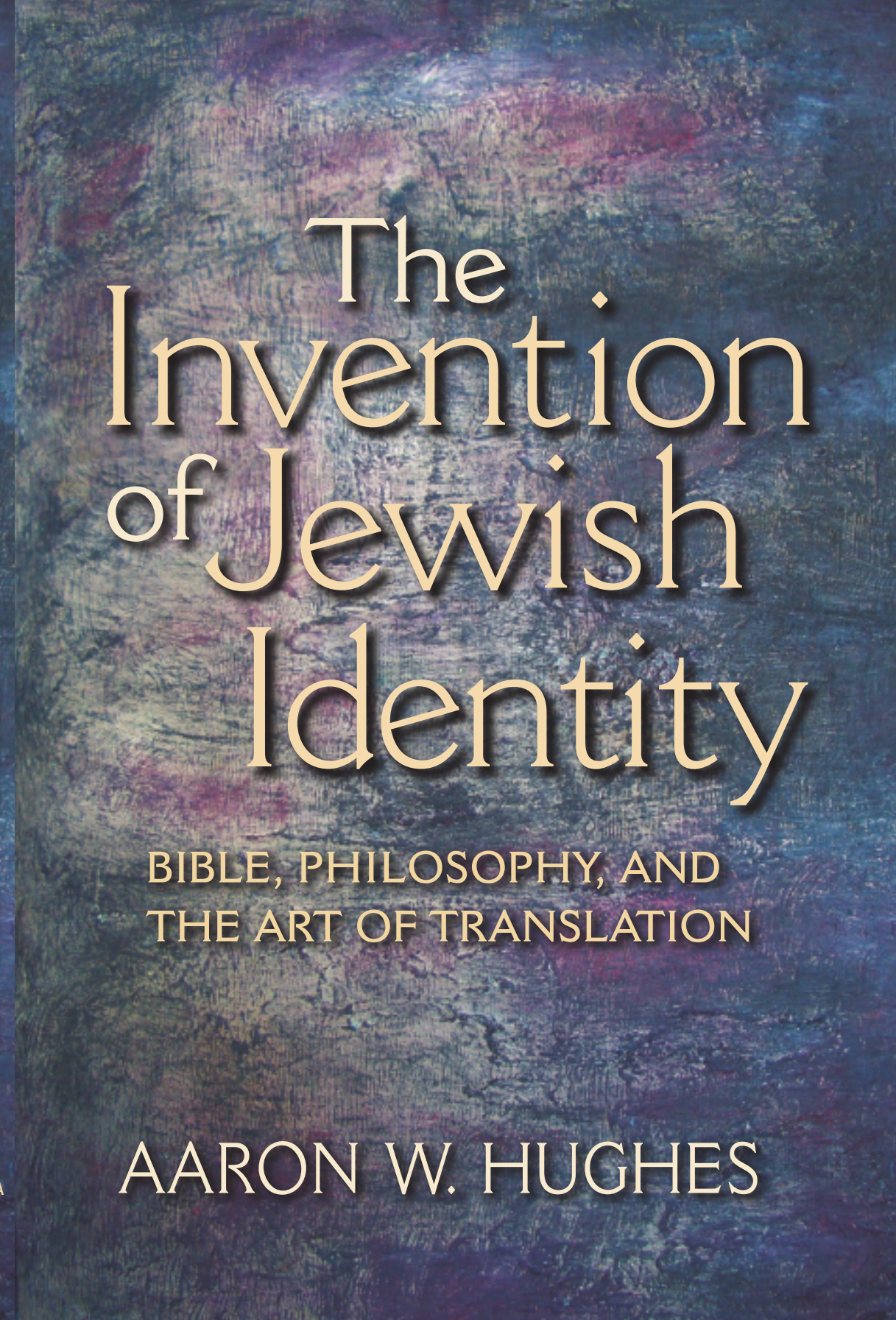
The Invention of Jewish Identity
BIBLE, PHILOSOPHY, AND THE ART OF TRANSLATION
AARON W. HUGHES

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für jennifer

outside by other worlds
i, long extinguished,
look at you
see beauty flash
from within

burdened by names
caught between breaths that mark
us there
not- there

your being beyond
being

outside a window
i see you
life's movement
growing whole
inside

CONTENTS

PREFACE

This monograph provides the first sustained analysis of Bible translation in Jewish philosophy. It conceives of translation as the originary practice of Jewish philosophy, functioning as the means both to domesticate philosophy and philosophize domesticity. Although all Jewish philosophy ultimately emerges from a series of encounters with the biblical narrative, surprisingly little work has been done on the translative act that makes these encounters possible in the first place.

To analyze this translative activity in Jewish philosophy, I examine some of the most important names that emerge from the *longue durée* of Jewish philosophical writing: Saadya Gaon (882–942), Moses ibn Ezra (ca. 1060–ca. 1139), Maimonides (1138–1204), Judah Messer Leon (ca. 1425–ca. 1495), Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786), Martin Buber (1878–1965), and Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929). All these individuals wrote philosophical treatises devoted specifically to justifying the translation of the biblical narrative into new linguistic or conceptual idioms. Rather than localize this study to a thick description of one particular era or individual thinker, my monograph considers these treatises as a whole: comparing them, contrasting them, and putting them in counterpoint so as to illumine something of the nature of translation and its cognate activities in Jewish philosophy.

The Invention of Jewish Identity is a historico- philosophical study. I maintain that philosophical questions and answers are inseparable from the historical and cultural milieux in which they arise and in which they are reflected upon. At the same time, however, I use the empirical- historical narrative as a way to articulate my own philosophical and literary reflections on translation. Although my base narrative seeks to explicate philosophical treatises justifying translations of the Bible in specific contexts, such contexts become the points of departure for larger and more universal sets of issues. In this regard, I intend for my own analysis to become another voice that emerges from and is in conversation with earlier voices.

This study also works on the assumption that the translation of the Bible is qualitatively different from the translation of other works in Jewish philosophy.[1] The biblical text, after all, is the perceived ground of Jewish existence, that from which all other principles (e.g., *halakhah*, memory, ritual, holy days) are ultimately seen to derive; as revelation, it becomes the rupture of the divine speech into the world, the call to which humans must reach out.[2] As temporal caesura, the Bible ostensibly reveals a different reality that is beyond time and whose language, Hebrew, represents reality's touchstone. The history of Jewish philosophy—as indeed of the history of Judaism as a whole—is a series of engagements with the biblical narrative. And because these engagements take place in time, Bible translations reveal to us something of the struggles over assimilation, integration, and separation that constantly confronted Jews as minorities. The translative act thus becomes one of the primary causal factors or agents that facilitates and powers the struggle for identity.

One of the great paradoxes is that as an attempt to translate the perceived eternality of the Bible's chiaroscuro into other idioms, translation paradoxically succeeds in temporalizing language and thus the biblical texture. Translation's greatest struggle is with temporal situatedness or thrownness, forcing us to confront the human condition where it is most fragile. One of the major themes of this study is that despite all attempts to rescue or resuscitate Hebrew through translation,[3] this act often succeeded in making Hebrew into a palimpsest that could be glimpsed only through the veil of another language. In its sacrality, Hebrew paradoxically ceased to be a real language; it became little more than a specter that translation keeps forever out of reach.[4]

In all these formations, Judaism is actively produced in a way that is contingent upon the category of the non- Jewish. This is not in some Hegelian sense in which "the Jew" derives its meaning by opposition to "the non- Jew"; rather, the very techniques, methods, and languages responsible for imagining diverse Jewish identities are ultimately non- Jewish. Rather than uphold reified borders between "Jewish" and "non- Jewish"—borders that are often constructed and projected retroactively—I here prefer to examine their fluidity. In so doing, I contend that the project to extend knowledge of "Judaism" (via, for example, Bible translation) succeeds in *othering* Judaism to itself, so that ultimately the very goal of maintaining Jewish distinctiveness ends up collapsing upon itself. Indeed, through all these permutations the category of "Judaism" remains beautifully and necessarily unstable.

It is upon this instability that *The Invention of Jewish Identity* focuses. Here translation functions as the space in between—the destructive place, in Heideggerian parlance[5]—where languages are stripped of their self-

evidentiary qualities and wherein one uncovers the perceived "authentic" from the various movements and deferrals that take place on the porous borders separating the Hebraic from the non- Hebraic.The destruction of one past/language functions as a catalyst for the creation of other pasts/languages as a possibility for the future. This interaction between futures and pasts in the present succeeds in opening up the world and the word, thereby facilitating the formation of identity in time and in terms of the temporal structure.

* * *

To focus the aforementioned observations, let it be stated that even if translative activity ultimately represents a struggle with both language and temporality, it ultimately took place in specific historical contexts as particular individuals engaged in translating the biblical narrative. Historically, then, I am interested in elucidating an understudied aspect and modality of Jewish philosophy: translation. What, for instance, did the individuals who are the subject of this study say about translation? How did they both theorize and practice it? What were they responding to? To answer such questions, I situate these individuals in their immediate cultural, linguistic, and intellectual milieux. On this level, many of the coming chapters can be read as a series of interlaced case studies, wherein Jewish philosophers, living diasporically, produced something called "Judaism," and one of the primary sites of this activity was the genre of Bible translation.

This historical level, however, represents but the initial, descriptive part of my analysis. I turn in my philosophical investigation to how the translative act was an attempt to overcome historicity. Now I am interested in how these individuals allow us to think about connections between temporality, language, and ontology, since the biblical narrative was in many ways the perceived ground of Jewish being- in-the-world. How, for example, does language recognize itself precisely as a mode of being? In what manner does the language of temporality and the temporality of language unveil being? How does God's language, the language of revelation, fit into this? My contribution here is to argue that because of translation's uncanny fiction to exist between both languages and the tenses of time, the translative act becomes a type of philosophical practice.

More specifically, the instability of Bible translation reveals that time is not some substantial thing out there. Rather, this notion of time—whether we label it as sacred history or the like—is not something in which we passively participate. On the contrary, it depends upon various investments or activities of persons in a culture and, in this regard, Bible translation shows that categories such as the "sacred" or the "holy" are constructed out of *re-*

trievals of the past in *anticipation* of a certain future in order to make a certain identity *present* at this moment. Translation thus proves the correctness of Heidegger's doctrine of ecstatic temporality in the second division of *Being and Time;* and in this regard, all the authors discussed here, albeit in their own ways, exemplify Heidegger's dictum that "Dasein is time."

A third level of my analysis situates itself between these historical particulars and philosophical universals, and concerns the imaginative projection and subsequent invention of cultural identity. Rather than maintain that a culture is composed of a set of stable and closed representations, beliefs, and symbols, I prefer—under the watchful eye of cultural studies—to interrogate the notion that there exists a stable and uniform identity that moves, unchanged, throughout history. Biblical translation permits such an interrogation because it shows the embrace of so- called "non-Jewish" elements on the level of Judaism's *raison d'être,* the biblical narrative itself. The biblical text then becomes the site of skirmishes between a past perceived from the vantage point of the present. Translation is what enables and facilitates the creation of Jewish identities in the light of unruly social worlds, wherein meanings are often ambiguous and identities rarely stable. On this reading, biblical translation informs and is informed by the language of identity and of cultural ontology.

Finally, all these interconnected layers—the historical, the philosophical, the cultural—will enable me to add my own voice to the Jewish philosophical canon, thereby putting another layer onto the received historical record. In so doing, I hope this is as much an original work of Jewish philosophy as it is a historical and cultural analysis.

* * *

A few words about the scope of this book are necessary. This book does not pretend to treat all those elements traditionally associated with biblical translation. Certainly the many genres that compose Judaism's collective lore played important roles in the formation of Jewish identities. And like the biblical text itself, this diverse body of literature was often subjected to the same processes of conceptual recasting and theoretical reframing that permit us to chart the processes by which Jewish philosophers recast and reframed the Bible. However, as mentioned, my goal is to explore the literary, historical, and philosophical features that constellate around a series of texts written by philosophers between the tenth and twentieth centuries that discuss their approach to the Bible and its translation. My goal, to reiterate, is their philosophical understanding of translation and not translation per se. This is why I have no qualms, for example, in putting the lexicographical chapters of Maimonides' *Guide* beside Buber's translation of the entire Bible into German. Informing all these projects is the notion

that for the Bible to be read properly, that is, with philosophical acumen, it must be re- read, un-read, and even creatively "mis-read."As such, the writings examined here—even though they come from distinct Jewish cultures and intellectual environments—provide important insights into the production of Jewish philosophy.

The Invention of Jewish Identity presents several overlapping case studies that explore thematically and synchronically the translation of the Hebrew Bible by Jewish philosophers and rhetoricians, all of whom were the leading actors in the formation of Jewish identity within medieval Arabophone, Renaissance, and modern Germanic cultures. As mentioned, I present an expansive concept of translation, conflating the genre of vernacular translation of entire biblical books with the genre of interpretive commentary on the translative act. I hope readers will see how, on one level, this conflation is justified: both genres do the work of absorbing foreign ideas and accommodating divergent aesthetic expectations. In other respects, my conflation is not without potential problems. While I attend to actual biblical translations of Saadya, Mendelssohn, and Buber-Rosenzweig, I ignore other complete translations (e.g., in Spanish, Yiddish, and English). In addition, one could argue that my selection of treatises—those by Maimonides, Moses ibn Ezra, and Judah Messer Leon—is perhaps overly restrictive. Bahya, Halevi, Gersonides, and Isaac Abravanel make no appearances here, though well they could have. My defense is one of space and—to quote Chaucer paraphrasing Hippocrates—"The lyf so short, the craft so longe to lerne." The individuals that I do examine here, I believe, offer more than adequate insight into the problematic that I seek to examine. Since all commentaries are translations in the same manner that all translations are also interpretive commentaries, I had to draw the line somewhere in the sand.

In the writings that I do consider here we encounter both the initial stages of philosophy's absorption into Judaism and the subsequent putting-into- praxis of this activity. We thus witness these thinkers' narrative ingenuity, hermeneutical skills, and often clever exegesis. The flip side of this, of course, is that we also discover the fractures and fault lines that emerge from reading the biblical narrative through philosophical lenses. Although my primary concern is with biblical translation, I trust that my comments inform and contribute to a broader appreciation of the deployment of philosophy in other Jewish (and non- Jewish) sources.Even if other Jewish philosophers did not engage in such translative activity, the Bible nevertheless remained their first point of departure to reconcile philosophy and Judaism.

The following study is an attempt to appreciate the dynamics of Jewish philosophical practice. Whereas it is usually more customary to speak

of "medieval Jewish philosophy" or "modern Jewish philosophy," I prefer to use the larger and more inclusive term. Rather than subdivide the field into a plethora of schools and timeframes, this study works on the assumption that Jewish philosophy represents a form of textual reasoning as seen most clearly in biblical translations made by philosophers who happened to be Jewish. Despite this, however, it is still necessary to inquire into the ultimate basis for philosophy to be considered Jewish: is it the text read or a set of ideas independent of the text? Or, rephrased: is there warrant for a community to take this form of textual reasoning as a *good* form of textual reasoning?

Although interested in particular individuals and their immediate contexts, this study walks a fine line between historical accuracy, philosophical acumen, and literary *jouissance.* Rather than proceed chronologically, my approach is thematic, with each chapter dealing with a particular *topos* that cuts across time and geography. This permits a certain freedom and leads to unexpected results as tenth- and twentieth-century texts sit, sometimes awkwardly and sometimes naturally, beside one another. The advantage of this approach is that it refuses to relegate thinkers and their ideas to the passing of history, to relics discussed solely in intellectual history or the history of philosophy.

Although I frequently find my stance on translation close to that of Buber and Rosenzweig, I cannot agree with them that the Hebrew Bible preserves some transcendent power. I thus read Buber and Rosenzweig as I read everyone in this book: against the grain. This permits a contemporaneous attempt to work out issues relevant to Jewish postmodernity in ways that are firmly grounded in the manifold forms of Jewish premodernity and modernity.

* * *

The monograph itself consists of six chapters. The introductory chapter sets the stage for all that follow by laying the interpretive ground necessary for understanding the relevant literary, historical, and philosophical features that my analysis presupposes. These features, I contend, form a nexus that must be adequately examined if we are to appreciate the dynamism inherent to translative activity. This chapter is more theoretical than the ones that follow because in it I seek to signal forthwith my break from a strict historical framework and thereby present this project, writ large and theoretically, as a work of Jewish postmodern philosophy.

The intertwined themes of forgetting and cultural memory form the backdrop of chapter 2, in particular, how forgetting the perceived originary language of creation—the need that drives translation in the first

place—becomes inextricably linked to the erasure of both cultural and scriptural memory. Language thus becomes interlaced with a perceived authenticity: the perceived Jewish ability to be both home and not home or, at least, its ability to call the "foreign" by the name of "home"; and to be in time and beyond time. Within this context, Hebrew provides the key both to open up and to be opened up by another language. Translation, however, comes with a cost that creates an unbridgeable rupture between the originary language—Hebrew or even some variant behind it—and the vernacular.

This chapter also sets the stage for an anachronistic reading of my data, as I try to put Franz Rosenzweig in counterpoint with Saadya Gaon. This anachronism, to which I alluded above, throws down a challenge to the regnant historicist discourses in the study of Jewish philosophy. It also suggests that we admit that we have much intellectual capital invested in this material and that the ideas of premodern Jewish philosophers, rather than be the stuff of antiquarian interest, do and must continue to inform the present.

Chapter 3 switches pace and focuses on the role that silence—the space in between—plays in translation. If the previous chapter turned on the dialectic of memory/forgetting, this chapter examines the tensions that emerge from another dialectic: that between language's transparency and opaqueness, its ability to reveal and conceal. I argue that the activity of translation becomes the primary means by which one gets at the nontext or urtext, bypassing the fragility of language and moving beyond the materiality of words to the formal presence of silence. To explore these issues in greater detail I focus primarily on the problematic status of the Bible's literal language and what constitutes its "proper" interpretation. Examining the writings of Moses ibn Ezra and Maimonides, we are confronted with the notion that something must reside behind the language in which the Torah communicates, something discernible in the text's silence.

Embedded in the activity of translation is the attempt to legitimate one's particular reading of Judaism both to one's coreligionists and to others. Chapter 4 accordingly examines the apologetics of translation. Prior to Saadya Gaon, when the superiority of Judaism tended to be discussed, it was always done on theological grounds. With Saadya, however, literary and aesthetic dimensions begin to feature highly in such claims. If the Torah is the font of all wisdom, then its language must both anticipate and surpass those (non- Jewish) canons used to define literary elegance. The perceived eternality of the Torah's language and the elegance of its mode of expression signaled the superiority of Jewish culture, the desire to make Jewish texts conform to non- Jewish standards, and the eventual

active Jewish participation in these standards. The Bible was now analyzable using the same critical tools and models used to explore any other piece of literature regardless of provenance or authorship.

If it could be argued that science, rhetoric, or poetics represented autochthonous expressions that originally sprouted on Jewish soil, then they could with minor conceptual and terminological difficulties be grafted back onto Judaism and subsequently cultivated. Translation figured highly in this because it was the primary vehicle whereby philosophers connected the Hebraic and the non- Hebraic, defining and shaping the former in the latter's light.

Yet if this study is about appreciating and understanding the translation of the biblical narrative by philosophers, I will only tell part of the story if I ignore the various and multiform criticisms that such translations inevitably gave rise to. To this end, I turn in chapter 5 to the backlash that followed in the wake of such translations. Rather than reduce these criticisms to misunderstandings, however, I take seriously their accusations as a way to further our larger understanding of the translative act in Jewish philosophy.

The final chapter examines the theoretical and philosophical implications of Bible translations, focusing on the intersection of identity and language. If one aspect of this translative activity concerns the spaces in between where languages meet and pirouette, a related aspect occurs along the frontier zones wherein cultural identities are formed and mapped. Translation is thus heavily invested in both the establishment and maintenance of borders between shifting and often unstable sets of overlapping historical, political, social, and religious constructions. Translation of the biblical narrative into a succession of languages and idioms certainly made possible a series of contacts between Judaic and non- Judaic cultures, facilitating the intellectual and linguistic integration of Jews into the larger contexts in which they found themselves. However, such contact was often predicated on the need to demonstrate the superiority of the perceived Hebraic over the non- Hebraic, to argue for the supremacy—whether defined in intellectual, cultural, aesthetic, or religious terms—of the language behind the translation, the language away from which one moved only to return to it again in a new guise.

* * *

Translation is the act that both makes the old become new and the means whereby the new is absorbed into the old. Yet this conflation of old and new, new and old, is also a fiction created by a translative smokescreen precisely because the biblical past and the present are imaginative constructions that appear in the distance, come into fleeting focus, and

then fade once again into the hazy fog of memory and desire. In this fog the translative act becomes the modality whereby Jewish philosophers ideologically justify their rationalist programs. The redeployment of terminology, the space that opens up between words and between languages, is creatively exploited with the ultimate aim of demonstrating the translatability of both languages and cultures. This activity permitted Jewish philosophers to read their agendas into the foundational work of Judaism and subsequently imagine and construct a series of Judaisms that accorded with their own rationalist ambitions.

More generally, the questions that these Jewish philosophers asked are relevant today, their issues are ultimately our issues, and their struggles with time, language, and the space in between are still our struggles. Such struggles inevitably cluster around dual or competing identities and what goes on in the hyphenated space that connects such identities (e.g., "Jewish-Ameri can" or "French-Muslim").The hyphen assumes a certain kind of translation of cultures, languages, and temporal frameworks—frameworks that all the authors in this study confronted and, successfully or unsuccessfully, tried to mediate.[6] It is in the hyphen, the so- called space in between, that real creative and imaginative work occurs.

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Whether by coincidence or design, the final part of this study on translation witnessed my own translocation and further reflection on the complex nature of borders and identities. I now find myself in a new academic home, surrounded at last by energetic and engaged colleagues that take my work in Judaism seriously. It is a joy to have as new colleagues Richard A. Cohen, Kenneth Dauber, Kenneth Ehrenberg, and James Bono. I would also like to acknowledge the generosity of Gordon and Gretchen Gross and the research funds associated with the professorship that bears their name.

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ABOUT THE COVER

Palimpsest, which is from a Greek root palimpsēstos, literally, "scraped again," is a surface that has been used multiple times. In the writing-over, there is a trace of what has been previously inscripted; indeed, with regard to this surface, inscription and erasure cannot be separated as it is precisely the erasure that facilitates the inscripting. The painting attempts to convey this paradox of writing/erasure, a paradox that relates more generally to the flow of time as the enduring appearance of the nonapparent, the manifestation of the occluded, as it were, in the visual field where what never came to be is scraped again as what came before. The sway of temporality—and the scholarly attempt to record this historically—must be thought from the vantage point of writing as demarcating the residue of what has been removed, the withdrawal of the withdrawal, which bespeaks the presence that is absent in the absence of its presence as the absence that is present in the presence of its absence.

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The Invention of Jewish Identity

1
INTRODUCTORY AND INTERPRETIVE CONTEXTS

The book of wandering could only be the wandering of the book.
So many books within a single one.
The desert is the keeper of the book.
Return to the book means return to the desert.

In the so-called *Letter to Philocrates*, Aristeas relates how the Egyptian king Ptolemy II Philadelphus was so impressed by the sanctity of the Hebrew Bible that he asked Eleazar the High Priest to send him six elders from each tribe of Israel. For the next seven days, the king put a series of philosophical questions to the seventy- two individuals, after which they were secluded for seventy- two days to produce a Greek translation of the Bible. This translation so impressed the elders of Israel that they ordered that "it should remain in its present form and that no revision of any sort take place."[1] In a second version of the myth—this time told by Philo of Alexandria—the seventy- two elders, gathered on the island of Pharos and sitting in seclusion, "became as it were possessed, and, under inspiration, wrote, not each scribe something different, but the same word for word, as though dictated by an invisible prompter."[2]

In their different ways, the two versions of this story justify the project of translation: the transference of authority from one language to another; the need to find counterpoints between cultures; and—what occupies me in the present study—the desire to absorb, legitimate, or otherwise describe the need for such activity in the first place. The mythology engulfing the production of the Septuagint in many ways justified all subsequent translation of the Hebrew Bible with its insistence that the divine presence could encompass a derivative work, that the vernacular could invoke the same reverence for the original and sacred word, and that the new language could awaken the same piety in the believer as the old.[3]

As Judaism moved into different cultural spaces, elite Jews sought out new modes of translation to update or clarify the meanings both within and those perceived to be at work behind the biblical narrative. The Bible

functioned like a mirror held up to reflect larger cultural, intellectual, and aesthetic models. Owing to Judaism's bibliocentrism, biblical translation became one of the primary means whereby Jewish philosophers formulated their rational articulations and subsequently disseminated these articulations to others. The various modes of translation to be examined in the present study were not solely a Jewish affair, however; rather, they were inextricably linked and therefore always formulated based on the larger non- Jewish contexts in which Jews lived.Translation thus provided a convenient way to absorb or counter the various intellectual trajectories of these larger cultural moments.

Translation activity opens up before us a series of vignettes wherein we can grasp something of Jewish and non- Jewish encounters.[4] When Jews in general and Jewish philosophers in particular translated the biblical narrative—whether in whole or in part—they imagined a new Bible: one that would simultaneously break with the confining shackles of existing dogma by returning to an encounter with a pristine past and that would both embrace a newly constituted set of memories in addition to all the cultural sophistications of the present. This paradox between old and new, with each putting on the garments of the other in order to express itself, reverberates throughout this study, and it plays out in the often-contested pages of the biblical narrative as Jewish thinkers sought to read philosophy into the Bible (and the Bible into philosophy) by showing it was already therein. Translation, as mentioned, simultaneously re- read, mis- read, and un-read the biblical narrative. In this it was certainly no different than other modalities of rabbinic interpretation.[5] Where philosophical translation differed from the latter, however, was in the depth of its encounter with non- Jewish systems of philosophy, which subsequently provided both the map and the tools for charting and making sense of such encounters. Translation becomes a philosophical interrogation that problematizes the relationship of the past to the present, of Jews to non-Jews, and of memory to reality.

As my argument unfolds, I show that Bible translation is not simply a matter of philology, but of philosophical and cultural aesthetics and thus the poetic realization of philosophical practice. None of the translators that I examine regarded their works as innovations, however, but as reconstitutions of an original text and as clarifying various instantiations of the divine presence.[6] Translators—using new tools and aesthetics at their disposal— increasingly imagined new Bibles that seamlessly fitted with their own conceptions of what Judaism was or should be. If the line between tradition and innovation, reading and mis- reading, has always been a fine one, the thinkers who are the subject of this study surely walked the razor's edge.

For reasons that will become clear, I have chosen to deal primarily with the translative activity of individuals across the *longue durée* of Jewish philosophical writing. The names are certainly familiar enough: Saadya Gaon, Moses ibn Ezra, Maimonides, Judah Messer Leon, Moses Mendelssohn, Martin Buber, and Franz Rosenzweig. However, I trust that their reasons for inclusion are not as obvious: all wrote—in one way or another and in various times and places—philosophical justifications for translating the biblical narrative into new linguistic or conceptual idioms. My interest is in precisely these philosophical justifications as opposed to their actual translations (although I shall certainly examine these as well). Rather than provide a series of chronological analyses, I instead read these texts together and, depending upon my question or set of questions, historicize or dehistoricize these texts as I deem appropriate. I trust that such a reading will illumine something of the nature of the translative act in Jewish philosophy. My concern is simultaneously historical, literary, and philosophical. In an attempt to bring some order to these potentially unwieldy categories, I unravel them in this chapter so as to raise what I consider to be some of the central issues surrounding each one. This interpretive ground will subsequently function as a point of reference for later chapters.

In order to expand my field of inquiry, I operate with a very broad notion of translation. For example, although Moses ibn Ezra and Mai monides did not literally translate the Bible into Arabic, the former's *Maqālat al-ḥadīqa* and the lexicographical chapters from the latter's Guide both take a keen interest in metaphor. Metaphor thus becomes for these two thinkers the locus of translation, the ability to move beyond the Bible's literal meaning toward its closely guarded secrets. In so doing, Moses ibn Ezra and Maimonides are just as interested in translating the biblical narrative as other individuals regarded as engaging in more "normative" translative activity, and their conceptual translations are as heavily invested in establishing retroactively authoritative versions of their own modes of reading.

As mentioned in the preface, I conceive of the present study as a historico- philosophical essay rather than a study in either of these fields. Philosophical issues are inseparable from the historical and cultural contexts in which they arise and in which they are reflected upon. Yet at the same time such issues neither can nor should be simply reduced to such contexts. I subsequently use the empirical- historical narrative as a way to articulate a larger set of philosophical and literary reflections on translation that may or may not have been relevant to figures living in earlier periods. Although this study seeks to make an original contribution to our historical understanding of philosophically informed translations of the

Bible, I subsequently use this historical understanding as a point of departure for larger and more universal sets of questions. In this I hope that my own study of translation will become another layer added to and in conversation with earlier voices from the Jewish philosophical canon.

Rather than proceed chronologically,[7] my approach here is thematic, with each chapter examining a particular problem that I perceive as existent in Jewish philosophy writ large. This permits interesting and often unexpected results as I juxtapose, sometimes awkwardly and sometimes naturally, tenth- and twentieth- century texts. The sudden shifts in discourses, figures, and contexts in the pages that follow are not meant to confuse, but to show relevance and to make the so- called history of Jewish philosophy into an organic engagement with ideas relevant to us, into something akin to the philosophy of Jewish history.[8] "To show that these texts are relevant today, to preserve their life," to quote Martin Kavka, we "must blast them out of their historical contexts."[9] Or, in the words of Walter Benjamin, "every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably."[10]

Translation: Inside Out

Reality is mediated in and through language. Attempts by philosophers to break through language's perceived confines—perhaps encountered most vividly in Maimonides' desire to shatter language's inherent anthropomorphism so as to abide in silent contemplation—cannot escape language's omnipresence. Even Maimonides, as we shall see, ultimately needs the very fabric of words both to express claims and to attempt to turn such words back on themselves. Translation derives both its necessity and its potency from the paradox that even though God's presence cannot be confined, it is encountered in language (i.e., the biblical narrative) and through the act of reading. Translation becomes the mode that attempts to mediate this paradox by moving between languages, by pointing the way to an articulation of the unspoken that can only be spoken and by trying to get at the nonlanguage that exists in language. The paradox that I am trying to expose here is articulated forcefully in the writings of Edmond Jabès, who—as the mirror inverse of Maimonides, traveling in the opposite direction from Cairo to Europe—also mined the limits of language and the status of the Book:

> God's truth is in silence.
> To fall silent in turn, with the hope of dissolving into it.
> But we become aware of it only through words.
> And words, alas, drive us ever farther from our goal.[11]

Words—agleam in the firmament—spread their traces, their residue, over the created order: revealing it, sustaining it, mimicking it, subverting it. Between texture and erasure translation seeks but never finds the silent splendor of the beyond, the unraveling of words to reveal the palimpsest of all language and the All- language.As such, no text can be completely original because intertextuality is inherent to language: the translation of the nonverbal word and world, every sign being the translation of another sign in a potentially infinite regress.[12]

But translation also represents the desire for a solution to or from this regress and, as such, becomes a central focus of the human dimension.[13] As a practice or *habitus,*[14] in addition to being a philosophical or literary genre, translation is the illusive quest for the perfect language that brings us back to the paradox mentioned earlier; a paradox, to use the terms of Rosenzweig, whose ultimate goal—at least according to some of the authors who are the subject of this study—is the arrival at a full silence that makes language possible.[15] It is an activity that presupposes that we are not perfect and that we are incomplete. The multiplicity of languages, to use the words of Derrida, "exhibits an incompletion, the impossibility of finishing, of totalizing, of saturating, of completing something on the order of edification, architectural construction, system and architectonics."[16] Because of this multiplicity, there is a need for translation: to build nexuses between cultures, between languages, between texts, between ideas, and between peoples.

Translation is a term, an activity, a mode—perhaps even a way of life—in need of clarification. Simultaneously a tool and an object of analysis, translation as I understand it is a complex tapestry of practical, historical, philosophical, and aesthetic processes. My goal throughout this study is to unravel these processes while at the same time appreciating their interconnectedness with an eye toward exploring something of the uncertain hopes, the fractured memories, and the tasks of communal reinvention that hover around the translative act. The search for nonlanguage within language: "Look at the road . . . because it links past to future and, the other way around, future to past—as if there were still a past after the future— but look also at the hope tougher than life that one day there could reappear out of the black bottom of misery a corner, a bit of blue sky."[17]

The Task of Translation

On its most fundamental level the task of biblical translation is ostensibly about understanding the past and thereby demonstrating revelatory con-

tinuities that have the potential to shatter the quotidian dimensions of the present. Translation, to use Schleiermacher's words, helps "to provide the reader with the same image and the same pleasure as reading the work in the original language."[18] Although this turn of phrase may well orient us to the task at hand, it also risks blurring the poetics of translation, forcing us into the overly practical and the perhaps all too familiar. Schleiermacher cannot, after all, explain why we continually retranslate. Reality attests the necessity of poetics that Schleiermacher ultimately ignores. Therefore we have to add Walter Benjamin's words to the equation. For him, the task of translation becomes inseparable from more philosophic and aesthetic concerns: "an intention, however, which no single language can attain by itself but which is realized only by the totality of their intentions supplementing each other."[19] To reduce biblical translation simply to the activity of making the Hebrew accessible in a new language, to aid those who no longer understand the nuances of the original, misses the creative and dynamic forces of the translative act. Translation is neither mimetic nor parasitic upon the original, but moves language toward God's messianic return in the present.[20] Schleiermacher and Benjamin thus provide us with two opposite ends of the continuum of understanding translation, two necessary guides—the quotidian and the utopian—to chart our course.

Again, we could ask: How are we to understand translation? Within this context, Hugo Friedrich raised many of the issues that preoccupy me in this study. In a lecture from 1965 entitled "*Zur Frage der Übersetzungskunst,*" he asks a series of penetrating questions that pierce to the heart of understanding both the nature and modality of translation:

> Is translation something that concerns the cultural interaction of an entire nation with another? Is translation just the reaction of one writer to another? Does translation resurrect and revitalize a forgotten work, or does it just keep a work alive to satisfy tradition? Does translation distort the foreign in an old work under the pressure of specific contemporary aesthetic views? Do translators pay close attention to the difference inherent in languages or do they ignore them? Does the translation create levels of meaning that were not necessarily visible in the original text so that the translated text reaches a higher level of aesthetic existence? What is the relationship between translation and interpretation: when do the two meet and when does translation follow its own laws?[21]

All these questions culminate in the following: Should a translation lead the reader to understand the cultural and linguistic universe of the original or transform the original by adopting and adapting it to the reader's own cultural and linguistic universe?[22] Although the historical and theoretical record equivocates on this, translation seems to be concerned primarily

with the target language, and the various textual and cultural problems of the original have largely faded into the background. Translation is about the present, not the past, but a present that has taken on the garb of the past and vice versa. Although the original never reappears in the new language, its presence haunts the translation and threatens to undermine it.[23]

With all these questions in mind, it is worthwhile to return to Walter Benjamin's discussion of "the task of the translator." It is necessary to ask, "What does translation communicate?" A translation that simply transmits information, according to him, is inessential and characterizes a bad translation.[24] Translation is not about assessing the accuracy of a translator's philological skills; on the contrary, thinking about translation—the how, the what, the why of it—only fully emerges when framed by the various cultural and literary moments in which we (as translators, broadly defined) find ourselves. To return to Benjamin:

> Translation thus ultimately serves the purpose of expressing the central reciprocal relationship between languages. It cannot possibly reveal or establish this hidden relationship itself; but it can represent it by realizing it in embryonic or intensive form. . . . Languages are not strangers to one another, but are, a priori and apart from all historical relationships, interrelated in what they want to express.[25]

Translations present us with windows whereby we can glimpse traces of the intersections between both languages and cultures. Translation is, again to use the language of Benjamin, a "mode" that harnesses the living spirit of the original and establishes its afterlife. Translation—as all the individuals who are the subject of this study will attest—must restore the fragments of an original that paradoxically has become strange and unfamiliar and that, by its nature, has been constructed as original. Reflecting the filiations between languages, the translative act uses the new language to make the old one "old" again; or, framed from a different angle, to make the new language "old." The translator thereby transforms both languages, the original and the target.

For the old has not been handed down *as the old that it is.* It has become new; it has othered itself. But we were not looking for this other. We were looking for the old. And so we search anew. But if translation shows the genetic affiliations and the transferability between languages, we must not lose sight of the endless deferral of translation; the idea that behind every language is the potential for language, the mirage- like pure language, to the extent that all language is translation: the endless translation of translation. Even though translation breaks down the barriers between languages, it is an act that also reinforces such barriers. Following

Octavio Paz: "The language that enables us to communicate with one another also encloses us in an invisible web of sounds and meanings, so that each nation is imprisoned by its language, a language further fragmented by historical eras, by social classes, by generations."[26] As language liberates, so does it imprison. Translation is the attempt to move beyond the shadowy confines of one language to reach toward another; the struggle to overcome both the familiarity of tradition and the novelty of the not- yet. The ontology of translation thus represents something of the in between: theoretical moorings to establish the contours of space, of home and not-home, and of peoplehood. Guided by memory of things past, translation—especially of canonical texts such as the Bible—is the attempt to ground both the past in the present and the present in the past. This play of tenses is anticipatory and is guided by the promises of future perfect. Accordingly, the translative act is as fraught with the uncertainty of human existence as it is underscored by the fragility of language.

Since all great works of literature contain their translations interlinearly,[27] it is to the white spaces between the black letters of the Hebrew Bible that I now turn.[28]

The Biblical Palimpsest and the Aporia of Translation

in front of
masters
going silent around us
in the Undivided, there testifies
a blinding
brightness.[29]

With these words of Paul Celan we enter the dialectics of unreason. We witness the irresolvable tension between the fullness of language and its silence—brightness and darkness—and the deafening unspeaking that guards, seraph- like, the caesural spaces that separate un-creation from creation and nonredemption from redemption.[30] The biblical narrative becomes the mise- en-scène to this:As the fundament of Judaism, the Bible is what ostensibly removes its readers from the habitual and the quotidian, the locus of encounter between humans and the unseeable face of God.[31] Translation is what seeks to bridge this encounter through the mediative presence of language.

* * *

Although every work of Jewish philosophy—perhaps even every work of Judaism—is ultimately an act of conceptual translation, my concern in

this study focuses primarily on those works that reflect theoretically yet specifically on an actual engagement with translative activity. What does it mean, for example, to move between languages? What is lost and what gained? Is this translation simply about getting a new generation, one that no longer understands Hebrew, to encounter its specter in a living language? If so, what happens to the original language of revelation? How does one create the old in the new, maintain the particular in light of the universal? If translation forges links between the past and the present, the Hebraic and non- Hebraic, it also threatens to undermine their points of contact, revealing the fragility of using one language to express the contents of another. The creation of the one thus threatens the other with erasure.

These questions, perhaps more theoretical and meta- historical than the ones Friedrich envisaged above, must also form part of our analysis. Such questions give rise to other ones, as endless as the endless deferral of translation. But where does all this leave the work to be translated? Or, more specific to the concerns of this project, what happens to the biblical narrative once it becomes transcribed into a vernacular? Is the message of the biblical narrative enrobed in the very texture of the Bible's language, or does it reside behind its language, unconfined by the words in which it is expressed? If the former, translation becomes impossible since its meaning is tied up in the flow of Hebrew; if the latter, language becomes unimportant since the message is supra- linguistic. But how can meaning exist, *pace* Maimonides, outside of language?

Although all the thinkers who are the subject of this study certainly differ when it comes to what translation is supposed to signify or the meaning that is to be illumined in the cross- pollinations between languages and cultures, they are all in firm agreement that the translative act is not solely about philological accuracy. For them, translation gets at something deeper: a core of meaning that is either hidden deep within or, in some cases, that other translations have missed. Translation thus becomes a true philosophical activity, the actualization of the narrative's potential fullness and something that seeks to verify the narrative as a source of wisdom. But translation is also part mirror wherein one sees in the Bible's words a reflection of oneself and of one's own understanding of what Judaism is or should be.

Translation in Search of Dreamtime

Translation is self- confirming since the task of reading, of translating, is to make correlations between the biblical narrative's texture and its deeper senses; to develop links between ideas developed in non- Jewish contexts

and that vast skein that informs and sustains Hebraic cultural and religious imaginings. Since the Bible is the ground of Jewish existence, its narrativity becomes the first point of departure to absorb, realign, or subvert dominant cultural and intellectual forms. Modes of reading the Bible—themselves reflected in the very activity of its translation—often seek to make explicit one particular dimension of the narrative's polymorphism. Standing on the level of Hebrew's ground, translation leads down through the dark passages that simultaneously link and separate the meanings in and of languages.

The works to be examined in this study thus represent the intersection of cultural moments, intellectual orientations, and linguistic pollinations. However, if on one level this intersection takes place on the fault lines between "Jew" and "non- Jew,"[32] its most tangible aftershocks vibrate within, where translation becomes the clash of memory and reality: how things are; how things were; and how things might have been otherwise. This takes us out of the cultural field of production and situates us, perhaps a little less firmly, in the dreamtime of memory.[33]

The distorted presence of memory often coincided with a perceived absence, whether political or intellectual. If Maimonides could point to an empty and silent palimpsest beneath the Hebrew of the Bible, Saadya Gaon or Judah Messer Leon could equally point to a pristine text that was the font of all poetic and rhetorical genius. Translation—to reiterate—is inseparable from the gaze of the translator and the cultural fantasy wrought by the present moment.

As the tool of memory and imagination, biblical translation affords a series of strategies based on a perceived identity.[34] Defining terms such as "Jewishness" in the present is often mediated through the perception of such identity in the past and by using the biblical narrative as mirror. The translation of the past into the present—or even the present into the past—thus provides a perceived stability to mediate a variety of cultural and intellectual tensions.

Translation as Cultural Production

If the translative act reflects and refracts a particular mode of being in the world, it must also be seen as a form of cultural production. The products of translative activity, the translation, themselves become literary artifacts wherein a translator lends a certain coherence to the various structures of his or her social, cultural, religious, economic, and intellectual contexts. As a subset of literature, translation cannot be understood apart from the "total context" of a particular culture.[35] As in the case of literature pro-

duced by Jews more generally, this total context must be expanded to include not only the specific contexts in which Jews lived and wrote, but also the broader non- Jewish contexts that governed aesthetic production. It is the creativity around these borders or margins—both the Jewish and the non- Jewish; the Hebraic and the non-Hebraic—that also generated Jewish philosophical activity. The Bible translations undertaken by Jewish philosophers thus permit us a glimpse at the frontiers of this creativity, focusing on how they encountered "foreign" ideas, struggled with them, and ultimately tried to embed them within the biblical narrative so as to domesticate them.

Yet aesthetic value, as socially constituted, is contingent upon a complex set of multiple and overlapping factors.[36] These factors include—but are certainly not limited to—institutional frameworks, social relations, political acts, and, especially, in the case of Jewish writers, the complex set of relations, both hidden and manifest, that govern minority- majority relations. For wherever Jews lived they did so amongst majority cultures governed by their own fields of literary and aesthetic production. The works examined here emerge out of what Bhabha calls the "inter" or the space in between.[37] This space or field of production takes us beyond the analyses of Bakhtin, Bourdieu, and others, placing us on the margins where we witness the dynamic interplay between majority and minority cultures wherein the latter struggles with and tries to overcome the aporia of the former. Drawn to the dizzying heights of non- Jewish literary, aesthetic, and philosophical production, Jewish thinkers were also forced to confront the potential disconnect between such production and that found within the Hebrew Bible, a work in possession of its own distinct rhythms and pace.[38]

Rather than maintain that a culture is composed of a set of stable and closed representations, beliefs, and symbols, I prefer to interrogate the notion that there exists a stable and uniform identity that moves eternally and effortlessly throughout history. Biblical translation permits such an interrogation because it reveals clearly and often glaringly the embrace of so- called "non-Jewish" elements.The biblical text subsequently becomes the discursive site between a past perceived from the vantage point of the present. Translation thus facilitates the creation of manifold Jewish identities.

Judaism—like any collective or even individual—maintains a certain degree of flexibility and at the same time a sufficient measure of coherence. As a result, it is important to think about identity in general and Jewish identity in particular as a series of constant reimaginings and reinventions.[39] An example of what I mean by this comes by way of Miriam Bodian's discussion of the invention of Sephardic Jewishness among crypto-

Jews after their departure from the Iberian peninsula. For instance, she writes,

> living in Calvinist Amsterdam, they were more conspicuously Iberian than ever before. This was a source of pride and an important component of their developing sense of collective self. As practicing Jews in a Christian environment, there was also a clear religious boundary separating them from the majority society. Both in the habits they had assimilated from Spanish and Portuguese society and in their practice of Jewish law, they suddenly became what they had never been before, a well- defined group.[40]

The formation of a Sephardic Jewish identity, as Bodian well argues, was neither given nor based on the simple recuperation of a lost group identity. On the contrary, it was part and parcel of active cultural work and construction. Majorities are often responsible for the production and sustenance of a minority's collective self. However, rather than regard these collectives—whether dominant or subaltern—as fixed or stable, it is profitable to be sensitive to the contiguities between them in ways that do not necessarily reinscribe universal characteristics.[41]

To return this discussion to the topic of biblical translation, it is important to be aware that there is no pure Jewish reading of the biblical narrative, in part because there can be no pure reading at all. Certainly the very act of reading the Bible by a Jew becomes a Jewish act; however, at least in the periods and translations to be discussed here, that which is encountered, that which is read, and that which is translated is always encountered through the murky waters where the past confronts the present, where reality slips into memory, and where imposed (and, by definition, artificial) borderlines separate "Jewish" and "non- Jewish."

Historical Features

Translation, of course, only occurs in historical contexts, and what counts as literature and artistic production is circumscribed by such contexts. To use the categories of Pierre Bourdieu, art works are not simply the product of creativity or of literariness, but emerge as the expression of a larger field of cultural production.[42] Framed more succinctly, artistic creation can only be understood in relation to a complex amalgam of material, social, and political forces that emerge from specific historical situations. In the present section I wish to consider something of these forces as a way to illumine further the production of translation by Jewish philosophers.

Framed as a series of question, to be picked up in the chapters that follow, we need to ask ourselves: How did various historical backgrounds affect the general types of translative activities carried out by Jews in gen-

eral and Jewish philosophers in particular? For instance, very few, if any, Christian or Muslim philosophers translated their respective scriptures into vernaculars.[43] What, then, led Jewish philosophers to engage in the practice of translating the biblical narrative? What, in turn, did this activity allow them to accomplish, whether philosophically or culturally? Is there an inverse relationship between subaltern status on the one hand and translation on the other? I trust that the answers to such questions will contribute to our appreciation and further understanding of Jewish philosophical writings.

As I argued in *The Art of Dialogue in Jewish Philosophy,* it is important to expand our understanding of Jewish philosophy by examining its so-called "secondary" forms.[44] These include, but are certainly not limited to, dialogues, biblical commentaries, encyclopedias, and philosophical literature. To this list, I contend, must be added Bible translations. For these translations permit us to glimpse at philosophy, not in isolation, but as related to a larger set of historical concerns. All the individuals who are the subject of this study were certainly aware of the literary and aes thetic codes that determined artistic production in their respective cultures. Furthermore, these translations enable us to see the arts of philosophy put into practice.

When put against a broad swatch of historical contexts, it soon becomes evident that biblical translation is intimately connected to authority, particularly what should count as an authoritative reading of the Bible and thus of Judaism. The authority of the Bible was constantly reconfigured and reconstituted in an attempt to create and justify various models of Judaism that fitted almost seamlessly with larger artistic and intellectual trends. Taken as a whole, all these translations were a series of attempts to make the Bible a part of and as something superior to the great works of literature produced in the cultures in which Jews found themselves.[45]

When philosophers undertook to translate the Bible, whether in part or in whole, they attempted to consolidate their particular reading of Judaism and thereby wrest it away from competing readings. Philosophical readings of the biblical narrative—despite protests by the philosophers to the contrary—were anything but conventional. Bible translation thereby became the primary arena wherein we witness something of the struggle over the competing readings of Judaism in the premodern period.

Translation justified and legitimated a particular reading and thereby elevated one particular paradigm over others. Disagreement about translation— what was in the text, or at least just behind it—inevitably meant disagreements about the text's intentionality. An interwoven set of religious, intellectual, and political forces were conferred upon any reading of the Bible. Those engaged in the translative act, however, rarely en-

visaged their activities as innovative; to the contrary, they saw themselves as taking up a semi- prophetic act, reclaiming and reconstituting an original text.

Literary Features

> In recent years, perhaps because of the increasing primacy of linguistics, there has been a tendency to deemphasize the decidedly literary nature of translation. There is no such thing—nor can there be—as a science of translation, although translation can and should be studied scientifically. Just as literature is a specialized function of languages, so translation is a specialized function of literature.[46]

Octavio Paz here points to one of the central arguments of this study: the activity of translating the Bible, as a subspecies of translation itself, is primarily a literary affair. Moreover, the literariness of this endeavor cannot be separated from contemporaneous non- Jewish aesthetic contexts. When, for example, Saadya Gaon attempts to demonstrate the literary elegance of the biblical narrative, it is certainly no coincidence that he lived in an Arabophone environment that put both an aesthetic and religious premium on elegance. Or, that Maimonides' desire to uncover the hidden and silent meaning of biblical language drew upon Islamicate hermeneutics that turned on the outer/inner (*zāhir/bāṭin*) pivot. Or, that Judah Messer Leon's uncovering of the Bible's rhetorical core occurred in an age that had moved well beyond the Aristotelian preference for demonstrative syllogism over poetry and rhetoric. Even Buber and Rosenzweig's desire to find a pristine and raw Hebraic consciousness that departed, in its very mode of being, from Indo-Europeanism cannot be divorced from the larger Weimar trend of turning away from conventional artistic and literary forms.

This literary retrieval of authentic Jewish existence occurs in the space or spaces that open up between original and translation. Since terms such as authenticity and identity reveal a fragility in their construction, the area in which such terms are played out occur in the very activities associated with translation. Here the literary imagination arising from Jewish sources confronts the aesthetic contours of the larger civilizations in which Jews found themselves. In the play space afforded by the translation, a national literature could be imagined. Although the Bible becomes the *sine qua non* of Jewish religious and aesthetic being, the manner of its construction and its imaginative presence are defined using the categories and standards inherited from larger non- Jewish contexts.

The literary and the aesthetic emerge as the catalyst for approaching the Bible in the first place. As the mark of divine revelation and as one of the symbols of Jewish distinction, the biblical text becomes the perceived font of all literary (and, by extension, philosophical) activity. If in the premodern period the Bible was not reduced to or even primarily defined as a work of literature, its literary dimensions were nonetheless paramount and were something that could be cast and recast or imagined and reimagined in different eras and in often radically different contexts.

Certainly what constitutes "literature" and "aesthetics" differs in these manifold historical and cultural contexts. Rather than erase such differences by means of generic terms, I simply underscore here the importance of translation as a way for philosophers to show both Jews and non- Jews something of Judaism's genius. The specific historical details of this are explored and adumbrated in greater detail in the coming chapters.

If, however, biblical translation is an activity of literary and cultural aesthetics, we must not lose sight, as Rosenzweig reminds us, that "the goal" of such translation "is not beauty but fidelity" (*Nicht um Schönheit geht es, sondern um Treue*): "What should be judged is not a 'work of art' but a translation, its fidelities and infidelities. And what is to be accepted or discarded, in detail or in the whole, is the belief that stands behind the fidelity, behind its manner and extent. The translation may not compel that sort of judgment; the thing translated surely does."[47] Although the relationship between beauty and truth has frequently been a fractured one in the history of western philosophy, the Jewish philosophers examined here rarely separated the perceived truth of the Bible from its perceived literary elegance. Of course, the definitions of "perceived truth" and "perceived literary elegance" were anything but stable. The dialectic between the translatable and the translated is a complex issue that cannot be confined solely to the realm of literature. It is for this reason that it becomes necessary to delve more deeply into the historical and philosophical contexts of this process.

Philosophical Features

If an adequate understanding of translation demands sensitivity to the cultural, historical, and literary records, it is also necessary to attune ourselves to the philosophical register that informs these texts justifying the translative act. Since these translations were produced by Jews who contended that the best way to understand Judaism was through philosophy, this understanding informed their desire to translate in the first place and so permeates their encounter, reading, and the subsequent metamorpho-

sis of the biblical narrative. All the thinkers in this study lived in distinct temporal and geographical milieux, and thus their readings of the biblical narrative were informed by different philosophical schools (e.g., Neoplatonism, Aristotelianism, Renaissance humanism). However, on a fundamental level all struggled with the ambiguity between language and nonlanguage, verbal expression and silence, and with the issue of how language could ideally overcome this tension even as it was firmly embedded within linguisticity.

At the heart of this study, there reverberate a series of tensions that turn on the dialectic between language's transparency and opaqueness, revelation and concealment. If the Torah bespeaks God's message, why does its language need to be translated into other idioms? If its language—including but not limited to its various anthropomorphisms—is potentially embarrassing to the philosopher, does this have any effect on the text's deeper message? The widening of the gap between language and what resides behind it, just beyond human comprehension, potentially destabilizes the Torah, making it a nontext within a text whose actual words mislead and curtail proper understanding. The activity of translation now becomes the primary means by which one gets at the nontext or urtext, bypassing the fragility of language, moving beyond the materiality of words to the formal presence of silence, the fullness of nonlanguage.

All the individuals who make up this study were confronted with the notion that something must reside behind the language in which the Torah communicates, something discernible in the text's silent traces. The desire to uncover this was what led to the translative activity in the first place. However, we must not lose sight of the fact that this creates a potential aporia: If the true meaning of the Torah occurs just beyond the text, (1) what do we need the literal text for? and (2) what happens when we have accessed the truth behind the text, something that virtually all the thinkers in this study claimed to have done?

The desire to overcome this aporia, to unleash the eternal features of the Torah's nonlanguage that have become embedded in the quotidian nature of human language, makes translation necessary for all these individuals. Although this principle may be framed somewhat differently by each of these thinkers, informing their desire to translate in one way or another was the notion that the translative act is the attempt to get behind language in order to access something of nonlanguage.

* * *

In this chapter, I have attempted to bring some sort of order to the potentially unwieldy sets of issues that constellate around translative activity, thereby laying the interpretive ground for what follows. To do this

I have largely tried to unravel what I regard as some of the central and interrelated processes that make translation possible. These processes—the cultural, the historical, the literary, and the philosophical—return throughout the coming pages, both as separate and as interconnected entities, in order to illumine the translative act in various Jewish philosophical cultures, including our own.

2
THE FORGETTING OF HISTORY AND THE MEMORY OF TRANSLATION

The task of translating the Bible was as much a salvific act as it was one of scholarship. The struggle with temporality and the attempt to confront the ontological hiatus between pure and mundane languages resides at the heart of virtually all the translation projects discussed in this study. In the present chapter the focus switches from purely theoretical concerns to ones of history or, perhaps better, to a- history and toward the distortive glances of memory that emerge from the confrontation between past, present, and future. Here history and the historical record again slide into the background; only now they do so not because they take a back seat to theorizing as they did in the previous chapter, but because the past, shed of its specificities, becomes implicated in the formation of authenticity. No longer understood as an unfolding series of events in a narrative setting, the past takes on a set of meanings as projected from a future. From the manifold intersections of imagined pasts, presents, and futures the world opens up in moments of vision and its projection becomes the perceived ground of unconcealment.

To forget the Hebrew of the Bible was tantamount to a loss of memory and all the national fragmentation that this implied. Translating the Bible into contemporaneous idioms, *if done properly,* could both save the antiquity of the Hebrew and yet also forever change the contours of a host language. The originary moment of Hebraic revelation could only be mediated paradoxically through another language. It was the semantics and grammar of these other languages that pointed to the traces of the former. The end result is that the originary moment of revelation came to be imagined as a rupture into the quotidian of the present. All this, as I argue in this chapter, was facilitated by the translative act. This functioned as an ongoing modern revelation in which the memory of the past was foregrounded against present concerns that would anticipate a future perfect.

In this chapter I provide an in- depth analysis of the two thinkers who bookend this study: Saadya Gaon and Franz Rosenzweig. If it can

be shown that the topic discussed here—the filiations between forgetting and memory, history and translation—exist in my *termini post quem* and *ad quem,* then I believe with confidence that the same holds true for the other thinkers in this study who inhabit the temporal periods in between.

* * *

Like all Jews who sought to translate the Bible into the vernacular, both Rosenzweig[1] and Saadya were motivated by what they considered to be a general state of neglect of the Hebrew language among their contemporaries. This neglect was not simply a historical process concerning the rise and fall of languages but was intimately connected to the unfolding of the universe from an originary point, and the word and world's redemptive return to this point. Although the relationship of language to ontology is perhaps most poetically and articulately described by Rosenzweig, its clearest archival record remains Saadya's *Commentary to the Sefer Yeẓirah,* a text that is foundational to all of Saadya's translative and commentarial activity.

Both framed this neglect in terms of forgetting—a forgetting of language, a forgetting of being, and a forgetting of all the religious obligations that flowed from such activity. This forgetting was linked to the erasure of both cultural and scriptural memory. Language was not just connected to communication and social entertainment, but interwoven with a perceived authenticity, the Jewish ability to be both home and not home, to be in time and beyond time. The ontological filiations between word and world witnessed in Rosenzweig's and Saadya's theories of translation were ultimately grounded in precisely these twin notions of authenticity and memory of a past that would be future. Authenticity and memory, however, were increasingly encroached upon by the claims of German Idealism and Karaism on the level of philosophy, by *Bildung* and *Arabiyya* on the level of cultural aesthetics, and by German and Arabic on the level of language.

The flip side of this forgetting was seen to be a youthful romance with another language and all the poetic and rhapsodic infatuations that such a romance entailed. The perceived musicality in the adopted language became falsely associated with tone- deafness in the originary one. In order to counteract this, each sought to fabricate harmonic and linguistic flows between Hebrew and their adopted languages by creating a series of channels that would fuse on the level of semantics the two languages. Contextually, their translations were certainly related to contemporaneous theories that connected language, linguistic expression, and aesthetics to peoplehood. Whether framed as the inimitability of the Arabic Qurʾān or as the racial and linguistic purity of the German *Volk,* language defined the

essential characteristics of Arab- ness or of German-ness. It should come as no surprise that when Saadya and Rosenzweig reflected on Hebrew and its correlations and disparities with Arabic or German, they employed categories derived from their larger surroundings. My interest, however, is less with these larger surroundings than with their individual thinking about language and with how each sought to construct an aesthetics of memory based on a complex dialectic of forgetting and un- forgetting.

The linguistic foregrounding of past and future in the present formed a clearing for isolating a series of reverberations between Jewishness and non- Jewishness.The mediative role offered by translation enabled Hebrew to slip into both the linguistic and ontologic structures of another language, thereby framing Hebrew—and ultimately Judaism—in the light of the other language and illuminating the living quality of this other language through the specter of Hebrew's nonliving qualities. This, of course, also functioned as an apologetic claim. The palimpsest of Hebrew emerges as the guarantor and touchstone of vibrancy for other languages, which can only emerge as living and dynamic when the specter of Hebrew breathes life into them from outside the text and from behind the word.

Yet if Hebrew breathes life into these other languages, it symbiotically requires their word- blood and grammar-cells for nourishment. Hebrew is thus kept alive by means of its relations to other languages. As a result, both Rosenzweig and Saadya pay significant attention to the space in between the two languages—the silences, the breathings, the formal constraints. It is these phenomena and not just the transcription of words and the transference of meanings that provide the various linguistic and semiotic strategies that allow Hebrew to both open up and be opened up by another language.

If one impetus behind Rosenzweig's and Saadya's respective translative activities was to stem the tide of forgetting, another was the desire to (re-)create a series of memories that—while hoary and labyrinthine with distance—were very much grounded in present concerns. The lyricality of a Hebrew transcribed into a staccato Arabic or German enabled the former to embed itself within the contemporary aesthetic ideals of the latter languages. Hebrew's traces now inform other semiotics and other writing, its silent echoes resonating through foreign linguistic articulations. The foreign thus creates the authentic and the authentic the foreign. The modern establishes the ancient and the ancient the modern. The past remembered becomes a future anticipated.

For both Rosenzweig and Saadya, Hebrew becomes a constituent part of the Ursprache, the potential for language as such, a silence that represents not the absence of language but its fullness. This silent speech functions as the originary poetic language, the language of creation, the lan-

guage of a Book from which all other books must ultimately derive their potency and their meaning. The Hebrew of the Bible—the Hebrew that defined Judaism and the Jewish people—represents but one idiom of this divine speech that does not speak, thereby making Hebrew (like all languages) translatable and allowing Hebrew to absorb another language and forever change it. According to Rosenzweig,

> For the voice of this book [the Bible] [*die Stimme dieses Buches*] is not to be enclosed in any space—not in the inner sanctum of a church, not in the linguistic sanctum of a people, not in the circle of the heavenly images moving above a nation's sky. Rather this voice seeks again and again to resound from outside [*will immer wieder von draußen schallen*]—from outside this church, this people, this heaven. It does not keep its sound from echoing in this or that restricted space, but it wants itself to remain free [*aber sie selber will frei bleiben*]. If somewhere it has become a familiar customary possession, it must again and anew, as a foreign and unfamiliar sound [*als fremder, unvertrauter Laut*] from outside stir up the complacent satedness of its alleged possessor.[2]

In his *Sefer ha- Egron*,a work meant to create a Hebrew- language lexicon for poets in order to facilitate acrostics and rhyme, Saadya also connects language, translation, and memory/forgetting. He writes that

> he who wants to acquire knowledge [*ʿilm*] must study in the companionship of friends, to persevere and not stop lest one forgets the different subjects that make up the science.
>
> The prophets exhorted this and it should be clear to the wise: "Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at my door" [Prov. 8:34]. The prophets also announce that the main sources of remembrance are perseverance [*al-mulāzama*] and exhausting one's energies [*al- mudhābita*]. They also remark that the loss of perseverance is the greatest cause of forgetting [*indirāsa*]: "Where there is no vision, the people cast of restraint, but the one that keeps the law is happy" [Prov. 29:18].[3]

In their different ways, both Rosenzweig and Saadya signal the radical otherness of biblical language. For Rosenzweig, this language has become too familiar, coming from inside as opposed to from without and it is fettered by Luther's German translation;[4] for Saadya, it has become too unfamiliar, in danger of fragmentation and of being forgotten through lack of perseverance. The over- vigilance of the former gives way to a dearth of vigilance for the latter. The uncanniness of the biblical narrative risks either being- at-home-in-the-world or falling-through-the-fissures-of-peoplehood. To correct this general state of decay, both Saadya and Rosenzweig sought to translate and maintain the autonomy of Hebrew by hebraizing Arabic and German, respectively.

Both had to take what they considered to be the essential core of Hebrew revelation and harness it to a new language. That is, they both conceived

of translation, not literally, but in ways that reflected—and challenged—contemporary aesthetics. For Rosenzweig, this was through recreating the rhythm and breath of human speech;[5] for Saadya, it was through rhyme, tonality, and rhythm that could compete with Arabic poetic meter. For Rosenzweig, it was taking the biblical narrative back to its ancient origins; for Saadya, it was bringing it up to date using the mesmerizing verse of Arab poets.

Both were presented with the same problem. How, using another language, could one quite literally reveal an original? How can one visible and tangible language point to another that is invisible and intangible? How does an unspoken and original language speak in a spoken and living one? What is lost and what gained? Framed somewhat differently, could the latter reveal the palimpsest of the former? How can the act of translation render the specter of the ur- language? If so, what might this say about language? Silence? The space in between?

Nineteenth- century German and tenth-centuryArabic spun in their languages and syntax all that was artistic and cultural, both marking for its speakers—whether Jew or Gentile—the respective high points of western civilization. Not to frame Judaism in their grammars was to risk ossification. Moreover, both used the literary features of their profane vernaculars to wax poetic about the contours of Hebrew's sacrality. For Rosenzweig, this meant casting his work in the literary aspects of Schelling's "narrative philosophy" [*erzählende Philosophie*],[6] an attempt to show how language, including its silences, mediates the various relationships between God, the world, and humans in time and in temporality.

Saadya, in a similar vein, had no choice but to compose his work—both translative and poetic—in a way that revolved around the Arabic term *faṣīḥ* (Heb., *tashut*), a term which subsumed all that was considered good, beautiful, and pure about language. Whereas the Arab grammarians considered the language par excellence to be Arabic, Saadya argued that Hebrew possessed the same properties and his *Egron* is, *inter alia,* an attempt to make the same case for Hebrew. It is like the work of Rosenzweig: a "narrative philosophy," in which is subsumed a theory of God's relationship to humanity through the ontology of language.

Chronological Inversions: Rosenzweig's Precursorship of Saadya

The historical study of philosophy in general and of Jewish philosophy in particular prides itself on terms such as "influences" and "anticipations." Earlier thinkers are framed as having envisaged a problem (one that we

often articulate from the vantage point of the present) and setting out to solve it, and their solutions are viewed either directly as "influences" or indirectly as "anticipations" of what later thinkers will do.[7] Using such a model, we certainly could, with little ado or difficulty, make the claim that the lexicographical and grammatical writings of Saadya Gaon, not to mention his translation of the Bible into Arabic, somehow "anticipate" those of Franz Rosenzweig.[8] "Anticipation" is the word usually invoked to argue that, even though a later author may not have read a particular earlier one, he nonetheless framed his problems in ways that are perhaps not unlike that particular earlier thinker.[9]

Yet what if we follow the path of Rosenzweig and start, not at the beginning, but at the end? Texts demand readers. Each reader reads texts in ways heretofore unread. In this Gadamerian "fusion of horizons" (*Horizontverschmelzung*),[10] the past is read using the contours of the present, anticipating a future that must ultimately be past again.[11] Each reading is an invention—an invention of text, of author, and of reader. Each reading, to invoke Borges, makes its own precursors.[12] We can accordingly read Saadya Gaon before Franz Rosenzweig, but once we read the latter, we can never read the former in the same way. If historically we must read Rosenzweig in Saadya's shadow, we can ahistorically read Saadya using the light supplied by Rosenzweig. Indeed, it is not just that we can read Saadya in this manner, we must.

There is ample reward for such a reading in the works of both Saadya and Rosenzweig. Both conceptualize language as moving back to an originary point and therefore as not progressing linearly. Language moves backward from present usage to past imagining and from the obsoleteness of the present to the perceived authenticity of the past that is also future. In so doing, both sought to rethink, and in many instances rewrite, the languages of their day—whether Arabic or German—as a way, to use the words of Klaus Reichert, to open "up new possibilities by recalling old or lost ones, unused potentialities."[13] In this way, both thinkers project their own fantasies of authenticity onto an invented past in which a beautiful and authentic Hebrew defined Jewish Dasein. As such, both make attempts to invent a Hebrew using another language—indeed, using its very vocabulary, syntax, and grammar. Hebraized Arabic and hebraized German point beyond themselves to reveal a glory that was past and that will ideally be future again. To use the words of Rosenzweig: "And if Judaism is a force of the past, a peculiarity of the present—to us it is the goal of every future. And since future, therefore a world of its own, in spite of the world that surrounds us. And since a world of its own, therefore rooted in the soul of each and everyone in his or her own language."[14]

For Rosenzweig, Judaism's ahistorical language is akin to a shifting

energy field that is the sum of different vectors moving around and colliding with one another. This movement makes Hebrew distinct from the manifold cultures that surround it and that seek to appropriate it. Rather than succumb to these surrounding cultures, Rosenzweig, like Saadya, seeks to renew Hebrew and all that this language carries with it into the present and into the future. The great paradox is that this renewal could only happen using the existing semiotic structures of living languages already in place—in Rosenzweig's case, German; in Saadya's, Arabic. That is, one could return to the past's authenticity only through the linguistic mechanisms of a present spoken language. Only by getting at Hebrew by linguistically reshaping German and Arabic would it be possible to prevent linguistic and cultural acculturation—the retrieval of a past from a present looking toward an uncertain future.

Rosenzweig on Translation

In "Die Schrift und Luther," Rosenzweig contends that ideas cannot be rendered free of words: "It is impossible to transmit the content without at the same time transmitting the form. How something is said is not peripheral to what is said [*Für das, was gesagt wird, ist es nicht nebensächlich, wie es gesagt wird*]."[15] Translation often fails precisely because it is most interested in transmitting content—ideas behind language—as opposed to the very linguistic texture and grammatical forms in which such content is embedded.[16] It is the forms of language that the translator, Hermes- like, must meander between, creating his own channels that permit the transportation of meaning across the chasms of space and time, lest the very words the translator seeks to convey crystallize and shatter. The creation of "a wavelike flow of words through the sentence-bed [*das wellenhaften Fließen der Worte durch das Satzbett*]"[17] ensures a dynamic process in which the translator does not passively absorb words [*Wörter*] from the dictionary but becomes the active creator of ideas [*Worte*].[18] Language thus becomes the quiddity of narration, in which reality is experienced as clothed in the temporality of speech. The art of translation thus becomes indistinct from the act of *Sprachdenken.*

Translation, perhaps owing to its practical necessity, becomes theoretically impossible. Rosenzweig describes it as "serving two masters" (*zwei Herren*),[19] inhabiting two modes- of-being and bespeaking two distinct cultural vocabularies. The translator is thus a facilitator of languages—the *moletz ha-kalām,* to use the words of Saadya that we will encounter below—the creator of new words and new worlds. Because of the intimate connection that Rosenzweig draws between language and ontology, speaking and

the unfolding of the world, translation is not simply the act of mediation between people, between languages, or between cultures;[20] rather, translation enables one—as listener, as translator, or as both—to open oneself up to another; and it is in this act of opening up that one encounters the presence of another and it is through this encounter that one ultimately gazes into the divine countenance.[21]

This encounter can occur because translation takes place around what he conceives to be a single linguisticity that envelops all language and that gives way to an essential unity underpinning all language. In the afterwordto his translation of the Halevi poems, Rosenzweig writes: "One can translate because in every language is contained the possibility of every other language; one may translate if one can realize this possibility through cultivation of such linguistic fallow land [*durch Urbarmachung solchen sprach lichen Brachlands*]; and one should translate so that the day of the harmony [*Eintracht*] of languages, which can grow only in each individual language, not in the empty space 'between' them, may come."[22]

Rosenzweig here uses a series of agricultural metaphors to argue not for the establishment of a common language that all peoples ideally speak—some form of messianic Esperanto—but to show that what happens in one language will ultimately influence what happens in another. Just as the Bible forever redirected the linguistic trajectory of the ancient Israelites, it must ultimately do the same for every language into which it is translated. The translator plants one language in the soil of another whereupon he watches its autochthonous forms grow and flourish.[23] In "Die Schrift und Luther," he switches from agricultural to geological metaphors to describe the translator and his act. The translator must now connect words (*Wörter*) and ideas (*Worte*) between the source and the target languages on the level of roots, which "the surface of words only let us dimly intuit" (*die an der Wortoberfläche nur erahnbare*).[24] These roots, paradoxically, are ultimately responsible for maintaining the boundaries between languages. The unity of languages is supported by difference and this facilitates the dynamic motion between them.

Staying with the geological motif, Rosenzweig argues that it is incumbent upon the translator to pay attention to "the glimmer emanating from the veins of the text itself" (*aber auch von dem Aufschimmern der Adern des Texts selbst darf er das Auge nicht hochmütig abwenden*).[25] This glimmer is presumably that which attracts the translator to the source language in the first place. Yet one must be drawn to this glimmer and not blinded by it. Applying this metaphor to the act of translation, one must not be so bedazzled by the formal and categorical embellishments of the target language, the language into which one translates, that one loses sight of that which one translates. According to Rosenzweig, this is one of the main problems

besetting translation fixated solely on the *Wissenschaft*- based model of philology that sought to harness rather than celebrate this *différence*.[26] On the contrary, Rosenzweig, both in his Halevi poems and—along with Buber—in his Bible translation, sought to tease out the otherness of Hebrew and make its uncanniness wrench the German out of its familiarity.[27]

It is the shattering of the dialectic between the transgression and non-transgression of linguistic possibility that drives translation forward, forging new inroads into the target language and forever changing its texture. The translator becomes a poet who embraces both the traces of the language to be translated and the new forms into which it must be translated. This becomes an act of perceived authenticity, taking the Jewish past and putting it into a German present with an eye to future renewal. Alternatively, and perhaps equally, it represents the construction of a German future present and its embeddedness in a Hebraic past.[28] In many ways this was the antithesis of what Luther had done when he wrenched the German present from contemporaneous forms and threw it upon a biblical but not necessarily Hebraic past.

Near the end of "Die Schrift und Luther," Rosenzweig discusses how in certain roots "the translator reaches the boundary of linguistic possibility [*die Grenze des Sprachmöglichen*], which the root meaning permits him to see beyond but not to walk across." Moses- like, the translator glimpses the text's sacred landscape without ever being able to enter its original form.[29] The translator must orient himself both toward an original that can never be completely rendered anew and also into a new work that must become its own original. There thus emerges a tremendous paradox in Rosenzweig's discussion of translation. On the one hand, translation must not simply be a form of mimesis or "free- rendering" (*nachdichten*) of an original. Yet, on the other, it must also not be so literal as to deprive the original of its life force. Although he claims in the afterword to the Halevi poems that his translations "want to be nothing other than translation[s],"[30] Rosenzweig subsequently writes: "How important the imitation of the rhyme form [*Reimform*] can be is seen even from the fact that in the poems under discussion the rhyme is not merely the mortar that glues one stone to another, as in modern poetic forms, but almost throughout, at least in addition, it is its very building material [*Baumaterial*], the unified tone of which determines the total impression given by the façade."[31]

The translator[32] must do the impossible: create and destroy language at one and the same time. The creation of one language corresponds to the dismantling of another. At the same time, however, the translator resurrects both languages by establishing a series of trajectories between the language- elements of the originary and those of the target. As these ele-

ments approach one another, the possibility of their interaction becomes possible, thereby establishing paths between them. These paths (*Bahnen*) subsequently make possible communication between present and past, past and future, future and present. Since the translator is able to let languages speak to one another, using the contours of one to illumine those of the other—and presumably vice versa—his act is a creative and divinely inspired one.

It is also a destructive act, however. In bringing one language to another, both to each other, the translator potentially destroys both in taking them back to their original and to the one language that admits of neither dialect nor idiom.[33] This translative activity paradoxically turns on silence. The silences between words, including breath, become on the level of the text the silence out of which emerges God's call—the call to which humans move and respond.[34] Just as creation (and revelation) only makes sense in terms of redemption, when speech reverts to silence, so, too, does translation only make sense when it ceases to be.[35]

In playing with language, translation becomes the putting- into-practice of a method of narration, what Rosenzweig calls "narrative philosophy" (*erzählende Philosophie*): the thinking of time and/or temporal thinking.[36] Since everything that exists articulates itself in language, ideas cannot be borne by anything other than words. To use his formulation, "The world is never without the word, and it only exists in the word, and without the word, it would itself also not exist" (*die Welt ist nie ohne das Wort, ja sie ist nur im Wort, und ohne das Wort wäre sie selber auch nicht*).[37] Words themselves both create and express this ontological temporality in the three modalities that we experience: that which is always already here (creation), that which is (revelation), and that which is always yet to come (revelation).[38] The translator—as a new thinker—must think in time and must think dialogically: the spontaneity of translating, as opposed to reading, enables the modern and assimilated reader to learn to speak anew with an other, with the past, and ultimately with God.[39] In *Der Stern der Erlösung,* Rosenzweig makes language central to such encounter, for

> to trust [language] is easy, for it is within us and around us [*sie ist in uns und um uns*]; and when it comes to us from the "outside," nothing other than it echoes our "inside" toward the "outside." The word is the same, whether heard or spoken [*Das Wort ist das gleiche wie es gehört und wie es gesprochen wird*]. The ways of God and the ways of man are different, but the word of God and the word of man are the same [*sind das gleiche*]. What man feels in his heart as his own human language is the word that has come from the mouth of God.[40]

Language must be living and not confined to the dictionary. Translation accordingly must not simply be about words—replacing a word in one language with its lexicographical synonym in another—but about getting

into the linguistic structures, what Rosenzweig calls "contours" (*die Konturen*),[41] and the configurations that connect the two languages. Despite the fact that Rosenzweig, as I noted above, spends much time on proclaiming the unity of all languages, he is acutely aware of the differences, of the dissonances, and of the ruptures between them: "Only respect for the distance involved makes it possible to leap over a ditch; he who starts by filling in the ditch cripples the powers of others to leap over it."[42]

This brings us to the monumental task of translating the Bible. Why would one undertake such a task? For whom? For the translator him- or herself? For others? If the former, why go to all the trouble and publish such a multi- volume work? Why not just reflect on language, mining root-veins that connect various linguistic structures and permutations without taking this extra step? If the latter, how can such a personal act of living with (at least) two languages—reflecting upon and illuminating their contours and interacting with them intimately on the level of dialogic—possibly be an inclusive activity? After all, Rosenzweig and Buber intended their Bible translation for those in possession of only one of the languages, the target one (i.e., German).

One can only do this if one has a larger set of theological claims to make; a set of claims that are worth publicizing and disseminating and that would moreover reach out, at least in theory, to every (German-speaking) Jew. For Rosenzweig, as I have already argued, this set of claims revolved around notions of Jewish authenticity, an authenticity that could presumably be uncovered from its embeddedness in ancient linguistic root- structures. Uncovering these Hebraic structures once removed in German translation would presumably facilitate their embrace, while simultaneously renewing German. Ideally, this twofold goal would impel a Jewish readership to move, paradoxically, beyond the German of German and beyond their German translation to a Hebrew palimpsest.

Translation is mimetic. It functions as a linguistic turning, a semantic tuning, creating an estrangement from the familiar and a familiarity with the strange. To do this, one had to write in one language using the structures of another and produce a set of meanings not of the translation but of the translated. This has the effect of liberating language in language and of producing meaning in the spaces in between. To use the words of Rosenzweig, the voice of this book (*die Stimme dieses Buches*), the Bible, "wants itself to remain free [*sie selber will frei beliben*]. If somewhere it has become a familiar, customary possession, it must again and anew, as a foreign and unfamiliar sound [*als fremder, unvertrauter Laut*] from outside [*von draußen*] stir up the complacent satedness of its alleged possessor."[43]

From the outside, translation must destroy the bonds of quaint possession; from the outside, language must shatter familiarity; from the outside,

translation must make the Bible newly approachable, without making it one more book in the cultural "treasure house" (*Schatzhaus*) of the world's literature. And finally, from the outside, translation must make the reader respond to its language and not simply read its words. This would have the effect of pulling the reader back "outside," to a language that opens up to the horizon of anticipation and to that language that will ultimately bespeak silently.

To contemplate such a translative project, however, it was first necessary to distance it from its competitors, in particular that of Luther.[44] Although Jews had previously translated the Bible into German,[45] it was the Luther translation that had truly captured a German readership since it became the "founding book" (*Grundbuch*), as Rosenzweig points out, "not only of a church . . . but of the national language itself" (*nicht nur einer Kirche . . . sondern der nationalen Sprache selber*).[46] However, to use Rosenzweig's terms, this twofold establishment was ultimately responsible for its becoming a "possession, a national possession" (*Besitz, nationaler Besitz*).[47] In contradistinction, Rosenzweig and Buber sought to reclaim both the German and the Hebrew of the biblical narrative. Gunther Plaut appropriately characterizes the translation as a "work of defiance."[48] Breaking with the more traditional models of German- Jewish acculturation and assimilation, this new translation would maintain Judaism's otherness and its lack of attachment to land, language, and conventional temporality.[49] Buber and Rosenzweig sought to make their translation different from German while at the same time using German; to use language to unspeak language in order to get at the silent speech that offers the potential for constant renewal. This apophatic act uses the one (or both) language(s) to create the possibility of the other (or neither).[50] However, it is paradoxical precisely because it uses the grammar and syntax of the one to reveal the un- grammar and un-syntax of the other. In his afterword to his Halevi translations, Rosenzweig writes that it is his goal not "to Germanize what is foreign [*das Fremde einzudeutschen*], but rather to make foreign what is German [*das Deutsche umzufremden*]."[51] For German to communicate the orality and antiquity of the Bible it must be an un- German German, a German that reflected and mirrored the idiosyncrasies of a Jewish minority within its midst. This is why the translation had to be finished by Buber—in Israel, not in Germany—for an audience that, again paradoxically, but this time also tragically, could no longer hear.

In many ways this was tantamount to the further exiling of Hebrew in order to reflect the Hebraizing of exile. Exile, for Rosenzweig, is defined by its relationship to *Schrift,* a relationship to both Scripture and writing simultaneously.[52] *Schrift* has priority and an ontological pre- temporality over non-*Schrift:* "The exiling of the environment is accomplished by means of

the constant presence of *Schrift.* With it, a different present slides itself in front of this environment and demotes it to the status of an illusion, or more precisely, a simile. So it is not that *Schrift* is adduced as an illustration (by way of simile) of life in the present; on the contrary, these events serve to elucidate *Schrift* and become a simile for it."[53]

Language takes priority over all else. This takes us back to the original task of the translator: since ideas cannot be rendered free of words, they must be born in their very fabric.[54] Like the poetic act, the translative one is artistic. Yet at the same time, the genius of the Hebrew language is that those who recite it (but never speak it) must remain fixed either on the page or in the formulaic language of the liturgy. This is not a language of everyday usage or a set of clichés appropriated by the aesthete for social entertainment; on the contrary, Hebrew takes one back to an originary moment in which the present is an illusion or a simile.

In part 3, book 1 of *Der Stern der Erlösung,* Rosenzweig discusses the three concepts that distinguish the Jewish people from all other nations: land, language, and law. Language, he claims, is—like land and law—something that, for most, is not eternal, but something that lives insofar as a people speaks it. Language thus has a unifying factor that connects a living people to an often- specific land.[55] Not so with Hebrew, however: "The eternal people lost its own language and everywhere speaks the language of its external destinies, the language of the people with whom it perchance dwells as a guest."[56] Whereas language traditionally locates a people in time, the language of Israel removes itself—and by extension Israel—from time and relocates it in eternity. Because Hebrew is disconnected from time, it lacks the spontaneity of lived encounter. It becomes the language of liturgy and of ritual celebration but never of daily life. However, by reciting the liturgical character of Hebrew and speaking the host language, "the Jew senses that his everyday language is also still at home in the holy language of his festive hours [*auch sein Sprachalltag noch heimisch in der heiligen Sprache seiner Feierstunden*]."[57] Hebrew thus relies on the vernacular to ground it in the lived experiences of those who can mouth its eternal sounds but never speak them to another, save God.

The Bible demands translation. To reverberate in the ears of contemporaneous Jews, biblical language must intersect with Hebrew and German, un- speaking and speaking simultaneously.The freedom and spontaneity that German affords Buber and Rosenzweig in their translation permits an allusion to—a pointing toward—the fixed eternality of the Hebrew. This is why Rosenzweig assigns the term "being- in-exile" (*im- Exil-Sein*) to Jewish poetry and literature. The presence of the scriptural present is foregrounded in the recesses that are embedded within the presentedness of exilic speech. This has a dreamlike effect of making the past present

and the future past. This saturation of biblical language has been forgotten in Rosenzweig's time and must be remembered, thereby overcoming the dialectic of home/not- home, speech/silence, Jew/Christian.

So how does one translate the Bible?

If Luther had made the Bible a national possession for the German people, Rosenzweig and Buber sought to reclaim it—not on the level of language, but on that of alterity, one that mirrored Judaism, its language, its situation and, most important, its *Im-Exil-Sein*. The Bible translation project thus had to reaffirm the Jewishness of the work and point to the authentic Hebrew residing interstitially between/behind the familiar, although now un- familiar, German. The language of the Bible is, according to Rosenzweig, the life blood that nourishes the creative imagination of both Jew and non- Jew. Its language frees language from itself and facilitates nonlanguage or silence. By returning the un- lyricality of modern speech to the *Ursprache* of poetry, what he calls the "mother tongue of the human race" (*die Muttersprache des menschlichen Geschlechts*),[58] the translator mines the origins of language and of communication. In the following quotation the chthonic depths of language and its ultimate origins in an *Ursprache* are connected by way of the Bible:

> All poetry that has been written in the Bible's light [*Lichtkreis*]—and indeed poetry more than prose, Judah Halevi more than Maimonides, Dante more than Aquinas, Goethe more than Kant—has been animated by the Bible's spirit of prose [*ist von ihrem Geist der Prosa begeistert*]. Henceforth the gate into the nocturnal silence that enveloped the human race in its origins, dividing each from each other, and all from what was outside and what was beyond—henceforth the gate is broken and cannot be altogether closed again: the gate of the word.[59]

The Bible, for Rosenzweig, is the *Hort* ("fortress") of human language. Shattering the dichotomous relations of poetry/un- poetry and prose/un-prose, biblical language is related to the prophetic language of *Ursprache*. That which declares the law is ensconced in its rapture. Breaking through into history, biblical language defines both word and world "at the moment of becoming human" (*am Augenblick seiner Menschwerdung*).[60] Becoming fully human requires a movement from death to life, from the ephemeral to the eternal, and from German to Hebrew. The way that Buber and Rosenzweig went about this was to (re-)create a German built upon the cadences and rhyme of Hebrew; to use the words of Mara Benjamin, "a German in which the classical Hebrew of Jewish scripture and liturgy formed the horizons of the German language field."[61]

Translation thus could not (and cannot) just be literal or prosaic. It must unlock or smash the semantic fetters that embed words. It must transgress punctuation and it must not be enslaved to the philological ap-

proach of *Wissenschaft* or source criticism.[62] The "breath of the word" (*Atem des Worts*) must resuscitate language,[63] revivifying a public that "has in reading been read off, read wrong, and read under."[64] The translative act is an act that must walk the razor's edge of harnessing this language at the same moment that it acknowledges its liberation.

Saadya Gaon on Translation

Not only did Saadya write the first Hebrew grammar, the first Hebrew lexicon, and one of the earliest commentaries to the *Sefer Yeẓirah,* he also translated the Bible into Arabic. This translation, like that of Rosenzweig and Buber, was not in a vernacular transcribed into Hebrew characters but was written in the characters of the host language.[65] All these activities, I contend, were intimately connected to one another, and all reflect a common interest in language—its role in creation and its redemptive properties. Indeed, Saadya's Bible translation only makes sense when informed by and understood against a broader context of the ontology and philosophy of language. His translative activity was not simply about finding Arabic equivalents for Hebrew terms; rather, like Rosenzweig, he sought out the linguistic structures and the grammatical configurations that connect two languages. Since language was responsible for the formation of the universe and everything within it, he was aware that translation was also a creative activity tied to peoplehood and ultimately contingent on a set of aesthetic and literary codes.

In the opening section of the *Egron,* the first Hebrew lexicography as well as the first work of Hebrew poetics, Saadya Gaon emphasizes that the intention behind his composition is to stem forgetting. To do this he proposes to look into the very fabric of the biblical narrative so as to retrieve both the memory of Hebrew and the memory of peoplehood.[66] In the Arabic introduction to the work, he writes:

> One can lose the knowledge of things
> On account of the reduction of diligence
> Public knowledge may be lost on account
> Of leaving this diligence behind.
> In my time I well understand that
> The Creator wants me to begin the process [of remembering]
> Since many students have lost the knowledge of tradition.
> The Book of Rhymes (*Kitāb al- aṭqīl*), the foundational
> Sciences and other matters have disappeared.[67]

Here Saadya implies that Jews of his day lack requisite knowledge of Hebrew. The inability to write poetry using its language and the inability

to communicate eloquently in its ancient literary forms, is, as for Rosenzweig, not simply a linguistic or philological lacuna. It is symptomatic of a larger issue that connects language to aesthetics and to ontology. The neglect of knowledge (*tark al- ʿilm*) is tantamount to the oblivion of knowledge (*nisyān al- ʿilm*).[68] Like Rosenzweig, Saadya uses an agricultural metaphor to convey this when he invokes Proverbs 24:30–31: "I passed the field of a lazy man, passed the vineyard of a man lacking sense, and behold it was overgrown with thorns." Here Saadya compares the "lazy man" to his generation of poets and intellectuals who are unwilling or unable to understand Hebrew, compared to a field that, when cultivated, yields the fruits of creativity. It is precisely this activity that Saadya seeks to accomplish in his Bible translation: to sow the uncanny seeds of Hebrew into the fallow and autochthonous lands of Arabic.

Since Hebrew is no longer a spoken language—for this, there exists Arabic—Hebrew runs the risk of ossification and of fragmentation. This also has a cosmic significance: Hebrew, as Saadya shows in his later *Tafsīr kitāb al- mabādī* (Commentary to the Sefer Yeẓirah),[69] is not simply a conventional language, but one which undergirds the universe and establishes its first principles and maintains its forms.[70] I submit that, like Rosenzweig, Saadya holds onto the view of Hebrew that falls outside the scope of rational justification.[71] The restorative and redemptive qualities of translation are archived in the dual roles that Saadya casts for himself in the two introductions to the *Egron.* In the Arabic introduction he compares himself to the Arab Abū Aswad al-Duwali, the person responsible for composing a treatise so that Arabs would not forget the classical Arabic of the Qurʾān. Yet in the Hebrew introduction he sees himself, prophet- like, as restoring Hebrew and as paving the "pathway to redemption."[72]

Language, examining Saadya from the perspective of Rosenzweig, is not innocent. It is not simply about the ability to compose Hebrew verse that can compete with and get the better of the Arab poets.[73] Presumably Hebrew poets wrote as beautifully in Arabic meter and prosody as the Arabs. Moreover, Saadya's theory of translation was not about the simple transliteration or transmigration of Hebrew words into Arabic. It seems that on a fundamental level Saadya was aware of the creative, sustaining, and destructive powers of language in general, but especially of Hebrew, what he calls the "sacred language, which our God selected."[74] Like Rosenzweig, Saadya envisaged himself as reinventing the language and as re-breathing life into its ancient forms, thereby reestablishing the first principles responsible for generating the universe.

In his introduction to the *Tafsīr kitāb al- mabādī,* Saadya discusses various theories of the world's genesis (everything from its eternality to its origination in preexistent matter).[75] After rejecting seven such theories, he

turns his attention to one that combines the Pythagorean notion of prime numbers with a Hebraic one that emphasizes the twenty- two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. These principles, according to Saadya, are responsible for the formation of the universe, and their various permutations ultimately establish the physical bodies to be found within it. Later in the commentary he argues that there is an analogy between human speech and divine speech. When humans speak the letters of a word, the word—including the letters that form it—takes on a tangible quality that is responsible for vibrating the air surrounding the words/letters and subsequently carrying them into the ear of the person who is listening. In like manner, when God speaks (e.g., Genesis 1:3), the words and the letters do not just resonate ethereally but form reality.[76]

Indeed, the first four parts of Saadya's *Kitāb fasīḥ lūghat al- ʿbrāniyyin* deal with the twenty- two letters of the Hebrew alphabet and examine the various consonantal makeup of words, showing how letters join and permutate with one another.[77] This corresponds to part 2 of his *Commentary to the Sefer Yeẓirah* wherein Saadya argues that the physical properties witnessed in the world correspond to the different combinations of the primary elements that make up physical bodies, which he identifies with the letters of the Hebrew alphabet.[78] He subsequently identifies both these combinations to the ways that meanings occur from the permutation of letters in words and the transposition of words in sentences.[79]

Letters thus have an existence independent of communication and writing. They are, to paraphrase the *Sefer Yeẓirah,* the very building blocks of creation. In the *Kitāb fasīḥ luūghat al- ʿbrāniyyin,* Saadya frequently refers to God as the "Institutor of Speech" (*moletz al- kalām*), the person from whom the twenty- two letters are derived.[80] Despite this, however, in the same work Saadya also contends that language is a conventional phenomenon: since objects have different names in different languages, these names are not based on intrinsic value but on consensus.[81] All languages, framed in Rosenzweigian parlance, are ultimately one; and it is this aspect of language that enables Saadya, as it did Rosenzweig, to translate between them.

This emphasis on language, on grammar, and on the permutations of the various Hebrew letters runs like a vein throughout Saadya's diverse writings.[82] As with Rosenzweig, the translator's skill turns on his ability to manipulate and play with language. The translator imitates divine activity by bringing languages together. By putting languages in counterpoint with one another, he or she forges new linguistic possibilities against the larger backdrop of literary worlds. In his treatise devoted to Hebrew grammar, Saadya included, according to Dunash ibn Labrat, a chapter (no

longer extant) devoted to linguistic permutations and the interchanging of consonants.[83] The formation of the universe was very much a grammatical act on the part of the *moletz al- kalām.* Understanding grammar, language, and the art of translation was not just a linguistic act but a cosmological one.

As the *Egron* also shows, however, there are also deep ontological filiations between lexicography and poetics. Language is bound up with aesthetics. Arab grammarians of the period stressed the inimita bility of qurʾānic Arabic and its formative role in the establishment of an Arabo(-Islamic) aesthetics. Saadya, of course, argued that Hebrew not only functioned this way in Hebraic culture, but actually easily surpassed the linguistic dexterity of Arabic.[84] He nevertheless takes his cues from the Arab grammarians:

> The children of Ishmael relate how
> One from their midst[85] realized that his generation
> No longer spoke the Arabic language purely [*faṣḥuna*].
> This grieved him and he wrote a small treatise
> As a model to get them to speak purely [*al-faṣīḥ*].
> I likewise saw many among the children of Israel
> Who are unable to master even the simple rules
> Let alone the more difficult ones of our language.
> They mispronounce when they speak;
> They are mistaken in their word choice;
> And when they compose poetry they neglect the foundations of our ancestors.[86]

Here in the Arabic introduction, Saadya provides the reason for undertaking his translative activities. It is both pedagogical and aesthetic and he takes as his role model an Arab grammarian who undertook the same task. Saadya envisages himself as the Jewish and Hebrew equivalent of Abū Aswad al-Duwali.[87] Since his contemporaries no longer understand their originary language and thus lack the aesthetic sensibilities to compose or to create, Saadya sought to remedy this. Whereas Rosenzweig and Buber complained of earlier translations that made Hebrew too *familiar,* Saadya was concerned about Jews who were too *unfamiliar* with the language. Whereas Rosenzweig and Buber sought to make a germanized Hebrew and a hebraized German less familiar, Saadya, as a more conventional linguistic thinker, wanted to familiarize a reading public with Hebrew by showing its points of contact with contemporary Arabic poetics and belles lettres.

Yet in Saadya's Arabic introduction there is no mention of Hebrew's distinctiveness. Hebrew is not framed in the same context as it was in the *Tafsīr kitāb al- mabādī,* as the building block of creation and of all subse-

quent ontology and epistemology.[88] On the contrary, Saadya writes as a scholar trying to prevent the poetic oblivion of Hebrew, and he frames this in exactly the same terms that would be recognizable to Arab grammarians and linguists. In the Hebrew introduction, however, Saadya connects language, peoplehood, and the exiling of both. But whereas Rosenzweig seemed to pride himself on the *Im-Exil-Sein* of Hebrew poetry and literature, Saadya laments the perniciousness of exile's grasp. In this introduction, Saadya is not at all concerned with the larger Arabic context of forgetting and instead frames forgetting and memory solely within the context of Israel's *Heilsgeschichte.* Despite the many historical and philosophical differences that separate them, it is possible to envisage a common practice against which such differences emerge.

In the Hebrew introduction to the *Egron,* for instance, Saadya presents the model for his attempt to revive an ancient and authentic language:

> The *Sefer ha- Egron* is in the sacred language
> Which God chose from time immemorial, and
> In which the angels sing *selah*
> All superior men [*bnei eliyon*] worshipped in it.
> Our language and a unified vocabulary existed in the land
> From the time God created *adam* upon the *adamah.*
> He bestowed upon him this wisdom for one thousand
> nine- hundred and ninety-six years.[89]

All languages, to use the words of Rosenzweig, possess an "essential unity." This unity, for Saadya, is that which defined the world prior to the scattering of the nations after the destruction of Babel and defined the Jewish people prior to their dwelling among other cultures and languages. The Hebrew language, especially that associated with the biblical narrative, is associated with "home." The myth of a linguistic unity—for Saadya, as for Rosenzweig—couples with a genetic unity that functions as a catalyst for contemporaneous Jewish renewal. According to Saadya, linguistic unity was one of the hallmarks of living in the land of Israel from the time of Abraham until just prior to the exile (*galut*):

> We did not speak the languages [of our neighbors],
> or worship their gods.
> From Egypt, our God spoke to us the words of purity [*divrei ẓaḥot*]
> in the mouth of his servant, Moses, a man of God.
> He spoke laws and judgments [*ḥuqqim u- mishpatim*]
> From atop Mt. Horeb.
> For generations we had deputies who lived
> In the land of our heritage.
> [Our language] was heard among our kings,

in the songs of the Levites, and in the hymns of our priests.
It was spoken by our prophets, defining their visions.[90]

Here language is tied to worship. The purity of Hebrew prevents it, and those who speak it, from being co- opted by idolatry, whether linguistic or religious. In the past, at least according to Saadya's reconstruction, Hebrew—the language of prophecy and of revelation—successfully prevented the ancient Israelites from worshipping other deities, from transgressing the commandments, and more generally from coming under the cultural influences of neighboring peoples. His goal in recreating this language through a Bible translation is to show how the highly ornate and literary Arabic language points to and reveals the distant Hebrew at the same time that it conceals its specter behind its own literary graces.

Saadya connects Hebrew to the trajectories of creation, revelation, and redemption; past, present, and future. Hebrew was the originary language and the language that all humans originally spoke. Hebrew was the language in which God called out to humanity and the language in which humanity responded to God's call. He juxtaposes this with Hebrew's current state of neglect, which is described as a form of punishment for adopting the languages of other peoples.[91] Saadya sees it as his obligation

To interpret, understand and study [Hebrew]—
Us, our children, our women, our slaves—
So that it will not completely [depart] from our lips.
[Hebrew] is wisdom; the laws of the Torah are our life, our essence [*ḥayyatenu*], our light, and our sanctification for eternity [*miqdashenu leme'olam ve- ād 'olam*].[92]

Here Saadya connects the forgetting of language to the forgetting of being. He envisages his goal as renewing and reviving Hebrew for the sake of Israel's redemption (*yeshu'ata*).[93] It seems that the key to renewing Hebrew and ushering in redemption was for Saadya, as indeed for Rosenzweig, through language and translation. The creation of a new language—a new Hebrew—that models itself on the literary and aesthetic qualities of another language is an innovative act. The new is cast as ancient only because its ancientness is conceived of in new terms. To conceptualize such a Jewish ontology in the diaspora is contingent upon the memory of a past that is defined by the present, both of which are ultimately shaped by the future.

To do this Saadya quite literally created a Hebrew grammar developed out of the Arabic. The result is the creation of one of the earliest examples of *adab* (or belles lettres) literature written by a Jew.[94] As with Rosenzweig, the translation from Hebrew into another language ultimately turns on

aesthetics. The Bible as the originary language—the *Ursprache,* in Rosenzweig's parlance—comes to Jews in the present through the veil of another language. This language is not other than the Hebrew of the original because all languages are ultimately one to the linguistic and literary caresses of a gifted translator. Both Saadya and Rosenzweig have to demonstrate to a readership that is not familiar with the Hebrew original how Hebrew transforms and ultimately breaks out of the semantic and grammatical casing of another language. The written Arabic or German ultimately reveals the Hebrew behind it, which in turn reveals the silent fullness beyond.

Translation is thus about creating a new literary language out of the ashes of old ones. This includes both the original Hebrew and their modern linguistic incarnations, for the new Hebrew—whether in Saadya's florid Hebrew introduction to his *Egron* or that discovered in his Arabic translation to the Bible—is not the Hebrew of the original. It is a Hebrew twice- or thrice-removed from its source. It is a Hebrew thatSaadya himself has developed in light of contemporaneous advances in Arabic grammar and lexicography. If his Arabic contemporaries searched the poetic language of pre- IslamicArabian poetry as a means to keep the pure Arabic of the Qurʾān alive, Saadya sought to understand the beauty of biblical Hebrew through both Arabic and his own reconstituted Hebrew:

> When I decided to write this book to facilitate knowledge
> Among all who have chosen the language of the holy angels
> I thought a lot about the speech, pronunciation and utterances
> Found among all the nations.
> All words exist in one of two types: foundational [*yesod*] and
> Additional [*tosefet*]. . . . Whereas the former are stable, the latter
> are not.[95]

Here Saadya differentiates between the tri- consonantal root structure on the one hand and those letters that are added to it in order to designate phenomena such as gender, plurality, and tense. He is thus quite literally constructing or, perhaps better, restoring a primary text using the categories of Arabic lexicography. A literary Hebrew slowly emerges through the linguistic forms and categories of Arabic, the language of Saadya's translation. The Hebrew Bible was a text that could be translated into Arabic. However, in translation it could also be as forceful as the original.

Translation—for Saadya, as for Rosenzweig—is a nostalgic act. It remembers the way the past was or might have been had things been different. Translation uses one language to invoke the meaning, the nuances, and ultimately the texture of another language. But if Hebrew is changed by being encased in Arabic, the latter—as the work from Rosenzweig makes abundantly clear—must also be forever changed in the process.

Arabic is expanded when touched by Hebrew. The latter language can actually become the catalyst for the renewal of the former because, according to Saadya, it now absorbs the purity of Hebrew. In Arabic, Saadya's translation amounts to a copy of a copy, an Arabic memory of what an otherwise unspoken Hebrew should sound like. Saadya's return to the past, his translation of an ancient text into the literary *lingua franca* of his day, was very much a project of modernity, a form of "ancient modernism," to borrow the phrase used of Rosenzweig's translation project.

Conclusions

Whereas Rosenzweig faced a semantic otherness posed by the radical differences between Indo-European German and Semitic Hebrew, empirically Saadya's predicament is not nearly as severe. Hebrew and Arabic were cognates and the former could easily be absorbed into the word structures and semiotics of the latter. However, he still encounters the same problem that every Jewish translator of the Bible must face: How does one keep open the spaces between the languages and the words? How does one create an aesthetically pleasing translation that vectors all the memories associated with another language and way- of-being in the world? Can an originary language bespeak in another language?

The retrieval of memory, as we have seen here, is tantamount to an aesthetic of forgetting. One must remember a past that will be future, using the colorful sounds and harmonics of a new language that is present. As such, this new language must be wrenched out of its familiarity and be conceived differently. The Hebrew must inform this new language, caress it, and transform it in the same way that it must ultimately open itself up to the other language. This fusion of languages paradoxically creates a past, the concept of a pristine language that is accessible only through a different and a modern language. It is this paradox that both Rosenzweig and Saadya faced, and it seems to me that they could never quite ameliorate the tensions brought on by this paradox. According to their respective models, the Hebrew is—as I have mentioned time and again—a palimpsest, something that, like the *Ursprache,* can be glimpsed only through the veil of another language. In its sacrality, Hebrew ceases to be a real language; it becomes little more than a specter that translation keeps forever out of reach.[96]

The target language thus conjures up an originary language that does not exist except as an alluring absence. Hebrew's presence resides solely in the verbal, grammatical, and semiotic structures of another text, another language, another mode of expression. It is the exiling of language using

the language of exile. Hebrew remains as a distant memory: one not to be forgotten, but also one that is potentially intangible.

* * *

A thick description of these two individuals on the nature and quiddity of language, memory, and translation reveals that the translative act resembles the prophetic one. Saadya Gaon and Franz Rosenzweig each charge themselves with the task of communal remembrance. However, this remembrance—filtered as it is through the distortive prism of memory—is neither historical nor objective recollection. It is, rather, the stuff of dreams and imaginary fulfillment.

In reflecting on the art of memory and translation here, I have also sought to overturn, or at the very least question, the axiom of precursorship, one of the guiding principles that governs the historical study of Jewish philosophy. Rather than have Saadya Gaon—as the earlier thinker—set the frames of reference for this chapter, I have used Rosenzweig as my point of departure, to use his understanding of language, being, and translation as a way of shedding new light on the translative project of Saadya. The results, I trust, are not so much anachronous as natural: one cannot read, from today's vantage point, Saadya's work on translation—his ontology of language, his linking creation to grammar, his notion of the redemptive value in translation—except through the lens provided by Rosenzweig, much as one cannot translate the Bible, according to Rosenzweig, by circumventing Luther. Or, perhaps framed somewhat differently, when one reads as a Rosenzweigian, one reads neither from the vantage point of yesterday nor of today. One simply reads and reads well. Saadya's questions are accordingly our questions and not a set of curiosities that inhabit one of the dusty backrooms of the museum of Jewish philosophy. By starting with Rosenzweig and moving back to Saadya we ideally see translation as a philosophical problem and not just a historical one.

3

THE TRANSLATION OF SILENCE AND THE SILENCE OF TRANSLATION: THE FABRIC OF METAPHOR

Saadya's and Rosenzweig's determination to revive Hebrew's imagi nation, showing its mute traces in a foreign narrative, set in motion a concern for uncovering a language beyond language and thereby revealing a divine message to which the words of scripture could only point. The ultimate fallibility of human understanding associated with language's imprecision demanded that the biblical narrative needed interpretation, translation, and clarification. The tension between what the Torah really meant and what it literally said had long been commented upon in rabbinic circles;[1] however, in the aftermath of Saadya and the contact with rationalist Islamic theology (*kalām*), the need increasingly arose to reconcile the biblical narrative with the demands of reason. This reconciliation, as we shall see in the present chapter, took the form of translation. This project was not so much interested in translating Hebrew literally into a foreign language but exegetically into a new set of conceptual idioms.

The literal level of scripture—using the precedent set by Islamic and Arabophone rationalism—was opened up by employing various linguistic tropes, the most important of which is the subject of this chapter, metaphor (Ar. *istʿara*).[2] The Bible's problematic language (e.g., that dealing with God's corporeality) now became the catalyst for a series of translative reflections on what constituted the true meaning of scripture. If something in the Torah conflicted with reason, it had to be translated into something that did not. This form of translation, much more piecemeal than the projects discussed in the previous chapter, nevertheless reveals a great deal about both the motivation and processes at work in this larger activity. Since translation cannot take place without individual units, I here focus on one set of these units in the hope that they might reveal something of the philosophical translation of Scripture.

There reverberate a series of tensions at the heart of this chapter that turn on the dialectic between language's transparency and opaqueness, its revelation and concealment. If the Torah bespeaks God's message, why

does its language need to be translated into other idioms? If its language, including but not limited to its various anthropomorphisms, is potentially embarrassing to the philosopher, does this have any effect on the text's deeper message? The widening of the gap between language and what resides behind it potentially destabilizes the Torah and makes its "real" message into a nontext within a text whose actual words have the potential to mislead and curtail proper understanding. The activity of translation now becomes the primary means by which one gets at this nontext—or alternatively urtext—bypassing the fragility of language and moving beyond the materiality of words to the formal presence of silence, toward the fullness of nonlanguage.

These various tensions are connected to the talmudic dictum that the "Torah speaks in the language of humans."[3] This phrase is revealing because it both sounds the Torah's uniqueness and grounds the biblical narrative in the quotidian. If the Bible is indeed a text like any other, then it can be understood using contemporaneous forms of literary criticism and poetics that are often supplied by the larger non- Jewish cultures in which Jews found themselves. Yet if the Bible does speak in human language, it must nevertheless be signified as more beautiful than anything in the field of non- Jewish literary or artistic production. Why? Again we are confronted with the notion that something must reside behind the language in which the Torah communicates, something that is discernible in the text's silence.

If, as argued in the previous chapter, translation is intertwined with the distortive glances of desire and memory, we need also be aware that translative activity emerges from the ultimate fragility of being human and the linguistic and ontological uncertainty that flows from this: words open onto non- Words; linguistic text gives way to the silence of theText. But the linguistic boundaries separating these forms are anything but clear, and movement between them is fraught with uncertainty. What facilitates this motion is translation: the tacit acknowledgment that translation must always be incomplete; that translation proves to be a fleeting attempt to harness the ambiguities of one language into those of another; and that it paradoxically shatters one language only to begin the process of crystallization in another. Perhaps it is in this initial shattering that the real energy is expended and the understanding of language's limitations slowly surfaces. Many Jewish philosophers were naturally drawn to the enterprise of translation because it enabled them to reflect further on the relationship between form and matter, language and nonlanguage, truth and being. If the Torah's eternality was enwrapped in the ephemerality of human textuality, translation becomes the attempt to uncover the latter in order to access the former.

Yet if translation now becomes an act of liberation—the unlocking of the text's "real" message—it also becomes a Sisyphean task. Translation emerges as the search for a meaning or set of meanings that remain out of reach, always just beyond the outer limits of human comprehension. A proper reading, as we shall see here, must always be a misreading, one in which the biblical narrative says one thing but ostensibly means something quite different. The translation of the Bible's literalness into a rational idiom through the use of metaphor is tantamount to translating the Bible into the language of philosophy and an attempt to smooth over the intellectual roughness of the text's literal surface. When rationalism collides with literature, however, there is always fallout. It is precisely such fallout that this chapter explores.

If the motivation for translation in the previous chapter was connected to the possibility of forgetting, the inclination here is to avoid the potential embarrassments that flow from biblical language. What does one do with the pronouncements that the Torah makes about God, including the various ways in which it ascribes to Him any number of human feelings and emotions? Anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms abound in the biblical narrative, and as Jewish philosophers confronted these passages they tended to interpret them or interpret them away as metaphors: words that meant not what they literally said but that had deeper figurative meanings that were connected to rational truths. This method of translating biblical terms from the literal to the nonliteral is not confined to al-Andalus in the tenth and eleventh centuries; rather, it is a central part of all philosophical interpretation/translation of the biblical narrative up until the present.[4] Although I here focus primarily on the former, its conclusions are also meant to illumine the latter.

Aesthetics, philosophy, theology, and apologetics all intertwined in the desire to translate the infelicities of the biblical narrative into a more pleasing idiom or set of idioms. If the Torah mentions "God's hand," it does not literally mean that God has a hand; if the Torah describes God in terms that resemble humans, it speaks metaphorically and its literal language must be figuratively reformulated. To those responsible for such observations, the Torah does this in ways that both prefigure and that can be elucidated by the highest aesthetic and/or philosophical standards developed by contemporaneous non- Jewish literary criticism. Philosophical aesthetics— what I define here, rather broadly, as the desire to bring the literary and artistic qualities of the biblical narrative into accord with the dictates of reason—informed a series of choices that sought somewhat paradoxically both to maintain the beauty of the text's literary language and to preserve God's otherness and incorporeality that could only be ascertained behind or beyond such language.

* * *

In order to explore these issues in greater detail, I focus here on the writings of two well- known JewishAndalusian thinkers: Moses ibn Ezra (1055–1135 or 1138) and Moses Mai monides (1138–1204).[5] These two thinkers—although separated by only a generation—inhabited very different cultural and intellectual worlds. Ibn Ezra was one of the greatest of the so- called GoldenAge poets, whereas Mai monides was relentless in his criticism of poetry's imagination; if Ibn Ezra's prose work reveals all the meandering hallmarks of an *ʿadīb* ("belletrist"), Mai monides was a systematizer of the first order; the philosophical system to which Ibn Ezra subscribed was Neoplatonic,[6] the very one Mai monides sought to temper by turning to the writings of Aristotle. Even on a mundane level, political uncertainty forced Ibn Ezra to flee northward to Christian Spain, whereas Mai monides' family fled south toNorth Africa; if Ibn Ezra's later writings pine for "Grenada the beautiful," Mai monides' work lacks any such romantic wistfulness.

One could quite easily multiply such binaries within the rich corpora of these two authors in general and their taxonomies of metaphor in particular.[7] For example, Ibn Ezra, the poet, celebrated the transformative character of such linguistic tropes, whereas Mai monides, the archrationalist, condemned them. Yet this characterization is in many ways false and downplays the poetic sensibilities of Mai monides and the philosophic ones of Ibn Ezra. Such binaries further perpetuate the neat taxonomies (e.g., poetry/philosophy, mysticism/philosophy) employed in secondary treatments of medieval Jewish thought.[8] One of Mai monides' greatest gifts, however, is his literary skill in deconstructing language and revealing the Text beyond the text. Moses ibn Ezra likewise creates as formidable a lexi con as Maimonides in his*Maqālat al- ḥadīqa,* one that reveals the philosophical content of scriptural metaphor. My reading of these two thinkers attempts to break with or at least temper received opinion by emphasizing the rationalism of Ibn Ezra and the literary quality of Mai monides.

Lurking in the background of this chapter, functioning as its horizon, is Jewish Andalusian culture. Although both Ibn Ezra and Mai monides wrote their defenses of biblical metaphor in the Arabic language, they did so during the final phase of Jewish cultural contact with Arabic and they did so stressing different aspects of its intellectual tradition. Andalusian culture was anything but monochromatic. It provided any number of intellectual and cultural expressions that reflected various authors' intellectual convictions.[9] Al-Andalus became and continues to be the stuff of memory, both in primary and secondary literature, a lost continent whose borders change to reflect different cultural values.[10] If both Moses ibn

Ezra and Mai monides wrote their works on translation after they had left Muslim Spain, they did so with competing memories of exile. In the confines of Castile, Ibn Ezra lamented his fate. Surrounded by perceived uncultured and illiterate coreligionists, he wrote his two major prose works as an act of memory and legitimization,[11] presenting himself as a transmitter of Andalusian Jewish culture.[12] Mai monides wrote his*Guide* in Arabic for a single student (and those like him) also as an act of legitimization, although for Aristotelian philosophy as opposed to poetry. Less interested in the glorious memory of Andalusian poetic culture,[13] he wrote much of his work, especially that dealing with halakhic and legal material, in Hebrew. Mai monides thus attempts to inscribe the future of Jewish learning in a different past.

The Ambivalence of Metaphor

Metaphors represent the world in microcosm. Inherent to both is a paradoxical impulse for hope and estrangement wherein the language of immortality must confront and eventually give way to the language of corporeality and vice versa. God—the very source of the poetic impulse—is likewise divided between creation and destruction suggesting an instability, a paradox, deep within God, the realization that monotheism and language can never be unified, can never be translatable, except perhaps in some future utopia. Implicit in the metaphor, however, is the vision that somewhere beyond the here and now the world might just be poetically and politically perfectible, and the metaphor's double language foreshadows this perfection. Whether utopia is possible or not, or whether its deferral is infinite, its promise nevertheless represents the desire of translation and its imaginary fulfillment.

Both Ibn Ezra and Mai monides are mistrustful of the imaginative conceits of metaphor, especially its capacity for deception. Both, however, must ultimately confront the fact that the Bible employs metaphors wherein deceit gives way to possible redemption. This bifurcation turns on the hope that the perdition of both word and world must ideally give way to restitution. All hinges on the correct way to read the Bible; yet one's reading is always transitory, a step on the path, differing from other possible readings. This aporia of translation evokes a work devoid of form, a formless content, a wordless book.

The generic medieval philosophical response is to claim that scripture is the product of the prophet's imaginative faculty that is closely circumscribed by his intellect.[14] This narrowly circumscribed imaginative faculty is subsequently responsible for taking abstract and complex philosophical

truths and turning them into pleasing images that those not trained in the technical aspects of philosophy can understand. It is in the imagination—connected as it is to the fall from grace—that the slippage between the literal and the metaphoric ostensibly begins. This subsequently gives the philosopher (as opposed to the prophet- lawgiver) free rein to rearrange revelatory language by translating that which does not conform to the dictates of reason into that which does. The philosopher now becomes the "anti- prophet," the one who must retranslate the pleasing images that had been coined by the prophet back into the philosophical truths informing them.

In what follows I move away from this generic psychological discussion of metaphor and its relationship to prophecy, and instead focus on discussions of metaphor in contemporaneous literary circles. Within the Arabic literary tradition, metaphor was intimately connected to ascertaining the often porous contours between figurative (*majāz*) and nonfigurative (*ḥaqīqa*) language,[15] a topic that witnessed its genesis in various theological debates concerning the proper meaning of the Qurʾān.[16] Muslim thinkers developed elaborate literary models to help clarify qurʾānic language,[17] a misunderstanding that distinguished orthodoxy from heterodoxy, as the debates between the Muʿtazilites and the Asharites on the nature of divine attribution in the first centuries of Islam well attest.[18]

Without wading into the technical discussions within Islamic theology on the nature of the divine language, let it suffice to mention here that—in its various permutations—such discussions served as the ambient air that all the thinkers mentioned here breathed. What we do learn from these debates, however, is that the ascription of the concept "metaphor" to a problematic term, and its subsequent analysis, was theological before it was aesthetic and ideological before it was literary.

It is against this backdrop that we must situate the works of the two authors who are the subject of this chapter. Both individuals reveal an ambivalence toward metaphor that is perhaps indicative of their own searches to reconstitute a new language of redemption, one that transcends the instability of the present. If these two individuals use biblical language to articulate that which is beyond articulation, they also acknowledge that this same language must speak to humanity in all its transitoriness, its pathos, and with the possibility of its ultimate transformation. This gives way to the ultimate paradox of language and philosophy: if the word desires to free itself from the linguisticity of the book, it is the latter that ultimately insists on the continuity of the word and of language. For the Torah is ambiguous, double- voiced, speaking for and against what it writes. Both Ibn Ezra and Mai monides catch glimpses of this ambiguity and respond to it in different ways. For Ibn Ezra, the truth of language emerges from the shad-

ows of poetry; for Mai monides, the language of truth is ultimately the suspension of language.

From Ibn Ezra's writings on metaphor and language there emerges an insurmountable tension. On one hand, his *Kitāb al- muḥāḍara wa-'l-mudhākara* (The Book of Conversation and Discussion)—the most complete and important treatise on Hebrew poetics written in the premodern period—is devoted to legitimizing Arabic- style Hebrew poetry and in the process to showing how many of Arabic's literary tropes exist nascently within the biblical narrative. Yet on the other hand, and not unlike Maimoni des, Ibn Ezra is critical of the falsity inherent to poetic language.[19] He claims, following the Arab literary critics, that "the best poetry is that which best deceives (*akdhab*),"[20] and that "if poetry were stripped of its deceit (*kidhb*) it would cease to be poetry."[21] These two points of view meander, labyrinthine- like, throughout his writings and ultimately subvert his understanding of language. Rather than celebrate language, as we would expect, or denigrate it, as Mai monides will, he is indecisive and ambivalent. This, as others have duly noted,[22] is surprising given the fact that Ibn Ezra was one of the most famous poets of his generation. That he should opt to display this ambivalence in a work that at least ostensibly defends poetry and describes the rules for its proper composition strikes us as odd.

This confusion also permeates his *Maqālat al- ḥadīqa fī maʿni 'l-majāz wa-'l-ḥaqīqa* (The Treatise of the Garden on Metaphorical and Literal Language), which offers an appreciation of the beauty inherent to the Bible's use of figurative language. Undermining or at least calling into question this appreciation is Ibn Ezra's desire to translate this language into more literal terms. This translative activity succeeds in acknowledging that biblical language—and perhaps language in general—is bifurcated between the hope for immortality and the threat of chaos. This seems to be a tacit realization on his part that biblical language is discontinuous and potentially empty, a language in whose darker shadows lurks the interminable violence of death.

Central to Ibn Ezra's understanding of poetry in both these works is the distinction between form and content and between language and nonlanguage. It is the space in between that he, like all poets, desires. Here the poet is not radically different from the philosopher: even though the language of poetry may well be false, the message encased within is true.[23] It is this message—the existence of a Language beyond language—that the poet/philosopher seeks to translate. For Mai monides, as we shall see shortly, the palimpsest of this translation ultimately proves empty and is a form of nonwriting that presupposes all writing; for Ibn Ezra, it is the realization that language, under the expert hand of the translator, can trans-

form itself and construct a utopian *topos* wherein the Torah functions as its precursor.

In his *Kitāb al- muḥāḍara,* Ibn Ezra singles metaphor out as the first and most indispensable of the twenty ornamental devices of rhetorical style. His definition of metaphor is short but to the point: "the borrowing of a word for something that is unknown using something that is already known."[24] According to this definition, metaphor takes an original meaning from another context and ascribes it to a new one. This "borrowing" is responsible for creating new meanings out of old and is, according to the Arabic poetic tradition to which he is an heir, the building block of poetry. In his *Maqālat al- ḥadīqa,* Ibn Ezra expands on this definition:

> The proper sense represents the primary sense, whereas the figurative sense is a derivation. If the proper sense is restricted, the figurative is inclusive. A metaphor approximates the proper sense, but the proper sense does not approximate the metaphor. . . . The primary sense is comprehensible in itself and is used to comprehend another thing; the metaphor, however, is incomprehensible on its own and must be understood in reference to the other thing. . . . The proper sense is natural, whereas the figurative sense is affected.[25]

Behind this rather technical discussion resides the acknowledgment that metaphoric language—like creation and redemption—is incomprehensible. Only when translated into "proper" terms, when its referent is properly articulated, is the metaphor grounded, harnessed, and embedded in an immanent discourse. Yet its language is also unnatural and because of this unstable and haunted. It is in the fissures between the natural and unnatural, the true and the nontrue, that Ibn Ezra himself engages in poesy because it is only in this activity that one can approximate the Bible's ambivalent beauty and its lush garden of doublespeak.

* * *

Like his older contemporary, Mai monides encounters a biblical narrative full of problematic figurative language. To a much greater extent than Ibn Ezra, Mai monides is bothered by what he considers to be its technical imprecision and its ability to lead the believer, whether or not a philosopher, astray. As many commentators have pointed out, his goal in composing his philosophical magnum opus, the *Guide of the Perplexed,* is to show the Jew who is interested in philosophy that the Torah need not be discarded as anthropomorphic nonsense, and that *when interpreted properly* it actually accords with reason. Before moving to the *Guide,* however, it is worthwhile looking at his definition of metaphor. To do this we need to turn to his *Al- maqālah fī ṣināʿat al-manṭiq* (Treatise on Logic) wherein he defines metaphor as follows: "A metaphorical term [*al-ism al-mustaʿār*] is

a name [*ism*] which in the original sense of the language came to denote, and to be fixed permanently in, a certain object, and afterward it was given but not permanently to another object, e.g., the name 'lion' given to one of the animal species, but sometimes also to a man of might; and the name 'sea' by which a generous person is sometimes called. Poets use many such terms."[26]

Two points relevant to my discussion below emerge from Maimonides' discussion here. The first is that metaphors are but one subtype of a larger genus of homonyms that he defines as single words that have "several meanings."[27] The metaphor is a linguistic strategy often employed by poets wherein a term (e.g., lion) is borrowed and used to refer to something different (e.g., a courageous man) based on a perceived similarity between the two.[28] A metaphor, according to this definition, is fleeting, transitory, a part of the language that adumbrates as it illumines.

The second point is that Maimonides imagines metaphors as playing an important role in what he perceives to be the evolution or historical development of language. Maimonides implies here, as indeed he will throughout the *Guide*'s lexicographic chapters, that words had originary meanings and only later became affixed occasionally to other phenomena. This post-lapsarian confusion of language presupposes a time of idyll and a period before imagination, for better or worse, infiltrated communication. In many ways, Maimonides' goal, unlike that of Ibn Ezra, is to return to the garden of literalness and from there revert back into silence.

Both these points may well suit poets among whom he notes metaphor is very popular. However, when it comes to thinking about God and His oneness it creates a myriad of problems. As such, Maimonides must signal both his antagonism toward and his radical departure from poets when it comes to such figurative language. In *Guide* I.59, for instance, he writes:

> Thus what we do is not like what is done by the truly ignorant who spoke at great length and spent great effort on prayers that they composed and on sermons that they compiled and through which they, in their opinion, came nearer to God. In these prayers and sermons they predicate of God qualificative attributions that, if predicated of a human individual, would designate a deficiency in him. . . . This kind of license is frequently taken by poets and preachers or such as think that what they speak is poetry, so that the utterances of some of them constitute an absolute denial of faith, while other utterances contain such rubbish and such perverse imaginings as to make me laugh when they hear them.[29]

In this platonic condemnation of poets—many of whom undoubtedly were the Andalusian Hebrew poet-philosophers of his own and pre-

vious generations (including Ibn Ezra)—Mai monides seeks to curtail the use of poetic and other excessively florid language. Such language is responsible for imprecision and laziness, in addition to the creation of linguistic idols wherein the confusion of metaphors for reality becomes the root cause of theological transgression. Mai monides' goal is the temporary suspension—if not ultimate eradication—of language; however, he is aware that this is an impossible task. Although silence with respect to God is the ultimate object of metaphysical contemplation, silence with respect to the sub- lunar world of physics and human interaction proves untenable. Rather, he must content himself with showing that the individual words that compose such sub- lunar utterances are the "greatest among the causes leading to error" (*akhbar sabab fī al- taghlīṭ*).[30] His aim is nothing short of liberation and to free his reader from the idolatrous bonds of language by returning language to its original, prelapsarian state. He may not be able to escape from language entirely, but his goal is, on some levels, much more modest: to translate problematic terms away by turning them into metaphors. Indeed, the very first paragraph of the *Guide*'s introduction is devoted to clarifying this principle:

> The first purpose of this Treatise is to explain the meanings of certain terms occurring in the books of prophecy. Some of these terms are equivocal [*mushtarika*]; hence the ignorant attribute to them only one or some of the meanings in which the term in question is used. Others are metaphorical [*mustaʿāra*] terms; hence they attribute to them only the original meaning from which the other meanings are derived. Others are amphibolous [*mushaqqiqa*] terms, so that at times they are believed to be univocal and at other times equivocal. It is not the purpose of the Treatise to make it totally understandable to the vulgar or beginners in the speculation.[31]

Although Mai monides is adamant that the *Guide* is "not a treatise on language" (*laysat hatha al- maqāla fī al- lugha*),[32] words are at the heart of his philosophical system, which is precisely why he spends most of the first part of the work creating a lexicon. If Mai monides is on one level critical of language in general and literal language in particular, on a deeper level he is keenly aware that a proper understanding (i.e., metaphorization) of the latter unlocks the secrets of both the Torah and the universe.[33] His mistrust of language—especially its tendency to enrobe God's noncorporeality in matter—paradoxically gives way to his recognition that figurative language represents one of the few phenomena in the sub- lunar world that possesses the unique ability to point beyond itself, to that which exists nonmaterially. Mai monides thus has a very ambivalent relationship to language in general and metaphors in particular. Figurative language both speaks and nonspeaks, conceals and reveals. If one fails to under-

stand this, one remains confined in language's idolatrous bonds. However, if one realizes the power of such language and its ability to mean and not mean, one can potentially use such language to return to the full silence from which language originally emerged.

Metaphors seem to embody the physical/metaphysical binary of medieval Aristotelianism. On the physical level they possess literal meanings; yet at the same time they also point above themselves to the metaphysical silence beyond their customary usage. According to Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, humans—as composites of matter and form—need the former to access the latter.[34] Although Maimonides never comes out and articulates this clearly, implicit in his work is that metaphors are the perfect vehicle to cross the material- formal divide. Because metaphors are "double-edged," both literal and nonliteral, physical and metaphysical, they reflect the reality of which all humans are a part. Figurative language points the way to silence that is the Maimonidean ideal.

* * *

If translation is for Ibn Ezra a literary and aesthetic act, for Maimonides it becomes the philosophical act par excellence. Both are aware of the transformative capabilities of metaphors and their uncanny ability to take language beyond itself and their facilitation of a utopic communication in the bonds of language's exile and exile's language. Yet if Ibn Ezra wants to re- create the linguistic dexterity of biblical language by translating it into his own poetic sensibilities, Maimonides seeks to harness this language by translating it, first, into language and, subsequently, into silence.

Saadya's Literary Offspring

Before proceeding, it might be worthwhile to make a detour and return, albeit briefly, to Saadya. Using various philological and grammatical sciences (*ʿulūm*) inherited from the Arabs, Saadya's translation project (*tafsīr*) and commentary (*sharḥ*) succeeded in introducing a series of new literary and philosophical models into the heart of Judaism.[35] It was Saadya more than anyone who applied the concept of metaphor to the biblical narrative in order to resolve various literary and intellectual dissonances. Although previous thinkers had expressed their discomfort with the literal level or literal understanding of the Bible (e.g., Philo, Onkelos),[36] Saadya was the one responsible for connecting biblical anthropomorphisms to the technical discussions of metaphor found in Arab grammatical schools.[37] In so doing, he set the stage for virtually all subsequent formulations and

provided the backdrop for much of the Jewish Andalusian discussion of metaphor.

The innovation of Saadya resides in his absorption of Karaite models into rabbinic literature.[38] Critical of rabbinic Judaism, especially its scriptural hermeneutics,[39] Karaites sought out new methods of interpretation based upon the exercise of human reason and the twin sciences of grammar and philology.[40] Following the methods outlined by the Muʿtazilite branch of Islamic theology, Karaites emphasized reason's ability to articulate what they considered to be true and authentic scriptural meaning. This involved emphasizing the literal level (*zāhir*) of the biblical text when it did not contradict reason and downplaying anthropomorphic language as a means of accommodation, even going so far, as in the case of al-Qirqisānī, to invoke the rabbinic dictum that "the Torah speaks in the language of humans."[41]

Saadya responded in kind to the Karaite critique of normative Judaism: If human reason could be invoked to reveal the rational truths at the heart of the biblical narrative, it could also be invoked to show that all of rabbinic Judaism coincided with reason. If properly understood, that is. In his magnum opus, *Kitāb al- ʾamānāt wʾal-iʿtiqādāt* (The Book of Beliefs and Opinions), Saadya argued that revealed "tradition" (*al- ḫabar*)—both written and oral—provided a complement to that which can be known through the three other "roots" (*usūl*) of knowledge: sense perception, self-evident truths, and inferential knowledge.[42] This "authentic tradition" (*al-ḫabar al- ṣādiq*), which derives from the other three sources, cannot contradict them.[43] Scripture and the larger Jewish tradition of which it is a part can thus not obviate that which reason tells us to be true. Indeed, Saadya goes on to define revelation as a gift from God that enables everyone—as opposed to just intellectual elites—to understand something of the nature of Truth. In the prolegomena to this work, Saadya explains why revelation exists in the first place:

> We say, then, [that] the All- Wise knew that the conclusions reached by means of the art of speculation could be attained only in the course of a certain measure of time. If, therefore, he had referred us for our acquaintance with His religion to that art alone, we would have remained without religious guidance until the process of reasoning was completed by us so that we could make use of its conclusions. But many of us might never complete the process because of some flaw in our reasoning. Again, he might not succeed in making use of its conclusions because he is overcome by worry or overwhelmed by uncertainties that confuse and befuddle him. That is why God, exalted and magnified be He, afforded us a quick relief from all these burdens by sending us His messengers through whom He transmitted messages to us, and by letting us see with our own eyes the signs and proofs supporting them about which no doubt could prevail and which we could not possibly reject.[44]

The rich and metaphoric language of revelation—a feature that Maimonides will amplify—enables non- elites to apprehend a modicum of rational truths. Saadya also implies here, and this will be an important feature of Moses ibn Ezra's analysis, that the pleasing narrative form of the Torah, including its very imprecisions, succeeds in keeping human reason that is customarily prone to errors on the right path. Saadya is particularly concerned with divine attributes, especially when the anthropomorphic expressions of the Bible are taken in their literal (*ḥaqīqa*) as opposed to their figurative (*majāz*) sense.[45]

Like many of the Andalusian Jewish thinkers who followed him, Saadya distinguishes between essential attributes and those of action. The former (e.g., life, power, and wisdom) occur to humans as three aspects, even though in God they exist as a unity:

> We are therefore compelled to employ in designating [these three aspects] three [distinct] expressions, after remarking by way of explanation, that the mind has recognized them simultaneously [*al- ʿaql raʾā bi- đhā*]. For it is not to be imagined that the Eternal, blessed and exalted be He, possesses several distinct attributes. All these attributes are rather implied in His being a Creator. It was only our need to transmit it that impelled us to formulate this concept in three expressions, since we did not find in existing speech an expression that would embrace all of the ideas. Nor was it seemly to coin a special expression for them, because, being unknown [*al-lafẓa ghayr mutʿārafa*], that expression would require a commentary [*tafsīr*] and we would have to have recourse to much verbiage [*alfāẓ kathīra*] on account of that one word.[46]

According to this passage—here going against the grain of my own reading of his *Commentary to the Sefer Yeẓirah* in the previous chapter— language is conventional, thus potentially obfuscatory and so prevents proper understanding. Saadya implies that the best way to apprehend God's essence is not though linguistic explanation but through silent contemplation—a notion that Maimonides will turn into a full-blown hermeneutic.[47]

Saadya's rationalist approach to Scripture is also evident in his discussion of attributes of action, including all those anthropomorphic terms used to describe God.[48] These attributes, according to him, must always be understood as referring to God's absolute unity even when such terms appear, *at first glance,* to belie this unity. To use Saadya's own words: "The unequivocal testimony of these scriptural passages is the principle on which we must rely, and it is our duty to refer back to it every doubtful expression in the way of figurative expressions [*majāzāt al- lugha*] until we can make it conform to the principle."[49]

For Saadya, if words had only one meaning we would not be able to express ourselves fully or convey to others what we think. This would make language one- dimensional and prevent the myriad of literary and

aesthetic expressions that defined the Arabic and Judeo-Arabic cultures of his age. Metaphors—as a central component of figurative language—permit the extension of words' meanings. It is this principle that Saadya subsequently takes back to the Bible in order to decode its more problematic verses. Thus when scripture speaks of God's "head," it refers to "excellency and elevation"; "eye" is used in the sense of "supervision"; "face" means "favor or anger"; "ear" denotes "acceptance"; and so on.[50]

Saadya puts this theory into practice in his translative activity. He translates the Hebrew of Job 14:3 ("Do you fix your eyes [*ʿeynekha*] on such a one"), for example, into the Arabic "Do you turn your attention [*ʿināyah*] to such a one."[51] Here Saadya replaces the anthropomorphic ascription of eyes to God with the more benign notion of providential concern. Likewise in Job 28:10, Saadya replaces "His eyes behold every precious thing" with "Every mighty act was foreknown to him."[52] Again, he translates the Hebrew eye into the notion of providence and thereby transforms the biblical anthropomorphism with a more rationally acceptable account.

* * *

Saadya's distinction between the Bible's *majāz* and *ḥaqīqa,* its figurative and its literal senses, would play a formative role in enabling all subsequent Andalusian Jewish thinkers—including Moses ibn Ezra and Mai monides—to resolve any number of rational and literary problems or discrepancies within the biblical narrative. Verses in the text that did not coincide with reason's good taste had to be understood in the nonliteral or figurative sense. Critics saw in this approach a clever way to bypass the literal level of the narrative when it was convenient. An even greater challenge, from my point of view here, at least, is that the *majāz- ḥaqīqa* binary created all sorts of difficulties on the levels of philosophy.

Poetry, Translation, and Death

The interminable violence of death casts a dark shadow over the creative impulse,[53] and the poetic imagination becomes a compensation for this violence. Translation, like the act of writing itself, fights against death and thus against forgetfulness by selecting one word over another and casting others into the uncertainty of noncreative silence.[54] Yet translation also has the potential to confirm death by closing the past and sealing it off both from the present and the future. Metaphor figures highly in this discussion because on a fundamental level language and God are in accord, with the former functioning as the latter's agent. It is unclear—and perhaps nowhere is this lack of clarity more acknowledged than in the Andalusian poetic- philosophical tradition—if language is subordinate

to God, whether as an instrument or as a potential nothingness encompassing God or whether language and God are equally powerful.

Metaphor, as we have already witnessed, blurs the fine line separating reality and nonreality, reason and imagination, and even life and death. Like other linguistic tropes, metaphors represent the fullness of language and force open its constituent parts. Metaphors—and this is something that all the rationalists who are a part of this study mistrust—interfuse a disparate and even contradictory set of images and impulses. This facilitates the creation of the new out of the ashes of the old and enables the formation of that which does not exist from that which does.[55] Even those critical of metaphor and poetry, such as Maimonides, could not deny the transformative ability of both.[56] The paradox between poetry and nonpoetry, between desire and memory, between Eros and Thanatos, and ultimately between what never was and what can never be drives the biblical translative project.

The great majority of Andalusian Jewish philosophers were also poets, biblical commentators, and *ʿudabāʾ* ("belletrists"). Many analyzed the Hebrew Bible according to the conventions of human literary creativity. As philosophers, many of these individuals criticized poetry on platonic grounds as that which could potentially embellish anything in a pleasing manner. Yet as poets they themselves were often masters of precisely such nonliteral expression. Lurking furtively in the background here is a variation on the Arabic theme that "figurative language is the bridge towards the divine" (*al-majāzu qanṭaratu l-ḥaqīqa*).[57]

These two worldviews—the physical and the metaphysical—collide on the level of the biblical narrative. If poetry was false, what was one to do with all those poetic expressions that abounded in the Bible? However, if figurative language was indeed a "bridge" to the divine world, then the decoding of poetic expressions in the Bible according to a fixed lexicon had to come at a great cost, nothing less than the denial of language's transformative character—the exact same character that many of these individuals celebrated in their poetry.

Once again, all the individuals who constitute this study are the heirs to Saadya. He sought to elevate the literary ornateness of the biblical narrative and define it—as I tried to show in the previous chapter—as *the* literary standard. In translating the Bible, however, he also had to show how the nonpoetic and the rational qualities ultimately took precedence over the literary and aesthetic ones. That is, the real beauty of the Bible's language was that which existed beyond its language; the nonlinguistic ultimately superseded the linguistic.

Informing this tension was the important distinction in medieval Arabic literary criticism between form (*lafẓ*) and content (*maʿna*).[58] In particular, the form in which a particular utterance was presented was gen-

erally regarded as secondary to the idea that resided behind it. The distinction was in turn connected to that between the figurative (*majāz*) and literal (*ḥaqīqa*) dimensions of discourse discussed in the previous section. Poetry, for example, differed from other literal (*muḥkam*) types of discourse in that its form was not necessarily connected to its content. For our purposes, this means that biblical language could be translated into different forms (*alfāẓ*) so long as fidelity to content remained. In his *Kitāb al-muḥāḍara,* for example, Ibn Ezra, connecting language to the body/spirit binary of medieval Neoplatonism, writes in reference to prophetic language: "The content [*maʿna*] is the spirit, and the form [*lafẓ*] the body. . . . A prophet must convey his message with words that make it enter into the mind [of his audience], though this might be different than the form [*lafẓ*] that he initially heard; what must not change, however, is the content [*maʿna*]."[59]

Ibn Ezra seems to imply here that the form of what the prophet initially receives may actually differ from the pleasing literary and aesthetic form that he subsequently gives to his audience. The prophet then engages in an act of translation by taking the initial form of a divine utterance and presumably transforming it into a more pleasing form that can be readily understandable. This enables Ibn Ezra to account for descriptions of God in human terms as literary embellishments that aid comprehension without taking anything away from the content behind the form. It is also a justification for his and his colleagues' own poetic and translative activity.

But there is surely a tension here. If form and content are so easily separated, why is he often unwilling to translate metaphors into more rational utterances? Whereas Mai monides will provide a lexicon in his*Guide* that translates problematic biblical terms into the language of philosophy, Ibn Ezra, at least in his *Kitāb al- muḥāḍara,* is not at all interested in such translation. In his chapter on metaphor, for example, he cites forty biblical metaphors but is completely uninterested in translating them into rationalist or other idioms. These metaphors are by no means obvious or clear (e.g., "the wine of greed" or "helmet of salvation"), and he is quite content to let them exist as is without any hint of an explanation.[60] The poetic and the metaphoric content of the biblical narrative here are sufficient for the reader; indeed, he even seems to imply that this metaphoric content is one of its defining or essential components.

If he is interested in his *Kitāb al- muḥāḍara* in defining poetry and its various tropes, including the way both generate meaning, his *Maqālat al-ḥadīqa* attempts to uncover the content beneath or behind the Bible's pleasing literary form. If the former work celebrates poetry, the latter seeks to bypass it; if the one describes its creation, the other oversees its destruction. The drunkenness of the poetic thus gives way to the sobriety of the

rational.[61] The *Kitāb al- muḥāḍara* adorns language in embellished finery and the *Maqālat al- ḥadīqa* strips language bare.

Indeed, it is this tension that resides at the heart of theories of translation in general and discussions of metaphor in particular. Does one translate biblical language through recourse to the metaphorical or does one do so by creating a lexicon of reason? Whereas Mai monides wants to do the latter and indeed provides an actual lexicon by which to undertake this, Ibn Ezra, at least in his *Kitāb al- muḥāḍara,* is not interested in such translation. Metaphors simply are. They are not to be rationalized, defined, or translated. They are there to transform the world, the word, and ultimately the reader. They enable us to confront and try to overcome the specter of death. But perhaps because this specter proves omnipresent, Ibn Ezra returns to this language, in his *Maqālat al- ḥadīqa,* and forces himself to translate metaphors into the patois of a more rationalist idiom.

The Torah Speaks in the Language of Humans

This phrase, perhaps more than any other, enabled and facilitated the translation of the Bible. Although it would become a full- blown hermeneutic in Maimonides' *Guide,* the phrase's deployment as a quasi- philosophical principle emerged much earlier, as we have seen, with both Karaite and Saadyan attempts to translate biblical anthropomorphisms. Implicit in the phrase is that the real meaning of the Bible resides beyond both its literary and its literal articulations. The biblical narrative now calls out for interpretation and for translation precisely because its real intent is potentially different from its literal meaning. Since the biblical narrative must be an inclusive document, there has to be some principle that permits access to its more exclusive levels of meaning.[62] Language, Torah, humans—all possess different gradations. If the prophet must communicate the divine message to the multitudes in a pleasing language that they can all understand, the philosopher must attempt the opposite.[63] Translation confronts retranslation and vice versa.

This philosophical understanding of the phrase "the Torah speaks in the language of humans" is certainly a departure from its original intent in the Talmud,[64] wherein it is acknowledged that the Bible employs a series of linguistic devices that are accepted by and thus susceptible to the scrutiny of ordinary language.[65] This latter understanding was not completely superseded, as Halbertal and Margalit would have it, because its formulation would still coincide nicely with the dialectic in Arabic poetics between content and form, a distinction that made the Bible both a literary document and a religious text. Regardless, the end result of these

processes is that the biblical narrative was seen to be in the possession of a secret message— what I have called the Text within the text—that was accessible using a variety of human- constructed hermeneutics.

When "the Torah speaks in the language of humans" was employed in the post- talmudic period,[66] it was generally done to explain the infelicities and eccentricities of biblical expressions (e.g., redundancies).[67] By the time we get to the Andalusian philosophical tradition, however, the phrase has taken on the meaning that Scripture explains complicated philosophical matters using language that everyone can understand on the surface even if they may not fully grasp its inner meaning. It is a complex if not always consistent argument: If the Torah is from heaven, it cannot be an embarrassment when understood against the backdrop of contemporaneous aesthetic and intellectual categories. Because Andalusian philosophers prided themselves on their rationalism, they argued that at its core the Bible was a work of reason, so they subsequently set themselves the task of translating biblical language and categories into the language of science through the aid of "metaphorization." Whereas intellectual elites could understand the truths of physics and metaphysics literally, the masses could not. As such, the Torah spoke in human language—i.e., using various stories and parables—as a way to prevent access to those unqualified.To read the biblical narrative properly was both to misread it and to read it selectively.

Even though philosophers and nonphilosophers—elites and nonelites—in theory read the same text, they quite literally read two different books. Informing this dichotomous readership and the hermeneutic that informs it is the Farabian notion that scripture is the product of the imaginative faculty of the philosopher/prophet/lawgiver and thus is quite literally a product of his imagination.[68] It is this that enabled certain exegetes to employ, as we saw in the previous section, techniques from Arabic literary criticism to understand better and more clearly the biblical text. Central to this enterprise is that a proper understanding of metaphor and other expressions of figurative speech enable the informed reader to understand the biblical depictions of God correctly.

In a passage devoted to allegory and enigma in his *Kitāb al- muḥāḍara,* Ibn Ezra writes that figurative language enables the masses to understand complex maters sensually as opposed to intellectually:

> Knowledge of the senses [*ʿilm al- ḥawāss*] is more immediate and simpler than intellectual knowledge [*ʿilm al- āqūl*]. Allegories [*al-amthāl*] are given to [humans] so that they can reflect on intellectual matters in the same way that they do those of the senses. However, this does not apply to our traditional commandments, lest doubt fall on them; for they are that which the intellect receives and they cannot be removed.[69]

In this passage, which Ibn Ezra has lifted directly from Saadya,[70] he implies that the biblical narrative employs figurative language such as metaphors and allegories because of their pedagogical utility. Such language enables the unlearned to receive a modicum of instruction on complicated matters by using an abundance of rich imagery to appeal to their senses. Central here is the notion of imagination.[71] In appealing to this faculty, Scripture goads simple believers into proper belief and conduct. Ibn Ezra is also aware, however, that such interpretation cannot be applied to the commandments, which must be understood literally—and this is most likely an anti- Christian polemic written from his new home in northern Spain.

Unlike the rational monotheism of Saadya or Mai monides, however, Ibn Ezra also argues in his *Maqālat al-ḥadīqa* that figurative language—despite the problems and discrepancies when it comes to descriptions of God and the divine world—is actually a valid medium.[72] Whereas Maimoni des argues that the ambiguity inherent to metaphorical languages can lead to idolatry if not properly decoded or translated, Ibn Ezra seems quite content to let such language describe God so long as it is remembered that God's essence is ultimately unknowable.[73]

Perhaps paradoxically, Ibn Ezra understands scripture poetically and not simply rationally. The Torah's metaphorical language can certainly be translated into a more rationalist or conceptual idiom; it cannot, however, be translated away into silence. Its language—when understood using the best that Arabic poetics and literary criticism has to offer—becomes *the* aesthetic standard of the age, even surpassing the lofty heights in which Arab rhetoricians had situated the Qurʾān. This permits Ibn Ezra to stress both the literary and poetic beauty of the biblical narrative. If the Bible is the word of God, in other words, it must surpass the beauty of all other texts. Mai monides, however, was never interested in theTorah's aesthetic dimensions and, because of this, he was much more willing than Ibn Ezra to sacrifice its literary qualities. For Ibn Ezra, on the contrary, even if the message of the biblical narrative may have been relatively simple, the aesthetic embellishments and ornaments in which it is cloaked were what truly permitted it to "speak in the language of humans."[74]

* * *

It is Mai monides who is responsible for redefining this phrase and transforming it into a hermeneutic with which to mine Scripture's depths. Whereas Ibn Ezra could use the notion of the Torah "speaking in the language of humans" to celebrate biblical language, Mai monides often seems embarrassed by this language. Accordingly, he uses this phrase as an ex-

cuse to retranslate the Torah back into the language of philosophy and, from there, back into silence.

Maimonides' agenda is purely philosophical with an aim of translating the metaphorical and figurative imagery of the Bible into a rational and conceptual one.[75] Like Ibn Ezra, Maimonides contends that the biblical narrative uses metaphors and allegories to reach out to the masses because such figures of speech are much more inclusive and simpler to comprehend than scientific truths.[76] However, unlike him, Maimonides' system leads him to the conclusion that these figures of speech are not used for aesthetic reasons, but are instead used to conceal truths from the unworthy, revealing their secrets only to those possessing the requisite skills to unlock them.

"The Torah speaks in the language of humans" runs as a leitmotif throughout Maimonides' *Guide* in general and the lexicographical chapters in particular.[77] "The language of humans" now refers to quotidian language that most people are capable of understanding. In *Guide* I.26, for example, he writes: "Hence attributes of corporeality have been predicated of Him in order to indicate that He, may He be exalted, exists, inasmuch as the multitude cannot at first conceive of any existence save that of a body alone; thus that which is neither a body nor existent in a body does not exist in their opinion. . . . Everything that the multitude consider a perfection is predicated of Him, even if it only a perfection in relation to ourselves."[78]

The Bible attributes to God descriptions that the majority of people will be able to grasp. These descriptions are often regarded as "perfections" when applied to humans (e.g., life, power, wisdom). The resultant anthropomorphisms—the depiction of God using material and not metaphysical terms—create and sustain perplexity in the ideal reader.[79] It is this perplexity, as we saw above, that Maimonides seeks to resolve in his *Guide*.

The language of the Bible is a hindrance to proper understanding. It confuses the philosopher or potential philosopher and leads nonphilosophers into both complacency and misunderstanding. To mistake the nonliteral language of the Bible for its literal level, to read metaphors nonmetaphorically, is to confound the divine nature and becomes a form of idolatry.[80] Metaphors and mis/reading are thus not simply a matter of literature, but become for Maimonides a matter of theology and orthodoxy.

It is for this reason that Maimonides begins his *Guide* with a series of lexicographical chapters wherein he sets out to explain the Bible's equivocal, derivative, and amphibolous use of language.[81] Maimonides signals that one of the main goals of his *Guide*—and thus a proper understanding of Judaism—is that the reader must not take the Bible, especially its lan-

guage, at face value. To read properly is to misread and to read against the grain of the text by translating it into another conceptual idiom or set of idioms.[82] Indeed, the first seventy chapters of the *Guide,* virtually the entire first book of the treatise, are devoted to an elucidation of such problematic terms. This is why, in Strauss's terms, the *Guide* "is not a philosophic book—a book written by a philosopher for philosophers—but a Jewish book: a book written by a Jew for Jews."[83] Staying with Strauss a little longer, he argues that propaedeutic to the divine science whose contours we see in the *Guide* is exegesis, not speculation, and translation, not pure ratiocination. By supplying the lexicographic code to decode the Bible's imprecision, Maimonides seeks to help his ideal reader to move beyond tradition, authority, and ultimately the text itself.

But Mai monides approach is piecemeal.[84] His lexicon has no particular order,[85] and he presents a series of terms with often arbitrary philosophical meanings. For example, in *Guide* I.30, he writes:

> To eat [*'akhol*]. The first meaning given to this word in the Hebrew language signifies the taking of food by living beings. This does not require an example. Subsequently the Hebrew language saw two notions in the action of eating: One was the destruction and disappearance of the thing eaten. . . . The other notion is the growth of the living being due to the food he takes. . . . In accordance with this last notion, the term *eating* is applied figuratively to knowledge, learning, and, in general, the intellectual apprehensions through which the permanence of the human form endures in the perfect of states, just as the body endures through food in the finest of its states. Thus: *Come ye, buy and eat [Is. 55:1]; hearken diligently unto Me, and eat what is good* [Is. 55:2].[86]

This passage, unlike many of the other lexicographic chapters that deal with biblical anthropomorphisms, refers primarily to humans instead of God. In translating the term "to eat" with the more philosophically acceptable "to apprehend intellectually," Mai monides contends that in those problematic scriptural passages in which the first or second senses of the term do not quite make sense, the verb must be interpreted in the new or figurative sense that he has ascribed to it. The extension of familiar language to other contexts and situations creates all sorts of dissonance in the minds of readers, and Mai monides' goal is to show that when the Bible employs these terms, it does so in ways that are not literal.

Also implicit in this chapter—as in so many of those dealing with biblical terms—is a theory of language. Mai monides alludes to a period "in the beginning," a time wherein language was literal (i.e., "to eat" = "to consume food"); only subsequently does language take on more metaphorical and figurative connotations. Here Mai monides seems to hold the position that in a prelapsarian state that was heralded by pure monotheism, there was no problem with language because words quite simply meant what

they did. Only after the fall from monotheism to idolatry, from intellection to imagination, did language become metaphorical and did original meanings slowly became separated from words.[87]

For Mai monides—and I shall have more to say about this below—language is messy, imprecise, and ultimately responsible for the entrapment of humans in the snares of materiality. The key for Mai monides is to get his readers—or at least his ideal readers—to return to the prelapsarian state and to the original monotheism when language served a particular purpose for basic communication. In this original state, when contemplation occurred, it did so not through words, but through silence.

* * *

"The Torah speaks in the language of humans" is probably one of the most significant phrases for the justification of both rationalist biblical interpretation and translation. Because the Bible is written for humans to understand, it is, by nature, imprecise and subject to interpretation. This, however, prompts the question as to what resides behind the biblical narrative. If there is just interpretation, there is no center. Yet if there is a center beyond interpretation, what is its relationship to language? Is the meaning of the Torah prelinguistic or protolinguistic? It would seem that, for Mai monides at least, it is the latter and thus he attempts to take the reader from language to nonlanguage. For Ibn Ezra, however, all the Bible presents both is and is in language; the text is a written document that must be both interpreted and celebrated. If Ibn Ezra wanted to translate the biblical narrative into the language of Arabic poetics and literary criticism, Mai monides sought to translate it into the language of silence. Let us now consider each of these hermeneutics in detail.

Ibn Ezra: The Aesthetics of Translation

If Mai monides was mistrustful of both language and poetry, preferring to bypass both in favor of a return to an initial silence, Moses ibn Ezra did everything in his power to translate the language of scripture into contemporary literary and aesthetic idioms. As both a poet and a forced émigré from Granada to the Christian North, he longed for the cultural well springs of al-Andalus.[88] And it is in his two prose works more than anywhere else that he presents himself as the faithful transmitter of that culture. Alienated from the intellectual, cultural, and social norms of Hispano- Jewish society,[89] haunted by the specter of Arab culture, Ibn Ezra sought both comfort and legitimization in the memories of his past life.

In the *Kitāb al- muḥāḍara,* Ibn Ezra explains that poetry, like music,[90] is responsible for creating a series of rich images and rhythms that deeply penetrate the soul of the listener.[91] These images in turn are responsible for activating one's aesthetic sensibilities, and they permit one to grasp more clearly the message that these images and rhythms convey. Lest one become too infatuated with the pleasing language of the work in question, Ibn Ezra again distinguishes between *maʿna* and *lafz,*[92] form and content: "The husk is . . . perceived by the ear, much as the other sense with respect to what they perceive, but [sense] perception is not understanding . . . which occurs only in the heart . . . [when] the idea is received by the intellect.. . . The biblical sage [says]: 'Incline your ear and listen to the words of the wise / Direct your heart to my wisdom' [Prov. 22: 17]. . . . He specifies the ear for hearing . . . the husk . . . and the heart for [understanding] the essence, i.e., the idea."[93]

Applying this principle to the biblical narrative, he is able to claim that the true meaning of Scripture is concealed and that the often- pleasing manner in which it is presented is ultimately a literary conceit on the part of the prophet. The prophet, according to his understanding, is now a gifted poet who communicates divine ideas to his audience, but who also wraps that message into as literary a form as possible. The flipside is that if the prophet is now a poet, the poet now becomes a prophet.[94]

The passage just cited from the *Kitāb al- muḥāḍara* certainly conforms to the rabbinic phrase that the "Torah speaks in the language of humans." However, and here we see a radical difference between Ibn Ezra and Maimonides,[95] the former seems to imply that the main role of biblical language is its images. These images are not necessarily code in need of translation with a philosophical cipher, as in Mai monides, but part and parcel of the literary beauty and elegance of the Torah.

Whereas Mai monides will attempt to move from the writtenTorah back to the silence from which it emerged, Ibn Ezra moves in the opposite direction. The secret or deeper meaning of the Torah cannot exist without its ornate language. And it is for this very reason that he is so concerned to establish the literary and aesthetic contexts to examine scripture in his *Kitāb al- muḥāḍara.*

Ibn Ezra is at great pains to connect the biblical narrative to contemporaneous discussions of metaphor in Arabic literary criticism. This both justifies the composition of Hebrew poetry and establishes the biblical narrative as the *sine qua non* of artistic creation. However, the Torah differs from all other human compositions because of the insurmountable gap between its form and contents. He writes, for example, that the "love and passion [depicted by] the poets of our people are not repugnant since this is

found in the Holy Writings, even though the hidden meaning of the work is different from the obvious meaning of the words."[96]

Here Ibn Ezra implies that the love poetry found among his contemporaries has as its model the biblical narrative with the result that the corpora of these poets cannot be regarded as obscene. At the same time, however, their poetic creations can never compete with the biblical narrative for the simple reason that the gap separating the latter's literal and nonliteral meanings is too great. Moreover, it is in the spaces in between biblical words—Ibn Ezra here intimates—that one encounters the "hidden meanings," although unlike Mai monides he never provides the code for his readers. This language both speaks and unspeaks. This gap is further pried apart in the *Maqālat al-ḥadīqa:* "The true idea that is intended is too wondrous and exalted to be understood precisely. The wise man must [therefore] divest the true ideas of their garb of gross figurative expressions [*majāzāt*] and [re]clothe them in pleasant garb, so that he will reach through them the intended idea, to the extent of human capacity to understand."[97]

Here he argues that the wise individual must translate the Torah's figurative language into more pleasant language. Perhaps significantly, he never bothers to define what makes this language more "pleasant." Is it rational? Is it more poetic? Regardless, the point remains: the Torah speaks in the language of humans and must accordingly be understood in human terms. Because the content and not the form is what is important, the latter may be interpreted and translated into other acceptable idioms.

Maimonides: Translation into Silence

As mentioned several times throughout this chapter, Mai monides favors silence over language and wordless contemplation over linguistic communication. In this regard, as Ken Seeskin has duly noted, language functions for Mai monides as a heuristic device, something ultimately to be discarded.[98] Inspired by Plato's account of the instability of language in the *Seventh Letter,*[99] Mai monides' main concern is that words call attention only to themselves, enrapturing us in their sonority and thereby ignoring or misrepresenting that which they are supposed to signify. In *Guide* I.31, for example, he writes that "man has a love for, and the wish to defend, opinions to which he is habituated and in which he has been brought up and has a feeling of repulsion for opinions other than those. For this reason also man is blind to the apprehension of the true realities and inclines to the things to which he is habituated. This happened to the mul-

titude with regard to the belief in His corporeality and many other metaphysical subjects as we shall make clear."[100]

Language habituates and forces us to see the world in one way but not necessarily in others. This crystallization of words restricts understanding and makes us rely on convention. Yet as Maimonides makes explicit time and again throughout the *Guide,* God transcends all such convention, and any attempt to make Him conform to convention distorts and ultimately leads to the most pernicious form of idolatry, that of language. This idolatry is so bothersome for Maimonides precisely because it takes place under the guise of "correct" belief. In *Guide* I.59 he writes:

> In every case in which you affirm of Him an additional thing, you become one who likens Him to other things and you get further away from the true knowledge of His true reality. . . . Know that when you make an affirmation ascribing another thing to Him, you become more remote from Him in two respects: one of them is that everything you affirm is a perfection only with reference to us, and the other is that He does not possess a thing other than His essence, which, as we have made clear, is identical with His perfections.[101]

Language forces the world to conform to the linguistic categories that we have created for it. The result is that we focus more on the terms and the categories that we have created for the world than on the reality as it displays itself to us.[102] If this is distortive when it comes to the physical world, Maimonides reiterates that it is absolutely insidious when it comes to understanding the metaphysical world, especially God. By describing God in terms that we use to speak of physical reality, we ultimately force the former into the terms supplied by the latter. For these reasons Maimonides praises the virtues of silence. In*Guide* I.59, for instance, we again read:

> The most apt phrase concerning this subject is the dictum occurring in the *Psalms:* "Silence is praise to Thee" [65:2], which interpreted signifies: silence with regard to you is praise. This is a most perfect put phrase regarding this matter. For of whatever we say intending to magnify and exalt, on the one hand we find that it can have some application to Him, may He be exalted, and on the other we perceive in it some deficiency. Accordingly, silence and limiting oneself to the apprehensions of the intellects are more appropriate—just as the perfect ones have enjoined when they said: "Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah" [Ps. 4:5].[103]

Maimonides here implies that language is not necessary for intellectual activity and is little more than a human convention to facilitate communication. This again reinforces the point, if in fact it needs reinforcing, that language is related to the potential irrational meanderings of the imagi-

native faculty since both create false idols and thereby have the power to lead the individual astray. Transcending language is silence and it is this silent contemplation that characterizes intellection. Language is temporal, silence is beyond time; language fluctuates, silence is beyond change. Yet Maimonides can never quite let go of language's hold. Unlike Plato, for example, Maimonides is forced to deal with religious language: prayers, liturgy, ancient *piyyutim,* and, most important, biblical language.[104]

If Maimonides is critical of the external senses of both language and scripture, he is also drawn to the internal sense of both because on a fundamental level they are connected to one another. It is here that Maimonides sees much of value in the metaphor and its role in the translative process. The only knowledge that contingent creatures can have is of phenomena that exist within the sublunar world. These phenomena point beyond themselves, to that which exists in the supra- lunar world; however, flesh- and-blood humans are cognitively unable to grasp that world as it exists, precisely because it is formal and noncorporeal. Humans are only afforded, to use the words of Maimonides in the introduction to the first part of the *Guide,* "flashes" that occasionally illumine truths to those able to see clearly:

> But sometimes truth [*al- ḥaqq*] flashes out to us so that we think that it is day, and then matter and habit in their various forms conceal it so that we find ourselves again in an obscure night, almost as we were at first. We are like someone in a very dark night over whom lightning flashes time and again. Among us there is one for whom the lightning flashes time and again, so that he is always, as it were, in unceasing light. Thus night appears to him as day. That is the degree of the great one among the prophets.[105]

Metaphorical language functions in exactly the same way as these "flashes of light." Whereas nonfigurative language is rooted in the descriptive and explanatory frameworks of quotidian reality, metaphors take such language but attach them to other signifiers and force language outside of itself, revealing both the instability of language and the stability of that which is beyond it. Like reality itself, the metaphorical language of the Torah points beyond itself to the nonsensible and to nonlanguage.

Although Maimonides' goal was to reach a state of silence, he could not eradicate himself from language since, according to Tirosh-Samuelson, it is rooted in a fundamental aspect of human existence, i.e., corporeality.[106] Since humans are composed of form and matter, because we exist corporeally, we can only get at the perfection of silence through the imperfection of language. Translation figures highly in this process because translation is the essence of reality. In our created world there is no such thing as absolute meaning; there is only ephemerality, instability, death. Metaphors mirror the fragility of human existence: in language, through

language, mediated by language, we face the reality of our own mortality. In this reality, we catch glimpses—or "flashes," to use Maimonides' words—wherein we attempt to dislodge the formal from the material, the nonword from the word.

* * *

The focus of this chapter has been on the literary and philosophical aporia connected to metaphor. As a building block in the translative act, such tropes are more than just literary features but become part of the universe's fabric—linguistic elements that are responsible for its creation and that ultimately figure in its messianic fulfillment. These features are part and parcel of what it means to be human, interweaving word and world in their fabric. Translation, whether into silence as for Maimonides or into the cultural aesthetics of Arab belles lettres as for Moses ibn Ezra, is the process by which we come to know truth.

4
THE APOLOGETICS OF TRANSLATION

EMERGING DELICATELY FROM THE INTERSTICES OF TRANSLATION AND memory—including the desire to purge all historical and anthropomorphic infelicities from the biblical narrative—was the need to make the Torah superior to all other literary creations. The field of literary production, as we shall see in this chapter, became another site to forge cultural identity, the place where an imagined past could arise, mirage- like, out of the embers of the present. The superiority of the biblical narrative—understood now as embodying all literary and rhetorical elegance—could be rediscovered and recalibrated by each generation's gaze. The translation of the Bible now became intertwined with the political act of uncovering an ancient literary tradition that was paradoxically itself a modern claim predetermined by contemporaneous aesthetic standards. Dormant and untapped in the fissures of the biblical narrative lay not only literary elegance, but also the seeds of Jewish cultural nationalism. Translation became the activity that brought both to the surface.

Terms such as "literary" and "aesthetic" are socially and historically constituted. Rather than proceed along formalist or internal lines and trace the various permutations of Jewish biblical translation, I wish here to focus on the complex and often shifting set of social factors that facilitated the need to translate in the first place. Accordingly, I explore some of the multiple frameworks that simultaneously authorized, facilitated, and legitimated translative practice.[1] How did translation function as the vehicle whereby elite Jews attempted to construct an ideal past, a cultural and aesthetic identity, around the rhetoric of authenticity?

* * *

Prior to the towering figure of Saadya Gaon, the superiority of Juda ism was discussed on theological grounds as opposed to literary and aesthetic ones. Increasingly, however, the perceived eternality of the Torah's language and the elegance of its mode of expression began to signal the superiority of Jewish culture, the desire to make Jewish texts conform to non-

Jewish standards, and active Jewish participation in these standards. If the actual borderlines between Jew and non- Jew frequently blurred through engagement in such activities, these lines often became reinscribed or reconfigured along new apologetical ones. So even though I wish to focus on polemics and apologetics here, I do so in a new way that refuses to reify cultural centers. Instead, especially in the second half of this chapter, I prefer to focus on the familial resemblances between cultures—the blurred boundaries—and see how Jewish thinkers used non- Jewish ideas to sort out and taxonomize issues of "Jewishness." What separated Jew from non-Jew was not hermeneutics, but the text upon which such hermeneutics were ultimately brought to bear.

Translation, as we have witnessed, is never just philological but becomes the handmaiden of poetical and philosophical practice. It is always done for a purpose and a movement toward some real or imagined end. The desire of memory confronts the uncertainty of the present and shapes the past and future in its kaleidoscope. I am again interested in memory, albeit viewed through a slightly different prism than in the second chapter. Here I focus on the role of translation in the various constructed remembrances of things long past, the primordial dreams that imagined a past perceived to be in possession of all literary graces and philosophical truths. This constantly reconfigured and reconfiguring past could absorb new literary or philosophical themes and permit their rediscovery in the dusty archives of fever. Translation became both the method and the product of this rediscovery and the dream wherein gossamer images of the past emerge and disappear against the present's twilight. Translation unfetters a people's imagination and thereby facilitates the perception of superiority over neighbors and their civilizational achievements. The mirror of the present is held in front of the past's mirror. As in chapter 2, however, this memory again confronts a paradox. Since the past thrives in the imagination, both provide the catalyst for social, cultural, and political innovation in the present.[2] The glory of this perceived and imagined past confronts the ambiguities of the anticipated future against the semantic field provided by the biblical narrative.

Translation must on a fundamental level be apologetical. Embedded in the transfer of meaning from one language to another—the movement across the horizon of one cultural field to the plain of another—is change. Whether because the old language is ostensibly "dead" or because of a perceived sense of inferiority, there exists the often implicit realization that one must adopt and adapt to the ostensible attainments of new cultural parameters. One must convince both one's coreligionists and those of other religions that one's own tradition possesses all the intellectual richness and aesthetic elegance of the host, at least *when properly calibrated.*

This calibration is the subject of the present chapter. However, this calibration is not as obvious as first appears. Certainly on one level it permitted Jews to argue that all the intellectual and literary innovations associated with ancient Greece, Muslim Spain, the Renaissance, or the Wei mar Republic were essentially a series of thefts from Hebraic- Biblical culture.[3] This is grounded in the minority need for legitimation— especially in terms of its cultural productions, its worldview, its way of life—in the face of the cultural and aesthetic achievements of a majority. Yet in making this statement I do not want to fall into the trap of ascribing essential features to Judaism and/or the various larger cultures with which it intersected. Following Homi Bhabha, I want to suggest that it is in the interstices, what he calls the "inter," or "the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between* space—that carries the burden of the meaning of culture."[4] An analysis of the translative activities that occur around the contested space of the Hebrew Bible provides a series of important insights into these in-between spaces and a set of snapshots of Jewish literary and cultural production.

It is in the accusations of Gentile theft that the production of Jewish and Hebraic translative activity begins to appear. By claiming that the Jews were, at some originary and mythic point in the distant past, in full possession of all wisdom owing to God's perfection and the gift of the Torah is not only a sign of religio- ethnic pride, but also permits the "re-absorption" of this wisdom back into Judaism. If science or rhetoric was part of every Jew's birthright—even if long forgotten—this nonetheless still justified active participation in these activities. The trope of theft became an important literary site where various Jewish identities could be both performed and contested.

The accusation that Gentiles stole from Jews, however, was not simply a passive response to a perceived aesthetic and scientific imbalance. Rather, this charge facilitated the active participation of Jews in these activities. If it could be argued that science, rhetoric, or aesthetics represented autochthonous expressions that originally sprouted on Jewish soil, then they could with minor conceptual and terminological difficulties be grafted back into this now barren soil and subsequently cultivated. Of central concern in this process was the retranslation of these sciences into more familiar (i.e., Jewish or Hebraic) idioms. The semantic field onto which they had to be grafted was the biblical narrative that now became the uniquely Jewish possession to rival all claims to superiority put forth by other cultures or groups. Although to those involved in the activity this was a natural enough procedure, it certainly did not go uncontested, as the next chapter makes clear.

The Torah continued "to speak in the language of humans." Unlike the previous chapter, however, this phrase no longer meant that the lan-

guage of Scripture masked an esoteric message meant only for philosophical elites. This slogan could also now have the opposite effect since it successfully wrestled the biblical narrative from its lofty metaphysical heights and put it firmly in the realm of aesthetics. The Bible was now analyzable using the same critical tools and models used to explore any other piece of literature regardless of provenance. Although the Bible could now be contextualized according to literary standards, behind this contextualization resided apologetic and polemical aims: the Bible not only contained the aesthetic standards of the various cultures in which Jews found themselves, but did so in ways that far surpassed the literary masterpieces created and performed in those cultures.

Mai monides and the arch-rationalist stream of Jewish philosophy that followed in his wake argued that at its most esoteric the Torah was a work of philosophy. This involved translating its language into the language of philosophy and thereby making explicit connections between the "Account of the Beginning" (*maʿaseh bereshit*) and Aristotelian physics on the one hand and the "Account of the Chariot" (*maʿaseh merkabah*) and Aristotelian metaphysics on the other. Many of the individuals who are the subject of the present chapter, though still maintaining the important filiations between reason and revelation, tended to gravitate toward the literary, aesthetic, and rhetorical superiority of the biblical narrative. They made the case that the Bible was superior to all competitors, whether other sacred scriptures (e.g., the Qurʾān), literary masterpieces from antiquity (e.g., Homer, Cicero), or those of the present (e.g., al- Mutanabbi, Goethe). Less interested in the legal and technical side of Scripture, they were drawn to the language of the Prophets and the Writings.

Although arguments for the Torah's aesthetic superiority would take on many forms, common to them all was the rich potentiality of its meaning. Its empty fullness, its familiar uncanniness, its modern antiquity—all signaled the biblical narrative's uniqueness in the annals of literary and aesthetic achievements. The Bible no longer became conceived of solely in legal or theological terms but was illumined by means of the literary and literate cultures in which Jews found themselves. There can be no coincidence that Jews in the orbit of Islam began to stress the Bible's poetic elegance; that in the Renaissance, Jewish intellectuals emphasized its rhetorical dimensions; or that in the early twentieth century, under the influence of expressionism and post- expressionism, Jewish thinkers emphasized the Bible's pathos and facticity.

The hermeneutic at work here was that if the author of the Bible was God, as communicated through the pleasing language of the prophets, then the elegance of biblical language, by its very nature, had to surpass the aesthetic and literary standards found in rival cultures. This could mean either that the biblical narrative was as sophisticated as contemporaneous

trends in Arab poetry and belles lettres, as, for example, Saadya Gaon or Moses ibn Ezra would argue; or, as Judah Messer Leon would claim, that Renaissance rhetoric fitted effortlessly with the biblical rhetoric. Such argumentation, however, could also take the form—as it would in the writings of Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber—that biblical expression was superior to contemporary literary forms because it returned the reader to a more primitive or archaic set of aesthetic expressions.[5] Rather than conform to and surpass contemporaneous literary models, the biblical narrative, on their reading, shattered such models.

Translation played a formative role in this activity by both articulating and facilitating counterpoints between what was Jewish and what was not and between what the Torah literally said and how it was to be read or interpreted. This translative activity was ultimately responsible for taking the antiquity of the received text and, while making it new, simultaneously retaining its hoary antiquity. The paradox, however, was that this antiquity was always conceived along modern lines. These constructions maintained the familiar themes of the past in the strangely familiar cadences and rhythms of the present. This dialectic between languages, between cultures, between past and present, according to Walter Benjamin, is the *raison d'être* of translation: "Unlike a work of literature, translation does not find itself in the center of the language forest but on the outside facing the wooded ridge; it calls into it without entering, aiming at that single spot where the echo is able to give, in its own language, the reverberation of the work in the alien one."[6]

* * *

Translation ideally straddles two worlds without fully committing to either. The translucency of the new language both teasingly reveals the palimpsest of the old while at the same time concealing the originary from full view. This concealing, however, again returns us to a tension that has reverberated throughout this study: What is the ontological status of the translation? Is it a literary masterpiece because of the original or because of the translation? If the latter, is there any need for the former?

In order to explore these themes in greater detail, I focus here primarily on the works of Judah ben Yehiel Messer Leon[7] and Martin Buber.[8] The former, probably much less familiar to modern readers than Buber, was determined to uncover the glimmer glowing from the veins of Renaissance culture in the autochthonous depths of the biblical narrative. In both the eyes of Messer Leon and his like- minded contemporaries, the radical differences between the culture of Renaissance Italy and that of the Hebrew Bible—one trying to break with the authority of the past, the other firmly grounded in it; one stressing the virtues of the *uomo univer-*

salis, the other apparently critical of such virtues—existed only on the surface. Once one penetrated the chthonic depths of the Bible, the conceptual differences between these two cultures shattered. Like Buber after him, Judah Messer Leon set out on a path of rediscovery that was determined to make filiations between biblical language and contemporaneous vernaculars and between Hebraic culture and the literary achievements of the cultures in which Jews found themselves. For both of these individuals, this was a matter of restoration as opposed to creative interpretation.

Under the influence of humanism, Italian Jewish scholars turned to Hebrew poetics and replaced the Arabic poetics that had been absorbed into a Hebrew idiom by, e.g., Dunash ibn Labrat and Moses ibn Ezra. Yet along with the latter's *Kitāb al- muḥāḍara wa- 'l-mudhākara,*[9] Judah Messer Leon's *Sefer Nofet Ẓufim* ("The Book of the Honeycomb's Flow") became one of the earliest Hebrew accounts to define the Bible as a work of great literature. Both Messer Leon and Buber—in their respective times and places—accomplished this by shining the torch of contemporaneous literary theory on the texture of the biblical narrative. Because my primary emphasis here is to trace a meandering journey between these two thinkers on the apologetics of translation, necessary weigh stations on the path will include the writings of Moses ibn Ezra, Saadya Gaon, and Maimonides.

The apologetic that this chapter seeks to investigate moves in two directions. First there is the translative approach that virtually all the thinkers of this study take up: the Bible plays an essential role in the formation of Western culture and literature because nascent in its narrative exist all the features and motifs that non- Jews had located in—chronologically—Arabic literature (including the Qurʾān), the literature of classical antiquity, and of modern Europe. The other direction—and this is localized to the translative activity of Buber and Rosenzweig—is the need to show the Bible's superiority by exploring its difference and its separateness from West ern literature. On their reading, everything about the Bible—its theory of narrativity, its use of word roots (*Wortstamm*), lead words (*Leitwort*), even the way it forces the reader to breathe—all succeed in making the biblical narrative shatter customary expectations.

Translation and the Affirmation of Difference

Let me take as my point of departure two rather lengthy quotations—one from Martin Buber and the other from Judah Messer Leon—that I believe get to the heart of this chapter's theme. In their thinking about the necessity of translation, whether in twentieth- century Germany or in fifteenth-

century Italy, each used contemporaneous aesthetic idioms as a way to restore/invent and to establish/shatter a Hebrew original using another language. As we have seen before, the Hebrew of the Bible sits silently in the background and illumines a set of concerns that move in front of its artificial horizon. The boundaries of linguistic possibilities that open up from such positioning reveal affinities between both the Hebraic and non-Hebraic, the past and present, while at the same time concealing their ontological aporia. These affinities lead to the claim that all is contained within Hebrew, now perceived as the epicenter of Western civilization, and from whose font flow all possible meanings. In his "Der Mensch von heute und die jüdische Bibel" ("People Today and the Jewish Bible"), Buber writes of the "abyss [*Kluft*] that lies between Scripture and the people of today."[10] The cause of this abyss, according to him, is as follows:

> People today have, to be sure, noted the disintegrative effects of such a separation of inter- related things [*Diese Trennung der Aufeinanderangewiesene*]—noted, that is, a disintegration that must touch deeper and deeper layers, until the entirely disempowered Geist is reduced to the willing and complacent servant of any power that be. . . . "Religion" today is itself a thing of unattached *Geist* . . . [that] cannot lead us to unity, because it has itself fallen into disunity, has accommodated itself to this dichotomy of our existence. Religion would itself have to return to reality before it could have a real effect on people today. But religion has always been reality only when it has been fearless— when it has taken upon itself the whole concreteness of reality, has signed nothing away as belonging by right to some other agent, has embodied Geist and at the same time consecrated the quotidian [*den Geist verleibte und den Alltag weihte*].[11]

Before moving into an analysis of this passage, I would like to put it in counterpoint with another extended quotation, this time from Judah Messer Leon's *Sefer Nofet Ẓufim,* written in Hebrew, roughly five hundred years earlier:

> Every science [*kol ḥokhmah*], every rationally apprehended truth that any treatise may contain, is present in our holy Torah and in the books of those who speak by the Holy Spirit [*ba-ruaḥ ha- qodesh*]—present, that is, for those who thoroughly understand the subjects involved, and for whom the Lord has enlightened the eyes. . . . In the days of prophecy, indeed in the months of old, when out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shined forth, we used to know from the Holy Torah all the sciences and truths of reason, including all that were humanly attained, for everything is already latent therein, or plainly stated. What other peoples possessed of these sciences and truths was, by comparison with us, very little.[12]

Reminiscent of Saadya's truncated history of the Hebrew language in the introduction to his *Egron,* Messer Leon next turns his attention to the

destruction of the Temple in 70 CE and the subsequent exile. Like Saadya, he pairs destruction and exile with forgetting. For in exile, which he locates as the end result of Israel's transgressions and iniquities, Jews slowly lost their scientific and artistic birthright. He continues:

> Thus the matter has come to be in reverse [*ha-ʿinyan bi- hofeḵ*]; for if, after we have come to know all the sciences, or some part of them, we study the words of the Torah, then the eyes of our understanding open up to the fact that the sciences are included in the Torah's words, and we wonder how we could have failed to realize this from the Torah itself to begin with. Such has frequently been our own experience, especially in the science of Rhetoric [*ḥokhmat ha- halṣah*]. For when I examined the words of the Torah in the way now common among most people, I had no idea that the science of Rhetoric or any part of it was included therein. But once I had studied and investigated Rhetoric, searched for her as for hidden treasures out of the treatises written by men of nations other than our own, and afterward came back to see what is said about it in the Torah and the Holy Scriptures, then the eyes of my understanding were opened, and I saw that it was the Torah which was the giver.[13]

These passages from Buber and Messer Leon demonstrate, in their different ways, the eternality and beauty that both authors perceive to be at work in both the form and content of the biblical narrative. Although later generations—or, in Buber's telling phrase, "the people of today"—may well have removed themselves from an auditory and rhythmic engagement with the Bible, this is the result of those doing the reading, not that which they read. The goal of both authors is to reconnect individuals to the Bible. The way they choose do this, however, is by appeals to external literature as opposed to internal modes of reading. Paradoxically but not surprisingly, Jewish superiority is defined and articulated by means of non- Jewish contexts.Since both Buber and Messer Leon clearly present us with Jewish theologies derived from non- Jewish sources, a focus on their translative projects can further illumine the correspondences between cultural identity, the semantics of literary production, and the shards of religious nationalism.

Both individuals develop radically different theories of translation that are shaped in large part by the broader cultural moment in which each lived. Unlike Buber (and Rosenzweig), Messer Leon is not interested in translating the entire biblical narrative into a contemporaneous literary vernacular. His concern is to show points of contact between the Bible and Renaissance humanism, especially the latter's use of the classical rhetorical tradition as developed by the likes of Cicero and Quintillian. One of Messer Leon's most original contributions is his substitution of examples taken from the Bible for those taken from Latin authors in non- Jewish

Renaissance treatises devoted to the topic.[14] Buber's desire, however, is to wrench the biblical narrative out of its Germanic context and to provide the path back to Jewish difference.[15] The articulation of a Jewish ontology becomes, at least for Rosenzweig (his co- translator), the way by which Jews can serve their world- historical mission.[16] Framed alternately, Messer Leon's need to find points of contact between Judaism and non- Jewish culture gives way to Buber's need to wrench Judaism from any such similarities.

Their radically different understandings of Judaism's situatedness certainly influenced their respective modes of translation. Messer Leon's interest is in the conceptual translation of select words and phrases and thereby the illumination of the Bible's anticipation of and conformity to classical rhetoric. Implicit in this argument is the divine status of the Bible and thus the superiority of Judaism. Buber and Rosenzweig, however, literally translate the Bible into German and in so doing try to show how the Bible is the "gate of the word" (*das Tor des Worts*),[17] but of course they have to do this in German that points to a Hebrew now silent.

Messer Leon implies that if in the biblical period all sciences naturally flowed from the Torah's wellsprings, in his own time "the matter has come to be in reverse." One must consequently read these sciences amongst the other nations and only then come back to the Torah to find them. Buber, on the contrary, argues that Judaism is pre- science and unfettered by the rationalism of the philosophical record, but instead archives an entirely different order that is nonrational and emotive. If for Messer Leon the biblical narrative—when read properly—could connect elite Jews to Renaissance culture, for Buber, when read properly, the biblical narrative shattered any such connections.[18]

Where Messer Leon reads the Bible using the literary standards of the Renaissance, Buber attempts to read against the grain of contemporaneous German trends in aesthetics.[19] The naturalness and beauty of the former gives way to the unnatural and nonbeautiful results of the latter. Both modes of reading, however, have the same effect. Messer Leon demonstrates the beauty of the biblical narrative by both situating it against the Renaissance's literary and rhetorical backdrop, and by going so far as to say that in the Bible one encounters both the origins and most forceful expressions of these themes. Buber, however, uses the biblical narrative as a transport to the preliterary, providing the means to retrieve an originary meaning subsequently lost to the rationalist and rationalizing philosophical tradition. The Bible, on his reading, now becomes the poetic realization of Jewish being- in-the-world.Although Messer Leon's ornate architecture gives way to the rustic simplicity of Buber, both thinkers maintain that it is in the biblical narrative that one truly and authentically

encounters not simply the Jewish response to non- Jewish literature, but the most beautiful expressions of Judaism.

Without attention to the formal beauty of the biblical narrative, one runs the risk of bypassing the contents of its narrative.[20] In so doing, the texture of revelation must intersect with the formal beauty of aesthetics. These standards, however, ultimately prove ambivalent. They must be imposed on the biblical narrative as the collision of an ancient text and contemporaneous theories of art and literature; yet in order to uncover filiations, the biblical narrative—as we have witnessed so often in this study—must be reshaped, manipulated, and recast. This is certainly not to imply that there exists some essential Torah that free- floats in the ether and that manifests itself differently within the different cultures in which it lands. On the contrary, the biblical narrative, as I argued in chapter 1, plays a defining role in the formation of Jewish cultures; however, these cultures shape both the contours and the texture of the Torah and constantly configure and reconfigure the way it is read, understood, and the meanings derived therefrom.

Messer Leon and Buber both show that the translative enterprise is intimately connected to cultural and literary apologetics. Jewish culture, Jewish aesthetics, and hence Jewish religious values are all sustained by and sustain the non- Jewish contexts in which Jews find themselves. Caution again should temper our use of the adjectives of "Jewish" and "non- Jewish." Both would most likely have looked and been understood differently among elite Jews in the fifteenth century than in the nineteenth; and both undoubtedly would differ from our reifications of these two adjectives today. It is imperative to attempt to do justice to such difference while at the same time to try and extract something of value.

Let me now unravel Messer Leon from Buber and examine each thinker in isolation. This will permit a more sustained treatment of each thinker in order that we may get a better understanding of their respective notions of translation and its intersection with cultural and literary apologetics. This will also establish a number of heuristic devices that I can then use to examine some of the other individuals who are the subject of the present study.

Ancient Tonality in a Modern Key: Martin Buber

In his "Die Sprache der Botschaft" ("The Language of the Message"),[21] Martin Buber argues that Scripture represents "genuine spokenness" (*echte Gesprochenheit*) wherein form and content cannot be neatly separated into discrete units. The message—*die Botschaft*—is that which occurs through

the biblical narrative, transforming it, its language, and ultimately the reader who stands in front of it, ready to receive it, in the same manner that the ancient Israelites stood before Sinai. The principle that makes this happen, according to Buber, is rhythm (*der Rhythmus*): "By rhythm we understand not segmented movement in general, but auditory connection [*akustiche Verbindung*], manifested in a significant order, of a constant with a variable. The constant can be purely structural [*strukturell*]—the recurrence of cadence, of tempo, of quantity. Or it can be phonetic [*phonetisch*]—the recurrence of sounds or sequences of sounds, of words or sequences of words."[22]

Buber, like his colleague in translation, Franz Rosenzweig, had an ambivalent attitude toward modernity. In emphasizing the importance of rhythm, of cadence and of tempo, Buber seeks to move beyond the text and to get at the pure linguistic and aural moment unharnessed by written language. Buber and Rosenzweig's translation project, to use the words of Braiterman, was not unconnected to contemporaneous advances in the phonograph, especially the desire "to create the technical means with which to reproduce the sound of revelation in German as recorded in the original text."[23] The way they went about this was to focus on sounds, on movement, and on the lyricality of the narrative as a way to enable the modern reader to stand anew with the text, to open up the continual possibility of receiving its narrative, and to reveal to the reader a new mode of reading.[24] In "Der Mensch von heute und die jüdische Bibel," Buber focuses on *ruaḥ elohim* to illustrate this point:

> *Ruaḥ elohim,* the breathing, blowing, surging manifestation, is neither natural nor spiritual but both in one; it is the creative breathing that brings both nature and spirit into being. The Bible here thinks not lexically but elementally [*nicht lexicalisch, sondern elementar*], and would have its readers think in its manner, would have the movement from God that precedes all differentiation undifferentiatedly touch the hearing heart. . . . The Bible again and again—in the "naïve realism" into which all ideas must be plunged in order to be reborn—seeks to evoke the original dynamic unity [*die ursprüngliche dynamische Einheit*], the single happening from God that ferments the heavens into storm and is blown into the essence of earth.[25]

Reading must echo creation. One must think not in terms of words but of the original and dynamic unity that illumines the heart and that makes revelation possible in the first place. One must get at the inner experience behind the outer form of revelation; therein one can partake of the rhapsodic effects of the Bible's auditory message. In this Buber (and Rosenzweig) directly challenged what they imagined to be the prevailing ethos that wanted to set the biblical narrative apart from life, whether through

the regnant biblical criticism or more general neglect among secular Jews. To read the Bible was to hear the Bible and to have its transformative language overcome the modern reader.

This is experience and not philosophy. As he had done with his early interpretation of Hasidic tales, Buber underscores the rhythm and movement behind the text as a way to breathe life and spirit into an otherwise closed structure.[26] The Buber-Rosenzweig biblical translation sought to let the rhythmic cadences of the human voice emerge suddenly and shockingly from behind the written text. Strange spellings,[27] neologisms, the breaking of the text into linear lines, and the attempt to re- create Hebrew's triliteral root system in an Indo-European vernacular[28] gave their translation an air of premodernism.[29]

What Buber and Rosenzweig were doing was by no means new. As others have well shown, Buber and Rosenzweig's interest in and unconventional use of form was part of a larger European trajectory that also witnessed the birth of Expressionism in art and modernism in literature and philosophy.[30] Expressionism, to use the words of Braiterman, was a movement to unlock "the non- material element in art that transcends its materiality."[31] This leads Peter Gordon to label the work of German thinkers such as Buber, Rosenzweig, and Heidegger as "philosophical expressionism": "The salient feature of philosophical expressionism is a theologically inflected pathos of isolation. This is combined with a rebellious attitude toward prior intellectual traditions and a resentful sense that such traditions have missed what is most fulfilling in life."[32]

The intellectual concerns of thinkers such as Buber and Rosenzweig were part of the larger shift in culture at the beginning of the twentieth century. For example, the unfamiliar rhythms and uncanny tonalities of Carl Orff's post- expressionist *Carmina Burana*(1937), the modern reworking of a thirteenth- century poem, is an attempt to capture the throbbing materiality of reality in art.[33] German expressionist painters such as Franz Marc and "Der Blaue Reiter" (The Blue Rider) circle, which included the likes of Wassily Kandinsky, stressed the intersection between the visual and the aural, the spiritual associations of color, and a keen interest in primitivism.[34]

This was also the time of Germany's growing infatuation with the Orient. A contemporary of Buber and Rosenzweig, the expressionist poet Oskar Loerke, situated their biblical translation alongside new translations of Oriental classics such as speeches from the Buddha that had just appeared in German.[35] Loerke writes that the new Bible translation brought "a heretofore undisclosed breath from the East, from the early age of man, whose essence cannot by any means be captured by such terms as archaic

or barbaric."[36] The oriental and simplistic qualities of the translation were meant to conjure up an authentic past, retrieve a form of cultural identity, and provide an alternative to existing forms of diasporic culture.

Both the modern turn to archaism and the occidental turn to orientalism were part of the cultural temperament of the times. The Buber-Rosenzweig biblical translation project cannot be understood in isolation from these larger intellectual trends. Where they differed from these larger trends, however, was in their location of this primal authenticity in the Hebrew Bible and its existential connection to the language and identity of the Jewish people. If non- Jewish thinkers had turned to medieval German literature or the ancient Indo-European literature of Buddhism, Buber and Rosenzweig cast their glance at the uncanny simplicity of the biblical narrative. For it was this work, as I argued in chapter 2, that for Rosenzweig became the Text from which all other texts derive their potency. As such, "the Bible alone, among all books of the literary epoch, whether literary or pre- literary, demands a pre-literary mode of reading [*die vorliterarische Leseweise*]—demands, that is, what the Hebrew expression for reading means, which is familiar in the West from the Koran and which has also yielded what words pertaining to writing have not yielded, namely the most familiar term denoting the Old Testament: the *qer'iah,* the 'calling out' [*die Kria, den Ruf*]."[37]

The Buber and Rosenzweig translation is decidedly apologetical. Their goal is nothing less than the articulation of the cultural and poetic genius of the Jewish people. By recovering the authentic spirit illuminating but not necessarily embedded in the physical page of the Bible, they hoped to demonstrate how the biblical narrative was a text unlike any other—an originary and preliterary facticity. Like virtually everyone else discussed here, they took much from the prevailing cultural and intellectual zeitgeist and adapted it to uniquely Jewish concerns. The Hebrew Bible, in the hands of Buber and Rosenzweig, became the conduit of preliterary, prephilosophical, and prescientific pathos. In the words of Buber, this is expressed most forcefully and dynamically in the *Leitwort:*

> By *Leitwort* I understand a word or word root that is meaningfully repeated within a text or sequence of texts or complex of texts. . . . What takes place between [these] verbal configurations thus related is in a way a movement [*eine Bewegung*], readers to whom the whole [*das Ganze*] is present feel the waves beating back and forth [*die Wellen hinüber und herüber schlagen*]. Such measured repetition, corresponding to the inner rhythm of the text [*der inneren Rhythmik des Textes*]—or rather issuing from it—is probably the strongest of all techniques for making a meaning available without articulating it explicitly [*ohne ihn vorzutragen*].[38]

The *Leitwort* becomes the bedrock of the Buber-Rosenzweig translation project; the preliterary and prephilosophical aurality that emerged from Israel's physical encounter with the divine presence.[39] In this respect the Bible is not literature in the Western sense of the term, but an encounter—one that must be reestablished in each generation and in each individual.[40] It is what enables them to re- create a Hebrew language in German form and provided the building blocks to rebuild a new Hebraic consciousness in the Diaspora. It thus becomes necessary, as Buber informs us, to bypass the literary and the written in order to "go straight through to the spokenness, to the being- spoken, of the word" (*Zur Gesprochenheit wollen wir hindurch, zum Gesprochenwerden des Worts*).[41] The result, according to Rosenzweig, will be a translated text "that moves not toward beauty, but toward Truth" (*Nicht um Schönheit geht es, sondern um Treue*).[42] The renunciation of beauty here is itself a statement governed by contemporaneous aesthetics. Beauty is no longer defined along formal and conventional patterns, but emerges slowly from the hidden and the primal. Like the Jewish people itself.

The Conservatism of Translative Apologetics: Judah Messer Leon

The rhetorical tradition that captured Judah Messer Leon's imagination was based on the rediscovery of Quintilian's corpus in 1416 and of Cicero's *De oratore* in 1421.[43] Hitherto Jews had largely absorbed rhetoric through the Arabo-Aristotelian tradition, perhaps best witnessed in Moses ibn Ezra's *Kitāb al- muḥāḍara.* Whereas the latter tradition stressed the logical status of rhetoric, the Quintilianic and Ciceronian model tended to emphasize rhetoric's indispensable configuration with philosophy and human good ness.[44] Mai monides, for example, who was indebted to the Arabo-Aristotelian philosophical tradition, refers to Aristotle's *Rhetoric* by name only once.[45] In this regard he shared the Platonic criticism of rhetoric as that which unduly influenced the convictions of listeners. Despite such criticisms, however, one could quite easily argue that Mai monides' linguistic hermeneutics that both critiques and defends biblical anthropomorphisms vindicates rhetoric.[46]

Judah Messer Leon's *Sefer Nofet Ṣufim* represents an important shift among Jewish intellectuals. As a transition between the older and new paradigms of rhetoric, this work straddles two intellectual worlds: its form and structure belong to the world of medieval scholasticism, yet its understanding of aesthetics and literature mirror Renaissance humanism.

Like the medievals before him, Messer Leon was well aware of the potentially dangerous features of rhetoric when taken as ends in and of themselves.[47] Like Moses ibn Ezra,[48] he tried to connect the study of rhetoric to moral and philosophical perfection.[49] Moreover, since *Sefer Nofet Ẓufim* was a work written for his students, Messer Leon sought to provide those with proper philosophical and ethical training with the requisite rhetorical techniques necessary to shape the conduct and views of Italian Jewry.[50]

My interest here is with the apologetics associated with the work, in particular with Judah Messer Leon's desire to discover or uncover the rhetorical currents flowing deep within the Hebrew Bible. In the opening of the fourth section of *Sefer Nofet Ẓufim,* for example, he writes:

> In the course of the preceding treatment of the subjects with which the present work is concerned, we entered their villages . . . and their encampments, and searched out the inner chamber of the pronouncements made by both ancient and more recent rhetoricians [*divrei ha- meliṣa ha- qadomim ve-ha-ḥadashim*]. . . . For most of what we shall say herein, we shall draw upon Book IV of the [New] Rhetoric by Tully, and upon the account given by the Philosopher in Book III of his *Rhetoric.* The illustrations [*ha- meshalim*] I have taken from our holy and beautiful house, from the words of prophecy and the divinely inspired narratives that sit first in the kingdom of agreeableness and elegance, that are sweeter than honey, that cannot be gotten for gold.[51]

Judah Messer Leon here clearly states his goal of illumining the rhetorical dimension of biblical narrative. If classical motifs and themes can be discovered in the biblical narrative—which predates the likes of Cicero, Tully, and Quintillian—then Messer Leon, according to his own agenda, will have succeeded in demonstrating that these motifs first existed in the Bible. The language of the above passage confirms this. Using the words of Genesis 25:16 ("their villages . . . and their encampments"), he describes the need to read works on rhetoric composed by non- Jews and to enter their "inner chamber" (2 Kings 9:2). Yet as the closing lines reveal, these features "sit first in the kingdom" (Esther 1:14) of the Bible. Even though he must ultimately go to non- Jewish texts to discover the defining elements and the important features of rhetoric, these definitions and features sit most beautifully in the Bible. For it is there that these features reside most purely, most pristinely, and, to use the language of Buber, most archaically. Judah Messer Leon attempts, in Altmann's words, to "stress the superiority of the Jewish heritage within the commonality of mankind."[52]

Following the chapter wherein the aforementioned quotation is located, the reader encounters eighty- two chapters, all of which reveal in intricate detail the numerous rhetorical terms and concepts and their definitions, including examples of how they are used within the biblical

narrative. For example, concerning the trope of metaphor (*ha-hityaḥasut*), Messer Leon writes:

> Metaphor is diction in which certain words are taken as parables and in a transferred sense, because some resemblance obtains between the literal and transferred meanings which allows this appropriately to be done. For example, "The wilderness and the parched land will be glad; and the desert will rejoice, and blossom as the rose" [Is. 35:1]. Gladness is properly attributable only to humans, but appears here through resemblance; for the bringing forth of the flowers is indicative of great good in the case of a desert and parched land, just as gladness is an indication of man's good. . . . The aim in using metaphor is sometimes conciseness [*ha-qeẓor*]. . . . Sometimes the aim is decency of language [*neqiyot ha- lashon*]. . . . Sometimes the intention is to magnify a matter. . . . Sometimes it is meant to minimize. . . . And sometimes its sole purpose is elegance: "That put darkness for light and light for darkness, that put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter" [Is. 5:20]. This figure should be fashioned with understanding and awareness, in such a way that the resemblance will not seem bizarre.[53]

This passage is significant for several reasons. First, Hebrew does not literally possess a word for "metaphor"; for this Judah must use the Hebrew term that connotes "relation," "relationship," or "ascription." Second, despite the nonexistence of a Hebrew technical term, he implies that the actual concept possesses a rich history in the biblical narrative, something that the chapter goes on to recount in intricate detail. Third, the small gap that opens between the Hebrew term and the concept ultimately gives way in *Sefer Nofet Ẓufim* to a chasm between biblical rhetoric and all other forms of (non- Jewish) rhetoric.This chasm exists because, unlike classical and renaissance rhetoric that are the product of human hands, the biblical narrative reveals its divine literary and rhetorical artistry. As Messer Leon himself claims, "The statutes and ordinances of Rhetoric that are included within the Holy Scriptures—and all of the like that all the other nations possess, the difference is so striking that to compare them is like comparing the hyssop in the wall with the cedar of Lebanon."[54]

In drawing this distinction between the Hebrew Bible and all other forms of non- Jewish literature, we should be cautious in assuming that Messer Leon himself inscribed hermetically sealed categories between "Jewish" and "non- Jewish." It seems to me that this was not simply a matter of a "Jew," Judah Messer Leon, engaging in "non- Jewish" poetics and rhetoric. On the contrary, we need to situate Messer Leon against the backdrop of fifteenth- century Italian humanism wherein he becomes a Renaissance thinker who read and struggled with its complex and often contradictory literary, philosophical, and poetic themes both in Latin and in the vernacular. Certainly he was fully committed to Jewish communal

and religious leadership, including the concomitant activity of reading biblical texts in the light of humanistic categories. However, these two worlds need not have appeared as contradictory to him. Rather, we need to think about how he thought as a Jew and as a Renaissance thinker, as someone who was important enough in the non- Jewish cultural and intellectual trends of the Renaissance that the emperor Frederick III accorded him the privilege not only of receiving a double doctorate, in medicine and the liberal arts, but also the ability to award such degrees to his own students.[55]

Judah Messer Leon's apologetics cannot be underestimated, as they subsequently justified the participation of Jews in Renaissance intellectual and cultural activity. By absorbing classical and renaissance rhetoric, not to mention other sciences, into the semantic field of the Hebrew Bible, he was able to domesticate them and make them Hebraic. For him, this was not an idiosyncratic imposition but the rediscovery of a birthright. It was not simply a matter of making facile connections so that one could subsequently go on and engage in Renaissance philosophy. On the contrary, the argument is much more subtle. Messer Leon was a fairly conservative thinker[56] who truly believed that the standards he perceived to be at work in the biblical narrative were clear for all—whether Jew or non- Jew—to see. This was an argument based on the distortive prism of memory: the glory of the perceived past contained within itself the traces to regenerate the present.

Looking Back to See Forward: Translation as Heritage or Production?

According to medieval Islamic discussions, if Christians and Jews received their miracles in the events of Jesus and Moses, respectively, the enduring miracle of the Islamic tradition was the ornate and elegant language of the Qurʾān. Because the Qurʾān was regarded as inimitable (*iʿjāz al-qurʾān*), itself a theological claim, a body of literature arose to define this inimit ability in terms we would describe today as both literary and apologetical.[57] If the Qurʾān was the most beautiful of books, then the language in which it was expressed, Arabic, was the most beautiful language, and those who spoke it, the Arabs, were superior to all other peoples.[58] This notion, referred to as *arabiyya* ("Arabism"), played a key role in polemical literature and was a phenomenon to which many non-Arabs, both Muslim and non- Muslim alike, reacted.[59]

In a series of studies, Nehemiah Allony has argued that virtually all Jewish literary production in the medieval Arabophone world was a reaction against *arabiyya*.[60] In the shadows of all literary production and ele-

gance, according to his assessment, was the specter of religious polemics. One of the major criticisms that Muslims leveled at Jews and Christians—a criticism to which these groups would subsequently respond in kind—was that their scriptures had been tampered with (*taḥrīf*). For Allony, contemporaneous Jewish literature was both a reaction against these charges and an attempt to show Jewish religious and literary superiority.[61] While on one level he is certainly correct to stress the cultural polemics at work in this literature, on another level it is far too functional and ignores both the fabric and contents of the literature in question.

Rather than locate translation as a simple reaction to the concept of *arabiyya,* I prefer to connect it to the notion of imagined community to which I referred above and to the ambiguity associated with a minority trying both to perceive and define itself using the dominant cultural and intellectual traits of the majority.[62] Ross Brann, for example, writes that it is "far easier to describe texts and identify their ties to Arabic sources as 'influences' and 'reactions' borne out of the Jews' minority status than to attempt a more nuanced conceptualization of the Jews' complex interaction with Arabic culture in al-Andalus."[63] One could also claim that Allony's insistence to locate much of medieval Arabophone Jewish literature as a reaction to *arabiyya* falsely maintains that a culture—whether the dominant or minority one—is composed of a stable and closed corpus of ideas, tropes or symbols that are supposed to have an affinity with specific opinions, attitudes, or modes of behavior. It is thus necessary to be aware of the importance played by exogenous dimensions of change.[64]

The translation of the Bible using the aesthetic palette of non- Jewish cultures assumes a set of cultural borders that might well be more apparent than real and that appear as discrete and hermetically sealed containers solely from the vantage point of today. Andalusian Jews certainly regarded themselves as Jews, but intellectually they spoke the same language and employed the same conceptual apparatus as their non- Muslim counterparts. "Jewish intellectuals" were not Jews who engaged in something called "Jewish intellectual activity," but were Arabophone intel lectuals who—much like their Muslim neighbors—engaged in the mutual task of translating their respective scriptures into various literary and cultural idioms. The relationship of many of these individuals to Judaism or the Jewish polity, to quote Jonathan Ray, "was but one of many aspects of their identity."[65]

Whereas Muslims located authentic communal and aesthetic expressionisms in the Qurʾān, Jews did much the same thing, only in the Hebrew Bible. This was perhaps less about cultural polemics than about the quest for authenticity and the need to reconfigure boundaries between past, present, and future. This is certainly not to deny the polemical edge

to some of this work; however, it is also important to be aware that intellectually, culturally, and aesthetically the ontological divisions between Jew and Muslim were in all probability fairly slight (especially when compared with a post- 1948 world, from whose vantage point such boundaries are today ascribed).

The translation of the Bible into Arabic vernaculars, as into Indo-European ones, played a formative role in creating a constitutive imagination that was instrumental to the formation of Jewish identity. To quote Jean- François Bayart,

> In a given society [this] *imaginaire* does not represent a coherent totality, since it includes a host of heterogeneous, constantly changing figures. Imaginary productions are thus not necessarily isomorphic. Moreover, as symbolic productions by definition they have many meanings and are ambivalent. It is in this respect that they help "hold together" a society without this "holding together of its world of meaning" ever being demonstrated or even assumed to be demonstrable.[66]

The translation of the Bible was associated with the discovery or invention of an ancient aesthetic tradition—one that just happened to coincide with contemporary literary production—that existed, dormant and untapped, in the fissures of its narrative. The formalization and the ritualization of biblical translation created and maintained—by repetition—certain values that, while referring to the past, were in fact reconstructed or fabricated. This trope of the "invention of tradition" succeeded in creating and maintaining a Jewish literary identity that could be neatly called upon and juxtaposed with what Muslim Arabophone intellectuals were doing with the qurʾānic narrative.[67]

A perfect example of this is the writings of Saadya Gaon. Virtually single- handedly,Saadya was responsible for the renewal of Hebrew in the tenth century. He did this through a process of "cultural extraversion," in which foreign cultural elements were put in the service of autochthonous objectives.[68] In seeking to uncover a pure and original core enshrined in a pristine biblical Hebrew, Saadya attempted to reconstitute an authentic Jewish literary—and thus communal and religious—expression in the face of what he envisaged as a regressive process: the forgetting and subsequent decay of Hebrew and Hebraic consciousness.[69] The discourse of a reconstituted or fantasized past functioned primarily as a critical commentary on the present and concomitantly represents an anticipation of future regeneration.

On one level it is fairly easy to situate Saadya Gaon against this backdrop of Jewish cultural nationalism. His *Egron* was both the first work of Hebrew lexicography and also the first book of Hebrew poetics.[70] In

composing such a treatise, Saadya was doing little different from contemporaneous Arab grammarians. On another level, Saadya was an Arabic-speaking intellectual and—like all such individuals—he stressed the religious and literary importance of *fasīḥ*, the Arabic term denoting all that was good, beautiful, and pleasing in language. This was not only vocabulary and expression, but also syntax and grammar as well. Like his Muslim colleagues, Saadya turned to the past and the constructed authenticity of an originary and pure language that would hold the keys to national renewal in the present.[71] Whereas Muslim lexicographers looked to the Qurʾān, Saadya looked to the Torah. Phenomenologically, their actions and intentions were virtually identical.

Rather than envisage the existence of a permanent inner core peculiar to each culture that confers upon it a veridical nature that determines present and future, cultural theorists prefer to stress the process of the subsequent elaboration of an ideology that speaks of the present by imagining an ideal past. Such a process enables those in the present to tame an otherwise unruly social world where meanings are often fraught with ambiguity and where identities are defined by their instability. This rhetoric of authenticity posits religions and religious actors who are often regarded as stable, uniform, and unchanged throughout history and across the globe.[72] As Daniel Boyarin has argued, however, identities that today appear hard and fast might well have been imagined otherwise at different times and places. In speaking of the fluid borders between Jews and Christians in late antiquity, for instance, he asks rhetorically: "Even if we grant the statistical dominance (and perhaps a certain power dominance, although, once more, I don't know how we would show or know this) of the separatists, in terms of the semantics of the cultural language, the discourse of the time, are there sets of features that absolutely define who is a Jew and who is a Christian in such wise that the two categories will not seriously overlap, irrespective of the numbers of the blurring sets? I think not."[73]

If we move—as many in cultural studies want us to—toward the idea that the real action is at the margins and not at the center, what does that say about our own notions of or attachments to any collective identity both in the past and in the present? It is thus important to be aware not only of the constructed nature of all identities, both personal and collective, but also of the ongoing construction and maintenance of boundaries between ethnic and other collective identities. David Nirenberg has examined how Jewish historiography, especially after the persecutions in Spain in 1391, attempted to fix taxonomic categories such as "Jew" or "Christian." In sorting through the shards of identity between 1391 and 1492, he writes that "genealogy [was elevated] to a primary form of communal memory."[74] Intellectual activity, which included biblical translation,

played a key role in constructing cultural identity and the memory that went with it.

Situating Saadya against this backdrop, it becomes clear fairly quickly that he was engaged in the same rhetoric of faith, tradition, and authenticity as his Muslim contemporaries. Both were fairly heavily invested in the business of sorting out and defining "Jewishness" vis- à-vis "Muslimness" (not to mention the numerous internal gradations within each category). He certainly would have had much more in common with these individuals of the same class and education than he would have had with his coreligionists from other classes or educational levels.[75] Where Jewish and Muslim Arabophone elites differ, of course, is in which language they could locate authenticity. For Muslims it was Arabic and for Jews it was Hebrew, although increasingly a Hebrew that was retrievable through Arabic. Whereas the former held that the purest expression of Arabic was in the Qurʾān, the latter held that it was in the Bible. I am not certain that this amounts to a direct and *Shuʿūbiyya*- inspired attack on *arabiyya,* as Allony contends. Rather, it is about two groups with the same conceptual apparatus trying to construct what they considered to be ideal communities. In this Saadya both absorbed and actively contributed to the conceptual vocabulary and categories of Muslim lexicographers in order to demonstrate that the Hebrew language, especially that of the Hebrew Bible, possesses all the aesthetic standards and literary embellishments that Muslims thinkers had located or invented in the Qurʾān.

Unlike Arab grammarians, Saadya includes sections in his *Egron* that focus on rhymes at both the beginnings and endings of words.[76] Implicit in this is the claim that, on one level, Hebrew is superior to Arabic in its poetic ability or potential. Near the end of his Hebrew introduction to the *Egron,* Saadya writes:

> When I decided to write this book to give knowledge
> To all who have chosen the language of the holy angels
> I thought much about human speech, pronunciation
> And the utterances of the mouth.
> I discovered that such utterances are of two types
> Those that are foundational [*yesod*] and those that are supplemental [*tosefet*].
> To them are added plurality, number and tenses.
> The foundational [utterances] are stable, and the supplemental are the opposite.
> The letters at the beginning of the [foundational words] are
> What provide change . . .[77]

Here we see in Saadya's comments the beginnings of the imagination of the Hebrew language, especially its triconsonantal root system that will

later find more elaborate explanation in the writings of Dunash ibn Labrat and Abraham ibn Ezra. Despite the rudimentary nature of the Hebrew root system illumined here, I wish to underscore the fact that for Saadya Hebrew is "the language of the holy angels" (*leshon malakhei qodesh*),[78] the language that mediates human- divine encounters, and the language of the authentic and revelatory past.

Based on my theoretical comments above and his own comments in the introduction to the *Egron,* we can say that, moving to his biblical translation, Saadya attempts to create an arabized version of the Hebrew Bible or—framed somewhat differently but in the same manner—a hebraized version of the Qurʾān. This version, although created and interpretable along the lines of what was going on in Arabo- Muslim contexts, is responsible for constructing a community that does not yet exist; a community that will possess an imagined past that conforms to the literary and aesthetic standards of the present. For example:

> We did not speak the languages [of our neighbors],
> or worship their gods.
> From Egypt, our God spoke to us the words of purity [*divrei ẓaḥot*]
> in the mouth of his servant, Moses, a man of God.
> He spoke laws and judgments [*ḥuqqim u- mishpatim*]
> From atop Mt. Horeb.
> For generations we had deputies who lived
> In the land of our heritage.
> [Our language] was heard among our kings,
> in the songs of the Levites, and in the hymns of our priests.
> It was spoken by our prophets, defining their visions.
> All of this occurred until the Exile in the days of Hezekiah.
> After the destruction of the city of our God
> We began to forgo the sacred language and speak in
> the languages of the people who dwelt in foreign lands.[79]

Here Saadya creates a "history" of the Hebrew language and proto-Hebraic nationalism through the prisms of revelation and forgetting and of purity and pollution. We need to situate such constructions not against the backdrop of some nascent historiography, but as part of a cartography responsible for creating and maintaining artificial borderlines between Muslim and Jew and between Muslimness and Jewishness. Saadya's acts of boundary maintenance are attempts to transform a fuzzy category into one with clear borders and a set of family resemblances into a set of features that will ultimately determine who is in and who is out.[80] As the most important gaon of his time, Saadya—perhaps more than anyone—was determined to impose clear boundaries between categories, between communities, and between languages. If Judah Messer Leon sought to es-

tablish the rhetoric of humanism deep within the biblical narrative and Buber and Rosenzweig sought to create a biblical language using an expressionist palette, Saadya here tries to define an ideal community in the distant past that would maintain religious identity in the face of various internal (Karaite) and external (Islamic) pressures.

One could also without much difficulty situate Moses ibn Ezra against this broad swath of apologetics and of creating a phantasmal past to invent a community in the present. Both his major nonpoetical works—the *Maqālat al- ḥadīqa* and *Kitāb al- muḥāḍara wa- 'l-mudhākara*—were written in perceived isolation in Northern Spain, in exile from his home in Granada in the South. In both works Ibn Ezra seeks to present himself as transmitter of Andalusian Jewish culture.[81] In exile he refused to adjust to his new surroundings and preferred to see himself as a "captive in prison"[82] and in a culturally and intellectually inferior society.

It was at a literary function in Castile that Ibn Ezra was asked by the host about the nature and function of metaphor and encouraged to write a treatise on the topic. The resultant work, the *Maqālat,* is a reverie and a way out of his self- imposed exile. Like the *Kitāb al- muḥāḍara,* he invents an ideal past and a constructed community based on the perceived lacunae in the present. But unlike Saadya Gaon, this past is not biblical but Andalusian. Whereas Saadya's translation project used contemporaneous aesthetic standards to create an authentic Hebrew literary past, Ibn Ezra used similar standards to imagine an idealized and equally constructed authentic Andalusian- Jewish community that he had just left and to which he could no longer return. To use the words of Ross Brann, "From the confines of his self- imposed intellectual quarantine, IbnEzra endeavored to consign to future generations his vision of Andalusian Hebrew literary culture, its manifold achievements and flaws. Accordingly, his ongoing production of poetry and critical prose signifies, not the poet's isolation, but his capacity to imagine a literary society that would survive him and that would learn from his works."[83]

Ibn Ezra uses both the literary and philosophical categories of the day as a way to translate select biblical terms and tropes. The community of Granada—defined by its literary elegance and aesthetic beauty—becomes the standard for ornate and elegant expressionism. His community, much like Saadya's, is as imagined as it is apologetic.

We see this at play also in the work of Mai monides. For him, the Torah is an intricately calibrated document that conceals and reveals in equal measure to any audience. This dialectic—as I argued in the previous chapter—turns on metaphor. Nonelites tend to read such tropes literally, whereas elites know that they point the way to deeper philosophical

truths. Maimonides' ultimate goal is to show the nonelites that these metaphors cannot be taken literally when they infringe on God's absolute oneness and that elites need not abandon the Torah (and Judaism) because it lacks the intellectual rigor of the sciences. Indeed, as Maimonides explicitly states in the introduction to the third part of the *Guide,* "I do not say anything over and beyond what is indicated by the text, but that it is as if I translated words from one language to another or summarized the meaning of the external sense of the speech."[84]

Here Maimonides intimates that his own treatise is modeled on that of the Torah. The ideal reader must translate this set of correspondences—understanding words and chapters, and reconfiguring structures—in order to understand that which is beyond a text, whether the *Guide* or the Bible. The biblical narrative represents the most beautiful form of philosophical expression. Implicitly Maimonides contends that philosophical truths are located most perfectly and most subtly within the biblical narrative wherein they are wrapped in divine embellishments.

Unlike both Saadya and Ibn Ezra, however, Maimonides is not interested in the aesthetic dimensions of scripture. As such, he is not attempting to show the literary elegance and refinement of the Torah and demonstrating its superiority to anything produced by Muslims in the same cultural field. On the contrary, his goal is to reveal the philosophical beauty concealed within the pleasing language of scripture. For instance, in *Guide* III:51 he uses as his prooftext Isaiah 58:8 ("And your righteousness will go before you; the glory of the Lord will be at your rear") to argue the following: "After having reached this condition of enduring permanence, the intellect remains in one and the same state, the impediment that sometimes screened him off having been removed. And he will remain permanently in that state of intense pleasure, which does not belong to the genus of bodily pleasures, as we have explained in our compilations and as others have explained before us."[85]

The ultimate philosophical state—though in many ways contradictory to the traditional teachings of Judaism—is here described in the most biblical of ways using the language of Isaiah. It is only through the *proper understanding* of the Torah of Moses that the Jew can ground philosophical principles. In this regard the Torah is superior to both the Qurʾān and the Christian Bible. Moreover, Maimonides' philosophical reading is presented as superior to readings produced in other Jewish subcultures.

* * *

While there is much more that could be said regarding the apologetics in the works of Maimonides,Saadya, Moses ibn Ezra, and others, my goal here has been less a detailed presentation than an attempt to provide a se-

ries of impressions and characteristics that mark all biblical translations: cultural, literary, and religious polemics. Virtually all the Jewish biblical translations were (and still are) attempts to show others the Jewish contribution to Western civilization. I have tried to do this gingerly, however, trying to show that the borderlines between Jews and non- Jews are anything but hermetically sealed. In so doing, I hope that I have challenged and brought further nuance to the regnant discourses that make hard and fast distinctions between cultures and the materiality of cultural production. Biblical translation was an attempt to draw such boundaries between Jews and non- Jews, not necessarily a reflection of boundaries that were already in place. Ultimately all the authors who are the subject of this chapter used "non- Jewish" categories to define Jewish or Hebraic superiority. They located this in the Bible and the way they went about this was through translation.

5
TRANSLATION AND ITS DISCONTENTS

To this point I have been interested in nuancing and teasing out what I consider to be several of the constitutive pieces that make up translative activity in Jewish philosophy. On a historical level I have suggested that this activity opened Judaism to other intellectual trajectories as it paradoxically erected boundaries between Judaism and others. On a metahistorical level I have argued that translation's focus on the space in between facilitated a set of musings on language, ontology, and temporality. This weave of history and meta- history is necessary to grasp the subject of this study in all its rich fullness. Yet such an appreciation runs the risk of apologetics if, in appreciating translation's ability to mine language, we lose sight of its selective use of the political and the ideological. Translation's very flight from history is precisely what grounds it firmly within history's narrative.

My analysis has largely focused on translation as an object lesson in the philosophical invention of Jewish identity, the construction of Hebrew memories in new linguistic settings, and the poetic- philosophical retrieval of Jewish existence in a variety of conceived and imagined presents. By restoring the Bible to an earlier facticity, all these translation projects invented a biblical text in their own images and thereby made the past conform to the present and vice versa. Whether making Hebrew absorb Arabic, German, or Italian belles lettres or by smashing contemporaneous linguistic constructions, translation sought to reconfigure and renew Jewish existence for the present.

Such a focus, however, tells only part of the story. The movement of Hebrew into new linguistic and conceptual idioms—and all that such movement implied—certainly did not go unchallenged. Many regarded translation as corrupting Hebrew and the translative act as responsible for the introduction of all sorts of foreign matter into Judaism's heart. Accordingly, in this chapter I attempt to give voice to the manifold critics of the translative project within Judaism.[1] My goal is neither to provide an

exhaustive survey of such criticisms nor to provide a reception history of these translations. Rather, I have tried to isolate a number of criticisms that strike me as inherent to translation. Although particular individuals—writing in specific times and places—may well have articulated these criticisms, the repercussions transcend any particular moment and are directed at the very core of translation, philosophical or otherwise.

In addition, it is also worth commenting on a possible awkward asymmetry that emerges from this chapter. In my desire to analyze some of the resistances to translation across the *longue durée* of Jewish history, I juxtapose the relative long- lasting and communal resistance to Maimonidean rationalism with one particular individual's criticism of the Buber-Rosenzweig translation. I do this for several reasons. First, both of these resistances, it seems to me, strike at the heart of the translative enterprise: they question, from different hermeneutical standpoints, the quiddity and the authenticity of movement between different idioms and different cultures. Second, although Siegfried Kracauer is but one person, his voice is not a lone one; rather, its timber reverberates beyond its individuality and resonates throughout the centuries by focusing attention on the legitimacy of the entire enterprise. In this, his voice joins the larger chorus of the critics of the Maimonidean enterprise. Finally, I also intend to use both sets of criticisms, now lifted from their immediate historical contexts and the voices that uttered them, as criticisms from which translation can never fully escape.

Virtually all the translations I have examined here were accused of being innovative or artificial. Such charges often stemmed from the translator's desire to access a Text behind the text, a move that would come at the expense of the Bible's literal fabric. As we shall see, this could be done by charging Mai monides with making the figurative (i.e., Aristotelian) sense of Scripture superior to the literal (i.e., traditional) level, or in accusations leveled at Buber and Rosenzweig that they created a prose as modern as its claims to be ancient. Of course, all these terms—figurative, literal, modern, ancient—were highly charged and have to be contextualized within mutually overlapping political and intellectual trajectories.

At issue in translation was what constituted the text's true fabric and, connected to this, what could emerge as an (or, perhaps better, *the*) authoritative reading of the biblical narrative. The space that opened up in between the Bible and its translations became the site of a series of skirmishes fought between often- competing regimes of truth. Both the issues and the stakes in these struggles were high. Accusations of artificiality, of infidelity, and of misreading—whether on theological or aesthetic grounds—have always greeted translations of the Bible.[2] Such critics argued that there can be no Text behind the text; or, if there is, the only

one privy to its illuminative contents is God. All that we possess is the literal level of scripture. Claims to discover other levels produced a hall of mirrors that succeeded in distorting the language and the message of the original.

Yet translators and their supporters countered that their readings of the Bible opened up the tradition in ways that made it fit with the larger intellectual and cultural moments in which Judaism was thrown. Rather than have a text full of anthropomorphic embellishments or an innocuous narrative brought on by years of neglect, they argued that translation sought to destroy customary and habitual modes of reading. The philosophical figurations of Maimonides' text or Rosenzweig and Buber's archaism succeeded in making Judaism philosophically and aesthetically acceptable both in Jews' eyes and in the eyes of others. Although these two translation projects arguably generated the largest set of criticisms, even Saadya Gaon—whose conservative synthesis between rationalism and tradition would so captivate later critics as a healthy alternative to the perceived dangers of Maimonides' rationalist agenda—complains in the introduction to his *Kitāb al-ʾamānāt wʾal-iʿtiqādāt* of anonymous critics who oppose any form of rationalism.[3]

Although the majority of this chapter focuses on the criticisms leveled against the translations of Maimonides and of Buber-Rosenzweig, the issues explored can be subsequently used to illumine the translative projects of all those discussed in this study. My goal is not simply to recount these criticisms, but to take them seriously and in such a manner that an understanding of translation—as both a historical and a philosophical possibility— develops in the process.

The Old as New

Both the Maimonidean program and the Rosenzweig- Buber Bible translation met stiff resistance with their claims of ascertaining the originary intent of the biblical narrative. Whereas Maimonides hinted at the esoteric core glimmering just beneath the Bible's exoteric exterior, Rosenzweig and Buber claimed to deliver its readership over to a premodern facticity.[4] If the former was a paean to esotericism, the latter wanted nothing more than to celebrate the Bible's literalism. Both translation projects, and there is no way to get around this, were as novel as they claimed to be traditional. For even a text's perceived literal level must be culturally constructed. The clash that took place on the pages of the Bible became ideological: if the translators sought to show that their interpretations of the biblical narrative were hoary and firmly contained within Sinai's revelatory content,

their critics pointed out that the language of this interpretation was novel and often discrepant with traditional teaching. As the present section shows, they did this on both theological and aesthetic grounds.

Perhaps the biggest reaction to translation occurred during the so-called "Maimonidean controversies" that wracked Jewish communities throughout Europe and the Middle East in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.[5] Not simply about academic or theoretical matters, these controversies constellated around definitions of Judaism: the nature and function of the commandments, sources of Jewish education, the quiddity of the afterlife, and so on. At issue was the dissemination and subsequent reception of Mai monides' writings, especially the *Guide of the Perplexed* and *Sefer ha- Madda,* being the first book of his *Mishneh Torah.* These works, as Bernard Septimus argues, served as "basic textbooks" in the emerging rationalistic approach to Judaism.[6] On a social level, according to Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, they proved especially popular among the rapidly expanding middle classes who sought mobility through the study of philosophy.[7]

Translation was the act that signaled these controversies. As the center of Jewish culture migrated from Spain north to Provence, the language of literary production switched from Arabic to Hebrew. Many of the great works of the Andalusian rationalist tradition were thus translated from Arabic into Hebrew so as to be available to a larger reading public. Whereas Mai monides' project had succeeded in translating key biblical terms into more rationalist idioms, his treatise, written in Arabic, was meant for elites. Shortly after his death, however, his metaphorical translation was itself literally translated into Hebrew by both Judah al- Ḥarizi and Samuel ibn Tibbon.[8]

Philosophical translation had always played an important role in the absorption of so- called "foreign" or "Greek" ideas into Islamic and Jewish cultures.[9] However, it is important to be aware that such activity never went unchecked; inevitably, it created internal chaos between rationalists and traditionalists who responded differently to its call and thereby created numerous *kulturkampfs* that reverberated often far beyond intellectual circles. Where the one group saw the potential to explore the biblical (or qurʾānic) narrative often through a series of creative misreadings, the other took comfort in the literal level of Scripture by refusing to open it up to what they considered foreign hermeneutical paradigms. Both groups—and it is necessary to be aware that there was certainly great nuance within each—ultimately, and perhaps not surprisingly, defined themselves and their programs of reading and of translation against the other.

Once Samuel ibn Tibbon (ca. 1165–1232) translated the *Guide* into Hebrew in 1204 (with a revised version in 1213), the work became very popular among certain circles in Provençe and enabled Jews who so de-

sired to make sense of all those irrational biblical passages that had long perplexed or embarrassed them.The result was that within a generation Mai monides' brand ofAristotelian rationalism had become *de rigueur* among a broad cross- section of both elite and other Jews.Yet if Mai monides had established smokescreens and mirrors in his *Guide* to keep the intellectually unworthy out, many who came after him compromised his approach by "exotericizing" his esotericism through more popular genres such as dialogues,[10] poetry,[11] and commentaries.[12] If Mai monides had wanted to keep people out, his subsequent followers felt compelled—perhaps taking their lead from the metaphor of Plato's cave—to help Jews understand the benefits of intellectualism.

An example comes from the commentary to Ecclesiastes by the aforementioned translator of the *Guide,* Samuel ibn Tibbon. His exegetical activity was an attempt to read the secrets of Maimonideanism back into the biblical narrative and to show other Jews the practical applicability of Maimoni des' teachings. In the preface to his commentary he claims that the task of the translator is to be as literal as possible (presumably a criticism of Judah al- Ḥarizi's translation of the *Guide* that was known for its more florid language):

> [This method of teaching through "chapter headings"] can be done orally and in person; it may even be easy for sages and men of understanding to do this; for the wise instructor has available many stratagems, digressions, and circumlocutions with which he can make the understanding student understand his purpose, even when his purpose is not made clear or explained. But he cannot do this when writing in a book. A man, for example, might say to his associate: "you did really well when you did that thing," while the person addressed will understand that in the former's opinion what he did was really bad. This he understands not from the words themselves, which are contrary to the speaker's purpose, but from certain affectations and accidents of speech, such as the appearance of the speaker's face, which may become red or green like that of an angry man, or his tone of voice; that is, rather than saying something in a gentle tone, in accordance with the manners of speech used by someone speaking straightforward, such a person would speak [using the tone] of someone who is speaking about something that he considers bad. [The listener can also understand his interlocutor's purpose] from other things that [the speaker] might attach to the words or attach the words thereto. Many examples of this type have been enumerated by the logicians.[13]

For Ibn Tibbon, a written text is not unlike spoken discourse and he intimates that the best way to translate either of these is by being as literal as possible, imitating the tone, order, and words of the original. To put his theory into practice, he composed his commentary to Ecclesiastes. A youthful Solomon composed this biblical book to refute those who denied

the possibility of conjunction with the Active Intellect. In his comments to 7:19 ("Wisdom gives more strength to the wise man than ten rulers who were in the city"), for instance, Ibn Tibbon claims:

> As for "more than ten rulers who were in the city," it seems to me that it relates to the "little city with few people in it" which he will introduce later. It is possible that the psychic faculties, excluding the rational faculty's theoretical part, comprise "ten" in number, including the nutritive faculty; the faculty common to the five senses; the five senses; the appetitive faculty, which is the locus of good and evil dispositions; and the imaginative faculty. This makes nine. The rational faculty is divided into two primary parts: theoretical and practical. This makes eleven: the theoretical part together with the other ten.[14]

Here Ibn Tibbon takes an enigmatic verse from Ecclesiastes and allegorizes it in such a manner that the theoretical faculty (i.e., "wisdom" from the verse) stands above all the other psychological faculties as elaborated by Aristotle. Taking Maimonides to a logical conclusion, Ibn Tibbon works on the assumption that Ecclesiastes—like the biblical narrative writ large—is first and foremost a philosophical treatise that presents its arguments in a dialectical manner and through allegory. If Maimonides had translated select terms from the biblical narrative into Greco-Arabic philosophical categories, Ibn Tibbon—like other post-Maimonideans—goes a step further and translates the entire biblical narrative into the often-technical language of philosophy and, moreover, does so in Hebrew. Ecclesiastes now concerns the taxonomy of the soul, the relationship of theoretical and practical intellects, and the soul's relationship to the body.

The translation project of Maimonides and those who followed in his wake succeeded in polarizing Jewish communities into Maimonidean and anti-Maimonidean camps. This led to a series of accusations and counter-accusations, bans and counter-bans, culminating in the Church's involvement and a subsequent ban against the study of philosophy.[15] Many of the anti-Maimonideans—faulting the Maimonideans for their extremism—were not completely opposed to some forms of rationalism, however, and many took solace in the more traditionalist translation project of Saadya Gaon.[16] The Saadyan synthesis, according to them, had largely succeeded in creating and fostering rationalism and traditional teaching that was subsequently decentered in the Andalusian Jewish philosophical tradition, presumably owing to the introduction of Aristotelianism. In the so-called first phase of the Maimonidean controversies,[17] whose main issue revolved around the nature of resurrection, a Franco-Spanish alliance formed to curb what they perceived to be the excesses of rationalism. Although it subsequently failed, the resurrection controversy proved but a small foretaste of what was to come later in the century and beyond.[18]

R. Meir ha- LeviAbulafia (aka Ramah, ca. 1165–1244) was one of the primary figures in the initial phase of the Maimonidean controversies. He took Mai monides to task for what he perceived to be the latter's denial of traditional Jewish teaching on the nature of resurrection.[19] Mai monides, according to his reading, denied corporeal resurrection in favor of intellectual eternality brought on by conjunction with the Active Intellect, the last of the ten celestial emanations. Mai monides' project translated away the traditional teachings of Judaism and made philosophical truths the biblical narrative's touchstone. Such intellectual eternality made a potential mockery of the commandments. Why follow the Torah if all one needs are philosophical sciences? For Ramah, Mai monides' claims—and this would be picked up in all subsequent incarnations of the controversies—contradicted the plain meaning of Jewish teaching (e.g., over individual salvation). Ramah was well aware that the Maimonidean translation of the Bible's literal message for an inner core would prove inaccessible to most Jews and jeopardize traditional Jewish teaching that connected the observation of the commandments to subsequent corporeal reward and punishment in the hereafter. He writes:

> He who attaches greater importance to the soul than to the body in [the final] judgment is, it would seem, of the opinion that reward and punishment in *ʿolam ha- ba*are not in accordance with men's deeds and the requirements of justice but rather in accordance with nature; for in this view the soul which is by nature immortal remains in existence while the body which is by nature mortal ceases to exist . . . and the soul of the righteous and wicked, according to this view, are judged not according to their deeds, but according to their intellects. For the soul that knows its Creator through philosophical proof is immortal by reason of its knowledge which is everlasting. But the soul that does not know its Creator by way of philosophical proof shall be cut off—though it be possessed of Torah and good deeds. The upshot is that there is no lasting benefit to Torah and good deeds since the matter is determined by nature.[20]

Here Ramah clearly and conveniently distinguishes between rationalism and traditionalism, setting up the parameters of all the debates to follow. Philosophy or rationalism makes little or no room for traditional Jewish values and teachings; if and when philosophy does claim to reinforce such traditional values, it must shape Judaism in such a manner that these values become both incoherent and unrecognizable. This, for Ramah and other critics, is the true danger of the rationalist translation project. Maimoni des thus subverts the biblical narrative and opens up a huge gap between what the text literally says and what it figuratively means. It is in this gap, or even abyss, that many Jews would get lost.

This charge is inevitable. Since Mai monides argued that theTorah is a philosophical work written in code and that the original Ursprache

was, depending on how we read him, either a form of silence or a reference to a simpler, prelapsarian, and preimaginative state wherein words and their meanings had yet to go awry, translation had to be a restorative practice. If translation turned the true believer from the idolatrous bonds of language, then for Mai monides' critics translation led to religious idolatry. Both Maimonideans and anti-Maimonideans were well aware of the dangers of idolatry and differed only in what it consisted of. Although Maimonides—like every other translator studied here—claimed that his project restored an original way of being- in-the-world, creating a memory of things past, critics such as Ramah argued that this restorative reading was in fact an innovation and far removed from the traditional chain of history. The battle ground in these debates was the murky field of memory—a memory—as distant as it was opaque—of what Judaism should be.

Mai monides' reading of Judaism, although presented as traditional and derived from the lofty heights of Sinai, was novel and challenged traditional teaching. Although the biblical narrative could well absorb this novelty, the introduction of Greek philosophy into the heart of Judaism proved dangerous to many. This was exacerbated by two factors. The first, as mentioned, was the subsequent translation of Mai monides' own translation. The second revolved around Mai monides' stature. All might be well if it were not for the fact that Mai monides both presented himself and was presented by others as the major halakhic authority in the Sephardic world. His rabbinic compendia and syntheses commanded major attention and the fact that such an individual wrote philosophical treatises could neither go ignored nor uncontested.

Isaac Polleqar (fl. mid- fourteenth century) and his highly entertaining *Ezer ha- Dat* (Support of the Faith) provide another convenient window into the struggle over the translation project in medieval Judaism.[21] Written as a series of concentric dialogues, this work provides wonderful insight into the nature and function of these debates. As a philosopher who was well aware of the excesses of philosophy and as a traditionalist cognizant of the dangers of naïve faith, Polleqar attempts to strike a balance between the two sides. The following dialogic exchange between a philosopher and a talmudist encapsulates the debate and quickly gets to the heart of the struggle between rationalism and traditionalism in fourteenth- century Spain and Provençe. Although the figure of Mai monides is not mentioned here, his specter is omnipresent:

> **The old man:** Aristotle, the Greek unbeliever with whom [you] are in alliance denies God's religion. . . . It is prophecy that allows one to apprehend hidden matters that the intellect cannot grasp. Torah is all that one needs. It provides an account of the chariot, the secrets of the heavens, the differences between "upper water" and "lower water" [i.e., Gen. 1:7], the secrets

> of *urim ve- thumim*. . . what is above and below, the green line that surrounds the world, lofty and hidden matters, and the viscous stones. I understand the secrets of Adam and Eve, Metatron, Gabriel, and the other angels, the *Sefer Yet zirah, gematria, keter,*and *atarah* [first and last of the *sefirot*]. Now why don't you tell me about your sciences? It is no exaggeration to say that there is none except in the customary and habitual occurrences in the world of nature, which we perceive with our eyes and ears every day.
>
> **The young man:** The philosophers grasp hidden things, but do so honestly and completely, because the intellect is like a spring and a fountain, in which the unknown is known by means of the known. The philosopher is able to do this because he understands the middle term and brings it to light. He is able to connect the great to the small, and join them so that the answer to every question is derived syllogistically. The philosopher is thus able to negotiate every obstacle. The prophet, however, is only able to grasp things without knowing how this grasping takes place or why it appears to him. If you were to ask him anything about it, he would be unable to respond because he does not know how [he received such knowledge]. Prophecy does not occur except in the imaginative faculty. Do not imagine that it occurs in the rational faculty! . . . Because of this, a wise man once said, "A *ḥakham* is better that a prophet," since a prophet cannot teach another his prophetic skill.[22]

At issue in this exchange is the nature of what each perceives to be true knowledge and the sources from which this knowledge is ultimately derived. Because the young man argues that the biblical narrative is the product of the prophet's imagination, it is by its very nature inferior to the rational faculty of the philosopher. It is precisely this pejorative take on revelation that the critics argued both facilitated and justified the Bible's philosophical translation. If the intellect is superior—to take the Maimoni dean position to its extreme—it could exact its will on the Torah's literal level, shaping and molding the literal texture to suit its intellectualist needs. If the philosophers accused the traditionalists of intellectual laziness, as the passage here illustrates, the latter frequently criticized the former for their laxity in the observance of the commandments, something they perceived to be brought on by the movement between languages and between cultures.

This tension between Maimonideans and anti- Maimonideans—between a reading of the Bible that translates it into another conceptual idiom and one that maintains its literal level—culminates in R. Solomon ibn Adret's ban on the study of philosophy under the age of twenty- five. His statement issued on July 31, 1305, roughly one hundred years after the death of Maimonides, reads:

> Therefore have we decreed and accepted for ourselves and our children, and for all those joining us, that for the next fifty years, under threat of the ban, no man in our community, unless he be twenty- five years old, shall study, either in the original language or in translation, the books which the Greeks have written on religious philosophy and the natural sciences. . . . It is also

> forbidden for any member of our community to teach any Jew under the age of twenty- five years of age any of these sciences lest they drag him away from the law of Israel which is superior to all of these teachings. How can a human being not be afraid to judge between the wisdom of man, who builds only on analogy, argument, and guess, and between the wisdom of the Superior Being, between whom and us there is hardly any comparison?[23]

This proclamation brings to an end at least one instantiation of the Maimonidean controversies. Although it would temporarily put an end to the debates, recriminations would soon radiate. It is important not to lose sight of the fact that the critics of philosophy perceived translation to be the process that introduced "foreign" wisdom into the heart of Judaism.

Although it might seem a strange juxtaposition, the reception of the Rosenzweig- Buber translation is in certain aspects not dissimilar. Only now the issue is not so much excommunication as it is aesthetics. If the responses (both positive and negative) to Mai monides' works focused on what counted as veritable Jewish teaching, the reception of the Buber-Rosenzweig translation tended to revolve around notions of temporalism and anachronism. If these two individuals claimed to take their readership back to a purer linguistic moment and stressed the orality of the biblical narrative over its *écriture,* then their project was as invested in establishing as authentic a Jewish reading as Mai monides had been. Many of the critics of the Buber-Rosenzweig translation tended to focus on its language and its ability to hold (or not hold) the old and the new in striking counterpoint.

At issue in the critical responses to Buber and Rosenzweig's translation was the claim that they had created an artificial text and that their biblical translation was as much a product of their time as their claim to the contrary. Innovation confronted tradition. The quest for authenticity had as its underside the scent of affectation. The premodernity of their translation was less a philosophical retrieval, their critics claimed, than a gimmick rooted in contemporaneous Weimar aesthetic practices. One critic of Rosenzweig's Halevi translation declared that his translation read "as if he had been compelled to translate into a German that was not yet there."[24] It is precisely this idea of an *Ursprache* in a language as new as it claims to be ancient that gets at the heart of all translation, not just that of Buber and Rosenzweig.

The most far- reaching critique of the Buber-Rosenzweig translation project came from the pages of the *Frankfurter Zeitung,* a newspaper popular among enlightened and liberal Jewish bourgeoisie.[25] In its pages, Siegfried Kracauer vented his now well- known critique.[26] In particular he levels his criticisms at the aesthetic qualities of the translation. Buber and Rosenzweig had claimed a return to the literal level of scripture as a way to unsettle contemporary readers and to dismantle habitual forms of communi-

cation. However, in the "stench of these alliterations," Kracauer hears not the biblical narrative in all its glorious antiquity, but "the runes of a Wagnerian sort [*eher den Runen schon, wie sie Richard Wagner begriff*]."[27] This language, he continues,

> is to a great extent *archaizing* [*archaisierend*]. As a result of considerations that fail to take account of their effects, the translation uses precisely those now utterly delegitimated "castle and court" words that Luther deliberately rejected. Their origin is obvious: they stem from the mythological busy-ness and antiquarianizing neo-Romanticism of the waning nineteenth century, which were maintained by a cultivated middle class in need of spiritual- intellectual backing, and which at the time may have been able to lay claim to a certain reality because of their appropriateness to the social situation.[28]

Here Kracauer hones in on the language employed by Buber and Rosenzweig, arguing that the type of archaizing found therein actually succeeds in obfuscating the Bible's texture. Kracauer further claims that despite Buber and Rosenzweig's claims to the contrary, their hebraized German—the originary Ursprache to which their translation hinted—ultimately proved to be "an ur- German that is only a few decades old" (*ziehen sie die Schrift in das Urdeutsch vor einigen Jahrzehnten herein*).[29] Kracauer's critique focused on the general artificiality of the translation: what Buber and Rosenzweig boasted as their ability to strip contemporaneous forms of language bare, and thereby return to the biblical narrative's literal and oral level, proved to be as invested in contemporary aesthetics as any other form of Weimar literature. For Kracauer, however, this was worse when it came to the Bible because its narrative demanded to be read on levels other than the aesthetic. He writes:

> As questionable as the translation's aesthetic effect may be, it indirectly confirms that its reality is only an aesthetic one. But at the very point where it wants most decisively to have a real effect, it sinks back into the impotence of the aesthetic. The decision not to include a commentary—supposedly in order to present the truth of Scripture without any intervention—gives the impression of having been made for the sake of artistic purity. . . .Here art is not basing itself on reality; instead, reality vanishes into the artistic.[30]

The translation's aesthetic, according to the passage quoted here, further removed the Bible and its language from contemporary relevance. Rather than shatter the quotidian, as its translators had hoped, they succeeded in removing biblical language from the everyday altogether. The originary language and mode of reading/listening that it claimed to invoke is ultimately responsible for its deconstruction. Its neo-Romantic sensibilities, like Wagner's own inflated prose, vacillated, in the words of Martin Jay, "between a heroic individualism and the populist call for instant community."[31] Although I shall say more about the authoritarian impulses of the translation in the following section, suffice it to mention here that

Kracauer's criticisms potentially undermine Buber and Rosenzweig's own claims that they are somehow able to provide an instantaneous or unmediated access to truth for their readers. The actual result, according to him, is a cheap aesthetic that panders momentarily to the quizzical gaze of the viewer, one that is ultimately lost in the service of any overarching canopy of truth. In ignoring the reality of the profane and in their desire to find solace in the romantic and the arbitrary, according to Kracauer (in his words, their "retreat into the 'Thou- World'"),[32] Buber and Rosen zweig do not transcend the temporal. They become mired in it even though their aesthetic tries to remove them from it; their translation is as bound to the laws of historicity as their attempt to overcome it. "For today," to use Kracauer's words, "access to truth is by way of the profane" (*Denn der Zugang zur Wahrheit ist jetzt im Profanen*).[33]

Certainly Kracauer's criticisms of the translation were not the only response that the work engendered.[34] Writing after the final volume of the translation had been published in Jerusalem in 1961 and thirty- five years after the original volume had appeared, Gershom Scholem praises the translation for its faithfulness to the original and its emphasis on orality and the spoken word. However, he writes that the greatest feature of the translation project was its appeal to German readers to learn Hebrew.[35] This is a far cry, as Jay notes, from the translators' utopian ideal to reconstitute an Ursprache.[36] Scholem concludes his comments with this claim:

> And yet I am not able to close without saying a word about the historical context of your work, which must remain a question and a very concerned question. When you and Rosenzweig began this undertaking there was a German Jewry; your work was intended to have a vital influence on them, to arouse them and lead them to the original. There also was a German language in which you could find a link with the great traditions and achievements, and with significant developments of this language. You yourselves could hope to raise this language to a new level by your work. There was a utopian element in your endeavor.[37]

With these comments, Scholem—like Kracauer—attempts to pull Buber and Rosenzweig back into the realm of temporality and historicity despite their claims to the contrary. Writing after the failed German- Jewish synthesis,[38] Scholem brings a certain solemnity to the occasion: the German language, the very one that Buber and Rosenzweig sought to transform and Hebraize, was the vehicle of a romantic Volkishness that excluded Jews as pollutants and that ultimately became complicit in their extermination. The existence of Jewish life drowned in the blood of syntax.

Like those critics of the Maimonidean translation project, Scholem articulates the position that there is nothing eternal about translation and that such projects come and go only so long as there is an audience to

read. Once the audience is gone—whether through migration patterns or death camps—translation, or at least the cultural moment that informed or informs it, dies. Translation does not transform the universe in its linguistic and utopian visions, this position claims; rather, it murders and destroys as Jews become too much like the languages into which they translate. Translation is as potentially in and as possessed by historical circumstance as every other phenomenon. Moreover, it is an activity that—in showing similarities between Jew and non- Jew and between Hebraic and non- Hebraic—potentially becomes complicit in Jewish destruction.

* * *

Along similar lines, critics also faulted Mendelssohn for the artificiality of his translation. Unlike Buber and Rosenzweig, however, this does not take the form of re- creating or a pointing toward an imaginary Ursprache, but the transference of biblical Hebrew into a high and formal German. The chief rabbi of Prague, Ezekiel Landau, refused to ratify Mendelssohn's translation because it would encourage Jews to read the books of Gentiles. The translation, he wrote, "induces the young to spend their time reading Gentile books in order to become sufficiently familiar with refined German to be able to understand this translation. Our Torah is thereby reduced to the role of a maidservant to the German tongue."[39] For Landau, as for many of the premodern critics of biblical translation, this activity succeeds in making the unfamiliar too familiar and domesticates that which is foreign and dangerous. The sacred language of Hebrew when translated leads directly into the profanity of other languages. Translation makes the Hebraic non- Hebraic. If Buber andRosenzweig had sought to show the ruptures between Semitic and Indo-European languages, Mendelssohn— writing under a different set of historical circumstances—desired to uncover their harmony and the points at which languages and cultures met. Translating against the backdrop of emancipation, Mendelssohn's translation, in retrospect at least, could not have been otherwise.

Whereas Mendelssohn had intended his translation project as a way both to increase the biblical and German proficiency of his readers,[40] many of his critics—as the quotation from Landau attests—faulted him for making Judaism potentially too similar to German culture. Self confronted other in the heart of this Jewish translation. Cultural improvement clashed with traditional Jewish difference. Reminiscent of the Maimonidean controversies, a *kulturkampf* followed in the wake of Mendelssohn's Bible translation between the forces of traditionalism and those of rationalism.[41] To translate the biblical narrative into German—to distill this and related criticisms—is to disparage Hebrew and to make it a "maid servant" to another language that removes Jews from their authentic selves.

Yet the criticism remains. If translation succeeds in making the Hebraic non- Hebraic, it also succeeds in making, at least theoretically, the Jew into the non- Jew.Although, as I argued in the previous chapter, these identities admit of great slippage, Landau believes that when Hebrew glistens forth from the form of another language it does not—*pace* Buber and Rosenzweig—take Jews back to a pure and originary Hebraic identity, but actually leads them away from such an imaginary phenomenon.

Translation and Authoritarianism

The nostalgia invoked by the likes of Saadya Gaon, Mai monides,Rosenzweig, and Buber was meant to foster or impose a new way of reading on others. The illusion of cultural identity requires as its dream- stuff basic narratives necessary to unite disparate groups and classes.[42] Where Maimoni des was criticized for usurping traditional rabbinic authority, Buber and Rosenzweig were accused of *völkisch* neoromanticism. Common to both these criticisms is the acknowledgment that such individuals—and, by extension, the philosophical translation of the Bible in general—is often bound up with nonliberal forms of Jewish renaissance.[43] Jewishness, variously defined, had to be based on showing difference with and from the larger cultural contexts in which Jews found themselves. Universalism risked subsuming Jews into the mainframe. As a result, the Bible, although paradoxically translated into the vernaculars of these mainframes, became the site of Jewish difference. Certainly Mai monides' outlook was much more universalist than, say, Rosenzweig's; yet his project was equally based on preventing assimilation and stressing a renewed focus on Judaism's master narrative, the Hebrew Bible.

In his criticisms of the Buber-Rosenzweig translation, Siegfried Kracauer worried about its inner- directed and private nature:

> The problem raised by the translation is that of *religious renewal* [*der religiösen Erneuerung*] in general. Spellbound by the word of such renewal, movements, circles, and groups have arisen and, out of a sometimes tenuous, sometimes closer contact with extant faiths, have endeavored to proclaim a shift in Being. The rendering of Scripture into German, which cannot be separated from the current state of this religious renewal, provides an indication of the dangers to which such movements are subject.[44]

Again invoking the specter of Wagner, Kracauer hints at translation's aesthetic to create instantaneously a heroic community and establish or renew a perceived ancient Jewish Volkishness.[45] The connections between the translation and Buber's Zionism disturbed Kracauer as the retreat from the public sphere into the murky private realms of feeling and emo-

tion.[46] In this latter realm, according to him, a metaphysical and ideologically charged reality—the product of an irrational and mystically charged vision— ignored the reality of the profane and the quotidian.

The invention and invocation of a national consciousness comes with a cost: the cost of manufacturing perceived others (who are often demonized), the cost of forcing one's task on others, and ultimately the cost of enforcing it. "Nationalism," according to Ernst Gellner, "is not the awakening of nations to self- consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist."[47] The imagining or invention of new communities—whether Maimoni des' new righteous nation or Rosenzweig's pristine community existing outside of history—was (and is) certainly not innocent of a variety of political and ideological messages.[48] All these translators ultimately sought to invent a Judaism that, despite claims to a hoary antiquity, were in fact the product of a singular and contemporaneous reading. Translation thus invents as it imposes its will on others.

Related to this inner- directed component of the Buber and Rosenzweig translation project, Scholem in his aforementioned comments also points to the "fanaticism" of the project, especially that found in its earliest volumes. He writes,

> If I had to characterize the difference between the two, the old and the new, I would speak—if you will allow me the term—of the extraordinary urbanity of the later version. What I mean is this: the first version, in all of its grandeur, contains an element of fanaticism. This fanaticism, it seemed to us, was inseparable from your endeavor. It aimed at driving words to their limit, extracting—I almost said chiseling out—from the language an extreme, yes, and excess of toughness and precision. It was not always easy to recover the melodic presentation of great texts, the *niggun* of the language. . . . The distinct urbanity of your new version seems to me the greater virtue.[49]

Here Scholem—although certainly not as critical of Zionism as the likes of Kracauer—points to a certain discomfort with the language of the earliest volumes in the translation project. In particular Scholem intimates that the earlier fanatical language was full of "anxiety" and that its words often stood "in a state of tension with their melos."[50] The earliest books, according to him, strike the reader as unpleasant and their fanaticism lacks the maturity and the urbanity of the later volumes. But it is precisely this sort of sophistication that the translators originally eschewed.

By the time that Scholem wrote his comments, however, the Jewish people were no longer, to use Rosenzweig's words—words that guided the very fabric of the translation—"outside of history"; and in 1961 its language, Hebrew, was as mundane as any other. The move within during times of cultural crisis—the inchoate spiritualism that Kracauer located

in the translation—perhaps ultimately proved the undoing of the translation. As a modality, translation might very well have become unwittingly involved in the extermination of those who could listen to an Ursprache that quickly became devoid of content and an ur- language that showed itself to be as fleeting as German Jewry.

The Erasure of Hebrew

I would like to pick up a thread that it seems to me has weaved in and out of the previous chapters, a theme that simultaneously signals translation's possibility and impossibility. I refer to the very existence, linguisticity, and fabric of Hebrew and the various ways that translation makes it sit silently behind other languages. These silent traces risk Hebrew's existence and force it to retreat behind the semantic curtain of other languages all the while heralding its metaphysical properties. Translation potentially takes Hebrew out of living circulation. All the individuals discussed above wrote before Hebrew reemerged as a spoken and living language in Israel, and all wrote from the vantage point of the diaspora. For all, Hebrew was the language that both informed and composed Jewish existence. However, it had the potential to merge into gray, becoming little more than the stuff of nostalgic recollection. To remedy this, translation of the Bible's Hebrew into any number of vernaculars became both necessary yet paradoxical.

If Hebrew only appears silently in the interstices of other languages, what becomes of it? Hebrew, in other words, can appear either as a silent fullness informing other languages or it can emerge, as it has today, as another spoken language in the everyday languages of communication. All the individuals discussed here chose the former course, and this necessarily predisposed them to imagine Hebrew behind, betwixt, and between other spoken vernaculars. Hebrew became the mortar holding together the semantic bricks of other languages. Yet this metaphor also implies crystallization, both of the mortar and the bricks. Perhaps, in the final analysis, this is the *telos* of translation: the destruction of linguistic forms that paves the way for the silent possibility of messianic fulfillment.

Translation is a process, not an end. Let me briefly invoke Walter Benjamin, whose theory of translation so closely resembles that of Rosenzweig and Buber, at least on some levels. Certainly translation is done for some higher purpose and thereby facilitates the recovery of an ur- language lost in the shuffle of post- Babel speech.[51] However, Benjamin cautions that the distance between orality and reading—and between speech and writing—could not be bridged through the naïve restoration of a perceived originary language.[52] The best that translation can do, it would seem, is point

the way and remind us of the difference between the language of God or language as such and the language of humans.[53]

All the translators who make up this study ultimately risk hypostatizing Hebrew by making it into a language that is no longer a language; a set of words and a grammar that can only be resuscitated or at least accessed by means of other vernaculars. Perhaps to get around this potential aporia, these translators had to make claims to the effect that it was actually Hebrew that informed these other languages from within and, as such, it had to simultaneously open and be opened by these other languages. This—let us call it a semantic fusion—paradoxically signals a language that, to invoke Elliot Wolfson's phrasing, is both presently absent and absently present.[54] This language—for some, it seems to be Hebrew; for others, a language beyond Hebrew—is accessible only through modern and spoken languages. It is this paradox of absences and presences that translation seeks to shatter but of course never can, since its specter haunts all languages. Hebrew is—as I have mentioned time and again—a palimpsest, something that, like the Ursprache, can be glimpsed only through the veil of another language. In its sacrality, Hebrew ceases to be a real language; it becomes little more than a glimmer that translation keeps forever out of reach. The target language thus conjures up an originary language that does not exist except as an alluring absence. Hebrew's presence resides solely in the verbal, grammatical, and semiotic structures of another text, another language, and another mode of expression. Hebrew remains as a distant memory: one not to be forgotten, but also one that is always just out of reach.

On this reading, then, translation emerges as an incomplete and futile process that is always on the path. Moreover, it seems to me that this is a potential criticism from which the translative enterprise can never fully escape. Rather, it stands before translation as language stands before God. But for these very reasons, as I have tried to articulate above, translation is the ultimate human activity. It is a practice in which we engage constantly. This occurs not only in the translation of great works—those that contain their potential translations between the lines—but on an everyday level in our interaction with others.

Conclusions

None of the aforementioned criticisms are terminal, nor when cobbled together do they undermine the translative project. However, if they reveal anything it is that translation is, must be, an impossible task, one that, by extension, is always incomplete. This does not and cannot stop the occur-

rence of translation. If, as I suggested, translation is both the philosophical and the human activity par excellence, it is a modality or a practice that demands engagement on multiple levels.

The spaces that open up in between, on my reading, are as much sites of creativity as they are of angst. Whereas critics of philosophy regard translation as a dangerous activity, those engaged in its practice appreciated its capabilities to keep language—and, by extension, Judaism—alive. This certainly does not mean that we can ignore criticisms such as its propensity toward artificiality or authoritarianism, or the potential disappearance of Hebrew between the semantic fissures of other languages. What it does mean, however, is that translation confronts squarely the human dimension and that the aporia of this dimension makes translation, both as a noun and as a verb, necessary.

6
TRANSLATION AND ISSUES OF IDENTITY AND TEMPORALITY

In one of his earliest essays devoted to the subject of education—addressed to no less an authority than Hermann Cohen—Franz Rosenzweig proclaims that the "German, also the German in the Jew, can and will read the Bible in German—in Luther's, in Herder's or Mendelssohn's versions; the Jew can only understand it in Hebrew."[1] Although he would later defend his own Bible translation, Rosenzweig here adumbrates the nexus between identity and translation, between ethnos and language. The semantics of translation, according to him, informs and is informed by the language of identity and of cultural ontology. It is against this backdrop that the present chapter explores some of the key features that make translation both possible and necessary.

As we have seen, identity and language are interconnected figurations, and their perceived relationships drive the entire project of Jewish biblical translation. If one aspect of this translative activity concerns the spaces in between where languages meet and confront one another, a related aspect occurs along the frontier zones wherein cultural identities are formed and mapped. Certainly translation of the biblical narrative into a succession of languages and idioms made possible a series of contacts between Judaic and non- Judaic cultures facilitating the integration of Jews into larger cultural contexts. However, as I argued in chapter 4, such contact was often predicated on the need to demonstrate the superiority of the perceived Hebraic over the non- Hebraic and to argue for the supremacy—whether defined in intellectual, cultural, aesthetic, or religious terms—of the language behind the translation: the language away from which one moved only to return to again in a new guise.

For such reasons, the perfect translation does not and cannot exist. There can never be one Arabic translation, one French translation, or one German translation of the Bible. Each translation carries in its wake a series of extra- philological concerns, such that translation and the percep-

tion of Jewish identities function isomorphically. Language and being are here mediated by the translative act and by translation's uncanny ability to exist between languages, in the silence that lays the ontological ground of a people's experience in and of the world.[2]

At the same time, however, we must not lose sight of the fact that the Bible's translation facilitates for the translator an ability to think through both the tenor and the quiddity of revelation. As such, biblical translation is intimately connected to temporality—to an imagined past, a tenuous present, and an anticipated future. All these tenses collide on the pages of biblical translation. What does the past speak to the present and future? How does language, as the ground of existence, recognize itself as a mode of being? In what manner does the language of temporality and the temporality of language unveil being?

I suggest in this concluding chapter that the textuality of translation and the translation of textuality function as discursive sites wherein we can better comprehend the issues dealing with border maintenance and temporality. Both issues are essential for understanding the dynamics inherent to the translative act. The translator does not simply move between languages, but actively takes on prophetic characteristics, both updating and interpreting Judaism's master narrative in the light of new linguistic and conceptual idioms. Like the prophetic messages of the Hebrew Bible, there is a distinct political edge to these translations: a message to rethink and refashion Judaism; a call to reimagine the status quo; an invitation to past futuricity.

* * *

Framed in its broadest sense, the question that concerns this chapter is, why translate? Or, and now framed more specifically, why would Jewish philosophers be interested in translating the Bible? For some reason or set of reasons, Jewish philosophers returned time and again to the biblical narrative, obsessing with it, playing with it, and translating it into different conceptual and linguistic idioms. Was this solely because Hebrew had been replaced by successive *linguae francae*? Did these individuals translate simply to justify their larger philosophical projects? If so, why translate the entire Bible into another language? Why not just do as Philo, Mai monides, or Judah Messer Leon did and translate certain key terms or passages? Why should these philosophers expend so much intellectual energy in translating an ostensibly nonphilosophical text?

More appears to be going on in such translative activity than first meets the eye. To explore this and related issues I have here concerned myself with connecting these various translation projects—brought from

across the historical length and breadth of Jewish philosophical writing—to the volatile mappings of Jewish and other identities. What brought these individuals to the biblical narrative on the levels of both historicity and philosophy? How were their translative projects shaped by larger historical and cultural contexts? What were some of the larger, nonhistorical features that inform these translations?

My goal in this chapter is twofold. First, I want to build upon the case studies in previous chapters by exploring, more theoretically, how Jewish identities are formed against the uncertain and shifting contours of language. Rather than view questions of identity or identities through the prism of religious or political history, part of my undertaking here is to move the reconfigurations of identity onto the overlapping spheres of literature and philosophy.[3] This permits us to glimpse at how translation is engaged in the larger project of defining identities. Second, my aim is to connect the translative act to issues of temporality, especially the simultaneous and often paradoxical desires for temporal fulfillment, temporal reversal, and the very resistance of temporality. Certainly on one level, identity formation and temporality are two separate issues that could be studied in and of themselves, and I certainly unravel them and examine them separately. Yet they also overlap in that all issues of identity are ultimately played out on the ground of temporality since all language and being ultimately require a temporal thrownness.[4] This thrownness enables us to conceive of Jewish temporality more clearly and, in the second part of this chapter, I attempt to frame Bible translation as the *modus* of uncovering something akin to the Heideggerean notion of authenticity.

Translation, Identity, and Border Maintenance

On both textual and philosophical levels the Hebrew Bible had to compare favorably with a myriad of non- Hebraic literatures, whether philosophical (e.g., the writings of Plato, Aristotle, Alfarabi) or religious (e.g., the Qurʾān or the New Testament). Although I examined the dialectic between cultural appropriation and apologetics in chapter 4, I focus here on how and why translation became invested in a set of larger metaphysical issues involving the perception and imagining of identity. The perceived juxtaposition of "Hebraic" and "non- Hebraic" literatures, along with the counterpoint between "Jewish" and "non- Jewish" identities, were ultimately responsible for generating translations—philosophical or otherwise—of the Bible.[5] Jewish encounters with other sets of literature, and the broader aesthetic webs that enmeshed them, produced a desire on the part of Jewish

intellectuals to engage with the linguistic frameworks of host cultures. All this, however, had to be grounded biblically by translating the books, the terms, the concepts of the Bible using new idioms.

In the premodern Jewish philosophical world, the Hebrew Bible had to compete, as mentioned, with the linguistic embellishments of the Qurʾān as elaborated by Muslims theologians and belletrists,[6] the supersessionism of the New Testament as worked out by the early Church fathers, in addition to the aesthetic and other qualities of nonreligious works (e.g., literature of antiquity, late antiquity, and the Renaissance). Increasingly in the modern period, the Hebrew Bible was intertwined with notions of nation, Volkishness, and Christian attempts to appropriate its narrative. The basic concern that revolves around all this Jewish translative activity is how to make the richness of the biblical tradition accessible in a new language and in such a way that the new preserves the old and that the old shapes the new. All this informed the perceived superiority of the Bible over other forms of literature and helped define what made the Jewish people different from other peoples.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the chiasmus between old and new and the ultimate untranslatablity between cultures, there nevertheless arose a series of translative attempts meant to imagine connections between Jewish peoplehood and an unspoken Hebrew, a regnant past and an uncertain present.[7] Since translation can, to use the phrasing of Naomi Seidman, appear "as a negotiation of an unavoidably asymmetrical *double*-sidedness,"[8] it necessarily became invested in the process of location and dis- location. Translation is part of the desire to partake of larger cultural process yet also a constant reminder of perpetual otherness and dif - ference.[9]

Biblical translation—representing points of contact between Judaism and other cultures—is heavily invested in the creation of cultural, political, literary, and religious identities. Yet paradoxically, translation is ultimately responsible for imposing and subsequently maintaining borders between these cultures. Rather than simply facilitate border crossings, translation actually impedes such movement by both articulating and differentiating the "Judaic," something that paradoxically can only be defined using the language and categories of the "non- Judaic." Although I have no intention of arguing that terms such as "Judaic" and "non- Judaic" are natural, essential, or fixed as they move through time, those working in the translative moment often conceive of them in precisely such ways. Translation creates identity as it imagines a past rewritten for the present. What was potentially amorphous in the past increasingly became reified through the act of translation. Saadya Gaon, for example, in the Hebrew introduction to his *Sefer ha- Egron,* writes:

Avraham Avinu, whose love was Isaac, his chosen one
Who followed his [father's] virtues, and from whom came all God's tribes.
Their feet traveled in every land, in every kingdom
Canaan and the land of Egypt.
We did not speak the languages [of our neighbors],
or worship their gods.
From Egypt, our God spoke to us the words of purity [*divrei ẓaḥot*]
in the mouth of his servant, Moses, a man of God.
He spoke laws and judgments [*ḥuqqim u- mishpatim*]
From atop Mt. Horeb.
For generations we had deputies who lived
In the land of our heritage [*yerushataynu*].
[Our language] was heard among our kings,
in the songs of the Levites, and in the hymns of our priests.
It was spoken by our prophets, defining their visions.
Until the exile from Jerusalem in the days of Hezekiah.[10]

As we have already witnessed, Saadya connects language to a perceived ancient national identity that is imagined from the vantage point of the present tense. His goal is to clear a space for language in light of its ontological connections to categories such as peoplehood, sovereignty, and land. The Hebrew language, according to Saadya's formulation, establishes the essence of the Jewish people and it is ultimately responsible for marking differences between Jew and non- Jew. Whereas Hebrew is the language of monotheism, other languages lead their speakers into idolatrous practices. The great paradox is that even though Saadya's theory of language occurs here in a florid Hebrew introduction to the work, he composed most of his vast oeuvre in Arabic. Saadya thus had to maintain this difference between authentic and inauthentic, true and false, and "sacred" and "idolatrous" languages through other means. For Saadya, as for others who are the subject of this study, translation functions as precisely such a mode of difference because it permits the translator to create actively linguistic and ontological boundaries in non- Hebraic languages by appeals to abstract notions such as identity.

Saadya's Arabic Bible creates as it sustains a Jewish identity by alternatively appealing to and inventing concepts such as Hebraic consciousness, political independence, and Jewish embodiment.[11] Biblical language now functions as an imaginary palimpsest that gives Arabic meaning while at the same time "spiritualizing" Hebrew, moving it beyond the physical page to the realm of metaphysical abstractions. Saadya thus seeks to reverse the creative process. Whereas God, according to his *Commentary to the Sefer Yeẓirah,* gave order to the Hebrew letters through the act of creation, Saadya liberates Hebrew from that concrete order, returning Hebrew letters to their imaginary point of origin, a point whence Hebrew— literally

under the cover of Arabic—comingles with the figments of memory to facilitate visions of ultimate liberation. This act, as we saw in chapter 2, takes us back to the future, to the full silence of creation, and ultimately moves Saadya's translation toward the hope of national redemption.

In his introductory remarks to his Bible commentary, Saadya argues that the main goal of his *tafsīr* project is to render the "plain text" of the Torah.[12] He exhorts his readers, however, to be aware of the fact that the biblical narrative does not stand alone, but must be supplemented by two other sources of knowledge, reason and tradition (i.e., philosophy and people hood):

> It is also incumbent upon us to follow two other sources of knowledge. The first may be found in the Torah and the other outside of it. The [latter] is active rational knowledge [*al- ʿilm al- ʿaqlī al- mukawwan*]. . . . The [former] is the knowledge granted to us by the messengers [*rusul Allah*], the truthful teachings that the prophets of truth brought to us. These are the three foundations [of our tradition]: that which is intellectualized [*al- ʿilm al-maʿqūl*], that which is written [*al- ʿilm al-manṣūṣ*], and that which is received [*al- ʿilm al-manqūl*]. When they are all put together, they bring perfection to humans.[13]

Franz Rosenzweig refocuses Saadya's comments on the relationship between text and peoplehood in his 1928 essay entitled "Das Formgeheimness der biblischen Erzählung." In this essay Rosenzweig argues that the biblical narrative, unlike other works, does not seek to remove the reader "from his own present circumstances," but "seeks to address him, and to have him respond, in the full presence of his body and soul."[14] Although writing centuries after Saadya, Rosenzweig will also define the beauty of the biblical narrative by appeals to its language and its ability to reach out to a community of believers that responds to the immediacy of its call. He writes further:

> I believe that almost every element of the Bible can be shown to exist elsewhere as well, if one has sufficiently wide knowledge—knowledge that is of course harder to acquire than is the abstract thesis of universal comparability. The Bible's uniqueness [*die Einzigartigkeit der Bibel*] is to be demonstrated irrefutably with respect not to the book as written but to the book as read [*nicht am geschriebenen, sondern nur am gelesenen Buch*]. The Bible is not the most beautiful book in the world, not the deepest, the truest, the wisest, the most absorbing, not any of the ordinary superlatives—or at least we cannot impose any of these superlatives upon anyone not already predisposed in their favor. But the Bible is the most important book.[15]

The uniqueness of the Bible, according to this passage, resides in its language, not its message, and in its audience as opposed to its religious significance.[16] Jewish peoplehood is here characterized by both its special relationship to this book and its ability to abide on an island of orality in a

sea of writing.[17] Once again, it is an imagined ancient peoplehood with its deep and ancient connection to preliterary modalities that provides Jews in the present with a home in language, albeit a language that is at least once or twice removed from its originary form. If Saadya lamented the displacement and dislocation wrought by exile, Rosenzweig celebrates the nonterritorialness of *Im-Exil-Sein*.[18] Home or not at home, both thinkers articulate an intimate nexus between Israel and Hebrew and between people and language.

Yet both delineate borderlines between Jew and non- Jew using a language that Jews no longer speak. Both do so paradoxically through dislocative languages and through the very languages that they each ultimately held responsible for further Jewish displacement and alienation. As such, both thinkers regard it as their translational duty to recall the Hebraic traces in these languages. Although Saadya attempts to do this by making the Hebrew- behind-the-Arabic more familiar, Rosenzweig seeks to make the German foreign by reflecting the foreignness and uncanniness of Jewish peoplehood.

If translation imposes borders between Jew and non- Jew, it also unsettles the distinctions between Jewish and non- Jewish languages.[19] At what point, for example, does the Arabic of Saadya, Moses ibn Ezra, and Maimonides or the German of Mendelssohn, Buber, andRosenzweig become a "Jewish" language? All these works create and imagine Jewish peoplehood in languages other than Hebrew; all attempt to establish a home of sorts in another language by rewriting Judaism's basic narrative.[20] This narrative, in turn, is regarded as transforming the host language, further embellishing its beauty and expanding its ability to signify. But what happens to Hebrew, to the originary language of revelation?

Perhaps nowhere is this clearer than in those projects not meant to translate the Bible literally into another language, but into a different conceptual idiom. For example, in his *Guide of the Perplexed,* Maimonides, *inter alia,* seeks to show the compatibility between biblical language and Greek philosophy using Arabic as the vehicle that determines their harmony. In his Introduction to the first part of the *Guide,* for example, he writes: "I shall begin to mention the terms whose true meanings [*ḥaqīqa maʿanaha*], as intended in every passage according to its context, must be indicated. This, then, will be a key permitting one to enter places the gates to which are locked. And when these gates are opened and these places are entered into the souls will find rest therein, the eyes will be delighted, and the bodies will be eased out of their toil and of their labor."[21] With this passage Maimonides signals his desire to translate the literal meanings of biblical and Hebraic terms, and thus the narrative as a whole, into the technical language of Greco-Arabic philosophy. Literal and metaphorical languages, for

Maimonides at least, are fluid and naturally move into one another. Unlike Saadya Gaon, who argued that the Hebrew language was connected to land, monotheism, and peoplehood, Maimonides' goal is to articulate the propriety of Hebrew's semantic field; however, like Saadya he implies that an improper understanding of Hebrew is idolatrous. Although they may differ in certain aspects of their respective programs, both Saadya and Maimonides connect language to cultic worship.[22] In *Guide* I.33, for example, Maimonides writes of the literal level of the Torah:

> The Torah speaks in the language of humans, as we have made clear. This is so because [the Torah] is presented in such a manner as to make it possible for the young, the women, and all the people to begin with it, and to learn it. Now it is not within their power to understand these matters as they truly are. Hence they are confined to accepting tradition with regard to all the sound opinions that are of such a sort that it is preferable that they should be pronounced true and with regard to all the representations of this kind.[23]

Biblical language is meant for the ignorant. An understanding of the Bible's literal level alone threatens proper belief because of its linguistic investiture in corporeality. A truly wise person knows that the literal language of Scripture is not to be taken literally and that it must be translated and reverted into the language of science. Maimonides' comments here are much different from those that we have witnessed in both Saadya and Rosenzweig. Like them, he would certainly agree that biblical language is intimately connected to peoplehood; however, unlike either of them, he claims that this notion of peoplehood will prove illusory or chimerical if it remains beholden to the literal level. The deepest level of the Torah, according to Maimonides, is meant for an elite community that cannot by its very nature include all Jews.[24]

In Maimonides' translation project we clearly see the lines blur between Jewish and non- Jewish languages. Certainly Jews are privileged in their possession of the Torah. This possession, however, proves a double-edged sword, with misunderstanding leading to enslavement in the Bible's literary literalness.

Writing roughly three hundred years after Maimonides, Judah Messer Leon also seeks both to maintain and blur the boundaries between Jew and non- Jew. Only for him the counterpoint is between the Bible and Renaissance humanism. And his language of choice is Hebrew, not Arabic. Although the philosophical and conceptual languages had changed, and despite his differences with Maimonides on the quiddity of rhetoric and aesthetics,[25] Messer Leon nonetheless also seeks to show his readership that when properly understood the biblical narrative not only naturally and effortlessly coincides with the best of non- Jewish sources, but actu-

ally bests such sources. In his *Sefer Nofet Ẓufim,* for instance, he defines and writes of the perfect orator in biblical terms:

> Now if you study the words of King Solomon, all that we have said above [about the importance of rhetoric] will be obvious to you from one short statement that is too marvelous to go unremarked, the one in which he says *The language of the Righteous is choice silver; the heart of the wicked is little worth* [Prov. 10:20]. By "choice silver" he means the silver that is entirely free of dross as it possibly can be. He has thus alluded to the most appropriate sort of verbal communication; it is as though he had said the language of the righteous is the most appropriate kind of verbal communication, and had set as the condition *sine qua non* of the good and sound speaker that he be a righteous man. Now this, of course, adverts to the definition of the orator as described by Quintilian.[26]

For Messer Leon, the biblical narrative—and by definition the Jewish people—is heavily attuned to the elegance of language, and the beauty of Hebrew is as beautiful as anything produced by the ancient Greeks, Romans, or contemporaneous humanists. It is precisely this message that he tries to communicate in his conceptual translation of humanist rhetorical categories into the Hebrew Bible and vice versa. For instance, after surveying what classical rhetoricians have to say about the orator and his virtues, Messer Leon concludes:

> This has already been stated by King Solomon in the verses: *The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable, but the mouth of the wicked is all forwardness* [Prov. 10:32], *The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips* [16:23]; and many others besides. Thus the eminent in Rhetoric [*miflagei ha-haliẓah*] were the elect of the nation and its special treasure, in whom all the virtues were very nearly perfect—I mean the prophets who are without compare [*ain ʿarukh elihem*].[27]

Once again the distinction between Jewish and non- Jewish languages diminishes here in the ultimate service of further maintaining the boundaries between Jews and non- Jews. Jews, in other words, can partake of Renaissance ideals because they are ultimately embedded in the biblical narrative; however, Jews ultimately have all that they need in the model provided by biblical rhetoric.[28] Certainly, as I argued in chapter 4, Messer Leon encourages Jews to take advantage of the models offered by non-Jewish Renaissance culture; but implicit in this statement is that they should not become too involved in them, for what makes Jews distinct from all others is the Bible.

In *Or Lintiva,* the introduction to his commentary on the Torah, Moses Mendelssohn both follows the medieval tradition by arguing that Hebrew is superior to other languages and anticipates Buber's and Rosenzweig's hermeneutic in his claim that Hebrew's superiority resides in its orality.[29]

The biblical narrative, on Mendelssohn's reading, preserves the natural graces and aesthetic qualities of its original oral communication, its intonation, stresses, and gestures.[30] For Mendelssohn, the free and unharnessed poetic language of the Hebrew Bible far surpasses that of other languages, whose aesthetic qualities are often dependent upon strict rules of meter and prosody. Because the Hebrew language, as the originary vehicle of revelation, works with a different aesthetic value—one that establishes intimate connections between sensual emotions, heart and mind—such poetic conventions could not work.[31]

Mendelssohn's task in translating the Bible into an elegant German was to get Yiddish- speaking Jews to adopt the cultivated manners of contemporaneous society.[32] His translation thus functioned as a classic work of *Bildung* ("education," "enculturation").[33] Nowhere is this clearer than in his Hebrew introduction to his *Sefer Netivot ha- Shalom* ("Book of the Paths of Peace"), the title of his German translation of the Bible:[34] "When God in his grace provided me with male children and when the time arrived to teach to them the Torah and to instruct in the words of the living God, as it is written, I took it upon myself to translate the five books of Moses into ornate and proper German such as is spoken in our time, and this I did for their benefit."[35] Here Mendelssohn makes clear that his translation was meant quite literally for his own children and, by extension, all those like them who misunderstand both German and Hebrew—the two linguistic bearers of high culture.[36] His primary desire was to get German Jews to overcome the grammatical, political, and ethical impediments symbolized by their enslavement to Yiddish, and emancipate themselves using the purity that Hebrew and German embodied.[37] Mendelssohn clearly envisaged his translation project as the vehicle to carry Jews toward culture. However, the very fact that Mendelssohn translated the Bible into German *using Hebrew script* also attests to the fact that he sought to maintain its Hebrew character and qualities. By retaining the Hebrew of the original, Mendelssohn still tried to harness the oral and aesthetic qualities of the originary Hebrew text by marking it off as a Jewish possession and as the defining element of Jewish peoplehood.

* * *

In this section I have for the most part gone through the majority of the thinkers who make up the subject of this study in search of evidence for how language and its translation into new idioms function in their work as markers of Jewish identity. Such markers, although appearing as part of the natural order to these thinkers, are—I want to suggest—in fact part of the creation of cultural identity that is at work in the face of larger cultural, social, and linguistic pressures. Translation affords these think-

ers with the ability to imagine and subsequently maintain the boundaries of Judaism and of Jewish peoplehood—their relationship to a language, a book, a land—and project this onto the present. Although each translation certainly went about this task somewhat differently, each one demonstrates that the Bible is both the same and yet different from any particular cultural moment in which Jews happen to find themselves. Of course, the "Jewish people," like any other collective identity, is certainly not stable throughout all of these imaginings. For the thinkers examined above, however, the core of the Bible may well coincide with Aristotelian science, Arabic, or Renaissance or Weimar aesthetics, but its eternality—its existential connection to "Jewishness," variously defined and mapped—is not exhausted by such concerns.

The Politics of Translation

Before I examine the other major theme of this chapter, that of temporality, it is necessary to underscore that border maintenance inevitably presupposes an ideological dimension, what I here signal as the politics of translation. Such maintenance involves distinct and discrete choices regarding the formation of a perceived identity, one that is ultimately definable by imagining it in counterpoint with its opposite (the so-called "not-us" or "other"). More often than not, asDaniel Boyarin reminds us, the borderlines drawn are directed at those groups that bear the most family resemblances to those doing the defining.[38] Borders, whether national or ethnic, are notoriously unstable, constantly undergoing modification and remapping.[39] Every single translation project discussed in the previous pages paradoxically attempted to change the very contours of Judaism's boundaries by the attempt to secure them. On one level, the translation of scripture is a highly utilitarian act and therefore bound up in the forces of conservativism and the maintenance of the status quo; however, when explored in closer detail one quite quickly sees the political intentions behind such activities.[40] None of this is particularly unique to Judaism. Historically, for example, the translation of the Bible figured intimately in the Protestant Reformation, wherein translations became the tool for consolidating religious authority and the attempt to wrestle it from opponents.[41] Biblical translations also accompanied the rise of early modern theories of the nation state,[42] and the emergence of contemporary religio- political movements.[43]

If translation is not simply a philological act but a philosophical one, then it must necessarily also be political. Informing Mendelssohn's translation, for instance, was the desire both to educate and refine his co-

religionists in order to show the larger world that Jews were capable of social and cultural improvement. As a "jargon," writes Naomi Seidman, "Yiddish could not serve the function of emblematizing the place of the Jews among the family of tongues and nations."[44] Mendelssohn's Bible translation project became the practical aspect of his larger program devoted to giving Jews a language and thus rights within Germany.

Although responding to a completely different set of concerns, Saadya's, Moses ibn Ezra's, and Maimonides' translative and lexicographical projects certainly serve a similar purpose. Like Mendelssohn, these individuals sought to illumine the relationships between the biblical narrative and contemporaneous intellectual and aesthetic trends. For example, in his *Maqālat al-ḥadīqa,* Moses ibn Ezra writes of God's superiority to the natural world and the inability of humans to grasp him in his entirety:

> According to a certain individual, the supreme name is part of the deductive proof [*istidlāl*] of God's existence. This assertion is inexact because the Name is only an allusion and is truly unknowable. In effect, like the reality of the divine essence, his name is unknowable, impenetrable by the intellect, and inaccessible to the imagination. As indicated, the reason for this unknowability, the diverse sorts of derivative names, their homonyms and amphibolous designations are inapplicable to God in the proper sense [*ʿala l-ḥaqīqa*], because He transcends all. He is thus given metonyms from the sensible order [*kināyyat ḥissiyya*] and metaphorical attributes [*ṣifāt majāziyya*]. As it says, "Observe faithfully the terms of this Teaching that are written in this book" [Deut. 28:58]. . . . All these verses refer metaphorically to the divine essence because it is ultimately unknowable and ineffable.[45]

Here Ibn Ezra argues, in a passage reminiscent of Maimonides, that because God's essence is unknowable, the biblical narrative applies a series of metaphors and other linguistic tropes to describe Him. The key for Ibn Ezra, like other contemporaneous Jewish rationalists, was to make sure that such terms not be taken literally but that they be translated into a proper idiom. Much like the lexicographical chapters of the *Guide,* Moses ibn Ezra provides his readers with the code to decode biblical language.[46] Like all the Jewish philosophers living and writing in an Arabophone environment, this code was ultimately derived from contemporaneous Arabic literary and philosophical hermeneutics. The proper reading of the biblical narrative for these individuals, as I argued in chapter 3, is a misreading, one that that derives its tenor from Arabic and rationalist hermeneutics, not unlike what other contemporaneous Islamicate subcultures (e.g., the Ismaʿiliyya) were doing.

Unwilling to wed Jewish culture to a biblical narrative full of embarrassing anthropomorphisms, these individuals set out to rewrite the Bible by showing how—when translated and understood properly—the bibli-

cal narrative was anything but a cultural embarrassment but in fact functioned as the touchstone for all literary and philosophical graces. For these individuals the translated Bible represented the superiority of Judaism to Arabo- Islamic culture. In so doing, they refashioned biblical language and in the process reshaped and standardized Judaism by making it conform to the dictates of reason.

Judah Messer Leon also tried to demonstrate through a translation of key terms that the biblical narrative—and, by extension, Hebraic culture—possessed all the *termini technici* of Renaissance humanism. These terminological correlations, according to Messer Leon, do not simply occur on the level of language, but extend deeper into the very relationship of Judaism to Renaissance culture.[47] Like the medieval thinkers to whom he is heir, Messer Leon follows this trajectory, arguing that it is in the Bible that one first encounters these terms and thus further testifies to Judaism's superiority to non- Judaic cultures. Such an attitude enables Jews to participate freely in non- Jewish cultures without fear of being absorbed into their larger fabrics. At the same time, however, it also permits individuals to articulate Judaism in novel ways—shifting, expanding, and testing its transparent boundaries in the process.

The political underpinnings of the translative act were invested in the desire to change the contours of Judaism and to persuade others that their own imagined forms of Judaism were superior. Saadya and Mai monides, for example, were not simply philosophers and biblical translators, but the de facto heads of rabbinic Judaism, who had to respond to numerous internal threats ranging from Karaism and false messianic movements to apostasy.[48] Their translative projects were accordingly part and parcel of these larger efforts to imagine and shape Judaism in their own rationalist images. In this regard, biblical translation was a much more effective medium to disseminate such imaginings than a technical and abstract philosophical treatise meant for cultural elites.

It is precisely within this context that Judah Messer Leon created his *Sefer Nofet Ẓufim*. On one level, this work certainly translates Renaissance terms into the Bible and vice versa, and, by extension, attempts to connect Judaism to the Italian Renaissance. However, on another level we must not lose sight of the fact that this book was also meant as a manual to instruct his own students in bureaucracy and thus part of an attempt to impose what he considered to be his own authoritative reading of the tradition on fifteenth- century Italian Jewish communities.[49] Caught up in contemporaneous power struggles of rabbinic authority, *Sefer Nofet Ẓufim* might actually undermine rather than reinforce our romantic notions of the Renaissance.[50] To use Bonfil's own words, the treatise potentially returns us to the "medieval" world:

> [Messer Leon] even published ritual ordinances rooted in strict Ashkenazi rulings and opposing centuries-old more lenient local habits. Worse still, he actually issued a ban against the reading of Gersonides's commentary to the Pentateuch, on the grounds that it contained heretical matter. . . . Messer Leon emerges as deeply intolerant of the cultural pluralism being encouraged in fifteenth- century Italy, indeed much more intolerant than any other contemporary rabbi of his region, including those of German or French origin.[51]

Biblical translations sought to change the shape of Judaism in at least two distinct manners: first, by showing how Hebraic and non- Hebraic cultures actually reinforced one another at the points at which they were potentially most fragile, and second, by showing how the larger, ideological readings emerging from these translations were in fact meant to be definitive, invested as they were within various internal power plays.

On many levels opposed to these aforementioned translative projects stands the biblical translation of Buber and Rosenzweig. Whereas undergirding virtually every other translation project examined here was the desire to show the linguistic, intellectual, and cultural filiations between Judaic and non- Judaic cultures, the Buber-Rosenzweig translation was an attempt to reveal the fundamental differences between Jew and non-Jew, and between Hebrew and German.[52] Their translation was, to use the words of W. Gunther Plaut, *"a work of defiance, as much as it was a work of utter loyalty to the original."*[53]

In their desire to demonstrate the patterns of dissimilarity between Jewish and non- Jewish modes of thought, however, their project was certainly no less political. Their task was nothing short of undoing what centuries of German (and other) biblical translations had tried to accomplish. By showing that Hebrew was different than German and that the con ceptual and thus the mental world of the ancient Israelites was profoundly different than Aryan categories, Buber and Rosenzweig imagined a Hebrew-centered consciousness that was juxtaposed against those of Aryans or Indo-Europeans.[54] In their textual claims to be faithful to the literal dimension of the biblical narrative, Buber and Rosenzweig, even if they sought to move beyond the political, nevertheless produced a work as indebted to its moment of historicity as its claim to move to a time beyond time.[55]

Translation and (Dis) Temporality

So as not to lose sight of the thread that links the disparate topics discussed here, the questions that drive this chapter are worth reiterating: Why did these philosophers translate the biblical narrative? What was it about the translative act that made them undertake it? The primary historical as-

pect of this activity, as I have suggested, is the politics of border maintenance and what ideally counts or should count as an authoritative reading. In this section I wish to move from the historical to the philosophical and further suggest that translation afforded the authors who are the subject of this study with the means to think about connections between language and ontology, since the biblical narrative was in many ways the perceived ground of Jewish being- in-the-world.

Even though, to use Rosenzweigian parlance, from the ground there glimmers forth a nexus between time, language, and truth, it is important to be aware that this nexus is ultimately grounded in the finitude of the subjects about whom I have written. This nexus—whether we call it Being or God—may itself be nothing more than finite and historical. Although all the Bible translations examined here are products of distinct Jewish cultures, ultimately locked in time, the very act of translation, I wish to suggest, is an attempt to overcome precisely such temporality. As such, we must locate translation in its dislocality, in its ultimate confrontation with temporality, and in the memory of a distant past that anticipates future redemption. Since languages are essentially sets of disparate signs, translation becomes the act of overcoming the perceived incommensurability of such signs and the larger fields of which they are a part.[56] Yet the temporality of time, the thrownness of human existence, makes it such that being is inconceivable without language and that ontological categories become encased in and inseparable from the texture of words. In his posthumously published essay, "On Language as Such and On the Language of Men," Walter Benjamin writes that "language communicates the linguistic being of things. The clearest manifestation of this being, however, is language itself."[57] Language, on this formulation, is tied neither to essences nor to things in themselves, but becomes that which moves between, that which points the way to the beyond- language.[58]

The art of translation, to stay with Benjamin a little longer, is the search for the natural and primordial language to which all languages function as traces.[59] Pointing to the language beyond itself, language is tantamount to the disclosure of reality; the disclosure of phenomena is revealed only in and through the language that calls it into being. In Elliot Wolfson's formulation, "It is particularly the verbal gesture of representing by name that allows us to speak of the linguistic nature of reality, for in the process of naming, language itself is communicated as potentiality for communication."[60] And for Benjamin, "language is in every case not only communication of the communicable, but also, at the same time, a symbol of the noncommunicable."[61]

Translation fits into this context because its movement between languages permits reflection upon the limits of being and temporality. For

Heidegger, the Being of *Dasein* does not so much occur in time, but exists in temporality: "Coming back to itself futurally, resoluteness brings itself in the Situation by making it present. The character of 'having been' arises from the future, and in such a way that the future which 'has been' (or better, which 'is in the process of having been') releases from itself the Present. This phenomenon has the unity of a future which makes present in the process of having been: we designate it as *'temporality.'*"[62] Since temporality is the ultimate meaning of being- in-the-world, it is not simply a medium or matrix to which we relate independently. According to Heidegger we exist as the very process of temporality, and because of this our existence is most fundamentally *temporality.*[63] This concept, as opposed to time, is a self- generating process of existence; *"temporality is the primordial 'outside- of-itself' in and for itself."*[64] Temporality is aware of itself not as coordinates of tense, but as *ecstases,* modes of its own transcendence through the act of temporalizing.[65]

If language is the ground of authenticity, translation becomes the temporalizing process that leads us to develop new forms of relationships with a canonical text and with temporality itself. Translation of the biblical narrative involves a breaking away from the quotidian and its categories, the projection of one's reading of Judaism onto the coordinates of time through the ecstatic moments of temporality's self- transcendence. Translation, as I shall suggest in the remainder of this section, is alternately, simultaneously— and thus paradoxically—temporal fulfillment, temporal reversal, and the resistance of temporality.

The translator perhaps more acutely than others finds him- or herself enmeshed *In-der-Welt-sein.*[66] Our existence is not something that we ourselves create; rather, our existence is our entrance into a worldly totality that is already there. This worldly grounding, to use the words of Rosen zweig, is not itself firm or determinate but itself exists in the temporal reversal into creation.[67] Standing in the midst of the world that is already there, in the midst of the All, language becomes our vehicle of experience, of engagement both in and of the world. Translation, in trying to take us back to a pure language, simultaneously returns us to the moment of the world's emergence and anticipates the silent holdout of future re demption.

The translative act—the movement between the languages and grammars of revelation—becomes the means by which we wrench ourselves out of our worldliness. Translation becomes involved in the process of overcoming our own elemental limitations,[68] the acute realization of the blurring of lines between language and nonlanguage. Translation functions, I want to suggest, for many who are the subject of this study as an

act of creation, as an act of unlocking meaning embedded in one language (i.e., Hebrew) and releasing it by (re-)creating it in another.The exoteric layer and contingent nature of language, of all languages, is exposed to reveal the illuminating spirit of silence's full presence within.

Translation becomes the pulling of the future into the present and both of these tenses subsequently into the past. In its very being, translation pushes language to its extreme, to the breaking point of signification, revealing the limits of linguisticity, leading to "unveiling the veil of being," to use Elliot Wolfson's apt phrasing.[69] In the nexus between language and being, translation becomes the modality of unspeaking the said, of unraveling traditional and quotidian modalities of communication.

Relatedly, translation also provides the means of temporal reversibility, the desire to return to the past's fabric and to the revelatory moment responsible for opening up humans, God, and the world to one another. For Rosenzweig, the very instability of these three elements—God, humans, world—presuppose both their flux and their ultimate interdependency.[70] As such, the relationships they develop with one another, their existence in counterpoint, can only occur in and through the vector that is the temporal order. But our understanding of time, of temporality, is one-dimensional, moving from the traces of the past into the present whence it sets out toward future's horizon. The consciousness of temporality, however, must include the demands of memory and of anticipation, and, as such, past and future have no independent existence except as they exist in the present, forming the presence of existence. Within this context, our understanding of time is tantamount to an understanding of our selves, our specificity, and our situatedness.[71]

In order to step into relationships with both the world and with God, humans are required to undergo reversal of the temporal and elemental worlds.[72] To use the words of Elliot Wolfson again, "Time is continuously in the making; hence at no time can time be circumscribed in a self- enclosed body; the 'objective world' is a product of human construction, an orderly and coherent edifice, to be sure, but one that can always be destabilized by the chiasmic texture of time's interruptive flow."[73] The interrelationships between textuality and temporality are responsible for the translator's ability to move between languages and between worlds.

Translation becomes the philosophic act par excellence, the way to reverse the created order and to pull the future into the present and onto the past. If, according to Saadya's *Commentary to the Sefer Yeẓirah,* God created the universe with language,[74] translation becomes the way that humans re- vector the established order and move the revelatory word toward the potential silence of creation and of redemption. The past and the future

thus meet on the plain of the present; and this collision informs the necessity of translation. For the translative act becomes, on this reading, the curve or arc of "going back to the future and arriving at the past."[75]

In Rosenzweigian categories, human beings only truly awaken to themselves, to their own "I," as a result of a call from God as opposed to any act of pure or pristine thinking.[76] This call occurs through the very fabric of the biblical narrative,[77] the narrative which the translator must return to its elemental silence before he or she can enter into a relationship with it. Only in his revelatory relationship with humans is it possible for God to attain the recognition of his absolute existence necessary for the fulfillment of his potential; likewise, only by grasping this relationship with God is it possible for humans to awaken to their singular calling. This self-knowledge—translation as a form of retracing the divine palimpsest—is what makes it possible for humans to enter into dialogic relationships with God and ultimately with one another.

Paradoxically, however, translation also becomes a strategy of resisting temporality or of temporal resistance. A present defined by an imagined past's contours gives rise to a flight from time constructed to time imagined.[78] The latter—alternatively referred to as Jewish messianism, as existence outside of history, as the Angel of History—becomes one of the perceived discursive sites of Jewish existence. On this horizon translation takes place and is formed against the shadowy presence of Redemption. The resistance of time does not bring us to the end of time but back to its beginning, to the originary point of revelation and to the rupture of the divine word into the fabric of creation.

If translation establishes a series of connections between Judaic and non- Judaic cultures, it also provides the translator with the ability to resist both customary usages of the new language and the customary ontologies inscribed in this language. The new language overwrites the old, yet the old transforms the new, making it conform to its originary vision. As both the guardian of language and the definer of meaning, the translator oversees the un- writing of the old and its writing anew, for, in the words of Jabès, "all shattered writing has the form of a key."[79]

Translation and the Space in Between

I have tried to call attention in this chapter to another argument, interwoven into all the above case studies, that has not infrequently made an appearance in my larger study. I refer here to my own take on translation, where I argue that the instability inherent to Bible translation shows that time depends upon various investments or activities of persons within a

culture. Translative activity now reveals the "sacred" or the "holy" as an active construction cobbled together from a past remembered in anticipation of an imagined future in order to mark the presence of identity in the present. Translation thus seems to prove the correctness of Heidegger's doctrine of ecstatic temporality in *Being and Time*—that *Dasein* is time. We forever exist "in between," between the contours of temporal and linguistic frameworks, in the shadows where hope and desire, memory and forgetting, collide and often collapse into the other.

Translation is—to reiterate—neither about finding semantic equivalences in a new language nor about accurate transcription. It is about something deeper; it is an uncovering, an event of unconcealment. If language represents the fundamental constituent in the revelation of the world, translation is the continuing need to locate ourselves in that revelation. Translation becomes the attempt to destroy so as to create and vice versa; the need to see the future in the mirror of the past and vice versa. The translative act is thus a philosophical one. Heidegger, for instance, writes:

> What is required of philosophical research is that it be a critique of the present. In disclosing the past in an original manner, the past is no longer seen to be merely a present that preceded our own present. Rather, it is possible to emancipate the past so that we can find in it the authentic roots of our existence and bring it into our own present as a vital force. Historical consciousness liberates the past for the future, and it is then that the past gains force and becomes productive.[80]

Translation, on this reading, is what frees the past as a potentiality for the future and sets it against the present's horizon. The translative act thus becomes the attempt to bring the past back to an imagined authenticity. In this imagining, the other ecstases—but especially that of the future—are put in the service of perceiving this authenticity, of clearing a space for it, and ultimately of giving it further legitimation by lending to it a perceived temporal sequencing. This means that, in anticipation, the future has meaning only insofar as we project onto it. The present, the moment out of which translation emerges, opens itself up to a world that is situated between and ultimately derives its potency from the horizons of past and future.

Biblical translation, to shift the focus a little, emerges as a response to the past as a possibility, a way of imagining the past as a challenge to the present or as a possibility for the future. It forms a repetition, in the Heideggerean sense,[81] of giving the past a new future and the future a new past. Yet unlike Heidegger, Rosenzweig, or indeed anyone else discussed in these pages, I contend that this quest for authenticity is always a chimera

and forever illusory. It is always rooted in the present, in the here and now, as a mode of imagining identity. Translation becomes the path toward the path itself, a quest for still life on a moving dreamscape.

Ich hatte einst ein schönes Vaterland
Der Eichenbaum
Wuchs dort so hoch, die Veilchen nickten sanft
Es war ein Traum

Das küßte mich auf deutsch, und sprach auf deutsch
(Man glaubt es kaum,
Wie gut es klang) das Wort, "Ich liebe dich!"
Es war ein Traum.

I once had a beautiful fatherland
The oak
Grew there so high, the violets gently nodded
It was a dream

It kissed me in German, it spoke in German
(One can hardly believe it,
It sounded so good) the phrase: "Ich liebe dich!"
It was a dream.[82]

CONCLUSIONS: BETWEEN SPACES

I TURN IN THE REMAINING PAGES TO TRANSLATION'S NECESSITY AND, AS it were, its celebration. I move toward an end that I hope reveals itself as a beginning; an end that, like all ends, takes place in the endless present and in the dreamtime of temporality's thrownness. Here or perhaps there, we confront in the very transfer of lexemes and the deferral of meaning, haunted by the reciprocality to which Walter Benjamin alludes, the realization that language is all there is. This realization affords glimpses into or toward the notion that translation, as doublespeak, seeks to make the absent present and to create meaning where there is aporia. Rather than speak in the names of those whom I have studied, I turn here to the first person in order to reflect on and converse with some of the historical, poetic, and philosophical issues raised in this study.

Translation is an understudied process in Jewish philosophy. Certainly there is a general and widespread recognition of its ability to absorb and domesticate the ideas of everyone from Aristotle to Kant. Historically, in other words, we know quite a lot about translation. Yet relatively little work has been devoted to the meta- historical processes, the *imaginaire,* that made such processes possible. Why translate? What motivations—whether historical or philosophical—make this possible? The translative act is what signals Judaism's originary encounter with non- Jewish ideas. It defines Judaism as it opens it up; creates boundaries precisely as it dismantles them. Certainly translation is about finding old words or coining new ones to make up for the lacunae brought about by the encounter with the strange and the foreign. Yet, just as important if not more so, translation refits and recalibrates Judaism's conceptual apparatus to absorb the new on the level of ideas. The result is nothing short of the redefinition, the constant and continuous redefinition, of Judaism. The new becomes old and the old new. Figuring into this play of tenses is the dreamtime of memory. Distortive and creative in equal measure, memory invents and charts a national literature that can be cast and recast—translated—in every generation.

In this study I have attempted to bring together a mosaic of texts and events, often distant from one another in time and place, that speak to the theme of translation and translatability. As both a literal value and a metaphorical one, translation—I have tried to suggest—opens us up fully to the possibility of being human. Engaging others—whether individuals, communities, or texts—ultimately permits reflection on ourselves, thereby facilitating our location in the timespace of human experience, in the discourses of identity, and in the rhetorical play of language. Here translation oversees borderlines, whence we stare into the eyes of temporality and identity.

As a fusion of aesthetics and analysis, of history and philosophy, and of space and the space in between, the translative projects discussed above force us to confront the amorphous contours of Judaism. I have tried to suggest that historically there has never been any such thing as a Jewish tradition free from internal complexity, tension, and complicated interrelations with many aspects of the surrounding cultures in which Jews found themselves. Both in the past and especially now in the present—in Israel—this has all sorts of political and ideological ramifications. A Judaism untranslated or untranslatable—a Jewish people closed to its neighbors— makes neither historical nor philosophical sense. It is both a contradiction and an impossibility.

The space in between is that creative ground wherein the individuals discussed above and we in the present translate—translate cultures, translate languages, and translate temporal frameworks. As mediation, translation permits creative and imaginative work that facilitates the exchange of ideas and their ultimate domestication, a calling of, toward, the foreign by the name of the home. This permits further reflection upon a set of contrasting demands—the universal and the particular, the past and the future, for instance—that are otherwise potentially unmediated or that even blur into the destructive.

These translation projects, to reiterate, both open Judaism to its surrounding environments, yet also provide the means to patrol the borders between admittedly artificially constructed categories such as the "foreign" and the "domestic." Like all such reifications, such categories are cultural as opposed to natural constructions. There can be, after all, no such thing as a natural identity that imposes itself on others. Yet this did not stop the individuals above, and others then and now, from seeking to define the quiddity or essence of Judaism and Jewish peoplehood. In this, the translation of the biblical narrative, the ground of Jewish existence, is a central element in the elucidations of such definitions.

All the individuals discussed in this study—in their disparate temporal and geographic spaces—envisaged translation as the way to show

others, both Jew and Gentile, that Judaism's religious and cultural record was neither an aesthetic nor an intellectual embarrassment. To the contrary: the biblical narrative, again as the fundament of Jewish existence and the very stuff of Jewish peoplehood, becomes both modern and relevant through translation's colorful hues. But making the new old and the old new, I tried to argue, is not just a philological act based on semantic equivalences discovered in a bilingual dictionary. Translation is a way of being, a philosophical and existential activity, that is intimately caught up in the webs of memory and desire.

As a subspecies of revelation, Jewish philosophical translation creates intentional acts of rupture that seek to open up caesural spaces in the midst of the habitual and the quotidian. If translation develops complex hybrids between the foreign and the domestic, it is also a mode that necessarily mediates all language, whether prophetic or mundane.[1] It is an activity that makes us aware of the bounds of language as it takes us from one language, one mode of being, toward another. But how does it mediate? What is the goal of this mediation?

In many ways the quest for the origins of language, the originary language, is a quest for the Language beyond language. This so- called Ursprache, whose silent traces exist between the morphological and semantic spaces of other languages, is forever out of reach. The distance that opens up and that differentiates between language as such and the languages of humans, what I have called the space in between, becomes one of the primary sites of theological, literary, and philosophical reflection. Because this space is fraught with uncertainty, it is the silence between and beyond words—between and beyond languages—that reminds us of both the frailty of the human condition and human inadequacy. If nothing else, the translation discussed here is a modality of sacred persistence.

If translation begins in the encounter with the foreign, it also—as mentioned—begins in a perception that the domestic lacks the riches of the foreign. There arises the idea that the domestic and the habitual pale in comparison to the philosophical and aesthetic achievements of the just encountered. Translation seeks to account for this discrepancy by blurring the very distinctions that it paradoxically seeks to uphold: the "Jewish" and the "non- Jewish" often blur in the initial encounter only to be resurrected in the religious and cultural polemics that inevitably and subsequently appear.

The result is the formation of a perceived or an imagined national literature. Hebrew and Hebraic- consciousness give shape to the Jewish people as they, in turn, give shape to it through the arts of translation. The Hebrew Bible now appears as the repository of all wisdom—past, present, and future—the font wherefrom all literary graces, philosophical ideas,

and cultural aesthetics flow. This, as I argued in chapter 4, is an apologetical claim grounded in the distortive glance of memory. It is a glance that reveals as it conceals and that closes off precisely in its desire to open up. As such, many of the translative projects that we have seen here paradoxically risk taking the Bible's polysemy and crystallizing it into the one-dimensional: the Aristotelian, the belletristic, the humanist, the apologetical, and the ancient. None do the biblical narrative full justice, and because of this the biblical narrative will be and must be translated and retranslated.

Philosophically, translation becomes an important part of our struggle with and in temporality, forging further links between the three trajectories of creation, revelation, and redemption. Translation shows us language at both its most necessary and at its most haunting fragility precisely because it points beyond itself and to the beyond language, to the languageless source of all language. The translative act is the search and perhaps the discovery of this source; the desire to find silence in language and the eternal in the quotidian. Moving between languages one inhabits and attempts to abide in the space in between.

By allowing the translator to forge connections between language and ontology, we perceive something of how translation seeks to smash the confines of the three modal tenses, the triadic structure of temporality, in its desire to seek respite in the ecstatic moment of temporality's self-transcendence. The temporal overcoming of time becomes the necessary point of departure on the path of truth's disclosure. A disclosure that, despite its attempt to shed language's skin, becomes further enwrapped in its omnipresence.

The great majority of the translative projects discussed here sought nothing less than the radical transformation of its readers through the very grammar of becoming. From this ground there glimmers forth a nexus between time, language, and truth. This nexus—adumbrated as it is by the richness of the Bible's originary language—calls out for clarification; the charting anew of the past's landscape against the twin horizons of the present's necessity and the future's anticipation.

The language of truth and the truth of language here collide. It is a collision, however, that can take place only in and through words—an understanding of their malleability, their transferability, and their pointing to what resides beyond.

> The space in- between
> History's desire and
> Philosophy's dream.
> The yearning of language
> Haunts its use and
> speaks its silence.

NOTES

Preface

1. As such, I am less interested in, say, Abraham ibn Ezra's actual Hebrew translation of Arabic scientific treatises than I am in Moses ibn Ezra's conceptual translation dealing with the figurative language of the biblical narrative. Or again, my interest is not so much with Samuel ibn Tibbon's translation of the *Guide* into Hebrew as it is with Mai monides' translation of biblical language into philosophy. In making such a claim, I am certainly not denying the importance of Abraham ibn Ezra's and Samuel ibn Tibbon's translations in the dissemination of rationalism beyond the Iberian peninsula.

2. See the comments in Scholem, "Revelation and Tradition," in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism,* 282–303. I thank Martin Kavka for this reference.

3. Here it is worth pointing out that none of the premodern philosophers discussed in this study were, anachronistically, proto- cultural Zionists. Certainly these philosophers sought to rescue the Bible's meaning or intention through vernaculars, but they were not intent on reviving Hebrew in the same manner as those responsible for the invention of modern Israeli Hebrew. I also think it worthwhile to point out the difference between medieval philosophers and the medieval poets and translators (such as Judah al- Ḥarizi). Although the latter certainly revived Hebrew as a literary language, the former were more interested in defending the integrity of biblical and rabbinic ideas.

4. Scholem makes a similar claim about revelation in his "Revelation and Tradition." I here use a similar argument to make the case for Hebrew.

5. *Destruktion,* according to Heidegger, "leaves no bitter aftertaste. It is the expression of philosophy to the extent that the motive of philosophy lies in securing, or rather in making insecure, one's own Dasein." Heidegger, *Phänomenologie,* 171. See the comments in Crowe, *Heidegger's Religious Origins,* 15–20.

6. See the comments in Lyotard, "On a Hyphen," 13–28.

1. Introductory and Interpretive Contexts

The epigraph is from Jabès, *The Book of Resemblances,* 69. I should note that even though I use this as my epigraph I do not necessarily endorse Jabès's larger project of reifying the Jew as eternally on a quest for identity. Rather than assume that Jewish identity is qualitatively different from other identity formations, I prefer to contend that Jew-

ish identity ultimately proves to be both as empty and fictive as any other identity formation.

1. Hadas, *Aristeas to Philocratus,* 221.

2. Philo of Alexandria, *De vita Mosis,* 6: 467–69. For the rabbinic source consistent with his version, see BT *Megillah* 9a. On the translative technique of the Septuagint more generally, see the collection of essays by Aejmelaeus, *On the Trail of the Septuagint Translators.*

3. On the importance of the Septuagint legend for Jewish cultures, see Wasserstein and Wasserstein, *The Legend of the Septuagint.* Of course, the Septuagint was not without its own set of translational problems, for as the work became more accessible to Christian audiences, rabbinic authorities became increasingly mistrustful of it. See the comments in Veltri, *Eine Tora für den Konig Talmai,* 1–21; Veltri, *Libraries, Translators, and "Canonic" Texts.* See also the comments in Seidman, *Faithful Renderings,* 37–72.

4. I am well aware that neither "Jew" nor "non- Jew" (including cognates such as "Greek," "German," or "Arab") are water- tight categories, and, as my argument unfolds, it should be clear that I agree with those who posit a great deal of slippage between them. Relevant literature may be found in, e.g., Boyarin, *Border Lines,* 1–32; Boyarin, "Rethinking Jewish Christianity," 7–36.

5. This is certainly not to claim that rabbinic thought existed in a vacuum. On the intersections between this thought and, e.g., larger Greek and Roman intellectual trajectories, see Lieberman, *Greek in Jewish Palestine;* Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine;* Fischel, *Rabbinic Literature and Greco- Roman Philosophy;* and, more recently, Boyarin, "Dialectic and Divination in the Talmud," 217–40.

6. On this trope more generally in the history of Bible translation, see Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible,* 17.

7. This, for example, was my point of departure in *The Art of Dialogue in Jewish Philosophy,* wherein each chapter provided a thick description of one particular dialogue that connected it to various historical, intellectual, and social dynamics.

8. This is certainly not to claim that there are not other equally appropriate or valid ways to approach this material. It is a testament to the dynamism of Jewish philosophy that it can be explored scientifically, ethically, theologically, or from the perspective of gender studies. My interest here, though, is from the perspective of literary theory and, perhaps for lack of a better term, "Jewish postmodernist discourse." See in this regard the essays collected in Ochs and Levene, *Textual Reasonings.*

9. Kavka, *Jewish Messianism and the History of Jewish Philosophy,* 9.

10. W. Benjamin, "Theses on the History of Philosophy," in *Illuminations,* 255.

11. Jabès, *The Book of Shares,* 9.

12. Here I am inspired by the comments in Paz, "Translation: Literature and Letters," 152–62.

13. I have in mind what I think Jonathan Boyarin alludes to in the title of his *Jewishness and the Human Dimension.* In the epilogue, he writes "that extension in timespace is not merely an 'objective' way of describing humans, individually, at the level of the group or the species as a whole; it is also critical to the rhetorics of identity with which, in turn, we forge our projects toward death, our projects of keeping on" (135).

14. I use this term in the way that Pierre Bourdieu intends in his *Outline of a Theory of Practice,* 72, as the system of

> durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is as principles which generate and orga-

> nize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to obtain them. Objectively "regulated" and "regular" without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor.

15. E.g., Rosenzweig, "Die Schrift und Luther," 104–105; in English, as "Scripture and Luther," 56. All subsequent citations from the work of Rosenzweig give the German title only, followed by the page number in the German edition and the page number in the English translation (e.g., 104–105/56). More on this dialectic of silence/language may be found in chapter 3 below.

16. Derrida, "Des Tours de Babel," 191.

17. Jabès, *The Book of Resemblances,* vol. 3, 69.

18. Schleiermacher, "On The Different Methods of Translating," 44.

19. W. Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," in *Illuminations,* 74.

20. See the comments in Mosès, *The Angel of History,* 70–72.

21. Friedrich, "On the Art of Translation," 11. Compare with Borges, "Some Versions of Homer," 1134–38.

22. See the discussion in Eco, *Experiences in Translation,* 20–22.

23. Paz, "Translation: Literature and Letters," 155.

24. W. Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," 69.

25. Ibid., 72.

26. Paz, "Translation: Literature and Letters," 154.

27. W. Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," 82

28. See the comments in Idel, "White Letters," 169–92; see also E. R. Wolfson, "Assaulting the Border," 475–514.

29. Celan, "Nothingness," in *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan,* 370.

30. My language here is indebted to Rosenzweig, *Der Stern der Erlösung.*

31. The language here comes from Fishbane, *Sacred Attunement,* 33, 54.

32. Realizing, of course, that neither are hermetically sealed containers.

33. See the comments in Masuzawa, *In Search of Dreamtime,* 13–33. In particular, she writes: "Ought we not know, after Freud, that we do not repeat only to make present again a past irreparably lost, but we repeat and remember, so that we may be released from the grip of our memory?" (30).

34. On the large literature devoted to the topic of the constructed, as opposed to natural, sense of identity (whether individual, cultural, or political), see, e.g., Anderson, *Imagined Communities;* Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780;* Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity.* Although much of this literature is concerned with the modern period, I think that both its methods and conclusions can be profitably applied to the Middle Ages.

35. See Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays,* 2–4.

36. Here I have in mind the elaborate and exhaustive analysis carried out in Bourdieu, *Distinction.*

37. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture,* 38–39.

38. The metaphor of attunement is from Fishbane, *Sacred Attunement,* 67.

39. See the comments in Boyarin, "A Jewish Introduction to the Human Sciences," in his *Jewishness and the Human Dimension,* 19.

40. Bodian, *Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation,* 18.

41. In thinking through these issues, I have been greatly aided by Jonathan Boyarin's lovely essay entitled "Responsive Thinking: Cultural Studies and Jewish Historiography," in his *Jewishness and the Human Dimension,* 25–44.

42. Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production,* 29–32.

43. In many ways, my argument here is based on the semantics of the term "philosopher." I am, for example, well aware of the late antique Christian Syriac translations of the Bible; the emergence of the Latin Vulgates; Persian and Turkish translations of the Qurʾān; and so on.

44. Hughes, *The Art of Dialogue in Jewish Philosophy,* 1–25, esp. 2–5.

45. In stating this I disagree with Jonathan Sheehan, who writes: "The Bible has not always been understood, read, appreciated, and venerated as a piece of Western 'culture' . . . if for no other reason that this ideal of the Bible and this ideal of culture were invented at a particular time, in a particular place, and for particular reasons." See his *The Enlightenment Bible,* x

I do not disagree with Sheehan's notion that the term "culture" is an invented one and that the various ways that the Bible has been imagined are bound up with this construction. However, I would certainly point out, as indeed I do throughout this study, that this did not originate in the Enlightenment period. On the contrary, the translation of the Bible has always been defined by what is seen to be constitutive of "culture" in any particular time, be it Arabophone, Renaissance, Enlightenment, Modern, or Postmodern.

46. Paz, "Translation: Literature and Letters," 157.

47. Rosenzweig, "Die Einheit der Bibel," 25.

2. The Forgetting of History and the Memory of Translation

1. Here it is important to be clear that Rosenzweig, as should be well known, did not undertake to translate the Bible alone into German. The main impetus behind the project was Martin Buber, and he was the one that did much of the translative work and who undertook to finish the project after Rosenzweig's death in 1929. Although both Buber and Rosenzweig wrote about their undertaking (collected as *Die Schrift und ihre Verdeustschung*), I here choose to focus on Rosenzweig's writings, especially his "Die Schrift und das Wort," "Die Schrift und Luther," and his afterword to the Halevi translation. When I mention Rosenzweig's "translation," then, it is simply a matter of convenience, and I am not trying to diminish Buber's contribution—which I discuss in greater detail in chapter 4—to the project in any way.

2. Rosenzweig, "Die Schrift und Luther," 104–105. An English translation may be found in *Scripture and Translation,* 56.

3. Saadya Gaon, *Ha- Egron,*Arabic introduction, 148 (lines 9–17).

4. Although Luther's translation remains incontrovertible and omnipresent, one cannot now translate the Bible as if there were no Luther translation. See the comments in Hollander, *Exemplarity and Chosenness,* 143–46.

5. See the comments in Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger,* 238–39.

6. Rosenzweig, "Das neue Denken," 148/81.

7. On the history and problems associated with the employment of "influences" in intellectual history, see the classic formulations in Skinner, "Limits of Historical Ex-

planation," 199–215; Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," 3–53. In the latter work, for example, he writes: "A given writer may be 'discovered' to have held a view, on the strength of some chance similarity of terminology, on some subject to which he cannot in principle have meant to contribute" (7–8).

8. There is, as far as I am aware, however, no evidence that Rosenzweig read anything by Saadya.

9. Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," 5–12; see further the comments in Tully, *Meaning and Context;* LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History,* 56–69.

10. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode.* An English translation may be found in *Truth and Method,* esp. 302–307.

11. Here I take my insights from E. R. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being,* xv–xxxi.

12. "In the critic's vocabulary, the word 'precursor' is indispensable, but it should be cleansed of all connotations of polemic or rivalry. The fact is that every writer *creates* his own precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future." See Borges, "Kafka and His Precursors," 73.

13. Reichert, "'It Is Time,'" in *The Translatability of Cultures,* 180.

14. Rosenzweig, "Zeit ists . . . ," 8, quoted in Reichert, "'It Is Time,'" 173.

15. Franz Rosenzweig, "Die Schrift und Luther," 113/61. See further his *Der Stern der Erlösung,* 275/265.

16. See the comments in Batnitzky, *Idolatry and Representation,* 110–11.

17. Rosenzweig, "Vorwort," in *Jehuda Halevi,* 4. The English page number refers to the Galli translation in *Franz Rosenzweig and Jehuda Halevi,* 172. In the original 1927 version, this essay appeared as an "Afterword"; in the version found in his *Gesammelte Schriften,* however, it appears as "Foreword." I will refer to it as his "Vorwort/Afterword."

18. See the comments in Rosenzweig, "Vorwort/Afterword," 4/172.

19. Rosenzweig, "Die Schrift und Luther," 88/47.

20. See the comments in Hollander, *Exemplarity and Chosenness,* 141–47.

21. E. R. Wolfson, "Facing the Effaced," esp. 74–80; Pollock, *Rosenzweig and the Systematic Task of Philosophy,* 304–307.

22. Rosenzweig, "Vorwort/Afterword," 3–4/171; cf. "Die Schrift und Luther," 124/67.

23. Reichert, "'It Is Time,'"174.

24. Rosenzweig, "Die Schrift und Luther," 125/67.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid., 110–11/59–60.

27. E.g., Batnitzky, *Idolatry and Representation,* 106–12; Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger,* 248–57.

28. In this regard the comments of Mara Benjamin are a propos in "Building a Zion in German(y)," 128–30, and more fully in *Rosenzweig's Bible,* 65–102.

29. Rosenzweig, "Die Schrift und Luther," 126/68.

30. Rosenzweig, "Vorwort/Afterword," 1/169.

31. Ibid., 6–7/174.

32. Here I refer to Rosenzweig's "ideal" translator, and not the many translators of whom he is critical in the "Vorwort/Afterword." These translators (e.g., Schulze, Cohn, and Wilamowitz), according to him, have "nothing to say" so they "need not ask anything of the language, and a language whose speaker asks nothing of it becomes frozen into a tool for basic communication" ("Vorwort/Afterword," 3/171).

33. Ibid., 3/171.

34. E.g., Rosenzweig, *Der Stern der Erlösung,* 198–99/192–93.
35. See the comments in E. R. Wolfson, "Light Does Not Talk But Shines."
36. E.g., Rosenzweig, "Das neue Denken," 148–49/80–83.
37. Rosenzweig, *Der Stern der Erlösung,* 327/312.
38. See the comments in Mosès, *System and Revelation,* 150–52.
39. See the comments in Galli, "The Halevi Book, Rosenzweig, and the *Star,*" 291.
40. Rosenzweig, *Der Stern der Erlösung,* 167–68/163.
41. Rosenzweig, "Vorwort/Afterword," 4/172.
42. Ibid., 5/173.
43. Rosenzweig, "Die Schrift und Luther," 104–5/56.
44. Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger,* 249.
45. See Plaut, *German- Jewish Bible Translations.*
46. Rosenzweig, "Die Schrift und Luther," 95/51.
47. Ibid., 107/57.
48. Plaut, *German- Jewish Bible Translations,* 18.
49. More generally, see *Der Stern der Erlösung,* 331–39/317–24.
50. See the comments in E. R. Wolfson, "Light Does not Talk, but Shines," 107–110.
51. Rosenzweig, "Volwort/Afterword," 2/170.
52. Ibid., 10/177.
53. Ibid.
54. See, e.g., Rosenzweig, *Das neue Denken,* 148/81.
55. See the comments in Samuelson, *A User's Guide,* 251–52.
56. Rosenzweig, *Der Stern der Erlösung,* 334/320.
57. Ibid., 336/321.
58. Rosenzweig, "Die Schrift und das Wort," 86/45.
59. Ibid., 87/46.
60. Ibid., 86/45.
61. M. Benjamin, "Building a Zion in German(y)," 136.
62. See Rosenzweig's comments in "Die Einheit der Bibel," 46–54/22–26.
63. Rosenzweig, "Die Schrift und das Wort," 84/44.
64. Ibid., 80/42.
65. See the comments in Abraham ibn Ezra, *Commentary to Genesis* 2:11.
66. Saadya wrote two introductions to the work, one in an ornate vocalized and accented Hebrew that imitated the biblical narrative, and a more prosaic Arabic one. The former was written in Egypt when Saadya was around twenty. The latter introduction was written "years later" when he wrote an expanded Hebrew-language lexicon for poets that included, in Arabic, a discussion of rhetoric and poetics. For an illuminating comparison of the two introductions, see Drory, *Models and Contexts,* 178–90.
67. Saadya, *Egron,* Arabic introduction, 150 (lines 23–29).
68. See Drory, *Models and Contacts,* 185–86.
69. On Saadya's attempt to ground the *Sefer Yeẓirah* in his philosophical system, see Vajda, "Le Commentaire de Saadia sur le Sefer Yeçirah," 64–86; Ben-Shammai, "Saadya's Goal in This *Commentary to the Sefer Yeẓirah,*" 1–9.
70. Saadya Gaon, *Sefer Yeẓirah ʿim perush Rabbenu Saadya ben Yosef Fayyumi,* 33–34.
71. An analogy may be found in Abraham Abulafia who, on the one hand, follows Mai monides and claims that Hebrew is conventional; but, on the other, argues that Hebrew is the essential language, the language of creation, revelation, and ultimately of redemption. I thank Elliot R. Wolfson for bringing this analogy to my attention.
72. See the comments in Drory, *Models and Contacts,* 188.

73. This is the opinion of Allony in the introduction to his critical edition of the *Egron*.

74. Saadya, *Egron,* Hebrew introduction, 156 (line 1).

75. Cf. *Kitāb al- āmānāt w'a-al-iʿtiqādāt.* An English translation may be found in *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions.* Requisite secondary literature may be found in H. A. Wolfson, *Repercussions of the Kalam in Jewish Philosophy;* Altmann, "Saadya's Theory of Revelation"; Efros, "Saadya's Second Theory of Creation," 133–42 (English section).

76. This is also related to Saadya's concept of the "second air." For requisite secondary literature on this topic, see H. A. Wolfson, "The Kalam Arguments for Creation," 198–245.

77. Saadya Gaon, *Or rishon bi- hokhmah ha-lashon.* Requisite secondary literature may be found in Malther, *Saadia Gaon: His Life and Works,* 139–40; Skoss, "Saadia Gaon, the Earliest Hebrew Grammarian"; Skoss, "A Study of Hebrew Vowels from Saadia Gaon's Grammatical Work *Kitab al-Lughah.*"

78. *Tafsīr kitāb al- mabādī,* 121–22.

79. Ibid., 117–19.

80. See the comments in Dotan, "Particularism and Universalism in the Linguistic Theory of Saadia Gaon," 71–72.

81. Ibid., 68–69. Although see my comments in n. 71 above.

82. In the Middle Ages, at least based on the manuscript tradition, Saadya's Commentary to the Sefer Yeẓirah was more popular than his *Book of Beliefs and Opinions.* See Ronald C. Kiener, "Saadia Gaon and the *Sefer Yeẓirah,*" 171.

83. Skoss, "Saadia Gaon, the Earliest Hebrew Grammarian," 59.

84. See the comments in Allony, "Translator's Introduction" to Saadya, *Egron,* 28–30.

85. I.e., the aforementioned Abū Aswad al-Duwali.

86. Saadya, *Egron,* Arabic introduction, 150–52 (lines 30–37).

87. Drory, *Models and Contacts,* 186.

88. Drory argues that the notion of Arabic as being primarily a communicative language, and therefore clear and understandable, was quite a common one among medieval Hebrew scholars. She contrasts this with the use of Hebrew, which was regarded as more "festive and grandiloquent." See ibid., 165–77.

89. Saadya, *Egron,* Hebrew introduction, 156 (lines 1–7).

90. Ibid., 157 (lines 18–27).

91. Ibid., 158 (lines 26–38).

92. Ibid., 159 (lines 45–48).

93. Ibid., 160 (line 66).

94. Schlossberg, "Ten Observations on Rhetoric and Expression by Saadia Gaon," 269–70.

95. Saadya, *Egron,* Hebrew introduction, 160–61 (lines 72–76).

96. See the comments in M. Benjamin, "Building a Zion in German(y)," 131–32.

3. The Translation of Silence and the Silence of Translation

1. E.g., BT *Sanhedrin* 34a; BT *Shabbat* 63a; BT *Yebamot* 11a; BT *Qiddushin* 49a. This is certainly not to imply that rabbinic interpretation was never interested in the *topos* of translation. An important precursor to the type of rationalistic translation to which

I here refer is Onkelos. On his theory of translation, see Drazin and Wagner, *Onkelos on the Torah,* vol. 1, introduction. More generally, see Gleßmer, *Einleitung in die Targume zum Pentateuch,* 77–94.

2. Relevant discussion and bibliographies may be found in Heath, *Allegory and Philosophy in Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā).* An excellent if technical discussion of this subject in medieval Jewish literature may be found in Cohen, *Three Approaches to Biblical Metaphor.*

3. There is a fairly large body of literature dealing with this topic in medieval Jewish philosophy, especially in the writings of Mai monides.See the bibliography in my "'The Torah Speaks in the Language of Humans,'" 237–52.

4. See, for example, the important essay by Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, "The Bible in the Jewish Philosophical Tradition," 1948–73.

5. My intention is not to provide biographies of these two thinkers, a topic on which much has already been written. For Moses ibn Ezra, see Fenton, *Philosophie et exégèse dans* Le Jardin de la métaphore *de Moïse Ibn ʿEzra,* 12–40, and the bibliography therein. On the life and times of Mai monides, see Davidson, *Moses Maimonides,* 3–121; Kraemer, *Maimonides,* and the bibliographies therein.

6. On the place and role of Neoplatonism in Muslim Spain, see my *Texture of the Divine,* chapter 2.

7. This, in many ways, is the pronouncement of Cohen, "Moses Ibn Ezra vs. Mai monides," 1–28. Cohen can sustain this binary, at least in this article, because he largely ignores Ibn Ezra's *Maqālat al- ḥadīqa,* a work, like Mai monides' *Guide,*that seeks to translate biblical metaphors into a rationalist idiom.

8. Most introductory treatments to Jewish philosophy, for instance, make no mention of Moses ibn Ezra, and always sharply differentiate the thought of Mai monides from his "Neoplatonic" predecessors.

9. See the comments in Decter, *Iberian Jewish Literature,* 6–9.

10. Ibid., 211.

11. Scheindlin, "Rabbi Moshe Ibn Ezra on the Legitimacy of Poetry," 101–15; Ross Brann, *The Compunctious Poet,* 79–83.

12. Brann, *The Compunctious Poet,* 61.

13. As Yahalom suggests, however, this ornate Arabic style might have been the reason that Mai monides found the time to work with Joseph ben Judah, whereas he refused the request of Samuel ibn Tibbon. See his "Mai monides and Hebrew Poetic Language," 12–14.

14. Al- Fārābī, "The Attainment of Happiness," 222–32. For requisite secondary literature, see Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam,* 11–29; and Galston, *Politics and Excellence,* 76–82, and the bibliography therein.

15. See the discussion in Heinrichs, "On the Genesis of the *Ḥaqīqa-Majāz* Dichotomy," 112–40.

16. Kopf, "Religious Influence on Medieval Arabic Philology," 21–36; Fenton, *Philosophie et exégèse,* 258–66.

17. See Fenton, *Philosophie et exégèse,* 260–64.

18. See, for example, Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy,* 42–64; Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought,* 195–226.

19. Ibn Ezra, *Kitāb al- muḥāḍara,* 9b–10a (p. 14).

20. Ibid., 62b (p. 116).

21. Ibid.

22. See, e.g., the works of Scheindlin, Brann, and Decter cited above.

23. See the comments in Scheindlin, "Rabbi Moshe Ibn Ezra on the Legitimacy of Poetry," 114; Brann, *The Compunctious Poet,* 74–75.

24. The Arabic reads: *maʿani al-istiʿāra al- kalima bi-shay lam yuʿarafa bi- shay qad yuʿarafa (Kitāb al- muḥāḍara,* 120a [p. 228]).

25. Ibn Ezra, *Maqalat al- ḥadīqa,* 27.

26. Mai monides,*Al-Maqālah fī ṣināʿat al-manṭiq,* in Efros, *Treatise on Logic,* 60. The authenticity of this work has recently been called into question by Davidson in his *Moses Maimonides,* 313–22. I, and others, remain unconvinced by his arguments; see, e.g., Kraemer, *Maimonides,* 69–73.

27. Mai monides, *Al-maqālah fī ṣināʿat al- manṭiq,* 59.

28. Cohen, *Three Approaches to Biblical Metaphor,* 102–103.

29. Mai monides, *Guide*I.59 (149/141).

30. Ibid., I.57 (139/132).

31. Ibid., introduction to Part 1 (3/5).

32. E.g., Ibid., I.10 (39/35).

33. See the important comments in Rosenberg, "Biblical Exegesis in the *Guide of the Perplexed*" (Hebrew), 94–98.

34. Tirosh-Samuelson, "Mai monides'View of Happiness: Philosophy, Myth, and the Transcendence of History," 193–99.

35. See the comments in Drory, *Models and Contacts,* 142–44.

36. More generally, see the discussion in Dawson, *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria.*

37. See, for example, Cohen, "Moses Ibn Ezra vs. Mai monides"; Cohen,*Three Approaches to Biblical Metaphor.*

38. Drory, *Models and Contacts,* 152–53. She explains that Saadya

> disengaged [these] models from Karaite ideology, eradicating their identification by Rabbanite readers as "Karaite" (and therefore ipso facto unusable); instead, they became neutral writing models, suitable for expressing Rabbanite bodies of knowledge and ideas. In so doing [Saadya] offered Rabbanite literature the option of using reworked writing models taken over from the Arabic—an option that had been blocked to the Rabbanites as long as these models had been used exclusively by Karaites (152).

39. See, e.g., the comments in Frank, *Search Scripture Well,* 1–32.

40. On the Karaite approach to translation more generally, see Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition of Arabic Bible Translation,* 3–22.

41. E.g., al- Qirqisānī, "Principles of Biblical Exegesis," in Nemoy, *Karaite Anthology,* 63. See the comments in Frank, *Search Scripture Well,* 11.

42. See Efros, "Saadya's Theory of Knowledge," 133–70; on Saadya's sources, see Vajda, "Autour de la théorie de la connaissance chez Saadya," 135–89, 375–97.

43. Saadya, *Kitāb al- āmānāt waʾl-iʿtiqādāt,* 15; an English translation may be found in Saadya Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions,* 18.

44. Ibid., 27/31.

45. Ibid., 83/95. For the relevant context of this distinction, see Heinrichs, "On the Genesis of the *Haqīqa-Majāz* Dichotomy," 112–40. I have more to say about this topic below.

46. Saadya, *Kitāb al- āmānāt waʾl-iʿtiqādāt,* 89/102.

47. See the comments in Rawidowicz, "Saadya's Purification of the Idea of God," 139–65. See below for a discussion of silence in Mai monides' thought.

48. More generally, see the comments in Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition of Arabic Bible Translation,* 76–90.

49. Saadya, *Kitāb al- ʾamānāt waʾl-iʿtiqādāt,* 98/114. Here I prefer Altmann's translation found in *Three Jewish Philosophers,* 86.

50. See the catalogue in Saadya, *Kitāb al- ʾamānāt waʾl-iʿtiqādāt,* 100–102/116–20.

51. Saadya, *The Book of Theodicy,* 255.

52. Ibid., 330.

53. For the persistence of evil, despite the act of creation, see Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*.

54. On this ambiguity, see Derrida, *Archive Fever,* 11.

55. More generally, see Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor,* 258–79; Stern, *Metaphor in Context,* 9–21. For a good discussion of how this technical discussion informs biblical and Hebrew poetics, see Cohen, *Three Approaches to Biblical Metaphor,* 16–30.

56. Yahalom, "Mai monides and Hebrew Poetic Language," 4–18. On this moving power of poetry in the Maimonidean corpus, see *Guide* I.59; III.9; *Commentary to the Mishnah (Avot),* 1:16.

57. See the comments in Heinrichs, "Contacts between Scriptural Hermeneutics and Literary Theory in Islam," 256–58.

58. See the discussion in Brann, *The Compunctious Poet,* 71–73; Cohen, *Three Approaches to Biblical Metaphor,* 241–45, 257–58.

59. Ibn Ezra, *Kitāb al- muḥāḍara,* 77b.

60. Joseph Dana argues that Ibn Ezra does not bother to translate them because their real meaning would be clear to the reader. See his *Poetics of Medieval Hebrew Literature according to Moshe ibn Ezra* (Hebrew), 115. For a dissenting opinion, see the comments in Cohen, "A Poetic Definition of Metaphor," 6–7.

61. See the comments in Cohen, *Three Approaches to Biblical Metaphor,* 63–64.

62. On the historic background of the dialectic of concealment/revelation, see the collection of essays in Stroumsa and Kippenberg, *Secrecy and Concealment.* On the topic in Jewish thought, see the comments in Halbertal, *Concealment and Revelation,* 49–59. A better and more sustained formulation of this dialectic may be found in the work of Elliot R. Wolfson, e.g., "Beautiful Maiden without Eyes," 155–203; E. R. Wolfson, "Occultation of the Feminine and the Body of Secrecy in Medieval Kabbalah," 113–54.

63. Halbertal, *Concealment and Revelation,* 51–52.

64. E.g., BT *Yebamoth* 71a; BT *Baba Metziʿa* 31b.

65. See the comments in Halbertal and Margalit, *Idolatry,* 54.

66. See the comments in Fenton, *Philosophie et Exégèse,* 257–58; Klein, *Anthropomorphism and Anthropopathism in the Targumim of the Pentateuch,* 5–22.

67. Halbertal and Margalit, *Idolatry,* 55.

68. See n. 14 above. This is of course picked up by Mai monides (cf.*Guide* I.17); at the same time, however, Mai monides is quick to dissociate Moses' prophecy from imaginative elements (cf. *Guide* II.35, 45).

69. Ibn Ezra, *Kitāb al- muḥāḍara,* 286–87 (148a26–30).

70. Saadya Gaon, *Mishlei ʿim Targum u- Perush Rav Saʿadya ben Yosef Fayyumi,* 13.

71. I discuss this faculty in much greater length and detail in my *Texture of the Divine.*

72. Ibn Ezra, *Maqālat al- ḥadīqa,* 46.

73. Fenton, *Philosophie et Exégèse,* 97–100.

74. Ibid., 257–58.

75. Cohen, *Three Approaches to Biblical Metaphor,* 136.

76. Cf. *Kitāb al- muḥāḍara,* 286–87.

77. I.e., Mai monides, *Guide* I.26, 29, 33, 46, 53, 59.

78. Ibid., I.26 (58–59/56).

79. Indeed, as Mai monides writes in the opening of the treatise, an improper understanding of these terms leads to

> a state of perplexity and confusion as to whether he should follow his intellect, renounce what he knew concerning the terms in question, and consequently consider that he has renounced the foundations of the Law. Or he should hold fast to his understanding of these terms and not let himself be drawn on together with his intellect, rather turning his back on it and moving away from it, while at the same time perceiving that he had brought loss to himself and harm to his religion (*Guide* I: Introduction; Pines, 4/5–6).

80. Seeskin, *Searching for a Distant God,* 53–55.

81. Hannah Kasher has suggested that these lexicographic chapters might have originally formed part of a separate treatise that Mai monides, in the *Introduction to Heleq,* said that he had started. See her "Is There an Early Stratum in the *Guide of the Perplexed,*" 120–27.

82. This is certainly not new, and can be witnessed as early as Saadya's catalog of the ten anthropomorphic terms in his *Kitāb al- āmānāt wa'l-i'tiqādāt,* 10.

83. Strauss, "How to Begin to Study *The Guide of the Perplexed,*" in the Pines's translation, xiv.

84. Ivry, "Strategies of Interpretation in Mai monides' *Guide of the Perplexed,*" 118–19.

85. See, however, the chart in Cohen, *Three Approaches to Biblical Metaphor,* 202; cf. Strauss, "How to Begin to Study *The Guide of the Perplexed,*" xx–xxv.

86. Mai monides, *Guide* I.30 (64/63).

87. See ibid., III.29.

88. See, e.g., Decter, *Iberian Jewish Literature,* 2–7; Brann, *The Compunctious Poet,* 59–64; Fenton, *Philosophie et exégèse,* 12–22; Scheindlin, "Moses ibn Ezra," 252–55.

89. Although on this trope of alienation among Andalusian Hebrew poets, see Brann, *The Compunctious Poet,* 63–65.

90. See the comments in Amnon Shiloah, "The Musical Passage in Ibn Ezra's Book of the Garden," 211–24.

91. *Kitāb al- muḥāḍara,* 14b–15a.

92. See the discussion in Cohen, "The Aesthetic Exegesis of Moses ibn Ezra," 291–93.

93. *Kitāb al-muḥāḍara,* 77b. Quoted in Cohen, "The Aesthetic Exegesis of Moses ibn Ezra," 291–92.

94. See my comments in chapter 2.

95. Sara Klein- Braslavy suggests that when it comes to philosophical esotericism, Moses ibn Ezra might very well have influenced Mai monides. See her *King Solomon and Philosophical Esotericism in the Thought of Mai monides*

96. *Kitāb al- muḥāḍara,* 143a.

97. Quoted in Cohen, *Three Approaches to Biblical Metaphor,* 63.

98. Seeskin, *Searching for a Distant God,* 183–84.

99. This knowledge can never be put into words like other subjects, but is "generated by living with the matter itself and from many conversations. Then like a flashing light when fire is kindled, it is born in the soul and nourishes itself" (341b–c). The metaphor of the flashing of light to refer to intellection, of course, is one that recurs frequently in the *Guide* (e.g., Introduction to Part 1).

100. Mai monides, *Guide*I.31 (69/67).

101. Ibid., I.59 (147/139).

102. Unlike the contemporary period, Mai monides would not have subscribed to the notion that there is no reality outside of language.

103. Ibid., I.59 (149/139–40).

104. See the comments in Seeskin, *Searching for a Distant God,* 55–61.

105. Mai monides, *Guide,*Introduction to Part 1 (6/7).

106. Tirosh-Samuelson, "Mai monides' View of Happiness: Philosophy, Myth, and the Transcendence of History," 193–99.

4. The Apologetics of Translation

1. Here I am influenced by Bourdieu, *Distinction,* e.g., 1–7; Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production,* 29–37.

2. See, for example, the classic work of Anderson, *Imagined Communities,* 9–36; more recently see Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity,* 30–38.

3. See, e.g., the classic study in Roth, "The 'Theft of Philosophy' by the Greeks from the Jews," 52–67. Also see my "A Case of Twelfth- Century Plagiarism," 306–31.

4. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture,* 38–39.

5. But even this was in keeping with contemporaneous trends in German aesthetics. See, for example, the comments in Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger,* 238–48, and more fully in Braiterman, *The Shape of Revelation,* 23–62.

6. W. Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," in *Illuminations,* 76.

7. For requisite biographical accounts, see Daniel Carpi, "R. Judah Messer Leon and His Activity as a Doctor." An abbreviated English translation may be found in Carpi, "Notes on the Life of Rabbi Judah Messer Leon." More recently see Bonfil, "Introduction" to the photostatic reprint of the editio princeps of *Sefer Nofet Ẓufim,* 8–31; and the translator's introduction to Messer Leon, *The Book of the Honeycomb's Flow,* xvii–liv; Tirosh-Rothschild, *Between Worlds,* 24–33.

8. For requisite biographies, consult Schmidt, *Martin Buber's Formative Years;* Mendes- Flohr,*From Mysticism to Dialogue.* Also useful, even if it borders on the hagiographic, is Friedman, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue*.

9. See, for example, Altmann, "*Ars Rhetoica* as Reflected in Some Jewish Figures of the Italian Renaissance," 75–76.

10. Buber, "Der Mensch von heute und die jüdische Bibel," 20/8.

11. Ibid., 15–16/5–6.

12. Messer Leon, *Sefer Nofet Ẓufim,* 143.

13. Ibid., 145.

14. Bonfil, "*The Book of the Honeycomb's Flow* by Judah Messer Leon," 24.

15. See the comments in Batnitsky, *Idolatry and Representation,* 99–104.

16. See, for example, Rosenzweig, *Der Stern der Erlösung,* 331–39/317–24.

17. Rosenzweig, "Die Schrift und das Wort," 87/46.

18. As Buber himself says, by "people of today" he primarily means "intellectuals" (*geistigen Menschen*): "People to whom it seems important that there be intellectual goods and values." See his "Der Mensch von heute und die jüdische Bibel," 14/5.

19. Yet despite the claims to get back to a "preliterary mode of reading" (*die vorliterarische Leseweise*), Buber and Rosenzweig were in fact, as Peter Gordon has convinc-

ingly argued, reading with as opposed to against the grain of contemporary aesthetics. See Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger,* 238–48.

20. I draw out the implication of this for the history of Jewish philosophy in my *Art of Dialogue in Jewish Philosophy,* especially chapter 1.

21. In their English translation, Rosenwald and Fox retain the German term both in the title and throughout the essay. They write: "'Message' most nearly conveys the pertinent sense of *Botschaft,* but the 'language of message' doesn't work as an English phrase. . . . What Buber means by 'the language of *Botschaft*' is language when it reveals divine instruction" (*Scripture and Translation,* 27n1).

22. Buber, "Die Sprache der Botschaft," 57/28.

23. Braiterman, *The Shape of Revelation,* 54–55.

24. Buber, "Der Mensch von heute und die jüdische Bibel," 33/14.

25. Ibid., 34–35/15–16.

26. See the comments in Urban, *Aesthetics of Renewal,* 34–36.

27. E.g., The "Mose" (Moses) of Luther's German translation now becomes the more Hebraic "Mosche."

28. One perhaps should not lose sight of the fact that this was the age of comparative grammar and the attempt to forge distinct "Indo-European" modes of thinking as somehow distinct from "Semitic" ones. See, for example, Masuzawa, *The Invention of Western Religions,* 149–56.

29. Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger,* 244–45.

30. Urban, *Aesthetics of Renewal,* 35; Braiterman, *The Shape of Revelation,* 49–51.

31. Braiterman, *The Shape of Revelation,* 12.

32. Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger,* 28.

33. Kater, *Composers of the Nazi Era,* 111–43.

34. See, e.g., Hoberg and Friedel, *Der Blaue Reiter und das neue Bild.* An excellent analysis that attempts to read Buber and Rosenzweig against the backdrop of contemporaneous German aesthetics is Braiterman, *The Shape of Revelation.*

35. Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger,* 243.

36. This comes from Loerke's review in *Neue Rundshcau* 38 (1927), cited in Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger,* 243.

37. Rosenzweig, "Die Schrift und das Wort," 79–80/42.

38. Buber, "Leitwortstil in der Erzählung des Pentateuchs," 211/114.

39. This concept has been ably and capably studied by many others, and I have no intention of going into this in the present context. See Batnitzky, *Idolatry and Representation,* 105–41; Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger,* 237–74; Hollander, *Exemplarity and Chosenness,* 118–55.

40. E.g., Buber, "Der Mensch von heute und die jüdische Bibel," 20/8; cf. the comments in Rosenzweig, "Die Einheit der Bibel," 51/25.

41. Buber, "Der Mensch von heute und die jüdische Bibel," 45/21.

42. Rosenzweig, "Die Einheit der Bibel," 51/25.

43. Altmann, "*Ars Rhetorica* as Reflected in Some Jewish Figures of the Italian Renaissance," 63.

44. Tirosh-Rothschild, "Jewish Philosophy on the Eve of Modernity," 520–21.

45. Mai monides, *Guide,*III.49.

46. See Altmann, "*Ars Rhetorica,*" 66–67.

47. See the comments in Tirosh-Rothschild, *Between Worlds,* 30–31.

48. E.g., *Kitāb al- muḥāḍara,* chapter 5.

49. E.g., Messer Leon, *Sefer Nofet Ṣufim* II.2 (Rabinowitz, 161–66).

50. Tirosh-Rothschild, *Between Worlds,* 31. On the topic of Jewish communal life in Italy more generally, see Bonfil, *Rabbis and Jewish Communities in Renaissance Italy.*

51. Messer Leon, *Sefer Nofet Ṣufim* IV.1/417.

52. Altmann, "*Ars Rhetorica,*" 70.

53. Messer Leon, *Sefer Nofet Ṣufim* IV.46/511–13.

54. Ibid., I.13/145.

55. See the comments in Rabinowitz, "Translator's Introduction," in ibid., xxv–xxvi.

56. See my comments in chapter 2 above.

57. E.g., Ibn Qutayba, *Taʾwīl mushkil al- Qurʾān,* 12.

58. See my comments, and bibliography cited, in "A Case of Twelfth- Century Plagiarism?," 315–18.

59. This reaction is often defined as a movement and given the name "Shuʿūbiyya." A representation of relevant historical and literary treatments may be found in Goldziher, "The Shʿūbiyya," 137–63; Gibb, "The Social Significance of the Shuubiya," 62–73; Agius, "The *Shuʿūbiyya* Movement and Its Literary Manifestation," 76–88; Munroe, *The Shuʿūbiyya in al- Andalus.*

60. E.g., Allony, "The Reaction of Moses ibn Ezra to ʿArabiyya," 19–40; Allony, "The Renaissance of the Bible in the Middle Ages as a Response to *ʿArabiyya*", 177–87; Allony, "Halevi's *Kuzari* in the Light of the Shuʿūbiyya", 105–13; Allony, "Translator's Introduction" to Saadya Gaon, *Ha- Egron: Kitāb ʿusūl al- shtr al- ʿbrānī,* 28–35.

61. This position is also voiced by Roth, "Jewish Reactions to the *ʿArabiyya* and the Renaissance of Hebrew in Spain," 63–84.

62. See, e.g., the comments in Brann, *The Compunctious Poet,* 6–8; Brann, "The Arab ized Jews," 435–54.

63. Brann, "The Arabized Jews," 439.

64. See the comments in Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity,* 34–35.

65. Ray, *The Sephardic Frontier,* 7.

66. Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity,* 233.

67. On this trope, more generally, see Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," 1–14; Hughes, "'The Golden Age' of Muslim Spain," 51–74, esp. 53–54.

68. Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity,* 71.

69. See my comments in chapter 2 above.

70. See the comments in Allony, "Translator's Introduction," 25.

71. See chapter 2 above.

72. See the comments in McCutcheon, *Religion and the Domestication of Dissent,* e.g., 42–46.

73. Boyarin, *Border Lines,* 21.

74. Nirenberg, "Mass Conversion and Genealogical Mentalities," 7.

75. See, in the regard, the comments in Wasserstrom, "Sharing Secrets," 205–28.

76. Allony, "Translator's Introduction," 26.

77. Saadya, Hebrew Introduction to the *Egron,* 160–61 (lines 67–77).

78. Ibid., 160 (line 70).

79. Ibid., 157 (lines 20–30).

80. Boyarin, *Border Lines,* 26.

81. Brann, *The Compunctious Poet,* 61.

82. As he writes in his *Kitāb al-muḥāḍara:* "At the end of my life, fate cast me into a long, frustrating, protracted exile in the farthermost regions of a distant land where I am held captive in prison, [and often feel] buried in a grave" (5b).

83. Brann, *The Compunctious Poet,* 68.

84. Mai monides, *Guide,*introduction to Part 3/416.
85. Ibid., III.51/628.

5. Translation and Its Discontents

1. This is certainly not to say that there were not many positive receptions to these translation projects. The rationalist project begun by Saadya and "perfected" in Mai monides would play a tremendous role in redefining Judaism; it is, moreover, a paradigm that thrives into the present. The Buber-Rosenzweig project, although just as bold, was much less successful, primarily owing to that fact that its target audience (German- Jews) were exterminated. Saadya's Arabic translation, unlike that of Buber and Rosenzweig, was used for centuries by Arabic- speaking Jews.

2. Even the Septuagint met the same form of criticism in certain rabbinic circles: "It happened that five elders wrote the Pentateuch in Greek for King Ptolemy, and that day was as hard for Israel as the day the [golden] calf was made because the Pentateuch cannot be translated properly." *Masekhet Soferim* 1:7, in *Masekhtaot ketanot* (Jerusalem: Makor, 1970).

3. Saadya, *Kitāb al- āmānāt wʾal-iʿtiqādāt,* 00/26–30.

4. See Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger,* 257–59.

5. I have no intention here of presenting an exhaustive account of these controversies, which I have examined more closely in *The Art of Dialogue in Jewish Philosophy,* 50–75; requisite bibliography may be found therein and in subsequent notes below.

6. Septimus, *Hispano- Jewish Culture in Transition,* 63.

7. Tirosh-Samuelson, *Happiness in Premodern Judaism,* 251.

8. On the latter, see the work of Fraenkel, *From the Rambam to Samuel ibn Tibbon*. On the dynasty of the Ibn Tibbonids, see the comments in Robinson, "The Ibn Tibbon Family," 193–224.

9. See, e.g., Kraemer, *Humanism and the Renaissance of Islam;* Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture.*

10. See my *The Art of Dialogue in Jewish Philosophy,* chapters 3 and 4.

11. E.g., Lehmann, "Polemic and Satire in the Poetry of the Maimonidean Controversy," 133–52.

12. E.g., Robinson, *Samuel ibn Tibbon's Commentary on Ecclesiastes.*

13. Ibid., preface, 158–59.

14. Ibid., 509.

15. See below; my comments here rely on the more detailed studies found in Stern, "The Crisis of Philosophical Allegory in Languedocian- Jewish Culture (1304–1306)," 189–210; Urbach, "The Participation of German and French Scholars in the Controversy about Mai monides and His Work", 149–59; Cohen,*The Friar and the Jews;* Tirosh-Samuelson, *Happiness in Premodern Judaism,* chapter 6.

16. See, for example, Halbertal, *Between Torah and Wisdom* (Hebrew), 22–49.

17. An excellent overview of this phase and the others may be found in Tirosh-Samuelson, *Happiness in Premodern Judaism,* 261–90. In this regard, see also Shatz miller, "Toward a Picture of the First Maimonidean Controversy," 126–44; Silver, *Maimonidean Criticism and the Maimonidean Controversy 1180–1240;* Sarachek, *Faith and Reason.*

18. Septimus writes: "In the 1230s, controversy reached the combustion point and exploded into local and inter- communal battle characterized by a scramble for al-

lies, polemical propaganda letters, excommunications, and finally even charges of illegitimacy and informing" (*Hispano- Jewish Culture in Transition,* 62–63).

19. This was done while Mai monides was still alive and presumably before the latter composed his *Treatise on Resurrection,* a work meant to reaffirm traditional teaching. Once Ramah got his hands on this treatise, however, his objections to Mai monides' position on resurrection effectively ceased.

20. Ramah, *Ḥiddushe ha- Ramah"al Maseket Sanhedrin,* 160a–b, quoted in Septimus, *Hispano- Jewish Culture in Transition,* 59.

21. See my *Art of Dialogue in Jewish Philosophy,* 76–106.

22. Polleqar, *Ezer ha- Dat,* 88–89.

23. Quoted in Marcus, *The Jew in the Medieval World,* 190–91.

24. Quoted in Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger,* 256.

25. See Eksteins, "The *Frankfurter Zeitung,*" 3–28.

26. A biography of Kracauer may be found in Martin Jay, "The Extraterritorial Life of Siegfried Kracauer," in *Permanent Exiles,* 152–97.

27. Kracauer, "Die Bibel auf Deutsch," 180/195.

28. Ibid., 180–81/196.

29. Ibid., 181/196.

30. Ibid., 182/197–98.

31. Jay, "Politics of Translation: Siegfried Kracauer and Walter Benjamin on the Buber-Rosenzweig Bible," in *Permanent Exiles,* 208.

32. Kracauer, "Die Bibel auf Deutsch," 185/199.

33. Ibid., 186/201.

34. See Rosenwald, "On the Reception of Buber and Rosenzweig's Bible," 141–65. Rosenwald's apologetic essay defends the Buber and Rosenzweig translation against the criticisms of Kracauer. Certainly Kracauer's lack of Hebrew potentially undermines *part of* his analysis; however, I am not sure that Rosenwald is as successful as he claims and my comments encourage that we take seriously these criticisms in any future thinking about translation, writ small or large.

35. Scholem, "At the Completion of Buber's Translation of the Bible," in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism,* 315.

36. Jay, "Politics of Translation," 214.

37. Scholem, "At the Completion of Buber's Bible Translation," 318.

38. See further, e.g., Scholem, "Against the Myth of the German- Jewish Dialogue," in *Jews and Judaism in Crisis,* 61–64. See also the comments in Seidman, *Faithful Renderings,* 158–59.

39. Quoted in Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn,* 383.

40. In the introduction to his Torah translation, *Or Lintiva,* he writes that his intended audience is his own children and those like them (i.e., a new generation of German Jews). See my comments in the following chapter.

41. See, e.g., Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn,* 383–405; Seidman, *Faithful Renderings,* 164–79; Sorkin, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment,* 53–89; Weinberg, "Language Questions Relating to Moses Mendelssohn's Pentateuch Translations," 197–242; Lowenstein, "The Readership of Mendelssohn's Bible Translation," 179–213.

42. Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity,* 20–22.

43. On the term "renaissance," see Biemann, *Inventing New Beginnings.*

44. Kracauer, "Die Bibel auf Deutsch," 186/200–201 (italics in original).

45. In the moving preface to his *Border Lines,* Daniel Boyarin examines briefly the modern Jewish fetishization of borders and of a nationalism without justice, and, alluding to Hillel, asks: "If we are for ourselves alone, what are we?" (xiv).

46. Although as Jay remarks, to do this Kracauer had "to slander the real nature of Buber's Zionism, which was universalist and antinationalist . . . and, worse still, these anti- Zionist remarks, which coincide with a current campaign in the [*Frankfurter Zeitung*] against Zionism, are grounded in a complete ignorance of Hebrew, which is best demonstrated in Kracauer's remarks on Hebrew names" (Jay, "Politics of Translation," 210).

47. Gellner, *Thought and Change,* 169.

48. Here I have in mind the discussion in Anderson, *Imagined Communities,* 3–8.

49. Scholem, "At the Completion of Buber's Bible Translation," 316–17.

50. Ibid.

51. E.g., W. Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," in *Selected Writings,* 74.

52. See the comments in Jay, "Politics of Translation," in *Permanent Exiles,* 211–13.

53. Here I am again inspired by W. Benjamin and his "On Language and Such and on the Language of Man", in *Selected Writings.*

54. E.g., "The presence of the present yields the present of presence remembering the past that is future and anticipating the future that is past, a presence, that is, enfolded in a double absence that renders the timeline irreversibly reversible. From that standpoint we set out on the path to uncover what may be recovered" (E. R. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being,* xxxi).

6. Translation and Issues of Identity and Temporality

1. Rosenzweig, "Zeit ists . . . Gedanken über das jüdische Bildungsproblem des Augenblicks," 463. An English translation, "It is Time: Concerning the Study of Judaism," edited and translated by Nahum N. Glatzer, may be found in *On Jewish Learning,* 30. A consultation of the original will show how my translation departs from Glatzer's.

2. Much has been written on the connections between language and ontology. I cite here only those works that have been instrumental in my own thinking through this connection: W. Benjamin, *Illuminations;* W. Benjamin, *Reflections;* Fynsk, *Language and Relation;* Heidegger, *On the Way to Language;* Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy;* Jacobs, *In the Language of Walter Benjamin.* In terms of relating this discussion to Jewish thought and philosophy, see the learned and rich discussion in E. R. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being,* 1–45.

3. Here I follow the lead of, e.g., Martha C. Nussbaum, "Introduction: Form and Content, Philosophy and Literature," in *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature,* 3–53; Peter Lamarque, *The Philosophy of Literature,* 5–21. See also my earlier study devoted to this study in *Texture of the Divine: Imagination in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Thought.*

4. E.g., Heidegger, in the concluding paragraph of *Being and Time* (488), illustrates what I have in mind here:

> Something like "Being" has been disclosed in the understanding- of-Being which belongs to the existent Dasein as a way in which it understands. Being has been disclosed in a preliminary way, though nonconceptually; and this makes it possible for Dasein as existent Being-in-the- world to comport

> itself *towards entities*—towards those which it encounters within-the- world as well as toward itself as existent. *How is this disclosive understanding of Being at all possible for Dasein?* Can this question be answered by going back to the *primordial constitution- of-Being* of that Dasein by which Being is understood? The existential- ontological constitution of Dasein's totality is grounded in temporality. Hence the ecstatical projection of Being must be made possible by some primordial way in which ecstatical temporality temporalizes. How is this mode of the temporalizing of temporality to be Interpreted? Is there a way which leads from the primordial *time* to the meaning of *Being*? Does *time* manifest itself as the horizon of *Being*?

5. By nonphilosophical translations I refer to everything from the Septuagint, the Greek biblical version of Aquila, the Aramaic translation by Onkelos, German translations in the nineteenth century by, e.g., Leopold Zunz, Lewis Philippson, and Samson Raphael Hirsch, to the modern Jewish Publication Society translation. For relevant literature, see Veltri, *Libraries, Translations, and "Canonic" Texts,* 1–25; Breuer, *The Limits of Enlightenment,* 15–29; Greenberg, "The New Torah Translation," in his *Studies in the Bible and Jewish Thought,* 245–60; Greenstein, "What Might Make a Bible Translation Jewish?," 77–102.

6. On the theological uses of literary aesthetics, see chapter 4 above.

7. More generally, see Budick, "Cross- Culture, Chiasmus, and Manifold of Mind," 224–44.

8. Seidman, *Faithful Renderings,* 9.

9. See the comments in Gilman, *Inscribing the Other,* 211–35.

10. Saadya Gaon, *Ha- Egron,* Hebrew introduction, 157–58 (lines 17–27).

11. "Ideas of bodily perfection and imperfection, of what is counted as mutilation and what as adornment, are conditioned by the politics of identity." J. Boyarin, "Self-Exposure as Theory," in his *Thinking in Jewish,* 46.

12. The Hebrew and Arabic texts of this commentary may be found in Zucker, *Saadya's Commentary on Genesis,* 5 (Arabic), 167–68 (Hebrew). A French translation may be found in Derenbourg, *Version Arabe du Pentateuch de R. Saadia ben Iosef al-Fayyoumi.*

13. Zucker, *Saadya's Commentary on Genesis;* Derenbourg, *Version Arabe du Pentateuch de R. Saadia ben Iosef al- Fayyoumi.* See, in this regard, the comments by Blau, "Saadya Gaon's Pentateuch Translation and the Stabilization of Medieval Judaeo-Arabic Culture," 393–97.

14. Rosenzweig, "Das Formgeheimnis der biblischen Erzählungen," 244/132.

15. Ibid., 257–58/140.

16. See the comments in Mara Benjamin, *Rosenzweig's Bible,* 169–70.

17. Rosenzweig, "Das Formgeheimnis der biblischen Erzählungen," 259/141.

18. Most famously on this trope in the Rosenzweigian corpus, see his *Der Stern der Erlösung,* 331–36/318–20.

19. Seidman, *Faithful Renderings,* 10.

20. On the nature of the relationship between translation and rewriting, see André Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame,* 1–25.

21. Mai monides, *Guide,* 21/20.

22. See here the comments in Halbertal and Margalit, *Idolatry,* 137–62.

23. Mai monides, *Guide* I.33 (73/71).

24. See the comments in Diamond, "Forging a New *Righteous Nation:* Maimonides' Midrashic Interweave of Verse and Text," 286–325.

25. On Messer Leon's relationship to Mai monides, see Tirosh-Rothschild, *Between Worlds,* 25–35; Abraham Melammed, "Rhetoric and Philosophy in Nofet Ẓufim by R. Judah Messer Leon" (Hebrew), 7–39; Melammed, "Rhetoric as Persuasive Instrument in Medieval Jewish Thought," 165–76. More generally, see Ravitzky, "The Secrets of the Guide of the Perplexed," 159–207; Rosenberg, "The Concept of Emunah in Post-Maimonidean Jewish Philosophy", 351–89.

26. Messer Leon, *The Book of the Honeycomb's Flow: Sefer Nofet Ẓufim,* 37–39.

27. Ibid., 40–41.

28. On the use of rhetoric in Renaissance Jewish culture, see Altmann, *"Ars Rhetorica* as Reflected in Some Jewish Figures of the Italian Renaissance," 63–84; Saperstein, "Italian Jewish Preaching," 85–104; Tirosh-Rothschild, *Between Worlds,* 34–54.

29. On the comparisons between Mendelssohn and Buber/Rosenzweig in the secondary literature, see Dafna Mach, "Moses Mendelssohn und Franz Rosenz weig als Übersetzer der Tora," 19–31; Mendes- Flohr, "Mendelssohn and Rosenzweig," 203–11.

30. See Mendelssohn, *Gesammelte Schriften, Jubiläumsausgabe,* vol. 14, 148–51. On this further, see the comments in Levenson, "Moses Mendelssohn's Understanding of Logico- Grammatical and Literary Construction in the Pentateuch," 1–37; Gottlieb, "Aesthetics and the Infinite," 326–53.

31. See Mendelssohn, *Gesammelte Schriften, Jubiläumsausgabe,* vol. 16, 125–28.

32. My goal here is not to enter into the obvious political reasons behind this. On this aspect of Mendelssohn's work, see Breuer, *The Limits of Enlightenment,* 147–76; Arkush, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment,* 167–240; Sorkin, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment,* 91–146.

33. More generally, see the comments in Sorkin, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment,* 126–30; Breuer, *The Limits of Enlightenment,* 163–73.

34. Altmann writes that the title of the work emphasized the peaceful and tolerant dimensions of the Torah as a way to defang potential criticisms. See Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn,* 419.

35. Mendelssohn, Hebrew introduction, *Sefer Netivot ha- Shalom,*xxv.

36. See the comments in Seidman, *Faithful Renderings,* 169.

37. Ibid., 167–69.

38. See the comments in Boyarin, *Border Lines,* 15–17.

39. Here I am influenced by the classic study of Sahlins, *Borders.*

40. For general studies of this, see, e.g., Schwarz, *Principles and Problems of Bible Translation;* Bailey and Pippin, *Race, Class and the Politics of Bible Translation;* Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible.* Today another discursive site of this may be found in translation and the use of gender-neutral language. See, e.g., Strauss, *Distorting Scripture? The Challenge of Bible Translation and Gender Accuracy.*

41. E.g., Reinitzer, *Biblia deutsch,* 20–43; Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible,* 1–25.

42. E.g., Bruce, *The English Bible,* 1–36; Hammond, *The Making of the English Bible.*

43. E.g., Lincoln, *Holy Terrors;* Boer, *Political Myth.*

44. Seidman, *Faithful Renderings,* 169.

45. Ibn Ezra, *Maqālat al- ḥadīqa,* 37–38, quoted in Fenton, *Philosophie et Exégèse dans* Le Jardin de la Métaphore *de Moïse Ibn ʿezra, philosophe et poète andalou du XIIe Siècle,* 107 (my translation).

46. For a more sustained comparison and contrast of Ibn Ezra and Mai monides, see my comments in chapter 3 above.

47. See, e.g., my comments in *The Art of Dialogue in Jewish Philosophy,* chapter 5.

48. E.g., for Saadya Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions.* In terms of Mai monides, see, for example, his *Iggeret Teman,* in Mai monides, *Der Brief in den Jemen.*

49. Bonfil, *Rabbis and Jewish Communities in Renaissance Italy,* 35–99. See also Tirosh-Rothschild, *Between Worlds,* 19–33.

50. On constructions of the Renaissance, see Celenza, *The Lost Italian Renaissance,* 1–16.

51. Bonfil, "*The Book of the Honeycomb's Flow* by Judah Messer Leon," 26.

52. Batnitzky, *Idolatry and Representation,* 106–8; Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger,* 249–51; Hollander, *Exemplarity and Chosenness,* 143–46.

53. Plaut, *German- Jewish Bible Translations,* 18 (emphasis in original).

54. See, e.g., Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus,* 1–22.

55. Seidman writes: "The closeness of their engagement with, indeed identification with, the Hebrew provided a route to sidestep the question of what sort of *German* text they had produced, as well as the larger question of how their translation fit in with their own situation as German Jews, as Weimar intellectuals, as philosophers and literary modernists. Their translation *was* the Bible, and it spoke not from within their milieu but as if from utterly outside it" (*Faithful Renderings,* 179).

56. Here I am influenced by the important studies on time and temporality found in the writings of Elliot R. Wolfson. See, in particular, his *Language, Eros, Being,* xv–xxxi; and *Alef, Mem, Tau,* 1–54.

57. W. Benjamin, "On Language as Such and On the Language of Men," in *Selected Writings,* 63.

58. Here I am indebted to the formulation in E. R. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being,* 12–14.

59. See chapter 1 above.

60. E. R. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being,* 12.

61. W. Benjamin, "On Language as Such and On the Language of Men," in *Selected Writings.* 74. See the discussion in E. R. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being,* 12.

62. Heidegger, *Being and Time,* 374.

63. See the comments in Ihde, *Sense and Significance,* 42–56.

64. Heidegger, *Being and Time,* 377.

65. Ibid., 376–80. See the insightful comments in E. R. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being,* xxix–xxx.

66. The concept, and its implications, derives from Heidegger, *Being and Time,* Div. I, chapter 2.

67. Rosenzweig, *Der Stern der Erlösung,* 148/133. See the comments in Pollock, *Franz Rosenzweig and the Systematic Task of Philosophy,* 240–42.

68. Pollock, *Franz Rosenzweig and the Systematic Task of Philosophy,* 225–26.

69. E. R. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being,* 17.

70. Rosenzweig, *Der Stern der Erlösung,* 10–21/16–26

71. Heidegger, *Being and Time,* 383–42; Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time,* 319–20: "Time is not something that is found outside somewhere as a framework for world events. Time is even less something which whirs away inside in consciousness. It is rather that which makes possible the being- ahead-of-itself-in- already-being-involved- in, that is which makes possible the being of care."Requisite secondary literature may be found in Trawny, *Heidegger und Hölderlin,* 45–57; Lohmann, "Ontological Difference and Language," 303–63; Krell, *Intimations of Mar tality* 47–63.

72. Once again, my comments are informed by the thought of Rosenzweig. See, in particular, his *Der Stern der Erlösung,* 124/123–24.

73. Ibid., xxvii.

74. See my comments in the Conclusions below.

75. E. R. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being,* xvii.

76. Rosenzweig, "'Urzelle' *des Stern der Erlösung,*" 131–33/54–56. See also the help ful comments in Mosés,*System and Revelation,* 105; Pollock, *Franz Rosenzweig and the Systematic Task of Philosophy,* 204–10.

77. For Rosenzweig, it occurs primarily in the Song of Songs. See in this regard M. Benjamin's, *Rosenzweig's Bible,* 52–60.

78. Mosès, *The Angel of History,* 11–12.

79. Jabès, *The Book of Questions,* 10.

80. Heidegger, *Supplements,* 174.

81. See, e.g., *Being and Time,* 383–84, 434–39. Helpful secondary studies include Gelven, *Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time,* 185–90; Polt, *Heidegger,* 99–101; Barash, *Martin Heidegger and the Problem of Historical Meaning,* 132–38.

82. Heine, "In der Fremde," in *Werke und Briefe,* 279.

Conclusions

1. Here I am influenced by the elegant expressionism given voice in Fishbane, *Sacred Attunement.*

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