

Foreign Coins in Hebrew Gold: Yaakov Fichman and the Gendered Economics of Translation

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ABSTRACT: In the first decades of the twentieth century, Hebrew writers and thinkers debated the topic of translation, considering the necessity for and best methods of translation into Hebrew. This essay explores writings by the poet and translator Yaakov Fichman, alongside those of his contemporaries, focusing on the economic and gender metaphors used to describe the activity of translation. I argue that through his metaphoric language Fichman sought symbolic justification for translation, in view of the anxiety surrounding the status of translated works in the nascent Zionist culture. Fichman posited translators as powerful stylistic and linguistic “billionaires” who stood to enhance and reform the language. Moreover, to bolster the status of the Hebrew translator, Fichman masculinized this activity, imagining the translator as a warrior who can conquer both the foreign work and the Hebrew language itself. Through this gendered economics of translation, Fichman strove to establish the productive value of translation within Zionist Hebrew culture, accomplishing his goal by using a patriarchal rhetoric of exclusion and subjugation.

IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY, the poet and essayist Yaakov Fichman devoted his attention to the issue of translation and its significance.¹ He published several essays on the topic, with two major contributions, both entitled “On Translations” (Al ha-tirgumim), appearing in 1913 (*Moledet*) and 1923 (*Ha-tekufah*). The two essays reveal Fichman’s approach to translation as a national endeavor—he couches the cultural and social value of translation in economic terms, using concepts such as “wealth,” “poverty,” “property,” and “capital.” With this

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¹ Fichman’s own translations from German into Hebrew included Johann Wolfgang Goethe’s *Roman Elegies* (1921) and Friedrich Hebel’s *Hordus and Miriam* (1922), as well as Heinrich Heine’s poetry.

metaphoric terminology, Fichman followed in the footsteps of the Hebrew poet Haim Nahman Bialik, who used extensive economic metaphors in his 1905 essay “Language Pangs” (Hevlei lashon).² But in contrast to Bialik, who strove to revive Hebrew internally, through an “ingathering” Hebrew-Hebrew dictionary, Fichman argued that translation from other languages into Hebrew was key to the language’s “enrichment.” Fichman also masculinized translation, using terms of power and conquest to suggest the importance of this activity and avoid its supposedly derivative connotations.

By triangulating gender, class, and ideology, Fichman could make a case for the necessity of translation within a Hebrew culture that was more focused on producing and publishing original works in the language. Through his metaphoric rhetoric, Fichman tried to convince his readers that even though translations, at this point in the history of Hebrew publishing, did not promise monetary profit for translators and publishers, they could enhance the symbolic power of the nascent Zionist Hebrew culture. Likewise, Ze’ev Jabotinsky initiated, in 1919, a publishing program in the pages of *Ha-arets*. As Zohar Shavit explains, original literature occupied a very marginal place in this program, in comparison to translated works of classical children’s literature, popular-science books, and other such “useful” literature.³

Such a pro-translation position was, however, far from obvious in the early twentieth century. In the first volume of *Hedim* (1922), for instance, the Hebrew writer Asher Barash claimed that “the reign of translations in our literature . . . delivers no doubt a death blow to our original literature.” He compares the supposed onslaught of translation to a strong wind blowing through a house of open windows, causing “our holy spirit” (*ruah kodshenu*) to become ill. Yet even Barash concedes at the end of this brief piece that the young reader who consumes translated literature might gain a taste for original writing in Hebrew, and then the day of the “national industry” would arrive.⁴ When considered in terms of Itamar Even-Zohar’s polysystem theory, Barash reacted ambivalently toward the central position attained by translated literature in the Hebrew polysystem, which allowed translations to vie for the status of original writing.⁵

Past and present scholars have described and assessed such tensions concerning the necessity for and function of translated literature in both the Yishuv and the Diaspora through the dichotomous terms of “lack” and “plenty.”⁶ Fichman likewise insisted, in 1913, on the supposed “poverty” of original Hebrew literature, in contrast to the recent “enrichment” of translated literature through newly published volumes.⁷ Interrogating Fichman’s metaphoric language of

² Haim Nahman Bialik, *Kitvei Haim Nahman Bialik* [Writings of Haim Nahman Bialik] (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1935), 215.

³ Zohar Shavit, “The Status of Translated Literature in the Creation of Hebrew Literature in the Pre-state Israel (the Yishuv Period),” *Meta: Translators’ Journal* 43, no. 1 (1998): 3–4.

⁴ Asher Barash, “He’arot ve-tsiyunim” [Comments and notes], *Hedim*, 1922, 40.

⁵ As Even-Zohar explains, one of the conditions in which translation becomes central to the literary polysystem is when “a literature is ‘young,’ in the process of being established,” or when there are “turning-points, crises, or literary vacuums in a literature.” Modern Hebrew literature in the Yishuv exhibited both of these conditions. Itamar Even-Zohar, “The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem,” *Poetics Today* 11, no. 1 (1990): 46–47.

⁶ Danielle Drori critically addresses such descriptions of Hebrew and its literary field as “lacking,” “inferior,” or “full of gaps,” offering instead a more variegated picture of the continuum between Hebrew and European literatures and the role of translation in early twentieth-century thought. Danielle Drori, “Fortresses and Open Cities: Debating Translation and Nation Formation in Early Twentieth Century Hebrew Literature” (PhD diss., New York University, 2018), 12–17.

⁷ Yaakov Fichman [Peli, pseud.], “Al ha-tirgumim” [On translations], *Moledet: Yarhon livnei ha-ne’urim* 4, nos. 2–5 (1913): 150.

wealth, status, and masculine power, I argue that the writer constructed translation into Hebrew as a highly selective procedure, one that required both the “strength” and the “means” of an already-established author who could undertake a translation of great magnitude, such as Bialik’s rendition of *Don Quixote*, composed between 1912 and 1923.⁸ Recognizing the previous dearth of translators, Fichman suggested that because of the creative power needed to undertake translations of “great literary works,” Bialik, Shaul Tchernichovsky, and Y. D. Berkovitch were among the few writers capable of such projects. His 1913 branding of translation as a prestigious male activity carried out by prominent national writers entailed the exclusion of writers who were not part of the literary elite because of their gender, age, or ethnicity. Through such metaphoric language, Fichman strove to confirm the status of translation as a male Zionist activity of central importance for his national culture.

THE SYMBOLIC ECONOMY OF TRANSLATION

“To study meaning as value is to place the problem of translation within the political economy of the sign,” writes Lydia Liu.⁹ She turns to Karl Marx’s comparison between translation and monetary transaction, alongside Pierre Bourdieu’s analysis of symbolic power, stressing the “mutual embeddedness of the economic and the cultural.” In other words, the inequality of supposedly equal linguistic exchanges can be compared to the inequalities of the marketplace, where trade does not guarantee an equivalence of actual labor time. According to Bourdieu, moreover, “[l]inguistic exchange . . . is also an economic exchange which is established within a particular symbolic relation of power between a producer, endowed with a certain linguistic capital, and a consumer (or a market)” who can obtain material or symbolic profit from the exchange. For Bourdieu, utterances function not only as a means of communication but also as “signs of wealth” and “signs of authority.”¹⁰ Liu further establishes that translation does not “guarantee the reciprocity of meaning between languages” but, instead, presents a “desire for meaning as value.” Translation creates equivalence where no such equivalence exists, thereby forcing one of the languages involved in the transaction to make certain sacrifices in order to appear commensurable with the other language.¹¹

In the early twentieth century, Hebrew, a language in the process of modernization, was not on equal standing with European national languages such as German, French, or Russian. Authors of Hebrew literature were well aware that at this point in their language’s development they had something to gain from translations, but they entertained different notions concerning how the process of translation should proceed, if at all. In 1923, Fichman referred to Hebrew as an “Eastern language” as opposed to Western languages. In his dichotomous thinking, European languages were “clear and solid” in contrast to the indeterminacy of Hebrew, which had not

⁸ While using these metaphoric concepts of poverty and wealth, Fichman also lamented, on a practical level, the high price tag of translated works and the lack of demand for them among Jewish readers in the Diaspora. For a discussion of Bialik’s translation, see Marianna Prigozhina, “Bialik’s Translation of *Don Quixote* (1912/1923),” in *The Russian Jewish Diaspora and European Culture, 1917–1937*, ed. Olga Tabachnikova, Jörg Schulte, and Peter Wagstaff (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 25–35.

⁹ Lydia Liu, “The Question of Meaning-Value in the Political Economy of the Sign,” in *Tokens of Exchange: The Problem of Translation in Global Circulations*, ed. Lydia Liu (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 21.

¹⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 66–67.

¹¹ Liu, “Question of Meaning-Value,” 35.

yet been well defined. Furthermore, Hebrew's expressive abilities were, from his viewpoint, far more limited and "narrow" in comparison to the "pictorial terms" of Western expression, which convey psychological nuances and varying shades of emotion.¹² In other words, Fichman devalued Hebrew when comparing it with other, particularly Western, languages, suggesting that Hebrew cannot pretend to be commensurable with the other languages from which it translates. Still, his comments were intended to spur writers and translators into action and to promote the "desire for meaning as value."

As Fichman maintained, in the process of translation into Hebrew, the writer had to reinvent the language rather than merely drawing on existing resources. In his terms, the translator is the "reformer of the Hebrew language, its renewer," even more so than the original writer in Hebrew. Aware of the "poverty" of the language and its literature, the translator could become a "witness to its flourishing." Without even "noticing it," the translator also came to share in "the property of the original work."¹³ The use of the term "property" (*rekhus*) suggests that Fichman viewed translation as an economic investment of sorts through which the translator and his literary culture stood to gain concrete value. The translator's activities compensated for the perceived unequal standing of Hebrew and its literature in comparison to other modern European languages.

When describing processes of translation in the early 1910s, Hebrew author S. Y. Agnon likewise foregrounded Hebrew's relative linguistic inadequacy, thereby claiming for the translators of the period a unique position as reformers and creators. Agnon recollects the years 1911 to 1913, when a group of Jaffa writers decided to publish a series of books, entitled *Yefet*, which collected classical literary translations from German, Russian, and English.¹⁴ Agnon explains that since "Hebrew still could not translate the meaning of a word, whoever translated from another language into Hebrew became a partner in the creation of the language [*le-ma'ase ha-lashon*]." Agnon's term *ma'ase ha-lashon* evokes the phrase *ma'ase ha-bri'ah*, "the act of creation," underscoring the importance of this work. He also depicts long days and nights of deliberations when terms that in other languages appeared "simple expressions" became, in Hebrew, "difficult and hard to comprehend."¹⁵ In this description, translation activities in prestatehood Palestine brought to the fore Hebrew's position as a language-in-the-making while also privileging translators as active molders of the language.

Zohar Shavit and Yaakov Shavit have argued that in the first two decades of the twentieth century, as the literary center in Palestine began to coalesce, translated literature was not in competition with original Hebrew literature but considered a "necessary condition" for the formation of a literary center that might sustain readers and publishing houses. In their view, only in the 1930s did an anxiety and sense of competition between original production and literary translation arise—paradoxically, after the literary center became more secure in its standing.¹⁶ Even when translated literature provoked more explicit anxiety in the 1930s, Barash's abovementioned opinion and Agnon's and Fichman's attempts to elevate the activities of translators as reformers all point to the tensions caused by the centrality of translated literature in the nascent Hebrew polysystem in

¹² Yaakov Fichman, "Al ha-tirgumim" [On translations] (originally published 1923), in *Kitvei Yaakov Fichman* [Writings of Yaakov Fichman] (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1959), 394.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 395.

¹⁴ The dearth of local translators into Hebrew, also noted by Agnon, brought about a heightened dependence on imported translations.

¹⁵ S. Y. Agnon, *Me-'atsmi el 'atsmi* [From myself to myself] (Tel Aviv: Schocken, 2000), 178.

¹⁶ Yaakov Shavit and Zohar Shavit, "Lemale et ha-arets sfarim" [To fill the land with books], *Hasifrut* 25 (1977): 47.

Palestine. In the first essay of 1913, Fichman explicitly counters the position that translated literature “blurs the form of original Hebrew literature,” therefore threatening original production in the language.¹⁷ Ten years later, he avoided the dichotomy between anti- or pro-translation viewpoints and, instead, sought to investigate what he termed the “interior side of things,” or the “theory of translation” (*torat ha-tirgumim*).¹⁸ In both essays, nonetheless, Fichman developed a metaphoric system that would justify the need to engage in Hebrew translation and prescribe how translation should be approached.

In the 1913 piece, signed under the pseudonym Peli, Fichman advanced a Hegelian dialectic according to which the translator is simultaneously a “slave and a master” in relationship to the original text.¹⁹ In other words, even when remaining “faithful” to the original work, the translator cannot and should not forgo “his own presence,” or erase his own freedom and creativity.²⁰ In this manner, Fichman tried to ward off the supposedly feminizing effects of translation. As Lori Chamberlain established in her by now classical essay “Gender and the Metaphorics of Translation,” the “fidelity” of a translation to its original source has long been described as that of a loyal wife/subject, and the original author has been compared to a husband/father. Moreover, “[t]his regulation is a sign of the father’s authority and power. . . . As in marriage, so in translation, there is a legal dimension to the concept of fidelity”; it guarantees and makes visible the paternity of the child.²¹ Precisely because translation threatens to erase the distinction between production and reproduction, the metaphoric language of “faithfulness” and legitimacy has been used to police gender and uphold the symbolic power of the translating culture.

The case of an emerging Hebrew Zionist culture heightened the patriarchal need to reverse the master/slave dialectic and encode translation, in Fichman’s terms, as a male activity, which can thereby appear as a productive and creative endeavor. For this purpose, Fichman insisted on the translator’s freedom, rather than obedient “faithfulness,” and suggested that translation produced in a state of utter servitude, through the erasure of the translator, may only result in a “stillbirth” (*ubar she-nolad met*), a fetus without spirit and soul.²² In other words, a feminized translation that is merely reproductive or “re-creative,” to borrow from Chamberlain, does not, in this theory, bring about a live progeny.²³ Fichman’s ambivalence toward the maternal role and his desire to endow the translator with the status of author and originator led him also to compare the translator to a prophet who “creates through the Holy Spirit.” He viewed the “successful translation” as a work that has received its “spiritual awakening” (from Aramaic, *it’aruta*) from the “old work” and the “original creator.”²⁴ Like the prophet who directly communicates with God, the (male) translator, in Fichman’s image, channels the original work in a spiritual manner rather than through the bodily means of reproduction.

¹⁷ Fichman, “Al ha-tirgumim” (1913), 150–51.

¹⁸ Fichman, “Al ha-tirgumim” (1923), 390.

¹⁹ The original manuscript of the “Peli” piece has been preserved in the Yaakov Fichman archive (in Gnazim Archive, Beit Ariela, Israel), 28725A.

²⁰ Fichman, “Al ha-tirgumim” (1913), 151–52.

²¹ Lori Chamberlain, “Gender and the Metaphorics of Translation,” *Signs* 13, no. 3 (1988): 461, 465.

²² “אם המתרגם יאמר לבטל את עצמו לגמרי בפני המקור, עבודתו פסולה: התרגום יהיה אולי נאמן בצורתו החיצונית, אך לא יהיה פנימי יותר יהיה עובר שנולד מת, בלי רוח ונשמה” Fichman, “Al ha-tirgumim” (1913), 152.

²³ Chamberlain, “Gender and the Metaphorics of Translation,” 466.

²⁴ Fichman, “Al ha-tirgumim,” in Yaakov Fichman archive, 28725A.

In this early essay, Fichman also acknowledged his debt to the writer and essayist Micha Yosef Berdichevsky, specifically to his thoughts on translation in *Ba-shirah u-va-lashon* (In poetry and language). For Berdichevsky, “translating from one tongue to another is a kind of creation [*bri'ah*] and a work of art rather than a mechanical task.” As a result, the translator must make changes to the original work, adapting it to the target language and its “spirit.”²⁵ To this Fichman added that the translator’s own “personality” also leaves its mark on the translation. Fichman, however, unlike Berdichevsky, frames the imagery of the translator as inspired creator in economic terms. In the subsequent section of his 1913 essay, he explains that any attempt to “blur” or “erase” the translator’s own selfhood would result in a “loss” rather than a “gain.” Thus, “the translated work would be enriched with a ‘minus’ rather than a ‘plus,’” since without his own “self” the translator cannot “give” anything. The terms “minus” and “plus” appear, in Hebrew, as Latin terms, universalizing thereby the significance of this translational economy.²⁶ Fichman uses the examples of Mendele (S. Y. Abramovitch) and Bialik, whom he calls the “billionaires of language,” since whatever they translate attains the seal of “linguistic richness and stylistic sophistication” even when the original work was written in a “simple and poor” language.²⁷

Significantly, through these metaphors Fichman reversed the power relations between Hebrew and other languages, positioning the Hebrew translator as an affluent lord rather than an impoverished servant. The transition into Hebrew not only enriched this language but could also elevate the original work. Fichman resolved in this manner the economic and cultural imbalance between Hebrew and other languages, expressing his desire for Hebrew symbolic “wealth,” achieved through translation. He considered those translators who do not slavishly erase themselves when they render a literary work into Hebrew to be “billionaires” who stand to enrich the translated work rather than lose in status or possessions as a result of their engagement in translation. The self-effacing translator, by contrast, detracts from the target language and its culture.

THE VALUE OF TRANSLATION: BRENNER AND FICHMAN

Fichman’s 1913 essay and its gendered economic metaphors stood in conversation with the Hebrew writer Y. H. Brenner’s thought on translation. In addition to publishing his own translations from German and Russian into Hebrew, Brenner developed his views on translation in essays such as “Me-‘olam sifroteinu” (1908, From the world of our literature) and the review essay “Yefet” of 1913. Fichman’s own “Al ha-tirgumim” of 1913 culminated with a critique of the first *Yefet* volume of translations, published in 1911, and especially of Meir Vilkinski’s rendition of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s 1774 *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (*The Sorrows of Young Werther*). Similarly, for Brenner in 1913, Vilkinski’s translation read as though the author was forced to undertake it rather than translating out of a deep connection to the work. When the

²⁵ Micha Yosef Berdichevsky, *Shirah ve-lashon: Mivhar masot u-reshimot* [Poetry and language: A collection of essays and reflections] (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1987), 119.

²⁶ “היציירה המתורגמת תתעשר במיניוֹס’ ולא בפלוֹס’ יען כי חלקָ עֲצִמִיּוֹתַי אֵין בְּכַחוֹ שֶׁל סוֹפֵר לַתּוֹרָה כְּלוּם.” Fichman, “Al ha-tirgumim” (1913), 289.

²⁷ Ibid. While Bialik, prior to 1913, was known primarily for his translation of Cervantes’s *Don Quixote*, which Fichman extols, Abramovitch had engaged in multiple projects of self-translation from his Yiddish oeuvre into Hebrew. In other words, when alluding to the “simple and poor” source language, Fichman could well have meant Yiddish, a language traditionally feminized.

translator's "soul" does not become involved in the process of translation, he is slavishly bound, according to Brenner, to the original work, unable to produce a truly readable Hebrew version.²⁸

In his earlier, 1908 essay, Brenner called into question the choice to translate Henrik Ibsen's drama *Nora* into Hebrew rather than produce modern renditions of classical works such as *Hamlet* and *Faust*.²⁹ He was critical of the attention paid to the recent work rather than to classical literature. He further prioritized original production in Hebrew over a translation such as that of Ibsen's *Nora*, since the small readership for books in Hebrew meant that the press would not gain any profit from the Ibsen translation. The Warsaw press Sifrut, which published *Nora*, did a disservice to its Hebrew readers, in Brenner's view, feeding them "hay" rather than original gold. Brenner added to these metaphors a more literal financial argument: while readers could buy such international works as *Nora* for "cheap" in a "living language," some of them were forced to pay more for the Hebrew translation since they read only in this language.³⁰ In this line of argumentation, the dearth of Hebrew readers and the absence of a market for Hebrew publications, whether original works or translations, render this language into a dead one, at least in comparison to prevalent European languages.

A translator of Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Gerhart Hauptmann, Brenner did not altogether dismiss the need for translations into Hebrew but objected to the particular value system that automatically put a translated European work at a higher status than an original Hebrew text. He used the loaded term "value" (*erekh*) immediately following his discussion of the actual cost of translated Hebrew books and the insignificant market for them. Brenner claimed that Bialik's national "rage poems" (*shirei ha-za'am*) have no less "general value" or "human value" than the new general European literature that has adopted "fancy" techniques and takes "pride in them." He sought, through such formulations, to change how his readers might understand literary "value": he did not subscribe to recent literary fashions or believe in the inherent value of European literature; rather, the value of the literary work did not depend, for him, on the language in which it was written or on its cultural origins. Consequentially, Brenner contended that "we should begin to change the 'values' of self-deprecation in relationship to anything that is 'general' and lack of appreciation toward anything that is ours."³¹ In Danielle Drori's words, Brenner oscillated in his relationship to translation, allowing for "a dialectical definition of cultural exchange within an inherently hierarchical literary landscape."³² Brenner strove for an equivalence between Hebrew and other languages by devaluing literary trends and marketplace considerations and suggesting that the humanistic value of a work of art can be detached from the language and context in which it was produced.

In contrast to Brenner's hesitant relationship to translation, Fichman's 1913 essay stressed, more emphatically, the importance of "enriching" Hebrew with translations from other literatures, while maintaining a high quality of language and form. A decade later, in his 1923 essay, Fichman revised, however, his former position regarding the need for a translated work to be

²⁸ Yosef Haim Brenner, "Yefet" (originally published 1913), in *Ktavim* [Writings], vol. 4 (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1985), 1067, 1069.

²⁹ Yosef Haim Brenner, "Me-'olam sifreinu" [From the world of our literature] (originally published 1908), in *Kol kitvei Y. H. Brenner* [Complete writings of Y. H. Brenner] (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibutz Ha-meuhad, 1978), 240.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Danielle Drori, "Literary Fortresses: Translation and 'World Literature' in Y. H. Brenner's *Beyond the Borders* and 'From the World of Our Literature,'" *Prooftexts* 36, no. 1 (2017): 208–9.

“close in its spirit and substance to the translator,” a position that Brenner himself adopted from Fichman in 1913.³³ As previously, he explained his shift of conception through economic and gendered metaphors: a poet who “surrenders only to himself” often has “limited powers and means” and is not truly a “free” master who avoids self-erasure. This kind of restricted author needs to select works for translation that match his style, whereas those with more developed means and abilities would do better translating works distant from them. If they push themselves beyond their own borders, they will not be impoverished, Fichman contended, but “will enrich themselves” and enhance the translated work in the process.³⁴

Fichman concurred, in the 1923 essay, with the Zionist A. D. Gordon’s view, which he cites, on the necessity of a degree of self-effacement in the translation process: “The translator’s power becomes evident when, after a battle with himself, he can forge a path to the foreign.” For Gordon, this argument has an ethical dimension as well: the struggle to approximate the original work is less deceiving, more ethical. For Fichman, this approach implies a balance between “two foreign forces,” since the artist can never fully relinquish or deny his own self.³⁵ The aspiration, however, should be to remain close to the original work, to the foreign. Such translational activity was bound, moreover, to transform the translator and leave its marks, or else deep engravings, in his soul. However, Fichman did not conceive of translation as merely an individual activity but also as a national one, enabling the accumulation of “the joint, public capital.”³⁶

Fichman framed his discussion of the translator’s selfhood and the “power” that a translator needs to complete “his” task in masculine terms, imagining the translator as a combatant who stands to endow Hebrew literature with its measure of “power” and “courage.”³⁷ The Hebrew phrase *ba’al emtsa’im*, “a person of wealth,” becomes the metaphoric link, for Fichman, between literary “strength” and gender: the writer with such “means” can “storm and conquer the fortress of the foreign poetry.”³⁸ Fichman also compares the weaker, more limited translator to one who receives “loot without battle.” The tougher artist, by contrast, selects to translate difficult works because resistance and battle further awaken his powers and make them even stronger.³⁹ In this manner, Fichman joins a long tradition, discussed by Chamberlain, of comparing translation to military conquest, with the suggestion that translation expands political borders, not merely literary ones.⁴⁰

As in his earlier essay, here too Fichman posited the translator as an original creator, even when rendering works that are more distant from his own form and style. Such sentiment culminates in the following statement: “[The translator] also needs to dare, to perform dangerous leaps, to rape the language, when it refuses to give that which he cannot do without. Sometimes, he must exert sevenfold more effort than the original writer. At other times, he must truly create something from nothing [*yesh me-’ayin*].”⁴¹ In “assaulting” the language—*lashon*, a feminine noun in Hebrew—the male translator proves that he is equal to the “original writer” or even

³³ Fichman, “Al ha-tirgumim” (1923), 393.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 390.

³⁷ Ibid., 394–95.

³⁸ Ibid., 394.

³⁹ Ibid., 393. Danielle Drori maintains that Ahad Ha’am’s attempts to measure the “strength” of Hebrew language and literature “had a lasting impact on Hebrew writers in his time.” Drori, “Fortresses and Open Cities,” 70.

⁴⁰ Chamberlain, “Gender and the Metaphorics of Translation,” 459–60.

⁴¹ Fichman, “Al ha-tirgumim” (1923), 394.

better or stronger to some extent. The translator defines his creativity, the ability to produce something new in the language, through such “daring” linguistic abilities. In turn, Fichman likens the resistance of Hebrew to such endeavors to a woman’s withholding of sexual favors. Rather than promoting the ethics of translation, rape and plunder became Fichman’s strategy for “enriching” Zionist Hebrew culture with foreign works.

More confident, by 1923, in the status of Hebrew culture and its literary center, Fichman revised his position from a decade earlier regarding the necessary “freedom” of the translator from the original work. Nonetheless, his economic gendering of the task of the Hebrew translator remained a constant component of his writing on the subject, and even became more predominant in the later essay. Fichman masculinized the activity of translation and endowed it with cultural value, if not actual currency. Both his essays position Hebrew and its culture on the impoverished side of the translation equation while promoting the “enrichment” of this language through literary translations. Fichman’s economic metaphors depended, as we have seen, on terms of personal and national power, alluding to the master/slave dialectic, as well as to the battlefield. He compared translation to the conquering of a fortress, a triumph that can be achieved through artistic “strength.”⁴²

At the same time, in order to produce a long-lasting translation, the author also needed to start off with sufficient means—whether described as a “billionaire of language” or a powerful artist. Despite the possibility of Hebrew literature’s accrual of new “wealth” through translation, Fichman’s standpoint was grounded in a static conception of the artist in terms of aesthetic prestige and abilities. A writer who also translates possessed, for Fichman, an abundance of literary powers, allowing him to “stamp foreign coins from his own gold.”⁴³ Insisting on this high, or else “golden,” translation standard, Fichman’s essays promoted those writers and translators who had already proven their powers in the literary field, the established “billionaires.” His economic metaphoric system conveyed the “desire for meaning as value” while asserting the symbolic power of writers who already constituted the Hebrew cultural elite.

Fichman’s rhetoric exhibits what Sherry Simon has called the “remarkable” “historical continuity of gendered theorizing of translation”—that is, the persistent use of “sexist language to describe translation.”⁴⁴ The metaphors that appear in Fichman’s writings import into Hebrew culture long-standing European views of translation as a stamp of “fidelity,” promoting metaphoric gender divisions that convey an awareness and fear of translation’s power to undermine such divisions. The repeated references to the power and wealth accumulated through translation served Fichman to solidify the symbolic profit of this activity. At the same time, through his gendered language, Fichman strove to ward off the potential confusion of translation with lack of creativity or derivative reproduction. Translation, for him, was a conquest of both the Hebrew language and the foreign work: “The great translator does not merely carry and fetch: he wins and profits others; sows and grows; he sums up, tallies the treasures.”⁴⁵ If Zionist Hebrew culture stood to benefit from these fruits or treasures, produced through the work of Fichman’s “great

⁴² Ibid., 396.

⁴³ Ibid., 390.

⁴⁴ Sherry Simon, *Gender in Translation: Cultural Identity and the Politics of Transmission* (London: Routledge, 1996), 10, 9.

⁴⁵ המתרגם הגדול אינו רק המוליך והמביא: הוא הזוכה והמוכה, הזורע והמצמיח; הוא המסכם, המונה את האצרות. הוא העד “לשגשוגה של הספרות; הוא המכיר את דלותה. כל רכוש היצירה המקורית יפול בחלקו מבלי משים; הוא השולחני של התקופה Fichman, “Al ha-tirgumim” (1923), 395.

translators,” we also need to consider what practices and forms of translation were suppressed in the process of cultural and national consolidation. A