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ENGLISH ABSTRACTS

‘MORE FIGURATIVE THAN ALL OTHER SONGS’. A STUDY OF THE PRE-MASKILIC HISTORY OF THE HEBREW *MELITSAH*

Amir Banbaji

The concept of Hebrew *melitsah*, designating rhetoric, eloquent speech, poetry, and rhetorical theory, which played an important role in the development of Hebrew literary thought, has yet to receive extensive and in-depth examination. The present article traces the development of the concept in the writings of four prominent thinkers who dealt with it before the Haskalah period: Moshe Ibn Tibbon, Yehuda Messer Leon, Azariah de Rossi, and Baruch Spinoza. Discussion begins with two stories by Mendele Mocher Seforim to illuminate the complex relationships that the Hebrew text maintains with fictional attempts to confine it within a simplistic historical or philosophical meaning. These relationships are then illustrated through an examination of the theoretical definitions given to the *melitsah* in the writings of these thinkers who viewed it as a figurative mode of expression whose power lies in its ambiguity—forcing readers to derive meaning precisely from its indeterminacy. A concluding brief note addresses the development of *melitsah* during the Haskalah.

‘TOTAL LOVE’: THE STORY OF MIRIAM IN ‘THE TALE OF THE SCRIBE’ BY S. Y. AGNON

Nurit Barnea-Bernheim

Since its publication in 1919, ‘The Tale of the Scribe’ has been regarded as one of S. Y. Agnon’s finest achievements. At first, the story was read as a neo-Hasidic legend describing the pain of Raphael the scribe and of his wife Miriam during their long years of barrenness. Over time, with the growing understanding that all of Agnon’s stories are essentially modern tales, literary critics settled on the interpretation that the couple failed to observe the Bible’s first commandment: *Pru u’Revu* (‘Be fruitful and multiply’) – namely, they abstained from marital relations. Here we examine Raphael and Miriam’s intimacy through the reality of their strictly halakhic world with the understanding that what may look like a non-halakhic stance must somehow express an unconventional solution to a hidden

entanglement. Now, husband and wife can reappear as two people who are trying their best to solve the riddle of their union, while staying within the boundaries of Halakah.

‘HOW COME I LOVE THE *UGAV*?’:
THE *UGAV* IN URI ZVI GRINBERG’S POETRY

Neta Stahl

An enigma that mystified the poet Uri Zvi Grinberg was his attraction to the *Ugav*, a word that references both the biblical musical instrument and the organ of the Catholic church. Here I show that although Grinberg mentions the word *Ugav* over 200 times throughout his poetry, its use dramatically rises in the 1940s, during and shortly after the Holocaust. In these poems—most of which are from *Streets of the River* – the *Ugav* appears both as the only remnant of the Jewish Temple, representing the very essence of national-religious spiritual devotion, and as the emblem of the defiled Christian church, which he blames for the atrocities perpetrated against European Jewry. This duality is surprising given the fact that during these years, Grinberg often avoids referencing elements associated with Christianity in Hebrew and that starting in the early 1920s he expresses a complete rejection of the visual and musical aesthetics of Christianity. I argue that in his poetry the church organ stands as an emblem of Western culture and its aesthetics and religious values, and that he uses the two different references of the word *Ugav* to reconcile his longing for the landscape of his childhood, on the one hand, and his resentment for European culture on the other. The memory of the sound of the organ coming from the Catholic church in his hometown is still a source of nostalgia and comfort in the poems that appear in his *Sefer ha-Igul*, but to permit such emotions toward what he called ‘the Kingdom of the Cross’, he relocates this sound to the ancient and ruined Jerusalem Temple. This maneuver conceals his inner conflict between his defiance of Western culture, which he expresses in his poetic persona as a national prophetic poet, and his modernist poetics which is rooted in European modernism. In the *Ugav* – known for its powerful, strong sound – Grinberg recognized his own Expressionist poetics, and it allowed him to sublimate his attraction, indeed even love, for modernist Western aesthetics.

English Abstracts

KIN OF DUST:
ON *AL ḤAKHMOT DERAKHIM* BY AVOT YESHURUN

Roy Greenwald

The article presents a new reading of *Al Ḥakhmot Derakhim* ('On the Wisdom of Roads), the first book by Avot Yeshurun – in particular the poem cycle 'Fasting and Thirst' – as the foundational text of his poetry throughout all its periods. It aims to show how neosymbolist poetics was used to create the fundamental symbols in the poet's work: the land as a beloved and forbidden mother, the *fellahs* as counterparts to the biblical patriarchs, and the Bedouins and their camels as a community of wandering sons. The core argument is that the territory of the Land of Israel is rendered as a forbidden Oedipal territory in which any attempt to claim a share or inheritance is akin to incest. Close reading of the poems explores the political implications of the Oedipalization of the territory as it was first articulated in Yeshurun's debut book and later developed in his 1952 poem 'Passover on Caves', written in the wake of the Nakba and Israel's War of Independence.

THE BOOK IS "A MODALITY OF OUR BEING":
EMMANUEL LEVINAS READS TWO OF AGNON'S NOVELLAS

Taly Segal

In his book *Noms Propres* (1976), Emmanuel Levinas includes an essay on two of S.Y. Agnon's novellas. It is a short, dense and extremely intensive piece, and I aim to shed light on one of the suggestive concepts he presented in his discussion of books in *Ethique et infini* (1982): that the book is a modality of our being (*le livre est une modalité de notre être*) and the potential ethical significance of reading literary works.

Agnon's writing, according to Levinas, is "pure poetry": images of being, scripture tonality, prayer language, the indescribable past, are all encapsulated in Agnon's poetic language. A language that is realized or acted while being read. Levinas highlights the way the author mixes biblical and rabbinical expressions and forms within the modern Hebrew text without using apostrophes, in a dual presence: in the Agnonic phrase and in the ancient text. It creates an intertemporal space "between the present and what has never managed to reach the present" (1976). Agnon's work is a complex, multilayered temporal space that challenges the normative, determinist, physical concept of time and, therefore, is potentially ethically significant.

Ethics is realized by rejecting the being (*être*), by striving to abandon the being as a determinist fact and a final horizon. Levinas is harsh in phrasing this critical

idea: “Any culture that accepts the being, its tragic despair, and its justification of crimes, should be defined as barbarian” (1935).

The ethical relation, Levinas argues, is time—the being of time, the doing of time. “Our time is the breath of one human being toward another. Time is the breath of spirit” (2005). Being in the fruitful time—made of past, present, and future—allows us to “be for the other”, creating awareness, initiative, comfort, and forgiveness; allowing us to be called and repent, bring justice, and save.

FREEDOM AND REDEMPTION THROUGH MERGING OF THE UNINTEGRATED: A REALIST FANTASY AND POSTMODERNIST ALLEGORY IN LEAH AINI’S NOVEL, *HORSEY*

Nancy Ezer

Examining several of Leah Aini’s texts demonstrates how she compulsively interrogates her own childhood deprivations and the unjust social treatment she experienced for being different through her female protagonists, who grew up in dysfunctional families and in an indifferent and abusive society. However, in her novel, *Horsey* (2010), Aini allows her horse-faced heroine, Sasha Zayit, who wildly gallops across a chaotic hybrid of literary genres, to find a way to heal her emotional wounds. She finds fulfilment with her larger-than-life beloved, a fairytale centaur, while eliminating the stigma of otherness through fantasy and its compensating imagination. In *Horsey*, Aini combines opposite genres, and mixes ontological and epistemological contrasts, like god, man, and beast. This novel creates intelligibility through ‘natural’ realistic coherence of chronology, causality, and mimesis, while using the fantasy genre. It thus narratively embodies the dialogue between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ and advocates for their merger in a chaotic, allegorical, progressive, postmodern utopia. The present article builds on my previous publications on the use of literary genres in the work of Leah Aini.

S.Y. AGNON’S EVOLVING DEPICTIONS OF BUCZACZ: FROM ‘A CITY OF THE DEAD’ TO ‘A CITY IN ITS FULLNESS’

Jeffrey Saks

This reading of S.Y. Agnon early works offers insight into the original raw material from which he crafted a literary universe over his long career. Elements of Agnon’s adolescent writing in Yiddish and Hebrew prior to his departure for *Eretz Yisrael* at the age of twenty in 1908 would be rearranged in stories, novellas, and novels from the moment his career is conventionally considered to have

begun, with his arrival in Jaffa, up to and including material he was working on shortly before his death in 1970. Through an analysis of a largely forgotten 1907 story, *Ir ha-Metim* ('City of the Dead'; published and annotated in this article's appendix), we see how Agnon already saw himself as the chronicler of his native Buczacz in ways that occupied the author for over six decades in a long artistic arc that led to the culminating project in his posthumously published *Ir uMelo'a* ('A City in Its Fullness').

'HE SMILED AND SAID: IT'S A SECRET'.
ON HADAS SHABAT NADIR, *CASE NO. ZERO*,
TEL AVIV, HAKIBBUTZ HAMEUCHAD LTD., 2022, 190 PP.

Uriah Kfir

At the heart of Hadas Shabbat Nadir's new book, *Case No. Zero*, lies a riddle the author calls 'the riddle of Pagis's name' – that is, the given name the poet bore in childhood and which, after all that he went through, he later changed to 'Dan' and kept secret. The book follows this riddle, which runs throughout Pagis's life and poetry, including, for the first time, the publication of Pagis's 'hidden' poems. This article, devoted to the book, explores the double game the riddle plays (specifically, the riddle of the name), which plants clues that simultaneously draw its readers toward the solution and hinder its resolution. It suggests that perhaps the riddle is best left unsolved, for in that state it hints toward the possibility of touching what is usually forbidden to touch.