Jewish-Christian Relations in Modern Hebrew and Yiddish Literature: A Preliminary Sketch

Hamutal Bar-Yosef,

Ben-Gurion University, Beer-Sheva and The Hartman Institute, Jerusalem

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Introductory Note

In February-March 1999 I had the honour of being the first Visiting Fellow of the Centre for Jewish-Christian Relations at Wesley House, Cambridge. This essay is based on a lecture delivered as part of the Centre's seminar series. It does not pretend to exhaust the theme, which deserves further research.

At the Centre I was generously received by Edward Kessler and his two colleagues, Deborah Patterson Jones and Melanie Wright. I met with a small but very lively group of scholars and students, an amazing mixture of religions, ages and nationalities, all of whom have deep interest in the emerging new discipline of "Jewish-Christian Relations". Everyone of them brought something from their own background, and the interchange of ideas and views - both during seminars and through informal meetings - was a unique opportunity for all of us to widen our horizons. These two months at the Centre have convinced me of the importance of promoting Jewish-Christian relations as a rich academic discipline. They inspired me with a determination to develop my research and teaching of Jewish-Christian relations in Israel and elsewhere. I would also like to deliver something of the atmosphere I found here to other places. I am very grateful to the Centre for Jewish-Christian Relations for this special experience.

1.

Modern Hebrew literature, namely modern Jewish literature in the Hebrew language, is about two hundred years old. Its first practitioners, at the end of the eighteenth century, were Moses Mendelssohn and his followers in Berlin. Later, toward the mid-nineteenth century, its centre moved to Czarist Russia, which was the centre of Hebrew literary activity until the 1920s. Following the October Revolution, the use of Hebrew was banned in Soviet Russia, and subsequently Hebrew literature moved to Palestine (pre-state Israel) and continued to develop in Israel. The history of modern Yiddish literature (in the nineteenth-century sense of the word "literature") begins in the 1870s, together with the rise of Jewish national consciousness in Czarist Russia. After the *Shoah* the creation of Yiddish literature was continued in a limited way in Soviet Russia, the United States and Israel, while literature in the Hebrew language became part of Israeli culture[1].

In both Hebrew and Yiddish literatures, being written by Jews, Christians and Christianity represent the Other. Jewish-Christian relations, or better: the attitude of Jews (including the writer) to Christians and Christianity, can be looked at then as part of a the wider theme of the Other in modern Jewish literature. The attitude to Other is by definition problematic because of the Other's difference. This difference is, however, also

[1] For a history of modern Hebrew literature see "Hebrew literature, modern", in *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1972) vol. 8., pp. 175-214; Robert Alter, *The Invention of Hebrew Prose* (Seattle:University of Washington Press, 1988); E. P. Dutton, *After the Tradition*, (New York, 1969), g. Shaked, *Modern Hebrew Fiction* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indian University Press, 2000). For a history of Yiddish literature see "Yiddish literature", *Encyclopedia Judaica*, (1972), vol. 16, pp. 798-832; L. Wiener, *The History of Yiddish Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (London: John C. Nimmo, 1899); S. Liptzin, *The Maturing of Yiddish Literature*, (New York: Jonathan David, 1970); S. Liptzin, *A History of Yiddish Literature*, (Middle Village, New York: Jonathan David, 1972); K. Frieden, *Classic Yiddish Fiction*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995); B. Harshav, *The Meaning of Yiddish*, (Berkekey: University of California Press, 1990).

a matter of power and status: the Otherness of the weak can be more easily ignored or forgiven than the Otherness of the powerful. Modern Jewish literature emerged in a historical context where Jews were traditionally persecuted by Christians because of their Jewish Otherness. They were not only a cultural and social minority, but also a religious enemy, whose moral value was attacked. Jewish traditional writings were busy in polemics, protecting the value of Judaism against Christianity. This situation has extremely changed during the last two hundred years, resulting interesting changes in the attitude to Christian and Christianity in Jewish literatures.

To fully understand the changing sensitivities of Hebrew and Yiddish literature in relation to Christians and Christianity, it is also important to remember that its exponents were Jewish intellectuals born and educated in Europe, surrounded by Christian culture which was basically antisemitic. For the enlightened European Jew it was not only the lack of civil rights which resulted in debasement: with a few exceptions, over the centuries Christian attitudes toward the Jewish people have been characterised by a "teaching of contempt".[2] From a tender age, Christian children received a picture of Judaism as being anachronistic, crude, primitive and wicked. Through liturgy and catechism they were taught that the Jews had crucified Jesus, that the New Covenant of Love had replaced the Old Covenant of stern Judgement, which God had rejected and condemned.

Modern Hebrew literature began, together with Jewish emancipation, as an effort to rehabilitate Judaism in the eyes of enlightened Christians and to present itself as a national culture equal to other European cultures. The whole idea of writing literature in Hebrew can be explained by examining the Jewish situation in Christian Europe. Hebrew was a language used for prayers and for holy study – Yiddish was the spoken language of the Jews in Europe. In late 18th century Germany Hebrew was chosen as the language of modern Jewish culture because it was the language of the Bible, a text highly respected by European Christian culture.

At the same time, in the wider European context, language and literature became an inseparable part of the romantic notion of "nation", while Jewish literature in the European sense of the word was non-existent. This is why Moses Mendelssohn and his

[2] Rev. C. Schoneveld, *Dialogue with Jews*, (Immanuel 5 1975), pp. 61-2.

followers in Berlin were so concerned to prove the existence of a living Jewish language and literature that grew from the ancient national roots. Unlike Heinrich Heine, who chose - in his words - baptism as an entrée into Christian society, Moses Mendelssohn, pressed to become a Christian by Johann Kaspar Lavater, refused.[3] Mendelssohn believed that by showing the moral and cultural value of Judaism, Jews like him would earn their entrance ticket to Christian society without being baptised.

The original mission of modern Hebrew literature was therefore to proudly reflect the unique history, character and spirit of the Jewish people. Paradoxically, this mission grew from the necessity to judge Judaism and Jewish life by European norms and to defend Judaism from Christian accusations by using a language loaded with Christian background. This double urge - to describe Jewish life as uniquely and independently Jewish, on the one hand, and to react to the European-Christian point of view on the other - motivated modern Hebrew literature as long as it was written by Jews who were born and/or educated in Europe. Only Israeli literature and thought had been partly liberated from the polemic character of the Jewish attitude to Christianity.[4]

2.

During the nineteenth century Hebrew and Yiddish writers seemed to ignore the physical presence of Christianity around them. Pondering why, the Yiddish poet Itsik Manger, wrote in 1937: "Did they not see, or did they pretend not to see? I think that the second is more likely, the classic Jewish turning away of the head, or closing the eyes".[5]

There were at least four more reasons than that: the first is the traditional reluctance from any discussion of Christianity versus Judaism, which was characteristic

[3] In his letter "Schreiben an der Herrn Diakonus Lavater in Zürich" (A letter to the Diacon Mr. Lavater in Zürich, 1760). Later Menselssohn translated the Bible into German and wrote his book *Jerusalem* (1783), in which he defended the honour of his Jewish faith before the Christian reader.[3]

[4] On images of Christians and Christianity and the Jewish anti-Christian polemics in traditional Judaism see I. Y. Yuval, *Shnei goyim be-vitnekh: Yehudim ve-notsrim – dimuyim hadadyim* (Jews and Christians – reciprocal images), Tel-Aviv: Am oved, 2000.

[5] I. Manger, editorial, *Foroys*, 1 (1937), ii: 2.

of Jews as long as they lived in a European ghetto. [6] During the nineteenth century Jews in Russia were struggling for their elementary human rights, and their writings were always under grave censorship. The second is the cultural isolation of Jewish life. Most Jews spoke their own Yiddish language and could not understand the language of the *Goyim* (literally "peoples". They were completely ignorant of the Christian theology and rituals. Even if they could see churches, cavalries, funerals and other ritual processions (the latter often leading to pogroms), they preferred to turn their backs to these "impure" and dangerous images and to drive them away from their inner world. The third was the writers' wish to focus on Jewish life and to introduce Jewish national culture as independent of the Christian world. The fourth was their belief in European liberalism and their secular world-view.

Although historically concurrent with German Romanticism, nineteenth-century Hebrew literature, moving from Germany to Russia in the mid-nineteenth century, was engaged with the ideas of the Enlightenment until the 1890s and expressed the ideas of the Jewish *Haskalah* (Enlightenment) movement.[7] *Haskalah* Hebrew writers in Russia, influenced by contemporary Russian Positivism and "civic" ideas, tended to treat Judaism not as a theology but as a civilisation, a way of life. They attacked traditional Jewish forms of life as well as Jewish traditional institutions. These were the "obscurant"

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[6] "And rightly so", says Yosef Klausner, "for it was dangerous for a Jew to point out any defect in Christianity, as the laws of Christian governments included grave punishments for any trivial affront, on the one hand, and the Jews themselves were afraid from any contact with Christianity, whether good or ill, even afraid to pronounce Jesus' name". See his "Bein Yahadut le-Natsrut" [Between Judaism and Christianity], (*Me'asef Davar*, Tel-Aviv 1955, p. 130). See also Y. Fleishman, *Be'ayat Hanatsrut Ba-Makhshava Hayehudit MiMendelssohb ad Rosenzweig* [The Problem of Christianity in Jewish Thought from Mendelssohn to Rosenzweig], (Jerusalem: Magnes 1964).

[7] On the Jewish *Haskalah* movement see R. Mahler, *Hasidism and the Jewish Enlightenment: Their Confrontation in Galicia and Poland in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century*, (Philadelphia, New York and Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1985); On *Haskalah* literature see Stanislawski, *For Whom Do I Toil*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

enemies of the "new Jew", who was trying to hone his European education and manners through open-mindedness, aesthetic refinement and freedom of thought. *Haskalah* writers perceived European culture as cosmopolitan and religiously universal. Such qualities were ascribed to the "good goyim" - enlightened Russian officers, idealistic revolutionaries – who scarcely appear in prose fiction written during the second half of the nineteenth century.

Haskalah writers ascribed the same qualities to both the "new Jew" and to the historical biblical Jew. Idealisation of the Jewish biblical past was a continuation of the Romantic Christian-oriented literary tradition, on the one hand and an indirect critique of contemporary Jewish life (for example, the excessive learning of the Talmud) from the enlightened European point of view, on the other. Historical novels and long poems on Biblical themes are characteristic of *Haskalah* Hebrew literature, especially during the first half of the century. Famous examples include Naftali Herz Wessely's biblical epic *Poems of Glory* (1789-1811), Avraham Mapu's first Hebrew novel *Love of Zion* (1853), and Yehuda Leib Gordon's long biblical poems written in the 1860s and 1870s. Christian characters are of course absent from these works of literature.

In the 1870s realistic prose fiction and long poems criticising "obscurant" Jewish life became fashionable, but even here Christian characters rarely appear, as if Christians did not at all exist in Jewish life, and when they do appear they represent the idealised enlightened Christian. Parallelism between the cruel attitude towards the mentally ill in the Jewish town and in a mental asylum in Vienna, depicted by Perets Smolenskin in a story published in 1878, is a surprising exception.[8] Cruelty in this case has nothing to do with Christianity; European culture is represented by Smolenskin as liberal and secular. His criticism is directed at its social defects, without any examination of Christian values. Thus at this time Hebrew *Haskalah* writers chose to disregard the role of Christianity in European culture.

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[8] In Perets Smolenskin's story "Torat Ha-no'ar", in *Hamabit*, (13.3.1878), pp. 2-20. Also in *Alei Hemed*, (Vilna, 1901), pp. 19-27.

Nineteenth-century Hebrew writers in Russia were in love with Western European - and later with Russian - culture, which they knew better from the literature than from the experience, and they wanted to become part of it. However, since the early 1880s, this love was severely disappointed following waves of pogroms encouraged by official institutions and by nationalistic journalism in Czarist Russia. Antisemitism appeared rooted not only in the non-educated people, but also in the enlightened, well-educated intelligentsia, and this revelation undermined the foundations of *Haskalah* ideology.[9]

Literary conventions of realistic prose which dominated Russian literature, no less than historical reality, formed the reflection of Jewish-Christian relations in Hebrew literature during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. As Jews were normally barred from living in big cities, most lived in little towns in the Russian Pale of Settlement, socially disconnected from their Ukrainian neighbours, whom they met at the marketplace or for business purposes. Hebrew and Yiddish writers in the 1860s do not yet describe Jewish-Christian commercial relationships. At that time they were more interested in criticizing the Jewish traditional life. In the 1870s, however, Christian characters begin to appear as party to commercial relations or as representatives of the ruling system.[10] In this context the local non-Jew was perceived not as a person having another faith or religion, but as a person belonging to the ruling non-Jewish majority.

While in the 1860s Mendele Moikher Sforim[11] in his Yiddish novel *Fishke the Lame* (1869: translated by him into Hebrew in 1909) and in his Yiddish play *The Tax* (1869) describes Jewish economic life in all its misery and corruption as a self-contained realm, in his allegorical *The Nag* (1873), he already hints at discrimination of Jews and

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[9] On the Jewish situation in Czarist Russia in the early 1880s see J. Klier, *Imperial Russia's Jewish Question 1881-1885*, (Cambridge, 1995).

[10] On the reflection of social Jewish-Christian relations in Hebrew literature see I. Bartal, *Ha-lo-Yehudim ve-hevratam basifrut ivrit ve-Yiddish bemizrakh Eropa bein hashanim 1856-1914* [Non-Jews and their society in Hebrew and Yiddish literatures in Eastern Europe during the years 1856-1914], PhD. thesis, (The Hebrew University:Jeruslalem, 1980).

[11] This is the Yiddish pseudonym (the Hebrew pronounciation is Mendele Mokher Sfarim) of Shalom Ya'akov Abramovich (1835 or 1836- 1917).

deprivation of equal rights in regard of their economic state and education. In his story *Aryeh the Stout* (1899-1900) Hayim Nahman Bialik (who was for a while a timber merchant himself) humorously describes the superiority of the Jewish commercial talent over the Ukrainian merchant and the ways by which the Jew cheats the *goy*.

Jews could also meet Russian representatives of the government and the police. Ben-Avigdor (pseudonym of Shalkovich) in his story "Leah the Fish Seller" (1891) bitterly uncovers the battle of survival in a Jewish market, where Jewish women-pedlars confront the Russian policeman. Mendele Moikher Sforim describes such unpleasant meetings, for example, at the end of *Travels of Benjamin the Third* (1897), where the two heroes are caught by a Russian policeman who force the two Jews to enlist in the Russian army. Shaving of head and side-curls was part of the procedure.

If there were any meetings with the representatives of the Church, they were perceived by nineteenth-century Jewish writers not as a meeting with the Christian religion, but as a meeting with a social power. A humorous description of such a meeting can be found in Scholem Aleichem's Yiddish novel *Tevye the Milkman* (1895, later filmed as *Fiddler on the Roof*). Tevye, the Jewish hero, debates with the *galakh*, the local Russian priest, on the subject of Judaism versus Christianity. This happens after Tevye's daughter (youngest of seven), who is working together with Russian revolutionaries, has fallen in love with a young Ukrainian, who wants to marry her. There is no question of his becoming a Jew, so the only solution is for her to be baptised. But for Tevye, the Orthodox Jew, this would mean losing his beloved daughter. The Russian priest tries hard to convince Tevye that Christianity is a better and more truthful religion than Judaism. Tevye, however, offers his answers and wins the debate, but the priest wins the daughter. The author indirectly reminds the reader of the long tradition of medieval debates between Judaism and Christianity, for Jews who won the debates were sometimes killed.

For Sholem Aleichem, Christianity represented the injustice of the strong, while Judaism represented the useless justice of the innocent weak. He also presented Christianity as a dangerous seductive, leading to disaster, for Tevye's daughter is not happy with her new life. The growth of antisemitism drives her desperately back to her father's home. Again, social reality, not theology, provides the meeting ground for Christianity and Judaism. This way of evaluating Christianity – focusing on the practical

practice of ethics more than on theological principles - is perhaps characteristic of the Jewish point of view.

4.

During the last two decades of the nineteenth century, unjust suffering on the part of the Jew, which Sholem Aleichem described with humour, became a dominant theme in Hebrew literature, where Jewish suffering as a result of antisemitic discrimination in Russia was dramatically portrayed. Mendele Mokher Sforim, in his novel *The Nag* (1873) transformed the tortured mare, Dostoevski's symbol of suffering in *Crime and Punishment* (1866), into a symbol of Jewish suffering caused by Russian antisemitism. Many stories and novels deal with the suffering of the *kantonists.* These Jewish children were recruited into the Czarist army for twenty-five years, treated cruelly and forced to become Christian.[12] In the Hebrew poetry of the 1880s and early 1890s, known as *Hibat-Tsion* (love of Zion, the proto-Zionist movement) poetry, the suffering woman, sometimes a sacred mother, was a frequent symbol of the Jewish people and its fate in the Diaspora.

It is interesting to note that the rather traumatic Jewish disappointment in the shattered hope of being accepted into European civilisation was expressed by the use of symbols, notions, and values that were important in Christian culture, and had specific colour in Russian tradition. Martyrdom was an important sign of the divinity of Christ and of human beings in Russian culture.[13] Suffering, and especially the sacred suffering of a motherly woman and child, become a trait of Jewish identity in the Hebrew *Hibat*

[12] On the Kantonists see E. Ofek, "Kantonists: Jewish children as soldiers in Tsar Nicholas's army" in *Modern Judaism* (1993), vol. 13, pp. 277-308; O. Litvak, *The Literary response to consciption: individuality and authority in the Russian-Jewish Enlightenment* , UMI: Ann Arbor, Mich 2000.

[13] On the centrality of masochistic altruism in Russian culture and literature, see: Daniel Rancour-Laferriere, *The Slave Soul of Russia*, New York: New York University Press, 1995. On martyrdom in rabbinic Judaism see D. Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the making of Christianity and Judaism,* Stanford California: Stanford Universty Press, 1999.

Tsion poetry. In the Hebrew Bible the value most extolled in women is their wisdom; they are never represented as victims by choice. It is only in post-Christian Judaism – which Hebrew *Haskalah* writers rejected - that we find feminine and child martyrology (such as Hannah and her seven sons in 2 Maccabees 7). The attraction of *Hibat Tsion* writers to this motif was influenced by Russian-Christian, not Jewish, literary tradition., and was motivated by apologetic needs.

Such unconscious infiltration of Christian ideas, absorbed through European culture of Romanticism, was characteristic of Hebrew and Yiddish literatures as long as they were part of European culture, even when their writers' explicit intention was to write a uniquely Jewish literature. This does not mean that Hebrew writers consciously adopted Christian theology. They were absorbing Christian ideas which were in the European "air", in art, literature, architecture and music, in the same way that Christian popular beliefs, customs, and ritual - together with other elements of popular culture (such as songs, dances, food, etc.) - were adopted by Jews,[14] especially by those who lived on the periphery of the Pale of Settlement, far from the Jewish urban centres. Retrospectively this phenomenon is humorously described in Shaul Chernikhovski's idylls *Dumplings* (1902) and *Berele is Sick* (1907), where the poet reflects with nostalgia on his childhood in the Crimean farm, before the outburst of antisemitism in Russia. In *Dumplings*, a Rabbi's widow and her friendly Ukrainian neighbour, who comes to visit her on Sunday, both complain about the neglect of religion among the young generation. In *Berele is Sick*, the Christian nanny reminds the four-year-old Berele that he must say his Jewish morning prayers. "What are you – a *goy*?!" she rebukes him. When Berele gets sick the young mother calls for a Ukrainian *volkhovitka* (a woman sorcerer or magician who cures the possessed) to cure him of his diarrhoea. The idea is suggested by a neighbour, a Jewish woman, who visits her as a representative of a Jewish charity. The *volkhovitka* herself, after finishing the curing ritual, enjoys *khalleh*, the plaited bread Jews bake for Sabbath. Chernikhovski describes idyllic cultural interchange taking place

[14] On Christian influence on Jewish religion, see M. Hilton, *The Christian Effect on Jewish Life* (London: SCM Press, 1994); D. Boyarin, *Dying for God*, ibid.; I. Y. Yuval, "Ha-poskhim al shtei ha-se'ipim: ha-hagada shel pesakh ve-hapaskha ha-notsrit" [The Jewish Passover *hagada* and the Christian Easter], *Tarbiz 65* (1996), pp. 5-28.

on a very earthy and simple level. It is a physical interaction, neither ideological nor theological.

5.

Changes in Jewish life at the turn of the twentieth century made possible a closer acquaintance between Jews and Christians. More and more Jews could read Russian, and Jewish children, although limited by a quota, could go to Russian schools. Jews started to enrol in Russian universities, and those who were not accepted in Russia went abroad, mainly to France, Germany and Switzerland.[15] In St Petersburg, where only Jews who had special rights could live, many opted for conversion to the Russian Orthodox Church in order to achieve social status or to marry a Christian..[16] More and more Jews became part of Russian culture, even without converting.

These vistas, all new for Russian Jews, changed the atmosphere considerably, and

[15] On Jews as universities students at the turn of the twentieth century see B. Nathans, *Beyond the Pale* (Berkekey, Los angeles, London : University of California Press, 2002), pp.201-307.

[16] On the history of Jewish converts see Y. D. Eisenstein, the entry "Mumar" (proselyte) in his Jewish Encyclopedia *Otsar Israel* (10 vols.), New York: Pardes, vol. 6, pp. 119-121. According to Eisenstein there were about 250.000 converts in nineteenth century Europe, including 40.000 in Russia in 1836-1875. More statistics on Jewish converts to Christianity in different Western-European countries in Yaakov Leshchinsky, "Hashmad Be-aratsot Shonot" [Conversion in Different Coubtires], *Ha-olam* 5 (1911), no. 1, pp. 14-16; no. 4, pp. 5-6; no. 5, pp. 4-5; no. 8, pp. 4-8; no. 9, pp. 3-5; no. 10, pp. 5-7; no. 11, pp. 6-8. On converts in Czarist Russia see Shaul Ginzburg, *Meshumodim in Tsarishen Russland* [Converts in Czarist Russia], New York:Bicher Verlag, 1946); Y. Slutski, *Ha-Itonut Ha-Yehudit-Russit Ba-me'ah Ha-Esrim* [Jewish-Russian Journalism in the Twentieth Century], (Tel-Aviv: Ha-Aguda Le-Kheker Toldot Ha-Yehudim and the Institue for The Research of Jewish Diaspora), pp. 15-17. On Jewish proselytism in St Petersburg at the turn of the twentieth century, see B.-T. Katz, *Zikhronot* [Memories], (Tel-Aviv, 1963), pp. 56-60; see also Sh. L. Zitron, *Me'akhorei Hapargod: Mumarim, Bogdim, Mitkakhashim* [Behind the Curtain: Converts, Traitors, Deniers], (2 vols., Vilna: Zvi Matz, 1923).

their impact, reflected in Hebrew literature, was twofold. On the one hand, the attraction of the Jew to the Christian world seemed stronger and more daring. It is not coincidental that sexual relations, love and marriage between Jews and Christians became frequent themes in Hebrew prose fiction at the turn of the century.[17] On the other hand, national consciousness became stronger, and the reaction to love when frustrated by antisemitism became more desperate and dramatic. From the turn of the twentieth century Hebrew and Yiddish writers gave vent to an awareness of the irresistible charm the Christian held for Jews, while warning the reader the price of giving in to its lures.

Erotic relationships between Jews and non-Jews is a theme characteristic of Hebrew literature during the first quarter of the twentieth century. It appears in the works of leading writers such as M. Y. Berdichevski, H. N. Bialik, Sh. Tchernikhovsky, Y. Steinberg, S.Y. Agnon, D. Vogel, and others. While in reality the Christian seduction could also have a social motivation, Hebrew literature of this period describes the attraction of the Jew to the Christian world as aesthetic, or romantic or (most often) purely sexual. This view is due to fin-de-siècle literary taste, no less than to the new conditions of Jewish life.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Christian characters began to appear in Hebrew literature together with their surroundings. Now we find the Church and the Cross as a natural part of the literary scene, even if they do not have any thematic function.[18] The relations between Jews and non-Jews are now described as closer: the Christian is sometimes the Jews' good friend, or his room mate, or a student in the same university, or (most often) his or her lover. The Christians are no more necessarily

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[17] On love between Jews and Christians and their mixed marriages see A. Komem, "Hagibor Hayehudi ve-hana'ara ha-goya; hadegem hagavri ve-hadegem ha-nashi" [The Jewish hero and the Gentile girl; the male model and the female one], *Ma'ariv's Literary Supplement*, (22.9.93), pp. 30-1 and, (29.9.93), pp. 34-5.

[18] Examples can be found in U. N. Gnessin's "Ktata" (A Quarrel, 1912), where a church is mentioned just as a part of the landscape, and in Rachel Feinberg's drama "Soné Ha-Nashim" (The Mysoginist), *Ha-Olam* 17 no. 2 (11.1.1929), p.39, where "a Christian church" in included in scene direction, witohut any connection with the dramatic situation, just as part the scene of a Jewish market-place.

enlightened and open-minded. They can also be as narrow minded and devoid of European education as any ghetto Jew, such as the hero's German landlord in Micha Yosef Berdychevski's "Two Camps" *(*1900), who is a constantly drunk shoemaker. Mikahel, the hero, comes from Poland to study in the German University, and finds himself in a complicated sexual relationship with both his landlady and her daughter. Berdychevski (1865-1921), who at the age of 25 left Russia to study in Breslau, Berlin and Bern, was a pioneer in describing the inner world of the non-Jew. His non-Jewish characters, just like his Jewish ones, are motivated by their unconscious drives, especially by sexual needs, and they behave according to their individual psycho-physiological constitution.

Chernikhovsky's long poem *Baruch of Magentsa* [Mainz] (1901) ends with the madness of the Jewish hero, who murders his Christian wife and two daughters. The story, set in the Middle Ages, describes a Jew who voluntarily converted to Christianity after being enchanted by the beauty of the churc, the music of the choir and intoxicated by the smell of incense. However, after realising the cruelty inflicted on his people by the Crusaders, he sets fire to the church and murders his beloved wife and daughters. In his madness he fantasises about the form of his revenge. Strangely enough, his fantasies are based on European non-Jewish folklore: he will be transformed into a vampire and suck the blood of Christians. It is perhaps worth noting that Tchernikhovsky's wife was a German Christian,[19] and that in his early poetry he was a great admirer of European "Greek" (in contrast to Jewish) beauty.

Jewish-Christian love always has a tragic ending in early twentieth century Hebrew literature. The roots of this tragedy, however, are differently explained: the tragedy of Tevye's daughter was a result of a social class conflict. In later literary works conversion does not necessarily takes place and there is no social scandal. The relationship is purely sexual, and it is a private matter. Love is frustrated, just as it rises,

[19] Chernikhovsky's wife was of Polish-German-Ukrainian origin. Their marriage raised the anger of Orthodox circles in Palestine, who until the mid 1940s refused to name a street after him in Jerusalem. Y. Klausner, *Shaul Tchernikhovsky: Ha'adam Ve-hameshorer* [Shaul Tchernikhovsky: the Man and the Poet], (Tel-Aviv:Yavneh, 1947), p. 61-2.

because of the cruel, deterministic laws of nature.

While Tevye's daughter is an innocent victim, at the beginning of the twentieth century Hebrew writers started to examine male Jewish attraction to Christian girls, and even to consider the wrongs committed to Christian girls by their Jewish lovers.

In his story "Without Her" (1899)[20] Berdychevski describes a destructive love affair between a Jewish student in a German university city and a local Christian girl. He abandons her because he perceives the chasm lying between them, and the separation causes him a severe mental crisis. Three years later he learns that she has gone mad.

In "Behind the Fence" (1910)[21] Hayyim Nahman Bialik tells about a young Jewish boy who peeps through the cracks of a closed fence into the neighbouring yard, where he can see the suffering of a Ukrainian orphan girl tortured by her stepmother. Childish games between the two leads to sexual relations and to pregnancy. However, there is no question of marriage: the Jewish boy, who is brave enough to fight with Christian hooligans, finds himself too weak to overcome the big blind fence between the Jewish and Christian worlds. While the author invites the reader's sympathy for the wrong the Jew committed against the Christian girl, the idea of marriage is beyond his horizons.

The catastrophic results of Jewish-Christian sexual relations are even more dramatic in Micha Yosef Berdychevski's story "The Two" (1912).[22] It is the tale of a Jewish girl who has travelled from one of the Baltic countries in order to study in a German university, where she falls in love with a Christian student from Russia. Berdychevski stresses the complete spiritual distance between the two young people, who are attracted to each other only by blind sexual drive. They experience a short-lived idyll, and then, seemingly without cause, the young Russian begins to treat his wife cruelly, drinking heavily. When she tells him that she is pregnant, he hits her and kicks her with

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[20] M. Y. Berdychevski, "Bil'adeiha" [Without Her] in *Mibayit Umihutz*, (Petrokov:Tushia, 1899), pp. 77-94.

[21] H. N. Bialik, "Me'ahorei Hagader" [Behind the Fence] in *Sipurim vedivrei sifrut* [Stories and Essays], (Tel-Aviv:Dvir), pp.43-85.

[22] M. Y. Berdychevski, "Hashnayim" [The Two] in *Kitvei Micha Yosef Berdychevski* [Collected Writings], (Tel-Aviv:Dvir, 1965), vol. 1, pp. 59-62.

his boot. The story ends with their inevitable separation.

For both Bialik and Berdychevski there is nothing theological or spiritual in the Jewish attraction to the Christian opposite sex: it is purely physical. The failure of romantic Jewish-Christian relations seems inevitable: it is perceived as a consequence of the deterministic laws of genetics. Couching the attraction of the Jew to the Christian world in terms of a sexual drive reflects not only a new historical and social reality, but also a new way of thinking about the Jewish problem. It is a metaphor, hinting at male Jewish insecurity and search for physical vitality.

Such understanding of the Jewish problem was characteristic of the European concept of the Jew at the turn of the century, when differences between nations and cultures were explained on the basis of genetics and racial rather than spiritual factors. In this context, sexual attraction does not represent a conscious choice, but a blind drive. It expresses the irresistible charm of the Christian world in the eyes of the European Jewish intellectual, whose inferiority complex internalised antisemitic stereotypes. David Vogel personifies this understanding of Jewish-Christian relations in his novel *Marriage Life* (1929-1930, English: 1988, 1998), which takes place in pre-Nazi Vienna. The hero, a Jewish feeble intellectual, hastily marries a huge blond woman from an aristocratic Viennese family, with whom he has no spiritual or emotional common ground whatsoever, but feels desperately physically attracted to her. Their married life is depicted as hell on earth, leading to the death of their baby (whom he treats with characteristically Jewish devoted fatherhood) and his complete madness.

The work of nobel prize winner Shmuel Yosef Agnon is replete with the subject of erotic relations between Jews and Christians.[23] Agnon is basically a Neo-Romantic writer, so his reflection of Jewish-Christian relations is not intended to be realistic. It is a poetic expression – sometimes legendary, or balladistic, or symbolic - of Agnon's nostalgia to Jewish reality which was deserted and destroyed, and also of his anger at the evils that was done to his people. In his story "Ha-panas" (The Lamp, 1907) whose Yiddish version "Toiten Tanz" (Dance of Death), was expanded into the story "Mekholat Ha-mavet" (Dance of Death, 1919) Shmuel Yosef Agnon tells about a Polish squire who

[23] Shmuel Verses, *Relations Between Jews and Poles In S.Y. Agnon's Work*, The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem 1994, pp. 85-103.

murdered a Jewish groom during his wedding and took his bride to be his wife. In "The Lamp" their grandson converted to Judaism and came at night to study Torah in the old house of study, while the epilogue to the Hebrew "Dance of Death" describes a nocturnal meeting between the bride and the murdered groom.

In Bialik's, Berdychevski's, Vogel's and Agnon's prose fiction individual Jews are not innocent victims: their yielding to the power of sexual seduction is seen as responsible for the late sufferingthey bring on themselves and on their Christian partners. In literary works written in Israel after the *Shoah* by writers born in Europe, the motif of Jewish-Christian sexual relations reveal an even harsher criticism on both sides. In Agnon's *The Lady and the Pedlar* (1942)[24] a Jewish pedlar arrives at an isolated house in a remote village. The mistress of the house buys something from him, then asks him to repair something in the house. He stays for the night and gradually becomes increasingly useful, ingratiating himself more and more with the mistress. Comfort convinces him to stay for good, but he notices something strange: she never eats anything. He becomes aware that this woman is a vampire, whose food is men's blood, and that the only way to escape his fate is to murder her and flee. The names of the two heroes, Joseph and Helena, makes clear the allegory. Agnon on the one hand blames the Jew for his love of comfort and for his blind naivety, and on the other he demonises the Christian world, thus expressing the traumatic Jewish reaction to the behaviour of European Christians during the *Shoah*.

Agnon's attitude to Jewish-Crhistian relations is shared by the Israeli novelist Aharon Appelfeld, born in 1932 in Chernovitz (now in the Ukraine). Appelfeld experienced the *Shoah* as a young teenager. In his short stories, collected in *Ashan (Smoke*, 1962), *Ba-gai haporeh* (In the Fertile Valley, 1964) and *Kfor al ha-aretz* (Frost Upon the Land, 1964) as well as in later novels, bestial cruelty is the law of survival which non-Jews possess by nature, but which Jews must either adopt through harsh experience or perish. In his *Badenheim* (1979, English: 1980, 2001) and in later novels,

[24] S. Y. Agnon, "Ha-adonit ve-harochel" [The Lady and the Pedlar], in *Samukh venir'eh* (Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv: Schoken, 1946), pp. 102-92. English: "The Lady and the Pedlar" , translated by G. Scholem , in *Twenty-One Stories*, (New York: Schocken, 1970), pp. 169-181.

he severely criticises the illusions of pre-*Shoah* Western European Jews, who were living in a fools' paradise assuming that antisemitism would have no bearing on highly cultured Jews. In his novels *Katarina* (1989, English 1990) and *Iron tracks* (1991, English: 1998), Appelfeld continues the tradition of warning against the sexual attraction of Jews to Christian women and against the seduction of proselytism for the sake of social success. For Appelfeld the *Shoah* represented the most bitter disappointment of the Jewish people on account of their love for European culture. It proved that Jews should remain Jewish, and that behind the enlightened European person a bloodthirsty beast might be found. Appelfeld and Agnon express a deep suspicion of European culture and Christian morality.

6.

From what has been said so far one might get the impression that modern Hebrew and Yiddish writers had very little interest either in Christianity as a religion or in the religious experience of Christian characters. Christians were either depicted as enlightened European "good *goyim*" or as "bad *goyim*", and their religious inner life were ignored. Moses Rosenson's books, published in St Petersburg during the 1870s and 1890s, where the writer recommends Jewish-Christian fraternity, were an exceptional phenomenon, and not coincidentally were strongly criticised.[25] This impression should not surprise us, literature being what it is – an emotional expression of individual and collective experience. Traditional Jewish life in Eastern Europe was disconnected with Christianity, a fact which S.Y. Agnon describes in his legendary tale "Ma'aglei tsedek" (Circles of Justice, 1923). Agnon tells about an old Polish Jew who saves half of his

[25] On Moshe Rosenson (? – 1896) see *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York, 1905), vol. 10, p. 477. Rosenson was a Rabbi, a physician and a poet and also a very rich person. He wrote about 20 books in Hebrew (in some editions also in Russian and French text) all of them attempting to make peace between Jews and Christians. In his book *Shalom Tsdaka Ve-Emet* [Peace, Mercy and Truth] he cited Jewish, Christian and Muslim sources to prove the importance of peace. The motto was Malachi 2:10: "But we have one Father, but one God created us". Two of his books were translated into Russian (Vilnus 1875, Warsaw 1892).

meagre earnings to go to Eretz Israel. He drops the money into the charity box set at a Calvary, and after some time has passed goes to take his money by breaking open the charity box, without any thought of profanation crossing his mind. That very day priests come from Rome to open the box and the Jew in caught in the act, stone in hand, and thrown into prison. In his novel *Bridal Canopy* (1929) the early noneteenth-century hero, Reb Yudel the Hassid, is a complete stranger to the Christian customs and rituals he encounters during his journey through the villages of Galicia. He also takes care not to look at the Christian "images" which are scattered all along the countryside (but the narrator is well aware of their presence).[26] Even when Jews and Christians met each other as students in the same university their inter-religious acquaintance was very limited: "They also have a religion and they pray, but they don't believe in the Cross", this is the way a German student girl thinks of the Jewish student she meets in Bersichevski's story "The Friend" (1902). Here Berdichevski, who later in his life dedicated many years to Jewish-Christian comparative research (in German),[27] humorously dramatized the limits of inter-religious understanding, as he expereinced it during his student life in Bern.

It is, however, surprising to discover the great interest Christianity and in the image of Jesus, which grew in Hebrew and Yiddish literature and art in the three first decades of the twentieth century, at the same time when the movement of Jewish national revival was gaining power. In 1912 Zionism was even accused as being the cause of this phenomenon:

> Since the beginning of the twentieth century young *masskilim* in Russia

[26] Ibid., pp.74-84.

[27] M. Y. Berdychevski, *In Bethlehem, in Jerusalem und in Rom: Christliche Welt,* Marburg, 1916; Der *Born Judas: Märchen und Geschichten*, Berlin, Schoken, 1934 (The introduction is dated 1916); *Jesus Son of Hanan: Researches in the History of Christianity*, translated into Hebrew from the German manuscript by Emanuel Bin-Gorion [The writer's son], Tel-Aviv, Moreshet Micha Yosef, 1959; *Shaul and Paul: Researches in the History of Christianity,* translated from the German manuscript by Emanuel Bin-Gorion, Tel-Aviv, Moreshet Micha Yosef, 1971.

(…) have begun to be engaged in problems of natoinality and Zionism, and have found the solution by praising and flatteing to Jesus the God of the Christians whom they exalted as the prophet of [our] God.[28]

This change can better be explained as a result of both historical changes in Jewish-Christian relations and new trends in European culture.

During the first quarter of the twentieth century Jewish life – even in the *shtetl* (the Jewish town in the Pale of Settlement) - became closer to Christianity, whether by mutual acquaintance of intellectuals and revolutionaries, or by conversion. This change in Jewish life can be clearly traced by comparing Berdichevski's image of the *shtetl* in his *From My Little Town* (1900) to his *Miriam* (1921):[29] while in the earlier one there is no sign of Christian presence, in the latter we find a series of Jewish characters who are attracted to Christianity, marry a Christian girl or even convert without leaving their dwelling place. For Jewish intellectuals and artists Christianity became part of their inner world. Interest of Jewish artists in Christianity and in Jesus began already in the 1860-1870 in Russia, when Mark (Mordechai) Antokolski sculpted *The Kiss of Judas Iscariot* (1867) and *Jesus in Chains* (1874). Comparisons between Israel Besht, the founder of Hasidism, and Jesus appear in writings S. Dubnov and M.Y. Berdychevsky.[30] Baal-Teshuva explains Chagall's attraction to Jesus thus:

> Because Christianity was central to the European cultural tradition, it attracted many Jews in the modern period: Edmund Husserl, Gustav Mahler, Alfred Doeblin, Roman Jakobson, and many others converted to Christianity. His friends in the interwar period, Raissa and Jacques Maritain, actively

[28] Y.D. Eisenstein, the entry "Messit U-madiah" in *Otsar Israel* , (see note 15) vol. 6, p.260.

[29] M. Y. Berdychevski, *A Completed Novel: M.Y. Berdychevski's Miriam:Annotated Edition with Introduction*, Haifa and Tel-Aviv: Haifa University Press and Zmora-Bitan, 1997.

[30] The manuscript of S. Dubnov's essay "Jesus of Nazareth and Israel Besht can be found in the YIVO archive, New Yor, record group 87: Papers of Simon dubnov folder 1009 folios 76300-76308. I would like to thank Anke Hilbrenner for the information on this source. M.Y. Berdychevsky, "Khasidizm" [Hasidism] V*oskhod* (June 1902), p. 11.

> propagated conversion of the Jews. Chagall was not one of them, since he was deeply connected with a Jewish folk sensibility; but culturally, the Christian world was a tangible reality in his work and life.[31]

Ecumenic trends in Europe, and especially the neo-Christian "spiritual revolution" in Russia, gave rise to intellectual experiments to blur the borders between Judaism and Christianity.[32] Interest in the psychology of the unconscious was also a factor which diminished the importance of differences between religions. The impression of Vladimir Solovyov (1857-1900) on Jewish thought and culture contributed to the convergence of Judaism and Christianity in Hebrew and Yiddish literatures.[33] Positive interest in Judaism continued among some of Solovyov's disciples (V. Ivanov, N Berdiaev, S. Bulgakov) as well as among writers who were not close to him: Fiodor Sologub, Leonid Andreev and Maxim Gorky. In his short stories and dramas, Leonid Andreev described the modern Jew as the real Jesus, and severely criticised contemporary Christian bourgeois morality. In his story *Judas Iscariot* (1907) he shocked the Russian church by creating a positive literary image of Judas Iscariot.

This was a time when Jewish writers mythologized and universalised the Jewish experience by using Christian symbols and narratives. Jesus – separated from the Church and from the history of Crusades, blood-libels, ghettos and auto-da-fés - became a universal tragic figure, a symbol of human suffering, sometimes on a par with the Jewish messiah.[34] Thus they blurred the borders between the two religions, diminishing the importance of the differences between them. By adopting a semi-Christian point of view they seemed to suggest the possibility of a Jewish-Christian experience. At the same time

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[31] J. Baal-Teshuva, *Chagall: A Retrospective* (New York, 1995), p. 301.

[32] B. Glazer-Rosenthal and M. Bokhachevsky-Khomiak (eds.), *A Revolution of the Spirit in Russia 1890-1924,* (New York : Fordham University Press, 1990).

[33] H. Bar-Yosef, "The Jewish reception of Vladimir Solovyov" in *Vladimir Solov'ëv: Reconciler and Polemicist,* ed. by W. van den Bercken, Manon de Courten and E. van der Zweerde, Leuven, Paris, Sterling, Virginia: Peeters, 2000, pp. 363-392.

[34] D. G. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* (Cambridge, Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 263.

contemporary Christian ethics was being attacked with unprecedented boldness by Jewish writers and thinkers. This duality – deep sympathy with Jesus the Jew, on the one hand, and sharp criticism of Christian ethics in practice, on the other hand, is characteristic of Hebrew and Yiddish literatures during the twentieth century.

Erasing the borders between Judaism and Christianity became possible in an atmosphere of a "devaluation of all values", when paradox became a worldview. Paradox was a central stylistic device in symbolist literature, which was absorbed in Hebrew and Yiddish literatures at the beginning of the twentieth century. Symbolism in art and literature, where national myths and religious symbols represented universal subconscious dream-like experiences, enabled Jewish artists and writers to adopt Christian myths and to make them part of their own inner world. For them Christianity, together with Kabbala and Hassidic folklore, was a legitimate source of symbolic motifs. The symbolist trend can be seen in Efraim Lilien's 1903 painting of the Jewish victims in the Kishinev pogrom as a crucified old Jew. Marc Chagall in his painting *Golgotha* (1912) painted himself as a mythological baby-Jesus, and in later paintings (*The White Crucifixion*, 1938, *The Yellow Crucifixion* 1943 and others) he painted a Jewish Jesus symbolising the suffering of the Jewish people in the pogroms and in the *Shoah*.[35]

In the late 1910s and in the 1920s depictions of Jesus as a Jew, or of the Jewish experience in the Diaspora as Jesus-like, became frequent – together with other Christian images - in Hebrew literature, although to a lesser degree than in Yiddish. Most Hebrew writers rejected the "cosmopolitan" identity as a dangerous illusion, and tried to build a new "healthy" and proud Jewish spirit, liberated from the complex of inferiority to Christian culture. However, they had the same wish to be translated into Russian and other European languages, and to become equal participants in world literature. Their sensitivity to the Christian world around them was no lesser than the Yiddish writers'; they were just less ready to "blur the borders". Not always did they succeed, for they were more absorbed in European-Christian culture than they could realize.

Jewish-Christian interchange of myths influenced even Hayyim Nahman Bialik (1873-1934), the most influential figure in modern Hebrew poetry. He was crowned with

[35] Z. Amishai-Meisels, "Chagall's 'Dedicated to Christ: sources and meanings", *Jewish Art*, (1995-96), 21-2, pp. 69-94.

the title "Poet of National Revival", because his poetry was perceived as an authentic poetic expression of the Jewish soul. Bialik attacked his contemporary non-Jewish surrounding when it threatened the continuity of Jewish culture. His poems, however, sometimes show the influence of Russian-Christian traditions. For example, the poet's mission is to suffer and sacrigice himself for his people, like Jesus; the mother and the beloved woman are depicted as a form of Madonna, merging the Kabbalistic *Shekhina* with the Neo-Christian Solovyovian symbol. In *The Scroll of Fire* (1905), however, Bialik symbolically refutes Solovyovian ideas of redemption through love of woman or through sacrificing individuality for the sacred All-Unity, presenting these seductive but false Christian symbols as alien to the spirit of Judaism and dangerous for its future. In his story *The Legend of Three and Four* (1934) Bialik symbolically described universal peace and love between Jews and Christians in terms of poetic utopia.

Literary interest in Jesus and Christianity was accompanied by the serialized publication of Yosef Klausner's "Jesus of Nazareth" as a supplement to *He-Atid* (Berlin, 1908. The book appeared in Jerusalem 1922, English: 1925), the first academic work on Jesus' life in Hebrew. A few months later H. Graetz' chapter on Christ and Christianity belatedly appeared in Hebrew translation.[36] These publications were followed by a stormy polemic on the relation between Judaism and Christianity and on the Jewishness of Christ. In 1910 Ahad Ha-Am (Asher Ginzberg), the leading and most influential essayist at that time, published his essay "Between Two Opinions". [37] After attacking the idea of including the New Testament in the Jewish canon,[38] Ahad Ha-am went on to explain the differences between Judaism and Christianity. This was followed by a series of polemic essays written by S.A. Horodetski and S.Y. Hurwitz, published during 1910-

[36] This was an addition to the ninth volume of the Hebrew translation of Graetz's *Geschicte der Juden* (originally 1855, English 1891-1892). *Divrei Yemei Ha-Yehudim*, translated by Y. E. Trivosh, Jerusalem: Makor, 1972 [1908-1909]. The book was donated as a prize to the subscribers of *Hed Hazman.*

[37] Ahad Ha-Am, "Al Shtei Ha-Se'ipim" (Between two Opinions), *Ha-Shiloakh* 23 no. 2 (August 1910), pp. 97-111.

[38] This idea was proposed by the Jewish Reform novement in England as well as by C. G. Montefiore in his *The Synoptic Gospels*, Sheffild Academic Press, 1995 (orig. 1909).

1914.[39] Their main theme was "the broadening of borders", namely, the acception of early Christianity as part of Judaism.

Jewish identification with the Jesus myth became a fashion in Yiddish literature towards the end of the the first decade of the twentieth century. The Yiddish symbolist writer Der Nister (Pinkhas Kahanovitch) ended his collection *Thoughts and Motifs* (Vilna, 1907) with the prayer of Mary for the birth of a son despite Satan's warnings of the tragic fate that would await him.[40]

Chagall's use of Christian together with Jewish imagery, sometimes humorously confusing them, found its counterpart in the Yiddish poetry of Itsik Manger, where Christian symbols become inseparable from the inner world of the Jew.[41] Beginning from the early 1920s his poetry is suffused not only with the Hebrew Bible but also with discussions of, and references to Christianity in general and Jesus in particular. In Manger's poems "Christ's head sobs symbolically in our dreams…The hand of the holy St Francis of Assisi lies on our heart".[42] In his first volume of poetry, *Stars on the Roof: Poems and Ballads* (1929) the cross appears repeatedly, indicating the poet's loneliness and his constant inner suffering:

> Now I am alone, and night is with me,
> And a red cross burns on my door,
> My wild, sick, thought.[43]

In his early work, Manger used a wide range of Christian elements as metaphors

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[39] S. Nash, *In Search of Hebraism: Shai Hurwitz and His Polemics in the Hebrew Press* , Leiden, 1980.

[40] Roskies, ibid., p. 263.

[41] Janet Hadda, "Christian Imagery and Dramatic Impulse in the Poetry of Itsik Manger", *Michigan Germanic Studies*, (1977), vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 1-12.

[42] I. Manger, "Erster briv tsu xy" [First letter to xy], editorial, *Getseylte verter* (1929), I, i: p. 1.

[43] I. Manger, "Alein" [Alone], J. Hadda (trans.) *Shtern afn dach: lid un balade*, (Bucharest, Sholem-aleykhem), pp. 61-2.

and symbols, such as his description of the night as "Maria Magdalena",[44] or using *sankt* (saint) as an epithet for Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Hassidism.[45] Manger also employed the landscape of Christianity (churches, clergymen) as a backdrop to Jewish life. The use of Christian metaphors and symbols is part of Manger's figurative language even in his later poetry, written after the Shoah, especially in poems about his childhood: e.g., the night is a "barefoot monk" in a poem published in 1948.[46] Manger labelled his poems in *Stars on the Roof* as "Ballads, Poems of Christ and Poems of the Baal Shem", and in fact, this volume is filled with direct treatments of Jesus, who appears as a symbol of human tragedy. Manger does not accept the suffering of Jesus as unique. Insisting on the universality of suffering, he writes;

> All paths that stray,
> Lead to the cross.
> It's all the same – whether Jesus was crucified
> Or the night, or I, or you![47]

In his 1929 poem "The Sacrifice of Isaac", Isaac competes with Jesus for the privilege of being sacrificed. Jesus is seen as the one who deprived Isaac of his glory, of his original right to be the personification of sacrifice and suffering.

The "problem of Crucifixion" became central in Yiddish literature from 1909, following the publication of two symbolist stories, L. Shapira's "The Cross" and Scholem Asch's "In a Carnival Night" in the Yiddish monthly *Dos Neie Leben* in New York.[48] In Shapira's story the cross is a terrible scar on the brow of a Jew who has been tortured

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[44] In "Veyse landshaft" [White Landscape], ibid., p. 90.

[45] *Lantern in vint*, (Warsaw: Farlag Turem, 1933), pp. 105-7. Quoted from J. Hadda, "Christian Imagery", p. 5.

[46] "Avent" (Evening), *Der shnaider-gezeln Nota Manger zingt* (The Tailor-Lad Nota Manger Sings), (London, Farlag Ararat), p.74.

[47] Quoted from J. Hadda, ibid., p. 5.

[48] L. Shapira, "Der Tselem", *Dos Neie Leben* (May 1909), pp. 329-44; S. Asch, "In a Carnaval-Nacht" [In a Carnival Night], ibid., pp. 382-90.

during a pogrom. Thus the writer brings to extremity the accusation of Christianity. Asch's story tells of a Christian carnival in sixteenth-century Rome, where eight Jewish leaders are tortured as part of the show. Asch describes Jesus climbing down from the cross on St Peter's Church in order to join the persecuted, followed by Mary who joins Rachel to sew the shrouds for them. Thus Asch hints at Jewish-Christian basic unity. In his essay "The Problem of Crucifixion", published in the same year in *Dos Neie Leben*, Sh. An-sky (Solomon Zainwil Rappoport) and Y. L. Peretz accused Asch of "competition through imitation" (the term was coined by Ahad-Ha-Am), namely, giving up his "Jewish soul" in order to win the admiration of non-Jewish readers.[49]

The traumatic Jewish experience in pre-Revolutionary Russia (as described, for example, in Isaac Babel's "My Dovecote", 1926) did not make it easy for Jews to believe either in Jewish-Christian basic unity nor in the new solidarity between enlightened Jews and Christians. Jewish critics thought Asch told the gentiles what they would like to hear. Indeed, Asch was the only Yiddish writer (before Bashevis-Singer) who enjoyed an international reputation and won literary prizes in Europe after being translated into Polish, Russian and German.

Asch dedicated most of his writing to his ecumenical mission.[50] He wished to reclaim such Christian figures as Jesus and Paul for Judaism, in order to give Jews a broader sense of their own contribution to Western culture. More importantly, he wanted Christians to realise the extent to which Christianity was rooted in Jewish history and religion. He demonstrated the interdependence of the two faiths by illustrating their common heritage, and he tried to effect a rapprochement based on mutual understanding and respect between the two religions. It was his belief that Christianity represented the culmination of Jewish thought, and that its rituals and concepts were rooted in Jewish ideas and practices. These ideas inspire Asch's entire work, and especially his Christian trilogy, *The Nazarene* (1939, English 1943), *The Apostle* (English 1943) and *Mary* (English 1949). The publication of these novels (the last two were published only in

[49] An-sky, "Di Tselem Frage" [The Problem of Crucifixion], *Dos Neie Leben* (New York) 1(1909), pp. 610-17, 665-71.

[50] G. Morgentaler, "The Foreskin of the Heart: Ecumenism in Scholem Asch's Christian Trilogy", *Prooftexts* 8 (1988), pp. 219-44.

English translation), which went on to become best sellers, resulted in a break between Asch and his Jewish readers. The works' Christian focus and the fact that they were published in the time of the *Shoah* caused a campaign against Asch in the American Yiddish press and in the Jewish world in general. Asch was accused of encouraging heresy and conversion by preaching Christianity.[51] He even found it difficult to find a translator to his *Mary*, in which the balance between Jewish and Christian points of view – which Asch tried to keep in the first two novels – is shaken in favour of Christianity.

In a trilogy of dramas– "The Bonds of Messiah" (written in 1907-1908), "The *Goilem*" (1917-1920) and "The *Goilem* Dream – A Comedy of Redemption" (1930-1932) – H. Leivik (pseudonym of Leivik Halperin) continued the tradition which was cultivated by modern Yiddish literature: to unite the Jewish and Christian traditions by creating symbolic images of the Messiah, and to connect it with contemporary events, especially with the October Revolution in Russia.

The Yiddish and early Hebrew poetry of Uri Zvi Greenberg (1894-1981) radicalised the complex Jewish attitude towards Christianity.[52] In *Albatros*, a Yiddish literary almanac edited by Greenberg himself, he published long poems which expressed his attitude toward Christ with such force and audacity that the editorial office had to stop publication. Greenberg was a frontline soldier in the Austrian Army during the First World War, but deserted it and lived in hiding. After experiencing a pogrom in his hometown of Lemberg (L'vov, L'viv), he became an ardent Zionist.

In his early poems Greenberg often refers to Jesus as "my brother" or "our

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[51] On the Jewish attacks on Scholem Asch see H. Lieberman, *The Christianity of Scholem Asch*, (New York 1953).

[52] In the 1910s and early 1920s Greenberg wrote expressionist poetry mostly in Yiddish, and edited the avant-guard Yiddish almanach *Albatros* (Warsaw 1922- Berlin 1923). He began writing in Hebrew after his emigration to Palestine in 1924. On Greenberg's attitude to Christ, Christians and Christianity see Noah H. Rosenblum, "Ha-Antitetiut Ha-te'ologit-Historit Shebanatsrut Beshirat Uri Zvi Greenberg" (The Theological-Historical Christian Antithesis in Uri Zvi Greenber's Poetry), *Prakim* 4 (New York, 1966), pp. 263-320; S. Lindbaum, *Shirat Uri Zvi Greenberg: Kavei Mit'ar* [The Poetry of Uri Zvi Greenberg: Contours], (Tel-Aviv: Hadar, 1984), pp. 117-159.

brother".[53] In this context Jesus is a symbol of universal human suffering. In his long poem, "The Mystery Man", published in 1922 in Warsaw in *Albatros*, Greenberg expressed his universalism with the words:

A man, Uri Zvi, or Ivan or Mustafa
with *Shadai* in his blood, or with the cross in the head
or with half a crescent at the trembling temple.[54]

In the poem "In the Kingdom of the Cross" (1923) Greenberg writes: "At the churches/ Hangs my brother/ Crucified (…) Brother Jesus, a Jewish skin and bones shrinks".

Greenberg identified himself with the historical Jesus, whom he – like Klausner – saw as a Jewish nationalist, who had been tortured and killed by the Romans because he was a leader of an anti-Roman revolt. But he detested historical Christianity, which had gone far away from Golgotha. He described Christ as being emptied from his humanity by two thousand years of distance from Jerusalem, Bethlehem and the Galilee. Jesus, who for Greenberg was a symbol of Jewish suffering, had been crucified by Christianity, and he was still being crucified in the Christian churches and cathedrals.

He gives vent to his attitude toward institutionalised Christianity with the words:

Oh Christ's bald priests!
No man has cut the veins of your hands
And no one has driven his nails in your throats
No one has brought one of you to Golgotha
And hanged him naked on a blossoming tree.
Whose is the lament?
Not yours! It is our pain, the pain of the Jewish redeemer!
Not your agonies! It is our wound.[55]

In 1922 Greenberg published in his *Albatros* a "concrete" poem in the form of a cross, which was entitled Uri Zvi Before the Cross/ INRI (Jesus the Nazarene King of the

[53] Lindbaum, ibid., p. 118.
[54] "Di misterie mentsch", trans. by H. Bar-Yosef, *Albatros* 2 (1922), p. 14.
[55] Ibid..

Jews).[56] In this poem the poet turned to Jesus, saying:

> You have become inanimate, my brother Jesus. You have two thousand years on the cross. Around you the world stopped. But you have forgotten everything. Your frozen brain does not reflect…You have become inanimate, you have tranquillity on your cross. I do not have it. Not me.[57]

The poet sees the Christian cross, a symbol of sympathy with suffering, as an empty, meaningless symbol. For him Jesus became the representative of the Jewish fate: "Ancient Jewish distress, Golgotha, my brother, don't you see, Golgotha is here: all around." Pilate places phylacteries on Jesus' head, which are "a new crown of thorns".

In the poem "A World on a Slope" (1922) the poet expressed his nihilistic loss of his former faith in Christian ideals. In this poem Jesus is fiercely attacked by a band of invalids and madmen who curse him and mock at him. They demand that he should get down from his heavenly cross to earth and join them, the real sufferes. They cry:

> Get down from the cross,
> you man, in our image!
> Get down! The world has chimed: thirteen![58]

In this poem Christ is described as being emptied from his humanity by two thousand years of distance from Jerusalem, Bethlehem and the Galilee. Never before did any Jewish writer dare to directly attack and caricaturise the image of Christ.

At a time when many European intellectuals believed in a pacifist future, Greenberg prophesied the destruction of Europe together with the Jews. He wrote:

> But I am telling you the prophecy – the black prophecy:
> From our valleys a pillar of cloud will rise
> From our dark breaths, woe to us how bitter they are!
> And you will not realize the terror in your flesh.
> And will go on prattling from burning palates

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[56] This poem might have been the inspiration for Chagall's *The White Crucifixion* (1938) where the same letters, INRI, appear above the cross).

[57] "Uri Zvi Greenberg faren Tslav INRI", *Albatros*, 2 (1922), pp. 3-4.

[58] "Velt Borg-Arop", *Kholiastre*, (Warsaw 1922), p. 17.

The Jews!

The Jews!

While poisonous gases will enter into palaces

And suddenly icons will scream in Yiddish.[59]

The Jews have nochance to survive in Europe. "Ten will remain, ten pain-stricken Jews … in order to prove: there was such a nation, on the Christian earth of distress", he wrote in his "In the Kingdom of the Cross" (1923). Greenberg describes the metamorphosis he went through:

I have been long meditating in the inwardness: is it possible

That those who kneel in Europe toward Bethlehem

And sanctify the bible – are those, these barbarians,

Whose dream is to annihilate the Jews completely?

Now he must admit that what the elders used to say about gentiles is true:

Oh, true-true-true is what my elders say:

The dead in the kloister is not my brother, he is Jezus.[60]

In 1925 Greenberg had written scathingly, "The land of enlightened Europe is not enlightened for the Jews. We are the most contemptible of humanity, as is well known"[61]. Now Greenberg perceived Christianity to be one element of a suspicious anti-Jewish world: "We [the Jews] are the only lonely ones in the world", he wrote.

When aleady in Palestine, Greenberg wrote in a Hebrew essay (in his characteristic expressionistic style):

Hey, it should be said once and for all: the pain of the pure Christianity is the pain of the stabbed Judaism. The wound is in our flesh under the skin, not theirs. The problem: Jesus of Nazareth, who was crossed when he was thirty-three years old – this is our problem, from us it arose.[62]

His fierce attacks on Christian Europe reach their climax in his post-*Shoah*

[59] English translation quoted from Baal-Teshuva, *chagall: A Retrospective* (New York 1995), pp. 301-302.
[60] Here Greenberg uses the Polish pronounceation of the word "Jesus" (in contrast to the Hebrew "Yeshu"), to emphasize Jesus' otherness.
[61] "Etsleinu ba-olam" [At our place in the world), *sadan* 4 (August 1925), p. 5.

collection of poetry in Hebrew *Streets of the River* (1951). Greenberg's emotional attitude toward the gentile world represents the psychological disastrous results of the Jewish experience in antisemitic Europe. The memory of this cruel experience is still active in the collective psychology and in political decisions in Israel and outside it.

7.

The interest in Jesus and in early Christianity did not disappear from Hebrew Zionist literature when its centre moved from Eastern Europe to Palestine during the 1910s-1920s. During this period of transition there were strong contacts and mutual interest between the Hebrew writers in Palestine and the Jewish Diaspora in Europe.

"The Brenner Affair", which took place in between 1910 and 1914, was again a polemic concerning the Jewish attitude to Christianity and to Christ, this time starting in Palestine.[63] In December 1910 Yosef Hayyim Brenner, who was then the dominant Hebrew writer in Palestine, published in the Zionist Socialist periodical *Hapo'el Hatsa'ir* an essay under the title "In Journalism and in Literature".[64] Its starting point was the wave of conversions to Christianity which was growing among young intellectual Jews in Russia at that time, and with which Jewish journalism in Europe was obsessively dealing as part of the New Year's summaries. Jewish journalists were attacking the shameful and dangerous phenomenon of *shemad* (conversion to Christianity), while serious essayists, such as Ahad Ha-Am, were engaged in asserting the praiseworthy sides of Judaism and its superiority over Christianity. Brenner, who considered himself to be "a free (non-religious) Jew" argued, that both reactions were out of place. Jews in Russia and in Germany did not convert to Christianity because of theological considerations, they simply adopted a Russian or German "form of life", which had nothing to do with Christian moral ideals. This is why proving the superiority of Judaism, as a moral theory,

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[62] Editorial column of *Sadan*, edited by U.Z. Greenberg, 1-2 (Jerusalem, 1935), p. 2, trans. By H. Bar-Yosef.

[63] N. Govrin, *Meora Brenner* [Brenner's Affair], (Jerusalem, Yad Ben-Zvi, 1985).

[64] Y. H. Brenner, "Ba'itonut u'vasifrut", *Ktavim* [Collected Writings], 4 vols., (Tel-Aviv: Ha-Kibbutz Ha-me'uhad ve-Sifriyat Poalim, 1985), vol. 3: 476-487.

would not prevent conversion. Besides, the converts had long before left their Jewish forms of life, so who cares if they convert? Brenner argued that sacred writings of all the religions contain high moral contents, but the deeds, not the theory, are the real criteria of ethics. The moral quality of a person and his adhering to Christian or to Jewish morality does not depend on the writings which he has learnt, but on his individual psycho-physiological qualities. Morality, said Brenner in disagreement with Ahad Ha-am and Klausner, is not a national trait, argued Brenner. There is no connection between contemporary European national cultures and the Christianity of "the poor Jew Joshua of Nazareth",[65] in the same way as contemporary Judaism is a long way from being identical with biblical Judaism. Brenner also claimed that the New Testament should not be banned by Jews, for it is kith and kin to the Jewish spiritual tradition. "I do not see any fundamental difference between the ascetic world view and the submission before God of the prophet of Anatoth [Jeremiah] and the prophet of Nazareth [Jesus]". [66] He says the Jesus myth (Brenner uses the term *legenda)* should be treated with suspicion, because "like every religious lie, like every continuing tradition" it is an "intentional illusion" invented to close up "the terrible abyss of the difficult riddle of life". Nevertheless, one can be a very good Jew, devoted with his whole heart to his nation, and still treat Jesus with religious thrill, he argued. "I understand that there are souls which have a yearning to other worlds, and they sometimes lift up their eyes to the 'good shepherd'… It is clear: the problem of the Christian myth is the problem of religious mysticism as a whole, and for whom there is no God in heaven [Brenner refers to himself], there is also no one who can be his son or his disciple".[67]

Brenner's essay was the starting point of a three years' polemic, involving many dozens of stormy reactions in Hebrew, Yiddish and Russian, most of which condemned Brenner's ideas and blamed him of blasphemy. In an unpublished essay written in late 1913 or early 1914, and as a reaction to the scandal, Brenner wrote:

> We have the right to praise Christianity or to condemn it, and for

[65] Ibid., p. 482. Here Brenner calls Jesus in the Jewish name Joshua.

[66] Ibid., p. 483.

[67] Ibid., p. 484.

> this right we are fighting! – But Europe is not Christian, and converts are not Christians. They are doing business. It is shameful, but what does it have to do with Christianity? What does it have to do with the ideals of Christianity, whether they found their place in our [Jewish] literature or not? … Our nationality does not demand from us to curse Jesus, as it does not demand that we despise Tolstoy and all the Christian writings. … We sometimes see in the story of Jesus a world tragedy and our heart goes to him, the tortured prophet … and sometimes we see in the whole business of prophecy a ridiculous and comic matter, and in his disciples fools who deviated from the way of the world.[68]

Brenner's later literary works (he was murdered by Arab terrorists in 1921 at the age of 40) show sympathy for moral ideals which can be considered as Christian – asceticism, submissiveness, readiness for being sacrificed. If Christianity was for him "the problem of religious mysticism as a whole", then he was approaching it in his mature work. Brenner's story *From Here and There* (1911), describing the hardships and misery of Zionist pioneer life in Palestine, ends with a symbolic portrait of an old man and his grandchild whose father was just murdered by Arabs, both carrying thorns on their clothes and heads, looking at an old woman who is baking new bread.[69] The prototype of this old man in Brenner's story was no other than Aharon David Gordon (1856-1922), who in 1904 immigrated from Russia to Palestine, where he founded "The Religion of Labour" and the first collective settlement, Degania. Gordon himself, after having translated Tolstoy's *What is Art?* into Hebrew, wrote an unpublished essay under the title "Examining the Difference Between Judaism and Christianity", where he rejected Tolstoy's anti-national preaching and tried to prove the basic purity of Judaisn

[68] N. Govrin, *Me'ora Brenner*, p. 196.

[69] Y. H. Brenner, "Mikan umikan" [From here and there], *Ktavim*, vol 2, p. 1440.

and its moral superiority over Christianity.[70]

Zionist Hebrew writers coming to Palestine from Russia and Poland brought with them, together with the background of Hebrew and Yiddish literatures, their Russian background. In this context, the Jewish suffering in the Diaspora and even more so the suffering of the Zionist pioneers was interpreted – like the suffering in Russia before and after the Revolutions – as part of an apocalyplic narrative, where martyrdom and bloodshed were necessary steps to redemption .[71] The influence of A. Blok's long poem "The Twelve" (1918), where Bolshevik revolutionaries are crowned with Jesus-like halos, was particularly conspicuous in the poetry and prose of writers who experienced the revolution in Russia.

Hayyim Hazaz in his "Revolution Stories" cycle, portrayed young Jews taking part in the Bolshevik Revolution in the image of Jesus or of John the Baptist. Thus in "From This and from the Other" (1924) Henich, the young Jewish revolutionary fighter reminds everybody - especially when he is dying - of John the Baptist.[72] In "Shmuel Frankfurter" (1925) the hero looks like Jesus. He is also attracted to Evangelic ideals (mediated by Tolstoy), which he tries to carry out in post-Revolutionist Russia. His comrade Rabi Ber argues: "Give your left cheek … yes, yes. These 'afters' were served by Him. Of course! Of course! But *gewald* [Help! In Yiddish], why should he hit me, ha? Why am I - from top to toe –nothing but a cheek? I am nothing but a cheek and he is nothing but a hand?"[73] He is finally murdered by Russian "White" soldiers, who while torturing him cry joyfully "let's crucify him, let's crucufy him!".[74] His grave becomes a ritual centre for the local Ukrainian farmers who believe that Shmuel was resurrected from the dead. Thus Hazaz adds a skeptical-ironical dimension to the motif of the Jesus-

[70] A. D. Gordon, "Leveirur hahevdel bein hayahadut vehanatsrut", *Kitvei Aharon Daviv Gordon* in Collected Essays, 5 vols., (Tel-Aviv: Hapoel Hatsa'ir:1927), vol.3, pp. 197-215.

[71] H. Bar-Yosef, "The Zionist Revolution as an Apcalypse in the poetry of H.N. Bialik and N. Alterman", *Trumah* 10 (Heidelberg 2000), pp. 41-57.

[72] "Mizeh U-mizeh", *Hatkufa* 21 (1924), pp. 7-32.

[73] Ibid., pp. 82-83.

[74] "Shmuel Frnakfurter", *Hatkufa* 23 (1925), pp. 132-133.

like suffering Jew. A similar plot is to be found in Avigdor Ha-Me'iri story "On Behalf of Jesus the Nazarene: How My Hair Grew White in One Night" (1928), this time in the form of a memoir.[75] Ha-Me'iri, who during the first World War was a soldier in the Austro-Hungarian army describes the fate of his Jewish comrade, who together with him was taken captive by Russian soldiers. He was forced to drink human blood, crucified and buried alive by a Russian commander.

The extreme suffering which was part of the pioneers' experience received literary expressions which often contained Christian symbols, and especially the symbols of Job and of Jesus. Major writers such as Uri Zvi Greenberg, Avraham Shlonsky, Yitshak Lamdan, and Yosef Hayyim Brenner mythologized through Christian symbols the Jewish Zionist experience of suffering for the Messianic purpose of reviving their nation.

The publication of Klausner's *Jesus of Nazareth* in 1922 was an integral part of the interest in Jesus, shared by Zionist intellectuals and artists who immigrated from Europe to Palestine. Klausner, Russian-born editor of the flagship of Hebrew literature in Europe, *Ha-shiloah*, and the first professor of Hebrew Literature at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem (between 1925 and 1949), devoted many years to the study of Jesus of Nazareth.[76] He emphasised the similarity between Jesus' teaching and his contemporary Judaism, while Paul merged the "pure" Christianity with Roman heathen "lower" elements. Klausner also pointed at the similarity between the original Christianity and the Zionist experience, both being movements of Messianic redemption. Literary authors such as Natan Bistirtski , Avraham Kabak and Hayyim Hazaz, shared Klausner's sympathy with Jesus and his views on Jesus' Jewish sources.

Natan Bistritski's drama *Judas Iscariot* (1930), Avraham Kabak's novel *The*

[75] "Beshem Rabi Yeshu Minatseret", in *Beshem Rabi Yeshu Minatseret (Kitvei Avigdor Ha-Me'iri* vol. 5), Jerusaelm and Tel-Aviv: Lema'an Hassefer and Haktav, 1928, pp.23-47.

[76] See also his *Historia Isre'alit* (Jewish History) (3 vols.), Odessa, Bletnitski, 1920, vol. 3 and his *Historia shel Ha-bayyit Ha-sheini* (History of the the Second Temple Period) (5 vols.), Jerusalem, Achiassaf, 1950, vol. 4 pp. 207-266 (On Jesus), vol. 5, pp. 87-130 (On "Heathen" and Pauline Christianity).

Narrow Path (1937) And Hayyim Hazaz's unfinished novel on Jesus (1947-1948)[77] represent the continuing interest in Jesus and early Christianity in pre-Israeli Hebrew prose and drama. Following Klausner, they tend to portray Jesus with deep sympathy and emphasize his Jewishness. They characterize him in the historical and cultural context as a founder of one of the many movements and sects into which Judaism was split at that time. The "good" Judaism of Jesus is distinguished from the "bad" Christianity of his apostles, especially of Paul. Paul is seen as a the one who popularized the morally "pure" Christianity and brought it nearer to Roman heathen culture. The New Testament is reinterpreted in a way less injurious to Jewish feelings. Descriptions of local geography, which was familiar to the writer and readers as part of their everyday life, increase the feeling of the reader that what was told in the New Testament is part of his own reality. The Hebrew speech of the characters is close the Talmudic Hebrew, mixed with Aramaic elements, thus creating the impression that Jesus' preachings were an organic continuation of post-biblical Judaism. These writers tried to change the Evangelic legends into modern prose in the tradition of psychological realism.

In Bistirtski's drama most attention is focused on Judas Iscariot, who is the leading protagonist. His introverted behaviour and other moral qualities make him appear the real messiah: he is "poor and rides on a donkey", symbolizing the humble Jewish Messiah of the Old Testament (Zechariah 9,9). He tries in vain to convince Jesus that the only way he can preserve his integrity is to flee from his misguided followers. Judas Iscariot thus becomes the prophet of Christianity's decadence.

Comparing Kabak's *The Narrow Path* to Sholem Asch's *The Nazarene* the Jewish American critic A.D. Friedland wrote that Asch's *Jesus the Nazarene* failed, because it was created under the shadow of apologetics, characteristic of the Jewish psychology of the Diaspora, while Kabak's Jesus is "Hebrew" - he is a creature of the free spirit of Jewish Zionist revival. While Asch dedicated great efforts to documentary details and made great efforts to exactly cite evangelic sayings on Jesus, Kabak painted his characters objectively with Rembrandt's brush: in Kabak's novel there is a natural

[77] Shmuel Verses, "Al Roman Histori Shelo Nigmar – Usvivav" (On an Unfinished Historical Novel and its Context), *Mimendele Ad Hazaz* (From Mendele to Hazaz), Jerusalem: The Jerusalem Magnes Press, 1987, pp. 41-75.

harmony between Jesus' sayings and the nature around him, says Friedland. Kabak describes Jesus' cultural-spiritual background in a more realistic way and his characters are psychologically convincing, while Asch's characters are artificial and detached from reality.[78]

Critics in Eretz Israel were less enthusiastic about Kabak's novel. They blamed the writer of interpreting Jesus in a non-Jewish spirit - not even according to the Evangelic sources – but in accordance with Christian liberals, or humanist Neo-Christians such as Tolstoy or Freud. One critic even expressed the opinion that writing about Jesus by a Jew, in the Hebrew language and in the land of the Fathers is necessarily a failure, because this subject which is so loaded with bitter memory cannot be treated in a merely artistic way.[79] Such disagreements between the critics show that the move to a new life in Eretz Israel did not always open the gate to a new, positive, more intimate understanding of Christianity.

In Hebrew poetry written from the 1920s to the 1950s by of Avraham Shlonsky (1900-1973), Natan Alterman (1910-1970) and other poets the sacred female is a modern symbol, which enables the merging of Jewish mysticism with European-Christian traditions. Following Russian symbolism and Bialik's poetry these poets unite the Kabbalistic image of the *Shekhina* together with Russian symbolist Sophiology. In their poems the amorphous anonymous divine woman appears as a symbol of various ideals and hopes in support of which the contemporary generation believed it was necessary to fight, even unto death.

Pre-state Israeli Zionist poetry adopted the Jewish-Christian (and Moslem) apocalyptic narrative of redemption, whose roots can be found in the Old Testament (Isaiah, Joel, Zechariah and Daniel) and its classical model is the Apocalypse of John. In Russia, especially in the period before and after the October Revolution, apocalyptic thinking was prevalent. During the 1910s- 1930s apocalyptic motifs were used in Hebrew and Yiddish poetry as a way of understanding contemporary Jewish suffering . Zionism was often understood as a messianic apocalyptic process. This understanding

[78] Eliezer D. Friedland, "Yeshu Hanotsri – Shtei Gishot" (Jesus of Nazareth – Two Views), *Niv* 4 no. 1 (New York, January 1940), pp. 7-8.

[79] M. Carmon, "Bamish'ol Hatsar", *Ha-Olam* 26 (1938), pp. 109-200.

was common to poets of both politically left and right wing Zionist parties (such as Shlonski and Greenberg).[80]

Hebrew literature in the pre-state Israeli period seldom deals with local Christianity and Christians in the Holy Land.[81] An exceptional example is Menahem Ussishkin's memoir "Four Guardians" (1905).[82] The narrator visits three Christian churches – the Russian Church on Mount Scopus, the Catholic Church on Mount Tavor, and a Protestant Church by the sea of Galilee - followed by a Sephardi synagogue in Jerusalem. Ussishkin makes it clear that the Christian churches are well kept and cared for, while the synagogue is dirty and neglected, leaving a bad impression on the Jewish visitor. Here Ussishkin continues the tradition of Hebrew *Haskalah* literature, by harshly criticising Jewish civilisation. A few short stories, written by minor writers, express suspicion and fear of missionary activities. Yitzhak Kumer, the hero of Agnon's novel *Only Yesterday* (1945, English 1931, 1957, 2000) shares the same fear, also indicating that moving locale may not be enough to change psychological mechanisms: although the novel was written in a new land, the sensitivity of the European-born writer to antisemitism remained very high.

Still, the first signs of change appear, for example, in Aryeh Lifshitz' story "The Sister and the Nun" (written in the 1930s), in which a young nun, who takes care of the narrator, arouses his love and admiration.[83] The feeling of danger dissolves, as the narrator's love for the nun does not endanger his Jewishness. Interest in the sexual and psychological life of nuns is the centre of K. L. Silman's short story "Pilgrims" (1929) and in a novel by Shoshana Shababo, a Yemenite woman writer, *Maria: A Story from the*

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[80] H. Hever, *Bishvi Ha-Utopia* [Captives of Utopia], (Sdeh Boker, 1995).

[81] On descriptions of Christians and Christianity in Hebrew literature written in Palestine see N. Govrin, "Bein notsrim lihudim: Menahem Ussishkin" [Between Christians and Jews: Menahem Ussishkin"], *Dvash Missela* [Honey from the Rock], (Tel-Aviv: The Israeli Ministry of Defence, 1988), pp. 53-61.

[82] "Arba'ah Shomrim" [Four Guardians], *Luah Ahiassaf* (1905), pp. 245-50.

[83] A. Lifshitz, "Ha'ahot ve-hanezira" [The Sister and the Nun], *Behemda Gdola* [With Great Passion], (Tel-Aviv:Tarmil, 1982), pp. 14-22.

Nuns' Life in the Holy Land (1932).[84] Conspicuous in both is the freedom from "the Jewish problem".

8.

Jewish-Christian relations appear less in Israeli than in pre-Israeli Hebrew literature. The interest of the Israeli reader in this theme is so limited, that he would sometimes not even notice its presence. "Christians and Christianity were up to now missing from modern Hebrew literature", said a literary critic and an experienced teacher of literature in 1975 when talking about Amos Oz's *Unto Death*. Trying to remember literary works which have dealt with *goyim*, he mentioned two examples of stories which describe Arab life.[85] Such a mistake is a witness of a major change in Jewish collective psychology: Jewish-Christian relations, which was a major issue in the life of the European Jew, does not play a major part in Israeli reality, which is full of other political and cultural tensions. In Israel it is Arabs, not Christians, who are conceived as the dangerous Other. This may not be the case for pre-Israeli writers who continued to create after 1948 (Agnon and Hazaz, for example) or for those who came to Israel from Europe after the Holocaust. Their view may sometimes continue the Jewish- European experience.

In Israel, as elsewhere in the Jewish world, the *Shoah* is understood as the climax of a long history of European antisemitism, rooted in Christianity (notwithstanding Hitler's anti-Christian policy). The non-Christian behaviour of so many Christians during the *Shoah* created a deep disappointment with and suspicion of Christianity. Among the plethora of memoirs of Jews during the Second World War, one finds many descriptions of personal Jewish-Christian relations. In this literary context, however, Christians are generally treated as different persons, sometimes with great disappointment and

[84] K. L. Silman, "Tsailanim" [Pilgrims], *Sansinim* [Twigs of Palm Tree], (Jerusaelm-Tel-Aviv, 1929), pp. 131-147; S. Shababo, *Maria, sipur me-hayei hanezirot be-Eretz Israel* [Maria: a Story from the Life of Nuns in the Holy Land], (Jerusaelm: Mitspeh 1932).

[85] Avraham Aderet, "A Discussion of Amos Oz's Ad Mavet [Unto Death] ", *Alei Siakh* 2 (Nov. 1975), p. 163.

bitterness, sometimes humorously, not as representatives of Christian theology.[86] The only Israeli writer who continues the Agnon-Greenberg tradition of demonizing Christian cruelty and seduction is Aharon Appelfeld. Appelfeld, who often expresses his alienation to Israeli culture, expresses the experience of the Jew who cannot recover from his trauma of the *Shoah.* Appelfeld does not believe there will ever be any improvement in the understanding between Judaism and European Christianity in the future. He views the search for such understanding as a continuation of the Jewish mistakes before the *Shoah.*

The reader of Israeli literature - who is in most cases a non-religious native-born Israeli - often tends to evade Jewish rituals, but willingly encounters Christianity in music, art, and architecture, disregarding the implied theological meaning of his aesthetic experiences. "True, for generations Jews were massacred in the name of the Gospel, but is the Gospel the necessary reason for that?" asked Y. Carmel, in an article which refutes arguments against the performance of Bach's "Johannes Passion" and "Mathew Passion" in Israeli concert halls in the early 1970s.[87] Having read the New Testament as a youth in pre-state Israel he witnesses that "at that time our Jewish feeling was so firm. So whole, so self-evident and so romantic, that there was no place for fanaticism or for pride, and that is why we were standing above any insult or criticism [of Judaism]".[88] For the non-religious Israeli, Christianity is neither seductive nor dangerous, it is rather a *terra incognita*.[89]

Israeli research on Christianity, carried out by David Flusser, Shlomo Pines, Hayyim Cohen, Yaakov Fleishman, Hayyim Cohen, Israel Yuval and others,[90] as well as

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[86] An astonishing expample of a humorous representation of the *goy* during the *Shoah* is Leib Rochman's *In Your Blood Thou Shalt Live* (Yiddish, 1961), a diary describing the experience of the author while hiding for two years in a farmer's attic together with his wife, and his brother and sister in law.

[87] Y. Carmel, "Ha-Passionim Shel Bach – Ken o Lo?" (Bach's Passions – Tes or No?), *Keshet* (Spring 1973), p. 58.

[88] Ibid., p. 51.

[89] On the Israeli attitude to Christianity and Jesus see Pinhas Lapid, *Israelis, Jews and Jesus*, New York: Doubleday &Company, 1979.

[90] David Flusser's articles were collected in *Yahadut U-Mekorot Ha-Natsrut* [Judaism and the Sources of Christianity], (Tel-Aviv: Sifriat Poalim 1979). For a bibliography of

the archaeological findings of the Dead Sea Scrolls, aroused the interest in early Christianity as a local historical phenomenon, closely tied to the history of post-biblical Judaism. However, Christianity is less available to the average Israeli than to the Jew who lives in a Christian country. The Israeli school curriculum does not contain anything from the New Testament.

Two historical short novels, Yigal Mossenzon's *Judas Iscariot* (1962) and Amos Oz's *Unto Death* (1971, English 1992) examine the conflict between Christianity and Judaism. Common to Mossenzon and Oz is the image of the Jew as a warrior, who, in terms of bravery and moral values is superior to the Christian soldier. Such a concept would have had been inconceivable before Israeli writers had personal experience of armed self-defence and the battlefield. Nor would it have been possible without a feeling of self-assurance and justice, which belongs naturally to every normal nation. Mossenzon, born in 1917 was a commander in the 1948 War of Independence and a writer of adventure books for the youth. In his novel early Christianity is a political underground movement, very much like pre-Israeli resistance to the British Mandate. Mossenzon depicts Christianity as an anti-Roman underground organisation, whose chief commander was Bar-Abba, who commanded Judas Iscariot to extradite Jesus. Unlike the version in the New Testament, . Judas' crime was his inability to refuse command. In Mossenzon's novel Judas did not commit suicide: he escaped and lived on a Mediterranean island under an assumed name. Mossenzon dwells upon the difference between historical reality and the myths created by Christianity for political needs: Judas was politically expedient, he was "the bad guy" needed for the Christian story. Like former writers (Kabak, Bistiritski) Mossenzon idealizes the character of Jesus, while his apostles appear as a band of military and political activists. The loneliness of the banished Judas Iscariot is the centre of his sympathy.

Christianity and its difference from Judaism is a constant theme in the stories and novel of Amos Oz, a native-born Israeli writer (b. 1939) and the nephew of Yosef

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the writings of David Flusser see *Immanuel* 24/25 (1990), pp.292-305; H. Cohen, *Mishpato Umoto shel Yeshu Hanotsri* [The Trial and Death of Jesus of Nazareth], (Tel-Aviv: Dvir, 1968). I. Yuval, *Jews and Christians: Reciprocal Images,* see note 4.

Klausner.[91] In his early story "The Trappist Monastery" (1962) a Israeli soldier who is fighting near the Trappist Monastery in Latrun learns about the vow of silence taken by its monks. Having experienced extreme conditions of suffering and sacrifice for the goals of life, the soldier reacts towards the asceticism of the Trappist monks with ambivalent feelings.

Oz's *Unto Death* is a symbolist psychoanalytical novel about the Crusaders. There is nothing holy in their voyage to the Holy Land, only bloodshed and corruption. The novel is written in the first person as a confession of a fanatic Crusader, whose quest for Jerusalem expresses his destructive, pathological yearning for perfect purity and his death wishes. The Crusaders cruelly torture Jews , because the Jewish vitality is an unconscious threat on their wish for purity and for death. Even their sexual sadism towards the Jews reveals their rejection of their own sensuality. Gradually they sense the secret presence of a Jew hiding among them. They find out that they carry Jewishness as part and parcel of their own Christianity. There is thus a mysterious interdependence between Judaism and Christianity. For Oz the crusaders represent the Christian antisemitic attitude to Jews. He views antisemitism as a symptom of a deep, unconscious psychopathological complex, which lies at the bottom of Christian attitude to Jews. [92]

Oz himself, when asked by a group of famous non-Jewish writers if *Unto Death* is not a slap in the face of Christianity, answered:

> Yes, but it is not Christianity – it's Christian Europe. My historical account with Christian Europe is bitter and more frightening than the quarrel with the Arabs and the Islam, which

[91] A. Balaban, "Bein Esh Le'efer" (Between Fire and Ashes), *Yediot Aharonot,* 16.1.87, p. 20; L. Fux, "A. Oz Be'ikvot Agnon O Ha-brit Ha-khadasha" (A. Oz followes Agnon or The New Testament?), *Ha-Do'ar*, New York, 28.7.1989, pp. 20-21; D. Zilberman, "Oz Lagoyim" (Oz for the Gentiles), *Moznayim* 65/4 (January 1991), pp. 20-25; A. Holzman, "Hosfani, Meshuasha, Metsamrer" (Stripped, Amused, Gives the Shivers), *Yediot Aharonot* 11.12.98, p. 26; G. Shaked, "Vidui Va-alilato" (Confession and its Plot), *Ha-Aretz*, 23.12.98, pp. 4, 13, 14.

[92] M. Wilf, "Ha-Tasbikh Ha-Yehudi shel Ha-tsalbanim" (The Jewish Crusader complex), *Ha-uma* 10/4 (September 1973), pp. 559-561.

> is just as episode. Both we and the Arabs are victims, in on way or another, of Christian Europe. And this is why it is indirectly but deeply responsible for the Israel-Arab conflict. *Unto Death* expresses deep genetic anger at Christian Europe, and also at fanaticism in general.[93]

In his novels from the 1980s and 1990s - *A Perfect Peace* (1982, English 1985), *Black Box* (1987, English 1988), *Fima* (1989,English: 1991), and *The Same Sea* (1999) - Oz often attributes Jesus-like traits to his main characters, as part of his thematic examination of idealism, spirituality and the irrational level of the human soul. His interest in Christianity can be witnessed also in his series of memoirs, *In the Land of Israel* (1982, English 1983), where he included a visit with Father Professor Marcel Dubois at his home in Jerusalem.[94]

The writer's affinity to Christianity is in most cases an expression of his alienation to Israeli Zionist "normal" culture. Such is the case of Pinhas Sadeh, and Nathan Zach. Pinhas Sadeh (1929-1997) was born in L'viv and immigrated to Palestine in 1933. He studied first in a religious school in Tel-Aviv and then in a kibbutz, where he was sent for high school studies by his parents whose relationships he defined as "hell". In an interview from 1987 Sadeh said: "I live in the feeling that I am completely not understood; as if during my sleep I was taken to China, where everybody is speaking Chinese while I am writing in Hebrew". In his early poetry and prose Christianity was one of the ways to escape an unbearable reality and to live in a secluded world of beauty and spiritual love. In his early work he was also attracted to Nietzschean ideas, and in a later stage Hasidism and Jewish simple faith took over. In his novel *Life as a Parable* (1958) and in his cycle of poetry *Massa Duma*, written in the mid-1950s, as well as in later poetry Christian apostles and saints are an object of interest and admiration. For Pinhas Sadeh the search for Christianity, together with other spiritual alternatives, was a revolt against Israeli mediocrity and an expression of an extreme, almost perverse yearning for spiritual purity.

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[93] News item on the Edinborogh Arts Festival, with the participation of ten famous writers (including Amos Oz), *Yediot Aharonot*, 6.9.1991, p. 23.

[94] *Po Vasham Be'Erets Israel*, Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1982, pp. 144-150.

Zach was born in 1930 in Berlin to a Jewish father and an Italian Christian mother, who immigrated to Israel in 1935. His native languages were Italian and French. In the 1950s-1960s Zach became the main leader of a literary movement which turned against the Israeli establishment. In his early poems he expresses anti-religious feelings. Allusions to the New Testament, but not religious feelings, appear in his early poems, where the poet plays the role of Jesus. In his "One Moment"[95] relationships between father and son mix biographical experiences with Christian images of Father and Son.[96] In his poem "Talita Kumi" (Girl, Get Up, from *Shirim Shonim,* 1961), the title of which is a citation from Marcus 5, 42,[97] the poet reconstructs the Christian narrative by ironically speaking to a girl whom he has deserted. In later poems Zach turns to Jesus with tenderness and empathy, describing him as a suffering human being and as a poet. In his poem "Image"[98] Zach describes Jesus in the likeness of himself, a human poet with his useless sufferings and weaknesses. In his poems on his mother's death, who dies in a monastery in Haifa, Zach describes the nurses' mercy compassion and love such as his mother has never before received.

A similar picture of the father as Jesus can be found in Joel Hoffman's autobiographical lyrical novel *Sefer Yosef* (The book of Yosef, 1988), where allusion to the New Testament and the life of Jesus construct the emotional attitude to the main character, who is the writer's father. In his stories and novels Joel Hoffman tells about the alienation of his German-speaking family to Israeli "normalcy". His attraction to Christianity as well as to the Far East cultures can be considered as part of post-modernism and post-Zionism in Israeli literature and thought.

In his novel *Kastoria* (1998) Benjamin Shvili combines an autobiographical poetic account of the writer's pilgrimage to his mother's native town of Kastoria (Greece) and a spiritual search for his own religious identity. Throughout the journey the narrator cites the New Testament, together with Hassidic stories and excerpts from Plato, thus

[95] "Rega ekhad", *Shirim Shonim* (Various poems), Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz ha-meuchad 1984 (orig. 1960), p. 23.
[96] On this poem and on Christianity and the New Testament in Zach's poetry see R. Kartun-Blum, "Ma atem hoshvim – she'ani elohim? Bein shirato shel Natan Sach la-brit ha-khadasha" (What do you think – that I am god? N. Zach's poetry and the New Testament), *Keshet ha-khadasha* 3 (Spring 2003), pp. 22-37.
[97] The original (in Aramaic) reads "talieta". Zach uses "Talita" as if it were a first name.

revealing their common message. A similar mixture of sources can be found in his second novel, *Hayerida min Hatslav* (Down from the Cross, 2000), which describes the writer's journey to Serbia and Croatia. The writer visits many churches , where he prays to Jesus to get down from his cross and become part of real life. Benjamin Shvili calls contemporary mass culture by the name of "Antichrist", and he uses both the Christian narrative and hassidic stories in order to fight it. Although charmed by Christianity, the narrator never questions his Jewish identity, as Christianity is neither a threat to his natural sense of belonging to Judaism as a nation, nor is there a possibility of Christianity tempting him to leave Judaism. He is charmed by the Christian narrative without questioning the value of Judaism. For a modern Jewish writer such a complex-free attitude to Christianity has become possible only in a place where Judaism is no longer a minority religion.

There are many signs of an increasingly open attitude towards Christianity in contemporary Israel, as well as a willingness to learn more about Christian theology and history, even in Orthodox circles.[99] This trend is associated with the gradual disappearance of the heightened Jewish sensitivity to the history of Jewish-Christian relations in Europe as well as upon the increasing understanding of the need to listen to the Other. Israeli readiness for dialogue with Christianity has no need to be based on Christian feelings of guilt. It is based on a personal search for spiritual renewal in a time of dominating technology, estrangement and cruelty. The possibility to be a host, not only a guest, necessarily changes the Jewish attitude to the other religions.

To conclude, modern Hebrew literature reflects the changing conditions of the Jewish-Christian dialogue. During the last fifty years, because it was written mainly in Israel, it reflects the Israeli situation. The state of Israel, although full of various tensions, enables a Jew to become interested in Christianity without ever experiencing antisemitism and without living in the midst of Christians. This is a new experience for the Jew and for writers of Hebrew literature. In a country where the visible manifestations of Christianity have a limited presence, there is no urgent need for the

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[98] "Dmut" (image), *Keivan sh-ani basviva* (As I am in the neighbourhood), Tel-Aviv, Ha-kibbuts hameuchad, 1996, pp. 136-137.

[99] An example is the yearly theological conferences in The Shalom Hartman Institute, where scholars from the three monotheistic religions meet for study and discussions.

rehabilitation of Judaism in the eyes of Christians. The growing interest in Christianity in Israeli literature must therefore be explained by intellectual curiosity and emotional attraction, almost free from the burden of victim psychology, leaving the wounds of blame and guilt to be cured through time and good will.