

In the Convoy and Alongside It: A Study of S. Yizhar's Works on Education and Literature

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Abstract During his years of silence, S. Yizhar, one of the canonical writers of Modern Hebrew literature, published six books of non-fiction and numerous articles. These writings, which deal mainly with education and literature, are barely mentioned in the diverse and extensive research on Yizhar, which focuses on his fictional works. Through an investigation of his non-fictional writings, this article will seek to shed new light on Yizhar's position as a cultural critic and on a central issue in his works in general: the tension between the individual and society. The article will suggest three main arguments: 1) There is a significant parallelism between Yizhar's view on education and his view on literature — namely, just as the internal world of the individual student is constantly threatened by outer forces, so, too, a work of fiction is threatened constantly from without by critics, academic researchers, etc; 2) His claims and the nature of his analysis testify to the fact that he perceives society as an uncontrollable entity that can be neither changed nor understood; 3) Yizhar's perception of society (and, accordingly, his relation to it) is more complex than what seems to be reflected in his fictional works, at least according to the common readings of them. Yizhar's world contains not only a vast and impenetrable social framework, but also an interpersonal and intimate sphere, and the distinction between the two is at the foundation of all of his thinking.

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I.

During his years of silence (1963–1992), S. Yizhar — the pen name of Israeli writer and politician Yizhar Smilansky — published six books of non-fiction as well as numerous articles, most of which were not anthologized.¹ The main subjects of these texts were education and literature. These writings are barely mentioned in the diverse and extensive scholarly literature on Yizhar. The criticism of Yizhar's intellectual limitations — claims that were chiefly made in the context of his fiction — is certainly part of the explanation for this.² Another reason is the fact that Yizhar takes numerous ideas, particularly from European intellectuals and philosophers, and expresses them in an Israeli context, but he doesn't develop them into an original worldview of his own.³

This article will explore Yizhar's non-fictional writings in order to better understand his views on the individual and society. From the perspective of this topic, these non-fictional texts have considerable value, part of which relates to their genre; the very nature of these writings is to clarify, analyze, and present claims in a coherent manner. Those concerns that critics of Yizhar's fiction wrote about — the introverted protagonist and his passivity, his alienation from society and his fleeing from and back to it, his moral failings and nostalgia — are expressed in his non-

¹ The following are the main works to be discussed here, accompanied by abbreviations in parentheses. All of the following sources are in Hebrew, unless otherwise noted. S. Yizhar, *A Call for Education*, Sifriyat Poalim, Tel Aviv, 1984 (“A Call for Education”); S. Yizhar, *On Education and on Education for Values*, Am Oved, Tel Aviv, 1974 (“The Education of Values”); S. Yizhar, *Two Polemics*, Zmora-Bitan, 1990 (“Two Polemics”); S. Yizhar, *Farewell to Education*, Zmora-Bitan, Tel Aviv, 1988a (“Farewell to Education”); S. Yizhar, *To Read a Story*, Am Oved, Tel Aviv, 1982 (“To Read a Story”); S. Yizhar, *A Story Is Not*, Ha Kibbutz Ha Meuhad, Tel Aviv, 1983 (“A Story Is Not”); Yizhar Smilansky, *Pages of a Dispute*, Zmora-Bitan, Tel Aviv, 1988b (“Pages of a Dispute”). In addition to these titles, Yizhar published articles in the daily press and granted several interviews. He was also at the center of forgotten polemics (for example, following his remarks on “the espresso generation,” or the “ghetto of Emek Yizrael” during the course of discussions on “Jewish consciousness” on the Board of Education in the Knesset). Several of these issues will be noted in section 3 of the article. Furthermore, Yizhar's doctoral thesis, which lies at the base of much of his later non-fictional work, is a significant source for understanding many of his positions; Yizhar Smilansky, *Alternative and Complementary Concepts in the Reading and Learning of Literature*. Thesis submitted for the degree “Doctor of Philosophy,” Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1979 (“Alternative and Complementary Concepts”). We do not purport here to cover every article or theoretical text that Yizhar wrote, nor will we describe every polemic he was involved with. Our principle interests are in his non-fictional books and notable essays. For a comprehensive survey of Yizhar's works, see Haim Nagid, ed., *S. Yizhar: A Selection of Critical Essays on His Works*, Am Oved, 1972. For a recent biographical study, see Nitza Ben Ari, *S. Yizhar: A Life Story* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 2013.

² See: Haim Nagid, “Introduction (The Development of Criticism on S. Yizhar's Stories),” in, Haim Nagid, ed., *S. Yizhar: A Selection of Critical Essays on His Works*, Am Oved, 1972, page 34; in particular, see David Canaani's article “In the Convoy and Alongside It,” which is included in this collection. Canaani's claims will be discussed at the end of this article. Coincidentally, not everyone who attributed intellectual shortcomings to Yizhar indicated this to be a deficiency. See, for example, Yitzhak Laor, *We Write You, Homeland in Narratives with no Natives: Essays on Israeli Literature*, Ha Kibbutz Ha Meuhad, Tel Aviv, 1994, page 75.

³ In his essays, Yizhar relies on the ideas of several thinkers. Most prominent are these: Jean-Paul Sartre, Paul Valéry, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Ludwig Wittgenstein. We will not examine their influences here. The more interesting cases, and, for some reason, less prominent in his writings, are the influences of Martin Buber and A.D. Gordon.

fictional writings as interrelated subjects that thus become more accessible to scholarly investigation.

Moreover, while in Yizhar's stories the majority of attention is devoted to the world of the individual (and not just because of the "stream of consciousness" style that Yizhar often used), in his essays and theoretical writings, a large part of the discussion is dedicated to society. Therefore, an examination of his theoretical texts can complete our understanding of his concept of the tension between the individual and society. Of course, this is not to say that what is to be found in these texts must from this point forward relate to what is expressed in his stories. What should be concluded is the following: The relationship between the individual and society is also expressed in Yizhar's essays, and this supplementary viewpoint is certainly an intrinsic part of his work and his worldview. The question of the linkage to his stories requires a separate discussion; we will treat it only briefly in this article.

Yizhar's non-fictional writings have an additional advantage: The question of the relation between the individual and society is connected to Yizhar's critical approach. This is how many tend to read his stories. Some of them, including *Khirbet Khizah* and *Days of Ziklag*, stirred up controversies that carried on for many years.⁴ However, along with the importance of the criticism contained within these works, as well as the waves of responses to them, their content is problematic, since it is part of a fictional world. For example, in *Khirbet Khizah*, the narrator's critique about the moral injustice of the expulsion of the villagers isn't a tirade of reproach, but is a component in the construction of a fictional character.⁵ The existential detachment of the soldiers in *Days of Ziklag* is first and foremost a literary depiction of the experience of fictional characters. These are stories, not political platforms. It shouldn't be concluded, of course, that it is unreasonable to attribute to works of fiction a criticism of society and culture, but only that, as this critique is expressed through a fictional world, it is inherently indirect and complex. In this context, Yizhar's non-fictional writings have additional value. The criticism leveled at his society is done so directly, such as his grievances about the educational system, his

⁴ A quite comprehensive description can be found in Nagid's introduction (see note 15 above); Gidi Navo, *Seven Days in the Negev: On The Days of Ziklag by S. Yizhar*, Ha Kibbutz Ha Meuhad and Machon Ben-Gurion, Tel Aviv, 2005, describes in depth the two waves of criticism on *Days of Ziklag*. The first was stirred up around the time of the book's publication in 1958, and the second during the time of the new edition that was published in 1989. According to Navo, "while the main findings of the early criticism were ... that *The Days of Ziklag* constituted a de-mythologization of the soldiers of '48, the later criticism ... saw in [the novel] the ultimate mythologization of the War of Independence (ibid., 37–38). The reception of *Khirbet Khizah* is discussed by Anita Shapira: "*Hirbet Hizah: Memory and Forgetting*," in Anita Shapira, *Jews, Zionists, and What Is Between Them*, Am Oved, Tel Aviv, 2007, 13–63

⁵ As will be seen in the following section, this general claim expresses Yizhar's own perception of the status of the fictional text.

clinging to the Labor Trend Workers' Organization (*Irgun zerem ha-ovdim*),⁶ and his disapproval of scholars of literature.⁷

At the time of publication, Yizhar's non-fictional writings garnered critical attention, especially on the part of teachers and educators; the majority disapproved of his call to "depart from education" and accused his rejection of education as being liable to deeply damage Israeli society.⁸ There were also those who claimed there wasn't anything new in his articles, and that their lure is restricted to Yizhar's unique style and to "the revolutionary pose in which he presents his thoughts."⁹ According to these critics, his claims succeeded in arousing shock because they were presented "at a time when fissures appeared in the Zionist ideal coupled with embarrassment among adolescents."¹⁰ In sum, because of Yizhar's cultural prominence at the time, his contemporaneous critics made every attempt to refute the claims presented in his essays. The ideological tendencies of these critics made it difficult for them, and perhaps for later scholars and critics as well, to locate the more interesting side of these texts. Beyond the question of the validity of the claims put forward and their value, we will argue that it is the underlying conception related to the brutality of society and the exceptionality of the individual that is critical and has nevertheless largely been overlooked.

This article will suggest three main arguments: 1) Essentially, both literature and education are understood by Yizhar in the same way. According to his claim, the internal world of the individual — the soul of the student, just like a work of fiction — is threatened constantly from without; 2) Yizhar's perception of society (and, accordingly, his relation to it) is more complex than what seems to be reflected in his fictional works, at least according to the common readings of them. Yizhar's world contains not only a vast and impenetrable social framework, but also an

⁶ The Labor Trend Worker's Organization was a socialist and Zionist professional union of preschool teachers and school teachers that was founded in 1925 and dismantled in 1953, when the law of compulsory education was enacted. See Yuval Dror, "The Labor Trend Workers' Organization during the British Mandate: An Educational Movement and a Unique Professional Organization." *Studies in Zionism, the Yishuv and the State of Israel*, Thematic Series, 2, Economy and Society in Mandatory Palestine, 2003 (583–615) (in Hebrew).

⁷ What was noted above regarding the inherent value in using Yizhar's non-fictional writings to illuminate his understanding of the individual and society should be said again: The criticism expressed in his non-fiction, even though it contains the advantage described above, doesn't necessarily become a standard for the critical meaning of his stories. Yizhar's non-fictional writings certainly contain some of his ideas regarding the question of the tension between the individual and society, and thus can complete what is understood from his fictional texts.

⁸ Yisrael Banimyanov, "Education — Without Values," *Mikrave'Iyyun*, vol. 59, (84) (1991), 7–13. Banimyanov notes that Yizhar's essay "Education for Values" "struck readers with astonishment and stirred up an aggressive, bitter controversy between educators and Yizhar" (7). The "astonishment" is explained further: "In his dismissal of the education of values, the author lands a death blow ... on the chance for a struggle for change and for the curing of illnesses and distortions of Israeli society."

⁹ Herzl and Balfour Haqqaq, *Mishnat Yizhar: Tel a-Za'atrv'e'Hirbet Ha Hrchim*, A Study of the Contrast in "On Education" and "Education of Values," *Ma'alot*, vol. 8, issue 4, (1977), 9

¹⁰ Ibid. Additional responses to Yizhar's essays are: Yehiel Kidmi, "Free Education or Freedom from Education," *Ha Hinukh Ha Meshutaf*, vol. 34, issue 113 (1984), 139–142; Edna Berg, "On a Distorted Understanding of *Mishnat Yizhar*: Notes on Herzl and Balfour Haqqaq's Article," *Ma'alot*, vol. 8, issue 5, (1977), 43–46; Yitzhak Barzili, "Heresy from Despair: Notes and Criticism on S. Yizhar's Ideas on the Matter of Education of Values," *Ha Doar*, year 60, vol. 36 (September 25, 1981), 577–579.

interpersonal and intimate sphere, and the distinction between the two is at the foundation of all of his positions; 3) His claims and the nature of his analysis testify to the fact that he perceives society as an uncontrollable entity that can be neither changed nor understood. This is relevant both in terms of re-evaluating the complaints about his intellectual limitations as well as understanding the seemingly paradoxical combination of rebellious and conformist aspects in his thought and writing.

Before turning to the essays, it is important to note that despite the general character of many if not all of Yizhar's claims, they do also maintain a distinctly Israeli context. Focusing on S.Y. Agnon's "The Candles" in a long and elaborate part of his doctoral thesis, Yizhar demonstrates his claims against scholars of Israeli literature.¹¹ He complains of the draconian instructions for writing footnotes in the journal *Katedra*.¹² In his criticism of values, he cites at length Eliezer Schweid's grievance about the modern Jew's effort to be free of any binding ties; he rejects Yehezkel Kaufmann's definitions of bequeathing culture to future generations; and he questions the glory of the "homeland" and the meaning of Minister of Education Zevulun Hammer's declarations calling for "the penetration of Zionist values in schools."¹³

A comprehensive discussion of the particular and distinct Israeli context of Yizhar's arguments is beyond the scope of the current paper. Yet, it remains crucial to bear in mind that his essays are not only abstract and purely theoretical studies. They are part of an Israeli context as well as several broad intellectual and historical contexts. Moreover, as was argued above, they are incarnations of existentialist ideas in Jewish and Israeli culture — particularly, the notion of authenticity in its different forms as well as a continuing expression of unease regarding the individual's place in the Jewish collective. Another context to take into account regarding his non-fictional writings is his non-literary activities. Aside from his fictional works, which are the source of his acclaim as a writer, Yizhar published articles in daily newspapers, held office as a member of the Knesset (1949–1967), and was a university lecturer for several years. Thus, our discussion of Yizhar's non-fictional writings illuminates one of the central strata of his multifaceted activities that have not previously received thematic and comprehensive treatment.¹⁴

¹¹ "Alternative and Complementary Concepts," 357–613. The critics whom he discusses are Baruch Kurzweil, Arnold Band, Dov Sadan, Meshulam Tochner, Nathan Rotenstreich, Gershon Shaked, Ya'akov Bahat, Yo'av Elstein, Esther Netzer, S.Y. Pnueli and Avraham Holtz. This analysis was incorporated into Yizhar's "To Read a Story," 387. See also, "A Story Is Not," 83.

¹² S. Yizhar, "Get Rid of 'Guidance for Authors,'" *Katedra* 71 (1991), 189–190; see Yehoshua Kaniel's response in the same issue: "Choking out the Freedom of Creativity, Is that So?" 191–192.

¹³ See pages 31, 51, 55, 66, 72, and 114 in "Education for Values." In his doctoral thesis, "Alternative and Complementary Concepts," Yizhar suggests a general and comprehensive critique of views calling for the positioning of literature and education in the service of society and its institutions. See, for example, his discussion on page 13 of Kaufman's "Mind and Spirit in Education" (1939), as well as his analysis of Yosef Schechter's view that the educational process ought to focus on texts relating to issues of existential meaning, pages 45–46.

¹⁴ Fragmentary discussions of Yizhar's non-fictional writings can be found in the following: Nitza Ben Ari, "S. Yizhar: (Anti)Hero of Culture," *Keshet He Hadasha*, vol. 21, Fall 2007, 169–178; AviMa'apil,

A final note: Yizhar's works elicited countless judgmental responses criticizing him or his protagonists of moral failing, helplessness, lack of responsibility, disseminating damaging ideas, and superficiality. We will not here reflect on whether his non-fictional texts contain shortcomings or otherwise evaluate them from an ethical or moral perspective. We are rather primordially interested in exploring these texts as sources enabling us to have a better understanding of Yizhar's worldview.

II.

Yizhar's fundamental arguments regarding education are the following: 1) There is no way by which to measure the influence of education; and the "cultural" contents of education are not a guarantee for the creation of an ideal society¹⁵; 2) In fact, education is a form of suppression. Its goal is to make youth belong to their society and culture. The need to do this reveals a hidden assumption about a lack of faith in the nature of man: "If you do not proceed and interfere, man's basic nature will burst forth, a wild, unruly, and uninhibited nature."¹⁶ In order to achieve its goal, education meticulously cultivates feelings of shame and guilt; it impresses these emotions on youth who are too young to be critical, and not mature enough to remember what has been embedded in them.¹⁷ The goal of this type of training and manipulation is to erase the uniqueness of the individual and to replace it with an impersonal, anonymous likeness. Education, Yizhar summarizes with a fragment from Friedrich Nietzsche's "Will to Power," is "essentially the means of ruining the exceptions for the good of the rule."¹⁸

This issue of the asymmetrical power relations that exist between the external and the internal is also at the heart of Yizhar's claims in his essays on literature. His point of departure is in distinguishing among three ways of understanding a story,

Footnote 14 continued

"Two Friends Set Out on the Path," *Mikan*, vol. 19 (Spring 2008), 183–211; Harel Lahav, "The Alterman-Yizhar Polemic: How the Division Between 'Doves' and 'Hawks' First Began" *Kivunim Hadashim*, 26, (June 2012) 119–133. Shortly after Yizhar's death in 2006, newspaper articles were published that dealt with his contribution to the preservation of the environment, his activity as a public figure, and his educational ideas. Among these were the following articles: Uzi Paz, "The Green Voice," *Haaretz*, Culture and Literature, October 6, 2006, 2; Ilana Elkad-Lehman, "This is All the Appreciation for the Importance of Education: On Yizhar's Approach to Teaching Literature," *Haaretz*, Culture and Literature, October 6, 2006, 3; Uri Avnery, "A Lament for a Culture that Died," *Time Out Tel Aviv*, vol. 199, August 24–31, 2006, 117.

¹⁵ For example, see "Departure from Education," 18–21. In order to illustrate this claim, Yizhar points at Nazi Germany as an example of a society wherein education toward lofty aesthetic ideals did not preclude the outbreak of barbaric violence. See *ibid.*, 20.

¹⁶ "Departure from Education," 19.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁸ Quoted in *ibid.*, page 52, taken from Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Will to Power*, translated by Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, New York: Vintage (1968), section 333, 492. In "Departure from Education," Yizhar adopts an epigrammatic style of writing characteristic of Nietzsche.

which he refers to as “angles of view” or “levels.”¹⁹ The basic level is a realistic one; the reader interprets the story as though what is taking place belongs to the realm of reality. The second is symbolic; according to its framework, the story is understood as a series of symbols, and uncovering their meaning requires an interpretive effort. The joint assumption between these two levels is that the story reflects reality, either in a direct manner or as mediated by symbols. Contrarily, on the third and more significant level, the events that unfold in the story are not perceived as “events that reflect reality (iconographic),” but as “fields loaded with tension (compositions) — in which nothing is told about the world.”²⁰ The language used on this level is not standard. It is transferred “from the language of public communication to the language of architectural construction.”²¹ On this level, literary works are experienced similarly to music — a fabric whose essence depends on the internal relations of its components. This level reveals the nature of the work of art, and in its framework it is understood that the author makes use of reality as raw material. The essence of the author’s effort is not to reflect reality through language, but to elevate language into a reinvigorating reality of its own.²²

Even though the different levels of reading are all legitimate for Yizhar (he even describes them as supplementing one another), the third level, the “aesthetic,” is attributed a special status.²³ Only in its light will the apex of human achievement in the creation of art be revealed. In creating an aesthetic order that is particular to him, man is able to overcome the external. Only in this sense is the creation of art salvific from the constant unease caused by the continually threatening external realm, which is described as “disorder,” “the alienating indifference,” “entropy” and “the impersonal apathy of the world.”²⁴ In this context, the external is not only the

¹⁹ “The Story Is Not a Story,” in *Departure from Education*, 152.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 153.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 162.

²² *Ibid.*, 153 and on.

²³ It is only a special status, not an exclusive one. This detail is important for evaluating his response to the polemic that arose in reaction to the decision to screen the film *Khirbet Khizah* on state television in 1978. During the course of the controversy, people pleaded with Yizhar to reveal the name of the village in which, according to the story, the expulsion took place. Yizhar refused to do so and presented his explanation in his article, “Before I Am Silent,” *Yediot Ahronot*, February 24, 1978, 1. The focus of his claims revolved around the independent status of the fictional work, in literature as well as on film. However, from his aesthetic position as it is presented here, it is clear that there is no reason not to reveal the name of the village. Not only do the different levels of interpretation invalidate one another, they, in fact, join together. A realist interpretation is fitting for the majority of readers, while understanding the text “aesthetically” is intended only for a few. None of this is even hinted at in the article in *Yediot Ahronot*: “The gaze of the story is turned towards a distant horizon, far away from this time and place... What is universal in it, which began with the local and the concrete, and in the fact of its exactness, at a later stage spreads wings and takes off ... turns to beyond what is known and recognized and limited to the here and now; otherwise, it is not art.” Therefore, it is not due to “poetic hallucination” (as Shapira argues; see above, note 17, 52) that Yizhar avoids revealing the name of the village, but for other reasons that should perhaps be located in the passivity that characterizes not only his protagonists but also his position as a critic. This matter will become clearer below.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 167. Due to the overcoming of threatening external forces, the work of art has a distinctly secular characteristic. Generally, secularism is a central topic for Yizhar. His article “The Courage to Be Secular,” which is included in the collection “A Call to Education,” had a broad impact and was published in several different outlets. Critics of his fiction also emphasized its secular dimension, each

repressive and belligerent social life, but also nature in its entirety, in its blind power and strength.

The aesthetic understanding of the story recognizes the independence of the fictional world. In this way, it is also loyal to the non-social, internal roots of the act of creative writing. Yizhar returns to this issue in several places. The creative work does not derive from the external and it is not limited by its structure. In the essay “The Story as a Story,” Yizhar formulates it as follows:

The beginning is from nothing. From utter oblivion. From before the world and before its events. From the nothing and emptiness that exists at the standing in the utter nothingness. Only afterwards, and in a manner not fully explained, while still drenched in the darkness that is before all, the creator bursts forth and arrives at recognition of the world around him. He is still entirely fetal from that from which he came. From what he knew alone, prior, before there was anything. Afterwards with a groping hand he grasps a hold of what exists and begins to do what he does with the materials of the world ...The world is only a late way station, not the beginning of creative work. Comprehending the emptiness and the lack of grasp are like falling into the void. Who did not know will not understand. The intent here is not some mystic and vague event, or some myth about knowledge of pre-existence; rather, it is a consciousness that he recognized, in his innermost self, and a perception of the nothingness as a beginning and an origin.²⁵

This claim allows him to argue in another place that great works of art are “above history, above geography, and above sociology, like the laws of geometry that are indifferent to place, time, and conditions.”²⁶ It seems that it is in this context that we should understand his declaration in an interview with Helit Yeshurun that he would have written *Days of Ziklag* even if he had been living in Canada.²⁷ In short, literature testifies to the gaping abyss between the internal and the external, or between the individual and reality: Firstly, its origin is connected to what is known to the author in his hidden “innermost being.” Secondly, literature exists — to one who achieves its depth — as an alternative world that transcends external reality.

In his doctoral thesis, Yizhar examines at length the wide array of possible relations between education and literature in an ideological, sociological, and

Footnote 24 continued

according to their own viewpoints; Baruch Kurzweil saw in secularism a distinct expression of decline and social disintegration: “The deep secret of a generation without faith, without a connection to history, that lives time in its disintegration” (*Between Vision and the Absurd: Notes on Our Literature in the 20th Century*, Schocken Books, Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, Kurzweil 1972b, 423); David Canaani is amazed by Yizhar: “Take note of the complete secularism of this soul, and his way of thinking — one of the prominent lines in the literary works of the young generation. Here, there is no God.” (Canaani, note 15 above, 45–65).

²⁵ “Departure from Education,” 176–177. In this same vein, he notes this in his story *Ha Nimlat*: “Do you know, coincidentally, a word more beautiful than ‘to begin’? I know nothing more beautiful than it.” *Ha Nimlat* in S. Yizhar, *Seven Stories*, Ha Kibbutz Ha Meuhad, Tel Aviv, 1971, 253. In the original, it appears in parentheses.

²⁶ “A Story Is Not,” 14.

²⁷ Interview in *Hadarim*, note 1, 216.

historical context.²⁸ Yizhar discusses two clusters of options bifurcated by the differentiation between: (1) A situation wherein cultural demands such as socialization and cultivation are made through the study of literature, and (2) A situation wherein human beings as individuals satisfy needs such as greater knowledge, pleasure, involvement, etc., through the study of literature.²⁹ Having examined and condemned the various attempts to use literature through education for social purposes, Yizhar's thesis concludes that literature and education should have an opposite goal: to protect the internal from the domineering and destructive tendencies of the external. He therefore goes on to argue for caution with regard to both educators and scholars of literature for similar reasons.³⁰ Just as education is the coercion of a unified identity, the common understanding of the creation of literature is a blurring of its uniqueness. This is the damage caused by conceiving literature mimetically in all of its possibilities. Readers, researchers, and critics make an effort "to catch the slave that has escaped from reality to freedom, and to return him, bound hand and foot, to his slavery."³¹

Therefore, according to Yizhar, there is a single, fundamental struggle taking place in both education and literature, and, accordingly, a similar solution is outlined for both. This response is based on the possibility of an intersubjective human mediation (one that Yizhar never identifies with the family).³² The call for liberation from educators and scholars isn't a call for complete disengagement with society,³³ but a call to be free of that which is dangerous and destructive within it. Yizhar seeks instead to connect to the intimate and gentle that is within the social fabric.³⁴ A reading such as this, which is done without a barrier, is a "meeting of the individual with the individual, a meeting of the single reader with the single story."³⁵ Therefore, the "correct" teaching of literature amounts to the reading

²⁸ See "Alternative and Complementary Concepts," 337–343. Yizhar's discussion here integrates general points with an examination of the position of literature in Israeli education.

²⁹ See *ibid.*, 337–338.

³⁰ In "To Read a Story," Yizhar formulates this claim as follows: "Literature (and art in general, but literature first and foremost) is therefore intended to be one of the most respected tools for 'transferring the national capital,' 'for the embedding of a general belonging,' and for 'the creation of the proper image of man,' according to the definition of the sociologist ... contributing to 'the realm of the dissemination of symbols' and as 'a vessel for the supply of general motion (Eisenstadt),'" 95.

³¹ "Departure from Education," 150; "A Story Is Not," 21.

³² To put it in the terms coined by A.D. Gordon, who was a major influence on Yizhar, the latter minimizes the status of the "limited family," i.e., the biological family, and favors the "large family," which includes all human beings. See A.D. Gordon, *Man and Nature* (Hebrew), in *Gordon's Writings* (vol. 2) (Tel Aviv: Zionist Library, 1957), 76. See also, in this context, Gad Ufaz, "The Woman and the Family in the Philosophy of A. D. Gordon," in *Iyunim Bitkumat Israel*, vol. 8 (1998), 602–613. For a general discussion of the status of the family in the Yishuv, see Dvora Bernstein, *Woman in Eretz Israel: The Aspiration for Equality in the Yeshuv's Period* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv: Ha Kibbutz Ha Meuhad, 1987.

³³ "To Read a Story," 11.

³⁴ Martin Buber's dialogical thought is particularly influential here. See Yuval Jobani, "The Lure of Heresy: A Philosophical Typology of Hebrew Secularism in the First Half of the Twentieth Century." *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 24, no. 1 (2016), 99, fn.12.

³⁵ "To Read a Story," 16.

aloud of a story.³⁶ The redemption of the pupil also depends on the existence of such direct human mediation. The pupil's educators are not the agents of a destructive system, but individuals whose activity is reduced to instruction and teaching; this activity is marked by the character of its gentle touch. As opposed to the belligerence of society, their work accompanies the pupil so he or she can "develop in peace as much as possible, like a budding flower."³⁷ Yizhar's 1983 essay in *Davar*, "How Did the Labor Trend Get Lost?" contains many similarly sweeping and flowery descriptions. He claims it is not because of *mamlachtiyut* (statism) that the labor trend was dismantled; in other words, it was not the result of the instruction of those in power high up in government. It was rather, the result of an internal social process during which the workers lost their class identity. The labor trend was lost because of "a decision made by Israeli society —to move to the right."³⁸ A large part of the essay is dedicated to a description of the values of the labor trend. Pertinent to the current discussion is the human interaction described here:

If someone happened upon Emek Izrael in the early 1920s, he could have encountered, either in the yard of the farm, or in the fields all around, or in the rocky paths of the neighboring mountain, a strange group of a few children and a grown man with them, lying in wait, head to head, behind a thorn bush or a few mounds of earth, peeping with outstretched necks at one small bird naively skipping and hopping here and there, chirping and twittering. That same man, whose appearance is strange, with his bald head and enthusiasm, would whisper there, all the time, that one should pay attention, please, listen and listen some more, to the manner of this bird's hopping, to its color scheme — from its neck down its backside, to its manner of flight, and to the musical tune repeating in its chirping. In that same enthusiastic whisperer's room, there still lay open the German books of Braham and Schimmel; and he now compared what he saw in the field with what he read by light of oil lamp at night. He would go back and confirm what he read by questioning these small, barefooted young ones, being precise in the findings of the meticulous observation of the small hopping bird that had been carried out by the little group of children.³⁹

What is described here is clearly supposed to stand in opposition to the harsh and oppressive elements of society. The guidance of the teacher is whispered gently, almost pleadingly to his young pupils. He is not standing before them as an authoritative figure who possesses fully crystallized knowledge, but as a friend or a travel companion. While his German books do still lay open in his room, everyone critically examines the findings in light of actual experience. The subjects of study are not separated or limited, but delineated by the natural curiosity of the children; they are intertwined without restrictions. At the end of their observation of the bird,

³⁶ "Ceasing Teaching Literature," in *Two Polemics*, 153.

³⁷ "Departure from Education," 77.

³⁸ "A Call to Education," 121.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 108.

Yizhar writes, the group will recall the birds in the Bible, the exegetical literature, a song about the bird, tune and rhyme, and the pecking of fruit that damages agriculture.⁴⁰

In conclusion, the relations between the individual and society in Yizhar's essays do not amount to the structure referred to in interpretive literature on Yizhar as "the convoy and the wondrous"⁴¹: the introverted individual tending to deviate from the strict social framework while, additionally, in a paradoxical way, continuing to belong to that society absolutely.⁴² Between the two extremes (the convoy and the wondrous) there is a fundamental and innocent human fabric, made up of sensitive and mutual interpersonal affinities. This is the context within which Yizhar's ideas on education and literature are to be situated; it is the background for understanding the individual, his distresses, and the solutions to them.⁴³

We will now turn to clarify Yizhar's image of the vast social framework. This framework is completely uncontrollable in its essence. As such, this framework, in a necessary sense, is not an object given to understanding, design, or planning. There is also no way to change it. What takes place in it is driven by an enormous power, not by any singular human deed. A simple expression of this can be found in the claim that the activity of the education system is not the result of decisions made by someone in a specified time and place, but the consequence of a vague and unrelenting inertia.⁴⁴ It is the result of "a constant and continuous inertia,

⁴⁰ Ibid. Using literary language, Yizhar describes here several fundamental ideas that can also be found in the manifest "Life and Nature" of the *Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel*, which was founded in Jaffa in 1909 by Yehuda Leib Metman (1869–1939), who established the Herzliya Hebrew Gymnasium. The goal of the society was to advance the scientific knowledge of Israel's nature in order to strengthen the emotional ties of the youth to it. See Yehuda Leib Metman, *Life and Nature* (Founders of the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel), (Jaffa: Society of Nature in the Land of Israel Press, 1909), 1. On Yehuda Leib Metman's educational activity, see Shlomo Harmati, *The Pioneering Teachers* (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense Press, 2000), chap. 11.

⁴¹ "Wondrous," a translation of "pil'i," is a term that originates in the story of the appearance of the angel to Manoah and his wife (Judges 13:18). It is here used to refer to the uniqueness of the individual as opposed to the commonality of the society around him. In this spirit, Hayim Nahman Bialik writes in his prose poem *The Scroll of Fire*: "A wondrous one ("pil'i") wonders among them." Bialik, H. N. (1957). *Kolshirei*, Hayim Nahman Bialik. Dvir. 397 (our translation).

⁴² The matter is described in scholarship and criticism as follows: "The relation between the protagonist and society, between the wondrous and the convoy, is very problematic. The individual personality, the essence of whose desire is to deviate from reality, stands in contradiction with the surroundings. This problem posed is dire, as we noted, because the author sees an ideal in social action, but the ideal stands in contradiction to the internal world of the protagonist" (Kurzweil, "The Art of the Story or Literalization of Life?" in Nagid, note 15 above, page 111); "Yizhar attempts to present characters that seek to be exceptional...but the desire for deviation never actually deviates from their own frameworks" (Gershon Shaked, *Israeli Fiction: 1880–1980*, vol. 4, Ha Kibbutz Ha Meuhad, Tel Aviv, 1993, 206–207); "The equal side of all of these protagonists ... stands out. All of them are deeply rooted in the life of society, but their internal lives do not border on the ideals of society and do not nurse from it" (Avraham Kariv, "S.Yizhar," in Haim Nagid, note 15 above, page 41).

⁴³ Gentle social mediation such as this — for example, such as an "intimate band" (*havura*) standing in opposition to society — is perhaps also expressed in his stories ("The Edges of the Negev" and "Habbakuk") though it doesn't hold a central place in the entirety of his literary canon, or at least in common interpretations of it. Social heterogeneity is therefore fully and distinctly expressed in his essays and not in his fiction.

⁴⁴ "To Read a Story," 94.

unchanging, that cannot change, that is not made for change, except for in a very slow, heavy crawl.”⁴⁵ Since Yizhar sees social routine in this way, he is not deterred in presenting support for his positions by relying on episodes taken from Stalinist Russia.⁴⁶ Due to the fact that social life, in all of its complexity, is not made up of human deeds, but the consequence of slow, hidden traditions and fossilized institutions, Yizhar can imagine society as belonging to “the collected and abstract names” that are described as “anonymous.” Society is abstract in his eyes; it is even “not real.” Not because it is a fabrication (anyone who attributes to society a domineering power could not think this), but because, according to Yizhar’s image of it, rather than being a living human project, society has a kind of fossilized existence that cannot be understood or altered.

Not only do Yizhar’s claims indicate this conception of society, but so does his method of thought. His essay “Gazing On, etc.,” revolves around the meaning of the word “etcetera,” which serves Yizhar as a key concept in clarifying the basic tendency of society. The essay opens with a description of a great multitude walking down Park Avenue in New York City. Yizhar looks out on “the procession of these toiling ants” and is amazed at the “countless individual differences contained within that same unifier, that turned the endless difference of personal dress (... that seemed to have meticulously been chosen by each person) to homogenizing uniforms.”⁴⁷ His main concepts in the essay, “etcetera” and “difference,” highlight the character of the existence of a man who has become, unknowingly, a member in this “uniform and impersonal parade of existence.”⁴⁸ What is important for our purposes is that all of Yizhar’s sociological differentiations are framed in theoretical-linguistic categories.⁴⁹ He describes the trend of unification in society as if it is not possible to decipher its motivating forces or its process of development. Thus, again, society is revealed as “anonymous and abstract.”

Yizhar attributes significance to the liminal position. He argues that man should aspire to move as a pendulum between two extremes. After describing in “Gazing On, etc.” the mechanical response to society and its opposite, Yizhar proclaims: “[O]nly this being thrown back and forth between the two poles constitutes actual life itself.”⁵⁰ In this same way, he depicts the nature of the existence of works of art

⁴⁵ “Departure from Education,” 24–25.

⁴⁶ In “To Read a Story,” 11, Yizhar calls to liberate literature from “the crushing tyrannical hegemony of society” and from the viewpoint of Georgi Plekhanov that “art is a social production.” In “Education of Values,” 72, he cites Trofim Lysenko’s lecture from the Lenin All-Union Academy of Agricultural Sciences of the Soviet Union as an example, in which Lysenko thanks Stalin as the “friend of science.”

⁴⁷ “Departure from Education,” 83. The description that begins the essay recalls Nietzsche’s introduction to “Schopenhauer as Educator.”

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁴⁹ A linguistic diagnosis of the social condition is the focus of a printed essay found in Yizhar’s personal archive in the National Library of Israel. The essay’s date is February of 1986, and the title is “Listening to *Kasakh* (Brutal Force).” In it, Yizhar writes about those suffering from that year’s economic crisis: “A language that comes to be the principle language of the public: ... Do you not know that this is the language of power... The name *Kasakh* alone strikes many with fear. A feeling of being helplessly exposed to a brutal force... language that sounds like violence for its own sake.”

⁵⁰ “Departure from Education,” 132.

“as that same greater sand plover that runs back and forth between water and land.”⁵¹ He repeats similar ideas in his interview with Yeshurun.⁵² The value and significant weight he attributes to the liminal position indicate his stance that society is not an object for change; Yizhar doesn’t offer any social vision. The existence of the individual is organized according to an uncontrollable, static, and inflexible social reality.

Another manifestation of the uncompromising nature Yizhar attributes to society can be found in the nostalgia he frequently expresses (and this not only in his writings). In an interview that he granted to Israeli journalist Yigal Sarna, Yizhar leads Sarna next to his house as he recalls what was once there (“Here lived a man whose yard was long like a noodle, and here was the hut of the doctor who was as righteous as Albert Schweitzer.”) He ended by noting this: “In opposition to all the laws of nature, change has caused this, that before there was a beautiful butterfly here, and afterwards this monstrous worm was built.”⁵³ When Yeshurun recalls these words to Sarna in her interview, Yizhar states that “there is something tragic in this, like aging: you can’t prevent what is going to change, while at the same time you know you were witness to a condition that, when it’s over, won’t be again ... [T]his condition speaks to me even now, the un-built, the openness of the fields, and now a bulldozer comes and destroys it. Here, in the middle of this thing there is already an electrical pole. And there is no going back. This ‘no going back’ hurts as knowing death.”⁵⁴ Additional expressions of nostalgia were noted above in the flowery descriptions of the labor trend that was abandoned, according to Yizhar, in the same way: “The Labor Trend has ended since most of Israeli society didn’t want it ... and have you seen in your lifetimes an old road that was abandoned because in the meantime a new highway was built that bypassed it, and everyone is flying along smoothly on it?”⁵⁵

At the center of these nostalgic expressions and their like there stands something coarse and ugly (the paving of the highway, the bulldozer, the electrical pole) that casts away a magical world.⁵⁶ This change is necessary. There is no way to oppose or attenuate it. It is uncontrollable, like old age and death. What is shared between these statements and others is the arbitrary power of society that penetrates all. The nostalgic yearnings testify to the operation of this power during the course of time; the claims about inertia or about a “uniform, impersonal parade of existence” indicate its operating in the present. As a result, nostalgia and inertia sometimes intersect. Yizhar’s description of education in the labor stream is the depiction of

⁵¹ Ibid., 163.

⁵² See note 3 above, 222.

⁵³ Yigal Sarna, “The Land that Was and Is No More: An Interview with S. Yizhar,” *Yediot Ahronot*, Seven Days, April 1990, 27.

⁵⁴ Interview in *Hadarim*, 217–218.

⁵⁵ “A Call to Education,” 122.

⁵⁶ A literary depiction of this can be found in the story “The Edges of the Negev,” in which the equipping of the drilling is described as a monstrous creature rising up against his creators. For example, see S. Yizhar, *The Edges of the Negev*, Ha Kibbutz Ha Meuhad, Tel Aviv, 1978a, 112.

what has disappeared in time as well as the sketch of the intimate human contact that is becoming lost in the impenetrability of the collective.⁵⁷

III.

As mentioned, Yizhar regularly published social criticism, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s; many of his well-known stories were also read in this way. Education and literature constitute only one (although central) component of the subject matter treated by his non-fictional writings. He wrote about Zionism, the moral injustices bound up in the control of the occupied territories, Jewish settlements, human rights, and the protection of the individual's privacy. The majority of these criticisms are "dispirited," not only because of the fact that he perceives of the vast social framework as an uncompromising and threatening body, but also because in his eyes all of social life is determined and given: The intimate environment is not in need of change, whereas broader society cannot change. Yizhar is thus prone to thinking in terms of complete social spheres. One is gentle, intimate, and in harmony, while the other is uncompromising and rigid. Neither, furthermore, is an object of either design or planning.

Moreover, the most prominent theme in Yizhar's non-fictional writings — including his journalistic articles — is the inflexibility of the broader social framework. The shared characteristic of the majority of these texts is the rebellious tone and dispirited position that are bound up with one another.⁵⁸ For example, Yizhar warns against a proposed law that would reveal private assets as a means to fight against black market capital, as if its realization would necessarily bring about a dystopia.⁵⁹ In the present phase of the Israeli-Arab conflict, Israeli society is depicted as impenetrable.⁶⁰ Because he attributes brutal power to society, Yizhar's only remaining option is to turn to the individual and to call on him to refuse cooperation or to implore him to join with other individuals in order to bring about a change that would "circumvent society." The articles mentioned above end in this way. For example, he calls for the individual to oppose the law for revealing private assets ("I come to call to each and every citizen to oppose this in every possible

⁵⁷ Uri Shoham, in his article "The Open Wilderness, The Closed Orchard, and the Arab Village: On Crucial Issues and Questions in S. Yizhar's Fiction," *SimanKriya* 3–4, page 336–346, points out the identical element in "the distant, open, and infinite that appears as a future not yet begun," and the object of nostalgia that is symbolized with the aid of "the closed, the past; which is the orchard" (337). Shoham comes to this conclusion from an examination of Yizhar's protagonists. What is noted here — that the power of society is substantially impenetrable in the present in the same way that by its nature it erases the wondrous past — illuminates from another angle the foundation shared by these escapes.

⁵⁸ Of course, this is not always the case. For example, see "An Open Letter to Yigal Yadin," *Haaretz*, December 9, 1979, 9; "The Criticism of an Individual on Four Points," *Maariv*, 3.11.79, 13. Yizhar comes out strongly there, for different reasons, against the withdrawal from Sinai.

⁵⁹ "Don't Let the Treasurer Do This," *Haaretz*, 7.3.80, 14, 20. "Pay attention, citizen, let them not come upon you and know everything about you without your consent. Pay attention, citizen, and don't let them take from you whatever they want ... and that they won't turn taxes into a deity that is above people."

⁶⁰ "Notes for Human Rights Day," *Iton* 77, 144–145 (February 1992), 6.

way”⁶¹), and he pleads with the reader to preserve his humanity with the hope of preventing his retreating within himself.⁶² This pattern characterizes all of Yizhar’s claims about education and literature. It is possible that the dispirited position described here is at the basis of the “rebellious pose” that he adopts in other contexts. He allows himself to denigrate Zionism, the “penetration of its values,” and the value of the idea of a “homeland,” even though he does not doubt them.⁶³ Yizhar is not deterred in presenting such views because he rejects the claim that society is in constant danger of collapse and its existence depends on the continuous effort to safeguard it. Apparently, these trends appeared to his rivals as looming dangers.

These matters also need to be taken into account when evaluating the complaints regarding Yizhar’s intellectual shortcomings. David Canaani claims that Yizhar’s intellectual limits are, in fact, the reason for the ethical failure in his story *Khirbet Khizah*. At the start of his article, Canaani praises Yizhar for having the “not small amount of civil courage” to describe “the Arabs in their helplessness and in their great tragedy, in strong realistic tones that touched the heart. Not through sentimental lies and an abundance of saccharine pity. It is much more than this: it is from respect for man in his moment of humility, in his time of iniquity, respect for the citizen of this land.”⁶⁴ However, Canaani proceeds to accuse Yizhar’s protagonist for a failure “that is an inconsistent humanism, a humanism that only goes half-way, whose weight in the real world is light as a feather and who goes bankrupt at the first real test.”⁶⁵

As noted, Canaani pins this failure on the intellectual deficiencies of Yizhar and his protagonists. It is required, he states in a Marxist vein:

to not only interpret and lament the harsh world, but also to change it. A prerequisite for this is having a vision that penetrates to the roots of the relations between man and society ... a broad view of the world in its entirety. Yizhar and his protagonists lack this perspective, since their standard is the moment in its entirety. They only know the isolated point and the isolated moment that stand before them. They know only one ethics, the ethics of intent, while the ethics of consequence, at the foundation of which is knowledge of the laws of society, is foreign to them.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Article cited in note 69 above, 14.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Yizhar’s identification with Zionism finds numerous expressions in his fictional, non-fictional, and biographical texts. Despite this, some described him as post-Zionist. A neglected essay that testifies to his enthusiastic relationship with Zionism is a manuscript that was apparently prepared as a lecture. It can be found undated in his archive (however, the envelope bears the date 17.8.79); he writes that Zionism “is one of the most pure, ethical, and human movements the world has seen,” and that it didn’t contain “appetite or fervor” except for “a few transgressions here and there.” On the claim that Yizhar is post-Zionist, see Gershon Shaked, “Imprisoned in Hirbet Hizah,” *Eretz Aheret*, vol. 35 (August-September 2006), 12–13.

⁶⁴ Canaani, note 15 above, 73.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 74.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 75.

According to Canaani, Yizhar's lack of intellectualism is expressed as follows: His protagonists, Canaani states, never make it to the "intellectual sphere, to a political program." They therefore have nothing to offer: "There is no way to find your path and advance without a compass, without clear vision, without an ideology, without perspective, and without intellectual considerations."⁶⁷

Indeed, thoughts such as these are not to be found in Yizhar's stories or in his non-fictional writings. Perhaps it is difficult to object to Canaani's claim if it is directed only toward Yizhar's protagonists. But his argument indicates something broader: In order to investigate Yizhar fully, his non-fictional texts must be taken into consideration. What can be concluded from them adds a more basic component to Canaani's argument. It is not because of an "intellectual shortcoming" that Yizhar lacks a "political platform" or "knowledge of the laws of society." The reason for his lack of a platform, as we saw earlier, is his fundamental conception of society as uncontrollable and incomprehensible. The ability to comprehend the nature of something isn't determined solely according to the power of thought. Yizhar doesn't penetrate deeply into the life of society, though he often deals with it. As has been shown above, the vast social framework, according to Yizhar, is "anonymous and vague." The interpersonal and intimate sphere is not an object of design. Social life is deterministically preordained. As he examines society, Yizhar always sees a back and not a face.⁶⁸ "Intellectual shortcomings" are not the reason here but the *result*. Thus, in his thought as well as in his imagination, Yizhar expresses helplessness when facing society.⁶⁹

IV.

Yizhar's non-fictional writings are part of a long line of essays within Hebrew culture that express discontentment with regard to the place of the individual within the Jewish collective. Among its first expressions were Micha Josef Berdichevsky's calls for the liberation of the individual and Brenner's oppositional stance according to which we should avoid living as ants in a line of ants — an image that Yizhar

⁶⁷ Ibid., 80.

⁶⁸ Yizhar's view on the limitations of the author is also possibly on the mark regarding his non-fictional writings: "Most unfortunately, the 'capability of speech' ... of an author is problematic. It is a capability of speech for only a few matters and not for the rest of matters, important as they may be. An author is an author when the thing in front of him takes hold of him, and he is not an author when it does not take hold of him; and what does or does not hold him is a murky and complicated matter, and the author himself doesn't always make the decision consciously, but sometimes it is as though he is held by some decree of calling, from within him or from without, and it forces him to do." ("Before I Am Silent," note 36 above.)

⁶⁹ Compare this to Yochai Oppenheimer's argument in Yochai Oppenheimer, *Beyond the Fence: Representation of the Arab in Israeli Fiction (1906–2005)*, Am Oved, Tel Aviv, 2008. He rejects Canaani's claim and argues that the inability to express protest doesn't derive from Yizhar's lack of "political platform," but from a "complete internalization of the collective ethos that is rarely stated directly in his thousands of pages of prose, since no character is capable of feeling its power, except one who seeks to escape it but realizes over and over that he or she is doomed to continue to bear its yoke."

returns to often.⁷⁰ A similar kind of tension is expressed more abstractly in Bialik's famous essay "Revelment and Concealment in Language" (1915), in which he describes the degradation of the rich and the resounding language of the first man once it becomes used in social life. The question of the status of the individual is of great importance in Israeli culture as well. From its early development in the 1950s, writers such as Pinchas Sadeh, Nathan Zach, and Yehuda Amichai expressed individualistic sentiments and their reservations concerning the collectivistic ethos.⁷¹

Clearly, this cultural context is helpful in deepening our understanding of Yizhar's non-fictional writings. However, and this is the aim of this section, the opposite claim, too, is significant; from what has been said so far about Yizhar's thought, we can further our understanding of this tradition of thought in Hebrew culture. Before proceeding, however, we need to add to what has been mentioned above. Following Menachem Brinker, we can characterize the call to free the individual in early-20th-century Hebrew culture as follows: The Hebrew writers promoting individualism did not completely negate the collective, certainly not in the absolute way in which Nietzsche, one of their main inspirations, did. They balanced their demand to free the individual with the recognition that he remains an integral part of collective Jewish life. The attachment of the Hebrew writer to his national tradition and his dependence on a precariously small audience are among the main reasons for this more moderate form of individualism.⁷²

These moderating features no longer prevalently characterize the post-independence Israeli writers. Indeed, in Israeli culture, we find an ever-expanding variety of ways in which individualism is adopted and promoted. We shall find, for example, expressions of avid antagonism toward the weight of collectivism and the Zionist project. On the other hand, we also find a writer in whose work the balance Menachem Brinker identified has turned into a barely bearable tension between the significance of the individual and the belonging to a society with the accompanying malaise. Though both elements are exacerbated, they keep on existing side by side.

Pinchas Sadeh, whose famed *Life as a Parable* was published the same year (1958) as *Days of Ziklag*, is a good example of the first type. Sadeh strongly recoils, in the name of the individual, from the burden of collective life and the Zionist

⁷⁰ See, for example, Helit Yeshurun, "Telling the Finite with the Infinite — An Interview with S. Yizhar," *Hadarim— Journal on Poetry*, 11 (Summer 1994), 221. S. Yizhar, *Departure from Education*, Zmora-Bitan, Tel Aviv, 1988 ("Departure from Education").

⁷¹ Later expressions, such as in Dan Ben-Amotz's writings or through the influence of author Ayn Rand in Israel, were even more radical. Though interesting, however, these remained rather marginal.

⁷² See Menachem Brinker, "Nietzsche and the Hebrew Writers: Attempt at a Comprehensive View," in *Nietzsche in Hebrew Culture*, 158–159. According to Brinker, this quasi-stoic position can serve as a personal and temporary escape for the Hebrew writer during hard times, but he cannot present it as a preferred position either to himself or to his readers. Indeed, "This rejection of Nietzsche's positive philosophy is easy to understand when we recall that Nietzsche's revolutionary values were meant to guide the lives of lonely philosophers who raise themselves above general needs and concerns. The *fin-de-siècle* Hebrew writers, however, were seeking new values for their entire public, values intended to edify and enlighten the younger generation of a whole nation ... a generation which had high expectation for the near future, not only for themselves but for the entire Jewish people." See Menachem Brinker, "Nietzsche's Influence on Hebrew Writers of the Russian Empire," in *Nietzsche and Soviet Culture: Ally and Adversary*, Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, ed., Cambridge University Press, 1994, 407–408.

project. Sadeh describes his coincidental encounter with Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as a crucial event in his life.⁷³ To his deep identification with the ideal of authenticity, the priority of art, and his contempt for the masses and bourgeois society, Sadeh added a fondness for Christianity and an admiration for outstanding figures of European literature (particularly for Friedrich Hölderlin and Herman Hesse). This eclecticism and the apparent adherence to Nietzschean ideas enabled Sadeh to fully and radically adopt the individualistic ethos: He is wholly absorbed in fulfilling his mission as an artist, and he looks upon his society from a distance and condescendingly. At the peak of the War of Independence, he claims that it makes no difference to him whether Jerusalem is ruled "by uncircumcised or circumcised people,"⁷⁴ and that the Jewish policemen who pass by him are, in his eyes, "like the state's bloodhounds."⁷⁵

In fact, Nietzsche's influence on Sadeh did not wane even in the final period of Sadeh's creative life, during which he was primordially invested in editing traditional Jewish texts, Hassidic ones in particular, and adapting them for a wide secular audience. Even in these works, Nietzschean themes, specifically the emphasis on authenticity and on the ethos of the individualistic genius, noticeably remained at the heart of Sadeh's worldview. These ideas, however, are formulated indirectly, in Jewish terminology and through canonical Jewish figures, in the introductions and appendixes Sadeh added to the texts he edited.

Yizhar exemplifies the second type outlined above. In his non-fictional writings, the tension between the individual and society is expressed in a completely different way. The nature of his concern with the pupil and the reader of literature testify to the centrality of the individual and the value he attributes to the individual's uniqueness. This concern is also reflected in the vigorous demand to free the individual from society and his repeated warnings about society's imperviousness and aggressiveness. Still, Yizhar does not seek to undercut the individual's bond to society. While the inner world of the individual remains central and society is perceived as a crude and hurtful power, the bond between the two, as well as their reciprocal dependency, is construed as firm and substantial. Therefore, in spite of the significant differences between the two, both Yizhar and Sadeh grapple with the tension between the individual and society in Israeli society.

Yizhar's essays provide a significant challenge to a prevalent claim about the critical influence of Nietzsche on Hebrew and Israeli culture.⁷⁶ The claim in question holds that while a wide array of Western philosophers significantly influenced Hebrew thought from the late 18th century Jewish Enlightenment movement known as the Haskalah to the rise of Israeli culture, Nietzsche's influence towers above them all. Henry Bergson's idea heavily influenced A. D. Gordon, Nahum Sokolov, Harav Abraham Isaac Kook, and Nathan Zach; Kant's philosophy is an integral part of the thinking of Gordon and Yeshayahu Leibowitz. Karl Marx and Baruch Spinoza, too, were greatly influential. Yet, Nietzsche has gained

⁷³ Pinhas Sadeh, *Life as a Parable*, Schocken: Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, 1984, 70–71.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 284.

⁷⁶ We would like to thank the two anonymous referees for having brought this issue to our attention.

particular prominence in the recent research of Hebrew culture, a prominence that is reflected, too, in the way in which the tradition of Hebrew thought about the discomfort of the individual within society is perceived.⁷⁷

Our analysis of Yizhar's writings, suggests, however, that Nietzsche's influence should not be overestimated. Hebrew writers seeking to explore the discontentment of the individual within the collective and the Zionist project had at their disposal a rich internal Hebrew tradition. Gordon, for example, is a permanent figure in Yizhar's spiritual world and his imagination. In Gordon's first published story, "Ephraim Goes Back to Alfalfa" (1938), his perception of the tiller of the land clearly emerges in the hero's yearnings, as well as in the dilemmas presented in the story. Some 20 years later, Yizhar once again expressed the significance of Gordon for him, in his speech at the Writers' Conference on the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the State of Israel. In an interview he granted to Helit Yeshurun toward the end of his life, he describes himself as "the last among Gordon's followers."⁷⁸ Gordon's ideas — "suckling" from the cosmic life, the prominence he attributes to the individual, his descriptions of labor in nature as an ecstatic experience that illuminates the hidden bond of man to nature — all of these are integrated into Yizhar's worldview. Bialik is similarly important to Yizhar.⁷⁹ In many of his poems, the "national poet" depicts the individual's lonely position facing nature, and opposes "the original experience" to mechanical life in society — for example, in his essay "Revelment and Concealment in Language" and in his story "Behind the Fence."⁸⁰ In short, in spite of his significant influence on writers in Hebrew culture from the late 19th century onward, one should be careful not to

⁷⁷ Brinker, for example, asserts that no other European thinkers or writers made a greater impact on the Hebrew writers of the early 20th century than Nietzsche. See Brinker, *Nietzsche and the Hebrew Writers*, 134–135. For a discussion on Nietzsche's influence on Hebrew culture, see, for example, Baruch Kurtzweil, *Our New Literature — Continuity or Revolution?* (Hebrew) Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1971, 225–269; Jacob Golomb, ed., *Nietzsche and Hebrew Culture*, (Hebrew) Jerusalem: Magnes, 2002; *ibid*, *The Hebrew Nietzsche*, (Hebrew) Tel Aviv: *Yediot Ahronot*, 2009. The importance of Nietzsche's philosophy in Hebrew culture stemmed, among others, from the fact that it offered an escape for those who were caught in the mental-existential storm regarding their own identity. As put by Yirmiyahu Yovel, Nietzsche was the one who "taught them to uncover this immanent world, and to emphasize life that bursts forward, that overcomes itself in order to increase its power; he helped them to discover (or to dream of) a new sense of self-worth that does not depend upon external sources... but which stems from the full life of the being who says 'yes' to the world without surrendering passively..." (Yirmiyahu Yovel, "Nietzsche and the Jews: Incomplete Dialogue," *Nietzsche in Hebrew Culture*, 89–90.)

⁷⁸ H. Yeshurun, *Saying the Finite with the Infinite*, *op cit.*, 218.

⁷⁹ Gordon influenced Yizhar's view on education as well. For example, Yizhar's criticism of indoctrination echoes Gordon's criticism in "Hebrew University" (1913), and in Gordon's Writings (vol. 1): *Nation and Work*, (Tel Aviv: The Zionist Library, 1952), 177.

⁸⁰ See, among many excellent analyses, Avner Holtzman, "The Rise and Decline of the National Poet," Alina Molisak and Shoshana Ronen, eds., *Polish and Hebrew Literature and National Identity*, Warsaw 2010, 38–46; Hamutal Bar-Yosef, "Altruism Versus Egoism in Bialik's Poetry and its Russian Context," *Iyunim Bitkumat Israel: Studies in Zionism, the Yishuv and the State of Israel*, (Hebrew), vol. 3 (1993), 205–223.

overemphasize Nietzsche's importance and turn him into the constant and exclusive background to discussions of the place of the individual within society.⁸¹

To conclude, tracing influences and their marks in a writers' work might sometimes shadow the essence. An idea, or an intellectual direction, does not necessarily testify to the influence of a famous philosopher. Yizhar's claim that he would have written *Days of Ziklag* even if had been born in Canada, and his claim that "the world is only a late station rather than the beginning of creation," are not restricted to his fictional work, but are valid for his non-fictional writing as well.

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⁸¹ In this context, it is important to point out that Yizhar became aware of Nietzsche at a relatively late stage of his intellectual biography. Indeed, Nietzsche wasn't among the thinkers and writers with a critical influence on Yizhar in his youth, unlike Gordon, Brenner, Bialik, and Ben-Zion Dinur, who was Yizhar's teacher at the teachers' seminary in Beit Kerem, and who left a substantial and lasting influence. On Ben-Zion Dinur's lasting influence on Yizhar, see Nitzza Ben Ari. (2013). S. Yizhar: A Life Story. Part I. Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press (Hebrew), 206–217. Sigmund Freud, too, belongs on this list. Not only was Freud greatly popular in the 1930s in Yizhar's environment, but also the young Yizhar used to obsessively analyze his own dreams and his friends' dreams at the time. (Ibid, 206.) Even in the doctoral thesis Yizhar submitted to the senate of the Hebrew University in 1979, Nietzsche isn't attributed a central place, at least not directly and openly. This is the case, despite the proximity of their critical stands toward the oppressive nature of education and the importance both attributed to protecting and maintaining individuality in a mass society.

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