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A Lament in Leopard-print Pants

Une pleureuse en pantalon léopard

מקוננת במכנסי נמר: מופע העצמי של צרויה שלו

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Une pleureuse en pantalon léopard

מקוננת במכנסי נמר: מופע העצמי של צרויה שלו

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I.

Zeruya Shalev is an author of lamentation. Her works may be read as sophisticated, original versions of the genre of lamentation, a genre that has a magnificent pedigree. They are in conversation with various branches of this genre, beginning with the “city laments” and “ritual lamentations” in Sumerian literature,¹ continuing to the prophecies of destruction of the prophets of Israel, the Book of Lamentations,²

1. Nili SAMET (2012), “Sumerian City Laments and the Book of Lamentations: Toward a Comparative Theological Study” [Hebrew]. *Shnaton - An Annual for Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 21, pp. 95-110.

2. Both Zeruya Shalev and her cousin, author Meir Shalev (who both were raised in secular households) have a deep relationship with Bible, and sections of it serve as Ur-texts in all of their stories. Zeruya Shalev has testified that the source of this deep relationship with the Bible is the Bible stories that her father read to her and her brother, Aner, when they were children. This relationship became even more profound during her studies at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where she completed a master’s degree in Bible studies. See Zeruya SHALEV (2002), “Literary Heroes Read the Bible” in Ruth KARTUN BLUM (ed.) *Writers and Poets on Sources of Inspiration* [Hebrew]. Tel-Aviv: Yedioth Ahronoth and Chemed Books, pp. 281-294. In her comments, Shalev relates that in this context: “They didn’t tell us about Little Red Riding Hood or Hansel and Gretel before we went to sleep. I only became acquainted with Cinderella and Snow White after my own children were born. They told us, from the age of three, stories from the Bible —

the *Aggadot Hachurban* (stories of destruction),³ and including modern works in which the genre of lamentation is central. Among these are works to which Shalev herself has pointed as being sources of inspiration: T.S. Eliot's "The Wasteland,"⁴

the story of Joseph, which we especially loved because of its exciting, happy ending, the story of David and Goliath, the story of David and Jonathan, and the story of Hannah, who, like our mother, was unable to have children for many years. I remember we used to implore our father to tell us another story and another until we agreed to go to sleep, excited and exhausted. The stories I heard influenced me to such a degree that the first story I wrote in my life, at the age of nine, was about Yael, the wife of Hever the Kenite, whose 'eyes shone like lightning and whose tar-black hair flowed down to her ankles,' who risked her life to save her people. I wouldn't like to create the impression that my life revolved around the Bible. Definitely not. But there is no doubt that I grew up with the sense that that book was open to me, not as an obligatory religious text, but rather as a treasure of literary power and inspiration." (*ibid.*, p. 282). Shalev made similar statements in a questionnaire titled "The Books that Changed my Life" (see *Yediot Ahranot*, Book Week, June 15, 2011, *24 Hours Supplement*, p. 12).

On Shalev's natural affinity with the Bible, Yoram Meltzer claims that "Shalev simply combines things [that relate to the Bible] as a layer of the thoughts and relationships of the characters themselves, as a living presence in their lives and in her text." Yoram MELTZER, "Observing Intimacy" [Hebrew]. *Ma'ariv*, Saturday Supplement, Literature and Books, May 19, 2000.

3. The *Aggadot Hachurban* (stories of destruction) serve as foundational intertexts in *Love Life*. The story is crammed full of references connected to the destruction of the home of the narrator. The book ends, intentionally, with a story of destruction that the narrator/author invents, "The Legend of the Daughter of the Priest who Converted Before the Destruction," (*ibid.*, p. 319) as a response of feminine rebellion against the double male subjugation that the narrator-protagonist undergoes. See Yigal SCHWARTZ (2000), "The Beauty who Chose to Continue to Sleep: On Zeruya Shalev's Feminine-Subversive Position in *Love Life*" [Hebrew]. *Tzafon* 6, pp. 89-113; Tali YANIV (2003), "'This is how God Felt after the Destruction': An Intertextual Reading of the *Stories of Destruction* Integrated into *Love Life* by Zeruya Shalev" [Hebrew]. *Dimui* 22, pp. 75-79; and Shai TZUR (2011), *The Destruction of the Private Home in Contemporary Hebrew Literature*, PhD dissertation. Jerusalem: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, pp. 206-276.

4. In an answer to the questionnaire mentioned above (see footnote 2), Zeruya Shalev wrote "Even now, those lines give me the chills. 'April is the cruelest month, breeding/ Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing/ Memory and desire, stirring/ Dull roots with spring rain.' I was seventeen when my literature teacher, the poet Aryeh Sivan, agreed to our request and founded a small literature club where we read and discussed chosen works. Among others, my brother Aner and I were there, and our friend the late Dror Daniel. [...] At one of the meetings we read "The Wasteland" from beginning to end and I went home dazzled by the power of the poem, even though I didn't understand a lot of it. 'Unreal City,/Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,.../so many,/I had not thought death had undone so many.'"

My Michael by Amos Oz,⁵ and the poetry of Dahlia Ravikovitch, in particular her first three books: *The Love of an Orange* (1959), *A Hard Winter* (1964), and *The Third Book* (1969).⁶ Shalev continues this dynasty and adds a new link to it. She creates this link with respect for the other links, yet from a position of rebellion and innovation. In this position it is possible to identify characteristics similar to those of other authors from the Israeli literary scene of the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, along with different characteristics unique to Zeruya Shalev. In this article, I have chosen to present Shalev as an author of lamentation, mainly through an examination of her first book, *Rakadeti Amadeti* (Dancing, Standing Still) (1993). Thus, for two reasons: to begin with, this book has not received the critical attention it deserves.⁷ Furthermore, in this first work Shalev's "lamentational display" is apparent in all its deceptive and threatening power. In her later works, Shalev moderated her erupting lamentational power. Even if not giving up this boiling core, she directed it to less open channels as a result, it seems, to her "literary survival instinct" in light of the misunderstood

5. "Meeting Hannah Gonen, the protagonist of *My Michael*," Zeruya Shalev recalls in the framework of the same questionnaire, "was full of meaning and power, almost fateful. In the middle of my hallucinatory youth, the book captured me with its strong message of alienation and foreignness through the character of Hannah, who refuses to accept the reality of her life, but also gives up entirely on the attempts to change her. The suggestive power of the book made simple romantic love seem almost primitive, as opposed to the distant, arrogant position of a young woman who lacks the strength to love." See also the afterword by Zeruya Shalev in the fortieth anniversary edition of *My Michael* (Keter, 2008, pp. 293–300) and my article "To Finally Decide who is Guilty: On Zeruya Shalev's *Pain*", *Haaretz Literature and Culture*, May 22, 2015, pp. 6-7.

6. In the framework of the same questionnaire (see note 2), Shalev wrote the following on Dahlia Ravikovitch: "The beautiful Hebrew, the deep simplicity, the rare metaphors, and the pain translated into strength. I knew whole poems by heart and would repeat them over and over, from *The Love of an Orange*, *A Hard Winter*, and the *Third Book*. When *Real Love* was published, the love songs to a child were the ones that accompanied me as a young mother, and since then they've been with me at an infinite number of moments." It is interesting to note that Ravikovitch liked Shalev's work. On the back cover of her second book, *Love Life* [Hebrew], in an excerpt from a critical piece she wrote for the newspaper *Shishi*, Ravikovitch said the following: "Within the huge tumult in which we live, real writing talents grow in their lonely rooms, and among them Zeruya Shalev's stories in particular excited me." (Zeruya Shalev [1997]. *Hayei Ahava* [Love Life]. Jerusalem: Keter)

7. On this issue see Shai TZUR, *ibid.*, p. 342; Avner HOLTZMAN, "Rereading Dancing, Standing Still" (manuscript); and Avraham BELMAN, "Doing Everything for Love" [Hebrew], *Davar*, January 28, 1994.

way in which *Dancing, Standing Still* was received. It was difficult for contemporary critics and readers in Israel to come to terms with what seemed to them to be an unbridled, chaotic performance.⁸ Shalev studied the criticism and responded with an appropriate strategy. Her next stories were clothed in more conservative artistic garments, but in their folds she concealed a double-edged sword.⁹

Mordechai Shalev, Zeruya's father, wrote a seminal essay titled "Dahlia Ravikovitch, Poetess of Lamentation,"¹⁰ in which he points out the content-related and form-related lamentational features of the poet's work, the unique ways in which she processes them in her corpus as well as the meanings derived from them. M. Shalev claims that the typical subject of Ravikovitch's poems is the loss of youth, and all her lamentations are "a weak echo of one lamentation: the lamentation for youth."¹¹ For her, youth is a wonder, a miracle. Losing it means losing wonder and miracle. Shalev quotes her line "our youth will pass in our time" meaning that youth stands at the center of idolatrous thinking. Its disappearance is an inexhaustible subject in her work. The deification of youth and its disappearance in the form of the death of the god inform her best meditations.¹²

Lamentation for the loss of youth is a central subject in Zeruya Shalev's works. It appears in two ways: lamentation for the loss of her own youth, which she presents by means of mono-dialogue with characters that serve as her reflections, and lamentation for the "first home", the family's one, that the narrator had, or supposedly had with her husband and daughter, the one was destroyed, described dozens of times as the private embodiment of the Temple.¹³ In this article, I will focus on the performance of the lamentation concerned with the death of youth at the personal level.

8. Tova RAZ (1994), "Style is not Everything" [Hebrew]. *Moznaim* 68.4, January 1994, pp. 46-47; Eli SHAI, "Full-length Unnecessary Emptiness" [Hebrew], *Maariv, Literature and Art*. October 1, 1993, p. 31.

9. See Avner HOLTZMAN, "Rereading *Dancing, Standing Still*."

10. In: Hamutal TSAMIR, Tamar S. HESS (eds.) (2010), *Sparks of Light: Essays on Dahlia Ravikovitch's Oeuvre* [Hebrew]. Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, pp. 109-136. In this context, see also Hamutal TSAMIR's chapter "Dahlia Ravikovitch: Lamentation and Prophet in a Field of the Dead: A Reading of the Poem 'The Coming of the Messiah'" [Hebrew] in *In the Name of the Landscape: Nationalism and Subjectivity in Israeli Poetry of the Nineteen Fifties and Sixties*, Jerusalem and Beer-Sheva: Keter and Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Massa Critit, p. 149-176.

11. Mordechai SHALEV, *ibid.*, p. 131.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 136.

13. For example: "My daughter sometimes knew everything, and sometimes nothing. Once she said, 'Protect the Temple.' She said, 'Our house is the Temple.'" (*Dancing*,

II.

The lament for the death of youth in *Dancing, Standing Still* is constructed in a symbolic array of characters and voices reminiscent of similar arrays in the poems of Nathan Alterman, first and foremost in the lamentational poem “*Simchat Anim*” (Joy of the Poor). Shalev is very familiar with “Joy of the Poor” from her father’s exemplary essay on the book.¹⁴ All characters represent human personas: “the father,” “the mother,” “the lover,” “the beloved,” “the husband,” “the daughter,” “the healer,” and so on, and all of them serve as objects of a discontinuous series of lamentations in the context of the loss of youth. One of the personas for whom the narrator laments is “the beloved,” the handsome and desirable young man who ages, according to the narrator-protagonist’s theory, with incredible speed:

He, who was once younger than I, had become older than my father. His hair was white, his face pinched and wrinkled, his back bent. And I forget for a moment that this is my beloved, and say to myself, “Either your grandfather has risen from the dead, or I have no idea who that old man is, trembling on the sofa here.”¹⁵

The tone of voice of the narrator is very different from that of Dahlia Ravikovitch (see matter in detail below) but the position of the lamenter regarding the loss of youth is similar. The same goes for the constant comparison, one of the basic features of lamentation, between the magnificent past of the representative

Standing Still, p. 44). A spectacular section in this context is the section where the mother returns home after one of her episodes of vagrancy and discovers that the house has changed: “When I returned to my husband and the girl, I needed to urinate. I went to the bathroom, and discovered that it hadn’t been used for years. The layer of dust on the toilet covered me up to my throat. I thought: ‘What is this? They don’t urinate or defecate? What is this? Have they become holy people?’ I came out of there and started to go around the rooms. Maybe they moved the bathroom here? Maybe there? The girl’s room was filled with scorched stones. There was a scent of incense there, but no bed. I took her aside and asked, ‘Tell me, where do you pee?’ She looked at me in amazement. ‘I haven’t peed in years.’ ‘Since when?’ I asked in astonishment. ‘Since the day you left us,’ she said. ‘And poo?’ I asked stubbornly ‘Not poo either,’ she said. ‘Certainly not poo.’” On this matter, see also Shai TZUR (2011), *ibid.*, and my article “To Finally Decide who is Guilty: On Zeruya Shalev’s *Pain*” (see note 5).

14. Mordechai SHALEV (1992), “Who is Afraid of ‘Joy of the Poor’?” [Hebrew]. *Alpayim* 5: pp. 152–206; 6: pp. 112–253. Yigal SCHWARTZ, “To Finally Decide who is Guilty: On Zeruya Shalev’s *Pain*” (see note 5).

15. *Dancing, Standing Still*, p. 52.

of youth and the miserable present in the vein of “How art thou fallen from heaven, O bright star, son of the morning!” This is obvious in the complaint of the narrator of *Dancing, Standing Still* voices to the character of “the lover”:

...People forgot themselves, talked about youth. “I knew that I was young and beautiful,” I said to the lover. “It was hard to ignore your past, the problems were small, and it was easy to carry them on your striped shoulders, and there was a good smell to everything you did, and a good sound to everything you said. I guessed that from the first moment, and I could only regret that I wasn’t there, that all the women turned their eyes to you and you laughed a colorful laugh as though you were free.” My problem is that I’m always late, and when I arrive, nothing is left for me. Just a stupid effort, so that everyone will think that my seat isn’t empty, that I’m filling it, and not that it’s filled and I’m emptying it.¹⁶

One of the significant differences between Zeruya Shalev’s lamentation and that of Ravikovitch is revealed in this request to “the lover,” or, more accurately, “the lover” that the narrator dramatizes before her audience (see more about this below). In Ravikovitch’s work, these are things that were certain, but have been eaten away by memory, for example, the father who dies — as well as experiences that are still valid — for example, the trauma that informs the poem “An Evil Palm.”¹⁷ Indeed, these experiences, the sources of the well of wonder that have been greatly depleted, have gone through an accelerated process of mythologization, but they are drawn from actual events. In Zeruya Shalev’s work this matter is different. It is true that the foundation of her lamentation is also a yearning for past youth, for the “lover” who was young and so handsome that he is compared, by means of a beautiful metaphor, to Apollo, god of the sun, whose movement is followed by all the women, the sunflowers. But this is an era of vitality and beauty that the narrator, according to her testimony, never experienced. Shalev’s narrator, in contrast to Ravikovitch’s speaker, laments a youth that existed only according to conjecture and rumor. She brings it to life by means of mythological inflation, “so that everyone will think that my seat isn’t empty, that I’m filling it, and not that it’s filled and I’m emptying it.” In other words, so she will be like a

16. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

17. See also Rivka GURFEIN (2010), “An Evil Palm” in Hamutal TSAMIR, Tamar S. HESS (eds.), *Sparks of Light: Essays on Dahlia Ravikovitch’s Oeuvre* [Hebrew]. Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, pp. 109-136.

chair that is never emptied, is always present and always exists, that is, according to the logic that visibility equals existence, as one who always serves the entire nation as the object of the gaze of “everyone”— like “the lover,” who is looked upon by all the women.

The lamentation for “the lover” is therefore a pastiche, an imitation in which the narrator-protagonist reveals to us information that has no basis in actual history. The lamentation scenes of the protagonist telling about “the beloved” — a separate and different character than “the lover”— are similar. These scenes, too, are scattered throughout the story. Some of them take the form of a quiz, a form whose generic base is the riddle, from the genre of wisdom literature, which, as Mordechai Shalev reminds us,¹⁸ stands in more than once for the lamentational genre (as well as the fable and the proverb). A similar lamentation scene in the form of a quiz whose subject is the disappearance of “the beloved,” the god of youth, takes place when the protagonist intrudes into the apartment that belonged to her family in the past, in which a young couple now resides, awaiting the birth of a child:

They continue to be silent, until it seems to me that there is a plot to get rid of me, and I decide to deceive them and say, “All right, so I’ll entertain you.”

“How?” the woman asks in desperation.

“I’ll give you a quiz,” I suggest. “An easy quiz. Any child could answer it in a minute.”

As they tense themselves, I ask the first question: “So, children, who remembers the beloved?”

“We don’t remember any beloved,” says the husband indifferently.

“Very good,” I encourage him, “That is the correct answer. I don’t remember any beloved either, but the neighbors told of a youth who would walk around this house again and again. In the most pouring rain he walked around here, and in the hottest heat waves he lay around here, and from his mouth good words flowed like a river.”¹⁹

18. Mordechai SHALEV (2010), “Dahlia Ravikovitch, Lamentational Poet” [Hebrew]. In Hamutal TSAMIR, Tamar S. HESS (eds.), *Sparks of Light: Essays on Dahlia Ravikovitch’s Oeuvre* [Hebrew]. Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, p.17.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 150-151.

The quiz that the narrator forces on the residents who live in the apartment, characterized as the destroyed Temple,²⁰ includes the main components of a traditional lament. The first one is the mourning for “the beloved,” the ultimate, indefatigable representative of lost youth (“In the most pouring rain he walked around here, and in the hottest heat waves he lay around here...”) and the mythological dimension attached to him by the symbol of the river (“and from his mouth good words flowed like a river”), which is linked to birth and fertility as well as to attraction and death. This is, as Juan Eduardo Cirlot²¹ instructs us, an ambiguous symbol, since it is connected both to the creative power of nature and the destructive power of time: “On the one hand it signifies fertility and the progressive irrigation of the soil; and on the other hand it stands for the irreversible passage of time and, in consequence, for a sense of loss and oblivion.”²²

Like the scene of lamentation for “the lover” quoted above, the scene of the quiz on “the beloved” is accompanied by a sense of pastiche, since the narrator testifies about herself: “I don’t remember any beloved either” and knows of his quite dubious existence only from the neighbors’ stories. The component of memory loss, which deepens the sense of pastiche in the lament of the narrator-protagonist, is reinforced in the answer to the second question she poses in the circus-like quiz:

“And what happened in the end?” the woman asks.

“Here you lead me to the second question of the quiz: ‘who killed the beloved?’”

“You,” the woman says simply.

“Not true!” I castigate her. “This time you were wrong, the beloved killed himself, to get away from me. He aged himself, until he died at a ripe old age. He had an almost painless death.”²³

In the “end” the narrator is always left with nothing, perhaps because she never had anything, and perhaps because she felt she did not deserve whatever she had, because she gained it through deceit or, as the final question of the quiz reveals, as a beggar:

She [the woman of the couple who the narrator forces to take part in the quiz] chuckles at me in confusion, almost in sympathy. Her sympathy encourages me, and I go on to the next question in the quiz.

20. See note 13.

21. Juan Eduardo CIRLOT, 2002 [1971]. *A Dictionary of Symbols*. Mineola, NY: Dover.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 274.

23. *Dancing, Standing Still*, p. 151.

“I have a question for you on another matter entirely, or perhaps it’s actually the same matter. Let’s see if you can guess what I took from the house of the former lover when I left that night, a few minutes exactly before his wife was widowed.”

“His underpants,” says the architect confidently.

“His undershirt,” says his wife modestly.

“No,” I say. “I didn’t take anything from there, I left empty-handed, hastily, as if I had never wandered among them and begged.”²⁴

Another site of lamentation is “the children.” The scenes of lamentation that focus on “the children,” like those of “the lover” and “the beloved,” are, at the level of both plot and style, brilliant pastiche cover versions of the myth of the murder of youth. The story of “the girl” is presented by the narrator “mother” in several contradictory versions refuting one another. According to one of them, she was kidnapped by enemy elements to the “Land of Hair,” a country made of hair that was plucked or fell from the heads of the mourning parents. “The mother,” too, was kidnapped (according to a different version, she runs away to the “Land of Hair”). But as long as “the girl” remains in the “Land of Hair”— according to one of the versions, she even dies there before “the mother’s” eyes, pulling a string attached to a plastic bag placed around her head — “the mother” manages to escape from the “Land of Hair” and returns to her home. There she devotes all of her time to a very bizarre mourning ritual for her daughter:

Every morning I would put on a robe, place a knitted hat on my head, take a hoe and rake, and set out on my way. Once I planted her teddy bears, and once her dolls. [...] Slowly the room emptied, and the main roads were filled. I would come when traffic was heavy and the drivers irritable. I liked the honking horns and shouts, the curses and insults [...] Sometimes I would receive a blow, but nothing deterred me. Here, I would encourage myself, finally you are learning what mother love is, what total devotion is. Everything I couldn’t give her when she slept on the lowest floor, I gave her now, when she was in another place.²⁵

The ability of the protagonist to learn “what mother love is, what total devotion is” indeed becomes possible only after her daughter is lost

24. *Ibid.*, p. 152.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 71-72.

to her, when “she [is already] in another place.” This conclusion is in line with “the lamenting mother’s” attitude to all those around her. The fact that everyone captures her attention only after their death, or, unfortunately, as they are dying,²⁶ is doubly validated in light of her declaration.

26. The ability to connect with people close to her only after they have died or while they are dying darkly links the narrator-protagonist of *Dancing, Standing Still* and all of Shalev’s protagonists in her various books with Dahlia Ravikovitch’s lamenting speakers, on the one hand, and their counterpart, Hannah Gonen of Amos Oz’s *My Michael*, on the other. On the dramatic influence of Hannah Gonen on her creative imagination, Shalev testified in the impressive afterword she wrote for the special edition of *My Michael* that appeared in the fortieth anniversary edition of the book (2008). “Because into my youth, surrounded by fragrant orchards and romantic hallucinations on the power of love to meld two into one, there suddenly intruded that ‘cold, beautiful Jerusalemite,’ a poet who doesn’t write poems, a woman gathered into herself, poor in actions and rich in dreams, who observes her husband from afar with an ironic gaze, bearing a strong message of alienation and foreignness. While she was not the first literary protagonist I had met who was not satisfied in her marriage, Hannah Gonen’s European sisters, Anna Karenina, Effie Brest, and Emma Bovary, who were foreign and alienated from their husbands, lead their desire to other places, and experience great, even fatal power, while Hannah, with her rich soul, is satisfied with childhood memories and hallucinations that she doesn’t dream of fulfilling, looks out the window like a stone princess, doesn’t give in to anyone, lets her desires live their eternal life beyond the body and its boundaries, beyond time and place.” (pp. 294-295) [...] “Romantic love seemed almost primitive, as opposed to the mocking, arrogant stance, as opposed to the complete freedom of the woman standing at the window, the same window that is also a barrier between her and what happens outside, but also an entrance into the inner world.” (p. 297) And to compare, “Sometimes I ask why those I love most are always in mortal danger. I stand next to the high window in the storeroom, see everyone climbing, slowly, the mountain across the way, and I scream, ‘Stop, turn around, go back!’ It’s lucky they don’t hear, because I know they don’t have where to turn around, that turning around is more dangerous than the ascent, and there’s no choice, they have to continue. But why do I have to look? Glued to the glass, I open my mouth wide, see the tiny car that any gust of wind could blow away, climbing the narrow mountain road, and inside it are my husband, my daughter and my beloved, all of those who become extinct in a moment” (*Dancing, Standing Still*, p. 62). It seems that the author was aware of the affinity between the narrator-protagonist of *Dancing, Standing Still* and Hannah in *My Michael*. This becomes clear from a number of intertexts, for example, the one that connects Hannah’s fantasy of the twin Arab youths and the fantasy of the narrator-protagonists in the book before us: “That summer, when my parents left, the world went mad, the cats started eating grass, birds fell from the sky for no reason [...]. Huge windows were torn from the house and there was no difference between inside and outside. At night two brown-skinned boys would knock on the door and come in with a wineglass in one hand and a burning cigarette in the other. One was too short, but didn’t stop talking about it, and he talked about it so much that it seemed he grew taller. The other was tall and handsome, but stammered, and I couldn’t understand a word he said. Arm in arm I would walk with

Regarding the thing that nags at her when she is burying the toys and dolls of her dead daughter: "To sprout suddenly from the snow and begin to bloom, that is my worst nightmare."²⁷

This powerful line is undoubtedly in direct conversation with the opening lines of Eliot's "The Wasteland." "April is the cruelest month, breeding/ Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing/ Memory and desire, stirring/ Dull roots with spring rain."²⁸ This conversation between *Dancing, Standing Still* and "The Wasteland," which Shalev defined as a book that changed her life,²⁹ has many paths, all of which lead to the same myth-lamentation for the death of youth.

Shalev's second version of lamentation is less pessimistic. The strong affinity between the lamentation for "the girl" and this myth is hinted at in the mysterious thicket connected to the name of "the girl," and the times of her birth and death.

Thus, for example, according to one of the versions of the history of "the girl," we learn that she is not even the biological child of the narrator. According to this version, she gave birth to a stillborn daughter. In her rage, the narrator steals from the "obstetrician," who is also represented as a general human persona, one of his twin baby girls, whose name, given to her by her parents, is Kayitz (summer). According to another version, the girl is given the name Kayitz after she steals her from "the obstetrician."³⁰ According to yet another version, Kayitz is the natural child of her mother and was born healthy and whole. Either way, the contradictory versions emphasize the name "Kayitz," which, again, brings us to the myth of spring, in which "spring," a symbol of youth and fertility, is destroyed by "summer," the symbol of age, sterility, and destruction. The link between the narrative present and the mythical plain is further reinforced when the narrator mother reports to us that "the girl was implanted in me in a Passover shag, which

them among the pools of water, throwing silver rings into one and gathering silver rings from the other" (*ibid.*, pp. 58-59, emphasis mine). See also my article "To Finally Decide who is Guilty: On Zeruya Shalev's *Pain*" (see note 5).

27. *Dancing, Standing Still*, p. 84.

28. T. S. ELIOT (1922), "The Wasteland". New York: Horace Liveright.

29. See note 4.

30. "It's not fair,' I said to my husband, 'that that scoundrel should have double happiness, and we remain childless.' I didn't believe he would agree, but he didn't even think it over. It was the hottest night of the year, and I chose the more beautiful twin and took her out of her pink bed. On the way back, when she was burning in my arms, I decided to call her Kayitz [summer]. My husband did it out of love. I did it out of revenge on the obstetrician" (*Dancing, Standing Still*, p. 98).

is considered the most successful kind.”³¹ The child, then, was “sown” during the spring holiday, the holiday of fertility and youth, the time when the young, beloved, and beautiful god is murdered and resurrected.³² And similarly, the girl who was lost, stolen, or died returns in the spring in order to die again:

In the spring, exactly when the terrible winter that nearly wiped us all out ended, [the girl] returned, twice as beautiful, twice as fragile. Each of my embraces would break some bone, every caress would scratch her. [She] came back suddenly grown up, sad, as if she were my mother.³³

As mentioned, the pastiche-like character of the lamentations for the girl is revealed on the stylistic plain as well. The most prominent expressions of this phenomenon are the replies and echoed replies of “the mother” and “the daughter,” which are concerned with taking inventory of metonymies that are typical of each of them, metonymies that are shown, each time anew, to be based not on identity, but only on similarity.³⁴ First, the girl, or, more accurately, the narrator “mother” quoting “the girl” is heard:

31. *Ibid.*, p. 108.

32. This is the well-known myth of Osiris, and other gods of the pagan pantheon, who were murdered and resurrected, usually after three days, a pattern adopted by Christianity in the story of the death and resurrection of Jesus. See on this matter Joseph CAMPBELL (2013) [1949], *The Hero with the Thousand Faces*, Princeton: Princeton UP. See also Northrup FRYE (1957), *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, Princeton: Princeton UP, pp. 131-239; and Christopher BOOKER (2004), *The Seven Plots: Why We Tell Stories*. London, New York: Continuum, pp. 163-206.

33. *Dancing, Standing Still*, p. 108.

34. *Dancing, Standing Still* also includes dozens of expressions of “routine” inventory taking, which is a well-known and popular lamentational practice. For example, “Every morning she [the girl] would count her limbs, as though she knew they were in danger. She would announce, ‘I have ten nails, two eyes, ten fingers and ten toes, I have two legs and two arms and two ears. I have one pee-pee and one behind. I have one tummy and two nipples’” (*ibid.*, p. 44, emphases mine). The inventory of what will no longer happen, presented in anaphoric linguistic patterns, and the inventory of what could have happened if..., also in anaphoric linguistic patterns are similar lamentational practices. An example of the first lamentational pattern: “You will never go anywhere again, I say to myself, never shock your narrow face with a broad smile, never straighten your chest proudly, never beg again for love. What’s left for you is to understand one thing, as small as a grain of sand, and afterwards to press your face to the earth, all the rest will happen by itself” (*ibid.*, p. 120, my emphases). An example of the second pattern: “I should have tied her around my neck like a string of beads, I say to myself, and never parted from her.

The girl always says in the afternoon: "I saw a woman with hair like yours, with pants like yours, with socks like yours, but it was a different woman." Immediately I would give her a toffee, chocolate, a marshmallow, a doughnut, depending on the season. Sometimes I would say, "You know what? Hit me." And she would hit. It's impossible to believe how much strength she had. In a moment, I would be covered with black and blue marks until I was unrecognizable."³⁵

The response of "the mother" to the reply of "the girl" confirms the loss of the original, authentic object, both by instructing "the girl" to hit her "until [she is] unrecognizable," and in the delicate, patently unfounded connection that she creates between the seasons of the year and their "products," none of which are natural.

Following other instances where "the mother" "quotes" this reply, spoken by "the girl,"³⁶ there are "echo replies" of the mother herself. The first appears while she is look for "the girl" in the Land of Hair, and on her way meets a girl and interrogates her:

"Tell me," I say to the girl. For a moment, she looks familiar, and I am horrified. "Did it ever happen to you that you saw a woman with a mouth like mine, with a nose like mine, with socks like mine, with scars like mine, with a suitcase like mine, but it wasn't me?"³⁷

This ping-pong of responses, which appears in other versions as well,³⁸ ends in an inversion of roles. In the last instance of this rhetorical pattern, the girl is the one who is being marked:

I should have kept running after her on the flowering path. I only stopped for a moment to rest and she disappeared. I should have gone on for a few more years, until she or I had grown old, I shouldn't have stopped. I'm paying now for the running I spared myself then, I'm proving myself, wandering in the Land of Hair, far from the flowering path, far from summer" (*ibid.*, p. 120, emphases mine).

35. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 31, 64.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

38. For example, "She loved me too much. That was her problem. Everything I did, she wanted to do too. Everything I wore, she wanted to wear too. Everything I said, she repeated after me, like a parrot. I never loved her as much as I did on those bus trips, as she sat across from me. She was someone else's child, who was sitting across from me by chance. She was a package that someone else would open. A flower someone else would pick. She was a wound that someone else would smear with ointment" (*ibid.*, pp. 22-23, my emphases).

When she falls, as beautiful as a bride, the whole audience falls with her and everyone cries in their dry throats, vomits their laughter, and the soldiers march back in a uniform rhythm. For a moment it seems to me that they are marching towards me, but they pass, and I pass too, progressing with fearful steps, finding it difficult to separate, swearing to myself again and again: I saw a girl with braids like hers, with a gaze like hers, with cheeks like hers, with skin like hers, but it wasn't her.³⁹

III.

Mordechai Shalev⁴⁰ presents three kinds of lamentation: the prophetic lamentation, the classical biblical lamentation, and the secular one. All three share three grammatical persons: the "I," which speaks in the first person, who supposedly has the role of narrator or announcer who describes or quotes speech only; the "you," the second person, before whom the "I" voices his claims; and the "he," the sacrificial entity, composed of parts that have broken off from the "I." This is a third person whose troubles and distresses the "I" repeatedly presents to the "you."

In secular lamentation, such as the lamentation of David and Jonathan (Sam. II; 1), the "you," that is God, is not represented. There is no need for it, since the comparison between the glory of the character in the past and his nullity in the present swallows the entire essence of the lamenter ("How the mighty have fallen..."). In the prophetic lamentation, on the other hand, the description of suffering or disaster becomes secondary to the divine interest that is satisfied ("How art thou fallen from heaven, O bright star, son of the morning! How are thou cut down to the ground, that didst rule over the nations!"; Is. 14; 12). And in the classical biblical lamentation ("How does the city sit solitary, that was full of people! how is she become like a widow!"; Lam. 1; 1), the "I," the first person, repeatedly addresses the complaint about the suffering of the "she," and the "he," which are the fruit of his own projection, to the "you," the second person. Sometimes the "I" also proves to the "he" and "she" who broke off from him that their sins have brought them from their exalted situation to their terrible situation in the present.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 115.

40. Mordechai SHALEV, *ibid.*, pp. 115-118.

The lamentational model that Zeruya Shalev developed following Ravikovitch is based mainly on the classic biblical type of lamentation, but it diverts from it in terms of two cardinal characteristics. First, while she preserves the classic triangular structure of lamentation, she changes the character of two of its vertices, the “he” and the “you.” In Ravikovitch, as in classical lamentation, the “he,” or, in its feminine adaptation, the “she,” is composed of and consolidated from broken pieces and shreds of the “I.” In Zeruya Shalev, the “she” hardly exists. It is replaced by “they,” a group of role players: “the husband,” “the lover,” “the beloved,” “the girl,” “the father,” “the mother,” “the healer,” “the spinning top seller,” “the commander,” etc., who take each other’s roles (“the husband” becomes the mother of “the healer” and later becomes pregnant instead of his wife, the narrator-protagonist,⁴¹ “the father” of the narrator becomes “the old cuckoo clock” after it stops working,⁴² and so on). The “they” are composed, like the “she,” from broken bits or victim-like shards of the “I,” but, and here the difference between the two writers is apparent, the broken pieces and/or shards are not unified. On the contrary, interrelationships of hostility and violence are formed between them.

A similar dramatic change is undergone by the “you” vertex of Shalev’s lamentational triangle. Here, too, the “you” as an external target for the complaints of the “I” is almost nonexistent, and is replaced, in the same move of “the epidemic of the multiplicity of the ‘I’” that we saw above, by the plural “you.” These are, surprisingly, the same personas that also function as “they”: “the husband,” “the lover,” “the beloved,” “the girl,” “the father,” “the mother,” “the healer,” and so on. Here, too, these personas switch roles among themselves, but do not merge with one another, and the text intentionally emphasizes the frictions and contradictions in their interrelationships.

41. “I quickly apologized and returned to the clinic room [...] my husband was rocking the healer in his arms. He said to him, ‘I always wanted to nurse, and even more than that, to give birth.’ The healer chuckled to himself in delight. ‘We’ll be able to solve everything today,’ he promised. When we left, my husband was pregnant, and I without a womb” (*Dancing, Standing Still*, p. 7). The narrator also reports on the variety of the husband’s roles to “the commander” who interrogates her in the Land of Hair: “The husband eats alone in restaurants,’ I mumble. ‘Goes alone to films, and his stomach grows as his discomfort grows. He has no one to talk to, and he has nothing to talk about. Alone he flowers, alone he withers. Sometimes he’s a man, sometimes a woman, sometimes a father, sometimes a grandfather. Sometimes he wears an apron, sometimes he wears boots. What else can I tell you about the husband?’” (*ibid.*, p. 107).

42. *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

Zeruya Shalev's "discourse of lamentation" is cast in a narcissistic mold reminiscent of the circle created by Ouroboros, the mythical serpent that eats its own tail.⁴³ The dialogical dimension in her lamentation is rhetorical only, and accordingly it may be called, following Menachem Brinker's terminology, "a rhetoric of honesty,"⁴⁴ "a rhetoric of dialogue." Here, this means that *Dancing, Standing Still* is, as its title suggests, a masked ball that is entirely a verbal self-performance that reflects a post-Cartesian world view that subverts the existence of a priori, autonomous, unified, and continuous subjectivity.

In this context, another two points of a historical poetic nature seem obvious. To begin with, it seems, (this matter requires a more thorough investigation) that Zeruya Shalev's literary enterprise should be examined, first of all, in the context of the tradition of Eretz-Israeli and Israeli poetry. Indeed, she writes mainly prose, but she began her career as a poet and her prose is typically lyrical. Furthermore, given the previous comment, I believe we should read Zeruya Shalev as a lamentational writer who reads Dahlia Ravikovitch as a lamentational poet through the "epidemic of the split and multiple 'I'" that characterizes the poetry of Yona Wallach, since it is difficult not to recognize the similarities between the functions fulfilled by the personas of the "they," and the plural "you" in Zeruya Shalev's "theater of identities": "the husband," "the lover," "the beloved," "the girl," "the father," "the mother," "the healer," and so on, and the functions that the corresponding personas fulfill in Yona Wallach's "theater of identities:" Cornelia, Cassius, Teresa, Nizeta, Sebastian, Antonia, and the like.⁴⁵

This essential similarity between the poetic component of the works of Yona Wallach and those of Zeruya Shalev indirectly sharpens the deep connection between Shalev and Dahlia Ravikovitch: Yona Wallach's starting point is not lamentational, but rather complaining. Her speakers complain that the world does not offer an outlet for their lust and does not satisfy them ("And that's not what/ 'll satisfy/my

43. On this matter, see Erich NEUMANN's enlightening interpretation in *Amor and Psyche: The Psychic Development of the Feminine*. Princeton: Princeton UP (1956).

44. Menachem BRINKER (1990), *Up to the Tiberian Alley: Narrative Art and Social Thought in Brenner's Work* [Hebrew], Tel Aviv: Am Oved, pp. 19-153.

45. In this context, see Zafira LIDOVSKY-COHEN (2009), "Loosen the Fetters of Thy Tongue Woman": *The Poetry and Poetics of Yona Wallach* [Hebrew], Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, pp. 18-26; 48-52; 57-61; 107-111; Lilach LACHMAN (1994), "On the 'I' in Yona Wallach's Poetry" [Hebrew]. *Hadarim* 11, pp. 142-154; and Yael RENAN (1976), "Aspects of Yona Wallach's Poetry". *Hasifrut* 22 A, pp. 46-54.

hunger no/ that's not/ what /'ll ease/my mind /no/ that's not it.")⁴⁶ In contrast to her, Dahlia Ravikovitch and Zeruya Shalev lament lost youth. Ravikovitch laments the youth that existed and has been lost, and Shalev laments youth that has been lost, but it is not at all clear whether it has actually existed.

The innovation that Shalev applies to the pattern of the classical biblical lament: absorbed from Dahlia Ravikovitch, mediated (relatively late) through Yona Wallach, it is expressed in an additional way. I refer to the way in which the "epic situation" is shaped in *Dancing, Standing Still*, through the shaping of the arena from which the narrator or speaker makes her mono-dialogue. In her first books, Ravikovitch's speaker speaks from an intimate existential arena. This can be a huge space that includes entire galaxies, but it remains private, yet not idiosyncratic. In Wallach's poetry, the public arena is existential and theatrical, but more idiosyncratic. In Shalev's work, the existential arena is, similar to Wallach's, public and theatrical, but it is not idiosyncratic, and in this it is similar the corresponding arena in Ravikovitch's poetry and differs from that of Wallach.⁴⁷

Shalev's narrator always speaks before an audience of some kind and addresses her most private and intimate matters. This is an ostentatious verbal striptease, planned, invested in, and constantly aware of the presence of the addressees, both direct (fictional) and indirect (readers) who "consume" it, and the impression it leaves on them. Thus, in the opening section of the novel, the narrator already hints to us:

Exactly seven months after the beloved walked quickly past our car, my ex-husband and I went to be healed. The healer was an old man with trembling fingers and a depressive mouth. Anyone who had seen the three of us together would have thought we came to heal him. We both wore clean black shirts that emphasized our white, courageous faces. We were white with problems, and he was blue with hope. What came out of our mixing was light blue. No other color came out. There were light blue dolls, light blue curtains, a fuzzy light blue carpet, light blue pillows. There was everything that a person can lose with one mistake. A man sat on the

46. Yona WALLACH, "And that's not what" in *Wild Light: Selected Poems*. Trans. Linda ZISQUIT. Rhinebeck, NY: Sheep Meadow Press, 1997. p. 30.

47. On this matter, see Nissim CALDERON's 2009 essay on the status of Hebrew poetry in Israel in the last decades of the twentieth century, "Monday: On Poetry and Rock in Israel". Dvir and Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Massa Critic, pp. 22-43, 69-83, 432-457.

side and did the accounts. I said: “What? Is there no limit to the problems? Has no one here heard about good taste?”⁴⁸

In this “couples therapy” scene there are three “legitimate” participants and a few others who have forced their way into this arena, some at the indirect invitation of the narrator. The “legitimate” human base here is the therapeutic triangle: the wife, the husband, and the healer (both are undergoing an accelerated process of castration⁴⁹). More characters who are, at least ostensibly, less legitimate, are added to this human base: those who belong to the “anyone who had seen would have thought” group, those included as being able to lose everything “a human being can lose with one mistake,” and of course the man “who sat on the side and did the accounts,”⁵⁰ and it is not clear who he is and what accounts he is doing. And to all these representatives of social public decorum are added those who are supposed to preserve “good taste.” The incursion of all of the participants into the couple’s therapy, which was supposed to be a discrete event, turns it into a strip-tease before the representatives of the general public. In this performance, which I have termed elsewhere⁵¹ “standup comedy-tragedy,” the narrator-actress positions herself on an imaginary stage and performs for the audience a stand-up show that has two different, contradictory, yet complementary, faces.

On the one hand, she displays her distress and pain, begging for empathy and even, at times, shouting for help. On the other hand, she takes distance from her audience, alienates herself from it, and sometimes attacks it with direct verbal violence. This ambivalent standup performance garners from the audience identification and alienation, a desire to help, repulsion and revulsion, cries of embarrassment, and bursts of laughter. It is, in fact, a wild and colorful theatrical dramatization of the traditional ambivalent position of the lamenter in relation to the “you,” the pagan god, God, or chosen man who serves both as the target of the

48. *Dancing, Standing Still*, p. 5.

49. In this context, see my article, “To Finally Decide who is Guilty: On Zeruya Shalev’s *Pain*” (see note 5).

50. “The man on the side” is also mentioned in the visit of the narrator and “the husband” at “the healer’s”: “I quickly apologized and went back to the healer’s room. I saw that the man on the side had already written down long columns of numbers” (*Dancing, Standing Still*, p. 7).

51. See Yigal SCHWARTZ, “Your Orgasm (men) is our Sarcasm: The Life and Death of the JIP – the Jewish Israeli Princess” in *Maariv, Literature and Books*, Part 1, 26.9.2001, pp. 21-22; Part 2, pp. 28-29.

feelings of anger and helplessness of the “I,” which refuses to complete the grieving process, and as a place of spiritual importance, in which the speaker wishes to hide and find comfort.

The performances of the narrator-protagonist in *Dancing, Standing Still* fill the novel. Large sections of the story consist, in fact, of such performances, in different styles. For example, the following excerpt from such a performance in which the narrator and men from her life participate:

In the morning they were all there: the ex-husband and the beloved, the former lover and even the brother, who I thought had forgotten me as I had forgotten him, stood aside, pale and drawn on the snow. At first I was glad: here these cowards have finally stood beside me, but at once I saw that the intention was the opposite. The moment they saw that my eyes were open, they started. “Why do you not give yourself?” they growled in unison, “Why do you not know how to love?” “Why do you not know how to be happy?” “Why are you ashamed of your love?” “Why are you ashamed of your joy?”⁵²

This is an amusing-pathetic cover version of the biblical scene in which Job’s three friends come to comfort him, but in fact, demand that he admit that he is guilty of all the misfortunes that have befallen him. Just as Job has answers, so does the narrator: she responds to the three men — the brother is described as present-absent — strongly. She divides her response, or rather, the first part of it, into three parts, each of which opens with a lead, an anaphoric pattern that corresponds with many lamentational sections of the book that are constructed in the same pattern:⁵³

52. *Dancing, Standing Still*, p.75 (emphases and placement on the page mine).

53. For example, “I want to eat an omelet and salad in the evening [...] I want whoever passes my house to think that a father, a mother, and a daughter live there. I want to speak of ‘we’ all the time and not be without you even for a moment. I want you to take me with you everywhere. I want to sleep with you in bed at night, and I want to go to the toilet with you. I want to be with her in kindergarten from eight to one, and afterwards in the office from one to five. Afterwards, we’ll drive to the supermarket, and from there we’ll rush home and eat an omelet and salad. I want us to light candles on Friday nights and sing ‘Peace upon you, ministering angels.’ I want to be pregnant and give birth to twins. I want to hold them, one in my right arm and one in my left. I want the girl to sit

“Look, gentlemen,” I said, “All I need is a hand to rub against, a knee would be my second preference, and even a door would help, I never asked for more. Everything you offered me was more than unnecessary.”

[...]

“Look, gentlemen,” I continued, “You all lay with the same women. The fungi and warts changed addresses, it spread to one, deepened in another. One scratched, and the other twisted. You had maybe twenty women, no more. No one will tell me that it’s too many, and there are maybe fifteen types of warts, so why are you standing there so humiliated, ugly, blocking the sun from me?”

“Look, gentlemen,” I sighed, “I find it harder than any man to move my mouth in a way that creates meaning. I have nothing so important to say to you that it would justify such an effort. If you really want to know, my deepest desire is an electric blanket.”⁵⁴

The speaker does not even bother to address the claims of the three men. Instead, she declares that she desperately needs to be touched (“All I need is a hand to rub against, a knee would be my second preference, and even a door would help”) but immediately rejects the possibility of getting help (“Everything you offered me was more than unnecessary.”), and then she moves into a frontal attack on all three, degrading and humiliating them as men and driving them away on grounds (they are blocking the sun) that correspond with the well-known story about the meeting between Diogenes, the cynical philosopher, and Alexander the Great. Finally, she confesses, “my deepest desire is an electric blanket,” another expression with a double message. One aspect denotes a desire to completely give up human warmth — a mature sexual relationship — and the other, which actually takes the first aspect to an extreme, suggests a death wish, because of the obvious association with “electric chair.”

Dancing, Standing Still ends with two major plot movements, each in a different direction, that reflect the rhythmic narrative and rhetorical character of the book: great exposure and withdrawal, withdrawal and great exposure, and so on. Towards the end of the novel, there are two large stand-up comedy-tragedy performances that display this rhythmic character.

on my knees and pinch her little brothers, so you can take our picture and send it to your parents. Is that such a lot to ask?” (*Dancing, Standing Still*, p. 47).

54. *Dancing, Standing Still*, p. 76.

The first, which I have already mentioned, takes place in the narrator's old house in the presence of a couple who lives there, a husband and wife who are expecting a child. The second performance, which the narrator-protagonist refers to as "my memorial ceremony"⁵⁵ is larger, is held before the "the whole great crowd,"⁵⁶ with a "master of ceremonies,"⁵⁷ who is probably "the former beloved," in charge of it.⁵⁸ The "memorial ceremony" is the grand finale of the narrator-protagonist's own performance, after which comes the ultimate withdrawal into a small, closed, space facing the window, a withdrawal that locks the lamenting narrator-protagonist in the circle of the "I."

... You should know that I'm not leaving here. I'll sit in front of the window, it will always be Friday, the day when everything is lost and then earned back, I will sit with closed lips, to learn everything from the beginning.⁵⁹

The position of the lamenting eulogizer is the basic position of the narrator-protagonist in all of Zeruya Shalev's works, and according to her own testimony, this was true even in the first works she wrote as a child and a teenager.⁶⁰ However, as noted, this position has undergone significant modification due to a lack of understanding on the part of critics of *Dancing, Standing Still*.⁶¹ Another reason for this modification is, apparently, and I am using Mordechai Shalev's⁶² term once

55. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 168.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 168, 169, 176, 178, and more.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

59. *Dancing, Standing Still*, p. 168.

60. From an interview with Tamar ROTEM on June 2, 2014: "In a poetry notebook that she saved are poems she wrote in school. 'Songs about animals. Almost always sad. Poems about loss, the death of a cat or dog, for example.' Shalev defines herself as 'conscious and thoughtful. Aware in some way of the potential for loss at any moment.'" "When she was ten, she wrote a two-hundred page novel about orphaned children. Before that she wrote stories about Yael the wife of Hever the Kenite." "The sense of loss also lies in the stories that took place before she was born. 'My mother was married before she met my father and lost her first husband in the War of Independence.'"

61. See note 8.

62. Mordechai SHALEV, *ibid.*

again, the gradual attempts of the author to liberate herself from the narcissistic cycle of lament.

In this psycho-literary move there are two main stages. In the first stage, at the center of which stands the book *Love Life* [Hayei Ahava] (1997), Shalev continued to adhere to the stand-up comedy-tragedy pattern that she concocted in *Dancing, Standing Still*, but made two changes that are related to one another. One is that the story is clearer in and of itself, but also because it is constructed as a cover story for a number of foundational feminine stories in Western culture.⁶³ Second, the elite status of the verbal performances is taken over by physical performances with a pornographic hue. These performances are planned in minute detail and are very aware of their effect on their immediate audience (fictional characters), as well as on readers of various sensibilities. I devoted a relatively detailed discussion to this phenomenon elsewhere.⁶⁴ In this context, I will limit myself to citing a typical scene from one of the provocative performances in the novel *Love Life*:

So that's what you're really like, I thought, I always wanted to see him on fire, he was always cold and denying with me, just like a machine, and now he was a little different, his hands moved over me with less indifference, tense and supple. Suddenly it began to rain, a serious cloudburst followed by thunder and lightning, and the little apartment looked like Noah's ark, dark and dilapidated, and they fell silent, letting the thunder speak, and Shaul looked at me, he had a question in his eyes, perhaps he was wondering what a girl like me was doing inside the ear of a pathetic old man or something like that, and for a moment I too felt a certain doubt, but Aryeh, who apparently sensed the retreat, began to peel off my panty hose, and then he stood up and pulled me to my feet, the panty hose stretched tight around my knees, and said, come to bed, you'll be more comfortable in bed, and I said, but what about Shaul, and Aryeh said it won't bother Shaul, right, Shaul? He said this in a loud, emphatic voice, like a kindergarten teacher, and Shaul said in his high, squeaky voice, no, it's OK, I'll just sit here and watch, as if he were doing us a favor, and Aryeh pulled down his trousers as

63. See Yigal SCHWARTZ (2002), "The Frigid Option: A Psychocultural Study of the Novel *Love Life* by Zeruya Shalev" in William CUTTER and David C. JACOBSON (eds.), *History and Literature: New Readings of Jewish Texts in Honor of Arnold J. Band*. Providence: Brown University Press, pp. 479-488.

64. *Ibid.*

he advanced on the bed, for a moment we looked like two toddlers running to the bathroom, with their bums exposed and their trousers round their ankles, and he lay down on his back and waited for me to kick off my boots and panty hose and sit on top of him, it was clear that this was what he wanted, and I tried to sit with my back straight and to move gracefully, like an actress, because I could sense Shaul's eyes on me all the time, I had never had an audience before, and I knew that it imposed an obligation.

My ambition increased from one minute to the next, I wanted to astonish my audience with my performance, so I stretched and arched my back until my hands touched the end of the bed and I almost expected applause but instead I heard panting and the sound of undressing, and I saw that the shadowy figure in the armchair was growing white, his fair skin was exposed as his clothes came off, he was almost phosphorescent, but suddenly I couldn't see anything because Aryeh turned over and covered me completely, and now it was his turn to impress with his performance, his pelvis moved energetically, and I began to moan, not only with pleasure, actually he was beginning to hurt me and I was getting fed up too, but I felt an obligation to supply the sound as well, so that it wouldn't be a silent movie...⁶⁵

The second phase, at whose center are all of Shalev's other books, *Husband and Wife* (2000), *Thera* (2005), *The Remains of Life* (2011), and *Pain* (2015), is marked by several characteristics, all of which are interrelated and conditional upon one another. The main ones are: a gradual "recovery," from the "epidemic of the multiplicity of the 'I,'" both at the vertex of the "you" and at the vertex of the "he"; lowering the flames of the rhetoric of eulogy and guilt and also of the rhetoric of blame; a reduction in the lyrical-dramatic element in favor of the epic narrative element; and a trend toward modesty in the self-exposure of the narrator-protagonist. In addition, the endings of the stories are more optimistic. *Dancing, Standing Still* and *Love Life* end in scenes where the narrator-protagonists stop moving freely in the world and withdraw. They are alone, at a clear distance from the world and its tumult. The protagonist of *Dancing, Standing Still* locks herself

65. Zeruya SHALEV (2000) [1997], *Love Life*. Trans. Dalya BILU. New York: Grove.

in her room and focuses her existence on looking through the window.⁶⁶ Similarly, the narrator-protagonist of *Love Life* stays alone at night in the reading room of the university on Mount Scopus in Jerusalem. Indeed, even in these scenes lies a seed of hope, but it is tiny and its life expectancy is dubious. On the other hand, the final scenes of the later books leave more room for an exit from the cycle of lament, the possibility of breaking out of the narcissistic mono-dialogical stance, and a cautious move towards a dialogical stance. These scenes take place in the bosom of the broken family that is focusing on reunion.

Zeruya Shalev's four most recent books are therefore more settled than their predecessors. It seems that the lamenter in the leopard-print pants has begun to wear tailored suits. But the tailored look, which has, of course, significant meaning, should not mislead us, since, as I said at the beginning of this essay, beneath it is always hidden a double-edged sword.

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66. Being secluded or imprisoned in an isolated room and the reduction of existence to looking through a window in women's and men's novels has been the subject of much discussion in feminist criticism. The most famous of all is Sandra M. GILBERT and Susan GUBAR's *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. Yale University Press, 1984. See also Yael FELDMAN (1999), *No Room of their Own: Gender and Nation in Israeli Women's Fiction Writers*. New York: Columbia UP, pp. 193-223 and Nitza KEREN (2010), *Like Fabric in the Hand of the Embroideress: Women Writers and the Hegemonic Text* [Hebrew]. Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University, pp. 47-81.

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Abstract: Zeruya Shalev is a lamentational author. Like Dahlia Ravikovitch, the great poet who influenced her, she adopted the model of classical biblical lamentation and redesigned it in accordance with her worldview. But unlike Dahlia Ravikovitch, the modernist who laments in her poetry for youth that has been lost and will never return, Shalev laments, in a post-modern style, a youth that apparently never was, and is experienced in the form of a pastiche. The difference between the two is expressed in the position of the speaker or narrator. Ravikovitch maintains the structure of the biblical lament in which there is an “I” who complains before a “you” about the difficult situation of the “he,” which is made of fragments of the victim-like “I.” In Shalev’s work, on the other hand, an “epidemic of multiplicity” is apparent in the “you” as well as in the “he” and attests to a different perception of the concept of identity. The assumption of the existence of a priori subjectivity is replaced by a perception of the “I” that is a self-performance of a masked ball of personas who express an imaginary “I” only.

Keywords: Shalev Zeruya (1959-), Dahlia Ravikovitch (1936-2005), Yona Wallach (1944-1958), Eliot T. S. (1888-1965), Lamentation, Modernism, Post-modernism, Stand-up, Comedy, Tragedy, Pastiche, Historiography of Israeli fiction and poetry

Résumé : Zeruya Shalev est une narratrice qui se lamente. Tout comme la poétesse Dahlia Ravikovitch qu'elle aime tant, elle a adopté le modèle de la lamentation biblique qu'elle utilise selon ses besoins. Or, à la différence de Ravikovitch, la moderniste qui cherche sa jeunesse perdue, Shalev se lamente dans un style post moderne sur une jeunesse qui n'a jamais existé et pour ce faire, elle utilise le pastiche. Ravikovitch reste fidèle au modèle biblique où le « je » se lamente auprès d'un « tu » sur les malheurs d'un « il ». Chez Shalev, en revanche, on trouve plusieurs « je » qui parlent de plusieurs « il », ce qui témoigne d'un concept tout à fait différent de l'identité : le « je » n'est que plusieurs personnages cachés qui forment ensemble un « je » imaginaire.

Mots-clés : Shalev Zeruya (1959-), Dahlia Ravikovitch (1936-2005), Yona Wallach (1944-1958), Eliot T. S. (1888-1965), lamentation, modernisme, post-modernisme, comédie, tragédie, pastiche, historiographie de la poésie et de la prose israéliennes

תקציר: צרויה שלו היא מספרת מקוננת. כדליה רביקוביץ, המשוררת האהובה עליה, היא אימצה את מודל הקינה המקראי ועיבדה אותו בהתאם לצרכיה. ואולם, בהבדל מרביקוביץ המודרניסטית, המקוננת בשירתה על נעוריה האבודים, שלו מקוננת בסגנון פוסט מודרניסטי על נעורים

שכנראה מעולם לא היו ועושה שימוש בפסטיש. ההבדל בין השתיים מתבטא בעיקר בעמדת הדובר או המספר. רביקוביץ נאמנה לתבנית המקראית, בה ה"אני" מקונן בפני ה"אתה" על מצבו הקשה של ה"הוא". ביצירתה של שלו, לעומת זאת, תופעת ריבוי ה"אתם" כמו גם ה"הם" מעידה על תפישה שונה של מושג הזהות. ההנחה של קיום אפרירי של סובייקטיביות מתחלפת בתפישה של "אני" שאינו אלא עיצוב של אוסף מוסווה של פרסונות המבטאות "אני" דמיוני בלבד.

מילות מפתח: צרויה שלו, דליה רביקוביץ, יונה וולך, קינה, מודרניזם, פוסט מודרניזם, קומדיה, טרגדיה, פסטיש, הסטוריוגרפיה של השירה והסיפורת הישראלית, ט. ס. אליוט