

THE RE-EMERGENCE OF THE JEW IN THE ISRAELI FICTION OF THE 1970's

By

GILA RAMRAS-RAUCH

Bar-Ilan University and Brandeis University

IN A FAMOUS story by Hazzaz, "The Sermon," the protagonist, Judke, raises some problems of major significance. He says: "Zionism and Judaism are not the same thing, they are two things that differ from one another, maybe two things that contradict one another! Zionism starts from the place of the destruction of Judaism . . . Zionism without continuity is uprooting and destruction. . . . I believe that Eretz-Israel is not Judaism any more." Hazzaz thereby points to a major crisis in the spiritual climate of Eretz-Yisrael and the State of Israel. Yet the clear-cut dichotomy between Judaism and Zionism, in the certainty with which he expresses it, is neither that simple nor that exact. I venture to say that the existence of the State of Israel has called for a reassessment of the norms and values upon which the State was founded and from which it draws its moral strength and even its *raison d'être*.

Baruch Kurzweil asked a question in the title of one of his books of criticism: *Our Contemporary Literature: Continuity or Revolution?* Obviously continuity and revolution are part of Hebrew letters—in regard to its schools, themes, and points of view. I can say without hesitation that the themes prevalent in early Hebrew literature appear and persist in Israeli literature. (For example, the basic theme of *hešbon hannepeš* typifies Hebrew literature from the start and is still prominent in the Israeli fiction of the 1960's and 70's. The same holds true for other basic themes, such as those of the guardian, the uprooted person, and the general archetype of the quest.)

Thus there is a definite continuity. As for the revolution in Israeli litera-

ture, we can point to certain differences between the historical periods. For one thing, the contemporary *Weltanschauung* is decidedly secular and at times even *ahistorical*. The contemporary Israeli writer, unlike his predecessors in the *Haskala* ("Enlightenment") and *Təhiyya* ("Renaissance") periods, does not wrestle with a complete and existing heritage.

And yet any talk of discontinuity leads us immediately to emphasize the continuity. Despite changes in perspective, attitude and intensity, despite the realistic turn of the first generation of Israeli fiction, Hebrew fiction today and for the last two decades has dealt with problems of belonging and identification, and change in values. The Israeli writer, like his predecessors, is still reflecting moral and spiritual crises—despite the differences between contemporary Israeli writing and that of former times. One prominent facet of contemporary Israeli fiction is that it is still concerned, in a highly complex way, with the problem of life and literature. The dialogue with these problems may be negative, the attitude satirical, ironic or otherwise. Yet the fact remains that contemporary Israeli literature is grappling with the basic problems of meaning, content, and goals.

Thus despite the unmistakable gap in *Weltanschauungen* between that of Israeli literature and its forebears, an equally unmistakable similarity exists—at least in the attitude towards the role of literature in society. One of my purposes in this paper is to examine the prominent reappearance of the Jew in contemporary Israeli literature. Where the writers of the *Təhiyya* period wrestled with their spiritual models of the *past*, contemporary Israeli novelists are concerned with the *future*, as the ominous force motivating the writer of the present. For the past few decades, Israeli writers have concerned themselves with the "face of the nation," with the goals or *tə'uda* of the State of Israel, with the question of what makes up the Israeli and by what considerations the future should be shaped.

In other words, the Israeli writer who belongs to what we will call the "normative" trend is concerned with finding a meaningful model of existence. As in the past, Israeli writers are grappling with problems arising from changes in values. A difference, however, is that the writers of the *Təhiyya* grappled with the collective Jewish consciousness of which they were a part: they were in the process of breaking away from an already *defined* world—of Jewish tradition, personal responsibility and personal role. By contrast, the contemporary Israeli writer is grappling with the problem of *defining* his value-system. The *Palmach* generation of the 1940's and 50's had a certain credo; but since that period one can no longer associate the present members of that generation with a uniform political affiliation, or with a prevailing conviction or belief.

The attempt to wrestle with problems of belonging, identification and self-image (on one hand) and the lack of a clear world-view or set of convictions (on the other) have been the contributing factors in two phenomena:

1. The writers dealing in the material pertaining to problems of value differ from one another in tone, approach and means. Yet they share a common concern with the meaningful continuity of existence.

2. In the few representative works which I shall discuss, we shall see that the *denouement* is quite difficult, often approaching a *deus-ex-machina*. This is, I feel, often the result of the writer's uncertainty with respect to a clear moral stance.

What is most illuminating is the reappearance of the Jew in the literature of the 1970's, along with themes such as redemption, survival, and fate—all this among writers whom we can consider as being in the non-normative category, highly individualistic writers associated with more existential themes. The aim of this paper, then, is to consider the reappearance, or perhaps the emergence, of the Jew as a prominent protagonist in the Israeli fiction of the 1970's.

Hebrew fiction, not unlike other literatures, can be broadly divided into two categories or tendencies: the realistic and the symbolic—with all the possible combinations and variations of the two. In many cases, both are to be found in one work of fiction—but here the initial orientation of the author (or the protagonist, as the case may be) is of vital importance, for the following reasons: In Hebrew literature one can see the basic orientation of the realistic trend as *place-oriented*, while the symbolic trend is *time-oriented*. Realistic fiction in Hebrew literature (which includes Israeli literature) addresses itself to man's relation to a place, in the here-and-now. By contrast, the orientation of the *Təḥiyya* period (roughly, between 1880 and World War I) was temporal, and the literature was mainly symbolic. That is, the writer of that period experienced and expressed the crisis in the transition from a collective religious mentality to a lonely, alienated existence without God. The uprootedness of Feierberg, Gnessin, Brenner, and others is treated symbolically—both in regard to the experience and its expression. These two trends exist as well in Israeli literature.

For the purpose of creating a meaningful model, one can talk of the problem of *consciousness versus situation*. Their interrelation will serve to explain certain changes in Hebrew (and Israeli) fiction. The starting-point of the Hebrew writer (and the Hebrew protagonist) in the *Təḥiyya* period was his Jewish consciousness. (This is true as well for the *Haskala* period.) His relation to that consciousness was problematic, amounting to a crisis—and the situation in which he found himself was at the root of the crisis he underwent. Jewish consciousness at the end of the Nineteenth and the begin-

ning of the Twentieth Century was a collective consciousness connected to the faith and heritage of a people. In the course of time, the term "consciousness" went through a process of secularization, and came to mean consciousness in the personal, ahistorical sense.

Before applying the model of *consciousness versus situation* to Israeli literature, let us divide that literature into periods or phases. There is the generation of the 1940's and 50's (called the *Palmach* generation, or better, *Dor ba'arec*); there is the generation of the 1950's and 60's (called *Gal hadaš*, "New Wave"); and there is the as yet unnamed generation of the 1960's and 70's. Now to return to our previous distinction: the Hebrew writer of the *Təḥiyya* had no doubts about the Jewish consciousness which was his starting-point; it was part of his very being. The tragic predicament was created only by the situation in which he found himself, insofar as the situation conflicted with that consciousness. By contrast, Israeli writers of the three generations take the concrete situation as their starting-point, and—as I shall try to show—it is that situation that will create or raise consciousness.

I. Israeli literature of the 1940's and 50's is essentially realistic, concerned with the situations of the here-and-now, the War of Independence, the kibbutz, the problem of the collective "we" and the associated way of life—all these constitute the concern of these writers and their protagonists. One writer most prominent as an originator is S. Yizhar. His short stories stand out, to this day, as unique artistic and linguistic achievements. It is in the writing of Yizhar that we find the situation most distinctly creating awareness. I refer to stories such as "The Captive" and "Hirbet Hiz'eh." Again, the consciousness, here, is personal and ahistorical—and it has no connection to what we know as consciousness in Hebrew literature. Just as Yizhar's landscape is personal and ahistorical, so his protagonists are devoid of historical awareness. Consciousness, for Yizhar, is existential, having to do with problems of personal responsibility for action or inaction, and problems of individual will as against general benefit. Despite the non-Jewish character of Yizhar's fiction, I would go so far as to say that the sort of consciousness he describes was the beginning of something that would continue (with changes) throughout the short history of Israeli literature.

II. The second phase of Israeli literature is marked by a more individualistic tone, mood, and point of view. It is more symbolic, and strives to arrive at an artistic expression devoid of the collective element. It is in writers of the New Wave—such as Oz, Yehoshua, Tammuz, Amichai—who excel in the individualistic approach, that we see the awakening of the new sort of consciousness. This is exemplified in A.B. Yehoshua's story, "Opposite the

Forests." His differs from the sort of consciousness in Yizhar because it does have an historical orientation.

This might seem to present a negative dialogue with the Jewish heritage, but that would be a misreading of Yehoshua's story. There are, nevertheless, questions such as Who am I? Why am I here? What is the meaning of my being in this particular land? Who owns this land?—questions such as these and all the problems pertaining to them have an historical dimension and significance.

Thus, questions as to the meaning of the past and the fate of the future appear in the fiction of the 1960's. Questions as to the nature of belonging and identification are, in the 60's, secular questions asked by the secular individuals who are the writers and their protagonists. It is therefore somewhat paradoxical to realize that the secular and individualistic writer of the 60's will be closest, in the handling of problems of meaning and values, to the writers of the turn of the century.

In Yehoshua, consciousness is in reaction to a situation: the wars, the shape of the State, the discrepancy between the declared norms associated with the establishment of the State and the present reality. To these writers, new wars mean new memories, and a memory is the start of an historical perspective. Yehoshua ends his story by saying, "If someone thinks that he does not remember, he does remember." Belonging to the land involves a twofold, even self-contradictory, relation of building and destruction. Memory is history, and history spells a right. Thus questions of self-definition, questions which were pertinent in the Diaspora, reappear—in an awareness stemming from the situation of the war and the struggle for survival. That awareness connected Israel's fate with Jewish fate, so that the Jew reappears. The danger of annihilation is connected to the struggle for the Jewish heritage—whereas the *Palmach* generation of the 1940's and 50's had concerned itself mainly with the Jew only in connection with the Holocaust. For the New Wave writers, however, the situation leads to a spiritual reassessment—which is why we can also classify Oz, Yehoshua, Tammuz and Amichai under the heading of *hešbon hannepeš*—spiritual self-assessment.

III. I have maintained that the reappearance of the Jew in the Israeli fiction of the 1960's and 70's is tied to the growing awareness of problems concerning self-definition and identity. The latest period is typified by a spiritual expansion and an openness to new issues. With this there is broadening of boundaries, so that the landscape in writing is no longer restricted to the land of Israel, any more than the protagonists are all Israeli. This is due in part to

the exposure of Israeli writers to the outside world (whereas the writers of the 1940's and 50's did not leave Israel). There was thus added a new variety to experience, and a new image of the Jew (the non-Israeli Jew) grew out of the writer's exposure to life abroad. Yet these objective factors provide neither the necessary nor the sufficient conditions for explaining the most recent literature.

Applying our model wherein situation leads to consciousness, we must ask about the situation. In the 1960's the main problem concerned the values and their strength in withstanding the test of reality. In the 70's the main problem came to be that of survival—in the physical and the spiritual senses of the term. The spiritual problem had been the concern as well of writers in the past. Yet in the present the topics of survival, the cyclical Jewish fate, the theme of redemption—these do not involve a return to belief, as in former times. What this means is that Israeli writers in the 1970's have established a rapport with topics they had hardly ever handled before, and with the image of the Jew who appears *as* a Jew. To the earlier Israeli writer the model of the Jew was often a stereotype, archetype, or prototype—e.g., the old person with a memory of the past, as in A. Megged's "Yad vašem." Although the Jew was present in the Israeli literature dealing with the Holocaust, he was not regarded as a major protagonist. In the 1970's, however, the Jew is emerging as a protagonist in a literature concerned with Jewish future destiny. The contemporary Israeli writer still juxtaposes Jew and Israeli: the question is not so much Who is a Jew? but Who is an Israeli?

I shall now go on to discuss four novels in this light, namely Bartov's *The Dissembler*, Oz's *Touch the Water*, *Touch the Wind*, Tammuz's *Bottle Parables*, and Aharon Megged's *The Bat*.

(a) Hanoah Bartov's *The Dissembler* (1975) presents a protagonist with a triple life: in Israel he is an Israeli, but when he goes to Europe he is a German in Germany and a Frenchman in France. He is a Jew born in Germany, a child during the Holocaust, later a youth in the French resistance. He came to Israel as a young man and took part in the 1948 war. In every one of the three localities he has established roots and passes as a native. He maintains his triple role with ease: his work as a publisher gives him unquestioned mobility; he has a family in Israel, offices and mistresses in Frankfurt and Paris. The arrangement works until he is involved in a road accident in England. He suffers a loss of consciousness, remains nearly comatose and has lost all memory. The question facing the attending psychiatrist is what identity to give him: Heinz Bergersohn, Henri Montherlant or Avishalom Hevroni. As

the psychiatrist says, "The question is not who he was but who he shall be." This can be taken as the question underlying the literature of the 1970's: Who will be the future Israeli? (By contrast, we can recall the words of one of Agnon's protagonists in *Shira*, speaking for Agnon himself: "I have not come to answer the question of Whither? Sometimes I answer the question Where did you come from?") What is the explanation for the escape from identity? And why must a search be instituted? Paralysis, unconsciousness, amnesia—all are taken as symptoms of the present spiritual climate.

In Bartov's *The Dissembler* the theme of survival is the key to the main character. Yet although this theme is given expression on the plane of the individual's spiritual survival (personal memory, preservation of past identity), the theme of survival can be seen in its wider dimension as a facet of Jewish existence—here reflected as a personal problem of the protagonist. The problem, then, is whether we can regard *his* (and the Jew's) assimilation as a way of overcoming his existential condition as alien and stranger.

The desire to belong, to overcome the situation of uprootedness and arrive at the status of the true native—all this is achieved, it seems, at the price of forgetting one's past, one's heritage, and submerging oneself in a new reality. In Bartov's novel the problem of assimilation has a tragic bearing. Even in Israel—established as it was on claims based on the past—the protagonist remains unchanged. Israel does not effect a change in him, inasmuch as he continues to follow a pattern established in the time of the holocaust.

In the modern era, Jewish existence has reflected a dialectical tension between Identity and Belonging: the Jewish majority has weakened its identification with Jewish faith and religious practice; and yet there continues to be the sense of belonging to the nation, the heritage, and the land—and even a heightening of that sense of belonging in more recent times. Thus, although belonging does not entail adherence to religious faith and practice, it nevertheless means an allegiance to memory, to history, and to a definite sense of continuity. In the Bartov novel, the sense of belonging is based on a personal history, rather than on the history of a nation or a people—and yet the personal history is marred as well.

Bartov presents the problem in terms of a categorical either/or. The protagonist will be either Israeli or something else—and if he is to be Israeli then that will be at the price of erasing his other identities completely, negating his other lives. In this way, the contemporary Israeli is represented as an individual without a past. Europe, World War II, the Holocaust—all this gave continuity and meaning, even a *raison d'être*, to the *Palmach* generation. This is reflected in Bartov's early book, *The Brigade*, as in Haim Gouri's *The Chocolate Deal*. In the 1970's, however, Bartov's approach is simplistic

(comparable to the way the *Haskala* era presented its problems in terms of light vs. dark, etc.). Bartov's finality and simplicity reflect, in my view, an unclear system of values. For the *Palmach* generation, too, the choices were simplistic: either Israel or the Diaspora, either the kibbutz or the decadent city, etc. I think we have by now gone beyond the reduction of problems to such stark contrasts and alternatives.

The *Palmach* generation, of which Bartov has been a prominent figure, is in search of its roots, asking: What was it that produced a certain spirit at a certain time? What were the psychological and sociological elements that led to the one-time euphoria? All this is reflected in H. Gouri's *The Crazy Book* and in A. Megged's *The Living on the Dead* (meaning the one living on the dead, a title which can be taken as his main motif). In their return to the past and its roots, the *Palmach* generation has a rather blurred projection of the future. After Bartov's protagonist regains his identity as a *bona fide* Israeli, Bartov kills him off in an inexplicable road accident during the Yom Kippur War.

(b) Amos Oz's *Touch the Water, Touch the Wind* (1973) gives us a protagonist who is a Jew, a teacher and mathematician, and who managed to survive the Holocaust through the exercise of almost superhuman powers. A man of purified spirituality, he expresses—through the author's use of the fantastic—what was perhaps the secret of Jewish survival in the Diaspora: spirituality, tenacity, the quest after the higher elements, a belief in miracle and that the impossible is possible. The protagonist proves to his satisfaction the power of miracle by combining pure mathematics with Hassidic wonders. He then decides to come to Israel, but his *'aliyya* is in essence a *yərīda*. He settles in Tiberias, geographically the lowest town in Israel and the source of many of its spiritual heights, and he subsists as a watchmaker. He can no longer perform miracles, since conditions are not conducive, there being a climate of "low legalism" (*huqqiyyut nəmuḳa*). Israel is immersed in its practical and concrete concerns, and the spiritual dimension hardly exists. A young flower-child who walks into his life has that dimension, so does an old Jewish-Russian poet, and so does a strangely naive son of a kibbutz. They, at least, are at the edge of miracle in their wholesome belief and innocent zeal. The protagonist symbolically rises to a higher sphere: he moves to a kibbutz in the upper Galilee where he is a watchmaker and shepherd. In his research he succeeds in resolving the mysterious paradox of the mathematical infinite, and gains international fame.

The author's aim, here, is clearly ironic. The protagonist's research touches "somewhere in the twilight zone between pure mathematics and

theoretical physics" (p. 41). Yet the here-and-now, the roughness of everyday experience, goes against the grain for the Jew who can command the elements! Roots and rootedness mean limitation—an end to the process towards the future and towards non-material goals. In Tiberias, overlooking the Sea of Galilee, the hero asks, "Was it not conceivable that it would happen here, a hint, a sound, a sign?" (p. 41). The land of Israel had been the source of meaning and miracle, its beams still radiating into the Western world.

The protagonist, his wife, a professor and other characters, move in an inexorable cycle of ascent and descent (according to the Hassidic theme whereby one has first to sink in order to rise). They must touch reality, and be humiliated and defiled, before they can ascend. The German occupation, then the Russian, had threatened to swallow them up. Now, in Tiberias, it is the earth that opens and swallows them up—and whether this be fantasy or allegory is left unclear.

Two problems around which the characters in this novel revolve are, first, the problem of the difference between actuality and the ideal, and second, the problem of continuity—the latter being a problem with which all the novels under discussion are centrally concerned. For our protagonist, the problem of the difference between actuality and the ideal should have been overcome in the kibbutz. Yet in the kibbutz there was a regular rhythm of life, without ascent or descent—life without contrast and ultimately without tragic significance. In such a setting no man can play the tragic hero. Yet our protagonist is a wizard (traditionally heroic material), an alchemist of both matter and spirit who can communicate beyond physical or psychic limits. He is the *Wandering Jew* as *Uebermensch*. The Jew, as one who is thrust beyond borders, is also beyond boundaries. He can touch the water, touch the wind, do the impossible (p. 81). His resolution of the paradox of the infinite, then, is almost a foregone conclusion—that which, in all consistency, ought to have been expected of him as a Jew. For Amos Oz, the situation of being without (and outside) boundaries, together with a situation of changing forces and forms, constitutes a viable existence.

Like Bartov, Oz makes a sharp distinction between the Israeli and the Jew. Each writer is concerned with the theme of survival, as I pointed out. Oz parodies a world devoid of belief in the miraculous, just as he criticizes the figure of the enlightened Jew who has for over a century prided himself on his firm grasp of reality. Only by way of the absurd can one approach the secret of being, Oz seems to be saying. Myth and legend are seen by him as the source of the spiritual history of man.

With the outbreak of war the kibbutz is shelled, a leading figure of the kibbutz dies and lies in state. It is then that our protagonist performs his last

miracle: the earth opens and he and his wife disappear. The question asked here concerns the meaning of survival. Is survival to be bought at all costs? Neither Oz nor Bartov knows how to resolve the problems they set for themselves; each uses a variation of the *deus-ex-machina* to round out his tale. Both writers violate the laws of aesthetics and probability in doing so.

(c) In his early writing in the 1950's and 60's, Benjamin Tammuz pursued an individualistic mood. His work in the 1970's—a novel, *Jacob*, a novella, *The Orchard*, and his latest novel, *Bottle Parables* (1975)—reflects a more collective orientation. In *The Orchard*, Tammuz deals with the problem of the land, symbolized as an orchard. In *Bottle Parables* he is concerned with the meaning of a value-oriented existence and with the problems of spiritual continuity and tradition.

The place is London, the time is the present, and the protagonist a young Jew who was brought to England during World War II and has stayed there, his family having perished in the war. He is an artist and university instructor, motivated by a vague quest—finding art-works of old and new masters in small junk shops. He is a person with no commitments, rootless, having lost his past and being unclear about (and even unaware of) the future. His aspirations go only so far as continued freedom from commitments and a house in Hampstead. Although he lives in London, he could be an Israeli in his dubious relation to the collective past.

The pivotal point is his meeting with an old, cultivated Jew who is the antithesis of the young man. He owns a fantastic collection of paintings, to which he hardly relates. Unlike the young man, the old man never thinks of selling his collection. He loves Mozart and draws his power to survive from a Yiddish newspaper he publishes, called *A Volk in Himmel*. He is fully committed to sustaining the continuity of tradition. The question asked here is: What values can one bequeath to a generation which changes its vessels so quickly and discards whatever has outlived its usefulness? In the old man's view, the decision not to belong is an act of treason towards the past. Yet it can be asked: Can there be a continuity after the Holocaust, in which the model of Jewish life was destroyed? There are lessons the old man can give. He is telling us not to expect outer recognition from others, and that self-recognition is the only valid kind. He is also telling us to remember that there once was a content to life, and that we can remember this even after the key to it has been lost, along with all meaning and hope.

The dualism Tammuz sets up is that between the sophisticated, restless young man and the old man who stands for the continuity of meaning and tradition. This juxtaposition is reflected in parables he weaves into the struc-

ture of the tale. One of these is the bottle parable: the old man claims that the disposable bottle points to a culture which destroys itself in self-disposal. In the past a bottle was a material vessel with a protracted use. And in a wider sense, cultural continuity and inheritance negate such a "use-once-and-discard" relation. In effect, culture overcomes man's mortality. The discard is repeated suicide, bequeathing nothing—so that, ultimately, man himself is disposable.

Another parable is the old man's answer to the present crisis as to "Who is a Jew?" His answer is a Hassidic tale. In the days of the Baal Shem Tov, Jews were afflicted by the decrees of the gentiles. When the Jews came to the Baal Shem Tov asking for deliverance, he went to a certain place in the forest, built a fire, said a prayer, and Israel was delivered. In the days of his pupil the Maggid of Meizrich, when the oppressed Jews came to him for help, he went to the same place in the forest, built a fire but could not remember the prayer. He said, "Almighty God, I have forgotten the prayer, yet do save Thy people Israel," and Israel was delivered. In the days of his follower the Rabbi of Sassov, hard times came again and people asked for redemption. The Rabbi went to the same place in the forest but did not know how to make a fire and had forgotten the prayer. Yet God saved His people Israel. And in the days of the Rizini Rabbi, when Jews were in trouble and asked for his help, the Rabbi sat in his study and said, "I do not know the place in the forest, nor how to light a fire, and I have forgotten the prayer. All that I remember is the story. And because I remember the story, O Lord, save Thy people Israel." And God heard the voice of the Rabbi, and saved His people, thanks to the story.

The old man explains that a Jew is one who remembers that there *is* a story, even if he does not know what the story contains. Again, continuity is a value, and in a secular world it takes the place of religious tradition. Thus, belonging is once again connected to memory, the only way to avoid obliteration of the past. The question remains, however, to what extent a sense of belonging, based on nothing more than half-empty memory (the memory only that there is a story), can create a viable and meaningful Jewish existence.

As in the other novels I discussed, here too we find a situation of either/or. In the Tammuz book we are told that only in the complete renunciation of material gains, along with the goods of this world, can we take the step towards a genuine change of heart. The old man makes the young man his heir, bequeathing to him his art collection. The young man's dream might be said to have come true. But he seals up the art works and sinks them in the river. This is another *deus-ex-machina*, but it is also a symbolic act whereby he rejects worldly gains for himself, preserves the art for future generations and saves the valuable objects from the clutches of the newly affluent.

(d) Continuity, redemption, the fate of the future—these topics appear in rather high frequency in Israeli fiction of the 1970's—and in one way or another they are tied up with the Jew as protagonist. Aharon Megged's *The Bat* (1975) is an epistolary confessional novel, wavering in mode between opaque irony and didactic allegory. A young boy raised in Eretz-Yisrael converts to Catholicism and joins the Jesuit order. He sees his conversion as part of a general vision of the redemption of Israel. It is his belief that the powers of Christendom will redeem and liberate Israel in World War II, and that by so doing they will repay their historic debt to the nation of Israel.

The protagonist, Gershon, believes that Jesus was the leader of the rebellion against the Romans in Jerusalem, and that he was crucified for that reason. This motif is interwoven in the fate of Gershon. The protégé of his spiritual mentor is murdered, and the murder weapon had belonged to Gershon—a memento from his days in the underground, when he was known as The Bat. The insinuation is that another (minor) crucifixion is at hand.

Once again we have the combination of the archetype and the contemporary. And here, too, we see the irresolute attitude, on the part of the author, towards the future: Who is The Bat? Is he merely an incident from the past? Is he a symbol? Is he a foil the author uses against nationalism in its irrational and extreme forms? Is he the embodiment of the absurd? Is he the victim or the criminal? Further, is the author mocking all attempts to read history, and to adapt it to contemporary life? Are extremes of attitude and outlook harmful or a blessing?

All these questions are left unanswered. The author's inconclusive attitude towards these issues—together with a shifting in tone and tenor, and the absence of a consistent viewpoint—all this is symptomatic. Once again the future is challenging, even ominous—even more so inasmuch as the author's lack of clarity on the above-mentioned issues gives us no clue as to what form he thinks the future should take.

Thus a new set of questions can be said to be presented here (although immanently, implicitly): To what should I aspire? What ought to be my vision of the spiritual future? Where does redemption rest: in the turn to the past; or is it rather in the tragic view that the future is an empty variable? To try to read history as a guide to daily existence in the present can lead only to absurdity. On the other hand, the total rejection of values in no way solves the problem. He who regards himself as belonging to the Jewish people and, moreover, accepts Judaism as a way of life, has a definite picture of what the future holds; his aspirations are clear. And yet the troubling question remains: What essential connection is there between a belonging, which is anchored in the past, and a conception of the future?

Is there a "message" in common to all these works? All are concerned, in the main, with the problem of spiritual continuity. Bartov reduces the problem to the immediate present, implying that the *situation* must decide the merit and the thrust of continuity—and futher, that neither past history nor aspirations for the future on the metapersonal level should be allowed to affect individual existence. Oz adheres to the same view, and in this book he regards direct continuity as impossible: the combination of the Jew as a metanatural phenomenon seen against the realistic and sparse spiritual climate of contemporary Israel does not give much hope of a synthesis. For Tammuz there can be no meaningful future without a spiritual continuity—and that continuity must involve Judaic content as well as more universal forms of renunciation, etc. For A. Megged the total adherence to the past carries the imponderable danger of fanaticism.

The four novels discussed here are not necessarily the best of current writing. Yet they do express a prevailing mood. They are marked by a very technical handling of the spiritual crisis—in a didactic, formal, and, at times, allegorical manner. I have suggested that the four writers have stated the problem but have made it impossible to solve the problem in its complexity themselves, since they have reduced it to simple contraries. In each of the novels, moreover, the Jew is a stereotype, a two-dimensional character devoid of many-sidedness or versatility. Further, the authors have failed aesthetically by introducing an artificial resolution in each case. As I have suggested, this reflects their uncertainty concerning the spiritual future of Israel. In their uncertainty they jump—it is not a leap of faith, it is only a short hop—to the assumption that spiritual crises are open to categorical solutions.

One can pose a question regarding these writers: If they come to a conclusion similar to that of Hazzaz in "The Sermon" (the point at which I began this discussion)—namely that Zionism marks the dissolution of Judaism—why do they still try to grapple with the problem of continuity? Why do they continue to concern themselves with the problem of how to relate to the past? Why does the Holocaust figure so centrally in their work? Why do they still worry about the spiritual survival of Judaism? I have compressed all these questions into one: If Zionism spells the end of Judaism, why do these Israeli writers make the Jew (rather than the Israeli) the central figure in their fiction?

My answer is, I admit, somewhat reductive and simplistic. As I see it, the short history of the State of Israel, and its existence in a seemingly ineluctable situation of no peace/no war, have led to a condition of living on the brink, a condition that connects the destiny of the State with that of its people and thus with Jewish fate. A writer immersed in his religious conviction (if he has it, as in the case of Agnon) can allow himself the comfort of an historical perspec-

tive. A secular writer, unfortunately, has no resources for such a perspective, whether complete or partial. He can only go so far as adopting a quasi-historical "dimension" (as in the case of Oz, Tammuz and A. Megged), or his writing is devoid of that dimension entirely (as in the case of Bartov). In either of the two secular eventualities, the figure of the Jew remains unfulfilled.

Beyond my discussion of these four writers, however, I can point to a more hopeful phenomenon in the general ongoing dialogue itself—and with this to the possible reappearance of the Jew as a positive figure in forthcoming fiction.

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