

# Windows to Israeli Society through Literature

From the Danube to the Shores of the Mediterranean

## Hungarian Writers in Israel

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## Theodor Herzl – Altneuland (excerpt)

Attention was diverted from the humorists when an elderly gentleman sitting next to, Mrs. Loeffler remarked in a slightly raised voice that things were becoming worse in Moravia. "In the provincial towns," he said, "our people are in actual peril. When the Germans are in a bad mood, they break Jewish windows. When the Czechs are out of sorts, they break into Jewish homes. The poor are beginning to emigrate. But they don't know where to go." Mrs. Laschner chose this moment to scream to her husband, "Moriz! You must take me to the Burg Theatre the day after tomorrow!"

"Don't interrupt!" replied the broker. "Dr. Weiss is telling us about the situation in Moravia. Not pleasant, 'pon my honor." Samuel Weinberger, father of the bridegroom, broke into the conversation. "Being a rabbi, Doctor, you see things rather black." "White (Weiss) always sees black," interjected one of the wits, but the pun went unnoticed.

"I feel quite safe in my factory," continued the elder Weinberger. "When they make any trouble for me, I send for the police, or call on the commandant. Just show bayonets to the mob, and it mends its manners." "But that in itself is a grave situation," countered Dr. Weiss gently. Dr. Walter, a lawyer whose name had originally been Veiglstock, remarked, "I don't know who it was that said you could do anything with bayonets except sit on them." "I feel it coming," cried Laschner, "We'll all have to wear the yellow badge." "Or emigrate," said the rabbi. "I ask you, where to?" asked Walter. "Are things better anywhere else? Even in free France the anti-Semites have the upper hand,"

Dr. Weiss, a simple rabbi from a provincial town in Moravia, did not know exactly in what company he found himself, and ventured a few shy remarks. "A new movement has arisen within the last few years, which is called Zionism. Its aim is to solve the Jewish problem through colonization on a large scale. All who can no longer bear their present lot will return to our old home, to Palestine." He spoke very quietly, unaware that the people about him were getting ready for an outburst of laughter. He was therefore dumbfounded at the effect of the word "Palestine." The laughter ran every gamut. The ladies giggled, the gentlemen roared and neighed. Friedrich alone was indignant at the brutal and unseemly merriment at the old man's expense. Blau took advantage of the first breathing spell to declare that had the new operetta boasted one jest like this, all would have been well with it. "And I'll be ambassador at Vienna!" shouted Gruen.

The laughter broke out once more. "I too!" "I too!" Blau assumed a serious tone. "Gentlemen, everyone cannot have that post. I am certain the Austrian Government would not accept so many Jewish ambassadors. You must seek other appointments." The old rabbi, deeply embarrassed, did not again raise his eyes from his plate while the humorists zealously dissected the new idea. They divided the new empire, they described its customs. The stock exchange would be closed on the Sabbath. Those who served their country or enriched themselves on the stock exchange would receive the "Order of David" or the "meat" sword from the king. But who would be king? "Baron Goldstein by all means," suggested Blau.

Schlesinger, representative of that renowned banker, was annoyed. "I beg that the person of Baron von Goldstein be left out of this conversation," he said, "at least while I am present." Almost the whole company nodded approval. The witty Blau did sometimes say very tactless things. Bringing Baron Goldstein into this kind of talk was really going a bit far. But Blau went on. "Dr. Walter will be appointed minister of justice, and will be ennobled under the title of 'von Veiglstock.' 'Walter, count of Veiglstock.'" Laughter. The lawyer blushed at the sound of his paternal cognomen. "It's a long time since you've had your face slapped!" he cried. The punster Gruen, more cautious, whispered some word-play on the lawyer's name to the lady next to him. "Will there be theaters in Palestine?" queried Mrs. Laschner. "If not, I shall not go there." "Certainly, madam," replied Gruen. "All Israel will assemble for the festival performances at the royal theater in Jerusalem."

Rabbi Weiss finally ventured a word. "Whom are you mocking, gentlemen? Yourselves?"

Herzl, Theodor (2017-02-25). *The Old New Land: Altneuland-Tel Aviv* Kindle Edition.

FROM THE SUMMIT OF MT SCOPUS

PEACE TO YOU, JERUSALEM

From the summit of Mount Scopus,  
I will prostrate myself to you,  
From the summit of Mount Scopus,  
O Jerusalem, peace unto you.  
For a hundred generations I have dreamt of you,  
To merit/to cry and behold the light of your countenance.

Chorus:  
Jerusalem, Jerusalem  
Light up your face to your son,  
Jerusalem, Jerusalem  
From your ruins will I build you.

I came here with a confident heart  
To rebuild your ruins,  
Yet how can I build your Temple  
When there is no peace among your children?  
Sephardi, Ashkenazi, Yemenite, Falasha  
Urphali, Georgian, Haredi and Liberal

Jerusalem, Jerusalem  
This is not what I have dreamt about  
Jerusalem Jerusalem  
Make peace among your sons.

From the summit of Mount Scopus,  
O Jerusalem, peace unto you.  
Thousands of exiles around the world,  
Raise up their eyes to you.  
In thousands of blessings may you  
be blessed,  
Kingly sanctuary, royal city.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem,  
I shall not move away,  
Jerusalem, Jerusalem,  
The Messiah will surely come, one day.

מעל פסגת הר הצופים

אביגדור המאירי

לחן: סטניסלב מוניושקו  
כתיבה: 1928

מעל פסגת הר הצופים  
אשתתנה לך אפים.  
מעל פסגת הר הצופים  
שלום לך, ירושלים.  
מאה דורות חלמתי עליך  
לזכות, לראות באור פניך.  
ירושלים, ירושלים,  
האירי פניך לבגד!  
ירושלים, ירושלים,  
מתרבותיך אבגד!

בלב בוטח באתי היום  
הקים את הריסותיך  
אך איך אבנה את בית מקדשך  
אם אין שלום בין בניך?  
ספרדים, אשכנזים, תימנים, פלשים  
אורפלים וגורגלים וחרדים וקפזים  
ירושלים, ירושלים,  
לא זאת חזיתי בתלום!  
ירושלים, ירושלים,  
בין בניך השרי נא שלום!

מעל פסגת הר הצופים  
שלום לך, ירושלים  
אלפי גולים מקצות כל תבל  
נושאים אליך עינים  
באלפי ברכות הוי ברוכה  
מקדש מלך, עיר מלוכה  
ירושלים, ירושלים,  
אני לא אזור מפה!  
ירושלים, ירושלים,  
בוא המשיח, בוא!

**Walking to Caesarea** Hannah Szenes

My God, may it never end  
the sea and the sand,  
the splash of the water,  
the brilliance of the sky  
the prayer of man.

(Sdot Yam- Caesarea November 24, 1942)

**הליכה לקיסריה** חנה סנש

אלי, שלא יגמר לעולם  
החול והים,  
רשרוש של המים,  
ברק השמים,  
תפלת האדם.

קיסריה, 24.11.1942

**Blessed is the Match** Hanna Szenes

Blessed is the match consumed in the kindling flame.  
Blessed is the flame that burns in the heart's secret  
places.  
Blessed is the heart with strength to stop its beating  
for honor's sake.  
Blessed is the match consumed in the kindling flame  
Serdice 5.2.1944

**אשרי הגפרור** חנה סנש

אשרי הגפרור שנספרף והצית להבות.  
אשרי הלהבה שבערה בסתרי לבבות.  
אשרי הלבבות שיזעו להדל בכבוד...  
אשרי הגפרור שנספרף והצית להבות.

סרדיצה, 2.5.1944

## **Introduction and Conclusion**

or

### **The Essence of the Book**

#### **Ephraim Kishon**

Attila (Haim) Csardas (formerly Cohen), an illegal immigrant from Hungary, was in the gymnasium in the Jewish Community Center in Bratislava (Pressburg – in the language of the Talmud), on the second rung of the wall-ladder. So great was his fear that he hugged his wife Shaari (born ‘Pearl’), to her great astonishment. A couple of policemen passed by the entrance to the Center, with clearly anti-Zionist strides.

“God of ill- ill- illegal immigrants,” panted Csardas (formerly Cohen) quietly, “May the Slovak tormentors of illegal immigrants not find me. Jews of the world, save me! I don’t care if I get to the holy land of Palestine in a wash-robe!”

At that moment the Slovak newsvendor led out a loud yell in his mother tongue. Csardas-Cohen shook all over. He lowered himself to the level of his partner in escape on the lowest rung, and rudely gave up even his wash-robe in the Holy Land.

Attila-Haim Csardas-Cohen sat in the bus, holding on with his fingernails to the shoulder of his wife’s coat. The vehicle bounded along, bumping violently, through the pitch-black night, on a hardly discernible Austrian track towards the border.

“If I make it safely to Salzburg,” Attila Cohen whispered softly, “It will be with the help of God! Blessed will be the Jews of Palestine and its merciful government! From this day on I foreswear all the pleasures of this world. If I reach our motherland (I swear that’s what he said: ‘motherland’), even if I am barely alive, I will donate ten thousand schillings for the restoration of the Western Wall. And I will also contribute...”

“Wait,” his wife interrupted him as usual, “I think we’ve already crossed the border.”

“Never mind,” said Haim Csardas, “I’m going to keep my vow. One hundred schillings won’t ruin me.”

Czardas, or Cohen for short, sat in the railway carriage, making himself as small as possible. His passport had erroneously been marked, instead of “Dr. Moshe Akzionskommittee, Safed”, with the name “Gisela Zwick, Budapest.” He was drenched in fear lest the Italian customs officers return him to Rothschild Hospital in Vienna (actually, the place he had escaped from).

“I think,” whispered Csardas-Cohen-Zwick to his wife, as the train emitted a terrible shriek and came to a halt on the Italian border, “that if the international Jewish brotherhood saves me right now, I will introduce Teffilin into the kibbutzim, I will sieve the sands of the sea of Jerusalem and I will divide up all my possessions, down to my second-last diamond, between the

‘Association for War Victims’ and the needy in the Orthodox kibbutzim in the Land. What joy to flee naked and penniless for the sake of the Holy Land.”

Attila-Gisela Csardas bent down under the blue skies of the land. One by one he yanked the nails out of his largest lift, until finally he peeled off the top. Then he mopped his streaming forehead in the Tel Aviv heat and dived into the contents of the chest. He searched and scrabbled and scratched around for a while – and suddenly stopped. He clutched his head, and a vein stood out on his temple.

“Shaaari,” he bellowed, “You remember that I put a green nailbrush in the drawer of the bathroom stool? That’s the Jewish Agency for you!!! My green nailbrush has vanished! Thieves! Grave robbers! It was almost new! This is the redemption? This is the State of Israel? Come on, Ben-Gurion, come here and look me in the eye!”

**Map of Budapest** Agi Mishol

Poring over the map of Budapest:

On the left of the blue

Duna

Is Buda

On the right is Pest.

I ponder how, were it not for

My wanderings from there to Remez, twenty five in Gedera

I would be stretched out there

Now

At Filer thirty, for example

On a hunched evening like this one

Alongside a penultimate cat

Describing lovers with names like

Bela or Janos.

**Ubi Sunt** Agi Mishol

Where are you, Transylvanian Geese?

Whose feathers drifted to Palestina without you?

And were gathered into my down quilt.

**Singalong** Agi Mishol

The flutelike artery of feeling

Seeped into me

Its underground waters bubble up in Hungarian

Agi, Agnes, Agitza, Aginka

They gently wonder at me

In the language of Attila.

What do you have in common with “The Sea of Corn That Surrounds Us”?

## I Heard

Miriam Neiger Fleischman

I heard on the radio  
Arabic words inserted into Hebrew poetry  
Like an ornament or surfeit.  
The melody lovely, liturgical style.  
As if the syllables were signals of an unseen sonar  
And not the distraction of broadcasting,  
Or immigrant identity.

From the land of Hagar, we wandered over sea and river waves.  
Europe had tied to our feet  
Its ropes – from the Danube fracture, a crawling Jewish plant  
over an unknown soil.

My foothold is neither here nor there  
My homeland does not tread.  
It tiptoes carefully  
Flutters in the trickling mind  
Purified by honing words against words  
Ana B'Koach – (Please, with all Your might, Hebrew)  
Ana B'Chebak – (I love you, Arabic)

שמעתי מרים נייגר פליישמן

שמעתי ברדיו  
מלים בערבית משבצות בשירה עברית  
כלנית חן או סרח ענף,  
נעימה ערבה, נסח פיוט.  
כמו היו ההגאים אותות סונאר בלתי נראה,  
ולא שדורי הסקה, הגירת שיכות.

על גלי ים ונהר מארץ הגר נדדנו .  
אירופה לכפות רגלינו קשרה  
חבליה משבר הדנובה צמח יהודי זוחל  
על אדמה לא מקרת.

מדרכי לא בזה ואף לא באחר  
מכורתי אינה דורכת.  
רק בזהירות על קצות האצבעות  
מרפרפת בתודעה הנגירה  
המטהרת בצחצוח מלים במלים  
אנא בכת.  
אנא בחיבק

## You do not get to choose your Family

*Amnon Groff*

A minute before they took away my grandmother,  
Daughter of the very religious David Rubenstein  
And granddaughter of the very, very religious,  
Solomon Meshulam Rubenstein,  
On a long trip, from which she never came back,  
She had promised to return  
As soon as possible,  
She asked my mother, who was thirteen,  
To watch over her (very + very, very)  
young brother and sister.  
She had also made her swear  
To continue fasting on Yom Kippur.  
She never kept her first promise  
But my mother, who had almost fasted,  
Together with her brother and sister  
Along all the years of the war,  
Continued to keep her promise  
And fasted every Yom Kippur,  
Even when she raised us in the Kibbutz (Hashomer  
Hatzair<sup>1</sup>)  
And even when she raised us in the city.  
(As a matter of fact, the Metaplot<sup>1</sup> had raised us in the  
kibbutz)  
In – 1973, after the Yom Kippur war  
And after her son did not return,  
Even though he had promised to  
'Just get to Cairo and immediately come back'  
She announced to us that, that was it.  
She and God are not related anymore  
And she did not fast again (except for pre Soroka<sup>1</sup>  
fasts)  
Until the day she died.

Since then, I was very surprised to discover, this month  
In the faraway, Budapest exile,  
A relative  
Great grandson of  
The very, very religious Solomon Meshulam  
Rubenstein,  
Whom I did not know, a true rabbi, who equipped with  
a shofar,  
Communicates with God.

משפחה לא בוחרים

אמנון גרוף

דקה לפני שלקחו את סבתא שלי,  
בתו של דוד רובינשטיין הדתי מאוד  
ונכדתו של סלומון משולם רובינשטיין,  
הדתי מאוד מאוד,  
לטיול ארוך, ממנו לא חזרה,  
היא הבטיחה שתחזור  
כמה שיותר מהר,  
ביקשה מאימי, בת השלוש עשרה,  
לשמור על אחיה ואחותה הצעירים  
(מאוד + מאוד מאוד)  
והשביעה אותה  
להמשיך ולצום ביום כיפור.  
את ההבטחה הראשונה היא לא קיימה  
אבל אימי, שכמעט צמה,  
יחד עם אחותה ואחיה,  
במשך כל שנות המלחמה,  
המשיכה לקיים את הבטחתה  
וצמה בכל יום כיפור,  
גם כשגידלה אותנו בקיבוץ (השומר הצעיר)  
וגם כשגידלה אותנו בעיר.  
(בעצם, בקיבוץ, המטפלות גידלו אותנו)  
ב- 1973, אחרי מלחמת יום הכיפורים  
ואחרי שבנה לא חזר,  
למרות שהבטיח ש'  
רק מגיע לקהיר וכבר חוזר'  
היא הודיעה לנו שזהו.  
היא ואלוהים כבר לא.  
ולא צמה עוד (חוץ מצומות של טרום סרוקה)  
עד יום מותה.  
מאוד הופתעתי לגלות, החודש,  
בגלות בודפשט, הרחוקה,  
קרוב משפחה,  
נינו של סלומון משולם רובינשטיין,  
הדתי מאוד מאוד, שלא הכרתי.  
רב אמיתי, שמתקשר, מצויד בשופר,  
עם אלוהים.

## About my Grandmother

Amnon Grof

Yolan (Rubenstein) Turner  
Who, on November 8<sup>th</sup> 1944  
Had left for the Death March from Budapest  
and was marching towards the Austrian border,  
In cold, and in rain and in snow  
Together with her oldest daughter  
Until she became ill and could hardly walk  
(Because it is hard to walk fast, when you have  
typhoid)  
It was then, that my aunt, who is now called Clara  
(But that is a different story)  
Had stepped off the main road  
Because she had seen a wheelbarrow in one of the  
fields.  
She was pushing her wheelbarrow  
and my grandmother who was sitting, or lying  
down, or dying in it  
Until one of the Hungarian guards  
Came up to her  
And told my aunt it was time for saying Shema<sup>1</sup>  
And that he wanted to help her  
He shot one bullet at the head of her mother  
And another, for help's sake  
At her leg.  
She continued to march, my aunt,  
With the bullet in her leg  
All the way to America.

על סבתא שלי

אמנון גרוף

יולן (רובינשטיין) טרנר  
שב-8 לנובמבר 1944  
יצאה לצעדת המוות מבודפשט  
והייתה צועדת, לכיוון הגבול האוסטרי  
בקור ובגשם ובשלג  
יחד עם בתה הבכורה  
עד שחלתה והלכה בקושי  
(כי קשה ללכת מהר כשיש לך טיפוס)  
שאז ירדה דודתי, שהיום קוראים לה קלרה  
(אבל זה סיפור אחר)  
מהדרך הראשית  
כי ראתה מריצה באחד השדות  
והייתה דוחפת את מריצתה  
ואת סבתי שישבה או שכבה או גססה בתוכה  
עד שניגש אליהן  
אחד מאנשי המשמר ההונגרים  
ואמר לדודתי, בהונגרית,  
שהגיע זמן קריאת שמע  
ושהוא רוצה לעזור לה  
וירה כדור אחד בראשה של אמה  
ועוד כדור, בשביל העזרה,  
ברגלה.  
והיא המשיכה ללכת, דודתי,  
עם הכדור, ברגלה,  
עד אמריקה.