

namely that linguistic thinking was indeed a genuine part in his exegetical work.

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הספרות כמעבדה מוסרית: קריאה במבחר יצירות בפרוזה העברית של המאה העשרים. (Literature as a moral laboratory: Reading selected twentieth century Hebrew prose). By Adia Mendelson-Maoz. Pp. 275. Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2009. Paper.

In her book, *Literature as a Moral Laboratory: Reading Selected Twentieth Century Hebrew Prose*, Adia Mendelson-Maoz is trying “to connect between the philosophy of morals or ethics and literature” (p. 1). She opens her introduction with a quote from D. H. Lawrence in which he claims that philosophy nails down and limits literature to an extreme, which is why Dr. Mendelson-Maoz is looking for a way to show a new methodology for literary criticism.

The book discusses an impressive amount of Israeli texts written in Hebrew during the twentieth century. This is why the literature teacher/professor who wants to present the students with a different point of view can definitely use the scheme brought by the author.

The book is divided into four parts or “gates.” In the first part, Mendelson-Maoz attempts to connect the two elements of literature and ethics. Here the author is trying to prove that literature is placed at the juxtaposition of moral life and moral principles. The chapter is full of footnotes, some of them are long and cumbersome explanations that lead to no conclusion. The author allows the future reader of any prose the freedom to make up his / her own mind. In addition, she claims (and I tend to agree) that “each text that deals with ethics will include the three layers: the aesthetic layer, the fictional ethic layer and the reading ethic one” (p. 86).

The second part deals with war stories. Here Mendelson-Maoz discusses three texts: “Hirbeth-Hizeeh” by S Yizhar, “The Origin” by Y. H. Brenner, and *Himo the King of Jerusalem* by Y. Kaniuk. In the introduction to this part, she proffers the discussion about the connection between the value of human life and sticking to the goal. She uses “Hirbet Hizeeh” as a representative of “the end of innocence” as S Yizhar, according to her, researches the dynamics of war crimes while using aesthetic tools and formatting the disso-

nance. In contrast, Y. H. Brenner's story deals with the residents of Tel Aviv and Jaffa, who, because of the expulsion, becoming immigrants and focuses on the relationships between the immigrants and the people in the village where they temporarily settle. She has a very detailed discussion about the duty of the people to help others and the "criminal" behavior of the village people. With Kaniuk's novel, the author finds dissonance in different parts. In his composition, she claims, the aesthetic layer is connected to the ethical layer in a unique way. "The composition as a whole is laid in a form of a moral dilemma and its solution" (p. 145). She leads the reader between the various areas in a very interesting way.

The third part is named by Mendelson-Maoz, "life story." Here she uses *Flash and Blood King* and *The Poor Man's Sheep* by M. Shamir, "Tehilah" and *Only Yesterdays* by Sh. Y. Agnon, and *The Last Jew* by Y. Kaniuk in comparison to Grosman's *See Under: Love*. In this part of the book, the starting point is moral Aristotelian philosophy: "What is the good life or what kind of life I should live?" (p. 149). Here, she compares Kaniuk to Shamir as both write about similar narrative: King David.

According to the author, Agnon asks questions about character and the way of life. She compares two kinds of protagonists in his compositions. The creative teacher can use this part as a potential paper topic for his / her students. As a teacher, I am happy to say that this part of the book raised many thoughts of how to teach Hebrew literature on one hand, and about Hebrew language on the other.

The fourth part discusses conflict and responsibility relating to A. B. Yehoshua's *A Journey to the Mellenium*. Here she tries to find out the questions that literal compositions ask when dealing with ethics and not just present the moral issue. She sees Yehosuah's books as catalysts of change to the reader's point of view

In conclusion, Mendelson-Maoz's book encourages the reader to reread the literary texts she discusses throughout the book, and to look into the principles of ethics. For the teachers amongst us, this book can be used as an additional tool to teach twentieth century Hebrew literature. For creative teachers, the book can be a base for creating independent learning. Teachers outside Israel can use this book as a tool to bring into the classroom Hebrew culture and the ways Israeli literature deals with moral issues in different aspects of life.

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