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# The Bereaved Father and His Dead Son in the Works of A. B. Yehoshua

Adia Mendelson-Maoz

## ABSTRACT

*In recent years, A. B. Yehoshua has been taken to task for tempering his criticism of Israeli politics and shifting closer to the political center. In this article, I shift the discussion to a historical and poetic perspective through an interpretive evaluation of the bereaved father figure in Yehoshua's oeuvre. His approach to the bereaved father has undergone a radical transformation. This is clearly seen in his latest works in which he has made the transition from a critical stance toward the bereaved father—one of the most potent images of Zionist ideology—to a more moderate position reflecting internalization and acceptance of bereavement. To investigate this development, I explore the use of the bereavement myth in several of Yehoshua's works and offer a detailed comparison of his early novella *Bi-techilat kayits* 1970 (*Early in the Summer of 1970; 1972*) and his more recent work *Esh yedidutit* (*Friendly Fire: A Duet; 2007*).*

*Key words:* A. B. Yehoshua, Akedah, Hebrew literature

**I**n 1992, during a conference on A. B. Yehoshua's novel *Mr. Mani* (*Mr. Mani; 1990*),<sup>1</sup> the author referred to the issue of the Akedah—the binding and sacrifice of Isaac—in his works:

From my earliest childhood, I have had a problem with that story, which is one of the key narratives of the Jewish people. . . . [T]he Akedah is a test that founding fathers were set. It is a hovering presence in our history, like a dark bird. For believers in the objective existence of God and His concern for humanity, the Akedah must be morally intolerable. What moral authority supports God's demand from Abraham to take Isaac and sacrifice him? Even if it is an ultimately unfulfilled test, the divine authority for

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demanding it is a moral outrage. But for Abraham, the moral failure is compounded. He is incapable of complying with the arbitrary, immoral demand to sacrifice his son—and neither does he receive any grounds for it. What does Abraham’s unconditional loyalty mean? Blind loyalty of that kind has led humanity to the worst horrors . . . yet it is precisely from the secular perspective that we can, to a certain extent, accept the story of the Akedah. And that is the perspective from which I engage with it, and can grasp a certain degree of moral coherence in it. Simultaneously, I see the accumulative damage it causes, and so it is well worth being more aware of its negative implications and its intensifying damage, in terms of our self-perception as a nation.<sup>2</sup>

[117]

*The Works of  
A. B. Yehoshua*

●  
Adia  
Mendelson-  
Maoz

Father and son relationships, the image of the bereaved father, and the biblical story of the Akedah are central themes in Yehoshua’s work—features that may stem from the sense of dissatisfaction the author describes above. Yehoshua says that, though in religious terms one must absolutely discard the Akedah narrative, in the national sense the narrative may be acceptable, “to a certain extent.” Nonetheless, he warns of the negative ramifications of this story.

In this article I discuss the Akedah narrative as it emerges from Yehoshua’s oeuvre. My study focuses on the figure of the bereaved father and the (national) myth of the Akedah, and it analyzes the changes that have taken place in Yehoshua’s attitude toward this myth. My central argument is that Yehoshua’s approach to the figure of the bereaved father has undergone a major transformation that is clearly expressed in his latest works, where he has shifted from a critical stance toward the bereaved father, one of the most potent images in Zionist ideology, to a more moderate position reflecting internalization and acceptance of the bereavement myth.

To examine these changes, I begin with a chronological exploration of the use of the bereavement myth in several of Yehoshua’s works. I then focus on a detailed comparison of his early novella, *Bi-techilat kayits 1970* (Early in the Summer of 1970; 1972)—which I believe is a key text for Yehoshua’s critical stance as reflected in his first decades as a writer, embodying ironic critique through the description of an obsessive father who longs for bereavement—with his more recent, much more mature work *Esh yedidutit* (Friendly Fire: A Duet; 2007), which depicts three fathers, two of whom are bereaved, and fleshes out the theme in a more complicated manner.<sup>3</sup> Analysis of these two works with their shared thematic traits helps to clarify the changes in Yehoshua’s attitude toward bereavement and the Akedah story. It can also constitute a response to recent criticism leveled at Yehoshua (and other writers of his generation) for toning down disapproval of Israeli politics



and for moving toward the political center and social and cultural consensus.<sup>4</sup> Finally, my examination enables an understanding of new developments in Hebrew literature over the past few years and an exploration of the links between Israel's literary field and its sociopolitical realm. The discussion ends with short remarks about two related texts by Amos Oz and David Grossman, to elaborate on the larger picture and set the stage for future research.

### Fathers, Sons, and the Myth of the Akedah in Yehoshua's Works

From his early writings to his recent novels, Yehoshua's works have dealt with the familial sphere and focused particularly on the loaded issue of father-son relationships. In the story "Mul ha-ye'arot" (Facing the Forests; 1963), a son is estranged from his father; in "Sheloshah yamim ve-yeled" (Three Days and a Child; 1965), the protagonist plots to murder his "foster son"; the father in "Shetikah holekhet veinimshekhet shel meshorer" (The Continuing Silence of a Poet; 1966) is disappointed that his son will not follow in his footsteps.<sup>5</sup> In *Early in the Summer of 1970*, a father fantasizes about his son's death; in *Hameahev* (The Lover; 1977),<sup>6</sup> Adam is fraught with guilt about his son's death and attempts to find a substitute; *Mr. Mani* revolves around rescuing and sacrificing sons; in *Ha-kalah ha-meshuchreret* (The Liberated Bride; 2001), the father is overly inquisitive about his son's life; and *Friendly Fire* features a father and his dead son. All of these texts compulsively delineate the intricate and difficult relationships between fathers and sons.<sup>7</sup> They are characterized by intergenerational silence, alienation, and a lack of communication that leads to violence, all of which are manifested both in the domestic sphere and on the political level.

Father-son relationships are directly connected to Yehoshua's place in the chronology of literary generations. As a young author, he was considered a member of a new generation of writers who sought innovative modes of expression and hoped to liberate literature from its social function. This new approach reflected the intergenerational tension between the 1948 Palmach generation and the so-called statehood generation. The Palmach generation was wholly absorbed in the experience of the 1948 war. In most cases, literary texts by that generation's members were attentive to the Zionist endeavor. Even when their texts were critical (like those of S. Yizhar),<sup>8</sup> the theme of war was ubiquitous and the Erets Yisrael experience was central. During the 1960s, when the existence of Israel had come to be taken for granted,

the ideological drive made way for other topics. Broader intellectual developments of the 1960s, such as philosophical existentialism, fostered new poetic approaches. These influences uprooted individual literary characters from a specific place and time, but the break was not complete due to a nearly obsessive engagement with the intergenerational question. Israeli authors in the 1960s were viewed as “sons” who were rebelling against their parents’ generation and ideals.<sup>9</sup>

Intergenerational conflict is a defining conflict in Yehoshua’s work. In the literary texts he wrote during the 1960s and 1970s, the protagonists are fathers from the Palmach generation and sons that belong to the statehood generation. The fathers are world-weary and lonely, and they feel threatened by their sons. The sons are detached from the values that the older generation wishes to instill in them, and they defy their parents’ attempts to uphold old myths and anachronistic ideals. The fathers are depicted as shallow and false, clinging to obsolete, empty attitudes but still holding institutional power. Although the sons seek a different path, they find themselves trapped in a web that turns into an implicit or explicit Akedah, characterized by a bitterly critical clash with the myth of national sacrifice.

The link between fallen soldiers and the myth of the Akedah crystallized during the first half of the twentieth century, particularly around the period of the War of Independence. The myth reinforces the connection between the individual believer or community and God. In the modern rite of fallen soldiers, God’s altar is replaced by “worship of the homeland.” Soldiers are portrayed as courageous youths who risk their lives for the sake of the homeland, “and in their deaths, bequeathed to us a life.”<sup>10</sup> Many writers who adopted this model describe these young men as *akudim* (bound) or as living-dead: the dead soldiers are presented on silver platters and remain beautiful and intact in the memories of the living.<sup>11</sup>

As Yael Feldman and Avi Sagi have shown, the national sacrifice myth during this era differs from its biblical archetype. Three major features typify the Akedah myth in its Palmach-generation version, which Yehoshua attempts to ridicule in his earliest works. First, unlike the biblical Isaac who passively let himself be bound, the War of Independence Isaac was perceived as an active fighter, consciously assuming his military commitment; discourse in the 1940s and 1950s featured “Isaacs” who willingly sacrificed themselves. Second, this discourse emphasized cooperation between fathers and sons, working together toward a common goal. And third, Isaac was viewed not as an individual but as an embodiment of the pioneer spirit and the Sabra outlook in general.<sup>12</sup>

[119]

*The Works of  
A. B. Yehoshua*

●  
Adia  
Mendelson-  
Maoz



In the 1960s, when Yehoshua started writing, criticism of the Akeidah myth was already being voiced, and it is clear that this influenced Yehoshua.<sup>13</sup> But, unlike the Palmach generation's criticism of the myth, Yehoshua's subversion of it was interwoven with descriptions of the gap between the parents' Palmach generation and the children's 1960s generation.

*Early in the Summer of 1970*, which I deal with extensively below, is the best representation of Yehoshua's attitude to the Akedah at that time. It was published in 1972 and is set during the War of Attrition (1967–70); the plot revolves around a father and son. The father, a Bible teacher, represents the Palmach generation; he believes in Zionist ideals and feels truly invigorated at times of war. In contrast, his son, who has returned from the United States with a foreign wife and child who do not speak Hebrew, is a dove who considers the concept of going to war and doing reserve duty to be a complete waste of time. The father is incorrectly informed that his son has died during military reserve service. He then clings to this image, longing to join the ranks of bereaved fathers of sons who remained loyal to their values and were willing to sacrifice their lives on the altar of the state.

In the late 1970s, Yehoshua's attitude toward the theme of fathers, sons, and the Akedah progressed in tandem with more complex realism and forms of polyphony (multiple voices) in his work. During that period, Yehoshua himself became a father and wrested himself away from the ideological hold of the Palmach generation.<sup>14</sup>

*The Lover*, written in 1977, is an interesting way station along that path. It takes place during the Yom Kippur War of 1973. At the core of this novel is the corruption of Israeli society, first hinted at in *Early in the Summer of 1970*. In *The Lover*, though, the structure is trigenerational (not bigenerational), and corruption finds expression in the mid-generation of the 1960s. Unlike the parents—the 1948 generation—who were committed to national projects such as the security services (Assia's father) or the Hebrew laboring class (Adam's father), and in contrast to the figure of the grandmother, Veducha, who represents the entire history of Zionism, Adam and Assia's generation discards the old values and becomes engrossed in their private lives and economic well-being. It is a generation that came of age after 1948 and sank into the euphoria of the 1960s, a generation more intent on financial gain than ideologies. As in *Early in the Summer of 1970*, here too war, which enables personal encounters and revives the dead, is paradoxically presented as a solution to this generation's problems of loneliness and loss of values.

The intergenerational conflict in the novel extends to the characters

of the grandchildren. Adam and Assia's daughter undermines the values of her parents and her grandparents. Gabriel, Assia's lover, is younger than Adam and Assia, and his opinions are close to those of the grandchildren. Yet his position as a lover subverts any attempt to link him with a specific generation. The linkage between his biography and his rebellious views reveals the essence of the intergenerational conflict.

The novel introduces an alternative that did not feature in Yehoshua's earlier work: an interim situation. Gabriel is dispatched to battle and is even compared to a fallen soldier when he disappears. It is said of him: "In the last war we lost a lover. We used to have a lover, but since the war he is gone. Just disappeared."<sup>15</sup> Gabriel—who is not quite a father and not quite a son—embodies a rebellious outlook. Like all the sons in Yehoshua's works, Gabriel reveals the decline of the fathers' generation. His mother was killed during the siege of Jerusalem during the War of Independence when he was a little boy, and later he decided to leave Israel, a step condemned by those around him. When he joins the army, his officer is determined to ensure he sees battle: "Make sure he fights properly. . . . He's been out of the country ten years. . . . [H]e tried to run away" (296). From Gabriel's point of view, he is confronting a generation of fanatical commanders who cling to war like a lifebuoy. Gabriel feels they want him dead: "I say it again—they simply wanted to kill me" (283). He understands that the war is emblematic of Zionism's failure: this is "a nation ensnaring itself" (298).

Yehoshua was clearly part of the generation of rebellious sons in the 1960s and early 1970s, but thereafter his own growth kept pace with the maturing state. When he became a father, these themes received more complex expression, and the ideological struggle between generations became wider in both spatial and temporal terms, as can be seen in *Mr. Mani*.

*Mr. Mani* is one of Yehoshua's pivotal works, in which he charts the fate of a long line of fathers and sons who fight with each other ideologically. Many parental figures in the novel are obtrusive. The sons disappear and are either saved from death or sacrificed. The novel is organized in reverse chronological order, starting from the present generation. In the first episode, Effi Mani (b. 1958) vanishes while on reserve duty, and Gabriel (b. 1938), his father, tries to commit suicide. In the second episode, Gabriel, as a young boy, is about to face certain death. Efraim (b. 1914), Gabriel's father, drags him to a labyrinth in Crete, where a German paratrooper awaits him, and Gabriel witnesses the confrontation between the two. Eventually, Efraim offers himself

[121]

*The Works of  
A. B. Yehoshua*

●  
Adia  
Mendelson-  
Maoz

up as a victim in exchange for his son's life. In the third episode, Joseph Mani (b. 1887), Efraim's father, is the fourth child in the novel who is condemned to death and is then rescued: as a child, he was destined to die because of his parents' incompatible blood (166); as an adult, he is again miraculously saved after having been sentenced to hang for spying. In the fourth episode, Moshe Mani (b. 1848), Joseph's father, commits suicide. In the final episode, when all these themes converge into a full-blown Akedah, the intergenerational conflict is staged in all its tragedy. Abraham Mani (b. 1799) binds his son, Joseph (b. 1826), on Mount Moriah, using a knife and ropes: "He had his throat cut, madam: like a tender lamb, or a black goat in the dead of night" (318).

As in the other works discussed here, in *Mr. Mani* the crux of the crisis between the father and the son is ideological.<sup>16</sup> Abraham Mani's need to bring about his son Joseph's death and to impregnate Joseph's wife derives from the son's ideological stance and the bizarre revolutionary ideas he wishes to promote. Joseph wants to forfeit his sperm, the continuation of the dynasty, to unite the country's inhabitants based on affinity to the nation. The father understands that his son's radical ideas could bring disaster not only on himself but also on the entire Jewish population of the Old City, and so he takes his son's place, assuming responsibility for the dynasty's continued existence and growth.

In his essay on the Akedah in *Mr. Mani*, Yehoshua asserts that in this novel he wants "to revoke the Akedah by performing it." He declares that the only way to get rid of the myth entails realizing it in full, and this is what he decides to do:

Here, the question of the Akedah that occupied me for years in many works, finally reaches, I hope, its ultimate realization. And I feel that this time, I've really freed myself from it. Not only my personal self is freed from it, in fact with this novel (what a terrible pretension!) I wanted to free the collective self from this important, powerful and awful myth that hovers so strongly over our history and culture.<sup>17</sup>

Did Yehoshua manage to get rid of this awful myth? Apparently not. Rather, the myth that was so dramatically honed in *Mr. Mani* emerges differently in his later works. In the works surveyed so far, the myth was aimed at the father-son conflict. Sons reveal the ideological degeneracy of their parents' generation and jeopardize Zionist values or even the nation's existence. They try to control their fates and lives, whereas the fathers try to maintain their own values in a twisted way, even to the point of sacrificing their sons. This scenario changes in *Friendly Fire*. Although fathers and sons are still a central theme, and



although this work, too, is based on a duet of voices, *Friendly Fire* abandons a diachronic structure and adopts a synchronic one, so the father-son relationship and the myth of sacrifice relate to the contemporary Israeli situation. This novel's characters—including the bereaved father, Yirmi; his dead son, Eyal; the novel's protagonist, Amotz Yaari; and his living son, Moran—bear similarities to characters in other works by Yehoshua. Nevertheless, the intergenerational conflict in this work has almost died away, the irony has disappeared, and the text conveys a new stance on the figure of the bereaved father and a different concretization of the Akedah myth. To highlight the change, I will compare *Early in the Summer of 1970* and *Friendly Fire* to demonstrate how, despite the numerous links between the two texts, attitudes toward the myth in the later work seem to have grown more forgiving, despite the complexity of the text.

[123]

*The Works of  
A. B. Yehoshua*

●  
Adia  
Mendelson-  
Maoz

### Two Kinds of Sacrifice

The protagonist of *Early in the Summer of 1970* is a lonely, elderly teacher whose life changes one day with the news—which later turns out to be erroneous—that his son has died on reserve duty during the War of Attrition. From the moment the protagonist hears the news that has made him a bereaved father, all his former acquaintances who considered him a tedious old man and had abandoned him over the years now swarm to see him again. At his school, the principal, teachers, and students seek out his company. His previously alienated relationship with his son's family—his daughter-in-law and grandson—is transformed into a new bond based on their shared loss. He becomes frantically active, hoping to find his spiritual vocation, and plans to continue his son's research work.

The story is cyclically constructed. The father, who narrates the story, relives the moment he received the news of his son's death, describing it over and over again. Between the reconstructions, he reminisces about events from the past connected to his work at the school and his relationship with his son. He also depicts the process of searching for his son, first at the morgue, where it becomes clear that the corpse shown him is not that of his son, and then during the trip to the army base where he finally meets his son, alive and well and unaware of the mistake that has been made. The story ends with another reenactment of the announcement of his son's supposed death, in a kind of desperate attempt to hang onto the calamity.

*Early in the Summer of 1970* has clear ties with both the biblical story

and the modern myth of the Akedah. Like the biblical Abraham, the father in the novella agrees to sacrifice his son. Although he does not directly cause his son's death, clues in the text link him to it. For example, he is shown holding twigs as though taken from the altar: "It is the branch that makes me so suspect" (34). The son is considered dead, almost dies, or is expected to die, but in the end he is saved. In the Bible, Abraham benefits from the incident by proving his belief in God beyond any doubt. In *Early in the Summer of 1970*, the father also profits from the alleged death. He is redeemed from distress and solitude, and he enjoys social recognition and attention. In addition, the connection to the Akedah is present in the language of the text. The father mentions his age in the style of biblical genealogy, "Three score and ten" (seventy years old) (59), and the description of the son's death borrows from the scripture's triple-layered sentence "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love." Describing his son's death, the narrator always uses a three-part structure: "Thirty-one years old. An only, beloved son" (37–38). There is also a clear reference to the "shed blood" (42), and, finally, the biblical text is mentioned explicitly as the "mumble" of "the morning's tidings in an ancient, biblical Hebrew" (33).

The father in this story both kills and revives. In his imaginary address at the school's graduation ceremony, he emphasizes the responsibility of parents who send their sons away to die, thus ascribing a sacrificial role to himself. As a representative of the Palmach generation, he is also perceived "as though in some furtive manner [he was] enjoying this war" (17) and "as if it [was he] who issued call-up orders" (64). But just as the father sacrifices the son, he also resurrects him "as though by my power I had killed him, as though by my power brought him back to life" (68). This takes place entirely under divine protection: "And to look at once for signs of a dead, distant, biblical deity among the arid hills flanking the road" (55).

*Early in the Summer of 1970* delineates the rift between father and son in detail. At first, the apparent physical likeness between the two is emphasized—"they are amazed by the resemblance between us" (16)—because there is no sign of intimacy between the two men. Silence and gloom characterize their encounters. The son returns from the United States but shows no special interest in his father's life, while the father does not understand his son's academic research and finds it difficult to converse with his daughter-in-law and grandson.

After the son's "death," the father reports that "[I] cleanse myself, put on fresh linen, find a heavy black suit in the wardrobe and put it on" (22–23). He takes advantage of his son's death in all possible ways—relishing in his tragedy, reconstructing his future. He is ready

and willing to become his son's heir. First, he seeks out his son's wife. He falls down "sobbing on the rug where they [his son and the son's wife] lay that night" (23). The son's wife is "of the kind who many years, eons ago, I might have fallen in love with, pursued in my heart, year after year" (25). She could have been the love of his life, the woman he dreamed about at the army base "in the close air of the Jordan Valley" (67). As a substitute for his son, he also becomes a stand-in father for the grandchild, such as collecting the boy from nursery school. Professionally, he is willing to try and understand his son's new ideas, raking over his papers, trying to see whether he can continue his research: "[I] will have to try and read these as well" (32). He even plans to publish a collection of his son's works (62).

The status of bereaved father benefits him not only on a personal, intimate level but in the public sphere as well. People want to be near him and show him signs of respect. He imagines himself giving the keynote address to graduates. His pride is restored and, paradoxically, through death, his son returns to him. "I was prepared for his death in a manner, and that was my strength in that fearful moment" (38). Apparently he was not only prepared but even consciously or subconsciously desired it.

In Yehoshua's essay on the Akedah, he outlines his interpretation of the biblical story: in his final years, Abraham was not convinced that Isaac would abide by his faith. How could he ensure that his son not only continued his lineage but also sustained the new belief? According to Yehoshua's analysis, through the Akedah Abraham shows Isaac a redeeming God to whom Isaac now owes his life. This interpretation is echoed in Yehoshua's oeuvre. To secure their sons' faith, fathers must steer them toward a perilous situation in which a knife is placed dangerously close to their hearts. At the last minute, after a staged act of rescue, salvation can be attributed to a higher power.<sup>18</sup>

In *Early in the Summer of 1970*, the father hopes to draw his son closer to his own world of values, even at the price of his death. The novella pushes the father's ideological loyalty to an extreme. Since he represents society, Yehoshua's criticism is directed not merely against the father but against every agent of sacrifice and bereavement. The society reflected in this text worships disasters and wars, and it endorses sacrifice for the sake of rejuvenation.

Writing about the novella in 1976, Haim Gantz noted the way the text embraces the myth of sacrifice:

The shift from private pain to public generalizations, to creating grief-related norms, and particularly assigning a historiosophic value to a

[125]

*The Works of  
A. B. Yehoshua*

●  
Adia  
Mendelson-  
Maoz

reality that one can only cry about, gives something of a justification to this reality. . . . When I invent customs connected to bereavement, this implies I expect that bereavement will continue to occur. Otherwise I would never formulate such a code of behavior since I would simply not believe that it would be necessary.<sup>19</sup>

Gantz is arguing that bereavement mechanisms actually encourage this phenomenon. In Yehoshua's novella, he maintains, the willingness to sacrifice and the anticipation of bereavement are tantamount to total acceptance of the myth of sacrifice and the death of the sons. However, acceptance in the novella is clearly parodic; the father who accepts the myth is presented as a warped, pathetic figure, and criticism of the values that he represents stems from the text's irony that sets off an incessant undermining of his worldview. Yehoshua depicts the acceptance of the myth as part of an ironic critique that represents resistance and renders ludicrous the whole worldview of fathers who are ready to sacrifice their sons.

*Early in the Summer of 1970* and, later, *Friendly Fire* share many themes: father-son relationships, the bereaved father, the myth of sacrifice, and ideological and social contexts. Yet the two works reflect different views on these issues. The earlier work is a novella with schematic irony and biting criticism; the later one applies a more complex gaze, achieved by doubling the fathers and the sons. Yet, alongside the marked differences in terms of textual complexity and maturity, the later text abandons Yehoshua's critical stance and internalizes a moderate approach to the issue of bereavement, addressing it without a trace of irony. The later text proposes a modern yet conservative alternative to the myth and to military heroism intended to establish the morality, and hence the legitimacy, of the army and state.

*Friendly Fire* interlaces the stories of three fathers, two of them bereaved. Yirmi's son, Eyal, was killed while serving in the occupied West Bank. After his son's death, he leaves Israel and settles in Africa, first as a member of a diplomatic delegation and then, after his wife's death, as part of a scientific mission. When his sister-in-law, Daniela, visits him, traveling to Africa alone to mourn for her sister, Yirmi reveals the circumstances of his son's death and his perception of the world as a result of his bereavement. Amotz Yaari, the novel's protagonist, is the second (non-bereaved) father. He, too, is concerned about his son, Moran, who works with him in his elevator engineering office and has been called up for army reserve duty. The novel describes the eight days of the Hanukkah holiday, during which Amotz, alone after his wife, Daniela, travels to Africa, vacillates between the office and

the tasks of caring for his children and grandchildren. Alongside these two men who are so closely involved with their sons, both of whom are presented as having served in the army, the novel describes a third father, a Mr. Kidron, whose son was killed in combat. Kidron lives in a lavish Tel Aviv residential tower and complains about the winds that haunt the building, whispering through the elevator shaft.

The state of bereavement is at the heart of this novel. It is expressed through the characters of all the sons but particularly through Eyal (“deer” in Hebrew), Yirmi’s son, who was sacrificed. Like the ram in the Akedah story, he died by accident, since the bullet was not intended for him. He met his death in an ambush in Tulkarm in the occupied West Bank, killed by “friendly fire.” Members of his unit were waiting on the rooftops for the arrival of a wanted man they were instructed to kill. Eyal climbed down from the observation point on the roof several minutes before his shift ended, to empty a chamber pot and rinse it out. His friends, seeing someone slipping away from the house onto the street, shot the figure, thinking that he was the wanted man. When the bereaved parents hear the bitter news, Amotz—who is Eyal’s uncle and Yirmi’s brother-in-law—uses the term *esh yedidutit* (friendly fire) to describe what had occurred. The bereaved father adopts the term:

But then suddenly, amid all the shock and anger, I also understood that inside this stupid oxymoron, this friendly fire, there was something more, some small spark of light that would help me navigate through the great darkness that awaited me, to better identify the true sickness that afflicts all of us. And from then on I fell in love with the expression, and started using it a lot. (77)

The concept of “friendly fire” signifies the idea that Eyal is a son sacrificed by his people. It emphasizes the source of the bereavement, which is the nation, thus linking the story to the myth of the Akedah.

From Yirmi’s interpretation, it might be concluded that bereavement is in the hands of the nation itself. As he reads the biblical prophets, including Jeremiah (Yirmi’s namesake), he understands that tragic events and suffering are ultimately a product of internal perception.<sup>20</sup> Yirmi claims that this suffering is something we anticipate, a part of the Jewish religious identity:

Death, destruction, exile, punishment, more punishment, devastation, plague, and famine . . . and this we have drunk with our mother’s milk, we’ve been fed it like baby food. So it’s no wonder that we’re all set for the next destruction that will come, yes, speedily in our own time,

[127]

*The Works of  
A. B. Yehoshua*

●  
Adia  
Mendelson-  
Maoz

maybe even yearning for it, look, it's already right here, we've been hearing about it, we've read it word for word in wonderful language. (279)

[128]

*Jewish  
Social  
Studies*



Vol. 17  
No. 1

As Gantz observed regarding *Early in the Summer of 1970*, expecting disaster in fact implies accepting it. There is something undeniably defiant in Yirmi's position on bereavement, particularly when it is turned inward toward Israeli society. One day, Yirmi tells Daniela about a memorial service he attended, where

instead of talking about the father who had died[,] they brought some sort of lecturer, an author or poet, who rebound the binding of Isaac, and then I saw how it's possible to find new ore in texts that have been mined over and over. This lecturer tried to describe what the whole story of the captive son and the big knife looked like from down below, from the point of view of the two youths who were guarding Abraham's donkey at the foot of the mountain. (275)

Yirmi, in fact, performs a similar move: he tries to find new angles to the text. In the investigations he conducts in Tulkarm after his son's death, he demands repeatedly to see the place where his son was killed, asking to climb up to the roof rather than remain on the street. Eventually, he is disappointed by the results, which reveal no details that are able to diminish his sense of loss, and he flees to Africa.

Yirmi's decision to leave the country can be interpreted as a manifestation of criticism toward the bereavement myth.<sup>21</sup> He refuses to play the game and be a bereaved father, so he abandons everything, including his natural environment. Yet this escape acknowledges that the kernel of "friendly fire" is a tragedy that stems from the people, from society. Guilt should not be directed toward the specific soldier who fired by mistake (and indeed Yirmi tries to find the soldier in order to absolve him of guilt), but guilt of the nation and the fathers. However, Yirmi rejects and diminishes this. He tells Daniela, "I am warning you, grieve, but do not preach" (57). Yirmi must exhaust the examination of the circumstances of the son's death, but then he declares "I milked his death dry . . . but my responsibility is over" (192).

The character of Amotz represents another position on bereavement: he experiences it indirectly. He is, arguably, the work's most dominant character and is the focus of the text, both in his private life and in the way he is involved in and investigates the story of Yirmi's bereavement. In many respects, Amotz, the non-bereaved father, is a kind of evolved, more normative version of the father in *Early in the Summer of 1970*. Throughout much of *Friendly Fire*, Amotz's son, Moran, is on army reserve duty. Since Amotz's wife is in Africa, he is lonely and seeks

something to lessen his boredom. He is preoccupied with Yirmi's (his brother-in-law's) bereavement and takes advantage of it: during Moran's attempts to evade reserve duty, Amotz reminds him of his deceased cousin (24). When his wife hints that Moran may be afraid of being conscripted, Amotz appropriates his brother-in-law's bereavement: "Can't a father with two children, whose family has already paid its debt to the homeland, ask for a little consideration?" (134).

Moran is taken from his home after failing to report for service, and he is kept under arrest on the reserve army base. At this point, his father's behavior undergoes a change: "It's hard for him to accept the fact that his son's cell phone, ever ready for his calls, has suddenly become a mere answering-machine, indifferently storing messages" (74). The personification of the telephone implies a kind of death message. When visiting Moran at the base, Amotz impersonates a bereaved father so he will be allowed to enter: "Now listen, you're new recruits, I am a bereaved father. Seven years ago my oldest son was killed in a military action in the West Bank, in Tulkarm. So please, don't be hard on me now. It's already late, and the one son I have left is here with the reserves, a combat officer who needs warm clothing" (147). He approaches another father, Mr. Kidron, and exploits his familiarity with bereavement in order to convince him that he wants to help: "I may not be a bereaved father like you, Mr. Kidron, only a bereaved uncle, but I have insider knowledge, family knowledge of your grief, and I respect it a great deal" (170). Thus, for Amotz, bereavement is a tool facilitating an individual's integration and approval by others in society (just like in the early novella). It opens doors and connects people, and therefore at times is seen as desirable.

Like the father in *Early in the Summer of 1970*, Amotz takes care of his son's family, particularly when the son himself is away. "The absence of a father automatically raises the grandfather's stock. He hugs and kisses them, then lightly hugs Efrat and brushes her cheek" (210). He looks at his daughter-in-law who "surrenders trustingly to his driving and sinks deeper into sleep. This gives him the opportunity to examine from close up just what her beauty is made of" (269). While visiting his son's base, he tells his son and his wife to get away and enjoy some privacy while he takes care of the grandchildren, but even then he feels an imagined bereavement. When the son and his wife do not return to the base on time,

[H]is practical engineer's mind churns through the outcomes of all possible situations, from a simple flat tire to a car-mangling wreck. Damn it, he berates himself, damn it. . . . In his imagination scenes of horrible

[129]

*The Works of  
A. B. Yehoshua*

●  
Adia  
Mendelson-  
Maoz



catastrophe mingle cruelly with practical considerations. How he will have to ask Daniela to quit teaching to devote herself to the grandchildren; how Moran's apartment will have to be rented out, and for how much; how his firm's lawyer will examine the life-insurance policy; and who will argue in court over the extent of the damages. He makes a mental note of which architect could best add a wing to their house for the children, and considers how he might persuade Nofar to become legal guardian after he and Daniela have passed away. (256–57)

Amotz's imagination shows that bereavement is present in the minds of all fathers in the novel.

### About Winds and Responsibility

In *Friendly Fire*, bereavement affects fathers and is conveyed to society as a whole in the form of winds (*ruchot* in Hebrew, which means both “winds” and “ghosts”).<sup>22</sup> Yirmi speaks of winds, and Mr. Kidron from the Tel Aviv tower states that “when we get home and get near the elevator, we don't hear the wind but howls of pain” (332). The winds represent the fallen sons who do not leave the fathers in peace. They demand accountability. But the accountability is always that of others, not of the bereaved fathers. Unlike Amotz's father, who despite his ailing health still insists on traveling to his friend's house in Jerusalem to fix the elevator as he promised he would, in the office of his son Amotz, a specialist is called in to “free you from responsibility” (37).

*Friendly Fire* portrays bereaved fathers and shares many themes with *Early in the Summer of 1970*. Yet the later work does not criticize the bereavement myth in the same vehement manner as the earlier one does. In *Early in the Summer of 1970*, the father seems to be a parody of bereavement, and the entire work is written with irony, whereas *Friendly Fire* tones down the irony and portrays a more complex picture, with a place for accepting and internalizing the myth in the context of the contemporary Israeli condition.

Several factors lead to this difference between the texts, one of which is the personality of the narrator or main character. As I have noted, the short and concentrated structure of the early text produces focused criticism, whereas the intricate structure of the dialogic novel results in a fuller picture. The novella's narrator is the father himself, who is under the sway of a complex mental and emotional state. In his descriptions, he alternates timeframes, creating improbable links and describing his fantasies. In the course of the book, he depicts the moment he received the news of his son's death



three times, yet differently each time. He interprets his relationships with those around him—the principal, the school pupils, his son’s wife and students—in an implausible way. Sometimes he appears to be suffering memory loss (such as when he finds it difficult to recall verses from the Bible), or he hallucinates about situations that never happened (such as the speech to the graduates to which he returns from time to time). The father in *Early in the Summer of 1970* is an unstable character, recounting events from a subjective viewpoint. Although he seems authentic, he gives the impression of being odd and emotionally imbalanced. His peculiar attitude to bereavement and his cultivation of an imaginary state as a bereaved father function in the novella as a kind of parody of Israeli mourning customs and the way that Israeli society has integrated the myth of the Akedah.

In contrast, in *Friendly Fire*, the narrator is external and the characters are normative. Amotz, who works in an elevator engineering office, is a thoughtful grandfather, a man with both feet on the ground, although during the course of the work he begins behaving in an unusual manner, which is explained by the fact that he is temporarily alone. Amotz is a likeable, warm, and supportive character, always willing to help. He respects bereaved fathers, and it is clear that his oversensitivity stems from the fact that he has experienced bereavement in his immediate family. Yirmi, who has left for Africa, is also reliable and tries to make sense of the occurrences and find a way of dealing with his loss. Both fathers represent average families in Israel, and the attitude toward them is generally positive, without criticism or disapproval.

Another factor in the difference between *Early in the Summer of 1970* (as well as *The Lover* and *Mr. Mani*) and *Friendly Fire* is that, in the latter, no major generational divide exists between fathers and sons, and the closeness between fathers and sons is distinct. All of Yehoshua’s early works include traces of crisis and intergenerational conflict reflecting his own interpretation of the Akedah story as a narrative aimed at establishing the fathers’ world of values through the knife game. Thus, the conflict between fathers and sons has been central to Yehoshua’s criticism of bereavement. Once the conflict is blurred, or even disappears, criticism of the Akedah myth evaporates.

In *Friendly Fire*, the fathers and sons collaborate. Amotz works in his father’s office, and his son works with him. Eyal, the dead son, was not alienated from military values, and in fact he chose to serve in combat units. Fathers and sons in the novel do not represent different poles, for the fathers are not one-dimensional messengers of an ideology.

Both generations are in a state of ideological incoherence that attests

[131]

*The Works of  
A. B. Yehoshua*

●  
Adia  
Mendelson-  
Maoz

to the drastic change in Yehoshua's writing, which no longer attributes unequivocal positions to each generation. In fact, the father-son collaboration creates another form of consensus. They work together in pursuit of a common goal. In this respect, the father and son relationships are more akin to the nature of the Akedah myth during the War of Independence. However, it is clear that Yehoshua does not propose reinstating the Palmach's values but instead provides a replacement for the classic national sacrificial myth. In order to describe this idea, it is worth refocusing on Eyal's story.

The description of the "work accident," as the Palestinians dub Eyal's death, is a major factor softening the book's critical stance, and in fact it reaffirms the function of bereavement and offers a modern alternative for the myth. Eyal was killed while emptying a chamber pot and rinsing it in the street rather than leaving it on the roof:

My precious innocent son . . . is ashamed to leave behind the bucket they gave him . . . afraid for his good name, his dignity in the eyes of the Palestinian family, and so he doesn't leave the bucket on the roof, and doesn't spill it from the roof, but a few minutes ahead of time he goes down with it, and not to dispose of it in some corner, but to rinse it thoroughly, to rinse it, you hear? So he can return it to the family as clean as he got it. (288)

When Yirmi tells Daniela about these events, she asks the obvious question: "And the Arab—was he at least touched by what Eyal did?" (289). Clearly, Daniela's question emphasizes that the bereavement in the novel is an internal matter; the query is directed not toward the situation forced on the Palestinian but rather toward the character and the virtues of the Israeli soldier, in this specific situation a family member. Thus, since bereavement is internal and is always a result of "friendly fire," the significance of the circumstances of Eyal's death should also be interpreted and valued within Israeli society.

Indeed, Eyal symbolizes Israeli society itself. In his life and death, he represents what is often termed "the enlightened occupation." He belonged to the occupying force. As one of the members of the Palestinian family on whose roof Eyal spent the last night of his life says, "Why would I feel sorry for a soldier who invades a space that does not belong to him and doesn't care about us, who we are and what we are? Who takes over a family's roof in order to kill one of us?" (329). Yet the fact that he was shot precisely when climbing down in order to empty and clean the chamber pot gives his death a moral aura. Eyal risked his life to respect both his own humanity and that of others: a

death that Israeli society seemingly embraces willingly. Although Yirmi is not proud of this death, those around him who hear Eyal's story—Daniela, Amotz, and the others—are suffused with pride.

When Yirmi talks with the Palestinian family, he realizes that Eyal's gesture has not earned the Palestinians' gratitude: "[T]hat Palestinian, who got a considerable sum from me just to tell me what happened with that friendly fire, did not seem at all impressed by what Eyal did" (314). "What do you want from me? For me to offer you compassion for your soldier?" asks a Palestinian family member. Does he think "that if he does us a favor and leaves us a clean bucket, washing away the evidence of his fear, we'll forgive him for the insult and humiliation? But how can we forgive? Can we be bought with a clean bucket?" (329). These words reveal the error of the "enlightened occupation" concept. The text does not describe any actual fighting or, for that matter, even refer to warfare and occupation. The house where Eyal met his death is described in a sterile manner, the soldiers are depicted in noncombat activities, and even Moran, who is taken into custody, is portrayed as playing chess at the training base with the officer who arrested him. Eyal is described as a physician who served as a reserve officer, and the circumstances of the death of Mr. Kidron's son are not mentioned, only the upkeep of his tombstone. Although a considerable part of the novel is related to the occupation and the soldiers' personalities, the sons are always shown in a civilian context. Thus, bereaved fathers are glorified, whereas the occupation and fighting that led to the bereavement are portrayed in terms of values and morality.

Even the desire to investigate the circumstances of the son's death, which could have resulted in ground-shaking revelations, actually reinforces societal values. Since the crucial feature of bereavement is the sacrifice, acceptance, and judgment of Israeli society, the characters of the sons who lost their lives and the bereaved parents are presented as irreproachable. By ignoring the occupation with its ethical implications, the text "obscures the moral contradiction and pretends [Israel is] a united national society," as Hannan Hever has put it (in another context).<sup>23</sup> This is why *Friendly Fire* refrains from grappling with questions of guilt and responsibility. Here, in complete contrast to other works by Yehoshua, the fathers are not found guilty.

In a generation where people no longer talk about heroism during combat on the battlefield or about young men sacrificed on the homeland's altar, Yehoshua supplies an alternative to the sacrificial myth—not on the homeland's altar, but on the moral altar of the Israeli army. It is a different sort of heroism, reflecting a certain

[133]

*The Works of  
A. B. Yehoshua*

●  
Adia  
Mendelson-  
Maoz

consensus between the fathers' and the sons' generations. Indisputable sacrifice is thus justified for the first time in Yehoshua's oeuvre.

[134]

*Jewish  
Social  
Studies*



Vol. 17  
No. 1

### **The Larger Picture**

Yehoshua and other writers of his generation have thus shifted toward the political center, a move reflected in their mainstream-oriented writings that express a conventional sociocultural and political stance. My analysis of how bereaved fathers are portrayed in two of Yehoshua's works demonstrates this process. Moreover, Yehoshua's shift points to a significant sociocultural phenomenon that should be explored in future studies, and in two particular trajectories that I will explore briefly here: aesthetic-generational, and sociopolitical.

First, Yehoshua and members of his generation burst onto the literary scene during the 1960s as writers who challenged the dominant literary norms of the time and sought new modes of expression. As new literary generations emerged, these writers were perceived as revolutionaries. But later, once they were accepted by the literary mainstream and cultural establishment, they assumed a national role and their works became more consensual and less critical.

Second, in the Israeli context, and particularly with regard to issues of nationality and military reality, it could be argued that the acceptance of the bereavement myth in Yehoshua's later works and his toned-down criticism concerning the military-national context illustrate the political-ideological crisis that the Israeli Left has experienced in the past 10 years. Many cite the embarrassment among the ranks of the Left who believed in the possibility of an arrangement with the Palestinians that will put an end to the conflict.<sup>24</sup> This crisis was manifested in the obvious gravitation of left-wing parties toward the center of the political spectrum and in the curbing of criticism concerning the military establishment and its moves. Yehoshua's literary shift may reflect this phenomenon, a trend that is also evident in his interviews in the mass media.<sup>25</sup> To elaborate on this larger picture, I will briefly comment on two of the most important authors in this context: Amos Oz and David Grossman.

Yehoshua and Oz belong to the same literary generation, so it is useful to examine whether a parallel current exists in Oz's writing. Commentary on the latest texts by Oz reveals similar arguments to those that have been leveled against Yehoshua. These arguments—indeed, even accusations—reached their peak with the publication of Oz's novel *A Tale of Love and Darkness* (2002).<sup>26</sup> Although the book

recounts the author's personal trauma, it is defined as a national novel.<sup>27</sup> The text's position on pivotal aspects of the Israeli experience, including the Holocaust and the events of the War of Independence, as well as extensive details on Jewish-Palestinian relations reflect a new consensus in Israeli culture. As in Yehoshua's works, this consensus is combined with intergenerational relationships. In one scene in *A Tale of Love and Darkness*, for example, in the midst of the celebration over the United Nations' decision to establish the State of Israel, Oz's father pleads persistently with his son to look, to remember, and to tell the next generations about the national miracle:

Just you look, my boy, take a very good look, son, take it all in, because you won't forget this night to your dying day and you'll tell your children, your grandchildren and your great-grandchildren about this night when we're long gone. (345)

Oz's text indeed fulfills this mission and thus joins the father in his acceptance and internalization of national solidarity.<sup>28</sup>

Like Yehoshua's texts, Oz's novel contrasts with his earlier oeuvre, which was highly critical of the Zionist project in general and of father-son relationships in particular.<sup>29</sup> The later texts by Oz, too, take a complex aesthetic and thematic position. Unlike the schematic nature of his first works, in *A Tale of Love and Darkness* we find multiple layers, perspectives, and voices. Yet it offers the new possibility of a shared consensus, which has led many readers to endorse the text and admire it.

Moreover, as in Yehoshua's work, Oz's transition from a critical to a more accepting stance implies not a return to the fathers' generation (that is, to values espoused by the Palmach generation) but rather a different approach to solidarity. Both Yehoshua and Oz were always Zionists and affiliated with the Zionist Left. (On this point, I do not fully agree with Todd Hasak-Lowy's thoughtful and enlightening description.)<sup>30</sup> Their writings were strongly critical of forms of Zionist fulfillment and the changing modes of Zionist values. In their later works, both authors prefer to shore up solidarity and to find a place for national consensus over shared values. They are becoming the fathers or grandfathers of Hebrew literature and seem to have taken on a social, national role.

The work of David Grossman, a member of the interim generation (between the literary generation of the 1960s and that of the 1980s and the 1990s), provides another example of these themes. In his book *Ishah borachat mi-besorah* (Until the End of the Land),<sup>31</sup> Grossman presents a criticism of the myth of sacrifice, but it would be wrong to assume that his criticism originates in post-Zionist attitudes.

[135]

*The Works of  
A. B. Yehoshua*

●  
Adia  
Mendelson-  
Maoz

In this novel, Ora prefers to flee rather than wait for the bad news that she is convinced will soon arrive on her doorstep. She believes that only those prepared for sacrifice, those who are anticipating it, will actually receive the dire news. By taking flight, she hopes that the message will be unable to find her.

Grossman introduces a mother figure into the masculine story of the Akedah, a mother who refuses to be a partner to the deed. Yet she walks the Israel National Trail (a trail for hikers that extends the length of Israel), which symbolically suggests conquering and reconquering and, in fact, stakes her claim for possession of the land, a Zionist possession. Furthermore, her complex family, the dual fathers, and the circumstances of childhood and adolescence are tied to Israel's wars. All of this gives Grossman's text an unresolved tension. On the one hand, he takes issue with the sacrificial myth; on the other, he brings into being—through the furrows of the land and its citizens' solidarity—a powerful validation of nationalist values.<sup>32</sup>

Where is Grossman located in terms of the process I have outlined? Can his Ora really escape bad news? Or is she growing stronger and more accepting with every step she takes through the land of Israel? The answer may lie in his future novels. Grossmann's position at the crossroads evidences the contemporary phenomenon I have introduced and indicates the two trajectories described here—the aesthetic-generational and the sociopolitical—as tools for grasping the developments in Hebrew literature in recent decades. The literary tension between subversion, on the one hand, and acceptance of central Zionist myths, on the other, is manifested, as I have shown in the works of Yehoshua and others, in the fascinating link between the Akedah myth, which brings up the intergenerational confrontation, and the chronological history of Israeli literature and the intergenerational struggle over its position. This literary tension reflects core conflicts in Israeli culture and politics.

## Notes

I would like to thank the editors and the anonymous reader for their helpful recommendations. This research was supported by the Open University of Israel's Research Fund (grant no. 37056). Quotations from Yehoshua's novels are from the English translations of those works, and so I have used the English titles throughout this article. For quotations from secondary sources in other languages, the translations are my own.

- 1 A. B. Yehoshua, *Mr. Mani*, trans. Hillel Halkin (Orlando, FL, 1992), originally published in Hebrew as *Mar Mani* (Tel Aviv, 1990).
- 2 A. B. Yehoshua, "Chatimah: Levatel et ha-'akedah 'al yedei mimushah" (1992), in *Ba-kivun ha-negdi: Kovets mechkarim 'al Mar Mani shel A.B. Yehoshua*, ed. Nitza Ben Dov (Tel Aviv, 1995), 396–97.
- 3 A. B. Yehoshua, *Early in the Summer of 1970*, trans. Miriam Arad (New York, 1977), originally published in Hebrew as *Bi-techilat kayits 1970* (Jerusalem, 1972); idem, *Friendly Fire*, trans. Stuart Schoffman (Orlando, FL, 2008), originally published in Hebrew as *Esh yedidutit* (Tel Aviv, 2007).
- 4 Criticism has focused on representations of Arabs and the Arab-Israeli conflict in Yehoshua's works, particularly in *The Liberated Bride*, trans. Hillel Halkin (London, 2004), originally published in Hebrew as *Ha-kalah ha-meshachveret* (Tel Aviv, 2001). See, e.g., Hannan Hever, "'Tenu lo badranim—ve-yanuach be-shalom': Kanoni u-populari be-'idan shel kibush," *Alpayim* 25 (2003): 155–69, reprinted in Yael Shapira, Tamar S. Hess, and Omri Herzog, eds., *Kanoni u-populari* (Tel Aviv, 2007), 193–207; Yitzhak Laor, "Ha-roman shel shuliyat ha-kosem," *Ha-arets, tarbut ve-sifrut*, Oct. 26, 2001, p. B13; Yitzhak Laor, "Motar ha-mizrachani 'al ha-mizrachi," *Ha-arets, tarbut ve-sifrut*, Nov. 2, 2001, p. B13; Tali Goldsmith, "Ha-gevuil shel ha-sifrut, 'al mosag ha-gevuil be-sifrut ha-sikh-sukh," *Alpayim* 32 (2008): 60–82; and Iris Yaar-Edelbaum, "Normali zeh hachi, Bulli," *Time Out* (Tel Aviv), Mar. 29, 2007, p. 134.
- 5 These stories appear in A. B. Yehoshua, *The Continuing Silence of a Poet: Collected Stories* (New York, 1991).
- 6 A. B. Yehoshua, *The Lover*, trans. Philip Simpson (Orlando, FL, 1985), originally published in Hebrew as *Ha-meahev* (Jerusalem, 1977).
- 7 Nancy E. Berg, "The Politics of Paternity and Patrimony," *Shofar* 24, no. 3 (2006): 100–114, views Hebrew literature, as a whole, as a father-son literature, responding to the dynamics of the changing generations in the evolving Zionist culture.
- 8 See, e.g., S. Yizhar, "Hirbet Hiz'ah" (1949) and "Ha-shavui" (1948), both in Hebrew in *Four Stories* (Tel Aviv, 1989), 35–88, 89–108. Short excerpts from "Hirbet Hiz'ah" were published in periodicals over the years. However, a complete English translation has not been published. V. C. Rycus's translation of "Ha-shavui" (The Prisoner) appears in *Modern Hebrew Literature*, ed. R. Alter (New York, 1975), 294–310.
- 9 The term "sons" was used in Gershon Shaked, *Gal chadash ba-siporet ha-ivrit* (Merchavya, 1972).
- 10 Hayim Nahman Bialik, "Im yesh et nafshekha lada'at," in *Bialik—Poems* (Tel Aviv, 1983), 1: 406. A government memorandum on Israel's first Independence Day contained the following sentiments, expressing how the Akedah was embraced as a framework for national bereavement: "Today Israel will remember with a shiver of pride and appreciation its sons and daughters, the nation's heroes, who risked their lives in the battlefields and, with their young, precious, pure, and courageous lives, gave us our liberty. The nation will venerate their memory, bask in the

[137]

*The Works of  
A. B. Yehoshua*

●  
Adia  
Mendelson-  
Maoz

- glory of their heroism, and comfort the bereaved parents who were fortunate enough to witness *our acceptance of their sacrifice*." Maoz Azaryahu, *Pulchanei medinah: Chagigot ha-'atsmaut ve-hantsachat ha-noflim 1948–1956* (Sedeh Boker, 1995), 111 (my emphasis).
- 11 Poets, songwriters, and other writers all phrased aesthetic interpretations of this myth in their works. For the myth in Hebrew poetry, see, e.g., Natan Alterman, "Magash ha-kesef," *Davar*, Dec. 19, 1947; idem, *Ha-tur ha-shevi'I*, vols. 1–3 (Tel Aviv, 1973); Haim Gouri, "Ha-re'ut," in *Mishpachat ha-palmach: Yalkut 'alilot ve-zemer*, ed. Haim Gouri and Haim Hefer (Jerusalem, 1963), 233; idem, "Hineh mutalot gufoteinu," *Pirchei esh* (Merchavya, 1949), 65; Avraham Shlonsky, *Shirim* (Merchavya, 1954); and Natan Yonatan, *Shevilei 'afar* (Merchavya, 1951). In Hebrew prose, see, e.g., Yigal Mosenzon, *Be-arevot ha-negev* (Tel Aviv, 1949); Moshe Shamir, *Hu halakh ba-sadot* (Tel Aviv, 1957); and idem, *Be-mo yadav* (Tel Aviv, 1951). Among the many studies in this field, see, in particular, Dan Meron, *Mul ha-ach ha-shotek: 'Al shirat ha-'atsmaut* (Jerusalem, 1992), and Michael Gluzman, *Ha-guf ha-tsiyoni: Leumiyut, migdar ve-miniyut ba-sifrut ha-ivrit ha-chadashah* (Tel Aviv, 2007), chap. 5. Oz Almog also refers to this myth in his *Ha-tsabar: Deyokan* (Tel Aviv, 1997). For the Akedah in the context of Israeli culture and literature, see, e.g., Gidon Ofrat, ed., *'Akedat Yitschak ba-omanut ha-yisraelit* (Ramat Gan, 1980); Arie Ben-Gurion, ed., *Al tishlach yadkha el hana'ar: Shirim ve-divrei hagut al ha-'akedah* (Jerusalem, 2002); Yael Feldman, "Yitschak o Oedipus: Migdar u-psychopolitika be-gilgulei ha-'akedah," *Alpayim* 22 (2001): 53–77; Yael Feldman, "Shel mi ha-korban hazeh, la-'azazel? 'Aliyato u-nefilato shel Avraham ha-'oked bi-shenot ha-chamishim," *Mikan* 9 (May 2008): 125–57; Glenda Abramson, "The Reinterpretation of the Akedah in Modern Hebrew Poetry," *Journal of Jewish Study* 41, no. 2 (1990): 101–14; Ruth Kartun-Bloom, "Me-ayin ha-'etsim ha-eleh be-yadi: Ha-'akedah ke-mikreh bochan ba-shirah ha-ivrit ha-chadashah," *Moznayim* 62, nos. 9–10 (1988): 9–14; and Hillel Weiss, "He'arot livechinat 'akedat Yitschak be-siporet ha-ivrit bat zemanenu ke-topos, temah ve-motiv," in *Ha-'akedah voha-tokhechah: Mitos, temah ve-topus ba-sifrut*, ed. Zvi Levi (Jerusalem, 1991), 25–31.
- 12 Feldman, "Shel mi ha-korban hazeh," 127; Avi Sagi, "The Meaning of the Akedah in Israeli Culture and Jewish Tradition," *Israel Studies* 3, no. 1 (1998): 46.
- 13 Attempts to subvert the Akedah myth by major writers of the Palmach generation (the generation that endorsed the myth in the first place) intensified during the 1950s and 1960s. See, e.g., S. Yizhar, *Yemei Tsiklag* (Tel Aviv, 1958), 2: 804, and Haim Gouri, "Yerushalah," in his *Shoshanat ha-ruchot* (Tel Aviv, 1960). Major criticism of the myth is also evident during later decades in Yehoshua's writing. For examples from Israeli poetry and drama, see Amir Gilboa, "Yitschak," in his *Shirim ba-boker ba-boker* (Tel Aviv, 1953); Yehuda Amichai, "'Akedah," in his *Me-achorei kol zeh mistater osher gadol* (Jerusalem, 1974); idem, "Kach et binkha et



- yechidkha,” in his *Patuach sagur patuach* (Jerusalem, 1998); idem, “Hagibor ha-amiti shel ha-akedah,” in his *Sheat ha-chesed* (Jerusalem, 1982); Hanoah Levin, “Avi ha-yakar” and “Akedah” from “Malkat ha-ambatyā” (1970), in his *Mah ikhpat la-tsipor* (Tel Aviv, 1987), 89–92; Yitzhak Laor, “Ha-metumtam ha-zeh Yitschak,” in his *Rak ha-guf zokher* (Tel Aviv, 1985); and idem, “Ha-metumtam ha-zeh Yitschak (later version),” in his *Layla be-malon zar* (Tel Aviv, 1992).
- 14 On the changing forms of the Akedah in Yehoshua’s work, see also Mordechai Shalev, “Chotam ha-‘akedah bi-‘Sheloshah yamim ve-yeled,’ ‘Bi-techilat kayits 1970’ uve-Mar Mani,” in *Ba-kivun ha-negdi: Kovets mekharim al Mar Mani shel A. B. Yehoshua*, ed. Nitza Ben Dov (Tel Aviv, 1995), 399–448. Shalev explores the traits of the Akedah in several texts but does not propose a process of development.
- 15 Yehoshua, *The Lover*, 3. Hereafter, the page numbers of quotations from this work—and from all English-language editions of Yehoshua’s novels—are given parenthetically in the text.
- 16 In this article I do not address the psychological-Oedipal aspect of this crisis. For a discussion of the Akedah myth in this context, see Feldman, “Yitschak o Oedipus” and “Shel mi ha-korban ha-zeh.”
- 17 Yehoshua, “Chatimah,” 395.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 397.
- 19 Haim Gantz, “Ha-cherut lelaket zeradim,” *Siman Kriah* 5 (1976): 293.
- 20 Some have identified Canaanite sentiments in Yehoshua’s book, particularly in view of chapter 44 of the Book of Jeremiah, where people worship the “Queen of the Heaven,” a well-known goddess from the Canaanite era (Ashtoreth in Canaan, Ishtar in Babylon) and are not prepared to accept Judaism, which distinguishes itself by evoking hatred, loathing, and destruction. This goddess could enable fusion in the regional territory, a merging that might have been acceptable in the eyes of the Arab student as well. See Amos Levitan, “Mi-hodu ‘ad kush,” *Itan* 77 (May–June 2007): 34–36; Yossef Oren, “Ha-sifrut ha-yisraelit: Setiah mi-derekh ha-yashar,” *Nativ* 122, no. 3 (2008): 55–67; and idem, “Pitputon mish-pachti u-manifest kena’ani,” *Nativ* 116, no. 3 (2007): 63–70.
- 21 See, e.g., Ziva Shamir, “Bein sof le-vein saf: A. B. Yehoshua, esh yedidutit,” *E-mago*, Feb. 23, 2007.
- 22 On ghosts, see *ibid.*
- 23 Discussing a different text, see Hever, “‘Tenu lo badranim,” 197.
- 24 See, e.g., Adi Ofir, ed., *Zeman emet* (Jerusalem, 2001).
- 25 See, e.g., Gidi Weitz and Dror Mishani’s interview with Yehoshua when *Friendly Fire* first came out. There he presents his views on the Palestinians (claiming they have different ethical codes), explaining his initial support for the Second Lebanon War in its early days, and his positions on Zionist issues. Gidi Weitz and Dror Mishani, “Esh yedidutit: Reayon ‘im A. B. Yehoshua,” *Ha-arets*, Feb. 15, 2008.
- 26 Amos Oz, *A Tale of Love and Darkness*, trans. Nicholas De Lange (London, 2005), originally published in Hebrew as *Sipur ‘al ahavah*

[139]

*The Works of  
A. B. Yehoshua*

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Adia  
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- ve-choshekh* (Jerusalem, 2002). In the context that I suggest, the debate ranges far and wide. See, e.g., Avirama Golan, "Ha-im ha-sipur shelo hu ha-sipur shelanu," *Ha-arets*, Aug. 31, 2005, pp. 1, 12, and Anita Shapira, "Ha-siper ha-tsiyoni shel Amos Oz," *Israel* 7 (Spring 2005): 163–71. Golan criticizes Oz for accepting the Zionist story and even claims that this was done in a manipulative manner, whereas Shapira praises him for responding to post-Zionism.
- 27 Oz himself has commented that the book does not engage with the family's narrative but is aimed at trying to understand "who brought us here. Why we came here. What would have happened if we had not come here." Ari Shavit, "Reayon 'im Amos Oz," *Ha-arets*, Mar. 1, 2002.
- 28 See also Adia Mendelson-Maoz, "Amos Oz's *A Tale of Love and Darkness* in a Framework of Immigration Narratives in Modern Hebrew Literature," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 9, no. 1 (Mar. 2010): 71–87.
- 29 See, e.g., Amos Oz, "Navadim ve-tsefa" and "Derekh ha-ruah," both in his *Artsot ha-tan* (Tel Aviv, 1965), and idem, *Michael sheli* (Tel Aviv, 1968).
- 30 Todd Hasak-Lowy, "Postzionism and Its Aftermath in Hebrew Literature: The Case of Orly Castel-Bloom," *Jewish Social Studies* n.s. 14, no. 2 (Winter 2008): 86–112.
- 31 David Grossman, *Ishah borachat mi-besorah* (Tel Aviv, 2008).
- 32 Critiques of Grossman's book are extensive. See, in particular, Arik Glassner, "Ishah borachat mi-besorah," *Ma'ariv*, Apr. 19, 2008; Arianna Melamed, "Mechir ha-shetikah," Apr. 3, 2008, <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3527203,00.html>; Michael Gluzman, "Im lo tiheyeh yerushalayim," *Ha-arets*, May 5, 2008; Yisrael Binyaminov, "Ha-'akedah ha-leumit," *Kivunim chadashim* 20 (2009): 268–72; and Galia Benziman, "Disket gibui la-chayim," *Ha-arets*, May 9, 2008. Discussion on this tension in Grossman's work between Zionism and protest was held at the National Association of Professors of Hebrew conference in July 2010 in New York.