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PUBLIC RITUALS: GRASPING MYTH IN DAVID GROSSMAN'S *TO THE END OF THE LAND*[2]

Abstract

The article investigates David Grossman's *To the End of the Land* as an intervention into debates on the presence of myth in Israeli society. Do resonances of the Bible in Modern Hebrew perpetuate biblical narratives as constitutive to Israeli collective memory? Do literary references to the Bible dictate the rootedness of Hebrew speakers to *the* Land? Grossman's novel discerns the implications of these questions for the political agency of individuals. It does so through the striking adaptation of a motif much frequented in Israeli literature: the Binding of Isaac. The prominent biblical myth is transformed in the novel through a set of interplays: the unusual enactment of the *Akedah* scene by a matriarch; original exegeses of biblical names; and the merging of several biblical narratives into the novel's structure. The protagonists reveal their "awareness" of these interplays, when they reflect on the correspondence of their "lives" with various biblical narratives – whose divergence from one another enable them to negotiate the overdetermination of myth in political discourse. The article argues that the novel's reflective stance on the role of myth in Israeli society is codependent on the philosophy of language that it develops. *To the End of the Land* features language acquisition, linguistic interferences with Israel's main vernacular by other languages, word play and semiotic collapse. Through the presentation of linguistic utterances as contingent, associative, subjective and ever-changing, the identification with biblical narratives is rendered volatile. *To the End of the Land* questions the limits of Israeli literature in redefining the valence of the language in which it is written as well as the ability of literary texts to reshape major conditions for their own reception: collective memory and national motifs.

Keywords: David Grossman, myth, Hebrew, *Akedah*, Israeli Literature

In a famous letter to Franz Rosenzweig, Gershom Scholem describes the appropriation of the Hebrew language in modern Israel as perilous.[3] Scholem stresses the eschatological danger of binding together the ancient and the mod-

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ern through language, a blind spot arising from secular Zionism's paradoxical reliance on religious tradition while simultaneously denying its authority.[4] According to Scholem, the religious meanings attached to Hebrew in its long-standing existence as "the holy language" may lead to the irresponsible revamping of religious narratives, as the experience of returning to the days of the Bible forms a sense of immediacy in reviving the national past.[5] The idea that biblical myth is "engraved" in the epistemology of Hebrew speakers presents them as bound to Israel both semantically and instrumentally—the land is where biblical myth, as well as its modern adaptation, reach a national end; it is also where Hebrew utterances are widely used while manifesting and perpetuating the speakers' connection to the Bible. Hebrew thus emerges as enforcing a three-fold bond between biblical myth, the land, and the country's hegemonic language.

The breadth of the intertextuality with biblical narratives is expressed in the possibility of invoking entire biblical narratives through as much as a single keyword.[6] Specific words from the Hebrew Bible are highly identifiable cultural tropes in modern Israeli culture with its attachment to the Old Testament as the source of national myth.[7] A main example for a word that induces such a process is the "Akedah," a trigger to the Binding of Isaac story, as shown in its recurrent appearances in modern Israeli literature, publicist writing and scholarship.[8] The

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4   Luz Ehud, *Parallels Meet: Religion and Nationalism in the Early Zionist Movement in Eastern Europe (1882-1904)*, `Am `oved, Tel Aviv, 1985, p. 382.

5   Raz-Krakotzkin argues that Scholem's idea of the Hebrew language takes part in his larger warning of the danger of eschatology that Zionism embodied. Raz-Krakotzkin Amnon, Between "Brit Shalom" and the Temple: Redemption and Messianism in the Zionist Discourse – a Reading of the Writing of Gershom Scholem. Raz-Krakotzkin Amnon, *Theory and Criticism*, Vol. 20, 2002, 87-112. According to Raz-Krakotzkin, Scholem did not take religious myth to be dangerous in and of itself. He saw it as perilous in its interpretation through the so-called secular national myth. Hebrew is used to describe (and form) reality with the historically charged concepts of apocalypse, Diaspora and redemption that then become an essential part of existence. Raz-Krakotzkin notes, "God was allegedly expelled of language, but the divine promise remained the source of legitimacy for the settlement and the taking-over of the land. The present was shown as a return of the Jewish people to its land, the homeland and the Promised Land (that was defined as empty), in what was perceived as the completion of history and the fulfillment of the yearnings of all generations," 92. All translations from the Hebrew are my own.

6   Literary and critical theory has ascribed several different meanings to the term "intertextuality," informed, among others, by Mikhail Bakhtin and Julia Kristeva's works. On the emergence of the term and its popular usages, see, for instance, Orr Mary, *Intertextuality: Debates and Contexts*, Polity, Cambridge, 2003. I shall use the term to convey the correspondence of a body of literary works to an earlier text. The singularity of the root *akd* in Hebrew poses a unique case of intertextuality, as its mere use evokes connections to the biblical *Akedah* story.

7   In her work on the reception of the Hebrew Bible in Zionism, Anita Shapira claims that the Hebrew Bible was the most dominant source to establish and shape the national ideals of Israeli society. That shaping took place, to a great extent, through linguistic employment of the Bible: "the modern Hebrew language absorbed its idioms and epigrams, images and associations, just as English did Shakespeare's and Russian, Pushkin's." Shapira Anita, The Bible and Israeli Identity, *AJS Review*, Vol. 28, No. 1, 2004, p. 11.

8   On the prominence of the motif in Modern Hebrew literature, see Feldman Yael S., Isaac or Oedipus? Jewish Tradition and the Israeli Akedah, in: *Biblical Studies/ Cultural Studies*, eds. Cheryl Exum & Stephen Moore, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield, 1998, pp. 159–189.
     Feldman Yael S., Postcolonial Memory, Postmodern Intertextuality: Anton Shammas's ARABESQUES Revisited, *Publication of Modern Language Association*, Vol. 114, No. 3, 1999, pp. 373-89; Feldman Yael S., With our own Hands, `ton 77, Vol. 312-313, 2006, pp. 26-30; Feldman Yael S., Whose Sacrifice is this Anyway? *Mikan* , Vol. 9, 2008, 125-57;

use of the *Akedah* motif —a trope of fatal personal sacrifice which is manifested in contemporary Israel in the army service—highlights how the view of life in modern Israel is dictated by biblical myth to the point of a so-called compulsion that operates through the centrality of myth in Hebrew speakers' epistemology.

Grossman's novel *To the End of the Land* negotiates that compulsion through its enactment of the *Akedah*, which stands at the center of the novel. Its Hebrew title *Isha Borachat Mi'bsora* (that translates literally as "Woman Flees Tidings") connects to the motif's dual function in the novel: the *Akedah* is both the topic of the narration and the symbolic moment that triggers it. Ora begins telling her life story (the novel is mostly focalized through her perspective) upon accompanying her son Ofer to his conscription at an army checkpoint. Ofer's recruitment evokes a strong premonition in Ora that he will die or be severely injured in war. When he is recruited, she also leaves her home, renouncing all means of communication in order to avoid hearing those possible tidings. She undertakes a journey on foot with Avram, her paramour and Ofer's biological father, during which she shares detailed memories of Ofer, under the belief that the act of narrating Ofer's biography may also serve to keep him alive.[9] The act of narration parallels the walking in Israel, whose landscape is described gradually as the narration evolves. One is constantly reminded of the connection between the *Akedah* and one's bond to the land, as Ora and Avram pass numerous monuments to deceased soldiers on their journey. The *Akedah* appears inseparable from Israeli nature and as an inherent condition to the launching of the journey—which is the beginning of narration.[10]

Flashbacks to past events reinforce the impression that the *Akedah* is bound to one's life in the land (the term "Qorban-adam," "human sacrifice" refers in the novel to the soldiers at the moment of their recruitment). One such instance is the description of the 1973 Yom Kippur War, during which Avram is captured

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Feldman Yael S., *Glory and Agony: Isaac's Sacrifice and National Narrative*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2010; Kartun-Blum Rut, Where are those Woods in my Hand From? *Moznaim*, Vol. 62, 1988-1989, pp. 9-14 and her *Profane Scriptures: Reflections on the Dialogue with Bible in Modern Hebrew Poetry*, Hebrew Union College Press, Cincinnati, OH, 1999; Shaked Malka, *I'll Play You Forever: The Bible in Modern Hebrew Poetry*, Yedi`ot `Ah aronot-H emed, Tel-Aviv, 2005, pp. 85-198; Yosef Milman, Remember What Your Father Has Done, in: *The Akedah and the Reproach*, Zvi Luz (ed.), Magnes, Jerusalem, 1991, pp. 53-72; Sagi Avi, The Meaning of the *Akedah* in Israeli Culture and Jewish Tradition, *Israel Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1998, pp. 45-60; and Weiss Hillel. Notes on the Examination of the Binding of Isaac in Contemporary Israeli Literature as a Topus, Theme and Motif, in: *The Akedah and the Reproach*, Zvi Luz (ed.), Magnes, Jerusalem, 1991, pp. 31-52.

9   Avidav Lipsker notes that the novel presents the beginning of talking as a life-confirming act. A Woman Flees Tidings Perseus' Shield and the "Mine Work," *Alpayim*, Vol. 33, 2008, p. 262. Yet, as the reflective act of talking and walking proceeds, it exposes the dread that it was created to repress: "This compulsive ritual is therefore a symptomatic sign; it does not protect from suffering but signifies it" (*ibid*, 263).

10   Ruth Ginsberg thus describes the novel as explicating a "theory" of a pre-trauma by unfolding the epistemology of characters whose certainty that a trauma will occur lies in a conflicted temporality which is also grounded in national and social standing. Ginsberg thus describes Ora's conviction that her son will die in war as subtended by her belonging to Israeli's hegemonic memory culture. Grossman's Pre-Trauma Picaresque, *Mikan*, vol. 13, 2014, pp. 286-310 [Hebrew].

by Egyptian forces and severely tortured. Ora and Ilan, Avram's childhood friend and Ora's first love, take care of the physically and mentally damaged Avram upon his return to Israel. This experience brings them closer and leads to the birth of their child, Adam. Yet the guilt they harbor about Avram's fate (the novel hints that both Avram and Ilan were Ora's lovers before Avram's injury) makes Ilan leave Ora and the young child.

The captivity, Avram's symbolic *Akedah*, also leads to the birth of Ofer, who is conceived during Ora's desperate attempt to rehabilitate Avram. When Ilan discovers that Ora is pregnant with Avram's child, he rekindles his relationship with her; consequently, Ora and Ilan raise the two sons as brothers, concealing the identity of Ofer's father. Sending Ofer to war thus takes part in Ora's continuous sacrifice to the state that includes her loss of Avram, who is permanently scarred after his torture in the war, and the uncanny development of her family life.

A later biographical fact about Ofer startlingly underpins the agency of the Israeli soldier (the "victim" or the "sacrifice") as potentially violent and unethical.[11] An event that troubles Ora throughout the novel is revealed close to its end, as she discloses that Ofer was involved in the arrest of an old Palestinian man held in a meat freezer for forty-eight hours. As the army police investigation continues, Ora feels she is unable to support her son, an inability that she describes as a part of her semiotic dysfunctionality, which will be elaborated upon below. That "failure" results in Ilan and Ora's separation, while it facilitates the reunion of Ora and Avram in the course of their journey.

Ora's enactment of the *Akedah* and her subsequent journey in Israel invokes the biblical pattern, in which the patriarch's obedience to God grants him the right to the land – with the striking change of Ora, a woman, adopting the role of the patriarch.[12] There are more resemblances between Ora and the biblical

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11 Feldman's account of the semantics of the term "Qorban" in Hebrew is helpful to the understanding of this transgressive shift. Grossman David, *A Woman Flees Tidings*, Hakibbutz HaMeuchad, Bnei Brak, 2008, p. 98 [Hebrew]. Feldman claims that the Hebrew word signifies two meanings that are distinct in other languages, such as the differentiation of "sacrifice" and "victim" in English. The term's linguistic flexibility denotes both active self-sacrifice (often considered admirable) and a passive stance of victimhood (*Glory and Agony*, pp. 35-36); Whose Sacrifice is this Anyway?, pp. 126-27; with our own Hands, p. 28). The dual meaning of the word and its semantic volatility in the description of Ofer's recruitment (where he appears both as a passive "victim" and a willing agent, or a "sacrifice") prepare the ground for the following descriptions of his active stance as an aggressor.

12 The scholarly reception of the novel has treated its adaptation of the *Akedah* to be as a milestone in Israeli literature's long preoccupation with the motif, pointing out that in staging the biblical scene the novel foregrounds focalizations that are marginalized both in the biblical story and in the modern correspondence with it. Yael Feldman situates the novel as manifesting—if yet in the fictional realm—the politics of Israeli women movements (such as "Four Mothers"). Feldman claims that by assuming an active woman's perspective, the novel explicates a "maternal protest" that is strikingly absent from the biblical story. She likewise takes the novel's presentation of an Ishmael figure and its emphasis of brotherly relationships as challenging the focus on a single son in the reception of the myth in Israeli culture. Isaac and Ishmael? The Sibling Challenge to Israel's Oedipalized Binding, *Religion and Literature*, Vol. 45, No. 2, 2013, pp. 113, 123. Ofra Amihay also takes the representation of the biblical scene in *To the End of the Land* to evoke an absent and uncanny mother figure, who is actively sacrificing her son. She thus proposes that the novel's presentation of an active mother figure exposes the responsibility of the mother to the *Akedah*, which is normally denied. With Her Own Hands: The Female Responsibility for the Akedah in David Grossman's *To the End of the Land*,

Abraham: She bears two sons from two different partners and experiences the "sacrifice" of her younger son. The reversal of gender is a subversive variation that grants power and agency to feminine sexuality. This adaptation retains the myth's familiar tokens of sacrifice while simultaneously transgressing the patriarchal code of male ownership over his wife and children.

Parallels to the biblical patriarch are also embodied, though to a lesser extent, in the character of Avram, Ofer's other parent. In contrast to the biblical Abraham, whose name change signifies the divine blessing, the modern Avram was not blessed by God: His character resembles the biblical Abraham during his feeble and debilitated stage.[13] In addition, Avram's torture by the Egyptians mirrors the confrontation of the biblical Abraham with the Egyptians, which in turn results in lowering Abraham's stature in the Genesis stories. The parallels between the modern Avram and the biblical Abraham link the two based on their common feebleness, rather than on the strength and authority that is typically ascribed to patriarchal figures.

It is precisely the abundance of links between the novel and the biblical myth that jeopardizes establishing a direct analogy between them. That failure derives from the semiotic competition between the two main characters for the role of the patriarch in the adaptation of the myth (in the Genesis narratives that role is destined to one parent only). Through that competition, the novel reassesses the biblical myth that was assumed to be, in the first place, the basis for the analogy, as it points out the versatility of the biblical character.[14] Consequently, both the correspondence with myth and its recognition appear non-deterministic and contingent upon personal perspective.

Another innovative link to the Genesis stories emerges through the introduction of an Ishmael figure. Ora brings her son to the army checkpoint with Sami,

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Teorya Ubikoret, 2011, pp. 38-39, 317 [Hebrew]. My own goal is to connect the novel's intervention into Israeli culture to the self-reflective semiotics that derives from its use of language. Exceptional among the readings of the display of the *Akedah* in the novel is Iris Milner's argument that the novel presents the scene as an inevitable fate referencing the "impending death in battle of the young soldier (333). Sacrifice and Redemption in *To the End of the Land*, *Hebrew Studies*, Vol. 54, 2013, pp. 319-34.

13   That liminal position is "recognized" by Avram himself. Shortly before he falls into the Egyptian captivity, Avram announces through the two-way army radio his wish that Ora and Ilan name their child after him, in the variation of "Abraham," meaning "the father of many people," *A Woman Flees Tidings*, p. 555.

14   In her *Lethal Love* Mieke Bal argues that intertextuality results in a two-way relationship between texts. The older text charges the later text with meanings; yet at the same time, pregnant with those meanings, the new text leads to new readings of the older text. Those new readings are especially provoking in their potential to undermine long-lasting assumptions regarding biblical texts, whose interpretation is determined through the prisms of tradition. Bal's reading of Victor Hugo's poem "Booz Endormi" demonstrates the revolutionary potential of such reexamination. She claims that the poem exposes the vulnerability of Boaz's character that was repressed in the long-lasting reading of the biblical narrative via the prisms of patriarchy. Bal Mieke, *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1987, pp. 68-85. Grossman's novel preforms a similar feat of shedding new light on the biblical text, as it dispels presumptions regarding the biblical Abraham, namely, the character's alleged strength and ascendancy. The novel turns gender presumptions up-side down in that process, linking the character's weak facets to a man and the strong ones—agency, initiative and activity—to a woman, while enacting the competition between the two over the role of the patriarch.

an Israeli-Arab cab driver and an old family friend, who in her impression has started showing hostility to her with the escalation of the military conflict. Ora describes her request that he drive her and Ofer to the army checkpoint as a grave—yet unavoidable—stupidity. She acknowledges the severity of her "mistake" as the car approaches the army checkpoint, leading to the possibility of Sami's exposure as Arab, i.e., a dangerous intruder.[15] Arriving at the checkpoint and amidst a crowd of family members accompanying their sons to the military operation, Ora draws parallels between Sami and the biblical Ishmael:

She turns back and looks at the snake-like procession of vehicles, and the sight is almost festive, excited, a huge parade, colorful, full of life in its own way: parents, siblings and girlfriends and even grandfathers and grandmothers bring their loved ones to the seasonal operation, she thinks, an all-out sale of stock, and in every car there is a young boy, *Bikkurim*, a spring carnival with a man-sacrifice in the end, and how about you, she sticks it to herself, look at you, how nicely and neatly you are taking your son here, your almost only son, whom you really loved, and Ishmael is taking you in his taxi.[16]

Ora's stream-of-consciousness that describes her readiness to sacrifice Ofer, her "almost only son," employs the *Akedah* text, while adding to it a comic effect by using "almost" and "really," idiomatic to Modern Hebrew.[17] The scene at once recalls the dramatic nature of the biblical narrative, and dispels it with irreverent interventions. Such double entendre is easily intelligible to the Israeli reader: the army operation, "mivtz'a" is also Hebrew for "sale." The boys who are led to be "sacrificed" thus participate in what can also be read as a "seasonal sale" in which they are the offered goods. Another playful addition to the *Akedah* picture does not hang upon the parody of an ancient Hebrew tradition, but rather on the citation of its additional one, that of the holiday of *Shav`uot*, with the word "Bikurrim," Which generally refers to the first fruits brought to the temple in the Jewish tradition. This is another watchword, which alludes to a tradition whose ancient roots echo human sacrifice, thereby commenting on, and transforming, the memory of the *Akedah*, and its place in the framework of the novel.[18] Meanwhile, Ora emerges not only as the (main) storyteller of a modern narrative, but is also the agent in "recognizing" the novel's main event as a modern adaptation of the biblical *Akedah*.

Importantly, the double motion of flight and narration is launched the mo-

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15 *A Woman Flees Tidings*, p. 98.

16 *Ibid*.

17 The linguistic interferences are in line with a long tradition of Jewish commentary on the Binding of Isaac narrative, exactly due to their subversive nature. The laconic nature of the biblical text has evoked in various Jewish sources the alteration of the dialogue between God and Abraham, altering and suspending its dramatic nature. See Bialik Hayyim Nahman, Yehoshua H ana Rawnitzki, and Yohanan Pograbinski, *The Book of Legends*, Dvir, Tel Aviv, 1987 [1913], p. 30.

18 See, for instance, Walter Burkert's account on the role of sacrifice in rituals of first fruits offerings in Ancient Greece. *Greek religion: Archaic and Classical*, trans. John Raffan, Blackwell, Oxford, 1985, pp. 62-68.

ment Ora recollects the biblical story of the Binding of Isaac and its amendment. Ora records her compatriots at that moment as accomplices in making "the sacrifice," but also in comprehending national mythology and constituting it as relevant to current occurrences. Such awareness is essential to the continuation of public ritual. The novel's many pages do not offer a similar direct allusion to the *Akedah*, and yet, its narratological framework places it at its center with the suspension of Ofer's death: The presence of the *Akedah* is strong precisely due to the ineffability of the figure. The standing of the *Akedah* as the salient scene that sets the novel's plot in motion provokes a reflection on the life in Israel as immersed in biblical myth. Through this reflection, the novel embarks upon dismantling the eschatological sense attributed to the rootedness of Jewish Hebrew speakers in the land. The novel suspends the identification with biblical myth through a set of semantic interplays, which stress the versatility and flexibility of what biblical myth is, and how it may be used or recognized. A review of the problems attached to citing the *Akedah* in modern Israeli literature may shed light on the singularity of that endeavor.

Atemporal Sacrifice

It can be argued that to a large extent Israeli literature that refers to the *Akedah* dismantles the motif's sanctified connotations, thereby undermining the authority of the biblical text.[19] Modern references to the *Akedah* often reject the justification of sacrifice and its reward, along with the nationalistic "lesson" allegedly to be learned from it regarding one's ultimate binding to the land.

The eminent Israeli novelist A.B. Yehoshua describes his engagement with the *Akedah* in his novel *Mr. Mani* as aimed at liberating both himself and the Israeli collective from the myth, which he sees as seminal to Israeli history and culture (1995: 395). He aspired to do so through the consummation of the *Akedah*: the description of its actual undertaking in a realistic novel that would neutralize its continually threatening potential to materialize (ibid.).[20] However, Yehoshua's attempt to extinguish the motif can be viewed as yet another link in the chain of

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19 Kartun-Blum identifies the correspondence with the *Akedah* in Modern Hebrew literature as an act of secularization. It dismantles, she claims, two main religious characteristics of the biblical *Akedah*: the love of God and the covenant with Him (Where are those Woods in my Hand From?, 9). The process of "secularizing" the motif results in the modern focus on the human "social-historical" experience in the world, both in its "private" and "national" form (ibid). In my reading of the motif through Scholem's description of the Hebrew language, I attempt to detect the religious presumptions and charges that continue to propel the *Akedah* in its modern (allegedly secular) manifestations, focusing on the experience of immediacy evoked through the connection between the religious myth and the conditions of modern life.

20 Milman claims that even Israeli authors who "rebel" against the myth (specifically, against streams in its reception that see it as confirming death, rather than life) are also invested in the myth's powerful heritage. Their "rebellion" thus appears to uphold a dialectical relation and perpetuation of the myth and its power (Remember What Your Father Has Done, pp. 60-70). This perspective illuminates the uniqueness of Yehoshua's project: Instead of criticizing the myth by offering a particular enactment of it, Yehoshua attempts a literary event that transcends all adaptations of the myth, thereby dismantling it of its power.

adaptations that the motif has undergone in modern Israeli literature. Yehoshua's novel is overtly contingent upon a temporal and cultural context—as is the entire literary tradition of employing the motif. In the novel, the murder of the son Yosef is attached to his pro-Arab world views, gesturing toward the present day occupation and the violence it embodies.[21] The actualizing of myth happens when political affairs reach a climax).[22] The novel embeds the motif in modern day reality and protests against the threatening presence of myth. At the same time, it cooperates with the tendency to attach biblical narratives to actual reality. To alter Scholem's warning, the immediacy of linking the religious to modern day reality exists not only in secular Zionism, but also in the attempts to resist it.

The motif has been used to promote and also criticize nationalism, and its interpretations vary according to historical and social transformations. The *Akedah* was employed by both Uri Zvi Greenberg in an eschatological attribution of the quasi-biblical conquering of the land[23] and by Yitzhak Laor in a poem characteristic of his radical left-wing activism.[24] As noted by Hillel Weiss, in Israeli culture "the pity on Isaac, the boy, is not persistent." He adds that "since the Lebanon War, when the illegitimacy of the army [the way it is portrayed] in Israeli literature reached new peaks, these heroes or their parents are brought to a second trial, and usually to their conviction"[25] (1998: 110). The extensive use of this motif shows that it should not be examined merely as an example of the subversive and diverse potential of literature in reacting to political reality; rather, the wide appearance of the *Akedah* motif in Israeli culture should be seen as a problem inherent to the enactment of collective memory. The adaptations of the motif continue to reinforce its cultural prominence and perpetuate, rather than shake, the connection of biblical myth to modern reality and collective memory.

Even radical reinterpretations of the *Akedah* ironically reinforce, rather than

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21   In this aspect, *Mr. Mani* continues the tradition of revising the *Akedah* motif in correspondence with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. See Kartun-Blum (Where are those Woods in my Hand From? p. 14).

22   In her analysis of the novel's ideology, Ziva Shamir claims that "in the center of the novel stands Yehoshua's attempt to convince his readers that they are at a historical intersection, in which it is still possible to correct fatal mistakes and prevent a tragic downfall." See her article The Present is the Future's Past: the Ideological Theory of Relativity of A.B Yehoshua According to Mr. Mani, in*: In the Opposite Direction: Articles on Mr. Mani by A.B Yehoshua*, Nitza Ben-Dov (ed.), Hakibbutz Hameuchad, Tel Aviv, 1995, pp. 139-150. [Hebrew]

23   In the poem "On a Night of Rain in Jerusalem," Greenberg's adaptation of the *Akedah* in the poem reflects his extensive use of Christian motifs. See original and English translation in Stanley Burnshaw, T. Carmi, and Ezra Spicehandler, *The Modern Hebrew Poem Itself: from the Beginnings to the Present: Sixty-Nine Poems in a New Presentation*, Harvard University Press, London, 1989, p. 63. For analysis of Greenberg's poetry as an enactment of the *Akedah* and its Christian allusions, see Feldman, *Glory and Agony*, pp. 116, 131, 148.

24   In Laor's poem, "The Dolt Isaac," the speaker "warns" Isaac not to obey to his father's will to sacrifice him and bids him to remember "what [his] father did to Ishmael" (the poem with its translation appears in Feldman, Isaac or Oedipus? Jewish Tradition and the Israeli Aqedah, pp. 184-185). Another instance of a provocative enactment of the *Akedah* by a left-winged intellectual is a dialogue from Hanokh Levin's play *Queen of a Bath* where the son evokes guilt in his father as he is about to sacrifice his son.

25   See Weiss, Notes on the Examination of the Binding of Isaac in Contemporary Israeli Literature as a Topus, Theme and Motif.

shake, the view of biblical myth as relevant to one's reality. On an additional level, it is not only the mere appearance of the motif that constitutes it as pertinent, but more specifically, its insertion in literary texts. A tradition of signifying subversive opinions and non-hegemonic political positions with the *Akedah* nevertheless contributes to a tradition, in which each new literary text adds a link in the chain. Provoking criticism of or affinity with Zionism through the motif is recognized by the Israeli collective as a familiar cultural act – or "public ritual." This recognition perpetuates group identity, and thus enforces the connection between the myth and one's reality as immanent.

"Woman Flees Tidings": Subversive Enactments

Grossman's novel presents an enactment of the *Akedah* that is unique due to its indeterminacy. Through deep structures of identification and reflection, the novel exposes nationalist ideology's role in establishing a tacit acceptance of the connection of the ancient to the present as "fateful." As the novel unfolds, the characters articulate the volatile and complex links between the *Akedah*, the Hebrew language and one's bond to the land.

Far into her journey with Avram, Ora reveals that in her last moments with Ofer at the army checkpoint he whispered to her (as they were being filmed by television crews): "If I die, leave the country." Ofer's request subverts the narrative fostered by the journalists, who are directing footage of brave patriots departing from their families. When she reveals the secret of Ofer's last-minute comment, Ora uncovers the dissonance of her son's sacrifice with Zionist ideology and the presumed patriotism of a soldier. The scene complicates the images of the *Akedah*. The patriotism that the motif often ascribes to the sacrificed soldier falters.

The agency of the *Akedah*'s performers further destabilizes the motif. As Ora reflects on the events that preceded her farewell with Ofer, she confesses that she discovered "with dread"[26] that it was not the army's calling that led to "the sacrifice"; Ofer had namely volunteered to participate in the operation for which he extended his army service:

> And it was him, yes – protested Ofer fervently, flaming in front of her and his forehead turns red – it was him that wouldn't quit . . . finally now, with his screwed-up luck, such a blasting operation, three artillery divisions together – there were tears in his eyes, for a moment one could think he was trying to persuade her to let him come back late from the class' *Purim* party…[27]

Ofer not only consents to his sacrifice; he initiates it. Surprisingly, the soldier's

26   *A Woman Flees Tidings*, p. 100.
27   *Ibid*, pp. 100-101.

agony is not a reaction to his possible death, but to the possibility that he might be dismissed from participation in the war. His dismay is expressed in a child-like bodily reaction. Informed also by the mention of the Purim party, the scene depicts Ofer as a child who is "playing soldier." Ofer's position as a self-indulgent aggressor, and yet, a possible Isaac, blurs the distinction between activity and passivity in the potential death of the Israeli soldier in war. Reflection on the sacred triangular connection between myth, the being in the land, and its hegemonic language is thus transgressed by the characters' transformations of the traditional roles. They seem to follow personal inclinations and are thus removed from an attachment to the land as the agent which requires their "sacrifice."

Yet the novel does not simply annul the premises of nationalism through its enactment of myth. The characters' reflection engages with the semantic resonance of biblical myth in their reality together with the instrumental attachment of Hebrew speakers to the land in which the language is spoken. As Ora reveals Ofer's last request, and implies that she might indeed depart from the land, Avram reacts worriedly: "You will not leave, he said starkly, almost frenziedly, you can't […] He would really like to tell her that only here, in this landscape, in the rocks, in the cyclamens, in Hebrew, in this sun, she has a sense."[28] At the same time that myth emerges as an unstable semantic source of identification, the novel discusses – and challenges – the attachment of Hebrew speakers to the land (and to the landscape), the locus where they can express themselves in their mother tongue. The novel explores the correlation between this attachment and the biblical "source" of the Hebrew language and questions its linguistic "rootedness."

Weaving Biblical Recollection: Hebrew as a Mother Tongue

In her seminal study *Beyond the Mother Tongue*, Yasemin Yildiz discerns the political ramifications of perceiving a dominant vernacular as the defining means of expression in a given culture.[29] In her literary analyses, Yildiz traces moments in which "mother tongue" is exposed as an arbitrary construct that supports national and cultural unity. But Yildiz presents another cultural hypothesis that uncovers an alternative, equally plausible condition for language use, namely, the coexistence of diverging vernaculars as equally available to speakers. In view of its role in establishing and perpetuating national affiliations, monolingualism, Yildiz writes, "constitutes a key structuring principle that organizes the entire range of modern social life."[30] The formation of a monolingual subject is at the center of the modern national project:

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28   *Ibid*, p. 411.

29   *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition*, Fordham University Press, New York, 2012.

30   *Ibid*, p. 2.

The pressures of this monolingual paradigm have not just obscured multilingual practices across history; they have also led to active processes of monolingualization, which have produced more multilingual subjects, more multilingual communities, and more monolingual institutions, without, however, fully eliminating multilingualism. Schooling has been one of the primary means of such a social engineering of monolingual populations.[31]

Showing biblical narrative as inseparable from Modern Hebrew's hegemonic standing, *To the End of the Land* underpins the monolingual paradigm's theological resonance.

Israeli names, which often carry biblical connotations, may provide an argument in favor of perceiving Modern Hebrew as perpetuating a national narrative. In this specific case of making the national subject synonymous with the speaker of the hegemonic vernacular, the monolingual paradigm derives its power from the materialization of the ancient in the present. The name "Ofer" is such an instance. "Ofer" is the Hebrew word for "fawn," an allusion to the ram sacrificed in the *Akedah* story in place of Isaac. Ofer's name thus adds to the suspense regarding his potential death in Grossman's novel. If killed during his army service, the symbolic parallelism between mythical fawn and the contemporary character Ofer would be complete.

Ora raises, however, a second way of interpreting her son's name as she revises a line from the Song of Songs: "My lover is like a young stag" (Hebrew: Ofer ha'aylim) (328).[32] The allusion to the Song of Songs introduces another link between the son's name and the Hebrew Bible, thus blurring the correlation of Ofer to the *Akedah* story.[33] The Song's emphasis on joy and erotic love carries one far away from the intimidating setting of the *Akedah*.[34] The attempt to read Ofer's destiny as dictated by his name hence fails, ironically, not due to its detachment from the Hebrew Bible, but rather, due to the amplitude of correlations with it; these conflict with one another, presenting the correspondence with the Bible as non-deterministic and as contingent upon individual perspectives and upon subjective-affective attachment to language. When it is the mother who speaks the "mother tongue," the political project of schooling the subject is rendered paradoxical. Through her symbolic role as a matriarch, Ora is both *a* speaker of the mother tongue and *its embodiment*: Her affective attachment to Hebrew

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31 *Ibid*, pp. 2-3.

32 The line is a play on the Song of Songs 2:9, 17 and 8:14.

33 However, another link between Ofer and the Song evokes the violence associated with his character. This appears when Ofer (during his army service) makes a club in front of Ora. When she asks him what he would do with it, he replies that he would "smash young foxes" (p. 496), in a clear allusion to the Song.

34 And yet the novel's attachment of the Song of Songs to the *Akedah* is a part of a larger tendency of inserting allusions to the Song of Songs in modern Israeli correspondences with the Binding of Isaac story. See Kartun-Blum, Where are those Woods in my Hand? p. 11, on that larger phenomenon.

encompasses manifold (seemingly endless) associations. Ironically enough, it is exactly language's affective malleability which dispels the linearity of its political usage.

Ora further complicates the premonition her son's name evokes, when she mentions its resonance with the English word "offer," enhancing the irony of Ora's "offering" Ofer for a war for the land (331).[35] This distinction simultaneously interferes with and establishes the parallelism of the modern to the ancient. The foreign language is, ironically, that which denotes the "predestined fate" of the son. Showing awareness of the English language, which is widely understood in Israel, the novel exposes, the dynamic nature of collective memory and cultural common ground that are necessary conditions required in the use of intertextuality and in the establishment of national myth. The introduction of English into the novel's Hebrew linguistic framework presents collective epistemology as ever-changing, and as exposed to "foreign" influences. Foreign influence reverses the eschatological nationalistic assumptions that are the basis for a correlation between the modern and the mythical.

Depicting connections between the Bible and modern day reality as multiple and diverse, the novel portrays identification as an active and subjective act. Likewise, points in the novel where several biblical narratives converge stress individual creativity as a necessary condition for *linguistic* correspondence with the Bible. One such instance is Ora's reading the biblical story about the great woman from Sunam (2 Kings 4) with Ilan in his shared room with Avram at their army base.[36] During the reading, the perspective shifts to focus on a scrawling above Avram's bed: "It is not good that the man should be" – a play on the verse from Genesis 2:18, "It is not good that the man should be alone." The different biblical quotes reflect the dynamics between the three lovers. Ora and Ilan's relationship is compared to that of the great woman from Sunam and her husband, as Ora's position as a prolific lover makes her appear as "the great woman." The biblical couple (here, Ilan and Ora) allocates a marginal place in their house to Elisha (Avram). Avram's enunciation bluntly alters a different biblical narrative and responds to Ilan and Ora's identification with biblical figures. His original alteration redefines romantic partnership as destructive, resisting the primordial blessing from Genesis given to the coupling of the man and woman. Avram radically modifies the verse by omitting only one word from its end, demonstrating biblical appropriation as a potentially explosive act.

Quoting a variety of biblical narratives challenges the attachment of the "language of the land" and national myth as a direct and immediate mental construction. It does so, first and foremost, by showing reflection as the obligatory means of connecting personal life events to allegedly constitutive narratives. Situating the individual as a narrator of his or her life story jeopardizes the status of myth

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35   On this facet of Ofer's name, as well as its reference to the Song of Songs, see Feldman, *Glory and Agony*, pp. 315-16.
36   *A Woman Flees Tidings*, p. 141.

in the same act of recalling its familiarity and ascendancy. The novel presents the Hebrew Bible as a cultural text whose canonical stature and the wide recognition of its symbols are the very grounds for its subjective renderings. In the context of one's personal perspective, engagement with the Bible's vocabulary reappropriates the text and disrupts prior national claims to its myths.

Domestic Tongues

Grossman's already engages with the *Akedah* in his early book of short stories, *Ratz* ("Runner") (1983) in the story "Michael Zidon, Michael" that depicts a non-Jewish British immigrant to Israel.[37] Throughout the story, Michael, the immigrant, carries on a dialog with his son who takes issue with his father's non-Zionist views. The son points out that they are contradictory with Michael's refusal to leave the country. At last, the father justifies his attachment to Israel with an allusion to the *Akedah* that surprisingly blurs the roles of the protagonists of the biblical story: "Since a great pain came and settled in me. And it goes and nibbles and sucks. Since I was bound [*akd*] to this land" (214). Not until later in the story does the reader find out that the dialogue is in fact a soliloquy. The speaker's son died during his service as a pilot in the Yom Kippur War, and the father holds the conversation in his imagination, deranged by his son's death: The father is "bound" to the land through the so-called sacrifice of the son—a description which dispels the active force of the patriarch.

The father's *Akedah* emerges with the son's death "for the land." Importantly, the transgressive rendering of the biblical narrative occurs through linguistic innovation: the use of singular root *akd* ("to bind"). This link to the story of the *Akedah* appears, uniquely, in the passive voice and in the first person. Thus, the father's *Akedah* maintains a dual active/passive position. The form is understood as passive in the context of the sentence, but it is an active stance in the biblical analogy. Denoting the verb in *binyan nif`al* – which in Hebrew forms both active and passive verbs – allows both meanings to coexist.

Likewise, Grossman's recent novel portrays linguistic utterances as hazardous to the stable form of national myth: Through creative adaptations of language, one can utilize and undermine the hegemonic appropriation of biblical narratives. The novel ingrains this perspective in its larger presentation of language, as it continually stresses irregular and inventive utterances as an inherent part of communication and language acquisition. That approach evokes sensitivity to the multiple meanings that a word can denote. Several instances in the novel present linguistic versatility as a destabilizing force, for instance, when relating the story of Ofer's first steps. Avram refers to Ofer's "fall" in his rendering of the story, an utterance which startles Ora because the use of the root *nfl* ("fall") also

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37   The Hebrew title differentiates between the Israeli pronunciation of the name (at the beginning of the title), and the English one (in its end).

denotes the death of soldiers in war.[38] Another instance is a scene describing Ofer as a soldier on vacation at home. Ofer evades Ilan's questions about his army routine with the mundane slang "not now, I am dead" (Hebrew: "harug").[39] The colloquial Hebrew word for tiredness gestures, when uttered by Ofer, toward its other denotation, death in war.

The novel depicts linguistic innovation not as intended political protest but as an intrinsic quality of communication. Ora's descriptions of her sons' child-hood foreground an always-lacking, sometimes "incorrect," performance of linguistic utterances. Ora shares with Avram the ways in which her sons learned to speak, attempts that result in a compulsive rhyming game, various neologisms, and invented etymologies of Hebrew words. An example of the latter is Ofer's own etymology for the word "Arabs" (Hebrew: "ʿAravim"). In his fear of the Arabs, Ofer is convinced that the word is "haRavim" (the adversaries) (420). Another part of that domestic realm is Ilan's custom of making the children repeat every new word they learned. Avram attests that he was the one to establish the game, as a way to "deliver" every new word, like a gift, to his future children. He names it Brit-Milah, a reference to the circumcision ceremony through a play on its name, the literal translation of which is "covenant of the word" (353). The act of teaching new words at one's home replaces the religious and national covenant between God and the Israelites, and is marked, in accordance with its altered content, through a neologism.

This neologism is just one of Avram's many linguistic innovations, and a small attestation to his linguistic fecundity. Ora notes that Avram's deep engagement with language and with creative writing led him, until the moment of his capture, to invent his own private dictionaries of words and idioms, such as renaming "bra" "sadaim," a combination of the Hebrew words for "breasts" and "splint."[40] His linguistic innovations and eccentricities include speaking in the third person about his interlocutor,[41] frequently using rare words and words of high register, and mixing Hebrew and Arabic (533). Avram's intimate relationship to language expresses itself when he accidently calls Ora "Ofra," melding Ofer's name and hers (275).

As seen with its evoking of the *Brit-Mila* ceremony, the novel presents the correspondence of biblical and modern Hebrew as a means of questioning national myth, rather than establishing it. The presence of biblical myth as a so-called perpetual ritual is thus disrupted. Yet it is not disruption alone that jeopardizes the hegemonic acceptance of national myth; more effective is the exposure of the volatile structure of hegemony itself. The novel presents Arabic and English, which are broadly understood by Israelis, as *both* markers of hegemony and

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38 *Ibid*, p. 267.
39 *Ibid*, p. 590.
40 *Ibid*, p. 174.
41 *Ibid*, p. 21.

"foreign influences" that undermine the authority of Hebrew as the national language. Co-existing with Hebrew as a main language in the State of Israel, Arabic challenges Jewish hegemony by dismantling the attempt to establish a rigid distinction between the two languages and cultures.[42]

In her analysis of the specific case of a Hebrew-Arabic co-presence in literary texts, Lital Levy furthers Yildiz's observations on literature's "recollections" of the multilingual condition of the speaking subject. As Levy notes, Jewish writers often already have a liminal connection to vernaculars due to their daily use of several languages. This relationship complicates the distinction of one language as the one hegemonic language, set apart from other vernaculars.[43] Levy describes the coexistence of Hebrew and Arabic as major vernaculars in Israel and associates it with a mode of writing through "a bilingual consciousness." This formulation serves as the basis for her discussion of the nature of the power struggle between the hegemonic vernacular and its coexisting alternates.[44]

In Grossman's novel, the presence of the Arabic language and culture is a constant interruption to the protagonists' life routine. Ora confesses that her "oversensitivity" to the presence of Arabic is a sign of her inability to accept the abnormalities of Israeli society, such as the institutional marginalization of the Arabic language and culture, which are presented as highly hazardous at the same time that they are broadly comprehensible to the Israeli collective. An instance in the novel expressing the double nature of Arabic is a scene in which Ora is making a salad for Ofer, during his vacation from the army. As Ora hears a radio broadcast about the arrest of a terrorist (depicted as a routine procedure), the cutting of vegetables turns into a frantic physical and mental collapse. Ora goes through a long list of Arabic names that she finds particularly repulsive, including the names of Arabic leaders, cities and countries (585). This hateful and painful recollection then becomes self-critical as she recalls the names "Sabra ve-Shatila" ("Sabra and Shatila"), the location of a massacre of Palestinian and Lebanese Muslims by Christian militia groups that entered the refugee camps during the Israeli occupation of the area. The scene ends with an ironic return from guilt to the domestic realm: Ora serves the salad to her son, saying, "Here, Ofer, Arabic salad as you like it" (585). The threatening presence of Arabic is recast as part of the pleasant and familiar. Conflicting feelings—hate and guilt—hover in and out of consciousness when encountering the language.

The impulsive reaction of Ora to Arabic words at the beginning of the scene is in line with descriptions of her bodily reactions as "psychosomatic," non-volun-

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42 On the Arabic language as a perilous force to Israeli hegemony, especially in the context of defining Israeli literature as a national Jewish literature, see Gil Anidjar, *Semites: Race, Religion, Literature* Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2008.

43 Lital Levy, *Poetic Trespass: Writing between Hebrew and Arabic in Israel/Palestine*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2014, p. 239.

44 *Ibid*, p. 13.

tary and dysfunctional. As Yildiz writes, "The manufactured proximity between 'mother' and 'language' stages the fantasy behind the modern notion of the mother tongue—namely, that the mother emanates from the mother's body."[45] In Grossman's novel, the mother expresses, it seems, an incessant refusal to make the monolingual paradigm a natural—and hereby deterministic—fact of life. Ora's dysfunctional bodily functions thus signify her inability to accept her children's military service and their escalating brutal behavior (115-116; 494-495; 601-603).[46] Her close connection to the human body (Ora works as a physiotherapist) leads to a discordance with hegemonic ideology. Presented as semiotic utterances, Ora's bodily functions are symptoms of an inability to consent to the national narrative; they are tactile expressions of breaks in its cohesiveness. Bodily disorders in the novel represent that which cannot be repressed, ignored and utilized in the service of "rational" hegemonic ideology—whose major embodiment is an unquestioning adherence to the hegemonic vernacular. It is when language is no longer perceived as an instrumental (and stable) means of communication that the presumptions behind common linguistic utterances are uncovered as both nationalistic and arbitrary.

Indeed, Ora attests that her use of language often results in an "unintentional discharge": She cries uncontrollably during a military ceremony; she experiences attacks of diarrhea before sending Ofer to the army operation and during what should have been a pleasant dinner in a restaurant, when Ofer announces cynically his obligation to die for national security. Portraying language as a semiotic discharge, an attack that she cannot control, Ora concedes a "weakness" incarnated in her bodily presence. The novel portrays that so-called weakness, or semiotic collapse, as dismantling the function of language as a stabilizing social force that dictates nationalistic ideology.

Hence, Ora seems capable of tracking subtle tendencies in the language of the collective. She depicts the language as an excessive sensitivity ingrained in her body. Yet it is only at the end of the novel that her peculiar stance in and toward language resonates politically, as she refers to her bodily (dis)functions as "Tourette attacks of left-wing ideology" (604). That declaration follows Ora's reaction to the violent act of Ofer's unit which arrested an old Palestinian man in the freezer and "forgot" him there – an act in which Ofer was presumably involved. Ora is aware that when describing the act she, Ofer and Ilan shift to the passive form in reporting that the man "was brought; was left; was forgotten" (603). Ora's reflection reveals how the collective's language shapes the representation of reality, letting the happenings proceed as if no agents were involved.

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45 *Beyond the Mother Tongue*, p. 12.
46 Anne Golomb Hoffman reads the novel through its presentation of the human body as a locus for the processing of trauma – mainly through speech whose definition as a "discharge" exposes the hazardous penetrability of the body. She thus argues that in the novel, "Speech finds its grounding in the functions that sustain embodied life." Trauma and Nachträglichkeit in Grossman's *To the End of the Land*, *Narrative*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 2012, p. 59.

Biblical Enactment: Collective Myth Intervened

The enactment of biblical motifs and their negotiation of cultural sources are seminal to Israeli literature. These practices correspond with the continual act of constituting Israeli collective memory. The use of biblical motifs in literary texts has the potential of reinforcing national narrative on at least three levels. First, the intelligibility of the Bible and the tradition of alluding to its motifs function as an interpellation of the subject, who would recognize him or herself as a part of the hegemonic collective – the possible case with Jewish Israeli readers. Second, as the text itself takes part in the long tradition of alluding to the Bible, it may be taken to participate in a "national practice" even when (and by force of) criticizing state politics. Third, the continuous act of referencing the Bible presents biblical narrative as an atemporal source of identification for Israeli society. It thus constructs an immediate relation between Israeli reality and the Bible and prolongs the theological tensions of secular Zionism.

The cultural prominence of the *Akedah* motif makes it particularly recognizable. The use of the motif directly consolidates a collective common ground based on its connotation with the on-going "sacrifice" for the land, an "unavoidable" facet of national imperative that is ingrained in collective epistemology. The authority of the motif is paradoxical: The image bases its power on its presentation as inescapable, with its presentation as unavoidable resting on its societal power.

In the context of that paradox, Grossman's recent novel develops several simultaneous discussions of the construction of linguistic enunciations in one's specific, personal and temporal surroundings. Through its often self-reflexive, original use of language, the novel recognizes biblical myth as an eminent source of hegemonic language, and, accordingly, of collective epistemology. Yet simultaneously the novel stimulates reflection on one's own stance in informing collective meanings. The presentation of linguistic mechanisms as contingent suspends an unproblematic, immediate identification with myth and dismantles the biblical image of its eschatological tone.

Grossman's literary endeavor thus demonstrates that what is looming above Israeli society is not the Binding of Isaac image with its threatening potential to materialize, but rather, the view of myths as an unavoidable transcendental imperative. In *To the End of the Land*, the adaptation and distortion of myth are not merely means for the criticism of Israeli politics, but are tools for exploring a new epistemology for Hebrew poetics that takes into account the conflicting forces of language and how they shape collective cultural figures. Addressing the *Akedah*, the novel does not break with the link of Hebrew speakers to biblical myth; rather, it challenges the immediate connection between the familiarity with the social trope and the participation in social institutions.

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Јаел Алмог

ЈАВНИ РИТУАЛИ: РАЗУМЕВАЊЕ МИТА У ДЕЛУ ДЕЈВИДА ГРОСМАНА *ДО КРАЈА ЗЕМЉЕ*

Сажетак

Овај рад истражује дело Дејвида Гросмана *До краја Земље* као интервенцију у дебату о постојању мита у израелском друштву. Да ли звучност Библије у модерном хебрејском значи да су и библијски наративи конститутивни у јеврејској колективној меморији? Да ли књижевне референце ка Библији говоре о вези оних који говоре хебрејски са *земљом?* Гросманов роман увиђа импликације ових питања за политичко деловање појединца. И то ради кроз одличну адаптацију једног мотива који је веома чест у јеврејској литератури: жртвовање Исака. Овај важан библијски мит је трансформисан у роману у неколико сцена: необичним доношењем *Акедах* сцене од стране матријата; оригиналном егзегезом библијских имена и уклопљавање неколико библијских наратива у структуру романа. Протагонисти откривају „свесност" ових сцена када их рефлектују на своје животе са разним библијских наративима – чије разлике им омогућавају да разматрају употребу мита у политичком дискурсу. Аутор у овом чланку сматра да овај роман говори о томе да је улога мита у Израелу зависна о философији самог језика који он развија. У делу *До краја земље* има учења језика, лингвистичких веза са главним језиком Израела, игара речи и семиотичких колапса. Кроз представљање језичких изговарања као контингента, асоцијативно, субјективно и са сталним променама, идентификација са библијским наративима је нестабилна. *До краја земље* доводи у питање лимите јеврејске литературе у редефинисању валенце језика којим се пише као и могућности књижевних текстова да обликују главне услове њене рецепције: колективну меморију и националне мотиве.

Кључне речи: Дејвид Гросман, мит, хебрејски, *акедах,* јеврејска литература