CHAPTER TWO

The Forgetting of History and the Memory of Translation

The task of translating the Bible was as much a salvific act as it was one of scholarship. The struggle with temporality and the attempt to confront the ontological hiatus between pure and mundane languages resides at the heart of virtually all of the translation projects to be discussed in this study. In the present chapter the focus switches from purely theoretical concerns to ones of history or, perhaps better, to a-history and towards the distortive glances of memory that emerge from the confrontation between past, present, and future. Here history and the historical record again slide into the background; only now they do so not because they take a back seat to theorizing as they did in the previous chapter, but because the past, shed of its specificities, becomes implicated in the formation of authenticity. No longer understood as an unfolding series of events in a narrative setting, the past takes on a set of meanings as projected from a future. From the manifold intersections of imagined pasts, presents, and futures the world opens up in moments of vision and its projection becomes the perceived ground of unconcealment.

To forget the Hebrew of the Bible was tantamount to a loss of memory and all of the national fragmentation that this implied. Translating the Bible into contemporaneous idioms, *if done properly*, could both save the antiquity of the Hebrew and yet also forever change the contours of a host language. The originary moment of Hebraic revelation could only be mediated paradoxically through another language. It was the semantics and grammar of these other languages that pointed to the traces of the former. The end result is that the originary moment of revelation came to be imagined as a rupture into the quotidian of the present. All of this, as I shall argue in this chapter, was facilitated by the translative act. This functioned as an on-going modern revelation in which the memory of the past was foregrounded against present concerns that would anticipate a future perfect.

In order to focus on the subject matter of this chapter I have opted to provide an in-depth analysis of the two thinkers who book-end this study: Saadya Gaon and Franz Rosenzweig. If it can be shown that the topic discussed here – the filiations between forgetting and memory, history and translation – exist in my *termini post quem* and *ad quem* then I believe with confidence that the same holds true for the other thinkers in this study who inhabit the temporal periods in-between.

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Like all Jews who sought to translate the Bible into the vernacular, both Rosenzweig[1] and Saadya were motivated by what they considered to be a general state of neglect of the Hebrew language among their contemporaries. This neglect was not simply a historical process concerning the rise and fall of languages but was intimately connected to the unfolding of the universe from an originary point, and the word and world's redemptive return to this point. Although the relationship of language to ontology is perhaps most poetically and articulately described by Rosenzweig, its clearest archival record remains Saadya's *Commentary to the Sefer Yetzirah*, a text that is foundational to all of Saadya's translative and commentarial activity.

Both framed this neglect in terms of forgetting – a forgetting of language, a forgetting of being, and a forgetting of all the religious obligations that flowed from such activity. This forgetting was linked to the erasure of both cultural and scriptural memory. Language was not just connected to communication and social entertainment, but it was interwoven with a perceived authenticity, the Jewish ability to be both home and not-home, to be in-time and beyond-time. The ontological filiations between word and world witnessed in Rosenzweig's and Saadya's theories of translation were ultimately grounded in precisely these twin notions of authenticity and memory of a past that would be future. Authenticity and memory however were increasingly encroached upon by the claims of German Idealism and Karaism on the level of philosophy, by *Bildung* and *Arabiyya* on the level of cultural aesthetics, and by German and Arabic on the level of language.

The flipside of this forgetting was seen to be a youthful romance with another language and all of the poetic and rhapsodic infatuations that such a romance entailed. The perceived musicality in the adopted language became falsely associated with tone-deafness in the originary one. In order to counteract this, each sought to fabricate harmonic and linguistic flows between Hebrew and their adopted languages by creating a series of channels that would fuse on the level of semantics the two languages. Contextually their translations were certainly related to contemporaneous theories that connected language, linguistic expression, and aesthetics to peoplehood. Whether framed as the inimitability of the Arabic Qur<'><a->n or as the racial and linguistic purity of the German *Volk*, language defined the essential characteristics of Arab-ness or of German-ness. It should come as no surprise that when Saadya and Rosenzweig reflected on Hebrew and its correlations and disparities with Arabic or German, they employed categories derived from their larger surroundings. My interest however is less with these larger surroundings than with their individual thinking about language and with how each sought to construct an aesthetics of memory based on a complex dialectic of forgetting and un-forgetting.

The linguistic foregrounding of past and future in the present formed a clearing in which to isolate a series of reverberations between Jewishness and non-Jewishness. The mediative role offered by translation enabled Hebrew to slip into both the linguistic and ontologic structures of another language, thereby framing Hebrew – and ultimately Judaism – in the light of the other language and illuminating the living quality of this other language through the specter of Hebrew's non-living qualities. This of course also functioned as an apologetic claim. The palimpsest of Hebrew emerges as the guarantor and touchstone of vibrancy for other languages, which can only emerge as living and dynamic when the specter of Hebrew breathes life into them from outside the text and from behind the word.

Yet if Hebrew breathes life into these other languages, it symbiotically requires their word-blood and grammar-cells for nourishment. Hebrew is thus kept alive by means of its relations to other languages. As a result, both Rosenzweig and Saadya pay significant attention to the space in-between the two languages – the silences, the breathings, the formal constraints. It is these phenomena and not just the transcription of words and the transference of meanings that provide the various linguistic and semiotic strategies that allow Hebrew to both open up and be opened up by another language.

If one impetus behind Rosenzweig's and Saadya's respective translative activities was to stem the tide of forgetting, another was the desire to (re-) create a series of memories that – while hoary and labyrinthine with distance – were very much grounded in present concerns. The lyricality of a Hebrew transcribed into a staccato Arabic or German enabled the former to embed itself within the contemporary aesthetic ideals of the latter languages. Hebrew's traces now inform other semiotics and other writing; its silent echoes resonating through foreign linguistic articulations. The foreign thus creates the authentic and the authentic the foreign. The modern establishes the ancient and the ancient the modern. The past remembered becomes a future anticipated.

For both Rosenzweig and Saadya, Hebrew becomes a constituent part of the *Ursprache*, the potential for language as such, a silence that represents not the absence of language but its fullness. This silent speech functions as the originary poetic language, the language of creation, the language of a Book from which all other books must ultimately derive their potency and their meaning. The Hebrew of the Bible – the Hebrew that defined Judaism and the Jewish people – represents but one idiom of this divine speech that does not speak, thereby making Hebrew (like all languages) translatable and allowing Hebrew to absorb another language and forever change it. According to Rosenzweig,

> For the voice of this book [the Bible] [*die Stimme dieses Buches*] is not to be enclosed in any space – not in the inner sanctum of a church, not in the linguistic sanctum of a people, not in the circle of the heavenly images moving above a nation's sky. Rather this voice seeks again and again to resound from outside [*will immer wieder von draußen schallen*] – from outside this church, this people, this heaven. It does not keep its sound from echoing in this or that restricted space, but it wants itself to remain free [*aber sie selber will frei bleiben*]. If somewhere it has become a familiar customary possession, it must again and anew, as a foreign and

> unfamiliar sound [*als fremder, unvertrauter Laut*] from outside stir up the complacent satedness of its alleged possessor.[2]

In his *Sefer ha-Egron*, a work meant to create a Hebrew-language lexicon for poets in order to facilitate acrostics and rhyme, Saadya also connects language, translation, and memory/forgetting. He writes that

> he who wants to acquire knowledge [<`>*ilm*] must study in the companionship of friends, to persevere and not stop lest one forgets the different subjects that make up the science. The prophets exhorted this and it should be clear to the wise: "Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at my door" [Prov. 8:34]. The prophets also announce that the main sources of remembrance are perseverance [*al-mul<a->zama*] and exhausting one's energies [*al-mudh<a->bita*]. They also remark that the loss of perseverance is the greatest cause of forgetting [*indir<a->sa*]: "Where there is no vision, the people cast of restraint, but the one that keeps the law is happy" [Prov. 29:18].[3]

In their different ways, both Rosenzweig and Saadya signal the radical otherness of biblical language. For Rosenzweig, this language has become too familiar, coming from inside as opposed to from without and it is fettered by Luther's German translation;[4] for Saadya, it has become too unfamiliar, in danger of fragmentation and of being forgotten through lack of perseverance. The over-vigilance of the former gives way to a dearth of vigilance for the latter. The uncanniness of the biblical narrative risks either being-at-home-in-the-world or falling-through-the-fissures-of-peoplehood. To correct this general state of decay, both Saadya and Rosenzweig sought to translate and maintain the autonomy of Hebrew by hebraizing Arabic and German respectively.

Both had to take what they considered to be the essential core of Hebrew revelation and harness it to a new language. That is, they both conceived of translation, not literally, but in ways that reflected – and challenged – contemporary aesthetics. For Rosenzweig, this was through recreating the rhythm and breath of human speech;[5] for Saadya it was through rhyme, tonality, and rhythm that could compete with Arabic poetic meter. For Rosenzweig it was taking the biblical narrative back to its ancient origins; for Saadya, it was to bringing it up to date using the mesmerizing verse of Arab poets.

Both were presented with the same problem. How, using another language, could one quite literally reveal an original? How can one visible and tangible language point to another that is invisible and intangible? How does an unspoken and original language speak in a spoken and living one? What is lost and what gained? Framed somewhat differently, could the latter reveal the palimpsest of the former? How can the act of translation render the specter of the *Ur*-language? If so, what might this say about language? Silence? The space in-between?

Nineteenth-century German and tenth-century Arabic spun in their languages and syntax all that was artistic and cultural, both marking for its speakers – whether Jew or Gentile – the respective high points of western civilization. Not to frame Judaism in their grammars was to risk ossification. Moreover both used the literary features of their profane vernaculars to wax poetic about the contours of Hebrew's sacrality. For Rosenzweig, this meant casting his work in the literary aspects of Schelling's "narrative philosophy" [*erzählende Philosophie*],[6] an attempt to show how language, including its silences, mediates the various relationships between God, the world, and humans in time and in temporality.

Saadya, in a similar vein, had no choice but to compose his work – both translative and poetic – in a way that revolved around the Arabic term *fa<s.><i-><h.>* (Heb, *tashut*), a term which subsumed within itself all that was considered good, beautiful, and pure about language. Whereas the Arab grammarians considered the language *par excellence* to be Arabic, Saadya argued that Hebrew possessed the same properties and his *Egron* is, *inter alia*, an attempt to make the same case for Hebrew. It is like the work of Rosenzweig: a "narrative philosophy," in which is subsumed a theory of God's relationship to humanity through the ontology of language.

Chronological Inversions: Rosenzweig's Precursorship of Saadya

The historical study of philosophy in general and of Jewish philosophy in particular prides itself on terms such as "influences" and "anticipations." Earlier thinkers are framed as having envisaged a problem (one that we often articulate from the vantage point of the present), and set out to solve it, and their solutions are viewed either directly as "influences" or indirectly as "anticipations" of what later thinkers will do.[7] Using such a model, we certainly could, without little ado or difficulty, make the claim that the lexicographical and grammatical writings of Saadya Gaon, not to mention his translation of the Bible into Arabic, somehow "anticipate" those of Franz Rosenzweig.[8] "Anticipation" is the word usually invoked to argue that, even though a later author may not have read a particular earlier one, he nonetheless framed his problems in ways that are perhaps not unlike that particular earlier thinker.[9]

Yet what if we follow the path of Rosenzweig and start, not at the beginning, but at the end? Texts demand readers. Each reader reads texts in ways heretofore unread. In this Gadamerian "fusion of horizons" (*Horizontverschmelzung*)[10] the past is read using the contours of the present, anticipating a future that must ultimately be past again.[11] Each reading is an invention – an invention of text, of author, and of reader. Each reading, to invoke Borges, makes its own precursors.[12] We can accordingly read Saadya Gaon before Franz Rosenzweig, but once we read the latter, we can never read the former in the same way. If historically we must read Rosenzweig in Saadya's shadow, we can a-historically read Saadya using the light supplied by Rosenzweig. Indeed, it is not just that we can read Saadya in this manner, we must.

There is ample reward for such a reading in the works of both Saadya and Rosenzweig. Both conceptualize language as moving back to an originary point and therefore as not progressing linearly. Language moves backwards from present usage to past imagining and from the obsoleteness of the present to the perceived authenticity of the past that is also future. In so doing, both sought to rethink, and in many instances rewrite, the languages of their day – whether Arabic or German – as a way, to use the words of Klaus Reichert, of opening "up new possibilities by recalling old or lost ones, unused potentialities."[13] In this way, both thinkers project their own fantasies of authenticity onto an invented past in which a beautiful and authentic Hebrew defined Jewish *Dasein*. As such both make attempts to invent a Hebrew using another language – indeed, using its very vocabulary, syntax and grammar. Hebraized Arabic and hebraized

German point beyond themselves to reveal a glory that was past and that will ideally be future again. To use the words of Rosenzweig:

> And if Judaism is a force of the past, a peculiarity of the present – to us it is the goal of every future. And since future, therefore a world of its own, in spite of the world that surrounds us. And since a world of its own, therefore rooted in the soul of each and everyone in his or her own language.[14]

For Rosenzweig, Judaism's ahistorical language is akin to a shifting energy field that is the sum of different vectors moving around and colliding with one another. This movement makes Hebrew distinct from the manifold cultures that surround it and that seek to appropriate it. Rather than succumb to these surrounding cultures, Rosenzweig, like Saadya, seeks to re-new Hebrew and all that this language carries with it into the present and into the future. The great paradox is that this renewal could only happen using the existing semiotic structures of living languages already in place – in Rosenzweig's case, German; in Saadya's, Arabic. That is, one could return to the past's authenticity only through the linguistic mechanisms of a present spoken language. Only by getting at Hebrew by linguistically reshaping German and Arabic would it be possible to prevent linguistic and cultural acculturation – the retrieval of a past from a present looking towards an uncertain future.

Rosenzweig on Translation

In "Die Schrift und Luther," Rosenzweig contends that ideas cannot be rendered free of words: "It is impossible to transmit the content without at the same time transmitting the form. How something is said is not peripheral to what is said [*Für das, was gesagt wird, ist es nicht nebensächlich, wie es gesagt wird*]."[15] Translation often fails precisely because it is most interested in transmitting content – ideas behind language – as opposed to the very linguistic texture and grammatical forms in which such content is embedded.[16] It is the forms of language that the translator, Hermes-like, must meander between, creating his own channels that permit the transportation of meaning across the chasms of space and time, lest the very words the translator seeks to convey crystallize and shatter. The creation of "a wavelike flow of words through the sentence-bed" [*das wellenhaften Fließen der Worte durch das Satzbett*][17] ensures a dynamic process in which the translator does not passively absorb words [*Wörter*] from the dictionary but becomes the active creator of ideas [*Worte*].[18] Language thus becomes the quiddity of narration, in which reality is experienced as clothed in the temporality of speech. The art of translation thus becomes indistinct from the act of *Sprachdenken*.

Translation, perhaps owing to its practical necessity, becomes theoretically impossible. Rosenzweig describes it as "serving two masters" (*zwei Herren*),[19] inhabiting two modes-of-being and bespeaking two distinct cultural vocabularies. The translator is thus a facilitator of languages – the *moletz ha-kal<a->m*, to use the words of Saadya that we will encounter below – the creator of new words and new worlds. Because of the intimate connection that Rosenzweig draws between language and ontology, speaking and the unfolding of the world, translation is not simply the act of mediation between people, between languages, or between cultures;[20] rather translation enables one– as listener, as translator, or as both – to open oneself up to another; and it is in this act of opening-up that one encounters the presence of another and it is though this encounter that one ultimately gazes into the divine countenance.[21]

This encounter can occur because translation takes place around what he conceives to be a single linguisticity that envelops all language and that gives way to an essential unity underpinning all language. In his Afterword to his translation of the Halevi poems, Rosenzweig writes

> One can translate because in every language is contained the possibility of every other language; one may translate if one can realize this possibility through cultivation of such linguistic fallow land [*durch Urbarmachung solchen sprachlichen Brachlands*]; and one should translate so that the day of the harmony [*Eintracht*] of languages, which can grow only in each individual language, not in the empty space "between" them, may come.[22]

Rosenzweig here uses a series of agricultural metaphors to argue not for the establishment of a common language that all peoples ideally speak – some form of messianic Esperanto – but to show that what happens in one language will ultimately influence what happens in another. Just as the Bible forever redirected the linguistic trajectory of the ancient Israelites, it must ultimately do the same for every language into which it is translated. The translator plants one language in the soil of another whereupon he watches its autochthonous forms grow and flourish.[23] In "Die Schrift und Luther," he switches from agricultural to geological metaphors to describe the translator and his act. The translator must now connect words (*Wörter*) and ideas (*Worte*) between the source and the target languages on the level of roots, which "the surface of words only let us dimly intuit" (*die an der Wortoberfläche nur erahnbare*).[24] These roots paradoxically are ultimately responsible for maintaining the boundaries between languages. The unity of languages is supported by difference and this facilitates the dynamic motion between them.

Staying with the geological motif a little longer, Rosenzweig argues that it is incumbent upon the translator to pay attention to "the glimmer emanating from the veins of the text itself" (*aber auch von dem Aufschimmern der Adern des Texts selbst darf er das Auge nicht hochmütig abwenden*).[25] This glimmer is presumably that which attracts the translator to the source language in the first place. Yet one must be drawn to this glimmer and not blinded by it. Applying this metaphor to the act of translation, one must not be so bedazzled by the formal and categorical embellishments of the target language, the language into which one translates, that one loses sight of that which one translates. According to Rosenzweig, this is one of the main problems besetting translation fixated solely on the *Wissenschaft*-based model of philology that sought to harness rather than celebrate this *différence*.[26] On the contrary Rosenzweig, both in his Halevi poems and – along with Buber – in his Bible translation, sought to tease out the otherness of Hebrew and make its uncanniness wrench the German out of its familiarity.[27]

It is the shattering of the dialectic between the transgression and non-transgression of linguistic possibility that drives translation forward, forging new inroads into the target language and forever changing its texture. The translator becomes a poet who embraces both the traces of the language to be translated and the new forms into which it must be translated. This becomes an act of perceived authenticity, taking the Jewish past and putting it into a German present with an eye to future renewal.

Alternatively, and perhaps equally, it represents the construction of a German future present and its embeddedness in a Hebraic past.[28] In many ways this was the antithesis of what Luther had done when he wrenched the German present from contemporaneous forms and threw it upon a biblical but not necessarily Hebraic past.

Near the end of "Die Schrift und Luther," Rosenzweig discusses how in certain roots "the translator reaches the boundary of linguistic possibility [*die Grenze des Sprachmöglichen*], which the root meaning permits him to see beyond but not to walk across." Moses-like, the translator glimpses the text's sacred landscape without ever being able to enter its original form.[29] The translator must orient himself both towards an original that can never be completely rendered anew and also into a new work that must become its own original. There thus emerges a tremendous paradox in Rosenzweig's discussion of translation. On the one hand, translation must not simply be a form of mimesis or "free-rendering" (*nachdichten*) of an original. Yet, on the other, it must also not be so literal as to deprive the original of its life force. Although he claims in his Afterword to the Halevi poems that his translations "want to be nothing other than translation[s],"[30] Rosenzweig subsequently writes that

> How important the imitation of the rhyme form [*Reimform*] can be is seen even from the fact that in the poems under discussion the rhyme is not merely the mortar that glues one stone to another, as in modern poetic forms, but almost throughout, at least in addition, it is its very building material [*Baumaterial*], the unified tone of which determines the total impression given by the façade.[31]

The translator[32] must do the impossible: create and destroy language at one and the same time. The creation of one language corresponds to the dismantling of another. At the same time however the translator resurrects both languages by establishing a series of trajectories between the language-elements of the originary and those of the target. As these elements approach one another, the possibility of their interaction becomes possible, thereby establishing paths between them. These paths (*Bahnen*) subsequently make possible communication between present and past, past and future, future and present. Since the translator is able to let languages speak to one another, using the contours of one to illumine those of the other – and presumably *vice versa* – his act is a creative and divinely-inspired one.

It is also a destructive act, however. In bringing one language to another, both to each other, the translator potentially destroys both in taking them back to their original and to the one language that admits of neither dialect nor idiom.[33] This translative activity paradoxically turns on silence. The silences between words, including breath, become on the level of the text the silence out of which emerges God's call – the call to which humans move and respond.[34] Just as creation (and revelation) only makes sense in terms of redemption, when speech reverts to silence, so, too, does translation only make sense when it ceases to be.[35]

In playing with language, translation becomes the putting-into-practice of a method of narration, what Rosenzweig calls "narrative philosophy" (*erzählende Philosophie*): the thinking of time and/or temporally thinking.[36] Since everything that is articulates itself in language, ideas cannot be borne by anything other than words. To use his formulation, "The world is never without the word, and it only exists in the word, and without the word, it would itself also not exist " (*die Welt ist nie ohne das Wort, ja sie ist nur im Wort, und ohne das Wort wäre sie selber auch nicht*).[37] Words themselves both create and express this ontological temporality in the three modalities that we experience: that which is always already here (creation), that which is (revelation), and that which is always yet to come (revelation).[38] The translator – as a new thinker – must think in time and must think dialogically: the spontaneity of translating, as opposed to reading, enables the modern and assimilated reader to learn to speak anew with an other, with the past, and ultimately with God.[39] In *Der Stern der Erlösung*, Rosenzweig makes language central to such encounter, for

> …to trust [language] is easy, for it is within us and around us [*sie ist in uns und um uns*]; and when it comes to us from the "outside," nothing other than it echoes our "inside" toward the "outside." The word is the same, whether heard or spoken [*Das Wort ist das gleiche wie es gehört und wie es gesprochen wird*]. The ways of God and the ways of man are different, but the word of God and the word of man are the same [*sind das gleiche*]. What man feels in his heart as his own human language is the word that has come from the mouth of God.[40]

Language must be living and not confined to the dictionary. Translation accordingly must not simply be about words – replacing a word in one language with its lexicographical synonym in another – but about getting into the linguistic structures, what Rosenzweig calls "contours" (*die Konturen*)[41] and the configurations that connect the two languages. Despite the fact that Rosenzweig, as I noted above, spends much time on proclaiming the unity of all languages, he is acutely aware of the differences, of the dissonances, and of the ruptures between them: "Only respect for the distance involved makes it possible to leap over a ditch; he who starts by filling in the ditch cripples the powers of others to leap over it."[42]

This brings us to the monumental task of translating the Bible. Why would one undertake such a task? For whom? For the translator him- or herself? For others? If the former, why go to all the trouble and publish such a multi-volume work? Why not just reflect on language, mining root-veins that connect various linguistic structures and permutations without taking this extra step? If the latter, how can such a personal act of living with (at least) two languages – reflecting upon and illuminating their contours and interacting with them intimately on the level of dialogic – possibly be an inclusive activity? After all, Rosenzweig and Buber intended their Bible translation for those in possession of only one of the languages, the target one (i.e., German).

One can only do this if one has a larger set of theological claims to make; a set of claims that are worth publicizing and disseminating and that would moreover reach out, at least in theory, to every (German-speaking) Jew. For Rosenzweig, as I have already argued, this set of claims revolved around notions of Jewish authenticity, an authenticity that could presumably be uncovered from its embeddedness in ancient linguistic root-structures. Uncovering these Hebraic structures once-removed in German translation would presumably facilitate their embrace, while simultaneously renewing German. This two-fold goal would ideally get a Jewish readership paradoxically to move beyond the German of German and beyond their German translation to a Hebrew palimpsest

Translation is mimetic. It functions as a linguistic-turning, a semantic-tuning, creating an estrangement from the familiar and a familiarity with the strange. To do this, one had to write in one language using the structures of another and produce a set of meanings not of the translation but of the translated. This has the effect of liberating language in language and of producing meaning in the spaces in-between. To use the words of Rosenzweig, the voice of this book (*die Stimme dieses Buches*), i.e., the Bible:

> wants itself to remain free [*sie selber will frei beliben*]. If somewhere it has become a familiar, customary possession, it must again and anew, as a foreign and unfamiliar sound [*als fremder, unvertrauterLaut*] from outside [*von draußen*] stir up the complacent satedness of its alleged possessor.[43]

From the outside, translation must destroy the bonds of quaint possession; from the outside, language must shatter familiarity; from the outside, translation must make the Bible newly approachable, without making it one more book in the cultural "treasure house" (*Schatzhaus*) of the world's literature. And finally from the outside, translation must make the reader respond to its language and not simply read its words. This would have the effect of pulling the reader back "outside," to a language that opens up to the horizon of anticipation and to that language that will ultimately bespeak silently.

To contemplate such a translative project however it was first necessary to distance it from its competitors, in particular that of Luther.[44] Although Jews had previously translated the Bible into German,[45] it was the Luther translation that had truly captured a German readership since it became the "founding book" (*Grundbuch*), as Rosenzweig points out, "not only of a church…but of the national language itself" (*nicht* *nur einer Kirche… sondern der nationalen Sprache selber*).[46] However to use Rosenzweig's terms, this twofold establishment was ultimately responsible for its becoming a "possession, a national possession" (*Besitz, nationaler Besitz*).[47] In contradistinction, Rosenzweig and Buber sought to reclaim both the German and the Hebrew of the biblical narrative. Gunther Plaut appropriately characterizes the translation as a "work of defiance."[48] Breaking with the more traditional models of German-Jewish acculturation and assimilation, this new translation would maintain Judaism's otherness and its lack of attachment to land, language, and conventional temporality.[49] Buber and Rosenzweig sought to make their translation different from German while at the same time using German; to use language to un-speak language in order to get at the silent speech that offers the potential for constant renewal. This apophatic act uses the one (or both) language(s) to create the possibility of the other (or neither).[50] However it is paradoxical precisely because it uses the grammar and syntax of the one to reveal the un-grammar and un-syntax of the other. In his Afterword to his Halevi translations, Rosenzweig writes that it is his goal not "to Germanize what is foreign [*das Fremde einzudeutschen*], but rather to make foreign what is German [*das Deutsche umzufremden*]."[51] For German to communicate the orality and antiquity of the Bible it must be an un-German German, a German that reflected and mirrored the idiosyncrasies of a Jewish minority within its midst. This is why the translation had to be finished by Buber – in Israel, not in Germany – for an audience that, again paradoxically, but this time also tragically, could no longer hear.

In many ways this was tantamount to the further exiling of Hebrew in order to reflect the Hebraizing of exile. Exile, for Rosenzweig, is defined by its relationship to

Schrift, a relationship to both Scripture and writing simultaneously.[52] *Schrift* has priority and an ontological pre-temporality over non-*Schrift*:

> The exiling of the environment is accomplished by means of the constant presence of *Schrift*. With it, a different present slides itself in front of this environment and demotes it to the status of an illusion, or more precisely, a simile. So it is not that *Schrift* is adduced as an illustration (by way of simile) of life in the present; on the contrary, these events serve to elucidate *Schrift* and become a simile for it.[53]

Language takes priority to all-else. This takes us back to the original task of the translator: Since ideas cannot be rendered free of words, they must be born in their very fabric.[54] Like the poetic act, the translative one is artistic. Yet at the same time, the genius of the Hebrew language is that those who recite it (but never speak it) must remain fixed either on the page or in the formulaic language of the liturgy. This is not a language of everyday usage or a set of clichés appropriated by the aesthete for social entertainment; on the contrary, Hebrew takes one back to an originary moment in which the present is an illusion or a simile.

In part three, book one of *Stern der Erlösung*, Rosenzweig discusses the three concepts that distinguish the Jewish people from all other nations: land, language, and law. Language, he claims, is – like land and law – something that, for most, is not eternal, but something that lives insofar as a people speaks it. Language thus has a unifying factor that connects a living people to an often-specific land.[55] Not so with Hebrew, however: "the eternal people lost its own language and everywhere speaks the language of its external destinies, the language of the people with whom it perchance dwells as a guest."[56] Whereas language traditionally locates a people in time, the language of Israel removes itself – and by extension Israel – from time and relocates it in eternity. Because Hebrew is disconnected from time, it lacks the spontaneity of lived encounter. It becomes the language of liturgy and of ritual celebration but never of daily life. However by reciting the liturgical character of Hebrew and speaking the host language, "the Jew senses that his everyday language is also still at home in the holy language of his festive hours" (*auch sein Sprachalltag noch heimisch in der heiligen Sprache seiner Feierstunden*).[57] Hebrew thus relies on the vernacular to ground it in the lived experiences of those who can mouth its eternal sounds but never speak them to another, save God.

The Bible demands translation. To reverberate in the ears of contemporaneous Jews, biblical language must intersect with Hebrew and German, un-speaking and speaking simultaneously. The freedom and spontaneity that German affords Buber and Rosenzweig in their translation permits an allusion to – a pointing-towards – the fixed eternality of the Hebrew. This is why Rosenzweig assigns the term "being-in-exile" (*Im-Exil-Sein*) to Jewish poetry and literature. The presence of the scriptural present is foregrounded in the recesses that are embedded within the presented-ness of exilic speech. This has a dream-like effect of making the past present and the future past. This saturation of biblical language has been forgotten in Rosenzweig's time and must be remembered, thereby overcoming the dialectic of home/not-home, speech/silence, Jew/Christian.

So how does one translate the Bible?

If Luther had made the Bible a national possession for the German people, Rosenzweig and Buber sought to reclaim it – not on the level of language, but on that of alterity, one that mirrored Judaism, its language, its situation and, most importantly, its *Im-Exil-Sein*. The Bible translation project thus had to reaffirm the Jewish-ness of the work and point to the authentic Hebrew residing interstitially between/behind the familiar, although now un-familiar, German. The language of the Bible is, according to Rosenzweig, the life-blood that nourishes the creative imagination of both Jew and non-Jew. Its language frees language from itself and facilitates non-language or silence. By returning the un-lyricality of modern speech to the *Ursprache* of poetry, what he calls the "mother tongue of the human race" (*die Muttersprache des menschlichen Geschlechts*),[58] the translator mines the origins of language and of communication. In the following quotation the chthonic depths of language and its ultimate origins in an *Ursprache* are connected by way of the Bible:

> All poetry that has been written in the Bible's light [*Lichtkreis*] – and indeed poetry more than prose, Judah Halevi more than Maimonides, Dante more than Aquinas, Goethe more than Kant – has been animated by the Bible's spirit of prose [*ist von ihrem Geist der Prosa begeistert*]. Henceforth the gate into the nocturnal silence that enveloped the human race in its origins, dividing each from each other, and all from what was outside and what was beyond – henceforth the gate is broken and cannot be altogether closed again: the gate of the word.[59]

The Bible, for Rosenzweig, is the *Hort* ("fortress") of human language. Shattering the dichotomous relations of poetry/un-poetry and prose/un-prose, biblical language is related to the prophetic language of *Ursprache*. That which declares the law is ensconced in its rapture. Breaking through into history, biblical language defines both word and world "at the moment of becoming human" (*am Augenblick seiner Menschwerdung*).[60] Becoming fully human requires a movement from death to life, from the ephemeral to the eternal, and from German to Hebrew. The way that Buber and Rosenzweig went about this was to (re-) create a German that was built upon the cadences and rhyme of Hebrew. To use the words of Mara Benjamin, "a German in which the classical Hebrew of Jewish scripture and liturgy formed the horizons of the German language field."[61]

Translation thus could not (and cannot) just be literal or prosaic. It must unlock or smash the semantic fetters that embed words. It must transgress punctuation and it must not be enslaved to the philological approach of *Wissenschaft* or source criticism.[62] The "breath of the word" (*Atem des Worts*) must resuscitate language,[63] revivifying a public that "has in reading been read off, read wrong, and read under."[64] The translative act is an act that must walk the razor's edge of harnessing this language at the same moment that it acknowledges its liberation.

Saadya Gaon on Translation

Not only did Saadya write the first Hebrew grammar, the first Hebrew lexicon, and one of the earliest commentaries to the *Sefer Yetzirah*, he also translated the Bible into Arabic. This translation, like that of Rosenzweig and Buber, was not in a vernacular transcribed into Hebrew characters but was written in the characters of the host language.[65] All of these activities I contend were intimately connected to one another, and all reflect a common interest in language – its role in creation, and its redemptive properties. Indeed, Saadya's Bible translation only makes sense when informed by and understood against a broader context of the ontology and philosophy of language. His translative activity was not simply about finding Arabic equivalents for Hebrew terms; rather, like Rosenzweig, he sought out the linguistic structures and the grammatical configurations that connect two languages. Since language was responsible for the formation of the universe and everything within it, he was aware that translation was also a creative activity that was tied to peoplehood and that was ultimately contingent on a set of aesthetic and literary codes.

In the opening section of the *Egron*, the first Hebrew lexicography as well as the first work of Hebrew poetics, Saadya Gaon emphasizes that the intention behind his composition is to stem forgetting. To do this he proposes to look into the very fabric of the biblical narrative so as to retrieve both the memory of Hebrew and the memory of peoplehood.[66] In the Arabic introduction to the work, he writes that

> One can lose the knowledge of things
> On account of the reduction of diligence
> Public knowledge may be lost on account
> Of leaving this diligence behind.
> In my time I well understand that
> The Creator wants me to begin the process [of remembering]
> Since many students have lost the knowledge of tradition.

> The Book of Rhymes (*Kit<a->b al-atq<a->l*), the foundational Sciences and other matters have disappeared.[67]

Here Saadya implies that Jews of his day lack requisite knowledge of Hebrew. The inability to write poetry using its language and the inability to communicate eloquently in its ancient literary forms, is, as it was for Rosenzweig, not simply a linguistic or philological lacuna. It is symptomatic of a larger issue that connects language to aesthetics and to ontology. The neglect of knowledge (*tark al-<`>ilm*) is tantamount to the oblivion of knowledge (*nisy<a->n al-<`>ilm*).[68] Like Rosenzweig, Saadya uses an agricultural metaphor to convey this when he invokes Proverb 24: 30-31: "I passed the field of a lazy man, passed the vineyard of a man lacking sense, and behold it was overgrown with thorns." Here Saadya compares the "lazy man" to his generation of poets and intellectuals who are unwilling or unable to understand Hebrew, compared to a field that, when cultivated, yields the fruits of creativity. It is precisely this activity that Saadya seeks to accomplish in his Bible translation: to sow the un-canny seeds of Hebrew into the fallow and autochthonous lands of Arabic.

Since Hebrew is no longer a spoken language – for this, there exists Arabic – Hebrew runs the risk of ossification and of fragmentation. This also has a cosmic significance: Hebrew, as Saadya shows in his later *Tafs<i->r kit<a->b al-mab<a->d<i->* ("Commentary to the *Sefer Yetzirah*"),[69] is not simply a conventional language, but that which undergirds the universe and establishes its first principles and maintains its forms.[70] I submit that like Rosenzweig, Saadya holds on to the view of Hebrew that falls outside the scope of rational justification.[71] The restorative and redemptive qualities of translation is archived in the dual roles that Saadya casts for himself in the two introductions to the *Egron*. In the Arabic introduction he compares himself to the Arab Ab<u-> Aswad al-Duwali, the person responsible for composing a treatise so that Arabs would not forget the classical Arabic of the Qur<’><a->n. Yet in the Hebrew introduction he sees himself, prophet-like, as restoring Hebrew and as paving the “pathway to redemption.”[72]

Language, examining Saadya from the perspective of Rosenzweig, is not innocent. It is not simply about the ability to compose Hebrew verse that can compete with and get the better of the Arab poets.[73] Presumably Hebrew poets wrote as beautifully in Arabic meter and prosody as the Arabs. Moreover Saadya’s theory of translation was not about the simple transliteration or transmigration of Hebrew words into Arabic. It seems that on a fundamental level Saadya was aware of the creative, sustaining, and destructive powers of language in general, but especially of Hebrew, what he calls the “sacred language, which our God selected.”[74] Like Rosenzweig, Saadya envisaged himself as re-inventing the language and as re-breathing life into its ancient forms, thereby re-establishing the first principles responsible for generating of the universe.

In his introduction to the *Tafs<i->r kit<a->b al-mab<a->d<i->* Saadya discusses various theories of the world’s genesis (everything from its eternality to its origination in preexistent matter).[75] After rejecting seven such theories, he turns his attention to one that combines the Pythagorean notion of prime numbers with a Hebraic one that emphasizes the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. These principles, according to Saadya, are responsible for the formation of the universe and their various permutations ultimately establish the physical bodies to be found within it. Later on in the commentary he argues that there is an analogy between human speech and divine speech. When humans speak the letters of a word, the word – including the letters that form it – takes on a tangible quality that is responsible for vibrating the air surrounding the words/letters and subsequently carrying them into the ear of the person who is listening. In like manner, when God speaks (e.g., Genesis 1:3), the words and the letters do not just resonate ethereally but form reality.[76]

Indeed the first four parts of Saadya's *Kit<a->b fas<i-><h.> l<u->ghat al-ibr<a->niyyin* deal with the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet and examine the various consonantal makeup of words, showing how letters join and permutate with one another.[77] This corresponds to part two of his commentary to the *Sefer Yetzirah* wherein Saadya argues that the physical properties witnessed in the world correspond to the different combinations of the primary elements that make up physical bodies, which he identifies with the letters of the Hebrew alphabet.[78] He subsequently identifies both of these combinations to the ways that meanings occur from the permutation of letters in words and the transposition of words in sentences.[79]

Letters thus have an existence independent of communication and writing. They are, to paraphrase the *Sefer Yetzirah*, the very building blocks of creation. In the *K. fas<i-><h.> lu<u->ghat al-<`>ibra->niyyin*, Saadya frequently refers to God as the "Institutor of Speech" (*moletz al-kal<a->m*), the person from whom the twenty-two letters are derived.[80] Despite this however in the same work Saadya also contends that language is a conventional phenomenon: Since objects have different names in different languages, these names are not based on intrinsic value but on consensus.[81] All languages, framed in Rosenzweigian parlance, are ultimately one; and it is this aspect of language that enables Saadya, as it did Rosenzweig, to translate between them.

This emphasis on language, on grammar, and on the permutations of the various Hebrew letters runs like a vein throughout Saadya's diverse writings.[82] As with Rosenzweig, the translator's skill turns on his ability to manipulate and play with language. The translator imitates divine activity by bringing languages together. By putting languages in counterpoint with one another, he or she forges new linguistic possibilities against the larger backdrop of literary worlds. In his treatise devoted to Hebrew grammar, Saadya included, according to Dunash ibn Labrat, a no longer extant chapter devoted to linguistic permutations, and the interchanging of consonants.[83] The formation of the universe was very much a grammatical act on the part of the *moletz al-kal<a->m*. Understanding grammar, language, and the art of translation was not just a linguistic act but a cosmological one.

As the *Egron* also shows however there are also deep ontological filiations between lexicography and poetics. Language is bound up with aesthetics. Arab grammarians of the period stressed the inimitability of qur<'><a->nic Arabic and its formative role in the establishment of an Arabo(-Islamic) aesthetics. Saadya of course argued that Hebrew not only functioned this way in Hebraic culture, but actually easily surpassed the linguistic dexterity of Arabic.[84] He nevertheless takes his cues from the Arab grammarians:

> The children of Ishmael relate how
>
> One from their midst[85] realized that his generation
>
> No longer spoke the Arabic language purely [*fa<s.><h.>una*].
>
> This grieved him and he wrote a small treatise
>
> As a model to get them to speak purely [*al-fa<s.><i-><h.>*].

> I likewise saw many among the children of Israel
> Who are unable to master even the simple rules
> Let alone the more difficult ones of our language.
> They mispronounce when they speak;
> They are mistaken in their word choice;
> And when they compose poetry they neglect the foundations of our ancestors.[86]

Here in the Arabic introduction, Saadya provides the reason for undertaking his translative activities. It is both pedagogical and aesthetic and he takes as his role model an Arab grammarian who undertook the same task. Saadya envisages himself as the Jewish and Hebrew equivalent of Ab<u-> Aswad al-Duwali.[87] Since his contemporaries no longer understand their originary language and thus lack the aesthetic sensibilities to compose or to create, Saadya sought to remedy this. Whereas Rosenzweig and Buber complained of earlier translations that made Hebrew too *familiar*, Saadya was concerned about Jews who were too *unfamiliar* with the language. Whereas Rosenzweig and Buber sought to make a germanized Hebrew and a hebraized German less familiar, Saadya, as a more conventional linguistic thinker, wanted to familiarize a reading public with Hebrew by showing its points of contact with contemporary Arabic poetics and *belles-lettres*.

Yet in Saadya's Arabic introduction there is no mention of Hebrew's distinctiveness. Hebrew is not framed in the same context as it was in the *Tafs<i->r kit<a->b al-mab<a->d<i->*, e.g., as the building block of creation and of all subsequent ontology and epistemology.[88] On the contrary, Saadya writes as a scholar who is trying to prevent the poetic oblivion of Hebrew and he frames this in exactly the same terms that would be recognizable to Arab grammarians and linguists. In the Hebrew introduction however Saadya connects language, peoplehood, and the exiling of both. But whereas Rosenzweig seemed to pride himself on the *Im-Exil-Sein* of Hebrew poetry and literature, Saadya laments the perniciousness of exile's grasp. In this introduction, Saadya is not at all concerned with the larger Arabic context of forgetting and instead he frames forgetting and memory solely within the context of Israel's *Heilsgeschichte*. Despite the many historical and philosophical differences that separate them, it is possible to envisage a common practice against which such differences emerge.

In the Hebrew introduction to the *Egron*, for instance, Saadya presents the model for his attempt to revive an ancient and authentic language:

> The *Sefer ha-Egron* is in the sacred language
> Which God chose from time immemorial, and
> In which the angels sing *selah*
> All superior men [*bnei eliyon*] worshipped in it.
> Our language and a unified vocabulary existed in the land
> From the time God created *adam* upon the *adamah*.
> He bestowed upon him this wisdom for one thousand
> nine-hundred and ninety-six years…[89]

All languages, to use the words of Rosenzweig, possesses an "essential unity." This unity, for Saadya, is that which defined the world prior to the scattering of the nations after the destruction of Babel and the Jewish people prior to their dwelling among other cultures and languages. The Hebrew language, especially that associated with the biblical narrative, is associated with "home." The myth of a linguistic unity – for Saadya, as for Rosenzweig – couples with a genetic unity that functions as a catalyst for contemporaneous Jewish renewal. According to Saadya, linguistic unity was one of the hallmarks of living in the land of Israel from the time of Abraham until just prior to the exile (*galut*):

> We did not speak the languages [of our neighbors],
> or worship their gods.
> From Egypt, our God spoke to us the words of purity [*divrei <s.>ahot*]
> in the mouth of his servant, Moses, a man of God.
> He spoke laws and judgments [*<h.>uqim u-mishpatim*]
> From atop Mt. Horeb.
> For generations we had deputies who lived
> In the land of our heritage.
> [Our language] was heard among our kings,
> in the songs of the Levites, and in the hymns of our priests.
> It was spoken by our prophets, defining their visions[90]

In this above passage language is tied to worship. The purity of Hebrew prevents it, and those who speak it, from being co-opted by idolatry, whether linguistic or religious. In the past, at least according to Saadya's reconstruction, Hebrew – the language of prophecy and of revelation – successfully prevented the ancient Israelites from worshipping other deities, from transgressing the commandments, and more generally from coming under the cultural influences of neighboring peoples. His goal in recreating this language through a Bible translation is to show how the highly ornate and literary

Arabic language points to and reveals the distant Hebrew at the same time that it conceals its specter behind its own literary graces.

Saadya connects Hebrew to the trajectories of creation, revelation and redemption; past, present, and future. Hebrew was the originary language and the language that all humans originally spoke. Hebrew was the language in which God called out to humanity and the language in which humanity responded to God's call. He juxtaposes this with Hebrew's current state of neglect, which is described as a form of punishment for adopting the languages of other peoples.[91] Saadya sees it as his obligation

> To interpret, understand and study [Hebrew] –
> Us, our children, our women, our slaves –
> So that it will not completely [depart] from our lips.
> [Hebrew] is wisdom; the laws of the Torah are our life, our essence [*hayyatenu*], our light, and our sanctification for eternity [*miqdoshenu leme<`>olam ve-<`>ad <`>olam*].[92]

Here Saadya connects the forgetting of language to the forgetting of being. He envisages his goal as renewing and reviving Hebrew for the sake of Israel's redemption (*yeshu<`>ata*).[93] It seems that the key to renewing Hebrew and ushering in redemption was for Saadya, as indeed it was for Rosenzweig, through language and translation. The creation of a new language – a new Hebrew – that models itself on the literary and aesthetic qualities of another language is an innovative act. The new is cast as ancient only because its ancientness is conceived of in new terms. To conceptualize such a Jewish ontology in the diaspora is contingent upon the memory of a past that is defined by the present, both of which are ultimately shaped by the future.

To do this Saadya quite literally created a Hebrew grammar developed out of the Arabic. The result is the creation of one of the earliest examples of *adab* (or belles-lettres) literature written by a Jew.[94] As with Rosenzweig, the translation from Hebrew into another language ultimately turns on aesthetics. The Bible as the originary language – the *Ursprache* in Rosenzweig's parlance – comes to Jews in the present through the veil of another language. This language is not other than the Hebrew of the original because all languages are ultimately one to the linguistic and literary caresses of a gifted translator. Both Saadya and Rosenzweig have to demonstrate to a readership that is not familiar with the Hebrew original how Hebrew transforms and ultimately breaks out of the semantic and grammatical casing of another language. The written Arabic or German ultimately reveals the Hebrew behind it and this in turn reveals the silent fullness beyond.

Translation is thus about creating a new literary language out of the ashes of old ones. This includes both the original Hebrew and their modern linguistic incarnations. For the new Hebrew, whether in Saadya's florid Hebrew introduction to his *Egron* or that discovered in his Arabic translation to the Bible, is not the Hebrew of the original. It is a Hebrew twice- or thrice-removed from its source. It is a Hebrew that Saadya himself has developed in light of contemporaneous advances in Arabic grammar and lexicography. If his Arabic contemporaries searched the poetic language of pre-Islamic Arabian poetry as a means to keep the pure Arabic of the Qur<'><a->n alive, Saadya sought to understand the beauty of biblical Hebrew through both Arabic and his own reconstituted Hebrew:

> When I decided to write this book to facilitate knowledge
> Among all who have chosen the language of the holy angels
> I thought a lot about the speech, pronunciation and utterances

> Found among all the nations.
>
> All words exist in one of two types: foundational [*yesod*] and Additional [*tosefet*]…Whereas the former are stable, the latter are not.[95]

Here Saadya differentiates between the tri-consonantal roots structure on the one hand and those letters that are added to it in order to designate phenomena such as gender, plurality, and tense. He is thus quite literally constructing or, perhaps better, restoring a primary text using the categories of Arabic lexicography. A literary Hebrew slowly emerges through the linguistic forms and categories of Arabic, the language of Saadya's translation. The Hebrew Bible was a text that could be translated into Arabic. However in translation it could also be as forceful as the original.

Translation – for Saadya, as for Rosenzweig – is a nostalgic act. It remembers the way the past was or might have been had things been different. Translation uses one language to invoke the meaning, the nuances, and ultimately the texture of another language. But if Hebrew is changed by being encased in Arabic, the latter – as the work from Rosenzweig makes abundantly clear – must also be forever changed in the process. Arabic is expanded when touched by Hebrew. The latter language can actually become the catalyst for the renewal of the former because, according to Saadya, it now absorbs the purity of Hebrew. In Arabic, Saadya's translation amounts to a copy of a copy, an Arabic memory of what an otherwise unspoken Hebrew should sound like. Saadya's return to the past, his translation of an ancient text into the literary *lingua franca* of his day was very much a project of modernity, a form of "ancient modernism" to borrow the phrase used of Rosenzweig's translation project.

Conclusions

Whereas Rosenzweig faced a semantic otherness posed by the radical differences between Indo-European German and Semitic Hebrew, empirically Saadya's predicament is not nearly as severe. Hebrew and Arabic were cognates and the former could easily be absorbed into the word structures and semiotics of the latter. However he still encounters the same problem that every Jewish translator of the Bible must face: How does one keep open the spaces in-between the languages and the words? How does one create an aesthetically pleasing translation that vectors all of the memories associated with another language and way-of-being in the world? Can an originary language bespeak in another language?

The retrieval of memory, as we have seen here, is tantamount to an aesthetic of forgetting. One must remember a past that will be future, using the colorful sounds and harmonics of a new language that is present. As such this new language must be wrenched out of its familiarity and be differently conceived. The Hebrew must inform this new language, caress it, and transform it in the same way that it must ultimately open itself up to the other language. This fusion of languages paradoxically creates a past, the concept of a pristine language that is accessible only through a different and a modern language. It is this paradox that both Rosenzweig and Saadya faced, and it seems to me that they could never quite ameliorate the tensions brought on by this paradox. According to their respective models, the Hebrew is – as I have mentioned time and again – a palimpsest, something that, like the *Ursprache*, can be glimpsed at only through the veil of another language. In its sacrality, Hebrew ceases to be a real language; it becomes little more than a specter that translation keeps forever out of reach.[96]

The target language thus conjures up an originary language that does not exist except as an alluring absence. Hebrew's presence resides solely in the verbal, grammatical, and semiotic structures of another text, another language, another mode of expression. It is the exiling of language using the language of exile. Hebrew remains as a distant memory: one not to be forgotten, but also one that is potentially intangible.

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A thick description of these two individuals on the nature and quiddity of language, memory, and translation reveals that the translative act resembles the prophetic one. Saadya Gaon and Franz Rosenzweig each charge themselves with the task of communal remembrance. However this remembrance – filtered as it is through the distortive prism of memory – is neither historical nor objective recollection. It is rather the stuff of dreams and imaginary fulfillment.

In reflecting on the art of memory and translation here, I have also sought to overturn, or at the very least question, the axiom of precursorship, one of the guiding principles that governs the historical study of Jewish philosophy. Rather than have Saadya Gaon – as the earlier thinker – set the frames of reference for this chapter, I decided to use Rosenzweig as my point of departure, to use his understanding of language, being, and translation as a way of shedding new light on the translative project of Saadya. The results, I trust, will be not so much anachronous as natural: One cannot read, from the vantage point of today, Saadya's work on translation – his ontology of language, his linking creation to grammar, his notion of the redemptive value in translation – except through the lens provided by Rosenzweig, much as one cannot translate the Bible, according to Rosenzweig, by circumventing Luther. Or, perhaps framed somewhat differently, when one reads as a Rosenzweigian, one reads neither from the vantage point of yesterday nor today. One simply reads and reads well. Saadya's questions are accordingly our questions and not a set of curiosities that inhabit one of the dusty backrooms of the museum of Jewish philosophy. By starting with Rosenzweig and moving back to Saadya we see translation as a philosophical problem and not just a historical one.

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[1] Here it is important to be clear that Rosenzweig, as should be well known, did not undertake to translate the Bible alone into German. The main impetus behind the project was Martin Buber and he was the one that did much of the translative work and who undertook to finish the project after Rosenzweig's death in 1929. Although both Buber and Rosenzweig wrote about their undertaking (collected as *Die Schrift und ihre Verdeustschung*), I here choose to focus on Rosenzweig's writings, especially his "Die Schrift und das Wort," "Die Schrift und Luther," and his Afterword to the Halevi translation. When I mention Rosenzweig's "translation," then, it is simply a matter of convenience, and I am not trying to diminish Buber's contribution – which I shall discus in greater detail in chapter five below— to the project in any way.

[2] Franz Rosenzweig, "Die Schrift und Luther," in *Die Schrift und ihre Verdeutschung*, 104-105. An English translation may be found in *Scripture and Translation*, 56.

[3] Saadya Gaon, *Ha-Egron*, Arabic introduction, 148 (lines 9-17).

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[4] Although Luther's translation remains incontrovertible and omnipresent; one cannot now translate the Bible as if there were no Luther translation. See the comments in Dana Hollander, *Exemplarity and Chosenness: Rosenzweig and Derrida on the Nation of Philosophy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 143-146.

[5] See the comments in Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger*, 238-239.

[6] Franz Rosenzweig, "Das neue Denken," in *Der Mensch und sein Werk. Gesammelte Schriften*, vol 3: *Zweistromland. Kleinere Schriften zu Glauben und Denken*, edited by Reinhold and Annemarie Mayer (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1984), 148. "The New Thinking," in *Franz Rosenzweig's "The New Thinking*," edited and translated by Alan Udoff and Barbara E. Galli (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 81.

[7] On the history and problems associated with the employment of "influences" in intellectual history, see the classic formulations in Quentin Skinner, "Limits of Historical Explanation," *Philosophy* 41 (1966), 199-215; *idem*, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," *History and Theory* 8.1 (1969), 3-53. In the latter work, for example, he writes that "A given writer may be 'discovered' to have held a view, on the strength of some chance similarity of terminology, on some subject to which he cannot in principle have meant to contribute" (7-8).

[8] There is, as far as I am aware however, no evidence that Rosenzweig read anything by Saadya.

[9] Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," 5-12; see further the comments in *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics*, edited by James Tully (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988); Dominick LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 56-69

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[10] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1990). An English translation may be found in *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Crossroad, 1982), esp. 302-307.

[11] Here I take my insights from E. R. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, xv-xxxi.

[12] "In the critic's vocabulary, the word "precursor" is indispensable, but it should be cleansed of all connotations of polemic or rivalry. The fact is that every writer *creates* his own precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future." See Jorge Luis Borges, "Kafka and His Precursors," in *Everything and Nothing*, translated by Donald A. Yates et al. (New York: New Directions, 1999), 73.

[13] Klaus Reichert, "'It Is Time': The Buber-Rosenzweig Bible Translation in Context," in in *The Translatability of Cultures: Figurations of the Space Between*, edited by Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 180.

[14] Rosenzweig, "Zeit ists…," 8, qtd. in Reichert, "'It Is Time,'" 173.

[15] Franz Rosenzweig, "Die Schrift und Luther," 113/61. See further his *Der Stern der Erlösung*, 275/265.

[16] See the comments in Leora Batnitzky, *Idolatry and Representation*, 110-111.

[17] Franz Rosenzweig, "Vorwort," in *Jehuda Halevi: Fünfundneunzig Hymnen und Gedichte* in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 4.1, *Sprachdenken im Übersetzen: Band Hymnen und Gedichte des Jehuda Halevi* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1983), 4. The English page number refers to the Galli translation in *Franz Rosenzweig and Jehuda Halevi: Translating, Translations, and Translators* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), 172. In the original 1927 version, this essay appeared as an

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"Afterword"; in the version found in his *Gesammelte Schriften* however it appears as "Foreword." I will follow Galli and refer to it as his "Afterword."

[18] See the comments in Afterword, 4/172.

[19] Rosenzweig, "Die Schrift und Luther," 88/47.

[20] See the comments in Hollander, *Exemplarity and Chosenness,* 141-147

[21] Elliot R. Wolfson, "Facing the Effaced: Mystical Eschatology and the Idealistic Orientation in the Thought of Franz Rosenzweig," *Journal for the History of Modern Theology* 4 (1997), esp. 74-80; Pollock, *Franz Rosenzweig and the Systematic Task of Philosophy*, 304-307.

[22] Afterword, 3-4/171; c.f., "Die Schrift und Luther," 124/67.

[23] Reichert, "'It Is Time,'"174.

[24] Rosenzweig, "Die Schrift und Luther," 125/67.

[25] Rosenzweig, "Die Schrift und Luther," 125/67.

[26] Rosenzweig, "Die Schrift und Luther," 110-111/59-60.

[27] E.g., Batnitzky, *Idolatry and Representation*, 106-112; Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger*, 248-257.

[28] In this regard the comments are a propos in Mara Benjamin, "Building a Zion in German(y): Franz Rosenzweig on Yehudah Halevi," *Jewish Social Studies* 13.2 (2007), 127-154, at 128-130, and more fully in Benjamin, *Rosenzweig's Bible*, 65-102.

[29] Rosenzweig, "Die Schrift und Luther," 126/68.

[30] Afterword, 1/169.

[31] Afterword, 6-7/174.

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[32] Here I refer to Rosenzweig's "ideal" translator, and not the many translators of whom he is critical in the Afterword. These translators (e.g., Schulze, Cohn, and Wilamowitz), according to him, have "nothing to say" so they "need not ask anything of the language, and a language whose speaker asks nothing of it becomes frozen into a tool for basic communication" (Afterword, 3/171).

[33] Afterword, 3/171.

[34] E.g., Rosenzweig, *Der Stern der Erlösung*, 198-199/192-193.

[35] See the comments in Elliot R. Wolfson, "Light Does Not Talk But Shines: Apophasis and Vision in Rosenzweig's Theopoetic Temporality," in *New Directions in Jewish Philosophy*, pages forthcoming.

[36] E.g., Rosenzweig, "Das neue Denken," 148-149/80-83.

[37] *Der Stern der Erlösung*, 327/312.

[38] See the comments in Stéphane Mosès, *System and Revelation: The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig*, trans. Catherine Tihanyi (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), 150-152.

[39] See the comments in Galli, "The Halevi Book, Rosenzweig, and the *Star*, in her *Franz Rosenzweig and Jehuda Halevi*, 291.

[40] Rosenzweig, *Der Stern der Erlösung*, 167-168/163.

[41] Afterword, 4/172.

[42] Afterword, 5/173.

[43] Rosenzweig, "Die Schrift und Luther," 104-105/56.

[44] Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger*, 249.

[45] See Plaut, *German-Jewish Bible Translations*.

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[46] Rosenzweig, "Die Schrift und Luther," 95/51.

[47] Rosenzweig, "Die Schrift und Luther," 107/57.

[48] Plaut, *German-Jewish Bible Translations*, 18.

[49] More generally, see *Der Stern der Erlösung*, 331-339/317-324.

[50] See the comments in Wolfson, "Light Does not Talk, but Shines," pages forthcoming.

[51] Afterword, 2/170.

[52] Afterword, 10/177.

[53] Afterword, 10/177.

[54] See, e.g., *Das neue Denken*, 148/81.

[55] See the comments in Norbert M. Samuelson, *A User's Guide to Franz Rosenzweig's Star of Redemption* (Surrey: Curzon, 1999), 251-252.

[56] *Der Stern der Erlösung*, 334/320.

[57] *Der Stern der Erlösung*, 336/321.

[58] Rosenzweig, "Die Schrift und das Wort," 86/45.

[59] Rosenzweig, "Die Schrift und das Wort," 87/46.

[60] Rosenzweig, "Die Schrift und das Wort," 86/45.

[61] Benjamin, "Building a Zion in German(y)," 136.

[62] See Rosenzweig's comments in "Die Einheit der Bibel: Eine Auseinandersetzung mit Orthodoxie und Liberalismus," in *Die Schrift und ihre Verdeutschung*, 46-54/22-26.

[63] Rosenzweig, "Die Schrift und das Wort," 84/44.

[64] Rosenzweig, "Die Schrift und das Wort," 80/42.

[65] See the comments in Abraham ibn Ezra, *Commentary to Genesis* 2:11.

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[66] Saadya wrote two introductions to the work, one in an ornate vocalized and accented Hebrew that imitated the biblical narrative, and a more prosaic Arabic one. The former was written in Egypt when Saadya was around twenty. The latter introduction was written "years later" when he wrote an expanded Hebrew-language lexicon for poets that included, in Arabic, a discussion of rhetoric and poetics. For an illuminating comparison of the two introductions, see Rina Drory, *Models and Contexts: Arabic Literature and its Impact on Medieval Jewish Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 178-190.

[67] Saadya, *Egron,* Arabic introduction, 150 (lines 23-29).

[68] See Drory, *Models and Contacts*, 185-186.

[69] On Saadya's attempt to ground the *Sefer Yetzirah* in his philosophical system, see Georges Vajda, "Le Commentaire de Saadia sure le Sefer Yeçirah," *Revue des etudes Juives* 106 (1941), 64-86; Haggai Ben-Shammai, "Saadya's Goal in this *Commentary to the Sefer Yezirah,"* in *A Straight Path: Studies in Medieval Philosophy and Culture in Honor of Arthur Hyman*, edited by Ruth Link-Salinger et al. (Washington, DC: The Catholic University Press of America, 1988), 1-9.

[70] Saadya Gaon, *Sefer Yezirah `im perush Rabbenu Saadya ben Yosef Fayyumi*, Arabic text and Hebrew translation by Yosef Kafih (Jerusalem, 1972), introduction, 33-34.

[71] An analogy may be found in Abraham Abulafia who, on the one hand, follows Maimonides and claims that Hebrew is conventional; but, on the other, he argues that Hebrew is the essential language, the language of creation, revelation, and ultimately of redemption. I thank Elliot R. Wolfson for bringing this analogy to my attention.

[72] See the comments in Drory, *Models and Contacts*, 188.

[73] This is the opinion of Allony in the introduction to his critical edition of the *Egron*.

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[74] Saadya, *Egron*, Hebrew introduction, 156 (line 1).

[75] C.f., *Kit<a->b al-am<a->n<a->t wa-al-i<`>tiq<a->d<a->t*. An English translation may be found in *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, translated by Samuel Rosenblatt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976). Requisite secondary literature may be found in Harry A. Wolfson, *Repercussions of the Kalam in Jewish Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979); Alexander Altmann, "Saadya's Theory of Revelation: Its Origin and Background," in his *Studies in Religious Philosophy and Mysticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969); Israel Efros, "Saadya's Second Theory of Creation in its Relation to Pythagoreanism and Platonism," in *Louis Ginzberg Jubilee Volume* (New York: American Academy of Jewish Research, 1945), 133-142 (English Section).

[76] This is also related to Saadya's concept of the "second air." For requisite secondary literature on this topic, see Harry Austryn Wolfson, "The Kalam Arguments for Creation in Saadia, Averroes, Maimonides and St. Thomas," reprinted in *Saadia Anniversary Volume* (New York, 1943), 198-245.

[77] Saadya Gaon, *Or rishon bi-hokhmah ha-lashon: Sefer sihot lashon ha-ivrim le-rav saadya gaon*, ed. A. Dotan (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1997). Requisite secondary literature may be found in Henry Malther, *Saadia Gaon: His Life and Works* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1921), 139-140; Solomon L. Skoss, "Saadia Gaon, The Earliest Hebrew Grammarian," *Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research* 21 (1952), 75-100; 22 (1953), 65-90, and 23 (1954), 59-73; *idem*, "A Study of Hebrew Vowels from Saadia Gaon's Grammatical Work *Kitab al-Lughah*," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 42 (1951-1952), 283-317.

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[78] *Tafs<i->r kit<a->b al-mab<a->d<i->*, 121-122.

[79] *Tafs<i->r kit<a->b al-mab<a->d<i->*, 117-119.

[80] See the comments in Aron Dotan, "Particularism and Universalism in the Linguistic Theory of Saadia Gaon," *Sefarad* LV.1 (1995), 61-76, at 71-72.

[81] Dotan, " Particularism and Universalism in the Linguistic Theory of Saadia Gaon," 68-69. Although see my comments in n. 71 above.

[82] In the middle ages, at least based on the manuscript tradition, Saadya's commentary to the *Sefer Yetzirah* was more popular than his *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*. See Ronald C. Kiener, "Saadia Gaon and the *Sefer Yezirah*: Translation Theory in Classical Jewish Thought," in *Interpretation in Religion*, edited by Shlomo Biderman and Ben-Ami Scharfstein (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 169-179, at 171.

[83] Skoss, "Saadia Gaon, the Earliest Hebrew Grammar," 59.

[84] See the comments in Allony, "Translator's Introduction," 28-30.

[85] I.e., the aforementioned Ab<u-> Aswad al-Duwali.

[86] Saadya, *Egron*, Arabic introduction,150-152 (lines 30-37).

[87] Drory, *Models and Contacts*, 186.

[88] Drory argues that the notion of Arabic as being primarily a communicative language, and therefore clear and understandable, was quite a common one among medieval Hebrew scholars. She contrasts this with the use of Hebrew, which was regarded as more "festive and grandiloquent." See her *Models and Contacts*, 165-177.

[89] Saadya, *Egron*, Hebrew introduction, 156 (lines 1-7).

[90] Saadya, *Egron*, Hebrew introduction, 157 (lines 18-27).

[91] Saadya, *Egron*, Hebrew introduction, 158 (lines 26-38).

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[92] Saadya, *Egron*, Hebrew introduction, 159 (lines 45-48).

[93] Saadya, *Egron*, Hebrew introduction, 160 (line 66).

[94] Eliezer Schlossberg, "Ten Observations on Rhetoric and Expression by Saadia Gaon," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 38.2 (1993), 269-277, at 269-270.

[95] Saadya, *Egron,* Hebrew introduction, 160-161 (lines 72-76).

[96] See the comments in Benjamin, "Building a Zion in German(y)," 131-132.