

## Judaisation in the First Hebrew Translation of *Romeo and Juliet*

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### Abstract

*Ram and Jael* (Vienna, 1878), the earliest Hebrew version of *Romeo and Juliet*, is a highly domesticating translation containing numerous Jewish cultural elements. This is attributable to the fact that the translation formed part of an ideologically loaded Jewish Enlightenment initiative to establish a European-style literary canon in Hebrew and reflecting Jewish values at a time when the language was still almost solely a written medium prior to its late nineteenth-century revernacularisation in Palestine. This contribution discusses the unusual sociolinguistic background to *Ram and Jael* and analyses its main Judaising features, which include the treatment of non-Jewish names; holidays and rituals; establishments; oaths and expressions; mythological figures; and foreign languages, as well as the insertion of biblical verses.

### Keywords

Hebrew, Jewish, Enlightenment, Haskalah, domesticating, translation, Judaism, biblical, Maskilic, Eastern Europe

### 1. Introduction

*Ram and Jael*, the first Hebrew version of *Romeo and Juliet*, offers a rare perspective on the European reception of Shakespeare. The translation, which was published in Vienna in 1878, was only the second complete Shakespeare play to appear in Hebrew, following a version of

*Othello* that had appeared four years previously. Both plays were translated directly from the English by Isaac Salkinson, a Lithuanian Jew living in Vienna.

Salkinson's translations are the product of nearly three quarters of a century of interest in Shakespeare among Hebrew authors in Central and Eastern Europe, dating back to the early nineteenth century with the growth of the Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment). This was a movement which originated in Berlin in the late eighteenth century and over the course of the following decades gained ground among Central and subsequently Eastern European Jews, enduring until the 1880s when it was succeeded by early political Zionism. The Maskilim (adherents of the Haskalah) advocated greater integration of Jews into their European host societies, including the study of subjects not traditionally taught in the Jewish educational system such as mathematics, science, grammar, and European languages. A key component of the Haskalah was the drive to create a European-style literary canon, which had not previously existed as such among Central and Eastern European Jews (see Pelli 2006 for discussion). The Maskilim selected Hebrew for this literary project due to its central and esteemed position in Jewish society, despite the fact that the language was almost exclusively a written vehicle at the time (having ceased to function as a vernacular in approximately 200 CE, it re-emerged in this capacity only after the end of the Haskalah in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Palestine; see Sáenz-Badillos 1993 for details). The early years of the Haskalah witnessed the emergence of the first Hebrew literary journals containing essays and poetry, and as the movement spread into czarist Russia in the latter half of the nineteenth century these were supplemented by a flourishing body of drama, novels, and short stories (see Patterson 1964 and 1988). In the absence of a previously established Jewish literary tradition of this nature, Maskilim turned to European-language writings, chiefly German and later Russian, as models for the composition of both original and translated Hebrew literature (Toury 2012:133). The goal of this enterprise was a heavily ideological one, as the Maskilim sought to create a new

body of didactic literature that would serve as a vehicle for the modernisation of the Jews of Central and Eastern Europe and the promulgation of European culture among them.

It is unsurprising that Shakespeare played a key role in this venture, given his central position in the European literary canon. Shakespeare's particular prominence in Germany is especially relevant in the context of Maskilic Hebrew literature, both because most Maskilim accessed European literature through German-language sources (with few of them trained in other European languages), and because of the great admiration for Shakespeare expressed by Lessing, Schiller, and Goethe, whom Maskilic authors held in extremely high esteem. As such, Shakespeare was regarded as a model for emulation in original Maskilic writing as well as for translation into Hebrew (Almagor 1975:721-726). For most of the nineteenth century attempts to render Shakespeare into Hebrew consisted solely of individual speeches and other fragments rather than entire plays, beginning with a translation of fifteen lines of *Henry IV Part Two* that appeared in a volume on biblical poetics (Levisohn 1816). These fragmentary translations were conducted via German Shakespeare versions rather than directly from the English source texts. See Almagor (1975) and Golomb (1998) for overviews of these early Hebrew Shakespeare translations.

Salkinson's status as the first translator of a complete Shakespeare play (and directly from the English rather than via a German intermediary) is rooted in his unusual biography. Born 1820 and raised in a region of Lithuania corresponding to present-day Belarus, he received a traditional Jewish education before becoming interested in the Haskalah and studying Hebrew grammar as well as German language and literature (Cohen 1942:11-18). In 1849 he embarked upon a journey to New York in order to enter rabbinical seminary, but during a stop *en route* in London he encountered members of the London Missionary Society and converted to Christianity (Dunlop 1894:373). Remaining in Britain, he trained as a Presbyterian minister in Edinburgh and Glasgow and was ordained in 1859 (Dunlop 1894:373). Following

this he was hired by the British Society for the Propagation of the Gospel among the Jews, who commissioned him to translate the New Testament into Hebrew and posted him to Vienna in order to convert the local Jews to Christianity. During this period Salkinson made his first attempt at literary translation into Hebrew, producing a complete version of Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

At the time Vienna played a central role in Maskilic literary culture as the home of a number of important writers and journals including the influential *HaShahar*, the chief forum for late nineteenth-century Hebrew literature (Holtzman 2010). Peretz Smolenskin, the Russian-born editor of *HaShahar* and an extremely prominent author of Maskilic prose fiction, had long desired to see Shakespeare's works translated into Hebrew, and recognised in Salkinson - a fluent English speaker and translator - a rare chance for the realisation of this dream. With Smolenskin's support, Salkinson translated *Othello* into Hebrew, and his *Ithiel, the Moor of Venice* was published in 1874. Salkinson's translation, like the earlier fragmentary Hebrew Shakespeare renditions, was conceived of as a purely literary project intended for private reading rather than for performance, as Hebrew was not a spoken language at this time and the first attempts at Hebrew theatre did not emerge until several decades later (see Zer-Zion 2010). It was aimed primarily at the Jews of czarist Russia, where the bulk of Maskilic Hebrew readers resided at the time.

Salkinson's *Ithiel* was very well received by Maskilic Hebrew literary circles, but the critical praise published in the leading Maskilic periodical *HaMaggid* was rescinded following the discovery of the translator's status as a Christian convert and missionary (Cohen 1942:63-64; Almagor 1975:744). Smolenskin was undeterred by this criticism and encouraged Salkinson to continue work on a further Shakespeare translation, supporting him in the publication of *Ram and Jael*. The motivation behind Salkinson's and Smolenskin's selection of *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet* as opposed to other Shakespearean works is unclear, though

Smolenskin stated in his preface to *Ram and Jael* that he envisaged the two translations as the first in a complete series of Hebrew Shakespeare renditions by Salkinson (Smolenskin in Salkinson 1878:v). Unfortunately, this dream went unrealised, as not long after the publication of *Ram and Jael* another member of Salkinson's missionary society reported him to his employers for neglecting his missionary activities and New Testament translation while rendering Shakespeare into Hebrew (Cohen 1942: 30-31). He then turned his attention to his New Testament project, and died in 1883 without returning to literary translation.

Salkinson's two Shakespeare translations were monumental for several reasons. Firstly, they are the earliest full Hebrew renditions of some of the world's most renowned dramatic works. Secondly, they paved the way for, and thus provide valuable literary and historical contextualisation for, all subsequent Hebrew Shakespeare versions. Most immediately, Salkinson's *Ithiel* and *Ram and Jael* served as the inspiration for another four translations of complete Shakespeare plays undertaken by various Eastern European Jewish authors between 1883 and 1901. Later, between the 1920s and 1950s after the centre of Hebrew literary production had shifted away from Eastern Europe, a number of new Hebrew translations of Shakespearean works appeared in the United States and Palestine which are likewise the direct heirs to Salkinson's pioneering enterprise (see Almagor 1975:752-753 and Golomb 1998:263-270 for details of these works). For example, the Israeli poet Natan Alterman, who translated *Othello* into Hebrew in 1950, expressed great admiration for, and indeed envy of, his predecessor Salkinson's *Ithiel* (see Almagor 1975:743-744). Thirdly, as Salkinson's translations were composed prior to the modern revernacularisation of Hebrew in Palestine, they represent a remarkable phenomenon among Shakespeare adaptations worldwide because they constitute some of the sole examples of translations into a largely unspoken language. Finally, they offer a rare and invaluable insight into the reception of Shakespeare in a nineteenth-century European minority culture. However, despite their significance they have

fallen into obscurity (though this may be now be changing as in 2015 *Ithiel* was reissued in Israel and the new publication attracted some interest in the Israeli press; see Arbel 2015).

In general terms Salkinson's Shakespeare translations were relatively close to the originals in that they often preserve the line divisions, do not omit significant amounts of material, and usually render the overall sense of each character's lines. This can be contrasted with prominent earlier European-language Shakespeare translations such as Pierre-Antoine de La Place and Jean-François Ducis' French adaptations (Schwartz-Gastine 2003:225) and Christoph Martin Wieland's German prose versions (see Williams 1990:51-58, 69).

However, Salkinson made a striking exception to this tendency towards literal translation in his systematic choice of domesticating solutions to non-Jewish cultural elements present in the English plays. This approach is attributable to the fact that his translations form part of the intensely ideological Maskilic initiative to establish a modern Hebrew literature rooted in Jewish cultural values. Given this consideration, it is perhaps unsurprising that domesticating tendencies are a prominent feature of translated Maskilic literature in general. This Maskilic translatorial philosophy was not a completely new development, but was itself rooted in a long tradition of dechristianising and Judaising Hebrew adaptations of European literary works dating back to the medieval and early modern periods, including e.g. the thirteenth-century Hebrew version of the legend of King Arthur (see Leviant 2003; Rovang 2009; Valles 2013:38-76), the *Bovo-bukh*, a sixteenth-century Yiddish adaptation of the English romance *Bevis of Hampton* via its Italian version *Buovo d'Antona* (see Shmeruk 1988:150-152; Baumgarten 2005:176-177, 183-184; Valles 2013:152-209), and Sephardic Jewish versions of Spanish ballads (see Armistead and Silverman 1965).

Salkinson's adherence to this Judaising ideology may appear surprising considering his extremely liminal position in Jewish society as a Christian convert and missionary. However, his decision to employ this type of translatorial strategy is actually the logical outcome of his

own personal circumstances as well as in the singular conditions surrounding the commission of the work. Salkinson had received an advanced traditional Jewish education and as such was intimately familiar with canonical Hebrew and Aramaic texts including the Bible, Mishnah, and Talmuds (Cohen 1942:-1213). Despite his conversion, he continued to self-identify as a Jew; moreover, although he was employed by a missionary society while conducting his Shakespeare renditions, he was relatively unsuccessful at converting other Jews and instead regarded his primary role in life as a Hebrew literary translator (Scolnicov 2001:183; see also Cohen 1942:42-43). Moreover, he would have been extremely conscious of the great negativity that Jews felt for Christianity (and for Jewish converts to that religion), as well as of the strongly Judaising tendencies evident in the Maskilic Hebrew literature of the period. In addition, his Shakespeare translations were conducted under the aegis of Smolenskin, a central pillar of the mainstream Maskilic Hebrew literary community. For these reasons, it is understandable that he maintained a Judaising translation strategy despite his conversion and missionary status. Salkinson's domesticating approach is reflected in numerous ways throughout *Ram and Jael*, as will be examined below.

## 2. Names

One of the most immediately noticeable features of *Ram and Jael* is the domesticating treatment of the personal names appearing in the play. Salkinson replaces almost all of the characters' names with Hebrew counterparts, typically derived from the Bible. This practice is not unique to Salkinson but rather is a common feature of Maskilic Hebrew translations in general (Dikman 2015:239).

In many cases the Hebrew names are those of minor biblical characters and are chosen primarily or wholly on the basis of a correspondence in sound. Such cases include Escalus, who is rendered as אֶשְׁכּוֹל *'eshkol* 'Eshcol' (based on an Amorite ally of Abram appearing in Genesis 14:13 and 14:24); Mercutio, who is renamed מֵרַיִוֶּת *'Meraioth*' after a figure appearing in 1 Chronicles 5:32 (= 6:52 in English Bible versions); Tybalt, who becomes תּוּבַל *tubal* 'Tubal', after one of Noah's grandsons mentioned in Genesis 10:2; and Sampson, who becomes שִׁמְשַׁי *šimšay* 'Shimshai', after a scribe appearing in Ezra 4:8.

However, in other cases Salkinson selects his Hebrew names on the basis not only of sound correspondence but also in order to evoke specific associations deemed appropriate to the character in question. Thus, Romeo becomes רָם *ram* 'Ram', the namesake of the ancestor of King David mentioned in Ruth 4:19. As King David and his genealogical line are exalted in Jewish tradition, and readers of Salkinson's text would have been familiar with the biblical Ram from the annual synagogue recitation of the Book of Ruth during the festival of Shavuot, they would have immediately associated Shakespeare's protagonist with the positive qualities of the Davidic line. Likewise, the fact that the name derives from the Book of Ruth is itself significant: as Ruth is the archetypal biblical love story, the name would have had romantic associations in readers' minds.

Likewise, Salkinson's decision to render Juliet as יַעֲלַי *ya'el* 'Jael' is rooted partially in sound correspondence, but has symbolic connotations as well. Jael would have been well known among Jewish audiences as the protagonist of the biblical story recounted in Judges 4 and 5, in which she saved the Israelites from crushing defeat and conquest by the Canaanites when she courageously lured the enemy general Sisera into her tent and killed him. Moreover, Jael has a prominent place in post-biblical Jewish tradition, with the Babylonian Talmud (Nazir 23b) considering her to be more meritorious than even the four biblical matriarchs Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah. As such, by bestowing the name Jael upon Shakespeare's heroine,



Salkinson has chosen to cast her unambiguously in the model of a strong, independent biblical figure who is unafraid to risk death in defence of her beliefs.

In other cases, Salkinson does not take sound correspondence into account when selecting his Hebrew equivalent but rather makes his choice solely on the basis of the name's significance. For example, Montague is renamed אַבִּירָם *'abiram* 'Abiram'. This name functions on two distinct levels in Hebrew. Firstly, it literally means 'the father of Ram', and as such would have served explicitly to establish the familial link between the character and his son Ram in readers' minds. Secondly, the biblical figure of Abiram would have been familiar to readers from his appearance in Numbers 16 as one of the members of Korach's rebellion against Moses' leadership of the Israelites during their forty-year sojourn in the desert following their liberation from slavery in Egypt. Abiram would thus have been synonymous with spite, arrogance, and disloyalty, not to mention the horrifying punishment of being swallowed by the earth. These associations would undoubtedly have had an effect on readers' understanding of Montague's character in the play.

By contrast, Salkinson does not usually select the Hebrew version of a character's name solely on the basis of an obvious correspondence in meaning. The only exception to this is Rosaline, whom he renames שׁוֹשַׁנָּה *šošanna* 'Shoshana', a common post-biblical Hebrew female name which does not resemble Rosaline in sound but means 'rose'. This is most likely due to the fact that, in contrast to most other names appearing in the play, Rosaline has a transparent meaning with an easily identifiable Hebrew equivalent.

Interestingly, Salkinson chooses to alter the one biblical name that actually appears in Shakespeare's text, changing Abra(ha)m into בֵּרָע *bera* 'Bera'. This seemingly undermotivated decision may reflect a reluctance on Salkinson's part for Montague's retainer to bear the name of the first biblical patriarch and symbolic father of the Jewish people (see Almagor 1975:748 in support of this explanation). His choice of 'Bera', the king of Sodom mentioned in Genesis

14:2, indicates that he regarded a minor biblical character with negative associations (and dating to the same period as the great patriarch) to be a more appropriate name for Shakespeare's Abra(ha)m.

### 3. Christian holidays and rituals

As mentioned above, despite Salkinson's Christian status he continued to identify as a Jew and was conscious of the fact that his translation would be read by a Jewish audience. As such, it is perhaps unsurprising that he does not adopt a literal translation strategy with respect to Christian holidays and rituals appearing in the text. Salkinson has two different approaches to the translation of such terms. In some cases, he opts for explicit Judaisation of a Christian holiday appearing in the source text. Thus, in (1), the original 'Pentecost' is replaced by 'Shavuot'. On one level, this is a necessary and straightforward translation decision considering that the Jewish festival of Shavuot, which commemorates the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, is the historical antecedent of the Christian Pentecost and falls at a similar time of the year, in late spring or early summer. Moreover, Salkinson would have struggled to find another way of translating the term given the lack of a recognised Hebrew term for Pentecost. However, on another level this substitution has the clear effect of erasing the Christian connotations of the original and replacing them with explicitly Jewish ones, given that Salkinson's Hebrew-reading audience would automatically have understood the reference as being to the Jewish holiday rather than to the Christian one.

- (1) a. Come **Pentecost** as quickly as it will (1.5.36)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> All line references to the English source text are from the Arden Third Series edition of *Romeo and Juliet*.

- b. בְּחַג הַשְּׁבִיעוֹת הַבָּא  
*bəḥag haššabu 'ot habba*

‘On the next **festival of Shavuot**’ (Salkinson 1878: 35)

In other cases, Salkinson does not opt for such an overtly Judaising solution, but rather removes any explicitly Christian content from the reference so that the holiday in question is rendered non-specific. For example, in (2) below, the English original refers to Lammastide, the Anglo-Saxon holiday marking the wheat harvest that takes place on the first of August. Salkinson’s version replaces this with ‘such-and-such a holiday’ that takes place on the first day of the fifth month. The reference to the ‘first night of the fifth month’ is a veiled allusion to Lammastide: the first month in the Hebrew Bible corresponds approximately to April on the Gregorian calendar, and as such the fifth month would equate to August. Thus, Salkinson’s translation serves to neutralise the Christian connotations of the original name (which has no established Hebrew equivalent and would not have been familiar to Jewish readers in any case) by substituting it with a nondescript label and placing it within the context of the biblical calendar. It is likely that Salkinson chose this strategy in the present instance because, in contrast to the case of Pentecost discussed above, there is no Jewish holiday which falls at a similar time to and could easily be equated with Lammastide. (Note that in order to introduce this description of the holiday Salkinson has substantially rephrased and expanded on the source text.)

- (2) a. How long is it now  
 To **Lammastide**? (1.3.15-6)

- b. כִּי חַג פְּלִנִי אֶלְמִנִי  
 בְּלִילָה הָרִאשׁוֹן לַחֹדֶשׁ הַתְּמִישִׁי עוֹדְנִו לֹא בָּא

מתי יבוא הקג ההוא?

*ki ḥag pəloni 'almoni*

*ballayla har 'išon laḥodeš haḥamiši 'odennu lo ba*

*matay yabo heḥag hahu?*

'For **such-and-such a holiday on the first night of the fifth month** has  
not yet come

When will **that holiday** come?' (Salkinson 1878:22)

Salkinson adopts similar approaches to the translation of terms for Christian rituals appearing in *Romeo and Juliet*. Thus, in some cases he again chooses an overtly Jewish solution. An example of this is the reference to baptism shown in (3), which he replaces with an allusion to covenant. The relationship between God and Israel is regarded as a covenant in the Jewish tradition, with the covenantal model mentioned on numerous occasions throughout biblical, rabbinic, and later Hebrew literature (see Weinfeld 2007 for discussion). As such, this concept can be regarded as a fitting Jewish functional equivalent of Christian baptism.

(3) a. Call me but love and I'll be new **baptized**. (2.2.50)

b. אַתָּ לִי וְאֲנִי לָךְ וּבְשֵׁם הַדָּשׁ כָּרַטְתִּי בְרִיתְךָ

*at li wa 'ani laḵ ubešem ḥadaš karatti briteḵ*

You are mine and I am yours, and **I shall make your covenant** with a  
new name (Salkinson 1878:48)

By contrast, in other cases, Salkinson dechristianises the references but does not replace them with explicitly Jewish ones. For example, in (4) he translates 'evening mass' as בֵּין הָעֶרְבָּיִם *ben*

*ha'arbayim* 'twilight', which eradicates any religious connotations but preserves the temporal associations of the original.

(4) a. Or shall I come to you at **evening mass**? (4.1.38)

b. או אשוב אבוא אליך בין הערבים?

*'o 'ašub 'abo 'eleka ben ha'arbayim?*

Or shall I come back to you **at twilight**? (Salkinson 1878:124)

#### 4. Christian establishments

Similarly, Salkinson consistently modifies vocabulary relating to Christian establishments appearing in Shakespeare's text. For example, in (5) below, Salkinson replaces Capulet's mention of 'church' in the original of Act 3, Scene 5 with a reference to the bride and groom, thereby preserving the basic sense of the words but presenting them in a format that would not jar with a Jewish readership. Moreover, Salkinson's solution has unmistakably Jewish connotations given that his translation *ככלה לקראת החתן kəkalla liqr'at heḥatan* 'as a bride towards the groom' is a paraphrase of the familiar wording *כחתן לקראת כלה kəḥatan liqr'at kalla* 'as a groom towards a bride' which appears in various places in well-known rabbinic and medieval Hebrew literature, including the Babylonian Talmud (Berakhot 59b) and the popular seventeenth-century biblical commentary of Moses Alshich. As such, the phrase would have been instantly recognisable to readers of the Hebrew text and would have evoked specific associations with a Jewish bride and groom.

(5) a. I tell thee what: **get thee to church** a' Thursday

Or never after look me in the face (3.5.161-162)

b. עָתָה בַּחֲרֵי לִי: צְאִי כְּכֹלָה לְקִרְאֵת הַחַתָּן

אוּ צְאִי מֵעַל פְּנֵי וְלֹא אוֹסִיף לְרְאוֹתְךָ

*‘atta baḥari lak: šə`i kəkalla liqr`at heḥatan*

*‘o šə`i me`al panay wəlo `osiḥ lir`otek*

‘Now choose: **go out as a bride towards the groom**

Or go out from before me and I shall not see you again’ (Salkinson 1878:117)

In certain other cases Salkinson opts for similarly dechristianising but less explicitly Judaising solutions. For example, in (6) below he adapts the mention of a churchyard appearing in the source text by means of a synecdochic reference to the graves contained therein, which lack any specific religious connotations.

(6) a. By heaven, I will tear thee joint by joint

And strew this hungry **churchyard** with thy limbs (5.3.35-36)

b. הָעֵידוֹתַי בָּךְ הַיּוֹם כִּי אֶגְזֹר בְּשָׂרְךָ לְגִזְרִים

וְזָרִיתִים עַל פְּנֵי הַקְּבָרִים לְמַעַן יִדְשְׁןוּ עֲפָרָם.

*ha`idoti bəka hayyom ki `egzor bəšarka ligzarim*

*wəzeritim `al pəne haqqəbarim lema`an yəduššan `aḥaram.*

‘I swear to you today that I will cut your flesh to pieces

And strew them over **the graves** in order to fertilise their earth.’

(Salkinson 1878:151)

Salkinson adopts a similar approach to non-Jewish religious titles appearing in the source text. This is illustrated in (7) below: while in the English original Friar John addresses Friar Laurence as a ‘holy Franciscan friar’, in Salkinson’s version the former calls the latter a פֹּהֵן קֶדֶק *kohen sedeq* ‘righteous priest’, a term which is not only devoid of any specifically Christian connotations but also would have had Jewish associations in readers’ minds as it, or its abbreviated form ק"כ *ka"š* ‘Katz’, are common Jewish surnames typically denoting descent from the biblical priestly class.

(7) a. **Holy Franciscan friar**, brother, ho! (5.2.1)

b. אי רֶצִין אַחִי? אי פֹּהֵן קֶדֶק?

*'e rəšin 'ahi? 'e kohen sedeq?*

‘Where is my brother Rezin? Where is [the] **righteous priest**?’

(Salkinson 1878:148)

A similar example can be seen in (8) below, in which Salkinson replaces the original reference to ‘pilgrims’ with the word גֵּר *ger*, which is a technical term with two distinct meanings in the Jewish tradition. In the Hebrew Bible, which served as the primary linguistic and textual model for Salkinson’s translation, the term denotes a resident foreigner in Israelite territory which constituted a distinct class in the biblical legal system (see Lieber 2007 for details). By contrast, in rabbinic and later Jewish literature, as well as in the Yiddish vernacular of Salkinson and his audience, the term refers to a convert to Judaism (see Rabinowitz and Eichhorn 2007). Both the biblical and post-biblical meanings of the word would have been familiar to Salkinson’s readers. As such, the translation can be understood on two levels, both of which retain the

notion of religious migration while situating the utterance within an unambiguously Jewish frame of reference.

- (8) a. My lips, two blushing **pilgrims**, ready stand  
To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss (1.5.94-5)

- b. הן גר אני עמך ובשפה מבשלת אדמה  
אמקה מגע ידי ואכפר על עוני בנשיקה  
*hen ger 'ani 'immaḵ ubšāpā mibbošet 'adumma*  
*'emḥe magga 'yadi wa'akapper 'al 'awoni binšika*

You see, I am a **sojourner/convert to Judaism** with you, and with a lip  
red from shame

I shall erase the touch of my hand and atone for my sin with a kiss  
(Salkinson 1878:38)

## 5. Oaths and expressions

Shakespeare's text contains numerous oath formulas and other phatic expressions containing allusions to Christian figures and concepts. Unsurprisingly, Salkinson does not preserve these references in his Hebrew translation. However, in contrast to the case of Christian holidays, institutions, and ceremonies discussed above, in some instances he simply deletes the expressions altogether. An example of this can be seen in (9), which in the original contains an expression mentioning Christian souls that is absent from the Hebrew version:

- (9) a. Susan and she, **God rest all Christian souls**,



Were of an age. (1.3.19-20)

b. וְשׁוֹשָׁנָה בַּת גִּילָהּ נוֹלְדָה עִמָּה בְּשָׁנָה אֶחָת.

*wəšošanna bat gila noləda 'imma bəšana 'eḥat.*

‘And Shoshana was her age; she was born with her in the same year.’ (Salkinson 1878:22)

Similarly, in (10) the source text contains an oath centred on the Christian cross; in Salkinson’s version this entire oath has been deleted.

(10) a. For then she could stand high-line; nay, **by the rood**,  
She could have run and waddled all about (1.3.37-38)

b. וְהִיא יִכְלֶה אֶז לְלַכֵּת וְלָרוֹץ לְכָל פִּנָּה

And she could then walk and run to every corner (Salkinson 1878:23)

In other instances, rather than omitting the expression entirely Salkinson retains some element of it but nullifies its Christian content. Such a case can be seen in (11), in which Friar Laurence’s invocation of Saint Francis is adapted into an expression devoid of any religious associations.

(11) a. **Holy Saint Francis**, what a change is here! (2.3.61)

b. אָהָה! לִבִּי יִשְׁתוֹנֵן לְתִמּוּרָה זֹו מִבְּהֶלֶת

*'ahah! libbi yištonen litmura zu məbohelet*

Aha! My heart is pained at this hasty change (Salkinson 1878:60)

In other cases, Salkinson opts to Judaize the expression in question. An example of this strategy can be seen in (12), in which the English oath invoking Saint Peter's church and Saint Peter is completely transformed in Salkinson's version:

(12) a. Now by **Saint Peter's church and Peter too** (3.5.116)

b. בְּשֵׁם בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ! וּבְשֵׁם מִיכָאֵל שַׂר הַפָּנִים!

*bašem bet hammiqdaš! ubəšem miḳa'el šar happanim!*

**By the name of the Temple! And by the name of Michael the Prince of the Presence!** (Salkinson 1878:114)

This is a particularly salient example of Salkinson's Judaizing translatorial approach. In substituting 'Saint Peter's church' with בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ *bet hammiqdaš* 'the Temple', Salkinson is making an unambiguous reference to the Temple in Jerusalem, which was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE but has remained the symbolic heart of the Jewish people and religion until the present day and is recalled on multiple occasions in the daily Jewish liturgy. Likewise, the replacement of 'Peter' with שַׂר הַפָּנִים מִיכָאֵל *miḳa'el šar happanim* 'Michael, the Prince of the Presence' serves to anchor the utterance within a specifically Jewish context. The angel Michael is mentioned in various places in the Hebrew Bible (most famously in the Book of Daniel) as well as in rabbinic literature (Midrash Rabba 2:20) as God's right-hand ministering angel. However, this specific phrase 'Michael, the Prince of the Presence' is an unmistakable reference to the extremely prominent exegetical work of the eleventh-century scholar Rashi, as his commentary on the book of Isaiah (63:9) is the only Jewish source in which this particular

wording appears. As Jews traditionally study the Hebrew Bible together with Rashi's commentary, this reference would have been an immediately recognisable to Salkinson's audience. While the Archangel Michael also has a place in various Christian traditions, appearing in the Book of Revelation (12:7-9) as one of the leaders of God's army against Satan and revered in later Christian theology, the conscious decision to employ the precise phrasing from Rashi's commentary underscores the fact that Salkinson wanted this translation to resonate with his Jewish readership.

## **6. Mythological figures**

Salkinson systematically domesticates references to figures from Classical mythology appearing in Shakespeare's text in the same way as he adapts the various Christian references featured therein. This strategy is rooted in slightly different motivations than those examined above: while explicit mentions of Christianity were perceived as totally incompatible with Jewish values and therefore Salkinson's avoidance of them is unsurprising (despite, as discussed, his own personal Christian status), Maskilic authors typically admired Classical texts as a foundational element of their European literary models. Thus, Smolenskin (in Salkinson 1874:v) describes the writings of Homer as the greatest literary works in history alongside Shakespeare and the Hebrew Bible; likewise, certain Maskilic authors produced fragmentary Hebrew translations of Classical texts (e.g. Micah Joseph Lebensohn's 1849 adaptation of a portion of the Aeneid via Schiller's German version). However, this Maskilic appreciation of Classical literature was a new development among Central and Eastern European Jews, who had traditionally regarded Greek and Roman culture as irrelevant or indeed antithetical to Jewish values. As such, familiarity with Classical language and sources

was very low even among Maskilim, and therefore mythological figures such as Jove and Cupid would typically have meant little to readers of *Ram and Jael*. In this light, Salkinson's decision to modify the Classical references appearing in the play in order to make them more accessible to his audience is understandable. (See Dikman 2015:234-235 for a similar explanation of Salkinson's omission of mythological references from his Hebrew translation of *Paradise Lost*.)

As in the case of the oaths discussed above, in some cases Salkinson simply deletes the references to figures from Classical mythology. This is illustrated in (13), in which the mention of Echo present in the original is absent from the Hebrew version:

(13) a. Else would I tear the cave where **Echo** lies (2.2.161)

b. כי לולי כן

הרימתי קולי בכח וְאָקְרָא בְּשֵׁם רַם בְּהִירִי

עַד אֲשֶׁר הַבְּקָעָה מִנְּגֵד תִּבְקַע לְקוֹלִי.

*ki lule ken*

*harimoti qoli bakkoaḥ wa'eqra bəšem ram bəḥiri*

*'ad 'ašer habbiq'a minneged tibbaqa 'ləqoli.*

Because otherwise

I would raise my voice and call out the name of my chosen Ram

until the valley opposite split at [the sound of] my voice. (Salkinson

1878:54)

In other cases, Salkinson does not delete the Classical reference but rather replaces it with a term that retains the basic meaning while lacking any anthropomorphic overtones, as in (14), wherein ‘Cupid’ is replaced with אֶהְבָּה *’ahaba* ‘love’.

(14) a. You are a lover, borrow **Cupid**’s wings (1.4.17)

b. יְדוּעַ אֶהְבָּה הַנָּדָה, קוּם וְשָׂא לָךְ מִמְנֵהָ כְּנָפַיִם

*yədua ‘’ahaba hinnāka, qum šə’al ləka mimmenna kənaḥayim*

You are an acquaintance of **love**; go borrow its wings (Salkinson 1878:

28)

By contrast, sometimes Salkinson replaces the Classical reference with a biblical allusion that has a similar sense to the original. It is possible that, as in the case of the Christian holidays discussed above, such decisions were motivated by the existence of an identifiable equivalent. This can be seen in (15), in which the original ‘Jove’ is replaced with שָׁבָא הַמְרוֹם *šəba hammarom* ‘the heavenly host’. This solution serves to retain the sense of the original in that Jove or Jupiter, the Greco-Roman sky god, can be equated with the ‘heavenly host’, a term for God’s army of angels mentioned in Isaiah 24:21 and on numerous occasions in rabbinic, medieval, and early modern Hebrew literature.

(15) a. At lovers’ perjuries,  
They say, **Jove** laughs. (2.2.92-3)

b. שְׂמֵעֵתִי אֲמַרִים

שָׁבָא הַמְרוֹם יִשְׁחַקוּ לְתַנוּצָת בְּרִית אֶהְבָּיִם.

*šam 'ati 'omrim šəḇa hammarom yišḥaḳu litnu 'at bərit 'ahaḇim.*

I have heard it said

**the heavenly host** laughs at love's grievances. (Salkinson 1878: 50)

A striking example of this technique can be seen in (16), in which Mercutio's 'Venus' is replaced by 'Ashtoreth' in Salkinson's version. Ashtoreth was one of the chief goddesses of the Canaanite pantheon and is associated with love and fertility (Frymer 2007:581); moreover, she has been linked to Aphrodite in Ancient Near Eastern sources from the first-millennium BCE (Ackerman 2009). In the Hebrew Bible the Israelites are condemned on multiple occasions for worshipping Ashtoreth (see e.g. Judges 2:13-14, Judges 10:6-7, 1 Samuel 7:3-4, and 1 Samuel 12:10). Salkinson was clearly aware of the links between Ashtoreth and the Greek and Roman goddess of love, and as selected her as an appropriate domesticating equivalent.

(16) a. Speak to my gossip **Venus** one fair word (2.1.11)

b. או קרא בשם עשתרת בלה נאפים  
 'o qəra bəšem 'aštoret bala ni 'uḇim

Or call on the name of **Ashtoreth**, weary from adultery (Salkinson 1878:44)

## 7. Foreign language

Salkinson likewise adapts the Latin and French linguistic elements appearing in *Romeo and Juliet*. As in the case of the references to Classical mythological figures discussed above, this decision is rooted in the fact that, whereas in much of Europe these languages were commonly studied and enjoyed a prestigious status, they were generally unfamiliar to Eastern European Jews (including Maskilim) and would have lacked any meaningful associations for readers of

*Ram and Jael*. Salkinson opts to translate the Latin and French elements into Hebrew, thereby homogenising the variegated linguistic texture of Shakespeare's play. This technique can be seen in (17) and (18), in which the original Latin and French greetings respectively are replaced by Hebrew equivalents in Salkinson's version.

(17) a. ***Benedicite*** (2.3.27)

b. בְּרוּךְ הַבּוֹא!

***baruk habba!***

**Greetings!** (Lit: blessed is the one who arrives) (Salkinson 1878:58)

(18) a. Signior Romeo, ***bon jour***: there's a French salutation to your French slop  
(2.4.43-45)

b. הַשְּׁלוֹם לְךָ צָרְפָתִי! הַשְּׁלוֹם לְמִכְנָסֶיךָ הָאֲדָמֹת!

***hašalom ləka šarṗati! hašalom ləmiḵnaseka ha'adummot!***

**Greetings, Frenchman! Greetings to your red trousers!** (Salkinson  
1878:64)

## 8. *Shibbuš*

A final domesticating strategy evident in Salkinson's text is *shibbuš*, a common Hebrew literary technique whereby intact or adapted biblical verses or verse fragments are inserted into a new composition. *Shibbuš* was very popular among Maskilic authors, for two reasons: firstly, they held the Hebrew Bible in great esteem, and as such the incorporation of biblical citations into their writing served to imbue it with added linguistic and literary value; secondly, since

Hebrew was not a vernacular at the time, drawing on stock biblical phrases was a convenient and practical aid to creative expression in the language. See Shahevitch (1970), Pelli (1993), and Kahn (2013) for further discussion of the use of *shibbuṣ* in Maskilic Hebrew literature. Salkinson employs the technique of *shibbuṣ* on numerous occasions in *Ram and Jael*, both for the above reasons and to infuse the text with additional Jewish cultural relevance.

Several conspicuous examples of *shibbuṣ* can be seen at the beginning of the balcony scene. The first is shown in (19) below, in which Sakinson transforms Romeo's words into an explicitly Jewish expression of love modelled on the Song of Songs, the quintessential biblical love poem whose famous phrase 'אני לדודי ודודי לי' *'ani laḏodi waḏodi li* 'my beloved is mine and I am his' is commonly inscribed on Jewish wedding rings and cited at marriage ceremonies.

(19) a. It is my lady, O, it is my love!

O, that she knew she were! (2.2.10-11)

b. זו היא רעיתי! זו היא נפשי! זו היא רעיתי!

מי יתן וגם היא תאמר, דודי לי ואני לו.

*zu hi ra'ayati! zu hi še'ahaba napši!*

*mi yitten wəgam hi tomar, dodi li wa'ani lo.*

This is **my beloved!** This is **the one whom my soul loves!**

If only she would say, '**My beloved is mine and I am his.**' (Salkinson 1878:46)

c. הנך זפה רעיתי

הנך לי שאהבה נפשי

אני לדודי ודודי לי



*hinnaḵ yaḇa ra 'yati*

*haggida li še'ahaba napši*

*'ani ladodi wadodi li*

You are beautiful, **my beloved** (Song of Songs 1:15)

Tell me, **the one whom my soul loves** (Song of Songs 1:7)

**I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine** (Song of Songs 6:3)

The second case of *shibbuṣ* in the balcony scene appears in the line directly following those shown in (19) above. Salkinson sees Romeo's English statement that Juliet 'speaks, yet she says nothing' as an opportunity to evoke the biblical heroine Hannah, whose heartfelt prayer is described in 1 Samuel as one whereby her lips move but no voice can be heard. Hannah's silent entreaty is renowned in the rabbinic tradition as the model of Jewish prayer (see Kadari 2009 for details), and as such this biblical reference would have been instantly recognisable to readers of the Hebrew text. Salkinson thus employs the technique of *shibbuṣ* as a way of creating a textual link between Juliet's wordless speech and the powerful prayer of the righteous Hannah.

(20) a. She speaks, yet she says nothing. (2.2.12)

b. שְׁפִתֶיךָ נִעוֹת כַּמְדַּבֶּרֶת אֲךָ קוֹלָהּ לֹא יִשְׁמָע

*šəpāteha na 'ot kimdaberet 'ak qola lo yiššamea'*

Her lips are moving like one who speaks, but her voice is not heard

(Salkinson 1878:46)

c. וְחִנָּה הִיא מְדַבֶּרֶת עַל-לִפְתָּהּ, רַק שְׁפִתֶיךָ נִעוֹת וְקוֹלָהּ לֹא יִשְׁמָע

*wəḥanna hi mādabberet 'al libba raq šəpāteha na'ot wəqola lo  
yiššamea* ' (1 Samuel 1:13)

A final example of *shibbuṣ* can be seen in (21) below, in which Salkinson translates the phrase 'die in debt' with a close rewording of Genesis 37:35, in which the patriarch Jacob expresses his anguish upon hearing news of the death of his son by declaring that he will go down in mourning to Sheol, the biblical abode of the dead. This serves to preserve the negative implications of 'die in debt' while erasing the Christian connotations of 'doctrine' in the original and adding an unmistakably biblical nuance to the text.

(21) a. I'll pay that **doctrine**, or else die in debt. (1.1.236)

b. אם לא טובה עצתי, ארד אֶבֶל שְׂאוּלָה.

*'im lo toba 'aṣati, 'ered 'aḅel šə'ola.*

If my advice is not good, **I'll go down in mourning to Sheol**. (Salkinson  
1878:14)

c. וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי־אֶרְדָּ אֶל־בְּנֵי אֶבֶל שְׂאוּלָה

*wayyomer ki-'ered 'el-bəni 'aḅel šə'ola*

He said, No, **I shall go down to my son mourning to Sheol** (Gen.  
37:35)

## 9. Conclusion

Salkinson's *Ram and Jael* provides an intriguing insight into the role of Shakespeare in nineteenth-century Jewish Central and Eastern Europe. As part of the Maskilic drive to create

a Hebrew-language Jewish literature based on established European models, Salkinson produced a target text that, while in many respects remaining relatively close to the source material, comprises a uniquely tailored version of the play steeped in Jewish cultural allusions and carefully purged of any explicitly non-Jewish elements. He accomplished this through the employment of a number of specific translation strategies, consisting of neutralisation and explicit Judaisation of references to Christian holidays, rituals, establishments, and oaths, as well as of figures from Classical mythology; the Hebraisation of foreign linguistic elements; and the technique of *shibbus*, the insertion of familiar biblical verses into the text in order to underscore its Jewishness. Salkinson's work thus sheds light on a fascinating yet little-known aspect of *Romeo and Juliet* in European culture.

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