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HISTORY AND LITERATURE: NEW READINGS OF  
JEWISH TEXTS IN HONOR OF ARNOLD J. BAND

edited by  
William Cutter and David C. Jacobson

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social-cultural rabbinic order that bound him. By rejecting the normative claims the *hakham* could place upon him, Weinberg confirmed his own social location as part of the Orthodox world and his own status as an Orthodox *poseq*.

In looking at the Weinberg responsum from this perspective, it seems that Weinberg could no more completely avoid compartmentalization than a young Arnold Band could when he was growing up in the parallel worlds of Dorchester and Brookline on the one hand and Boston and Cambridge on the other. Band has permitted us to see that an Orthodox authority like Rabbi Weinberg was no more immune from wrestling with the struggle presented by diverse cultural settings than any other modern Jew.

The challenge of constructing an authentic Jewish identity within the modern situation does not arise only *in extremis*. The testimony offered by Band concerning his own boyhood as well as his reflections on the rise of Jewish studies within the American university indicate that the struggle involved in the creation of an integrated human personality often occurs within the confines of an orderly social life. For Band, as for Weinberg, meaning was sought and identity constructed in the face of multiple and at times discordant cultural worlds. In this instance, as in so many others, Band has provided a framework that allows a text to be explored in novel ways. In so doing, he alerts those whose lives he has informed to the diverse ways that human beings go about the task of constructing individual and social meanings. The tensions among the circles that constitute and inform a life can frequently find no clear resolution. Parallel worlds are at times confluent and fluid. At the same time, they are often discordant and no real equilibrium can be achieved between them.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>46</sup> This perspective illuminates some of the dynamics at play in this part of the Weinberg responsum. For this understanding, as for so much else, I thank Arnold Band. His scholarship and his person enrich my world immeasurably. It is an honor to pay tribute to him in this way.

### A THIRD GUIDE FOR THE PERPLEXED? SIMON RAWIDOWICZ "ON INTERPRETATION"<sup>1</sup>

David N. Myers

In a recent lecture, Arnold Band trained his critical gaze on the work of one of the twentieth century's great and neglected Jewish thinkers, Simon Rawidowicz (1897–1957). Band and Rawidowicz crossed paths in Boston at opposite ends of their respective careers, in the mid-1950s, when Band was finishing graduate school at Harvard before coming to UCLA and Rawidowicz was in his last years at Brandeis.

Some forty years later, Band reacquainted himself with Rawidowicz. The occasion was the thirty-fifth Simon Rawidowicz Memorial Lecture at Brandeis.<sup>2</sup> Band commenced his talk by noting, with a familiar blend of delight and mild indignation, that no previous lecturer had seen fit to discuss Rawidowicz. Anxious to rectify this neglect, he proceeded to identify Rawidowicz's prescience as a critic of the Zionist rendering of Jewish history. One also senses that he identified *with* Rawidowicz's criticism of Zionism, particularly its negation of the vitality and necessity of Diaspora Jewish culture. Indeed, both Band and Rawidowicz occupy the peculiar status of Diaspora Hebraists for whom culture, more than nation, state, or religion, has served as the most durable and enduring pillar of Jewish group identity. More will be said about these affinities at the conclusion.

For the moment, I would like to return to Band's reencounter with Rawidowicz, because it reveals a number of characteristic intellectual features. First, Band is a tireless excavator, intent on retrieving precious and forgotten textual gems. Quite apart from his study of luminaries such as Nachman of Bratslav, Kafka, or Agnon, Band has often rummaged

<sup>1</sup> Simon Rawidowicz, "On Interpretation," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 26 (1957): 83–126. This essay was reprinted in modified form in Simon Rawidowicz, *Studies in Jewish Thought* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1974), 45–80. References throughout the paper are to this article.

<sup>2</sup> Arnold J. Band, "Simon Rawidowicz: An Early Critic of the Zionist Narrative," unpublished lecture delivered at Brandeis University.

through the genizah of the Jewish literary past, extracting lesser-known essays, stories, or poems that merit, in his excellent and idiosyncratic judgment, serious attention. This archaeological labor does not rest on a simple literal-minded reading of the text but probes the mystery of the text's reception or lack thereof. Thus we can understand Band's retrieval of Simon Rawidowicz, whose remarkable erudition and clairvoyance have remained sealed off from a wide reading public for a regrettable mix of linguistic and ideological reasons. Band seeks to understand not only Rawidowicz's piercing of the armor of Zionist triumphalism from the early 1930s but also his adumbration of contemporary post-Zionist currents. In the process, Band hints at the way in which the target of Rawidowicz's early critique—a Zionist master narrative—became the very blanket obscuring his subsequent ideas and notoriety. The result of this method is a sympathetic yet unsentimental reading, a compelling fusion of horizons in which text and reception blur into one.

Band's orchestration of this kind of reading should not suggest an inattention to contextual detail. For another notable quality of Band's is his stubborn belief that history matters in literature. Having come of age in the heyday of New Criticism and witnessed countless theoretical turns since, he is conversant with much of literary theory but genuflects before none of its minor deities. Indeed, orthodoxy of any sort is anathema to him. The one possible exception to his heterodoxy is his insistence that historical knowledge is an essential ingredient of literary interpretation. At home in many and diverse areas of Jewish history, as well as in the scholarly debates attending them, Band enriches his textual readings through frequent recourse to context and biography in a way that few other literary scholars can or choose to do.

Band's talents as historian are on display in his Brandeis lecture on Rawidowicz. There he excavates a number of Rawidowicz's Hebrew essays from 1930–1932, a period in which the peripatetic scholar was still in Berlin (before moving to England and, later, the U.S.). These essays lay out Rawidowicz's vision of a Hebrew cultural nationalism distinctly at odds with more renowned forms of Zionist expression—including Ahad Ha-Am's notion of a spiritual center in Palestine. Throughout his prolific career, Rawidowicz inveighed against the territorial monism of Zionism, arguing for a genuine *shutafut* (partnership) between equals, Diaspora and Zion.<sup>3</sup> In seeking to redress the imbalance of what Band identifies as an

<sup>3</sup> The centrality of this notion of partnership has been noted by a number of key commentators of Rawidowicz. See Benjamin Ravid, "The Life and Writings of Simon Rawidowicz," in Rawidowicz, *Studies in Jewish Thought*, 15; see also Michael A. Meyer's introduction to Simon Rawidowicz, *State of Israel, Diaspora*,

emerging Zionist narrative, Rawidowicz repeatedly affirmed the vibrancy of Diaspora Jewish culture. At the core of that culture—indeed its unending source of creativity—was the enterprise of *perush* or "interpretation." For Rawidowicz, interpretation was not merely a method of reading. It was a way of life, and a central one in the textually grounded Jewish tradition.

True to his archaeological mission, Band locates an early articulation of this point in Rawidowicz's 1931 essay, "Halakhah uma'aseh." Here Rawidowicz anticipates later literary theorists by describing interpretation—in this case, of Jewish Scripture—as a creative enterprise in its own right. "Does not [talmudic] commentary," he queried in 1931, "represent a creation in its own right, indeed one of the greatest creations of Israel's spirit."<sup>4</sup> In subsequent writings, Band notes, "it becomes increasingly convincing . . . that 'interpretation' [for Rawidowicz] is the instrumentality of Jewish creativity in the Golah."<sup>5</sup> The *summa summarum* of this line of thought is an extraordinary English essay Rawidowicz wrote, but did not finish editing, before his death in 1957. Entitled "On Interpretation," the essay offers a distillation of Rawidowicz's wide learning covering the entire range of Jewish history and thought.<sup>6</sup> More specifically, it presents a sharply contoured vision of Jewish history predicated on the intersecting circles of interpretive sophistication, Jewish cultural vitality, and Diaspora. In evocation of traditional Jewish commentary, and in recognition of Rawidowicz's bold insights, I now turn to an interpretive reading of this seminal essay.

Explicatio and commentatio follow the "text" step by step, "uncover" and explain it from the aspect of its form and content, language, and historical background. Interpretatio is centered on the "soul" of the text, its leitmotif, its main purpose, its essence, its particular character. (86)

and *Jewish Continuity: Essays on the "Ever-Dying" People* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1998), 6.

<sup>4</sup> "Halakhah uma'aseh," *Ha'olam* 46 (15 December 1931): 978. In the same location, Rawidowicz insisted that "every creation of the spirit is but an interpretation, an interpretation of life, of reality."

<sup>5</sup> Band, "Simon Rawidowicz," 14.

<sup>6</sup> Although he did not elaborate on this essay, Band did note in his Brandeis lecture that it contains "one of the most compelling descriptions of the nature of Jewish creativity . . . from Ezra to the modern period and, consequently, constitute[s] a powerful argument for Jewish Diasporan existence" (*ibid.*, 4).

Shortly after opening his essay with reference to the centrality of the text in Jewish history, Simon Rawidowicz hastens to distinguish among gradations of textual commentary. Both *explicatio* and *commentatio* remain beholden to the text, seeking to render it faithfully, as it was understood in its original context. In contrast to this seamless literalism, *interpretatio* is a deliberate agitation of the text. Impelled by crisis, *interpretatio* gains force from a recurrent "tension between continuation and rebellion." The interpreter, or *homo interpretes* in Rawidowicz's parlance, is forever torn between "a deep attachment to the 'text' and ... an 'alienation' from it" (85). This tension, however, proves to be animating, driving the *homo interpretes* to a deeper, often hidden, meaning—to the "mystery between the words and between the lines" (86). And yet, while penetrating the "soul" of the text, the interpreter creatively subverts the original. Armed with the dialectical tools of *interpretatio*, the skilled practitioner sets about "absorbing a 'given' world and reshaping it, giving it a new meaning and direction" (88).

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The *Bayit Sheni* is not a commentary but an *interpretatio* of the highest order. *Bayit Sheni* is second only in time; it is first in essence, in its own particular essence. (91)

Rawidowicz's conception of the *bayit sheni* or Second House<sup>7</sup> bursts forth with revisionist force. In the first instance, Rawidowicz eschews scholarly convention by expanding the temporal parameters of the *bayit sheni*, from the time of the Babylonian Exile (586 B.C.E.) to the completion of the Babylonian Talmud (sixth century C.E.) (89). At the same time, Rawidowicz transports the term *bayit sheni* beyond the realm of chronology. Indeed, the *bayit sheni* does not signify for Rawidowicz merely a historical period; nor is it a function of geography (i.e., Palestine). Rather, it embodies a noble spirit of cultural creativity, born in and cultivated through the Diaspora.

<sup>7</sup> Rawidowicz himself translated the Hebrew *bayit* as "house" rather than "temple." This choice of a more generic English term may well reflect a subtle attempt to shift the focus of Israel's creative energies from the religious to the cultural sphere. Rawidowicz's translator stated that Rawidowicz chose the term *bayit* in order to leave "the distinction of the various levels of meaning to be assigned to this term to the reader." See the translator's comment in Rawidowicz, "Israel's Two Beginnings: The First and the Second 'Houses,'" in Rawidowicz, *Studies in Jewish Thought*, 83. See also Benjamin Ravid, "The Life and Writing of Simon Rawidowicz," in Rawidowicz, *Studies in Jewish Thought*, 29.

As such, this notion of *bayit sheni* stands in contrast to *bayit rishon* (First House). In "On Interpretation," Rawidowicz continues a theme that he developed over many years of work leading up to the publication of his monumental philosophy of Jewish history, *Bavel vYrushalayim* (1957). The opening *sha'ar*, or section, of this work is entitled "Al parashat habatim," or "On the Matter of the Houses." My awkward English translation does not capture the thinly veiled polemic of this Hebrew title, which consciously targets Ahad Ha-Am's famous collected writings, *Al parashat haderakhim* (1913, 1921). Rawidowicz's vision of *Bavel vYrushalayim*—two centers of equal magnitude symbolized by Babylonia and Jerusalem—challenges Ahad Ha-Am's view of Palestine as the center of Jewish cultural vitality (whose rays radiate out to the Diaspora).

Likewise, Rawidowicz's discussion of an expansive conceptual (rather than temporal or spatial) *bayit sheni* subtly challenges another kind of Zionist claim—that the core of Jewish national identity is bound up with the political and military achievements of Israel in the time of the *bayit rishon*. Adumbrating George Steiner's oft-quoted aphorism that "the text is the homeland" of the Jews, Rawidowicz aims to place the cultural achievements of the *bayit sheni* on an equal plane with its predecessor.<sup>8</sup> This move is reminiscent of the earlier essay, "Halakhah uma'aseh," from 1931; in both cases, Rawidowicz sought to unhinge the *bayit sheni*'s defining textual creation, the Oral Law, from its dependence on the Bible. In the later "On Interpretation," we read:

The Oral Law or the *Bayit Sheni* did not just add something of its own to the Written Law or the *Bayit Rishon*. It is not just a continuation or a development but a new act of weaving undertaken by master weavers of rare power. (91)<sup>9</sup>

At times, it seems as if Rawidowicz wanted more than parity between the two *batim*. In *Bavel vYrushalayim*, he spelled out in considerable detail the distinct features of the two: the first *bayit* represented an unrestrained mythic world ordered by sensory perception; the second

<sup>8</sup> Steiner's 1985 essay, "Our Homeland, The Text," offers a far less schematic view of Jewish history than Rawidowicz. And yet, Steiner's emphasis on the centrality and moral authority of the text, born or at least nurtured in the Diaspora, echoes Rawidowicz's position. See George Steiner, "Our Homeland, The Text," reprinted in George Steiner, *No Passion Spent: Essays 1978–1996* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996), 304–27.

<sup>9</sup> The image of a new interpretive weave can also be found in Rawidowicz, "Al parashat habatim," in Simon Rawidowicz, *Bavel vYrushalayim* (London and Waltham, Mass.: Ararat, 1957), 1:81.

signaled the shift in Israel from vision (*mareh*) to concept (*musag*).<sup>10</sup> Rawidowicz elaborated on this revolution in "On Interpretation," leaving little doubt that he favored the interpretive sophistication of the Second House to the sensory literalism of the First (98–99).<sup>11</sup>

There he also argued that the guiding ethos of the *bayit sheni* did not expire with the sealing of the Talmuds but was carried forward, even perfected, in the medieval philosophic tradition. The giants of that tradition, Sa'adya Gaon and Maimonides, perpetuated "the operation of conceptualization, of purging, of strengthening *ratio* against *mythos*, of 'translating' the vision of ancient Israel into clear concepts" (99). Indeed, in their hands, *interpretatio* was a weapon in an unending struggle against the currents of base literalism that survived the *bayit rishon*. Mindful of this important function, Maimonides continually endeavored to demonstrate that *interpretatio* was not a luxury, but a duty for the Jew (101). In doing so, he was waging a heroic battle in Rawidowicz's eyes, guiding the perplexed against the interpretive simpletons of the past, as well as against the dangerous literalists of the future.

On the eve of modern times there stands out one opponent of Maimonides to whom he was very much indebted, against whom he rebelled so vehemently, a "literalist" of a new kind, without the faith of the medieval anti-Maimonides literalists: Baruch Spinoza. (106–7)

In Rawidowicz's periodization, it was Baruch Spinoza who induced the rupture of modernity. This in itself was not such a radical judgment, but Rawidowicz's rationale was typically idiosyncratic. Unlike Yitzhak Baer (among others), he did not point to Spinoza's status as the first Jew to leave the confines of the Jewish community without converting.<sup>12</sup> Nor did he concur with Harry A. Wolfson, in whose sweeping scheme Spinoza marked the end of the long medieval attempt to reconcile Scripture and philosophy that began with Philo. Wolfson emphasized

<sup>10</sup> Rawidowicz, *Bavel vYrushalayim*, 1:59.

<sup>11</sup> Elsewhere Rawidowicz writes with evident approval that the creators of the Oral Law "not only elevated it to the degree of the text, but were sometimes not afraid to hint at a kind of 'if not higher,' or 'if not more' for this, Israel's second beginning" (Rawidowicz, "On Interpretation," 97).

<sup>12</sup> In a well-known formulation, Baer observed that Spinoza "ist der erste Jude, der sich von seiner Religion und seinem Volk lossagt, ohne einen formellen Religionswechsel zu vollziehen." Yitzhak Baer, *Galut* (Berlin: Schocken, 1936), 90.

Spinoza's efforts to uproot the scriptural element of this equation in "restor[ing] philosophy to the status in which it was prior to the Philonic revolution."<sup>13</sup> By contrast, Rawidowicz focused on Spinoza's effort to recover Scripture from allegory or metaphysics via an unstinting biblical literalism. In his reading of the seventh chapter of the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, Rawidowicz observes that Spinoza strictly "forbids the attributing of any doctrine to the Bible which is not to be found in it *clarissime*" (107). In fact, Spinoza did insist in the *Treatise* on recovering the "literal meaning" of the text even if it be "repugnant to the natural light of reason."<sup>14</sup> Moreover, he proclaimed a break with the tradition of medieval interpretation, and quite dramatically so, by directing his wrath at the figure of Maimonides. Maimonides exemplified for Spinoza the flawed interpretive procedure—and philosophical hubris—of the medievals. For in subordinating a literal rendering of the text to the demands of reason, Maimonides was merely affirming "preconceived opinions, twisting them about, and reversing or completely changing the literal sense, however plain it may be."<sup>15</sup> Spinoza concluded that this interpretive mode was "harmful, useless, and absurd."<sup>16</sup>

But it was precisely Maimonides' hermeneutical daring in scriptural interpretation that excited Simon Rawidowicz. Maimonides' "metaphorical *interpretatio*" brimmed with the creative spirit and independence of mind essential to Israel's survival in the Diaspora (114). That it was thoroughly undermined by Spinoza's literalism posed a grave threat to the entire project of Diaspora Jewish creativity. In his own efforts to parry Spinoza's anti-Maimonidean thrust, Rawidowicz excoriated the Dutch philosopher, calling him "the first *peshat*-Jew of modern times" (110). This epithet reveals not only Rawidowicz's antipathy toward Spinoza but also a number of important tenets of his own intellectual worldview. First, Rawidowicz was unhesitant in favoring medieval *interpretatio* over modern *peshat* (or *explicatio*); the latter was but a revival of the worst forms of ancient literalism. Second, Rawidowicz regarded Spinoza's "*peshat*-method" as the work of a committed historicist, who attempted to read

<sup>13</sup> See Isadore Twersky's introduction to H. A. Wolfson, *From Philo to Spinoza: Two Studies in Religious Philosophy* (New York: Behrman House, 1977), 36. Twersky observes that Wolfson saw Spinoza as "overthrowing the old Philonic principles which by his time had dominated the thought of European religious philosophy for some sixteen centuries" (11).

<sup>14</sup> See Benedict de Spinoza, *A Theologico-Political Treatise*, trans. R. H. M. Elwes (New York: Dover, 1951), 102.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.



the Scripture text *ex ipsius historia*, "as it was."<sup>17</sup> The allusion to Leopold von Ranke's "*wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*" was not intended to honor Spinoza. Rather, Rawidowicz took delight in recalling Droysen's condemnation of Ranke as a "eunuch of objectivity," suggesting that Spinoza merited the same designation (116).

Behind this insult lay Rawidowicz's belief that historicism bore a decidedly morbid impulse. Two centuries before Moritz Steinschneider was alleged to have done so, Spinoza was already plotting, through his historicization of the Bible, to give Judaism a decent burial.<sup>18</sup> Rawidowicz writes:

Since he does not want to see the Bible as a life-giving body for the future, he embalms it. The Bible is "saved," and becomes petrified. The *Tractatus* seen in this light—the great attack on traditional *interpretatio*—is thus also the document of emancipation for Europe and Israel from the Bible, closes the gates for a return to the Bible, terminates the possibility of turning it into a foundation of a revival. (118)

Where *interpretatio* "bridges the gap between past and present," *peshat* isolates, contextualizes, and ultimately freezes the past (116). The consequences of such ossification extended beyond interpretive practice. For it was but a short distance, Rawidowicz implied, from a fossilized text to a fossilized people. To his mind, Spinoza wove a tight bond between the two, claiming that the demise of the First Temple—the *Bayit Rishon*—spelled the end of Jewish interpretive and political vitality. In one of his starkest formulations, Rawidowicz concluded: "No *perush*—means here no continuation, no expansion. No continuation of the Bible—means no survival of post-biblical Israel."

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All subsequent discussion [after Spinoza] in Israel and about Israel, inside and outside Israel, by individual thinkers or by religious and political movements, is at its source a discussion concerning the theological

<sup>17</sup> Spinoza did outline in the seventh chapter of the *Theologico-Political Treatise* (101–3) a methodological protocol for the historical study of Scripture whose foundations were philological competence, close textual analysis, and (in the case of the prophetic books) attention to contextual and biographical detail.

<sup>18</sup> In another renowned essay, "Israel: the Ever-Dying People," Rawidowicz refers to Heinrich Heine, Leopold Zunz, and Steinschneider as "*Totengräber* [gravediggers], last custodians and collators of a vast tradition which was dying out." See Rawidowicz, *Studies in Jewish Thought*, 217.

and political meaning of Israel's past and future. Practically it is either acceptance or rejection of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. (122)

Spinoza's definitive break with *interpretatio* severed the continuous and life-giving thread of postbiblical Jewish life. Enabled by historicism's chilling dispassion, Spinoza opened up the way for an abandonment of the glorious legacy of Jewish interpretation. His own betrayal—for which Rawidowicz labeled him "the great irresponsible of modern times"—prompted the rapid attenuation of Jewish cultural identity in subsequent centuries (118). Periodically, heroic figures arose who drew from the well of Jewish interpretive genius. Foremost among them was Nachman Krochmal, whose *Moreh nevu'khei hazeman* Rawidowicz edited and, more importantly, regarded as a fitting successor to Maimonides' work, a true guide for the perplexed of the time (124).

And yet, the drift commenced by Spinoza proved both powerful and alluring. Those swept up in its wake lost touch with the guiding spirit of Diaspora Jewish life, the animating tension that, Rawidowicz asserted at the outset of his essay, impels interpretation. At least two groups of moderns were adrift in this current: those who were no longer burdened by the once-pervasive struggle between "continuation and rebellion, tradition and innovation," having thrown in their lot with the latter; and those who fashioned themselves continuators of a sort, but who sought to reconnect only with the ancient past at the expense of the postbiblical. For Rawidowicz, the Zionist infatuation with the *bayit rishon*—and concomitant rejection of Diaspora cultural creativity—was a clear manifestation of the second.

That infatuation preoccupied Rawidowicz throughout his career, from Berlin to Brandeis. Following the creation of the State of Israel, Rawidowicz identified the great existential question of the day in terms consistent with his overarching scheme: What would be the fate of the *bayit shelishi*, the third house of the present era? Accompanying this question were a series of related queries that Rawidowicz posed in *Bavel vYrushalayim* with passionate and at times bitter urgency:

Will the third house be the first or the second, or will it be a continuation of the first—or will it be neither? ... If the voice of the boiling blood of the conquerors of Canaan, and the hand of the members of the second house, win the day—could it be that Israel of the third house would uproot from its heart the second house? ... If the first house prove decisive in the third—what will become of the thousands of years of the second house and the succeeding exile? Will those two thousand years be regarded as a waste that need not be taken into account, as history that is not worthy of the name "history," *per* the

great "wisdom" of the negators of exile, the young and old Hebrews and Canaanites?<sup>19</sup>

Clearly, for Rawidowicz, to relegate those millennia to the dustbin of history would be a national disaster, akin to a second destruction of the *bayit sheni*. *Bavel vYrushalayim* was a *cri de coeur*, Rawidowicz's own guide to the perplexed in the monumental tradition of Maimonides and Krochmal. Poignantly, his efforts to forge a sweeping rationale for Diaspora Jewish existence offered succor to precious few. He was now operating in an era marked, as Daniel Bell famously observed, by the end of ideology.<sup>20</sup> The golden age of both Zionist and Diasporist ideologies had lapsed decades earlier, replaced by *étatisme* (*mamlakhtiyut*), in one case, and a pragmatic acceptance of Israel's centrality, in the other. And yet, the fact that Rawidowicz failed to create a social movement should not cause us to dismiss his thinking. Nor should we ignore his extensive contacts with the leading literary, cultural, and political figures of the Jewish world until his last days. A recent foray into the Rawidowicz archives attests to the staggering range of correspondents who engaged the enigmatic thinker, even as the tide of history was moving away from his position. Among the luminaries whose letters populate the archives, one of the most renowned was David Ben-Gurion. Band finds the exchange between the two men in 1954–1955 "a bit comical," in large measure because of the disparity in power between the Israeli Prime Minister and a peripatetic Diaspora scholar.<sup>21</sup> However, it remains the case that Ben-Gurion, with much else on his mind, felt compelled to respond on four occasions to Rawidowicz, particularly to his claim that the term *Israel* should be applied only to the "people of Israel" and not to the political-territorial center in the Land of Israel.<sup>22</sup> For Ben-Gurion, Rawidowicz was far more than a run-of-the-mill polemicist. He was a trenchant and uncompromising critic whose knowledge of the Jewish past and well-developed ideological stance demanded attention.

Such an appreciation, even from an ideological opponent, has not been heard much since. Sadly this is so, for Rawidowicz remains as neglected today as he was prescient then. In a recent volume of reissued essays, Michael A. Meyer reminds us of Rawidowicz's unerring sense "for where the concerns of the Jewish people would lie well into the

<sup>19</sup> Rawidowicz, *Bavel vYrushalayim*, 1:151.

<sup>20</sup> Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1960).

<sup>21</sup> Band, "Simon Rawidowicz," 3.

<sup>22</sup> The exchange appears in English in Rawidowicz, *State of Israel*, 182–204.

future."<sup>23</sup> Indeed, Rawidowicz's insistence on a genuine partnership between equals in the Jewish world has immense relevance for contemporary debates about an appropriate relationship between the State of Israel and the Diaspora. Lamentably, few among the participants in the current debate can draw upon Rawidowicz's range of learning, bold formulations, and nuanced grasp of Jewish history and thought. In fact, few, if any, have even heard of him.



He who studies Jewish history will readily discover that there was hardly a generation in the Diaspora period which did not consider itself the last link in Israel's chain.<sup>24</sup>

It is altogether fitting that Arnold Band returned to the legacy of Simon Rawidowicz several years ago. Not only has Band often retrieved important texts or figures that the rest of us have forgotten. And not only did Band and Rawidowicz cross paths in the fertile intellectual triangle of Waltham, Brookline, and Cambridge in the 1950s. More importantly, the two share an important patrimony, an abiding allegiance to Hebrew language and culture. In fact, both have devoted their lives to cultivating the rich and evolving forest of Hebrew, which they regard as the great *yerushah* of ancient Israel. That they have maintained this belief while living and teaching in the Diaspora is perhaps the most intriguing of their biographical commonalities. Both men seem drawn to the marginal position of critic, secretly relishing the liminal status between insider and outsider. In that sense, both are ideal candidates to be the last Diaspora Hebraist, clinging to the legacy of Hebrew culture in a sea of apathy and ignorance.

It was Rawidowicz who pointed out in one of his most memorable essays that visions of apocalyptic doom are a regular feature of Jewish history.<sup>25</sup> It is not altogether clear how sanguine Rawidowicz would have been about Hebrew culture in today's Diaspora world.<sup>26</sup> But I suspect

<sup>23</sup> See Meyer's introduction in Rawidowicz, *State of Israel*, 6.

<sup>24</sup> Rawidowicz, "Israel: The Ever-Dying People," 211.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 211ff.

<sup>26</sup> Rawidowicz was hardly naïve about Hebrew's limited future in the Diaspora, though he never surrendered his desire to fight for its survival. Indeed, his indomitable spirit led him to establish the Ararat publishing house in England in 1942 so that Hebrew would not cease its millennial existence in Europe. See Ravid's biographical essay in Rawidowicz, *Studies in Jewish Thought*, 22, as well as Avraham Greenbaum, *History of the Ararat Publishing Society* (Jerusalem: R. Mass, 1998), 10.

that he would not have been unhappy at the state of *interpretatio*. The impressive proliferation of Jewish studies in North American and European universities, along with the emergence of a new generation of Jewish authors, many of whom are learned in traditional Jewish culture, would have fortified his faith that reports of Israel's demise are premature. Had Rawidowicz counted the legions of students of Arnold Band, scattered throughout "Israel," he might even have uncovered a measure of faith in the future of Hebrew literary studies, if not Hebrew culture. Perhaps he would have recollected his sentiments of half a century ago:

Yes, in many respects it seems to us as if we are the last links in a particular chain of tradition and development. But if we are the last—let us be the last as our fathers and forefathers were. Let us prepare the ground for the last Jews who will come after us, and for the last Jews who will rise after them, and so on until the end of days.<sup>27</sup>

To conclude on such a note of messianic optimism seems an almost unfair way to celebrate Arnold Band, given his proudly skeptical and antimystical cast of mind. So to honor my teacher, colleague, and friend, I offer this final note of dissonance. Simon Rawidowicz's view of *interpretatio* as the animating force of Diaspora life rested on a thinly veiled antihistoricism, directed against those who would reduce the people of Israel to the sum of its contextualized parts. To his mind, Israel soared beyond its context, immune from local vectors of influence that gave defining form to other peoples. Indeed, in Rawidowicz's language, assigning unilateral influence was an intellectual malady—"hashpaitis" (from the Hebrew *hashpa'ah*)—to be avoided.<sup>28</sup> In *Bavel vYrushalayim*, he inveighed against the notion of a Zionist center in Palestine that "influenced" the Diaspora.<sup>29</sup> In his decades-long work on Nachman Krochmal, he repeatedly challenged the assumption of Hegelian "influence" on the Galician thinker.<sup>30</sup> And in "On Interpretation," Rawidowicz asserted that while Israel lived in a gentile world, contending with "the outside is

<sup>27</sup> Rawidowicz, "Israel: The Ever-Dying People," 223.

<sup>28</sup> Rawidowicz, "Two That Are One," *State of Israel*, 155–56. See also the Yiddish original, "Tsvey vos zeynin eyns," in *Di Tsukunft* (May–June 1949): 287.

<sup>29</sup> Rawidowicz, *Bavel vYrushalayim*, 1:322–71.

<sup>30</sup> See the distillation of Rawidowicz's thinking in "Was Nachman Krochmal a Hegelian?" in Rawidowicz, *Studies in Jewish Thought*, 335. There Rawidowicz avers that "the starting point for Krochmal's philosophizing was neither a wrestling with the problems of ethics nor with one of pure logic or epistemology, but the problem of faith, of the Jewish religion, of Judaism in general."

certainly not the best of stimuli for a constructive and stabilizing *interpretatio*." It was rather the internal stimulus, the "pressure from within" to attain a deeper and truer meaning, that was the vitalizing force of *interpretatio*, and by extension, of Jewish life (125).

Despite his own Hebraism and considerable interpretive skills, Arnold Band could not embrace Rawidowicz's internalist view of *interpretatio*, itself a curious anticipation of Derrida's famous "*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*."<sup>31</sup> For Band, there is too much around the text not to notice. It is this kind of environmental curiosity that made him a pioneer in the study of comparative literature at UCLA. And it is this same curiosity that makes him such a deep, probing, and masterful reader of Hebrew and Jewish texts.

<sup>31</sup> Jacques Derrida, *De la Grammatologie* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1967), 227. Derrida goes to greater lengths than Rawidowicz to demonstrate that historical/biographical considerations are *not* irrelevant to his mode of reading. At the same time, he is more explicit in positing the text as a comprehensive cognitive-epistemological framework. It is on this latter point that Moshe Idel offers an intriguing gloss, one that hints at the shared Jewish roots of both Rawidowicz's and Derrida's textual inclusivism. Idel proposes that Derrida drew his principle of "*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*" from the late thirteenth-century Kabbalist, Menachem Recanati, whom he encountered through Georges Vajda's French translation of Gershom Scholem's German lecture at the Eranos conference of 1954. Vajda translated a key passage from Recanati's *Ta'amei hamitsvot* to the effect that "*car la Torah n'est pas en dehors de Lui* (i.e., God), *pas plus qu'il n'est Lui-meme en dehors de la Torah*." Idel suggests that Derrida read this translation and then "substituted the term and concept of Torah by [sic] that of text." See the fourth chapter of Moshe Idel, *Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002). I thank Professor Idel for calling this citation, as well as his discussion, to my attention.