II. Barukh Kurzweil - A Cultural Biography

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Barukh Kurzweil and Modern Hebrew Literature.

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"Those who are ignorant of the context of ideas are similarly destined to misunderstand them."¹ We may invoke this corollary to Santayana's familiar dictum about the necessity of understanding the past in order to point to the biographical context of Kurzweil's life that is our subject here. In Kurzweil's case the context is clearly identifiable: the life and cultural tradition of Central Europe. Specifically we may locate it in the pre-World War I Austro-Hungarian Empire and in post-War Weimar Germany.

Two things should be borne in mind in examining this context. First, that the Central European tradition is "a tradition whose assumptions for the most part have no precise equivalent in the English-speaking world."² In fact, we may even say that as far as Kurzweil goes, the Central European stands in opposition to the Anglo-American intellectual tradition.³ Second, the adjective "Central European" applies not only to general culture but has a specifically Jewish frame of reference as well. Pre-Holocaust Jewish life, like anything European, was extremely variegated and took on different textures and emphases in various countries. Indeed, the differences within Ashkenazic Jewry itself⁴ are at times almost as substantial as the more fundamental and historical ones between Ashkenazim and Sephardim.

I shall discuss the salient facts of Kurzweil's life against their cultural background. I divide his life into the following formative places and periods:

1. Boyhood in Moravia: 1907-1921
2. Studies in Frankfurt: 1921-1933
3. Teaching in Brno, Czechoslovakia: 1933-1939
4. Settlement in Israel (Jerusalem, Haifa, Ramat-Gan): 1939-1972.⁵

Moravia: 1907-1921

Barukh (Benedikt) Kurzweil was born July 22, 1907, in Pirnice, Moravia, a small town in what was then western Moravia very near the border of Bohemia, and what is today west-central Czechoslovakia.⁶ Moravia was at that time a part of the Hapsburg Empire, which was both generally and Jewishly a unique cultural matrix. Unlike Slovakia to the east, where the principal
influence was Hungarian, Moravia lay within the orbit of Czech, Austrian and German language and culture. This was the region of Grillparzer, Stifter, Schnitzler, Hofmannsthal, Kafka, Musil, Broch, and more generally, that of Agnon and Svevo. Schocken notes the following figures who were all born in the immediate vicinity of Kurzweil's birthplace: Edmund Husserl, Fritz Mauthner, Gustav Mahler, Sigmund Freud, and Karl Kraus. The fact that most of the above men were born Jews testifies to the opportunities for creativity which the Hapsburg Empire afforded to Jews and to all minority groups. Moreover, the fact that most of them became assimilated Jews testifies to how advanced the process of Emancipation was in the Empire by the end of the nineteenth century. The Edict of Toleration of the Emperor Joseph II of 1782 was one of the earliest examples of the political liberation of the Jews from the medieval world order, enabling them to participate more fully in society.

Jewishly, Moravia itself was distinctive, for it was situated at the crossroads of Europe. Jews had been there since the first half of the thirteenth century. The heretic Jacob Frank had lived at the capital, Brno, in 1773. Because of its proximity to Vienna, Moravia became a hotbed for the followers of Herzl at the turn of the century, and we can assume the flourishing existence of many Zionist groups and institutions throughout the area during the first decade of this century. "After the Czechoslovakian Republic had been established in 1918, Moravian Jews frequently constituted the bridge between . . . traditionalists and modernists, Zionists and non-Zionists."

Kurzweil himself, in his tribute to Max Brod on the latter's sixtieth birthday, has some interesting things to say about Czech Jewry and therefore, however indirectly, about himself. The Haskalah, he notes, took a more controlled, less assimilationistic course in Bohemia and Moravia than it did in Germany, and so religious tradition never quite lost its hold. Moreover, because the Jews there had to face two nationalisms--Slavic and German--neither one could make an absolute claim on their loyalties. This gave Czech Jewry a sense of moderation, an ability to see the many sides of a question. This, in turn, engendered a skeptical outlook on life which Kurzweil feels is the most important feature of Czech Jewry. The knowledge by the Czech Jew that he could not take seriously his being either a German or a Slav left him with two choices: either to become a rootless cosmopolitan or to integrate his life around a specifically Jewish identity. As we shall see, affirmation of tradition, an attachment to Jewish
nationalism, and a deep scepticism were all key elements in Kurzweil's own make-up. At any rate, all these elements were fostered in his early life. His father was a (the?) rabbi in Pirnice, and his maternal grandfather was, evidently, a rabbinic scholar of some repute. In his childhood, Kurzweil, like his counterparts throughout all the centuries and lands of the European Diaspora, was introduced by his father to and received a thorough grounding in the classical Hebrew texts of Judaism: the Bible, the Talmud and halakhic and midrashic sources. Even as a child he was a voracious reader. By the age of nine or ten he was reading Biblical narratives in Hebrew freely for his own interest. Before then he says he read stories in German and somewhat later, about the age of eleven or twelve, he discovered Czech literature. He also attended both local German and Czech schools until the age of fourteen, at which time his father determined that the son would leave home to study in a larger Jewish community with a major Yeshiva, as befitted his abilities. The Yeshiva of Rabbi Solomon Breuer in Frankfurt-am-Main was chosen, and Kurzweil left for that city in 1921.

Before I discuss that Yeshiva and the Frankfurt years, I ought to note one further feature about the Hapsburg environment that was deeply imprinted into Kurzweil's consciousness—its stability. Kurzweil never forgot, and may possibly have idealized, the coherence of his childhood world that was the Austo-Hungarian Empire before the outbreak of World War I. For him, as for Agnon, Musil and others, the assassination of the Archduke Francis Ferdinand in 1914 was the watershed of the cultural and political upheaval that is the hallmark of the twentieth century. The implication of these events is that if man in the twentieth century has begun to put away his human kings, he has also, therefore, begun to put away Divine authority. This is Kurzweil's primary experiential concern and informs virtually everything he ever wrote. It is for this reason that Kurzweil hears a tone of romantic melancholy in all the literature emanating from the Austro-Hungarian Empire and from Czech-Jewish literature in particular. It is not too much to say that Kurzweil listened for that melancholy in any variation possible in every literary work he encountered.
The climate in Frankfurt between the wars was obviously different from Moravia, politically, culturally and Jewishly. The twelve years Kurzweil spent there were seminal to his development.20

Kurzweil began as a student in the Yeshiva of Rabbi Solomon Breuer. This venerable academy, certainly one of the major institutions of its kind in Pre-Holocaust Europe, had been founded in the nineteenth century by Breuer's father-in-law, Samson Raphael Hirsch (1815-1889).21 Here Hirsch's "neo-Orthodox" response to the Emancipation expressed itself in the Yeshiva's ideal of combining traditional Torah study with the pursuit of the secular knowledge of science and the humanities. This was quite different from East European Yeshivot, where secular learning was suspect and forbidden (though often acquired covertly), as well as from such rabbinical seminaries as the one at Breslau fostered by liberal Jewry which approached Judaica through the critical canons of the historical school, the Wissenschaft des Judentums.22

Although it was a penurious life in the Yeshiva, involving eating with a different family each day, we may assume that Kurzweil fared reasonably well as a student. In time he was selected to serve for a while as Haus-bakhur (steward) to the aging Rabbi Breuer. He befriended one of the master's sons, Yitshak Breuer, and the influence of this future ideologist of German Orthodoxy and major critic of secular Zionism on Kurzweil is among the most important of the numerous influences that we shall identify.23 The essential thrust of the Hirsch-Breuer school was its affirmation of the independence of Judaism (and, by implication, the Jewish people) from history. The Torah and its people are seen as "meta-historical," beyond the human and subjective categories of all that lies within the realm of the historical. As we shall note, this idea became seminal to Kurzweil's world-view and is a key element in his criticism of modern Hebrew literature.24

Contemporaneous with his Jewish studies (mostly of Talmud and poskim) in the Frankfurt Yeshiva, Kurzweil continued his secular studies on the secondary school level as a non-residential student ("Externer") at the Helmholtz Oberrealschule. This allowed him to pass the matriculation examinations so that by 1928 he was able to gain admission to the University of Frankfurt. From that time on Kurzweil no longer attended the Yeshiva regularly, although he still continued his close association with it. From 1928-1933 he
devoted himself to doctoral studies in the humanities, with concentration on Germanics (probably literature and philosophy) and history. Here he absorbed all the dominant ideas and schools that one might expect to find in a leading German university of that time: the idealistic metaphysical tradition, phenomenology, existentialism, and the aristocratic esthetics of German classicism, Romanticism, and modernism, especially as embodied in the elitism of the George Kreis. The result was Kurzweil's doctoral dissertation, *Die Bedeutung bürgerlicher und künstlerischer Lebensform für Goethe's Leben und Werk dargestellt Am Faust 1. Teil,* accepted in 1933. This was among the last doctorates awarded to a Jew at Frankfurt and possibly in Germany before the onset of the Nazi regime. By this time, also, Kurzweil had received rabbinical ordination from Rabbi Solomon Breuer.

We should note, however briefly, a number of other people and institutions that were flourishing in Frankfurt at this time, which, even though Kurzweil did not have direct contact with them, were still part of the total environment in which he developed for twelve years. This was the period of the great collaboration between Buber and Rosenzweig which began to produce their new German translation of the Bible. The celebrated *Freies Judisches Lehrhaus* was during these years at its peak of activity. Although Kurzweil as a student of the Breuer Yeshiva was officially a part of the separatist element which, since Hirsch, had held itself aloof from the organized Jewish community of Frankfurt (Kurzweil never met Rosenzweig), it is nevertheless inconceivable that he was not in touch with what was being thought and written in more liberal circles. Similarly, Frankfurt was the seat of the *Institut für Sozialforschung* which produced important historical and sociological studies in the light of German socialism by such figures as Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse.

In 1933, having formally completed his studies, and with the spectre of Nazism becoming imminent, Kurzweil returned to his family in Czechoslovakia.

*Brno: 1933-1939*

After a brief stay with his mother, Kurzweil was finally offered employment at Brno, the capital of Moravia, on the faculty of the Hebrew gymnasium there, the only institution of its kind in western Czechoslovakia. His task was an unenviable one: to teach religion to young people who were more than likely to have been negatively pre-disposed to the subject. The indications are that
he succeeded beyond everyone's expectations, showing powers as an engaging teacher that were to be life-long. During this period, Kurzweil was also invited by the local rabbi to perform certain rabbinical functions and rites de passage in his absence.  

In January 1937, Martin Buber, who was shortly to emigrate to Palestine, had occasion to lecture at Brno on the Bible. Kurzweil's meeting with him was to prove to be momentous in several respects. Kurzweil was profoundly affected by the man and his teaching; he describes this first encounter as "a decisive turning point in my life." Buber, too, was impressed and invited Kurzweil even then to come to Frankfurt to teach in the Lehrhaus. Kurzweil, however, declined, as he refused to return to Nazi Germany. It is important to note, I think, that Kurzweil was not unfulfilled doing what he did in Brno. In spite of his inclinations toward Jewish nationalism, he was thoroughly imbued with a love for and a sense of the validity of Jewish life in the Diaspora, and quite probably would have been content to live out his life in that mode. Here we may answer the speculative question that cannot but be asked of Kurzweil by anyone who studies his life's work: where would he have been had World War II and the Nazi Holocaust never happened? Our answer must be: most likely in a German university and without question in Europe.

When the situation became critical—in March 1938 the Nazis occupied Austria and several thousand Jews escaped to Brno—the only real option for Kurzweil was to go to Palestine. Accordingly, at about this time or possibly somewhat earlier, Kurzweil wrote to Buber requesting from him a certificate of sponsorship which was necessary, under existing British mandate law, in order to be permitted legal entry into Palestine. This document apparently took some time in arriving, but when it came in late 1939 after the war had begun, it enabled Kurzweil to go to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem as a research student under the aegis of Buber. Kurzweil, we can see, got out of Europe just in time, unlike most of his family and friends who were very soon deported to the death camps as the liquidation of Czech Jewry proceeded. Kurzweil thereafter always regarded himself as a "brand plucked from the fire," a sensibility that haunted his inner life in a way not always visible in his criticism.

It is not exactly clear what or how much Kurzweil published during the Brno years. There are extant copies of two lectures that bespeak his teaching and rabbinical activity. Barzilai, in the preface to his bibliography of Kurzweil's writings up to the
end of 1963, notes that articles in German were published in Austrian, Swiss, German and Luxembourg newspapers and journals which are probably no longer in existence. He does not, however, indicate what these articles were about.36

Palestine and Israel: 1939-1972

The first two years following Kurzweil's arrival in Palestine were spent in Jerusalem. Kurzweil was, as I have noted, a research-student of Buber, but it is not clear just what this entailed. Certainly Kurzweil attended Buber's lectures at the Hebrew University and also spent time at Buber's home, probably as part of the latter's select circle of students. There is no question that Kurzweil needed Buber at this phase of his life. The master spoke to the student's deepest perplexities and yearnings. Years later, at Buber's death in 1965, Kurzweil reflected upon this "man of the spirit, unique sage, who was the embodiment of personal tranquility, self-security and love of life... Individuals who were unhappy, fragmented, consumed by doubts that gnawed away at their innards—all sought Buber's presence."37

It is important to note that at this time Kurzweil saw himself both as a literary artist in the German language and as an academician and a teacher. His deepest desire was to create in German, especially the experience of the Diaspora Jewish life of Central Europe he had so recently and so painfully left behind. During the Jerusalem years Kurzweil participated in a circle of other literati from Germany where presumably their own works as well as classics from German literature were read and discussed. The participants included Dr. Moshe Spitzer, Yitzhak Shenberg (Shenhar), Heinz Politzer, Manfred Sturmann, Jean Levinson, and Aryeh Ludwig Strauss.38 At one of the first sessions of this circle that Kurzweil attended very soon after his arrival in Jerusalem, something occurred that was to transform his life: a few chapters of Agnon's novel, Ore'ah natah lalun (A Guest for the Night), which had just been published, were read aloud from the Hebrew original. Kurzweil was affected to the core of his being.39 Here was the very narrative that lay dormant within him, the very thing that struggled for expression in his novel-in-progress Die sterbende Gemeinde: the pre-World War I "then" of the Austro-Hungarian town depicted over against the shattered post-war "now." It became at once clear to Kurzweil that he would never be able to write fiction like that, but the experience also spurred
him to look more deeply into Agnon and the whole field of modern Hebrew literature. Several years previous Kurzweil had read Agnon's "Vehayah he'akov le mishor" in the German translation ("Und das Krumme wird gerade") but he had not been significantly impressed. In the Frankfurt Yeshiva he had been introduced to Feierberg and Bialik by some of his fellow-students from Eastern Europe, but that, besides a few of Ahad ha-Am's essays and a smattering of Mendele, was all the modern Hebrew literature he had read. Furthermore, another development occurred during these years which also helped deflect Kurzweil away from literary creativity in German towards literary criticism in Hebrew: the destruction of European Jewry, about which he learned at this time. Kurzweil now made a pact with himself never again to write publicly in German. Privately, however, he could not relinquish the language (he continued writing his notes and probably some letters in German) nor his desire to create with it. During the period 1940-1942, with Buber's encouragement, he sporadically attempted in his own way to transmute his vision of Jewish Moravia into fiction.

The problem of a livelihood must by now have come to the fore. Whether Kurzweil formally sought it at this time or not is unclear, but the prospect of an appointment on the faculty at the Hebrew University was not forthcoming. Instead Kurzweil went to Haifa where he began teaching at the reputable Reali school, probably in the fall of 1942. After one year he was dismissed by the headmaster, Dr. Biram ("he will never be a teacher"). The next year was spent teaching in a vocational high school but this too proved fruitless since it was hardly the environment for humanistic concern. Finally Kurzweil joined the staff of the innovative Hugim school in Haifa, and here he remained until he was called to Bar-Ilan University in 1956. The contrast in the classroom between the European, traditional teacher and his brash Sabra students must have been a challenge to both, but it was not without success.

Kurzweil's relationship with the Hebrew University is complex and many-sided, both from an emotional and an intellectual standpoint. There can be no doubt that he possessed the credentials that would have entitled him to a professorship there, but the question here has to be put in two ways: did the Hebrew University fail to appoint Kurzweil? or did Kurzweil fail to get appointed to the Hebrew University? Such evidence as there is indicates that at various points both formulations are correct. At the outset Kurzweil, we remember, was under the tutelage of
Buber and, strange as it may sound now, in the early forties Buber did not carry much influence within the university. Kurzweil, in this respect, did not pick a teacher who was either willing or able to advance his career. But Kurzweil himself did not help his own cause. In some of his early critical pieces, which I shall presently discuss, he treated some of the university's leading lights, notably Prof. Joseph Klausner, with something less than respect and gentleness. It is thus clear that in those early years the door to the Hebrew University was closed. Later in the forties and in the early fifties, Kurzweil was invited several times to come from Haifa and lecture in Jerusalem. In 1952 or 1953, there was an opening in Hebrew literature and Nathan Rotenstreich, who was then rector and a friend of Kurzweil, suggested that he submit his credentials, which step would, apparently, have allowed him to be considered and probably appointed to the position. Characteristically Kurzweil refused to do this. He considered that his abilities and his reputation as a literary scholar were by that time beyond a process of this kind.

Nevertheless, I think it an over-simplification to say, as many in Hebrew literary circles do, that because of these developments Kurzweil bore a life-long grudge against the Hebrew University. There are more substantial issues involved here as well. The Hebrew University, especially in its Jewish studies departments, was committed to the Wissenschaft approach of the historical school. It was inevitable that on purely intellectual grounds the products and claims of that method of research would run afoul of Kurzweil, as did Gershom Scholem, Jacob Katz, and Isaiah Tishbi.

The Haifa years by no means marked a stagnation in Kurzweil's development, even if it is certain that a university environment would have been eminently more suitable. For one thing, Kurzweil himself never denigrated what he was doing, since he considered the teaching of literature a serious task regardless of the age of the students. By the early fifties Kurzweil was also lecturing at Haifa's Teachers' Seminary and even Dr. Biram saw fit to change his mind and invite him back to do the same at Reali. In Haifa there was also intellectual companionship of the first order: Yehezkel Kaufmann, Yosef Schechter and the poet Shin Shalom all lived there and the relationship with them was fructifying. Kurzweil himself became in time one of the prominent figures on the Haifa cultural scene, speaking frequently at literary and other topical forums. In 1943 he married Margot Gotlewsky, who
had also come from Germany in recent years and who he had met in Jerusalem. Subsequently one daughter, Ruth, was born to them.

But beyond all this, the Haifa years began with the inception of perhaps the most important development in Kurzweil's career as a literary critic: his association with Ha'arets. This daily newspaper had been founded in 1918 by Zalman Schocken, a highly literate German Jew who became Agnon's patron and one of the leading publishers of the incipient Jewish state. Ha'arets was unique among the Yishuv's dailies--it remained independent of any political party. In addition it established itself journalistically as the most substantial and authoritative of the Hebrew newspapers and came to occupy a role in Israel commensurate with that of the London Times or the New York Times. Sometime in 1941 Kurzweil was asked by Schocken to become a regular contributor to the newspaper's weekly literary supplement. The match was a fortuitous one. The newspaper acquired a young critic who was superbly equipped and poised for a fundamental encounter with modern Hebrew literature. And the critic now would have access to a far wider audience than any lecture hall could give him, especially considering the paucity of well-developed literary periodicals in the emerging state as well as the fact that Ha'arets served as a major organ of the intelligentsia, a role it has never completely relinquished even with the subsequent proliferation of quarterlies. Moreover, the independence and integrity of the newspaper stood Kurzweil in good stead, for he had harbored a suspicion of all journalism which traded on the transitoriness of the word. Thus from the time his first piece appeared, on January 30, 1942 (on Agnon's Elu ve'elu until his last, on July 14, 1972 (on the use of the computer in literary studies) we count perhaps three hundred fifty essay-reviews and critical articles. To be sure, Kurzweil's long relationship to Ha'arets was not without its problems. There were times when the violence of his polemic strained the limits of understanding between publisher and critic; and there were also instances when Kurzweil, rightly or wrongly, felt manipulated and condescended to by younger, enterprising editors of the literary supplement. For a while in fact, in the early sixties, Kurzweil sharply reduced his contributions to Ha'arets and saw fit to appear in Davar. But always the disagreements, which bear resemblances to a family quarrel, were patched up and Kurzweil returned to Schocken's daily. Indeed, it is not too much to say that over thirty years of appearing in the same place on Fridays turned Kurzweil himself into something of a fixture among various sectors of the Israeli reading public.
From the outset, the articles on Agnon and European fiction were, in general, received with respect, even acclaim. In 1953 they were collected by the Schocken publishing house into Kurzweil's first volume, *Masekhet haroman*. More controversial was Kurzweil's treatment of the budding Israeli writers. He had judged their work mercilessly, found it wanting artistically, and thus had trampled upon the national pride of the new state, which regarded its literature as something more to be read in celebration rather than to be critically evaluated.

In general, the earliest responses to Kurzweil's arrival on the literary scene in the years that preceded statehood (1942-1948) are instructive. Hebrew literary criticism had never seen a critic possessing anything quite like Kurzweil's Central European background combined with such independence, fastidiousness and such an implacable and explosive temperament. It is interesting to see how the various doyens of the intellectual life of the Yishuv tried to come to terms with him. Klausner, as the title of his only response indicates, "A Little Less Carelessness and a Little More Humility," scores Kurzweil for his sweeping overstatements and his braggadocio, though he is not without admiration for what he notes as Kurzweil's courage and his literary sensitivity. Ernst Simon chided Kurzweil for his unrestrained impulse to polemic, the obvious glee of his sarcastic utterances, and also his posing as a kind of Karl Kraus in Hebrew garb. . . . It is forbidden to him to enjoy the blows he must so frequently inflict on the unsuccessful. It is just this part of his work that should be done in fear and trembling and not in what is almost delight.

Rabbi Binyamin went even further. Kurzweil, he says, makes the fundamental mistake of judging modern Hebrew literature by the standards of European literature, which are inapplicable to a literature less than two centuries old. Such criteria will, of necessity, bring about a superficial reading of modern Hebrew literature; it will only be known "from the outside."

Kurzweil's counter-reaction came in each case swiftly and forcefully. Klausner was rebuked as a popularizer and panderer who has distorted Jewish history, especially Biblical history, to conform to the demands of secular Jewish nationalism. His work is not criticism but dilettantism. The true critic must oppose the popular will and its taste, for his vocation is an aristocratic, lonely one. Simon was answered by similar asseverations of the total independence of the critic, for whom irony and satire are legitimate weapons in the fulfillment of his duty to art and to
As for Rabbi Binyamin, Kurzweil did not so much refute as corroborate him. Picking up on the former's distinction of reading modern Hebrew literature "from the outside" as opposed to "from the inside," Kurzweil makes out Rabbi Binyamin to have meant not that Kurzweil read superficially but that he is "an outsider" to the Hebrew literary community. Such a designation is quite acceptable to Kurzweil. From the outset of his life as a critic he held himself separate from all political parties and literary cliques. In fact, one of Kurzweil's favorite targets was the "you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours" syndrome that he saw energizing the Israeli literary scene.

It should thus be clear that almost from its beginning Kurzweil's literary career was marked by controversy, rancor, and misunderstanding. This is not to suggest that Kurzweil was taken lightly. As early as 1948 he was asked to serve as one of the judges for the Ruppin Prize. In 1954 he was himself awarded the Holon Prize in recognition of his critical labors. But we do not need to cite these facts to prove that by the mid-fifties he was taken very seriously. Even his most hard-bitten critics admitted that he had major critical powers. It was thus natural that when Bar Ilan University was founded in 1955 at Ramat Gan, Kurzweil was asked to chair both the departments of Hebrew Literature and World Literature. Agnon and the renowned Talmud scholar Shmuel Bialoblotzky were largely responsible for the invitation.

Kurzweil began teaching at Bar-Ilan in 1956. The university was in many ways a very congenial arena for his endeavors. Here Jewish culture was openly affirmed as religious in nature and the tradition as something to be lived out rather than relativized as an object of historical research. Here, a century later, was the Hirsch synthesis between Torah and secular culture in the context of an Israeli university. Moreover, being a new institution, Bar-Ilan offered no precedents that Kurzweil would have to contend with in shaping his departments. From its inception Kurzweil was, along with Bialoblotzky, probably Bar-Ilan's scholar of highest stature in the humanities and, upon the latter's death in 1960, he succeeded him as chairman of the University Senate.

He did not come to the new institution from another university, and so did not bring with him the glamour and the recognition of more established centers of research in Israel; he brought [instead] his personality, his authority, and his experience in scholarship and teaching. Other institutions and agencies in the country recognized only later on (largely because of his own efforts) his achievement and labors in the university, and they were forced to acknowledge them.
Because of his position in the university, Kurzweil was embroiled in a number of crucial battles in those first years of existence. Bar-Ilan as a religious university was frequently eyed as a sphere of influence by the Israeli religious establishments—the National Religious Party and the Chief Rabbinate. Kurzweil fought vigorously and ceaselessly against their encroachment, which apparently became an issue during the period of his chairmanship of the University Senate (1960-62). In addition Kurzweil was appointed by the President of Israel, Yitshak ben Zvi, to the country's first Commission on Higher Education. This involved him in several battles for the accreditation of Bar-Ilan. Although his own departments were recognized immediately, he took the status of the entire university personally. He construed the delays in getting official recognition of Bar-Ilan's advanced degrees (as well as those of newly-founded Tel Aviv University) as an attempt by the Hebrew University to monopolize all graduate study in Israel.66

It was as a teacher, though, that Kurzweil triumphed at Bar-Ilan. Soon after its opening the university could not handle the applications of all who sought to be accepted as Kurzweil's students. Many students from older universities came over to him and asked him to direct their theses and graduate work until he was unable time-wise and energy-wise to accommodate them all.67

By 1964 Kurzweil notes a total of three hundred students in his twin departments, an impressive number by any standards.68 There is ample testimony from those who attended his classes—it is clear that these were lectures and not discussions—that they were a singular experience. Kurzweil pronounced in an inimitable way not only on the literary work or topic of the day but upon various aspects of current events and personalities.69 The venerable professor could be cruel in cutting down wrong-headed or pretentious students, but he was also known to be the one to see if a student needed any kind of personal assistance.70

Off-campus Kurzweil was very much the bon vivant who enjoyed good brandy, good conversation and good music. He presided over a curious, semi-secret society for the restoration of the Hapsburg monarchy, and took pleasure in inducting his colleagues into it, an academic prank that became something of a tradition.71

The Bar-Ilan years witnessed the successive publication of five volumes of Kurzweil's critical essays. In 1959, a number of his major utterances of the previous twenty years were collected: the discussions of Mendele and Feierberg, the trenchant critique
of Ahad ha-Am, the comprehensive four-part treatment of the influence of Nietzsche and Lebensphilosophie on modern Hebrew literature, the analysis of the Canaanite movement, and the luminous exposition of the metaphysical and existential bases of the idyllic. All these, introduced by an expansion, written specially for this volume, of an earlier seminal essay on the nature of modern Hebrew literature, resulted in Sifrutenu hadashah: hemshekh o mahapekhah? [Our Modern Literature: Continuity or Revolt?]. Surprisingly, although this book contains some of Kurzweil's most original and important work, it was received in relative silence.  

It was followed within a year by Bialik veTshernihovski - mehkarim beshiratam [Bialik and Tshernichovski - Studies in Their Poetry]. Here all Kurzweil's previous essays on the two major poets of modern Hebrew were brought together, and the results could be seen as a vigorous application of the theory laid down in the previous volume.  

Kurzweil's next project was to collect all his work on Agnon. Part of this, we recall, had appeared in 1953 as part of Masekhet haroman, but the book had gone out of print. In 1963, Masot 'al sipurei Shai 'Agnon [Essays on the Fiction of S. Y. Agnon], was published. This was one of Kurzweil's most acknowledged achievements and was influential in getting Agnon nominated for the Nobel Prize in 1966, the process of which Kurzweil himself helped initiate.  

By now, Kurzweil was clearly established as a major figure, some would say the major figure, in Hebrew literary criticism. This was, of course, a matter of opinion, but in early 1964 it was expressed in more or less official terms: Kurzweil was awarded the Bialik Prize by the City of Tel Aviv for belles lettres, the most prestigious honor conferable upon a Hebrew writer. He who had opposed, if not ridiculed, the awarding of literary prizes in a country as small as Israel as nepotism and against the true interests of art, now was constrained to accept one himself. It is worth noting that the Bialik Prize was awarded to Kurzweil not for his work on Agnon, as we might have expected, but for the revision he had forced in the understanding of Bialik and Tshernichovski. The judges' citation at the awarding of the prize said in part:  

Barukh Kurzweil is one of the most important critics of Hebrew literature in our time. Equipped with a wide and profound knowledge of world literature and the literature of Israel, he knows how to relate the two into one entity in his critical writings. He investigates the
purpose of Jewish existence and fights for it in every fibre of his being and with every stroke of his pen.

In the fall of 1964 Bar-Ilan University matters took Kurzweil on his first and only trip to the United States. After a brief stop in Europe, Kurzweil spent several weeks in the New York City area. During this time he gave several well received lectures in Hebrew on modern Hebrew literature at New York University, Rutgers, the Hebrew P.E.N. Club, and at the Jewish Theological Seminary. At the Leo Baeck Institute he lectured in German on the relationship between Jewish identity and language in Kafka, Karl Kraus and Hermann Broch.

The fall of 1966 saw the publication of Bein hazon levein ha'absurdi [Between Vision and the Absurd]. This was a continuation of the Kurzweilian thesis and method applied to other key figures in modern Hebrew prose and poetry, but with visibly deepening enrichment of critical theory. The first hundred pages, comprising nine essays on Uri Zvi Greenberg, constitute a miniature study of that poet. This is followed by sections on the poetry of Lamdan, Shin Shalom, Shlonski, and Altermann, and the prose of Brenner, Gnessin, and Shenhar. The volume concludes with a few of Kurzweil's many essays on the fiction of the Sabra writers, notably his much-disputed treatment of Yizhar's Yemei tsiklag.

In 1969 the collected Kurzweil corpus was significantly enriched by the appearance of Bema'ava 'al 'erkei hayahadut [In the Struggle for Jewish Values]. Here we find the quintessential Kurzweil--literary criticism alongside Jewish philosophical concern and both interpenetrated with the question of values in both their general and Jewish manifestations. Some of the literary essays, especially the preface, are distinctive in that we see in them a shift of emphasis away from the practical toward theory, as Kurzweil, feeling more and more misunderstood toward the end of the sixties, strove again and again to clarify his position. In this volume, too, are the celebrated and important critiques of Gershom Scholem and the scientific treatment of Jewish studies, as well as some of the most recent statements on Jewish education and Israel-Diaspora relationships.

In actuality the latter half of the sixties were not easy or pleasant years for Kurzweil. The larger cultural and religious problems that obsessed him were never mere intellectual constructs but crises that he lived out in uncommon experiential intensity. (It is quite possible that in all his writings no noun appears more often than "crisis.") Thus, apart from any constitutional or
psychological reasons, about which we can only conjecture, the continued failure of reality to attain to his expectations predisposed Kurzweil to chronic pessimism and depression. Those who promised and believed in progress and even redemption were among his favorite targets; all man can hope for, he felt, is the least possible evil.\textsuperscript{80}

Towards the end of the sixties these tendencies became more pronounced in Kurzweil's essays. The tone of the polemic is not so much biting and sarcastic as hostile and shrill. Internal considerations for this aside, there were a number of external factors that might have been influential here. The Six Day War of 1967 and its resulting re-unification of Jerusalem precipitated what must have been a severe challenge to Kurzweil's world-view: secular Zionism and the processes of history had seemingly intruded into the realm of sacred meta-history. Kurzweil could only oppose, however vainly, what in retrospect can be seen as an ill-founded euphoria and even, in some extreme cases, pseudo-messianism.\textsuperscript{81} Furthermore, the literary and critical pendulum in Israel had begun to swing in those years away from the taste and esthetic criteria that Kurzweil and his generation represented. Whereas Hebrew literature and criticism had since their inception been tied in some way to the Jewish problematic, whether that was construed religiously or nationally, now the younger writers and critics overtly severed the links between literature and ideology and preferred to inhabit a wholly esthetic domain, the autonomy of which they affirmed. In short, it is possible that, allowing for exceptions, Kurzweil discovered that he had lost much of his audience. The rapid development of literary studies at Tel Aviv University under Benjamin Hrushovsky, where formalism and structuralism were the regnant critical approaches, controverted all that Kurzweil had written and taught. It was to him but one more manifestation of the deepening "crisis in culture" that threatened Jewish and human apocalypse. It is possible that Kurzweil founded Bar-Ilan's journal of criticism, \textit{Bikoret ufarshanut [Criticism and Interpretation]} in 1970 to counter the influence of Hrushovsky's haSifrut [Literature] which had begun publishing in 1968.\textsuperscript{82}

Barukh Kurzweil died on August 24, 1972, by his own hand. Press reports described his death as due to "a protracted illness" or "a heart attack at his office."\textsuperscript{83} The funeral was attended by a large crowd of mourners, including many of the prominent members of Israel's academic community and government.
Five volumes of Kurzweil's work have been published post-humously. haNesi'ah (The Journey), which came out in the fall of 1972, contains the three stories by Kurzweil. Though two of these had appeared previously in the press, the work as a whole came as a revelation of the interior landscape of the recently-deceased critic to readers, who were probably adjusting to the relative quiet that had settled over the Israeli critical scene, however temporarily. In 1973, a major service to the Kurzweil corpus was rendered by Friedlander, who collected virtually all Kurzweil's essays on European fiction, some of which had appeared in Masekhet haroman in 1953, and published them as Masekhet haroman vehasipur haeiropi [The Course of the Novel and European Fiction].

In 1975 Sefer Barukh Kurzweil [The Barukh Kurzewil Memorial Volume] appeared. Originally intended as a Festschrift to be presented on the occasion of Kurzweil's sixty-fifth birthday, it served instead as a posthumous testimony to him and to his wide range of interests. Bar-Ilan University has also initiated the Kurzweil Archives (Yad Kurzweil) which will re-publish several of the hitherto uncollected essays as well as prepare a complete bibliography. In 1976 the first of these appeared. Entitled leNokhah hamevukhah haruhanit shel dorenu [Facing the Spiritual Perplexity of Our Generation], this volume collects Kurzweil's major essays on Jewish thought and figures.

Conclusion

Kurzweil's life is in several ways paradigmatic of the European Jewish experience of the twentieth century. Geographically and culturally, it traverses the course followed by those who were forced to uproot themselves from the European context of several centuries of continuous, coherent, if not always secure, Jewish life and re-locate themselves on a different soil, where life, though no less precarious, had already begun to develop in a way very different from the abandoned and decimated Diaspora. Experientially, Kurzweil saw himself and, we can now see, must be seen by us not so much as an emigrant as a survivor. Intellectually his life is an expression of the larger struggle to inter-relate Jewish and Western cultures or, more accurately, to come to terms with the purpose and meaning of Jewish existence amid a society of secularized consciousness that challenged, when it did not refute, the transcendent basis of the ancestral religious tradition and its norms.
Gershom Schocken is, thus, perceptively correct, I believe, in accentuating Kurzweil as an "outsider" to the society he lived in for almost exactly half his life. For, unlike most of his counterparts, Kurzweil did not accede with his whole being to the new Jewish reality that was taking shape in Israel. To be sure, he accepted it in principle, but I do not think he ever made his peace with its visible manifestations. Unlike all other major critics, Kurzweil "did not grow up inside the movement of our national revival . . . ." This perception of him as an "outsider" thus coincides with his own perception of himself. Kurzweil's temperament, some of the features of which are implicit from the foregoing, did not ameliorate this view. I have no intention of painting an in-depth psychological portrait of Kurzweil. Suffice it to say that those who knew him testify to an unusual capacity for impatience and a rather well-developed ego; those who knew him very well speak of paranoid inclinations in certain situations.

One trait, however, comes through as clearly on the printed pages as, apparently it did in real life, and it is this that is of relevance here: Kurzweil's visceral inability to tolerate even for a second anything that smacked to him of inauthenticity and pretentiousness. "Refusal to acknowledge limitations engenders phoniness." This was the principle which animates every line Kurzweil ever wrote. His ruthless application of it over the years made him many enemies and did not endear him to those, however benevolently disposed, who were less consistent and sensitive than he.

In this perspective we may say that Kurzweil was not an "outsider" to the society in which he lived as a critic but in truth an "outsider" to all the imperfect reality of this world. He beheld this imperfection with more pain than most men, a pain that was exacerbated by his fear that for man the worst was yet to come. The fruit of that pain and that fear is the literary criticism that I shall now proceed to examine.