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*THE ARAB IMAGE IN HEBREW FICTION BETWEEN WORLD WAR I
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The years between the two World Wars were fateful ones for the Jewish people. They culminated in the rise of Nazism and the destruction European Jewry. This destruction brought with it the decline and ultimate cessation of Hebrew literary activity in Europe. The Hebrew literary centers of Russia and Poland, where Hebrew letters had flourished, gave way to the Palestinian center to which many of the leading Hebrew writers had immigrated.

Hebrew literature in Palestine had begun to develop along modern lines during the Second Aliyah, in the first decade preceding World War I. The issuance of the Balfour Declaration in 1917 and the end of the War were harbingers of hope for the future of Hebrew literary creativity. With the Third Aliyah, beginning with the twenties, the ranks of the Hebrew writers were augmented by new voices and Palestinian Hebrew letters came into their own.

Upon coming into contact with the soil and climate of Palestine the immigrant writers became attuned to the landscape of the area. They responded to the evolving life there, and even the Hebrew language in which they wrote underwent great transformation. The dominant theme of Hebrew letters became the Land of Israel. In poetry as well as in prose the Hebrew writers depicted the attachment of a returning people to its homeland and its soil. At the same time, the cataclysmic events which had engulfed European Jewry served as a mournful backdrop to their literary efforts. It is in the light of these events that one must view the attitudes toward the Palestinian Arabs and their life that were expressed in Hebrew letters.

One of the major writers of Hebrew fiction to emerge in Palestine between the two World Wars was Yitzhak Shenhar. He may be considered a member of the "transition generation" which forsook the ghettos of Europe to take up the difficult pioneering life in the new land. In Hebrew letters, too, he represents a transitional figure between the earlier less sophisticated prose writers and the more refined modern craftsmen. Most of Shenhar's early thematic material was drawn from the life of the Ukrainian shtetl which he knew so well. A talented stylist, he was able to depict the harrowing experiences of Ukrainian Jews who had witnessed pogroms and revolution.

Gradually, Shenhar, who incidentally had Hebraized his name from Shenberg, was drawn to the new life of Palestine. He began to depict its landscape and the experiences of the settlers in both urban and rural surroundings. His stories were concerned primarily with the pangs of adjustment of the newcomers and undoubtedly reflected his own experiences. His characters are typical of a transitional era in which members are torn between two worlds.

As part of his effort to reflect the realities of the new land, Shehar was led to include Arab themes. But this proved to be a strange new world for him. Like Moshe Smilansky before him, he lapsed into romanticism and did not concern himself with the immediate problems of Arab-Jewish co-existence. Although conscious of the Arab presence he proved unable to portray it with the same grasp of reality he had exhibited in dealing with old world themes.

Typical of Shenhar's approach is his short story "As Grapes in The Desert,"¹ in which he recounts his experiences as an employee at an isolated railway stop

somewhere in the bleak, parched Negev. His superior is the unsympathetic Yusuf Effendi, who jealously guards the water supply that is periodically replenished by a passing supply train and refuses to share a drop with the local Bedouins. The narrator, who is more compassionate, is moved to fill the pitcher of Azizah, a young Bedouin girl.

In the midst of this Negev scene fantasy takes over. In the sultry desert heat the narrator envisions the Bedouin girl's tragic lot. He sees her as having been promised by her father to an aging sheik who desires to add a young wife to his household. However, she is deeply in love with Halil, a member of a rival tribe who is waylaid and slain by her brothers. The story ends in real tragedy when Azizah is crushed by the supply train as she seeks to salvage a few drops of water from its tank.

Like Shenhar, a number of other prose writers was attracted by the exotic aspects of Palestinian Arab life. It should be remembered that, for the most part, these writers were of East European origin. The strange world of sheiks, tents and camels held a special fascination for them. Very often it was a fascination that was fed more by stereotyped images of both noble and bloodthirsty characters than by realistic experience and encounter. Here were writers schooled in Western thought and literature who felt called upon to interpret a starkly different way of life, one which they could not but view as elemental and primitive.

In some cases, however, when Hebrew writers painted typical scenes of Arab blood revenge on the one hand, or of Arab wedding customs and hospitality on the other, they did so on the basis of careful study of Arab folkways and first-hand knowledge of Arab life. As a matter of fact, Hebrew writers were the first to describe Arab life and yearnings in Palestine and anticipated in this the belletristic efforts of the Arab writers themselves.

Several of the prose writers have sympathetically captured aspects of Arab life in stories which could very well have been written by Arab writers in Arabic. Moshe Stavi, who used the pen name Abu Naaman when writing his tales of Arab life, described the apprehension felt by a group of Arab villagers when confronted with their Turkish tax agents, who descend upon them to deprive them of their hard-earned crops. In a lighter vein, Avraham Hareuveni related the difficulties experienced by the hapless Ahmed with the Turkish army, which finally requisitioned his finest camel. Another writer, Pesah Bar-Adon, in a story reminiscent of one of Y. L. Peretz's Hasidic tales, describes an illiterate Arab shepherd who pours forth his soul in playing the flute. In another tale he takes up the pervasive theme of blood revenge. In this case a shepherd exacts revenge for his slain uncle fully twenty years after the uncle's murder.

Yaakov Churgin, who was educated in Palestine and grew up with the Arabs, was well equipped to depict the Arab way of life. His short story, "Village Wedding," is a vivid description of the typical festivities at an Arab wedding celebration. All proceeds as customary, except that the young bride rebels against her bridegroom who is already the father of two grown sons, and flees her marriage bed. Similarly, Menahem Kapliuk, a student of the Arabic language and Arab affairs, also expertly recorded the events of "One Wedding Day." In this short story he touches upon another aspect of Arab-Jewish relations. The members of a kibbutz near the Syrian border are invited to attend a wedding in a neighboring Arab village. Previously, an Arab from that same village had been shot outside the kibbutz when apprehended in an attempted robbery. The threat

of blood revenge hangs like a pall over the proceedings. Fortunately, the kibbutz members are able to avoid a blood feud by buying off the avenging brother.

Nahum Yerushalmi belongs to the select group of Hebrew writers who devoted their talents to describing the life of the Oriental Jewish communities. It was the members of these communities who lived in closest proximity to the Arabs and were most often thrown into close contact with them. In his involved long tale "Mercado the Donkey Driver," which he published at the beginning of the twenties, Yerushalmi described in detail the life of the Jewish ghetto community in the midst of the preponderately Arab populace of Hebron. One of his Arab types is Jamil, the son of a sheik who had acquired Western habits and who is representative of the Muslim effendiyah of the cities. In his unflattering portrayal of this type, Yerushalmi imparts a sense of the constant tension felt by the Jewish minority in Hebron. Jamil pursues the daughter of a Haham of Hebron, who is only able to ward off his embraces with difficulty.

A more problematic aspect of the encounter between the sexes serves as the basis for the poet Shin Shalom's story "Lena." It tells of the love of a Jewish teacher in a Galilee settlement for Lena, a sheik's daughter who speaks Hebrew. They meet secretly and become attached to each other, but the wall that separates their two peoples stands between them. In this story Shalom looks into the soul of the suffering Arab woman, who gets married against her will. The theme of Arab-Jewish love, which is dealt with here, is a recurring one in Hebrew fiction and as we shall see was explored particularly by Yehuda Burla.

The short stories to which I have referred thus far are all included in *Sippurim Ivrim Me-Hayye Ha-Aravim* (Arab Life in Hebrew Prose),² edited in 1963 by the Hebrew writer Yosef Arikha. This anthology illumines still other important facets of the Arab-Jewish encounter. Interestingly enough, this prose work opens with a poem by Yaakov Steinberg, who is also the author of many polished stories and essays and who has been called by some critics "the Ecclesiastes of modern Hebrew literature." His poem, "Shir Aravi" (Arab Song), echoes a forlorn and plaintive song which is heard in the stillness of the night. The poem catches the spirit of the Arab fate and empathizes with it. The poet, who settled in Palestine in 1914, is part of the new wave of immigrants who have come to revive the land and to westernize it. Yet he is conscious of the haunting Arab presence which is destined to give way before the dynamic inroads of Jewish settlement.

This disturbing sense of confrontation and of a gap which is virtually unbridgeable, later to find its most poignant expression in contemporary Israel writing, is adumbrated also in Steinberg's short stories. In "The Haj From Hefzi Bah," a short story replete with biblical associations and colorful word pictures, Steinberg is able to individualize brilliantly the confrontation. The story describes a group of Jewish laborers who have come to establish a settlement on a hill in Hefzi Bah, near Hedera. The place was once the site of an Arab village and it contains a symbolic *even shetiyah*, the Hebrew term for a foundation stone. Steinberg has employed this symbol to dramatize the confrontation between the two peoples. The concept of the *even shetiyah* is central to both the Moslem and Jewish traditions. According to Jewish belief it represents the rock of Mt. Moriah on which Abraham was commanded to sacrifice his son Isaac. It also is said to be the site of the Holy of Holies in the Jewish Temple. The foundation stone is equally sacred to the Arabs, for it gives its name to the celebrated Dome of the Rock or the Mosque of Omar, situated on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

The young settlers of Hefzi Bah are both attracted to the new landscape and awed by it. A disturbing element of strangeness is introduced by the old Arab watchman — the Haj of Hefzi Bah — who has never left the place and whose favorite spot during his nighttime vigils is the symbolic rock. The narrator relates how, whenever he ventured out for a stroll during the night, he was confronted by the stoic presence of the old Haj who sat doggedly crouched over the rock. Once he called out to him from afar, “Shalom,” and the Haj hoarsely replied: “Aleikum salaam.” The presence of the Arab doesn’t forsake him even during his waking hours.

Finally, one moonlit night the narrator dresses to take a walk and soak up the atmosphere of the new homeland. He has a fateful meeting with the Haj at the rock. The Arab taps his staff menacingly and stalks away, uttering imprecations all the while. Steinberg concludes his description of this confrontation with the Arab watchman as follows:

I followed him with my gaze, trembling with both wonder and understanding. An awareness akin to that which sometime illumines a deep enigma like a flash, quickly gripped me at the moment when the Haj began to disappear into the mist; I knew then that, like me, he wanted to grasp the homeland anew. I had troubled him night after night by filling the air with strange longings It was as if he was descending into the bowels of the earth. Only his dog growled at me softly.³

In depicting this Arab-Jewish encounter Steinberg has gone to the root of the problem. The Haj and the narrator both seek to grasp the homeland anew. With remarkable sympathy the author conveys the aged Arab watchman’s feeling of estrangement in the land which he considers to be rightfully his by virtue of his people’s sojourn there throughout the centuries.

In still another sketch, entitled “Ahmed,”⁴ Steinberg has sensitively recorded his impression of a meeting with an Arab youth who speaks Hebrew fluently. The encounter takes place in an orchard where the youth is in the employ of a Jewish owner. The narrator is attracted by the youth but he cannot repress his feelings of ambivalence. He recalls his own student days in his European hometown. The Arab youth’s black, piercing eyes with their amber hue remind him of the flashing eyes of the cat which used to creep stealthily through his parents’ house. He seeks out the young Arab and comes upon him as he is busily bent over his hoe. He admires his industriousness, yet his admiration is tempered by his own disturbing youthful memories.

A different kind of meeting with an Arab youth is described by Yosef Hanani in his short story “Ahmed’s Flute.”⁵ At the youth’s insistence, an exchange is made with the narrator, who gives him his penknife in return for the flute. They part in friendship and the narrator treasures the flute throughout the years. Even though it is now cracked and can no longer produce musical sounds he fondly recalls the melodies it once produced.

The years between the two World Wars took their toll of Jewish victims in Palestine. The situation was exacerbated by the Mandatory Power, which did little to improve Arab-Jewish relations and to foster understanding between the two peoples. In the stories of some writers, like Asher Barash, there are expressed feelings of apprehension over the Arab character, given to outbursts of violence. In one story, “Haj Ibrahim,”⁶ he describes a scene of Arab hostility in which the Haj throws off his cloak of businesslike friendship to lash out at a Jewish lad. Elsewhere he writes of an Arab woman who, despite her veneer of Western training, becomes enraged at her brother and threatens to murder him with a

mélon knife.⁷ Implied in these stories is a latent suspicion that the Arab mentality is governed by emotions that cannot be contained. One never knows when they may flare up.

By the same token, Hebrew writers are able to depict scenes of sincere Arab friendship and humaneness for Jews even during periods of tense relations. In Yosef Arikha's story, "Nocturnal Landscape,"⁸ Aharon Giladi, a Jewish settler, is captured by an Arab band on a lonely road as he makes his way back to his settlement. He is spared by the leader, who looks at a photograph of Giladi's daughter that reminds him of his own child Latifa. Similarly, Israel Zarhi describes in his novel *Kfar Hashiloah* (The Village of Shiloah)⁹ how in the difficult days of Arab rioting in 1929 an aged sheik does everything in his power to protect the Jewish settlers. He shows the settlers the woman's kerchief sent to him by the Arabs of Hebron as an expression of their disdain for his siding with the Jews. The settlers in turn bring him a letter of approbation from Ben-Zvi, then chairman of the Jewish National Assembly. The sheik accepts it gracefully but sadly says: "Perhaps it will avail my son."

Highly instructive with regard to the Jewish attitude toward the Arabs in the post-World War I period is Nathan Bistrizky's long kibbutz novel of the twenties *Yamim v' Lailot* (Days and Nights),¹⁰ which takes ample account of the Arab presence. It chronicles the efforts of the halutzim to identify with the Arabs and to befriend them. Still the realities of Arab hostility, which reached a climax in the Jaffa riots of 1921, vitiate their hopes for peaceful coexistence.

In his loosely constructed and sentimental narrative Bistrizky describes the life of the halutzim who struggle to gain a foothold in Givat Aryeh, on the banks of the Sea of Galilee. The settlement is named after one Aryeh Goldzweiger, who met his death at the hands of an Arab from a neighboring village. Later in the novel we learn also of the death of another kibbutz member who was wounded by Arabs while visiting the city of Jaffa.

The novel opens appropriately enough with an evocative description of the courtyard of Kamal Effendi in an Arab village near the settlement. This description effectively introduces us to the slow-moving, static life of the Arab villagers. Essentially, the novel depicts the loneliness and struggles of uprooted Jewish halutzim from Eastern Europe. The author takes us back to their origins and explores their feelings of doubt as they seek their salvation in the new land.

Central to the effort of the halutzim is a desire to come close to the Arab inhabitants whose rootedness they envy and seek to emulate. One of the group, Uri Rotburt, who now calls himself Uriel Ganani, is representative of their strivings to achieve amicable relations with the neighboring Arabs. Occasionally he has his doubts about the chances for this. In one instance he perceives an Arab who passes by astride a donkey, with his teeth bared and smiling in the sunlight, and ponders:

Hum . . . one cannot think . . . that a person who smiles like this . . . that he is capable of killing his friend for the pleasure of it . . . between cigarettes . . . and perhaps even without a knife . . . without a knife, just with his teeth and nails¹¹

Taken aback by his thoughts, Uri is further led to reflect that it was probably such an Arab who fatally stabbed Aryeh, for whom the settlement was named. His doubts notwithstanding, Uri makes serious efforts to befriend the neighboring Arabs.

Twice a week the kibbutz is visited by Sheik Sa'id, who delivers dairy

products at lunchtime. Sheik Sa'id is pictured as being worlds apart from the settlers. He cannot comprehend the devotion of the halutzim to the ideal of labor. He has three wives, the youngest of whom is fifteen, but he is childless. Uri joins Sa'id in an effort to cultivate his friendship. He tries to identify with him and to imagine himself in the role of his son. In his own search for new roots he desperately clings to Sa'id as a "father image" to replace the one he forsook at home and is keenly disappointed when his overtures are rejected. Uri is constantly alert to the need of reaching understanding with the Arabs, and on a trip to Jerusalem searches out Arab types.

On one occasion Uri is instrumental in arranging an overnight visit at the Sheik's home by a group of his fellow-halutzim. The visit coincides with a wedding celebration, and arrangements are made for the group to share the Sheik's hospitality. During the course of the conversation Uri expresses ambivalent feelings. On the one hand, he is suspicious of the Arab smile which may cloak pent-up feelings of hostility. On the other hand, he is even ready to accept the myth that the Arab fellahin are originally of Hebrew stock and that they remained in the land, implying that they could be brought back to the fold. After all, he muses, a brother who kills his own brother is no ordinary murderer. The enmity between Arab and Jew is simply a product of historic misunderstanding. Later that evening, the Sheik guides Uri to his sleeping quarters by lantern light. Bistrizky again invokes the "father image," for Uri is described as eagerly following the Sheik, just as he once followed his own father in Lemberg.

It should be kept in mind that the action takes place against the background of constant threat of Arab attack. Uri himself stands guard at night and has ample time to sort out his ambivalent feelings. He still hopes for Arab-Jewish rapprochement and wants desperately to be accepted by his Arab neighbor, the Sheik. Once he implores him:

Dear Sheik Sa'id! Take me unto you, into the embrace of the sun-warmed manure of your village, your ancestral village.¹²

Perturbed as he is by the course of events and by the danger of the Arab threat, he does not cease yearning for the kind of rootedness represented by the static Arab way of life.

The final part of the novel brings with it a rude awakening. It depicts the Arab pogrom of 1921 in Jaffa during which many Jews, including a prominent Hebrew author who is obviously none other than Yosef Haim Brenner, lost their lives. Bistrizky describes the horror and disillusionment of those days. He incorporates various realistic scenes to convey a sense of terror and destruction. By making use of the image of the martyred Hebrew writer Brenner, who had advocated the need of cultivating the Arabs and their language and who had sought the key to mutual understanding, he sharpens his portrayal of the tragic Arab-Jewish conflict.

Still, Bistrizky chose not to end his narrative on a completely negative note. He concludes his novel as he began, with a scene in the Arab village. Once again we are in the courtyard of Kamal Effendi, who explains why a pit in the courtyard remained unfilled. It appears that it originally had been dug in search of a treasure, but the treasure had eluded the diggers. Perhaps there is a symbol intended here — the treasure represents none other than the ideal of Arab-Jewish understanding for which Uri and the members of his pioneering generation were unsuccessfully striving.

The novels and short stories of Yehuda Burla, the Jerusalem-born writer who

was descended from an old Sephardic family, represent a major effort to portray the life of Oriental Jewry on a broad canvas not only in Palestine but in neighboring lands as well. As in the case of Yitzhak Shami, Burla's second language was Arabic and he was able to describe authentically life among the Arabs. Burla does not present an idealistic picture of Arab-Jewish relations, yet he indicated the many social, cultural and economic bonds which have linked the two peoples, especially from 1880 until after World War I. More than any other writer he depicted the love relationship between Jew and Arab, the outcome of close association in varying circumstances.

Burla's early tales, written after World War I, reflect his experiences as a soldier in the Turkish forces. An excellent storyteller who combined western and eastern techniques, he composed typical romantic stories of love and revenge. Still he was saved from sentimentality by his abiding concern with real life situations. His early work reflects the static world of the Oriental Jewish communities down to 1920 and the marked influence of Muslim culture on the Jewish way of life and thought. The Arabs are pictured in their manifold relationships with Jews and in their own interrelationships. Many of Burla's stories are pervaded by the Jewish fear of Arab oppression, but they also furnish numerous examples of friendship and cooperation.

Burla remains a primary source for our knowledge of the Oriental Jewish communities over a wide spectrum of lands and time. The political aspects of Arab-Jewish coexistence are not always uppermost in his works, but he does convey a sense of the new strivings among the Arab youth and women. Beneath the static life of the Middle East we discern the changes that are gradually leading Arab society to break out of its shell and to keep pace with modernity.

Burla reveals especial sympathy for the social position of the Arab woman. In his first long tale, *Beli Kokhav* (Without A Star),¹³ dealing with Bedouin love and revenge, Nehora, a sheik's daughter, is the victim of her family's wrath. Having run off with one of her father's captive tribesman and having married him, she is finally killed, along with her two children, when she is discovered in her home near Damascus. The story is replete with romantic adventure, for her lover had spirited her away from her family while the family was on a pilgrimage to Mecca. The pilgrimage is described in lavish detail.

In a later novel, *Senunit Rishonah* (First Swallow),¹⁴ Burla recounts the story of Munira, the daughter of a prominent family from Dagestan which had settled in Baghdad. As a young girl she rebels against wearing a veil, studies languages on her own and exhibits socialist leanings. Her family frowns upon her efforts to improve the status of the fellahin who work the lands she has inherited. In her quest for independence she goes to Beirut, where she meets up with various students, including Carmella, a Jewess from Palestine. In her talks with Carmella she questions the justice of Zionism and receives clarification regarding the Jewish aims concerning the Arabs. After an unsuccessful marriage, Munira accepts Carmella's invitation to come to Palestine and take up life in a kibbutz.

Burla describes Munira's experiences with kibbutz life which convince her of the "real" idealism of the kibbutz members. She begins to see in the kibbutz a way of life that, if followed by the Arabs, could help in alleviating some of their social ills. Her stay in the kibbutz is made trying by the outbreak of the War of Independence which she condemns as a terrible mistake. The novel ends in personal tragedy when she learns of the death in Haifa of her Jewish lover Nissim Nahum, to whom she was to be married, and she has a mental breakdown.

In this novel Burla came closest to expressing his credo for Arab-Jewish coexistence. He attempted to show that the two peoples could be brought together and could live together. His approach may seem to be overly idealistic, but he apparently held that once the Arabs realized the benefits that could come to them from Zionism, they would drop their hostility. He also tried to foster a spirit of cooperation through joint literary activity. In 1964 he edited a collection of writings called *Mifgash* (Meeting-ground), in which the stories of leading Hebrew and Arab writers appeared side by side both in the original and in translation on facing pages.

Burla dealt more soberly with the prospects for Arab-Jewish cooperation in a perceptive story entitled "The Vision of Brutus,"¹⁵ set in the period shortly after the United Nations recognition of Jewish statehood. Brutus is an Arab watchmaker in a town near Nazareth. Micah Ezri, who obtains a watch from him, is a member of a neighboring kibbutz which is committed to the principle of Arab-Jewish peace and coexistence. Brutus, a Christian Arab, cannot share this hope fully. While he admires the social aims and accomplishments of the kibbutz, he sees no possibility for a breakthrough as far as the Muslim world is concerned. Too much enmity has been stored up. Following a visit to the kibbutz, Brutus is waylaid by an Arab band and murdered. The watch he had sold to Micah Ezri remains as a symbol of the limited time that remains to effect a solution to the problems dividing Arabs and Jews.

An aspect of Arab-Jewish relations which received perhaps the most comprehensive treatment in Hebrew literature at the hands of Burla is the theme of Arab-Jewish love. Apparently, Burla viewed romantic attachments between the two peoples as a natural concomitant of their being thrown together, and not as a strange, exotic phenomenon. He devoted major novels and a number of short stories to depicting such relationships.

In *Naftuley Adam*, translated into English under the title *In Darkness Striving*,¹⁶ Burla writes of the love of the young Damascus-born Jew Rahamo for Shafica, a divorced Moslem woman. Rahamo, unhappy in his own marriage, is an itinerant peddler who travels to see Shafica whenever he can. And she is prepared to be his second wife or to wait for his divorce. As in several of Burla's other works, the lovers become victims of inexorable fate. Rahamo is blinded by Shafica's former brothers-in-law and tries to maintain his love as his afflictions multiply. Shafica loses her sanity and commits suicide. Only the sympathetic treatment that Rahamo receives from Sheik Abdul Karim, who reads to him from the works of the blind poet Al-Maari, helps him retain his will to live. Abdul Karim is cast in the role of a healer whose wisdom brings Rahamo some respite from his Jobian doubts.

Another novel by Burla, *Baal Be-Amav* (The Dignitary),¹⁷ treats this theme. Gideon, a Sephardic young man from Jerusalem who comes into regular contact with Arab workers, becomes infatuated with Hamda, the daughter of a fellah from the village of Silwan. Hamda is even willing to convert to Judaism and to become his junior wife. This arrangement may seem unreasonable, but it was apparently quite acceptable to the Arab girl, who undoubtedly viewed it as a step upwards. Finally, Gideon marries a Jewess and only later does he invite Hamda to join his household to take care of his children. Even though he obviously remained attached to her, he could not bridge the gulf that divided Jew from Arab in order to marry her.

A final example of the close social relationships between the two peoples is

afforded by Burla's novel *Meranenet* (The Songstress),¹⁸ set in Damascus during the World War I period. It depicts the role of Bediya Zakkai, a Sephardic Jewess, as the mistress of the Arab official Haj Rashid. Her company is sought after by Arab notables attracted by her beauty and talents. Because of her generosity she also retains the respect of the Jewish community. In this novel we hear the rumblings of Arab nationalism, which result in the imprisonment of Haj Rashid and his son at the hands of the Turks on a charge of disloyalty. Only through the intercession of Bediya's young protege with the Turkish commander are they save from hanging. The events in the novel bespeak a high degree of acceptance for an accomplished Jewish woman in Arab society.

Only a number of scattered references to the Arab-Jewish problem are to be found in the writings of the celebrated Nobel Prize Laureate Shmuel Yosef Agnon. A writer who made abundant use of materials from the Jewish tradition, Agnon chose the form of the fable to react to the Arab riots of 1929. His own home in Talpiot was looted at that time, and he expressed his disappointment in two satiric fables about a wolf and sheep, based on the verse in Isaiah 11:6, "And the wolf shall dwell with the lamb." It is apparent that when the author speaks of the wolf he has in mind the Arab attackers, and that when he chides the lambs for their foolishness in the face of obvious danger he refers to certain Jews.

That Agnon was levelling a veiled criticism against the pacifist intellectuals of the Brit Shalom group who advocated an idealistic bi-nationalist solution to the Palestinian question is clear from his fables. For in a letter replying to Dr. Judah L. Magnes, head of Brit Shalom, who had objected to his fables, Agnon reiterated his stand about the inalienable right of the Jewish people to the entire Land of Israel.¹⁹ He never swerved from his traditional rationale which was buttressed by the Divine promise to Israel in the Bible.¹⁰

Because of his traditional point of view Agnon felt that Arab-Jewish peace and coexistence could be achieved only on the basis of the full recognition of the Jews as a nation among nations. That he believed the Jews could not negotiate from weakness is clear in his popular fable, "From Foe To Friend."²¹ In this seemingly naive tale Agnon describes how he finally won the wind over to his side. On each occasion when he had put up a flimsy structure, the wind had come to mock him. Only when he erected a permanent abode did the wind make its peace with him. Agnon thus implies that the Jewish settlers can achieve peace with their neighbors only if they are respected for their stability and strength.

In one of his stories, "Beneath the Tree," an odd mixture of fantasy and reality, Agnon describes a meeting with an Arab official. The meeting takes place when the narrator is on his way to plant saplings in the kibbutz of Degania. A discussion ensues regarding the Jewish and Arab claims to the land. The narrator reiterates the bond of the people of Israel to the Land of Israel as recorded in the Bible. Strangely enough, his argument is not disputed by the Arab. It is on this basis that the narrator says: "We have come not to seize rule and to have dominion, but to plow, sow and plant."

A reference to a modern aspect of the Arab-Jewish problem is made by Agnon in his novel *Temol Shilshom* (Only Yesterday), which presents the historical background of the Second Aliyah, beginning with the first decade of the century. The novel traces the fortunes of Yitzhak Kummer, an idealistic halutz who journeys to Palestine from Galicia. One of the problems which agitated the Jewish settlement at that time was the employment of cheap Arab

labor by the Jewish farmers. The novel describes the struggle of Kummer and his fellow-laborers to make ends meet because of their difficult economic situation.

Finally, note should be taken of the achievement of the Russian-born Hayyim Hazaz in portraying the life of the Yemenite Jews. An outstanding example of this aspect of his literary work is his tetralogy *Yaish*,²² which is set against the background of the Jewish quarter of Sanaa, capital of the Yemen.

For almost 1,000 pages Hazaz follows the life of Yaish from infancy through adulthood, when he leaves for the Land of Israel. This is a colorful saga depicting the many-faceted life of a Jewish community rich in tradition and cultural values, but poverty-stricken because of the limited economic opportunities open to it. It is a community which is subject to discrimination and oppression, but which finds solace in the study of Torah and Kabbalah and in social feasts, dance, and song.

Because the Yemenite Jews were Arabic speaking, Hazaz developed a specific style tintured with Arabisms and Arab phrases to convey the folk flavor of his characters' speech. He was eminently successful in capturing the spirit of Yemenite customs and folkways, having observed these at close range during the years he lived among the Yemenites who had settled in Jerusalem.

The character Yaish has his share of troubles at the hands of the Arabs. He was orphaned when but one year old. On his way to the Land of Israel, his father became involved in saving two Jewish orphans from forced conversion to Islam and was never heard of again. Because of his difficulties in eking out a living as a goldsmith, Yaish takes to itinerant peddling. He enjoys the hospitality of an Arab sheik, whose treatment of him is a notable exception to the general rule. The sheik shows him kindness and permits him to ply his wares in the surrounding villages. Later, when Yaish opens his own jewelry shop, the sheik places a generous order with him for his daughter who is to become a bride.

The central theme of the novel is Yaish's striving to rise above his circumstances through prayer and kabbalistic study. His ultimate decision to leave for Palestine is symbolic of the age-old longing of Yemenite Jewry for redemption and for deliverance from their oppressors. Through this novel and his other writings dealing with the Yemenite Jews, Hazaz added a noteworthy chapter to the body of his work.

Hebrew fiction between the two World Wars reflects the complex relations between Jews and Arabs in Palestine. During this period a number of Hebrew writers authentically illumined various facets of Arab life in the land and opened windows on the Arab soul, particularly that of the Arab woman. Some chose to deal with the exotic aspects of this life, while other faced up to the realities of Arab-Jewish relations and coexistence. A mixture of optimism and pessimism characterizes the approach of the Hebrew writers. Although at times one may detect a latent feeling of apprehension concerning the Arab presence, never is this feeling translated into hatred.

By and large the Hebrew writers of this period may be said to incorporate in their writings a humanistic vision of Zion as expressed by Buber in one of his conversations:

Zion is something greater than a patch of land in the Near East or a Jewish State on this patch of land. Zion implies a memory, a demand, a mission. Zion is the foundation stone, the bedrock and basis of the Messianic edifice of humanity. Zionism is the limitless destiny of the nation's soul.²³

This vision is the basis of our hope that the ideals of peace and genuine cooperation may yet prevail between Arab and Jew.

NOTES

1. Available in the English translation of Shlomo Katz in *Jewish Frontier*, vol. 15, no. 3, March 1948, pp. 44-48.
2. Tel-Aviv, Am Hassefer, 1963.
3. Quoted from the story in *Sippurim Ivrim me-Hayye ha-Aravim*, p. 116.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 117-118.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 249-250.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 124-126.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 126-128.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 216-224.
9. For an extract from this novel see *ibid.*, pp. 243-248.
10. Jerusalem, 1926. A revised edition was published by Sifriat Poalim in 1940.
11. Quoted from the Jerusalem 1926 edition, p. 126.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 395.
13. Originally published in 1927 and included in his collected works, 1961.
14. Published in 1954 and included in his collected works, 1961.
15. Reprinted in *Hatanei Pras Yisrael*, edited by Hillel Barzel. Tel-Aviv, 1970, pp. 263-287.
16. The novel was originally published in 1929 and is included in his collected works, 1961. The English translation, by Joseph Shachter, was published in Tel-Aviv by the Institute For the Translation of Hebrew Literature, 1968.
17. Included in his collected works, 1961.
18. Published in 1930 and included in his collected works, 1961.
19. S. Y. Agnon, "A Letter To J. L. Magnes, *Ha-Umah*, vol. 8, no. 3, May 1970, pp. 175-176.
20. For a discussion of Agnon's views see Dov Sadan's essay, "Beneynu le-Veynam," in his volume *Al Shai Agnon*, 1959, pp. 105-121.
21. Translated by Joel Blocker, in *The Reconstructionist*, vol. 25, no. 7, May 15, 1959, pp. 30-32.
22. Published in 1947-1952 and reprinted in his collected works, 1968.
23. Quoted from Mordechai Martin Buber, "Zionism — True and False," in *Unease in Zion*, edited by Ehud Ben Ezer, Quadrangle Books, N.Y., 1974, p. 115.