Avriel Bar-Levav

In a Double Language: The World of Texts and the World of Readers in Hebrew and Yiddish in the Writings of Rabbi Shimon Frankfurt of Amsterdam

The linguistic reality of most of tradition-bound European Jewry in the early modern period was bilingual and for Ashkenazic Jews that meant Hebrew and Yiddish operating together (Turniansky 1980:11; Even-Zohar 1990:121–130; Berger et al. 2003).[1] It is difficult to define precisely the functions of each language, which also differ regarding well-educated elite groups on the one hand and less-educated lower classes on the other. In general, Yiddish was the spoken language and Hebrew acted according to its Yiddish name—the "Holy Tongue" (*loshn-koydesh*). The sacred canonical texts were read in Hebrew (and Aramaic); it was the language of prayer, and the primary (although not exclusively) language of learned spiritual creativity (Shmeruk 1978:11; Turniansky 1994:81; Resnick 1990:51–74).[2] However, it would be inaccurate to classify Hebrew as the language of high culture—as distinct from the vernacular—for a number of reasons: Scholarship currently regards popular culture as a manifestation of culture and not its absence; with its own qualities, and not a primitive form of the elite culture. Moreover, Yiddish, as the spoken language, had a cultural function for the elite, since it was the language of instruction for study of the Hebrew texts.

Yiddish was the mother tongue (*mame loshn*) and Hebrew an acquired language. Teaching was in Yiddish and was utilized in learning to read Hebrew and

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1 Only at a later historical time was a third language—the local language—added.
2 It should be emphasized that Hebrew and Yiddish were sometimes functionally interchanged. For example, religious sermons delivered in Yiddish and international business dealings between European and Oriental Jews communicated in Hebrew.

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Aramaic (Turniansky 1994:82). In the yeshivas the text of the Talmud was taught in Yiddish. As the student progressed, he gained experience and acquired the ability to read difficult texts in Hebrew and Aramaic and the facility to write halakhic and ethical writings in Hebrew and even poetry, on occasion. Generally, the knowledge was practical and did not include a theoretical understanding of grammar. However, departing school at an early age meant that the pupil's Hebrew knowledge would remain elementary, and limited to several primary subjects—the prayer book, the Torah, passages of the Prophets and Rashi's commentary (Turniansky 1988:21–58). Until the late nineteenth century women usually did not receive a formal education, and if they did learn to read, it was in Yiddish, not Hebrew (Parush 2004).[3] Thus the differences between learned elites and uneducated lower classes were in relation to the two languages as well: Everyone knew Yiddish, but knowledge of Hebrew was characteristic of the educated and a criterion for the esteem in which they were held.

Another way to present the relations between Hebrew and Yiddish is by use of the complementary pair of terms 'the world of texts' and 'the world of readers' (Chartier 1994:3).[4] There is of course a partial overlapping between the two, since the 'readers' read the texts. Yet, for the world of texts the primary value is intertextuality—to join one must master the texts, thereby gaining cultural capital. In contrast, for the world of readers the primary values are communication and accessibility. Nevertheless, the creation of religious texts in Yiddish (or their translation) meant admitting these texts to the world of texts of Jewish readers. In other words, the primary layer of the Jewish world of texts is comprised of Hebrew and Aramaic texts, such as the Bible, Talmud, and *Zohar*, yet, in the course of its development, additional languages joined the Jewish world of texts. This process began with the use of Jewish languages or dialects, first languages such as Judeo-Arabic and Judeo-Persian in the East and later Yiddish and Ladino in the West, and it continues with the cultural process of translation of Jewish texts into the languages of surrounding peoples, such as Moses Mendelssohn's translation of the Torah into German. This article will illustrate one of the earliest stages of the opening of the Jewish world of texts to Yiddish—by means of a text in two languages by one author, Šimʿon Frankfurt of Amsterdam, the author of *Sefer ha-Ḥayyim.*

Sefer ha-Ḥayyim (*The Book of Life*, Amsterdam 1703) is one of the central and most influential books in the genre called 'books for the sick and the dying' (*sifre*

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3 The institute of the Fírzogerin (a woman who led prayer from the women's balcony in synagogue) perhaps evidences the need to assist those who did not know how to read, if the institute in fact existed (Zinberg 1975, vol. 7:23–24).

4 This distinction can be found in the difference of organizing a library according to books or the needs of their readers (Shunami 1969:35). Cf. Niger (1957:46) as cited in Parush (2005:237).

ḥolim u-metim), a genre that includes prayers and texts for study intended for the ill, from the time of their illness until their death, and for those tending the ill, until their death and afterward. Such books were first printed in Italy, with the publication of *Ṣori la-Nefeš u-Marpe la-'Eṣem* (*Balm for the Soul and Healing for the Bone*) by Leon Modena (Venice 1619), followed shortly afterwards by *Ma'avar Yabboq* (*Ford of Yabboq*, Mantua 1626) by his younger relative Aharon Bĕrakya of Modena (Francesconi 2021). Over a short period of time the genre flourished and included hundreds of books and editions (Bar-Levav 1995, 1998, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2017). *Sefer ha-Hayyim* is the first bilingual work of this genre. Its author, Šim'on Frankfurt, was born in Schwerin, Poland, moved to Amsterdam in the wake of the pogroms that occurred during the Swedish wars, and served as rabbi of the city's Ashkenazic Burial Society. He wrote the book in two parts, one in Hebrew and the other in Yiddish. The relation between these parts will be discussed in the second half of this article, showing that Šim'on addressed the Yiddish part to the 'world of readers.' In the first part of this article, a different work by the same author, intended to be part of the 'world of texts'—the world of rabbinic and halakhic texts—will be presented. A similar approach regarding the world of readers can be applied to texts translated from Hebrew, or texts that were originally written in Yiddish, such as the *tkhines* (private devotions, often meant for women; Weissler 1998, 1989; Guren Klirs 1992; Baumgarten 2005:67–70, 274–285).

1 The World of Halakhic Texts: Rabbi Šim'on Frankfurt and the Comprehensive Library Conception

After *Sefer ha-Ḥayyim*, Šim'on Frankfurt wrote another work, called *Sefer Yittĕnu* or *Sefer Tinnuy.* This is a halakhic work in Hebrew that remains in manuscript.[5] In the preface, Šim'on presented the requirement to study all halakhic texts as a religious duty incumbent on halakhic adjudicators (*posĕqim*).[6]

> It is stated "But he who is arrogant (*ha-gas libbo*) in giving a judicial decision (*hora'a*), is foolish, wicked, and arrogant (*gas ruaḥ*)" [*m. Avot* 4:7], this is not stated about one who does not want to give a judicial decision, but rather concerning one who is presumptuous and retorts before he listens, without interrogation and inquiry [cf. *m. Sanhedrin* 4:5] about the

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5 For the full preface, see Bar-Levav (1997:284–291).
6 The manuscript is in the possession of the Birnbaum family of Jerusalem. See also Bar-Levav (2006:201–224, 2011).

quality of the question and without referencing a book concerning the true source of the ruling (*ha-din*), only from his arrogance do his judicial decisions arrive, as if he, by heart, is an expert in the entire Torah [i.e., Jewish law]. And, therefore, he is a fool (*šoṭe*) who errs (*še-ṭoʿe*) in his judicial decision. And when he is informed that he has erred, he is ashamed to admit his arrogance, and cares (*wĕ-ḥas*) more for his honor than for God's honor. And to that sin which he initially committed in stupidity and error, he adds the sin (*ḥeṭ*) of intentional transgression (*pešaʿ bĕ-mezid*), buttressing his word by "purifying a creeping animal (*šereṣ*) with seventy interpretations (*panim*) [cf. *b. Sanhedrin* 17a; *ʿEruvin* 13b, and *Bamidbar Rabbah* 13:16]. And the unwitting mistakes (*šĕgagot*) of his study are considered an intentional transgression (*zadon*) [cf. *b. Bava Mĕṣiʾa* 33b] and he becomes a wicked person due to his arrogance. And a sign of arrogance is impoverishment in Torah [knowledge], and it is stated concerning him: "He who robs his father and mother and says, 'It is no offense' (*peshaʿ*), is a companion to vandals" [Prov. 28:24], "Many are those it has struck dead, and numerous are its victims" [Prov. 7:26]. [. . .]

Furthermore, Rabban Simeon B. Gamliel stated, "Appoint for yourself a teacher (*rav*) and avoid doubt" [*m. Avot* 1:16, in the name of Rabban Gamliel]. Who is a teacher (*rav*)? The book, which is the teacher of man, which is to be consulted and studied well before his judgment is spoken from his lips, so that he will not err and not be ashamed. Since currently they permitted the writing of the oral tradition (*tora še-bĕʿal pe*), everything that is recorded and written is true—[thus] it is prohibited to decide anything from memory (*bĕʿal pe*).

"And all who issue a judicial decision in the presence of their teacher are liable for death" [cf. *b. Bĕraḵot* 31b; *ʿEruvin* 43a]. That is, before consulting a book, which is his teacher.

"A judge has only that which his eyes see" [e.g., *b. Sanhedrin* 6b]—In a book.

"Do not judge your fellow man until you have reached his place" [*m. Avot* 2:4]—to the source of the ruling, as it is in the book.

"And do not rely on your own understanding" [Prov 3:5]—issuing a judicial decision without consulting a book.

And it is known that one who lacks books, lacks knowledge, for a person's wisdom only reaches until the location that the hand of his books reaches.[7] There is no artist without tools.

Also, what is found in one book as permitted is found in a different book as prohibited. And all of this is amplified (*mosif wĕ-holeḵ*) in "the making of many books is without limit" [Eccl 12:12]. And, therefore, we are not to rely on one book for deciding [halaḵa], even if [it was written by] the greatest of the generation in practical halakhah, for [one is to] "incline according to the majority" [Exod 23:2; *b. Bava Mĕṣiʾa* 59b]. Therefore, all legal adjudicators must have enough books so that they are able to rely on the majority [opinion] in all the laws that are currently practiced in these states.

Šimʿon's preface to *Sefer Yittĕnu* is a kind of manifesto of the world of rabbinic texts. In order to issue a halakhic ruling, i.e., in order to create an authoritative halakhic text, one must consult all of rabbinic literature. In a brilliant homiletic process Šimʿon integrated a series of rabbinical locutions, some that appear in non-judicial contexts, such as, "Do not judge your fellow man until you have reached his place;"

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7 The source of this phrase is in R. Isaac Canapton's *Darḵe ha-Talmud*, see Bar-Levav (2006:303, note 7).

"And do not rely on your own understanding," and interprets them in accordance with the world of the book. Of particular interest is the claim that, since the world of the book is imperfect—massive in scope and containing multitudes of (opposing) opinions, inconclusive arguments, and errors, the responsible reader, who would like to join this world, needs to have command of all the sources and know all of the books, so that the picture they obtain will be a balanced one. Thus, for example, Šim'on created a parallel between the legal requirement that a number of judges sit in judgment and not a single judge alone and the need to consult many books—in fact all the relevant books—and not a single book in order to issue a ruling. Oral knowledge, which was essential and central in the time of the Mishna and Talmud (Sussmann 2019; Fuchs 2020), was depreciated and presented as the quality of the arrogant, who wished to flaunt their vast knowledge. According to a post-antiquity conceptualization, oral knowledge is inaccurate and anyone who relies on it without verifying in a book will surely deteriorate morally as they will refuse to acknowledge their error, for they will further commit to their incorrect position, thereby, becoming a charlatan. As opposed to the stability of the world of texts, the world of oral knowledge is unstable and suspect. Only the book—not personal authority, but textual authority—can eliminate doubt. That is how Šim'on interpreted the expression of Rabban Šim'on B. Gamliel, "Appoint for yourself a teacher (*rav*) and avoid doubt"—which originally meant to rely on an individual authority, who could give clear rulings and remove one from doubt—as referring to the book, "Who is a teacher (*rav*)? The book, which is the teacher of man." The saying "A judge has only that which his eyes see"—which is generally understood as referring to the physical evidence in the case and not theoretical hypotheses—was also reinterpreted as referring to relying on the book of laws. Likewise, the psychological advice: "Do not judge your fellow man until you have reached his place," was reinterpreted as not to refer to the emotional, psychological place of one's fellow, but to a judicial context in which one is advised to not render judgement until the source of the ruling is found in a halakhic book.

Šim'on's view conforms to similar views current at his time regarding comprehensive library conception (Bar-Levav 2006, 2021). His orientation was toward books and not readers. An implication of this orientation was the limiting of those able to partake in the halakhic cultural field, which is now open only to those who have access to all of the relevant Hebrew books in the Jewish world. This limitation stresses that the text—and not the readers—is at the center of the world of texts.

2 The World of Readers: Between Hebrew and Yiddish in *Sefer ha-Ḥayyim*

Leaving the Jewish educational system at an early stage meant leaving the world of texts, as aforementioned, thus creating a gap between Yiddish-speaking readers and authoritative Jewish texts. In its most extreme manifestation this gap meant that some of the public, whose education was limited, found it difficult to understand the basic Hebrew text that underlay Jewish culture—the prayer book (*siddur*). The phenomenon of learned scholars writing for the masses in Yiddish (Elbaum 1990:68–71) and not, or at least not exclusively, in the Hebrew language of rabbinic scholarship should be understood in this context. Among the representatives of this phenomenon, besides Šimʿon Frankfurt, are for example R. Yĕḥiʾel Mikhl Epstein (d. 1706), the author of *Qiṣṣur Šĕne Luḥot ha-Bĕrit* and its Yiddish translation (Gries 1989:58–61), who also published a Yiddish translation of the prayer book, *Dereḵ Yĕšara*, R. Elḥanan Hendel Kirchan, author of *Simḥat ha-Nefeš* and the annotations of the second edition of *Sefer ha-Ḥayyim* and R. Zvi Hirsh Koidanover, author of *Qav ha-Yašar*, who added a Yiddish translation that was printed beneath the Hebrew text (Idel 1997; Baumgarten 2007).

As in every case where assets held exclusively by the elite are divided among the masses, here too the process of dividing cultural capital in the form of knowledge aroused objections on the part of some of the conservative elite. They attacked writing in Yiddish and criticized it (Assaf 1946:349; Zinberg 1975, vol. 7:216–217; Gries 1989:60, note 80). These objections were answered in principle by some of the writers, among them R. Moše Frankfurt, the son of Šimʿon Frankfurt, who wrote the commentary *Nefeš Yĕhuda* on *Mĕnorat ha-Ma'or* and, also translated the latter into Yiddish. In his interesting preface to this translation (Amsterdam 1722) Moshe stated that all the sacred books, the Talmuds, Midrash, and *Zohar*, that are now hard to study were not written in the holy tongue, but in the vernacular used by men, women, and children in their time and place. Furthermore, he justified his translation with the example of the Hebrew translations of classic Judeo-Arabic literature, such as Maimonides's *Guide* and Baḥya Ibn Paquda's *Ḥovat ha-Lĕvavot*. Moshe's attitude toward writing in Yiddish is anchored in his father's approach to that language, reflected in the latter's decision to write *Sefer ha-Ḥayyim* in two parts in two different languages.[8] Šimʿon was aware of the different social contexts of each language and felt obliged to provide for the spiritual needs of a group to which he did not belong—women and the uneducated. His son, Moshe, felt that he had a

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[8] Moshe's desire to simplify matters for his less educated readers is also noticeable in his Hebrew writing, see Frankfurt (1712:introduction).

similar obligation. Moreover, his literary activity is parallel to his father's bilingual writing. He wrote both popular works (e.g., *Ševa' ha-Pĕtilot*) and scholarly works (e.g., *Ze Yĕnaḥamennu* on the *Mĕḵilta*) in Hebrew, on the one hand, and translated *Mĕnorat ha-Ma'or* to Yiddish, on the other. Šim'on wrote the Yiddish part of *Sefer ha-Ḥayyim* for the masses and *Sefer Yittĕnu* for halakhic scholars.

The objections were relatively easy to refute and were unable to curb the wave of Yiddish creativity.[9] Some important rabbis encouraged translation into Yiddish. R. Naftali Ha-Kohen Katz was so enthusiastic about *Dereḵ Yĕšara*, the great bilingual prayer book by Yĕḥi'el Mikhl Epstein, that he gave orders to reprint it and gave it a *haskama* (approbation), in which he expressed his sorrow that it was not more popular in Poland (Frankfurt 1703).[10] R. Yom Tov Lippman Heller, the author of the commentary *Tosĕfot Yom Ṭov* on the Mishna, not only translated into Yiddish the testament of Rabbenu Asher, known as *Sefer ha-Hanhaga* (Gries 1989:28, note 119), but also wrote a composition of his own in Yiddish, *Bĕrit Melaḥ* about the laws of salting meat. These works illustrate the transition of Yiddish from the world of Jewish readers to the world of Jewish texts.

3 Bilingual Writing: Between the Worlds

Bilingual reality is also reflected in bilingual writing, i.e., works written in both languages and not only in one of them (Turniansky 1980; Pfaffenhofen 1985:59–121; Turniansky 1994:81–87). A distinction should be made between intentional bilingual works and translations. Translations transfer something written in one language to another language, even if the original and translation are printed together. For a translated bilingual work may be the decision of an editor—and not the author—as in the case of Epstein's prayer book, which presents both the Hebrew text and Epstein's Yiddish translation. But in Yiddish there is a long tradition of bilingual creativity that started with bilingual poetry in Hebrew and Yiddish (Shmeruk 1978:42–45). Writers who use both languages and present them together have two alternatives: to divide every page into two sections (generally the Hebrew on top, but sometimes the Hebrew in the right column or the internal column of a two-page spread) and the Yiddish part (the bottom, the left column or the surrounding column), as Zvi Hirsh Koidanover did in the second printing of *Qav ha-Yašar*

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9 A major exception being the ban placed on the Vilna printing of *Simḥat ha-Nefeš* (before 1796), in which the second section of the book was printed with a separate title: *Šulḥan 'aruḵ*, see Zinberg (1975, vol. 7:216–217).

10 On Yiddish translations of liturgy, see Shmeruk (1981:64).

(Frankfurt 1709), or to print each part separately, as Šimʻon Frankfurt did in *Sefer ha-Ḥayyim.* In these and additional cases, it is not a Hebrew original and a Yiddish translation, but two parallel works. Even though there is a degree of congruence between the different parts, each stands on its own and their combination defines the work. However, when the writer decides to print them separately, as in the case of *Sefer ha-Ḥayyim*, their connection should be examined in order to decide if they comprise one or two books (Shmeruk 1978:47; Turniansky 1980). The theoretical possibilities that emerge from the capacity to write in two languages, each possessing its own character and tone, are fascinating, but they cannot be explored here. Nevertheless, the choice to write bilingual compositions presupposes a united community, of which the writers are members.

4 The Yiddish in *Sefer ha-Ḥayyim*

The following description appears in the rhymed title page of the Hebrew part of *Sefer ha-Ḥayyim*: "In which all the laws of joyous occasions are delineated well in double language (*bĕ-lašon kiflayim*)." The explanation of the expression "double language" and its meaning appears in the preface to this part, in which the writer depicts his anticipated readership:

> To write the words of the living God in the book of life [. . .] / For pious men and pious women (*la-anašim wĕ-la-našim*, *la-ḥasidim wĕ-la-ḥasidot*), whose portion will be in life. / And do not men desire life, and do not women desire life? / Therefore, I said to elucidate well that which is written with kindness and truth in a double language, / So that they would know to deal in kindness and truth for the sake of Heaven, / And then she is "a woman to be praised for her fear of the Lord" [Prov 31:30] / [. . .] And, therefore, for their merit / I wrote in their script and their language / To be an aid for men and for women / And also new grave-diggers, who are new to their profession / And do not know how to apply their hands in kindness and truth, / Will find everything explained. / And the children of my people scattered in villages and towns, / And who did not learn the Torah of kindness and truth, / And they do not have a teacher [. . .]. / Therefore, hear me, my brothers and my fellows, / And place these things in your heart, / And learn the Torah of kindness and truth in your lifetime [. . .]. / And, therefore, I wrote the Hebrew (*lašon ha-ʻivri*) also in easy language, / Every request, petition, and prayer, / So that they will understand what they speak like pearls in their mouths (Frankfurt 1703:6–8).

The broad definition of the imagined readership is clear and unambiguous: The book is meant for the public that did not have formal Jewish education: women, villagers, and residents of small and distant towns,[11] the loyal members of the world

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11 In this manner *Sefer ha-Ḥayyim* may be contextualized within didactic Yiddish literature, see Turniansky (1984:163–177).

of readers. It is not meant for them alone, since it also includes sections that are more relevant for the educated members of the world of texts, such as halakhic discussions pertaining to mourning (e.g., 1 § 59–72:66b–69b), but even in these circumstances, Šimʿon also wished to address the common folk.

Chava Turniansky has already demonstrated that the title pages of Yiddish books stated clearly that the book was written for the general public and not for women alone (Pfaffenhofen 1985:143; Turniansky 1994:61–66). The Yiddish part of *Sefer ha-Ḥayyim* fits this description, as the title page declared: "For men and women, boys and girls." This is not just a literary convention, but an expression of the writer's intent. The Yiddish preface says this explicitly:[12]

> Listen to me dear people[13] / Why have I prepared this book in Yiddish? / In the wake of the times / That the children of Israel are dispersed all over / And they do not have rabbis everywhere to instruct them about everything / And not everyone knows how to deal properly with the dead / And the pious women who deal with the dead do not understand the holy tongue / And many of the men are no better.

The dispersion of the Jews in places where there were no rabbis who could teach them how to handle the ill and the dead led Šimʿon to write the Yiddish part of his work. The awareness of diasporic dispersion and the existence of small and isolated communities—comprised of only a handful of Jews and incapable of supporting a spiritual leader—rose tremendously following the catastrophes that befell Eastern European Jewry, especially the Jews of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which reached a climax in the Khmelnytsky Uprising of 1648–49, followed by the persecutions due to "the second wave of wars" of 1655–57 and other contemporary pogroms (Teller 2020:23–92). Holland, where Šimʿon lived, had many micro communities in his time. The second part of *Sefer ha-Ḥayyim* was written mainly for women, who did not know Hebrew, but also for men, since many of them did not have sufficient command of Hebrew to understand the first part. Examination of the contents of the Yiddish part shows a focus on the female readership; among such as examples are the first section (*siman*) in the book "The supplication that a woman should recite when she is ill," followed by § 14: "*Adon Olam* (Master of the Universe), to be recited by women at the side of a dying person"; and § 20: "The supplication that women sing while preparing the dead [i.e., the purification ceremony]." Moše, Šimʿon's son, referred to this part as intended for women, but pointed out that it was also useful for men, particularly villagers:

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12 I would like to thank R. Yechiel Goldhaber, Prof. Marion Aptroot and Dr. Noga Rubin for their assistance in translating the Yiddish.

13 This is a classic locution that was popularly employed at the beginning of prefaces, see Shmeruk (1981:104); cf. Zinberg (1975, vol. 7:64–65).

> And after my father and teacher left the men's section (*me-ʿezrat anašim*), / And he came to the help of women (*le-ʿezrat našim*) and those whose minds were weak (*qalot*) like women. / And he wrote everything in Yiddish (*bi-lšon Aškĕnaz*) purification ceremony written in truth, / in good taste and clearly explained. / And, also, of great benefit for villagers, / Who have no teacher of righteousness to inform them of the path in which to walk—that is burial and all the necessary laws / And in this book every man will find what he seeks almost immediately by looking at the index (Frankfurt 1703:19)

Moše regarded the second part as a continuation of the work in another language and not a translation, as is borne out from a comparison of the two parts, which—except for a few short paraphrases of the Hebrew part—demonstrates that the relation between the two parts is not of original to translation: the Yiddish differs from the Hebrew and also includes supplementary information lacking in the Hebrew. Parts of the Yiddish section were written especially for a different readership than the Hebrew. The difference between the languages and their functions influenced the choice of material in the Yiddish part, which included practical matters and bilingual prayers. The result of these differences in language and literary traditions, addressed to different groups, was to give a different character to each part. In fact, the Hebrew part was also written with simpler vocabulary, but nevertheless a scholarly style. The Yiddish part, on the other hand, is pleasantly written in a warm and emotional style—although not always grammatically correct.

5 The Hebrew and Yiddish Prefaces Compared

The relation between the two prefaces illustrates the difference between how each language expressed itself in the written word: The Hebrew preface is lengthy and includes theoretical and scholarly material. It opens with the classic structure of a sermon and the writer alludes to many textual sources.[14] In contrast, the brief Yiddish preface, written in a welcoming rhyme, has no textual allusions. We do find echoes of ideas based on Jewish scholarly literature, such as the idea of the clothing of the souls made from commandments fulfilled, but with simplified terminology: "With commandments the souls are dressed." Alongside the learned parts of the Hebrew preface, the author did not omit practical warnings, such as days on which oaths should not be taken, or the following warning:

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14 Not for naught did Šimʿon state in *Sefer Yittĕnu* "Thank God I had a lot of books and hardly lacked any." Likewise, see his son Moše's response to the annotations on his father's work, in which he referenced his father's vast library, see Frankfurt (1716).

> And every man should take great care about this and warn his wife not to lay the infant next
> to her in bed and not to fall asleep while nursing him, lest she smother him with her breasts.
> And they have given repentance to this that [if this happens] the woman should lie one night
> on her dead infant's grave, and see the proper souls that would have grown from him flow-
> ering from his tomb. Thus, it is written about Cain "your brother's blood" [Gen 4:10; ad loc.
> Rashi]—his blood and the blood of his descendants. And see the children of your children—
> peace on Israel [Pss 128:6] (Frankfurt 1703:20).

Šim'on provided the reader with information from a variety of sources. The warn-
ing above is based on practical experience—the need to take care not to smother
an infant accidentally. The sin of such a tragedy is not only the death of an infant,
but also the loss of his potential progeny. In addition to remedies and medications,
Šim'on presented a format for a will (Frankfurt 1703:9–10), remedies unrelated
to specific illnesses (Frankfurt 1703:10–11), and information about developments
in medical technology, such as obstetrical forceps. Another example of the differ-
ence in writing between the two languages is in the laws regarding a dying person
(Frankfurt 1703, part 1 § 23:27a; part 2 § 10:3a–b). Most of the material in the
Hebrew part is also in the Yiddish part, except for the lexical explanation of the
word *goses* (dying), which appears only in the Hebrew. On the other hand, in the
Yiddish part examples of the sounds produced by a dying person were presented
with an explanation of their meaning for stages in the death process (Frankfurt
1703, part 2 § 9:3a). But not everything in the Yiddish appears in the Hebrew. For
example, a parable about a candle—its flame can flicker even after it seems to have
died, so too in the case of a dying person and, thus, one must be careful with them—
only appears in the Yiddish. Also missing in the Hebrew is a warning against ideas
that the writer calls "foolish," such as the influence the surface on which a dying
person lies has on the process of dying. In both versions Šim'on warned on the
basis of a kabbalistic source that no limb of the dying should be outside his bed,
but in each version the warning is given in a different context. In the Hebrew it
is addressed to the dying persons themselves, and not to their entourage (Frank-
furt 1703, part 1 § 96:30a) and, consequently, there are no instructions for how the
caregivers should act in such a case; but they are given in the Yiddish, which was
addressed to their attendees. In earlier paragraphs in the Yiddish there is additional
material about the dying person that does not appear in the Hebrew, mainly, a
multidimensional description of the symptoms of a dying person and a corpse,
including a vivid description of a deceased body's temperature, appearance, color,
and odor, and a stern warning that if these symptoms do not occur—the patient is
not dead! In this context the writer mentioned a case—from the euphemistically-
named Tractate Sĕmaḥot, which was on the topics of death, burial, and mourning—
in which a man was buried by mistake and after three days got up from the grave,
and lived for many years, even bearing five children.

Both parts are practical in character and for that reason they differ in order to suit the different readerships. While the technical Hebrew is for educated men, the Yiddish, for woman and common people, is more concrete and realistic, and the author allows his reader to benefit from his years of experience as rabbi of the Burial Society of Amsterdam, in which capacity he witnessed manifold deaths and mourning ceremonies. Additional examples of descriptions that appear in the Yiddish section but not in the Hebrew are instructions about the order in which to wash the body in the purification ceremony, how to clean it, how to carry it, and how to ensure that every stage has been performed by preparing a check list. This information cannot have been intended for women alone, thus we see that the two parts of the book complement each other in certain matters, and in other matters they are meant for a different readership. Šimʿon's practical experience in dealing with the dead is reflected well in both parts.

In addition to addressing different audiences the two parts of the work may also reflect a conscious decision to present different kinds of information in the language appropriate to each kind. Thus, although knowledge of signs of death would be important information for an educated man as well, the writer preferred to concentrate the practical and concrete material in the Yiddish part. Perhaps he also sensed that Yiddish was the more suitable language for such descriptions than learned Hebrew, and because he thought that it was more appropriate to provide such practical matters to those who were accustomed to them, including women. If so, the Hebrew reader could also read certain parts of the Yiddish part if need be. An example of a well-educated man reading the Yiddish section may be seen in the reservations concerning *Sefer ha-Ḥayyim* written by Elḥanan Hendel Kirchan, author of *Simḥat ha-Nefeš*, some of which refer to the Yiddish part, which were printed at the end of the second edition of *Sefer ha-Ḥayyim* (Amsterdam 1706).

The appeal to women is evident in the kinds of remedies that appear in the Yiddish section of the work. Some of them are intended for women and their specific issues, some for children, others for illnesses of both genders, and some for specifically male issues, such as impotence (although the impetus for a solution may derive from the wife) (Frankfurt 1703, part 2 § 34:56b).

6 To What Degree Are the Two Sections One Work?

The possibility that a writer could turn in one work to different potential readerships, each one in his own language, raises both theoretical and practical problems (Even-Zohar 1990). The effort to reconstruct the author's voice is more complicated when the author has at least two voices. The connection between the two voices is

also not simple and the distinction between the different audiences, which is not absolute, may explain only part of the picture. Additional questions may be asked: To what degree is *Sefer ha-Ḥayyim* indeed one work and not two separate works? Is the author's intention to see them as one work sufficient to define them as such, or should each part be treated separately? How does this possibility of distinguishing between them influence the writing itself and, if it does, what is the importance of that influence? What is the methodological significance of this situation for analyzing the theoretical concepts of *Sefer ha-Ḥayyim* and especially the concept of death in the book?

The author of *Sefer ha-Ḥayyim* regarded it as one work in two parts. In some places it seems that Šimʿon imagined using both parts of the book at the same time, one by a man and the other by a woman, which would mean separate binding of each section (Steinberg 1955:193). Thus, for example, in discussing the moment of death in § 11 he wrote:

> The men [standing] by the dying man will recite as it is written in the first part, and the women will say "*El Shadday*," as is written in the Yiddish translation, but [standing] by a woman, they should not recite it until they see that she wants to depart. They should recite it as it is written, alphabetically, in a sad melody.

Elsewhere in the second part there are references to the first part, for example § 2:1a. Moše Frankfurt, the author's son, also treated the book as if it were one work and referred to both parts at the same time. We should therefore study both parts of *Sefer ha-Ḥayyim* in its entirety. Nevertheless, the division itself is significant and the two parts should not be blurred, because they differ in content, language, and style.

7 Original Writing and Redaction in *Sefer ha-Ḥayyim*

Sefer ha-Ḥayyim includes both material that Šimʿon Frankfurt collected from other works and original material that he wrote himself. The collected material stems from various sources: (1) Biblical passages, such as "A Woman of Valor" (Prov 31:10–31) (Frankfurt 1703, part 1 § 19:25b) and chapters of Psalms (Frankfurt 1703, part 1 § 21:26a–27b); (2) classic rabbinic passages; (3) liturgical passages from the prayer book, such as the confession recited on the Day of Atonement, which is part of the deathbed confession (Frankfurt 1703, part 1 § 9:15b–16a); (4) prayers by various writers, such as a supplication for every day which Šimʿon attributed to Leon Modena (Frankfurt 1703, part 1:12b) and the anonymous prayer for physicians (Frankfurt 1703:14–15).

The example of *Sefer ha-Ḥayyim* is not unique, of course. The phenomenon of a writer-redactor is common in Western culture, and also in both Muslim and Jewish culture; in fact, basic intertextuality is one of its hallmarks. The Jewish canon itself is based on relations of content and intertextuality between later writings and earlier ones—especially the Talmuds to the Mishna and Scripture. Jewish creativity in the medieval period, in Hebrew and Arabic, is based on this quality and developed it (Dan 1975:146–166). Naḥmanides's work *Torat ha-Adam*—the first lengthy halakhic monograph on illness and death—included mainly a rich selection of classic rabbinic sources.

How should a literary work of this kind, based on material from different periods and regions, be discussed? Identifying the sources is important for understanding the text itself and the voices in which it speaks, as well as the context in which it was written. But, as important as they are, questions about the sources of the text comprise only a part of the questions that these texts should prompt. Focusing too much on this matter may come at the cost of understanding the character of the author, for whom redaction is only one of his creative tools. The literary researcher Northrop Frye (1957:96) claimed persuasively that perceiving the author as one who presents original material never seen before is a relatively new, romantic perception that only developed under the influence of printing and the notion of copyright. Great writers in earlier periods were proud of their use of earlier sources. Understanding the late romantic context of perceiving the ideal writer as an original creator and not a redactor is important for reading many Jewish texts and understanding how they were transmitted. This applies not only to the writings themselves, but also to the techniques used by the following generations to preserve them, and particularly to the freedom they allowed themselves to alter the texts (Pedaya 1990:139–164, especially 141, 145, 163–164; Liebes 1993:85–138; Sussmann 1995:61–63; Abrams 1996a:65–69, 1996b:16). Perceiving the text as changeable is related to understanding the work of the author as the editor and adapter of the sources and not only as an original writer, whose connection to the word is essential and determines both their identity and the work's identity. Readers and students can also join in this activity in the stages that follow redaction and continue to give it shape by additions or omissions, which culturally are not considered aberrations, but legitimate creative actions. In other words, the work is not regarded as final, but open—not only in terms of interpretation, but even regarding the limits of the text itself (Eco 1979:55–60; Ta-Shma 1993:17–24).

Underlying this phenomenon is the context of oral culture, as flexibility is one of the characteristics of oral transmission (Ong 1982). That is another example that the border between oral culture and written culture is neither clear, nor solely restricted to the manner of transmission, whether orally or in writing. In this way the famous dictum of Marshall McLuhan, "The media is the message," is too

extreme, since one medium of transmission may reflect contents related to another medium. Processes of forming cultural criteria for transmission are slow, and centuries may pass until a uniform text, provided by the printing press, emerges as the standard to be regarded as inviolate.

What this means regarding *Sefer ha-Ḥayyim* is that it should be considered one unit. Identifying the sources should not mitigate the attempt to understand the author's worldview (in this sense the Hebrew terms: *měḥabber* [author] and *ḥibbur* [composition] are very suitable since they suggest compilation) not only by what the author wrote himself, but through sources he wanted to integrate into his work and include in his composition. For Šimʿon Frankfurt, awareness of the world of (halakhic) texts, reflected in the preface to *Sefer Yittĕnu,* is combined with an awareness of the world of readers—men and women—for whom he wrote *Sefer ha-Ḥayyim.* Together, the world of texts and the world of readers form one Jewish community.

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