

THE SOLITUDES OF THE HAPAX-LEGOMENON:
ON SHEM TOV DE CARRION
Las soledades del hapax-legomenon: acerca de Shem Tov de Carrion

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BIBLID [0544-408X (2006) 55; 157-169]

Resumen: La soledad es uno de los temas clásicos en la religión, mística, filosofía y la literatura y ha llamado la atención de los estudiosos. Estos sin embargo han ignorado generalmente la existencia del tema en el *corpus* de textos de Shem Tov de Carrion de los Condes, poeta bilingüe del siglo XIV. El examen del mismo lleva a la conclusión de que existe un trabajo literario dedicado al tema en su obra. La falta de atención al fenómeno por parte de la crítica lleva lógicamente a una evaluación de la misma y los problemas que esta suscita. Uno de éstos es el de los extremos: por una parte corrientes críticas aisladas entre sí por barreras lingüísticas, por ejemplo, y por otra la falta de atención a la universalidad de ciertos temas tratados en el *corpus* de Shem Tov. En el trabajo se propone la posibilidad de un acercamiento comparativo a la obra de Shem Tov. Al mismo tiempo se trata de subrayar la necesidad de estudiarlo también en su contexto histórico, siempre que la evidencia lo permite, pero también-lingüístico.

Abstract: Solitude is one of the classical themes of religion, mysticism, philosophy and literature and has attracted scholarly attention. Its presence in the oeuvre of the bilingual fourteenth century poet Shem Tov de Carrion de los Condes however has been largely ignored. The examination of the texts produced by him shows that he invested in literary developments of the theme. This naturally takes us to evaluate some of the problems in the critical corpus. One of these is that of extremes: extreme isolation between different critical currents separated by linguistic barriers but also overemphasis on exclusive "sources" or "traditions" in cases where the themes may be shown to be universal. In this article an attempt is made to show the possibilities of a comparative approach to the work. At the same time there is an emphasis on the need to study Shem Tov in context: historical context of course (when the evidence permits it) but also a linguistic context.

Palabras clave: Shem Tov de Carrion. Literatura hebrea comparada. Cultura y pensamiento hispano-judío en el siglo XIV.

Key words: Shem Tov de Carrion. Comparative study of medieval Hebrew and Romance literatures. Fourteenth century Hispano-Jewish culture

It cannot be denied that the theme of solitude in texts from medieval Iberia has been the subject of explorations. Eleventh and twelfth century treatments of the theme in Hebrew poetry as well as Arabic analogues have been analyzed¹. Later treatments in Ibero-romance languages have also been studied. In the latter case, it would seem that the wish to find precedents for Gongora's most accomplished work, the *Soledades*, was a major concern. The religious-mystical aspects of solitude in the fifteenth century, and their continuity in Christian Spanish mysticism into the late seventeenth century were also a major theme in Vossler's study² in the 1930's, as he maintained that in the Iberian context there were weighty reasons for not polarizing, dividing and distancing literature and religion.

King Denis *Cancioneiro* mentions "Vossa soidade" as nostalgia or, rather- "*Sehnsucht*". About nine poems found by Vossler develop the theme of *soidade* but, as he says, dozens more could be adduced. It leads to *saudade* in such sixteenth century texts as those of Camoes: "Minha saudade/carro penhor meu/a quem direi eu/tamanha verdade?"[p.8] In the *Cancioneiro geral_de Resende* Vossler finds it as a sensitive mood description, in Dom Joam de Meneses verse:"Faz me alguma saudade/vyrem cousas aa memorea..." In Castile too, there is attention to this theme. Diego Lopez de Haro writes: "que despues de ser perdido/bivo en tanta soledad/ que desseo no haber sido" and Juan de Agraz : "Senyora, tu soledad/mas lo siento que la mia" [p.13] In the *Carcel de amor* the Queen Mother writes to Laureola: "Bevire en soledad de ti y en compania de los dolores que en tu lugar me dexas..." Juan del Encina composes a song which contains the line: "Hermitano quiero ser/por ver/Hermitano quiero ser..." In Catalan, Jordi de San Jordi writes from prison:"Desert d'amichs, de bens e de senyor". The

1. Razhavi, Y., 1984, 1-8.

2. Vossler, K., 1935.

fortuna, in Spain, of the Horatian *Beatus ille* serves Vossler well in his quest for Iberian *soledades*.

Vossler's book, curiously, pays no attention to Rabbi Shem Tov Arduviel. It was written, to be sure, more than a decade before Ignaci Gonzalez Llubera's epoch making book. Llubera was a turning point in Shem Tov studies, most evidently because of his privileged access to the Cambridge MS "C" in Judeo-Spanish *aljamia*³. This was the result of Herbert Loewe's expertise and information⁴. Attention is paid -by Curtius' and Spitzer's teacher- to language and literature, to the theme's development in medieval *romance* texts. Gumbrecht's recent work, however, suggests that Vossler's is a text of self-exploration in the age of the *Leben und Sterben der Grossen Romanisten*⁵.

I

The literary, poetic development of the theme of solitude, however, is not restricted to these particular traditions of the *Romania*⁶.

3. Santob de Carrión, edited by González Llubera, 1947.

4. For recent work on provenance see Gutwirth, 1996.

5. Gumbrecht, H. U., 2002.

6. In the study of certain types of Judeo-Spanish literature [ballads, tales, etc] it has been realized for some time that attention to both a) "universal", international, motifs alongside b) necessary attention to the particular *romance* and Hebrew parallels could be helpful. Both help to achieve a certain sense of proportion in the approach to the Judeo-Spanish composition. This is especially the case in *Proverbios morales* scholarship where works such as Steins' *Untersuchungen* do not always provide what could be termed "sources" in the strict meaning of the term. Attention to other traditions without entering into inquiries as to their genetic, historical link is by now accepted. My interest here is in the common problems facing poets who have decided to write about solitude. I have no interest here in the question of historical links between China and Spain or the Jews. On the eighth century inscriptions of Tang- i Azaó see Henning 1957; Stein 1907; Utas 1968. Ashtor, vol. I p. 282, cites the ninth century geographer Ibn Khurdadhbih who writes about the Radhanites, who knew the language of Al Andalus. He also writes about the routes of the Jewish merchants that, departing from Spain, they embark in the Eastern Sea and they go to China. On their return from China they carry musk. According to Ashtor in his work on Muslim Spain as long as the Tang dynasty ruled, foreign merchants, like the Radhanites, could visit its ports and trade freely [ib. p.287]. See also Morag 1999 pp.65-69 who cites Al-Qirqisani's mention of China as one of the places

Liu Zong-yuan (773-819) writes as an exile in the remote jungle outposts of southern China, after being demoted for participating in a reform movement:

In the evening a fisherman shelters against West Cliff.
 Early he draws clear water, and makes a fire of bamboo.
 By sunrise, his smoke vanished, no one is seen.
 As his song rings out, waters and mountains show green.
 From mid-stream he glances backward to the distant shore:
 Above the cliff, the carefree clouds give chase.⁷

Wilson sees poems such as this as belonging in a poetry open to a number of readings. A situation of the poet who responds to nature as an exile can range from sorrow, to the Buddhist observation of the vanity of human aspirations, to the Taoist celebration of natural simplicity of man freed from the artificiality of the social sphere. Determining a particular reading is neither possible nor desirable.

Du Fu writes, (in his poem *A Friend Visits*⁸)

North and South of the cottage, spring floods abound;
 Day by day my only visitors are gulls.
 Before today I never swept the path of fallen petals
 But now my thatched door's opened-just for you

According to Wilson, the poet is bound to the starkness and poverty of his surroundings, to exile; he has known month after month of unbearable

where the Babylonian vocalization of Hebrew was practiced. A Pelliot MS contains a liturgical poem in Hebrew with certain Babylonian features, before 820 CE, found in Tun-Huang. See the bibliography in Morag, loc cit.

7. *Hundred Tang Poems*, translation by Wilson 1995, 171.

8. *Ib.* p.90/1.

loneliness. In his *Night Thoughts on a Journey* he writes⁹ “Who do I resemble, after all ? /A lone gull, poised between earth and sky”. He could be read as lamenting exile or as exulting in a new found freedom. These considerations are not gratuitous, but necessary to understand the concern with solitude in many of the hundred poems from the Tang dynasty even when this is not the main theme of the poem. Thus, Wei Ying Wu (737-?-) writes a poem¹⁰ on the ferry boat in his [poem 44] *Chuszhou's West Valley Stream*. It ends:”No one aboard, the ferry boat rights itself upon the tide.” As the translators indicate, the ferryboat is the perfect embodiment of the Taoist ideal of self- so -ness and non purposeful action.

The creation of solitude in a poem within a unified prosodic discipline and the bounds of permissible poetic language is here effected generally by reference to nature and to the explicit mention- however brief- of solitude. In many cases, the poet's background is courtly or at least governmental-the civil service. That is to say that the option for this particular theme becomes meaningful because of an underlying, implicit memory or frame of civil, social, gregarious life which is not developed in the poem but sometimes is known from biography or mentioned in the rubrics. Thus, Liu Zong-yuan's poem “sent to the magistrates of Zhangzhou”, gains meaning from common memories of a past in which the business of government and, therefore, continuous human contact is not mentioned in the poem but is shared by reader and writer alike. It begins “From the high city tower, a vast wilderness./Expanse of sky and sea-and infinite this sorrow” Images of vast, sublime natural phenomena conjure those of the exiguity and loneliness of the poet. Minute images and delicate observations esthetize the solitude. Wang Wei¹¹ writes: “Alone, a stranger in a distant province-/At festivals I'm homesick through and through/In my mind's eye, my brothers climb the mountain,/ Each carrying dogwood/-but there's one too few.” In his *Grieving for Meng Haoran* he writes: “I will not ever see my friend again/Day after day

9. *Ib.* p.16.

10. P. 109.

11. Seth, 1992, 7.

Han waters eastward flow/ Even if I asked of the old man, the hills/And rivers would seem empty in Caizhou.¹²

Lamentation or absolute solitude is not the only possibility. In his *Zhongnan retreat*, Wang Wei paints a less tragic picture: “In middle age I’m quite drawn to the Way./Here by the hills I’ve built a home. I go/...alone/To see the spots that other folk don’t know...” Sound is another element in these constructions of solitude: “The sound of rustling silk is stilled/.../no footfalls echo on the floor” in H.A. Giles’ 1901 translation of the lament for his dead concubine by the Emperor Wu of Han¹³ (140-87 BCE)

II

Translators of these poems on solitude warn us about cultural and linguistic specificity and yet, fortunately, transgress such warnings by their main activity-translation. Cultural and linguistic specificities are elements in the formation of the critical corpus on Shem Tov. They are particularly noticeable because of certain technical difficulties. These go from the question of differences in the manuscripts available at different stages of the criticism, through different alphabets and problems of transcription of unvocalized texts without diacritics, through the different languages in which the reception of Shem Tov was expressed, through the problem of the consistency or inconsistency with the other works of the same author. In addition there are the large but unavoidable issues of cultural and historical background. These questions in practice are connected.

The lack of technical access leads to concentration on such aspects as fit the cultural and linguistic specificities of the critics’ background. Reliance on imperfect manuscripts for example could lead quite naturally to an impression of the *Proverbios morales* as unconnected proverbs. From here to the old

12. Seth, 1992, 6.

13. Graham, 1965, 333.

cliches about “oriental necklaces” with an esthetic of composition by simple addition, there is a small step. Faced with texts written in the language of the *fueros* before research on such language, critics may well turn to what they knew before reading the text. From the vantage point of dichotomies of reading according to the spirit or according to the flesh, it is comprehensible to encounter views about the lack of spirituality or other-worldly morality in the *Proverbios* and comparisons with the morality of the bazars. After Pidal, and in cultures strongly influenced by him, it is not surprising to find notions about the lack of *sosiego* and the nervous qualities of the *Proverbios*. If the history is inaccessible, then why not find Semitic qualities-reversibility of values, or even more amusing and far fetched, the Vietnam war, Zoroastrianism or Marian spirituality in the Rabbi’s work.

These are some of the possibilities in critical cultures which sometimes offer a celebration of anachronism rather than excessive historicism. In some cases, the anachronism is poetically creative. But not all anachronisms result in texts of the quality of Antonio Machado’s. Here we are simply concerned with avoiding the confusion between both. History is difficult to find in the corpus. Indeed, when the *Proverbios* text mentions nowhere the Zohar, Averroes, Abner of Burgos, it is difficult to imagine how readings which so strenuously attempt to inject them into Shem Tov’s *oeuvre* can be termed historical, unless one bears in mind that the critics reflect Baer’s *History* and its passages on the first half of the fourteenth century¹⁴. Half remembered old textbooks are also easily discernible behind the labeling of Shem Tov as poet of decline. To be sure, if we take, say, Shem Tov’s concept of “the book as friend”-i.e. the book as a paliative of solitude- and remember that more than a century ago Stein¹⁵ identified sources such as Moshe ibn Ezra, we might conclude that the *Proverbios* are a decadent translation or derivation, which contrasts with the pure originality of the eleventh/ twelfth century.

Today, however, both the “pure originality” theory and the “decline” label have been problematized beyond recognition. Almost at random one recalls that the belief in the pure originality of Yehudah Ha-Levi or others’

14. Preceded, of course, by his still highly influential article in Baer, 1935, 197-204.

15. Stein 1900.

image of nostalgia for the palm trees of the land of Israel was challenged about two decades ago by research on Arabic poetry of nostalgia as precedent¹⁶. More relevant is the existence of Arabic poems with verses such as: “I had not tasted the pleasure of life/ untill in my loneliness I had my books as my friends/ the decline comes from mingling with people/ leave them and you shall be honourable and a head/ nothing is higher than wisdom/ no friend but wisdom will I pursue”¹⁷. Much more interesting is the question of lack of prominence of the book as remedy for solitude in the corpus assembled by Vossler or that presented by Curtius.

It is not by such labeling that recent work achieves realization of Shem Tov’s extraordinary mastery of language and its concrete expressions in the *Proverbios*: the attitudes to dialefa and sinalefa, to be sure, but also, and throughout the text, the particular effects of supressions - by means of zeugma or apocope- as well as those of homonimia, alliteration or hiperbaton¹⁸. The same occurs in the case of the *Maase Ha-Rav* where the progress comes from the patient word by word analysis [Fruchtman¹⁹] which leads, in numerous cases, to the recognition of surprising new semantic charges.

III

The focus on the theme of solitude in the *Proverbios* is justified, also, as one of the spaces which offer us an opportunity to approach Shem Tov as bilingual author of a bilingual poetic *oeuvre* rather than of isolated beads in a necklace. If anything can be learnt from the development of the critical corpus, it is that frequently what seemed at first reading to be an isolated “bead” or section in the *Proverbios* had a subtle link to another “isolated bead” in the text. Thus, the case of solitude parallels the frequently discussed case of the “scissors” or *Libri cum characteribus ex nulla materia compositis*²⁰ a theme which is also present in more than one language or one text by

16. Doron – Barkai, 1981., 239-251.

17. Razhavi, 1984, 8.

18. Uria Maqua, 1990, 31-48.

19. See Fruchtman’s notes in Shem Tov Arduziel (edition by Nini -Fruchtman 1980).

20. Kurz 1977.

Shem Tov. The scissors could be explained, of course, by multiple hypothetical readings. But in the text itself -it could be argued- they are quite explicitly linked to solitude: [*Proverbios*, line 524]

fazen de uno dos
 non ha mejor riqueza
 que buena ermandat
 nin tan mala pobreza
 como la soledat.

That is to say, that the theme of “soledat” is presented as a natural, logical extension of the immediately preceding section on scissors.

If we look at the *Maaseh Ha- Rav* or *The disputation between the pen and the scissors*, we may wish to notice that there is a narrative framework. The text presents a story rather than a mere accumulation of arguments for one or the other side. This frame is created by way of a scene- a scene of winter. Without this scene of winter, the whole work would be diegetically impossible. One of the main components of the winter morning is that of solitude. This is articulated several times, in different ways, generally by means of different biblical allusions. Thus [I Sam. 10/21: Saul...was taken...and when they sought him he could not be found...[v.22] And the Lord answered Behold]*he hath hid himself amongst the stuff*. Similar is the following formulation of the same concept: [Is 63/3: I have trodden the winepress alone] *and of the people there was none with me*. He does this also in [Jos 6/1: Now Jericho was straitly shut up...]*none went out and none came in*.

This might seem to imply an almost mechanical accumulation of biblical fragments-the so called *musivstil*. The most practical outcome of this is in the field of translation of such medieval Hebrew texts into modern languages, where there is always the possibility of translating by means of a mechanical accumulation of fragments from the numerous Bible translations into modern languages. In the case of medieval, fourteenth century texts however, the language had evolved and acquired added resonances.

Thus, also allusive is *'En re`a we-'en haver*. They are united by parallelism in Job 30/29: "I am a *brother* to dragons and a *companion* to owls". Even closer is Ps 35 /14: "I behaved myself as though he had been my *friend or brother*." *Re`a -haver*, by this time, in the Hebrew of medieval Spain, already acquires added layers: the resonances and memories of grammatical and lexicographic discussions on the soledades, *Einsamkeit*, "loneliness" of unique, rare or unparalleled linguistic phenomena such as, say, the case of hapax legomena. Thus, for example, the dispute between the disciples of the tenth century grammarian from Al-Andalus, Menahem ben Saruq and their rivals, the disciples of the grammarian Dunash ben Labrat, contains the accusation²¹ against Menahem's putative belief that *peham* was a *re`a* [friend, cognate root] of *pehat*. Nevertheless one's impression is that it comes into its own in the multiple [at least seventeen] occurrences of *'en lo re`a* in the twelfth century texts of Abraham ibn Ezra. They appear in the sections of grammatical and lexicographic import in his biblical exegesis and seem to surpass his predecessors in terms of lasting influence. One random example would be his gloss on [Gen 6/14] *gopher*: "it has no friend" i.e. it is a hapax. We now know that the author of the *Proverbios* had meditated on the question of languages with numerous synonyms versus languages where only one word was available. He set down these meditations, in writing, in a recently studied Hebrew text²².

These are four different ways of setting up the scene of *soledat* in the *Ma`aseh Ha-Rav*. By comparison the construction of *soledat* in the *Proverbios* appears as dense and compressed. Indeed, recent research has argued cogently for methods of analysis which would lead to the conclusion that Shem Tov was a virtuoso of the *caesura*²³. In contrast, solitude in the *Ma`aseh* works by the techniques of *amplificatio* as has been seen. In both there is a link to scissors.

Most of the themes of the *Proverbios* concern problems created by living in the polis, in human, civil society. The section on solitude is relatively brief.

21. Stern 1870, 34; Varela Moreno 1981; Benavente Robles 1986; Saenz-Badillos 1980.

22. Gutwirth, 2000, 275-286.

23. Kantor 1992, pp. 109-133.

The Tang poems show the close link between the activity of writing about solitude on the one hand and, on the other, the circumstances of the poet's life at the center of civil society-government, bureaucracies, court life. Shem Tov's link to the court or similar institutions has not been seriously questioned. The inclusion in his poetic texts of the ruling monarchs of the Kingdom of Castile [Alfonso XI, Pedro I] are eloquent reminders of the social background of the poet. His one documented peer or friend, Ibn Shoshan, includes -in his *Book of Onyx*- poems related to tax-collection. This reinforces our views about the link between fiscal and literary history in the case of medieval Hebrew poetry perhaps particularly in the late middle ages, the period of Shem Tov, Ibn Shoshan and Bonafed. As tax collection was one of the main avenues for Jewish contacts with the court, Shem Tov's friend must be seen in such a context.

Of the four examples of solitude in the Ma'aseh, the last recalls the fundamental problem confronting writers on *soledat*. The paradoxical quality of the project of representing solitude through language has been discussed for other cultures. But it is present in Shem Tov as well. The solution is that solitude can never be absolute. But in Shem Tov it leads to the question of silence/language, a discussion which -as is becoming clear- is one of the many, unrecognized, "hidden" depths of the *Proverbios Morales*.

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