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“This Large Jewish Mass Striding with Fatal Tranquility towards Its Doom”: The Poetic and Political Jewish Illusions in Naomi Frankel’s *Saul and Joanna*

Abstract: The focus of this study is on the collective self-delusion constructed by the Jews in regard to their fate under the Nazi regime and in regard to the Zionist mission, as it emerges in Naomi Frankel’s trilogy *Saul and Joanna*. I explore Frankel’s use of the characters’ illusion as a literary construct, in her writing about the Holocaust only a decade after the Second World War, which shows Frankel to be a unique writer in the cultural milieu that surrounded her. To examine the way in which their self-delusion vis-à-vis the Zionist mission is revealed in the literary work, I rely on the theory of the political unconscious, a concept derived from Frederick Jameson’s cultural worldview. The fact that the trilogy was well accepted by the literary critics of the time highlights the importance of re-examining this work 60 years after the publication of the first volume of the trilogy.

Key words: Jewish history, the Zionist narrative, German Jewry, literature and politics, Holocaust literature.

Introduction

The trilogy *Saul and Joanna*, first published in the 1950s, is a family saga, derived from the traditional European family saga of the 19th and early 20th centuries.¹ At the same time, the story also corresponds to the structure of the historical novel that is part of European realism. The ideological tone of this type of historical realism is conveyed through the historiosophical point of view of the omniscient narrator.²

1 For a historical and historiosophical overview of the genre of the European family saga, see Malka Shaked, *Links and a Chain: The Family Saga Novel in Hebrew Literature* (Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Ha-Meuhad, 1990) 13–34.

2 The realism of the trilogy merits two comments. The first refers to Gershon Shaked’s subcategories of realism, which include naturalistic realism. According to him, *Saul and Joanna* is more similar to the naturalistic saga in the style of Upton Sinclair and Herman Wouk, who wrote about World War II, than it is to the European realistic family saga of the 19th and early 20th centuries; see Gershon Shaked, *Hebrew Narrative Fiction 1880–1980*, vol. 4 (Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Ha-Meuhad, 1993) 59, 65. The second comment is that at this stage in her writing, Frankel was loyal to Marxist

The plot unfolds during the rule of the Weimar Republic, between the end of 1930 and the burning of the Reichstag in March of 1933. The epic richness of the trilogy, however, is not related to its brief temporal span, but to the breadth of the canvas portraying the social panorama of the period.³ The common thread connecting the three volumes is the story of the Levi family: three generations of assimilated Jews whose lives evolve in parallel to the historical developments of the era. Secondary narratives that deviate from the main plot provide additional perspectives on the conflicts that members of the Levi family encounter. The secondary plots enhance the historiosophical stance, which aims to present escape to Palestine as the only salvation option available to German Jews, based on a realistic and retrospective viewpoint. This is the overt presentation of the Zionist narrative in Frankel's trilogy.

The configuration of each volume, portraying the gradual development of the tragic plot, moving from cultural decline to degeneration to ruin, is symbolic of the decadence of German Jewry on the eve of the Holocaust. The binary opposition between the dynamics of ascent and descent in the literary work organizes this family saga in a manner that associates it with both Hebrew and non-Hebrew family sagas.⁴

The characters are presented as forming a hierarchical web, joined at its center and illuminated by the Jewish focus, which transforms the surrounding spheres into a mere background that reflects the grandeur of the core.⁵ The structure of concentric spheres as a way of understanding Jewish identity was popular at the dawn of the 20th century,⁶ yet the concentric spheres in this novel unfold in the opposite direction. That is to say, the affiliation with the Jewish identity, which begins at the center with the character of Joanna, fades as the spheres become increasingly distanced from the center. Still, the Jewish affiliation regains its importance for the

aestheticism in the style of social realism. The critics of her period examined the trilogy in terms of its correspondence to left-wing politics. In other words, categorizing the trilogy as belonging to the genre of realism merits more careful consideration, based on a more rigorous definition of the boundaries of the genre.

3 Gita Avinur, "Israeli Writers and the Shadow of the Holocaust" (Hebrew), *Moznayim* 28.5–6 (1969) 394.

4 M. Shaked, *Links*, 94–104. Shaked expands on the generic achievements of the trilogy in chapter 4.

5 Daniel Ben-Nahum, "Something about Prose in General and Three New Prose Books" (Hebrew), *Al Ha-mishmar*, Jan 5, 1968, 5. Ben Nahum ignores the rich social sphere of the German characters of the novel and views them as peripheral compared to the Jewish characters.

6 Menachem Brinker, *Israeli Thoughts* (Hebrew; Jerusalem: Magnes, 2007) 24.

secondary characters who belong to the periphery, representing the outermost sphere. The portrayal of most of the Jewish characters in the novel as sharing the unresolved complex of Jewish identity emphasizes the intricate relationships and the interdependence among the many spheres that form the Jewish web of the trilogy.

Although the first volume can stand alone as a novel, it also constitutes a preliminary phase for the following volumes. The third volume brings a sense of closure, not only in regard to all the subplots introduced in the earlier volumes, but also on the theme of the Land of Israel, which, despite its absence from the earlier volumes, was finally featured as the promising horizon towards which the characters and indeed the entire plot seemed to converge.⁷ The readers' perception of a link between the rise of the Nazi regime and the developments following the Holocaust is what makes the trilogy a profound Zionist epic.⁸ Critics have uniformly interpreted the trilogy as aligning with the Zionist narrative.⁹

Saul and Joanna was written over a period of 15 years. The first four chapters of the first volume were published in the journal *Orloguin* in 1953 – Frankel's first publication as a novelist. These chapters were greeted with great enthusiasm on the part of readers,¹⁰ which led to the publication of the following chapter a year later.¹¹ By granting readers a preview of her work, Frankel not only created anticipation for the complete first volume of the trilogy, which was published in 1956, but also guaranteed a widespread reception among both critics and the public. Despite the fact that this was Frankel's first novel, its favorable reception was rapid. Literary celebrations, numerous awards, adaptation as a radio drama and inclusion in the high-school curriculum are indicative of the broad array of sociohistorical reactions associated with this trilogy.¹²

7 Baruch Kurzweil, "German Jewry in the Eyes of Naomi Frankel" (Hebrew), *Ha'aretz*, Mar 30, 1962, 18.

8 G. Shaked, *Hebrew Narrative Fiction*, 64.

9 The lone exception in Hanan Hever, whose work is discussed below.

10 Dalia Karpel, "For Me the State of Israel Is Over" (Hebrew), *Ha'aretz*, magazine, Dec 18, 1998, 42–46. See also Amos Nevo, "I Know All These Leftists Are Waiting for Me in the Corner" (Hebrew), *Yediot Ahronot* 7, *Yamim* magazine, Jun 15, 1990, 44–46.

11 Naomi Frankel, "Rainy" (Hebrew), *Orloguin* 11 (1955) 1–32.

12 Its reverberating effect coincides with the literary reception model proposed by Hans Robert Jauss in *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1982). See also Robert C. Holub, *Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1984), and Aviva Karinsky, "Reception Theory as a Dialogue" (Hebrew), *Helkat Lashon* 19–20 (1995) 118–140.

In the field of literary criticism, studies of *Saul and Joanna* suggest that the work was viewed as adding an important contribution to Hebrew literature. A major question that preoccupied both readers and critics at the time was what had prepared this author to embark on such a broad and challenging mission in her first novel?¹³ Frankel's achievements were measured in terms of innovations that the novel introduced into Hebrew literature, which were related to the work's epic, thematic, social and gender dimensions. Frankel was among first authors to introduce a departure from the prior artistic and ideological dimensions of Hebrew literature, which had focused on the native-born Israeli – thus indicating the beginnings of a paradigmatic shift.¹⁴

Both readers and critics of *Saul and Joanna* perceived it to be a foundational text, in the sense that it marked a new development in the evolution of Hebrew literature. Long before it was published in its entirety in 1967, the trilogy was accepted as a major literary work.

Analyzing it now from a temporal distance raises significant questions, one poetic and the other political, both of which seek to determine whether the canonization of the trilogy involved the configuration of an illusion.

1. The Poetic Illusion: Linear and spiral movements

1.1. Literary construction

The loss of essential Jewish identity in the period between the two world wars was a fatal process that emphasizes the poetic potential of absence in *Saul and Joanna*. This absence, a typical Hegelian paradigm, is on the one hand the soil in which the phenomenon of "Jewish self-hatred" develops.¹⁵

¹³ See esp. Baruch Kurzweil, "Attempts to Deepen the Epic Dimension" (Hebrew), *Ha'aretz*, Aug 10, 1956, 7, and *In Search of Israeli Literature: Essays and Criticism* (Hebrew; Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University, 1982) 86. Also Yitzhak Bezalel, "Three-volume Soul-searching" (Hebrew), *Ma'sa*, Jun 2, 1967, 1–2.

¹⁴ Yosef Orbach, "Young Literature and the Social Novel" (Hebrew), *Al Ha-mishmar*, Aug 10, 1956, 2. In the third installment of this article, Aug 24, 1956, Orbach claims that Frankel's achievements thus far suggest that she has great talent, and the key to her continued success lies in the development of those skills.

¹⁵ Theodor Lessing, *Der jüdische Selbsthass* (Berlin: Jüdischer Verlag, 1930). Following Lessing, Kurzweil, in his essay "Self-hatred in Jewish Literature," diverts the historical discussion towards art and debates Lessing's universal approach, claiming insufficient evidence of the phenomenon, which he views as entirely Jewish. See Baruch Kurzweil, *Our Modern Literature: Continuation or Revolution?* (Hebrew; Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1971) 329–401.

On the other hand, within the trilogy, the absence serves as the foundation of another process – one that leads to self-delusion, in light of the condition of the Jewish community in pre-Holocaust Germany.

The characters in *Saul and Joanna* are formed using the basic stereotypical code that informs the phenomenon of Jewish self-hatred, a concept that is explicitly mentioned in the second volume of the trilogy and continues to appear in various implicit and explicit forms throughout the entire text. The cultural context, which is a necessary component in a European family saga set in Germany, underscores the role of decadence as a historical and literary paradigm of the period between the two world wars. The claim that anti-Semitism is grounded in Jewish self-hatred calls for an exploration of the link between the success of the Nazi propaganda and the self-delusion inherent to the Jewish community in Germany.¹⁶ The source of the deceptive impression is no longer external to the individual, but rather, it is rooted in the mind. Hence, self-delusion is grounded in self-deception, and the two are equivalent concepts.¹⁷

The concept of illusion is derived from the field of optics, yet it also has implications in the realms of psychology and consciousness. The psychological concept of delusion uses the sensory definition of the term illusion and places it in the realm of the mind.¹⁸ In the field of sociology, the Marxist concept of false consciousness refers to illusion that dominates the entire proletariat and allows for its continuous exploitation. "Jewish illusion," is a term that appears in studies dealing with the Holocaust,¹⁹ refers to the widespread notion among Jews that anti-Semitism would disappear as they proved themselves to be responsible, participating citizens of the European nations. The common Archimedean point underlying all these conceptual nuances is that the development of illusion depends on a human consciousness that accepts the existence of something that does not exist in reality, or alternatively, that rejects the veracity of something that in fact exists in

16 This context calls for the important comparison between Naomi Frankel's *Saul and Joanna* and Aharon Appelfeld's novel *Badenheim 1939*. The basis for such a comparison is the two authors' psycho-poetic approach to forming the sense of illusion. For more on the self-delusion in Appelfeld's novel, see Haya Shacham, "Double Speech: The Problem of Language and Language Criticism in *Badenheim Ir Nofesh* by Aharon Appelfeld" (Hebrew), *Bikoret U-farshanut* 28 (1992) 71–81.

17 T. Bayne and J. Fernbaández, *Delusion and Self-Deception: Affective and Motivational Influences on Belief Formation* (New York: Psychology, 2009).

18 A. S. Reber and E. S. Reber, *Dictionary of Psychology* (London: Penguin Books, 2001) 313. See entry for *hallucination*.

19 See, for instance, Randolph L. Braham, *The Politics of Genocide: The Holocaust in Hungary* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000) 219.

reality. I refer to this consciousness as collective delusion, given that the deceptive reflection of the facts has evolved into an interpretation of reality shared and accepted by many.

This cross-disciplinary convergence of the concept of illusion is in line with Frankel's neo-Marxist views. During her childhood in Berlin, she was raised on Marxist ideology. Later, at the kibbutz where she lived, she was nicknamed Naomi Marx, because of her strong ideological stance, a moniker that faded only after she completely divorced herself from the Marxist ideology and its poetics.²⁰

By its very nature, a literary text is an artistic illusion.²¹ In *Saul and Joanna*, there is an additional level of illusion manifested in the consciousness of the characters, which despite its illusory substance is very much grounded in the extra-literary reality. The characters' illusion is their willingness to be deceived by promises of emancipation, at the very time when their rights are being uprooted by Nazi anti-Semitism. The tension between the characters' self-awareness and the more comprehensive and retrospective view of the all-knowing omniscient narrator enhances the scope of the characters' illusion in the trilogy and presents it in an ironic light. For the reader, however, there is an inverse dynamic, in the sense that the stronger the characters' illusion becomes, the greater the reader's awareness of their actual circumstances.

1.2. Blindness and false dreams

The illusion that guides the characters' consciousness is not addressed directly in the text; rather, the very notion of an illusion is constructed by means of metaphorical paradigms. The use of this device throws into high relief the power of this ephemeral construct, which completely takes over the characters' consciousness.

The trilogy presents the collective delusion of German Jews as founded on two paradigms, blindness and a futile dream, both of which indicate that the German Jews are unable to read the situation accurately. In the first paradigm, the illusion is defined as blindness to the crisis to which the German Jews are subjected. Arthur Levi tells his children that these are not dark days, yet he says: "my eyes have darkened from seeing the skies

20 Ya'akov Achimeir, "Kir'on-Hevron-Destruction: Re-education of Naomi Frankel" (Hebrew), *Monitin* (1985) 31–35.

21 For a succinct review of the aesthetic illusion, see the first part of Menachem Brinker, *About Literature: Essays on the Borderline of Philosophy of Art and Literary Theory* (Hebrew; Jerusalem: Magnes, 2000) 3–16.

filled with bad omens."²² In the next sentence he describes his belief in the perfection of human understanding, which only emphasizes the extent of the illusion and the German fanaticism that his character represents. When the Zionist emissary from the Land of Israel fails in his attempt to rid the German Jews of their blindness, the expression "the wise can see what has yet to come"²³ acquires an ironic meaning, shedding light on the inability – or unwillingness – of the assimilated German Jews to see things for what they are. The fact that this expression is pronounced by a Nazi lawyer adds to the atmosphere of the absurd that characterizes the Jews' blindness.

The dream is yet another paradigm that reflects the characters' self-delusion. Thus, for example, the grandfather has a dream that is perceived by his son and his grandchild as highly unlikely. At the end of the first volume they come to the realization that the head of the family "has false dreams,"²⁴ but the grandfather, in whom the self-deception is most deeply embedded, refuses to part with this grand dream. His son Arthur, who becomes increasingly disconnected from reality, is also characterized as a dreamer, whose dreams do not correspond to the current *zeitgeist*.²⁵ Thus, blindness and the dream serve in the trilogy as two metaphorical conduits that feed the self-delusion and drive the German Jews farther and farther from reality.

1.3. Two opposing dynamics

The self-delusion is also informed by means of two opposing dynamics, which are unique to this trilogy. The most obvious dynamic is the linear development of the illusion that follows the chronological events of the novel. In the second type of dynamic, the development of the consciousness of illusion is manifested in the body language of the grandfather and takes the form of spiral movements.

The gradual development of the plot, which unfolds over the course of three important years in German history, moderates the progression of the illusion and presents it as a carefully calculated, psycho-historical phase. The fact that the first explicit mention of the year 1930 appears only towards the end of the first volume supports the development of the illusion. Likewise, the fact that the first volume ends with the celebration of the secular

²² Frankel, *Saul and Joanna* (1961), 250.

²³ Frankel, *Saul and Joanna* (1956), 177–180, 280, 305, 314.

²⁴ Frankel, *Saul and Joanna* (1956), 367.

²⁵ Frankel, *Saul and Joanna* (1961), 366.

New Year and the hope for a better year to come also serves to strengthen the optimistic tone of the trilogy. Nonetheless, in the first part of the first volume, there is a description of the depressed German youth, an explicit hint of the crisis Germany was experiencing between the two world wars. In addition, the emergency regulations enacted by Brüning's government, which are mentioned later on in the same volume, as well as Hitler's political success, lead to increased anti-Semitism. Edith's witnessing of Hitler's speech, in the second volume, and Uncle Alfred's injury caused by rebelling students, in the third volume, emphasize the direct impact of anti-Semitism on the family members, on both their bodies and souls.

The second volume is situated in 1932, a year of elections that also marks the Centennial of the death of the poet Goethe. The double significance of this point in time conveys the liminality of the situation. The Nazi regime's appropriation of the building across from the Levi family's home and the establishment of a Hitler youth club there symbolize the demise of the humanist dream that had characterized German culture and the end of the symbiotic German-Jewish relationship. Nevertheless, coming face-to-face with the presence and the vulgarity of the Nazi regime on a daily basis does nothing to dismantle the self-deception.²⁶

As the power of the Nazi regime increases and anti-Semitic acts become part of the daily routine in Berlin, so too the characters' self-delusion grows stronger. In the second volume especially, the impact of anti-Semitic acts is trivialized. This is the context for Uncle Alfred's decision to stay in Germany and teach Judaism to the Jews, at a time when clearly neither Jews nor Judaism have a right to exist in the German homeland any longer.

The series of events that describe Jewish existence during the rise of the influential swastika convey the feeling of an executioner's rope gradually tightening around the virtual neck of the Jewish community, which is at its most taut when the Nazi doctrine receives political legitimacy. The linear development of events in the second volume emphasizes the scope of Arthur's illusion, such that his death comes just before the announcement of the final results of the election. As he lies on his deathbed, his son whispers to him the news that President Hindenburg has defeated Hitler in the election. Thus the last piece of news that Arthur hears substantiates his illusion.

The grandfather's suicide at the end of the third volume, which serves as a denouement of the narrative, raises the following question: is this suicide

²⁶ Kurzweil, "German Jewry," 18.

an act of weakness in acknowledgment of his failure, or should it be viewed as a heroic act?

Arthur's son Heinz attempts to aggrandize the family tragedy by presenting his grandfather as invincible even in death, given that the event of his suicide is cause for a large number of Jews to gather together, a gathering which was strictly forbidden by the Third Reich. But according to the grandfather's brother Uncle Herman, this vile act should be repudiated:

I have it from verifiable sources that the issue is not as bad as the outcry. The government intends to control the upheaval and prevent violence against the Jews. Germany has always been governed by law and order and law and order will return to Germany.²⁷

Rationalization heightens the emotional tension of this scene.²⁸ It fuels Heinz's mixed emotional response, as it demonstrates that his grandfather's act was his last – but not futile – attempt to save his children. The grandfather's conscientious concern for his family was clear from the very beginning of the trilogy. He knew his relatives well enough to understand that opening their eyes to reality would require a major and shocking event. Hence, ending the trilogy with the reading of the grandfather's final will and testament imbues his act with heroic significance, as the reader witnesses the younger generation's awakening from its state of illusion. Notwithstanding, the grandfather's suicide is perceived as an admission of his failure to carry out his own strategy to save his family.²⁹ Consequently, it is impossible to determine the degree to which the grandfather actually overcame the illusion, and the two possible interpretations of the suicide create dramatic tension.

The second type of dynamic that accompanies the development of the collective delusion is presented through the metonymic device of the grandfather's imperial mustache. When he is attacked, the hairs of his mustache stand on end, conveying his power and strength. This is seen when he paces through the factory or when he is enraged by a count's ridicule of

²⁷ Frankel, *Saul and Joanna* (1967), 518.

²⁸ Jean Laplanche and Jean Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis* (London: Hogarth, 1980) 22. Yonatan Brafman describes the conflict between rational self-understanding and contextual explanation in practical Jewish thought; Y. Y. Brafman, "Practical Jewish Thought and the Sociality of Reason," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 24 (2017) 261–287.

²⁹ Shaked perceived the grandfather's suicide as another stage on the way to the familial and historical disaster, rather than as an insight; see Gershon Shaked, *Identity: Jewish Literatures in European Languages* (Hebrew; Haifa: Haifa University Press, 2006) 411–412.

the Jews. In contrast, the spiral motion as he twirls his mustache indicates weakness, a weakness related to his need to convince himself to sustain his illusion and his inability to give it up.³⁰

During a fateful talk with an officer of the SS, when the grandfather twirls his mustache, it is unclear whether he is attempting to calm himself or to convey his confidence and calm to his interlocutor. The grandfather's claims in the course of this discussion convey the immensity of the delusion in which he is trapped, and the spiraling motion of twirling his mustache becomes a loaded gesture that symbolizes his entrapment.

The narrator notes that as the officer takes his leave of the Levi family, the grandfather's mustache "quivers," as his illusion is shattered. Not surprisingly, the mustache quivers also as he leaves the house before committing suicide. Thus, the quivering of the mustache emphasizes the dichotomy between the motions that connote strength and weakness, and conveys the grandfather's loss of stability when faced with the shattering of his life-long illusion.

The development of the temporal mode in the trilogy carefully follows the cyclical movements of the seasons, and the fact that the second volume is entirely immersed in springtime connotes a cyclical view of history. In the cycle of nature, withering is a phase that precedes a new period of flowering. In this manner, the illusion aims to legitimize current events, by suggesting that they are merely part of a "natural" process. The characters' subjective view of this historic period is presented as based on their past experiences.

The characters perceive the situation in Germany to be a temporary crisis that will soon pass, and are unable to free themselves of their self-deception. Heinz's delusion is the most extreme: "With his integrity and his sharp mind, he could foresee without any sense of illusion the treacherous road ahead ...; yet he chose that path over complete desolation."³¹ He fails to realize that at this stage the illusion is the source of his ruination. Heinz's dialectic perception of time affords him not only a foundation for the development of his illusion, but also an escape route.

The ever-increasing dimension of the characters' illusion, especially in the case of the Levi family, raises the question whether abandoning the illusion (what Shaked calls developing a "Jewish consciousness"³²) would be enough to save the characters. Given that the illusion is based on a tendency towards Jewish assimilation and self-hatred, it seems clear that the text aims

³⁰ Meir Ya'ari, "Book, Author and Period" (Hebrew), *Al Ha-mishmar*, 2 Feb 1962, 2.

³¹ Frankel, *Saul and Joanna* (1957), 179.

³² G. Shaked, *Identity*, 411.

to indicate that the shattering of the illusion, or rather awakening from the illusion, must necessarily entail the characters' departure from Germany. In the middle of the second volume, the reader is informed that one important couple has left Germany. The third volume opens with another's decision to immigrate to Israel and ends with the news that he managed to reach his destination. These events are symbolic of the Zionist meta-plot of the trilogy, which presents the Land of Israel as the ideal and most immediate solution on the textual horizon.

The trilogy tells the story of Joanna's education and personal development,³³ using the genre of the German *Bildungsroman*. Joanna's departure from the mode of self-hatred inherited from her forefathers (which characterizes her brother Heinz in particular) provides the seeds for a Zionist narrative that develops slowly and gradually takes over the ideological stance of the text. She is shown as she faces her family and manages to emerge from the family turmoil. She is an archetype of the rebel, conveying the message of the return to the Jewish identity and the Jewish homeland. We find in the trilogy two opposing historical developments: namely, destruction and renewal.

1.4. *Saul and Joanna* in the Corpus of Holocaust Literature

The fact that the trilogy is categorized as Holocaust literature indicates the uniqueness of this work in the historical context in which it was written – that is, merely a decade after the end of the Second World War. The first volume, published in 1956, did not align itself with the traditional narrative about the heroic native-born Israeli *tzabar* (sabara), which in Israel in the 1950s was not only popular, but the only literary model available. Instead, the focus of the plot is on the Jewish diaspora and its demise. The fact that in the next two volumes, the Zionist narrative is developed and emphasized might seem to moderate the statement about the first volume, but it does nothing to weaken its psychosocial effect in the context of the 1950s. Regardless of the fact that nowadays we question whether the founding generation in Israel meant to distance itself from the narrative of Jewish weakness by presenting the model of the *tzabar*,³⁴ it is clear that in writing about the Holocaust in the 1950s, Frankel was ahead of her times.

³³ The Saul of the title is one of Joanna's friends, a secondary character despite his place in the title. Saul Koenigsberg served as a model for Saul in the trilogy.

³⁴ Also in the commemoration literature and the Holocaust research written between the years 1945 in 1961, there appears a rather complex system of norms for writing about the Holocaust, on the one hand, and the response of the Israeli audience, on the

In contrast to Alan Mintz's sweeping statement that there was no "serious" work of Hebrew literature on the subject of the Holocaust between the Second World War and the Eichmann trial in 1961,³⁵ Malka Shaked claims that Frankel's text is a trailblazer, in the sense that it is the first work of literature to directly cope with the issue of the Holocaust, in an attempt to understand its roots and the lessons to be learned.³⁶ Thus, Frankel's work paved the way for the literature of the 1970s and 1980s, when the poetics of the second generation of native Israelis was developed. Thus, it becomes clear why, in the literary history of the mid-20th century, Frankel's work is considered a representative model of Israeli literature on the topic of the Holocaust.³⁷

The particularly humanistic juxtaposition of the image of the Nazi and the Jew within the literary construct of *Saul and Joanna* foreshadows the technique Avner Holtzman associates with the new wave of Holocaust literature of the 1980s.³⁸ Although literary manifestations of the Israeli psychologizing of the trauma began to appear only in the late 1980s, in *Saul and Joanna* the characterization of the German society is delivered through the omniscient narrator's neutral description.³⁹ In contrast to the literary attitude towards the Holocaust expressed by the generation of Israel's founders, which preferred the narrative of Zionist ideology, this trilogy offers an alternative model, in terms of its underlying psycho-ideology. More specifically, it emerges from a deeply emotional need to mourn the reality of loss, by examining Germany's cultural baggage.⁴⁰ In other words, at the time,

other hand. See Anat Livneh and Avner Greenberg, "'The Cry of the Desperate and the Fortitude of the Remaining Will Suffice': Commemorative Literature, Documentation and the Study of the Holocaust, 1945–1961," *Dapim* 24.1 (2010) 177–222.

35 Alan Mintz, *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984) 21. This assumption underlies Mintz's research and motivates his conclusions.

36 M. Shaked, *Links*, 238.

37 Shari Yehuda Bloch and Yisrael Klauzner, eds., *History of the Twentieth Century* vol. 3 (Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Yizrael, 1963) 307.

38 Avner Holtzman, "Trends in Israeli Holocaust Fiction in the 1980s," *Modern Hebrew Literature* 8–9 (1992) 23–28. An expansive Hebrew version of the article was included in the Journal of the University of Haifa, based on a lecture given in Manchester in Jun 1991: A. Holtzman, "The Holocaust in Israeli Literature: A New Wave" (Hebrew), *Dapim Le-mechkar Be-sifrut* (1996) 131–158. In relation to visual arts, see Batya Brotin, "The Duality between Victim and Aggressor in the Works of Second-generation Israeli Artists of the Holocaust" (Hebrew), *Igud: Mivchar Ma'amrim Be-madaei Ha-yahadut* 2 (2005) 55–81.

39 Raul Hilberg et al., "Roundtable Discussion," in *Writing and the Holocaust*, ed. B. Lang (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1988) 271–290.

40 Tal Wald, "The Beauty of Japheth: The Shaping of German Character in Naomi Frankel's Trilogy *Saul and Johanna* and Its Influence on the Reaction to the Trauma of

by choosing to describe German Jews through the imposing framework of social realism, *Saul and Joanna* did lend its voice to the dominant ideology of the *tzabar* and the politics of the left. At the same time, it enabled its readers to experience the fear and anxiety associated with the Holocaust – feelings that were being repressed by the Zionist narrative.

The artistic presentation of the reality of the Holocaust in *Saul and Joanna* underscores its problematic position in the literary corpus. The use of the genre of realism may have provided a convenient way to plant the notion that the Holocaust was an event among many others on the historical continuum. However, by delimiting the narrative to the period prior to the Holocaust and keeping the Holocaust itself beyond the boundaries of the text, while simultaneously writing from a historical perspective through the use of the all-knowing omniscient narrator, the text grants presence to that which is absent and reinforces the sense of impending horror.

Frankel's biographical uniqueness is another indication of her extraordinary status among the literary authors of her time. She was not a Holocaust survivor, as she immigrated to Israel in July of 1934, only a few months after the Nazis' rise to power.⁴¹ Hence, she cannot be integrated into Holtzman's categories of Holocaust literature, whereas she may fit into Nurit Govrin's category of Jewish authors who experienced the Holocaust from afar.⁴² Nonetheless, the trilogy corresponds to the era defined as pre-Holocaust, and hence, the existential experience conveyed by the author and the authentic descriptions embedded in the fictional framework ring true. Although the events of the Holocaust are absent from the trilogy, time in the text flows directly towards the sense of horror experienced in the early 1930s. Joanna's immigration to Israel, described towards the end of the third volume as a certain future development, presents her as the ultimate embodiment of the Jew on the Jewish-Zionist timeline, and her depiction seems to loyally follow the literary pattern preferred by the Zionist narrative. Nevertheless, I suggest there is room to question whether this loyalty prevails.

the Second World War and the Holocaust" (Hebrew; MA thesis, Tel Aviv University, 2001).

⁴¹ Tzipora Kochavi-Reini, *Seashell Queen*, vol. 1 (3 vols.; Hebrew; Jerusalem: Gefen, 2013).

⁴² Nurit Govrin, "From Near and Far: Reactions to the Holocaust in the Hebrew Literature of Those Who Were Not 'There,'" *Reading the Generations: Contextual Studies in Hebrew Literature* (4 vols.; Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Gvanim, 2002–2008) 1.303–323.

2. The Political Illusion: The Zionist narrative and "Zionism of the Holocaust"

As I attempt to discern the fissures in the Zionist ideology as presented in *Saul and Joanna*, I rely on the concept of the political unconsciousness, which is part of Fredric Jameson's cultural theory.⁴³ The two key concepts of Jameson's method are contradiction and repression, and his intention in using them is conveyed as follows:

The political unconsciousness seeps through the cracks in every text, a symptom of the irresolvable tensions of the extra-literary reality. A reading of the political unconsciousness attends to reestablish the repressed and buried reality of this basic history and restore it to the surface of the text.⁴⁴

Jameson attempts to read instances of ideological repression through the silences in a text, or conversely, through what he calls textual outbursts. His goal is to uncover the logical and ideological focal points that a particular historical text was unable to voice, or alternatively, which it tried to repress. Frankel's writings do indeed feature textual outbursts on the one hand, along with attempts to blur the effect of such outbursts, on the other hand.

Jameson focuses on the text as a cultural product and does not attempt to interpret the intentions of its author. In line with this, my main argument here is not about Frankel's ideological preferences, but about the text she wrote. The political unconscious of her text appears to be inconsistent with the Zionist narrative. The decision of the reader or critic to identify or ignore the fissures in the text is a political decision that is integral to the reading process, which is essentially an aesthetic act. As long as readers or critics interpret the trilogy as a constitutive text of the Zionist narrative, they continue to repress another layer of consciousness, and thus keep the second implicit narrative hidden in the text. Whereas, if readers or critics identify and acknowledge the fissures in the Zionist narrative as they appear in the trilogy, they allow the second narrative, the post-Zionist story, to rise to the level of consciousness.

⁴³ Jameson developed this theory in *The Political Unconscious* and refined it in his article about postmodernism in *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. See Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Symbolic Act* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1981). The first chapter presents the theoretical skeleton of the book, and the remaining chapters apply the theory to works by Balzac, Gissing and Conrad.

⁴⁴ Translation and paraphrase by Hanna Soker-Swager in her review, "Marxist Interpretation in the Postmodern Era," in *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Symbolic Act*, trans. H. Soker-Swager (Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Resling, 2004) 107–108.

The discussion of the literary strategies that expose the illusions of the characters about their future (see Section 1) serves as the backdrop for this section, in which I challenge the interpretation of the trilogy as aligned with the Zionist narrative. In Section 1, I use the term illusion to refer to the characters' state of mind; however, the term also has political implications in the context of the entire trilogy, encompassing the notions of dream and metaphorical blindness. The textual manifestations of these three notions – illusion, dream and blindness – can be linked to Jameson's method, as they are related to the subconscious, on the one hand, and to ideological motives on the other hand.

In addition, there is a clear connection between illusion and political unconscious. Both conceal something that must not be openly addressed. Moreover, both conceal a contradiction that is not easily resolved. It can be argued that illusion is one of the possible manifestations of Jameson's political unconscious. In the interpretation offered here, the illusions embedded in Frankel's text are perceived as a textual attempt to keep the political unconscious repressed. The fact that the illusions are implied, without being directly labeled as such in the text, emphasizes the desire to keep them at bay.

I agree with Nancy Ezer that it is important to examine the political unconsciousness of the text from its beginning.⁴⁵ In this claim, she defers to Ian Watt, who claimed that the opening serves as an introduction to all aspects of the narrative.⁴⁶ Her interpretation is based also on the research of Menachem Perry, which focused on the reading process, and distinguished between the opening and the other parts of the narrative.⁴⁷ The claim that the entire essence of a text can be found in its opening calls for analysis of the opening in any literary work, in order to glean what it repressed.

At the same time, I propose that the other end of the spectrum, the closure of the text, similarly conveys ideological import. In this sense, I introduce

⁴⁵ Nancy Ezer, *Literature and Ideology* (Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Papyrus, 1992) 34–36. Although Ezer refers to novels, the intent is pertinent to any text, i. e., any cultural product.

⁴⁶ Watt was among the first to recognize the importance of the opening of a novel; see Ian Watt, "The First Paragraph of *The Ambassadors*: An Explication," *Essays in Criticism* 10.3 (1960) 250–274.

⁴⁷ Menachem Perry, "Dynamics of the Literary Text: How the Order of the Text Determines Its Meanings," (Hebrew) *Ha-sifrut* 28 (1979) 6–46. Also Menachem Perry, "'O Rose, Thou Art: Sick!' – Meaning-building Tricks in William Faulkner's *A Rose for Emily* and Excursions to the Theory of Rhetoric in Fiction" (Hebrew), *Siman Kri'a* 3–4 (1974) 423–459. Perry notes the importance of differentiating between the opening and the exposition, that is, between the beginning of the *sujet* and the beginning of the *fabula*.

a methodological innovation in the literary analysis of the political unconsciousness. The closing of the text conveys whether the ideology is ratified or rejected, and it is this impression that is engraved in the memory of the reader.⁴⁸ The principle underlying this view suggests that the literary ending, in its contents and its form, represents an ideology or a concrete political agenda. Thus, the ending is yet another textual arena in which a political struggle takes place.

The early literary critics approached the Zionist issue in *Saul and Joanna* using historiosophical tools, analyzing the text in light of Israel's War of Independence, and claimed that Zionism guided the development of the Zionist narrative in the trilogy. This historiosophical project was led by Gershon Shaked, who viewed the developments in Hebrew literature of the past century as part of the Zionist endeavor. Among the critics who followed this direction were Baruch Kurzweil, Chana Yaoz, and Dan Meiron. The latter viewed *Saul and Joanna* as a literary model based on the continuum of Jewish history, and felt that the culmination of this continuum in the Zionist promise is manifested in the work's themes and structure.⁴⁹ According to Elie Sweid's interpretation, Zionism constitutes the ideological core of the trilogy, which he claimed is embodied primarily in the character of Joanna.⁵⁰

The fact that the metanarrative emphasizes the Zionist ideology led to the inclusion of the trilogy in the curriculum for matriculating high-school students until 2000, despite the trilogy's unusually broad canvas. Furthermore, the connection the reader can make between the rise of the Nazi regime, the triumph of the Zionist project and the aftermath of the Holocaust all suggest the epic depths attributed to Zionism in the trilogy (despite the fact that the Land of Israel does not feature in the text as an arena where events unfold).⁵¹ The Zionist notion gains further support from the fact that Joanna's Zionism is cultural rather than political, in the sense that it is nourished by her desire to understand her roots, rather than by the desire to flee anti-Semitism.⁵²

⁴⁸ For more on the types of confirmatory and undermining literary closure, see Michal Arbel, *All's Well That Ends Well? Narrative Closure in Hebrew Literature* (Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Ha-Meuhad, 2008) 30.

⁴⁹ Dan Meiron, *If There Is No Jerusalem: Essays on Hebrew Writing in a Cultural-Political Context* (Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Ha-Meuhad, 1987) 133.

⁵⁰ Elie Sweid, "Towards the End of the Diaspora" (Hebrew), *La-Merhav*, Jan 26, 1962, 5–6.

⁵¹ Shaked, *Hebrew Narrative Fiction*, 4.64.

⁵² Joanna's Zionism is similar to the Zionist perception of Martin Buber. For an analysis of Buber's Zionist view, see Amos Elon, *The Pity of It All: A Portrait of the German-Jewish Epoch, 1743–1933* (New York: Picador, 2002) 243. In Rubin's opinion, the entire

Hanan Hever is the only critic who refrains from defining the trilogy as a Zionist story, stating that it was only an approximation of the historic model of the Zionist story.⁵³ This may be viewed as a first step towards revealing the political unconscious of a Zionist narrative in the trilogy. Although the Zionist narrative attempts to take control of the overall ideology of the text, it is the repressed subtext, rooted in the crisis of Jewish identity, that serves as the foundation of the Zionist ideology in the trilogy. *Saul and Joanna* indeed is supported by the Zionist metanarrative and links the motif of rebellion with the Masada myth in its tragic heroic context. Nonetheless, it simultaneously creates an ideological reduction, by including the "textual outbursts" which posit that Zionism was fundamentally a side effect of the Holocaust, a "Zionism of Holocaust."⁵⁴

This view is expressed by the character of Alexander, the Zionist emissary, since he portrays the Zionist ideology of the 1930s as a false consciousness, an illusion. This perception is also supported in a scene that describes the gathering of funds intended for the Zionist movement, which gives rise to a piercing criticism of Zionism and its leaders. In the trilogy, Zionism is not considered an actual ideological movement, and "the kibbutz is probably no paradise either."⁵⁵ The Jewish social corpus of the trilogy, peopled by assimilated German Jews, serves as a fertile ground for inculcating the ideological duality of the Zionist project. The two contradicting views of Zionism produce a tension that leads to an ideological impasse. Even an implicit reference to this contradiction in a literary work constitutes a blatant transgression of the unwritten rules of the Zionist consensus.

As a work of realism, the trilogy attempts to convey a social consciousness.⁵⁶ The social dichotomy is accompanied by the evident political tension between the Reds and the Browns and their respective calls for change in Germany. In effect, Frankel sought to examine the processes that led to the Holocaust, and, indeed, these can be found on the very first page of the first volume, in the political consciousness that it reveals.

The Jewish problem, which Frankel viewed as inherent in the failure of the German Enlightenment, and the portrayal of which led to the trilogy's

Zionist project was mobilized to promote political inter-relationships through cultural mechanisms; Adam Rubin, "'Turning Goyim into Jews': Aliyah and the Politics of Cultural Anxiety in the Zionist Movement, 1933–1939," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 101 (2011) 71–96.

53 Hanan Hever, *Literature Written From Here: Israeli Literature, The Abbreviated Version* (Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Yedioth Ahronoth, 1999) 30.

54 Frankel, *Saul and Joanna* (1961), 127.

55 Frankel, *Saul and Joanna* (1967), 499.

56 See Jameson's discussion of "The Ideology of Form," *Political Unconscious*, 76.

immediate inclusion in the pantheon of Zionist literature, is closely related to the component of political unconscious in the text. The use of a non-Jewish omniscient narrator, whose non-Jewish affiliation is revealed in the description that opens the trilogy (wherein “even the Jews come to relax on the bench on Saturdays”⁵⁷) is intended to present an outsider’s neutral view of German Jews. Likewise, certain characters, such as attorney Philip Lasker, are not immediately depicted as Jews, but are revealed as such only at a later stage.

This brushing off of the characters’ Jewishness matches both the spirit of the times and the problematization of Jewish consciousness in the trilogy. In the openings of volumes two and three, also, the Jewish world is not the focus of the narrative. Frankel gave the trilogy an international perspective by blurring the boundaries between the main and secondary characters – a strategy which is later reversed, as the German characters that were in the background become the major actors in the foreground.⁵⁸

The non-Jewish narrator is clearly aware of the characters’ delusion. Hence, it is not surprising that when the narrator pretends to adhere to the point of view of the Jewish characters, what is revealed is the irony of their self-perception and their Utopian discussion. They reminisce “about the past, when they enjoyed their high social status and their material riches, and they talk about the days to come, when they will have all this again.”⁵⁹ What has not been mentioned – i. e., the current status of the Jews – is purposely ignored and is part of the collective repression that characterized the times. Thus, it is the narrator’s role, as mediator between the text and the reader, to manipulate the reader’s awareness. Consequently, the characters’ dream of an optimistic outcome on the eve of the Second World War is clearly perceived as proof of their utter blindness, grounded in illusion.

The self-delusion could have two possible sources: on the one hand, the assimilation of the Jews who wish to become German citizens of equal rights, and on the other hand, the Zionist movement, which promised that the New Jews would live freely in a country of their own. To the reader, however, it is clear that the first source would fail, while the other one was realized in 1948. Yet this historical assumption does not correspond

⁵⁷ Frankel, *Saul and Joanna* (1956), 9.

⁵⁸ For more about the “international perspective” and the functioning of the secondary characters that become primary, see Wald, “Beauty of Japheth,” 15–21. This intercultural phenomenon is close to the historical model proposed by Randi Rashkover, “Overcoming Tolerance: Mendelssohn and Augustine on Judaism and Christianity,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 16 (2009) 118–145.

⁵⁹ Frankel, *Saul and Joanna* (1956), 9.

to the pattern of retrospective analysis, according to which the cracks in the Zionist ideology can be perceived well before the dawning of the Post-Zionist era.⁶⁰ Metaphorically speaking, the clinical signs that characterized the nation's post-partum depression following the birth of the Zionist homeland can be detected also during the gestational period of the Zionist ideology. In this sense, the opening of the trilogy serves to blur the historic contradictions; in Jameson's terms, it is a manifestation of the inevitable repression inherent to every text.

The use of the bench in the opening of the trilogy exemplifies Jameson's claim. Originally, Frankel had placed the bench on the beach in Tel Aviv and had intended to write an Israeli novel about soldiers returning from battle during the War of Independence; however, she was unable to proceed without first analyzing the Holocaust, and it was this awareness that led her to erase what she had written and start over.⁶¹ Consequently, any discussion of the bench as a key symbol in the trilogy necessarily brings to the surface the existence of the erased and repressed bench, which was intended to describe the era after the Zionist dream had been realized.

Another aspect that was completely ignored by the literary critics of the time is that in the trilogy, Zionism is not the absolute ideological model that the Israeli collective considered it to be in the early years of the foundation of the State of Israel. Rather, Zionism is portrayed in the trilogy as a Pyrrhic victory, as "Zionism of the Holocaust." This portrayal could not have been intended merely to demonstrate that the Zionist narrative was an outcome of the Holocaust, particularly since the plot of the trilogy takes place in the period before the Holocaust. Rather, this portrayal hints at the possibility that Zionism, an ideology nurtured by disaster and devastation, is itself disastrous.

The family saga of European decadence, which was a source of inspiration for Frankel, was given an unusual twist in *Saul and Joanna*, such that overall, the trilogy conveys an optimistic tone, in light of the Zionist solution hovering at the edge of the text. Although the first two volumes seem to suggest that the denouement might be not one of revival but of Holocaust,⁶² the tenor of the work changed with the publication of the third

⁶⁰ On the relationship between post-Zionism and national memory, see Daniel Gutwein, "Left and Right Post-Zionism and the Privatization of Israeli Collective Memory," *Journal of Israeli History* 21.2–3 (2001) 9–42.

⁶¹ Hava Pinchas-Cohen, "Suddenly in the Summer of '83" (Hebrew), *Nekuda* 87 (1985) 18. And also Kochavi-Reini, *Seashell Queen*, 2.157.

⁶² Hillel Barzel, "Trends in Israeli Prose" (Hebrew), *Moznaim* 14.5–6 (1962) 413–419, esp. 414.

volume, especially due to the fact that it ends in the children's decision to immigrate to Palestine.

This is the context that led Shaked to claim that the trilogy "draws towards the Zionist conclusion as a lesson driven by the Jewish catastrophe."⁶³ By contrast, the tone of the work is informed by a retrospective and sobering process of re-examination. Given that the catastrophe enables the characters to find redemption and return to their religious and national Jewish identity, Shaked consistently perceived the trilogy to be a fundamentally humanist work, conveying a prevailing optimism.⁶⁴ However, the optimistic tone of the catastrophe that he perceived is an outcome of the instrument he selected for the purpose of his analysis – namely, the prism of the Zionist narrative. It is difficult to agree with his conclusion as pertaining to the whole of the trilogy, given that Joanna is the only character whose redemption is not the result of the catastrophe, but the outcome of a harmonic process of searching for her roots.

It is only natural that Joanna, the main character in the trilogy and the one after whom the work is named, would be the only character for whom Zionism is purely an ideological way of life. Her process begins when she reads Herzl's *Altneuland* and identifies with its message; it includes her desire to learn Hebrew ("Altneulang") and her dream of the kibbutz as a Zionist utopia. Her process of ideological inculcation concludes with her search for her Jewish roots. These robust manifestations of Joanna's Zionist ideology may reflect another repressive effort to conceal the cracks in the Zionist ideology, a somewhat futile attempt to lure the reader into following the juvenile Zionism of a 12-year-old girl.

In light of this conclusion, the fact that the Zionist dream is not fulfilled within the confines of the text merits further consideration. The cultural decadence on which the trilogy is founded leaves no room for "the dawning of a new era" for the family. Following in the tradition of the German novels that inspired her, Frankel ends the trilogy with a symbolic scene that conveys the tension of choosing between life and a disgraceful death, and in her novel neither course is entirely redeeming.

As described in the ending, the trip to Palestine is scheduled to take place two weeks hence, in accordance with the stipulations decreed in the grandfather's will. The grandfather's name is mentioned twice: in the first instance, it is specifically given in the context of his stipulation that his

⁶³ Gershon Shaked, "Light and Shadow, Unity and Multiplicity" (Hebrew), *Alpayim* 4 (1991) 132.

⁶⁴ G. Shaked, *Identity*, 412–413.

family emigrate, whereas in the second instance, it cannot be spoken, as his grandson is unable to bring himself to utter it. Could this second instance hint that the Zionist dream will not be realized a fortnight after the trilogy's ending?

Not surprisingly, Shaked's response to the possibility that the Zionist dream might not be realized is subjugated to his nationalist interests. In his view, the characters of the trilogy "manifested – in body and soul – the edicts of the Zionist meta-plot, regardless of whether they actually arrive in Israel or not."⁶⁵ Not only does this response award the characters the Zionist medal of honor, by claiming that they have already manifested the Zionist dream (which is, practically speaking, not a viable possibility, given the physical absence of the Land of Israel from all three volumes), but in one fell swoop he also manages to entirely erase the Land of Israel from the Zionist equation.

Summary

In this study I have examined the theme of illusion as it develops among the characters of Naomi Frankel's trilogy *Saul and Joanna*. The analysis serves to expose the political illusion (the Zionist ideology), as well as the poetic illusion (the correspondence to the corpus of Holocaust literature). Both types of illusion have a clearly political resonance. What appears on the surface to be a conventional Zionist story of the Holocaust in fact leads to a fresh examination of the Zionist model of Holocaust literature. The intertwining of the poetic and political illusions indicates that the trilogy, written 60 years ago, foreshadows the questioning approach that characterizes the post-Zionist era. The discussion of the classification of the trilogy as Holocaust literature, as well as the meta-plot's adherence to the Zionist code, emphasizes an additional dimension of the illusion – namely, that of the readers, as they sense the doubts seeping through the cracks in the text.

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⁶⁵ Gershon Shaked, "In Time: An Introduction to the Realist Fiction of the Land of Israel" (Hebrew), *Mechkarei Ha-aretz Be-sifrut Ivrit* 13 (1992) 241.