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"ALL GOD'S MYSTERIES HE ENCRYPTED IN THE TALMUD" – ON SHAY AGNON'S POETICS OF HALACHA

NURIT BARNEA BERNHEIM

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Abstract

From the very beginning, Agnon's writing was acknowledged as a **unique** literary achievement within the evolving corpus of Hebrew literature. Alongside his modern stories depicting secular life in Germany and Israel, Agnon focused on the bygone traditional diaspora-centered Jewish world. Over the years this choice became the center of dispute amongst Agnon's literary critics. It was debated how the same stories could contain two conflicting commentaries: religiosity based on Halacha, together with a disillusioned egocentric attitude of the individual psyche, characteristic of modern literature. In particular, what enabled the two conflicting outlooks to co-exist within the same narrative? This article shows that keeping his stories within of Halachic boundaries is what allowed Agnon to write traditional yet very modern (and vice versa – modern yet very traditional) stories. Taking these interpretive liberties can be viewed as a paradox: secularism within the boundaries of Halacha.

The three stories discussed in this paper – "Panim Aherot" (1932), "Agunot"(1908) and "Vahaya HaAkov LeMishor"(1912) – all deal with the impact of secularism on the Jewish married couple. In "Panim Aherot" divorce is at the center; in "Agunot" arranged marriage is posed against the modern concept of falling in love; and "Vahaya HaAkov LeMishor" is concerned with the abandoned wife (Ha'Aguna). In all of these stories, the dissolution of marriage is caused due to the introduction of the new modern ideas of lust, love and sexuality into

traditional Jewish society. These three stories are among the most discussed stories by Agnon, yet reading them through a Halachic lens reveals new meanings that are valid even in today's post-secular Israel. Special attention is paid in this paper to the question of women who, in the literary battle between secularism and Halacha, still maintain the integrity of their love, their body and their honor. Agnon manages all of this by taking liberties that can be understood almost as a paradox: secularism within the boundaries of Halacha

AN UNKNOWN VERSION OF THE MYTH OF THE FALLEN ANGELS

MOSHE IDEL

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Abstract

Unlike the assumption of scholars as the scarce occurrence of the ancient myth of the fallen angel, in Ashkenazi literature written in the Middle Ages, various versions of this myth occur. The most elaborate one, extant in a unique manuscript in Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, Hebrew MS 859, is copied in the name of a certain Rabbi Barukh Kohen Ashkenazi, an unidentified, probably late 13th century author, has been ignored in scholarship. This unedited version has a much shorter parallel included in Rabbi Eliyahu Capsali early 16th century history entitled *Eliyahu Zutta*. The two versions have been printed here and commented on at some length in my discussions and footnotes. In my opinion, this version includes some motifs, stemming from late antiquity material, and its content may help reconstructing a different history of the transmission of variants of this myth, with an accent on the seminal contribution of medieval Ashkenazi preservation of older material, as it is also the case in other instances.

'THEY NO LONGER DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN THE NATION OF
ISRAEL AND GENTILES': RAV TZVI ISRAEL THAU AND HIS
BATTLE AGAINST FOREIGN INFLUENCES

MORDECHAI MILLER

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Abstract

Since its establishment in July 2019, the Noam party has been fighting against what it defines as 'foreign influences'. The party believes that these influences endanger the continued existence of the State of Israel as a Jewish state. The party's struggle focuses on the areas of Feminism, LGBTQ, and opposition to contemporary non-orthodox Jewish streams. The party also strives to bring about a total merger of religion and state. In this article, I seek to shed light on the party's insistence on abandoning core issues that traditionally characterized religious-zionist politics. The party prefers to lead a war in explosive issues that alienate potential right-wing and religious voters. To understand this, I trace the political thought of the party leader, one of the senior rabbis in religious-zionism, Rabbi Tzvi Israel Thau.

In this article I emphasize on R. Thau's emergency consciousness according to which intensive political activity is necessary for the state of Israel to continue to exist as a Jewish state. In addition, I show that the party's rhetoric concerning 'foreignness' is drawn from significant Jewish philosophical sources, that draw an ontological distinction between Jews and non-Jews. Also, I explain R. Thau's decision to join the political arena, in contrast to his past opposition to any political activity, consider Kookist historiography and its current development by R. Thau. I also describe aspects of R. Thau's struggle with foreign influences, and how the disengagement plan from Gaza may explain his

choice to dedicate himself to this struggle. The article concludes with a discussion of possible political scenarios that may materialize in the wake of the political turning point of R. Thau and his students.

'WE ARE A UNIQUE PEOPLE, UNLIKE ANY OTHER'
THE DISCRETE PERCEPTION
AS REFLECTED IN SCHOOL ANTHOLOGIES

OSHRI ZIGHELBOIM

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Abstract

This article examines how the concept of the Chosen People is reflected in the literary works that comprise school anthologies of the Haredi Ultra-Orthodox Jewish Sector in Israel. The concept of the Jewish People being the Chosen People entails a Discrete Perception that is not always noticeable at first glance. It is, however, indicated and revealed through the semantic-linguistic tools that are provided by Cognitive Semantics. In turn, these shed light on the conceptual arrangement of the semantic fields that comprise the concept of the Chosen People. The complex model of national identity that was developed in a previous study exposes three different types of the Discrete Perception – religious, ethnic, and territorial aspects – and the relationship between the three. The findings of this study reveal a polarization between the group of affiliation and the 'other' at both the revealed and concealed levels of the text. This polarization is reflected through a number of aspects, from discrete terms that differentiate between The People and Gentile, through the characteristics that are attributed to the Jewish People compared to other nations, to the abstract semantic fields that create polarization between up and down, between light and darkness. In this manner, a mental map is formed to emphasize the importance of the Jewish Collective and the strength of the Jewish People as a group, that differs greatly from the weakness of the individual.

BEYOND THE CONTRACTIONS OF
RELIGION AND NATIONALISM:
ON THE ENDURING RELEVANCE OF
HERMANN COHEN'S CRITICISM OF ZIONISM
AND ITS UNHOLY ALLIANCE WITH ORTHODOXY

CHRISTOPH SCHMIDT

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Abstract

This essay presents Hermann Cohen's critique of Zionism as a national contraction of Jewish ethical monotheism. Against all national, social or political transformations of the monotheistic God into a mythological god, Cohen takes prophetic messianism as a point of departure for a critique of the dialectics of enlightenment. The Jewish nation beyond sovereignty symbolizes the messianic aim of a history beyond domination.

THE END OF THE STORY,
AND OTHER ADVENTURES
IN AMERICAN JEWISH APOCALYPSE

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Abstract

This essay explores what it calls the "secular apocalyptic" discourse of the decline and disappearance of American Jewry not as a demographic problem but rather as a narrative crisis, or a crisis in narrativity. The article argues that the economic and cultural successes of Jewish Americans have been difficult to locate within Jewish narrative traditions, rendering the shape and meaning of these experiences opaque or resistant to incorporation within familiar Jewish narratives.