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THE MEANS IS THE MESSAGE ON THE INTRANSLABILITY OF A HEBREW TEXT

EDNA APHEK and YISHAI TOBIN

I. INTRODUCTION

In this paper we will analyze a specific text, "At the Outset of the Day" by S.Y. Agnon¹, in order to illustrate the intrinsicness and inseparability of the language and the message in this particular short story. We shall illustrate that the 'means is the message' by analyzing and explaining three linguistic and stylistic textual phenomena originally discussed in Aphek 1979: (a) the concept of word systems, a macro-textual stylistic phenomenon composed of a matrix of words with a common denominator which may be conceptual, phonological, etymological, folk-etymological, associative, and/or semantic which serves as a junction where the plane of the plot and ideas converge with the linguistic plane, (b) the development of a specific conceptual field related to the semantic notion, of "cover-clothing", and (c) the specific use of the first four letters of the Hebrew alphabet in this short story. We will then discuss the implications of these linguistic-stylistic phenomena on Hebrew-English translation².

We would first, however, like to clarify our view of the notion of text³. As opposed to a "work" which is a physical object, a printed mass occupying space, a text, on the other hand, is a "methodological field". A text exists as a discourse which is inseparable from its language. Barthes (1979: 76) views a text as a cloth, a woven *textus*. We, on the other hand, choose to view a text as a prism, a crystal, a form consisting of facets which are parallel to the vertical axis and intersect the horizontal axes. By adjusting this text-prism at different angles to the light, a new spectrum of colors and experiences are revealed to the reader, yet, the text-prism, the crystallized mass, remains intact as a single, undivided, integral entity. We share the notion that a text is "multiple

1. We will be referring to the original Hebrew version (Agnon 1959: 171-177) and the English translation (Agnon 1970: 252-260) throughout our paper. The page numbers which appear in parentheses in the various tables will all be from these published versions of the story.
2. Problems of Hebrew-English translation in general have been discussed in Bloom (1976), Dagut (1978), Megged (1966), Nida (1979), Patterson (1959), Jobin (1981a, b, 1982); problems in the translation of word systems in S.Y. Agnon by Aphek and Tobin (1981,a,b) and of S.Y. Agnon in general in Rabin (1958); problems in the notion of 'intranslatability' in Catford (1969), Nida and Taber (1970), Steiner (1975), and Werner in Arrowsmith and Shattuck (1961). The literature in 'problems of translation' usually centers around micro-textual phenomena (e.g., specific semantic or collocational problems in lexical sets, non-equivalent grammatical, phonological, or cultural elements, etc.) as opposed to macro-textual stylistic phenomena such as word systems.
3. Many of the views we will present here correspond to the ideas expressed in Barthes (1979).

and irreducible; it emerges from substances and levels that are heterogeneous and disconnected"; but we feel, however, that a text is an irreducible whole. In short, we contend that a text should be studied as an intricate network whose combinatorial factors and elements and their varying contributions to the formation of a whole requires the active collaboration of the reader and the writer. It is with these principles in mind that we have undertaken to analyze the specific textual elements to be discussed in this paper.

We will first discuss the notion of word systems which is a central phenomenon in S.Y. Agnon's literary works. These word systems serve as junctions which are characterized by their simplicity and linguistic economy on one hand, and their compactness on the other: a number of words connected to each other to the point at which they create a "tight word system" containing the essence of a story. These junctions or word systems could be defined as the nucleus of a story; a nucleus nurturing the themes of the story with a greater intensity than the sum total of the language employed throughout the work (Aphek 1979: 128).

The concept of word system is based on Martin Buber's theory of "leading words", (*Leitwörter*) in a biblical text; i.e., this mechanism which creates "compactness", connects different texts or parts of the same text, and serves as a "measure for measure", or "moralistic" *quid pro quo* device⁴. Aphek (1979) enlarged the application of the notion of Buber's "leading words", was the first to apply it to modern Hebrew literature, give it linguistic formulation, and classify various kinds of word systems. This new concept of word systems includes cases in which Buber's concept of *Leitwörter* has not been explicitly applied, i.e., the semantic word system, the associative word system, and leading words in their metathesized forms. There can be more than one word system in a story and each of the word systems "nurtures the theme of the story with great intensity" (Aphek 1979: 111).

Although it may be claimed that Hebrew, a Semitic language which builds its lexicon primarily from CCC roots, might be particularly well-suited for the creation of word systems; it must be noted, however, that words systems do not occur in all Hebrew writing. Therefore, the very existence or absence of word systems might tell us something about the creative process of an individual writer. It is not our claim, however, that it was the author's intention to create these word systems, or that he is even aware of them, since they might be drawn from the unconscious. Word systems also introduce the concept of "reciprocity" (mutual interactions on various levels between the participants of a story), but do not usually serve as a tool for conveying moralistic elements, unlike Buber's *Leitwörter* in biblical texts. Word systems are not extended examples of micro-textual stylistic elements such as alliteration, puns, "plays on

4. Buber (1964) points out the connective use of the verb *anah* and its various conjugated forms (respond, call out, be humbled, be tortured, and torture) in the story of the covenant between God and Abraham (*Genesis* 15: 13) and the story of Sarah and Hagar (*Genesis* 16: 4-7, 9, 11) or the use of the verb *birekh* and its various conjugated forms and nominal derivatives (blessing, gift, benefit) in the story of Jacob (*Genesis* 27: 4, 8-10, 13, 19, 24, 25, 27, 29-30, 32-33, 35, 37-38, 41; *Genesis* 28: 1, 4, 6; *Genesis* 32: 29-30).

words", or word repetition, but represent a stylistic element that cuts through the entire literary work ⁵.

As we have stated, the components of the word system can be related phonologically, semantically, etymologically, folk-etymologically, conceptually, or associatively. In most cases they are polysemic, thus enabling multiple and varied readings of a text. Therefore, a story containing a word system or word systems poses insurmountable problems to the translator. These involve more than merely finding accurate, equivalent, similar, or suitable translations of individual lexical items, expressions, idioms, or phrases, while retaining target language fluency, but rather entail the recreation of the entire complex word systems with all its multifarious linguistic, conceptual, and stylistic emotional implications from the source language to the receptor language (Aphek and Tobin 1981, a, b). Thus, the text may be viewed as a multi-textured and multi-dimensional structure in relief where the word systems are its most outstanding points; i.e., a complex construction which may not necessarily be restructured in the same manner in translation.

In the specific story under discussion this concept of word systems is primarily exemplified by a recurrent pivotal triconsonantal (CCC) root *X-R-B* ("to be destroyed, ravaged, desolate, waste; to dry up; to destroy") (Alcalay 1965 : 816) and one of its metathesized forms, partially antonymous in meaning, *X-B-R* ("to associate, be bound together, be united, be joined; to stitch; to practice magic, bewitch, enchant, enthrall"), (Alcalay 1965 : 706). The concept of word systems is also peripherally exemplified in this specific short story by other metathesized forms of this CCC root, namely: *B-R-X* ("to run away, flee, take one's heels, escape, elope, abscond, make haste") (Alcalay 1965 : 289-290), *B-X-R* ("to choose, select, prefer, pick, like, love, elect") (Alcalay 1965 : 214) and *R-X-B* ("to become wider, widen (v.i.), expand, broaden (v.i.)") (Alcalay 1961 : 2433); as well as by another phonologically related CCC root *B-R-KH* ("to kneel, bend the knee, genuflect; to bless, greet, congratulate, praise, thank : (euph.) to curse") (Alcalay 1965 : 293-294) and one of its metathesized forms *R-KH-B* ("to ride (an animal, bicycle, etc.) mount") (Alcalay 1965 : 2540) ⁶.

We will then explore the development of a conceptual field of "being clothed — covered", exemplified in this story primarily in the CCC root *K-S-H* ("to cover, hide, cover over (up), keep secret from") (Alcalay 1965 : 1045-1046),

5. Buber (1964 : 291, 297) indicates the presence of metathesized forms in various biblical texts, but does not recognize them as creating a pivotal axis of a metathesized *Leitwort* form.
6. In our discussion we will present the Hebrew verb forms as triconsonantal roots (e.g., *X-R-B*, *B-R-X*, *X-B-R* etc.). We will be presenting a rather loose transliteration of the Hebrew text where we will attempt to remain faithful to modern Israeli pronunciation as well as to differentiate between certain orthographical conventions. Both "x" and "kh" should be pronounced as "oh" in German *Ach*, but represent two different historical phonemes (whose phonetic difference is still retained in certain "oriental" dialects of spoken Hebrew) and which are represented orthographically by two different letters in the Hebrew alphabet (*xet* and *chaf* respectively). We will also follow Israeli pronunciation and therefore, not differentiate between the glottal stop (ʔ) *aleph* and the pharyngeal (ʕ) *ayin* consonants and render them in transliteration as vowels. In those cases where the phonetic or orthographic distinctions may be of interest they will be indicated.

with regard to its implications in the text in general. In particular we will follow this development in two other polysemic CCC roots which encompass the full semantic range of this conceptual field: *B-G-D* ('clothing, garment, dress, robe, mantle, cloak, covering, gown, frock, raiment, vestment, garb, costume, attire, wear; betrayal, deceit, treachery, treason, high treason') (Alcalay 1965: 185-186)⁷ and *M-A-L* ('coat, cloak, role, overcoat, mantle, treacherous, dealing treachery, fraudulent conversion, embezzlement, speculation; sacrilege, sacrifice for the sin of sacrilege; tunic') (Alcalay 1965: 1418); as well as in other CCC roots which partially share the semantic field of clothing-cover, *A-T-F* ('to cover, cloak, clothe, wrap, swathe, envelop, fold up; to become feeble, faint, languish') (Alcalay 1965: 1881-1882), *L-B-S* ('to wear, dress, put on, wrap, clothe, cover') (Alcalay 1965: 1098). In addition, the notion of being "covered, hidden, concealed, destroy, disarray, disarrange" is also found in this story in the root *S-T-R* (Alcalay 1965: 1828-1829), and *X-P-H* ('to cover, overlap') (Alcalay 1965: 863). There are, as if in a descending order within this semantic or conceptual field another CCC root *A-T-H* ('to dress, put on, wrap (cover, veil) oneself') (Alcalay 1965: 1881) dealing with the physical notion of clothing and covering alone as well as the nouns *kutonet* ('shirt; (bib) tunic, coat') (Alcalay 1965: 1078), *simla* ('dress, robe, gown; (anciently) tunic, mantle, garment, frock') (Alcalay 1965: 2657), *talit* ('praying shawl, cloak') (Alcalay 1965: 871) and *kittel* ('white surplice worn by officiants, and many congregants, on New Year, the Day of Atonement, etc.') (Alcalay 1965: 2278).

We will then illustrate how Agnon uses the first four letters of the Hebrew alphabet (*aleph* (פ), *bet*, *gimel*, *dalet*) in their consecutive or linear order, from which a quadriradical (CCCC) verb (*A-B-G-D*) ('to spell, to arrange in alphabetical order') (Alcalay 1965: 44) may be formed. We will show how Agnon exploits the possibility of breaking the consecutive linear order of these four letters into two separate pairs of consecutive letters from which particular Hebrew words can be formed: *AB* ('father, parent (male), ancestor, progenitor, patriarch, forefather, head (of a family), leader; God, principal, chief, master, important, great teacher') (Alcalay 1965: 1) and *GD* ('luck, fortune, success, Gad (Babylonian god of fortune') (Alcalay 1965: 320)⁸.

II. THE STORY

Agnon's fiction in general describes a situation of crisis and destruction in the world of man's social, cultural, and ethical values. This destruction is also the personal destruction of modern man in his isolation and alienation, i.e., it represents a universal message related to the problematic situation of modern man. This universal message, however, reflects only part of Agnon's message.

7. This semantic notion of 'garment' 'betrayal' ('coat' and 'turn-coat') form the root *B-G-D* in Semitic languages and their possible etymologies from Semitic or Hamitic roots is discussed in Rabin (1976: XXI, 242).

8. We would like to call to the non-Hebrew speaking reader's attention that each Hebrew letter also has a numerical value attached to it and very often the letters are used as numbers to indicate page numbers, chapters, verses, etc. Part of Jewish religious and mystical tradition, geometry, also involves the use of the numerical values of certain words (such as the word for God).

The narrator in most of Agnon's fiction is a Jew in search of a *place* in the world and of *God*, the Omnipresent, both of which are expressed in the meaning of the Hebrew word *makom* (Alcalay 1965 : 1473-1475). In this particular story Agnon's message, i.e., the destruction of the social, cultural, and ethic world of Judaism, the resultant isolation and alienation, the search for a place (*makom*) and for God (*makom*) are all intrinsically related and linked to Agnon's use of the Hebrew language, i.e., we are dealing with a text where the means and the message are inseparable, i.e., *the means is the message*.

The story opens with destruction (*X-R-B*) of a house (*bayit*) belonging to a father (AB) and his daughter (*bat*) who take flight (*B-R-X*), i.e., escape, from the external destruction of their home. They flee to the world of the past (*olam haABot*) with the hope that in this world they will find the antithesis of this destruction. Their escape takes place on the eve of *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement, the holiest day in the Hebrew calendar, also known as the Day of Repentance (*tšuva*) as well as the Day of Judgement (*din*). This presents us with a situation of a search for a return (*šiva*, *tšuva*), as well as for an answer (*tšuva*) and repentance (*tšuva*). The father tells his daughter that there, in the world of the past, i.e., the world of their ancestors, kind men will arrive and give them a *talit* (a prayer shawl), i.e., a cover (*Kis(H)ui*) like the one ripped and torn (*K-R-A(¶)*) by their enemies as well as a prayer book, (*sidur tšilot*). The father then explains to his daughter how the prayers are formed by combining or putting together (*X-B-R*) of the letters (*aleph*, *bet*) to form the word father (AB) giving us the concept of God, i.e., our Father is Heaven. The father and daughter are standing before a memorial candle while they are conversing, trying to warm themselves in the spirit (*ruax*) of their ancestor in the world of the past, when the wind (*ruax*) blows at the candle and the flame then touches the daughter's garment (*kutonet*). In order to save his daughter's life, the father rips (*K-R-A(¶)*) the daughter's clothes and she is left naked. From this point on the story focuses on the search for a covering, a garment, a dress; (*beged*).

At first the search takes place in the synagogue storeroom among the torn fragments (*K-R-A(¶)*) of the sacred books made of parchment. However, since these sacred books are no longer read (*K-R-A (P)*) they are no longer torn (*K-R-A (¶)*). Therefore, it is impossible to find a cover (*K-S-H*) for the bared soul among the ripped fragments of the sacred writings. Agnon is presenting us with a generation or an era without books or clothing.

Since the father could not find a covering or a garment for the naked soul in the sacred writings, he then goes in search of it in the home of Rabbi Alter, his former teacher. At Rabbi Alter's house he finds a group of old men characterized by signs of approaching death. Their faces are wrinkled and wizened like a shrivelled pear. They are standing and reading a letter which has arrived from the old rabbi's grandson Gad (GD) a former yeshiva student who has left the fold. Two nights before he disappeared, his wetnurse dreamt that he had screamed "A-B-C-D", i.e., the first four letters of the Roman alphabet as opposed to the Hebrew *aleph* (A), *bet* (B), *gimel* (C), *dalet* (D). The name Gad, (GD) symbolizes the skipping over or the omission of the first

two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, i.e., those letters AB from which the prayers and the name of our Father are combined. The consecutive order, i.e., the continuity of the first four letters of the Hebrew alphabet is now broken, symbolizing the breaking of Jewish tradition as a whole. When the father asks the old men for a garment they reply that it is enough for them to still have skin on their flesh. He takes his leave by walking out of the room backwards ⁹.

After leaving the old Rabbi's house he comes upon two local men who also cannot help him find a garment for his daughter. They view his plight either with indifference or as an interesting story. Meanwhile evening has fallen and the solemn holiday has begun and he is standing in the world of the past dominated by signs of the break with tradition, torn fragments, and death. His daughter is standing before him naked, trembling in the cold, when almost magically, the Yom Kippur prayers are heard in the empty synagogues of the world of the past. These prayers engulf his soul. Suddenly, among the old Torah scrolls, a new one covered in a red mantle (*MEiL*) with gold letters engraved upon it, gleamed. This was the very scroll that the narrator, the father, had inscribed himself in his youth in memory of "the souls of days that had departed". Since the past is already dead, the narrator can merely erect a monument in its memory, i.e., write a book "in memory of the souls of days that had departed".

III. THE WORD SYSTEM

Agnon does not confront the reader with "round characters" and a complicated plot, but rather with a multi-level language, where the means becomes the message. We shall first illustrate this basic thesis by explaining the concept of word systems and describing the key word system in this story composed of the metathesized CCC roots *X-R-B* ("to be destroyed, ravaged, desolate, waste; to dry up; to destroy") and *X-B-R* ("to associate, be bound together, be united, be joined..."), as well as the other more peripherally related metathesized or phonologically related CCC roots: *B-R-X* ("to run away, flee, escape..."), *B-X-R* ("to choose, select, prefer, like..."), *R-X-B* ("to become wider, expand..."), and *B-R-KH* ("to kneel, bless, praise...") and to a much lesser degree *R-KH-B* ("to ride, mount"). Thus one of the major axes found in the language of this story is an axis composed of a pivotal metathesized CCC root that is phonologically related and semantically opposed, i.e., antonymous in meaning, which serves to give the reader a double message: first one of phonological similarity which is then rebuked by the semantic reversal of meaning, i.e., *X-B-R* ("to combine") as opposed to *X-R-B* ("to destroy").

9. The act of walking out of the room backwards is associated with Jewish ritual behavior in a cemetery. The theme of death in the world of the past, the tearing of the garments, another sign of mourning, as well as the old men and women there, are prevalent throughout this work which takes place in the "world of the past."

Table 1

The Word System of X-R-B, X-B-R...

| English Translation | Transliterated Hebrew Text |
|---|---|
| 1. After the enemy <i>destroyed</i> my home I took my little daughter in my arms and <i>fled</i> with her to the city. (252) | axarei šu <i>heXRiBu</i> haoivim et beiti lakaxti et biti haktana al zrootai <i>uBaRaXti</i> ima lair. (171) |
| 2. Now that the enemy had <i>destroyed</i> my home I and my little daughter sought refuge in these places... (252) | veaxšav še <i>heXRiBu</i> haoivim et boiti mimlateti ani u viti haktana bimkomot eilu... (171) |
| 3. You remember the lovely prayer shawl that I used to spread over your head when the priest would rise up to <i>bless</i> the people. (253) | halo zokheret at et taliti hana'a še hayiti pores al rošekh kšehayu hakohanim olim <i>leBaReKH</i> et Israel. (172) |
| 4. You see, my daughter, two little letters stand there in the prayer book as if they were all alone; then they <i>come together</i> and lo and behold they are "AV". (254) | roa at biti, omdot lahen štei otiot kتانot basiddur keilu leacman omdot, baot hen <i>unitXaPRot</i> zo zo ve harei hen av. (172) |
| 5. We had fled in panic, destruction at our heels, and had taken nothing with us. (254) | ...šemenusat bahala nasnu menusat <i>XeReB</i> ve lo lakaxnu imanu klum. (172) |
| 6. ...Reb Alter, peace be with him, had been in the habit of sitting on that platform with his long pipe in his mouth, <i>sending</i> wreaths of smoke gliding into space. (255) | ...ragi haya rav alter alav ha šalov leyašev kšemiktarto haaruka netuna ba piv ve galgalei ašna olim ve <i>RokHBim</i> ba xulato šel olam. (174) |
| 7. Perhaps it (the letter) was from his grandson, my <i>friend</i> Gad, perhaps news had come from Reb Alter's grandson Gad, who has frequented the House of Study early and late. (256) | o eššar šelnekhdō hi, šel Gad <i>XaBeRi</i> , še eššar še ba'a bsura mi nekhdō šel rabi alter, Gad <i>XaBeRi</i> , še haya, maškim umaariv beveit hamidraš. (174) |
| 8. Again I looked in the storeroom where the torn pages from sacred books were kept, the room where <i>in my youth</i> , I would find among the fragments, wondrous and amazing things. (257) | ve šuv nistakalti bagniza še hayu gonzim šam kirei sfarim, še <i>beBaXaRuti</i> maale hayiti mitokh hakraim dvarim noraim ve niflaim. (175) |
| 9. ...picking from his teeth the last remnants of the final meal, pushing his <i>wide</i> belly out to make room for himself. He stood about like a man who knew that God would not <i>run away</i> and there was no need to worry. (258) | ...kšehu mexatet bein šinav et šiyarei haseuda hamafseket umoci et kreso <i>haReKaBa umaRXiB</i> lo et txumo veamad kemf še yodea se elokim lo <i>yiBRaX</i> ve ein eorekh lemaher. (176) |
| 10. My daughter began crying. "Let's run away from here." (258) | hitxila biti bokha ve amra, <i>niBRaX</i> mikan. (176) |
| 11. And if we were to <i>flee</i> , where would we flee and where could we hide? (259) | ve im <i>liBRoaX</i> , leheikhan <i>niBRaX</i> ve ei makom še nisater bo? (176) |

The theme, ideas, plot and the linguistic plane, i.e., the destruction (*X-R-B*) of the home, the destruction of the past, i.e., of the old Judaism of the ancestors, as well as the possibility of regeneration through prayer, the construction of prayers by the combination (*X-B-R*) of letters, as well as the societal elements of Judaism (*XeBRuta*) and the connection (*XiBuR*) to the past are all found in the pivotal metathesized axis illustrated in the word system of *X-R-B* — *X-B-R* found in Table 1 in exs. 1,2,4,5,7. The other, more peripherally related examples in Table 1, are both phonologically, conceptually and associatively related to the above two major pivotal metathesized examples discussed above: ex. 3 with the CCC root *B-R-KH*, is related to the notion of prayer, ex. 6 with the metathesized form of the above root (*R-KH-B*) is related to the past, exs.

9,10,11 with the CCC root *B-R-X*, another metathesized form of our two major pivotal roots, deal with the concept of running away, fleeing, or escape. Furthermore, in ex. 9 we have two instances of another phonologically related metathesized form of these pivotal roots in the CCC root *R-X-B*.

IV. THE CONCEPTUAL FIELD

The notion of the conceptual field dealing with “being clothed-covered” and its various semantic implications appear in the form of CCC roots in the form of verbs (*A-T-F*, *K-S-H*, *X-P-H*, *A-T-H*, *S-T-R*, *L-B-S*), lexical items in the form of nouns (*talit*, *kutonet*, *simla*, *ks(h)ut*, *beged*, *kittel*, *meil*), two of which have specific religious Jewish garments (*talit*, *kittel*); two of which are polysemic covering the entire semantic-connotational range of “clothing-covering-treachery” (*beged*, *meil*); as well as an “umbrella term” (both nouns and verbs) (“cover, covering”) from the CCC root *K-S-H* which can be used to replace the more specific verbs and/or lexical items referring to “being clothed-covered”. “There is no clothing or cover (*beged*) because there has been deceit or treachery (*beged*)”. Examples of the conceptual field of “clothing and covering” as they appear in the story are found in Table 2. The examples found in Table 2 will then be classified in figure 1 according to the criteria we have outlined: CCC verbal roots, lexical items-nouns, those with a religious connotation, and those which are polysemous or serve as an umbrella term.

Table 2

The Conceptual Field of Clothing and Covering

| English Translation | Transliterated Hebrew Text |
|--|--|
| 1. Grasping her hand in mine, I said “Good men will come at once and give me a <i>prayer shawl</i> with an adornment of silver just like the one the enemy tore. You remember the lovely prayer shawl that I used to spread over your head when the priests would rise up to bless the people... and I will wrap myself in the prayer shawl and take the book and pray to God, who saved us from the hand of the enemy who sought to destroy us. (253) | natalti et yadah beyadi ve amarti la, miyad yavou anašim tovim ve yitnu li talit im atara šel kesef keota še krauha haoivim. halo zokheret at et <i>taliti</i> hana’a še hayiti pores al rošekh kšehayu hakohanim olim levarekh et Israel... ve <i>etatef betalit</i> ve ekax et hamaxzor ve etpalet lifnei haelokim ašer hicil otanu mikaf kol oiveinu mevakšei nafšeinu. (172) |
| 2. Fire seized hold of her dress. I ripped off the flaming garment, leaving the child naked, for what she was wearing was all that remained of her lovely clothes. (254) | axaza haeš <i>bekhutanta</i> še aleiha, karati et <i>ktonta</i> mipnei hadleka še axaza <i>bakutonet</i> ve nistaiera hayalda eruma, še mikol <i>simloteiha</i> haxamudot še hayu la lo nistaiera la ela <i>kutonet</i> se aleiha. (172) |
| 3. Now that fire had consumed her dress I had nothing (no cover) with which to cover my daughter. (254) | ve axšav še paga eš <i>bekhutanta</i> lo hayta beyadi <i>ksut lekhasot</i> et biti. (173) |
| 4. I turned this way and that, seeking anything my daughter could clothe herself with. (254) | paniti eilakh ve eilakh uvikašti davar še <i>titkaseh</i> biti bo. (173) |
| 5. But now I turned there and found nothing with which to cover my little girl. (254-255) | ve axšav še paniti lešam lo macati šam klum <i>lekhasot</i> bo et yaldati haktana. (173) |
| 6. What could I do for my daughter, what could I cover her nakedness with? (255) | ma eeseh lebity uvame <i>akhaseh</i> maarumeiha. (173) |
| 7. ...and I had no garment nothing to wrap my daughter in. (155) | ...ubeyadi ein <i>ksut</i> ve ein klum <i>laatof</i> et biti. (173) |

| English Translation | Transliterated Hebrew Text |
|---|---|
| 8. I'll go to his sons and daughters, I decided, and ask <i>clothing</i> of them. (255) | amarti elekh ecel banav uvenotav avakes mehem <i>beged</i> . (173) |
| 9. Tapping one finger against his spectacles, he said, "you are looking at our torn <i>clothing</i> ." (257) | hikiš beecba al batei einav ve amar, mistakel ata be- <i>vigadeinu</i> hakruim. (175) |
| 10. I left in despair and, empty-handed, with no clothing, with nothing at all, returned to my daughter. (257) | yacati befaxei nefši uveyadaim rəkot belo <i>beged</i> uvelo klum ve xazarti ecel biti. (175) |
| 11. Her hair was loose and <i>wrapped</i> about her. How great is Thy goodness, O God, in putting wisdom into the heart of such a little girl to enable her to <i>wrap herself</i> in her hair after <i>her dress</i> has burned off, for as long as she had not been given a <i>garment</i> it was good that <i>she covered herself</i> with her hair. (257) | seara haya satur ve haya <i>otef</i> ota. ma rav tuvkhā elokim, še natata xokhma belev ktana še kazu <i>lehitatef</i> beseara axarei še nisrafa <i>kutanata</i> še aleiha, še kol zman se lo heviu la ksut <i>lehitkasot</i> ba tov še hi mitkasah biseara. (175) |
| 12. The stone steps sounded beneath... Jews as bearing <i>prayer shawls</i> and <i>ritual gowns</i> streamed into the House of Prayer. With body I <i>covered</i> my little girl, trembling from the cold... (257) | ...kšeragleihem niglalot ve yordot bema'alot naavanim uviydeihem <i>talitot</i> ve <i>kitlim</i> . <i>xipiti</i> begufi et yaldati haktana se riteta mixamat |
| 13. At times she <i>takes</i> (dresses, puts on) the form of an old woman and at times the form of a little girl. (257) | peamim še hi <i>mitlabešet</i> bidmut zkena ufeamim bidmut yalda. (175) |
| 14. A fire has sprung up and has burned my daughter's dress... (258) | eš yaca ve sarfa et <i>kxtonet</i> biti... (175) |
| 15. Once more I shouted, "It's not enough that no one gives her any <i>clothing</i> , but they must abuse us, too." (258) | xazarti ve caakti, lo dai še lo meviim la <i>ksut</i> , ela še megadfim otanu. (176) |
| 16. ...where would we flee and where could we <i>hide</i> ? (259) | ...leheikhan nivrax ve ei makom še <i>nisater</i> bo? (176) |
| 17. Where could we hide? Our home lay in ruins and the enemies <i>covered</i> all the roads. (259) | ei makom še <i>nisater</i> sam? beitenu xarev ve oivim <i>mekhasin</i> et hadrakhim. (176) |
| 18. ...she (my little girl) had been stripped of <i>clothing</i> , she didn't even have a shirt... (259) | ...še mešulelet <i>bgadim</i> hayta yaldati haktana, ve afilu kutonet lo hayta la. (177) |
| 19. ...and among them (the Torah scrolls) gleamed a new scroll <i>clothed</i> in a red <i>mantle</i> with silver points. (259) | umitokh sifrei hatora hivhik sefer xadaš <i>oteh meil</i> adom im nekudot kesef. (177) |
| 20. My soul <i>fainted</i> withim me, and I stood and prayed as those <i>wrapped</i> in <i>prayer shawls</i> and <i>ritual gowns</i> . (260) | umeeleiha umeacma <i>nitatfa</i> alai nafši veamadeti vehitpalalti <i>keatufei</i> talitot uvaalei kitlim. (177) |

Figure 1

The Classification of the Conceptual Field of Clothing and Covering

| <i>Umbrella Term</i> | <i>Polysemic</i> | <i>Religious Connotation</i> | <i>Lexical Items</i> | <i>Verbs</i> |
|----------------------|------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| <i>Ka-S-H</i> | <i>beged</i> | <i>talit</i> (1,12,20) | Nouns/(Example #) | CCC root/(Example #) |
| (3,4,5,6,7,11,15,17) | (8,9,10) | <i>kittel</i> (12,20) | <i>talit</i> (1,12,20) | <i>A-T-F</i> (1,7,11,20) |
| | <i>meil</i> (19) | | <i>kutonet</i> (2,11,14,18) | <i>K-S-H</i> (3,4,5,6,11,17) |
| | | | <i>simla</i> (2) | <i>X-P-H</i> (12) |
| | | | <i>ks(h)ut</i> (3,7,11,15) | <i>A-T-H</i> (19) |
| | | | <i>beged</i> (8,9,10,18) | <i>S-T-R</i> (16,17) |
| | | | <i>kittel</i> (12,20) | <i>L-B-S</i> (13) |
| | | | <i>meil</i> (19) | |

The major themes of the story and the conceptual field of "clothing-covering" are also related to the homophonous roots of (*K-R-A P*) ("to tear,

tear to pieces (assunder), rend, rend a garment in mourning; to split, divide; to cancel, abolish”) (Alcalay 1965 : 2353) and *K-R-A* (פ) (“to read; to call (cry) out; to proclaim, pronounce, preach; to name, call by name to study (the Bible), recite; to summon, invite, assemble, convene; to implore”) (Alcalay 1965 : 2336). This can be found in Table 3.

Table 3
The System of the Homophones *K-R-A* (פ)|*K-R-A*(צ)

| English Translation | Transliterated Hebrew Text |
|--|---|
| 1. Good men will come at once and give me a prayer shawl with an adornment of silver just like the one the enemy <i>tore</i> . (253) | miyad yavou anašim tovim ve yitnu li talit im atara šel kesef keota še <i>krauha</i> haoivim. (172) |
| 2. “...And now my dearest daughter, tell me, an <i>aleph</i> and a bet that come together with a <i>kamatz</i> beneath the aleph — how do you say them? (254) | ve ata biti. bat nafši, imri li <i>aleph uvet</i> še baim keexad ve yeš šam kamatz taxat haaleph keicad hem <i>nikraim</i> ? (172) |
| 3. I <i>ripped off</i> the flaming garment, leaving the child naked... (254) | <i>karati</i> et ktenta mipnei hadleka še axaza bakuto-net ve nistaiyera hayalda eruma... (172) |
| 4. I’ll go to the corner of the storeroom, I said to myself, where <i>torn</i> sacred books are hidden away... (254) | elekh ecel pinat hagniza makom še gonzim šam sfarim <i>kruima</i> (173) |
| 5. When books <i>were read</i> , they <i>were rent</i> . (255) | bezman še hayru sfarim <i>nikraim</i> hayu sfarim <i>nikraim</i> . (173) |
| 6. ...but now that books are not <i>read</i> , they are not <i>rent</i> . (255) | ve axšav še ein sfarim <i>nikraim</i> ein sfarim <i>nikraim</i> . |
| 7. ...his daughter, together with a small group of old men and old women, sitting near a window while an old man with a face like a wrinkled pear stood <i>reading</i> them a letter. (256) | ...et bitc šel rabi alter ve ima sia ktana šel zkenim ve zkenot yošim smuxim laxalon ve zaken exad panav kepnei agas mecumak omed vex <i>kore</i> beigeret. (174) |
| 8. Tapping one finger against his spectacles, he says “You are looking at out <i>torn</i> clothing. Enough that creatures like ourselves still have skin on our flesh. (257) | hikiš beecba al batei einav ve amar, mistakel ata bevigadeinu <i>hakruim</i> dayam livriyot še kmo-teinu še nistayer lanu oreinu al bsareinu. (173) |
| 9. Again I looked in the storeroom where the <i>torn</i> pages from sacred books were kept, the room where in my youth I would find, among the <i>fragments</i> , wondrous and amazing things. (257) | ve šuv nistakalti begniza še hayu gonzim šam <i>kirei</i> sfarim, še bebaxaruti maale hayiti mitokh <i>hakraim</i> dvarim noraim ve niflaim. (175) |

The notion of “tearing”, (the destruction, mourning etc.) is evident in exs. 1,3,8, the notion of “reading” or “reciting” in exs. 2,7, and the connection between the “torn fragments” of the sacred books (the world of the past, the Judaism of the past) and the connection between these holy books and the Jewish people, are most evident in exs. 4,5,6,9. The exploitation of homonymy of these two forms in Israeli pronunciation (cf. fn. 6) is most obvious in exs. 5,6.

V. THE USE OF THE HEBREW ALPHABET

Instead of explicitly speaking about the destruction of the past, i.e., Jewish tradition, the dispersion and fragmentation of Jewish society, (i.e., as a single community), Agnon implicitly describes the “breaking-off of the link” through the use of the first four letters of the Hebrew alphabet: aleph (פ), bet, gimel, dalet. The combination (XiBuR) of the first two letter Ab allows one to address

God, our Father, which according to Agnon, gives us the possibility of continued living experience, i.e., by reading the Torah and the prayers. The abandonment of Judaism is then represented by the skipping or passing over of the first two of these four letters of the Hebrew alphabet in the name of the old rabbi's grandson *GaD*, who has left the fold — thus, losing connection with the concept of Ab and with the past. The use of the name *GaD* is ironical since it also means “luck” or “fortune” as well as being the name of a Babylonian god. If we add the letter *bet* to *GaD* we have the root *B-G-D* which, as we have previously discussed, is polysemous giving us the meanings *BaGaD* (“he was treacherous”) and *BeGeD* (“clothing” and treachery”). We can also read the word *BaGaD* inserting a juncture between the first and second syllable e.g., *Ba—GaD* and receive the expression “luck has come”¹⁰. Another example of this break with the past, i.e., with Jewish tradition, is the abandonment of the Hebrew alphabet in favor of the Roman alphabet, i.e., “a,b,c,d”... as opposed to *aleph, bet, gimel, dalet*. This may indicate the assimilation of the Jewish people into the cultures of the countries of the Diaspora, i.e., giving up their own language which is an integral part of their cultural heritage for that of the other civilizations in which they have lived and desired to emulate. The use of the Hebrew alphabet in this particular story and its implicit message is illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4
The Aleph-Bet-Gimel-Dalet System

| English Translation | Transliterated Hebrew Text |
|---|---|
| <p>1. “...And now, dearest daughter, tell me, an <i>aleph</i> and a <i>bet</i> that come together with a <i>kamatz</i> beneath the <i>aleph</i>—how do you say them?”</p> <p>“<i>Av</i>,” my daughter answered.</p> <p>“And what does it mean?” I asked.</p> <p>“<i>Father</i>,” my daughter answered,</p> <p>“like you’re my <i>father</i>,”</p> <p>“Very nice, that’s right an <i>aleph</i> with a <i>kamatz</i> beneath and a <i>bet</i> with no do in it make “<i>Av</i>.”</p> <p>“And now, my daughter, I continued, “what <i>father</i> is greater than all other <i>fathers</i>? Our <i>Father</i> in Heaven, who is my <i>father</i> and your <i>father</i> and the <i>father</i> of the whole world... and the prayers rise up before our <i>Father</i> in Heaven, who listens very carefully to all that we pray... (254)</p> | <p>ve ata biti, bat nafši imri li, <i>aleph uvet</i> še baim keexad ve yeš šam kamatz taxat <i>haaleph</i> keicad hem nikraim? hešiva biti ve amra, av. amarti la, uma perušo? hešiva biti ve amra, <i>aba</i> kegon ata <i>aba</i> šeli. amarti la, yafe perast, ken hu, oleph kmuca <i>uvet</i> refuya <i>av hq</i>. ve ata biti imri li eize <i>av gadol</i> mikol <i>av?</i> ze <i>avinu</i> se bašaamaim. še hu <i>avi</i> šeli ve hu <i>avikh</i> šelakh ve hu <i>aba</i> šel kol haolam kulo... ve hatfilot olot lifnei <i>avinu</i> še basamaim ve hu maazin umakšiv lekol tfilatenu. (172)</p> |
| <p>2. I’ll go to his sons and daughters, I decided, and ask <i>clothing</i> (b-g-d) of them. (255)</p> | <p>amarti elekh ecel banav uvenotav vavakeš mehem <i>beGED</i>. (173)</p> |
| <p>3. As long as Reb Alter lived in his home I was a frequent visitor there, the more so in the early days when I was a classmate of his grandson <i>Gad</i>. (255)</p> | <p>ve khol zman še haya rabi alter kan hayiti yoce ve nikhnas eclo kol še ken bayamim harišonim kšehayiti lomed beknufiya im nekhdo, im <i>gad</i>. (174)</p> |
| <p>4. Perhaps it was from his grandson, my friend <i>Gad</i>, perhaps news had come from Red Alter’s grandson <i>Gad</i>... (256)</p> | <p>o ešar šel nekhdo hi, šel <i>gad</i> xaveri, še ešar še baa bsura minekhdo šel rabi alter, <i>gad</i>... (174)</p> |

10. Cf. *Genesis* 30: 11-12: “And Leah said: ‘Fortune is come!’ And she called his name *Gad*.”

| English Translation | Transliterated Hebrew Text |
|---|---|
| 5. It is said that two nights prior to his disappearance his wetnurse had seen him in a dream sprouting the plume of a peculiar bird from his head, a plume that shrieked, "A,B,C,D!" (256) | omrim šnei leilot kodem še nitalem raata oto meinikato bexalom kšenocat ouf mešune mevac-becet merošo ve covaxat <i>ah,be,ce,de</i> . (175) |
| 6. Tapping one finger against his spectacles, he said, "You are looking at our torn <i>clothing</i> ." (b-g-d). (257) | hikiš beecba al batei einav ve amar, mistakel ata <i>bevegadeinu</i> hakruim. (175) |
| 7. I left in despair and empty-handed, with no clothing (b-g-d), with nothing at all returned to my <i>daughter</i> . (257) | yacati befaxei nafši uveyadaim rekot belo <i>bege</i> d uvelo klum ve xazarti ecel biti. (175) |
| 8. I glanced at my little girl who stood trembling from the cold, for she had been stripped of her <i>clothing</i> (b-g-d)... (259) | hicacti al yaldati haktana se amda veriteta mexamat cina, še mešulelet <i>bgadim</i> hayta yaldati haktana... (177) |

In particular, the notion of the combination of the first two letters AB to give us the concept of prayer and God is amply illustrated in ex. 1; the use of *GD* alone is found in exs. 3,4, the appearance of the Roman alphabet and its implications is explicit in ex. 5, and the concept of *B-G-D* (overtly as "clothing") appears in exs. 2,6,7,8.

VI. SUMMARY

The junction of the theme, message, and language in this particular story cannot merely be subdivided into the word system revolving around the pivotal metathesized CCC roots *X-R-B* and *X-B-R*, the concept related to the semantic notions of "being clothed-covered" and its various connotational and polysemic implications, the search for cover-clothing due to treachery, and the use of the first four letters of the Hebrew alphabet, all of which are related intrinsically in a multifarious and sometimes antonymous and inseparable manner. This is not, in our opinion, a question of varied heirarchical levels of a text, but rather that the language used in this story can no longer simply be viewed as a non-random grouping or arbitrary signs. We maintain that the language of this story has actually been transformed into a consolidated unit where the message is tightly enclosed within the actual language itself, in short, not a *textus* in the sense of Barthes, but a prism. All of the linguistic-stylistic phenomena we have discussed above, as well as the other language phenomena we have mentioned or alluded to in the paper (the K-R-A homophones, the historical illussions, alliterations, repetitions, etc.), together, impress the reader as they form part of a solid, crystallized, prismatic whole which can be maneuvered and viewed in diverse ways when brought to the light. This intensive merger, this singular and integral fusion of the means and the message within, among other things, the compactness of the CCC root system of the Hebrew language as well as the use of the first four letters of the alphabet may very well make the translation of this story a most difficult, if not impossible task.

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