HEBREW UNION COLLEGE - JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION
NEW YORK SCHOOL

INSTRUCTIONS FROM AUTHOR TO LIBRARY FOR THESES

AUTHOR David Edleson

TITLE Midrash Sha'ul: "Midrashic" Interpretations of King Saul in the Bible, the Classical Midrash and Modern Hebrew Literature.

TYPE OF THESIS: D.H.L. ( ) Rabbinic (✓)

Master's ( )

1. May circulate (✓)

2. Is restricted ( ) for ___ years.

Note: The Library shall respect restrictions placed on theses for a period of no more than ten years.

I understand that the Library may make a photocopy of my thesis for security purposes.

3. The Library may sell photocopies of my thesis. ✓ yes ___ no

3/15/90
Date

Signature of Author

Library Record

Microfilmed
Date

Signature of Library Staff Member

90-B430

HEBREW UNION COLLEGE-JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION
NEW YORK SCHOOL

Report on the Rabbinic Dissertation Submitted by

David Edleson

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Ordination

Midrash Sha'ul

David Edleson's thesis, "Midrash Sha'ul," is prodigious and original effort to survey the literacy development of the figure of Saul in the Bible, Aggadah, and modern Hebrew literature. It is the most ambitious and competent study I have supervised during my twelve year tenure at HUC-JIR. Dr. Leonard Kravitz was more directly involved with Edleson's study of the classical materials, so I would like to address my comments to some features of his modern Hebraic research.

The play "Melukhat Sha'ul" by Yosef Hefrati mi-Troplovich is a Haskalah classic. It contains some beautifully lofty, ornate, and complex poetry and no small measure of dramatic power. While it is not Shakespeare, it is the closest thing which we have in Hebrew to a genuinely Shakespearean tragedy. Edleson has read this play with extraordinary precision and perspicacity, and he has evaluated Efrati's treatment of King Saul with synoptic brilliance and insight. Utilizing all of the important secondary sources in Hebrew - Papirna, Shapira, Klausner, Shaked, and others - Edleson has focused on some telling features of the play, and he has provided the English reader with a hitherto unavailable means for considering this unique work.

With Efrati, as with every other aspect of his study, Edleson constantly returns to the question of "midrash" interpreted in the broadest sense. He occasionally endows this term with a bit too much religious significance for a purely "literary" study, this is, of course, quite appropriate for a rabbinic thesis. I would caution him, however, about the use of some of his categories in a strictly academic environment. This reservation should in no way detract from the literary and analytical merit of Edleson's study, which I feel are most noteworthy.

After his section of the Haskalah play of Haefrati, Edleson moved to a consideration of Tchernichovsky and some contemporary poets. Here the material was much more accessible and I dare say, more palatable. (For a lesser student, the study of Haefrati alone would have more than sufficed as a distinguished rabbinic thesis, and I cannot praise it enough.) The Tchernichovsky poems have been read by modern literary critics, but Edleson went back to the original with new close readings and new insights. He always weighed every possible view and theory and arrived at his own

conclusions. He is a very critical thinker, and, even when I disagreed with him - as on the question of Tchernichovsky's concept of revenge - I had only the highest respect for the way in which Edleson came to his own appraisal. His translations here, as in the Haefrati play, show a wonderful sense for language.

In evaluating modernistic poems such as those by Wieseltier and Zach, Edleson was assisted by an unpublished paper by Warren Bargad and by an article by Shaked which he had faxed to him from Cincinnati. His tireless pursuit of precision and completeness filled me with admiration and with a special satisfaction which I have experienced only rarely in my teaching. As he continued in the work he began to get better and better, and there is no doubt in my mind that he could do a dissertation on even the most difficult of topics - such as the Haskalah or the poetry of Yocheved Bat Miriam. I recommend his chapter on the modernistic poems of Saul to anyone fascinated with such "modern midrashic" treatments of biblical figures.

My superlatives in this appraisal are not used lightly. By the same token, I will end by noting again that some features of the work would require refinement in the crucible of "drier" academic scholarship, but this could easily be accomplished by someone of Edleson's brilliance without clipping his wings too drastically.

Respectfully submitted,
Dr. Stanley Nash, Referee
Professor of Hebrew

April 2, 1990

HEBREW UNION COLLEGE-JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION
NEW YORK SCHOOL

Report on the Rabbinic Dissertation Submitted by

David Edleson

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Ordination

Midrash Sha'ul:"Midrashic" Interpretation of King Saul In the Bible, In the Classical Midrashim, and in Modern Literature

Mr. Edleson defines midrash as the

> way in which Jewish writers interact, reinterpret, restructure, and revitalize the Jewish national histories and myths in order to make them relevant to changing contexts, and in order to invest these myths with lessons of morality, ethics and pride which give guidance to the Jew in his/her efforts to live a "holy" proper life.

By using such an expanded definition, Mr. Edleson explores what is common to the Bible, the Midrashim, and modern Hebrew literature in their treatment of King Saul. Saul was seen, not necessarily as he was, but as those who came after him wished him to be seen. The Biblical record reflecting the triumph of the David party had to have Saul's failure and David's succession explained as the resultant of Saul's sin and madness. For the Rabbis, themselves subject to Roman rule, the first king of Israel was granted heightened holiness. Saul was presented as a pious Jew whose misadventures were due to inadvertence and misunderstandings. As the Jewish People entered the modern world, the image of Saul was to be transformed. Unlike David or Solomon, Saul was not an icon of the Jewish religion. He could be treated as a tragic hero., a king qua king, who had failed, or, he might be treated as an exemplar of a pattern of life which Jews once had had and which they would need. again. Saul might be seen as the natural man who had been brought low by the machinations of the religious establishment of his time, the prophet Samuel, even as Jews in the modern world had been weakened by the Jewish religious institution of our time. Even after the establishment of the State of Israel, the figure of Saul has reflected the differences within the intellectual world of Medinat Yisrael. He has even been seen as a kind of exemplar of mindless militarism.

Mr. Edleson has written a brilliant study of the differing treatments of Saul, son of Kish. It is with great pride in his achievement that I recommend the acceptance of his thesis to the Faculty of the College-Institute.

Respectfully submitted,
Leonard S. Kravitz, Referee
Professor of Midrash and Homiletics

April 2, 1990

MIDRASH SHA'UL:

"Midrashic" Interpretations of King Saul in the Bible, the Classical Midrash and Modern Hebrew Literature

David Edleson

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
Requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute Of Religion
Graduate Rabbinic Program
New York, New York

March 13, 1990

Referee: Dr. Stanley Nash
Referee: Dr. Leonard Kravitz

Table of Contents

MIDRASH SHA'UL

1.
INTRODUCTION:
DEFINING "MIDRASH"

The Agenda

There is no such thing as pure academic motivation. Behind every scholarly endeavor lies an agenda, a desire to prove a greater point by use of a more narrowly defined topic of research. This desire may indeed be buried in the subconscious of the scholar, or it may be quite open and explicitly stated. For example, the cellular microbiologist may conduct exhaustive research on the intricate chemical reactions required in a particular function of a particular cell. This biologist gives as the motivation for the research a scientific curiosity about how cells function, or the possible advances for humanity that come from unlocking the secrets of the cell. But beyond this, a deeper agenda may be operating: perhaps a desire to show that nothing is inpenetrable to the human mind and that mystery is but a temporary veil for ignorance; or perhaps that the intricacies of nature are so complex as to be unfathomable to the human mind, and that life itself is a great mystery which research can only reinforce. Another more cogent example may help to illustrate the point. A Christian biblical scholar may do research into the use of semiticisms in the language and syntax of the New Testament. The explicit agenda may be the desire to illuminate the influence of semitic languages on the New

Testament, or to ascertain the relationship of proto-rabbinic tradition on New Testament dominical statements, or to determine which layers of text are the oldest. However, behind this scholarly motivation assuredly lies the more profound agenda of either demonstrating that the "real" Jesus was very much influenced by the rabbinic teachings of his time, or conversely that he was not influenced at all by those teachings. And there may even be an more profound religious agenda behind that: what did Jesus actually say so that his followers may observe. The use of semitics is but a scholarly tool to satisfy a deep religious need.

The myth of objectivism - knowledge for knowledge's sake - is one of the great icons of academia. It is not an icon which informs this thesis. I realize that I am not objective, and so I wish to make explicit this thesis' agenda at the outset. I believe that modern Hebrew literature, when it touches on the relationship of God and mankind, is as valid a part of Jewish religious literature and the continuous revelation of our tradition as is the literature of the Commentaries, the Midrash, and much of the Scripture itself. I believe this as a liberal Jew who holds dear the notion that Torah is a continuing process of revelation and learning, in which eternal values are made relevant to current contexts by the reexamination and reapplication of national myths[1] and history. I believe this as a Zionist who sees in the flowering of modern Hebrew and modern Israel the return to a

[1] It should be made clear that by myth I do not mean to imply that it is fiction, rather that the seed-event(s) have been repeated and embellished and turned into legends which then become deeply ingrained in the self-perception of the group. These seed-events therefore become lost in the legends which are needed to explain the groups raison-d'etre and place in the world. Thus by myth, I am making no judgement as to the historicity of the legend, but as to its importance in the group self-perception.

vibrant and living Jewish culture rooted in land and language, the first flowering of redemption.

This thesis is further motivated by my profound dislike for and impatience with the Judaism of nostalgia. This Judaism of the "Great Sages", which now defines so much of Jewish attitude toward the past, in my opinion borders on idolatry and ancestor worship. If we as a people and a culture truly wish to flourish, we must continually create new patterns founded upon our oral and written heritage. We must continually build, add, change, remodel. We must not stand still, satisfied to remained comfortably unchallenged at our foundations. For a people as ancient as we, exposed foundations are a sign of destruction, a sign of war. They are shelters in which we try to hide from the bombing perils of modernity. I do not believe our rabbinic ancestors would have appreciated being used as a shelter from reality and change, for above all they were challenged to discover, amidst changing conditions, the "living principles given by God through which his people might survive and flourish[2]." The rabbis had to adapt and change, or perish. Nostalgia is not a healthy basis for any living culture, nor any ongoing relationship, and especially not for the relationship between the Jewish people and our God.

This thesis will address this larger agenda through and exploration of the genre of Jewish literature known as midrash. Since the definition of terms in a discussion really determines the shape of its outcome, a thorough explanantion of how the term "midrash" will be used in this research should now be forwarded.

---

[2]Bruce D. Chilton, A Galilean Rabbi and His Bible: Jesus' Use of the Interpreted Scripture of His Time. (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1984.) p. 16.

Defining "Midrash" and the Midrashic Process

In the narrow sense, midrash refers to

> the designation of a particular genre of rabbinic literature constituting an anthology and compilation of homilies, consisting of both biblical exegesis and sermons delivered in public as well as *aggadot* or *halakhot* and forming a running aggadic commentary on specific books of the Bible.[3]

This definition refers to the classical rabbinic midrashim, composed from the 5th century until the 13th century, with important compilations continuing until the 16th century. Normally the term 'midrash" only refers to these works of textual interpretation. These midrashim are known for making connections between texts from different bibilcial sections, for bringing new more relevant meanings to certain texts, and for filling in the gaps in the lives of certain bibilcal figures.

In most writing and discussion, that is the midrash. However, the purpose of this thesis is to broaden that definition, to get away from that narrow academic definition of the genre, and to look instead at the midrashic process. **For our purposes, we will define the midrashic process as the way in which Jewish writers interact, reinterpret, restructure, and revitalize the Jewish national histories and myths in order to make them relevant to changing contexts, and in order to invest these myths with lessons of morality, ethics and pride which give guidance to the Jew in his/her efforts to live a "holy" proper life.** To be sure, the rabbinic midrashic models function

[3]Encyclopaedia Judaica, "Midrash", pp 1507

within complex principles of hermeneutics and formal structures, but their process is basically the same. The need of Jews to have our ancient legends and traditions address current issues and concerns did not begin and end with the classic midrashim. Rather, it is an ongoing process that can and does occur at every period of Jewish life, starting long before the classical rabbinical midrashim.

It seems absurd to talk of the Bible as midrash, and in the narrow sense it is absurd. However, if we take this broadened definition of the midrashic process, biblical texts can also be interpreted as midrashic. These texts are themselves reworkings of even more ancient myths and legends. The redactors wove these oral histories together according to certain concerns and world-views. The redactors received an ancient lore. It was up to them to create from this lore a sacred text which was relevant to their audience and which reflected the concerns and needs of their day. Thus different biblical strata and books can be understood as parts of the eternal midrashic process of updating religious symbols to suit a changing society. The biblical texts certainly are not midrash in the classical sense of the term, but insomuch as they are attempts to apply ancient traditions to new situations, they function as midrash in the broader sense.

Just as biblical redactions can be said to function within this midrashic process, so too can modern Hebrew/Israeli literature. David Jacobson, in his book Modern Midrash: The Retelling of Traditional Jewish Narratives by Twentieth Century Hebrew Writers, eloquently and forcefully defends that idea. He writes that both the ancient and the modern authors of interpretive retellings of Jewish legends "share a common midrashic impulse to use the Bible as a source of characters, plots, images, and

themes in order to represent contemporary issues and concerns. [4] He continues:

> When the whole corpus of retold versions of traditional Jewish narrative by twentieth-century Hebrew writers is taken into account, it may be seen not only as a continuation of the midrashic tradition of the rabbinic and medieval periods, but also as the product of the revival of interests in myths, legends, and folktales that has spread thoughout western culture in the past two centuries. [5]

Such "mythopoetic writing" sees in the mythic world of the past a source of "revolutionary values more appropriate to the cultural needs of their time than are the values of the present."[6] Jacobson sees the modern Hebrew return to its national myths as a result of the cultural redefinition which Judaism has undergone under the influence of Zionism and the realities it has created. The need to re-explore and rewrite these myths lies in their being important sources of self-understanding, and "useful as a means to analyze present crises and to explore alternative approaches that might help to resolve these crises."[7] This return to tradition is neither reactionary nor nostalgic, but rather progressive and even radical. It's purpose is to point out how far the people have currently diverged from the mythic ideals which have shaped our self-conception and sense of worth. Thus, creative

---

[4]David C. Jacobson, Modern Midrash: The Retelling of Traditional Jewish Narratives by Twentieth Century Hebrew Writers, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987) p. 3.

[5]Jacobson, p. 4.

[6]Jacobson, p. 5, quoting Northrop Frye, The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976) pp.161-88.

[7]Jacobson, p.5.

encounters with our written past has the potential to engender a revivifying, empowering, even radical response on the part of the reader.

The choice of Saul.

This thesis will focus on the character of Saul. It will attempt to look at Saul's treatment in Hebrew texts, beginning with the biblical text of Samuel and continuing through modern Israeli poetry. The decision to only examine one character was made in the belief that the universal is most clearly revealed within the particular. It is also hoped that this will allow a somewhat deeper comparison of the ways in which the bibiilcal, rabbinic and modern Hebrew writer approach one character and reinterpet him to suit their context.

The character of Saul was chosen a) because he is a complex character which lends itself to a variety of interpretations, b) because the text of I Samuel represents an amalgam of legends and ideologies structured according a deliberate agenda, c) because he is also well represented in modern Hebrew literature, especially poetry, d) the issues that Saul evokes, namely those of authority, power, nationalism on the one hand, and melancholy, paranoia, and suffering at the hands of God on the other are relevant to to all periods of Jewish history, and particularly relevant to the Zionist period of the rebirth of the State of Israel.

Method

For each work of literature examined, a brief synopsis of the work will be presented, followed by some critical remarks on its literary qualities. These remarks may rely heavily upon secondary critical literature.

A focused study will then be presented on how that particular piece of literature portrays Saul Where appropriate, linguistic, semantic, structural and theological/philosophical comparisons will be offered. Most importantly, each work will end with e a discussion of how each piece of literature functions as midrash, on what lessons or values it was trying to impart, and in reaction to what contextual needs and trends. Once again, my agenda is to demonstrate the breadth and flexibility of the midrashic process, and especially how the modern Hebrew writer can function to interpret Jewish history to the present needs in as valid and authentically Jewish a way as did the rabbis and the biblical authors themselves.

A brief explanation should be given as to why the literature examined is limited to Hebrew writers, for it is certainly arguable true that all Jewish writing on Biblical themes falls within the category of midrash, regardless of its language. Yet, I firmly believe that the spirit and *zeitgeist* of our people is best expressed in the language of our people, Hebrew. Since thoughts shape language as much as language shapes thought, Jewish thought is most clearly expressed in Hebrew. More concretely, since all the biblical and rabbinic texts are originally in Hebrew, it is appropriate to limit the modern literature to that linguistic medium.

In terms of modern Jewish literature, there is a strong ideological motivation for limiting it to Hebrew. I believe that the revival of the Hebrew language is central to the continued vitality of the Jewish people. To quote Ben-Yehuda:

> today we may be in a strange land, but tomorrow we will dwell in the land of our fathers; today we may be speaking alien

> tongues, but tomorrow we shall speak Hebrew. This is the meaning of the hope of redemption, and I know no other."[8]

Given the intimate ties of culture and language, I believe the creative and forward-looking rebuilding of Jewish culture must be centered on the revival of the Hebrew language, for that is the language of our nodal myths, our law, our lore, and above all, our Torah. This thesis is written in the belief that through our national rebirth and the revitalization of the Hebrew language

> the holy spirit, the creative genius of the people. . .will again animate our people ...; it will create new things which we cannot at present even imagine. No one can foretell what form and shape the newborn life and spirit of the regenerated nation will assume. As regards their religious expressions, and especially with respect to the Jewish religion, they will certainly be equally different both from present-day and from ancient religion.[9]

It is within that leap of faith that this thesis operates, and so it is limited to Hebrew authors. And in order to sober the sublime with the mundane, considerations of time, space, and thesis requirements were not without their import.

And so, having made clear the agenda and format of this thesis, it is time to execute it. This is first done by an examination of the biblical text of I Samuel (in which the bulk of the Saul myth is contained) and then the rabbinic midrash on Saul. This is followed by an in-depth examination of

---

[8]Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, "A Letter of Ben-Yehuda (1880)," in The Zionist Idea. ed. Arthur Hertzberg (Atheneum, NY,:Atheneum, 1959)p. 161.

[9]Moses Hess, "Rome and Jerusalem", in The Zionist Idea, p. 134-5.

modern Hebrew drama and poetry centering of the character of Saul. By examining the way these different writers reinterpreted the meaning of Saul's life to suit the times in which they live, we can begin to get a feel for the history and scope of midrashic interpretations of Saul. We can also begin to understand the power and importance of the midrashic process as it touches all of Jewish legend. It is my belief that this process has been central to our survival as a people up to now, and that it is crucial to our continued survival as a vital and creative people. If our myths die, we die with them.

2.
THE BIBLICAL SAUL:
I SAMUEL AND THE MIDRASHIC PROCESS

All written history is a form of midrash, the attempt to impose upon certain reported events a system of cause and effect relationships which allows those events to attain meaning and coherence. Although the modern historian may try at all costs to be objective in approach, in reality truly objective history is not possible. Any historian is bound to the conceptions of life, universe and law that govern his/her era, and he/she has no choice but to operate within those confines, which are at the time seen as objective. History is the attempt to sort through recorded information in order to achieve a coherent theory of what took place; coherent, that is, with the prevailing world-view of the time. Today we live in an "information age," in which an almost endless number of details concerning certain events can be recorded, perused, and turned into history with the aid of great libraries, photocopy machines, cameras, microfilm, and of course, computers. And yet, our history is not objective, for in choosing which material is recorded and highlighted and which material isn't, the historian creates a hierarchy based on subjective motivations. World-view, self-conception, race, gender, sexual orientation, level of education, income: these all serve to filter out that which is not believed worthy of remembrance.

Furthermore, what constitutes "coherent" changes from age to age and from culture to culture. To posit a feminist example, "objective" history has in the past tended to only record what men say and do, so this "objective" history is in reality subjective men's history, and all that makes it coherent is its conformity to men's attitudes. Such history is more a reflection of the culture, taboos, and attitudes of the writer than it is of "what really happened." Truly objective comprehensive value-free history is not possible for the human mind, for we process all information through the software of our values and outlook. What "really happened" can't be ascertained, so we are left to try and fit what we know (which is predetermined by our values and world-view) into a framework we can understand. This need to impose meaning on life's events is at the heart of both history and midrash. It is their common bond.

If, in the modern age of information, objective history is impossible, how much less likely it was in biblical times when events were recorded by word of mouth and passed down through generations, constantly being reshaped to fit the evolving world-view of the time and culture. At such a time, the "midrashic" character of history would surely have been more pronounced. As described in Chapter 1, "midrashic" refers to the

> **way in which Jewish writers interact, reinterpret, restructure, and revitalize the Jewish national histories and myths in order to make them relevant to changing contexts, and in order to invest these myths with lessons of morality, ethics and pride which give guidance to the Jew in his/her efforts to live a "holy" proper life.**

Thus different biblical strata and books can be understood as parts of this midrashic process of updating religious symbols to suit a changing society.

As the Israelite political, economic, and cultural lives changed and evolved, the national Hebrew myths, anchored in some objective occurence, had to be reinterpeted as to remain consonant with the changing world-view. The biblical texts certainly are not midrash in the classical sense of the term, but insomuch as they are attempts to apply ancient traditions to new situations, they function as midrash in the broader sense.

This is particularly true of Book of Samuel. In I Samuel, as will be demonstrated in this chapter, the redactor is restructuring certain loosely-related myths and legends of the transition from confederacy to monarchy for the purpose of finding in those myths the origins and possible solutions to certain issues facing the redactor and his circle of colleagues. In so doing, the biblical writer functions as "midrashist," for he is operating under the impulse to use the mythic characters, plots, images, and themes in order to represent contemporary issues and concerns, and in order to "analyze present crises and to explore alternative approaches that might help to resolve these crises."[1]

The text of I Samuel.

Before any investigation of the character of Saul in the I Samuel can be made, some discussion of the text itself is required. (Because this thesis is not in the area of biblical criticism, these remarks will be brief and only touch the surface.) It must first be said that the Masoretic text of Samuel is in bad shape, exhibiting countless copying errors and ommissions.

---

[1]David C. Jacobson, Modern Midrash: The Retelling of Traditional Jewish Narratives by Twentieth Century Hebrew Writers, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987) p. 5

It "suffers extensively from haplography, scribal omission triggered by repeated sequences of letters, most often at ends of words or phrases.... Some are of extraordinary length."[2] However, the Masoretic text does reflect an old source which is quite short, and free of much of the expansion found in later versions. This short text is in marked contrast to the Septuaguint version of Samuel which is much longer and in many cases at odds with the Masoretic text. It has been posited that the Septuaguint is a later attempt to correct the Masoretic text, but its similarity to the Qumran scrolls of Samuel has led other scholars to assert that the Septuaguint is based on an entirely different Hebrew original than is the Masoretic text.[3]

In both versions, the narrative itself is often contradictory, redundant, and heterogenous. Kyle McCarter, in his introduction to the Anchor Bible's I Samuel edition explains:

> The narratives about Samuel, Saul, and David that make up our book have a heterogeneous appearance even to the untrained eye. Numerous internal thematic tensions, duplications, and contradictions stand in the way of a straightfoward reading of the story. The figure of Samuel dominates the first three chapters, then vanishes suddenly and completely in cc 4-6, only to return again in c 7. In c 8 kingship is depicted as wholly offensive to Yahweh, while in cc 9-10 the first king is annointed at Yahweh's command. Saul becomes king by lotttery in 10:17-27 but, apparently, by popular proclamation in c. 11. He seems to be rejected by Yahweh not once but twice (in cc13 and 15) , and he acquires the services of David not once but twice (in cc 16 and 17). There are two accounts of David's betrothal to a daughter of Saul (c18) , two of his defection to

---

[2]P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., "Introduction to I Samuel" in The Anchor Bible , Vol. 8 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1980) p. 8.

[3]McCarter, p. 6.

the Philistine king of Gath (cc 21 and 27) and two of his refusal to take Saul's life (cc 24 and 26).[4]

There are many theories and opinions as to exactly how many layers there are in the text, when they were redacted and by whom, and how much historical material is contained in them. Wellhausen believed there were two strata: an early stratum, generally favorable to the institution of the monarchy, which was written in a mythic romantic style but preserved genuine historical material; and a later stratum with little historic value which viewed the monarchy with great suspicion and exhibited a post-Exilic Deuteronomic outlook.[5] Scholars such as Cornill, Budde and Driver agreed with the two-strata theory but held that the anti-monarchist stratum belonged to the Elohist document and was therefore much earlier than Wellhausen had asserted. Still other scholars held that Samuel represents a composite of many narratives redacted late, and therefore of questionable historicity. Leonard Rost, whose opinions are still greatly accepted, holds that their are several story-cycles within the early narrative stratum, while Martin Noth argues that the Deuteronomistic editor brought these materials together for the first time and linked them by the anti-monarchical material. Weiser argues against Noth saying that there are several layers of redaction and revisions even within the anti-monarchical material.[6]

Mr. McCarter points out that unlike the books of Judges and Kings, the I Samuel shows a very spare redaction on the part of the Deuteronomist. Because of this, McCarter asserts that the bulk of the material of Samuel

---

[4]McCarter, p. 12.
[5]McCarter, p 13.
[6]McCarter, pp 13-14.

reached the Deuteronomist in a form which already reflected proto-Deuteronomic outlook and theology. Since this material was largely acceptable to the Deuteronomist, only a light editorial touch was required. McCarter believes that the majority of I Samuel as we have it is the work of a Josianic historian . This view is supported by the central place of Jerusalem in the narrative and the rejection of the Shilonite institutions and priesthood [Eli and his sons] in exchange for Jerusalemite ones. [See Superiority of Jerusalem to Shilo, below] Also, several extended speeches, such as that of Abigail in I Samuel 25:28-31 anticipate Josianic rhetoric.

Imposed upon this Josianic material is what McCarter calls a prophetic layer. This layer of redaction is seen in the anti-monarchical material which shows the prophet as the true leader and the king as compromise at best. This layer also portrays the king as being dependent on the prophet for election and annointing and subject to the propet's rejection. [See: Superiority of Prophet to King, below] This layer speaks strongly against the dynastic system of passing on rule from father to son, and instead favors the passing of rule to the one "chosen by God" as determined by the prophet. [See: Superiority of David to Saul,below] This leads McCarter to conclude that the prophetic layer is Northern in origin, since the dependence of the king on prophetic election and the rejection of dynastic transmission is typical of Northern prophetic circles.[7] Further, the narrative of the ark being stolen and returned due to the workings of the stolen god [I Samuel 4-6] is typical of a Northern genre of literature. [8]

McCarter holds that this layer, though having much in common with Deuteronomist thought, pre-dates it considerably. At the same time, given

---

[7]McCarter,. p. 21.
[8]McCarter, p. 24-25.

their harangues against it [I Sam. 8:10-18], the author(s) must have had experience with the monarchy, and they must have been pro-Davidic given their portrayal of Saul. Therefore, McCarter dates the bulk of material in the late 8th century B.C.E, after the collapse of Northern Israel, and holds that it was written by a Northern writer living in the southern Davidic community.[9] This proto-Deuteronomic prophetic text was later touched up by the Deuteronomist to achieve the final form of the text of Samuel.

Thus, the text of I Samuel itself represents a considerable obstacle in determining what historical material, if any, is present. The text is more clearly understood as layer upon layer of "midrashic" interpretations of the Samuel/Saul/David legends, each layer reflecting the political, social and religious context of its time.

Despite its heterogeneity, the text as we have it is an attempt to combine the various legends concerning Samuel, Saul and David into a coherent linear narrative of the rise of the monarchy. This attempt is also characteriestic of classical midrash, in that it tries to resolve certain contradictions and redundancies in the received tradition.

The Life of Saul in I Samuel.

What follows is a summary of the life of Saul as the redactor of I Samuel wanted it to be remembered.

Saul's election and coronation.

-Disregarding the kingship of God, the people insist on a king so as to be like all the other nations. God warns the people through Samuel of the pitfalls of having a king, but the people continue their demand and God relents.

---

[9]McCarter, p 22.

-Saul, the son of Kish son of Abiel son of Zeror son of Becorath son of Aphiah, a Benjaminite, is elected. He is from a wealthy and respected family [גבור חיל I Sam 9:1] [10] Saul is taller and more handsome than any other Israelite, and to the people, this is taken as a sign of his worthiness to rule.

-As a youth, out searching of his father's lost asses, Saul meets the seer Samuel who informs him he is to become king and annoints him.

-On the way home, Saul meets a band of prophets and gripped by the spirit of God, begins speaking in ecstasy like the prophets themselves.

-Having annointed Saul privately, Samuel later assembles the various tribal leadership and by lot shows Saul to be God's appointed. Saul however is modestly hiding among the baggage of the leader, reluctant to become king. Once found, Saul is acclaimed king and describes the rules of the monarchy, but some "scoundrels" grumble against Saul and do not think him worthy of his position. Saul then hears of the predicament of some fellow Israelites being held siege and gripped by the spirit of God, he gathers 330,000 men to attack and save them.

-After his victory, all the people acknowledge Saul's worthiness, and in an apparent act of magnanimity, Saul spares those who have previously grumbled against him. Saul is then formally inaugurated king at Gilgal with all the proper sacrifices.

Saul's military encounters.

-Saul spends most of his military rule fighting the invading Philistines. On one occasion, Saul's son, Jonathan, kills the Philistine prefect, and realizing the impending retaliation, the

---

[10]According to S.R. Driver, in his Notes of the Hebrew Text of Samuel (Winona Lake, Indiana: Alpha Publications, 1889/1984) p 69, this expression refers to a man of substance, a "well-to-do country farmer." In contrast, according to Kyle McCarter in THe Anchor Bible: I Samuel, p. 173, this expression refers to the taxable land-owning gentry, powerful men, and substantial citizens.

Israelite military gathers to defend themselves. Samuel had ordered to Saul to wait for his arrival in seven days at which time the proper sacrifices would be made before battle. After seven days, Samuel has still not appeared, and the people, seeing the great strength of the Philistines, begin to scatter and hide. In order to stop this, Saul goes ahead without Samuel and offers sacrifices. Just as he is finishing, Samuel arrives and informs Saul that because he did not wait, Saul's dynasty will not endure over Israel.

-In another engagement with the Philistines, Jonathan sneaks out of camp with an attendant and suprises the Philistine camp, wreaking havoc on them so that they flee. When the Israelite see this, they join the battle and pursue the Philistines. Saul, in his piety, has made the soldiers swear not to eat any food before nightfall, but since Jonathan hadn't been there to hear this oath, he eats some honey he finds to give him strength. After nightfall, the famished troops take the sheep and cows of the spoil and slaughter them without proper rites, thus violating the taboo of eating with the blood. Saul, angry that the people had ignored the law of God, orders that everyone bring a sacrifice, and he sets up a large stone altar on which to offer the proper rites before eating. Later, when Saul inquires of the Urim and Tummim for military advise, they do not answer and Saul realizes that someone has broken the oath against eating. When it is shown to be Jonathan, Saul, ever strict in his enforcement of the law, is prepared to execute Jonathan, but the other soldiers dissuade him.

-Samuel then commands Saul to battle and exterminate the Amalekites, including men, women, children and livestock. Saul does defeat the Amalekites, but instead of killing their king, takes Agag captive. Contray to the command of Samuel, he also saves the best of the livestock to sacrifice to God. Samuel is furious when he discovers that Saul has disregarded the command of God, and announces that Saul will loose his kingship. After that, Saul never sees Samuel again.

Saul's madness.

-After Samuel's pronouncement, Saul begins to have fits of terror and depression. In order to help him through these, David, a musician, is brought to the court to play for Saul. Unbeknownst to Saul, David has already been secretly annointed by Samuel as the next king, since God's favor has departed from Saul.

-In another version of David's initial meeting with Saul, David is portrayed as defeating the giant Goliath, and being rewarded by Saul's offer of marriage to his daughter. In either case, David enters into Saul's court.

-Saul is impressed with David, and makes him his arms-bearer. Saul's children are also smitten with David's charm. Both his son, Jonathan, and his daughter Michal are in love with David. In fact, Jonathan is more loyal to David than to his father Saul.

-All this exacerbates Saul's fits of paranoia and he repeatedly tries to kill David.

-Saul, to fulfill his earlier promise, offers his daughter Merab, but David defers, and Merab is given to another. Saul, wanting to reneg on his promise offers his daughter Michal on the condition that David kill 100 Philistines and bring back their foreskins. David kills 200 and Saul is forced to allow the marriage. This only deepens Saul's fear of David.

-The remainder of the book of I Samuel relatesthe ongoing attempts of Saul to destroy David and of David's elusion of Saul initially with the help of Saul's family, and later by his own cleverness. David repeatedly demonstrates his continued loyalty to Saul and shows that he wishes him no harm. On some of these occasions, Saul realizes his own insanity and apologizes, admitting that David means him no harm. Nonetheless, the fear returns and the pursuit continues until David is forced to leave the country and join the Philistines.

- Though the Philistines surround and greatly outnumber the Israelite army, Saul receives no advice from God through either a prophet or the Urim and Tummim. Desparate, he breaks his own law and consults a necromancer in order to bring the ghost of Samuel up from the grave to advise him. Samuel informs Saul that he and his sons will die tomorrow in battle amidst defeat.

-This comes to pass, and in the midst of battle Saul, mortally wounded, fall on his own sword and dies.

-The Philistines take the bodies of Saul and his sons, decapitate them, parade the bodies throughout their territory, and impale the heads on the walls of Beth-shan. Appaled, a group of men from

> Jabesh-Gilead go to Beth-shan and take the heads down, burying them under near Jabesh under an unmarked tree.

On the whole, the text portrays Saul as a handsome, modest, perhaps pious young king who, through two well-intentioned mistakes in carrying out the letter of God's law as conveyed by Samuel, forfeits his kingship. Thereafter he becomes a sad figure of a man possessed with fear and paranoia, who realizes his condition but can not change. Finally, amidst despair and defeat, he kills himself.

The Text as Literature.

Approaching a biblical text from a literary standpoint is a difficult endeavor, for the text was not written according to modern literary genres and norms. Certainly, biblical literature, like modern literature, was written to teach, edify, entertain and compel its audience. However, in addition to these aims, biblical literature was also written as sacred text, the revealed word of the one God, whose truth and validity was unquestionable. The expected reaction from the reader was not catharsis, but obedience.

What complicates the task of evaluating biblical text as literature is determining whose standards will be used for the evaluation. One can use the cultural standards and values of the writers as a basis for judgement, but the only real material we have from which to determine those standards and values is the biblical text itself. Furthermore, since the texts were passed down orally, then written, then redacted over periods

of hundreds and even thousands of years, it is impossible to really determine which period of values one should use. Nonetheless, it is possible to take some basic assumptions of the mind-set of ancient times in the Near East and attempt some evaluation of the text based upon those assumptions.

In relation to the text of I Samuel, we can assume that these legends were written with certain didactic aims. These will be discussed later in this chapter. It is difficult at best to determine if this story was written consciously as literature. The modern reader will read the story of Saul and immediately react to it as a tragedy. We see Saul as a tragic figure, much in the way King Lear is tragic. He is controlled by forces beyond his control. He has responsibilities he never asked for. From his perspective,m he is plagued with military threats from the outside, which mirror the threats in his court from David and Jonathan, which in turn mirror the internal threats of his own descent into madness. We see a man who is unjustly punished by God and Samuel for a minor trangression under a very stressful situation. We then see him punished again for sparing the lives of women and children. We see a man who is mentally ill, who tries to kill David but who then apologizes and begs forgiveness. He can't help himself. We see a man who loves his son so much he is terrified of loosing his loyalty, and in his zealousness to prevent this, drives his son and daughters away. We see a man with bad advisors, who take advantage of his mental state in order to further their own careers. We see a man rejected by God, rejected by his children, rejected by Samuel, and rejected by his people, who in lonely desperation consults a necromancer, and is then again rejected. Finally, we see a defeated man die at his own hand in the midst of a terrible defeat. His inner defeat is again mirrored by the outer

military defeat. In all of this, we see a terribly tragic figure, with God and Samuel as the antagonists and Saul as the protagonist. Certainly the mirroring of external and internal battles is a fine literary technique. This is perhaps why The figure of Saul has become so popular in modern Hebrew literature, and other literatures as well. Chapter 4 of this thesis will deal with one dramatic attempt to create a true tragedy from the biblical narrative.

However, those are the results of the imposition of modern values and perspectives upon an ancient text. Baruch Kurtzweil, in his essay "Is There Such a Thing as Biblical Tragedy?"[11] examines the question of whether the narrative of Saul can be considered a classical tragedy according to the parameters of that literary genre. Drawing upon literary theorists from Aristotle to Hegel, Kurtzweil draws a distinction between tragedy and sacred plays. Tragedy can only occur when there is a conflict between relative sets of values, both of which are positive value systems, but between which the tragic character must choose. The tragic figure is caught between two relative systems, and unable to resolve the conflict, withdraws into absolute solitude of self. Sacred drama, or morality plays, portray a conflict between absolute values, immutable qualities of good and evil, and the characters in these dramas represent either one or the other. There is no room for moral relativity. In sacred drama, the protagonist is caught between moral absolutes, good and evil, and that figure must choose. If he or she chooses evil it is not truly tragic from a point of view, rather it is a lesson to the audience of the results of the wrong choice.

---

[11]Baruch Kurtzweil, "Is There Such a Thing as Biblical Tragedy?", in An Anthology of Hebrew Essays, Vol. 1, eds. I. Cohen and B.Y. Michali (Tel Aviv: Massada Publishing Co. Ltd., 1966.), pp. 97-116.

Kurtzweil points out that although in the text of Saul the characters are not completely flat symbols of good or evil, nonetheless the story unfolds under the overarching system of absolute morality. Saul is not caught between competing value systems. Saul is simply not able to submit totally to the absolute will of God. According to Kurzweil, there is not question in the biblical text of what is right and what is wrong. Clearly Samuel and David represent the absolute good, obedience to God's will, no matter how harsh that may be. Saul represents an inability to comply with God's will. This is not tragic, it is unfortunate for Saul. In the biblical picture, Saul himself recognizes the Absolute, and wishes to comply but can't seem to comprehend what that requires. Saul repeatedly admits his sin, his mistreatment of David and Jonathan. Saul does not withdraw into solitude, but rather even at his most desperate hour goes to anecromancer in order to conjure up Samuel, that is, to renew some contact with the absolute good, which he now has lost completely. According to Kurtzweil, this is not a tragedy, but a complex and subtle morality play. Saul's death is not tragic - it is an inevitable step in the establishment of the Davidic dynasty, and as such has a morally positive ending from the biblical perspective. (Of course, the sins of David against the Absolute themselves make up the text of II Samuel.)

Even from a modern point of view, the story is not truly tragic. In a tragedy, the reader or viewer is most moved because there is not clear enemy, no one to blame, no one to project anger upon. In a tragedy, we see a hero caught in a terrible situation that is no one's fault. The lack of an antagonist is the key to catharsis, for just as death is the ultimate tragedy, every viewer of a tragic play senses his own feelings of helplessness with fate. In the story of Saul, the modern reader definitely

has characters to blame. Not accepting the moral system of absolute obedience, the modern reader sides with Saul and is angry at Samuel and God for unjust and "immoral" commands. That the modern reader views God's command as immoral gives some indication of the huge gap that exists between our moral outlook and that of the biblical redactors.

Thus the biblical narrative is not truly tragic. Instead, it is a very complex and challenging morality play, in which there is a clear good and evil, and in which obedience is the lesson. The genius of the text as a morality play is its inclusion of complicating factors, such as Saul's madness, Samuel's harshness, Jonathan's love for David, and Saul's own cognizance of his illness. These factors serve to arouse sympathy for Saul, and thereby to challenge the viewer to determine exactly what is good and what is evil. This challenge reinforces the absolute nature of the morality involved: even if a person is mad, even if God asks them to murder groups of women and children, even if a mistake is made with good intentions, the result is the same. Disobedience to God's (via the prophet) will, no matter how small and no matter why, results in catastrophe for the sinner. This makes Samuel one of the outstanding examples of morality literature, surpassing in its complexity, subtlety, and dramatic force the later medieval and modern morality plays of which it is a forerunner.

The Text as "Midrash"

As stated above, the current text of I Samuel represents a thorough reworking of history, myths, and legends surrounding the central characters of Samuel, Saul and David. In order to achieve a coherent retelling of the Israel's transition from a tribal confederacy to a monarchy, the writer had

to arrange the legends into a series of events according to his theology and belief-system. This gives the text linear coherence. It is clear that this text was written long before the classical midrashim. Yet, in the redactors' impulse to rework and reinterpret the legends and myths they received, and to create from them a text which spoke to their contemporary issues and concerns, it can be said the the text of I Samuel is in someways midrashic.

As described above, the writer (or writers: for convenience the text will use the singular) of this text was likely from the prophetic circles of Northern Israel, living in a time when his country had fallen. This fall forced the writer to admit that according to his theological system, the Southern Kingdom was in some way more righteous than the Northern Kingdom had been. Otherwsie, the Northern Kingdom would have prevailed. Unwilling or unable to give up some of the fundaments of his Northern outlook, he maintained a belief that prophetic rule was superior to royal rule, but that even under royal rule, only God can pick the successor to a current king (and not dynastic succession.) Nonetheless, since Jerusalem had survived, he had to find a way to show the divine reason for that survival, and living under Davidic rule, he had to show the superiority of the Davidic line to that of Saul (even though he was opposed in principle to the concept of royal lineage.) Thus, there are three primary concerns which the writer incorporated into the "midrashic" process of updating and restructuring the legends in I Samuel:

-1) to demonstrate the superiorty of prophetic rule to monarchic rule,

-2) to show the superiority of the Jerusalemite institutions and priesthood over those of Shilo, and

-3) to explain why despite all of his undeniable shortcomings, David was chosen by God to rule over Israel instead of Saul. Each of these requires a more detailed inspection.

Superiority of Prophet to King

The most prominent theme in the first half of I Samuel is the superiority of prophetic rule over monarchic rule. To exemply this, the author has taken what were most likely unrelated legends of a prophet/judge/warrior-leader named Samuel and intertwined his story with the legends of another judge, turn-first-king, Saul. The book begins with a narrative about the miraculous conception of Samuel by a barren mother, Hannah. Hannah vows that if given a son, she will "dedicated him to the Lord for all the days of his life, , and no razor shall ever touch his head." [I Sam 1:11].[12] This is a clear reference to Nazirite vows made by a barren mother for a son, and indeed the entire narrative closely parallels the birth narrative of another judge, Samson, in Judges 13. This narrative was almost certainly originally a part of the Saul-cycle of stories[13] and only much later applied to Samuel. This is witnessed by the fact that Samuel does not become a warrior as would be expected on parallel with Samson after such an introduction, and he does not militarily deliver the Israelites in the manner of the judges. More telling is the etymology of the name Samuel given in I Sam 1:17-28 . It is based on word plays on the root שאל, the obvious root of the name Saul, but of no clear relation to the name Samuel. In verse 17, Eli says ואלהי ישראל יתן את שלחך אשר שאלת מעמו , followed in verse 20 by Hannahs explanation שמו שמואל כי מיהוה שאלתיו

[12]Unless otherwise indicated, all English translations of the Hebrew text are taken from the new translation of **THE HOLY SCRIPTURES** published by the Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1978.

[13]McCarter, p. 19

ותקרא את . These variations on the root reach their climax in verses 27-28, in which Hannah explains:

על הנער הזה התפללתי ויתן יהוה לי את שאלתי אשר שאלתי מעמו
וגם אנכי השאלתיהו ליהוה כל הימים אשר היה הוה שאול ליהוה...

Clearly, this entire series of word plays is meant as build-up for the final attestation of the name Sha'ul [Saul] in this final verse. The reattribution of these early legends describing the miraculous birth of Saul to the character of Samuel demonstrates from the beginning of the book the author's intent to assert the superiority of the prophet to the king. It also shows his willingness to rearrange received legends in order to make his point, a willingness which later becomes central to the classical midrash.

It is unclear exactly what title Samuel held originally. He is said to have worn the ephod and perform temple services like a priest. [1:18] but he is also called a prophet [Chapter 3, and throughout]. Both of these are probably later claims by different groups trying to bolster their authority by linking their ancestry to Samuel Most likely, he was a judge, a fact that is witnessed by the formula in 7:15-17:

> Samuel judged [שפט] Israel as long as he lived. The name of his firstborn son was Joel, and his second son's name was Abijah; they sat as judges in Beer-sheba.

which is a typical ending for the narrative of a judge. [14] This supports the assertion that early legends of a temple-servant-turned-judge named Samuel were coopted by the prophetic circles who coopted Samuel as their spiritual ancestor. Samuel was thereby elevated in their lore from being the last of the judges to being the first of the prophets, the annointer and rejector of kings. Again, such restructuring of received legend in order to

---

[14] McCarter, p.17.

justify current practice and belief is characteristic of the midrashic process.

In its origin, the narratives of Saul are mostly similar to those of Samuel. As stated above, Saul's birth description, as veiled in Chapter 1, parallels the narrative of Samson's birth. Further, Saul did become a warrior who delivered the Israelites from the threat of the Ammonites. The cycle of stories concerning his birth, his searching for the lost asses and his deliverance of Israel from the Ammonites [I Sam 11] parallels the Samson stories of Judges 13-16, and are distinctively Northern Israelite. The elevation of this judge to king witnesses the influence of Southern Judaen outlook which supported the monarchy, and found its legendary roots in Saul. [15] The "Saul-as-King" narrative is clearly introduced by the typical formula for the reign of a king: "Saul was . . . years old when he became king, and he reigned over Israel two years." [13:1] Thus chapters 8 to 13 are revealed to represent the authors version of the mythic transition between rule by judges and rule by kings.

That the redactor clearly believed rule by judges/prophets to be preferable to rule by king is seen in the structuring of the book. According to the redactor's theology, true victory will come to Israel from a complete sense of obedience to the command and will of God, not through military power. It is YHWH that protects. Thus Samuel is reported to have brought about the defeat of the Philistines simply by assembling the people and fasting, praying, and sacrificing to God who then caused the Philistines to flee.[7: 5-14] Thus the first seven chapters which portray Samuel in the role of judge and humble servant of God are meant to provide a backdrop of perfect leadership against which the peoples demand for a king seems

---

[15]McCarter, p. 27

completely unjustified and heretical. The redactor, commenting on monarchic abuse, has Samuel attempt to dissuade the people from choosing a king by describing supposed monarchic practice:

> He said, "This will be the practice of the king who will rule over you: He will take your sons and appoint them as his charioteers and horseman, and they will serve as outrunners for his chariots. . .or they will have to plow his fields, reap his harvest and make his weapons. He will take your daughters ...He will seize your choice fields, vineyards and olive groves, and give them to his courtiers. . . He will take a tenth part of your grain and intage and give it to his eunuchs and courtiers. He will take your male and female slaves, your choice young men and your asses and put them to work for him. He will take a tenth part of your flocks, and you shall become his slaves. [8:11-18]

To this harangue , the people responded that they nonetheless wanted a king so that they could be "like all the other nations;" [8:20] a statement which is fundamentally offensive to the theology of the redactor who holds Israel's status to be unique.

Outside of theology, the redactor demonstrates that prophets are indeed better rulers than kings. Again and again, the bumbling well-meaning Saul is portrayed as trying to serve God but not knowing how. This is contrasted with Samuel who knows exactly what God wants even when it seems cruel and unnessary. The most forthright example of this is the narrative concerning Saul's sparing of the Amalekite king and livestock. Saul argues that it seemed better to save some of the livestock, not for selfish reasons, but as sacrificial gifts to God. Samuel's rebuke [15:22-23] serves as a mouthpiece for the redactor's theology:

> "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices
> As much as in obedience to the Lord's command?

> Surely obedience is better than sacrifice,
> Compliance than the fat of rams.
> For rebellion is like the sin of divination,
> Defiance, like the iniquity of teraphim.
> Because you rejected the Lord's command,
> He has rejected you as king."

Samuel, in order to obey God, then "cuts Agag down."

In another wonderful demonstration of the superior power of the prophet to the king, Samuel calls forth thunder and rain completely out of season, so that the people "will take thought and realize what a wicked thing you did in the sight of the Lord when you asked for a king." [12:17] Such a reworking of the original myths can only be seen as an ancient "proto-midrash" in which the redactor imposes his own values onto an ancient myth in order to enhance its relevance, and to make a statement as to the proper values by which to live.

The redactor was also aware that in popular opinion, Saul was known as a prophet [Is Saul too among the prophets?] In order to preserve his version of the narratives, the redactor had to refute that idea, or at least undermine it, and so he offers two explanations for the saying itself, both portraying Saul in a derogatory manner, as a man who falls into ecstatic trances and takes off his clothes.[10:9-13, 19:18-24.] Though this sort of ecstatic fit also falls under the umbrella of prophecy, it does not compare with the wisdom and power of prophets such as Samuel. Thus, though Saul may be said to be among the prophets, it is a completely different type of prophecy, and one which is completely unbecoming to a ruler. In this way, the redactor turns a popular complimentary adage about Saul into a derogatory condescension, thereby disarming it.

Since in their original narratives both Samuel and Saul were judges, Saul's elevation to the kingship by the pro-monarchists necessitated that the pro-prophetics elevate their predecessor Samuel to a position even higher than king. Thus the prophet becomes the only person who can choose kings and by the same token, remove the king from office. Samuel annoints Saul king, not once but three times [10:1,10:17-27, 11:14-15.] Later Samuel twice declares Saul's reign to be over [13:13-14, 15:26] The role of the prophet as the determiner and conscience of kings is here established, and it continues throughout prophetic literature. This function is central to the self-conception of the prophets and their sense of position, and in Samuel we see this institution being anchored to ancient myth.

The redactor finds in ancient myths what he considers to be safeguards against monarchic abuse of power. He takes well-known but unrelated stories, legends, and myths of a priest-turn-judge and of a judge-turn-king and intertwines them in order to criticize the status-quo. He creates a mythic basis for what he sees as the proper way the government should function. In his approach to the relation of Samuel to Saul, prophet to king, the redactor clearly operates within the parameters of the midrashic process, as we have defined them.

The Superiority of Jerusalem to Shilo.

Another of the redactor's agendum is to show the mythic justification for the fall of the Shilonite priesthood-power center and the consequent rise of the Jerusalemite priesthood-power center. This is achieved by connecting this fall and rise to the legends of Eli. Eli, though pious himself, spoils his sons and allows them to abuse the sacrifical system. His sons are later responsible for the capture of the ark by the Philistines.[4:5-

11] God accuses Eli of honoring his sons more than God. [2:29] Because of this and the wickedness of the sons, Hophni and Phineas, God declares:

> I intended for you and your father's house to remain in My service forever. But now - declares the Lord - far be it from Me! For I honor those who honor Me, but those who spurn Me shall be dishonored. A time is coming when I will break your power and that of your father's house, and there shall be no elder in your house.....And I shall raise up for Myself a faithful priests, who will act in accordance with My wishes and My purposes. I will build for him an enduring house, and he shall walk before My anointed evermore. [2:30-36]

This statement clearly alludes to the struggle between the Elide Shilonite priests and the Zadokite Jersualem priests, weaving that struggle into the independent legends of Eli. Clearly, by the time of redaction, the Zadokites had won the struggle, but there was a need to explain this victory in mythic terms. Thus Eli and his sons become responsible for their own downfall.

To reinforce the connection of Zadokite victory and myth, the redactor wove these independent Eli narratives into the stories of Saul, David and Samuel, in order to create a Davidic/Zadokite/Jerusalemite alliance against a Saulite/Elide/Shilonite alliance. The connection of Saul with the Elide priesthood is shown in several ways. According to some traditions, Saul was the Benjaminite who informed Eli of the death of his sons.* [4:12] Saul is more clearly connected with Eli in 14:3 in which "Ahijah son of Ahitub brother of Ichabod son of Phinehas son of Eli , the priest of the Lord at Shiloh, was there bearing an ephod" and accompanying Saul into battle. Another of Eli's great grandsons, Ahimelech was the head of the priests at Nob, and was the one who gave David the sacred bread, an act which

---

*This tradition is later reflected in Tchernichowsky's "Saul's Love Song." [See: Chapter 5 below.]

resulted in the the slaughter of the priests of Nob at the hands of Saul. [22:9-19].

It is the slaughter of the priests of Nob that results in the mythic transference of the Elide priests from Saul to David, and consequently their mythic subjugation to the Zadokites in Jerusalem. David is portrayed as accepting Ahimelech son, Abiathar who flees from Saul, and in II Samuel 20:25 , Zadok and Abiathar are both priests in Jerusalem. However, under Solomon, Abiathar is dismissed, "thus fulfilling what the Lord had spoken at Shiloh regarding the house of Eli." [I Kings 2:26]

Again, the redactor is functioning as a "midrashist" in that he is restructing ancient legends in order to make a comment on his contemporary issues. Furthermore, he adds to the characterization of Saul the notion that he is attached to the wrong religious influences, namely the Shilonite priesthood. This serves to support the redactor in another of his agendum, namely that David was more fit to rule than Saul. It should be noted that Samuel is also placed artificially into the circle of the Elide priesthood[17], but this is only to show his superiority to it, and through him, the superiority of the prophet to the priest.

The Superiority of David To Saul.

The last of the redactor's agendum to be discussed in this chapter is the neccessity of demonstrating the mythic basis for the success of David (and his descendants) over Saul (and his descendants). The redeactor even stresses that Saul himself knew that divine rule should pass to David [26:25]. It can be theorized that the redactor was reacting to an ongoing

[17]McCarter, p. 66.

struggle between the house of Saul and the house of David, or between Israel and Judah. If this struggle was not actually ongoing, it was at least a struggle that was recent enough in memory as to require revision and commentary.

Saul is removed from kingship because unwittingly he disobeys God. In contrast, David is portrayed as always asking God for advice before taking action action, and then always following that advice. Whereas Saul was tall and handsome, and therefore admired as a warrior, David was small in stature but powerful through his obedience to God. God warns Samuel, "Pay no attention to his appearance or his stature, for I have rejected him [Eliab], For not as man sees does the Lord see; man sees only what is visible, but the Lord sees into the heart." [16:7] This warning most clearly expresses the divine reason (as understood by the redactor) that Saul, who was great in stature and appearance, is inferior to David, who is great in heart.

According to the redactor, David is irresistible. Even Saul's own son and daughter are immediately smitten with him, and later exhibit loyalty to him over their own father. Jonathan even agrees voluntarily to give up his dynastic rights and support David as the future king. [18:1-5, 18:28, 20:13-16.] The Philistine King Achish is so charmed by David that he grants him a town and some rule, despite the ract David has killed hundreds of his soldiers and officers. These stories are best understood as exaggerated attempts to express the charisma of David in contrasts with the complete lack of charisma with Saul, who hid behind baggage.

David is also portrayed as selflessly loyal. His undying loyalty to Saul is portrayed in contrast to Saul's irrational desire to kill him. Again

and again, David has the opportunity to kill Saul, but will not touch "the Lord's annointed."

Whereas Saul is portrayed as indecisive and dependent, David is portrayed as a strong leader, and extremely clever and unconventional. Saul boldly affirms the necessity of murdering Jonathan for braking an oath, but is convinced by his soldiers not. Saul, seeing the soldiers abandoning him before battle, goes ahead and sacrifices without Samuel in order to win them back. He becomes so obsessed with David that he compromises the safety of his nation in the face of the Philistine onslaught. By contrast, David is resourceful and bold. He kills Goliath with a slingshot and without armor. He feigns madness in order to avoid death at the hands of King Achish at Gath. [21:11-16]. David has military success wherever he goes because the "Lord is with him," as opposed to Saul who sufferes defeat because the "Lord had departed from him."

Of course, part of this agendum is the desire of the redactor to show that if the people have to have a king, that king must be chosen by God, not by the people, and each king's successor must also be chosen by God and not according to dynastic descent. David, not Jonathan, becomes king after Saul because David is the chosen of the Lord. Later the stories of David's rebellious sons echo the motif of Eli's sons, and show that even with David, dynastic succession is not assured, and perhaps not preferable. The redactor, living during what was clearly a time of dynastic descent, reworked the mythic Saul texts in order to create a criticism of that system, and a support of a prophetic system of election by divine choice.

The redactor also had to demonstrate why David, whose later acts of misconduct, murder, and cowardice were assuredly well-known, became king over Saul whose sins were by accident and relatively minor compared

to those of David. The redactor worked these texts to create a positive portrait of the lesser know young life of David. This exemplary youth clarifies why he was elected to be king, despite the well-known exploits of his later rule.

We can only imagine the "real circumstances" to which the various layers of Samuel address themselves: the ongoing struggles and tensions between various prophetic guilds, between the prophets and the priests, between the Zadokite and Elide priests, between the judges who favored confederation and the monarchicists who favored unification, between those who supported dynastic succession and those who supported the divine election by the prophets, between the Davidic lines and the Sauline lines, or between Benjaminites and Judaites. All these tensions must have entered into the background of context against which the redactor of Samuel reworked the Saul/David/Samuel/Eli legends in order to support with sacred text his own point of view.

On the surface level, it seems that Saul did nothing to deserve the punishment he received, and that in retrospect, David was a worse sinner. Furthermore, Saul had every reason to have been paranoid about David. His son, the future king, was loyal to him. His daughter loved him. He was a popular war hero, loved by the people. He was a great military commander. He was talented. He was charismatic and outgoing, whereas Saul was modest and shy. He had court training which Saul did not have. David was able to gather a band of rebel outlaws, perhaps in an attempt to overthrow Saul, and he managed to avoid Saul's more highly trained troops continuously. David was helped by Saul's priests at Nob and by towns loyal to Saul. David joined with the enemy as a commander, and began to send

gifts to Judah. In light of all this, it would make perfect sense for Saul to be justifiably afraid of a Davidic rebellion and to want to kill its leader. But the biblical redactor wants to show that this surface reading of the events does not correspond to the reality of what happened afterwards, and is therefore not "coherent" with later events. To that purpose, the redactor reinterprets, rearranges, reworks these various strands of historical narrative and fits them into his theological/political mindset in order to create a "coherent" account of what took place; coherent in so much as it solved the contradictions and explained the present situation in accordance with the redactors own outlook. In this way, the biblical text of Samuel itself functions as a "proto-midrash" on earlier myths and legends, reworking the to respond to the changing conditions of the redactor's time. He took narratives which most likely celebrated the rise of the monarchy over the weaker judge/priest leadership and inverted them, creating instead a polemic against the monarchy. This polemic stressed the importance of obedience to God, the dangers of investing any human ruler with too much authority, the need to view God as our source of victory and strength, and the indispensibility of the prophet as the messenger of God, arbiter of justice, and rejector of kings. This is characteristic of the later midrashic process. The text of I Samuel therefore functions as a proto- midrash on received stories and legends, and it is upon this layer of midrash that the proto-rabbinic and rabbinic commentators build their own classical midrash about Saul. It is to these later midrashists that we now turn in order to explore how they re-interpreted the story of Saul to fit their own context.

3.
THE RABBI-KING:
CLASSICAL MIDRASH ON SAUL

Unlike the redactor of the text of Saul, the rabbis were not living under the monarchy, and therefore many of the issues which shaped the reworking of the biblical text no longer existed when the rabbinic traditions about Saul were written down. Of course, the origins and traditions on which the rabbis based their interpretations may be traced back to monarchic times, and possibly to the time of I Samuel redaction. But in their final form, these rabbinic portrayals of Saul address adifferent set of needs and agendas than biblical text. In this chapter, we shall explore that rabbinic portrayal of Saul, compare it to the biblical portrayal, and make observations on how the rabbis reinterpreted these myths to make them meaningful to their life context. In order to do this, we are going to deal with several sources: 1) The Targum Jonathan 2) the Commentators to the biblical text such as Rashi, Gersonides, and Malbim, 3) the formal midrash as recorded in the Babylonian Talmud and the Midrash Rabbah, and later collections such as Midrash Shmuel and Midrash Tanhuma.

The Targum Jonathan.

The Targum is a translation of the Hebrew Bible into Aramaic. It began as an oral tradition of simultaneously translating the reading of the Torah into the language spoken by the people, Aramaic. Later it began to offer explanatory additions in order to clarify difficult or problematic

passages in the Hebrew. These explanatory additions expanded over time, and eventually offered a revision of the Hebrew text suited to the theology and context of the post-monarchic times. In addition to its simple function as a translation, it often served a midrashic function as well. These oral traditions were probably collected and redacted into a written form in the academies of Babylonia, forming what we have today as the written Targum.

In the Targum Jonathan to I Samuel, we might expect extensive reworking of the text, since as explained above, the text is in bad shape and is plagued by problems. Nonetheless, this Targum does not change extensively the shape of the narrative it received. Instead it focuses on explaining the cause-effect relationship of the events as described and relating them to the rabbinic outlook.

In its portrayal of Saul, the Targum reinforces the notion that Saul was worthy of becoming king. In a gloss on 13:1, the Targum takes the Biblical text:

> Saul was . . . years old when he became king"

and interprets:

> And Saul was *a year old - there were no sins in him*[1] - when he became king..."

This reinforces the notion that at the beginning of his reign, Saul was pure and free of sin. Similarly, in 10:26, the Targum takes the Biblical text:

> And Saul also went home to Gibeah, followed by upstanding men (unclear Hebrew) whose hearts God had touched."

---

[1]All English translations of Targumic texts are taken from Targum Jonathan of the Former Prophets, [Targum] Introduction, translation and notes by Daniel J. Harington and Anthony J. Saldarini, (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Gelzier, Inc.,1987.) Here, pg. 124.

and adds the gloss:

> And Saul also went home to Gibeah, accomapnied by *part of the people, men fearing sin, in whose hearts fear was given from before the Lord.* [2]

In glosses such as these, Saul's piety and purity is stressed more than his appearance and military ability. This is in consonance with the rabbinic context which lived without an army and in the belief that piety was the highest value for humanity.

Saul is also portrayed as being uninterested in monetary gain. In 10:7, whereas the biblical text mentions that those who opposed Saul did not bring a gift, the Targum interprets that they "did not come to wish him peace"[3] removing any suggestion that Saul was interested in gain.

The rabbinic interest in lineage as a source of worthiness is also found in relation to Saul. In a lengthy gloss in 15:18, Samuel explains to Saul that though he may appear weak in his own eyes, "... the merit of the tribe of Benjamin your father was the cause for you for he sought to pass in the sea before the sons of Israel. On account of this the Lord has elevated you to be the king over Israel."[4] This reference to the midrash of Nachson, who was the first to enter the Reed Sea and on account of whose faith the sea parted, is completely absent in the biblical text. By including it, the targumist reasserts the worthiness of Saul, and at the same time posits the value of faith in the face of doom, a theme dear to the heart of the rabbinic faith.

---

[2]Targum, p. 120.
[3]Targum, p. 120
[4]Targum, p. 130.

In an amusing interpretation of 10:11, Saul does not meet a band of prophets, but rather a band of "teachers (ספריא)" and instead of falling into an ecstatic trance, he "sang praise" to God. The targumist even changed the expression for which the story served as etymology: "Is Saul too among the prophets" become "Is Saul also among the teachers?" This format is repeated in 19:18-20 when Saul comes to David at Naioth. By changing prophets into teachers, the rabbis are attempting to assert that their antecedents can be traced back to the time of Saul. This gives them great age and credibility, and serves as a response to accusations that the rabbinical movement was completely new and without foundation in Israel's past. Interestingly, the "teachers" mentioned might be the scribal guilds from which the rabbinic movement descended, and so this description of Saul as a scribe might refer to the earlier struggle of the scribes and the priests.

This praise of the young Saul as a pious scholar changes with the arrival of David. No attempt is made by the Targum to defend Saul's actions. Instead, the targumic additions only reinforce the explanations given by the biblical text. Samuel's biblical declaration that Saul's kingship is terminated because of his sparing of the Amalekites and disobedience to God's word in favor of obedience to the sacrificial cult is expanded in the Targum:

> Is there delight before the Lord in holocausts and holy offerings as in accepting the Memra of the Lord? Behold accepting his Memra is better than holy offerings; to listen to the words of his prophets is better than the fat of fatlings. For like the guilt of men who inquire of the diviner, so is the guilt of every man who rebels against the words of the Law; and like the sins of the people who go astray after idols, so is the sin of every man who cuts out or adds to the word of the prophets. Because

> you rejected the service of the Lord, he has removed you from being the king.[5]

Here Saul is guilty of going against the Law, the ultimate sin for the rabbis. This proclamation is directed at the persona of Saul, but was no doubt meant as a homily aimed at the people sitting in the synagogue.

In the same chapter, Saul is accused by the Targum of being hypocritical, saying one thing but practicing another. Though he agreed to kill all the Amalekites, he did not do it. Saul is contrasted with God [and thereby with the prophets]:

> ...before whom there is no deception, and he does not turn from whatever he says; for he is not like the sons of men who say and act deceitfully, decree and do not carry out. [6]

This portrayal of Saul as indecisive and "wishy-washy" reinforces the similar portrayal of him by the biblical text. It perhaps best illustrated in a targumic gloss on the etymology of the "Rock of Separation" in 23:28, for as the Targum understands it, that was "the place where the king's heart was divided to go here and there."[7]

Thus the biblical portrayal of Saul and the targumic portrayal of Saul reinforce one another. The targum adds to the biblical text a portrait of Saul's purity and devotion to God as youth, and then contrasts it strongly with his dementia and hypocrisy in later life. The one major difference is that Saul is portrayed as a scribe.

The Rabbinic Commentaries.

---

[5]Targum, p. 130.
[6]Targum, p. 131.
[7]Targum, p. 147.

In approaching I Samuel, the commentators [מפרשים] have a tremendous task in achieving their goal of rectifying textual discrepancies and giving meaning to redundancies. This endeavor occupies the vast majority of the rabbinic commentaries on the text of Samuel, and often little is said as to the characters of Samuel, Saul, and David. Commentators such as Gersonides also prefer to spend their energy in examining the implications of reward and punishment, good and bad behavior as exemplified by Saul and David. Gersonides tries to philosophicaly explain why the text as written makes theological sense. Like the Targum, the copmmmentators defend the piety and worthiness of the young Saul, but when David arrives on stage, their comments are reserved for expounding upon this progenitor of the Messianic line. Since Messianic redemption was central to the rabbis reconstructed theology of Judaism after the destruction of the Temple, the character of David takes on profound importance and it is to him that they devote the bulk of their portraiture and explanation. When the commentators do make observations as to the character of Saul, they are usuaally culled from the more formal midrashic material, and so will be dealt with in the next section of the chapter. Nonetheless, some information on the character of Saul as viewed by the rabbis is presented.

As in the Targum, Saul's worthiness to rule is partially attributed to his lineage. Kimchi , noticing that Saul's lineage according to Chronicles 8:33 says he is the grandson of Abiel, whereas the lineage presented in I Samuel says he is the grandson of Ner. Kimchi explains that Abiel was the real name, but he is also called Ner, because he lit the candles

for people to go to synagogue and for that reason Saul was chosen king.[8] Rashi, quoting the Targum, agrees that Saul is also worthy to rule due his descent from Nachshon.

Saul's piety is expressed by Rashi and Rdak in their commentaries to 13:1, in which Rashi explains that Saul was as sinless as a one year old child when he became king, whereas Radak argues that Saul had not been sinless, but upon his ascension to the throne he was forgiven all sin and thereby became sinless like a one year old child. In a comment on 9:24, Rashi also points out that Saul didn't want to eat the special portion Samuel had reserved for him at the Bamot banquet because he did not want to violate the law by eating the portion reserved for the priests. This is also an expression of Saul's humility, a trait agreed upon by Rashi, Abarvanel and Kimchi in their understanding of Saul's reason for hiding behind the baggge at his election. [10:22] Radak adds to this portrayal in his comment on 10:26 that after being elected king , Saul does not take up residence in a palace, but returns to his home, a sign that he was still willing to do menial labor, especially because he was aware that not everyone supported him. Saul was even modest about his looks. According to Rashi in 20:30, Saul was one of the Benjamites who were supposed to get a wife by capturing one of the women of Shiloh. Saul was too shy to approach the dancing women, but one of them was so attracted to Saul that she suggested to him that he should capture her.

Saul's good looks are also reinterpreted by some of the commentators. Metsudat David interprets טוב as "righteous," and Abravanel say it refers to

---

[8]Samuel I, "A New English Translation of the Text and Rashi, with a Commentary Digest." Edited and translated by Rabbi A.J. Rosenburg. New York: The Judaica Press, Inc., 1976,p. 67.

his good character. However, Rashi and Radak maintain that he was overwhelmingly handsome. In their commentary on 9:13, in which the biblical text is inordinately long and conversational in relating the speech of some girls which Saul met in his search for Samuel, both Rashi and Radak explain that tthe girls babble so effusively because of their desire to keep Saul with them and continue just to look at him. He was exceptionally handsome.

An interesting explanation for the choice of Saul is given in Rashi's commentary on 9:17 זה יעצר בעמי, that Saul would be able to prevent the army from scattering during battle. Does this imply that the judges and prophetic rulers were unable to hold the disparate tribal components of the army together during battle, thus necessitating a king? Possibly the rabbis were aware of a bit of early history that the prophetic redactors of I Samuel purposefully omitted from their version of the story.

The commentators' criticism of Saul adds little to the biblical explanations. They do criticize Saul for not punishing those who were against him [11:13] , but even in this case, Malbim explains that Saul was only being just, for when they criticized he was not yet truly the king for he hadn't proved himself. Therefore it would have been unjust to punish them.[9] Even when Saul was having the kingship torn from him because of his leniency with the Amalekites, the rabbis defend him saying that his excuse, "I was afraid of the troops and I yielded to them." [15:24] is in reality referring to Saul's respect for Doeg, the Edomite. In the rabbinic commentary, Doeg is transformed into the head of the Sanhedrin and most learned and respected in matters of Torah. Doeg, as will be explained in the next section, convinced Saul that to murder the children and the livestock of

---

[9]Ibid., p. 86.

the Amalekites would have been a violation of Torah law and therefore not permissible. So Saul was only doing what he thought was right according to the Torah. This defense, brought here by Rashi, is a powerful rereading of Saul's sin in order to portray Saul a positive light. He is again portayed as person who only wishes to do what is right, but is constantly incorrect in making that determination. Saul is portrayed as a person with good intentions but bad judgement. Of course, once he falls into dementia, his judgement is completely lost, but even then, from time to time his good heart shows through in his expressions of love and regret towards David. This poignant portrayal of Saul by the rabbis mitigates the harsh criticism of him forwarded by the biblical redactors. This trend will be made clearer by an exploration of the formal midrashic sources.

Formal Midrashic Sources

The midrashic sources posit several explanations for Saul's being chosen as the first king. According to one midrash in Midrash Shmuel 11, Saul had distinguished himself as a military hero under the leadership of Hophni and Phineas. Goliath had captured the tablets of the law, and upon hearing this Saul marched to the Philistine camp from Shiloh and wrested the tablets from Goliath.[10] This midrash also affirms that connection of Saul to the Shilonite priesthood, but more importantly it makes Saul a defender of the Law, a position in which the rabbis viewed themselves.

---

[10] מדרש שמואל. Edited by Salomon Buber. Krakau: Druck und Verlag von Josef Fischer, 1893. p. 78-79.

He was also chosen because of his beauty. In the Babylonian Talmud's Berakhot 48b, Rav Samuel explains that the girls talked at length...

> כדי להסתכל בפניו של שאול דכתיב משכמו ומעלה גבוה מכל העם
> (...so that they might feast their eyes on Saul's good looks, since it is written, From his shoulder and upward he was highter than any of the people.)[11]

In מדרש שמואל 13 it is pointed out that Saul, like Absalom had beauty of body, but not beauty of soul. Perhaps physical beauty was a sensitive subject for our sages of blessed memory.

מדרש תנחומא brings two examples of Saul's modesty as reasons for his becoming king. While out looking for his father's lost asses , Saul turns to his servant and says, "My father will take worry about us" [9:5] By saying this, Saul is placing himself on the same level as his servant, and thus exhibiting great humility. Later, he refuses to accept the dignity of kingship until the Urim and Thummim were consulted. [12]

In Berakhot 62b we learn that even in his toiletries, Saul was exceedingly proper. In the episode of the cave in which Saul is defecating in a cave where David is hiding, thus giving David the opportunity to kill him, David spares him because of his modesty. The Rabbis explain the verse "and he came to the fences [NJPS: sheepfolds] along the way. There was a cave there, and Saul went in to cover [לרגלו] his feet" [24:4] teaches us that there was a fence within a fence and cave within a cave, and Saul in order to

---

[11]All the English translations of passages in the Babylonian Talmud are taken from the Soncino translation of the Talmud. This one is from: Berakhot 48b., p. 293.

[12]Ginzberg, Louis. The Legends of the Jews. Vol. 4, "From Joshua to Esther." Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication society of America, 1913.p. 65.

find proper privacy went to the innermost of these places and even then he covered himself as with a sukkah. [from the verb להסך] Thus Saul is made to exemplify the rabbinic ideal of צניעות, modesty.

Saul's most outstanding virtue in the midrash was his innocence. In Yoma 22b we learn:

> "בן שנה שאול במלכו" .אמר רב הונא: כבן שנה שלא טעם טעם חטא
> (Rav Huna said: Like an infant one one year who had not tasted the taste of sin.)

(Of course this theory was not without its detractors. Rabbi Nahman ben Isaac responded to this claim by saying "perhaps like an infant of one year old that is filthy with mud and excrement.")

According to the midrash, it was Saul's desire to be scrupulous in the observance of Torah that got him into trouble. Though commanded to kill all the Amalekites, Saul listened to Doeg, who according to the rabbis was a great scholar and head of the Sanhedrin. Doeg pointed out to Saul that the Torah prohibits the slaying of an animal and its young on the same day, and if this is true, is must be less permissible to slaughter human parents and children on the same day.[13] Elaborating on this, Yoma 22b explains that the expression וירב בגחל "and they struggled in the valley" [I Sam.15:5] refers to Saul's arguing with God about the righteousness of sparing the Amalekites. Saul argues:

> When the Holy One, blessed by He, said to Saul: 'Now go and smite Amalek" he said: If on account of one person the Torah said; Perform the ceremony of the heifer whose neck is to be broken, how much more [ought consideration to be gvien] to all these persons! And if human beings sinned, what has the cattle committed; and if the adults have sinned, what have the little

---

[13] מדרש שמואל 18, p. 99-100.

> ones done? A divine voice came forth and said: "Be not righteous overmuch." [14]

These stories of Saul's attempts to out-debate God about what is just and what isn't evoke the story of the Oven of Aknai, and other material in which the rabbis explicated the Law in ways that may be considered "righteous overmuch." At the end of the passage above, we almost expect Saul to say, "We no longer listen to divine voices." In these stories, Saul is shown to be the spiritual and functional predessor of the rabbinic process.

That is not to say that some rabbis did not create midrash that portrayed Saul in a much more negative light. Leviticus Rabbah 26:7 contains several stinging criticisms of Saul. Reish Lakish was particularly stinging in his criticism of Saul's consulting the witch of En-dor. He asks:

> To what could Saul be compared at that moment [when he ask to see a necromancer] ? Reish Lakish said: He was like a king who entered a province and decreed that all the cocks that were there should be slaughtered. He wished to depart at night and asked: 'Is there a cock in the place that will crow? They answered him: Was it not you who issued the decree and ordered that every cock that there is in the place should be slaughtered? It was the same with Saul. He removed the ghosts and familiar spirits from the land and then he says "Seek me a woman that divineth by a ghost.'[15]

In a similar accusation of hypocrisy and double-talk, Rabbi Levi expounds that when Saul swore to the Lord that he would not harm the woman for bringing up spirits :

---

[14]Yoma 22b, Soncino, p. 101

[15]The Midrash Rabbah. Vol 2: Exodus-Leviticus. Translation, notes and glossary edited by Rabbi. Dr. H. Freedman, and Maurice Simon. Oxford: University Press, 1977 and by Soncino Press. p. 331.

> He was like a woman who is in the company of her paramour and swears by the life of her husband? So it was with Saul; he enquires of the ghost and the familiar spirit and say, "As the Lord liveth, there shall no punishment happen to thee for this thing![16]

In a final critical passage from Leviticus Rabbah 26:7, Saul confronts the ghost of Samuel who apparently makes clear that David is the enemy and adversary of Saul. Seemingly, Saul wants to know why Samuel did not make that clear to him while he was alive, to which Samuel replies:

> When I was with you I was in a false world and you might have heard untrue words from me, for I was afraid of you lest you should kill me, but now that I am in a world of truth you will only hear from me words of truth.[17]

Thus in these passages Saul is portrayed in a negative light as a ruler who contradicted himself, was unfaithful to God, made false promises, and was threatening to those who confronted him.

These negative passages are balanced by passages which praise Saul's bravery and commitment to the divine will. Having been told by the ghost of Saul of his impending doom and that of his sons, Saul bravely confronts the future. Seeing this

> ...the Holy One, blessed be He, called the ministering Angels, and said to them: Come and look at the being whom I have created in My world! Usually if a man goes to a feast he does not take his chilren with him, fearing the evil eye; yet this man goes out to battle, and, though he knows that he will be killed, he takes

---

[16]Midrash Rabbah, p. 332.
[17]Midrash Rabbah, p. 335.

his sons with him and faces cheerfully the Attribute of Justice which is overtaking him."[18]

Such passages of praise for Saul are many. The Tanhuma explains that Saul's later life was filled with regret for slaughtering the priests of Nob, and remorse secured forgiveness for him.[19] They explain that Saul's mad jealousy toward David was the result of Doeg's evil mouth, for Doeg know exactly how to send Saul into a fit of paranoia by praising David excessively.[20]

In fact, the relationship between Saul and David, and the relative virtues of both are closely examined by the midrash. It is true that God protected David with miraculous events, and that David was completely obedient to God's will in his early rule. Ginsberg relates a story from Midrash Tehillim 27, which mirrors the story of Saul's not waiting for Samuel's arrival to sacrifice before engaging the Philistines in battle. In this story, David is commanded not to attack the Philistines until the tops of the trees begin to move, and though the Philistines moved ever closer, David waited, for he believed it better to die as a pious man than to break the command of God. He says, "Above all, let us have confidence in God." The trees then begin to move, and David emerges victorious. This story is clearly created to demonstrate that, although Saul had good intentions, David was more obedient to the command of God. This midrash itself says that the angels were constantly asking God why he had taken the royal

---

[18]Midrash Rabbah, p. 335-6.
[19]Ginzberg, p. 72.
[20]מדרש שמואל 16, p.18.

throne from Saul and given it to David, and this story was posited as the answer.[21]

The angels in this story were certainly expressing the questions of the rabbis, a common midrashic device. The rabbis had great trouble understanding why David with all his sins, including adultery and murder [most heinous sins in the eyes of the rabbis], was considered more worthy than Saul to be king. After all, Saul's were sins on the side of mercy and piety, and demonstrated only impatience and bad judgement, not an evil nature. In light of this, the rabbis had trouble adjusting their knowledge of David's sins with the fact that Saul lost. In Yoma 22b, Rav Huna remarks that "Saul sinned once and it brought calamity upon, David sinned twice and it did not bring evil upon him."[22] In Mo'ed Katan 16b, this contrast is explored at length:

> Indeed, in all respects his [Saul's] piety was so great that not even David was his equal. David had many wives and concubines; Saul had but one wife. David remained behind, fearing to lose his life in battle with his son Absalom; Saul went into the combat knowing he should not return alive. Mild and generous, Saul led the life of a saint, in his own house, observing even the priestly laws of purity.

Though stories like the one about the trees above attempt a partial justification of God's favoring of David, they do not completely explain the decision. Other midrash, not satisfied with the explanations given by Samuel for Saul's loss of the kingship turn to his slaughter of the priests of Nob as his fatal sin. A complete resolution of the problem is not to be found.

---

[21]Ginzberg, p. 93.

[22]Yoma 22b, Soncino p. 101.

Conclusions.

The rabbinic and proto-rabbinic midrashic material concerning Saul do not center on the conflicts between Jerusalem and Shilo, between the prophets and the monarchy, or between dynastic succession or succession by divine choice. These points are moot for the rabbis who live in a time when there are no kings nor prophets, in a place where there is no Jerusalem Temple cult, and in a political situation in which both Jerusalem and Shilo are subject to foreign rule. Instead that rabbis turn their attention to the character of Saul, his piety, his behavior, his sins. They do so in an attempt to anchor their own system in mythic precedents. Thus Saul is said to have a president of the Sanhedrin [Do'eg] as his closest advisor, and even argues about law with God.

Such anachronistic projections of rabbinic institutions and systems onto the ancient legends of Saul are clearly a midrashic attempt to show that Saul himself was practically a rabbi, only without enough training to succeed. David, who had no training, succeeded by sheer good faith and devotion, and perhaps more importantly by divine favor. Saul emerges as a man, like the rabbis, who is doing his best to do what is right and being criticized harshly for it. In this, no doubt, the rabbis found a bond with the character of Saul. They therefore softened the biblical text's harsh criticism of Saul and replaced it with a portrait of a mild-mannered, indecisive king who was perhaps too kind to rule properly, but who tried to do what was right. To the rabbis, David represents the messianic line, somewhat outside of the jurisdiction of human law. But in Saul, they found a *mensch* who tried to do what God wanted, and when he failed, was filled

with remorse and *teshuvah*. For that God forgave him, and though Saul did not find happiness in this world, by his remorse and his submission to Divine justice in death, Saul secured a home in the world to come, in paradise with Samuel. [23]

In admitting that Saul's life was unfair, but that his reward would be in the world to come, the rabbis clearly demonstrated their theology of reward after death, a theology which was central to their ability to explain the destruction of the Temple and the persecution of the Jewish people. Saul becomes the archetypal rabbinic Jew, failing, but through repentance [not sacrifice] he achieves immortality and gets his proper reward from God.

As with the biblical text, the rabbis linked their own theology and world-view to the epic myths of the Bible and drew out of those myths lessons which spoke to the Jews of their time. They tranformed the monarchic myths of battle and obedience into myths of human frailty, suffering, and final reward. They made the myths relevant to their time and in so doing preserved them for the next generations to learn from. It is those later generations that the remainder of this thesis will examine in order to discover if they, like the biblical and rabbinic writers, are re-interpreting Jewish myths in order to make them relevant to their context.

---

[23]Midrash Rabbah, p. 335-6.

4.

SAUL AND THE HASKALAH

MELUCHAT SHAUL: YOSEF HaEFRATI MITROPOLOVITZ

The character of Saul next re-emerges in Hebrew literature during the period of the Enlightenment, or Haskalah. Although during this period many plays and poems were written about Saul, this chapter will concentrate on the first and most successful and innovative of these works: מלוכת שאול [Meluchat Sha'ul- THE REIGN OF SAUL] by Yosef haEfrati miTropolovitz. Published in 1794, this epic poem in dramatic form presents a new, modern, psychological treatment of the character of Saul that had never appeared previously. More importantly, the play bears witness to the Haskalah's overriding agenda of reconciling Jewish culture and tradition with modern sensibilities. In order to understand this play, and the reemergence and recharacterization of Saul within it, we must first briefly examine its cultural and political context: the Haskalah.

The Context: Haskalah

In Jewish terms, the "modern period" began with the Haskalah, or Enlightenment, in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Faced with the unprecedented option of cultural assimilation, the Jews of western Europe tried in a myriad of ways to strike a viable balance between the Jewish and the European mind. The outstanding example of this attempt to find a balance is found in the character of Moses Mendelssohn, the "father of the

Haskalah." Mendelssohn represented a new model to the European Jew, well-educated and erudite in both Jewish and secular modern learning, observant at home, yet completely skilled to function in non-Jewish society. Mendelssohn exemplified a compromise of cultures, and as such bore witness to all the conflicts and contradictions that inevitably accompany a cultural compromise.

Having its roots in the general Enlightenment of Europe, the Haskalahstressed rationalism, Deism, and universal humanism. INtegrating these beliefs with the traditional Jewish concepts of national election ("chosenness") by God, divine revelation of Torah law, and messianism led to profound philosophical/theological conflicts. Mendelssohn and his fellow " maskilim" ("enlightened ones") wrote tractates and essays attempting to unify these systems, but at best, a temporary stasis was achieved. This stasis is what defined the fragile Haskalah, and in less than a century this stasis broke up into the spectrum of political and religious movements which define the modern Jewish world.

The Haskalah was fueled by the desire of the growing Jewish middle class of merchants and professionals to interact fully and comfortably with their middle class non-Jewish colleagues, as well as their desire to reconcile what they saw as an ancient archaic way of life with the modern era of opportunity. Thus, the Haskalah stressed 1)the combination of secular with traditional Jewish study, 2) the assimilation by Jews of European language, dress, and ettiquette, 3) loyalty to the states in which one lived, and the rejection of any notion of Jewish national messianism, and 4) the complete emancipation of the Jew in European society. [1]

---

[1]Encyclopedia Judaica, s.v. "Haskalah," Encyclopedia Judaica, by Yehuda. Slutsky

Along with this desire to prove the Jew's worthiness as individuals in general society, the Haskalah also carried with it a collective cultural agenda: to show that Jewish culture and civilization was as valid and worthy of respect as any other ancient or modern civilization - that Jewish culture was no cause for shame (as many Jews apparently felt it was.) It is to this challenge that Hebrew Literature of the Haskalah dedicated itself. The changes of language and style that resulted from meeting this challenge of culture led to the the birth of modern Hebrew Literature[2]

During the Haskalah, aesthetic value was primary among the criteria used to judge literature. High German literature was thought to be the pinnacle of this aesthetic. This posed a dilemna for the enlightened Jew. The language of common Jewish literature was Yiddish, but this was completely unacceptable if the Jews were to asssert the dignity of their cultural tradition to the German speaking world. The Jewish middle-class of merchants and professionals, as well as intellectuals, desired a literature which reflected the " good taste and reason" of their time, and the noble character of their past. Yiddish, being a bastardized form of "low-German" and representing as it did the unassimilated Jew, was dismissed as vulgar and completely lacking in aesthetic value or potential. Rabbinic Hebrew, which had been used up to that time for religious writing and important documents was also rejected because it represented the narrow-minded parochialism and legalism against which the Haskalah battled. Instead, classical Hebrew was promoted as a language for literature and

---

[2]Encylopedia Judaica, s.v. "Hebrew Literature, Modern" by Eisig Silberschlag

didactic for it was seen as having a lofty aestethic quality and a noble history. More importantly, the Biblical tongue enjoyed tremendous prestige among the gentiles, which was no small perquisite for the aspiring maskili There was however one problem. Classical Hebrew had never been used as a language of secular literature, nor had it been used on any widespread basis for thousands of years. So it became the task of Hebrew intellectuals and writers to revive the ancient Hebrew tongue and make it sing again. Revivifying Hebrew became an integral aspect of the Jews' efforts to exert the validity of their culture and civilization. If Hebrew, the tongue of Moses and the great literary prophets, could again become the language of Jewish literature, it would clearly show that Jewish civilization deserved respect and acceptance among the cultures of the Western world.

Yosef ha Efrati: Biographical Material

It is against this background that we must examine the epic play Meluchat Shaul by Yosef haEfrati miTropolowitz. This play embodies many of the Haskalah ideas outlined above, together with many of its contradictions. About the author little is known. He was born in 1770 in the city of Tropolovitz in the region of Upper Shelzia.[Czechoslavakia] This district, conquered by Prussia in 1751, had become a hotbed of anti-Prussian revolutionary activity.[3] At some point, Efrati moved to Ratibor and became a tutor for the son of a rich Jewish family, tutoring the child in traditional Jewish learning. It must be remembered that in Eastern Europe, the Haskalah ideas of assimilation and secular study were fiercely opposed,

---

[3]Gershon Shaked, Introduction to מלוכת שואל, by Josef ha Efrati miTopolovitz (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1968), p. 8

so in order to gain an in-depth knowledge of the intellectual and literary currents of his time, Efrati must have secretly devoted himself at night to modern secular studies and literature. [4] Landau imagines that Efrati happened upon a few volumes of the first Hebrew literary journal Meassfim, and that reading them triggered in him a love of Hebrew poetry.[5] It was in Ratibor the Efrati began to compose Hebrew poems, as well as the first four acts of Meluchat Shaul. From 1791 to 1794, Efrati lived in Prague. Here, while continuing to expose himself to European learning, he completed his play. Here also he wrote two extant elegies, one upon the death of Leopold II, and the second upon the death of Rabbi Ezekiel Landau. There is perhaps no better illustration of Efrati's Haskalah agenda than the illustration which appeared on the publication of the latter elegy. It was a drawing which pictured Rabbi Landau embracing Moses Mendelssohn at the entrance to the Garden of Eden.[6] Although it would seem that most of Efrati's poetic work is lost, a notebook of his work was discovered and published by A.Z. Ben Yishai in a book entitled Book of Lost Poems of Jseph Ephrati. In addition to his poetic work, Efrati wrote polemical essays and translations of German poems.[7] He died in 1804, in Ratibor, survived by his wife. Although he "lived unnoticed and died unmourned," [8] Efrati's Meluchat Shaul achieved great popularity and influence after his death, going through some thirteen Hebrew and Yiddish editions and exerting great influence on the generation of Hebrew writers which followed.

---

[4] J.L.Landau, Short Lectures on Modern Hebrew Literature, (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1923), p. 76

[5] Landau , p 76

[6] Landau, p. 77

[7] Shaked, p. 8

[8] Landau, p. 76

It is my assertion that this influence was the inevitable result of Efrati's great foresight in choosing his genre, his subject and treatment of that subject, his language, and his motifs. All of these crucial choices were made to show that the Jewish past and the Jewish present could be reconciled to beautiful effect,. Further Efrati wanted to demonstrate that Hebrew was as worthy as any language for aesthetic and powerful literature as any language. Simply stated, Efrati wished to show that Jewish literary culture had nothing to be ashamed of. His popularity in later generations is witness to his success in achieving that goal.

Meluchat Shaul: An Overview

It is my contention that Meluchat Shaul is a brilliant combination of drama, poetry, and polemic, with almost every choice being an intentional means of shaping the work to convey Efrati's Haskalah ideas without having to state them openly within the text itself. Unlike some of his contemporary writers, such as Naphtali Hartwig Wessely, who placed long Haskalah preachments into the mouths of biblical characters, [9] Efrati subtely wove his message into the play through the choice of genre, language, subject and development.

Genre

Although, Efrati was primarily a poet, for his greatest undertaking he chose the genre of the poetic drama, a genre practically unknown to Hebrew literature up to that time. The Jews of ancient times had never developed the drama, perhaps because it was seen as part and parcel of

[9]EJ, "Hebrew Literature", p. 180.

Greek religious and cultural dominance, and therefore seen as an accessory to idol worship. The rabbis of the first and second centuries CE objected to the building of any theatres in the Holy Land.[10] Likewise, during Judaism's Golden Age under Islamic/Arab rule the Jews, like the Arabs, did not delve deeply into dramatic form. In Efrati's own time, the British and German theatres were patronized largely by the bawdy underclass, by prostitutes and hellions, situations in which Jews might have felt threatened due to anti-Semitism and cultural difference. However, to the Western mind, the classic drama was one of the great forms of literary expression. So Efrati took it upon himself to create a Hebrew drama in a classical style. This in itself is a powerful assertion of Jewish Hebrew culture's ability to adjust to and assimilate western norms and aesthetic values.

Critics such as Shaked, Shapiro, and Landau have criticized Efrati's talent as a dramatist, saying that he has no unity of structure, too many characters, too many scene changes, and too many diversion which detract from the over all dramamtic power of the play. Although from a strictly dramatic or literary point of view, all these criticism are quite valid, they miss the point. Efrati was not trying to write a unified well-structured drama. Rather he was trying to write a national epic tragedy in a genre which was respected by the general culture, but absent in his own. Efrati did not write his drama to be performed, but rather to be read as an epic poem in dramatic format. It seems quite likely that this genre was suggested to Efrati by the success of Geothe's play "Gotz von Berlichingen" (1771) which was the first important German play and which caused quite a stir in the German literary world. Goethe's play, epic in proportion and

---

[10]Landau pp77-78

focusing on German legend must have challenged Efrati to compose a similar work in Hebrew.

Subject

It is not important whether Efrati first settled on the genre or the subject matter, for in the case of Meluchat Shaul, the two suggest each other. If indeed Efrati had already settled on the story of the downfall of King Saul and the rise of David, the dramatic genre would suggest itself since the biblical text itself is layed out dramatically, with a cast of characters, constantly changing scenes, all repleat with dialogue. Had Efrati first decided to write a play and then scoured the Jewish past for a subject, no subject could have lent itself more to the genre than that of Saul's tragic fall. The story of Saul is perfect for the writing of a national tragedy, and because of its inclusion of both socio-historial conflicts and internal psychodrama, the Saul/David struggle contains broader possibilities for secularization into historic drama than most other biblical legends. [11] According to Papirna, Saul is perfect for a tragedy, because "his soul is tragic in every sense of the word," since his death came not from an external battle, but instead "was founded only upon his internal war."[12]

The tradegy of Saul and the rise of David also parallel the Jews own experience in Europe. Like Saul and David, they were experiencing the dusk of an old order and the dawning of a new age. They, like Saul, were caught in the middle of this transition, plagued by doubts, turmoil, conflicts, fears,

---

[11]Shaked, p. 10.

[12]A.Y. Papirna, "הדרמה בכלל והעברית בפרט" ("The Drama in General and Hebrew in Particular") in Sourced for the Generations of Hebrew Criticism in the Period of the Haskalah, ed. S. Halkin (Jerusalem: Mifal haShikhon, 1960) p. 393.

and greed. Saul may have represented their deepest fears and David their greatest hopes. More will be said later about Efrati's structure of the play, and the contrast between the tragic and the pastoral, but suffice it to say here, that in choosing the tragedy of Saul, Efrati was choosing a symbol for his own time.

Whatever his reasons, it is clear that by choosing this story, Efrati was imitating the traditions of great European theatre. Shakespeare, Racine, and Geothe all chose as subject matter the downfalls of legendary national kings, and the subsequent dawn of a new dynasty. However, in Meluchat Shaul, the ancient king was not just any king. It was none other than King Saul - the first king of the Bible, and David the glorious poet-king among whose descendants will be the Messiah. Compared to these two, gentile kings such as Lear and Phaedre shrink to insignificance. Thus, even if the literary technique of the play were to fall short of other national plays, solely by virtue of its subject matter the play would succeed in asserting the nobility and worthiness of the Jewish past.

Language

Consistent with the Haskalah's goal of reviving the Biblical idiom, Efrati writes his play in a highly elevated epic style, which borrows heavily from biblical style, especially that of the literary prophets and the psalms. The play is written in the heroic meter of 11-13 syllables per line, popular with the epic poets of Europe and introduced into Hebrew literature by Naphtali Hartwig Wessely.[13] Rhyming is only occasional, occurring mainly in the songs of David, where the rhyme scheme is aa-bccb-dd-effe. Often

---

[13]"Hebrew Literature, Modern", p. 180.

a rhyming couplet punctuates the end of scene or important monologue, reminiscent of Shakespeare.

Efrati commonly uses biblical imagery from the prophets, the psalms and the proverbs. For example, on the opening page of the text, Jonathan uses a common prophetic image:

איש ואיש תחת גפנו ותאנתו בטח

[Each man in security under his vine and fig tree]

It must be noted that this is not a direct quote from the Bible, rather a reworking of a biblical image into the meter and style of Efrati. In this case the closest biblical parallel is from I Kings 5:5

וישב יהודה וישראל לבטח איש תחת גפנו ותחת תאנתו

Likewise, in approaching the biblical text of his story in I Samuel, Efrati does not approach the text as untouchable or inalterable. Rather he approaches the text with care, remaining true to the power and import of the text, while feeling free to change it to accomplish his goals. Such flexibility in approaching the text is in itself a sign of the Haskalah and its willingness to reinterpret the past and desacralize it. Shaked warns that there are two primary dangers in approaching Biblical stories and language: one is the danger of adhering too closely to the original text and paraphrasing, thereby diluting the original and accomplishing nothing original; the other is to diverge widely from the text and thereby profane it.[14] It is to Efrati's credit that avoids both of these pitfalls.

Whenever an actual expression from the biblical text can be used in his drama, Efrati will use it, thereby incorporating lines from the original

---

[14]Shaked p. 10

into his play. But in every instance, he changes these lines to fit his poetry, and weaves them into a longer speech. This provides those brief quotes with a more rounded context, and allows the reader to see them from a different perspective than that suggested by the biblical narrative. Perhaps the finest example of this is when Saul, infuriated at Jonathan's protection and defense of David, lashes out at him calling him a "son of a rebellious woman..." in I Samuel 20:30-31. The biblical text reads:

ויחר אף שאול ביהונתן ויאמר לו בן נעות המרדות
הלוא ידעתי כי בחר אתה לבן ישי לבשתך ולבשת ערות אמך
כי כל הימים אשר בן ישי חי על האדמה לא תכון אתה ומלכותך
ועתה שלח וקח אתו אלי כי בן מות הוא

[And Saul became angry at Jonathan and said to him, "You son of a rebellious wench,
Don't I know that you have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame and the shame of your mother's nakedness,
For as long as the son of Jesse lives upon this land, you and your rule will not be established,
So now go and bring him to me, for he has been sentenced with death.

Efrati takes this difficult but powerful biblical passage and reworks it:

בן נעות המרדות! קול אביו בל שומע
רוע לבך ידעתי רוע מחשבותיך
לבשתך ולבושת יולדתך זאת עשית
כסא המלכות דע גם לי גם לך בל יהי
עתה חושה להביאו פה כי הוא בן מות[15]

[You son of a rebellious wench! Do you not hear your father's voice?
I know the malice in your heart, the malice of your thoughts
To your own shame and the shame of she who bore you have you done this
The throne of the king: know that neither you nor I will have it
So now go and bring him here for he is sentenced to die!]

In cases such as the one above, when Efrati works a biblical text into his drama, he does not try to give it a radical new meaning, but rather to

[15]Efrati, p 101

reinforce the dramatic power of the original by giving it background and context. In this way, he is akin to the rabbinic Midrashists who also delighted in placing biblical verses in new settings and stories in order to allow the reader to see the lines in a fresh light and with new insight.

It should be said that in his desire to elevate Hebrew to the epic level, Efrati is sometimes quite inflated and stiff in style and language. The epic language is often at odds with the dramatic impact. Characters sometimes speak in broad hyperbole, stilted expressions, even at their most poignant moments. Intimate tender exchanges become grand oratory and melodrama. Efrati makes the mistake of allowing the language to become grandiose and oratorical, instead of letting the beauty and character of the poetry convey the grandeur of the work. Efrati is also guilty of using Germanisms in his grammar, and of using archaic forms. Nonetheless, after repeated readings, Efrati's language gains a consistency, beauty, and clarity which is impressive, given the evolving state of the language at that time. To me, the finest example of the beauty and clarity of his poetic gift is found in Act IV, in which Saul, obsessing on the women's song that "Saul had killed his thousands, but David his tens of thousands," falls into prophecy:

הבה שאול באלפיו האלפים המלך
אך דוד אך בן ישי לרבבות הבמו
לרבבות לרבבות רבבות כוכבי השחק
כלבנת הספיר יאירו כלם יאירו
כטבעת המשבץ מאבני הברלח
ובה אבן הראשה בתוך יושבת
השחקים עם כוכביהם כלמו טבעת
אך אבן הראשה השמש הזורחת
ילדי ישראל אלה גם המה טבעת
אבן הראשה בן ישי מביה הלחם
מאור האבן הזאת יאירו כלמו

כל אבני הקצוה תוכם שאול המלך
תודב אבן ידאשה עמה השבעת[16]

["Saul has slain his thousands" the thousands are of the king
But David, But the son of Jesse has slain his myriads.
His myriads or myriads. - Myriads are the stars of the firmament.
Like the brightness of the saphire they shine, all of them shining,
Like a ring inlaid with amber stones
And the center stone sits in their midst.
The firmament with its stars are all a ring -
And the center stone is the blazing sun.
The children of Israel are also a ring
And their center stone is the son of Jesse from Bethlehem.
From the light of that stone, all of them shine,
All the bordering stones - among them Saul the King
If the center stone be destroyed - so with it the ring.

Shining poetic passages such as this, with its beautifully carved imagery and language reduce to insignificance any less skilful sections, and cement Efrati's place in the history of Hebrew literature.

Structure of the Play

The play begins after Saul's defeat of the Amelekites (but before Samuel's pronouncement that God has rejected Saul as king) and ends with Saul's death on the battle field. The play basically follows the Biblical story with several exceptions: Samuel's hacking down of Agag is never mentioned, nor is his annointing of David as king. The two introductory stories of David are placed in sequential order, with David being in the king's service as harpist and arms-bearer, and from that position going out to defeat Goliath. Saul's family members Kish, Ner, Merav, Michal, and Ahinoam are either introduced into the story or expanded from the Biblical text. One scene is added in which the palace guards on night-watch are discussing the king's recent problems, and in the middle this discussionSaul

---

[16]Y. Efrati, מלוכת שאול (1794) (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1968), p. 95

comes out chasing ghosts, and has a lengthy soliloquy which will be discussed below. Also, the scene with the witch of En-Dor is greatly expanded and choreographed. Other minor changes in and omissions from the biblical story were made, but they are of no major importance. The only other change reworking of the story is found at the end, where David appears as Saul is dying, the two are reconciled, and Saul dies with the name "David" on his lips. The play closes with a Hebrew translation of Heller's על הבבור.

The play is divided into six acts, according the precedents of other well-known dramatists, such as Werner and Rostand. The outline of the play, by acts, looks as follows:

Act I: Saul and Jonathan share Saul's distressed state.
Samuel's pronouncement of Saul's rejection.
Jonathan and Abners advice to Saul, ending with invitation of David.

Act II: David's opening song and soliquy.
Jonathan's explanation of problem and invitation of David.
Saul's further rantings, and Michal's worry.
David's arrival.
Abner and Ahinoam's sharing of worry.
David singing for Saul, everyone admiring David.
Michal and Merav discussing propriety of King's daughter loving commoner.

Act III: David and Jonathan distressed, but friendship firm.
Kish and Ner try to strengthen Saul: Announce Goliath and Philistine onslaught, they leave to do battle.
Ahinoam and Michal sharing concern.
David and Jonathan leave to fight Goliath
Ahinoam and Michal share fear and sorrow at situation.

Act IV: David and Saul return from battle.
Saul disgraced by David's victory returns to insanity.
Saul throws spear at David and collapses.
Abner advises Saul to accept David.
Saul agrees to wed David to Michal.
Doeg advises Saul to have David killed.
David and Samuel discuss strategy.
Saul tries to approach but falls into prophetic spell.
David and Jonathan discuss strategy and friendship.
Dinner at New Moon, Saul expels Jonathan.
Jonathan and David renew bonds and pledge loyalty.

Act V: David sends his family to Moav.
Saul, under influence of Doeg, goes insane, agrees to slaughter of priests at Nob.
Malchishua tells David of slaughter at Nob.
Michal laments to Yonatan over her sorrow.

Ahimelek, Avishai and David plan strategy.
Jonathan appears to David to beg for Sauls' life.
David's servant steals Sauls spear, announces it.
Saul repents of his anger.

Act VI: King's guards witness Saul's insanity.
Episode with the Witch of Ein-Dor.
Death of Jonathan and Saul.
Poem.

As can be seen by the outline above, this play with its 20 some-odd scene changes was not written with any realistic expectation of being staged, and much criticism has been made about the structure of Meluchat Shaul: namely that it has too many scene changes (20), an unruly cast of extraneous characters (more than 23), that the scenes do not build dramatically upon one another, that the play is too fragmented, too pastoral, too long; that the real tragedy doesn't begin until the third act, that it is atechtonic without unity of time or space, that the final poem reduces the work to a monolithic morality play; that we see nothing of the life of the common people; that the character of Samuel is almost absent, and so on.[17] To be sure the play is dramatically flawed, but I feel that many of these criticisms come from a lack of understanding of some of Efrati's basic goals.

Efrati was undoubtedly well read in the world's dramatic literature. In this play there are clear reflections of Shakespeare, Racine, Werner, and Geothe. Efrati surely had a good understanding of how a play should be constructed if it's goal is to carry the viewer along into the dramatic build-up and resolution. However, I don't believe creating a great tragedy was the only agenda operative in Efrati's choice of subject and structure. Rather, it is my contention that in addition to trying to write a great national tragedy and a great national epic, Efrati was also using the story

[17]Landau, p. 83, Shaked, p. 25.

of Saul and David as a metaphor for the turmoil of Jewish life during the Haskalah, and as a commentary on that transition. The "changing of the guard" between an old regime/world-view and a new regime/ world-view is always frought with confusion, fear, anger, dislocation, but also with hope and vision of the new era. I believe that for Efrati, Saul represents the "old guard" of traditional Judaism, caught up in a theology of reward and punishment, afraid of the changes happening in their world, afraid to abandon the old ways and therefore angry and condemnatory of those who did. In contrast, David represents not only a new king, but a new order and world-view. David is in harmony with nature. He is a "common man" who is both wise and courageous, who sees God as a loving universal creator and who understands that all things are from God and are for the best. This level of interpretation finds support in the commonly criticized layout of the play, with its contrasting scenes of pastorale and tragedy, and also in the conspicuously contrasted characterizations of Saul and his valence group and David and his.

Many critics have made mention that the play is really composed of a tragedy on the one hand and a pastorale on the other, and that the two do not mix to good effect. Most critics feel the tragedy of Saul, with its in-depth and rounded characterization of the mad king, is the most powerful, while the pastorale, with its puerile two-dimensional characterizations, only detracts from the potency of the central tragedy. Compounding the problem is Efrati's method of consistently presenting one scene that centers on Saul's descent from melancholia into madness, and then immediately following it with a scene that centers on either David or Saul's family coping with the situation in positive and constructive ways. In the construction of an engaging tragedy, this back and forth structure is

terribly distracting and counterproductive. However, such a structure is quite effective in contrasting two different groups. If one of Efrati's goals was to contrast the old and the new not by polemic but by portraiture, then this structure of alternating scenes serves him well, and perhaps begins to explain Efrati's arrangement and choice of scenes.

More striking is Efrati's choice of certain images and theological perspectives which he uses to contrast Saul's valence group with David's. Furthermore, these contrasting portraits are often linked by key words or images. For example, at the very opening of the play, we find Saul torn by a tumult of contradictory emotions:

עוד חמתי כלבת אש בלבבי בוערת
גם אחרי הכותיו לא מצאתי מרגוע

[Still my angers burns in my heart like a flaming fire,
And even after smiting him, I find no solace.]

and then

שמחה פחד רנה ועצב בי יסערו
מה זה לי בזה יום העוז וישעי?

[Happiness and fear, joy and sadness storm within me,
Why am I like this on this day of strength and victory?][18]

Saul is introduced as a troubled soul unable to find happiness in victory or solace [מרגוע]. In contrast, David is introduced as a young earthy untroubled man, whose lusty nature revels in nature. He begins with what must be an ironic reference to Saul:

מלכי ארץ יושבי היכל ובית
התערן עם צמחי כרם וזית
ספות החמת שכר לשחות

[18]Efrati, p. 47

ביין השוב בשן התמלאו
תור אחד הענג כאשר תמצאו
לא לכם מרגוע לא לכם נחת[19]

[Kings of the Earth! Those who sit in palace and home,
Indulge yourselves with the fruit of the vineyard and olive grove
Pour out your waterskins. Get deadly drunk
Fill your bellies with good wine
Go after pleasure when you find
That you have no solace or comfort.]

These two scenes are clearly connected by the word מרגוע, solace. David, who sees his relationship with God as a cause for revelry and joy feels that drinking and looking up into the night sky can comfort any trouble. That is, that God, far from being a cause of trouble, is the comforter who can give one perspective on one's earthly troubles. By contrast, Saul, whose sees God as the source of fear and punishment, can not see that there is any possibility in God for solace. David sees God as an ally: Saul sees God as an enemy. Such a contrast was clearly relevant to the Haskalah. Traditional Judaism explained the suffering and wandering of the Jewish people as God's punishment of exile upon the people for the sin of transgressing the Torah. Thus any misfortune was the consequence of sometransgression. The result of such a theology is the internalization of anger and pain, much as Saul internalized his anger and pain in this play. Such a religious outlook was quite abhorrent to the maskilim who dismissed the idea that God commands and punishes particular people. Instead, they upheld the idea of a universal God of love and human progress, and saw the Jew's dispersion not as a punishment, but as a blessing and an opportunity. Their image of God is much more akin to that of David who exclaims after his introductory song:

---

[19]Efrati, p. 57

אהבתיך יוצרי מנעורי אהבתיך
עוד רוחי בי כוסף דעת דרכך . . .
התאפק בל אוכל לבי יודך
חוכי לב רגש זאת עשו ידיך
בוער כלפידים על כנפי רוחי[20]

[I love You, my Creator, I have loved You from my youth,
My sould continues to grow in the knowledge of Your ways...
I can't control myself - my heart exalts You,
Within me is a tender heart, which You made with with Your hands
That burns like a flame upon the wings of my spirit.]

David is filled with an abundant love of God. This love is so strong it burns [בוער] in his heart. Saul is filled with an abundant fear of God. Not love, but anger, and I would add his gnawing dread, burn [בוערת above] within him.

Related to this love of God/fear of God dichotomy is the blessing/curse contrast. What seems a curse to Saul is clearly considered by everyone around him to be a blessing. The most prominent example of this is David himself. To Saul, David is a curse, a punishment, God's way of fulfilling the divine decree against him. In his first soliliquy after his return from defeating Goliath (at which the women sang "Saul has killed his thousands, but David his tens of thousands"), Saul says about David:

מיום בוא הנבזה הלז בחצר המלך
מיום ההוא עוד לא חדש ימים עברו
דמיתי הקל מחלתי והוי להפך
כל תחלואותי היו לי כימי קדם
מיום צאתי מרחם היום התקבצו
כברקים יעבורו כלם בי יתגוררו
הנמאס הזה אם יעמוד יום או יומים
גם מלוך ימלוך גם משול ימשול בארץ[21]

---

[20]Efrati, pp 57-58.
[21]Efrati, p. 87

[From the day that despised man came into the courtyard of the king
From that day not even one month ago,
It seemed to me that my illness would be relieved, but the opposite is true.
All of the woes which I suffered in the past
From the day I left the womb, today have heaped together.
Like lightning they will pass, all of them are swept along inside me -
That loathesome man, if he stays one day or two,
He will also become king and rule in the Land.]

This loathing of David as a curse from God becomes more and more obsessive until Saul, seeking to circumvent the will of God, determines to kill David. Meanwhile, Saul's family and advisor's consider David to be a gift from God, a blessing. David is someone who can both soothe the king with music and lead the armies now that the king and his entourage have become old. Kish says about David's killing of Goliath:

אצבע אלהים זאת [This is by the hand of God]

and he and Jonathan sing David's praises to which David responds:

מפעלות שדי אלה אותי בחר לשלוח
[This is the work of the Almighty, He chose to send me.][22]

This same theme is repeated more clearly by Saul's closest adviser, Abner. Abner, responding to Saul's inquiry as to his opinion of the newcomer, replies:

אלהים חפץ מלכותך אוהב עמך
לכן בעת שרי הצבאות זקנו
העת בה כחות אדני המלך לקחו
שלח ממרחק איש גבור יודע לחם[23]

[God desires your kingdom and loves your people,
Therefore, at the time when the generals of the armies have become old
The time in which the strength of my lord the king has been taken
He sent from afar a valiant man who knows how to war.]

---

[22]Efrati p 86
[23]Efrati p. 89

So from the perspective of this play, David was not sent as a curse from God, but rather as a potential blessing. All the characters which are portrayed as healthy and happy share this opinion. It is not God, but Saul's own ominous cruel image of God that prevents him from seeing that David is a blessing. Unable to see the potential for good and progress, Saul can see in David only the threat and the danger, much like those who opposed the Haskalah's agenda views those who supported it.

Saul's dark fearful image of God is supported by Samuel. Landau, feeling that the character of Samuel would provide the greatest contrast to Saul in terms of national ambition, criticizes Efrati for the insignificance and silence of Samuel's role in the play. [24]However, Landau misunderstands Efrati's motivations. Samuel in fact shares Saul's religious outlook of a God who threatens and punishes and who is without mercy. It is in fact Samuel who starts the entire process of Saul's descent into religious madness. And it is Samuel's position of castrating silence which constantly reinforces Saul's own certainly of impending doom. When Samuel reappears at the end he is as castigating and merciless as he was at the opening, resulting in utter despair and resignation on the part of Saul.

I use the expression "religious madness" because Efrati's most powerful moments of poetic description center around Saul's fearful visions of eschatology in which the forces of nature begin to rule. Though not explicitly stated, Saul sees this destruction as being from God. That such poetry almost always precedes Saul's harangues against David points to Efrati's belief that this "religious dementia" is the primary illness of Saul,

---

[24]Landau, p. 83

with anger at David being a projection of it. One such section appears right before Saul throws the spear at David:

נפלו כוכבי שחק נפלו נפלו לארץ
רדי שמש ממקומך כל כסילי מעל רדו
נפלו בזרוע כח על כל הולכי שפל
תתם כל הבריאה גם אתם תשברו
גם שאול ובן ישי יחדו יכרתו
רעדה ומהומה נוראה אף חרדת נצח
הפלצות תאחז כל העולמים יחד
תהום אל תהום יגעש ירעש יקרא מר צורח
תפרזה אבדון ובור תחתיות ילחמו
מי ילך בתחלה בלעות עולמי שחק
נפלו נפלו בל יוסיפו לקום לנצח
הארץ האורה הזאת היתה לתהו
גילו הרשעים יורדי בור גילו ושמחו
כי נקרא דדור וחפש לכל יושבי צלמות
ארץ שמים וכסילי מעל אינמו
התחתים באפלה תהו ובהו יחד[25]

[The stars of the firmaments have fallen: fallen, fallen to earth.
The sun as come down from its place, all the constellations above have come down.
The have fallen by a might arm upon all who walk below
That will silence all creation, and also you will be shattered
Also Saul, and the Son of Kish together will be cut off.
Shudders and horrible shaking, and eternal dread
This trembling will seize all the worlds together.
Depth upon depth will sahke and quiver and will cry out with bitter shrieks
Hell will open and the underworld will war
Who will go first as the heavenly worlds are swallowed --
They have fallen , fallen - They will never again rise.
This cursed land was chaos -
The wicked and those who descend into the pit rejoice! Rejoice and be glad
For liberty has been proclaimed and freedom to all who dwell in the netherworld.
Land, sky, and the stars above are no more-
They are together with the underworld in chaotic darkness.]

[25]Efrati p. 88

The same stars which to David are witnesses of God's beauty and sources of inspiration, are for Saul terrible omens, symbols of defeat and destruction. This same image is expressed even more powerfully and immediately before Saul's attempt to throw a lance at Jonathan. In this passage the images are more blantantly religious and demonic:

... תחרד התפוחה תפתחנה דלתותיה
ולשוני אש יצאו יעופו על הארץ
לתהו יהיה הבל הזה כמעט רגע . .
פוחה הבישי השעירים עדך ירקדו
האספי מרשעת האספי המחדי
האפסי רוח עולם האספי והיי בהו
מות כל נמצאו התבקעי הארורה באתוך
יצאו מבטנך זוחלי עפר בחמתמו . . .
העוד בל תשי אזנך? האינך שומעתה?[26]

[Let hell tremble, and let her doors open,
And tongues of fire come out and sweep across the land
In but a moment all this reality will change to chaos...
Blowl [feminine] Look, you still cause the satyrs to dance,
Gather me, you shrew. Gather me and conceal me,
Gather me, Birther of the World, Gather me, and may it be in them
The deat of all things. Plow, you who are cursed in the world
Those that crawl in the dust will come out of your womb in anger
Are you still not listening? Can't you hear?

And then, in a moment of tremendous venom, Saul expresses clearly his feelings of betrayal and powerlessless towards God and God's world which have turned against him.

לו הבריאה הזאת כל הדברים כוננת
התבל הזאת ומלואה כל בניך
הוי לו בין שני אלה אוכל כתוחמו

[26]Efrati, p. 112-113.

גם אתה בי החלחו בי מלך שמחתני[27]

[If only...this creation and that You have formed
This world and that which fills Your handiwork
If only I were able to crush it between these teeth!
For You have also mocked me! Me - for you made me king.]

Saul views God and the world God created as fundamentally threatening and dangerous - demonic forces which are bent on destroying him. David sees these same natural forces as sources for celebration and comfort. Saul sees David as a curse from God, everyone else sees him a great gift from God. Saul's fear of divine retribution is the cause of his illness and inability to rule. David's faith in God's goodness and his love of nature are the foundation of David's strength and virtue.

On one point everyone agrees: Saul's illness is indeed from God, but whereas Saul sees it as the fulfillment of a horrible prophecy, Saul's family and David see it as sent by God for some worthy purpose. David, Jonathan, Michal and Ahinoam all express the attitude that even what seems the worst of disaster is eventually for good because it comes from God, and that when one takes a look at the world, evil pales in the face of good. [28]

In these ways, Efrati effectively contrasts the character of Saul with that of those around him, especially David. It is my belief on some level, Saul represents the traditional anti-Western Jew of Eastern Europe against which Efrati secretly struggled. David, who is portrayed as wise, well-rounded, beautiful, eloquent, mannered, and a lover of God and nature, represents the hope and vision of the Haskalah. Jonathan, Michal, and

---

[27]Efrati, p 113.

[28]See in particular, Efrati p 106, lines 6-10, p 116, lines10-22, p 120, lines 9-26.

Ahinoam represent those who know that progress and enlightenment are inevitable and who therefore support it as the will of God, but who also are deeply distressed by the effect this change is having on their society and those they love. It should however be noted that even within the framework, Efrati does succeed in evoking the reader's sympathy for Saul's struggle with his changing environment, a sign that Efrati too sympahtized with those Jews who were caught in the tumult of the Haskalah.

Perhaps the most persuasive evidence of this agenda lies in the one major change which Efrati made in the biblical story. At the very end of the play, when Saul lay dying on the battlefield, David appears, and before his death, Saul is reconciled with him. This change works against the effectiveness of the play as a tragedy, for it would have been far more poignant if Saul had realized his error too late and died alone without reconciliation. But Efrati opts against such a powerful tragic ending, and instead brings David, together with Kish and Abner, to comfort the dying Saul and to be reconciled with him. Just as the cover to Efrati's elegy to Rabbi Landau showed reconciliation between the rabbi and Moses Mendelssohn, so here we have a picture of reconciliation between the old ways and the new, between traditional Judaism, and the Haskalah.

Although it is impossible to proove beyond doubt that such a theme was operative in Meluchat Sha'ul, I believe that the arrangement of the scenes and the contrasting portraiture, linked by certain themes, images, and specific words, clearly point to its presence. This is not to say that such was Efrati's primary objective. Rather, it is simply to assert that present among his agenda was the desire to present an allegorical portraiture of the turmoil, tragedy, and hope which was reshaping his own community. Saul and David gave him such an allegory.

Efrati's Interpretation of Saul: The Play as Midrash

It is clear that Efrati did not consider his play as Midrash, for it is not presented in Midrashic style or langue which Efrati must have known well. However, insofar as this play does take the character of Saul and reinterpret it to fit the cultural context and religious needs of the time and place, it functions as modern midrash.

It does so on both profound and surface levels. For example, Efrati portrays Saul and his generals as old men who are really past their prime. Such an interpretation is not present in the Bible or Midrash. Also, Efrati portrays Saul's father Kish as a warrior hero, who even in old age can do battle valiantly. In doing so, Efrati, like Rashi and most of the commentators before him, is interpreting the biblical description of Kish a גיבור חיל. [I Samuel 9:1] Unlike the medieval commentators, Efrati takes the literal meaning of the biblical Hebrew and uses it to create an entire characterization and image of Saul and his family as literally the "old guard."

Although not directly related to the character of Saul, some mention must be made about Efrati's portrait of the character of Ahinoam. In the biblical text, she is given no voice, but in this play, Efrati creates a character full of beauty, dignity, love and pathos. Some of the most beautiful and natural speech comes out of her concern for her husband and her fears of his death. We see a woman who is queen, and who has suffered the emotional turmoil of seeing her beloved constantly going out to war, not knowing when or if he will return, and now has to cope with his descent into madness. In this characterization, and in the characterization of the

relationship between Ahinoam and her daughter Michal, Efrati is truly involved in the midrashic process of creating voices where the Bible is silent, of building full characters out of the mention of a woman's name.

As important and effective as these lesser midrashic interpolations are, it is in the reworking of the character of Saul that Efrati truly contributes to a new understanding of the first king of Israel. To appreciate just how innovative Efrati's portrait is, we must first confront several of our own misconceptions. When we, as modern readers, read the biblical story of Saul, we automatically project onto it our modern notions of psychology and mental illness, and see Saul as a tortured soul plagued with mental illness. For us, such an understanding seems obvious and indeed intended by the very text of Samuel. We take for granted the psychological underpinnings of the narrative. Such assumption on our parts is anachronistic and it prevents us from seeing how daring and unprecedented Efrati's treatment of Saul was. It must be remembered that the basic approach of the biblical text to the story was that Saul was doomed by his sin and that his madness was simply the means by which this doom was realized. When the Bible says that an evil spirit from God plagued Saul, it means just that. This understanding of the Saul /David conflict continued up to Efrati's day and well past it. In both Jewish and non-Jewish literature, this story was portrayed with few exceptions as a morality play between good (David) and evil (Saul.)[29] Saul was portrayed as the enemy of God, the rebel, the vengeful pagan who deserved his punishment. David was portrayed as the ever-obedient servant, the shepherd-king, the apotheosis of piety who was vicitmized by Saul's evil inclinations. Although this tradition of

[29]Shaked, p. 10-12

evil Saul versus good David is clearly reflected in Meluchat Shaul. It is profoundly altered and redefined. Efrati's Saul is not a doomed king living out the punishment of a veangeful God. Rather, Efrati "psychologizes" the portrait of Saul for the first time, creating a complex "round" character who is tortured by obsession and madness, but also capable of great good and great love. Saul becomes a character who is neither good, nor evil, but sadly human and trapped by his own imperfections. According to the parameters of tragedy set up by Kurtzweil, Ephrati succeeds in making Saul a character caught between two competing value systems, neither of which is evil. [30] To be sure, Efrati used as models the great works of Shakespeare and Racine ,and one can almost hear King Lear and Hamlet in the mad rantings of Saul. But such an interpretation was new to the Jewish context, and as such represents a major innovation in "modernizing" the text and making it relevant and powerful to the audience Efrati was trying to reach.

Efrati presents Saul, not as an evil demonic king being punished by an angry God for his wicked ways, but rather as a man trapped by a world view and theology that destroys him. Saul is a man too blinded by his own fear of progress and change to see what is best for him and his people. For Efrati, Saul is not evil - he is pitiful and tragic, doomed by his own short-sightedness. By portraying Saul in this way, Efrati subtlely responds to the needs and issues of his day. He addresses the turmoil created by the emancipation of the Jewish community by taking an ancient legendary character and making him a symbol of the disaster that can befall a person

---

[30]Baruch Kurtzweil, "Is there Such a Thing as Biblical Tragedy", in An Anthology of Hebrew Essays, vol. 1, I. Cohen, and B.Y. Michali,eds.,(Tel-Aviv: Massada Publishing Co. Ltd, 1966), pp. 97-116 [See Thesis Chapter 2: **The Text as Literature.**]

who clings irrationally to the old ways. He holds up David as an example of the new enlightened Jew, and in so doing creates a Messiah who is also a Maskil. The large cast of other characters symbolize the Jewish community as a whole caught in the middle of the clash of culture and values, each trying to cope in good faith with the disequilibrium that surrounds him or her. Just as the biblical redactor turned Saul into the enemy of the prophets and of the house of David, and the rabbis turned him into a fumbling pharisee, so also does Efrati make the character of Saul relevant to his, the writer's, context, and in so doing makes the character alive for yet another generation of Jews.

5.

SAUL ON SAUL:
TCHERNICHOWSKY RECLAIMS HIS NAMESAKE.

In מלוכת שאול (Meluchat Shaul), we saw how Yosef ha-Efrati, writing during the dawn of the Haskalah, took the basic text of Saul's life and reshaped its structure and emphasis to create a play that could convey dramatically some of the tensions and conflicts of his day. In his play, Saul became a metaphor for a generation of Jews caught in transition, and the play became a "midrashic" interpretation of those tensions and their possible results. Once again, it should be said that I am usingthe term "midrashic," to mean that the play took an ancient text of national myth and reinterpreted it to address the concerns and issues of the contemporary Jewish world of its time. I do not mean that the writer used the forms or language of traditional Midrash. Without changing the time, place, or basic plot of the story, Efrati was able to inject the issues of the Haskalah into a national biblical legend, and thereby make it live again in the minds and hearts of its contemporary readers. Saul's plight could once again speak to them in a relevant and personal way. It was in this play that the character of Saul first received such treatment in the canon of modern Hebrew literature.

Following מלוכת שאול, there were many other attempts by various playwrites to rework the legends of Saul within the dramatic genre. These were mostly unsuccessful endeavors characterized by flatness, cliche, and

stiff sylization. It was not until the end of the next century, at the hands not of a playwright, but rather of a young poet that the character of Saul once again became the subject of a literary and philosophical reinterpretation which allowed the ancient figure to speak to a new generation of Jews with a new generation of concerns.

Saul Tchernichowsky was born in 1875, in Mikhailovka, Russia and received both a traditional Jewish education and secular Russian education. As a youth of 14, Tchernichowsky went to Odessa where he began writing poetry and became involved in the Modern Hebrew literary scene of that town. Tchernikovsky desired to become a doctor, and, excluded from entering medical school in Russia, he pursued his studies in Germany and Switzerland. There, too, he continued to write poetry and practice medicine. Tchernikovsky returned to Russia at the outbreak of World War I to serve as a doctor in the Russian army. Having witnessed the devastating impact of World War I on his country, and the disturbing aftermath of the Bolshevik revolution, he left Russia again in the 1920's and returned to Germany, where he continued his medical and literary pursuits. in 1931, Tchernikovsky emigrated to Palestine where he continued both of his careers until his death in 1943.

Such a biographical overview can not begin to reveal Tchernichowsky's importance as a poet and Zionist spokesperson. Through his poems, Tchernichowsky addressed the growing ferment of Russia Jewry at the turn of the century, and committed himself to the Zionist path for resolving those problems. Specifically, Tchernichowsky held a radical approach to both Zionism and Jewish history and tradition. A disciple of Berdichevsky, Tchernichowsky believed that the only way to revitalize the Jewish people was to return to a creative, erotic, spirituality which reveled

in nature, beauty and power. He looked toward the ancient Greeks and Hebrews for inspiration as to the lusty life-affirming Judaism he wished to create. This Judaism he believed had existed in ancient times but was extinguished by later Jewish leaders, beginning with the biblical prophets and continuing through the rabbinic and medieval periods, up to his own day. To him, the laws and moral austerity of prophetic and rabbinic Judaism had confined this youthful spirit to a guilt-ridden, paralysed, and debilitated Judaism. The Jewish people had become " an old and sick people worshipping a weak and aged God." [1] Perhaps Tchernichowsky's most graphic poetic depiction of this belief is found in his poem לנכח פסל אפולו (Lenokhah pesel 'appolo - Before a Stature of Appolo")(1899.). In the closing lines of this poem Tchernichowsky uses the images of the tefillin binding up the vital spirit-God of the people.

אכרע לחיים לגבורה וליפי
אכרע לכל שכיוח החמדה ששדדו
פגרי אנשים ורקב זרע אדם
מורדי החיים מיד צורי שדי
אל אלהי מדברות הפלי
אל אלהי כובשי כנען בסופה
ויאסרוהו ברצועות של תפלין

I will bow down to life, to power, to beauty,
I will bow down to all the beautiful treasures which
The human corpses wasted and the seed of man let rot.
They bring down Life, from the hand of my Rock Almighty,
The God of the gods of miraculous orations,
The God of the gods of the conquerors of Canaan by storm -
And they bound him in the leather straps of the tefillin.

[1] David. C. Jacobson, Modern Midrash - The Retelling of Traditional Jewish Narratives by Twentieth -Century Hebrew Writers (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987) p 93.

Clearly, the traditional Jew is seen here as creating God in his own feeble image, and in Tchernichowsky's estimation, this has resulted in the emasculation of the entire Jewish people and their current powerless situation. Only by creating a Jewish nation, dedicated to recreating the power, beauty and lustful youth of his imagined ancient culture did Tchernichowsky believe the Jewish people could be saved from dissolution.

It is no wonder then that Tchernichowsky found the most salient symbol of his hope for revitalization in the character of his namesake, King Saul. During his life, Tchernichowsky wrote six poems about King Saul. He wrote them during nearly every period of his life, and in their form and message, these poems reflect the development of Tchernichowsky's talent and belief. They also reflect the events of his life and the changing fate of the Jewish people as he witnessed it. The poems in chronological order are:

בעין דור (B'ein dor - At EnDor) (1893)

על חרבות בית שן (Al Horvot Bet-Shean - Upon the Ruins of Beit-Shean) (1898)

שיר אהבה אשר לשאול (Shir Ahava asher l'Shaul - Saul's Love Song) (1922)

המלך (Hamelekh - The King) (1925)

אל הרי גלבע (Al Harei-Gilboa - Upon the Mountains of Gilboa) (1929)

אנשי חיל חבל (Anshei Hayyil Hevel- A Band of Stalwart Men) (1936.)

In these poems, Tchernichowsky uses Sauls' character and the various events in his life as microcosm from which to examine the situation and problems of the Jews of his day. By so doing, the poet attempts to make the reader sympathetic toward the king and angry at Samuel and David for

wronging him. Much of Tchernichowsky's devotion and interest in the character of Saul is tied up in his rejection of the prophetic tradition of Judaism. In taking the side of the king against that of the prophet, Tchernichowsky is following in the poetic tradition set by J. L. Gordon in his poem צדקיהו בבית הפקדה "Zedekiah in Prison." In this poem, Gordon remembers the conflict between Samuel and Saul and he writes:

תמיד בקשו החזים הנבאים
להיות המלכים תחתיהם נכנעים
כן עשה לפני חמש מאות שנה
למלך הראשון הראה בן אלקנה
כי היה בן קיש איש חיל רב כח
מאן הבנע לא אבה השח
ויבקש החזה תאנה וימצא
להשפיל את כבודו ולחתו לשמצה

The prophets and seers have always sought
To have the kings bow down beneath them.
As, five hundred years ago,
The Seer son of Elkana did to the first King.
For ben-Kish was a valiant man, and mighty,
who refused to bow down, who had no wish to cower,
And the Seer sought a pretext and found it
And so destroyed Saul's honor and gave him disgrace.

Gordon goes on to retell the story of how Saul obeyed Samuel's command to wait seven days before making animal sacrifices and beginning the battle. However, when Samuel did not arrive in the agreed upon time, Saul - under the pressure of the moment, his army leaving, the Philistines ready to pounce, and Samuel nowhere in sight - made the decision to go ahead and make the sacrifices. To Gordon, this was the right decision, so Samuel's subsequent condemnation of Saul is completely unjustified.

ובאוש קנאה קשה ובעברה זדון
קרא למלך באזני שרי חיליו

ובאזני כל העם העומד עליו
"נסכלת לא תקום עוד ממלכתך
כי לא שמרת מצות אלהיך"
ומי האשם - אם לא הוא החזוה? ...

And in a blaze of jealous and malicious anger
He called out to the King in earshot of all his army officers
And in earshot of all the people standing with him:
"You have been a fool! Your kingdom will not stand
For you have not kept the commandment of your God!"
...And who is guilty, if not him, the Seer?!

Tchernichowsky, like Gordon, believed that Samuel and the mind-set he represented were at fault. They robbed the youthful king of his power, spirit and strength and created instead a melancholy, desperate, paranoid man. Saul, like the Jewish people, had become a victim of prophetic command-oriented Judaism. In his autobiography (published in HaShiloah 35, 1918, p. 103), Tchernichowsky explains:

> I do not know why, but I have always held a grudge in my heart against all those of our people who were famous as holy and good, despite all the evil that they did, and I though that those who wrote our history hid much from us in order to justify them and condemn others.
>
> And thus I always sided with King Saul. And perhaps the name was a factor.

In Saul, Tchernichowsky found a character he believed had been wronged by the forces of prophetic and biblical Judaism. In Saul, Tchernichowsky found what he believed could be a metaphor for the entire Jewish people, and so the poet went about reclaiming Saul as a vibrant character who had been victimized by the confining force of Samuel, David, and the Judaism which descended from them. Tchernichowsky used Saul's character and the various

events in his life as a screen onto which he projected the Jewish concerns of his heart.

This chapter will look at each of these poems, and discuss them in terms of their message and cultural context. Stress will be given to the ways in which these poems reinterpret the character of Saul and allow him to function midrashically. Reference to structure, technique, and literary device will be mentioned only as they relate to this primary goal.

At En-dor בעין דור

"At En-dor" is Tchernichowsky's retelling of the story, found in I Samuel 28, of King Saul's visit to the witch at En-dor. Saul, desperate for some word or advice about the imminent battle with the Philistines seeks out the witch, against his own royal decree that all witches and necromancers be put to death. Donning a disguise, Saul sneaks out of camp at night, goes to the woman and asks her to raise up the ghost of Samuel so that he might advise Saul. The woman does so, and Samuel tells Saul that because he did not kill the Amelekite king and all of his people and property, Saul has been rejected by God and will in fact die with his sons in the morrow's battle. Saul is mortified and throws himself on the ground, but after some coaxing, eats a bit and returns to camp.

Tchernichowsky adheres to the basic setting of the story, but transforms the story into a plaintive cry on the part of King Saul to return to his glorious days of youth. In "En-dor" Saul is not wearing a disguise. Rather he arrives בלי קשת ושלח without bow or spear, a clear sign of powerlessness. The disguise which Saul now wears is a false sense of powerlessness, caused by the harsh pronouncement of Samuel and the growing power of David. In this, Saul is a metaphor for the entire Jewish

people who have been likewise robbed of power by the pronouncements of traditional Judaism.

Tchernichowsky then paints a poetic picture of the witch's house, full of magical pagan images which are reminiscent of Macbeth, which he in fact loved and translated into Hebrew. There are boiling cauldrons, and snake-like smoke, dancing witches and "fires of terror": all meant to enhance the drama of the moment. In the biblical narrative, there is no description whatsoever of the witch's house or the rituals she used. Tchernichowsky, fascinated by such primal ceremonies, especially those recorded within Jewish tradition itself, creates a magical mystical world into the center of which the despairing king places himself.

Once in the center of this witches' circle, Saul is בגפרית משוח "annointed in sulfur." This is a clear reference to his previous annointing by Samuel when he was still a strong vigorous young man. To Tchernichowsky, that annointing was also the beginning of his decline, for it made him subject to the prophet. Here, the annointing with sulfur presents a pathetic conclusion to that first annointing, for just as his kingship began with one annointing, so here it ends with another. This marks the nadir of his life as king and properly punctuates the end of his rule.

Standing within this magical circle of dancing pagans, annointed with sulfur, the despairing king has a vision of his youth, before he became king. This idyll to his pastoral childhood is criticized by critics such as Kurtzweil[2] who say it destroys the structural unity of the poem. This may be so, but in terms of reinterpreting the character and life of Saul, it is

---

[2] Baruch Kurzweil, מחקרים בשירתם :ביאליק וטשרניחובסקי Bialik and Tchernichowsky-Investigations in Their Poetry (Tel -Aviv: Shocken Books. 1960.) pp. 179-180

crucial and, in my opinion, very successful. Saul remembers a time in his life before "his sky had darkened." He sees an expansive pasture land with grazing cattle, and there is the scent of sweet grass and the shade of great terebinth trees. The cattle dance before him, and he drinks it in. He exults:

אנכי הבאשר גם בריא גם רענן
מי יתן אובלה וכאז אהי שאנן

I am the blissful one, both healthy and strong.
Would that I could as serene as I was then.

What a contrast to the situation Saul now finds himself in! The bitter contrast between this vision of his youth and the reality of his present is moving and deliberate. Instead of the smell of smoke and sulfur, there was the smell of sweet grasses. Instead of the dark shades of the night and of demons, there was the shade of the terebinth. Instead of dancing witches, there were dancing cows. Instead of a Philistine army lined up against him there were herds. In this portrayal of Saul's youth, Tchernichowsky succeeds in evoking the reader's sympathy for the king and helps him/her to better understand why Saul went mad and became so embittered.

This sympathy is enhanced by the sudden entrance of Samuel into Saul's vision of youth. Once again, the Seer Samuel interrupts and ruins Saul's youth. He asks why Saul disturbed him, and in an ironic touch, reminds Saul how much he owes him because :

אנכי הראה למלך משחך
מאחרי הבקר היכל הושיבך

I am the Seer who annointed you King.
I took you from the flock and enthroned you in the palace.

Of course, Saul is not at all thankful for this "honor", and challenges Samuel, asking why Samuel did this horrible thing to him:

מדוע מאחר הצאן לקחתני
ולנגיד על עמך כיום זה שמתני

כליתי כל כחי בסערות מלחמה
ואשרי בביתי כבר היה לשממה

עם פלשת סבוני בעוחי צלמות
הרוח הרעה תדכאני עד מות

איש האלהים מה אל יעננני
כי סר מעלי מה אעשה ענני

מדוע הה מלך על עמך משחתני
מדוע מאחרי הצאן לקחתני

-Why did you take me from the flock?
And why did you thenmake me a ruler over your people as I am today?

I used up all my strength in the storms of battle
And my happiness in my home has already been made desolate.

The Philistine people surround me, horrors of the underworld -
The evil spirit has crushed me to death.

Man of God! What will God answer me?
For He has abandoned me - What shall I do? Answer me!

Why, why did you annoint me as king over your people,
Why did you take me from the flock?"

This poignant cry to Samuel is the center of the poem. In these lines, Tchernichowsky manages to turn the tables on Samuel. No longer is Saul the sinner, the criminal, the guilty party. As in Gordon's "Zedekiah in

Prison," it is now Samuel, the prophet, who emerges as the guilty oppressor, the cruel tyrant. In the biblical account, Saul only asks Samuel to advise him what he should do in battle, and he does so in a contrite pleading manner. Here the subject of the confrontation it transformed. Saul is angrily condemning the prophet for making him king against his wishes and he demands an explanation. Saul has grown a proverbial spine, and he lets Samuel know thatthe debt is not from Saul to Samuel, but rather from Samuel to Saul. Samuel owes Saul for all the misery he has caused him, and for that he must answer the king. The question as to tomorrow's battle is now secondary to the real question plaguing the king, "Why did you take me from the flock?" That is the question to which Saul must know the answer before he goes to his death in battle. To be sure, Saul is hoping for some reprieve, some return to happiness in this life, but if that is not to happen, he must have this explanation if he is to die with any sense of peace. The reader can not help but feel empathy and pathos towards the pitiful king, and anger toward the prophet. This is certainly the design of the poet.

Saul's desperate demand for an explanation from the prophet is met by complete avoidance by the prophet, and instead he gives the formulaic condemnation found in the biblical story that Saul is to die as punishment for disobeying the command of God. The prophet's unwillingness or inability to really answer Saul and engage in dialogue with him highlights his callousness and ongoing resentment that God made Saul king in the first place. This Samuel is vindictive to the very end. Kurtzweil criticizes Tchernichowsky at length for not allowing the prophet a greater say, for not creating a fuller dialogue between prophet and king. [3] However such a

[3]Kurzweil, p. 216-17.

dialogue would defeat the strength of the poems as it is written. Tchernichowsky clearly believed that the prophets and their tradition had received more than enough opportunity for exegesis and explanation, and his goal was to allow Saul's point of view to be heard and felt. Samuel's silence is central to the poet's understanding of the character. Samuel is a vindictive prophet who can only spout formulas and invective against those who break any law which he announced. Samuel becomes Tchernichowsky's symbol of the traditional halakhic system which allows no flexibility to meet a changing Jewish reality, a halakhic system which condemns its followers for acting upon their creativity and erotic impulses, and portrays God as a short-sighted tyrant concerned more with the letter of the law than with the well-being of those who followed it. To paraphrase Berdichevsky in his essay "Wrecking and Building,"[4] Samuel is the symbol of a system in which Judaism came first, before Jews, in which the legacy of ancestors came before the living people. Samuel represented the antithesis of the values he felt Jews should be living by.[5] Thus Samuel's terse formulaic response regarding God's reasoning is central to the poem's message.

The poem ends with Saul returning, without bow or spear, to camp. He is a pale, defeated, despairing man who has been robbed of his last wish: to at least understand why he had been made king, why he had to suffer so and to what purpose it had been. Samuel denied Saul this, and in so doing, denied him death with dignity.

---

[4]in The Zionist Idea, Arthur Hertzberg, ed. (Atheneum, NY: Atheneum Press, 1959/1986) p. 294.

[5]Kurzweil, p. 218.

As a midrashic interpretation of Saul's visit to the witch of En-dor, this poem is outstanding. In "At En-Dor" , as in a classical midrash, Tchernichowsky reinterprets a text to respond to certain contemporary issues. When Tchernichowsky looked at the Jewish community of Russia during the pogroms, he saw a weak and defeated people, unable or unwilling to defend themselves, preferring to follow the safe path of the ancient law rather than to defend and revitalize themselves. To Tchernichowsky, the Jewish people had once been, like Saul, a young vibrant people living close to nature, but they had lost that due to the oppression of the prophetic/rabbinical tradition represented here by Samuel. Like Saul, Tchernichowsky longs to return to a nature-centered, almost neo-pagan, Judaism which gloried in strength and virility. The end demonstrates Tchernichowsky's pessimism that the Jewish people would ever throw off the yoke of their tradition in order to live again in celebration of nature. According to Jacobson:

> In his portrayal of Saul's situation and state of mind at the time that he seeks help from the woman at En-dor, Tchernichowsky conveys the dilemmas of the European Jew at the end of the nineteenth century. Like Saul facing the imminent victory of the Philistines, the late-nineteenth-century Jew is in danger of physical destruction at the hands of anti-Semitic progromists. He feels, like Saul, that God has abandoned him, and he is no longer even certain of God's existence.[6]

---

[6]David. C. Jacobson, Modern Midrash - The Retelling of Traditional Jewish Narratives by Twentieth -Century Hebrew Writers (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987) p 98.

There is yet another issue which Tchernichowsky addresses in this poem: "chosenness". Tchernichowsky opposed the notion that the Jewish were "chosen" by God, and therefore had special burdens and moral demands placed upon them. Such moral responsibility confined the Jews' creativity and imagination and resulted in stagnation and guilt. In "At En-dor," Saul voices this resentment toward special responsibility when he challenges Samuel and asks him why he was taken from the flock and given the duties of rule, for which he did not ask. Before he had those duties, he was happy, carefree, strong. After those duties were placed upon him, he became melancholy, depressed, and paranoid. Saul here clearly represents the Jewish people as a whole. Tchernichowsky realized that keeping the tradition might result in physical suicide as people, whereas completely severing the roots of tradition might result in spiritual suicide. Neither option was viable, and the result was an overriding sense of futility in contemplating the Jewish future. This sense of futility and despair are represented by Saul who returns to battle a broken hopeless shadow of his former self.

In some ways, "At En-dor" functions like a classical midrash on a text. As in the classical midrashim, Tchernichowsky here takes a line (or two) from the scripture (in this case, Samuel's response to Saul) and creates a setting which precedes it and gives the verse a new context and meaning. In the biblical story, Samuel's response to Saul's question of what is going to happen in battle seems reasonable and sufficient. By contrast, in "At En-dor," by the time the reader arrives at the prophet's response, his/her sympathies and perspective have been so drastically realigned that that response now seems cold and heartless. The reader can never read Samuel's response again without remembering Saul's desperate

plea and Samuel's uncaring response. The base text has been irrevocably reinterpreted and enriched for the reader, and in this way, "At En-dor" clearly functions as a modern midrash on the text of Samuel.

On the Ruins of Beth-shan על חורבות בת שאן

In some ways, "On the Ruins of Beth-shan" serves as the sequel to "At En-dor.." In this second ballad of King Saul, Tchernichowsky creates an imaginary scene on the site where Saul's decapitated body was hung following his defeat at the hands of the Philistine army. This, of course, took place on the day he returned from En-Dor, and it is the death which Samuel so callously foretells in that poem. According to the biblical text which Tchernichowsky brings as a prescript to his poem:

> And the Philistines came...and found Saul's body,...and they cut off his head...and hung his corpse on the wall of Beith Shean.

This text provides Tchernichowsky with the setting for his imaginary "dance macabre" of Saul. He imagines the twilight at Beth-shan with the light fading upon Mt. Hermon, the birds winging among the trees, the nighttime quiet. Into this calm landscape walks the ghost of King Saul, wandering among the rocks of the ruins of the ancient city, clad in his armor. Only his spear is missing, and so he searches night after night for the spear he lost in battle. As dawn approaches the search becomes more frantic as Saul begins to cry out for revenge against the Philistines, even as he continues his search for his missing spear. Tchernichowsky then imagines the distant future when the Messiah will come and Saul will finally find his missing

spear, and full of anger and vengeance, will call his resurrected soldiers to his side in order to finally avenge their deaths. Then, at the last minute, God calls out, " Stop!," and announces that He has forgiven those who spilled the blood of Saul and his army, and that His vengeance will be in steadfast love [כי בחסד אנקם].

In this poem, Tchernichowsky is responding to the ongoing pogroms and physical violence against the Jews of Eastern Europe. Saul, who in "At En-dor" was a defeated bitter man, is portrayed here as a defeated bitter ghost, constantly searching for his missing spear and yearning for revenge. Like Saul, the Jewish pogrom victims lead a "ghostly humiliated existence"[7], and like Saul they are restless, angry, but powerless to defend themselves. One cannot help but think of Pinsker's "Auto-Emancipation," in which Jews are likened to ghosts of a people who should not exist but who nonetheless refuse to disappear.

The central image of the poem is the spear, the same spear which he left behind during his visit to En-dor. In an earlier poem which also deals with revenge "חרבי אי חרבי" (Harbi Ey Harbi - "My Sword , O My sword") Tchernichowsky describes the desire for revenge as a longing for a sword , but in the end finds that revenge is not possible, because the arm has withered and can not use the sword it finally obtains. This image is also found in "On the Ruins of Beth-shan." Saul wants revenge but has no spear, clearly an image of an emasculated man searching for his phallus [spear] which will return to him his power and youthful vigor. Here the phallus (arm/spear) is not withered, it is completely severed. In this way, "On the Ruins of Beth-shan" is even more pessimistic about the future of Jewish revitalization and self-defense than is "At En-dor."

---

[7]Jacobson, p. 99.

At the end of the poem, set in the time of the Messianic resurrection, Saul does finally find his spear and summons his soldiers to battle and revenge against the Philistines.

"הוי חיליי-"הננו!" - "הבל
לחרב נוקמת לשרקיו"

"Ho, my soldiers!" - "Here we are!" - Everyone
To the avenging sword, to plunder!!"

Finally, after an eternity of waiting and wandering night after night, he summons them to battle. His chance has at last arrived, but into this triumphant scene bursts the voice of God who bellows "Stop!," and commands revenge by love [חסד] because all those who killed the Israelites have been forgiven.

There has been much debate over this ending. Some critics, such as Yom Tov Hellman and Silberschlag, say it is a sign that although Tchernichowsky desires revenge, he understands that ultimately, love is a higher value. Others, such as Kurzweil and Bahat, argue that this a sarcastic criticism of traditional Judaism which continually attempts to mitigate people's primal passions and anger.

Those who argue the former point out that Tchernichowsky is usually very direct in his meanings, and does not tend to like enigmatic irony and sophisticated sarcasm. They also point out that in poems such as "Baruch of Mayence" although the protagonist does cry for and get revenge, his revenge is that of a man insane by grief who in the revenge process performs heinous acts and dies spiritually.[8] These critics believe that the ending of "On the Ruins of Beth-shan" demonstrates the poet's belief in two

[8]Yom Tov Hellman, פרקים לשירת שאול טשרניחובסקי (Jerusalem: The Hebrew Institute for Enlightenment in Writing in Israel, 1957)pg 1120-122.

types of revenge: personal revenge which is ultimately unquenchable and futile and not even death can atone; and Divine revenge, which is vengeance by love and forgiveness, and ultimately the only way to truly make peace with the atrocity of the past. In the poem, Saul is a symbol of the former, whereas the poet sides with the latter, and thus ends his poem on that message.

I side with the critics who argue that this ending is indeed a touch of sarcastic irony. Tchernichowsky was clearly frustrated with the Jews' inaction at combatting the pogroms and wished to see the Jews at least take up self-defense, if not retaliation. Although it may be much more appealing to modern liberal sensibilities to claim Tchernichowsky realized revenge is an ugly never-ending cycle that can only lead to more violence, and that surely at the coming of the Messiah such a cycle must be stopped, the fact is that Tchernichowsky did not necessarily share modern liberal sensibilities. First, it is highly doubtful that the poet believed in the coming of a Messianic era. Given his disdain for rabbinic Judaism it would seem unlikely that so rabbinic a concept would find its way into his belief system. Second, it must be remembered that the Messiah was a descendant of David, not Saul. This is alluded to by the word חסד which appears in II Samuel 7:15 and I Chronicles 17:13 in reference to David:

> "... but I will never withdraw my חסד from him [David's descendants] as I withdrew it from Saul, whom I removed to make room for you."

So this God of חסד is the same God who unfairly punished Saul by allowing the Philistines to defeat him, and made David as the eternal king over Israel, despite the many commandments he disobeyed. Although Tchernichowsky may not be known for subtle irony, in this poem I think the cruel

humor is clear. After being metaphorically castrated by Samuel at En-Dor, murdered by the Philistines as divine punishment for a crime he committed unintentionally, and then spending an eternity as a restless ghost in search of his spear and revenge, the glorious moment is finally at hand. The spear is found, Saul is once again a man, the God of Vengeance and Vigor is about to vindicate him, and who pops in but the God of Mercy, David's God, and informs him that the spear is not a valid tool for revenge in the first place. Saul is once again castrated, his life's drive thwarted. It is almost like David's God is having a last laugh on Saul, showing him that not only was his life spent in vain, but that his tormented afterlife has been equally futile. This sardonically underlines Tchernichowsky's basic belief that Saul was wronged by God. It also bespeaks Tchernichowsky's feeling that the Jewish tradition of passivity, forgiveness, and intellectualizing still had the power to thwart any effort at retaliation or revenge, no matter how justified.

Although it can be claimed that this poem is more successsful in terms of literary style and unity than "At En-dor," from the point of view of midrashic content, it is the weaker of the two early poems. Tchernichowsky does provide a scriptural text from which he works, but the scene he creates is completely outside the biblical narrative,taking place in the present and future. As such, it does not really lend much to the interpretation of the bibilical story and character of Saul. It does project Saul's tragic path into his afterlife, and thus lends an even more pathetic aura to the character of the king. Whereas the rabbinic midrashists teach that Saul died with dignity for he faced his death with with calm and acceptance, Tchernichowsky, as midrashist, doesn't even allow that.

It is interesting that Tchernichowsky purposefully avoids any mention of biblical end to the story, with the men of Jabesh-gilead taking Saul's decapitated corpse and giving it proper burial. (The poet finally addressed this image in the last of his Saul poems, "A Band of Stalwart Men.") It might be said that Tchernichowsky manipulated the text to serve his needs, but in fact, here burial is not the issue. The issue is death with honor and life with honor. In "At En-dor," Saul was robbed of a dignified death by Samuel's refusal to explain his life's path to him. In "Beth-shan," Saul's endless wandering after death is robbed of dignity by God's negation of the goal of his wandering. Only in his last two poems on Saul, "On the Hills of Gilboa," and "A Band of Stalwart Men" does Tchernichowsky create images of Saul which allow his death dignity and meaning.

Saul's Love Song שיר אהבה אשר לשאול

Literary critics do not usually include "Saul's Love Song" among Tchernichowsky's "Saul poems." Written in 1922, it has only a midrashic connection to the biblical King Saul, drawn from the story related in I Samuel 4 of the defeat of the Israelite army and the capture of the Ark by the Philistines during the time of Eli. In that story, a young man from the tribe of Benjamin runs from the battlefield to Shiloh, where he encounters the aging Eli and informs him that the Ark has been captured, the Israelites routed, and Hophni and Pinchas, Eli's two sons, are dead. At this news, Eli falls over, breaks his neck and dies.

Rashi was puzzled as to why in I Samuel 4:9, the terse biblical prose includes the detail "a man **from Benjamin**" and he concludes that it is

referring to the young Saul. Tchernichowsky takes Rashi's lead and creates from it an entire setting and context for the verse in which we learn of Saul's family and beloved, as well as his already established reputation among the young women of his village.[9] Tchernichowsky creates an oriental love poem between the young Saul's beloved and her friends. Having been playing by the fountains, the young women laugh and look at their friend's wedding wardrobe and jewels, and her household gods and goddesses. The beloved then speaks of the beauty, strength and wealth of her young lover, Saul. The joy is interrupted by the sight of the young man's mother and sister who tell the young women that the Philistines have invaded, that Saul has gone off to fight them, and that there has been a terrible defeat. Night after night the beloved waits for Saul and his mother pines in agony, until finally Saul, the lover, knocks on the door, wounded and exhausted. The beloved bravely urges him to go up first to see his mother who is desolate from the uncertainty of Saul's fate in battle.

The poem has been widely criticized as a deliberate and inferior imitation of the style and vocabulary of the Song of Songs. Yet, as stated above, it is not the aim of this paper to discuss the literary merits of the poetry, but rather its importance as modern Hebrew midrash. In that respect, this poem does have considerable value. This poem, like the earlier midrash of Rashi and Radak, stresses Saul's incomparable good looks. The same good looks that in I Samuel 9:13 caused the young women that met him to babble on and on in order to prolong their view of his face, the same esteemed stature which won him the appellation of גבה מכל העם משכמו ומעלה "a head taller than any of the people:" those attributes are

[9]Eisig Silberschlag, Saul Tchernichowsky: Poet of Revolt, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press., 1968), p. 56.

here presented in the oriental style of the Song of Songs. This style allows and even requires hyperbole, aggrandizement, overstatement, and apotheosis of the character. The primary description of the Saul-lover character is found in part II of the poem. In a clear imitation of Song of Songs 5:9,

מה דודך מדוד שכבה השבעתנו
How is your beloved better than another that you adjure us so?"

the beloved's women friends ask:

מה דודך מדוד שכבה ואהביהו,
"What is thy beloved more than another beloved,
that so much thou dost love him?"[10]

To this query, the beloved responds:

דודי רם וחסן בחור משבטו
עיניו עיני נשר מאזרות זקים
במחשך אור לו כחנים
לבו עשוי לבלי חת לב הנמר בהר
ברזל מקשה אזרועו בקנה
זקוף דודי וחסן רעיותי אהבתי
כשקמה בשפלה כארז בלבנון
שרידיו גבעות גיר מיסדות על ערבות בר
מראהו כליש בחור כנמרים

My beloved is tall and poweful,
the chosen one of his tribe:
His eyes are an eagle's eyes
that gird themselves with firebrands
lighting the dark from him like jackals:
His heart is made to be fearless,
a tiger's heart on the mountain,
his forearm is beaton iron:
Erect is my beloved,
dear friends whom I have loved,
like the sycamore in the lowland,
like the cedar of Lebanon:
His muscles are hills of chalk

[10]from Silberschlag, tranlation by Shalom J. Kahn and others.p. 158.

based on wild plains of the desert;
like a leopard he appeareth,
excellent as panthers[11]

In terms of Tchernichowsky's own symbols of Saul, the descriptive passage which immediately follows the above is much more telling. In it the beloved decribes the young Saul's spear.

שלח לו לדודי ומדיו עליו
הנה קובעו שלבחידי
שלשה חשוקים וסביב לו מחשוקי נחשת
כלם מעשה חרש נגודי מקבח
אזור אזור על משנהו מפוחד במלחמה
חרבו צמאה דמים קשתו עורגה בשר
לא נתק היתר ולא בגד
דומה רמחו לחזיז או לברק הבלהות
הנה זה בערף אויבנו
מבריק מן המער נוצץ מן הסופה
קינו עשוי מלה פיהו ברזל עשות
עין המות צופיה מעל חדו
בחליו חלין אימה

My beloved heth a spear,
he is clad in his apparel:
Behold, the helmet of him I have chosen -
with three rings circles, of the rings of copper:
All of them the work of a craftsman,
beaten with hammers,
one circle upon the second placed
because of the fear in battle:
His sword thirsteth for blood,
his bow panteth after flesh,
the string is not broken and heth not betrayed:
His spear is like a flesh of lightning,
or the thunder of teror;
behod, it is in the back of our foe,
gleaming more than the storm,
shining more than the tempest:
His spear is made of olive wood,

[11]Ibid, p. 158.

its edge is of forged iron;
the eye of Death keepeth watch over its point,
in its sheath lodgeth terror:[12]

This is Saul before he lost his spear, and with it his dignity and strength. This is Saul before En-Dor and Beth-shan. This is the Saul that Tchernichowsky idolized, a Hebrew Apollo, full of beauty and eros, who deserved to be king and to rule a pagan lusty people (recall that the beloved has gods and the goddess Ashtarte). This is Saul before Samuel and David with their confining morality castrated him and turned him into a paranoid, melancholy, defeated man.

This poem also represents a new phase in Tchernichowsky's treatment of Saul. Up until now, Tchernichowsky has dwelt almost exclusively on the ignominy of Saul's last days and his death, seeing them as a metaphor for the condition of the Jews of Eastern Europe during the pogroms. Here, Tchernichowsky decides instead to turn to Saul's younger life, before his insanity and defeat, and to examine the mythic character of the first king of Israel. Whereas in "At En-Dor" the reader gets a glimpse of Saul as a shepherd in the fields, here in "Saul's Love Song" we see the burgeoning warrior that would eventually lead his troops to defeat the Philistines.

It is no accident that Thcernichowsky chose as the central character of his Song of Song's imitation the youthful Saul. As has been said above, Tchernichowsky had no affection for David and his dynasty, and that certainly includes Solomon, to which the Song of Songs is attributed. Tchernichowsky makes it clear that his choice for a mythic hero-king is the valiant Saul, not the intellectual political Solomon. It should also be noted

[12]Ibid, pp. 158-159.

that despite the blatant imitation of Song of Songs, Tchernichowsky does not focus only on Saul's good physique, but also on Saul's physical and military prowess, his wealth and familial devotion. Whether or not "Saul's Love Song" is on a literary par with the other Saul poems of Tchernichowsky is a matter for literary critics. What is certainly important from a midrashic viewpoint is the poet's reclaiming of the character of Saul as a national hero and symbol, based upon an obscure verse in the beginning of Samuel. "Saul's Love Song" functions as midrash, allowing us to move inside that verse and discover its setting and context. It gives the verse a story, which is clearly in the realm of midrashic interpretation. Such a midrash also serves Tchernichowsky's goal of demonstrating the greatness of Saul's early life, before he became the victim of the Samuel and David. Exactly what prompted the poet to change is focus from Saul's death to his youth is a matter of speculation. Perhaps he was inspired that the figure of the New Soviet Man, the utopian farmer-workers of the early Soviet state. Perhaps he felt that the Jewish people needed the image of a warrior hero, more than they needed to an image of pathetic demise. Perhaps Tchernichowsky was inspired by the early Zionists. Whatever his reasons, the poem ushers in a new stage in Tchernichowsky's treatment of Saul, a positive exalting treatment which reaches its height in the poem, "The King."

The King **המלך**

Kurzweil called "The King" " one of the strongest ballads known to me." [13] Indeed, Tchernichowsky's poem of Saul's ecstatic prophecy is the finest of the Saul poems, both from a literary and a midrashic perspective. Tchernichowsky wrote the poem in 1925, after having witnessed the devasting effects of World War II and the depressing aftermath of the Bolshevik revolution. No longer solely concerned with the Jewish condition, the poet focused his attention on the need to rebuild a positive culture and society throughout Europe and the world. Believing that the political and military leadership bore the primary responsibility for the devastation, Tchernichowsky began to feel that only through the leadership of the poets and artists could the civilization of Europe be rebuilt in life-affirming and positive ways. According to Jacobson, Tchernichowsky felt that:

> the error of civilization had been to take too seriously the structures that divide human beings from each other and from nature. Only by becoming aware of the poet's discovery of the unity of existence will the peoples of Europe reconstruct their culture and build a world based on harmony and peace. [14]

In order to express this belief poetically, Tchernichowsky turned to his namesake, Saul, and drawing on certain events in the kings life, crafted an exquisite ballad of the king as poet and prophet, fully in touch with the unity of all things.

The action of the poem is based primarily on the text of I Samuel 10. After annointing Saul as the future king, Samuel explains the the youth that:

---

[13]Kurtzweil, p. 220.

[14]Jacobson, p. 108.

> You shall pass on from there until you come to the terebinth of Tabor. There you will be met by three men making a pilgrimage to God at Bethel. One will be carrying three kids, another will be carrying three loaves of bread, and the third will be carrying a jar of wine. They will greet you and offer you two loaves of bread, which you shall accept. After that, you are to go on to the Hill of God, where the Philistine prefects reside. There, as you enter the town, you will encounter a band of prophets coming down from the shrine, preceded by lyres, timbrels, flutes, and harps, and they will be speaking in ecstasy. The spirit of the Lord will grip you, and you will speak in ecstasy along with them; you will become another man. [I Samel 10: 3-6]

Tchernichowsky swirls these two events into one spiralling movement of transformation and ecstasy. The poem also alludes to Saul's other moment of prophetic ecstasy, retold in I Samuel 19:19-24, when Saul, having sent messengers to David, finally goes himself and meets a band of prophets with Samuel as their leader, upon which he is himself filled with the spirit of God, and begins to speak in ecstasy.

> Then he [Saul] too stripped off his closthes and he too spoke in ecstasy before Samuel: and he lay naked all that day and all night. That is why people say, " Is Saul too among the prophets?" [I Samuel 19: 24]

Tchernichowsky takes all of these ecstatic episodes in Saul's life and weaves them into a poem of ecstasy. According to poem, Saul indeed encounters a band of prophets with three kids, and three loaves of wine and a skin of wine and a harp and Saul accepts these gifts. The prophets bless Saul as being God's annointed, and the praise him for having life and death in the power of his command. They assure him that he will be able to see the sublime light of God and know the secret of complete freedom. Then Saul and the prophets feast until sated, when they begin to play music and

sing, and dance hand in hand. As they dance, they more and more inspired and joyous, rising higher and higher in ecstatic fervor. Five times during this ecstatic dance, Saul is overcome with the spirit of God and removes some article of his clothing. First he removes his crown, the barrier which distinguished him from his people Israel. He then removes his harp, the barrier which distinguished him from all the people of the earth. Next, as the prophets dance more and more wildly, cleaving and hugging, Saul removes his sword, and with it the barrier of fear and violence which separates man from other animals. The prophets now are in full abandon, swirled together so that one can't distinguish body from body, and in the midst of this, Saul removes his royal cloak, and the barrier between him and the full glory of all creation is removed. Finally, the prophets have become "one body with many faces," dancing among trees and rolling in the grass, and Saul removes what remains of his clothing, and becomes mystically and ecstatically unified with God.

ותצלח רוח אדני על משיחו
ויהי גם הוא מתנבא בתוך המחנה
ויהי לאחד עם היקום ומלאו
זיק אחד קטן באין סוף והויה
לאהבה ולדבקה בכל הבריאה
ויפל ערם כל היום ההוא
וכל הלילה... ערם... ערם ... ערם...

And the spirit of the Lord rested upon His Annointed
And he too prophecied among the camp.
And he was as one with the universe and all that fills it
One tiny spark in the Limitless One of Being
Loving and cleaving to all creation.
And he fell naked all that day,
And all that night...naked...naked...naked...

Here, the image of Saul naked on the ground is transformed from the negative connotations of the biblical text into a sign of transcendence and divine wisdom. Saul is at once both prophet and king, mystic and poet. The conflict between king and prophet which we saw in Y.L. Gordon's "Zedekiah in Prison," and in Tchernichowsky's "At En-Dor" is here turned on its head. It is no longer king versus prophet, but rather the king as prophet. There is no room in this poem for the dividing wall between prophets and kings, but rather the underlying unity of all things is of utmost importance. Here, Samuel and Saul are partners in mystic ecstasy, but Saul because of his kingly qualities best comprehends the great unity. This is a completely new concept in the modern Hebrew literature of Saul, one which constitutes a stunning innovation by the poet.

Through his ecstasy, Saul is completely liberated from the contradictory extremes that plague normal awareness. Saul understands that such symbols as crowns and swords and clothing only create a false allusion of distinction among Creation. Unity of all is the overarching reality under which these false barriers operate. For Tchernichowsky, such a revelation of unity offers a way out of cultural degeneration and decadence. Just as Saul the King's revelation rendered him uniquely fit to rule the people, so Saul Tchernichowsky, because of his poetic revelation, is the

> truly proper leader of the people who through his unique sensitivity can show them the way to be liberated from the agonies of the present historical moment.[15]

---

[15]Jacobson, p. 108.

In particular Jewish terms, Tchernichowsky is here renewing his earlier admiration for raw primal paganism, but linking it with specifically Jewish antecedents. The prophetic ecstasy of the Samuel text is for Tchernichowsky an authentically Jewish alternative to the dry legalism and morality of later prophetic and rabbinic Judaism. Nakedness is not a shame, it is the fundamental human condition. Further, through the language of the poem, Tchernichowsky links this early biblical ecstasy with the ecstasy and emotional outbursts of the Hassidim. Such words and phrases as אור נאצל (the Sublime Light) אין סוף (The Limitless One) מחול חסידים (the Hassidic Dance) are all clear references to Hasidism. For Tchernichowsky, this emotional mystical spirituality represented a radically alternative Jewish tradition, one that he as a poet could admire.

Another important element in the poem is that of freedom, liberation, and equality. The prophets tell Saul that he is to discover דרור גמור (absolute freedom) and later as Saul begins to dance he realizes that he is כאחד עמו (Like one of the people). For Tchernichowsky, these were nationalistic concepts used by Zionists to express their yearning for national freedom and their socialist identification with the common people. Jacobson suggests that Tchernichowsky saw modern Zionism as the latest is a long chain of alternative traditions in Judaism, beginning with the ecstatic prophets, continuing through Hasidism, and now resting in Zionism.[16] This discovery of diversity within his own tradition perhaps helped the poet to resolve some of his earlier animosity for Judaism and for those who practiced its more orthodox forms. Thus Saul is not depicted as being defeated by the tradition, but rather as reveling in his freedom from

[16]Jacobson, p. 107.

that tradition and in the liberty of true unity with God. In this poem, Saul's removal of his sword, is not a sign of weakness, but of strength.

In "The King" Tchernichowsky produces a brilliant piece of midrashic poetry. By taking several prophetic episodes in Saul's life and weaving them together into a symbol of the king as prophet, Tchernichowsky takes what is a minor, somewhat denigrated, element of Saul's life in the biblical text, and transforms it into the king's greatest strength. In fact, his entire right to rule is derived from his ecstatic knowledge of universal divine unity. Tchernichowsky chooses the most positive image of the king at the height of his youthful powers and creates from him a symbol for all of Europe, and in particular Europe's Jews. Through Saul, Tchernichowsky asserts that despite the barriers which seem to exist between people, ultimately all is holy and all is unified. War is the result of a false-reality, not reality itself, and only poets and artists can show the world that unified reality. Tchernichowsky takes biblical texts, weaves them together and inserts into that weave cultural values and beliefs of his own particular time. In so doing, he makes the ancient timeless text relevant to a new generation of readers, and creates new Hebrew midrash.

On the Mountains of Gilboa על הרי גלבע

During the late 1920's and 30's, Tchernichowsky became more preoccupied with the struggle between Arabs and Jews in Palestine. Tchernichowsky himself wished to immigrate to Palestine, but could not find any gainful employment, and so remained in Europe. In 1929, at the height of Arab/Jewish tension, there was an Arab massacre of the Jews in

Hebron. This massacre was widely publicized and created a strong reaction among the Zionists of Europe. It is likely this event which sparked Tchernichowsky's next poem on Saul, על הרי גלבע (Al Harei-Gilboa) "On the Mountains of Gilboa."

In this poem, Tchernichowsky returns to the subject of Saul's death on the battlefield, but unlike the earlier poems "At En-Dor" and "On the Ruins of Beth-shan," this poem presents Saul's death as deeply heroic and brave. This is not the defeated worn man that met an ignominious death at the hands of the Philistines, but rather a brave and fierce soldier who even at the hour of seeming doom, rallies his strength to lead the troops into one last assault.

The poem is stirring tightly-constructed ballad. The Israelite heros are dying everywhere in their battle against the Philistines. The king's arms-bearer tries to convince the aging ruler to rest so that he, young and strong, may go out to battle. The Philistines are everywhere with spears and arrows, and the arms-bearer wants a final blast of the shofar to rally the fleeing Israelites once more. Then a messenger with news that Jonathan has been killed. Instead of being crushed, Saul announces that he still has two more sons which he would feel blessed to be able to sacrifice for such a noble cause. Again, the arms-bearer urges Saul not to move from his place, but another messenger comes and announces that Malkhishua is also dead. Saul accepts this as the price that must be paid and insists on fighting onward, and calls those who would flee a disgrace. The arms-bearer then adjures Saul to fall upon his sword so that the Philistines won't capture and kill him, but a third messenger announces the death of Abinadab. This final death rejuvenates the king who blows the great shofar and calls the Hebrews together to fight in the place of those who have already fallen.

Of course this is a radically different picture of Saul's last hours than is given in any literature up until now. The biblical text shows Saul surrounded by the enemy and badly wounded, commanding his arms-bearer to kill him so that the Philistines won't have that opportunity. The classic midrash show Saul nobly accepting his fate and not resisting it. Efrati has Saul a broken tragic man who has realized upon his death how much harm he has caused by his paranoic fear of David. Tchernichowsky in 'At En-Dor" and "Upon the Ruins of Beth-shan" shows the king as having died powerless and broken. But here we see the valiant last stand of an incredibly brave and fearless warrior-king. He may be old, he may be wounded, he may have lost three sons, and he may have no chance to survive, but still he rallies himself as a true leader of his troops to at least fight to the end with dignity.

According to Jacobson, and I concur, this poem is a call to the Jewish people in Europe to respond to the Arab massacre of Jews in Hebron by fully supporting the Zionist struggle and, if possible, emmigrating to Palestine to defend their fellow Jews.[17] Jacobson's claim can be easily supported by examining the final couplets of each stanza.

רבים ממנו היום הערלים
תקע חזקו ואמצו גבורים עמלים

The uncircumcised outnumber us today.
Blow: Be strong and have courage, you toiling heros.

רבים ממנו היום הערלים
תקע ויחלצו היושבים על הבלים

The uncircumcised outnumber us today.

[17]Jacobson, p. 109-110.

Blow, and those who sit upon their weapons will be called to arms!

רבים ממנו היום הערלים
תקע ויבואו השבטים הבדלים

The uncircumcised outnumber us today.
Blow, and the withdrawing troops will return?

רבים ממנו היום הערלים
חבוז משתינים ומפגרים עצלים

The uncircumcised outnumber us today.
Shame upon the saboteurs and lazy ones in the rear!

רבים ממנו היום הערלים
הכבש ישראל אם נשחט כרחלים?!

The uncircumcised outnumber us today.
Shall the flock of Israel be slaughtered like lambs?

רבים ממנו היום הערלים
עלו! תפסו מקומם של נופלים וכשלים

The uncircumcised outnumber us today.
Go up! Take the place of the fallen and failed!

Read like this, divorced from the specific context of Saul and the Philistines, the call to the Jews of Europe is more apparent. The uncircumcised are the Arabs (and perhaps the British), and the only way to remedy their outnumbering of the Jews is through increased immigration. "Those who sit upon the weapons" are the Jews of Hebron and Palestine who need reinforcements in order to be saved. The "withdrawing troops" and the "saboteurs and lazy ones in the rear" are clearly those Jews who are either withhold their support for the Zionist enterprise or those who outright oppose it. To those people Tchernichowsky, through the persona of Saul, cries out in anguish at the slaughter of the Jews of Hebron, "Shall

the flock of Israel be slaughtered like lambs?" and the unstated answer is yes, unless the Jews of Europe "Go up" and "Grab the place of the fallen and failed." It is intentional that the final line uses the verb עלה (go up) which is also the verb for emigrating to Israel.

In the body of the stanzas too there is adjuration for the Jews of Europe. Saul blares out:

-לא עת להנפש אין פנאי...

It is not time to rest! There is no time...

and that :

-עוד לנו מלחמה וקרבות עוד באים.

We still have a war and battles are still coming.

Tchernichowsky also makes known that although Zionism requires the sacrifice of young Jewish lives, that:

נסיכים מנדבים נדבתם פי שלשה
Noblemen are prepared to pay their three-fold sacrifice.

And in the final stanza, Saul the King and Saul Tchernichowsky cry as one to the "Hebrews:"

תקע תקיעה גדולה תקוע ותקוע
וישמעו העברים :דם דם על גלבע

Sound the great shofar blast, Blast and Blast,
So the Hebrews shall hear: Blood! Blood on Gilboa!

Tchernichowsky himself is that shofar through whom this poem is announcing blood is being spilt and that the modern Hebrews must go and take up the fight.

It is interesting to note that when Tchernichowsky wrote this poem, he was in his mid-fifties. The dying king which to the young poet in his teens and early twenties seemed powerless, decrepit, and weak, is to the middle-age poet in his fifties, a hero who still has many strengths and resources even at the hour of his death. Could this be Tchernichowsky's own way of reassuring himself that despite his age he still has much to offer to the Zionist enterprise and good reason to continue his struggle to emmigrate?

Tchernichowsky introduces this poem with the verse in I Samuel 31:6: "And Saul and his three sons and his arms bearer and all his men died together that day." This verse would seem to invoke feelings of defeat and disillusionment, but the poet transforms them into a rallying call, a shofar blast as it were, to renewed struggle and dedication. The entire biblical account of Saul's death is refocused and finally the kings death is full of heroic bravery and honor. This is a powerful and sweeping reinterpretation of the biblical text, one that fits clearly within the parameters which this paper set up for defining modern midrash. In this poem, Tchernichowsky takes the same character and scene which before had served as a symbol of defeat, and he imbues that symbol with an entirely new set of cultural cues and values. The Saul which in "At En-Dor"band "On the Ruins of Beth-shan" was a symbol of the weak and melancholy state of the Jews of Eastern Europe during the pogroms, is here remade into a symbol of the brave Zionists who are dying in the defense of their independence and honor. Such is the function of the midrashic process and its value in keeping national symbols alive in each generation of readers.

A Band of Stalwart Men **אנשי חיל חבל**

Whereas "On the Mountains of Gilboa" was written "with the romantic glorification of the Zionist struggle that would be expected of a poet still living in the diaspora detached from actual scene of the events,[18] Tchernichowsky's last ballade about King Saul אנשי חיל חבל ("Anshei Hayil Hevel," "A Band of Stalwart Men") (1936) is written from the viewpoint of a poet that was living in Palestine and confronted daily with the reality of the Zionist conflict.

In 1931, Tchernichowsky finally emigrated to Palestine. The idealistic poet who called Jews to battle in "On the Mountains of Gilboa" was now confronted by the reality of both Jewish and Arab suffering and loss in that battle. This reality of loss which Tchernichowsky experienced in Israel is the subject of several poems, perhaps the most well-known of which is ראי אדמה ("Re'i Adamah" "See, Land")(1938). In it:

> the poet addresses the Land of Israel, which has received the dead bodies of too many young Jews who have died in the struggle over the land. As proud as he is of the sacrifices of these youths, which he believes will lay the groundwork for the eventual establishment of Jewish sovereignty, the poet undermines his own pride by declaring how wasteful their deaths have been.[19]

Tchernichowsky did not change his support for the Zionist struggle, but he began to absorb the greatness of the cost on both sides. It was in this mood, during the most intense period of Arab-Jewish tension, that Tchernichowsky composed אנשי חיל חבל "A Band of Stalwart Men." In this poem, Tchernichowsky finally addresses the burial of Saul which he

---

[18]Jacobson, p. 110.

[19]Jacobson, p. 95.

had avoided in "On the Ruins of Beth-shan," and he describes poetically how the men of Jabesh-gilead took the bodies of Saul and his three sons and buried them with honor.

The poem is preceded by two excerpts from the biblical description of Saul's burial, one from I Samuel 31:12-13 and the other from I Chronicles 10:12. In the Samuel passage, the Israelites who lived on the other side of the Jordan, having witnessed the defeat of Saul, abandoned their towns and fled. The Philistines took the bodies of Saul and his three sons and cut off their heads, stripped them of their armor, and paraded this spectacle around the Philistine territory to announce their victory. They eventually placed the armor in their temple of Ashtaroth and then they impaled his body upon the wall of Beit-shan.

> When the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard about it, what the Philistines had done to Saul- all their stalwart men set out and marched all night; they removed the bodies of Saul and his sons from the wall of Beth-shan and came to Jabesh and burned them there. Then they took the bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree in Jabesh, and they fasted for seven days. [I Samuel 31:12-13]

The account in Chronicles differs in some details. According to that account, Saul's head was impaled at the Philistine temple of Dagon, and the stalwart men of Jabesh-gilead removed the bodies of Saul and his sons and buried the bones under an oak tree in Jabesh. Tchernichowsky utilizes details from both accounts and weaves their discrepancies into a beautiful elegy to the dead king and to the brave men who buried him.

The poem describes in the somber meter of a funeral march[20], how these stalwart men of Jabesh-gilead took the bodies wrapped like mummies

---

[20]Kurtzweil, p 223.

and adorned in royal trim and carried them two by two on poles towards Jabesh. This processional was forced to march stealthily along the mountain trails, "on lion's paths, in the wake of wolves" in order to avoid being caught by the Philistine armies that controlled the valleys. They arrive at the tamarisk/oak tree and bury the bodies there without a marker so that no foreigner or Philistine could find and desecrate it. Also, the absence of a marker would prevent that Bethlemite, David, from recognizing it. The poem ends assuring the king's memory that there will be someone who will remember him to the generations:

יש מי יזכרהו ויספר לדור
זמר הגלבע כשף בעין דור
ליחיד המלך מחנבא בעם
ברית כורת עם חרב ומשלם בדם
האחד בתפארת לב נדיב עניו
שמגר לשלח לבו ולב בניו

There is one who will remember him and recount to the generations
The song of Gilboa, the magic at En-dor
Of the only king to prophesy among the people
A covenant cut with a sword and fulfilled in blood;
The one, who in the beauty of a generous modest heart,
Defeated his own heart with a spear, and the heart of his sons.

That one who will remember is none other than the poet himself, and indeed the end of the elegy reads like a review of Tchernichowsky's poems on Saul. This review serves to encapsulate the goal of the poems as a group: to tell the generations that contrary to the biblical account, Saul was a generous modest man, who led a fascinating mythic life and died with bravery and honor.

The poem is replete with allusions to biblical episodes of the Jews exodus from Egypt. Saul and his sons are in אריג מצרים (Egyptian cloth),

just as Jacob and Joseph might have been when the Hebrew children carried them up from Egypt. The corpses are carried בשנים שנים ובמוט (two by two on poles), a clear reference to the story in Numbers 13 when the Hebrew spies carry the fruits of Canaan out במוט בשנים (on poles by twos.) because they were so large. These allusions to the original Exodus are ironic, for whereas the biblical episodes are stories of hope, freedom, and optimism as the Jews are about to enter the "promised land," their roles in this poem are as symbols of defeat and disillusionment. According to Jacobson,[21] it is as if Tchernichowsky is admitting that the modern reality of Arab-Jewish struggle seems to confirm the pessimism of the ten spies who were against going into Canaan, saying "we cannot attack that people, for it is stronger than we," and that "the country that we traversed and scouted is one that devours its settlers." [Numbers 13: 31-32] These allusions show the poet's growing understanding that Zionism will require a heavy price, and that it will not be the undaunted victory the poet had envisioned while still in Europe.

Further, the image of these "stalwart men" reduced to sneaking along animal trails to avoid the eyes of the Philistines is a clear voice of frustration at the fear in which the Jews of Palestine were living due to the rising Arab antagonism. Far from his youthful vision of strong young people settling in the land as conquerers and heros, the adult Tchernichowsky learned firsthand that the resettling of Zion by the Jews was not always heroic or valiant.

Some of the earlier themes of his Saul poetry are also present in this late poem. The poet describes the king's corpse as seeming even greater and more powerful in death than in youth,

---

[21]Jacobson, p. 111.

טרם משחוהו שמן נביאים
טרם הלבישוהו ארגמן ובוץ
עד לא יצא שם לו למדן ועד עוץ

Before they annointed him with the prophet's oil,
Before they dressed him in royal violet and linen,
When his name had not yet become known from Dan to Uts.

As in "At En-dor", Saul is portrayed as having seen the height of his power as a youth before he began the journey to the kingship and its death.

We also see Tchernichowsky's dislike for David in his comment that Saul can have no marker lest that Philistines and David recognize his grave and desecrate it.

איש לא ידענו, לא ימצא קברו
לא יחללהו פלשתי בעברו
זר לא יכירנו אף לא בן עמי
ואפלו עבד זה ביתי הלחמי

No one will know it, no one will find his grave.
The Philistine will not desecrate it when he passes
No foreigner will recognize it, nor even my own people
And not even that servant from Bethlehem.

This is a reference to treacherous disloyalty which is belied in I Samuel 28-29, where David willingly agreed to fight with the Philistine prefect against Saul and his army. Tchernichowsky, who always resented David because he was held up as "famous as holy and good, despite all the evil that he did"[22], here finds a perfect pretext for criticizing him as a traitor. In this way, the poet takes different episodes from the biblical narrative of the final battle of Saul and creates from those disparate pictures a unified poetic image of Saul's burial and its meaning. Tchernichowsky even takes

[22]Jacobson, p. 91, from Tchernichowsky's "Autobiography."

the variance between I Samuel and Chronicles as to whether it was an oak or a tamarisk under which Saul was buried by having the funeral procession look ahead and see up ahead:

במרחק- שם אשל...אשל או אלה?
In the distance, a tamarisk...a tamarisk or an oak?

By taking the conflicting biblical accounts and unifying them in a simple human question of whether the tree ahead is an oak or a tamarisk, the poet humanizes the players in the poem, gives them a voice, and creates a sense of movement and anticipation. This is a simple but brilliant stroke of midrash.

In some ways this last of Tchernichowsky's Saul poems is his strongest from a midrashic point of view. In strictly technical terms, the poet succeeds in taking various verses from the Torah and relating them to the Prophets as found in the text of I Samuel. This approaches to a degree, albeit a poetic degree, the stringing of verses by shared words that is found in classical proems. Tchernichowsky also manages to bring various accounts of Saul's death together, unifying them in much the same manner as a classical commentator might try to recitify textual discrepancies and weave together pieces of the text that support one another.

In terms of values and cultural context, Tchernichowsky manages in "A Band of Stalwart Men" to express his anguish at the death of so many Jews (and Arabs) in the cause of Zionism, while simultaneously expressing his commitment to continuing the struggle despite the terrible cost. He reminds us that "a covenant cut with a sword is fulfilled with blood" and

that Saul, though modest and generous, sacrificed himself and his sons by the spear. According to Jacobson, Tchernichowsky recognized that:

> there is a suicidal and even infanticidal aspect to modern Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel, for Jews are constantly subjecting themselves and their children to the mortally dangerous violent Arab opposition to Zionism. [23]

Despite this almost neurotic devotion and the high cost of settlement in human lives, Tchernichowsky believed that such settlement must continue and the Jews could not and should not ever turn back. This determination is lyrically expressed in the penultimate line of the poem:

היבגד הליש במצוק טרשיו?-

Can the lion forsake his rocky lair?

The answer is no, the lion cannot forsake his rocky lair, anymore than the Jewish people can abandon their rocky homeland. Saul may have died and abandoned his home and his people, but ultimately they defeated the Philistines and lived as a free people. Through this poetic midrash-elegy on the burial of Saul, Tchernichowsky remind his readers that they must feel the pain and loss of those who died in the struggle for the Zionist state, and remember their sacrifices, but those losses must not deter them from the fundamental goal of Jewish revitaliztion, renewal, and freedom for which they gave up their lives.

***

[23]Jacobson, p. 112.

With Tchernichowsky, we see the process of reclaiming Saul as an important symbol in Modern Hebrew Literature grow and attain maturity. Through the various phases of his life, Tchernichowsky returned to this character and created from him a variety of symbols to suit a variety of contextual needs. In the first two poems, "At En-dor" and "On the Ruins of Beth-shan", Tchernichowsky focuses on Saul's sad end, and transforms the defeated king into a symbol of the weak and degenerate Jewish people of Eastern Europe. In the middle poems, "Saul's Love Song," and "The King", Tchernichowsky turns his poetic attentions to the king at the height of his virility and charisma. In so doing, he reclaims Saul as a symbol of early Israelite history, full of power and beauty, but also capable of ecstatic prophecy and divine union. In the final poems, "On the Mountains of Gilboa" and "A Band of Stalwart Men," Tchernichowsky interprets the character of Saul within a cultural context of Zionist struggle and sacrifice, turning the First King of Israel into a symbol of courage, strength, perserverance, and noble self-sacrifice.

Tchernichowsky certainly never attempted to create classical midrashim, yet in many instances he approaches their techniques in his use of biblical allusion and textual interpretation. Certainly, Tchernichowsky took the character of Saul and made his life relevant and real to the changing Jewish world of the first half of this century. It is interesting that Tchernichowsky never chose to address Saul's insanity or his obsessive pursuit of David, the very aspects of the king's life which fill the majority of the biblical narrative of I Samuel. It is conceivable that Tchernichowsky could have used his poetic talents to justify the king's paranoia, to lash out at David's fickle political attachments, and Jonathan's disgraceful lack of loyalty to his own father. Or perhaps Tchernichowsky would have thought

to delve into the king's melancholy and make it accessible and heartrending for the reader. Tchernichowsky did none of these, and chose instead to dwell on the king's life outside of his relationship to David.

Yet it must be said that even in his choice of subject matter Tchernichowsky demonstrated his midrashic flair. By extricating Saul from his relationship with David, Tchernichowsky was able to help the reader see Saul as an individual character with his own important lessons, instead of as pawn in the eventual rise of the Davidic dynasty. By taking the less examined episodes of Saul's life and bringing them to the forefront, the poet made the character fuller and easier to relate to on a personal and national level.

In the opening chapter of this thesis, I set out a working definition of midrash as:

> the process by which Jewish writers interact, reinterpret, restructure, and revitalize the Jewish national histories and myth in order to make them relevant to changing contexts, and in order to invest these myths with lessons of morality, ethics and pride which give guidance to the Jew in his/her efforts to live a "holy" proper life.

There is no doubt that according to this working definition, Saul Tchernichowsky succeeded not only as a brilliant poet, but as a profound modern Hebrew midrashist of the character of Saul, his namesake.

6.

"King Saul and I:"
Israeli Poets
Encounter Saul

Alterman, Bat Miriam, Penn
Gilboa, Amichai, Zach, and Wieseltier *

Saul Tchernichowsky returned again and again throughout his lifetime to encounter the figure of King Saul, thereby establishing within Hebrew literature an entire genre of Saul poetry. By reclaiming this national mythic figure as an important focus for the expression of the poetic, Tchernichowsky created an archetype which the following generations of poets would have to encounter, one on one. Through their poetic intercourse with King Saul, seven modern Israeli poets have expressed their poetic ideals, their philosophical outlook, their national identity, and their individual conditions. Yocheved Bat-Miriam, Natan Alterman, Alexander Penn, Amir Gilboa, Natan Zach, Yehuda Amichai and Meir Weiseltier have each penned poems in which the central focus is the character of King Saul. By writing on a common subject, these poets and their poems provide us with a fixed frame of reference, and allow us an important avenue for exploring the differences between them as poets, as well as the common

*Hebrew texts, and working translations to all the poems discussed in this chapter can be found in Appendix B.

issues and developing concerns they share as representatives of the collective Israeli consciousness.

According to Gershon Shaked, in his article "Five Poems on King Saul,"[2] modern Israeli poets are drawn to the figure of Saul as a secular hero struggling against fate and God, always under pressure by enemies and threat of death. By encountering Saul on a personal level, these poets attempt to explore the psychological relationship between themselves and an intersubjective archetypal symbol, and at the same time explore the relationship between themselves as individuals and the psycho-spiritual mood of the collective Israeli culture. This process has resulted in the body of poetry which the chapter examines.

As befits the agenda of this thesis, primary attention will be given to how these poems function as modern Hebrew midrash, that is, how these poems interact with the ancient myth and texts of King Saul and in so doing imbue these symbols with new meanings, making them relevant to a new generation of Jews. Certainly, in these more modern poems, the techniques of classical midrash will not be present, yet the creative mood and approach to the text that typifies the midrashic genre does certainly motivate these poems.

The poems are examined in the approximate order of their publication. When appropriate comparisons may be made between poets and poems, but the emphasis will be on the poems as individual midrashim, each with its own character and message. Although some remarks will be made about the life and style of the poets, as well as the literary techniques and style of

---

[2]Gershon Shaked, חמישה שירים על מלך שאול (Five Poems on King Saul), Lamerhav, 16 and 23 May 1958, in "Masa" literary section

their poems, these remarks will be peripheral to the overall goal of examining their midrashic content and power.

Yocheved Bat-Miriam : שאול - "Saul"

Yocheved Bat-Miriam (1901-1980), born Yocheved Zhelezniak in Keplits, Belorussia, is one of the outstanding female poets in Hebrew literature. Born to a traditional Jewish family, but having studied at universities in both Odessa and Moscow, she began to question the role of women in tradtional Jewish culture, especially the relation between female Jews and a male God-image. She emigrated to Palestine in 1928 and began to publish poetry in 1932. Her poetry is greatly influenced by the Russian symbolist poetry she encountered in her university years. Very dense, her poetry presents symbolic image and image, fading and reappearing, one floating into the other in a surreal dreamlike fashion. Her images are unbounded by time, and so, past and present often meet and merge. [3]

In many of Bat Miriam's poetry, a female speaker expresses her longing to unite with a distant entity, usually either a male lover or a god. This lover/god's absence reinforces the speaker's sense of rejection, loneliness, guilt and worthlessness, but at the moment of greatest despair, the speaker discovers her self-worth and asserts her independence from that distant lover/god who has forsaken her. The poet also rebels against mortality, imaging death as another male figure who seeks to take away from her her desire for self-expression, self-worth and self-fulfillment. In some of her poetry, the speaker goes so far as to reject the lover/god completely and imagines instead an accepting feminine being beyond

[3] Encyclopaedia Judaica, Vol. 4, 1971, s.v. "Bat Miram, Yoheved."

ordinary reality. [4] For the poet, the power of imagination and creative self-expression are the only things which can allow the soul to escape its bonds and perhaps even death.

In the late 30's and early 40's, Bat Miriam wrote the poems contained in the volume בין חול ושמש (Between Sand and Sun), a volume which contained a cycle of six poems on biblical characters. These six characters, Miriam, Saul, Abraham, Hagar, Adam, and Eve "struggle like the poet to find fulfillment and self-worth despite the limitations inherent in their relationships with the opposite sex, God, mortality, and reality as a whole."[5] The poem on Saul was dedicated to the poet's brother, Saul, and focuses on the agony of a human faced with the reality of death.

The basic context of the poem is Saul's visit to the witch at En-dor. It begins:

אתונות אתונות ללא דרך

Asses, asses with no path, *

Although this describes Saul's journey to En-dor, it evokes the image of the young king searching for his father's lost asses. This image evokes the sadness of a desperate melancholy adult confronting the contrast with his happy youth. The search for those asses eventually led the king to Samuel and the kingship, just as the aimless asses upon which he now rides are leading him again to Samuel. Upon the asses, the king's clothing is scattered (מתבדר בגדו של המלך), a possible allusion to Saul's tearing of

---

[4]Jacobson, p. 114.

[5]Jacobson, p. 115.

*all translations of Bat Miriam are from my working translations, [See appendix B.]

Samuel's clothing when the prophet announced God had rejected him as king because of his failure to annihilate the Amalekite people and king. These two images are of "distant voices" (ענות קול רחוקה) which reinforce the king's feelings of failure and guilt. These memories tell the king that:

לא יבוא הוא הנין והנכד
לחלק זהדך הנכלם

They won't come, the great grandson, nor the grandson
To share your disgraced glory.

Saul understands that he and his sons will die in battle, and he will have no descendent to share the throne. In the biblical version, this is the very question which Saul goes to the witch to have answered by Samuel's ghost. In Bat-Miriam's poem, Saul internally knows the answer before he arrives at the witch's abode.

Once at her home, the witch conjures up the semblance of Samuel, whose scarred hand seemingly annoints Saul again. Following the approach of the first stanza in which images from Saul's past provide a sad dark contrast to his current situation vis-a-vis Samuel, here too it would seem that the יד נביא בפלקה והמושחה ("hand of the prophet, scarred and annointing") alludes to the original annointing of Saul by Samuel. However in this second annointing, Samuel's scarred hand is confirming that Saul is forsaken by God, rather than choosen by God as in the first annointing.

In this gloomy setting, Saul is seen as marching between his royal mission and his adorning fate:

שאול מלכי הפוסע
בין יעוד וגורל מאצפר

My king Saul, who marches
Between mission and adorning fate.

For Bat-Miriam, this represents a choice between being limited by duty and responsibility, one's earthly destiny, and the more sublime fate of becoming a poet, who through creative self-expression learns to assert his worth in the face of death and rejection. Samuel represents the limitations of mortal existence, and his annointing of Saul, the imposition of responsibilities that limit Saul's inherent inclination to creativity. Saul represents the ecstatic, prophetic creative person who is able to rebel against this mortal responsibility and defy God's command.

Saul delivers painful monologue in which he expresses his frustration that his creative spirit is so limited by impending death. This monologue is in itself a sort of midrashic exposition of the line in I Samuel 28:15:

צר לי מאוד

I am in great trouble

In the biblical text, this line is Saul's way of explaining to Samuel that he is in a desperately outnumbered by the Philistines. In Bat Miriam's poem, his trouble is not battle, but rather the realization of his death, and that his creative longings will never be fulfilled. He cries out that he is a poet caught in the tumult of inspiration and anguish. He rails that his soul's yearnings are at their height, and that it is agonizing to know that he will die never having been completely loved, always having been both blessed and cursed. His soul's longings are like a song that grows stronger and stronger and lifts him on the path to his "crowning death" (מוחי הנכחיד אל). The aimless, pathless, wandering of the asses in the opening of the poem is here replaced with the true aim and path of all life - death. The

final stanza is an eloquent plea that his soul be lifted away from the inevitable end of death:

שא את נפשי הבחלחלה
שא כי לא חדע למות
הנה היא מזוגה בגדות תכלת
ענודה זהרים וענות---

Carry my trembling soul,
Carry her, for she does not know how to die,
Behold, she is poured into a sky-blue vessel
Bound with lights and affliction.

The king is all too aware of the limitations of his mortal existence, and this is what is causing him such pain as he goes to meet his death. His desires and creative longings are portrayed as feminine (נפשי, כלות, אוב, מנגינות,אשה), while those things which impose limitations and duties upon him are portrayed as masculine (יומי, מוחי,נביא). For Bat-Miriam, the desire to be liberated from the limits of death parallels the desire of women to overcome male dominance. These feminine creative energies must be balanced with male energies of limits and authority. The eternal paradox is that male time/death does not know how to contain female desire, and female desire does not know how to submit herself to male time/death. [7] It is this paradox that Bat Miriam examines in much of her life and poetry.

As a reinterpretation of the classical text, the poem does, in some ways, resemble Tchernichowsky's "At En-dor" and "The King." As in the former, the witch represents the younger primal self and the prophet represents the burden of responsibility which strips the king of his enthusiasm and love for life. As in the latter, Saul is portrayed here as a man full of inspiration and poetic knowledge. However, the Saul of Bat-

[7]Jacobson, p. 121.

Miriam does not long for his youth, but rather for immortality and the ability to fulfill his recently mature blossoming desires. Samuel is not the enemy. Death is. Saul does not want an explanation. He wants the liberation of his poetic soul from the confines of his mortal body.

Albeit in a highly symbolic and imagist manner, Bat Miriam does create a midrashic poem by imbuing the figure of Saul with her own issues and concerns. She ties together images from Saul's past and his present. She creates monologues out of biblical phrases, filling them with new meaning. Saul becomes a victim in the Jewish imbalance between male and female energies. Saul is rejected by God and prophet (male) but nonethless asserts his creative worth and asks that his soul be allowed to soar (female). She provides for the incident a En-dor, an entirely new philosophical context, and within that new context, the encounter at En-dor is transformed into a statement on male/female energies and their imbalance within the Jewish tradition. Though this may not have appealed to a vast audience, or changed the general perception of the figure of Saul, it is midrashic. As Jacobson aptly points out:

> by rewriting biblical history to reflect this point of view, Bat-Miriam points to a similar need to transform the consciousness of modern Jews to take these feminine energies more seriously and strive to synthesize them with masculine enrgies that have so dominated traditional Jewish culture" [8]

Natan Alterman: **הנה חמו יום קרב וערבו "Behold the Day of Battle is finished, and it's night"**

---

[8]Jacobson, p. 129.

Natan Alterman (1910-1970) was one of the leaders of the generations of poets which came to Israel during the third aliyah in the 1920's. Together with Uri Zvi Greenberg and Avraham Shlonsky, he came to dominate the culture with his imagist poetry, following the rythms of spoken Hebrew. Born in Warsaw, he settled in Israel in 1925. He became known as a writer of political verse for Israeli newspapers, and in fact some of his poems were banned by the British Mandatory authorities. In 1941, he published the volume שמחת עניים (Simhat Aniyim, The Joy of the Poor), in which he began to use images from Jewish folkore and myth, including the figure of Saul. According to Matti Megged, the central poetic idea of שמחת עניים was

> that the barriers that ordinarily separate the living from the dead through love and trust can be broken. These two attribute offer the hope of rebirth out of doom and destruction only if one courageously confronts death.[9]

In these poems, symmetric repetition is highly emphasized, and each poem has a studied number of stanzas, a clear rhyme scheme and meter.

This is certainly true of הנה תמו ימים קרב וערבו. The rhyme scheme of the three stanzas is ABABCDCDEE, and though the meter does vary somewhat, it is consistently reminiscent of the stamping of a running horse, an image which fills the poem. The poem's action takes place after the death of King Saul on his sword. The image is that of a messenger, furiously galloping on his horse to announce the defeat. At dawn, the messenger arrives to his mother's home and collapses at her feet, covering them in blood. In tears he tells his mother that the king has fallen on his

---

[9]Encyclopaedia Judaica, Vol. 2, 1971, "Alterman, Natan" by Matti Megged.

sword and died. The mother reassures him that as long as the people are defeated on their own land, they will arise again and defeat their enemies. King Saul may have failed, but his successor, rooted in the land, will succeed. The poem ends with the image of David listening to the mother's words and being inspired.

Literarily, this poem incorporates much alliteration, assonance, and plays on homophones. The two primary images which occur repeatedly are of the king falling on his sword and the mother's feet being covered with blood. However, it is not for this paper to explore all the poetic nuances of this masterful ballad, but rather to extract from it its midrashic implications on the character of Saul and his relationship to the collective Israelite culture.

As Gershon Shaked points out in his article "Five Poems on King Saul,"[10] Saul is really a non-character in this poem. Rather it is the meesenger who becomes the hero. According to Shaked, this is a poem of three national archetypes - the Commoner, the Homeland, and the Mother - and how they relate to each other. The messenger is an archetype of the common little man, struggling heroically and in so doing transcending his own limitations and achieving true greatness. The Homeland, אדמה, is the very scenery and landscape to which a man is rooted physically and emotionally, and it is the relationship of the common man to his own soil, his homeland that inspires him to greatness. The third archetype is that of the Mother, which according to Shaked is the symbolic "Mother of Heroism" or the "Eternal Mother Earth," who is in many ways the personification of the homeland. She is not an historical figure, but rather a psycho-cultural symbol. This mother is so great that even though her feet be covered with

[10]Shaked, see above.

the blood of her children, she will always give rise to new heroic children. Just as Gilboa is "covered with defeat" so the mother's feet are covered with the blood of defeat. Just as Gilboa was a battlefield, so does the dust around the mother's feet become a battlefield.

ויהיה העפר שדה קרב
And the dust became a battlefield. *

This dual archetype, Land-Mother, is a powerful new image in Hebrew poetry. It is the Land-Mother that inspires those who live upon her to greatness and heroism. Twice the mother explains that as long as the people, or the individual, is connected to his own land, there can be lasting defeat, for new heroes will arise from the land.

אבל שבע יקום העם
אם על אדמתו יובס
But the people will arise times seven
As long as it is conquered upon its own land.

and:

אך יורש לו יקום עד עת
כי על אדמתו השעין
But his successor will soon arise
For upon his own land he leaned..

Clearly, Alterman is here establishing a formidable relationship between heroism and homeland. He is expressing his belief that history is not determined by leaders and rulers, but rather by the common man inspired to extraordinary heroism and greatness through his relatiionship to his

*All translations of Alterman are from my working translations [See Appendix B.]

Land-Mother. Through this relationship, and only through it, does the simple man become a leader and hero, and as long as that relationship exists, leaders and heroes will continue to arise. Saul became king due to his relationship with the land, and perhaps died because he lost the strength of that relationship. However, David now has it and will arise, and after him others, rulers and heroesfrom among the anonymous masses of people rooted in their homeland.

This poem is something of an "anti-midrash" on Saul. Saul is not the character, but his death is. The poet gives us a stirring picture of the vents after his death, and of the extraordinary greatness of the common Israelite. Saul's death becomes almost inconsequential, for as long as the people is rooted on its own Land-Mother, there will be not shortage of heroes to lead them to victory.

Without doubt, Alterman is writing to Jews of the pre-state Yishuv, explaining to them that one defeat or setback is meaningless, that now the Jewish people can not be defeated, whatever the facts, because they are once again rooted in the Land-Mother. This poetic anti-midrash on Saul points out to the yishuv settler that although blood may be spilt, success is inevitable, and even the loss of a "king" can not affect it. Every settler can be a hero and achieve mightily. No matter how impossible the historical odds seem against the Jews succeeding against Britain and the Arabs, the ahistorical emotional power of life on the Land-Mother will overcome them. As such it represents the beginning of poetry of Jewish people rooted in its homeland, expressing the idea that "נוף המולדת הוא מקור כוחה של האומה", that "the view of the Land-Mother is the source of the people's strength."[12]

---

[12]Shaked.

Alexander Penn: שאול "Saul"

It was Alterman's counterpart, Avraham Shlonsky, who encouraged Alexander Penn (1906-1972) to publish his lyric poetry. Born in Nizhne-Kolymsk, Russia, he immigrated to Israel in 1927, where he set up the first film studio. Aside from his poetry, Penn worked avidly in the Marxist-Communist press, and edited their daily, Kol ha-Am, until he felt that the party had become too anti-nationalist.

Penn's ballad, שאול "Saul," (1953) is written in the style of a folk song. The poem describes Saul as a powerful youth, admired by all the young women of his village. This youth happened upon the kingship, and indeed did not want it (אך מלך להיות ועל עם לחלש - לא לי), but Samuel forced him to accept because of his stature. Once king, this good-hearted youth became pressured, and pushes his own people to battle, while Samuel watches with "his two eyes that sought torment, revenge and hate."* (שישמו ונקמו והשטימו) Because of this pressure from Samuel, Saul "became the most pitiful creature in his kingdom" (ויאומלל מכל חי בממלכת), and David took advantage of his state and mocked him. Only as he was dying did Saul remember the innocence and righteousness of his youth. Penn then attacks David's eulogy for Saul as insincere, and assures the reader that Saul did not choose him to eulogize:

...לא "הצבי ישראל" בחר בו
במספיד עם כזבי עינים...

The "Glory of Israel" did not choose him,
This eulogizer with the treacherous eyes.

---

*All translations of Penn are from my working translation. [See Appendix B].

Then Penn explains that the only truly sincere eulogy for Saul was that of his concubine, Ritzpah Bat-Aiah who guraded the corpses of the sons and grandson of King Saul which David had murdered.

With the exception of the final image of Ritzpah Bat-Aya, this ballad does not present the reader with much that is new or innovative. The image of Saul as a happy youth forced into responsibilities he did not want was powefully expressed in Tchernichowsky's "At En-dor." The image of Saul as a handsome virile youth was better presented in Tchernichowsky's "Saul's Love Song." However, unlike Tchernichowsky, Penn chooses to touch on the period of Saul's paranoia and obsessiveness. He describes the king's descent into madness under the tyrannical gaze of Samuel. This clear animosity for Samuel is once again reflective of the Y.L. Gordon's "Zedekiah in Prison."

One beautiful image Penn brings is that at the moment of Saul's death, he recalls the innocence and beauty.

רק בשקט איש בן קיש צף חסדו בו כמו
שזכור מנעוריו תם אור צדק

Only as this man, son of Kish, became silent did his mercy rise within in,as
He remembered it had in his youth - a pure light of righteousness.

At least at the moment of his death, Saul returned to his former purity and goodness of heart. However, it should be noted that this image is also what closes the life of Saul in Efrati's מלוכת שאול.

The only truly innovative midrashic image in the poem is Penn's final image of Ritzpah Bat-Aiah giving the only sincere eulogy for Saul. In II Samuel 21, the text explains that during David's reign there was a three-year famine. This famine was blamed on David's murder of several

Gibeonites. In order to appease them, and end the famine, David agreed to turn over to the vengeful Gibeonites Saul's two sons by Ritzpah Bat-Aiah, as well as Saul's five grandchildren of his daughter Merab. The Gibeonites impaled all seven, and upon hearing this:

> Ritzpah, daughter of Aiah took sackcloth and spread it on a rock for herself, and she stayued there from the beginning of the harvest until reinfrom the sky fell on the bodies; she did not let the birds of the sky settle on them by day or the wild beasts [approach] by night. [II Samuel 21:10]*

Interestingly, the text continues that upon hearing of Ritzpah's devotion, David was moved to go to Jabesh Gilead and take the bones of Saul and Jonathan, and the other who were impaled upon the wall of Beit-shan and bury them properly in the territory of Benjamin, in the tomb of Saul's father Kish. After this, the famine ended. This final burial of Saul (and Jonathan) in his family grave in Benjamin is neglected by all the other poets we have so far examined. The text obviously represents an alternate tradition as to Saul's final burial. By bringing in this image from David's reign, Penn provides us with a moving image of the transformative power of sincere mounring. Through her mourning, her "eulogy" in action, Ritzpah moves David to finally do his duty regarding Saul and Jonathan. His grand eulogy "O how the might have fallen!" was only empty oratory, but this final burial is redemptive. By bringing in this story of Ritzpah and David, Penn provides us with a new character in the Saul saga, and a new view of Saul's final burial. Though this is interesting and does help the reader to tie various texts of Saul together into one image of his life, this poem

---

*all biblical translations are taken from the New JPS version. See Bibliography.

does little to truly transform the reader's interaction with Saul into something which is relevant and speaks to the reader's present concerns. This failure seriously weakens the poem's midrashic strength and meaning.

Amir Gilboa: שאול "Saul"

Bat-Miriam, Alterman, and Penn represent a generation of poets who settled in Israel during the 3rd Aliya of the 20's, and they are each heavily indebted to the formal, allusional style of Bialik and Tchernichowsky. However, in the late 40's and 50's a new generation of poets emerged who had experienced the War of Independence, and who sought to create a new style of Hebrew poetry that was truly Israeli, that reflected Israeli speech and idiom, and that could begin to address their concerns as normalized individuals, not as representatives of the Zionist enterprise. One of these poets was Amir Gilboa (1917-1984).

Born in Radzyvilov, Volhynia, in the Ukraine, he was raised in a Hebrew speaking environment and attending hachshara camps as a youth to prepare him for eventual life on a kibbutz. Gilboa illegally entered Israel in 1937, and worked on various kibbutzim as a laborer. In World War II, he joined the Jewish brigade in Italy and began to write poems which reflect his experiences in that war, as well as his reaction to the loss of many relatives in the Holocaust. In his poetry, Gilboa represents a break with the style of Alterman and Shlonsky,[15] a style he felt was too allusional, too influenced by biblical idiom, and too full of classical references. Gilboa prefered a more colloquial style which reflected modern spoken Hebrew. In

[15]Warren Bargad and Stanley F. Chyet, Israeli Poetry: A contemporary Anthology, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 14.

his volume, Early Morning Songs, the poet returns to biblical figures, such as Saul, and paints psychological portraits of them, often placing them in settings which allows the poet to dwell on the irony of their situation in relationship to the present day.

In שאול "Saul" (1950), Gilboa places the speaker at the walls of Beth-shan. The poem begins as an intensely personal expression of the speaker's feelings when confronted with the final image of Saul's life. The speaker relates to Saul not as a member of the Jewish people, but as an individual relating to a national myth. The speaker most empathizes with the pain and anguish of the arms-bearer who was asked by the King to kill him, but who just couldn't go through with it. By interacting so emotionally and so personally with the characters in that scene, Gilboa greatly enriches the historical context of the scene. By speaking so directly and honestly with the king, Gilboa humanizes him and brings a mythic figure down to the shared plane of the emotional. This empathy is so powerful that the poet/speaker transcends the time gap between them, and speaks to him and to the scene in the present. Bargad believes that the speaker in the poem is indeed a person walking at Beth-shan shortly after Saul's death and sees his head impaled on the wall or at least the imaginary visit of the speaker to that time frame. [16] In my opinion this undermines the intense emotional power of the poetic moment in which the speaker (Gilboa), while passing by the modern city of Beth-shan, is so strongly reminded of that ancient event that he relates to it as in the present. In the emotional reality of that moment Saul and his arms-bearer live again within the subjective world of

---

[16]Warren Bargad, "Poems of Saul: A Semiotic Approach," paper presented to the World Congress of Jewish Studies, Jerusalem, 1988, (photocopy) pp. 4-5.

the poet. Thus he calls out to the king, "Saul, Saul," and explains that even though it was ages ago, the terror of that event still fills the poet with either fear or shame. He does not know which. What he does know is that the feeling is so real he must turn his head. When he turns his head he sees the valley and the battle scene appears to him.

This scene is that of the arms-bearer refusing to kill the king with his sword in order to prevent the Philistines from killing him. For the speaker, the arms-bearer's refusal is so shocking it renders him speechless, and yet he admits:

אני באמת איננני יודע לאמר מה אני במקומו
אם נערך הייתי

I really don't know to say what I in his place
had I been your boy.*

On the one hand, he fully understands the king's power and authority, and on the other, he fully understands the arms-bearer's inability to carry through with the order. So again he explains to the king, that "I dont know to say what I in his place [would have done.]. Here, though still relating to the king in an intensely honest and personal way, the speaker has also become a representative of the collective Israel, and their emotional relationship to the figure of the king. In the face of such a figure, such heroics, and such suffering, the people turn their heads for they can't live up to that image, and because they also fear the same end. Yet, at the poem's ends, the speaker is empowered to reaffirm his own validity as an

*All translations of Gilboa are taken from Bargad's unpublished paper, "Poems of Saul: A Semiotic Approach. See Bibliography.

modern Israelite, and with him the validity of the who nation. He calls to Saul on behalf of the entire nation:

שאול שאול בוא
בביח שאן בני ישראל יושבים

Saul, Saul, come!.
At Beth-shan the children of Israel dwell.

Whereas the opening cry "Saul, Saul" is completely personal, the closing cry "Saul, Saul come!" is both personal and collective.

It would be possible to impose upon this poem all sorts of ideas as to the specific meaning and references in the poem. For example, is Gilboa drawing on his experience in the military, perhaps of watching his commander wounded, or of being unable to follow an order? Or, as Bargad asserts intriguingly, is the entire poem a personal response to the Holocaust which so influences Gilboa's poetry. [18]According to this theory, the speaker is a victim, traumatized by the experience of helplessness in the face of the Holocaust, and ridden with both fear and survivor guilt, not knowing what he would have done had he actually been in the Holocaust and able to act. Only the people's return to Beth-shan can provide any sense of comfort and pride in the face of such helplessness. Whatever specific interpretations are imposed upon the poem, it remains fundamentally a personal interaction between the speaker and an ancient scene which touches him deeply with its universal tragedy and helplessness. Any specific Jewish or Israeli references are secondary to this one-on-one relationship of a human being-poet with a tragic figure.

---

[18]Bargad, "Poem's of Saul" p. 9.

This poem represents a new phase in Hebrew midrash in which the writer's personal relationship to the biblical figure is what gives the figure its new relevance and universality. Gilboa , and the poets who follow him, aimed to express in their poetry their individual emotions, and yet it would seem that the more intensely personal they are, the more universal they become. It is the power of that personal emotional relationship which can transport the ancient figure into the present and give him life and meaning to a new generation of individual Israelis, themselves struggling to define their relationship to their past.

Yehuda Amichai: המלך שאול ואני "King Saul and I"

As in Gilboa's "Saul," Yehuda Amichai's poem "King Saul and I" is at once intensely personal and yet speaks for a generation. The poem examines the relationship, or more accurately, the lack of relationship that exists between the modern generation of Israelis and the mythic heroes of Israel's legend. Written in 1956, the poem addresses the feelings of inadequacy and boredom that the modern Israeli experiences upon comparing themselves to a legend such as Saul. The tedious realities of their day to day life seem a far cry from the heroic antics of those legends, and yet, the poet affirms the worth of this mundane "normal" Jewish existence.

Born in Wurzburg, Bavaria, to an orthodox family, Yehuda Amichai (1924-) settled in Israel in 1936. His poetry is written in conversational tones, and can seem at first glance to be simplistic. Yet it is in that immediacy, that simplicity of language that Amichai achieves his power. His poetry "reads like a personal diary,[19]" and like a diary, it allows the

[19]Bargad and Chyet, p. 79.

reader into the emotional inner world of the poet where the reader often meets himself in the words of the poet. Amichai uses casual colloquial language, down-to-earth similes and concrete images to convey his meaning. He avoids allusions, symbolism, and formalism in his constructions. However, drawing on his religious upbringing, the poet often does address traditional Jewish subjects from the Bible and Jewish liturgy, but in these poems, Amichai explores his own feelings of disillusionment and the gap between his perception of these subjects and the perception he was taught as a child.[20]

"King Saul and I" was written in the 50's, a period during which much of Amichai's poetry "expresses his sense of the painful gap between notions of national heroism and the need for personal equanimity."[21] The poem is divided into four sections, each emphasizing a different aspect of the comparison between the King and the speaker. The opening couplet establishes immediately the difference in character between the two.

נתנו לו אצבע ולקח את כל היד
נתנו לי יד ולא לקחתי אפלו זרת

They gave him a finger, but he took the whole hand.
They gave me the whole hand; I didn't even take the little finger.*

Here, Saul is portrayed as a "go-getter," a ambitious man who goes after what he wants and takes it, whether or not it is offered. In contrast, the speaker doesn't even take advantage of the possibilities that are offered to him. He shuns power and responsibility, is shy, reserved, and introverted.

---

[20]Bargad and Chyet, pp. 79-81.

[21]Bargad and Chyet, p. 80.

*All translations of Amichai are taken from a published translation, the source of which I could not locate.

The poet goes on to say that whereas Saul got his youthful training tearing oxen, (an allusion to I Samuel 11:7 in which Saul cuts up oxen into pieces and sends the pieces throughout Israel as a warning of what will happen if they don't follow him into battle) the speaker's most strenuous youthful feat was "weightlifting his first feelings." Whereas Saul's heart beats like "hammers on a new building," the speaker's pulse is "like drips from a tap." This use of familiar concrete imagery to characterize the difference between the two figures typifies Amichai and gives the poem its strength. This first section ends by expressing the contrast between Saul and the speaker in terms of the archetypal relationship of big brother/little brother, in which the speaker is the little brother who only gets the hand-me-down clothes of his glorious older brother. Saul is the "big brother "jock" and the speaker is the little brother who is the "artistic type. The little brother by only judging himself in terms of the big brother's strengths, talents, and accomplishments denies to himself a sense of worth and talent in his terms. It is a competition in which the little brother is constantly judging himself in comparison to the big brother, and always falling short. The result is a feeling of inadequacy, worthlessness, powerlessness and introversion on the part of the speaker. In this first section, the figure of Saul looms large in the speaker's opinion and self-identity. Nonetheless, he is still accessible and human, and so the speaker relates to him in a very human way, as a big brother.

In the second section, Saul's status is less human and more mythic. He is so great that the speaker doesn't even appear in the section. Saul always knows what direction he is heading, for his "head, like a compass, will always bring him to the sure north of his future." Again he is ambitious and able, having prepared himself to take advantage of the critical moment

of opportunity for rule whenever it should present itself. He is so great that "nobody can stop him." However, in a bit of biting criticism, the poet points out that though no human can stop him, the asses will still "bare their yellow teeth" at him when he is finished. The final line in Section 2 might be an allusion to Saul's trip to En-dor upon asses, and with it an image of Saul's ultimate defeat and powerlessness. In this section, Amichai presents Saul as almost ruthless in his drive for power. He can not think or do anything but work toward his own power. "No one can stop him" He is driven by his will to power. He is a Nietzschean hero run amok, but as the poet points out, at his end, the asses which brought him to power will usher in and acknowledge his ultimate defeat. They do not appreciate his power.

The second section ends with the hint of death, and the third section begins with that theme, a theme which will eventually close the poem. Here death conveys a sense of obsolescence, of being antiquated and irrelevant. "Dead judges turned time wheels/When he went out searching for asses.." The judges are now dead, as is Saul. Just as a huge gap of personality separates the two figures of Saul and the speaker, so also does a huge gap of time separate them. Those dead judges are the very image of antiquity and archaism. The emotionally immediate relationship that characterized the first section, that of big brother/little brother rivalry has in this section been replaced with a more distant relationship. Saul went out looking for asses long long ago and instead became king. Now years later, the speaker is left with those same asses, only he doesn't know "how to handle them," and they kick him. Saul, the mythic legend of the past knew how to handle his responsibilities. The speaker is not equipped to control things, animals or people, and he doesn't want such control. He explains:

הורמתי עם המוץ
נפלתי עם גרעינים כבדים

I was lifted with the chaff,
I fell with heavy seeds.

That is to say, he just floats along, going where fate and circumstance take him, not seeking to control his life or the life of others. He is passive and flexible, accepting whatever comes his way.

In marked contrast to this is the mythic Saul. Whereas the speaker simply goes only with fate, Saul shaped and formed his own destiny. Saul "breathed the winds of histories," and was annointed with oil. What follows is a curious image of Saul wrestling with olive trees, and all the judges ran away from the arena, leaving only God to serve as referee for the fight. In this image, Saul "battled with olive trees, forcing them to kneel." Clearly this is hyperbole tinged with sarcasm. According to Shaked, the olive trees are a symbol of the kingship, and by making them kneel, Saul is demonstrating his ability to control everything in his path, even trees and the earth itself. [23] The poet tells us that "Roots bulged on the earth's forehead with the strain," and that God did the ten-count. Bargad takes a different approach to this image, stating:

> God, downgraded to the position of part-time referee, counts the opponents out. the match is not only one-sided, it is patently absurd. Saul's -- and God's -- mythical power is sardonically diminished by Amichai's ludicrous images. This is Amichai's subtle way of denigrating the power of the mythic hero.[24]

---

[23]Shaked, "Five Poems on Saul."

[24]Bargad, "Poems of Saul: A Semiotic Approach." pp. 16-17.

I disagree with Bargad. I feel that Amichai is not really denigrating the mythic power, but rather expressing its irrelevance for modern people. By portraying God as doing a ten-count, Amichai is showing the absurdity of applying mythical expectations to modern events. Saul in this image is a Hebrew Hercules, wrestling the sturdy olive tree. In fact, Saul's power has reached such grand dimensions that no human can even interact with him. Only God is left to play games with the king, just as the Greek gods toyed with their demi-god offspring in their legends. Here Saul is no longer the archetype of the big brother, and not even of the father, but rather he is a demi-god that no mere mortal could ever measure up to. The comparison between the speaker "I" and Saul is pointless and ridiculous. Amichai is not denigrating God nor Saul, but rather he is sardonically criticizing the application of ancient legendary standards to the real flesh-and-blood Jew of modern-day Israel. The ancestor-hero worship of the early Hebrew poets such as Bialik and Tchernichowsky, and to a great degree Alterman is here being criticized by a modern poet, who seeks a normal life without such unfair role models.

This theme of normalcy is what fills the fourth and final section of the poem. Saul may have wrestled with the earth itself and prevailed undaunted, but the "I" speaker in the poem is tired from the worries of day-to-day life. He explains:

אני עיף
מרחי היא מלכותי

שנחי היא צדקתי
חלומי פסק הדין

חליתי את בגדי על כסא
בשביל מחר

I am tired,
My bed is my kingdom.

My sleep is just,
My dream is my verdict.

I hung my clothes on a chair
For tomorrow.

Saul, the myth, may have concerned himself with grander things, but the speaker's world is ruled by the normal concerns of everyday life. Saul "...hung his kingdom/In a frame of golden wrath/ On the sky's wall:" the speaker "...hung his clothes on a chair/ For tomorrow." The contrast couldn't be clearer. Saul's grand feats are fundamentally irrelevant to the speakers life. There is no way he can measure up to Saul, and why should he try? The feelings of inadequacy and worthlessness that fill the first section are here gone. Instead there is a realization that any comparison is pointless. Saul's heroics, and his mythic power are things of the distant past that should not be imposed upon modern people concerned with living normal lives. The concerns of the Ancients, and the concerns of the average Israeli have very little if anything in common. As Amichai tersely sums up in the final lines of the poem:

הוא מלך מת
אני אדם עיף

He is a dead king.
I am a tired man.

The speaker may be an introvert, he may be powerless, he may be passive, and he may be uninteresting, but he is still alive and his concerns are real to him. The king is dead, and his concerns no longer have any reality. That is the meaning conveyed through this poem. I agree with both Bargad and Shaked who believe that Amichai in this poem is critizing those Israelis

who try to evoke the ancient past as the model for the present, who tout military heroics and victory as the heritage of the Jews, who hold up power as the symbol of success. However, I disagree with Bargad's belief that the poet is criticizing this through the use of absurd images, sarcasm, and humor. I feel the poet is very sincere in his encounter with the image of the King. Amichai's poetry matured in the atmosphere of post-War of Independence euphoria. Like young Saul, Israel had defeated the modern-day Philistines despite all odds. Israel worshipped its heroes and glorified the Jewish people's newfound strength. By the fifties, the artistic community was criticizing this culture of the heroic, encouraging instead the original Zionist aims of renewed normalcy for the Jewish people. This is the cultural context in which Amichai wrote "King Saul and I." Amichai is not being flippantly sarcastic, as Bargad seems to imply. Rather, I believe the poet deeply feels the gap between the heroic expectations and the reality of an average human being. The painful sense of inadequacy expressed inthe first section is genuine, and the poet resolves some of this pain only through the realization that Saul is a mythic figure and not a real "big-brother" that one should model one's life upon.

In speaking from that intensely personal "I" persona, Amichai expresses his own feelings of being unable to measure up to those standards. Yet - Amichai also expresses in this poem the unspoken feeling of countless Israelis whose value as individuals is undermined by the pervasive cultural glorification of military heroism and extraordinary bravery. Amichai is criticizing cultural icons, such as Saul and other military heros, but he is not criticizing them through diatribe or polemic. Rather, he has chosen the medium of inward personal poetry to expose the emotional damage such a cultural context can do to the everyday Israeli.

Amichai is saying through this poem that it is neither healthy nor productive for a national culture to engender feelings of inadequacy, failure and weakness upon its citizens.

What is unique about this poem's midrashic quality is that it does not make the ancient figure more relevant to the modern times and readers. Rather, it makes that ancient figure irrelevant and alien to the modern times. Yet, I still feel it functions powerfully as midrash, because the speaker's feelings toward Saul are so real and present in his modern life, Saul attain a new importance and reality for the reader. It may be that the poet ends by negating the value of the reality, but nonetheless, the reality is established through the poem. By making such a statement through a poem about King Saul and one citizen's relationship to him, the poet creates a powerful midrash which helps the reader define his relationship to that mythic biblical character in new ways.

Natan Zach: תיאור מדויק של המוסיקה ששמע שאול בתנ"ך

"A precise description of the music that Saul heard in the Bible."

The poetic reaction against the aggrandizment of military heroes will again appear in the final poem of this paper, Weiseltier's "Saul's Second Coronation." However, before addressing that poem, we must first look at the treatment of Saul by the leader of Israel's avant-guarde poets of the 50's and 60's. Natan Zach (1930 -) was born in Berlin and settled in Israeli in 1951. He quickly became the leader in the poetic movement against Shlonsky and Alterman. Zach wanted to liberate Israeli poetry from the formal structures and language, as well as the Russian symbolism of Alterman and his generation. Zach looked toward America and Britain for

his inspiration, advocating colloquial speech, a breakdown in any linguistic structure, and free verse. He also believed that the modern Israeli poet must be freed from the confines of collective Jewish consciousness, and instead must become wholly individualistic. In the manifesto of the journal לקראת Likrat (Toward), the journal of this group of poets, they stated that:

> it opposes the "holy enthusiasm" of the War of Independence generation, because the writers of that group "had not met the strict test of secularity." The goal of the new generation was "toward no direction except that of the individual [artistic] development of each one of us." A purported group psychology and group values were to be replaced by individualistic varieties of creative writing. [25]

This declaration is certainly reminiscent of Amichai's message in "King Saul and I." Unlike Amichai, Zach's personal style opposes to metaphor, and prefers immediate dramatic, if ambiguous, situations. Zach likes to use colloquial street Hebrew including slang, and then throw in an occasional word or line of classic Hebrew for contrast and emphasis. Zach also incorporates humor, sarcastic wit, and mockery in his poems. According to Bargad,

> in essence what Zach creates is a poetry of disdain. His main contribution, his ultimate overturn of the tradtion, is the displacement of a poetic discourse of national, ideological issues by a poetic voice of private feelings and individual fate. While he argues aesthetically for closer contact with life's common experiences, Zach expresses in the body of his work a basic recognition of death as the most personal, most pressing reality. [26]

---

[25]Bargad andChyet, pp 8-9.
[26]Bargad and Chyet, p. 127.

Thus wit, innovation, humor, and linguistic playfulness all become means of expressing the poetic undertone of private pain, distance, and a sense of death's inevitability.

This is all certainly true in the poem תיאור מדוייק של המוסיקה שששמע שאול בתנ"ך, "A precise description of the music which Saul heard in the Bible." The poem appears upon first reading as a silly exercise in repetition and redundancy. In all but two of the poem's eleven phrases, the words שמע מוסיקה and שאול appear in some order. The poem opens:

שאול שומע מוסיקה.
שאול שומע.
איזו מוסיקה שומע שאול.

Saul hears music.
Saul hears.
What sort of music does Saul hear?*

And so the poem continues to repeat again and again various permutations of this phrase.

However, into this litany of repetition, Zach introduces three question and answer sections, some incorporating the basic phrase. The speaker asks, "What sort of music does Saul hear?" to which the answer is "Saul hears music which gives him healing." Zach uses the obscure word רפאות (rifut) instead of the more common רפואה (refu'ah) in order to emphasize this line and contrast it to the constant monotonous hum of the basic phrase, "Saul hears music." After this line, that basic phrase repeats itself twice more, and then the poet injects the phrase:

והאנשים סביבו אינם כאלו
נעלמו נאלם כל העם.

*All translations of Zach are from Bargad's unpublished paper, "Poems of Saul: A Semiotic Approach." See Bibliography.

And the people around him aren't there, as if
They've disappeared, the entire nation's become mute.

This is the heart of the poem. When Saul listens to his music, the rest of the world with its pressures and problems disappear. David disappears. Jonathan disaapears. The Philistines and Samuel disappear. Saul is a public figure. The poem itself almost reads like a pop-music interview of the king. There is a constant buzz of noise around the king, noise which comes both from the outside and from the inside. The outside is constantly pressuring him because of his position of authority. The inside is constantly pressuring him because of his melancholia and paranoic depression. Saul's only respite is in the music he hears, for in the presence of that music all the problems melt away for a moment.

Yet, that moment of respite is brief, for immediately the pressure resumes, asking him "Is this the music /that Saul should be hearing/ at a time like this? " Those around him have reappeared and are asking him if it isn't a bit irresponsible and indulgent to listen to music when the demands of the kingdom are upon him. The reader can almost visualize Saul sitting listening to David's music, while his advisors are scurrying behind him whispering complaints about this whimsy. Zach responds to those very advisors, by affirming, "Yes, this is the music/ that Saul should be hearing at a time like this..." , and to the unasked question "why" the poet answers, "for there is no other (music) now/ and perhaps there will be none/ until Gilboa." Thus the impending pressing reality of death that was discussed above appears as the theme of this poem. This music is the only comfort and joy Saul has in the face of his madness and eventual death. It may seem frivolous to the onlooker, but to the king it is the very stuff of life.

In Saul, Zach did not find a national hero or collective archetypal figure. Rather Zach found a soulmate, a fellow poet. Zach asserted in many of his poems that in the face of death and depression, the only solace a poet has is the creative act of writing poetry. Zach also loved music, and wrote poems specifically as lyrics, and his poetic style, he stressed the musicality of poetry. In this poem, the repetition of the basic phrase is almost a muscial form and variation. However, this constant repetition can also been interpreted as the constant innane chatter of day to day conversation, or the obsessive inner voice of a man on the edge of insanity. In either case, just as poetry provides the solace for Zach, so music provided some solace for king Saul. Though it may seem irresponsible for a king to indulge in such a frivolous pastime, Zach understands as a poet that the only modicum of pleasure and calm Saul can receive in the face of his melancholy is that little moment of music, and no matter what else may be demanded of him, that music is always primary. In the face of Gilboa (death), those musical moments of pleasure are the only meaning his life has, and it is impossible to explain that to someone who does not share his need. This is seen in Zach's choice of a title "A precise description of the music Saul heard in the Bible." This is sarcastic, for as Zach knows there can be no precise description of the ineffable. The curative powers of poetry and music are beyond any description, because they are so subjective and bound to the deepest recesses of the individual's inner world.

Zach avoids making grand statements on Saul's character and meaning, and instead focuses in on one crucial part of the king's life, a part which helps the reader understand the king's psyche. Unlike Tchernichowsky and Alterman, and for that matter Amichai, Zach does not address Saul's outer actions and military exploits. Instead, he focuses on Saul's poetic

soul. By choosing this aspect of Saul's life and exploring it in deeply empathetic way, Zach manages to establish a profoundly personal interaction with the figure of King Saul, and give him true relevance to the living poet who is speaking. Though this may not provide a modern midrash with a broad appeal, and it probably does not redefine the collective understanding of the mythic character Saul, this poem does provide the artistic soul with a biblical figure who understands and shares their need. For a poet reading poetry, this is beautiful midrash.

Meir Wieseltier: שאול מחלך בשנית "Saul Recoronated."

Zach's goal was poetry that only reflected the individual artistic drive of the poet, poetry that investigated the inner life of the poet. In sharp contrast to this is Meir Wieseltier (1941 -). Wieseltier, like Zach, is aligned with the younger generation of Israeli poets and incorporaties into his poetry dramatic settings, shunning of similes, colloquial language, and of course sarcastic wit. However, Wieseltier's primary poetic target is political and ideological, and he rejects any notion of art for art's sake as self-indulgent. Wieseltier was born in Moscow and moved to Israel in 1949. He began publishing his poetry in the 60's, and became a well-known anti-establishment political poet, whose political verse challenges commonly held religious and ideological icons. His poetry often mourns the unwanted loss of idealism and the resulting bitterness. His disdain for bourgeois morality and politics, and for the shallowness of ideology pervades his political verse. Often, he stands in the center of his poetry as the voice of conscience and true morality. [28]

---

[28]Bargad and Chyet, pp. 213-215.

In his poem, שאול מחדש בשניה, "Saul Rethroned," Wieseltier attacks the self-confident power of the Israeli military establishment by creating a fictional moment in the life of Saul. In this scene, which is not part of the biblical legend of Saul, nor of any classical midrash, Wieseltier has Saul being coronated for a second time, seemingly toward the end of his career. Unlike his first public coronation as king in which the army and all the people fervently supported him, this second coronation reeks of the propogandist political stunt.

The poem begins with oil once again being poured through Saul's hair as he is annointed again. The speaker, who seems to be a cynical spectator of the event, asks the king:

האם אתה חש
ברבדל החבוי שאול?
מה שמן משמן...

do you feel
the subtle difference, Saul?
What's one oil from another...

The apparent answer to this rhetorical question is no, for as we learn later in the poem, Saul is so full of himself and his power, that he is oblivious to the real political climate surrounding him. The speaker however is keenly aware of the real situation. He comments that "the look on the spectators faces/ is not much like spring anymore" because in "the time that's elapsed between enthronements" their support has waned. They have become more cynical, less naive, and are no longer blinded by the kings glory. They are no longer as willing to put up with the kings demands. The speaker in the poem knows what is being said behind the king's back.

ה 'מה פתאם החל להאפיר
(חחלה בחשאין)

The "Who needs it!" is already being said
(in whispers at first)*

Clearly, the people are not as happy with Saul as this ceremony would like to convince them. Perhaps that is the very reason for the ceremony: to boost Saul's sagging popularity before the next war. The poet then brings a quote from II Chronicles 10:16, "Each man to his tent." This is an allusion to an episode in the life of King Rehoboam in which all Israel refused to support him and instead returned to their homes. In this poem, that sentiment is addressed to Saul. The cynical speaker/ spectator goes on to observe the fickle nature of the public, saying that "hearts flower but fleetingly/ such is the nature of things."

At this point the poem achieves true brilliance by simultaniously expresses the kings perspective on the event and the perspective of his almost mutinous military. The king has apparently received a new sword as a gift "from the military which betokens its/ confidence anew on this solemn occasion.." The sight of this sword excites the king, and the speaker comments that "things novel yet unhoped/ for already course through your [Saul's] veins." However in a masterfully sardonic touch of double-entendre, the speaker observes that this new sword which was presented to the king will שעתידה למלא תפקיד "will soon fulfill its role." In Saul's eyes, this means victory in upcoming battles. In the minds of a treasonous military it means Saul's death.

Wieseltier succeeds in creating a menacing atmosphere at this second coronation of Saul. The king, oblivious, is so involved in the pomp of the

*all translations of Wieseltier are from Bargad and Chyet, Israeli Poetry, p 219.

moment and in his own high opinion of himself that he is unaware that he has lost the support of his leaders and the people. The military can no longer tolerate his tyranny and so plan on disposing of him. One can almost see the military leaders looking knowingly at one another as they give Saul the gift of the sword, which he of course misinterprets as a sign of renewed support. The whole scene is one of public demonstration, a media event, but one that can not prevent the coup which is now inevitable.

This poem is a biting criticism of Israel's military and political establishment. Like Amichai, Wieseltier is appalled at the grandiose self-congratulatory antic of Israel's leadership. Like Saul, that leadership does not realize that the Israeli public is fed up with war and the demands the army places upon them. All the ceremonies and media events can not fool the public, which through experience has become cynical and canny. While the army propaganda orates about the bravery of the Jewish soldier fighting for his homeland against an implacable enemy, the soldier knows that there are limits to how much they are willing to do for this struggle. There is even the more radical implication that the threat is not so much from the outside as it is from the military establishment itself which depends on war for the propagation of its power. Whereas Amichai writes of the devastating effect this militarism can have on the inner psyche of one average Israeli, Wieseltier warns the military that they cannot unquestionably count on the support of the public. Wieseltier's cynical spectator provides a voice for the disgruntled Israeli who does not wish to be a part of this military culture, but who is forced to be involved due to the obsessiveness of the leadership.

The poem functions as midrash on Saul in that the poet gives us a new way of looking at the ancient figure, a way that is surely relevant and

biting. However, it is not a positive midrashic statement. Saul is now a metaphor for a military run out of control. The modern reader encountering this metaphor inevitably begins to define their relationship to the ancient figure of Saul in a negative way. They define their identity in opposition to Saul, not in imitation of him. Until this poem, all the Saul poetry related to Saul in a positive manner. In Tchernichowsky's "At En-dor" and "On the Ruins of Beth-shan," the portrait of Saul may not have been that favorable, but his degraded state was a result of pressures from the outside. He was a victim with which the Jewish people could relate. Saul's image in the poems of Bat-Miriam, Penn, Gilboa and Zach is similar, for the reader empathizes with the king's pain. In Alterman's poem, the king is mostly an absent figure, but is nonetheless a symbol of heroism. Even in Amichai, King Saul is not portrayed as an evil figure, but rather a figure who is so mythic, he has no relevance or reality in the day to day world of the modern Israeli. Only Wieseltier goes so far as to portray Saul in an extremely negative light, one in which the reader sides with the speaker against the king. In doing this, Wieseltier is certainly within the parameters of negative midrash. These negative midrash abound in the classic works about such characters as Satan, Ishmael, Doeg, and of course Amalek. What is completely new about this particular statement is that such an esteemed figure as Saul is now within the company of these villains.

Conclusions

In the poetry of Tchernichowsky, we saw a poet of the Jewish people creating out of Saul a symbol for the Jewish people. It was a poetry of the collective consciousness, of the people and their mythic archetypes. The

reader related and empathized with the figure of Saul not as an individual to an individual, but as a member of a people to one of its national legends. This approach continued into the next generation of Hebrew poets in the work of Alterman and Penn. Wieseltier also continues this collective approach, albeit in reverse, with Saul as a negative metaphor for the collective conscience.

However, the other poets who have written on Saul have begun to approach his character not as members of the collective, but as individuals. They are searching in his character for some echo of their own poetic spirit and pain. Bat-Miriam and Zach approach Saul as a fellow poet caught in the existential despair of impending death. Gilboa approaches Saul as a survivor speaking to one who did not survive. Amichai approaches the king as a mythic national figure, but one who has no relevance to him as an individual. Each of these poets approach the figure of Saul primarily from an individual personal point of view and interact with him accordingly. What is so compelling about these highly personal poems is the amount of emotional empathy the evoke in the reader, and this empathy is, in my opinion, the result of continued group consciousness. The poets are not only attempting to define their relationship to Saul as individuals, but by delving deeper and deeper into their own psychological relationship with this archetypal symbol of the Jewish/Israeli past, they are also trying to define their relationship to the collective Jewish people which the figure represents. As stated above, the more intensely personal the poet becomes, the more universal he becomes. The more he explores his own relationship to the Jewish past through the symbols of that past, the more the average reader finds a reflection in that poetry of his or her own struggle for identity. Thus, these intensely "personal" poems seem to create the most powerful

midrash, for they strike the deeper chords of the subconscious roots of identity.

7.
CONCLUSIONS:

This thesis began by explaining the agenda operating within it. Primary among them was my desire to show that the interpretation of national myths to suit current situations was not a process which began and ended with the "rabbis of old." Rather, it wished to demonstrate that this "midrashic" process by which

> Jewish writers interact, reinterpret, restructure, and revitalize the Jewish national histories and myth in order to make them relevant to changing contexts, and in order to invest these myths with lessons of morality, ethics and proper life

was a continual process which began long before the classical midrashim. I believe that in my exposition of the text of I Samuel, I did indeed demonstrate that even the biblical texts themselves are commentaries on older legends and mythologies, and that the process by which the redactor restructured these legends was midrashic in nature.

Another important goal for this thesis was to show that the process did not end with the classical midrash, but continues up until today. This goal too was accomplished, for in analyzing modern Hebrew literature it became apparent that the authors of that literature were interacting with the mythic figure of Saul and then reinterpreting that character so as to make him relevant and meaningful to the modern day.

The final important goal I had was to show that Hebrew, as a language, is crucial for the continuation of this creative midrashic process. I feel that in explicating the plays and poems, it became apparent that the subtletu of allusions, the play of modern words upon the ancient words, the ability to evoke in a single word an entire passage from a text: these are all dependent upon the medium of Hebrew language. Modern Midrash can surely exist in any language, but it with the Hebrew tongue that they achieve the greatest richness and authenticity.

In terms of modern literature, it was interesting to note that most of the treatments of Saul have been in the genre of poetry. Even in the Haskalah drama Meluchat Shaul, the most powerful "midrashic" passages were indeed the most purely poetic. Perhaps poetry is the medium through which the midrashic thought is best expressed. It would seem that poetry's eloquence, its beauty, it's compactness, its multi-leveled meanings, its focus upon one image, all contribute to making it the literary heir to the classical midrashic form.

Regarding the development of Saul's character through the ages, a clear pattern does emerge. In the biblical text, Saul is portrayed as a man who disobeys God, albeit with good intentions. His descent into melancholia is seen as punishment for that disobedience. Saul's character is portrayed so as to remind the people that prohetic rule is superior to the rule of kings. Saul above all represents the pitfalls of a monarchy.

In the rabbinic period, Saul's character was reinterpreted. No longer was Saul the symbol of the monarchy. Instead he became a "proto-rabbinic" Jewish symbol, whose advisor was a member of the Sanhedrin, and who only

wished to follow the law to the letter. Saul is transformed into a halakhic Jew, trying to observe all the laws and somehow falling short. The rabbinic portrayal is much kinder and sympathetic to Saul's character than the biblical portrayal.

In Meluchat Shaul , Saul is portrayed as being caught between two ages, just as the Jews of the Haskalah were caught between two ages. Saul is not a bad man, nor is he a good man. He is a person caught in a conflict of values and cultures. He can not let go of the old system, and yet he understands the necessity for the new system. He is a victim of change, and as such he becomes a metaphor for many of the Jewish Europeans who were caught in a similar conflict of cultures.

With Tchernichowsky, the meaning of Saul's character is diversified. In the early poetry, Saul's weak and despairing end symbolizes the powerlessness and weakness of the Jewish people. In the middle period, Saul represents the poet-king, who through his ecstatic wisdom can truly transform the world and lead it. In the later period, Saul becomes a symbol of the Zionism struggle to establish a homeland in Palestine. Saul is a symbol of necessary sacrifice, of death with honor.

Finally in the most modern period, Saul's character is secularized and psychologized. No longer is Saul so much a national collective figure. Instead he is made into an archetype with whom Jews can interact on a personal psychological level, as well as collective level. What is most compelling about these poems is their deeply personal intensity, for it is this that transforms Saul into a relevant figure. Through the poets' and readers' emotional interaction with this mythic figure, Saul lives again and attains subjective emotional reality in our lives. His life impact upon ours. In his problems, we see a ancient mirror of our own problems. We know him

personally, for we have interacted with him on an emotional level. This interaction is "secular" and "psychological," but that is as it should be. The midrashic process is one by which contemporary values are imposed upon the text, and secular psychology certainly rules the contemporary cultural context. However, it is my belief that in the "psychological" emotional interaction we achieve the greatest universal spirit and the greatest depth. These poems use Saul to explore the human condition of the poets, and through them the human condition of every Jew who reads them. By exploring the place of the individual and the Jew in relation to his past, his people, and his future, these poets address issues which are far from "secular." They transcend.

The continued vibrance of the Jewish people depends on our ability to re-interpret our symbols in every age. I strongly believe that we are now living at a crucial time in Jewish history, one that rivals in scope the transformation from Temple to Rabbinic Judaism. The past hundred years have seen the pogroms, the rise of Zionism and and independent Jewish nation in Israel, the Holocaust, the rise of American Jewry, the rise of feminism, and the implosion of culture through computers and mass media. Judaism must respond to these radical changes in bold and inventive ways if it is to continue to speak to the modern condition. The genius of the classical midrash is that it creatively and innovatively imbued ancient texts with new meanings, meanings which helped the reader understand his or her place in the changing universe; meanings which allowed the reader to remain Jewish in a completely new way. That is the challenge of Jewish leadership of our time. We must begin to create post-rabbinic midrashim. We must find equally creative and innovative ways to reclaim our legends,

for it is in understanding the world through our unique sacred legends and myths that we become Jewish. If we fail, then our faith will become stagnant, petrified, archaic. The process of midrash, by which our people has always remained vibrant and vital must today be urgently resurrected if that vitality is to carry us into the next century. It is in that hope that this thesis was written and submitted on the 16th day of March, 1990, (תשנ"ו י"ט אדר).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Babylonian Talmud. Vol. 1 "Seder Zera'im I: Berakhot" Edited by Rabbi Dr. I Epstein. London: The Soncino Press, 1958.

The Babylonian Talmud. Vol. 5 "Seder Mo'ed V: Yoma" Edited by Rabbi Dr. I Epstein. London: The Soncino Press, 1958.

Bargad, Warren. "Poems of Saul: A Semiotic Approach." Paper presented to the World Congress of Jewish Studies, Jerusalem, 1988. (Photocopy).

Bargad, Warren and Chyet, Stanley F. Israeli Poetry: A Contemporary Anthology. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.

Berdichevski, M.Y. "Vision and Poetry." In An Anthology of Hebrew Essays. 2 vols. Cohen, Israel, and Michali, B.Y., editors. Tel Aviv: Massada Publishing Co. Ltd, 1966. Vol. 1.

Driver, S.R. Notes on the Hebrew Text of Samuel. Winona Lake, Indiana: Alpha Publications, 1984.

Efrati, Yosef ha, מלוכת שאול. Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1968 [original text, 1794]

Encyclopaedia Judaica. Vol. 2, 1971. S.v. "Alterman, Nathan," by Matti Megged.

Encyclopaedia Judaica. Vol. 4. 1971. S.v. "Bat-Miriam, Yoheved."

Encyclopaedia Judaica. Vol. 7. 1971. S.v. "Gilboa, Amir."

Encyclopedia Judaica, S.v. "Haskalah," Encyclopedia Judaica, by Yehuda. Slutsky.

Encyclopedia Judaica, S.v. "Hebrew Literature, Modern" by Eisig Silberschlag.

Encyclopaedia Judaica. Vol. 11. 1971. S.v. "Midrash," by Moshe David Herr.

Encyclopaedia Judaica. Vol. 13. 1971. S.v. "Penn, Alexander," by Getzel Kressel.

Encyclopaedia Judaica. Vol. 13. 1971. S.v. "Ratosh, Yonatan," by David Saraph.

Encyclopaedia Judaica. Vol. 14. 1971. S.v. "Saul."

Encyclopaedia Judaica. Vol. 16. 1971. S.v. "Zach, Nathan," by Getzel Kressel.

Ginzberg, Louis. The Legends of the Jews. Vol. 4, "From Joshua to Esther." Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication society of America, 1913.

Ginzberg, Louis. The Legends of the Jews. Vol. 6, "Notes to Vulumes IIII and IV, From Moses in the Wilderness ot Esther." Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication society of America, 1959.

Hellman, Y.T. פרקים לשירי שאול טשרניחובסקי. Jerusalem: The Hebrew Institute for Enlightenment in Writing in Israel, תשי"ז (1957).

Jacobson, David C. Modern Midrash: The Retelling of Traditional Jewish Narratives by Twentieth Century Hebrew Writers. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987.

Kurzweil, Baruch. ביאליק ושרניחובסקי-מחקרים בשירתם. Tel-Aviv: Shocken Books, 1960.

Kurzweil, Baruch. "Is there such a thing as Biblical Tragedy." In An Anthology of Hebrew Essays. 2 vols. Cohen, Israel, and Michali, B.Y., editors. Tel Aviv: Massada Publishing Co. Ltd, 1966. Vol. 1.

Landau, J.L., Short Lectures on Modern Hebrew Literature. London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1923.

McCarter, P. Kyle. "Introduction, Notes and Commentary" The Anchor Bible. Vol. 8, I Samuel. Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1980.

Meron, Dan. Notes from lecture in Modern Hebrew Literature, Columbia University, 1987.

The Midrash Rabbah. Vol 2: Exodus-Leviticus. Translation, notes and glossary edited by Rabbi. Dr. H. Freedman, and Maurice Simon. Oxford: University Press, 1977 and by Soncino Press.

Papirna, A. Y. "הדרמה בכלל והעבריה בפרט" ("The Drama in General and Hebrew in Particular"), in מקורות לתולדות הביקורת העברית בתקופת ההשכלה (Sources for the Generations of Hebrew Criticism in the Period of the Haskalah.) pp. 388-294. Edited by S. Halkin. Jerusalem: Mifal haShikhon, 1960.

Ratosh, Yonatan. ראשית הימים. (The First Days). Tel Aviv: Hadar Press, 1982.

I Samuel. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1978. pp103-164.

Samuel I, "A New English Translation of the Text and Rashi, with a Commentary Digest." Edited and translated by Rabbi A.J. Rosenburg. New York: The Judaica Press, Inc., 1976.

Shaked, Gershon. חמישה שירים על מלך שאול ("Five Poems on King Saul,"), למרחב (Lamerchav), 16 and 23 May 1958. משא (Masah) section.

Shaked, Gershon, Introduction to מלוכת שואל, by Josef ha Efrati miTopolovitz. Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1968.

Shapiro, H.N. "יוסף האפרתי" ("Yosef ha-Efrati) in ההשכלה במרכז גרמניה ספרות (Haskalah Literature in Central Germany:1784-1829) Tel Aviv: Masada, date not given.

Silberschlag, Eisig. Saul Tschernichowsky: Poet of Revolt. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1968.

Targum Jonathan of the Former Prophets. Introduction, translation and notes by Daniel J. Harington and Anthony J. Saldarini. Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Galzier, Inc.,1987.

Tchernichowsky, Saul. שירים (Poems). Tel Aviv: Dvir Company, Ltd., 1966.

ילקוט שמעוני. New York: Title Publishing, Co., 1944.

מדרש שמואל. Edited by Salomon Buber. Krakau: Druck und Verlag von Josef Fischer, 1893.

מדרש תנחומא. Edited by Salomon Buber. Vilna: The Widow and Brothers Romm, 1913.

מקראות גדולות : נביאים וכתובים .

תלמוד בבלי, Commentary by Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz. Vol. 6. "יומא" Jerusalem: Israel Institute for Talmudic Publications, 1977.

תלמוד בבלי, Commentary by Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz. Vol. 1. "ברכות" Jerusalem: Israel Institute for Talmudic Publications, 1967.

תלמוד בבלי, Commentary by Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz. Vol. 2. "שבת" Jerusalem: Israel Institute for Talmudic Publications, 1968.

Appendix A

SAUL POEM'S OF TCHERNICHOWSKY

שירי שאול של טשרניחובסקי

[Hebrew Texts and
Working Translations]

...וּבְחֶשְׁכַת הַלַּיִל בְּלִי קֶשֶׁת וָשֶׁלַח
עַל סוּס קַל עֵין־דּוֹרָה בָּא שָׁאוּל הַמֶּלֶךְ.

וּבְאַחַד הַבָּתִּים אוֹר כֵּהֶה הוֹסִיעַ:
– ״פֹּה תָנוּר״ – הַנַּעַר לוֹ חֶרֶשׁ הִבִּיעַ.

– ״אַתְּ בַּעֲלַת־הָאוֹב ?״ – ״כֵּן, אֲדוֹנִי, הַגֵּר״.
– ״נָא קָסְמִי בָּאוֹב, צֵל הָרֹאֶה הַרְאִינִי !״

עֲלָטָה... אֵשׁ וָזְעוּת... בַּפִּנָּה קַלַּחַת.
וּשְׁמוֹת כָּל הַשֵּׁדִים וּבְלִילָה רוֹתַחַת...

וּכְנָחָשׁ יִתְפַּתֵּל בֵּין עִשְׂבֵי הַבֹּשֶׂן
יִזְחֲלוּ, יִתְאַבְּכוּ כָּל תִּימְרוֹת הֶעָשָׁן.

וּבְמַעְגַּל הַקְּסָמִים, בְּגָפְרִית מָשׁוּחַ,
שָׁם יַעֲמֹד הַמֶּלֶךְ, לֹא לִבּוֹ יָנוּחַ.

וִיצוּרֵי עֲרָפֶל וּצְלָמִים נִשְׁבָּרִים...
אֶגְלֵי הַזֵּעָה עַל לְחָיוֹ נִגָּרִים.

אַף רוּחוֹ בּוֹ רָפְתָה, גַּם נַפְשׁוֹ דוֹאֶבֶת.
מַה יִּמַּס בּוֹ לִבּוֹ וַיָּבֹא הַמָּוֶת !

--

חַיָּיו בְּמַחֲזֶה יַעַבְרוּ, יֶאֱתָיו...
״הַנַּח לִי, הַנַּח לִי !״ – שְׂפָתָיו יִבְעָיוּ.

עֲלָטָה... אֵשׁ וָזְעוּת... דְּמָמַת הַשַּׁחַת..
מַעְגַּל הַקְּסָמִים וַעֲשַׁן הַקַּלַּחַת...

וַיִּזְכֹּר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת גֶּבַע וַעֲלוּמָיו,
אֲבִיב חֶלְדּוֹ, טֶרֶם יִקְדְּרוּ עוֹד שָׁמָיו.

וּתְמוּנוֹת מַרְהִיבוֹת עֵינָיו תְּחַזֶּינָה:
כַּר נִרְחָב יוֹסִיעַ, וּפָרוֹת תִּרְעֶינָה.

וּתְכֵלֶת רוּם שַׁחַק, גַּם רֵיחוֹת עֲדָנִים.
אָל תַּחַת צֵל אֵלָה, חָסֹן כָּאַלּוֹנִים.

שָׁם שָׁלֵו יָנוּחַ הָרוֹעֶה הָעֶלֶם.
וּלְנֶגְדּוֹ יְרַקְּדוּ הַבְּקָרִים בַּתֶּלֶם.

אַךְ שַׁלְוָה תָּמַם, אַךְ יִסְפֶּה וְהָדָר...
מַה נָּעֵמוּ צִלְצְלֵי פַּעֲמוֹן הָעֵדֶר !

״אָנֹכִי, הַמְאֻשָּׁר, גַּם בָּרִיא, גַּם רַעֲנָן,
מִי יִתֵּן אוּכְלָה וּכְאָז אֱהִי שַׁאֲנָן !״

וַעֲצֶבֶת נוֹרָאָה סוֹטֵר לִבּוֹ לְחָצָה,
וּכְמוֹ שֶׁפֶטֶת־דִּמְעָה אֶל גְּרוֹנוֹ פָּרְצָה.

וּפִתְאֹם – וַיִּרְעַם קוֹל גָּדוֹל וְחָזָק,
וְאֵשׁוּן־הָעֲלָטָה הֵאִיר הַבָּזָק.

– אָנֹכִי הָרֹאֶה לַמֶּלֶךְ מִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה.
מֵאַחֲרֵי הַבָּקָר הֵיכָל הוֹשִׁיבְךָ;

מִמְּחִלּוֹת רִקָּבוֹן עַל־מָה הִרְגַּזְתָּנִי
וּלְאַרְצוֹת־הַחַיִּים מַה הֶעֱלִיתָנִי ?

– ״מַדּוּעַ מֵאַחַר הַצֹּאן לְקַחְתָּנִי
וּלְנָגִיד עַל עַמְּךָ כַּיּוֹם זֶה שַׂמְתָּנִי ?

כִּלִּיתִי כָּל כֹּחִי בְּסַעֲרוֹת מִלְחָמָה,
וְאָשְׁרִי בְּבַיִת כְּבָר הָיָה לְשַׁמָּה.

עִם פְּלֶשֶׁת סְבוּתִי, בְּעוּתֵי־צַלְמָוֶת –
הָרוּחַ הָרָעָה תְּדַכְּאֵנִי עַד מָוֶת.

אִישׁ־הָאֱלֹהִים ! מָה אֵל יַעֲנֵנִי ?
כִּי סָר מֵעָלַי – מָה אֶעֱשֶׂה ? עֲנֵנִי !

מַדּוּעַ, הָהּ, מֶלֶךְ עַל עַמְּךָ מְשַׁחְתָּנִי,
מַדּוּעַ מֵאַחֲרֵי הַצֹּאן לְקַחְתָּנִי ?״

– עַל מִרְיְךָ, וְאוֹן לִבְּךָ, אֱלֹהִים יַזְעִמְךָ !
מָחָר אַתָּה עִמִּי, גַּם אַתָּה, גַּם עַמְּךָ !

בְּאַשְׁמֹרֶת הַבֹּקֶר בְּלִי קֶשֶׁת וָשֶׁלַח
עַל סוּס קַל הַמַּחֲנֶה שָׁב שָׁאוּל הַמֶּלֶךְ.

וּפָנָיו חִוְּרוּ, אַךְ בְּלִבּוֹ אֵין מוֹרָא.
וּבְעֵינָיו מִתְנוֹצְצוֹת – הַיֵּאוּשׁ הַנּוֹרָא.

Saul Tchernikovsky (working translation: David Edleson)

AT EIN DOR

...in the darkness of night, without bow or spear
On a swift steed King Saul came to Ein Dor

And in one of the houses, a dark light appeared
"Here she lives" the youth told him in a whisper.

"You are the mistress of ghosts!" -"Yes, my Lord, here I am."
"Please conjure a ghost, the shadow of the Seer show to me!"

Darkness . . Fire of terror . . In the corner, a cauldron
And the names of all the shades, and the potion boils.

Like a snake wriggling betwee the grasses of Bashan
The trails of smoke crawl and rise up.

And in the circle of witches, in sulfur annointed
There will stand the king, his heart without rest.

And the creations of mist, the storming forms...
The tracks of perspiration pouring down his cheeks.

But his spirit had weakened within him, and his soul languished
How his heart melted within him and death was prophecied!

His life past before him in a vision, שמואל...
"Calm me, calm me!" His lips uttered

Darkness. . . fire of terror . . . the silence of the grave
The circle of witches and the smoke of the cauldron . . .

And the king remembere the hill and his secrets
Spring of his life, before his sky had darkened

And astounding picture his eyes envisioned
An expansive pasture land appeared, with cattle grazing.

And the blue of heaven's heights, also the scents of sweet grass
(wafted) there beneath the shade of the terebinth, strong like oaks.

There in calm the young shepherd will rest
And before will dance the cattle in a line

Both calm and pleasantness, both spendour and beauty.
HOw enjoyable were the ringing of the bells of the herd.

I, the happy one, also healthy, also strong.
Would that I could be as serene as I was then.

Then a terrible melancholy crushed upon his breast
And (it was as if) a rush of blood gushed toward his throat.

Then suddenly - a large powerful voice resounded
In the midst of the darkness, the lightning flashed.

"I am the Seer to the king, your annointer
From among the herd I placed you in a palace

From the cave of rot, for what did you disturb me
And why did you raise me to the land of the living?"

-"Why did you take me from the flock?
And why did you make me a ruler over your people on a day such as that?

I used up all my strength in the storms of battle
And my happiness in my home has already been made desolate.

The Philistine people surround me,horrors of the underworld -
The evil spirit has crushed me unto death.

Man of God! What will God answer me?
For he has abandoned me - What shall I do? Answer me!

Why, Alas, did you annoint me as king over your people,
Why did you take me from the flock?"

-"Because of your rebelliousness, your haughty pride, God has become wrathful toward you!
Tomorrow you will be with me, both you and your kin."

On the watch of morning, without bow or spear
On a light steed King Saul returned to the camp

His face had become palled, also in his heart there was no fear
And in his eyes there glittered- terrible despair.

Oct 1893.

עַל חָרְבוֹת בֵּית־שָׁן

וַיָּבֹאוּ פְלִשְׁתִּים... וַיִּמְצְאוּ אֶת־שָׁאוּל...
וַיִּכְרְתוּ אֶת־רֹאשׁוֹ... וְאֶת־גְּוִיָּתוֹ תָּקְעוּ
בְּחוֹמַת בֵּית שָׁן.

(שמואל א׳ ל״א, ח—י)

כִּי יִכְבּוּ עַל חֶרְמוֹן הָהָר
נְגֹהוֹת בֵּין־הָעַרְבַּיִם,
כְּתֹם רֹן הַזָּמִיר הַשָּׁר,
וּכְהֵדֹם מַבּוּעַ הַמַּיִם;

עֵת דּוּמָם יָנוּחַ הַגָּן,
יִכָּנֵף זַמִּיר בֵּין הֶעָלִים, –
עַל עִיֵּי מַשּׁוּאוֹת בֵּית־שָׁן
יָנֻסוּ מִסָּבִיב הַצְּלָלִים.

דּוּמִיַּת הַקֶּבֶר בַּכֹּל,
עֲטַלֵּף יְרַפְרֵף לוֹ חֶרֶשׁ...
צַל מֶלֶךְ בְּצַעֲדֵי אֵין־קוֹל
שָׁם יִתְעֶה, בֵּין סֶלַע וָשֹׁרֶשׁ...

וְלָאטּוֹ הוּא עוֹלֶה בַּתֵּל
בִּדְמִי לֵיל עֲרִירִי־מַעְיָן,
חֲגוֹר כְּלֵי־מִלְחַמְתּוֹ הַצַּל,
בִּגְדוֹ הַשֶּׁלַח רַק אָיִן.

וּכְבָר רַד גַּם כּוֹכַב־הַצִּיר,
כְּסַפִּיר שְׂפַת יָם־הַמֶּלַח,
בּוֹ שָׁם יִתְנוֹסֵס הַשָּׁנִיר –
וְהוּא טֶרֶם מָצָא הַשֶּׁלַח.

גַּם אַפְסֵי פְּאַת קֶדֶם בָּאוֹר,
יָנוּסוּ צְלָלִים וַעֲנָנִים, –
אָז יֵרָמוּ צַל שׁוֹכְנֵי הַבּוֹר,
אַף יֶחֱוְרוּ רִשְׁמֵי הַפָּנִים.

וַיְנוֹפֵף הַיָּד, יַחֲרֹק שֵׁן,
מֵעֵינָיו נִשְׁקֶפֶת הָאֵימָה:
״אֶנָּקְמָה!״... בְּהָדָר וָחֵן
יוֹפִיעוּ נַבְטוּנִים וְשַׁדְמָה...

בְּלַיְלָה בְּלַיְלָה אָנֶה וָאָן
יִתְהַלֵּךְ צַל שָׁאוּל הַמֶּלֶךְ
בֵּין עִיֵּי מַשּׁוּאוֹת בֵּית־שָׁן,
וְעֵינָיו מְבַקְּשׁוֹת הַשָּׁלַח.

כִּי יָבוֹא יַגִּיעַ הָאוֹת,
וִישֵׁנֵי הַקֶּבֶר יָקִיצוּ,
אָז יִמְצָא הַחֶרֶב הַזֹּאת,
אֵשׁ נְקָמַת־עַד עֵינָיו יָפִיצוּ.

״הוֹי, חַיָּלַי! – הִנָּמוּ! – הַכֹּל
לְחֶרֶב נֹקֶמֶת, לְטֶרֶף!!״

וְאֵל אֵלִים אָז יַרְעֵם בְּקוֹל
וְיִקְרָא לִמְשִׁיחוֹ אָז: הֶרֶף!

שָׁמַיִם הָאָרֶץ וּתְהוֹם!
כֹּה אָמַר אֱלֹהִים גַּם יָקוּם:
סָלַחְתִּי לְכָל שׁוֹפְכֵי הַדָּם!
סָלַחְתִּי, כִּי בְחֶסֶד אֶנָּקֵם!

אודיסה, 1898

Saul Tchernichowsky (working translation: David Edleson)

On the Ruins of Beit Shean

So the Philistines came...and found Saul... and cut off his head... and they hung his corpse on the wall of Beit Shean. ISam 31: 8-10

As the rays of twilight
Fade upon Mount Hermon
As the song of the singing nightingale is finished
And as the gush of water is silenced;

The time of silence will rest the garden,
A zephyr wings among the leaves -
Among the ruins of Beit Shean's desolations
The shades/shadows will stretch out all around.

The silence of the grave is upon everything,
The bat flutters itself in silence...
The shade/shadow of a king in voiceless steps
Wanders there, among the rocks and stones.

And slowly he ascends the mound
In the silence of a night isolated from view
Clad in the weapons of his shadow war
And in the sheath of his spear only nothingness.

And already the morning [tsir] star has descended
Like a sapphire of the Salt Sea's shore
In gold, there sparkles the glacier-
And he has not yet found his spear.

And now too the reaches of the corners of the east are in light,
The clouds and shadows/shades will be fleeing -
So the shade/shadow of those who dwell in the pit awaken from the grave
And the [ghostly] features of the faces are made pale.

So the hand will flutter/wave, and the tooth will grind,
From his eyes the terror can be seen:
"I will be avenged!" . . . In beauty and loveliness
The hills and field appear . . .

Night after night hither and yon
The shade/shadow of King Saul will wander
Among the ruins of Beit Sheans desolations
While his eyes are searching for the spear.

For a time will come when the sign arrives
And those who sleep in the grave will awaken,
And so he will find that sword,
His eyes spreading the fire of eternal vengeance.

"Ho, my soldiers!" - "Here am I!" - "Everyone
to the avenging sword, to plunder!!."
And God will thunder with His voice
And so call out to his saviour: "Stop!"

Heaven and earth and the underworld!
Thus sayeth God who also avenges:
I have forgiven all those who spill blood!
I have forgiven, for in steadfast love I will be avenged!

Odessa, 1898

שיר האהבה אשר לשאול

ברך איש־בנימן – זה שאול

(ש״א ד׳, יב; ובמדרש שם)

א

הביאנו למשתות בנך
כי באנו לראותך היפה:
הריחנו את אשכלות כפרך
גשם נפשו משעניך
וריחם עדנים ומשכיר:
אריחנו את מרך ואת נרדך הטוב
לקטנו בערוגת הבשם
קטפנו מבין דודאיך
מבין חבצלות ושושנים:
בין מגדלות אהלות שחקנו:
היינו שוכבות על־יד מעין־גנים
על דלת ראשנו רסיסים מבריקים
שזרקנו אשה ברעותה:
עיפנו רגלינו עיפו:
אנא סבנה רעיותי למקרה:
כי הנה החם גדול
השמש לוהט בוער
פה היריעות כמו הכתלים
קר משכב נפש ינוח
וצל הקיטוס סוכך עלינו:
קומה רעיתי נלכה:

אכלנו יערך עם דבשך
אשישות ממתק־אגוז שבענו
וסמנים ערכת בתפוחים:
שתינו יין־הרקח ועסיס רמונך:
הראיתנו המסלות עשית לך
נתבונן ליפי תכשיטך:
מה אראה לכן ולא ראיתן:
ראיתן את צמידי העשר וזהב־שבא
את שהביא לי אבי מצידון:
כנחש דמות תבניתו
מראהו כאספה:
ראשו כתם־פז
ירכיו עקלקלות כפוסות כספנות:
עיניו אדם־הנדו
בוערות בנוהות
יושבות במשבצת:
פתוחי־אמן נעשו לו עם נקודות הספיר
וזנבו עשת־פז מעלפת סמרגדים:
כלם מבריקים וכלו מחמדים
זה צמידי וזה שרתי רעיותי תמותי:
הנה תורי־זהב וכל מיני אפר
הלא התבוננתן לעגילי:
מה עוד לי לכן לא הראיתי:
חלי וסבעת ענק ואצעדה
״״ כל מראות כומז
רוזים עם כל ראשי נטיפות:
ג פניניך כרסיסים

מַבְרִיקוֹת כִּסְלָלִים אוֹרוֹת כְּדָמְעוֹת:
הַרְאִיתֶן בַּתְּרָסִים כִּתְרָסָי:
תְּנָה מִלְּשָׁם אֶחָד תְּנָה מִלְּשָׁם עָשָׂר
פָּסוּל מִשּׁוּ סְחֹרֶת מִשּׁוּ דַּר וְאַכְּסִיס
מִפְּנֵי אַלְמֻגִּים מִשּׁוּר הָאֻמָּם
עַשְׁתֹּרֶת וְעַשְׁתְּרוֹת־קַרְנַיִם:
מַה־יָּפוּ תְּרָסַיִךְ רַעְיָה יָפָה
מַה־נָּאווּ תְּרָסַיִךְ בַּתְּרָסִים
וְזֹאת עַשְׁתְּרָתֵךְ מִכָּל פְּסִילִים:
מִי־זֹאת צוֹפָה מִן הָרְדִידִים כִּבְרוֹר חֲבַצָּלוֹת
מְעֻלֶּפֶת שֵׁן וְהָבְנִים מִכָּל אֶבֶן חֵפֶץ:
כֻּלָּהּ עֶשֶׁת־שֵׁן וְעֵינֶיהָ סַפִּירִים
דַּלַּת רֹאשָׁהּ זָהָב שָׁחוּט
פִּטְמַת דַּדֶּיהָ אֹדֶם:

ב

מַה־דּוֹדֵךְ מִדּוֹד שֶׁכָּכָה תְּאֳהָבִיהוּ:
דּוֹדִי רָם וְחָסֹן בָּחוּר מִשִּׁבְטוֹ:
עֵינָיו עֵינֵי נֶשֶׁר מְאִירוֹת זִקִּים
בְּמַחֲשַׁךְ אוֹר לוֹ בַּיָּמִים:
לִבּוֹ עָשׂוּי לִבְלִי־חַת לֵב־נָמֵר בָּהָר
בַּרְזֶל מִקְשָׁה אוֹרוֹתוֹ בְּקָמָה:
זְקוּף דּוֹדִי וְחָסֹן רֵעוּתִי אֲהַבְתִּי
כְּשִׁקְמָה בַּשְּׁפֵלָה כְּאֶרֶז בַּלְּבָנוֹן:
שְׁרִירָיו גִּבְעוֹת־בַּר מְשֻׁדּוֹת עַל עַרְבוֹת־בָּר
מַרְאֵהוּ כְּלַיִשׁ בָּחוּר כַּגְּבוֹרִים:
לְמַלְאַךְ־אֵל צְבָאוֹת מִשְׁתַּחֲוִית

דִּמִּיתִי אֶת שֶׁאָהֲבָה נַפְשֵׁךְ:
שָׁלַח לוֹ לְדוֹדִי וּמַדָּיו עָלָיו:
תְּנָה קֹבַעוֹ שֶׁלִּבְחִירַי
שְׁלֹשָׁה חִשּׁוּקִים סָבִיב לוֹ מֵחִשּׁוּקֵי נְחֹשֶׁת:
כֻּלָּם מַעֲשֵׂה חָרָשׁ וְשִׁרְיוֹן־מַקֶּבֶת
אֵזוֹר אָזוּר עַל מָתְנָיו מִפַּחַד בַּמִּלְחָמָה:
חַרְבּוֹ צְמֵאָה דָּמִים קַשְׁתּוֹ עוֹרְגָה בָּשָׂר
לֹא נִתַּק הַיֶּתֶר וְלֹא בָּגֶד:
דּוֹמֶה רָמְחוֹ לַחֲנִית אוֹ לִבְרַק הַבַּלָּהוֹת
תְּנָה זֶה בְּעָרְפְּךָ אוֹיְבֵנוּ
מַבְרִיק מִן הַסַּעַר נוֹצֵץ מִן הַסּוּפָה:
קְנוֹ עָשׂוּי מִלָּה פִּיהוּ בַּרְזֶל עָשׁוֹת
עַיִן הַמָּוֶת צוֹפִיָּה מֵעַל חָדּוֹ
בְּתִלְיוֹ תָּלִין אֵימָה:
סְחֹרָה לוֹ לְדוֹדִי חֲרֹשֶׁת הַכַּשְׂדִּים
אֶל־נָכוֹן תְּחַבְּקֶנּוּ אַף תְּאַמְּצֶנּוּ
כְּכַלָּה מִתְרַפֶּקֶת עַל דּוֹדָהּ:
גָּאֶמְנוּ מְאֹד בֵּין הַדְּבֵקִים
וּלְרַגְלוֹ מִגְפָּתוֹ מַבְרֶקֶת:

ג

גָּמָל יֵשׁ לְדוֹדִי בְּאֻרְוָתוֹ שֶׁלּוֹ
נָתַן אֶלֶף כֶּסֶף לַגַּמָּלִים
בְּמִדְבַּר פָּארָן גִּדְּלוּהוּ דוֹדָנִים:
שְׂעָרוֹ זְהַבְהַב אָפֹר כָּתֹם כְּחוֹל־עֲרָבוֹת
לֹא יִכַּר בֵּין חוֹלוֹת הַמִּדְבָּר:
רַגְלָיו כְּקַשׁ נָסוּר דַּקּוֹת וְקִישׁוּת־קוֹמָה

כִּנִּימִים נְתָתוּ עַל כְּפוֹר:
קָלוּ פַּרְסוֹתָיו אַף לֹא יִיעַף וְלֹא יִיגָע:
חוֹלֵף וְאֵינוֹ נוֹגֵעַ בַּחוֹל:
חוֹלֵף וְעוֹבֵר כְּצֵל בַּצָּהֳרָיִם:
עִקְבֵי פַּרְסָה לֹא נוֹדְעוּ בַּמִּדְבָּר
שֶׁלֹּא יְבַקֵּשׁ הָאוֹיֵב יִתְבּוֹנֵן הָאוֹרֵב לוֹ:
גַּבּוֹ עָלָיו כְּגִבְעָה וְדַבַּשְׁתּוֹ כְּתָבוֹר
שֶׂסִּי נָתוּן בָּעֲרָבָה:
עֵינָיו שְׁהָמִים בְּכֶתֶר עַל רֹאשׁ מַלְכֵי־קֶדֶם
עֵינָיו רַכּוֹת כְּאַיָּלָה צוֹפוֹת עַד קְצֵה כָּל הַמִּדְבָּר:
חֵן וְהָדָר לְצַוָּארוֹ הַזָּקוּף
בִּנְדִיבוּת וּבְגַאֲוָה יָרִים
עָלָיו תָּלוּי שַׁהֲרוֹן הַכֶּסֶף
בּוֹ יִתְגָּאֶה כַּסָּף בַּגְּמָלֶת:

ד

אֶל מַשְׁאַבִּים יָרַדְתִּי בָּעֶרֶב
הָעֵינָה וְכַדִּי עַל שִׁכְמִי:
שָׁם רָאִיתִי אֶת אֵם בְּחִיר נַפְשִׁי
אֶת אֲחוֹתוֹ שֶׁל־דּוֹדִי רָאִיתִי:
הָיְתָה אִמּוֹ בּוֹכִיָּה וְדִמְעָתָהּ עַל לֶחְיָהּ
נוּגָה חֲוֶרֶת אֲחוֹתוֹ:
אֲנִי לֹא שָׁאַלְתִּי שֶׁמָּה הַיּוֹם כָּכָה
שַׂמְתִּי מַחְסוֹם לְפִי נֶאֱלַמְתִּי:
עָלוּ פְּלִשְׁתִּים בָּהָר פָּשְׁטוּ אֱדוֹם לָבוֹ
מַלְכֵי קֶדֶם וְשִׁבְטֵי דּוֹדָנִים:
וַיִּזְעַק הָעָם לְמִשְׁפְּחוֹתָיו:

יָצָא דוֹדִי גַּם הוּא בַּגְּדוּדוֹת:
וַיִּנָּגֵף הָעָם חֲלָלִים נָפְלוּ
עַל בָּמֳתֵי שָׂדֶה כָּרְעוּ:
שָׁבוּ פְּלִשְׁתִּים וְדוֹדִי אִתָּם:
עַל מִשְׁכָּבִי בַּלַּיְלָה בָּכִיתִי
לְשֶׁאָהֲבָה נַפְשִׁי בָּכִיתִי וְלֹא נַמְתִּי:
בִּשְׁתֵּי סַנְסִנֵּי בַּיּוֹם
מֵאַנְחָתִי נִכְלַמְתִּי:
בֹּקֶר אֲשַׁפְשֵׁף עֵינַי בַּקָּרִים
בְּטֶרֶם תָּנוּחַ בַּגּוֹזָלִים:
פֶּן תִּתְבּוֹנֵן־בִּי אִמִּי הוֹרָתִי
אֲחוֹתִי וְתַעֲמִיק לִשְׁאֹל:
יָגַעְתִּי בְּאַנְחָתִי עַרְשִׂי אֶשֹּׁף
וְלֹא תָבֹא אַנְחָתִי בַּבֹּקֶר:
אֵם־הַבָּנִים אֲבֵלָה תָּרִיד אֵשֶׁת הַבַּעַל
הִתְעַנְּתָה הַבְּתוּלוֹת:

ה

לַיְלָה לַיְלָה עָלִיתִי גַּג־בֵּיתִי
אֶל הַמַּעֲקָה נִשְׁעַנְתִּי וְנִשְׁקַפְתִּי:
לְרֹאשׁ אַשְׁמוּרוֹת קִדַּמְתִּי הַצְּפִירָה
הוֹי שֶׁאָהֲבָה נַפְשִׁי אַיֶּכָּה:
אִם נִשֵּׂאתָ סָחוֹן לִפְנֵי שׁוֹבְךָ
מִמְכַּר־עֶבֶד וְנִמְכַּרְתָּ לִפְלֶשֶׁת
אוֹ צִחֵה צָמָא בְּצִחִיחָה קָרַסְתָּ נָפַלְתָּ:
תַּנִּים גָּרְמוּ עַצְמוֹתֶיךָ
וְעוֹרְבֵי נַחַל אֶל עוֹרֵב לִבְשָׂרְךָ קָרָאוּ:

חָלְפָה אַחַת אַשְׁמוּרָה
מִשְׁנָה אַחֲרֶיהָ חָלָפָה:
כְּלָבִים צָעֲקוּ נָעַר חֲמוֹר:
עַרְפִלֵּי טֶרֶם־בֹּקֶר מִתַּמְּרִים בָּעֵמֶק
מִתְרַפְּקִים עַל שֶׁן־צוּרִים וָצוּק:
הִתְחִילוּ מַכְחִילִים הָרֵי נַפְתָּלִי:
מֵת יָרֵחַ בְּלִקּוּיוֹ בַּגְּרָא
אֲנִי עֵרָה וְלִבִּי לִבְחִירִי:

ו

אֲנִי יְשֵׁנָה הַבֹּקֶר אוֹר
קוֹל דּוֹפֵק בְּחַלּוֹנֵי יוֹנָתִי:
הִתְנַעַרְתִּי כְּסִיס־עָגוּר מִפְּנֵי צַיָּד
כְּאַיָּלָה נִפְחָדָה קַמְתִּי:
לֹא שָׁאַלְתִּי מִי הַדּוֹפֵק
לֹא דָרַשְׁתִּי:
עַד שַׁקַּמְתִּי אֲנִי לִפְתֹּחַ
לִבִּי אָמַר לָצֵאת מִמִּסְגְּרוֹתָיו
כִּי הֶעֱבִירַנִי אֶל דּוֹדִי אֶל רֵעִי שֶׁאָהֲבָה נַפְשִׁי:
פִּתְחִי לִי יוֹנָתִי
הַרְאִינִי אֶת מַרְאַיִךְ מִבַּעַד לַחֲרַכִּים:
שֶׁרַגְלַי נִטְפוֹת דָּם
כַּפּוֹתַי נִטְפֵי מְצָעִים:
יָמִים שִׁשָּׁה עָשִׂיתִי בַּמִּדְבָּר:
חֲצִי אָדָם דְּלָקוּנִי וּפְלִשְׁתִּים מַיִם
עִם חַיַּת הַמִּדְבָּר עַל סְבִיבָי:
אֶלֶף הֶחָצִין מְחָצוּנִי
סִלּוֹנִים וְחָרוּל שָׂרְטוּ בִבְשָׂרִי
חוֹל הַמִּדְבָּר הֵרַע לְפִצְעָי:
אֶת הוֹרָתִי עֵדֶן לֹא רָאִיתִי:
סֹב לָךְ דּוֹדִי וּבְרַח
שֶׁשְּׁכוּרַת אַהֲבָה אָנִי
סֹב לְךָ אֶל אִמְּךָ יוֹלַדְתֶּךָ אֶל הוֹרָתֶךָ
מְחֵה דִמְעָה מֵעַל פָּנֶיהָ
כִּי אֵינֶנָּה יְשֵׁנָה בַּלַּיְלָה
בּוֹכִיָּה לְךָ כָּל הַיּוֹם:
עַד שֶׁיָּפוּחַ הַיּוֹם וְקָדְרוּ מִשְׁעוֹלֵי הֶהָרִים:

אודיסה, 1921

Saul Tchernichowsky (trans: E. Silberschlag*)

SAUL'S LOVE SONG

'And there ran a man of Benjamin'—that was Saul
(I Samuel, 4:12, and Rashi's commentary)

I

The Women: Bring us to the stillness of thy garden,
for we are come to see thee, O fair one:
Let us smell thy clusters of henna,
thy plantings drop spice, and thy savours
are Edens that make us drunken:
We have gathered thy myrrh and have gleaned
thy good spikenard in the bed of spices;
we have plucked from among thy mandrakes,
from among lilies and roses:
Where aloes grew, we have played:
We have been mischievous beside a garden-
fountain;
on the hair of our heads are the glittering drops
we have sprinkled each on the other:
We are weary, our legs are weary:
The Beloved: Pray turn ye, my dears, to the cool place:
For, lo, the heat is great,
the sun is a consuming flame;
there, curtains cover the walls,
a breathing coolness restores the soul,
and ivy vines will shade us:
Rise ye, my dears, let us go:
The Women: We have eaten thy honeycomb with thy honey,
we are sated with nuts and sweet cakes,
thou hast garnished sponge cakes with apples:
We have drunk of spiced wine
and the juice of thy pomegranates:
Let us see the dresses thou hast sewn,
examine the beauty of thy ornaments:

*Eisig Silberschlag, Saul Tschernichowsky: Poet of Revolt, (Ithaca, NY:Cornell University Press, 1968), p. 156.

SAUL'S LOVE SONG

The Beloved: What shall I show ye, that ye have not seen?
Ye have seen my bracelet of Sheba's gold
that my father brought from Sidon:
Like a serpent it is shaped,
in the form of a viper:
Its head is as the most fine gold,
its crooked thighs bent like rings:
Its eyes of a coppery red
are aflame with coals of fire,
sitting in their settings:
Engraved it is by a craftsman
with bits of sapphires;
its tail is of pure-gold polished,
overlaid with smaragd stones:
All of them shine—it is wholly a delight,
this my bracelet, this my chain,
my friends, my dear ones:
Here are my circlets of gold
and all the rings of my nose,
and my earrings, ye have examined:
What else do I have, that I have not shown ye?
Ornaments, and large rings, and bracelets,
with all shapes of girdles,
hooks and beads with all the chief pendants:
The Women: Thy pearls are beautiful as drops
gleaming like dew, bright as tears:
The Beloved: Have ye seen any idols like mine?
Here is one of jacinth, of jacinth made;
carved of onyx marble,
from pieces of shell and agates,
from sandalwood, from the trunk of the pear-tree,
Astarte and horned Astarte:
The Women: How beautiful thine idols, beautiful beloved;
how comely are thine idols among the idols,
and this thine Astarte above all the carven images:
Who is this looking from a mantle like a bunch of
lilies,

overlaid with ivory and ebony and all sorts of
precious stones?
She is all of polished ivory
and her eyes are sapphires;
and the hairs of her head are beaten gold,
the nipples of her breasts are ruby:

II

The Women: What is thy beloved more than another beloved,
that so much thou dost love him?
The Beloved: My beloved is tall and powerful,
the chosen one of his tribe:
His eyes are an eagle's eyes
that gird themselves with firebrands
lighting the dark for him like jackals:
His heart is made to be fearless,
a tiger's heart on the mountain,
his forearm is beaten iron:
Erect is my beloved,
dear friends whom I have loved,
like the sycamore in the lowland,
like the cedar of Lebanon:
His muscles are hills of chalk
based on wild plains of the desert;
like a leopard he appeareth,
excellent as panthers:
The Women: To a destroying angel of the Lord of hosts,
we have compared him whom thy soul loveth:
The Beloved: My beloved hath a spear
he is clad in his apparel:
Behold, the helmet of him I have chosen—
with three rings circled, of the rings of copper:
All of them the work of a craftsman,
beaten with hammers,
one circle upon the second placed
because of the fear in battle:

SAUL'S LOVE SONG

His sword thirsteth for blood,
his bow panteth after flesh,
the string is not broken and hath not betrayed:
His spear is like a flash of lightning,
or the thunder of terror;
behold, it is in the back of our foe,
gleaming more than the storm,
shining more than the tempest:
His spear is made of olive wood,
its edge is of forged iron;
the eye of Death keepeth watch over its point,
in its sheath lodgeth terror:
My beloved hath a buckler carved by Chaldeans,
assuredly he doth embrace it, even make it firm,
like as a bride leaning upon her beloved:
The joints very faithfully are joined;
on his legs are glittering greaves:

III

The Beloved: My beloved hath a camel in his own stall;
a thousand pieces of silver to the camel drivers he gave,
in the wilderness of Paran cousins reared him:
His hairs are a blonde-grey yellow
like the sand of the desert-plains,
not to be distinguished among sands of the desert:
His legs are like a line outstretched,
thin and erect of stature,
like strings stretched on a harp:
His hooves are light and swift,
neither doth he faint or grow weary:
He passeth, and toucheth not the sand:
He passeth, and passeth away
like a shadow at noon:
Hoof-prints in the desert are not to be known,
in vain shall the enemy seek,

shall he who would ambush him look carefully:
The back of him is like a hill
and his hump like Mount Tabor,
a high hill set on the plains:
His eyes are onyx stones
in a crown of ancient kings;
his eyes are soft as a doe,
looking to the very end of the desert:
Grace and dignity is in his upright neck
that he lifteth with nobility and pride;
on it hangeth a silver crescent
whereof he boasteth in the thronging caravan:

IV

The Beloved: To the watering-troughs I went down in the evening,
to the well with my pitcher on my shoulder:
There I saw the mother of him my soul hath chosen,
the sister of my beloved I saw:
His mother wept and her tear was on her cheek,
sad and pale was his sister:
I asked not, that today they were thus;
I set a curb upon my mouth, I was dumb:
Philistines went up on the mountain,
Edom rushed to their prey,
ancient kings and tribes of cousins:
And the people were called together by their families:
My beloved, too, went forth among the army with banners:
And the people were smitten down, wounded they fell,
on the high places of the fields they bowed down:
Those that escaped returned,
and my beloved was not there:
By night on my bed I wept and slept not,

SAUL'S LOVE SONG

I was ashamed of my tears by day
and confounded for my sighing:
In the morning I rubbed my eyes with cold water
from the garden spring, with flowing water:
Lest I be observed by my mother, she that conceived
me,
by my sister, and she question deeply:
I am wearied in my sighing, I bite my couch,
that my sighing go not forth in the morning:
The mother of sons is in mourning,
the husband's wife is cast down—
shall the virgins shut themselves off?

V

The Beloved: Every night I went up to the roof of my house,
I leaned upon the battlement, I looked forth:
At the beginning of the watches I greeted the
dawn;
ah, him that my soul loveth, where art thou?
Hast thou been taken to grind before thy captors,
hast thou been sold as a slave to Philistia,
or, parched with thirst in a parched land,
didst thou stoop and fall down?
Jackals broke thy bones in pieces,
and ravens of the valley cawing
called other ravens to thy flesh:
When one flock flew away,
a second flock came after it:
Dogs clamoured, an ass brayed:
Mists before dawn in the valley
rise high as a palm tree,
leaning on rocky crags and cliffs:
The mountains of Naftali are turning blue:
The eclipsed moon is dead in the valley;
I wake, and my heart is unto him I have chosen:

SAUL'S LOVE SONG

VI

The Beloved: I sleep, the morning is light;
Hark! knocking at my window, I
I shook like a swallow or a crane ~~before the hunter,~~
like a frightened doe, I rose:
I asked not who knocked,
I inquired not:
Until that I arose to open,
my heart wanted to leave its frame,
leading me over to my beloved,
to my friend whom my soul loveth:

Saul: Open to me, my dove,
show me the vision of thee through the lattice:
For my legs drip with blood,
the palms of my hands are drops of wounds:
Six days have I been in the desert:
The arrows of Edom chased after me,
and the Philistines from the sea,
with wild beasts of the desert on every hand:
A thousand stones pierced me,
thorns and nettles cut my flesh,
the desert sand hurt my wounds:
She that conceived me, I have not yet seen:

The Beloved: Turn thou, my beloved, and flee,
for I am drunken with love;
turn thou to the mother who bore thee,
to her who conceived thee;
wipe the tear from her face,
for she doth not sleep at night,
she weepeth for thee all the day:
Until the day breath,
and the lanes of the mountains shall darken:

Odessa, 1922

וילך הרמתה. פגע שם
נביאים חבל יורדים מן הבמה.
לפניהם אחד נושא גדיים שלשה.
ואחד נושא שלשת ככרות לחם.
ואחד נושא נבל יין וכנור.
ויתנו לו שני גדיים. ושני לחם.
ונבל יין ואת הכנור.– לקח.

ותצלח רוח אלהים על נביא.
ויען איש מהם ויאמר: "שלום.
ברוך־אלהים מגברים. משיח־אל
הגדול על פני אחיו! משנה ברוך
בברכה של יסורים גדולים ואשרם
ובאשר גביר־לאחיו ומר־סבלו;
הנאפד תעלומות שליט גוזר
בדברו את החיים ואת המות.
וספוג שכרון גדול. שכרון־הוה,
וגלוי עינים לחזות צל אל־חי.
ונעלית עוד. ולבבך יטהר
עד כדי שיקלט מן האור הנאצל;
ואם לא התקדשת. נפשך תכאב
מפגע כנפי אין־הסוף. בחסן
בתוך נצחים שוסכים לתוך נצחים
לדעת סוד הדרור הנעמור מה הוא..."

ויבוא הרמתה ועד הבמה.
ושם נביא אל־חי.– והוא הגדול
מאחיו בני הנביאים – ישיש נהדר.
וישסע את הגדי – וחם צלהו.
ויברך על הלחם – ויאכלו.
ומן הבשר טעם – וישבעו.

וכשבעם פרס אחד על הנבל.
וישאו כלם קולם וישוררו.
ובשירם נח עליהם רוח פתאם –
ויחזק איש ביד רעהו. יד ימין
ביד של שמאל ושמאל ביד ימינו.
וישאו את רגליהם. כלם יצאו
במחול־חסידים לפני המזבח;
ויכרכרו בכל עז ובכל מאדם.
ויצא אתם גם המלך במחול.

ושלובי ידים שם כרכרו הנביאים.
הימינו. השמאילו. מזדקפים. מריעים.
יש נכחם עולים וחוזרים ונסוגים.
כצפרים על חומה. כנצורים נמוגים.
מרגע לרגע שמחתם גדלה.
ונם משתוקק לעלא ולעלא.

ויסר אז המלך בר־וזהבו
וישלך ציץ־תפארתו אשר עליו.
ויפל מרו ארצה. ובחצץ

שם זנק בצלצול ושוב התגלגל. צלצל.
ותפל גם החומה החוצצת
אשר בינו ובין כל בני עמו,
מחיצה אשר הקים אדם לאדם.
ויהי ככל ישראל. כאחד עמו.

ושלובי זרועותם הסתובבו הנביאים.
הימינו. השמאילו. קוראים־מריעים.
נפרדים לסיעות וחוזרים מתלכדים
לעגול רב־תנועה. מסוזים. מרקדים.
מרגע לרגע התלהבותם גדלה.
ולבם התנענע לעלא ולעלא.

ויסר כנור־שירו. כנור־ברותים.
וישלך את כלי־זמרו אל הסבכים.
ויפל כלי השיר נסבך בין פארות.
שם נתקו נימיו: נימת הנחתה.
ותפל גם החומה החוצצת
אשר בינו ובין האדם כלם.
מחיצה אשר הקים בורא־עולם.
ויהי ככל האדם על הארץ.

ושלובי ידים השתגשו הנביאים.
הימינו. השמאילו. מתעופפים. ממריאים
מחבקים איש אחיו. דבקו. דבקו.
ונטיה לנטיה נצמדו נשקו;
מרגע לרגע קרבתם גדלה.
ישותם היא תכלה לעלא ולעלא.

ויסר חרבו. חרב גאותו.
וישלך את כלי־זינו אל הצורים.
ויפל כלי החמס על האבן.
שם פגע בו הצור, ויצלצל בקולו.
ותפל גם החומה החוצצת
בינו ובין החי על פני הארץ.
מחיצת איבה בין החי ובין האדם.
ויהי ככל החי אשר בארץ.

ונמוגי נפותם הסתובבו הנביאים.
נשאים שמימה ואינם מגיעים.
נשאים בסער. משמאילים. מימינים.
בין נטיה לנטיה כבר אינם מבחינים;
מרגע לרגע משובתם גדלה.
ונפשם שואפת לעלא ולעלא.

ויסר את בגדיו בגדי מדיו
וישלך לבוש מלכותו על הארץ.
ויפל בד תפארתו על הדרך.
שם שכב מבהיק על רקמתו ולבנו.
ותפל גם המחצה החוצצת
בינו ובין הבריאה במלא עולם.
אשר הקימו לחות שמבראשית;
ויהי ככל הנברא במאמר שדי.

ולסוף חד רב־פנים התלכדו הנביאים.
מימינים. משמאילים ברקודים מפליאים.
מתלבטים בין עצים ואבני מזבח.
מתגוללים בדשאים ובעשבי־הריח;
מרגע לרגע דבקותם גדלה
ורוחם מתנשאה לעלא ולעלא.

ותצלח רוח אדני על משיחו;
ויהי גם הוא מתנבא בתוך המחנה.
ויהי לאחד עם היקום ומלאו.
דיק אחד קטן באין־סוף ההויה
לאהבה ולדבקה בכל הבריאה.
ויפל ערם כל היום ההוא
וכל הלילה... ערם... ערם... ערם...

סוינמינדה, 1925

The King

And he went to Rama. He met there
A band of propehts descending from the High Place.
Before them, one was carrying three kids.
And one was carrying three loaves of bread.
And one was carrying a skin of wine and a harp.
ANd they will give him two kids, and two breads,
And the skin of wine and the harp. - He took.

And the spirit of God rested upon a prophet,
And one of them answered and said "Shalom,
More blessed is God than mighty men, The Messiah of God
Most exalted of his brothers. Twice blessed
With the blessing of great sufferings and their happy reward,
And with the happy reward of the lord of his kin, the master of his suffering.
The one who is girded in mysteries of the ruler decrees
With his word, life and death,
And steeped with great passion, the passion of a visionary
His eyes uncovered to gaze at the shadow of the living God.
You have been even further exalted, and your heart shall be purified,
Until such time as it will absord from the sublime light;
But if you have not cleansed yourself, your soul will ache
From the touch of the wings of the Endless One, as they fleet
Through eternities pouring into eternities
To know what is the secret of complete/final freedom . . "

And they will come to Rama and up to the High Place.
And there, a prophet of the living God - And he is the greatest
Of his brothers, the prophets - a wondrous old man.
And he will cleave the kid - and they will roast it.
And he will bless the bread - and they will eat it,
And from the meat he tasted - and they will be sated.

And when they are sated, one will pluck the lyre.
And they all will raise their voices and sing.
And in their singing a spirit suddenly rests upon them -
ANd each man will grasp the hand of his neighbor, the right hand
In the left hand, and the left in the right hand
And they will lift their legs, all of them will break out
In a dance.

And with arms locked, the prophets whirled there,
they turned to right, they turned to the left, they backed and advanced
Then leaping ahead, now swaying, now cheering,
AS in seige of a wall, like the besieged retreating.
Their joy grows stronger from moment to moment
And their backs strain for the heights, for the height.

And so the king removed his crown of gold
And he cast off the flower of his beauty which was on him.
And his crown fell to the earth, in the gravel

There it bounced with a ring, and again it rolled and rang .
And the dividing wall also fell
Which was between him and all his people.
A barrier which man raises up to a man.
And he was like all Israel, like one of his people.

And their arms intertwined, the prophets spun,
To the right and to the left, they yelled and whirled,
THey are divided into groups and return united
Into a greatly moving circle, leaping, dancing
From moment to moment their enthusiasm grows
And their hearts yearn for the heights, for the height..

And he will put aside the harp of his song,hnis cypress-wood harp,
And he cast off the instruments of his song to the shrubs
And the instruments of song fell in the shrub between the branches.
There the strings were cut: each string and her lament
And the dividing wall also fell
Which was between him and all the people.
A mehitzah which the Creator of the world raised up.
And he was like all the people of the earth.

And with their hands locked, the prophets went mad,
To the right and to the left, they flew, the soared,
Each man embraced his brother, cleaved and clung.
Body to body, they were joined, they kissed.
From moment to moment their closeness grew

Their essence would end in the heights, in the height.

ANd he removed his sword, the sword of his pride,
ANd he cast off the instruments of weapons to the cliff,
And the instrument of violence fell on the rock,
The rock/cliff was struck, and it rang with its voice.
And the dividing wall also fell
Between him and all life on the face of the earth.
The mehitzah of fear which is between the living and man,
And he was like all life upon the earth.

And bodies joined, the prophets spun
Straining toward heaven, but not arriving.
Straining in a fury, from the left, from the right.
Already one can't distinguish between body and body.
And moment by moment their apostasy grew
And their souls yearned fopr the heights, for the height.

And he took off his clothes, the clothes of his status,
And he cast the clothes of his rule to the earth
And the cloak of his beauty fell on the road
There it lay glowing with its embroidery and its white,
And also fell the dividing mehitzah,
Between him and between the creation in the fullness of the world,
Which the powers from Creation raised up
And he was like all that was created by the word of the Almighty.

And with one body with many faces, the prophets were united
From the right, from the left, in astounding dances
They exerted themselves between the trees and the stones of the altar
Rolling themselves on lawns and scented grasses,
From moment to moment their cleaving grew
And their souls rose to the heights, to the height.

And the spirit of the Lord rested on his Annointed
And also he prophecied among the camp.
And he was as one with the universe and all that fills it,
One small spark in the Enless One of Being
Loving and cleaving to all creation.
And he fell naked all that day.
And all night, naked . . . naked . . . naked.

1925

על הרי גלבע

וימת שאול ושלשת בניו ונשא כליו
גם כל-אנשיו ביום ההוא יחדו
(שמואל א׳ ל״א, ו)

אחד אחד נפלו גבורים. בתקע
שופר אדירים על הרי גלבע.
– עיפת, המלך, סב אחרי הצנה.
עוד כחי במתני, עליך אגנה.
– רבים ממנו היום הערלים.
תקע: חזקו ואמצו, גבורים עמלים!

– בחצים ירבו ולא יקרבו הנה!
עיפת, המלך, עלי השענה!
– לא עת להנפש! אין מנוס. תתוקע!
עוד מורקים חניתות. עוד אויב ירע.
רבים ממנו היום הערלים.
תקע ויחלצו היושבים על הכלים!

– גם קרני החמה בי כלו חמתן.
הגד מה בפיך? – כי נפל יונתן.
– עוד שנים לי בנים פה במערכה.
תנה על ראש מביא שנים הברכה.
רבים ממנו היום הערלים.
תקע ויבואו השבטים הגדלים!

– אל הסוס ממקום בו נעמדה. אל נוע.
מה תגיד. המגיד? – גם מת מלכישוע!
– עוד לנו מלחמה. וקרבות עוד באים.
כי נפל האחד, שם יפלו עוד שנים.
רבים ממנו היום הערלים.
הבוז למשסים ומסגרים עצלים!

– על חרבך תפל, ואל תפל בידיו!
מה תגיד, המגיד? – כי מת אבינדב!
– הוא מת! ולו תעמד האבן הראשה.
נסיכים מנדבים גדבתם פי שלשה.
רבים ממנו היום הערלים.
הכבש ישראל. אם נשחט פנחלים!!

תקע תקיעה גדולה תקוע ותקוע
וישמעו העברים: דם! דם על גלבע!
תקע נגבה. צפונה. קדמה ימה –
תרגז הארץ ותרעד אדמה.
רבים ממנו היום הערלים:
עלו! תפסו מקומם של נופלים וכושלים!

שיכטנגרונד, 1929

Saul Tchernichowsky (working translation: David Edleson)

ON THE MOUNTAINS OF GILBOA

And Saul and his three sons and his arms-bearer and all his people died together that day. [I Samuel 31:16]

One by one, the might fell with the blast
Of the Shofar, the mighty upon the mountains of Gilboa.
You have tired, my king, leave the shield.
My strength is still in my loins, I will defend you.
The uncircumcise outnumber us today.
Blow: Be strong and have courage, you toiling heros.

They will shoot with arrows, but they will not near here!
You have tired, my king, lean on me!
It is not time to rest! There is no spare time, O you who blows the shofar.
They are still polishing their spears, the enemy is still in tumult.
The uncircumcised outnumber us today.
Blow, and those who sit upon the weapons will be called to arms.

The heat of my anger is spent.
Say what is in your mouth? - That Jonathan has fallen.
-I still have two sons here in the battlefield,
May a blessing fall upon the head of one who brings two as a sacrifice.
The uncircumcised outnumber us today.
Blow, and the withdrawing troops will return!

Do no leave this place on which we are standing. Don't move.
What will you say, Messenger? Is Malkhishu'a also dead ?!
-We still have a war, and battles are still coming.
As the one fell, there will fall two more.
The uncircumsiced outnumber us today.
Shame upon the saboteurs and lazy ones in the rear!

Fall upon your sword, don't fall into their hands.
What will you say, Messenger? That Abinadv has died!
-He Died! It is enough that the crownstone should stand.
Noblemen are prepared to pay their three-fold sacrifice.
The uncircumcised outnumber us today.
Shall the flock of Israel be slaughtered like ewes?

Sound the great blast, blow and blow
And the Hebreww shall hear: Blood! Blood on Gilboa!
Blow south, north, east, and west
May the earth shake and the ground tremble
The uncircumcised outnumber us today.
Go up! Take the place of the fallen and failed.

אַנְשֵׁי־חַיִל חָבָל·

וַיָּקוּמוּ כָּל־אִישׁ חַיִל וַיֵּלְכוּ כָל־הַלַּיְלָה
וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת־גְּוִיַּת שָׁאוּל וְאֵת גְּוִיֹּת בָּנָיו
מֵחוֹמַת בֵּית שָׁן, וַיָּבֹאוּ יָבֵשָׁה וַיִּשְׂרְפוּ אֹתָם
שָׁם: וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת־עַצְמֹתֵיהֶם וַיִּקְבְּרוּ תַחַת־
הָאֶשֶׁל בְּיָבֵשָׁה
(שמואל א' ל"א, יב–יג)

וַיִּקְבְּרוּ אֶת־עַצְמוֹתֵיהֶם תַּחַת הָאֵלָה בְּיָבֵשׁ
(דברי־הימים א' י', יב).

צַעַד בְּצַד צַעַד, גֶּבֶר בְּצַד אִישׁ:
אַנְשֵׁי־חַיִל חָבָל מֵעַבְדֵי בֶּן־קִישׁ –
הֵם נוֹשְׂאִים בִּשְׁנַיִם־שְׁנַיִם וּבְמוֹט
בְּאֶרֶג מִצְרַיִם אֶת שָׁלֹשׁ הַגּוּפוֹת.
שָׁלֹשׁ גּוּפוֹת בְּמֶשֶׁךְ, כָּל גּוּפָה בְּאוֹתָהּ.
וּרְבִיעִית נִדְגֶּלֶת – הִיא אַחֲרוֹנָה.
הַגּוּפָה בּוֹלֶטֶת דֶּרֶךְ הַסָּדִין, –
אֵבָר וְאֵבָר הָדָר לֹחַ – אִישׁ עָדִין.
יֵשׁ נִדְמֶה, וּכְאִלּוּ הוּא גָּדוֹל וָרָם
מִהְיוֹתוֹ נִלְחָם – בַּמִּצְפָּה – בָּעָם.
עָז. עַלִּיז־עֵינַיִם וְיָמָיו טוֹבִים.
טֶרֶם מְשָׁחוּהוּ שֶׁמֶן נְבִיאִים.
טֶרֶם הִלְבִּישׁוּהוּ אַרְגָּמָן וָבוּץ.
עַד לֹא יָצָא שֵׁם לוֹ לְמִדָּן וְעַד עוּץ.

הֵם נוֹסִים הַשָּׁכֵם בְּכֹבֶד הַגְּוִיָּה.
הֵם נוֹסִים אֶל עֵבֶר יְשִׁימוֹן־צִיָּה,
בְּמִשְׁעוֹלֵי הַלַּיִשׁ, בְּעִקְּבוֹת זְאֵבִים.
גָּבָא לָמוֹ דֶּרֶךְ – צְמֵאִים רְעֵבִים –
נִכְחָם בַּשָּׁרָשׁ וּבְשָׁדַי־חִטִּים
הָרָה: כִּי בְּעֵמֶק מַשּׂוּאוֹת פְּלִשְׁתִּים –
לְגִלְעָד יָבֵשָׁה... הִנֵּה הַגִּלְעָד!
כָּל הַלַּיְלָה אָמֵשׁ יִרְתְּקֵם כַּשֵּׁד.
לֹא כָשְׁלָה הָרֶגֶל, יָד לֹא מָעֲלָה. –
בַּמֶּרְחָק – שָׁם אֵשֶׁל... אֵשֶׁל אוֹ אֵלָה?

צַעַד בְּצַד צַעַד, גֶּבֶר בְּצַד אִישׁ.
אַנְשֵׁי־חַיִל חָבָל מֵעַבְדֵי בֶּן־קִישׁ.
עֵמֶק... נַחַל מַיִם... רֶכֶס הָר... צֶלַע.
הִנֵּה, שָׁם מִנֶּגֶד, מַר הָאֵלָה.
שָׁמָּה יִקְבְּרוּהוּ – גְּבוֹרָם־מַלְכָּם!
לֹא יַכִּירוּ נֶפֶשׁ, אֶבֶן לֹא תוּקַם.
אֵשֶׁל יֵשׁ סוֹרַת לוֹ, יֵשׁ סוֹמֵר אֵלָה, –
וְיִמְחַק לָנֶצַח זֵכֶר לְהַלָּה.
אִישׁ לֹא יֵדָעוּ, לֹא יִמָּצֵא קִבְרוֹ,
לֹא יְחַלְּלֻהוּ פְּלִשְׁתִּי בְּעָבְרוֹ.
זָר לֹא יַכִּירָהוּ, אַף לֹא בֶּן־עַמִּי.
וַאֲפִלּוּ עֶבֶד זֶה בֵּית־הַלַּחְמִי.

יֵשׁ מִי יִזְכְּרֵהוּ וִיסַפֵּר לַדּוֹר
זֶמֶר־הַגִּלְבֹּעַ, קֶשֶׁף בְּעֵין־דּוֹר
לַיָּחִיד הַמֶּלֶךְ מִתְנַבֵּא־בָעָם.

בְּרִית סוֹרַת עִם חֶרֶב וּמְשַׁלֵּם בַּדָּם;
הָאֶחָד בְּתִפְאֶרֶת לֵב נָדִיב, עָנָיו,
שֶׁמִּהֵר לִשְׁלֹחַ לִבּוֹ וְלֵב־בָּנָיו.
וְהִגִּיד הַלַּיִשׁ בִּפְתוֹן סָרְצָה: –
וַיִּפֹּל כַּלַּיִשׁ: הוּא וְכָל־אֲנָשָׁיו...

תל־אביב, 11.3.1936

Saul Tchernichowsky (Working trans: David Edleson)

A BAND OF STALWART MEN

Step by step, man by man
A band of stalwart men from the servants of Kish's son -
They carry two by two on a pole
In Egyptian cloth, the three bodies.

Three bodies in tow, each corpse in its shroud
And the fourth is adorned - it is the last.
THe corpse is distinguishable by its garment-
Each limb adorned with strength - a noble man.
It almost seems as if he were greater and more powerful now
Than he was in battle - on guard - among the people,
Strength, joyful eyes, and his days were good.
Before he was annointed by the prophet's oil,
Before they clothed him in violet and fine linen.
And his name had become known from Dan to Uts.
They bend their shoulder in honor of the corpse.
They veer to the edge of the arid wilderness.
On lion's paths, in the wake of wolves
Cisterns was pathmarks, - thirsty, hungry -
In from of them rocks and wheat fields
Up until the mountain. But in the valley were the signal fires of the Philistines -
To dry Gilead... here is Gilead!
All through last night, they were joined as in shackles,
No leg faltered, no hand acted treacherously.
And in the distance a tamarisk...a tamarisk or an oak?

Step by step, man by man
A band of stalwart men from the servants of Kish's son
A valley...a river...a mountain ridge or a cliff.
Behold, there across, the crown of a terebinth.
There they will bury him - their heroes, their king!
They will be no marker, no stone will be erected.
A terebinth, there is alway someone to chop it, someone to saw the mighty oak.
And so his memory will be erased for ever.
No one will know where, he will not find that grave

The Philistine will not desecrate it when he passes over.
No foreigner will recognize it, not even one of my people,
Even that servant from Bethlehem.

But there is someone who will remember him and tell it to the generations.
The song of Gilboa, witchcraft at En-dor,
The only king to prophecy among the people,
A covenant that was cut with a sword and payed in blood.
The one, who in the beauty of a noble, modest heart,
Defeated with a spear his own heart and the heart of his sons.
Can the lion abandon his rocky lair? -
And he fell like a lion: he and al his men.

Tel Aviv 1936

Appendix B

SAUL POEMS OF ISRAELI POETS

Alterman, Bat Miriam, Penn
Gilboa, Amichai, Zach, Wieseltier

[Hebrew Texts and
Translations]

הִנֵּה תַּמּוּ יוֹם קְרָב וְעַרְבּוֹ

הִנֵּה תַּמּוּ יוֹם קְרָב וְעַרְבּוֹ
הֲכָלֹא זַעֲקַת כְּשָׂפָה,
עֵת הַמְּלָךְ נָפַל עַל חַרְבּוֹ
וְגִלְבַּע לָבַשׁ תְּכוּסָה.
וְנֶאֱרַץ, עַד שַׁחַר קָם.
לֹא נָדְמוּ פַּרְסוֹת הָרָץ,
וְנִהֲרֵי רַמְכוֹ בַּדָּם
מְבַשְּׂרִים כִּי הַקְּרָב נֶחֱרַץ.
הִנֵּה תַּמּוּ יוֹם קְרָב וְעַרְבּוֹ,
וְהַמְּלָךְ נָפַל עַל חַרְבּוֹ.

בְּהַבְרִיק עַל הָרִים אוֹר יוֹם
בָּא הָרָץ אֶל מִסְתַּן אִמּוֹ
וּבְנָפְלוֹ לְרַגְלֶיהָ דָּם
אֶת רַגְלֶיהָ כִּסְּתָה דָּמוֹ.
אֶת רַגְלֶיהָ כִּסְּתָה שָׁנִי
וַיְהִי הָעָפָר שָׁדֶה־קָרָב.
וּכְדַבְּרָהּ אֲלֵיהוּ: קוּמָה. בְּנִי –
מִנִּי דָמַע חָשְׁכוּ עֵינֶיהָ.
וַיְסַפֵּר לָהּ יוֹם קְרָב וְעַרְבּוֹ. –
אֵיךְ הַמְּלָךְ נָפַל עַל חַרְבּוֹ.

אָז אָמְרָה לוֹ לַנַּעַר: דָּם
אֶת רַגְלַי אִמְּהוֹת יְכַס.
אֲבָל שֶׁבַע יָקוּם הָעָם,
אִם עֲלֵי אַדְמָתוֹ יִזַּכֵּס.

אֶת הַכְּלָךְ סָהֵד הַדֶּרֶךְ.
אַךְ יוֹרֵשׁ לוֹ יָקוּם עַד עַת.
כִּי עֲלֵי אַדְמָתוֹ הִשְׁפִּין
אֶת חַרְבּוֹ שָׁעְלֶיהָ מַת.
כֹּה דִּבְּרָה וְקוֹלָהּ הִרְעִיד.
וַיְהִי כֵן. וַיִּשְׁמַע דָּוִד.

NATAN ALTERMAN (working trans: David Edleson)

BEHOLD THE DAY OF BATTLE HAS FINISHED, AND IT'S NIGHT.

Behold the day of battle has finished, and its night
Full of the cries of flight.
When the king fell on his sword
And Gilboa was robed in defeat.
And in the Land, till the rise of dawn,
The messenger's hooves never fell silent,
And his swift steed's nostrils in blood
Bring the news that the battle is decided.
Behold the day of battle has finished, and its night.
And the king fell on his sword.

When the light of day flashed upon the hills,
The messenger came to his mother's doorstep
And falling silent at her feet
His blood covered her feet.
And the dust became like battlefield.
And she spoke to him: Rise, my son -
His eyes darkened with tears.
And he told her of the day of battle and its night
How the king fell on his sword.

So she said to him the youth: Blood
may cover the feet of mothers.
But the people will arise seven times
If upon its own Land it is routed.
Judgement dealt with the king,
But his successor will arise forever,
For on his own Land he leaned
Upon the sword upon which he died.
Thus she spoke and her voice trembled.
And so it was. For David listened.

Page Missing

שָׁאוּל

אֲתוֹנוֹת, אֲתוֹנוֹת לְלֹא דֶּרֶךְ.
כְּמֵיתַר הַזָּהָב הַתּוֹעָה.
מִתְבַּדֵּר כְּבוֹדוֹ שֶׁל הַמֶּלֶךְ
כְּמוֹחָה עֲנוֹת־קוֹל רְחוֹקָה.

מְלַטֶּפֶת מְבוּכָה אֶת הַשְּׁכֶם –
״הִתְמַשֵּׁךְ, הִתְמַשֵּׁךְ נָא בָּעֵם!
לֹא יָבוֹא הוּא, הַגַּיְן וְהַנֶּכֶד –
לְחַלֵּק וְהָרֵף הַגְּבָלִם״.

וְרַק הִיא מִשְׁכְּבֵי הַלַּחַשׁ,
אֵשֶׁת אוֹב, מְהַלֵּיל מְמִיחָה.
שִׁפְעַת סוּס וְדִמְדוּמֵי הַשַּׁחַר
כְּיַד נָבִיא מְצַלֶּקֶת וּמוֹשְׁחָה.

קוֹדֵר, קַנַּאי וּבוֹטֵחַ,
הַמֵּתָה, תְּפִיסָתוֹ לְכַפֵּר!
שָׁאוּל מַלְכֵּי הַפּוֹשֵׁעַ
בֵּין יַעַד וְגוֹרָל מִתְעַשֵּׁר.

שָׁר, הוֹמָה מִתְכַּנֵּף בְּרוּחַ,
שָׁר, הוֹמָה מִתְחַנֵּן בְּחִיל:
צַר לִי צַר, בְּיוֹמַי הַקּוֹבֵעַ
כְּלוֹת נַפְשִׁי לֹא יָדַע לְהָכִיל.

הִנֵּה הִיא רוֹסֶסֶת מֵעֵבֶר,
הִנֵּה הִיא בְּזִיו סֶרֶם בָּא.
לְשִׁיר לֹא מַשְׁלִימָה וּמְאוֹהֶבֶת,
לְשִׁיר מְבָרֶכֶת וּמְצַוָּה.

לְשִׁיר כִּמְנוּיָה מִתְגַּבֶּרֶת
וְאוֹתָהּ בְּקֶצֶב הַשִּׁיר,
נִשָּׂאת הִיא, נִשָּׂאת רַק הַדֶּרֶךְ
אֵלָיו, אֶל מוֹתֵי הַמַּכְתִּיר.

שָׂא אֶת נַפְשִׁי הַמְּחַלְחֶלֶת,
שָׂא כִּי לֹא תֵּדַע לָמוּת,
הִנֵּה הִיא מוּנָה בִּגְדוֹת תְּכֵלֶת,
עֲטוּדָה וְהָרִים וְעֶנוּת! — — —

Yoheved Bat Miriam (working trans. David Edleson)

SAUL

Asses, asses with no path,
Like the sadness of a golden thread.
The clothes of the king are scattering
As if erasing distant calling voices.

Confusion carresses the shoulder -
"Stretch, stretch now among the people!
He will not come, the great grandson nor the grandson
To share your shameful glory."

And she alone from the whispering grasses
The witch, from the night conjures up
The stamping of a horse and the quiet of dawn
The likeness of a hand of a prophet, scarred and annointing.

Gloomy, zealous and sure,
Is it you, that will pacify him to atone?
Saul my King who is marching
Between mission and adorning fate.

A poet, noisily huddling in the wind,
A poet, noisily asking for mercy in pangs of anguish:
It is hard for me, hard, that on my appointed day
The yearnings of my soul, he (the day) will not know how to contain.

Behold her (soul's longings), sprinkling from beyond,
Behold her, in brilliance before he came.
Never to be fulfilled or loved.
Forever blessed and afflicted.

Forever like a growing tune
And with her the rythm of the song.
She is carried, carried only on the path
To him, to my crowning death.

Lift my trembling soul,
Lift it for she knows not how to die.

Behold her, poured into a sky blue vessel
Decorated with light and suffering.

שאול

גפן שירקם

היו בנות־הכפר בקריצה מוצצות:
"גבה מאלון רב־הדר..."
יבוא הבחור לחפש אתונות
ומצא מלוכה וכתר.

נבוך בנו של קיש: "מרדות בשלש
לו תנו ליפתי — ושכניה.
אך מלך להיות ועל עם לחלש —
לא לי!..." ובכסים הגיע.

בקש השמים על נפשו: "שמע אל, —
משהו שרצון וחכמה לו!..."
אבל מה הרך גדלו שמואל,
כי היה משכמו ומעלה...

והנה טוב־הלב ובן־חיל הרין —
בני הריש מאחיו — על פלשתים הוא.
ועליו שתי עיניו של שמואל הצריח,
ששמו וקמו והשסימו...

ותכבד על שאול יד רוחו הנועה
ויאמלל מכל סי בממלכת.
ודוד היפהפה את נפשו הקמוטה
שם לשחוק מתספק מלבד...

רק בשלם אישה־בן־קיש צף חסוד בו, כמו
שנכור מנעוריו — סבראור־צדק.
ועל־אף — הוא היה ונשאר משכמו
גם בסלק בני־בליעל בו סרק...

ובראות הלבנה, כי נפל על חרבו —
שאת גדלו המדבר מאנה היא...
והספד — לא "האבי ישראל" בשר בו,
במספיד עם בני־עינים...

כי אחד הספד מני לב — זה היה
הספדה של רצפה בת־איה:
לבלי קול ודמעה — סבבה, מה אוית! —
עם בניהם, שרוצתם — דוד...

1953

Alexander Penn (Working Trans. David Edleson)

SAUL

in the style of folk song

The women of the village would announce with a wink:
"Taller than an oak, great in beauty..."
The youth went out to search for she-asses
And found kingship and the crown.

The son of Kish was perplexed: "The three pack mules
Please give to my right hand - and I will control them.
But to be king and to command the people
Not me!" ...And he shrugged his shoulders.

The naive one pleaded for his life: "Listen to God, -
Annoint one who has desire and wisdom!..."
But had Samuel decided his fate
For he was from the shoulders up . . . "

And the good-hearted one was afflicted and he pressed the soldiers -
Farmers from among his brothers - to the Philistines.
And upon him were the two eyes of Samuel the despot
that tormented, sought revenge, and hated . . .

And the hand of his troubled spirit was heavy upon Saul
And he was more pitiful that any creature in the kingdom.
And David, the beautiful, of [Saul's] fractured soul
made a mockery for [trying] to evade the trap.

Only when this man, Son of Kish, was calm did his mercy rise within him, as he remembered from his youth - the honest light of righteousness.
And in spite of it - he was and remained from his shoulders up...
Even when the wicked cleft him.

And when the moon saw that he fell on his sword -
She refused to bear the sight of his conquered greatness
And he was eulogized - it was not the "Glory of Israel"[Saul] that choose him-
That eulogist with treacherous eyes...

For only one eulogy was from the heart - it was

The lament of Ritzpah Bat Aya:
Without sound or tears - love, how you longed! -
With their children, that David murdered ..

שָׁאוּל

שָׁאוּל! שָׁאוּל!
אֵינֶנִּי יוֹדֵעַ אִם בּוּשָׁה זֹאת הָיְתָה
אִם פַּחַד מִפְּנֵי רֹאשׁ נְטוּל־גּוּף –
אוֹ בְּעֵבֶר שֶׁל פְּנֵי חוֹמַת בֵּית־שְׁאָן
הַטּוֹתִי אֶת רֹאשִׁי.

אָז. בִּמְקוֹם נַעַרְךָ לְהַגִּישׁ לְךָ הַחֶרֶב לְפִי שֶׁצִּוִּיתָ
שָׁמַרְתִּי אֵלָם. נְטוּל הַדִּבּוּר
נָדַם גַּם מִלֵּב.
אֲנִי בֶּאֱמֶת אֵינֶנִּי יוֹדֵעַ לֵאמֹר מָה אֲנִי בִּמְקוֹמוֹ
אִם נַעַרְךָ הָיִיתִי.

וְהוּא הַמֶּלֶךְ.
וְהוּא כְּבוֹד הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּמִצְוָתְךָ.

וַאֲנִי בֶּאֱמֶת אֵינֶנִּי יוֹדֵעַ לֵאמֹר מָה אֲנִי בִּמְקוֹמוֹ.

שָׁאוּל שָׁאוּל בּוֹא!
בְּבֵית־שְׁאָן בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל יוֹשְׁבִים.

Amir Gilboa (trans: W. Bargad, unpublished*)

SAUL, SAUL

Saul! Saul!
I don't know whether it was shame
of fear of a cut-off head --
But as I passed by the wall of Beit She'an
I turned my head away.

Then, when your boy refused to hand you the sword as you had commanded
I stood mute, cut-off from speech
and my blood flowed from [my] heart.
I really don't know to say what I in his place
had I been your boy.

And you are the king.
And you are His Majesty the King with your command.

And I really don't know to say what I in his place.

Saul Saul come!
At Beit She'an, the Children of Israel live.

*Warren Bargad, "Poems of Saul: A Semiotic Approach," paper presented to the World Congress of Jewish Studies, Jerusalem, 1988. (Photocopy.), p. 4.

יד

תיאור מדוייק של המוסיקה ששמע שאול בתנ״ך

שָׁאוּל שׁוֹמֵעַ מוּסִיקָה.
שָׁאוּל שׁוֹמֵעַ.
אֵיזוֹ מוּסִיקָה שׁוֹמֵעַ שָׁאוּל?
שָׁאוּל שׁוֹמֵעַ מוּסִיקָה
אֲשֶׁר נוֹתֶנֶת לוֹ רְפָאוּת.
שָׁאוּל שׁוֹמֵעַ מוּסִיקָה.
מוּסִיקָה שׁוֹמֵעַ שָׁאוּל.
וְהָאֲנָשִׁים סְבִיבוֹ אִתָּם, כְּאִלּוּ
נִפְלְאוּ, נִפְלְאוּ כָּל-הָעָם;
כִּי שָׁאוּל שׁוֹמֵעַ מוּסִיקָה.
הַאִם זֹאת הִיא הַמּוּסִיקָה
שֶׁשָּׁאוּל צָרִיךְ הָיָה לִשְׁמֹעַ
לְעֵת כָּזֹאת?
כֵּן, זֹאת הִיא הַמּוּסִיקָה שֶׁשָּׁאוּל
צָרִיךְ הָיָה לִשְׁמֹעַ לְעֵת כָּזֹאת
כִּי אֵין אַחֶרֶת עַכְשָׁו
וְאוּלַי לֹא תִּהְיֶה
עַד הַגִּלְבֹּעַ

Natan Zach (trans. W. Bargad, unpublished*)

A PRECISE DESCRIPTION OF THE MUSIC THAT SAUL HEARD IN THE BIBLE

Saul hears music.
Saul hears.
What sort of music does Saul hear?
Saul hears music that gives him a cure.
Saul hears music.
Music Saul hears.
And the people around him are not there, as if
they've disappeared, the entire nation's become mute.
For Saul hears music.
Is this the music
that Saul should be hearing
at a time like this?
Yes, this is the music that Saul
should be hearing at a time like this
for there is no other now
and perhaps there will be none
until Gilboa.

*Bargad, "Poems of Saul," p.22.

שָׁאוּל מְמֻלָּךְ בַּשְּׁנִיָּה

בִּיטוֹת תַּלְתַּלֶּיךָ נֵגֵר הַשֶּׁמֶן הֶחָדָשׁ.
הַאִם אַתָּה הָשׁ
בְּהֶבְדֵּל הֶחָבוּר, שָׁאוּל!
מַה שֶּׁמֶן מִשֶּׁמֶן. אֲרֶשֶׁת הַפָּנִים שֶׁל הָעוֹמְדִים סָבִיב
כְּבָר אַתָּה אָבִיב כָּל כָּךְ. הַזְּמַן שֶׁעָבַר
בֵּין הַמְלָכָה לְהַמְלָכָה
כְּמוֹ הַפְסָקַת הָאוֹר שֶׁזָּרְהָ רָוַח בְּגִיתָה
הִמְלִיחַ אֶת הַלְּבָבוֹת.
תִּבֵּל אֶת הַלִּגְלוּג.
הִדְלִיחַ אֶת הַתֹּם.
הַ'מַה פִּתְאֹם' הֵחֵל לְהֵאָמֵר
(תְּחִלָּה בַּחֲשָׁאִין)
הָ'אִישׁ לְאֹהָלֶיךָ' צָף.
הַהַמְתָּנָה מִלְאָה
אֶת הַטּוֹחַן.
פְּרִיחַת הַלְּבָבוֹת קְצָרָה
מִטְבַּע הַדְּבָרִים. דְּבָרִים
חֲדָשִׁים צָבָל לֹא מְקֻיָּם
מִתְרוֹצְצִים כְּבָר בְּדָמְךָ. חֶרֶב
חֲדָשָׁה, שֶׁעֲתִידָה לְמַלֵּא תַּפְקִיד.
מֻגֶּשֶׁת לְךָ. מַתָּת
מִן הַחֲיָלוֹת הַמַּבִּיעִים לְךָ בְּזֶה אֶת אֵמוּנָם
הַמְחֻדָּשׁ. לְרֶגֶל מַעֲמָד חֲגִיגִי זֶה, שָׁאוּל.

Meir Weiseltier (trans: W. Bargad in Israeli Poetry[§])

Saul Re-enthroned

Fresh oil pours through your curls,
do you feel the subtle difference, Saul?
What's one oil from another, the look on the spectators' faces
is not much like spring anymore, the time that's elapsed
between enthronements
like a blackout forcing a pause in the music
has salted hearts,
has seasoned derision,
has sullied innocence.
The "Who needs it!" is already being said
(in whispers at first)
The "Each man to his tent!" bubbles up,
waiting wearies
the mind,
hearts flower but fleetingly
such is the nature of things, things
novel yet unhoped for
already course through your veins, you're given
a new sword, soon to play a role,
a gift
from the military which betokens its
confidence anew on this solemn occasion, Saul.

[§]Warren Bargad and Stanley F. Chyet, Israeli Poetry: A contemporary Anthology (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), p.

הַמֶּלֶךְ שָׁאוּל וַאֲנִי

[א]

נָתְנוּ לוֹ אֶצְבַּע וְלָקַח אֶת כָּל הַיָּד.
נָתְנוּ לִי יָד וְלֹא לָקַחְתִּי אֲפִלּוּ זֶרֶת.

בְּעֵת לִבִּי הִתְאַמֵּן בַּהֲרָמַת רְגָשׁוֹת רִאשׁוֹנִים,
הִתְאַמֵּן הוּא בִּקְרִיעַת שְׁוָרִים.

דְּפִיקוֹת דָּפְקִי הָיוּ כְּטִפּוֹת מִבֶּרֶז.
דְּפִיקוֹת דָּפְקוֹ כְּהַלְמוּת פַּטִּישִׁים בְּבִנְיָן חָדָשׁ.

הוּא הָיָה אָחִי הַגָּדוֹל

[ב]

רֹאשׁוֹ כְּמַצְפֵּן תָּמִיד יוֹבִיל
לַצָּפוֹן הַמֻּחְלָט שֶׁל יַעֲדוֹ.

לִבּוֹ כְּשָׁעוֹן מְעוֹרֵר
מְכֻוָּן לִשְׁעַת הַמְּלוּכָה.
כְּשֶׁכֻּלָּם יִישְׁנוּ, הוּא יִצְעַק
עַד שֶׁכָּל הַמַּחְצָבוֹת תִּהְיֶינָה צְרוּדוֹת.
אַף אֶחָד לֹא יַפְסִיק אוֹתוֹ!
רַק הָאֲתוֹנוֹת תּוֹקְעוֹת שִׁנַּיִם צְהֻבּוֹת
בִּקְצֵה דַּרְכּוֹ.

[ג]

קוֹסְמִים מֵתִים כּוֹכְבוּ גַּלְגַּלֵּי זְמַן.
בְּעֵת יָצָא לְחַפֵּשׂ אֲתוֹנוֹת,
כָּאֲנִי, עַכְשָׁו, מְצָאתִי.
וְלֹא אֵדַע לְטַפֵּל בָּהֶן.
הֵן בּוֹעֲטוֹת בִּי.

הוּרַמְתִּי עִם הַמּוֹץ,
נָפַלְתִּי עִם גַּרְעִינִים כְּבֵדִים.

אַךְ הוּא נָשַׁב בְּרוּחַ תּוֹלְדוֹתָיו.
הוּא נִמְשַׁח בְּשֶׁמֶן מְלוּכָה
כִּבְשֶׁמֶן מִתְאַבְּקִים.

הוּא נֶאֱבַק עִם דְּקָלִים,
הִכְרִיעַ אוֹתָם לִכְרֹעַ.

שָׁרָשִׁים נִגְלוּ עַל מֵצַח הָאֲדָמָה
מֵרֹב מַאֲמָץ.
הַסּוּסִים בָּרְחוּ מִן הַזִּירָה.
רַק אֱלֹהִים נִשְׁאַר וְסָפַר:
שֶׁבַע... שְׁמוֹנֶה... תֵּשַׁע... עֶשֶׂר...
הָעָם, מִשִּׁכְמוֹ וָמַעְלָה, צָהַל.
אִישׁ לֹא קָם. הוּא נִצַּח.

[ד]

אֲנִי עָיֵף.
מִטָּתִי הִיא מַלְכוּתִי.

שְׁנָתִי הִיא צִדְקָתִי.
חֲלוֹמִי, פְּסַק הַדִּין.

תָּלִיתִי אֶת בְּגָדַי עַל כִּסֵּא
בִּשְׁבִיל מָחָר.

הוּא תָּלָה אֶת מְלוּכָתוֹ
בְּמִסְגֶּרֶת וְשֵׁם זָהָב
בְּקִיר הַשָּׁמַיִם.

זְרוֹעוֹתַי קְצָרוֹת, כְּחוּט קָצָר מִדַּי
לִקְשֹׁר חֲבִילָה.

זְרוֹעוֹתָיו שַׁרְשְׁרוֹת בַּנָּמֵל
לְמַשָּׂא מֵעֵבֶר לַזְּמַן.

הוּא מֶלֶךְ מֵת.
אֲנִי אָדָם עָיֵף.

Yehuda Amichai (trans: unknown published source.)

KING SAUL AND I

1

They gave him a finger, but he took the whole hand.
They gave me the whole hand; I didn't even take the little finger.
While my heart
Was weight-lifting its first feelings
He rehearsed the tearing of oxen.

My pulsebeats were like
Drips from a tap,
His pulsebeats
Pounded like hammers on a new building.

He was my big brother,
I got his used clothes.

2

His head, like a compass, will always bring him
To the sure north of his future.

His heart is set, like an alarm clock,
For the hour of his reign.
When everyone's asleep, he will cry out
Until all the quarries are hoarse.
Nobody will stop him!

Only the asses bare their yellow teeth
At the end.

3

Dead ~~prophets~~ judges turned time wheels
When he went out searching for asses
Which I, now, have found.
But I don't know how to handle them.
They kick me.
I was ~~raised~~ lifted with the ~~straw~~ chaff,
I fell with heavy seeds.

But he breathed the winds of his histories.
He was anointed with the royal oil
As with wrestlers' grease.
He battled with olive trees,
Forcing them to kneel.

Roots bulged on the earth's forehead
With the strain.
The ~~prophets~~ fingers escaped from the arena;
Only God remained, counting:
Seven . . . eight . . . nine . . . ten . . .
The people, from his shoulders downward, rejoiced.
Not a man stood up.
He had won.

4

I am tired,
My bed is my kingdom.

My sleep is just,
My dream is my verdict.

I hung my clothes on a chair
For tomorrow.

He hung his kingdom
In a frame of golden wrath
On the sky's wall.

My arms are short, like string too short
To tie a parcel.

His arms are like the chains in a harbor
For cargo to be carried across time.

He is a dead king.
I am a tired man.