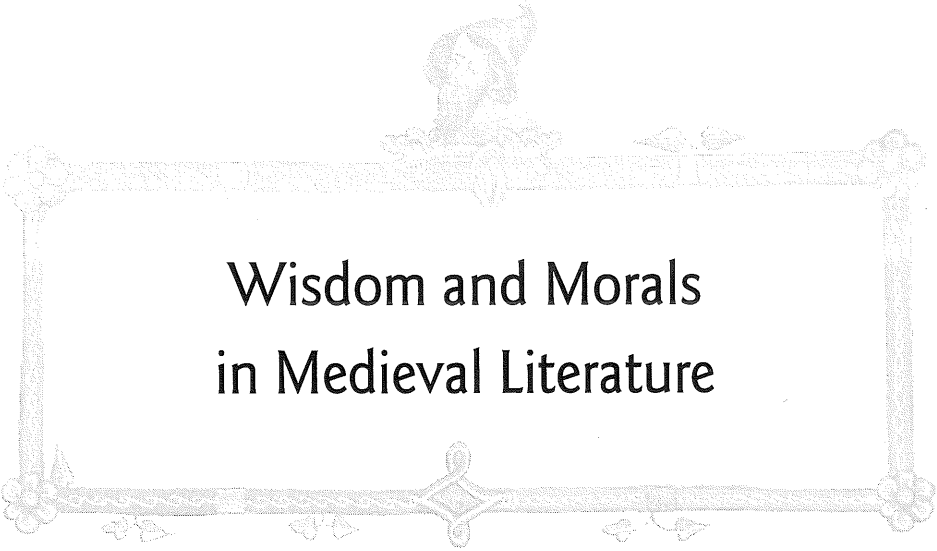


And Wisdom Shall Flow from the Wise ושכל יצא משכל



Wisdom and Morals in Medieval Literature

Edited by

Tovi Bibring and Revital Refael-Vivante



Misgav Yerushalayim Research Center
for the Heritage of Sephardi Jewry



Dedicated with infinite love
to our children,
Dafna and Tomer Refael-Vivante
and Shani Bibring,
eternal seekers of wisdom



The book was published with the support of
Akavyahu Foundation,
Department of Literature of the Jewish People at Bar-Ilan University,
and the Medieval Literature Research Initiative in memory of Dr. Dov Yarden

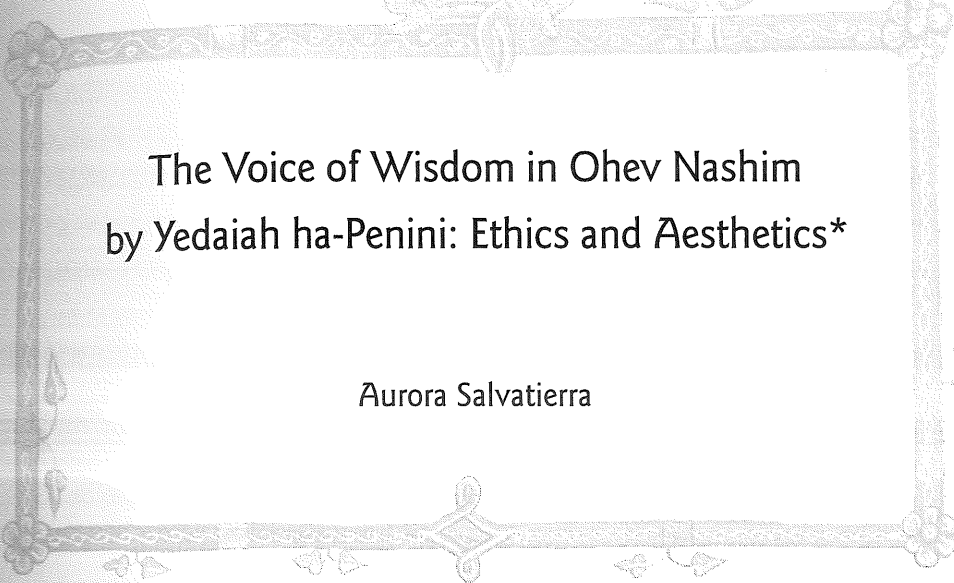
Language editor
Carolyn Gross-Baruch

Proofreading
Elana Ginsberg

Design and production
Nitsa Bruck

© 2022 Bibring and Rafael-Vivante. All rights reserved.
No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system,
or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying,
recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner

Printed in Jerusalem, 2022
ISBN 978-965-599-855-9



The Voice of Wisdom in Ohev Nashim
by Yedaiah ha-Penini: Ethics and Aesthetics*

Aurora Salvatierra

Introduction

Yedaiah ben Abraham Berdesi (also known as ha-Penini and En Bonet in Provençal) was born and lived in southern France during the last decade of the thirteenth century and early-mid fourteenth century (ca. 1280–after 1340).¹ The son of Abraham Berdesi, his work as a scientist, philosopher, and moralist draws the attention of researchers to this day.² However,

* This study is published within the framework of the research project “Lengua y literatura del judaísmo clásico: rabínico y medieval” (FFI2013-43813-P).

1 For biographical information on the writer, see Henry Gross, *Dictionnaire géographique de la France d'après les sources rabbiniques. Collection de la Revue des Études Juives*, 49 (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2011), 101–103; Ernest Renan, *Les écrivains juifs français du XIV siècle* (Paris: impr. Nationale 1969; reprint Nendel/Liechtenstein: Kraus, 1971). Vol. 31 of *Histoire Littéraire de la France*; ed. A. Rivet de la Grange (Paris: Benedictines. Congrégation de Saint Maur -Académie des inscriptions et Belles-Lettres), 350–403.

2 The most extensive and rigorous academic attention has focused on his most popular work, *Behinat Ha'Olam (The Examination of the World)*, which is preserved in at least 75 manuscripts, and his polemical letters in particular.

almost nothing has been written about his achievements as a man of letters, although the *ars poetriae* was, indeed, one of his interests. In addition to his poems – some as well known as *Bakashat Hamemim* (*Petition of the Mem*)³ and the elegy *Elef Alafin*⁴ (*A Thousand Ales*) – another noteworthy work by this author contains a unique and passionate defense of poetry and poets: *Sefer Hapardes* (*The Book of the Orchard*),⁵ an ethical piece written when ha-Penini was a mere fifteen years old, offers a compendium of brief maxims that reflect his ideas about poetic creation and rhetoric.

However, his most important contribution to the field of literature is, without a doubt, *Ohev Nashim* (*The Lover of Women*), a fairly short work that forms part of the debate on women begun by Yehudah ibn Shabbetai with his *Minḥat Yehudah Sone HaNashim* (*The Offering of Yehudah the Misogynist*).⁶ A contemporary poet named Yitzchak responded to this extremely popular and widely read story in two works with a similar narrative structure: *Ezrat HaNashim* (*In Defense of Women*) and *Ein Mishpat* (*The Fount of Law*).⁷ These pieces criticize Ibn Shabbetai's

3 A poem, written in imitation of his father's *Bakashat Ha'Alefin*, which contains one thousand words that begin with the letter *mem*.

4 Susan L. Einbinder, "Yedaiah Berdesi's *Elef Alafin*," in *Studies in Arabic and Hebrew Letters in Honor of Raymond P. Scheindlin*, eds. J. P. Decter and M. Rand (New York: Gorgias Press Edition, 2007), 37–46.

5 Published for the first time in Constantinople in 1515 and preserved in several manuscripts: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Mich 536 (NLI f-22082), 1518–1520; Moscow, Russian State Library, MS Guenzburg 315 (NLI f-43028) dated 1524; Warsaw, Zydzowski Instytut Historyczny K 99 (NLI f-10100, f-11938) from the 19th century, and New York, Jewish Theological Seminary, MS 2131 (NLI f-11229). Joseph Luzzatto published the eighth section in *Oṣar ha-sifrut* 3 (1889–1890), 1–18. The text was republished by Leopold Dukes in *Nahal Qedumim, Nahalat Ya'aqov* (Tel Aviv: Sion, 1968), 21–23, in Hebrew.

6 Published by Matti Huss, *Critical Editions of Minḥat Yehudah, Ezrat HaNashim and Ein Mishpat with Prefaces, Variants, Sources and Annotations*, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Ph.D. Dissertation, Hebrew University, 1991). From here, Huss, *Minḥat Yehudah*. Currently both volumes can be consulted online at <http://hufind.huji.ac.il/Record/HUJ001949920>.

7 Both texts were published by Huss, *Minḥat Yehudah*.

misogynistic attitude and constitute the earliest literary controversy in Hebrew related to attacks on or in defense of women. In some ways, ha-Penini's text continued this debate. However, more than ninety years had passed since Ibn Shabbetai wrote his work, which had crossed the borders of medieval Iberia and reached southern France. Though the thematic ties between the two stories are maintained, the context in which *Ohev Nashim* was written and received was quite different.

Although the work is interesting in many aspects because of its characteristics, the almost complete lack of studies on *Ohev Nashim* is surprising. As far as I know, the only materials available today are brief references in introductions to ha-Penini and his work and general descriptions included in broader studies.⁸ Moreover, in some cases, opinions regarding the value of the book are not high.⁹ However, even the first contact with *Ohev Nashim* reveals a passionate piece of writing that raises countless questions, with both a high level of originality and remarkable literary value in terms of reaching a better understanding of medieval Hebrew letters.

Unlike *Minḥat Yehudah Sone HaNashim*, which is extant in at least nineteen manuscripts and two early sixteenth-century editions, the only known version of Yedaiah ha-Penini's text was, until quite recently, the Oxford manuscript held at the Bodleian Library, MS Opp. Add. Qu. 144 (NLI f-21678).¹⁰ This source was edited by Adolf Neubauer in 1884,¹¹ annotated

8 For instance, Jefim Schirmann, *Hebrew Poetry in Spain and Provence*, ed. Ezra Fleischer, 4 vols. (Jerusalem: Bialik; Tel Aviv: Devir 1954–1960), 4: 489–498, in Hebrew, which includes a fragment from the work, and Schirmann, *The History of Hebrew Poetry*, 2: 505–508.

9 For instance, Schirmann, *The History of Hebrew Poetry*, 506, which disparages the book's style ("it is even surpassed by *Ezrat HaNashim*") and asserts that "it is not possible (and is probably not worth the effort) to briefly describe the plot." Unless otherwise indicated, the translations from the Hebrew are mine.

10 The digital version is available at <http://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/inquire/Discover/Search/>

11 Adolf [Abraham] Neubauer, "Jedaiah hap-Penini's *Ohev Nashim*: Edited from a Unique Manuscript in the Bodleian Library," in *Jubelschrift zum Neunzigsten Geburtstag*

by Senior Sach¹² in 1894, and reprinted by Abraham Habermann in his *Shalosh Maqamot al Nashim*.¹³ At the end of the 1980s, however, a second manuscript came to light, Boesky 76, currently in New York at the Jewish Theological Seminary, MS 10774.¹⁴ This is a complex, passionate text that dates back to the fifteenth century.¹⁵

Despite the argument that this is a minor work of poor quality, a close reading of *Ohev Nashim* holds more than a few surprises. This article will focus on a particular aspect of the work: the function of moralizing material (specifically that of *Tevunah*) in the medieval culture of the thirteenth and fourteenth-century debate.

Central Plot: Tevunah in the Defense of Women and Marriage

Wisdom, one of the major themes in medieval literature, constitutes a preeminent motif in *Ohev Nashim*. This text tells the story of the dispute

des dr. L. Zunz (Berlin: Louis Gerschel, 1884), part. I, 1–19. Moritz Steinschneider made some interesting corrections to this edition, “Frauenliteratur.” *Israelitische Letterbode* 12 (1888): 67–69.

12 “Tiqune Ha-shirim She-ba-sefer Ohev Nashim le-R. Yedayah ha-Penini ha-Berdesi u-bi’urihem,” in *Matmone Mistarim*, ed. Hayyim Brody (Krakow: bi-defus Y. Fisher, 1894), part II, 1–20, in Hebrew.

13 Abraham Meir Habermann, *Three Maqāmat on Women* (Jerusalem: Ben Uri, 1971), 54–72, in Hebrew.

14 This manuscript, which dates from the fifteenth century, belonged to the Boesky family and was auctioned in 2004 by Sotheby’s. The digital version is available at http://garfield.jtsa.edu:8881/R/-?func=dbin-jump-full&object_id=121355&silolibrary=GEN01

15 See Salvatierra Ossorio, Aurora, “Ohev Nashim and Minhah Yehudah Sone HaNashim: New Fragments of a Debate” in *His Pen Ink is a Powerful Mirror. Andalusí Judaea-Arabí, and Other Near Eastern Studies in Honor of Ross Brann*, eds. Bursi, A., Pearce, S.J. and Zafer, H. (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2020), 259–281. I would like to note that, contrary to commonly accepted opinion, this copy contains interesting variants with respect to the Oxford manuscript. It also includes extensive fragments of the *Minhat Yehudah Sone Hanashim* that are unusual and differ from the versions known to date and edited by Matti Huss.

between Cushan-Rishathaim (Judg. 3:8–10) and his army of ignoramuses, and defenders of women. The former group renounces marriage, convinced that only by repudiating their wives will they be happy. It is an attitude that makes fools of them. In opposition to them is a group of wise men, identified as the supporters of women/wives: among others, Tobiah (an *alter ego* of Yedaiah ha-Penini), Sherayah, and most notably, *Tevunah* (Wisdom). *Tevunah* is a central motif in the story, for it is around her that the praise of women is structured.

Throughout the work, *Tevunah*'s presence is constant, and emphasis is placed on her solidarity with the group that 'loves women': *Tevunah*'s prince, her people, her prophet, and the author himself (Tobiah/Yedaiah ha-Penini), all members of her army. The identification of Wisdom with the defense of wives, and of foolishness (*kesilut*) with the rejection of them is a key element in the story. Indeed, the core argument is structured around the binomial of understanding/marriage and ignorance/repudiation. From the beginning, it is expected that the battle between the two troops will be unequal. On one side is Tobiah, the 'author', *Tevunah*, and God himself; the other side includes foolishness, Cushan's sons, Cushi ben Akran, Satan, and Fate, and the mere mention of their names evokes evil.

These wicked figures describe women using the common clichés found in these types of texts: they are liars, seductresses; they only bring sadness and regret.¹⁶ The criticism particularly focuses on two aspects: the power of their beauty ("I would have gone crazy looking into your eyes and contemplating your beauty")¹⁷ and the evil that passion ("like a glass of poison")¹⁸ brings to men. It also underscores how they are the antithesis of knowledge in two respects: on the one hand, they are responsible for men becoming foolish

16 On these stereotypes, see Robert Archer, *Misoginia y defensa de las mujeres. Antología de textos medievales* (Valencia: Ediciones Cátedra, 2001); R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

17 Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Opp. Add. Qu. 144, fol. 2v, ll. 14–15. The fragments cited or translated in this study are based on the reading of this manuscript.

18 Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Opp. Add. Qu. 144, fol. 1, l. 17.

(something already achieved by Eve) and on the other, they are presented as anathema to Wisdom:¹⁹ knowledge is never with them²⁰ and “if you send them wisdom, they will vomit up the morsel they have eaten” (Prov. 23:8).²¹

In these early dialogues, the harsh words aimed at women (you will not give them shelter; you will cast them away from your side; you will increase their sorrow) echo well-known attitudes found in the so-called misogynous medieval works. ‘Wise men’ must protect themselves from women both because of the associated carnal dangers and because they represent an obstacle to obtaining knowledge.

Faced with this group of characters who are opposed to women, *Tevunah* enters the scene to sing their virtues, but does not adopt a female embodiment.²² She only allows her voice to be heard without any association to a corporeal image. However, her discourses are delivered as a female and her reactions and attitudes reveal emotions commonly associated with female characters. She addresses God with her words, crying while praying to him. Her prayer is a lament against the lies and evil that fill the earth, a plea from one who feels abandoned and fears that she has been forgotten by her Creator. It is a dejected Wisdom who asks for protection, like a maiden calling out for help. The “fruit of the belly of God”²³ has ceased to have children and is now sterile. Folly has had consequences for her similar to those produced by foolish men for the women they reject: loneliness, helplessness, and a lack of descendants. This oration leads to the formation of an army to confront the fools. This well-known and highly

19 On the dissonance between Wisdom and women, a commonplace in the medieval mindset, see Emily Francomano, *Wisdom and Her Lovers in Medieval and Early Modern Hispanic Literature* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008).

20 Cf. Ber. 22a.

21 Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Opp. Add. Qu. 144, fol.3r, ll. 3–4.

22 Unlike what occurs in a number of contemporary Hebrew works in which Wisdom is personified in a female body. See Tova Rosen, *Unveiling Eve. Reading Gender in Medieval Hebrew Literature*. Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 86–102.

23 Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Opp. Add. Qu. 144, fol. 6v, l. 8.

efficient literary recourse, in which strong women exhort men to bravery, is projected here in the female representation of *Tevunah*.

God responds to Wisdom “out of the whirlwind,”²⁴ as if she were a new Job. His words, full of biblical quotations that add to the solemnity of the discourse, take a clear position in favor of women “bedecked with sapphires” (Song of Sol. 5:14).²⁵ The focus of His intervention is to console Wisdom. Against the threats of fate and ignorance, He promises to help her and announces her victory: soon He will cover her in tunics “like a bride I will adorn your attire.”²⁶ At the same time, He threatens the fools and husbands who do not protect their partners. The same God, then, takes up the defense of women and offers them protection very similar to what He offers *Tevunah*.

This position is maintained when another character, Tobiah, is put in charge of transmitting these new teachings. This alter ego of the author also delivers a long speech before God as the spokesman of *Tevunah*: “These are the words of the agreement made by Wisdom.”²⁷ He uses his words to caution men who scorn women about the seriousness of their conduct and warns about the punishment awaiting them: bitterness, desolation and *She’ol* itself. In contrast, he heaps praise upon women: they beget just men; they transmit integrity through their breast milk; they are stars in the sky; their works are glory and goodness; nothing good is lacking in them. In addition to these words of encomium, the author makes a great effort to depict male desire for women in a positive light. Taking Proverbs 11:23 (“the desire of the righteous is only good”) as a starting point, the love felt for the gazelles is presented as something good, inscribed in the hearts of men by divine will: “love for the gazelles and desire for them is the inheritance of the servants of the Lord.”²⁸ Certainly, this position is

24 Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Opp. Add. Qu. 144, fol. 7v, l. 21.

25 Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Opp. Add. Qu. 144, fol. 7v l. 22.

26 Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Opp. Add. Qu. 144, fol. 8r, l. 12.

27 Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Opp. Add. Qu. 144, fol. 12v, ll. 13–14.

28 Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Opp. Add. Qu. 144, fol. 13r, ll. 23–24.

consistent with the teachings of rabbinic Judaism, which understand that the idea of pleasure and religious virtue can be complementary.²⁹ *Tevunah* is presented as a great ally of women and her words sever women from one of the great 'defects' associated with them: desire (their body) as a danger for men. In *Ohev Nashim*, desire for women is neither a cause for sin nor something that alienates men from knowledge. Consequently, there is no ambivalence whatsoever regarding marriage, nor propaganda against it.

Interestingly, this literary approach is very different from that of *Minhat Yehudah Sone HaNashim*, the work that inspired ha-Penini.³⁰ Unlike Ibn Shabbetai's texts, *Ohev Nashim* does not allow the reader to doubt for even one moment that reason is on the side of *Tevunah*. Her message makes it clear that there is no separation between folly, evil, and contempt against women and marriage. Her words indicate clear support for the side of matrimony and for the sensible and just men who defend it. She fiercely censures men who hold women in contempt and clearly positions herself in favor of abandoned wives, recognizing their very different virtues.

In *Minhat Yehudah*, Wisdom and the model of the 'wise man' are, initially, represented by Tahkemoni, Zerah, their friends and whoever else

29 Reuben Kimelman, "The Rabbinic Theology of the Physical: Blessings, Body and Soul, Resurrection, and Covenant and Election," in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, ed. S. T. Katz, vol. 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2006), 946–976. However, this favorable attitude with respect to desire is a position that contrasts with the dominant stance in the sociocultural context of the era: the seductive power of women (even within matrimony) is synonymous with danger. This attitude is also reflected in numerous texts written in Hebrew that demonize the bodies of women. It is equally striking to see how in *Ohev Nashim* the boundary traditionally established between Wisdom and women breaks down in these discourses. *Tevunah* prays for the women and asks God to help them. She goes so far as to consider that those who offend women offend God Himself. This creates an unusual link between God, knowledge, and women. See Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Opp. Add. Qu. 144, fol.13r, ll. 7–8.

30 In medieval texts "*Raison*" usually expresses the neoplatonic discourses and, therefore, she is against marriage and sexual love. From this point of view, *Minhat Yehudah Sone HaNashim* probably reveals the more current neoplatonic perspective of women and marriage.

opposes marriage. These are the 'positive' figures and their ethical message consists of warning against female evil and the dangers of marrying.³¹ It is they who constitute, as it were, the army of the 'wise', determined to return to the world the order taken away by women. In an unusual association in a Jewish milieu, wisdom (at least at the beginning of the story) consists of refusing to take a wife. However, in *Ohev Nashim*, *Tevunah* forms part of the group she belongs to by convention, alongside those who defend marriage.

Thus, Yedaiah ha-Penini returns to Wisdom the values and a discourse concordant with Judaism. While Ibn Shabbetai inverts the concept of traditional ethics when he transforms celibacy into an expression of rectitude and understanding, ha-Penini returns it to its original place. Wisdom and marriage now fight on the same team from beginning to end. In this respect, the function of *Tevunah* is to teach the correct standards of conduct in the style of medieval didactic literature. Readers of the era, who were familiar with this image of Wisdom, found a model in which they recognized the commonplaces of the sapiential tradition of their community.

Tevunah: A True Winner?

As expected, the story ends with the defeat of the fools. Sherayah's marriage to one of the repudiated women and the homecoming of the wives symbolize the return to order and the triumph of Wisdom. However, after the story that constitutes the main body of *Ohev Nashim*, ha-Penini surprises his readers with a new (and very original) scene in which the 'author' and his 'audience', a group of poets (*edat ha-melišim*), both appear.³² In a dialogue with Yedaiah, this collective character discusses the impression made by the text. Their presence is reminiscent of the well-known poetic institutions of the period like the *Puy d'Arras*,³³ the *Cour Amoreuse* and the *Consistoire*

31 See, among others, the *Tahkemoni* testament written in imitation of sapiential literature. See Huss, *Minḥat Yehudah*, vol. II, 6–10.

32 Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Opp. Add. Qu. 144, fol. 20r.

33 Known as the *Confrérie des jongleurs et bourgeois d'Arras* and *Puy d'Arras*, this circle of troubadours from northern France was remarkably influential during the twelfth

de la Gaie Science, in which groups of poets created and enjoyed competing with texts in collaboration.

This group of experts in rhetoric (*melisim*), stunned by the beauty of the text, pays homage to the 'author' and insists that he reveal the nature and secret of his writing to them. After several attempts to get an answer, Tobiah and Yedaiah give them the key: everything is the fruit of their imagination and has only one aim, to make them laugh:

Listen all people, this is what I declare: Why do you quarrel with me (Exod. 17:2)? All of this is the product of my imagination. As long as I have existed, my eyes have not seen Cushan, nor did Wisdom yell, nor did Sedayah fight; this is merely a story with which I played zithers amid fatigue to cheer myself. All who hear it will laugh with me (Gen. 21:6). I swear to you upon my life that these things did not exist.³⁴

Once the secret of the work is revealed, the circle of poets begs Yedaiah to immediately give them a "beautiful copy of the text of the work" (Esther 4:8), which he does. After receiving their copy, the men attending the encounter – "judicious men, experts in rhetoric"³⁵ – are pleased and praise it endlessly: "How can this book be crowned with gold and light? It is more valuable than wisdom and honor, so pleasing are the words that we are struck dumb; today is a day of glad tidings, but we are speechless."³⁶ The 'author' is then elected to be king, a common practice, for example, in the *puy*s where the *ménestrels* (minstrels) who met regularly would elect the

and thirteenth centuries and well received by court society. They were particularly involved in the development of the *jeu parti*, a literary genre in which two poets debated, usually about love. With the poets unable to reach an agreement, the poem and argument would end and judges would be chosen to decide the winner. See the classic work by Arthur Långfors, *Recueil général des jeux-partis français* (Paris: Édouard Champion. Société des anciens textes français. 1926), 2 vols. and the more recent Michèle Gally, "Disputer d'amour: les arrageois et le jeu-parti," *Romania*, 107/1 (1986), 55–76, and *Parler d'amour au puy d'Arras: lyrique en jeu* (Orléans: Paradigme, 2004).

34 Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Opp. Add. Qu. 144, fol. 20v. ll. 23–25 and 21r, ll. 1–3.

35 Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Opp. Add. Qu. 144, fol. 21r, ll. 10–11.

36 Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Opp. Add. Qu. 144, fol. 21r, ll. 11–12.

truest connoisseur of science and rhetoric and crown him for his superior verses.³⁷

It is striking that in this dialogue between the 'author' and his 'audience' there is no allusion whatsoever to the argument in the preceding story or the battle between the fools and the wise men. There is no discussion of who won the battle or what happened with the women. Neither is the victory of *Tevunah* (and, indirectly, God) celebrated. Now the discourse focuses on beauty, the literary quality of ha-Penini's work, and his skill at writing. This statement from Tobiah/Yedaiah demands a reconsideration of the meaning of the story that faces defenders and critics of marriage off against each other. In it, *Tevunah* seems to reclaim a sapiential discourse in consonance with Jewish tradition, but now the character of ha-Penini and the rhetoric experts seem to dissociate the didactic content (i.e. the pro-marriage message) from its value as a literary work.

Both planes (ethical and aesthetic, as it were) reappear in the final section of *Ohev Nashim*.³⁸ In this fragment, Yedaiah and Ibn Shabbetai (who descend from heaven) once again take up the topic of marriage and the argument about women. This occurs when the fame of ha-Penini's book reaches the Garden of Eden, where Yehudah is resting. Then Ibn Shabbetai, who has been dead for more than fifty years, returns to the land of the living to defend his honor and that of his *Ofrenda*.³⁹ The reader becomes witness to an exceptional faceoff between the two authors.

37 See Jane H. M. Taylor, *The Poetry of François Villon: Text and Context* (Cambridge-New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 7; Mary O'Neill, *Courtly Love Songs of Medieval France: Transmission and Style in the Trowère Repertoire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Edmond Faral, *Les jongleurs en France au Moyen Ages* (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, Éditeur, 1910), 268-269.

38 This final fragment was edited by Jefim Schirmann, *The History of Hebrew Poetry*, 4: 492-496. See Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Opp. Add. Qu. 144, fol. 21r, ll. 20-25 - fol. 23r.

39 This poetic recourse strongly emphasizes the dominance of competition in medieval French culture where numerous literary genres (*tensó, demande, jeu parti*, etc.) bear witness to elaborate textual games in which each participant tried to surpass his predecessor with the complicity of his audience.

In the dialogue between the two men, Yedaiah defends himself and blames Shabbetai for the harm caused by his book, which has induced the members of his town to disown their wives, instigated divorces, and incited the condemnation of women. For his part, Ibn Shabbetai reiterates his opinion: women are foolish and evil; the men who leave their wives are blessed and those who want to marry are cursed. The topic of the debate is once again the rejection or support of marriage. However, no agreement is reached during the brief argument between the two poets about what consideration is due to women or, indeed, regarding the supremacy of one work over the other. Ha-Penini then proposes a trial, where the judges are none other than Yehudah and Meir dels Enfanẓ, the author's patrons praised at the beginning of the book: "Now we prepare to struggle in the presence of two noble sons, who are most beloved and pleasant."⁴⁰

This literary recourse was a common solution in medieval debates, where the introduction of a judicial structure is well documented.⁴¹ Trial models, in combination with the scholastic *disputatio*, were recurrent forms used in literary disputes.⁴² At least in theory, an authority was sought to decide the case and present a verdict in favor of one of the opponents, a solution that, among other things, helped to give the text a sense of the theatrical.

In *Ohev Nashim*, the judges admit that they are aware of *Minḥat Yehudah Sone HaNashim*, but they reject the author's arguments against women:

The two nobles, the two luminaries, answered him, saying: Listen Yehudah, the greatest in rhetoric, do not betray the gazelles, do not consider woman a daughter of Belial! (1 Sam. 1:16) If in the days of Noah even the sons of God came down (Gen. 6:2) to be in their company, even more so those who

40 Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Opp. Add. Qu. 144, fol. 21v, l. 20.

41 Many relevant examples can be found in the Romance languages, both the early *tenso* and *jeux parti* and later works like Christine de Pizan's poems and *dits*, and in Hebrew literature including *Minḥat Yehudah* itself and the first replies to it: *Ezrat HaNashim* (*In Defense of Women*) and *Ein Mishpat* (*The Fount of Law*).

42 See Emma Cayley, *Debate and Dialogue: Alain Chartier in His Cultural Context* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 20–26.

live in clay houses (Job 14:19)! From the glory of God she comes, the prudent woman comes from God (Prov. 19:14), there are honor and glory in her tent,⁴³ her mouth is smoother than oil (Prov. 5:3). But the night prevents the man from ascending, the watchtower on the Ophel remains out of his reach (Mic. 4:8). Let the darkness reach him this night! Therefore, stop, put an end to your words, better that you should not vow (Eccl. 5:5). Tobiah has worked great wonders with his grace and truth is with him. But for your honor we will give you a verdict divided into two parts; in view of the fact that your book will survive, we will deliver an impartial judgment neither in his favor nor in yours.⁴⁴

This fragment depicts Meir and Yehudah's support for Yedaiah's (Tobiah) position in favor of women. Their words indicate a clear position on the side of matrimony and of the 'author' who defends it. At the same time, however, because of Ibn Shabbetai's prestige as a poet and the fame of his work, they choose not to hand down a sentence and give an impartial judgment; their respect for and recognition of his literary skill save him from punishment. The trial has no winner and no guilty party. Nevertheless, the text makes it clear which author's message about women is the losing one: "Listen to the judgment surrounded by truth since the judgment is God's (Deut. 1:17). Let each one take a gazelle to his home, to stand before him and serve him (2 Chron. 29:11) and let her have illustrious boys and girls, let boys and girls be born to her, iniquity will not be your guest (Ps. 5:5) if he be a married man."⁴⁵

It is clear that the judges reject Yehudah's arguments against women and reproach him for using his skill with language to denounce them. However,

43 This follows the manuscript, which differs in some cases from the reading proposed by Schirmann.

44 Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Opp. Add. Qu. 144, folio 22v, lines 10–21. Schirmann, *Hebrew Poetry*, 4: 495. Cf. Arié Schippers, "Abraham Bedersi, Yeda'ya ha-Penini and the traditions of Spain and Provence" in *Mittuv Yosef. Yosef Tobi Jubilee*, eds. Ayelet Oettinger and Danny Bar-Maoz, volume One: *Bible, Medieval Literature, Modern Literature* (Haifa: The Center for the Study of Jewish Culture in Spain and Islamic Countries, 2011), 370.

45 Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Opp. Add. Qu. 144, fol. 22r, ll. 22–26. Schirmann, *Hebrew Poetry*, 4: 495–496.

at the same time, thanks to Ibn Shabbetai's prestige as a poet ("great artist of language," "his words were sweeter than honey, his lips dropped sweetness as the honeycomb")⁴⁶ and the fame of his work ("in view of the fact that your book will survive"), he is not given a sentence.⁴⁷ In fact, Ibn Shabbetai is content with the disguised victory ("He answered as a sincere man, saying, 'That is right'.")⁴⁸ and immediately returns to paradise: he spreads his wings and the angels carry him away as an astonished Yedaiah and his friends watch "a spirit ascend out of the earth" (1 Sam. 28:13). In the trial held for ha-Penini's work, the loser would not be asked to repent.

Tevunah and the Culture of Debate in the Thirteenth–Fourteenth Centuries

There is no doubt that the defense of women and marriage is an important part of the text, but *Ohev Nashim* is not merely a response to the supposedly misogynistic contents of *Minḥat Yehudah*. Considering the main story and the final section of *Ohev Nashim*, it is clear that *Tevunah* and her praise of marriage are the winners in this battle. As noted above, more than any other character, it is *Tevunah* who most solidly defends women in the text.

In this respect, Wisdom's triumph is undeniable. The battle between those who censure and those who praise women ends with the complete defeat of Cushan and his army of demons and sinners, all of whom are fully humiliated and punished. The positive postulate of marriage, in accordance with rabbinic Halakha, triumphs over the negative image of wives. From this point of view, moreover, the victory of *Tevunah* and all that she represents is also a victory for the 'author' and his message, since Tobiah/ha-Penini is one

46 Cf. Sg 4:11. Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Opp. Add. Qu. 144, fol. 21v, l. 4.

47 The judges' decision not to determine who is guilty was nothing new in this literary genre where the final decision was often avoided (as in this case) or postponed. See Adrian Armstrong, "The Deferred Verdict: A Topos in Late-Medieval Poetic Debates?," *French Studies Bulletin*, 18/64 (1997), 12–14; Emma Cayley, *Debate and Dialogue*, 25–26.

48 Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Opp. Add. Qu. 144, fol. 23v, ll. 13–14. Schirmann, *Hebrew Poetry*, 4: 496.

of the characters fighting alongside Wisdom in her battle against the fools. However, one fact is nonetheless important here: at no time is the beauty of *Minḥat Yehudah* and the honor that its author merits denied. Neither *Tevunah*'s pro-women message nor her support for the 'wise men' imply a criticism of the antagonist's work (despite its attack on marriage).

This is an ambiguous solution. On the one hand, the triumph of *Tevunah* and her teachings are proclaimed, while on the other, the defender of the contrary position (Ibn Shabbetai) is honored for his work, and his authority as an author is recognized. Moreover, at no time are the readers asked to cease to enjoy the 'misogynist' work, *Minḥat Yehudah Sone Hanashim*. This raises the question, then: who is the winner in this encounter? Yedaiah and his didactic message? Or Ibn Shabbetai and his good literary work? To understand this apparent contradiction, it is important to establish the context around the work. Certainly, *Ohev Nashim* belongs to the literary current of attacking and praising women, a form with a long tradition in the medieval world.⁴⁹ However, it also (and primarily) falls within the literary debate model, a formula that became popularized in vernacular language with the appearance of troubadour lyric poetry.

Behind *Ohev Nashim* lies a culture of competition and debate, as the author himself notes in the prologue when he says that, having been deprived of the company of noblemen for a few days, he decided to delight "in the stories of the ancients, in their poetry and poems of old." These include what he considers the best of the works and most praiseworthy: "a beautiful, short *melitsah* by the poet (*melits*) R. Yehudah ben Shabbetai ha-Levi called *Sone Nashim*, the most praiseworthy of all the *melitsot* in books."⁵⁰ This text has made a deep impression on him and moves him

49 See, for instance, Alcuin Blamires, *Woman Defamed and Women Defended: an Anthology of Medieval Texts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); Helen Solterer, *The Master and Minerva. Disputing Women in French Medieval Culture* (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 1995); Alcuin Blamires, *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

50 Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Opp. Add. Qu. 144, fol. 1r, ll. 6-7.

to write forthwith. The main intention that ha-Penini reveals is that of competing with Ibn Shabbetai's book. From these very first lines, ha-Penini joins the literary debate in a context where the desire to fill free time, have fun, and emulate and live up to a famous author takes precedence over all other reasons. This practice was proliferated in late medieval France in many forms (*dialogue, jugement, jeux partis, the tenso*, etc.), each with its own characteristics. But all were part of a diverse repertoire of 'debates' that developed a number of commonplaces and can only be fully understood in the framework of post-twelfth-century culture and society. From this perspective, Wisdom is more than merely one voice championing marriage or an instrument to defend women. She is also a key part of the structure of the debate proffered to the audience. The educational or ethical value of the content is, then, at the service of a game in which literary creation was inseparable from response, provocation, and controversy as well as from a system of social relationships that created group identities during the medieval era.

Especially in thirteenth and fourteenth-century medieval France, this enthusiasm for literary competitions was reflected in numerous verse and prose texts that formed part of a game that featured the participation of a "collaborative debating community."⁵¹ Members of this group did not only read and interpret texts but also responded to them. This was a game between opponents where texts were the combatants, fighting to acquire prestige. The main function of these debates was to bring together a group of courtiers with shared values and social behavior, and not only to hold a trial with 'winners' and 'losers'.

In this sociocultural context, ha-Penini offers a dual 'battle' to his audience. On the one hand, he pits Wisdom's message against that of the fools or, in other words, the praise of women against condemnation of

51 This expression is used by Emma Cayley in her suggestive *Debate and Dialogue*. On the meaning of the term 'collaborative debating community', see especially pp. 5–8. See also *Medieval Debate Poetry. Vernacular Works*, ed. and trans. Michel-André Bossy (New York-London: Garland Publishing, 1987), XI–XV.

them. To this end, *Tevunah* and her followers defend truths accepted by the community, rescue an ethical discourse, and spread an indisputable pro-marriage message among the Jews. Thanks to her, readers identify with rabbinical-communal norms that consider marriage a sacred obligation. *Tevunah* allows the fools to be defeated and the world returned to the order that Ibn Shabbetai rejected. But when the dispute focuses on the prestige of the authors, Ibn Shabbetai's defeat is not as clear. His language, his mastery of rhetoric, and his prestige are cause for admiration and recognition. In his opponent, the young ha-Penini sees a teacher. He refrains from criticizing his work and allows him to enjoy the pleasures of Eden thanks to the quality and fame of his work.

There is no doubt that ha-Penini uses Wisdom to respond to the message of a rival who had managed to subvert the values traditionally associated with her. In the main part of the story, her presence and words seem to associate the *belles-lettres* with honest habits and praiseworthy actions. However, the context of the book makes it clear that the author's intention is also to demonstrate his knowledge of the *ars poetica* and his skill in a setting where poetry is a collaborative social activity that bolsters the prestige of the poet and entertains the audience.

Tevunah's didactic and edifying message and her power to address public ethical concerns in *Ohev Nashim* are at the service of a literary debate in a context where "this poet's work is not merely influenced by existing poetry; it is often explicitly conceived and presented as a response to it."⁵² The social nature of poetry and its potential as a vehicle for competition are well illustrated by Yedaiah ha-Penini, a Jewish author who, like his contemporaries, formed part of a poetic community that did not only create individual works, but also productive connections between texts.

52 Adrian Armstrong, *The Virtuous Circle. Competition, Collaboration and Complexity in Late Medieval French Poetry* (Tempe, Arizona: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2012) XIV.