



Yael Halevi-Wise. *The Retrospective Imagination of A. B. Yehoshua*. University Park: Penn State University Press, 2021. 226 pp.

The final chapter of Yael Halevi-Wise's book includes a telephone conversation with A. B. Yehoshua. I couldn't wait to get to this part to find out what Yehoshua thought of Halevi-Wise's lengthy, detailed analysis of his work. How would he react, would he confirm some of Halevi-Wise's conclusions as to key sources of influence on his writing? Did Yehoshua really consider all the layers of meaning associated with the names he chose for his characters? Are the spatial and temporal contexts of his writing really meant to say something about the identity and the history of the Jewish people, and are Israeli Jews so different from Jews living in the Diaspora?

When I got to the last chapter and saw Halevi-Wise's sleight of hand, the only thing I could do was sigh in relief. In fact, the telephone call between Halevi-Wise in Montreal and Yehoshua in Giva'tayim does not contain Yehoshua's half of the conversation. Halevi-Wise thus mimics Yehoshua's own poetics in *Mr. Mani* and lets the reader fill in what he would say if the exchange had been real. I sighed because I realized that Halevi-Wise in fact does not need to address the author himself. One conversation clearly could not do justice to the richness of his work, and the questions Halevi-Wise raises should be left for readers to mull and contemplate for themselves.

The Retrospective Imagination of A. B. Yehoshua is a fascinating book that provides an analysis of major patterns dominating Yehoshua's oeuvre. Each chapter takes an integrative approach that targets different facets of his writing and shows how they form a composite in different texts.

The book begins with a brief introductory chapter where Halevi-Wise elaborates on the cultural and poetic context of Yehoshua's writing, as well as his reception and his thoughts on the unending Jewish search for identity and national resurrection. Her approach, which works on the axis of space and time, is aligned with what is known now as the "spatial turn" in the study of Hebrew literature. She thus focuses on Yehoshua's spaces and places and their interconnection with history and Jewish identity.

In the second chapter, "Mapping Yehoshua's Worldview" Halevi-Wise analyzes the setting of the novels and suggests ten maps to explore the issue of Israel versus the Diaspora. Yehoshua's fears for the vulnerability of the Jewish people prompt him to send his characters to weigh the diasporic alternatives and look at Israel from the outside. Viewed from a distance, the religious framework also broadens to capture the interrelations between Jews, Muslims, and Christians. Some novels send their protagonists on long journeys such as *Open Heart (Hahivah mi-Hodu)*, 1994) where the main character goes to India, or *The Retrospective* (2011) which takes place in Spain. Other characters leave Israel with no clear intention of returning, such as Yehuda in *A Late Divorce* (1982) and Yirmi in *Friendly Fire* (2007), however, their names resonate with the historical origins of

the people of Israel, and the catastrophic events they experienced in the Diaspora. Leaving Israel hence does not mean a negation of the relations of the people to their land, but in fact the contrary: as they struggle to find their identity within the multireligious and multicultural fabric of the Diaspora, their responsibility to their homeland grows ever stronger. Traveling outside Israel, but also within it, such as in *The Lover* (1977), involves crossing borders and personal, national, and cultural boundaries. *The Liberated Bride* (2001) is a good example where the action shifts from Israel to the occupied territories. In *Mr. Mani* (1990) the city of Jerusalem practically becomes a protagonist in its own right as the characters wander through the city, in a way reminiscent of *Ulysses's* Dublin. *A Woman in Jerusalem (Shliḥuto shel ha-memune 'al masha'abei 'enosh*, 2004) also portrays a journey outside Israel and then back to the city which the Christian Yulia Ragayev considers to be the Holy City.

Chapter 3, “The Watchman’s Stance,” constructs a topographic layer on top of the spatial analysis in the previous chapter. Beginning with his short stories, “Flood Tide” (1962), “Yatir Evening Express” (1959), and elaborating on “Facing the Forests” (1963), Halevi-Wise examines the chronotopic scenarios and the way they are related to ethics and responsibility. The traditional phrase “watchman over the house of Israel” (Ezekiel 3:16) is often used to describe the role of the author as a modern prophet, but in Yehoshua’s work the chronotope of “The Watchman’s Stance” bemoans all those places that are left without a watchful eye. In the next chapter, Halevi-Wise extends this analysis to discuss the characters’ impressive range of professional activities. She shows that all of Yehoshua’s judges, teachers, doctors, filmmakers, engineers, and scholars in fact face the challenge of repairing/restoring something or someone. They are in charge (*memunim*) of people and things: their mission is almost metaphysical, as though they had a “higher calling.” However, this calling deviates from a religious context and is centered on national and social obligations.

Time and history also resonate in chapter 5, where Halevi-Wise discusses the place of Jewish holidays in the novels, and in the sixth chapter, where she focuses on names. Passover in *A Late Divorce*, or Hanukkah in *Friendly Fire*, is not only used to enable family members to gather but also raises questions about Jewish identity and cultural tradition. Ben Attar’s second wife is condemned to death during the High Holidays in *A Journey to the End of the Millennium* (1997) and on Yom Kippur in *Mr. Mani*, Dr. Mani throws himself under a train. Combining the historical component with myths and rituals highlights the burning question of the Jewish survivor.

Throughout this volume, Halevi-Wise underscores the links between Yehoshua and his sources of influence in the world as well as in Hebrew literature, primarily Faulkner and Agnon. In the last chapter, she presents a highly interesting document from Yehoshua’s archive consisting of an outline for a sequel to Agnon’s *A Simple Story* (1935). The analysis reveals the deep connection between Yehoshua and Agnon. Both construct love triangles that threaten family harmony. From “Three Days and a Child” (1965), through *Open Heart*, *The Lover*, and *A Journey to the End of the Millennium* to *Mr. Mani* these triangles can lead to death and are often associated with the biblical story of the binding of Isaac and the Akedah.

Book Reviews

A. B. Yehoshua, who passed away recently, was one of the pillars of Israeli literature, and his death marks the end of a generation of authors, among them Amos Oz, who, each in his own way, took the role of “the watchman over the house of Israel,” by contemplating and often criticizing, in their works and in their political and cultural activity, the “Israeli condition.” This integrative volume presents a fine-grained analysis of Yehoshua’s stance as a writer who targets historical and cultural dilemmas in Jewish and Israeli existence. It shows that although Yehoshua’s work as a whole is heterogenic—it ranges from short stories to novellas and novels, from nonrealistic to realistic, from first person to third person to polyphonic strategies, and from historical novels to contemporary settings—there is a deep-seated unity as though all of Yehoshua’s narratives had been coded in the same way.

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Gaëlle Fisher. *Resettlers and Survivors: Bukovina and the Politics of Belonging in West Germany and Israel, 1945–1989*. New York: Berghahn, 2020. x + 291 pp.

With this important book, Gaëlle Fisher joins a series of recent publications dealing with the entangled histories of Germans and Jews in Central and Eastern Europe. In contrast to works that treat the Shoah as the endpoint of this entanglement, like most of the contributions to the volume edited by Tobias Grill, *Jews and Germans in Eastern Europe: Shared and Comparative Histories* (de Gruyter, 2018), her study focuses on the period of time after 1945, when the majority of both groups did not live in the region anymore but in their respective “ethnic homelands,” Germany and Israel. It can thus be seen as an attempt to extend the history of multicultural Central and Eastern Europe in time and space.

Fisher’s monograph is distinctive in its focus on the postwar histories of Germans and Jews from one particular region, Bukovina, which was well known for its lively German Jewish bourgeois culture. Though published in the Berghahn Worlds of Memory series, the author points out in her introduction that this is not just a “history of memory” but a “history of the aftermath,” which she defines as analyzing the “‘meaning-making processes’ at work in the wake of the conflict” (14). Bukovina and the associated “Bukovina myth” (8) serve as a “prism” to look at what the author calls “politics of belonging”: German and Jewish Bukovinians had to negotiate their place in postwar national societies which left more or less space for their specific origins, cultures, and memories, but also in a contested shared past. In that sense, the book is in close dialogue with my monograph, *The Unchosen Ones: Diaspora, Nation, and Migration in Israel and Germany* (Indiana University Press, 2019), which traces the entangled migration trajectories of Germans and Jews from Eastern Europe after the war. Where *The Unchosen Ones*