

Humor in Medieval Invective: The Correspondence of Todros Abulafia and Don David Ben Shoshan

Shira Shevarsman Maziel*

Abstract: The poetry of Todros Abulafia, who flourished in Christian Spain during the thirteenth century, is conspicuous for the whimsy that typifies it. This essay seeks to examine the humorous aspects of invective in the correspondence between Abulafia and David Ben Shoshan, a powerful Jewish official. Though the invective is vicious, it includes gentle touches of humor that lend it a lighthearted air and mitigate its inherent offensiveness. The main argument here advanced is that this humorous veneer had meaning for the poet in the context of his lived experience: the dichotomy of comedy and invective reflects the instability of Abulafia's life and the realities of his complex relationships with the dignitaries of his day. The humor shrouds the venom, reduces it by a degree, and permits him to preserve his relationship with his esteemed interlocutor while at the same time resisting, even defying him.¹

Keywords: Abulafia, invective poetry, Ben Shoshan, Christian Spain, derision, humor.

Introduction

The poetry of Todros Abulafia, of thirteenth-century Christian Castile, is marked by humor and whimsy. Schirmann characterizes him as impulsive, noting the sometimes “comedic disparity between the classical veil of his poetry and the face of the clown peering out from beneath it.”² Baer, in his introduction to *The Garden of Parables and Riddles* (Hebrew: *Gan ha-Meshalim ve-ha-Ḥidot*), sums up Abulafia's comicality with his observation that “wit truly is the foundation of his thinking; it is everything to him. His wit is coupled with delicate jest, and typically finds expression in brief epigrams.”³

Whimsy and wit proliferate in Abulafia's work, and manifest both in the various genres of his poetry and periodically in his life story. The wit comes across in poems of pleasure, such as love poems,⁴ but also in other fields of poetry. This essay considers the comic aspect of Abulafia's poetry

¹ This article has been published in Hebrew in *Humor Mekuvvan 10* (2018), pp. 55–67.

² Schirmann and Fleisher 1997, p. 396.

³ Abulafia 1932–1936, vol.1, p. xvi.

⁴ See my article in *Pe'amim* on the use of quotations given altered meaning in expressions of longing found in Abulafia's love poetry.

* **Shira Shevarsman Maziel**, Doctoral candidate, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Department of Hebrew Literature, Israel. shira.maziel@gmail.com

as expressed by the invective in his correspondence with David Ben Shoshan, one of the leading Jewish aristocrats of his day.

Abulafia was a scion of a distinguished Toledo family. He served from his youth as an assistant and poet to influential Jews with ties to the royal court who held key positions in the political bureaucracy of the Catholic kings of Castile.⁵ Abulafia aspired to secure his place in the Jewish elite while solidifying his economic standing as a court poet to these figures. This occupation was his bread and his butter.⁶ His relationships with high-ranking officials and his desire for their patronage produced a wealth of laudatory poems with which he approached them with humility in one hand and flattery in the other, and took on responsibility for the public image of his patrons. When dissatisfied, however, Abulafia did not refrain from deploying the genre of invective poetry against the cause of his displeasure.

In the second volume of *The Garden of Parables and Riddles*, we encounter extensive correspondence between Abulafia and David Ben Shoshan, a member of an elite Jewish family of Toledo.⁷ The invective in this correspondence sometimes turns violently combative, sporting such seeming expressions of loathing as were common in the era's Arabic invective poetry,⁸ which was unrelenting in the satirical abuse of its victims.⁹ Unlike those works, the poems here under consideration, though not without certain elements of Arab invective poetry, deliver their barbs with delicate, almost affable, playfulness. The poems' comicality dilutes the venom of their invective to the point that they sometimes appear to be a mere game of comedy, a rhetorical contest for the entertainment of the correspondents.¹⁰ The more astringent among Abulafia's poems well may have

⁵ Abulafia spent his childhood under the reign of Alfonso X (1252–1284), who availed himself heavily of the services of Jewish scholars and assigned Jews to key positions in the administration of the state. However, his attitude toward the Jews gradually changed for the worse under the influence of his religious zealotry, as well as pressure from the Christian clergy and his nobles. Concerning the killing of Jewish officials and the arrest of leading members of the Jewish community, see Baer 1936, pp. 15–44.

⁶ Schirmann and Fleisher 1997, p. 377.

⁷ Baer 1936, p. 50.

⁸ Shinar 2005, pp. 136–137. Invective poetry, represented by the *hijā'* genre, had its start in Arabic literature during the *Jahiliyyah*, or pre-Islamic period. After the spread of Islam, the genre served primarily as an instrument of mockery for use against adversaries and rivals. See Levin 1995, p. 309. An Arabic invective poem was a verbal onslaught of curses, insults, and defamations intended to degrade, debase, disgrace, and injure in any way permitted by the words forming its verses; see Shinar 2005, p. 134.

⁹ Abulafia 1932–1936, vol. 2, pp. 18–21.

¹⁰ Discussed here are poems 455–467, 477–478; see Abulafia 1932–1936, vol. 2, pp. 12–18, 21.

been written later in his life, after his ties with officials began to deteriorate.¹¹ During this period, he authored cutting works of satire in which he collectively lampooned his contemporaries and their leaders.¹²

I suggest that the combination of mockery and derisive humor within such poetry is best understood as a tool with the potential for verbal warfare informed by authentic scorn and hatred. An examination of the humorous elements accompanying the invective and the meaning that they had for the poet himself against the backdrop of his relationship with his high-ranking contemporary will demonstrate that in the eyes of Abulafia, hilarity had ample destructive potential.

Of Good and Bad

The poetic correspondence begins with a financial dispute. It transpires that Abū Amar, a son of David Ben Shoshan, has failed to return money that he borrowed from Abulafia, who proceeds to sue him and to protest before the elder Ben Shoshan. The father then writes to Abulafia to request that he treat his son with decorum, and in so doing describes the poet as one who fails to show due respect to officials of rank: “And your tongue honors not princes, and you petition as a man of hungry soul” (l. 16). Ben Shoshan portrays Abulafia as avaricious and accuses him of attempting to use the courts to extract ill gains from persons of higher status: “and you’ve brought judges to bear o’er naught, that he leave all, bring all to your hand” (l. 19). At the conclusion of his poem, Ben Shoshan summarizes what he considers an unfavorable change in Abulafia’s conduct in the wake of the financial dispute: “*And toward him you’ve become one changed, in speech as in thought*” (ll. 20–23). In response,¹³ Abulafia again demands the return of the money he claims was illicitly taken from him: “*Tell him to give back my money, and that wrath of mine shall end, the clash conclude, as shall that spirit which deceitfully took what it possesses ...*” (ll. 8–9). This poem ends with Abulafia’s declaration that he will show no love and do no favor to any person who has cheated him. On the contrary, his heart will be inclined to show favor only to a good man—even if a bad individual he thus declines to favor has a father of considerable standing: “*And one who comes with deceit comes not into my heart, though one pure into my estate may enter ushered / But to do good to one ill, my heart refuses, while to do good to one good*”

¹¹ Baer argues that Abulafia’s erstwhile good relations with the Ben Shoshans, as well as other officials, declined for a variety of reasons following the arrest of prominent Jews in 1281; see Baer 1936, p. 50.

¹² See the discussion by Baer, *ibid.*, p. 48.

¹³ Following the convention of Arabic poetic correspondence, Abulafia composed his reply in the same meter and rhyme scheme as Ben Shoshan’s original missive; see Schippers, “Mu‘āraḍa”.

it desires, does accede" (ll. 17–18). These ideas of good and bad lay the foundation for much comic derision to come.

The following epigram (no. 457) was penned by Ben Shoshan:¹⁴

דָּבָר בְּבַחֲרוּתְךָ עַל-פִּי לְשׁוֹנֶה תִּמְיֵד, וְנִהְפַּכְתָּ בְיָמַי זְקוּנֶיךָ
הַטּוֹב בְּעֵינֶיךָ הוּא רַע בְּעֵינַי, אֲךָ כַּמָּה בְּעֵינַי טוֹב אִם רַע בְּעֵינֶיךָ.

In your youth, on your tongue e'er was word, and in your old age you've changed.

That which is good in your eyes is ill in my eyes, but how good 'tis in my eyes if it be ill in your eyes!

The epigram revisits two topics discussed earlier. To his earlier charge, "*And toward him you've become one changed,*" Ben Shoshan adds that "*in your old age you've changed*" (l. 1) for the worse. The second verse of the epigram addresses the matter of integrity, first raised in Abulafia's previous poem, though here, the concepts of good and ill reflect not moral judgment, but the state of Abulafia's eyes. "*How good 'tis in my eyes,*" exults Ben Shoshan to his ophthalmologically ill interlocutor, "*if it be ill in your eyes!*" Ben Shoshan's message is clear: Abulafia's condition is a source of schadenfreude. Ben Shoshan alters the meaning of biblical quotations that he incorporates in his composition, giving the figurative scriptural expressions "that which is good in your eyes"¹⁵ and "ill in your eyes,"¹⁶ both in the second verse, literal meaning.¹⁷ The altered sense of these quotes, as well as the parallelism of the two parts of the verse ("That which is good in your eyes" and "good 'tis in my eyes," "ill in my eyes" and "ill in your eyes"), puts a humorous edge on the message.

Abulafia responds in coupling form, taking the final word of Ben Shoshan's poem ("your eyes," *einekha*) and depositing it at the end of each verse, every time with varied meaning:

¹⁴ The poem is captioned, "It came to pass that relations were severed between him and Abi Saliman Ben Shoshan, and it came to pass at that time that he suffered from an illness of the eyes and Abi Saliman, the same mentioned in his words, did address him." The captions were added by a later hand. See Yellin's comment: Abulafia 1932–1936, vol. 2, Notes and Commentary, p. 17.

¹⁵ See I Samuel 14:36: "Saul said, 'Let us descend after the Philistines at night and plunder them till the morning's light, and let us not leave a man of them.' They said, 'Do all that which is good in your eyes.'"

¹⁶ See Numbers 22:34: "Balaam said to the angel of the Lord, 'I have sinned, for I did not know that you were standing in the way to meet me, and now, if it is ill in your eyes, I shall return.'"

¹⁷ In the scriptural idiom, what is good in one's eyes is pleasing or acceptable; that which is ill, displeasing or unacceptable.

לבי לך נהפך יען הפכפך את לא תעמד אל דוד רגע בעיניך
ובאמרך כי טוב אם רע בעיני, אות כי הם עכורים מימך בעיניך
מיום היותך זר דרךך, והרע לך ייטב, והטוב הוא הרע בעיניך
אם נפלה בי מום, חדש זה, אך את רע מנעוריך לבך ועיניך
או אם בגיל תרקוד בראות בעיני, עוד אקום ואעשה, עוד אראה בעיניך.

My heart to you is changed 'cause you're fickle, not standing by one familiar a moment as was your wont,
And to say 'tis good if it be ill in my eyes, 'tis a sign that of muddied waters in your springs.
From the day you arrived, your way is awry, that which is ill to you is good, and that which is good is ill in your eyes.
If in me blemish be found, 'tis new, but you are ill from your youth, your heart and your eyes.
Yet if joyfully you dance on seeing my eyes, I yet shall rise, indeed, I yet shall see your wretchedness.

To Ben Shoshan's accusation that "in your old age you've changed," (no. 457, l. 2), Abulafia responds that "*my heart to you is changed 'cause you're fickle*" (no. 458, l. 1): this development, according to Abulafia, is due to Ben Shoshan and his unstable opinions, apparently in the sense that the aristocrat is attacking Abulafia, once a close associate, and supporting his son in the financial dispute. Abulafia then claims that his illness causes Ben Shoshan to be happy because the waters in the wellsprings of the latter—his inner thoughts—are impure (l. 2). In the third verse, Abulafia finds general fault with the morality of Ben Shoshan, in whose eyes that which is good and straight becomes bad. In the next verse, Abulafia distinguishes between permanent and passing physical deformities. If I am blemished, says the poet, due to his eye disease, then the defect is recent. Ben Shoshan, meanwhile, has spent his entire life with a bad heart and bad eyes (l. 4), both moral degeneracy of the heart and a concrete malady of the eyes, an allusion to the fact that Ben Shoshan was blind or suffered from some other eye problem.¹⁸ In the final verse, Abulafia hopes that someday, *schadenfreude* will be his as he sees his rival impoverished.¹⁹

In this coupling, Abulafia gives five different senses to the word *einekha*: "as you were," "your springs" (i.e., thoughts), "your view," "your eyes," and "your wretchedness." The rhetorical technique,

¹⁸ See note in Abulafia 1932–1936, vol. 2, Notes and Commentary, p. 25.

¹⁹ See II Samuel 16:12: "Perhaps the Lord will look upon my impoverishment."

like the variations on “good” and “ill,” emphasizes the deformity of the visually impaired addressee as well as his moral shortcomings. Yet at the same time these flourishes seem to soften the blow, forming a stylistic envelope of humor even as invective strikes.

Abulafia accuses Ben Shoshan of fickleness for taking the younger Ben Shoshan’s side in the conflict between him and the poet, and disparages the father as immoral and despicable: “that which is good is ill in your eyes” (l. 3). This section of the poem responds to Ben Shoshan’s happiness at Abulafia’s illness, but its root is in the question of integrity, of good and bad, that first was raised at the beginning of the correspondence.

Physical deformities, featured in these epigrams, are one of the most prevalent themes of Arabic invective poetry. Arab poets would use verse to mock the physical defects of their rivals: the aesthetic insufficiency of the addressee, his various parts and appearance, his garments, his scent, his movements, and any other offensible thing related to the human body, including both deformities predating the poem and, on occasion, new ones imagined for the purpose.²⁰

Abulafia mocks the immorality and evil ways of his rival, too. Aside from insults of physical deformity, the Arabic genre includes attacks on moral offenses and character flaws in general.²¹ Ben Shoshan is thus portrayed respectively as fickle, despicable for his impure thoughts, viewing what is good as bad, and viewing what is bad as good. Van Gelder argues that in Arabic poetry, descriptions of physical appearance and personality frequently are blended together and cross-fertilize each other.²² The phrase “ill in your eyes” refers at once to both, namely, the physical defect of eye disease and the moral defect due to which what is good is bad in the eyes of the addressee. The final lines of the epigram introduce the aspiration to witness the wretchedness of the addressee, also a theme known to us from Arabic poetry, though here it takes the form of a curse for the future, while Arabic invective poems mock the addressee as impoverished at the moment. The essential concept is the same: poverty is degrading.²³

Abulafia’s next epigram (no. 459) continues the discussion, but its conciliatory tone suggests a later date. It seems that tempers have cooled.

²⁰ Levin notes that such fabrication often is equivalent to caricature. He characterizes the technique as “caricaturist invective.” See Levin 1995, p. 311.

²¹ Dishon 1974, pp. 49–50.

²² Van Gelder quotes in this context a poem from *Kitāb Al-Zahra*: “Their appearances are ugly; but when you get to know them, / their appearances are beautiful compared to what you know of them.” See Van Gelder 1988, p. 58.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 65–66. See also Dishon 1974, pp. 49–50.

שְׁתִּי בְּבוֹאֶךָ גִּלְתִּי בְּחִזְוֹתֶךָ, אֶךְ רַע בְּעֵינַי עַל כִּי טוֹב עָשׂוֹתֶךָ
כַּמָּה בְּעֵינַי טוֹב בְּהִיּוֹתֶךָ רַע, אֶךְ כַּמָּה בְּעֵינַי רַע טוֹב בְּהִיּוֹתֶךָ
כִּי כָּךְ וּבִיּוֹן כָּךְ אִין עֲרַכְךָ בְּעִירֶךָ ? רַבּוּ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל, אַחִי, כְּמוֹתֶךָ.

I did rejoice at your arrival, revel at your sight, / Yet 'tis ill in my eyes that you've done good.
How good in my eyes 'tis when you are ill, / But how in my eyes 'tis ill when you are good.
This way or that, you're unmatched in your city. / Let there be many in Israel, brother, like you.

Abulafia here declares himself delighted that Ben Shoshan visited and congratulates him for doing so. As the verse progresses, however, he voices disapproval of the other's having bettered his ways: "'tis ill in my eyes that you've done good." The positive sentiment in the first part of the verse and the return to the motif of good and bad indicate that the poem's message is a sarcastic and facetious one. The second verse, again rehashing the motif of good and bad, describes Abulafia as pleased when Ben Shoshan is in a poor state. In the final verse, Abulafia makes clear that tensions between the two have subsided, or else the previous provocations were not meant seriously. He concludes the poem with the assertion that Ben Shoshan is unrivaled by any person in his city and draws on a talmudic expression (*Shabbat* 126) to express hope to see more Jews like his addressee. This poem shows the relationship between poet and official in a different light, one in which repeated gibes are tempered by consensual friendly banter. Ben Shoshan responds in a comparable mode of indeterminate seriousness and unquantifiable affection:

יָדַע לִבִּי בִּי וְיָדַע וְיָדַע לִבֶּךָ בְּךָ חֲשָׁקָה נִפְשִׁי וְלֹא מִרְבָּךָ
הַטּוֹב וְהַיָּשָׁר בְּעֵינַי לַעֲשׂוֹת כְּדָת וְכַהֲנֹן, וּבִלְ-זֶה אִין בְּךָ
עַל אֶף מְלִיצָתֶךָ כְּעָרְכִי אִינְךָ רוּאָה וְהַאֲסִפְסוּיִף אֲשֶׁר קָם קִרְבְּךָ
עִינְךָ פָּקַח וְרָאָה הַזָּאִיר חֲשָׁפֶךָ וְחִיָּה עָלִי סִפְרֶךָ וְלֹא עַל חֲרָבֶךָ.

There knows my heart within me, knows and will know, your heart. / My heart desires you, though not for your greatness.
Good and straight, in my eyes, is to do / The licit, the right, all absent in you.
Despite your verse, my match you do not / See, even with that massed inside you.
Open your eye and see whether it illumines your dark, / and live by your book, and not by your sword.

“My heart desires you,” writes Ben Shoshan to the poet, but quickly adds, “though not for your greatness” (no. 460, l. 1),²⁴ at once proclaiming his love for Abulafia and mocking the standing of the commoner. In the second verse, Ben Shoshan avers that what he views as good is to do what is right and what is proper, but these are “all absent in you,” Abulafia, who allegedly is neither good nor upstanding. The third verse is a response to its counterpart in Abulafia’s preceding poem, which stated that “you’re unmatched in your city” (no. 459, l. 3). Ben Shoshan here notes that despite Abulafia’s comments in the preceding poem (“your verse”) with which he mocked Ben Shoshan, and despite the bad thoughts inside the poet (“that massed inside you”), he sees no one who can compare to Ben Shoshan. He thus jestingly criticizes Abulafia for wayward behavior, but simultaneously expresses pleasure that the poet understands that he, Ben Shoshan, is unequalled. The poem concludes with a recommendation that Abulafia busy himself with study and live by his book, rather than his sword (l. 4)—the weapon that jabbed at Ben Shoshan in the foregoing war of words.

These poems raise questions about the relationship between Abulafia and Ben Shoshan. On one hand, there are positive sentiments: Abulafia is happy when Ben Shoshan comes to visit him, he glorifies him as without equal—and on the other hand, he declares that he would be pleased to see Ben Shoshan suffer. Ben Shoshan’s response shows the same flippant ambivalence: he declares his love, but disparagingly states that this love is not due to any greatness on Abulafia’s part. He is gratified by the poet’s recognition of his greatness, yet criticizes the poet’s conduct, and he is unappreciative of Abulafia’s “sword”—the invective poetry that has been wielded at Ben Shoshan’s expense.

Abulafia responds to Ben Shoshan with a lengthy, personal poem whose opening subject is taken from the preceding poems: Ben Shoshan’s greatness and eminence in his city.

אַתָּה בְּאַמְּת מְבַחֵר זְמַנְךָ אֵין רִיב בְּזָה בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶיךָ
לֹא מִשְׁלֵמוֹת שְׂבָדָה, אֲכֹר מְרַב פְּתִיּוֹת שְׂבָרוֹזְנֶיךָ
הַזֶּדֶם בְּאוֹנָם לֹא בְּשִׂכְלָם, אֵךְ הַזֶּדֶד בְּשִׂכְלָךְ לֹא בְּהוֹנְךָ

Truly are you choicest of your time. / On this, no contention is there betwixt me and you.
Not on account of perfection that’s yours, but / Of abundant folly among your dignitaries.

²⁴ According to Yellin, Ben Shoshan means to describe his love for Abulafia as unconditional. In my view, however, an insult is intended, as indicated by the following lines and by Abulafia’s response in the next poem, which strikes a similar tone. See Abulafia 1932–1936, vol. 2, Notes and Commentary, p. 20.

Their grandeur is in their lucre, not their intellect, but / Your grandeur is in your intellect, not your wealth.

Abulafia dubs his addressee the “choicest,” i.e., the best, “of your time.” As far as this point is concerned, they have no quarrel. However, the reason for this agreement is farcical: “*Not on account of perfection that’s yours, but / Of abundant folly among your dignitaries*” (no. 461, l. 2). Ben Shoshan owes his greatness not to blamelessness, says Abulafia, but to the foolishness of other aristocrats. These introductory lines are reminiscent of those in Ben Shoshan’s poem stating that he loves Abulafia but not because of his greatness. Each of the two poems contains a comically sarcastic remarks that follows, and seeks to void, a compliment. In both cases there is a mocking, demeaning acidity, and in both case, humor mitigates it. In the verses that follow, Abulafia expands on his argument by comparing Ben Shoshan to nobles of similar rank with whom Ben Shoshan associates. Those exalted nobles, according to Abulafia, owe their place in society to their wealth, and not to erudition. In the succeeding verses (10–11), Abulafia returns to the discussion of good and bad, this time in a tone that is personal, forthcoming, and serious:

אל בעשות הטוב בעיניך נא תתעל, והמליך בקוניך
תמצא לך כי המענות הוא הטוב והישר בעיניך

In doing what’s good in your eyes, pray don’t / Exult, but consult your Creator.
You’ll find what’s crooked is / What’s good and straight in your eyes.

Abulafia asks Ben Shoshan not to boast of his good deeds, because contrary to his report of his own actions, what he believes good is in fact crooked and wrong. Abulafia now more deeply explores what ostensibly “straight” thing he considers to be “crooked” (ll. 13–16).

אל תאמן המחניפים לך האומרים חפצך בפניך
הדברים עתק בכל-מקום ובכל-זמן ישנם ואינך
הם שעשויעך ורעיד הנחשבים נאמניך
נבלות שפתם והבל פיהם הרחק, ושלח בם חרוניך.

Believe not those flattering you, / Who say as you wish to your face,

Those who speak terrible things everywhere / And always where they are and you are not.
These are your beloved and your companions, / Those thought to you true.
The villainy of their lips, the breath of / Their mouths—Send it afar, and dispatch among them
your wrath.

Abulafia entreats Ben Shoshan not to believe those who flatterer him, claiming that they constantly speak ill of him wherever they go. Why the poet finds his addressee's ways wanting and crooked finally becomes clear, as he reviles Ben Shoshan's associates and confidantes as evil and hypocrites. Ben Shoshan, he says, should reject them. These are the miscreants who have corrupted his thinking and his comportment (l. 16). Next, Abulafia responds to Ben Shoshan's advice in the previous poem that he put down his sword and live by his book. The poet insists that he lives by his book as appropriate, but is unwilling to relinquish the sword of his poetry. This weapon, Abulafia asserts, is what gives him power, and it is the tool that can avenge Ben Shoshan against his rivals (ll. 22–25):

ספר וסוף נחלת אבות לי, מבני לוי סגניך
כן אאחז אאחז בזה ואת זה לא אנוח, כרב תבליו למיניך
אשפתרה עם רודפי משורה אנתחמה עם תחכמוניך
אנא, בחר בי, אף בחר בי, בה אקם לך נקמת מדניך.

Book and sword are patrimony / Of mine, of the sons of Levi your deputies,
Thus I surely grip this, yet that do not / Rest, as an abundance of assorted spices.
I shall wax poetic against pursuers of rank, / Deal wisely with those devious with you.
Pray choose me, even my sword, therewith / I shall avenge you against your adversaries.

Abulafia requests the patronage of his correspondent. The sword of verse is Abulafia's strength and his weapon. With his invective poetry, he can demean the enemies of Ben Shoshan, who therefore would be well served as his patron. Later in the poem, Abulafia resumes excoriating Ben Shoshan's hated companions (ll. 44–46):

אל נא עגלים את-עגליך יעדו, ולצים שחרוניך
הבדלה מהם ואל תשלה לפני חזיריהם פניניך
אינם לרעים, אף לרועים אל עדרי בקריך וצאנך

Let your pendles by calves not / Be worn, your ornaments by scoffers.

Separate from them, do not cast / Before such swine your pearls.

They are right not as companions, but as herders for / The flocks of your cattle and sheep.

Abulafia characterizes Ben Shoshan's associates as scoffers, and urges him to stay away from them and stop letting them profit from his status. These mockers, Abulafia claims, are fit not to keep company with Ben Shoshan, but to look after his livestock (l. 5). Finally, Abulafia attempts to convince his addressee that they are an auspicious match because the poet's works will glorify the name of the aristocrat: "For me alone favor, and I shall favor you, my collarets beautifying your neck" (l. 48).

The above poems shine some light on the complex relationship between the poet and Ben Shoshan. Abulafia sues the other man's son, mocks the state of Ben Shoshan's eyes, accuses him of immoral behavior, and rains comical barbs on him. In this last poem, though, he makes a personal request, imploring Ben Shoshan to forsake those around him and instead bestow his patronage on Abulafia and adopt the poet as his intimate.

Two other poems written by Abulafia for Ben Shoshan show the contours of a friendship between the two men. In one of these Abulafia responds to the death of Ben Shoshan's granddaughter, and in another to the illness of his daughter, as would have been expected of a court poet.²⁵ At the same time, there are many other poems in the *divan* that communicate fierce hatred, with Abulafia expressly stating his hatred of Ben Shoshan.²⁶ In the latter series, the invective is cutting and abusive, and there is no evidence of any closeness: the goal is to belittle and demean him.

We are left to ask: Does this mutual mockery represent a consensual code of behavior, a comedic game played through correspondence that does not truly threaten a friendly relationship? Is it a manifestation of the humorous and ironic literary taste of their day?²⁷ Or is the dichotomy of the poems only partly

²⁵ Abulafia 1932–1936, vol. 2, p. 17.

²⁶ See, e.g., no. 468: "Dominant are the blind and the crippled, those abhorrent," and no. 476: "After an imbecile put forth his hand against the father's edifice, etiquette corrupted by hate."

²⁷ It is reasonable to assume that high-ranking Jews of the royal court, who had close relationships with regime officials, were influenced by trends in the literary culture of the era, including the invective poetry of both Provençal troubadours and the poets of Galicia and Portugal; see Chaytor 1912, p. 126. The spewing of invective and defamation was *de rigueur*, and according to Chaytor one's good name was worth no less than life itself. Saul Kirschbaum dedicated an entire article to the influence of Galician and Portuguese invective poetry on the work of Abulafia; see Kirschbaum, 2012, pp. 48–51. In my view, it is the general social and literary underpinnings of the era, and especially the prevalence of defamation in the genre of invective poetry, that informed Abulafia and Ben Shoshan's mutual insults in their correspondence. Abulafia was drawn to invective poetry by the social and literary ambience of his time, but his work was most directly influenced by Arabic poetry, which he took as a

ironic, a delicate blend of banter and seriousness that reflects the complexity of their relationship? It is not unlikely that the humor enveloping the semi-mockery is a product of two sentiments felt by Abulafia. On one hand, he is estranged, embittered, and angered by the noble's closeness to those he considers disingenuous sycophants. Yet on the other, he is lonesome and longs for Ben Shoshan's patronage.

The Figs

Another round of correspondence between Abulafia and Ben Shoshan has its own elements of humor. In the following poem (no. 465), Abulafia writes to Ben Shoshan with a request for figs:

וְדַעְתִּיךָ נְדִיב לֵב בְּתַאֲנִים וּמֵאֵז אֵינְךָ נוֹצֵר תְּאֵנָה
וְאֵיךְ שִׁבְתָּ כְּחַיּוֹם לִי כְּכִלִּי וְנִהְפַּךְ לְךָ לְרַע לֵבָא וְעֵינָא?
וְקָרָאתָ לְסוֹסְתֵי חֲמוֹרָה וְעֵינְךָ, אֲמַת, לֹא תִחַזְנָה
אֲמַת, רוֹאֶה אֲנִי דַן עֲמוּרָה בְּשׁוֹרְךָ הוּן בְּכָל רְגַע וְעוֹנָה
וְנִדְעִיתִי לְךָ בְּגוֹ דְּבָרִים דְּפָסִילָנָא בְּדִינָא לְךָ לְדִינָא
וְנִסְתְּרוֹת אֲנִי עוֹד לֹא אֲגַלָּה אֲבָל אֵינְךָ עֲצָה נְכוֹנָה:
תְּאֵנָה חֲנֻטָה שְׁלַח, וְחַלְקָה לְשִׁבְעָה בָּם תִּנְה, גַּם אֶל שְׁמוֹנָה
וְהִנֵּה לְךָ זְמוּרְתֵי שְׁמוּרָה הֲכִי הוּן לֹא לְזֶר עוֹד אֲתִנְנָה
וְעַם גְּבוּר קִטְטָה אֶל תְּבַקֵּשׁ וְאַל תִּבּוֹא בְּגַם מֵאִין סְפִינָה.

I know you to be generous with figs, / And of old, you are not one who withholds a fig.
So how today have you turned to me as one miserly, / Your heart and eye changed for ill?
And you called my mare a jenny, / Your eyes not perceiving truth.
Truth—I see a judge of Gomorrah / In your sight, indeed, at each moment, all times,
And I know of you secret things / With which lawfully to disbar you from judgment,
And hidden things I shan't yet reveal. / But let me lend you meet advice:
Send forth a budded fig, and a portion / Thereof for seven give, even eight,
And behold, for you is my zemora reserved. / Behold, no longer to a stranger shall I give it,
And with one mighty, a quarrel don't seek, / And don't enter the sea while in lack of a ship.

paradigm, and he implemented many of its devices in his verse. Concerning the influence of Arabic poetry on Abulafia's work, see, e.g., Schippers 1994, pp. 17–24; Ishay 2013, pp. 53–76. Yellin, in his notes to *The Garden of Parables and Riddles*, identifies a number of verses that Abulafia borrowed from Arabic poetry.

Abulafia complains that Ben Shoshan has become miserly with his figs.²⁸ Yellin notes that the third verse “apparently refers [...] to a comic poem that Ben Shoshan wrote about the poet’s mare”²⁹ in which the blind man referred to the horse as a donkey. Here again, it seems that Abulafia is mocking his addressee’s handicap. The next verse too shares a theme—denunciation of moral lapses—with Arab invective poetry. Abulafia calls Ben Shoshan “a judge of Gomorrah,” a perverter of justice. In verses 5 and 6, he invokes the noble’s sins and threatens, as it were, “And I know of you secret things / With which lawfully to disbar you from judgment”: he is privy to secrets about Ben Shoshan that would suffice to disqualify him as a judge.³⁰ Abulafia threatens to publicize these sins, perhaps bribes received as befitting a jurist of Gomorrah.³¹ In the eighth verse, the poet promises that if Ben Shoshan acquiesces to his request, then Abulafia’s *zemora*—an ambiguous term whose meaning according to medieval grammarians, as described below, hides a further threat—will be reserved for Ben Shoshan. Concluding, Abulafia lays down his demand: figs of an appropriate quantity for the consumption of seven or eight persons.³² Abulafia, pretending superiority to Ben Shoshan, counsels him not to be the cause of a quarrel with one mightier than he, might being defined in terms of poetic ability. The quarrel

²⁸ The words “one who withholds (*notzer*) a fig” are borrowed from Proverbs (27:18). Complaints of this variety are common in Hebrew poems of rebuke, where such contrasts follow an accustomed formula: “you were good to me, and now you are bad to me,” or “you were very generous to me, and now you are miserly”; see Levin 1995, p. 272. Stinginess is a common subject of Arabic poetry; see Van Gelder 1988, p. 37.

²⁹ Abulafia 1932–1936, vol. 2, Notes and Commentary, p. 23.

³⁰ The words of the poem here are borrowed from the Talmud (*Ketubbot* 105) and given different meaning.

³¹ The word *be-shurakh* (“in your sight”) is of indeterminate meaning. Brody proposes the emended reading *be-shodakh* (“in your plundering”), and Yellin proposes that *hen* (“indeed”) should be corrected to *hon* (“wealth”; l. 4). The poem then reads, “in your plundering of wealth at each moment, all times,” and Ben Shoshan again stands accused of taking bribes as a judge of Gomorrah. See Abulafia 1932–1936, vol. 2, Notes and Commentary, p. 23.

³² Kirschbaum argues that the talmudic expression “heart and eye” (Jerusalem Talmud, *Berakhot*, ch. 1), whose original context portrays those parts of the body as the agents of sin, is here used to indicate that Ben Shoshan is engaged in an illicit relationship. In Kirschbaum’s reading, what passes at first reading for a cane, or mature fruit-bearing branch of a grapevine, actually symbolizes the male organ and implies that Ben Shoshan is homosexual (see verse 8). He identifies the fig as representative of the female sexual organ, and concludes that Ben Shoshan is a pander of a sort who arranges sessions of vice (a “budded fig” being a young woman). According to Kirschbaum, Abulafia’s poem to Ben Shoshan, like the poems of the troubadours, has concealed within it an additional, sexual meaning, which is at the root of the humor that typifies the genre; see Kirschbaum 2011, p. 152. Unabashed crass and sexual messages were a mainstay of Arabic invective poetry as well; see Levin 1995, p. 310. Methods of created additional and hidden meanings in the text were shared by Arabic poetry and the Hebrew poetry that adopted its conventions. Al-Harizi, for example, makes liberal use in his personal satire of loaded quotations, allusions, and bisociations. See Oettinger 2012, p. 79.

that the noble is admonished to avoid is a war of words, the same sort of violence above represented by a sword.

In the following epigram (no. 466), Abulafia returns to the subject of the figs with a new strategy:

כְּאִשֶׁר בְּכָל-יוֹם יִלְאוּנִי תְאוּנָיִךְ חֶלֶק כְּחֶלֶק תָּנוּ לִי מִתְאוּנָיִךְ
אִם מִבְּלֵי מַרְמָה אֶתָּה תְּחַלֵּק עִם אֲנִשֵׁי בְרִיתְךָ אֶת-מַעֲדָיִךְ –
כָּל-מַעֲדָיִי עוֹלָם יִהְיוּ, בְּמִקוֹם מַצָּה וּמְרוֹר מְנַחִים לְפָנֶיךָ.

As each day your sorrows weary me, / Give me commensurately of your figs.
If without guile you share with / Your confederates your delicacies,
All the world's delicacies shall there be, instead of / Strife and bitterness, placed before you.

Here the poet addresses his patron and asks to be treated commensurately with his actions. He is wearied day after day by Ben Shoshan's business—"your affairs" (*te'unekha*). Ben Shoshan thus ought to share with him those good things at his disposal, namely, "your figs" (*te'enekha*).³³ In the following lines, Abulafia clarifies to Ben Shoshan that if the latter uprightly and ingenuously shares his luxuries with his friends, then he will have all the delicacies of the world before him, rather than conflict and bitterness.³⁴ In promising that Ben Shoshan will be well served by sharing, because this will prevent contention, Abulafia may be issuing a veiled threat: failure to surrender the figs will be the cause of further invective poetry. Abulafia jests that the noble's affairs exhaust him, and demands figs as one might request payment for taxing work.

The hunger for figs yet unconsummated, the humor escalates (no. 467):

לְאוֹמְרִים: תִּשְׁאַל מִרְעֵךְ דָּוִד מִן הַתְּאוּנִים לְשַׁלַּח תְּמוּנָתוֹ
שְׁחַתִּי: בְּלֵי יִשְׁלַח עַד כִּי זְמוּנָתִי אֶשְׁלַח אֵלָי אִפּוֹ תַחַת תְּאוּנָתוֹ.

To those saying, Ask your friend David for some figs, to send as his consideration,
I spoke, He will send not until I send my *zemora* toward his nose, beneath his fig.

³³ See Ezekiel 24:12 for the poetic terms used for "sorrows" (*te'unim*) and causing fatigue (*hel'at*).

³⁴"Strife and bitterness" (*matza u-maror*) is borrowed from *Mekhilta (Bo)*, where the same words denote "flatbread and bitter herbs."

According to Abulafia, Ben Shoshan will cede none of his figs until “*I send my zemora toward his nose*” (l. 2)—until Abulafia subjects him to ridicule and mockery. The *zemora* previously appeared in the first poem about figs: “And behold, for you is my *zemora* (cane) reserved. / Behold, no longer to a stranger shall I give it” (no. 465, l. 8). The *zemora* again appears as a symbol of derision in another epigram, this one about wine, in which Abulafia writes that it is dedicated to “mocking folk”: “And I shall souse myself until I am exposed in my vineyard and to the mocking folk send *zemora*” (no. 319, l. 2). Yet another appearance comes in a blame poem dedicated to a certain Frenchman: “And regarding him, the lads shake their heads, and they do send the *zemora*” (no. 580, l. 11).

Here too, Abulafia was influenced by Arabic invective poetry. The same Hebrew word that previously denoted a cane from a vine here is unambiguously borrowed from Ezekiel 8:17, where Jonah Ibn Janah (in *Sefer ha-Shorashim*) and subsequently David Kimḥi render it as “flatulence.”³⁵ The threat issued by Abulafia, a common one in Arabic invective poetry, is that he will flatulate at Ben Shoshan’s nose.³⁶ The humor of this threat is not sufficient to cancel out its seriousness. Invective poetry in the hand of a poet, whether Abulafia or a practitioner of the Arabic genre, is a means of debasing the other, but its goal is to obtain something for the poet. As Levin comments, “he aroused fear in the hearts of many and ‘extracted’ ‘gracious’ gifts from the same, who were afraid of being targeted by him.”³⁷ Abulafia no doubt considered invective poetry an effective tool for dealing with officials of rank. It was his “sword,” a weapon for achieving what he desired. These poems make clear that despite the astringent depiction of a “judge of Gomorrah” and the threatened perils of flatulence, they envisage no discontinuation of the relationship between poet and patron. The poet is and remains a “confederate” of Ben Shoshan; he simply is angry because of a dearth of presents from his patron.

Two other epigrams addressed to Ben Shoshan discuss his character flaws, again following the Arabic practice. In the view of Ibn Rashīq, truly great invective poetry demeans a person for his inner defects, while defamation of physical blemishes or faults attributed to the parents of the addressee

Ibn Janah 1896, p. 133.³⁵

³⁶ See, e.g., Van Gelder 1988, p. 38. See also Kennedy’s discussion (2005, p. 106) of the poetry of Abū Nuwās. Yellin notes in his comments on the poem that “the practice of the Arab masses, when interested in mocking or dishonoring some person, is to emit such a sound from one’s mouth”; see Abulafia 1932–1936, vol. 2, Notes and Commentary, p. 24.

³⁷ see Levin 1995, p. 309.

enjoys a lesser status.³⁸ Weaknesses such as cowardice, arrogance, greed, stupidity, and infidelity were particularly beloved in the Arabic tradition.³⁹

Character Flaws: Folly and Faithlessness

Abulafia portrays Ben Shoshan as a cheat (no. 477) who provides white items to those who requested black.⁴⁰ The poet here shrewdly alludes to Ben Shoshan's physical defect, the blindness that indeed prevents him from distinguishing black from white.⁴¹ The noble is described as a traitor who inherited the trait of perfidy from his ancestors and will bequeath it to his own progeny.

בְּמַרְמָה בּוֹאֵךְ לְכָל, וּמִזְמִין שְׂחָרִים עִמָּךְ יִמְצָא לְבָנִים
וְלִבְשֵׁת בְּגָדִים כְּבָגְדִים וְזֶה נוֹדַע לְפוֹתִים אֶף לְבָנִים
בְּגָדִים מֵאֲבוֹתֶיךָ יִרְשָׁתָם וְעוֹד יִהְיוּ בְּגָדֶיךָ לְבָנִים.

With deceit do you approach all, and he who requests / Black from you finds white.
You wear the garments of the perfidious, / And this is known to the callow, even to babes.
Perfidy did you inherit from your forefathers, / And evermore shall your perfidy be your sons'.

The following epigram by Abulafia mocks Ben Shoshan as a fool. In the second verse, Abulafia quotes I Samuel 19:10. In the biblical story, "Saul sought to strike through *David and the wall* with the spear," while in the present context, the conjunction takes the sense of a disjunction, and it is intimated that David Ben Shoshan is an unaware of the blows of mockery as is an inanimate wall of being struck. The hyperbolic slight is based on the talmudic dictum (*Shabbat* 13) that "a fool does not take offense." Ben Shoshan, according to Abulafia, is the fool, and incognizant of the offense dealt him in the warfare of words—the poetic battles of invective.

חֶלֶק וְנִחְלָה בְּדוֹד זֶה אֵינוֹ לְנִכְבֵּד וְיִקִּיר
שׁוֹהַ בְּשׁוֹהַ בְּעֵינַי מִפֶּה בְּדוֹד וּבִקִּיר.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 310.

³⁹ Works of this genre are understood as the opposite of laudatory poetry. Thus the strength of the invective is considered to increase according to the number of contrasts drawn in the given poem between laudable qualities and their maligned counterparts. See *ibid.*, p. 309.

⁴⁰ The poet here borrows his terminology from the Mishna (*Beitza* 1:4), but alters the construction of the root *z-m-n* to "request" (or "order") rather than the original sense of "prepare."

⁴¹ Abulafia borrows from Ecclesiastes 9:8 the phrase "at all times let your garments be white (*yihyu begadekha levanim*)," but quotes these words with the sense "shall your perfidy be your sons'."

No bequest or legacy from David / Here has either dignitary or beloved.
Indistinguishable in my eyes 'tis / If one strikes David, or the wall.

The messages again are venomous, but they also contain a humor that mitigates the venom, and so leaves the thoughts of those playing this literary game still inscrutable.

The Purpose of Humor in Invective

Are we to take the jokes and calculated puns in these poems as nothing more than banter? An exercise in comic literary composition that was a pastime of a past society? Do the mutual antics of Abulafia and Ben Shoshan take place against the backdrop of a known code of conduct practiced by the poet and those close to him, without malicious intent? Or should we understand the humorous elements of these poems as means of preserving an advantageous relationship by obscuring the viciousness of the accompanying remarks? Humor, viewed thus, allowed the correspondents to insult and criticize each other without substantively threatening their relationship, as suggested by Arie Sover: “Humorous criticism is a friendly and efficient instrument, compared to direct, aggressive criticism that lacks humor. This tool permits the addressee to return to propriety without excessive offense accruing to him or another group member, as often happens when criticism is direct and humorless.”⁴²

The half-humorous, half-serious dichotomy that characterizes many of these poems is in keeping with Abulafia's style, and bears witness to the social climate and literary discourse of his generation.⁴³ Moreover, I would argue that the humorous aspects of the poems held significant meaning for Abulafia and played an essential role in his dealings with individuals of lofty standing. The uneasy coexistence of laughter and insult reflects the instability of his life and the sense of social detachment with which he lived. His humor obscures the venom, somewhat reduces its toxicity, and as previously discussed, helps to preserve the relationship of the correspondents even as he injects potential for destruction and war within his comedy. Scorn delivered with humor, in the view of Abulafia, is a crushing weapon, and therefore his weapon of choice in life. He states as much in a personal poem (no. 798):

⁴² Sover 2009, p. 55.

⁴³ See n. 27 above.

בְּהִתְחַבְּרֵי לַעֲמֵי הָאֲרָצוֹת בְּצוֹק עֵתִים וְאֶשֶׁב בְּמִסְבּוֹת
אֲנִי יָרָא לְבִלְתִּי יִמְשְׁכוּנִי בְּדַבְּרֵי רִיק וְהִבְלִי מִחֲשָׁבוֹת
וְיִהְיוּ מִבְּלִי חֶפֶץ לְטַבְּעֵי עֲלִילוֹתָם וְטַבְּעֵיהֶם גְּנוּבוֹת
וְעִמָּהֶם אֲנִי שׂוֹחֵק, לְמַעַן בְּכַל-עֵת אֶעֱרֹךְ עִמָּם קְרִיבוֹת.

On joining simpletons in adverse times, while seated at parties,
I fear they will draw me in with empty words and vain thoughts
And their ways and nature incommodiously steal into my nature,
Yet I do jest with them, that I may ever do battle against them.

Abulafia lived in a hostile environment. He was in disagreement with its values, its animating spirit, and its standard-bearers. And he chose the humor of abasement as his strategy for contending with the surrounding society. As he carouses in the company of the same elites he dismisses as boors and “simpletons,” he is afraid of becoming one of them, but, he declares, “*Yet I do jest with them, that I may ever do battle against them*” (l. 4). The hilarity of the invective poetry Abulafia sends to Ben Shoshan in no way contradicts the reality of this battle. It is the initial skirmish. It reflects the duality of Abulafia’s relationship with officialdom. This humor, I would suggest, does not belie the seriousness of the underlying messages, but is more correctly understood as a device brought to bear in coping with the complexities of the society in which the poet functions. The blend of mockery and accompanying humor has the potential for verbal combat of the same sort waged by the Arabic invective poets, with all its violence, indignities, and wild abandon. The humor at once symbolizes the desire to be a part of society and to communicate according to its conventions (at first glance), and serves the poet as a means of resistance and of attack.

Much the same idea, though in a different guise, appears in a poem written by Abulafia to a Jewish official in charge of tax collection. In it, the poet claims that he pretends to be wealthy and contented only to defy fate and his human enemies, who would rejoice to learn of his hardship. Appearances to the contrary, says Abulafia, he is poor and miserable, and thus deserving of a discount. The poem (no. 692, ll. 1–4), though ironic, demonstrates Abulafia’s awareness of the role played by humor in his life.

אִם הִזְמֵן מוֹל זְהָרֵי נוֹבֵחַ, הֵנוּ כְּכֶלֶב – וְאֲנִי יָרַח,
אֲשַׁחַק לְקוֹרוֹתָיו וְאֶלְעֵגָה אֶעֱשֶׂה כְּעוֹר – וְאֲנִי כִקְחָה.
אֲרָאָה, לְהַכְעִיס אוֹיְבִים כֹּחַ וְאוֹן, לֹא לְזֵמֵן אֶכְפֵּף וְאֶשְׁתַּוַּחַח,
אֲצַא בְּפָנַיִם נֶעֱלָסִים לְיָקוּם – וְאֲנִי בְּתוֹךְ לִבִּי בְּמַר צוֹרַח...

If Time at my brilliance barks, / It is as a dog, and I, the moon.
I laugh at its happenings and mock it. / I become as one blind, though I am sighted.
I show, to anger enemies, power and lucre. / Not to Time do I bow and prostrate myself.
I go out with joyful visage to the world, / But in my heart, I bitterly scream ...

The poet laughs at Time, at cruel fate, and mocks it. He goes about his public business with a happy expression on his face despite the troubles that secretly plague him. The poem expresses Abulafia's dual life, one of true inward distress masked by a cloak of humor that fools the world.

Conclusion

Todros Abulafia embellished his poems to David Ben Shoshan with humor-coated invective whose hilarity softens its barbs and reduces, to some extent, their power to offend. I have argued that this comic coating illustrates the perplexity of Abulafia's relationships with high-ranking officials of his time. The personal poems discussed above demonstrate that the veil of lighthearted merriness worn by the poet disguised secret bitterness and depression, though these are fully prepared to emerge in combat. Abulafia saw comedy as a pretense, an outer envelope permitting him a sense of superiority. Humor permitted him to preserve his relationships with the powerful, to express himself in a socially acceptable manner—and at the same time to resist. The fiery wit of his invective is not limited to consensual banter among friends. As far as Abulafia is concerned, it allows him to be every-ready for a battle of verse.

References

- Abulafia, Todros. *Gan hammeshalim we-hahidoth: Diwan of Don Tadros son of Yehuda Abu-el-'Afiah* [Hebrew] Yellin, David (ed.), Jerusalem: Weiss, vols. 1–2, 1932–1936.
- Baer, F. J. "Todros Ben Jehuda Ha-Levi and His Time", [Hebrew], *Zion* 2 (1936), pp. 15–44.
- Chaytor, H. J. *The Troubadours*, Cambridge: Cambridge: University Press, 1912.
- Dishon, Judith. "A Critical Study of 'The Writ of Excommunication' by Judah Ibn Shabbetai", [Hebrew], *Criticism & Interpretation*, vol. 4–5, 1974, pp. 48–53.
- Ibn Janaḥ, Yonah. *Sefer ha-Shorashim le-R. Yonah Ibn Janaḥ* [Hebrew] Becher, Wilhelm (ed.) Berlin: Mekize Nirdamim, 1896.

- Ishay, Haviva. "The Prison Poems of Todros Abulafia—Biography of a Genre" [Hebrew], *Pe'amim* 133–134, 2013, pp. 53–76.
- Kennedy, P. *Abu Nuwas: A Genius of Poetry*, Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2005.
- Kirschbaum, S. "Todros Abulafia, um Poeta Judeu na corte do Rei Sábio", *Revista Signum*, vol. 12, 2011, pp. 147-165.
- Kirschbaum, S. "Todros Abulafia: a Jewish poet in the Christian Medieval Spain", *Psefas* 89, 2012, pp. 48-51.
- Levin, Israel. *The Embroidered Coat: The Genres of Hebrew Secular Poetry in Spain* [Hebrew], Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, vol. 2, 1995.
- Oettinger, Ayelet. "The Characteristics of Satire on Jewish Communities in Yehudah al-Harizi's *Book of Tahkemoni*," [Hebrew], in *Mahbarot Liyehudit: Studies Presented to Professor Judith Dishon* (ed. Ephraim Hazan and Shmuel Refael), Ramat Gan, 2012, pp. 59–88.
- Schippers, A. "Arabic Influence in the Poetry of Todros Abulafia", *Divre ha-Qongres ha-olami ha-ahad-asar le madda'e ha-Yahdut*, Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, vol. 3, 1994, pp. 17-24.
- Schippers, A. "Mu'ārāḍa", *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., Online.
- Schirmann, Jefim, and Fleischer, Ezra. "Chapter 8: Todros Abulafia," [Hebrew], in *History of Hebrew Poetry in Christian Spain and Southern France*, Jerusalem: Magnes, 1997.
- Shevarsman-Maziel, Shira. "Bi-Vocal Speech in Todros Abulafia's Love Poetry", [Hebrew], *Pe'amim* 149 (2016), pp. 47-72.
- Shinar, Pessah. *Introduction to the History of Classic Arab Literature* [Hebrew], Jerusalem: Academon, 2005.
- Sover, Arie. *Humor: The Pathway to Human Laughter* [Hebrew], Jerusalem: Carmel, 2009.
- Van Gelder, G. J. *The Bad and the Ugly: Attitudes towards Invective Poetry (Hijā') in Classical Arabic Literature*, Leiden: Brill, 1988.