

Hidden Contiguities: Zalman Shneour and Leonid Andreyev, David Vogel and Peter Altenberg

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ABSTRACT: The map of modern Jewish literature is made up of contiguous cultural environments. Rather than a map of territories, it is a map of stylistic and conceptual intersections. But these intersections often leave no trace in a translation, a quotation, a documented encounter, or an archived correspondence. We need to reconsider the mapping of modern Jewish literature: no longer as a defined surface divided into territories of literary activity and publishing but as a dynamic and often implicit set of contiguities. Unlike comparative research that looks for the essence of literary influence in the exposure of a stylistic or thematic similarity between works, this article discusses two cases of “hidden contiguities” between modern Jewish literature and European literature. They occur in two distinct contact zones in which two European Jewish authors were at work: Zalman Shneour (Shklov, Belarus, 1887–New York, 1959), whose early work, on which this article focuses, was done in Tsarist Russia; and David Vogel (Podolia, Russia, 1891–Auschwitz, 1944), whose main work was done in Vienna after the First World War.

PRIOR TO MODERN JEWISH NATIONALISM becoming a pragmatic political organization, modern Jewish literature arose as an essentially nonsovereign literature. It embraced multinational contexts and was written in several languages. This literature developed in late nineteenth-century Europe on a dual basis: it expressed the immanent national foundations of a Jewish-national renaissance, as well as being deeply inspired by the host environment. It presents a fascinating case study for recent research on transnational cultures, since it escapes any stable borderline and instead manifests conflictual tendencies of disintegration and reintegration, enclosure and permeability, outreach and localism.¹

¹ Emily S. Rosenberg, ed., *A World Connecting: 1870–1945* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), 4–23.

The map of modern Jewish literature is made up of contiguous cultural environments. Rather than a map of territories, it is a map of stylistic and conceptual intersections. But these intersections often vanish as soon as they appear: not always leaving a notable trace in a translation, a quotation, a documented encounter, or an archived correspondence. Contacts between literatures usually remain implicit, lacking a clear scene of appearance. And even where there is one—the coffeehouses of Vienna or Paris, for instance, which Russian Jewish writers would frequent alongside Viennese and French writers, or, for instance, the Jewish lending libraries of the Ukraine, Lithuania, or Poland, where one could choose between Hebrew literature, Yiddish literature, and Russian literature — the meaning of these connections is still not easily teased out.

The cultural affinities of transnational phenomena are only now starting to be investigated: How to consider migrant national literatures? How to define the “resident-alien” cultures existing inside the maze of major continental cultures? And most importantly, is it even possible to trace the network of contiguities given that they are often discreet, hidden, or even denied?²

This article discusses two cases of “hidden contiguities” between modern Jewish literature and European literature. They occur in two geographically very distinct contact zones in which, during the first half of the twentieth century, two European Jewish authors were at work: Zalman Shneour (Shklov, Belarus, 1887–New York, 1959), whose early work, on which this article focuses, was done in Tsarist Russia; and David Vogel (Podolia, Russia, 1891–Auschwitz, 1944), whose main work was done in Vienna after the First World War.

Shneour and Vogel are among the modern Jewish authors whose work carries prominent signs of European influence. Some of the major scholars on Shneour’s work have already pointed out the influence of the Russian author Leonid Andreyev on the early bilingual stories Shneour wrote in the first decade of the twentieth century.³ Vogel’s name has often been mentioned among those of other Jewish writers active in Vienna before and after the First World War, and his close affiliation with Viennese Jewish writers like Arthur Schnitzler, Jakob Wasserman, and Peter Altenberg has already been noted. Gershon Shaked, the literary scholar, put it most radically when he argued that Vogel’s major novel, *Married Life* (1929–30), is an “Austrian-Viennese novel that happens to be written in Hebrew.”⁴

It is hard, however, to find any real traces of contact between these artists, whether in the form of reading or translation or by way of encounters or correspondences. Both Andreyev and Altenberg had far more prominent followers in modern Jewish literature. Moreover, Shneour and Vogel explicitly refused to recognize Andreyev and Altenberg as their sources of inspiration. Their reserved positions toward these writers were documented in their correspondences. Hence, instead of following a path of intersections, we find ourselves facing sophisticated strategies of refusal.

And indeed, at the very heart of the cultural nexus of modern Jewish literature in Europe are hidden contiguities, which cannot be quantified, ruled out, or confirmed. If they are to be uncovered, one must yield the marked outline of a Jewish culture in general and of a Hebrew

² For a review of some of the major consequences of the transnational or global turn, see Mark Wollaeger and Matt Eatough, eds., *Global Modernisms* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 3–22.

³ Zalman Reizen, editor of the famous compendium of Yiddish writers, was the first to suggest a link between Shneour’s early fiction and that of Andreyev. Zalman Reizen, “Z. Shneour,” in *Lexicon von yiddishe Schreibern* [Lexicon for Yiddish writers] (Vilnius: B. Klazkin, 1928), 7–815.

⁴ Gershon Shaked, postscript in David Vogel, *Hayeh nisu'im* [Married life], ed. Menachem Peri (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1986), 335–36. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

national culture specifically. Any essentialist definition of Jewish literature must be given up in favor of the question of its function and the transient lines that intersect and touch it. It is in this context that Anita Norich wrote:

Indeed the question of what constitutes Jewish literature is as intractable as any other question about identity, as likely to run the risk of offering essentialist definitions as it is to produce imprecise assertions about hybridity or multicultural influences. This dissatisfaction with all the signs we attach to Jewish literature has nothing to do with the criticism or theory but rather with the question itself. It cannot be resolved categorically, but only and always situationally, contextually, changing as the history of the Jews and their lived experience within or among other groups changes.⁵

Underlying this article is the need to reconsider the mapping of modern Jewish literature: no longer as a defined surface divided into territories of literary activity and publishing but as a dynamic system of contiguities. This is where it distinguishes itself from comparative research that looks for the essence of literary influence in the exposure of a stylistic or thematic similarity between works.

By the notion of contiguity I aim to describe how modern Jewish literature crosses its own imagined boundary.⁶ Replacing the borderline which one way or another seals off modern Jewish literature, setting it apart from neighboring or host literatures, I would like to talk in terms of “contact zones” within which temporary contact between literatures is likely to occur.⁷

ZALMAN SHNEOUR AND LEONID ANDREYEV

On the publication of his first collection of stories in 1901, Leonid Andreyev (1871–1919) immediately became one of the most widely read authors in Russia. This collection and many of the stories he wrote close in time to the 1905 revolution present realistic and piercing descriptions of the economic and social situation in Tsarist Russia, reflecting the growing forces of protest against the Romanovs. Andreyev’s stories often focus on inadvertent revolutionaries, like the six men and one woman who have been sentenced to death and are awaiting execution in the novella *The Seven Who Were Hanged* and like the French prisoner on hunger strike in the story “The Marseillaise.” Baffled revolutionaries, they are broken in body and spirit, violent in the face of desperate indifference. More than pointing at the revolution’s ideological dimension, they testify to its inevitability and to the near madness to which it gives rise.

The realism of Andreyev’s stories attracted a large readership from among Russia’s Jews. These were multilingual readers who, in addition to Russian literature, also read Yiddish literature and sometimes modern Hebrew literature as well. Andreyev was one of the Russian writers whose work

⁵ Anita Norich, “Hebraism and Yiddishism: Paradigms of Modern Jewish Literary History,” in *Modern Jewish Literature: Intersections and Boundaries*, ed. Sheila E. Jelen, Michael P. Kremer, and L. Scott Lerner (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 311.

⁶ The notion of contiguity derives from Dan Miron’s *From Continuity to Contiguity: Toward a New Jewish Literary Thinking* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010). Here Miron presents the principles for a new historiography of modern Jewish literature centering on the dynamic surface and varying contexts from which it evolves. This is how Miron defines his use of the term “contiguity”: “the state of being a borderline, being in contact with something” (305).

⁷ In making this argument I rely on the ecological discourse concerning modern Jewish literature which Avidov Lipsker has been developing. Avidov Lipsker, *Ekologia shel Sifrut [Ecology of Literature]* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University, 2019).

formed a central part of the literary (and political) education of Jewish readers and writers in Russia at the turn of the twentieth century. His extensive popularity among the modern Jewish readership in Russia of the early twentieth century has been described in detail by Hamutal Bar-Yosef.⁸

There were several reasons why Andreyev's short stories and dramas found their way into modern Jewish literature. Probably the main one was the political profile of this fiction, which Bar-Yosef describes as "traumatic moments of disillusion with humanism and romanticism."⁹ Frederick H. White argues, "His stories and plays reflected the political and social turmoil of the last days of the Romanov dynasty."¹⁰ But the apparently most relevant explanation for the popularity of Andreyev's writing among Jewish readers can be found in an unsigned review of the novella *The Red Laughter* (*Der royter gelakhter*) printed in the New York Yiddish paper *Die warheit* on 16 December 1905.¹¹ The story was written in 1904 against the background of Russia's defeat by Japan. It is in the first-person singular and comes in the form of a collection of fragments taken from the diary of a Russian army officer who participated in the battle. These fragments render the soldiers' terror and near madness on the battlefield. The article in *Die warheit* says about Andreyev's style that it is neither realism nor fantasy but rather "a fantasy that outdoes realism in its realism, truer than the truth." The Jewish readers of the story transferred the traumatic battle scenes from the war with Japan to the violent riots against Jewish communities in Russia in the wake of the failed 1905 revolution. The writer of the article mentions this explicitly: "Now, all the cities in which the Jews lived turned into provinces, territories of the red laughter. Like a dangerous, infectious disease, like a plague, the red laughter took possession of the land, casting eternal darkness, and each and every one fell victim to this disease."¹² At the time this article was written, Jewish communities throughout Russia had indeed started to suffer from waves of violence. On the very day this review was published, the paper's headline was "Riga Is Burning," and reports focused on the fate of the local Jewish community.

The most important source of influence of Andreyev's writing on the Jewish reading public seems to have been his realistic stories about the revolution. They gave him the reputation of being an author who offers "[a] depiction of contemporary society in which people had lost their moral compass having fallen into the 'black abyss' of individualism and decadence."¹³ This was a position that resonated powerfully with the readers of modern Jewish literature. Thus, for instance, the novella *The Seven Who Were Hanged* (1908), which follows the last chapter in the lives of five revolutionaries and two others who are awaiting execution, was translated into Yiddish in three versions, the first of which appeared in Vilnius in the same year that the novella was first published.¹⁴

⁸ Hamutal Bar-Yosef, "The Reception of Leonid Andreyev in Hebrew and Yiddish Literature," *Symposium* 58 (Fall 2004): 139–51.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 143.

¹⁰ Yuri Leving and Frederick H. White, *Marketing Literature and Posthumous Legacies: The Symbolic Capital of Leonid Andreev and Vladimir Nabokov* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013), 5.

¹¹ Unsigned review of *Der royter gelakhter* [The red laughter], by Leonid Andreyev, *Die warheit*, 16 December 1905, 4.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Leving and White, *Marketing Literature*, 21.

¹⁴ Leonid Andreyev, *A derzeilung vegen sieben gehangene* [The seven who were hanged], *Die welt* (Vilnius), 1908; *Erzeilungen vegen sieben gehangene*, trans. Noach Prilotzky (New York: Literarische Verlag, 1916); *Die sieben gehangene: Tragedie in sechs bilder*, trans. Zvi Hersh and Philip Krantz (Vilnius: H. Matz, 1924, 1930).

But translation is only one contiguity — albeit the most obvious and explicit — between modern Jewish literature and Russian literature. There are other contiguities through which Andreyev's work entered the minds of contemporary Jewish readers. Thus, for instance, his presence in the Jewish press should be considered as well. Already from 1903 Andreyev's work is mentioned in both the Yiddish and the Hebrew press. These references follow Andreyev's work and include literary reviews of some of his books. Also included are news items relating to his public appearances, his contacts with the authorities, and his struggles with censorship.¹⁵

Andreyev's work took a particularly central place during the first decade of the century in the Hebrew newspaper *Ha-zman*, published in Vilnius. If one could choose a contact zone where Andreyev's work was especially important, it may well have been in the Jewish literary center constituted by Vilnius during those years. Vilnius's Jewish literary center emerged around the venerable publishing house the Widow and Brothers Rom, which published a canonical edition of the Babylonian Talmud as well as modern Hebrew literature; and around the editorial offices of new newspapers like *Ha-zman*, *'Olam Katan*, *Die Zeit*, and *Falks Zeitung*, which attracted to Vilnius many writers, editors, and translators from all over Russia. One of these guest writers published a short piece in *Ha-zman* in 1907 describing a visit to Vilnius's Jewish cemetery. The author renders his impressions of the revolution and the subsequent bloody riots with explicit overtones of Andreyev's writing: "The strong life instinct that unconsciously exists within me breaks out when it comes into contact with the brain, from all the cracks and hidden places in my being, giving me a very special kind of pleasure. It laughs in the face of death, in the face of that 'prophet dressed in gray' which Leonid Andreyev brought to light through his symbolic mysticism."¹⁶ This is just one of many references to Andreyev's writing in Vilnius's *Ha-zman* in the first decade of the century. Indeed, some of the Jewish writers most closely associated with Andreyev's work visited Vilnius in those years. One of them was Zalman Shneour. Arriving in Vilnius for the first time in 1904, Shneour started work at the editorial office of *Ha-zman*. He stayed in the city for about a year, until the start of the revolution, when Vilnius's Jewish papers, including *Ha-zman*, closed temporarily. Shneour left for Warsaw and returned only at the end of 1905. It was during his stay in Vilnius that he wrote the stories in which readers and critics identified Andreyev's influence. A major one of these is the Yiddish story "Revenge" (Nekome), published in Vilnius in 1906. Shneour describes the return of a student to his parents' home in a small town, having received news of his brother's death and his mother's injury in a pogrom. Another central work in the corpus of Shneour's early writings is the bilingual story of a pogrom entitled "On the Shores of the Dniester" (Oyfn baide zaiten Dniester), which was also printed in Vilnius, in the *Falks Zeitung*.¹⁷ The story, taking place somewhere in Bessarabia in 1905, presents the testimony of one of the survivors of a pogrom against the Jewish population of a town in the area. Shneour's early work is notable for its stylized politicization of literary representation. In part it appears in the form of a lament about the loss, as in the story "Revenge," and in part it

¹⁵ Among the periodical publications in which Andreyev's name features regularly during the first decade of the twentieth century are the Yiddish daily *Der freynd*, published in Saint Petersburg; the Yiddish daily *Di vurhait*, published in New York; the Hebrew paper *Ha-tsifra* and the Hebrew periodical *Ha-dor*, which were both published in Warsaw.

¹⁶ "Feuilleton katan: Reshimot porhot ve-kvarim" [A small feuilleton: Flying lists and graves], *Ha-zman*, 28 July 1907, x.

¹⁷ The Hebrew version of this story was included in the collection of Shneour's short stories: *Min ha-ḥayim ve-ha-mavet* [From life and death] (Warsaw: Tushiya, 1907).

is presented through a piercing realism as in “On the Shores of the Dniester.” The events of the revolution are inextricably part of the incidents presented here, tying Shneour’s story to Russia’s social-political history, much as they tie it to the chronicle of Jewish catastrophes.

Some less direct implications concerning Andreyev’s influence on Shneour’s work can be found in an interesting article in *Ha-zman* of January 1907. This piece centers on the argument that Jewish writers have been “exploiting” the drama of the revolution by highlighting it in their work. The anonymous author reviews the Jewish literature printed in 1906, the year in which “Revenge” was published: “And if some of our writers should be blamed for unduly exploiting the revolution, they are the writers associated with the *Falks Zeitung*. The [illegible] in literature sometimes spoils even the work of the greatest talents (as the Russian writers rightly complain . . . in the revolutionary stories of Gorki, Andreyev, . . . and others).”¹⁸ Even though Shneour’s name is not mentioned in this article, his story “Revenge” can be assumed to have been one of the stories the writer of the above passage has in mind. A further suggested contiguity between Andreyev’s and Shneour’s work lies in the fact that Shneour sent his two early short stories “Revenge” and “On the Shores of the Dniester,” immediately on publication, to the Hebrew writer Yosef Haim Brenner, who was living in London at the time.¹⁹ Brenner, in those days, was the editor of the Hebrew periodical *Ha-meorer*, in which Shneour published work and which also discussed Andreyev’s writing. In 1907 Brenner even published a Yiddish translation of Andreyev’s “The Marseillaise.”²⁰ Shneour may have assumed that his stories would find a sympathetic reader in Brenner exactly because of their affinity with Andreyev’s style. Shneour himself, moreover, may well have been an experienced interpreter of the links between Andreyev’s writing and Jewish Russian modernism of those times. Thus, in a casual comment, in a letter to Brenner, he makes sure to mention: “Right now I am in Hirschbein’s apartment. He’s writing a new play.”²¹ The writer and dermatologist Peretz Hirschbein, who was also in Vilnius in the years around the first revolution, was one of the earliest, and perhaps most prominent, Jewish writers to be influenced by Andreyev.

To this must be added Shneour’s own account from those years. This account confirms all the historical and textual traces that have already been identified in the Vilnius contact zone between Shneour’s and Andreyev’s output. On 17 March 1905, Shneour writes his nightmarish impressions of the bloody events in Warsaw, earlier that month, in a letter to his Vilnius friend, the editor of *Ha-zman*, the author Y. D. Berkowitz: “Just now I have seen all fences collapse between a nation and its society. All I see is general panic, general madness, it’s as though all have gone crazy, looking on with indifference as their fellow humans bleed.”²² And in the next lines, directly following his description of the traumatic impact of the incidents, he mentions the following to Berkowitz: “I recently read Andreyev’s Red Laughter.” Only a few months after this letter was written, in December of the same year, the critical article in the Yiddish paper *Falks Zeitung* was to appear discussing the Yiddish translation of that story. This critique emphasized

¹⁸ “Sifrutenu ha-ivit bi-shnat 1906” [Our literature in the year 1906], *Ha-zman*, 17 January 1907, 3–4.

¹⁹ “I sent you my Revenge published by Di velt did you get it?” (24 February 1907). “I just finished [writing] a big realist story (50 pp) in jargon. About the shores of the Dniester. On the calamities in Bessarabia. My hands are still boiling” (27 March 1907). And on 23 April 1907, on publication of the story “On the Shores of the Dniester” in *Yiddishe falks tsaitung*. The correspondence is stored at the Gnazim Archive, Tel Aviv.

²⁰ “Marsaiyez,” in Y. H. Brenner’s *Algemaine bibliatek* [General library] (Warsaw, 1907).

²¹ Letter from Shneour to Brenner, dated 23 September 1906, in Gnazim Archive.

²² Letter from Shneour to Y. D. Berkowitz, dated 17 March 1905, in Gnazim Archive.

the connection in the minds of Jewish Russian readers between Andreyev's story and the terror experienced by the Jewish communities that were the target of violence in the wake of the 1905 revolution. This context throws an even more interesting light on what Shneour writes next in the letter: "I recently read Andreyev's *Red Laughter* and it didn't give me even one new idea. What I found there was everything I'd been warning against, 24 hours a day." Shneour argues that Andreyev taught him nothing new, because what the latter wrote in the novella, especially concerning the devastation likely to follow the era of the revolution, he had already known for a long time. For Shneour, the apocalyptic vision of *The Red Laughter* is part of his own vision: "What I found there was everything I'd been warning against, 24 hours a day." As such, Shneour both rejects — and indirectly acknowledges — Andreyev's influence. It is a rejection because he claims that he doesn't find anything new in Andreyev's story. That is why the story cannot serve as a source of inspiration. It is an acknowledgment because he in fact affirms the connection and the actual ideological and doctrinaire identity between himself and Andreyev.

There is a difference between staking out contact zones and revealing hidden contiguities between Shneour's writing and that of Andreyev, on the one hand, and process-based explanations of literary influence, on the other. Unlike imitation, citation, translation, or actual encounters, the contact zone offers no more than a possible ground for the existence of influence. Indeed, potential influence, together with its typical uncertainty, may well be the most fascinating feature of the conditions of writing and reading a literature in a minor language in an overarching literary and lingual constellation. In Shneour's case, the literary contact zone is also a political one, tying modern Jewish literature to the history of Russia's early twentieth-century revolutions. The contact zone in which the hidden contiguities between David Vogel's writings and those of Peter Altenberg in Vienna become manifest is a very different one in many ways, as will become clear below.

DAVID VOGEL AND PETER ALTENBERG

The Hebrew writer whose work was most strongly influenced by Peter Altenberg is Gershon Shofman (1880–1972). Shofman, who lived in Vienna before the First World War, also met with Altenberg at Café Central.²³ A Hebrew translation by Shofman of a collection of writings by Altenberg was published in 1921.²⁴ Altenberg's influence on Shofman is also obvious in the latter's efforts at short impressionistic sketches à la Altenberg, the first of their kind in modern Hebrew literature.

But the association of Hebrew writers in Vienna with the work of Altenberg ranges wider than this explicit link with Shofman. It includes hidden or partly hidden aspects. One of these, perhaps the most challenging, is the way Altenberg's personality and work affected the work of the Hebrew writer David Vogel. Altenberg's name has frequently been mentioned as one of the Viennese writers under whose influence Vogel shaped the Hebrew European fiction he wrote in Vienna in the 1920s. In the research on Hebrew literature in Vienna, the names of Vogel and Altenberg have been jointly mentioned more than once.²⁵ Over and beyond these references

²³ Shachar Pinsker, "Jewish Modernism and Viennese Cafés, 1900–1930," in *The Thinking Space: The Café as a Cultural Institution in Paris, Italy, and Vienna*, ed. Leona Rittner, W. Scott Haine, and Jeffrey H. Jackson (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), 50.

²⁴ Peter Altenberg, *Ktavim nivharim* [Selected writings], trans. Gershon Shofman (New York: Avraham Yosef Shtible, 1921).

²⁵ Gershon Shaked argues that the writings of Arthur Schnitzler and Peter Altenberg reflect the impressionism that evolved in late nineteenth-century German literature and that their influence can be felt in the works of

which support the argument regarding the general connection between Vogel and the circle of modernist artists active in Vienna in the early 1920s, Vogel's complex link with Altenberg has not been closely scrutinized.

A first attempt to outline the zone of contact between Vogel and Altenberg in Vienna raises a number of problems. First, a considerable hiatus in time separates the two men: Vogel, who was born in Satanov, Ukraine (formerly the region of Podolia in the Russian Empire), in 1891, was thirty-two years younger than Altenberg. Altenberg published his first book, *How I See It* (*Wie ich es sehe*), in Vienna in 1897, while Vogel's first collection of poems, *Before the Dark Gate* (*Lifney ha-sha'ar ha-afel*), appeared in the same city twenty-six years later, in 1923. Vogel first arrived in Vienna in 1912, the year in which Altenberg admitted himself to the psychiatric clinic Steinhoff and a few years before his death in 1919.

As for the question of whether Vogel read Altenberg's work, here too it seems not to be conclusive that Vogel had any serious familiarity with the latter's writing. On arriving in Vienna, in 1912, Vogel explains about himself: "Here I find myself at the start of a new phase of my life, and at its center is German culture."²⁶ His journal of those years in Vienna reveals that he started studying the German language only upon his arrival there. In 1913 he reads, by his own account, the writings of Ibsen and Maeterlinck. During the years of his journal writing, 1912–22, Altenberg's name is not mentioned even once.

It is quite likely that Vogel read Altenberg only after the latter's death, and we may suppose he did not read him in the original German but in the Hebrew translation by Altenberg's friend Shofman, which came out in 1921. In that year Vogel himself had not yet published his major works. In 1923, two years after the Hebrew translation of Altenberg's writings was published, Vogel's first collection of poems appeared. He became known as a prose writer only toward the end of the decade, in 1927, on publication of the novella *In the Sanatorium* (*Be-veit ha-marpeh*).²⁷ The plot of this novella unfolds in an Austrian sanatorium for people suffering from lung disease and follows the hospitalization of a Jewish Viennese patient by the name of Ornick, until his unexpected death. With this novella, Vogel's fiction became characterized as first of all Hebrew Viennese. This was to be strongly confirmed later by the novel *Married Life* (*Hayeh nisu'im*), which Vogel published in 1929–30.²⁸ Set in Vienna, this novel follows the violent married life of a Viennese woman who had been born to an impoverished aristocratic family and married a failed Jewish writer.

Shofman and Vogel. Gershon Shaked, *Zehut: Safruyot yehudiot be-lashon la'az* [Identity: Jewish literatures in foreign languages] (Haifa: Haifa University, 2006), 463. Mikhail Krutikov singles out the influence of the Jung Wien school — among others, Schnitzler, Beer Hoffman, and Peter Altenberg — on the development of Yiddish modernism. Mikhail Krutikov, *From Kabbalah to Class Struggle: Expressionism, Marxism, and Yiddish Literature in the Life of Meir Wiener* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 102. Yigal Schwartz mentions Altenberg's stylistic affinity to Shofman, Vogel, and other Hebrew writers. Yigal Schwartz, "The Ashkenazim — East vs. West: An Invitation to a Mental-Stylistic Discussion of Modern Hebrew Literature," in *Around the Point: Studies in Jewish Literature and Culture in Multiple Languages*, ed. Hillel Weis, Roman Katsman, and Ber Kotlerman (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2014), 50.

²⁶ David Vogel, "Ktsot ha-yamim" [End of days], in his *Taḥanot kavot* [Stories, diaries] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1990), 289.

²⁷ David Vogel, *Be-veit ha-marpeh* [In the sanatorium], in *Taḥanot kavot*, 199–265. This novella has not yet been translated into English.

²⁸ The novel *Hayeh nisu'im* [Married life] was first published in 1929–30 in Palestine. It was later reedited by Menachem Peri (1986).

Other than a general link between Vogel's fiction and the German literature produced in Vienna in the early twentieth century, it is difficult to find any special affinity with Altenberg. Unlike in Shofman's case, Vogel's work shows no attempt to adopt Altenberg's terse expression and his subjective impressionism. Altenberg's concise and short passages, which became known as his *Telegramm-Stil der Seele* (telegraphic style of the soul), seem not to have any resonances in Vogel's fiction, which stuck to the major forms of the novel and the novella.²⁹

The one explicit reference to Altenberg in Vogel's archive is a negative one. On the appearance of his first book of poems in 1923, Vogel received an appreciative letter from one of his friends in New York. In reply, Vogel wrote: "Your words about my poems made me very happy. They come close to the truth. It is a new poetry, of a kind previously unseen in the Hebrew language. But it harbors no 'Altenbergisms' — it's wholly 'Vogelish.'"³⁰ One may assume that the similarity this reader observed between Vogel and Altenberg's style was a shared terse impressionism. Vogel's poetry indeed stands out on account of its break with the tight rhythmic tradition of his generation's Hebrew poetry. He is one of the pioneers of free verse in Hebrew. Nevertheless, the speaker's marginal position in Vogel's Viennese urban poems — at night "on the edge of the city"; or in a sitting room, with night entering through the window and filling it — is reminiscent of the typical speaker's point of view in Altenberg's writing. It too is a nocturnal perspective, from the sidelines, from a café table or from a hotel room.³¹

But the hidden contiguity that makes the connection between Altenberg and Vogel lies outside the province of literary writing. It is to be found in a contact zone that exceeds the literary text as such, in Altenberg's complex identity games and in Vogel's personal diary, which reveals the autobiographical roots of Vogel's writing. Rather than a stylistic comparison between Altenberg's and Vogel's oeuvres, what is required here is an exploration of a fascinating literary phenomenon occurring in the margins of literary activity: Altenberg's biographical persona, the coffeehouse poet, is part of the literary imaginary that Vogel adopted, regarding both his personal life and his writing. The core of the connection between Vogel and Altenberg, in other words, is not the work of literature itself but the combination of Altenberg's biography and the art of his writing.

This is what James Guida wrote in the *New Yorker*: "there are tale-like aspects in Altenberg's art and whole life project."³² In fact, writes Andrew Barker, Altenberg's biographer: "Altenberg himself accepted no distinction between his work and his persona, which was projected as intensely in public life as it was in his art."³³ Even more interesting in this context is a comment by Gershon Shofman, Altenberg's Hebrew translator, who defined his writing as autobiographical:

These "Selected Writings" were assembled from all of Peter Altenberg's books, with their typical titles: *Wie ich es sehe*, *Was der Tag mir zuträgt*, *Märchen des Lebens*, and so on. Altenberg's titles perfectly describe the small sketches as being nothing but intimate notes from his

²⁹ Andrew Barker, *Telegrams from the Soul: Peter Altenberg and the Culture of Fin-de-Siècle Vienna* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1996), xviii.

³⁰ Letter from David Vogel in Vienna to Shimon Polik in New York, dated 20 July 1923, David Vogel dossier no. 19232/1, in Gnazim Archive.

³¹ See, e.g., Altenberg's "I Drink Tea" (14), "The Hotel Room" (78), and "The Night" (129), in his *Telegrams of the Soul*, selected and trans. Peter Wortsman (New York: Archipelago Books, 2005).

³² James Guida, "A Flâneur for All Seasons," *New Yorker*, 7 March 2013, xx.

³³ Barker, *Telegrams from the Soul*, xii.

everyday life, private letters of a kind, or passages from a journal. Altenberg's writings, then, are a type of autobiographical notes by a poet — one who did not write anything else but these: a poet who did not rhyme.³⁴

These lines appear at the opening of the 1921 Hebrew edition of Altenberg's writings. They are introductory words aimed at the Hebrew reader, and they claim that the first thing to note about the author's work is its relation between the literary imagination and the biographical life. In a 2012 article on Altenberg, Gemma Blackshaw develops this fundamental argument and describes what she calls Altenberg's "authoring madness."³⁵ Blackshaw studies his three main identities: the first, his "mad writer identity," is his identity as a mentally ill person who had been diagnosed early in life as suffering from "a state of nervous exhaustion in which individuals could no longer summon the strength to deal with the stress and speed of modern metropolitan life."³⁶ The second is his sexual identity, reflected in a near-pedophilic attraction to adolescent girls. The third, "Lebensreform identity," is constituted by his dedication to the German back-to-nature movement, while being an alcoholic and addicted to painkillers.³⁷ Barker had already pointed out these three identities in his biography, situating them in the chronology of Altenberg's life. Of these identities, his ambiguous sexual identity stands out, as it forms the basis for his literary persona, as reflected by his chosen pen name.³⁸ It also serves as the main inspiration for his literary production. His first sketch, written in September 1894, was occasioned by the thirty-five-year-old Altenberg's encounter with two girls on summer vacation in Austria. The title of the sketch he wrote following this encounter was "Nine and Eleven" (Neun und Elf), the respective ages of the girls. It is the first sketch in Altenberg's debut collection, *How I See It*, and it appears as part of the cycle "The Lakeshore" (See-Ufer). This cycle, whose symbolism is extremely important to our understanding of Altenberg's source of inspiration, presents a series of encounters with objects of observation and desire, in ascending order of age.

Shofman's translation, too, opens with this cycle, but for some reason Shofman chose to skip the first sketch and translated the two other sketches in the cycle: "Twelve" (Zwölf) and "Nineteen" (Neunzehn). This had a momentous impact on the way Altenberg was presented in Hebrew. Shofman's choice suggests a reservation, perhaps a worry, about the sexual side of Altenberg's writing; it is a choice that might be seen as an act of censorship, either self-imposed or imposed otherwise. Altenberg's Hebrew translation appeared outside Vienna, outside that city's literary circles, and outside the array of aesthetic and political sensitivities that evolved in Central Europe in Altenberg's times, the last days of the Habsburg Empire. The translation went to press in 1921 at Stiebel Publishers, in Saint Petersburg. The establishment's chief editor was the Jewish Polish author David Frishman. Like the publishing house's founder, a Russian Jew by the name of Avraham Yosef Stiebel, and like David Frishman, most Hebrew readers in the years following the First World War were from Tsarist Russia and had been brought up on Russian social realism.

³⁴ Gershon Shofman, "Peter Altenberg" (introduction), in Altenberg, *Ktavim nivharim*, 8.

³⁵ Gemma Blackshaw, "Peter Altenberg: Authoring Madness in Vienna circa 1900," in *Journeys into Madness: Mapping Mental Illness in the Austro-Hungarian Empire*, ed. Gemma Blackshaw and Sabina Wieber (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012), 109–29.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 111

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 110–11.

³⁸ The first chapter of his biography, *Telegrams from the Soul*, is dedicated to the making of the pen name Peter Altenberg. Barker, *Telegrams from the Soul*, 10.

Altenberg's impressionism, the description of a new and controversial type of intimacy occurring outside the confines of the bourgeois family, in a coffeehouse or a hotel, the meaningful aesthetic distance from political phenomena — all this was bound to be met with caution by the Hebrew reader, as was the case with the Hebrew Viennese novel *Married Life* by Vogel.

David Vogel's own acquaintance with Altenberg's work also starts off with this implied censorship, which could have been noticed only by comparing Shofman's Hebrew volume to its German source. Shofman's caution regarding Altenberg's sexuality somehow entered Vogel's awareness, however, whether directly or unconsciously, for Vogel took similar action with regard to his own work when he decided to shelve those of his writings that touched on his infatuation with a young girl, a subject that, as I will explain below, was as pertinent to him as it was to Altenberg.

On reading the above, the reader who is familiar with Vogel's Hebrew work will be put in mind of a major episode in the author's life. This is the story of Vogel's falling in love with an eleven-year-old girl when he was twenty. During his stay in Vilnius, in 1911, Vogel became involved in a double love affair with a mother and her eleven-year-old daughter. In his personal diary he writes at length, initially about the affair he had with the mother, and then about the daughter, Hanya (Hannah), with whom he fell in love. This infatuation caused him to leave the mother, his former lover, whom he subsequently shunned and detested.³⁹ Initially appearing in Vogel's diary, this episode was documented in his literary writing too. However, Vogel put away all his works that included versions of this biographical event and he avoided publishing them until soon before he died.

The most detailed prose version of this theme appears in a novel that was only recently found in Vogel's archive and published in 2012, entitled *Viennese Romance (Roman vinaey)*. This novel begins with the arrival in Vienna of a young Russian Jewish man called Michael Rost, in the years preceding the First World War. The owner of Rost's first apartment becomes his lover at the very outset of the novel. But it is her adolescent daughter, Erna, who will eventually take her place as Rost's new object of desire.⁴⁰ Infatuation with an adolescent girl is the central theme of the works Vogel put away. Unlike in the case of Altenberg, who let his sexual identity emerge in his writings, for Vogel the issue stirred doubt and self-censorship.

What Vogel learned from Altenberg are the principles of a genre that might be called "autobiographical fiction," which ties the figure of the author to his work. This is felt outside the issue of sexuality too. Altenberg, as mentioned, was diagnosed early on with a dysfunction that prevented him from being economically independent, relegating him to the margins of bourgeois society, where he became one of its most outspoken critics. This behavioral component of his personality could also be found in Vogel. But Vogel's marginality has tended to be interpreted somewhat differently, in accordance with the national context in which he belonged as a Hebrew writer.

Vogel scholars have written much about the fact that Vogel, in a very tempestuous historical period, and in conditions of considerable economic and personal distress, preferred to abstain from any active ideological, political, or economic involvement in general, and in Zionist national ideology more specifically. Vogel's very choice of the Hebrew language, which in the early twentieth century was a prominent form of ideological identification with the national-Zionist project, made it hard to assess his ideological position. Other than the fact of being written in Hebrew,

³⁹ David Vogel, "Ktsot ha-yamim," in *Tahanot kavot*, 288.

⁴⁰ David Vogel, *Viennese Romance*, trans. Dalia Bilu (Melbourne: Scribe, 2012).

Vogel's work includes no reference whatsoever to Zionism, the Land of Israel, the question of settlement, and Jewish national identity.

Vogel's Hebrew Viennese literature is written in the Jewish national language (Hebrew), which, then, is used very successfully to describe the effort to move away from, and even to deny, Jewish identity. Altenberg, too, managed to create a labyrinth in faithful reflection of the complex issue of identity in early twentieth-century Vienna. He contrived to do this not only in his literary effort but most of all through his pen name, which marks the distance he assumed from his Jewish origins.

What Vogel and Altenberg share is their view of their origins in literary-aesthetic terms and not through practical political engagement. Both withdrew from the intensities of political and ideological discourse. Unlike in the cases of Karl Kraus, Theodor Herzl, Max Nordau, and others, Altenberg and Vogel's literary writing, begun relatively late in their lives, in their mid-thirties, expressed an intended, almost declared move away from any ideological perspective and productive-economic activity.

As Michael Saler recently claimed, "studies of the fin-de-siècle have become steadily more encompassing since they first appeared in the early 20th century."⁴¹ However, despite the current turn to global perspectives, it seems that further research into the identity maze of Vienna is needed. A better understanding of the influence that Peter Altenberg exerted on a Hebrew Viennese writer like David Vogel is bound to generate a series of new questions: How was Altenberg read from the other side, from that of a minor literature practiced in the same contact zone of Vienna but written in a foreign language, accessible only to a minority of immigrants and foreigners? What was the cultural identity of the ideal reader of Vogel's Hebrew Viennese literature? Was it a reader in the middle ground between German literature and Hebrew-national literature? Or was it an invented reader representing an imagined cultural continuum between Viennese German literature and Viennese Hebrew literature, a reader who would situate Vogel's Hebrew Viennese fiction within the Viennese canon of modernist fiction?



Considering the literary enterprise as a surface marked by a complex arrangement of links that cannot be elucidated through explicit procedural explanations leads to the identification of two cases of hidden contiguities in the contact zones between literatures. The two cases studied, Shneur-Andreyev and Vogel-Altenberg, illustrate fundamentally different types of links: while the contact zone between Shneur and Andreyev is situated in Tsarist Russia of the early twentieth century and based on political involvement in modern Russia's revolutionary era, the contact zone between Vogel and Altenberg occurs in post-First World War Vienna, and it is in fact rooted in an avowed and documented withdrawal from the political and ideological dimension. Both cases, nevertheless, illustrate the challenge of mapping modern Jewish literature in Europe and, more generally, the way a marginal literature operates in a literary setting that should be defined by its contiguities rather than by the boundaries between literatures. A

⁴¹ Michael Saler, ed., *The Fin-de-Siècle World* (London: Routledge, 2015), 1.