

The “Double Triangle” Paradigm: National Redemption in Bi-generational Love Triangles From Agnon to Oz

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines a dominant plot structure in Israeli fiction, where two generations mired in dysfunctional love triangles are historicized in relation to each other through a shared lover. Suggesting that this plot pattern is so prominent in Hebrew fiction that we can approach it as a distinctive national paradigm, this study argues that the paradigm's significance has less to do with oedipalized representations of neurotic youth seeking parent substitutes than with a negotiation of national redemption staged between two generations who vie for the interpretation and control of historical processes. Through the figure of the shared lover, second-generation characters evaluate their options in light of past expectations, tracing a nutshell history of modern Zionism from its initial rejection of messianic yearnings to an ongoing reassessment of the demands of statehood. The paradigm's capacity to encapsulate such a vital history-in-the-making explains why this specific plot structure has been so attractive to Hebrew writers during an extended period of national formation and consolidation.

“What would now be if my mother had married Mazal? What would have become of me?”

—TIRTZA IN S. Y. AGNON'S *B'dmey yameha*

“Mommy's face went white . . . I managed to speak. . . . How can you say there wasn't another choice and that was the only choice?”

—DAFI IN A. B. YEHOOSHUA'S *Hame'avev*

"I of all people had to repair the past, since it was broken I was broken too. . . . But how can one mend the past without knowing it? It's hard enough to accept that the future is unknown."

—YA'ARA IN Z. SHALEV'S *Hayey ahavah*

So prevalent in Israeli fiction that we can define it as a distinctive national paradigm, the plot structure explored in this essay presents a negotiation between two generations vying for the interpretation and control of historical processes. This negotiation is conducted through the figure of a shared lover, who represents elements discarded by one generation only to resurface as a troublesome inheritance for the next. Characterizing canonical texts such as Moshe Shamir's *Hu halakh basadot* (*He Walked through the Fields*), Amos Oz's *Menuḥah nekhoneh* (*A Perfect Peace*), or A. B. Yehoshua's *Mar Mani* (*Mr. Mani*), this same plot scheme can be found in highbrow novels, including Haim Be'er's *Notzot* (*Feathers*), Miron Izakson's *Neshotav shel Natan* (*Nathan and His Wives*), or Ruth Almog's *Shorshey avir* (*Roots of Light*), as well as in many popular works of fiction, albeit in a looser fashion, as in Yehudit Katzir's *Hineh ani mathilah* (*Dearest Anne*), Meir Shalev's *Keyamim ahadim* (*The Loves of Judith*), or Sami Michael's *Shavim veshavim yoter* (*All Are Equal, but Some Are More*).

The structure explored in this article occasionally appears in universal literature, including diasporic Jewish fiction.¹ Yet in Israeli fiction, the paradigm recurs with such frequency, prominence, and intensity that we must ask ourselves the following: Why is the bi-generational double triangle structure so prevalent and dominant? What about this pattern appeals to Israeli writers? How is it useful to them? What conceptions of Israeli history emerge from and suit this particular paradigm? Is this plot pattern fundamental to Israeli fiction?

In Israeli fiction, the bi-generational double triangle structure can be found across literary generations that, despite significant caveats, continue to be strategically differentiated as Dor Hapalmaq (Shamir), Dor Hamedina/New Wave (Yehoshua, Oz), New Feminist Writing (Shalev), and Modernizing Traditionalist/Unclassifiable (Agnon).² The paradigm itself invites us to trace a struggle between generations, observing the imprint of one generation upon the next, and an anxiety of influence. However, its very

recurrence among different "periods" suggests that a preoccupation with historicized patterns of loss and substitution transcends, and therefore erases, conventional divisions in Israeli literary history.

Rather than offer an inventory or typology of intergenerational love-triangle plots in Hebrew fiction, this preliminary investigation emphasizes the paradigm's historiosophic contours, especially as they appear in the redemptive anxieties of two generations whose social and sexual choices are crystalized through the figure of a shared lover. It is actually through this shared lover that the second generation evaluates its options against past expectations, a pattern that evokes a nutshell history of modern Zionism, first in its hallmark rejection of messianic yearnings and then in subsequent readjustments to the expectations and demands of statehood. Indeed, the "double triangle" paradigm has been so attractive to Hebrew authors during a protracted period of national formation and consolidation because of its capacity to encapsulate a history-in-the-making in which a family's biological and ideological continuity is always at stake.

I believe that the paradigm itself was forged in the Diaspora, through Agnon's conflation of biblical and Freudian motifs as they were interwoven in his 1923 novella *B'dmey yameha*.³ Although the present essay reveals how widely that early text resonates across contemporary Israeli fiction, it also insists that Agnon's imprint upon Hebrew writers cannot be attributed merely to literary influence. Still, *B'dmey yameha's* extraordinary influence invites us to ponder why it resonates so deeply among Israeli authors and to further investigate how they have each modified Agnon's concerns.

In an extended analysis of *B'dmey yameha*, A. B. Yehoshua admitted that Israeli writers "have pulled threads of gold out of this novella and used them to weave their own varied and various stories."⁴ But although many writers and scholars readily acknowledge the importance of this master text, if only by alluding in passing to similarities between it and any number of contemporary works, it has yet to receive attention commensurate with its impact upon the Israeli literary tradition. A compact, almost cryptic tale, *B'dmey yameha* recounts Tirtza's marriage to a man her mother loved yet exchanged for Tirtza's father. Without entering into details yet, we may note that in this work, the love triangle of one generation

(Leah-Akavia-Mintz) is repeated in the next (Tirtza-Akavia-Landau), with one character (Akavia) linking both triangles.

Perhaps it is not surprising to find this scheme replicated in works by Yehoshua and Oz, who in essays and interviews have repeatedly expressed their appreciation for Agnon, singling out *B'dmey yameba* for special attention.⁵ It is likewise logical to find strands of Agnon's work in younger authors engaged with canonical Hebrew literature, if only to subvert it, as does Zeruya Shalev in *Hayey ahavah* (1997), where two dysfunctional generations are again linked by a shared lover. It is rather surprising, however, to find the same scheme shaping works of the Palmah period, which we are accustomed to associate with ideological agendas rather than with the intertextual aesthetics favored by Dor Hamedina/New Wave authors.⁶ Nevertheless, the principal novel of the Palmah period, Moshe Shamir's *Hu halakh basadot* (1947), likewise hangs its ideological message upon a love triangle in one generation (Rutka-Avraham-Vily), followed by a similar triangulation in the next generation (Vily-Mika-Uri). In Shamir's book, Uri's father, Vily, is the shared lover.

Although *Hu halakh basadot* might seem to have little in common with Zeruya Shalev's erotic bestseller *Hayey ahavah*, they share a common lineage that historicizes a preoccupation with national redemption through the figure of a lover who links and differentiates two conflicted generations. This lineage juxtaposes biblical and Freudian patterns of loss and substitution, consistently articulated through an historiosophic rhetoric of atonement and redemption, which in contemporary Israeli fiction has acquired a sociopolitical secular expression.⁷

In every case discussed below, a lover facilitates the second generation's introspection, setting in motion a readjustment of hopes and disappointments inherited from the past. The fact that this negotiation is always articulated through a highly charged rhetoric of atonement and redemption, which this paper emphasizes, clues us to a possible explanation for the paradigm's prevalence in Hebrew fiction. In effect, the bi-generational, double love triangle paradigm reflects the foundational trajectory of modern Zionism from its practical redefinition of messianic redemption through its continuing adjustments to the ideals and pressures of statehood. In Hebrew fiction, these redemptive adjustments take the form of an "inherited" lover who draws two or more generations into a review of their expectations and disappointments.

MISSING SONS AND SHARED LOVERS

A salient feature of the double love triangle paradigm is its persistent connection to a shared lover and a missing child, whom the lover replaces in various ways. This replacement occurs at the levels of symbol and plot, in a fashion that resonates with the biblical story of Isaac's binding. Not every threatened or missing child in Hebrew fiction justifies an 'akedaic analysis, to be sure.⁸ Yet any likely connotation is reinforced by the importance that leading authors such as Shamir and Yehoshua have ascribed to 'akedaic motifs in their own fiction and criticism. Furthermore, while acknowledging Agnon's *B'dmey yameha* as a master text, Yehoshua interprets this novella as an 'akedaic binding of Tirtza to her father's guilt.

In each of the canonical and popular examples cited above, the shared lover's deepest function lies in his ('akedaically inflected) entanglement with a child who is conspicuously missing. Precisely because of this entanglement with a missing child, the shared lover is able to filter a family's anxieties about biological and ideological continuity. The paradigm's capacity to evoke the national in the personal, and the historical within intimate family tensions, again suggests that this plot scheme appeals widely to Israeli authors because it offers a nutshell history-in-the-making in which the ideological and physical survival of every generation is a pressing concern.

One of the most productive ways to think about the shared-lover motif in connection with a missing child is through Yael Feldman's disentanglement of confused oedipal and 'akedaic strands in Hebrew literature and criticism. Feldman discovered that across Israeli literature and scholarship, decontextualized 'akedaic features have been routinely superimposed upon an Oedipus complex in a manner that disguises oedipal conflict as 'akedaic anxiety.⁹ It is obvious that a lover who functions as a parent substitute—a lover who is shared actually or symbolically between two generations—represents primary aspects of the oedipal complex. From this perspective the intergenerational double triangle paradigm reflects an extended oedipal situation. However, Israeli double triangle plots tend to sublimate a family's preoccupation with a missing child into sexualized generational tension, represented by a shared lover. It is through the figure of this shared lover, then, that each family's ongoing quest for redemption is carried out.

The double triangle's systematic juxtaposition of decontextualized 'akedaic elements upon oedipal substitutions intrinsic to any intergenerational love affair offers an important illustration of what Feldman has identified as a confusion of oedipal and 'akedaic strands in Israeli culture. The apparent harmony between father and son in the original 'akedaic story is here dislocated to accommodate an oedipalized mode of generational conflict in which personal and national redemption are still at stake, as they are in the biblical myth. This, of course, was the story that Agnon told . . . repeatedly.

* * *

The double triangle plot in Israeli fiction does not occur as a side issue. It drives countless Israeli novels from opening to resolution, far exceeding the use of bi-generational love triangles in universal fiction. If this paradigm is indeed an obsession in Israeli literature, then its relevance must be explored beyond the psychocultural function of triadic patterns inherent to the novel as a genre.¹⁰ For example, Amos Oz's *Makom aḥer* (*Elsewhere, Perhaps*, 1965) features an unlikely lover straddling two generations whose unstable family life stems from an earlier love triangle that sets in motion the novel's tension between Diaspora and Zion.

A variation of this scheme appears in Yehoshua's *Hame'avev* (1977), where the love triangles of two generations are linked through a series of symbolic substitutions that point to different options in contemporary Jewish history. Grudgingly returning to collect an Israeli inheritance after a long sojourn in the Diaspora, *Hame'avev's* Gabriel Arditti replaces Adam and Asya's lost child, Yigal, whose very name derives from *ge'ulah* (redemption). When Gabriel is also lost, Adam and Asya's daughter obtains a lover of her own, the Arab boy Na'im, who functions as yet another substitute for the unredeemable Yigal, as well as a rival for a second Yigal that stands for genuine, yet banal, normalization. In Oz's *Menuḥah nekbonah* (1982), the arrival of Azaria Gitlin offers an opportunity to make amends for the cruel expulsion of Benya Trotsky years earlier. Azaria frees Yonatan and his parents from a conflicted obsession with the past and enables Rimmona to achieve the fertile potential of her name. Even *Mar Mani's* (1990) oedipal conflict, as revealed in that novel's final conversation, presents a love triangle repeated through filicide and incest in the next generation. It is worth noting, moreover, that apart

from the missing child in *Menuḥah nekbonah*, all the shared lovers and missing children in these examples are male.

My analysis of Agnon's novella and four Israeli variations emphasizes their similar historiosophic preoccupation with patterns of loss and substitution, articulated in every case through a rhetoric of atonement and redemption that binds a missing child to a lover who is shared actually or symbolically between two generations. Yehoshua's 'akedaic interpretation of Agnon's master text illustrates how the oedipal features of *B'dmey yameha* are haunted by 'akedaic motifs. This suggests, in turn, that Agnon may not only be the propagator of the double triangle paradigm in Hebrew fiction; he may be in large measure responsible for the widespread confusion between oedipal tensions and 'akedaic motifs that Israeli writers have in turn disseminated.

BREACHED CONTRACTS: AGNON'S *B'DMEY YAMEHA*

Among Israeli intellectuals, A. B. Yehoshua and Amos Oz have devoted the most intense critical attention to *B'dmey yameha*, publishing detailed analyses of its patterns of loss and substitution, which Oz reads as a confusion of identities and Yehoshua interprets as an 'akedaic binding of Tirtza to Akavia, motivated by Mintz's guilt over Leah's death. In contrast to Yehoshua, Oz does not stress the historiosophic elements of Agnon's text. Yet when he notes that the disturbing ending of the text compels readers "to return to the opening, to reexamine, as it were, the fine print of the contract,"¹¹ he directs our attention to an historiosophically inflected reappraisal of the past that characterizes all double triangle plots in Hebrew fiction from Agnon onward.

Even in the text's opening gambit, Tirtza's private emotions are projected onto an historicized national sphere, as the memory of Leah's voice evokes in her a yearning for the fallen Temple of Jerusalem: "[M]y mother's words were few. But when she spoke it was as though limpid wings spread forth and led me to the Hall of Blessing [*beikhal habrakhab*]."¹² Agnon's use of the term *beikhal*, preceded by a reference to the wings that graced the Temple's entrance, leaves no doubt about this intended allusion.¹³ The fine print of the novel's opening "contract" thus anticipates the historiosophic parameters of

its pivotal *Mizrah* sequence—the two scenes involving a tapestry that marks the direction of prayer toward Zion—in which the mother and daughter graft the terms of a national covenant onto their private romantic contracts.

During this *Mizrah* sequence, which operates as the narrative's eroticized epicenter, Leah and then Tirtza declare themselves to Akavia by ostensibly calling upon the same transcendental Zionist longing. What is interesting here, however, is that the nature of their desires changes surreptitiously during the generational transition. For while Leah attaches herself to Akavia by expressing yearning for divine wholeness, Tirtza's feelings for him are mediated by Leah's absence.¹⁴ The quest for harmony and redemption fails in both generations, giving way to a canonized cycle of introspection, judgment, and deferred redemption that reaches a crescendo through Agnon's references to the liturgy of the High Holidays.

From Akavia's diary, Tirtza learns that her grandfather had displayed the following inscription in his home, marking the direction of prayer toward Zion:

Blessed be he who shall not forsake Thee
 And he who shall cleave unto Thee.
 For those who seek Thee shall not fail
 Nor shall they be put to shame
 Those who seek and dwell within Thee.¹⁵

This uncharacteristic text for a *Mizrah* derives from a prayer read during the Musaf service on the first day of Rosh Hashanah, *atah zokher ma'aseh 'olam . . .* (You remember deeds done in the universe . . .). The allusion to the High Holiday liturgy thus underscores the atmosphere of commitment, remembrance, and judgment that suffuses *B'dmey yameha*.

From Akavia's diary, Tirtza further discovers (as does the reader) that this inscription played a memorable role in Leah and Akavia's courtship, which was cemented during the holiday season. For it was when they were decorating the Sukkah that

a ring loosened and fell from one of the *Mizrah's* corners. Leah took the ring and slipped it on my finger. She then proceeded to untie the crimson

ribbon fastened to her locks and using the ribbon secured the *Mizrah* tapestry to the wall, reading out loud, “Blessed be he who shall not forsake Thee.” I read on, “And he who shall cleave unto Thee.” Suddenly we both blushed. . . . And we thanked God for exalting us toward love.”¹⁶

Given that the *Mizrah*'s inscription reinforces a national covenant passed from generation to generation, Leah and Akavia's appropriation of its terms for their romance raises the stakes of their engagement, which now adopts the form of a marriage ceremony that God himself is called upon to witness. Following the course of a traditional Jewish wedding, Leah and Akavia's private ceremony takes place in a Sukkah that doubles as a *hupah*, and includes a ring, vows, and a reference to the destroyed temple expressed through the *Mizrah* rather than through the customary shattered glass. Leah says, “Blessed be he who shall not forsake Thee”; however, her thoughts turn from the prayer's intended recipient to her own private beloved, upon whose finger she brazenly slips a ring. Akavia accepts Leah's challenge when he responds, “And he who shall cleave unto Thee.” Indeed, Akavia cleaves unto Leah, never becoming involved with another woman—no Rachel after this Leah—until her own daughter reenacts the private marriage ceremony in an attempt to diminish the tragic consequences of its breaching.

Eighteen years after the first ill-fated pledge, Tirtza finds the *Mizrah* tapestry that mediated Leah and Akavia's private engagement. On her way to “repair” it, she meets Akavia Mazal, who asks,

“What is that book?” I removed the paper and . . . unwound the string which I had twined round my hand after our last meeting. . . . I fastened the string to the *Mizrah* and hung it on the wall. Mazal stared in astonishment. I read what was written . . . “Blessed be he who shall not forsake Thee.” Mazal bowed his head. I blushed and my eyes filled with tears. Suddenly I longed to cry out: you have brought upon me this shame!¹⁷

Tirtza's failed attempt to rekindle Akavia's romantic love functions here as a brilliant narrative palimpsest that historicizes two heightened moments of thwarted

desire. This second time, Akavia remains silent and the young woman's daring venture shames her. For whereas Leah and Akavia blush in self-conscious unison, Tirtza blushes alone, enveloped by the feeling that the inscription promises to cancel: "Nor shall they be put to shame / Those who seek and dwell within Thee." While Leah had hoped to dwell in God through Akavia, Tirtza seeks to recapture a pure love for her mother *through* Akavia. Yet even the repetition of her mother's very words fails to evoke the earlier excitement of those "limpid wings" spreading forth toward a far and fallen hall of blessing.

The tragic separation that Tirtza seeks to repair parallels the *Mizrah's* role as a reminder of a sundered national heart and body, for the function of a *Mizrah* is to remind Jews to direct their thoughts to Jerusalem even if their bodies are "on the edge of the West"—an exhortation reinforced by well-known psalms such as "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem" (a far more common *Mizrah* inscription than the prayer fragment employed by Agnon in this story). The tension between Zion and Diaspora, which surfaces through the pivotal position that Agnon assigns to the novel's *Mizrah* sequence, draws attention to the impressive way in which his "negotiation with Jewish history is obvious in every line."¹⁸

Set in the last decade of the nineteenth century, at a time when a choice between Diaspora and Zion was starting to become a tangible option, an explicit dimension of Zionist revival appears in this story through Tirtza's Hebrew teacher Segal, whose "eloquent . . . visions of the land of Israel"¹⁹ stop short of drawing Tirtza to Landau, the young and wealthy suitor who functions as an antithesis to Akavia.²⁰ Landau's hazy Zionism is the road not taken—a choice not even fully discussed, yet it hovers in the background of the story through strategic references to the patterns of loss and substitution that are woven into the historical, structural, ritual, and psychological levels of Agnon's text.²¹

Commenting on the epilogue of Agnon's ambiguously Zionistic novel *Tmol shilshom* (*Only Yesterday*), Dan Miron observes that Agnon promises that "what was 'spoiled' or 'ruined' in the generation of the protagonists will be righted in the next generation." However, Miron continues, such a reconstruction is never fulfilled in any of Agnon's fictional works.²² *B'dmey yameha's* "sequel," *Sipur pashut* (*A Simple Story*), likewise fails to correct Barukh Me'ir's broken promises through Hirshl and Blume's romance. Although in *Sipur pashut* Tirtza and Akavia's home

serves as a haven for Blume when she flees Hirshl's indecisiveness, it is unclear whether the Mazals represent a successful alternative to Blume-Hirshl-Mina's and Mirl-Ts'iril-Barukh Me'ir's genealogical breaches of faith. Agnon's refusal to provide clear-cut closure stems from his reluctance to reconcile traditional religious injunctions with modern generic choices, for, as Miron observes, a complete "voyage from the tradition of Jewish pious literature to that of the European novel . . . would have constituted a major capitulation as well."²³

All of Agnon's historicized love triangles are hence grounded in a preoccupation with national redemption, which even when pared down to a symbol of practical responsibilities still cannot be solved in the private sphere. No atonement is sufficient and no redemption is fully achieved by Agnon's characters. Although Tirtza marries her mother's intended and also hastens to include her own father in the newlyweds' hearth, we are nonetheless presented at the end with a teasing resolution that challenges the eroticized atonement of Tirtza's desire, which is suddenly recast as a failed attempt to repair irreparable loss.

By applying holy terms to the love lives of Leah, Akavia, and Tirtza, Agnon contextualizes the mutability of human contacts within a spiritual, yet teleological, national contract. The inscription embroidered on the *Mizrah* in *B'dmey yameha* derives from a prayer that marks a "process of judgment, which requires a precise recollection of everything that has taken place in the *past*, an understanding of the *present* situation of those being judged, and an insight into their *future* potential and the effect that judgment will have upon them and others."²⁴ Indeed, Agnon's historicization of *B'dmey yameha's* love affairs delays judgment; for here each generation struggles anew to repair loss through substitution, while redemption is endlessly deferred.

The symbolic dynamic of loss and substitution that we traced through Agnon's *Mizrah* sequence extends also to *B'dmey yameha's* seminal entanglement between a missing child and a shared lover, who enables the family to revisit its loss. As noted earlier, the connection between a missing child and an historicized lover occurs regularly in double triangle plots after Agnon, and is invariably articulated as a reconsideration of redemptive hopes such as we traced through the *Mizrah* sequence.

In Agnon's novella, Akavia Mazal is presented as the legitimate replacement

for Leah's brother, who was unwittingly sacrificed to the cruel injustice of a local overlord. The story of how this brother was lost, along with an account of the loss of the family's wealth, appears at the beginning of Akavia's diary; consequently, the reader cannot help associating Akavia's accommodation in Leah's household with a fortuitous replacement of the missing son. Yet since the diminution of the family's wealth accompanies the death of their child, an ideal restitution would provide material security along with the "biological" replacement. Agnon, however, tricks us into separating these requirements by telling us virtually nothing about the claims of Akavia's rival, Mintz—except that his wealth evidently failed to save Leah—while showing us a great deal about Akavia's background. Since we are aware from the start that Mintz's wealth failed to keep Leah in good health, as her father had hoped, we are conditioned to regard Mintz as a misguided replacement for the family's lost money, while Akavia appears not only as the entitled groom but also as a rightful replacement for the keener loss of a son.

Although the death of Leah's brother results from his father's misjudgment of an opponent's power—in this case a corrupt power that represents the cruelties of diasporic history—the boy's death in itself does not evoke 'akedaic connotations. Still, if we view Akavia as a potential replacement for this child, then 'akedaic connotations arise in a way that knocks the *Mizrah's* negotiation of redemptive yearnings against the 'akedah's grand promise of national responsibility and redemption. In Jewish tradition, the 'akedah dramatizes a moment of judgment in which everything that has happened in the past and may happen in the future is at stake. As a centerpiece of the Rosh Hashanah service, the 'akedah evokes the same narrative arc that is expressed in the *ma'ase olam* prayer, as described above. Lost to many of us today, these details were alive in the imagination of a writer steeped in the daily and yearly cycles of Jewish practice.

Furthermore, Agnon's explicit echoes of the 'akedah's vocabulary in Tirtza's charged *hineni* (here I am) and *bito yehidato* (his daughter; his only one) led A. B. Yehoshua to interpret *B'dmey yameha* as a subconscious binding of Tirtza to her father's guilt over a loss that he could not stave off.²⁵ However, Agnon's entanglement of oedipal and 'akedaic tensions in this story actually reverses the 'akedah's original transformation of a private covenant into national redemptive promises,

as here we are shown that any appropriation of the national teleology for private contracts consistently thwarts the expected success.

In contemporary Israeli novels by Yehoshua and others, the motif revealing a connection between an historicized lover and a missing child is stronger and more obvious than in Agnon’s master text. Yet the pattern of loss and substitution, particularly involving the replacement of a lost child by a jilted lover, continues to be conveyed through a strident rhetoric of atonement and redemption that shuttles between private affairs and national concerns. A focus on Shamir’s *Hu balakh basadot*, Yehoshua’s *Hame’avev*, Oz’s *Menuḥah nekhonah*, and Shalev’s *Hayey ahavah* serves to highlight their representation of private atonement and national redemption through “entanglements” between a missing child and a lover shared, actually or symbolically, between two conflicted generations. Through the figure of the shared lover, each generation evaluates its options in the light of past choices. This vital history-in-the-making, in which biological and ideological continuity are always at stake and national anxieties are projected onto a micro-cosmic plane, explains why Agnon’s paradigm remained so useful to Israeli novelists during a protracted period of national consolidation.

DOUBLE TRIANGLE PLOTS: BETWEEN ATONEMENT AND REDEMPTION

Second-generation protagonists in Israeli double triangles—unlike their Agnonian ancestor Tirtza—usually have more than one chance to repair their parents’ dysfunctional heritage. This is not the case, however, in Shamir’s *Hu balakh basadot* (1947), a classical Palmah novel that along with its adaptations for the theater and cinema had great impact on Israel’s cultural imagination. As adumbrated in the epigraphs heading this essay, when second-generation characters realize that their choices are constrained by inherited historical factors, they launch into quests to investigate problematic decisions from their parents’ past. In the course of such quests, they engage with elements their parents discarded, which nonetheless continue to hover over the family’s life, demanding attention. Whether symbolically, as in *Hame’avev* and *Menuḥah nekhonah*, or concretely as in *B’dmey yameha* or *Hayey ahavah*, these discarded elements become embodied in the form of a lover who straddles two generations.

The role of Vily as the pivotal shared lover in *Hu halakh basadot* was minimized both by Shamir's own 1948 adaptation of his novel to the stage, and practically elided altogether in Yosef Millo's 1967 film. But in the original novel, the sexually experienced Mika musters courage to knock on Vily's door with the intention of offering herself to him, and only when she discovers that he is unavailable does she switch her attention to Vily's son Uri, who along with everyone else on the kibbutz is well aware that Mika adores his father. This sexual competition compounds Uri's feelings of inadequacy related to Vily's exploits as a pioneer, soldier, farmer, and national hero.

The novel's preface, presented from Vily's point of view, announces Uri's accidental death in the same breath that it exposes an erotic sequence of fantasies about Mika: "What happened? What was going on under Uri's smiles and Mika's gazes? Did you ever hear their nightly talk? . . . Was Uri sure of himself, manly, able? . . . What is Mika? A woman? A girl. . . . naked? How is she as a woman, as a lover? . . . And how was Uri as a man?"²⁶ By contrast, the novel's final word is *Vily*, uttered by Mika during the tragic scene in which she alone ignores the fact that she will never see Uri again.

If Shamir's Vily had been merely an alternative love interest for Uri's girlfriend, the novel would be presenting an intergenerational love triangle, quite common in world fiction. Yet Vily's entanglement with a threatened child at different junctures in this novel manifests a more complicated motif, showing a sequence of loss and substitution, atonement and redemption, all cast over a crucial period of national formation that Shamir strove to portray even as he was living it.

In a retrospective evaluation of her relationship with Vily, Uri's mother, Rutka, attributes the collapse of her marriage to an atonement for her betrayal of kibbutz values when she withdrew with baby Uri to Tel Aviv during the settlement's hardest years. The memory of Rutka's flight to the city not only colors her subsequent relationship with the kibbutz, but also seeps into the intimacy of her marital life in a way that eventually proves counterproductive to Uri's safety:

It seemed to us that to make up for our sin against the kibbutz — my sin — we were obligated to sacrifice our inner property. Because of this, Vily threw himself into his crazy activism — from mission to mission,

from duty to duty, and nobody in the kibbutz said, enough! And thus I sank into work and silence, without daring to demand what was due to our lives or their family element. *Thus, no child followed Uri.* And thus, I allowed Vily to roam for years with a feeling of *binding sacrifice* to atone for two three quiet bourgeois years in Tel Aviv [my emphasis].²⁷

That the couple did not produce other children—“Thus, no child followed Uri”—is reinforced when Vily visits his aging mother in Tel Aviv, and an old grocer, recalling Vily’s wife and son, inquires, “surely there are others, praised be God, hah?”²⁸ The conspicuous absence of further children, which Rutka attributes to a protracted atonement for her betrayal of kibbutz values, exacerbates the family’s tragedy beyond Uri’s death and Mika’s threat to abort Uri’s seed.

Rutka’s evaluation of her life’s choices occurs after she has taken a lover, unwittingly implicating Vily in two simultaneous love triangles involving two generations. For Uri, who above all desires a stable family life and a bit of intimacy with his father, this situation becomes unbearably confusing, leading to his quasi-suicide within the framework of a national battle for survival.

Until the current overhaul of national “myths,” *Hu halakh basadot* had been interpreted as reflecting an optimistic harmonization of personal and collective spheres,²⁹ even though an attentive reading of the text could have easily revealed a complex and ambivalent portrayal of psychological antecedents and thwarted redemptive yearnings similar to those characterizing *B’dmey yameha*. Like his literary forerunner and successors—Tirtza, Dafi, Yonatan, and Ya’ara—Uri’s existential questions are directed toward his parents’ past: “Why did mother leave the kibbutz for two years? Perhaps Vily ceased to love her at that time? . . . What did Vily seek in his voyages? . . . What was the truth? How were these things in flesh and blood?”³⁰ Yet unlike his forerunner and successors in the double-triangle paradigm, Uri never receives answers to his questions.

Uri becomes so muddled when the nation’s pressing needs conflict with his desire for family stability that when death is again a threat, he courts it. It may seem, on the surface, that Uri, like Tirtza, merely binds himself to his parents’ redemptive yearnings by offering up his life to their mutual national cause. However, when we examine Uri’s choices through his mother’s retrospective

musings, we realize that his death results from a long series of ideological fissures that have imprinted themselves upon him via his parents' stunted romance, driving him to escape both life and romance. As is the case with Amichai's Jerusalemites, this "new Hebrew" upon whom so many hopes were placed turns out to be already "worn out by history . . . slightly damaged."³¹ It would have been fitting for Uri, rather than for Vily, to retain a marker of the (diasporic) past in his name, for Uri's tragedy stems precisely from his inability to transcend past sorrows and yearnings.

It has been remarked that Shamir's novel dramatizes a conflict between personal and national demands at a crucial time of national formation. Uri's father does not acknowledge a split in his own personal and collective spheres until it becomes too late to balance them. Uri, by contrast, feels this split so keenly that he propels himself desperately toward one of the axes, and dies in a pathetic training accident chalked up to the struggle for national redemption. As Nurit Gertz notes, the cinematic adaptations of Shamir's novel have systematically raised the profile of Uri's heroism, downplaying the original death scene, which has been called "either a useless death or suicide."³² Yet in inverse proportion to their aggrandizement of Uri's heroism, Shamir's 1948 play and Millo's film diminish Mika's involvement with Uri's father, thus underscoring that Uri's ultimate escape is connected with his inability to live up to his father's image in Mika's eyes.

In each case, however, Uri's death is represented as a tragedy softened by the imminent birth of his child with Mika. But what kind of tragedy does his death represent? For the nation, Uri's death is a painful loss at a crucial juncture in Jewish history. For Uri himself, death allows for an ambiguous solution to his family problems and limited choices. For Mika, Uri's death ironically improves her position on the kibbutz, for along with their child, she will now occupy the special place that Uri enjoyed in the collective's heart. His death further cements Mika's relationship with Vily, to whom she is now attached by family ties. Rutka, on the other hand, who once compromised her status with the collective in order to protect her young son and thereafter atoned for this ideological breach of contract, suffers the worse loss. The depth of her tragedy stems from her life-long attempt to avert precisely this loss. By contrast, Vily's tragedy (like that of Oedipus) is one of sudden and belated awareness.

This nuanced distinction between degrees of tragedy is one that Shamir

himself defined in an attempt to distinguish between Oedipus’ recognition of his bitter fate and Abraham’s test during the *’akedah*. According to Shamir, Oedipus’ recognition is sudden while Abraham’s potential tragedy is exacerbated by a full *consciousness* of his test.³³ From this perspective, Uri’s tragedy merges Oedipus’ epiphany with Abraham’s test: for having tried (and failed) to be his own father, Uri turns the “knife” upon his own split self. Vily, on the other hand, is too busy with the nation to take full stock of the test of fatherhood. Only Rutka measures up to Abraham’s pathos. Alterman’s poem, which Shamir chose as the epigraph of his novel and the source for its title, marks Rutka’s tragedy as a perpetual yet ineffective attempt to dispel the awareness of loss: “I *am* sewing for him a holiday tunic / He *walks* in the fields / He will come over here / In his heart a lead bullet” [my emphasis].

YEHOShUA’S AND OZ’S VARIATIONS ON THE PARADIGM

More elegantly than in Shamir’s novel, the double love triangle in Yehoshua’s *Hame’abev*, illustrated in the diagram below, intertwines symbolically through concerted references to a missing child, Yigal, whose very name means *redeemer*, yet who ironically was run over by a car when he was very young. The novel’s principal lover, Gabriel Arditti, functions as one potential replacement for the lost Yigal. When Gabriel faints from hunger in Adam’s office, Adam relives the aftermath of his son’s accident: “I picked him up in my arms,” he says about the man who will become his wife’s lover, “a light warm body. . . .”³⁴ It very quickly becomes clear that Adam’s obsessive search for his wife’s lover—not to kill him but rather to restore him to the family’s bosom—is an attempt to replace the missing child.

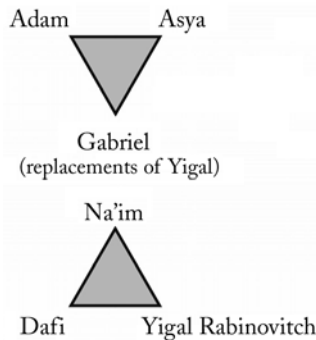
Dafi’s lover Na’im functions as yet another replacement for the missing Yigal. When she first meets him, it hits her “in a flash” that he looks “a bit like Yigal, there’s something about him, some similarity, and they don’t realize it, they don’t understand. . . . And if I tell them they’ll say, ‘Nonsense, what do you know about Yigal, you never saw him.’”³⁵ Dafi is mistaken here, for while the connection between Yigal and Gabriel never registers explicitly in Adam’s consciousness, and only flickers across Asya’s dreams,³⁶ as soon as Adam lays eyes on Na’im, he feels “a little stab of pain in my

heart. I was reminded of Yigal, I don't know why, something about those dark eyes."³⁷ When Na'im is slightly wounded in Adam's garage, the link is reinforced and further drives home the relevance of Gabriel's earlier collapse: "[S]uddenly . . . you see a boy . . . covered in blood. . . The cuts aren't deep, but all that blood scares me . . . this isn't the first time you've seen a boy lying in a pool of blood."³⁸ There is nothing subtle, then, about the connection between *both* of this novel's lovers and the lost Yigal.

Subtler is the formation of a classical Agnonian double triangle paradigm through the existence of yet another Yigal in this novel. For surely it is no coincidence that Dafi's alternate love interest is an adolescent named Yigal Rabinovitch, who, although seemingly uninteresting, is nonetheless useful and available for her purposes. Dafi asks him to switch places with her in class so that she might doze off unobserved by the teacher:

He didn't want to change. . . . So I started buttering him up, smiling at him, chatting with him during recess, walking home with him after school and even touching him as if by accident. He found all this a bit confusing, the dumb cluck, I saw it wouldn't be long before he started falling in love with me. He took to waiting for me outside the house in the morning to walk with me to school, even skipping basketball practice before class. I didn't want to overdo it, just enough to persuade him to change places. He refused and refused but in the end he gave in. Poor devil, his marks are so bad he could be in real trouble, he's got a good reason too for not wanting to be too conspicuous. I really wanted to kiss him but I had to be careful not to give him the wrong idea.³⁹

We can thus create the following diagram:



Compared to Tirtza’s Landau in Agnon’s novella, where Landau’s empty Zionist rhetoric withers along with his courtship, Dafi’s “suitor” acquires a very concrete and normal presence in Haifa. Indeed, this Yigal is so refreshingly unheroic that his redemptive presence loses any transcendental drama. The potential relationship between Dafi and Yigal Rabinovitch accordingly represents the kind of normalization that Yehoshua advocates in *Bi-zekhut ha-normaliyut* (*Between Right and Right*). This “redeemer” is just there, ordinary and available.⁴⁰ However, it is through Na’im that Dafi heals from the neuroses she developed in response to her family’s dysfunctions. On the sociopolitical plane, moreover, the Arab Na’im will never be just a “shadow” for her,⁴¹ for she has known him intimately.

Although *Hame’avev* ends with Na’im’s vague hopefulness and Adam’s realization that he cannot progress without the help of Na’im’s relatives, the progress of Dafi and Na’im’s relationship remains ambiguous and is always threatened by a formula that holds out Yigal Rabinovitch’s position as an alternative romantic option. For when Dafi leads Na’im to a shortcut down the Carmel, they bump into Yigal Rabinovitch, and Dafi asks herself, “how far am I going to walk with [Na’im]? To his village? And I parted from him. He could look after himself now.”⁴² Dafi then tries to convince Yigal and a friend to accompany her to a café, but they are still too young to take advantage of this rapprochement. The exchange nonetheless adumbrates a potential postscript in which a relationship between Dafi and Yigal remains an open prospect.

This multilateral substitution of lovers for a missing child who symbolizes national redemption facilitates the family’s negotiation of changing attitudes toward history and nation. In this negotiation, history and Zionism alternately occupy the roles of father, God, or an expected redeemer,⁴³ so that Gabriel’s observation about the messianic expectations of the Haredi Jews among whom he hides—“sometimes . . . they’d beat their breasts as if in pain or yearning for something, the devil knows what, exile perhaps, or the Messiah”⁴⁴—applies to Adam and Asya’s misguided yearning to replace their Yigal with substitute elements, which sends their family on a wild chase that diverts attention away from the present and the living.

Oz’s bi-generational love triangles in *Menuḥab nekhonah* are not yoked together by an individual character as in Agnon’s novella. Rather, as in Yehoshua’s

Hame'avev, a shared-lover figure is split and transposed from one historical moment to another. At stake in this historicized transposition is a preoccupation with generational continuity in the midst of which we find the motif of a threatened or missing child. This becomes evident during the climactic existential scene in which the protagonist, Yonatan, faces death in the wilderness as he once did on the battlefield. In this scene, Yonatan links his inability to engender life with a growing ambivalence toward his parents and their ideology:

Why did I kill them all? Why am I killing them now? What did they do to me? What did I ever want that I didn't get? Who am I looking for out here in the wild? . . . My mother is a wretch. And my father. For I killed Efrat, and that other baby before her, and turned Rimmona into a corpse. And now I'm killing their son. And Zaro's a wretch too. . . . Let Zaro give her a baby? Let my father die? What was I thinking of all those rainy nights when I wanted to pick up and go?⁴⁵

Located at the “high point” of *Menuḥab nekbonah*,⁴⁶ this scene functions as a turning point that enables Yonatan to harmonize, in his own generation, a triangular dysfunctionality inherited from his parents. Tempting death by running across the border to Petra, Yonatan imagines that he will “retrieve” his stillborn daughter from the City of the Dead. But before long, he desperately turns back, relinquishing his quest for clear-cut answers to the questions that haunted him “all those rainy nights.”

These questions, recast as a hyperbolic killing spree for which Yonatan hysterically blames himself, actually allude to the mythical Benya Trotsky, who, crazed by Yonatan's mother, had unsuccessfully tried to kill Yonatan's father and commit suicide. Yonatan mulls over Benya's farcical spree, recorded in the kibbutz's collective memory and the tortured imaginations of Yonatan and his father, who perpetually wonder whether Yonatan is really Benya's son. Yonatan becomes obsessed with the title of a poem that Benya had composed for *Iḥava*—“But Their Hearts Were Not True.” Whose hearts? Why plural? True to what?

Through an anachronistic but ultimately successful approach to the Labor Zionist enterprise, Azaria Gittlin, a reincarnation of Benya, offers a solution to some of

Yonatan’s troubles. Nicknamed *Zaro* (stranger) and *Chimpanoza*, Azaria revamps a triangulation that links him—via an unmistakable analogy with Benya—to Yonatan’s parents, Yonatan himself, and Rimmona. Like Benya Trotsky, Azaria represents a diasporic Jew whose romantic weakness contrasts with the emotional hermeticism expected from kibbutz stalwarts such as Yolek and Yonatan. But in marked contrast to Benya, Azaria’s goals in love, labor, and politics hit their intended targets against all odds, and Azaria manages to find a place for himself within the Lifshitz family and their community. Although the nickname *Zaro* reinforces his alien status, he lives up to the serviceable connotations of his full name (*la’azor*, to help). Rimmona becomes pregnant again, this time a baby girl is born, and the question of paternity ceases to concern anyone. In contrast to the older generation, Yonatan, Azaria, and Rimmona raise their daughter together in apparent harmony, a harmony that extends to Hava and Yolek, though not to Benya.

Yonatan, Azaria, and Rimmona’s relationship revamps *B’dmey yameha’s* bitter-sweet ending into a more satisfying image of triangular harmony, which Avraham Balaban associates with a Jungian model of redemptive yearning that is present across Oz’s work: “*A Perfect Peace* does not reject the possibility of redemption. . . . However, that redemption does not mean freedom from sin and base drives, but rather the achievement of an equilibrium and harmony among all the components of one’s psyche.”⁴⁷ It is interesting that the double triangle structure that I have traced in this essay matches Jung’s image of the psyche as a double pyramid in which nature and culture move in opposite directions. The parallels between Jung’s structure and the novelized paradigm found in Oz’s work and Hebrew fiction at large bears further investigation. Suffice it to note, here, that in our present examples the double love triangle plot functions historiosophically during heightened moments of generational transition, when the welfare of the individual and the nation depend on a renegotiation of redemptive expectations.

GRANTING AUNT TIRTZA A SECOND CHANCE

Further cases of interlinked double triangle plots in Hebrew fiction may readily come to the reader’s mind, including canonical and popular examples that comple-

ment or extend those listed earlier. To emphasize the paradigm's indebtedness to *B'dmey yameba*, I will wrap up this brief literary history with what at first glance might seem an unlikely example, Zeruya Shalev's *Hayey ahavah*.⁴⁸ Yet this popular erotic bestseller conforms closely to Agnon's model, pulling "threads of gold" from each of the texts discussed above as well as from the Bible and Midrash.⁴⁹ At the heart of *Hayey ahavah's* extended oedipal situation, we again find a conspicuously missing child, and the dynamic of loss and substitution that ensues from this loss is conveyed through a rhetoric of atonement and redemption that particularly recalls Agnon's *Mizrah* sequence because it revisits the fall of the Temple through the lens of modern Jewish concerns.

In her youth, Ya'ara's mother Rachel had met Aryeh while he was recovering from a battle wound that rendered him sterile. Hoping for children and a more privileged social position than Aryeh could offer, Rachel married his best friend instead. Ironically, only after great difficulties did Rachel and Shlomo succeed in having children at all, and then their second child died of a mysterious congenital malady. When Aryeh appears one day in her parents' apartment, Ya'ara, a married woman already, propels herself into a passionate, quasi-incestuous affair with him. The affair functions as a journey into her parents' past, illuminating the thwarted expectations of their youth, which had surreptitiously imprinted themselves upon every aspect of Ya'ara's life, including her relationship with her husband.

Ya'ara's journey into her parents' past culminates in the sudden recollection of a tale that alludes to the biblical struggle between Absalom and King David (Absalom also being the name of Ya'arah's dead brother). In the novel's context, the tale alludes as well to "a different son of King David, Batsheva's first child, conceived in adulterous sin."⁵⁰ Significantly, the story that Ya'ara recalls at the end of the book clarifies the extent of her mother's emotional involvement with the barren Aryeh, to whom Rachel had imaginatively attributed the paternity of her children:

I recalled the story that my mother used to tell my brother Absalom when he cried. Of course he didn't understand anything, but the story calmed him. . . . I hadn't realized that I remembered this story about little Absalom and his big black cat named Aryeh [Lion]. Everyone

asked, how come your cat is named Aryeh? It’s like calling a snake *Rabbit* or a dog *Fox*. But Absalom wouldn’t tell. He knew that Aryeh was the king of cats and deserved the name of a king, and it was clear to him that everyone would laugh at him if they discovered this reason. Prove he is the king of cats, they would tell him, and he couldn’t prove, he could only feel. He felt that more than Aryeh being his cat, he was Aryeh’s son. And Absalom liked very much to be the son of a cat.⁵¹

The recollection of the story that Rachel told baby Absalom during his brief life enables Ya’ara to realize that, first of all, her mother named the boy Absalom to commemorate the passion-laden verses that she and Aryeh once recited to each other, exalted toward love, as Leah and Akavia were exalted by the *Mizrah*’s lines. More significantly, the story demonstrates that Rachel had continued to fantasize about Aryeh, attributing her children to him although they had been conceived with another man. Ya’ara thus understands that when Absalom died, Rachel felt punished for her breach of faith with the two men in her life.

This realization is of paramount importance for Ya’ara’s development, as she always had assumed that her parents’ bitterness stemmed from her own shortcomings. As a surviving child (like Yehoshua’s Dafi), Ya’ara had been invested with redemptive expectations that she could not fulfill. By employing the historisophically inflected rhetoric that we have been tracing throughout this essay, Shalev actually conveyed this point succinctly during an interview with Ya’akov Besser: “If Absalom had lived, Ya’ara’s childhood might have been easier, though her parents’ tragedy begins earlier. Absalom dies before he could disappoint them. I think that had he lived, they would have seen that he, too, was incapable of redeeming them.”⁵² Yet thanks to her affair with Aryeh, Ya’ara comes “so close to their youth, to their past, the past that is a tame cat one moment and a savage frightening one next” that she is able to realize how her lifelong attempt to atone for baby Absalom’s death had grown from a misplaced judgment.⁵³

This realization is transposed into the novel’s intertextual conversation with the Bible and Midrash, as Ya’ara applies her epiphanies to an eccentric interpretation of the *Aggadot behurban* (*Legends of the Fall of the Temple*), a text she carries around as research material for her master’s degree. Ya’ara now interprets these

legends in light of insights gleaned from her liaison with the figure that hovered within the deepest recesses of her parents' intimacy, surreptitiously undermining her relationship with them and with her husband.

Realizing that her family's dysfunctions did not stem from the death of baby Absalom or from her own inability to repair this loss, but rather resulted from a sequence of failed redemptive shortcuts of which Aryeh is a living reminder, Ya'ara transposes this knowledge into an innovative feminist interpretation of three *Aggadot heḥurban* that blame well-meaning women for a lack of fortitude in their more powerful male counterparts.⁵⁴ Yet, paradoxically, through this interpretative exercise she again places herself in the role of a pseudo-prophetic redeemer whose insights aim to forestall any future tragedies stemming from an inability to sympathize precisely with the characters condemned in the Midrash.⁵⁵

Unlike Agnon's *Tirtza*, Ya'ara withdraws in good time from her futile quest to mend the past, but she withdraws only on a personal level, renouncing both her marriage to the placid Yoni and her extramarital affair with Aryeh, who loses all appeal after Ya'ara finishes milking him for information about her parents' youth. On an intellectual plane, however, Ya'ara embarks on a new ploy to decode the past in order to control the future, for now she weds herself to a book, and closets herself with it as a substitute for the two men she has equally rejected, as well as for a child of her own.

Over and above its historiosophic platform, the double love triangle plot in Hebrew fiction portrays two or more generations at odds with each other's relationship to history. The first generation carelessly dismisses conflicting demands in an attempt to stave off disaster and hasten practical redemption. The shortcut problems are then inherited by the next generation, which suddenly finds itself mired in patterns of behavior that stymie its growth. The second generation is then forced to question, rectify, and redeem in its own way those elements so hastily discarded by the parents. The shared lover figure—through whom the second generation conducts its reinterpretation of history—embodies those discarded elements still hovering in the family's consciousness.

In Agnon's novella, Leah replaces God with Akavia, recasting traditional redemptive expectations into romantic yearnings. Soon, Leah's father replaces Akavia with Mintz in a futile attempt to prevent further untimely deaths in his

family. Tirtza inherits the burden of *both* these failed redemptive shortcuts. She reacts to her greatest loss, the absence of her mother, by embracing the suitor whom her grandfather had discarded; rechannels the rhetoric of the *Mizrah* that her mother truncated; binds herself to her father's desire for atonement; and produces a child to stave off the physical threat of extinction that tags this family. Despite all this, redemption is not granted either in the historiosophic sense of national fulfillment or in the modern sense of personal happiness.

Among the Israeli examples outlined, Oz's Yonatan and Shalev's Ya'ara follow the pattern of their ancestress Tirtza, coming to realize that beyond a certain point they cannot recreate their parents' past choices. Seeking new models of personal satisfaction still tied to the safety of the nation, Yonatan welcomes an unconventional inclusive model of intimacy that is more humane and practical than that which Yolek, Hava, and Trotsky chose. Shalev's Ya'ara, by contrast, issues an apocalyptic warning based on insights gleaned from her detective-like, semi-inces- tuous journey into her parents' past. Yehoshua's Dafi improves upon Tirtza's predicament by leaving all choices open between her two love interests, Na'im and Yigal. Thus, the exasperated challenge that Dafi throws at her mother during a Zionist history lesson applies to the family's misguided replacement of one lost Yigal with an entity equally incapable of redeeming her family. Only an accidental improvement in the connection between generations (mother-daughter) and social groups (Arab-Jew) enables Dafi to begin healing from a shock-induced insomnia that, as in Shalev's novel, represents an apocalyptic wake-up warning.

While Yonatan, Ya'ara, and even Dafi's journeys of self-discovery enable them to identify the original decisions that engendered them, Shamir's Uri is so estranged from his parents that he never gets an opportunity to understand his own choices in light of their history. On the one hand, his pathetic accident becomes a tragic escape from personal problems. On the other hand, Rutka's memories reveal that Uri's life was bound and borrowed from the start. Ultimately, this family carries on only because of Mika's love for Uri's father, when she decides to keep her pregnancy for his sake.

In this, Shamir may have illustrated for future writers a full-blown application of Agnon's subtle superposition of decontextualized 'akedaic motifs upon oedipal tensions in which a redemptive drive, often thwarted, manifests itself through the

replacement of a missing child by a shared lover. The paradigm's key feature, the lover shared symbolically or actually between two generations, functions as a metaphor for national and personal redemptive ideals and possibilities that each generation inherits and must negotiate anew in order to survive.

The shared lover embodies elements that were rejected by previous generations, but which still hover by the wayside of history, claiming attention. The second generation's quest to uncover the roots of its own dysfunctional love life thus results in a reassessment of emotional and social processes, "shortcuts" by the parents in an attempt to hasten redemption and achieve normalcy. The paradigm's thematic and structural entanglement of oedipal and 'akedaic elements suggests that, grafted upon an 'akedaic seed, oedipal tensions enhance and modernize a generational conflict that had been suppressed by the *'akedab's* harmonization of personal commitment and national continuity. While the *'akedab's* traditional context portrays two generations moving together toward an ideal redemption, the Freudian model (more so in Family Romance than in the Oedipus complex) stipulates that no civilization can progress without generational conflict and its subsequent resolution.

From this angle, we can hazard an answer to some of the questions posed at the onset of this essay. First, it is important to underscore how well the double paradigm's historiosophic articulation of 'akedaically inflected Oedipus complexes dramatizes what Feldman has identified as an uneasy fit between 'akedaic and oedipal modes tangled up in Israeli literature and criticism. To understand why a plot pattern that joins two generations through a shared lover dominates so many works of modern Hebrew literature, we must understand why the modern Jewish, and particularly Israeli imagination, has superimposed a revised 'akedaic myth upon an oedipal impulse, and why this combination has become so powerful that it manages to displace the *'akedab's* traditional exegetical context and actual biblical details in order to serve as a catch-all model of generational strife. Agnon's systematic conflation of modern psychological insights and traditional Jewish scripts occupies a primary position in the dissemination of this entanglement, particularly because it tightens the connection between oedipal and 'akedaic tensions projected from a psychosexual plane toward an historical progression that charts the course of two or more generations.

The bi-generational double triangle plot is useful to contemporary Israeli

novelists because, during critical years of national formation and consolidation, its historiosophic resonances and intimate family microcosm enables Israeli novelists to hedge their bets, as it were, between a desire for modernity and a longing for "tribal" perseverance. This idea propagates Agnon's enterprise and simultaneously activates sociopolitical elements that are tenuous in his work. While Freud's understanding of civilization equates progress with an acknowledgement and resolution of generational conflict, the *'akedah* suppresses generational conflict for the sake of physical and ideological continuity against all odds.

The double triangle paradigm, however, represents a generational continuum that does *not* preclude a struggle to control historical processes. Sons and daughters thus consciously bear the burden of their parents' broken dreams and launch into a quest to discover the hidden sorrows and transgressions in their parents' lives. Through direct or symbolic contact with a lost or rejected figure who embodies these fault lines, the members of the second generation revisit their parents' choices and reinterpret the past. Nonetheless, each narrative ends at best with an ambiguous promise of regeneration tinged with warning.

The double triangle paradigm offers a structural illustration of how "a particular literary form can be suited to the exigencies of historical experience."⁵⁶ Since an ongoing redefinition of Zionist redemption continues to affect every aspect of Jewish culture, the interlinked bi-generational love plot becomes an apt vehicle for describing generational transition as a constant reexamination of historicized hopes and possibilities. The threat against physical survival and the hope for ideological continuity are jointly represented through *'akedaic* elements grafted onto a lover shared between two conflicted generations; discarded by one, he reemerges to challenge and prod the next. The double triangle structure thus operates as a history-in-the-making for two generations that vie to control their present and future through a reinterpretation of the past. We might say that the double triangle paradigm as a cultural phenomenon encapsulates the anxieties of two generations over the course of a protracted period of national reformation.

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NOTES

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- 1 Notable instances appear sporadically in national literatures of various periods—e.g., Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), Theodor Fontane's *Effi Briest* (1895), I. J. Singer's *The Brothers Ashkenazi* (1936)—though nowhere with the regularity and consistency exhibited by Hebrew fiction.
 - 2 These categorizations have been reconsidered since the mid-1970s, yet they remain indelibly etched upon Israeli literary history. See Gershon Shaked, *Hasiporet ha'ivrit, 1880-1980*, vols. I-V (Jerusalem: Keter and Hakibutz Hameuḥad, 1977-1999); Nurit Gertz, *Hirbet Hiz'a vehaboqer shel moḥarat* (Tel Aviv: Hakibutz Hameuḥad, 1983); and Dan Miron's rebuttal in *Pinkhas patuah* (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Po'alim, 1979).
 - 3 Situating Agnon's novella between biblical and Freudian models of family conflict, my "Reading Agnon's *In the Prime of Her Life* in Light of Freud's *Dora*" (forthcoming in *Jewish Quarterly Review*) claims that Agnon may have obtained directly from Freud the bi-generational double triangle pattern that Agnon then adapted to an historicized depiction of family conflict in which the nation's future is at stake.
 - 4 A. B. Yehoshua, "A Father and a Daughter in an Unconscious Relationship: *In the Prime of Her Life* by S. Y. Agnon," in *The Terrible Power of a Minor Guilt*, trans. Ora Cummings (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 108.
 - 5 Yehoshua and Oz have each devoted serious essays to this novella. See A. B. Yehoshua, "A Father and a Daughter in an Unconscious Relationship (108-29) and Amos Oz, "Who Has Come? On the Beginning of *In the Prime of Her Life* by S. Y. Agnon," in *The Story Begins: Essays on Literature* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1996), 17-27. These authors' relationship to Agnon has been amply documented. Respecting Yehoshua, see Bernard Horn, *Facing the Fires: Conversations with A. B. Yehoshua* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 91-98; Yedidya Itzjaki, *Hapsukim hasmuyim min ha'ayin: 'Al yetz'irat A. B. Yehoshua* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1992), 218-19, 231-33; Yehoshua,

“Agnon vesifrut zmanenu: ’edut ishit,” *Yediot Ahronot* April 4, 1980, 20, 24; and “Adayin anu tsmeyim le’Agnon,” *Ha’aretz*, February 8, 1968, 24. It is also worth noting that Yehoshua’s *Hakhalah hamesbaḥreret* (Tel Aviv: Hakibutz hameuḥad, 2001) circles around Agnon in suggestive ways. Respecting Oz, see Hillel Barzel, “Oz veAgnon,” in *Sefer Amos Oz*, ed. Aharon Komem and Isaac Ben-Mordechai (Beersheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2000), 109–27; and Yair Mazor, *Lituf ba’afelah: ’Al siporet Amos Oz* (Jerusalem: Keter: 1998), 38, 82, 356–57 and passim. Oz has written an entire monograph on Agnon, *The Silence of Heaven: Agnon’s Fear of God*, trans. Barbara Harshav (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); his autobiographical novel, *Sipur ’al ahavah vaḥosbekh [A Tale of Love and Darkness]* (Jerusalem: Keter, 2002), contains valuable references to Agnon and particularly to *B’dmey yameha*: 90–97, 248–49, 447–48, 575. Avraham Balaban recounts Oz’s description of a widespread indebtedness to Agnon: “Agnon is like a big bank with many cashiers. Oz himself stands by one of these cashiers, A. B. Yehoshua stands by another . . . and so on” in *Between God and Beast: An Examination of Amos Oz’s Prose* (University Park, Pa: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 4 n. 5.

- 6 Regarding Agnon’s influence on writers of the Palmah generation, see Meshulam Tohner, *Pesher Agnon* (Tel Aviv: Masadah, 1968); Shalom Kremer, *Rializm ushvirato* (Tel Aviv: Masadah, 1968), 142–43; David Kna’ani, *Beynam l’veyn z’manam* (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Po’alim, 1955), 253. Moshe Shamir acknowledges that “we all drink from [Agnon’s] fount” in “The Author’s View of Time Distant, Time Near,” in *Israeli Writers Consider the Outside*, ed. L. I. Yudkin (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1993), 98. Yet as the editor of *Yalkut hare’im*, as well as in numerous essays on his generation’s accomplishments and duties, Shamir himself was largely responsible for portraying this “generation” as ideologically bound, distinguishing it from the aesthetic interests ascribed to Agnon and New Wave authors.
- 7 By historiosophy, I mean a philosophy of history with theological nuances, particularly one that projects preoccupations with atonement and redemption unto a national scale, as in Eddy M. Zemach’s “On the Historiosophic Understanding of Two of Agnon’s Late Stories,” in *Qriyah Tamah: Besifrut ’ivrit bat hame’ah ha’esrim* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1990), 40–51.
- 8 Ruth Kartun-Blum forcefully reminds us that the original *’akedah* is about substitution rather than loss. For overviews of *’akedaic* motifs in Hebrew poetry see Kartun-Blum’s “A Double Bind: The Sacrifice of Isaac as a Paradigm in Modern

- Hebrew Poetry,” in *Profane Scriptures: Reflections on the Dialogue with the Bible in Modern Hebrew Poetry* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1999), 21; and David Jacobson, *Does David Still Play before You?: Israeli Poetry and the Bible* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997), 121–31, 154–57. Yael Feldman wrestles with the deepest conceptual problems attached to this topic, which she anchors in Yehoshua’s claim to have undone the *’akedah* by acting it out through *Mar Mani*. See Yehoshua’s “Ḥatimah: Levatel et ha’akedah ’al yedey mimushah” [Undoing the *’akedah* by Acting it Out] in *Bekhivun hanegdi*, 395–98; recently translated by Harvey Bock as “From Myth to History,” *AJS Review* 28, no. 1 (April 2004): 205–12 and Yael Feldman’s “Ḥazarah lebereshit: El hamudhak um’e’ver lo bazehut hayisra’elit,” also in *Bekhivun hanegdi*, 204–22.
- 9 Feldman’s articulation of Israeli literature’s uneasy fit between biblical and psychoanalytic models can be traced across the following series of articles: “Zionism on the Analyst’s Couch in Contemporary Israeli Literature,” *Tikkun Magazine* (Nov.–Dec. 1987): 31–34, 91–96; reprinted as “Back to Vienna: Zionism on the Literary Couch,” in *Vision Confronts Reality: Historical Perspectives on the Contemporary Jewish Agenda*, ed. R. Kozodoy, D. Sidorsky, and R. Sultanik (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1989), 159–89; “And Rebecca Loved Jacob, But Freud Did Not,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 1, no.1 (1993): 72–88; “Hazarah lebereshit,” in *Bekhivun hanegdi* (cited above); translated and updated as “The Jacob Complex and Zionist Masculinism in the Work of A. B. Yehoshua,” in *Gendering the Jewish Past*, ed. Marc Lee Raphael (Williamsburg, Va.: College of William and Mary, 2002), 49–65; “Isaac or Oedipus?: Jewish Tradition and the Israeli Aqedah,” in *Biblical Studies/Cultural Studies*, ed. J. C. Exum and S. D. Moore (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 159–89; and “Between Genesis and Sophocles: Biblical Psychopolitics in A. B. Yehoshua’s *Mr. Mani*,” in *History and Literature: New Readings of Jewish Texts in Honor of Arnold J. Band*, ed. William Cutter and David Jacobson (Providence: Brown Judaic Studies, 2002), 451–64.
- 10 Marthe Robert’s *Origins of the Novel*, trans. Sasha Rabinovitch (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1980) attributes the birth and development of the genre to a literary variation of Family Romance fantasies that allow a myth of origin to replace an unsatisfying family triad. René Girard’s *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965) distills the history of the novel into a series of triangulated quixotic tensions in which the gap between a character’s reality and desires is mediated by a role model.

- 11 Amos Oz, “Who has Come?,” 26.
- 12 S. Y. Agnon, “*In the Prime of her Life*,” trans. Gabriel Levin, in *Eight Great Hebrew Short Novels*, eds. Alan Lelchuk and Gershon Shaked (New York: New American Library, 1993), 167.
- 13 However, the combined term *heikhal habrakbah* (hall of blessing) derives from the title of a Hasidic text that Agnon cites in his treatise on the High Holidays, *Yamim nora'im* (Jerusalem and New York: Schocken Books, 1964), 401.
- 14 Eddy Zemach links the color symbolism of the *Mizrah* scenes with Tirtza’s sexual teasing of Akavia, the red cap in the maid’s dream, and the red cap that Mintz brings for his expected grandchild. See Zemach, *Kriyah Tamah*, 17–20.
- 15 Agnon, “*In the Prime of Her Life*” 180.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 184–85.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 206.
- 18 Arnold J. Band, “Negotiating Jewish History: The Author, His Code, and His Reader,” in *Tradition and Trauma: Studies in the Fiction of S. Y. Agnon*, ed. David Patterson and Glenda Abramson (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1994), 40.
- 19 Agnon, *In the Prime of Her Life*, 201.
- 20 Nitza Ben-Dov discusses the pseudo-Zionist dimension of Segal and Landau in her rich analysis of Agnon’s novella, *Agnon’s Art of Indirection: Uncovering Latent Content in the Fiction of S. Y. Agnon* (Leiden, New York, Cologne: E.J. Brill, 1993), 123.
- 21 In *Between Exile and Return: S. Y. Agnon and the Drama of Writing* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), Anne Golomb Hoffman traces a dynamic of atonement and redemption through images of exile and Zion across Agnon’s opus. See also Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, *Booking Passage: Exile and Homecoming in the Modern Jewish Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 81–102. In *Not a Simple Story: Love and Politics in a Modern Hebrew Novel* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2001), 27, 142–44, Sharon Green qualifiedly interprets the lack of committed Zionism in *Sipur Pashut*—where the Mazals reappear—as one of the main symptoms of Shibushian befuddlement.
- 22 Miron, “Domesticating a Foreign Genre: Agnon’s Transactions with the Novel,” *Prooftexts* 7, no. 1 (1987): 10.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 26.

- 24 R' Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, "Atah zokher—You remember," in *The Complete ArtScroll Machzor: Rosh Hashana* (New York: Mesorah, 2000), 511.
- 25 These explicit echoes of the 'akedah's vocabulary were unforgivably lost in the English translations of both Agnon's novella and Yehoshua's essay on it. See Yehoshua's original analysis, "Av uvito bema'arekhet lo-muda'at: B'dmey Yameha me'et S. Y. Agnon," in *Kofo hanorah shel asmah ktanah* (Tel Aviv: Yediot Ahronot, 1998), 148–49.
- 26 Moshe Shamir, *Hu halakh basadot* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1972), 7.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 178.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 263.
- 29 Though remarking upon the increased glorification of Uri from the 1940s to the 1960s, Nurit Gertz still interprets the novel and its adaptations as an affirmation of collective values over personal desires; see "The Book and the Film: A Case Study of *He Walked through the Fields*" in *Modern Hebrew Literature* 15 (1995): 23 and *Hirbet Hiz'a* 72–73. Gershon Shaked singles Uri out as the "prototype of the idealistic, self-sacrificing sabra . . . who places national duty before love . . . [and] functions well despite the disintegration of his parental home," in *Modern Hebrew Fiction*, trans. Yael Lotan, ed. Emily Budick (Bloomington and Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2000), 142. Similarly, in *The Sabra: The Creation of the New Jew*, trans. Haim Watzman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 59, Oz Almog echoes Shaked by insisting that Uri's suffering "is not a tragedy that comes out of . . . alienation . . . or . . . internal conflict." For a recent reassessment of Palmah literature, see Hanah Naveh and Oded Manda-Levy, *Yom krav ve'arvo vehaboqer shelemaḥarat: Yets'ugah shel milḥemet ha'ats'ma'ut basifrut uvatarbut ha'ivrit beYisra'el* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2002).
- 30 Shamir, *Hu halakh basadot*, 82.
- 31 Yehuda Amichai, "Jerusalem is Full of Used Jews," in *Poems of Jerusalem and Love Poems* (New York: The Sheep Meadow Press, 1992), 109.
- 32 Gertz, "The Book and the Film," 25.
- 33 Shamir, "Oedipus veAvraham," in *Bekulmus mahir* (Merhavia: Sifriat Poalim, 1960), 331.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 96.
- 35 Yehoshua, *The Lover*, trans. Philip Simpson (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1977), 168.

- 36 Ibid., 84, 180–81.
- 37 Ibid., 127.
- 38 Ibid., 147.
- 39 Ibid., 133.
- 40 Gilead Morahg interprets Yehoshua’s fiction in light of the provocative assessment of tensions between Diaspora and Zion expressed in Yehoshua’s collection of essays, *Between Right and Right*, trans. Arnold Schwartz (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1981). See Morahg’s “A. B. Yehoshua: Fictions of Zion and Diaspora,” in *Israeli Writers Consider the Outsider*, ed. L. I. Yudkin (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1993), 124–37; “Facing the Wilderness: God and Country in the Fiction of A. B. Yehoshua,” *Prooftexts* 8, no. 3 (1988): 311–31; and “From Madness on to Sanity: A. B. Yehoshua’s Shifting Perspective on the Diaspora,” *Shofar* 11, no. 1 (1992): 50–60.
- 41 Yehoshua, *The Lover*, 121.
- 42 Ibid., 190.
- 43 Morahg, “Facing the Wilderness,” 322–23.
- 44 Yehoshua, *The Lover*, 317.
- 45 Oz, *A Perfect Peace*, trans. Hillel Halkin (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1985), 340.
- 46 Balaban, *Between God and Beast*, 23.
- 47 Ibid., 229.
- 48 A recent study of Israeli literary history claims that allusions to Agnon are largely cosmetic, and that Agnon’s school is empty compared to Brenner’s; see Ortsion Bartana, “The Brenner School and the Agnon School in Hebrew Literature of the Twentieth Century,” *Hebrew Studies* 45 (2004): 68–69. I would counter that if anything emerges clearly from this literary history of the double triangle paradigm, it is that Agnon’s influence is so deeply entrenched in Israeli fiction that his historiosophic rhetoric has been imported wholesale along with his hallmark plot structure.
- 49 In a psychocultural study of Shalev’s novel, Yigal Schwartz observes that *B’dmey yameha* and *Hayey ahavah* belong to a category of narratives that mythologize the Western woman by intermingling the story of a young woman who seeks a father substitute with that of a young woman who hopes to repair her mother’s old love affair (Schwartz, “The Frigid Option: A Psychocultural Study of the Novel *Love*

- Life* by Zruya Shalev,” in *History and Literature: New Readings of Jewish Texts in Honor of Arnold J. Band*, ed. William Cutter and David C. Jacobson (Providence: Brown Judaic Studies, 2002), 479–80. Leah Baratz traces *Hayey ahavah*’s direct allusions to *B’dmey yameha*, noting for instance, that Ya’ara’s father fears she will succumb to Aunt Tirtza’s fate (Baratz, *Hagigah shel hitporerut: Diyun behitporerut bat’a hamishpaḥti bekhamah romanim Yisraelim* (Or Am, 2002), 167ff. Smadar Shiffman situates Shalev’s intertextual strategies within a postmodern feminist context in “Ha’im ani nimts’et: Sipur haḥanikhah hanashit ets’el Zeruya Shalev veYehudit Kats’ir,” *Mikhan* 2 (2001): 125–41, while Tali Yaniv concentrates on this novel’s dialogue with Midrash in “‘Kakha hergish elohim le’aḥar haḥurban’: Qriyah intertextualit be’agadot haḥurban hashlivot *beḥayey Ahavah* me’et Zeruya Shalev,” *Dimui* 22 (2003), 75–79.
- 50 Ḥayuta Deutch, “Fisfus kehurban,” *Nequdah* 208 (October 1997): 83–84.
- 51 Zeruya Shalev, *Hayey ahavah* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1997), 278. This embedded tale, which so wonderfully illuminates Aryeh’s status in Rachel’s fantasies, was entirely omitted from the English version of Shalev’s novel. For a methodological approach to embedded storytelling scenes as a key to interpreting their framing novels see Halevi-Wise, *Interactive Fictions: Scenes of Storytelling in the Novel* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2003).
- 52 Ya’akov Besser, “Zeruya Shalev,” *Iton* 77 209 (1997): 12.
- 53 Shalev, *Hayey ahavah*, 252.
- 54 Collected in H. N. Bialik and Y. H. Ravnitzky, *The Book of Legends, Sefer ha’agadah: Legends from the Talmud and Midrash*, trans. W. G. Braude (New York: Schocken, 1992), 142–50, 189–99. The sources for the two legends Ya’ara cites most frequently—the legend about the carpenter’s apprentice and wife, and the legend about the high priest whose mother was brought before him to be tested for adultery—can be found, respectively, in *Gittin* 48 and in *Yalqut Shimoni on Lamentations*. By contrast, the novel’s final legend about an apostate daughter was invented by Shalev in a climactic gathering of the novel’s concerns. See Schwartz, “Hayefeyfiyah shebaḥarah lehamshikh lishon: ‘Al ha’emdah hanashit-ḥatranit shel Zeruya Shalev *beḥayey ahavah*,” *Ts’afon: Qovets’ sifrut* 6 (2000): 111; and “The Frigid Option,” 487.
- 55 Avi Vimar adopts Ya’ara’s intertextual hermeneutics as a metaphor for his own navigation of Shalev’s text. See “Khamah ḥomer betezah sh’ḥorah aḥat, khamah ḥesed berega’a eḥad: ‘Al *Hayey ahavah* shel Zruya Shalev,” *Dapim lemeḥqar besifrut* 12 (2000): 317–31. Yet despite Shalev’s obvious engagement with Jewish history

via the book of Samuel and *Agadot haḥurban*, the author and her reviewers insist that national issues do not form part of her work. See, for instance, Shiri Lev Ari’s recent interview with Shalev in “Emotional Excavations,” <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/pages/ShArt.jhtml?itemNo=588884>.

- 56 Alan Mintz, *Banished from Their Father’s Table: Loss of Faith and Hebrew Autobiography* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 203.

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