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Morris E. Rosenthal, a descendent of noted turn of the 20th century author Sarah Foner, translates six of her texts from their original Biblical Hebrew into English. Rosenthal combines his translation notes along with Foner’s original footnotes to provide contemporary readers with a fuller picture of both Foner’s dialect and her linguistic tools as she wrote in what Rosenthal calls the “sometimes exaggerated” Biblical vocabulary (xiii). He further provides readers with complete footnotes and references to Biblical books on his website, www.fonerbooks.com. Rosenthal’s translation of Foner’s Haskalah diction marks the first such work undertaken by a translator since Foner herself originally wrote over one hundred years ago.

Writing during the Haskalah, the Jewish Enlightenment of the 19th-century, Sarah Foner used her lived experience as a child in Eastern Europe as well as her love of the history of this region to pen historically founded short stories and novellas. She wrote in Hebrew and is noted for helping the Biblical dialect of this language become part of secular publishing between the mid 1800s and early 1900s in America. In fact, Foner is credited with being the first woman to publish a work of fiction in Biblical Hebrew, when most authors of the time published for a wider readership in Yiddish. Beginning her career with romances such as *Love of the Righteous*, which were popular among audiences at the time, Foner moved towards social commentaries of Jewish communities in texts such as *The Children’s Path* and *The Treachery of Traitors*. In the latter work of historical fiction, Foner tells a story of Jewish independence dating from the first century A.D., relying on accounts from the Romano-Jewish historian, Josephus. *Treachery of Traitors* provides the reader with strong female characters, adding these voices to the
Zionist movement in which Foner participated. Rosenthal notes that Foner further used her writing to document and publicly acknowledge women’s societal and religious experiences, both in their relationships with each other and the men in their lives.

A key literary tool Foner employs in *Love of the Righteous* is letter writing between the narrator and his mother. Life experiences of women in mid 19th century Europe can be heard through the voices brought to light through these correspondences. These experiences include tensions between Christians and Jews in Europe during this time, and the crimes perpetrated upon members of Jewish communities, which were largely ignored by governmental powers. Foner also uses direct dialogue between both primary and secondary characters, many of them women, to relay dramatic trials and tribulations of Jewish youth within these communities. The exaggerated language and lofty word choice through which Foner writes is noted in translator’s notes by Rosenthal throughout these scenes. In including these footnotes, Rosenthal enlightens contemporary readers to Foner’s writing style and brings into modern context why she wrote in such a style.

In *From Memories of My Childhood Days*, Foner moves from describing external conflicts of a Jewish community to internal conflicts within a Jewish community in a similar setting and time period. Her main foci of plot and theme include societal and religious conflicts between Hassidic and Mitnagdim practitioners and rabbis, as well as descriptions of relationships between powerful Rayphali and other village residents. Drawing together these conflicts and combining them with effects of malcontent created by them, Foner illustrates historically accurate episodes of re-settlements of Jewish communities throughout Eastern Europe. Woven throughout the societal frameworks are precise descriptions of Jewish religious rituals. Foner meticulously explains women’s rituals, noting minute details as she writes, “A woman stood to bless the candles on Friday evening at twilight, and candlesticks were silver candlesticks. After the blessing, she placed her hand over her eyes to recite the prayer known to women (7). Another example of Foner’s accurate societal experiences comes on page forty-seven when she...
describes an Aguna, a request common during the 1800s, in which Jewish women pled for the return of their missing husbands.

Another Foner text translated by Rosenthal is a one-page open letter that Foner wrote to the *Hebrew Daily Newspaper* in 1866. This letter decries an order placed upon Jewish students attending the Gymnasium Alexander (high school) in the town of Riga, located in Latvia. The school’s principal requires that all Jewish students must pass not only their course examinations but also their Hebrew language exams in order to be promoted. As a fierce proponent of Hebrew being taught to all students as a modern language, Foner calls on the administration of Alexander High School to make Hebrew a language requirement for all students, not simply Jewish students. Her sarcasm and wittiness come through in this short text and enlighten the reader to Foner’s commitment to broaden linguistic expressions of Hebrew within Western educational institutions.

A final text that Rosenthal chooses to translate is an autobiographical account of Foner’s experience as a young child, as she sought to become a Gaon, and being told by her father and uncle that, “a girl can’t become a Gaon” (79). Titled appropriately, “A Girl Can’t Become a Gaon?” this short story tells of women’s traditional roles in 19th century European Jewish communities and of a child who possesses gifts of language and mimesis of oral and written Hebrew texts. Foner poignantly writes, from a child’s perspective, of her disdain and disbelief of women’s roles within the religion. The text concludes with her prevailing, however, as she receives permission to attend the Cheder (a religious school for boys). Throughout her years, there she learns the Hebrew contained in the Tanach (Bible) and the Talmud. Ending her anecdote triumphantly, she writes in what Rosenthal calls her signature style: “When I finished there I began to read every Hebrew book I could get my hands on. When I reached 25 years old, I wrote a Hebrew novel, and this was the first of my books to be printed” (79). With this phrase, Foner cements her place as the first Jewish woman to publish works of women’s life experiences entirely in Hebrew.