

BETWEEN CONFIRMATION AND CONVERSATION: REACHING ACROSS THE GAPS BETWEEN JEW AND
JEW AND BETWEEN JEW AND ARAB IN A. B. YEHOSHUA'S RECENT NOVELS

Professor Bernard Horn
English Department
Framingham State College
Framingham, MA 01701

Borders and the bridging of borders, physical, intellectual, emotional, cultural, and moral, have been central concerns in A. B. Yehoshua's recent fiction, notable *Journey to the End of the Millennium*, *The Liberated Bride*, and *Friendly Fire*. This paper addresses these issues in two of these novels through the triple lens of Martin Buber's idea of confirmation, Anthony Appiah's idea of conversation in *Cosmopolitanism* and Hayyim Soloveichik's seminal study of the haredi community.

In *Journey* the gap between Jew and Jew seems, as originally presented, unbridgeable: the South with its traits of the external, the social, shame, honor aligned against the North and its qualities, the internal, the individual, guilt, righteousness. As I wrote in my article, "Is There One Jewish People?" the gap becomes bridgeable in a conversation that rests on a re-imagining of the idea of halachah that is a *kivun hanegdi*, a countermove, that opposes the rigidifying or reification of the idea of halachah in the second half of the twentieth century, most sharply within the haredi community, which is most tellingly described in a seminal essay by Hayyim Soloveichik. The conversation leads to a mutual confirmation, dramatized in the mutual and brazen attraction between the spokespeople of the two sides, Esther-Minna and Ben Attar.

Between Jewish Israeli and Moslem Palestinian the gap is more formidable. The most telling example of the great difficulty in bridging this gap in Yehoshua's fiction is the conversation in *Friendly Fire* between Yirmiyahu and the young Arab woman in the village in which his son Eyal was killed. The gap between the two is so severe that any confirmation of each in the other's eyes is impossible. For Yirmi to confirm the woman's values would erase any meaning for his son's death. For the woman any confirmation of Yirmi and his moral perspective would erase the external perspective of the occupation.

But if such confirmation is impossible for the characters, Appiah's idea of conversation, as amended by Martin Buber's notion of confirmation, provides a glimmer of hope. In Appiah's formulation such a conversation, not leading to or based on shared values, a conversation, in other words, across irreconcilable distances offers the modest hope that Jewish Israeli and Moslem Palestinians might at least grow "used to" one another, which is a small first step towards "being intrigued by" or "learning from," even if short of the Buberian ideal of genuine, mutual confirming conversation.