A DARKLING PLAIN

JEWS AND ARABS IN MODERN HEBREW LITERATURE

by

David Patterson

The Yarnton Trust
for
THE OXFORD CENTRE
FOR POSTGRADUATE HEBREW STUDIES
and
BALTIMORE HEBREW UNIVERSITY

Published by
The Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies
St Giles', Oxford, England

PREFACE

The publication of the 1988 Maurice A. Stiller Prize lecture delivered on April 24, 1988 by Professor David Patterson is a unique attempt by the western civilization's oldest and most distinguished university devoted to Jewish scholarship, Oxford University, and one of the youngest and smallest schools, Baltimore Hebrew University, to shed light on the evolving, complex and increasingly agonizing world of Arabs and Jews in the land of Israel.

Professor Patterson, Founder President of the Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies, delivered the Stiller Prize lecture at the first convocation marking the appointment of our 70-year old school as a University. The Prize, established in memory of Maurice A. Stiller by his son, Shale Stiller, has in past years been awarded to Meyer Levin, Karl Shapiro, Aharon Appelfeld, John Hersey, Telford Taylor, Bernard Malamud, and Martin Peretz.

In this lecture, Professor Patterson, who became the University's first honorary degree recipient, eloquently analyzes the changing image of the Arab in modern Hebrew literature and by implication, in the essential consciousness of the modern Jewish mind.

July 14, 1988

Leivy Smolar
President
Baltimore Hebrew University

For Herbert and Ilse Frankel

with affection and respect.

A Darkling Plain
Jews and Arabs in Modern Hebrew Literature

The Maurice A. Stiller Lecture delivered by Professor David Patterson at the Baltimore Hebrew University on Sunday, 25th April 1988

Mr. President and Mr. Chairman, Mr. and Mrs. Stiller, Distinguished Faculty, Ladies and Gentlemen:

May I say, first of all, what a privilege it is to receive two awards of such distinction. It serves to confirm my long-held view that when you are a young scholar, you get less than you deserve, and when you are an old scholar, you get far more than you deserve. Only in that spirit do I feel able to accept these two distinguished awards with grace, humility and gratitude. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to President Smolar for his gracious words and his kindness in conferring these honours upon me, and to Mr. and Mrs. Stiller for their generosity in continuing this memorial prize.

The title of this evening's lecture, "A Darkling Plain", is taken from a well-known poem "Dover Beach" by Matthew Arnold. It is particularly apt because this year is the centenary of Matthew Arnold's death. The last three lines of that splendid poem read:

> "And we are here as on a darkling plain
> Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
> Where ignorant armies clash by night."

With reference to the theme of Jews and Arabs in modern Hebrew literature, the quotation is not inappropriate,

My talk this evening is really in the nature of a prolegomenon. The topic was suggested to me, and it at once appeared an interesting subject for investigation. As I began to work on it, the realisation quickly dawned of just how complex, involved, and fascinating a theme it is. Indeed, all that it will be possible to do this evening is to outline some of the main threads which comprise this intriguing topic and attempt to arrange a number of pieces of jigsaw puzzle to form some sort of picture. Many important items must, of necessity, be treated all too briefly, but there is an Aramaic proverb which runs, "For the wise man, a hint is sufficient." I am confident that my audience will garner the hints and weave them into a suitably imaginative framework.

May I begin by reminding you of a number of important items which are not always kept in the forefront of our minds. If we go back just 100 years to 1881, I do not believe there was a single person in the world, not one, whose sole language was Hebrew. Just over 100 years later there are now about a million people whose sole language is Hebrew, and perhaps another million whose first language is Hebrew, and perhaps another million whose important second language is Hebrew. In other words, the revival of Hebrew as a spoken language has gone from nothing to three million in just over a century!

Now, I cannot claim for certain that this constitutes a unique phenomenon, but it must be very unusual. Certainly, this factor must be taken into account in any discussion concerning the development of modern Hebrew literature. Another item worthy of consideration is that there are now considerable numbers of Arabs who read Hebrew with ease, while some have started to write in it most effectively. Again, this is an important factor to bear in mind.

One of the most fascinating aspects of modern Hebrew literature since the first decade of this century is that it tore its roots out of eastern Europe and planted them in *Eretz Yisrael*, the Land of Israel. Now, I use the term, *Eretz Yisrael*, to cover both the Palestinian and the Israeli period, partly because it saves having to think: "Is this pre-1948 or is it post-1948?" and shift from Palestine to Israel or Israel to Palestine accordingly. But, more importantly, perhaps, is that for many of the writers who will figure in this talk, the concept of *Eretz Yisrael* was in the forefront of their minds. Hence, the use of that term is more faithful to the actual situation than either of the political terms, Palestine and Israel, although I may have to resort to them on occasion.

What we are concerned with, by and large, is a question of perceptions; and it is the perceptions, the way that people look at things, the way they understand them, the way they see them, which are often decisive. Indeed, these varying and shifting

perceptions comprise the main theme of my address this evening.

To resume, the phenomenon of a literature tearing its roots entirely out of one part of the world and planting them in another, as was the case with modern Hebrew literature, may again not be unique, but it must be very unusual. The shift was accompanied by a number of fascinating aspects, and it should be evaluated in this light. In the first place there was the question of sociology and demography. The Jews of eastern Europe, as is well-known, were very numerous in the nineteenth century, and they increased at a geometric rate. They comprised a dense, closely knit community. Everybody had fathers and mothers and children and grandparents and grandchildren and cousins and second cousins. It was a variegated, kaleidoscopic community, in which the ubiquitous *shadchan*, the matchmaker, during the process of arranging marriages between families, would often go back seven or eight generations in determining the genealogy of the persons concerned. There are few of us now in the west who can think in continuous terms of seven or eight generations. It was a settled community poor in material possessions, but very rich in spirit, and it carried a great weight of accumulated culture and learning, which it sought to transfer on to the slender shoulders of the tiny Jewish population, known as the *Yishuv*, in *Eretz Yisrael*.

In 1914, at the outbreak of World War I, the Jewish population of *Eretz Yisrael* numbered not more than 85,000 souls of whom about half comprised the old *Yishuv*, living in the four holy cities, Jerusalem, Tiberias, Safed, and Hebron, while the rest were concentrated in perhaps thirteen or fourteen new little townships or settlements. By 1918, this population, because of the deprivations of the war, had diminished to something like 65,000. We are dealing, therefore, with a tiny community, which by 1939 had grown to about 600,000.

It is important to recall that during this period the Arab population was about twice that of the Jews. When the Jewish population numbered about 85,000, the Arab population was approximately 170,000. When the Jewish population reached about 600,000, the Arab population was approximately 1,200,000. In other words, Arab immigration and Jewish immigration proceed along more or less parallel lines between the two World Wars. Hence, the sociological and demographic background to the shift of Hebrew literature from Europe to *Eretz Yisrael* is of great consequence.

Another factor of considerable significance is that for a large proportion of the Jews in eastern Europe in the nineteenth century, certainly before the great crumbling of Jewish institutions at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, before the great migrations westwards and southwards, and before the flight from Judaism into revolutionary Socialism, Jewish life was intense and all-embracing. The nature of Judaism is such, that it colours life from first thing in the morning until last thing at night. In Orthodox

Jewish circles in eastern Europe at that time, when a person rose in the morning, he would not take three paces before washing his hands, and he would recite the *Shema* last thing at night. From dawn to dusk, he lived in a universe tinged with the Divine, where the hand of God was perceived in virtually all activities. Moreover, the calendar that was followed - the festivals, and the religious cycle of the year - was based on the old agricultural cycle of life as Jews had lived it in ancient Israel. It permeated life completely, as described, for example, in a wonderful book by Shmarya Levin, *Childhood in Exile* which I trust you have all read!

Certainly, I recall, in my own childhood in Liverpool, England, how surprised I was that at certain times of the year in synagogue prayers for rain were being offered while outside it was pouring cats and dogs. It puzzled me for many years until gradually it dawned upon me that the Jewish liturgy was completely indifferent to climatic conditions in Liverpool, or in Manchester, or in Warsaw or in Moscow or even, dare one say it, in Baltimore. The liturgy was concerned only with climatic conditions in Jerusalem, the holy land. Jews in the diaspora maintained for thousands of years a blueprint for life in the land of Israel. The Jewish child in *Cheder* from his earliest years learned stories of the patriarchs and the matriarchs, the great figures of the Bible, the Mishnah, and the Talmud. These figures often seemed more real than the alien and frequently hostile peasants in the outside world. Combined with a fiercely intense life of the spirit, Jews maintained a mental image of *Eretz Yisrael* which was central and sustaining. It is a factor often overlooked, but one which is essential for the present theme.

For a large proportion of Jews in eastern Europe, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Jewish title to the holy land, to *Eretz Yisrael*, seemed absolute! This consideration is of prime importance, but in the light of the present situation, which is so different, perspectives become all too easily blurred. It is instructive for example to examine an early period in modern Hebrew literature, ranging from the publication of Abraham Mapu's first novel *Ahavat Tziyyon* (the Love of Zion) published in 1853, which describes life in ancient Israel in the period of Isaiah, to the searing articles *Emet Me-Eretz Yisrael* (Truth from *Eretz Yisrael*) published by Asher Ginsberg in 1891 under the pseudonym of Ahad Ha-Am - a period covering nearly forty years. Now, I cannot pretend to have read all Hebrew fiction published during those 40 years, but I have read a goodly portion of it, and I have come across only two examples suggesting that *Eretz Yisrael* might be occupied by any other people. Only two!

May I present another example? In the sixties of the last century, a fascinating correspondence took place between two rabbis in eastern Europe replete with profound Talmudic erudition, who were concerned with two particular problems which would face the Jewish people on their return to their ancestral homeland and

following the rebuilding of the Temple. Their first concern was how would it be possible to determine the genealogy of the priestly families who would be entitled to serve in the Temple. The second addressed the problem of identifying the exact nature of the vestments that the priests would wear while serving in the Temple. After some two years of learned discourse, the correspondence was joined by a third rabbi, clearly a little more worldly, who pointed out to his astonished colleagues that on the site where the Temple once stood there happened to be another building called the Dome of the Rock. It had never occurred to them. Who would have thought it?!

This mental climate is crucial for the understanding of what follows. Jews in eastern Europe believed that Jewish title to *Eretz Yisrael* was absolute. They remained curiously unaware that the land was occupied in any serious manner by other people, and they assumed that the Temple could be re-established without let or hindrance. In fact, Jews looked at *Eretz Yisrael,* not through rose-coloured spectacles, but rather through a rose-coloured monocle. Their view was so completely blinkered, so strictly focussed, that the idea of anyone else holding serious title to the land came as something of a shock.

Such was the idealized picture of *Eretz Yisrael* which Jews had in their minds when in the first decades of the twentieth century Hebrew authors began to set off home. Writer after writer left the shores of Europe in search of *Eretz Yisrael*, only to find themselves in Palestine. What a trauma! What a shock! The documents and letters of the time reveal the extraordinary nature of this realization. When the mental picture, the ideals, the sort of rosy glow that people had built up in their minds were shattered upon the hard rocks of reality, only one of two things could happen. The writers would have to abandon their ideals, or attempt to change reality to exemplify those ideals. They would have to create a new situation more in keeping with their mental picture.

Even in 1951 when my wife and I first went to Israel, I was still - I must confess - slightly surprised, after all those years of reality, to find a normal coastline. There remained in my mind the remnant of something magical, although by then the situation was very different from that which faced the early settlers at the end of the nineteenth or the beginning of the twentieth centuries. Again the writers who transferred themselves from Europe to *Eretz Yisrael* were faced with another problem which was, as in so many aspects of Jewish history, if not unique, certainly most unusual and which played an important role in this whole story.

Now, the writer in exile is not an uncommon phenomenon. In London, for example, at the end of the nineteenth century, there were many writers in exile from Czarist Russia and from other countries, who lived in England, working in the British Museum, for example, and continued to write in the language of their native

land, that is, in Russian or some other European language. They hoped and strove to change the political conditions in their own country so that they could return to their readers. In other words, there were authors writing in Russian in London for a readership in Russia, hoping to change the Czarist regime in Russia so that they could go back to their readers.

Compare this with the situation of the Hebrew writer who, when he was in Europe, firmly believed that he was living in exile. His readers in Europe also believed that they too, were languishing in exile. When, therefore, the writer left Europe to settle in *Eretz Yisrael*, he regarded himself as having exchanged exile for a homeland. But once in *Eretz Yisrael*, the only way to further the process of changing reality to fit in with his vision was to attract large numbers of other people to leave their exile and come to the homeland. It was almost, if I may use the image, a case of the mountain going to Mohammed. Instead of the writer trying to return to his readers, he had to ensure that his readers came to him.

But how could it be done? Could the writer proceed to portray what he found? If he were to show that everything was terrible, who would come? If immigrants were to be attracted, the harsh reality could not be profitably described. Either he would have to continue writing about themes derived from life in Europe, or he would have to resort to a kind of romanticism which I will discuss in a moment. The very few authors who did actually describe what they found became very unpopular. They were telling their readers things they did not want to know!

In one of the stories, a character is made to say, "Tell us some good news; we have enough bad news already." The readers wanted to hear good things. They wanted assurance that the homeland was a place where they could live a decent life, a life of dignity, a life of freedom; not the sort of life they were living in Czarist Russia. This is a very important matter, and perhaps I may be forgiven for having laboured it at such length.

At this point I would like to deal, at least in outline, with my theme this evening, namely the portrait of Jews and Arabs in modern Hebrew literature - and there are a number of different portrayals. The first thing that would probably strike a person examining the subject - and a number of studies have been made including some good ones[1] - is how little description of the Arab in *Eretz Yisrael* appeared in Hebrew literature until about 1977. During the first seven decades of this century, the Arab element in modern Hebrew literature is comparatively slight, with only some half a dozen writers deriving their themes from Arab life. In fact, in the early decades, there was, perhaps, apart from the Sefardic Jewish author Yehudah Burla, only one Hebrew writer who treated the theme in any considerable measure, namely Moshe Smilansky, who composed many stories under the title *B'nai Arav* (The Sons of

Araby). They are almost all romantic stories, and what they portray, by and large, is Bedouin life firmly established on a somewhat barren landscape. The Bedouin have their own culture, maintain their own dignity and, Smilansky seems to imply, have much to teach the Jewish immigrant in search of rootedness. The author also constantly expresses the belief that by coming to *Eretz Yisrael* and developing the country, the Jews are bringing economic benefits for the Arab population which the Arab population must surely appreciate.

May I refer to another illuminating example. Going back even further to the interesting novel *Altneuland* which Herzl published in 1902, we find a portrait of *Eretz Yisrael* as he imagined it would be in fifty years' time when Jews had resettled it. The story revolves upon a party of cultured and cultivated tourists who travel around *Eretz Yisrael* and become aware of everything that has been accomplished there. Of course, the language spoken there according to the novel was German. Significantly there is, as far as I recall, only one Arab in the novel, an aristocratic Arab, who accompanies the party everywhere and agrees with everything he sees! It is all a matter of perception. People see what they want to see. If you examine the three great Hebrew writers of the pre-state period in *Eretz Yisrael* - Agnon, Brenner, and Hazaz - the amount of literature which they devote to the Arabs is miniscule. In fact, it is so small that what they do write has been taken out of context and become well known. There is only the odd sentence here and there. They deal with all kinds of other situations and realities, real or imagined, with dream or nightmare situations, with Jewish tribes or with life in Europe in the *shtetl*, but not with the Arab. There is, in fact, only one writer in the immediate pre-state period who treats the Arab problem in any serious manner, namely Yisrael Zarhi who portrayed the growing hostility of the Arab population to Jewish immigration and put it in proper perspective.

The following passage is taken from a novel called *The Silwan Village*, which lies just outside Jerusalem:

> "When the dawn of the night of terrors had broken and the sun climbed up in the sky, the full extent of the horror became known. Rioting had broken out in the city, within all its gates, wounded people died all over the town: the corpses were buried during the night. One party of rioters descended from the mountains, passed through the valley of Kidron, and went up to Bet-Yossef, where they met with policemen whom they drove away with guns. The rioters then turned to the suburb of Talpiot, which borders the desert, and on the same night attacked and broke into houses, all of whose owners were crowded together in one large house at the end of the suburb and who defended themselves courageously, standing up holding their guns. The attacking party stormed about the suburb throughout the

> night, rioting, destroying, and smashing whatever took their fancy. They broke into the house of the scholar, Yossef Klausner, and pulled down the walls of his books. They broke open his drawers and tore up all his manuscripts which were then scattered by the wind all over the courtyard; only a few torn pages of a book on the history of the Second Temple, which he had written many years before, remained. They also ruined the house of the writer S. Y. Agnon and scattered his library of precious books and his books of the history of old Jerusalem through the ages which he had collected all his life. The rest of the houses they ruined and burned down, they stole whatever was worth stealing, and whatever they did not want to take, they destroyed, until dawn broke, when they retreated to the desert."[2]

This is one of the few passages in Hebrew fiction in the period under discussion prior to the state, that is, between 1911 and 1948, which actually describes the hostility, the embitterment, the assault which the Arab population aimed against the Jews in 1922, and in 1929, and in the period between 1936 and 1939. For some reason or other, it does not get into Hebrew literature, perhaps because the writers were so reluctant to accept the fact that there might be other inhabitants with title to the country. It was difficult to change perceptions and preconceptions of Jewish entitlement to the holy land.

After the War of Independence in 1948, over a period of some ten years, three short stories appeared, all of them concerned with the moral aspect of what had happened to the Arab populations - the mass exodus and the destruction of abandoned villages. Two of them were written by S. Yizhar and achieved instant renown. One was called *Ha-Shavui* (The Prisoner), and the other *Hirbat Hizah* which is the name of an Arab village. A third short story *Taharut ha-Sehiyah* (The Swimming Race) by Benjamin Tammuz also addresses the moral problem. Here again, however, the volume of Hebrew literature devoted to the thorny problems of Arab displacement and the refugee camps is very small.

In the late sixties and early seventies a new approach to the portrayal of Arab life made its appearance in Hebrew fiction. The change is particularly marked in a story by A. B. Yehoshua called *Mul ha-Ya'arot* (Facing the Forests). In its day it caused a considerable stir, mainly because of the attempt to depict the unease, the sense of threat, the feeling of nightmare, the growing realization of a problem which will not go away which began more and more to find expression in Hebrew literature at this time. The plot of this interesting story concerns a young man who is given a job as a firewatcher in a large plantation in a remote part of the country. He undertakes to spend his summer months there looking after the forest to make sure that no fire breaks out. In order to pass the time, the firewatcher decides to make a study of the kingdom of Jerusalem in the time of the Crusades. Now, it is

interesting that the Crusades figure in many works of Hebrew literature in the late sixties and early seventies, and the analogy is clear. The kingdom of Jerusalem established by the Crusades in the middle ages was imposed upon the holy land for some ninety years but was eventually destroyed. The other main character in the story is an old Arab who has had his tongue torn out - the story adds that it is not sure which side was responsible - who lives there with his little daughter, and prepares the young man's meals. As the summer months wear on, the firewatcher, who is never given a name, becomes increasingly aware that the plantation covers a ruined Arab village, and he also realizes that the Arab is gradually collecting tins of kerosene. The very night before he is due to depart, the whole forest catches fire, and after the conflagration, under the burned out trees, the ruins of the Arab village appear.

Now, the symbolism requires little exposition. But what is interesting, of course, is the Arab with his tongue torn out, who cannot communicate with the young firewatcher, nor can the young man communicate with him. The complete lack of communication, the hatred which the Arab feels, the act of revenge which is perpetrated, bringing the whole plantation down in flames combine to present a powerful and disturbing allegory.

I seem to remember in America, not very long ago, when from sheer frustration, many blacks started burning down the buildings they lived in, shouting: "Burn, baby, burn." Even though in the end it brought no good to them, and even though the old houses in which they lived were no longer available, it was an act of rebellion and of desperation. Something of that kind pervades this most interesting story.

A year or two later, Amoz Oz published his well-known book *My Michael*, of which the heroine is a lady called Hannah Gonen, who lives increasingly in a kind of dream world. Her fantasies are more and more pervaded by an Arab twin, whom she had known in childhood and who assumes in her dreams an increasingly threatening stance. So much so that at the very end of the novel the heroine experiences a vivid nightmare including the following passage:

> "At dusk they will crouch on the ground to prepare their equipment. Faded army rucksacks. A box of explosive. Detonators. Fuses. Ammunition. Hand grenades. Glittering knives. In the ruined hut thick darkness reigns. Halil and Aziz, the beautiful pair whom I called by the name of Halziz. They will have no words. Guttural sounds will emerge. Their movements controlled. Their fingers supple and strong. They form one body. It rises firm and gentle like a palm, a submachine gun suspended from the shoulder. The shoulder square and brown. They move on rubber soles. Dark khaki tight to the body. Their heads bare to the wind. In the last twilight glimmer they will rise as one man. From the hut they will glide the steep slope. Their soles treading a path the eye cannot see. Theirs

> is a language of simple signs: light touches, hushed murmurs, like a man and a woman at love. Finger to shoulder. Hand to neck. A bird's cry. A secret whistle. Tall forms in the gulley. The shade of ancient olives. Silent the earth surrenders. Lean and grimly gaunt they will trickle down the winding wadi. The tension lurks gnawing deep within. Their movements bowed and curved, like tender saplings swaying in the breeze. Night will clutch and veil and swallow them in his folds. The chirp of crickets, a distant fox's cackle.
>
> A road crossed in a crouched leap. Their movement approaches a weightless glide. The rustling of shadowy groves. Barbed wires severed by savage shears. The stars are their accomplices. They flash instructions. In the distance, the mountains like masses of darkening clouds. Villages glimmer below on the plain. The swish of the water in serpentine pipes. Sprinklers splash. They sense sounds in their skins, in their soles and their palms, in the roots of their hair.
>
> Soundlessly circling an ambush secreted in the folds of the gulley. Slantwise they cut through pitch-black orchards. A small stone clatters. A sign. Aziz darts ahead. Halil crouches behind a low stone wall. A jackal shreaks shrilly, falls silent. The submachine gun's loaded, sprung, and cocked. A vicious dagger flashes. A stifled groan. Unbending. The chill of salty sweat. Noiseless onward flow."[3]

An so on, and so on. The threat is palpable, the feeling which arises from a nightmare situation that something dark and mysterious, but nevertheless very threatening and real is going on in the dreams of Hannah Gonen. Now, one of the strengths of modern literature is that it acts as a sounding board, a kind of barometer, for the social, intellectual, moral, ethical and spiritual climate of society. Our own society, where violence and brutality are rife, frequently resorts to terror dreams and nightmares for its literary metaphors. Where the nightmares are not directly expressed, modern writers are prone to adopt poetic symbols and images to convey the sense of unease, the sense of disturbance, the feeling of growing threat. In modern Hebrew literature such devices are commonly used by the better writers who form the contemporary generation.

This use of symbol is clearly evident in a novella by Benjamin Tammuz entitled *Ha-Pardes* (The Orchard). Here the author uses two brothers, one of a Muslim mother and one of a Jewish mother - like Ishmael and Isaac or Hagar and Sarah - as a metaphor to symbolise two warring nations. They struggle not only as two individuals, but as two peoples whose histories are at enmity, whose destinies are locked in combat.

A wrestling match between the two brothers, which purports to be a sporting match, quickly turns into a mortal hand-to-hand struggle.

> "When the Gentile called 'Go', I saw what Obadiah did (one of the brothers is called Obadiah in his Jewish phase and Abdullah, which is, of course, the cognate name in his Muslim phase), and I was astounded: he jumped at his opponent, grabbed the inside part of the tie Daniel was wearing around his neck and pulled it with all his might. That idea couldn't have come to him then, on the spur of the moment. I believe that Obadiah had meditated on this occasion for many days and years before this, or perhaps he was used to it from other fights and wrestling matches about which I knew nothing. At any rate it looked as if he would finish Daniel off, strangling him to death on the spot, but Daniel, whose neck muscles were strong - stronger, it appeared, than one would have guessed by appearances - pulled himself backwards a step or two, swung up his right leg and kicked Obadiah in the chest, knocking him to the ground. Before Obadiah had time to recover and get up, Daniel tore the tie from around his neck and threw it away. Now the two brothers were tightly locked together, each trying to raise the other up in the air and throw him heavily back down onto the ground. They resembled two men in a primitive dance, wild and savage, a dance in appearance only, but in truth, the last embrace before death."[4]

The use of metaphor and symbol in this passage to illustrate the predicament not only of two individual brothers, but of two national histories is clear. It reflects a period in which the feeling of threat and the imminent resort to violence are very strong. After 1977, however, a new perception of the Arab in Hebrew literature is reflected in a series of, perhaps, half a dozen sensitive novels, which herald a new approach to the subject. For the first time, as far as I am aware, the writers of these novels try to look at the situation not only from the standpoint of the Jews in Israel, but of the Arabs in Israel, too; and an attempt is made to penetrate the psychology of the Arab minority, to understand their emotions, their embitterment, their frustrations, their sense of defeat, to an extent which is not encountered in previous literature where Arabs are portrayed. There was a significant advance, which deserves demonstration. Prior to offering a number of examples, however, mention should be made of a novel by Sammy Michael entitled *Hasut* (Refuge) in which the author uses a crude, but striking image to convey the situation of the Arab-Jewish struggle as he perceived it in the seventies. The passage compares the two peoples to a pair of dogs copulating in the street which somehow have got stuck and cannot separate one from the other; they are squirming and screaming, hopping from place to place, but cannot disengage, while feeble-minded people look on, laughing and enjoying the spectacle. It is a powerful image which seems to take the measure of the problem.[5]

At this point, I would like to mention one further aspect which may help, perhaps, to throw some light on the sorry situation prevailing in the Middle East, but which is often overlooked. Over the past two millenia the history of the Jews has

been one of movement. Jews have always been accustomed, when life became intolerable in one place, or when they were expelled or driven out, to put down new roots and adapt themselves rapidly to new situations. Hence, when the Arabs left Israel in large numbers in 1948 for whatever reason, and found themselves or were kept in festering refugee camps in various places, Jews found it difficult to understand why it was that the other Arab countries did not try to assimilate the refugees, or why the latter did not themselves try their luck in a new situation as Jews would surely have done.

There is a lovely little anecdote about the reactions of an Englishman, a Frenchman and an Israeli when the end of the world is decreed by flood in two weeks' time. The Englishman says, "Right! We'll spend two weeks hunting and fishing." The Frenchman says, "Well, at least we have two weeks for love-making." And the Israeli turns to his friends and says, "We have just two weeks to learn how to live under water!"

This Jewish ability to adapt throughout history to new situations made it difficult - so I believe - for Israelis to come to terms with the idea that the Arab refugee problem would remain as a kind of festering nightmare. Indeed, it seems that only in the last decade or so has the realization begun to dawn, at least as far as modern Hebrew literature is concerned, that the problem is not transient and simply will not go away. The appearance of a new kind of Hebrew novel, therefore, in which Arab characters express their point of view may well be regarded as a significant advance.

The Lover by A. B. Yehoshua is a case in point, in which the author has attempted to express the views of the Arab minority in Israel through the eyes of a young Arab boy, Na'im, in the form of an interior monologue. The young lad who has just been engaged to work in a garage belonging to a Jew who treats him rather well, muses as follows:

> "Knowing where to draw the line, that's what matters, and whoever doesn't want to know had better stay in the village and laugh alone in the fields or sit in the orchard and curse the Jews as long as he likes. Those of us who are with them all day have to be careful. No, they don't hate us. Anyone who thinks they hate us is completely wrong. We're beyond hatred, for them, we're like shadows. Take, fetch, hold, clean, lift, sweep, unload, move. That's the way they think of us, but when they start getting killed, they get tired and they slow down and they can't concentrate and they suddenly get all worked up about nothing, just before the news or just after, news that we don't exactly hear, for us, it's a kind of rustle, but not exactly, we hear the words but we don't want to understand. Not lies, exactly, but not the truth either, just like on Radio Damascus, Amman or Cairo. Half-truths and half lies and a lot of bullshit. The cheerful music from Beirut is much better,

> lively modern Arab music that makes your heart pound, as if your blood's flowing faster. When we're working on the cars that they leave with us the first thing we do is to switch off Radio Israel or the army wave bands and look for a decent station, not a lot of talking, just songs, new and attractive songs about love. A subject that never tires."[6]

Another revealing passage occurs in the description of Na'im's journey every evening on a bus which takes him from Haifa to his village in upper Galilee. At first the pasengers include both Jews and Arabs, but as the Jews get off, the atmosphere gradually changes:

> "Haifa disappears from the horizon, Carmel is swallowed by the mountains, the electricity pylons thin out. No smell of Jews now. Muhammad (that's the driver) tunes the radio to the Baghdad station that broadcasts verses from the Koran to entertain us. We go deeper into the mountains, driving among orchards on the narrow road twisting among the fields and there's nothing to remind us of the Jews, not even an Army jeep. Only Arabs barefooted shepherds in the fields with their sheep. Like there never was a Balfour Declaration, no Herzl, no wars. Quiet little villages, everything like they say it used to be many years ago and even better. And the bus fills with the warbling of that *imam* from Baghdad, a soft voice lovingly chanting the *suras*. We sit there hypnotized, silent at first and then crooning softly along with him."[7]

When Na'im is asked to bring a message to his employer's home and arrives drenched with rain, they bring him in, provide him with dry clothes and invite him to have dinner with them. The scene is described through the young lad's eyes as follows:

> "At last we sat down to eat. Since morning I hadn't eaten anything and I was weak with hunger and maybe that was why I got a bit mixed up in the poem as well. And there was a white cloth on the table and two candles and a bottle of wine. I didn't know they were religious. But they didn't even pray, just started eating right away. I sat beside the girl being very careful not to touch her, and the woman brought in the food. To start with, it was sort of grey meatballs, so sweet they made me feel sick. Looks like this woman doesn't know how to cook, she puts sugar in instead of salt, but nobody noticed or maybe they thought it wasn't polite to mention it. And I forced myself to eat it too so she wouldn't be offended like my mother, who's offended if you don't eat everything. I just ate a lot of bread with it to try and kill the sweetness. And that Adam ate so fast, I hadn't had time to look at the food and he's already finished it all. They brought him some more and he gobbled that too. And I was eating slowly because I had to be careful to eat with my mouth closed and luckily the girl was eating slowly too so the grownups didn't have to wait only for me.

> At last I finished those disgusting meatballs. I've never eaten anything like them before and I hope I never will again. I asked them what they were called so I could avoid them if ever I fell into a Jewish house again. They smiled and said, "It's called *gefilte fish*. Would you like some more?" I said, "No thank you," in a hurry. And the woman said, "Don't be shy, there's plenty more," but again I said quickly, "No, thank you, I've had enough," but she'd already gotten up and gone to the kitchen and fetched a full plate and again I said, as firmly as I could without offending her, "No, really, I'm full, no more, please."[8]

These passages are revealing. They demonstrate that for the first time in modern Hebrew literature, there is a serious attempt to get into the mind of the other side, to look at a person as a person instead of as a cypher or an enemy or someone who is a danger or a threat - although the threat and the danger from the foe are evident on almost every page. The novel endeavours successfully to come to terms, human terms, with another sort of person from a different culture. May I finally recommend one further novel entitled in its English translation *Confessions of a Good Arab*, by Yoram Kaniuk which appeared not long ago.[9] Here the main protagonist, the child of an Arab father and a Jewish mother, represents in his own person the unhappy conflict and the clash of histories of Arab and Jew. The analysis is skilfully and convincingly presented in a manner which has scarcely been equalled in any Hebrew fiction or non-fiction, that I have read thus far.

In short, a definite change is taking place, and a real attempt is being made in this very serious literature to chart the new reality and come to grips with a profound problem. What is needed now, in my opinion, are parallel studies devoted to the portraits of Arabs and Jews as they appear in modern Arabic literature. I have the feeling that we might be in for a considerable shock. But that is another story!

REFERENCES

1. See e.g., R. Domb, *The Arab in Hebrew Prose 1911-1948*, London, 1982; G. Moragh, "New Images of Arabs in Israeli Fiction" in *Prooftexts* 6, Baltimore, 1986, and the works cited therein. I would like to express my thanks to Dr. G. Abramson, Professor G. Moragh and Professor S. Somekh for their helpful suggestions.
2. Y. Zarhi, *The Silwan Village*, Tel-Aviv, 1948, p. 273.
3. A. Oz, *My Michael* (tr. by N. de Lange), New York, 1972, pp. 285 ff.
4. B. Tammuz, *The Orchard* (tr. by R. Flantz), Providence, 1984, pp. 54 f.
5. S. Michael, *Hasut* [Refuge], Tel-Aviv, 1977, p. 237.
6. A. B. Yehoshua, *The Lover* (tr. by P. Simpson), New York, 1985, p. 121.
7. Ibid., p. 123.
8. Ibid., p. 168 f.
9. Y. Kaniuk, *Confessions of a Good Arab*, (tr. by D. Bilu), London, 1987.