

## Ka-Tzetnik's Moral Viewpoint

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In the last two decades, considerable critical attention has been given to the Hebrew and Yiddish writer Yehiel Dinur, who wrote the *Salamandra* sextet under the name “Ka-Tzetnik 135633.”<sup>1</sup> This meant a turn in the reception of this writer and his work since Dinur used to be perceived less as a writer worthy of study than as a cultural icon in the realm of Holocaust memory, especially given his dramatic appearance in the Eichmann trial, his unusual character, and his naturalistic, arguably pornographic, writing style in the Holocaust corpus.<sup>2</sup> The “Other Planet” — by now a key metaphor in Israeli Holocaust discourse for the world of the Nazi camps — was launched by Dinur at the Eichmann trial. Ka-Tzetnik’s 1946 novel *Salamandra* was a bestseller in Israel at the time; some of his books were taught and distributed in Israeli schools.<sup>3</sup> Ka-Tzetnik, as Dan Miron observes, “fulfills in Israeli culture an almost official role as the ‘spokesman’ of the Holocaust and its atrocities” (148).<sup>4</sup> Academic study of his work in terms of its literary value and qualities was uncommon before the nineties.<sup>5</sup> During the overdue surge in the study of Ka-Tzetnik, considerable attention has been paid to his portrayal of Jewish interpersonal conduct under Nazi oppression, especially to its moral

<sup>1</sup> Ka-Tzetnik was born in 1909 in Sosnowitz, Poland, as Yehiel Feiner. He was sent to Auschwitz in 1943, liberated in 1945, and immigrated that year to Palestine, where he changed his surname to the Hebrew Dinur (or De-Nur). “Ka-Tzetnik 135633,” meaning “concentration-camp inmate 135633,” is a combination of “Katzet” for *Konzentrationslager*, the Slavic/Yiddish suffix “nik” for vocation or a way of life, and the number is the one tattooed on Feiner’s arm in Auschwitz. The number appeared as part of the author’s name in the early editions of his Hebrew books, but now is preserved only on the translated editions. For a discussion of Dinur’s choice and artistic use of this pen name, see Popkin. On Dinur’s life and early work, see Szeintuch 2005 and 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Dan Miron observes pornographic features in the *Salamandra* books in an essay which initiated this recent wave of Ka-Tzetnik studies (2005 [1994]: 153, 156).

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion Ka-Tzetnik’s impact on Israeli society and educational system, see Miron 149–51; Segev 3–11; Libsker.

<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise indicated in Works Cited, the translations are mine.

<sup>5</sup> A rare exception is Yaoz 1980 (72–76; 121–24; 168–70).

dimension as manifested in a concrete set of inter-related questions: how common was collaboration with the Nazis among the Jews and how was it actualized? How did Jewish religious and social structures persist under Nazi persecution and what replaced them? How were humanity and moral codes retained and what shape did they take in the unprecedented circumstances of the camp and ghetto?

Indeed, Ka-Tzetnik's first three novels — *Salamandra* (1946; translated as *Sunrise over Hell*), *Beyt habubot* (1953; translated as *House of Dolls*), and *Kar'u lo Piepel* (1961; translated as *Moni or Atrocity*) — provide a most detailed panorama of the Holocaust available in Hebrew fiction. This is particularly the case with the “human landscape” of the Holocaust, a novelistic project that may be compared to what Primo Levi accomplishes in *If This Is a Man* and *The Drowned and the Saved*. The sub-headline added to the recent Hebrew editions of the sextet reads “a chronicle of a Jewish family in the twentieth century,” and, indeed, the plots of the novels focus on members of the Prelesnik family — Harry, Sanya, Daniella, and Moni — but they also explore the human continuum of the camp and ghetto in its full diversity: Jews and non-Jews, adults and children, men and women, Kapos and Judenrat, Wehrmacht and SS, German women serving as camp officials, and even, briefly, Rudolf Hoess, the commandant of Auschwitz. All these individuals and groups interact under the sign of animosity or solidarity, violence or generosity.

Two extensive studies of Ka-Tzetnik, Omer Bartov's and Iris Milner's, share the view that, with very few exceptions, Jews in his novels ultimately fail the moral challenge, as they give up their human values and social structures and brutalize each other in a violent struggle to survive. This state of affairs is common in accounts of life in the Nazi camps. Eugen Kogon describes a “regression to a more primitive state” in which the “prisoner's worst enemy is the prisoner” (304, 307), and Wolfgang Sofsky observes that in the camps, “one prisoner's death was another's bread” (162). Primo Levi delineates the “gray zone of *protekcja* and collaboration,” in which prisoners worked in different capacities with the Nazi authorities, thereby, at least potentially, saving their own skin by serving the system that annihilated their fellows (42). I challenge the observations made by Bartov and Milner: the first section of this essay discusses their findings and presents textual instances in support of the opposite reading of *Salamandra*, *House of Dolls*, and *Piepel*. The second section uses narratological methodology to explore the moral implications generated by the aesthetic mediation of the world of the Holo-

caust constructed in the novels. The third section integrates the thematic and the formal considerations to show how they combine in Ka-Tzetnik's critique of the abuse of power, empathy towards those who were forced to shed their sense of solidarity, and foregrounding of moral and spiritual resistance and the retention of humanity in the face of Nazi oppression.

### Moral Life on the Other Planet

In "Kitsch and Sadism in Ka-Tzetnik's Other Planet" Omer Bartov makes the following observation:

If the Nazis are always in the background of the evil he [Ka-Tzetnik] portrays, his attention is focused much more on the disintegration of even the most basic human relationships and moral codes among the inmates, the cruelty of the Kapos, the murderous instincts to which hunger, deprivation, and humiliation give rise, the fall of those who under other circumstances would have been the most admired members of a community. Very few figures retain their humanity for long in his version of the camps, and the isolated figures that do so are quickly destroyed precisely because of their failure to adapt to that new and for them unacceptable world. (63)

The point about the collectivity of moral degeneration among Ka-Tzetnik's characters is at the heart of Milner's "The 'Gray Zone' Revisited." Milner asserts that while in Levi's account, "moral deterioration is reserved for the position-holders only,"<sup>6</sup> Ka-Tzetnik's insight into the gray zone is in line with Giorgio Agamben's inclusive conceptualization of the zone as applying to the camp in its entirety (129). Accordingly, *Salamandra* exposes the "decomposition of all cohesive materials that make human contact possible, as the governing principle of the Lager in its entirety" (ibid.). Milner's argument is supported by a plethora of examples from Ka-Tzetnik's early novels, representing moral degeneration among the inmates in the camp, an extreme situation that awakened in them an "actual desire to harm each other, to consciously and willingly become their brother's Cain" (133). This desire, in Milner's account, constitutes the rule rather than the exception. Ka-Tzetnik's texts, she argues, "powerfully demonstrate the shared experience of all inmates,

<sup>6</sup> "Position-holders," "functionaries," "function-holders," and "functionary-prisoners" all indicate inmates who were assigned a role or a position (a "function") in the camp, for the fulfillment of which they were rewarded with privileges, such as protection or an extra portion of food. For a compelling discussion of the topic and its moral dimensions, see Levi 36–69.

functionaries and rank-less alike: all the Lager's inmates . . . exist in 'a zero-sum situation in extremis,' as Sofsky defines it, where 'the laws of the jungle prevailed in the daily struggle for survival'" (119). Similarly, Bartov argues that in Ka-Tzetnik's novels, the Jews and other non-Jewish inmates "incessantly brutalize" each other, and "all members of that universe — with very few exceptions — are ultimately reduced to the level of potential murderers" (66–67).

My argument here is that while many textual instances indeed indicate loss of solidarity among the individuals populating Ka-Tzetnik's texts, generalizing the phenomenon misrepresents the moral view-point constructed in the novels. Whereas Bartov and Milner see moral degeneration as characterizing the entire community of Jews and as the focus of Ka-Tzetnik's portrayal of society under Nazi oppression, my reading suggests that this phenomenon does not constitute the norm and that it is offset by the recurrent motifs of resistance to the Nazi "absolute power" through compassionate reciprocity, adherence to social structures, and moral heroism.

*Salamandra*, Ka-Tzetnik's first book and the title of the sextet, revolves around the story of Harry and Sanya Prelesnik, a young Jewish couple struggling to survive in the ghetto of the imagined Polish city of Metropoli and later in Auschwitz.<sup>7</sup> Told against the background of other individual and collective stories of physical and mental survival under circumstances created by an apparently unbeatable force, the Prelesniks' is a story of passionate love and spiritual perseverance. Driven by her desperate love for Harry, Sanya uses her almost magical personal charm to release Harry from the work camp back to her in the ghetto, and it is Sanya who, under the guise of a nurse, infiltrates the Gestapo's holding facility in the ghetto and releases, singlehandedly, various friends and relatives (1987a: 79–80, 107–109; 1977: 99–101, 138–42). Harry himself forgoes a rare opportunity to escape the Nazi occupation using foreign documents because of his love for and commitment to Sanya, who eventually dies in Auschwitz (1987a: 55; 1977: 67–68). Such acts of commitment could fall into the category of "exceptions" to a total

<sup>7</sup>The first edition of the novel *Salamandra* was written in Yiddish in 1945 and published in Hebrew translation in 1946. In 1971 Dinur published a revised Hebrew edition (the 1987 reprint is used here), which served as the basis for the 1977 English translation. For the sake of consistency, names and terms are spelled here as they appear in the English translation of the novels. Page references to the Hebrew editions are followed by references to English translations.

collapse of human relationships, which both Bartov and Milner regard as dominant, had there not been so many other instances. Henry Baum, Harry's friend at the camp, risks his function and his life in an attempt to get himself and Harry released. They are caught, and Henry dies for his friend (1987a: 177–81; 1977: 242–48). Zanvil Lubliner the tailor helps Harry fulfill his quota of sewing at the ghetto shop, placing himself at risk out of friendship (1987a: 88–89; 1977: 112–13). Gruen, a German Jew who lives outside the ghetto, risks his life when hiding Jews at his home and devising, with the actress Tila Adamszek, the escape from the ghetto of Lilka, Sanya's little sister (1987a: 83; 1977: 105). When the Jewish police come one night to take Irina Shafran, her grief stricken mother volunteers to go in her stead and so does her father (1987a: 115; 1977: 152). When the police knock on Felix's door looking for his brother, Felix volunteers to take his brother's place. When, under the demand of his wife who threatens to kill herself if he goes, Felix gives away the hiding place of his sister-in-law and niece so they can serve as collateral for the missing brother, he collapses, heartbroken with guilt (1987a: 118–21; 1977: 155–60). These examples of self-sacrifice and powerful human solidarity are drawn only from Ka-Tzetnik's first novel.

*House of Dolls* focuses on Daniella Preleshnik, Harry's younger sister, first in the ghetto and later in a women's camp, where she is coerced to serve as Feld-Hure, providing sexual services for the Germans. Along with various instances of the absence of human solidarity and moral conduct, the novel presents compelling examples of social bonds and mutual assistance.<sup>8</sup> Thus Vevke the shoemaker rescues Daniella from the Judenrat when he assigns her to work in the shop that he manages, as well as when he finds her residence in the ghetto (1953: 36; 1997: 29). He also invites Daniella for meals with his large family when, obviously, his food supply is as limited as everybody else's (1953: 7; 1997: 7). Risking his own neck, Vevke also participates in the shop's work, helping the new and untrained "shoemakers." An incomplete quota or defective shoes can easily ship an employee to Auschwitz for "willful sabotage," as Schultze, the German overseer, calls it (1953: 78; 1997: 61). The unnamed girl from Oświęcim finds refuge in an occupied apartment, where the residents provide her with some food (1953: 49; 1997: 39). Fella, the beautiful woman who keeps company with the Judenrat, brings bread to the residents of the apartment in the ghetto; she never tells what she

<sup>8</sup>For examples of such loss of human solidarity, see relevant footnotes in Milner 154–55.

does to get the bread but is always generous in distributing it (1953: 55; 1997: 43). In the “Joy Division” of the women’s camp, Fella, using her charm, is able to secure a position.<sup>9</sup> She refuses the offer to be a supervisor, since she would “sooner die” herself “than kill someone else” (1953: 256–59; 1997: 192–94). The refusal may leave her with nothing, which almost certainly means death, but she takes the risk in the hope of a function which is not as deeply flawed: a maid in the Camp Commander’s quarters. In her new position, she is able to help Daniella and the other girls. Risking her life and saving theirs, she becomes the “guardian angel of the girls of Block 5” (1953: 259; 1997: 194). Harry, whose story occupies a significant part of the novel, brings bread to his sister in the ghetto though he needs it himself; although hungry, Daniella tries to decline the gift (1953: 61; 1997: 49). As a medic in the camp, Harry consistently acts to save and improve the life of the inmates. He treats their wounds as much as possible, shares food with Zanvil Lubliner and Tedek (as a function-holder, he has a little more food than the others), and at some point volunteers to take the flogging assigned to Zanvil, his close friend. Eventually Harry is reprieved from the punishment in exchange for an exquisite cigarette that he had kept for just such an emergency (1953: 214–16; 1997: 162–63).

*Piepel*, the third in the *Salamandra* sextet, is set wholly in Auschwitz.<sup>10</sup> It tells the story of Moni Prelesnik, a child of eleven or twelve, Harry’s younger brother. There is also a secondary plot-line, whose protagonist Hayim-Idl has already appeared in *House of Dolls* as a merchant in the ghetto. The novel follows these two characters in their struggle to acquire and maintain functions that will allow them to survive — Moni as a sex-

<sup>9</sup> While historians agree about the existence of a brothel in Auschwitz (block 24), the (coerced) employment of Jewish women there is strongly disputed. Laurence Rees, for example, mentions that “most of the women who worked in the brothel were selected from the inmates of Birkenau” but does not mention Jewish women specifically (2005: 197). In a book published in Hebrew by Yad Vashem, Erich Kulka and Ota Kraus, Jewish survivors of Auschwitz themselves, discuss a brothel in block 24 which employed German women-prisoners originally incarcerated for prostitution. They make no reference to Jewish women as its employees and indicate the camp’s personnel as the consumers, not the German soldiers which Ka-Tzetnik mentions (116–17). Na’ama Shik argues decisively that “cases of rape were unusual in Auschwitz,” where restrictions were easier to supervise, and that most rapes of Jewish women during the Holocaust were “performed by non-Germans” (232–33). Based on historiographical studies and other testimonies, Ka-Tzetnik’s account of the Jewish brothel has been branded as vulgar, pornographic, and factually groundless. For this critique, see Libsker; Karpel; Kershner; and Wallen 5–8.

<sup>10</sup> The full title of the Hebrew book is *Kar’u lo Piepel*.

slave to the block-masters and Hayim-Idl in various odd jobs. Focused on functionaries in the camp, the novel narrates daily life in Auschwitz from the midst of what Levi defined as the “gray zone,” making the moral problematics of survival in the camp unavoidable. The book is rife with descriptions of torture and murder, indifference and suffering among inmates and within families, theft from the dead as well as from the living, and even cannibalism.<sup>11</sup> But *Piepel* also abounds in acts and thoughts of compassion and commitment. Moni, for example, redeems the Rabbi of Shilev from torture in the traditional “sport” drills with an invaluable packet of cigarettes (1961b: 67; 1963: 79). When Fruchtenbaum first arrives at the camp, Moni cannot bear the newcomer’s tears and gives him his own portion of soup (1961b: 194; 1963: 219). Hayim-Idl gives extra portions of soup to the Rabbi and bread to Moni, while Bergson gives his to Vevke the shoemaker (1961b: 162, 242; 1963: 183, 272). The Rabbi himself carries a wooden board in his hand rather than laying it on his shoulder, which is easier, just so he would not accidentally hit someone walking behind him (1961b: 155; 1963: 175). Under the inspecting eyes of the SS chef, Vatzek, the Polish manager of the potato-peeling kitchen, tries to defer his duty to flog Moni, who has been caught stealing (1961b: 249; 1963: 279). In another case, Moni asks Vatzek to stop the flogging of a thief, thereby saving the man’s life. This is only a partial list of the characters’ acts which signify the human and communal obligation that pervades the novel.

Solidarity gains distinct manifestation also through inside views. In the midst of Hayim-Idl and Bergson’s unexpected singing performance for the Germans, another prisoner jumps in to share their success, entering into a competition for this potential life-saving function. According to the “jungle laws” of Auschwitz, Hayim-Idl is expected to feel threatened and perhaps act in protection of his interests. Instead, he is delighted to see the new singer. “Sure, why not?” he thinks. “Let another Jew sing for his life! The more the merrier” (1961b: 144; 1963: 163).<sup>12</sup> A similar attitude is expressed convincingly, although differently, in one of Moni’s inner monologues:

Come to think of it, why shouldn’t I offer myself again to the Block Chiefs for whom I worked at the beginning? Golden Lolek took Franzl away from

<sup>11</sup> For a variety of examples, see Milner 133–39.

<sup>12</sup> The Hebrew original reads “*yatsil od yehudi et nafsho*” (lit. “Let another Jew save his soul”), which conveys a more general message of Jewish solidarity. This motto is expressed also in another inner monologue of Hayim-Idl (1961b: 131; 1963: 150).

me, didn't he? So why shouldn't I do the same to another Piepel? What's it to me what happens to the other Piepels? Am I supposed to look out for other Piepels? Did they ever look out for me? . . . *If you want to stay alive in Auschwitz, you've got to kill someone else.* The first commandment of Auschwitz. He wondered why it hadn't occurred to him before. He could kick himself for always thinking of the other Piepel's neck whenever a Block Chief asked him to become his Piepel. If you want to stay alive in Auschwitz, you mustn't think about the next fellow, he snarled at himself. It would seem that after a year in Auschwitz, you'd know better. (1961b: 104; 1963: 121–22)

And this is Moni, who early in the novel is shown entering a true friendship with Berele, a demoted Piepel, who “loved Moni with the rare love that could manifest itself only in Auschwitz” (1961b: 21–22; 1963: 28–30). Although not without self-interest — Berele instructs Moni how to pleasure his master and Moni rewards his teacher with food — the two boys develop a sincere and strong friendship, which helps with their emotional and practical needs and exceeds the form of opportunistic teamwork which was common in the camps. Does Moni's internal monologue cited above indicate a complete reversal of how this child understands social life in the camp? This is the case according to Milner, who argues that in this passage “Moni Prelesnik is explicitly described as consciously desiring the annihilation of fellow inmates, young Jewish boys of his own age and fate” (135); hence, the “innocent victim becomes co-opted” into the evil world designed by the Nazis (*ibid.*). To me it seems, however, that the passage indicates the exact opposite because it does not convey a conscious desire, but rather presents Moni's internal mocking of himself for what he has not done and is unable to do for his own advantage. In this inner monologue, Moni tries to convince himself to desire the death of another Piepel in order to gain his function, but his internal debate demonstrates that, even after a year in Auschwitz, he cannot embrace its “first commandment.” In a sort of projection of his stubborn moral compass, even Moni's body refuses to fatten — in accordance with the preference of the masters — and, while he serves as a sex-slave, his appetite is weak despite the relative abundance of food available to him through his status. While other Piepels dress well, cultivating their sexual appeal, Moni's appearance is not very different from that of a regular inmate. What makes him attractive to the masters are his soft, “virgin eyes,” his most expressive feature, and, perhaps, the last to be affected by the depravity of Auschwitz. Despite the practical opportunities available to Moni to be “co-opted” into the evil of the Nazi



system, his deeply ingrained moral sense prevents this from happening.

Ka-Tzetnik sharpens the contrast between these opposing moral codes — Auschwitz's "first commandment" and "let another Jew save himself" — through a well-orchestrated encounter between the inmates who express them. Caught and almost flogged for a heroic attempt to steal some jam for the Rabbi of Shilev, Hayim-Idl is expelled from his cozy function at the potato peelery as from the Garden of Eden. Always on the lookout for another source of food, he comes across Moni who is busy polishing a pair of boots, a job out-sourced to him by another Piepel. "You've as good as killed yourself and dragged the others along," Moni reproaches the older Jew. "You can't be a softy in the Katzet," he explains. "But the heart, Moni, what about the heart!" Hayim-Idl pleads passionately in reply. "We're Jews, aren't we? We are born that way and there's nothing we can do about it. Why do you keep bringing the Rabbi tea every day?" (1961b: 177; 1963: 200–201). The question confuses Moni, and he eventually realizes that he does not know the reason for his own caring. Underneath the tough assertions he makes about the practices that one should adopt in order to survive in Auschwitz, Moni, one of the camp's veteran inmates, has not abandoned the gentle feelings of compassion. A similar sense of moral conduct and solidarity manifests itself in the behavior and attitude of other characters, too numerous and diverse to be regarded as "exceptions" (cf. Bartov 66–67; Milner 139). A statistical analysis is not required in order to see that this psychological and spiritual response is palpable and frequent throughout the opening three books of *Salamandra*.

## Ethics and Narrative

"I do not regard myself as a writer and a composer of literary material," Yehiel Dinur explained at the Eichmann trial. "This is a chronicle of the planet of Auschwitz," he continued (1961a). Yet, except for *Tsofen: EDMA* (1987; translated as *Shivitti*) which takes the form of a journal, the *Salamandra* books follow novelistic conventions and make sophisticated though submerged use of narrative techniques that join the paradigm of the characters' conduct to work out an ethical system.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup>Rina Duday discusses Dinur's use of fictional writing as a protective against the horror (127). Responding to Bartov's observation that Ka-Tzetnik's writing on horror is not "in any way contrived" but rather "wholly uninhibited" and of "raw nature," Jeffrey Wallen suggests that Ka-Tzetnik's work "demonstrates a high degree of control and that his writing about horror is often contrived" (13).

In his work on “rhetorical literary ethics” James Phelan treats a literary text as a “site of a multilayered communication” between audience and authors, who design their texts “in order to affect readers in particular ways” (2004b: 630–31).<sup>14</sup> Rhetorical ethics involves “accessing the dynamic interactions among these many layers of communication through careful attention to the details of the text and identifying the ethics of the rhetorical exchange by focusing both on the ethical dimensions of *what is represented* and on the ethical consequences of *how those things are represented*” (2004b: 630).<sup>15</sup> Of particular relevance is Phelan’s distinction between the “ethics of the told” and the “ethics of the telling.” The former includes character-character relations, while the latter includes the relation of the narrator and the implied author to characters, to the task of narrating, and to the audience. Most importantly, as Phelan observes, narrative ethics and narrative aesthetics are inter-related (2007: 14).<sup>16</sup> The moral system constructed in *Salamandra*, *House of Dolls*, and *Piepel* emerges not only from character-character relations, but also from their narrative mediation.

The morally significant principle that governs aesthetic mediation in the *Salamandra* novels is the distribution of details between background and foreground. The foreground of Ka-Tzetnik’s text presents a tension between good and evil in their particular manifestations under the circumstances of the Holocaust. Tzvetan Todorov formulates these

<sup>14</sup>For a full development of this model, see Phelan 2004a, 2007.

<sup>15</sup>Phelan uses “ethics” while so far I have been using the notion of “the moral.” A useful distinction between the terms has been suggested by Avishai Margalit: ethics “tells us how we should regulate our thick relations [with the ‘near and dear’]; morality tells us how we should regulate our thin relations [with the ‘stranger and the remote’ or ‘fellow human beings’]” (7–8, 37). In literary scholarship, this distinction is not practiced: Wayne Booth uses the term “moral” (73, 274), while Adam Zachary Newton studies “narrative ethics.” In Holocaust discourse, Tzvetan Todorov speaks about “vital values and moral values” (40), and Giorgio Agamben writes about the “touchstone by which to judge and measure all morality and all dignity. The *Muselmann* . . . is the guard on the threshold of a new ethics” (69). I continue to use “moral” in my own discourse except in references to scholars who use a different vocabulary.

<sup>16</sup>Focus on the relation between ethics and artistic properties is a dominant marker of the “ethical turn” that literary studies took in the nineties. Adam Newton asserts that a “theory of narrative ethics need not be determined by, nor does it necessarily arise out of, considerations about novels’ or their authors’ moral or moralizing intentions.” Rather, “it is concerned with the intersubjective dynamics of narrative, and their ethical implications, independent of ‘moral paraphrases’ which they may invite or which we can ascribe to them” (32–33).

manifestations in terms of totalitarian ideologies seeing the individual as an instrument: “far more than any sadistic or primitive instincts, it is depersonalization, of the other and of oneself, that is responsible for totalitarian evil” (158–59). Humanistic philosophy, in contrast, “considers the individual an ultimate end” (158). In Ka-Tzetnik’s novels, the Nazis create and operate a system of dehumanization, but so do their authorized servants, Jews and non-Jews alike, whose acts of exploitation, abuse, rape, torture, and murder are rendered in detail. In contrast, the good manifests itself in characters whose conduct nurtures human reciprocity and social bonding, from the basic attitude to people as people to acts of sharing and self-sacrifice.

The Preleshniks, Vevke, Fella, Hayim-Idl, and Zanvil are all as close as circumstances allow — and significantly beyond average — to the pole of moral good in terms of their interpersonal conduct, and their characters are central to the novels’ plot-lines. At the opposite pole, besides the Nazis, there are those who abuse their authority against the helpless: Poldek, the shop supervisor at the Metropoli ghetto; Limanowski, the ghetto’s housing official; Monyek Matroz, the Head of the Jews in the ghetto, and Felicia Schwartz, his personal secretary; Fruchtenbaum, the brutal Chief Orderly of block 10; Piotr Holy Father the torturer; Spitz the Kapo; the Jewish policeman called the “13”; Zygmunt the Chief Block Orderly; Ludwig Tiene, the ruthless Camp Senior; Elsa the Master-Kalefactress; and Block Chiefs, such as Franzl and Robert. These characters embody evil consistently and monolithically. In Ka-Tzetnik’s novels, evil does not develop through the collapse of human solidarity, social structures, and moral conduct under the circumstances of the ghetto and camp — a process that may present characters as forced into this venue of survival. Rather, the essence of characters is fully exposed by their responses to the new hierarchical relations imposed by Nazi rule. Although, as functionaries, these characters fall within Levi’s definition of the “gray zone,” Ka-Tzetnik’s rendition reduces any moral ambiguity involved in their actions. None of them serves the Nazis merely to secure a position or to remain alive and none shows any mercy even when possible. These characters operate out of a desire to benefit at the expense of the weak and out of pure sadism. Ka-Tzetnik’s positive characters are significantly more developed than the negative ones, whose roles are more limited, though distinct and sometimes colorful, and of a major influence on the main characters’ destinies. It is at the narrative’s background, with its anonymous masses, that moral ambiguity and collapse of human solidarity take place. The narrative foreground is occupied by the pure and

stable, maximizing characters' positive inner qualities with no turning from one side to its opposite.

Ka-Tzetnik does not conceal his resentment towards the evil characters. While the implied author of his novels endorses the Preleshniks and other characters who hold on to their humanity with a variety of positive qualities, endowing them with beauty, professional success, innocence, wisdom, charm, and talent, those who abuse their power against the helpless are rendered as disgusting. The Jewish Police, the narrator reports, mostly consists of "the scum of Jewish society" (1987a: 58; 1977: 71). Poldek, the shop supervisor at the ghetto, and the collaborator labeled the "13," are fat and repulsive (1987a: 89; 1977: 113; 1953: 117; 1997: 91). Monyek Matroz, the Head of the Jews in the Metropoli ghetto, has a nervous "effeminate voice," appropriately mocking the high position he arrogates (1987a: 34; 1977: 39). Fruchtenbaum, the brutal Chief Orderly of block 10, evokes Moni's pity and disgust when whining and begging for help on his first day in Auschwitz (1961b: 194; 1963: 219). The implied author's antagonism to such characters culminates when they are shown sharing some of the qualities attributed to the Nazis, who, for Ka-Tzetnik, represent the epitome of evil and who generally remain external to his intimate portrayal of Jewish life in the novels. Felicia Schwartz's enthusiastic collaboration with the Nazis, for example, is emphasized when she responds positively and with "an impeccable German accent" to the demands presented by the Gestapo officer (1987a: 50; 1977: 59). If the Nazis are often likened to vultures, predators, and dogs,<sup>17</sup> Spitz, a Chief-Jew, is given a "large hump of a nose, arched like a sickle," which gives him "the appearance of a vulture" (1953: 214; 1997: 162).

The sharp external differentiation between good and evil in Ka-Tzetnik's character portrayal helps disambiguate the moral status of two characters who may be said to occupy Levi's "gray zone." Fella is only able to care for others through the privileges she gains in the Judenrat and camp administration. Matroz is a corrupted leader of the Judenrat, but at least initially he reveals some moral difficulties in sacrificing his fellow Jews (1987a: 51; 1977: 60). Ka-Tzetnik signposts the distinction between the two by representing Fella as beautiful, brave, and resilient,

<sup>17</sup> Some examples: Hitler is a "German viper"; Lindner is a "German wolfhound"; the German soldiers do not utter a "human yell" but rather "the scream of a predator" (1987a: 22, 75, 31; 1977: 23, 93, 35); the German soldier raping Daniella has "huge bare teeth, like a beast's"; Elsa, the Master-Kalefactress, "stalks through the camp like a frenzied beast in heat" (1953: 243, 231; 1997: 183, 174).

while Matroz is mocked as sneaky and effeminate. Good and evil are also observed through the narrator's choices in rendering inner life. If, as Booth suggests, "granting to the hero the right to reflect his own story can insure the reader's sympathy," and "withholding it from him and giving it to another character can prevent too much identification," Ka-Tzetnik orients his readers to favor characters who behave morally (1961b: 282). While the Preleshniks' inner worlds are explored and other good characters granted sensitive external portrayals, the Nazis and their collaborators are deprived of such mimetic privileges, and only their deplorable actions and deformed appearances remain as a basis for our judgment.

In Ka-Tzetnik's paradigm of human response to Nazi oppression, the "gray zone" is situated between the good and the ultimate evil and confined to the narrative background, where it is inessential to the unfolding of the main stories and involves marginal, anonymous, undeveloped characters. Consequently, while the rending of the "fabric of reciprocity" under the pressure of annihilation (Sofsky 24; 153–63) documented by sociologists and historians is acknowledged in the novels, it is also restricted in scope and function, and balanced by the tension between good and evil. The various instances that Milner (136–39) presents of moral degeneration and collapse of solidarity — a father who does not share his soup with his hungry daughter; a son who curses his father for his weakness in labor as it may trigger the supervisor's violence; an unnamed woman who praises the Lord for the conclusion of the transport out of the ghetto as she survived it; the relief of the ghetto dwellers upon any transport targeting a category of Jews other than theirs; the hostility of the camp's veterans towards newcomers; cannibalism in the camp<sup>18</sup> — occupy relatively brief textual spaces and constitute a lateral episode in the novels' overall narration of life in the ghetto and camp; they involve anonymous or undifferentiated characters. Owing to this anonymity and to brevity, instances demonstrating the collapse of mutual care form the background to the manifestations of passive or active resistance to evil located at the forefront. They reflect historical facts but do not constitute the narrative's focus.

<sup>18</sup> Another instance may be found in the collection *Kaddish* (Ka-Tzetnik 1998: 78–80), where nine inmates wait for a tenth to urinate in the block during curfew, so they can relieve themselves as well while he takes the blame. The inmates are not only anonymous, but also rendered synecdochically as "pairs of eyes." For a discussion of this passage, see Popkin 349.

Thus, ch. 9 of Section 3 of the novel *Salamandra* opens with Harry and Sanya finding refuge in an already overpopulated bunker. During the unusually long wait, the stench of human waste, the heat, and lack of fresh air and of space to sit down bring people to the point of suffocation and collapse. Suddenly a baby begins to cry, endangering the lives of the entire group. He is passed around, and when he is returned to his mother's arms, he is apparently dead. The soldiers' approach made someone decide that the baby must be silenced even if that means killing him. At last, after four endless days, the Jews are finally able to leave the bunker. In this startling section, the baby's murder — an act demonstrating a shocking collapse of solidarity — is implicit. Although Ka-Tzetnik's narrator does not spare us the difficult description of the sluggish choking in the bunker, he does not describe the killing of the baby, leaving the individual accountability for the act unscribed. This scene seems to monitor the emotional impact of the reported events. The baby's unbearable death is not told directly, but is easily deduced from the sudden silence and the mother's agonized protest. That makes the effect of the act somewhat easier to digest, especially when located within a lengthy, naturalistic account of the suffering in the bunker. Such narrative choices provide not a justification but a context — in both information and sensual effect — for the killing. The act is also explained in the brutal answer the mother receives: "Maybe you think we should all have gone on to kill ourselves just because of that one kid?" (1987a: 132; 1977: 177). Placing the act within its circumstances conveys a moral dilemma rather than grounds for accusations. The dynamics of background and foreground is also observable here. The people in the bunker are an anonymous crowd, undifferentiated by name or appearance, and Harry and Sanya are elided in the description of these events. Only immediately after the baby's death does the focus return to the Preleshniks, placing the strength they draw from each other's loving words in the narrative foreground.

Chapter 4 of *House of Dolls* combines foreground scenes and background images between which the narrative oscillates. Harry and Daniela appear in the foreground in a lengthy conversation, interspersed with streams of memories and day dreaming, conducted on the stone steps of the Judenrat soup kitchen. In the background the narrator places various shorter scenes, glimpses of life in the ghetto. While the conversation between the Preleshniks expresses mutual devotion and willingness for self-sacrifice, the background scenes reveal an inability to care for others and aversion to such care, if not the utter collapse of human solidarity. While Harry has come all the way from the other side of the ghetto to

give his beloved little sister some bread, indifference rules the Jews aggregating in the line for soup, where “hunger was ruthlessly kneading a gigantic human mass” and women “screamed piteously,” while men “rammed elbows into hearts of feebler ones” (1953: 59; 1997: 47). While Daniella prefers not to take the bread her brother has saved for her, in the background a father reneges on his obligation to provide his little girl with food and affection. While Harry and Daniela exchange compassionate words, powerless in facing the Nazis but desperately drawing strength from each other’s presence, nearby children surround helpless defeated adults. Switching between foreground and background in this chapter, the narrative juxtaposes two opposing Jewish reactions to Nazi oppression: the collapse of human solidarity and its survival. Since the dialogue between the Preleshniks constitutes the bulk of the chapter, as well as the organizational frame into which the background images are incorporated, the narrative eschews fluctuation between reactions located on the same plane. The social chaos emerging from the background scenes is surrounded, balanced, and overcome by the powerful bond between the Preleshnik siblings in the narrative foreground. The zone where people, even family members, turn against each other under the pressure of survival is acknowledged but confined to the anonymous characters in the background. Thus, in terms of textual organization, the Preleshniks and the response they practice — maintaining and nurturing human solidarity in the face of oppression — prevail.

Having established in the foreground a distinction between the morally endorsed and the condemned, Ka-Tzetnik expresses empathy for those trapped in the inescapable collapse of solidarity in the background and margins of the story. As Phelan observes, “any character’s action has an ethical dimension, and any narrator’s treatment of the events will inevitably convey certain attitudes toward the subject matter and the audience” (2004b: 632). Purposefully and consistently, Ka-Tzetnik allows instances where morality and solidarity collapse to slide away from the readers’ scrutinizing eye, pointing to the remaining shreds of the humanity that has been sacrificed in the struggle for survival. The distinction between foreground and background is sometimes destabilized. When characters are promoted from anonymity and marginality to the narrative’s focus, they go through an emphatic process of concretization and development, which balances the effect of dehumanization. This is the case in ch. 4 of *House of Dolls* when Harry observes an exhausted woman being led by her children out of the line for soup. Her pot is empty, and as she sits frozen in the downpour, surrounded by her crying little

children, no one cares for their misery. Her appearance is disturbingly familiar to Harry, who is finally able to recognize her “rain-swept tufts of hair” (1953: 69; 1997: 54). He remembered the woman crawling out of her hiding place in the ghetto after a major *Aktion*, repeatedly praising the Lord for the conclusion of the transport, which she survived while others were taken.<sup>19</sup> Such blasphemous piety is indeed, as Milner notes, a case of “striving for the death of others” (137), but the dehumanization it exemplifies is somewhat balanced when read in its wider context as well as in terms of textual organization and effect. While the nearby Jewish crowd is indifferent to the helpless woman and her children, through Harry’s stream of memories Ka-Tzetnik conveys to the readers the woman’s personal past and its relation to the present: after her earlier relief at escaping the fate of others, now this woman is desperately attempting to feed her children, and the crowd is indifferent to her suffering. While before the woman was saved by the others’ capture, now others deprive her of soup. In this context dehumanization appears as a general property of life in the ghetto, which is motivated by the need to save one’s family, and it is ultimately rooted in circumstances rather than in deliberate exploitation (as is the case with those among the Judenrat and Kapos, which Ka-Tzetnik foregrounds and categorizes as evil). The woman is drawn out from her anonymity in the narrative’s background by Harry’s humanizing and empathetic gaze, through which she is for a brief while placed in the forefront as a concrete character. Her fate is entwined in that of the collective, but her story is personal.

Bartov observes that “if the Nazis are always in the background of the evil he portrays,” Ka-Tzetnik’s “attention is focused much more on the disintegration of even the most basic human relationships and moral codes among the inmates” (63). The Nazis are indeed in the background, but Ka-Tzetnik’s focus is not on the disintegration of human relationships but, on the contrary, on their preservation in extreme situations. Disintegration is relegated to the narrative background, mediated through the distribution of textual space, and balanced by scenically represented accounts of the opposite phenomena. Ka-Tzetnik’s “ethics of the telling” helps to retain part of the humanity that is lost in the domain of the “ethics of the told.”

<sup>19</sup>“Aktion” is a mass deportation from the ghetto, usually to extermination camps.



### Ka-Tzetnik's Moral Viewpoint

The moral panorama of *Salamandra*, *House of Dolls*, and *Piepel* is multifaceted. Although the novels present quite a few instances of what Levi calls “a Hobbesian life, a continuous war of everyone against everyone” (134), they also present numerous instances where solidarity, compassion, and moral conduct prevail. Moreover, the principles governing the aesthetic mediation of both categories of instances do not give them equal weight. As noted above, while acts illustrating the collapse of human bonds and commitment are confined to the background, the foreground is populated either by positive characters or by completely evil ones, who are granted limited narrative attention. In the moral realm of Ka-Tzetnik's first three novels, what Roman Jakobson termed the “dominant” — “the focusing component of a work of art” which “rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components” and “guarantees the integrity of the structure” (82) — can be identified as moral and as rooted in the theme of the retention of humanity in the face of Nazi persecution, and the adherence to values of solidarity and compassion as well as to familial and social structures in extreme situations. Even if there are not more examples of exponents of these values than of their opposite on the level of the “ethics of the told,” these values are dominant on the level of the “ethics of the telling”: those adhering to their humanity gain the narrator's preference in his commentary and focus, ranging from relatively developed characters to protagonists. Characters who demonstrate the opposite kind of response are reduced either to caricature or to representations of radical evil in the foreground, or else to anonymity in the background. If a character is released from the margins through an empathetic gaze, his suffering is foregrounded and her humanity partially restored. The Preleshniks and Hayim-Idl, who maintain their humanity in the face of Nazi oppression, are also the characters whose inner world is explored. They function, in different episodes, as focal characters (see Genette 189–98), who orient readers' perception and judgment of the story through the prism of their moral codes. The moral realm of *Salamandra*, *House of Dolls*, and *Piepel* precludes the possibility of what Mikhail Bakhtin discussed in terms of polyphony — a “plurality of consciousness-centers” and “equally authoritative positions” (17–18). Rather, these novels endorse a specific moral stance and objectify the positions that differ from it.

Retention of humanity also establishes itself as “the dominant” in the novels' plot design. The details clash with Bartov's observation that

underlying Ka-Tzetnik's "representation of the Holocaust . . . is the assumption that only those who adapted by shedding their humanity . . . had even the faintest chance of surviving" (63) and with Milner's conclusion that only those who adjust to the "radical existential battle," where "human solidarity and the psychological affects composing it have been consumed as if by acid, may gain a meager chance or at least the illusion of one, of living through the catastrophe" (135). Like many of the historical collaborators and Judenrat officials, Limanowski, the notorious manager of housing in the Metropoli ghetto, and Poldek, the shop supervisor, are finally sent to Auschwitz along with the Jews they have exploited. But Ka-Tzetnik's plot design does more than assimilate historical occurrences; there is a touch of vindictive zest in his representation of the fates of the collaborators, as when we are told that Limanowski's hand is "no longer stuck in his trouser pocket, there being no pockets in the Auschwitz trousers; nor is a fragrant cigar clamped in his lips. A Judenrat potentate, accustomed to his daily platter of succulent goose topped by a mug of foaming beer and cheesecake for desert, he is hungrier than most" (1987a: 147; 1977: 199). Ka-Tzetnik grants a close-up to the ways in which these two former ghetto royalty are scorned and lynched by their former subjects, first by the Jewish prisoners and then by the Block Chief (1987a: 148; 1977: 200). As if for further emphasis, Poldek is also cannibalized by his own victims. Likewise, Moniek Matroz and Felicia Schwartz, the Head of the Ghetto and his loyal assistant, are sent to Auschwitz when, in their enthusiasm for eradicating the use of foreign passports for getting out of the ghetto, they fail to comply with other Nazi requirements.<sup>20</sup> "Stepping up into the prison van, Felicia Schwartz was on the verge of saying something, but she didn't quite make it," the narrator reports somewhat vindictively: "The first German boot in her belly made her totally forget what it actually was she was about to say" (1987a: 124; 1977: 165). On the other hand, Fella, Hayim-Idl, and Harry, who survive, are among the characters who retain their humanity and moral codes.

<sup>20</sup> Here Ka-Tzetnik alludes to historical facts. Moniek Matroz is the literary embodiment of Moshe "Muniek" Merin, head of the Jewish community council in Sosnowitz, later head of the Central Committee of Jewish Councils of Elders for Eastern Upper Silesia. The prototype of Felicia Schwartz is Fanka Czarna, Merin's secretary and interpreter, eventually sent, like him, to Auschwitz. For accounts of Merin's activity, much of which is immersed in Ka-Tzetnik's writing, see Friedman 353–64; Yahil 206–10; Szeintuch 2009: 22–68.

Yet, other characters who hold on to their humanity in extreme situations, such as Moni, Daniella, Vevke, and Zanvil, die in the camp, while many of the Kapos make it to the novels' conclusions unharmed. Here poetic justice yields to historical realism. The author orchestrates the destinies of his characters almost arbitrarily: Harry, Fella, and Hayim-Idl survive thanks to functions gained almost by chance, while Zanvil and Vevke, whose seemingly solid functions are based on their skill, perish. When even a function cannot guarantee the holder's life, the text's focus is directed away from the consequences of holding a function — survival or death — to the characters' conduct in extreme situations, where functionaries differ sharply in the way they use their privileges. For the morally praiseworthy in Ka-Tzetnik's novels, sharing and caring do not procure any practical gain, especially not in those instances when the expression of human solidarity involves risking one's life to save another. It is the retention of humanity for its own sake that is at the novels' moral center of gravity.

It is not surprising that Ka-Tzetnik's rendition of Jewish moral and spiritual resistance during the Holocaust has been overlooked by some of his readers. The intensity of his descriptions of torture and atrocities are unusual in Holocaust literature. The Nazi evil, as always, magnetizes the readers' attention. The less heroic dimension of moral and spiritual response is consequently shadowed, not only in terms of aesthetic organization but also in terms of subject matter.<sup>21</sup> Another issue is the conceptual lens applied when approaching the texts. When *Salamandra*, *House of Dolls*, and *Piepel* were published, non-armed moral and spiritual resistance to the Nazis was practically imperceptible for readers in the *Yishuv* and then in young Israel, whose conceptual constraints at the time set the ground for the novels' future reception. As Anita Shapira observes, the "traditional Jewish responses of acceptance of judgment and martyrdom in the effort to preserve humanity even under impossible conditions were incompatible with the self-image of the new Jew." For that reason, "only the rebels were granted entry into the Palestinian pantheon. They were integrated within the offensive ethos and fructified it, as symbols and foci of emotional identification" (339).<sup>22</sup> In fact, "heroism was still perceived

<sup>21</sup> Here Ka-Tzetnik's writing demonstrates one of the tendencies typical of survivors' testimony. Terrence Des Pres observes that in testimonies "any sign of elementary humanness — pales to insignificance," mainly because as a witness, "the survivor aims above all to convey the otherness of the camps, their specific inhumanity" (99).

<sup>22</sup> For further discussion of Israeli attitudes towards the survivors, see Segev.

as a characteristic of armed resistance” even after the Eichmann trial (1961), which exposed Israelis directly to the suffering of individuals and the dilemmas they faced during the Holocaust, allowing an acknowledgment of moral and spiritual resistance (see Yablonka 226). The sharp opposition between Ka-Tzetnik and his readers in conceptualizing Jewish resistance during the Holocaust impeded the readers’ entering “the authorial audience” (Phelan 2004b: 632).<sup>23</sup> As a result, some ethical dimensions of Ka-Tzetnik’s writing were inaccessible to the broad Israeli readership of the fifties and sixties.

Moral and spiritual resistance in Ka-Tzetnik’s writing constitutes a blind spot also for the conceptual lens of our time. Bartov reads Ka-Tzetnik’s early novels in the context of Daniel Goldhagen’s *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* (1996) and of Dinur’s later personal narrative *Shivitti*, where, seeing in his vision his own “face up in the sky, wearing an SS cap superimposed on a swarm of vipers,” Dinur realizes that “[w]herever there is humankind, there is Auschwitz” (1987b: 77, 121; 1989a: 61, 107). Such insight indeed echoes the work of Goldhagen or Christopher Browning’s *Ordinary Men* (1992), as all three crush naïve hopes of confining the agents of the Nazi genocide to sadistic monsters or robotic killing machines. Seeds for this development in Ka-Tzetnik’s moral perspective can be detected earlier than *Shivitti*. While in his 1961 *Ha’shaon* (translated as *Star Eternal*), Ka-Tzetnik still asserts decisively that the Germans “are not human beings” (1989b: 22; my translation), in his 1966 *Ha’imut* (originally titled *Kakhol me’efer*; translated as *Phoenix over Galilee*), he notes that “only later did it become clear that those who imprisoned you in Auschwitz were also created in the image” (1994: 174; my translation). When this observation is made in the fifth volume of the *Salamandra* sextet, Harry Preleshnik is a member of a group that is trying to establish a peaceful coexistence between Jews and Arabs in the terror-stricken Israel of the fifties. The anti-Jewish violence of the time increasingly stimulates in Harry and Galila, his wife, the question of analogy between Nazis and Arabs (or the British ruling Palestine), and this potential correspondence between enemies serves as ground to the insight — still hesitant in this book — about the Nazis’ humanity. Bartov, however, argues that “from the very first volume,” Ka-Tzetnik insists

<sup>23</sup>The term “authorial audience” refers to the ideal, implied, or hypothetical readers who share the text’s assumptions, knowledge, and beliefs. Phelan here uses a distinction between audiences originally made by Peter Rabinowitz (126–27).

that under the conditions of the Holocaust “all men become savages and yet all savages are men” (66). As my reading of the texts shows, the conceptual turn in *Shivitti* has little ground in the general poetics and even details of Ka-Tzetnik’s earlier novelistic renditions of the camp, which distinguish sharply between good and evil, victims and victimizers, savagery and humanism.

Milner reads Ka-Tzetnik through the lens of Levi’s “gray zone,” applied more broadly in accordance with Agamben and through a sociological lens such as Sofsky’s, who describes the circumstances under which, in the camp, “one prisoner’s death was another’s bread” (162). Other studies of the camp, however, reach different conclusions. Based on a comprehensive study of numerous survivor testimonies from the Lager and Gulag, Terrence Des Pres observes that

the assumption that there was no moral or social order in the concentration camp is wrong. Except peripherally and for brief periods similar to the “initial collapse” of individuals, the general condition we call chaos or anomie — what philosophers designate as the “state of nature” — did not exist. Certainly it did not prevail. Through innumerable small acts of humanness, most of them covert but everywhere in evidence, survivors were able to maintain societal structures workable enough to keep themselves alive and morally sane. The “state of nature,” it turns out, is not natural. A war of all against all must be imposed by force, and no sooner has it started than those who suffer it begin, spontaneously and without plan, to transcend it. (142)

Similarly, in a sociological analysis grounded also in personal experience as a survivor, Anna Pawełczyńska describes how resistance in Auschwitz was expressed “in the constant effort to maintain inner freedom,” in the battle for which “prisoners gave each other mutual assistance,” following, in pairs and groups, the basic norm: “Do not harm your neighbor and, if at all possible, save him” (127, 144). This brings us back to the question, what was the norm and what the exception in Jewish interpersonal conduct during the Holocaust — whether caring, solidarity, and reciprocity were the dominant code of response to the necessities of survival in the camps and ghettos or were they marginal in a jungle of all against all. These are questions for historians and sociologists. In Ka-Tzetnik’s artistic representation, the retention of humanity dominates the Jewish response, manifesting itself in multiple instances and forms, occupying the forefront of the narrative, and establishing the moral core that shapes the story. Moreover, it is the panoramic exploration of the ways in which

Jews held on to their humanity that defines the achievement of *Salamandra*, *House of Dolls*, and *Piepel*. Ka-Tzetnik's novels explore characters' passive resistance and active caring, zoom in on covert acts of humanity and non-conformism, while narratively linking these personal situations to more salient occurrences that left their mark on the recorded history of the Holocaust. The novels' balanced narrativization of their concerns — with the individual and the collective, with private and public life, with complicity and steadfastness — allows them to transcend the constraints of scholarly discourse. At the time of composition these novels filled the conceptual lacuna in early Israeli Holocaust consciousness by a compelling depiction of the Other Planet, with its horrors and its logistics, that brought into relief the Jews' struggle for the retention of their humanity.

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