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THE BIBLE IN CONTEMPORARY ISRAELI LITERATURE: TEXT AND PLACE IN ZERUYA SHALEV'S *HUSBAND AND WIFE* AND MICHAL GOVRIN'S *SNAPSHOTS*

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> What an intoxication at slowly opening, while driving, the folded infinity of the place here, confronting dream with reality.*

Zeruya Shalev's *Husband and Wife* and Michal Govrin's *Snapshots* offer two distinct literary responses to Anita Shapira's polemical question: "Is there a way to restore the Bible to the focus of Hebrew Culture?" In both novels, the authors try to find a place for the Bible in a contemporary Israeli context: Shalev makes the Bible part of the local, intimate life of her protagonist and Govrin breaks the Bible's dominance over the Talmud and of the primacy of sovereignty over mobility, and in so doing gives legitimacy to different narratives of place. Both authors search for feminine models in order to move away from the Zionist association of the Bible with the land. Furthermore, both authors advance, or at least allow for, a reading of these feminine models as metaphors for a larger, collective identity, which not only reflects personal, private conflicts but also reacts to the changes that Zionist ideology has undergone in Jewish thought.

1. Text and Place in Contemporary Hebrew Literature

Heinrich Heine claimed, with regard to the Jewish people, that

> a book is their fatherland, their possession, their ruler.... They live between the boundary markers of this book; here, they exercise their inalienable civic rights; here, nobody can chase them away.[1]

Against this assertion, Zionism and the new settlements in Eretz Israel represented a shift from text to territory. Hebrew literature, as influenced by Zionism, was able to imagine a literary space in which Jewish texts and na-

* M. Govrin, *Snapshots*, p. 209. The translations are from *Snapshots*, Harshav's forthcoming translation of Govrin's book. I would like to thank Michal Govrin and Barbara Harshav for providing the translations and for the permission to use them.

[1] H. Bieber, *Heinrich Heine: Confessio Judaica: Eine Auswahl aus seinen Dichtungen, Schriften und Briefen* (Heinrich Heine: Selection of his poetry, writings and letters; Berlin: Welt-Verlag, 1925), pp. 91–92. For a discussion of this quote in the context of Jewish perspectives of space, see C. E. Fonrobert and V. Shemtov, "Introduction: Jewish Conceptions and Practices of Space," *Jewish Social Studies* 11:3 (2005): 1–8. The quote from Heine was translated by C. E. Fonrobert.

tional territory were woven together, almost seamlessly, in order to create a new national home. Through an intertextual web of biblical and modern language and imagery, the modern Hebrew text conflated the past and present landscapes of Eretz Israel. Initially, descriptions of the Land of Israel relied heavily on biblical texts, as Ya'akov Fichman observed: "Those who returned to Zion needed to feel that they lived in the land of the Bible."[2]

Though the Bible was not, of course, the only intertext for imagining or describing the land by Hebrew writers,[3] it was undoubtedly a major and influential one. To this day, the land continues to be perceived in Israel as a bridge between the past and the present. David Jacobson argues that "not only is Israel's national identity permitted by the sense that it is reconnecting the Jewish people to its biblical past, but Israel is also the country in which most biblical events took place. As Ruth Kartun-Blum puts it, "one cannot escape the feeling that here biblical reality is repeating itself."[4]

Recent scholarship nonetheless characterizes the shift away from biblical references as a salient feature of contemporary Hebrew literature. Although this scholarship refers to intertextuality with the Bible in general, it also takes into consideration the use of biblical narratives and language in descriptions of the land. For example, the very title of Malka Shaked's 2005 anthology of poems, *I Will Play You Forever* (לנגנך אנגן), reflects a response to her own discomfort with what she describes as "the fading status of the Bible in Israel." In her introduction to this anthology, Shaked mentions by way of example a character from S. Yizhar's *Days of Ziklag*, a soldier who carries his Bible with him into the Negev and reads to his fellow soldiers sections of the biblical text that identify their battlefield with King David's biblical Ziklag. According to Shaked, Yizhar's warrior no longer speaks to contemporary Israelis; rather, in the present context, he comes

[2] Quoted in M. Shaked, לנגנך אנגן: המקרא בשירה העברית החדשה, אטלנטיס (I will play you forever: The Bible in Modern Hebrew poetry; Tel Aviv: Yediot Aharonot, 2005), p. 17.

[3] See, for instance, Barbara Mann's recent study on Jewish urban space:

> The writing and manipulation of the vicarious landscape [an expression of one's attitude toward a particular place] of Eretz Israel has been a crucial component of modern Hebrew literature production. Memories of "the land of geography"—whether of the Ukrainian countryside or the boulevards of Paris—seeped into the writing of European immigrants about Palestine, either explicitly by the way of comparison or implicitly through shared imagery and atmosphere.

B. Mann, *A Place in History: Modernism, Tel Aviv, and the Creation of Jewish Urban Space* (Stanford: Stanford University, 2006), p. 17.

[4] D. C. Jacobson, *Does David Still Play Before You? Israeli Poetry and the Bible* (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne University Press, 1997), p. 20; and R. Kartun-Blum, "'Where Does This Wood in My Hand Come From?' The Binding of the Issac in Modern Hebrew Poetry," *Prooftexts* 8 (1988): 293.

across as ridiculous and even grotesque.[5] Anita Shapira's recent study *The Bible and Israeli Identity* traces the different ways in which the Bible shaped and became an integral part of Zionism but later assumed a minor role in Israeli identity. As Shapira argues,

> In a society were a considerable portion of the young are native Israelis or even the off-spring of native Israelis, there is no longer any need to prop up the attachment to the land with genealogical charts or a "book memory."[6]

Like Shaked, Shapira is also disappointed with the new generation's lack of interest in the Bible, and concludes her article with the question "Is there a way to restore the Bible to the focus of Hebrew Culture?"

The research that I have highlighted above does not necessarily argue that contemporary Hebrew literature does not make a single reference to the Bible. On the contrary, many of the poems, articles, songs, and novels that are in circulation today make use of biblical references and language and affirm or contest this canonical text. Malka Shaked's exhaustive project, for example, attests to the continuous dialogue with the Bible in Hebrew poetry, as does the special volume of the *AJS Review* titled *Recreating the Canon: The Presence of the Bible in Israeli Literature and Culture*, which featured several of the articles that I cite here.[7] What is evident, however, especially with regard to geographical descriptions, is that biblical references are no longer perceived as literary conventions that blend seamlessly into contemporary texts. Rather, their presence in a literary text is often very noticeable and less conventional. The decrease in the use of biblical phrases in literary texts, as well as changing literary conventions and a shifting cultural climate, has rendered biblical intertextuality even more salient.

In an article published in *Recreating the Canon*, Avraham Balban argues that "postmodernist Hebrew fiction depicts protagonists for whom the Bible, its language, and its characters, form no part in their experience and *Weltanschauung*." Intertextuality with the Bible, he argues, was once considered as a way to

[5] M. Shaked, לנגנך אנגן, p. 18.

[6] A. Shapira, המקרא והזהות הישראלית (The Bible and Israeli identity; Jerusalem: Magnes, 2005). The quote is from Anita Shapira's English article, "The Bible and Israeli Identity," *AJS Review* 28:1 (2004): 41.

[7] *Recreating the Canon: The Presence of the Bible in Israeli Literature and Culture*, ed. N. Aschkenasi, *AJS Review* 28:1 (2004).

> amplify the text and broaden its meaning. The new authors, on the other hand, refer their readers to modern texts, and make use of colloquial expressions and phrases that are taken from popular media in order to stress the "textuality" of their characters and as a means of flattening the language and the reality it reflects.[8]

He further argues that postmodernist Hebrew literature defines itself by

> emphasizing the arbitrary, accidental nature of existence and the flat, one level quality of its texts, render the biblical content irrelevant … Yet, the Bible is not altogether absent from postmodernist Hebrew fiction. As the works of [Meir] Shalev and Nurit Zarhi attest, it survives in places where it does not conflict with central postmodernist trends, but rather complements them.[9]

Although Balaban advances a very inclusive definition of postmodern literature which seems to take into consideration many different trends in contemporary Hebrew prose, his observations nevertheless highlight the continued presence of the Bible in contemporary texts.

The Bible's textual presence notwithstanding, over the years Hebrew literature and culture has also accumulated a large body of descriptions of Israeli locations, developing a new language in which to write the land. Moreover, contemporary Israeli readers are familiar with their space, or at least with their own local place. Their native relation to the land no longer requires the mediation of old texts or a national ideology in order to feel at home when reading about their place. In today's secular Israeli culture, the homeland is no longer the text, nor does the text necessarily serve as a bridge between the ideal and the real land. There is no longer any need to question the gap between these two conceptions of place, to find ways to justify Zionism, or to unify the nation through the text.[10] Rather I argue that, in addition to the postmodern conventions that Balaban pointed out, Israeli literature's relation to the Bible should be read in the context of shifts in Israeli perspectives with regard to the connection between the biblical text and the Land of Israel, the meaning of home and place, and the ways in which these terms and their interrelation affect the definition of

[8] A. Balban, "Biblical Allusions in Modern and Postmodern Hebrew Literature," *AJS Review* 28:1 (2004): 198.
[9] A. Balaban, "Biblical Allusions," pp. 202–203.
[10] I am not referring here to anti-Zionism. Hebrew literature for the most part does not question the legitimacy of living in Israel, but rather takes Israel's existence for granted. In the works of Maya Arad or Ronit Matalon, for example, Israeli identity is strong and stable enough to allow for the option of alternative homes without threatening national literary boundaries.

Israeli identity/identities. *Husband and Wife*[11] and *Snapshots*,[12] the two novels that I will discuss in this paper, explicitly reflect and participate in this cultural context, by weaving together questions of text, territory and gender.

The changing status of the Bible in Israeli literature presents a particular challenge for women writers who attempt to gain a foothold in a place previously denied to them in a literary space dominated by male voices.[13] Traditionally, Jewish women have enjoyed limited access to the religious textual tradition, a fact which defined their participation in the late nineteenth century revival of modern Hebrew literature, at a time when writers were expected to be familiar with the Jewish bookcase and refer to it in their work.[14]

Women writers are now actively conversing with the Bible in Hebrew literature not only by adopting certain stylistic conventions but also by functioning as innovators and participating in a polemical discussion with the Bible, its values and status in Israeli culture. Shulamit Hareven's *Desert Trilogy*, for example, situates women writers in the tradition of Abraham Mapu, David Frishman, and Haim Hazaz, and at the same time, it confronts and challenges the value of biblical myths.[15] As Yael Feldman argues, Harveven evinced in her later work

> a women's protest against the core myth of monotheism, paternal aggression. By so doing she has joined by default the camp of feminist pacifism that was initiated half a century earlier by Virginia Wolf and has recently been resurrected by both women on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.[16]

[11] Z. Shalev, בעל ואישה (Tel Aviv: Keshet Press, 2000). In English translation: Z. Shalev, *Husband and Wife* (trans. D. Bilu; New York: Grove Press, 2003).
[12] M. Govrin, תמונות (Snapshots; Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2002).
[13] On the major changes in the quantity, quality, and acceptance of women's prose and on the relationships between gender and Zionist ideology, see Y. S. Feldman, *No Room of Their Own: Gender and Nation in Israeli Women's Fiction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999) and Y. S. Feldman, "Feminism Under Siege: The Vicarious Selves of Israeli Women Writer," in *Israeli Women Studies: A Reader*, ed. E. Fuchs (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2005), pp. 317–328.
[14] The conventions of *melitsa*, *nusach*, and the rejection of the *nusach* relied on the education and knowledge of Jewish men. See, for example, the discussion of this issue in M. Gluzman, *The Politics of Canonicity: Lines of Resistance in Modernist Hebrew Poetry* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 107–117.
[15] S. Hareven, עמאין: שלושת המדבר (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1996); in English translation: S. Hareven, *Thirst: The Desert Trilogy* (trans. H. Halkin; San Francisco, Calif.: Mercury House, 1996).
[16] Y. S. Feldman, *No Room*, p. 176. On the particular use of and challenge to the Bible by Israeli women, see Y. S. Feldman, "'A People that Dwells Alone?' Toward Subversion of the Fathers' Tongue in Israeli Women's Fiction," in *Recreating the Canon*, *AJS Review* 28:1 (2004): 83–103.

Similarly, Shalev and Govrin's work demonstrates too that not all women writers are willing—now that they finally can be part of the Jewish intertextual tradition and present alternative national narratives and perspectives—to adopt a mundane, colloquial literary register and refrain from intertextuality with the Bible. Rather, underscoring biblical myths and themes becomes a way for women writers to participate in the ideological and cultural discourse on Israel's political reality.

Although early Hebrew women writers were working from within Zionism's shift from text to place, they were not entirely included—or included themselves—in the nation-building literature that redefined the link between text and place. As Dan Miron and others have argued, women's writing in this period was often read as personal and particular,[17] or to quote Hamutal Tsamir, their works were read "as metonyms rather than as metaphors for the collective," namely, their works were read as portraits of individual lives in the community but not as representations of the nation as a whole.[18] The contemporary literary trend of focusing on the local and mundane invites texts that were once perceived as "feminine" and "personal" into the national literary fold, but it also presents a challenge for women writers who would like to revisit and correct these traditional roles and readings and assert their protagonists as metaphors for the collective. The complex relation between postmodern conventions, Zionism, and gender is discussed extensively in Feldman's book *No Room of Their Own*. Feldman argues, for example, that Orly Castel Bloom's novel *Dolly City*

> is deeply anchored in Zionist realities. The novel conducts a dialogue—albeit through parody—with the foundational Zionist texts … as well as with major Hebrew/Jewish (as well as Zionist) paradigm, the akedah.… At the same time it also takes feminism to task: to the extent that this unorthodox akedah is carried out by Dolly (a single mother of sorts), the plot may be read as a feminist appropriation of a traditionally patriarchal role. Yet the narrative perspective takes away what the plot may seem to imply, undercutting any delusion of meaningful crossing over of gender boundaries within the Zionist metanarrative—itself an object of debunking and deconstruction. In the final

[17] D. Miron, אמהות מיסדות, אחיות חורגות: על שתי המחלוקות בשירה הארצישראלית המודרנית (Founding mothers, step-sisters: The emergence of the first Hebrew poetesses and other essays; Tel Aviv: Hakibutz Hameuchad, 1991), p. 67.

[18] H. Tsamir, בשם הנוף: לאומיות, מגדר וסובייקטיביות בשירה הישראלית בשנות החמישים והשישים (In the name of the land: Nationalism, subjectivity and gender in the Israeli poetry of the statehood generation; Jerusalem: Keter, 2005), p. 138. See also M. Gluzman, *The Politics of Canonicity*, pp. 100–105, for an elaborate discussion of the metaphors and language used in descriptions of works by modern Hebrew women.

> analysis it is the belief in the bankruptcy of all metanarratives that Castel-Bloom shares with her postmodernist male peers.[19]

What Feldman's reading uncovers is that biblical myths in their relation to Zionism and gender appear even in texts which Balaban has described as shifting away from the national paradigm.

In what follows, I will approach the novels by Shalev and Govrin as two very different examples of how biblical references in contemporary Israeli fiction permit these writers to elaborate and reflect on the relation between text, place, and gender in contemporary Israeli society from a female perspective: Shalev's *Husband and Wife* focuses primarily on human intimacy and the private life, while Govrin's *Snapshots* confronts more directly Israel's political reality.

2. The Bible in Zeruya Shalev's *Husband and Wife*

The novel *Husband and Wife*, published in 2000, tells the story of Na'ama, a social worker who is forced to accept a new reality when her husband, Udi, wakes up one morning unable to move his legs. There is no physical explanation for his condition, but soon it becomes quite clear that Udi's paralysis is a physical expression of mental stress and emotional despair. This particular morning catalyzes a series of events that reveal significant problems in the couple's relationship. Na'ama's lyrical internal monologue gives the reader a glimpse into the conflicting emotions of a woman whose marriage is falling apart and who struggles to understand and finally accept the end of a long-term relationship.

The novel *Husband and Wife* was a runaway best-seller, with more than 80,000 copies sold in Israel and over 400,000 copies sold internationally, mostly in Germany. In reviews of the novel, critics focused on Shalev's extraordinary ability to describe intimate relationships and to reveal and reach into the complicated inner world of deeply introspective female protagonists.[20] Several reviews described the characters in the book as imperfect individuals who struggle to function in the world despite emotional conflicts and personal problems that offer no clear solution. Shalev also underscores her novels' focus on the personal and intimate and agrees that her books are largely detached from the broader cultural, political and social

[19] Y. S. Feldman, *No Room*, pp. 230–231.

[20] D. Amir, "ואלה שכבר לא יולדו לעולם" (And those who will never be born) מקור ראשון (Oct. 23, 2005).

being at home in the national place allows the narrator to question the constituting national narrative of Exodus, and to conclude toward the end of the book that it does not really matter if the events actually happened or only exist in the collective memory.[42]

Shalev's female protagonists move towards what David Ben Gurion envisioned as the step that followed nation building: "'Like the land,' Ben-Gurion noted, 'the Book opens up only to those rooted in the soil and in the living language.' Only after the people had gained a foothold in all parts of the country and revived the language of the book, 'only then will the Book open its heart and inner meaning—and the soul of the Book and the soul of the people will become one.'"[43]

3. Texts and Place in Michal Govrin's *Snapshots*

Michal Govrin's writings bring back into Hebrew literature not only an intertextuality with the Bible but also the entire Jewish bookcase. Her first novel, *The Name*, is saturated with quotes and references to Jewish texts from different periods;[44] *The Tale of the Sea* is structured in the form of Talmudic pages;[45] and *Snapshots* is a midrash on the meaning and importance of *Shmitah* in the Bible and Jewish law.[46] By including texts that the Hebrew Enlightenment and Zionism regarded as canonical texts of the Diaspora, Govrin gives a place in her work not only to Judaism but also to new, post-Zionist reflections on the link between home, homeland, and text. By breaking the dominance of the Bible as the authoritative text of the land and by breaking the dominance of Israel as the only Jewish home, *Snapshots* questions Zionism's negation of exile.[47] The novel also engages the controversial negation of Israel as the Jewish homeland as presented, for example, in George Steiner's essay, "Our Homeland the Text."[48] Steiner's article sparked a long, argumentative discussion on the associations between text, place, and no-place. Moshe Idel's response to this essay, for instance, questions Steiner's assumption that finding a home in the text necessarily implies mobility or the absence of a geographical home.[49] In the context of this debate, Govrin's novel can be read as a rethinking of the correlations between text(s), territory, mobility, and home within the possibilities and limits of a fictional work.

Snapshots is the confession of a woman who betrayed her father's Zionist narrative by moving from Israel to wander through Europe, Israel, and New York. Through short diary entries that the protagonist, Ilana, calls "snapshots," we follow her travels and learn about her relationships with the men in her life, especially her three major loves. The first of these is Alan, a Jewish, anti-Zionist European who is also her husband and the father of her children. He is devoted to the narrative of the Diaspora and to preserving the memory of the Jewish world that perished in the Holocaust. Through Alan, Ilana is introduced to Jewish life in the Diaspora; over time, he comes to represent the new home she builds outside of Israel. He is also the place to which she returns from her journeys. The second man in her life is her lover Said, a Palestinian artist with whom she has collaborated on a peace project and who represents the Palestinian narrative. Though the two share a strong attraction, their relationship is largely noncommittal. Finally, the third, significant male presence in Ilana's life is her father and his love of the land and commitment to Zionism. Despite the backdrop of

[42] Z. Shalev, הדרה, p. 456.
[43] A. Shapira, "*The Bible*," p. 24.
[44] M. Govrin, השם (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad/Siman Kriah, 1995); in English translation: M. Govrin, *The Name* (trans. B. Harshav; New York: Riverhead Books, 1998). Nizan Keren reads *The Name* as "a series of challenges to the dominant hegemonic order in the name of subversive women's culture." See, N. Keren, "In the Name of the Mother: Women's Discourse—Women's Prayer in Michal Govrin's *The Name*," *Nashim* 10 (2005): 126–135.
[45] M. Govrin, מעשה הים: כרוניקה פרוש (The making of the sea: Chronicle of an exegesis; Tel Aviv: Carmel, 2000). Rachel Feldhay Brenner points to the novel's complex dialogue between western and Jewish sources in her article: "העולם בלשון: מעשי הישנות וחידוש—על מעשה הים: כרוניקה פרוש מאת מיכל עוברין" (The world in language: Repetition and renewal in *The Making of the Sea: Chronicle of an Exegesis* by Michal Govrin) *Resling* 8:1 (2001): 99–103.
[46] Govrin provides the following explanation about *Shmitah*: "Every seven years, in the year of *Shmitah*, the fences around the property have to be destroyed, everybody has to be given food from its produce … the poor, the neighbor, the foreigner, even the beasts of the land … to let go of ownership" p. 92. English translation by B. Harshav (see footnote 50).

[47] On changing Israeli perspectives on the negation of exile, see Anita Shapira's article, "לאן הלכה שלילת הגלות?" (Where did the negation of exile go?) אלפיים 25 (2003): 9–54.
[48] G. Steiner, "Our Homeland, The Text," in *No Passion Spent: Essays 1978–1995* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 304–327. For Heine and Stein, text "becomes a space in which collective identity can be formed without territory, and consequently it can be a metaphor for exile and homelessness"; See C. E. Fonrobert and V. Shemtov, "Introduction," p. 3.
[49] "The main gist of my argument, however, is not only a historical one.… My question has to do more with Steiner's insistence that the text is the Jews' homeland, on one hand, and his emphasis on mobility, on the other. Without entering into the question as to the identity of the text that was addressed in the polemical reappraisal by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, let me merely point out the possibility that being absorbed in studying texts may also cause a quite unintended result. In my opinion, it is precisely because some Jewish elites were so concerned with studying texts for part of their religious life that geographical mobility became much less important. If the homeland may be a text, someone is always at home with or without any kind of geographical dislocation. Books, by their nature represent the very opposite of the readers' necessity to travel.… Creativity and the critical acumen do not belong to the movement of the feet but, I suspect, to the movement of the mind." M. Idel, "George Steiner: A Prophet of Abstraction," *Modern Judaism* 25:2 (2005): 109–140.

the Gulf War and the complexity of the three male narratives, Ilana tries to create her own connection to Israel, a connection that will be based on her own experiences and reading of Jewish texts but will not exclude the Diasporic and Palestinian narratives.

Ilana's search for a sense of home is also an attempt to consolidate the concepts of home and wandering, which the novel presents through their ties to Jewish sources. The connection to Israel as a Jewish home is often expressed in her father's words: words he once said, what she anticipated he would say at a given moment, and the writings that he left behind when he died. These sections concerning her father underscore Ilana's Zionist heritage and its strong relation to biblical sources. In drafts of letters left by her father, for example, she finds his confession that in difficult personal moments he finds comfort in reading what the Scriptures say about "our land and its heritage."[50]

In these snapshots, the Bible becomes a part of Ilana's monologue and allows her to present her thoughts and feelings in the context of her religious and cultural tradition:

> Father, how to tell you that what you bequeathed me, in a genetic mutation of generations—beyond the Zionist interim, beyond the thin layer of connection to the Land of Israel—is that passion for wandering. A passion no structure I built could stop. No architectural plan, in spite of all the prizes. Not even the Falling Sukkah of David I'm putting up now, in the shadow of the rocket launchers going up in Iraq.
>
> The curse of wandering. The "stigmata," Father. That madness to run away, to be uprooted. Cain unable to hide, vomited up again and again to Nineveh from the belly of Leviathan. Like Isaac turning into a dove, flying off the altar and the wood and the fire, before his soul would pass away....
>
> Genes infected with waste go on unloading the disease to the third, the tenth generation. The ancient legacy we've inherited, we shall leave, we shall sing, we shall shed. (If any heir remains at all, somebody who will continue our mysterious story, who'll collect the tatters.)
>
> And the Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; and there thou shalt serve other gods which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, even wood and stone. And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest....
>
> (The obsession with "sources" lately.... The fingers reach for pages of the Bible, the Mishnah, the Gemarah. Sink into the forgotten tongue. Formulating a kind of "Laws of Sukkah" rather than an architectural sketch)[51]

[50] M. Govrin, הבוקים, p. 221.

[51] M. Govrin, הבוקים, p.37. In this passage, Govrin evokes Leon Pinsker's well-known metaphor of exile as illness. However, unlike many Zionist thinkers, she sees it as an incurable illness. The establishment of Israel failed to put an end to Jewish wandering. On Jewish and Israeli wandering, see V. Shemtov, "Between Perspectives of Space: A Reading in Yehuda Amichai's 'Jewish Travel' and 'Israeli Travel,'" *Jewish Social Studies* 11:3 (2005): 141–161.

Ilana's attempt to define a new Israeli identity remains as snapshots of ideas that are found in her belongings after she unexpectedly dies in a car crash in Europe. She addresses the entire diary to her father:

> I owe you an explanation, Father, a belated one, of my leaving, "Ilana's desertion"—what finished you. You didn't understand why I didn't come back to finish school in Israel. I, your pride and joy, "the second generation of builders." I've got to try to explain to you (in the rattling taxi), the need to leave everything that was dear to you, the "love of Israel." The constraints of Alain's work or of mine (what you called "Ilana's wanderings") and the heaps of ideology were only excuses (as you always knew).
>
> ... Everything was just to get as far away as possible from your story, Father. To live on the other side of the century the story of our wanderings.[52]

Ilana, much like Zeruya Shalev's Udi, has a profession that closely involves physical space, and also bridges the past and present. In Israel, Ilana lives in Jerusalem, where she works as an architect and bases her designs on the concept of *Shmitah* and the architecture of the *sukkah*, the hut that symbolizes the Israelites' wandering in the desert. While working on a project, she comes up with an architectural model for a yeshiva for Jewish refugees from the Soviet Union. In the course of her research for the yeshiva, she overcomes her initial cynicism with respect to Judaism and Jewish texts and discovers in these texts a new model for a Jerusalem monument: "In the Talmudic discourse one can find the most radical relations between the people and the land, an unnatural connection!" Ilana's discovery leads to what she calls an "architecture of nomads" and to the challenge of creating a monument that not only will serve commemorative purposes but also will create new relations to place. The return to biblical sources is not obvious or expected, but rather requires an explanation, a context that will make the reference to Jewish texts relevant to a contemporary novel.[53]

Ilana explains what she finds in the Talmud as follows:

> Look at the discussion [in Hebrew: Talmudic discussion] of my students of Shmitah or the laws of Sukkah. Here you can find the most radical definition of the relationship between nation and land, an unnatural relationship!" I went back to bed, continuing the concentrated lesson in Judaism. "There's a precise formulation here of my old uneasiness with the Zionist story with all the love of the Land steeped in paganism or German Romanticism. That's a definition

[52] M. Govrin, הבוקים, p. 23.

[53] M. Govrin, הבוקים, p. 91.

> of place with no possibility of owning it. As it says in the wonderful chapter of Leviticus, 'for the land is mine.' Mine, God's, not man's. The land doesn't belong to anybody! It was given as a promise to the nation that came to it from far away, and the promise is 'on condition.' It will be kept only if the nation is at an ethical level that will justify it. Otherwise the nation will be sent into exile. And how do you stay conscious of that condition? By the laws of Shmitah.[54]

Ilana continues by describing the idea for the monument as a sukkah:

> Think about a place that can't be owned [in Hebrew: *liv'ol*]! Especially the Land of Israel, Jerusalem, the place everybody wants to conquer, to own! Jerusalem, the longed-for city, the woman, the place of yearning … to let go of her…
> … Working from the start on an idea of an 'anti-monument'—'a Sukkah.' A rickety place, not monumental, and not to look at it from outside, but sit in it, live in it. Trying to develop in today's terms the notion of Shmitah, letting go.[55]

Govrin presents Ilana's new ideological design in a conversation that takes place in the middle of a sex scene. The words *ba'alut* (ownership) and *be'ilah* ("taking possession," in the biblical sense), which share a root in Hebrew, relate to both sex and territory; this linguistic tie not only establishes a connection between the sex scene and the dialogue, but also frames territorial possession from a male perspective on place.

This sex scene is a key to understanding the ways in which *be'ilah* and *Shmitah* define the connection to the land and women. Ilana's ability to move and leave, as well as her expectation that a man provide emotional and physical intimacy but also be able to let her go, parallels her idea of the land. In this scene, Govrin draws on the old metaphor of the land as woman and woman as the land. In their traditional usage, these metaphors reflect a clear gender hierarchy with respect to place and nation. Hamutal Tsamir has recently offered an intriguing discussion of this metaphor in the context of Hebrew literature:

> The nationalist metaphor of woman as land in particular is a central site of such displacement and relegation, in fact, a "no-place." Moreover, as Page duBois convincingly shows, the operation of this metaphor in Western modern culture is tightly connected not only with nationalism but also with

[54] M. Govrin, הבוזקים, p. 92.
[55] M. Govrin, הבוזקים, p. 93.

> capitalism and bourgeois economy, as it marks—or rather, reveals—a point of convergence between the land and women as men's property and commodity.
>
> Accordingly, this metaphor is a major point of departure for female writers, one of the few "places" from which they can write—especially in a modern national Jewish literature preoccupied with territorialization and with transforming the *idea* of a land into (or replacing it with) a real, concrete, material land (through conquest, purchase, cultivation, betrothal, Be'ilah, etc.). Female poets use this metaphor—overturn, parody, realize it, etc.—so as to escape, cancel, or "do away" with it, in order to overcome the representational exclusion and resist their objectification, symbolization, and particularization by the masculinist-nationalist narrative. In order to be subjects, to turn themselves from "signified" to "signifier," from a metaphor to "human being"—to become and to be seen as real and representative—they need to concretize and expose the very mechanism that objectifies and excludes them.[56]

The male characters in Govrin's book explicitly create connections between the land and women.[57] Said, Ilana's Palestinian lover, explains to her that the land "is a mother and a woman. For us, a woman does not have a few husbands. A man with many women—that's possible." His words are followed by a song that calls for a violent war to free the motherland—the beloved land—and restore her honor.[58] Ilana characterizes her father's relation to the land as a sexual conquest, through which he has planted the seeds that will allow the motherland to give birth to a new Jewish man.[59]

The idea of *Shmitah* instead of *be'ilah*, or conquest, is Govrin's way of resisting the objectification of "the land as woman" metaphor. Although Govrin does not repudiate this metaphor, she does alter it in order to express the possibility of an independent, free woman/land. In the aforementioned sex scene, Ilana says:

> "Impossible to be in the Land without letting go of it [in Hebrew: *lishmot*], without opening your hand," I reached out my hand in that movement of opening the fingers, of letting go of the hand [*Shmitat yad*], a gesture I had recently become used to doing while sketching. Claude grabbed my hand and hovered his lips over it.
> "That's only on condition, Claude, remember…"
> "I've already let go [in Hebrew: *shomet*]."
> We laughed.[60]

[56] H. Tsamir, בשם הנוף, p. 140 (English translation provided by H. Tsamir).
[57] In an interview with Daliah Karpel for *Ha'aretz*, Govrin talks about (refers to) Jerusalem as both a woman and an erotic city. Understanding this aspect of Jerusalem is, according to Govrin, essential for understanding Israel's current political conflict and even anti-Semitism. D. Karpel "תשעה קבין סקס" (Nine portions of sex) *Ha'aretz* (April 19, 2002).
[58] M. Govrin, הבוזקים, p. 195.
[59] M. Govrin, הבוזקים, p. 42.
[60] M. Govrin, הבוזקים, pp. 92–93.

This sexual, but less hierarchical, relationship between men and women, as well as the land and its inhabitants, allows for a new association with the land, one that is more open and inclusive. Govrin presents the land as woman and woman as land *and* place. She turns the female body into the place that embodies, carries, and materializes Palestinian, Israeli, and Diasporic identities. At the end of the novel, Ilana discovers that she is pregnant, but she is not sure if the child is Said's or her husband's. While awaiting the lab results, she imagines that the child is born of her own father's seed. She imagines that she has licked his seed with her tongue and swallowed it, thereby turning herself into the motherland.[61] The true identity of the father of Ilana's child is never revealed in the story, thereby leaving the impression that she is carrying all three narratives in her body. In death, Ilana becomes what she always desired her monument to be: a place in which different identities meet; a place that is open and inclusive.[62]

By breaking the traditional perception of woman as a stable home and replacing it with a non-monogamous, transient female protagonist, Govrin creates a female protagonist who comes to symbolize not only the land but also the text. The novel does not begin with a date, as one would expect from a diary, but rather with a specific location. By plotting her novel in terms of geography, Govrin emphasizes mobility and presents Ilana as a collection of unfinished travel notes that do not tie her to any one place. Instead, Ilana becomes a metaphor for both home and homelessness. By expanding the metaphor of woman as land to encompass woman as text, Govrin makes room for women to participate in both Zionist and Diasporic discourses.

As the story of *Snapshots* progresses, it becomes clear that Ilana's father was not the only one who had trouble letting go of Ilana and accepting her *galut*. Ilana herself was not ready to leave her father and Israel behind. Before her departure from Israel, she realizes that, despite her theories and ideologies, she can not avoid what she calls "the primitive feeling" of belonging to a place and loving it. By using the word "place," which in Hebrew is masculine, rather than "land," which is feminine, Ilana expresses

[61] M. Govrin, *הבובקים*, p. 375.

[62] Turning Ilana into place or home also draws on the traditional Jewish metaphor of the woman as house. See C. E. Fonrobert, "The Women as House: Conceptions of Women's Corporeality in Talmudic Literature" in her book *Menstrual Purity: Rabbinic and Christian Reconstructions of Biblical Gender* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000). Fonrobert argues that the metaphors in Talmudic literature serve the ideological objectives of the Rabbinic movement in that the wife as house, as interiority is bound to the house. But in Govrin's novel, the metaphor receives a new meaning with Ilana who eludes objectification by being a home that moves constantly, thereby representing both wandering and intimacy, interior and exterior.

her attachment to Israel in terms of heterosexual love. And it is only after she feels this sense of belonging to Israeli place that Ilana can let go and return to Europe.[63]

However, Ilana's *shemitah* ultimately has no future; we later learn that she dies in Europe. With the love of the land also comes an understanding that the beloved may not be willing to open its hand and let go. However, Ilana's decision to let go of Israel and to return to Europe is neither naïve nor optimistic. Although her need to let go of a beloved and familiar land is presented as a moral and ideological choice, her death in Europe ultimately questions the future that awaits those who do let go. What seems to be the right thing to do in theory proves to be dangerous and ultimately fatal in practice.

This gap between the ideal and reality also reverberates throughout the novel in the building of a peace monument against the backdrop of violence, a project she embarks on with her lover Said. Through this shared experience, Ilana comes to realize that Said cannot or does not want to find the same kind of openness, of *Shmitah*, in his own national narrative. As Yochai Oppenheimer observed in his review of *Snapshots*,

> its attempt to retell the national struggle from a new perspective is sensitive to the ideological-emotional complexity of the opposition between melancholy and utopia, in which the one-sided imaginary, almost-unreal dialogue between the members of the peace movement [in Israel] and the Palestinians takes place.[64]

Zeruya Shalev and Michal Govrin's novels are two distinct attempts to answer Shapira's question: "Is there a way to restore the Bible to the focus of Hebrew Culture?" Shapira's query, which opened this essay, reflects nostalgia for the Bible and what it represented in Israeli culture, especially after the establishment of the State. Shapira's nostalgia, Yitzhak La'or argues, is for a Zionist utopia and for a collective language, goals, and ideology.[65] Hers is a nostalgia for a collective ideology of the place in particular and not just the text.

[63] M. Govrin, *הבובקים*, p. 212.

[64] Y. Oppenheimer, "*החיים הכפולים של האושיפיה*" (The double life of utopia) *Ha'aretz* (May 6, 2002). On the gap between ideal and real aspirations towards place, see also M. Govrin, "Layers of Changing Space in Jerusalem: View from a Hilltop," in this volume, p. 388: "What is the space that will make a place for the complexity of otherness, sufficiently multilayered to enable the co-existence of fully distinct 'others'?"

[65] I. La'or, "*שמשון חיטר בשתי רגליו היה*" (Samson was lame in both legs; review of Anita Shapira, *The Bible in Israeli Identity*), *Ha'aretz* (April 1, 2006).

Shalev and Govrin are not trying to restore this utopia. Each tries to find, in her own way, a place for the Bible in a contemporary Israeli context. Both authors look for feminine models as ways to break away from Zionism's association of the Bible with Eretz Israel. It is too early to say if these works will lead to a new trend in Hebrew women's literature, but these works definitely offer new directions for reflecting a post-Zionist—but not anti-Zionist reality. The postmodern convention of avoiding biblical language and themes should not be read, then, as the end of intertextuality with the Bible. In contemporary Israeli writing, rather, references to the Bible call our attention, provoke our thinking about the relationship between old and new texts, and can lead to fascinating novels that restore the intriguing and longstanding tradition of rethinking the relation between text, utopia, and local space in Jewish thought and literature.