

BITZARON

QUARTERLY REVIEW OF HEBREW LETTERS

SUMMER - FALL 1985

SELECTED ABSTRACTS

Sh. Shalom's Creative Imagination

André Neher

Hebrew U., Jerusalem

In his poetry Sh. Shalom responded to the cataclysmic events of his times. The chain of tragic events, including the slaughter of European Jewry, the desperate and unequal confrontation with the British mandatory government in Palestine, the subsequent wars and the high price in precious blood that was paid - all these fateful and momentous events found their definitive and stirring expression in Shalom's poetry.

Other motifs of Shalom's poetry are the quest for the "hidden light", man's existential isolation, and the forging of the immortal out of the temporal. Shalom's poetry is also distinguished by the mystic element which pervades it. This mysticism is part of his Hasidic heritage. Shalom developed innovative techniques and forms to express the restlessness of his soul and his endless yearning for the union of his personal "I" with his metaphysical "I". The fourteen volumes of his collected works constitute a major contribution to Hebrew literature by one of its great masters.

Encounter with Israeli Novelist David Shahar

Nelly Segal

Late in the summer of 1983, at his home in Jerusalem, David Shahar spoke of his fictional world and its connection to the real; of his characters, many of whom populated the streets of his native Jerusalem before weaving their way into the plots of his stories and novels through the alleys of his creative imagination, and of literature in general. "Literature is an art," says the author, "it is not journalism or propaganda. The moment it is in service of a cause, however good and justified that cause might be, it ceases to be art. It has become a vessel for ideas, and once those have been realized, the vessel is obsolete. I am not saying that a writer does not have ideas or opinions. A writer like any other responsible citizen has ideas. But the moment he uses his work to prove a particular thesis, he has failed as a writer. Literature is not meant to substantiate thesis statements. Ph. D. dissertations and leading articles serve this purpose well. Literature is an art; it is the mirror of the human soul."

Literature, according to Shahar, has often been described as “good” and “not so good.” The very word “good” has moral implications. “The apple is either good or bad. I think that literature should be measured by its credibility: how true it is to life, to thoughts, to the emotions. The human truth does not exist in a vacuum. It can be found in a particular detail, at a certain place; it has a special flavor, and a certain smell. And more — it is the wonder in the mundane, the concealed in the exposed.”

Was Ibn Zabara a Misogynist?

Yehudit Dishon

Bar-Ilan University

The theme of women is among the central themes in Yosef Ibn Zabara's *Book of Delights*. In all but three of the stories dealing with this theme, the woman is portrayed as a negative, treacherous and undesirable character. The question arises, was the author, first to deal with this subject in the Hebrew *magamat*, a woman-hater, or did he want to entertain his readers in the fashion of his Indian predecessors, the originators of the genre?

A close examination of the text reveals that in the conflict between the two friends and principal characters in the stories, Zabara and Einan, the first uses women to finally defeat the second, who feared and disliked them. It appears Zabara actually praises the woman, and Einan is the one who slanders her. As a result, the dual treatment of the theme emphasizes the negative characterization of Einan - an anti-feminist, narrow-minded and unreliable individual, and it highlights Zabara's positive qualities — openness and belief in the equality of the sexes. Having gained victory over Einan through a woman (under Zabara's influence Einan marries the woman he doesn't love and who isn't right for him), Zabara offers the moral of the story: A man should get married, but he must make the right choice.

Darkness and Wonder in the Poetry of David Fogel

Aharon Komem

Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

David Fogel's (1891-1944) poetry has been perceived as pessimistic, devoid of national-social values, and dominated by the theme of death. His style, marked by a distilled and restrained imagery, has set him apart from both his contemporaries and predecessors. Fogel so bewildered the readers of his time, that he practically

turned them off. This reaction was reversed among later generations, who were attracted to the poems for their craftsmanship, profound sense of finality, nostalgic pessimism, and perhaps, their being antithetical in almost every way to the poetry of the national renaissance, at the tail end of which Fogel began writing. "The end of days are tucked into night/tucked into death": "We have just arrived/and our time's over".

However, had Fogel's poetry been given solely and totally to Thanatos, it might not have survived. It is balanced by its positive connectedness to nature, from which it also draws a vitality and lasting freshness.

A study of A.B. Yehoshoua's "The Death of the Old Man"

Yair Mazor

The University of Wisconsin

This is an interpretive close reading of A.B. Yehoshoua's early story "The Death of the Old Man". The story is examined on three levels: theme, composition and rhetoric. Earlier critics have emphasized the allegoric or symbolic nature of the dominant theme which deals with death, petrifying social norms and degradation. This article postulates that beyond the story's symbolic and allegoric features is a thematic "deep structure", which may be defined as a substantial, fundamental barrenness which threatens to trespass and stifle life. The story's major theme contrasts the age-long, universal combat between degrading barrenness and the source of creative life. This theme is skillfully embodied in the story's compositional level. The plot is molded as a tense, dialectic duel between two possibilities: will the old man be buried alive by Ms. Ashtor or will he defeat her and remain living?

This study shows that the narrator's character embraces the most significant characteristics of the old man, as well as Ms. Ashtor's namely, the petrifying barrenness and the growing powers of life. The narrator's character acts as an intersection between the story's protagonist and antagonist as well as to expose the story's ideological kernel: that within life there exist simultaneous, reciprocating forces of deteriorating barrenness and vital creativity.

Yahel: A beacon in the Desert

Saadyah Maximon

Kibbutz Yahel is in the Israeli wedge between Sinai and Jordan; forty miles south is its cutting edge — Eilat. All the rest of Israel is north. Nobody believes that useful life can exist in the desert, yet eight kibbutzim-oases thrive along that stretch where previously the scorpions spoke only to the vipers. Yahel is a strand in the relationship between God (who provides the sun and the underground water) and the Jewish people (who provide the will and the knowhow) on its *home ground*. Yahel's original settlers of eight years ago had no children; this year has seen the first kindergarten graduation. . . children are one-third of the population.

As for security, Yahel's fields abut no-man's-land where Jordan's troopers come snooping, so the price of liberty is vigilance, provided by shelters, dugouts, lighted fencing, walkie-talkie guards, army road patrols, and the kibbutz's own security officer, who became a victim of cancer. Yahel demonstrated it was a family, lent support to wife and daughter through three hospitalizations, gave generous attention when the final gasp freed him. The kibbutz never left the widow and the orphan out of the collective family.

Once 'Kibbutz' meant agriculture. Now appears industry, which offers a variety of manufactures and services. Yahel faces its 'industrial revolution', aware that every rosebush has its thorns, every beehive its sting.

Erratum: In Prof. E. Silberschlag's abstract on Three Hundred Years of Hebrew Poetry in America, in the last Spring issue of the Bitzaron, the following paragraph has been inadvertently omitted:

"Since Hebrew literature in America was a bookish literature it cultivated elegant diction. It lacked slang and colloquialism; it indulged in metaphysical speculation. Gabriel Preil, nurtured on Frost and sandburg, was and remained an exception: deliberately "unpoetic." Like Frost he transmuted event or fact into poetic artifact!"

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