

Mount Moriah and the Labyrinth: Back to the Sources in A. B. Yehoshua's *Mr. Mani*

My novel, Mr. Mani, concludes with the confession of Abraham Mani, its protagonist. But what does Abraham want to tell his Rabbi? He recounts the story of the akedah—the binding and sacrifice of Isaac—at the true site where it was meant to be carried out, that is, on Mt. Moriah. In sacrificing his son [. . .], Abraham Mani returns matters to square one. From that point, he [. . .] returns all the way to his origins and the beginnings of Judaism with Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees.

— Abraham B. Yehoshua, “Mr. Mani and the Akedah”.¹

WHAT ARE WE TO MAKE of A. B. Yehoshua's definition of the biblical *akedah* as not only the binding of Isaac but also his sacrifice? Surely, Yehoshua knows that the Hebrew root *ayin*, *kof*, *dalet*, from which the word *akedah* derives, means only “to bind” (and not “to sacrifice”), and that in Jewish tradition, the philosophical meaning of the *akedah* lies in the “detail” that in the end Isaac was not sacrificed.

Cynthia Ozick has warned us to be skeptical of novelists' extra-textual elucidations, asserting that prefaces are nothing more than pieces of fiction and should be taken as just one more fiction in a book of fictions.²

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Are we not, therefore, to take A. B. Yehoshua's essay, "Mr *Mani* and the *Akedah*," as a fiction as well? In this extra-textual commentary, Yehoshua "explains" that in writing the novel's ending (which is the beginning of the *Mani* family saga, about which more later), he wanted to free himself and the Jewish people of the *Akedah* myth—"a powerful and terrible myth," he calls it, "morally insupportable"—and to "annul," by its fulfillment in the novel, the *Akedah* that hovers menacingly over the heads of the Jewish people.³ The problem with this essay, however challenging its formulations and its message, is that, as it relates to Yehoshua's novel, it is also a fiction, no less a fiction than the novel itself. For, as we shall see, while the novel does allude obliquely to several biblical stories in general and to the biblical story of the binding of Isaac in particular, nowhere in the narrative of the murder of Yosef *Mani* on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem in 1847 is there the slightest hint that he is being sacrificed by his father Abraham, responding to a call from God. In fact, within the novel itself there are two competing versions of the murder of Yosef *Mani*. In the first version,⁴ Yosef had gone out at night without a lantern. Stopped for this infraction by a watchman, he flees, ending up on the *Haram-el-Sharif* (Mount Moriah), where he is slaughtered not by his father but, in Avraham *Mani*'s own words, "by our Ishmaelite cousins." In a somewhat more ambiguous second version of the story told by the father (361), the son has a lantern, which the father and his son's "murderer" take from his hand and cause him to flee. In this case, the son is chased not only by "Ishmaelites" but also by a band of Russian pilgrims celebrating Christmas Eve and the birth of their Savior. The father and his Ishmaelite companion—the murderer—seek explicitly not to kill Yosef but rather to save him from the Christian mob.⁵

Interesting as literary gossip or as a back-story to the novel, Yehoshua's extra-literary fiction-making does not detract from the exquisite artistry that pervades the literary masterpiece that is *Mr. Mani*, the novel. If anything, Yehoshua's willful "interference" in the reader's reading of his novel—his distortion of it, misrepresenting what he has written—ought perhaps be perceived as a fiction-writer's primal impulse to create fictions, inviting us to move from consideration of what "actually" happens in the novel to a much more interesting question: What is going on here?

Yehoshua's English translator, Hillel Halkin, makes an insightful comment on *Mr. Mani* that unpacks the duality of the novel: "As always in Yehoshua's work," Halkin suggests, "one must look for a second, submerged novel beneath the first one."⁶

The idea of inexactly parallel and contradicting stories is a leitmotif of the novel. One of the novel's five narrators, while telling a story to his father

in the downstairs salon of his father's estate, is sure that his sister, upstairs, is telling her version of the story to their mother. "Let there be two stories," he pronounces, "an upstairs and a downstairs. As for the truth, it can run up and down between them" (214). In another episode, having learned that the birth of Moshe Mani was the result of an illicit coupling of Avraham Mani with his daughter-in-law, we are told a contradictory version of that story. "Our defendant's father, Moshe Hayyim Mani, was conceived to his mother Tamara and his father Joseph Mani, who died before his son was born" (165). At issue here are two "facts": 1) that Joseph Mani did not merely die but was murdered; and 2) that Joseph Mani did not father Moshe but rather that Avraham was the progenitor.

What is instructive about these alternative stories is that they lead to another leitmotif in the novel, the urge by the various narrators to tell their stories, and to tell them "correctly." Thus, we find statements like "my goal is to tell you my story in the order and way it should be told" (82); or, confident reassurances that despite many loose ends "everything will fit together in the end" (169); or, assertions that, contrary to appearances, "in the end I always manage to get to the point" (216). No less instructive is the declaration that the very act of telling the story is somehow therapeutic, "a balm for my weary soul" (229).

The theme of alternative narratives is closely paralleled by another *dédoublément*, this time enlarging the artistic space by the use of mirrors. These mirrors appear most prominently in a birthing clinic founded in Jerusalem by the gynecologist Dr. Moshe Mani. As another Mani physician, Dr. Ephrayim Mani, explains to his father back in Poland after attending a Zionist Congress with his sister in Vienna, "Wherever we looked we saw reflections—ghostly apparitions—images within images" (254). And then, seeing a womb, he remarks, "this was doubled and redoubled all around us—behind us, before us, overhead and underneath—yes, even the tears that glittered in the eyes of Linka, who was enraptured by the mystery of birth, were increased exponentially" (255). What is implied by these mirrors is that it is possible to enlarge the space of a specific work and to break beyond the work of art's frame into real life.

In the novel's first Conversation, which takes place on a kibbutz in 1982, during the first Lebanon war, Hagar Shiloh tells her mother that she believes that she has stumbled into a story that is much larger than her own. Believing that she has become an integral part of the Mani story, Hagar attaches herself to Judge Gavriel Mani who, she surmises, is intent on committing suicide. Later, returned to Tel Aviv, she copulates with Efi Mani and

becomes pregnant. Despite Efi's refusal to marry her, she has the baby, Roni Mani (1983-), and brings him up on her mother's kibbutz. Judge Mani comes regularly to visit his grandson (another in an ambiguous string of "illegitimate" Manis) and a relationship between him and Hagar's mother, Ya'el, starts up. Attacked in his car by Arab terrorists on one of his frequent trips to the kibbutz, Gavriel Mani, far from being interested in committing suicide, having survived the attack, vows to be more careful, and henceforth will take safer routes from Jerusalem to the kibbutz. The story's plot, having skirted tragedy at every turn, ends almost pastorally in the comic mode with the promise that there will indeed be a future for the Mani line. Hagar's story becomes a sort of detective novel in which she endeavors to find out what the "bigger story" in which her story is imbricated consists of. "I keep trying to explain this new feeling . . . that I've never had before, which is that I'm not so alone anymore but part of a much bigger story that I don't know anything about yet because it's only beginning" (43). In another Conversation, the British-Jewish prosecutor, Ivor Horowitz, is bitten by the same bug as Hagar Shiloh. "The knowledge turns in me like a knife," he says, "that there's another story here" (195). He believes that Mani is engaged in a bit of playacting.

In the end, what Yehoshua is attempting here is to create a theatrical frame around his story in which the Manis must put on a play they are destined to perform. "Mani had finished writing his drama—had added the stage directions—had cast the lead—had even picked his audience—and was now only looking for a place to set up a theater and put on the play" (282). Not only is the play the thing, it is the eternal, DNA-coded thing. "It flashed through my mind . . . that the curtain had already risen—that before me no longer stood a doctor from Jerusalem but an actor forced to recite a script that he cannot revise—one drummed into him immemorial ages ago—which—although he was the director and the theater owner too—he was not at liberty to leave unperformed and must stage to the bitter end" (284).

It can be no coincidence that Yehoshua's five narrators tell their stories in five languages—Hebrew, German, English, Yiddish, and Ladino—and tell them at five different sites in five different time frames—at a contemporary Israeli kibbutz; on the Greek island of Crete during World War II; in Mandatory Palestine in 1918; at a Jewish country estate at the time of the Zionist Congress at the turn of the century; and in Athens, Greece, in 1848. What they have in common is the need to tell a story in his or her own way. This is also a trait they share with their novelist, the author of this version of "Judaism and the Art of the Novel."

The art of *Mr. Mani* has much to do with Yehoshua's three most obvious efforts at stylistic pyrotechnics. Like Yehoshua's previously-published novel, *Molkho* (1987, published in English as *Five Seasons*, 1989), parts of which were written contemporaneously with *Mr. Mani*, the latter novel is written in five parts and can be read quite easily—if “wrongly”—as five different novellas.⁷ Like Martin Amis's 1991 Holocaust novel, *Time's Arrow*, *Mr. Mani*'s chapters are presented in reverse chronological order, calling for what Arnold Band terms an “archeological reading.”⁸ Like a chapter of Yehoshua's 1984 novel, *A Late Divorce*, each part of the novel is presented dramatically, as a dialogue of which we hear only one speaker's voice.⁹ The plot of the novel is, therefore, difficult to follow and to retain in the extreme.¹⁰

The plot reveals what happens in the novel. To get at an understanding of what is truly going on there, we must first ask what to make of the novel's stylistic quirk that Yehoshua calls in Hebrew *ha-kivvun ha-negdi*, the contrary direction.¹¹ In adopting this technique, Yehoshua flouts not only the norms of chronological story-telling but, perhaps more importantly, flies in the face of conventional morality, both Jewish and Western. Nevertheless, Yehoshua's apparent artifice is realistic in the extreme. In life, he seems to be saying, we must recognize that things do not happen idyllically.

As we have noted, Arnold Band likens the novel suggestively to an archeological dig, peeling back the layers of a civilization to get at its source. He then finds a parallel in psychoanalysis, whose process follows a similar pattern. There is also the idea latent in the novel that, by going backwards to the source of a disaster we might somehow repair it and therefore change the course of history. All three elements are indeed present in *Mr. Mani*.

If one peels back the layers, as Band suggests Yehoshua is doing, the reader will be disabused of any romantic notions of smooth transitions from one generation to the next (and to the next, and so on) and will not fail to see that national histories, no less than family sagas, are unstable, filled with surprising turns and, to say the least, with ambiguous developments.

It is more than merely curious that each of the narrators of the five parts of the novel is to be considered a misfit or even a rebel in his or her society and is also acutely aware that somehow, perhaps mysteriously, he or she is going back in time. Thus, Hagar, the young kibbutznik who uses the sperm of Efrayim Mani to insert herself in the Mani story, asks herself, “am I going back in time?” (47) and has a feeling that the *kivvun ha-negdi* is “pulling me like a magnet” (48).

Another Efrayim, the young Polish pediatrician, considers himself a “reverse Jew.” His report to his father on the Basel Zionist Congress describes

Dr. Mani as one who did not look “like a man bound for a country that was our common goal, but rather like one being sent back to some starting line” (242-43). The patrician pediatrician interrupts his narrative of his trip to Basel and Jerusalem to retell to his father a Jewish legend, “a story about the dead. . . about how, at the End of Days, at the Resurrection, the Christians would rise from their graves where they were, but we Jews would crawl through the underground caverns and come out in the Land of Israel.” He adds a telling commentary to his story: “which is just about what I’ve been doing these past few days, but in the opposite direction—from there to here” (208-09), i.e., in the *kivvun ha-negdi*, from Israel to the Diaspora.

Avraham, the incestuous primogenitor of the Mani race, also takes a trip “à rebours.” In his Sefardi *sihah* (Conversation) with “Dona Flora” and “Rabbi Heddayah,” he narrates how his son put together an extra-legal *minyán* (prayer quorum) of ten “Ishmaelites” to satisfy the father’s urge to say a prayer in honor of his dead parents. And not only that, this paterfamilias in the extreme explains, “all this was . . . to enable the father to satisfy his craving to chant the *kaddish*, not only for the souls of his parents, but also for those of his grand—and great-grand—and even greater-grand-parents than that, until the first father of us all must have heard in heaven that Avraham Mani had arrived in Israel.” Thus does Avraham go back in time and somehow “become”—though not in the way Yehoshua would have us believe in his essay—the Avraham of Mount Moriah.

What is interesting here is that in Yehoshua’s voyage “back to the sources,” he insists on juxtaposing the Jewish cultural experience with that of Western civilization. He does so by focusing on geography, specifically on the place where each civilization supposedly began. Thus, on the one hand, he takes the story back to Mount Moriah, the site of the biblical *Akedah*, the binding of Isaac, and, on the other, to the Labyrinth at Knossos on the Greek island of Crete, site of the palace of the legendary King Minos, which according to another myth is the source of Greek and, therefore, Western civilization.

What exactly is the meaning of ancient Greece in this Jewish novel? Is it to serve superficially as a sort of Western, secular, juxtaposition to the Jewish civilization that pervades the novel? The Western-Jewish polarity unquestionably exists here. It is certainly not a coincidence that the first “Conversation” of the novel takes place at “7:00 p.m. on Friday, December 31, 1982,” that is, on a New Year’s Eve that is also a Shabbat.

While the novel is lightly seeded with grains of allusions to Greek civilization per se, it is in the second “Conversation” that the theme of Greece gives off in abundance both its fruit and flowers. Egon Brenner, a young Nazi

soldier stationed in the recently conquered Greek island of Crete, was brought up in an upper-class German household and has studied both Latin and Greek and the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Egon reports to the interlocutor of his Conversation—his mother—the story of his encounter with a “Greek” guide, one Mr. Mani. For Mr. Mani, apparently a spellbinding narrator in his own right, “Sir Arthur Evans and his English archeologists who came here at the turn of the century, and King Minos and his royal court who lived here three and a half millennia ago, . . . were all one big family” (102). In what his mother will surely see as a perversion of German identity and the German ethos, he articulates his hope that one day soon, “Germans would come to the ruins of the Labyrinth from all over the Reich to study their own history and be solaced by another ancient civilization for the sorrow and disillusionment of our own” (201-02).

For Egon, Greece, and especially Crete, is a *locus amoenus*, “a wonderful special island, between the sun and the sea” (117), a place whose significance . . . I sensed immediately” (95). Even more specifically, the ruins of Knossos to which he has been introduced on Crete are perceived by him as “an ancient civilization that stirred and enchanted my soul” (102).

In Egon’s mind, Greece is nothing less than the very source of Western Civilization, “the warm, true blue womb of the German genius” (88).¹² But what Egon is doing goes far beyond looking to Greece as a source of what Germany has become. Rather, Yehoshua places in Egon’s psyche the idea, if not precisely the term, of *hakivvun hanegdi* to explain why—deep down—the Germans chose to conquer Crete. “[T]o drive south, . . . to ancient Hellas, to this island of Crete, this most wonderful place that has been from the start . . . the true grace of our German soul, whose deepest desire . . . is, simply to *exit from history* [. . .], if not forward then backward.” Egon’s theory of Europe as the cradle of European Civilization is therefore an indictment of German history. Going backward is apparently the trace followed by *all* the narrators of the novel.

What, specifically is it that Egon Bruner finds so attractive in the ancient civilization he finds on Crete? From his “Greek” guide, Mr. Mani, he learns—and accepts as his own—the patently absurd assertion that “this particular prehistoric culture had no gods at all, which was why he was so fond of it” (108). Furthermore, as long as he is rewriting both Greek mythology and even the historical lessons learned from British archeology, Yehoshua expands the fiction to make of ancient Knossos an ancient civilization that, in contrast to Jewish civilization, he says, “knew neither guilt nor fear” (130). Egon tells his mother how, shortly after the conquest of Crete, Egon was him-

self appointed as a guide for German visitors to the new German province. "I would convince them to come along with me to Knossos for a look at its ancient Labyrinth, which I tried getting them to see not just as an ancient ruin repainted to suit the whims of a fanatical British archeologist but as a possible goal, a holy grail for all Europe, for the European of the future, who will be free of fear and guilt" (130). It would appear, therefore, that for Yehoshua, Greece is the quintessential anti-Moriah, site of the event in Jewish history that provided to the world—including a guilty Germany—the idea of "fear and trembling."

But what is the place of the Jews in this womb of civilization? After all, implies Yehoshua, since prehistoric Knossos existed "before the Jews invented themselves," they were not even part of the equation. For the anti-Semites among his characters, Egon Bruner, for example, the Jew is a possible contaminant. That is why when Efrayim Mani declares to the German, "I was Jewish, but I am not anymore. . . . I've canceled it," Egon is happy to remark, "the infection had already cured itself, so that the blue womb that we had returned to was as pure and as uncontaminated as ever" (123). Egon is doubly happy because, in his belief that the Germans in history have themselves veered away from the purity represented by Greece, he comes to believe that if the Jews can cancel themselves, so too can the Germans. But Egon, suspecting that Efrayim's cancellation of his Jewishness is nothing more than a subterfuge, goes about searching the Mani house "for something they took out at night, something that might refute his declaration." He is appeased when he learns "that there is nothing Jewish a Jew can't do without" (127).

In this, the anti-Semite is wrong.

For many years, A. B. Yehoshua has been arguing against what he perceives as a Diaspora malady; namely, that the essence of a Diaspora Jew's identity is the centrality of the Jewish textual tradition. Yehoshua is adamantly fighting against assertions by those such as George Steiner, author of an essay entitled, "Our Homeland, the Text."¹³ Although he doesn't mention Steiner by name, Yehoshua repeatedly criticizes the idea that "Jewish identity can feed itself on the study of texts." He almost makes textual study the cause of the Diaspora malaise he perceives and of the alienation between American Jews and Israelis. He calls the study of "old texts" a way to escape from reality, and he asserts, "I am incensed by the increasingly dangerous and irresponsible disconnection between the glorification of the texts and the mundane matters of daily life."

And yet, Yehoshua would be the last one to deny that he himself is immersed in the Jewish textual tradition. In fact, while the novel is divided

into five “Conversations” in which we hear only the voice of one of the participants, there is definitely a sixth “Conversation” going on in the novel, and that is a conversation that Yehoshua is having with the Jewish textual tradition. As with the “silent,” unreported speech of the interlocutors in the five “Conversations,” which the reader is playfully being asked to elucidate, the reader is also challenged to make sense of Yehoshua’s conversations with Jewish texts.

It is obviously not for nothing that biblical names are sown all over the soil of the novel, taking root there with various levels of success. The names of the Israeli mother and daughter of the first Conversation are Biblical, not “Israeli”: Ya’el and Hagar, the latter, according to the author, a name “fitting for a girl born in the desert.” It is instructive that although the novel is named “Mr. Mani,” there are no fewer than ten Manis named in the book, nine of them with biblical names, including one Eliyahu Mani, three Yosef Manis, two Efrayim Manis, one Avraham Mani (presented as the family patriarch), and even one Moshe Mani, of whom Avraham Mani says, “I had my fill of Genesis and went on to Exodus, from which I took the name of Moses in all simplicity” (306). In the episode where Avraham Mani, against all Jewish morality, chooses to impregnate his daughter-in-law, can there be a doubt that she is named Tamara specifically to mirror the episode in Genesis where Judah impregnates his daughter-in-law, Tamar—at her initiative, to be sure, thus assuring family and tribal continuity? Interestingly, for all his use of the *Akedah* motif in the novel, Yehoshua does not name any of his characters Isaac but rather skips to the biblical hero Joseph, whom he rewrites into another Isaac. “Has my master and teacher forgotten,” Avraham Mani asks the silent Rabbi Heddaya, “the only son I offered up to him, my Yosef?” (316). The reader attentive to euphony will not fail to hear an echo of God’s commandment in Genesis, in which God leaves the name of Abraham’s sacrifice to the end of the sequence, “your son, your only son, Isaac.” There is also an uncanny resemblance of Yosef Mani to the biblical Joseph. For what other reason is he introduced into the marriage bed of Rabbi Heddayah and Dona Flora, if not to raise the specter of the biblical episode of Joseph with Potiphar’s wife? The Hebrew vocabulary of this novelistic episode is surely revelatory. When Yehoshua uses the Hebrew verb “*lehit’apek*,” to restrain oneself, he is recalling the biblical moment that uses the same verb to describe Joseph’s inability to hold back his tears when confronting his brothers in Egypt for the first time. That expression is mixed artfully with two others taken whole from the story of the *Akedah* itself, including not only the verb “*la’akod*,” to bind, but also the noun “*ma’akhelet*,” the

carving knife not used on the biblical Joseph but used to slaughter Yosef Mani on Mount Moriah.

And if Yosef Mani can be the biblical Joseph and the biblical Isaac at the same time, why can Avraham Mani not also be the biblical David when he sublimates his love for Flora into a love for his mentor Rabbi Heddaya, “who commands my loyalty more than my love of woman” (309), an echo of David’s declaration to Jonathan.

Arnold Band, as we have noted above, has called Avraham Mani “the most unreliable narrator in the novel.” But perhaps there is a deeper meaning to Avraham Mani’s mythomania, especially when it is linked to his propensity to quote—and to misquote or, more accurately, to rewrite—Jewish Scripture and Rabbinic sayings. He demonstrates that he is at home in Scripture when he utters a prayer for the restoration of his Rabbi’s health by taking the biblical verse used by Moses to pray for the healing of his sister Miriam and twists it ever so slightly so that the pronoun turns from the feminine to the masculine. Referring to *Pirkei Avot* (Sayings of the Fathers), Avraham Mani does not hesitate to rewrite one of that tractate’s many aphorisms. “Ben Ha Ha says,” he quotes, “‘according to the sorrow shall be the reward.’ But I . . . make bold to say: according to the reward shall be the sorrow” (347). Even more suggestively, one might ask whether Avraham Mani is referring to the reworted Torah or to the art of the novel when he says, “It was then that I thought of the words of Ben Bag Bag, ‘turn it and turn it, for all is in it and in it you shall find all’” (352). In conflating several biblical stories into one, and in calling the stories of these ten Manis “*Mr. Mani*,” Yehoshua is declaring in essence that the global story of Jewish identity, however flawed, while it may wind up in Israel, passes through the several Diaspora lives of a man named Mr. Mani.

One of the aesthetic lessons embedded in *Mr. Mani* is that a novel is a complicated, labyrinthine piece of work that is easy enough to get inside and even easier to get lost in when moving around from one compartment to the next. But how is one to get out of the labyrinth that is the novel without Ariadne’s complaisant thread to guide us, like Theseus, back out?

We have asked whether the *fil conducteur* of the novel is the theme of the *kivvun hanegdi*, the backward flow of time that the novel takes in its itinerary “back to the sources,” or whether it is the confrontation between Hebraism and Hellenism that is depicted here in the spatial polarity of Mount Moriah and the palace of Minos at Knossos. Perhaps we should be asking whether this book embodies a metaphysical point of view that we have been overlooking.

As constant as the two themes listed above is a third commonplace that is found to a greater or lesser degree in all five conversations. All of the conversations can be viewed as “trials” of the various narrators, all of whom either have a guilty conscience or feel—since they are aware that they are à rebours types—that they are being accused of some criminal activity. It is certainly no coincidence that the very center of the book—the third of the five conversations—is a judicial trial, the trial of a Jewish spy in Mandate Palestine. Here, a Jewish prosecutor’s special pleading averts a death sentence for the guilty Mani and therefore winds up serving not Justice but Jewish continuity. True, neither Hagar Shiloh, nor Ephraim Shapiro, nor for that matter Egon Bruner has much of a guilty conscience about his or her deviations from the norms of their respective societies. Nevertheless, all three of them feel that they are being judged by their interlocutor, a parent who plays the accusatory role of the super ego. In fact, at one point during his narration, Egon erupts at his mother by saying, “You’re not Minos, the great-grandson of Zeus. . . . You can’t judge me” (139).

Still, one might rightly be inclined to state that this is a novel about the necessity of judging and being judged. One who *can* be judged, who *demand*s to be judged, is Avraham Mani, who, in a religious filiation, takes up a literary position alongside Dostoevsky’s Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment*, and Camus’s judge-penitent Jean-Baptiste Clamence in *The Fall*. What Avraham wants is not earthly judgment but the judgment of heaven. All throughout his panegyric with Rabbi Heddayah, Avraham Mani comes back to one theme: the necessity for judgment. “I have not come to amuse myself with your Grace,” he tells his mentor, “but to ask for judgment” (355). He demands that his judgment come with all the legal trappings of traditional Judaism, asking the rabbi to convene a rabbinical court. So strong is his need to confess that he is unaware that the old Rabbi has already died in his presence when he admits that it was his own seed that was responsible for the conception of his son’s son. He reminds the stricken Rabbi that “the case is not at all difficult. The defendant has already brought in a verdict of guilty and given himself the maximum sentence. He simply does not know if this will atone for the crime or if it will only compound it. Or to put it differently: “Will I have a share in the World to Come” (348)?

Avraham Mani, at the beginning of the saga, and Hagar Shiloh, at its conclusion (but certainly not its end), both know that due to their sexual misdeeds there will be future Manis in this world. Like Hagar, who sees her life as being played out in a film, Avraham Mani also expands the physical space of the story and takes it, not onto the screen, of which he has no

inkling, but into another realm. For Avraham Mani, the *locus amoenus* is not a physical place—neither Jerusalem nor Greece—but a metaphysical one. Taking us back into the world of Jewish texts, Avraham Mani wishes to go beyond the realm of the *pesak*—the verdict—that he already knows, and into the realm of the *gezar din*—the sentence. In so doing, he takes the novel into the realm of eternity—a place, need we be reminded, where all Jewish texts eventually must reside.

NOTES

1. *Judaism* 50 (Winter 2001), 61-65.
2. Cynthia Ozick, "Writers and Critics," *Commentary* 62 (September 1976), 10-12. In making this argument, Ozick gives us an insight into the mind of the prose writer as quintessential fabulist.
3. Cf. Haim Gouri's powerful poem on the same subject, *Yerushah*, in his *Shoshanat ha-ruhot* (1960), translated from the Hebrew as "Inheritance" by Stanley F. Chyet, in Gouri's *Words in My Lovesick Blood* (Detroit: Wayne University Press, 1996). Several verses of Gouri's poem are cited by Yehoshua in his "essay."
4. A. B. Yehoshua, *Mr. Mani* (1989), translated from the Hebrew by Hillel Halkin (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 318. Further references to Yehoshua's novel will be to the English translation; page numbers will be found within the text.]
5. Arnold J. Band, in a footnote to his article, "Mr. Mani: The Archeology of Self-Deception," *Prooftexts* 2, 3 (1992), 244, writes, rather politely, "I state that the first Yosef Mani was 'apparently' killed by one of his Arab lovers since the agency of his death is by no means unambiguous. Yehoshua himself has informed me both in written and oral communication that the father, Avraham, actually killed his own son and admits it on page 341, paragraph 3, last sentence. When one examines that sentence, however, one finds it artfully obscure. The narrator, Avraham, is, to say the least, beside himself here, and is certainly the most unreliable narrator in the novel. Yehoshua was, perhaps, unwilling to portray so heinous a deed more clearly. The overwhelming of Yosef Mani by the Arab mob is much clearer. That so crucial an act is left so opaque leaves me uncertain."
6. Hillel Halkin, "Politics and the Israeli Novel," *Commentary* (April 2004), 33.
7. Indeed, the third part of *Mr. Mani* was published as a short story, entitled "Conversation in Jerusalem." *The New Yorker* (December 30, 1991), 28-61.
8. *Op. cit.*, 236.
9. Is it going too far to speculate that this technique was inspired by Jean Cocteau's innovative 1930 play, *La Voix humaine* (*The Human Voice*)?
10. An account of the plot, presented chronologically, from the "beginning," of what happens in the novel—leaving aside for the moment what is "going on" within its pages—can be found in Alan Mintz, "The Counterlives," *The New Republic* (June 29, 1992), 42-43.
11. Students of French literature, with which Yehoshua, who lived and taught in Paris for some four years in the nineteen-sixties, is conversant, will recognize in the term *ha-kivvun ha-negdi* an allusion to the title of the classic text of the French Decadent

- movement in the late nineteenth century, Joris-Karl Huysmans's *À Rebours*, translated as "Against the Grain," connoting something that is both "against nature" and tends to take a "reverse tack."
12. For a study of the metaphorical use of the womb in *Mr. Mani*, see Anne Golomb Hoffman, "In the Womb of Culture: A. B. Yehoshua's *Mar Mani*," *Prooftexts* 12 (September 1992), 245-63.
 13. George Steiner, *No Passion Spent: Essays 1978-1996*, 312; first printed in *Salmagundi* 1986. "The Meaning of Homeland" is the title of an essay Yehoshua published in *Ha'aretz Magazine*, May 13, 2006.