



## Behikansi Atah (In My Entering Now, Selected Works of Hava Shapiro)

Carole B. Balin and Wendy Zierler,  
Resling Press, Tel Aviv, 2008

After five years of collecting and sifting through materials from publications and archives across the world, Carole Balin and Wendy Zierler have co-edited this anthology of Hebrew writings by the largely-forgotten early-20th century fiction writer, journalist, feminist, and cultural critic Hava Shapiro. Born in Slavuta [Ukraine] in 1878, Shapiro died in Prague in 1943 during the Holocaust. Although a lifelong Zionist, she never immigrated to Palestine, but persisted nonetheless in writing and publishing Hebrew prose in the Diaspora. Besides writing in the ancient language, Shapiro was unconventional in many respects: at the age of 25, she left her husband and son to pursue higher studies and eventually earned a Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Berne. Her life story reflects the sacrifices that a woman of her time needed to make in order to pursue a life of the mind and the pen. Shapiro was the first woman to publish fiction in Hebrew; her collection of stories entitled *Kovetz Tsiurim* appeared in 1909, eleven years before Nehama Puhachewsky's *Bi'Yhudah hehadashah* (1921) and eighteen years before Dvora Baron's *Sippurim* (1927). She was one of the first Hebrew feminist

literary critics, composing several path-breaking essays on images of women in Hebrew literature and on women's reading — all of this, several decades before the emergence of feminist literary criticism in England, France, and the United States. From her vantage point in war-torn Ukraine and as a refugee in Czechoslovakia, she reported on Jewish culture and the arts, interpreted European literature for Hebrew readers, and also reported from various Zionist Congresses and gatherings across Europe. From 1899 to 1943, she kept a diary in Hebrew, which was the first known Hebrew diary written by a woman. She also wrote close to 200 Hebrew letters to Reuven Brainin, the famed Hebrew/Yiddish writer and editor, with whom she had a 20-year-long romance. Though Brainin never left his wife for her, Hava clearly never left his heart or mind, for Brainin deposited all of these letters in the Brainin archives of the Montreal Jewish Public Library, which he founded. Shapiro's letters to Brainin constitute the first extended Hebrew correspondence between a literary man and woman. Balin and Zierler's edited collection includes selections from all of Shapiro's writing — fiction, essays, feminist criticism, excerpts from the diary and letters — as well as an extensive bibliography of Shapiro's writings and a critical afterword, which they co-authored.

### Preface to *Kovetz tsiurim* [A Collection of Sketches] Warsaw, 1909:

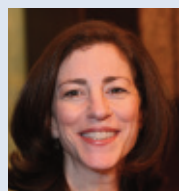
In 1909, Shapiro published *Kovetz Tsiurim*, her first and only collection of stories, under the pseudonym *eim kol hai* ["mother of

all life," a pun on her given name Hava/Eve]. Prominently dedicated to her mother Menuhah, the volume contains portrayals of women, both those Shapiro admired who broke from traditional molds and those she disdained who conformed to convention. Shapiro prefaced the sketches with an important feminist literary manifesto — the first of its kind in Hebrew literature — on the need to add women's voices to Hebrew literature. Riffing on the famous opening line of the Hebrew poet Y.L. Gordon's "*Kotzo shel yud*," [which asks: "Hebrew woman, who knows your life?"], Shapiro responds that women ought to take up the pen and depict their own experiences.

*Our literature lacks the participation of the second half of humanity: that of the weaker sex.*

*In my entering now into this unfamiliar sphere, my strongest hope is that many others of my sex will be inspired to walk in my footsteps. So long as they [other women] do not take part, our literature will be impoverished and lacking a certain aspect. Time and again, when we [feminine plural] are amazed and awed by the talents of a "wonder worker," one who "penetrates the woman's heart," we feel at the same time as though a strange hand has touched us. We have our own world, our own pains and longings, and we should, at the very least, take part in describing them.*

*I know myself that I have not yet fulfilled the requirements that I myself have set before the male or female artist. This collection of sketches is only an attempt, only the beginning of the revelation of*



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### Dr. Wendy Zierler

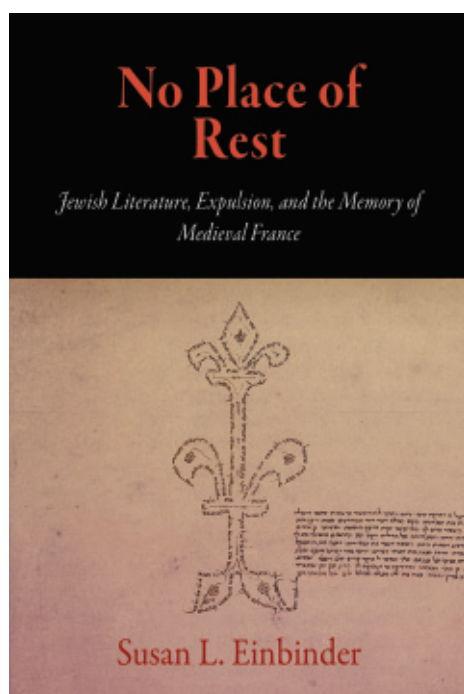
is Associate Professor of Feminist Studies and Modern Jewish Literature at HUC-JIR in New York. Her areas of interest encompass gender and Judaism, feminist commentary on traditional texts, modern Hebrew literature by women, and Holocaust literature. She is the author of *Behikansi Atah (In My Entering Now, Selected Works of Hava Shapiro)*, edited with Carole B. Balin, and *And Rachel Stole the Idols: The Emergence of Modern Hebrew Women's Writing*. She is a contributor to *The Torah: A Women's Commentary*.

*the female spirit, which has been forced to abandon the treatment of “its sorrows, joys, hopes, and wishes” to others.*

*I know and recognize also the impediments and obstacles that have been placed [before women] both intentionally and unintentionally on the path of literature, in general; and I am aware of the weakness and relative smallness of our literature, in particular. Nevertheless, all of the guiles of the niggardly will not deplete my strength nor distance me from my position.*

*Artistic perfection is my aspiration and my ultimate goal.*

*Now, in publishing this Collection of Sketches I am filled with confidence that it will be received as a bold attempt to tread on new ground. ■*



## No Place of Rest: Jewish Literature, Expulsion, and the Memory of Medieval France

Susan L. Einbinder, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009

**W**hen King Philip VI expelled the Jews in 1306, some 100,000 men, women, and children were driven from royal France into the neighboring lands of Spain, Provence, Italy, and North Africa. The great expulsion of 1306 was

arguably one of the most traumatic moments of medieval Jewish history and would prove to be the harbinger of a series of recalls and expulsions, local and general, culminating in King Charles VI's expulsion decree of 1394. Despite the upheavals of the fourteenth century, the literary productivity of Jews was astonishing. Yet there are few direct references to the catastrophic events of 1306, even in Jewish liturgical and historical texts, where one would expect to find them. In this book, Susan Einbinder coaxes out the literary traces of this traumatic expulsion. Why did the memory of this proud and vibrant Jewish community fade from historical memory? Where do its remnants reside among later communities and readers? From the lyrics of the supposed “Jewish troubadour” Isaac HaGorni to medical texts and astronomical charts, Einbinder studies a range of writings she reveals to be commemorative. Her careful readings uncover the ways in which medieval Jews asserted their identity in exile and, perhaps more important, helped to preserve or efface their history.

**“In order to remember what we lost of them through their sin, let every one pay heed.” Cincinnati HUC MS 2000, fol. 87v**

In the rare book and manuscript collection of the HUC-JIR Library in Cincinnati, a small liturgical codex tells a story of wandering. It is a variation on the story told by all the manuscripts I have cited in this book. Most of HUC MS 2000 is written in a Provençal hand that has been dated to the fourteenth century, but a later writer has come along to fill in missing sections in a French-style script. The liturgy is replete with *piyyutim*, many of them favorites of Provençal Jews and a number, presumably local, unknown. Although the codex itself was

lovingly produced and illuminated, the opening *Haggadah* contains a blistering curse that suggested, according to one paleographer, “a period of severe persecution.” From this end of history, we know how that period ended. Between then and now, this small codex journeyed. By the seventeenth century at the latest, HUC MS 2000 was in Islamic lands, perhaps far to the east; additional prayers with eastern vocalization and an owner's entry in Arabic conclude the volume. From its birthplace, the title page preceding the *Haggadah* still proclaims that it follows the rite of R. Amram and “the French *gaonim*.”

HUC MS 2000 is only one illustration of a neglected source on the medieval Jews of France and Provence. Another, Vat. Heb. MS 553, is found among the vast collection of Hebrew manuscripts in the Vatican library; this manuscript consists of two Provençal fast-day liturgies joined together to form a whole. The first section has been bound haphazardly so that some of the folios are upside down and out of order. The scribe, Simon b. Samuel, inserted his colophon on what is now folio 87v, indicating that he copied and finished his work in the imperial principality of Orange in 1389. That was two years before anti-Jewish violence would sweep across Aragon, killing thousands of Jews and leading to the conversion of thousands of others, and five years before the final expulsion from France...

These are just two examples of forgotten clues to the life and literature of medieval Jews who traced their origins to France, and continued to cling to some notion of Frenchness – first in Provence and the Comtat Venaissin, and later in places like Orange, Italy, Spain, North Africa, and farther east... Cincinnati's Klau



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the author of *Beautiful Death: Jewish Poetry and Martyrdom from Medieval France* and *No Place of Rest: Jewish Literature, Expulsion, and the Memory of Medieval France*, and the recipient of fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the Institute for Advanced Study, the American Philosophical Society, the National Humanities Center, the Shelby Collum Davis Center of Princeton University, and the Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers at the New York Public Library.