The Many Lives of *Sabina*: "Trashy" Fiction and Multilingualism

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the circulation and translation of Yiddish and Hebrew serialized novels such as *Sabina*, *Tamara*, and *Aviva* from the 1930s to the 1950s. Popular fiction, especially these romance-adventures, were excoriated by Hebrew critics of the time as foreign, worthless, and culturally dangerous. But these popular, mass-produced texts became sites of multilingualism in the Jewish community in Mandatory Palestine and in the early years of the State of Israel. Romance-adventures capitalized on textual reproducibility and readership demand, creating a literary marketplace in Israel that eschewed the formal institutions of Hebrew culture.

A FEW SUMMERS AGO, I was working in the National Library of Israel in Jerusalem and I requested a copy of a popular Yiddish serialized novel from the stacks. *Sabina: Roman fun a kranken-shvester* (Sabina: A novel about a nurse) captivated readers in Warsaw in the mid-1930s, with its stories of damsels in distress, noble heroes, and dastardly villains cavorting around Poland and Monte Carlo. Published in one hundred weekly installments by the Yiddish daily paper *Haynt*, *Sabina* ran to nearly two thousand pages, a clear indication of success in the world of popular serialized fiction. But the novel that was waiting for me at the librarians' desk was not from Warsaw in the 1930s. Like so many popular novels of the time, it did not have a title page or a copyright notice, but on the last page of each chapbook, at the very bottom of the page, it noted that it had been published by D. Sarfar in Tel Aviv. Why was a popular *shund* novel, an exemplar of Yiddish trashy fiction, being published in Tel Aviv in the early 1950s, and again in the 1960s?[1]

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[1] *Sabina: Roman fun a kranken-shvester* [Sabina: A novel about a nurse] (Tel Aviv: Ha-dfus he-hadash, n.d.); and *Sabina: Roman fun a kranken-shvester* [Sabina: A novel about a nurse] (Tel Aviv: Tikvah Press, n.d.). The two editions have different cover images but follow the same pagination and chapter divisions. Though both are undated, the price listed on each booklet gives an important clue in terms of publication date, as do aspects such

The surprisingly long life of a popular novel like *Sabina* highlights aspects of multilingualism that persisted within Hebrew culture in the realm of popular fiction. In the Yishuv, the Jewish community in Mandatory Palestine, Zionist ideologues strongly promoted Hebrew as the language of daily life and the language of national culture, an essential building block of Zionist society. But Mandatory Palestine and the young State of Israel were both highly multilingual societies.[2] According to Roberto Bachi, 40 percent of Jews in Palestine reported speaking Hebrew in a 1916–18 survey; 36 percent used Yiddish and 18 percent used Arabic as their first or only language.[3] By 1948, many more people reported speaking Hebrew as a first or only language (70 percent), but by 1954, that number had shrunk to 58 percent with the influx of immigrants in the early years of the state. Israeli society remained multilingual, however, as 60 percent of Israeli Jews surveyed in 1954 said they spoke two or more languages.[4]

Despite strong pressures to institute Hebrew as the language of daily life and national culture, leisure activities in the Yishuv reflected this multilingualism: local cinemas screened films in English, Yiddish, German, and Russian; people spoke a variety of languages in local coffeehouses; and readers sought books in many different languages from lending libraries, bookstores, and newsstands.[5] Copies of some of the most popular Yiddish serialized novels in Warsaw, like *Sabina*, were imported to Palestine and sold on the streets of Tel Aviv and Haifa. Shlomo Ben-Yisrael (Gelfer), one of the most prolific writers of detective fiction in Hebrew in the 1930s, recalls walking past a kiosk in Tel Aviv filled with magazines and cheap sensational books imported from Greece and claims that the availability of popular fiction in other languages inspired him to start writing similar stories in Hebrew.[6]

Popular fiction—genre fiction aimed at pleasing mass audiences and achieving commercial success[7]—became a peculiar space for multilingualism in the Jewish community in Mandatory Palestine. Chapbooks in Yiddish, Greek, and other languages continued to appear in local newsstands and kiosks as local writers and publishers started to produce crime fiction, thrillers, romances, and adventure stories in Hebrew. Many were translations or imitations of popular fiction in other languages, from Ben-Yisrael's novels featuring the detective David Tidhar to

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as typeface. The *pruta* (pl. *prutot*) replaced the British Mandate *mil* in 1949, and the *agora* (pl. *agorot*) replaced the *pruta* in January 1960. Ha-dfus he-hadash booklets cost 100 prutot each and therefore were published in the 1950s. Tikvah booklets cost 50 *agurot* and so were published in the 1960s. See "Past Notes and Coins Series," *Bank of Israel*, https://www.boi.org.il/en/Currency/PastNotesAndCoinsSeries/Pages/Default.aspx#Top.

I thank Joseph Galron-Goldschlager for his help in dating the texts.

[2] Benjamin Harshav, *The Polyphony of Jewish Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 29; Liora Halperin, *Babel in Zion: Jews, Nationalism and Language in Palestine, 1920–1948* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 9–11.

[3] Roberto Bachi, "A Statistical Analysis of the Revival of Hebrew in Israel," *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 3 (1956): 188, 194.

[4] Ibid., 192–93, 198.

[5] Halperin, *Babel in Zion*, 41–61.

[6] Letter from Shlomo Ben-Yisrael to Ya'akov Shavit, appendix to Zohar Shavit and Ya'akov Shavit, "Le-toldot 'sifrut ha-pesha' ha-ivri be-erets Yisra'el" [The history of Hebrew "crime fiction" in the land of Israel], *Ha-sifrut* 18–19 (1974): 49.

[7] Ken Gelder, *Popular Fiction: The Logics and Practices of a Literary Field* (London: Routledge, 2004), 12–13. I am aware of the debates surrounding the term, and specifically the pejorative connotations associated with "popular literature," as explained in J. A. Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (Oxford: Basil Blackwood, 1991), 729. But like similar terms used in other literary contexts, such as German *Trivialliteratur* and Victorian sensation fiction, the negative connotations are essential to understanding the literary and social conditions of these texts.

Max Schechter's "Library of Love," which presented fictionalized versions of historical scandals involving Catherine the Great, Lady Hamilton, and Rasputin. Relatively few of these detective novels or romances incorporated multiple languages within the text. But they relied heavily on textual circulation, translation, and imitation, strategies that frequently cross linguistic lines. Liora Halperin writes that "leisure was thus both a central realm for the use of languages other than Hebrew and a primary site of contest over the purview of Hebrew."[8] Popular fiction was certainly a cultural space in which a variety of languages flourished, as well as a flash point for debates over the use of Hebrew. But in contrast to other cultural battles in the 1930s, many critics argued that popular fiction should not be published in Hebrew and should not be read at all.

This essay examines multilingual dynamics in serialized romance-adventure novels published in Tel Aviv between the late 1930s and early 1950s, analyzing both the novels themselves and the critical discourse surrounding them. While the term "romance" initially referred to popular medieval narrative poems written in the vernacular,[9] by the middle of the nineteenth century romance-adventure novels combined narratological elements such as lovers separated by circumstances beyond their control; innocent victims and dastardly villains, often women; and harrowing near-death experiences (kidnapping, poisoning, imprisonment, etc.). Often published in installments, the novels used cliff-hangers and parallel plots to keep people reading, constantly postponing narrative resolution to sustain the melodrama. Barbara Fuchs argues that these sorts of novels have been marginalized in critical discourse despite (or perhaps because of) their popularity: "even within the larger category of mass-market genre fiction, the term romance marks the most criticized and also least recognized kind, the one associated with young or infantilized female readers and particularly deplored."[10] As romance-adventures, texts like *Sabina*, *Regina*, *Tamara*, and *Aviva* represent a distinct subset of the popular fiction that arose at the time and were relegated to the very bottom of the hierarchy of popular fiction. Critics at the time condemned them as corrupt and pornographic, though their romances were quite tame, leaving much to the reader's imagination. Scholarship on Hebrew popular fiction has privileged detective fiction, giving far more attention to male detectives than to a genre assumed to be for women readers.[11] Yet romance-adventure novels, many published in installments over the course of months, give insight into both realities and fantasies of life in Palestine at the time. They create a cultural space with different linguistic dynamics than "high" literary culture, thanks to the fluidity of the concept of the "original," the prevalence of translation, and the widespread circulation of texts, driven by market forces. Though they were relegated to the peripheries of Hebrew culture, these novels show the persistence of popular fiction and its multilingual features, despite changing audiences and cultural contexts.

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8 Halperin, *Babel in Zion*, 27.

9 Barbara Fuchs, *Romance* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 4.

10 Ibid., 129.

11 E.g., Dan Miron, "Komariya be-Yisrael" [A vicarage in Israel], *Ho!* 3 (2006): 99–128; Z. Shavit and Y. Shavit, "Le-toldot 'sifrut ha-pesha.'" One of the few scholars to write about romances is Nitsa Ben-Ari: see Nitsa Ben-Ari, "Popular Mass Production in the Periphery," in *Beyond Descriptive Translation Studies*, ed. Anthony Pym, Miriam Shlesinger, and Daniel Simeoni (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2008), 1–18; Nitsa Ben-Ari, "Popular Literature in Hebrew as a Marker of Anti-Sabra Culture," in *Culture Contacts and the Making of Cultures*, ed. Rakefet Sela-Sheffy and Gideon Toury (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Unit of Culture Research, 2011), 219–43.

READING POPULAR FICTION

Popular fiction, also referred to as non-canonized literature,[12] has often been overlooked as a site of multilingual circulation and exchange. Literary historiography has tended to examine manifestations of popular fiction within national literary traditions, such as German *Trivialliteratur* and Victorian sensation fiction, rather than in broader comparative frameworks.[13] Recent scholarship has examined the multilingualism of Jewish cultures as well as multilingualism and modern Hebrew literature, but this work primarily focuses on "high" literary forms.[14] Thanks to the work of Itamar Even-Zohar, who argued that a vital canonized literature relies on the pressure from non-canonized literature,[15] several scholars have examined the mid-twentieth-century origins of Hebrew popular fiction. In their foundational research, Zohar Shavit and Ya'akov Shavit identified non-canonized texts that began to appear in Hebrew in Mandatory Palestine and explored their cultural, social, and political contexts. Their work is oriented by a strict distinction between original and translated popular fiction, arguing that attempts to create an original popular fiction in Hebrew in the 1930s and 1940s were replaced by translations, primarily from English, by the 1950s.[16] In the highly formulaic popular novels of this period, however, distinctions between original and translation can be fuzzy. Successful novels were not marked by literary or linguistic innovation but rather by the texts' ability to deploy familiar characters, plots, and settings in new and interesting ways, what John Cawelti calls "stereotype vitalization."[17] As we will see with romance-adventure novels, originality was not particularly important to the writers and publishers who produced serialized novels like *Sabina* and *Tamara*.

Gideon Toury finds a similar divide in the 1930s and 1940s between translations of canonized literature (primarily from Russian and French) and non-canonized literature (from English).[18] Translations from Yiddish, however, are largely neglected in his analysis of translations into Hebrew between 1930 and 1945. The total number of Yiddish translations in this

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12 Drawing on the work of Viktor Shklovsky, Itamar Even-Zohar defines non-canonized literature in the following manner: by "'canonized' one means those literary norms and works (i.e., both models and texts) which are accepted as legitimate by the dominant circles within a culture and whose conspicuous products are preserved by the community to become part of its historical heritage. On the other hand, 'non-canonized' means those norms and texts which are rejected by these circles as illegitimate and whose products are often forgotten in the long run by the community (unless they change their status)." Itamar Even-Zohar, "Polysystem Theory," *Poetics Today* 11, no. 1 (1990): 15.

13 See, e.g., Peter Nusser, *Trivialliteratur* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1991); Bruce Campbell, Alison Guenther-Pal, and Vibeke Rützou Peterson, eds., *Detectives, Dystopias, and Poplit: Studies in Modern German Genre Fiction* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2014); Lyn Pykett, *The Nineteenth Century Sensation Novel* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011); Andrew Maunder, *Varieties of Women's Sensation Fiction, 1855–1890* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2004).

14 See, e.g., Adriana X. Jacobs, *Strange Cocktail: Translation and the Making of Modern Hebrew Poetry* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018); Lital Levy and Allison Schachter, "Jewish Literature / World Literature: Between the Local and the Transnational," *PMLA* 130, no. 1 (2015): 92–109; Shachar M. Pinsker, *Rich Brew: How Cafés Created Modern Jewish Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2018).

15 Even-Zohar, "Polysystem Theory," 16–17.

16 Z. Shavit and Y. Shavit, "Le-toldot 'sifrut ha-pesha'"; Zohar Shavit, "Hitpathut ha-sifrut ha-lo-canonit" [The development of non-canonical literature], in *Toldot ha-yishuv ha-yehudi be-erets Yisra'el me-az ha-aliyah ha-rishonah* [History of the Jewish Yishuv in the land of Israel since the first aliyah], vol. 1, ed. Moshe Lissak (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1999), 467–94.

17 John G. Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 11.

18 Gideon Toury, *Normot shel tirgum ve-ha-tirgum ha-sifruti le-ivrit be-shanim 1930–1945* [Norms of translation and literary translation into Hebrew, 1930–1945] (Tel Aviv: Mif'alim universita'im le-hotsa'at la-or, 1977), 118.

period lagged behind translations from other languages.[19] But the strong historical and cultural connections between Hebrew and Yiddish, as well as the ideological clashes and power asymmetries between the languages, make translation from Yiddish a particularly interesting case. Both translations and imitations of popular Yiddish romance-adventures were disparaged by Hebrew critics as *shund*—not only trash but specifically Yiddish trash.

Popular fiction developed surprisingly late in Hebrew, in large part because of the relationship between Hebrew and Yiddish in Eastern Europe. As Itamar Even-Zohar argues, "cultural stratification persisted in the different roles assigned respectively to Yiddish and Hebrew" in the beginning of the twentieth century. Relying on long-established cultural-linguistic patterns, "Hebrew continued to be the vehicle of high and official culture, though now secularized, while Yiddish stuck to its old function as the lower cultural and literary stratum."[20] The symbiotic relationship that existed between the two languages gave way to parallel literary developments and growing competition within the Eastern European cultural sphere. Over the second half of the nineteenth century, writers like S. Y. Abramovitsh, Sholem Aleichem, and Y. L. Peretz developed a "high" Yiddish prose, but relatively few efforts were made to encourage a "low" Hebrew counterpart.[21] "Low" in this context refers to texts that were designed to entertain readers without devoting much, if any, attention to artistry or to the aesthetics valued at the time. A lively popular literature flourished in Jewish vernaculars such as Yiddish and Ladino during the second half of the nineteenth century, not in Hebrew. In Eastern Europe, the availability of popular fiction in Yiddish and other languages essentially relieved Hebrew literary culture of the need to provide engaging, entertaining, and cheap texts. European Hebrew readers were overwhelmingly multilingual, so they could read romance novels or detective novels in Yiddish, Russian, Polish, or other languages. In Jewish communities in the Middle East and North Africa, the constellation of languages differed—Judeo-Arabic, Ladino, and more—but the principle remained the same: Hebrew was rarely the language of popular fiction.

By the interwar period, however, it became clear that Hebrew could no longer outsource popular fiction to Yiddish and other languages. Practically, the Hebrew-Yiddish bilingualism that had undergirded Eastern European Jewish society was declining, as, for example, most children raised in Palestine were not reading in Yiddish and most children in Poland were not reading in Hebrew. At the same time, the sociocultural conditions necessary for popular fiction—a reading public, new modes of dissemination, and at least some disposable income—were being established in the growing Jewish community in Mandatory Palestine.[22] Ideologically, Yiddish was

19 Ibid., 116.

20 Itamar Even-Zohar, "Russian and Hebrew: The Case of a Dependent Polysystem," *Poetics Today* 11, no. 1 (1990): 101.

21 Ya'akov Shavit notes that both Yiddish and Hebrew writers translated "semi-canonical" popular literature, and translation efforts intensified at the end of the nineteenth century. While many popular—or, in Shavit's terms, non-canonical—texts appeared in Yiddish in the same period, this did not happen in Hebrew. Ya'akov Shavit, "Le-inyan ha-ma'avar me-sifrut 'shund' be-yiddish le-sifrut 'shund' be-ivrit" [On the transition from "trashy" literature in Yiddish to "trashy" literature in Hebrew], *Tarbits*, Shvat-Adar Bet 1984, 304. See also Dan Miron's discussion of late nineteenth-century Hebrew translations in Dan Miron, *Bodedim be-mo'adam: Li-dyukanah shel ha-republikah ha-sifrutit ha-ivrit bi-tehilat ha-me'ah ha-'esrim* [Loners in their time: The image of the Hebrew literary republic at the beginning of the twentieth century] (Tel Aviv: 'Am 'oved, 1987).

22 Ya'akov Shavit, "Varsha / Tel Aviv—yiddish ve-'ivrit: Bein sifrut hamon le-hevrat hamon," [Warsaw / Tel Aviv—Yiddish and Hebrew: Between mass literature and mass society], *Ha-sifrut* 10, nos. 3–4 (1986): 206. Maria Adamowicz-Hariasz argues that the success of the serialized novel in France relied upon technological advances in the printing industry and the growth of a new readership, an urban working class with steadily increasing rates

viewed as not just popular but antithetical to Hebrew national culture, a Diasporic language that, for some, threatened the very essence of Zionist culture.[23] This contrasts with languages like Russian, which served as an important model for emergent Hebrew culture without the same ideological resistance.[24] In the Zionist cultural establishment in Palestine, many intellectuals saw national monolingualism as the only viable path. Supporters of Hebrew waged a "language war" in the 1920s, as groups like the Hebrew Language Defense League, a group spearheaded by Tel Aviv high school students and their teachers, attempted to impose the use of Hebrew by protesting against individuals, lectures, films, and other cultural events that used Yiddish or other languages.[25] In the 1930s, for example, the league wrote a letter to the deputy mayor of Tel Aviv complaining that a local cinema was planning to screen the Yiddish film *Di yiddishe mame* (The Yiddish mother), and they rioted in the theater when the screening was allowed to proceed.[26] Despite these threats, writers continued to write and publish in Yiddish and readers continued to buy Yiddish texts.[27]

In the 1930s, Mandatory Palestine saw the rise of a new kind of fiction, disparaged as inferior literature (*sifrut kelokelet*) or trash (the Yiddish word *shund*) by Hebrew critics, that circumvented the major cultural institutions of labor Zionism. Much of this fiction relied on other languages, directly or indirectly, to supply texts or models for texts. For example, Ha-roman ha-zaʿir (The miniature novel), one of the earliest popular publishing houses, had been transplanted by Hungarian Jew Miklós (Moshe) Faragó to Palestine in 1939. Ha-roman ha-zaʿir published Hebrew translations of its popular Hungarian novels, many of which had been translated from German.[28] Some writers at the time, like Avraham Shlonsky, dismissed such "inferior literature" as irrelevant, suggesting that such works had only a small audience.[29] But others, like M. Ben-Eliezer, declared *shund* to be "enemy number one for our literature" and argued that writers, teachers, and parents had to work together to "uproot" these intoxicating works by creating

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of literacy, along with the decline of French political journalism. While the political and cultural landscape in Mandatory Palestine was quite different from that in France, as, for example, there was no decline in political journalism, the other elements were quite relevant for the emergence of serialized Hebrew popular fiction. Maria Adamowicz-Hariasz, "From Opinion to Information: The *Roman-feuilleton* and the Transformation of the Nineteenth Century French Press," in *Making the News: Modernity and the Mass Press in Nineteenth Century France*, ed. Dean de la Motte and Jeannene M. Przyblyski (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 161–62. See also David Coward, *A History of French Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 288.

23 Yael Chaver, *What Must Be Forgotten: The Survival of Yiddish in Zionist Palestine* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2004), 8–10; Zohar Shavit, "Tel Aviv Language Police," in *Tel Aviv, the First Century*, ed. Maoz Azaryahu and S. Ilan Troen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 191.

24 Even-Zohar, "Russian and Hebrew," 102–5.

25 For more information on the Hebrew Language Defense League and other confrontations, see Arye Leib Pilowsky, "Yiddish ve-sifrutah be-erets Yisraʾel, 1907–1948" [Yiddish and its literature in the land of Israel, 1907–1948] (PhD diss., Hebrew University, 1980); Z. Shavit, "Tel Aviv Language Police," 193–200; Shimon A. Shur, *Gedud meginei ha-safah* [Language defense league] (Haifa: Haifa University Press, 2000).

26 Pilowsky, "Yiddish ve-sifrutah," 171–72.

27 See Chaver, *What Must Be Forgotten*; Naomi Brenner, *Lingering Bilingualism: Modern Hebrew and Yiddish Literatures in Contact* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2017).

28 Gavriel Rosenbaum, "'Ha-roman ha-zaʿir' ve-'ha-kulmos': Sifrut popularit hungarit—mi-Budapest le-Tel-Aviv" ["The miniature novel" and the "quill": Popular Hungarian literature from Budapest to Tel Aviv], *Kesher* 26 (1999): 88–89, 92–93.

29 Safra [Avraham Shlonsky], "Sifrut kelokelet" [Inferior literature], *Turim*, 3 August 1938.

suitable "light" literature.[30] While popular fiction was imported into Hebrew from a variety of sources, the fact that many critics referred to it as *shund*, using the Yiddish term, reinforced the association of Yiddish with bad, trashy texts. From the beginning, popular fiction was perceived as foreign and, by many, as dangerous.

IMPORTING *SABINA*

Sabina, published in installments by the Warsaw Yiddish daily *Haynt* in 1937, was part of what Yiddish critics decried as a *heftn epidemye*, a chapbook epidemic, in Warsaw in the 1930s.[31] Its many installments, each twenty-four pages long and printed on low-quality paper, trace the trials and tribulations of the lovely, blonde Sabina, a young woman orphaned and adrift in the world following the death of her mother. Desperate and contemplating suicide, Sabina is saved by the handsome Leon Kayzerstein, the heir of the wealthiest Jewish industrialist in Warsaw. The two fall in love and pledge to let nothing keep them apart, only to be bedeviled by assorted money-grubbing relatives, con-artists, and criminals. Featuring instances of mistaken identity, attempted murder, kidnapping, and more, the novel is filled with cliff-hangers aiming to captivate readers and encourage them to keep buying new installments of the novel. The novel's one hundred installments and nearly two thousand pages demonstrate its commercial success, since serialized novels were typically published only as long as they attracted buyers.

Although the Warsaw text is riddled with typos, plot hiccups, and misnumbered chapters, all of which suggest hasty production with little editing, those issues did not seem to bother Yiddish readers. Journalist A. Pshepyorka claimed that a Yiddish "artistic work" would sell no more than two hundred copies in the 1930s, but one hundred thousand copies of booklets of *Sabina* would be immediately snapped up from newspaper stands.[32] The *Głuboker Sztyme*, a weekly Yiddish paper from Glubokoye (Vitebskt region, now northern Belarus), published S. Segal's humorous poem entitled "Sabina," which poked fun at how "everyone" was reading *Sabina*: "On the street, in the home, / butcher's, market, or even in a club, / just like clockwork / here and there they come running, / flying, to speedily buy / the 'novel' *Sabina.* / There may be crisis, need, or lack / that unfolds anywhere— / Spain, Japan, China— / but anyone who has feet, a hand / familiar with the *alef-beys*, / reads only *Sabina*."[33]

Sabina was one of many *shund* novels published in the Warsaw Yiddish press, as competing Yiddish daily newspapers tried to woo readers. Yiddish critic Nakhmen Mayzl noted that there were some good novels, but the majority were "mass-produced pieced-together 'novels' made according to a definite 'recipe' by anonymous novelists or by writers who are ashamed to put their real names on this suspect merchandise."[34] These "recipes"—or, in Cawelti's terms, formulas— were not unique to Yiddish. Although such novels were typically published anonymously or

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[30] M. Ben-Eliezer, "Al ha-milhamah im sifrut ha-shund" [On the war with trashy literature], *Ha-olam*, 31 March 1938, 4.

[31] A. Klinger, *Sabina: Roman fun a kranken-shvester* [Sabina: A novel about a nurse] (Warsaw: Hayntike Nayes, n.d.). We know *Sabina* was serialized in 1937 because of the commentary in the Yiddish press. Khone Shmeruk identifies two distinct *heftn epedemiyes* (chapbook epidemics): in New York in the 1890s and in Poland in the 1930s. Khone Shmeruk, "Le-toldot sifrut ha-'shund' be-yiddish" [History of "trashy" literature in Yiddish], *Tarbits*, Tevet-Adar 1983, 335–37.

[32] Quoted in Shmeruk, "Le-toldot sifrut ha-'shund,'" 333.

[33] S. Segal, "Sabina," *Głuboker Sztyme*, 21 October 1937, 3. All translations are mine.

[34] Quoted in Natan Cohen, "*Shund* and the Tabloids: Popular Reading in Inter-war Poland," *Polin* 16 (2003): 202.

pseudonymously, many of them were translated from or imitated similar texts in Polish, German, or French. Writers like Itzik Manger and Kadya Molodovsky called for the Yiddish literary establishment to fight against popular fiction, though few steps were taken.[35] In the debate that raged in the Yiddish press about the evils of popular fiction, romance-adventures like *Sabina* and *Regina* became synonymous with the "lowest" type of *shund*.[36] Alter Katsyzne used *Sabina* and *Regina* to castigate the Yiddish press:

> On the corner stands a Yiddish newspaper kiosk. He is surely sitting there, among the bedbugs, with different *Regina*s and *Sabina*s—a run on merchandise. The street lives in chaos. The street runs and rumbles. And in the middle of the tumult she [the street] stands near the corner. She has her own aesthetic interests—the street. She is charmed by the two gentle, delicate female creatures on the corner: *Sabina* with *Regina*, who are doing good business. Who are these successful brides, who bring their grooms a nice profit? What is their address? If you were to ask them, they would show you the address of the two "powerhouses": *Haynt* with *Moment.*[37]

Warsaw's two major daily newspapers become, in Katsyzne's scathing criticism, the husbands (or, really, the pimps) of *Sabina* and *Regina*, prostituting their charming melodramas on the Yiddish street. The Yiddish masses—metaphorically *di gas*, the grammatically feminine street—become victims of their own passions, seduced by the papers' commercialism. Katsyzne warns the papers that readers will become sick of *Sabina*s and *Regina*s, "who are being carried around [*trogn zikh arum*] with their [the papers'] stamps." Lurking within this statement is an additional meaning of the verb *trogn zikh*, "to be pregnant." If the aesthetic and moral corruption of *Sabina* and *Regina* were not enough, Katsyzne implies that their encounters with the Yiddish masses will spawn more such texts.

As they were being serialized in Warsaw, *Sabina* and *Regina* were also being exported to Yiddish readers outside Poland. In 1938, in the daily paper of the Zionist Left, *Davar*, Hebrew critic S. Y. Pineles (later, Panueli) complained about "a new shipment of 'lively' and 'invigorating' merchandise, which has come to us in the form of 'literature.'. . . Full boxes of *Sabina*s and *Regina*s have arrived from Poland. Apparently, there are consumers for this 'literary' product who are fond of it and its impurity."[38] Pineles thus acknowledges the market forces driving the arrival of *Sabina*s and *Regina*s, which here serve as stand-ins for Yiddish popular fiction more generally. Popular fiction, as Ken Gelder argues, epitomizes the "culture industry" characteristic of modern capitalism, precisely the sort of mass culture that Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer critiqued in the 1940s.[39] As a commercial product, serialized texts were imported or published only as long as there was a market for them. In 1930s Palestine, there was clearly a market for Yiddish romance-adventures.

35 Molodovsky proposed that the Warsaw Yiddish PEN club sanction members who wrote *shund* under pseudonyms, provoking a heated debate, described in Nakhmen Mayzl, "Mi-koyekh dem shund-roman" [About the *shund* novel], *Literarishe bleter*, 10 November 1933, 1–2; Itzik Manger, "Shomeriade," *Getseylte verter* 4 (6 June 1930): 1–2.

36 Cohen, "*Shund* and the Tabloids," 208.

37 Alter Katsyzne, "Sabina mit Reginan, oder di klole fun nisht-organizirtkayt" [Sabina with Regina, or the general rule of disorganization], *Mayn redndiker film*, 15 October 1937, 8.

38 S. Y. Pineles, "Sabina, Regina ve-Tamara" [Sabina, Regina, and Tamara], *Davar*, 15 March 1938, 3.

39 Gelder, *Popular Fiction*, 1–2; Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," in *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972).

Numerous articles in the Hebrew press illustrate the popularity of these serialized novels in Palestine. M. Yehiel, writing in *Ha-tsofe* in 1938, describes an evening stroll in Tel Aviv that was interrupted by the crowds surrounding a kiosk, where people were impatiently waiting to buy the latest installment of *Sabina*.[40] Hebrew critics often wrote about the risks these popular novels posed to impressionable youth, but the descriptions of these crowds suggest a wider cross-section of Jewish society, not only young readers. The newspaper *Ha-boker* reported that a group calling itself the Union for the Implantation of Hebrew (Igud le-hashtalat ha-'ivrit) petitioned the city of Tel Aviv in 1938 to forbid kiosk owners from selling "inferior literature" (*sifrut kelokelet*), to appoint a commission to determine what literature should be allowed at kiosks, and to demand that the Warsaw Yiddish papers *Haynt* and *Moment* stop sending *Sabina* and *Regina* to Palestine.[41] Not surprisingly, there are no reports that suggest these measures were implemented. While voices from the cultural establishment railed against this new popular fiction and its corrupting influences, they seem to have had little success in stopping its circulation. Despite the strong sentiment against both popular fiction and Yiddish in Zionist cultural and intellectual circles, Yiddish *shund* like *Sabina* was being imported to Palestine because there were eager readers and buyers. The presence of texts like *Sabina* in Tel Aviv situates the Yishuv as part of a global market for Yiddish popular culture during its heyday in the 1930s, sharing both texts and critical reactions.

ADAPTING *SABINA*

Not long after Alter Katsyzne blasted the insidious seduction of these popular texts, S. Y. Pineles shared his Yiddish colleague's concerns in similar terms in Hebrew. In the same 1938 article, Pineles warned readers about the dangers of these Yiddish "women": "*Sabina* and *Regina* were born impure on Smucha and Nansha Streets in Warsaw. Whereas in Tel Aviv a new heroine has been born for Israel, her name both Hebrew and Eastern—*Tamara*! If *Sabina* and *Regina* were intended for the *shmendriks* from Nalewki and Dzika, *Tamara* was crafted for sabras, native born. For the price of 5 mils, any sabra can unite with this 'sweet thing,' that comes from the degenerate imagination of its creator-birther and follow her escapades with her 'demon.'"[42] For Pineles, the appearance of Hebrew romance-adventure fiction is even worse than the presence of Yiddish fiction in Palestine. *Sabina* and *Regina* may have been part of a degenerate Diaspora culture in Warsaw, but they have spawned a new Hebrew *shund*, the "native" *Tamara*. Books like *Tamara* are more dangerous, he argues, because they target native-born Hebrew readers, contaminating Hebrew literature and its young, healthy readers, "poisoning souls" as their textual "offspring" spread to villages and settlements. While Pineles would likely have objected to popular novels translated from English or Russian, his gendered critique draws on the myth of Yiddish femininity. As Naomi Seidman has demonstrated, Yiddish came to be associated with female readers in early texts addressed to "women and simple people," and it was further sexualized by early twentieth-century critics like Sh. Niger, reinforcing the inferior status of both women and Yiddish.[43]

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40 M. Yehiel, "Havai Tel Aviv" [Tel Aviv life], *Ha-tsofe*, 12 January 1938, 2. See a similar street scene in S.D.L., "Birhovah shel ir" [On the city streets], *Ha-tsofe*, 4 April 1938, 2.

41 "Neged 'sifrut ha-shund'" [Against "trashy literature"], *Ha-boker*, 19 March 1938, 6.

42 Pineles, "Sabina, Regina ve-Tamara," 3.

43 Naomi Seidman, *A Marriage Made in Heaven? The Sexual Politics of Hebrew and Yiddish* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 3–5, 31.

These feminine novels are, to Pineles, "born impure" as Diasporic women so that any attempts to produce Hebrew equivalents are tarred by association.

Hebrew heroines, Pineles argues, should not be modeled on popular Yiddish heroines, just as Hebrew-speaking Jews in Palestine should not be provided with the same entertainment as Yiddish-speaking Jews in Warsaw, whether in Yiddish or in Hebrew. The transformation from Diasporic Jewish culture to Zionist national culture has no space for popular, lowbrow fiction, especially these "degenerate," "feminine" novels.

It is hard to tell whether Pineles read *Tamara* and found the narrative problematic or objected simply to the concept of a Hebrew romance-adventure. A great deal of commentary on popular fiction, both in the 1930s and later, tends to mention or catalog popular novels without engaging with their narratives. *Tamara: Roman me-hayei ha-hoveh ha-erets Yisre'eli* (Tamara: A novel of life in the land of Israel), published in installments in 1938, follows the trials and tribulations of a young, beautiful Yemenite woman living in Tel Aviv who, like so many of her fellow heroines, is left alone in the world after her mother's death.[44] Tamara is rescued by the attractive, mysterious musician Avraham Karni, who saves her from a flooded house and helps her bury her mother. But just as our heroine and hero start to fall in love, Avraham's estranged wife, Lora, shows up to make trouble of various kinds. Thanks to Lora's machinations, Tamara flees to Beirut and Avraham ends up in jail in Haifa, sending the story on twists and turns as the lovers try to reunite. As the characters travel around Tel Aviv, Beirut, Poland, and Haifa, they speak Hebrew, Arabic, French, English, and Yiddish, all rendered in the same unornamented Hebrew prose.

On the surface, there is very little objectionable about *Tamara* and nothing obviously "degenerate" about it, to use Pineles's description. The story's formulas are familiar: a young, attractive heterosexual couple bedeviled by villains, the hero's false imprisonment, and surprising twists of fate. Though the critics disparage this as "pornographic" literature modeled on European works,[45] there are no titillating scenes, and while the plotting is overly dramatic and the dialogue is stilted at moments, the text is not poorly written. One typical scene is when Tamara and Avraham meet in jail under the watchful eyes of a police guard in the ninth installment in the series:

שניהם נשתתקו והקשיבו לדפקי לבבותיהם שהלמו בקול. אחר אמר אברהם בקול חנוק כמעט:
"עתה הן לא תעזביני יותר, תמרה, הלא?"
ואז פרצו את שניהם בדמעות. תמרה לקחה את ידו, לחצה אותו בכח ואמרה:
"לא, לא אעזבך!"[46]

The two of them fell silent and listened to their pounding hearts. Then Avraham said in an almost choked voice:

"Now you shall forsake me no more, Tamara, is that not so?"

The two of them burst into tears. Tamara took his hand, squeezed it tightly, and said:

"No, I shall not forsake you!"[47]

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44 S. Kamer, *Tamara: Roman me-hayei ha-hoveh ha-erets Yisra'eli* [Tamara: A novel of life in the land of Israel] (Tel Aviv: Sifriyah le-kulam, n.d.).

45 Ben-Eliezer, "Al ha-milhamah," 4.

46 Kamer, *Tamara*, no. 9, 163.

47 The words *ta'azveni* and *e'ezavkha* could be translated as "leave" instead of "forsake" here. I have chosen the higher register to signal both the allusive nature of the biblical phrases and the oddly formal sentimental dialogue between lovers.

While the villainess Lora seduces men to achieve her goals, the novel's hero and heroine behave in restrained fashion throughout their melodramatic trials. The prose demonstrates no aspirations of literary greatness, instead relating its drama in clichés ("loud beating of their hearts") with little subtlety and the barest attention to character development, atmosphere, or description. The conversation between lovers is both cloying and oddly allusive, with Avraham's plea (*lo ta'azvini yoter*, "you shall forsake me no more") echoing the plea to God in Psalm 71:18, "O God, forsake me not,"[48] and Tamara's response ("I shall not forsake you") borrowing the words of God's promise to protect Jacob in Genesis 28:15, "I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee."[49] This is a stylistic flourish, akin to the decorative embellishment of *shibbuts* common in medieval Hebrew poetry, rather than an attempt to situate Tamara in the place of the divine.[50] Allusive language, however, is side by side with grammatical errors: in this case the masculine pronominal suffix *oto* is mistakenly paired with the grammatically feminine "hand" (*yad*). This short passage characterizes the unevenness in many of these Hebrew novels, which generally use higher linguistic and stylistic registers than similar texts like *Sabina* but share the same sorts of hackneyed phrases, plot twists, and, in many cases, poor editing. But originality, quality, and literary innovation are not the point here. As Cawelti argues, "formulaic works necessarily stress intense and immediate kinds of excitement and gratification as opposed to the more complex and ambiguous analyses of character and motivation that characterize mimetic literature."[51] These familiar characters and plots are in fact the keys to the genre. The novelty of *Tamara* was that it translated popular formulas into Hebrew and, as the subtitle emphasizes, set them in Mandatory Palestine.

The portrait of Palestine that appears in these texts departs in significant ways from literary norms of the time. Hebrew fiction of the 1930s and 1940s ranged from Agnon's modernist stories to S. Yizhar's vivid descriptions and stream of consciousness writing. But in a time when politically engaged literature (*sifrut meguyeset*) was still a strong cultural force, with the expectation that literature should express or at the very least engage with the values of labor Zionism, popular fiction departed from more familiar literary representations of society. *Tamara*, like most romance-adventures, was overwhelmingly urban (set in Tel Aviv and Haifa); cosmopolitan (with characters traveling to Beirut; Jews, Muslims, and the occasional British official); and highly class conscious (with wealthy characters flaunting their wealth). Early in *Tamara*, for example, Tamara's nemesis, Lora, attends the ball that has all of Tel Aviv astir, stepping out of her chauffeured car beautifully attired, planning to carry out a devious plot. Tamara herself takes a position as a maid with the wealthy Mrs. Sharira. After helping her mistress prepare for an elegant French ball in Beirut, Tamara is attacked by the evil Mr. Sharira and flees in tattered clothes, finding herself (once again) penniless, ill, and desperate on the streets of Beirut, rescued, fortuitously enough, by an attractive young Jewish man. Tel Aviv and Beirut are not described in any depth in the novel, but as class-conscious, cosmopolitan cities, they represent a radical departure from early twentieth-century Hebrew literature, in classic terms, neither genre nor anti-genre.

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48 English translation from the Jewish Publication Society, 1917 edition, https://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt2671.htm.

49 Ibid.

50 For more on *shibbuts*, see Dan Pagis, *Shirat ha-chol ve-torat ha-shir le-Moshe Ibn Ezra u-vney doro* [Secular poetry and poetic theory of Moshe Ibn Ezra and his contemporaries] (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1970), 70–77.

51 Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance*, 8, 14.

The cosmopolitan spaces that serve as the backdrop for assorted couplings and never-ending schemes obscure the valued spaces of labor literature—the *meshek* (cooperative settlements) and the land of Israel, with its harsh beauty and historical significance. They also emphasize the multilingualism of this fictionalized Middle East, with characters speaking Hebrew, Yiddish, French, Arabic, and English to each other, all rendered in Hebrew. The emphasis on extreme wealth and extreme poverty highlights issues of class and lifestyle, depicting the Yishuv as a stratified society, essentially indistinguishable from Eastern European social norms. Though the Yemenite Tamara may represent a vaguely Palestinian spin on class—Yemenites at the bottom of the Jewish social hierarchy—Tamara is not substantively different from the beautiful but poor Ashkenazi heroines in similar serialized novels. Universal, clichéd themes of love, devotion, greed, and revenge motivate the characters' action, played out in a generic urban landscape.

Perhaps most worrying for critics was that the narrative depicts life in a Palestine devoid of virtually all political character. *Tamara*, unlike some of the other serialized novels of the time, has vaguely Zionist inclinations because it features a romance between Jewish immigrants from Yemen and Poland who choose to live in the land of Israel. But beyond a miniature *kibbuts galuyot* (ingathering of the exiles), Zionist beliefs are conspicuously absent, as are any other competing ideologies, with the exception, perhaps, of crass materialism. The social norms and physical comforts found in Yiddish romance-adventures survive largely intact in the novel's representation of life in 1930s Palestine. *Tamara*, as a Hebrew adaptation of this popular genre, highlights not Hebrew culture but the strength of the conventional formulas of popular, escapist fiction. Formulaic fantasies of romance can be tweaked to accommodate aspects of Jewish life in the Yishuv, giving young Jewish immigrants the romantic and material desires of bourgeois European narratives.

TRANSLATING *SABINA*

Tamara, serialized in 1938, was joined by many similar popular novels: *Ha-shvuya mi-Tel Aviv* (The captive from Tel Aviv; 1939), *Ha-tme'ah: Roman me-hayei Tel-Aviv* (The impure one: A novel from Tel Aviv life; 1939), *Shulamit: Roman eretsyisre'eli* (Shulamit: A land of Israel novel; 1947), *Yael: Harpatka'oteha ve-ahavoteha shel yefeifiya mas'ira havrat mahteret 'ivrit bi-ymei ha-mandat* (Yael: Adventures and loves of a tempestuous beauty, member of the Hebrew underground in the days of the Mandate; 1949), and many more. Among this outpouring of popular fiction, *Aviva: Koroteha shel ma'apilah tse'irah* (Aviva: Life of a young illegal immigrant; 1946) is a particularly interesting example of the genre.[52] The fifty-two installments of *Aviva* follow the love and betrayal of the titular heroine, a lovely young nurse who endures the death of her mother, is poisoned and left for dead in the morgue, joins a traveling circus, escapes a sinister kidnapper, interrupts a deadly duel, escapes a locked tomb, and helps rescue her lover from a mental institution, among many other exploits. Reading through the pages of *Aviva*, it quickly becomes apparent that the novel, with its young, beautiful nurse, is a translation of *Sabina*. A brief comparison of the opening installments of the novels makes their close relationship clear. Early in *Sabina*, the newly orphaned Sabina buries her mother:

ווען סאבינע ריינמאן האָט זיך אומגעקערט פון בית-עולם אהיים, איז דער הימעל געוואָען עגעלך צו איר נשמה:
שווערע בלייערנע וואָלקנס האָבן געגאָסען מיט טרערען אויף סאבינעס גורל. ס׳האָט גערעגענט און אַ ווינט

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52   *Aviva: Koroteha shel ma'apilah tse'ira* [Aviva: Life of a young illegal immigrant] (Tel Aviv: Ha-roman ha-meratek, n.d.). The publishing gap between 1939 and 1946 reflects the fact that the publication of popular fiction all but ceased during World War II, because paper was rationed.

האט גערישען סאבינעס דינעם, אויסגעריבענעם פּאַלטען, אירע בלאָנדע, שענע האָר פון אונרטערן היטעלע
אפּער. זי איז געגאַנגען איבער די גאַסען און האָט נישט געזען קיין מענטשן, א שטומער ווייטיג צונויפגעפּרעסט
אירע ליפּען. זי האָט נישט געקאָנט וויינען, צו גרויס איז געוועון איר צער, איר פּיין. מיט אַ האַלבע שעה צוריק
האָט מען איר מוטער אַראָפּגעלאָזט אין קבר אויפ׳ן פּראַגער בית-עולם. ווען דער קברן האָט פאַרשאָטען די
ערד, האָט זיך בלויז אַ הויכער קרעכץ אַרויסגעריסען פון סאבינעס אָנגעווייטאַגט האַרץ. מער נישט וויינען
האָט זי נישט געקענט. זי איז געוועון אַליין ביי די קבורה פון איר טייערער מאַמען, קיינער איז נאָך דער עגלה
נישט נאָכגעגאַנגען. ⁵³

> When Sabina Raynman returned home from the cemetery, the skies matched her soul: harsh,
> leaden clouds cast tears on Sabina's fate. It rained and a wind ripped through Sabina's thin,
> shabby overcoat, [whipping] her blonde, beautiful hair out of her hat. She walked through the
> streets and saw no one else, a silent ache pressed against her lips. She could not weep, too great
> were her troubles, her pain. A half hour earlier her mother had been laid in her grave in the
> Praga cemetery. When the gravedigger had shoveled the earth, only a high groan escaped from
> Sabina's pained heart. She could cry no more. She was alone at the burial of her dear mother;
> no one else followed the hearse.

Aviva faces virtually identical circumstances at the beginning of *Aviva*:

דומה היה לה, לאביבה, כאילו עולמה חשך בעדה לנצח. היא שרכה רגליה על פני הרחובות הריקים מאדם
וסילוני הגשם נמזגו בדמעות שנשרו מעיניה. רוח זלעפות יבבה כהד לאנקות הכבושות שהתפרצו מחזה. היא
חזרה מבית העלמין, ועתה לא הייתה לה עוד נפש קרובה בעולם. לפני שעה קלה נסתם הגולל על אמה,
שנגאלה סוף-סוף מייסוריה על-ידי המות שבא עליה כחטף. בשעה שרגבי האדמה נפלו בקול עמום על קרשי
הארון שבו נטמנה גוית האם, ידעה אביבה שמכאן ואילך תהיה גלמודה בעולם קר ואכזרי. ⁵⁴

> It seemed to her, to Aviva, that her world had darkened for eternity. Her feet plodded on the
> deserted streets and streams of rain mingled with the tears that fell from her eyes. A fearful
> wind sobbed, echoing the restrained cries that exploded from her chest. She was returning
> from the cemetery, and now she had no one close to her left in the world. A short while ago her
> mother, finally freed from her suffering by sudden death, had been sealed in her grave. As clods
> of earth fell with dull thuds on the boards of the coffin that enclosed her mother's corpse, Aviva
> knew that from now on she would be alone in a cold and cruel world.

Both Sabina and Aviva are orphaned and left alone, grieving in the rain. The names and setting
have changed from one text to the next, from Sabina Raynman (literally, "pure man") to Aviva
Bat-Ami ("daughter of my nation"), and from Warsaw to Tel Aviv. The linguistic register in the
Hebrew is higher than in the Yiddish, with Hebrew phrases like "as clods of earth fell with dull
thuds" replacing the Yiddish "when the gravedigger had shoveled the earth." Despite the low
status of the text, the Hebrew version is a good example of what Nitsa Ben-Ari calls *tirgumit*,
a stylized Hebrew for translations, notable for its woodenness, mixed linguistic registers, and
generally elevated language.⁵⁵ It comes across as more self-consciously literary than the Yiddish

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53 Klinger, *Sabina*, vol. 1, 3–4.

54 *Aviva: Koroteha she maʿapila tseʿirah, roman ahavah ve-harpatkaʾot be-hemshekhim* [Aviva: Life of a young illegal
immigrant, a novel of love and adventures in installments], vol. 1 (Tel Aviv: Ha-roman ha-meratek, n.d.), 2.

55 Nitsa Ben-Ari, "Tirgumit o ivrit shel tirgumim" [Tranlatese or Hebrew for translations], in *Aderet le-Binyamin:
Sefer ha-yovel le-Binyamin Harshav* [An overcoat for Benjamin: Jubilee book for Benjamin Harshav], vol. 1, ed.
Ziva Ben-Porat (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibuts ha-meʾuhad, 1999), 294–300.

prose. The Hebrew text tends to condense Yiddish dialogue and summarize or skip banter and characters' internal reflection, which reflects the limitations of Hebrew prose in the 1940s. Still, *Aviva* is clearly based on *Sabina*, which is not surprising given the frequency with which popular fiction was translated from preexisting sources.[56] In this case, Yiddish culture really was "to blame" for a popular Hebrew novel.

In fact, it is likely that *Sabina* was modeled on earlier popular fiction as well. Katsyzne, as part of a series of articles criticizing *Sabina* and *Regina*, claims that the Yiddish text was an uncredited adaptation of Polish-Jewish writer Witolda Gutowskiego's *Siostra Marja* (Sister Mary), further complicating any sense of "original" with respect to these texts.[57] However, each iteration of this text reflects its local linguistic and historical circumstances to a much higher degree than translations of "high" literary works. *Aviva* and *Sabina* illustrate what has been called weakly marked translation (Anthony Pym) or aggressive translation (Andrea Ricci).[58] The text is translated into another language and liberally adapted to suit local tastes and expectations, by changing names, locations, assorted other references to religion, politics, and other aspects of society, as well as key plot episodes.

Translations of popular fiction, Gabrielle Krisjanson argues, typically avoid excessive foreignness in favor of "domestication."[59] Extensive domestication was common in nineteenth-century translations into Hebrew, when writers recognized the need to import texts through translation but were faced with their language's limited literary and vernacular resources. Part of the solution, Gideon Toury argues, was "positing acceptability as a major constraint on literary translation, to the almost complete forfeiture of translation adequacy; a kind of Hebraic *belle infidèle*, if you wish."[60] As a result, in these Enlightenment translations "the borderline between original writing and translation tended to be rather obscure. . . . Indeed, it was not even necessary to mark a text as being translated. Moreover, even when a text *was presented* as a non-original, the common practice was to attribute it first and foremost, sometimes even exclusively, to its translator, who was thus conceived of as being virtually on par with the author of an original."[61] By the middle of the twentieth century, however, translational norms had shifted for belletristic texts, as names were transliterated rather than Judaized or Hebraized and there were fewer attempts to clean up the text for its Hebrew audience by removing objectionable or explicit language.[62] Yet *Sabina* and *Aviva* follow earlier translational norms, obscuring boundaries between original and translation, never mentioning earlier texts and making extensive changes. Not unlike maskilic translators, the publishers who paid for translations of popular fiction were more concerned with the reception of these works than their fidelity or artistry. The target audience, however,

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[56] Y. Shavit, "Varsha / Tel Aviv," 203; Toury, *Normot*, 130–32.

[57] Alter Katsyzne, "Festshtelung," *Mayn redndiker film* 2, no. 15 (1938): 2. The National Library of Poland has a long serialized novel titled *Siostra Marja: Historja wielkiej miłości i czystego serca; Wstrząsający romans z życia wyższych sfer towarzyskich* [Sister Mary: A story of great love and a pure heart; A shocking affair in the life of the upper class], published in one hundred booklets in Warsaw between 1931 and 1933, running to 2,400 pages, and attributed to (in different entries) both Witold Gutowski and Witolda Gutowskiego.

[58] See Anthony Pym, *Method in Translation History* (Manchester, UK: St. Jerome, 1998), 60; Andrea Ricci, "When a Text Is Both a Pseudotranslation and a Translation," in Pym, Shlesinger, and Simeoni, *Beyond Descriptive Translation Studies*, 155.

[59] Gabrielle Krisjanson, "Meaning in (Translated) Popular Fiction," *TranscUlturAl* 5, nos. 1–2 (2013): 167.

[60] Gideon Toury, *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond* (Amsterdam: J. Benjamins, 1995), 131.

[61] Ibid., 133.

[62] Toury, *Normot*, 184–85.

had shifted from the small Hebrew-reading elite in Eastern Europe to a growing population of Hebrew readers in Mandatory Palestine, and publishers' motivations had also changed, from primarily aesthetic and ideological concerns to commercial ones.

Novels like *Aviva* highlight many of the differences in translation and multilingual practices more generally in popular fiction. *Aviva*, published without an author's name, does not acknowledge its connections to *Sabina*, much less retain aspects of foreignness in its translations. But its domestication is both extensive and superficial: characters are renamed and the plot is uprooted from Warsaw and other Polish and European cities to Tel Aviv and Middle Eastern destinations. In these passages, Warsaw's Jewish cemetery in the Praga district, the Bródno Jewish Cemetery, is replaced by a Tel Aviv cemetery. Later in the narrative, an itinerant gypsy circus troupe in *Sabina* becomes an Arab circus troupe in *Aviva*. But *Aviva*'s Tel Aviv is not substantively different from *Sabina*'s Warsaw—there are no references to the "First Hebrew City," the sea, the climate, or really anything aside from street names that might differentiate it from another city. Aviva, unlike Sabina, is identified as a *ma'apila*, an illegal immigrant, a sympathetic figure in the Yishuv in 1946, but the narrative never explains Aviva's background or immigration. Aside from that fact, virtually nothing in the narrative resembles the Hebrew literary landscape of the 1940s—no kibbutzim or collective settlements, no soldiers, no noticeable ideologies, and hardly any Zionist themes. Like *Tamara*, the Yiddish and Hebrew texts share an attention to social class that is highly unusual for Hebrew literary texts of the time. Aviva lives in a bourgeois urban world, where her training as a nurse brings her into contact with the upper strata of society, families with large mansions, chauffeured cars, and loyal or backstabbing servants. Via this translated text, 1940s urban life in Palestine is presented as essentially identical to 1930s East European life.

Writers, translators, and publishers of popular fiction worried little about the implications of uprooting a story from one location and replanting it in another. From a literary perspective, the lack of description of the setting and surrounding environment means that these narratives could be adapted relatively easily to a new language and location. The conventions of the genre—pure heroines, noble heroes, cruel villains, and scheming villainesses—could simply be plopped down in a new geographical location and launched into convoluted plot twists. From a political perspective, the people who produced these texts apparently cared little about local expectations and demands.[63] Modern European mass-market fiction, Diane Bianchi and Adele D'Arcangelo argue, tends to gloss over sensitive religious matters to avoid alienating readers.[64] Novels like *Tamara* and *Aviva* glossed over most religious and political matters, but in the context of Mandatory Palestine, even the avoidance of politics was a controversial cultural act. For labor Zionist writers in the 1930s, life in Palestine was supposed to be radically different from life in Warsaw, part of the Zionist "negation of the Diaspora." These portraits of a cosmopolitan, bourgeois Palestine—though they may have had some truth—infuriated mainstream critics, who feared the impact this literary vision would have on young, impressionable Hebrew readers. If the Hebrew literary establishment was concerned with educating young Zionists, *Sabina*, *Aviva*, and *Tamara* were not only bad literature but also dangerous.

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63 Nitsa Ben-Ari argues that many of the writers and publishers of popular fiction were associated with the right-wing Revisionist movement. Ben-Ari, "Popular Literature," 228–31.

64 Diane Bianchi and Adele D'Arcangelo, "Translating History or Romance? Historical Romantic Fiction and Its Translation in a Globalised Market," *Linguistics and Literature Studies* 3, no. 5 (2015): 250.

From the vantage point of translation, however, *Aviva* is notable not simply because it is an uncredited translation of *Sabina* but also because the translation shifts into the realm of pseudo-translation. Douglas Robinson defines pseudotranslation as a work "whose status as 'original' or 'derivative' is, for whatever social or textual reason, problematic."[65] *Aviva*, as we saw, was clearly based on *Sabina*, but over the course of the sprawling serialized narrative, its plot abandons the Yiddish original and takes on a life of its own. In the first few chapters, there are small differences between the two narratives; for example, the heroine is buried in a fake funeral in the Yiddish version, but the Hebrew text lets her sneak out of the morgue. Gradually the narratives diverge, with elaborate intrigues culminating in an escape from an insane asylum and a dramatic confrontation in Yiddish, while Hebrew readers were given an intrepid private detective and a kidnapping standoff happily resolved by a daring commando raid. The formulaic nature of the serialized novel, with each self-contained episode part of the larger narrative arc, lends itself to this kind of literary reinvention. But these changes also represent the shift in social context and the high degree to which the latter sections of the text are tailored to a Hebrew audience. As a result, we cannot label *Aviva* as a "derivative" text or a "translation," in Robinson's terms. It inhabits a middle ground, possessing a clear textual precursor that guides but does not ultimately dictate its final form. In contrast to Zohar Shavit and Ya'akov Shavit's distinctions between original and translated non-canonized literature, *Aviva* is both translated and original, a text that grafts aspects of life in Palestine onto an escapist romance-adventure. If *Aviva*, much like its immigrant protagonist, starts out as translated and foreign—"illegal," even—both the heroine and the text are nativized to significant degrees over the course of the narrative.

Nitsa Ben-Ari, one of the few scholars who has analyzed Hebrew romances, sees popular novels like *Tamara* and *Aviva* as important precursors to the adventure stories, detective stories, erotica, romances, and thrillers that inundated the Israeli market in the 1950s and 1960s. The Zionist writers and critics who tried to shape Hebrew culture, she argues, sought to break with the Diaspora and Yiddish culture. But popular fiction represents the opposite: "The survival—and ultimate success—of the cheap cosmopolitan popular genres reflects the persistence of (metaphorical) Yiddish. In spite of the war declared upon Yiddish language and culture, and the temporary triumph of the Sabra ethos, (metaphorical) Yiddish was vital enough to survive in the periphery and finally have the upper hand."[66] Ben-Ari's reduction of Yiddish to low culture, even metaphorically, is problematic given the wide artistic range of twentieth-century Yiddish literature. But if Yiddish had provided European Jewish readers with *shund* fiction for generations, then midcentury Hebrew culture aimed to replace Yiddish as the source of this cheap entertainment. In 1930s and 1940s Palestine, this was done not only by the people Ben-Ari calls the "culture planners" and their efforts to prevent undesirable fiction but also by marginal "pop-up" publishers seeking to make money by publishing Hebrew *shund*, via translation or imitation. Both *Tamara* and *Aviva* reanimated Yiddish heroines and plot structures, which in turn relied on Polish, German, and other European models, to attract readers and to sell novels. They did so because romance-adventures filled a gap within Hebrew culture, a gap that could be filled easily enough with the help of 1930s Yiddish *shund*, which was already circulating in Palestine.

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65 Douglas Robinson, "Pseudotranslation," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, ed. Mona Baker and Kirsten Malmkjaer (London: Routledge, 1998), 183.
66 Ben-Ari, "Popular Literature," 240.

SABINA'S RETURN

The continued circulation of the Yiddish *Sabina* in Israel, however, demonstrates that the persistence of Yiddish in Israeli popular culture was not only metaphorical. *Sabina* would not have been reprinted in Tel Aviv in the 1950s and the 1960s if there had not been readers and buyers. By the middle of the 1950s, when *Sabina* was being printed in Tel Aviv, the situation regarding Yiddish culture had changed in major ways. The thriving Yiddish cultural center in Warsaw that had produced the "original" *Sabina* had been destroyed by the Nazi genocide, along with its writers, publishers, and readers. Hebrew had been institutionalized in the structures of the new State of Israel, which could legislate what was and was not allowed with respect to cultural performances, newspapers, and publishing in other languages.

Still, there was a large and active population of Yiddish cultural producers and consumers in Israel, both in areas like Givʻat Aliyah, an immigrant neighborhood in Jaffa in which Yiddish language and culture were dominant in the 1950s,[67] and in cities like Tel Aviv, with its concentration of Yiddish writers and intellectuals.[68] As Gali Drucker Bar-Am argues, the multilingualism and cultural polyphony of Mandatory Palestine continued into the early years of Israeli statehood, prompting "a constant and ongoing process of negotiation, where the public seeks to express its cultural and structural variety, while governing institutions generally seek to unite it."[69] These negotiations differed across high and low cultural forms. Rachel Rojanski, surveying Yiddish culture in Israel in the 1950s, writes that "as long as there were sporadic popular attempts to revive Yiddish as a daily language, to present it as one of the languages of the Jewish people, and to bring it back on the Israeli street, the establishment rejected it, even fought against it. However, at the same time, the state's policy-makers favored the creation of a kind of small island of Yiddish culture that would allow it to be preserved, perhaps even developed, like an asset that every nation keeps in its pantheon of culture."[70] Rojanski concludes that until the 1960s, "a high culture in Yiddish developed, while a popular culture in Yiddish was relegated to the sidelines."[71] Drucker Bar-Am and Rojanski, as well as other scholars, have examined Yiddish belles lettres, newspapers, and theater in the 1950s and 1960s.[72] Popular fiction, and specifically works like *Sabina*, have received far less attention.

Whoever was buying the many installments of *Sabina* in the 1950s and 1960s was choosing to read for pleasure in Yiddish. *Sabina* was far from the only popular fiction in Yiddish being published in Israel at the time. Novels like *Klara: Di naye olah* (Klara: The new immigrant) and *Rutke: In flamen fun libe, laydnshaft, un nekome, an emese pasirung fun hayntikn Yisroel-lebn* (Rutke: In the flames of love, suffering, and revenge, a true adventure from contemporary life in Israel) targeted the same Yiddish readership in the 1950s.[73] Critical reactions to these texts shared the same atti-

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67 Rachel Rojanski, "The Struggle for a Yiddish Repertoire Theatre in Israel, 1950–1952," *Israel Affairs* 15, no. 1 (2009): 13.

68 Gali Drucker Bar-Am, "'Our Shtetl, Tel Aviv, Must and Will Become the Metropolis of Yiddish': Tel Aviv—a Center of Yiddish Culture?," *AJS Review* 41, no. 1 (April 2017): 113.

69 Ibid., 114.

70 Rachel Rojanski, "The Status of Yiddish in Israel, 1948–1951: An Overview," in *Yiddish after the Holocaust*, ed. Joseph Sherman (Oxford: Boulevard Books, 2004), 56.

71 Ibid.

72 Shachar Pinsker, "Choosing Yiddish in Israel: Yung Yisroel between Home and Exile, the Center and the Margins," in *Choosing Yiddish: New Frontiers of Yiddish Language and Culture*, ed. Lara Rabinovitch, Shiri Goren, and Hannah S. Pressman (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2013), 277–94.

73 I thank Elissa Sperling, from the Yiddish Book Center, for bringing these novels to my attention.

tudes toward multilingualism that were evident in the 1930s. In an article in *Ma'ariv* in 1954, David Giladi complained that *Sabina* was part of a terrible phenomenon plaguing Israeli society: the widespread publishing of "antinational" books and newspapers in languages other than Hebrew.[74] Statistics from the time support Giladi's perception that many Israelis were reading in languages other than Hebrew; Roberto Bachi found that fewer than 20 percent of adult immigrants to Israel in 1948–49 read books or newspapers in Hebrew.[75] Giladi's concerns about the threat of other languages—with Yiddish as the biggest threat, given his complaints about *Sabina*—recall the language debates from decades earlier. Popular fiction reflects the continued multilingualism of Israeli society, despite extensive efforts to replace immigrant languages with Hebrew.

Journalist Paula Apenshlak, writing in the leftist paper *'Al ha-mishmar*, offered a more sympathetic view of Israelis who read popular fiction in languages like Yiddish. The immigrant suburbs, she writes, suffer from high unemployment and crowded apartments. Workers make their way to the nearby city every day, work hard at mindless, physical jobs, and then return home to their crowded apartment blocks with no entertainment, nothing to do. As a result, she argues, they turn to easy-to-digest fiction, mass-produced "erotic, pornographic, or criminal novels." "*Sabina* and the like are distributed primarily in the suburbs populated by new immigrants. How does this novel attract the seamstress with the fingers that have been poked and the red-rimmed eyes, why does a mechanic returning from his work buy it, what encourages the mother with two small children to throw herself into this novel on the threshold of her apartment? It isn't the erotica or the pornography or the criminal themes. It isn't the imaginative novel or the many adventures and murders."[76] Apenshlak argues that books like *Sabina*, published in Yiddish, Romanian, Polish, Bulgarian, and even Arabic in Israel, serve as "opium" for these immigrants, a symbol of the government structures that have created these *Sabina* readers.[77] Invoking Karl Marx's critique of religion as the opium of the people, she issues a vaguely socialist call for the creation of alternative entertainments for the suburbs to combat *Sabina*: namely, encouraging people to leave the suburbs and explore nature. If people in the suburbs are left to their own devices, she warns, *Sabina* will continue to attract readers.

Apenshlak, like so many others, is critical of *Sabina*'s continued popularity, but she sees it as a symptom of broader social problems of the 1950s. Critics in the 1930s had seen *Sabina* and other romance-adventures as foreign products, imported to corrupt young Hebrew readers and thus fundamentally an ideological problem. Apenshlak, by contrast, sees these same books as a coping mechanism for immigrants mired in economic distress, giving them a way to escape their misery temporarily. Implicit in her argument is that *Sabina* is not literature but entertainment, in this case one of the only reliable and cheap forms of entertainment in multilingual immigrant communities. Earlier critics saw the foreignness and multilingualism of romance-adventures as threatening, but Apenshlak sees their translation and continued circulation as reflections of a multilingual, stratified society.

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74 David Giladi, "104 itonim mefitsim la'az be-Yisrael" [104 newspapers printed in foreign languages in Israel], *Ma'ariv*, 1 January 1954, 6.

75 Bachi, "Statistical Analysis," 222.

76 Paula Apenshlak, "'Sabina' ve-ha-parvarim" ["Sabina" and the suburbs], *Al ha-mishmar*, 17 September 1954, 5.

77 Ibid., 4.

CONCLUSION

Sabina, with its dedicated lovers, thrilling adventures, and never-ending cliff-hangers, did not survive in a variety of different languages and versions for decades because of its literary quality. *Sabina* survived because people kept buying it and texts like it, whether in Poland, Tel Aviv, Haifa, or the immigrant suburbs. Romance-adventures capitalized on textual reproducibility and readership demand, creating a literary marketplace in Israel that eschewed the formal institutions of Hebrew culture. Serialized texts could be modeled on popular foreign texts, produced quickly, and modified to suit local tastes. The formal features of genres like the romance-adventure—its formulaic nature, reliance on conventions, and minimal artistry—facilitated translation and replication in different languages. From the outset, publishers wanted to make a profit and designed texts to cater to local readers' tastes. That typically meant a thorough domestication of the text, renaming characters and setting the episodic plot in a familiar local environment and dismissing concerns about aesthetic value or translational fidelity. Authorial names mattered little to readers or publishers, who often omitted them from the printed volumes. While *Sabina* was attributed to the pseudonymous A. Klinger (literally, "a ringer") in Warsaw, neither *Aviva* nor later reprints of *Sabina* bothered to include an author. In the unstable publishing world of popular fiction, where presses appeared and disappeared on a regular basis, it did not matter whether the "original" text was provided by a Polish, Yiddish, or Hebrew writer, nor did the concept of "original" hold much power in formulaic genres. The short episodes of any popular novel could be scaled to fit a specific publication venue or an audience's taste, both in their translation and in their length. Whether we look back to the global success of Eugène Sue's *Les mystères de Paris* in the middle of the nineteenth century or to *Sabina* in the twentieth century, popular texts crossed linguistic and national boundaries because people wanted to read them and were willing to buy them.

But the linkage between popular fiction and multilingualism stigmatized both realms as "inferior." Widespread critical disparagement of popular fiction and its Yiddish roots was rarely challenged within Hebrew cultural discourse between 1930 and 1960. While cultural figures like Vladimir Jabotinsky and Avigdor Hame'iri defended detective novels and S. Y. Agnon's characters admitted to enjoying them, romance-adventures like *Sabina* were at the very bottom of the literary hierarchy. The fact that multilingualism flourished in such a "low" genre linked multilingualism to this illicit popular space, overshadowing other forms of literary multilingualism. The prevalence of translation from Yiddish, and later from English and other languages, reinforced the critical claims that popular fiction was foreign and undesirable. Even Apenshlak, who acknowledged the important social role that *Sabina* played, sought to replace multilingual popular fiction with more "suitable" kinds of entertainment.

It is difficult to quantify the readership or gauge the impact of popular novels like *Sabina* and *Aviva*, but multilingualism and popular fiction have had more influence in Israeli culture than critics have acknowledged. Zohar Shavit argues that non-canonized literature written (rather than translated) in Hebrew had little impact on Hebrew culture, since it disappeared relatively quickly, never achieved any degree of literary legitimacy, and was never studied by literary scholars.[78] But popular fiction in Hebrew and in other languages helped shape a mass readership in Israel and highlighted themes and fantasies that were outside the purview of mainstream Hebrew literature, whether in depictions of socioeconomic gaps in urban Tel Aviv or in bourgeois fantasies of love and villainy. If we subject these novels to the same literary analysis as contemporaneous novels by writers such as

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[78] Z. Shavit, "Hitpathut ha-sifrut ha-lo kanonit," 469.

Agnon, Yizhar, and Megged, then they will certainly be judged as lacking both artistry and depth. But if we examine these texts on their own terms, they represent complex orchestrations of generic formulas and fertile grounds for textual reproducibility. Ⓐ