

# BITZARON

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## SELECTED ABSTRACTS

### TIME AND THE NOVEL

#### Moshe Shamir

At a lecture sponsored by *Bitzaron*, under the auspices of the Department of Hebrew Culture & Education at New York University, the distinguished Hebrew novelist, Moshe Shamir, focused on the notion of *time*, both as a philosophical issue and as a central theme in his own creative writing. His life and his work, he disclosed, are informed with a sense that from the vantage ground of the all seeing eye, time, in the ordinary sense of past and future, does not exist. Time is a vast unity in which mortals float, grasp, and dangle. Because of our inherent limitations, we divide time, measure it, and impose boundaries upon it.

Memory is the source from which the literary work draws its experience of the past. It is like a rear view mirror through which the traveler, while moving forward, sees objects fleeting by. Three types of memory feed artistic creativity: the national collective memory or myth, the familial collective memory, and personal memory. The first is rooted in the distant past. His novel *King of Flesh and Blood* was born of such memory. The second is based on the more recent past, experienced by living witnesses. His new novel, *The Bridal Veil*, is situated in this time frame. The third is the memory of present events. His novel, *The Poor Man's Lamb*, although set in biblical times, is actually a subjective projection of raw pain in the immediate experience for which there is no justification or explanation.

Living the life of a people lovingly and knowingly means that the past is never distant or alien. It is never dead. The need to look back is, in effect, the need to look forward. This is the underlying quest in his work. His books have been written so that readers would gain the strength to know where they are going because they know whence they have come.

### THREE HUNDRED YEARS OF HEBREW POETRY IN AMERICA

#### Eisig Silberschlag

#### The University of Texas at Austin

Hebrew poetry in America begins with epitaphs on influential personages collected with exemplary piety by Dr. David de Sola Pool and published in 1952 in New York City. In the course of time landscapes of the New World and indigenous themes begin to dominate poetic creativity. Since Hebrew poetry in America is largely a product of immigrants from eastern Europe, it is dominated by insecurity and bewilderment in a new environment, needs of adaptation to a new homeland, yearning for the past in the old country. This two-leveled life creates tension. With no secure base on earth the Hebrew poet floats on romantic air and creates a soul-bound literature in contradistinction to the literature in Israel which, for the past one hundred years, is largely soil-bound.

No Hebrew poet in America neglected the ancestral Land of Israel: it was for him a journey to the future illuminated by the past. But he did not avoid confrontation

with his American milieu. The author of the first book of Hebrew poetry, published in 1877 in New York City, Jacob Zevi Sobel-James H. Soble in the Americanized form-deplores religious inanity, ignorance of Judaism and vulganzation of Jewish life in this country. He is also the first poet to depict in pedestrian verse the Jewish peddler "with a pack on this back." This negativism echoed re-echoed in Hebrew poetry for one hundred years. M. M. Dolitsky, Gershon Rosenzweig and, especially, Ephraim E. Lisitzky deprecated the emptiness and futility of Jewish life in the United States.

But There were advocates of optimism. Moses Aaron Schreiber graced the centennial of American independence in 1876 with a long poem "Gift of Judah" which was the first Hebrew poem on the theme of Americanism. The gold rush inspired the narrative poem "Gold" by Israel Efros. Americanism drew on a triple theme which was new to Hebrew literature: the American Indian, the American Black, the native American of Jewish and Christain faith. As persecuted minorities the Indians and the blacks were spiritually close to Hebrew poets. The most prominent among theme - Benjamin Nahum Silkiner and Ephraim E. Lisitzky, Israel Efros and Hillel Bavli-achieved depth and maturity in ethnic poems. They mined native themes and they also made important contributions to Hebrew literature with their translating activities.

The period between the two world wars may be regarded as Golden Age of Hebrew poetry in America. After the Second World War it declined with abrupt suddenness. Some poets moved to Israel, some died and left no significant successors.

## THE CRISIS OF JEWISH IDENTITY IN ISRAEL

**Shlomo Sharan**

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Jewish identity in Israel can be conceived as consisting of three main components: Our historical consciousness of ourselves as heirs to the history of the Jewish People, our ties to Jewry in the Galut and our continued striving to reconstruct the Jewish People and the Land of Israel. All three components of Jewish identity are currently under severe attack from many sources, not only in the Golah in the form of assimilation, but in Israel as well. The adoption of a materialist, socialist ideology by the East-European Zionists at the begining of this century paved the way for the development in Israel of an anti-traditional, anti-historical, 'here-and-now' orientation to Jewish life and to the question of Jewry's ownership of the Land of Israel. It layed the foundation for the later emergence of the claim that Israelis have no real allegience to Jewry in the Golah and that the latter have no real share in Israel. These attitudes conspire to undermine Israel Jewry's historical continuity. Israel's educational system must be cited for its singular failure to assign the cultivation of a Jewish historical consciousness and identity among the youth a place of central importance among the nation's educational goals, A radical revision of Jewish education in Israel is imperative for "Jewish" survival in Israel.