

Prosaic Conditions

*Heinrich Heine and the Spaces
of Zionist Literature*



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The city of Berlin houses two memorials within short walking distance from one another that bear the name of Heinrich Heine, two landmarks of the cultural politics of public memory in postwar Germany and its transformations over time. The first is designated explicitly as a Heine memorial. Erected in 1966 in East Berlin by the German Democratic Republic, the monument at the Volkspark am Weinberg on Veteranenstrasse shows the poet seated and gesturing with his hand, as if caught in the middle of an utterance. It thus stages Heine in a frozen performance, making the spoken word into the ultimate point of reference of his work. The second brings Heine's name and his words into the circle of remembrance of the events of the Holocaust. This is Micha Ullman's 1995 memorial at Bebelplatz, the infamous location of the Nazi book burning of May 1933. Ullman's subterranean library at the square is a monument hidden from public view, uncannily revealing itself only to those who walk right by it and confronting them with a library emptied of books. The monument consists of a bare white room that is located under the ground of the central city square and is visible through a rectangular glass surface that often reflects the clouded sky above or the nighttime city lights. It bears an inscription taken from Heine: "Das war ein Vorspiel nur, dort / wo man Bücher verbrennt, / verbrennt man am Ende auch Menschen." "That was only a prelude / Where they burn books / In the end, they will burn people too." Situated as they are, Heine's words ring with premonition; he seems to speak for a Jewish collective, expressing a fear that would, in the twentieth century, turn out to be founded. In their original context, however, the words are spoken not by a Jew, but by a Muslim: this is the comment made by Hassan to Almansor, the Muslim refugee of the Spanish Inquisition who gives his name to Heine's early play, when he tells him of public burnings of the Koran (SS 1:284-85).

Does this render Ullman's use of the quote ironic, or even irreverent? On the contrary, it makes his monument into not only one of the most captivating of existing Holocaust memorials, but also the most fitting and interesting Heine monument to have been erected to date. Rather than staging a performance, the monument produces an empty space from which both books and bodies are absent. And rather than invoking Heine

PREFACE

the poet as a speaking performer, this monument performs the operation of severing a piece of his language from its context, showing that the location in itself has a power to transform the text. In this, Ullman echoes an important element in Heine's writings: the insight and insistence that words are always spoken from a particular position in time, as well as in space. It also reflects Heine's related fascination with the consequences of severing the written word from such a context. Ullman uses the medium of the memorial to create a context, a space that invites those who pass through it to perform an act of commemoration by rereading Heine's words and rearticulating their meaning.

In these two Berlin monuments, I see refracted two schematically opposed ways of thinking about literature. In the first, the text is seen as anchored in a space organized by the human body, whose gestures and performances allow texts to produce meaning. This phenomenological view of literary language traces the text—and the text in this case is more likely to be a poem—back to an enunciation, a spoken word in a world space. In the second, the language of literature is seen as undoing or challenging this phenomenological, embodied order. Here, literary language—which in this case is prototypically prose—functions in the absence of a performing body and constructs its own spaces against the space of performance.

Here a clarification is necessary, for this may sound like a retrograde reinstitution of binaries rooted in the metaphysics of presence that decades of philosophy, deconstruction, and literary theory have labored to dismantle. In that metaphysical schema, poetry is said to align itself with presence and truth, whereas prose figures as the ultimate form of writing, mediation, absence, and therefore falsity. But reinstituting such binaries is not my intention. Instead, the formulation of this binary opposition should be seen as an ideal-typical schema in relation to which phenomena—texts, images, reception histories, archived notebooks, none of which fulfills the ideal type completely—can be measured and understood. Thus, in the classical Weberian sense, these ideal types are never instantiated in pure form, but rather versions of them circulate in culture and can be reconstructed by an observer as a way of understanding the scale that lies between the binaries.

Another way of thinking about this is that the two monuments exemplify two pragmatic frames of reference: the first assumes a space of copresence, within which a gesturing body, spoken words, and context operate together to create meaning; the second, in contrast, assumes that neither context nor gesture are available and that language must compensate for this absence in order to speak clearly. Presence and absence are thus not mapped onto a binary distinction between mediation and

immediacy, but rather seen as different pragmatic conditions.

Prosaic Conditions argues the operation of “prose” as a past two centuries, using the literature of Jewish modernism to describe the argument of a condensed history of the colonial preamble to the argument of an ideal type that is “prose” in G. W. F. Hegel to the context of Hoffmann position themselves.

The composite figure of prose is a form of historical consciousness, a difference between the present and the past, in a statement from the prosaic nature of the context. Such self-positioning of the text in an essential way, from the political implications; they are arts, an insight embodied by “the conditions of our present” (VA 1:25).

But how did “prose” and the valis, Hegel, and others, call the eighteenth century, the history and the stable hierarchy, a poetics rooted in oral culture, of prose and the rise of the of as natural, the shape taken a conscious effort to create to confront observers as so only underscores the question did a formal category or a cosmology and the power to perception of the nature of cosmological statement by conditions such as Friedrich Schlegel’s “sobriety”³ or the prognosis name an example that is central to epitomize the serious sense

immediacy, but rather seen as attributes of different media that operate in

different pragmatic conditions.

Prosaic Conditions argues that this schema is helpful in thinking about the operation of "prose" and "the prosaic" as figures of thought in the past two centuries, using this figure in particular in order to reread the literature of Jewish modernity and the Zionist revolution. Before I briefly describe the argument of the book, I will use this preface to present a condensed history of the concepts of prose and the prosaic; this is a crucial preamble to the argument, because it allows us to start mapping the ideal type that is "prose" in order to gauge how authors ranging from G. W. F. Hegel to the contemporary Israeli novelists Haim Beer and Yoel Hoffmann position themselves in relation to it.

The composite figure of prose and the prosaic is closely associated with a form of historical consciousness that concerns itself primarily with the difference between the present and the past, as strikingly expressed, for example, in a statement from Novalis's *Allgemeine Brouillon*: "Cosmology: Such self-positioning of the present beyond a threshold that separates it, in an essential way, from the past has a broad range of philosophical and political implications; they are particularly drastic for aesthetics and the arts, an insight embodied by Hegel's famous and controversial claim that "the conditions of our present time are not favorable to art" (ALA 1:10; VA 1:25).

But how did "prose" and "the prosaic" become the terms that, for Novalis, Hegel, and others, captured the essence of this transformation? By the eighteenth century, the Aristotelian distinction between poetry and a poetics rooted in oral culture were challenged by a flow of informative prose and the rise of the novel.² While prose came to be thought of as natural, the shape taken by language by default in the absence of a conscious effort to create meter and rhyme, it concurrently continued to confront observers as something new, more modern than poetry. This only underscores the question: How, at the end of the eighteenth century, did a formal category or a literary mode, of all things, gain in the status of cosmology and the power to capture fundamental transformations in the perception of the nature of the world? What does contemporary observational cosmological statement by Novalis, as in other contemporary observations such as Friedrich Schlegel's diagnosis of an "epidemic of prosaic soberness"³ or the prognostic gestures of Hegel and Heinrich Heine, to name an example that is central to my investigation? How did prose come to epitomize the serious sentiments of the serious nineteenth century?

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Prose, etymologically related to a movement forward, hardly seems destined to become attached to this uneasy nostalgia, this sense that things have changed irrevocably and that the consequences for art and literature are serious. *Prosa* or *prorsa* is derived from the Latin verb *provertere*, “to turn forward,” and the adjective *prorsus*, “straightforward, straight, direct.” This dimension of prose is often present to the minds of those who theorize it. In their essay “The Prose of the World” Michal Peled Ginsburg and Lorri G. Nandrea focus on the tension between “the linear, forward movement of prose,” its progressive nature, the fact that its “sense depends on what lies ahead (the end of a sentence; the next event in the plot of a novel)”⁵ and its various modes of looking and linking back.⁶ This allows them to isolate a “particular consciousness of time or historical consciousness” embodied by prose in which the irrevocability of the past, the fact that “there is no return,” seems to be the fuel of a movement forward: “time moves only forward, it is not cyclical, and we always move toward the new and the unknown.”⁷ Indeed, the literary term for straightforward discourse also shares a root with a Roman goddess—*Proverta* or *Prorsa*—who was called on by women in labor to ensure a straightforward, headfirst birth. Thus, prose guards the advent of the entirely new into the world.⁸

Yet concurrently, prose has been thought of as a particularly fitting medium to speak of the *past*, its independence from any formal constraints lending it the credibility to narrate history.⁹ Indeed, the same goddess who turns the fetus forward on its way into the world has been associated with a mastery over the past; as the *Encyclopedie d'Yverdon*, published by Fortune Barthelemy de Felice in 1774, defines it:

PRORSA or PROSA, (N), Myth. Goddess who is invoked by women to procure successful labor. One also invokes her to repair those born ill, since she has power over the past.¹⁰

The thrust of the turn forward, in other words, is balanced by the call of the past, be it as something that is mastered, something that is truthfully represented by prose discourse, or as something that is irrevocably lost with the rise of prose and a prosaic consciousness, as in the example from Novalis's *Brouillon*. In this way, *Prosa* bears a relation to another Roman deity, the double-faced Janus who stands at the threshold and looks both ways, to the future and to the past.

But Barthelemy's reference to the mythological roots of prose is an exception to the rule. The interest of the Enlightenment and its nineteenth-century successors in prose focuses mostly on its status as a latecomer to

the scene of language. Coelestine, in the thirteenth century, Buoncompagni's primacy of prose by situating it in a “ruined language: “All writings are a poor suffrage, and this is the view. Vico, Klopstock, and others account of the primacy of prose by the master of philosophy who was a bourgeois gentleman, that is, a hierarchyless equation—“the thing that is not verse is prose.” In a 1670 comedy a lesson that was given in the belatedness of the past, the ascription with which Jourdain's communication with his wife is carried out in prose. She, in the text ironically stages a performance recognizing it constitutes a past that who has gained this knowledge is a derivative of the latter-day, disenfranchised, the treatises of the eighteenth century.

Twentieth-century scholarship has created a space between different senses of the word between the problems that arise from the use of prose as a new technique of discursive program and a literary program. Literary scholars after World War II, the local philosopher's easy dismissal of the Enlightenment scholar's idea that prose is something taken on as a project.¹⁶

And yet, Buoncompagni's theory did have its echoes. For the eminent theorizer of prose in the nineteenth century, with the melancholy of a more positively charged genre or heteroglossia. If for Balzac, the maturation of prose or fall, its catching up with the unvoicedness in prose is precisely a social phenomenon that

the scene of language. Centuries before the Enlightenment, in the early thirteenth century, Buoncompagno da Siena was compelled to assert the primacy of prose by situating it both temporally and logically before metered language: "All writing originates from prose. For rhythm and meter are a poor suffrage, and they originate in prose."¹¹ He was to remain alone in this view. Vico, Klopstock, Herder, Condillac, and Schlegel all proposed accounts of the primacy of poetry and the belatedness of prose.¹² Even the master of philosophy who famously teaches Monsieur Jourdain, Molière's bourgeois gentleman, that prose and poetry exist in a seemingly timeless, hierarchiless equation—"everything that is not prose is verse and everything that is not verse is prose"¹³—ultimately teaches the viewers of the 1670 comedy a lesson that anticipates the interest of the eighteenth century in the belatedness of prose. That lesson lies in the ridiculous enthusiasm with which Jourdain embraces the realization that the entire realm of his communications with others, even the orders he issues to his servants, is carried out in prose. Short of endorsing the philosopher's neat formula, the text ironically stages prose as what needs to be recognized; and recognizing it constitutes a parodic moment of self-knowledge. The Jourdain who has gained this knowledge and made this realization is a representative of the latter-day, disenchanting, prose-speaking humans who populate the treatises of the eighteenth century.

Twentieth-century scholarship of prose moved productively in the space between different senses of this belief in the newness of prose: between the problems that authors encounter when they attempt to use prose as a new technique or tool and the emergence of prose as both a discursive program and a viable object of academic study.¹⁴ Like Molière, literary scholars after World War II were mostly skeptical of the critical philosopher's easy distinction between prose and poetry.¹⁵ And like the Enlightenment scholars listed above, they persistently returned to the idea that prose is something that emerges, that is invented, discovered, or taken on as a project.¹⁶

And yet, Buoncompagno's view that prose is in some sense prior to poetry did have its echoes. For Mikhail Bakhtin, arguably the most prominent theorizer of prose in the twentieth century, prose is not associated with the melancholy of a loss or disenchantment, but rather with a far more positively charged gathering of multiple social voices in dialogue or heteroglossia. If for Bakhtin prose is belated, it is because it seems to represent the maturation of literary language, rather than its deterioration or fall, its catching up with the essence of language, since "this double-voicedness in prose is prefigured in language itself . . . in language as a social phenomenon that is becoming in-history, socially stratified and

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weathered in this process of becoming."¹⁷ For him, then, prose is more natural or closer to the properties of language as such, whereas poetry is derived from a process akin to the estrangement that thinkers from Vico to Herder recognized as the source of prose.¹⁸

Bakhtin's polemical favoring of prose over poetry is framed as a response to both the Romantic view that the world can and must be re-enchanted through poetry and the Russian Formalist privileging of poetry and poetics as the key to thinking about literary language. Recalling Novalis's statement, Bakhtin's position is sometimes translated into the language of cosmology, for example when he describes prose as a "Galilean linguistic consciousness."¹⁹ For Bakhtin, "the language of the poetic genre is a unitary and singular Ptolemaic world outside of which nothing else exists and nothing else is needed. The concept of many worlds of language, all equal in their ability to conceptualize and to be expressive, is organically denied to poetic style."²⁰ This is certainly a different galaxy from Novalis's prognosis of the "prosaic nature" of his contemporary universe, yet the shared cosmological metaphor is thought-provoking and only underscores the persistence of a number of questions regarding the usage of the terms "prose" and "prosaic." First, what is the relation between the two terms? What is so prosaic about prose? And why did this literary mode come to signify a world-historical rift that results in loss and disenchantment? Furthermore, how did this perception change over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? What is its afterlife in the present? Finally, what are the implications of this association for our reading of prose texts?

Prosaic Conditions is an effort to supply some answers to these broad, but curiously rarely discussed, questions. In what follows, I treat prose as a signifying practice that emerges in competition with other existing practices, specifically, the practice of performance. What marks prose as an emergent signifying practice is the power to abstract from the particular time and place of a performance, to produce a discourse that replaces copresence through a range of rhetorical strategies that supply alternative scaffolding for discourse.²¹ However, this does not imply a binary picture, cut after the model of Monsieur Jourdain's philosophy teacher, in which everything that is not prose is performance and vice versa. Rather, prose and performance represent the two ends of a spectrum along which utterances, texts, and other objects can be located, based on the degree to which they seem to assume a space shared with a listener or conversely to assume that no such shared context is available and things must be explained and explicated. Moreover, as they are reproduced in new media, translated into new languages or simply consumed in new contexts,

objects might change their the poles of performance or

I use the term "performance" to describe language that occurs in a context. This does not draw on performance studies, but rather on linguistics in contrast with abstract ability to form an utterance in an occurrence of speech. The contrast with ability, but rather with context, occurs within a context of communication courses (prototypically prose). This brings me close to the notion of performance as defined by figures such as Bakhtin. The contribution of context to the notion that pragmatic conditions within which an utterance occurs is by the utterance or text.

The spectrum between performance and the pragmatic conditions of performance and the formal ramifications of speech is highly marked by context. For example, it can vary across persons, places or times (such as in a classroom). Clarification. Prose likewise is a practice in which it is produced and consumed. The separation between speaker and listener, a presumption, that defines the practice of performance, prose must construct itself, allowing them to open up the discourse rather than performance. This becomes particularly clear when the pragmatic conditions are considered. Another type of limit that marks the spectrum is the orders crossed when texts appear in new contexts they were originally circulated. At times, other places, and for other purposes. New languages or when the practice of musical composition of a performance.

But conceptualizing performance in these terms has not only formal

objects might change their location on the spectrum, traveling closer to the poles of performance or prose.

I use the term "performance" to signify actuated, spoken use of language that occurs in a context in which both speaker and hearer are present. This does not draw on the vibrant and highly theorized field of performance studies, but rather is related to the term as it is used in Chomskian linguistics in contrast with "competence," to distinguish between the abstract ability to form an utterance and the actualization of this ability in an occurrence of speech. However, my interest is not in performance in contrast with ability, but rather in performance as a type of utterance that occurs within a context of copresence in contrast with non-performed discourses (prototypically prose) that operate without such contextual scaffolding. This brings me closer to a different field of linguistics, Pragmatics, as defined by figures such as Paul Grice, a field that is devoted to the study of the contribution of context to meaning. Of particular importance here is the notion that pragmatic conditions, constraints related to the context within which an utterance or a text is produced, influence the form taken by the utterance or text.

The spectrum between prose and performance can be mapped according to the pragmatic conditions in which different texts or utterances operate and the formal ramifications that these conditions have. Performed speech is highly marked by the shared space of copresence that forms its context. For example, it can use deictics, expressions that point at persons, places or times (such as "you," "here," or "today") with no further clarification. Prose likewise is formed by the pragmatic conditions under which it is produced and consumed, except in this case it is precisely the separation between speaker and addressee, between production and consumption, that defines these conditions. In other words, unlike performance, prose must construct the context for deictic expressions within itself, allowing them to operate anaphorically, that is to point back within the discourse rather than pointing at an object present in a given context. This becomes particularly clear in limit cases, for example cases in which the pragmatic conditions are flouted, creating challenges for the reader. Another type of limit that makes pragmatic conditions visible are the borders crossed when texts appear in a new context, beyond the one in which they were originally circulated; this happens when texts are read in later times, other places, and for new purposes, when they are translated into new languages or when they are otherwise remediating (for example in the musical composition of a poem or the cinematic adaptation of a novel). But conceptualizing prose, and literary texts more broadly, in pragmatic terms has not only formal but also historical and political ramifications

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as it directs our attention also to the pragmatic impact of literary texts. This too is borne out in multifarious ways: texts can be thought of as having agency through their influence on other texts, but also through their interference in the formation of national movements and the expansion of political imaginations. An overwhelmingly clear example of such an impact of the literary sphere on politics and society is the case of literary Zionism in its two main languages, Hebrew and German.

As Benjamin Harshav famously describes, Israeli statehood is the end result of “an ideology that created a language that forged a society that became a State,” a causal chain that would have been interrupted if it were not for the force of literature that carried the language through.²² But this leaves the question open what it would mean for texts to be agents in such world-historical transformations and it paints too monolingual a picture of the literary history of Zionism. By focusing on the pragmatic conditions that are implied by key Zionist texts in German and in Hebrew—the way that they write about their own relation to the world and ability to operate in the world—this book addresses the fundamental assumptions that have formed the scholarly discourse on the agency of literary texts in the transformation of Jewish life in modernity and the remaking of its spaces.

Building on the model that presents prose as the medium diametrically opposed to performance, I focus on the changing pragmatic conditions of Jewish writing in the modern period. This entails an interest in the different contexts, the different places in which the texts I read situate themselves and in which they are read. Accordingly, my description of the transformation of Jewish cultures and literatures in Europe since the early nineteenth century centers on the transformation of space, both as the product of social construction and as a poetic category that forms the imagination and its products.²³ Positioned at the heart of this transformation, Zionism is a constellation of grand spatial ambitions, aiming to relocate masses of Jews to Palestine and fundamentally transform its topography. As a national movement, Zionism devoted an exceptional amount of energy to engineering and architecture, and the ideal space of the Jewish state was seen as the vehicle for utopia, be it in the socialist vein of labor settlement or in the messianic vein of religious nationalism.²⁴ The relatively recent construction of a massive wall of separation between Jews and Palestinians within the occupied territories on the west bank of the Jordan River is perhaps the most ambitious—and the most destructive—reorganization of space taken on by Zionism to this day. Among its myriad consequences, all of this energy devoted to the transformation of space has serious implications for the literary sphere. As Jewish spaces are

transformed, so are the pragmatic conditions in which texts operate and the result is a literature that is both articulating and pointing out its own limits.

In the chapters that follow, I explore various kinds of transformations and the conditions in which texts operate and the operations necessary. Think of the transition from poetry into prose, to take a particular example from a recent book. For every gesture, many conditions are at the same time, once these words are set in motion, the dance has been irrevocably begun. I explore the work of G. W. F. Hegel, Heinrich Heine, and Sholem Aleichem Bialik—all explore the position of the poet in the world and describe the remedial operations necessary in producing prose. As I read these texts, I am struck by the reticence and practitioners of the craft who have sought insight into the matter.

In the first chapter, I read Heine's *Die Kunst des Prosaikers*, a text that is automatic of and influential on the history of the novel. I show that a key concern of the text is the role of the artist in the modern world; in response, Heine reimagines prose as a worldly and practical art that focuses in particular on the conditions of the “world of prose” in one of the most important pictures and analyzes the role of the artist in the modern world. Heinrich Heine, the poet and author who drew the most radical conclusions from the current prosaic conditions, negotiates between emancipating himself from these conditions as they delineate the boundaries of the nation ranges from his quasi-technical to his political pronouns—their ability to function in the world, and the difference between that ability—to his provocative and often provocative writing a brief discussion of the conditions of the world. Heine's epoch-making *Buch der Bilder* is a text on art and the theater and prose as an artistic medium that operates in the conditions and concerns. With this text, Heine offers “pictures”—a series of experiments in the art of prose as strikingly and provocative

transformed, so are the pragmatic conditions within which Jewish texts operate and the result is a literary tradition constantly obsessed with articulating and pointing out its contextual conditions.

In the chapters that follow, I track a series of mediations: different kinds of transformations and translations that alter the pragmatic conditions in which texts operate. This makes different kinds of clarifying operations necessary. Think of a dance performance that is transposed into prose, to take a particularly clear example that will arise in the book. For every gesture, many words of description are required; at the same time, once these words have been produced, the significance of the dance has been irrevocably altered. The authors I discuss in detail—G. W. F. Hegel, Heinrich Heine, Theodor Herzl, and Haim Nahman Bialik—all explore the position of prose in a field of competing media and describe the mediating transformations and translations involved in producing prose. As I read them, they are at the same time both theoreticians and practitioners of prose, a duality that crucially forms their insight into the matter.

In the first chapter, I read Hegel's lectures on art as a text both symptomatic of and influential on the discourse that forms the figure "prose." I show that a key concern of the lectures was the dissolution of the space of art in the modern world; in response to this dissolution, Hegel figuratively fashions prose as a worldly and world-producing medium. My reading focuses in particular on the switch between "prose of the world" and "world of prose" in one of the most widely read passages from the lectures and analyzes the role of the monarch—the "king of prose"—in that world. Heinrich Heine, the second chapter argues, was the contemporary author who drew the most radical conclusions from Hegel's assessment of the current prosaic conditions. As a Jewish author writing in a Germany negotiating between emancipation and nationalism, he worked to expose these conditions as they delimited what he was able to say. This negotiation ranges from his quasi-technical preoccupation with the operation of pronouns—their ability to function as deictics and extend a pointing hand into the world, and the difference that medium and mode make in terms of that ability—to his provocations and challenges to censorship. Following a brief discussion of the complex pragmatic operations carried out in Heine's epoch-making *Buch der Lieder*, I focus primarily on his writing on art and the theater and present Heine as a prolific theoretician of prose as an artistic medium that operates with a unique set of pragmatic conditions and concerns. With this in mind, I read his *Reisebilder*, his "travel pictures"—a series of experimental prose texts that are traditionally read as strikingly and provocatively unconcerned with the landscapes through

pragmatic impact of literary texts. Days: texts can be thought of as having other texts, but also through their formal movements and the expansion of an example of such an emblemically clear example of society and society is the case of literary Hebrew and German.

scribes, Israeli statehood is the end language that forged a society that would have been interrupted if it at carried the language through.²² at it would mean for texts to be formations and it paints too monology of Zionism. By focusing on the out their own relation to the world is book addresses the fundamental sularly discourse on the agency of Jewish life in modernity and the

which the author travels—as a treatise on the relation between prose and space and the world-making potential of prose.

Heine had an immense impact on Jewish culture at the turn of the twentieth century, and as I show, his Jewish readers were often well aware of the generic and pragmatic negotiations that he carried out as a theorizer of prose. The focal point of my description of the history of Heine reception is its intensely intermedial character: Heine is by far the most widely composed of German poets, a segment of his *Nordsee* was the first poem to be broadcast on the German National Radio in the 1920s, his poetry was the subject of visual rebuses, and the decade-long debates concerning his monument became a platform for a vehement discussion of the relation of poetry and literature to visual arts and to public spaces. I make questions of medium, performance, and space the center of my reading of the Jewish and Zionist reception of Heine, a history that I flesh out by laying out the history of Heine translation into Hebrew and by analyzing in detail the relation of two Zionist authors—Theodor Herzl and Haim Nahman Bialik—to Heine. The common thread that runs through this varied and complex reception history is the preoccupation with the balance—or rather, the problematic imbalance—between performance and prose. As I show, the parameters of this history of reception are set, not surprisingly, in Heine's own work, in which prose is fashioned as the modern medium that explodes and reconstructs spaces. Heine is thus a mediator in multiple senses: between romanticism and modernism, between German and Hebrew, and between multiple modes and media.

The second part of the book moves into the twentieth century, presenting Herzl and Bialik as theoreticians and practitioners of prose who build on and revolutionize the positions of their predecessors. Herzl's utopian novel, *Altneuland* (1902), is the most famous text to imagine forth the Jewish state and describe its space before the fact. Based on archival research and a reading of his mostly ignored works for the newspaper and the theater, I show that Herzl prepared for the writing of the novel by reflecting extensively on the key concerns that emerged from my reading of Hegel and Heine: the historic emergence of prose, the relation of prose to performance and other artistic media, and the pragmatic conditions under which prose is written and read. The implications for the novel as well as its reception by contemporary and later Zionist readers are spelled out in the second part of the chapter. The following chapter turns to the opposing camp within the Jewish national movement—cultural Zionism—to show that Bialik, one of its major literary practitioners, followed a similar path of exploration of prose in relation to other media in order to reflect on the relation of literature to the national space. The chapter analyzes

Bialik's literary responses to demanded multiple forms of way to his monumental narrative the crucial form of translation media of the spoken testimony Bialik attempted to produce the performative poetic idiom reading, I offer an interpretive theoretical writing and show both ideological and philosophical

In the final chapter, I show book have a remarkable status Israeli literature, culture, and history of Heine's Hebrew translation it is an efficient barometer and its relation to questioning describe the curious afterlife debates concerning the name informed the work of Hebrew Heine. The chapter, and the of Israel's most fascinating Haim Beer. As I show, both prose in the context of post-structural of reference in this experiment

Prosaic Conditions aims making pursued by Zionist of literary nation-building movement sent a genealogy of contemporary familiar teleological narrative autochthonous language. In guage and its literature are different languages, spaces, and

Bialik's literary responses to the Kishinev pogrom of 1903, a process that demanded multiple forms of mediation, translation, and revision on the way to his monumental narrative poem "City of Slaughter." I show that the crucial form of translation in this process is between the different media of the spoken testimony of the victims, the historical prose that Bialik attempted to produce in his unfinished report on the events, and the performative poetic idiom of "City of Slaughter." Complementing this reading, I offer an interpretation of Bialik's use of the term prose in his theoretical writing and show that the relation of prose to space carried both ideological and philosophical ramifications for this important poet. In the final chapter, I show that the phenomena that I pinpoint in the book have a remarkable staying power and relevancy to contemporary Israeli literature, culture, and politics. The final chapter completes the history of Heine's Hebrew translations in the twentieth century to show that it is an efficient barometer of the transformation of Hebrew literature and its relation to questions of prose, media, pragmatics, and space. I describe the curious afterlife of the Heine monument debates in the Israeli debates concerning the naming of a street for Heine, discussions that have informed the work of Hebrew translators and authors who engage with Heine. The chapter, and the book, ends with a reading of novels by two of Israel's most fascinating contemporary authors: Yoel Hoffmann and Haim Beer. As I show, both of them experiment with the pragmatics of prose in the context of post-state Zionism and use Heine as a crucial point of reference in this experiment.

Prosaic Conditions aims to throw new light on the literary world-making pursued by Zionist authors, and by extension on the operation of literary nation-building more broadly. This approach allows me to present a genealogy of contemporary Israeli literature that departs from the familiar teleological narrative of national fulfillment and the return to an autochthonous language. Instead, I show that the modern Hebrew language and its literature are formed by a series of translations, between different languages, spaces, modes, media, and literary genres.

the relation between prose and prose. Jewish culture at the turn of the readers were often well aware that he carried out as a theodescription of the history of Heine's character: Heine is by far the most prominent of his *Nordsee* was the National Radio in the 1920s, s, and the decade-long debates form for a vehement discussion of Heine, a history that I flesh translation into Hebrew and by Zionist authors—Theodor Herzl the common thread that runs a history is the preoccupation with imbalance—between performers of this history of reception work, in which prose is fashioned reconstructs spaces. Heine is romanticism and modernism, multiple modes and media. the twentieth century, present-actioners of prose who build predecessors. Herzl's utopianous text to imagine forth the fact. Based on archival records for the newspaper and the writing of the novel by re-emerged from my reading of prose, the relation of prose to pragmatic conditions under actions for the novel as well as inist readers are spelled out in g chapter turns to the opposing chapter—cultural Zionism—to actioners, followed a similar other media in order to reflect space. The chapter analyzes