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SELECTED ABSTRACTS

THE HEBREW WRITER AND THE STATE OF THE HEBREW LANGUAGE

Moshe Shamir

As far back as 1904, the well-known novelist and critic, Shlomo Zemach, deplored in his recently published autobiography the moral and social state of the small Jewish community in Palestine, foreshadowing conditions in our present time. He describes three problems plaguing the Yishuv: 1. Ill-conceived Ugandanism 2. Non-productivity i.e. the widespread use of non-Jewish workers for physical labor and 3. Preference of French language and indigenous Levantine customs to Hebrew language and literature.

The existence of nearly identical symptoms in Israeli society eighty years later, is indicative of the fact that the social and cultural ills expressed by Zemach in 1904 have yet to be eradicated. Evidence of cultural deterioration and vulgarization of the Hebrew language is widespread even in schools, in the media and in contemporary literature. The Israeli theater contributes its share to the distortion of our national image. Instead of sustaining our value-system, the Hebrew writer has turned against the ideals which have sustained efforts to create and renew national and cultural renaissance.

Hope for the future lies in the rejuvenation of the national value-system, revival of our resources and aspirations and the revitalization of the Hebraic cultural tradition.

THE ROLE OF TIME IN DAN PAGIS' POETRY

Yair Mazor

University of Wisconsin

Time has a prominent role and impact in Dan Pagis' poetic works since a major portion of his poetic body is governed by alternating concepts to time. These time concepts act as a cluster of semantic vehicles which carry the essence of the poetry's cryptic meaning.

To decipher the time concept in Pagis' poetry is to decode the very heart of his aesthetic perceptions and principles. As Pagis's poem "Killelat halevanah" ("Moon's Curse") demonstrates the role and effect of time in his aesthetics, the current paper probes that poem's theme and composition through an interpretive close reading.

The major findings of the poem's interpretation exhibit how time can act as an aperture to Pagis' *ars poetica*: two time concepts are amalgamated in the poem, past

and present, and together they mold a flexible semantic equation that provides the poem its sense and meaning. Thus, an encounter with the time motif in Pagis' poetry is an encounter with the very essence of the poets' craft.

A FUTURE WITHOUT PERHAPS — REVIEW OF GABRIEL PREIL'S
SUNSET POSSIBILITIES AND OTHER POEMS

Yael Feldman
Columbia University

"Romantic" yet "insanely clear," fanciful and nakedly down to earth, dreamy as well as diagnostic — these are just some of the paradoxes seething beneath the "cool and cautious" surfaces of Gabriel Preil's poems collected in this volume. Yet the greatest paradox of all is perhaps the fact that these lucid poems about New York and Maine, Fordham and Murray Hill, Williamsburg and Lincoln Center are in fact translations; These typically "American" poems were originally written in *Hebrew* — in New York. In some sense, then, this first bilingual edition of Preil's poems signifies the closing of a circle — the returning "home," namely, to the English language and to the American reader, of verse that not only was conceived on "American soil," as the poet says in one of his poems, but has been credited with modernizing the tradition of Hebrew verse by its own version of Anglo-American Imagism.

Although some aspects of Preil's thematics are missing in this book (particularly those expressing his supra-personal loyalties and identifications), this selection brings the best of Preil as the disillusioned romantic, the mature imagist, the lyrical poet whose awareness extends from metapoetic self-knowledge to ironic self-deprecation. It is the astuteness of such observations, the accuracy of the *mot juste*, that lends Preil's later introspection its haunting presence. And it is this dimension of his lyrical voice that is superbly captured in *Sunset Possibilities*. This selection clearly illustrates, even in translation, that unique blending of harsh scrutiny and wry humor which turns Preil's indulgence and self-preoccupation into perceptive imagery whose universal language crosses the boundaries of continents and cultures with great ease.

CONTRASTING TRENDS OF TWO HEBREW LITERARY CENTERS:
PALESTINE AND AMERICA

Nurit Govrin
Tel-Aviv University

Two Hebrew literary centers began to emerge at the start of the 20th century — Palestine and America. Both centers resulted from the mass immigration of Jews from Eastern Europe. The source was the same but the direction and goals were different. In Palestine the Jewish people returned to their own land; the revival of

their ancient language was part of their national inspiration. In the U.S.A., on the other hand, the Jews soon adapted to the language and culture of their new Home.

For a time, until the end of World War I, the American center seemed to flourish, and it even seemed to surpass the Palestine center. It soon became clear however that the Hebraic literary and cultural revival in America was short-lived. The fledgling Hebrew center could not sustain itself in the face of the dominant Anglo-American ethos. Many of the most prominent Hebrew men of letters saw the writing on the wall and emigrated to Israel.

The differences between the two centers become evident when one compares them in regard to language and literary thematics. While in Israel Hebrew developed as a living tongue, Hebrew in America adhered to classic forms, well suited to lofty poetic expression. Indeed, Hebrew poets in America excelled in introducing Indian lore and Negro spirituals into Hebrew literature. They also wrote nostalgically on life in the European shtetl. In contrast, the Hebrew writer in Israel dealt with the new reality of rebuilding the ancient land and gave full expression to life in a new vibrant society in the making.

S.Y. AGNON AND THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

Ruth Adler
Baruch College

S.Y. Agnon imbued his works with language and imagery from ancient Jewish literature. Close examination of the myriad women portrayed in his works leads to the conclusion that he utilized prototypes and metaphors from the Book of Proverbs in delineating his female characters. The positive female characters are modeled on Proverbs' ideal Woman of Valor; they are charitable, hardworking and faithful. Seemingly negative characters on the other hand, parallel verses about the Strange Woman of Proverbs, sometimes even to the point of caricature. These women are described as demonic, erotic, aggressive and unfaithful. Surprisingly, it is the women settlers of the Second Aliyah who are described in this fashion. This indicates that Agnon, as many of his contemporaries, disparaged the liberated women pioneers of the Second Aliyah, reluctant to accept their new roles. Yet, in his posthumously published novel, *Shira*, Agnon appears to have come to terms with the new Israeli woman. *Shira* combines both the kindness and selflessness of the Woman of Valor with the eroticism and aggressiveness of the Strange Woman.

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