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Dancing, Standing Still: Back to the Hidden Source

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Dancing, Standing Still: Back to the Hidden Source

Danser, s'arrêter : *Retour à la source cachée*

רקדתי עמדתי: חזרה אל המאגר הנסתר

Avner Holtzman

In an interview with the journalist Eilat Negev, Zeruya Shalev recalled the moment she was born as a prose writer.¹ She had been working as an editor in Keter Publishing House in Jerusalem, and had had a café meeting scheduled with an author whose manuscript she had been editing. The author was two hours late, and while waiting for him she started scribbling words on a napkin, inspired by a life story she had heard some time before from another woman she had met. The story had struck hard and she immediately appropriated it for her own private store of nightmares. That married woman had decided to follow her lover, thinking her life would not be worth living without him. In order to get her husband's consent for the divorce, she had to forgo all she had – her house, her belongings, and worst of all, her children. But the love that motivated her to wreck her old home broke not long after. That lover hit her and abandoned her, and she was left down and out, utterly disconnected from life.

Up until that moment, Zeruya Shalev had considered herself a poet – her first and only book of poetry, *Easy Target for Snipers* [Matara Noha LeTzafim],² having been published in 1988 and warmly received – and she had therefore thought of these scribbled lines as a soon-to-be-formulated poem. One sentence,

1. Eilat NEGEV, 1995, אספנית של אסונות.

2. Zeruyah SHALEV, 1988, מטרה נוחה לצלפים.

which would have been the core of this poem, was gnawing at her mind: “When you leave your child, you’re always pregnant, you always carry him around within yourself”. However, to her surprise, lines of prose were beginning to fill the napkin. After half an hour – she told the interviewer – ten written pages had burst from within her, uncontrollably and without plan. This continued for the following days, in series of creative unplanned bursts and in intensive inner turmoil, bringing her to tears at times, until the completion of the book *Dancing, Standing Still* [Rakadeti Amadeti].

This book has lead Zeruya Shalev to the path of narrative prose, but its critical reception was a difficult and painful event for her, leading her to consider it a complete failure. In another interview she described the first weeks and months after the book’s publication as a traumatic experience, because its reviews were too harsh for her to bear.³ For months, she was afraid of opening the literary supplements in fear of taking another blow, and even the sight of stacks of weekend newspapers in a shop would make her tremble. After many years she admitted that perhaps the reviews hadn’t been all that harsh, and that it had been she who might have been inexperienced and too easily offended. In retrospect, she even found the experience beneficial, as it seemed to strengthen and immunize her against future critique. Indeed, reviews trying to interpret *Dancing, Standing Still* upon its publication did not appear to exhibit viciousness, hostility or derision, mainly detachment and bafflement caused by incomprehension.⁴

In no way do I exclude myself from this context. When the novel was published in 1993, I dedicated a radio talk to it on *Kol Israel’s* literary program. Fortunately for me, this radio conversation dissolved in the air rather than (being) printed for posterity, but I remember well the deep uneasiness the book had caused me. Who was this tormented woman speaking to us from within this book in a feverish, raging, burning monologue? Was this an attempt to express the consciousness of a person who has completely lost her mind? What was the nature of the world portrayed in her words and why was it so distorted and frantic? Did the story have any realistic basis or was its entire existence founded on the twilight of the mind

3. See: Yaakov BAR-ON, 2012, ספר הוא כמו ילד בר-מצווה.

4. See, for example: Yehudit ORYAN, "להשאיר לו את הרחם" (To Leave Him The Womb), *Yediot Aharonot*, 3.9.1993; Elie SHAY, "ריקנות מיותרת באורך מלא" (A Full-Length Unnecessary Void), *Maariv*, 1.10.1993; Avi Katz, "אשה בטעם רע" (A Woman in bad Style), *Haaretz*, 29.10.1993; Tova RAZ, "סגנון זה לא הכל" (Style is Not Everything), *Moznaim*, 68/4, January 1994, pp. 46-47; Avraham BALABAN, "לעשות הכל בשביל האהבה" (Doing Everything for the Sake of Love), *Davar*, 28.1.1994.

or on the linguistic dimension? And why was the story so disconnected from local time and place? Was there any sequence binding the different episodes, or were they simply strung on a purely associative arbitrary line? And why were so many of these episodes so violent and extreme, filled with portrayals of bodily torture and blatant sexuality?

In retrospect, it is clear to me that I was asking the wrong questions. I tried, as did others, to decipher the book with incompatible ciphers and to interpret it using an out-of-date lexicon. Other critics also tried desperately to anchor the book into the safe and known categories that have characterized canonical Israeli prose to that point: plot coherence, characters built on psychological models, personal life stories intertwined with some collective context, either a social or a national one, and anchored in identifiable times and places.

But in 1993, these categories were rapidly losing their relevance, because they no longer fitted vast sections of contemporary Israeli prose. Since the late 1980's, a major storm was brewing in this world of prose. The illuminated center of the arena was still occupied by prose written by the statehood generation: works of the likes of Amos Oz, A. B. Yehoshua, Aharon Appelfeld, Ruth Almog and Yehoshua Kenaz – what Yigal Schwartz dubs “the Modernist Zionist Narrative”⁵ – but this prose was challenged from many directions by subversive voices, soon to be a bit inaccurately titled Postmodernist.⁶

Dozens of new authors, most of them young, strived individually to break the traditional molds of prose and the reality structure laid out within it, to play around with material, deconstruct clichés of language and thought, direct attention to the linguistic medium and raise profound questions regarding the major narratives underlying the prose that came before them. They undermined the

5. Yigal SCHWARTZ, 1995, העידן שאחרי – הסיפורת העברית .

6. This Postmodernist wave in Hebrew fiction produced a wave of anthologies and critical discussions, most of them published in the 1990s. See: Gershon SHAKED, 1993, ספרות אז, כאן ועכשיו ; Dan MIRON, 1993, "הרהורים בעידן של פרוזה"; Lily RATOK, 1994, "כל אשה מכירה את זה: אחרית דבר"; Avraham BALABAN, 2010, גל אחר בסיפורת העברית; Hayim PESAH (ed.), 1995, מבוחר הסיפור העברי, סיפורת עברית פוסטמודרניסטית 1995-1985; Yitzhak LAOR, 1995, אנו כותבים אותך מולדת, החדש; Gadi TAUB, 1997, המרד, השפוף; Alan MINTZ (ed.), 1997, *The Boom in Contemporary Israeli Fiction*; Yosef OREN, 1998, לאן?, הספרות הישראלית – Hanna HERZIG, 1998, הקול שפירות שנק, האומר: אני – מגמות בסיפורת הישראלית של שנות השמונים; Hannan HEVER, 1999, ספרות שנק, אוטוט, Assaf GAVRON (ed.), 1999, תבת מכאן: קיצור הספרות הישראלית; Yitzhak Ben-Ner (ed.), 2005, מפת דרכים: סיפורת עברית כיום, סופת חול עומדת להגיע; Egar KERET (ed.), 2005, 11 סיפורים, זלילות: 11 סיפורים.

modernistic, realist and neorealist poetics of their predecessors through various means. They broke the space-time continuum, weakened or dissolved life-like links between events, regarded the norm of rich layered language with suspicion, developed absurd and grotesque modes of expression and observation and parodied the traditional conventions of expression. They showed a conscious alienation towards the traditional canon, flattened language and at times and alternatively drew inspiration and thematic models from popular culture.

The new literary climate was emerging from many different directions all at once. It wasn't a monopoly of one specific literary group, or of one specific literary magazine or publishing house. Nonetheless, one of the most prominent forums promoting and encouraging it was Keter Publishing House, in which Zeruya Shalev was working as an editor and lector. In 1989, Yigal Schwartz, original prose editor at the publishing house, founded a prose book series entitled צד התפר ("Tsad HaTefer") – literally "wrong side of the fabric" – who's title hints at its orientation: literature analogous to a piece of clothing worn inside-out, with the stitching visible. During the series five-year existence, some 40 books were published in it, the vast majority of which being novels. Veteran prominent authors connected to the publishing house were also included, headed by Amos Oz, Aharon Appelfeld, Ruth Almog, Yitzhak Ben Ner and David Schütz. They were the ones giving it an aura of respectfulness and literary continuity, even though some of them were influenced by the Postmodernist gale of innovation. Nevertheless, they weren't the ones setting the series' unique color. It seems that Schwartz's key aspiration was in fact to emphasize and encourage the new atypical subversive voices of authors – men and women, young and old – among them a special group of known poets turned prose writers. I am referring to authors like Yoel Hoffmann, Itamar Levy, Avraham Heffner, Leah Ayalon, Gabriela Avigur-Rotem, Arieh Eckstein, Amnon Navot, Iris Le'al, Eyal Megged, Avner Shats and Avi Shmuelian, to name a mere dozen, each one utterly unique. Alongside this series and with affinity to it was the new magazine אפס שתיים (Efes Shtayim), literally "zero two" (like the dialling code for Jerusalem), under the joint editorship of Yigal Schwartz and Zeruya Shalev.⁷ The magazine expressed the new literary climate in various ways: the variety of stories and novel chapters included in it; its literary review articles; its gruff, almost deterring, graphics; and its editor introductions constituting literary manifestos of sorts. One of these essays, titled "Hebrew Prose – the Era of the 'Post'" ("HaSiporet HaIvrit – HaIdan SheAhrey"),⁸

7. The three issues of the magazine were published in 1992, 1993 and 1995.

8. Yigal SCHWARTZ, 1995, העידן שאחרי – הסיפורת העברית – הסיפורת העברית – הסיפורת העברית.

is still one of the best keys to understanding the 1990's revolution in Israeli Prose, especially as it was written in real time and from within the center of events.

Zeruya Shalev was living in this literary climate during the years the change from poetry to prose was developing within her. She read many manuscripts and helped in finding texts for the prose series, and was a full partner in editing and shaping the magazine. It is undoubtable that her leap into the prose arena was a spontaneous and almost unconscious act. And yet, it is probable that her being in an open and enabling literary environment, such as Keter Publishing House was in those days, granted her the self-legitimacy to release her innermost demons. Indeed, *Dancing, Standing Still* is one of the more daring products of the "Tsad HaTefer" series.

It is not a lengthy text but nonetheless an extremely dense one. It could be generally described as a spoken monologue, a performance, uttered by a young woman whose life had been shattered. Her world contains three men, between whom she alternately moves – her husband, her beloved and her former lover. She has a daughter that was taken from her, and it is unclear whether she is looking for her or accepting her loss. She has parents who do not remember her name, and for her part, she is filled with feelings of estrangement towards them. There is an abundance of episodic characters, appearing in her life only to disappear again from whence they came.

The book is composed of image upon image, segment upon segment, a nightmarish collage whose parts are not truly linked. Its diverse pieces are written in different codes: some of them more or less life-like, most of them surrealist and grotesque. The story begins with a doctor's appointment scheduled for an operation in which the heroine's uterus is removed and transplanted into her husband's abdomen, "and when we left", she says, "my husband was pregnant, and I was without a womb" (p. 7). Other segments of the story take place in a hair-laden land, in which the heroine is kept in captivity. Another chapter of her life finds her between heaps of garbage in a landfill. A different part of the story takes place in the ruins of the Holy Temple, and includes memories of its burning. The transitions between segments seem to be led by a private, cryptic process of association.

It is equally as hard to find a linear plot sequence in the story, as well as a uniformity of space and time. However, there are recognizable branching networks of lingual brushstrokes, recurring modes of observation and issues obsessively occupying the narrator's mind. Such is the hair motif interwoven throughout the story. The heroine is incessantly occupied by the state of her hair, which grows and falls out by turns signaling her illness, until she ultimately finds herself in a land consisting only of hair. Another example of recurring elements is the repeated connection between human and mechanical, or mechanized. The story is laden

with depictions of mechanized humanity and humanized mechanics. The heroine describes herself as some sort of a mechanical, modular soulless entity. Her daughter is described as "a puppet that has been bewitched and suddenly began breathing [...] I didn't know how long will her engine continue working" (pp. 8-9), and then turned back into a lifeless doll (p. 130). Her father turns into a cuckoo clock, and "just as my clock indicates that it's nine o'clock, my dad's grey head pops out from the door of his room, and repeats nine times 'Everyone's going to die', and then closes the door again" (p. 24). When her lover's abdomen rips open, it starts gushing gravel (p. 117). The heroine herself transforms at one point into a video game character from her childhood (p. 154), and so on and so forth. Human relationships are converted into mechanical constructs. For instance, the heroine is connected to her husband through a unique apparatus, "not through our souls but through arms. He was made of nails and wire. It was painful but comfortable" (p. 124). It's no wonder the whole world transforms at one point into a heap of damaged or used material, a landfill or a museum of junk (p. 60).

Relationships portrayed in the story seem an intentional parody directed at conventional human norms. Any expectation of kinship between a wife and her husband, a woman and her lover, a daughter and her parents, a sister and her siblings, parents and their daughter, is completely broken. Anything that might speak of a connection, caring, jealousy or love, is turned on its head and voided of any substance or immutable value. Whose daughter am I, she asks herself; whose wife am I; whose mother am I; and no answer is to be found (p. 139). Supposedly, the world described here is void of any real emotion. The word "love" collapses into a series of incomprehensible sounds and loses its human essence (p. 84). Not only is there no chance of love, but any other kind of human contact is also out of the question. Intercourse, for instance, is described as a bizarre and boring affair: "in, out, in, out, whatever can come of this? I've always wondered why people make such a big fuss about this. If I were to, say, take my finger in and out, in and out of a glass of mineral water, would that shock anyone?" (p. 18). On the other hand, utterly trivial issues take center stage. The search for a missing ripped sock becomes a wholly engrossing concern and an object of many a heated conversation between the heroine and her husband. Time and again, the novel shifts proportions between the inconsequential and the critical and essential. For example, the main reason she finds for putting off her divorce is her sorrow for all the soon-to-be wasted hours she dedicated to installing shelves and hangers in the house (p. 45). A person's name is not a stable identifier, as it changes according to circumstance, just as the heroine's mother addresses her with a different name every time. Furthermore, people and landscapes often change colors, turning blue, yellow, red or black according to circumstance. The world constructed

here, is made of distortion upon distortion, simultaneously mixing recollection and forgetfulness, consciousness and sleep, reality and fantasy. Everything pivots around disintegration, alienation and inconsequence, and hidden behind these is deep despair for the impossibility of constructing any meaningful human existence in this world.

Nevertheless, beyond the breathtaking grotesque carnival of nightmarish situations, are two noticeable underlying traumatic issues, completely human and concrete, upon which the heroine's anxieties and desires are focused.⁹ One could be summarized by the yelled sentence escaping her lips while riding a strange bus: "I want my home back, I want my family back" (p. 103). The entire novel centers around the collapse of the heroine's marriage after ten years: the wife's departure from her husband and her home, after choosing to stay devoted to her lover, marks the starting point of a chain of disastrous events. The private destruction of the home is described by two contradicting similes. At times it is likened to a warehouse, in other words, a completely neutral space (p. 42), located in a city quarter solely populated by warehouses (p. 132). At other times, the warehouse transforms into the Holy Temple, a space fully loaded with holy significance (pp. 44, 144). The lamentation for the disintegration of the nuclear family – consisting of mother, father and child – is intertwined into the story; and the banal day-to-day routine portrayed, for example, as sitting together eating an omelet and a salad, appears as a lost and longed-for destination (p. 47). The destruction of the home is connected to the event of the destruction of the Temple, and the private lamentation is intertwined with the national tradition-laden lamentation.

The second issue is the insistent search for the child, disappearing and reappearing by turns. The stronger the maternal anxiety becomes, the further the chain of horrific imaginings of what has become of the child branch out. These two underlying issues are depicted dimly and elusively, because gradually, the heroine's responsibility for the two disasters that have befallen her becomes clear. The accusations she fires in all directions turn out to be a distraction mechanism, masking the heavy feeling of guilt burdening her. The family's disintegration and the loss of contact with the daughter are revealed, through careful reading, to be a result of the heroine's choices, sentenced to live forever with the results of the destruction she brought upon herself. At the last moment, she tries desperately to fix what has been broken, and constructs a fantasy of how she would grow a baby,

9. See: Avraham BALABAN, 1995, סיפורת עברית: פוסטמודרניסטית, גל אהר בסיפורת העברית: תשע אמהות ואמא: ייצוגי אימהות בסיפורת העברית, pp. 61-68; Avraham BALABAN, 2010, תשע אמהות ואמא: ייצוגי אימהות בסיפורת העברית, pp. 134-155.

with the help of her parents and siblings, but this attempt collapses (pp. 185-188). She withdraws into the house that has turned again into a warehouse, with her parents and brother, and condemns herself to eternal anticipation of that which will never happen.

Reading *Dancing, Standing Still* today, twenty-one years after its publication, is still an intense tantalizing experience. However, this is not a first encounter with a new literary talent, as it was in 1993, but a retrospection on the starting point of a glorious literary path. As we well know, Zeruya Shalev's international fame has grown from the success of the four novels she has published after *Dancing, Standing Still*: from *Love Life* to *The Remains of Love*, translated into more than twenty languages.¹⁰ And yet, her first novel is not known to her international audience, because no translation was ever published, save for a Russian one (2000). In fact, Hebrew readers too are unfamiliar with it, and as far as I'm aware, it was never reprinted. It's somehow symbolic, that you cannot get a copy of the book in the Israel National Library in Jerusalem, because the library's catalogue states that one of the two copies has been lost, and the other is locked for preservation in a remote storage and is not accessible for reading. While her four later novels were given quite many thorough scholarly interpretations, *Dancing, Standing Still* has all but failed to arouse researchers and critics. They usually label it as "cryptic" and "experimental", without bothering to reread it, and some unequivocally admit to never have read it in the first place, having yet to find the time to do so. So it has happened that this book remains a blind spot of sorts, a hidden site, almost a dark secret or a distant rumor in the comprehensive literary landscape created by Zeruya Shalev.

But reading *Dancing, Standing Still* today, reveals the fact that at this secret inaugural novel's dense core, lies the root to many different phenomena that have developed and spread out in Shalev's later books: characters, underlying themes, storylines, emotional materials, spoken sentences, grotesque patterns and figurative systems. I daresay the dense mental materials that had erupted lava-like from the author's psyche, settling as concrete images on the pages of *Dancing, Standing Still*, constituted a primal reservoir, from which she has been drawing threads to this day.

I could only give a mere handful of examples of this. One of the most unforgettable scenes in the novel is the heroine's farewell visit to her former lover, a few hours before his death. Rather than showing interest in him, she wishes to say goodbye to his extraordinary genitals, the likes of which she has never seen. At her

10. Zeruyah SHALEV, 1998, *היי אהבה* ; Zeruyah SHALEV, 2000, *בעל ואשה* ; Zeruyah SHALEV, 2005, *תרה* ; Zeruyah SHALEV, 2011, *שארית החיים* .

arrival, she finds his wife, who informs her that her husband is busy copulating with his French mistress for the last time, and she then watches the act with interest. This scene is to a large extent the kernel from which formed the novel *Love Life*. The old lover, Arieh Even, his wife, Josephine, to which the terminal disease was transferred, and the young French mistress with the cigarette holder, appearing and disappearing in turns, are a realistic grotesque development of the three characters from the earlier novel. That same dark and mysterious lover popping into the heroine's life and awakening uncontrollable desires within her, is a repeating archetype of sorts, and it appears in different embodiments in Shalev's later novels: he is not just Arieh Even from *Love Life*, but also Micha Bergman, the architect from *Husband and Wife*, and Oded Sheffer, the psychiatrist from *Thera*.

The analogy between the disintegrating home and the destruction of the Temple is portrayed in *Dancing, Standing Still* in a primal fragmented way, even though the burning of the Temple is described as an actual event in the text: "I remember that one evening, on the same day the Temple burned down, I found lumps of ash in the toilet bowl, and the fire was still scorching the water" (p. 77). Another episode depicts the husband and daughter living in the abandoned Temple and busying themselves in intricate rites of mourning, remembering the wife and mother that has forsaken them (p. 95). In Shalev's later books, it would gather weight and density. In *Love Life*, Yaara Corman is occupied by a thorough examination of the Talmudic legends of the destruction of the Temple, and she suggests an original interpretation of the well-known story of the carpenter whose wife leaves him for his apprentice. The lamentation for the destruction of the Holy Temple, in direct affinity to the Book of Lamentations (*Megilat Eikha*), is intensified in the later books. It reaches its peak in *Thera*, in Ella Miller's bitter cry for the first house she destroyed with her very hands and for the second house, itself on the brink of destruction before it was even constructed.

The wild store of materials comprising the world of *Dancing, Standing Still* also permeates through various channels into the later novels. Even *The Remains of Love*, a masterpiece of realistic writing, rich with detail and well-anchored in Israeli time and place, contains situations and images whose roots can be traced to the earlier novel. For instance, the topic of adoption, which brings the later novel to its climax, is already depicted, in its essence, in *Dancing, Standing Still*. In one of the plot's turns, the heroine's private home transforms into an orphanage, full of children awaiting their new parents: "our warehouse was merely a temporary station until the arrival of the adoptive parents. With outstretched arms and warm smiles, they will say: 'this child, this child is exactly what we've been waiting for all our lives.'" (p. 48). Another example: a considerable part of *Dancing, Standing Still* takes place in a snow-filled world. The heroine digs holes in the snow and

hides her daughter's toys in them. Her mother and brother appear before her as part of a snowy vision, she trudges through the frozen streets and the chill covers the world (pp. 72-73). And again, this fantastic nightmarish vision from the earlier novel transforms in *The Remains of Love* into a completely realistic situation. The later novel's conclusion is shrouded in a late-December Siberian chill, and the very last paragraph describes a world gradually being covered and filled with snow, almost as if it grew from the ground.

It is possible to find many different ways material flows and permeates from the earlier novel to the ones that followed. Images that are part of the hallucinatory reality of *Dancing, Standing Still* are integrated into realistic webs and situations in the later novels. Segments of reality from the earlier novel become part of the heroine's nightmares in the later ones. Concrete situations from the earlier work are fused into the symbolic webs or the metaphoric language of the later novels. Primal emotional states striking the reader with their crudeness in the earlier novel, are refined, adapted and expanded in the later ones. *Dancing, Standing Still* could be described with a metaphor borrowed from Biblical Studies: it is an Urtext – a primal obscure textual source, from which branch out further adaptations of the original text.

By this metaphor I do not wish to claim that one narrative pattern governs Zeruya Shalev's writing and duplicates itself with variations from one novel to the other. On the contrary. One of the most fascinating features of her literary world is the movement and change of focus in each novel. Indeed, one fundamental question is always there: how to conduct an authentic life as a human being and especially as a woman between the contradicting forces that shake the heroine? How to navigate between destruction and reparation? The answers vary, but they are always in accordance with the heroine's qualities and conditions. It can be said in general, that over the years the forces of reparation gain more and more weight over the forces of destruction. Building the house above the fractions is the desired aim. As the heroine grows up from novel to novel and becomes a more complex and mature personality, she acknowledges the force of motherhood as the most profound reason for her existence. In this respect, the sublime last scene of *The Remains of Love* is a mirror-image of the ending of *Dancing, Standing Still*. The early novel ends while the heroine is entirely a hollow void of anticipation, knowing there is no reparation for her life without her missing daughter, and ready, as she said, "to learn everything from the start" (p. 188). In the later novel that void is filled at the moment of the first encounter with the child, the deepest reparation for a life that lost its aim.

Perhaps it would be better to use a more appropriate metaphor from the field of cosmology, founded on the well-known physics theory known as the Big-Bang.

I would venture to liken the growth of Zeruya Shalev's creative cosmos to that same physics process. *Dancing, Standing Still* could be likened to that singular infinitely compressed point, into which all matter was compacted in the outset of the universe, in unimaginable density. Whereas the following novels are the products of this Big Bang, parts of an ever-expanding universe, branching out and differentiating into separate distinct galaxies and star systems, the primordial matter imprinted and sustained in all of them. Every new novel by Zeruya Shalev is more realistic than the last, based in a wider human and social reality, farther from the dense nightmarish tangle of her first novel. Nevertheless, each novel contains within it the essential molecules of her world, as they were imprinted in her first novel – the grotesque astonishing images, the radicalized situations, the emotional wounds slashing the flesh, the lyrical qualities and the enchanting poetic language. I have no doubt that this cosmos will continue to expand, and that new planets shall be born from it and lead Zeruya Shalev's grateful readers to new spectacular destinations.

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Abstract: *Dancing, Standing Still* (1993), is one of the more daring products of Israeli Postmodern fiction. It is a spoken monologue, a performance, uttered by a young woman whose life had been shattered. Her world contains three men, between whom she alternately moves – her husband, her beloved and her former lover. She has a daughter that was taken from her, and it is unclear whether she is looking for her or accepting her loss. She has parents who do not remember her name, and for her part, she is filled with feelings of estrangement towards them. There is an abundance of episodic characters, appearing in her life only to disappear again from whence they came. The book is composed of image upon image, segment upon segment, a nightmarish collage whose parts are not truly linked. Its diverse pieces are written in different codes: some of them more or less life-like, most of them surrealist and grotesque. Beyond the breathtaking grotesque carnival of nightmarish situations, are two noticeable underlying traumatic issues. One of them is the destruction of the private home as a consequence of the collapse of the heroine's marriage. The other one is the desperate yearning to the daughter she had lost.

A re-reading of *Dancing, Standing Still* reveals the fact, that at this almost forgotten inaugural novel's dense core lies the root to many different phenomena that have developed and spread out in Shalev's later books: characters, underlying themes, storylines, emotional materials, spoken sentences, grotesque patterns and figurative systems. One daresay the dense mental materials that had erupted lava-like from the author's psyche, settling as concrete images on the pages of *Dancing, Standing Still*, constituted a primal reservoir, from which she has been drawing threads to this day.

Keywords: Shalev Zeruya (1959-), Israeli fiction, Postmodernism, Surrealism, Grotesque, Fantasy, Parody, Absurd, Enstrangement, Motherhood, Monologue, Collage, Violence, Mechanization

Résumé : Le premier roman de Zeruya Shalev, Danser, s'arrêter (1993), est l'un des produits les plus audacieux de la narration israélienne post-moderne. C'est le monologue dramatique d'une jeune femme dont l'existence est brisée : elle passe sa vie soit avec son mari, soit avec son amant, soit avec son amant précédent ; elle a une fille qui est absente, ses relations avec ses parents sont conflictuelles... Le texte est fait d'images séparées, une sorte de collage surréaliste et grotesque, reflet d'un vrai cauchemar centré autour de son couple détruit et de l'absence de sa fille.

En fait, ce roman de jeunesse, peu étudié, est le noyau dur des thèmes et des romans que Zeruya Shalev écrira par la suite. On pourrait peut-être le définir comme le réservoir de base de l'ensemble de sa narration.

Mots-clés : Shalev Zeruya (1959-), narration israélienne, postmodernisme, surréalisme, grotesque, fantaisie, parodie, absurde, monologue, collage, violence, amour maternel, littérature

תקציר: "רקדתי עמדתי" (1993), הרומן הראשון של צרויה שלו, הוא מן התוצרים הנועזים והמתסיסים ביותר של הסיפורת הישראלית הפוסט מודרנית. זהו מונולוג מדובר, סוג של מופע, מפי אישה צעירה שחייה שבורים לרסיסים. יש בעולמה שלושה גברים שהיא נעה ביניהם חלי-פות – הבעל, האהוב והמאהב לשעבר. יש לה ילדה שנלקחה ממנה והיא ספק מחפשת אותה, ספק משלימה עם היעדרה. יש לה הורים שאינם זוכרים את שמה והיא, מצידה, מלאה ניכור כלפיהם. יש עוד שלל של דמויות אפיזודיות המופיעות בחייה ונעלמות כלעומת שבאו. הספר בנוי תמונות תמונות, קטעים קטעים, כקולאז' מסויט שחלקיו אינם מתקשרים זה לזה באופן ממשי. קטעיו כתובים במפתחות שונים: מקצתם דמויי-מציאות פחות או יותר, רובם סוריאליסטיים וגרוטסקיים. מעבר לקרנבל עוצר הנשימה של מצבים מסויטים, מסתמנים ברומן שני נושאי יסוד טראומטיים. האחד הוא חורבן הבית הפרטי עם התמוטטות נישואיה של הגיבורה, והשני הוא כמיהתה הנואשת לילדה שאבדה לה. קריאה חוזרת ב'רקדתי עמדתי' מגלה, שרומן הביכורים הכמעט-שכוח הזה מכיל בתוכו כמו גרעין דחוס, את שורשיהן של תופעות רבות שהתפתחו ונפרשו בהרחבה בספריה הבאים של שלו: דמויות, נושאי יסוד, קווי עלילה, תכנים נפשיים, משפטים מדוברים, תבניות גרוטסקיות ומערכות פיגורטיביות. ניתן להעז ולומר, שהתכנים הנפשיים הדחוסים שפרצו כמו לִפְּה מתוך הלא-מודע של המחברת והתקשרו כתמונות מוחשיות על דפי 'רקדתי עמדתי' הם המאגר הראשוני שממנו היא מושכת חוטים מאז ועד היום.

מילות מפתח: צרויה שלו, סיפורת ישראלית, פוסט מודרניזם, סוראליזם, גרוטסקה, אבסורד, מונולוג, קולאז', אלימות, אמהות, הזרה