

ABSTRACT

This study offers a pragmatic option for creating a new realm of discourse within the historiography of literature in general and of Hebrew literature in particular. It suggests a renewed perspective on the forgotten traditions of literary margins and ‘average taste’ readers that make up the ‘environmental biotic mass’ for the emergence of literary pinnacles. This new approach seeks to suspend the aesthetic and poetic judgment comparing ‘central’ and ‘outlying’ literatures, on the assumption that their perception as components of equal value within a ‘cultural ecological system’ will lead to a new set of questions and answers about the emergence of writers and poets.

The book aims to deconstruct the arguments of the political-evaluative discourse and its key metaphor, as articulated by Albert Thibaudet (1874-1936)—‘the Republic of Letters.’ This metaphor created a historiography that discusses culture in terms of power, political conspiracies, and economic interests, as in a materialist Marxist approach. This discourse has dominated the historiography of Hebrew literature for a century, as described in Chapter One, which presents an approach that casts doubt on the explicative legitimacy of violence as inherent in the ‘Republic of Letters’ discourse. In principle, this approach questions the legitimacy of a narrative that explains the history of literature diachronically, as a sequence of stories about stylistic rebellion, ideological revolutions, and canonic writers replacing others pushed to the margins of literary life, instead of clarifying all the environmental and immanent conditions of literature that take part in the evolutionary explanation of its history.

Chapter Two details the starting points of forms of discourse close to the ecological discourse of culture in the history of modern philosophy, from Montesquieu and Herder until the present. The last and particularly fruitful link is the anthropological and cybernetic stance of Gregory Bateson (1904-1980), author of *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (1972). It enables new views on culture,

including on writers, books, and literature, reviewing them as systemically connected to all that is part of their 'environment.' His thought fosters a new order of ecological paradigms, illuminating the conduct of the cultural-literary system in unprecedented ways.

Chapter Three presents a pragmatic methodological proposal to endorse an ecological discourse on literature as a systematic theoretical structure of cultural schemes 'nesting' within one another. The core concept of this methodology is the 'literary ecological niche,' denoting a special kind of literary/cultural skill developed by authors as their special response to their habitat. Their relationship with their habitat is simultaneously competitive (schismogenic) and cooperative (symbiotic), while the literary text, its style, and its genre bear the genetic code of this relationship's history.

Chapter Four is devoted to three historiographic cases that are explained through the ecological-literary methodology: 1) Refuting the narrative about the rebellion of the 'young guard' (*Tze-irim*) and Micha Yosef Berdyczewski against Ahad-Haam's hegemony. 2) The story of Aharon Appelfeld's cultural acclimatization in the modern narrative Hebrew literature. 3) Replacing the narrative about the rivalry between writers (S.Y. Agnon and H. Hazaz) with an explanation about critical climates in the historiography of Hebrew literature.

The critical experience of *An Ecology of Literature* is not dogmatic. Its purpose is to expand the scope of the paradigmatic questions raised by the historiographer of literature by placing them in a new realm, where the intra-textual and the extra-textual form a new methodological sequence.