Akiva Jackson
Comparative Literature JP2
Professor Leonard Barkan
5.1.19

Warring over Yiddish Poetry:
Retranslating Morris Rosenfeld as a Political Zionist

In 1897, Harvard lecturer Leo Wiener, an ardent supporter of Jewish assimilation with a declared distaste for "the Zionist monstrosity," proclaimed Morris Rosenfeld's socialist Zionist poetry the start of "a new path" for Jewish literature "which leads to glory and universal recognition."[1,2] As Judaics scholar Sarah Alisa Braun argues, Wiener's subsequent English translation of Rosenfeld's poetry was a deliberate attempt to establish support for the assimilation of Jews into American society, and therefore legitimate his own tentative position as a Jew in academia. In Wiener's selection and interpretation of Rosenfeld's poetry, he portrayed Jews as harmless but valuable members of a unique culture, attempting to neutralize the perceived threat of overwhelming Jewish immigration and present Jews as a boon to American society. As Braun argues, Wiener chose Rosenfeld specifically because he represented an "authentic" voice of the ghetto, yet one that didn't threaten the hegemony of Christian America.[3]

Four years later, the translator Berthold Feiwel and illustrator E.M. Lilien, secular German Zionists, published a beautifully ornate German edition of Rosenfeld's poetry with Lilien's *Jugendstil* illustrations on almost every page. While their politics radically opposed those of

---

[1] Irving Levitas, "Reform Jews and Zionism—1919–1921," *American Jewish Archives*, no. April 1962 (n.d.): 19.

[2]Lifschutz, Ezekiel. "Morris Rosenfeld's Attempts to Become an English Poet." *American Jewish Archives*, no. November, 1970 (n.d.): 121.

[3] Sarah Alisa Braun, "Translating the Ghetto: Leo Wiener, Morris Rosenfeld, and the Construction of Yiddish in America," in "Jews, Writing and the Dynamics of Literary Affiliation, 1880-1940" (The University of Michigan, 2007), 72-121.

Wiener, their volume at first glance seems simply a translation of Wiener's English edition, appropriating title, selection, organization and even specific turns of phrase. Like Wiener, Feiwel modifies Rosenfeld's poetry to fit his political agenda. But instead of presenting Rosenfeld as the model assimilating Jew, posing no threat to American society, Feiwel organizes and translates the poems to present a vision of a viable and necessary Zionism. Feiwel's collection reconfigures Rosenfeld's poetry, originally intended for an audience of Jews from similar backgrounds, into a document that demands universal support for the Zionist movement. Unlike Wiener, who saw Rosenfeld as the perfect example of the assimilating traditional Jew, Feiwel saw the poet as "the singer of modern Zionism," calling for political action in the face of oppression.[4] In this paper, I will show how Feiwel presents Rosenfeld as "the singer of modern Zionism." Through careful selection and organization of Rosenfeld's poems in addition to subtle changes in translation Feiwel turns a poet who, while clearly Zionist, fails to present a clear argument for Zionism as a political movement, into one who demands involvement in a necessary and viable Zionism.

To decipher Feiwel's interpretation of Rosenfeld's poetry, one must first understand Wiener's *Songs from the Ghetto* and the methods the English translator used to reframe Rosenfeld's poetry for his own political purposes. What drew Leo Wiener so strongly to this Yiddish poet? Wiener publicized the poet, sparking Rosenfeld's national fame with the English language collection of his poetry, *Songs from the Ghetto*. A year later, Wiener traveled and researched extensively in preparation for writing *The History of Yiddish Literature in the Nineteenth Century*, seen by many Yiddishists as the start of the academic study of Yiddish literature, despite its numerous faults.[5,6]

---

[4] Morris Rosenfeld, *Lieder des Ghetto*, trans. Berthold Feiwel, 3. Aufl. (Berlin: Hermann Seemann Nachfolger, 1902), 12 (unpaginated).

[5] Leo Wiener, "Preface," in *The History of Yiddish Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1899), vii-xi.

[6] Sarah Alisa Braun, "Jews, Writing and the Dynamics of Literary Affiliation," 79 and 74.

Leo Wiener was certainly not naturally inclined towards Yiddish literature. A Jewish emigrant from Bialystok, Wiener grew up in a household enamored of German culture, with a father who "sought to replace the Yiddish of his environment by literary German."[7] Leo Wiener himself "preached absolute amalgamation with the Gentile surroundings," and would frequently go on "tirade[s] against the Jews for one grievance or another," while his wife, Bertha Kahn, would "speak with contempt of the 'gluttony of the Jews.'"[8,9] This family rejected their Judaism so entirely that Wiener's son, the famous mathematician Norbert Wiener, only found out he was Jewish through a chance remark overheard from a family friend. Leo Wiener's interest in Rosenfeld could be simply seen as part of his myriad interests, ranging from Gypsy to Mayan culture. A polyglot, his mastery of around thirty languages earned him a position on the faculty of Harvard, where he became the first professor in the field of Slavic Studies in America.
But in light of his anti-Jewish and anti-Yiddish background, his efforts to publicize and translate Morris Rosenfeld's poetry, declaring it "consummate art" and the "highest perfection" of Yiddish literature in America are more than peculiar.[10] Numerous scholars have attempted to explain this quandary, with suggestions ranging from a youthful rebellion against his family's emphasis of German over Yiddish to a suggestion that Wiener inherited his love for Yiddish poetry from his father.[11] But the critics are not just confused why Wiener was interested in Yiddish literature,

---

[7] Descended from the Grand Rabbi of Posen and also, according to legend, Maimonides.
Susanne Klingenstein, "A Philologist: The Adventures of Leo Wiener (1862–1939)," in *Jews in the American Academy, 1900-1940: The Dynamics of Intellectual Assimilation* (Yale University Press, 1991), https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt22726pd, 8.

[8] Levitas, "Reform Jews and Zionism," 19.

[9] Klingenstein, "A Philologist," 212 n.16.

[10] Ibid., 8-13.

[11] "Minute on the Life and Services of Professor Wiener," Harvard Gazette, 9 March 1940: 123, quoted in Klingenstein, "A Philologist," 212-13 n.17, and Lifschutz, Ezekiel. "Morris Rosenfeld's Attempts to Become an English Poet." *American Jewish Archives*, no. November, 1970 (n.d.), 122..

they are surprised by his interest specifically in Rosenfeld, going so far as to compare the poet to Dante.[12]

Judaics scholar Sarah Alisa Braun provides a compelling explanation for Wiener's choice of Rosenfeld, taking into account his "assimilationist tendencies" and grounded in a careful reading of Wiener's text. Braun argues that Wiener "saw his project not simply as constructing a literary history but as actively shaping perceptions American readers would have of the culture of East European Jewry more broadly." In translating Rosenfeld's work, Wiener was able to present an image of Jews that was both harmless, ready to assimilate into American values, but also as part of a unique culture worthy of respect, in line with the contemporary American fascination with regional literature. This project ultimately attempted to legitimate Wiener's own place in American society, as a Russian Jewish immigrant and representative of the new field of Slavic Studies in America. Wiener selects and translates Rosenfeld's poetry in a way that provides no call to action, lays no specific blame, and ultimately resigns itself to simply hoping. As Braun points out, Wiener creates a version of Rosenfeld's socialist poetry which puts no demands upon the reader, except to recognize Jews as a quiet and unthreatening minority.[13]

---

[12] Leo Wiener, *History,* 130, and Shatzky, Jacob. "Leo Wiener." *Yivo Bleter*, April 1940, 251: "Viner hot zicher mugzam geven rozenfelds talant...er hot gevolt tsyen di oyfmerkzamkeyt fun der eydisher gezelshaft in amerika oyf dem ershtn vichtikn eydishin poet fun der neyr velt" ("Wiener certainly exaggerated Rosenfeld's talent," but he did so because he "wanted to draw the attention of American Jewish society to the first important Yiddish poet of the new world.")
Cf. Braun, "Jews, Writing and the Dynamics of Literary Affiliation," 74-5, for a review of Susanne Klingenstein and Shmuel Niger's views, both of which she dismisses as interpretations of personal whim with little basis and explanatory power.

[13] Braun, "Jews, Writing and the Dynamics of Literary Affiliation," 76-106.

Feiwel's Project

Four years later, in 1902, the German Zionists Berthold Feiwel and E.M. Lilien published *Lieder des Ghetto* (Songs of the Ghetto), a beautifully bound and illustrated German collection of Morris Rosenfeld's poetry. The volume was intended to be seen as "'a contribution' to the 'great enterprise,'…of making 'the products of the modern national culture of the Jews, particularly in literature and art, accessible in beautiful form.'"[14] But this book, directed at both Jews and Gentiles, was not simply meant to disseminate Rosenfeld's poetry, but to support Feiwel's political Zionist agenda. Unlike Wiener, upon whose work he bases *Lieder des Ghetto,* Feiwel creates a book that constitutes a unified demand upon the reader, to see the pain of the ever-spreading modern ghetto, and to recognize the modern Zionist movement as a necessary and viable redemption. *Lieder des Ghetto* ultimately presents Zionism as a divine project, a panacea to all the difficulties of Jewish life.

Lieder des Ghetto is heavily influenced by the Harvard lecturer Leo Wiener's earlier collection of Rosenfeld's poetry, *Songs from the Ghetto.* Feiwel at points even seems to confuse Wiener's contributions with Rosenfeld's, mentioning the very aspects of Wiener's work that Braun points to as constituting his rereading of Rosenfeld's poems for his assimilationist goals as if they were the poet's own.[15] Feiwel then borrows Wiener's title and organization for his own book and bases his choice of poems on Wiener's.[16] Furthermore, Feiwel at times uses phrases in his translations that seem based on Wiener's, phrasing the German in ways closer to the English than the original

---

[14] Feiwel, *Lieder des Ghetto*, 18 (pages unnumbered), quoted in and translated by Gossman, "Jugendstil in Firestone," 63.

[15] In the introduction to *Lieder des Ghetto,* Feiwel says, "Der dichter hat seine 'Songs from the Ghetto' in drei Teile geschieden" ("The poet divided his 'Songs from the Ghetto' into three parts"), seeming to forget, or not know, that the poet, in his 1897 *Lieder-bukh* (Songbook), had not divided the poems in any way. Nor was that title Rosenfeld's own, but one chosen by Wiener for the English edition.
Rosenfeld, *Lieder des Ghetto*, 11 (unpaginated).

[16] He does however, cut five poems and expand by sixteen.

Yiddish he was translating.[17] Yet despite this close similarity to its predecessor, *Lieder des Ghetto* carries out an opposing project to *Songs from the Ghetto*, arguing that the oppression described by Rosenfeld must necessarily be read as a call to action, entirely antithetical to Wiener's attempt to portray Jewish immigrants as willing to assimilate fully into American society, without any worries of double-loyalty. To illustrate how Feiwel carries out this attempt to turn a work around completely, I will first explore his framing of his project in the preface to *Lieder des Ghetto*, and then show how his organization and subtle changes in translation not only render the Zionist dream a possibility, but demand that the reader takes part in its realization.

Berthold Feiwel's introduction to his *Lieder des Ghetto* outlines the paradox at the center of this, the attempt to turn "the poet of the modern ghetto" into "the bard of modern Zionism."[18] The majority of Feiwel's introduction is devoted to the explanation of the book's title. Feiwel explains that the ghetto is not just a piece of the past, left behind by the advance of Enlightenment, but a pervasive phenomenon whose "spirit" appears in the oppression of Jews in Eastern Europe and the grinding Jewish poverty in the big cities.[19] Yet explaining that the spirit of the ghetto still exists is not enough to fulfill Feiwel's goal. He needs a witness: "Wer aber vermöchte das Ghettto zu schildern?" ("But who is capable of describing the ghetto?").[20] Rosenfeld, the oppressed worker, as he did for Wiener, serves as the perfect witness for Feiwel, who goes to great lengths to make sure the reader takes the Yiddish poet's sufferings seriously. For Wiener, Rosenfeld served as an unbiased window into a section of society.[21] Feiwel,

---

[17] Such as his rendering of the line "als varbey" (all that is past) as "Doch für ihn ist nichts dabei!," surprisingly similar to Wiener's "all that is not for him." Similarly, Rosenfeld's arresting image of the trees of Palestine as "sheyne meysim," beautiful corpses, is rendered by Wiener as "dead beauties" and Feiwel as "tote Schönheit," both of which break the intensity of the image in the Yiddish, losing the anthropomorphization of the trees.

[18] Ibid., 12.

[19] Ibid., 7.

[20] Ibid., 8.

[21] Braun, "Jews, Writing and the Dynamics of Literary Affiliation," 85.

however, doesn't want lack of bias but an expression of the "immense pain" of the ghetto. To ensure that Rosenfeld is taken as an authentic witness to this pain, Feiwel needs to frame the poet's entire life as misery, so he states that when Rosenfeld left the sweatshop to work as a Yiddish journalist, he entered a "still more difficult slavery" ("die noch schwerer Skläverei am Schreibpult"). Feiwel quotes a poem of Rosenfeld's to prove this, how as a journalist, his "spirit was broken," unable to create art, "slaving away, line after line" ("mein Geist, er ist gebrochen. / Zeile muß um Zeile schuften").[22]

Not only does Rosenfeld's life not perfectly fit the misery Feiwel wants to portray, the poet also doesn't fully represent the ghetto which Feiwel describes, in which "lives an unparalleled belief in God and love for the observed law" ("Hier lebt eine einzige Gottgläubigkeit und Liebe zur geheiligten Lehre"). Rosenfeld seemed not to have this perfect faith, writing many poems decrying the problems and hypocrisy of religious Judaism, many of which Feiwel includes in his collection. Rather, Rosenfeld seems to represent Feiwel's external view of the ghetto, who saw the religious obligations as "heavy traditions" ("schwere Traditionen").[23] Feiwel recognizes that Rosenfeld is unique in his perspective. While one of the characteristics of the ghetto is "the inextinguishable hope for the messianic kingdom, for the redemption through Zion" ("die unauslöschliche Hoffnung auf das messianische Reiche, auf die Erlösung durch Zion"), in Feiwel's view, Rosenfeld goes beyond simple messianic hope. Singing the pain of the contemporary Jew,

---

[22] Rosenfeld, *Lieder des Ghetto*, 11 (unpaginated).

[23] Ibid., 8. In the volume are "Jomkippur Abend" (Evening of the Day of Atonement) and "Laubhüttenfest Vorbei" (The Festival of Booths Concluded), which describe the futility of religious practice, and "Der Mamzer" (The Bastard), which laments the injustices caused by the strictures in religious law. See also "The First Bath of Ablution" and "The Candle-Seller" in Wiener's *Songs from the Ghetto*, which describe death at the hands of the religious.

> der Dichter des modernen Ghetto wird zum Sänger des modernen Zionismus, der gewaltigen Freiheitsbewegung des lebendigen Judentums, die die Juden aus der neuen Gefangenschaft in die alte Heimat, in ihren Frieden und ihre Freiheit führen will.[24]
> *the poet of the modern ghetto becomes the bard of modern Zionism, living Judaism's tremendous freedom movement, which will lead the Jews out of the new captivity into the old homeland and its peace and freedom.*

Rosenfeld is not just a representative of the ghetto: he is a poet who is able to transcend his background and recognize the new spirit of the times, which will sweep away his whole world. This final image, of peace and freedom in the old homeland, almost quotes Feiwel's translation of the poem "The Jewish May" ("Der jüdische Mai"), in which God will bring the Jews to Zion, were they will be: "Frei and friedlich wie einmal /…/ In dein altes Heimatland" ("Free and peaceful as once /…/ In your old homeland").[25] Yet instead of the traditional "messianic… redemption through Zion," Feiwel posits these poems as promoting the political movement of Zionism, a human project that will solve all the problems of modern Judaism, dissolving the ever-present "spirit of the ghetto." This reading of Rosenfeld doesn't totally fit. He never outlines or calls for any specific plans of political action, nor does he mention the Zionist movement. His visions of Zion are all, as Sarah Alisa Braun points out, not of a realistic political Zionism, but a messianic "pastoral bliss."[26] To fit his project, Feiwel has to somehow change Rosenfeld to fit his Zionist agenda.

In his selection, organization, and translation of Rosenfeld's poems, Feiwel frames, alters, and juxtaposes Rosenfeld's poetry to create this Zionist vision. In this paper, I will first illustrate how

---

[24] Ibid., 12.

[25] Ibid., 100.

[26] Braun, "Jews, Writing and the Dynamics of Literary Affiliation," 99.

Feiwel organizes and translates Rosenfeld's poems to create a vision of a viable and necessary Zionism. Then, by looking at Feiwel's use of the imperative in his translations, I will show how he involves his audience, starkly different from that presupposed by the original Yiddish poetry, in the Zionist project, demanding attention to the plight of the Jews, presenting the Zionist dream, and asserting the reader as an essential part of the realization of this dream.

Organization as Argument

Feiwel's organization of the poems in the book in itself constitutes a political argument about their meaning. The order of poems in the central *Lieder des Volkes* (Songs of the People) section places the poems in a Zionist narrative, portraying the problems with Jewish life as inherently tied to diaspora and the Zionist dream as the only solution. This section is bookended with poems about Zion, which in outlining the story of Zionist redemption from beginning to end, force the reader to see the poems in between as part of this larger story. The first poems, subtly altered in Feiwel's translation to further support this reading, portray Zionism as necessary and viable, by showing the intolerable nature of diaspora and promising Zionism's ultimate success through divine protection. These poems also serve as the beginning of a narrative. "Das Volk des Herrn" (The People of the Lord), the second poem of the section, describes the return to Zion as a second Exodus, with God commanding the poet to wander. The subsequent poems, describing the pain of diaspora Judaism, can be seen as the fulfillment of this command, the whole section outlining a narrative of Exodus and return to Zion. These "evil days of wandering" are epitomized in the poem "Sturm" (Storm), where two Jews despair, buffeted endlessly between unfriendly countries.[27] E.M. Lilien's illustrates this poem in a powerful two-page spread of the Jews in a storm-rocked boat, with the figure of death sitting across from them.[28] But the opening

---

[27] "bösen Wandertagen," from the poem "The Jewish May." Rosenfeld, *Lieder des Ghetto*, 99.

[28] Ibid., 70-1. The poem appears on pages 73-6.

poem of the section, "The People of the Lord," had promised, in Feiwel's altered translation, that God "will not let" the Jews "die on the journey."[29] This promise comes true as the odyssey culminates in the messianic glory of "The Jewish May," where a return to Zion is finally shown. Lilien's accompanying illustration is similar in many ways to that of "Storm" but replaces the figure of Death with an image of Jerusalem, drawing a direct parallel between the two and strengthening the narrative arc created in this section, with Zion standing in contrast to the depravity of diaspora.[30] Between the depth of despair in "Storm" and the climax of "The Jewish May," Feiwel constructs a presentation of the different solutions to the problems of diaspora. By pairing Rosenfeld's poems about the futility of religion with those describing former Jewish sovereignty and a future return to Zion, Feiwel posits the Zionist movement as the only answer to the problems facing modern Jewry.

This stands in stark contrast to the organization of poems in Wiener's *Songs from the Ghetto*. As Braun says: "Rather than calling for revolution, the poems selected for translation are all highly pessimistic about the possibility of change, and particularly about any change initiated by the immigrants themselves."[31] Without Feiwel's careful placement of the poems to create a narrative of hope, Wiener's selection is ultimately pessimistic, the glimmers of hope which Feiwel so effectively uses lost in the sea of despair. For such a radical difference, Feiwel's "Lieder des Volkes" (Songs of the People) section looks remarkably similar to Wiener's "National Songs," cutting only three out of nine poems and adding five new ones. Contrary to what one might expect, the added poems are not all positive. But through his meticulous juxtaposition of different poems, Feiwel is able to frame the pessimistic poems as outlining a sphere of futile

---

[29] Ibid., 66: "Du wirst auch jetzt mich nicht am Wege sterben lassen." As discussed below, Feiwel alters the translation to create an assurance that the Jews will make it to the land, not just vague promises of God's protection.

[30] The illustration to "The Jewish May" is on ibid., 92-3.

[31] Braun, "Jews, Writing and the Dynamics of Literary Affiliation," 95.

alternatives in contrast to Zionism, thus further legitimizing the power of Zionism. In this section, I will explore Feiwel's choices to show how he carries out all the rhetorical tactics outlined above, establishing Rosenfeld's poetry as an argument for Zionism.

The opening poems to Feiwel's "Songs of the People" section establish the legitimacy of Zionism and outline the section as a narrative arc of Zionist redemption. Through subtle changes in his translation, Feiwel is able to turn poems permeated with weakness and uncertainty into ones that declare Zionism an honorable and viable demand. At the beginning of the section, Feiwel places two Zionist poems absent in Wiener's translation, "Juda" (Judah) and "Das Volk des Herrn" (The People of the Lord).[32] These poems both describe the diaspora, the first framing a defiant refusal to "cowardly beg" for a home "in a foreign land" ("Mir feig erbetteln im fremden Land"), while the second portrays diaspora as a long, divinely commanded, and divinely protected, wandering journey to a Jewish homeland.[33] The combination of these poems' placement and Feiwel's careful choices in translation portray Zionism as a viable political movement, framing this section as a coherent narrative of exodus. This allows all the poems to be read as explications upon this theme and therefore as support for the Zionist movement.

Feiwel alters the first poem, "Juda," to turn Rosenfeld's Zionism of despair into one of choice and honor, legitimizing Zionism as a political movement. Feiwel changed the poem's title from the Yiddish "Yerushalayim" (Jerusalem) to "Juda" (Judah), a move which reframes the poem as political. Instead of portraying a yearning for Jerusalem, the spiritual and religious center of Judaism, the poem now seeks the Jewish homeland as a political entity, the goal of the Zionist movement. I will discuss later how Feiwel's use of the imperative changes this poem from one of individual dream to collective action. But for now, I will focus on the opening lines, which

---

[32] In Yiddish "Yerushalayim" (Jerusalem) and "In zeyn hand" (In his hand).

[33] Rosenfeld, *Lieder des Ghetto*, 63-6.

Feiwel subtly changes to reinterpret them as a declaration of choice instead of weakness. The Yiddish "A, ikh ken in fremde lender / nit betlen gehn a heym mit shand" (O, I cannot in foreign lands / shamefully beg for a home) is portrayed in German as "Nein, nein, ich mag kein Gnadenleben / Mir feig erbetteln im fremden Land" (No, no, I do not want a life of favor / cowardly begged in [this] foreign land).[34] This translation turns the Yiddish poem of despair into one of defiance. The Yiddish poet opens with "O, I cannot," a cry of anguish and a statement of helplessness, turning towards Zion simply out of an inability to stay in the diaspora. The German replaces this with the doubled, resistant "no" and the assertion of choice, "I do not want." The translation then switches "shame" for cowardice, emphasizing this turn to Zion as a choice from a position of strength. The shame of begging is a direct result of the confrontation of supplicant and patron, a shame of having to debase oneself in asking. One feels shame in begging whether or not there is another option. In "cowardly begg(ing)," the negative emotion comes not from the begging but rather from the lack of courage to take a more honorable path. The refusal to beg is thus not an avoidance of shame but a determination to fight for justice. This reading is further strengthened through the use of enjambment. In the Yiddish, the first line, "O, I cannot in foreign lands," foregrounds the position of weakness, the impossibility of living in "foreign lands." The German, in contrast, presents the high grounded "No, no, I do not want a life of favor [or mercy]," commenting not on the sense of being lost in a "foreign land" but on the honorable refusal of a defendant life. In all, the German presents a radically different image from the Yiddish original, one where Jews can choose to fight for a different life, not simply a poem of a despair at the impossibility of life in diaspora.

In the second poem of the section, "Das Volk des Herrn," Feiwel subtly alters the meaning of Rosenfeld's Yiddish to turn a poem about reliance on God, "whatever happens," to one that demands, and expects, that God will ensure the return to Zion. Feiwel's translation of the last line

---

[34] Rosenfeld and Harkavy, *Gezamelte lieder*, 96, and Rosenfeld, *Lieder des Ghetto*, 63.

of "Das Volk des Herrn" reinforces this reading. Describing the journey to Zion, the poet states: "And if stones and thorns cover my path," rendering the original Yiddish, "Meyn zeyn hastu gezikhert zey vie zey" (You have insured my being whatever happens), as "Mein Herr und Gott, ich bin in deiner Hand" (My Lord and God, I am in your hand).[35,36] By presenting the poet as the sentence's subject, the German translation focuses on an active choice to rely on God, declaring the poet's determination to reach the land. More importantly, the Yiddish ending states that God will protect him "whatever happens," whether or not the poet makes it to the Holy Land. The removal of this phrase in German takes away the possibility of the journey's failure. In this translation God's protection is juxtaposed to obstacles on the way, and the narrator chooses to place himself in God's hand in order to overcome these obstacles, not simply to achieve a vague protection of his "being."

This reading is reinforced by another striking translational choice. Although Feiwel makes some major changes to the poem, including striking two whole stanzas which he subtly incorporates into the other verses, the change of one word affects how one reads the whole poem. In Yiddish, the poet says that just as God brought the Israelites out of Egypt, "Du vest mikh veyter oykh nit iren lozen" (Similarly you will not let me continue to aimlessly wander), which Feiwel closely translates as "Du wirst auch jetzt mich nicht am Wege sterben lassen" (Now also you will not let me die on the way).[37] The one word change from "wander" to "die" supports the notion, established Feiwel's altering of the last line, that God will ensure the success of the journey to

---

[35] German: "Und mögen Stein und Dorn die Wege mir bedecken." The Yiddish original reads: "Un megen shtroykhlungen meyn yeden trit bedeken" (And if shrubs cover my every step), which conveys a similar meaning, though the German connects to the pervasive imagery of the Diaspora as thorns present in Lilien's illustrations to the volume.

[36] Rosenfeld and Harkavy, *Gezamelte lieder*, 99, and Rosenfeld, *Lieder des Ghetto*, 66.

[37] Ibid.

Zion.[38] Instead of God simply protecting and ensuring the right direction of the narrator's journey to Zion, the German promises that God will help the narrator overcome any obstacles and not let him die on the way, ensure the fulfillment of the Zionist dream. As mentioned above, these two poems, with their establishment of the political Zionism as an honorable and attainable demand, frame the entire section as a narrative of Zionist redemption. Not only is the narrator "in God's hand" for a personal journey to Zion, the reader is a long for the ride, and the poems of the section form an account of this journey. The "Songs of the People" section closes with "Der jüdische Mai" (The Jewish May), a poem that ends with a jubilant messianic return to Zion. This poem complete the narrative of the section by bringing the Zionist dream to fruition. This arc to the section is compelling not because Feiwel happened to place poems about leaving on a journey to Zion at the beginning and one about reaching Zion at the end.

The narrative arc to Feiwel's "Songs of the People" section is created not just by a basic outline of plot, but by the deeply intertwined imagery of "The Jewish May" and the two Zionist poems at the start of the section. The journey started in "Judah" and "The People of the Lord" finally ends in "The Jewish May," the promises of the beginning finally attained. "The Jewish May" and "Juda" share much of their imagery. Both poems invoke the representative places of Zion: the Carmel, Sharon, and Lebanon.[39] In both, songs waft through the air, and the narrator is called to a promise of new life.[40] The "bands of love" ("der Liebe Band") which tied the narrator to his "homeland" ("Heimat") in "Judah" finally bring him home in "The Jewish May," where he will be "Free and peaceful as once [you were] /…/ In your old homeland" ("Frei and friedlich wie

---

[38] Veyter and jetzt serve almost synonymous purposes in this case.

[39] Rosenfeld, *Lieder des Ghetto*, "Juda," 64 / "Der jüdische Mai," 98-99:"Vom Libanon grüßt jünger Schnee" / "Fragt vom Libanon die Zedern"; "es grünt der Karmel" / "den Karmel, jeden Baum"; "Saron blüht" / "Sarons Myrten."

[40] Ibid. "Durch weiche Lüfte ziehen Lieder " / "Würzige Paradieseslüfte" and "wunderreiche Lieder"; "Vertraute Stimmen hör' ich wieder / Und hör' sie rufen: Komm zurück! —" / "Hörst du, Jude?... / Ruft dir zu ein neuer Mai"; "Und alles lebt" / "Leben wirst du, Leben wieder."

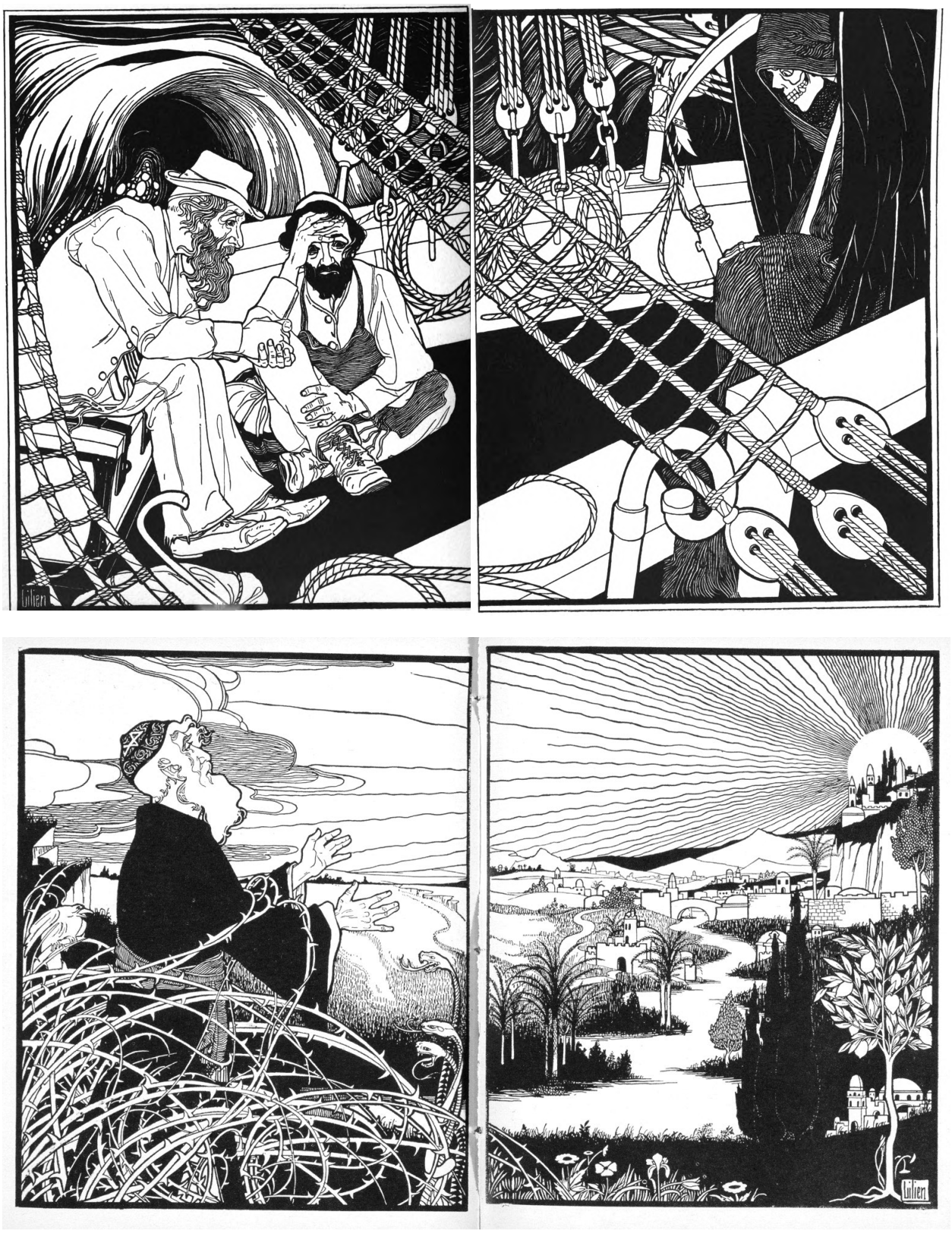
einmal /…/ In dein altes Heimatland").[41] The political defiance of "Judah," the poet's tenacious determination to return to the land is at last fulfilled. "The Jewish May" also incorporates the imagery of divine protection from the second poem of the section, "The People of the Lord," realizing God's promise to bring the narrator's journey to its end in Zion. Just as the poet describes how God brought him through the sea and desert before, and will enable him to arrive at the Jewish homeland, so "The Jewish May" declares before its description of this future state of glory in Zion that "dein Gott, er bring dich hin" ("your God will bring you there"). By bookending the entire section with the start and end of a journey to Zion, Feiwel reframes the entire section as a Zionist narrative.

As Aristotle points out in his *Poetics*, every good story needs a beginning, middle and end.[42] The three Zionist poems above outline the two poles of the narrative, but portraying the central poems, which scarcely mention Zion (only two brief tangential mentions over the course of eight poems), as the middle of this Zionist narrative seems incongruous. Two elements incorporate the central bulk of poems into this story of Zionist redemption. The first is the use of E.M. Lilien's illustrations to portray the central poems as linked to the end, letting them be read as the wanderings between Exodus and arrival in the Holy Land. The second is the careful juxtaposition of poems to outline and subsequently reject other, specifically religious, suggestions of redemption from the misery outlined in the section's poems. By placing these different possible solutions next to each other, Feiwel emphasizes that all the misery heartbreakingly rendered in these poems can and must be solved through political Zionism.

---

[41] Ibid. Curiously, Feiwel removes the only explicit reference in "Juda" to the May, replacing the Yiddish "Es komt tsurik meyn ershter mai" ("my first May returns") with the almost unrelated "Und alles lebt, so schön wie je" (And everything lives, as beautiful as ever").

[42] Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. James Hutton (New York & London: Norton, 1982).



E.M. Lilien, *Sturm* (Storm) above and *Der jüdische Mai* (The Jewish May) below. *Lieder des Ghetto*, trans. Berthold Feiwel (Berlin Marquardt, 1902), 70-1 and 92–93. Images from archive.org version (see bibliography) and Gossman, "Jugendstil in Firestone."

The full-page illustrations to the "Songs of the People" section fill in the middle of the Zionist narrative by framing the central poems as part of the wandering on the way to Zion. The poems in this section all discuss the misery of Jewish life, yet only a couple outside the first and last poems frame this misery as related to, or as a result of, the diaspora. But this book is not just a presentation of text, but also of imagery, allowing the connections to be made visually. Two poems in this section are singled out for attention with two-page illustrations: "The Jewish May," discussed above, and "Sturm," (Storm), a poem telling of the journey of two Russian Jews deported from America, because they "are Jews and have no money" ("Wir sind nur Juden und haben kein Geld!"). This poem seems to epitomize the wanderings foretold in "The People of the Lord," buffeted around between hostile countries. The characters are literally mid-journey, on a ship in the middle of the sea.[43] The poems is further placed in this narrative through the use of the illustration, whose formal similarities to the illustration of "The Jewish May" lead them to be read in parallel. Both images contain a strong diagonal movement across the page, with a Jewish subject on the bottom left and an object of observation on the upper right. In "Storm," this object is Death, personified as a skeleton with a scythe, but in "The Jewish May," this figure is replaced with the idealized city of Jerusalem. The Jews on the bottom left of both images are similar, white bearded and religious. The coils of rope in "Storm" parallel the encircling thorns of "The Jewish May." This parallelism between the images serves to reinforce the reading of "Storm" as the epitome of diaspora wanderings, while the replacement of Death with an image of Zion assures the reader that Zionism is the perfect solution to the problems of diaspora.

The parallels between the illustrations to "Storm" and "The Jewish May" establish not only "Storm" as part of the Zionist redemption narrative, but also the section's other poems. "Storm"

---

[43] Rosenfeld, *Lieder des Ghetto*, 76.

doesn't mention Zion explicitly, focusing instead on two pervasive themes in Rosenfeld's poetry, poverty and the difficulty of being Jewish. In light of the reinterpretation of these troubles as consequences of living in diaspora, solved only through the return to Zion, the other poems in this section (all of which touch on at least one of these themes) are folded into the narrative as well. But the other poems don't just serve to portray the miseries of diaspora. Feiwel carefully juxtaposes poems in this section to outline how political Zionism provides a solution to diaspora and why no other solution would do.

Zionism Is the Only Solution

Over the course of the section, Feiwel pairs poems portraying the futility of religion and hopelessness of the diaspora with foils about human strength and visions of Zion to present Zionism as the necessary and only resolution to the tribulations of diaspora. Rosenfeld's poetry doesn't immediately suggest a political solution to the problems facing Judaism in his time. Many of his later poems, and certainly those included in Wiener's *Songs from the Ghetto*, simply decry injustice without offering any calls for practical change. One of the injustices Rosenfeld condemns is traditional Judaism, which he describes as at best futile rituals unable to solve the problems facing Jews in diaspora, and at worst, self-righteous ceremonies carried on while widows die outside in the street. This pessimistic poetry belies the possibility of redemption which Feiwel promises.[44] Feiwel solves this problem in an ingenious way, pairing poems about futility with closely linked poems of hope to not only neutralize the negativity of these poems, but to even more strongly support the Zionist movement, with political Zionism taking the place of belief in God to save the Jewish people. With this reframing of these poems, Feiwel is able to rewrite Rosenfeld's pessimism as simply the base conditions to be redeemed by Zionism. Feiwel removes two poems from Wiener's earlier English collection, in which Jewish law is presented

---

[44] Rosenfeld, *Lieder des Ghetto*, 12 (unpaginated).

as a hypocritical orthodoxy at the expense of human life.[45] Yet Feiwel adds another two poems, "Jomkippur Abend" (Evening of the Day of Atonement) and "Laubhüttenfest Vorbei" (The Festival of Booths Concluded), which seem just as pessimistic of the value of religion. These poems discuss the despair at the end of a Jewish holiday, prayers and religion portrayed as futile in a broken world. However, these two poems are paired with poems of hope and strength, not only tempering their pessimism but ultimately redefining the discourse by shifting focus away from a failed religious practice to redemption through Zionism as a political movement.

The first poem on the futility of practice, "Jomkippur Abend" (Evening on the Day of Atonement), presents the failure of the holiest day on the Jewish calendar. But the following poem "Chanukka-Lichter" (Hanukkah Lights), presents an alternative to this pessimism with an almost secular image of Jewish national sovereignty, suggesting the Zionist movement as a solution to the failure of Jewish practice in diaspora. "Jomkippur Abend" ends, after a

---

45 "The First Bath of Ablution" and "The Candle-Seller." Only one other poem, "The Jewish Soldier," was removed from this section. Sarah Alisa Braun argues that this poem, in its representation of Jewish service to one's country (even while cursing Russia for not recognizing the service of the Jewish soldier), serves in Wiener's collection to "repudiat(e) the familiar accusation of dual loyalty," reassuring "That the Jews remain faithful to the country of their residence, despite the manner in which they are treated." In some ways this is the exact opposite of Feiwel's project, using the oppression of the Jews to argue for the creation of a Jewish nation-state (Braun, "Jews, Writing and the Dynamics of Literary Affiliation," 101).

Despite taking out the two poems about the harshness of Jewish law, Feiwel leaves in the poem "The Bastard," about the sufferings of an illegitimate child in the Jewish community. This poem directly criticizes Jewish society, not simply lamenting Jewish life or the futility of Jewish ritual. The illegitimate child tells of his tragic exclusion from Jewish ritual and society. However, as I will show with the poems in *Lieder des Volkes* about the futility of Jewish tradition, this poem is neutralized in conjunction with the poem that follows it, "Kidusch Lewanah" (Moon Prayer). In that poem, a father prays for God to renew the light of the moon, a metaphor for the people of Israel. His son plaintively asks him about the stars, wondering if one of the smallest stars represents them because they are poor, to which the father can only respond with tears. These two poems are connected in many ways. In both, a child laments his life, and a father (or lack of one) plays a central role. These poems are also similarly framed with Lilien's illustrations of trailing vegetation, the first with thistles and the second with lilies, white flowers on a black background. The juxtaposition of these leads one to read the first through the lens of the second, as part of a more general struggle for Jewish liberation from oppression and salvation for the poor.

description of the fervent closing prayers, with the enigmatic question: “Und was ist nachher, wenn geschlossen die Tür?…” (And what comes next, when the door is closed?…). This questions asks for some solution, but while religion has power in the prayer house to move the congregants it seems to have no sway beyond the doors of the synagogue.[46]

“Jomkippur Abend” is immediately followed by “Hanukkah Lights,” where, in contrast to the dying synagogue candles in the previous poem, the festive candles represent times of Jewish glory and power.[47] Not only did the Jews have power, but they still have the possibility to reclaim that strength. They “were not always the people that cried” (“Wir waren nicht immer das Volk, das weint”), and they will not always be: “the old Hasmoneon fire still burns in our blood” (“noch brennt in unserm Blut / Das alte Hasmonderfeuer”), “an ideal / that nations, you can never conquer” (“ein Ideal / Das, Völker, könnt ihr nie besiegen”). Furthermore, this former sovereignty didn’t come from God but from the people, from “Heldenmut” and “Heldenblut” (heroic courage and heroes’ blood).[48] The lights of Hannukah serve as an answer to the paralysis and subsequent despairing question in “Jomkippur Abend”: the next step must come from the Jews, not from God. Through action, Jews can solve the problems that religion cannot,

---

[46] In the poem, "Die Trauer liegt überm Gotteshaus" (Grief lies over the house of God) [Rosenfeld, *Lieder des Ghetto*, 80.] This fits Feiwel's description of religion in his introduction to Lieder des Ghetto: "Hier lebt die schwere Tradition der Zeremonien und Feste, der traurigen mit ihren Fasten und Bußen, die die ganze Seele erfassen..." (Here lives the heavy tradition of the ceremonies and holidays, the sad ones with their fasts and penance, which grasp the entire soul).

[47] "Die Seelenlichter gehen schon aus;" Ibid., 80.

[48] Rosenfeld, *Lieder des Ghetto*, 80-3. Religion is explicitly mentioned once in "Chanukka-Lichter." The Jews are portrayed as having fought for their religion: "Und für den Glauben großer Ahnen / Wir gingen mutvoll in die Schlacht" (And for the faith of great ancestors / We went bravely into the battle) . Yet religion is here portrayed as "the faith of great ancestors"—religion is subordinated to peoplehood. The last line of the poem makes it clear that the faith described in this poem is not one primarily focused on God: "Doch lebt in uns ein Ideal, / Das, Völker, könnt ihr nie besiegen." (But there lives in us an ideal / that nations, you will never be able to conquer). The empowering force is the ideal outlined in the poem, the image of the warring ancestors, not a God who enables this vision.

turning a poem of despair into an empowerment to bring about change, which in the context of the book becomes a call to the Zionist movement. This pair of poems establishes the possibility of reclaiming Jewish sovereignty in Zion.

The other poem about the futility of Jewish tradition, "Laubhüttenfest Vorbei" (The Festival of Booths Concluded), is paired with a poem that establishes Zionism as a solution to the total loss of hope in the diaspora. "Laubhüttenfest Vorbei" decries life in the diaspora as a series of broken hopes, but paired with the next poem, "Der jüdische Mai" (The Jewish May), it outlines the possibility and process of going from diaspora to Zionist redemption. "The Festival of Booths Concluded" describes the end of the autumnal harvest festival, the wilting leaves portraying the end of all hopes:

Da liegen verwelkt die süßen Träume,	*There lie, wilted, the sweet dreams,*
Da sind zertreten die schönen Freuden,	*There the beautiful joys crushed underfoot*
Da ist gestorben das Glück.	*There, dead, one's happiness*
Das ist deine Liebe,	*That is your love*
Das ist dein Sehnen,	*That is your yearning*
Das ist, mein Freund,	*That is, my friend*
Deines Lebens ein Bild.	*A picture of your life.*[49]

Like "Jomkippur Abend," this poem presents the end of a festival and the emptying of a synagogue, explicitly and personally expressing religious paralysis. The next poem, "The Jewish May," closely parallels this poem, expressing this loss of hope with the same imagery and language.

---

[49] Ibid., 89-90.

"The Jewish May" initially echos the themes of paralysis from the earlier poem, representing a blossoming spring inaccessible to the downtrodden Jew. Ultimately, however, the Zionist dream comes to resolves this hopelessness, creating the opportunity for a truly Jewish May. The autumnal wind in "The Festival of Booths Concluded," which blew away all of the Jew's withered dreams, reappears as a "may breeze" (Maienluft). But the Jew cannot access this vernal happiness: "lebensmatt und müd" (life weary and tired), his May has "already long since faded" ("schon längst, schon längst verblüht"). The losses of "Laubhüttenfest Vorbei" are repeated almost verbatim in this poem. The Jew cannot access the happiness and "Golden dreams" of spring ("das Glück" and "Goldne Träume"). The Jew's "trampled" "wishes and hopes" appear again: he has "no ray of hope / in his glance" ("Zertreten am Boden /…/ Dein Wünschen und Hoffen" / "es glänzt kein Hoffnungsstrahl / Aus dem Blick"). All that is left to him is "Death and dying, corpses, corpses — —, / old youth, dead happiness" ("Tod und Sterben, Leichen, Leichen — —, / Alte Jugend, totes Glück").[50] The Jew experiences spring in diaspora as dead autumn.

Unlike the previous poem's pessimism, "The Jewish May" creates opportunity for hope. Like "Hanukkah Lights," the poem recalls long lost ages of glory, "The Jewish May" goes beyond the memories and unconquerable "ideal" represented in "Hanukkah Lights" to an actual vision of change, a "new song" ("das neue Lied"): the promise of a return to Zion. This return is couched as a reversal of the former loss of spring, a promise of dreams and happiness: "New dreams draw near: / Do you hear, Jew? "Happiness and Peace!" / A new May calls to you" ("Neue Träume ziehen herbei: / Hörst du, Jude? "Glück und Frieden!" / Ruft dir zu ein neuer Mai"). The eternal autumn of the Jewish soul blossoms into a perpetual spring: "you will live, live once more,

---

[50] Ibid., 89-97.

continuously into eternity," the glorious culmination of all the dreams and end to all misery ("Leben wirst du, leben wieder, / Fort in alle Ewigkeit.").[51]

But if "The Jewish May" is meant to portray Zionism as a real option compared to the futility of religion, a utopian image of return seems to undermine the claim that Zionism is practical. "The Jewish May's" presentation of Zion is entirely utopian, a messianic era of eternal peace, an end to "misery / …suffering and torment" ("Und beschlossen ist das Elend / Und beendet Leid und Qual"). Furthermore, in the return outlined by "The Jewish May," people have no part in the fulfillment of the Zionist dream: "Und dein Gott, er bring dich hin" ("And your God will bring you there").[52] This seems the exact opposite of a proposition for a political movement.

Through the emphasis of a single line of "The Jewish May" in E.M. Lilien's art, the, poem, and the entire book is framed about the active role the humans must take in the Zionist movement. The cover of *Lieder des Ghetto* is a striking image of a broken harp hanging from a willow tree, the bottom framed by the skyline of Jerusalem, echoing Psalm 137's description of exile:

> By the rivers of Babylon—
>
> there we sat down and there we wept
>
> when we remembered Zion.
>
> On the willows there
>
> we hung up our harps.[53]

---

[51] Ibid., 99.

[52] Ibid.

[53] "Bible Gateway Passage: Psalm 137 - New Revised Standard Version," Bible Gateway, accessed May 1, 2019, https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+137&version=NRSV.

This seems to be a pessimistic framing of the whole work, positing Rosenfeld's role as conjuring the image of Zion, not in hope but in lament. The broken strings of the harp, however, seem to complicate this image, suggesting the loss of even this song. A year after *Lieder des Ghetto*, Feiwel translated and published *Junge Harfen, eine Sammlung jungjüdischer Gedichte* (Young Harps, a Collection of Young Jewish Poems), a title that equates the "young harps" with the new generation of "young Jewish" poets. The opening poem by Max Barber acts as a preface to the book. "On the willows hang the harps… / […] Now they are silent, long shattered," the poet tells, ending with a command and a promise: "Build young harps! /…/ …That will lead us out of our dismal exile to the light of the sun" ("An den Weiden hangen die Harfen… / […] Nun sind sie stumm, sind längst geborsten." "Baut junge Harfen! /…/ …Das soll uns aus trüber Gebanntheit zur Sonne geleiten").[54] This poem reads as a commentary on the cover image of *Lieder des Ghetto*. The broken harp is not the end of song, but the symbol of a broken world which calls forth a demand for a new one, with poetry empowered to go beyond conjuring up a vision of Zion to actually lead there.

In light of this reading of the imagery of the harp hanging on the willow as suggesting an opportunity for change, "The Jewish May" can be seen as a poem with a real call to action. The messianic idealism is not presented as undermining the requirement of concrete political action but as forming a symbolic basis for this radical movement. The poem presents a vision of Zion's glorious past, with angelic playing music in the Temple and Jews reciprocating with "the most beautiful string music" ("beim schönsten Saitenspiele").[55] The songs the Jews sang reflect those of the angels, suggesting equal role to human and divine in the return to the Jewish homeland.

---

[54] Berthold Feiwel, *Junge Harfen, eine Sammlung jungjüdischer Gedichte* (Berlin: Jüdischer Verlag, 1903), 3.

[55] "כִּנֹּרוֹתֵינוּ" (*kinoroteinu*) the word in Psalm 137 translated as "our harps" can also be translated as "our violins," informing Rosenfeld's original Yiddish line "from a wonderfully rich violin / [the Jew] kissed the prettiest songs" ("fun a vunder-reykhe fidel / oysgekusht di shehnste lieder").

This vision soon ends, and the poet laments: "O, on silent willows / Judah hung its dreams" ("Ach, an stumme Weidenbäume / Hängte Juda seine Träume").[56] Here the harp is directly equated with the dreams of the Jewish people, suggesting not just song but the vision conjured up by that music. Feiwel's translation of these lines, while very close to the original Yiddish lines, subtly alter key elements. The Yiddish poem reads "oyf a verbe, oyf a shtume, / hengt der khalom fun meyn umeh…" (on a willow tree, on a silent one, / hangs the dream of my nation).[57] As pointed out in the discussion of the poem "Juda's" title, "Judah" is not just a description of the people of Israel but that of a political entity, the former biblical kingdom, suggesting that Feiwel's translation politicizes this line. As described above in reading the introduction to *Junge Harfen*, the end to the old song, the lament for Zion, calls for a new song of political action. The Yiddish presents the dream as always present, if unattainable, silently hanging out of reach, parallel to the vision of messianic Zionism, where Jews constantly hope for redemption. Feiwel's version changes this to a description of a past action, the active giving up of the dream, putting the harps away. Not only does this emphasize the active role that Jews take in relation to Zionism, it links it to a historical event, which can be seen in line with the poem "Hanukkah Lights" as the loss of Jewish self-sovereignty. The messianic ideal was never abandoned, but the active attempt to reclaim the Jewish homeland was given up as futile. Thus the "new song" ("das neue Lied") that follows this passage is not simply the suggestion of divine redemption but the promise of the Zionist movement.[58]

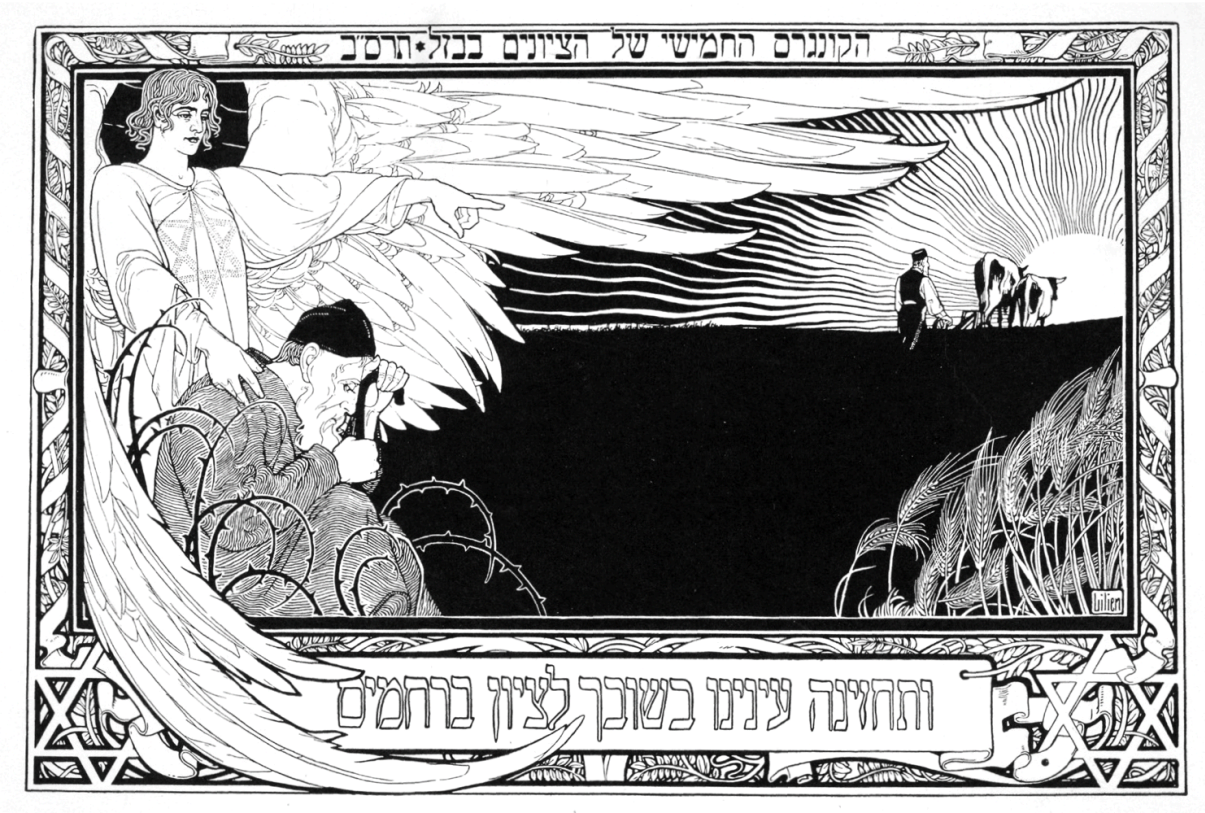
E.M. Lilien's illustration to "The Jewish May," in juxtaposition to his earlier illustration of the Fifth Zionist Congress delegates' card, outline a way to read this utopian poem as melding messianic hope and practical political action. The illustration to "The Jewish May" portrays a

---

[56] Rosenfeld, *Lieder des Ghetto*, 98.

[57] Rosenfeld and Harkavy, *Gezamelte Lieder*, 119.

[58] Rosenfeld, *Lieder des Ghetto*, 99.



E. M. Lilien, delegates' card, 1901. The upper Hebrew inscription reads: "Fifth Zionist Congress, Basel, 1901." The lower one reads: "May we behold with our eyes the return, in mercy, to Zion." Reproduced in E. M. Lilien: Sein Werk (Berlin: Schuster & Loeffler, 1903). Marquand Library of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University.

E. M. Lilien, *Die Erschaffung des Menschen* (The Creation of Man). The figure on the extreme left is usually held to be a representation of Theodor Herzl. Berthold Feiwel, Lieder des Ghetto, 3rd ed. (Berlin: Hermann Seemann Nachfolger, 1902), [112–13]. Cotsen Children's Library, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

Text and Images from Gossman, "Jugendstil in Firestone."

man in adorned, traditional religious clothing, including an embroidered *yarmulke* with a Star of David, who, ensnared in thorns on the bottom left, reaches out with a tear in his eye to an idealized version of Jerusalem framed against a radiant rising sun at the top right.[59] This seems to reinforce utopian image presented in the poem, but when compared with Lilien's Fifth Zionist Congress delegates' card, it becomes clear that the image is closely tied to the Zionist movement.The delegates' card is rather similar: a bearded Jew with cap and robe sits wrapped in thorns in the bottom left corner, while a youthful angel stands behind him, direction towards the orb of the rising sun on the top right, framing a farmer in the land of Israel.[60] In some ways this image is more messianic. Unlike the illustration to "The Jewish May," where the Jewish man looks out, unguided by anything more than a nightingale's promise of spring, the delegates' card explicitly evokes divine guidance in the journey to Zion. Clearly political Zionism does not presuppose an absence of religious imagery. Instead, the angel serves to justify the Zionist project, framing the political battle for a Jewish homeland as a fulfillment of the two thousand year old Jewish dream. The illustration to "The Jewish May" then actually presents an even stronger visual argument for the Zionist movement than Lilien's delegates' card: the absence of any divine figures suggests even more strongly that through human action alone, an attainable utopian state.

Furthermore, one can read these images in conjunction of another one of Lilien's illustration in this book, to the poem "Die Erschaffung des Menschen" (The Creation of Humankind), to suggest that the Zionist movement takes the place of direct divine intervention, humans carrying out the messianic promise. In this image, angels celebrate the creation of man.[61] The angel on the

---

[59] Rosenfeld, *Lieder des Ghetto*, 92-3.

[60] Michael Stanislawski, "Vom Jugendstil zum Judenstil," in Zionistische Utopie, israelische Realität : Religion und Nation in Israel, Originalausg., Beck'sche Reihe (München: Beck, 1999), 87.

[61] Rosenfeld, *Lieder des Ghetto,* 112-13.

far left, carrying a lyre, has facial features closely resembling those of the founder of modern Zionism, Theodore Herzl.[62] The guardian angel presented in Lilien's Fifth Zionist Congress delegates' card is replaced with the human figure of Herzl. Holding a harp, Herzl connects past and present, messianic idealism and practical politics, suggesting that Zionism is a movement encompassing all these aspects, a movement destined for success, but requiring human involvement to make that happen.

Demands on the Reader

In order for *Lieder des Ghetto* to be a thoroughly Zionist work, it must not only establish the necessity and viability of Zionism, as seen above, but it must also provide a reason for the audience to care about the Zionist movement. While Wiener subtly changes aspects of the poetry to remove its political demands, Feiwel does the opposite, creating a translation that insists on the reader's involvement in the Zionist project. Feiwel does this in a subtle but forceful way, taking narrative statements and turning them into imperative commands to the reader. In three separate poems in the central *Lieder des Volkes* sections, Feiwel changes a statement about sight into a command to the reader to pay attention. In these three poems, I will show how Feiwel's use of the imperative forces the reader to take interest in the plight of the Jews, presents the Zionist dream directly to the audience, and ultimately invokes the reader as part of the realization of this dream.

In the poem "Der jüdische Mai" (The Jewish May), Feiwel turns a poem that presupposes an existing relationship between reader and subject, fellow Jews in the original Yiddish, into one that creates this relationship. The translated poem acts as a publicity notice for the Jewish condition, demanding that the reader recognize the misery of diaspora. In describing the decrepit

---

[62] A fact noted by many a critic. Cf. Stanislawski, "Vom Jugendstil zum Judenstil," 92.

wandering Jew, the Yiddish poem turns toward the reader to recognize the subject: “Dokh ihr seht dort eynem treten” (But you see one stepping there) and “Veyst ihr, kent ihr yenem krankem” (Do you know, do you recognize that sick one). Feiwel only subtly changes these lines to “Aber seht, dort wandelt einer” (But see, one strolls there) and “Sagt mir, kennt ihr jenen Kranken” (Tell me, do you recognize that sick one). Unlike the other poems in this section, the Yiddish original of “The Jewish May” involves the readers in the narrative. But Feiwel changes the terms of the relationship of the reader to the narrative. In the original Yiddish, the reader obviously sees the Jewish man. While “dokh” is used to create a contrast to the previous section about the glories of spring, it also serves to intensify the relationship between subject and reader. The reader is portrayed as already understanding the pain of the Jew. The question that begins the next verse, “Do you know, do you recognize that sick one” is answered a couple lines later with “unser alter, unser id!” (our old man, our Jew!). The reader may not see who it is at first, but it is obvious that in the end they will recognize the Jewish fate. In Feiwel’s translation, however, this recognition is not taken for granted. The experience of the Jew is mediated through the involvement of the narrator, who needs to point out the miserable Jew, telling the readers to “see” (seht). The question in the next verse is not one of the recognition, but the creation of a new knowledge. The narrator directly asks the reader if they know the subject: “Tell me, do you recognize that sick one[?]” The relationship in the poem is thus set up not between reader and Jew, but between reader and narrator, so when the answer comes, “Unser Alter, unser Jud’…,” it reads as an instruction to the reader, not as long-awaited recognition. The readers are told to recognize the Jew as one of their own. Instead of the emphatic exclamation point of recognition in the Yiddish, the German edition places an ellipsis, trailing off, perhaps in embarrassment about the implied relationship of reader to poor subject. The Jewish subject is presented as almost a curiosity. But this presentation is ultimately a demand on a reader who otherwise would not notice the Jew in the glory of spring, in contrast to the original Yiddish, which knows that despite the vernal splendor, the reader ought to see and recognize Jewish pain.

In "Channuka-Lichter" (Hannukah Lights), a poem about lost Jewish strength, Feiwel involves his audience in the Zionist dream by shifting the first-person narrative to one in the second-person. In the Yiddish poem ("Di khnuka likht," The Hannukah Light), the narrator sees the Hannukah candles ("ven ikh zeh" [when I see]). The candles conjure up a dream which directly addresses the narrator: "id, du hast gekriegt amol / id, du hast geziegt amol" (Jew, you fought once / Jew, you were victorious once). Feiwel changes the opening of this verse from "ven ikh zeh" (when I see) to "Sieh!" (see!).[63] This tiny change fundamentally alters the meaning of the poem. In this formulation, instead of being a passive bystander to this revelation, the reader is involved in the narrative. The dream of Zion is ascribed to the reader, a dream to which the reader is called to pay attention.

The narrator's place in this poem is further removed by later changes in the poem. The narrator's personal, emotional responses to the dream offered by the candles are removed and replaced with statements continuing the dreams. The vision tells of how "Jew, you fought once," and in the original Yiddish, the narrator responds, "Got, dos gloybt zikh koym!…" (God, one can hardly believe it!…). In the next verse, where the dream tells of when the Jews "once had a land," the narrator exclaims "Akh, vie tief dos rihrt!" (O, how deep that touches). Feiwel changes these lines entirely, replacing them with "Stolz und kraftgestählt!" (Proud and steeled to strength) and "Wunder längst vorbei!" (A long gone wonder). These changes remove the emotional response to the dream, reading as simple continuations of the vision. This elimination of the personal emotional reaction universalizes the dream into a story of loss of pride and power. Thus, when the poem describes goes on to speak in the first-person plural, the reader is necessarily included:

---

[63] Morris Rosenfeld and Alexander Harkavy, *Gezamelte lieder* (Nyu York : Aroysgegeben fun der Internatsyonaler bibliothek ferlag kompani, 1904), http://archive.org/details/nybc211745, 132-4. Rosenfeld, *Lieder des Ghetto*, 81-3.

this attempt at inclusion in the Zionist project is valid even for gentiles, for whom visions of Jewish power would not "touch" so "deep." When the poem ends with hope, the reader can either participate in the dream of Zion or simply recognize its power: "Doch lebt in uns ein Ideal, / Das, Völker, könnt ihr nie besiegen." (But there lives in us an ideal / that nations, you will never be able to conquer). By now we have seen how Feiwel calls his audience's attention to the plight of the Jews and presents to them the Zionist vision. But the reader still doesn't have a clear place in this movement.

In the first poem of the section, "Juda," the reader is not only witness to the Zionist dream but is given a clear role in making this dream come true. In Feiwel's translation of this poem, the narrator's fantasy of return to the land of Israel gets turned into a direct experience of the reader. Feiwel flips the Yiddish "Mir dacht ich zeh dem karmel vieder" (I think I see the Carmel again) to "Sieh! Saron blüht, es grünt der Karmel" (See! Sharon blooms, the Carmel turns green), again involving the reader in the narrative. Yet the rest of the poem remains in the first person. This change is related to a fundamental change in the poem. In the Yiddish, Rosenfeld starts three subsequent verses with the words "mir dakht" (I think). These words set up these verses, which portray the return to Zion as fantasy, returning to reality with a thud when the narrator says "mir dacht…. un kol zman mir vet dakhten, / vel ikh nit…/…beten sey a heym mit shand" (I think… and the whole time that I so think, I will not…/…shamefully ask from them a home). In the Yiddish poem, the fantasy of being called to Zion and seeing the land is a sustaining force for the refusal to "beg shamefully for a home" ("betlen gehn a heym mit shand"). Feiwel removes these statements of uncertainty, turning them into described experiences, not fantasies: "ich…/hör' sie rufen: Komm zurück!" (I hear them calling: come back!) and the above mentioned "Sieh! Saron blüht, es grünt der Karmel" (See! Sharon blooms, the Carmel turns green). Feiwel returns the element of uncertainty in what is in the Yiddish the return to reality, translating "mir dacht…. un kol zman mir vet dakhten" as "so träum' ich….Träume? Nein, ich schwör' es:/…/Nehm' ich von

dem…/Auch nicht das kleinste Plätzchen an" (so I dream….dreams? No, I swear/…/I won't take from them…/Even the smallest little plot). As opposed to the Yiddish, which resolves the fantasy as an ideal to motivate the narrator, the German translation portrays the fantasy of a return to Zion as a reality contingent on the action of the narrator. With this understanding, the insertion of the reader into the narrative with the use of the imperative "see," is not a shifting of experience away from the narrator, but a verification of the narrator's dream. Not only does the subject of the poem believe he sees Zion, the narration confirms the possibility of this sight by inviting the reader to take part.

These changes by Feiwel mirror similar choices by Wiener in translating the Yiddish. In the poem "The Pale Operator" (Der Bleycher Opretor / An der Nähmaschine), the poet says, "Ikh bet aykh," "I ask you, how long will / the weak one drive the bloody wheel?" which as Sarah Braun states, in her above-mentioned analysis of Wiener's translation,

> confront(s) the reader for a possible solution. Wiener, however, opted for a more polite "Pray tell me," a form of address not implicating the audience in any way. The change forestalls the creation of a direct relationship between reader and poet but also any explicit sense that the reader bears responsibility for the worker's condition[64]

While Feiwel demands a level of audience involvement in the poetry that Rosenfeld himself doesn't even call for, Wiener does the opposite, distancing the reader from the poetry's demands.

Berthold Feiwel's German collection of Morris Rosenfeld's Yiddish poetry, *Lieder des Ghetto*, presents the poetry as a Zionist polemic. To do this, Feiwel needed to somehow alter Rosenfeld's poetry, which instead of outlining support for a political Zionist movement, seemed to portray a

---

[64] Braun, "Jews, Writing and the Dynamics of Literary Affiliation," 97.

pessimistic, if messianic, vision of change, where the poet was left simply hoping for God's redemption. Feiwel, through subtle changes in his translation and the careful placement of poems in the "Songs of the People" section, reframes Rosenfeld's poetry into a narrative arc that pushes the reader to reinterpret and privilege certain elements of the poems. This framing reads Rosenfeld's poems as part of one large argument about political Zionism, presenting Zionism as honorable, necessary and viable. This change is even more drastic when one considers that Feiwel was not creating his collection unmediated from the poet's corpus, but based his book on Leo Wiener's English *Songs from the Ghetto,* which as Sarah Alisa Braun argues, attempts the opposite of what Feiwel tries to achieve. Wiener's book uses Rosenfeld's poetry to portray Eastern European immigrants as willing to assimilate, slowly abandoning tradition and language to join the mainstream American culture. One of the ways in which Feiwel constructs his argument is through a similar suggestion of Rosenfeld's role as not only embodying, but transcending the traditional "ghetto" culture. Yet unlike Wiener's vision of Rosenfeld as the assimilating Jew (a man in his own image), Feiwel presents the poet as "the bard of modern Zionism," the weight of Jewish oppression and the "heavy traditions" leading to redemption in Zion.[65]

---

[65] Rosenfeld, *Lieder des Ghetto,* 12 and 8.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Naomi Shifrin, Zach Smart and my mother, Claudia Marbach, for their careful reading of sections of this paper and insightful feedback. My gratitude to Professors Barbara Nagel and Esther Schor for their helpful guiding comments, Sean Toland for meeting with me at the crack of dawn in the writing center, and my entire family for listening to me yap in Yiddish and German for two years.
And a special thank you to professor Leonard Barkan, for always pushing me to get words on the page, never being too harsh in his *toykhekhe* (admonition), and perpetually guiding me in the direction I needed to make this paper a reality.

Bibliography

"20,000 at Funeral of Morris Rosenfeld, Poet." *New York Tribune / Herald Tribune*, June 25, 1923.

Aristotle. *Poetics*. Translated by James Hutton. New York & London: Norton, 1982.

Baigell, Matthew. "Sweatshop Images: Jewish History and Memory." Brill, 2009. DOI: 10.1163/18718000 8X408591.

"Bible Gateway Passage: Psalm 137 - New Revised Standard Version." Bible Gateway. Accessed May 1, 2019. https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+137&version=NRSV.

Braun, Sarah Alisa. "Jews, Writing and the Dynamics of Literary Affiliation, 1880-1940." The University of Michigan, 2007.

Feiwel, Berthold. *Junge Harfen, eine Sammlung jungjüdischer Gedichte*. Berlin: Jüdischer Verlag, 1903.

Genette, Gerard. *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. Cambridge ; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Genette, Gerard, and Marie Maclean. "Introduction to the Paratext." *New Literary History* 22, no. 2 (1991): 261. https://doi.org/10.2307/469037.

"Guide to the Papers of Morris Rosenfeld (1862-1923)1894-1967RG 431." Text. Accessed April 15, 2019. http://digifindingaids.cjh.org/?pID=109127.

Klingenstein, Susanne. "A Philologist: The Adventures of Leo Wiener (1862–1939)." In *Jews in the American Academy, 1900-1940: The Dynamics of Intellectual Assimilation*. Yale University Press, 1991. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt22726pd.

Levitas, Irving. "Reform Jews and Zionism—1919–1921." *American Jewish Archives*, no. April 1962 (n.d.): 3–19.

Lifschutz, Ezekiel. "Morris Rosenfeld's Attempts to Become an English Poet." *American Jewish Archives*, no. November, 1970 (n.d.): 19.

Lionel Gossman. "Jugendstil in Firestone: The Jewish Illustrator E. M. Lilien (1874–1925)." *The Princeton University Library Chronicle* 66, no. 1 (2004): 11. https://doi.org/10.25290/prinunivlibrchro.66.1.0011.

Lynne Swarts. "Lilien's Sensual Beauties: Discovering Jewish Orientalism in Ephraim Moses Lilien's Biblical Women." *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues*, no. 33 (2018): 90. https://doi.org/10.2979/nashim.33.1.05.

Miller, Marc. *Representing the Immigrant Experience : Morris Rosenfeld and the Emergence of Yiddish Literature in America*. 1st ed. Judaic Traditions in Literature, Music, and Art. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2007. http://www.loc.gov/catdir/toc/ecip073/2006033605.html.

———. "The Artificiality of German in Modern Yiddish Poetry." *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 4, no. 2 (July 1, 2005): 123–35. https://doi.org/10.1080/14725880500133350.

Rosenfeld, Morris. *Lieder des Ghetto*. Translated by Berthold Feiwel. 3. Aufl. Berlin: Hermann Seemann Nachfolger, 1902.

———. *Lieder des Ghetto. Autor, Abertragung aus dem Judischen von Berthold Feiwel, mit Zeichnungen von E.M. Lilien*. Translated by Berthold Feiwel. Berlin Marquardt, 1902. http://archive.org/details/liederdesghettoa00roseuoft.

———. *Lieder-bukh : ershter theyl*. Nyu York: Grover Brothers, 1897.

———. *Moris Rozenfelds briv*. Argentiner Yivo-bibliotek, nr. 16. Buenos-Ayres: Yidisher Visnshaftlekher Institut--Yivo, 1955.

———. *Shriften fun Morris Rozenfeld = The works of Morris Rosenfeld*. Internatsionale Bibliothek. Nyu York: A.M. Yevalenko, 1908.

———. *Songs from the Ghetto*. Translated by Leo Wiener. Boston: Copeland and Day, 1898.

———. *Songs from the Ghetto*. Translated by Leo Wiener. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Literature House, 1970.

Rosenfeld, Morris, and Alexander Harkavy. *Gezamelte Lieder*. Nyu York : Aroysgegeben fun der Internatsyonaler bibliothek ferlag kompani, 1904. http://archive.org/details/nybc211745.

Rosenfeld, Morris, and Nachman Mayzel. *Tsum hundertstn geboyrntog fun Moris Rozenfeld zamlung*. Nyu-York : Ikuf farlag, 1962. http://archive.org/details/nybc209586.

"'Ruler of the Zionist World The Men Who Surrounded Herzl in Vienna and Their Powers' in Theodor Herzl A Memorial.Rtf," n.d.

Shatzky, Jacob. "Leo Wiener." *Yivo Bleter*, April 1940, 247–56.

———. *Moris Rozenfeld in likht fun zayne briv*. Nyu-York : [Astoria Press], 1936. http://archive.org/details/nybc202849.

Stanislawski, Michael. "Vom Jugendstil zum Judenstil." In *Zionistische Utopie, israelische Realität : Religion und Nation in Israel*, Originalausg. Beck'sche Reihe. München: Beck, 1999.

Wiener, Leo. *The History of Yiddish Literature in the Nineteenth Century*. New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1899.