

# BITZARON

QUARTERLY REVIEW OF HEBREW LETTERS

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# **BITZARON**

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# SELECTED ABSTRACTS

## AN INTERVIEW WITH AHARON APPELFELD

by Shmuel Schneider  
Yeshiva University

In this interview, Aharon Appelfeld speaks candidly of his childhood experiences before, during, and after the second World War; of his life in Israel as a man and as a writer, of his social and moral responsibilities as a Jewish author and of his craft. Of special interest are his comments on the Hebrew writers who have influenced and guided his literary career, among them - Dov Sadan, S.Y. Agnon and Y.H. Brenner. Appelfeld expresses his views on the state of American Jewry and the threats of assimilation it is facing.

## THE SUMMIT, (a Novella)

by Aharon Appelfeld

The *Summit* takes place in the Austrian countryside during the seething days of the late 1930's. A group of Jews, professionals, intellectuals and businessmen, many dismissed from their positions and estranged from their assimilated families are thrown together in a shabby pension on a mountain top. The place is directed by a Polish Jew - and was established as a training ground for shedding "Jewish" traits and learning to adopt a "healthy, gentile" life style.

The story is filled with a sense of impending catastrophe and decay, and is rendered in the haunting, understated style which has distinguished the works of Aharon Appelfeld.

## THE CONCEPT "GENERATION" IN CONTEMPORARY HEBREW LETTERS

by Reuven Kritz  
Tel Aviv University

'Generation' has become an important concept in Hebrew criticism. In Israel, literary mediators (book reviewers, teachers, librarians) are strongly influenced by authoritative evaluators who decide which book will be awarded a prize, translated, reviewed, cited on TV, taught at High Schools and consequently sell. Thus, when these literary authorities decide that a certain writer represents his 'generation' he actually seems to represent it.

'Generation' proved a convenient frame of reference for switching from micro - to macro-criticism, but it has not been dealt with in meta-criticism, i.e., its validity has not been examined. It was a convenient mixture of socio-ideological, psychological and linguistic elements. Its roots can be traced back to Georg Brandes, Heinrich Heine, even to the Talmud.

In 1945 several writers published a periodical of their own and critics named them *Dor Ba'aretz* (In 1958 a definitive anthology appeared by that name). Hebrew criticism has marked eight "generations" in Hebrew literature in the 20th century, named after progenitors of certain literary trends and movements, or creative periods, beginning with the Bialik era to the present day. Periods often overlap. In the 1970's five "generations" were writing and publishing simultaneously.

The concept of "generation" is often misleading. By a selective process critics tend to promote evidence to characterize a given era while dismissing as not "characteristic" evidence which does not meet their criteria.

## THE HOLOCAUST IN CONTEMPORARY HEBREW PROSE

by Nehama Rezler-Berson  
Princeton University

Three groups of writers deal with the subject of the holocaust: 1 - Native Israeli writers who have not experienced the holocaust but feel a need to respond to it. 2 - Writers who, as children, were taken out of Europe and brought to Israel on the eve of the holocaust. 3 - Those writers who have lived through the holocaust and survived it. Although the three groups differ in their literary approach to the subject, they all share the feeling that the holocaust continues to shadow their literary lives.

Some of the themes common to all three groups are: A sense of alienation; the need for revenge; a probing into the psychology of the survivors. Works by Y. Amichai, S. Golan, Y. & A. Sened, N. Frenkel, H. Bar-Tov, D. Ben-Amotz and I. Yaoz-Kest are examined.

“TAUNT THE DEVIL” — Two letters from Shai Hurwitz and Reuven Brainin

Stanley Nash  
Hebrew Union College

This article introduces and analyzes archival documentation of the shared ambitions of Hurwitz and Brainin in challenging the conventional wisdom of the day. The introduction traces Hurwitz’s “split-personality,” his offer of a prize for a book to save Judaism side-by-side with expressions of grave doubts as to the possible efficacy of *any* solution.

The special interest of the letters lies in their emotional rhetoric and sense of “Promethean” destiny. Hurwitz shared with Brainin the conviction that the extraordinary, the unconventional, “Hebraic” thinker was doomed to encounter the castigation of petty and cowardly men. Moreover, their deep-rooted and authentic commitment to Judaism gave them the right to criticize it, however harshly.

In writing to Brainin, Hurwitz expresses his Beshtian desire to “taunt the devil” — to take a chance, as it were, and bring Judaism to the severest of crises in one last desperate effort to save it from atrophy.