, and heralds proclaim in advance, "Make way before our Lord, the son of David, as is due unto him," the Arabic words being "Amilu tarik la Saidna ben Daud." He is mounted on a horse, and is attired in robes of silk and embroidery with a large turban on his head, and from the turban is suspended a long white cloth adorned with a chain upon which the cipher of Mohammed is engraved. Then he appears before the

Caliph and kisses his hand, and the Caliph rises and places him on a throne which Mohammed had ordered to be made for him, and all the Mohammedan princes who attend the court of the Caliph rise up before him. And the Head of the Captivity is seated on his throne opposite to the Caliph, in compliance with the command of Mohammed to give effect to what is written in the law - "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah nor a law-giver from between his feet, until he come to Shiloh: and to him shall the gathering of the people be."

The precisely planned city in which this scene took place was meant to fully incorporate the dense texture of a crowded palimpsest, the whole spectrum of light diffused by the Levantine prism: instead, "as Alexandria turned its back to Egypt and looked out on the Mediterranean, Baghdad faced the East."² This eastward entrenchment was not a choice but a necessity marking one limit point of an expansive new radius stretching through Persia and Central Asia all the way to China.

Baghdad's repositioning embodies another much more easily upset and potentially cataclysmic aspect of that delicate balance between the urban and the rural described earlier as characterizing the material and aesthetic economy of the Islamic city. This aspect - relations between a regional center of administration, wealth and beaurocracy, the seat of power, and the diverse but unwillingly socialized tribes and peoples producing the food in the lands surrounding and lying

beyond the city - constitutes a social phenomenon and problematic both encompassing and going far beyond the Islamic city. In The Republic of Cousins, Germaine Tillion writes:

Until Pasteur, in fact, town-country relations can be represented in the shape of a two-way current. The numerically larger stream flows inexorably but silently from the countryside to the town. No organized, conspicuous human masses (or at least only rarely), but the continuous arrival of isolated individuals: adult individuals, in other words, people bearing a heavy burden of convictions. So in each generation these convictions are revitalized by new contributions, thanks to the immigrants. The other current flows in the opposite direction - from the town to the fields and grasslands - bearing conspicuous objects: books, fashions, ideas. It is registered in directories and catalogues, and thus leaves historical traces that will provide a feast for compilers, but it has neither strength nor depth, because very few men accompany it. Those who do, moreover, are transient officials: merchants, travellers, soldiers. Only the bearers of religious faith constitute an exception and settle. For thousands of years a rough balance ensured the survival of the two currents, the 'city' prospering thanks to the surplus of men surreptitiously drained off to it from steppe and hamlet. From time to time, a bigger wave swept through at ground level (which is the level of history) and ravaged the town: such a wave was called 'the end of a civilization'.

Baghdad itself witnessed just such a bigger wave - in the form of the 13th c. Mongol invasions - that certainly signaled the end of a certain kind of civilization. It is no accident that the move from a monastic to an urban university centered

culture and the height of interaction between Muslims, Christians and Jews in Europe (during the reign of Alfonso El Sabio X, when at Salamanca and Seville astrolabes, celestial globes, armillary spheres, clocks and quadrants were universal signs that could be understood in either Hebrew, Arabic or Latin), exactly coincides with Baghdad's demise.

Yet, the earlier crowds of Baghdad can, in some sense, be said to have inherently contained the elements leading to its dissolution. The carnival-like diversity of those crowds - like the early entrenchment towards the eastern front - also originated in necessity, not choice:

In the great metropolises of Africa and Asia, where climate and overcrowding continually incubate the most deadly diseases, the extermination of children was more radical than anywhere else. From the moment of their foundation, the huge mortality of the ancient cities obliged them constantly to attract numerous adults within their walls: only thus could they avoid disappearing for lack of inhabitants, and by remaining populous, remain also strong and wealthy. In the old countries of Europe, Africa and Asia, the adults in question necessarily came from the neighboring country tribes.¹⁰

Without relying exclusively on this theory of movement as applicable to all cases at all times, it does present a dynamic within which the position of Jews in "the republic of

cousins," the Mediterranean Levant, can be reassessed. Even the movement of scholars and translators (and their role in the rise and fall of cultural centers) can be seen in terms of only one of the many continuing waves of migrant workers, skilled and un-skilled, making their way from one end of the Islamic world to the other. Despite some agricultural activity and settlement (most notably in Mesopotamia, Palestine, Islamic Spain, the Atlas Mountains and Central Asia), following the "great bourgeois revolution" of the 9th c., the majority of Jews were undoubtedly what Isaac Abravanel termed, "not the builders of great cities, but the dwellers of them."¹ As such, like a number of other non-Muslim minorities such as Greek and Armenian Christians, they assumed a tremendous role as conduits between town and country. This, coupled with the fact that Jews maintained an extra-territorial legal status, often put them in a precarious position at the service or under the protection of unstable power structures constantly struggling to deflect and assimilate the tensions and conflicts arising from what Tillion has called "the absurd maintenance of rural ideas within city walls,"¹² brought about precisely through the manner of population movement she describes. But this 'absurd maintenance' included, to be sure, the legitimate gripes of overtaxed peasants or the perceived injustice felt by their newly urbanized descendants unwilling to support the

extravagant whims of an often decadent and unproductive urban elite. Nor did these claims find their victims only amongst the minorities as much modern ethno-centric history would have us believe: wealth, status and class played roles just as decisive as faith, race and tribal or ethnic allegiance, something which not only the merchant's letters of the Cairo geniza (dating from the 10th to the 13th c., the classical period of Mediterranean Arab culture), but many other accounts up until the modern period eloquently attest to.

Nevertheless, as inhabitants of cities and travellers between them - whether through artisanal work, scholarship, the medical profession, trade or in an administrative capacity, certain positions and roles remained remarkably intact amongst Jews within the Mediterranean and Arab world until the colonial and nationalist period. A very precise (and late) sense of this can be gotten from the following passage by Mordechai Hakohen (d. 1929), a Libyan Jew whose Book of Mordechai covers every aspect of Jewish life in Libya and amongst the Berbers with an interpretive scope and methodological precision worthy of modern anthropology:

Merchandise is brought from Tripoli on the backs of camels: pepper, cumin, coriander seeds, ginger, sweet calamus, and all sorts of spices - honey, sugar, tea, coffee and tobacco; the flower of the rose, the flower of the myrtle, spikenard, saffron, cassia, and cinnamon; buds of perfume, powders, pure frankincense,

and women's cosmetics - antimony powder to darken their eyes, the bark of nut trees to paint their lips like a scarlet thread, henna plants to redden their arms and legs; mirrors, hair combs, glass and coral beads, matches, threads, and needles; and other kinds of merchandise too numerous to mention.

All the Jews are tradespeople who scatter throughout the region with sacks on their shoulders, or on their donkeys, to sell their merchandise to the Berbers and the Arabs in exchange for grain, olives, olive oil, figs, butter, sheep's wool, goat's hair, silver, eggs and so forth.¹²

This figure of the wandering merchant, although in some sense almost a caricature of a certain kind of Jew, shall be encountered again, in the next chapter, fictionalized (in a novella by Yehuda Burla) just at the point when the social fabric still lending credence and meaning to that role was disintegrating. In Hakohen's account, though, the merchant - like those travelling intellectuals, the doctors and teachers - still embraces the full range of a role introduced and institutionalized many, many centuries prior. But entirely unlike the confinement of Jews to certain professions in Christian Europe, this role - and its persistence - was not a boundary or limit point but one possibility among many, testament to the very different set of material and phenomenological circumstances binding the texture and fabric out of which the culture of Mediterranean and Arab Jewry is woven. This set of circumstances can be summarized by the following four concepts, each of which can be derived to a

greater or lesser extent from as late and apparently marginal a description as Hakohen's: autonomy, translatability, diversity and mobility.

As indicated by Hakohen, travel by Jewish merchants from Tripoli to the outlying Berber and Arab settlements throughout the region was common practice; the land itself, however, was characterized in the following less than inviting terms: "The traveler on those paths can easily make a fateful stumble if he does not pay attention to these dangers; his legs will take him to his death. The outsider who climbs up the mountains will become weary of the difficult traps that his feet encounter. He will feel that he is marching in a wild land, and his legs are taking him into hell. But the inhabitants of the region skip barefoot through the mountains and skip over the hills with heavy loads on their shoulders."¹⁴ Yet, this "wild land" was clearly familiar to the itinerant Jews and it would stand to reason that such travel assumed both the legal/communal autonomy motivated and supported by a particular social structure as well as the confidence borne of nativity within that sphere itself. Both the distribution of goods as well as the role of the merchant ("In distributing goods throughout the region, the Jew was a cultural merchant as well. Former peddlers have told me that when they came to a village and stayed at the home of a ma'aruf, or village sheikh, they would be expected to provide entertainment by

telling stories. Presumably they also spread news and ideas."'),¹⁵ assume at least some of the many senses of translatability, through the introduction of new products as well as the inevitable bearing of messages transformed to fit the needs and expectations of each audience encountered. In addition, the barter of imported goods for raw materials (silver, wool, goat's hair, and most probably leather), all certainly destined to serve the artisan in making jewelry, religious objects (mezzuzoth, kiddush cups, adornments for the Torah scrolls), carpets, footwear and other handicrafts, marks another occurrence of translation on the non-linguistic plane. Finally, the enormous diversity of merchandise limns an astonishingly extensive transactional and physical network both producing and relying on an intricate, well-established but extremely fluid communications system. It is this geographical range that brings us full circle, back to the time and space of Benjamin's journey and the conditions within which these characteristic modes took root and grew. It is here - before going on to locate the effective start of the see through walls/prism metaphor in a more precise and specific way - that a brief survey of the classical Arab Mediterranean, the geniza world, is needed.

II.

The word geniza, in Hebrew, simply means "storage" or "hiding place" and refers to that part of the synagogue where old writings are kept. The term, however, has almost become synonymous with the Cairo geniza where, at the turn of the century, several hundred thousand Hebrew and Arabic texts first became known to western scholars. Many apocryphal stories surround the remarkable "discovery" of this treasure house, located in a windowless room in the attic of the ancient synagogue of Fostat, Old Cairo. While most of the credit has gone to Solomon Schechter, the scholar who travelled to Cairo in 1896 after receiving some fragments purchased as mementos by two Cambridge residents, the geniza was certainly known as early as 1750 (mentioned - and possibly used - by Mediterranean rabbinical authorities)¹² and most probably remained in continuous living use since its establishment in the 10th c. Schechter, in fact, unlike Rabbi Wertheimer of Jerusalem, David Kaufmann of Budapest and Elkan Adler of London, showed little interest in the geniza material until realizing that one of the pieces of parchment he received was an original fragment of the Hebrew text of

Ecclesiasticus, The Book of Wisdom by Ben Sira, written around 200 B.C. Regardless of the sequence of revelation, and notwithstanding the favorable climactic conditions, the preservation of the hundreds of thousands of extant fragments still remains somewhat of a miracle. Yet, for anyone who has visited the synagogue, now utterly desolate, this miracle might not seem entirely unlikely. Like so many facets of Mediterranean and Arab Jewish life, the synagogue has fallen prey to the exorbitant and often grotesque discrepancies of the drastically altered economy it now finds itself in: the lone attendant - left with neither community nor quorum - mutters in an ambivalent amalgam of despair and rage, clutching twenty-five year old Israeli post-cards and demanding foreign visitors to explicate them in a mix of Arabic, Hebrew, French, Ladino, Italian and English; while distant Jewish communities (amidst government corruption and opportunism) invest to restore the interior and turn the synagogue into a tourist attraction, outside, in one of the poorest, most neglected sections of the city, children, Coptic monks and potters emerging from their subterranean workshops in the shadows of the Moqqatam hills crowd the unpaved streets filled with donkeys, horses and roosters. Within this web of circumstance and relation, an almost awesome aura conducive to the miraculous, and commensurate to the history of the site, still seems to permeate the place. Close to the Nile, legend

has it that Moses knew the place, that the temple of the prophet Jeremiah stood on the same site, that Joseph and the holy family went into hiding and worshipped there only to be followed by the apostles Mark and Peter; in the 12th c., the great poet and commentator Abraham Ibn Ezra came from Jerusalem to inaugurate the reopening, while Benjamin of Tudela noted that the scroll penned by Ezra the Scribe could be found within. But more than a museum, a place of pilgrimage for "great men" or a site of "great events," the true value of the Cairo geniza lies precisely in the full spectrum of light the fragments found there cast on the life of common people, on a time and spirit quite remote from ours.

The major work, monumental to be more precise, of reconstructing this lost world (based mostly on the thousands of personal letters and business accounts of Jewish merchants that formed part of the geniza treasure) was undertaken by the great scholar S.D. Goitein, and found its full articulation in the four volume work, A Mediterranean Society, that occupied the greater part of his working life. Like Gershom Scholem, Goitein was a German Jew who also decided, early on, to venture into Palestine. In From Berlin to Jerusalem: Memories of My Youth, Scholem wrote:

With a very knowledgeable, somewhat younger member of the Frankfurt circle I arranged a joint passage

from Trieste for after I had put my affairs in Berlin in order. That was Fritz (Shlomo Dov) Goitein, the scion of a famous Moravian-Hungarian family of rabbis; I had stayed with him on my earlier visits to Frankfurt and got along with him very well. He had had an excellent Jewish education - his father had been a rural rabbi in a Lower Franconian district - and had just taken his doctorate under the direction of Josef Horowitz, a first-rate Arabist. Goitein was a rare blend, for he was a person with an artistic, even poetic, vein who was at the same time a scholar and a born schoolmaster. This was immediately recognized by Dr. Biram, the director of the Haifa secondary school, when he came to Germany in the summer of 1922 in order to recruit qualified teachers for his school. He gave Goitein a firm contract for the fall of 1923, by which time he would have received his doctorate.''

While Scholem's work repositioned and thoroughly revolutionized the whole dynamic of Jewish history and interpretation (instrumental also as a fundamental source in the odd academic exchange mentioned earlier as taking place between literary and Jewish studies), there can be little doubt that Goitein's work - perhaps less alluring and dramatic, but no less poetic or methodologically rigorous - is now of greater cultural and political pertinence, more acutely attuned to serve as a fertile, resilient and antithetical point of reference in face of the unchecked assumptions and "logical minimalizations" that everywhere circumscribe the present scene.

In reading Goitein one suspects that in addition to the scholarly endeavor, his work paid secret and tender homage to

the many Mediterranean and Arab Jews that he encountered, people forming the last intact generation of a disappearing world whose formation he traced so meticulously in fragments of parchment buried in libraries from Leningrad and Cambridge to New York. Historical parallels are often drawn as he recounts experiences or incidents that seem paradigmatic, valuable as evidence of attitudes or ways of doing things that become fully intelligible only through seeing them in a living context. Receipts, for example, indicating expenses for garbage removal in Fatimid Cairo, along with his own recollection of the system of street-cleaning in mandatory Palestine, serve as two pieces of a puzzle that, completed, describe a whole system of medieval municipal services. In another instance, when analyzing the function of the synagogue, he tells this story:

I recall vividly a visit to the mosque in Bursa, Turkey, some time before the sunset prayer, when I observed ordinary people from the neighborhood listening to an exposition of a sacred text, occasionally addressing the reader with a remark or question. A few days before I had been present in a small synagogue in Jerusalem between the afternoon and evening prayer, where Yemenites, mostly craftsmen, recited the Mishna in unison, thus concluding, or interrupting their day's work. In both cases, I was struck by the impression that for these people the House of God was theirs, it was the meeting place of the community.¹⁰

Again, in trying to determine which classes of people recieved full training in calligraphy, he tells of an encounter with a craftsman, also Yemenite, who had put him "to shame more than once with his knowledge of Jewish ritual law and cabala,"¹⁹ but did not know how to write. Even more significant, though, than the numerous single instances of such clues and fine distinctions is the sum of the three major experiences Goitein found most directly applicable to deciphering, reconstructing and interpreting the geniza documents: the years he spent in America, far from the "authoritarian Germany" of his youth, and "Jewish society in Palestine and later Israel, with its socialist, welfare and protectionist tendencies," both "utterly different from Geniza society, which was loosely organized and competitive in every respect;" his work in the Oriental Jewish educational system during the mandatory period in Palestine and, finally, the many years of ethnolinguistic research he carried out amongst the Yemenites, "those most Jewish and most Arab of all Jews."²⁰ Throughout his work, whether implicitly or explicitly, each of these realms is drawn from.

The Mediterranean of the geniza world comprised just the inner, entirely familiar region of a realm that casually stretched to the Indian Ocean before reaching only a little

more cautiously to the ends of the silk route in Central Asia and China. Although readily identifiable barriers and divisions (the Muslim east and west; al-~~rum~~/the land of the 'Romans'), as well as labels (the franj) existed, they were no indication of any lack of contact or unbreachable national boundaries. Europeans, for example, appear frequently and everywhere, before, during and after the Crusades. While the Genoese conquered the coastal cities of Caesarea, Acre, Tripoli and Beirut, their compatriots were busy moving goods through the markets of Old Cairo or shipping and receiving in Alexandria. One of the most striking aspects of the geniza world is the extent to which people, goods and ideas continued to travel freely over a vast and incredibly diverse geographical area, despite political conflicts, wars, civil wars, invasions, unstable or tyrannical rulers, natural disasters, epidemics and any and all other possible obstacles, whether human or divine.

A letter written around 1070, during the midst of a civil war, and sent from Sicily by a native of the Tunisian port of Sfax to his partner in Egypt, is typical in that it simply describes business as usual - except that the main carriers of goods and cash were Muslims, since the wealthier Jewish merchants had already taken the precaution of fleeing the city. After meticulously listing and describing all the goods that were sent out, along with a few business requests, the

writer asks his partner to find him "a flame colored robe, which should be short and well fitting, of fine, not coarse, material; I would like to wear it first on the Day of Atonement. Likewise, a turban of fine linen, which should be short and of pleasant, not coarse, material. Send with this some odorous wood, flasks of camphor and perfume..."²¹ Another letter from the same period, even though written in the midst of an invasion, still manages to put personal and business matters before anything else: only after inquiring about his friend's eye disease, describing how other duties had forced him to suspend work on some rabbinical texts, delineating a fine legal point of Hay Gaon's, elaborating on an inheritance case involving a local Muslim judge and lauding the revival of study in Egypt, does the writer mention the chaotic state of things: "You inquired, my lord, about Sicily. The situation deteriorates constantly, and everyone is truly disturbed about the progress of the enemy who has already conquered most of the island. The prices here (in Tunisia) go up, for this place must rely for its supply of grain entirely on Sicily. Twelve families of our co-religionists have been taken captive, and countless numbers of Muslims..."²²

Both of these letters reveal another striking aspect of geniza society: the assumed familiarity and lack of either animosity or barriers between Muslims and Jews as such, something that usually extended to Christians as well and, for

those in the India trade, to close Hindu and Abyssinian friends and business relations, usually referred to as "brothers." Sentiments such as the following (from the 11th c.) are not uncommon: "I have another wish, my lord. Should a caravan set out in which trustworthy Muslims, who have given you sureties, will travel, let the merchandise of my brothers be sent with them as if it was yours."⁴³ In fact, seclusion in the geniza world - when and where it existed - was often initiated by the minorities and not the Muslim majority; Jewish as well as Christian women "disliked sharing houses with Muslims" since custom or restrictions regarding the veil might apply to them as well. Because of this, Jewish authorities occasionally initiated statutes prohibiting the sale or lease of parts of houses to Muslims.⁴⁴ On the commercial level, however, partnerships between Muslims, Jews and Christians in any and all combinations were not only common but completely normal and unrestricted in any sense. This fluidity extended into other areas as well:

As we know from Geniza documents coming from Fustat, Cairo, Alexandria, al-Mahalla and other places in Egypt, from Kairouan, Jerusalem, Damascus and Aleppo, Jewish houses often bordered on those of Muslims or Christians or both. There was no ghetto, but, on the contrary, much opportunity for daily intercourse. Neither was there an occupational ghetto. I have counted so far about 360 occupations of Jews, of which 240 entailed some type of manual work. There was constant cooperation between the various religious

groups to the point of partnerships in business and even in workshops. In order to assess correctly the admissibility of the Geniza records for general sociological research, we have to free ourselves entirely from familiar notions about European Jews.²⁶

Only in light of such relations as a routine assumption do later attitudes like Albert Antebbi's regarding political and economic parity between Arabs and Jews as a not only natural, but entirely unquestionable prerequisite for any possible Jewish endeavor in the Holy Land, make sense. Numerous examples illustrating such assumptions of familiarity and recognition can be drawn from all over this same Levantine geographic and conceptual space throughout and up until the late 19th and early 20th c. The contemporary Palestinian writer Ghassan Kanafani, for example, in a narrative whose voice can only be the recollection of a previous generation, manages to convey some sense of this: "In Safad, even though there were four thousand Jews who had never, for one day, been farmers, no one minded. They'd lived in their small shops for a long time, selling their wares to the people, exchanging greetings with them and long conversations. They'd be invited to lunch and dinner. Because they'd been there for a long time, they knew how to speak Arabic. They were called by Arabic names and they read Arabic books and newspapers. It seemed logical for the inhabitants of Safad to call them Arab."

Jews."²⁶ Much more graphically, with explicit historical and contextual detail and in a situation where restrictions regarding the veil and preferred tenancy obviously didn't apply, Ya'qob Yehoshua (in his six volume work, Childhood in Old Jerusalem), describes the extent and intimacy of 'pre-Childhood in state' ties between Sephardic Jews and Muslims:

Jews and Muslims had common courtyards, just as if we were a single family. We grew up together. Our mothers revealed everything to the Muslim women and they, in turn, opened their hearts to our mothers. The Muslim women even learned how to speak Ladino and were adept in its sayings and proverbs. We didn't live in shelters for the needy like the Ashkenazim and there were no large estates separating our houses from those of the Muslims. The Muslim women used to come down to our places across the roof at dusk to spend the evening in conversation. All the kids played together and if anyone else from the neighborhood bothered us, our Muslim friends would come to our defense. We were allies.

Our mothers would nurse any Muslim children whose mothers' had died or were unable to attend to them, just as they would care and watch over them if their mothers' were busy or otherwise occupied. And the same was true the other way around. The parents of Muslim boys born after great expectation and long suffering often asked their Jewish friends to arrange for a Jew to perform their circumcision on the eighth day, following Jewish and not Islamic custom... According to Islamic custom, though, a baby nursed by someone other than the mother, was considered a relative. Nissim Franco, son of the Hacham Ya'aqob Franco, told me the following story: "Once my brother and I accompanied our father to the train station on the way to Haifa from where he intended to go and visit the saints' tombs in Meron. As we sat in the car a very dignified Muslim sheikh entered and, upon seeing my father, cried out: "Ya akhi" (My brother!). They grabbed each other and stood a few moments in a tight embrace. My father asked us to kiss the sheikh's hand.

We both got up and kissed his hand after which he blessed us. When my father saw how astonished we were at the whole thing, he turned to us and said: "When I was young we lived with the sheikh's parents in one courtyard. His mother died suddenly and my mother nursed him until he was weaned. So we're brothers." -'

The space described by Yehoshua also corresponds to that of the geniza world. Since Jewish institutions in Palestine were maintained through funds donated by other communities, rabbinical emissaries set out from the four cities - Jerusalem, Hebron, Safed and Tiberias - to both collect donations and serve for certain periods of time in various functions, most often as rabbis, cantors, teachers or a combination of all three. Egypt, where Yehoshua's father served on such a mission, was considered the most pleasant post: besides its vicinity to home, many Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese Jews lived there. Others went to the "inland west" (Tripoli, Algeria, Tunisia), and the "outer west" (Morocco); still others went to Turkey, Iraq, Bukhara or India. Those going to Europe adapted themselves by shedding the long cloaks, headwear and other traditional garb they felt at home in in the Levant, and dressing "European." Besides the official emissaries, business people, families and individuals also travelled freely and widely, sometimes emigrating for a variety of reasons. The story of Asher Mizrahi, for example,

is told: a musician well-known in the Arab cities and villages of Palestine and the composer of many tunes that became standards in the Arab world, he decided to settle in Tunis following the events of 1929.²⁰

Far from being an unobtrusive, silenced or submissive minority, the Jewish presence and way of life was not simply tolerated but always acknowledged and recognized as part of the texture of the Levant itself: while stories about the port of Salonica coming to a complete halt on the Sabbath and Ladino serving as a lingua franca there are well-known, a similar state of affairs - though not as legendary as that prevailing in Salonica but certainly as pervasive - could be found in Baghdad through the 1940's:

It was on Yom Kippur that our community made the full weight of its presence felt in the city. The entire city involuntarily observed our solemn day. With the exception of the theatre whose Muslim owner presented only Egyptian productions, all the movie houses were closed. Rashid Street, the city's main artery, was practically deserted. Muslim passers-by would affect an air of nonchalance which made Baghdad look like an orphaned city. Christian and Muslim businessmen, behind their counters, seemed only to half believe in their work. In the textile bazaar, Shiite shopkeepers gossiped with their neighbours as they sipped on their narghilahs, waiting for their rare customers.²¹

Besides the obvious legal bond of religion, it was to cities that people formed their deepest allegiances; as

Goitein remarks of the geniza world: "The cities preceded the countryside. They were founded and filled with populace immediately after, or even in the course of, the conquest and formed the nuclei of Arabization. Consequently, it was natural that the capital of a country or district be identified in terms of the region it dominated. The region, as it were, was subsumed in its capital. Countries were political complexes, often changing their borders and characters, cities were units of life."¹⁰ Amongst Arabs "al-hanin ila 'l-watan" ('yearning after one's home'), was such a pronounced psychological and social phenomenon that a separate and distinct poetic genre categorized by that same expression existed; medieval geographers such as Yaqut and Ibn Jubayr, astonished at how people could live in certain climates or under certain conditions, finally attributed such irrational predilections to love of one's native city, something that obviously went beyond the dictates of reason and logic.¹¹ Evidence of one of the ways Jews expressed this throughout the ages can be seen in the names of synagogues founded by new emigrants all over the Levant; amongst the many synagogues in Old Cairo were those established by the "Damascenes," "Palestinians" and "Babylonians." After the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, congregations bearing the names of almost every city in Castille flourished throughout the Ottoman Empire. To this day Sephardi synagogues in Israel carry on the traditions or are

named after particular cities. In one neighborhood of Jerusalem alone, the following can be found: the synagogue of the refugees from Hebron; the Ades synagogue of Aram Zoba/Aleppo; the congregations of Manastir, Ionnina, Baghdad, Sa'ana, Aden, Dir Bakr and Teheran. Yet another, perhaps even more significant expression of this characteristic in the geniza world proper was in the precedence one's identification with a native city took over religious affiliation. On the road, Jews had a tendency to feel more comfortable with people from their own city, regardless of their religion. A merchant, the only Jew on the caravan, making his way back to Palestine from Libya writes: "On this very day a big caravan is setting out for Barqa under the command of Ibn Shibl. I have booked in it for my goods at the price of 3 dinars, and have already paid the fare. Most of the travelers are [fellow] Barqis. They have promised me to be considerate with regard to the watering places and the keeping of the Sabbath and other matters."²⁴ Due to the long distances traversed and the frequent and extended periods away from home, the merchants' letters are filled with longing, not just for friends and family but for the specific temper and style of their native or adopted cities.

Marriage contracts also attached stipulations assuring the bride to be that any move from her native city would have to meet with prior approval; in one case, a divorcee from -

Fustat/Old Cairo "engaged to a divorced man from Alexandria, stipulated that the couple would live in the capital and that she was prepared to accompany him on his visits to his family in Alexandria, but for not more than one month per year." As Goitein adds: "A month, she obviously felt, was the maximum she could stand."³³ Just as relations between the faiths extended far beyond the "logical minimalizations" that present circumstance and ideology allow, so did the condition and range of possibilities engaged in by women. Without trying to construct an apologetic chapter in a book of women's "accomplishments" in which that of men is taken as the sole standard of measurement, Goitein presents the beginnings of a foundation for a more thorough social history of medieval Jewish women, one that could confront and pose a wider range of practical and theoretical questions. Something as innocuous as naming practices - in which women's names are almost completely 'secular' and highly individualized (as opposed to the more standardized Biblical names of men) - opens the field to inquiries regarding what Goitein refers to as "the chasm between the popular local subculture of women and the worldwide Hebrew book culture of the men."³⁴ Nevertheless, the basis outlined, the exceptions to the rules (the mention of "the son of the female astrologer;" the world famous women bankers and merchants along with the more commonplace brokers and agents; the teachers, doctors and occultists), certainly

provide food for thought. Being an affluent society, the women of the geniza world were freed from many of the more prevalent forms of female bondage. Besides employment in a variety of vocations, women were engaged in business and were property owners. Marriage contracts not only stipulated the bride's choice of domicile but also provided firm safeguards for economic independence should the marriage break up; often this provision for independence even preceded marriage and was simply a matter of course in a family's distribution of wealth. As Goitein notes: "Women of all classes appear in the Geniza documents as being in possession of immovables. They receive as a gift or donate, inherit or bequeath, buy or sell, rent or lease houses (more often parts of houses), stores, workshops, flour mills, and other types of urban real estate, and also take care of their maintenance."²⁶

While clear lines of demarcation between the worlds and activities of men and women certainly existed, women within Jewish society - just as Jews within Mediterranean society - were far from a secluded and submissive minority. Single women travelling overseas - whether for business, pleasure or religious pilgrimage - were common; women initiating judicial actions and then appearing in their own defense were also an ordinary occurrence: "I went to the qadi (Muslim judge)," writes a widow from Alexandria quite casually in a letter addressed to the attention of the Jewish Vizier Mevorakh. "

Despite the chasm between the male dominated book culture and the generally vernacular literary parameters of women's culture, not only concern but great attention was paid to both securing and providing for the education of children; in fact this was considered a woman's duty. A particularly moving letter written by a woman on her death bed beseeches her sister to provide for her youngest daughter's formal education (ta'alim), something that would include reading and writing; in making the request, she refers to the example of their mother, herself an educated and pious woman:

This is to inform you, my lady, dear sister - may God accept me as a ransom for you - that I have become seriously ill with little hope for recovery, and I have dreams indicating that my end is near.

My lady, my most urgent request of you, if God, the exalted, indeed decrees my death, is that you take care of my little daughter and make efforts to give her an education, although I know well that I am asking you for something unreasonable, as there is not enough money - by my father - for support, let alone for formal instruction. However, she has a model in our saintly mother.''

The affluence of the ganiza world was not only reflected in the status of women, but through its incredibly rich and diverse material and culinary culture. While the medieval Cairene working class ate lunch out, the middle-class usually

brought a wide variety of hot, ready-made dishes home from the bazaar. Imported foods were not considered luxury items but basic staples: highly perishable fruits such as apricots, peaches and plums came into Egypt from the Eastern Mediterranean in a half-dried or glazed state; almonds, pistachios, walnuts, hazelnuts and olive oil came in from the East and the West, cheese from Crete, Sicily and Byzantium, the land of the "Rum". Sugar cane was exported by Iran and southern Iraq, honey by Tunisia, Palestine and Syria. Spices, as one might well imagine, came from everywhere and formed the ingredients of both the druggist's and perfumer's trade. A relatively simple or commonly used medicinal mixture could contain as many as twenty different items, each coming from a different corner of the known world.

As the large number and high specialization of occupations testify, the sophistication and variety of commodities readily available was truly astonishing. Local styles and specialties were the pride of many branches of endeavor, among them the metals, glass, pottery, leather, parchment, paper and furniture industries. One of the major industries, the real "big business" of the time, was the dyeing and textile field, an area embodying, literally, the highly individualized and "exotic" tastes of *ganiza* people. Our merchant's "flame colored robe," mentioned above, was not particularly extraordinary; people ordered every possible

nuance and shade of every available color on the spectrum, using highly distinctive epithets like silvery, sandal-colored, clean white, bluish-iridescent, olive green, gazelle-blood, pure violet, musk brown, intensive yellow, sky-blue, crimson, pomegranate red, pearl-colored, ash-grey ('color of bamboo crystals'), basil (brownish-violet), blue-onion, lead-grey, turquoise, gold, indigo and emerald. Taste was both exquisitely refined and extremely picky; in one letter a trader entreats his supplier: "Please, my lord, the red should be as red as possible, likewise the white and the yellow should be exquisite, I was not satisfied with the yellow... The siglaton robe is of the utmost beauty, but not exactly what I wanted, for it is white and blue, while I wanted to have instead of the latter, onion color, an 'open' color. The lead-colored [bluish-grey] robe is superb, better than all the rest." As if this were not enough, clothing was embellished with numerous kinds of "glitter" and "gloss," iridescence, stripes, waves and patterns; sleeves often featured calligraphy made to order.¹⁴

The textile industry, maybe more than any other, fully represented the geographical range and the mobility of the geniza world, the intricate network of its cities. Brand names manufactured in Spain but originating in the heart of Asia, the Jurjan dress for instance, indicate the migratory movement of both manufacturers and craftspeople. Often it was.

difficult to discern whether one was getting the real thing or if the market was flooded with 'imitation' items bearing only the name and the style of the original, such as the clothes named after remote regions of Iran imported to Egypt from Spain or North Africa but actually produced in Palestine. Always up on style, geniza people also imported the latest from Europe; one of the most popular items amongst the brides of Damascus and Fustat/Old Cairo from the 10th to the 12th c. was a mandil Rumi, a "European mantilla." This later was embellished by the Yemenites until it could be ordered as a "European mantilla in the Yemenite fashion;" with this modification, it became very popular in Egypt.⁴⁹

Besides serving the obvious function as centers of wealth and commerce, cities also assumed a stature and character much greater than the sum of their parts. Trade and urbanity - the urbanity of trade - incorporated a nexus of taste, quality, standards and expectations; as Oleg Grabar writes: "Trade, altogether, was much more than the main source of wealth in the city. It was its cultural mix, its source of ideas and adventures, and in many ways the means by which almost everything from a Chinese ceramic to an absurd story could penetrate across social classes and from one end of the Muslim world to another."⁵⁰ Business practice paralleled the range and movement of the geniza world. Capital was never allowed to sit idle; rapid exchange and quick turnover was the

general rule, as summed up in the often paraphrased ancient Near Eastern proverb: "Sell while the dust of the journey is still on your feet."⁴¹ Because of this, merchants handled an "almost bizarre diversity of goods;" as shown by the following list of items dealt in by Nahray b. Nissim, a well-known 11th c. wholesaler:

1. Flax, exported from Egypt to Tunisia and Sicily.
2. Silk (from Spain and Sicily) and other fabrics, from Syrian or European (Rum) cotton to North African felt, and textiles of all descriptions, from robes to bedcovers.
3. Olive oil, soap and wax from Tunisia, occasionally also from Palestine and Syria.
4. Oriental spices, such as pepper, cinnamon, and clove, sent from Egypt to the West.
5. Dyeing, tanning and varnishing materials such as brazilwood, laquer and indigo (sent from East to West); sumac and gallnuts (from Syria to Egypt); saffron (from Tunisia to the East).
6. Metals (copper, iron, lead, mercury, tin, silver ingots), all West to East.
7. Books (Bible codexes, Talmuds, legal and edifying literature, grammars, and Arabic books).
8. Aromatics, perfumes and gums (aloe, ambergris, camphor, frankincense, gum arabic, mastic gum, musk, betel leaves).
9. Jewelry and semiprecious stones (gems, pearls, carnelians, turquoises, onyxes, and the like).
10. Materials (such as beads, "pomegranate" strings, coral, cowrie shells, lapis lazuli and tortoise shell) used for ornaments and trinkets.
11. Chemicals (alkali, alum, antimony, arsenic, bamboo crystals, borax, naptha, sulfur, starch, vitriol).
12. Foodstuffs, such as sugar, exported from Egypt, or dried fruits, imported from Syria.
13. Hides and leather. Also furs and shoes. All coming from, or through Tunisia and Sicily.
14. Pitch, an important article.

15. Varia, such as palm fiber, and items not yet identified with certainty.⁴⁴

A much less conspicuous merchant, Isaac Nisaburi for instance, a Persian living in Alexandria around 1100, dealt in goods as varied as dyeing plants (saffron and brazilwood), medical and culinary herbs (scammony and cubeb), glass, silk (along with a variety of other textiles), corals, perfumes (ambergris and musk), wax and millstones.

The range of things handled by such merchants, and made available by them in turn to a common market, parallels the continuous movement of people between cities that distinctly marks the geniza world. If, though, we could concentrate on less obvious aspects and look - not through the gold and glass chambers of a crystal palace as Benjamin of Tudela did, but through the walls of an ordinary house in the Old Cairo of that time, we would find the same sense and practice of mobility as that found in such lists, along the trade routes and in the bazaar itself:

Mobility within the house conditioned the rhythm of life. Despite the rich architectural nomenclature of the Geniza and contemporary Muslim documents we would look in vain there for such terms as dining room or bedroom. In winter one slept in a small closet, which could easily be warmed by a brazier; in summer one sought relief from the heat in the spacious living

room with its ventilation shaft, which brought the cool north wind from the roof into the interior of the various floors. The meals were taken where it was appropriate in accordance with the circumstances. There were no fixed tables surrounded by chairs; food was brought in from the kitchen on trays and put on movable low stools. Thus, whether resting or being with other people, one could enjoy either roominess or intimacy. But the emphasis was on space.⁴⁰

And if we could draw up a list of a person's belongings, all the material objects they had left behind in this world at their departure for the world to come, we would, as well, find concrete traces of all the traders' routes and bits of the varied treasure they had brought back with them. In our case - although the remnants we have been given to examine are not those of a Vizier but just a coppersmith who had emigrated from Spain to Egypt - we shall as well find a clue taking us right back to the palace, its see-through walls and refracting prism. The coppersmith was a craftsman as well as a dealer; the list of his belongings "contains about one hundred and forty brass, bronze and copper vessels of all descriptions, kept on the middle floor of the house where he lived, while, as usual, his workshop was on the ground floor. There, no doubt, he exhibited other products of his art for his customers. The middle floor harbored also his personal belongings, and the third floor was probably occupied by a tenant or by the proprietor of the house." After "three old

carpets, a threadbare blue robe, a worn linen robe, a new Spanish robe, a lined chest containing ten Spanish "raw" [unfulled] robes, an Iraqi burd gown, a Muli turban, a piece of Sicilian cloth, two shrouds in which some china is packed, various pairs of pants and overalls, an 'Abbadani mat, a woolen curtain and some water jars made of stone," we find "a small chest containing the prayer book of Rabbenu Saadya of blessed memory, a section of the Book of Psalms, a Maghrebi prayer book, and a book of poetry in Arabic characters."⁴⁴

III.

The cities, trade routes, bazaars and houses - the qualitative inner and outer spaces of the geniza world - constitute the overall site without yet marking the specific start or duration of the see through walls/prism metaphor and the poetics of knowledge so accurately refracted by it. For that, a 'cleavage, an inscription in the history of things aiming beyond narration, a cut separating different types of happening to initiate a new collective duration' must be identified, ferretted out of the clues left in the coppersmith's "small chest" and the four books found there. Each of those books, in different ways, channel a possible history of Hebrew and Jewish writing; together, they can serve as a focal point around which unconventional modes of grouping and a new working order of this history can be proposed. The chronological tags of this proposed new order, for want of better or more exact terms, consist of the "pre-modern," "modern," "neo-modern," and "post-modern." These categories cannot be conceived of as inclusive or rigid, defining strict and essential characteristics; they must be considered, rather, as relational

scanners, places on a map to lean on for orientation. Thus, the "modern" category, for instance, would include within it 'classical' or 'traditional' periods, phases or writers. This proposal, which will be more fully outlined, corresponds to the two other sets of qualities and distinctions already introduced.

The first, which relates specifically to the actual geographical circumstances of writers (those who have stayed in a given area; those who left entirely; the newly arrived; others relocated within the wider sphere of the same area but whose work has been realigned by altered conditions), can also be applied to other kinds of "movement," i.e. the ideological ends or use works have been put to within the same or another geographical area by different people, groups, political or educational structures and hierarchies. Although obviously pertinent to this study, examining such transactions within the vast sphere of influences as the Hebrew/Jewish context provides can also open up a whole range of questions that probe the limits, formation and perpetuation of "national" literatures in general. These hypothetical fields of inquiry would include the ideological uses of literature in the solidification of national/political characters and structures, and the effects these political structures and alliances superimposed over other forms of connection - such as pluralistic inter-urban culture - have on writing. Other issues such as the connections between the standardization of dialects, the establishment of 'centralized'

curriculum and the canonization of reduced or decontextualized interpretations based on functional hierarchical ends could also be examined. Such lines of analysis are by no means marginal in accounting for the range of assumptions and choices that went and go into the formation of European literatures emerging from the combination of Latinity (with its curriculum and agenda), combined with the Islamic renaissance; more precisely, a very different context for assessing the generic and linguistic decisions taken by the Troubadours, Dante, Petrarch or Chaucer could be taken into account. Light might also be shed on a range of other issues: the national/political elements in Romantic ideology or the differences between New and Old world literatures written in Spanish and English, for example. Beneath the surface of such particular concerns remain the deeper implications regarding allegiances based on the both broader but more specific criteria of region, color or gender, and the often collaborative uses literature is put to in upholding or valorizing the lost, existing or intended ideals of social structures and hierarchies. The peculiarities of the Hebrew/Jewish situation (in which a legal/communal/religious but completely extra-territorial focus has been replaced by a national entity, itself not just the icing on some teleological cake but a new country with a very particular and exacerbated political, social and literary history), make the examples and paradigms offered by its present repositioning quite

provoking, open to scrutiny and potentially applicable to many other areas of inquiry.

The second set of descriptive characteristics (autonomy, translatability, diversity and mobility), relate specifically to the connection between the social and economic conditions of Jews in the Levantine period and their 'reproduction' in writing and cultural practice through the assimilation and transformation of an enormous range of materials. But these categories, too, have a wider application; first for the general history of Hebrew/Jewish writing which spans some 3,000 years with centers of activity and production in Canaan, Palestine, Babylonia, Egypt, North Africa, Yemen, Central Asia, Kurdistan, India, Spain, Byzantium, Turkey, Greece, The Balkans, Provence, Italy, Northern France, Germany, Holland, England, Central and Eastern Europe, the New World and Israel. Any history of this writing must take into account the peculiar circumstances and conditions of its production; in a book investigating the Egyptian context of the Bible, the great semitic scholar Abraham Shalom Yahuda wrote:

During the years of their history with which we are fairly familiar, the people of Israel voluntarily or involuntarily led a wandering life; and indeed not as an uncivilized nomadic tribe, but as a people, seeking, creating, and transmitting spiritual and material culture did they wander from nation to nation, from land to land.

Through all the different periods of Jewish civilization, it was in the first place the language of the peoples among whom they dwelt that exerted the most

extensive influence upon them. The Hebrews, with their staunch conservatism, preserved the Hebrew language throughout; this language, even at times when only in literary and scholarly use, did not by any means cease to live in their midst but was continually enriched by the adoption of new elements through close contact with many other peoples and the most varied cultural surroundings. In the development of the Hebrew language, one can even follow the very route of Israel's wanderings. In its expansion and enrichment, we can see reflected the fresh cultural values acquired in all periods. All the newly created conceptions, all the borrowed or imitated phrases and modes of speech, as well as the adopted, partly hebraized foreign words, are to be found embodied in the language and worked into its texture.⁴⁵

The writing shaped by the circumstances of such a language can be called "inaugural," a sense described by Derrida as "the anguish of the Hebraic ruah (wind/spirit), experienced in solitude by human responsibility; experienced by Jeremiah subjected to God's dictation, or by Baruch transcribing Jeremiah's dictation... It is the moment at which we must decide whether we will engrave what we hear. And whether engraving preserves or betrays speech."⁴⁶ It is also the moment at which one preserves or betrays real or imagined constructs of the self, shaped and inherited through language and geography. The sense of writing as "inaugural" opens both the doors and the floodgates: extending the itinerary and increasing the way stations along the route, it also blurs, relocates and redefines the markers distinguishing the "sojourner" and the "inhabitant." When Moses admonishes the people

of Israel to remember Egypt, both the sojourning and the slavery, perhaps he meant - as Yehuda implied in his study - 'inscribe your experience within the very fabric of the language, take the land and the cities and the people with you and make them live in your book, reinscribe Egypt in such a way that you remain responsible for the Egypt within, the interior exile.' Freed by the desert and the breaking of the tablets and graciously exempted by God from the disappointment of seeing the promised land become a monarchy modeled on the banished one, only a child of Egypt like Moses could so thoroughly accept the exterior Egypt, since it posed no threat to him, to permanently interiorize it by inscribing it within the palimpsest.

This way of acceptance, this manner in which the exterior is internalized without being disowned or renounced is a stance of utmost respect and recognition toward the other, as well as an acceptance of the otherness of one's self: a fertile path furrowed in the very humus of the "bookish earth" by the Biblical and rabbinic tradition, the Jewish writers of the Mediterranean and Arab Levant kept well within its course. Travelling through Egypt from Spain in the 12th c. on the way to his intended destination of Jerusalem, Yehuda Halevi wrote:

See the cities:
Behold the unwall'd
villages held once
by Israel and pay

homage to Egypt.⁴⁷

This constant referral back to something always anterior but newly circumscribed within the text can be seen as the flip side of apocalypse, or what apocalypse has been taken to be, the tone of defiance and urgency announcing the coming of the end. This flip side seems to say, rather, that the beginning is always at hand and may refer to what Derrida has characterized as a "non-question:"

The non-question of which we are speaking is not yet a dogma; and the act of faith in the book can precede, as we know, belief in the Bible. And can also survive it. The non-question of which we are speaking is the unpenetrated certainty that Being is a Grammar, and that the world is in all its parts a cryptogram to be constituted or reconstituted through poetic inscription or deciphering.⁴⁸

If the world is seen as an act of God's speech, then the study of grammar includes all the disciplines that have become disparate and even conflicting in the western tradition since all categories of thought must ultimately struggle for and find their expression in language. Humans are both God's speakers and readers, and grammar is not the "after effect" of language but the genesis of meaning: to hear, in Hebrew, is to understand. Much of the 'certainty' of the Hebrew tradition owes itself to the acceptance

of this 'grammatical' non-question and its relation to the 'question' of personal, communal, legal and cultural autonomy. This, in turn, immediately raises the issue of 'originality' and 'tradition' as they impinge upon the given possibilities within any cultural space. In the case of the Jews, then, there is nothing surprising in seeing how part of the creative genius of their tradition manifested itself in grammar, codification and literary/philological commentary, three of the great rabbinical projects. Almost all the important Levantine rabbinical writers, in addition to being physicians, diplomats, judges, astronomers, teachers or merchants, were first and foremost grammarians, but grammarians whose standard form of currency was poetry. Instead of the sterile discipline usually associated with the study of grammar, the rabbinic grammarian/poets practiced their art of inscribing and deciphering the word's poetic cryptogram as if the world depended on it for, in their terms, it actually did. At the same time, these questions and concerns - of exile and the book, the sojourner and the inhabitant, inaugural writing and the responsibility of inscription and how they relate to the four categories - cannot simply and snugly be relegated to permanent "residence" within an ethnocentric domain. It is only in this sense that Anna Akhmatova's enigma, "all poets are Jews," can be fully understood, since the particular nomadic state of the Jews - and the specific development of Hebrew literature as a paradigm

for other "Jewish" writing - only enact the possibilities of any writing in a more drastic and exacerbated way.

'Translation' in its most variegated sense - the means through which the experience of diversity can be mobilized, the process through which movement and difference of all kinds can be expressed - was not only a casual and inherited way of life for Jews throughout their odd nomadic history, but the key to their very sustenance, a paradigmatic model of generation and regeneration. Writing is only the most visible and resilient evidence tracing this transaction. In a tradition where reading and the transmission of writing are ritual acts, where hundreds of thousands of geniza fragments could survive partly due to the taboo against destroying the written word, there should be nothing surprising about finding our prism within the measure of a poetic line. Such a vessel might seem entirely unlikely, too weak to hold the ballast of a thousand years and circumscribe the space of more than a hundred cities, yet the act and the gesture of this particular innovation proved enduring. The act - which triggered an explosion of new writing - came in the form of introducing quantitative meters, verse-forms, themes and genres from Arabic into Hebrew poetry. The acrobat responsible for initiating this "collective duration" was Dunash Ben Labrat. A native of Fez with a Berber name, he had gone East to study in Baghdad with the

master, Sa'adiah Gaon, the figure who served as a bridge between the period preceding the Islamic Renaissance and its height by both preserving and reviving the use of Hebrew while confirming and even 'institutionalizing' use of the richer, semantically and philosophically more adept and versatile Arabic, the language of almost all the significant prose works written by Jews of that period.

Although Sa'adiah's work formed the foundation for this modernity, the poet's gesture more clearly marks the beginning of a "modern" period that inextricably inscribed Arabic within the palimpsest, opened a completely new space for Hebrew and formed the basis of a poetics that permeated the whole Levantine to continue with stops, starts and diverse flirtations through to the present and its last significant practitioners. More obvious at the start, the Arabic inscription (with further Spanish, Greek, Turkish and other layers added), was retained right through the "traditional" phase that closed the "modern" period, following the radical change in the conditions of production for Hebrew/Jewish writing in the region caused by the proletarianization of Mediterranean and Arab Jews and the shift from a communal to a national identity. In Egypt, for example, the Laylat al-Tawhid (the custom of studying the Torah on the eve of the ancient New Year), assumed a particular form. Hebrew liturgical poems were sung to Egyptian tunes before being translated, verse by verse, into Arabic. The climactic text - all in Arabic and recited at midnight

- contained many Islamic formulas. Beginning with the Muslim invocation (B'ism Allah al-Rahman al-Rahim), it invoked the ninety-nine divine attributes in the Sufi manner and used Koranic epithets for Biblical figures: Abraham as al-Khalil, Aaron as al-Iman and Moses as Rasul Allah. Kept intact as long as there was an active Jewish community in Egypt, this solemn service that "renders the heart and fills the soul with terror," seems to have been originated by the Nagid Avraham, son of Maimonides. Again, in what may very well be the last 'Old World' collection of Hebrew poetry (I Shall Arise At Dawn, three volumes of North African works from the 17th to the 20th c.), edited and annotated by a genuine exponent of that tradition (the Moroccan liturgical poet Rabbi Haim Raphael Shoshannah, 1912-1987), the resonant Arabic core is retained most tangibly through writing's relationship to music, "wounded kinship's last resort."⁴² In his introduction, before an elaborate description and set of 'stage' directions for the performance of liturgical poetry, Rabbi Shoshannah writes:

The ancient poets of Arabia came to the conclusion that every melody that had ever been or might possibly exist could not but correspond to one of the 11 melodic modes... These ancient musicians, with sound, subtle and acute sense, also stressed that each melodic mode corresponded to a particular time of day. And naturally anyone of judgement and taste can effortlessly feel that the 'asbaq mode, for instance, is clearly meant for the morning, with the throat's protestations and the voice's resonance after sleep. The subjects of the poems - I refer here to Arabic poetry, of course - also revolve around sunrise, the glitter of the sun, the dew's caress,

the smell of the field, wind at daybreak and the battle with nightfall, as it is driven off to give way to the light of day. Thus, you find that a melodic mode like the mayá corresponds to evening and poems set in this mode concentrate on descriptions of twilight and the setting sun, subjects invoking melancholy amongst those who must put an end to their gaiety and dissolve the bonds of friendship with the coming of night, but joy to those whose designs can only be fulfilled under cover of darkness. There are melodic modes characterized by delight and pleasure, such as the hijaz, while others - such as the dramatically structured ghariba - evoke an undercurrent of grief and sorrow.⁵⁰

Like the coppersmith's medieval prayerbooks, Rabbi Shoshannah's 20th c. collection serves the double function of ritual guide and poetry anthology; the poems are divided both by subject, in relation to the Biblical portion of the week and, more significantly, by the ancient Arabic melodic modes described by Shoshannah. This poetry was also performed - sung by the congregation according to fairly strict standards - particularly during the High Holiday services and the month preceding them, a custom still fairly intact amongst traditional Jews and one marking an achievement in cultural transmission that should not be taken too lightly. The equivalent, in England for example, might be if a good part of the population spent several weeks reciting selections from Chaucer, Wyatt, Campion, Marlowe, Shakespeare, Jonson and another few dozen poets. The continued popularity of this often extremely complex poetry, its constant production and

performance, also seems to indicate the persistence of a quality noted by Goitein as common to the geniza world:

The attainments of laymen must sometimes have been impressive. We are able to recognize their achievements in several business letters that have been preserved, on the reverse side of which the recipients - merchants whose handwriting is well known to us - discuss theoretical problems or actual cases to be decided according to the sacred law. Their discussions are on a high level and do not differ in character from legal opinions written by a scholar. These instances should not be regarded as exceptional. Many letters contain quotations from the Bible, and sometimes also from postbiblical literature, which are by no means mundane, and the poetical proems frequently preceding letters are seldom confined to conventional phrases. Thus, the general standard of adult education, or rather of the regular study by middle-class adults, cannot have been low.²¹

Without yet entering into the complex relations between Arabic and Hebrew poetics, between Hebrew liturgical and non-liturgical poetry, all part of a longer tale, suffice it to say that thousands of such anthology/prayerbooks kept poetry 'in-print' and current for just such an audience throughout a Levantine space circumscribed by the geniza world on one end and its corresponding "pre-state" parameters as described by someone like Ya'qob Yehoshua on the other. During the height of the Andalusian period, in his Arabic work on poetics, The Book of Conversations and Memories, Moses Ibn Ezra stressed that great poems were

"recited and conveyed, heard, read and noticed by everyone. In fact, I find no need to cite the choicest pearls of the most outstanding poets nor have I noted their beautiful phrases here since they are already so well known and flow so freely through the mouths of the reciters: after all, if the morning light has no need for a lamp - how much less is the sun in need of a candle!" Speaking specifically of the poetry of Samuel Hanagid, Ibn Ezra notes: "His writings are known in the remotest regions of the East and the West... They reached the Heads of the Babylonian Academies and the Sages of Syria, the learned of Egypt and the Viziers of Tunis, the western patrons and the Spanish aristocrats..."⁶² In a 13th c. geniza letter, information can be garnered on "a Hebrew liturgical poem available in France, so cherished by those who had heard it in Alexandria, that a cantor in Old Cairo who already knew of it was eager to obtain a copy, but the colleague in Alexandria reserved the exclusive privilege to its use for himself."⁶³ A 17th c. poet like Israel Najara, with firm roots in Andalusian poetics, tailored his verse to fit popular Turkish, Armenian, Spanish and Greek melodies, a combination that made him popular not only throughout the Levant but as far as Aden, Calcutta and Cochin. Like the "European mantilla in the Yemenite style" so popular in the Cairo of the geniza world, this kind of mobility, transfer of style and ease of exchange remained very real to poets like Shoshannah or the master musician Rabbi David Buzaglio, another Moroccan who, in the 1940's set Yehuda Halevi's

12th c. poetry to popular contemporary sharqi (Eastern) melodies from Egypt while modally and rhythmically modifying them to fit ears tuned and turned toward the "West," the Maghreb and its Andalusian memory.

Both the 'literary' function and the actual publishing history of a collection like I Shall Arise At Dawn (unsubsidized, non-academic and non-commercial, with money for printing raised through contributions and subscriptions within the community), pulls into sharp relief the accumulated testament of Levantine Jewish writing, its very concrete allegiances, antecedents and material circumstances, with its present textual state and cultural status. The "modern" period, by upholding the Arabic facet of the Levantine prism, not only through poetic inscription but perhaps (with the preceding examples serving only some indication) just as significantly through musical practice, precisely counters the "neo-modern" European Enlightenment and Zionist phase of Hebrew/Jewish culture, with its Orientalist under and overtones. For all the invaluable and pioneering work done by Enlightenment Hebrew scholars, the deeper connection between an imagined Andalusia held up as an example of 'successful' Jewish assimilation and the continued living tradition of Levantine rabbis and poets was never really made, despite contact and ample opportunities for such exchange.** Again, during the early state period of the Zionist phase, despite the effort to keep popular editions of classical Levantine Jewish writing available,

absolutely no connection was made between that culture and the textual, musical, oral and aesthetic traditions of the hundreds of thousands of immigrants pouring into the country. The academic institutionalization and elevation of those classical periods to a privileged but completely decontextualized status, along with the current social position of the natural inheritors of that culture, has created very discrepant sets of values and meanings. Thus, to take an example so stereotypical it verges on the comic, the "neo-modern" Hebrew national poet, Haim Nahman Bialik, could spend a good part of his creative energy and a number of years collecting and editing Andalusian Hebrew poetry while saying that he couldn't "abide Sephardic Jews because they reminded him of Arabs."²² At the same time, these very Jews whose living knowledge of musical and poetic performance constitutes an encyclopedia inscribed in rapidly fading ink have little or no access to the institutions that have privileged the basis and shifted the receptive space of those same counters. Most ironically, the best source spanning the full range of Mediterranean Hebrew poetry currently available, T. Carmi's Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse, has to be imported into Israel. Many of the most important poets remain completely out of print while even 'classical' Andalusian poets like Samuel Hanagid, Yehuda Halevi, Solomon Ibn Gabirol and Moses Ibn Ezra can only be gotten whole in expensive scholarly editions. Dozens of poets and thousands of poems remain in manuscript, within the vocabulary of

a few specialized scholars, remote from most readers of poetry and completely beyond the scope of even an imaginable curriculum.

The possible history that the coppersmith's books and the circumstances of their being together propose divide the two longest periods, the "pre-modern" and the "modern," retro and prospectively while again alluding to the immense popularity and function of poetry as legitimate currency amongst people from all walks of life. The Book of Psalms, most obviously, surveys and contains the "pre-modern," an ancient semantic and narrative space that inscribes, revolts against, comments on and commemorates the Egyptian, Sumerian, Akkadian, Ugaritic and Babylonian poetic and mythic traditions. The fact that to this day most traditional Jews, even the "illiterate," can recite the Psalms by heart as well as chant them to a variety of melodies, points to another significant act of cultural transmission, one reaching to an even earlier strata of the Mediterranean palimpsest. The anthology/prayerbooks, along with the book of Arabic poetry, specifically place the coppersmith well into that period of Jewish history following the absorption of Baghdad's cacophonous plethora of contexts when Jews steadily navigated the waters of all the reigning discourses, with poetry kept as a favored reservoir. It was only after the bulk of that spade-work had been done, following the 'age of translation,' that Sa'adiyah Gaon, a native of Egypt elected to head the Babylonian Academy at Sura, found himself in the capital. Many of the projects he saw as essential

to firmly anchoring the criteria for a common vocabulary amongst the Jews, from the West to the East, were already behind him; these included the first translation of the Bible into Arabic (considered by many to be as significant as the Septuagint), the edition of the first 'standardized' prayer book (the same one possessed by the coppersmith), and the compilation of the first comprehensive Hebrew lexicon, complete with a rhyming dictionary for poets.

Before the Andalusian school, post-biblical poetry written by Jews could be divided into roughly two main spheres of activity: the tradition of the paytanim ("liturgical poets," the term being a derivation of the Greek poietas and appearing in Hebrew sources as early as the 2nd c.), lasting from about the 6th to the 11th c., with important centers in Palestine and Babylonia; and the pre-Islamic Jewish poetry of Southern Arabia, of which only fragments survive, most notably those of Sarah and Samawal Ibn Adiya. The piyut ("liturgical poem"), went through many different phases. The most important, for our purposes, is the process of linguistic change from the relatively clean 'Biblical' usage in the early tradition, to a progressively more complicated and abstruse use of neologisms, obscure allusions and highly specialized Talmudic and Midrashic vocabulary that characterizes the later piyut. Although the piyut often brilliantly managed to go beyond the very strict formal and functional constraints to which it was bound, Sa'adiah Gaon was the first to systematically practice the reforms needed

to expand the possibilities of a Hebrew poetics that had exhausted itself. The main element of his approach consisted of the concept of tsahot, translatable as 'clarity,' or 'purity of style,' and referred primarily to the adoption of the Bible - Biblical vocabulary and usage - as the sole model of excellence for contemporary Hebrew poetry. The inspiration for this, like so many other aspects of the Hebrew literary revival, came from Arabic and the concept of 'al i'jaz al-Qur'an, "the inimitability of the Koran." Without entering into elaborate technical and historical descriptions, the following anecdote told by Moses Ibn Ezra in The Book of Conversations and Memories gives a very exact sense of the psychological and emotional weight carried by this concept:

Once, in the days of my youth, in the country of my birth, one of the great Muslim sages, a man extremely adept in all aspects of judgement, requested that I read before him the Ten Commandments in Arabic. I understood his intention: he wished to diminish the value of their "rhetorical purity." Therefore I asked him to read before me the Opening of the Koran in Latin, a language he knew perfectly. When he attempted translating the Opening into Latin, he found the original beauty was marred, and the whole thing laughable. Then he understood what I had meant and did not renew his request.⁶⁶

Although the Arabic influence on Hebrew writing was absolutely pervasive, Arabic and Hebrew writers faced very dissimilar sets of past and present references and relations that made the context and the social space in which their work was received quite different. No matter what kind of agitation modernity and the

innovations in science or philosophy aroused, poetry - in both Hebrew and Arabic - maintained the logic of its own linguistic and historical circumstances. Not that science or philosophy and the introduction of new texts on such a massive scale had no effect on reorienting, circumscribing, diminishing or expanding the space of poetry - quite the contrary, but the functional role and position of the poet within each respective society and culture remained very specific and usually dictated, in a subtler but more unyielding way, the possible boundaries poets inherited.

By Sa'adiyah's time, the history of "modern" Arabic poetry was already well over a 150 years old and could be characterized by a very complex relationship to the Koran and monotheistic religious thought on one hand, and the rich pre-Islamic but pagan oral poetic tradition (going some 300 years further back), on the other. As the encyclopedia of the tribe, shamans believed to possess extraordinary powers, the ancient Arabic poets of the Jahalliyah (the time of ignorance), were powerful figures who, in a very real way, witnessed and ritualized the being in time of their people. As public poets of the desert, that space characterized by Jabès as "at once everything and nothing," which is itself "listening pushed to the extreme,"⁵⁷ the reciprocity between performance and reception, the song and memory of the song, crystallized into what can be termed "a critique of reality from the point of view of music."⁵⁸ It was against the bedrock of this experience that the standards of all Arabic poetry were measured,

even following the radical transformation from orality to writing and the ensuing changes in social structure that came with the Prophet Muhammad's astonishing revelation recieved in the form of the Koran:

In the pre-Islamic period, the poet's role was to flout norms of caution and reasonable self-interest, and through such recklessness to fashion a model for the balanced life. Under Islam, the community lived the balanced life, which Koran, prophetic tradition, and religious law mapped out between the permissible and the forbidden. The poet moved out into the margin. He was still the reckless character of the old tradition, but his function had changed. He used to provide the structure; now he evaded it. He became an actor whose best role was some form of institutionalized disorder. For this role society had a ready slot, and there we very likely have a more important social cause for the flourishing of love song and drinking song than either in the new elegance of Mecca or in the luxurious solicitations of the Iraqi cities.⁶⁰

But the dialectic between these two positions, between critical beauty (the oral/encyclopedic past), and recieved truth (the graphic/monotheistic present) embodied in the text of the Koran - a work unique and set apart, composed neither of prose nor verse - opened a completely new space for poetry, one that would again aspire to 'providing the structure,' but in very different terms. A poet like Abu-Muwas, for example, could "transform drunkenness, which rides the body of the censures of logic and tradition, into a symbol of total liberation." In such an order, or disorder, "the

symbol is an immense vestibule of metamorphoses. Wine is no longer wine. It is symbol and interpretant: transformative, annihilating, creative, negating and affirmative power."¹⁰ For Hebrew poets using Arabic models, each term in these equations took on entirely different meanings and related to other sets of circumstances altogether. This phenomenon, of necessity, often led to those apparently anachronistic situations such as the one we have already witnessed in which ancient pagan Arabic melodic modes - filtered through particular practices and conflicts - were retained for over a millenium as defining categories for Hebrew poetry written to be performed in synagogues.

Like almost all the Jewish writers born into the world of "new" Arabic poetry, Sa'adiyah also tried his hand at verse, in an ambitious work that attempted a methodical union between 'philosophic' and 'poetic' discourse based on his innovative rhetorical approach. Distinction as a poet, though, went to Sa'adiyah's prize student and it was there, in Baghdad, that Dunash Ben Labrat began the experiments that radically changed the course of Hebrew writing. The Eastern Caliphate had already come under foreign rule and was in a state of decay. Mutanabbi, one of the last giants of an Arabic tradition already 500 years old, "expressed the Zeitgeist - the anguish of the homeless individual personifying the lost empire - in textured language powered by a unity of intellect and emotion."¹¹ The younger Jewish poet transferred the accumulated knowledge of this tradition to

initiate another age that, hundreds of years later, would also be looked back on, with nostalgia and pride, as source and model. Unlike the coppersmith, no record of any robes or rugs that Dunash might have possessed exist. We do know, however, that around 960 he went West, attracted by the efforts of the Jewish physician and minister Hasdai Ibn Shaprut to lure the leading intellectuals of the East into Abd al-Rahman the III's court at Cordoba. It was from there that a poem by Dunash - sung to this day by all traditional Jews - must have entered the coppersmith's other volume, the Western or Mughrabi prayerbook. Partly because of the many tunes it has been set to, this hymn (Deror Yiqera, which could be translated as "Let Freedom Ring"), remained Dunash's most popular work, but not the work through which he gained such notoriety as a radical innovator. For this, one has to turn to his brash grammatical guerrilla raids on the older, more established Menahem Ibn Saruk (also aimed, by implication, at Dunash's master Sa'adiah whom Ibn Saruk ostensibly rose to defend), and then to the poetry itself, specifically to the first Hebrew wine song:

And he said: "Don't sleep! Drink fine wine,
 amidst myrrh and lilies, henna and aloe,
 in groves of pomegranates, palms and vines
 lined with lovely saplings, coursed by tamarisks,
 the murmur of fountains, the strain of lutes
 and the sound of minstrels with flutes and lyres.
 Every tree is full, every branch graced by fruit
 and birds, each in kind, lilt among the leaves.

The doves voice a plaintive melody and their
 mates answer, cooing like deep toned reeds.
 We'll drink by the lily-bordered flowerbeds,
 we'll eat sweets and wash them down by the bowlful,
 we'll raise our goblets and act like giants.
 In the morning I'll rise to slaughter
 ample choice bulls, rams and calves.
 We'll anoint ourselves with fine oil
 and burn incense made of aloes.
 Come on, before fate lowers its boom -
 let's enjoy ourselves in peace!

I lashed out at him: Be still, be still.
 How can this come first, when the Temple,
 God's footstool, has fallen to the uncircumcised?

You spoke like a fool, you chose idle rest
 Your talk is vain, like that of dolts and curs!
 You left off studying the Law of God the Highest,
 even now, as you rejoice, jackals run wild in Zion.

How can we drink wine
 how even raise our eyes
 when we are nothing,
 loathed and despised?"

Although other similar works may very well have been written in Hebrew before or around the same time, this wine song has come to stand as a marker clearly differentiating everything on either side of it, that cleavage dividing the two collective durations that, for the sake of convenience, have here been labeled the "pre-modern" and the "modern." Interpretation of the poem has also, traditionally, been divided into two schools of thought: one sees the first long stanza as a somewhat clumsy but nevertheless acceptable attempt at imitating an Arabic wine song with the last

three short stanzas apologetically tacked on as a reassuring nod to "tradition." The second version sees things the other way around: the first stanza as a preening, almost contemptuous display of prowess mocking 'oriental' indolence, with the last three stanzas carrying the weight and the "real" message of the poem, again, being "tradition, tradition, tradition," but this time with the accent and intonation of Tevye from Fiddler of the Roof, heaping guilt upon a fellow "Jew" wandering out of the "fold." Such approaches obfuscate both internal and external evidence. Internally, both parts of the poem display extraordinary skills that verge on the bravado. Despite any kinks or alleged flaws, Dunash's act of transference - metrically, generically, thematically and conceptually - would be tantamount to the hypothetical case of a young American poet moving to London and deciding to write pastoral poetry in "pure" Middle English using a combination of blank and projective verse measured by variable feet! The differences between the indirect speech of the first stanza (opening with a standard Arabic convention, wa-qal, "And he said"), and the emphatically directed speech in the following stanzas strengthen the rhetorical effect of a small drama enacted within a particular setting, but one whose irony must be sought outside that setting, using external evidence. The setting is the site of the new Hebrew poetry: the garden of courtly relations, where gatherings turned into literary contests; as T. Carmi notes:

Secular Hebrew poetry was born at the courts of Jewish grandees who served as courtiers to Muslim rulers, at first in the caliphate of Cordoba (927-1013) and later, after the dissolution of the caliphate, in the smaller Muslim principalities. This aristocratic birth set its mark not only on the subjects of the poetry, but also on its style and character. Its main genres were panegyrics, laments on the death of the patron or his relatives, songs of self-praise, invectives aimed at the patron's rivals, the poet's rivals or, when the need arose, against the hard-fisted patron himself; aphoristic verse; stylized wine songs and love songs which, to the accompaniment of instrumental music, regaled the company gathered for a drinking session in the palace garden in springtime or the palace courtyard in winter.⁶³

But this was not, by any means, the only setting for Hebrew poetry, as even Dunash's own production attests to. Nor did the setting of such a song have remotely the same meaning for Hebrew and Arabic poets. Beyond the world of the court depicted in panegyrics, love songs, wine songs, complaints and meditations, Hebrew poets fulfilled a completely different function for another audience entirely through the personal/communal religious lyric and liturgical poetry. Here, they were placed in a unique position: worldly people serving as intimate interlocutors between the community, the individual and God. Most Hebrew poets wrote for the synagogue, in one form or another, and only a tiny minority of the hundreds of extant poets were exclusively courtiers or professionals. Yet, even they, no matter how "secular" their verse appeared, still wrote according to the strict standards of an Andalusian poetics that insisted on the "Biblical purity" of its

language, with all the inevitable explicit and implicit "religious" allusions that entailed. It is precisely coming to terms with this relationship to the 'religious' that poses the most problems in any modern approach to medieval literature, creating a tendency to lean towards either one of two extremes: the Reductionist Fallacy or the Magnification Fallacy. The Reductionists gloat over any non-doctrinal chink in the Wall of Orthodoxy through which some Secular Spark might reach the Blinding Light of Reason; the Magnifiers, on the other hand, disregard or distort whatever cannot be allegorized. Both, needless to say, miss the point entirely and display a kind of hysterical immaturity that only Cliffhangers and Those Long Accustomed to Hovering Over an Abyss can appreciate. In a Jewish context this problem becomes even stickier since Jewish 'orthodoxy' is generally marked and identified by a particular Eastern European brand. The seemingly casual approach to 'religion' and the entirely different relationship to God that permeates the Levantine or Arab sensibility seems surprising and even anomalous in the context of such cultural assumptions. In the case of this wine song, the external evidence, the possibility that Dunash - a prize student of one of the greatest legal and philosophical minds in all Jewish history and the foremost religious authority of the time - could even think in terms of the "religious" and the "secular" or being "in" or "out" of the "fold," liars the irony of the situation. This irony is more precisely disclosed when one considers the

discrepancy between the persona of the "rebuker" ("We are nothing / loathed and despised"), and the actual status of Dunash the poet, an honored member of the Caliph's elite. But even this reading is further problematized by the poet's art: the very powerful dirge like rhythm (dóm, dóm... aykh tikdóm) of the rebuker's entrance and the more clipped, sharper beat of the rest of the poem, forces the reader/listener into an internalized sensual relationship with the lazier, extended measure of the drawn out garden scene, a relationship that is never really resolved but simply allowed to co-exist within the space circumscribed. This quality of being in-between, in-between Fez and Baghdad, in-between the "world" and the "community," the space of the courtly garden and the place of kinship embodied in the covenantal relationship to a lost kingdom, does not relegate the poet to a state of limbo, being neither here nor there. The final topos of the poem ('Zion in ruin while we shamelessly indulge ourselves'), emphatically asks that the context of the ganiza world, where 'Zion' was not some distant unreachable dream but simply another spot on a very familiar and accessible map, seriously be taken into account. In light of the poetics of "rhetorical purity" that Dunash and his followers practiced, the ingredients of this poem and the career of its author ironically chart what is most particular about the Levant, its people and their works: an almost anarchic lack of purity and exclusivity, the inexhaustible knack of being in many places in many times at once.

In "Averroes' Search," Borges writes of the philosopher's perplexity at the presence of "two arcane words" that "pullulate throughout the text of the Poetics... tragedy and comedy."⁴ Although the story dwells on the incongruence of the philosopher's utter incapacity to decipher what the writer assumes as given for his readers, Borges goes on to dissect the tale's overly algebraic assumptions: "I felt that Averroes, wanting to imagine what a drama is without ever having suspected what a theater is, was no more absurd than I, wanting to imagine Averroes with no other sources than a few fragments from Renan, Lane and Asin Palacios." The inability to ever be fully present in that other world, the absurdity of the narrator, is most evident in Averroes' longest discourse, a defense of the use of "old metaphors":

... In Alexandria, it has been said that the only persons incapable of sin are those who have already committed it and repented; to be free of an error, let us add, it is well to have confessed it. Zuhair in his mohalaca says that in the course of eighty years of suffering and glory many times he has seen destiny suddenly trample men in the dust, like a blind camel; Abdelmalik finds

that this figure can no longer marvel us. Many things could be offered in response to this objection. The first, that if the purpose of the poem is to surprise us, its life span would not be measured in centuries, but in days and hours and perhaps minutes. The second, that a famous poet is less of an inventor than he is a discoverer. In praise of Ibn-Sharaf of Berja it has been repeated that only he could imagine that the stars at dawn fall slowly, like leaves from a tree; if this were so, it would be evidence that the image is banal. The image one man can form is an image that touches no one. There are infinite things on earth; any one of them may be likened to any other. Likening stars to leaves is no less arbitrary than likening them to fish or birds. However, there is no one who has not felt at some time that destiny is clumsy and powerful, that it is innocent and also inhuman. For that conviction, which may be passing or continuous, but which no one may elude, Zuhair's verse was written. What was said there will not be said better. Besides (and this is perhaps the essential part of my reflections), time, which despoils castles, enriches verses. Zuhair's verse, when he composed it in Arabia, served to confront two images, the old camel and destiny; when we repeat it now, it serves to evoke the memory of Zuhair and to fuse our misfortune with that dead Arab's. The figure had two terms then and now it has four. Time broadens the scope of verses and I know of some which, like music, are everything for all men. Thus, when I was tormented years ago in Marrakesh by memories of Cordova, I took pleasure in repeating the apostrophe Abdurrahman addressed in the gardens of Ruzafa to an African palm:

You too, oh palm!, are
Foreign to this soil...

The singular benefit of poetry: words composed by a king who longed for the Orient served me, exiled in Africa, to express my nostalgia for Spain.⁵⁶

Following Dunash, the Andalusian school - with antecedents in the "new" Arabic poetry and its ancient heritage - triggered an explosion of new writing that first circulated back and forth

from the western to the eastern Levant, from city to city, according to fortune and the vicissitudes of power, and then - because of expulsion or immigration - beyond the old and into the New World. Of about 350 writers chosen for a possible but still very selective anthology, only two were born, lived and died in the same place: Sarah Coppia Sullam, a poet from Venice, and Haim Palaggi, a rabbi from Smyrna. Fully intent on the possibilities of each idiom they encountered, these writers turned their cities to books and lived in words, but never as a means of excluding themselves from the world they inhabited. Refusing to use tradition as a barricade, they avidly pursued and confronted the new: first in Hebrew, Arabic and Aramaic, then Spanish, Provencal, Italian, Latin, Catalan, Portuguese, Greek, Turkish, Persian, Berber, Serbian, French, English, Dutch and more than a few other mother tongues. Every imaginable form appeared - in parchment and newsprint, divan and prayerbook, question and commentary, document and fable - each with its own curious history and mode of transmission: philosophical, medical, legal and mystical writings; mathematics, astronomy, alchemy, grammar, music theory and dream interpretation; poetics, commentary, linguistics and literary criticism; rhymed prose narrative, picaresque, pastoral and realistic novels; geography, cartography, travel accounts and history; drama, opera and lyric.

But strict periodization emerging from only one or even several major lines of influence serves no real purpose in tracing

the course of this writing: after all, the different peoples inhabiting the greater Levant literally lived in different historical times using different calendars. Rather than a chronological sequence, one has to imagine different traditions at different stages of development being influenced by different things in very different ways: usually bi or tri-lingual, like medieval Europeans, these writers often used different languages for different audiences or purposes. The enormous plethora of contexts delineating the range of choices possible in any writing - what one transforms, takes in, rejects, writes through or across - finds a remarkably concentrated form amongst these Levantine writers. Accumulatory and accretionary qualities operate on the semantic, narrative and generic levels: through syntactic patterns, nuances, words, forms and meters borrowed or adapted from other languages; through the tiered texture of fabulae going into the common pool of image and event that could be drawn on and recast, with each generation inheriting what was actual in its own surroundings plus all the baggage of the past. This both greatly exacerbated relations to the wider implications of each of the four concepts of autonomy, translatability, diversity and mobility, and contributed to another marked characteristic that courses - never too far below the surface - throughout the writing: the persistence of "old metaphors" and the tricky process, to paraphrase "Averroes," of allowing 'time to broaden their scope.'

The currency of familiar counters, however, and the almost obstinate sense of conservation, is accompanied by an apparently contradictory urge: an almost unrestricted openness toward experimenting with new idioms and forms. Hebrew poets, for instance, could be arch-conservatives in their "own" tradition while letting loose using the material of others. Immanuel of Rome (c.1261-1332), the first poet to write sonnets in a language other than Italian (using the form in Hebrew over a hundred years before either the French or the English imported it), is a perfect example of this. A poet like Immanuel lived and worked simultaneously in three sequences: his own ritual and textual time, as commentator on The Song of Songs; the agitated course of Dante and poets of the dolce stil novo with whom he exchanged Italian sonnets; and the opaque world of Arabic narrative, with its stock of characters and situations, recieved through Hebrew versions and translations. While extremely innovative in his adaption of Italian material, Immanuel still based his work on Arabic models, conventions, narrative structures and metaphors already in circulation for over 300 years. The very revival of Hebrew, the gesture initiated by Dunash on Sa'adiah's philological scaffolding and continuously rehearsed throughout the "modern" period, itself enacts an omni-directional movement that reveals other aspects of the contradictory relations between the "old" and the "new," tradition and invention, the steady accumulation of time and the bright flash of novelty, tensions reproduced throughout the

intersecting history of Jewish writing in the Levant. By adopting Arabic 'software' as the guiding system through which Biblical antecedents could be programmed, the Andalusian poets achieved a radical re-reading of their own Ur-text. By inscribing Arabic so deeply within the palimpsest, they simultaneously preserved and obliterated it while creating both hybrid and completely original forms that went on to assume the historical logic of their own particular circumstances. The double movement embodied in the practice of this gesture opens a whole new problematic and series of questions regarding different forms and expressions of social identity and allegiance within writing, particularly in terms of particularism and universalism, the possible mobility between 'high' and 'low' culture, and the implications of formal and linguistic 'choice' within the different space of expression available to men and women or people of different social standing.

Part of this problematic remains open to scrutiny in the work of Yehuda Alharizi (c.1170-1235), the polymath that Immanuel fashioned his Notebooks after. Although a native of Christian Toledo, it was Alharizi who summed up, crystallized and, in a sense, managed to transfer, transform and recirculate the best of the Andalusian golden age he found himself belatedly born into. By his time, the giants, Hanagid, Ibn Gabirol, Ibn Ezra and Yehuda Halevi, were already dead. Although Spain itself had become the nexus of both rich exchange and violent confrontation between the "cross" and the "crescent," the old cities newly conquered by

the Christians remained Arabic in custom, taste and style: in such a context, translation and the correct interpretation of signs could be a matter of cultural or actual life and death. In fact, the ability to solve riddles and 'read' situations calling for decisions whose swiftness of action and moral consideration held clear implications for survival, whether physical or spiritual, remained a major theme in a genre that underwent a renaissance of sorts during this period. This form, the maqama, consisted of rhymed prose tales interspersed with poetry; collections of these, forming books built around confounding circles of structural ploys, subtle and startling shifts between 'fact' and 'fiction,' attained a remarkably dense and complex narrative texture. As master of this genre, Alharizi's own career was emblematically divided into three overlapping parts. Each role - that of translator, poet and traveler - deftly played along the margins of the more vigilant and ambivalent range of feelings internalized in his fiction. These feelings, ranging from intense pride to a vulnerable sense of precariousness, are certainly connected to Spain's position at the vanguard of a new world order, intimating and ushering in the decisive westward shift whose eventual frontier would only end at the Pacific. Yet, Alharizi's decision to translate the most popular Arabic work of the age, move back to the East and span the full generic range available to him in his own work, also indicates an acute and often very moving awareness of the need to document a past about to go under. His

position, then, for the Hebrew/Jewish culture of the Levant, is analagous to that of Aristotle's in the Hellenic world and Chaucer's in medieval Europe: all three gather paradigms in an attempt to fend off the sweeping effects of changing orders without realizing the overarching trajectory of their gestures, the fact that their work would go on to reanimate the life of forms by sustaining the specific knowledge contained within them.

As translator, Alharizi's 'minor' works included versions of texts by Aristotle, Galen and the Christian medical authority Hunayn ibn Isحاق; his major works included The Guide to the Perplexed by Maimonides and his masterful rendition of the enormously popular 'picaresque' Assemblies of Alhariri (d.1122), an accomplishment that became the first endeared object of Alharizi's often boundless pride. Seven Hebrew poets had attempted one or several of the fifty sections before him, but only Alharizi took the Assemblies on whole to fully transfer it into a Hebrew context, with Biblical equivalents and correspondences that could serve as both primer and 'proof' of precedence and, if not 'superiority,' then certainly equality with the "poetry that Hagar, Sarai's Egyptian handmaiden, had borne."¹⁶ Because of the sheer variety of scriptural fictions (and despite the obvious and blatant Arabic models), these claims led to an even more refined and firmly rooted appreciation of the Bible as linguistic, narrative and metaphorical source than that achieved and practiced by the classical Andalusian Hebrew poets:

And they said that our language is too narrow and its rhetoric is deficient. But they know not that the lack is in those who do not comprehend its speech and do not recognize its loveliness, like one who has disease in his eyes, and the sun, that shines before him grows dark. He thinks that the accident or the plague is in the sun and he knows not that the plague is in his own eyes. Thus, most of our people despise the Holy Tongue because its themes are too wonderful for them. Eyes have they but they see not the light. The manna is before them but when they go forth to gather they find it not. The rivers of Eden are before them yet they are athirst. And I took up my parable:

Woe to the fools, like wild asses they bray;
Beside fountains of Eden, yet thirst they all day.
Manna is before their eyes - but their eyes are blind.
They go forth to gather but none do they find.

Now many of those that slept in the soil of folly awoke and they made the chariots of their tongues race through the road of song. They planned to translate the book of this Arab Hariri, from the Arabic tongue into the Sacred Tongue, Hebrew, and they came in prosaic garments to serve in the sanctuary of the muse. And when they came forth equipped for the battle of poetry, they could only take as spoils one out of the fifty. For by the power of the metaphors of the book they were dismayed and terrified, and at the sound of its thunders and hailstones they perished and were exterminated, and the hail came down upon them and they died...

Until I arose and wrought its armor. I translated the whole book with fitting prose and poems like pearls, pure and salty...~7

The weakness of the "public," the callous vulgar audience, is an old theme, familiar in the work of Ibn Gabirol ("If your ears are uncircumcised, how / can my bell be heard? Your necks are not fit

to wear my golden crescents...),⁶⁰ and prevalent with the later Troubadours; for Alharizi, once the test of translation is over, the transference accomplished, there had to be a further move:

Now when I had fulfilled their desire and had translated the book, I forsook my home and I wandered on roads, I sailed on ships. I crossed seas. I fled from the West and I shone in the East. And I saw that I had done foolishly and my iniquity was greater than I could bear in having neglected to compose a book of our own poetry, as though the word of the living God were not among us. I had hastened to keep the vineyard of strangers, but mine own vineyard I had not kept.⁶¹

Here Alharizi's pride and arrogance seem tempered: first by his own experience as a wandering poet in search of patrons, then through the popular form of his new book, The Ishkemoni, addressed as an entertainment to a wide audience, but with an obvious didactic thrust, even if the very assertion of that purpose is condescendingly put: "And how much this new book will help the people of all the provinces from Egypt unto Baghdad, many of whose tongues stumble and whose reading is deficient and bad when they speak the Holy Tongue. For, through this book they will smooth their ways and will speak correctly - they will say well what they speak. Through it their thoughts will awake from the sleep of folly and their eyes will be opened and they will

know that they are naked. And they will sew leaves of rhetoric and songs and will make themselves girdles."²⁴

The leaves of this rhetoric were gathered from every possible branch of letters, as Alharizi himself is careful to point out in the proem to his fifty "gated" work:

And I gathered in this book many parables and sweet themes. Among them various poems and striking riddles, words of instruction, songs of friendship, proverbs of right things; words of admonition, events of the time and tidings of the years. The remembrance of death and the place of the shadow of death; words of repentance, and pardoning of guilt. The delights of love and pangs of love. The betrothing of women, bridal canopy and marriage, and matters of divorce; the drunkenness of drunkards; the asceticism of ascetics; wars of heroes and events of kings; the adventures of the road; songs of praise, and supplications of prayers; ethics of the sages, and associations of the upright. The passion of lovers; gardens and hamlets; words of princes; the patter of children; the hunt of hunters; the treachery of deceivers, and the folly of fools; the slandering of scorners, the blaspheming of revilers. And wonderful songs and epistles written in a marvelous way: in order that this book may be as a garden in which are all manner of dainties and pleasant plantations. And in it each seeker will find their heart's desire...²⁵

As in Alhariri's Assemblies and, for that matter, most all collections of rhymed prose narrative, the glue holding all these pieces together consists of the complex relationship spun between the author as author; the author as narrator; the protagonists as narrators, authors and witnesses, and every possible combination

imaginable between and among all of these. As Dan Pagis noted: "In each episode (chapter, "gate," individual maqama) there are two recurrent characters. One is the protagonist (Alhariri's Abu Zaid; Alharizi's Heber the Kenite), a wandering poet, scholar and picaresque-like rogue who often appears in disguise and does not shrink from deception and fraud, yet endears himself to the reader by his wit, inventiveness and zest for life. The other character, the witness-narrator (Alhariri's Harith ben Hannan; Alharizi's Heman the Ezrahite) relates his friend's, the protagonist's, escapades and presents his rhetorical achievements."²⁴ Although the continued encounters and unlikely scenes might appear repetitive or tedious to the uninitiated, each episode plays subtle and more startling variations on an underlying theme. In Alharizi's book, the protagonist Heber is a function of the literal meaning of his own name, derived from the Hebrew root haber: to join, connect, stitch together, unite, compose or write. As he himself says:

Indeed they call my name Heber because
I write all scattered precious poetry.²⁵

All Heber's efforts are put into gathering, retrieving the "scattered" pearls and putting them into some kind of order; yet, each episode - after Heman recognizes his "boon companion" or

Heber gives his own disguise up - ends in parting. The intensity and meanings of each of these partings is very different but the fact remains: Heber and Heman are doomed to part at the end of every meeting, a division that reiterates and adumbrates "the remembrance of death and the place of the shadow of death." One clue to uncovering Alharizi's intent, his wish to fully compile the example of Spain in a book since its actuality had past, is that the most poignant parting between the companions comes at the end of Gate 18, a definitive chapter of ars poetica and literary history. Here, Heber doesn't even divulge his name but only circumscribes his identity:

I am the companion of all who seek me,
 Migratory Oaks is the city of my habitation.
 In the tourney of the intellect, my praises are my weapon,
 And I make my tongue, - my lance.'⁴

One of the Andalusian school's most effective weapons, a tool used to both stave off mortality and regenerate meaning, was embedding, the use of Biblical citation within verse lines or rhymed prose. The Hebrew term, shibbutz (to embroider, inlay, ornament), derives from the Arabic al-iktibas ("The lighting of a candle from a lamp already lit, or the kindling of a flame from a fire already blazing, perceived as an analogue to the Koran as

source of light").⁷⁴ Franz Rosenzweig, one of the most sensitive to the incredibly layered and intricate implications of citation for the translation of Hebrew poetry, stressed that it is "by no means an ornamental appendage," but a basic material; he called embedding the "coined form" of the poet's ideas, "the paper slip enveloping speech."⁷⁵ Poets often begin from citations embedded within the body of a text so as to make them appear as if they were added on later, as fillers, something that further confounds grasping the allusive nature of this practice; as Alharizi himself, or rather a character speaking through the voice of Heman the Ezrahite notes: "Know that there are ways to poetry, and paths and roads for rhymes. They have art forms, guarded and arranged. But the best of the arts is to take a verse from the prophetic books and build a choice and lovely theme on it."⁷⁶ The slip, then, is more often a veil, one that can never be perceived as static but remains perpetually mobile, hiding and revealing different things as it moves with the poet's relationship to the text within the new context it has been placed and the 'crisis of choice' faced by the reader in directing remembrance and intellect in the act of interpretation. This process gets to the root of what is unique and innovative about the Arabic poetics inherited by Hebrew writers.

As absurd as Borges felt trying to piece together "Averroes" from odd scholarly fragments, there is little question that Averroes, Ibn Rushd himself, did try to grapple with fragments of

Aristotle and the poetic concepts that could be derived from them. Significantly, Averroes adopted the term "poetic discourse" rather than poetry as a working category and, like Al-Farabi (d.950) and Avicenna/Ibn Sinna (d.1036) before him, remained intent not on determining, like Aristotle, "the genus commune in which all kinds of imitative arts converged," but "the ultima differentia of poetic art."²⁴ One thing that clearly does differentiate semitic poetic discourse is the extraordinarily high "degree of verbal consciousness" expected by the reader;²⁵ this kind of awareness assumes that figures of speech have the power to provoke psychological, intellectual, even mystical connections and correspondences. Again, terminology is of great significance: the Arabic term takhyil (a mental process by which the poet can cause mimetic representations to be imagined, effective and creative), was characterized by Ibn Sinna as "an acceptance."²⁶ The most powerful and evocative forms must allow the space needed for this "acceptance" to be shared, produced and reproduced by both reader and writer, a concept articulated in the astounding work of al-Jurjani, an 11th c. rhetorician:

If it is clear that an expression can be interpreted only in one way which is directly suggested by its apparent form without their being any possibility of ambiguity in this expression, and if it can be realized that the expression conveys what it conveys without any meditation, reasoning and probing consideration, then there is no distinction in this expression. For distinction and high esteem are qualities which are to

be reserved for what is (ambiguous, namely) that which in its apparent form may be interpreted in a way other than its real interpretation, but then one finds one's soul more intimate with the real (meaning) than with the feasible one... The noblest and most highly placed poetry inevitably requires such participation, for the recipient needs to establish structural relations between the various elements."¹

For Hebrew poets, this participatory process was constantly reinforced through the practice of embedding, the effects of which are as varied as instances of its use. One of the keys essential to unlocking the secrets of the poetry of the "modern" period is the ability to track words and phrases down, grasp their original sense before going on to trace their history and circumscribe the poet's possible or probable intent in using them within a new structure or context. Time, naturally, broadens the scope of such verses: a Biblical phrase extracted from a narrative sequence may have legal connotations in the Talmud which can then be imbued with philosophic, cosmological or mystical implications, all of which - one can rest assured - poets took into account.

Although Alharizi is most known for his seamless use of citations to achieve incongruous, ironic and outrageously comic effects, he also initiated a new, very different form of embedding. By paraphrasing or even directly citing lines from the classical Andalusian poets of the generations preceding him, Alharizi also displaces their citations in order to recontextualize them. Here,

he renders a double homage that firmly fixes the classical status of the Andalusian school, but within the criteria and terms of his own text. This status, due to the narrative structure of Alharizi's work, is also injected with a note of 'realism,' one that contrasts sharply with "neo-modern" interpretations and myths about Andalusian poetry and the world it formed a part of. Like many before him, Alharizi also made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, an entirely ordinary trip, as pointed out earlier, within the parameters of the geniza world. It is, however, the journey of Yehuda Halevi, Alharizi's most famous pilgrim/poet predecessor, that has assumed the status of 'nationalist' myth and model in the Zionist phase of the "neo-modern" period. The following poem, written by Halevi while still in Spain before setting out for the Holy Land in 1140, can be seen as a further, almost alchemical refinement on the 'rebuker's' refrain in Dunash Ben Labrat's earlier wine song:

My heart is in the East and
I at the end of the West -

How can I taste what I eat
how make it sweet?

How shall I fulfill my vows
and binding ties while Zion

is held by the cord of Edom
and I by Arabia's bonds?

I would find as much ease
leaving all Spain's good

as my eyes grace in seeing the
dust of the ruined Shrine.⁶¹²

Because of their grand but concise diction, purely crystallized emotion, evocative rhythms and allusive language, all the poems left from that journey (those from the outset and others, like the Sea Songs and the Egyptian sequence composed in Alexandria along the way) rightfully vie with the Psalms and the Song of Songs in the Hebrew canon. Yet, like so many other works of the Levantine period, these poems have been read less than used - like the perennial elephant of the Jewish joke - to handily answer one of the many forms of the "Jewish question," as another piece of evidence fit into the mold of an already predetermined set of assumptions. At its most vulgar, Halevi is made into some kind of proto-Zionist; this metamorphosis, naturally, precludes emphasizing the fact that he was also known as Abu al-Hassan; that his Socratic dialogue, The Kuzari, one of the most popular books

amongst all Jews, was written in Arabic; that most of his poetry, like that of his Andalusian counterparts, was steeped in the material and spiritual culture of Islam; that the financial 'insurance' behind his pilgrimage resulted from the holding in escrow, through a business partner, of an expensive silk turban, probably as extravagant an item as any of those found in our traders' inventories. Whether or not Halevi ever reached Jerusalem remains a mystery: his vision of the city, though, at a time when the Crusaders had barricaded themselves in, remains ideal, exalted, removed from time, despite the very personal almost sensual tone of his magnificent poems:

Lovely height, world's joy,
city of the great King:
my soul yearns for you
from the edges of the West.

the breadth of my pity
stirs remembering the East,
the exile of your Divinity,
and your Shrine's ruin.

Borne to you on eagle's
wings I'd drench your
dust in my tears until
they turn to mortar:

Though your King be not
within you, and in place of
your balm of Gilead venomous

snakes and scorpions are
 found, I seek you. Shall
 I not cherish and kiss
 your stones, will not
 the taste of that caked

mass be sweeter to
 my mouth than honey?"¹¹

Some 75 years later, after the victory of Saladin, his cleansing of the mosques on the Temple Mount and decree allowing Jews back into the city, Jerusalem is portrayed as a much more worldly place. For a teller of moral tales like Alharizi, 'Holy Land' was only part of an itinerary marked for the spirit within a whole ethical and qualitative space, unreachable and uninhabitable without an effective community; what concerned him, again, were questions of division, of gathering while being torn apart, from without or within:

The fire of strife flames day and night
 Sundering the hearts of friends as blight
 If pure and upright men don't put it out
 God's wrath will burn against us without doubt.
 For every ill men find a cure to make them well
 But jealousy breaks and shatters one to hell.
 All transgressions God can bear, even rage forbear,
 But divisiveness He cannot, cannot bear!¹²

The scarlet thread of "old metaphors" binding the cities of the Levant together through its poetry never precluded either the personal or the original: although steeped in conventions, poets set their very unique seal on what they were given. In the wide range of carpe diem motifs, for example, whether set in graveyards or nature's open book, set pieces take unique and very real twists, as in this short poem by Moses Ibn Ezra:

My thoughts roused me to stop by
the resting place of my parents and
my friends. I asked them, though none
could listen or reply: have you all
betrayed me, even my father and my
mother? Mouthlessly they summoned
me to them, and showed me my
place at their side.⁴⁵

Samuel Hanagid, the first major figure of the Andalusian school, for all the bravado he displayed as vizier and commander of the Muslim armies of Granada, was as intimately aware as Virgil of the inherent confusion and loss of self the individual faced through service to the state. Unlike Virgil's, Hanagid's world is not one of chiaroscuro; even in the sublime space of creation, the blood of the battlefield seeps through:

Look at the jasmine, whose branches, leaves,
and stems are green as chrysolite, whose flowers
are white as rock crystal, whose tendrils are
red as carnelian - like a white-faced youth
whose hands are shedding the blood of innocent men.⁴⁶

Usually the setting of precious jewels in such a landscape presents a cameo within which a lover's face can be praised and beauty's transience lamented: in this poem, the progression from more common minerals such as chrysolite and rock crystal to the only precious stone mentioned, carnelian, immediately sets up a different response to that convention. A lover would not be compared to such relatively common materials, but the reddish hue of carnelian can begin to prepare us for the shocking end, the sudden switch from the expected erotic description to the blank youth - without eyes, ears or mouth - fulfilling orders as inured to change as the order of the correspondences in the world itself.

The ability to congregate meaning out of the conventional presumes familiarity with those conventions: the common semitic and Arabic method (examined earlier in the work of Adonis and al-Ma'ari), of presenting an abstract statement, fixed later in the poem by a sharp image, becomes, in the hands of Hanagid, entirely his own:

I survey the heavens and the stars; I
 look at the earth with its creeping
 creatures; and I understand in my
 heart that they were all intricately
 fashioned. Look up at the sky - like
 a tent, whose clasps are joined to it
 by loops; the moon and its stars - like
 a shepherdess grazing her flock in a
 pasture; the moon among the sweeping
 clouds - like a ship sailing with raised
 pennants; a cloud - like a girl walking
 through a garden, watering the myrtles;

a cloud of dew - like a maiden shaking
 the drops from her hair onto the ground.
 But the earth's inhabitants are like
 an army pitching its tents for a
 night, looting the local granaries. And
 all flee before the terror of death -
 like a dove chased by a hawk. All are doomed
 to be like an earthenware plate
 which has been smashed to bits.¹⁹

In a sweep of the eye the poet sees a group of celestial objects and compares them to a group of terrestrial objects, all held in absentia, in the mind's eye; the imagination and the inner space of memory seem a safe and fertile place - water leads to woman, a garden, home - but the spiral down from the sky to the womb is intruded upon, crowded out by an army, chased by a hawk, smashed like a plate - people plunder, loot and even rape the fruit of the earth's fertility without paying heed to the consequences. The impression of these parallels can be that of either an arbitrary, stock list or a perfectly ordered, intimately connected sequence. Unwont to trade in such currency, accustomed to not getting beyond *topoi* in treating the distant, and considering the poet whose tools are honed by the rhetorical art as some well intentioned carpenter whose mold is not wood but words, we might choose the arbitrary. But closer scrutiny (and familiarity with Hanagid's other work), shows the imagery to have an inevitability and sense of tragic irony in its futility that works backwards, each clause illuminating the one before it until the last lines

snap the whole picture into focus: the mind is free from the ways of the world only insofar as it has the power to create its own order. In one of the few profound readings of a medieval Hebrew poem available in English (significantly in a book titled On the Art of Medieval Arabic Literature), Andras Hamori concludes a long explication of this same poem by Hanagid with the following:

Perhaps this impingement (that of comparison) is more than a poetic mannerism; perhaps it goes some of the way toward redeeming the experience of memory. Their end is to be compared; we do the comparing. We are imprisoned in time, every bit as much as the things that surround us; to compare, to sort out the relations about us, to actively experience our being in time is making the best of it.¹⁰

"Old metaphors" continued to channel the experience of memory and chart the geography of time within the enclosed garden of the Mediterranean, long past the apparent dissolution of its early unity in the geniza world. Along with "fate" and the inevitable passing of time, Hebrew poets found the source of metaphor out of which they fashioned their art in the courtly and figurative scene of lovers' unions, the arena of song and the space of exile, all, again, with highly original twists and turns, as in this "Poem from Prison" by Todros Abulafia (c.1247-1295), a native of Toledo:

Debris and mire are spit up by the sea
 but corals sink to the very depths. This
 is Time's way: to raise the worthless and,
 in that elevation, humiliate the noble.
 Time turns good and bad upside down -
 it mocks those who think they've reached
 their station, but anyone of intelligence
 must come to taunt it, amuse themselves
 with a "perhaps" or an "if." After all,
 there is a balance in dust and heaven
 that pulls down the innocent
 and uplifts the wanting.¹⁰⁰

This poem, like so many others, relies on embedding and the pun in the last line, a citation from Isaiah 40:15 ('the nations...are accounted as dust on the scales'), in which the word shahak means both "heaven" and "dust." Rather than an ornament, the scriptural word here serves as the structure that, without justifying them, can at least attempt to make the world's incongruities intelligible.

By the 13th c., the romance languages, though clearly part of the Andalusian vocabulary from the beginning (through the khardjas, those curious stanzas appended to Hebrew and Arabic girdle songs, and considered the oldest of any surviving romance fragments), began inscribing newer and deeper layers into the texture of the Levantine palimpsest. In addition to the classical Andalusian fare, it was Alharizi's encyclopedic compendium that served as a directory indicating the repertoire available to poets born at these new intersections. The "picaro-like rogue," the

wandering poet in search of patrons, now took on the guise of a real troubador, like Isaac Hagorni, the 13th c. minstrel from Aire who drifted through the Jewish communities of Southern France in search of a fitting audience. The apotheosis of song and the hermetic style of the troubadors typical of Hagorni, was then combined with the ritual discipline and cosmic implications of the kabbalah, the withdrawal of things into themselves, in the work of Meshullam da Piersa, one of the most innovative post-Andalusian poets:

When they sang together, when my
 morning stars sang as the night was
 ending and light came from all sides;
 when the night was ending, the dark-
 ness expelled, and my sun rose in the
 East; when my thoughts shook off
 slumber and my limbs woke from their
 sleep of night - then I sought to greet
 the dawn with music and to worship
 the morning with song...

I began
 to sing and improvise, to see if my
 instruments would answer my words,
 to see if they would comfort me in my
 wandering, in this land of exile which
 is my home...

O master of mysteries, have you ever
 known a musical instrument that would
 not strike up when I sing - and the
 birds voiceless among the branches, the
 swallow songless in my house? Yet I
 wish them well, for with their silence
 they counsel me to hide my works, to
 hide my words..."

As the confrontation between the "cross" and the "crescent" intensified in Spain, Hebrew poetry began to go underground more and more; no matter how precarious things sometimes got for the Jews within Islamic society, they remained a protected people, "the people of the book." But Christian culture, particularly in Spain, asked things of the Jews that the Islamic structure never had; the kind of autonomy and recognition that had so long been assumed in the Levant underwent a process of erosion beginning in the 13th c. and culminating in the first truly 'modern' totalitarian project, the Inquisition, a structure whose logic would bring about the emergence of another truly modern phenomenon, the crypto-Jew. Some writers, like the remarkable 14th c. poet Shem Tob Ardutiel, worked in both Hebrew and Spanish. Others like Solomon Bonafed, a member of the Saragossan "Band of Minstrels" and the last prominent Hebrew poet in Christian Spain before the expulsion, used the conceit of the love lyric to express an increasing sense of desperation:

See how horses streak through the sea
like lightning bolts, and ships sail
through the market-place. A thread of
linen splinters a bar of iron, and water
blazes like wood. Leopards flee before
kids and foxes give chase to lions. Nor
should you marvel that the world is
turned topsy-turvy and the times have
strayed from their natural course...
Oppression grows from day to day...

Oh, let us go, my fair companion, let us

walk far afield, and amuse ourselves
 among the thickets... there we shall not see
 the vagaries of time nor pay heed to
 wicked betrayers... Slowly, eagerly,
 we shall drink the wine of wisdom and
 feed on wafers of choice melodies -
 until time mend again what it had
 twisted and restore all it has ruined;
 until time set apart the lead from the
 gold...³¹

With the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, Hebrew poetry, stuffing over 500 years into its itinerant baggage, set out for other shores. Welcomed with open arms by the Ottomans, Jews settled throughout the Empire: Safed, Constantinople, Smyrna, Salonika and back to the East to renew, rejoin and reinscribe a new layer into the worn texture of the Hebrew/Arabic wedge of the Levantine palimpsest. The Zohar, that most unclassifiable of books and itself an amalgam of the narrative, poetic and mystical conglomerate cutting through Christian Spain, infiltrated almost every aspect of the spiritual, communal and intellectual life of the Jewish Levant. The work of the extraordinary "Masters of Poetry" circle in Salonika, for example, could not be read innocently: as the children and grandchildren of the Spanish refugees who had survived the catastrophe, almost every standard figure and conceit could implicitly refer to the great questions about creation, good and evil, the suffering of the innocent and the coming of the redemption that the inward turning of the

kabbalah had posed. The "old metaphors" took on new urgency, as in this almost ecstatic poem by Israel Najara, the most popular of all the "new" Levantine Hebrew poets:

Sleep deserts my eyes and I toss like a
 ship in the sea of my yearning for You
 as I imagine these things: If I were an
 infant and you were my nurse, I would
 suckle your beautiful breasts, and
 quench my thirst. If I were a stream
 and you and I sat in the shade of my
 garden, I would look after your fruit.
 If I were a spear and you thrust me
 into your enemies' hearts, I would be
 drunk with their blood. If I were a tent
 and you dwelt in me, we would delight
 ourselves with love and clothe ourselves
 with joy. If I were a tongue and you
 were my words, I would soothe desire's
 flame with a song. If I were a slave and
 you were my lord, I would never choose
 freedom.²²

Najara, Alharizi and the dozens of other compilers of narrative collections, the wandering bards from Provence, the "Band of Minstrels" in Christian Spain, the "Masters of Poetry" in Salonika, versifying Roman doctors, Venetian prodigies, the baroque Frances brothers of Livorno and Mantua, all felt the light cast from behind by Sepharad and al-Andalus through the Levantine prism. Their world is certainly akin to that of the English courtiers and metaphysicals; to Chaucer, Spenser, Wyatt, Raleigh, Sidney, Herbert

and Crashaw; to the picaresque and Book of Good Love, the Spanish and Italian flourishes of Calderon, Gongora, Ariosto and Marino; the German Minnesingers and Provencal Troubadors, to so much, in fact, that is familiar, it remains a mystery why the Hebrew poetry of the Levant has not entered the common vocabulary of the "European" tradition. Besides the "major" poets of Andalusia and the many "minor" figures and schools only briefly mentioned here, literally hundreds of poets continued to people this Mediterranean world. Hebrew poetry wound its way through Renaissance and Baroque Italy, flourishing until the end of the 19th c. when the delicate work of poets like Abraham Ishaq Castello and Giuseppe Almanzi molded a unique place within the Romantic space that had been shaped throughout Europe. After the expulsion from Spain, Amsterdam became the site of a revival where poets took to the stage to create Hebrew drama, a genre that, along with opera, was also produced in Italy. The North African tradition, which began almost as a colony of Spain and whose output fluctuated in relation to the political situation on both sides of the sea, was most productive from the 17th to the 20th c., with Rabbi Haim Raphael Shoshannah, the last 'classically' educated traditional poet from Morocco, still writing until his death in 1987 in Beersheba. Minor liturgical traditions, like that of Aleppo, flourished in Brooklyn until the 1960's as a result of the same waves of immigration after the turn of the century that brought Khalil Gibran, Mikhael Naimy and Amin Rihani from Syria and

Lebanon to the New World. Such newly established centers often 'adopted' well-known poets, as this Syrian community took on Yehezkel Hai Albeg, a Baghdadi who had studied in Jerusalem before immigrating to America. Certainly the most interesting "old world" Hebrew poet still living, Albeg recently published his complete Diwan after retiring as cantor and 'house' poet for the Brooklyn community. The Yemenites, those 'most Jewish and most Arab of all Jews,' did not, as is generally accepted, live in complete isolation, as the different strains coursing through their poetry clearly indicates. Like other Jews in various places and at various times, the Yemenites wrote quite a bit of poetry in Arabic, but based more on local traditions than on the classical Arabic verse that had served as the foundation for Andalusian poetics. Nevertheless, the light of that prism still reached them, mainly through the kabbalistic poetry written in Palestine and the Near East during the 16th and 17th centuries. This, then, remained the basis of a Yemenite practice that continued until 1951 when it was abruptly cut short and superseded by the The Yemenite Laments; this group of poems, written in the transit camps of Israel to mourn the death of Rabbi Ya'qob Salim G'rafy (shot to death by police during riots protesting the authorities unwillingness to allow freedom of worship), ironically came to mark what the poet/rabbis must have felt to be the 'post-deliverance' death of the community itself.

V.

In the beginning of Don Quixote, Cervantes has his narrator describe the discovery of a manuscript in the marketplace; this text, The History of Don Quixote de la Mancha by Cide Hamete Benengeli, Arabic historian, when translated from Arabic into Castillian, becomes the novel itself:

One day I was in the Alcana at Toledo, when a lad came to sell some parchments and old papers to a silk merchant. Now as I have a taste for reading even torn papers lying in the streets, I was impelled by my natural inclination to take up one of the parchment books the lad was selling, and saw in it characters which I recognized as Arabic. But though I could recognize them I could not read them, and looked around to see if there was not some Spanish-speaking Moor about to read them to me; and it was not difficult to find such an interpreter there. For, even if I had wanted one for a better and older language, I should have found one."

The "better and older language" alluded to by the narrator, with more than some of Alharizi's pride and prejudice, is obviously Hebrew. Although written well over 100 years after the expulsion,

as conversos, the Jews still played a major role in all aspects of Spanish society and culture. But the inflationary nature of the hidalgo/Old Christian ethic, based on an almost unimaginable discrepancy in the distribution of wealth and power (estimates reckon that the nobility in the Castile and Aragon of 1482, 1.65% of the population, controlled 97% of the land while a Marquis could command 100,000 ducats a year where one ducat was equivalent to eight days' wages of a skilled worker),¹⁴ infected the very nature of all relations in Spain, spreading the disease wherever Spanish influence reached. The ostensible reasons for establishing the Inquisition in Spain (quite late in the game for Europe, where anti-Jewish legislation had already been enacted at the Fourth Lateran Council of Rome in 1215), can be seen as economic. Again, because of their extra-territorial urban network and culture, the Jews often found themselves in a very precarious position. In his introduction to Moses Almosnino's Extremos y grandezas de Constantinople, for instance, published in Madrid as late as 1638, Jacob Cansino - a Jew - speaks of himself as a third generation employee of the Spanish court in the capacity of Arabic translator. Besides his own diplomatic connections with the Barbary Coast, Cansino relates the experiences of his father (killed in service) and grandfather in their station as liasons between the court and the "frontier" Moors, still holding out against the central powers; this office appears to be another instance of the city/country go-between and the inherent

instability of that position, retained, in this case, from at least the 14th c., when Jews began prominently serving as tax-collectors to rural areas. Beyond economics, however, the limpieza de sangre, the purity of blood codes ensuring "noble" descent, soon stretched to cover "purity" of thought before finally suffocating thought altogether. The censor's big stick imposed a rule of silence and a set of linguistic and conceptual double standards that Spain has only recently begun to recover from. At the same time, the brutal machinery of the Spanish Inquisition and the kingdom's power struggle never stopped at the Jews; recent historiography suggests its primary target to have been the last vestiges of Islamic power in Europe and the larger struggle between "East" and "West,"⁶⁶ a conflict the Jews also found themselves in the middle of. While the torments inflicted upon Jews by someone like Torquemada have assumed an almost iconic indelibility in the European imagination, little attention has been paid to the persistent oppression of the Moors whose final decree of expulsion - effecting anywhere between 275 and 400,000 people - came in 1609. Nowhere has Europe's semitic heritage and debt been more apparent and suppressed than in Spain; Spanish culture, whose palimpsest is so perfectly condensed in this passage by Cervantes, can almost be seen as the result of the struggle between and against the memory and reality of its Hebrew and Arabic past. It should come as no surprise that two of Spain's most feared modern writers, García Lorca and Juan Goytisolo,

directed so much of their work at both recovering the texture of Spain's "impure" Moorish past and destroying the myths of a "pure" Spanish history whose only logical outcome could be Franco, fascism and disaster.

While Hebrew poetry with its Arabic antecedents continued to be written in Italy, North Africa, Yemen and other old centers throughout the Levant, the exile from Spain was accompanied by another, from many perspectives, acutely ironic phenomenon: the new Spanish and Portuguese literature of the Sephardic diaspora. In the Eastern Levant, the Ottoman Empire added another language and culture to its already diverse make-up: rabbinical works (like the enormous Me'am Lo'ez project, lasting over several generations), popular narrative, historical works, travel accounts, drama, romances and songs were all written in Spanish and readable in Palestine, Constantinople, Rhodes, Aleppo, Cairo and Fez. In the West, Amsterdam became a vital center for Spanish drama and poetry; developments on the Spanish and European stage were closely watched as dozens of poets and playwrights formed groups, literary circles and societies to disseminate their work. Italy remained the center of emigré printing, with lines of communication open to the Maghreb and the Mashreq, to Tunis and North Africa on one hand, Syria, Palestine and Egypt on the other. The Levant may have been under siege and gone underground, usurped by the European Renaissance, but the legacy of Andalusian enlightenment found its way into Europe through the auspices of

Jewish humanists: Italian printers like the Soncinos, scientists like Joseph del Medigo (a student of Galileo's), philosophers like Judah Abravanel, rhetoricians like Judah Messer Leon, and doctors like Rodrigo de Castro, David de Pomis or Amatus Lusitanus. Called in as a medical expert by the court of Ragusa, a city now known as Dubrovnik, in a case in which a woman was imprisoned and tried on the charge of causing a young man to become deaf, Lusitanus provided sufficient medical proof to convince the court that the young man's deafness had been caused by syphilis and not witchcraft; his Physician's Oath, given at Thessaloniki in the year 5319 (1559), expresses the persistence of a very Levantine code:

I have given my services in equal manner to all, to Hebrews, Christians and Moslems. Loftiness of station has never influenced me, and I have accorded the same care to the poor as those of exalted rank. I have never produced disease. In stating my opinion, I have always told what I believed to be true... In short, I have done nothing that might be considered unbecoming an honorable and distinguished physician, having always held Hippocrates and Galen before me as examples worthy of imitation... I have been diligent and have allowed nothing to divert me from the study of good authors. I have endured the loss of private fortune, and have suffered frequent and dangerous journies and even exile with calmness and unflagging courage, as befits a philosopher. The many students who have come to me have all been regarded as though they were my sons... I have published my medical works not to satisfy ambition, but that I might, in some measure, contribute to the furtherance of the health of humanity; I leave to others the judgement whether I have succeeded; such at least has always been my aim and ever had the foremost place in my prayers.*"

The schizophrenia imposed by the expulsion, the culture of the newly converted and the Inquisition with its distorted ethic of brute power and superstition aimed against reason, seeped into many aspects of European life. Analogies can even be made within the new order of economics brought about by the establishment of the stock market: here, the post-medieval European scene did not differ as much from the geniza world in geographic range or type of goods handled as in its methods of speculation. The fictitious nature of deals involving shares and options, in which "speculators thought in terms of the "difference" between what one anticipated and what actually occurred,"²⁷ departed somewhat from the more concrete relations extant in the geniza world. In this, the Marranos - already used to gambling away their very identities for life and death stakes - present a haunting specter. Joseph Penso de la Vega, the son of converts who had returned to the "fold" and a prolific writer in both Hebrew and Spanish, describes the state of affairs transpiring at the Amsterdam stock market in his Confusion de Confusiones, written in the form of a Socratic dialogue held between a Philosopher, a Shareholder and a Merchant:

Shareholder: To be sure, there is widespread honesty and expedition on the Exchange... Such honesty, co-operation, and accuracy are admirable and surprising. But to make payments for obligations which according to the Exchange usances do not exist, when your credit is not endangered and your reputation not likely to suffer, - that is not

liberality, but insanity; it is not punctuality, but prodigality; not courage, but the foolishness of Don Quixote... A witty man, observing the business on the Exchange, the studied impoliteness there, remarked that the gamble on the Exchange was like death in that it made all people equal... It is a great error to assume that you can withdraw temporarily from the Exchange or that you can gain peace of mind when you cease to meet with the other speculators. If ill fate pursues you persistently, it can reach you just as well in the rocks and the forests, where lightning may strike you and wild beasts attack you... Moreover, it is foolish to think that you can withdraw from the Exchange after you have tasted the sweetness of the honey... He who has once entered the charmed circle of the Exchange is in eternal agitation and sits in a prison, the key of which lies in the ocean and the bars of which are never opened...9b

At the end of the four dialogues, the Merchant pragmatically chooses to say that he might eventually become a shareholder but never a speculator. The philosopher, in closing, states that he will keep his shares, not to gain wealth, but only until he "can get out of them in peace." He then concludes the book with this: "All schools of philosophy teach that the soul is nobler than the body, life nobler than death, and the existent nobler than the non-existent. But, as for the stock-exchange, I approve the paradoxical opinion of the Platonic musician that the non-existent is better than the existent. I think it much better not to be a speculator, and in making that statement I have in mind real speculation, not the honest business in shares, for what is fair in the latter is dubious in the former..."²²

The philosopher's attitude expresses a scepticism shared by many and summed up in a phrase used by Jews in the Inquisition and the literature following it: "No hay que nacer y morir" ("there is nothing more than to live and to die")¹⁰⁹. In other words, at least in one possible interpretation - wait and see, who knows what tomorrow may bring. Indeed, the Shareholder's vision of the Exchange is an accurate portrayal of the inscrutable "logic" of terror initiated by the Inquisition, turning life itself into a prison, imposed from within and without. For writers, in addition to the use of all kinds of other codes and subterfuges, translation was often the only mode ambiguous enough to work in. Curiously enough, Petrarch was restored as a model for converso, Marrano and New Christian intellectuals. In The Spain of Fernando de Rojas, Stephen Gilman notes just what made Petrarch so appealing to the forced converts: "While the traditional purveyors of consolation - Seneca, Job, and Boethius - were also read, they lacked one thing which Petrarch provided: a portrait of a man exposed to the world in all its aggressive immediacy."¹¹⁰ The translation of his work by one of these converts, Solomon Usque, constitutes an unexamined episode in this chapter of Jewish culture in the Levant and one instance of the unconscious debt owed Europe's semitic inheritance.

Aware of the dead-end the courtly lyric as a disconnected entity led to, there is a sense in which Petrarch attempted a shift in linguistic units: the single word as conglomerate sign

and the single poem attaining the status of a word with greater semantic range within a sentence made up of the collection itself. The relatively simple romantic punning technique (compared to semitic practice) used by Petrarch is given semantic breadth through time and the psychological pressures that shift through time: the reader's activity and intellect is most called for, not to ascertain "meaning" in the usual sense, but to contain and direct memory in the 'crisis of choice' faced in locating references within the context of another time and place in the collection. This mode is very similar to the effects of embedding described earlier, but self-contained in a lyric book. The opacity of limited lexical counters - "old metaphors" - with their self-referentially enticing and seductive function, all givens of Petrarchan discourse, were already given clear articulation by someone like al-Jurjani in the 11th c., something quite odd considering Petrarch's opinion of the Arabs and Arabic poetry: "You know what kind of physicians the Arabs are. I know what kind of poets they are. Nobody has such winning ways; nobody, also, is more tender and lacking in vigor, and, to use the right words, meaner and more perverted... To sum up: I will not be persuaded that any good can come from Arabia..." Yet, it may precisely have been from Arabia, via the Hebrew poets of Andalusia, that some of the clearest articulations and most solid justifications for the kind of lyric poetics Petrarch practiced did come. Regardless of his opinion of the Arabs, Petrarch inherited many of

the earlier Levantine assumptions concerning choice, range, limitation, effect and intent in poetic composition. Though contemporary, the centerless conjunction of Petrarch's collected lyrics, the Rerum vulgarium fragmenta, would not, at first glance, seem to have much in common with works like Alharizi's The Tahkemoni or The Canterbury Tales; yet, it is their apparent lack of precise structure (as opposed to Dante's more obvious scheme), that accentuates the reader's own structural presuppositions and conjectures. The openness of these works is most adeptly illustrated by the range of "closed" partisan interpretations they can accommodate.

The figure Solomon Usque (Salusque Lusitano) encountered (or projected) in his 1567 translation of "sonetos, mandriales y sextinas de gran POETA y orador Francisco Petrarca," is a far cry from the stereotypical image of Petrarch as a static, precious and overly embellished keener. This view has been handed down partly through the dismissal of Petrarch's style as 'fustian and ornamental' by Ezra Pound who bemoaned the loss of Cavalcanti and Dante's "radiant world... untouched by the two maladies, the Hebrew disease, the Hindu disease, fanaticisms and excess."¹⁰⁹ While the course of Dante's bark is surely set, the opacity that permits substance to be transformed also bestows upon all who embark on Petrarch's vessel a turn to navigate. Subtly steering around points on the map of the literal, Usque locates the pain of his exile. In XXIII, instead of "com'io vissi in libertade," Usque

condenses, merging his very self with liberty: "como yo libro antes era."¹⁰⁴ Later in the poem:

Spirto doglioso errante (mi rimembra)
per spelunche deserte et pellegrine,
piansi molt'anni il mio sfrenato ardire:
et anchor poi trovai di quel mal fine,
et ritornai ne le terrene membra,
credo per più dolore ivi sentire.¹⁰⁵

is transformed into:

M'acuerda espirto triste por agenos
lugares, y por cuevas, y abismo:
Mi osadia llorar muy muchos años.
Del qual mal falle fin despues yo mismo,
y tornado en los miembros fuy terrenos,
creo para sentir mas mal y daños.¹⁰⁶

Born in Lisbon in 1530 of a family that had fled the Inquisition in Spain only to face it again in Portugal before being forced to move on to Italy and Constantinople, Usque's use of "agenos lugares" for "pellegrine" is auspicious. The ambivalence of Petrarch's use of the word is already evident: if his pilgrimage is devoid of any sanctified destination, these wanderings may be aimless. The word "ageno," to this day, retains an iconic

resiliency in the symbolic consciousness of Spanish speaking Jews, representing both the exile from Spain and the memorial recollection of the earlier Roman and Babylonian dispersions. By using it, Usque divests himself of any association with pilgrimage, no matter how ambivalent, and makes these peregrinations into a symbol of personal and communal catastrophe.

The use of "abismo" and "yo mismo" indicate more than a facile search for rhyme. The "abyss" Usque refers to is the day to day life conversos lived, reflected in such scathing expressions as the one mentioned earlier: "no hay que nacer y morir," final resolve in face of an executioner promising fulfillment in the world to come, "denial of the immortality of the soul and divine reward and punishment"¹⁰⁷ meted out under such conditions. The bastardization of language so common in totalitarianism finds its modern origins in the Inquisition: the expression "relaxado en persona" (to weaken morally, be lax or relaxed 'in person'), taken from an inquisitorial record of 1538, means "burned at the stake."¹⁰⁸ It is pure irony that the poet whom modern critics have taken as the exemplar of a writer whose center is "the absence of intelligibility and, in that absence, the impossibility of maintaining the integrity of the signifiers,"¹⁰⁹ was wholly embraced as model and precedent by some of the first victims of this very breakdown. The bitter paradox of the last two lines refers back to "yo mismo." This "yo" is all Usque has left and

"miembros...terrenos" can easily imply something like "landed members of my people," i.e. those who have settled and found a new home. Yet, turning to them in their own impermanence and instability would only be a cause to feel "mas mal y daños."

Perhaps the most poignant encounter in Usque's translation comes at the culmination of the canzone (CCLXIV) with which he chooses to end the poems of Laura's lifetime:

En tal estado estoy, Cancion, y frio
del miedo, mas che nieve,
Sintiendome morir sin duda sedo.
Qu'ya determinando, he embuelto al dedo
muy mucha parte de mi tela breve.
Ni peso creer si deve
Puesse, como el che yo sufro en tal estado,
Che con la muerte al lado
Busco de mi bivar consejo al cabo
Y vieno lo mejor; lo peor alabo.¹¹⁰

Canzon, qui sono, ed o'l cor via più freddo
de la paura che gelata neve,
sentendomi perir senz'alcun dubbio:
ché pur deliberando è volto al subbio
gran parte omai de la mia tela breve;
né mai peso fu greve
quanto quel ch'i' sostengo en tale stato:
ché co la morte al lato
cerco del viver mio novo consiglio,
et veggio'l meglio, et al peggior m'appiglio.¹¹¹

The rhetorical strategy differs just enough from Petrarch here to emphasize the personal and strip the "ornamental." This is my

state, song, "y frio / del miedo, mas che nieve." Rather than agglutinate, Usque pauses - the oddity and incongruence of being "frozen with fear, more than snow" (in relation to what?), refers back to Laura as sun diffusing significance. Here, Usque insists that the sum of his fear is true petrification and will always be greater either in relation to any melting power or any frozen substance. In the last two lines, Usque again avoids implication in any of the possible meanings "novo consiglio" might sustain by shifting emphasis through word order and adding the ambiguous "al cabo" ("at last," but retaining "cape, end, extremity;" 'living on the edge of the abyss'). If any doubts remain, Usque ends both the poem and the collection with the word "alabo," the same word used in the Spanish (Sephardic) prayerbook for the Hebrew hallel, to praise: following prophetic theology, Usque elects to praise whatever is left him to praise, the remnant, "lo peor," "the worst" that can happen.

VI.

Marking the effective start of the see through walls/prism metaphor in Dunash Ben Labrat's innovative act and gesture has given us only one aspect of the "collective duration" outlined here as the "modern" period. A single geniza fragment existing in two versions, each with its own circuitous and miraculous history, casts a very different light through that prism. The incomplete version of this fragment, a four line poem that made its way from the local Cairo collection of Jacob Mossery to Paris (through his widow) before reaching Jerusalem, was originally thought to have been written by Dunash himself. The other complete text, only discovered recently, presents another picture entirely:'''

Would the fair gazelle's	/	companion remember her
the day they parted,	/	their only son in her arms,
the day he set the seal	/	of his right arm upon her left
and she, in his,	/	placed her bracelet,
the day she, in memory,	/	took his mantle and he, her veil:
given half the Prince's	/	kingdom, would he stay in Spain?

The customary introductory line in Arabic (kitab le'zuga Dunash / "Epistle of the Wife of Dunash"), completely clarifies any questions about the persona that had previously nagged the poem's explicators: the fact that its author remains nameless, identified only in relation to her celebrated husband, is only par for the course in "the republic of cousins," with its distinctive epicenter in the Mediterranean Levant, "where women, like fields, are part of the patrimony."¹¹ Yet, in a detailed and moving commentary, as exacting and cautious a scholar as Ezra Fleisher concludes that the very existence of such a perfectly accomplished and exquisite poem - at the beginning of the Andalusian period - should signal the distinct possibility of rethinking that history altogether. While traditional interpretations of Dunash, as in the wine song looked at earlier, stressed the cracks in the seams of the new Hebrew poetry, Fleisher stresses the seamless, untainted quality of his wife's work:

The poem's movement is striking in its beauty. The two clipped passages at the beginning and the end hold the middle in relief like some kind of inanimate sentimental ritual in which the acts, carried out as a metaphoric dialogue, express much more than words themselves can. The prolonged silence of the poem's center only emphasizes the sharp, near cry clasping both ends of the poem. The symbolic acts - the exchange of articles as testimonial signs - do not exactly inspire confidence to one overseeing this scene of separation but awareness of the tragic inevitability of parting is only vaguely hinted at. The blunt encounter with destiny is brought to the fore by mentioning the child (almost inadvertently), the very fruit of the parting lovers life together.

except that he, too, although a witness, is mute. His place at his mother's arm delicately and powerfully enacts the tragic dimensions of the circumstances: this is not just the standard "gazelle" about to be deserted, but also a beloved and only son, with the unmistakable Biblical allusion to Isaac - "take now thy son, thine only son whom thou lovest." He is the only witness to their love that can neither be exchanged nor divided. Thus, he remains torn, in the middle, between the two.

The parting itself is described in a noble, restrained way. Only the proud, people full of self-respect, can part silently like this, exchanging distinguished articles as a remembrance (with other Biblical allusions here, this time to the Song of Songs) while accepting such a heartbreaking judgement in tranquility. Given that the poem is written in the "fair gazelle's" name, the real 'loser' in what transpires, her dignified stance is even more conspicuous... Nowhere does she implore his fidelity, his love or even that he maintains contact: it would satisfy her that he just remember... From what we can ascertain, it doesn't seem as if the "companion" is leaving for reasons that are completely beyond his control: his departure seems more like a personal decision, even a capricious one. Yet, the poem is written in an irreproachable and loving tone that it never departs from... One way or another, this pearl has come down to us, the work of a mature and true poet who has managed to shed light on an explicitly singular, complex and fragile lyric situation, reenacting it through restraint, with a minimum of materials, using only the most indirect and economical means.'''

Just how many women writers there were in the "modern" period is difficult to say: quite a few are already known; others seem to have been "absorbed" into the oeuvre of their more famous (male) relatives; certainly others remain hidden in unexamined

manuscripts, concealed behind clues and leads never followed or lost altogether. The space, however, initiated by Dunash's fair "gazelle," extends along the very same parameters as that initiated by him - only the conditions differ, of production, transmission, reception, opportunity. Although the enormous range of forms created, adopted and adapted within this space has been stressed, the need to cut across generic boundaries to assess whatever is available is an imperative even more urgent in the writing of Levantine women. The geniza letters of women, for instance, should be directly linked to the correspondence of foreign secretaries to the Ottoman court like Esperanza Malki and Esther Kyra in formal terms. Every period covered here provides evidence of just such "exceptional" women: that, though, should not be the point. Just as Goitein's examination of women in the geniza world does not attempt an apologetic of accomplishment, that work should be taken as the basis for a parallel study that could more fully assess the writing and culture of women within the whole framework of the Levant. Such an investigation would, first and foremost, have to consider conditions and their effect on the possible space of expression accessible to women. For instance, within the "universal Hebrew book culture" of the men, it is significant to note that all the Hebrew women writers that have survived (amongst them Dunash's wife, Kasmunah, Lady Maliha, Osnat Bat Barazani, Shama'ah Shabazi and Rachel Morpurgo), were born into either prominent or very learned rabbinical families. Many

others, those working in the mother tongue, like the Italian Renaissance poets Deborah Ascarelli and Sara Coppia Sullam, or the many Spanish and Portuguese women writers (among them Estrella Lusitano, Manuela Nufes de Almeida, Isabella Correa and Bienvenida Cohen Belmonte) involved in the emigré literary life of 17th c. Amsterdam, were also born into favorable circumstances. Yet, the so-called "simple" works created by the poor, those that have been relegated to the static realm of folklore, often both retain and comment on the culture of the "learned" in ways that can inform our knowledge of the whole social structure and the intertwining web of relations within it. Much of the rich Judeo-Spanish lyric and romance tradition (or, for that matter, the Yemenite and North African Arabic traditions), transmitted almost exclusively by women, should be seen in this light. Singers sometimes take the most deeply ingrained and oppressive values of "the republic of cousins," like the code of virginity, and proudly turn it to their own favor: accepting the decrees inevitably handed down to them, like Iphigenia going off to the pyre, they still preserve that minimal amount of space left within which at least some choice can be made, some voice heard, as in this bitter jewel sung in Turkey, Greece and the Balkans:

Mother, if I am ill
 I don't want a doctor.
 If he gives me medicine
 I won't take it.

Mother, if I should die
 I don't want a chorus paid
 off to lament my passing.

I want twelve young men,
 my love at the head of them,
 all tossing candies,
 candies of every color.¹¹⁸

The custom of this singer's world dictated that the coffin of a young unmarried girl be draped with a bridal gown, with Jordan almonds strewn along the way to the cemetery, as they would have on the way to the wedding canopy. Like the defiant joy of a New Orleans jazz funeral, the girl here knows what she wants: her illness is not just conventional lovesickness but willed resistance to an intolerable state of affairs in which the only "choice" left her is the order she can give to the "celebration" of her own suicide. Like the poem of parting written by Dunash's wife, this song uses only the sparest means, the fewest words to tell a whole untold world. By grasping the place of such works within their social and literary contexts, we can begin to appreciate the extremely intelligent and subtle rhetorical strategies employed by people whose means are circumscribed from without, the often very subversive role that a "song" can have, and the implications these "missing pages" hold for the validity of any "books" purporting to be complete, but compiled without them.

Footnotes:

1. The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela, critical text, commentary and translation by Marcus Nathan Adler (New York: Feldheim) (no date: reprint of first edition, published in London, 1907), p. 30.
2. Jacqueline Kabanoff, From the East the Sun, p. 5 of preface (see note 52, chapter 1).
3. Ilan Halevi, A History of the Jews; pp. 70-75. Also see Eliahu Ashtor, A Social and Economical History of the Near East in the Middle Ages (London, 1976); Walter J. Fischel Jews in the Economic and Political Life of Medieval Islam (New York: Ktav, 1969), and volume I, "Economic Foundations," of Goitein's A Mediterranean Society.
4. F.E. Peters, Allah's Commonwealth: A History of Islam in the Near East / 600-1100 A.D. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), pp. 143-44.
5. For an excellent summary of this, see Arabic Thought and the Western World by Eugene A. Myers (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1964). For a colorful look at Baghdad during the Abbasid period, see: André Clot, Haroun al-Rashid and the World of the Thousand and One Nights (London: Al-Saqi, 1988). For the standard work on the "golden age" of the Jews during this period, see Eliahu Ashtor, The Jews of Moslem Spain 3 vols. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1973-1984).
6. Oleg Grabar, The Formation of Islamic Art (New Haven: Yale University Press), p. 11. For a neglected but quite insightful look at particularly "Jewish" art within the Islamic context, see L.A. Mayer, L'Art juif en terre de l'Islam (Geneva: A. Kundig, 1959).
7. See above, note 1; p. 40.
8. See above, note 4; p. 144.
9. Germaine Tillion, The Republic of Cousins: Women's Oppression in Mediterranean Society, trans. Quintin Hoare (London: Al-Saqi, 1983), p. 156.
10. Ibid., p. 155.
11. For Abravanel on cities, see pp. 256-59 in Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook, edited by Muhsin Mahdi and Ralph Lerner (New York: The Free Press, 1963).

12. See above, note 9; p. 154.
13. Mordekhai HaKohen. The Book of Mordekhai, edited by Harvey Goldberg (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1980), p. 81.
14. Ibid., p. 69.
15. Ibid., p. 79.
16. See, for instance, the introduction to Richard Gottheil and William H. Worrell's early Fragments from the Cairo Geniza in the Freer Collection (New York: MacMillan, 1927). "But the Geniza was known in 1750 and 1864 as we have seen and hence could not be "discovered." Also, if "all the contents" were dumped into the courtyard, they must have been restored, in part at least, to the Geniza before Schechter's visit in 1897 for he found them there. In view of all the statements, perhaps the contents of the Geniza and the entrance to it were always known to the Synagogue authorities. They deceived Adler upon his first visit, in 1888, with a conventional answer: The Contents of a Geniza are regularly buried." See also the general introduction to the first volume of Goitein's A Mediterranean Society. For an interesting usage of geniza sources by a rabbinical authority see Zvi Zohar's A Great Sephardic Posek Champions Women's Rights (Rabbi Uziel's responsum on Women's Suffrage, 1920) (Jerusalem: Shalom Hartman Institute, 1985).
17. Gershom Scholem, From Berlin to Jerusalem, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1980), p. 158.
18. S.D. Goitein, A Mediterranean Society, p. 32; vol. IV. For more on the Fatimid period, see Jacob Mann's pioneering The Jews in Egypt and Palestine Under the Fatimid Caliphs 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1920-22).
19. Ibid., p. 180; vol. II.
20. Ibid., pp. viii, ix; vol. II.
21. S.D. Goitein, Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 141.
22. Ibid., p. 167.
23. Ibid., p. 78.
24. A Mediterranean Society, p. 292; vol. II. Also see p. 289 of the same volume and p. 21, vol. IV.

25. S.D. Goitein, Studies in Islamic History and Institutions (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1966), p. 246-7.
26. Ghassan Kanafani, Palestine's Children, trans. Barbara Harlow (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1984), p. 32.
27. Ya'qob Yehoshua, Childhood in Old Jerusalem (Jerusalem: Reuben Mass, 1966-1979) [Hebrew]; Vol. 1, pp. 215-16 (my translation).
28. Ibid., pp. 58-66 in Vol. 3 and pp. 204-214 in Vol. 1.
29. Naim Kattan, Farewell, Babylon, trans. Sheila Fishman (New York: Taplinger, 1980), pp. 47-8. For a survey of some examples of this genre of memoir, see Jacob M. Landau's "Bittersweet Nostalgia: Memoirs of Jewish Immigrants from the Arab Countries," in The Middle East Journal, vol. 35, no. 2, Spring 1981.
30. A Mediterranean Society, p. 42; vol. II.
31. Ibid., pp. 44-5; vol. II.
32. Ibid., p. 274; vol. II.
33. Ibid., p. 8; vol. IV.
34. Ibid., p. 315; vol. IV. See the section on naming, pp. 314-19.
35. Ibid., p. 326; vol. IV.
36. Ibid., p. 332; vol. IV.
37. Ibid., p. 353; vol. IV. See the whole chapter, "The World of Women," pp. 312-359. The literature on women in the Levant, spanning the whole indivisible spectrum - ancient, medieval and contemporary - is continually growing. For references to the present scene, see chapter 4, note 30. For the ancient and medieval period, some of the works I have found most useful in the context of this study are the previously cited Republic of Cousins (see above, note 9), and the following: Sarah B. Pomeroy, Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity (New York: Schocken, 1975); J. G. Persistiany ed., Mediterranean Family Structures (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), and his Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966); Part I, "Tradition," of Middle Eastern Muslim Women Speak, eds. Elizabeth Warnock Fernea and Basima Qattan Bezirgan (Austin and London: University of Texas, 1977), pp. 3-86; Fatima Mernissi, Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Muslim Society (London: Al Saqi, 1984); Margaret Smith, Rabi'a the Mystic and Her Fellow Saints (Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1974); Nabia Abbott, Aisha - The Beloved of Mohammed (London: Al-Saqi, 1986), and Two Queens of Baghdad (Chicago:

University of Chicago, 1974); and Written Out of History: Our Jewish Foremothers, eds. Sondra Henry and Emily Taitz (Fresh Meadows: Biblio Press, 1983).

38. See above, note 21; p. 77.

39. A Mediterranean Society, p. 191; vol. II.

40. Oleg Grabar, "Cities and Citizens," in The World of Islam (see chapter 1, note 116), p. 96.

41. See A Mediterranean Society, pp. 200-1; vol. I.

42. Ibid., p. 154; vol. I.

43. Ibid., p. 48; vol. II. See Hassan Fathy, Natural Energy and Vernacular Architecture (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), particularly the preface and Part 1, "Environment and Architecture." Also see K.A. C. Creswell's Early Muslim Architecture (London: Penguin, 1958); Oleg Grabar, Islamic Architecture and Its Decoration, A.D. 800-1500 (London: Faber and Faber, 1964), and L.A. Mayer, Islamic Architects and their Works (Geneva: Albert Kundig, 1956).

44. A Mediterranean Society, p. 339; vol. II.

45. A. S. Yahuda, The Language of the Pentateuch in its Relation to Egyptian (Oxford University Press / London: Humphrey Milford, 1933), p. xxvii.

46. Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference (see chapter 1, note 1), p. 9.

47. My translation from the original text in Haim Schirmann, Hebrew Poetry in Spain and Provence (Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute, 1979) [Hebrew], p. 512; vol. II.

48. See above, note 46; pp. 76-7. For some works on the importance of grammar and linguistics in the present context, see: Khalil T. Semaan, Linguistics in the Middle Ages (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968), and Hartwig Hirschfeld, Literary History of Hebrew Grammarians and Lexicographers (London: Oxford University Press, 1926). Also see José Faur's remarkable article: "The Hebrew Personal Pronouns," in Perspectives on Jews and Judaism, ed. Arthur A. Chiel (New York: The Rabbinical Assembly, 1978).

49. This phrase is from Nathaniel Mackey, "Sound and Sentiment, Sound and Symbol," in Callaloo (New Orleans), # 30 (vol. 10, No. 1); p. 29. For information on the Egyptian custom described above, see Jacques Hassoun's "The Traditional Jewry of the Hara," in The Jews of Egypt: A Mediterranean Society in Modern Times, ed. Shimon Shamir

(Boulder: Westview, 1987), pp. 169-173. For further details, the following Hebrew works can be consulted: Refa'el Aharon ben-Shim'on, Me'har Mitzrayim (Alexandria: 1906/1907); Yom-Tov Yisrael, Minhagey Mitzrayim (Jerusalem: 1871/1872), and Eliyahu Hazan, Neve Shalom, Minhagey No-Amnon ve-Eretz Mitzrayim (Alexandria: 1892/1893).

For some works on music in the Hebrew/Arabic context that I have found particularly helpful, see the following by Henry George Farmer: Saadya Gaon and Music (London, 1943); The Oriental Musical Influence and Jewish Geniza Fragments on Music (New York: Hinrichsen Edition, 1964); A History of Arabian Music to the XIII Century (London: Luzac, 1929); Historical Facts for the Arabian Musical Influence (London: William Reeves, 1930); The Sources of Arabian Music (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1965); "The Music of Islam," in The New Oxford History of Music, vol. I. (London: Oxford, 1957), pp. 421-477. In addition, see E. Werner and I. Sonne's important article, "The Philosophy and Theory of Music in Judeo-Arabic Literature," in HUCA (Hebrew Union College Annual) 16 (1941), pp. 251-319, and 17 (1942/43), pp. 511-572. The numerous Hebrew articles of the Syrian born Israeli scholar Amnon Shiloah have also been immensely useful; for one of the best bibliographies on the whole subject, in a book that is itself of great value, see: Dalia Cohen, East and West in Music (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1986) [Hebrew].

50. R. Hayyim Raphael Shoshannah, I Shall Arise At Dawn (Beersheba, 1986) [Hebrew], p. 22. For more on the North African tradition, see Haim Zafrani, Poesie juive en occident musulman (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1977).

51. A Mediterranean Society, p. 195; vol. II. For comparisons and influences, see Bayard Dodge's excellent Muslim Education in Medieval Times (Washington, D.C.: The Middle East Institute, 1962).

52. Moses Ibn Ezra as cited by Dan Pagis, Change and Tradition in Secular Poetry: Spain and Italy (Jerusalem: Keter, 1976) [Hebrew], p. 43.

53. A Mediterranean Society, p. 221; vol. II.

54. An intriguing study could be done on the relationships between European (both Eastern and Western) Jewish scholars and their Mediterranean and Arab counterparts, but from the point of view of the non-Europeans. This dynamic, of course, is multi-layered and includes the contempt that, for example, German Jews often felt for the "Oriental" Eastern European Ostjuden, something that led them to romanticize the golden age of Spain while completely ignoring the living examples of that very culture. A progressive curve tracing this rift can be drawn from an 18th c. figure like the HIDA, Hayyim David Azulai, to 19th and 20th c. figures like Hayyim Palaggi, Giuseppe Almanzi, Eliahu Benamozeg, Shaul Abdullah Yoseph, A.S. Yahuda and Moise Ventura, to mention only some. All of these people

had extensive contact with both European Jewish intellectuals and institutions, yet a reading of almost any general history of modern Jewish thought would leave one with the impression that the Mediterranean and Arab world remained plunged in darkness, totally unaware of what was taking place outside of it. The relationship between Nahum Slouschz and Mordekhai HaKohen discussed in chapter 3 is just a mere paradigm of one aspect of this imbalance.

55. Cited by Nahum Menahem in Ethnic Tension and Discrimination in Israel (see note 8, chapter 1), p. 83; p. 86 in the French edition.

56. See my "The Qill's Embroidery," Parnassus: Poetry in Review, Spring / Summer, 1983; pp. 85-115. The translation is from a composite of sources: the original Arabic, and two Hebrew versions, one by Ben Zion Halper and the other by Dan Pagis. The Arabic text, The Book of Conversations and Memories, is available on microfilm in the National Library at Hebrew University; a Hebrew version appeared as Shirat Yisrael, trans. B.Z. Halper (Leipzig, 1924). For the most accessible version, see M. Schreiner, "Le Kitab al-Mouhadara wa-l-Moudakara de Moïse ibn Ezra et ses sources," Revue des études juives 21, pp. 98-117, and 22, pp. 230-40; 1890-1891, Paris.

For the importance of language, both Hebrew and Arabic, see: A.S. Halkin's "The Medieval Attitude Toward Hebrew," in Biblical and Other Studies, ed. A. Altmann (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), and Anwar G. Chejne's definitive "Arabic: Its Significance and Place in the Arab Muslim Society," The Middle Eastern Journal 19 (1965), pp. 447-470.

57. "An Interview with Edmond Jabès Conducted by Jason Weiss," in Conjunctions (New York) 9, pp. 137-39.

58. This phrase of Victor Zuckerkandl's is quoted by Nathaniel Mackey in his "Sound and Sentiment, Sound and Symbol;" see above, note 49. For the original reference, see: Victor Zuckerkandl, Sound and Symbol: Music and the External World (Princeton: Bollingen Foundation, Princeton University Press, 1956), p. 371.

59. Andras Hamori, On the Art of Medieval Arabic Literature (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 38. There is nothing even remotely comparable to this available in English; Hamori takes Arabic literature seriously, as literature, and provides both an introduction and an accomplished reading of a variety of texts.

60. Adonis, Introduction A la poétique arabe (see chapter 1, note 75), p. 80 (my translation).

61. Birds Through a Ceiling of Alabaster: Three Abbasid Poets, (see chapter 1, note 95), p. 20.

62. My translation; for original text see H. Schirmann, Hebrew Poetry in Spain and Provence, pp. 34-5, vol. I.
63. The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse, edited and translated by T. Carmi (New York and Hammondsworth: The Viking Press and Penguin Books, 1981), p. 25. This remains the most accessible source of "modern" Hebrew poetry for the non-specialist.
64. Jorge Luis Borges, Labyrinths (New York: New Directions, 1964), p. 149. Interestingly enough, the Baghdad born Israeli scholar Shmuel Moreh has done some pioneering work on the theater in medieval Islam, research that would further confound Borges's own labyrinthine sense of the available: see Shmuel Moreh, "Live Theater in Medieval Islam," in Studies in Islamic History and Civilization in Honour of Prof. David Ayalon (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1985), as well as Metin And, A History of Theater and Popular Entertainment in Turkey (Ankara, 1963/64), referred to by Bernard Lewis in The Jews of Islam (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 131.
65. Ibid., pp. 153-4.
66. Judah al-Harizi, The Tahkemoni, trans. Victor Emanuel Reichert (Jerusalem: Raphael Haim Cohen Press, 1965-1973), p. 32. The popular Hebrew edition, Sefer Tahkemoni, edited by Y. Toporovsky (Tel Aviv, 1952), remains out of print; the equivalent of this, in terms of a national literature, would be if The Canterbury Tales remained out of print in English, Don Quixote out of print in Spanish, or Eugene Onegin out of print in Russian. While the fact that the Tahkemoni remains out of print is both shameful and, ultimately, inexplicable, hopefully the schema of cultural biases and power shifts outlined in this study goes some of the way towards explaining it.
67. Ibid., pp. 35, 36-9.
68. As above, note 63; p. 309.
69. As above, note 66; pp. 39-40.
70. Ibid., p. 38.
71. Ibid., p. 36.
72. Dan Pagis, "Variety in Medieval Rhymed Narratives," Scripta Hierosolymitana, vol. XXVII (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1978), p. 86. This article by Pagis is one of the rare pieces of criticism to take the rhymed prose collections seriously as intentional narrative structures. For other examples of the rhymed narrative, see the superb translation by Raymond P. Scheindlin of Isaac Ibn Sahula's "The Sorcerer," in FICTION, vol. 7, nos. 1 and 2 (New York, 1983), as

well as a version of Meir Ibn Zabara's The Book of Delight rendered by Moses Hadas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932).

73. As above, note 66; p. 186, vol. II.

74. Ibid., p. 69; vol. II.

75. David Yellin, Introduction to the Hebrew Poetry of the Spanish Period (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1978) [Hebrew], p. 120. For the most accessible catalogic compendium of Hebrew rhetorical figures - the Hebrew equivalent of Quintillian - see Judah Messer Leon, The Book of the Honeycomb's Flow, critical edition and translation by Isaac Rabinowitz (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983).

76. M. Gertner, "On Translating Medieval Hebrew Writing," Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society 3/4 (1962-63), p. 178. This excellent but neglected article is one of the most suggestive available on the poetics of translation from Hebrew, with a particular emphasis on the practice and problematic of Biblical citation.

77. As above, note 66;

78. Arabic Poetics in the Golden Age, edited by Vincente Cantarino (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975), p. 73.

79. Sanford Shepard, Shem Tov: His World and His Words (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1978), p. 72. Shepard's fine distinctions between the romance practice of punning and the semitic idea of participatory semantic paranomasia open areas of comparative poetics rarely touched upon. See pp. 67-78, "Poetics and Translation."

80. As above, note 78; p. 82. For another, more theoretically complex and 'up to date' view on Arabic poetics, see Jamal Eddine Ben Cheikh, Poétique Arabe (Paris: Editions Anthropos, 1975).

81. Kamal Abu Deeb, Al-Jurjani's Theory of Poetic Imagery (London: Aris and Phillips Ltd., 1979), pp. 280-81. Also see chapter 7, "The Psychological Approach to the Image," pp. 257-302. I am not aware of a more accessible work that suggests and traces the vast conceptual and theoretical riches of medieval Arabic poetics; in addition to Abu Deeb, G.J.H. van Gelder's Beyond the Line: Classical Arabic Literary Critics on the Coherence and Unity of the Poem (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1982), is also an important work.

82. My translation from H. Schirmann, Hebrew Poetry in Spain and Provence, p. 489; vol. II.

83. Ibid., p. 489; vol. II.

84. As above, note 66; pp. 146-49. For some of the specific historical background to this, see S. D. Goitein's "Contemporary Letters on the Capture of Jerusalem by the Crusaders," Journal of Jewish Studies 3 (1952), pp. 162-177.
85. T. Carmi, The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse, p. 327.
86. Ibid., p. 297.
87. Ibid., p. 295.
88. As above, note 59; p. 98.
89. My translation from H. Schirmann, Hebrew Poetry in Spain and Provence, p. 446; vol. IV. Also see Carmi's fine translation in The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse, p. 416.
90. The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse, p. 407.
91. Ibid., pp. 430-31.
92. Ibid., p. 477. For a standard survey giving some sense of the enormous range of writing produced through this whole period, see M. Steinschneider's Jewish Literature from the 8th to the 18th c. (London, 1857).
93. Miguel Cervantes, Don Quixote, trans. J.M. Cohen (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1950), p. 76. For remarkable material on the Jews in Spain, see the work of Raphael Cansinos-Assens, the brilliant polymath who was an early influence on Borges: Los judios en la literatura española (Buenos Aires: Columna, 1937); Los judios en Sefarad: Episodios y simbolos (Buenos Aires, 1950), and "Cervantes y los Israelitas Españoles," Los Quijotes (Madrid, 1963), año 2, num. 27; pp. 3-11.
94. Henry Kamen, The Spanish Inquisition (New York: The New American Library, 1965), p. 14.
95. See Allan H. Cutler, The Jew As An Ally of the Muslim (Notre Dame University Press, 1986). For some of the figures and dates of the Moorish expulsion, see J.H. Elliott, Imperial Spain 1469-1716 (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1970), pp. 305-8; and R. Trevor Davies, The Golden Century of Spain 1501-1621 (New York and Evanston: Harper Torchbooks, 1961), pp. 109 and 169.
96. For a biography and assessment of Amatus Lusitano's medical career, as well as this text, see Harry Friedenwald, The Jews and Medicine (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1967), pp. 332-81.

97. Joseph Penso de la Vega, Confusion de Confusiones 1688. Portions Descriptive of the Amsterdam Stock Exchange, selected and translated by Professor Hermann Kellenbenz (Boston: Baker Library / Harvard Graduate School of Business Administration, 1957), p. xvii.

98. Ibid., p. 18.

99. Ibid., p. 42.

100. Sanford Shepard, Lost Lexicon: Secret Meanings In The Vocabulary Of Spanish Literature During The Inquisition (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1982), p. 91. This book is an invaluable aid to any reading of Spanish golden age literature; in fact, after having read it, one is amazed at just how hermetic and cryptic that writing is and how all its myriad and twisted implications can possibly be grasped without the use of this lexicon.

101. Stephen Gilman, The Spain of Fernando de Rojas (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 177. For the most accessible anthology of Marrano poetry, see Timothy Oelman, ed. Marrano Poets of the 17th c. (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1982).

102. In The Renaissance Philosophy of Man, edited by Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller and John H. Randall Jr. (Chicago: Phoenix, 1948), p. 142.

103. See "Cavalcanti" in The Literary Essays of Ezra Pound (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), pp. 149-201.

104. The Petrarchan text is from the Canzoniere, edited by Gianfranco Contini (Turin: Einaudi, 1964), XXIII, 1. 5. The Usque text is available in the Hispanic Society of America or, on microfilm, from the Weidner Library at Harvard University, as: Salomon Usque, Sonetos canciones, mandriales sextinas de gran POETA y orador Francisco Petrarca, traduzidos de Toscano por Salomon Usque, Hebreo (Venezia: Nicolao Bevilacqua, 1567), p. 127.

105. As above, Canzoniere, XXIII, lines 141-46.

106. As above, see note 104; Usque, p. 129.

107. As above, see note 100; p. 91.

108. Ibid., p. 142.

109. Marguerite Waller, Petrarch's Poetics and Literary History (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1980), p. 4.

110. As above, see note 104; Usque, p. 161.

111. As above, see note 104; Canzoniere, CCLXIV, lines 127-136.
112. My translation based on the text in Ezra Fleisher, "On Dunash Ben Labrat, His Wife and Son: New Light on the Beginnings of the Hebrew/Spanish School," JSHL (Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature) 5 (1984), pp. 189-202[Hebrew]. Also see Tova Rosen Moked's "On Tongues Being Bound and Let Loose: Women in Medieval Hebrew Literature," in Prooftexts 8 (1988), pp. 67-87.
113. Germaine Tillion, The Republic of Cousins (as above, see note 9), p. 103.
114. As above, note 112; p.
115. My translation from a text found on the jacket notes of Ladino Folk Songs sung by Raphael Yair Elnadav (New York: The Collectors Guild, 1961). For an excellent presentation of "folk-poetry" by women, see Misha'el Maswari Caspi, Daughters of Yemen (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

3.

History's Noise / The Beginning of the End

Error de los que entienden, que un mismo sueño se puede decifrar del mismo modo a diferentes sujetos, en diferente tiempo.

(Those who believe the same dream can be interpreted the same way by different subjects at different times are mistaken.

- from: Transformaciones de Morpheo o Tractado de Sueños

Mosseh Almosnino / Amsterdam, Año 5494

"los fonógrafos nos siegaron los garones"

("phonographs have cut our throats")

- an elderly Sephardic woman to
Mair José Benardette

New York City/1922

Palestine is a land planted
by eyes /

refusing to be closed

- Etel 'Adnan

I.

In 1856, after traversing the frontiers of the New World past the Atlantic to the Pacific, Herman Melville ventured back, into "the republic of cousins," the Old World of the Mediterranean Levant. The trip to Cairo and then Constantinople managed to stir something in him, a certain "spontaneity":

To the Bazaar. A wilderness of traffic. Furniture, arms, silks, confectionary, shoes, sandals - everything. (Cairo). Crowded overhead with stone arches, with side openings.

Immense crowds. Georgians, Armenians, Greeks, Jews, & Turks are the merchants. Magnificent embroidered silks & gilt sabres & caparisons for horses.

You loose yourself & are bewildered & confounded with the labyrinth, the din, the barbaric confusion of the whole.

The Propontis, the Bosphorus, the Golden Horn, the domes, the minarets, the bridges, the men of war, the cypresses. Indescribable."

Given such "an absence of palpable woman in his works," it is striking that Asia and Europe are seen by Melville in the ancient figure of two women engaged in "a contest of beauty." The city of

Constantinople itself appears through the metaphorical paraphernalia of the "harem": "The fog lifted from about the skirts of the city... It was a coy disclosure, a kind of coquetting... like her Sultanas she was thus seen veiled in her ashmack."³ But engaged in his own desperate search between water and stone, the sea and the desert, this vision was quite real for Melville, with a different hue and quality than the more exotic projections of flight and mastery then so prevalent in the European imagination. Yet, by the time Melville made his pilgrimage, the "East" already found itself in a subordinate position, locked within an "ideological superstructure with an apparatus of complicated assumptions, beliefs, images, literary productions, and rationalizations (not to mention the underlying foundation of commercial, economic and strategic vital interests);" the contemporary Syrian theorist Sadiq Jalal al-'Azm has called this cumulative body of theory and practice "institutional orientalism," situating it squarely "within the context of the general historical expansion of modern bourgeois Europe beyond its traditional confines."⁴

This institutional phenomenon constituted only part of "the great Western Transmutation," a "world event" that marked a decisive break from the "relative evenness of historical development among all the societies" of the Old World since Sumer:

The same generation that saw the Industrial and French Revolutions saw a third and almost equally unprecedented event: the establishment of European world hegemony. It was not merely, or perhaps even primarily, that the Europeans and their overseas settlers found themselves in a position to defeat militarily any powers they came in contact with. Their merchants were able to out-produce, out-travel, and out-sell anyone, their physicians were able to heal better than others, their scientists were able to put all others to shame. Only a limited part of the world's surface was actually occupied by European troops, at least at first. European hegemony did not mean direct European world rule. What mattered was that both occupied ('colonial' or 'settled') areas and unoccupied ('independent') areas were fairly rapidly caught up in a world-wide political and commercial system, the rules of which were made by, and for the advantage of, the Europeans and their overseas settlers. Even 'independent' areas could retain their local autonomy only to the extent that they provided European merchants, European missionaries, even European tourists, with a certain minimum of that type of international 'law and order' which they had become accustomed to in Europe, so that the Europeans remained free to vaunt a privileged position and to display among all peoples the unexampled new physical and intellectual luxuries of Europe.*

For Arab and Mediterranean Jews, the effects of this process of transmutation that came with the Industrial and French Revolutions were extensive, ultimately transforming in a fairly drastic way the nature and particular qualities of life within the ancient Jewish communities of the Old World. To emphasize the radical nature of this change, on the other hand, is not to imbue that life with the ahistorical, static but enticingly nostalgic and mythic glow of "tradition" so often attributed to rabbinic society. "The speed of the new" that characterized the

drastic "change in the patterns of investment of time and money" in the "technical age" - the decisive turning point of which Hodgson puts in the year 1800 - struck each community and each class within those communities at a different velocity. For some, the encounter represented liberation from the fetters of an overtly repressive and coercive structure; for others, it meant either a loss of nativity altogether or a further retreat into the confines of an even more restrictive but no longer autonomous religious culture in which ritual in and of itself began to take up an increasingly disproportionate but less and less integrated part of an individual's cultural space.'

Competition by the colonial powers for the allegiance of the 'intermediary' communities (particularly the Jews, Greeks and Armenians that Melville correctly identified as the merchant class), was fierce. At the same time, though, it was directed at those who could be expected to give something back in return, either commercially through the old network of trade connections rooted in the geniza world or as part of the new administrative structure being built around the Mediterranean in the decades following the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt. By the middle of the 19th c., these structures had dug deep institutional roots. French education, for example, came hand in hand with imperial ventures: the concession for the Suez Canal was granted in 1854 and completed in 1869 with the labor of 20,000 conscripted Egyptian peasants.' Meanwhile, the Alliance israélite universelle,

established in Paris in 1860, opened its first school in Tetouan in 1862. From here on, the gaze of the Jewish bourgeoisie was drawn more intently to the capitals of Europe: to Paris, Vienna and London. By 1912 there were 71 Alliance schools for boys and 44 for girls all over the Levant, in Baghdad and Jerusalem, Tangier and Istanbul, Beirut and Cairo, Damascus and Salonika.' The net result of this was to progressively link "the Jewry of the Mediterranean Islamic countries to the movement of European expansion, detaching it from the fate of the Arab peoples."¹⁰ For the masses of Arabic and Spanish speaking Jews, the stevedores of Salonika or the dyers of Fez, still largely living within the rabbinic domain but increasingly isolated from the "native" population and their anti-imperial concerns, there was less and less room to maneuver in: it was they who would be most affected by the new reapportioning of power and the brutal dictates that went into the 'reconstruction of historical geography' in and after the colonial period. As the conflict in Palestine completely collapsed into a confessional war between essentialized "Jews" and "Arabs," an appalling shade began to block and shatter the rays of light once clearly refracted through the Levantine prism.

Yet, this schematic review cannot even hope to do justice to such a complex set of circumstances nor, at the same time, can it account for the extent of Jewish participation in all facets of the burgeoning cultural life of the late 19th and early 20th century Levant. This would include, to mention only some

examples, the contributions of major innovators like the musician Daud Husni (whose 1919 "Cleopatra's Night" was the first Egyptian full-length opera), the filmmaker Togo Mizrahi (whose films of the 1930's, "Cocaine" and "The Children of Egypt," are considered landmarks of contemporary Arab cinema), or the many other composers, singers, actors, actresses, directors, producers, script-writers and technicians who worked in the formative years of the Egyptian and Iraqi entertainment industries.'" In addition, the overly simplistic tendency to exclusively identify rabbinical culture with the regressive forces of a closed society must be tempered by the actual record of many Levantine authorities. Again, just a few examples can be cited to give some sense of this: Rabbi Haim Nahum Effendi, for instance, besides being a member of the Egyptian senate, was one of the founders of the Arabic Language Academy, appointed by a royal decree in 1933; in another case, bitter disputes took place between Sephardi and Ashkenazi rabbis from the turn of the century through the 1930's as to whether non-religious subjects or vocational training should constitute part of the standard curriculum. In Palestine, these differences of philosophy led to major rifts between the communities with the Arab and Mediterranean rabbis consistently opting for broader, more integrated and practical pedagogic approaches. This also extended to the debate between the communities regarding the voting rights of women; here, as well, Ben Zion Uziel, the chief Sephardic

rabbi of Jaffa, formulated a highly original ruling that even overrode the misogynistic authority of Maimonides. This, it should be noted, was in 1920, at a time when only some European countries had recently granted voting rights to women.¹²

All of these episodes were part and parcel of the diversification of social structure, opportunity and aspiration brought about by the "great Western Transmutation" initiated and fed by both the Industrial and the French Revolutions. Writing, naturally, inscribed and internalized all the issues dredged up by this new order, both in generic terms and through the changing roles of authority, a process that directly translated into new sets of choices, constraints and possibilities for Levantine writers themselves. Older established printing centers like those of Livorno and Amsterdam, set up primarily to reprint classic texts, rabbinic works and belles lettres, found themselves overwhelmed by the new publishing enterprises that began operating in the 1850's and were geared toward a much wider audience. The emergence of a popular press throughout the Levant, in Hebrew, Arabic, Judeo-Spanish and French, was a great catalyst both in shifting the pace at which news traveled as well as the type of information exchanged. As the governing powers of religious authorities began to erode, the learned class (or those aspiring to it), branched out into a whole new assortment of endeavors. Although certain genres persisted and even flourished (thousands of original plays were written and

performed in Judeo-Spanish before and between the two World Wars, for example),'' those whose primary avenue of expression would have been in the "modern" Hebrew poetic or rabbinic mode could now pursue distinctly other kinds of writing. Some of the most important genres developed through this exchange were journalism, historical and scholarly writing, the novel, drama and poetry in the modern languages. Yaqob Sanua, for instance, the Jewish Egyptian nationalist who had coined the phrase "Egypt for the Egyptians," opened a theater in Cairo in 1870 where his own enormously popular Arabic plays and satires were staged. By the First World War, with the popular press already in operation for over 50 years, this generic and linguistic exchange had become prevalent. In the 1920's and 30's, Jewish writers in Iraq experimented with the new Arabic forms that had emerged from the free verse movement. In Tunisia and Algeria, alongside the traditional modes, a literature in French developed. The same holds true for Cairo where, one should not forget, Edmond Jabès published his first book in 1930. At that point he was only one of many Levantine writers, in Italy, Southern France, North Africa, Greece, Turkey, the Balkans and the Fertile Crescent, struggling to forge new and different forms of expression out of the older cultures and traditions indelibly marked by the radical reordering of their world. For Jews, participation in the creation of this new literature also marks a watershed point in the increasingly less subtle shift in the very terms constituting

Jewish identity; that process, set in motion during the Inquisition, saw the legal, covenantal and communal basis of Jewish existence give way to the racial, the ethnic and the national, something that the new forms of written authority - often unintentionally - lent credence to.

II.

Mordekhai HaKohen, the Libyan encountered earlier through his Book of Mordekhai (that curious blend of rabbinic erudition and enlightenment/positivist scholarship), spent quite a bit of time assisting the well-known European scholar and traveler Nahum Slouschz who had come to the Levant in 1906 to search "for traces of the biblical past and evidence of groups boasting an autonomous Jewish existence." This "national romanticism" was accompanied by another trait in Slouschz's own work and later accounts of that journey: "a unilineal, evolutionary view of cultural development" that led to a "penchant for building grand historical theories that overshadow the data on which they are based." HaKohen, on the other hand, combined the practical experience of a jurist with the firm knowledge of a scientist to reach a point where "no aspect of life was foreign" to him; by using "a wide range of tools," HaKohen's text exhibits a precision and logic that often collapses in Slouschz's 'grand designs.'"⁴

Eager to continue collegial relations after their work together, HaKohen corresponded with Slouschz for several years, from 1906 to 1910. Interestingly, many of the requests HaKohen made to Slouschz were of a "highly specific and technical nature. In one letter, for example, he asks Slouschz if there is some

demographic law whereby a population equalizes its sex ratio if many men are killed in a war. In another letter, he discusses color terminology in Hebrew and Arabic and asks for reactions to his interpretation from Slouschz or his colleagues. He asks Slouschz to send him detailed maps of Libya. He seems to have received no replies to these various requests."¹⁵ Later, there was talk of a French version of The Book of Mordekhai, yet in the ensuing letters the matter is dropped entirely. The relationship remained completely lopsided, with HaKohen's invaluable assistance barely noted in Slouschz's work: "The overall impression is that of a nineteenth-century explorer condescendingly appreciating his 'native guide.'"¹⁶ Slouschz's work, at least that part dealing with the Jewish presence in Libya and amongst the Berbers, because of its conceptual myopia and condescending approach, ultimately remains a historical curiosity, more valuable for garnering information on European attitudes to the Orient than for its ethnographic or anthropological data. HaKohen's text, on the other hand, remains an open book, fertile ground ripe for further analysis, planted with the precise and minute details of ways of life forever past. The archaeological material gathered by Slouschz, however, does stand out and it is quite instructive to observe that Slouschz's "national romanticism" led him to the promised land. There, in 1919, he revived the Palestine Exploration Society, a venture responsible for many of the digs establishing the "material

testimony" (to use the parlance of the Blue Guide) that could buttress, through a "militant archaeology," the later "reconstruction of historical geography" that would characterize Jewish settlement in the Holy Land. HaKohen, at least from the evidence extant, does not seem to have been particularly attracted to Zionism even though he did make a trip to Jerusalem's close and familiar terrain to find a spot "in which his mother could eventually be buried."¹⁷ He chose to remain in Tripoli where, "as his daughters said, he became more and more removed from daily affairs, and was primarily concerned with making an important contribution to science. He would sit and work with single-minded concentration, even ignoring the cat if it jumped on his shoulder as he sat at his desk. He had become preoccupied with a classic challenge of the physical world, the invention of a perpetual motion machine. In the midst of his work, on August 22, 1929, he died of a stroke."¹⁸ There is something profoundly ironic in this juxtaposition: Slouschz, the "westerner," chose to dig into the ground for long lost roots, hoping to rejoin the tribe in an idealized and romantic vision of the collective past; HaKohen, the "easterner," firmly rooted in his own native space, remained where he had always been while aspiring to invent a machine that could defy the laws of both motion and gravity. The very date of HaKohen's death is also significant and marks another dim but precise turning point in the slow, steady revolution of the Levantine prism.

III.

The "disturbances" of 1929, in which 133 Jews were killed and several hundred more wounded in the old Arab Jewish communities of Hebron and Safed, came after eight years of relative tranquillity. The sheer brutality of the events, the fact that the victims were mainly traditional Jews with little or no interest in the machinations of the Zionist enterprise, only masked the underlying political and economic factors leading to the violence even further and clarified, in no uncertain terms, just how convoluted the struggle in Palestine would become, at least on the surface. These urban Jews, again, found themselves caught between dispossessed peasants and an ever widening sphere of power whose constituents included absentee feudal landlords, ideological zealots and crumbling empires, each involved in both cool and desperate ploys to secure their precious respective but often mutual interests.

1929 also saw the publication of two works in Hebrew that have been taken to represent the best of "authentic" Sephardic writing in the pre-state period, composed, as one Israeli critic put it, by "writers charmed to some extent by the exoticism of the Orient and inspired by the figure of the noble Arab horseman

with his cartridge belt riding on his mare, or by that of the fellah whose way of life was similar to that of the Jews of the Biblical period."¹⁴ These writers, however, rather than being seduced by the Orient, just simply happened themselves to be native "orientals." Yehuda Burla, author of In Darkness Striving, was born in the Old City of Jerusalem in 1886, descendant of a family that had settled in Palestine in the 18th century; Itshaq Shami, author of The Vengeance of the Fathers, was born in Hebron in 1888. Shami's mother was from the Kastel family, with its deeply rooted line of descent going back to the four cities of the Holy Land and Jewish settlement in them following the expulsion from Spain; his father, sage Eliyahu, was a small-time merchant from Damascus whose business - precisely like that of the protagonist of Burla's novel - took him from city to city and village to village throughout the terrain of Palestine and Syria. Both Shami and Burla found themselves in that category of writers who remained within their native space but whose work, and its ultimate meaning and reception, was transformed through the altered circumstances brought about by the 'reconstruction of historical geography' within that space.

Shami recieved a traditional religious education before attending a new school, attached to the Talmud Torah of Hebron, dedicated to introducing students to a wider range of Orientalist studies. It was only after this that Shami shed his native garb and donned the clothes of the franni, the European, in order to

go to Jerusalem and continue studying at the Ezra school, an institution paralleling the Alliance. There he began writing and publishing his first stories along with poems and descriptions of the workshops of the potters, glassblowers and other craftsmen of Hebron. But before completing his studies, Shami left Jerusalem to teach Arabic in some of the new settlements of Judea. From there, retracing his father's steps, he went to Damascus. Between the two world wars he taught in Sofia before returning to Palestine and settling in Haifa. His collected works, as opposed to Burla's prolific output, can be found in one slim volume comprised of six short stories and the novella he is most known for, The Vengeance of the Fathers.

On the surface, this text tells a tale in the classical sense, one ostensibly contained by the events it depicts. The story begins in the spring, describing the elaborate preparations made for the festival of pilgrimage to the tomb of Nebi Moussa, the Prophet Moses. The protagonist, Nimmer Abu Il-Shawarab, leader of the pilgrims from Nablus, "was the only man who scrupulously observed the customs of the fathers,"⁴⁰ but his pride drags him into battle with the leader of the pilgrims from Hebron; the death of Abu Faris at the hand of Abu Il-Shawarab leads to an irreconcilable blood feud with the Hebronites and Abu Il-Shawarab is forced to go into hiding. The fall of Abu Il-Shawarab is slow but steady: his decision to flee was not taken lightly and soon the once upright and robust figure begins to

merge into darkness, "sorrowing and bent under the desperate suffering and agony of men exiled from the land of their birth..." After a trying journey through the desert, he arrives in Cairo and rents a "room in a large khan consisting of a vast number of cubicles and crannies, like an anthill, in one of the poorer sections of the city. Here - in the whirlpool of the city, in the incessant noise of masses of refugees and exiles from different lands and of different races, among sad displaced peasants in broad blue gowns who had left a homeland not their own to oppressors and bloodsucking landlords to escape emptyhanded to the distant and enchanting city of promise and to try their fortune there as porters and street-cleaners, doormen or pickpockets - here his presence aroused no wonder or astonishment." This is precisely that part of Cairo that can be extrapolated from Umm Kulthum's memoirs and it is here, also, that Abu Il-Shawarab is drawn to the taverns and coffeehouses, the sweet voices of the famous songstresses and the soothing intoxication of the narghile spiked with hashish. A period of progressive dissolution follows: Shami's use of time, so leisurely embroidered in the earlier part of the book by the details of nature and custom, is masterful. After a night of terrifying hallucinations and physical exhaustion ending in "white visions that cannot be expressed," in which "he rocked like a child relieved of its suffering, who falls asleep, calmly and quietly, in his mother's lap," two years are consumed in a single

sequence: "Autumn and winter passed, and the summer and autumn after these, and nothing happened to give Nimmer even a gleam of hope."¹³ After a mortifying vision of the Fathers (the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob), Abu Il-Shawarab finds himself driven across the entire length of Cairo, down to the Old City, on the other side of the Nile. There he goes through the large iron gates of al-Azhar, the ancient complex housing the mosque and university, the seat of Islamic thought and practice. A dervish immediately recognizes both the pain and urgency betrayed by Abu Il-Shawarab's expression and leads him directly to Sheikh Al-Azhar, the reigning authority. After a full confession, reminiscent of both the healing sequence in Burla's novel and the methods of psychoanalysis (a practice Shami was most certainly aware of, given his knowledge of German and his connections to A.S. Yahuda, the semitic scholar from Jerusalem who had befriended Freud in Vienna),¹⁴ the saintly sheikh proposes a repentance ritual. Fulfilling this means going back to Hebron and it is there ("A winter Friday in Hebron. A day of cold and drizzle. Low leaden skies, mud, slush."¹⁵), in an atmosphere contrary in every way to the story's spring beginning, that the tale ends: the bitter, vindictive Hebronites lie in wait at the Cave of Machpelah, the Tomb of the Patriarchs, only to themselves turn away in terror as they witness Nimmer Abu Il-Shawarab collapse and sink into the ground, joining it forever, laid waste by "the vengeance of the Fathers."

As in most of Shami's work, Jews are barely mentioned or just noticed in passing; here, it is instructive to note that they appear at the very beginning of the story, as the new hawadias, the masters and landowners who offer high wages for a day's work in their fields. The workers lured by these wages are described as "the frivolous - the curse of Allah upon them! - the young renegades who live in the Sahal [the coastal plain], near the Jewish settlements, where they work as hired hands - only they have begun to reject the old tradition and to scoff at the sanctity of this pilgrimage." * Shami's linking of the landowners to the changing mores of the young workers as a frame around Abu Il-Shawarab's desperate attempt to guard the honor of the old ways, along with the inevitable fall that lands him in the slums of Cairo where his fate is suddenly joined to that of all the other dispossessed peasants and exiles, provides more particular knowledge about one of the pivotal dynamics of the conflict in Palestine than dozens of scholarly tomes. Yet, contemporary critics - or at least the few who have dealt with Shami's work - often go to great lengths to present a "true naive," locked into a "traditional" world, aloof in face of the great changes taking place at the time. But Shami's text, like the "native" discourse of Albert Antebbi's brief letter examined earlier, deals in irreducible specifics: the "Jews" are never such in any collective sense. Nor are the "Arabs" just quaint mirror images of an idealized "Biblical" way of life: they remain,

rather, both the guardians and conscience of the history inscribed in and enacted upon the land, live conduits through whom the sources of events elevated to site and ritual still flow.

Besides yielding this kind of detail, Shami's work can sustain many other readings: his few remaining letters reveal a tormented figure struggling for material sustenance, desperately coaxing the sparks needed to ignite and create the space for creativity. This struggle was enacted on three fronts: the road away from home ("How on earth could a youngster from Hebron, whose very surroundings were so utterly permeated by awe of the Iqrah, even think of secular studies," / as Shami's close friend David Avissar recalled); the difficulty of being recognized and finding his place as a writer and, finally, his own temperament, that of an impulsive perfectionist. These contradictory qualities are reflected in the very prose of the short note he left in his will regarding the seven works he felt might be worthy of further life:

My literary remains are meagre and sullen. The fountain of my creativity, following all the disturbances and internments, was not a blessed spring, abundant and refreshing to the soul, but a harsh stony spring out of which no path could be paved. Enraged at its obligation, it dripped in spurts here and there, dampening the smooth wall before again consuming itself.
Must everyone with creative powers bear a heavy burden of parchment upon their very backs on the long path to

the everlasting? My load is light and I surely shall not bow down under it every step I take....

The steps away from home, the roaming, include home itself and, without engaging in overly simplistic psychology, the depth and the structure of the written conflict, the fathers and the mothers of the text, do recall accounts of the clashing and irreconcilable spheres of Shami's parents. In a footnote to The Vengeance of the Fathers, Shami points out that a battle such as the one he has just depicted actually took place twenty five years prior. He would have been fifteen at the time and surely such an occurrence, not to mention the pageantry and spectacle of the pilgrimage itself, must have made a deep impression. All of these elements combined, then, can also lead to a reading of the work as a precise and consummate transformation of highly charged and very personal material. But then again, the native is only allowed to sketch - with greater or lesser skill - the trappings of an exotic ambience, not intentionally transform experience into finely wrought and highly self-conscious art.

Yehuda Burla's short novel, In Darkness Striving, is somewhat more transparent than Shami's work. Yet, its narrative structure betrays the sometimes simplistic ideological thrust and tone of

the book. Like the medieval maqama genre, this too is a frame story; the complexities here, however, do not pertain to the identity of the narrator but the identity of the narration. The narrator of the frame is a Zionist from Palestine working as a Hebrew teacher in the Jewish community of Damascus. He finds himself drawn to Rahamo Hibb, a blind Jewish merchant described by some as "a shiftless loafer, a woman-chaser, a desecrator of the Sabbath, an eater of forbidden food;" others, however, "defended his odd behaviour and praised his virtues," saying that "the fellow isn't what he seems to be... there are moments when he can be a truly fine man... when he's in the mood, you may hear him speak words of wisdom."¹ The Hebrew teacher sees Rahamo in one of those moments, during a ritual vigil at the home of a woman who had just given birth to a son. Here the blind man takes on the role of the rawi, the traditional Arabic storyteller:

The rhymed couplets were reminiscent of those of the classical Arab poets, charged with wisdom and linguistic brilliance, and he recited them with astonishing ease and eloquence, and with a calm, pleasing intonation. He sang the melodic parts of the narrative tunefully despite his hoarse voice."²

The two befriend each other and, after much pleading, the Hebrew teacher, along with the headmaster of the school, finally convince Rahamo to tell his life story. Rahamo humbly submits because: "I have come to feel great affection and esteem for you: I see that you are Zionists, and your thoughts are pure, and your way of thinking is unlike that either of the Jews or non-Jews. I found you 'human', clear-sighted. I once knew a man like that, an honored sheikh who could stare straight and deeply into a man's heart and into his inner life." "

The rest of the book, after this very brief introductory frame, consists of Rahamo telling the tale of his life, in "Arabic." The main thread of the story involves a kind of process of elimination of possible remedies for the impossible and ultimately tragic love affair between Rahamo the Jew and Shafikah the Muslim. Although Rahamo is already married, Shafikah counters his reservations with a proverb: "Let the stream water our land, and also all the other lands in the village. Would that make ours any the less fruitful?" All avenues are considered, including conversion by either one to the other's faith. Deliberations in her family over this are suddenly interrupted by an attack on Rahamo in which he is blinded, carried out by members of a clan who had once bought Shafikah as a wife for one of its members; she, however, detesting this husband, had escaped back to her own family, eventually managing to obtain a divorce. After the blinding, both Shafikah and Rahamo succumb to

different forms of madness and desperation. Rahamo tries everything, even attempting to confess all to the rabbi, the Sage Zadok Abulafia. Failing this, he decides on suicide but, significantly, realizes that he can no longer find the door of his own room. Finally, the services of a certain "wise sheikh, called Abdul Karim a-Tunisi, who treated all kinds of mental diseases, disorders, melancholy and the like,"¹² are procured. His large house in a residential area of Damascus serves as a clinic, with separate facilities for men and women; here Rahamo, and later Shafikah, begin treatment. Besides their regular sessions, the sheikh finds poetry a particularly effective cure for Rahamo's malaise, particularly the verses of the great blind poet Abu Ala al-Ma'ari. The choice of al-Ma'ari, often accused of heresy, along with the sheikh's discourses on Rahamo's need to leave off beseeching the favor of the 'petty God of men' ("You knock in vain. There is no one here. The owner of the castle does not live here and there is no one to hear you. The house is empty!"),¹³ and begin meditating on "the Eternal God," fully reveal the book's not so hidden agenda. This agenda, the stormy journey on the path away from the dictates of the tribe and onto the road of secular reason, is summed up - after Shafikah's suicide - by Rahamo's laconic conclusion: to make something of this life, one must be "the author, not of words, but of deeds."¹⁴

As a "native," however, Burla does not pronounce the new credo at the expense of denouncing the trappings of the old, the

fetters of the tribe: even as they fulfill their expected roles, the families of both characters are not unsympathetic to the plight of their wayward offspring. Even as the story lags here and there, two things beyond the more obvious theme of the love affair between a Jew and a Muslim remain significant. First, the role of the sheikh: an idealized figure, he embodies all the qualities implicit in a nostalgic vision of the height of classical Arabic culture and it is he, ultimately, who saves Rahamo from hopelessness and despair. In addition, at a number of points in the story, great emphasis is placed on Rahamo's superb and expressive spoken Arabic, something readers of this Hebrew text can only imagine or take at the author's word. This, particularly in a writer like Burla where the ideological bias is so open, subtly internalizes and emphasizes the extent to which appreciation of and allegiance to Arabic culture had become a conflict in figures of his standing.

The more deeply embedded and firmly bound ties to music ("wounded kinship's last resort") witnessed in the unbroken tradition of liturgical poetry, begin to unravel and scatter in this "high-culture" text. The "Jewish" world depicted becomes just that: subject matter, and not the very material of a way of life that is simply practiced from within. From this point on, the gap steadily widens between a more popular, generally working-class Arab Jewish or Judeo-Spanish culture, and the secular Hebrew culture of Zionism or one of the many versions of culture

inherited by European colonialism. As the working-class Jews of the Levant found themselves more and more marginalized within this framework, with fewer and fewer avenues of expression open to them due to the undermining of rabbinic authority and popular culture, "authentic orientals" - in a kind of Orientalism in reverse celebrating the "exotic" - began to depict worlds they had long left behind. At the same time, the very real political conflict between Arabs and Jews, with its tremendous cost in human suffering, increasingly began to effect precisely those Jews most firmly rooted in Arabic culture, something that would ultimately result in the cultural schizophrenia of Levantine Jews in Israel. For a writer like Burla, with unequivocal ideological ties, the discord is internalized, woven into the tale. For those whose gaze had been directed beyond the minarets of home to the capitals of Europe, the ambivalence of their position often led to a bewilderment that resulted in a kind of existential short-circuit, as this passage by the Tunisian born novelist Andre Nahum so poignantly shows: "I turn and perceive, far back in the past, a young boy, partly Arab French and partly (more) Jew, a character who has no real place anywhere, colonized by others who are colonized themselves, awkwardly sitting on three chairs in a precarious equilibrium.""

In 1930, just one year after the publication of these two works by Shami and Burla, Albert Cohen, a native of Corfu whose family

emigrated to Marseille, published his classic novel Solal. 1930, as mentioned earlier, was also the year the first book of Jabès appeared and links between the two writers, in the wider scheme of the new forms of Levantine writing then emerging, are not at all spurious. By his own admission, Jabès was then writing a kind of ethereal symbolist poetry aspiring, from the remove of Cairo, to enter the pantheon of an idealized world of French letters, with neither overt nor covert reference to anything that could even vaguely be described as a "Jewish" thematic. But by 1921, Albert Cohen had already published his Paroles juives, a book of poems that, indeed, must have seemed quite odd on the French scene of that time. Cohen's advance party, made up of the Jew as writer and prophet within the terms of a newly interpreted law no longer bound to a concrete community, spied out and surveyed the terrain that would turn into that drifting abode, the homeland of the book, with its cult of absence. For Cohen, the tranquil space of a garden enclosed - so perfectly embodied by the very real Greek island he was born on and accentuated even further by the very particular language he was born into, the Venetian dialect of the Jews of Corfu - ruptured early on. His family moved to Marseille when he was five and his first trip back to the island only came at the age of thirteen: the impressions of this magical world, with its picaresque cast of characters who would come to people Cohen's books, provided the fuel for a flight into memory indebted to and often worthy

of Proust. But while the known itinerary from flight to absence, the pre-history of the Jew=Writing=Book equation, generally leads from Proust to Kafka, this flight (and the absences nurtured by it), maintain the distinct qualities of very different circumstances.

Each of the writers discussed here grapple, in their own way, with the angel who can no longer deliver; with seeing, as Walter Benjamin wrote, that "The gate to justice is learning," and knowing (like Kafka) that one "dare not attach to this learning the promises which tradition has attached to the study of the Torah." Here, the "assistants are sextons who have lost their house of prayer, the students are pupils who have lost the Holy Writ." In Shami, the earthly codes of honor and vengeance are ironically usurped by the Patriarchs themselves; in Burla, the problematic of absence is articulated through Rahamo Hibb's inability to find the door to his own room and by the empty, unowned castle spoken of by Abdul Karim a-Tunisi, the worldly philosopher/sheikh turned psychoanalyst. Cohen's castle, in Solal, is of an entirely different nature, not empty but full: yet, in the final analysis, this fullness might just amount to the same thing. Solal (heir to the tribe of the Solals of Cephalonia, in the direct line of the priestly class leading back to Aaron, the brother of Moses), after having completely rejected his family and become a high official in the French government, decides to buy a castle with huge underground halls, vaults and

chambers, and move in his entire native city. When his wife, not of the chosen tribe, catches sight of this astonishing scene, Solal confesses:

I went and threw myself before the lord my father and the man of mercy pardoned me. He commanded me to build a secret dwelling within my European dwelling. I obeyed. - He is wise and understands I have my western life to live. - I brought the Solals together, those of Cephalonia and others. A Biblical city swarms under His Excellency's House. In the daytime, the Ministry, the Chamber, the party meetings. In the night, I return to my country. And day and night, I am sad, so sad."

What ultimately differentiates these Levantine writers from the interiority informed by Kafka's rupture with the Law, and the tradition emerging from that break, is their concrete and sensual attachment to the fact and memory of a native space. But even the terms in Cohen (the European dwelling, the western life, the Biblical city), come at a point when the autonomy of the Levant, the autonomous history of the Jews of the Levant, has already been overwhelmed by the "great Western Transmutation." What does come through in these earlier writers, however, and later on in Jabès (despite his further burrowing into the interior book), are the vestiges of worlds forever gone, inscribed as cautious testimony to an enduring rift that ends in a cleavage, 'where a cut separates different types of happening.' These missing pages

of time and place have since largely been filled by partisan histories of convenience that studiously reject, as Walter Benjamin put it, that "gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past" which exerts a "retroactive force that will constantly call in question every victory, past and present, of the rulers." What remains at stake, then, is the ability to "seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger; to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it."¹²

At the end of Solal, in a most remarkable re-telling of the stories of both Abraham and Isaac and Adam and Eve, Solal takes his sleeping child away from the house of his estranged wife and:

Pulling on the wide black velvet trousers, the soft boots, the linen shirt girdled with golden braid, he thought of the horrible dead before him. The moon, mingled with the earliest dawn, was pouring out its bluish milk. He saw the Hebrew praying shawl, unfolded it, and put it over his shoulders. Now, he was a mad prince, covered in silk and fringes... The pearls in one hand, the shining dagger in the other, he went down the stairs. He was Solal. At this hour who could stop him from being Solal?¹³

Although he takes his son with him, Solal's only intention is to kill himself. He enters a beautiful garden where he plays with

his boy before eating a flower and a fruit and wounding himself. His wife wakes up and, realizing her son is missing, runs to the garden where he sees her child playing with his dying father's curly hair. "Then five old men, three brothers, other old men, beggars, visionaries and women emerge from the Commandery," the name of Solal's underground Biblical city, his eastern dwelling. At this:

Solal placed his hand on his wound, raised to his lips fingers dipped in the wine of the flesh, and blessed life. He no longer knew why he had sought death. His heart was beating... They had thought him dead; he was not dead. Behold, from his bare chest gilded by the sun, the blood had ceased to flow! O race of the living!⁴¹

For Solal, resurrection is nothing out of the ordinary. He sought oblivion, attempting to annihilate the past. Failing this, he tried leading a double life whose only compensation was sadness. When the Biblical city emerges, when the family comes out of its eastern dwelling in the full light of day, Solal is ready to look the sun in the face: his suicide had only been figurative, a desire to destroy part of himself. An infinite amount of such regenerative hope, to again paraphrase Benjamin on Kafka, may exist, "but not for us."⁴²

IV.

A death warrant on the world of Cephalonia (no matter how well concealed beneath or within the "European dwelling"), signed by indifference and sealed by power, was delivered through the auspices of efficiency and pragmatism. In another exile, in a language almost lost, Rachel Castelete, daughter of the wandering minstrel Yakov Yona of Salonika, inscribed a gentle, bittersweet epithet:

When I Came to London

When I came to London
I was a girl on vacation.
I met this young man
And married him.

I had bad luck:
He left me in my old age.
And I, a fool,
Had never relished my youth.
I had brought him a good dowry,
Along with lots of Turkish liras.
I changed them into English money
And got nothing of it.

I came to this city
And have had to wage my own wars.
I thank my God
My children are all right.

If I had stayed in Salanik,
 Hitler would have killed me
 Just as he killed
 All of my people.
 Still, today in this city
 I find myself
 Miserable;
 Today I find myself here,
 And I cannot even buy a little bottle
 of wine or raki.⁴

Unlike the Arabic side, slowly waning but still scattering light throughout the spectrum, the Spanish facet of the Levantine prism shattered suddenly, with just a few isolated afterglows surviving the shock. Only the barest skeleton of romance, the dashing figures of the Castilian epics, Urraca and the Cid, Roncevaux and Charlemagne, once scrupulously gathered, edited and recast by Yakob Yona, remain in his daughter's verse. Born in Monastir in 1847, Yona already sensed the transient nature of his time, the precarious state of the 500 year old songs and legends still binding the community together, and he spent the better part of his life trying to preserve that tradition. His daughter, though, was left to her own devices and the mechanics of her poem are self-generated, without either the trappings or the codes of chivalry so perfectly preserved in the Judeo-Spanish lyric and ballad. In this poem, it is she and not a maiden handed down through the years who comes to London, meets and marries a young

man, brings a dowry, and changes liras into pounds. It is she, too, who finds herself miserable, plagued by both the guilt of survival and the ache of the unfamiliar. The loneliness of the poet in these lines; the singed photograph - partially burned during the bombing of London - of her father's gravestone in a graveyard of Salonika itself destroyed by the Nazi occupation forces; the sadness of Solal, compromised in his European dwelling by the inadmissible and no longer extant Biblical city of his heart and mind, all mark the enormous distances traversed by Levantine Jews since the 'great transmutation.' Yet, the promise and the act of "redemption," in the official forms of ascent to the promised land, often entailed further and more insidious suffering, precisely because it came at the hands of purported "saviours," members of the same tribe.

Footnotes:

1. See Charles Olson on Melville's trip to the Levant in Call Me Ishmael (San Francisco: City Lights, 1971), pp. 89-96.

2. Quoted in Olson, as above, p. 95.

3. Ibid., p. 94.

4. Sadig Jalal al-'Azam, "Orientalism and Orientalism in Reverse," in Forbidden Agendas: Intolerance and Defiance in the Middle East, selected and introduced by Jon Rothschild (London: Al-Saqi, 1984), pp. 349. This article constitutes part of the Arab critique of Edward Said's Orientalism and offers a much more interesting counterpart to Said's scheme of things than the usual, partisan objections one is used to getting in the United States from figures like Bernard Lewis. Unfortunately, there is very little material available on this debate in English; for a good introductory survey, see Emmanuel Sivan's "Edward Said and his Arab Reviewers," in The Jerusalem Quarterly Number 35, Spring 1985, pp. 11-23.

Lewis, for example, in his The Jews of Islam (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), accepts the traditional curve of light to darkness in the history of the Jews of the Levant with only minor revisions; this approach gets more and more uncritical the closer he comes to the modern period. Accounts of the conditions of Jews in Arab countries are given almost exclusively through the writings of foreign visitors and are not related specifically to other local and global developments. Compare, for instance, Lewis's interpretation of the infamous Damascus blood libel of 1840 (pp. 156-58) with Nahum Menahem's in Ethnic Tension and Discrimination in Israel (pp. 243-251 in the Hebrew edition, pp. 212-220 in the French edition). The major differences between these two interpretations stem from Lewis's polemical versus Menahem's non-polemical stance regarding the "intentions" of the "other," specifically here the Arab "other." The deeper implication of this is that Lewis seems to accept the existence of "anti-semitism" as an immutable and eternal phenomenon that only appears at different times in different guises; these prejudices are more clearly delineated in his very uncritical reading of Arab "anti-semitism." One could just as easily, as Nissim Rejwan has done on different occasions, compile a record of official "philosemitic" statements issued by various Arab leaders and bodies. Even more importantly, however, is the lack of attention Lewis pays to autonomous and native Jewish culture in the Levant; that is, if life was as grim as the accounts of Westerners would have us believe, how was it possible for thousands of books to be written, for artisans to continue producing a wide variety of beautiful objects, or for Jews to attain positions of wealth and power in every Arab

country they lived in right up until the dissolution of those communities in the 1940's and 50's?

5. Marshall G. S. Hodgson, The Venture of Islam / Conscience and History in a World Civilization: Volume Three, The Gunpowder Empires and Modern Times (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), p. 177. Chapters I and II of Book 6 ("The Impact of the Great Western Transmutation: The Generation of 1789" and "European World Hegemony," pp.176-248), are models of informed and 'sympathetic' scholarship that never cross the border into polemics or partisan reporting. For the basic source on the economic history of the period in the Levant, see Charles Issawi, ed. The Economic History of the Middle East, 1800-1914: A Book of Readings (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

6. Ibid., pp. 179-205 for an extensive discussion and definition of the "technical age," as Hodgson describes it.

7. This can be attested to most recently in the phenomenon of Mediterranean and Arab Jews in Israel adopting the religious customs and rites of the most intolerant and orthodox Eastern European Jews more as a defense mechanism than a genuine spiritual or cultural bent. This process has not yet been adequately documented even though it constitutes one of the most significant processes in the dissolution and marginalization of Judaism as a practical way of life and its transformation into an increasingly self-referential "religion," something that traditional Mediterranean and Arab rabbinic practice has always tried to avoid by a variety of means, particularly through an integrative approach to education. See Jose Faur, "Introducing the Materials of Sephardic Culture to Contemporary Jewish Studies," American Jewish Historical Quarterly 63 (1974).

8. Eric R. Wolf, Europe and the People Without History (Berkeley: University of California, 1982), p. 294.

9. Haim Vidal Septhiba, L'Agonie des Judéo-Espagnols (Paris: Editions Entente, 1979), p. 43.

10. Ilan Halevi, A History of the Jews, p. 201.

11. Very little is available in English on this aspect of Levantine Jewish culture; to get some sense of it, see Sasson Somekh's article "Participation of Egyptian Jews in Modern Arabic Culture, and the Case of Murad Faraj," in The Jews of Egypt: A Mediterranean Society in Modern Times (see chapter 1, note 15), pp. 130-39.

12. See Zvi Zohar's translation and very fine commentary of Rabbi Uziel's decision (see chapter 2, note 16).

As remarkable as his career was, the biography of Rabbi Haim Nahum Effendi is not that extraordinary amongst the elite of Mediterranean

and Arab Jewry during the period under discussion. Born in 1872 in Magnesia, Turkey, he was sent at the age of 8 to the Yeshiva of Rabbi Abbo in Tiberias where he remained for over five years. From there he went to the College at Smyrna before studying Islamic jurisprudence at the faculty of law in Constantinople. After attaining a degree, he went on to Paris where, in 1879, he graduated from the rabbinical seminary as well as the College de France where he specialized in semitic languages. After directing the rabbinical seminary in Constantinople, the Ottoman government appointed him professor of languages at the Superior Academy of Artillery and Military Engineering. In 1907 he was delegated by the Alliance to take part in a mission to Abyssinia to study the early history, customs and particular needs of the Falashas. This exploratory voyage resulted in a book that shed new light on the Jews of Ethiopia; during the audience granted him by Mendik II in Addis Ababa, he delivered a speech in Amharic. In 1908 he was appointed chief rabbi of the Ottoman Empire, a post he held until 1920. In 1923, he was asked to become the chief rabbi of Cairo and, in 1931, he was appointed to the senate by King Fuad I.

The biographies of other prominent 19th and 20th c. Jews in the Levant reveal similar peregrinations and involvement; interestingly enough, one needs to go to the earlier editions of Jewish encyclopedias to find data on the "minor" figures of the Levant. This, of course, just further confirms the kind of cultural assumptions and redistributions of power discussed throughout this study. A comparative survey of entries between The Encyclopedia Judaica (Jerusalem: Keter, 1971) and either The Jewish Encyclopedia (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1903-1916) or The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia (New York, 1942), yields very interesting differences.

13. See Elena Romero's meticulously documented and extremely important work in 3 volumes: El teatro de los sefardies orientales (Madrid: Instituto "Arias Montano," 1979). A good overview of the French and Judeo-Spanish press can be found in chapter 9 (pp. 97-106) of Sephiha (see above, note 9). For the Egyptian climate, see Irene L. Gendzier, The Practical Visions of Yaqub Sanu (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966). For general bibliographic information, see: Shmuel Moreh, Arabic Works by Jewish Writers: 1863-1973 (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute for Research on Jewish Communities in the Middle East, 1973) [Arabic]; The Writings of Sephardi and Oriental Jewish Authors in Languages Other than Hebrew: A Bibliographical Survey of Belles Lettres in the Twentieth Century, Volume I, compiled and edited with an introduction by Itzhak Betsalel (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University and the Center for the Integration of the Oriental Jewish Heritage, 1982); Asian and African Jews in the Middle East: 1860-1971 / Annotated Bibliography, edited by Hayyim J. Cohen and Zvi Yehuda (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1976) [Hebrew and English].

14. From Harvey Goldberg's introduction to The Book of Mordekhai (see chapter 2, note 13); p. 25. The whole introduction is well worth

referring to as an example of a highly sensitive reading of completely forgotten material. For Slouschz, see his My Travels in Libya 2 vols. (Tel Aviv: Va'ad HaYovel, 1938-1943)[Hebrew], along with Travels in North Africa (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1927).

15. Ibid., p. 24.

16. Ibid., p. 23; Here, Golberg mentions another relationship between guide and native: "In a similar fashion, Slouschz' teacher at the Sorbonne, Joseph Halevi, did not even mention his guide, Habshush, in his reports on his travels in Yemen." Even more interesting is the fact that it was Goitein, in a similarly sensitive act of recuperation, who edited the extremely valuable Arabic texts of this very guide, Habshush. See his introduction to Travels in Yemen as Related by Hayyim Habshush (Jerusalem: The Ben Zvi Institute, 1983)[Hebrew and Arabic].

17. Ibid., p. 24.

18. Ibid., pp. 13-14.

19. See chapter 1, note 25; p. 22.

20. Yitzhak Shami, The Vengeance of the Fathers, trans. Richard Flantz, in 8 Great Hebrew Short Novels, edited by Alan Leichuk and Gershon Shaked (New York: New American Library, 1983), p. 65.

21. Ibid., p. 123.

22. Ibid., p. 126.

23. Ibid., p. 136.

24. For the relationship between Freud and Yahuda, see Ernest Jones, The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud 3 vols. (New York: Basic Books, 1953), pp. 234, 370 and 373. In the abridged version, Yahuda is reduced to a footnote. His idiosyncratic critique of Moses and Monotheism, written from the point of view of both a traditional Levantine Jew and a pioneering scholar of the Egyptian language, appears as "Sigmund Freud On Moses and His Torah," in 'Eber ve 'Arab (New York: Hebrew Union of America, 1946)[Hebrew], pp. 37-73.

25. See note 20; p. 157.

26. Ibid., pp. 61-2. For, however, one of the finer "scholarly tomes" on the complex process of land dispossession in Palestine and the subsequent class transformation of peasants into workers referred to in the text below, see Ylana M. Miller, Government and Society in Rural Palestine 1920-1948 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985).

27. Avraham Haim Elhanani, Literary Conversations (Jerusalem: Reuben Mass, 1960) [Hebrew], p. 198.
28. Ibid., p. 196; also appears in Asher Barash's preface to Shami's collected stories, The Stories of Itzhak Shami (Tel Aviv: M. Neuman, 1971) [as above, my translation].
29. Yehuda Burla, In Darkness Striving, trans. Joseph Schachter (Jerusalem: Institute for the Translation of Hebrew Literature and Israel Universities Press, 1968), p. 11.
30. Ibid., p. 12.
31. Ibid., p. 17.
32. Ibid., p. 33.
33. Ibid., p. 95.
34. Ibid., p. 107.
35. Ibid., p. 135.
36. Andre Nahum, Partir en Kappara (Paris: Piranhas Editions, 1977), p. 15.
37. Walter Benjamin, Illuminations, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 139.
38. Albert Cohen, Solal, trans. Wilfrid Benson (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1933), p. 242.
39. See note 36; p. 255.
40. See note 37; p. 316-17.
41. Ibid., p. 321.
42. See note 36; p. 144.
43. Translation by Stephen Levy in Voices Within the Ark, edited by Howard Schwartz and Anthony Rudolf (New York: Avon, 1980), p. 1046. The original text appeared in Esta Ginko es el Tesoro de Rachael Casteleta Ija de Jacob Yona, published in London in 1959. For information on Yakob Yona, see Samuel G. Armistead and Joseph H. Silverman's extensively documented The Judeo-Spanish Ballad Chapbooks of Jacob Abraham Yona (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).

4.

Postscript: "To end, to begin again"

What utter folly to wish to name the promised land

- Mony de Bouilly

Oh, what did you do, Ben Gurion?
You smuggled us all in:

Because of the past we gave it all
up and came to Israel!

Oh, if only we'd ridden in on donkeys
and hadn't yet gotten here!

Alas, what a black hour it was -
To hell with the plane that brought us here!

- popular Iraqi immigrant song
in Israel in the 1950's

And I also intend to speak of the Hamdi-Ali family.
What is it, in essence? Look, the Hamdi-Ali family
is the joy of life, the unvanquishable Mediterranean edge.
Yes, Mediterranean. Really. Maybe it's by right of that
same Mediterranean that I sit here unravelling this tale.
Here, in the Land of Israel, bordering the shores of the
Baltic Sea. Sometimes you find yourself utterly perplexed -
is Vilna the Jerusalem of Lithuania or is Jerusalem actually
the Vilna of Eretz Israel? It's because of this I wanted
so much to tell the story of the Hamdi-Ali family,
and the story of the city of Alexandria.

- Itshaq Gormezano Goren

1.

The 'miraculous cleansing of the land,' in the form of the forced expulsion and flight of the Palestinian Arabs in 1948, left empty houses, deserted shops, abandoned villages and untended orchards that, lest the refugees attempt to return, all needed "Jewish" bodies to fill them.' From 1949 to 1951, during the period when immigration was at its height, about 600,000 people, one way or another, came to the new state of Israel. Some were survivors of the death camps in Europe; others, drawn step by step into a tangled net of circumstances they could no longer find a way out of, were expelled - more or less brutally - from countries they had lived in for thousands of years. Most of the ancient Mediterranean and Arab communities were completely uprooted: the rich and the poor, professionals, rabbis, artisans and merchants, all part of very particular societies still connected to the old network of the geniza world one day, found themselves confused refugees the next, completely cut off from the textures and rhythm of a deeply ingrained and familiar way of life, not to mention their own houses, businesses, books, manuscripts, artworks, religious artefacts and personal mementos left behind. The gradual exchange of the legal, communal and cultural basis of Jewish existence for the racial, the ethnic and the national (a

process with a longer history and more dire consequences in Europe) assumed a final, physical form in the Levant. Official discourse spoke matter-of-factly of the "elimination of the Diaspora," a slogan that even slipped into the "elimination of the Jews."¹ The new immigrants were spoken of, and dealt with, in the most dehumanizing terms: all were considered "human material," some "anti-social" and some "easily transportable." A Zionist emissary sent to Libya, for example, spoke of the "material" there in the following terms: "They are handsome as far as their physique and outward appearance are concerned, but I found it very difficult to tell them apart from the good quality Arab type."² An irony entirely lost within the context of this kind of cynical and pragmatic kinship can be found in Mordekhai HaKohen's account of the Italian occupation of Libya just a few decades earlier, where Muslims pretended to be Jews in order to slip through the clutches of the foreign invaders.³

The discourse of "deliverance" did not just operate on the bureaucratic level: it permeated all facets of public and private life. Side by side with the more openly slanderous and racist homiletics of politicians and journalists, academics constructed elaborate theories to justify "re-education" schemes that could break the "primitive" mentality of these not so noble savages and introduce them to the glories of "civilization." In effect, such efforts only served to further justify the blatant economic exploitation of the new immigrants and fully smother any

alternative social organization or cultural expression." Hundreds of thousands of people were herded into camps, families deliberately broken up, children "lost," factories opened and people assigned to a routine of toil, with life measured out by the time-clock and space calculated by the square meter, for maximum efficiency. The camps became tent cities, the tent cities huts, and the huts "development" towns or slums fixing thousands of years of fluid Levantine urban culture fast within the very cement of their rectangular structures.

There is, though, at least some poetic justice in having the Yemenite Jews ("those most Jewish and most Arab of all Jews," as Goitein put it), deliver the eulogy on the "modern" period of Jewish culture in the Levant. The Yemenite Laments, written by Rabbi Yehuda Ariele Durani and his son Avraham after the traumatic events in the transit camps, sadly seal off life in the old world and drive an unbreachable wedge between them and any other subsequent "traditional" Hebrew poetry that does not take those events into account. In these poems all the standard "old metaphors" used to mourn the burdens of exile and the destruction of the Temple are stood on their head to confront a stunning new reality. In the following poem, for example, the very use of the word "Yemen" - in a thousand-year-old poetic mode where places other than Jerusalem are rarely mentioned - emphasizes the shift into a "naturalism" that grapples with lived and not inherited experience:

How come justice, meted out with power
and wisdom, was a way of life in Yemen

while now, here in our Holy Land - far, so far -
the cry of the humble receives no just rejoinder

nor, in times of need, is the widow
answered: and still, there is no Savior.

How come in Yemen the sages and the teachers
were held in high esteem, the patrons

and the leaders all revered, while here,
in our Holy Land, grief's their only lot:

the word of the wise is worthless, and no one
grants these wretched souls the least respite.

How come in Yemen we were as one, bound
selflessly to the single God, while here,

in our Holy Land, we're spread and
shattered, our wall of faith is fallen -

O who shall tend our wounds

and who,

relieve the pain?

Were my head water

and my eyes

a spring

of tears

I'd weep both night and day / to lament my loss of glory.'

II.

Unlike the revival of contemporary Arabic literature in which writers often found themselves in opposition, going against the grain of reigning structures and accepted ideas, with a few notable exceptions Hebrew writers - at least on the European side - identified with one or another of the representative political streams of national revival. This identification, of course, was in itself a rebellion against either Yiddish, rabbinic or the European culture of assimilation. Yet, involvement and participation in at least some form of the ideological and political project of Zionism imbued much of the writing that emerged from this period, "the neo-modern," with a very particular tone that might best be compared to the kind of effects that result from adherence to doctrines like socialist realism or agitprop, with all its attendant advantages and drawbacks. On one hand, this writing played an instrumental role in creating a new "imagined community"² then in the process of formation; on the other hand, the radical historical revisionism inherent in this very process of "recreating" the nation ultimately led to what Ilan Halevi has called "the mass-production of false consciousness."³

For the first time, "neo-modern" writers worked from a self-perceived position of dominance, something that the almost total lack of a deeper critical or reflexive impulse in much of the writing only pronounces. In prose, this manifests itself most blatantly and obviously in the presentation of "others," characters outside the dominant type, namely Arabs and non-European Jews, as already illustrated in the work of Yosef Haim Brenner. But beyond that, although this would be very difficult to "prove," the space left free for the reader confronted by "old metaphors" is often choked off by a more openly referential and functional approach to the things of the world: the open and autonomous nature of the text, such a seminal idea in the writing and reading of the Biblical, rabbinic and kabbalistic worlds - the "pre-modern" and "modern" periods - is reduced to a subservient role, the means to an end. Some linguistic evidence for this can be found more easily in poetry: there, "neo-modern" reading becomes a treasure hunt for references - not as a function of the pleasures of recognition and the desire for the infinite production of new meaning found in the links between "old metaphors" and the prooftext witnessed in the "modern" period, but in order to verify both the writer's knowledge of the Hebrew sources and, more significantly, his or her deep ambivalence about them. It is on this level of recognition, that of a common 'existential' and social bond in relation to the use and interpretation of historical materials for the fulfillment of a specific project - national revival itself -

that reader and writer connect. This double bind - the erasure of and inability to see actual native culture along with the zealous but equivocal search for the traces of "timeless" ancient roots - characterizes the writing of the "neo-modern" period. The consequences of this consensus can still be felt in much contemporary Hebrew literature and its alliance, whether more or less tenuous, to the covenant of consensus represented by 'officialdom's' sanctioned versions of the past.'" Naturally, as in any writing, the human, social and ideological affiliations of the writer, the user of language, can assume crucial priority in placing the work. What remains instructive about the transition from the "neo-modern" to the "post-modern" period in Hebrew writing, given the exacerbated circumstances of its history (through the conception of a new national entity, the physical creation of a new state, the collective adoption of a new tongue and the actual formation of a new culture), is just how naked these affiliations are, just how important it is to know who is using the language and in what context.

Painful and severe as the record of the complete breakdown of Arab and Levantine Jewish culture is, the co-opting of both individuals and whole communities into an alien and alienating system ultimately remains even more inscrutable. Someone like Ya'qob Yehoshua, for example, while inscribing testimony that is both extremely poignant and of indisputable historical value, could at the same time silently fulfill the role of director of the

Muslim division in the Israeli Ministry of Religious Affairs during a period when Islamic institutions, monuments and landmarks were systematically neglected, desecrated or seized."

This co-opting, however, was never total: while the "mass production of false consciousness" continued (particularly in the educational system and all forms of mainstream Israeli culture), prophetic and testimonial voices, albeit in the wilderness, remained. These voices, both hearkening back to another time and pointing ahead to a different order, comprise an entirely marginal but nevertheless formidable alternative tradition. One of the strongest and most persistent of these was that of Eliyahu Eliachar whose two books, Living With Jews and Life Is With The Palestinians, belong to a peculiar genre of Levantine writing, the autobiographical political memoir, with a good dose of conscious historical, sociological and anthropological data added for the record. These books, like so many of the works produced by Mediterranean and Arab Jews in Israel reflect the same kind of genre displacement typical in the Levant since the 1860's, but with a more fiercely recuperative and polemic urgency. Outside the standard modern genres of poetry, the short story, the novel and theater, this alternative canon includes works as varied as collections of liturgical poetry (such as I Shall Arise At Dawn, mentioned earlier, along with scores of others); autobiographical political memoirs (such as Eliachar's books or the Arabic work of the poets Anwar Shaul and Meir Basri); historical and sociological

writing falling well outside the academic mainstream; community histories; childhood memoirs centered on cities or particular neighborhoods, and local, community based newspapers and journals.¹⁴ Almost none of this material is published by commercial presses nor is it generally available except by word of mouth or through direct contact with the authors/publishers themselves. Although, once thoroughly documented, a good case could be made for this alternative line itself constituting the primary culture of a good part of the population, it remains largely ignored and rarely referred to even in purportedly thorough historical accounts or studies of Israeli culture.

The production of false consciousness, as an essential part of the mechanism in any such sweeping historical process, ultimately serves to abrogate responsibility for the human price exacted by ideology and the precise logic of power. But the suppressed ghosts creep back into consciousness one way or another, whether in the form of rebellion, witness, art, or Baudrillard's "circular response of the polled," that phenomenon referred to earlier which, for "the analyzed, the natives, is all the same a challenge and a triumphant revenge." The 1950's and 60's remained a time of shock and deep trauma, not only for the shearith Israel, the "scattered remnant of Israel" reunited in the promised land, but for the native Palestinians who remained within the new order.¹⁵ This

order, besides hermetically sealing the country off from the Arabic culture of the surrounding environment, also meant scrupulous adherence to the invasive censorship code that went along with the repressive military rule of a civilian population. Efforts to create the space for literature within this pressurized vacuum included the experience of exile, as in the case of Rashid Hussein (a writer persecuted by both Arabs and Israelis for his belief in co-existence), and the persistent wait of Emile Habiby, one of the most innovative contemporary Arab writers whose first book of fiction only came out in 1969, when he had reached the age of fifty.

For Mediterranean and Arab Jews, the collective process of reclassification - in which they literally emerged as a new class, as proletariat "human material" - again redefined the space in which writing could be possible. Some of the immigrants - particularly Iraqis who had been associated with or influenced by the Communist Party there - arrived with a language just about to bloom into the collective fruition of a new and hopefully better world. But the defeat and brutal suppression of such a vision in Iraq along with the fact that, in Israel, their language also just happened to be the tongue of the "enemy," cut this literature off at the root. Although a few of the writers who immigrated when they were older, in later waves, managed to maintain - both emotionally and linguistically - the integrity of their means of expression, none of the younger, already partially formed writers

of the first wave emerged intact. David Semah, for instance, in a neglected but extremely moving episode, was the first poet to write about the infamous massacre of Palestinian civilians by Israeli soldiers at Kufr Qassem in 1956. That a Jew could compose a work in Arabic about a completely suppressed incident at a time when every possible form of pressure, external and sometimes even internal, dictated against it, just makes the gesture more poignant. The fact remains, however, that Semah stopped writing Arabic poetry, eventually finding a niche within academia.

The implacable fate of the Jew writing Arabic in Israel was to remain unread: on one hand, the increasingly high and feverish pitch of official nationalist Arab culture cut off outside avenues of expression to anyone even remotely associated with "the Zionist entity;" on the other hand, fewer and fewer Jews found the means to maintain the level of Arabic needed to contend with works of literature. The single exception to this is Samir Nakash, a writer who managed to persevere perhaps precisely because he arrived at such a young age, before such decisions as language choice could be made on a pragmatic level. Nakash not only continues to work in Arabic, but blends the standard literary language of narrative with dialogue written in the peculiar Jewish dialect of Baghdad. In Israel, though, his work is read more in Hebrew translation than the increasingly obscure original. Most other writers did make the transition to Hebrew: two of the most important, both from Baghdad, are Shimeon Balas and Sami Mikhael. Balas's first

novel, The Transit Camp, a bitter but certain and unapologetic account of life in the tent cities published in 1964, can also be called Israel's first 'protest' novel. This was followed, some years later, by Sami Mikhael's Some Are More Equal Than Others. Both have become significant writers and it is interesting to note that their further work forms a sub-genre of contemporary Hebrew prose related much more intimately - in terms of narrative structure, subject matter and intentional trajectory - to the modern Arabic novel than the last vestiges of "neo-modern" trends still prevalent among many of their own Israeli contemporaries. Balas's immersion in the world of Arabic literature through his academic work, including a steady output of articles as well as his extensively researched and compassionate Arabic Literature Under the Shadow of War, just emphasizes this affiliation. Both writers gave Israeli Jewish readers their first complex Arab characters and it is only one of the anomalies of "the great transfer" that, in Mikhael's work for instance, one can find a more finely tuned account of the communist underground in Iraq during the 1940's - in a Hebrew novel published in Israel in the 1970's - than in any comparable Iraqi work. It is also significant that, like many other Hebrew writers emerging from an Arabic or Levantine environment, the work of Balas and Mikhael, although quite popular in Israel, has not yet found the receptive space and further approval needed for export as a genuinely Israeli "product."

III.

Many signs marking the possibility of a new collective duration, of a new period, are discernible in trends and particular works of the late 1970's and early 1980's. This generation - following such writers as Balas and Mikhael, and the dozens of other lesser known writers who formed the terrain out of which their work grew⁴ - pointed toward both the revival and the fruition of a genuinely pluralistic Levantine culture. Forgotten figures were reread: the essays of Jacqueline Kahanoff, for instance, the Egyptian who wrote in English, became available in a collection edited by Aharon Amir, the most active surviving member of the old Canaanite school. The Algerian born poet Erez Bitton revived the practice of reciting poetry accompanied by music. His work eloquently limned the parameters of "another Hebrew," a language far from the fashionable phrasing of Tel Aviv's Dizengoff st. and its slavishly imitative modes that set the tone for the country as a whole. Bitton's idiom was the tongue taken home by those closing shop and heading back to neighborhoods not included in any tourist's itinerary, places where the common language remained music, "wounded kinship's last resort." Besides practicing this

cond through his recitals, Bitton's poetry paid tribute to some of the forgotten and neglected greats, the once famous singers and musicians now relegated to a life of obscurity:

zohra alfasiya's song

zohra alfasiya

singer at Muhammad the Fifth's court in Rabat, Morocco
 they say when she sang
 soldiers fought with knives
 to clear a path through the crowd
 to reach the hem of her skirt
 to kiss the tips of her toes
 to leave her a piece of silver as a sign of thanks

zohra alfasiya

now you can find her
 in Ashkelon
 Antiquities 3
 by the welfare office the smell
 of leftover sardine cans on a wobbly three-legged table
 the stunning royal carpets stained on the Jewish Agency cot
 spending hours in a bathrobe
 in front of the mirror
 with cheap make-up -

when she says

Muhammad Cinque
 apple of our eyes

you don't really get it at first

zohra alfasiya's voice is hoarse
 her heart is clear
 her eyes are full of love

zohra alfasiya's

Here naming and the use of almost formulaic epithets and images turn the present back to the fertile space of its own memory: while conjuring up an unbridgeable abyss, the very act and gesture of the poem spans the chasm. The poem cannot restore either Zohra's voice or her audience, only record the indelible fact of her life: even as memorial, the word regenerates. Bitton's own bitterly ironic experience informs this paradox: playing with his friends at the age of 10 in one of the abandoned orchards of Lod, he discovered an old grenade. Picking it up cost him his eyes and the partial use of an arm but it also brought him to one of the better institutions for the blind where he recieved the kind of education that those he left behind could never even have dreamed of. For them, however, those of the neighborhoods speaking "another Hebrew," there was no real need to return to the voice of Zohra or the other great musicians for they remained an inseparable part of their vocabulary.

Despite all the obstacles, (technical and psychological) present in Israel, there is probably nowhere in the Levant where such a vast variety of music can be found since each group of immigrants either preserved or, if at all possible, continued to follow the trajectory of their musical culture from afar. In the alleys of the open marketplaces, at the central bus stations, out of suitcases, kiosks, flimsy stalls or tiny shops, virtual walking encyclopedias of popular culture sell cassettes and videos, in every dialect of Arabic, in Turkish, Greek, Persian and Kurdish.

Every imaginable form of the piyut, the Hebrew religious poem (either chanted according to the traditional rules of prosody or set to music in one of the ancient Arabic maqam), is available. There is great admiration for the 26 year old Moshe Habusha, a cantor from Jerusalem whose lifelong dream is to meet the venerable Muhammad Abdul Wahab, the dean of Arabic music; stories are told of Abdul Wahab's special effort to travel from Cairo to see the Tunisian Jew, Raoul Journo, at his appearance at the Olympia in Paris. Older Egyptians reminisce about Laila Mourad, the beautiful singer whose father was a rabbi and a cantor; they speak of how Farid al-Atrache went into seclusion and stopped singing after his sister Asmahan was killed; of the bitter feud between her and Umm Kulthum. The Moroccans speak of how orchestra leaders would come to Rabbi David Buzaglio to answer a musical query once they had exhausted all other sources; the Algerians tell of the singer and oud player Reinette, and how one of her accompanists was deported to Auschwitz by the Vichy regime. And then there is the constant gossip, about the new Israeli "cassette" singers, about the Persian, Turkish and Moroccan musicians who come to play the nightclubs in Jaffa. But it is here, as well, where the very real political and cultural schism creates a true split. In this sense, the majority of Mediterranean and Arab Jews are still hostage to policies and hierarchies of power they did not institute: social, political and economic structures and realities directly confront cultural parameters.

memories, affinities and events. Like Zohra Alfasiya, hundreds of old singers and musicians remain forgotten, living and dying in obscurity: the great oud player Braham Souri, for instance, can be found selling shoelaces, razor-blades, cheap perfumed soap and other assorted odds and ends out of a cardboard suitcase on Jaffa Road in Jerusalem. Even more pointedly, one can hum the tunes of Farid al-Atrache or Muhammad Abdul Wahab one minute, and serve as an interrogator in which the Palestinian subject becomes an object of misplaced rage the next. Such is the nature of Israeli working class schizophrenia and each turn of the screw in both the hegemonic cultural structure and the continuing occupation, always amply abetted by the industry of official imagery, only serves to further mutilate memory itself as an entirely new history and set of relations is constantly being produced.

Younger artists, those in their 30's and 40's, have come closer to confronting this dilemma: from the painter Pinchas Cohen-Gan to the musician Shlomo Bar, from the novelist Itshak Gormezano Goren to poets like Shelley Elkayam, Amira Hess and Roni Somek - all have somehow struggled, in different ways, to transfix the splintered shards of the past's mirror into the available present before projecting them into an intelligible future, where memory can truly be free to invent and reinvent form. Goren's novels,

for example, reopen Pandora's box by going back to the somewhere else that is the forbidden past, in his case, childhood in Alexandria, with its hypocrisy and cynicism, its Ladino and French, its Greeks and Jews and Arabs. His work is a far cry from nostalgia, even though there is real, albeit gentle, mourning in it. The forgotten, distorted world - willed into oblivion by the discourse of "deliverance" and the ideology of return's tunnel vision - is faced like an ecological disaster, as an inseparable part of the eroded self whose contours must at least be retraced to right and write the body and the mind's own damaged, unbalanced economy.

The poetry of Amira Hess also peers into the past's forbidden box; her first book And the Moon Drips Madness, came late, at the age of 41:

I am Baghdad's daughter
 Yet could swear
 I were native to London
 Recall those gates of iron
 All that golden glitter
 Horse guards and cavalry
 What a wind nipped at my feet
 To remind me I belonged in spirit
 But take not the body
 So weak and trembling!"

Baghdad's colonial architecture, the changing of its guards, is at once the deepest recess of childhood si(gh)te and an imposition, chilling to the bone. None of the poems in the collection are titled and from the first lines ("I am Amira / Salima's daughter, / the daughter of Hayim Yitshak Yehuda, / son of the Lord Be Firm, Peace upon him."'), the ghosts push open the lid to establish their own geneology, rushing out wildly in an exquisite, sensual language that recalls the hallucinatory visions and paradoxes of the Hebrew prophets. Amira is also Maria, the golden-haired infant woman; she is a mermaid and the Moabite and "Astarte Moloch of ancient times;" she is the reincarnation of her own foremother, the renowned Osnat Bat Barazani, a 17th c. teacher and poet. Like in a sisterwork, the Lebanese poet Hoda al-Namani's "I Remember I Was A Point, I Was A Circle," these figures kaleidoscopically merge and clash but never conclude, all caught within the confines of an irresolute space:

There was a time
 when I'd have said:
 with this vile Orient,
 I won't defile myself,
 I won't go back home to
 my mother's owlish face
 weeping over the ruins,
 my father's cabbage patch look -
 the Lord - graced him not.
 And I also said:
 the West, for instance,
 has no caress to its spirit,
 cooked within, scorched to the shrouds.
 East and West I'll set out in a strong beat

and there is no ark
 to bestir myself, if another
 brainchild passes away
 to make eagles soar.'"

The "neo-modern" tendency to "demystify" the Hebrew language, to diminish, degrade or suppress sections of its semantic, environmental or historical strata in a break-neck effort to be "new" was often accomplished, ironically, by putting rarely used words originating in a more obviously "religious" or ritual climate into contexts that stripped those words of their prior meanings and connections. This process sometimes led to the absurd situation of odd words being resurrected, with new shifts in meaning, in order to appear up to date and colloquial. This kind of lexical enrichment came at the cost of a lapse in the attention paid to the possibilities of "plain" language. In Shelley Elkayan's work, particularly From the Song of the Architect, the nativity inherent in the topography of an earlier poem like "The Crusader Man," finds an even surer and more measured response to the treasure hunting poetics of the "neo-modern." The vocabulary in these newer poems is basic but by no means simple: instead of looking for obscure words, she chooses precisely those counters with the widest semantic space, the textual black holes of the

Biblical world, always patiently waiting to again be accommodated. Her most accomplished poem, "Yes Indeed I'll Answer God," is written in a flat, declarative tone that is as well prophetic, but not in the hallucinatory style of Amira Hess. The ambiguity of person, expressed in Hess through naming, is filtered linguistically through peeling changes on the limited lexicon of The Song of Songs: here, the "woman" as "writer" stretches and oversteps the role and boundaries of gender. In some stanzas "she" beckons the lover who "finds himself in the garden" to come: "Come, my pleasantly tied, / unlace yourself in the palm / of my hand."¹⁹ But in another stanza, "she," the "writer," declares: "I forgive my father for doing things without questioning my desire./ Look, after all, the ledger's open. / Ceremonial testaments inscribed in the body. / A man and his covenant / carved in his form."²⁰ Here the return to the semantic breadth of Biblical language and semitic syntax takes the reader to the fuzzy edges of determinacy and meaning itself, to the "antithetical sense of primary words," in Freud's terms. At the same time, this vocabulary plumbs the further recesses of "plain" language in a poetry that is entirely "readable" without being either banal or simplistic. The other spheres of activity and the 'social space' of Elkayam's work also signal a different context for writing and parallel the very precise criteria given to the intellectual by the American poet Bruce Boone:

Writing would not be separate from whatever one does as an intellectual - in the body of those who both think and act, and who stand in a certain tendential, final relation to the modern Prince. It is impossible to assume that this writing has not already begun in places one visits each day. Writers, in this view, are simply engaged in teaching, political organization, community work and liberation groups and so on - in fact in normal activities we are already engaged in. This is the opposite of modernism and écriture. Above all, a writing like the one I am supposing accepts its relation to power. It knows it has no other choice. But in this it feels tremendously exuberant at the thought of the possibilities opening before it.~'

This too differentiates such an approach from that of many "representative" Israeli writers whose "market" value is often predicated upon their ability to eloquently articulate precisely those facets of a "humane liberalism" that the powers that be not only like, but must project and promote, as a survival tactic, in order to perpetuate the race and the order of the race.

Another tack is taken by Roni Somek, the youngest new and established poet actually born in the old Levantine world. His immediate roots go back to Baghdad, but the past informs only by negation:

So what if I came
 from where the garden of Eden once passed.
 My father never talked of Euphrates and Tigris
 or of muscles
 padding his shrunken arms.

but in the pictures eternal mountains
 stood erect
 and gladiolas British officers planted
 as mementos in their back yards.
 At 3, in the dunes of Bat Yam,
 the world blanched from the washing,
 hands of diligent women shook in the wind,
 Ben-Gurion made a speech at every election
 and broads ringed Maurice Chevalier
 in a white top hat
 on the cinema-front billboard.
 Maybe because of all this
 I loved Marilyn Monroe when I touched
 an American girl spending another summer
 at Kfar Hayarok.⁴²

This poetry obviously owes much more to western pop-culture than to any ancient, indigenous tradition, but this debt is not simply accrued unwittingly. The reverse, rather, is true: Somek domesticates the pop-culture that is trying (usually with a great deal of success) to dominate the whole region by confronting it with the peculiarly contradictory realia of the particular world he finds himself a part of. The negation of the past, in itself, still remains informative: it contains information while circumscribing a certain space and the relations within it. The Tigris and Euphrates are etched in before the British officers, Bat Yam, Ben-Gurion, Maurice Chevalier and Marilyn Monroe, establishing an always transferable breach in which even what ultimately counts - the here and now - is bordered by what it can and cannot offer, as in "7 Lines On The Miraculous Yarkon," a poem

that ironically domesticates and personalizes the indigence of local myths:

Soon the city of Tel Aviv will be drawn like a pistol.
What'll come from the sea starts with the hot wind and
on the street you can already hear the kind of quiet talk
that follows a shooting. Too bad there's no circus in this
town, too bad there's no sword swallower, no magician, no
elephants, no dragon; too bad just one dingy floats by right
as I show someone not from here the miraculous Yarkon. -4

IV.

Erez Bitton spoke of "another Hebrew" and the writers briefly looked at here, each in their own way, have all attempted to articulate both the desire for and the knowledge of something else, something other than the expected or accepted. Yet, none of these writers has been able to attempt the kind of frontal internal and external attack on received ideas that can radically realign and snap the past back into an entirely different focus, a feat accomplished, for instance, by Juan Goytisolo in his trilogy, Marks of Identity, Count Julian and Juan the Landless. As Carlos Fuentes wrote:

It is a mockery no other writer has dared make of the hollow imperial gesture by which Spain defeated herself, fatally cut herself off from the human, cultural, and economic resources that fled with the expulsion of the Jews and the defeat of the Arabs... Goytisolo takes the totality of Spanish language and history, traps it, imprisons it, encapsulates it, digests it and then expels it... His enterprise offers a dual aspect: attack the myths and do so by assailing the language on which the myths rest; it is, first and foremost, an adventure of language, a critical battle against the language appropriated by power in Spain. It is also a search for a new/old language that would offer an alternative for the future but also a fecund link with the outlawed Arab and Jewish strains.²⁴

At the end of the last book of the trilogy, Juan the Landless, Goytisolo "breaks the habit of language" itself, "by writing it in accordance with simple phonetic intuitions."¹¹ From there, the text goes into a phonetically transliterated mixture of this new language and Arabic before finally shifting completely into Arabic. On the final page, Goytisolo even goes so far as to write in Arabic script, penning the five lines ("Why don't the people understand me / Why don't they follow me / My relations are finished / I'm without doubt on the other side / With all the poor people always / They will find the knife") which close the book.

For Hebrew literature, for the writing of Mediterranean and Arab Jews now in Israel and the place of both in a realigned Levantine prism turned to refract the rays of its own light, the move from the "modern" to the "post-modern" comes from a most unlikely source. Once one might have hoped that things could have been different, that Jews would continue as integral and innovative partners in the creation of Arabic culture - writing plays, poetry and novels; making music, films and art, publishing newspapers; reading and speaking and thinking and singing and dreaming in the mother tongue. But, irony of ironies, precisely the reverse has happened. Rather than continuing and renewing the Arabic tradition or creating "another Hebrew," we have been given an "other" writing Hebrew. Rather than a frontal attack, we have been given a compassionate opening into a possible future, proffered by a true native son (Anton Shammas, a Palestinian

Israeli), in a form (the arabesque) that is as much a part of the Levant as of the post-modern world.

By not only accepting but even celebrating his own exile within language, Shammas fully realizes the conditions and problematic of writing anywhere: he enters that infinite and mysterious void described by Blanchot as "the only space in which literature can exist," where the writer must "discover the language of literature" by searching "for the moment which precedes literature."²² In many ways, Shammas's novel Arabesques, is about finding this constantly recurring and elusive moment, about pulling differently colored threads through the labyrinth of form divided here into two parts, "The Tale" and "The Teller" or, in our terms, the narration and the narrator. Ostensibly, the narrator is looking for a lost relative, but the search ends up as an essay in recuperation, an attempt to, if not assemble, then at least gather the shards of the long-shattered primal vessel. The narrator is not driven by false nostalgia but the need to make some sense out of the delicate and layered existence comprising the life of those Palestinians who stayed after the disaster of '48. These layers include the now airtight world beyond, represented by Beirut, both as it was and is; the West Bank, with all the attendant ambivalence and confusion involved in that relationship; and Israel itself, with the incessant hope and disappointment it offers. By going back in time from the village of Fasuta, in a world where Beirut was still the urban reference

point, and forward, past the carnage at Sabra and Shatila to Paris and Iowa, Shammas emerges as both teller of tales and narrator of texts. He includes the 19th c. novels many would have preferred he continue writing by interrupting, interrogating and, finally, through sheer bravado, outdoing them. Rather than rely on the ploy of the found manuscript, the long lost relative himself (the character Michael/Michel Abyad) offers the teller of tales the book of his own life when they finally meet in Iowa City, so far from everything that has separated them this long.

Form and language are not mere surrogates on this journey, but intimate partners. The first section of the book, along with the remaining sections that compose the family chronicle dating from the mid-19th c., embed their fable in words that are themselves part of the past: here, the archaic and the magical coincide. The eyes of the child (observer / narrator) process all the information - colors, sounds, smells, feelings - and release it through the art of a medieval story-teller. Yet, just as the story-teller was seldom content to rest on the merits of the tale without at least suggesting its consequences, so Shammas employs various means to re-process that primal information, to rescue it from interment in the past, static and eloquent in its beauty but ultimately inapplicable to the only place where it can be of use, the present. These themes mirror and fold in on themselves: the characters that belong to this primal past possess a kind of subterranean vision. Seeing from the underground up, they often

take to the road, in both flight and search, to wander through the same displaced strata as the narrator. Other characters, those from the "afterworld" (Israelis and others the narrator meets along the journey), can only see in reverse: they have to try and reconstruct Anton the narrator by finding those parts of himself he is still in search of. Paris and Iowa City are just two of the further way stations in this search and, as Shimeon Balas has pointed out, link another of the book's underlying themes, that of the love story. This love story, though, is more the story of unrequited love, something which has always served to limn the difficulty of a final union, whether with oneself, one's past, or one's promised land. It is precisely this transition from the magical world of childhood to the composition of a mature identity that sounded the alarm for some readers: after all, the native, admired and even envied for a sense of "authenticity" long lost by those whom the luxuries of civilization has "spoiled," must remain innocent and childlike, in need of the guidance that aspiring to "higher" forms of life can offer.⁴⁷

In a different context ("Algerian Literature Towards the Year 2000"), Jamal Eddine Ben Cheikh wrote: "Our Palestine is within and the language we have to express it guards its secret voice."⁴⁸ By guarding the secret voice of his own language, Shammas counters complexity with complexity to reinforce the relentless lesson about what happens once a whole life order has been shattered and fragmented, both politically and naturally.

Arabesques is a book that, in many ways, should never have had to be written; as the "narrator" himself writes: "I am gripped by the feeling that it would have been better if the story had remained curled up like a caterpillar in the cocoon of silence forever. But now the cocoon has hatched and the butterfly of the story, with a magical flick of its wings, has shaken off the webs of years of forgetfulness and the way back is blocked, both for me and the butterfly." With the way back blocked, there is nowhere to go but forward: once circumstances dictated the very possibility of such a book, it is almost as if it had to be written. And once written, as in the wake of any truly innovative work, branches of affiliation are realigned, retro and prospective readings change, and new maps need to be charted. In making Hebrew a lingua franca that just happens to dominate this particular region for the time being - and which can be used due to political and cultural vicissitudes by anyone who happens to be trapped within such circumstances - Shammas has pulled the proverbial finger out of the dike damming the basic contradiction within the definition of Israeli nationality and nationhood. Israel as a "democratic Jewish state," which is also the "homeland" of the "Jewish people," must now come to terms with the presence of a Christian Palestinian writing in Hebrew who also claims (along with another 20% of the population, the other 750,000 Palestinian Israelis, both Christian, Muslim and Druze), to form an integral part of this nationality. By forging this path with such accomplished art, Shammas has also

presented solid reason to reexamine, a little more thoroughly this time around, the ethnocentric assumptions that have so long and exasperatingly governed most (un)critical readings of "Jewish" writing. At the same time, the aching political, social, sexual and cultural problematic drawn so finely by this text snaps the frame of a Levant in which Israel can clearly belong sharply into focus. The specific terrain of Shamma's Arabesques refers us to the environment of writers who, despite being barely or only recently known to Israeli readers (and still far from comprising an indivisible referential axis and certain part of the general literary vocabulary), simply make more sense when looked at in relation to each other.

V.

The Mediterranean, by 'right of which,' to paraphrase Itshaq Gornezano Goren, 'the tale unravels,' is now a polluted sea crowned by an orderly, confident and overdeveloped North slowly meeting and merging with a chaotic South, parts of which, Cairo and Beirut for example, test the limits of discourse itself. And Jerusalem, what George Seferis called the "ungovernable" city, remains as cut off as ever since its "reunification," divided even more distinctly within itself since the beginning of the intifada, the Palestinian uprising. Rather than the sparkling sun and clarity of tourist brochures, the old Levantine world is a space of poor and crowded cities, some ravaged by war, dwindling resources, increasing debt and other, more ancient and insidious forms of oppression such as the subjection of women, unabated in this "republic of cousins" where, as the Algerian writer Assia Djebar wrote "the ancestral barriers are being rebuilt."³⁰ The changes brought about by industrialization, the "great Western Transmutation" and colonialism are, in many cases, only further compounded by more "progress." As the Egyptian architect Hassan Fathy writes:

Energy-intensive mechanized tools have diminished the personal, cellular contribution to the fabrication of objects, the building of structures and the growing of food. Production of beauty, once the prerogative of millions, is replaced by industrialization - even of bread - under the control of a minority of owners... Constant upheaval results when industrially developed societies weaken the craft-developed cultures through increased communications. As they interact, mutations create societal and ecological imbalance and economic inequities which are documented to be increasing in type and number. Profoundly affected is the mass of the population, which is pressured to consume industrially produced goods. The result is cultural, psychological, moral and material havoc."

Yet, the Levant is still a space of immense human richness, a space that can propose new models for a world rapidly losing sight of the dependance of each part upon every other part. By having the light from both ends of the spectrum - the highest accomplishments of the ancient world and the most convoluted problems of the modern - refract through its prism (like the pyramids in the distance at Giza dotting Cairo's dense cityscape), the Levant is still in a unique position. As Yusef Chahine, the Egyptian film director has said: "France, England, they are the Third world - I'm the First world, I've been here 7,000 years." Yet, to repossess these years, to peel off the layers of imposed and alien interpretation, means a confrontation on all levels: for artists, above all, it means a confrontation with memory, with both recieved and constructed images of the self. As Chahine put it:

Memory is confrontation, a confrontation with oneself. You must first confront yourself before confronting other people, or a whole country, or the whole Arab nation. That's also the political context of memory, as you look back at yourself caught in the American dream or the pseudo-socialist dream you gradually move forward. The final confrontation is when you ask if you accept yourself. Because if you can't communicate with yourself, how can you communicate with others?''

This submission, these lapses, letting events be defined and determined outside the self, is akin to what, in another context entirely, Andrea Dworkin has called "the initial complicity, the acts of self-mutilation, self-reconstruction," which recur until there is no self, only the diminished, mutilated reconstruction.""

The confrontation - to attack, perforate and subvert various forms of hierarchical power and the institutionalized transmission of memory - can only be one stage on the way to a freedom in which memory and event discover their own forms; as the Tunisian Nouri Bouzid, another film director, emphasizes:

What others call a defeat, I call a break in memory. The very word "defeat" is connected to events in our history, but I link it to our collective memory, to our education. We must seek explanations there: unless we start there, we can do nothing. We must unveil our memory and confront it. Change comes from knowledge. We dare not see ourselves in the mirror. We look for someone else. We're not proud of what we see. We're not used to seeing ourselves because we can't cope with the errors in our memory or the bad memories of an education based on repression, frustration, aggression, in sum, all social prohibitions. Our history is bound by memory

prohibitions and taboos. We must uncover what we keep hidden. Only then will we know who we are."

The books and the art of the Mediterranean, what can now in all frankness and without shame be called Levantine Writing and Levantine Art - its ancient fragments, sites and images, its contemporary texts, paintings and films - are still the Levant's most treasured resource, but they must be reoriented within the terms of an altered, plural political and cultural economy. Music, once again, persists: it is there, for instance, where perhaps kinship's deepest wound - for women are certainly more ancient than "Jews" or "Arabs" - can at least begin to heal for, as Assia Djebar writes: "From the fragments of ancient songs I can see how we might search for the restoration of a real conversation among women." Music too opens a new window on what has been of most concern here, the relations between 'eber and 'arab, Hebrew and Arab, those two unvoiced peoples whose breaches and embraces make up just one chapter of the Levant's long book of memory. But putting the vowels back into each other's consonants is a mutual enterprise and just as the Arabic needs to be read back into the Hebrew, the Hebrew must be read back into the Arabic.

One of the strongest gestures pointing this way can be found in The Man of Ashes, a film by Mouri Bouzid that tenderly depicts the friendship between a young Arab and an old Jewish musician. It is fitting that precisely this part of the mirror, in which

the Jew's image is refracted through the light of the Levantine prism, be unveiled through a "new" medium. At one point in the story the two sit together across a table in the Jew's home. The candles of a menorah, the ancient seven branched candelabrum symbolizing both eternity and mortality, light and the life-cycle, flickers behind the old man. As the Jew strums his oud, the young man recites this poem:

I came to see you / the doors were closed
I remember when / the streets were full

The old places / lose their magic
No more singing / no more parties

The doors don't dance, the locks are still
The roofs are in tears for the parting sparrows

The Jew then starts to sing, beginning with the first stanza:

I came to see you / the doors were closed
I remember when / the streets were full

before adding these lines:

I strummed this song to recall your features
Let joy run free and break down frontiers
push back boundaries and break down frontiers "

The young man's words meld the sensuous diction and figures of the lover's plaint in The Song of Songs with the terse pain of the blues in a world where absence is present everywhere. The old man's part seems a role reversal: it is he who switches tense, pointing further, turning the texture of memory ahead. To idealize and romanticize this memory seems as futile and bankrupt an endeavor as to appropriate and pervert it, but to not sift through its very particular qualities in order to chart a map based on the contradictory knowledge that the flux of events can yield is a complete abdication of responsibility. Somewhere between the closed doors and the full streets, the magic of the old places and the still locks of rooms without song, a space remains, a space for a poetics of the possible.

Footnotes:

1. The literature on the 1948 expulsion/flight is vast. For a significant new overview using only recently available archival sources see: Benny Morris, The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-49 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). A pioneering work that still remains immensely useful is Don Peretz, Israel and the Palestine Arabs (Washington D.C.: The Middle East Institute, 1958). For a rather shocking graphic account that, unfortunately, has no equivalent in English, see Kostandi Nikola Abu-Hammud Directory of Geographical Names in Palestine (Jerusalem: The Arab Studies Society, 1984) [Arabic]; this book simply lists, along with a brief descriptive note on each, the place names of some 400 destroyed Palestinian villages. Ibrahim Abu-Lughod's The Transformation of Palestine (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1971) remains a basic source. For two specific accounts see: Walid Khalidi's "The Fall of Haifa," Middle East Forum XXXV (Dec. 1959); and Nafez Nazzal's "The Zionist Occupation of Western Galilee, 1948," Journal of Palestine Studies, III, 3; Spring, 1974. On the political side, a major new contribution is Simha Flapan, The Birth of Israel: Myths and Realities (New York: Pantheon, 1987).

Not enough has been written on the specific instances of property "exchange" in the global sense, in which the refugees from Arab and Mediterranean countries - whose property and goods had been expropriated - were assigned "absentee" property in Israel. The one work that gives at least some sense of the implications of this is Abbas Shibliak's previously cited and mentioned The Lure of Zion: The Case of the Iraqi Jews. Also see chapters 2 and 3 of Tom Segev's groundbreaking 1949: The First Israelis (New York: The Free Press, 1986). For the Palestinian side, see Sami Hadawi, Palestinian Rights and Losses in 1948 (London: Al-Saqi, 1987).

2. "The attitude of the first Israelis toward the newcomers was complex and self-contradictory, charged with emotions and infused with prejudices, reflecting their self-images as Jews and Israelis. The key to their attitudes toward the immigrants lies in their contemptuous attitude toward the Diaspora. Most tended to regard themselves as Israelis first and Jews second. Israel was above all... They discarded ancient Jewish cultures and did so without compunction, for they believed that they were making the only relevant history; the State of Israel meant more to them than the preservation of Jewish culture abroad." See pp. 117-118 in Segev, 1949: The First Israelis.

3. Ibid., p. 170.

4. Mordechai HaKohen's description of the Italian invasion of Libya in The Book of Mordechai, p. 185: "The remaining Moslems, who were

unable to escape by the skin of their teeth, did so by denying they were Moslems. Hitherto, it had been a terrible disgrace for a Mohammedan to say "I am a Jew" or "I am a Christian," but on that day the tables were turned. In order to save his life, the Moslem found it expedient to say, "I am a Jew," to fool the Italians, who could not differentiate between the two."

5. Just one example can be seen in Segev, 1949, pp. 157-58: "Some time after the number of immigrants from the Arab countries began to exceed that from Europe, the quarterly Meganot approached five prominent scholars of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Ernst Simon, Natan Rotenstreich, Meshulam Groll, Yosef Ben-David (Gross) and Karl Frankenstein, all of Central or East European origin, and asked them to consider this new problem. They approached it with appropriate academic rigor, their articles bearing such titles as "Absolute Criteria" and "The Dignity of Man." Karl Frankenstein's article ended with the sentence: "We must recognize the primitive mentality of many of the immigrants from the backward countries." The others were of the same opinion. Frankenstein proposed that in order to understand the mentality of the immigrants it should be compared, among others, to the primitive expression of children, the retarded, or the mentally disturbed. Yosef Gross was of the opinion that the new immigrants from the Arab countries were suffering from "mental regression" and "a faulty development of the ego." His colleagues discussed "the nature of primitiveness" at great length. As a whole these articles project an Ashkenazi consensus, which was partly paternalistic and benevolent as well as being supercilious and contemptuous."

6. In the preface to Vol. 1 of A Mediterranean Society, p. viii.

7. Text is from Rabbi Moshe Schonfeld, Genocide in the Holy Land (Brooklyn: Bnei Yeshivos, 1980), p. 494. For background on the Yemenite arrival in Israel, see Segev, 1949; pp. 178-194.

8. This term is used in the sense delineated by Benedict Anderson in his Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (London: Verso, 1983). See pp. 14-16.

9. See pp. 164-65 in Ilan Halevi, A History of the Jews: "The attempt to consider, as Ben-Gurion did, the Jewish nation as a single entity all through history, from the exodus from Egypt to modern Israel, with the same identity, was bound to lead Zionist theoreticians to an apologetic and essentialist falsification of the history of the Jews, with which the whole Israeli educational system is deeply impregnated: the mass production of false consciousness." This consciousness has become so ingrained that those historians who stray from the consensus, not treating the Jews as a "single entity," are considered radical revisionists.

10. A recent and telling example of this was the controversy over the publication of a poem by Mahmoud Darwish in Israel. See my "Who's Afraid of Mahmoud Darwish?" in MERIP Reports, 154 (Sept./ Oct. 1988), pp. 26-28; also Mahmoud Darwish, Palestine mon pays (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1988), with articles by Simone Bitton, Matityahu Peled and Uri Avneri surveying the Israeli reactions to the poem.

11. See the bulletin that Yehoshua served as editor of, Majallat al-Ahbar al-Islamiyyah (Journal of Islamic News), published in Jerusalem by the Israeli Ministry of Religious Affairs from 1949 to 1974 (Arabic). Further information on the function of this ministry was taken from David Neuhaus, Politics and Islam in Israel 1948-1987, an unpublished Master's Thesis for the Department of Political Science at the Hebrew University.

12. Some significant examples include the previously mentioned and cited book by Nahum Menahem, Ethnic Tension and Discrimination in Israel (also available in French as Israël: tensions et discriminations communautaires) and Mordechai Gabbai, Whom Does the Israeli Establishment Serve (Kfar Kadima, 1984). Both of these books ostensibly appear as "sociological" approaches, yet they provide true alternative histories with quite unorthodox conceptual assumptions and a good amount of original archival research. Another important book, Dr. Abraham Matalon's The Hebrew Pronunciation in its Struggle (Tel Aviv: Hadar, 1979) (Hebrew), shows to just what extent the "subject" of such works are interconnected to the aims and approaches of their authors. Through elaborate and exacting linguistic proofs and arguments, Matalon explicates a very succinct thesis, namely, that only when Israelis pronounce Hebrew correctly (i.e. closer to the Arabic pronunciation), will there be a possibility for them to creatively and autonomously interact with their natural geographic, political and cultural environment.

Afiqim (Tel Aviv), and BeMa'arakha (published by the Council of the Sephardic Communities in Jerusalem), are amongst the significant, more traditional "Oriental" journals that have been around for a number of years; 'Itan Aher (a forum for social and political criticism edited by David Hano in Haifa), Aperion (a journal of Mediterranean literature and arts edited by the poet Erez Bitton) and Pa'amon (a Tel Aviv neighborhood newspaper centered on local social and cultural issues), are amongst the more important newer projects to have appeared in the past 5 years. To document all this material systematically would require a separate study in itself.

As far as historiography is concerned, the tradition of history writing among Mediterranean and Arab Jews goes back to the beginnings of Jewish historiography itself. For a highly sensitive reading that probes the concerns of those writers who first worked in 15th and 16th c. Spain, see Yosef H. Yerushalmi's Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory (Seattle: University of Washington, 1982). Yerushalmi defines memory as the central element shaping the forms used by these early writers and counters it to the development of modern Jewish

history writing - more analytical but somehow outside of memory, constantly attempting to recuperate the collective experience of an imagined community - that commences with the Enlightenment. My own sense of this is that the tradition of memory writing does continue unabated within the Mediterranean and Arab context despite the considerable inroads made by European education and Enlightenment models and conceptual structures. Thus, the work of many late 19th and early 20th c. "local" historians such as Abraham Elmaleh, Moise Franco, Abraham Galante, Joseph Nehama, Salomon Rosanes and Jacob Toledano (see bibliography), seems much more an outgrowth of the rabbinical culture preceding it than a radically new and European implantation. The fact that many of these writers took to the form of the chronicle is, naturally, related to the kinds of vast and sweeping changes occurring throughout the Levant as discussed in chapter 3. In addition, their work simply seems to make more sense when placed in the context of both their predecessors (rabbinic writers and the 15th and 16th c. Spanish historiographers such as Joseph HaKohen and Solomon Ibn Verga discussed by Yerushalmi), and their contemporary followers, such as Menahem, Gabbai or Matalon.

13. For basic works on the Palestinians who remained within Israel after 1948, see: Sabri Jiryis, The Arabs in Israel (New York: The Monthly Review Press, 1976); Elia Zureik, The Palestinians in Israel: A Study in Internal Colonialism (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1979), and Ian Lustick, Arabs in the Jewish State: Israel's Control of a National Minority (Austin: University of Texas, 1980).

14. See Shmuel Moreh and Lev Hakak Contemporary Literary and Academic Works by Iraqi Jews in Iraq and Israel (Or Yehuda: Center for the Tradition of Babylonian Jewry, 1981) [Hebrew].

15. Erez Bitton, Minha Marokayit (Tel Aviv: 'Eqed, 1976), p. 29 [Hebrew]. For biographical information on Bitton, see Dr. Shlomo Elbaz, Revendication ou éveil culturel? (Département des Communautés Sépharades Organisation Sioniste Mondiale, Petite Collection Sépharade) [No date or place of publication], p. 18.

16. Translated by Rebecca Toueg in Modern Hebrew Literature (Tel Aviv: Institute for Hebrew Translation; Volume 12, Nos. 3-4, Spring/Summer 1987), p. 45.

17. Ibid., p. 44.

18. My translation from And the Moon Drips Madness (Tel Aviv: 'Am 'Oved, 1984) [Hebrew], p. 9.

19. My translation in Ariel (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Post Publications; Number 67, 1987), pp. 88-90.

20. Ibid., as above. Also see Freud's article "The Antithetical Sense of Primal Words" in On Creativity and the Unconscious (New York: Harper and Row, 1958).

21. Bruce Boone, "Writing, Power and Activity," in The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book, Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein eds. (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University, 1984), p. 145.

22. Translated by Gabriel Levin in Modern Hebrew Literature (Tel Aviv: Institute for Hebrew Translation; Volume 12, Nos. 3-4, Spring/Summer 1987), p. 26.

23. My translation from Ronny Someck, 7 Lines on the Wonder of the Yarkon (Tel Aviv: Opatowski, 1987), p. 5.

24. Juan Goytisolo, Count Julian, trans. Helen R. Lane (New York: Viking, 1974). See pp. ix, x, and xi of Carlos Fuentes's preface.

25. Juan Goytisolo, Juan the landless, trans. Helen R. Lane (New York: Viking, 1977), p. 268.

26. See chapter 1, note 93.

27. For example, the leading Israeli literary critic Dan Miron praised Shammás's portrayal of "the behavior of people and animals" attributing it to the "intuitive understanding of a villager," while claiming that the parts of the book taking place outside the village are unsuccessful because "Shammás has not yet reconciled himself intellectually and emotionally with his past." See The Jerusalem Post Magazine (December 12, 1986), p. 18. In "The Double Bind: Anton Shammás' Arabesques (unpublished paper), David Shasha notes: "It comes as a tremendous shock to Israelis that this noble savage, this enfant terrible, has inserted a narrative of his journeys from Jerusalem to Paris to Iowa. In the words of translator and critic Hillel Halkin: "I felt cheated. No longer was I reading a magical novel about an ordinary and wondrous Palestinian village, but rather a flat exercise in literary modernism, with its airplane flights and cocktail parties, its self-conscious artifice and look-at-me-ness, its multiple narrators, split identities and writers writing about writing." This, of course, is to simply ignore the very artifice that allows the metamorphoses of the "tale" to un-cocoon themselves."

28. Jamal Eddine Ben Cheikh, "Ecriture et Ideologie (la littérature algérienne horizon 2000)," in Les Temps Modernes (Paris: Octobre, 1977), p. 377.

29. Anton Shammás, Arabesques, trans. Vivian Eden (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), p. 241.

30. Assia Djebar, "A Forbidden Glimpse, A Broken Sound," trans. J.M. McDougal, in Women and Family in the Middle East: New Voices of Change, edited by Elizabeth Warnock Fernea (Austin: University of Texas, 1985), p. 350. Originally in Assia Djebar, Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement (Paris: des femmes, 1980), pp. 167-89.

In addition to the Fernea volume cited above (and the works listed in chapter 2, note 37), the following are some of the books I have found most useful on women in the contemporary Mediterranean and Arab world: Sarah Graham-Brown, Images of Women: The Portrayal of Women in Photography of the Middle East, 1860-1950 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Malek Alloula, The Colonial Harem (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985); Judith Tucker, Women in 19th Century Egypt (London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Huda Shaarawi, Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist, trans. Margot Badran (London: Virago Press, 1986); Women in the Muslim World, edited by Lois Beck and Nikki Keddie (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978); Scholars, Saints and Sufis: Muslim Religious Institutions in the Middle East Since 1500, ed. Nikki R. Keddie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972); Middle Eastern Muslim Women Speak, edited by Elizabeth Warnock Fernea and Basima Qattan Bezirgan (Austin and London: University of Texas, 1977); Nawal El-Saadawi, The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World, trans. Dr. Sherif Hetata with a foreward by Irene L. Gendzier (Boston: Beacon Press, 1982); Elizabeth Warnock Fernea, Guests of the Sheik (Garden City, New York: Anchor Doubleday, 1969), and A Street in Marrakech (Garden City, New York: Anchor Doubleday, 1975); Nayra Atiya, Khul-Khaal: Five Egyptian Women Tell Their Stories (Cairo: American University Press, 1984); Women of the Mediterranean, ed. Monique Gadant (London: Zed Press, 1986); Women of the Fertile Crescent: Modern Poetry by Arab Women, ed. Kamal Boullata (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1981), and Forough Forrokhzaad, A Rebirth, trans. David Martin (Lexington: Mazda, 1985).

Also, the following periodicals: Khamsin 6, a special issue on "Women in the Arab World," and MERIP Reports 58 ("Women in Egypt"), 82 ("Egypt's Working Women"), 95 ("Women and Work"), 124 ("Women and Labor Migration") and 138 ("Women and Politics").

31. Hassan Fathy, Natural Energy and Vernacular Architecture, edited by Walter Shearer and Abd-el-rahman Ahmed Sultan (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1986), pp. xix, xx.

32. Interview from Ferid Boudjedir's 1987 film, Camera Arabe.

33. Ibid.

34. Andrea Dworkin, Intercourse (London: Arrow Books, 1987), p. 167.

35. As above, see note 32.

36. From Mouri Bouzid's film, The Man of Ashes; Tunisia, 1987.

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