

THE DAYS OF ZIKLAG

THE ASSESSMENT OF AN IDEOLOGY

ROBERT ALTER

To hell with heroism. Who needs heroism. A come-on for suckers. All this flag-waving. Our hands have got so knotted up waving old flags that they don't have the strength left to let go, to shake themselves loose, when there's nothing glorious about the flags any more. And instead of just tossing away, really and wholeheartedly, all the flags, in order to walk light and free—you go to your death for their sake, for the sake of flags that don't say anything. The hours of what's left of your life are stooped and dreary under the proud flag.

At first glance, this is hardly a surprising statement to find in a war-novel published in 1958, or, for that matter, any time during the last forty years. But the familiar theme of embittered disenchantment with causes begins to look a little strange when we realize in what war the speaker is fighting and which proud flag it is that doesn't say anything to him. This abjuration of causes is a typical moment during a discussion among a small group of soldiers on a Negev hilltop, waiting in the blistering heat of a September afternoon in 1948 for an Egyptian attack. The young men—none is older than twenty-one—are part of the first generation of Jews in two thousand years to take up arms to defend their own land. The cause for which they are fighting is the rebirth of Jewish national

existence after twenty centuries of exile. But the soldiers in this novel tend to see both the glorified state and their own glorified role in another light: as the same speaker puts it a moment later, "a weight of rhetoric like a millstone around your neck."

The appearance, two summers ago, of S. Yizhar's *The Days of Ziklag* can be taken as one of the significant cultural events in Israel since the founding of the state. It would be a mistake to imagine that the novel marks anything like a turning-point, or the sudden beginning of a crisis in Israeli thought, but *The Days of Ziklag*—together with the furor of debate raised in the Israeli press by its publication—put into a new sharp focus the whole tangle of problems of what has been standard Zionist ideology. S. Yizhar (pen-name for Yizhar Smilanski) is far from being a lone, embittered voice, or even a spokesman for simply an off-beat protest-group of angry young Israelis. He has for some time been widely regarded as *the* writer of the younger generation in Israel. Intellectual circles in the new state waited impatiently for the completion and publication of *The Days of Ziklag*, which, at long last, was to give them the epic novel of the Israeli-Arab War, and, hopefully, the first great novel of Israel written by an Israeli-born author. Yizhar, on his part, (perhaps rather too self-consciously) was laboring at his war-

novel with the seriousness of a man out to make literary history. By the time he completed his account of the seven-day struggle for a hill in the Negev, his on-and-off stream-of-consciousness novel had run to two large volumes and 1143 closely-printed pages. Israel's reaction to this bulky addition to its bookshelves was, in the most intense areas of debate, little short of schizophrenic. (One paper went so far as to print two different reviews of the novel side-by-side, one a reserved tribute and the other a violent attack.) Admirers of the book, particularly the younger critics, acclaimed it as "the literary event of the decade," "the greatest artistic creation by an Israeli-born writer." The novel's detractors (after being sure to make clear that, despite it all, they had gotten through to the end) denounced it as both unreadable and dangerously nihilistic, perhaps even subversive.

The whole dispute came to a climax in the muddle over the awarding of the Bialik Prize for belles lettres for 1958. The Bialik Prize, given annually by the municipality of Tel Aviv, is Israel's highest honor for a work of fiction or poetry. On purely literary grounds, there could hardly have been any question about the recipient of the award. *The Days of Ziklag* had no real competitor; whatever its faults may be, it is certainly one of the very few pieces of contemporary Hebrew fiction outside the work of S. J. Agnon which deserves to be taken seriously. The majority decision of the judges was that the Bialik Prize would not be awarded for 1958, as no book had been discovered which was worthy of the honor. Both judges who refused to select *The Days of Ziklag* began their justification by declaring the book unreadable, and concluded (and it would seem that this was the real reason) by

complaining that Yizhar had distorted the image of the young generation of fighters for freedom. The degree to which some of Yizhar's critics were emotionally involved in the issues under debate is suggested by the oratorical fervor that creeps into Abraham Kariv's statement to the press explaining why he voted against the novel on the prize-committee. "Thousands of boys purchased victory for us with their lives . . ." and Yizhar dared to betray their memory. "*The Days of Ziklag* . . . tears down more than it builds." This notion of a literature that ought to "build" was generally implicit in the position of older critics and educators who denounced Yizhar's novel of protest. Obviously, if pushed to its logical conclusion, such a notion reduces creative literature to propaganda. But the very existence of a concept of literature as an "ought to" among members of a society's supposed intellectual leadership is symptomatic of a certain uneasiness in that leadership, of a sensed (or feared) gap between official ideology and popular conviction. It is worth noting, in this connection, one interesting feature of the *Ziklag* debate: the zealous defenders of the generation of freedom-fighters were not the young people themselves but the generation that had educated them. The feeling, in the main part, among the young intellectuals in Israel was that Yizhar had written what most of them felt. One of the younger critics frankly described Yizhar's book as the "Final Inventory" that the war-generation had taken of itself and its supposed ideals.

The most intelligent—and at the same time, the most violent—attack on the novel came from literary pundit Baruch Kurtzweil in an article which he called "The Great Disappointment." Kurtz-

weil touched on most of the real technical faults of *The Days of Ziklag*: its unjustified repetitiousness, its lack of character differentiation, the indigence and monotony of the inner lives that we are asked to follow through hundreds of pages of interior monologue. But the real weight of Kurtzweil's criticism was brought to bear against the moral quality of the book. He accused it of cynicism, nihilism, narcissism, masochism, exhibitionism, verbal onanism, to cite some of his choicer invectives. Kurtzweil may have had personal motives for objecting to Yizhar, but it is nevertheless indicative of the real danger some people in Israel sensed in this book that a major critic felt obliged to bury it in such a stream of Freudian dirty-names. (Criticism of the Beatniks in America was, by comparison, dispassionate, perhaps because nobody sensed in the Beatniks the same kind of seriously *responsible* protest against society that Yizhar represented in Israel.) If we put aside Kurtzweil's vocabulary of pathology, his moral claims against *The Days of Ziklag* were the same as those made by the other strenuous opponents of the book: Yizhar had given a distorted picture of his own generation because of his fundamental cynicism and nihilism. If the writer whom a good part of the young Israeli intelligentsia looks on as its spokesman is really a nihilist, the acclaimed idealistic enterprise of the Zionist state would appear to be heading toward some very painful cultural dead-end. How true the claims are, or what general situation could have led to the insistence on such claims, will become clear through a consideration of the precise nature of the protest made in *The Days of Ziklag*.

The plot-outline of this long novel is simple enough. A squad of Israeli sol-

diers siezes an Arab-occupied hill in the Negev. Twice they are driven off the hill, but with reinforcements, they recapture it both times. The book ends after the Israelis have succeeded in repulsing an extended attack on the hill by Egyptian forces. Judging just by this general scheme, we might conclude that *The Days of Ziklag* was following the time-honored pattern of war-novels and novels of action: failure 1, failure 2, ultimate success. The book, in fact, departs radically from the tradition of the popular war-novel in refusing in any way to capitalize on the inherent, reportorial dramatic appeal of the events of the war. The author has worked out a narrative technique whose very purpose is to extract all trace of dramatic excitement from the action described. He accomplishes this principally by denying the continuity of experienced time. Time is fragmented into an endless succession of autonomous moments. "The whole world is nothing but the bubble of this moment. This hot moment. This cut-off moment. . . . And you exist from one moment to the next, one moment after another. . . . This sickening time, this falling bridge." Living in a world of isolated moments is bound to produce two kinds of emotional states: a sense of being becalmed in time, helplessly adrift, and a sense of apprehension at what the next, unconnected moment will bring. And throughout the interior monologues and the long discussions in *The Days of Ziklag*, boredom and fear are the two principal themes. The human will, which must assume a temporal continuity in which to operate, is paralyzed when time is completely fragmented. Action can no longer be the subject of the novel: its place is taken by a study of the emotions of boredom and fear. Now, working within this

framework, Yizhar can do a rather effective job of deflating any heroic notions of the nature of war. But his novel is something more than just another debunking of the heroic, or just another protest against the debasing, stultifying effect on the individual of modern war. Both the anti-heroic theme and the peculiar metaphysic of time have special cultural significance in the context of present-day Israel. An examination of the ironies bound up with the title of the novel will lead us into the ideological implications of Yizhar's attitude toward the heroic and toward time.

Ziklag was the city David used as his center of operations after he and his band of warriors had been driven into exile by Saul. The Biblical days of Ziklag, like Yizhar's, were a period before the Jewish state was fully established, when survival demanded courage and skill at arms. One of the more distinctive members of Yizhar's squad of soldiers is a Bible enthusiast named Barzilai. Barzilai is a not unlikely product of secular, nationalist education in Israel. He carries with him at all times his little pocket-Bible, and whenever he has the opportunity, he pulls it out to leaf through it—looking not for “inspiration,” as a devout Christian might, but for an imaginative identification with Biblical personages and the places they lived in. So when the group of Israeli soldiers takes possession of the hill, Barzilai becomes very excited at the thought that this very hill might be the site of King David's Ziklag. “‘Hey, if this is really Ziklag,’ Barzilai insisted, ‘and we're fighting on Ziklag, then it's a different story altogether!’ But Nahum remained indifferent: ‘It's not a different anything.’” Barzilai soon discovers, after consulting a map, that his conjecture about the identity of the

hill was probably mistaken. The hill is not Ziklag, David's Ziklag, the unique Ziklag of the Bible, but merely point of elevation 244 on the military maps, distinguished from other hills in other places only by the bland, linear distinction that makes one number different from the next. The name, however, has already stuck. The Israelis refer to their anonymous hill in the Negev as Ziklag; they capture Ziklag, run from Ziklag, are parched and frozen, maimed and killed on Ziklag—which is, after all, only point of elevation 244. The final irony is that, even if it were the real Ziklag of Biblical times, it wouldn't make the least difference to them.

The most powerful exposure of the spuriousness of neo-Biblicism as a way to national consciousness occurs on the evening of the first day. The Israelis, with all their ammunition gone, have been forced to run for their lives in the face of a sharp Arab counter-attack. They lie sprawled out on the ground, half-naked, exhausted, hungry, caked with dust and sweat. Barzilai, out of the best of intentions, chooses this moment to read to the group something “the fellows would like” from the first chapter of Second Samuel.

“Now it came to pass after the death of Saul, when David was returning from the slaughter of the Amalekites; and David had abode two days in Ziklag; It came even to pass on the third day, that, behold, a man came out of the camp from Saul with his clothes rent, and earth upon his head; and so it was, when he came to David, that he fell to the earth and did obeisance. And David said unto him, From whence comest thou? And he said unto him, Out of the camp of Israel am I escaped. And David said unto him, How went the matter? I pray thee, tell me. And he answered, That the people are fled from the battle, and many of the people also

are fallen and dead; and Saul and Jonathan his son are dead also. And David said unto the young man that told him. How knowest thou that Saul and Jonathan his son be dead? . . ." "Why don't you just get off our backs now with all your dead?" Chivi burst out in anger. "We have enough without that."

Barzilai, in this instance, is living out the neo-Biblical mentality to the last letter. He is trying to give depth and significance to the experience of the present moment by identifying it with a parallel moment in the heroic past of the Jewish people. This explains the innocent enthusiasm with which he undertakes a Bible-reading to his friends at such an unpropitious moment. When he is interrupted, he is drawing close in his reading to the point when David will lift his voice in the Bible's great moving elegy over the defeat of heroes—"How are the mighty fallen . . ." But against this heroic, literary image of defeat in battle, these soldiers have before them the reality of their own defeat—with the stench of their own sweat, the ache of their own tiredness, the memory of their own cowardice. Any attempt to see their dirty, distasteful world in the light of the epic grandeur of the Bible could only strike them as an infuriating falsehood.

To realize the full importance of Yizhar's attack on Israel-the-Land-of-the-Bible thinking, it is necessary to recall the role that the Bible has played in Zionist ideology. The popular notion, to begin with, of the Jewish people through their centuries of exile as the People of the Bible, is rather misleading. The Jews were the people of the Law, a Law whose ultimate authority derived from the Bible, but which was articulated in the Talmud. The Talmud, not the Bible, was the principal

text of study. And the Bible itself was always seen by Jews through the eyes of its rabbinic commentators. Modern Zionism, from its first literary precursors over a century ago, has been a distinctly romantic movement: a return to a glorious past, a break with all that life in the Diaspora implied to go back to a glowing world of the Bible. But this whole romantic return of Zionism was founded on a contradiction. In the past, the Bible—or rather, the Bible and its tradition of interpretation—had remained the living book of a people because the people accepted it as God-given. Modern Zionism relegated the Bible to the position of a great humanist doctrine, and, having thrown away the one justification for "living" the Bible, proceeded to use it as the cornerstone for a new culture. One symptom of the sort of change that has occurred is Ben-Gurion's habit of referring to the Bible as the Book of Books. The phrase, which did not exist in earlier Hebrew, sounds even worse to the discriminating listener in Hebrew than it does in English. Certainly the insistence on the Bible as the Book of Books reflects a kind of huckster approach to the Scriptures, a my-book-is-better-than-your-book pitch. This spectacle of trying to "sell" the Scriptures as a national book points to the whole futility of the Zionist return to the Bible; a people in the twentieth century cannot be expected seriously to take up a piece of ancient literature as its pattern for living, even if it is demonstrated that the book in question is a very good piece of ancient literature. There is no need to conclude that the founders of the modern Jewish settlement in Palestine (essentially, Ben-Gurion's generation) were simply using the Bible as an instrument of propaganda in all their talk about the fulfillment of the pro-

phetic vision, the rebirth of ancient Israel, and so forth. The vacuity of a belief is hardly a measure of the sincerity with which people can believe it. Zionism has succeeded in fostering a secular messianism with adherents who have believed quite literally that their actions meant the realization of prophetic promise. But as a general state of affairs in cultures it would seem to be much easier to fool yourself than it is to fool your children. Yizhar's young soldiers, as we shall see, are far from the radical cynicism of which they have been accused; they are simply being confronted with the awful disparity between the high-sounding words on which they were educated and the reality they have to live in. When Barzilai unthinkingly tries to make these tired, beaten men identify with the heroic model of David, he is committing an outrage on their sensibilities, and Chivi's angry rebuke is the natural, honest reaction.

But if such young people see the falseness of linking themselves with the ancient Jewish past, and are at the same time the children of the pioneer generation that divorced itself from the immediate Jewish past, where are they supposed to stand? This is the one haunting question that the characters of *The Days of Ziklag* find themselves asking again and again.

My grandfather, whom I never knew, was a scholar; all he did was study his Torah and his books; his life was whole and he was firmly rooted in all his relationships. Fine. My father tore himself away and came here and planted himself again. Now I and my friends are *segatiles*. Plants sprouting by the roadside. No longer scholars of the Torah, and not yet wise with any new wisdom . . . My grandfather's wisdom came to the end of the road. A new wisdom we haven't come up with yet . . . Fellows without fore-

fathers. Only fathers. And anything before your father's immigration—darkness. Back to the days of King David.

It becomes clear now why Yizhar chose to represent time in his novel as a succession of autonomous moments. The technique, of course, offers a certain fidelity to the psychological reality of mechanized warfare; it is a means of reproducing the torment of endless, helpless waiting that is the main part of the modern soldier's fighting. But, beyond this, the whole extreme situation of battle affords Yizhar the opportunity to represent concretely, by means of his autonomous moments, the moral anguish of a generation that is forced to live with no past, or only a sham past, and with no goals before it that can give any very reassuring sense of the future ("time . . . this falling bridge"). If all that *The Days of Ziklag* did were to exhibit its wound of cultural disinheritance, the accusations of cynicism, and perhaps even of masochism, would have some justification. The truth of the matter is that Yizhar's novel is a book whose most distinctive quality is its moral soundness. The first step that Yizhar takes is to try to face honestly the world in which he and his generation find themselves: so the first purpose of his book is to do a good deal of thorough ground-clearing. Among what he was clearing away, however, were ideals to which some people in Israel had committed their whole lives, and it was inevitable that they would be able to see in Yizhar only a profaner of the nation's altars.

The young soldiers whom we get to know during the course of the novel are, for the most part, the sons of small farmers and *kibbutzniks* (though Yizhar does attempt to give a wider demographic

sampling). Their birthdates all fall into the period between 1928 and 1930, which makes them the children of the wave of idealist pioneer immigrants who came to Palestine during the twenties. Pioneer immigrants, both of the Second Aliyah (before World War I) and of the Third Aliyah (after the Balfour Declaration) were, as a group, moved by a feeling that they were participating in the inauguration of a great millennial enterprise. First came the conviction that modern Jewish nation—was a fulfillment of an ancient Jewish messianic ideal. Then there were more specific kinds of millennial hopes founded on specific modern ideologies: the Marxist ideal of the Perfect Society, which the collective settlements hoped to realize; the Tolstolian ideal, preached by A. D. Gordon, of a union of the individual and the people with the cosmos through a return to the soil. The children of the pioneer-idealists, coming to maturity as their people was fighting to ensure statehood, had been educated in a vocabulary of the millennium and found themselves in a world where the millennium had not yet arrived and didn't at all seem to be on its way. They sympathize with, even admire their fathers, but they are simply in a different world from them.

An amazing generation, our old men. What they managed to accomplish between their youth and old age. The pathos they had, that we've lost almost completely. It's hard for us, the clear-minded ones, to follow their path. We haven't burnt any bridges behind us. We haven't exchanged one world for another. No terrors of the pogroms and drums of revolution on one side, or abandonment in a new and alien wilderness on the other side. Work intoxicated them. Both soothed them and stirred them. And then we came along.

The resentment of these young people

is not so much against the parents themselves as against the education their parents gave them. They want to face the facts of their world without a vocabulary that overvalues those facts; they want, first of all, to get rid of the milestone of rhetoric that has been hung around their neck.

Just as long as it's without talk . . . Don't let them come to remind me of duties. Don't let them come to explain to me the situation, the nation, our youth, the role of our youth, the hour, the hour's imperative, the task,—those days are finished! I have a stock that will last me forty years. Just don't let them educate me.

The very fundamental nature of Yizhar's break with the ideals of the pioneer generation becomes evident in his treatment of the theme of the Seven Days. Any kind of secular messianism involves the transfer to an exclusively human plane of the Judeo-Christian conception of history, a history created and directed by God. History is supposed to have meaning for man, is going somewhere, is intended to reach a post-historical culmination. The experience of our century would tend to place in a dubious light the attempts to cling to a millennial interpretation of history while substituting man for God. Yizhar tries to show in his novel what the world must look like, stripped of illusions, when there is no faith in a God of history.. The two days of Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, occur in the middle of the seven days of his novel. Rosh Hashanah is the point in the year assigned by Jewish tradition as the "birthday of the world," the anniversary of creation. The Biblical seven days of creation suggest the pattern for any messianic conception of history. On each day, new things are created, and the creation culminates in the Sabbath, just

as a progressing history is to culminate in the Sabbath of history. But Yizhar, by means of constant description of the changing sky from sunrise to sunset and then through the changing stars at night, is at pains to show us the complete *sameness* of each of his seven days. While a group of young men struggle for a hill that may or may not be important to somebody or other, nature—and nature's time—remains absolutely impassive and indifferent. In these seven days, there is no process, only cycle, no culmination, only the untiring repetition of sunrise and sunset and sunrise again.

The other major Rosh Hashanah motif in the novel offers a further indication of the intense moral honesty that motivates Yizhar's critique of traditional ideals. The Torah-reading for the second day of Rosh Hashanah is the chapter in Genesis that describes the Binding of Isaac. At the moment of the year when Jews stand before God to be judged, they recall the devotion of their forefather Abraham, who was prepared to sacrifice to God his most precious possession. The motif of the *Akeda*, the Binding of Isaac, is taken up by Yizhar early in the novel and developed through the seven days of fighting. Without faith in a living God who will send his angel to stay the sacrificial knife, or faith in a God who, in any case, is supremely more important than anything else, including human life, the call to an *Akeda* becomes unbearable. And when a notion like Homeland is substituted for the God that demands the sacrifice of the sons, the reaction of embitterment is still more understandable. These are the thoughts of a young Israeli machine-gunner as he waits for an Egyptian shelling to begin:

There's no way around the *Akeda*.

You only imagine that you can leave everything and run. You can't. You're denied the possibility of running . . . I hate our father Abraham going to sacrifice Isaac. What right does he have over Isaac. Let him sacrifice himself. I hate the God that sent him to sacrifice and closed all other paths for him—only the way to the *Akeda* He left open. I hate the fact that Isaac is nothing but material for an experiment between Abraham and his God . . . To slaughter sons as a proof of love! To use force and step in and take lives in order to win a quarrel. And that the world remained silent and didn't get up and scream: Scoundrels, for what do the sons have to die? Hate all necessity to get something at the price of causing ruin. Or destruction. Or torture. Or compulsion.

It is a hopeful sign that one of the major literary spokesmen for Israel's younger generation turns out, in the final analysis, to have deep pacifist sensibilities. Secular Zionism's assigning of ultimate value to national existence in itself was bound to carry with it the danger of making all moral values subordinate to the highest good of the preservation of the state. Yizhar and the members of his generation found themselves faced with this problem very concretely when the Israeli-Arab War put them in the position of having to take human lives in the name of the "Homeland . . . a word . . . that says everything and says nothing." *The Days of Ziklag* is a deep-felt protest on behalf of individual conscience in the face of a historical situation that often threatens to silence it. Yizhar's pacifist tendencies, moreover, are of a responsible, realistic kind. He realizes that the fighters of Ziklag do not have the alternative of simply laying down their arms. His objection to war, like all of his criticism, is made in a context of social commit-

ment. (It should be noted that Yizhar, the great voice of protest, is committed to social action even to the extent of being a member of Knesset, representing Mapai, the ruling party.) Here, as in other areas, Yizhar's formulations bear a distinct family-resemblance to those of Jean-Paul Sartre. His pacifist machine-gunner's justification for fighting sounds very much like a variation on the title-theme of *The Red Hands*:

Always man belongs. Always he is of. Always attached to and not disconnected, by himself . . . And for the "of" he must die. And why should he be permitted to begin making noble decisions that he won't shoot at the looters of his home, what right does he have to stand aside, to announce that he will neither do evil nor destroy, that his hands will stay clean and won't commit murder, when his whole generation is forced to wade in blood, bound to a necessity greater than it.

The generation cannot turn its back on the necessity; Yizhar's plea is that the mind of the individual should not become enslaved to the necessity. *The Days of Ziklag* does not pretend that anyone can wish away the horror of war, but it insists again and again that we cannot allow ourselves to come to terms with a world that accepts war. Yizhar certainly has no programmatic suggestions for a road to positive action either for the individual or for the people. He has tried to remove illusions from his world, and he finds it stonily indifferent to all human enterprise. (He emphasizes repeatedly that the soldiers don't *belong* on Ziklag or in the whole natural setting.) There is little he can suggest except that, as the Sartre-brand of existentialism teaches, the individual must be ready to assume the terrible burden of responsibility for making his own moral

decisions in a universe with no built-in values:

You only live one time. This time. And that puts an awful lot of responsibility on you. Because there's no other time. You can't try again, a different way, like the kid in school, who, when the drawing doesn't turn out right, runs for the eraser. There is no eraser. I'm a one-time-in-the-world-and-finished creature.

This call to moral responsibility is accompanied throughout the novel by Yizhar's other major positive theme: the thirst for belief. The young generation of Israelis he portrays has not, on the whole, responded to the disenchantment with past beliefs by becoming cynical. Many of the characters of *The Days of Ziklag* are intensely conscious of the vacuum left by the loss of the old faiths, and they are anxious to find something they can believe in which will fill the emptiness. But they are not willing to settle for anything less than the genuine article.

Yet all this moral candor and courage is hardly an answer to the question of cultural continuity that is raised by *The Days of Ziklag*. If the young generation has divested itself of all the spurious connections which Zionism tried to make with the Jewish past, are there any grounds for thinking that the developing Israeli culture will be at all a Jewish culture? One begins to suspect that Yizhar's young soldiers, during these discussions taking place under the threat of enemy arms, are led to overstate their position. It is hard to believe that for young Israelis, certainly for young Israeli intellectuals, all of Jewish history is simply "darkness, back to the days of King David." The relationship of Israeli youth to the Jewish past may be problematic, but that past is not quite a completely closed book. A dramatic instance

of continuity in historical experience is supplied by Yizhar himself, perhaps unintentionally, in a striking short-story called "Hirbet Hiz'ah" (the name of an Arab village). The soldier-narrator's vague feelings of uneasiness at the banishment of the villagers from their homes suddenly crystallize in a moment of nearly traumatic shock when he realizes what it is that he is witnessing: "Galut [exile]. Why this is Galut. That's the way Galut looks." It is through the centuries of pain and fear distilled in the word *Galut*—a *Galut* which he never experienced personally—that the narrator suddenly understands the suffering of the Arabs trudging into exile. His sympathy for them is not just the result of a humanitarian predisposition; it is made possible, and is emotionally colored, by the collective past experience of the Jewish people.

S. Yizhar has performed the service of deflating much that called for deflating in Zionist ideology. On the positive side of the ledger, it is doubtful if he, or the whole generation of Israelis he would seem to speak for, is really as completely cut-off from the Jewish past as some of the characters of *The Days of Ziklag* pretend. In any case, the manifestation of such honest self-scrutiny in a culture is certainly a healthy sign. Professor Ernst Simon of the Hebrew University, in his lucid discussion, "Are We Still

Jews?" in the *Ha-aretz* Yearbook for 1951-52, described the importance of this kind of self-criticism in Jewish national consciousness:

The remarkable power of survival of Judaism is rooted as well in the "no" it knew how to say to every call of redemption that did not fit the image of the true redemption: to Christianity, to Islam, to Sabbatai Zvi, to communism. And through the strength of this negation the people of Israel remained *the* people of redemption and preserved the hope of redemption *in the world* which remained unredeemed. The assertion of the messianic character of the State of Israel means the loss of the criterion for true redemption . . . The zealous guarding of this criterion is a prerequisite for the continual advance of the people of Israel.

The Days of Ziklag undeniably performs this function of zealous guardianship. The criticism of Zionist messianism that it presents is not its own innovation, but it is significant that Israel has reached a point when such criticism could be so completely summed up in a single book, and when such a book could be regarded by many of the young intelligentsia as their Final Inventory. From this point, one may hope for a time when prevailing thought in Israel will come to a more realistic appraisal of the purpose and justification for the Jewish state.