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Nancy E. Berg

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The Politics of Paternity and Patrimony¹

Nancy E. Berg
Washington University in St. Louis

This article reassesses the characterization of Hebrew literature as a literature of fathers and sons. It argues that not only is the image of the father more complicated in the “classic” texts than is typically noted, but that the father continues to be significant in more recent works. In these works the character of the father is often problematic—he is unnamed, unknown, or absent—and the question of paternity becomes ever more significant. The quest for a father propels many of the narratives under discussion, and can be seen as a search for roots, for identity, and for legitimacy. Connections between paternity, patrimony, lineage, and land are read against the context of politics. Ultimately the characterization of the literature is reaffirmed, although there is no attempt to claim it as all-inclusive.

“And how to do it without a father? Because there is no one to take a father’s place.”²

Modern Hebrew literature was once characterized as a literature of fathers and sons, reflecting the patriarchal nature of the society, as Yonah Hadari-Ramaj noted as late as 1994:

In the arena of public thought, Israeli discourse is generally one of men among themselves. A discourse of warriors, **fathers and sons**, of buddies and even of

¹An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Israeli Literature: Politics and Nation conference at the University of Minnesota, April 7, 2002.

²A. B. Yehoshua, *Mar Mani* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1990), p. 310.

rivals, and so on. In the main, the discourse is still that of the pioneering Ashkenazi Jew, the white, blond, pure-in-deed male . . . his acts and words . . .³

The canonical texts helped form a narrative about the founding fathers and their native born sons, who were often farmers or soldiers. Many writers used the story of the *akedah*, the binding of Isaac, as a template to establish the legitimacy of their claim to the land. In the literary application—unlike the biblical account—the story is often fully realized.⁴ The Isaac figure is sacrificed on the altar of Zionism. Within a generation of the establishment of the state, the same story was used to question both the myth and its legitimizing function. Paradoxically, at the same time the father-son story was dominating the Hebrew narrative, the Zionist pioneers and their fictional representations were promoting a clean break from the past, thus severing the bond between parent and child.

Certainly the inclusion of new voices and preoccupations previously relegated to the margins has transformed the literary landscape and calls for new characterizations. But when one rereads the earlier works—the classics—we see that the father-son duo is not unequivocally dominant, and that the literature privileges the son over the father. Yet the figure of the father looms large then and now. Especially now, fathers absent, impotent, and unnamed or unknown populate the literature. The questions of paternity and patrimony—and the quest for the father—can be seen as a search for roots for the literature, as well as for the society, roots deliberately cast off and abandoned in the past.

Fathers' sons broke from the past and, as pioneers, threw off the exilic yoke of their shtetl or bourgeois fathers to fulfill Zionist dreams. Fathers' sons wrote their stories. Moshe Shamir's characters Uri and Elik have become the

³Yona Hadari-Ramaj, *Thinking It Over: Conflicts in Israeli Public Thought* (Ramat Efal: Yad Tabenkin and Yediot Aharonot, 1994), p. 20 [emphasis added]. See also Amos Elon's classic *The Israelis: Founders and Sons* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971).

⁴Stanley Nash wrote about the trope of the *akedah* as reflecting different stages and frames of mind in Israeli literature in *Edebiyat* 11 (1977): 29–40. More recent articles include Yael Feldman, "Isaac or Oedipus? Jewish Tradition and the Israeli *Akedah*," in Cheryl Exum and Stephen Moore, eds., *Biblical Studies/ Cultural Studies: The Third Sheffield Colloquium* (Sheffield University Press, 1998), pp. 159–189; Avi Sagi, "The Meaning of the *Akedah* in Israeli Culture and Jewish Tradition," *Israel Studies* (March 1998); Ruth Kartton-Blum, "A Double Bind: The Sacrifice of Isaac as a Paradigm in Modern Hebrew Poetry," in *Profane Scriptures* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1999), among others.

iconic figures for this part of the Zionist narrative.⁵ Elik stars in *B'Mo Yadav* (With His Own Hands),⁶ a memory book disguised as a novel based on the life of the author's brother. The protagonist is the prototypical Sabra—tall, handsome and heroic with the requisite *blurit* (forelock). From his preference for manual labor to his devotion to a stray dog, he is as different from the image of an exilic Jew as possible. The book opens with the oft-cited sentence: "*Elik nolah min ha yam*" (Elik was born of the sea). Elik represents the new start, the new Hebrew without any ties to the *galut*. The passage continues with alternative birth stories: "We found you in a barrel that the sea washed ashore. We turned you up inside a cauliflower, a big one. Actually we found you among the Bedouins in the desert" (p. 1). The family birth myths emphasize the boy's affinity with nature: the sea, agriculture, and the people who live in its bosom. Ironically the sentence used as shorthand to declare a break from the past begins a book embedded in family. The parents are the ones who tell these stories only to refute them with passionate denial: "No, no, no. You're ours, you're our little boy. You're ours" (p. 1). Furthermore, the book is authored by the main character's older brother, in homage to Elik, who died fighting for the land. Elik is at once larger than life and representative of his whole generation. He earns the land by dying. And yet ironically, there is no one for him to bequeath it to.

As in other texts of this genre, the father-son relationship is fairly straightforward, and the usual Oedipal-like patterns of intergenerational conflict are suspended. Both generations are working toward fulfilling the ideals of Zionism. The character and his sacrifice are idealized. Any irony inferred by the reader is external to the text itself.

The title question of Hanoch Bartov's 1970 novel, *Shel Mi Atah, Yeled?* (Whose boy are you?)⁷ echoes the beginning of *B'Mo Yadav*. It is answered in several different ways throughout the book.

When asked by his neighbor Mr. Blackman, the protagonist answers naively, directly, profoundly: "*shel imma vshel abba*" (my mother's and my father's) (p. 14). Mr. Blackman jokes that the boy comes from the Bedouins who sold him and calls him *arabchik*:

⁵See, for example, Gershon Shaked, "Born of the Sea: The Hero in Modern Hebrew Fiction," *Ariel* 65 (1988): 4–21.

⁶Moshe Shamir, *B'Mo Yadav* (Merhavaya: Sifriyat Poalim, 1951) [my translations].

⁷Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1970. Translated by Hillel Halkin (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1978). Quotations from the translation.

That's what you think *oremer kind*—poor child! That's what you think! The truth is that they bought you. Yes, bought you! See for yourself. Just look at your hair. It's like a Bedouin's. And your eyes! Does your father have eyes like yours? Eh? Does your mother? And your face! Just touch it with a finger and black comes off like chimney soot. I may be Black man, but you're really black. They bought you from the Bedouin. Yes they did. (p. 13)

The neighbor's joke preys on a child's psychological fear of not belonging, as well as the Jew's apprehension of the other. It also echoes Elik's characterization as a Bedouin.

His father claims him in Biblical overtones: "our son, our only one" (p. 15), paraphrasing the words Abraham uses regarding his son Isaac. "You're ours, of course you are" (p. 16), he reassures him. Later, the boy is shamed by being identified as his father's son, when his classmates at the religious school mock him and his father. Still later, his father tries to instill a sense of Jewish identity in the son, to root him, to bring him up not "to live as if he's sprung out of nowhere" (p. 228).

The same neighbor who teases him with tales of Bedouins tries to claim the boy as his own by asserting his rights as a *cohen* (someone descended from the priestly class) to the first born. "You'll be our kaddish," he says to the boy, resolving an older man's anxiety of being childless. Mr. Blackman has inherited his status as a *cohen* and thus his alleged rights.

The boy's identity is positioned at the crossroads of tradition and ideology. His original answer—my mother's and my father's—becomes more complex as the story unfolds. His father changes through the narrative, going through phases of being more and then less religious, from shopkeeper to Talmud Torah teacher, to construction worker (from secular bourgeois to religious and then to proletarian), from able to disabled. In the last answer provided by the narrative, after the father has been permanently injured in a construction accident, he admonishes his son: "From whence comest thou? From a putrid drop" (p. 336).⁸

The boy's perspective also changes as he grows up and begins to see the man through other's eyes. This is most extreme at the traditional school where he begins his formal education.

Now his father's stature seemed to shrink from day to day. . . . His father's humiliation was his too. Worse yet, against his will he was beginning to think of his father the way the boys did and to call him Shpiegeleh in his mind. He measured his father with critical eyes: Rabbi Kutter was a good two heads taller and even

⁸Pirkei Avot, chapter 3, verse 1.

Kashani looked as though he could finish him off with one blow. . . . A wall had gone up between him and his father. (pp. 113, 115, 116)

He himself fantasizes that he is the prince banished from his father's palace in the midrashic allegories of exile. Such stories generally cast the father as God and the banished prince as the children of Israel sent into exile. This is clearly an ironic use by the native-born Israeli, a child of Zionists who deliberately left their fathers' homes. The story that is referenced is balanced by another.

In school they had read a story about a man who had bequeathed a buried treasure to his son, who dug and dug for it without finding a thing until he finally came to understand that his father was alluding to the earth itself and to the wealth of those who worked it. (p. 159)

The motif of inheritance—and more specifically, the land as inheritance—recurs throughout many of these narratives. The central character of Shamir's play *Ha Yoresh* (The Heir)⁹ inherits the mantle from Uri and Elik, a native born Israeli (Sabra), but shrugs it off. Unlike the earlier pioneers, this protagonist did not have to break from his father because the father was never there. His father's absence leaves an emptiness the protagonist tries to fill by adopting new identities. Although given the name Wolf Cohen at birth, he changes it to Yigal Bernas. Like James Joyce's adolescent artist, he:

attempts to renounce the name of the father and claim his own name and identity, but names are always already part of a genealogy are always already the name of the father. [This attempt] is both facilitated and frustrated by the 'double law of the name' that creates the illusion that the proper name signifies an individuality, but always expresses this individuality in reference to the name of the father.¹⁰

He has replaced a name that is vaguely old-world for one that is unmistakably Euro-Israeli. It is not far into the text of the play, however, before he takes on another identity. He returns to his birth name, but not his original identity. This time he masquerades as another Wolf Cohen, now deceased. The dead man was born in Schwartzheim, Germany ten years before our protagonist was born in Tel Aviv. The older Wolf Cohen was both a Holocaust survivor and orphan whose left hand was paralyzed.

⁹Tel Aviv: Or Am, 1989.

¹⁰Kent Baxter, "Making a Name for Himself: Paternity, Joyce and Stephen's Adolescent Identity Crisis," in Eva Paulino Bueno, Terry Caesar, and William Hummel, eds., *Naming the Father: Legacies, Genealogies, and Explorations of Fatherhood in Modern and Contemporary Literature* (Lanham, Md: Lexington Books, 2000), p. 205. See also Derrida, *Difference in Translation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

Bernas stumbled upon this new identity when he visited his father's grave. Upset by the neglected state of the gravesite, he set out to find the relatives of those buried nearby, including those of the German Wolf Cohen. The recently deceased left behind no next of kin. As the only person who has appeared to express interest in the deceased man, Bernas is given access to his possessions, including a briefcase full of paperwork. Curious, Yigal leafs through the papers. When he discovers Cohen's application for war reparations, he decides to submit it and with the money buy a gravestone for his father's grave.

The symbolism is unmistakable. Yigal reclaims his father's name yet eschews his identity. The fraud begins with a son's desire to pay tribute to his father, a father he hardly knew and who left him no bequest. Yigal is not even certain when exactly he died. His girlfriend asks: "Your father died a long time ago?" "I don't know," the character Wolf/Yigal/Wolf answers:

I was a kid when he left the house. . . . My father was something else. In HaShomrim — you know. He was never at home. Always wandering. Hanging out among Arabs. He was like one of them—a weapon, horses, never buying cigarettes. He would roll his own. You know—licking the paper with his tongue. I don't know how he died. I don't even know exactly when or where. What does it matter? (p. 24)

Note that the character's description of his father strongly parallels the author's earlier description of his own brother Elik, and the idealized image of the New Hebrew. Meanwhile Yigal's deceit succeeds, and he finds himself awarded the reparations due the dead German. He becomes so successful at identifying with his new persona that he virtually erases his true self and in so doing denigrates the Sabra identity. He becomes his own opposite, undermining the achievement of the new Hebrew.

To fit his new identity he even woos a new girlfriend. In courting his lawyer's secretary, he asks, "Could you fall in love with a man who is German, bourgeois, exilic, a musician with a paralyzed hand—and all the rest?" (p. 57). He ironically rues his assumed identity: "How much does it cost to buy a Sabra identity card? . . . I would give all the money I have left. . . ." (p. 58).

His scheme is wildly successful; he becomes heir to several fortunes—not just those of the German Wolf Cohen's father, but also of the extended family, the father's brothers, his mother's family and of his wife who preceded the real Wolf Cohen in death. The fraud proves to be too much for him, and he unravels, confessing his deception:

"Enough!!! I am—I'm not—Wolf Cohen. . . . It's not nerves—it's not madness—I am not Wolf Cohen from Schwartzheim. I am, after all, Wolf Cohen from Tel Aviv, a native of Neve Zedek. Yes, a native of the land. A Sabra like you. A sabra

who doesn't know a word of German. Dankeschon, Bitteschon— Dankeschon, Bitteschon—that's it! I was born here, a little over a mile away. . . (p. 101)

The Sabra son, an orphan, masquerades as—of all things—a Holocaust survivor. In the end he is lost and his identity is further muddled. He finds his left hand unable to respond, paralyzed like that of the German. His proximate motive was to honor his father, just to get enough money to clean up the gravesite and pay for a stone. But of course he does not stop at that. The money is seductive, leading him further and further into the Wolf Cohen persona. He revels in his newfound importance. He is a worthy rival of the Shomer's, inverting his values and heritage. The search first for Cohen's relatives and then for their wealth mocks the traditional search for roots. Yigal digs for the proverbial buried treasure, and ends up only with dirt on his hands.

Through the character of Yigal, the play distorts and thus puts into question the figures of the Sabra, the Palmakh-era hero, and even the survivor whom he plays as pathetic. His father, a hero, and possibly a martyr for his country, turns out to be less than a model father. He neglected his son, leaving him to be a hustler and failure. The absence of his father leaves a palpable void:

For whether or not the actual father is there does not affect the perpetuation of the patriarchal culture within the psychology of the individual; absent or present, the 'father' is always in his place. His actual absence may cause confusion, or on another level, relief, but the only difference it makes is within the terms of the overall patriarchal assumption of his presence. In our culture he is just as present in his absence.¹¹

In this case an unformed identity thereby allows the creation or adoption of a new one. Yigal renounces his status as native-son and *yichus* for German war reparations, for wealth—for ill-gotten gains. Clearly the playwright's message referred to the corruptive nature of the reparations. We can see that the character of Yigal also speaks to the inadequacy of the Sabra son image, the inadequacy of the legacy because the ideology is not strong enough to continue into the second generation. Yigal is left with his father's grave and a withered hand.

The image of the *halutz* father, a strong figure with unbending principles, is often revisioned as less heroic in his role as father. Yigal's father is one of the founders, a member of Hashomrim, off in the field. His absences open

¹¹Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (New York: Random House, 1974), p. 232.

the space for his son to fill with his schemes and deceit. Uri's father Willy in Shamir's *Hu Halakh BeSadot* (He walked in the fields) is too busy with his Zionist missions to pay proper attention to his family; his wife leaves him for another man. His son impregnates one of the Teheran orphans before dying in battle. Amos Oz's character Shimshon Sheinbaum condemns his son to a spectacular death because of his uncompromising stance and high standards.¹² Some of the men have more principles than accomplishments. Yaakov Shabtai opens his novel *Zikhron Devarim*¹³ with the death of Goldman's father, an intractable ideologue. The man is so rigid in his socialist-Zionist principles that, offended by the frivolity of keeping a pet in times of austerity, he kills the neighbor's dog cruelly and brutally. We never get to know him beyond his appellation as Goldman's father and his principles.

Some of the fathers lack even the principles.

In the play *Teumim* (Twins)¹⁴ Sami Michael portrays the internal dynamics of a mixed Iraqi Jewish family in Israel as they face internal and external challenges. The father Yosef came to Israel presumably as part of *HaAliyah HaHamonit* (the mass immigration) with his mother, leaving behind his Arab father Latif. It was a preemptive strike. The situation was worsening for the Jews, and the mother decided to abandon her husband before he abandoned her. Years later with sons of his own, Yosef is torn between guilt toward his father and fear that his true identity as half-Arab will be revealed. The two sons react to the family secret in very different ways. Eytan emphasizes his Jewish identity, turning to religion as a *hozer b'tshuvah* (born again), and Erez his patriotism, serving as a paratrooper. The family heritage is one of shame and compensation; the land itself is seen as at least as tenuous as their claim to it.

"They brainwashed us," says Yosef, "until we took pride in our sons' sacrifice." He continues: "I love this house, but it is built on sand" (p. 89). The house in the play is, of course, not only the family home, but the state of Israel. In the end, the family abandons their home, much as they abandoned the family patriarch, and leave Israel to set up a new life in England.

In other stories, the fathers fail in their encounter with the realization of Zionism. David Asher's father in *Shavim Ve Shavim Yoter* (Equal and More Equal)¹⁵ is unable to maintain his status as head of the family. Sprayed with

¹²"Derekh HaRuach," in *Artzot HaTan* (Masadah, 1965).

¹³Yaakov Shabtai, *Zikhron Devarim* (Tel Aviv: HaKibbutz HaMeuchad, 1977).

¹⁴Author's manuscript, 1989.

¹⁵Sami Michael, *Shavim VeShavim Yoter* (Tel Aviv: Boostan, 1974).

DDT upon arrival from Baghdad, deemed unqualified even for day labor, he loses his health, his sight and his dignity. "Within five short minutes the new homeland succeeded on turning my father from an energetic man standing at the height of his powers into an old humiliated broken human being" (p. 15). We read of the son's distress at witnessing his father's decline into impotence and blindness.

What is father? The one taken for father. The one recognized as the true one. "Truth," the essence of fatherhood, its force as law. The "chosen" father.¹⁶

We see similar suffering in "My Father or Not" by Hanokh Bartov,¹⁷ a short story that presents fatherhood as performance rather than as biology. The story is written in the form of a psychotherapy session. We only get the voice of the person in treatment, Assaf Levitan, director general for his friend, a government minister. In the session narrated he talks about his father's demise and a startling discovery. He first speaks of his father only with the pronoun "he," virtually denying the man his individuality and denying the bond between them. He doesn't use the term "my father" until nearly half-way through the narrative, when he is describing the man in an advanced state of senescence: "An empty sack on a wheelchair, completely out of it, with a glassy gaze, saliva dripping from his twisted lip. That's all that was left of my father."

Mourning the man before his death Assaf tries to find the proper distance, alternately too detached and too involved. He describes the older man reduced to a collection of bodily fluids and functions: "now a sack of feces and a bag of urine and a catheter." Assaf portrays himself as an attentive son, finding the right old age home for his father, making sure that he is there with his friend from the old days, and defending his father—aggressively, mistakenly, inappropriately—from the dentist.

The father Katriel is remembered as one of those salt-of-the-earth types, an early settler who worked in construction—to build and be built—and held on to his socialist principles without compromise. He disapproves of his granddaughter's husband because the young man is an actor, engaged in a frivolous profession to entertain the bourgeoisie. Katriel remains faithful to his values and friends from the pioneering days of old.

¹⁶Helene Cixous and Catherine Clement, *The Newly Born Woman*, translated by Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. 103.

¹⁷Hanoch Bartov, "Lo Avi, Ken Avi," *Zen Isbl Medaber* (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Ma'ariv, 1990), pp. 123–124.

In what Assaf calls his father's last moment of clarity, the father indirectly tells Assaf that he is not his biological father. Suddenly the son understands vague family mysteries—his aunt's coldness toward him, his mother correcting him that his birthday isn't in May but rather December:

"[A]s though with a sword, he slashed what, until then, had cloaked my past like a canopy, laying bare, to the moment of my birth, my true identity." Assaf tells his therapist, "What that man . . . had suddenly freed from the depths of his senility, did not merely dumbfound me. It wrote a huge X over what had been myself until that moment. In my mind, everything was flooded with lights as after a long power blackout."

A secondary strand of the narrative, which supports the idea of fatherhood as a function rather than genetics, concerns the search for an apartment for Assaf's daughter. She is married to the actor and about to have their first child. Assaf is pressured to choose between moving back in with his ex-wife, or returning to his old room at his mother's home in order to give up his flat for the new family. After Katriel's death they discover the papers to an apartment that he—the grandfather—had put in the granddaughter's name. Thus the inheritance—the apartment as metonym for the homeland—is passed on, blood ties are proven less critical than those of family. "You have to know, bubbele," Assaf's mother tells him, "how for papa, all of his life, with all of his heart, there was only you, and that's what he used to say to me: what will remain of the Levitans? Only Assaf!"

"The mystery of paternity is just the beginning."¹⁸

The question of blood ties—the question of the "real" father—recurs in the literature. The texts generally focus on the child and his/her origin. In Shalev's *Kyamim Ahadim*, the woman Yehudit never reveals the truth of her son Zayde's parentage, allowing three men to claim paternity.¹⁹ Verging on the fantastic realism, the multiplicity is allowed to remain. Each of the men bequeaths Zayde physical characteristics, personality traits, and an inheritance.

From Moshe Rabinovitch I inherited a farm and a cowshed and yellow hair.
From Yaakov Sheinfeld I inherited a fine house, fine furnishings, empty canary cages and drooping shoulders.
And from Globerman the cattle dealer, I inherited a *knipele* of money, [the green pick up] and my gigantic feet. (p. 9)

¹⁸Geoffrey Galt Haupham, "The Business of Mourning," in Bueno, Caesar and Hummel, eds, *Naming the Father*, p. 28.

¹⁹Shalev, *Kyamim Ahadim* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1994).

Each man fulfills his role as Zayde's father—or, more accurately, as one of Zayde's fathers—in his own way. Yaakov teaches him to read, Globerman prepares him beef jerky, and Moshe plays endless games of “horrible bear” with him.

The father is thought to serve as his child's first role model of masculinity. These three “fathers” offer Zayde different models, calling the gendered quality of the father's role into question.

Yaakov, who gave up his beautiful wife for his (mostly) unrequited love of Yehudit, cooks lavish gourmet meals for the boy—three during his lifetime and one posthumously. In addition to the house and drooping shoulders he also left Zayde the set of dishes and a wonderful picture of his beautiful wife. Modest and patient, he makes Zayde a blind for watching crows and *koreblik*—paper boat—“the boat a father folds for his son” (p. 22). The man has learned the womanly skills of cooking and sewing from his worker, a former Italian prisoner of war. Until he sets all of them free in an extravagant declaration of love, Yaakov takes care of a flock of canaries. “Look what good fathers they are,” he points out to Zayde; while the mothers tend to pluck the feathers of her hatchlings to pad a new nest, the males are devoted to the little ones, feeding them and teaching them to sing.

The character Rabinovitch takes the gender shifting a step or two further. The youngest of seven boys, his mother dressed him in girl's clothes and let his hair grow into a long braid.²⁰ Having married—and been widowed from—his “twin,” he shocks the village by dressing up as her on Purim. In the end he bests Yaakov in winning Yehudit's hand. As his brother remarks: “And a boy who was a girl and wore a dress and had a braid will beat every other boy in every contest of love” (p. 209).

Globerman, the coarse cattle dealer, gives Zayde lots of advice, the benefit of his absolute views, and gifts of cash. He tries to teach Zayde all the tricks of the cattle trade, the swindles and stratagems that he learned from his father. He shows few feminine characteristics, instead, he brings out the gender crossing tendencies in Yehudit. Despite her dislike of him, she accepts Globerman's weekly visits to sit together and drink grappa.

Yehudit leaves all the stereotypical mother-worry to the three men. Having named her son Zayde (the Yiddish term for grandfather) in order to confuse and befuddle the Angel of Death, she shows no concern regarding her

²⁰“Two things remained from his childhood: he didn't bless God for not making him a woman, he didn't forget his golden hair” (p. 30).

son's safety. Instead, the three men work themselves up into a lather. Whether because of the protective quality of his name—or the advice from and the life stories of the three fathers—Zayde never engages in a committed relationship with any woman. “A son will bring a grandson, and the grandson will bring the Angel of Death,” he declares, shying away from consummating his relationship with his then (and presumably only) girlfriend. The pluralistic paternity offers Zayde an extraordinary richness of experience but ultimately retards his emotional development, leaving him lugubrious and lonely at the end of a long life.

During one of the gourmet dinners, Yaakov tells Zayde the story of a wealthy man whose children began to anticipate their inheritance too strongly. The father began hating the children the more they waited for him to die. He decided to use up their inheritance, figuring out to the last cent how much he needed until the end of his life. “He was so precise . . . he remembered to subtract the food for the fast of Gedalia and Yom Kippur . . .” (pp. 191–192). He even had an hourglass made to measure out his last days. One night two robbers came and struck the hourglass, killed the man, and stole his money, “proving the old man right. His time and his money and his life all ran out in the same moment . . . and nothing was left for his sons after him” (p. 193). In this story we have the reversal of *HaYoresb* in which Yigal denies his father to claim an inheritance. Here the father denies his children, disallowing them their inheritance, severing them from the land, and cutting the link between paternity and patrimony.

The figure of the father plays a dominant role in the writing of A. B. Yehoshua. Yehoshua has shown himself to be if not obsessed by—at least preoccupied with—the figure of the father.²¹ Most prominent is Yehoshua's tour-de-force

²¹Stanley Nash, for example, has pointed out the recurring image of the old man as a father, father figure, or father substitute in his earlier works such as “BetHilat haKayitz 1970,” “Shtikah Holekhet VNimshechet Shel Mishoret,” “HaMifaked HaAharon,” and even “Mul HaYaarot.” The father in *HaMeabev* fails to keep his family secure, ceding his role as an authority to his daughter, abandoning her to his young Palestinian worker and transgressing by sleeping with her pubescent friend. In *Gerushim Meucharim* the father returns to Israel from America to get his mad wife to agree to a divorce. The question of who gets the family home is significant. In the end, the father becomes his wife—much as Moshe Rabinovitch became his late wife—by putting on her dress. The protagonist of *Shivah MeHodu*, the son of another emotionally distant father, falls for his intended's mother, an Oedipal rival to the man who serves as a father figure for him. He marries the girlfriend of the intended, and becomes a father by novel's end.

Mar Mani, itself dedicated to Yehoshua's own father: "a man of Jerusalem and a lover of its past." The novel has been the subject of numerous articles and studies. It is a work that plays on the genre of the family saga, by tracing the history of the Manis in reverse chronology, in five distinct one-sided conversations. Only in the last conversation do we hear directly from a member of the Mani family, its founding patriarch, the symbolically named Avraham. The connections between the Mani family and Jerusalem—the spiritual capital of Israel—are multiple and mysterious.

The family saga genre is savaged—not only by the reversal of time, the apparent decentering of the subject family, and the absence of the narratees' responses—but also because of the nature of the family links themselves. In this family, paternity is in turn surrogate, illegitimate, and incestuous.

The last conversation—the earliest in time—takes place between Avraham Mani and his ailing rabbi-teacher. Their relationship is somewhat convoluted: the rabbi is both a rival (for his wife's attentions) and surrogate father. Yet Avraham was forced to part from the rabbi when his own father died. Years later Avraham sends his son Yosef as his own surrogate. The childless rabbi and his wife Flora virtually adopt Yosef to the extent that Yosef even shares their bed when the rabbi is away on business (!). Yosef is then married off to Flora's niece who bears a strong resemblance to her aunt. As the conversation unfolds it comes to light that Yosef's marriage was never consummated. Instead, his father Avraham, visiting in Jerusalem to "nurture" the new couple when the son is murdered, takes it upon himself to substitute for the son and thus to found the Mani dynasty in incest. The murder of the son is described in terms evocative of the binding of Isaac ("his throat slit like a tender lamb"), and indeed the narrative implicates the father as perpetrator. Here the *akedah* is written as the Oedipus tale turned upside down.²²

Avraham's son/grandson Moshe never knows either his father or his grandfather. He is virtually adopted by the British consul, who becomes his surrogate father. Yet he is not fully satisfied. "I crave a father I never had and of whose existence I know so little that each time I seek to catch a glimpse of him in my son, I see not the young man who was killed in a brawl before my birth in the walled city, but the wily old face of my grandfather, standing before me in his black rabbinical clothes" (p. 280).

²²See articles by Mohammad Siddiq, Mordechai Shalev, and A. B. Yehoshua in Ben Dov, *Bakivun Hanegdi: Kovetz mekhkarim 'al Mar mani shel A. B. Yehoshua* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz HaMeuchad, 1995).

Yosef, cuckolded husband and sacrificed son, makes no biological contribution to the lineage, but he is the one who begins the long and mysterious connection between the Manis and Jerusalem. As Arnold Band points out, he settles in the city not for any religious or nationalistic reasons²³ but rather to meet his fiancée, who shows reluctance to leave her home. His own granddaughter (that is, the granddaughter of his wife and his father) leaves Jerusalem to marry “the son of a wealthy Jew from North Africa who had come to purchase a grave in Jerusalem and was buried in it sooner than he had planned” (p. 172).

The grave reminds us of both the story of Yigal from *HaYoresb* (The Heir) and the biblical patriarch Abraham’s purchase of a burial cave for Sarah. Abraham’s acquisition is taken, at least symbolically, as establishing Jewish property rights in the Holy Land. Ironically the purchase of a cemetery plot in Yehoshua’s book leads to the departure from the Land of Israel. Nevertheless, the Mani existence in the land is maintained and nurtured in the generations that follow.

His father’s absence affords the granddaughter’s brother, Yosef, the ability to roam, chameleon-like, throughout the city fitting into different communities in various sectors. He presents himself to the hasidic community as an orphan, and they host his bar-mitzvah. Just as easily he mingles with and insinuates himself within different segments of the city’s populace. This second Yosef, Moshe’s son, continues the dynasty with a baby born out of wedlock. The biological connection is tenuous at best, and the statement concurring with his claim undermines itself. “Our Mani claims that he’s his,” says the narrator of the third conversation, “and there’s no reason to doubt him, even though they don’t look alike at all” (p. 176).

Yehoshua’s novel is a pastiche of the father-son stories written until now, summoning up shades of Isaac and Elik, absent fathers and surrogate sons. This continuity is reinforced in the stories of the conversation partners, both voiced and unvoiced, who are not Manis. The motifs of surrogacy, substitution, and replacement recur in their lives. The *akedah*, the sacrifice of Isaac, is also present. About the last conversation partner (a term I use loosely; the rabbi has lost his power of speech and even dies at some undetermined point during Avraham’s confession): “It was jokingly said that he had been born straight from the sea.” Yehoshua knowingly, slyly, and consciously ironic takes

²³Arnold Band, “Arkheologiya shel honaah ‘atzmit,” in *Bakivun Hanegdi*, pp. 182–192.

the trope most identified with the new Hebrew—the secular Sabra as embodied by Shamir’s memorialized brother Elik—and distorts it by fitting it to the elderly rebbe, a Sephardic relic of the old world. Not only is Yehoshua staking a Sephardic claim to the story of Zionism and the land of Israel in this text, but he is also offering us a treatise on fathers and fatherhood.

The father serves as the source of identity, heritage, and inheritance. The Jewish and Zionist claims to the land of Israel are rooted in the Bible, in the stories of the Hebrew patriarchs. By investigating the complex politics of paternity and patrimony, modern Hebrew literature questions the link between lineage and land.

ולא היה לי זמן
להתכסדת אזור
או חלדה
ולגלגל
לדה-קבורה-לדה
להשתיך לזכרונות
או להצהיב
דפים-דפים בספר הכבד
להיות מובן.
ודאי.
אובד.
זוכה בירושה.
ביני ובין אבי – הים.

To cover myself with hyssop
Or a shirt
No time for
Birth-burial-birth
To join with memories
Or for the pages of the heavy tome
To yellow.

To be understood
Certain
Lost
Gain an inheritance
Between my father and me—the sea.

Haim Gouri