The Mytho-flora of Israeli Fiction:

The Olive Tree in Nathan Alterman's Poem "The Olive Tree" And A. B. Yehoshua's Short Story "Galia's Wedding"

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For Lee Maman

> *Rabbi Joshua ben Levi asked, why is Israel compared to an olive? Just as an olive is first bitter, then sweet, so Israel suffers in the present but great good is stored up for them in the time to come. And just as the olive only yields its oil by being crushed – as it is written, 'clear olive oil, crushed for the light' – so Israel fulfills [its full potential in] the Torah only when it is pressed by suffering.*
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> **Midrash Pitron Torah to Num. 13: 2**[1]

A.

The enormous scope of this subject requires at least several long essays to cover it. In addition, research should be conducted on the mytho-fauna of Israeli fiction, and these two projects should comprise links in the chain of research on mytho-biota in Hebrew literature from the Bible to the present day. It should be a dyssynchronous study that includes thousands of texts written over three thousand years in Hebrew, Aramaic, and diasporic Jewish languages (Yiddish, Ladino, and others). It should incorporate all references to plants, trees, and animals, track the changes in this inventory, and point to the nature of the changes.

This research should be built in layers, like tree rings, with each layer referring to a given period. The attention to these layers must be directed to a large amount of basic data, some of which is characteristic, apparently, only of the written and spoken corpus of the Jewish people. I mean, for example, the fact that some of the texts were written in ancient times when they lived in their country (the Bible, the Mishna, the Jerusalem Talmud), and some were written in exile (the

[1] Translation, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, "Olive Oil, Crushed for the Light." https://www.929.org.il/lang/en/page/77/post/42887

Babylonian Talmud, the poetry of Spain, the literature of the Haskalah, and the literature of the revival period). This crucial point has great significance both in the context of the first literary divisions of Modern Hebrew literature – those written by authors born in the Diaspora who never visited Israel[2] – and, above all, in terms of the subject at hand, regarding the last divisions of Hebrew literature – those written by writers who were born in exile and moved to Eretz Israel beginning at the end of the nineteenth century.[3]

It is easy to notice while reading these works that their authors were immigrants not only in the sociological sense of the term – those who move from their homelands to other countries, where they become residents – but also in the Jewish-Zionist cultural sense of the term – those who move from the lands of their birth, which were never their homelands, to their true homeland (even if they were not born there) because it is the Promised Land, the land promised to the ancestors of their nation in the Bible, and from which their ancestors were exiled hundreds of years ago. For this reason, their migration began to be called, beginning at the end of the nineteenth century, *aliyah* [ascent], and it continues to be called that. On the other hand, and correspondingly, if the "immigrants" returned to their place of birth or moved to another country, this move was termed *yeridah* [descent], with all the binary opposition this term implies, especially from the establishment of the State of Israel until the 1990s (later the term lost much of its legitimacy).[4]

The difference between "immigrants" and "olim" to Eretz Israel is significant in the literary mytho-biotic context since the *olim* did not come to semiotically virgin land. The land, the streams, and also the trees, plants, and animals that welcomed them were familiar to them from texts they had grown up with from a young age as they read the Bible, the Mishnah, the Gemara, the Midrashim, liturgical poems, the Hebrew poetry of Spain and Italy, the rabbinic literature written in the Islamic countries, and the literature of the Enlightenment written in Germany and later in the Russian Empire, among others texts. The mytho-biotics of Eretz Israel were also known to them through an extensive network of rituals they knew from the Jewish holidays, many of which are rooted in the landscape of the land and its traditional agricultural past. The situation of the immigrant writers, at least those who grew up in a Jewish environment, was decidedly different

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[2] דן מירון, "בשולי שיר נוף ארץ-ישראלי", בתוך: יוסף האפרתי (עורך), *שאול טשרניחובסקי: מבחר מאמרים על יצירתו* (תל אביב: עם עובד) 183-194; יגאל שוורץ, *הידעת את הארץ הלימון שם פורח, הנדסת האדם ומחשבת המרחב בספרות העברית החדשה* (אור יהודה: דביר, 2007), 229-236 .

[3] שוורץ, שם, 239-500.

[4] אליעזר שביד, *מולדת וארץ יעודה: ארץ ישראל בהגות של עם ישראל* (עם עובד, 1997); זלי גורביץ, *על המקום* (תל אביב: עם עובד), 2007.

from that of immigrant writers who left their homelands and moved to new places, especially places that were, for them, almost terra incognita, as was the case of writers who emigrated from Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to the New World, to North America and South America, South Africa, New Zealand, and other lands. These immigrant writers found themselves, as, for example, the satirical descriptions of *Robinson Crusoe* and *Gulliver's Travels* demonstrate, in nearly empty semiotic spaces.[5] The texts they wrote were considered semiotic tabulae rasae, unlike the Jewish writers who immigrated to Eretz Israel, who wrote, voluntarily or involuntarily, palimpsests – layered stories.[6] Non-Jewish writers who went to Eretz Israel – not only in the framework of pilgrimages – and knew the Old Testament and the New Testament well found themselves in a similar situation.[7]

The situation has changed in the last hundred years, during which many Hebrew writers were born, lived, and worked in Israel. They write as "natives," although not for all intents and purposes, since – and I have addressed this issue elsewhere – they, too, have not been freed from the bonds of mytho-biotics created in the Diaspora for two thousand years.[8]

The basic premise of this essay, which only opens a window to future, systematic, and much broader research, is that every community at any time that can be framed as a "period" (and this is, I admit, a tautological definition) has a unique "mytho-floral set." This set consists of a list of trees, plants, and flowers whose composition and characteristics correspond with parallel "sets" from related realms and reflect the spirit of their time.

This list is always hierarchical. In each period, it is possible to identify trees as more important and less important in terms of their symbolic value. A significant change in the composition of the list and the hierarchy of its components points to a change in the spirit of the times and often also the dawning of a new era. Thus, for example, a representative of the local flora that once held a key position in the list may be relegated to the bottom or even excluded altogether. Exclusion from the list is a dramatic move that usually occurs following a series of parodic interpretations of that favored representative that undermine and challenge its status.[9]

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[5] יגאל שוורץ, *ג'ק ואפון הפלא או למה אני מעריץ את האנגלים וגם התחלתי מהמלין או סיפורם של אלה שנשארו מאחור* (חיפה: פרדס), 2024.
[6] Lennard J. Davis, *Resisting Novels: Ideology and Fiction* (New York: Methuen, 1987).
[7] See, e.g., אורה לימור, *מסעות ארץ הקודש: עולי רגל נוצרים בשלהי העת העתיקה* (ירושלים: יד יצחק בן-צבי), 1998
[8] Yigal Schwartz, *The Rebirth of Hebrew Literature* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2016), 115–137.
[9] Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teaching of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (London: Methuen, 1985).

This status and the processes of its empowerment, on the one hand, and its undermining, on the other, are also related. This topic is very charged in the context of Israeli mytho-biotics in the immediate and distant "mytho-biotic environments." Thus, for example, in the context of the immediate environment, we should consider (which I do not do in this essay) that the Israeli mytho-biotic environment maintains relations of kinship and hostility with the neighboring Palestinian mytho-biotic environment. The two cultures are also in constant conflict regarding the "ownership" of the national symbolic status of certain trees or fruits or, as Oz Almog calls it, "the mystification of the landscape of the country."[10] This phenomenon is apparent, for example, in the struggle for "cultural archetypes," to use Almog's term[11] or the term I use here: "mytho-floras." Among the most prominent cases are the olive,[12] the lemon,[13] the orange, and the sabra.[14]

At the same time, in the context of the distant environment, writers who immigrated to Eretz Israel longed for the "mytho-flora" of their homelands. Their longings emerge in different ways, for example, through their observation of trees that exist both in Israel and the lands of their birth, such as pines (in Leah Goldberg) and apple trees (in Aharon Applefeld), among others. A related issue is the "immigration" and "domestication" of trees imported from other countries, near and far, for example, the eucalyptus tree, which plays a central role in Eretz Israeli and Israeli fiction, poetry, and songwriting.[15] Another matter that should be considered in this context is Orientalism. The Western writers' view of the Middle Eastern space as "exotic" certainly influenced Modern Hebrew literature, beginning with Abraham Mapu's *The Love of Zion*, continuing with the poetry of Hibat Zion, through the literature of the First Aliyah, the Palmach generation, and the generation of the State, and Israeli magical realism and postmodernist literature.[16]

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[10] עוז אלמוג, *הצבר* (תל אביב: עם עובד), 252.

[11] עוז, שם, 14-26.

[12] דן אלמגור, '"עץ-הזית, אחי הנידח' – על עץ-הזית ושורשיו בשירה, בפזמון, בסיפורת, בבמה ובעיתונות", *עלי שיח* 39, קיץ תשנ"ז-1997, 153-159; חיה שחם, *בדק בית, על לבטי זהות, אידיאולוגיה וחשבון נפש בספרות העברית החדשה* (אוניברסיטת בן-גוריון בנגב, מכון בן-גוריון לחקר ישראל והציונות), 2012, 187-222.

[13] See, e.g.,
בשיר חיירי, *מכתבים לעץ הלימון* (המרכז לאינפורמציה אלטרנטיבית, 1997).

[14] גדעון עפרת, "הצבר שלנו, הצבר שלהם", בתוך: "המחסן של גדעון עפרת", *ארכיון טקסטים*. Gideonofrat.Wordpress.com. הנ"ל, "הצברים הללו" בתוך: *הקשר מקומי* (תל אביב: הקיבוץ המאוחד, 2004), 197-208.

[15] דפני אמוץ, "על ה'אקליפטוס הציוני' ועל טקסי מעבר – הערות לשירו של עמית מאונטנר 'עין הנעליים'", *בכיוון הרוח*, http://.bkiovnroh1.com

[16] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978); Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1952); Yaron Peleg, *Orientalism and the Hebrew Imagination* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005). See also: חיים נגיד, "קסמי המזרח בראי הספרות העברית החדשה", *ארצות הצבי, מחקרים על נוף ואדם בספרות העברית מוגשים לצבי לוז* (עורכים: זיוה שמיר ואבידב ליפסקר, כרמל, 2021), 425-436

B.

The nature and meanings of one mytho-floral set change when the composition of the characteristics and shaping of another mytho-flora change. The change is more noticeable concerning central mytho-floras, and it becomes decisively important concerning mytho-floras that never left the mytho-flora set of Hebrew literature. A distinctive mytho-flora of this kind is the olive tree, which has held a central position in Hebrew culture since its beginnings.

In this essay, I address only the connection between two historical stages of the history of the mytho-flora of the olive tree in Modern Hebrew literature. One stage, the 1930s in Eretz Israel, will be presented through the poem "The Olive Tree" by Natan Alterman, who was then considered the "national poet" who had a significant influence on the national agenda and represented and also shaped the spirit of the times of the generation identified with the War of Independence.[17] The second stage, the 1960s, is presented through excerpts from the short story "Galia's Wedding" by A. B. Yehoshua, one of the most prominent authors of the generation of the First Israelis.[18]

THE OLIVE TREE[19]

By Natan Alterman

Summer has reigned
Seventy years;
Its mornings have poisoned ***[blinded]*** *with avenging light.*
The Olive tree alone,
My abandoned brother,
Has not withdrawn in battle from their brightness.

How holy is its vow, for its black branches

[17] זיוה שמיר, *עוד חוזר הניגון: שירת אלתרמן בראי המודרניזם* (תל אביב: פפירוס, 1989); ידידיה יצחקי, *הפסוקים הסמויים מן העין: על יצירת א״ב יהושע* (הוצאת אוניברסיטת בר-אילן, 1993); גרשון שקד, *הסיפורת העברית 1880-1980, ה , בהרבה אשנבים בכניסות צדדיות* (כתר והקיבוץ המאוחד, 1998); אורי ש. כהן, *הנוסח הביטחוני ותרבות המלחמה העברית* (ירושלים: מוסד ביאליק, 2017).

[18] יגאל שוורץ, *מגש הכסף* (קדימה, 2020).

[19] See Hénia Stein, *Jerusalem: Most Fair of Cities* (Jerusalem: Armon, 1977), 74.

Bear neither star nor moon.
Only its poverty, like the Song of Songs, O ***[my]*** *Earth,*
Pierces the heart of your stones.

Perhaps from the eyes of its god, its lord,
One tear is granted, heavy and hot,
When like a bookkeeper, breathing anger,
He crouches lonely over your book.

When you wish your mountains to die
And herds bleat for rain and fodder,
It will stand watch on your wall, your solitary bridegroom,
And you will know your life is in its keeping ***[in the palm of its hand]****.*

And in the evening bleeding with the sunset
It will feel along your face — "Where are you? ..."
In its twisted trunk, in the fire in its veins,
It keeps and preserves your tears.

When from the distance the red desert wind
Springs violently forth,
It will withdraw
In terror,
For the mountain shall not fail, its heart shall not grow still
So long as one sapling
Tears forth from its side. [20]

[20] Translation by Robert Friend. The Hebrew poem may be found in:
נתן אלתרמן, *שירים שמכבר*, (תל אביב: הוצאת הקיבוץ המאוחד, 1972), 101.

The overt thematic focus of the poem is an ecological battle that features three elements of nature: the olive tree, the summer and its messengers – the blinding mornings and the red desert wind – and the earth. These three factors undergo intense personalization and symbolization, turning the routine ecological, seasonal relations in a hot country like Eretz Israel into a dramatic, intense, pagan mythological battle between three mytho-floras.

The visible battle takes place between two male elements: the summer, on the one hand, and the olive tree, on the other. They fight for the heart of the earth in opposing ways. The summer attempts to dry out and crumble the earth and the olive tree that stands upon it. On the other hand, the olive tree splits the cores of the earth's stones, and its sapling rips apart the mountain's side – violent actions in themselves. Still, unlike the destructive actions of the summer, these are actions whose purpose is to hold on to the earth and simultaneously protect it from the dangers of disintegration.

Alterman emphasizes in several ways that the battle between summer and the olive tree is unbalanced. The summer has reigned for seventy years. Seventy is a typological number that implies a long-standing rule, perhaps even from ancient times. Summer has its soldiers at its disposal, the mornings that blind the olive tree with the light of vengeance. It is a vast and abundant blinding light used by someone who seems to have had their kingdom stolen from them. It is burning, excessively bright, a blinding light, like the light with which the angels struck the people of Sodom who attempted to harass Lot's guests.

Facing summer, a force of nature, and its destroying angels – an entire well-equipped army – stands a lonely olive tree whose loneliness and meager strength Alterman repeatedly highlights. He does so directly ("The Olive tree alone" and "one sapling") and through a multitude of terms and images from different semantic fields. The speaker calls the olive tree "my abandoned brother," emphasizes its "poverty," and compares it to a "bookkeeper, breathing anger" as he "crouches lonely over your book" and a solitary bridegroom who will "stand watch on the wall." Moreover, after who knows how many battles of the day, in the evening, it becomes clear that the mornings have succeeded in blinding the olive tree: "And in the evening bleeding with the sunset/It will feel along your face – "Where are you?..."

However, Israel is not widowed (see Jeremiah 51:5), and according to one of the fundamental myths of Israeli society, the victor of the battle is not necessarily the biggest and

strongest, and the many do not necessarily triumph over the few, as Nurith Gertz has shown.[21] Those who win the battle for the land, according to Alterman in this poem, are the ones who adhere to the goal and do everything to achieve it without giving up for a moment, even if all the odds are against them.

The olive tree does exactly this; it swears and remains true to its oath no matter what, even if it is not decorated with a royal wreath ("its black branches/[b]ear neither star nor moon"), and even if only "[o]ne tear is granted, heavy and hot,/[w]hen like a bookkeeper, breathing anger,/[h]e crouches lonely over your book." And when the earth asks the lion to die, and the "herds bleat for rain and fodder,/[it] will stand watch on your wall, your solitary bridegroom,/[a]nd you will know your life is in its keeping [in the palm of its hand]."

In the end, the land entrusts itself not to the stronger one but to the braver one, so much so that the "red desert wind" deviates from its path and "withdraw[s] in terror." This situation is heroic and dramatic. The Hebrew ואימה תאחזהו (lit. terror will grasp it) confers here an ancient biblical glory in which we witness the strengthening of the romantic desire for the earth-woman overcoming the physical power relations between the earth, the summer, and the tree. This move is an unusual one in human–world relations, and Alterman summed it up with a brief epigram:

> For the mountain shall not fall, its heart shall not grow still
> So long as one sapling
> Tears forth from its side.

I wrote human-world relations, but the visible text addresses the relations between a plant – an olive sapling and an olive tree – and the world. However, to anyone who reads this poem, it is clear that the poet is explaining the interrelationships between the olive tree, the summer, and the earth, not per se but as a metaphor to imply that his "lesson" is the correct path for the "Hebrew immigrant" – like Natan Alterman and most of his contemporaries in Israel – to follow in order to become a full-fledged "Hebrew oleh."

I know this for two main reasons. The first is obvious. The poem's speaker, who is satisfied most of the time to remain invisible, does not hold back. At least twice, he reveals to us not only his very existence and presence in the poetic world but also his position regarding the issue at hand, which is identical to the position of the olive tree. In the first exception/deviation, at the end of the

[21] Nurith Gertz, *Myths in Israeli Culture: Captives of a Dream* (Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 2000).

first stanza, he states, "The Olive tree alone,/My abandoned brother,/Has not withdrawn in battle from their brightness." In the second deviation, at the end of the second stanza, he adds, "Only its poverty, like the Song of Songs, O Earth,/Pierces the heart of your stones."

At the end of the first stanza, he remarks that the olive tree is like a brother to him, although he does not address it directly. He reports on it admiringly from a distance, a position in line with the connotation of the phrase "the Olive tree alone," which is "one God." On the other hand, he addresses the earth directly. He calls it "O [my] Earth," and if we were to replace this phrase with "O my beloved," we would not be violating the spirit of the poem. This point is unambiguous in the closing lines of the third stanza: "And it will stand on the wall, your solitary bridegroom,/ And you will know your life is in its keeping."

The second reason I claim that the relationship in the poem between the olive tree, the summer, and the earth is "only" an allegory and that the allegory, that is, the relationship between the Hebrew immigrant/oleh and his old country, is the very point here, is anchored in the poem's historical-cultural context. Alterman, the "national poet" of his time, committed an act of appropriation and creation typical of artists who set the tone for their time. He took from the people of the period that preceded his – the writers of the first three *aliyot* – the narrative that they used for the story of integration into Israel – the story of the transition from the status of an immigrant to the status of an *oleh* – and reworked it in his spirit, the spirit of his poetry collection *Stars Outside*, which became the spirit of his time.

The founding narrative of the literary period that preceded Alterman was structured this way. An immigrant who wishes to become an *oleh* comes to the country. In order to succeed in this task, he has to go through an initiation ceremony where he witnesses the death of a native Hebrew or a wonderful immigrant. Those who experience a more severe initiation ceremony succeed but pay with their lives and then pass the baton to the immigrant, who at that moment becomes an *oleh*. In this context, we may recall seminal stories such as "Yoash" by Yosef Luidor or "Khawaja Nazar" by Moshe Smilansky. In Luidor, Yoash, the native, dies in the battle to defend his village, and David, the immigrant, participates in the battle but is not killed. The native is an orphan and, therefore, also a mortal. His role is to show the way to the immigrant who will become an *oleh*, and then he returns to the eternal hunting grounds. In "Khwaja Nazar," this is what happens when the wonderful immigrant, who is not Jewish at all, drowns in the Jordan to prove that it is a real river, like the Volga, one that can be drowned in. The witness to this move, like the

witness to Yoash's move, watches Khwaja Nazar's move as the Jordan (nature) appropriates his body, and thus he, the witness, experiences the land and is transformed from an immigrant into an *oleh*.

In Alterman, the olive tree occupies both the place of the native and the place of the miraculous creature who conquers nature by the force of his will. The place of the immigrant witness is taken by the poet, who betrays his existence, as mentioned, in the possessive phrases that escape his mouth: "my brother" and "[my] Earth" (in the Hebrew original). The land remains "contested territory," except that in the stories of the previous period, the conflict frequently occurred between the Jewish native and the Arab native, while in Alterman, there is no mention of the Arabs. This difference is significant, and a separate study should be devoted to it. For our purposes here, the most significant difference is the process of romanization that Alterman conveys in his artistic kiln of the pioneering Zionist narrative. The stories of integration into Israel by Luidor, Brenner, Zemach, Smilansky, and other authors of the first *aliyot* to Eretz Israel in modern times are fundamentally naive or ironic realist stories[22] that force the wonder outside of the story's reality-like existential framework. As mentioned, the miracle, in the form of a native or a gentile giant who "made aliyah," appears only momentarily as an exemplary figure and passes into the mists of myth.[23] Alterman also accepted the pioneer Zionist narrative shaped by his predecessors and contemporaries. However, unlike them, he did not force the wonder out. On the contrary, he designed this dominant narrative in a romantic balladic style[24] and, inspired by his favorite European romances and ballads, emphasized the blurred boundaries between the living and the dead (the living-dead) and between the real and historical and the mythical.

The descriptions of Jews who have just immigrated to Israel and are trying their hand at jobs they have never engaged in and the place of the frequent confrontations with the inhabitants of the land, the Arabs, and with the foreign foods (watermelons, oranges, olives) and all types of fever, are replaced in "The Olive Tree" by a parable about the story a larger-than-life love story in which love and loyalty conquer nature. The war between the "summer king," perceived here as some whimsical and furious pagan god, and the olive tree is fought, as mentioned, over the heart of a woman: the earth, who accepts the olive tree despite its undoubted relative weakness, because

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[22] גרשון שקד, *הסיפורת העברית 1880-1980*, כרך ב, *בארץ ובתפוצה* (כתר, הקיבוץ המאוחד, תשמ"ג); יגאל שוורץ, *מה שרואים מכאן, סוגיות בהיסטוריה של הספרות העברית החדשה* (דביר, 2005).

[23] דוד גרוסמן, *הזמן הצהוב* (הקיבוץ המאוחד, סימן קריאה, 1987).

[24] דן מירון, *מול האח השותק, עיונים בשירת מלחמת העצמאות* (כתר, האוניברסיטה הפתוחה, 1992).

of the romantic stubbornness of its indefatigable return. The poetic speaker states it thus: "And you will know your life is in its keeping [in the palm of its hand] and that "[i]n its twisted trunk, in the fire of its veins/[i]t keeps and preserves your tears." Thus, and this is the closing line of this section, it is worth noting that through this larger-than-life romantic ballad story, Alterman appropriates, as if incidentally, the myth of the Palestinian *tzumud*,[25] which, in light of its charged execution, led the members of the Palmach generation to the War of Independence.[26]

C.

Thirty years after "The Olive Tree" was published in Eretz Israel, A. B. Yehoshua published the short story "Galia's Wedding."[27] The story also features an olive tree or, more precisely, a grotesque creature resembling an olive tree. Like Alterman's olive tree in his time, this distorted olive tree reflects the spirit of its creator's time, which is very different, as we shall see, from the spirit of Alterman's time.

The story of "Galia's Wedding" begins with an announcement in the newspaper, thanks to which the narrator realizes that the love of his life, Galia, is marrying a fellow called Danny that very day. The wedding will be held at a kibbutz called Sdot Or, which he has never heard of. The narrator-protagonist has no idea how to get to this place, and in order to solve the problem, he carries out a series of bizarre actions:

> I got up, left the house ... [I went] … towards the open field. I climbed to the top of the small rise, and assumed my eternal position beside the wasted, solitary olive tree.
>
> ... dropping my arms in despair, [I] swiveled toward the charred olive tree, gasping,
>
> "My Lord God, this is the end."
>
> A light tremor passed through the top of the tree. It held its breath. I stepped limply towards it, and thrust my head under the tangle of branches ...
>
> "Yes, my Lord, this is the end." …
>
> I stepped inside the tree.[28]

[25] The olive tree is the most representative symbol of the idea of the Palestinian *tzumud*. See Edward W. Said, *The Question of Palestine* (New York: Vintage, 1992).

[26] עמנואל סיון, *דור תש"ח: מיתוס, זיקון, זיכרון* (הוצאת מערכות, 1991).

[27] א.ב. יהושע, "חתונתה של גליה", בתוך: *עד חורף 1974, מבחר* (תל אביב: הקיבוץ המאוחד, 1975), 41-57.

[28] A. B. Yehoshua, "Galia's Wedding," in *The Continuing Silence of a Poet: The Collected Stories of A. B. Yehoshua* (London: Halban, 1988). Kindle edition, 219–241.

From the words "I climbed to the top of the small rise, and assumed my eternal position beside the wasted, solitary olive tree," we could conclude that Yehoshua's narrator, like Alterman's speaker, is drawing a parallel between the man and the olive tree. However, the man first moves toward the tree, but then, like the solitary tree forever standing in its place, he assumes what he defines as his "eternal position" next to it.

Another similarity, at least at first glance, between Alterman's speaker and Yehoshua's narrator and the olive tree is the sacred status that they attribute to it. Alterman's speaker says:

How holy is its vow, for its black branches
Bear neither star nor moon,
Only its poverty, like the Song of Songs, O Earth,
Pierces the heart of your stones.

Yehoshua's narrator surpasses himself and takes action, not only identifying the sacred nature of the tree but linking it, like Alterman, to the Holy Scriptures (The Song of Songs). He turns to the tree and attributes to it an explicit divine status: "I stepped limply towards it and said … "Yes, my Lord …" Then the tree responds: "A light tremor passed through the top of the tree. It held its breath." At this moment, the narrator not only identifies with the olive tree, like Alterman's speaker ("The Olive tree alone, My abandoned brother"), but is swallowed up by it: "I stepped inside the tree."

The relationship between the protagonist and the olive tree at the beginning of Yehoshua's story thus seems to represent a full realization of the structure of the relationship between the two factors in the mytho-biotics of the Alterman period, but there is a catch. The realization is tainted by intentional excesses and bumps that imply that Yehoshua's goal is not to identify with the mytho-biotic model of the Alterman period and the worldview that shaped them but to eliminate them.

This point is evident, for example, in the obvious parallel between the scene Yehoshua sets, in which the speaker and his olive tree feature, and the parallel scene of Moses and the burning bush. The bush, we recall, burns without being consumed; this is the basis of the biblical miracle. On the other hand, Yehoshua's tree is "charred." Moreover, if the tree is "charred," how does the speaker stick his head "under the tangle of branches," and how did "a light tremor [pass] through the top of the tree"? Finally, if it is a charred, burnt tree, how does the narrator step into it? These are questions that evoke a sense that the narrator is untrustworthy, a sense accompanied by a

chuckle when we consider the fact that when Moses stood before the burning bush, he removed his shoes, while Yehoshua's narrator, who addresses the burnt tree as if it were God himself ... steps into it.

Yehoshua's "abuse" of the position of the olive tree as the representative of the spirit of Alterman's time is grotesquely empowered as we become acquainted with the "olive man." Yehoshua's narrator wants to get to Sdot-Or, where the wedding of his former lover, or more precisely, of the person he imagines was his lover, is taking place. He arrives at a bus station, but "not a soul knew where the bus to Sdot-Or was."[29] The narrator does not know what to do. He wanders around the bus station area and, by chance, finds an "elegant blue bus"[30] and sits in it. He takes a nap, an hour passes, and then:

> … a rustling sound awoke me. Up the steps came an earth-encrusted individual, looking as though he had just been yanked from some copse among the rocks.
>
> … the terrific size of [his] intricate outfit made it bunch away stiffly from the squat body, appearing for all the world like a twisted tree-trunk.
>
> His head was gigantic, poking forward, and over his forehead hung a green driver's cap [כענף שנקטם like a branch that has been broken off].[31] Dark glasses with frames shaped like long narrow leaves were fixed over his eyes. … In his bear-like paws, the creature was seizing handfuls of fresh olives, tossing them into his open mouth and lustily spewing the pits at the gleaming windscreen …[32]

The central figure of this excerpt is the (very) strange bus driver. This driver, the "olive man," is described in the original Hebrew as "מפלצת קטנה [a little monster],"[33] a creature perhaps a plant, perhaps human. "The olive man" is "an earth-encrusted individual, looking as though he had just been yanked from some copse among the rocks." That is, in the past, his condition was the same as that of Alterman's tree. He, too, stood stubbornly in his "eternal position." Nevertheless, now, for some reason, his stubborn attachment to the earth ceases. He is "yanked" from it, and instead of a tree that is "born" on its land, grows on it, takes root in it, and protects it, he becomes a "monster" with an enormous power of propulsion and movement – and this is a role assigned in

[29] A. B. Yehoshua, "Galia's Wedding", 220.
[30] Ibid., 221.
[31] א.ב. יהושע, "חתונתה של גליה", 44.
[32] A.B. Yehoshua, "Galia's Wedding", 222.
[33] א.ב. יהושע, "חתונתה של גליה", 44.

all of Yehoshua's writings to hybrid creatures[34] – that drives our protagonist and his acquaintances to and from the wedding. Thus, the figurative connection created by Alterman between an olive tree and the "new Jew," who seeks to put down roots in the soil of his homeland, is replaced by an opposing and hyperbolic figurative connection between an uprooted olive tree and a helpless passenger with no grip on reality.

What Yehoshua has done here, with great sophistication, is to uproot the mytho-floral foundation of Alterman's worldview, which gave it a powerful hold in the culture of Eretz Israel in the decade before the establishment of the State of Israel. It should be mentioned that the worldview that Alterman attempted to inculcate is autochthonous. It tells us that its hero, who represents his nation, was born from the soil of his homeland and clung to it; he was a seed, a sprout, and then a tree. The earth, his land, serves as the womb that gives birth to him, nourishes him, and finally absorbs/accepts him, and he, for his part, is entrusted with an oath to protect it. Yehoshua, on the other hand, presents a myth of the birth of a person and a nation based on a story of displacement and migration. His story of displacement and migration can be defined as the commitment of a violent parodical act perpetrated against Alterman's autochthonous myth. In a grotesque way, he takes us back to the story of the birth of the "original" nation of Israel as we know it from the book of Genesis – the story of Abraham's migration from Aram Naharaim to Eretz Israel.

It becomes clear to us, therefore, that the parallel between the "new Jew" and the Eretz-Israeli olive tree, in other words, the adoption of the myth of the olive tree, the autochthonous Zionist myth, the myth of "sabra" in all its glory, lasted in Hebrew literature for at most two generations. A. B. Yehoshua, with his keen senses, already foresaw at the end of the 1950s that the autochthonous Zionist myth would not survive and the myth of displacement and immigration would take its place. According to Yehoshua, changing places does not change one's luck, and the wandering Jew syndrome will only intensify.

This inglorious failure, that is, the failure of the pioneer Zionist project, has, according to A. B. Yehoshua, disastrous results. It is to this point that the author hints later in the story when he creates an intertextual conflict between the wedding event in Alterman's poem, which connects the olive tree, the "solitary bridegroom," and the earth, and the "alternative" wedding ceremony

[34] יגאל שוורץ, יגאל, "דאוס אקס מכינה: אלהים, מכונות ובני אדם בסיפורת של א"ב יהושע", *מבטים מצטלבים: עיונים ביצירת א"ב יהושע* (עורכים: אמיר בנבג', ניצה בן-דב וזיוה שמיר, הקיבוץ המאוחד, 2010), 515-507.

that takes place in "Galia's Wedding" after the official wedding event, attended by the newlywed and Galia's four ex-lovers.

Already on the way to the wedding, it becomes clear to us that the narrator is not Galia's only lover:

> At a wide fork in the road, shaded by few large flowering olive trees …. [stood] three young men … shouting anxiously one after the other:
>
> "To Sdot-Or?"
>
> "To Sdot-Or?"
>
> "To Sdot-Or?"[35]

It becomes clear that these are Galia's "first loves,"[36] who are described, through the narrator's eyes, like the olive man, as another kind of monster – one "big silhouette … watching me with its three heads."[37] The four lovers abandoned by Galia seek revenge. But – and here another layer of grotesque distortion is created – they take their revenge not on Galia, but on her partner, Danny:

> … Slowly the trio approached him, surrounded him, moved in on him with voracious eyes.
>
> "We came here to get to know you," Ido intoned in the deep silence that had fallen over the room.
>
> The prisoner's lips parted in a bemused smile, but the stark gravity of the three men wiped it away. The circle closed in on him.[38]

The post-wedding picture is a homosexual rape scene. It stems, it seems, from the frustration of men who fell in love with a woman who was unattainable to them: a dream woman, the idea of a woman. The violence toward this unattainable woman, through the shockingly violent treatment of her groom, is linked to the repressed violence in the relationship between the narrator in A. B. Yehoshua's story and his olive tree, his double, which has been cut off from its roots, its land, and its idea, and become a monster.

[35] A. B. Yehoshua, "Galia's Wedding", 225.
[36] Ibid., 227
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid., 231.