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The Arab in the Mirror: The Image of the Arab in Israeli Fiction

Severed Language

THE STATUS OF THE ARAB in Hebrew fiction is an interesting test case for a cultural and cognitive maturation process. To be explored here is the extent to which Hebrew literature recognizes the Arab's independence and otherness: to what extent does it allow him to have a separate identity, which is not subservient to the Zionist one and to its accepted scheme of values? I shall examine the ability of Hebrew literature to produce a heterogeneous scheme of values and to live in a self-conscious world, which not only acknowledges the existence of the Arab as an independent entity, but also searches for a language that would represent him.

The figure of the Arab has appeared in Hebrew literature since the beginning of the century. Though that period (1900–1948) is not the concern of this paper, a few features that characterize the representation of this figure till 1948 should be mentioned.¹ First, the most important authors, such as Moshe Smilansky, Yosef Ḥayyim Brenner, Yitzhak Shami, Aharon Reuveni, Yehuda Burla, and Meir Steinberg see themselves as belonging to the Jewish minority, describing the Arab majority. The minority consists of an immigrant population, while the majority consists of natives. Some of the authors were European-born, and others came from the Middle East. We are thus able to distinguish between the distant attitude of the former, as opposed to the more understanding attitude of the latter: the Middle Eastern authors emphasized their proximity to the Arab majority rather than the gap between the two cultures. Second, the

figure of the Arab is stereotypical, following a characteristic pattern that can be found even in extra-literary descriptions of the Arab in that period. Third, the situations in which the Arab appears lack the dimension of conflict between majority and minority. There is certainly no political conflict; rather, the situations described deal with daily routine, society and its customs, and local culture. Dramatic conflicts, which no literature can afford to do away with, also find their place within this framework. Fourth, beyond the sociological distinctions between Bedouin, farmer, effendi—each with his own mental characteristics—the Arab was conceived as an admirable model. He symbolized the very cultural values that were opposite to the Jewish experience of the Diaspora: his rootedness and his attachment to the land through agricultural labor, his cruelty and belligerence, his vital existence, unspoiled by modernity. Not only did the Arab conform to the Romantic European norms regarding the exotic East, but the Oriental way of life was connected in the minds of many authors to the world of the biblical fathers. The Arab played the stereotypical role of the noble savage, while being used as a model for imitation and not as representing a strange, inferior, and inaccessible world.²

The Hebrew literature following the War of Independence marks a reversal in the place and status of the Arab in the literary world. First, it is clear that the relations between majority and minority changed starting with the founding of the State of Israel. The Arabs begin to be perceived as a minority as far as their strength. Second, the context in which the Arab appears becomes political, and the war experience, which led to a new political order, turns the Arab out of his homeland; his original status lost, he is an exile in his own country. From this moment, the trauma of war is the starting point of every reckoning and every relationship to be formed between Jews and Arabs. It goes without saying that the admiration for the Arab, which was characteristic before 1948, is replaced by guilt toward him, mingled with the author's critique of the majority, as a result of the latter's immoral attitude toward the defenseless minority. Third, early writers such as Orloff, Shemy, and Burla explored the figure of the Arab out of a need to internalize and study him, while the object of description stands at the center of the narrator's world of experience. Unlike them, the writers belonging to the post-Independence generation, with Yizhar leading, suddenly find themselves in a different position, in which there is no interest in the defeated Arab himself. All positive, romantic stereotypes are replaced within a short time by negative stereotypes. The Arab, as he appears in Yizhar's war stories, is meant to mirror the inner conflicts of the Israeli soldier who tells his own story—hence the conspicuous stagnation of the Arab, and his absolute voicelessness.

Yizhar's "Hirbet Hizah" and "The Prisoner," written shortly after the War of Independence and published in 1949, were quite rightly conceived of in their time as undermining the Zionist values in whose name the State of Israel was founded. The narrator who calls the Jews "colonizers" obviously makes an exception of himself and even reneges the main issues. To this are added the thoughts on the needlessness and the lack of justice in the expulsion of the Arabs, on the transformation of the persecuted Jewish refugee into persecutor, and more such doubts related to the main issues of the national consensus of those years. But at a temporal distance, one can distinguish between the cultural-political self-criticism emerging from these stories, and the mental framework of the period in which Yizhar wrote, and from which he could not depart. This is a "monological" mentality that does away with all interest in and consideration of marginal groups. Within this interior monologue (which is also the means of description of the narrator's stream of consciousness), there is no place for the Arab. That is, even an undermining of the majority's values does not give way to an identification with the Arab's suffering. It is not the Arab who interests Yizhar, but the ideal of free humanistic man, whom he sees as the basis of his worldview and of values not to be relinquished. Such a man is incapable of hiding behind a dubious ideology, considerations of security, or the obligation to obey orders, while Arabs are being driven out of their villages, or while he is holding an Arab prisoner and has it in his power to set him free. The Arab is only a test case for the conflict between a humanistic system of values and a military one. In this drama, the Arab must remain a voiceless side-player.

Already in Yizhar's war stories, it is difficult to find familiar stereotypes of the Arab that preserve the balance between positive and negative features. He presents a new stereotype, as if through the eyes of a conqueror who, meeting the conquered for the first time, fears for his own status; it seems he must unequivocally establish their hierarchical relationship, which also constitutes an (illusory) means of security. He must neutralize the conquered and sterilize him not only of every attractive element, but also of every threatening one. The conquered villages are described for the first time in Hebrew literature as an aesthetic inferno:

It was better to stand or to walk all day, only to avoid sitting on this ground, which is not a field but a patch of dust, moldy and abominably sick, upon which generations spit, passed their water, laid their excrement, and led their cattle and their camels—those patches of dust close by the huts, infected by the stench of the remains of miserable human habitations squeezed close one by the other. Everything was abominable, it was disgusting to take anything in your hand.³

The native Arab is perceived as lacking any shred of human dignity, as being a subhuman: "Who is he and what is he but a miserable nothing, a shriveled and submissive creature, a face wrapped in a headscarf, shrinking and lowly, immaterial, a sack of insignificance, frightened, fading, disappearing out of sheer nothingness, ready to be kicked and seeing kicks as natural ("kick him—the Arab—it's nothing to him!" "The Prisoner," *ibid.*, p. 107). Admittedly, the narrator ultimately asserts that the real prisoner is not the Arab but the Israeli soldier who is unable to follow his conscience and remains trapped in his circular, infinite inner conflict. Still, out of the sociocultural critique emerges the colonial gaze that judges and evaluates the other according to the aggressive standard of the self, who wishes to appear human and even universal.

Even Yizhar's protesting voice cannot stand by; it also joins in the slight abuse as in a game. Without a bit of irony, he adopts the narcissistic point of view of the soldier who, bored with the undramatic conquest of the village, needs to relieve his tensions. When vitality is perceived as a superior force, it inhibits criticism: "There was an immediate need to take revenge, to break and crush, or at least to trample underfoot. They would whip the camel until the arm could no longer move . . . and they would kick the old Arab refugee . . . and they would wait for the thing that was to occur right away, for something to happen, damn it!" (41). The Arab, like any other commodity, loses his identity as soon as he becomes the object of unilateral pleasure, if even for once. But even the shared experience of pleasure cannot help the soldier evade the absolute anonymity of military, belligerent life; rather, it concretizes it. In any case, it is a kind of violence that is supported by a nod of approval and explanation. It is perceived as natural, just as the Arab is perceived as a passive prisoner of the conqueror's youthful caprices.

Opposite the figure of the Israeli soldier, tortured and willing to be tortured by his inner conflict, stands the Arab, whom the Israeli represents out of consideration of the conscience. The Arab's unequivocal appearance is characterized by a surprising simplicity. All preexisting structures, which had maintained the points of contact between conqueror and conquered, are suspended. But it is precisely this absolute separation between the Israeli soldier and the Arab farmer that emerges from the story as non-absolute. This could be because the refugee villagers' appearance recalls that of the Diaspora Jews driven like a flock to be butchered ("Ḥirbet Hizah"), or because it is not clear who the real prisoner is: the soldier holding a gun in his hand or the Arab whom he cannot rid himself of, as he cannot rid himself of the psychic complications caused by the capture of the Arab ("The Prisoner"). The apparently polarized relationship of ruler and subject is more dialectic than it is usually assumed, as soon as we recognize the fluidity of the polarization:

it can easily turn into a blurred structure, whose borders are no longer real, and the Arab is then represented as the mirror of the Israeli.

The critical role of Yizhar's post-1948 stories is not confined to explicit political-cultural protest, but rather in the marking of fissures: these are found in any ideological system that purports to legitimize a political order based on a clear and unilateral hierarchy between the powerful and the powerless. In the context of the War of Independence, this system is supposed to justify the expulsion of the Arabs. In addition, within such a system are traces of displacement reflecting the conqueror's discomfort, his inability to completely suppress his reminiscence of the conquered. Even after the Arabs of Hirbet Hizah had been put on a truck and driven beyond the border, the dubious, subversive force of the signs of absence emerges in the area supposedly freed of foreign elements:

Those green villages—there comes a day when they begin to shout. . . . The village that just a moment ago was nothing but a spread of forsaken hovels and an orphaned silence . . . breaks into singing the song of objects whose soul has departed; the song of human deeds that became reincarnated and turned wild; the song of the harbinger of sudden, crushing disaster, which froze and lingered on like a curse. (47)

This drama takes place in the real Arab's absence. Thus, Yizhar's stories mark a new stage in Hebrew literature, in which the Arab's role is to reflect Israeli consciousness, but he himself is voiceless and cannot determine his own identity, its world, and its otherness. The Arab's muteness continues until the publication of novels such as A. B. Yehoshua's *The Lover* and Sammy Michael's *Refuge* in 1977.

I would now like to focus on Yehoshua's early story "Facing the Forests" (1963), which marks the change of the norms set by Yizhar and adjusts them to the developing political reality after 1948. This story grows in an atmosphere of postwar, civil, daily routine—or rather, the appearance of routine—and out of the political order that began to emerge after 1948. This new order created a new landscape, a new map that replaced a previous one. A forest was planted where an Arab village had stood. The ruins are barely visible.

When Yizhar wrote his stories, the injustice was conspicuous. The destruction had not yet been blurred, and a system of concealing facts had not yet been developed. Yehoshua turns to the Arab villages at a time when it is incommensurably hard to discover what happened during the war. Only a disinterested viewer is capable of noticing the turmoil underneath; a viewer holding Zionist ideological convictions is unqualified for that. Yehoshua therefore prefers not to have the father, who represents the center, the national consensus, as a key figure, but the son, whose spiritual laxity might facilitate an acquaintance with the unknown,

unofficial reality.⁴ Yehoshua describes a social hierarchy in the margins of which are to be found "all kinds of charity cases, the handicapped, the lame, the abnormal."⁵ To this marginal group also belongs the hero of the story, who takes upon himself the function of forest watchman. A marginal status in Israeli society seems to be the only position that provides the opportunity to discover the ruined Arab village. The retreat to the margins is thus a subversive strategy, even if at first this is an unconscious act for the hero, who chooses the forests as a place where he hopes to complete his doctoral dissertation and to prove himself to his social entourage.

The move from the center to the margins and the unexpected revelations that take the hero, as a forest watchman, by surprise, also free him from inner conflict and from an ambivalent attitude (which characterized Yizhar's heroes). The discovery of the ruined village and the acquaintance with the old Arab who has probably lost his family there produce a complete identification with him: the watchman hangs in his room an old map, on which that erased village is marked, he runs about hoping to detect signs and relics, and he eventually plans the burning of the forest. Unlike Yizhar's passive hero, Yehoshua's hero carries on "hostile" activities, while he consciously abandons his private historical research in favor of contemporary political research. With the hero's readiness to act, Yehoshua also frees himself from the direct political discourse that Yizhar uses. His protest against the supposedly natural Zionist seizure of the country (what can be more natural than a forest planted by the Jewish National Fund?) is formulated not directly, but symbolically. The watchman's research on the treatment of the Jews by the Church during the Crusades brings to his mind the analogy between the Israelis who visit the forests and the crusaders, conquerors of the country. His resentment for the persecution of the Jews by the Church is indirectly translated into a parallel relationship between Israelis and local Arabs. Symbolic allusion makes contemporary discourse redundant. It also validates the concealed political attitude and endows it with historical depth, necessitating identification with the Arab precisely because, as Jews, our collective memory is marked by suffering.

Yet "Facing the Forests" is concerned with a more complex situation than that of "Hirbet Hizah" or "The Prisoner." The Israeli story about the admission of guilt toward the Arabs and of its suppression functions as a frame for another story: the story of the Arab whose tongue has been cut out. For the first time since 1948, Hebrew literature focuses on the Arab point of view. It is not just the personal story of a nameless Arab, but the top-secret story that the majority culture strives to conceal, just as it is able to conceal the reality upon which the story is based—the ruined village.

Yehoshua juxtaposes two different narratives—the narrative of the conqueror (“No, there’s no village here, the map must be wrong,” 113) constructed to deny the narrative of the conquered, whether by means of ridiculous claims or by cutting out his tongue. The Arab narrative, only partially revealed, has a threatening potential precisely because it is concealed, hinted at, absent. The Arab’s voicelessness and his inability to use a narrator as responsible for saving his story and perhaps also for rectifying the injustice, cause him to talk through action and fire. This complex function of the concealed Arab narrative grants it a central position in the story, in complete contrast with Yizhar’s stories, in which the Arab narrative is almost nonexistent.

It is clear that political strategy is connected to a poetical decision regarding the narrator’s point of view as well as the accessibility of his characters’ consciousness. Yizhar chooses one of the soldiers for narrator, and thus justifies the act of ignoring the national point of view of the refugee villagers or of the Arab prisoner. Admittedly, the analogy that the narrator makes between his childhood experiences, marked by exile and violence, and the experiences of the Arabs in the present, reveals a clear identification with the victim. But its place in the story is marginal. Yizhar tries to explain why it is difficult for the Israeli soldier to display human sensibility to the suffering of others, and he at the same time attempts to reveal the hidden motive behind the “military” action of expelling the Arab villagers. To be Israeli means to be rid of the shame of exile, of the unmasculine self-image of the Jew, by means of identification with the aggressor and adoption of his methods:

Exile, look, this is exile. Yes, this is exile. This is what exile looks like. . . . I have never been in exile—I said to myself—I have never known how it was. But they talked to me, and told me, and taught me, and they repeated to me again and again, in every corner, in book and newspaper, and everywhere: exile . . . and it was in me, probably came in with my mother’s milk. What have we really done here today? (85)

Facing the evacuated village, the narrator understands the psychological needs that led to the victimization of the Arabs; in their weakness, the Arabs evoke the stereotypical connotations of the defenseless Diaspora Jew so strongly that they prohibit the Israeli soldier from identifying with them! Yehoshua, on the other hand, chooses a less intelligent narrator, whose criticism is not explicitly formulated. He does not have a complex defense system at his disposal, either. The figure of the old (nameless) Arab is described only according to the impression that it produces. He is unable to provide information on the Arab’s consciousness, an inability that is particularly conspicuous in the light of his muteness and his strangeness in relation to the Israeli who watches

him. The appearance of the Arab, for instance, is always sudden and surprising—of course, only from the narrator's point of view. That is, the reconstruction of the Arab narrative is achieved only through the perspective of the naive Israeli, a forest ranger, and not through the Arab's language. The problem that arises from Yehoshua's choice of such a narrator has to do with the legitimacy of Israeli terminology used to represent the Arab. Is that story, reconstructed and translated, supposed to be reliable? Does the archaeology at the site present a true picture? Does not the severed tongue of the Arab point to another story?

Perhaps the facts are not important here, because despite the fact that a crime has been committed, the story is not an inquest with the purpose of opening a criminal record:

Here the Arab explains something with quick and confused movements of hands, mutters with his severed tongue, rolls his head, tries to say that this here is his house and there was a village here, too, and they just concealed everything here, buried in the deep forest. The watchman looks at the movements, and his heart fills with joy. What is it that upsets the Arab so? It seems that his wives were killed here too, it's a mystery. (121)

In the absence of factual evidence for this interpretation, attention shifts from history, from the erased narrative, to the one who reconstructs the story. The mute Arab calls attention to the absence of the complete Arab narrative; he leaves the watchman with a possible but not absolute version. The struggle around it takes place in the Israeli consciousness and in relation to the validity of its interpretation of the Arab's experience. Could it replace the Arab's own testimony?

Limiting the narrator's point of view means that his descriptions will reflect the stereotypical image of the minority in the eyes of the majority, and not the image of the minority in its own eyes or in the eyes of some neutral authority. Time and again, the Arab is attributed a threatening significance, related to the burning of the forest (108, 115, 120, 126), which adds to the ever-rising tension leading up to the fire. Nothing is known about the Arab, except for his potential to start the fire. Even as far as the plot is concerned, the drama at the end of which the forest is burned is an Israeli drama. The Arab who at first ignores the ruined village later turns into the trigger of that need for personal revenge that overtakes the watchman.⁶ The plot is thus the realization of a stereotype, when the stereotype itself reflects the uneasiness of a culture marked by its responsibility for the extinction of another culture, or even reflects its sense of guilt. But in this way, the representation of the Arab is trapped in that narcissistic circle in which it loses the realistic dimension and ends up reflecting the inner tension of Israeli psychology. The revenge at the end of the story is not only the Arab's, just as language is not his own. Over

the threads that guide his movements in the story he himself has no control.

Stolen Language

The Arab's first appearance as a developed character is in A. B. Yehoshua's novel *The Lover* (1977). This is a novel without a narrator. Each of the characters presents his own point of view with regard to the events through alternating monologues, and the story is built by the integration of the various personal attitudes. Yehoshua takes it upon himself to reveal an Arab's consciousness, his language, and his authentic disposition, not through the remote point of view of a narrator belonging to the ruling culture.

What conditions the discovery of this territory is the rejection of what we already know about the Arab, i.e., the stereotypical knowledge that is part of the means by which the majority rules over the minority: "When that political chatter about the Arabs, the Arab character, mentality, and all the rest, started, I would become anxious. . . . What do you really know about them? I have maybe thirty Arabs working for me and believe me, from day to day, I become less of an expert on Arabs" (157). For habit and experience create a limited and limiting knowledge. Only the other, the Arab, can disclose that to which the Israeli has no access.

Knowledge is power; one can see that in the Israeli characters' curiosity about the Arab. His power, however, lies in the withholding of the desired information, in setting the boundary that protects him from the invasion of the curious, in refusing to cooperate beyond the call of his duty within the hierarchical system called coexistence. The dialectic of this system is characterized by the fact that beyond the stable power relations is a dynamics of the ruler paying court to the ruled. For the ruler, the ruled is always abstract, even nameless. Anyone ruled is dispensable, since his place in the system is marginal, his role lacks any personal dimension (a garage worker, a delivery boy in a supermarket, and so on). But the lack of information is perceived by the ruler as lack of authority: "What does he think in his heart of hearts? What does he think about me, for instance? He hardly ever talks, and when he does he always talks shop" (157). The power of the ruled lies in his refusal to turn the political (military) relations into everyday, routine relations. Through his refusal, he points toward the limitations of rule; no weapon will make him speak when he knows that under such conditions, speech will amount to self-betrayal. Speech must have a tactics of expression in hostile surroundings. One can recall here the picture of a black man dressed in military uniform proudly saluting the French flag—a picture that Roland Barthes

mentioned as an example of creating a false impression (a myth), whereby opposites integrate naturally. The language that determines the African's identity (and, in our case, the Arab's) is repressed by the language and the insignia of the empire, whose role is to blur the contrast between the conquering Europeans and the people of the conquered colonies who have been recruited. In Yehoshua's novel, the old Arab whose son has been killed in a terrorist attack against Jews is supposed to declare his dead son mad and to condemn him in front of the television cameras and the microphones of national radio. He is supposed to adopt the language of the majority (and its ideology) "in flawed Hebrew" in a ceremony in which the member of the minority declares his unreserved loyalty to the hierarchy upheld by the majority; pretense is the theater of a fake pledge of allegiance to a foreign language: "And they hear the curses, the words of allegiance and condemnation, nod their heads but do not believe that we believe what we are saying, yet they are willing to hear nothing else" (194).

The above reflects in a typical way the limitations of Israeli political discourse of the seventies. The question is whether it is possible to say something additional in literature, that functions as an uncensored site, where the Arab might cast off the mask that has been forced upon him involuntarily. Does literature allow for sincerity beyond the attitude that confines itself to the acceptance of subjugation with irony? Has the monological novel fulfilled its critical potential to penetrate the Arab consciousness? This penetration could be attempted as a dialogue between questioner and questioned, focused on the Zionist sensibility and its conceptual world; or it could be based on sheer curiosity: "So many questions she asks, as if she worked for the security services. What does Father do and what does Mother do and how many brothers and how many sisters. . . . And what do I know about the Jews and have I heard about Zionism and what do I mean by this word?" (207). But can the novel surpass the limits of the majority's notional system so as to make room for the other language, for the truth that cannot be expressed in the language of translation? The question to be raised here is with regard to the competence of the Arab figure that Yehoshua has chosen for this task. Can the monologues of a fourteen-year-old boy express clear awareness of belonging to the suppressed minority? The choice of an Arab adolescent who falls in love with a Jewish girl enables us to examine the universal aspect of the experiences of this age, the first signs of love, sex, power, and disappointment. But in this way, Yehoshua produces an absolute depoliticization of the Arab figure. The private and the political do not fit together. The fact that Naym is an Arab does not function as a barrier but as a spice, at least for Daffy, the Israeli girl. The most conspicuous aspect is that even for Naym himself, being an Arab is not a

way to define his identity, but a handicap. It is preferable and indeed possible to hide it, in order to be accepted by the majority, to be invited into the garage owner's house, to exchange the Arab father in the village with the wealthy urban Jewish father, and at the same time to win his daughter's hand. All this despite the fact that at the end of the novel, Naym becomes disillusioned with the elevated image he had created for the man he used to see as "a little God" (338) and prefers to return to his village. He is even willing to accept the majority's values while overlooking his own identity. His path from being an Arab to becoming an Israeli goes through the recognition of the Arab's stereotypical marks of difference and their erasure. He is not a member of the minority whose exterior appearance gives away his Arab identity (that "epidermic identity" that Frantz Fanon talked about); on the contrary, he is able to pass for a Polish Jew (200), have his hair cut as a Jew (396), and speak Hebrew without a foreign accent.

His identification with the majority reveals itself on three levels:

(1) His estranged attitude toward the Arab option, which finds its expression in the character of his brother Adnan. After being rejected from Haifa University, the latter joins a terrorist organization, returns to the campus to take his revenge in a terrorist attack, and is killed in the attempt: "Our brother—what does he do? Where does he get such courage? Damn honor. Why don't the damn Jews take better care of themselves?" (192). Naym does not interpret his brother's act politically, but rather, psychologically and personally, as if there were nothing here but a problem of mentality, a "damn honor." The attempt to ignore political significance and to transform it into psychological and personal, represents, first and foremost, the attitude of the majority. The relations between the political and the psychological can be used as a standard for the distinction between literature written from the viewpoint of the majority and that written from the viewpoint of the minority. Jameson develops Deleuze and Guattari's claim about the collective nature of minor literature⁷ and sets up the following rule:

In the West, conventionally, political commitment is recontained and psychologized by way of the public-private split that I have already evoked. Interpretations, for example, of political movements of the '60s in terms of Oedipal revolts are familiar to everyone and need no further comment. . . . What is relevant to our present context is not, however, the demonstration of that proposition, but rather of its inversion in third-world culture, where I want to suggest that psychology, or more specifically, libidinal investment, is to be read in primarily political and social terms.⁸

According to the standard set by Jameson, the Arab adolescent's attitude is congruent with the dominating rhetorics: it reduces political motives to psychological motives.

(2) Identification is also recognizable in the cleaning ceremonial that Naym undertakes upon arriving at his employer's house. The mud he brings with him from outside symbolizes for him interior impurity. He therefore thinks himself under an obligation to erase every sign of impurity that might be perceived as representing his foreignness: "I began to clean the bathtub, which had gotten very dirty. I dried it with a towel. I also cleaned the floor and brushed the sink and even things that I hadn't dirtied myself, but I didn't know if they would remember that it wasn't me" (203). This grotesque situation is related to the meaning of the encounter between ruler and ruled, encounter marked by an absolute self-effacement, an ambition to be absorbed, if only for a short while, into the foreign major culture, to renounce political discourse and its limitations in favor of the discourse of desire, which is to win Daffy's love for the Arab boy ("I haven't come here for politics but for love," 255).

Naym's journey into Israeli society in search of love transgresses the limits of the eroticism that characterizes the Arab workmen. They find a way of freeing themselves from sexual desire by fantasizing about the pornographic pictures on the garage walls. This fantasy about unreachable, unrealistic womanhood, has a way of remaining mute. Conversely, the courting of a real person, the employer's daughter, requires speech, which functions as a kind of entrance ticket to an erotic relationship. Thus Naym, unbeknownst to himself, renounces the political option represented by his cousin Khamid and, in fact, by the entire, anonymous group of workmen. It is the refusal to talk with the man holding power in his own language and to turn power relations into seemingly natural relations, which means to legitimize them. The refusal to discuss personal matters, to expose the minority to the majority's information-thirsty curiosity, leaves the Arab as a signifier without a clear signified. This mystery, which only Naym, in his eagerness to tell everything, hurries to resolve, does not permit one to ignore the fact that the situation in which Jews and Arabs meet is not a natural one. Rather, it is a state of emergency, in which any conversation must be a sort of unilateral questioning (158), a kind of imposition. From the majority's viewpoint, it is the function of routine to make the national-political conflict disappear. From the viewpoint of the suppressed minority, the political conflict should be visible and displayed in every possible way.

(3) Naym's deepest identification with the dominant Israeli culture finds its expression in his use of language. Not only does his Hebrew sound like a mother tongue, rather than as an acquired language, but it is also similar to that spoken by the Israeli characters. Nothing bears witness of his bilingualism. He is unwilling to speak Arabic even with old Veduccia, a Jewish woman of Oriental origin. He knows the Jews' mastery of Arabic is associated with their taking over the Arab himself

through acquaintance with his culture ("Those are the Jews who think they know us best, damn them, they only know the things that they can mock us about and they don't respect us," 254). Just as the respectable Arab way of life remains out of sight, so the Arabic language disappears from conversation.

The Arab boy likes to quote Bialik, and even upon his arrival at his employer's house he steals a book of Alterman poems, *The Stars Outside*. All this is accompanied by the naïveté of someone who thinks that "they know nothing about us, they don't know that we're learning a lot of things about them. They can't imagine that we're actually being taught Bialik and Tchernichowsky and other Hasidim, and we even know about Beit Hamidrash and the Jewish fate and the burned town" (207–8). The boy's naïveté can be recognized in his confusion between Arab identity—the one the majority really knows nothing about—and the borrowed identity, imposed upon the Arabs by the state curriculum, which compels minorities to receive a purely Hebrew education. The grotesque aspect of this lies, of course, in that Naym, the product of a culture that emphasizes learning by rote, is able to quote Bialik, whereas Daffy, who is the product of an education system that considers itself progressive, knows nothing about that cultural heritage ("all our boring stuff," 210).

The grotesque reaches its peak when Naym exhibits his knowledge by quoting the lines from "The Dead of the Desert," which were used in all school ceremonies ("We are heroes and the last generation to be subjugated, and the first to be free, our hand alone, our strong hand the yoke has thrown off, and our head raises up straight to the sky," 208). Coming from the lips of an Arab adolescent, these pathetic lines, adopted by Zionist discourse, historically and politically interpreted as defining the sense of Zionist revolution and liberation, draw attention to his contrasting position. He recites enthusiastically the most canonical text of the culture that replaced his own language, his own pathos, and his own liberation. This exposes an overwhelming lack of political awareness: despite his tireless efforts to find another point of identification, the boy is insensitive to the gap between reciting a text about throwing off the yoke, uprising, and liberation, on the one hand, and the hopeless state of the minority to which he belongs, on the other.

Nevertheless, the critical attitude of the author toward the imposition of a Zionist education upon the Arab population comes through twice: first, it is explicitly mentioned in a childish formulation ("Poor people—says the girl suddenly—it's not their fault," 208); and second, it is perceived through the transfer of the canonical Bialik text to a new context, in which it reflects the aggressivity of the Zionist identity and its language, the "de-territorialization of language," in Deleuze and Guattari's terms. This critique is supported by the parody of the Arab

adolescent's figure, who sees it as incumbent upon himself to use the language of the majority, because his own language has no place here.

Yehoshua chose a character that is unqualified to represent the culture of the minority to which he belongs. His character is cut according to his role in the major culture—to be a lover without a social position, who is supposed to remain concealed and invisible. To play such a role is to be without an identity. In the context of the plot, in which every character has a lover, the Arab appears as one of the secret lovers whom society is drawn to, as primarily an Israeli problem. The Arab, despite being allowed to express himself freely, still does not represent his own language. The only way to do so is to renounce the adolescent discourse of desire in favor of political discourse.⁹

Double Language

"Members of the Oriental minority always speak two languages, at least," says writer Sammy Michael.

First of all, the language they speak with the representative of authority, of hostile government . . . this is their first language, which they must use in order to pretend, in order to deceive. The second language is the language that they speak among themselves, when they are alone. . . . And then there is, of course, the language that every man speaks with himself, the inner, individual language. And when you are an endangered minority, you can sometimes tell the truth only to yourself.¹⁰

This perception has found its literary expression as early as the novel *Refuge* (1977), which described the complex relationship between Jews and Israeli Arabs and between Israeli Arabs and Palestinian Arabs living in the territories. Sammy Michael is outstanding as the first writer to go beyond the character of the Arab without a language, whose unique personality in its diverse aspects has remained outside the reach of Israeli fiction. It is perhaps no accident that the relatively complex representation of the Arab has been accomplished by an author of Oriental origin. Michael has been followed by Shimon Balas in his book *The Locked Room* (1980). Balas not only brings to bear the experience of the minority in two different countries, but also belongs to two different cultures and languages: Arabic, of which he writes, and Hebrew, in which he writes. From the start, we witness an identification of the Jewish member of the Oriental minority with the Arab, as there is also a mutual cultural and linguistic recognition. The search for the Arab is also a metaphorical journey of self-discovery for the Oriental Jew, who examines his complex relationship with the major Israeli culture, dominated by Western Ashkenazi Jews.

The turning point in the representation of the Arab finds its expression in the reliability of the realistic aspect of the story. The novel *Refuge* reveals for the first time that, besides the Israeli Arab, there is another kind of Arab who lives beyond the boundary called the "Green Line." This difference is essential insofar as it points to a conflict between contrasting identities, or different options for self-definition. The poet Fathi, an Israeli Arab, visits a refugee camp near Jenin, where the family of his future brother-in-law Watzfi lives, supported by him economically. In this contact between the members of the same family and of the same people, speaking the same language, all the differences between the extremes of the Palestinian world are revealed. The main difference lies, of course, in the economic status of the two societies—the Israeli Watzfi is well-off, owns an American car, and dresses ostentatiously, as opposed to those members of his family who live in difficult conditions. There is also a spiritual gulf between the Israeli Arab living in a Western atmosphere and the downtrodden Palestinian society, still fettered to its conservative mentality. In the novel, this conservatism comes across through violence, especially the man's (the father, the brother) toward the woman, in the name of family honor. This conflict makes clear that the transition to the Western way of life leads to confusion and loss of identity. For the Israeli Arab is rejected by the Palestinian community and even he feels estranged from it. Yet he cannot become identified with Israeli society, either because the latter refuses to absorb him and treats him as a member of the minority, or because he is unable to accept Israeli culture and the Jewish Zionist state, which stand in complete opposition to his identity as an Arab. The Israeli Arab is thus neither here nor there, as someone who has lost one world without conquering another. He is a refugee in his own country.

We may learn from the words of Azmi Bshara to David Grossman the extent to which the Israeli Arab is denied a point of cultural identification:

Our entire story, that of the Arabs in Israel, has to do only with the struggle for survival, and that isn't a very heroic struggle. It was mostly a story of lowliness, of flattery and opportunism, of imitating the Israeli way of life. . . . And what Arab Israeli symbols are there for a man like me to identify himself with? . . . Where is all that talk about our pride and heroism? . . . One can't compare them, it would be a shame to compare them to the Palestinians in the territories. You must see how it is there, when someone is speaking—there's an entire history in his words, in whose name he speaks. There are symbols, rhetoric, pathos, sparkle. And here you only hear half a sentence and you feel how empty everything is on our side, our history is ruptured. (*Present Absent*, pp. 17–18)

The power of the novel *Refuge* lies in having diagnosed this emptiness as early as the mid-seventies, many years before the Intifada brought about

a revolution in the relations between Arabs on both sides of the Green Line and created the rhetoric, the symbols, and the pathos. Since 1948, the Arabs who remained in the State of Israel have been condemned, as if they were traitors. And since that time, there have been claims by those who remained that their role is to guard the country by living in it. This they saw as a subversive act whose purpose was to maintain the Arab presence in Palestine and to educate the Arabs. In *Refuge*, only one side is heard. The apologetic rhetoric is represented as a falsity that no one boasts of any more. The Israeli Arab understands that restoring his identity involves a cultural and political return to the roots, as "a son who the family can take back into its bosom despite the dirt that has stuck to him as a result of having long lived among the Jews" (49).

Yet Sammy Michael does not tend toward radicalism, and there is no sign in his writing of politically motivated admiration for the Palestinian or scorn for the Israeli Arab, as can be found in Bshara's writing. The history in the name of which the Palestinian speaks is no different from the history in the name of which the Israeli Arab speaks. Just as there are private childhood memories of being driven out of one's village into exile—namely, a life in the shadow of that absent conquered place, with memory as a way of resisting violent reality—so there is a collectivization of memory, its transformation into a living heritage. In the refugee camp, so we are told, every child learns to answer the question "Where are you from?" by mentioning one of the major towns in which Arabs lived before 1948. In this respect, the Israeli Arab is no different from the Palestinian: they both live the story of exile. The description of the desperate attempts made by Fathi's father to return, before his death, to the village from which he had been exiled, concretizes the truthfulness of memory and the truthfulness of living close to the land. The father knows that he must come full circle, that there is a heritage, represented as a claim of rights, and that whoever has been exiled from his land will not be able to end his life without returning to that place.

Sammy Michael begins to bestow upon the Arab what Hebrew literature had until then denied him—the time dimension, memory, and, in brief, the uncompromising experience of exile, though only in embryonic form: there is no development of and no focus on past memories or on hopes for the future (329). These are scarce in the novel. To a greater extent, however, the novel gives the Arab his tongue back, constantly drawing attention to the translation of the characters' spoken Arabic into Hebrew as a foreign language. Arabic expressions and proverbs are transmitted to the Hebrew reader with the narrator's mediating comments, which he introduces in the text as well as in footnotes ("What is it?" cried the woman, 'Does your tooth hurt, ya babba? Ya babba!' The poet's face turned pale, this is how the poorest of the poor talk only to

small children and to members of the upper classes who have wasted their manhood in pleasures," 56). The linguistic realism emphasizes the fact that the Arab no longer reproduces Israeli discourse. Rather, he is outside it; he has a language of his own and a style that, even translated into Hebrew, must sound foreign and different (expressions such as "dust on your head" [187], "blindness on your heart" [118], "we think of God, to whom we will return" [230]).

But Arab identity is primarily a political matter. There is a reason that the Arab characters are described on the background of Yom Kippur War. In *The Lover*, the plot also takes place as a result of that war, although its mark can only be recognized in the Israeli characters ("And we lost a lover in the last war"); the Arab public, represented as a passive mass, gives no testimony of the changes that time has wrought. In *Refuge*, the situation is different. The author is looking for the most painful and revealing point of contact between the national entities living in this country. If the sharpness of the contrast might have been softened in another context, war prevents blurring. This is what draws attention to the unbridgeable gap between Jews and Arabs.

In his essay "Critique of Violence," Walter Benjamin wrote that a ruling system based on force rather than on freedom of choice seeks to conceal the fact that it is only a state of emergency; it accomplishes that by creating the appearance of routine, in which power relations become settled and turn completely invisible: the law replaces the gun.¹¹ *Refuge* describes the connecting line between Jews and Arabs—people who are members of the binational Communist party, who are striving for coexistence in their own private lives through mixed marriages. This attempt to erase lines of division collapses completely because of the state of emergency brought about by war, a state that calls renewed attention to the recognition of difference. Yet this time, the difference is not only that between ruler and ruled, oppressor and oppressed, victor and loser, but also that between those who have an identity and those who are without one.

It turns out that power is what gives identity. That pathos that Azmi Bshara attributed to the Palestinians during the Intifada is a transition from lack of identity, that is, powerlessness and its rhetoric, to an identity and a newly-gained confidence in the fulfillment of dreams that had never before been defined or realized. War between equals (and especially the 1973 Yom Kippur War, which seemed—at least at first—as an Israeli defeat) unties the other language, not the one that maintains the ruler-ruled hierarchy, but that language that until this moment had to be concealed and suppressed. From this moment, the Arab may talk about the will to take over Palestine and expel the Jews, and it is even imaginable (in an ironic context) that the Arab defeats the forces of the

enemy. This is a new discourse, that of "the proud, fighting Arab," which stands in opposition to two previous ones: the familiar discourse of the "miserable, oppressed, persecuted, exiled, pitiable, shaking Arab, trembling for fear and haunted by nightmares" (176), and party discourse, in which the Arab is expected to adopt a rationalistic, humanistic point of view, which blurs the spontaneous connection between identity and power: "We are working among Jews. . . . We are forced to take them into consideration. When they demanded that we condemn the children's death, we demanded that they condemn the aggressivity of the Israeli army in Lebanon, and they consented" (63). This polite liberal condemnation is the official, artificial voice that dominates the inner, intimate voice.

Apparently, however, the author is not interested in this latter voice. The representation of the Arab becomes absolutely political, i.e., emphasis is put on the radicalization of the differences between the two peoples rather than on the similarities between them, even in those spheres of life that are considered politically neutral and universal. The politicization of desire appears as a novelty in this book, if we compare it with *The Lover*, which represents the discourse of desire as contrasting with political discourse. Even the erotic attraction between the Arab Fathi and the Jewish Shula has limits that it cannot transgress; this is not the limit imposed by morality upon a woman lest she cheat on her husband who has gone to war, but a political limit. There is no assimilation in the Arab's eroticism (unlike Naym's), but rather a national kind of soul searching, which he cannot do away with: "He wanted to come to her as an Arab man to a Jewish woman. He claimed from her payment for the injustice done unto him and his people. . . . The poet did not want her as a refuge but as the representative of a guilty people" (354). The imposition of a boundary upon desire defines the distinct national identity that nothing can blur: "At that hour, they ceased being man and woman. He was just an Arab and she was just a Jewess" (372). Yet the novel is not about lost love, but about the discovery of national identity, with all the limitations that it poses. For nationality is not a mode of identification but a mode of differentiation, the concretization of distance.

The Arab identity is an internal Arab affair; it is nonnegotiable with others. In this respect, it is connected to the monologue. Even when it cries out, usually in the form of political slogan, it finds no response and does not aspire toward dialogue. The long passages in which the narrator describes Fathi's thoughts on the repossession of lost Arab honor are monologic. But there is an additional level in this novel, beyond that of political monologue. It transgresses the level of collective simplicity, which Deleuze and Guattari see as one of the characteristics of minor literature. The central plot in the novel deals with giving refuge to a persecuted Arab as an act of resisting the ruling political system during the war of 1973 and this in the name of a humanism that transcends

politics. This humanism posits an attitude of protest against a system in which all characters—Jews and Arabs—must define their contrasting cultural and political identities. It is the last refuge from barbarity. It is even capable of overlooking the ideological paradox imposed upon the giver of refuge in an Israeli context (Mardouk's wife gives refuge to Fathi, an Arab intellectual: "She knew very well what was going on in the minds of Fathi and Fuad, who were sitting in the guest room awaiting her reply, demanding and expecting that she give refuge to the poet, and at the same time wishing for the annihilation of the Israeli forces," 190). Giving refuge while a war is going on—not simply to a persecuted man but to a man who is also one's enemy—is that other heritage, presented as a critical standard in relation to familiar political language. The humanistic dimension in this novel is based upon the experience of Mardouk—a Jew who grew up in Iraq and was persecuted there for Zionist activity and for belonging to the Communist party. He received refuge in the house of an unknown woman while running away from the authorities. Despite the persecution, which he has a hard time even talking about, he is not vindictive toward Arabs, but rather has the high moral obligation of giving refuge to any persecuted man regardless of one's national belonging. Humanistic identification with the other is thus opposed to a political relation, which is defined by power. The balance between these two poles sets the limits of political discourse in a reality in which there is no refuge away from the cataclysmic implications of politics. As much as we can consider this novel as characterized by a fatalistic perception of Jewish-Arab relations, as far as the violent contact between the two peoples, it is also possible to read it with optimistic humanist perception, which sets forth the claim that human feeling be preserved even in the midst of turmoil: Shula gives Fathi refuge, and he promises to return the kindness should it ever become necessary, and even decides to save her eventually from the Arab armies that will conquer the country. Whether the characters will be able to hang on to that human feeling remains unresolved. In any case, it is clear that the discovery of the Arab's distinct identity and that of any other character who is part of Israeli reality encapsulates the challenge incumbent upon literature to face, if it is to avoid becoming stereotypically political. Literature must transcend the boundaries of the narrow and obvious political sphere, in the attempt to reveal identity and its components in every aspect of life.

Beyond Political Identity

In his book *The Yellow Wind*, David Grossman reports his conversation with an old man named Abu Harb, at the end of which the Arab describes the legendary yellow wind:

Then he began to tell me about it, about the yellow wind soon to come, maybe even in his lifetime: from the gate of hell it will come (from the gate of heaven, only a nice cool wind blows), *reyh asfar*, as it is called by the local Arabs, and it is a horrid hot east wind, which comes and heats up the area once in several generations, and the people run away from its heat and take refuge in caves and crevices, but even there it reaches those it wants to reach, those who do deeds of evil and injustice. And there, in the crevices of the rocks, it kills them one by one. After a day like that, Abu Harb relates, corpses will be spread all over the country. The rocks will be whitened by heat, and the mountains will crumble into a powder that will lay over the land like a yellow gown.¹²

This legend appears after the members of a family living in a Samaritan village describe the hostilities carried out by the Jewish settlers. The ending uses a different language: no more a list of grievances but the revealing of the ruled minority's mental status, which finds expression in cultural knowledge recruited in time of need. This story grants the Arab a living dimension beyond the range of his grievances—for he is possessor of a heritage of survival, which also directs his future: this yellow wind is blowing at his back and is the source of his inner energy, even if in the existing conditions, the Arab's force seems to lie only in the hand holding a stone and a sling.

The yellow wind is perceived here as a political symbol, although it suits any context involving an affliction that requires a solution. The proposed solution is absolute and finite: it is not the outcome of a reconciliation between different needs or even between different cultures. Its cruelty derives from the gravity of the affliction, an affliction to which no one else is party. *If affliction shapes identity, so does the apocalyptic dream of liberation that necessarily results from it.*

David Grossman went out to the territories to document the beginnings of the Intifada. His sensitive microphone came close to what was going on in the minds of people on both sides—Palestinians as well as settlers. What he heard in most cases was typical of the population to which the speaker belonged. The journalistic-interview genre pushed people to define themselves politically, in the hotter than ever political arena of the day.

Three years later, Itamar Levy's *Sun Letters, Moon Letters* was published (1991). The writer sets out into the territories, but not as a self-declared interviewer this time. In a certain sense, he is invisible, as if he found himself in a foreign, conquered country, in a situation that calls for a complete separation between conqueror and conquered. The Arab is no longer an adolescent aspiring to become a perfect Israeli, nor is he a party member, but someone else, someone with a clear identity and a separate language: no confusion of identity burdens his conscience. But this other is perceived here according to new categories, not limited to his distinct political discourse or to the contrast between politics and desire. Here, the

Arab is not a reflection of the Israeli search for identity, and his function is not limited to his being an echo of the psychological and cognitive tensions experienced by the Israeli characters.¹³ To make room for the Arab, the Israeli must be marginalized; only thus can real attention to the Arab's so far suppressed speech be achieved.

This book is an interesting attempt to listen to the inner voice of the other people, other than through an Israeli prism. It describes the years of Palestinian uprising in a Palestinian village, from the perspective of a local adolescent who relates his family's experiences. We become aware of an everyday reality involving continual conflict between conqueror and conquered. The realism that the media has made us so familiar with emerges out of the personal story: the almost permanent curfew; the confrontation between local armed forces and the Israeli army; the soldiers breaking into houses in the middle of the night, arresting family members; the blown-up houses of suspected activists; and the violence of imprisonment. On the other hand, there is the reaction of the Palestinian street: the murder of suspected traitors without an investigation; the atmosphere of terror; the writing of suspects' names on walls as a warning; the naming of streets after the victims of the uprising; the widespread assistance to families whose houses have been blown up; and such norms that take root and grant the people who are involved a well-defined ethos of struggle. This reality is characterized, beyond any political standard, by the continuous flow of sewage water into the streets and an ever-rising cloud of smoke above the village. It is a kind of corner in an all-too-familiar hell, which we watch with detachment on our television screens, in which the struggle against evil is perceived as the only way to preserve a lost human dignity, although that very struggle destroys and corrupts internally and externally: "Electric wires adorned the village sky, above the tree tops. Flags were hanging on them, and a pair of gym shoes, and some dirty underwear, and an army shirt" (133).

The achievement of this book lies primarily in its coming close to the complexities of Palestinian reality. The text is laden with materials that can tempt the reader to give the events narrated a political interpretation, to see the collected data as an incriminating document, even though condemnation is not explicit in the book. But this is not all the book is about. Levy attempts to transcend factual documentation, beyond reality captured on camera, to more basic spiritual and cultural strata, which find a mode of expression in political events, but only to a limited extent. He tries to define the Palestinian figure not only in terms of an independence-war drama, but also through cognitive and empirical characteristics emerging from it. The author remains invisible; he allows the local boy, as narrator, to speak in his own intimate language, which is supposed to express the main principles of "self-definition."

The narrator—who does not participate in the casting of stones, but only watches the events as a bystander and weaves them into the story—naturally has a vested interest in documenting and preserving a world that faces total ruin, just as the house in which the narrator lives faces total explosion. The sensibility of the conquered is completely different from that of the conqueror. This is something that Grossman outdid himself in formulating in his book *The Smile of the Lamb* (1982): “Hilmi, for example, tells himself stories in order to remember them, he recites them by heart all the time, and I tell them in order to forget, to break them into little pieces and to get rid of them in this way.”¹⁴ Memory is a tactics of salvation, for the conqueror can do nothing to hurt it, and it is different from a mere camera set up to capture instantaneous events: it has historical awareness, and a sensibility that adds up and turns into a seismograph, into a perspective, and finally, into a story. But beyond the narrator’s interest in documenting the events, it turns out that the choice of a boy’s comparatively innocent point of view is supposed to blur the immediate political dimension of the reality described. The focalizing eye is still fresh enough to distinguish between a variety of nuances, wherever the newspaper or television reporter will hasten to use the conventional ways of representing reality. For instance, from the boy’s viewpoint, the story about the army breaking into the house is embedded into the frame story of the grandmother’s gluttony. She is detached from all temporal events and is constantly busy with her food (53). The political speech given from the mosque balcony, which is meant to thrill the audience and encourage them to fight, is also transmitted through that same innocent perspective, possessed of a sensibility still capable of responding to the sound of the words, to their reverberation through the air. This calls the reader’s attention to the refreshing, concrete dimension of the scene described, which evades political taxonomy (113).

This viewpoint allows for a double allegiance. It relates to reality with an intuitive understanding of the obligation to bear testimony. Therefore, all the more reality is represented clearly in the book, and its fantastic dimensions become more and more dominant. The internal logic of events belongs to the realm of legend: the grandfather who wanted to whitewash the mosque but fell into the paint containers that dried over the years and preserved him inside; the grandmother who spends her life in a continuous ingurgitation of all kinds of food, blind to everything that surrounds her, her feet rooted into the land; the uncle who had been put to sleep for five years by the grandmother’s curses; the mute boy who can quote passages from the Koran when his body is struck; Lukman, the legendary figure who died and was buried and then returned to life; and the blood of the murdered father, which refuses to dry up and serves as a reminder of the need for revenge. The events or situations themselves are

of a fantastic, legendary nature, as the norms of behavior and ways of thinking of the characters involved are intertwined with the rich Arabic oral cultural tradition, as well as with a written tradition deriving from the *Arabian Nights*, such as the story of Kalila and Dymna. The harder reality gets, the more spiritual and cognitive preparation it demands, together with the appeal to memory and collective knowledge that enable the characters to anchor their secret wishes into a legendary model, which is to serve as precedent. Such a system of remembrance, which attests to the wishes of the one who remembers and to the present that inhibits wish fulfillment, is to be found, for instance, in the legendary background to the character of Lukman, "the popular singer migrating from village to village, moving from house to house at curfew time. Some say that he is transparent, and that he can pass through a truck full of soldiers and no one will notice" (18).

The remembrance and actualization of legendary traditions join with the turning of reality into a legend, that is, myth-making. On the one hand, consciousness reproduces present reality according to familiar models of behavior and experience from the past, as well as defines and activates new models of behavior that turn into a new tradition, relevant also for the future. Legend takes shape as the continuation of reality, and the villagers' uprising against the soldiers produces the unfolding heroic story. On the other hand, the story shapes reality in a legendary structure and thus it already classifies it with orally transmitted tradition, which establishes the autonomous experienced identity of the population in whose midst it is disseminated:

And if I may speak in the hearing of your innocent ears, my brother, I will tell you about the hand of Ibrahim Abou Haled, which held a stone. I will tell you about my enemy Ali Abd Almagid's right hand, which waved the Palestinian flag. . . . I will describe the eyes of Faiz Swallame the locksmith, scorning the soldiers, and the truth-speaking tongue of his neighbor, and his brother's nose snoring contemptuously at the army. (78)

In addition to the making of reality into myth and its turning into a part of the cultural heritage, the attribution of an aesthetic dimension to reality is also remarkable. Fragments of reality are immortalized as in a picture that endows them with an aesthetic dimension, preventing forgetfulness, and enables even the ugly to be stored up in memory. The function of this aesthetic dimension is to stylize and preserve. Thus, the sewage water streaming between the village houses may freeze and turn into shining glass (97), and the murdered brother's blood may drip on his lips and draw flowers on his shirt (49). If imagination is sufficiently creative, it may even find a world of beauty and momentary comfort in the sight of a blown-up house, minutes after the event: "Among the

whirls of smoke, I saw the shapes of yellow camels, and the shape of a woman's profile, and the shape of a turtle in pain, and the shape of dead sheep, and the shape of a circus lion" (117). Admittedly, here we deal with the young narrator's totally personal experience, different by virtue of its being apolitical and uninvolved in the collective experience of turning reality into a myth of liberation. But the common ground between these two kinds of experience is the ability of both to add a new significance to drama, violence, and history, whether by the translation of these into the language of tradition, or by turning them into a picture fixed in memory, immortalizing that what has been lost and ruined.

The function of literature is to construct myths, just as historiography constructs myths that eventually become an integral part of national consciousness and identity. Neither historical nor territorial considerations will suffice to define the dimensions of the conflict between ourselves and the Palestinians. Here an Israeli author tries to bestow an autonomous identity upon the other people—an identity shaped by experience, which emerges and establishes itself at the moment of danger, when the disaster most suitable for the preservation and the refreshing of memory is the loss of home, exile.¹⁵ The authors try to look at the Other uncensored; to see him, despite his great suffering, as heir to a tradition, a culture, a world of desires and an identity in which we, the Israeli power group, have no share, just as the Israeli characters have little share in this text. The penetration of this territory partially acquaints us with a population that has until recently been veiled, and gives hope of qualifying it for the Israeli reader as an equal partner in a dialogue beginning to take shape in reality.

Conclusion

The common denominator of the different Israeli authors who dealt with the various images of the Arab, is that all of them are driven by a moral attitude, or more precisely, by a feeling of guilt. Guilt is felt toward the Arab as a victim. But although prose itself cannot change the historical past, and unfortunately also not the present and the future, it changes the position of the Arab as victim of the historical circumstances into a position of what Lyotard called "the plaintiff":

It is in the nature of a victim not to be able to prove that one has been done a wrong. A plaintiff is someone who has incurred damages and who disposes of the means to prove it. One becomes a victim if one loses these means. One loses them, for example, if the author of the damages turns out directly or indirectly to be one's judge. The latter has the authority to reject one's testimony as false or the ability to impede its publication. But this is only a

particular case. In general, the plaintiff becomes a victim when no presentation is possible of the wrong he or she says he or she has suffered.¹⁶

Beyond the above-mentioned basic moral attitude of the Israeli authors, there are significant differences in the way in which they represent the Arab as plaintiff and the components of their criticism of the dominant Israeli cultural and political values. The change that Israeli fiction has undergone, as far as its confrontation with the Arab subject is concerned, needs to be described in terms of knowledge. Knowledge focuses on the autonomous voice of the Arab, on the culture from which his speech emerges, and links political actuality with a differentiated language and tradition, which have it in their power to define identity. Authors such as Grossman and Levy do not cancel the Arab's external distinctiveness (Fanon's "epidermic identity"),¹⁷ so prominent in Hebrew literature until the publication of *The Lover*; instead, they turn its features into those of a distinctiveness that requires speech, hearing, and a language. Yizhar described the repulsive external appearance of the Arabs of H̱irbet H̱izah or the contemptible sight of the prisoner, just as Oz described the Arab of the early sixties as identifiable only by external features, the result of a projection of Israeli fears and desires.¹⁸

There is recognition of the fact that every impression left by the other, the member of the minority, the native, on the mind of the powerful majority, is an impression full of significance. Yet until the seventies, this recognition does not produce any attempt to overcome the limitations in the representation of the Arab by recurring to his voice rather than to his appearance. To what extent does the shift described in the earlier sections involve a policy of transgressing the existing limits of representation?

We can refer to Said's book on Western Orientalism as a severe critique of the pretensions of Western language and culture to represent Islam authentically. It is an understanding of the non-transgressible barriers between cultures that leads Said to a principled question related to the very possibility of representation: "The real issue is whether indeed there can be a true representation of anything, or whether any and all representations, because they are representations, are embedded first in the language and then in the culture, institutions, and political ambience of the representer."¹⁹ Said's detractors were right to claim that such a generalizing assertion undermines his critique of Orientalism in the West, for such a critique must assume that there are representations distinct from one another by virtue of their different degrees of objectivity, or of their different degrees of acquaintance with the object of study.²⁰ We may agree that the Arab cannot be represented without using language, ideology, way of thinking, and load of stereotypes with which Israeli culture is equipped. Yet this wide domain itself may allow for significant

shifts marking a change in standards. The shift from representing external reality to a concern with the linguistic identity of the Arab is the replacement of one semantic field by another. The connection between the Arab and legendary material, oral literature, and a rich Oriental imagination is not new. It can be found in Hebrew literature since the first immigration.²¹ But the novelty introduced by Grossman and Levy with regard to the image of the Arab as heir to a legendary tradition lies in the complexity and depth added to this image. They save it from the ordinary type of representation and from the cultural assumption that accompanies it: the contrast between the old, primitive Arab, living in an imaginary world, disconnected from history; and the Jew, young, European, and modern, acquainted with reality and making history by his very presence in the country. Grossman and Levy not only disconnect the image of the Arab, possessor of a linguistic identity, from this binary ideological system, which reinforces the negative attitude toward Israeli Arabs. They also reveal the authentic Arab world of experience without serving the condescending Israeli position, known to be motivated by power.

The doubts about the possibility of representation are not the bottom line of Said's work. I am more interested in the following comment, which defines a standard whereby to distinguish between various forms of representation: "I consider Orientalism's failure to have been a human as much as an intellectual one; for in having to take up a position of irreducible opposition to a region of the world considered alien to its own, *Orientalism failed to identify with human experience, failed also to see it as human experience.*"²² The category of "human experience" obliges the researcher of the Orient to go beyond the boundaries differentiating between Oriental and Occidental culture and to observe the universal human dimension of the people whom it tries to describe. Despite its generalizing nature, it is clear that this category is utopian. It assumes that it is possible to discover the human, the universal, and the identical even in the one whose otherness can be taken for granted. Rather than explaining the difference, it is possible to explore the similarity, which arouses empathy. This is not because of a colonial tendency to assimilate the Arab into the Israeli social system, but precisely because of the ability to perceive his difference in the context of the human experience he enacts: existence in a place full of danger and the construction of a national identity out of that danger.

The tendency to link the Arab's consciousness with the narrator's childhood experiences was present as early as S. Yizhar's stories. This analogy promotes the transition from a concern with refugee Arabs to an inquiry into the experience of being a refugee. Autobiographic experience functions as precedent and analogue to the experience of the other:

Suddenly, there was a spark in my heart, reminding me of how it used to be at home, not many days ago and many, many days ago . . . when suddenly there was shooting at dawn and noises and curfew, and something big and threatening and worrying, and running, and secrecy, and tense listening. . . . Shivers will creep down their spines, intestines will turn. A mother, scared to death, will gather her children around her, her heart almost stopping. How the paralyzing silence of tense expectation, of the familiar "maybe you can spare us, please sir!" takes shape, how for one moment a prayer floats through the air, a long, old, mysterious moment, shifting from here to there before it is decided. And in the heart of every one and of all as one, the drum of Genesis thumps and cries out: "danger, danger!" ("Hirbet Hizah," 48)

But the common human experience of danger is ultimately marginal in S. Yizhar's stories the essential of which is the Israeli's experience of the difference between himself and the Arab. By contrast, the Arabs in Grossman's work (*The Smile of the Lamb*) and in that of Itamar Levy are supposed to lay the foundations for a complex and comprehensive identity, characterized by a distinctiveness devoid of the threatening tendency to displace another identity. Grossman permits Hilmi, the bereaved father, to weave his story episodically, while Levy gives Jafar Omar Ysmail the right to narrate. In their own voice and through their idiosyncratic experience, almost exceptional by contrast with the violent world they describe, they successfully create a human landscape that is also local, Arab, Palestinian. The knowledge imparted to the reader is meant to disperse the lack of clarity in relation to the other culture, which functions as the object of aggression only when repressed or trapped between the familiar polarities of the repulsive and the threatening. By giving the Arab uncensored freedom of speech, Israeli literature is able to attenuate the discomfort that it feels in relation to him.

I tried to describe the development of Israeli prose in terms of oppositions: external appearance versus speech; Zionist mainstream ideology versus its criticism; central versus marginal position of the Arab in the text. This development cannot be understood as a process in which new images or a new semantic field was created; rather, it is a "recycling" of prevailing images of the Arab. As such the renewal does not concern the material (images, motives, narratives) used by the authors, but its relationship to other pertinent components of the representation of the Arab. For example, whereas the relationship between the Arab and his oral tradition was marginal in the beginning of the century, it became dominant in the prose written since 1980. On the other hand, the erotic and physical representation of the Arab, which was once dominant, became now marginal.

However, the change of the hierarchic position of the various components does not imply that recent Israeli literature is free from stereotypes,

without prejudices, and beyond ideology. Yet it is not a mere return to the well-known image of the Arab. In the actual context in which the stories of Grossman and Levy are published, representing the Arab in connection to his oral tradition has been more complex than ever before. It received a new political and cultural significance, one of protest.

Therefore, the change that I described is spiral, and not linear. Elements that previously were marginal are reshaped in a surprising and fresh way. They become central and have new political implications. This spiral model could be the key for the reading of the historical evolution of Hebrew literature as such. The change that the image of the Arab underwent can be considered a test case for this model.²³

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NOTES

1. I am drawing here upon Gershon Shaked, *Ein maqom aher* [No other place] (Tel Aviv, 1988), pp. 67–77; Gila Ramras-Rauch, *The Arab in Israeli Literature* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1989), pp. 13–52; and Risa Domb, *The Arab in Hebrew Prose 1911–1948* (London, 1982).

2. For the adoption of the Arab model in Hebrew folklore, see Itamar Even-Zohar, "The Growth and Formation of Local and Native Hebrew Culture in Eretz Israel 1882–1948," *Cathedra* 16 (1980): 174–75. Netiva Ben-Yehuda gives a personal testimony on the Arab as model for identification: "To us, they, the Arabs, were great heroes. Frightening, threatening, courageous, dominant, instilling terror and awe. We envied them, we surely envied them. We were dying to be like them ever since the Shomer and until the Palmach were founded. We were only concerned about one thing: to talk like them, to walk like them, to act like them. . . . We imitated them in everything. To us they were the model of natives of the country, while we—we may not have been anything specific, but we were definitely not 'Diaspora Jews.' So what does a native of the country, a 'non-Diaspora Jew,' look like? Like an Arab. Anyone who could chat in Arabic was held in great honor, and if he had Arab friends, he was a king." See 1984—*Between Eras* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1991), 5th ed., pp. 175–76.

3. "Ḥirbet Ḥizah," in *Seven Stories* [Hebrew] (Ramat Gan, 1971), p. 40. All translations from Hebrew texts included in this paper are my own.

4. Several scholars have focused on the oedipal struggle in this book: Shaked and Shalev are among them (Mordechai Shalev, "The Arabs as a Literary Solution," *Ha'arets* (30 Sept. 1970). In my view, the intergenerational relations represent different cultural attitudes of center as opposed to margin, in an attempt to test their ability to acknowledge the existence of the other (the Arab) and to confront the violent consequences of the War of Independence at a temporal distance.

5. A. B. Yehoshua, "Facing the Forests," in *All His Stories* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv, 1993), p. 101.

6. Menakhem Perry, "The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict as a Metaphor in Recent Israeli Fiction," *Poetics Today* 7 (1986): 603-19.

7. G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (Minneapolis, 1986), p. 16.

8. Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multi-National Capitalism," *Social Text* 15 (1986): 71-72.

9. Gilead Morahg's analysis of the representation of the Arab in Hebrew literature betrays the failure of exclusively technical literary distinctions to establish the political and cultural significance of the text. Morahg rightly observes that until the publication of *The Lover*, "narratives of encounter between Jews and Arabs . . . were conventionally limited to the point of view of a narrator-witness or a Jewish hero narrator, whose very nature and whose involvement in the narrated events biased the reader toward a Jewish perspective." Conversely, *The Lover* and a number of additional texts mark a shift in attitudes: "They aspire to restore a balance and thus allow for several points of view, having in common the possibility of dividing the reader's empathy between the Jewish and the Arab characters, through a constant shift of perspectives and centers of experience. . . . These novels rely upon a network of monologues, confronting the Jewish narrators' inner worlds and personal voices with the Arab idiosyncrasy that emerges from Naym's monologues" (Gilead Morahg, "Lovers and Enemies: The Image of the Arab in the Mirror of Literature" [Hebrew], *Moznayim* 61 (1987): 16-17. In my analysis, it becomes clear that the use of an Arab narrator is not necessarily conducive to the exposure of his personal or collective idiosyncrasy, and that literary technique does not guarantee a breakthrough in the representation of the Arab.

10. David Grossman, *Present Absent* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv, 1992), pp. 60-61.

11. Walter Benjamin, *Reflections*, edited and with an introduction by Peter Demetz (London and New York, 1978), pp. 277-300.

12. David Grossman, *Hazman hatsahov* [The yellow wind] (Tel Aviv, 1987), p. 64.

13. As M. Perry claims in his article. On this issue, see Gilead Morahg, p. 15, and Shimon Levy, "Prisoners of Fiction: The Arabs in Recent Hebrew Literature" [Hebrew], *Moznayim* 57 (1983): 73.

14. David Grossman, *The Smile of the Lamb* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv, 1982), p. 13.

15. Walter Benjamin defined the moment of collective danger as an occasion to reexamine the past and rearrange it in conformity with the requirements of the new perspective. On this occasion, tradition becomes contemporary and usable. See "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations* (Suffolk, 1970), pp. 255-66.

16. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute* (Minneapolis, 1988), p. 8.

17. Frantz Fanon, *White Skin Black Masks* (London, 1970).

18. "In defense of the perpetrators of the latest revenge, I will say openly that that herdsman was possessed of a terribly sly countenance: one eye, broken nose, drooling, and out of his jaws—to this all the perpetrators of the action swore as one man—stuck out long sharp and crooked teeth like a fox's. One who looks like that is capable of every abomination." Amos Oz, "Nomad and Viper," in *Where the Jackals Howl* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv, 1975), p. 29. Oz radicalized the list of features while producing a latent parodization of the gaze upon the Arab. Parody also concretizes the quasi-automatic association between external appearance and the operative conclusions it is supposed to serve. In this story, the Arab's appearance, expected to reinforce the recognition of a distinction between ethnic groups, functions as justification for an act of revenge against one suspected (because of his appearance) of being a threatening figure, deserving of punishment.

19. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London, 1978), p. 272.

20. Robert Young, *White Mythologies—Writing History and the West* (London and New York, 1990), p. 138.

21. For example, see *The Children of Arabia*, by Moshe Smilansky. Also Yaffah Berlowitz, *Inventing a Land, Inventing a People: The Literature of the First Immigration* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv, 1996), pp. 113–66.

22. Said, *Orientalism*, p. 328.

23. Tynjanov considered literary evolution as a process of changing the function of literary norms and techniques. In this process, literature is influenced by existing social conventions and nonliterary norms. I would like to develop this theory in a more thematic and not only stylistic-formal way. Literary development shows itself in the recycling process of semantic elements and in changing the hierarchic position that these elements hold in literature. See Jurij Tynjanov, "On Literary Evolution," in *Reading in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*, ed. L. Matejka and K. Pomorska (Cambridge and London, 1971), pp. 66–78.